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Binding Monsters in Swedish-Speaking Finland, Scandinavia, Finland, and Karelia: A Case Study from Åland

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Abstract: Scholars have widely debated whether mythological motifs move through inheritance within language families or through diffusion within geographic areas. This debate has been especially central to the comparison of Scandinavian and Finno-Karelian mythology and folklore. This article gives an example of a mythic motif crossing linguistic boundaries, namely through an Ålandic legend about a ritual specialist binding a sea monster through the use of magic.

There has been much scholarly discussion about shared features of mythologies and whether mythic motifs spread through inheritance within a language family or through diffusion within neighboring geographic spaces (see e.g. Krohn 1931: 5–9). Some scholars have applied this debate to Scandinavian and Finno-Karelian mythology and folklore (e.g. Haavio 1967; Siikala 1992 [2002]; DuBois 1999; Tolley 2009; Ahola 2014; Frog 2019a). Since the languages in question belong to different language families, parallels cannot be attributed to a common linguistic heritage. This article takes up one such case, which has been little discussed, concerning the motif of a ritual specialist binding a sea monster with magic. The lack of attention received by this motif is attributable to the rather weak parallel between examples from Old Norse and Karelian mythology and the relevant post-medieval folklore having remained outside of academic discussion.

In medieval Iceland, there is a myth that recounts how Óðinn cast the Miðgarðsormr, or world serpent, into the sea, where it will stay encircling all lands with its tail in its mouth (an *ouroboros* image) until the world ends (Snorri Sturluson 2005: 26). Centuries later, a seventeenth-century Swedish folk legend tells of Kettil Runske, a sorcerer who stole magic runes from Oden. Kettil is said to have bound a serpent to the bottom of a lake by carving runes on a stone. The serpent would stay there until it grew large enough to encircle an island and bite its own tail, then the world would come to an end (af Klintberg 2010: 315).

A poem from 19th-century Viena, Karelia, tells the tale of *Jumalan poika* [‘God’s lad’], who set out to sea in a boat accompanied by saints. Iku Turso, a sea troll, tried to capsize their boat; in retaliation, Jumalan Poika grabbed Iku Turso by the ears and threw him to the bottom of the sea, where he would remain until the end of time (*SKVR* I_1 339; Kuusi 1977: 182).

At first glance, the Scandinavian and Karelian traditions seem as though they could have developed independently from one another. However, there is a folk legend from Åland that shares features with both and may bridge the divide, so to speak, between the two traditions. Recorded just several decades after the Kettil Runske legend, this Swedish-Finnish legend tells how a *runkarl* [‘sorcerer’; literally ‘rune man’] bound a troll to the bottom of a swamp by carving two rune stones; there the troll will stay until the runes fade away (Enqvist 1938: 163). This Ålandic legend could be an example that illustrates how mythic motifs travel across linguistic borders and fuse with local traditions to make something new.

This is not to say that the Karelian poem about Iku Turso came directly from the Icelandic myth about the Miðgarðsormr; rather, that Scandinavian and Finno-Karelian cultures did not exist in isolation and have a long history of contact with each other. Anna-Leena Siikala argues that, instead of direct borrowing, the similarities between Scandinavian and Finno-Karelian lore come from a shared source tradition that was once common to an expansive geographic area, but is now only preserved in the peripheries of Northern Europe (1992: 275). Thomas A. DuBois builds on this idea and contends that not only is there a shared tradition of belief, but also a shared tradition of structure and style (2003: 233; see also Stepanova 2011). Although one cannot say for certain when and how these similar narratives developed in the oral tradition, it is clear that they share fundamental features. The recordings we have of the narratives move both temporally and geographically from medieval Iceland to nineteenth-century Karelia. The Ålandic legend seems to present a link between the Scandinavian and Finno-Karelian traditions.

Swedish-Speaking Finland

The Åland Islands have largely been a place of encounters between eastern and western cultures in Northern Europe for millenia. Sailing technologies and economic networks of the Bronze Age incited the mobility of Pre-Germanic-speaking cultures across the Baltic Sea. This mobility led to the establishment of trading posts and Scandinavian cultural influence in the eastern Baltic. During this period, western and southern Finland became the frontier for linguistic contacts between the cultures from either side of the Baltic Sea. These sailing routes through the Åland Islands potentially had some degree of continuity through the Viking Age and may have played an important role in the shaping of Ålandic identity (Ahola et al. 2014: 230–231).

