



The Spirit of the Place and the Place of the Spirit: Local Spirits, Boundaries, and Social Order in South- west Finnish Folklore

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Abstract

Southwest Finnish folklore recorded in the early twentieth century contains a wealth of legends about local spirits, residing and acting both in the wilderness and on farm premises. They belong to belief systems that express social norms and regulations. Many of the legends contain enough information to allow us to locate exactly where local spirits are said to appear or interact with people. In this paper I study these locations and their place in the structure of village society, using historical village maps. The results shed new light on the nature of borders and boundaries in folklore and vernacular belief, as well as on the view of the social meaning of local spirits. Borders and border zones are common ground between several societies, lacking a clearly defined master. In places of uncertain mastery local spirits, endowed with taboos and the authority of the surrounding societies, play a social role in regulating the activities of people on such common ground.

Keywords: local spirits, borders, liminality, folklore, the sacred, vernacular belief

This paper's background lies in a broader study of revered sites of folklore in Southwest Finland. My initial studies of sites considered sacred have led to a network of places sharing similar cultural-geographical characteristics and topographical features connected with different types of lore. They are varyingly considered sacred, magical, frightening, or haunted. Some are also known to have been used for festive or ritual gatherings.

Many of these sites are connected with the idea of a local spirit residing in them or communing with one when offerings to it are left. Many of the places are also connected with different kinds of border or boundary.

The concept of boundaries has featured frequently in the research of both folklore and the vernacular sacred. In this study I present new perspectives that expand and specify the connection between borders and local spirits. I analyse how local spirits in Southwest Finnish folklore have interacted with people and analyse identifiable places connected with reported appearances. I compare the actions of local spirits, and their places in the wilderness and farmsteads, seeking patterns, similarities, and differences.

Employing Jochum Stattin's theory of the social role of the supernatural and Veikko Anttonen's view of the vernacular understanding of the 'sacred', I focus on spirits as social beings with social meanings endowed by their affiliated societies. I further attempt to understand the meaning of borders related to the significance and social roles of spirits and their places.

Most of my research material consists of records from the Finnish Literature Society's folklore archives and the *Finlands Svenska Folkdiktning* compendium of Finland Swedish folklore. The *Finlands Svenska folkdiktning* consists of Finnish-Swedish folklore records gathered in the early twentieth century and organized into genre-specific books. Of these, I have researched Volumes II.3.2 (mythical tales) and VII.1. (supernatural beings), and picked out the records for my study area. The folklore archives of the Finnish Literature Society (referred to as KRA) contain a larger corpus of similar material in Finnish. The KRA material is organized both thematically and by parish, but as I have found the parish material more comprehensive, I have focused on selecting all records describing encounters with local spirits. I have also used books on local history and historical maps.

My study area is the region of Finland Proper, otherwise known as Southwest Finland. As the study region consists of more than 60 historical parishes, I have selected a manageable sample of material from 27. In total, the material for this study consists of 264 folklore records describing local spirits, with 131 from Finnish sources and 133 from Finland-Swedish sources. Of these 264 records, 57 contain references to identifiable places. Sometimes several records refer to the same place. Sometimes it is impossible to locate the places mentioned, because placenames have changed or been forgotten, refer to buildings which no longer exist, or the descriptions are simply too vague. I have been able to identify and visit 21 sites in total. I have pinpointed each individually identified site on historical village maps mostly from the time of Partition (the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries) to gain an understanding of each place as part of their cultural milieu when the recorded practices and beliefs prevailed. Field visits and observations made at the actual sites enable me to identify traits, patterns, and similarities

that are not apparent in the lore. As this paper is part of a broader study of revered sites in the study region, the material used here is only a sample selected around the specific theme of local spirits.

