



The Retrospective Methods Network

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Mythology, Religion and Research

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RMN Newsletter is a medium of contact and communication for members of the Retrospective Methods Network (RMN). The RMN is an open network which can include anyone who wishes to share in its focus. It is united by an interest in the problems, approaches, strategies and limitations related to considering some aspect of culture in one period through evidence from another, later period. Such comparisons range from investigating historical relationships to the utility of analogical parallels, and from comparisons across centuries to developing working models for the more immediate traditions behind limited sources. *RMN Newsletter* sets out to provide a venue and emergent discourse space in which individual scholars can discuss and engage in vital cross-disciplinary dialogue, present reports and announcements of their own current activities, and where information about events, projects and institutions is made available.

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CONTENTS

Editor's Note	5
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BETWEEN TEXT AND PRACTICE: MYTHOLOGY, RELIGION AND RESEARCH

Reflections on Texts and Practices in Mythology, Religion, and Research: An Introduction.....	6
Frog & Karina Lukin	
Picturing the Otherworld: Imagination in the Study of Oral Poetry	17
Lotte Tarkka	
Mythology in Cultural Practice: A Methodological Framework for Historical Analysis.....	33
Frog	
Folklore and Mythology Catalogue: Its Lay-Out and Potential for Research	58
Yuri E. Berezkin	
Females as Cult Functionaries or Ritual Specialists in the Germanic Iron Age?	71
Rudolf Simek	
A Retrospective Methodology for Using <i>Landnámabók</i> as a Source for the Religious History of Iceland? – Some Questions.....	78
Matthias Egeler	
Baptizing Soviet Children in Contemporary Rural Narratives	92
Nadezhda Rychkova	

REVIEW ARTICLES AND RESEARCH REPORTS

Meta-Mythology and Academic Discourse Heritage.....	100
Frog	
The Blurry Lines among Humans, Gods, and Animals: The Snake in the Garden of Eden.....	109
Robert A. Segal	
Social Movement and a Structural Distribution of Karelian Ritual Genres	112
Eila Stepanova & Frog	
Lonely Riders of Nenets Mythology and Shamanism	118
Karina Lukin	

CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Austmarr IV: The Plurality of Religions and Religious Change Around the Baltic Sea, 500–1300: Methodological Challenges for Multidisciplinary Data	128
Kimberly La Palm	
Interdisciplinary Student Symposium on Viking and Medieval Scandinavian Subjects.....	130
Seán D. Vrieland	

Public Engagement with Research: A Viking TeaBreak	131
Lisa Turberfield, Claire Organ & Blake Middleton	

DISSERTATIONS AND THESES

PhD Projects

Myth in Translation: The Ludic Imagination in Contemporary Video Games (working title)	133
Robert Guyker, Jr.	
Pre-Christian Sources on Odin: The Significance of Text and Iconographic Evidence as well as Archaeological Finds (4 th –11 th Centuries AD) (working title).....	135
Tom Hellers	
Porous Bodies, Porous Minds: Emotions and the Supernatural in the <i>Íslendingasögur</i> (ca. 1200–1400)	140
Kirsi Kanerva	

Master's Projects

On the <i>dyēus</i> -Semantic Group and the Case of <i>Týr</i>	145
Petra Mikolić	
Appropriation and Originality: Hending and Alliterative Word Constellations as Tools for Skaldic Composition	148
Cole Erik Nyquist	



CALLS FOR PAPERS

Versification: Metrics in Practice	149
The Ontology of Supernatural Encounters in Old Norse Literature and Scandinavian Folklore: 4 th Symposium of the Old Norse Folklorists Network.....	150
Would You Like to Submit to <i>RMN Newsletter</i> ?	150

Editor's Note

The volume of *RMN Newsletter* that you hold in your hands, or which shimmers on a screen before you, is a thematic special issue *Between Text and Practice: Mythology, Religion and Research*. This collection of articles and reports addresses a number of themes that have proven of great interest to our readership and presents a variety of discussions and insights. Some contributions illustrate new methodological frameworks for research on mythology and religion in earlier periods. Others elucidate new types of resources and theoretical tools, and there are discussions of inclinations, prejudices and problems that have haunted earlier research, and which may still impact us today. Together, the works presented here offer a variety of perspectives from several disciplines and backgrounds of scholarship. Their diversity is complementary, encouraging these works to converse with one another, to dialogic engagements that will reach their fullest richness and potential in the reflections of the reader. We have the hope that they may also inspire, and that the reader may then carry these discussions further, along with the insights that they enable.

The special issue is the product of a cooperation between *RMN Newsletter* and the Academy of Finland project, "Oral Poetry, Mythic Knowledge and Vernacular Imagination (OMV): Interfaces of Individual Expression and Collective Traditions in Pre-Modern Northeast Europe" of Folklore Studies, University of Helsinki, led by Professor Lotte Tarkka. This cooperation has involved bringing together researchers linked to the Retrospective Methods Network (RMN) and researchers involved in the events and activities of OMV. More specifically, this special issue has in its background the OMV's panel of two sessions organized at the American Folklore Society's annual meeting in 2014 (Santa Fe, New Mexico, U.S.A.), "Mythology as Cultural Knowing I: Texts, Beings, and Intersecting Categories; II: Between Historical Experiences and Imaginal

Realities", as well as some connection with the international, multilingual conference "Laulu ja runo – Song and Emergent Poetics – Песня и видоизменяющаяся поэтика" held at the end of 2013 (Kuhmo, Finland). Contributions developed from these events are complemented by works by voices familiar from *RMN Newsletter*'s discourse space as well as additional articles that have been invited through our networks. The outcome is a rich and stimulating volume.

Between Text and Practice: Mythology, Religion and Research is organized as a main body of scientific articles that are complemented by additional relevant review articles and research reports. Several reports on the research projects of junior scholars also connect directly with the overarching theme. As a whole, these various contributions form an ensemble that is both diverse and opulent, with something of interest for all of our readers.

Of course, this special issue is the product of only one of many activities current in the RMN and its daughter networks. A report on the most recent Austmarr Network can be found in these pages, and its next meeting will be held already in October. The Old Norse Folklorists Network has been no less active: a call for papers for its up-coming symposium "The Ontology of Supernatural Encounters in Old Norse Literature and Scandinavian Folklore", to be held in December 2015, can be found at the back of this volume. *RMN Newsletter* is also already organizing another special issue that centers on metrics and will appear already this winter. There is no doubt that the RMN is vibrantly active and we at *RMN Newsletter* are proud to be able to participate, and to help by providing a channel of communication and platform for discussion in order to promote and support these activities.

Frog
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BETWEEN TEXT AND PRACTICE

Mythology, Religion and Research

Reflections on Texts and Practices in Mythology, Religion, and Research: An Introduction

Frog and Karina Lukin, University of Helsinki

Mythology and religion in cultures through history have proven to have enduring interest for research. This interest was sparked to life under the aegis of Romanticism, in the fascination of defining and affirming one's own culture through reflection on – and sometimes the appropriation of – the 'other' (e.g. Csapo 2004). The allure of both the fantastic and horror has played its part, as well as the intrigue held by the riddle of the other's 'belief' that was somehow bound up with sometimes incomprehensible symbols and perplexing practices. This endurance has brought us two centuries rich with intense investigations – works, theories and methods upon which current research builds – and yet the new perspectives across each of those many decades has carried with it new challenges, toppling methodological frameworks that are ever being built up anew. *Between Text and Practice: Mythology, Religion and Research* has been developed to wrestle with some of these topics, especially where they connect with retrospective methods.

Of course, research on mythology and religion is vast and has advanced in unnumbered directions. It sought to explore historical others that belong to the heritage of the past and cultural others that belong to the peripheries of the present. Theology entered into the field of comparison as a frame of reference for interpretation and gradually blurred into an object of research, leading to the evolution of a field of religious studies. Rather than a discipline crystallizing around mythology, however, its research has remained distributed across disciplines, addressed in anthropology, archaeology, ethnography and ethnology, folklore studies,

history, linguistics, literature studies, religious studies, sociology and even psychology and semiotics – just to mention a few. Within the reflectivity of a Post-Modern environment, modern reinventions of mythologies of the 'other' have come under scrutiny, from the use of mythology in the service of nationalism to reworkings in popular culture. It also became acknowledged that mythology was not exclusive to the 'other': mythologies of current, scientific cultures also entered the field of discussion. Indeed, it is possible to view the empirical testing of 'myths' on the popular television program *Myth Busters* as yet another form of research on mythology. Amid such breadth and diversity, the scope and aims of the present volume remain quite narrow and modest.

The works collected here present a range of views from different disciplines and scholarships looking at mythology and religion in different historical periods. Emphasis is on pre-modern cultures and religions linked to Northeast Europe, although this frame is expanded considerably as the time-depth is increased owing to the sources available and the range of material under comparison. Although research presented here connects with, for example, ethnographic fieldwork, archaeology and etymology, the contributions to *Between Text and Practice: Mythology, Religion and Research* are generally united by working with written and oral textual evidence. Studies and discussions range from concentration on the analysis of empirical data to concentration on theory, methods, and tools and concepts applied in research. A number of these discussions elucidate issues, biases and trends of interpretation that have

evolved in the research discourse itself. Together, these works can be seen as offering tools that can be used and further developed in research on these and other cultures.

Texts and Sources

Sources and how we relate them to the past present challenges that have been subject to ongoing reassessment across the history of research. The discipline of philology emerged around precisely this topic and its offspring, folklore studies, sought to overcome the corresponding methodological problems first of oral texts, and then of oral-derived texts resulting from fieldwork. The challenges are manifold, and increase as the sources become historically remote, sparse, and offer minimal information. These present first the problem of a source's specific representation of a text-script of performance or description of religious practice, and then a secondary issue of how the context-specific representation relates to the cultural phenomenon that it (potentially) represents, reflects or refers to.

Especially early sources for the vernacular religions and mythologies of Northern Europe tend to offer only brief glimpses from the perspective of a culturally and religious 'other'. In practice, this means that the producers of these sources were constructing images of their own culture and practices in a dialectic with those that they sought to represent, inevitably affecting the elements and features that they chose to foreground and how these were interpreted (cf. Lindow 1995; FROGA; TARKKA – references to articles in this volume are indicated by the author's name in SMALL CAPITALS). Such representations are almost inevitably ethnocentric, in the sense that the producers of the texts view their own culture as superior (Lévi-Strauss 1952; de Castro 1998). Whether Christian or Roman, these were often written within a context of uneven power relations, in which the author represented the dominant group that was still in the process of seeking to extend and exercise power over the 'other'. However, such representations might also be structured by social apprehension and fear (cf. Hiimäe 2004), for example linked to historical events and encounters that threaten or contest those power relations, as in a case brought forward

by RUDOLF SIMEK (cf. also af Klintberg 2010), or linked to a concern that those lacking social, economic, martial or political power might have recourse to supernatural means (cf. Stark 2006; Tolley 2009). These factors make it important to consider potential factors in the context of the mythic discourse that gave rise to the source (cf. FROGA).

Caution is also needed regarding the verisimilitude of descriptions, as underlined by MATTHIAS EGELER: verisimilitude may in fact represent contemporary folklore, such as legends of historical 'pagan' religious practices attached to the heritage of the landscape (cf. af Klintberg 2010: 350, legend-type T62) or legends of practices of the cultural 'other', such as Sámi shamanism (*ibid.*: 264–265, types M151–160). Such circulating plots and motifs may be applied according to broad, intuitive ontologies that will generalize it to a category that includes diverse cultures and religions that we would distinguish in research (cf. Frog & Saarikivi 2014/2015; Frog 2014a: 442–443), and such circulating stories of the 'other' are transferred and adapted to new groups as historical circumstances and contact situations change (Tangherlini 1995). The issues of relating such evidence to particular cultures are increased by the ontologies operative in research (FROGB), which may also presume abstract and ideal categories of culture in earlier historical periods. For example, research tends to operate on the assumption that Celtic and Germanic religions were as distinct during the Iron Age as their languages, yet SIMEK points out that the name or role designation of one purportedly Germanic seeress may be etymologically Celtic, which in turn produces questions of the degree to which the early source in which she appears reflects 'Germanic' religion according to the ontologies we tend to assume. It thus becomes very important to bear in mind the possibility that these sources are presenting different types of 'lore', and to be cautious about the categories that we assume both for the sources, and for our own research.

Additional issues are entailed in religious, ritual and mythological texts. Texts circulated in written form may fossilize mythological conceptions and paradigms from the period

when they were entextualized while the corresponding models of religion evolve around them, as in the case of the Hebrew Bible addressed by ROBERT A. SEGAL. However, such formalized texts and their uses in practice may become subject to variation where a unifying administrative apparatus of organized religion is not in place, as happened during the Soviet anti-religious campaigns discussed by NADEZHDA RYCHKOVA. Variation is still greater in wholly oral traditions, even where oral poems may be formally quite stable in their social circulation. Particularly in medieval studies, there has been a long-standing tendency to conflate the isolated transcription of such a text with tradition. Especially in the evolving wake of Oral-Formulaic Theory (on which, see Foley 1988; Foley & Ramey 2012), perspectives on variation have, however, been increasingly penetrating into the discussion and into the ways scholars imagine such text-transcripts in relation to what would certainly have been a multi-modal performance (e.g. Gunnell 1995). This does not mean that mythological stories were not historically enduring – such endurance is unequivocally evident in the vast materials surveyed in the discussion of YURI E. BEREZKIN – but it does mean that caution is needed when considering an isolated text-artefact from the Middle Ages in relation to a tradition which it may (or may not) represent. In the present volume, discussions addressing such material tend to maintain a level of abstraction, looking at plots, motifs and images, rites and rituals that exhibit patterned recurrence across a corpus or corpora where they are manifested in multiple context-specific entextualizations (e.g. LUKIN). However, variation in those specific entextualizations leads to another crux of analysis: the elements of mythology and religious practice are simultaneously polysemic (TARKKA) and ambiguous (FROGA). This leads their particular semantics and meanings to be emergent in their specific relation to co-occurring signifiers of the particular expression, performance or enactment (see further TARKKA). Thus, a text-script of a mythological epic or ritual performance provides challenges no less great than texts that describe the religion and beliefs of the ‘other’.

Genres and Registers

Valuable tools in approaching mythology and religion are the concepts ‘genre’ and ‘register’. The term *genre* is especially associated with folklore studies and literature studies, where it is used to designate and distinguish text-type categories or performance-type categories (e.g. Honko 1989). It is now normally used with a distinction between etic genres, as ideal constructs applied cross-culturally by a researcher, and emic genres, as categories of text type that are operative in a local community and may be extensively interpenetrating (e.g. Ben Amos 1976; Tarkka 2013). The term *register* has been developed through social linguistics and linguistic anthropology, initially to refer to variation in language according to situation and participant roles (esp. Halliday 1978). The term’s use has gradually extended to the full range of resources for expressive behaviours that reciprocally function as models for those behaviours (esp. Agha 2007). As each term has extended its field of use, ‘genre’ and ‘register’ have been inclined to converge and sometimes even become used more or less interchangeably. They nonetheless remain complementary tools. Genre places emphasis on textual products or performance wholes, which in many cases entails informational content (e.g. a genre of epic cannot be defined independent of epic stories) or a performative enactment (e.g. a ritual performance as a completed whole affects change in social, physical or supernatural reality). Register places emphasis on expressive resources that may communicate the informational content or accomplish an enactment but do not include these, and that may be used outside of the context of producing generic products or even generically mixed products. (See also Frog 2015.)

The relevance of genre to studies of mythology and religion has advanced considerably especially across roughly the past half-century. Although the term ‘myth’ is today quite flexibly applied to, for example, ‘false beliefs’ (cf. *Myth Busters*), it was implemented as a term to talk about stories of non-Christian religions (FROGA). As such, it continues to be discussed and debated in terms of a genre of text type (see e.g. Briggs

& Bauman 1992). This, however, proves problematic because cultural qualification as 'myth' is centrally qualitative rather than formal (e.g. Doty 2000), which also problematizes viewing 'myth' strictly in terms of stories (cf. Barthes 1972; FROGA). Nevertheless, genre remains an instrumental concept for discussing and distinguishing, for example, mythological epics, incantations, prayers, shamanic songs and so forth, which may each have distinct uses, social functions and relations. KARINA LUKIN illustrates how even across a group of closely related genres of Nenets epic and shamanic singing, common images and motifs may exhibit conventionalized functions producing distinctive meanings within the different genres as contexts. EILA STEPANOVA & FROG correspondingly outline a structural distribution of Karelian oral genres and the groups using them in transition rituals for an individual's movement from one community into another. The frameworks of conventions that structure a genre are also relevant to assessing information presented in generic texts, as EGELER points out regarding Old Norse literature. Genre proves an important tool for considering, among other things, the variation of different elements of tradition across contexts of use and the distribution of functional or communicative labour across genres within a cultural environment (cf. Honko 1981), as well as considering how a source of a particular type may shape the information about mythology or religion that we seek to extract from it.

Register provides a complementary tool for attending to how a system of representation shapes what it represents or communicates, whether this is the linguistic register of a form of verbal art or a broad performance register. Just as equivalent narrative elements may vary in use according to genre (Honko 1981; LUKIN), mythology becomes interfaced with the speech register and performative register associated with a genre, practice or set of practices. This interface has the outcome that mythology may vary considerably across different registers and the genres or practices associated with them (see also Stepanova 2012; FROGA). In parallel to the linguistic or speech registers of verbal art, FROG has proposed analysing such variation in terms of

registers of mythology. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that none of these registers form closed systems: as LOTTE TARKKA stresses, verbal art does not exist in isolation from everyday speech, nor one genre in isolation from others, and the potential to transpose generic strategies and their registers provides a nexus of activity for the generation and negotiation of meanings. Register provides a tool for distinguishing and talking about certain of these resources in relation to others. The concept is still relatively young: its potential has only begun to be widely tapped and explored across roughly the past quarter-century, while its utility for the analysis and exploration of mythology and religion is only just beginning to open (e.g. Stepanova 2012). However, it provides a potentially powerful complementary tool to genre.

Practitioners and Specialists

Of course, mythology does not simply exist 'out there' in the ether: people must talk about it, tell stories, use it in magic or ritual, and structure their behaviours in relation to the understandings that it entails – otherwise it stops being told, stops being remembered, and disappears or changes into something else. The same is no less true of religion, which has no reality independent of people practicing it, whether in the present or historically. Indeed, participants in a religion may define it in terms of the social practices around which their group identity is constructed (Bell 1992). Advancing from the perspective that a register may be considered not only in terms of formal resources for expressive behaviour but also reciprocally a model for behaviour, FROG proposes that:

religion can be broadly considered as a type of register of practice that has developed through inter-generational transmission, is characterized by mythology, and entails an ideology and worldview (FROGA, p. 35).

This allows looking at, for example, Christians and non-Christians that share a common environment as performing their different religions and religious alignments as broad registers of practice. Of course, this broad register of practice would also entail numerous genres and registers of verbal art and performance. Within this frame, it

becomes useful to underline that not all individuals will be equally competent in all genres and registers (cf. Agha 2007). The more socially centralized a practice is, and the more distinguished from unmarked daily behaviours, the more concentrated the practice is likely to be in a specialist role. In such cases, the majority of participants in the practices would be passive rather than active tradition bearers (cf. von Sydow 1948: 11–12), whereas the specialists are positioned as authorities in the practices, knowledge and use or negotiations of power (e.g. with the otherworld) that the practice entails. In other words, mythology and religion are simply social phenomena linked to different genres and registers of practice; many genres and registers are linked to varying degrees with specialist roles, and those specialists – not the genres – become nexuses of competence and authority in mythology and religious practice.

Specialist roles are necessarily bound up not only with the social practices themselves but also with the structures of society in which they function, and different areas of ritual activity may be associated with different specialists. Specialist roles in ritualized activities draw great interest and attention, but caution is needed not only in source-critical scrutiny of information on a specific case (cf. EGELER), but also on the inferences made about what the significance is of someone being identified with such a social role (SIMEK). Within a cultural environment, there may be a variety of roles that specialize in engagements with beings and forces of the unseen world. Researchers often begin from a more or less modern, Christian set of categories like ‘priest’, ‘witch’/‘sorcerer’, perhaps ‘healer’, and more recently ‘shaman’. Individuals performing ritual activities or otherwise acting as intermediaries with the supernatural then get grouped into these simplistic categories, which can be hazardously misleading. A factor that is easily confused in this regard, as in the cases discussed by SIMEK, is whether or not the role is identified with a formalized function in cult practice, orchestrating and/or mediating interactions with a god or gods at the center of the religious life of a community. Not every intermediary with

the otherworld was necessarily linked to ‘cult’ practice.

It may also be important to distinguish a potentially exclusive social position of cult functionary from a specialist institution based on specialized competence in particular ritual technologies. In Karelia, for example, activities that we might interpret as ‘cult’ would be orchestrated by a much broader category of specialist,¹ who would use his power as an intermediary with the otherworld in a variety of capacities (Siikala 2002). In shamanic cultures, shamans are also generally defined in terms of institutional roles linked to technologies rather than to cult *per se*. If viewed as a broad register of practice, religion may include cults and larger publically orchestrated events, but it also includes a diversity of specialists and ritual activities that are better approached on their own terms. For example, Karelian lamenters were ritual specialists in socially central, public funerary rituals. They acted in order to ensure that the deceased would be integrated into the community of the ancestors, as well as maintaining reciprocal communication with the otherworld thereafter, working for the benefit of both individuals and of the community (STEPANOVA & FROG, and works there cited). These practices might be framed in terms of a ‘cult of the dead’, but such a frame would conceal as much as it reveals about living practice. Similarly, driving religious practice and its priests from the public sphere effectively drives that religion into the private sphere, which may entail non-specialists assuming specialist roles – *becoming* specialists for the community, as in the case discussed by RYCHKOVA – in order that the essential rituals of lived religion are maintained. Beginning from general and simplistic categories may be a practical reality, but the dynamics of religion in social practice only exceptionally reduce to simple black and white terms.

Knowledge and Imagination

Mythology can be approached as a category of knowledge (cf. Doty 2000: 55–56). This may be knowledge of the past and future beyond the present world, or knowledge of the social, empirical and supernatural worlds along with the paradigms whereby they are

organized and operate (FROG_A; cf. LUKIN). Mythic knowledge is organized and structured through discourse, but not all views in a community carry equal weight (Honko 1962: 126). It nests in genres and registers whereby it is communicated, implemented and manipulated, and it centers in specialists authorities. Both poetic systems and the structures and paradigms of mythology can also function as memory technologies, providing frameworks that can be capitalized on in order to crystallize mythic knowledge both at the level of individuals and in social transmission (Lyle 2012: 9–20). In parallel with these are also ritual technologies that equally are a form of knowledge that requires refined competence, such as rite techniques combined with singing or incantations to produce an ecstatic trance and to organize the ensuing experience with the supernatural (Siikala 1978; Frog 2014b: 202–205; as ‘technology’, see Frog 2013). Mythic knowledge and technologies interface in a cultural environment, forming links between mythology, language-based technologies of verbal art and ritual technologies of practice that enable prayer, sacrifice, or other activity to achieve its intended goal in contact with the otherworld. Religion can be viewed as organized around forms of knowledge. Recognizing these as forms of knowledge allows their spread across cultures, reflected in vocabulary (Tadmor 2009), areal patterns in rite techniques (Siikala 1978) and narrative traditions, to be addressed in terms of “information exchange” (BEREZKIN, pp. 68). From that position, such information exchange can then be considered in relation to networks of exchange of other types of information, such as seafaring and metal-working technologies (cf. Frog 2013: 68–72).

Mythic knowledge and knowledge of technologies are not evenly distributed in a community: non-specialists will in general have a less sophisticated and less elaborate base of mythic knowledge (cf. Wright 1998: esp. 72–73), which will normally be dependent on specialist authorities rather than representing a synthetic understanding (Converse 1964). Mythic knowledge is also not uniform, and thus an individual’s mythic knowledge will vary in relation to the genres and registers

in which he or she has competence and the areas in which he or she develops them (Stepanova 2012; 2014). This means that variation in mythic knowledge is not on a simple spectrum, but rather that a single individual will have degrees of knowledge relative to different genres and registers as well as relative to the different fields of practice in which these are applied. Such variation is also of considerable importance for source-critical assessments, especially for pre-modern sources. Just as such sources may present legends of the ‘other’, the authors may also have had no more than the most basic rudiments of knowledge about traditions they mention or describe. It is often doubtful whether a specialist would refer to the tradition with the same words, describe it in the same way, or even draw attention to the same features.

TARKKA elaborates on the fact that imagination is fundamental to the operation of mythic knowledge. The ‘imaginal’ is a quality that has received increasing attention in research on myth (e.g. Doty 2000), but this has tended to blur into characterizing myth by features of the fantastic or unreal. The role of imagination has long been marginalized in research and has remained under-theorized. Imagination is the key to both the social construction of the unseen fields of existence, in this world and beyond, and also for relating the symbols of mythology to this world and social life. Unseen worlds that exist in the present, extending from the known, and also those worlds that exist before or after present time, are constructed through discourse – through verbal and performative arts and through people talking about them. As TARKKA stresses, the image systems from which these are developed draw on the known, the seen, the familiar, which provides a platform for the identification of features that set the ‘other’ apart, making it different, uncanny. The ‘other’ thus shares parallels in the structures of kinship relations, social organization, dwellings, transportation, tools and dishware, conventions of hospitality, and so on, while at the same time, key features are absent or inverted. LUKIN foregrounds the elementary role that the experiential intimacy of these familiar images play in shaping the

meanings of mythic images of the otherworld and of the other, and how those mythic images reciprocally shape the meanings and significance of experiencing their empirical counterparts. Meaning is construed through this dialectic relation between the imaginal and the empirical. This extends from convergences of experiential reality and its mythic-image counterparts to symbolic correlations and juxtapositions:

otherworld imagery lays bare and simplifies the structures, characteristics and values of the reality that is familiar and observable, of the reality that corresponds to our horizons of expectation (TARKKA, p. 28).

This process cannot operate independent of the human capacity of imagination.

Historical Change and Stratification

Mythology exists in the present of its users, and religion exists through the practices of those who live it. The meaningful present of tradition emerges from the inherited symbols, structures and practices of the past being adapted to current needs and circumstances, a process that transpires in dialectic with internal innovations and external influences. That meaningful present is construed in research through the formal elements of the tradition – images, motifs, rites, plots, rituals – and meta-discourse surrounding them. Evidence of their use and representation, patterns indicative of convention as well as their contestation, forms data on their collective significance, functions, social meanings and meaning potential (cf. Siikala 1990: 197). These formal elements both provide shared frames of reference and are, at the same time, resources for expression, communication, and the exercise of power. Rather than being static, they are in constant flux: internal innovations and acculturated external models constantly increase the inherited resources available, while the same process affects the neglect and obsolescence of others, which gradually fall out of use. As a consequence, mythologies and religions are in perpetual processes of historical stratification (cf. Siikala 2002). More radical changes of reinvention or displacement may lead whole genres and registers to break down and disappear. However, this may disperse stories,

symbols and practices rather than causing them to disappear: socially significant tradition elements that have become charged with emotive power may instead be acculturated to the new social (e.g. RYCHKOVA) and religious (e.g. Harvilahti 2013) environment, or adapted to new contexts, uses and social functions (e.g. Fowler 1987; Frog 2011; cf. Dégh 1995: 97, 125–127, 218–219). They become resources in mythic discourse, where their meanings, interpretations and valuations become contested and negotiated amid the fits and starts of cultural change, and in the accompanying tendency of groups to develop a new *status quo* (cf. FROGA). These processes are not abstract, even if they may be discussed abstractly: they are social and semiotic phenomena that occur through interactions of embodied individuals under their particular historical circumstances. Historical stratification is a condition fundamental to mythology and religion, but it must be stressed that stratification is always a condition relative to a present moment, and in that moment, “earlier historical layers of meaning are of no more significance than later ones” (TARKKA, p. 22).

Historical change and stratification are of pivotal concern for many investigations into mythology and religion in earlier periods. A long-standing issue has simply been the methodological obstacle of approaching information about vernacular traditions in post-conversion environments. As EGELER emphasizes, the potential value of such sources are themselves dependent on certain types of continuities or ongoing mythic discourse that functions as knowledge about the past in the present of the sources – whether or not it is rooted in historical events that it purports to describe. The process of change and stratification may itself be the target of research, focusing on particular cases or mythic discourse in such circumstances as a process (FROGA). Attention may also turn to continuities, which for oral cultures must rely on comparative evidence. Working with a database of astounding scope, BEREZKIN illustrates that mythological narratives and models for thinking about the world can readily have continuity extending back to the Stone Age. Situating the frame of comparison at a global scale, these comparisons present

evidence for the history of the spread of knowledge, both carried in immigrations and through contact networks (as well as having the potential to yield negative evidence of knowledge displacement or loss). Long-term continuities attest to continued social relevance of the knowledge or traditions, while widespread connection with mythology suggests ongoing cultural significance. However, this does not indicate that continuities entailed the *same* relevance: the meanings and meaning potential of such traditional elements change more quickly than the elements themselves (Siikala 1990: 188). Care must be taken not to presume that continuity of form and relevance indicates a continuity of meaning. As SEGAL illustrates, even a stable written text may remain at the center of religious practice while understandings change around it: this is evident in the ontologies of beings operative in the Hebrew Bible and linked to the era of its formalized entextualization, in contrast to the categories through which it is interpreted today. The same problem manifests in comparing ritual roles (e.g. Dumézil 1988), or considering possible continuities between the types of roles attested in sources scattered hundreds of years apart (SIMEK).

Stratification also has more subtle relevance. The tension between continuity and change is ever in an ongoing process of resolution, whether this is a slowly changing process within a more or less stable cultural environment,² or under conditions of more rapid and aggressive impacts of religious conversion or anti-religious campaigns. However, deeper understanding of synchronic uses, variation and juxtapositions of mythology often requires some perspective on backgrounds of the inherited or borrowed patterns of use. In addition, these processes are not uniform, but rather transpire and are negotiated locally and in networks producing different dialects of mythology and religion (Siikala 2012). At the same time, they develop in connection with different practices and specialists so that variation and change manifests differently in different genres and registers (FROG_A), which may be key to understanding variation in mythology between genres or their distribution of labour in the present of ritual practices (STEPANOVA & FROG; cf. also Honko 1981).

Research, Ahead and Behind

Mythology and religion are addressed by countless disciplines and the number of approaches and the variety of phenomena that can be addressed only seem to increase with time. However, it is imperative to remain aware that, just as these phenomena exist in a present rooted in and shaped by their past, so too is the research on them, even if that inherited past may vary considerably across disciplines and across the cultures or religions under investigation. This rooting in the past has played an instrumental role in the structuring of current research, its orientation, interpretations and relative valorizations of source materials, methods, theories, and so on (FROG_B; cf. Kuhn 1970). This problem is foregrounded in TARKKA's discussion of imagination, that was simultaneously identified as central to mythology and oral poetry while being devalued, peripheralized and remaining under-theorized in the same research across the 20th century. Inherited ways of looking at material also shape the way that we are inclined to interpret source material, such as interpreting vague early references to Germanic women connected to the supernatural through a later (and no less obscure) institution, or presuming their connection to a cult, as in the material discussed by SIMEK. It is essential to return to these topics and reassess them from a current perspective, lest we become trapped, operating within our own mythology of the mythology and religion being investigated – lost within a 'meta-mythology' (FROG_B).

The inheritance of earlier research includes a multitude of infrastructures, such as methods and systems for organizing and analyzing materials, and the wealth of resources in which material has been catalogued and analytically assessed as a platform facilitating further research. These infrastructures have been subject to ongoing development and revision. Many of them took shape across the first half of the 20th century, when the methods, aims and working theories of research were quite different. Their basis may therefore be neither well-suited nor methodologically viable for use with current research questions within current methodological frameworks. Just as it may prove

necessary to reassess and theorize concepts such as 'imagination' or the appropriateness of identifying certain women mentioned in early sources as 'cult functionaries', it may also be methodologically relevant to reconsider whole typological systems and to develop alternatives. This is done here by BEREZKIN, who offers an alternative to tale-type (Uther 2004) and motif (Thompson 1955–1958) indices, developing a system of categorization that is better suited to the particular research goals for which it is used. Of course, if advances in research are to influence the scientific community, they must connect with current models and understandings, whether through the internal innovation of what is known or through its extension into new areas and in new directions: new knowledge can only be accessed via a bridge from what is known. Thus, reassessments and displacement of inherited models, perspectives and interpretive frames must be situated in relation to those frames. An additional strategy for advancement is capitalizing on the diversity of disciplines and approaches to bring their multiple perspectives to bear on the target of analysis. This is the strategy advocated by EGELER: bringing together and triangulating the methods and understandings available from different categories of data linked to different disciplines is a methodological strategy that is especially relevant where evidence under scrutiny is extremely limited. Such triangulation is more likely to produce findings that are sustainable across disciplinary perspectives, and findings that are more historically enduring. The dialectic between current research and inherited disciplinary resources presents a framework for innovation and advancement in a variety of ways.

The history of research discourse is characterized by changes in broad paradigms that provide general frameworks according to which more particular methodologies (e.g. the Historical-Geographic Method) are structured and implemented.³ Investigations into the mythologies and religions of earlier cultures were long dominated by emphasis on their formal elements – stories, rituals, cosmologies – and their reconstruction into ideal forms. Attention gradually shifted to their relationships to society, both in terms of social

structures as well as psychology, and more recently to processes of change, variation and contextual meanings or significance. These directions are continuously evolving, and although they may seem natural or even inevitable in retrospect, the clues anticipating them are notoriously difficult to read from within the discourse.

The present collection is too modest to propose generalizations anticipating trends in the future, but it may be worth noting explicitly the potential of 'knowledge' and 'imagination' as new key concepts being applied in studies here (TARKKA; LUKIN; FROGA; BEREZKIN; and cf. KANERVA). In addition, 'mythic discourse' has become a significant frame of reference (even if the term is not used), attending to practice and the activity of people (FROGA; TARKKA; EGELER; STEPANOVA & FROG; RYCHKOVA; cf. GUYKER), rather than projecting idealized images of static and atemporal religions and mythologies. Such approaches also take broader views of mythology than simply 'stories', turning attention to the 'mythic' (FROGA; LUKIN; TARKKA; cf. KANERVA). A variety of attention is also given to ontologies operating in vernacular cultures and texts which may not correspond to those familiar to researchers, or to those that are inferred and assumed when approaching research materials (FROGB; SEGAL; SIMEK; STEPANOVA & FROG; and also KANERVA; MIKOLIĆ). Corresponding attention is given to typologies and categories used in research (BEREZKIN; FROGA; and also TARKKA). This extends to the analysis of variation in the use of formal elements across genres as categories of discourse (LUKIN), or in the distributed use of genres in cultural practices (STEPANOVA & FROG). Another site receiving attention is the more general dialectic construction of the unseen world in relation to experiential reality (TARKKA), and how the meanings of each are constructed in relation to the other (LUKIN). Of course, the attention given to these topics is interfaced with, and complementary to, comparative studies of formal elements of folklore data (cf. BEREZKIN; FROGA), or focused reconstructive attention given to particular elements of mythology, such as a particular god (cf. HELLERS; MIKOLIĆ). Such research is an

integrated part of studies that attend to the topics and phenomena mentioned above and do not marginalize them.

We make no claim that some or any of these points mark or anticipate future trends or trajectories of research. Perhaps, however, you may encounter thoughts and perspectives among these pages with which you are not already familiar, something with the potential to invite looking at familiar data or traditions in new and different ways, something that can carry your own research in unforeseen directions.

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Notes

1. Such as the annual sacrificial festivals described by Stark (2002: 117–119), noting that the sources generally do not elucidate a connection between the person overseeing the ritual and the broader category of specialist, even where this is clearly known (e.g. Inha 1999 [1911]: 370–373).
2. Jukka Korpela (2014) has, for example, argued that Iron Age cultural structures and worldview were still maintained in parts of Karelia into the 19th century. These conditions were essential for the maintenance of the mythology and practices rooted in the Viking Age or earlier were upheld in conjunction with the associated ritual specialists until the traditions were documented in the 19th and 20th centuries (Siikala 2002; Frog 2013).
3. The view of the relationship between ‘paradigm’ and ‘methodology’ used here distinguishes a methodology as an ideological arena within which individual researchers operate, entailing views and valorizations of research materials and questions put to them, methods, theories, research tools, argumentation strategies, and so forth – methodology corresponds more or less to the proverbial ‘box’ in which we ‘think’; a paradigm is here considered a broader structuring framework entailing core operating principles, implicit theories, valuations and priorities as a historical pattern according to which contemporary methodologies are organized – i.e. a paradigm extends beyond and unites the (sometimes competing) ‘boxes’ within which groups of researchers ‘think’ and operate.

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Picturing the Otherworld: Imagination in the Study of Oral Poetry

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Abstract: This article advocates a reassessment of imagination in the study of oral poetry, theorizing imagination as a tool for research. It addresses imagination's role in constructing unseen worlds through oral poetry, which dialogically structures understandings of the experiential world. It argues for a unified approach to imagination operating in mythic and other discourses. Kalevala-metre poetry provides an illustrative case.

The otherworld is by definition beyond the scope of empirical experience. Knowledge and understandings of the otherworld, its topography, inhabitants and significance are not random and purely spontaneous: they are socially constructed and communicated through discourse. Anchors of this knowledge are forms of verbal art or oral poetry linked to mythology, ritual and magic. In practice, of course, the deictic opposition between 'us' or 'ours' and 'other' leads to the symbolic correlation between the remote, empirically inaccessible otherworlds and the environmental or social spaces that are 'other', such as the forest or a neighbouring village. (Tarkka 2013: 327–428.) These 'others' may also be conceived through the lens of the supernatural in dialectic with empirical experience, yet the supernatural qualities and attributes ascribed to them belong to the sphere of the imaginal¹ (see Frog 2015). In all cases, imagination provides the essential bridge between discourse and knowledge or understanding.

Research has a long history of interest in mythology, the supernatural, and the traditions of oral poetry through which these realms of discourse and understanding have been communicated. Like any other symbolic action, oral poetry works by creating new, otherwise unimaginable couplings between language and the world. As these connections intertwine, the unseen and inexplicable is clothed in concrete images and is thus rendered observable, conceivable, and understandable. At the same time, the everyday and that which is manifest in the world are linked with images in such a way that their familiar meanings become obscure and open to question, infusing them with new meaning potential. A central position in the creation of poetic meanings is the imagination.

In recent decades, imagination has received increased attention for understanding functions of verbal art and how it operates in society.

The vitalization of imagination as a tool has nevertheless maintained a divide between the entertainment of fantasy and poetic meaning potential on the one hand, and understandings of the mythic, unseen world on the other. The present article discusses this problem through the case of research on Finno-Karelian traditions. It reviews the discussion of imagination through the history of scholarship, where it has been under-theorized. It then sets out an approach to imagination, especially following the work of Mark Johnson (1987), and illustrates its utility as a tool against empirical data. Finally, the article argues that the divide between the mythic and the fantastic or poetic is a specious construct rooted in the research history, and that better theorizing of imagination makes it possible to observe a particular poetics operating in the creation of meaning through imagery against a mythic sounding board.

Imagination and Fantasy in Early Finnish Research

The preliminary connotations of imagination are already observable in the process of inventing the Finnish written language, where it is called *kuvatuslahja* ['the gift of picturing'], or *kuvaisaisti* ['image-sense'], following the terminology established by Elias Lönnrot in his pioneering Swedish–Finnish dictionary from 1866–1880 (Lönnrot 1958a: 830; 1958b: 76). Here, imagination or fantasy has to do with images, the senses and human dispositions. According to a more recent dictionary definition, imagination is the “capacity to form internal images or ideas of objects and situations not actually present to the senses” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘imagination’), but in philosophy, psychology, and art studies the concept has been the subject of intense and long debate (see e.g. Johnson 1987: 141–166; Iser 1993; Petterson 2002). In the imagination, images and ideas may be combined without being continuously subjected

to a reality-check; imagination is thus free up to a certain point. A basic premise in the study of verbal expressions, such as poems, is the notion of the communicability of imagination in a way that is conditioned by the translatability of the imaginative into language. Thus, the study of imagination has to take into account the boundaries set by language and its conventions that are set by culture. Lönnrot (1840: i) points out the imperfection of this conversion process: “in speaking of matters of the mind and thought,” “figuration may only take place through the voice and the word, deficiently, like all other kinds of description in the world.” Lönnrot’s position can be looked on as a foundational view of how this has been understood to take place within the field of Finnish folk-poetry research.

Finnish folklore studies took shape within the project of Romantic Nationalism. The collection, archiving, publication, and study of folklore focused on the oral poetic tradition that was still practiced in the peripheries of the Finno-Karelian culture area in the early 19th century. This tradition, namely poetry in the Kalevala-metre, provided the source material for Lönnrot for his compilation of the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala* (1835; 1849). The poems of this epic, indeed the mere existence of such a proof of civilization, fuelled the national imagination, and its influence ranged from art and education to politics and commerce. The publication of the epic resulted in extensive campaigns of folklore collection. Initially the study of this poetic tradition concentrated on the literary epic, and, in line with the intellectual climate of the time, the main question was whether Lönnrot’s epic reflected ancient mythology or ethnic, and thereby national, history. The scientific study of folklore only started to prioritise Lönnrot’s sources and other oral poems as scholarly research material in the early 20th century. The study of Kalevala-metre poetry was dominated for decades by the so-called Finnish or Historical-Geographic Method, which aimed at the reconstruction of the poetic tradition through comparative study (esp. Krohn K 1918; cf. Krohn K 1926; see Frog 2013). Starting from the 1960s, the historicising interest was increasingly challenged with sociological and anthropo-

logical insights. These foregrounded the study of poetry as a social phenomenon and as an aesthetic and ideological resource for the people who sang the poems.

In the study of Kalevala-metre poetry, imagination has been linked above all with three issues: *a)* the birth of poems and poetry through individual or collective creativity; *b)* the origin of mythic concepts; and *c)* the figurative nature of poetic language. Imagination and fantasy have, however, remained residual categories: no attempts have been made to analyze and theorize them, and the attempts to envisage them have resorted to metaphor: imagination is pictured, for example, as ‘a borderless realm’ (*ääretön valtakunta*) which ‘flies’ (*lentää*) (Setälä 1932: 606) or which ‘billows free and broad’ (*vapaana ja laajana lainehtii*) (Hästesko 1910: 5). Traditions of interpretation of the poetry have long been bound up with nationalist ideology and a call for a nation to have a history (see e.g. Siikala 2012: 22–23). The imaginative faculty or fantasy received a dubious reputation: there was no national need for it, and it even became an obstacle to reconstructing the history of the nation through the epic poems. This bias, which Satu Apo (2015) identifies as *romantic historicism*, has influenced particular genres in the history of research, favouring some, and rejecting others, particularly those characterised as fantasy-based entertainment. Most traditions of Finnish folk-poetry research were motivated by the quest for the real: poems were supposed to tell of historical events, past ethnographic reality, or of myths that in antiquity were believed to be true and therefore equally conceived of as representations of an ethnographic reality. In the eyes of the researcher, these ‘ancient’ beliefs were naturally ‘fantasies’ (*kuvitelmat*) (e.g. Harva 1948: 50, 53). Used in this way, the word fantasy has a pejorative dimension which points to a false or warped interpretation of reality, the superstition of ‘other’ people (cf. Frog 2014: 438–441).

Although imagination rarely functions as an analytical concept, the international groundbreaking text of Finnish folk-poetry research, Kaarle Krohn’s *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode* (1926), defines the research object of folklore studies by means of

imagination: according to Krohn, folkloristics investigates:

das Volkswissen, soweit es: 1) *traditionell*, 2) *von der Phantasie bearbeitet* und 3) *echt volkstümlich ist*" (Krohn K 1926: 25, original emphasis; cf. also Hautala 1957: 32–33.)

the lore of the folk, insofar as it is 1) *traditional*, 2) *moulded by the imagination*, and 3) *genuinely of the folk*.

Krohn even calls the object of research *Volksphantasie* ['folk fantasy'] (1926: 21–22). It becomes clear from reading Krohn, however, that imagination mainly relates to the aesthetic or poetic form of texts: poetry is first and foremost the sphere of the imagination. Kalevala-metric epic poems could be formed 'within the native imagination without any other basis in reality than the singer's own internal and external vision,'² and poems could be developed and linked 'merely by means of the imagination' (*pelkän mielikuvituksen avulla*) (Krohn K 1932: 25–26). The more artistically-minded folklorist Martti Haavio later advocated that it was a researcher's responsibility not only to elucidate the materials and poetic patterns used by a poem's composer, but also to attend to this aesthetic and creative process: since he is dealing with 'the birth of a work of art, one should take note of the poet's imagination and skill'³ (Haavio 1952: 213). Although imagination or 'fantasy' remained intuitively rather than analytically defined, its significance for research was underlined already from the first half of the 20th century.

The association of imagination with poetry and creativity is a Romanticist notion. The Greek word *poiesis*, from which it derives, points to the ability of poetry to create something new, and especially to create "new kinds of worlds" (Oesch 2006: 87). Typically, imagination has been seen as freedom of expression and creation, and poetry thus becomes 'the shoreless, borderless realm of the imagination, where the flight of imagination is limitless and unbounded'⁴ (Setälä 1932: 606). Imagination is both the prime mover of poems and the impulse that makes them change and thus depart from their original form and meaning. Already in the 19th century, Julius Krohn (1885) emphasized that amending Kalevala-metric poems or poetic

motifs with various materials, either learned or invented, calls for an exceptional 'poetic gift, an open eye, which embraces nature, life and the human soul, and an imaginative power which creates clear and beautiful images'⁵ (1885: 585, cf. also 587). Rather than being a characteristic of all people, creativity was a talent of the few, the chosen of ancient bards, or the collective of the *Volk*. This romantic gift was natural and unbound to subjects, or essentially *itseletön* – 'unconscious of self' and 'selfless' – since individual performers of folk poetry did not have 'the slightest poetic gift of their own' (*vähintäkään oma runolahja*) (Krohn J 1885: 583).

In depicting the Karelian 'creative linguistic instinct' (*luova kielivaisto*) and 'mind prone to dreaming' (*haaveilulle herkkä mieli*), Kaarle Krohn positively valued this tendency to produce variation: the eastern rune-singers had not only preserved the poetry, but had 'added to it with inexhaustible imagination, and brightened it with the unquenchable flame of feeling'⁶ (1914: 352). In his own words, Krohn (1918: 132) clung to this 'theory of free development' (*vapaan kehityksen teoria*), especially as regards Kalevala-metre poems, because he 'believed in the special quality of the Karelian imagination.'⁷ Later, as the idea of gradual evolution gave way to the idea of devolution, and Krohn came to emphasize the poems' western Finnish origin, the positive connotations of imaginative creation were attached to the particular time and place of the poems' origin: the subsequent changes were renderings of mechanical thought and the laws of poetic metre (esp. in Krohn K 1926). 'The time when something new is created was past'⁸ and imagination had withered into an ability to 'select' (*valikoida*), 'assemble' (*kokoonpanna*) and 'ornament' (*koristella*) (Krohn K 1918: 130).

In addition to its position in the discussion of poetic quality and creation, imagination has served as an explanatory or interpretive concept in the study of folk belief and mythology. As opposed to legends based on historical events, myths were 'tales created by the imagination' (*mielikuvituksen luomat tarinat*) (Krohn K 1932: 22–24). Personification, typical of folk belief, has in particular been seen as a product of the

imagination (e.g. Krohn K 1914: 351). The problem of ‘believing in’ religious ideas has also been elaborated upon in this light. F.A. Hästesko (1910: 2–3, 5) argues that religious ideas ‘born [...] with the help of the imagination, but based on belief,’⁹ do not really belong to the sphere of the imagination in the true sense – the imagination does not need ‘the support of make-believe’ (*luulottelun tuki*). Especially interpretations of nature-myths foregrounded the role of the imagination in the generation of religious ideas, concepts and images. For example, E.N. Setälä emphasised that myths of the world pillar as a pillar or axle at the centre of the world which supports the universe (*mailman-pylväskuvitelma*) are not ‘in essence matters of belief’ (*pohjaltaan uskomuksellinen*). They are based on ‘folk knowledge’ (*kansantieto*) and “‘scientific’ folk observations’ (*tieteelliset kansanhavainnot*) of the immovable North Star, which ‘has set the folk imagination going and simultaneously given cause for religious imaginings.’¹⁰ (Setälä 1932: 596–597.) For Uno Harva, the original core of the nature-myth ideas was ‘the very mental image awakened by the phenomenon of nature’ (*itse luonnonilmiön herättämä mielikuva*) together with the vernacular explanation of the phenomenon’s origin (Harva 1948: 72). These initial forms were mixed with ‘additional traits from other stories and folk tales’¹¹ (*ibid.*). Imagination was therefore seen as both the ability to mediate observations and mental images as well as the narrower capacity to generate ‘contaminations’ and ‘interpolations’ in poems. Imagination was thus the creative power of the poet who first composed a nature-myth poem, a power which no successor could surpass even with boundless imagination of his own (Setälä 1932: 583).

The problem of imagination has been discussed by Finnish folklorists in the context of the Sampo-Cycle and the *sampo* in particular. The *sampo* is a mythic symbol of prosperity and growth that is produced by men and lost because of the inability to share its produce (e.g. Tarkka 2012). Setälä argued that rune-singers did not ‘know’ what the *sampo* was: for them, the platonic idea or ‘proto-image’ (*perikuva*) of the *sampo* was alien, but they tried through their

imaginings to envision it through ‘images’ (*kuvat*) that would capture its essential traits. These images always remained deficient, nor were they able to communicate logically the idea of what they sought to represent (Setälä 1932: 18, 26, 191). The *sampo* of the rune-singers was for Setälä a ‘fantasy’ (*kuvitelma*), whose meaning had become ‘obscure’ (*hämärtänyt*), lending these images of the *sampo* several different ‘*Gestalts*’ (*hahmot*). Both rune-singers and researchers have attempted to analyse the multiplicity of these *Gestalts* through ‘imagination and knowledge’ (*mielikuvitus ja tieto*). (*ibid.*: 25.) Setälä emphasised that, unlike the rune-singers, researchers’ responsibilities lay in investigating the prototypical images, not the fleeting reflections created by the imagination (Setälä 1932: 20).

In the discussion of the *sampo*, although knowledge and rationality were favoured over interpretative creativity, the question of imagination is articulated. The suspicion expressed towards imagination and the imaginative reflects two traditions of thought. In the first, the meaning of a symbol equates to its supposed original meaning, which imaginative reworking obscures (e.g. Setälä 1932: 25–26). In the second, imagination is defined as the inclination of the human mind to grasp “objects through their images, shadows and reflections” (Johnson 1987: 142). As Mark Johnson (1987: 141–145) has noted, the latter approach derives from a misreading of Plato’s philosophy and sets imagination in opposition to knowledge and rationality, confining it within the field of art.

Early Finnish folklore research thus treated the ‘image sense’ operative in folk poetry with ambiguity. Although imagination was acknowledged as an essential characteristic of poetry, myth, and folklore – indeed, of all discourse – its careful conceptualization was not prioritised. The National Romanticist ideology foregrounded the unity of language, history, and art as the backbone of a national culture and thus of a nation state. The imagination, however, blurred any clear vision of the nation’s history and thus became confined into the epiphenomenal sphere of art. Imaginativeness as an aspect of language was treated with similar negligence.

Imagination and the Figurative Nature of Language

To be communicable and expressible in language, imagination must link up with the conventions and poetics of the expressive culture in question. Our ability and inclination to create mental images independently of any direct sensual perceptions and to construct imaginal worlds from them is linked to culture, language, and the generically determined means of expression – even fantasy genres and nonsense-verse have their own poetics and hence their limitations of expression. Jouko Hautala (1957: 33) places imagination within the competence of the performer to produce poetically structured and stylized texts: in the verse tradition, ‘form itself indicates the influence of fantasy.’¹² In this respect, imagination is thus a lingual phenomenon.

Analyses and typologies of the figurative language within Finnish folk-poetry research are as rare as conceptual analysis focusing on imagination. The most interesting attempt to comprehend the figurative nature of folk poetry is Oskar Relander’s thesis, *Kuvakielestä vanhemmassa suomalaisessa kirjallisessa kansanrunoudessa* (1894) [‘On Figurative Language in Older Finnish Lyric Folk Poetry’], which represents a folk-psychology investigation seldom practiced in Finland. The work was not approved as an academic dissertation in folklore studies, and it was only approved with difficulty in the discipline of aesthetics (Timonen 2004: 14–15). Relander maps out the figurative expression of lyric folk poetry on the basis of the laws of association between emotion and thought. The driving force is emotion, which demands to be satisfied and expressed, and ‘imagination brings forth images which keep emotion enlivened.’¹³ The imagination also sets in motion the recoupling of mental images already in the consciousness that have been activated in reaction to new images fed in by the imagination. The imagination therefore not only serves the emotions, but also promotes ‘the activity of thought’ (*ajatustoiminta*). (Relander 1894: 2.) Although Relander’s analysis remains a relatively mechanical attempt to create order and sense in the imagery and poetic features of Kalevala-metre poetry, he emphasises, albeit vaguely, the role

of images such as metaphors and similes in human thought: ‘People think through images. Images always arise in people’s minds: they are the surge of people’s thoughts.’¹⁴ (Relander 1894: 295.)

The emphasis on emotion is connected not just with theories of folk-psychology and the definition of lyric as a poetic genre of emotion, but also with Romanticism, in which the connection of the imagination with emotions and irrationality formed a valued but also hazardous force (see Oesch 2006: 78–79). The relationship of imagination to the senses and its draw towards sensuality bring in their train the potential for vice and sin (Bendix 1997: 31). Assessments of figurative language often cast explicit aesthetic value judgements. Julius Krohn (1885: 572) argued that figurative language is undeveloped in Finnish oral poetry, ‘since allegory is impossible in folk poetry, where the intellect does not yet have the least influence.’¹⁵ For his part, Haavio (1992: 290) emphasises that ‘the verbal expression of ancient poets is not shallow but [...] stratified,’¹⁶ and continues:

In striving with limited means to bring out precisely and comprehensibly concepts and emotions which do not belong to everyday life, they [ancient poets] do resort to the language of everyday life, but use the words and phrases with new meanings, as symbols for new states and activities.¹⁷ (Haavio 1992: 290.)