Centuries later, in the 1680s, the Ålandic legend was recorded by the pastor of the Kökar parish, Gabriel Olai Hamnodius. The legend says that in ancient times a troll lived in a local swamp called Kalby Oppsjö. The people of Kökar were so afraid of the troll that no one dared to fish in the waters there, so eventually they hired a *runkarl* to bind the troll. The *runkarl* came and carved two runestones, one on the south side of the swamp and one on the north. These stones kept the troll bound to the swamp floor, but the *runkarl* warned that the troll would regain its power if the runes on the stones wore away. To prevent the runes from wearing away, the local people covered the stones with birch bark.

> Orsaken, varför dessa stenar äro hit lagde, säga de är denna. Deras förfäder i hedendomen skulle ha varit gruvligen rädda för ett troll, som skulle ha haft sitt tillhåll i förbemälte träsk, så att ingen dristade sig att däruti draga not, fiska etc. Därför hava de lejt en runkarl, som påstått sig med sin runskrift på dessa stenar kunna fastbinda samma troll. Han skall ock hava sagt, att så länge skriften skulle synas på dessa stenar, så länge skulle de ha ro för trollet. Men så snart runskriften blivit bortnött, skulle trollet få sin förra makt igen. Därför ha också Kökarsborna i forntiden, som nämnt är, övertäckt honom med näver, så att skriften icke skulle nötas bort och trollet återfå sin makt. (Enqvist 1938: 163)

> The reason why these stones are here laid, they say, is this. Their ancestors in paganism were horribly afraid of a troll, who had his abode in the previously mentioned swamp, so that no one dared to draw a seine, fish, etc. Therefore, they hired a *runkarl*, who claimed to be able to bind the same troll with his runic writing on these stones. He is also said to have said that so long as the writing was visible on these stones, then they would have peace with the troll. But as soon as the runes were worn away, the troll would regain its former power. Therefore, the people of Kökar in ancient times, as mentioned, covered them with birch bark, so that the writing would not be worn away and the troll regain its power.[1]

The apparent mix of Finno-Karelian and Scandinavian mythology and folklore in Ålandic legend will be elucidated in the following sections. I will argue that it bridges the two traditions, illustrating the potential spread of this bound sea monster motif across the Nordics. The final product of this influence can be seen in the Finno-Karelian epic poem about Iku Turso, which displays similarities with Scandinavian myths. The Ålandic legend, however, is nearly identical to the Swedish legend about Kettil Runske, mentioned above.

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Scandinavia

Most of Kettil Runske's legends were recorded in 17th-century Sweden. However, the first mention of Kettil comes from Olaus Magnus' *Historia de Gentibus* in 1555 (1555: 124). Kettil's name, 'Runske', denotes his knowledge of runes as a *runkarl*. Kettil is usually depicted as a folk hero, who helps the common people by binding monsters with the magic rune staves that he stole from the old god Oden in one of his legends (af Klintberg 2010: 272–273; Enqvist 1938: 160). When Kettil throws these rune staves, they magically return to his hand, much like Þórr's ['Thor's'] hammer, Mjǫllnir, returns to his hand when he throws it (Enqvist 1938: 160; Snorri Sturluson 1998: 42).