Theoretical perspectives

According to Veikko Anttonen, who has studied the Finnish concept of the sacred, the sacred cannot be viewed simply as a religious or transcendent concept, but must be seen as deeply rooted in its culture in a broader sense. The concept of the sacred as something reserved for God or a divinity is a later semantic change of the word (Anttonen 1996, 158). Anttonen has studied the meanings of the sacred in relation to corporeal, territorial, social, and temporal categories, and in relation to how it defines limits. The concept of the sacred defines territories, social groupings, and periods and can be seen as ‘a signifier of limits between cognitive categories for society and the individual, or the transgression thereof’ (Anttonen 1996, 151–7, 216). It is noteworthy that Anttonen has mainly studied the sacred from the departure point of the nominal, that is, that which is named ‘*pyhä*’ (the Finnish word for sacred). Anttonen’s proposal of the sacred, based on Finnish word ‘*pyhä*’, as a border has later been criticized by linguist Janne Saarikivi for its lack of etymological evidence. Saarikivi’s critique is based on the known meanings of the word ‘sacred’ (Saarikivi 2017). However, the phenomenon of the heightened meaning of ‘borders’ in belief systems has been well known in the study of folklore, irrespective of Anttonen’s research, and it gains further weight in this study.

In his classic study of the water spirits of Swedish folklore, Jochum Stattin has argued that supernatural beings such as water spirits act as ‘tools for thought’. These beings appear in all kinds of border zones between clearly defined categories like areas that cause unease and anxiety because of their ambiguity, and the beings of folklore that ‘act out’ that meaning. The beings also strive to strengthen and maintain social norms and roles, and regulate human interaction with nature and each other: ‘The rules of daily life were also applied to activities in nature, on the fields, meadows, pastures, forests etc., which were therefore subjects to control. Since it could not be subjected to human surveillance, nature was populated by supernatural beings’ (Stattin 1984, 44–57; quotation, 57). Mikael Häll has developed the concept, discussing the idea of supernatural beings as a ‘thought model’ exemplifying and illustrating social norms or their breaching (Häll 2013, 516–30). The idea of supernatural beings being connected with social norms has often

been emphasized in research: Matti Sarmela has pointed out that in Finland this trait is typical of the western parts of the country (Sarmela 1974, 343; 1994, 158). Kaarina Koski maintains that the moral rules and repercussions embedded in stories of the supernatural may have been understood either metaphorically or literally as direct supernatural forces from an invisible world (Koski 2011, 342).

Häll criticizes Stattin's idea of supernatural beings as liminal entities in the sense of existing on boundaries between categories as too vague (Häll 2013, 538). Boundaries can seem vague if we lack a proper picture of their social meanings and how space is structured in the society we study. To overcome this, culturally specific or emic borders need first to be identified.

Matti Sarmela has pointed out that the folklore of local spirits enforces social norms, especially in Western Finland (Sarmela 1974, 343; 1994, 158). Changing norms and new cultural influences have with time been incorporated into the lore. For example, Camilla Asplund-Ingemark has shown how Christian texts and values have influenced the folklore of supernatural beings by introducing new models, norms, and values (Asplund-Ingemark 2004, 176–80, 206–17).

Ilkka Pyysiäinen has delved further into the question of spatial boundaries and ritual performance. Pyysiäinen emphasizes the social aspect of such performances, and how social performance is tied to a community's willingness to cooperate (Pyysiäinen 2008, 287f.). Laura Stark-Arola has also emphasized the meaning of spatial boundaries in her studies of Finnish and Karelian women's magic. Stark-Arola has identified ritualized emic boundaries between an 'inside' that consists of the household and several concentric layers of 'outsides' such as farms, the village, and the forest. All these boundaries need to be magically protected against malign external influences (Stark-Arola 1998, 36).

The 'scale' I employ in studying the social context of local spirits and their places is that of the local society – the village and the farm. The landscape of a village and the landscape of a farm or household follow certain mental patterns with central areas, insides, and outsides. Boundaries of different kinds organize the landscape, create a spatiality of meanings, divide shared spaces from private spaces, and separate the dominions of different farms, villages, or parishes. Village partition maps show us precise borders and boundaries that were adhered to by inhabitants, and an emic way of structuring the landscape. If it is possible to see what kind of landscape features supernatural beings are attached to, there may also be connections with their social functions. Their place in the structure of the landscape can shed

light on how they can function as metaphors, tools for thought, or actual enforcers or norms.

The study of places in folklore, folk religion, and folk belief has seen a resurgence in recent years. Terry Gunnel has studied how certain features in the terrain are protected by folklore in Iceland and Ireland (Gunnel 2018). In Estonia the international term 'placelore' (Valk & Sävborg 2018) has seen the focus shift from studying regional differences and geographical spread in different phenomena to understanding their local and social context. Timothy Tangherlini has taken a particularly close perspective, studying the locations of tales with a frame of reference in the individual lives of storytellers (Tangherlini 2010). The historian Simon Young has mapped the locations of folklore beings on historic maps of local societies in Northwest England, seeking patterns for their locations in the social landscape (Young 2020). I am conducting my research on a very similar scale to Young, which afford an interesting comparison between Northwest English and Southwest Finnish placelore.