Ideas that were ‘mysterious’ (*salaperäinen*), abstract or associated with the otherworld were at odds with everyday experience and they were presented in graphically concrete forms by using metaphors or ‘translation’ (*translaatio*) into images (Haavio 1992: 289–290). Anna-Leena Siikala (2002: 48–49) emphasises particularly the concreteness of mythic images. In them, the unknown and inexplicable are rendered into visible and detailed graphic forms: both lightning and the *sampo* could be pictured as birds, the first as one with iron wings (Siikala 2002: 50–52), the latter as one with long claws (Tarkka 2012: 145). By rendering one phenomenon through another that represents a different conceptual category, metaphors enable

linguistic innovation and speech about things for the depiction of which the vocabulary or nomenclature is lacking. These things may also be non-existent, for example things that subsist only in the realm of the imagination. Seppo Knuuttila uses the term *visualisation* (*kuvantaminen*): this indicates a conceptual process ‘in which for example the non-existent is given meaning by linking it with various experiential and perceivable entities’¹⁸ (Knuuttila 2012: 140). This is especially clear in mythic metaphor and images of the otherworld. The translations of the mysterious and abstract through images and shaping these through oral poetry allows imagination to become communicable through language, and this same process also develops the expressive vocabulary of the poetry itself. An oral poetry not only preserves archaisms and flexes the semantics of vocabulary to conform to its expressive needs, it also maintains the systems of metaphors, images and symbols that are fundamental to its functioning in communication – communication that depends on imagination to be used and understood. In this light, Hautala’s (1957: 33) formulation of Kaarle Krohn’s (1926: 21–22) *Volksphantasie* appears insightful for his time: the form of Kalevala-meter poetry (or any poetry) “is in itself an indication of the influence of fantasy” (cf. Lakoff & Turner 1989).

Myths and Imagination

William G. Doty argues that the imaginal nature of myths connects them with other “imaginal expressions and stories” and “idiosyncratic imaginings” that provide a model for the interpretation of experienced reality (Doty 2000: 40). A feature distinguishing myths from other forms of meaning formation is their interpretation as something culturally important (Doty 2000: 37–39). Mythology and mythic language produce the core metaphors of a society or a community, by which “the apparent randomness of the cosmos can be stabilized [...] Myths provide the overarching conceptualities of a society by structuring its symbolic representations of reality.” (Doty 2000: 51.) Both Doty and Siikala argue that the products of the mythic imagination, such as mythic images, are “true experientially” (Doty 2000:

40) or “considered and experienced as real” (Siikala 2002: 52).

According to Mark Johnson’s (1987: 140) broad definition, imagination is the human “capacity to organize mental representations (especially percepts, images and image schemata) into meaningful, coherent unities.” Imagination is not confined to the field of art, nor does it relate only to the creation of images or the arrangement and comprehension of perceptions (Johnson 1987: 140–141). Johnson argues that imagination is part of human rationality:

Imagination is a pervasive structuring activity by means of which we achieve coherent, patterned, unified representations. It is indispensable for our ability to make sense of our experience, to find it meaningful. [...] Imagination is absolutely central to human rationality, that is, to our rational capacity to find significant connections, to draw inferences, and to solve problems. (Johnson 1987: 168.)

Johnson’s broad definition helps to outline the analytical and methodological potential of the concept of imagination. In research on folk poetry, this definition can be complemented by some additional points and observations. Imageries and figurative expressions in poetic language are not ornamentation, but point to the ways in which people create order and meaning in their world – they are traces of imaginal processes and they imply, at least potentially, rational argumentation (see also Lakoff & Turner 1989: 215). The interpretations of images change over time, and earlier historical layers of meaning are of no more significance than later ones. Moreover, when examining the mythic imagery of poems, it is not appropriate to limit oneself to mythic or ritual texts: the imagination has the ability to link mythic and “believed-in imaginings” (de Riviera & Sarbin 1998) with everyday thought and the worlds of play.

When taken altogether, representations arising from and organised within the sphere of the mythic imagination do not necessarily form a completely coherent mythological whole (cf. Siikala 2002: 55–56), although variation and innovation are structured and

conventional in the context of the image frames that govern the new couplings between images and that structure the relative freedom of imagination itself. The coherence of images and image frames within a mythic corpus is context-specific: they make sense, but the relevant meanings within one context should not be extended to another. Although in the present survey the focus is upon the verbal expression of the imagination, the images could also be represented visually or in action (cf. e.g. Siikala 2002: 52; Tarkka 2012: 163–164). For example, in Karelian ritual praxis, the supranormal power that was believed to threaten a person was eliminated by means of the image of an iron and/or fiery fence which surrounded him. The image was verbalised for example in the charm words *aijan rautasen rakennan* [‘I will build an iron fence’] or *tavos mulle tulinen miekka* [‘Forge me a fiery sword!’] (circling the body with an iron sword being symbolically equivalent to the erection of an iron fence), while the image was concretised with a fiery splinter, and with an axe or sword, and finally was activated by circling the person under threat with the splinter and axe (SKVR I₄ 1878, 1887). Within the frame of an individual performance, the conventions for using and interpreting image representations becomes active, and the pragmatic relations between linguistic and para-linguistic expressions as well as objects and elements of the environment resolve otherwise ambiguous and potentially contradictory symbols into meaningful coherence.

Mythic images and the poetic language by which they are expressed are shared, historically layered, and linked to the slowly changing structures of mentality (cf. e.g. Siikala 2002: 29–32; 2012: 64–71). The collective and traditional dimension of imagination (Petterson 2002) may be emphasised by speaking of ‘popular’ or ‘vernacular’ imagination. In the area of vernacular imagination, mythic images form powerful loci of cultural memory, emotion, and action. These are simultaneously made possible and moulded within tradition; they influence the ways in which individuals and communities act and reciprocally change as they are shaped through this action.

At the risk of reproducing Romanticizing notions of folk poetry, there is also reason to ask whether oral and literary poetries differ in relation to the cultural and linguistic channelling of imagination, for example through traditional, crystallized imageries. In particular, a system like Kalevala-metre poetry, in which several genres operate within the framework of one poetic language, is impossible to set apart from other forms of communication as a completely separate artistic sphere. The poetic language was intertwined with spoken language and other poetic systems (see Stepanova 2012: 281; Tarkka, forthcoming a), and its recognised genres occupied a concrete position as social or magical tools (see Tarkka 2013: 109–115, 120–122, 286–287). Julius Krohn (1885: 576) argued long ago that ‘[f]olk poetry is closely connected to life; the realm of the imagination has not been prised from it as something separate from normal life, as with art poetry.’¹⁹ Nor for this folk poetry does there exist ‘poetry as poetry’, ‘poetry for poetry’s sake’, ‘pure poetry’ (cf. Setälä 1932: 592–593), or ‘mere poetic expressions’ (cf. Siikala 2002: 52). In addition, the intertextuality of folklore genres mediates the genre-specific meanings attached to imageries and image frames, thus allowing the mythic meanings to affect the whole field of expressive genres.

Images of the Otherworld

Mythic worlds simultaneously shape and provide frames for people to understand the world of their everyday experience (cf. Frog, this volume; Lukin, this volume). This will be illustrated here through the ways in which the singers of Kalevala-metre poetry constructed their mythic worlds. Descriptions of the otherworld provide a suitable empirical basis for the analysis of how people picture and put into words the unknown world beyond the senses.²⁰ As a starting point, it may be asserted that the networks of meaning and image systems rooted in the otherworld are mythic in their nature, but their range of uses also extends across the description and evaluation of everyday life and of individual life histories (see Siikala 2012: 64–65; Tarkka 2013: 237–258).

In 1871, Miihkali Perttunen performed *The Song of Creation*, in which the mythic hero Väinämöinen drifts across the primordial sea. The myth of the world's creation depicts the time before time and a landscape which had not yet been organised into the geography that we recognise. This is despite the poem's internal world being brought together from landscape elements and social relations that, already before the acts of creation, resemble the familiar world. The world is created from the eggs of the water bird that broods upon Väinämöinen's knee and the sea bottom has taken on its shape from his movements, whereafter the hero drifts to the shore of Northland (*Pohjola*). To an audience familiar with the poetic corpus, Northland activates a broad, spatio-temporal semantic framework rooted in the otherworld (Tarkka 2013: 383–384): it is clear that the events of mythic primordial time are situated on the border of two worlds: 'ours', and that of the 'other'. Miihkali gives the following account on Väinämöinen's journey:

- (1) Hätä tuuli tuuvittauve,
 ilman lieto liikuttauve,
 oalto rannalla ajaue
 pimieh om Pohjoilahe,
 tarkkahan Tapiolahe,
 miehien šyöjähän kylähe,
 urohon upottajahe,
 kiven kirjavan šivulla,
 poajem pakšun lappiella,
 šoarehe šelällisehe,
 mantereh on puuttomahe.
 (SKVR I₁ 58.82–92.)

A wind lulls him,
 a gentle breeze sweeps him,
 a wave drives him to shore,
 to dark Northland,
 to strict Tapiola,
 to the man-eating village,
 the drowner of heroes,
 to the side of a colourful stone,
 to the slope of a thick crag,
 to an island of the open sea,
 to a land without trees.

Corresponding depictions are typical of Kalevala-metre poetry, the narrative world of which is built up through journeys conducted between this world and the otherworld. The otherworld destination is too dark to see and too strange to picture by means of normal

expressive strategies. In the face of this challenge, the poem lingers and, through its repetitive structure, creates a cross-exposure of the undesired space.

How did Miihkali depict what lay outside the experience of observation, of everyday and rational thought? How did he relate and picture the unknown? For Miihkali, the other-world was dark and 'strict' (*tarkka*), strangely coloured but still natural in its stone-like-ness – it was a barren island surrounded by water, a village which consumed and drowned heroes. The otherworld thus resembles what is familiar and yet remains unknown. In taming and familiarizing the unknown, Miihkali brought concrete and everyday landscape features (such as islands), social organizations (such as villages) and elements (such as water) into contact with perpetually new and surprising image frameworks. The familiar meanings of the features and elements of this landscape receded and were brought into question, but the unknown became filled with images and meanings. The colourful stone was peculiar as a stone, but that unfamiliarity compelled reflection on the categories and characteristics of these phenomena in dialectic with their regularities and contrasts with empirical experience.

Miihkali's performance is the result of a process of contextually relevant selection: the singer combined elements from the pool of traditional expressions known to him and that also suited the context in order to form an aesthetically satisfying whole. The paradigmatic set of usable expressions was based on the singer's mastery over the mythic corpus (Doty 2000: 33–34; Siikala 2012: 60–61), and the combination of these elements into a syntagmatic whole presupposed competence in the broader poetic idiom. Siikala (2012: 465) notes that singers and performers of incantations were able to form different epithets by continuously combining 'new features of the mythic world'.²¹ In the history of research, the creation of a paradigmatic set of images and tropes, the selection of possible expressions, and the inclination to form parallel depictions have all been connected with the field of imagination. These patterns are deeply cultural, and hence part of the vernacular, poetic imagination.

On the level of the regional mythic corpus, the epithets of the otherworldly Northland depict a world permeated by strangeness. The positive pole of meaning of otherworld settings is concerned with wealth: Northland was a ‘thick, fat’ (*pakšu*) and ‘strict, sharp’ (*tarkka*) place, an otherworld home of wealth, which could also be situated in real regions, for example on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, teeming with fish (Tarkka 2013: 222–223). As a place of wealth, the otherworld was, however, connected with Utopias: boundless wealth was a dream of the hungry (Tarkka 2012: 165).

At its most typical, otherworldliness is connected with life after death and its spatial representation, and with hostile images milling out moral concepts – the otherworld Northland is *helvetti* [‘hell’], *paha paikka* [‘the evil place’] and *paha sarana* [‘the evil hinge’], where *paha valta* [‘evil power’] rules (SKVR I₁ 634, 58, 54a). The Northland of the incantations is above all a place of sins and a realm of death described with negative epithets, where evil has its origin and to which evil is returned. The afterlife was depicted as a place that put an end to the familiar, warm, and good life, and the images of the realm of the afterlife in Kalevala-metric poetry overlap with the imagery of the realm of evil. Notions derived from folk medicine and incantations about the powerful death substance called *kalma* also support the perceived overlap of these concepts: *kalma* originated from the realm of the dead (or *katonehen kartanosta* [‘from the yard of the fallen’]), or from the bodies of the dead (or *manalaisen maksan päästä* [‘from the liver of the departed’]), and thither it was also sent back with the aid of an incantation (SKVR I₄ 548; Tarkka 2013: 385, 395–396).

The otherworld is defined in relation to difference: it is a relational term which relates at least implicitly to the notions of a boundary and what is on this side of the boundary. These dimensions of reality are pictured in the terms *tuonilmanen* [‘that world’, lit. ‘of that air (sky)’] and *tämänilmanen* [‘this world’, lit. ‘of this air (sky)’]. (Tarkka 2013: 385.) Although the unknown nature of the otherworld presupposes its being filled with meanings which trace back to and are

generated in relation to this world, the situation in folk poetry is more complex: the depiction of the unknown otherworld helped to define and value this world, and to emphasise this world’s essential characteristics in a dialectic process. The familiar world of the living and the otherworld subsisted side by side, or one inside the other. The boundary between them was a fundamental structuring principle of this world, and one of the central functions of ritual was to define, sanction and maintain that boundary (cf. Stepanova & Frog, this volume). (Tarkka 2013: 423–424.)

The otherworld is defined both deictically, from the definer’s own position – ‘that over there’ as opposed to ‘this here’ – and also in contrast to self-definition – it is ‘other’. Although the terms are relational (the relationship of this to that), they nonetheless point to spatial and bodily experience: to existence within a world, under a ‘sky’, the this-worldly state of a lifespan. For an individual, this condition begins at birth, when the child moves from the womb with its otherworld associations *tälle ilmalle* [‘into this air’], *näitä maita marssimah, ilmoja ihanumah* [‘to march these lands, to admire these airs (skies)’] (SKVR I₄ 985, 960). From an individual’s point of view, the *tämän ilmanen* [‘this-worldly’] is temporally limited and at the end of life the departed leaves *tuolla ilmalla* [‘for that air/world’] (SKS KRA. Samuli Paulaharju b)16431. 1915). (Tarkka 2013: 385–386.) In their deicticity, the spatial images of the otherworld and this world presuppose a subject position from which this and that are defined as spatial entities. Hence they also construct the identity of the subject and position him or her in space and time, and in a social relationship. Spatiality and relationality also present the possibility of exchange and movement: travel between the otherworld and this world, and communication between them. Hence the conceptual construction of the otherworld creates a basis for the themes of journeying and incantation performance represented in Kalevala-metre epic poetry. (Tarkka 2013: 386.)

Otherworld epithets combine with each other and may form extensive passages that give the narrative a rhythm, motivate the plot and describe the narrative universe – as in

Miihkali's eight-line description of Northland in example (1) above. At its briefest, the otherworld may, however, be depicted with just one compound word, such as *ikiiperä* ['eternal end'] (SKS KRA. Heikki Meriläinen b)547. 1888). Also, landscape terms and place names, in themselves neutral, may be linked with the matrix of otherworld localities in a narrative context or, for example, through parallel expression, leading their interpretation and value to change. Thus pejorative epithets that emphasise distance or lowliness like *perä* ['back; end'], *pohja* ['north; bottom'] and *syvä* ['deep'] (e.g. SKVR I₁ 60, 72) may be joined with value-free descriptions. The relationship between the otherworld and this world also may be emphasised by using kinship terms, by which the people of Northland are described as being kin to the heroes (e.g. SKVR I₁ 165). (Tarkka 2013: 386–387.)

In addition to spatial, topographical and social definitions, the otherworld is characterised as differing from normal reality in its temporality or non-temporality, which is described with the epithet *iki* ['eternal']. Northland is the *ikikylä* ['eternal village'] and *ikiiperä* ['eternal end'] (SKVR I₁ 93; SKS KRA. Heikki Meriläinen b)547. 1888). The eternal otherworld is the world of the dead, a space-time outside the temporality of this world. From this primary meaning, use of the epithet *iki* has spread. Mythic eternity is a characteristic of positive heroes, above all Väinämöinen, based on his age, which indexes wisdom. Väinämöinen is the *ikuinen* ['eternally old'] *ikiruno* ['eternal poet'] (SKVR I₁ 308, 624). Timelessness also refers to the continuity of knowledge mediated from earlier generations or *vanha kansa* ['the ancient people'] (Tarkka 2013: 500): the temporal reach of tradition exceeds an individual generation or the lifetime of one person. The epithet *iki* also gives form to a community's temporal depth, the chain linking the generations to the primordial time of the world-creation, along which the forefathers aid and counsel the living. Through the ritual maintenance of this connection, eternity and the present moment, this world and the otherworld, fed and shaped each other. (Tarkka 2013: 387–388.)

The geography of the Kalevala-metre poetry's otherworld is linked with Northland, which, as its name indicates, was situated in the north. As a northerly region, it was compared with Lapland (e.g. SKVR I₂ 873) and was pushed to the periphery of a community's sphere of activity by means of derivatives of 'north' (*pohja*) pointing to distance, being at the back of beyond or lowness: Northland (*Pohjola*) was *pohja* or *pohjo* ['north; bottom'] (SKVR I₂ 1025; I₁ 683). The *pohjainen* ['northerly'] was a cold north wind (*vilu viima* ['the cold breeze']) with which the mistress of Northland blights Väinämöinen's sowing (SKVR I₁ 88). In a geographicalised otherworld, the direction of north and ethnic foreignness ('Lappishness') are characterised by coldness and darkness, which create an association with concepts of the world of the departed. Northland is an icy and slippery *kymä kylä* ['cold village'] (SKVR I₁ 60, 81), the dark and stone-hard *Pimettölä* ['Darkland'] (SKVR I₁ 60, 81, 88, 54). In the land hostile to life, even the heavenly bodies do not shine (SKVR I₁ 93). (Tarkka 2013: 388.)

Through imagination, a person could visualise and verbalise both the non-existent and the unknown. One of the most typical epithets describing the otherworld points precisely to this dimension: the otherworld was strange. Because the unknown reality had to be envisioned, however, and made perceptible, it could be described as a region or a building: Northland was the *vieras maa* ['foreign land'], the *tuntematon tupa* ['unknown cottage'], the *outo ovi* ['strange door'], the *tietämätön tie* ['unknown road'] and the *salakansan kartano* ['yard of the secret folk'] (SKVR I₁ 60, 64, 79a; I₂ 816, 1025). (Tarkka 2013: 390–391.) One of the dimensions of the unknown was *nimettömyys* ['namelessness'], which appears in innumerable compounds when describing a reality which the main social epithets do not engage with. The otherworld was *lahti nimetön, nimen tietämätön* ['a nameless bay, unknown by name'] (SKVR I₁ 58a). (Tarkka 2013: 416–417.) The naming of phenomena and agents belongs among the central functions of mythic knowledge, since knowledge of a phenomenon's name and origin gave power over it (Siikala 2002: 89–90). Naming not

only created categories and order in the phenomenal universe, it also highlighted the name-giver's power to define reality. A cosmos-constructing name-giving power appears particularly clearly in origin incantations. At the same time, calling something nameless and unchristened was an effective means of placing phenomena in the matrix of conceptual and social categories. (Tarkka 2013: 417–420.) Epithets such as 'nameless', 'strange', 'secret', and 'unknown' not only identified something as unknown; these all indexed danger, or potential threatening power that one was not in a position to control. Although this negative identification, an acknowledgement of knowing that something is ultimately unknown, already eliminated (some of) that danger.

Speaking of the otherworld fills the unknown dimensions of reality with images, giving them form and content. The source of these images is naturally in the familiar reality that can be observed and understood by the users of the poetry, because 'nothingness' cannot be depicted as such, as Kenneth Burke (1966: 430) has expounded. One way to solve the problem of depicting the otherworld is the use of negations: indicating the absence of features which characterise reality (or their inversion) (Tarkka 2013: 389–391, 423). Negation is a linguistic feature whereby a phenomenon is described according to what it is not. As a phenomenon, negation is purely linguistic: only in the linguistic universe may something be set before us which does not exist. (Burke 1966: 419–421.) Even tentative understanding of the negative requires imagination.

Negations work like metaphors, uniting different conceptual fields and features, comparing and distinguishing them: both broaden the circles of describable and verbalisable reality. The structure of metaphor, the uniting of two conceptual spheres for the birth of a new meaning (e.g. Lakoff & Turner 1989), presents a direct way of talking about the otherworld: a phenomenon which lacks any immediate language to describe it is described through the features of the known and familiar or their absence. Negations and metaphors may be viewed as the prerequisites for the verbalisation of the otherworld.

Through them, that which is not – and that which is not known – is given a linguistic existence (Katajamäki 1997: 8; Tarkka 2013: 389–390, 423).

The most typical linguistic ways of expressing negative epithets are the endings *-ton/-tön* ['less'] and the prefix *epä-* ['un-, non-'] and the use of the words *ei* ['not'] (SKVR I₁ 93) or *ilman* ['without']. Toarie from Aajuolahti describes Väinämöinen's being driven to the otherworld thus:

(2) [...] kantopa vanhan Väinämöisen
paikoilla papittomilla,
mailla ristimättömillä.
Äij' on sinne männehijä,
vaan ei pois palannehia,
pirtti on ovettomah,
ilman ikkunattomaha,
miesten syöpähä kylähä,
urosten uponnehese.
(SKVR I₁ 78.37–46.)

[...] carries old Väinämöinen
to priestless places,
to crossless / unchristened lands.
Many have gone there,
but have not returned,
to the doorless cottage,
without windows,
to the man-eating village,
to the drowner of heroes.

Like Miihkali, Toarie articulates her picture of the otherworld according to the principles of parallelism: the verse pairs are internally coherent and they are linked together in a meaningful way. Priestlessness and crosslessness are typical epithets for the otherworld. The familiar social cosmos was a land characterised by the priests and crosses of Christianity, and only those who had been baptised and named in the Christian faith were full members of society and thus fully human. A crossless land also indicated that part of the graveyard where the problematic departed were buried, for example those who had died in a liminal state or those who did not belong to the community. The next epithet Toarie gives for the otherworld describes it as a place where many have gone but whence few have returned. This is the place of the departed, whose unknown character is emphasised: the living do not know the world of the departed, as eyewitness accounts or

messages are received thence, but only rarely, in ritual settings and in dreams.

Images of a doorless and windowless cottage point too to funeral rites and the otherworld as a place of the departed. The sphere of everyday human existence, the this-world home, was often pictured metaphorically as a house. Correspondingly, the otherworld sphere was described as a building which lacked the essential parts of a human dwelling – doors and windows. Otherworld dwelling places were non-places: closed and airless spaces that it was impossible to get into, and which it was impossible to exit. Ritual equivalents served as mediators between the house images of this world and the otherworld. Ritual texts for funeral preparations emphasised that doors and windows were to be made, at least symbolically, on the *kropnitsa*, the covering built over a coffin and grave, so that communication between the living and the dead would be possible (Stepanova 2011: 137). The lack of doors and windows pointed to a bad death and the severing of communication. (Tarkka 2013: 391.)

Otherworld epithets indirectly describe an unobserved world outside everyday thought. They make use of the imagination in projecting features of the known and familiar universe onto the unknown, indicating, however, the absence of these characteristics. The same mental and linguistic images used to describe the otherworld aid our understanding of the world we know: otherworld imagery lays bare and simplifies the structures, characteristics and values of the reality that is familiar and observable, of the reality that corresponds to our horizons of expectation. What belongs to this world is figured through the otherworld, and the otherworld, eschewing definition, is verbalised as a concrete opposite of this world. Such dialectic differentiation works by selecting contextually meaningful characteristics of a phenomenon and creating epithets on the basis of them. In depicting the otherworld, many simultaneous or parallel definitions were resorted to: the negative and inverted, the relational and deictic, the spatial and temporal, and the co-ordinates of real geography or of the fictive world of traditional narratives.

Imagination, Dreams, and Utopian Discourse

Vernacular notions of the nature of the imagination may be found in areas other than the symbolism of the otherworld, for example in words signifying imagination and fantasy, and in concepts related to dreams and forebodings. In Karelian, what was conceived as the opposite of the real and reality was *mielenkoavailus*, which is derived from the base word *koavehus*. *Koavehus* is ‘imagination’, and *koavailu*, derived from it, indicates description and narration, but also make-believe and dreaming; the forms *koavassellakseh*, *koavasteliutuo* and *koavehtie* or *koavastoa* indicate fantasy or a mirage in the mind and appearances in dreams. (*Karjalan kielen sanakirja* III: 311; II: 262–263.) The last of these in particular is closely related to the imaginative process, in which a dream is ‘seen’ (*nähdään*). The dream world was the opposite of *ilmi*, or the visible world and wakefulness (SKS KRA. Iivo Marttinen 8: III D.3.6, I, 16. 1911; *Karjalan kielen sanakirja* I: 439), but was nonetheless seen: what was seen in a prophetic dream might move into the waking world; it was fulfilled. The as yet non-existent future might also announce itself and become perceptible through hearing, vision or smell. Thus when, for example, something is heard from the lake *niinkuin huhuonta* [‘like hollering’], it presaged a drowning. When *muka niin kuin välistä korvissa kuuluu itku eikä mitänä ole* [‘thus it is as though weeping is heard and there isn’t anything there’], it forebodes something that will cause weeping for the house (SKS KRA. Samuli Paulaharju b)14121–14122. 1916; see also b)4466. 1911). Forming images without sensory observation and their traditional interpretation, the experiencing of sensations without stimulus as signs of a future event, and the dialogue between wakefulness and dreams are all expressions of the vernacular imagination. These imaginations manipulated concepts of time and almost invariably thematicised basic essentials of human life: good fortune, wealth, and their distribution.

The overlap of wakefulness and the dreamworld and the imaginative working out of the future in forebodings are linked with ritual activity in which possibilities were

given shape and their fulfilment was manipulated. In Kalevala-metre poetry, the exploration of possibility is coupled with utopian images. Senni Timonen's analysis of utopian intent is among the most powerful interpretations of the poetics of the imagination and image-formation in Kalevala-metre poetry. The utopian images distinguished by Timonen do not stop with commentary on the singer's experience, typical for lyric, but '[w]hen turning away from what is present, the mind set on a change begins to strive for the imagined'²³ (Timonen 2004: 355). This project appears 'in fantastic series of images' (*fantastinen kuvasarja*) (*ibid.*). The hoped-for, better situation of the future has to be presented in images, because it is not, for the time being, in existence and hence cannot be captured in propositional expressions. Just as the otherworld is a place of unknown reality, the 'non-existence here' (*tässä-olemattomuus*) of a localised Utopia creates new, alternative universes, the depiction of which takes from a couple of lines up to ten (see Timonen 2004: 355, 367). It is not a matter of 'pseudo-worlds' (*pseudomaailmat*) as defined by Leea Virtanen (1991: 53), where a person retreats 'to be happy' (*viihtyäksseen*) or to sort out 'the hard world of reality' (*arjen kova maailma*). Setälä (1932: 607) also conceived of the imagination as a force by which people may 'create new worlds and new heavens for themselves, of which no-one may deprive them,'²² a conception that equally assigns to these other realities merely the role of a safety-valve and neglects their subversive and world-creating force. Utopia is, for example, a poetic means of moving beyond the reality depicted in autobiographical songs to create unique and meaningful communications, exploring the potentialities of existences that, like the supernatural otherworld, are inextricably engaged in a dialectic assessment of the world of the singers.

Unlike images of the otherworld, utopian images relate to something better than this life (Timonen 2004: 356). Like negations, they express the characteristically human ability or 'inclination to turn from what is present towards what is absent'²⁴ (*ibid.*). Timonen notes, however, that the mythic metaphors of the otherworld – as defined by Anna-Leena

Siikala (2002: 49, 52, 55–56) – are not to be equated with utopian images, although both operate with much the same concrete images. Utopian images cannot be reduced to the referential background of the tradition of belief, which Siikala argues determines the meaning of mythic images. Whereas Siikala emphasises that mythic images and metaphors, regardless of their polyphony, are "not just any images" (2002: 49, 55–56), Timonen positions utopian images differently:

A utopian image may be almost 'anything at all' in terms of content, nor is its meaning [...] exhausted within the referential framework of folk belief – even if it has a clear relationship to it. Whereas the concept of the 'otherworld' structures folk belief – at least in theory – Utopia is situated in the sphere of 'this world', even if on its periphery. Utopia makes the impossible into a reality; it extends the real without completely crossing its borders.²⁵ (Timonen 2004: 357.)

Imagination operates in utopian discourse and lyric modes of expression according to the same parameters as in mythic discourse. To return to the words of Mark Johnson quoted above:

[It] is a pervasive structuring activity by means of which we achieve coherent, patterned, unified representations [that] is indispensable for our ability to make sense of our experience, to find it meaningful. (Johnson 1987: 168.)

It extends our reality by depiction and verbalisation, by drawing out the wordless and even subliminal from within the mind into an intersubjective dimension. The depiction or figuration of the otherworld – in the form of mythic images, myths and rituals – "provides opportunities to 'perform the world'" (Doty 2000: 41) in a performative sense: it extends the field of what exists, actualizing and defining the unseen. Utopian discourses manifest corresponding worlds in corresponding processes of performative articulation set into a dialectic relation to our own. This dialectic also shows the common-sense reality to be the outcome of a laborious, multi-layered mental and symbolic process of the dialogues created between it and various imaginal worlds.

The difference between mythic and Utopian discourses is not at the level of imagination as a phenomenon, but at the level of social perceptions of the signs and symbols being engaged. Whereas in Utopian discourse the semantic range of images used is remarkable (Timonen's "almost 'anything at all' in terms of content"), the range of symbols in mythic discourse is more narrow. These constraints are not necessarily reducible to any assumptions about what people experienced or believed to be "true" (Doty 2000: 40) or "real" (Siikala 2002: 52) – after all, any analysis of these subjective experiences remains speculative in the study of historical forms of discourse. Mythic imagination anchors the imaginative associations to traditional mythic narratives and their authorization in ritual practice. Yet also in these collective displays of mythic meanings, the range of interpretations varies greatly from individual to individual, and they also change over time.

Conclusions

In the history of Finnish folk-poetry research, imagination takes the form of an essential characteristic of poetry, a dimension of collective or individual creativity, an explanation of the origin of mythic notions and concepts, and a motivating force of the figurative nature of poetic language. In spite of being identified as central, it has been peripheralized and devalued through the majority of the history of research until relatively recently. In this sense, the imagination has been treated with the same bias as the notion of creativity: both have been at odds with the perception of tradition and traditionality, and closely linked to individual subjects and the idiosyncratic. Anna-Leena Siikala's and Senni Timonen's reinterpretations have significantly progressed the analysis of the imaginal. Their work emphasises the connection of poetic language with the structures of worldview and conceptual categories. Even here, however, a divide has been maintained between mythic images and other images. This divide has developed owing to research emphasis on the genres and qualities, meanings, and uses of the image systems being analyzed. The present study attends instead first and

foremost to imagination in the uses and structuring of imageries across different discourses – such as genres – and consequently produces a new perspective and more synthetic understanding of the operation of imagination in Kalevala-metric poetry. Folklore genres are differentiated yet interconnected spheres of vernacular imagination: they offer the expressive means and set the expressive constraints for imaginative processes and their communication. As folklore genres are increasingly defined as essentially dialogical (e.g. Tarkka, forthcoming b) the domains of mythic imagination and other discourses become conceptually intertwined.

If we accept Johnson's broad definition of imagination and bring it into primary focus, it becomes possible to demolish the assumed divide between mythic images and other images. This definition becomes a tool whereby we can arrive at a more precise picture of the imaginativeness of Kalevala-metric poetry and observe how meaning is created using imagery against a mythic sounding board. Mythic images are emotionally, cognitively, and morally compelling representations that are authorised both as tradition and in relation to the intertextual universe of the oral poetry, as well as in relation to the vernacular belief system. The boundary between these and other representations is, however, variable and often indistinct, since mythic symbols have a polysemic quality, yielding a capacity to synthesise with co-occurring symbols in specific contexts of use: they are able to articulate not only the cosmogonic and cosmographic frames and supranormal powers but also the values of the community, historical circumstances, and personal experiences of individual singers (see Tarkka 1998: 133). Although the present study has focused on Kalevala-metric poetry, this case illustrates that it is in the field of vernacular imagination that mythic elements are charged by means of emotions and current interests, personality and historicity, and thus gain an expressive and world-altering power. By means of imagination, possible worlds are created, which may have surprising consequences for the intersubjective reality that we perceive as present for us.

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Notes

1. The term 'imaginal' (cf. Doty 2000) is used here as a neutral term referring to the involvement of imagination while avoiding the term 'imaginary', which has connotations of lacking reality and falsehood, and thus both the ideas that the sun rotates around the earth and that the earth rotates around the sun can be described as 'imaginal' understandings, whereas only one might be described as 'imaginary'.
2. "kotimaisen mielikuvituksen piirissä ilman muuta todellisuuden pohjaa, kuin minkä laulajan oma sisäinen ja ulkonainen näkemyspiiri tarjosi" (Krohn K 1932: 25–26).
3. "on [...], koska kysymyksessä on taideteoksen synty, huomattava runoilijan mielikuvituksen ja taidon osuus" (Haavio 1952: 213).
4. "mielikuvituksen rannaton, ääretön valtakunta, missä mielikuvituksen lento on rajaton ja rajoittamaton" (Setälä 1932: 606).
5. "runolahjaa, avonaista silmää, joka luontoa, elämää ja ihmis-sielua käsittää, sekä selviä, kauniita kuvia luovaa kuvitusvoimaa" (Krohn J 1885: 585, cf. also 587).
6. "sitä ehtymättömällä mielikuvituksella kartuttaneet ja sammumattomalla tunteen tulella kirkastaneet" (Krohn K 1914: 352).
7. "uskoi karjalaisen mielikuvituksen erikoiseen laatuun" (Krohn K 1918: 132).
8. "Uutta luova aika oli ohi" (Krohn K 1918: 130).
9. "mielikuvituksen avulla, mutta kuitenkin todella vallinneen uskon pohjalla [...] syntyneet".
10. "on ollut omiaan panemaan kansojen mielikuvituksen liikkeelle ja samalla antamaan aihetta uskomuksellisiinkin kuvitelmiin" (Setälä 1932: 597).
11. "muunlaisista kertomuksista ja saduista saatuja lisäpiirteet" (Harva 1948: 72).
12. "muoto sinänsä on osoituksena fantasian vaikutuksesta" (Hautala 1957: 33).
13. "mielikuvitus luo esiin kuvia, jotka pitävät tunnetta vireillä" (Relander 1894: 2).
14. "Kuvien kautta ihminen ainakin ajattelee. Tämmöisiä kuvia ihmisen mielessä aina syntyy, ne ovat ihmisen ajatusten maininki." (Relander 1894: 295.)

15. "sillä vertauskuvallinen runous on mahdollon kansanrunoudessa, missä ei äly vielä ollenkaan vaikutta" (Krohn 1885: 572).
16. "muinaisten runoilijain sanallinen ilmaus [ei] ole yksikerrostumaista, vaan [...] monikerrostumaista" (Haavio 1992: 290).
17. "Pyrkinessään puutteellisin välinein täsmällisesti ja ymmärrettävästi tuomaan esiin käsitteitä ja tunnetiloja, jotka eivät kuulu arkiseen elämään, he tosin turvautuvat arkielämän kieleen, mutta käyttävät sanoja ja fraaseja uudessa merkityksessä, uusien tilojen ja toimintojen symboleina." (Haavio 1992: 290.)
18. "jossa esimerkiksi ei-olevaa merkityksellistetään kytkeällä se erilaisiin kokemuksiin ja havainnonmukaisiin entiteetteihin" (Knuuttila 2012: 140).
19. "Kansanrunous on lähimmässä yhteydessä elämän kanssa, ei ole siitä erotettu mielikuvituksen valtakunta tavallisen elämän ohessa, niinkuin taiderunous" (Krohn J 1885: 576).
20. The empirical part of this survey summarizes my analysis of the otherworld imagery of the poetic corpus of the village of Vuokkiniemi in Viena Karelia (Tarkka 2013: 383–424).
21. "jatkuvasti uusia myyttisen maailman piirteitä" (Siikala 2012: 465).
22. "luoda itselleen uudet maat ja uudet taivaat, joita kukaan ei voi häneltä riistää" (Setälä 1932: 607).
23. "Kääntyessään pois läsnäolevasta muutoshaluinen mieli alkaa tavoitella kuviteltua" (Timonen 2004: 355).
24. "taipumusta kääntyä läsnä olevasta kohti pois-olevaa" (Timonen 2004: 356).
25. "Utooppinen kuva taas voi olla sisällöltään miltei 'mikä tahansa', eikä sen merkitys [...] tyhjenny kansanuskon viitekehyksellä – ei, vaikka sillä olisi siihen selvä suhde. Kun kansanuskkoa – ainakin teoriassa – strukturoi 'tuonpuoleisuuden' käsite, utopia sijoittuu 'tämänpuoleisuuden' piiriin, vaikkakin sen äärireunoille. Utopia tekee mahdollontta reaaliseksi, laajentaa todellista ylittämättä kokonaan sen rajoja." (Timonen 2004: 357.)

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Abbreviations

SKS = Suomalaisen Karjalaisuuden Seura / Finnish Literature Society.

Sources

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SKVR I₁₋₄ = *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot I: Vienen läänin runot*. 1908–1921. Ed. A. R. Niemi. Helsinki: SKS.

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Mythology in Cultural Practice: A Methodological Framework for Historical Analysis

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Abstract: This paper presents a methodological framework for addressing variation and change in mythology within a cultural environment. Mythology is approached in terms of a 'symbolic matrix', which provides a semiotic context for mythic discourse. Different formal 'integers' of mythology are distinguished. 'Dialects' and 'registers' of mythology are introduced along with an approach to 'positioning' within the symbolic matrix.

In recent decades, research on mythology has struggled increasingly with the problem of living variation in historical cultures and how this should be addressed. The present article sets out an approach to mythology that can be applied to any cultural arena and calibrated in both temporal and cultural-geographic scope according to the research questions asked and the material available. This is a usage-based approach to mythology as a special type of semiotic phenomenon. It is designed to take into consideration both synchronic and diachronic local and regional variations in mythology. The same social processes and practices that enable continuities also necessarily produce variation as an historical outcome. The equation of continuity and variation is affected by different social and historical factors including contacts and conversions. It is necessary to bear in mind that these are processes that take place in communities and networks of embodied individuals, even where the specific processes are ambiguously remote in time and the individuals have been rendered anonymous. A specific aim in the development of this approach was to provide a methodological framework equipped to address these processes and the active uses of mythology by agents operating in them. The approach is therefore equipped to address social variation at the level of practices and group identities that may exist within a single community,

even where that variation is at the level of different religions. Equipping the approach to be a functional tool in synchronic and diachronic investigations of either situation-specific uses of mythology or broad social developments has required theorizing mythology in a way that can move beyond many of the limitations of earlier approaches.

This approach addresses mythology in terms of what I call a *symbolic matrix*, a term which refers to the constitutive elements of a mythology or mythologies in a cultural environment and conventions for their combination (see also Frog 2014a; 2014d). Rather than seeking to attend to 'a mythology' as a single, static thing, this approach attends to the symbolic resources through which mythology is manifested and functions. As a usage-based approach, it attends especially to interfaces between mythology and social practices or sets of practices. It acknowledges the potential for mythology to vary between different practices – types of variation that are customarily eclipsed by images of 'a mythology' as uniform, homogeneous and atemporal. The scope of the symbolic matrix under consideration can be calibrated to a 'cultural mythology' or a 'religion', but attending to the matrix of resources helps avoid the presumption that 'a mythology' is exclusive of 'other mythologies'. This is essential for considering diverse variations related to contacts, such as those discussed

below. A focus here is on the problem of how to take into account different perspectives that coexist within a community on the same elements of mythology.

The present discussion briefly outlines what is meant here by ‘mythology’ and what is referred to as a symbolic matrix. A review then follows of some formal differences between certain types of ‘integers’ in that matrix (i.e. unitary signifying elements such as images, motifs, etc.). Distinguishing these elements make it easier to observe and analyze what is happening in specific cases under discussion. Examples will be provided of variation between perspectives on symbols of mythology. Different perspectives will be considered, both under conditions of encounters between religions and also between different social practices. *Registers of mythology* is then introduced as a tool to account for both of these types of variation as different forms of the same phenomenon. In accord with interests of the readership of *RMN Newsletter*, emphasis is on pre-modern environments rather than modern cultural arenas.¹ Examples are centrally drawn from Old Norse and Finnic cultures.

The Problem

Before turning to the problem of synchronic variation, it is useful to highlight mythology’s capacity for long-term continuities, which is a necessary counterpoint for considering variation. This historical endurance parallels that of language, which is why it becomes reasonable to talk about ‘Indo-European mythology’ or ‘Uralic mythology’: just as the words and grammar of language have a continuity spanning thousands of years, so too do symbols and structures of mythology.² Language and mythology have somehow been paired through the history of different cultures until they were documented in the forms in which they have become known. This does not mean that Hungarian and Finno-Karelian mythologies are the same any more than the respective Uralic languages. It also does not mean that Finno-Karelian mythology is any more homogeneous than the dialects of Finnish and Karelian languages. Building on the analogy of mythology to language, Anna-Leena Siikala (2012: 15) has proposed that we

should discuss ‘dialects’ of mythology as a means of talking about this sort of variation in much the same way we talk about dialects of language. This type of analogy for considering mythology provides a valuable tool for thinking about variation.

Languages and dialects of language do not evolve in isolation: they are affected by loans and other interference from contacts with different languages and dialects. Mythologies are correspondingly affected by contacts with other mythologies and the practices with which those mythologies are interfaced. Viewing a mythology as a coherent, homogeneous and exclusive system leads one to imagine that Christianity encountered a more or less coherent mythology – and thus religion – when it arrived in Finland or Scandinavia. The various consequences of such an encounter that produce new combinations of mythological material have been described with terms like ‘syncretism’, ‘religious pluralism’ and ‘acculturation’. Such outcomes have been conceived of as something like a creolization of two idealized religions with their associated mythologies. The researcher then seeks to untangle which elements derive from which religion or how they work together. However, this sort of approach easily marginalizes and devalues the hybrids of this contact (or collision): they appear as aberrations between two ideal images. A particular concern that I want to address here is the social perception of different mythologies – the perception that leads to the assimilation or manipulation of symbols associated with one perspective on a mythology by people viewing the same symbols from a different perspective. This perception may be from the perspective of an entirely different religion, as in an encounter between Christians and non-Christians, but it can also occur where different groups or specialists have different perspectives on (what we assume to be) the same mythology.

A distinction between ‘mythology’ and ‘religion’ is also warranted here. These tend to get blurred in comparisons of ‘Christianity’ to the ‘mythology’ of a culture or community in the North. Mythology and religion should better be viewed as distinct but complementary categories. If we follow the

analogy of mythology to language, the elements like images, motifs and stories along with the structures and conventions for their use and combination can be viewed as a parallel to the lexicon and grammar of a language. In other words, mythology is like another system for communication, representation, labelling and interpretation; it is a system that functions symbolically rather than linguistically.³ In contrast, *religion* can be broadly considered as a type of register of practice (cf. Agha 2007) that has developed through inter-generational transmission, is characterized by mythology, and entails an ideology and worldview. This approach to religion views it as a metasemiotic entity – a system of practices and behaviors (extending to social groups with hierarchies and multiple roles) associated with mythology and that is socially recognizable as a particular religion. Thus, individuals exhibiting certain behaviors, practices and associated symbols are viewed as associated with a particular religion, and that identification associates the practitioner with the broader range of practices and behaviours, and the worldview of that religion, as well as associating them with other practitioners of that religion as a register of practice. ‘Christianity’ is not simply a mythology, but a religion that entails a socially recognizable religious identity. The link established between a religion and a mythology allows the metasemiotic entity of religion to be recognized through characteristic elements of that mythology, and individuals identified with a religion become associated with its emblematic symbols of practice and mythology. Although religion and religious identity are topics of discussion beyond the scope of the present paper, it is important to emphasize that, according to the present approach, mythology remains a signification system, whereas religion is the constellation of practices and behaviors interfaced with mythology that provide a fundamental frame of reference for religious identity.⁴ In this respect, the conflation of mythology with religion is comparable to conflating language with ethnicity.

Distinguishing mythology and religion may not seem especially significant at first glance, but it must be stressed that

continuities of mythology may be maintained through a radical change in religion (see e.g. Frog 2013c), while a change in religion may be accomplished on the platform of an established mythology (e.g. the Reformation).

Mythic Discourse and a Symbolic Matrix

The terms ‘myth’ and ‘mythology’ have been defined in many ways. Generally speaking, approaches tend to fall into three broad categories, or some mixture between them. These broad groupings are considered according to how they define or construe ‘myth’ and ‘mythology’ as formal categories rather than according to categories of analytical and interpretive approaches (psychoanalysis, Myth-and-Ritual, literary criticism, etc.; see Doty 2000), within which implicit or explicit definitions of ‘myth’ and ‘mythology’ may vary. A brief look at these three categories is warranted as a frame of reference for the theoretical approach to mythology outlined below.

A classic approach is to define myth as a type of story. This approach has a foundation in the origin of the modern term ‘myth’, which was borrowed from Classical Greek *mythos* during the era of Romanticism as a word for talking about stories associated with non-Christian religions.⁵ Specific definitions of ‘myth’ as a type of story nevertheless remain quite diverse.⁶ William G. Doty has suggested that the continued emphasis on narrative is at its root “a way to stress the humanistic values of imaginative storytelling, in contrast to bloodless scientific abstraction and arithmeticizing.” (Doty 2000: 41.) Defining myth as a type of story normally leads to constructing a model of mythology as something like a coherent narrative world in which gods and their adversaries have adventures according to narrative logic. This sort of approach has difficulty with, for example, gods addressed in rituals but not narrated, such as Äkräs, the Karelian god of turnips and other root vegetables (e.g. Harva 1948: 209–220): although he would seem to be a god linked to the orchestration of growth and sustenance, he remains beyond the scope of this type of mythology if there are not stories about him. The same is true of other mythic images and motifs familiar only from

ritual discourse, such as the staircase to the otherworld described in Karelian lament (Stepanova 2012: 262) or *Kipuvuori* ['Pain Mountain'], ruled by a maiden who receives and tortures aches and illnesses in Karelian incantations (Siikala 2002: 192).

A more subtle problematic site in narrative-based approaches is an inclination to (historically) reconstruct and fill out the image of a mythology into a coherent whole. This inclination easily leads to the inference that in the Old Norse eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð*, for example, each mention of an act or adventure of Þórr and Óðinn in their competitive dialogue either *a*) refers to a narrative that was known and circulated independently as part of the broader mythology, or *b*) is an invention of the author of the poem without relevance to the mythology. This can only be tested in cases where the story is independently attested or referenced elsewhere, which tends to be the exception because extant sources are so limited. The difficulty here is that a presumption of integration is not necessarily valid. Looking at the much richer data of kalevalaic poetry, the mythic smith Ilmarinen is attributed with forging of the vault of heaven in epic contexts as an exemplar of his skill, and the motif is used in incantations as a symbol of mythic power. However, the event is never narrated and it is never presented in poems of the creation of the world – even where *The Origin of the World* is performed as part of an epic cycle in which this act is attributed to Ilmarinen.⁷ In redactions of *The Singing Competition*, the demiurge Väinämöinen similarly proclaims certain motifs in the act of creating the world that are not found in performances of *The Origin of the World* by the same singers.⁸ However the history of these variations is interpreted, certain elements of the mythology clearly exhibit context-specific functions even within the 'textual universe' (Tarkka 1993) of a single genre. This raises questions about how to view motifs and themes that are referenced or narrated in ritual discourse but which otherwise seem at a remove from the broader mythology.

This sort of autonomy is common for charm historiols, such as accounts of how Jesus meets Peter (sitting on a stone) and

heals him of an ailment in so-called *Super petram* ['On a Stone'] charms (e.g. Roper 2005: 122–125), or how the River Jordan is stopped so that Jesus and John can cross it in some so-called *Flum Jordan* ['River Jordan'] charms (e.g. Roper 2005: 104–109).⁹ When developing a coherent image of a mythology, narrative-based approaches have often included such historiols. The case of the Second Merseburg Charm is famously controversial, because its first attestation is the most important Old High German source for vernacular mythology, whereas the numerous later examples are normally found with Christian actors like Jesus, Peter and Mary (e.g. Christiansen 1914; see also Beck 2003 and works there cited). For the present discussion, it makes no difference whether a Christian narrative was translated into vernacular Germanic mythology or vice versa: in either case, a function-specific narrative appears to be transposed into a different 'mythology' without clear integration into its broader narrative world. In fact, the agents in such charms seem to be easily transposable (Versnel 2002: 118) – i.e. such narrative elements can easily be transferred from the mythology of one culture or religion to another – and it is not necessary for them to interface at all with the broader mythology for users to see them as magically effective (Frankfurter 1995: 475). These are just a few examples of sites where narrative-based approaches to mythology frequently appear ill-equipped to consider what might otherwise seem to belong to 'mythology'.

Another major type of approach begins with an idea of mythology as a sort of modelling system for understanding the social, empirical and unseen worlds, how they work and why they are the way that they are. This type of approach has developed from attention to the relationship of mythology to the way people think about reality (e.g. Cassirer 1925), which led up to Branislaw Malinowski's proposal that myth "is not merely a story told but a reality lived" (1926: 100). In its background is Émile Durkheim's view of religion as "a system of ideas with which the individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members and the obscure but intimate relations which they

have with it" (1912: 225). It has been influenced by structuralism, which considered structures and their systems through which culture and cultural expressions are organized and which exhibit a *longue durée* (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1967 [1958]: 202–228; Greimas 1987 [1962]). Semiotics has been most fundamental in developing the modern approaches, among which Roland Barthes (1972 [1957]) is at the forefront. Although its implications extend to such a fundamental level that it can be challenging to unravel (esp. Lotman & Uspenskij 1976), this type of approach proves very useful for addressing myths in modern cultures owing to its emphasis on symbolic patterns and the indicators that make them recognizable in diverse forms, such as the 'myths' that good will triumph over evil or that soap bubbles help make things clean. Basically, myths become viewed in terms of symbolic models that provide frames of reference or that are more abstractly just recognized and understood as meaningful or significant (i.e. functioning paradigmatically rather than syntagmatically). Similar ideas are implicitly behind descriptions of mythology as constituted of things that are *bonnes à penser* (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 128) ['good(s) to think with'] or mythology as "a form of *knowing*" (Doty 2000: 55–56, original emphasis). On the other hand, the semiotic approach is not equipped to differentiate these types of patterns from a 'myth' of Þórr's battle with the world serpent or a 'myth' that the world was created from an egg. In other words, it slides towards structuralism's pitfall of identifying a meaning-bearing paradigm, and then using that abstraction as a lens through which to view all of the paradigm's instantiations. Even when the abstraction is not artificially applied across contexts and cultures¹⁰ and the indexical semantics of the paradigm have been accurately assessed, using that paradigm as a lens customarily levels differences between those instantiations and marginalizes their potential for distinctive meanings. The utility of this type of approach is compromised especially where the 'mythology' of narrative-based approaches is brought into focus if no differentiation is made between the 'myth' of an abstract paradigm, like the monster-slayer's victory over the monster,



Figure 1. The so-called Gosforth Fishing Stone, 10th (?) century, Cumbria, England. Þórr is on the left with his hammer, deeply carved eyes and a fishing line with an ox-head for bait; his companion on the adventure, the giant Hymir, is on the right with an axe to cut the fishing line when the World Serpent is caught and raised to the surface; the face (?) of the World Serpent is in the lower right, with its tail in lower left (the knotwork pattern above the boat might speculatively be interpreted as the serpent's body, which encircles the world). (Illustration by the author.)

and 'myths' that are distinct instantiations of that paradigm, like Þórr's battle with the World Serpent (cf. Figure 1).¹¹

Since around 1990, a third major approach has developed that has been less concerned with defining 'myth' or 'mythology' and focuses instead on *mythic discourse*, or people's use and manipulation of images, motifs and stories that have a mythic quality in order to mediate conceptual models, values, understandings and so forth. The term and concept of mythic discourse emerged when 'discourse' became both a catchword and a new frame for looking at different phenomena.¹² The term 'mythic discourse' is most often used without seeking to define it, but it was quickly adapted into studies of mythology and religion (e.g. Siikala 1992) and has been more

generally explored as a tool for addressing how people interact with emotionally invested symbols (e.g. Goodman 1993). The rise of mythic discourse as an approach to mythology is linked to increased attention to meanings, performance and viewing mythology in terms of systems of symbols,¹³ which will here be considered the ‘integers’ of mythology. An *integer of mythology* is considered a meaningful, unitary element that can be distinguished from other elements. However simple or complex, insofar as anything linked to mythology is presented, understood and referred to as a single unit and can carry meanings or associations as a unit, it can be considered a symbol: it is a type of sign that can be recognized as signifying something. This may be the image of a god, a narrative motif or even a complex story. Different types of these symbolic integers will be introduced in the following section. For the moment, it is simply important to stress that mythology is here considered to be more than just stories; it is made up of all sorts of symbolic integers and the conventions for their combination.¹⁴ All of these together form a symbolic matrix.

When approaching the symbolic matrix of a particular environment, three factors should be stressed. First, discussing mythology and its symbols should be distinguished from ‘belief’. ‘Belief’ is a subjective phenomenon which happens at the level of individuals. Owing to how this term is used with Christianity, ‘belief’ is normally imagined as a conscious subscription of faith. Mythology enables imaginal understandings of the world and experience. It extends beyond the empirical world to mental models that are related to the world through imagination (see Tarkka, this volume). Mythology is distinguished from, for example, poetic metaphor by the emotional investment of these models (Doty 2000: 55–58). Thus mythology can be viewed in terms of *emotionally invested thinking models*. When talking about mythology, its integers can be described as emotionally invested symbols because they are socially recognized as being meaningful to people in powerful ways, whether they are so deeply established that they function as unconscious assumptions or they are actively contested within or across communities.¹⁵ On the one

hand, the engagement with these models is not dependent on a conscious understanding: just because one does not ‘believe’ in ghosts does not mean that s/he will not get nervous or frightened by strange noises in the middle of the night in a house that is supposed to be haunted (cf. Kamppinen 1989: 18–19). On the other hand, the recognition of this emotionally invested quality is not dependent on personal alignment with the symbol: an atheist can easily respond to symbolism of martyrdom in literature. It is precisely the recognition that certain symbols are emotionally invested that leads them to be used and manipulated. In addition, mythic symbols are generally characterized by ambiguity: they can be interpreted flexibly and in varying ways (cf. Bell 1992: 182–187).¹⁶

In some contexts, it may be relevant to discuss the symbolic matrix of ‘a mythology’ in the sense of a system of symbols along with the constructions and conventions for their combination that are seen as belonging together and associated with a particular language, culture or religion. When this is done, the symbolic matrix aligns with ‘a mythology’ in an abstract sense comparable to a description of ‘a language’. This type of approach nevertheless differs from many narrative-based approaches by extending to include all elements in a mythology on the one hand, while allowing that not all elements will be employed equally or function in the same way in all discourses on the other – much as certain archaisms and loan words are established in some varieties of language practice but not in others. However, a particular utility of the symbolic matrix is that it can be calibrated to a cultural environment where more than one such mythology is active and where, capitalizing on the ambiguity of mythic symbols, the elements of a mythology may be manipulated and contested. When calibrated in this way, a symbolic matrix is constituted of the all of the relevant symbolic resources available, as will be illustrated below.