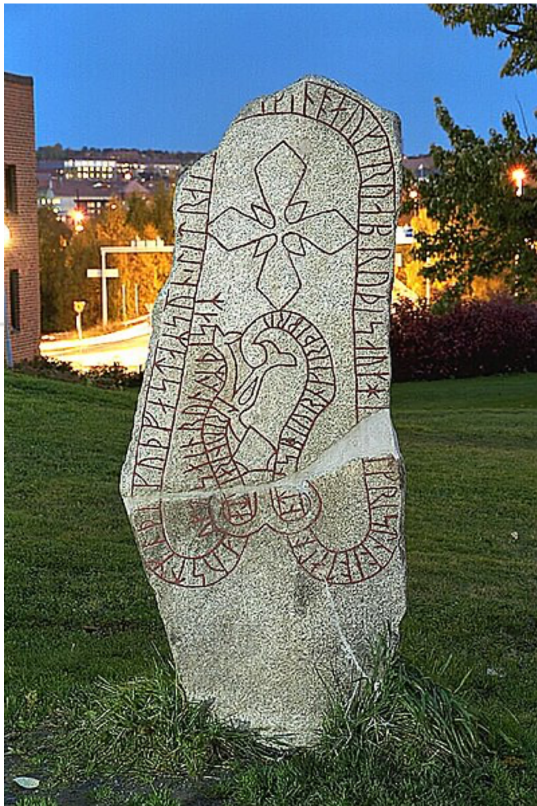

Figure 1. The Frösö runestone (photo attributed to Bengt A Lundberg, Riksantikvarieämbetet, CC BY 2.5).[2]

One legend that is exemplary of Kettil's role as a folk hero is the legend about binding the sea serpent. This legend was recorded in Jämtland, Sweden, in 1635 by Morten Pederson Herdal. It says that a great serpent appeared in Lake Storsjön and terrorized the local people. After the people tried in vain to deal with the serpent, they sent for the famous Kettil Runske. Kettil came and erected a great stone on the island of Frösö. He carved runes upon the stone that bound the serpent to the bottom of the lake. There the serpent would stay so long as the rune stone remained (Enqvist 1938: 168; af Klintberg 2010: 315). Other variants of the legend say that once the sea serpent grows large enough to encircle the island and bite its own tail, the world will end (af Klintberg 2010: 315). The runestone mentioned in the legend is an actual runestone from Frösö, which in fact still exists today. The runes upon the stone say nothing of a local sea serpent, but the stone does depict a serpent biting its own tail. In the 17th century, local Swedes most likely could not read the runes on the stone, which simply state who Christianized the local area and built a local bridge. Instead, they seem to have interpreted the picture of the serpent on the stone as proof of the legend.

Some features of this legend correspond to those of the Ålandic legend: (*1*) a local, land-bound body of water is (*2*) inhabited by a monster that (*3*) threatens the local people; (*4*) the local people hire a sorcerer to take care of the monster; (*5*) the sorcerer is called a *runkarl*, and (*6*) he carves runes (*7*) on runestones that (*8*) bind the monster; (*9*) the binding magic will only work so long as the runestones endure. This complex constellation of elements suggests that the different accounts reflect the plot of what is called a belief legend (af Klintberg 2010). The role of runes and runestones is particularly noteworthy in the Ålandic context because no runestones have been found on the Åland Islands, although they are adjacent to the region of Sweden that boasts more runestones than anywhere else in the world (Sjöstrand 2014: 84). In Finno-Karelian mythology and folklore, ritual specialists do not carve runes. It is reasonable to assume that at least these features, if not the plot type itself, spring from Scandinavian influence.

It is important to remember that Kettil Runske legends were recorded before Swedish translations of eddic poetry or Snorri's *Edda* were available, especially to rural people, among whom these legends were found. Although traditions of the Miðgarðsormr were most likely forgotten in Sweden by the 17th century, it is possible the folk legend about Kettil springs from some kind of variant of the Miðgarðsormr myth, or at least shares some connection with it (cf. Frog 2022a). The

parallel motifs of the two narratives, in conjunction with Kettil's strong association with Oden (and therefore the Old Norse god Óðinn) as the source of his runes, seem to argue for a relationship between this Kettil legend and medieval Icelandic myth, despite the massive temporal and geographic divide.

Around the year 1220 in Iceland, Snorri Sturluson wrote a work called *Edda*, which was meant to be an explanation of skaldic poetry and its composition accompanied by introductions to the mythology in prose. He continuously quotes eddic poems throughout the *Gylfaginning* section of the work to support his retelling and interpretations of the mythology (Snorri Sturluson 2005). Most or all of the eddic mythological poems themselves would only be written down after *Edda* was composed (Clunies Ross 2005: 8; Frog 2022b: 194–195, 206–207): most were preserved in a collection devoted to poetry compiled around 1270, which became the core of what is today called the *Poetic Edda* (Haukur Þorgeirsson & Njarðvík 2017: 165).