The archaeologist and folklorist Sonja Hukantaival has taken a different kind of 'close perspective', comparing archaeological finds in old buildings with descriptions of offering and depositing customs in folklore records (Hukantaival 2016). Otherwise, Finnish research has focused on encounters with the supernatural as a connection with another 'invisible' or 'supernatural' world (see e.g. Koski 2011). I choose a different perspective, observing the 'supernatural' or local spirits as functioning parts of human society.

Local spirits in Southwest Finnish folklore

Local spirits are a very prominent feature of Finnish folklore and are frequently associated with revered sites. The material used here comes from an area in which both Finnish and Swedish are spoken. Based on characteristics such as appearance, function, and context, the same folklore beings can be said to appear in the material of both language groups. My focus and selection of material is based on the role and context of the beings, that is, place-bound supernatural beings who are told to interact with people. The names of beings with these functions can be quite varied.

The most commonly used generic word for a local spirit in Finnish is '*haltija*', with variants such as '*haltti*' or '*haltja*' in southwestern dialects. The equivalent in local Swedish is '*rådare*', often shortened to '*rå*'. Both words can roughly be translated as 'owner' or 'ruler'. When the name '*haltija*' is used, it is often with a prefix revealing the place over which it rules, such

as the *haltija* of the house, sauna, forest, and so on. Household *haltijas* are also very commonly called 'tonntu' in Finnish, or 'tomte' in Swedish. It is noteworthy that the Finnish 'tonntu' and Swedish 'tomte' are almost identical, with the meaning in both languages denoting a lot of land containing or reserved for a dwelling, that is, 'tonntti' in Finnish and 'tomt' in Swedish. The similarity in the names is explained in a medieval text about the *tomte* by St Bridget of Sweden. She calls it 'tompta gudh', meaning 'god of the lot' (Klemming 1861, 197).

The names of spirits appearing in the wilderness are much more varied. In writings about Finnish folklore they are often gathered into types such as 'forest *haltija*', 'water *haltija*', and 'mountain *haltija*'. Gunnar Granberg observed the similarity of the roles and functions of Nordic wilderness spirits in his 1935 study (Granberg 1935, 67). My material reveals an even wider and more mixed use of names, and a mixing of what in the literature are often considered separate 'types' of supernatural beings with similar functions. Wilderness spirits are often called ghosts ('*kummitus*' or '*haamu*'), trolls, or devils. In her dissertation on encounters with the devil in folklore Ulrika Wolf-Knuts has pointed out that the devil enforces order and norms, partly through threats, whereas Ülo Valk has observed that in Estonian folklore breaching norms usually precedes encounters with the devil (Wolf-Knuts 1991, 242, Valk 2001, 194). The spirits can also have individual names such as '*Laakkarin taata*' ('the Grandfather of Laakkari'). A very typical form of the forest *haltija* is that of the 'lady of the forest' (Finnish: '*metsänneito*'; Swedish: '*skogsfrun*'), who is described as a beautiful lady often dressed in a white gown. In Swedish-speaking regions the local dialect name '*träskiskäringar*' ('lake crones') is used for water spirits. Some wilderness spirits are known as 'border devils'.

Both household and wilderness *haltijas* are often either confused with or believed to be ghosts. A being may be called a ghost with the physical characteristics and role typical of a *haltija*, or a being named a *haltija* may be revealed to be the ghost of a murdered child or is said simply to 'haunt' a place. The word 'haunt' (Fi. '*kummittelee*', Swe. '*spökar*') is frequently used to describe the activities of a spirit, irrespective of what it is called. According to Sarmela the conception of the *haltija* as the ghost of a person buried at the place is one of the dominant ideas of the origin of the *haltija*, especially in regions where settlement was well established during the medieval period (Sarmela 1994, 158ff.).

In an interesting example from Nousiainen the *haltija* is equated with the patron saint of a church: 'Thus, the *haltija* of the church of Nousiainen was

St Henry, for he was the first person to be buried there. And when thieves and witches, who at nighttime would enter churches and open their doors with the power of words, they could not enter the church of Nousiainen, as it had such a sacred *haltija*, who would not open the church doors, no matter how they asked' (SKS KRA Nousiainen, Leivo F. 2397. 1937). Spirits appearing both in the household and wilderness are also often called devils (see *Finlands svenska folkdiktning* VII.1, 280–7).