Distinguishing Formal Types of Integer in Mythic Discourse

When approaching mythic discourse and a symbolic matrix of mythology, it is helpful to distinguish between the formal types of

symbolic integers. The terms ‘image’ and ‘motif’ are often used rather loosely and to some degree interchangeably. I distinguish an *image* as a static integer corresponding to the grammatical category of a noun.¹⁷ In contrast, a *motif* incorporates a verb and involves change or situates two or more images in a relationship.¹⁸ This distinction provides a framework for approaching different types of variation in mythic discourse. For example, a motif common in the Baltic Sea region is THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL¹⁹ (cf. Uther 1997–1999: 763). (SMALL CAPITALS are used here to indicate symbols as semantic units; this is done especially at the level of images and motifs and the symbolic equations formed by them.) Within this motif, THUNDER describes a role for the local god like Pórr, Finno-Karelian Ukko, or Lithuanian Perkūnas, and is filled by the corresponding symbolic image (i.e. PÓRR, UKKO, PERKŪNAS). The slot of DEVIL may be filled by the image of the relevant adversary and does not require a unique identity.²⁰ This motif functions as a core of many legends and is also linked to taboos and related traditions, such as what to do in order to avoid being struck by lightning. In the latter contexts, THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL can be viewed as an *immanent motif* – i.e. the motif could manifest as reality or experience any time it thunders. This motif is also interfaced with a number of other motifs, such as DEVIL FLEES FROM THUNDER, which is in turn associated with motifs like DEVIL ENTERS HOUSE TO HIDE. This last motif is in its turn associated with preventative measures of shutting windows and doors when it thunders in order to avoid the house being struck by lightning. Such actions reflect an immanent motif THUNDER STRIKES HOUSE WITH OPEN WINDOW/DOOR (← DEVIL ENTERS HOUSE TO HIDE), which is connected to the system of motifs surrounding THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL.

The whole system surrounding the THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL motif has developed on a principle that the images in the slots THUNDER and DEVIL have agency. Individual motifs linked to this system and the narratives built out of them could pass between cultures in the Baltic Sea region with relative ease because the different cultures shared the general framework related to conceptions

about thunder (cf. Uther 1997–1999: 763). Vernacular images of THUNDER and DEVIL could simply be transposed into the appropriate slots and the motif would ‘make sense’ within the symbolic matrix of the local mythology (Frog 2013b: 110). Modernization carried alternative images of many phenomena based on scientific learning. These included redefining thunder as caused, for example, by movements or collisions of air. These alternative images divested THUNDER of agency, which thus dissolved the central motif THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL. Although dissolving this central motif would seem to break down the whole system surrounding it, this was not precisely the case, as recently illustrated by Ülo Valk (2012) in his discussion of Estonian traditions. Viewed in terms of the model outlined above, motifs such as THUNDER STRIKES HOUSE WITH OPEN WINDOW/DOOR remained emotionally invested and vital: just because the understanding of thunder changed did not mean one stopped taking precautions against being struck by lightning! Rather than necessarily changing motifs that structured behavior, the motif could also be reinterpreted. The image of thunder was linked to new motifs as basic principles for how thunder works, such as THUNDER IS ATTRACTED BY MOVEMENT OF AIR, through which an associated logic emerges for the motif THUNDER STRIKES HOUSE WITH OPEN WINDOW/DOOR (← OPEN WINDOW/DOOR MOVES AIR IN HOUSE) (cf. Valk 2012: 43, 53, 61, and also 56, 59). This same process can be observed for other immanent motifs (e.g. Frog 2014d: 67). These examples illustrate mythic discourse in the negotiation of the relationship between individual behavior and understanding how the world works. At the same time, this example is illustrative of the utility of distinguishing different types of minimal integers in a mythology and their relationships when approaching variation.

Motifs are here addressed as minimal units in narration, activity or experience. In research, the term ‘motif’ has sometimes also been used for more complex integers of narration that circulate socially, but it is often useful to differentiate these from motifs as well. More complex integers made up of conventionally associated images, motifs and/or equivalent

sets of these can be distinguished as *themes*.²¹ In the Finno-Karelian kalevalaic epic *The Song of Lemminkäinen*, for example, the hero encounters and overcomes a series of dangers on his journey,²² each of which can be approached as a theme made up of a set of motifs that comprise the encounter, resolution and continuation of the journey (cf. Frog 2013b: 106–108). The series of themes are normally structurally similar, varying only in equivalent images for the danger encountered (e.g. FIERY EAGLE, BLACK WORM, WOLVES IN IRON BRIDLES), each of which is linked to a relevant motif for overcoming that danger (cf. Frog 2014e: 196–198). Nevertheless, the image of the danger or motif of overcoming it may vary without disrupting the theme as a whole.

Whole themes can also be manipulated in mythic discourse. For example, *The Song of Lemminkäinen* includes a theme of a duel of magic in which the hero and his adversary ‘sing’ an alternating series of helping-spirits and the hero triumphs. In one exceptional case, a singer reversed the roles of Lemminkäinen and his adversary so that the hero is defeated (SKVR VIII₁ 839). This can potentially be seen as asserting an alternative perspective on the image of the hero. Like images and motifs, whole themes can also be transposed. This theme of a magical duel is found in a localized variation of the epic *The Singing Competition*, where it has displaced the theme of the demiurge Väinämöinen’s dialogic competition of knowledge with Joukahainen (SKVR II 33, 34a–b, 36). The case is interesting because these contests are never otherwise interchangeable. Keeping them separate appears historically rooted in a contrast between identifying the socially disruptive Lemminkäinen with magic of a *noita* or shaman while Väinämöinen, *tietäjä iän ikuinen* [‘tietäjä of age eternal’], is identified with the type of power and magic relied on by the ritual specialist who commands the power of incantations and associated rite techniques, a *tietäjä* [‘knower, one who knows’] (Frog 2010: 191–196; see also Frog 2013c). This local variation may not, however, reflect contesting conceptions of mythology *per se*; it may instead be symptomatic of changes in the local significance of differentiating these types of magical knowledge, or it could be more

generally symptomatic of the epics losing their mythic status and the differentiation breaking down.

A *narrative pattern* is a constellation of elements (images, motifs, themes and/or equivalence sets of these), their organisation and interrelations, forming a coherent sequence, although not necessarily constituting a plot forming a narrative whole; a conventional *plot* or *plot type* is a narrative pattern that characterises a complete narrative from complication to resolution.²³ For example, the tradition of the Theft of the Thunder-Instrument, identified as tale-type ATU 1148b (Uther 2004 II: 48–50), is a complex plot type characterized by two interconnected narrative patterns. The opening narrative pattern accounts for the theft and concealment of the object with which the thunder-god produces thunder (an image of THUNDER); the second narrative pattern accounts for the god’s adventure(s) whereby he recovers the stolen THUNDER and defeats his adversary with it (THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL).²⁴ In the period when this plot type was recorded, the image of THUNDER as a musical object was inconsistent with current aetiologies of thunder in most of the cultures concerned (Frog 2011: 80; cf. Frog 2014b: 125–134). The plot was also generally falling out of use or being adapted into something more currently relevant (Frog 2011: 81–91). One example from Estonia presents the opening narrative sequence in which the devil steals the god’s ‘instrument’ (*pill*), but then concludes abruptly as an origin of the devil’s association with bagpipes (*torupill*) without connection to THUNDER (Loorits 1932: 63–64). This adaptation may have been intended humorously, but it can in any case be viewed as contesting the ATU 1148b tradition and the image of thunder from an instrument (*pill*). It illustrates the difference between adapting the narrative pattern of an episode as opposed to a whole plot type, as well as the potential for variation between integers of different types (here adapting a narrative pattern into a complete plot; in other specific cases a motif may vary with a theme or even with a whole narrative pattern). When considering variation in mythic discourse, it can be quite important to distinguish integers of different scope and complexity in order to assess the dynamics

and potential significance of the variation observed.

Gods as Central Symbols

Images of gods are symbols that are often seen as emblematic of a religion and the mythology with which it is interfaced. This is unsurprising insofar as gods regularly appear as agentive symbols of authority and power that function like proper nouns and are interfaced with networks of motifs, themes and other integers of mythology. These other elements appear dependent on the agency of the image in the role of the god. This provides the god as a symbol with the impression of especial *centrality* in the sense that if the symbol of the god is changed, all of these other elements of the mythology must change as well (Converse 1964: 208). In other words, changing a god can have wide-ranging ramifications affecting stories, relationships to other gods and possibly social order, ritual practices and so forth. In contrast, changing a motif that has an identity like a proper noun, such as ÞÓRR FISHES FOR WORLD SERPENT, has ramifications of much more limited scope. A motif such as THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL, on the other hand, may be manipulated in a specific context to affect the image of a god but, it is much more difficult even to perceive as targetable for manipulation as a symbol itself. It may have centrality within the symbolic matrix, but it functions more like a common noun and its very pervasiveness leads the symbol simply to be taken for granted. Gods thus manifest as central emblems of religions, whether engaged by subscribers to a religion as a register of practice or perceived from outside as linked to a social identity for which the religion is inferred (and potentially fictionalized, e.g. from a Christian perspective). Accordingly, gods become prime targets of engagement in mythic discourse.

When addressing the images of gods, it is relevant to distinguish the mythic image from the name of the god. Basically, the Old Norse name *Þórr* (as well as Modern English *Thor*) is a word, a lexical integer designating the image ÞÓRR. This distinction becomes more pronounced in the case of the one-eyed god Óðinn: a remarkable variety of names that are used to designate him in the various disguises

he assumed and in poetic discourse – 204 in the list compiled by Neil Price (2002: 100–107; cf. Falk 1924; Lassen 2011: esp. 183–193, 230–233). All of these names present alternative ways of referring to the image ÓÐINN. Óðinn's penchant for disguises has equally led the image ÓÐINN to be recognizable through the image of MYSTERIOUS STRANGER, especially when predicated with only one eye. Equating name and image becomes more complex in *interpretatio Romana*. In various parts of the Germanic-speaking world, the local image equivalent to ÞÓRR seems to have been commonly designated *Hercules* and equivalents to ÓÐINN as *Mercurius*, although such 'translations' were not entirely consistent (e.g. de Vries 1956–1957 II: 27–32, 107–111). The name or label for the image was translated into a word from another language. This other word might carry particular connotations for the image in a local environment but could also simply affect a full translation of the image (ÞÓRR → HERCULES) among, for example, the local elite in Rome. At the same time, Old Norse texts present *interpretationes Norroenae* whereby Old Norse names for vernacular gods were used to translate names (and thereby images) of Roman gods (e.g. Lassen 2011: 95–109). It is easy to conflate personal name and image, but there is in fact a great deal of potential for slippage and (re)interpretation between the word as a signifier and the symbolic image that it signifies.

It is worth pointing out that images of gods could also be communicated, for example, non-verbally through iconography. An example of this is the representation on the so-called Gosforth Fishing Stone (Figure 1, above). In this case, the image ÞÓRR becomes recognizable through a configuration of image elements. These elements become interpretable in relation to one another as a distinct motif ÞÓRR FISHES FOR WORLD SERPENT, the motif at the center of a theme of confronting the World Serpent at sea, which is in turn the center of a broader narrative pattern of Þórr's fishing adventure (images associated with both being present in the representation). The preservation of this stone in St. Mary's Church in Gosforth suggests a Christian relevance. The incorporation of the Gosforth Fishing Stone into the visual arena of a

church might be rooted in initially rendering vernacularly meaningful equivalents in the place of unfamiliar Christian mythic symbols – in this case the corresponding Christian motif JESUS FISHES FOR LEVIATHAN and the broader theme and narrative pattern of which it is iconic. This would be a type of mythic discourse as translation – an *interpretatio Norroena* – at the level of motifs and narrative sequences. Such translation has also been suggested for the representation of the vernacular dragon-slayer Sigurðr in Christian contexts where the Christian St. George or Archangel Michael would be expected (Rowe 2006: 169). The history of the Gosforth Fishing Stone is unclear, and its incorporation into the church may otherwise have involved mythic discourse at the level of reinterpreting the ambiguity of image elements as signifiers, allowing them to be seen as directly signifying the Christian motif JESUS FISHES FOR LEVIATHAN (a transition which presumably occurred eventually among the local congregation).

It is worth pointing out that the symbols in a mythology index one another as an outcome of their patterns of use – i.e. they form links of association that develop potentially quite complex networks. On the Gosforth Fishing Stone, for example, ÞÓRR becomes recognizable through the configuration of image elements which we might say cumulatively attain a sort of critical mass that activates recognition of the symbol ÞÓRR FISHES FOR WORLD SERPENT. This motif is iconic of a broader mythological narrative as a symbol, a symbol that is of broader scope than the motif that indexes it. However, it is precisely the indexical network of elements comprising ÞÓRR FISHES FOR WORLD SERPENT that allows it to be recognizable, and once recognizable, specific image elements on the stone are interpreted in relation to the motif and the narrative sequence to which it belongs. This process also holds for the image of ÞÓRR: once recognized, the pronouncedly carved eyes become interpretable through Þórr's fiery gaze as a characteristic predicate.²⁵ In other contexts, an attribute may prove emblematic of the god, which has led one-eyed figures to be interpreted as signifying ÓÐINN. This appears in the context of two



Figure 2. Section of the Skog Church Tapestry presenting three figures customarily interpreted as the gods Óðinn (left, characterized by the emblem of missing an eye), Þórr (center, characterized by the emblem of his hammer), and Freyr (right). (Reproduced from Wikimedia Commons, "Three kings or three gods.jpg".²⁶)

other gods on the Skog Church Tapestry, where each representation supports the interpretation of the other two gods as forming the characteristic grouping of three, venerated gods (Figure 2). The lack of an eye has equally led to the interpretation of the Lindby figurine as a representation of ÓÐINN owing to this emblematic feature (Figure 3).

Like any mutilation characterizing a god's identity, this emblem is connected to a motif: EYE SACRIFICED FOR MYTHIC KNOWLEDGE/POWER. The index of this motif to ÓÐINN leads a variety of artefacts to be interpreted as construing an identity with the motif ÓÐINN SACRIFICES EYE FOR (MYTHIC KNOWLEDGE/POWER?) where the artefact exhibits contrastive differentiation of light and dark eyes or the post-production mutilation of one eye, as well as cases of the deposition of a removed eye or associated part of a helmet representing the eye(brow) (see Price & Mortimer 2014). Some of these ritualized behaviors are likely intended to produce a signifier for ÓÐINN, but this cannot be assumed for all cases. Leszek Gardela identified a one-eyed female head uncovered in the Viking emporium of Truso, Poland, with this pattern (Gardela 2014: 81–83). If this head is related



Figure 3. Bronze figurine from Lindby, Svenstorp, Skåne, Sweden SHM 13701 (7th century), generally accepted to be a representation of the god Óðinn, as the figurine only has one eye. (Photo © SHM (Swedish History Museum), reproduced with permission.)

to the pattern of one-eyed symbolism, it is clearly not a signifier of Óðinn *per se* (Figure 4).

Like so many symbolic elements of mythology, the motif EYE SACRIFICED FOR MYTHIC KNOWLEDGE/POWER seems to have circulated cross-culturally in the Baltic Sea region (Frog 2014a: 375–376). A common basis can be inferred for both Óðinn's sacrifice of his eye at the spring of the giant Mímir and its parallel in a tradition in Lithuania of sacrificing an eye for mythic knowledge at a spring, where the practice is connected with the chthonic god Velnias (Gimbutas 1974: 89). Here VELNIAS equates to Óðinn just as Lithuanian PERKŪNAS will translate PÓRR (and vice versa) in relevant plot-types built on the motif THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL. Even if the narrative describing the sacrifice of Óðinn's eye varied by dialect of mythology in time and space, the integer Óðinn SACRIFICES EYE FOR (MYTHIC KNOWLEDGE/POWER?) seems to have maintained continuity.²⁷ The motif EYE SACRIFICED FOR (MYTHIC KNOWLEDGE/POWER?) also seems to have been mobilized across languages and associated mythologies in the dynamics of mythic discourse. This fact highlights social perceptions of the motif's significance and reinforces its validity as a frame for interpretation.

Depositions of material eye-symbols suggest ritualized enactments of precisely this motif, with the implication that the significance of performance is informed by Óðinn SACRIFICES EYE enacted as personal experience (noting that the latter motif might have been altered or exchanged when the ritual was adapted cross-culturally). Some of the identified images may signify the EYE SACRIFICED FOR (MYTHIC KNOWLEDGE/POWER?) motif performed by someone other than Óðinn. The significance of this motif can be inferred to derive from the motif Óðinn SACRIFICES EYE. That motif operates as a metonym for the power acquired by Óðinn's act, which would in turn be identified with the power conferred on the individual filling the role of sacrificer. This highlights that the uses of Óðinn SACRIFICES EYE could be diverse. Identifying this motif as a symbolic referent must therefore be distinguished from the potential network of associations through which it is engaged in any one case. If the



Figure 4. One-eyed female head from Truso (Janów Pomorski). The right eye exhibits a clear eye with pupil, while only a hollow area appears where the left eye should be. (Photo by Leszek Gardela, reproduced with permission.)

one-eye modification to the so-called weapon-dancer on one of the Torslunda matrices is not an Óðinn image (Price & Mortimer 2014: 524), inferring the motif Óðinn SACRIFICES EYE does not reveal its significance, nor does it reveal the significance of a woman represented this way in the Truso head (Frog 2014a: esp. 396–398).²⁸



Figure 5. Þórr's hammer ring. (Illustration by Amppi Darmark, © Ålands Museum, reproduced with permission.)

Similarly, the so-called 'Þórr's hammer' amulets (cf. Figure 5) may potentially also have activated the image ÞÓRR metonymically through the symbol of his power as the one who wields it. This would link the possessor of the amulet (or its use) to that power and thereby to ÞÓRR. Here again the amulets as signifiers passed cross-culturally in a part of the world where the hammer or axe was the characteristic instrument of the thunder god. The ambiguous amulet-signifier may thus have metonymically activated different gods in different cultural contexts, much as the Gosforth Fishing Stone could be interpreted as a signifier of JESUS FISHES FOR LEVIATHAN. These systems of indices are important because the connections between symbols reciprocally construct those symbols, their significance and valuation. The motif THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL and its patterns of use reciprocally construct the image ÞÓRR as a protector of social order from agents of chaos. Disrupting that index or altering the patterns of use of the motif would necessarily redefine the image ÞÓRR, which is constructed exclusively through discourse (unlike e.g. images of other immediate ethnic groups, where discourse is in dialectic relation to empirical experiences of contacts with those groups).

Alternative and Changing Perspectives

Contexts of radical cultural change provide vital sites to observe mythic discourse. Modernization is extremely interesting in this respect, but it does not work well for illustrating a symbolic matrix and how such a

matrix works. Today, we are accustomed to viewing mythology as distinct from science, and this makes it difficult to recognize ELECTRICITY and other mythic images, motifs and more complex integers associated with them in terms of mythology (see Frog 2014d). In this respect, historically and culturally remote contexts are much more easily viewed with greater objectivity. The historical remoteness of mythic discourse associated with medieval Christianization proves much more practical to illustrate effects of cultural change on a symbolic matrix.

According to the present approach, the arrival of Christianity in the North was not a process of one exclusive religion displacing another. Instead, the new religion richly increased the available symbols in the matrix. Christians and non-Christians were not unaware of each other's mythologies and they could actively utilize each other's symbols in mythic discourse as resources for the negotiation of their relationship (cf. McKinnell 2008). This sort of engagement has produced quite exceptional narratives that may seem to fall between the respective mythologies. For example, an Old Norse saga describes such a confrontation between a missionary and a pagan priestess in which the priestess tells that the thunder-god Þórr once challenged Jesus to a duel, and Jesus was too cowardly to fight (*Njáls saga* 102). This can be viewed as the emergence of a new plot (or at least the kernel of a plot) through the combination of different images (ÞÓRR, JESUS), and as a variation on the motif of confrontation which normally leads to THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL in other mythological narratives about Þórr. Whereas the example of the Gosforth Fishing Stone could be viewed in terms of translation across mythologies, in this case the manipulation of the images ÞÓRR and JESUS situates gods of two mythologies in a contrastive relation to one another. The new plot asserts a relationship between them, and thus between the ideologies and ways of life (which can be compared to the vernacular concept commonly identified with 'religion')²⁹ of which those gods were emblematic.

There is no evidence for the historical endurance of a story about Þórr challenging Jesus, but it has long been thought that the

kalevalaic epic *The Judgement of Väinämöinen*, in which Väinämöinen is banished by a Christ-like baby, emerged and became established out of precisely this type of process (e.g. Kuusi 1963: 320).³⁰ Examples like this are important because they highlight that individuals can draw on all of the resources available to them and that the particular symbols are regarded from the perspectives of those individuals. Such perspectives can be approached in terms of *positioning* in the matrix. Religions, viewed as registers of practice, may correspondingly be viewed as characterized by socially established positioning and stance-taking – i.e. as generally characterized by alignments, interpretations and valuations of the different sets, constellations, or systems of symbols in the matrix. It should also be noted that individuals will not have an even competence in all of the symbols available in the matrix. Such competence varies not only in relation to the positioning of different religions, but also between specialist and non-specialists associated with the same religion formation. This uneven distribution of competence also participates in the relative ambiguity of the symbols.

Other strategies in mythic discourse may target interpretations of specific symbols. Óðinn seems to have been rather popular in this regard, at least in certain genres and discourses (Lassen 2011). He was characterized by disguises and motifs of organizing and orchestrating the fates (and deaths) of heroes in the vernacular mythology. Although the medieval oral culture of Scandinavia can only be guessed at, Christian authors took up these established motifs in certain saga genres and steered their interpretations to foreground deceit and manipulation as primary characteristics of Óðinn as a pagan god (e.g. Lassen 2011: 152–177). In other cases, they could emphasize Óðinn's 'otherness' by linking him to motifs of Sámi shamanism (Tolley 2009 I: 507–513). They could also employ a motif familiar to Christian discourse, such as DEVIL TEMPTS CHRISTIAN, situating the image ÓÐINN in the role of DEVIL, which reciprocally informs the valuation and interpretation of ÓÐINN; the relationship between Óðinn and the Christian Devil could also be made explicit by stating that the Devil took

the form of Óðinn, whereby the image ÓÐINN itself becomes a signifier of the image DEVIL (see e.g. Kaplan 2011). Affecting the interpretation of motifs linked to Óðinn's disguises and manipulations of fate established new conventions as a process, and that process redefined the image ÓÐINN accordingly. Of course, such mythic discourse did not involve non-Christian agents only. In much the same way that mythic discourse constructed the image ÓÐINN in relation to, or to become a signifier of, the image DEVIL, the images ST. OLAF and ST. ELIAH were evolved in the cultures of Northern Europe in relation to vernacular images of the thunder god (Kaplan 2008; Harvilahti 2013). These strategies are dependent on the expansion of the symbolic matrix: this expansion made symbols of the vernacular religion available to the Christians for manipulation. Developments in patterns of the use of mythic symbols, their interpretations and relative valorization are outcomes of mythic discourse. Just as the symbolic matrix is expanded by the introduction of a new religion into the cultural environment, it inevitably contracts again as mythic discourse advances the social environment toward increasing degrees of hegemony in the distribution of relationships of identities, practices and mythic symbols. These developments are important to understand as a social process, but they also have implications for research and the significance of extant research materials. Research builds understandings of mythic symbols through the identification of the patterns in preserved, documented discourse, but the discourse that has been preserved may only enable a view from one perspective in the community, society or cultural environment.

Symbols of the relevant vernacular religion were not always available to medieval Christians. In the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, for example, descriptions are also offered of encounters with non-Christian sorcerers or priests. The Scandinavian accounts mentioned above are historically removed from events, yet the authors are generally concerned with the history of their own communities and events in (more or less) familiar locations. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* recounts historically remote events in geographically distant

locations such as Lake Beloye, where the non-Christians are presumably Uralic and therefore also culturally remote from the authors. Some of these pagan specialists are made to state explicitly in dialogue that their god is named 'Antichrist' and even to describe their gods through Christian images as demons in Hell.³¹ It is therefore good to consider whether such an example of mythic discourse manipulates symbols of the culture addressed (as in the case with ÓÐINN above), symbols only of the culture in which the source was produced (as seems probable in the account surrounding 'Antichrist' as a pagan god), or even of an unrelated third culture with which some association has been made.³² In addition, cultures construct images of other groups, their mythologies and religions, and these constructed images not only produce conventional interpretations but also feed into the resources of the symbolic matrix – e.g. developing a mythic image SÁMI as not just an ethnic other but also as a supernatural other (Lindow 1995).³³

In some cases, a whole plot type of a mythological narrative may be manipulated in mythic discourse. This seems to have occurred in medieval Iceland with the Theft of the Thunder-Instrument (ATU 1148b) mentioned above. This narrative tradition is found in Baltic, Finnic, Germanic and Sámi cultures. It is generally interfaced especially with the motif THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL and also with conceptions of a relationship between thunder and fertility and/or life on earth that are manifested through various motifs in the different cultures. The 13th century eddic poem *Prymskviða* presents a version of this narrative that differs from the tradition elsewhere in certain key respects. Most notably, a) Þórr is passive rather than orchestrating the action; b) the motif GOD ASSUMES A DISGUISE associated with the recovery of the stolen THUNDER here takes a unique variation, in which the god is pressed into dressing up as goddess in a wedding gown, that is explicitly identified with humiliating the god through gender transgression; and c) the story appears completely divorced from belief traditions – the god's chariot still produces thunder and lightning as he travels (disguised as a bride)

and the adversary exhibits no fear either of this thunder or of the stolen object (Þórr's hammer), which he is willing to return in exchange for marrying the goddess Freyja (hence the disguise).³⁴ *Prymskviða* appears to be a product of mythic discourse in which a mythological plot was adapted into a new narrative that makes fun of the god Þórr (for discussion, see further Frog 2014a). This example is also interesting because the adaptation made the narrative sustainable in the new environment of a Christian milieu: it eventually spread throughout Scandinavia and was preserved as the only purportedly mythological narrative recorded from the Scandinavian ballad tradition (Liestøl 1970: 18).

In the context of periods of religious change, the negotiation of perspectives and positions of groups through mythic discourse gives rise to diverse and fascinating products, such as how Þórr challenged Jesus to a duel. Very few of these become established and historically maintained as tradition beyond that transition period, if at all (see Frog 2013b: 109–110). The transience of such products can be associated with the transience of the period of transition itself: as Christianity became dominant, the interest and relevance of contesting the images of vernacular gods receded. They belong to the process whereby the expansion of the symbolic matrix was followed by its contraction. The introduction of an alternative modelling system for the world (mythology) linked to the new religion was followed by the negotiation of mythic symbols. Such diversity in the symbolic matrix was inevitably resolved on local and regional levels as people and their identities became united under the rubric of shared social practices to which only certain ranges of mythic symbols were relevant. Cases like *Prymskviða* – attested relatively little changed across a period ca. 650 years – are exceptional. In this case, the plot's long-term sustainability seems connected to the fact that the story of a burly, bearded man being disguised as a sexy bride in order to recover his phallic hammer and beat up the thief continued to be entertaining even when contesting the authority of Þórr was no longer topical. Reviewing these products of mythic discourse highlights that

integers of the symbolic matrix are not uniformly engaged: they are engaged from different perspectives with different degrees of competence as shared symbols through which identities and understandings may be contested and negotiated. It also foregrounds that the relevance of integers in the symbolic matrix vary in relation to social and historical contexts, which in at least some cases seem to exhibit alternating periods of pronounced change and stability.

Generic Interfaces with the Symbolic Matrix

In general, the systems of symbols in the matrix tend to center around particular social practices. Consequently, the symbols and perspectives on those symbols become interfaced with genres. Such interfaces become particularly apparent when mythology is compared across genres. Modern ideas about Finno-Karelian mythology have been primarily developed surrounding narratives in Kalevala-meter epic and incantations. These genres are intimately connected. The most central agent narrated in this poetry is Väinämöinen, who is a demiurge and a founder of culture, who plays a significant role in establishing the present world order, and who is the *tietäjä iän ikuinen* [*tietäjä* of age eternal], providing an identity-model (cf. Honko 1998: 20–29) for the ritual specialist known as a *tietäjä*. Narratives about him both offer origins of the incantations used by the *tietäjä* as well as exemplar models of magical events described in incantations themselves. However, Väinämöinen is not narrated in prose, he is rarely directly summoned for support in incantations, and he is not ‘worshipped’. (Frog 2013c: 75–83.) On the other hand, the thunder-god Ukko [‘Old Man’] (blurring into the Christian God) is summoned by the *tietäjä* as the primary source of his power, and Ukko is ‘worshipped’, associated with rituals, taboos and so forth. However, Ukko plays no role in the creation of the world nor in the establishment of the world order and he is not narrated as an agent active in Kalevala-meter epic, even if he has a strong presence in narrative prose. (Frog 2013c: 72–75.) Ukko is no less important for the *tietäjä* specialist than Väinämöinen – albeit in different ways – yet he does not play an active role with

Väinämöinen and Väinämöinen’s companions in narratives. These gods appear quite differently across different genres although they are associated with the same type of specialist and even linked to the same ritual practices, such as healing (cf. also Honko 1981: 26).

Although Ukko and Väinämöinen seem to have different distributions in different genres, there do not necessarily appear to be gross inconsistencies in mythology across these genres. The contrast increases if we compare these with Karelian lament traditions, which were performed by different specialists in different contexts.³⁵ Both Väinämöinen and Ukko are completely absent from laments – as is the Virgin Mary (Stepanova 2012: 276; 2014: 215), who was prominent both in other women’s traditions and incantations (e.g. Timonen 1994; Siikala 2002: 195–203). Laments are instead directed at specific deceased individuals, the remote community of ancestral dead, and a mysterious category of divine powers (*syndyzet*) which may blur into a Christian ‘Savior’ (*spuassuzet* = *spuassu*.DIM.PL; *Spuassu* < Ru. *Spas*, *Spasitel* [‘Savior’]). The topography of the otherworld also differs from that of genres mentioned above. (See further Stepanova 2012; 2014: 191–223.) Although certain features are found across genres, such as the dog guarding the path to the otherworld, laments lack a river separating the worlds of the living and the dead which is otherwise fundamental to Kalevala-meter epic and incantation (Stepanova 2012: 262; 2014: 198–199). Laments also refer to a copper staircase, which indicates vertical movement between worlds rather than the horizontal movement characteristic of epic (Stepanova 2012: 262; 2014: 196). In spite of the fact that these genres had been evolving in the same communities for centuries, they appear to engage quite different parts of the symbolic matrix with only a rather limited number of shared symbols.³⁶ Observing that lament, on the one hand, and epic and incantations on the other, have assimilated a variety of Christian symbols, they might be described as exhibiting mythologies that are as different from or similar to one another as each is different from or similar to the mythology of Christianity.

The complementary distribution of Ukko and Väinämöinen across different genres underscores the fact that the image of ‘a mythology’ that will emerge in a study may vary considerably depending on the types of material subject to analysis. The complementary significance of these mythic agents to the same institution of ritual specialist equally emphasizes the need for caution in the emphasis given to different categories of data when considering the relative significance of different gods in a cultural environment. The fact that Väinämöinen was not venerated in worship does not make him less socially significant than Ukko any more than the absence of Ukko from the world-creation and narration of mythological epics would make Ukko less socially significant than Väinämöinen. What is interesting to keep in mind is that the presence and absence of both appears to have been relatively stable on a genre by genre basis, and their complementary significance to the *tietäjä* seems never to have produced narratives about Väinämöinen and Ukko as co-adventurers any more than it did about Väinämöinen and the Virgin Mary. This type of social and historical interfacing of mythology distributed across genres can be considered no less present in the relative significance of the Virgin Mary in traditions associated with women (cf. Timonen 1994) and Mary’s absence from lament, which was a characteristically women’s practice (Stepanova 2014: esp. 283). Still more striking is the fact that genres associated with different categories of ritual specialists seem to have intersected and overlapped rather than to have aligned in a coherent and uniform mythology. Although mythology as engaged within a genre exhibits social stability, it becomes relevant to ask *whose mythology* and how that relates to, reflects and reinforces the uses to which it is put by the people practicing the particular genre.

Registers of Mythology

The variation of mythology by genre can be approached in terms of ‘registers’. This approach can then be applied back to variation in mythology according to positioning by religion, as in mythic discourse related to Christianization. Whereas language has

commonly been conceived as an abstract and uniform whole, *register* developed in social linguistics as a term for variation in language according to situation or context and the relationships of participants (esp. Halliday 1978; see further Agha 2001; 2007). The image of language as an ideal, uniform and homogeneous system was thereby replaced by a much more nuanced picture. The thing we call a language appears as a set of potential resources of vocabulary along with frameworks for grammar and pronunciation that form various constellations as registers. However, no single register includes all of the potential vocabulary of the language. The meanings of words may also not be the same or have the same connotations in different registers. Speech communication is not limited to language only, and the term register has been progressively expanded from language to paralinguistic features and the broader semiotics of expression. Register-based approaches have become common especially in Finnish folklore research to refer to the linguistic and para-linguistic resources for expression associated with a particular genre (see e.g. Koski 2011: 322–324). A complementary term *mode* was early on employed to describe the mediating system through which the signifiers of a register are communicated, whether these are signals, such as the sounds of a voice singing, or another system of signs, like alphabetical characters in a written text.³⁷ In the same way that speech registers are mediated through a mode of expression, the symbols of mythology are mediated through a speech register. In this way, a speech register can be regarded as a mode of expression for a register of symbols of mythology.

Viewed in this way, variation in mythology by genre or cultural practice becomes expected in parallel to variation in the linguistic register’s lexicon and its semantics, grammar and pronunciation. In other words, certain symbols like the turnip-god Äkräs have quite narrow and specialized contexts of use, whereas other symbols like Ukko or the Virgin Mary are used much more widely. At the same time, this does not mean that Ukko and the Virgin Mary are uniformly integrated into every register of mythology. This returns us to the long-term persistence of mythology.

In this context, the long-term persistence of mythology is linked to the corresponding persistence of particular genres and cultural practices. The relationship of such practices to registers of mythology have been historically constructed and socially negotiated – they function in the present as outcomes of the past. We tend to take it for granted that Mary and Jesus do not go on adventures with Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen because we see them as belonging to Christian and vernacular traditions, respectively. However, kalevalaic poems about both were sung by the same singers for centuries, and Väinämöinen, Mary and Ukko can all have relevant places in a single incantation. (Frog 2013c: 74.) How and where these symbols appear, and how they are or are not combined, are not a function of a contrast between ‘Christian’ and ‘non-Christian’ in the present of the singers, but rather an outcome of the long-term persistence of conventions for their use in different registers of mythology.

On the same basis, the different registers of mythology can be assumed to evolve in relation to practice by individuals in conjunction with their interests and aims (which may be based on or respond to needs in the community: cf. Rychkova, this volume). This process means that the registers develop with varying degrees of interconnection with and independence from one another (cf. also Honko 1985 on ‘tradition ecology’). When this is acknowledged, it underscores the caution needed when developing perspectives on mythology in contexts where sources are limited. For example, the sort of evaluative stance-taking in representations of Óðinn in certain written genres of Old Norse saga literature addressed above seems to have evolved a genre-based image ÓÐINN aligned with the perspective of the sagas’ Christian authors. At the same time, the role of Óðinn as an active and present agent in the lives and deaths of heroes in the mytho-heroic past seems to be rooted in the vernacular mytho-heroic traditions: the Christian construction of ÓÐINN seems to have developed through the manipulation of traditional motifs and themes that already indexed ÓÐINN. However, this register of mythology is linked to particular written genres of saga literature and is not

necessarily representative of oral genres handling mytho-heroic traditions with which written sagas necessarily co-existed for some considerable period of time, even though little about those oral genres is known (cf. Lassen 2011: 308–383).

Shifting attention away from ideal and uniform mythologies to a register-based model also provides an approach to registers of mythology linked to different religions. In the same way that we discuss Finnish and English as separate languages, we can discuss Christian versus non-Christian or ‘scientific’ versus vernacular mythologies. When Finnish and English are introduced into a single environment, they increase the linguistic resources available and the different languages can function as alternative registers: switching between them may be contextually prescribed or a strategic choice.³⁸ Particular resources can be seen as centrally interfaced with the genres and cultural practices through which they are asserted, communicated and socially negotiated, whether those resources are linguistic or symbolic. It is in the interactions of such environments that symbols of the matrix are adapted from one register to another just as words are borrowed from one language to another, potentially changing in meaning or use. With mythology, this process may involve reinterpretations or the conflation of symbols linked to different registers, such as the image ÓÐINN in Christian discourse sometimes merging with DEVIL, the image ST. OLAF merging with PÓRR, or reference to *Spuassu* [‘Savior, Christ’] in Karelian lament merging with the supernatural powers that the register was historically oriented to address. This same process led the Old Norse term *purs* to be preserved in mythological eddic poetry referring to cosmological giants in mythic time, in incantations referring to agents of illness in the present world, and in sagas used as a simple synonym for ‘monster’ (Frog 2013a). These are all engagements with the symbols of the matrix from the perspectives of users and uses of the particular registers. That positioning constructs the interface between the genre or cultural practice and mythology. At the same time, conventions of a genre and its use condition the conservatism and social innovation of that

interface – i.e. how much it is inclined to change or stay the same and in what ways – which affect the long-term maintenance of mythology within the particular register.

In the long-term, each register of mythology may develop a different internal historical stratification of both language and symbols. This stratification is an outcome of the history of uses, contacts with other genres and relationships to them. In addition, different registers of mythology may also remain rooted in their formation in a particular era with a particular perspective. This may be when a particular genre, set of cultural practices or religion was introduced into a cultural environment, or when historical changes led to the (re)formation of a practices into their distinct form on the basis of earlier traditions. The register of Old Norse skaldic poetry, for example, evolved its system of poetic circumlocutions interfaced pervasively with the referents and patterns of association of the pre-Christian cultural milieu and especially the mythology and mytho-heroic traditions of that milieu. The adaptation of the skaldic register to the Christian milieu evolved within that framework rather than displacing the pre-Christian elements and associations with a set of Christian alternatives. (Clunies Ross 2005: 114–115, 134–138.) A corresponding phenomenon can be observed in the evolution of Finno-Karelian kalevalaic mythology, incantations and the *tietäjä*-institution, which emerged especially under Germanic influence during the Iron Age (Frog 2013c; cf. Siikala 2002; 2012). The formal continuities of mythic images, motifs, themes and narrative sequences in mytho-heroic sagas reconventionalized from a Christian evaluative stance may also warrant consideration in this light. For example, Old Norse saga literature emerged in a Christian environment in conjunction with the Christian technology of writing. It drew on the resources of vernacular oral traditions for the inception of new, written genres that can be assumed to have developed distinctive registers of both language and mythology within that special Christian milieu.

Conversely, the obsolescence of a register may lead to whole areas of the symbolic matrix falling out of use. Integers of the

mythology, such as the turnip-god Äkräs, that operate in quite narrow fields are of course particularly vulnerable in this regard. However, the breakdown of a register that is socially central to a broad area of the symbolic matrix could have wide-ranging consequences. Here, it is again important to emphasize that registers of practice are registers of those who practice them.³⁹ As social phenomena, such registers are linked to social roles, relations and/or recurrent situations. Where mythology is concerned, practices associated with authoritative roles and institutions can take on a key role in historically shaping and structuring the positioning of social perspectives within the matrix, becoming *conduits of authority* for mythology (cf. Frog 2013c: 111). In terms of social semiotics, their registers become centers in the historical maintenance of mythology. Rather than a simple binary equation that registers either are or are not linked to these conduits of authority, the networks of diverse registers and their relations can be regarded in center–periphery relations to different conduits of authority (potentially several at any given time in history). Thus, the richness of kalevalaic mythology is associated with ritual and magical uses by *tietäjäs* with a continuity extending back to the Iron Age, but as those uses became obsolete in the wake of modernization, the whole imaginal world began to be forgotten. It first began shifting away from the center of the public life of the community, gradually displaced by public Christian practices and associated authorities. As the institutionalized specialization of the *tietäjä* became marginalized, different individuals began taking up the role to meet the needs of the community: a tradition that seems to have been dominated by men was finally kept up almost exclusively by women as the mythology collapsed and rapidly began to disappear (cf. Rychkova, this volume).

Theory and Utility in Practice

The aim of the present discussion has been to introduce an approach to mythology through a ‘symbolic matrix’ that is capable of addressing variation and diversity in mythology within a culture or cultural environment, and

that can be calibrated according to the scope of investigation. This methodological model is based on an approach to mythology through systems of symbols that are used and even contested in mythic discourse. Viewing mythology in a social environment in terms of a matrix of symbolic resources allows it to be addressed simultaneously as a whole – even if that whole is not internally systematized *per se* – while acknowledging the diversity of perspectives and uses that can be distinguished and situated in relation to one another.

Developing this approach with attention to mythic discourse has had the result that it is particularly suited to addressing mythology in situated practice. This has motivated the development of a more formalized and systematic distinction of integers in the matrix (images, motifs, themes, narrative sequences, plots) in order to have more sophisticated tools for addressing variation at a structural level. The emphasis on mythology in situated social activity has also highlighted the historical construction of the integers in the matrix and perspectives on them in relation to historically structured social practices or genres. It may also be noted that the basic framework for distinguishing types of formal integers and their use and variation in discourse is not dependent on symbols having the quality of signification linked to emotional investment making them ‘mythic’: the basic framework can be readily employed to address the variation and historical stratification of symbolic integers in any discourse.

Following the analogy with linguistics, this model complements the approach to local and regional variation of mythology according to ‘dialects’ with an approach to variation according to ‘registers’. Although the discussion and analysis of registers necessarily abstracts these as semiotic resources from the people who use them, it is extremely important to recognize them as registers of practices that are in many cases socially constructed around roles or even social institutions. These roles and the individuals who fill them have been described in terms of ‘positioning’ in the matrix. This positioning, anchored in a social role or institution, then participates in the historical construction of genres and in the stratification of mythic symbols with which

they are interfaced. The present model develops this as a framework within which it is possible to address alignments and tensions between individual choices or innovations and the social conventions of genres. At a broader social level, the alignments and tensions may be between those choices or innovations and the competing valorizations of different symbols and positioning within the matrix. Within such considerations, emphasis has been placed on the historical durability of the flexible yet compelling symbols and structures or resources in the symbolic matrix. Continuity and variation of these symbols and structures highlight that the outcomes of mythic discourse in any particular present moment in history participate in linking the past of the tradition to the future, or in disrupting that link.

The model outlined here is not intended to be the ideal tool for all research questions concerned with mythology. It is centrally intended for studies concerned with mythology in cultural practice, especially where variation in mythology is a focus, issue or concern. When looking at specific examples and historical situations, this approach has the advantage of acknowledging the synchronic meanings of the integers of the tradition. These may differ considerably from those of the cultural contexts from which they ultimately derive (cf. Siikala 2002; Frog 2013b). The usage-based approach underlines functions and meanings of mythology in application, on which both continuity and variation are dependent. This gives the framework a utility for addressing the dynamics between continuity and innovation or change. It is equally applicable to unique, situation-specific adaptations of mythology that may never become socially established, and to the investigation of an established tradition as the social outcome of such an innovation or change. Such applications simply require the calibration of the temporal and cultural or geographical scope and sensitivity of the symbolic matrix that forms the frame of reference. Although such a matrix is inevitably both hypothetical and abstract, it can be much more sensitive and specific if the scope is narrowly defined in time and cultural space where thick data is available – for example, a

single parish in Karelia during a single century (cf. Tarkka 2013). Sensitivity decreases and the matrix becomes increasingly abstract as its scope is extended across multiple dialects of mythology and a greater range of historical contexts. For example, it is possible to calibrate the framework to consider Scandinavian–Christian contacts during the Late Iron Age, but the range and specificity of symbols and structures considered would likely have to remain at quite a general and abstract level that would be unavoidably removed from locally distinct contact events. This would not invalidate such a model once it was developed, but it would affect its utility for addressing certain research questions. As a tool, however, this methodological framework nevertheless remains of central utility where variation is a relevant factor.

Approaching mythology in terms of a symbolic matrix places emphasis on signifiers, their patterns of use and variations in those uses. Where an investigation or method moves away from the symbolic integers of the mythology and their relations, so does the usefulness of this approach. For example, it would have little relevance to research focusing on a mythology or religion as a metasemiotic entity without exploring its unitary integers as such. In other words, both medieval Christians and players of modern video games may recognize Þórr as metonymically indexing vernacular Scandinavian mythology and religion. However, there is no need to introduce a symbolic matrix or even to discuss Þórr as a symbol if focus is on the meanings and associations of Scandinavian mythology and religion as an entity for medieval Christians or modern players of video games. Similarly, discussing a symbolic matrix is focused on social phenomena and social conventions that may only be of interest as a frame of reference if focus is on mythology as used at the level of a specific individual or in a specific text. An investigation may also concentrate on conceptual models mediated through symbols of mythology, much as symbols of mythology may be mediated through language. Conceptual models may be approached through symbolic integers, but such an investigation may simply target and survey those integers, as may a

study of the semantics of specific elements of a mythology. Any of these investigations might benefit from the present approach especially when looking at specific examples and cases, but they do not need it *per se*. On the other hand, investigations into the meanings and understandings mediated by mythic symbols should take into consideration registral variation, and thus that these meanings and even conceptual models may vary by register of mythology. The methodological framework presented here does have a wide range of applications, but it should be treated as a tool among other tools, and like any tool, it is better for addressing some problems than others.

Research on mythologies has been customarily done with mythologies associated with different language groups – Finno-Karelian mythology, Scandinavian mythology, Uralic mythology, Indo-European mythology and so forth. Here, variation has been foregrounded, which problematizes viewing mythology as a more or less uniform whole. The distinction of registers of mythology provides a new tool for approaching variation between cultural practices, the historical development of that variation in relation to uses and users, and also for looking at the linkages and continuities of mythology across diverse practices. However, attending to variation does not mean that broad categories of mythology by culture or religion are invalid any more than addressing linguistic registers invalidates addressing languages as categories of broad, inter-generationally transmitted systems. Rather than being mutually exclusive models, these are alternative and complementary ways of looking at material. They both become tools in the hands of a researcher for answering specific research questions. For example, comparative studies in Indo-European mythology and religion have a strong philological basis that seeks to identify and relate integers of mythology, interfaces between mythology and ritual language, connections to social roles and social structures, and other paradigmatic structures operating as organizing principles with a *longue durée*. The methodology outlined here is no more necessary to studies on these topics than linguistic register theory is to etymology and reconstructions of historical

phonology, grammar or metrics. However, it becomes relevant when attention turns from the question of *whether* certain motifs were associated with the central Indo-European god **Dyéus* [‘Sky’] to *why* some of these seem to have been transferred to Óðinn (cf. West 2007: 173), *why* Indo-European structures do not seem to be filled by etymologically cognate gods in Old Norse mythology (cf. Lyle 2012: 75–86), or *why* the thunder-god’s battle with his serpent-adversary is, in the Scandinavian tradition, situated on a fishing trip and in a collective battle at the end of the world (cf. Watkins 1995: 414–428). The methodological framework presented here can thus complement certain aspects of these sorts of investigations. Most important in this regard remains the perspectives that it enables, which extend beyond applying the framework directly. The variation that becomes evident through this approach should be taken into consideration in any attempt to develop a broad image of a mythology at a cultural level: such broad cultural mythologies are unlikely to be as uniform and systematic as it has long been popular to assume.

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Notes

1. On applications of this approach to mythologies in modern culture, see Frog 2014d.
2. Addressing mythologies in this way groups them according to linguistic heritage and will then highlight the relatedness of those groups, which does not necessarily entail seeking to reconstruct an earlier form of the mythology. Any long-term continuity is of course linked to the history of the mythology and what that mythology was in earlier periods. Consequently, what can be said about the

mythology of speakers of Proto-Indo-European (e.g. West 2007; Lyle 2012) and that of speakers of Proto-Uralic (e.g. Napolskikh 1992; Hoppál 2010: 28–37) are quite different. Perspectives have more recently been offered on elements and cycles of mythology that may have significantly earlier roots in the Stone Age (e.g. Meletinskij 1997; Napolskikh 2012; Witzel 2012; Berezkin, this volume). Alternately, attention may also be given to ‘macro-regional complexes’ of mythology, which are areal patterns and systems that develop in parts of the world where multiple cultures with different heritages of mythology have a long history of ongoing interactions (Witzel 2012: 65–68; cf. Frog 2011; 2014a; also Berezkin in this volume).

3. Cf. Algirdas Julien Greimas’ (1987 [1962]) description of mythology as a “metalanguage”.
4. It is possible to distinguish here between two broad types of religious identity. One is an ‘official’, ideally prescribed religious doctrine linked to scripture and an institutionalized social or bureaucratic apparatus, such as the Catholic Church. The other is socially constructed through discourse and interaction at a local level. However, it should be noted that the ideal model of religious practice and identity is centrally a frame of reference constructed by and for those participating in a religious identity. Constructing images of the religious identities of ‘other’ groups is built on social perceptions especially constructed through discourse, whether this is a Norse or Finno-Karelian perception of Sámi religious identity, or the Church’s construction of images of ‘pagans’, ‘Muslims’ and ‘Jews’.
5. E.g. Eliade 1968 [1963]: 1–2; Doty 2000: 4–30; see also the discussion in Csapo 2004.
6. E.g. Eliade 1968 [1963]: 5–6; Lévi-Strauss 1967 [1958]: 202–228; Barner-Barry & Hody 1994; see also discussions in Rowland 1990 and Briggs & Bauman 1992.
7. This occurs in the Sampo-Cycle, in which Väinämöinen is the only anthropomorphic agent in the world-creation, following which forging the vault of heaven may be attributed to Ilmarinen as an indicator that he has the skill to create the mysterious object called a *sampo* (see further Frog 2012; 2013c: 69–73).
8. For example ‘heaping together mountains’ (e.g. SKVR I₁ 185.23, 30), whereas *The Song of Creation* attributes him only with the creation of the celestial bodies from a world-egg, which may include forming heaven and earth from its upper and lower parts (notably distinct from the fabrication of the vault of heaven from iron), and shaping the contours of the seabed but not of the land (for a variant from the same singer, Ontrei Malinen, see SKVR I₁ 79.19–26, 50–61).
9. Discussing the coherence of a mythology must be kept distinct from arguments about the ‘origin’ of a particular narrative element or historiola. For example, linking the *Flum Jordan* motif to an account of the baptism of Jesus found in the 7th-century *Chronicon Paschale* (Davies 1996: 21)

- does not mean that users of the motif in charms also included it in local accounts of Jesus's baptism.
10. Particularly controversial in structuralist approaches was the attempt to advance structural patterns and paradigms to universals (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1967 [1958]) or to otherwise presume a pattern whereby it became an artificial lens through which evidence was interpreted, and then to treat the interpretation as demonstrating the validity of the pattern (e.g. Germanic mythology and religion in Dumézil 1988 [1948]).
 11. In order to resolve this issue, I have elsewhere outlined a differentiation between *centralized symbols* and *decentralized symbols* (Frog 2014a; 2014d), and between a *surface mythology* and *deep mythology* (Frog 2014c).
 12. It was used, for example, to describe how references to apocalyptic visions were handled and manipulated in political speeches and the media (e.g. O'Leary 1989).
 13. This is found even among scholars who defined myths in terms of stories (e.g. Witzel 2012: 17; cf. also Doty 2000: 49).
 14. Certain abstract structural patterns can also be viewed as types of signs in that they have diagrammatic iconicity: recognizing the pattern equates to the recognition of its meaningfulness, even if the images and motifs with which it is completed may be open to considerable variation.
 15. This type of variation has been discussed by Doty in terms of the degree of the *vitality* of a myth (2000: 137–140).
 16. Cf. also Claude Lévi-Strauss' argument that "symbols are more real than what they symbolise; the signifier precedes the signified" (1987: 37).
 17. On mental images and image schemata, see e.g. Lakoff 1987: *passim*; on mythic images, see Siikala 1992: 42–50.
 18. I have developed this definition of 'motif' as a practical tool for analysis. The term 'motif' was originally intuitively defined and its use has been extremely inconsistent. Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955–1958) did not serve to clarify this, owing to his own approach: "Certain items in narrative keep on being used by storytellers; they are the stuff out of which tales are made. *It makes no difference exactly what they are like; if they are actually useful in the construction of tales, they are considered to be motifs.*" (Thompson 1955: 7, my emphasis; cf. Berezkin, this volume.)
 19. Thompson's motif type A62.2 "Thunder and Lightning Slay Devils".
 20. I.e. the image filling the slot DEVIL may be a *decentralized symbol* – a symbol that functions as a common noun ('devil') as opposed to a proper noun ('Satan') (on decentralized symbols, see further Frog 2014a; 2014d).
 21. Like the term 'motif', the term 'theme' has been used in a variety of ways and most often without clear formal criteria to distinguish it from other structural units (cf. Propp 1968 [1928]: 12–13; Arend 1933; Lord 1960: 68–98; Frye 1968; Foley 1990: esp. 240–245, 279–284, 329–335).
 22. For a review, see Frog 2010: 377–395; for examples of this epic in English, see *FFPE* 34–38.
 23. This distinction is not clearly made in the Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) tale-type index of international folktales (Uther 2004 or its earlier editions), which is ostensibly concerned with plots, even if these might be combined. However, certain types listed seem normally to have appeared only as episodes within complex narratives without a distinctive complication and/or resolution to form a complete plot according to the definition here (e.g. ATU 1087). On this topic, see also Berezkin, this volume.
 24. For a survey of the sources for this tradition and its variations, see Frog 2011; for a more detailed review of the problematic Scandinavian evidence, see Frog 2014b.
 25. If I am not mistaken, I was introduced to the potential significance of this feature in a presentation given by Merrill Kaplan at the University of Uppsala in 2006.
 26. Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Three_kings_or_three_gods.jpg.
 27. On the one hand, this means that the accuracy of Snorri Sturluson's account of this event in his *Edda* is not relevant to this discussion except insofar as the loss of the eye is correlated with sacrifice and the acquisition of supernatural power. On the other hand, this means that caution is needed when employing Snorri's account as a frame of reference because the same details that make it accessible to us as narrative may deviate from the local tradition of ÓÐINN SACRIFICES EYE in relation to which a particular artefact was made or ritual performed.
 28. For example, the one-eye modification could have been only symbolic, emblematic of a role, just as modifications to helmets were emblematic to their wearers rather than a literal blinding *per se* (cf. Price & Mortimer 2014: 519–525). It might be appealing to infer that the one-eyed Truso head represents some type of sorceress, but this would only be speculation. For all we know, the modification of an image making it one-eyed like the Truso head or the one-eyed buckle tongue from Elsfléth near Bremen (Price & Mortimer 2014: 525) may have been part of a ritual act for the creation of a supernatural helping agent that could act on behalf of the user (in later Scandinavian folklore this is most familiar in the form of a milk-stealer created by witches). The question seems irresolvable.
 29. The vernacular language was not equipped with equivalents to the modern terminology for discussing religion, religious conflict and religious change. Instead, it used expressions like *inn forni siðr* ['the old way of life'] as opposed to *inn nýi siðr* ['the new way of life'] or *Kristinn siðr* ['Christian way of life (religion)'] (Cleasby & Vigfússon 1896: 526; on the interplay of vernacular and Christian religion in the conversion context, see further e.g. Aðalsteinsson 1978; Miller 1991; Sanmark 2004; Gunnell 2009).