In Snorri's *Edda*, he tells of how the Miðgarðsormr first came into being. Loki had three children with the *jǫtunn* Angrboða: Hel, the wolf Fenrir, and the Miðgarðsormr. The gods deciphered prophecies that the children would cause great harm to the world, so Óðinn sent the gods to capture the children and bring them to him. Óðinn sent Hel to rule over one of the realms of the dead, the gods collectively bound Fenrir, and Óðinn cast the Miðgarðsormr into the sea that lies on the edge of the world. There the Miðgarðsormr grew so large that it encircled all lands, biting its own tail (2005: 26–29). The Miðgarðsormr will stay on the edge of the world until the final battle of Ragnarǫk and the destruction of the world (2005: 45, 50). This origin story of the Miðgarðsormr is only clearly recounted in Snorri's *Edda*, and not in eddic poetry, but there is no reason to doubt its basis in the poetic tradition. The account corresponds to the Kettil legend in a number features: (*1*) a serpentine monster (*2*) threatens a community; (*3*) a sorcerer (*4*) binds the monster (*5*) in water, where (*6*) it (will) encircle an island or island-like land as (*7*) an *ouroboros* (*8*) until the end of the world. The *ouroboros* image seems to have been specifically connected to the Miðgarðsormr in the medieval sources, so that its appearance in other sources, like the dragon in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, appear as referential 'echoes' of the cosmological monster (Frog 2022a: 574–575). Such 'echoes' appear to have been an integrated part of how Old Norse mythology was used in society (for a theoretical approach, see Frog 2022a). Kettil's feat is therefore consistent with an 'echo' of Óðinn's act in a cosmogony that has been reproduced in a local landscape. The monster-binding legend seems to ultimately share continuity with the mythological event.

It is not clear whether the legend type had already formed when Óðinn's feat still held a place in local conceptions of the cosmogony, or whether it was a result of a euhemerism-type displacement that adapted powerful images and motifs into something compatible with a Christian worldview. The general legend type cannot be dated through the use of runestones in the binding of the monster, as the legend's interpretation of a rune stone as the instrument of binding seems to date from a time when the stone could no longer be read. However, this may be the product of interpreting this and probably other rune stones through legend, constructing their meaning in the landscape. The emergence of a legend type from Óðinn's feat may thus have occurred earlier and only later became connected to rune stones depicting bound serpents or monsters (which is not uncommon). There is also no reason to assume that the legend type with rune stones emerged in connection with Kettil, since Kettil is otherwise connected to rune staffs rather than stones. Kettil may instead have become identified as the sorcerer in legends because of his prominent connection with runes, while both his popularity and the connection of the legend to the landscape would have contributed to the preservation of the legend in the local tradition.

The Kettil legend appears four centuries after Snorri's *Edda* and an end of the Old Norse language area far removed from Iceland. An even greater divide, however, is the linguistic difference between Scandinavian and Finnic languages, as well as the geographic distance between Iceland and Karelia. Although these divides are massive geographically, temporally, and linguistically,

the Åland legend displays the possibility of a connection between these two traditions. A bridge that leads to the amalgamation of these symbols and motifs may be found in a recording from nineteenth-century Karelia.

Karelia and Finland

In 1836, J.F. Cajan collected a poem from the famous singer Arhippa Perttunen in Viena, Karelia (*SKVR* I_1 339; Kuusi 1977: 182). A second variant of the poem was collected just two years later in 1839 by M.A. Castrén from the same singer. The two versions are nearly identical (*SKVR* I_1 339, 339a) and no other examples are recorded. Arhippa is arguably the most important singer from the Viena region, and was interviewed extensively by Elias Lönnrot in 1834. Arhippa is recognized in research for his extensive repertoire, although his recorded versions of epics sometimes reflect adaptations of vernacular mythology to his Christian worldview (Frog 2010: 225–229), viewed through a lens of his own understanding of Christian identity (see also Frog 2020). That the two examples of the epic are nearly identical indicates that it was firmly established in Arhippa's memory. That it was an epic he had clearly learned allows the inference that the core of the plot was part of the epic tradition rather than having been invented by Arhippa himself. Although he adapted some epic material to conform to his own vision of the mythology, sometimes creatively (Frog 2010: 225–229, 397–398), parallels to unusual material in his epic repertoire are generally found, if only scarcely attested, elsewhere in the corpus of around 150,000 variants and fragments of poetry. That Lönnrot did not collect a version from him suggests that it was peripheral to his repertoire.