Although my material shows even the traditional division of local spirits into cultural and wilderness spirits (see Granberg 1935, 67, Sarmela 1994, 158) to be somewhat obscure, I will next present the material roughly following those groupings: the spirits of the farm and household; and the spirits of the wilderness.

Spirits of the farm and household

Farm or household *haltijas* are known to help around the premises, at least if treated well. Many types of *haltija* dwellings on farm premises are mentioned, typically the sauna, *riihi* (a kiln house used for smoking grain), the barn, and the main dwelling room. Whether these are specific types of *haltija* or just alternative places where the farm *haltija* is assumed to live is unclear.

One of the oldest literary references to household spirits in Sweden is in the *Revelations of St Bridget of Sweden* (Book 6, Chapter 78), written in the fourteenth century, already mentioned above (Klemming 1861, 197). The first mention in Finland is found in Michael Agricola's foreword to his 1551 Finnish translation of the Psalter of David: 'The *tonntu* ruled the activities of the room' (Agricola 1551, translation by the author.).

Some of the most frequently mentioned ways the *haltija* can help are tending the fire, helping with farm work, waking people up when required, warning of danger, and amassing a fortune for their farms, even by stealing from neighbours (this trait is mentioned only in Swedish-speaking regions). It has even been said to provide a good harvest or luck in making liquor. An oft-repeated motif is that of the *haltija* either giving omens or warnings through booming or knocking sounds. Some records mention the booming sounds as a frightening or 'haunting', while others mention it as a sign of the *haltija*'s contentment.

As well as being known as helpful, the house *haltija* is also referred to as a frightening being who can appear in monstrous forms, and is mentioned as living in the house's darkest and most frightening corners. The house

haltija can cause trouble, mischief, and bad luck, even to the extent of burning houses down and killing people.

Misfortune caused by the house *haltija* is often caused by improper behaviour or acts of disrespect towards the *haltija* itself. Farm residents are often punished, but strangers and visitors even more so. For example, the *haltija* is said to disrupt the work of unfamiliar threshers in the threshing barn, or assail passing travellers who stop to rest in a sauna or *riihi*. A farmer who calls the sauna spirit a devil is soon scared by the apparition of a flayed calf bursting out of the sauna. The most extreme punishment motif is directed at a person who likes to swear and curse, and bathes too late in the sauna. The protagonist, in one account a farm matron, in another a priest, is later found dead, and in various accounts either decapitated or flayed, with their skin stretched out to dry on the wall. The sauna is one of the most clearly taboo-laden and sacred places around the farmstead. I explore this in more detail below. These examples illustrate how the house *haltija* can function as a thought model that illustrates proper and improper behaviour around the farm premises.

To remain on good terms, farm residents went through different measures to appease the house *haltija*. Typical measures include greeting the *haltija* on entering a building, avoiding making noise, or sometimes even the opposite – firing shots in honour of the *haltija* on certain days. The most frequently mentioned way of maintaining good relations with the *haltija* is to leave offerings at certain locations on the farm premises. Appeasing the *haltija* with offerings, especially food, is considered a western Finnish trait by Matti Sarmela. This is because the western Finnish *haltija* is thought to be like a human (Sarmela 1974, 351f.). Martti Haavio has speculated that leaving the first milk or the first bread made from the first grains for the *haltija* may be a result of the tabooed nature of the first share of food (Haavio 1942, 452).

Typical offerings mentioned are often related to food – a share of the same food the farm residents are eating (porridge, milk, alcohol, fresh bread) or unthreshed sheaves of grain. New clothes, shoes, and coins are also mentioned. Offerings can be left every day, on Saturdays, when performing certain work like baking, or for certain seasonal events, typically Christmas and harvest/threshing time.

The household spirits had their own revered places on the farm premises. As the following record from the Swedish-speaking parish of Nagu shows, they could often be seen as ominous and frightening:

All abodes of the *tomte* evoke both fear and reverence. Those who are even slightly afraid of the dark especially fear certain buildings on the premises, as well as the attic and the oven (this is the name for the space above the hearth between the chimney and the wall (*Finlands svenska folkdiktning* VII.1, 335, translated from Swedish by the author).