30. This interpretation was a structuring principle of Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala*, where *The Judgement of Väinämöinen* is represented at the end of the epic to mark the end of the pagan past and beginning of the Christian era.
31. This is found in the entry under year 6579 (AD 1071); a Christian's assertion that a pagan god is in fact the Antichrist is also found under the entry for 6582 (AD 1074).
32. This last case seems likely, for example, in the case of Old Norse sagas mentioning *Jómali* (from Finnic *jumala*) as a god of the *Bjarmar* ['Bjarmians'] on the White Sea: it is highly improbable that the theonym of such a remote and infrequently contacted foreign group was maintained in oral discourse for perhaps two centuries when other personal names were not (see Frog 2014c: 466–467).
33. Cf. motifs in legends related to Sámi shamanism (Christiansen 1958: 54–56, type 3080; Jauhainen 1998: 167–168, types D1031–1040; af Klintberg 2010: 264–265, types M151–160). Such motifs construct the image SÁMI through discourse.
34. For a full discussion, see Frog 2014b: 142–154.
35. On Karelian lament, see further Stepanova 2014; for works in English, see Stepanova 2011; 2012, and also Stepanova & Frog, this volume.
36. These differences extend to quite a fundamental level, as discussed regarding raptor symbolism in Ahola et al. 2016.
37. Although 'mode' was introduced with a prominent position by M.K.A. Halliday (1978), it was not as concisely defined as his other terms and was not devoid of ambiguity (see Shore 2015). On the use of 'mode' here, see Frog 2014e: 198–202.
38. This phenomenon has been referred to as 'linguaging'; see e.g. Jørgensen et al. 2011.
39. This has recently been highlighted by Eila Stepanova, who has characterized the lament register as a register of lamenters rather than as a register of a genre of folklore *an sich* (2014).

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Folklore and Mythology Catalogue: Its Lay-Out and Potential for Research

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Abstract: The catalogue of folklore and mythology contains ca. 50,000 abstracts of oral texts from all over the world. The distribution of 2,000 cosmological and etiological motifs, adventure and trickster episodes is systematically checked across almost 1,000 traditions. The database was developed as a tool for the research of prehistoric migrations and cultural interactions. The present article introduces and illustrates its potential for research.

“The Thematic Classification and Areal Distribution of Folklore-Mythological Motifs. The Analytical Catalogue” (www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin) with a set of accompanying files not placed on the web is a resource created for the study of the human past. Folklore texts from more than 6000 books and papers as well as some unpublished materials have already been processed. The textual part of this database is in Russian and therefore inaccessible for most users. Since the mid-1990s, the work was supported by Russian funds that assigned money, not for the creation of the database itself, but for receiving new information on prehistory. To find time for the preparation of abstracts in English for the items catalogued was practically impossible. This sad fact has its positive side too. Before being widely opened, a system of such scale had to be properly adjusted. With the progress of computer technology and ever easier access to publications, many gaps and flaws that the database initially contained have been filled and corrected. A complete translation of textual material into English has hardly been manageable, but some means to diminish this disadvantage will hopefully be found.

The database had a long formative period of development. Graduating as an archaeologist and initially having in mind a search for potential clues to understanding the mythological scenes on Moche vases and murals (ca. A.D. 100–800; Berezkin 1981), I began to systematize South American Indian folklore data in my own way. Only later, since the mid-1990s when the processing of the North American materials began, did I become more intimately engaged in problems of method and theory, being influenced more by Franz Boas and his students (Boas 1995: 329–363; 2002: 635–674; Kroeber 1908; Lowie 1908; Wilbert & Simoneau 1992: 41–45) than by the mainstream folklore studies. A crucial

point on the way towards the systematization of all the New World and later also of the Old World materials was an encouraging conversation with Johannes Wilbert in Los Angeles in 1993. My first computer was bought the same year thanks to a George Soros’ grant, and my first attempts to apply statistical methods to the data took place in the year following. These attempts would have failed without the friendly help of anthropologist Alexander Kozintsev.

The Replication of Narratives

The database has been developed through the etic interpretation of ‘myths and tales’ as cultural elements subject to replication. This approach is complementary to their study as emic phenomena that have a particular meaning for the people who use these cultural elements. However, it warrants stressing that these approaches to cultural data do not compete or interfere with one another. Any cultural feature can be both interpreted and unconsciously reproduced (Durkheim 1911; Geertz 1993: 92–93). I use the expressions ‘folklore’, ‘mythology’ and ‘folklore and mythology’ indiscriminately to refer to all kinds of traditional stories and tales, long and short, sacred and profane. The focus of research is placed on the replication of forms that can be borrowed from culture to culture and not emic interpretations that are culturally specific. Borrowing between cultures and historical processes of cultural change can both potentially change the emic category to which a story or tale belongs, which makes it essential to treat the material inclusively in the type of research for which the database has been developed.

Certain elements of culture are related to the physical survival of people, but narratives and mythological images are not counted among these. You cannot make flat roofs after coming to live in a rain forest, even if you

made them when living in a desert. However, nothing prevents you from reproducing the same stories in the new environment. Social events that include a public retelling of myths are important, but there is not a necessary dependence between the public event and the content of the story or stories told (Malinowski 1926). Thus, sets of folklore elements can be preserved even if the landscapes, climates and social configurations in which they are told change. A deep and abrupt cultural or environmental change would probably trigger modifications in the folklore-mythological sphere too, but not because of a direct dependence between mythology and environment. More important would be a general cultural imbalance that facilitates the loss of some cultural elements and the adoption of other, new ones. All other conditions being equal, folklore and mythology change in proportion to number of times it undergoes interpersonal transmission in the chain of its historical communication. In practice, that transmission has long been recognized as a social process rather than being limited to a chain of single individuals (Frog 2013: 21). For this reason, it can be practically discussed in terms of generations and inter-generational transmission. Any culture is based on the copying of its elements from generation to generation, and any replication is ultimately subject to variation.

Unlike genes, cultural elements can be acquired both from other members of the same group of peoples and from outside that group, i.e. they can move from people to people without the need for those peoples to be genetically related. Thus the distribution of cultural elements and genetic markers will not necessarily co-occur across different populations. The study of tales according to biological metaphors has a long history, and this has more recently advanced to comparisons using models and software from genetics. The different kinds of transmission of the folklore elements can be described as vertical when transmitted from generation to generation within a population, and horizontal when transmitted between peoples of different origins. Both kinds of transmission could take place in any period of history. If parallels with biology are appropriate, the development of

the folklore is more like the evolution of prokaryota than that of eukaryota. Therefore applying the same procedures to the study of a particular folklore plot as to the study of a gene (Tehrani 2013) does not seem to be methodologically correct.

The ultimate purpose of the research based on the analysis of the areal patterns of the spread of the folklore elements is to reveal not functional dependences between folklore and other spheres of culture (and nature) but the particular and to some degree chance peculiarities of such processes as migrations and cultural contacts and interactions.

The Problem of Multigenesis

The database is a tool for the study of human past. Such a tool would be useless if elements of folklore tales were ephemeral units subject to easy emergence and disappearance. Therefore it was desirable to assess the probability that multiple similar elements in folklore could emerge independently of one another. The reality is that we can hardly measure such a probability and that the independent emergence of even complex cultural forms cannot be completely excluded. However, though every particular cultural element could probably emerge more than once, trends in the areal distribution of a great number of elements (many dozens and even hundreds of them) must depend on some social, natural or historical factors. Otherwise the areal distribution of elements would be chaotic. The hypothesis of the ephemeral nature of elements of folklore was rejected, not because of some theoretical considerations, but under the pressure of factual evidence. This or that element is found in one region and absent from others. Those elements that are truly found universally have simply been ignored because their study is useless for our purposes.

Initially, the factors responsible for the patterns in the areal distribution of folklore elements were thought to lie in social and natural spheres. It was thought that cultures with particular types of economy and social organization that existed in particular climates and landscapes produced similar stories and worldview images. However, such correlations have proven to be weak at best. The data from



Figure 1. Myths with circum-Pacific distribution that explain the origin of plants on the principle of 'many from one'. Many different fruits and tubers grow on the branches of one tree; bodily members of a person (Avesta: a bull) turn into different plants. Grey circles = traditions for cultivated plants. Black circles = traditions for wild edible plants.



Figure 2. The earth-diver cosmological myth. Persons or creatures acquire from the bottom of the ocean or from the lower world small amount of solid substance which turns into the earth. The outlined routes of the spread of the motif are highly hypothetical.

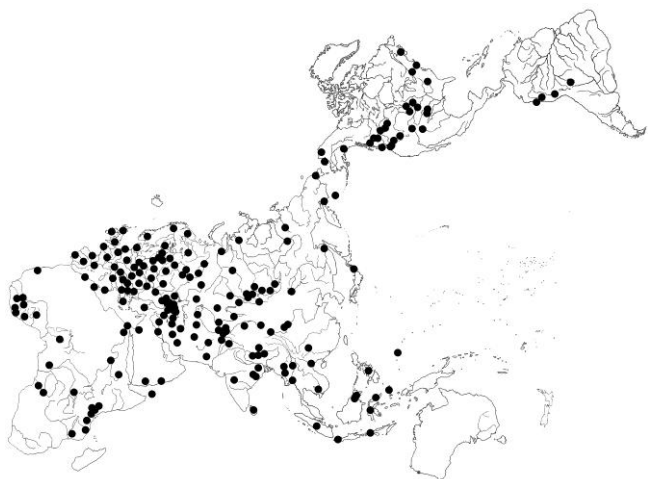


Figure 3. The task-giver is a king or a chief. The person who gives difficult tasks to the hero is a prominent figure in the social hierarchy, i.e. a head of the political unit of a community or higher level and not a mythical being.

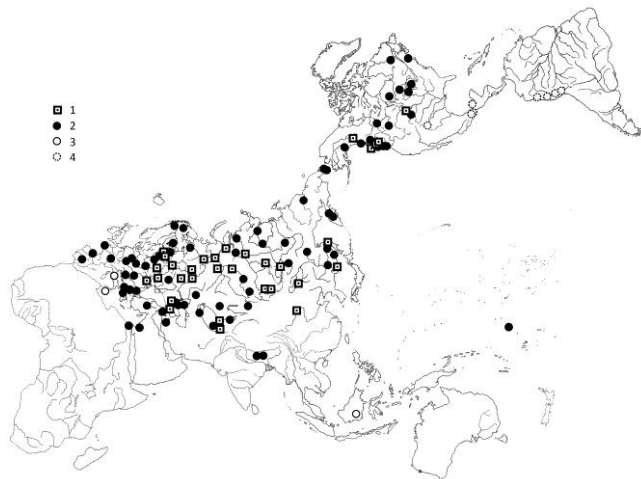


Figure 4. Obstacle flight. Running away from a dangerous being, a person throws objects that turn into mighty obstacles in the way of the pursuer. 1. A whetstone and a comb are thrown, and they turn into a mountain and into a thicket, forest, etc. 2. Either a whetstone or a comb but not the both. 3. A comb is thrown but it turns into another kind of obstacle, not into a thicket. 4. A thrown comb in the American Indian tales (probably a Spanish borrowing).

African cultures processed during the last eight years was the last straw in breaking this hypothesis. This led me to determine that the potential influence of social-ecological conditions on the distribution of folklore elements is insignificant. Sub-Saharan African agriculture, based on root-crops and trees and not only on grain-crops, is of the same type as the Southeast Asian, Oceanic and tropical American agriculture. However, no etiological stories related to the origin of cultivated species (nor to the origin of practically any plants at all) were found in Africa, while a lot of stories related to the origin of edible plants are known to people on the both sides of the

Pacific, and these stories have much in common (Figure 1). Even if I missed some African texts of this category, they must be extremely rare, whereas corresponding texts can be found in almost every publication on the folklore of the circum-Pacific region.

It is easy to offer additional examples. The 'earth-diver' stories are found mostly in the continental areas far from any large body of water (Figure 2). The person who suggests impossible tasks for a hero is a prominent figure in the social hierarchy (and not just a

mythological character like Thunder, the Sun, a wizard, etc.) in stories recorded in those parts of North America where social stratification was weak. Such a figure is practically absent from Nuclear America with its state- and chiefdom-level societies, the few Andean cases could well have emerged under Spanish influence (Figure 3). A whetstone and a comb as objects thrown behind the hero to become a mountain and a thicket blocking the way of the pursuer are not registered everywhere where combs and whetstones were used, but across a wide but restricted zone of Northern Eurasia and North America (Figure 4).

As long as the population was sparse and contacts between small groups were episodic, vertical transmission has in general probably prevailed. During the initial colonization of as yet unpopulated parts of the globe, it can be assumed that the transference of folklore elements was exclusively vertical as people spread into the new territories. Within densely populated areas where contacts between the people were continuously ongoing and intense, the horizontal transmission of folklore likely became dominant and also shaped vertical transmission. Therefore the formation of the trans-Eurasian information network since about Hellenistic/Han period had to have important consequences for the development of the Old World folklore (and culture in general). When patterns such as those illustrated above are observed in such a large body of data, a historical explanation for the areal distribution of the folklore elements seems the most plausible.

Motifs as Analytical Units

Up to this point, I have tried to refer to the replicated units of texts ‘elements’, just as F. Boas did more than a century ago. This term is too vague, however, so the term ‘motif’ was chosen as a more practical and specific. It might be better to coin a totally new term more appropriate for the study, but all suggested alternatives have been rejected for various reasons. For example, the term ‘episode’ is perhaps the best for the description of narratives but it is not well suited to cosmological ideas like ‘rainbow as a serpent’ or ‘shadows on the moon as a

rabbit’. The terms ‘motif-episode’ and ‘motif-image’ are used when it is relevant to make certain distinctions.

I define motifs as any episodes or images retold or described in narratives that are registered in at least two (although normally in many more) different traditions. Some of my motifs find correspondences in standard indexes used by folklorists. For motif-images, the corresponding index is S. Thompson’s (1955–1958) index of elementary motifs, and for motif-episodes the index is the A. Aarne – S. Thompson – H.-J. Uther’s (ATU) index of the types of international folklore (Aarne 1910; Thompson 1961; Uther 2004). However, neither of these systems can be regularly used for our purposes. Neither of them was ever contemplated to serve as a tool in historical research as such, and both are Eurocentric.

S. Thompson’s index was created with the declared aim to hold it aloof from any problematics of historical research (Thompson 1932: 2). The aim was to reduce any text to a kind of standard combination of ‘characters’ or ‘units’. It is symptomatic, however, that an expert can easily extract a set of registered motifs from a given text, but it is normally impossible to reconstitute the content of any real text on the basis of the set of motifs extracted. Descriptions of the root motifs on which clusters of more particular motifs are based were intentionally deprived of details in Thompson’s index, wordings like ‘Origin of Frog’ (A2162), ‘Dwarfs in Other World’ (F167.2) and ‘Self-Mutilation’ (S160.1) being typical. Particular motifs are, on the contrary, too specific and often created based on one unique text (cf. A1730: Creation of Animals as Punishment and A1731 Creation of Animals as Punishment for Beating Forbidden Drum). As a result, Thompson’s index presents both a combination of units that are universal and can be found anywhere and units that have a restricted local distribution. When all of these units are taken together without differentiation, the statistical processing of regional sets of ‘motifs’ is senseless. The application of Thompson’s index to South American materials (Wilbert & Simoneau 1992) demonstrated that, if necessary, the system itself can be upgraded

to fit the non-European cultural and environmental peculiarities. However, the world-wide processing of units selected on the base of Thompson's index would reflect the similarity/dissimilarity between environments and (material) cultures, and not between oral traditions themselves.

The tale-type was originally understood as a narrative plot with a more or less precise origin in space and time. This idea has been severely criticized (e.g. Jason 1970) and now the ATU tale-types are primarily used as reference points for finding parallels for particular texts. There are several reasons why the ATU index is impossible to use for the sort of historical studies discussed here, i.e. for assessing a degree of similarity/dissimilarity between folklore traditions on a global scale. Being Eurocentric, ATU's power to classify the folklore of Sub-Saharan Africa, Siberia, Southeast Asia and Oceania is restricted, while Australia and America are completely beyond its scope. The ethnic attribution of texts is systematically provided only for Europe. For other areas, it is absent or practically absent not only in the reference index itself (Uther 2004), but also even in some regional indexes that use the ATU system (e.g. Thompson & Roberts 1960; Ting 1978; El-Shamy 2004). A still more significant problem is related to how ATU tale-types are defined. In many cases, sets of episodes found in particular variants of the same tale-type are so different that it is impossible to assess the degree of similarity between particular texts of the same tale-type without consulting the original sources or publications. Finally, the mistakes in the index are relatively numerous, which is of course inevitable if the texts themselves are not available but only citations of texts.

One of the best-known tale-types, ATU 301 The Three Stolen Princesses can be used to illustrate what really stands behind some of the types in the index. The description includes about a dozen and a half of the episodes that are often incorporated into the stories identified with this tale-type. Six of these have been chosen for the present illustration, considering their areal spread using original publications. As in any other ATU type, these episodes can be found in

different combinations inside one text but can also be used in stories for which the ATU index gives other numbers. In Uther 2004 (I: 176–179), the selection of episodes described in the context of particular tale-types is fortuitous. In the case of ATU 301, the motifs listed below as 1, 2 and 6 in Figure 5 are described, whereas those listed as 3, 4 and 5 are omitted. The six example motif-episodes are here described according to the wordings in our catalogue and numbered according to the distribution maps in Figure 5. The example motif-episodes may be described as follows:

1. *Hero, His Companions and a Dwarf. The hero and his companion, or companions, live together. Every morning one stays at home while another or others go to hunt, etc. A demonic person comes, eats up all the food and beats the cook. Or, the man who remains at home comes to the demon himself in search of fire and is maltreated by him. The hero kills or neutralizes the demon.* Besides Nuclear Eurasia, this episode is popular in the Southeast Asia and rather well represented in Sub-Saharan Africa.
2. *Hero Marooned in the Underworld. A man descends down into a well, over a precipice, etc. Saving a girl or girls, getting treasure, etc. he sends them up. After receiving the girls and/or treasure, his companions cut the rope and the hero remains below.* The episode is better represented in India and in China than the previous one, but is totally absent from insular Southeast Asia.
3. *Snake Threatens Nestlings. A serpent or water monster regularly devours or injures children of a powerful being, usually nestlings of a giant bird. The bird has no power over the serpent but the hero kills the monster.* This episode, unlike others, is found in the Americas; one of the Kazakh versions is especially similar to the Amerindian ones (Berezkin 2014b, fig. 1). In the Iranian index, the episode is selected as a distinct tale-type 301E (Marzolph 1984).
4. *White and Black Rams. Going to the underworld, the hero should take a white ram (horse) with him, which would carry him back to earth. By chance, he takes a black one, which carries him even deeper to the lower level of the underworld.* This episode is popular in the Eastern

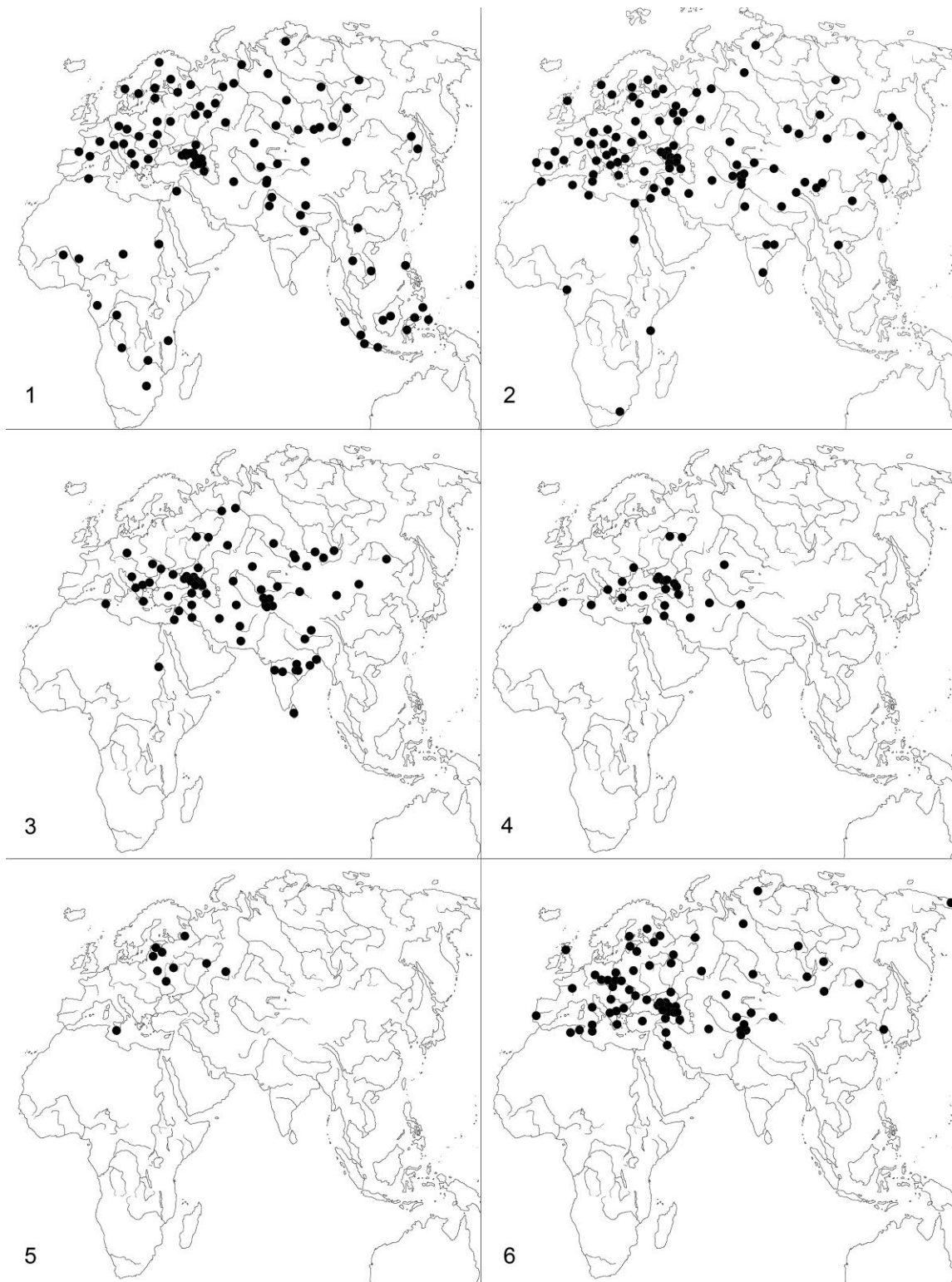


Figure 5. Patterns of distribution of six motif-episodes that are used in the context of ATU tale-type 301. 1. Hero, His Companions and a Dwarf. 2. Hero Marooned in the Underworld. 3. Snake Threatens Nestlings. 4. White and Black Rams. 5. The Packed Kingdom. 6. Man Feeds His Own Flesh to His Animal Helper.

Mediterranean but not known beyond the Maghreb, the Middle Volga area and Pamir.

5. *The Packed Kingdom*. Returning from the underworld, an abducted princess puts objects that she used there (clothes, house, 'kingdom') into a small container (an egg, a ball, etc.) and brings them with her. This episode is more rare than others and mostly

found in Eastern Europe. Some examples of this episode may potentially have remained unnoticed by me because the motif has only recently been included in the catalogue.

6. *Man Feeds His Own Flesh to His Animal Helper*. The hero has to feed a powerful creature (usually a giant bird) by regularly giving it pieces of meat. When the meat

supply is exhausted, he cuts off a piece of his own flesh. The pattern of areal distribution of this episode is reminiscent of the distribution of episode 2, with the important exception that it is absent from South Asia.

The presence or absence of particular episodes in Atlantic Europe, South Asia or Africa is important for research on the prehistoric exchange of information or movements of people. However, it is impossible to retrieve such data from the available folklore indexes. It was therefore necessary to create a database of our own and not use the systems created for other purposes.

The Database Lay-Out and Usage

The database exists as a set of Word files and as a correlation table in *sav format. The textual version contains abstracts of ca. 50,000 texts from all over the world. The precise number is difficult to assess: one text can contain several motifs and is therefore reproduced several times in different parts of the catalogue, but one motif can be illustrated by several texts. Texts are arranged according to the motifs that they contain. Motifs included in the first half of the catalogue and denoted with letters from A to I are mostly related to cosmology and etiology. Motifs in the second half, denoted with letters from J to M, are related to adventures and tricks. This dichotomy is not rigorous but that is unimportant because the database's search function allows any motif to be easily found regardless of its place in the general list of motifs or grouping with other motifs of the same kind (e.g. motifs related to the explanation for death or trickster episodes; motifs found only in Eurasia or only in the Sub-Saharan Africa, etc.).

For every motif, abstracts of texts are arranged by regions, beginning with South Africa and ending with Tierra del Fuego. The relative size of the regions distinguished in the database varies significantly and depends on the problematics of the research at the time when a particular set of regions was defined. Within each region, several traditions (from one to several dozen) are selected, and just these units (the traditions) together with the motifs form the basic structure of the system. This structure allows individual motifs and

regions or cultural groups to be handled as separate but intersecting parameters.

Ideally one tradition should correspond to one 'ethnic' group, but such groups, as is well known, are different. We can provisionally accept a hypothesis that cultural differences depend on *a*) geographical distance between people and on *b*) the existence or nonexistence of language barriers between them. Accordingly, linguistically homogeneous traditions that occupy very wide geographical areas were split and those whose carriers spoke closely related languages and occupied small territories were merged together. Such Eurasian traditions as Ukrainian, Kazakh, and especially Russian and Chinese, occupy huge areas, even considering the traditional ethnic territories before ca. AD 1500. These should be split into smaller units in the future. The main reason that it has not been done yet is because of the lack of information concerning the exact provenience of part of the texts.

For poorly known regions (especially Melanesia, including New Guinea, and Australia), where the number of languages is large and the amount of folklore data for each individual language is relatively small, ethnic traditions were united into clusters rather mechanically differentiated.

The textual database available on the internet is upgraded once a year. In 2014, an interactive version with English wordings of motifs and maps of the areal distribution of motifs was created. The automatic transfer of the data from the *sav format produced chance mistakes, some of which potentially have not yet been identified. Because of this, the site has not yet been opened to the public, but I hope that it will be in the near future.

Using the database, we can either check the areal distribution of particular motifs or apply statistical programs to assess the degree of similarity/dissimilarity between traditions. Examples of the spread of particular motifs have been shown above (Figures 1–5). Another example is shown in Figure 6, which represents the spread of tales reproduced by later groups of Asian migrants on their way to the New World.

Initially, when only data on the American traditions was included in the catalogue, the distribution of all the motifs according to all



Figure 6. *The Leg-Bridge*. A person stretches his or her leg or neck (Dafla of northeast India: hand) as a bridge across body of water. The fugitives or those who walk ahead cross the bridge; the persecutor or those who are behind usually fall because the person takes his bridge away.

the traditions was analyzed. When the data on the Old World traditions was included, the system became too heterogeneous to be processed as a whole. It contains, on the one hand, motifs that can be extremely old, which potentially spread already in the early Holocene or Late Pleistocene Periods, and on the other hand, motifs that spread across Nuclear Eurasia during the last millennia or even in recent centuries. Consequently, any use of the database to address a particular research question requires preliminary analytical work concerning which motifs in particular should be selected for processing.

Expressed in figures, the world folklore and mythology database is a binary table (i.e. consisting of zeros and ones) with lines for traditions and columns for motifs. In this way, every tradition is characterized by long strings of zeroes and ones that contain information on the degree of similarity/dissimilarity between traditions. This information can be extracted in different ways. One way is based on the principle of factor analysis. Within this framework, features (i.e. the motifs) are represented as sums of a small number of concealed variables (factors). Factor analysis algorithms promote, as far as possible, the preservation of initial correlation between the features (the motifs). As a result of such a presentation, every tradition is characterized by values of a small number of factors (usually two or three), so the number of variables is fundamentally reduced. One of

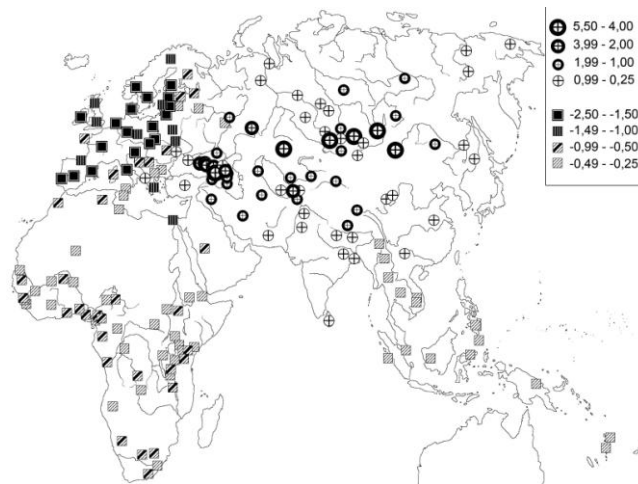


Figure 7. *Computed data on the distribution of 548 folklore motifs related to adventures and tricks according to 309 ethnic traditions of the Old World. Second principal component (2nd PC).* Traditions located between the Caucasus and Mongolia with adjacent Siberia form one group, while traditions of Western Europe and the Mediterranean with adjacent Africa form another group. This evidence suggests that information exchange inside two spheres of communication was slightly more intensive than between those two spheres. Traditions with mathematic indexes from +0,24 to -0,24 are neutral with respect to the Western and Eastern complexes and are not shown on the map.

the variants of the factor analysis uses the so-called principle components (PC) as factors, which are formally related to a completely different task, which is to find a linear combination of features for which the dispersal is maximal. The number of such maximums coincides with the number of dimensions of a particular task. The greatest maximum corresponds to the 1st PC, the next one to the 2nd PC, and so on. With the processing of such a large and diverse dataset as ours, the first three or four components undertake less (sometimes much less) than 20% of the total variability. However, it is enough for a convincing differentiation of the traditions according to a huge number of features.

As an example of the statistical processing of data, the results of computing the information on distribution of adventure and trickster motifs typical for the tales recorded in Nuclear Eurasia are presented in Figure 7. This scheme was first published in Berezkin 2015 (as Fig. 2) and here is slightly modified after including data on ca. 500 additional texts.

***Advantages of the Database: Folklore
Parallels between the Caucasus and the
North Eurasian Forest Zone***

A new approach to the material is justified as far as one gets access to new information hitherto unavailable. One of the advantages is the possibility to apply statistical analysis to a vast and diverse aggregation of data and to reveal tendencies that otherwise would remain unnoticed. Our database in *sav format inevitably contains chance mistakes and misprints. However, the information was accumulated during such a long time in the context of such diverse research projects that a systematic bias is hardly possible. And all '1's and '0's of the correlation table can be easily checked against the data of the textual catalogue.

Another innovation is the global rather than regional approach to the material. The database began to grow from an original concentration on South America. As its scope was expanded, the Western Eurasian folklore, which has been the focus of attention of traditional folkloristics, was looked into from the outside. Thanks to this, it was possible to observe transcontinental parallels that had remained beyond the horizon of earlier researchers. Besides regularities in the distribution of motifs that are related to the problems of the peopling of the Americas, the Austronesian dispersal, early maritime contacts between Africa and South and Southeast Asia, and other broad themes that need not be reviewed here, the previously unnoticed parallels between texts recorded in Western Eurasia itself were also found.

Of special interest are those that concern parallels between traditions of the Caucasus and the much more northern areas of the forest belt. Because a direct contact between the two regions is impossible, the motifs in question had to be known earlier in the steppe zone, from where they probably disseminated in both directions. The steppe zone is an area where ever new groups of people were almost constantly moving from West to East (in the Chalcolithic Period and the Bronze Age) and then mainly from East to West (since the Iron Age). Because of population replacement, the early motifs had little chance of being preserved. However, information found in the

folklore traditions to the north and to the south of the steppe zone helps to reconstruct the stories that were probably known to the pre-Turkic and pre-Mongolian inhabitants of the steppe. Comparing southern and northern Eurasian versions, the anthropogenic myth in which a dog and a horse participate was provisionally reconstructed (Berezkin 2014a). Here is another example of the same approach.

Two persons engaged in dialogue describe a series of objects and creatures as being simultaneously giant and small:

Abkhazians (Shakryl 1975, no. 89: 395–396). A dialogue between a devil and a man. – What news? – Eight dogs cannot eat up a thigh of a mosquito. – Dogs are small. – They devoured eagles that flew into the yard of a prince. – Eagles are small. – When they sat on a roof of the palace, their wings touched the ground. – The palace is small. – Every room is spacious enough for eight camels. – Camels are small. – They were eating the upper branches of pines. – Pines are small. – When my brother was looking at their tops, he had to crane his neck and his cap fell down. – Your brother is small. – He could take stones from the bottom of a well by putting his hand into it. – The bottom was near. – If you throw a stone in the morning, it will not reach the bottom until evening. – The day was short. – A cow that conceived in the morning returned with a big calf in the evening.

Similar texts are recorded among the *Abazins*, a groups of Abkhazians that migrated to the northern slope of the main Caucasian range, and the *Kabardin*, who are more distantly related to the Abkhazians and live to the north of the Abazins (Alieva and Kardangushev 1977: 121–123; Tugov 1985, no. 120: 335–336).

Ossetians. A dialogue between a man and a giant. – How did you cross Terek River? – I caught a donkey, used my cap for a saddle, legging bands for saddle-girths. – It was not Terek but a stream? – The donkey's cry was not heard on the opposite bank. – The donkey was small? – From its hide, a coat and a cap for Uryzmag were made. – Uryzmag was small? – He could not hear a cock crying at his feet. – He was deaf? – He heard how ants ploughed in the underworld. – The ants were not far away? – Herdsmen reached them in a year. – Herdsmen were

bad? – During this year, wolves could not take a single ear of a kid. – Wolves were bad? – They immediately devoured buffaloes in the steppe. – Buffaloes were bad? – They spent an iron yoke almost immediately after being harnessed. (Britayev & Kaloev 1959: 380–382.)

Georgians (Imeretia). A dialogue between a wolf and an angel in the guise of a beggar. – How did I cross the sea? – On the back of a fly. – The sea is small? – An eagle tried to fly over it but was exhausted and drowned. – It was an eagle nestling? – When he moved, his wings they covered three towns. – Towns were small? – A horseman could hardly ride across them during three months. – He had a colt, not a horse? – When this horse died, its master made three coats and three caps of its hide. – The master was small of stature? – When a cock cried, he could hardly hear it. – He was deaf? – When ants were arguing under the earth, he could hear them. (Kagan 1898, no. 22: 64–66.)

Armenians. A dialogue between a monster and a beggar who is really a fish saved by the man and had now arrived to help him. – Where are you from? – From the other side of the sea. – How did you come? – I rode a lame flea. – The sea was small? – An eagle cannot fly across it. – The eagle is a nestling? – The shadow of its wings would cover a town. – The town is small? – A hare cannot run across it. – The hare is tiny? – Its hide is enough to make a coat, a cap and a couple of mittens. – For a dwarf? – If you put a cock to cry on his knee, he will not hear it. – He is deaf? – He hears how a deer eats grass in a forest (Tumanyan 1984: 101–106.)

Northern Khanty. A dialogue between two persons. – Why are your legs crooked? – I crossed seven seas in a boat without oars. – The seas were small? – Who knows, but a blue, a green bird was flying across but fell into the water. – The bird was small. – Who could see it, but seven men used its wing as a house roof. – The men were small. – Who knows. People say that each one was as big as a net on the Ob River. – So the nets were small. – Small or big, but put at a depth of seven *sazhen* (a *sazhen* is 7 feet) and the upper edges were seen. – It means the water was shallow. – Shallow or deep, but when the blue, the green fish is swimming, its head, its tail are not seen (Nikolaeva 1999, no. 11: 156).

The northern Khanty version is not expected in company of the Caucasian ones but stories about the Sun and a demon who compete for the hero have a similar areal distribution (Figure 8). A man pursued by a demonic person seeks protection from another person who is related to the upper world (the Sun, the Moon, Venus). The protector, the pursuer or both are female. They pull the man in the opposite directions and usually tear him in half or the man's leg is torn off. Stories about two females, the Sun and a demon, who tear the male Moon apart, are known both in Siberia and in the Caucasus. Owing to constraints of space, I provide only two abstracts.

Abkhazians. A girl who was really a werewolf was born into the family of a prince. Her younger brother ran away, met the Moon woman and married her. After some time, he decided to visit his former home and found it in ruins. His cannibal sister pursues him and the youth ascends to the Moon. His sister, however, could catch his foot and tore it off. That is why a one-legged person is seen in the Moon (Bgazhba 1983: 33–35).

Khanty (Vakh River). A cannibal daughter was born to an old couple. Their son decides to run away and marries a daughter of the Sun. He decides to visit his home, but it is empty and his cannibal sister attacks him. He escapes but reaches his wife at the moment when his sister manages to catch him. His body is torn apart by the two women. His wife gets the part without a heart and cures him, but he continues to die and to be revived. He is the Moon (Lukina 1990, no. 5: 65).

In Western Siberia the plot is registered among Tundra Nenets, different groups of the Khanty, Sel'kups and Kets (Osharov 1936: 11–115, 142–144; Dul'son 1966: 13–115; Pelikh 1972: 368, 369; 1998: 42, 63; Alekseenko 1976: 83, 83–84; Prokofieva 1976: 107; Kulemzin & Lukina 1977: 122; Sangi 1989: 42–44; Lukina 1990, no. 5, 6: 65, 66–67; Golovnev 1995: 303–304; Nikolaeva 2006: 123–126; Tuchkova 2006: 126, 241, 305) and in the Caucasus among the Abkhazians, Abazins, Ossetians and Ingush (Miller 1882: 297–299; Chursin 1956: 149–150, 150, 150–151; Bgazhba 1983: 31–33, 33–35; Malsagov 1983, no. 138: 297–299; Tugov 1985, no. 36:



Figure 8. Moon Torn in Half. 1. A man pursued by a demonic person seeks protection from another person who is related to the upper world (the Sun, the Moon, Venus). The protector, the pursuer or both are female. They pull the man in opposite directions and usually tear him in half or the man's leg is torn off. 2. Two male persons compete for a girl, one pulls her up into the sky and another down to earth. She gets to the Moon.

91–93). They are registered also among the Hungarians, Romanians and Ukrainians (Afanasiev 1994: 271–272; Botezatu 1981: 27–37; Hidas 1953: 24–32). Such areal distribution fits the hypothesis about the circulation of similar narratives among the inhabitants of the steppe region very well.

In tales of the Sami of the Kola Peninsula, it is a girl who is an object of competition and now is seen in the Moon (Charnoluski 1962: 50–79; Kharuzin 1890: 348–350). The Eastern Sami folklore tradition has a strong Western Siberian component (Berezkin 2008) and had hardly any links with the steppe region.

Stories about a cannibal sister (ATU 315A) are known across half of Eurasia, but the motif of the Moon being torn apart is more specific and peculiar to the traditions mentioned above.

It is interesting that a rather similar episode exists in the folklore of the Makka Indians of Paraguayan Chaco (Wilbert & Simoneau 1991, no. 84, 85: 179–186, 187–191). This can be taken as an example of the independent emergence of a comparable narrative scheme. A very early transfer of the motif from Asia to the New World is not completely excluded but cannot be proven, of course.

Motifs which are typical for Scandinavia, Baltic Finns and northern Russians, on the one hand, and the Caucasus, on the other hand, also exist. A “Big (or long) bull” (*Iso härkä*, *Suur härg*) is one of a series of motifs

related to this complex. But that is a theme for another paper.

Perspectives and Future Prospects

As was mentioned above, the database contains ca. 50,000 abstracts of texts while the number of texts, published or preserved in the archives, is at least ten and possibly a hundred times larger. The more texts that are processed, the greater the analytical power of the database as a tool, so its field of application is practically unlimited. The database was designed to yield results that are of potential interest mostly for archaeologists, linguists engaged in historical comparative linguistics, and geneticists, i.e. for those scholars who study history, and especially the deep history of human culture. On the other hand, the resource can be used to reveal information linked to processes in much more recent history. For example, the statistics in Figure 7 may reflect information exchange resulting from the Osman intrusion into the Balkans and central Mediterranean (a southern Balkan - Sicilian wedge between Central Europe, Arabian Egypt and the Near East, which leaves the Albanians as the only ‘Eastern’ tradition in the ‘West’). It is yet to be seen what sort of uses and utility the database may have for other researchers with different types of research questions and research aims. In addition to offering an alternative model for indexing folklore material, the database may prove of interest as a resource for typological studies, for helping contextualize research on a particular local tradition, or it could simply be used as a complementary resource for considering the traditions of a particular culture or region. A multiply indexed database of ca. 50,000 abstracts of traditional texts from cultures around the world holds tremendous potential, even if the selection of material has been limited by the aims for which it has been designed.

There is nevertheless a point of concern that the future prospects of the database project as presented here are rather uncertain. It has been developed as a tool for analysing folklore, especially by scholars concerned with the deep history of human cultures. Scholars who command the historical data,

such as archaeologists or geneticists, do not themselves work with folklore materials, while folklorists today are usually indifferent to historical problems and rarely have a sufficient knowledge of the human past for such long-term perspectives. This leaves the database rather betwixt and between different types of specialists. During the last 25 years or more, dozens or perhaps hundreds of people from many countries helped me by providing necessary literature, inviting me to conferences, teaching me computer programs or helping to provide grant support. However, the preparation of the abstracts of texts and the selection of traditions and motifs has remained almost exclusively up to me. With the possible exception of my younger friend and colleague Yevgeni Duvakin, who at the moment does not even have a permanent position in Russia despite his excellent historical and linguistic education, no one knows enough about the database to be able to modify and develop it further. It is therefore difficult to say for how long this project will outlive me.

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Females as Cult Functionaries or Ritual Specialists in the Germanic Iron Age?

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Abstract: This article reviews women of Germanic tribes mentioned in early Greek and Latin sources that have, in the past, been interpreted as cult functionaries or even 'priestesses'. Each case is presented and it is shown that although these women may have connections with the supernatural, with prophecy and even had political influence, there is no reason to presume they are associated with a particular cult or a formal role in any cult.

In recent years, it has become fashionable to interpret deviant burials of women in the Germanic Iron Age as burials of sorceresses, witches, priestesses, *vǫlur* (sg. *vǫlva*), or, more cautiously, as 'ritual specialists', 'cult specialists' or 'cult functionaries'. This would presuppose that we know anything about such functions of women for the period from ca. 400 BC to AD 1000, i.e. for a period during which Germanic polytheism was slowly retreating towards the North of Europe, finally being replaced by Christianity even in Norway, Iceland, and Sweden during the 11th and 12th centuries. But in fact, before the high medieval Christian pseudo-historical novels preserved as the Icelandic sagas, we have no indication of female cult functions beyond occasional occurrences of the term *vǫlva* in a single skaldic and in several eddic stanzas, none of which are dateable to before ca. AD 1050, and not a single rune stone mentions any female cult functionaries. However, as far as the etymology can tell us anything, it appears that the Old Norse term *vǫlva* is cognate to the term *vǫlr* ['staff'], which is the only connection between such prophetesses and staffs, although findings of potential staffs among grave goods have led to speculation about them as being connected with *vǫlur* (or rather, to their graves). On the other hand, we do have a number of texts referring to Germanic prophetesses/seeresses from the Roman Iron Age, however these may be interpreted in each case.¹ Because this information on early Germanic sibyls is not readily available in English, the following article sets out to offer an overview of the Greek and Latin sources for such roles of females in the pre-Christian period.

Strabo's Prophesying Women of the Cimbri

On 5th October 105 BC, the Roman armies suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Germanic Cimbri at Arausio, deep in southern France. Thereafter, the Germanic threat

haunted the Roman writers, and not only them. The Greek geographer Strabo (ca. 63 BC to ca. AD 23) does not mention the defeat, but, talking about the Cimbri, who according to him lived beyond the Elbe, he mentions a custom which must reflect the traumatic experiences of the Roman armies some 100 years earlier:

About the Cimbri, the following custom is told: the women in the train of the army were accompanied by grey-haired, prophesying women in white shirts and long dresses, fastened on with a brooch, with bronze belts and bare feet. These approached the prisoners in the camp with drawn swords, put wreaths on their heads and led them to a large sacrificial cauldron, measuring about 20 amphorae [about 524 litres]. One of them ascended some steps, bent over the cauldron and cut the throat of every one [of the prisoners] held up to her. From the blood streaming into the kettle, she prophesied the future. Others cut open the bodies and, reading the entrails, promised victory to their own. In battle, they beat the hides stretched over the wickerwork of their wagons, creating an enormous din. (*Geographika* VII.2, 3, my translation; cf. *The Geography of Strabo*, vol. 3, p. 170.)

These bloodthirsty priestesses in long white dresses cutting the throats of the Roman prisoners to collect their blood in iron cauldrons in order to predict the future from it, have in turn haunted the imaginations of scholars delving into the religion of the ancient Germanic peoples ever since. However, the source value of this detailed description for our understanding of Germanic cult functionaries is greatly diminished as it is a conflation of different elements. Strabo, his informant or possibly even written source, seems to have combined three elements regarding religious habits:

1. Seeresses were employed among the Germanic tribes to predict the future (see below).

2. The Germanic tribes (among others) were known to occasionally slaughter their prisoners after a battle as part of a votive sacrifice.
3. The Roman practice of predicting the future from the entrails of animals.

Strabo here uses two terms to denote these grey-haired, prophesying women. Both Greek *hiéreia* ['priestess'] and *prómantis* ['prophetess'] (cf. also Gr. *mantis*, *profétis* ['prophetess']) are used, not the more formal term sibyl (Gr. *sýbilla*), but neither of these terms is ever found in other classical or later authors to denote Germanic seeresses.

Tacitus's Veleda and Albruna

Around a century later, Tacitus (AD 56–116) describes the role of Germanic women in war in his ethnographic account. In AD 98, he writes:

Inesse quin etiam sanctum aliquid et providum putant, nec aut consilia earum aspernantur aut responsa neglegunt. Vidimus sub divo Vespasiano Veleadam diu apud plerosque numinis loco habitam; sed et olim Albrunam et compluris alias venerati sunt, non adulatione nec tamquam facerent deas. (*Germania* 8.)

They even believe that there is something sacred and prophetic inherent to [women], and neither disregard their council nor ignore their answers. At the time of the divine Vespasian, we have seen how Veleda was long held by most to be a deity (*numinis loco*), but even Albruna and others were venerated, albeit neither out of adulation nor as if they were goddesses (*deas*).

These comments are more guarded and yet also more precise than those of Strabo, seeing that he gives us the names of two of the seeresses, namely Veleda and Albruna. The former, he says, was active during the reign of Vespasian (AD 69–79), the latter *olim* ['once upon a time' or 'a long time ago'], thus probably before Veleda.

There is no other information on Albruna. Even the name is by no means certain: 'Albruna' is actually an emendation for Aurinia and Albrinia. If either Albrinia or Albruna is correct, then these names would suggest an interpretation as 'the trusted friend of the elves' or else 'the one gifted with the secret knowledge of the elves' (cf. ON *álfr*,

Ger. *Alb* ['spirit']; ON *rún* ['secret (magical) knowledge; charm']). The version Aurinia, however, places the name in the etymological vicinity of matron names such as Aufaniae, Aumenhenae or the name of a goddess Aueha (all on 2nd century AD votive stones). However, the uncertainty of the form of the name leads its reconstruction to be motivated by other information about Germanic priestesses and seeresses rather than the name yielding independent information about the function or significance of seeresses.

Tacitus provides us with significantly more information both on Veleda's state and her function in his *Historiae*, and it is from this description in particular that we can learn a great deal about the political role of a seeress in the 1st century AD.

Veleda was a member of the tribe of the Bructeri who lived in the area between the Ems and the Lippe rivers. According to this account, she played a vital political role in the Batavian revolt. In AD 69, the Germanic Batavi from the area on the Lower Rhine rose against the Roman occupation under which they were living. Their leader, Julius Civilis, sent Munius Lupercus, the commander of the conquered legion Castra Vetera, as a gift to Veleda. Tacitus reports this as follows:

Ea virgo nationis Bructerae late imperitabat: vetere apud Germanos more, quo plerasque feminarum fatidicas et, augescente superstitione, arbitrantur Deas. Tuncque Veledae auctoritas adolevit. Nam prosperas Germanis res et excidium legionum praedixerat. Sed Lupercus in itinere interfectus. (*Historiae* IV, 61.)

This maiden of the tribe of the Bructeri enjoyed extensive authority, according to the ancient Germanic custom, which regards many women as endowed with prophetic powers (*fatidicas*) and, as the superstition grows, attributes divinity to them (*arbitrantur deas*). At this time Veleda's influence was at its height, since she had foretold the Germanic success and the destruction of the legions. But Lupercus was killed on the road.

The death of the commander did not lessen the honour given to Veleda and, when the Germanic peoples on the western banks of the Rhine later threatened the town of Cologne,

the citizens of Cologne called upon Civilis and Veleda as arbitrators:

Arbitrum habebimus Civilem et Veledam, apud quos pacta sancientur.' Sic lenitis Tencteris, legati ad Civilem et Veledam missi cum donis, cuncta ex voluntate Agrippinensium perpetravere. Sed coram adire adloquique Veledam negatum. Arcebantur aspectu, quo venerationis plus inesset. Ipsa edita in turre: delectus e propinquis consulta responsaque, ut internuntius numinis, portabat. (Tacitus, *Historiae* IV, 65.)

'We will have as arbiters Civilis and Veleda, before whom all our agreements shall be ratified.' With these proposals they [the citizens of Cologne] first calmed the Tencteri and then sent a delegation to Civilis and Veleda with gifts which obtained from them everything that the people of Cologne desired; yet the embassy was not allowed to approach Veleda herself and address her directly: they were kept from seeing her to inspire them with more respect. She herself lived in a tower (*in turre*); one of her relatives, chosen for the purpose, carried to her the questions and brought back her answers, as if he were the messenger of a god (*internuntius numinis*).

Soon after this, in AD 70, the Germanic fighters seized the flag ship of the Roman Rhine fleet, a Trireme, in a night-time attack and dragged it as a gift for Veleda up as far as the river Lippe. The commander, Petilius Cerialis (who had escaped solely because he had spent the night with a Germanic mistress on land), correctly assessed the power of Veleda and asked her in secret messages to allow the fate of war to take another direction upon which he promised a pardon for both Civilis and the Batavi (Tacitus, *Historiae* V, 24). Unfortunately, we do not know how Veleda reacted to this attempt at bribery to change her predictions, but we do hear about her later fate from other sources: a poem written by Papinius Statius (*Silvae* I, 4, 89) mentions Veleda as a prisoner in the year AD 77, and a little later she was apparently deported to Italy. It is not unlikely that she lived out the remainder of her days as a temple servant in a temple in the town of Ardea in Latium (South Italy), since a Greek satirical poem found on a small fragment of

marble from this town is aimed at someone called Veleda and refers to her as "the tall, arrogant virgin whom the Rhine-water drinkers worship."²

From the words of Tacitus "At the time of the divine Vespasian we have seen ..." one might deduce that Tacitus had indeed seen Veleda when she was brought to Rome, as he was born in AD 60 and Vespasian only died in 79. This possibility might explain the historian's special interest in Veleda, whom he mentions five times altogether.

Despite the tempting phonetic similarity, the name Veleda is most likely not etymologically related to ON *vǫlva* ['seeress'], but is connected with Celtic *fili(d)* ['poet, scholar'] (cf. Krahe 1961; Guyonvarch 1961; Meid 1964; cf. also Cymr. *gweled* ['to see']: Birkhan 1997: 295). It is quite possible that Veleda was originally not a name, but rather a term for 'seeress', in which case the term could indeed be of Celtic origin. If **veleda* is an originally Celtic term for a variety of female cult specialist, it is possible that the corresponding role has also been assimilated from or at least heavily influenced by Celtic models. Syncretistic interaction between Germanic and Celtic religions are found in most sources (mainly inscriptions) along the Lower Rhine. It is therefore at least possible that Tacitus's account of the **veleda*/Veleda is more strongly reflective of Celtic traditions on the continent than the role of Germanic cult functionaries in Scandinavia at that time or later.

Dio Cassius's Ganna and Waluburg

Two more seeresses from the 1st century AD are known to us through Roman sources, both mentioned by name by Dio Cassius (AD 163 – ca. 229), writing (in Greek) in the early 3rd century AD. These are quite apart from an unnamed, gigantic or at least supernatural – woman of similar function. This last woman purportedly confronted the Roman commander Drusus in 10 BC, when his army was approaching the Elbe near to (what is today) Magdeburg, i.e. in the tribal lands of the Cherusci. According to Dio Cassius (*Roman Histories* 54, 35), this person predicted Drusus's approaching death (Abramenko 1994). Despite the fact that the appearance of this woman has served as the main evidence for beliefs that

women among Germanic tribes could be powerful agents with the ability to prophesy, it nevertheless has an extremely legendary character and will not be considered here as presenting valid ethnographic information. The two named seeresses mentioned by Dio Cassius are Waluburg and Ganna.