In the poem, Sampsa *poika* ['lad, son'] Pellervoinen asked three oak trees if they would provide timber for a boat for the creator. The third oak tree agreed and Sampsa built the boat. Saint Peter and Saint Ann joined Sampsa in the boat and they invited Jumalan poika to come aboard and rest with pillows and blankets; Jumalan poika did so. They sailed for three days and on the third a great storm swelled the sea, so they awoke Jumalan poika for help. Iku Turso raised his head from the sea and Jumalan poika grabbed him by the ears, pulling him onto the boat. Jumalan poika asked him three times why he had risen from the sea. On the third time, Iku Turso answered that he was trying to sink the boat. Jumalan poika threw him to the bottom of the sea and said he shall not rise again, so long as the sun and the moon last (*SKVR* I_1 339, 339a; Kuusi 1977: 179–182).

This poem has received less attention from a comparative perspective because it is so poorly attested, and because it is identified mainly with Christian rather than non-Christian actors. Concerning these actors, it is worth noting that the epic tradition structured epic agents into groups that were not normally mixed with one another; nevertheless, there could still be variation in the actors of an epic narrative by exchanging one group for another (Frog 2020: 597). That the poem was only recorded from Arhippa is another difficulty here, because there is no point of reference to determine in what respects it may have varied from the broader tradition. That the epic is poorly attested does not speak against its age: the epic known in English as *The Bond*, which seems rooted in a Viking-like milieu valorizing sea-raiding, has itself been found in very few variants in the forested inland regions of Karelia, roughly as far as one could get from the sea in the language area (Ahola 2014).

This poem about Jumalan poika and Iku Turso displays a number of characteristics similar to the Old Norse myth where Óðinn casts the Miðgarðsormr into the sea: (*1*) a sea monster (*2*) with a distinct identitiy (*3*) threatens a group of divinities and (*4*) the main god (*5*) physically throws the monster (*6*) to the bottom of the sea (*7*) where it must stay (*8*) until the end of time and the destruction of the world. However, these two stories are seperated not just by six centuries: they also come from opposite sides of the Nordics.

To an Old Norse scholar the recording of the Karelian poem may seem very late. But Karelia was, from the perspective of the Russian Empire, a remote wilderness comparable to Siberia. The rich traditions of vernacular Karelian religion and mythology that were recorded in the nineteenth century are thus comparable to the contemporary documentation of Northern Eurasian shamanic traditions further east (see also Frog 2020:

577–586 and works there cited). The Karelian oral poems recorded in Viena in the nineteenth century cannot reasonably be considered influenced in any way by written eddic poems or Snorri's *Edda*. It may be noted that the treaty establishing the border between Novgorod and Sweden was established already a century after Snorri was writing. Also, in addition to the political boundary becoming coordinated with the boundary between the eastern and western Churches, Finnic speakers of this region generally remained geographically remote from centers of religious and political administration, to which the languages also remained foreign. Like the Old Norse myth, the poem about Iku Turso most likely springs from an oral tradition that goes back centuries and was finally codified in the nineteenth century.