In my material it is generally impossible individually to localize the places of the household spirits. The records usually simply refer to a place that can exist in any household. It is still not unusual for individual farms to be mentioned. However, even in these cases it is highly unlikely that individual farm buildings mentioned in records from the early twentieth century would remain today.

The most commonly mentioned place for leaving sacrifices is the *riihi*. Other commonly mentioned locations for sacrifices are on the floor in the rear corner of the common room (this location is especially mentioned for the pouring of alcohol as a sacrifice), in the sauna, at the yard tree, in a special room reserved for the *haltija*, in a chest or wooden bowl, and, as one interesting description mentions, at a wooden pole erected in the forest for leaving food offerings to the *tomte*. There are occasional mentions of sacrifices made on stones in the fields. A local trait in the Pöytyä-Oripää subregion is a special room in the household reserved for the *haltija* where sacrifices were left. One record mentions this room being in the attic (SKS KRA Pöytyä. E. Vihervaara b) 1268. 1910). Both mentions of money offerings in wooden containers are from the archipelago.

According to Sonja Hukantaival's dissertation on building concealments, offerings to the house *haltija* could also be placed in the corners of the house, as a foundation ritual, in the walls, above the ceiling, under the floor, or more rarely, the hearth or threshold (Hukantaival 2016, 109, 144).

Yard trees as sacred or supernatural places where offerings are left have been the subject of two master's theses (Tuohiniemi-Hurme 2006, Malinen 2015). In Southwest Finland such trees often have the prefix '*tonttu-*' or '*haltija-*', such as the '*haltjamänt'* pine in Suoloppi, Muurla (SKS KRA Muurla, Suoloppi. Arvid Kuusola TK 50:49. 1961). Typical customs and beliefs regarding revered yard trees include pouring milk sacrifices over the trees' roots after the first calves are born in the spring, the belief that the tree protects the house and its inhabitants, and a taboo against cutting down the tree (see e.g. Malinen 2016, 35–58, Tuohiniemi-Hurme 2006, 41–52, Landtmann 1922, 8f.).

The two most commonly mentioned places for the *tonttu* to appear are separate buildings, which were found on most farmsteads. The most com-

monly mentioned location for a *tonttu* is the *riihi*. The *riihi* is mentioned in 56 of the 153 records describing household spirits in my material. The second is the sauna, a bathhouse equipped with a similar kiln to that in the *riihi*. Although the sauna is mentioned in only 19 records, its sacred nature is explicitly described in several records from both the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking regions.

People used to say the sauna was comparable to the church. You were not allowed to speak dirty words or curse there. The *haltija* would get angry, and accidents would follow. One had to say good evening upon entering the sauna, farewell when leaving, and make a blessing when closing the doors. If you farted while bathing in the sauna, nasty boils would follow. Children behaved well in the sauna when they were scared by being told the *tonttu* would get angry and come into the sauna. ... (SKS KRA Nousiainen. Leivo, Frans. N:0 2101 – 1936, translated from Finnish by the author).

The concept of the sauna as a revered and ritualized place is well known in Finland. The sauna was (and remains) primarily used as a place for bathing. Previously, the sauna had many more functions, most of them involving human vitality and health. The sauna was used for healing diseases, including bloodletting, as the place for childbirth, for the final washing of the dead, for the ritual of ‘raising love’ in a maiden (i.e. making her more attractive to suitors), but also for purposes like smoking meat and malting. Bathing in the sauna is often mentioned as an important ritual at the beginning of annual festivities like the autumn festivals and Christmas, when the spirits were given their own turn to bathe (Pentikäinen 1999).

It is important to note that although sauna bathing was seen as important at annual temporal borders like New Year and Midsummer, there were also strict prohibitions against being in the sauna at the temporal border of midnight. People were therefore expected to purify themselves when approaching the temporal border, but not at the exact moment when the border was crossed. At that moment the sauna *haltija* would drive out, as-sail, or even kill and flay the late bather.

When the records were gathered, the dominant type of sauna was the chimneyless smoke sauna, the heating of which was a time-consuming process that involved a significant risk of the whole sauna burning down if done carelessly or without experience.