Ganna was a seeress from the tribe of the Semnones, settled east of the Elbe, and seems to have been active towards the end of the 1st century AD. She was brought to Rome with the king of the Semnones, Masyos:

Masyos, king (*basileus*) of the Semnones, and the virgin Ganna, who had appeared as a seeress in Celtica³ after Veleda, came to Domitian, were treated honourably and were returned. (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 67, 5; *Historiarvm romanarvm*, vol. 3, p. 180).

Domitian was emperor from AD 81–96, and a treaty with the Cheruski (who lived between the Weser and the Elbe) seems to have occurred during the year after his final war against the Chatti, namely AD 86, which is thus a likely date for the appearance of Ganna in Rome. As such, she was active in the decade after Veleda had been captured and deported.

On the basis of phonetic similarity, the name Ganna is either connected to *gin-* (as an ablaut variant of **gan-*; de Vries 1970: §572) or else interpreted as being connected with ON *gandr* ['magic wand']. However, the etymology of *gandr* is uncertain although it is clearly connected to magical practices (cf. Heide 2006: 65–69; Tolley 2009 I: 246–247). In Old Norse, it appears to refer to magical implements which may be variously interpreted as a 'staff' or 'wand' or a magical spirit being manipulated in magic. If the word meant 'staff, magic wand', the name would be directly related to the emblem of her calling, just as in the case of the seeress Waluburg (addressed below). This presents the possibility that Ganna might not be a personal name but could reflect a term denoting her office, as was discussed for Veleda above. The Greek text is ambiguous here, explaining various matters in a secondary clause: that she was a virgin, active after Veleda in Celtic lands, and that she was a seeress. It is noteworthy that she is not called by the usual term *sibylla*, but rather *theiázousa* ['someone making prophecies'].

The seeress Waluburg, on the other hand, is expressly called a sibyl (*sibylla*). This is found of all places on a Greek ostrakon from the island Elephantine opposite Assuan in Southern Egypt, and dated to the 2nd century AD. Here she is referred to as "Waluburg Se[m]noni Sibylla", quite clearly her name, origin and profession. This description is found in the penultimate line of a list of Roman and Graeco-Egyptian soldiers, possibly a pay-roll. *Walu-* probably derives from Germanic **walus* ['stave, wand'],⁴ thus the wand, the symbol of a seeress.

How the Germanic seeress came to be in Egypt, where she was obviously in service to the Romans, is an open question. If she did not go there as a slave, then perhaps it was in some form of service to a Roman officer, which would also explain her lowly rank on the salary list. Possibly she had been deported by the Romans for political reasons, like Veleda, which would underline the significant political influence which the seeresses had upon the Germanic peoples.

Tacitus and Dio Cassius obviously considered the seeresses of Germanic tribes to be virgins, that is to say, unmarried, youngish women. However, it must remain an open question whether the Roman authors interpreted the Germanic female cult functionaries in terms of the only group of Roman female cult functionaries they were acquainted with, namely the Vestal Virgins.

Gambara of the Longobards

A rather questionable case of a female cult functionary is the Langobardian queen-mother Gambara, whose sons Ybor and Ajo led the Langobards to victory over the Vandals after their mother had prayed to Frea. The only indications of a cult function for Gambara are her – obviously public – prayer, and her name, which has been interpreted as deriving from **Gand-bera* ['wand bearer']. However, neither the Langobard texts (*Origo gentis Langobardorum*; Paulus Diaconus I, 3 and 7) nor the version in Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Danorum* VIII, 284: the form he gives is *Gambaruc*) hint at an official religious role, although prophesy is not mentioned and nothing indicates an institutionalized position in a cult.

Seeresses in the Early Roman Iron Age

Apart from the etymology of names such as *Ganna*, *Gambara*, *Veleda* and *Waluburg*, and the various references to their political roles, the only details we have about these seeresses come from the descriptions of Strabo and Tacitus. Strabo, as discussed above, seems to have combined various notions into one picture, namely that of old women as cult functionaries and legendary accounts of the ritual slaughter of prisoners after a battle. Although not altogether impossible, his account is totally isolated and should be considered to have little reliability. He does not even use the word priestesses for these women, although that is what his description may imply. Tacitus, on the other hand, may have personally seen *Veleda* and goes into some detail when talking about her role in two different works.

We hear about three physical facts, namely that (like *Ganna*) she is considered to be a virgin, secondly that she lives in a tower, and thirdly that she receives presents, including, no less, a large Roman battleship. It may be considered surprising that Tacitus mentions a tower, but in the usage of his time Latin *turris* has two meanings: on the one hand, it is a siege tower (and as such is frequently used by Caesar in his *De bello Gallico*, e.g. Lib. II, 12, 30, 33), on the other hand it is used as a synonym for *burgus* and denotes a very small fort, usually with a lookout tower. Thus, Tacitus may imply that she lived in some small, native fortified settlement, not just in a village, implying that she lived apart from ordinary people. This would also explain why servants had to act as go-betweens between her and those who came to see her. The gifts are more difficult to explain: from Tacitus' description, it seems that both the Romans and the natives tried to influence her predictions by sending her presents. However, as the ship was sent to her *after* a victory over the Romans that she had predicted, it would thus appear to have to be equated with the votive gifts common in Iron Age Germanic societies (cf. the ship offerings of Hjortspring, Nydam, and Thorsberg). However, votive gifts can only be dedicated to a deity as a token of gratitude for prayers granted. If this interpretation of the ship as a votive gift is

correct, *Veleda* must then have served as the representative of a deity.

In the other passage quoted above, however, Tacitus distinctly says that *Veleda* and other seeresses were venerated "neither out of adulation nor as if they were goddesses." So what exactly was *Veleda*'s role? It can be deduced from the fact that no hint is made at a sacrifice or any other cult act, at which she may have officiated, that she was not a priestess. Tacitus expressly states that she was not a goddess, and anyway he would have used the word *fanum* rather than *turris* for her abode if he had wanted to imply anything of that kind. The votive gifts, on the other hand, might seem to assign to her a divine role, but her human nature is stressed by her function as a mediator and by the attempt of a Roman official to sway her decisions with political promises. It seems natural, therefore, to assume that *Veleda* was a politically active seeress, potentially involved more in politics than in religion.

But what does all this tell us about the role of women in the Germanic cults of the Roman Iron Age? The detailed information about *Veleda* seems to point to a not insignificant public political role of the seeresses. However, this function appears limited to the prediction of the future, seeing that *Veleda*'s role as a mediator seems rather atypical and also not in keeping with her secluded place of abode.⁵

And despite the fact that not even hints can be found in the Roman Iron Age of the supposed magic wands that have been unearthed in some Viking Age women's graves (Dommasnes 1978; 1982; Petré 1993; Gräslund 2001), the staff must have been a sign of their trade, even to the point where it was reflected in their names or terms of their function: *Ganna*, *Gambara*/*Gambaruc*, *Veleda* and *Walu-burg* might all be functional terms rather than personal names, in most cases referring to their sign of office.

Apart from the ritual slaughter of prisoners mentioned by Strabo (and this in their prophetic function!), the evidence from this period offers no indication whatsoever of a cultic function of women beyond prophecy, and certainly no solid grounding for seeing them as priestesses in public cultic functions.

From the Iron Age to the Völur

The Veledas and Gannas of Iron Age Central Europe may well be reflected to a certain degree in the late poetic and other literary records referring to *völur* in the North. These would supposedly declaim the history and future of the world (as in *Völuspá*) or make guesses at the future of the local inhabitants (as in the case of Thorbjörg *litilvölva* in *Eiríks saga*, Thordís *spákona* in *Vatnsdæla saga*, or Heimlaug *völva* in *Gull-Thóris saga*). The latter, whose literary existence only starts in the High Middle Ages in some rather fanciful sagas, are not depicted by their literary creators to have the same social standing as their counterparts a millennium earlier, and their supposed practices own more to the authors' knowledge of Sami witchcraft than to Norse customs – as far as these are described 300 years after the advent of Christianity. Where the importance of their function is emphasised (as in *Völuspá*), this is done in descriptions which owe more to the four classical sibyls of early medieval literature than to the *spádísir* and *spákonir* who may have practised their craft on farms in Iceland and Greenland in pre-Christian times. The reality of *völur* in the Viking Age and their living practices – if they indeed existed at all – are in fact far less clear than contemporary accounts of such women from the Roman Iron Age, leaving the direct connections and continuities between them tenuous.

But even for the late literary manifestations of (minor) prophetesses in Scandinavia in saga literature, terms such as 'cult specialist' (e.g. Tausend 2009: 155), 'cult functionary'⁶ or 'ritual specialist'⁷ (Gardeła 2012: 89ff.) seem strangely out of place, and even more so for the seeresses of antiquity. We hear nothing about their role in a public cult, and to assume a (formalized? transregional? traditional?) ritual of prognostics beyond the wild phantasies of Strabo is pure guesswork. We may certainly call them 'prognostic specialists' with an important role in politics, but to assign their role to religious cults is based exclusively on Roman concepts of prognostics in state religion and popular Romantic ideas of the past. Such ideas remain

completely speculative and unfitting for Germanic areas.

The sibyls of heathen antiquity – the Erithraean, the Cumean, the Delphic and the Libyan sibyls – had become acceptable to Christians of the Early Middle Ages, as the Erithraean sibyl in the texts of the Sibylline Oracles who had supposedly uttered a verse about the coming of Christ and the end of the world, which was taken up in the writings of St Augustine and Isidor of Seville and thus became widely known, to the extent that it was even integrated into the Easter liturgy:

*Dies irae, dies illa,
solvet saeculum in favilla,
teste David cum Sibylla*

(Version by Thomas of Celano, ca. 1190–1260.)

Day of wrath, that day,
an age dissolves in ashes,
according to David and the Sibyl

The fact that the literary topos of the *völva* in eddic poetry owes elements to both the literary Latin description of classical sibyls and to the actual practises of famous seeresses in pre-Christian times does, of course, not presuppose that Tacitus was known in 13th century Iceland (as has been claimed: Tausend 2009: 173), but may well reflect a common Germanic reminiscence of such important women in a distant past. Nevertheless, despite these literary interferences of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, it would be dangerous to draw a direct line between the literary medieval descriptions of the *völur* with the seeresses of Germanic antiquity – even if the role of the latter was also surprisingly close to that of the classical Mediterranean sibyls. But this again may be due to the *interpretatio Romana* tacitly inherent in the descriptions of the Germanic seeresses and given voice by our classical sources.

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Notes

1. On seeresses generally, see Schröder 1933: 133–137; Hultgård 2005; Simek 2006: 367–369, 463f., 477f.; Tausend 2009: 155–174.
2. On the fate of Veleda, see Guarducci 1945–1946; Keil 1947; Wilhelm 1948; Volkmann 1964.
3. Despite what Walter Baetke (1938: 113) says, namely “in Germania”, the manuscripts and editions all read “in Celtica”.
4. The name *Waluburg* has nothing whatsoever to do with the German name *Walpurga* (from *Wald-burga*).
5. To assume, as Tausend (2009: 166f.) seems to imply, that Veleda and/or Ganna had something to do with the sacrificial feast of the Semonones, described in Tacitus, *Germania* 39, is pure speculation.
6. “Kultfunktionärin” is the term preferred by Olof Sundqvist (2003: 425).
7. The term ‘ritual specialist’ is understood here as having specific association with cult.

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A Retrospective Methodology for Using *Landnámabók* as a Source for the Religious History of Iceland? – Some Questions

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Abstract: This paper describes and discusses nine different categories of ‘indicators’ that can be taken into consideration when assessing the historicity of accounts in Landnámabók. This presentation is specifically targeted at references to religion and religious practices in Iceland prior to the Christianization of the country. The methodological tools can be adapted to analyse other types of information, other texts, and other traditions.

If one approaches the Icelandic *Landnámabók* or ‘Book of Settlements’ as a historian of Norse religion, one faces a dilemma. On the one hand, this text contains an extremely rich assemblage of religious motifs: funerary rituals, temple buildings, sorcery, supernatural beings, prophecies, shape-shifting, and miracle-working all play a role in this text; religion and the supernatural are indeed so prominent in *Landnámabók* that they appear to have formed a key interest of its author(s) and/or redactor(s) (cf. the overview in Map 1 below). This suggests that *Landnámabók* might have tremendous relevance as a source for the religious history of Iceland. Yet, *Landnámabók* is anything but a contemporary witness to the happenings it claims to record. The first, ‘original’ version of *Landnámabók* has frequently been ascribed to Ari the Learned and Kolskeggr Asbjarnsson in the early 12th century. If this dating of the ‘original’ *Landnámabók* is correct, this first version of the text was already written down some two centuries after the events it describes, but this version is not extant. What we have are a number of later recensions dating from the late 13th/early 14th century onwards: the Sturlubók recension (ca. AD 1275–1280), the Hauksbók recension (probably AD 1306–1308), the Melabók recension (early 14th century, but extant only as a small fragment), and two recensions from the 17th century (cf. Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007: 241f.; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2001: 614f.; Hermann Pálsson & Edwards 1972: 3–5). This means that the extant texts of *Landnámabók*

are not two but four centuries removed from the Settlement Period.

This temporal distance is the more significant as the different extant recensions of *Landnámabók* differ markedly from each other, and furthermore stand in complex inter-textual relationships to the corpus of the Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*): *Landnámabók* and the Sagas of Icelanders share a considerable amount of material, and more often than not the exact nature of the relationships between these two corpora is problematic or just simply unclear (Bödl 2011: 230; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2001: 616). Yet even if it is hardly possible to disentangle the details of the interrelationships between *Landnámabók* and the Sagas of Icelanders with any degree of certainty, it is abundantly clear that both in the choice and in the treatment of the motifs contained in *Landnámabók*, the different recensions of this text are very much part of the literary discourses of their time of creation. Thus, they are anything but a monolithic pillar rooted in the Settlement Period in any straightforward way.

All this is of course well known (cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 2014: 177; Jakob Benediktsson 1966–1969), and the purpose of reiterating these fundamental problems of *Landnámabók* as a source for the religious history of the Settlement Period is merely to highlight the dilemma that a historian of religion faces concerning *Landnámabók*: on the one hand, this text contains such a wealth of religious motifs that it seems impossible not to turn to it as a source for the study of Old Norse

The acts of writing by the authors and/or redactors of *Landnámabók* and its different versions may have recorded a contemporary understanding, thus reflecting what the ‘truth’ was as it was known to the author/redactor, or they may record an invention dating to the time in which the text was created (written/redacted). In the former case, i.e. if the text reflects a contemporary understanding, it can be termed a ‘folkloric truth’. Strictly speaking, there may be one such layer of ‘truth’ for each writer and redactor involved in the creation of the extant recensions of *Landnámabók*. Since more often than not it is, however, impossible to differentiate these different authorial layers conclusively, no attempt will be made in the present article to pin down possible indicators for, say, an assessment of a 12th century ‘folkloric truth’ of the original *Landnámabók* vs. a 14th century ‘folkloric truth’ of the Hauksbók redaction. Another problem which has to be acknowledged, but can be solved only very rarely (if ever), is that the oral culture could have developed several competing views on one and the same question. This implies that even in the case of blatant contradictions between different medieval Icelandic traditions, more than one version could be *bona fide* true (= a ‘folkloric truth’) even if it is not factually so.¹

Truth-Type B: Historical Truth. A ‘historical truth’ is defined as a statement constituting an accurate representation of actual historical circumstances.

Even if an entry in *Landnámabók* is a *bona fide* recording of the ‘truth’ insofar as it constituted the contemporary understanding of the time in which the extant text was created, this does not necessarily imply that this high medieval ‘folkloric truth’ is identical with the factual conditions of the Settlement Period, i.e. the ‘historical truth’. The factual accuracy – the ‘historical truth’ value – of such information is, however, a possibility to be enquired into.

Arguably, the narratives recorded in *Landnámabók* – unless they are a conscious literary invention by one of its writers/redactors – are recordings of what is essentially folklore (understood as contemporary social understandings).² This is the basis for terming the faithful recording of this contemporary

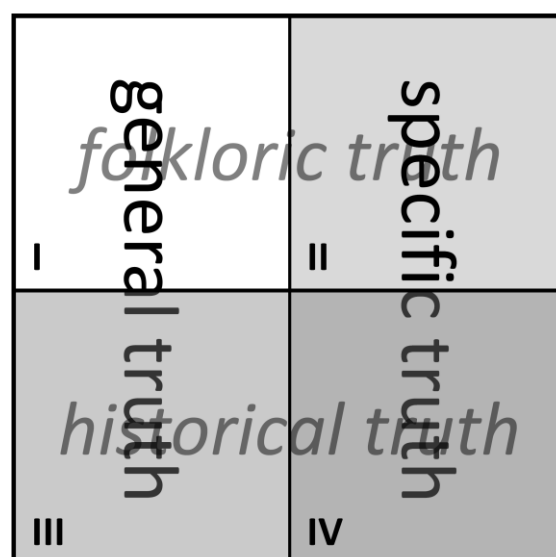


Figure 1. The relationship between ‘folkloric truth’ and ‘historical truth’ vs. ‘specific truth’ and ‘general truth’.

‘folkloric’ understanding a ‘folkloric truth’. In contrast to this, the term ‘historical truth’ tries to grasp the factual relationship between the extant literary account and the historical circumstances of the Settlement Period beyond ‘mere’ high medieval understandings. Of course these two ‘truths’ are not mutually exclusive; in fact, in order to be ‘historically true’, an account will normally also have to be ‘folklorically true’, as it is only a continuous folkloric chain of transmission which gives the author/redactor of the extant text access to an aspect of Settlement Period history.

Another distinction which is necessary to draw is the distinction between a ‘general’ and a ‘specific’ truth:

Truth Quality A: General. A motif, image or concept can be described as ‘true in a general way’ if the author/redactor has taken it from the pool of contemporary social understandings available to him, but has put it into a context of his own devising.

One hypothetical instance would be the idea that settler X built a temple: such a claim reflects a ‘general truth’ if the author/redactor of the text shared a contemporary *bona fide* belief that the early settlers built temples, but, for reasons of his own, ascribed this motif to a settler for whose temple-building he had no authority.

Truth Quality B: Specific. ‘Specifically true’ is a motif which is a *bona fide* reflection of ‘the truth’ both in terms of its own content and in terms of its context.

To continue the example of the temple-building settler: a claim that settler X built a temple is a ‘specific truth’ if the author of *Landnámabók* based this account on the contemporary state of knowledge both in terms on the general makeup of the motif and in terms of the specific person he associated it with.

It goes without saying that the categories of ‘folkloric’ vs. ‘historical’ and ‘specific’ vs. ‘general’ truth are not dependent on each other, but rather lie perpendicular to each other: a ‘folkloric truth’ in *Landnámabók* can be both ‘specific’ and ‘general’, and so can a ‘historical truth’, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Even using all the indicators proposed below, it will almost never be possible to determine the exact location of a claim made by *Landnámabók* on this grid. This is especially the case when we attempt to distinguish between a ‘specific’ and a ‘general’ truth, which is only possible where there is external evidence relating to a *specific* claim made about a *specific* settler – and such evidence is almost never available. To be sure about the ‘specific historical truth’ represented by square IV in Figure 1 is thus virtually impossible. But even though – or perhaps rather especially because – this problem cannot be solved, it is necessary to bear it in mind.

After these preliminary remarks, it is now time to turn to the question of what indicators are available to assess the trustworthiness of accounts given in *Landnámabók*. In the following, such indicators will be presented individually. As a matter of course, however, this is merely a question of presentation, not of their actual use. In actual use, the indicators proposed below should always be correlated with each other and used cumulatively to the greatest possible extent (cf. Ahola & Frog 2014: 11–13 on ‘relevant indicators’). Obliquely, this point will be reflected in the recurrent use of some of the same *Landnámabók* narratives to illustrate a number of different indicators.

Indicator 1. Archaeological Evidence

Where possible, accounts of *Landnámabók* should be compared with the archaeological data, which constitute the most tangible of the very few categories of evidence that actually stem from the time that *Landnámabók*

purports to speak about. One obvious restriction of this tool is that the types of information provided by *Landnámabók* are only rarely open to archaeological verification or falsification. There are, however, some notable exceptions. Perhaps the most obvious is *Landnámabók*’s frequent mention of mound burials (S39, 40, 42, etc.), whose historicity is amply confirmed by the archaeological evidence (Adolf Friðriksson & Kristján Eldjárn 2000). More specific is the archaeological evidence for *Landnámabók*’s claim that some settlers received boat burials (S72, 115): while the historicity of the *specific* boat burials mentioned in *Landnámabók* cannot be confirmed by the archaeological evidence, there is good evidence illustrating that the *general* idea of Settlement Period boat burials is historically accurate (cf. Figure 1). This archaeological confirmation of the literary accounts possibly includes the detail that the main burial could be accompanied by human sacrifice (S72); corresponding evidence may recently have come to light in the course of the excavation of the Litlu-Núpar boat burial in Northern Iceland (Roberts 2008/2009). The inverse case – i.e. an archaeological falsification of claims made by the *Book of Settlement* – is illustrated by its claim that the early Icelandic settlers built ‘temples’ (*hof*: S41, 85, 233, 234, etc.): unambiguous evidence for substantial Settlement Period cult buildings is notable only by its complete absence, strongly suggesting that the ‘temples’ of *Landnámabók* are a retrojection of high medieval churches into an imaginary pagan past.³

Indicator 2. Toponyms

Toponyms form another important type of evidence for the study of religious history; they are as important for Iceland as they are for other parts of the Germanic-speaking world (cf. Brink 2007; Laur 2001; de Vries 1956–1957: *passim*). What makes place names (including the place names in *Landnámabók*) particularly interesting as sources for the religious history of Iceland is the conservatism created by their specific social context: a place once named, and generally known by its name, is much less likely to be renamed than a local story is to be retold. This makes toponyms found in *Landnámabók* like *Horgá*

(S222) [‘Altar-River’ or ‘Temple-River’], *Hörgárdalr* (S223, 224) [‘Altar-River-Dale’] or *Pórsmörk* (S343) [‘Thor’s Forest’] highly valuable as historical sources. The disadvantage of such toponyms is, of course, that, while semantically clear toponyms are a narrative in a nutshell, this nutshell is a very small one indeed: their ‘narrative’ content is restricted to the composition of two or perhaps three terms, which encapsulate and hint at the circumstances which brought about the acquisition of a certain name by a certain place, but they do not at all elaborate on it. Place names and their semantics contain as little elaboration as anything narrative possibly could. This extreme restriction of their narrative content implies an equally limited information content. But even so, sacral toponyms can raise interesting questions. Why, for instance, is the river flowing through *Pórsmörk* [‘Thor’s Forest’] called ‘Cross River’ (*Krossá*: S343)?

Indicator 3. Historical Accounts

Where possible, accounts of *Landnámabók* should be reviewed in the light of independent, contemporary historical sources. One restriction of this tool is that such a review is generally only possible with respect to elements of *Landnámabók* which are not directly related to Iceland. This is because virtually no independent, contemporary historical sources from the Viking Age exist for Iceland. But even so, historical evidence can be of relevance for assessing some of the religious elements in *Landnámabók*. One case in point is the claim that the settler Órlygr Hrappsson – reputedly one of the first Christian settlers in Iceland – was the foster-son of a certain bishop Patrick. Allegedly, this bishop had his see on the Hebrides, his advice formed the basis for Órlygr’s settlement on the Kjalarnes peninsula, and the *Patreksfjörður* in the West Fjords was named after him (S15). Interestingly, however, no such bishop Patrick lived during the time in question (Jakob Benediktsson 1968: 52n.2; Wellendorf 2010: 14); more likely than not, this figure was merely extrapolated from the toponym *Patreksfjörður*, whether at the time of writing or in oral history. This situation allows for the possibility that the account could reflect a

‘folkloric truth’ (Figure 1, squares I and II), but it precludes that it reflects a ‘historical truth’ (Figure 1, squares III and IV).⁴ Thus, the use of independent historical accounts suggests that (at the very least) a number of central elements of the story of the reputed early Christian settler Órlygr are not historical.

Indicator 4. Non-Icelandic Literary Sources

Further indications of the historicity – or the lack thereof – of an anecdote in *Landnámabók* can sometimes be provided by comparing its account to non-Icelandic literary sources (predominantly sources from the British Isles): if an anecdote in Icelandic literature so closely parallels a non-Norse narrative from other parts of Atlantic Europe that there seems to be a historical connection between the two tales, then the *Landnámabók* story is more likely to be a borrowed literary fiction than a historical account. One instance of this is provided again by the settlement narrative of Órlygr Hrappsson. In this narrative, ‘bishop Patrick’ presents Órlygr with essential objects for building and equipping a church. Among the bishop’s gifts is a church bell. The *Hauksbók* version of the story contains the detail that this bell falls overboard before Órlygr reaches the place where he is to settle, but is then found lying on the shore when Órlygr lands after having identified his settlement site (H15). Curiously, the motif that a church bell drifts over the sea and lands on the place where a Christian settlement is to be established also recurs in Irish hagiography, which suggests that the occurrence of this motif in the settlement story of Órlygr Hrappsson is a borrowing from Irish ecclesiastical sources (Young 1937: 120; Wellendorf 2010: 15f.). This serves to further emphasise the fundamentally fictional character of the settlement narrative of Órlygr Hrappsson as a whole, which seems to be cobbled together from a broad range of diverse sources, some of which are demonstrably unhistorical (reinterpreted toponyms, hagiographical stock motifs), while for the rest a historical background cannot be proven and is made implausible by the strong unhistorical elements of the narrative.

Non-Norse roots of a settlement narrative do not necessarily, however, also imply that

the narrative in question is late. An example of a non-Norse, but possibly early, mythological motif in *Landnámabók* is provided by the story of Auðun the Stutterer (S83; Egeler 2014; cf. af Klintberg 2010, legend types F101–106). This Auðun was a settler who took land on the Snæfellsnes peninsula. According to *Landnámabók*, he had kinship connections to Ireland: Auðun was married to a certain Mýrún, the daughter of “Maddaðr, king of the Irish” (S83). One autumn, *Landnámabók* tells, Auðun saw a dapple-grey stallion run down from Lake Hjarðarvatn and to his stud-horses, and the horse subdued his breeding-stallion. Then, Auðun went over, took hold of the grey stallion, yoked him before a two-ox sledge, and carted all the hay from his home-field. The stallion was easy to manage through the middle of the day, but as time went on, he trampled into the ground up to the hoof-tufts, and after sunset he broke the entire harness and ran to the lake. After that he was never seen again.

Kinship connections to Irish kings – or rather: *the* Irish king – are a topos of Icelandic literature. In the case of Auðun the Stutterer, however, these claims have an unusual ring of authenticity conveyed upon them by the names of Auðun’s wife and reputed father-in-law: both of these seem to be reflections of real Irish names current during the Viking Age (*Muirenn* and *Matudán*; the latter name happens to be attested as the name of several Irish kings of the Viking Age). This makes it interesting that the strange horse which emerges out of a mountain lake over Auðun’s farm has close parallels in early medieval Irish literature: the most prominent heroic mount of Irish story-telling during the Viking Age was the ‘Grey of Macha’, the horse of the hero Cú Chulainn. If one analyses its representation in Viking Age texts like *Fled Bricrenn* and *Brislech mór Maige Muirthemni*, this heroic horse shared the following traits with Auðun’s water-horse: both horses are *a*) stallions of grey colour, *b*) which are supernaturally strong, *c*) very difficult to tame, *d*) emerge from a mountain lake, and *e*) ultimately disappear into the same mountain lake. Given Auðun’s marital connections to Ireland, the exact parallelism between the story of the Snæfellsnes water-horse, which *Landnámabók*

attributes to the Settlement Period, and well-known early medieval Irish narratives suggests that *Landnámabók* might be correct to claim that this story indeed dates as early as the Settlement Period. If this is so, then it attests to a mythologization of the Icelandic landscape that was executed on the basis of an Irish narrative pattern and that dated as far back as the time of the first settlement.⁵

Indicator 5. Landscape

The anecdotes which *Landnámabók* ties to particular landscapes and landscape features should be compared with these landscapes or landscape features if these are still extant. The potential significance of such a comparison is illustrated by the *Landnámabók* account of the settlement of Þórsnes (S85; cf. *Eyrbyggja saga* 10). In the course of a colourful discussion of the pagan religious sites on Þórsnes, this passage of *Landnámabók* comes to speak of the assembly site on the eastern part of the peninsula. There, the text claims, was a large boulder sacred to Thor on which those were killed who were sacrificed to the god.

To locate an assembly site on Þórsnes seems to be based on authentic local knowledge: in the eastern part of the peninsula, where *Landnámabók* (and *Eyrbyggja saga*) locate an assembly site, lies a farm which to this day bears the name *Þingvellir* [‘Assembly Fields’]. Such local knowledge also appears to have influenced the picture of the sacred landscape that is painted by the literary account in an additional way. In the homefield of Þingvellir farm, where the literary account locates the boulder which was reputedly used for human sacrifice, lies to this day a large boulder. This boulder is coloured by reddish inclusions of iron, giving it a pattern recalling dried blood (Collingwood & Jón Stefánsson 1899: 95f. with fig. 82). Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson (2005: 500f.) assumes that the account of *Landnámabók* (and *Eyrbyggja saga*) is based on historical fact and that this boulder was indeed used for human sacrifice. What argues against this, however, is that reliable evidence for human sacrifice to gods is otherwise notable only by its absence from early Iceland. Therefore, and given the existence of a prominent, iron-coloured boulder in Þingvellir, it seems likely

that the account of human sacrifices on Þórsnes is a high medieval fiction, whether it is a literary fiction or an oral, 'folkloric' one. This fiction was not conjured up out of thin air, but was based on an in-depth familiarity with the local landscape and the 'blood'-spattered boulder to be found there. Here, a medieval fantasy of a murderous paganism was developed out of the real-world features of the landscape and gained a status as 'history', which led to its inclusion in the purportedly historical fabric of *Landnámabók*. Recalling the different kinds of 'truth' summarised in Figure 1, it might very well be that the *Landnámabók* redactor who inserted this episode did consider it to be a *bona fide* accurate tradition. Thus, the tale of Thor's sacrificial stone might still very well reflect a post-conversion 'folkloric truth'; yet it clearly does not reflect a Viking Age 'historical truth'.

Indicator 6. Stereotypification

As a methodological point, the question of 'stereotypification' concerns the problem of whether the picture drawn by *Landnámabók* or other medieval Icelandic sources seems to reflect a medieval Christian cliché. A motif which appears to display traits of stereotypification according to Christian medieval patterns should be considered to be of limited validity for use in a retrospective reconstruction of pagan beliefs or practices.

One example of a passage in *Landnámabók* to which the question of 'stereotypification' might be applied is its account of the settlement of Auðr the Deep-Minded (S95, 97, 110, 399). *Landnámabók* claims that Auðr had, before moving to Iceland, lived in the British Isles and was a Christian. When she died, she ordered that she should be buried on the shore at the high water mark, because she did not want to lie in ground that was not consecrated. After her death, her family lost the Christian faith. They began to worship the 'Cross Hills' (*Krosshólar*), where Auðr previously had had her place of (Christian) prayer, built a temple (or altar: *høgrgr*) there, and believed that these hills would be the place where they would go after their death.

A parallel to this account is provided by *Laxdæla saga*. *Laxdæla saga* paints a picture

of Auðr which is, however, significantly different from that in *Landnámabók*: while *Landnámabók* describes Auðr as a noble Christian, *Laxdæla saga* describes her as a noble pagan. This is particularly striking in the respective accounts of her death (*Landnámabók* S110; *Laxdæla saga* 7): both texts give closely parallel accounts of the feast which Auðr organises immediately before her death, but while *Landnámabók* concludes its report with Auðr's burial on the shore, the *Laxdæla saga* account ends with a magnificent pagan boat burial.

Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (2001: 615) argues that the older of these two narratives is the one represented by the saga: he hypothesizes that the saga account could have been taken from an older, now lost version of *Landnámabók*, while the extant version of *Landnámabók* turned some of the first settlers into Christians in order to make Iceland part of the Christian history of salvation. What perhaps might argue against this conclusion, however, is the almost stereotypical simplicity of the historical account given by *Laxdæla saga*. In the saga, there is a very simple and very straightforward dichotomy between a pagan past and a Christian present: what came before the official conversion of Iceland in the year 999/1000 was pagan, and what came after is Christian. *Landnámabók*, in contrast, presents a much more nuanced picture free of such a clichéd, straightforward division between pagan and Christian: in this account, the settlement is partially Christian, then this Christianity is lost, and finally it is re-established a few generations later. This picture of an oscillation between Christianity and paganism is much more complex and distinct, and because of this very distinctiveness it also seems much more plausible than the saga's simple black-and-white dichotomy between a pagan Settlement Period and a later Christianisation. This is particularly so since the idea that Norse settlers coming from the British Isles might follow a Christian faith, as it is exemplified by Auðr, is historically eminently plausible. Since the British Isles had been Christian long before the beginning of the Viking Age, they would indeed have constituted a plausible background for the acceptance of Christianity by Norse settlers.⁶

In fact, it should be emphasised that this historical context is a crucial indicator pointing towards the historicity of the *Landnámabók* account (and, by implication, towards the validity of ‘stereotypification’ as a phenomenon, arguably observable in the version of the events told by *Laxdæla saga*). In principle, the astereotypical character of the *Landnámabók* account could, rather than being a consequence of historical accuracy, also be a narrative device. This interpretation is argued for by Sveinbjörn Rafnsson when he suggests that the purported Christian faith of some of the earliest settlers merely served to tie the Icelandic settlement into the history of salvation (2001: 615). For such an approach, the Christianity of figures like Auðr the Deep-Minded could be a literary anticipation of the later conversion.⁷ Hypothetically, such a reconstruction of the genesis of the *Landnámabók* account is just as possible as assuming that its astereotypical character gives it historical precedence. Seen in the wider historical context of the Settlement Period, however, it seems highly significant that the *Landnámabók* account with its oscillation between Christianity and paganism exactly mirrors the actual historical situation of early medieval Atlantic Europe, which was a complex and multicultural one in which Christianity and paganism recurrently did indeed live side by side.

To some extent, the archaeological record also reinforces the impression that the account in *Laxdæla saga* presents not a recording but rather a stereotypification of history. To date, there are only five certain boat burials known from the whole of Iceland (Roberts 2008/2009: 38). This is a surprisingly low number, given that there are several hundred known from the Scandinavian continent (cf. Müller-Wille 1968/1969). This might indicate that boat burials were only rarely performed in Iceland, which further undermines the plausibility of the saga account which claims that Auðr received a boat burial. In addition, high medieval Icelandic literature contains a surprisingly large number of descriptions of boat burials (the relevant passages are collected in Müller-Wille 1968/1969): the medieval literature seems to use them as a kind of antiquarian pagan stereotype,

arguably with connotations of particular lavishness and wealth, given the scarcity of timber suitable for shipbuilding in Iceland. On the basis of these considerations, the most likely reconstruction of the history of the traditions about Auðr might be that the account in *Landnámabók*, with its oscillation between Christianity and paganism, has historical priority over the stereotypically pagan Auðr of *Laxdæla saga*. There might even be a hint in the text of *Laxdæla saga* itself that the author of the saga knew this other tradition, but consciously chose to simplify the stratigraphy of Icelandic religious history by substituting the complex historical intermingling of paganism and Christianity with a simple dichotomy: that he chose to ascribe a boat burial to Auðr could be interpreted as a conscious literary nod towards the tradition according to which Auðr was buried on the shore at the high water mark.

This being said, it should be stressed that this reasoning obviously does not mean that the account in *Landnámabók* presents us with ‘the specific historical truth’ (Figure 1, square IV) about Auðr. It merely indicates a probability that the *Landnámabók* account may have historical precedence over the account presented by *Laxdæla saga*; and this ‘historical precedence’ is nothing more than a location on a relative scale of probability, not a clear distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’. Neither the account of *Landnámabók* nor the account of *Laxdæla saga* can be taken to be necessarily true (be it ‘historically’ or ‘folklorically’), and even less so since they are complex assemblages of broad narrative patterns and individual motifs which may have different origins and individually carry different degrees of weight.

Indicator 7. Narratological Integration?

Another indicator that could be useful for assessing the value of *Landnámabók* passages as sources for Icelandic religious history has to do with what I call ‘narratological integration’. This point, however, is too insecure to propose as a thesis. It should better be formulated as a question to be discussed: is it possible to argue that the less easily an element can be explained

narratologically within its given context in *Landnámabók*, the more likely is it to be a reflection of traditions whose roots run deeper than the composition of *Landnámabók* as a high medieval text? Or, to put it differently: are statements of *Landnámabók* which appear to follow the intrinsic logic of a straightforward narrative likely to do so because they have been invented for this purpose? And, conversely, is something which does not make a 'good story' (gradually) more likely to reflect a historical tradition than an element which follows the intrinsic logic of the plot of a narrative? These questions suggest themselves especially in those cases where material treated by *Landnámabók* is also treated by one of the Sagas of Icelanders, but in a different way. In such cases, one is tempted to wonder whether an element is particularly plausible if it contradicts the accounts given in the Sagas of Icelanders, since this contradiction means that it is not only demonstrably independent from, but also less dependent on, the framework of the plot of an extended narrative than the version given by the saga. To some extent, this point corresponds to the phenomenon for which Frog (2014: 128f., n.12) has coined the term 'suspension'. Frog defines 'suspension' in the following way:

Conceptual models or motifs can be considered 'suspended' in a traditional narrative when they are not reconciled with the broader conceptual system or belief traditions, or when they are otherwise maintained although their significance has become obscure or completely opaque [...]. (Frog 2014: 128n.12.)

Frog's term has a different thrust than my question of 'narratological integration': the phenomena for which he uses his category of 'suspension' generally seem to have preserved their 'suspended' features because these features are structurally important for their respective narrative contexts, making them 'suspended' within the context of the *world-view of the society* in which they are used as elements of a story, whereas 'narratological integration' approaches the historical validity of motifs from the angle of their *narrative* context (or lack thereof). Both terms, however, share the attention to a certain

discontinuity between the narrative motif and its contexts: they look at how a motif seems not to be fully integrated into its wider surroundings and treat this lack of integration as a consequence or indicator of its status as a relict with roots outside of its current textual home.

One element of *Landnámabók* which raises the question of whether a lack of 'narratological integration' might be a hint at historical plausibility is the settler Helgi *bjóla*. *Landnámabók* claims that Helgi, who took land on the Kjalarnes peninsula and was counted among the outstanding settlers in the South Quarter, was a Christian (S14, 397, 399). In contrast to this, *Kjalnesinga saga* (mid-14th century) claims that Helgi was a follower of the old religion, though he sacrificed only rarely (ch. 1). *Kjalnesinga saga* then further tells that Helgi allowed a Christian Irishman and his retinue to settle on a part of his land claim.

Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (2001: 615) suggests that *Kjalnesinga saga* here reflects an older tradition than *Landnámabók*: in his opinion, the historical Helgi *bjóla* was a pagan, and not a Christian as claimed by *Landnámabók*. If, however, one compares the appearances of the Christian Helgi in *Landnámabók* and the pagan Helgi in *Kjalnesinga saga*, it is striking that Helgi's Christian faith plays no narrative role within *Landnámabók* whatsoever,⁸ whereas the purported paganism of Helgi and his family in *Kjalnesinga saga* is crucial for the saga plot. The plot of *Kjalnesinga saga* revolves around the religious tensions that increasingly develop between Helgi's pagan family and the Christian Irish settlers whom he has allowed to settle on his land claim. In order for this plot to work, Helgi and his family have to be pagan; if he were a Christian, Helgi would undermine the very basis of the further development of the saga plot. On the other hand, the Christian faith of Helgi in *Landnámabók* is merely mentioned without having any further consequences within the text; the narrative of *Landnámabók* gains nothing by this detail, and this implies that, had this detail been a late invention by an author/redactor of *Landnámabók*, it would not only have taken a considerable liberty with the historical tradition, but would have

done so in a way which was utterly functionless for the new narrative. In this sense, its position lacks narratological integration: it can hardly be explained by its narrative context. This raises the question of whether, historically, the account of *Landnámabók* might perhaps be more plausible than the account of *Kjalnesinga saga*: did the author of (the later) *Kjalnesinga saga* base his plot loosely on historical persons, but subordinate (historical and/or folkloric) ‘fact’ to the requirements of developing a working fictional plot?

While I do not think it applies in the case of the Christian Helgi of *Kjalnesinga saga*, a qualifying point should be noted as an aside: we may not only imagine that a good fit between an anecdote and a wider narrative framework is due to a conscious adaptation of the anecdotal material to its wider narrative frame, but we may also imagine that there may be cases in which anecdotal material was *preserved because* it fitted well within a wider narrative frame. This implies a methodological aporia, which illustrates how important it is to see the different indicators proposed in the present paper cumulatively and to correlate as many of them as possible in order to reach a convincing assessment of the material.

It may also be noted that the question of narratological integration in *Kjalnesinga saga* exactly parallels a question asked earlier about *Laxdæla saga*. In both cases, the differences between the descriptions of the same happenings in *Landnámabók* and in the sagas make one wonder whether the authors of the sagas prioritised the artistic requirements of their narratives over the historicity of their tales. And both saga authors might also share yet another trait in their treatment of the material: if their versions are indeed secondary, fictionalised versions of what we are told in *Landnámabók*, then both authors built a nod towards the ‘historical’ account into their fictional version. In the case of *Laxdæla saga*, this means that Auðr’s Christian burial on the shore is mirrored by the burial of the paganised Auðr in a boat. Similarly, the Christian faith of the Helgi of *Landnámabók* reverberates in the statement of *Kjalnesinga saga* that Helgi was a pagan, but a pagan who sacrificed only rarely – i.e. a

pagan who was already drifting away from paganism. Both these details, again, make one wonder whether they should perhaps be understood as literary references rather than as historical reality. And could this perhaps further strengthen the suspicion that, in these cases, the accounts of *Landnámabók*, with their lack of stereotypification and their limited narratological integration, might be closer to ‘historical’ reality than the stereotypical and narratologically well-integrated accounts of the sagas?

Indicator 8. Lack of Elaboration?

Strictly speaking, the potential indicator ‘lack of elaboration’ constitutes a special case of Indicator 7 (‘narratological integration’). Yet it can be applied to *Landnámabók* so frequently that it deserves to be mentioned as an individual point. Methodologically, this potential indicator prompts inquiry into the degree to which a motif is elaborated on: can one suspect that, the less an element is elaborated, the more likely it is to be based on an extra-textual tradition?

The background of this question is an inference: an element which has been invented by the author or a redactor of *Landnámabók* needs a certain amount of explanation to be understood by the reader; if no such explanation is given, then this could suggest that the author/redactor was drawing on a pre-existing narrative tradition and could assume that the information necessary to understand this element was available even without being included in *Landnámabók*: it was part of the ‘assumed knowledge’ of the intended audience. This does of course not mean that this tradition goes back all the way to the Viking Age and is ‘historically true’ (cf. Figure 1); nobody would argue that Quasimodo or the Count of Monte Christo were historical figures just because they do not need to be explained to a modern audience. But, it does imply that such a tradition was established at the time of *Landnámabók* in its extant form, which in turn implies that the tradition is older than this source. One possible example for this is the Christian faith of Helgi *bjóla*: this motif is never elaborated on and remains without any narrative function throughout *Landnámabók*.

This lack of elaboration might be taken to suggest that his Christian faith was not invented by a *Landnámabók* author, but constitutes a passing reference to a tradition that already existed outside of this text (just as it had already been suggested by the above comparison of the Helgi of *Landnámabók* with the Helgi of *Kjalnesinga saga*). Another example is found in half a sentence of the settlement account of the valley Flateyjarðalr in Northern Iceland (S241). There, Eyvindr Loðinsson *nam Flateyjarðal upp til Gunnsteina ok blótaði þá* [‘took the Flatey-valley up to the Gunn-boulders and made sacrifices to them’]. The text makes so little – indeed nothing at all – of Eyvindr’s habit of sacrificing to the boulders called *Gunnsteinar* that there is no obvious reason why the author of this passage of *Landnámabók* should have invented it. This does of course not *prove* anything (after all, this detail *could* just be a fiction meant to add local colour), but it might indicate a tendency of probability. The boulders worshipped by Eyvindr in Flateyjarðalr might be a case in point that lack of elaboration could be due to an implied reference to a pre-existing tradition – be it a tradition about Eyvindr specifically (which would give the account ‘specific truth’ in the sense of the classification proposed in Figure 1) or about pre-conversion pagans more generally (which would put the account into the slot of ‘general truth’).

To conclude, it might furthermore be mentioned that ‘lack of elaboration’ as an indicator could also be inverted. Thus, one could argue that the more elaborate an account becomes, the more questionable its individual details may be. As a case in point, one could quote the ‘blood’-spattered sacrificial boulder on Þórsnes that has been discussed above in the context of Indicator 5, the landscape context: this boulder is a colourful element of a very detailed account and almost certainly does not reflect any ‘historical truth’, be it general or specific (cf. Figure 1). This makes one wonder whether one should in general be wary of any account which is too good at putting flesh on its narrative bones: after more than two centuries of (probably predominantly oral) transmission, anything which presents us with more than

the barest outlines of a story may be intrinsically suspicious.

Indicator 9. Folkloristic Comparisons

In spite of the huge problems posed by the late date of folkloric material, comparisons with the evidence of folklore might also help to indicate tendencies of probability.⁹ One example is offered by Eyvindr’s boulder-worship in Flateyjarðalr: folkloric reports from 18th and 19th century North-Western Iceland mention that certain boulders called *landdísasteinar* were the objects of a certain amount of worship and of certain prohibitions, such as not to cut grass in their immediate vicinity (Simek 2003: 126; Simek 1995: 234; Turville-Petre 1963; de Vries 1956–1957: §528). Similarly, other kinds of non-human beings were also thought to inhabit rocks and boulders (cf. Simek 1995: 234; Turville-Petre 1963); dwarfs, for instance, are associated with the cliffs *Dverghamrar* [‘Dwarf-Cliffs’] near the waterfall Foss á Síðu in Southern Iceland and the boulder *Dvergasteinn* [‘Dwarf-Stone’] on the northern shore of the Seyðisfjörður in Eastern Iceland. Such modern parallels to Eyvindr’s cult of the *Gunnsteinar* boulders could be taken to suggest (though they do not prove) that this tradition could be historically correct (Figure 1, squares III and IV). Or, if it is not historically correct, that it does at least seem to have been invented in accordance with current folk belief (Figure 1, squares I and II).

Another example of the possible applications of comparisons with modern folklore is provided by the floating church bell of Örlygr Hrappsson, already discussed above apropos Indicator 4 (‘non-Icelandic literary sources’). In this story, during the settler’s voyage to Iceland, a church bell is transported in the settler’s ship. Before the settler reaches his destined place of settlement, this bell falls overboard, but instead of being lost, it is – against all probability – found lying on the shore by the settler’s final place of settlement. What is noteworthy about this account from the perspective of the folkloric record is that sunken church bells are a rather well-attested motif in Swedish folk legends – but in none of these folk legends do such church bells float, and in fact most of these legends emphasise

the impossibility of bringing the sunken bell back to the surface (af Klintberg 2010, legend types U71–77, 81–90). This negative evidence might be taken to indicate that the motif of the floating church bell might not be an established Norse one – an idea which correlates very well with the above-mentioned fact that it has direct parallels in Irish hagiography. In this way, the negative evidence of Scandinavian folklore further supports the conclusion that the motif of the floating church bell in Ørlygr Hrappsson's settlement account indicates that it does not represent a 'historical truth' (Figure 1, squares III and IV).

In sum, it can thus be postulated that folkloric comparisons can be applied to *Landnámabók* anecdotes in two ways: positively, as indicators of the (at least folkloric) accuracy of *Landnámabók* material, and negatively as indicators of a lack of historical value (cf. Frog 2013: 113).

Concluding Remarks

I hope that others will be able to add to this provisional list of methodological questions, the aim of which is to help in assessing the historical reliability of religious motifs in *Landnámabók*. Any such additions would be particularly valuable given that indicators such as the ones proposed here for the most part provide nothing more than tendencies of probability and therefore should, as far as possible, always be used cumulatively – and the more indicators that can be accumulated, the better. That such a cumulative use is both possible and meaningful is, for instance, illustrated by the settlement account of Ørlygr Hrappsson just mentioned above. In the preceding pages, this account has been discussed under the headings of three indicators: Indicators 3 ('historical accounts'), 4 ('non-Icelandic literary sources'), and 9 ('folkloristic comparisons'). This illustrates the possibility to correlate different indicators and to use them cumulatively; and it should be noted in particular that all three indicators suggest essentially the same (negative) assessment for the historical authenticity of the settlement story of Ørlygr Hrappsson. This suggests that these indicators consistently point towards the same conclusions –

conclusions which are substantially strengthened by the combination of several such indicators of probability.

Retrospective questions are certainly not the only ones which can and should be applied to *Landnámabók*; one might, to pick just one example, perhaps think of the geocritical approaches of Robert T. Tally and Bertrand Westphal as alternative ways of approaching this work, ways which do not primarily focus on the question of its 'truth' (Westphal 2011; Tally 2011; Tally 2013; Egeler 2015). Given that the extant recensions of *Landnámabók* are separated from the Settlement Period by some four centuries, a retrospective approach might arguably not even be the approach most appropriate to its specific character as a high medieval work of literature. Yet if one wants to appreciate *Landnámabók* fully, then retrospective questions – whatever their place may be in the overall picture – should not be discounted entirely. The claim to relay a (historical? folkloric?) 'truth' about the Settlement Period is at the core of *Landnámabók*. If one wants to do justice to this text, one has to take this claim seriously – not in the sense that one would necessarily have to believe in the factual truth of *Landnámabók*, but in the sense that one should weigh and confront its claim to truth, whatever the result of this confrontation may be. From a certain point of view, it is just as interesting when it can be plausibly shown that *Landnámabók* is historically inaccurate as when it can be plausibly shown that it is historically, or at least folklorically, truthful. On one level, it may, admittedly, seem more illuminating that Eyvindr's cult of boulders is likely to be 'true' (at least when taken with a folkloric grain of salt) than that *Landnámabók*'s claims about the existence of pagan temple buildings appear to be blatantly historically untrue. But on another level, the latter point contains just as much insight as the former; it is, after all, neither trivial nor can it be taken for granted that Icelandic cultural memory (at least as it is represented in *Landnámabók*) assimilated pagan cult practice to the practice of the Christian church rather than stylising it as something completely alien and condemning it as devil-worship. Therefore, negative

answers to the retrospective question of the ‘truth’ of an account also further our understanding of Icelandic religious history, and not necessarily just in a negative way.

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Notes

1. Cf. Egeler 2014: 54–56 with n. 8 on the different versions of the identification of Auðun the Stutterer’s father-in-law in S81 and H71.
2. Cf. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson (1999: 146): “*Landnámabók* is by nature largely a folkloristic work.”
3. Cf. however the recent interpretation of a pit house in South-Eastern Iceland as a cult building (Bjarni F. Einarsson 2008; rejected by Milek 2012: 92f.). Of course *Landnámabók*’s mentions of ‘temples’ could reflect real memories of the establishment of cult sites which have been recast on the basis of medieval Christian understandings of what a cult site should look like (i.e. equivalent to a church-like building). This, however, can not be verified, nor would such an inference have an appreciable information content, since it can be assumed as a matter of course that there were cult sites of some description scattered across the whole of Iceland.
4. As an aside it might be mentioned that this example also illustrates both the value and the limitations of sacral toponyms as sources for religious history (Indicator 2).
5. It might be worth mentioning that instances of a mythologization of the Icelandic landscape are very common in *Landnámabók* (as well as in other genres of Icelandic literature). The best-known instances probably are the cliffs and mountains that, like Helgafell on Snæfellsnes, are conceptualized as dwelling-places of the dead (*Landnámabók* S68, 85, 97, 197; cf. Mayburd 2014; Heizmann 2007). Thus, the tale of Auðun and his lake-horse is of interest both as an instance of a narrative based on an Irish prototype and as an example of a broader pattern in the Icelandic treatment of the relationship between the supernatural and the landscape in which the former is ‘inscribed’ into the latter. Arguably, this act of ‘inscribing’ supernatural meaning into the landscape reflects an Icelandic understanding of the relationship between the settlers and the land in which the latter becomes a space that is imbued with otherworldly properties (cf. Mayburd 2014; Egeler 2015).
6. It might be worth noting as an aside that such Norse converts would, after moving to largely-pagan

Iceland, have been far beyond the reach of both the control and the expertise of the Church hierarchy. Their religious life might therefore easily have been far removed from what a trained priest in the British Isles might have considered good Christian practice, be it in terms of liturgy or of cosmological ideas. Or to put it differently: it is one thing if a settler decided to call himself or herself a ‘Christian’, but it might have been a different thing entirely whether this self-proclaimed and unsupervised Christianity would have been accepted as ‘properly Christian’ by a Church representative outside of Iceland. Thinking along these lines, one might even wonder whether the later paganization of Auðr’s Christian place of prayer at Krosshólar could not have been a direct continuation of tendencies already inherent in whatever exactly was Auðr’s practice of worship at this site. (Though, of course, this is pure speculation.)

7. Cf. Sayers (1994: 132f., 138, 145f., 149), who interprets the reference to *papar* [‘(Christian) priests’] at the beginning of *Landnámabók* as well as later references to Christian settlers in this way as typological antecedent and precedent of the later Christianisation of Iceland.
8. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (2001: 615) argues that Helgi’s ‘Christianisation’ *does* have a function within the broader Christian framework of *Landnámabók*, forming part of an attempt to integrate the history of Iceland into the wider framework of the Christian history of salvation. If this is so, however, it is striking indeed just how little effort the passages about Helgi put into highlighting such an agenda. I would argue that Helgi’s Christian faith is mentioned so much in passing that it does not even make a noteworthy contribution to such a salvific agenda.
9. Recently cf. on the use of folkloristic sources more generally Heide & Bek-Pedersen 2014; Sävborg & Bek-Pedersen 2014.

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Baptizing Soviet Children in Contemporary Rural Narratives

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Abstract: This paper presents field-work based research on baptisms performed in the Soviet Union, especially during the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign. It focuses on the phenomenon of religion being shifted from the public to the private sphere and also addresses the tensions that arose when religion was again returned to the public sphere in the Post-Soviet period.