The epithet *iku* or *iki* means 'ancient'; the name *Turso* is a diminutive form of *tursas*, which reflects a borrowing of Proto-Germanic **þur(i)saz* into Middle Proto-Finnic as **tur(i)sas* (Frog 2023). This loan is extremely early, antedating the tremendous superstrate of North Germanic loans into Proto-Finnic customarily dated to between roughly AD 200 and 550 (Kallio 2015: 26–27), and which seem to have been concentrated within a process of intensive cultural hybridization at the beginning of that period (Frog 2019a: 273; 2019b: 20–21). Frog's survey of derivatives of **þur(i)saz* in Germanic languages leads him to conclude that this had previously been a more commonly used term for 'giant'-type agents of chaos, as well as being used as a name for a ruler of the otherworld realm of the dead. The Finnic loan is preserved almost exclusively in North Finnic languages, where it refers specifically to a dangerous and hostile water monster or troll that controls an area of water and the ability to catch fish there. Frog argues that these semantics are likely rooted in the original context of the loan, and that the word was borrowed to refer to a water monster alongside other very early Germanic loans connected with aquatic life on the Baltic Sea (2023). The borrowing of **tur(i)sas* thus appears comparable to borrowing the Miðgarðsormr of the later mythology but referring to it with the Old Norse word *jǫtunn* ['giant'], as the serpent is identified in various sources, and then interpreting the borrowed word through the water monster. However, identifying the Miðgarðsormr with the image of the *ouroboros* – i.e. as a serpent biting its own tail and forming a circle – must be considered a later development. The *ouroboros* image is not found in Scandinavia until the Migration Period (Oehrl 2013), which was long after the borrowing of **tur(i)sas* (Frog 2023). There is no motif of a sea serpent biting its own tail in Finno-Karelian mythology and folklore, which is consistent with the respective cultural contacts and influences entering prior to the Migration Period.

In the Ålandic legend, the nature of the aquatic monster as a swamp troll seems to derive from Finno-Karelian influence. Both the Kettil legend and the Ålandic legend were recorded in Swedish. In the Kettil legend, the sea monster is called an *orm* ['serpent'], consistent with the Miðgarðsormr of Old Norse mythology. In the Ålandic legend, it is called a *troll* ['troll']. References to agents called a *tursas* or *turso* in Finnish and Karelian (as well as Vepsian) suggest it was imagined variously as anthropomorphic and as tauromorphic – i.e., bull-like – rather than as serpentine. In the Karelian epic in focus here, the description of the physical characteristics of Iku Turso are very vague: the only thing that is clear is that it had some kind of ears, by which Jumalan poika grabs it. Iku Turso most likely was not envisioned by the Karelian audience as a serpent, but as some kind of a more anthropomorphic aquatic troll. In the Swedish legend tradition, *troll*s are commonly represented as anthropomorphic agents that have households and communities mirroring human societies: they bake bread and have cattle and have interactions with humans within that framework, while other types of supernatural agent are connected with water (af Klintberg 2010). The rune stones in the Ålandic legend point to the legend type being adapted from a tradition in Sweden, but the identification of the monster as a *troll* rather than an *orm* suggests that the Swedish serpentine image has been replaced by a Finnic image of a *tursas* that interferes with fishing.

Although the Iku Turso epic is exceptional, Frog contextualizes it in relation to Finnic and

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Germanic traditions of the thunder god going on a fishing adventure, which appears to reflect a cross-culturally shared tradition that also makes a historical connection to the Iku Turso epic possible (Frog 2023). The Scandinavian tradition presents the god Þórr fishing for the Miðgarðsormr. This myth most often presents Þórr as nearly killing the monster, which escapes back to the bottom of the sea. It will not return until the apocalyptic battle of Ragnarǫk, when Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr will slay one another in that final conflict. Þórr's fishing adventure is recounted in prose in Snorri's *Edda* (2005: 43–45) and in the context of another adventure in the eddic poem *Hymiskviða* (Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson 2014: 399–407), and is also referred to in several passages of skaldic poetry (i.e. court poetry attributed to named poets), as well as some iconographic representations on picture stones. There seems to have been some variation within the tradition regarding whether or not Þórr kills the monster during this fishing expedition. *Ragnarsdrapa*, a skaldic poem attributed to Bragi Boddason in the ninth century and which takes inspiration from a depiction of the myth on a shield, holds that the serpent got away. However, Úlf Uggason, in the late tenth century, describes a pictorial panel in an Icelandic house depicting Þórr decaptating the Miðgarðsormr at sea. This critical moment in the text of *Hymiskviða* is defective (Turville-Petre 1964: 75–76). However, Snorri explains that some people believe that Þórr killed the serpent then and there, whereas he believes that the serpent got away (2005: 45).