Although the *riihi* is mentioned more frequently as the abode of the household *haltija*, its sacred or ritual features are much less distinctive in

the lore than those of the sauna. A *riihi* was used at the final stage of the harvest. Harvested sheaves of grain were smoke-dried in the *riihi*, which had a similar chimneyless kiln to the smoke sauna, and finally also threshed there. In vernacular Finnish threshing is called 'killing' and is seen as the final stage of the harvest cycle (see e.g. Vilkuna 1935, 108–14). It may thus have been seen as an important boundary. There are several mentions in the material of sheaves of unthreshed grain being left in the *riihi* as an offering to the *haltija*. Food or clothes brought to the *riihi* as an offering to the *haltija* are also mentioned several times.

It is noteworthy that the material also mentions *haltijas* in connection with further grain processing stages such as milling and baking, as well as earlier stages, with some offerings or acts of honouring the *haltija* said to be made in the grain fields. The material also contains references to offering stones in the fields, although without more specific details regarding what has been offered or to whom. It is possible that a peculiar group of standing stones, the '*tonntu* stones' of Merikarvia (outside the study region), are said to improve the fertility of the fields and are related to the phenomenon of offering stones to the household spirit (see Salo 1972).

Spirits in the wilderness

The local spirits of the wilderness are less frequently described in Finnish folklore than the house *haltija*, and many take more diverse shapes and names (as previously described). Sometimes the name or appearance described is similar to that of the *tonntu*. The similarities and mixing between wilderness and household *haltijas* were already noted by Gunnar Landtmann, who proposed that the *tomte* was actually a wilderness spirit, presiding over the lot of land on which a house was built (Landtmann 1922, 9–17, 21–30).

Uno Harva describes the typical traits of a forest *haltija* in his writing on 'the spiritual folk culture of Finland Proper'. The forest *haltija* is encountered most frequently in the form of a beautiful tall woman dressed in a white gown. She can be experienced as both frightening and alluring or erotic. However, she looks like 'a pile of twigs' or 'a burnt pine stump' from behind, and touching her is considered dangerous. It is said that she can lead a person into the cover of the forest, rendering the victim unable to find a way out of the forest and invisible to others (Harva 1935, 126ff.). According to Gunnar Granberg the shapes and roles of forest spirits depend on the livelihoods and activities carried out in the forest. The motifs typi-

cally found in Southwest Finland resemble those in the pine forest regions of Sweden, where the forest economy was a predominantly male domain (Granberg 1935, 229–42, 53–60).

The lady of the forest is said to be as frivolous as the mermaid. She brings the most wonderful hunting game to the path of her lover (*Finlands svenska folkdiktning* VII.1, 640, translated from Swedish by the author).

As the above example from the parish of Pargas illustrates, wilderness spirits are said to be helpful in many ways, although an element of insecurity or instability is often involved. Ways in which wilderness spirits have been said to be helpful include pulling up a man who has fallen into a river, granting wishes, tying sheep to a tree to stop them running away, or even blessing a hunter's gun so he will never miss his prey. The most commonly mentioned way of being helpful concerns the economic activities performed in the space controlled by the wilderness spirit. It could grant a good catch in hunting or a plentiful berry harvest, or help by tending animals grazing in the forest.

To receive its blessings, one had to give offerings to the spirit. This typically involved part of the catch – for example, releasing the first fish caught back into the water, or being courteous and respectful to it in other ways. Although Veikko Anttonen has claimed them to be unknown (Anttonen 2000, 298f.), I have been able to identify several sites where offerings were left in the forest.

Especially in the material from the Swedish-speaking regions, the wilderness spirits can also be found performing chores similar to those performed by the household spirits. In one account from Iniö the 'man of the forest' offered to sharpen the axes of woodcutters while they were sleeping. However, he sharpened them so intensely that the blades were completely gone by morning (*Finlands svenska folkdiktning* VII.1, 641).

Just like the household spirit, the spirit of the wilderness also has a dangerous side. It can stop or turn around horses, set a pack of wolves on hunters, or discipline people physically. However, it usually just scares people away by appearing in frightening shapes or making booming sounds like the household spirit. Likewise, the punishments and malign actions of wilderness spirits often seem to be bound to people's disrespect for boundaries and rules. A common example is that of the spirit punishing those who have gone berry picking, hunting, or fishing during a church service.