The social, political and religious paradigms of Russian society have changed considerably across the 20th century. Many discussions in *RMN Newsletter* that address religions take up traditions in the remote past and one concern that arises is how vernacular religion adapted or was displaced in historical processes of conversion to Christianity. The present article treats quite a different, if related, theme: it looks at the adaptation and displacement of Christianity under an alternative ideology advocating atheism. A process of secularization – or at least religion moved away from the center of social life – undoubtedly accompanied urbanization and education that transformed a large segment of the population during the 1920s and 1930s. In November 1937, the Bolsheviks publicly declared that one-third of the rural population and two-thirds of the urban population – less than half of all Soviet citizens – had become atheists. With the annulment of religion as a system of beliefs, society therefore needed new explanatory models beginning already early in the Soviet Period (Groh 1992). As a consequence, new ritual practices appeared and old ones changed. The present paper deals with the case of baptism. It is dedicated to the question of how Orthodox rituals managed to survive in the everyday life of the Soviet Union while they were being publicly suppressed by the atheist propaganda. It will examine how they were adapted and performed in this social environment. Consideration will then be given to what

happened in the Post-Soviet period, when sanctioned authorities of the Church were introduced into the local communities where the domestic form of religion had developed. This discussion is a case study of a historically and culturally bound example of religious change. More specifically, it is a study of what happens when social religion becomes constrained to the private sphere, and when local or domestic adaptations of religion are confronted with sanctioned authorities of an institutionalized Church. It is hoped that this case will also be of analogical interest for researchers concerned with other periods and religions where only limited evidence is available for the mechanisms of religious change from the perspective of those confronted by hegemonic authority.

Methods and Fieldwork

The formation and evolution of these religious practices and the narratives about them are approached through folklore materials. These are addressed and analyzed through folkloristic and anthropological methods. The research material consists of fieldwork data that the research expedition of Centre for Typological and Semiotic Folklore Studies (Russian State University for the Humanities) has gathered in several villages in the Ukrainian Enclave of the Saratov Region. This fieldwork was done in the village of Samoilovka and in several villages near it during 2012–2014. Ukrainians migrated to this region in the middle of the

18th century. Descendants of these migrants maintain a local ethnic identity: they call themselves *Khokhol* and refer to their dialect as *Khoklyachy* or *Khokhlatsky* – a dialect of Ukrainian. Some archaic traits have been preserved in the folk culture of these people.

For the present paper, we made nearly one hundred interviews about the baptism of children in the 1950s and during years of the era of the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign, the peak of which was in 1958–1964. The Khrushchev anti-religious campaign was carried out by the mass closing of churches and monasteries. The campaign also included a restriction of parental rights for teaching religion to children, as well as a ban on the presence of children at church services. The social attitudes produced by this environment varied depending on the person and the place, but it could produce social pressure even on any explicit expression of religious identity. For example, some of our informants recalled teachers' responses to the wearing of a cross in the context of the Soviet atheist education:¹

Меня в школе чуть не задушили крестиком, щас ўси крэсты носяць, а тоді тико мы носили, отэц нам начипляў. И она як цяўла, учительница, у мэнэ аж пина з ўрудив шла, чуть нэ задушила. (Inf#7.)

I was almost strangled with the cross at school. These days everybody wears a cross, but in those days, we were the only ones to wear it. Our father hung crosses around our necks. The teacher pulled so hard that foam dripped from my chest, she almost strangled me.

– Не носили крестик?

– А то – укрáдкой, прýтали. Да ещэ как прýтали! И дóма моли́лись и всё. На людýх не показывали, а дóма вéрили – вся семья. И большинство́ тоўдá все так и дéлали. (Inf#4.)

– Didn't you wear a cross?

– Furtively – we hid the crosses. Yes, we even hid them! We prayed only at home. We didn't show people, but at home our whole family believed. Those days most of people did so.

There is a great deal of literature on both the relationship between the state and the church during this period and also on the work of

priests and their relationship with the people in this period (e.g. Shkarovskii 1995; 2000; Marchenko 2007; Shlihta 2012), but these topics remain beyond the scope of the present paper. Work has also been done on the domestic religious life of people during the Soviet period. For example, Irina Paert (2004) discusses how Old Believers in the Urals maintained religious identity. Elena Levkieskaya (2013; 2014) examines sacral specialists in the Ukrainian Enclave of Saratov Region who baptized children, performed funeral rites, sanctified water and sanctified the food at Easter. The present paper extends these discussions on the basis of recent fieldwork.

Babushki as a Substitute for the Priest

Consequences of the anti-religious campaign were that the churches were closed in these villages and there was a lack of priests to perform rituals characteristic of Christian religious practice. This created the fundamental question of who should take on that role if the ritual were to be performed.

According to the memories of our informants, there were several 'sacral specialists' who took over the role of the priests in this district. These people performed essential activities to meet the religious needs of the people. They baptized children, performed funeral rites, sanctified water and also the food at Easter.

Our informants called such specialists *babushki* ['grandmothers'], as said, for example, "[они] бóуу вéрили и мы им..." (Inf#4) ['[they] believed in God and we believed them...']. These were old ladies, who perhaps had worked in the local church before the revolution. They had icons, some church books and candles. The villagers also told about a man – one of my informants called him a *pop* ['folk priest'], whereas another called him a *yurodivy* ['strange person' or 'holy fool']. During our fieldwork expedition, we interviewed people who had used the services of 'grandmothers', for example in the baptism of their own children or of the children of their relatives or neighbours. They had also used the services of assistants of these 'grandmothers' – women who had participated in the rites many times. None of

these people who performed religious rites and rituals. However, it was possible to interview the daughter of one of the 'grandmothers', who had been her assistant. We also had a possibility to interview one woman (Inf#8), who was a companion of 'blind T.', one of these 'substitute priests'.

The fear of dying becoming deceased without having been baptized is very strong in traditional culture. Death before baptism is considered to be a horrible thing because an unbaptized child will become a restless soul. There are, in addition, traditional notions about the terrible afterlife of unbaptized children. Informants would usually tell about dreams in which they saw such an afterlife. In these narratives, unbaptized children are described as downcast and sickly in a place where the sun does not shine on them. Furthermore, some narrative linked the lack of baptism with the baby's illness, in which case baptism appears to be regarded as a healing practice:

С мужем плохо жила, он приходил пьяный, я ребенка держу так на руках, он у меня его вырвал да вот так вот в угол бросил. После этого он стал болеть, ну я смотрю, делать нечего. Позвала П., С., бабушка крестила его, ну по всем правилам дома. (Inf#2.)

It was not a good life with my husband. He came [home] drunk. I carry the baby in my arms, he snatches it out from my hands and throws it into the corner. After that he [the baby] fell sick, I understood there was nothing I could do, so I called for P., S., grandmother baptized him at home, according to all the rules.

For these people, it is reasonable to say that the baptism of children was considered obligatory even in the Soviet times. And this rite was supported owing to so-called grandmothers who were the bearers of the cultural memory.

This situation is explained in the following interview:

- Детей раньше крестили?
- Обязательно.
- Даже в советское время?
- Крестили.
- А как крестили?
- Ну как крестят.

- Церквей не было, как же крестили?
- А-а-а, церквей не было. Я своего сына дома кре... крестила. [...] Батюшки не было, а за батюшку бабушка была. [...]
- Все крестили?
- Крестили, только активисты-коммунисты, они облизывали власть, и они, некрещённые у них дети. (Inf#6.)
- Were children baptized?
- Certainly!
- Even in the Soviet times?
- Yes, they were.
- How were they baptized?
- Well, in the way you baptize children.
- If there were no churches, how did you baptize them?
- Aaah, there were no churches. I... had my son baptized at home. [...] There were no priests; there were 'grandmothers' instead of priests.
- Did all of the people baptize their children?
- Yes. Only the communists-activists, they were desperate for power, and their children were unbaptized.

However not all of the communists were atheists. For example, one informant told us that the godfather of her child was the village council chief (*predsedatel' sel'skogo soveta*). In spite of that, almost all of the women stressed that they baptized their children secretly, and sometimes even their husbands did not know about it:

Inf#3: А було то ищо, мы же ўтихара, ўтихара издыли потом хрыстыть [...]

Inf#5: С Яловатки боўомольный какой-т старик.

Inf#3: Вин приехал... и хрэстыл, и мине сказаны, вин ще у нас був и я ёўо пидхватыла, ни було новинькаўо, я на велосипед села, ключ нашла, открыла, шоб новинька надеть на ёўо. А Серёжку в Ялань возылы, тож вин нэ зна, а этоўо тута хрэстылы, а ёўо Т. [первый секретарь РК КПСС (1957–1962)] и вызав: 'Ты че, — кажэ, — хрэстишь детей?' А мы тэбе ще и тоўо, коньяк був, понэмножку выпылы тут, шоб, той кума та ще нэ знаю хто, и тэби оставылы, а ты кажэшь: 'Чо эт таке ты пидносышь мэнэ?' А я кажу: 'Та за здоровье С.' (Inf#3.)

Inf#3 (wife): And once, we went to baptize a child in secret.

Inf#5 (husband): There was a pious man in Yalovatka.

Inf#3: He came and performed the baptism. And somebody told me, he was at our home. And I took my child, he did not have new clothes. I got on a bicycle, found a key, opened [the door] to put some new clothes on him. We took S. to Y., he did not know anything either, but he was baptized there. And T.* called for him and asked, 'Why do you baptize children?' And we would give you, there was cognac, we drank a little there for the... and godmother and I do not know who else and left you something, and you said, 'What is it that you are offering me?' And I said 'To the health of S.'

** The first secretary of the district Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union (1957–1962).*

So, the closure of churches and the traditional idea that it is necessary to baptize children led to the emergence of a local religious 'institution'. Women, who were called 'babushki', served people at home.

Baptizing at Home

The circumstances of the anti-religious environment prompted a transformation of church rituals into domestic rituals. The Church does allow baptism rituals to be performed by laymen under special circumstances. This is a formally prescribed practice in which it is necessary to immerse a child in water three times, pronounce one specific prayer and hang a cross around the child's neck. Before the Soviet times such ritual was used only if a child was in danger. If a child was still alive in the morning, he would then be carried to the church and a priest would administer sacraments without dipping the child into water. 'Grandmothers' kept up orthodox rituals during the anti-religious period. Informant #8 explained about the home baptizing rituals as follows:

- А вы видели, как она крестила?
- Да, как же, в воду погружала. Большинство я крестная была, потому что брать со стороны боялись. Даже крестили, чтобы муж ни знал.
- Расскажите: дома крестили, брали какой-то таз с водой...

– Ну не таз, а... была такая ну специальная, вот держали, в ней уже не бельё не стиралось, ничего, чистую посуду держали такую. Вот. И эта когда крестить, вода, обыкновенной воды наливали, тёплой воды и погружали ребёнка.

– И чего говорили?

– Ну, это уж я не знаю, бабуш... [смеется], бабушка читала молитвы. Я эти уже не запомню, конечно.

– А когда крестила ребенка, она сколько молитв читала?

– Ой, много, вот, много молитв, не так, что вот раз-раз и всё. (Inf#8.)

– Did you see how she baptized?

– Yes, she dipped the child into water. Usually I acted as a godmother because people were afraid to invite outsiders. Sometimes the baptism was conducted without the husband even knowing about it.

– Tell me, how did the grandmothers baptize? Did they take some washbasin with water?

– Well, not a washbasin, but... they had some special bowl that was not used for washing clothes any more, but was just a clean vessel. That's it. And when it was time to baptize, water, they poured in ordinary water, warm water, and dipped the child into it.

– And what did they say?

– Well, I don't know that, grandm... [laughs] grandmother was saying prayers. I can't remember those, of course.

– And while baptizing the child, how many prayers did she say?

– Oh, a lot, well, a lot of prayers, it was not like only one or two.

Our informants emphasized that every grandmother did everything correctly, like in church. For example:

– И бабушку домой пригласила, она всё своё собрала, святая вода чтоб обязательно была, а она перекрестила.

– А бабушка тазик святой воды налила и туда окунула?

– Ей всё приутовили: и воду, и тазик – и всё ей приутовили, а читать, по-церковному она знает. Почитала, перекрестила, завернула в пелёнки – и ребёнок крещённый. (Inf#6.)

- I invited home a grandmother. She brought her own things. Holy Water had to be there, and she would christen [the baby].
- The grandmother poured holy water into the bowl and dipped [the baby] in it?
- She prepared everything: the water and the bowl, and she knows how to prepare them and how to say [the prayers] according to the Church's way. She read, crossed the baby, wrapped him up in a cloth – and the child had been baptized.

- Церквей не было, а как же тогда детей крестили?
- Крестили, эта была нас в Еловатке одна бабушка, М., на дому [...]
- И она сама крестила детишек?
- И крестила детей, да.
- А как крестила, в воду окунала?
- Да, поставит тазик среди комнаты и крестный с крестной ходят, она там молитву читает. (Inf#1.)

- If there were no churches, so how were the children baptized?
- They were baptized, there was a grandmother in Yelovatka, M., she baptized them at home.
- So she baptized the kids herself?
- Right, she baptized the children.
- How? Did she dip them into water?
- Yes, she would put a basin in the centre of the room, the godparents would walk around it while she was saying a prayer.

The 'grandmothers' clearly upheld the ritual practice of baptism in the community and they were viewed as performing these practices precisely as they were required and done by a priest in a church. The descriptions, however, do not seem to reflect the layman's form of baptism prescribed by the Church, nor do they necessarily correspond to the rituals performed by priests when the religion was still openly practiced. By comparing a number of these narratives, it becomes possible to reconstruct the domestic ritual of baptism, or at least its principle features. According to the narratives, it appears that all 'grandmothers' sought to imitate the church rituals as well as they could remember and perform them. They dipped children into water, cut their hair, godparents walked around the basin, and by touching the baby with holy water, they may have imitated the immersion. At the end of baptism, the

grandmother would hang a cross (which had to be provided by the parents) around the child's neck.

Remembering Domestic Rituals

We should pay close attention to the fact that the details are not consistent between the interviews and sometimes the accounts seem to contradict one another. The memory of informants is inevitably selective. Leaving aside the question of how and with what degree of accuracy the 'grandmothers' remembered what had been practiced in the Church, it can be said that the informants were of a generation that no longer remembered the authentic Church rituals. They could remember only those details which were of great importance to them and to their family history. For example, one informant whose child died young remembered only one episode from the description of the whole ritual. This was the episode in which the length of her child's life was predicted:

- А что она делала? Как она делала?
- Ни знаю, я ни присутствовала
- Нельзя было родителям?
- Нет, родители нет
- Только с крестными?
- Только там крестные были, да. Ну волосики там отрезала, чё-то, куда-то с воском, а ей видно было, видно, тоуда, сколько жизнь его.
- Как это видно?
- А всегда так делается, не знаю как. (Inf#2.)
- What did she do? How did she do it?
- I don't know, I was not there.
- Was it prohibited for parents to be there?
- Yes, they should not be there.
- Only the godparents?
- Only the godparents were there, yes. Well, they cut the hair, and did something with the wax, and she saw it, saw how long his life would be.
- How could she see it?
- It is always done like that, I do not know how.

This example is interesting because the part of the ritual that the informant remembers is from the folk tradition, a practice of telling fortunes with wax, and had no place in Church rituals.

According to the informant's memories, some grandmothers only sprinkled the child with water rather than dipping him or her into water during a domestic ritual. As in one of the examples quoted above, some informants remembered that holy water should be used. In the rural folk tradition, holy water has miraculous properties. It is used, for example, to cure the evil eye. Though according to Church rules, the water is sanctified during the rite, the use of different holy water such as holy water for the Epiphany is not allowed. Tradition bearers believe in the healing properties of such holy water. Our informants seemed in general to believe that the 'grandmothers' used holy water in the baptism ritual. It is uncertain whether these 'religious specialists' considered the use of holy water obligatory. Informant #8 told that the grandmother 'blind T.' used ordinary water. It could be that her mother knew the prayer for sanctifying water and said it during the rite. However, it seems unlikely that they would distinguish between holy water for baptism and holy water blessed for use in other ritual contexts, as prescribed by the Church.

The informants stressed that saying prayers is the main part of baptism. All of the villagers mentioned several prayers. They seemed to feel that a lot of spiritual texts had to be said for the baptism to seem correct. On the other hand, no one remembered which prayers were said. Even the many women who participated in the rite and were godmothers many times seemed not to remember which prayers were used. The domestic baptism is accepted by the official Church if one specific prayer is said, but the informants could not confirm that this particular prayer was used.

Today's Priests and Yesterday's babushka: The Fight for Memory

Nowadays, the situation has changed. The churches were opened once again and the priests reappeared in the villages. As a rule, these priests are young. In places where informal religious authorities had been maintaining a connection with the era before atheism, the arrival of priests led to a collision. The religious change pushed religion

out of the domestic sphere into the official sphere of Church authority. The Church advocated that the domestic baptisms should be annulled and people should be re-baptized by sanctioned priests. However, the domestic rituals were considered fully binding and effective for the local villagers (who were roughly in their sixties and seventies). They did not accept the Church's idea.

The collision between official views and those of the local inhabitants was bound up with social memory and the anxieties in the folk tradition concerning what would happen to those who would not receive baptism in the church. The most common alternative points of view are:

1. The domestic rite received in the Soviet years is validated by the official church.
2. The person baptized during the Soviet years must go to the church and the priest will administer the sacrament of anointing.
3. The person must be baptized in the church again.

Regarding view (1), I would like to underline that holy water is considered necessary for the baptism to be official in narratives that retell a priest's opinion. View (2) acknowledges that the domestic baptism has validity, but asserts that there is a need for the Church to further authenticate the baptism. This view nevertheless implies some insufficiency in the domestic baptism from the perspective of the Church. View (3), rejects the validity of the domestic baptisms entirely, leading to controversy:

А потом батюшка, вот открылась церковь, батюшка говорит: 'Перекрещивайтесь, это неправильно, что она крестила.' 'Батюшка, какая разница, молитва одна и та же, только тебе теперь надо денежек отдать сколько мноуо, а тоуа...' (Inf#9.)

When the church had been opened, the priest said: 'You must be baptized again, it was not correct, that the grandmother baptized you.' 'Father, it makes no difference. It was the same prayer. The only differences is that now I have to pay to you a lot of money...'

In spite of the second and third official opinions, most of our informants are sure that the domestic baptism by grandmothers is valid, because the grandmothers believed in

God and maintained the villagers' connection with the religion. The folk beliefs about the specific status of the unbaptized person – that his or her grave must be in specific place, prohibitions against praying for him or her, a terrible fate in the afterlife – determined that performing baptism was essential even in the atheist period. This ritual was supported due to so-called 'grandmothers', who were keepers of cultural memory. This fact is reflected in their narratives, which include individual notions about the correct method of baptizing. Those 'grandmothers' are all dead now and it was only possible to interview some of their assistants during fieldwork. These assistants did not perform this ritual, because they used the services of 'grandmothers' in Soviet times and the churches were opened again before another generation of 'grandmothers' was established.

Conclusion

The banning of the church rituals in the Soviet anti-religious period produced tensions where the appropriate performance of the rituals was considered essential for the welfare of individuals in the community. When the priests sanctioned by the Church were not available to perform these rituals, a new form of the 'folk priests', most often called *babushki* ['grandmothers'], appeared in the atheistic period of the Soviet State. These were overwhelmingly old ladies who had good knowledge of Orthodox traditions. They performed the church rituals necessary for people in the community, especially the baptism at home. This was kept outside of the public sphere, where expression of religious faith and religious identity could be subject to strong, negative social views. This development is a testament to the emotional investment that people have in particular religious practices and the adaptability of those practices even when people are pressured to abandon them.

All of the grandmothers who took up the officiating duties of absent priests are now dead. Nevertheless, their acts and significance survives in cultural memory. The regard for their significance and the authority of the rituals they performed led to conflicts between members of the community and the priests sanctioned by the Church. When these

'real' priests should now perform the Church services in these villages, conflict arose with the local Church authorities at the point where their views devalued the grandmothers and their religious authority for the local people. At the same time, and perhaps more significantly, the cultural memory of these informal religious specialists became a means for local people to construe their own shared identity in contrast to that of the newcomers. Thus the *babushki* and their rituals became a symbolic center that first united the identity of local people in contrast to Soviet authority and the "communists-activists" who "were desperate for power". Later, this symbolic center continued to function as a unifying center for the religious life of the community in the Post-Soviet era, when it set them apart from the newly-arrived authorities of the official Church.

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Notes

1. The Ukrainian dialectal features are reflected in the quotations of the spontaneous speech of our informants. Special symbols: [ŷ] – [y] non-syllabic, which is pronounced at the end of words and in the beginning of words before consonants instead consonant [b]; [ɣ] – [r] fricative.

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- Inf#4 – Informant #4, female, born 1934, Samoilovka village
- Inf#5 – Informant #5, male (husband of informant #3), born 1925, Samoilovka village
- Inf#6 – Informant #6, female, born 1923, Samoilovka village
- Inf#7 – Informant #7, female, born 1940, Samoilovka village
- Inf#8 – Informant #8, female, born 1928, Samoilovka village
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REVIEW ARTICLES AND RESEARCH REPORTS

Meta-Mythology and Academic Discourse Heritage

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Across the past few years and in a number of different contexts, I have touched on the phenomenon that I describe as ‘meta-mythology of academic discourse heritage’, but I have not offered a focused presentation of my approach to it. *Between Text and Practice: Mythology, Religion and Research* seems an appropriate venue for a preliminary introduction to this topic. I will thus briefly outline ‘meta-mythology’ and ‘discourse heritage’¹ as terms used in this context. Focus will be placed on their intersection in the context of academic discourse in particular.

What Is Meta-Mythology?

The term ‘meta-mythology’ has been subject to diverse and inconsistent usage. These include macro-structures in which individual myths participate, deep structures or recurrent patterns in culture of mythic or archetypal quality, objectifications of mythology through literature and art, and so forth. These will not be reviewed here for reasons of space. The present approach has evolved on the background of a framework that I have been developing for the theorization of mythology and an associated research methodology (see Frog, this volume). In the present context, meta-mythology is considered *mythology about mythology*.

‘Mythology’ is approached here in terms of (often ambiguous) symbols along with the constructions and conventions with which these are combined (see pp. 35–38, this volume). This frame for mythology allows the inclusion of a broad range of integers of religious practice rather than being narrowly limited to ‘stories’ and their constituent elements. ‘Myth’ is understood in terms of a quality of signification (Barthes 1972), distinguished by the sign being engaged non-reflectively

(Lotman & Uspenskii 1976), which enables it to become emotionally invested (Doty 2000: 55–58). This may be in an environment where the symbols are consciously contested or where they generally function unconsciously. This definition of ‘myth’ removes the popular deictic bias that ‘myth’ is a false understanding from the perspective of ‘truth’, ‘science’ or a *status quo* (cf. Kuhn 1970: 2): myth is a quality of signification that determines how we process signs regardless of their relation to an objective reality.

Meta-mythology emerges through the mythologization of discourse about mythology. In other words, it occurs when discussion about myths or a mythology develops distinct myths attached to the signifiers of mythology or to the mythology as a meaningful entity and integer addressed through discourse. Meta-mythology can be classed according to one of two broad categories: *emic* and *etic*.

Emic meta-mythology emerges among groups for whom a mythology is already vital. Understandings surrounding a variety of elements of mythology are indeed constructed through the way that people talk about them – i.e. through discourse. For example, an understanding that a particular story narrated at the opening of a charm is the ‘first’ healing event of that type in the world is not (normally) entailed in the text; it is constructed through discourse surrounding that text. The same is true of whole categories of texts or genres. This is the case, for example, with epic traditions in which it is believed that heroes and events have objective existence at the time of narration (e.g. Honko 1998: 136), and in charm traditions where it is understood that one will lose the power of an incantation when communicating its text (e.g. Siikala 1991: 197). A performative practice itself may be

mythologized in this way, as in the conception that a ritual funeral lament will cause a death if performed outside of a ritual context (Stepanova & Frog, this volume). However, it should be stressed that the utility of addressing these phenomena in terms of meta-mythology has yet to be demonstrated. There may be cases in which such a distinction is warranted, but emic meta-mythology seems in general to converge with the emic integer of the mythology (a charm *historiola* or charm whole), or to constitute a distinct integer of that mythology (e.g. the mythologization of lament performance).

Etic meta-mythology is the mythologization of mythology that is somehow ‘othered’. The mythologization of discourse surrounding an ‘othered’ mythology can be viewed as a process of social investment by a group in the mythology as providing meaningful symbols and frames of reference for that group. This may be through appropriation as heritage and involve strategic action. For example, the 19th-century epic *Kalevala* was strategically developed to present a unified image of Finnish and Karelian mythology in the wake of rising nationalism (e.g. Järvinen 2010). It codified the systems of symbols and their entextualization which were then mythologized through discourse to produce a meta-mythology: the mythology of *Kalevala* became what Finns and Karelians generally, both then and today, consider their cultural mythology. This meta-mythology emerged as a modern mythology in the construction of heritage. It might be described as an emotionally invested model of the mythology and religion of pre-Christian Finns and Karelians. However, mythologization was dependent on the cultural environment: in Spain, for example, *Kalevala* could provide information about a foreign mythology without mythologization in local discourse. Such processes are not dependent on nationalism: the deep-rooted presence of Scandinavian or Greek mythology, Buddhism and so forth in the West have enabled the development of popular meta-mythologies about each of these – socially invested constructs of what these mythologies and religions are, including their relevance and significance, that provide models for understanding them. The conception,

common in 17th-century Europe, that all occult traditions ultimately derive from Ancient Egypt, formed no less of a meta-mythology.² Meta-mythologies may diverge significantly from the emic traditions around which they develop. For example, medieval Christian meta-mythology of Muhammad and Islam had very little connection with Muslim practices. Etic meta-mythologies may therefore be in a variety of relationships with the traditions that have been mythologized. The vitality of such a meta-mythology can be correlated with the degree of presumption and conviction that the discourse’s image of the mythology and the ‘othered’ mythology itself are, in fact, the same.

As products of discourse, etic meta-mythologies develop at the level of communities and their networks. It is possible to generalize, for example, characteristic features of the medieval Christian meta-mythology of paganism in Western Europe, but this is necessarily very abstract. Meta-mythologies are no more homogeneous than any other mythologies. The meta-mythology of Scandinavian paganism current in 13th-century Rome would have been considerably different from that of Snorri Sturluson and his contemporaries in Iceland. Like *Kalevala*, Snorri’s so-called *Edda* advanced and advocated models of an ‘othered’ mythology. This was, however, an engagement in mythic discourse (see Frog, this volume) that targeted certain groups and networks, advocating the interpretation of the ‘othered’ mythology as heritage viewed through the Christian lens of euhemerism (e.g. Wanner 2008). *Edda*, or at least elements from it, seem to have been assimilated into the local meta-mythology (cf. Frog 2011). It cannot, however, be assumed that the meta-mythology evolving in relation to *Edda* penetrated significantly beyond those networks that it targeted as its audience, at least not until much later. Variation in relation to communities and networks produces potentially great differences between popular and academic meta-mythologies.

What Is Academic Discourse Heritage?

Every discipline develops many types of heritage. One variety that is easily overlooked is the manifestation of discourse itself as

heritage. A distinctive feature of academic discourse is the pervasive and ongoing dialogic engagement with voices in the past. Such engagement is most evident in the rather ritualistic ‘review of previous scholarship’ that reintroduces those voices into the present as a context for discussion. Engagement then also becomes explicit through quotations and arguments for and against earlier (although co-present) views, and more subtly through citations³ and appended lists of works cited. The dialectic engagement with these voices is enabled by the concretization through publication (or archival preservation) of utterances within the discourse, and through such engagements we “add, singly and in combination, to the ever growing stockpile” (Kuhn 1970: 2). I use the term *discourse heritage* to refer to the ever-accumulating body of concretized utterances in a discourse.

Academic discourse of a discipline or subject operates within a contemporary framework of negotiated knowledge and understandings. This might be described in terms of shared sets of acknowledged ‘facts’ which are agreed to or recognized as contested to varying degrees (see e.g. Lotman 1990: 217ff.). Such frameworks interface with theories, methodologies and paradigms (see e.g. Kuhn 1970; Lakatos 1980 [1978]) and are often linked to particular registers of discourse in which the vocabulary has been structured by the history of use and the development of distinct terminology (cf. Frog with Latvala 2013: 56–58). Such shared frames of reference have become a practical necessity of scientific discussion: without such a platform, it would either be necessary to provide analytical discussions of every detail in the background of an argument, or there would otherwise be a levelling of the veracity of arguments and interpretations (cf. 18th and 19th century discussions of etymology, mythology, history, etc.). These shared frames of reference in the present emerge from the discourse heritage in dialectic with the views expressed by current voices. A discourse heritage anchors contemporary discussion by situating it in relation to those discussions of the past.

The operation of academic discourse naturally inclines toward mythologization.

This can occur at many levels, including the images of relative authority of voices in the discourse (e.g. Kaarle Krohn, John McKinnell), images of methods, theories and methodologies (see e.g. Frog 2013), images of sources and their authority (cf. Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* or Elias Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* in different periods), or hierarchies of authority among types of sources (e.g. poetry versus prose or ‘late’ versus ‘early’), and so forth. What I wish to focus on here, however, is the mythologization of the object of research and associated interpretations in the case of mythology.

Two points should be stressed at the outset. First, *not all ‘facts’ of a discourse’s frame of reference are necessarily mythologized or are uniformly mythologized*. Many if not most ‘facts’ of the discourse frame are more or less critically and analytically handled units of information linked to discussions and problematics concerning their veracity. There is also variation within any discourse by local and national scholarships, ‘schools’ of interpretation and so forth.⁴ Mythologization may also not affect all participants in the discourse evenly – e.g. some mythologization may be especially common among younger scholars. Second, *mythologization functions at the quality of signs, their valuation and interpretation, irrespective of veracity*. In other words, mythologization is linked to emotional investment and non-reflective apprehension or reaction; it produces a capacity to influence people’s minds irrespective of cognitive value and utility in analysis or analytical reasoning. This process can occur equally with scientifically demonstrable claims considered objectively ‘true’ as with understandings that can be scientifically disproven as erroneous.

The vulnerability of academic discourse to mythologization readily links to both ‘blind spots’ and ‘core beliefs’ of the discourse. *Blind spots* are topics or problems that have simply never been brought into focus, and may remain peripheral or as external frames of reference. As a consequence, they may become generally taken for granted and can function with the quality of non-reflective presumptions that would be surprising, confusing or disruptive to challenge. A more subtle and significant site of mythologization

results from emotional investment in arguments and interpretations – we easily come to love our own ideas. Although such arguments and interpretations may be based on objective analysis, they also inevitably engage with numerous ‘facts’ of the discourse as the frame of reference through which they have developed. Such primary ‘facts’ easily become emotionally invested because of their *centrality*, whereby changing them would require that other arguments and interpretations dependent on them also be reassessed and altered (Converse 1964: 208). Mythologization especially surrounding so-called ‘core beliefs’ of a discipline or discourse can be viewed in this light.

Centrality operates directionally by both the number and degrees of relations that form networks (Converse’s ‘belief system’), and these relations can be assumed to produce hierarchies, leading back to what have been called *core beliefs*, or Converse’s (1964: 211) *crowning postures*:

premises [that] serve as a sort of glue to bind together many more specific attitudes and beliefs, and [that] are of prime centrality in the belief system as a whole. (Converse 1964: 211.)

A distinction relevant here is that between conceptual models or ‘beliefs’,⁶ which operate as theories and ‘facts’ of that discourse, and the signifiers that undergo mythologization. Such conceptual models or ‘facts’ and theories interface with apprehendable symbolic integers through which they can be communicated and discussed – through which they manifest in discourse, socially constructing referent ‘facts’ and theories as well as their relative valorization (cf. Siikala 1990: 197). Such include the Darwinian motif SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST, the Marxist motif MATERIAL CONDITIONS DETERMINE SOCIETAL ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT, or hermeneutic motifs like FIELDWORKER AFFECTS OBSERVED SUBJECT (on ‘symbolic integers’ and ‘motif’ as used here, see pp. 38–40, this volume). Mythologization enables such integers to operate at the deep structure of a discourse (whether valorized or rejected with prejudice), although their relative centrality may vary by period, discipline and network or school.

However, this inclination of mythologization to nest in relation to a hierarchy of centrality suggests the following: the greater the centrality of ‘facts’ and conceptual models that are interfaced with these integers and their mythologization, the more that participants naturalized to them in a discourse will collectively incline to defend said ‘facts’ and theories or collective ‘core beliefs’.

The discourse heritage in research on historical cultures plays a significant if subtle role in the process of mythologization in two key ways. First of all, and most obviously, it is oriented to the construction and testing of ‘facts’ in the discourse, and reviews of scholarship and citations situate each utterance within that web of utterances and ‘facts’ of varying degrees of centrality. Second, and more subtly, the ‘facts’ of the discourse are constructed through the claims, arguments and interpretations of voices in that discourse and propagated through accumulating utterances. As a consequence, ‘facts’ can become removed from empirical evidence or circulate in relation to specific evidence that has been interpreted and is no longer critically reviewed. As an outcome of such mythologization, new ‘facts’ advanced and argued within that discourse may appear, in the context of other discourses or in later periods, to have suffered from empirical underdetermination as other ‘facts’ and motifs operative at the deep structure have been reevaluated or demythologized (cf. Figure 1).

From Discourse Heritage to Meta-Mythology

Academic discourse on mythology evolves a meta-mythology – a socially construed and emotionally invested model of the mythology and religion of another culture. As a metasemiotic entity, ‘a mythology’ as a whole is readily mythologized concerning what it does or does not include, whether it is presumed coherent and unified, whether its documented forms are ‘authentic’ or its ‘authentic’ form existed only before Christianity and must be reconstructed, and so forth. Insofar as these become “a set of unconsciously held, unexamined premises” (Jewett & Lawrence 1977: 17) about the mythology of a culture or religion, they



Figure 1. Gold bracteate IK 357. The process of mythologization may occur with archaeological as well as textual sources. This process has been advancing with the interpretation of the coin-like charms called bracteates from the Migration Period. These are normally preserved in gold and are readily linked to Germanic religion. Karl Hauck has advocated an interpretation of a group of these (Type C) depicting a man (or his head) and a horse or horse-like animal (with visually twisted forelegs) in terms of the Second Merseburg Charm, in which Wodan (Odin) heals a horse with a sprain (e.g. 1970). This interpretation has gained increasing acceptance. It can be viewed as in a process of mythologization as it ceases to be critically reviewed and begins to be treated as an unequivocal point for reference when thinking about Wodan/Óðinn, the Second Merseburg Charm and early Germanic religion. Nonetheless, the interpretation remains speculative and problematic. Comparative evidence suggests, for example, that the curious position of the horse's legs may signify bowing rather than injury (Beck 2003). (Illustration by the author.)

constitute a meta-mythology that shapes the operating principles according to which research is undertaken (cf. Kuhn 1970). Accordingly, the meta-mythology about *what* a mythology is can extend to the mythologization of research strategies and their potential. For example, the Romantic construal that the sources produced in Christian contexts were historically removed from a coherent and authentic form of a mythology was interfaced with the methods which could reconstruct (at least parts of) that coherent and authentic state. In other words, the implementation of methods rapidly advances to the equivalent of rites in a ritual context: it was a 'fact' that their appropriate implementation in the correct order and with

the correct materials would produce a desired outcome, such as reconstructing the *Urform* of a story about Þórr.

Such meta-mythology evolves through, and is reinforced by, the ever-accumulating discourse heritage. This process might be described metaphorically as momentum. Challenging basic conceptions or 'core beliefs' about 'a mythology' is to challenge that discourse heritage and the principles according to which it evolved: it is set in opposition to their momentum. For example, variation in mythology regionally and locally has long been acknowledged (e.g. de Vries 1956–1957). However, the principle that 'a mythology' was coherent and its elements had been (at some point) integrated into a system has been a basis of operating principles in the study of mythology since it developed under Romanticism. Challenging this idea might seem on the surface to be a rather simple issue of only acknowledging some types of variation or looking at a particular case in a different way (cf. pp. 47–48, this volume). However, it is actually to challenge an implicit frame of reference at the basis of research and argumentation for the vast majority of the discourse heritage. It therefore carries the threat of unravelling the whole model of the mythology that has evolved through that discourse. In other words, it threatens the views and understandings of mythology to which we have become naturalized, and in which, whether we like it or not, we have invested our ways of thinking.

The discourse heritage constructs images of the integers of the mythology, normally in relation to their sources and interpretations. Images of peripheral integers of the mythology that less frequently receive attention may be affected more easily in the discourse, yet these may not undergo mythologization *per se*,⁵ or simply remain in 'blind spots' of the discourse, potentially quite peripheral but remaining among basic operating assumptions.⁷ The meta-mythology may also simply be idealized and reconstructive, so that it is not accurately representative of all or even most of the traditions it is used to discuss.⁸ In other cases, the element may appear peripheral but actually interface with the broader envisioning of the mythology. For example,

part of the basic frame of reference for thinking about Scandinavian mythology includes the ‘facts’ that the goddess Freyja is the source of Óðinn’s knowledge of *seiðr*-magic, and that she brought it from among the Vanir gods to the Æsir gods, who had lacked it.

These ‘facts’ about the origins of *seiðr* derive from a short sentence in *Ynglinga saga* (4): *Dóttir Njarðar var Freyja, hon var blótgyðja, ok hon kendi fyrst með Ásum seið, sem Vönur var títt* [‘The daughter of Njörðr was Freyja, she was a sacrifice-priestess, and she first taught to the Æsir *seiðr*-magic, which was customary for the Vanir’]. According to the saga, this knowledge ultimately enabled the Æsir to defeat the Vanir in war. This war is also referred to in other sources although not the origin of *seiðr*. This saga is treated with caution as a source for mythology on other topics because it euhemerizes gods and events as human history, and its accounts seem to differ significantly from other sources where comparative materials are available (cf. Simpson 1963–1964: 42–43; Tolley 2009 I: 507–513). Freyja is only unambiguously characterized as a practitioner of *seiðr* here, although she is also attributed with practicing magic in a peculiar story in *Sorla þáttur*, where the euhemerized presentation of the gods seems to be based on *Ynglinga saga*,⁹ and some association with magic might be inferred from Loki calling her a *fordæða* [‘evil-doer, witch’] albeit in an insult (*Lokasenna* 32). In contrast, *Ynglinga saga* elaborates on the magical practices of Óðinn, who is also associated with *seiðr* in several other contexts and sources (see e.g. Price 2002: 91–107). Although *seiðr* is said to be customary among the Vanir, the Vanir gods Njörðr and Freyr also lack any such associations with magic, and no gods identified as Vanir seem significant to the incantation tradition – in contrast to e.g. Óðinn and even Þórr. Nonetheless, this origin of *seiðr* has held a significant position in the construction of academic images of Freyja, the Vanir and *seiðr* magic. It has provided a basis and frame of reference for a variety of comparisons and interpretations (see e.g. Dronke 1997). These ‘facts’ seems to have undergone mythologization, evolving into socially invested elements of the image of the

mythology with which researchers operate in discussion. These ‘facts’ are not only taken for granted, but they remain largely beyond the scope of critical attention.¹⁰

Mythologization may occur with contested elements as well as those taken for granted. For example, the eddic poem *Brymskviða* presents a story of the theft and recovery of Þórr’s hammer, in which the god is humorously humiliated by being compelled to disguise himself as the goddess Freyja in a wedding gown. This is generally taken for granted as an element in the mythology, much as is Freyja’s association with *seiðr*. The lack of any early reference to this plot or its distinctive elements has led to a long-standing debate concerning whether the story is ‘authentic’ Scandinavian mythology or a ‘late’ poem by Christians making fun of Þórr (see Frog 2014 and works there cited). Interpretations of the plot hinge on this interpretation of provenance. This question of provenance is no less significant when using this tradition or text in discussions of gender representations, humour in mythology, Þórr’s hammer as a mythic symbol, and so forth. It also affects uses of more specific features of the poem such as the role of Þórr’s hammer in the poem’s concluding wedding ceremony or the (unique) identification of the god Heimdallr as one of the Vanir. Whole webs of interpretation running through the mythology can be affected by the perspective taken on the provenance of *Brymskviða*. Even where arguments and counter-arguments may begin objectively, participating scholars readily develop (perhaps subtle) emotional investments in their view on this element of the mythology. This occurs as that view advances from framing dependent interpretations as cautious conditionals to the view becoming a naturalized aspect of the researcher’s modelling system for thinking about the mythology, which thus affects his or her views and understandings of other elements of the mythology. This view nonetheless shares a social if minority view on the mythology that can be seen as part of a competing meta-mythology.¹¹

Mythologization and Centrality

Attention here has been on ways of understanding and thinking about constitutive elements of a mythology as an object of research – ways of thinking that can be considered meta-mythology (bearing in mind that mythologization of the research object can be found in any area of study). A factor relevant to mythologization seems to be centrality in the sense of the number and degree of other views that could require reassessment and revision if the element is changed. Observing this factor is of interest for considering controversies in a discourse.

An academic meta-mythology is, in essence, the image of the mythology to which we become enculturated and naturalized through the discourse heritage on that mythology and contemporary dialectic engagements with it. Meta-mythology is not about ‘true’ versus ‘untrue’ but rather investment in the image of a mythology and its elements, and how these are viewed or understood. The greater the centrality of a certain element or feature to the meta-mythology, the greater the resistance that can be anticipated to reassessing it in a way connected to its centrality. It is possible to address the more central elements in terms of ‘core beliefs’ or ‘core integers’ of the mythology at the level of deep structure. However, it is important to keep in mind that centrality is a matter of both scope and degree forming hierarchies and networks within the system, and identifying one feature or element as a ‘core’ element may easily marginalize other elements and the dynamics of the multiple hierarchies in which these participate.

Some integers of a mythology may be sufficiently peripheral that they remain largely outside of the social meta-mythology. In Scandinavian mythology, for example, the widely discussed mysterious female being called *Heiðr* in *Völuspá* (st. 22) may have a position as a symbolic integer in the academic meta-mythology. Her obscure identity (cf. McKinnell 1998–2001) can nevertheless remain ambiguous and unresolved rather than being mythologized to a particular interpretation. The fact that other elements of the social meta-mythology are not dependent on a particular interpretation alleviate such mythologization, or their mythologization leads them simply to

be ‘taken for granted’, with few or no noteworthy consequences. The mysterious story about the ride of the goddess(?) *Gná* has been scarcely addressed in the discourse heritage (cf. Lorenz 1984: 445–446) and might not qualify as a narrative integer of the meta-mythology at all. In contrast, challenging the centrality and authority of the god *Óðinn* in the mythology (e.g. Gunnell forthcoming) has implications that would require countless adjustments to understandings of the mythology if accepted, and which can be expected to meet with resistance (if only for ‘feeling’ counter-intuitive) where these interface with a meta-mythology. This is crucially relevant to the so-called Vanir Debate, and the challenge to the validity of Vanir as a category of gods (esp. Simek 2010 [2005]). If this category is rejected, it also requires the reassessment of both the identities and significance of all gods defined and interpreted through a Vanir identity, as well as the category of the *Æsir* gods, which has been defined in relation to the Vanir in what has been considered a basic structuring feature in the mythology. Basically, accepting this position means accepting that rather fundamental (or ‘core’) operating principles of the discourse heritage have been wrong and that we need to give up ideas and understandings to which we have been naturalized as basic ‘facts’ of the mythology.

Developing an awareness of meta-mythology and its relation to discourse heritage enables a sensitivity to its workings, with the potential to objectify and demythologize it. This same sensitivity can also become a resource in framing argumentation that challenges central elements of a meta-mythology, as well as for considering the implications of such challenges. Perhaps more importantly, such a sensitivity can also be employed reflexively in order to consider our own responses to arguments that challenge views and interpretations to which we ourselves have become naturalized through the discourse heritage, in which we inevitably ground our understandings.

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Notes

1. I have earlier used the expression ‘heritage of discourse’. The latter formulation was easily interpreted as any heritage that has been constructed or maintained through discourse. The revised term is intended to foreground that the discourse is itself the heritage referred to.
2. Works such as Athanasius Kircher’s (1652–1654) *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, (inventively) translating the Egyptian hieroglyphics as the language of Adam and Eve, which simultaneously constructing an image of Egyptian mythology and its relevance as contemporary heritage.
3. In many disciplines, there seems to have been a marked increase in the use of citations in the latter half of the 20th century.
4. Cf. ‘dialects of mythology’ in Siikala 2012 and also p. 34 in this volume; cf. also Lakatos 1980 [1978].
5. For example, E.N. Setälä (1907: 249–250) revitalized an etymology of the name of the primordial being of Finnic mythology *Kalev(a)* as connected to Baltic words for ‘smith’ (e.g. Latvian *kalvis* [‘smith’], *kal(e)velis* [‘smith.DIM’]), reconstructing a Baltic **kalevias*. This was initially viewed critically by folklorists because a semantic connection was lacking (e.g. Krohn 1903–1910: 815). Matti Kuusi (1963: 154) later advocated that that *Kalev(a)* evolved from the smith-god *Kalevias* without acknowledging that the latter is a hypothetical reconstruction rather than an attested Baltic theonym and god. This allowed *Kalev(a)*’s origin in a fabricated Baltic smith-god to be further circulated on Kuusi’s authority (e.g. Hakamies 1999: 80–81; although cf. Harvilahti 1990: 60). However, it is not clear that there was any emotional investment in this understanding of *Kalev(a)* individually or socially: the advanced ‘fact’ was not necessarily mythologized.
6. On the problematics of the term ‘belief’ and its subjective implications, see p. 38, this volume.
7. For example, it is a general operating principle in research that Old Norse Fulla was invariably conceived as the handmaid of the goddess Frigg, rather than sometimes or also as e.g. Frigg’s sister, as her cognate appears in the Old High German Second Merseburg Charm; or that valkyrie-names such as *Göndul* and *Skögul* designated distinct and unique identities in the mythology.
8. This sort of development easily happens in dialogue with a popular meta-mythology. In the case of kalevalaic mythology, for example, the god Väinämöinen is postulated as the demiurge in *The Song of Creation*, but the role of the anthropomorphic agent disappears from the epic in regions to the south where Christian influence had been longer and more pervasive (Frog 2012: 222–226). Similarly, *The Song of Lemminkäinen* is imagined as entailing the hero’s death and resurrection, although this was only met in quite few local traditions, and was falling out of use even there (Frog 2010: 72–102). The general meta-mythology is in fact an inaccurate frame of reference for most tradition areas.
9. The euhemerized account of the origins of the gods and the story of the origin of Freyja’s necklace preface the *þáttir* as a background for the endless mytho-heroic battle known as the *Hjaðningavíg*: Óðinn has had Freyja’s necklace stolen and will only return if she will use magic to create an endless battle. The story is peculiar in several respects and it is not clear that Freyja had any relationship to the *Hjaðningavíg* tradition outside of this one text.
10. E.g. Clive Tolley, in his *magnum opus* (2009), offers excellent source-critical assessments of representations of and references to *seiðr*, but this critical attention does not turn to assess the identification of *seiðr* with Freyja and the Vanir, which is part of the framework of the mythology within which that study operates.
11. On competing perspectives on symbols of a mythology, see pp. 44–47, this volume. Such competing meta-mythologies may also be interfaced with broader competing research methodologies or ‘research programmes’ (on which, see Lakatos 1980 [1978]: 103–121).

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The Blurry Lines among Humans, Gods, and Animals: The Snake in the Garden of Eden

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In the West, though by no means in the East, the gap between the human and the divine is conventionally considered to be clear-cut and insurmountable. The differences between divinity and humanity are assumed to be of kind, if also of degree. God has qualities that humans do not, of which the most commonly named is immortality. Where humans may be knowledgeable and powerful, God is omniscient and omnipotent.

Similarly, the differences between humans and animals are assumed to be of kind, if also of degree. In Genesis 1 human beings are given dominion over all animals. The divide between humans and animals is unambiguous. Humans, who in this first of two biblical creation myths are unnamed, are closer to God than to anything created by God. In Genesis 2, the first of two chapters on the Garden of Eden, Adam is commanded to name all the animals – another form of dominion over them. With the exception of the snake, Adam and in turn Eve have qualities that animals do not, of which the most conspicuous are intelligence and speech – or at least human speech.

Not only is there assumed to be a divide between humans and God, but also the divide, it is assumed, cannot be overcome. Humans cannot become gods. In fact, the most egregious sin in the West is the attempt by humans to become gods, epitomized by the vain efforts of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. The hiatus between humans and gods is assumed to apply as fully to polytheistic religions as to monotheistic ones. For ancient Greeks, those who dared to seek divinity were killed for their *hubris*. Those who directly challenged the gods, such as Tantalus and Sisyphus, were often consigned to eternal punishment in a section of Hades that was later incorporated into Tartarus (Homer, *Odyssey* XI:582–600).

Animals are conventionally assumed to fall outside the issue of challenges to divinity. They lack independent agency and therefore responsibility. Leaving aside such

supernatural human-animal combinations as centaurs and the minotaur, transformations of gods into animals are only a temporary change of forms. By contrast, transformations of humans into animals are widely found in the Greco-Roman world. They are either a punishment or an alleviation of suffering. Either way, those humans are thereby transferred from the social and supernatural order to the natural order of the environment (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*). In the later Christian world animals belong no less to the natural order. Rather than exhibiting independent will and responsibility, they enact the will of God (Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*).

Exceptions that Prove the Rule

The West does permit exceptions, but they are assumed to be exceptions. In the ancient world the grandest exception was Heracles (Hercules), who, while born to Zeus, was still mortal, accomplished superhuman feats of strength, outmaneuvered death in his last three great feats, and was rewarded with immortality by Zeus for his yeoman service (Apollodorus III.vii.7). Yet for some ancient writers, such as Herodotus, Heracles' very stature meant that he had been born a god, so that his case was the proverbial exception that proves the rule. Greeks did establish cults to worship human heroes, but only after their deaths.

Humans who can become gods are not necessarily heroes. But heroism constitutes an in-between category that narrows the divide between humans and gods. Heroes are humans who, in usually just a single, if varying, respect, are so exceptional as to be god-like.

In Christianity the grandest exception to the divide between humanity and divinity is, of course, Jesus. (In Judaism the Messiah is believed to be a mere human, descended from King David.) Yet even Jesus' capacity to be at once fully human and fully divine is taken to be a paradox, and a paradox difficult to maintain in practice. Throughout its history,

Christianity has veered between making Jesus merely an ideal human being, as in the Victorian period, and making him a sheer god, as in ancient Gnosticism.

The present article questions the commonly assumed divide both between gods and humans and between humans and animals. I do not presume to generalize to all mythologies. I take just one test case: that of the Hebrew Bible, and above all that of the snake in Eden. As readers of *RMN Newsletter* are perhaps aware, clear-cut distinctions among the supernatural, the human, and the animal were not current in all cultures of Europe prior to their Christianization (Frog 2015). The relationship of the Hebrew Bible to the ancient Near East is a traditional topic that will not be considered here.

Gods and Humans

Consider the Hebrew Bible. God is not omniscient, omnipotent, singular, or non-anthropomorphic. And humans can become gods. I am not concerned with later philosophical interpretations of the Bible, interpretations going back to Philo. I am concerned with popular religion as found in the Bible.

The difference between God and humans is merely a difference of degree. God knows more than humans but is not all knowing. God is more powerful than humans but is not all powerful. There is more than one god. God, one or more, has human qualities of all kinds, mental and physical alike. Overall, the Hebrew God is like Homer's gods. Subsequent philosophical characterizations of God are as distant from the biblical depiction as Plato's characterization of Homeric gods, let alone of his creator god in the *Laws*, is from Homer's, and also Hesiod's, depictions of the gods.

Even if the difference between God and humans is only of degree, the difference can still prove insurmountable. The issues are separate. But it turns out that the divide is not insurmountable, which is why God must continually fend off the threat of humans' becoming divine themselves.

God is not omniscient. God does not anticipate the sinning by Adam and Eve and the need to evict them from Eden (Genesis 3). God does not anticipate the disobedience of

all humanity save Noah and the need to destroy the world and then to re-create it (Genesis 6–9). God scarcely knows whether Noah's descendants will be any better than present humanity. God thus creates the rainbow as a promise never again to destroy the world, no matter how humanity behaves (Genesis 9.8–17).

God is not omnipotent. God does not, in either of the creation stories (Genesis 1–2.4a or 2.4b–25), create *ex nihilo*. Instead, God organizes raw materials into an orderly world. God fears the building of the Tower of Babel lest humans reach God and thereby threaten God (Genesis 11.1–9). God forbids the making of graven images lest they, as icons, be used magically against God (Exodus 20.4–5). God forbids the taking of his name in vain for the same reason (Exodus 20.7). The Israelites cry out for a human king because God has failed to defeat the Philistines (I Samuel 8). A king, while human, is thus expected to be stronger than God.

God is not singular. God may be the chief god, but he is not only the only god. When, in Genesis 1, God declares, “Let us create man in our image” (Genesis 1.26), he is not speaking in the royal “we,” which he never uses of himself alone. Rather, he is addressing fellow gods. When, again, God uses the first-person plural to announce the eviction of Adam and Eve from the Garden (Genesis 3.22), he is likewise addressing fellow gods. The Bible takes for granted that each nation has its own god. The contest between Aaron and Pharaoh's magicians is over the strength, not the existence, of each side's god or gods (Exodus 7). The same is true of the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal (I Kings 18). The earth in Genesis 1 is commanded by God to produce living things, so that the earth is a deliberative, living figure in her own right (Genesis 1.24). In Proverbs the goddess Wisdom creates the world alongside God (Proverbs 8.22–31).

God is anthropomorphic. God sees, hears, talks, breathes (Genesis 2.7), rests (Genesis 2.2), and eats, enjoying the smell of Noah's sacrifices (Genesis 8.21) and later consuming part or all of priestly sacrifices. God has a body, and it is visible. Otherwise Moses at the

burning bush (Exodus 3.6) and later the Israelites at Mt. Sinai would not have to look away to avoid seeing God. God is male. There is no neuter gender in biblical Hebrew. At the same time the “image” of God in which humans in Genesis 1 are made is not merely physical but sexual: it is the division into male and female sexes (Genesis 1.26–27). Either God is androgynous, or some of the fellow gods are female. God has the same array of emotions as humans, ranging from happiness to anger and even jealousy (Exodus 20.5).

God initially resides in a physical place, even if he, like Britain’s Royals, has more than one home. God resides in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3.8). God later resides in the Ark. Otherwise the taking of the Ark by the Philistines (I Samuel 4) would not be discombobulating for the Israelites. Ezekiel sees God on his throne in heaven (Ezekiel 1.26–28).