Also relevant in this context is a Finno-Karelian poem about the demiurge Väinämöinen, who fished up the great pike, decapitated it, and made a kantele (a harp-type instrument) from its bones. One of the oldest variants of this epic poem was recorded by Kristfrid Ganander in 1760 from a manuscript in Ostrobothnia (Kuusi 1977: 167–169), an area in western Finland with a Swedish-speaking majority. However, a relationship between this epic and later Swedish contacts is doubtful, since the epic is well attested throughout Russian Karelian singing areas. Notably, the sea monster in this fishing adventure is a gigantic pike and not a serpent. Nevertheless, both Þórr's and Väinämöinen's fishing adventures share similar motifs with the Iku Turso poem. In all three narratives, (*1*) a god (*2*) embarks far out to sea on a boat (*3*) with one or more companions and (*4*) confronts a massive sea monster. However, both Väinämöinen and Jumalan Poika encounter the sea monster accidentally, whereas Þórr, Kettil and the Ålandic *runkarl* all embark specifically in order to confront the sea monster. This difference could be another disparity between the Finno-Karelian and Scandinavian traditions. However, there is also a Karelian legend about a priest confronting a sea monster, which shares this motif of embarking with the goal of confronting a sea monster.

In conjunction with the widespread fishing adventure motif, Frog also points to a Karelian legend recorded in 1936 about a *merihärkä* ['sea-bull'] that lived in the river Nokkalahti in Sortavala. The *merihärkä* was always roaring loudly and horribly, until a priest came and exorcised it into Lake Ladoga, where it has not been heard since (Frog 2023; SKS KRA Matti Moilanen 1765, recorded in Sortavala from A. Hyppönen, age 71). This Karelian legend seems to share some pointed commonalities with the Swedish legend about Kettil Runske and the Ålandic legend. Instead of the ritual specialist binding the sea monster on the open ocean, which is what happens in the Old Norse myth and the Iku Turso epic, the monster is instead banished into a named local lake, which is also characteristic of the Kettil and the Åland legend. This *merihärkä* legend seems to be further evidence of this bound sea monster motif spreading into Karelia.

A Note on the Cosmological Timeline

I use the term *cosmological timeline* to refer to the timeline of a society, religion, or culture on which events are ordered from the creation to the destruction of the world and potentially also extending to preceding or subsequent periods. Amid individuals' interpretations and attempts to place events in some kind of chronological order, the cosmological timeline can be viewed as a general framework or master narrative of the history of the universe from its origin to its destruction, although many specific events remain only vaguely or

variably placed upon it. Viewing events in the materials compared here in relation to their respective cosmological timelines adds another dimension to the analysis, because almost all of the narratives make reference to the end of the world.

The Scandinavian myths situate the binding of the Miðgarðsormr within the cosmogony, establishing the serpent and its form as an *ouroboros* as a cosmological periphery throughout subsequent time until the eschatological battle of Ragnarǫk. The Kettil legend is situated in local human history but his feat is also related to the eschatological future: the monster is bound until the end of the world. Iku Turso is also bound until the end of time – i.e., so long as the sun and the moon last, assuming that this alludes to the end of the world. This eschatological element is absent in Väinämöinen's fishing adventure, but this is unsurprising since the monster is slain rather than bound for a period. The eschatological reference is also absent from the *merihärkä* legend, but here the priest banished or exorcised the monster (*manasi menemään pois* [literally 'conjured [it] to go away']) rather than binding it *per se*. Within the context of kalevalaic epic, the reference to eschatological time in the banishing of Iku Turso is striking because the epic tradition's cosmological timeline is normally quite simple and lacks a developed eschatology (Frog 2022a: 592–593). Kalevalaic epic poetry is highly crystallized at the level of line groups and their phraseology, which enables what seem like anomalous features or even inconsistencies with the cosmologies to be found built into particular passages of the poetry (e.g. Frog 2020: 645–647). Since eschatological references are also not normally built into narrative poems on Christian subjects, although they are used in some ritual incantations, there is no reason to view this element of the Iku Turso epic as necessarily a product of Christian influence. Instead, it seems more likely to be a temporal feature that was maintained within the epic owing to structural factors, comparable to the way that spatial features are built into epics with remarkable durability in oral transmission (on which, see Frog 2020: 599–630).