A common spirit encountered in the wilderness is that of the ghost of a murdered and secretly buried infant who haunts a place until it is buried in

consecrated ground. This is obviously a warning against infanticide, which is also presented as the extreme consequence of actions beyond the bounds of social norms. Sexual conduct outside accepted social norms (among the unmarried) could lead to pregnancies outside the accepted social structure. In the worst case children who lacked a place in society might have to be secretly killed and buried in a place of undefined social association, such as at a border. The ghost of such a (probably hypothetical) child thus becomes a guardian appointed to keep watch against such unbound behaviour in places where no one is on guard. Juha Pentikäinen, who has written a doctoral thesis on the Nordic dead child tradition, has emphasized that ghost children are ‘without status or membership’, which is also acknowledged to be a result of social neglect, that is, a breach of social norms (Pentikäinen 1968, 356, 360).

The specific sites where different kinds of spirit are known to appear in the wilderness, or where offerings have been left to them, are quite often named in folklore records. In some cases placenames have been changed or forgotten, or the descriptions are too vague to identify. A study of the identifiable sites where wilderness spirits are encountered on village maps shows that a little more than half the locations are at or very close to the defined borders between villages or parishes.

These are not natural borders like a riverside, forest’s edge, or dusk, as suggested by Jochum Stattin. Nor are they boundaries with an ‘unknown world’. They are administrative, agreed borders between social groups – parishes and villages. As such, they are also very precise, and watching over these precise borders is integral to the social order. Some of the local spirits have functions related to borders. The material mentions ‘border devils’, who haunt border stones that have been moved secretly, and who will find no rest until the stone has been restored to its rightful place.

In her dissertation on the land partitions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the historian Kirsi Laine has suggested that borders between villages in wilderness areas were not exactly defined until the Partition process. Before Partition forests and wilderness were somewhat diffusely claimed as common property (Laine 2020, 124f., 61f.). The drawing of borders in the Partition has thus brought about a change in the social context of the sites’ meaning. It is the ‘border devils’ mentioned above that have a new function, derived from the Partition, of local spirits keeping watch over newly defined borders.

Almost all the localized sites of wilderness spirits are on the outskirts of villages, usually within a few kilometres of habitation. Remote islands are also

featured in the archipelago. However, none of the locations is to be found in the furthest forested regions of the studied parishes, or the 'Korpi' regions.

Some common traits for the terrain of spirit sites are mentioned: 'paths ... between ugly rock fields' (SKS KRA Nousiainen. Leivo, F. 2197. 1936.), '... places far from habitation. These are usually by roads and paths...' (*Finlands svenska folkdiktning* VII.1, 337). Often-mentioned terrain features include woods by the road, steep hillsides, hilltops, boulders, caves and crevices, lakes, rapids, bridges, and in the Swedish-speaking area, small islands. Some of the sites are described as 'gloomy' or 'grim-looking'. There are occasionally mentions of rocks containing foot or hand imprints made by local spirits.

Visiting the places themselves has brought many insights and revealed features that are not evident in the written lore. Recognizing the sites has also become easier, as they seem to share certain traits. In particular, they usually stand out from the surrounding terrain in an eye-catching way. For example, they may have unusual rock formations. Many of the sites also have notable features familiar from other folklore sites, though unmentioned in the lore, such as frequently recurring springs and solitary boulders. I have myself experienced feelings such as 'ominous', 'eerie', or 'grim-looking' in most of the places, though these are subjective experiences. A critical description of experiencing the terrain in spirit places requires a lengthier analysis, which must be undertaken in a future study. I next present some places of wilderness spirits.

Case: the Grandfather of Laakkari

The slope of Laakkari lies along the forest road in the village of Ilmarinen. Close to that slope is a rock, and on its side is a large imprint of a hand. It was struck there by the Grandfather of Laakkari. If you should see him, your wishes will be granted. He is that kind of grandfather. A man named Rihko from the village of Pakurla went there once, hoping to see the Grandfather. When he was stumbling through the forest, an old man appeared, asking, 'What do you want?' 'Would I want shit from an old man like you?' answered Rihko. When he returned home, he found shit thrown precisely all over the place. Rihko had thought the Grandfather to be someone slightly more impressive, not a poor old man like that (SKS KRA Lieto. Posti, F.H. KRK 8:23; translated from Finnish by the author).

I was able to locate the slope of Laakkari with the aid of local informants in 2020. The place is not actually on the lands of Ilmarinen, but in an area of

forest which used to be the common property of several villages until the twentieth century.