Humans can become gods. God throws out Adam and Eve because they *can* become gods (Genesis 3.22). In the Garden of Eden story divinity means knowledge and immortality, no more. God halts the building of the Tower of Babel lest the builders reach God and thereby presumably equal him (Genesis 11.1–9). When God takes the people’s demand for a king as a repudiation of him, God is elevating the king to equality with himself (I Samuel 8.7). And what characteristics does the first king, Saul, harbor? He is the tallest man in Israel in one source (I Samuel 10.23) and the handsomest as well in another (I Samuel 9.2). In religion generally, gods are gods because they are bigger, stronger, kinder, wiser, or better looking than humans. The difference is of degree, not kind. The biblical God himself may not be pre-existent, for the Bible begins *in medias res*, with God already existing. God’s own immortality may depend on his eating from the Tree of Life. Otherwise why not just cut down the Tree?

In short, the Hebrew Bible assumes no straightforward, let alone insurmountable, divide between humans and God.

Humans who can become gods are not necessarily heroes. But heroism constitutes an in-between category that narrows the divide between humans and gods. Heroes are humans who, in usually just a single, if

varying, respect, are so exceptional as to be god-like.

Animals, Gods, and Humans

Just as the boundary line between humans and gods in the Hebrew Bible is blurry, so is the line both between animals and gods and between animals and humans. Take, as the grandest example, the snake in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3).

The snake is categorized as a wild creature, not as either a human or a god. True, the snake is deemed the craftiest creature in the garden, but that difference is merely one of degree.

In its pre-fallen, natural state the snake talks, thinks, and deliberates. Presumably, the only way the snake knows the contents of the Tree of Knowledge is by having eaten from it himself. (That is likely as well the way God knows the contents.) But then the snake is automatically half-divine. He lacks only immortality, if in fact he is mortal. The snake is smarter not only than Eve but also than God, whom he outwits. Contrary to later, especially Christian interpretations, God does not anticipate what the snake and in turn Eve and Adam will do. Otherwise God would not have to scurry to evict Adam and Eve.

The punishment of the snake is that he will now crawl on his belly rather than walk upright and that females will hate him. For the hatred to occur, the snake must get evicted as well. Presumably, the snake loses his ability to speak. Or else the speech of the snake, like that of birds, can no longer be understood by humans.

In Christianity the snake is Satan, who is more than an animal and even turns out to be a son of God. But in the Hebrew Bible the snake is merely an animal, however extraordinary he is. Satan in general plays a far smaller role in Judaism than in Christianity, and in Judaism the real beginning is in Genesis 12, when God chooses Abraham (then Abram) to be the founder of his chosen people. But the very differentiation of the biblical snake from later Satan underscores the looseness of the boundary between animals on the one hand and humans and gods on the other. The snake falls from an elevated status to an ordinary

one, but that fall is not the natural state of the snake. Had Eve resisted the snake's temptation, the snake would presumably have continued to reside in the Garden, and with all his human-like and god-like talents intact. And maybe the snake is eligible to return to Eden insofar as the post-Edenic ideal is a near-return to the original state.

Conclusion

Today we take for granted sharp divisions among gods, humans, and animals – and even if we ever more treat pets *as if* they were humans. But these divisions are far less sharp in the Hebrew Bible. In fact, the natural state of humans, gods, and at least the snake in the Garden of Eden is one of near equality – that is, until God begins to institute rigid divisions in the living world. But then God does so to protect his shaky power. He alters the very natural order that he has created. In short, the categorical distinctions that we take for granted have not always been assumed. (See Frog's article on "Mythology in Cultural Practice", this volume.)

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Social Movement and a Structural Distribution of Karelian Ritual Genres

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In the pre-modern cultural environment of Karelia, there were two central modalities of verbal art employed by vernacular ritual specialists who acted as intermediaries with the forces and inhabitants of the otherworld. These were kalevalaic incantations and lament. These categories of performance behaviour were quite different from one another. The present discussion briefly reports a working hypothesis concerning a general pattern of correlation between *a*) the modality of verbal art in rituals, and *b*) the stage of an individual's social movement between two communities. This hypothesis developed from the discussion of Eila Stepanova's paper "Movement between Worlds in Karelian Ritual Poetry", presented at the American Folklore Society's annual meeting in November 2014 (Santa Fe, New Mexico; published Stepanova E 2015a). The rituals in question qualify as transition rituals, which can be conceived in terms of the three-phase process: *separation – transition – incorporation*

(van Gennep 1960 [1909]). The hypothesis presented here has been developed to account for a pattern of the distribution of labour between genres of verbal art and the communities by which the relevant rites are performed (Table 1).

The Basic Model

The social movements addressed here are birth, marriage, conscription to military service, and death. Each of these involved an individual's separation from one community and integration into another, although in some cases the second community may be in the otherworld. The structural distribution of specialist roles within a community identifies laments as orchestrators of rituals of separation. The lamenter represents the community from which the person is departing. The liminal stage of transition was a dangerous period for the individual. Incantations were used to secure and protect the subject in this process. These incantations

Table 1. The distribution of genres of verbal art in rituals involving social movement from one community into another. In all cases, laments are performed in rituals orchestrated by a specialist of the community from which an individual is being separated and incantations are performed in rituals orchestrated by a specialist of the community into which the individual will be integrated. Situations where the ritual activity would take place in a foreign or supernatural community are indicated by “Otherworld” in square brackets. The phase of integration will not be addressed here.

Social Movement	Phases of Transition Ritual		
	<i>Separation</i>	<i>Transition</i>	<i>Integration</i>
Birth	[<i>Otherworld</i>]	Incantation	–
Marriage	Lament	Incantation	–
Conscription	Lament	[<i>Otherworld</i>]	[<i>Otherworld</i>]
Death	Lament	Lament / [<i>Otherworld</i>]	[<i>Otherworld</i>]

were performed by a representative of the community into which the person would arrive. In the public social ritual of a wedding context, this was the responsibility of a ritual specialist known as a *tietäjä* [‘knower, one who knows’]. Birthing rituals were concealed and private, and the incantations would be performed by a midwife (cf. Pentikäinen 1978: 178–180). From this view, transition rituals for social movement from one community into another require the involvement of specialists from both communities. However, the social movements addressed only involve movement between two Karelian communities of the living in the case of weddings. The present approach builds from the emic perspective that *a*) otherworld communities have objective existence and social reality, and *b*) socially ‘other’, ‘foreign’ and supernaturally ‘other’ communities fall into a single category of ‘other’ (cf. Lindow 1995). From this perspective, the expectation is inferred that all ‘other’ communities will practice rituals of separation and incorporation paralleling other living communities of Karelians (or Russians) in weddings (on the otherworld conceived through social and empirical realities of the living, see Tarkka, this volume). This leads to the diagram in Table 1.

The correlation of a type of social movement between communities with rituals characterized by a mode of verbal art is most evident in the case of laments, which will therefore be introduced first. It should be noted that the rituals surrounding birth, marriage and death were extremely complex and lasted for several days. They also varied both locally and regionally. The following

does not explore this variation and remains at a level of broad generalizations.

Karelian Laments

Laments may be generally defined as:

melodic poetry of varying degrees of improvisation, which nonetheless follows conventionalized rules of traditional verbal expression, most often performed by women in ritual contexts and potentially also on non-ritual grievous occasions. (Stepanova E 2012: 58.)

The most common ritual contexts for lamenting in Karelia are funerals and commemoration rituals, weddings, and the departure ceremonies for men conscripted into military service. However, laments were also performed ‘occasionally’, outside of ritual contexts, as a valued medium for emotional expression; in some contexts they were also otherwise used as a mode of elevated speech.¹

The verbal art of Karelian lament lacks fixed meter. Units of utterance of up to ca. 40 words are united by alliteration in a descending melodic phrase. Expressions are characterized by semantic parallelism within and between units of utterance.² The most striking feature of the register is its dense systems of avoidance vocabulary and extensive use of diminutive and plural forms, as well as possessive affixes. The avoidance vocabulary includes verbs but is especially characterized by a rich, flexible, generative system of nominal circumlocutions (see Stepanova A 2012). This circumlocution system depends on culture- and genre-dependent symbolic and metaphorical patterns and also includes semantically subordinated equivalence vocabu-

lary (including e.g. lexica adapted from Russian). It cannot be correctly interpreted without some degree of specially-developed competence. The poetry is interfaced with mythic knowledge and conventional representations of the unseen world (Stepanova E 2012). Lament was also a deferent honorific register, structured in a way that the addressee was elevated and positive while a lamenter's self-characterization was effacing and miserable (Stepanova E 2015b; Wilce & Fenigson 2015).

The social significance of the lament register and its uses were bound to the conception that it was a language for reciprocal communication with the other-world. It was believed that the dead could still hear and interact with the living but that they could no longer comprehend normal language: the lament language (register) was the only language that they could understand. This situated lamenters as intermediaries between the communities of the living and dead branches of kin groups, as well as with other types of supernatural beings. They would actively maintain these relationships by visiting the deceased kin in the cemetery outside of social ritual contexts, awakening them and opening communication with the anticipation that deceased individuals could provide responses in dreams or visit in the form of a bird or butterfly. Lament was also understood to have supernatural efficacy. Laments performed in funeral rituals were understood to actualize the unseen world, the deceased individual's successful journey to the realm of the dead, and his or her integration into the community of deceased kin. Without lamenting, it was believed that the deceased's journey would be unsuccessful. The mythic power of lament is also reflected in beliefs that the performance of a funeral lament outside of a ritual context would cause a death. (Honko 1974; Konkka 1985; Stepanova A 1985; Nenola 2002; Stepanova E 2014b.)

Ritual performances of laments fall into two broad categories: laments for the departure of an individual to be integrated into a new community, and laments of commemoration and reciprocal communication with deceased kin (i.e. individuals who have already been

integrated into a foreign community). All of these contexts irrespective of category are generally characterized as emotional situations charged with grief and thus a mood appropriate to laments.

Wedding laments were performed at the home of the bride surrounding her departure but not in the home of the groom, where other songs were sung. In rural Karelia, marriage entailed the movement of the bride to the household of the groom, which constituted a 'foreign' community, with very limited or no contact with her parents' household thereafter. Conscription laments were performed for men going into military service, which would equally remove them to a 'foreign' community. Military service would be for many years, and if they returned at all, they would no longer be the same men who had left. Both wedding and conscription laments are generally thought to be ultimately extensions of the funerary lament tradition through a symbolic correlation of these types of separation (e.g. Honko 1974). These are all rituals of separation in which a member of the living community must depart and be integrated into a 'foreign' community (see also Tarkka, this volume). The symbolic correlation of marriage and military service with death may seem dramatic by modern standards, but it warrants observing that the cemetery was a village of the dead (Siikala 2002: 126) that would be more regularly visited than either the departed brides or soldiers.³

Kalevalaic Incantations

The so-called Kalevala-meter is an alliterative, trochaic tetrameter, characterized by parallelism and highly crystallized formulaic diction, and was employed across a remarkable range of genres (Kuusi et al. 1977: 62–75; Frog & Stepanova E 2011: 198–204; Tarkka 2013: 53–102). Kalevalaic incantations are incantations in this poetic mode. There are a number of varieties of such incantations associated with different uses and users (e.g. charms used when herding cattle). The best known are incantations belonging to the ritual technology of the *tietäjä* (e.g. Siikala 2002: 71–120). This institution of specialist took the place of a shaman as the primary intermediary between the living community and inhabitants

and communities of the unseen world (except for the ancestral dead) in Finno-Karelian cultural areas (Siikala 2002: 330; Frog 2013). This technology was interfaced with the mythology of kalevalaic epic, for which the *tietäjä* provided a conduit of authority in its transmission (Frog 2013: 57–58). Historically, this seems to have been a male institution (but not necessarily exclusively).⁴

The *tietäjä*'s ritual performance involved a hyperactive trance that is linked to raising anger and aggression (Siikala 2002: 242–248). The aggressive stance is built into the incantations. These position the performer as a powerful and dominant authority who commands unseen allies (the thunder god, the Virgin Mary, etc.) to provide weapons, armour, tools, power, and so on, or to take more direct action to resolve a crisis. Adversaries, such as forces and beings that cause harm, are combatively challenged and banished (cf. Siikala 2002: 100). Unlike incantations and Christian verbal magic elsewhere in Europe, efficacy is linked to the *tietäjä*'s own power: the performance could fail; it is only through his power and will that the incantations effectively compel the responses of the unseen agents and forces (Keane 1997: 49–52; Frog 2010b).

To make a sweeping (over-)generalization, an extensive range of *tietäjä* rituals might be described as centrally concerned with boundary maintenance (both of the community and of the body in issues of health), and more generally with the maintenance of social and natural order in the world, insofar as this connected with the *tietäjä*'s immediate community.⁵

The *tietäjä* did not orchestrate rituals of separation. He would use incantations to aggressively expel agents of harm from the community and ensure that these would not return (Siikala 2002: 178–194). He would secure the living community from the deceased taking the community's resources on his or her journey to the otherworld (Stepanova A 1999: 45). The *tietäjä*'s technology would, however, also be employed to secure an individual or party in the hazardous transition of physical movement between worlds.

In wedding rituals, the *tietäjä*'s technology was associated with the party of the groom and especially with securing the bridal party

on their journey from the household of the bride to the household of the groom.⁶ The kalevalaic epic, *The Song of Lemminkäinen*, was one of the resources used in this context. The core of the epic describes a youthful hero's ability to use magical power to pass various supernatural 'deaths' (dangers) on a journey to the otherworld (cf. Kuusi et al. 1977: 205–237). Images and motifs from this epic, the description of the journey or the whole epic could be performed in or as an incantation to protect the wedding party (Frog 2010a: 80, 82, 84, 86–87). Incantations rather than laments were also performed in conjunction with childbirth. These were performed in closed women's rituals to ensure the successful transition of the individual into the world of the living community.⁷ These incantations involved the same authoritative and commanding stance as the *tietäjä*'s incantations. They characterized the arriving child as a traveller and could also employ images, motifs and lines of verse associated with *The Song of Lemminkäinen* (Tarkka 1990: 249–254; 1994: 277–287). Although a distinction may be made between the category of specialist performer in these rituals, a clear connection can be observed between the incantation traditions that these specialists employ.

A Structural Distribution of Genres?

An overview of these Karelian traditions suggests a structural distribution of the roles of genres in rituals for social movement between communities. In all cases, social movement is not simply metaphorical: it is conceived through physical movement in geographical space (cf. van Gennep 1960 [1909]: 10–11), which in the cases of birth and death extends into the mythic topography of the otherworld (Stepanova E 2015a). The genre employed seems to correlate with the community from which the specialist orchestrating the ritual derives. A lamenter represents the community from which the individual departs and orchestrates the ritual of separation leading to the transition. Incantations are employed as aggressive expressions of power intended to secure that same individual in the dangerous process of transition. This genre is, however, employed by a specialist of the community into which

the new member will arrive. The role of lament in funeral rituals, ensuring the deceased's integration into the otherworld community, may appear to vary from this pattern, but that becomes less clear when it is placed in a broader perspective. The lamenter actualizes the deceased's dangerous journey through her performance which creates a narrative with a successful outcome. However, she requests rather than commands the ancestral community to prevent the dog of the otherworld from barking and to open the gates to their realm, or she may structure this sequence as a series of questions that seek confirmation from the deceased that events did indeed unfold in this way. In either case, responsibility for action falls to the otherworld community. That community can be expected to anticipate the arrival of the deceased no less than the household of the groom anticipates a bride or the living community anticipates a new member through birth – and they can be expected to act accordingly.

In itself, this distribution of genres is not surprising. Lament rituals are interfaced with feelings resulting from especially changes that produce a permanent separation. Thus movement from the community provides a basic context for lament performance. Lamenters use their verbal art to orchestrate and also to moderate both the grief of the community as well as that of the individual subject to the transition (cf. Stepanova E 2014c; 2015b), both of which are fundamentally affected by the change in that individual's status. By contrast, incantations present more aggressive tools for the assertion of power, offensively or defensively, or more generally tools to affect aspects of the environment. The incantations used in these rituals seem to follow the pattern of the *tietäjä*'s technology, oriented to boundary maintenance and concern for order inside that boundary rather than outside of it (cf. also the discussion of the otherworld in Tarkka, this volume). The distinction between these genres was potentially quite deep: the verbal art of each genre was interfaced with mythic images, motifs and narrative patterns, and there are clear differences in the mythology linked to each of these traditions (Stepanova E 2012; cf. pp. 47–48 in this

volume). If these patterns are taken for granted, it seems only natural that a lamenter orchestrates rituals for the community from which an individual departs and an incantation specialist does the same for the receiving community. The question becomes interesting when it advances to *why* the lamenter (rather than e.g. a *tietäjä*) should be the specialist responsible for the deceased's successful journey, and *why* incantations take a counter-role for which the other community is responsible.

For the present discussion, it is sufficient to observe that a structural distribution of labour has developed between these genres and between the types of specialists who used them. These genres can be seen as complementary resources: they could be used by different specialists within the broader frame of a complex ritual, such as a wedding, or the same individual could fill the role of different specialists, such as a woman who was both midwife and lamenter. This complementarity was, however, historically maintained in spite of the intimacy of their contexts of use.

Notes

1. Generally in Finnish, see Honko 1963; Konkka 1985; Stepanova E 2014b; in Russian: Stepanova A 1985; in English: Honko 1974; in English on the Karelian lament register and its dialects among Finnic lament traditions, see Frog & Stepanova 2011: 204–209; Stepanova E 2015b; on Finnic laments in an Uralic context, see Stepanova E 2012: 258–260; on areal characteristics of lament traditions in the Circum-Baltic cultural area, see Stepanova E 2011; cf. also Nenola 2002.
2. Stepanova E 2014b; in English, see also Frog & Stepanova 2011: 204–209; Stepanova E 2014a.
3. An additional extension of laments in departure ceremonies is found in the poorly-attested rituals for banishing bedbugs (e.g. SKVR I₄ 1957). In these rituals, the bedbugs would be lamented and removed from the household and community with symbolic actions linked to their death and/or departure (with parallels in Komi and North Russian traditions, on which see Mišarina 2012). This adaptation of laments would seem to be rooted in a conception of the ritual efficacy of lament performance in accomplishing the successful transition of someone from within the living community into a foreign community and environment – irrespective of the lamented's will before and after the performance (but actualized through the implicit role-taking in the ritual).

4. Many women filled this role in the time when the traditions were recorded. However, the prominence of women *tietäjäs* at that time should be viewed in the context of social processes whereby women became active tradition bearers as men stopped maintaining the particular vernacular practices.
5. This generalization is not intended to encompass all incantations, such as those for hunting, fishing, cattle charms, etc.
6. The representative of the groom and groom's community was called a *patvaška*, who would be a *tietäjä*. The origin of this role is even identified with Väinämöinen, the mythic model of the *tietäjä* institution (the *tietäjä iän ikuine* ['*tietäjä* of age eternal']): according to Sihippa Inninen, *Väinämöinen oli ensimmäinen maailmassa, joka oli patvaskoja* (SKS KRA Inha 89 Kuivaisjärvi 1894) ['Väinämöinen was the first in the world who was a *patvaška*']. The incantations of rites performed by a *patvaška* were nevertheless relatively limited (Siikala 2002: 80–82, 285–286, 292–293) and thus a skilled *patvaška* need not also be, for example, a powerful healer. The *patvaška* as a spokesman for the groom's kin could also be distinguished as a role from the *tietäjä* responsible for the supernatural protection of the bridal party.
7. These incantations are here identified with midwives as performers, but they were also known to *tietäjäs* (Tarkka 1994: 277).

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Lonely Riders of Nenets Mythology and Shamanism

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The present review looks at the images of movement and its expressions in Nenets epic and shamanistic ritual poetry. Concentration will be on narrative characters and events associated with the nouns *ηædalyoda* and *ηædalyowa*, both produced from the verb *ηædalyo-*. The first of these, *ηædalyoda*, is an imperfective infinitive of the verb denoting a person moving with a light reindeer sledge and can thus be briefly translated as 'rider'. It is used in epic to denote a type of lone character who arrives from outside of the community and produces a complication that sets the plot in motion or otherwise advances it. This type of character has a number of associations that build on the opposition between the tundra, as a dangerous space associated with the 'other', and the camp of the Nenets community, as a place of security and belongingness. The second term, *ηædalyowa*, refers to the process of the verb *ηædalyo-* itself. Strictly interpreted, it is a deverbal noun with emphasis on locality and thus denotes the distance that one can travel without giving the reindeer a break. (See Salminen 1993–2012.) It thus is not only a description of movement itself, but also a qualifier of time situated in place or rather landscape. The distance denoted by *ηædalyowa* differs depending on the quality of the environment one is moving in and the circumstances of travel. Consequently, it is not an exact unit of measurement, but a contextually dependent qualifier, which is creatively exploited in Nenets poetic art. The interest in this verb here is that it is used in meta-discourse to refer to the journey of a shamanic séance. Other verbs, symbolically linked to specific spirit-forms, are used in

shamanic singing. The use of this verb in meta-discourse construes a parallel in the activity type of the shamanic journey in ritual and the movement of the *ηædalyoda* in epic, a parallel of contrasting direction into or out of the community's camp, and yet which is more generally informed by the mythic construction of space for these mobile communities of the tundra.

Nenets Epic and Shamanistic Poetry

The present review is based on materials that were collected among the Nenets in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. The earliest materials were gathered by Matthias Alexander Castrén, who made two extensive linguistic and ethnographic excursions to Northern Russia and Siberia in the 1840s. While still travelling in Western Siberia during his first excursion, Castrén proposed the linguistic affinity of Tundra Nenets and other Samoyedic language to Finnish. He also collected Nenets epic poetry, genres called *syudbabts* and *yarabts*, that he believed would bring to light the history of Finnish mythology. Castrén left a mighty legacy to the Finnish humanities. It was, however, not until the 1910s that the next Finnish scholars were to leave for fieldwork among the Samoyedic-speaking peoples. While Kai Donner concentrated on other Samoyedic languages, Toivo Lehtisalo collected linguistic materials and folklore among the speakers of Tundra and Forest Nenets. He also invited one of the Nenets to Finland in 1928, which resulted in important recordings of Nenets ritual poetry. The texts that Lehtisalo collected during his first field excursion among the Nenets comprise one of the largest and broadest collections of Nenets folklore

made by a single person. His published edition contains most of the genres that we know Nenets to have had, and presents this in several different dialects along with even some knowledge about the performers. Lehtisalo also edited and published Castrén's collections. (Castrén 1940; Lehtisalo 1947.) I have used these texts as primary material for my study but have not ignored the other published texts of Tundra Nenets folklore (Kupriyanova 1965; Tereščenko 1990; Lar 1998; Labanauskas 2001; Puškaryova & Homiš 2001; Golovnyov 2004). The secondary texts have served as material for comparison, but they have not been analyzed in detail for the present discussion.

Nenets epic poetry consists of three genres: *syudbats*, *yarabts*, and *xynabts*. All three genres are long epic forms (cf. Honko 1998), with documented examples ranging from 300 to several thousand lines. The epic sung poems are highly valued among the Nenets. Their themes vary from marriage and blood vengeance to the hardships and tough fates of their heroes. The stories are all mythic in nature, and the Nenets tend to interpret them historically, as narratives telling about the mythic past (Siikala 1992: 145; 2004). Some of the themes in the poetry are situated in recent history, giving special value to some of the figures and events that are also remembered in other contexts or even written about in Russian histories of the Nenets. (Niemi 1998; Vasilyev 1984.) Soviet scholars have emphasized the events known to western historiographies that are also told within the genres of *yarabts* and *xynabts*, giving them value through their reference to historical events (Kupriyanova 1965: 55–56; Puškaryova 2000; cf. also Tarkka, this volume). The relationships of epics of these genres to history is probably more complicated than that, but the historical aspects of Nenets epic poetry is outside of the concerns of the present review, which emphasizes the mythic values that are expressed in and arise from these poems.

As poetry, the main difference between *syudbats*, *yarabts*, and *xynabts* lies in their use of grammatical person and tone of narration. The *syudbats* are told in third person singular by a personified poem or

word, called *syudbabts-wada* ['*syudbabts-word*'], a mythological being in itself (Puškaryova 2003a: 192). Their narration tends to be more distant if we compare them to the *yarabts* and *xynabts* that are both told in first person singular, and also concentrate on the emotions and suffering of the heroes. On the whole, these genres of epic poetry share many poetic devices and images, and it is not at all clear what the difference between *yarabts* and *xynabts* is. For example, the image of the rider, *ḡædalyoda*, discussed in this article, is shared by all of these genres.

Nenets shamanistic ritual poetry is only sung during a shamanistic séance. The ritual poems are sung by the shaman and repeated by his or her assistant, and possibly also repeated by the audience. In the poems, the shaman describes the question at hand, calls the spirit helpers, describes his or her journeys in the otherworld, and sends the spirit helpers back to the otherworld. The answers to the shaman's questions are also given during the ritual, and the audience is addressed through different expressions. The shamanistic ritual poems are called *sampadabts*, which is derived from the verb *sampa-* ['to be able to communicate with the deceased or to carry the deceased to the otherworld'] and the verb *sampada-* ['to shamanize']. (Kupriyanova 1965: 21–56; Niemi 1998: 52–78; Puškarjova 2001; Salminen 2005: 70.) The term *sampadabts* is used even when the rituals are not only about carrying the deceased to the otherworld or communicating with the deceased or ancestor spirits. The rituals are also performed for more mundane problems and for securing the means of livelihood. Although the shamans do communicate with ancestral spirits, the imagery and cultural meanings of many of the spirits are attached to mythological texts in a way that, as a consequence, has had the result that they no longer represent ancestral spirits *per se*.

Movement and Knowledge in Myths

Mythic texts are very often about movement. However, the places and environments in which movement takes place, the otherworld topography, its inhabitants and societies, customarily project and reflect the empirical environs, societies and experiences of the people maintaining the mythology (e.g. Siikala



Photo 1. Tundra landscape on the Island of Kolguyev, where nomadic Nenets have lived since the 19th century. The sharp peak on the right is one of the central sacred places of the island. (Photograph by Inga Ardeyeva, reproduced with permission.)

1992: 145; 2004: 41; Tarkka 2005: 302–305; Tuan 2007: 86; Ahola 2014: 55–59, 63–65; see also Tarkka, this volume.) In nomadic societies, one tends to move with one's own community. As noted by many scholars on nomadic reindeer herding, everyday life builds up cycles of movements that repeat themselves similarly every year. The routes of one nomadic society, namely the group that forms a camp, follows routes in a way that produces seasonally fixed landscapes and places; vistas that one experiences every year in almost identical times, seasons and thus also in the same environmental circumstances. (Stammler 2005: 83–91; Habeck 2006: 132–135.) Together with this communal movement, there are personal movements that individuals make on the tundra in order to visit relatives or close camp communities, to visit towns and cities, to go hunting and fishing, and so on. This is also the picture among the nomadic Nenets, who live in Northern Russia and Northwest Siberia in the arctic and subarctic regions. Large-scale reindeer herding has often been described as their main and traditional way of life. When the whole camp moves from one pasture to another, it is described through the verb *myusye*- ['to move

the camp in a caravan']. The caravan consists of everything the camp as a social and economic unit owns: the reindeer, the people, their tents, clothes, food, dishes, religious objects, etc. The sledges are tied together and while some sit on their sledges, others might walk. Movement is slow and calm. This is in strict contrast to the movement of *ηædalyo*- ['to ride a light reindeer sledge alone'], where the rider has harnessed a few reindeer and aims to move forward fast. It is this latter category of movement that is indexed by the nouns *ηædalyoda* and *ηædalyowa* that are in focus in the present article.

Eric Leed has noted that, in the narratives of non-nomadic societies, movement is attached to experiencing the 'other', and to ways of coming into contact with the strange, and with the dangerous – with all of the things that lead to new findings, opportunities and knowledge (Leed 1991: 18–20). In a similar way, the nomadic Nenets have attached images of strangeness, danger and otherness to the motifs of travel and couple these with new knowledge. Nevertheless, the relationships between travelling and the other in Nenets epic are not built around clear boundaries and crossing them. The boundaries, in other

words, are unclear, not marked, and they are crossed without being noticed or crossing boundaries is not mentioned in the narration at all. Regardless, the heroes are inclined to arrive in unknown countries, territories, or worlds. Leaving his home camp often means that the social role of the hero will be changed – from a boy to a man, or from a man to a husband and father, or to the head of the camp. Thus, the change is not only personal but communal or societal, and it might benefit the whole community. On the other hand, it might also be spiritual, as the hero acquires mythic or shamanistic qualities, gains attributes of a god or spirit, or is even named as such at the end of the narrative. (Lukin 2015.) Movement is a central trope in myths all over the world that entail new, socially and spiritually important know-ledge and revitalization of the community. (E.g. van Leeuwen 2007; Tarkka 2005: 300–302; Siikala 1992: 256–257; 2012: 261.)

In mythic stories, movement never happens in places or landscapes that are just a background for the narrative, as Richard van Leeuwen has shown with such flourish in his study of movement in the stories of *A Thousand and One Nights*. Quite the opposite, the narrators of epic texts have situated their heroes in environments that already have some meaningful connotations in the minds of their listeners and readers. Thus, the places and the landscapes give significance to the movements, to the heroes' emotions, and they also gain new meanings through the stories that happen in those places and landscapes. Consequently, Nenets mythology happens in tundra landscapes that are part of the everyday living environment of the Nenets; the families of heroes live in camps that are organized in a way paralleling the everyday camps of epic singers and their audiences. As a consequence, movement and the placement of the actors in these mythic texts become understandable through the everyday: the head of the camp rides in the head of the caravan; the socially lowest sit near the door of the conical tent, etc.

The Dædalyoda – The Lonely Rider

Nenets epics exhibit two broad types of character whose defining feature is linked to



Photo 2. Winter tundra on the Island of Kolguyev. Especially in winter, the tundra, covered with ice and snow, seems to be a vast and unbounded territory, where it is easy to get lost and wander aimlessly. (Photograph by the author.)

movement on the tundra. The *ηædalyoda* is a lone stranger, that might be described as a personification of the 'other', and whose appearance bodes trouble. He always arrives into a camp, whether it is moving or staying in one place. He might be noticed already days before his actual arrival, or alternatively he is only spotted by the dogs that bark at him. The other type of character is the wandering hero who seems to move on the tundra almost aimlessly, often unaware of his whereabouts or his destination. Both of these types of characters are in a sense defined according to how their movement relates to the camp: the *ηædalyoda* is always arriving, whereas the wandering hero rides or walks on the tundra and remains outside. The symbolic image of the *ηædalyoda* as the lonely rider and the meaning attached to it are closely related to the image of the wandering hero. The difference between them is in part only one of perspective: the wandering hero appears exclusively in the role of the protagonist, from whose perspective the story is told; the lonely rider is characteristically an antagonist. In other words, they are representatives of the in-group and the 'other', respectively.

A significant difference between these roles is in the character's knowledge. Journeys that are characterized by having unknown destinations and aimless wandering are central elements in Nenets epic poetry. The basic plot of such narratives is structured around the movement of a character who lacks knowledge: an orphan or a hero who otherwise does not know the reasons for the death of his or her father. During the journeys,

the characters encounter otherworldly creatures, visit the underworld, or suddenly realize that they are having a conversation with the deceased. They also establish relations with individuals, whose supernatural powers or equipment will help the protagonist later. These journeys produce important social and supernatural (martial) capital and allies for the heroes and their societies. The journeys also entail a change in family relations and status, both social and shamanistic. The otherworldly, mythic instruments and the ability to use them, which are won by the hero on these journeys, make him or her a powerful figure in his or her surroundings. These instruments and relationships are symbols of mythic power and shamanistic knowledge. In contrast, the *ηædalyoda* does not lack knowledge, but rather has such knowledge that motivates his arrival to the camp or otherwise manifests an event or agreement in the past of the community that appears from the tundra and seeks to take something from the camp in order to resolve that history. In the poem *Nyeru yaxan xæwxana* [‘On the Willow River’], for example, one of the heroes is moving with his newly wedded wife back to his home camp with the dowry reindeer and sledges, and their caravan is attacked by previous suitor:

- (1) tarem myusye
xoyi nyin tewi’.
Yinyenyad
ob [ŋ]ædalyoda to,
sa yorkalɣada,
metada tida
nyarawa puyelyo’
yanamada yangu’:
“Mendaw nyew
nyew mewan,
uyna nyeyum,
xayusyendu ta’!”
(KK MAC VII Samoiedica 2, Jurak-samoiedica 1: 557–568.)

And so he moved
came to a mountain
from the left side
one rider (*ηædalyoda*) came,
captures with a strap,
the reindeer that he caught
has copper trimming
it will not calm down:
“A wife I have taken

my wife you have taken
the daughter of the Uyna [‘Feeble Bow’]
Give me compensation!”

In most cases, the *ηædalyoda* is a suitor that is coming to get the wife that he had been promised. He is often not recognized by the characters in the camps, but if he is, the camp begins to prepare itself for war or to plot conspiracies. In addition, if the lonely rider is recognized by someone, he is also named. Hence, in the *syudbabts* called *Teryi ya* [‘The Unknown Land’], recorded by Castrén, the host of the camp immediately recognizes the rider and hides his daughter, who has been promised to the rider but whom the father does not want to give to him. This is the opening scene of the whole narrative:

- (2) teri yana
sidya mya’.
nyundye nya
syidye po
xanoidi mewæ
yirisyu
xanoityi nye amdawe
tyikyî yana
amdi yud yalya,
nyisyiyu nyimdye
xæxonya xabt,
nyuyu nyimdya
yalinsya xabt
nyisyiyu
xart easonda’
sæta parmsyetya’
anyi ximsyitye’
xabt yalinsya:
“amgæ manyiyen?”
“many, mow, manyiyem:
syiw yiryi tyana
wayetyilye’ xabt.
(KK MAC VII Samoiedica 2, Jurak-samoiedica 1: 1–22.)

In an unknown land
there are two conical tents.
With his son
two years
their sledges
beside each other
on their sledges they sat down
in this place
they sit ten days.
The name of the father
is Xæxonya xabt [‘Holy [male] Reindeer’]
the name of the son
is Yalinsya xabt [‘Fair [male] Reindeer’].

The father's
own side
his face is black
and it is getting more black.
Xabt Yalinsya:
"What do you see?"
"I," he said "see:
within seven months
Wayetyilye' xabt

As can be noted, here the performer has not used the term *ηædalyoda*, but s/he is making use of the image of a lonely rider who is arriving at the camp, bringing trouble with him. This extract also beautifully illustrates the structural importance of the *ηædalyoda*: the figure often comes up in the beginning of narration, or in the beginning of a new cycle or scene in the narration of epic songs. Thus, the *ηædalyoda* brings complication to the plot. What precedes the appearance of the *ηædalyoda* is a typical and often formulaic description of the status quo, where nothing really happens, no one is coming and no one is going, or as here: the men are sitting on their sledges having a conversation.

When considering the *ηædalyoda*, it is important to keep in mind that the tundra is not simply a background for these journeys. The tundra is the landscape where the Nenets situate knowledge. This is not only in the sense that the landscape is strange and unfamiliar: it is also a landscape of supernatural or mythic powers. Even in the everyday practices of the Nenets, one is not allowed to wander on the tundra alone before one has the proper technical and mythic knowledge to do so (Stammler 2005: 83–91; Anderson 2002: 116–131; Lukin 2011: 170–194). The unfamiliar tundra is opposed to the camp site, where one is secured by the community. The potential of the strange is acknowledged in epic poetry in multiple ways. The character of the lonely rider is one of these. The *ηædalyoda* is the character that brings the strange to the campsite or to the camp caravan. In the last example, the father recognizes the rider whom he does not want to see in the camp area; in the first example, the rider intrudes on the camp caravan demanding compensation. In both poems, as is typical, the rider's presence is linked to a prior injustice that will be compensated or resolved during the course of the poem. The character of the aimless

wanderer, on the other hand, is always potentially in danger, as he is moving in the strange environment where supernatural powers reside, and he is lacking proper mythic knowledge or social networks. Nevertheless, his journeying is a source of knowledge and networks, which are gained through suffering or through the help of relatives and characters who recognize the protagonist and hence can explain to him the state of affairs. The 'other' world of the tundra, then, is inhabited by the possibilities of gaining knowledge about the past and acquiring social networks for future battles. The journey itself provides the protagonist with the knowledge of the paths of the otherworld.

The Ngaedalawa – A Shamanistic Ride

A different derivative of the verb *ηædalyo-* comes up in connection with the shamanistic *sampadabts* poems. This is based on the simple fact that the *sampadabts* is not a narrative about events that happened before, but rather a depiction of what is happening in the present, in the ritual context. Moreover, as the ritual itself is considered to realize one great journey, the journeys that shamans take during a séance are imagined as 'rides' (*ηædalyowa*). What is important, however, is that the word *ηædalyowa* is not mentioned in the *sampadabts* itself, but comes up in the meta-discourse about shamanistic séances. To clear this up, it is necessary to look at the practical and ideational frames of the shamanistic séance in general and at the verbs of motion in the *sampadabts* in particular.

As Anna-Leena Siikala has noted in her studies about Siberian shamanism, the shaman describes a rather concrete journey in his ritual singing during the séance. The shaman not only describes his journey, but also the spirit helpers whose form s/he takes, and the discussions that s/he has with other spirit helpers. (Siikala 1987: 205–211.) The verb used for the shaman's movement and how it is described are linked to the form s/he takes, as illustrated in the examples in (3):

- (3.i) namna xora
myirkananyi'
tyeta ηæmyi
layikuts
(Lehtisalo 1947: 498b)

(ii) yesya xora'
myirkananyi'
tyeryi tonyi"
wyinatambiw'.
(Lehtisalo 1947: 474b–475a.)

(iii) yesya pyiryi
myirkananyi'
toreryini'
nasabarŋga.
(Lehtisalo 1947: 481a.)

(i) [In the] one year calf
figure of mine
my four legs
are galloping.

(ii) [In the] iron reindeer
figure of mine
I let my wings
whistle.

(iii) [In the] iron pike
figure of mine
along my stream
I paddle.

On the other hand, the movements of the spirit helpers are also brought out in the *sampadabts*. In the course of the ritual, the spirit helpers are first invited to the scene, and then their arrival is depicted; in the end of the ritual, their departure is correspondingly described. The spirit helpers are often numerous and the shaman collects them as though they were his or her herd. The parallel lines listing the spirit helpers are separated with intervening calls such as *ye-e-e-ei*, as seen in example (4). These calls reference the calls that a herder makes when driving the herd to the corral. (See Dobžanskaya 2008: 53–65, 88–91.)

(4) ye-e-e-ei!
yesya pudu
yadibada,
ye-e-e-ei!
yesya xarw'
yadipada,
ye-e-e-ei!
yesya tuptusyi
yadipada,
ye-e-e-ei!
yesya xanu
yadipada
ye-e-e-ei!
wadenkenta
syelyaxi

xabtyeyemda
podyermi"
ye-e-e-ei!
(Lehtisalo 1947, 209.)

ye-e-e-ei!
Iron tube's
forger,
ye-e-e-ei!
Iron knife's
forger,
ye-e-e-ei!
Iron axe's
forger,
ye-e-e-ei!
Iron sledge's
forger,
ye-e-e-ei!
Wadenkenki
hill's
male reindeer
harness!
ye-e-e-ei!

Whereas the shaman's movement is described through concrete verbs of motion, the spirit helpers' presence and movement is illustrated through the sounds they make. This is accomplished with the help of different expressions of sounds but also through verbal evidential modes that authenticate evidence that has been heard. Such passages describe the presence of the otherworld, which for the Nenets can only be sensed – besides in dreams – through hearing, whether in the form of all sorts of random sounds or as a human voice and narration.

(5.i) syidya syiw
nun' xasya
wiwryudu"
towanontu"
ŋamtyusyemyi"
myadn' syin
tyintu" xamuwontu"
(Lehtisalo 1947: 477a.)

(ii) yisyadarka
nun' nyumyi'
mokadanta
yamparyin
wirkadoda
xamawonta,
syimzipanta
paxalyina.
(Lehtisalo 1947: 493a–b.)

- (i) Two times seven
heavenly youngsters
rustling
can be heard to arrive
to my sitting place
in the back of the tent
can be heard to settle.
- (ii) my father
my heavenly son
[along] the middle pole of the tent
along,
to the base of the pole
can be heard to land,
to the *syimzi* pole's
base.

The use of the auditive mode and the whole idea that the presence of the otherworld is based on auditory evidence relates the shamanistic séance to the movement of *ηædalyo*- in an interesting way that has been beautifully described by Oksana Dobžanskaya (2008). The shamanistic ritual of the Nenets is based on, in addition to mythic and shamanistic images, the meaningful use of different kinds of sounds and melodies. The ritual itself is a heterophonic soundscape consisting of the shaman's singing, the repetitions and explanations of the shaman's ritual helper (the *teltan̄goda*), and the audience. The idea is to create a soundscape where different sounds, varying in both rhythm and pitch, form a continuous stretch of noise that carries the shaman on his journey. The sound, however, is an attribute of the movement at a more general, conceptual level. According to Dobžanskaya, this conception derives from the performative context of the personal songs called *syo*. These are intimate and short lyrical songs that a person him- or herself composes about his or her life. While these songs can be performed by others in a context where the subject of the song is not present, the stereotypical place of performance is the ride with a sledge, consequently, a *ηædalyowa*. The journey is the place for the performance of the *syo*, but because of their close relationship, the song has come to symbolise movement. The shamanic songs of the *ηædalyowa* can therefore be seen as the mythic counterpart to the personal *syo*, which both narrates and actualizes the unseen world and the shaman's adventures there on his or her journeys to distant places.

As these passages show, the movement of the shaman is quite concretely depicted in the *sampadabts*. It is more interesting to note – in the context of this article – that the whole ritual is imagined as a journey, and the overall scheme of the shamanistic séance is one of movement. This comes out in the beginning of *sampadaptses* when the shaman suggests that everyone depart on the journey with phrases such as *ηanyimpoi / xæxertsyenyiq!* ['Once more / let us depart!']. Moreover, this is also clear in the meta-discourses of the rituals that Toivo Lehtisalo briefly discussed in his report on the visit of Matvei Yadne, one of his informants, to Helsinki in 1928. According to Yadne, the one journey within the ritual, i.e. the one song in which the shaman depicts how s/he travels to and in the otherworld, who s/he meets there and what kind of discussions s/he has there, is conceptualized as a *ηædalyowa*.

The wandering protagonist of the epic songs, could be compared to the shaman initiate who is sent by his or her teachers to the otherworld to meet the spirit helpers s/he will work with in the future. The spirits might be benevolent or malevolent and the initiate is helped and guided by his or her teachers. The teachers, however, do not teach the initiate through the meta-discourse: the initiate learns through helping the instructing shaman in that shaman's séance and by performing séances him- or herself. Shamanistic powers and knowledge are gained through the practice of movement in the otherworld that is potentially dangerous for those who do not yet have the proper knowledge. The landscapes of the epics and the séances gain their symbolic power from each other and, moreover, they are based in parallel patterns of new empowering knowledge that can be acquired within the landscape of the other. What is more, the image of the lonely rider can be viewed in comparison to the reasons for a shamanistic séance. The *ηædalyoda* is an outsider who brings complication to the plot of epics and creates problems that have to be resolved; he represents that which is outside of the community. In the same way, the shamanistic séance is based on the assumption that the problem to be solved is coming from outside of the community, from the otherworld. The problem is solved

by taking a journey in otherworldly topographies. The parallels between the epic and shamanistic journeys are then further built around the image of the danger being outside the community, threatening its wellbeing.

While the shamanistic *séance* clearly links the otherworld through the aural evidence that actualizes it, the epic singing is also based in the notion of indirect evidence. The teller of Nenets epics is the *wada-syudbabts* ['Word-syudbabts'], a personified word or narrative. This character appears in the narration carrying it ahead, opening up new scenes and giving power to the heroes. The performance of epic, then, is an event where both the listeners and the singer himself are listening to the events that the *wada-syudbabts* brings about. Informants interviewed by Jarkko Niemi have stated that the personified word is the main actor of the performance. (Niemi 1998: 57.) Hence, the song, the text of an epic, is mediated knowledge, and this is paralleled in the meta-discourse: the singer does not allege to have seen the otherworld s/he is singing about, but s/he does allege that s/he is repeating what the *wada-syudbabts* is telling. (Puškaryova 2003b, 188.) This further connects the epics with shamanism and the notion of an otherworldly being known only through aural evidence.

The Ride: Movement, Sound, and Knowledge

This review has looked at the symbolic means that Nenets oral poetry uses in describing the otherworldly journeys in epic and shamanistic ritual poetry, with concentration on two deverbal nouns derived from the verb *ηædalyo-*: *ηædalyoda* denoting the (lone) rider, and *ηædalyowa* denoting the distance or place of a lonely ride that one can take on the tundra. As indicated, both of the nouns gain their meaning from the everyday activities of the nomadic Nenets, for whom a lonely ride in the tundra is a possibility if one has proper knowledge about that physical and mythic environment. The lonely ride is also the place for the performance and composition of the personal songs that should not be performed publicly by the individual who composes them, nor by outsiders if that person is present. Nevertheless, the verb *ηædalyo-* and

the nouns derived from it receive their central symbolic power in poetic contexts that make use of the everyday as a frame of reference, but rely on the mythic images of the tundra and knowledge attached to the tundra and journeys taken there.

The mythic knowledge of the Nenets circulates, among other forms, in epic and shamanistic poetry, and in their performance contexts. This knowledge is poetically structured and, though performed publicly, not performable for everyone in the community. The poems transmit an image of mythic knowledge that is gained through travels that take the heroes to unknown lands and people or characters who transform their status. This is based on the dichotomy between the tundra and the camp as different social and religious landscapes: the tundra as a landscape for transformative and mythic knowledge, the camp as a site for memory that is circulated within the community. In Nenets mythology, the lonely rider, *ηædalyoda*, arriving at the camp brings this transformative, potentially dangerous element into the community and sets the story in motion either in the beginning of the poem or in the middle, when complication is needed.

Because the shamanistic *séance* is conceptualized as a *ηædalyowa*, a lonely ride, it receives mythic meanings from the above-mentioned whole. The journey takes place in the ritual space, which is the conical tent, but also in the poetic space that the shaman builds up through his singing. In the *sampadabts*, the journey is depicted as a very concrete one. This concreteness is communally created in the heterophonic singing and noise that carries the shaman, but consequently the whole ritual community, to the otherworld and back, ideally with answers and advice gained during the journey.

These journeys are all based on sound. The otherworld and the journeys to and in the otherworld are known through aural evidence only. These sounds are needed both for shamanic travel and for the depiction of heroic tales about the journeys of Nenets mythic figures. As the lonely rider is the one who often sings his or her own personal song, the link between travel and sound is also

important in Nenets conceptions of sound and knowledge.

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CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Austmarr IV: The Plurality of Religions and Religious Change Around the Baltic Sea, 500–1300: Methodological Challenges for Multidisciplinary Data

4th–5th December 2014, Sundsvall, Sweden

Kimberly La Palm, University of California, Los Angeles

The Austmarr Network held their fourth symposium on 4th–5th December 2014 at Mid-Sweden University in Sundsvall. The topic of this meeting was religious change in the Baltic region between 500–1300, with a particular focus on the methodological challenges of working with multidisciplinary data. Presenters from folklore, literature, archeology, and history of religions among others covered topics as distinct as burial practices in Norway, the intersection of legends from medieval Iceland and Poland and the cognitive analysis of magic narratives, which facilitated lively discussion. The meeting was particularly well planned as regards the schedule, offering the participants the invaluable opportunity to discuss with colleagues across multiple fields, reinforcing the theme of supporting interdisciplinarity within the humanities.

Frog (University of Helsinki) opened the meeting with a talk entitled “Mythology as a Symbolic Matrix: Approaching Contacts and Variation in the Austmarr Arena”. He suggested a revised methodology for the analysis of prehistoric mythologies of regions bearing the influence of multiple cultures. This method looks at mythology as a matrix, being experienced and interpreted differently by individual cultures and communities. As an example case, Frog addressed the ‘claw paw rite’ in Viking Age Åland, noting the Finnic and Germanic influences on the islands. Klas af Edholm (Stockholm University) sought to bridge the gap between literary historians and historians of literature with a discussion of Týr as literary figure and deity. His talk, “A Comparative and Critical Analysis of the God Týr”, considered the various interpretations of Týr put forth by

scholars over the last one hundred years. He offered an analysis of these theories using both literary and historical evidence. Kendra Willson (University of Tartu) presented a project she is co-authoring with Karen Sullivan (University of Queensland) titled “Conceptual Metaphors in *seiðr* Magic”. Willson’s work focuses on the Icelandic literary sources, while Sullivan works with the cognitive metaphor theory. For this meeting, Willson presented the integration of their work through a discussion of *seiðr* and cognitive metaphor.

After lunch, the participants were treated to “‘The Past is a Foreign Country’: A Postcolonial Perspective on the Study of Religious Change” by keynote speaker Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide (Bergen). Dr. Nordeide’s archeological work considers evidence of the Christianization of Norway by looking at pre-Christian and early Christian burial sites. She suggests that, contrary to written sources, which reflect the bias of their post-conversion authors, the archeological evidence suggests that conversion was gradual and localized, with individual communities changing their ritual practices independently. Maths Bertell (Mid-Sweden University), the host and organizer of the meeting, presented “A Carrot or a Whip? A Comparative Perspective on Conversion.” Dr. Bertell’s paper focused on the conversion of the Sámi in the 17th and 18th centuries as a comparative tool with which to address questions about the conversion of the Nordic peoples to Christianity some seven hundred years earlier. His discussion of indigenous religions as localized when compared to missionary religions which tend to have a central organizational body pointed

back to the work presented by Dr. Nordeide and Frog earlier in the day.

The final paper of the day was presented by Leszek Slupecki (Universities of Rzeszów and Warsaw). His paper “Golem and Mökkurkalfi” explored the similarities and differences between Old Norse stories of insentient figures animated through magic with the golem figure from Jewish folklore. In particular he discussed the similarities between Snorri’s Mökkurkalfi and the golem of Prague, both of whom served as bodyguard/sidekicks to their human counterpart.

The second day began with a guided visit to the Sundsvalls Museum and their exhibit featuring the archeological finds from the excavation of four Iron Age burial mounds at Högom. The excavations, which took place between 1949 and 1960, unearthed some of the most extensive collections of Iron Age objects in Sweden. After their return to the symposium site (and a brief *fika*), Mart Kuldkepp (University of Tartu) presented on “Genre, Textualization and Religious Change in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature”. Dr. Kuldkepp’s work focused on conversion narratives in the Old Norse sources with an eye to the transformation of the narrative in the move from oral tradition to written description. By looking at the texts as the interaction of two belief systems, he offered a theory of these narratives as an attempt by the authors to reconcile differing concepts of religion.

Daniel Sävborg (University of Tartu) spoke on “The Pagan Resistance in 11th Century Sweden”. He addressed the recent debate over the existence of the Swedish King Blotsven, asserting that the evidence in favor of such a rebellion outweighs arguments against. His paper explored connections between Icelandic sources that tell of an 11th century pagan rebellion, and Swedish, Icelandic and international contemporary

sources regarding the Christianization of Sweden.

The final session of the symposium included papers by Kimberly La Palm (UCLA) and Sirpa Aalto (University of Oulu). La Palm’s paper, titled “‘De uno peccatore qui promerit gratium’ and the International Nature of Late Medieval Religious Drama”, presented her ongoing dissertation research on the medieval performance tradition in Scandinavia, focusing specifically on the oldest surviving vernacular play from Scandinavia and the work that has been done with it to date. Her project seeks to expand the discussion of the early performance tradition in Scandinavia. Aalto’s paper “Imagined, constructed, or real borders? Textual evidence of Scandinavian-Sámi contacts in the Middle Ages” looked at medieval documents regarding Scandinavian-Sámi interactions alongside archeological evidence of the same. The paper specifically looked at the evidence of extensive interactions between Norwegians and the Sámi during this early period, positing that borders were established to keep the Christian community from interacting with non-Christians who were believed to participate in supernatural practices. Earlier evidence shows seemingly regular interactions between pagan Norwegians and the Sámi.

This fourth meeting of the Austmarr Network was a productive and enjoyable event. It provided an excellent opportunity for networking between scholars from across Europe and North America while highlighting the possibilities available for present and future collaborative work. Special thanks should be given to Maths Bertell and the Department of Humanities at Mid-Sweden University who did a splendid job organizing this meeting and introducing all of the attendees to *Norrlands huvudstad*. The next meeting of the Austmarr Network will be in Visby on 15th–16th October 2015.

Interdisciplinary Student Symposium on Viking and Medieval Scandinavian Subjects

19th–20th March 2015, Aarhus, Denmark

Seán D. Vrieland, University of Copenhagen

The Interdisciplinary Student Symposium on Viking and Medieval Scandinavian Subjects has come a long way since it first started, as eight students from Aarhus University. Bergdís Prastardóttir, the founder and organizer of the symposium's first four years, recalls that in the first year, "We had to twist our classmates' arms just to get them to come and talk about something." Now in its eighth consecutive year, the symposium has grown into a two-day event with 24 speakers from eleven universities in six different countries. Eighteen MA students and six PhD students presented on subjects relating to Old Norse literature, society, language, religion, and material culture, divided among eight themed sessions over the two days. Programs for this and previous years' events can be found on the website vikingoldnorse.au.dk.

The symposium began Thursday morning with an opening by Sophie Bønding, chair of this year's organizing committee. She heartily welcomed over 100 students from eleven different countries and reminded them of the symposium's purpose: to be a place where students can have a friendly, professional environment to share their ideas, ask questions, learn from each other, and gain experience in the art of research presentation.

The opening session bore the theme "Old Norse Poetry", beginning with Hannah R.F. Hethmon's (University of Iceland) comparison of Óðinn's trickery in posing neck-riddles to Vafþrúðnir and Heiðrekr. This was followed by two colorful lectures: Bob Oscar Benjamin van Strijen (University of Iceland) spoke on the tripartite color division black-white-red in connection with social class and myth in both Old Norse poetry and around the world. Claire Organ (University of Aberdeen) brought the session full-circle with her discussion of the symbolic use of red-gold rings, wolf hair, and otter skins in foretelling death.

Shifting focus in the second session to "Runes and Monuments", Giacomo Bernobi (Ludwig-Maximilians University Munich) presented on runic revival in the 11th–15th

centuries and the influence of manuscript tradition in runic graffiti. Roberto Pagani (University of Iceland) followed by debunking the concept that individual runes inherently bore magical properties, taking instead the sensible approach that the writing system was used as a tool in casting spells. Jonas Koesling (University of Bergen) reeled in the session with an exploration of saga scenes such as the fishing for the *Miðgarðsormr* and broader literary tropes as depicted on the Gotland picture stones.