Eschatology is potentially present in the Ålandic legend. However, the priest who recorded the legend notes that the birch bark that people had used to cover the stones had rotted away some time ago. He reports that, at the time of writing, the runes on one of the stones had worn away, and he states that the other stone was now under water, and no one knew where it lay (Enqvist 1938: 163). It seems that this binding could have been effective until the end of the world were it not for the lack of upkeep. Nevertheless, the binding is not tethered to the cosmological timeline in the way that Óðinn's binding of the Miðgarðsormr, Kettil's binding of the Frösö *orm*, and Jumalan poika's binding of Iku Turso are. In this context, it is worth noting that the connection between the serpent bound by Kettil and the end of the world is not dependent on a reference to how long the binding will endure; rather, it is dependent on when the serpent will become an *ouroboros*, growing to bite its own tail. The lack of an eschatological point of reference for the Ålandic legend aligns it with the *merihärkä* legend. However, if the eschatological reference is considered a feature of the legend type as carried from Sweden to Åland, its absence may be attributable to exchanging the image of a serpent for that of a troll. The place legend also changes function when the stone referred to has no runes on it, making it a narrative about people's beliefs in the past, rather than imagining the supernatural agent that was bound as simultaneously existing in the present and being potentially relevant to the future.

Conclusion

With these comparisons in mind, the Ålandic legend seems to be the meeting point between the Scandinavian and Finno-Karelian traditions concerning the motif of a ritual specialist binding a sea monster to the bottom of a body of water. Not only is Åland positioned geographically between Scandinavia and the Finno-Karelian cultural area, but this legend was recorded after the Scandinavian variants and before the Finno-Karelian variants of the motif. In this way, the recordings of this motif move both temporally and geographically across the Nordics from Iceland to Karelia. However, the correlation of

temporal and geographical progressions of the sources cannot be assumed to correlate with the progression of the tradition though time and space.

The Ålandic example seems to reflect a legend type or subtype that linked the binding of the water monster to rune stones. It thus presumably reflects a medieval – if not later – form of the tradition linked to changing interpretations of the significance of rune stones. The motif of binding with a rune stone is improbable for the booming period of rune stone production in the early Christian period or the Viking Age before it, let alone the period of Scandinavian cultural spread to Åland in the sixth century. The limited evidence of the Iku Turso epic makes any dating conjectural.

Relating the spread of the Ålandic legend to the kalevalaic epic in Viena, Karelia, carries with it multiple caveats. There was immigration to Viena from Ostrobothnia as well as from Savo to the south in the 17th century, which impacted the Viena traditions (Frog 2010: 73 and works cited therein). This allows a hypothetically possible situation where Finnish–Swedish contacts around the Gulf of Finland could have produced an adaptation bridging the language barrier, and then carried this to Viena. The more significant difficulty is that it is improbable that a place legend linked to a lake or other fishing venue would be elevated to a seafaring adventure of cosmological actors in mythic time with no connection to the geography of people telling it (cf. Frog 2022a). An additional caveat is that the eschatological connection is lacking from the Ålandic legend, which has lost the *ouroboros* motif through the change of the monster from a serpent to a troll or *tursas*. And yet, the eschatological reference is found in the kalevalaic epic, where it is generally exceptional, and its use corresponds to Óðinn's deed rather than Kettil's. It might be tempting to therefore assign a great age to the kalevalaic epic's background and consider whether its identification with Christian agents is an innovation, but this returns to the problem of the limited evidence. When these factors are considered, it becomes much less clear how to regard the quite brief account of the *merihärkä* legend, and whether it, with its strange, bellowing monster, should be viewed as related to the Swedish and Ålandic place legends in a region that was for a time part of Sweden (when Finland was its eastern territory). This legend might instead have shifted independently from kalevalaic mythology and adapted to a local place in a region where kalevalaic mythology had broken down and had been shifting into tale traditions.

When considering these materials, it is crucial to recognize that the few documentations we have of this motif are only glimpses of oral traditions, told and retold, presumably, across centuries. These recorded myths and legends are simply an indicator of a much deeper oral tradition, which would have spanned across centuries, thousands of kilometers, and across cultures.

Notes

1. All translations are my own unless noted otherwise.
2. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5>, via Wikimedia Commons.

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