After a sociable lunch, the session "Social Issues in Saga Literature" opened with Elizabeth Skuthorpe's (University of Iceland) conviction of outlaws as superhuman or monstrous beings crossing in and out of society. This discussion transitioned smoothly to Alexander J. Wilson's (Durham University) presentation on the use of monstrous language in the propagandist telling of *Sverris saga*. Jennifer Hurd (University of Oxford) kept the session turning with her discussion on the subversive twisting of a maiden-king tale and the roles of women in *Nítíða saga*. Christine Amling (Goethe University Frankfurt am Main) concluded the session with a comparison of two politically charged hagiographies of local Germanic heroes, St. Edmund and St. Óláfr.

The final session of the day was a lively pair of presentations on the theme "Dealing with (Dead) Bodies". Rebecca Conway (University of Iceland) opened by introducing the motif of wooden legs and its relevance to material culture and the technology of embodiment. William Biel (University of Oslo) wrapped up the day right in time with another motif: barrow-breaking as a chronotope separating the (often pagan) 'then' from 'now'.

Moving forward in time, the second morning opened with the theme "Reception History". Vanessa Iacocca (University of Iceland) started the day by comparing the use of ancient mythology in building national identity by Icelandic and Irish poets. Minjie Su (University of Iceland) followed by

portraying the poet and painter William Morris' use of color in illustrating *Sigurd the Volsung* as a hero. The session ended with Capucine André (University of Iceland) presenting on how Nordic characters are depicted in the newest generation of Franco-Belgian comics (*bandes dessinées*).

The following session went further afield with the topic "Peripheral Beings in Old Norse Literature". Jonathan Correa (University of Iceland) began with a treatment of the *berserkr*-drive in the Old Norse world and among Vietnam-Era veterans. Shirley McPhaul (University of Iceland) followed by posing the question of why Brynhildr takes on multiple forms in *Volsunga saga* and whether she could be considered the tragic hero rather than the antagonist. Judith-Sarah Berger (Kiel University) closed by tracking down the elusive nature of the *dísir* in Old Norse literature and the cult practices described in the historical record.

The scholarship continued after lunch with the topic "Manuscripts and Learned Culture", opened by Mathias Blobel's (University of Iceland) use of network-analysis tools on manuscripts and a case study of the so-called 'political sagas'. Seán D. Vrieland (University of Copenhagen) followed with a study of a single Old Gutnish manuscript and the scribal and linguistic influence of Danish on the text.

Li Tang (University of Iceland) added to the session with a discussion of pagan and Christian number symbolism and their use in *Knýtlinga saga*. Bethany Rogers (University of Iceland) concluded the session with a lecture on the importance of emotional investment in the teacher-student relationship in Old Norse fosterage and Ancient Sparta.

The second day concluded with the down-to-earth session "Landscape Studies". Ryan Foster (University of Edinburgh) showed the geographical distribution of *-setr/-sætr* and *-ærgi* place-names in the Scottish Hebrides, with considerations of Norse farming practice. Finally, Johanna Nowotnick (University of Iceland) wrapped up the unforgettable symposium by examining associations with natural phenomena as an aid to the survival of myth in cultural memory.

Bergdís Þrastardóttir closed the two-day event by giving a few words on why such a platform for students to share their ideas is still needed, evident by the impressive turnout of students from all over. We can only look forward to how the International Student Symposium on Viking and Medieval Scandinavian Subjects will continue to be a place that attracts students and their ideas for many years to come. Or, to use her words: "Keep up the good work, and I can't wait to see where this madness ends."

Public Engagement with Research: A Viking TeaBreak

Lisa Turberfield, Claire Organ and Blake Middleton, University of Aberdeen

In 2013, the University of Aberdeen launched its inaugural May Festival with over 7,500 people attending 100 events across the Northeast of Scotland. As part of this festival, PhD candidates Claire Organ and Lisa Turberfield of the Centre for Scandinavian Studies organised a new public engagement event called the Viking TeaBreak (VTB).

The purpose of the VTB was to stimulate interest and encourage discussion regarding the research taking place at the Centre of Scandinavian Studies. This was the first public event organised by the Centre and as such we were keen to engage the public as much as possible. To accomplish this, the VTB was made a free of charge event and letters were sent to schools in Aberdeen City

and Shire offering mini-Viking TeaBreaks prior to the festival, which turned out to be very popular with teachers and pupils alike. Upon its launch, our event was fully booked within a few days and an extension on the number of tickets was required. On the day of the VTB, the public came out in force, filling the large room to the very last seat.

The idea of VTB was to give the public insight and access into current Scandinavian studies research as well as raising the department's profile. Unfortunately, academics within university settings can appear to the general public as stiff, unapproachable and even scary. With this in mind, we chose to conduct the event as an informal 'Tea Break' with scholars using a speed dating model.

After an initial welcome and introduction, PhD students rotated between tables every 15 minutes, discussing their theses with guests over a cup of tea and some cake. Whenever a participant wanted, they could join another table, look at the poster boards or view the Cantasia (narrated slideshow) presentation. A special crafting corner at the back of the room was set up for the children, where they could build Viking ships, write their name in runes, or listen to stories while volunteers cut out shields and swords for them to take home. We also included two competitions during our event – ‘Best Dressed Viking’ and ‘Best Question’ – several children dressed up for this and we had numerous entries for the question competition including, *How many Vikings does it take to change a light bulb?* and, *Did Vikings wear underwear?*

To make our first event run smoothly we worked closely with the University’s Researcher Development and Public Engagement with Research units, to produce a review of the running, organisation and outcome of our event. We also had the event evaluated through audience feedback forms and a detailed report from an assigned (neutral) observer. The reviews showed that our guests welcomed the different approach, as the VTB ‘was a far cry from a formal seminar or lecture’. The VTB was also highly commended for ‘exceptional achievements in public engagement’ by the judges of the Principal’s Prize for Public Engagement with Research 2013 and is now used as one of the case studies on the University’s Public Engagement with Research website.

Due to the popularity and success of the event, we gained the opportunity to host a second VTB in 2014 and decided to expand the event by offering an additional three days of primary school events under the rebranded *Vikingling Thing* name. The Vikingling Thing gave us the opportunity to specifically target our ‘research presentation’ towards a younger audience. We achieved this by bringing historical studies to life using a fun, hands-on

approach; ship building, writing secret messages in runes and discussing daily activities of the Vikings, encouraging the children to ask questions and thus stimulating an interest in the Vikings and history in general. The highlight of the day was the story-telling by the Centre’s own version of the god Thor (Blake Middleton) who, dressed in Viking clothing and with a replica of Thor’s hammer (Mjölnir), began telling myths in Old Norse and English. Following the conclusion of the May Festival 2014 the Vikingling Thing went ‘on the road’, visiting an additional two primary schools with students who could not attend the University event itself. The feedback from the schools showed that the children (and teachers) enjoyed the alternative approach to learning, whilst developing an interest in history and a better understanding of its relation to their own world. In 2015 after another successful application to the May festival, we further extended our Vikingling Thing event to accommodate even more groups of children and named it *The Viking Teabreak Returns*. All sessions were immediately booked out and we were asked to hold an additional event at another school, which had failed to secure a space. All the events were a great success, both with the children and with the PhD students.

The University’s May Festival gave us great opportunities to work within a large public event, whilst organising and running our own individual events (VTB and the Vikingling Thing). The process benefitted all the PhD students involved, as we were encouraged to view our research from an alternative point of view, whilst developing our organisation and presentation skills in order to make our work accessible to our target audience(s). In addition, we formed ongoing partnerships with the schools involved and our visibility as individual scholars increased, not only within our own department, but within the University itself.

DISSERTATIONS AND THESES

PhD Projects

Myth in Translation: The Ludic Imagination in Contemporary Video Games (working title)

Robert Guyker, Jr., Pacifica Graduate Institute

Research project undertaken for the completion of a degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Mythological Studies at Pacifica Graduate Institute (US); scheduled for submission in late 2015.

Supervisor: Laura Grillo (Pacifica Graduate Institute).

This doctoral dissertation investigates the adaptation and creative use of mythological themes, narratives and motifs in video games. The main body of source material for my case studies consists of contemporary video games produced within the last two decades alongside culturally significant and historical antecedents ranging back to the earliest computer games developed in academic labs of the 1960s, and domestic computer games and home consoles of the 1980s through the late 1990s. The sources present explicit engagement with culturally derived sacred traditions of Eurasia in general with emphasis on Greco-Roman antiquity, Japanese folk religion, tales and national mythologies, and Ancient Near East religions. Recognizable allusions to the Norse Eddas, Celtic legendry and Arthuriana offer auxiliary discourse on the reception and transmission of imagined Viking lore, Romanticism and neo-Medievalism (Stern 2002). Modern poetic and artful conceptions of myth will also be considered through the creative traditions of mythopoeic literature as they relate to the distinct branches of modern high fantasy, and speculative and science fiction media. To this extent, referents and significations are built on, or defined by, either cultural sources of myth or poetic inventions of in-game lore.

Based in both a theoretical framework and pragmatic methodology, this study develops a media-conscious perspective on mythic discourse, intertextuality, performance and personal narrative as they converge in the video game medium through process and product. Problematics in both myth and game are addressed in three avenues:

- Text: On the textual plane, I follow the protocol of analyzing *mythic texts* (Lincoln 1999: 150–151; Doty 2000: 466–467), in relation to *ergodic literature* and *cybertext* (Aarseth 1997; Eskelinen 2012).
- Participation: Knowingly or unknowingly, the consumer of myth and the player of a game retain traits of active participation in the ideology of the myth and the rules of the game, though both can be subverted and overturned internally for purposes of ludic interpretation and configuration. Here the *mythos* is transmuted into a semi-ritualized space of play, action and the non-verbal.
- (Other)Worldliness: Aspects made natural to gameworlds and myths are the generation of mental worlds. Here, I build on Jesper Juul's liminal positionality of video games between fictional worlds and real rules (2005).

Theory and Method

In theory and method I emphasize a polysemic and polyfunctional perspective on the study of myth and game studies. Overly deterministic and monistic theories are situated beside multivocality and multi-authorship (Doniger 1998: 84–88). In this way, my case studies analyze various subtypes of myths (e.g. theogonic, cosmogonic, theomachy, heroic, etc.) as they migrate and become re-contextualized in various genres of games like real-time strategy, computer role-playing games, and massively multiplayer online role-playing games. By assembling and focusing comparanda, I give attention to the distinct voices and modes of mediation case-by-case, *pace* wide-ranging ('strong') comparison of Claude-Lévi Strauss, Mircea

Eliade, and C.G. Jung—in favor of a ‘weaker’ kind of close comparison as proposed by scholar and critic Bruce Lincoln (2012: 122–123). As such, mythic structures used in the assemblage of gameworlds are considered in relation to smaller etic units of international motifs and tale types. And finally, sets of emic units are to be assembled for case studies involving idiosyncratic ecologies of video game culture and specific video game communities that engage in online interaction in persistent worlds. Thus, in conjunction with a textualist perspective, I will include personal narratives from players and designers.

My thesis has the aim to address and discuss the following overarching issues of cross-cultural influences and exchanges in commercial, material, visual and ludic culture:

- Translatability, as developed by Jakobsonian semiotics and linguistic translation, while extending to the broader application of *cultural translation* (Smith 2004)
- Syncretism as a mechanism and as a system of amalgamation and appropriation of foreign deities
- *Mythogenesis* and *mythopoeisis*
- The natural genesis of pantheons *vis-à-vis* poetical pantheons of artifice or exogenous contact

Concluding remarks

Basic to my approach is the notion that myth can take on ‘weaker’ and ‘transmuted forms’:

Myth can be transmitted either in its immediate shape, sacred narrative anchored in theology and interlaced with liturgy and ritual, or in transmuted form, as past narrative that has severed its ties to sacred time and instead functions as an account of purportedly secular, albeit extraordinary happening. (Puhvel 1987: 39.)

As a remediated model of interactivity, video games inflect the reality-claims of these culturally based transmuted myths, mobilizing them through conscious-consumerism, rather than naturalized Barthesian ‘myth consumers’ (Krzywinska 2008: 126; cf. Barthes 2012 [1957]: 240, 272). The situation remains ambiguous between production and consumption on the one hand, and valuation and signification on the other. The gameworld assimilates the

transmuted form of myth and localizes it in a world of extraordinary deeds, mythmakers, and culture heroes of fictional worlds.

The central premise of my thesis is the coterminous development through history of the cultural categories of myth and game as they are presented in contemporary video games. As activities of leisure, nascent subjects of research, tools of business strategy (e.g. gamification in marketing mythologies), and scapegoats in popular discourse (i.e. myth as true/false and game as a productive/wasteful use of time), I argue that myths and games are generative interlocutors at play and in competition.

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Pre-Christian Sources on Odin: The Significance of Text and Iconographic Evidence as well as Archaeological Finds (4th–11th Centuries AD) (working title)

Tom Hellers, University of Bergen

A PhD research project affiliated with the Research Group in Medieval Philology, University of Bergen.

Supervisors: Jens Eike Schnall (University of Bergen), Alexandra Pesch (Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology, Schleswig).

In Old Norse literature, the Germanic god Odin is depicted as a complex divinity that has many different social, religious and mythological functions: the Allfather, god of runes and poetry, god of magic and ecstasy, god of war and the dead, the forefather of royal dynasties and so forth. The age of these conceptions, their expansion and evolution still remains an open question and the subject of controversial discussions among researchers.

Scholarly interest in the historical background of written sources has in recent studies led to a stimulating debate on Odin and his age (most recently Lassen 2011; Liberman 2011; cf. also Hultgård 2007: 776–782). Archaeological findings such as the recently discovered figurine from Lejre, Denmark, which might depict Odin (Christensen 2009; 2010; Ellingsgaard 2010), raise new questions and one can discuss to what extent the contents of much younger written sources can be transferred to the findings and thus what new conclusions about the social and religious conditions of earlier centuries can be made. In my PhD project I will investigate the miscellaneous conceptions about Odin in synchronic and diachronic perspective. By using an interdisciplinary approach, I will analyze how Odin has been depicted, to what degree it is possible to verify his complex in older sources that date from before the High Middle Ages, and which functions he had at which time.

The State of Research

Odin is regularly the subject of investigations (lately Price 2015). Scholars have been most occupied with Odin's character, cult and origin and have interpreted the god in various ways. A few attempts have been made so far to interpret Odin in his entirety (e.g. Steinsland 2005: 165–194; Bödl 2013: 142–187). More often, specific aspects, functions and characteristics have been illuminated,

which can lead to a one-sided and thus distorted representation of the god. This can, for example, be observed in the most recent monographs on Odin. Kershaw (2000) focuses on Odin's function as a god of war and the dead. Based on Höfler (1934), she interprets him primarily as a god of the Indo-Germanic *Männerbünde*. This was criticized due to her rather non-critical use of sources, and consequently conclusions, that are difficult to verify (cf. Hultgård 2007: 780; Lassen 2011: 67). Solli (2003) interprets Odin as a "queer god" for the reason that he practices *seiðr*, a form of magic that was mainly used by women. This assumption is based on an almost exclusively shamanistic interpretation of the sources, which was met with criticism (Behr 2011: 208ff.). Lassen takes a different approach by compiling all textual sources from the High Middle Ages dealing with Odin. She argues that Odin's complexity and the different functions ascribed to him result from the intention, genre and literary context of the text. She therefore assumes that Odin can be seen as a literary figure that can be changed and adapted as needed. Thus, the medieval textual sources can not be used for investigations in the field of history of religions (Lassen 2011: 81, 391). This approach has been fast criticized (Heide, 2012: 193–198).

In these three monographs, Odin's complexity is either rejected or the god's significance is reduced to one single function by prioritizing a certain category of sources and at the same time omitting others. The selection of sources varies depending on the researcher's academic background and according to the purpose of their investigation.

Research Questions and Objectives

Until now it has been difficult to verify Odin in older sources dating back to the time before the detailed texts from the High Middle Ages.

There exist only a few reliable sources related to Odin among older sources, i.e. sources that undoubtedly mention him. These are exclusively written sources. In contrast, there are far more dubious sources, i.e. sources which to varying degrees are attributed to Odin in the literature, including figural depictions, word traditions, place names and archaeological finds. Many scholars when interpreting these sources try to compensate for the lack of contemporary material through the much younger Old Norse Literature and Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*. Others limit their research by excluding some of the source categories. Thus, uncertain sources have been interpreted rather uncritically as a source for an Odin cult. In my research, I shall, on the one hand, use a method that is adapted to the special source situation around Odin and that, on the other hand includes, all sources categories and sources (see "Approach and Method" below).

I shall investigate three main questions:

1. Are there non-written sources that can with (greater) reliability be considered to be connected with Odin?
2. How is Odin depicted in older sources from the 4th to the 11th century AD and how is Odin's complexity manifested and changed over this period?
3. How are the conceptions about Odin and the Odin cult from older sources related to the depiction and complexity of Odin in younger sources?

The investigation of these questions demands a broad knowledge about the conceptions of Odin in heathen times. Therefore I shall assemble a corpus of all the older sources related to Odin and thereafter evaluate the significance of every single source. Furthermore I shall map the *reliable* sources, summarize them statistically in a register and discuss the changes of the Odin conceptions over the centuries.

Sources and Corpus

The sources can be divided into two main groups by their age: older sources from the 4th to the 11th century and younger sources from the High Middle Ages. The older ones consist of literary, archaeological and iconographic sources, as well as theophoric personal and

place names. The older sources include, among others, texts from late antique and early medieval authors such as The Venerable Bede, Germanic weekday names, runic inscriptions, archaeological finds, some pictorial sources like the Gotlandic picture stones, pictorial runestones, gold bracteates, coins, press plates and small figurines. Only sources dating from the 4th century on will be considered, because in this period we have occurring for the first time several sources which are assumed to be related to Odin. The younger, High Medieval sources are solely textual sources. They incorporate such miscellaneous source genres and works such as the *Poetic Edda*, *Snorra-Edda*, skaldic poetry, saga literature, Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* and Odin's numerous names, which are scattered across different genres. It is especially the older skaldic poetry, parts of the *Poetic Edda* and Odin's names that at least in part can be traced back to heathen times.

The corpus will contain all older sources that up until now have been discussed as being related to Odin. Previous source catalogues contain, beside the text sources, usually just a few uncertain, i.e. iconographic, archaeological and runic sources. Non-literary sources are usually interpreted as lone sources in conjunction with older reliable text sources and with sources from Old Norse Literature, including Saxo Grammaticus (e.g. Turville-Petre 1964; de Vries 1970; Simek 2003; Steinsland 2005; Bödl 2013). A comprehensive corpus considering both older reliable *and* unreliable sources does however not yet exist. Such a corpus is a desirable and necessary tool to collect, make precise and interpret our knowledge about Odin.

Approach and Method

In addition to the development of a method, the study consists of three parts: the composition of a corpus of sources; evaluation of the sources' significance; the answering of the three main questions.

The depiction of Odin in younger sources was recently presented by Lassen (2011), so in that case I can refer to her work. In particular cases, I will quote the original sources. Odin's numerous and highly symbolic names were published by Falk (2005, 1st ed.

1924). With the aid of these publications, I will clarify the main features (functions, characteristics, myths) of the god in the younger sources, and use them as a starting point for the evaluation of the conceptions related to Odin in older sources.

In recent years, research has introduced several complementary methodological approaches for an interdisciplinary interpretation of the sources. Nevertheless, no comprehensive and commonly accepted method yet exists with which to verify Odin in older, non-written sources. For this reason, I will select and combine methods used so far in scholarship, and, thereafter, advance them. Such an adapted method will allow me to relate some of the sources to Odin with higher reliability and to exclude others. Furthermore, great importance will be attached to the inclusion of all source categories, i.e. texts, images, language and word traditions, archaeological finds and theophoric name material.

Research methods used to analyze gold bracteates combines, amongst others, archaeological, iconographic and runological methods and can be seen as a methodological prototype in this context. This research has succeeded in coming forward with comprehensible interpretations of many pictorial elements and inscriptions and, thus has managed to set the bracteates in a supra-regional social and religious context, in which the Odin cult apparently played an important role (firstly done by Hauck 1954a; 1954b; 1980a; 1980b; then based on Hauck e.g. Pesch 2007; 2011; 2012; Beck 2011; Behr 2011; Düwel & Nowak 2011; Hauck 2011a; 2011b; Heizmann 2011; 2012; Müller 2011). I will interpret the gold bracteates using this method and in addition try to transfer and adapt it to other sources that contain inscriptions and/or pictures (e.g. rune stones with pictures). Helmbrecht (2011) and Pesch (2007; 2012) work with a method for religious interpretations of pictorial sources, which is based on Panofsky's art historical theories (1932; 1955). According to this method, pictures are interpreted in three levels: pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis, iconological interpretation. I will interpret archaeological sources using

Ellmers' method (1992). He defines criteria to interpret finds as "Germanic" and as "religious" and uses runic inscriptions as a link between archaeological sources from the Iron Age and text sources from High Middle Ages. Regarding possibilities and limits of using Old Norse Literature, I will follow Beck (1992; 1994; 2007) and the works that are based on and enhance his research (Schjødt 2009; Krümpel 2013; van Nahl 2013; Sundqvist 2013). These scholars evaluate the source's value of the different texts by examining their literary context, the author's methods and purposes and the cultural environment in which the texts were written down. The same applies to Polomé (1992) and Timpe (1992), who use a similar approach for antique sources. The rich material of theophoric names has been treated several times and analyzed in relation to methodological problems (e.g. Hald 1963; Andersson 1992; 2005; Reichert 1992; Vikstrand 2002). They introduce a method whereby theophoric names are used as sources for the history of religion by determining the age of the names, placing them into a cultural landscape, incorporating other religious and cultic sources from the closer and more distant surrounding environment and by interpreting the names linguistically and onomastically. With a starting point in these works and methods, it will be possible for me to analyze the significance of the sources and to re-evaluate their relevance. In this way I will be able to present a reliable collection of older written and non-written sources related to Odin, which at the same time will provide the answer to the question of whether there are indeed older, non-written sources that can be related to Odin with (greater) reliability than previously possible (main question (1)).

On the basis of the results from the first main question, I will examine how Odin is depicted in the sources from the 4th to the 11th century and how Odin's complexity is displayed and changes during this period (main question (2)). According to how broad the reliable source material is, various questions may be discussed: Is it possible to detect miscellaneous conceptions of Odin? Which functions can be defined? What is the

interrelationship between the miscellaneous conceptions and functions? Could one here speak about competitive concepts related to Odin from different regions and/or periods, which are related to different functions? If this is the case, how can this development and the interaction between the competitive concepts be illustrated? Is it possible that the different conceptions are manifested in, for example, ritual acts? Are there regions with several sources related to Odin and others where the god cannot be verified? Is it perhaps even possible to concretize the expansion of the Odin cult from the 4th century onwards?

Finally, I shall analyze the relation between conceptions about Odin in older sources and depictions of the god and his complexity in younger sources (main question (3)). This concerns similarities and differences between the older and the younger tradition, as well as any impact that could have affected the older conceptions related to Odin over the centuries. I shall take account of possible external impacts, such as emigrations, cultural contacts and the expansion of Christianity. The consequences of such external impacts, if existing, will be investigated further. Has Odin undergone a significant change of meaning in different regions over a longer period? What kind of understanding can be obtained from such new knowledge in matters of Odin's position, especially in relation to the other Germanic gods?

My research shall contribute to a more complete understanding of the enigmatic figure Odin on the basis of an evaluated source corpus and facilitate future studies.

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Porous Bodies, Porous Minds: Emotions and the Supernatural in the *Íslendingasögur* (ca. 1200–1400)

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Thesis defended for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Turku, Finland, School of History, Culture and Arts Studies (Cultural history) on 31st January 2015.

Supervisors: Professor Hannu Salmi (University of Turku), Professor Marjo Kaartinen (University of Turku) and Adjunct Professor (Docent) Anu Lahtinen (University of Turku).

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This study concentrates on the conceptions and representation of emotions in medieval 13th- and 14th-century Iceland. The main sources employed in the study consist of *Íslendingasögur* that are analyzed inter-textually. The study contributes to earlier research done on saga emotions where the emphasis has been on their somatic representation, and particular focus has been placed on individual emotions such as love, sorrow, anger, empathy and shame (e.g. Miller 1992; 1993; Le Goff 1992; Wolf 2000; 2013; 2014; Larrington 2001; Sävborg 2007; Ármann Jakobsson 2008). In this study, however, two new perspectives are undertaken. Firstly, the emphasis is on possible alternative emotion discourses that may have existed in literature in addition to the usual manner of representation in dialogue, poetry or in somatic changes. Secondly, the study explores the preliminary outlines for a medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotions: what emotions were thought to be, what they originated from, and how they operated. Consequently, the emphasis is also on the cultural thinking models of emotion that existed in the Christianized but peripheral medieval Icelandic culture, in whose context the emotions were both experienced and represented. The thesis consists of five articles and a 181-page introduction that discusses and synthesizes the results.

Ógæfa [‘Misfortune’]

The article “*Ógæfa* (Misfortune) as an Emotion in Thirteenth-Century Iceland” (Kanerva 2012) analyses the concept of *ógæfa* and its connotations and meanings, and the essence of the experience of *ógæfa* in 13th-century Icelandic culture. This is done, firstly, by analysing the use of the word and its derivatives in sagas to examine its

connotations. Secondly, following the example of William Ian Miller (1992; 1993), the concept is analysed by studying the motivation behind the behaviour of the *ógæfumenn* [‘men of misfortune’] and how the emotional experience inherent in *ógæfa* was represented in the *Íslendingasögur*, with a special focus on *Brennu-Njáls saga* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. It is suggested that, like emotions, *ógæfa* was considered a phenomenon that could be perceived in somatic changes of the body and in a person’s physical appearance. It is argued that *ógæfa* did not refer merely to a state of affairs but had emotional connotations as well. *Ógæfa* was used to represent the inner struggles and feelings of guilt in literature in a culture that did not yet have a word for this kind of affective state, but which can nevertheless be characterized as a ‘culture of gratitude’, often held as the predecessor of cultures of guilt in cultures whose relations were based on principles of reciprocity. Thus, in spite of the lack of the word ‘guilt’ representing an emotion in saga literature, guilt-like emotions were felt in medieval Iceland. *Ógæfa* was not synonymous with guilt, however, but also involved feelings of distress, anxiety and hopelessness as well as fear of the dark, and signified absence of approval and forgiveness or the lack of the blessing of one’s kin.

Eye Pain

The experience of guilt in medieval Iceland is further discussed in the article “Eye Pain as a Literary Motif in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century *Íslendingasögur*” (Kanerva 2013a), which discusses the episodes of eye pain that occur in *Fóstbraðra saga*, *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Bjarnar saga Hítðalakappa* and *Ljósvetninga saga*. The aim of this study is to examine the meanings given to the eye pain

motif in medieval Iceland by examining the texts intertextually and by using comparative material from different geographical areas and historical eras (see e.g. Heide 2009). In the article, it is discussed how eye pain in *Íslendingasögur* was an external punishment for social misdemeanour, often caused by a person skilled in magic or a supernatural agent. Moreover, the consequences of eye pain, such as the bursting out of the eyes, for which the verb *springa* [‘to burst’] is used, suggest that eye pain also had emotional connotations such as guilt, as *springa* is often employed to depict conditions associated with physical over-exertion or excessive emotions.

As a result, the article also proposes new outlines for medieval Icelandic conceptions of emotions, or the medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotion. According to medieval 13th and 14th-century Icelandic conceptions of emotion, emotions were construed as bodily experiences and processes. An emotion was regarded as movement of the *hugr*-mind, *hugarhræring* [‘emotion’; lit. ‘movement of *hugr* (mind)’] (and manifested, as shown earlier [Miller 1992; 1993; Larrington 2001], in somatic changes). Not only were relationships and communication with the living in one’s social environment expected to propel movements of the mind but the supernatural could also be involved: supernatural powers and beings could make the mind move. From a medieval Icelandic perspective, the body and the bodily mind were porous: supernatural forces could penetrate the boundaries of the body through the eyes, mouth and other body openings. Consequently, similar to the pre-industrial Finno-Karelian *body schema*¹ that guides ideas of illness, emotions and their causes,² the medieval Icelandic body schema was ‘open’ in that the body boundaries were regarded as “*opening up* to the external environment” (Stark 2006: 152, original emphasis). Various natural and supernatural forces could exert their influence on people by penetrating body boundaries through bodily orifices.³ Consequently, the boundaries of the body (e.g. skin, etc.) were not considered ‘closed’, but ‘open’, so that the individual was exposed and sensitive to external influences originating from the social

and physical environment. For instance, strong-willed people who had magical skills – such as smiths and other people with special skills, or witches – could affect other people’s minds and emotions and, consequently, also their psychophysical condition.

Consequently, as discussed in the article “Eye Pain as a Literary Motif”, the upspring and experience of guilt that was associated with the recognition of moral responsibility could be represented through eye pain that was inflicted upon the experiencer in dream by a strong-willed person or a supernatural being whom the experiencer had betrayed or insulted. The person suffering from eye pain could recover, if he ‘atoned for his sins’ and made amends which happens in *Fóstbræðra saga*. In other case (e.g. *Ljósvetninga saga*), the eye pain that was presumably regarded as a kind of supernatural ‘shot’ could result in bursting out of the eyes, and finally, death.

Disturbances of the Mind and Body

The example of eye pain suggests that medieval Icelanders also categorised differently what in modern terms would be called emotions and illnesses. The article “Disturbances of the Mind and Body: Effects of the Living Dead in Medieval Iceland” (Kanerva 2014) further discusses different modes of categorisation compared to modern ones, according to whom the condition caused by magical or supernatural means could be construed as emotion, pain or illness. The article concentrates on the effects that reanimated dead have on the living people in sagas, with special emphasis on *Flóamanna saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Laxdæla saga*. Two aspects of the influence of the dead on the living in these sagas, fear and physical illness, are concentrated upon, and medieval Icelandic conceptions of mental disorder are discussed by examining the meanings given to fear and illness intertextually. It is argued that emotions were not necessarily distinguished from physical illnesses or pain. Instead, emotion could be an illness, or part of the manifestation of illness, or cause or consequence of an illness or physical pain. Sudden and extreme emotions could also cause instant death. Consequently, for medieval Icelanders ‘mental’ was something

rather physical, and, although the symptoms caused by the restless dead – fear, insanity, illness and death – could be categorized by us as mental or physical, in the sagas these were all considered bodily in nature. Both emotions and (physical) illness encompassed a state of disequilibrium and could be dependent on external agents and forces that had the power to influence the bodily balance and trigger the onset of ‘mental disorder’. Consequently, ‘mental disorder’ could be manifested also in physical illness.

As is typical for ethno-theories of emotion, medieval Icelandic theory of emotion was not a thoroughly thought out or unambiguous doctrine. Conceptions of the essence and operation of emotions varied. The essence of emotions could also be considered material and be preserved in the body. Anger was especially considered a kind of energy and substance that could reside in the breast. As the amount of anger in the breast grew, the consequences of this were portrayed in sagas in somatic changes: the body of the angry person became swollen (see also Larrington 2001). Anger was considered also a kind of life power and energy. If a person died angry, the anger was expected to remain in the corpse. In such cases anger could contribute to the reanimation of the corpse and the deceased could return out of its own will to harass the living. People who expressed posthumous restlessness had usually been known for their strong will already when they were still alive. As they appeared posthumously they elicited fear, especially in people who were regarded as weak, or in other words, since their body boundaries were porous, penetrable.

Restless Dead

Supernatural beings, such as the restless dead, were particularly expected to appear in social environments where somebody had broken norms or betrayed someone, or the social equilibrium was shaken in some other manner, that is, similar to pre-industrial Finno-Karelian beliefs (Koski 2011). In both medieval Scandinavian and pre-industrial Finno-Karelian traditions, the dead returned as a result of the transgression of norms and in cases of social disequilibrium.

This aim of the restless dead to preserve social order is discussed in the articles “Rituals for the Restless Dead: The Authority of the Deceased in Medieval Iceland” (Kanerva 2013b) and “The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland: A Case Study of *Eyrbyggja saga*” (Kanerva 2011).

The article “Rituals for the Restless Dead: The Authority of the Deceased in Medieval Iceland”, concentrates on two scenes of actual or anticipated posthumous restlessness in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* and *Eyrbyggja saga*. Both are countered with special and similar rituals, but these have different consequences: the corpse in *Egils saga* remains peaceful whereas some restlessness occurs in *Eyrbyggja saga*. The episodes are examined from the perspective of power and authority. The article includes a discussion of the way in which some of the deceased who were expected to have “strong minds” were ascribed authority over the living in sagas. In this role the reanimated dead could interfere in the lives of the living, and occasionally adopt a moral function in that they could rectify injustices, although they were sometimes malevolent in nature. Nevertheless, some individuals could contest their post-mortem power and use various means, such as rituals, to control it or modify it according to their own needs. It is suggested that such a capability was possessed by a certain kind of character, one whose mind was strong enough to bridle the powers of death, but which could in turn be counteracted by magic.

The article “The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland: A Case Study of *Eyrbyggja saga*”, then, concerns the reanimated dead story of *Eyrbyggja saga*, the so-called ‘wonders of *Fróðá*’ (*Fróðárundr*), and examines the meanings of this episode as they were interpreted in medieval Iceland. It is argued that the living dead in *Eyrbyggja saga*, which are decidedly malevolent rather than benevolent in nature, act as agents of order whose restlessness is connected to past deeds of those still living that have caused social disequilibrium. In *Fróðárundr* these actions involve expressions of disapproved sexuality and birth of offspring with indeterminate social status. It is also shown how the hauntings present an opportunity for the

banisher of the reanimated dead to improve his own indeterminate status.

Perspectives

A fundamental structuring principle of the medieval Icelandic worldview seems to have been the contrast between order and disorder. In terms of the body extended to a model of wholeness and the disorder of contamination or other penetration that has caused internal movement or other disarray. Consequently, one means to protect oneself against supernatural forces such as the dead was presumably to live and act according to the norms and expectations of the society. Moreover, it was good for the person's wellbeing if he or she could control his or her emotions. Some emotions, such as fear, made people vulnerable to supernatural influences, since it was thought that a person's body boundaries would open when he or she became afraid. According to medieval Icelandic thought, only those who were mentally strong enough could keep their body boundaries intact and resist the external influences – and could also control the restless dead. Experiencing the supernatural was ordinary, but being affected by the supernatural was considered a weakness.

However, in the case of eye pain and guilt, the sources hint at possible contradiction considering the weakness associated with vulnerability to supernatural influences and Christian conceptions of sin, and confessing and repenting one's sins. In *Íslendingasögur*, the men who suffered from eye pain caused by a supernatural agent and associated with guilt and recognition of moral responsibility were considered both wise and respectable, and many of them thought positively of Christianity or were even portrayed as good Christians (Þormóður in *Fóstbræðra saga*, Gestr in *Barðar saga*, Björn in *Bjarnar saga* and Þorvarður in *Ljósvetninga saga*). Presumably these men would not have been considered weak in medieval Icelandic context, although their bodies had been penetrated by supernatural forces that caused them eye pain and although later some experienced eye-bursting. It is possible that the contradiction between eye pain as guilt and ideas of a porous body-mind were linked

to thoughts of the individualization of Christian salvation. In 1215, the fourth Lateran council decreed that every Christian individual needed to confess his or her sins once a year. It has been suggested that this indicates an individualization of the concept of Christian salvation (Le Goff 1980). In Norway, this decree was adopted in 1268, and since Iceland had been part of Norway since 1262, the practice is likely to have spread to Iceland soon afterwards (Nedkvitne 2004). In 13th- and 14th-century *Íslendingasögur*, guilt represented as eye pain could have been a way to represent recognition of one's responsibility in doing ill deeds – their awareness of, in the pagan period, that they had 'sinned' – in a time when the salvation of the soul, as a consequence of confession and repentance, had become the individual's own responsibility. This is despite that, according to indigenous beliefs, the reactions of these men as depicted in literature could be understood as a sign of their weakness.

Notes

1. That is: the "unconscious organization or style of bodily performance, as distinct from the body image, which is the conscious conceptual construct of the body, informed by both experience and mythic or scientific understanding. [...] that] refers to the way in which this image, once internalized, is operationalized in everyday behaviours, most of them minute and intuitive" (Stark 2006: 152).
2. This body schema was adopted in Finno-Karelian cultures as a consequence of Germanic influences and Christianization (see Frog 2013: 63, 66–67; 2014/2015).
3. See also penetration by spirits and sharp projectiles shot by supernatural agents (i.e. 'supernatural shots') in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse cultures as well as in later Scottish and Scandinavian folklore in Lid 1921; Hall 2005; 2007; Heide 2006.

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Master's Projects

On the *dyēus*-Semantic Group and the Case of Týr

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Report on the thesis “The God-Semantic Field in Old Norse Prose and Poetry”, completed from the degree of Master of Philosophy at the Institute for Linguistic and Nordic Studies, University of Oslo, 23rd June, 2013.

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According to Friis-Jensen (2010), Snorri did not seem to use a completely different technical and poetical vocabulary for Christian and pre-Christian terms, but has rather adopted the old forms that originate from before Christianization. This implies that, as Meulengracht Sørensen (1989) also pointed out, the words that were used by their forefathers in the pre-Christian times, were still in use in Snorri's time. Neither Friis-Jensen nor Meulengracht Sørensen seem to distinguish between prose and poetry, between eddic and skaldic poetry, and between texts with Christian topics and those with a historic theme or myths. It seems that Friis-Jensen's and Meulengracht Sørensen's conclusions can well be argued against since (despite Snorri's claim) there is still a lack of sources describing the society from before Christianity's official acceptance. After having observed the terminology according to its use, the data indicated the opposite from the claims of both Friis-Jensen and Meulengracht Sørensen.

When we want to have a better understanding of the Old Norse myth, we often turn to the same sources, for instance, Snorri and his *Edda*. In his works one will find words such as *týr* and *tívar*, *goð* and *guð*, *rogn* and *regin*, *ás* and *æsir*, *bond* and *hopt*, *dróttin*, and *díar* defined as terms for ‘god’ or ‘gods’ used for the old gods, worshipped before the Christian one. He uses one of these terms as an appellative in his description of the Old Norse myth and pantheon – Týr. However, Snorri's employment of these terms raises questions about their earlier use and what their occurrence within different contexts says about their meaning and the gods they describe.

The aim of this research project was to use the modern linguistic approach, discourse analysis and the theory of the semantic fields in the analysis of the Old Norse sources, namely poetry and prose, and those words in particular according to their use and function within texts of Christian and non-Christian topic.

One of the words analysed was *týr*, which can be reviewed as an illustrative case. Snorri in *Gylfaginning* uses it as an appellative, and lists its plural *tívar* among other terms for pagan gods. According to *Edda* and *Lokasenna*, Týr the one-handed god of war, son of Óðinn (*Skáldskaparmál*), god of justice (often related to Þing) and as the god of sacrifice (sacrificing his arm in order to bind Fenrir). His function as the god of war could be found in Old Icelandic translations of Latin Christian texts rendering the name of god Mars (*Klements saga*, *Breta saga*, *Rómverja saga*, *Páls saga postula*) and in *Gylfaginning*. He is also known as the god of the *þing* [‘assembly’], representing justice and peace, and identification that especially finds support in Germanic translations of the ‘day of Mars’ as both the ‘day of Týr’ (OHG *Ziostag*, OE *Tīwesdaeg*, ON *Týrsdagr*, Modern English *Tuesday*, etc.) and ‘the day of *Thingsus’ (e.g. Modern German *Dienstag* [‘Tuesday’]). Archaeological findings at Housesteads of an altar dedicated to *Deo Marti Thincso* [‘to the god Mars of the Þing’], encompassing both of the functions of Týr – that of sovereignty and that of battle. Tacitus in his *Germania* IV also mentions a god of war equivalent to the god Mars, but describes him as the deity of sovereignty – sentencing for any kind of punishment was not done unless priests serving the ‘god of war’ first consulted with the deity. Týr seems to

encompass many functions (cf. Dumézil 1958) – he is a sky-god, a god of war, a god of justice, and fertility.

Snorri names skalds as the main authorities for his work, yet skaldic poetry uses some of these lexemes differently to that of the prose and, of course, Snorri. In skaldic poems, the lexeme *týr* appears as a plural common noun, and in singular we find it only as a part of kennings and heitis. In heitis or kennings it never refers to the god Týr. The word is used in kennings denoting chieftains or kings, as in *Vellekla* where king Hákon is referred to as *hertýr* and is also named *týr teinlautar*, ‘god of sacrifice’. The word *týr* also often forms kennings for warriors which points to the word being semantically related to victory and leadership. Furthermore, the word has been reserved exclusively for the chieftains or leaders of higher status. This relates to Snorri’s depiction of Týr as the son of Óðinn, or rather lists a kenning for Týr as being *sonr Óðins* in *Skáldskaparmál*. However, in *Nafnapulur* he is not mentioned under the list of Óðinn’s sons, but is listed only among Æsir. Snorri names Týr *vigaguð* [‘battle-god’] (*Skáldskaparmál*, 9) as well, thus defining him as a deity related to war and battles besides being only the son of Óðinn.

The word *týr* was also used not only in the service of forming kennings for warriors, chieftains and kings, but also in the formation of compounds, where *týr* can represent any god, such as in the example we find in *Haustlång*, verses 2 and 6 – the kenning *byrgi-týr* in 2, describes the giant Þjazi as *fort-týr*, while the one in the 6, *hirði-týr* ‘tending god’, refers to Loki, who then hits Þjazi with a stave. Moreover, in the first stanza of the poem the collective *tíva* is used in reference to the three Æsir in question – Óðinn, Loki and Þórr. But as it can be seen from the examples above, Þjazi is also named *týr*. In another stanza of *Haustlång*, the kenning *reiði-Týr* is used to denote Þórr. Another kenning for Þórr *karms týr* ‘god of the chariot’ is found in *Þórsdrápa* 19. Yet by far the most kennings and heitis with *týr* as a constituent are in reference to Óðinn, such as *Hertýr* [‘army-god’] (*Vellekla*, stanza 5), *Gautatýr* [‘god of the Geats’] (*Hákonarmál*, 1), *Sigtýr* [‘victorious god’] (*Gráfeldardrápa*,

13), *Valtýr* [‘god of the slaughtered’] (*Háleygjatal*, 12), *Farmatýr* [‘god of burdens’] (*Háleygjatal*, 9), *Geirtýr* [‘spear-god’] (*Hákornarkviða*, 18) and *Böðvar-Týr* [‘god of battle’] (*Hákonarkviða*, 16). All these heitis are related to the warlike aspect of Óðinn which could show the relation between him and the deity Týr, one replacing the other in function. This could indicate that during the course of the change between Germanic beliefs under various possible influences, a god whose name meant something like ‘prophet’ (Proto-Germanic **wōðanaz*, adj. **wōðaz*, related to Latin *vātēs* [‘seer, prophet; poet’]) became more relevant. This is also indicated by Tacitus who attested the Germani as worshipping Mars, Mercury and Hercules, here Mercury likely referencing Óðinn, and Hercules Þórr. As Mercury is not a supreme deity, but rather a messenger of the gods, a connector between the divine and earthly, his equivalent could logically be a prophet, or in this case Óðinn.

In eddic poetry, we find Týr as the one-handed Old Norse deity only in *Lokasenna* and *Hymiskviða*, *týr* as a building block in kennings, and the plural form *tívar*. In *Lokasenna* it appears as a theonym in the introductory part (*Týr var þar, hann var einhendr*), and stanzas 38 and 40. Here, Loki mentions Týr’s sacrifice and from the context it is obvious that he refers to the deity that sacrificed his hand that is also mentioned in *Gylfaginning*. In *Hymiskviða*, on the other hand, it seems that Týr is not the same deity as the one described in *Lokasenna*. In this poem, Týr says that his father Hymir, a giant, possesses a cauldron big enough for Ægir’s feast, unlike in Snorri’s *Gylfaginning* where he is said to be the son of Óðinn. Furthermore, he is addressed by Hymir’s wife as *sonr* and *áttniðr jötna*, and he appears to have both hands, fully functional. In the introductory stanzas both Þórr and his companion are addressed as *tívar* (stanzas 1 and 4) and the only time we come across the possible identification of Þórr’s companion is in the phrase “Týr kvað” in stanza 6. Marteinn H. Sigurðsson (2005: 203) proposes that the word Týr in this poem could have been used as a common noun and was therefore unnecessarily capitalized. He suggests the

editors probably capitalized the word *týr* believing it to be a proper noun. This could have shaped our understanding of the characters in the poem and their functions.

The plural collective noun is the most common form of *týr* in eddic poetry. In *Hávamál* 159 the word *tívar* seems to be parallel with *goð* in plural, a term that involves all the gods, but most often refers to *Æsir* as they were the victorious gods in the battle between the *Æsir* and the *Vanir*. In *Vafþrúðnismál*, the word *tívar* is also referred to as *alla goð*, while at another instance the plural *tívar* is paralleled to *regin*, as in *tíva rök* (*Vafþrúðnismál*, 38, 42) where the word *tívar* is used the same way as *regin*.

The lexeme *týr* in the Old Norse texts (and in Snorri's time as well) seems to have had another function to that of the theonym – it was used in reference to important and victorious chieftains, kings, warriors and other deities, which seems to indicate that *Týr* might have been replaced in worship and remains only as a common noun, 'god'. Evidence of his earlier worship can still be found in the name's use to translate 'Mars' in names of the days of the week, as noted above, which indicates that the deity *Týr*'s role was once more prominent.

Other lexemes of the *dyēus*-semantic group have also been used differently from how Snorri employs them. In *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri quotes skalds using the named terms for deities, but in the course of his storytelling he does not use the same vocabulary himself in his *Gylfaginning*. This might be problematic as the majority of dictionaries use Snorri as a reference in defining the meanings of different lexemes denoting *gods*. The words of the semantic field also shift from one function and meaning to another,

indicating the fluidity of the borders between them. It rather seems there was no uniform consistency or organization, and there often seems to be confusion between *Æsir*, *Vanir*, *álfar*, etc. The research of this thesis also points out the influence that Snorri's works have had on our understanding of Old Norse myth. We see, for instance, *Týr* with a certain function and description in *Gylfaginning*, yet other works do not seem to describe him in the same way or do not use *týr* as a theonym at all. Snorri used those words rather differently from how they were used in other texts, be it prose or poetry. In that way, Snorri may have not only reshaped the past for his contemporaries, but may have also done the same for those who try to make sense of Old Norse tradition and myth today.

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Appropriation and Originality: Hending and Alliterative Word Constellations as Tools for Skaldic Composition

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Report on the thesis "Compositional Techniques and Perceptions of Authorship in Skaldic Poetry: Alliterative and Hending Word Constellations", completed for the degree of Master of Arts at the Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway, May 2014 (available at: <https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/40824>). Supervisor: Mikael Males (University of Oslo).

The oral compositional techniques of skaldic poetry have been studied from a number of perspectives, including through the use of kenning and *heiti*. There are certainly a variety of approaches which have been, or could be, used to study skaldic composition, but I have chosen to approach this topic from the perspective *hending* and alliteration. For the purpose of my research I have focused on word combinations, or constellations; involving the internally rhyming and alliterating words required by many skaldic meters. The strict metrical requirements and the need to sometimes spontaneously compose such poetry orally required skill and, as such, it is interesting to investigate if any creative methods, small or subtle though they might have been, were used to aid in the composition of oral poetry.

I developed a new approach for studying the oral composition of skaldic poetry. Rather than focusing on kennings and *heiti* in the search for compositional aides, I chose instead to analyze the *hending* and alliterative word constellations which are typically found in *dróttkvætt* poetry. These generally include three alliterating words in each couplet, with two in the first line and the third at the beginning of the second line as well as two internally rhyming words within each line. I compiled a data set including every alliterating and internally rhyming word found together in 1,486 relevant couplets from 68 different poets and 19 anonymous poems. These word constellations were then compared between the verses of different authors in order to find instances where either the alliterative word combinations, *hending* word combinations, or both, recurred between the works of different skalds.

I found that out of the 1,486 couplets from poetry of relevant meter that I analyzed there are 240 examples of *hending* and alliterative similarities between couplets by different skalds. This is roughly 16% of couplets from which I collected data that share similarity in

alliteration or *hending* word constellations with other works by different authors. 37 different named skalds and five different anonymous poems are represented in this study and 16 of these appear more than three times with different word constellation comparisons. This is from the original pool of 68 different skalds and 19 anonymous poems. Assuming the anonymous poems have different authors, about 48.3% of the poets share alliteration and *hending* similarity with at least one other poet in at least one couplet, frequently more than one. This means that nearly half of the poets whose works appear in my research have at least the potential to have participated as the victim, user, or both in appropriation or inter-skaldic adaptation.

I believe there is a strong case to be made from this research that the appropriation or adaptation of another poet's *hending* and alliterative word constellations was an accepted technique to aid in the composition of oral poetry, as long as the originality of the new work was sufficiently upheld. If appropriations were indeed used by such a wide variety of skalds from the 9th to 11th centuries and in such a wide variety of poems, then even if one is not convinced that appropriation was a widely-used compositional technique, this research can still provide insight into the inter-connectivity and inter-skaldic knowledge of the works of both contemporary and earlier skalds. These subtle appropriations seem to have allowed some poets to find a necessary alliteration or *hending* word constellation required for their own poems, perhaps even paying homage to a famed earlier poet or work, without having to abandon the pride that comes with originality in composition. All that was required to appropriate or adapt *hending* and alliterative word constellations was a knowledge of predecessors' poetry and the creativity to subtly incorporate such constellations into new works within different contexts.

CALLS FOR PAPERS

Versification: Metrics in Practice

25th–27th May 2016, Helsinki, Finland

Versification describes the marriage of language and meter: it is the key to the production of poetry. This phenomenon attracts researchers from a wide variety of intersecting disciplines, ranging from metricists proper and researchers of cognitive poetics to scholars of folklore, linguistics, linguistic anthropology, literature, musicology, philology and more. Meter is often discussed abstractly as the formalization of how words, sounds and sometimes also semantics relate to rhythm, yet poetic meter cannot exist without instantiation through language and a connection with social language practice. The 2016 NordMetrik conference brings focused attention precisely here, on versification as metrics in practice.

By bringing together the insights and perspectives from different disciplines on the many facets of versification, our aim is to stimulate multidisciplinary discussion in order to negotiate shared understanding leading to new knowledge. No natural language in human history has been without poetry. This fact suggests that versification is somehow fundamental to culture, and underscores the importance of subjecting this phenomenon to concentrated discussion.

Keynote speakers of the event are:

- Paul Kiparsky (Stanford University)
- Tomas Riad (University of Stockholm)
- Jesper Svenbro (Swedish Academy)
- Kati Kallio (Finnish Literature Society (SKS))
- Jarkko Niemi (University of Tampere)

We invite proposals for papers on the following and related topics:

- The symbiosis of meter and language in practice

- The relationship between meter, melody and rhythm
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- Generative metrics
- Cognitive poetics
- The language- and/or culture-boundedness of poetry practice
- Performance and the study of versification
- Impacts of social or cultural change on metrics and versification
- The invention and variation of meters in literary poetics

Papers may either concentrate on empirical studies of specific poetics or have a theoretical or methodological emphasis. Each speaker will be allowed 20 minutes for presentation followed by 10 minutes for discussion. We ask speakers to keep in mind that the audience will be multidisciplinary, and presentations should remain accessible to specialists in other fields.

To propose a paper, please send a title, 3–5 keywords and a 300-word abstract along with your name, affiliation and contact information to Eeva-Liisa Bastman at [eeva-liisa.bastman\[at\]helsinki.fi](mailto:eeva-liisa.bastman[at]helsinki.fi). The deadline for proposals is **1st October 2015**.

For more information please visit our website at <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/versification/>.

Versification: Metrics in Practice is organized by the Department of Folklore Studies and the Department of Finnish Literature, University of Helsinki, in cooperation with the Finnish Literature Society (SKS).

The Ontology of Supernatural Encounters in Old Norse Literature and Scandinavian Folklore: 4th Symposium of the Old Norse Folklorists Network

11th–12th December 2015, Tartu, Estonia

The 4th symposium of the Old Norse Folklorists Network (ONF) is dedicated to the question of the ontology of supernatural encounters in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, myth and legend, as well as in later Scandinavian folklore. It focuses on the controversial issue of ‘truth’ or ‘real experience’ behind narrative depictions of such encounters, and seeks answers to questions such as the following: How were encounters with supernatural beings, or visits to supernatural places conceptualized and understood by the individuals or communities who experienced them, and what was their relationship to accepted “norms of truth”? To what extent were supernatural beings perceived as physical beings and how was their physical appearance interpreted? How can we use various kinds of sources to gain knowledge of these matters? What are the long-term continuities in the ways that the supernatural has been understood in the Scandinavian and geographically close (Baltic, Finnic, etc.) cultural areas? In the spirit of previous events of the ONF series, the conference seeks to stimulate discussion on these issues and to bring philological and folkloristic perspectives on both Old Norse

and later sources into closer contact with each other.

Keynote speakers of the event are:

- John Lindow, University of Berkeley
- Mikael Häll, University of Lund
- Daniel Sävborg, University of Tartu

All researchers (including PhD students) who are interested in presenting their ideas or research results connected to these or similar topics are encouraged submit proposals for 20-minute paper presentations (followed by 10 minutes of discussion). The venue of the symposium will be University of Tartu, Department of Scandinavian Studies. If you are interested in participating in this event, please send a short abstract to Professor Daniel Sävborg at [daniel.savborg\[at\]ut.ee](mailto:daniel.savborg[at]ut.ee) by **1st September 2015**.

The event is organized by Professor Daniel Sävborg, PhD Karen Bek-Pedersen ([karen\[at\]bek-pedersen.dk](mailto:karen[at]bek-pedersen.dk)), and PhD Mart Kuldkepp ([mart.kuldkepp\[at\]ut.ee](mailto:mart.kuldkepp[at]ut.ee)). The conference secretary is Kristel Pallasma ([kristel_pallasma\[at\]hotmail.com](mailto:kristel_pallasma[at]hotmail.com)).

Further information can be found on the symposium website: <http://www.flgr.ut.ee/et/osakonnad/ontology-supernatural-encounters>.

Welcome to Tartu in December!

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The orientation of *RMN Newsletter* is toward presenting information *about* events, people,

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If you are interested in making information about your own work available or participating in discussion through comments, responses or short-article contributions, please send your contributions in *.doc, *.docx or *.rtf format to Frog at editor.rmnewsletter@gmail.com.

For more information and access to earlier issues of *RMN Newsletter*, please visit our web-page at www.helsinki.fi/folkloristiikka/English/RMN/.

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