The rock is visible from the road, and there are some small springs in front of it. On top of the rock is a recess like a large human hand and forearm. Immediately behind the rock there is a larger hill, which is a border marker with the parish of Maaria (now in the city of Turku). On both sides of the border are relatively large expanses of forest.

The tale of Rihko and the Grandfather of Laakkari illustrates that a local spirit could be either benign, granting wishes, or mischievous and even harmful to those who behaved disrespectfully. The legend does not categorize the Grandfather as a particular 'type' of spirit, though his social function corresponds with themes in stories of the devil (Wolf-Knuts 1991, 243). The Grandfather, like the devil, acts as a projection of socially unapproved hopes by granting any wish. Yet he also acts as a reflection of social norms. Rihko hoped to gain the unnatural luck granted by the old man but ended up being punished and ridiculed for his arrogance and disrespect – and quite possibly for trying to transgress his status.

The site lies in a forested area relatively far from habitation that is shared by many stakeholders. There is a border in the forest, not just a line between villages, but one which divides one parish from the next. The border is not merely a boundary between an inside, known world and an unknown outside in the sense outlined by Anttonen, Stark-Arola, and Koski, among others. It is also an insecure zone between two societies, both of them very much in this world, and it is very precise (albeit invisible), not a vague or arbitrary natural boundary. The forests around the border were the common property of several villages. The presence of a frightening spirit could help prevent unapproved behaviour, especially to avoid conflict between the land's stakeholders on both sides of the border.

Case: Tomte places

On some of the islands south of Turku there are a few known locations (in both Finnish- and Swedish-speaking areas) that are typical of wilderness *haltijas*. However, the spirits appearing there are referred to as *tonttu* or *tomte*, and are exclusively described as threatening or frightening. Such places include the 'Tonttukoivu' birch between the villages of Nikkilä and Kaivoinen on the island of Satava (see Tallgren 1909, 13, Ahola-Riikonen 2000, 97), and the hill of Virvelängsberget in Pargas:

Tomtes can also appear in places far from habitation. These are usually close to roads or paths and are called ‘*tomte sites*’. One such site is said to exist east of the Lampis lake by the hill of Virvelängsberget (*Finlands svenska folkdiktning* VII.1, 337, translated from Swedish by the author).

The Lampis lake is in the northern parts of the Ålö island in Pargas. Although the name ‘Virvelängsberget’ is not marked on any map, the *tomte* site is quite easy to point out with the help of Partition maps. East of the Lampis lake, an old village road crosses the village border between a steep cliff and the lake (MML Lampis; Isojako 1776–1776 [A78:41/4-5]), again exemplifying the typical placement of local spirits at administrative borders between villages.

Another account describes the actions of the *tomte*, saying that he is now mostly inactive, ‘only sometimes he can give a cuff on the ears to some boy who is out at night on courting adventures’ (*Finlands svenska folkdiktning* VII.1, 379f.). Young men out at night on courting adventures were at least partially out of bounds. The disciplining *tomte* at Virvelängsberget can be seen as a thought model, a warning to young people seeking romantic or sexual encounters outside the surveillance of farm premises and at night.

Conclusions

A comparison of the social roles of wilderness and household spirits reveals many similarities. Both spirits watch over and enforce the social norms intended to be followed in their domains. The norms often contain elements of showing respect and reverence to the spirit itself, and its associated place or abode. Sometimes the spirits are even honoured with offerings, which are often part of the produce gained from the spirit’s domain. Both wilderness and household spirits are presented as able to affect the outcomes of economic activities in their respective territories. This could be a bountiful harvest for a farm, or luck in fishing and hunting in the wilderness.

Both types of spirit are said to act, appear, or dwell in specific places that can be feared, laden with taboos, or sometimes even deemed sacred. Observing the places on village maps reveals that they are often on socially and administratively defined boundaries or agreed borders.

Both Veikko Anttonen and Jochum Stattin emphasize the importance of boundaries of all kinds – boundaries between the self and the outside, boundaries between categories, and natural boundaries such as waterbodies, or the sacred being between boundaries. Stattin has pointed out that

the spirits of folklore often turn up in situations where cultural divisions or categories are weak or diffuse (Stattin 1984, 44–52, Stattin 1990, 151).

Observing functionally revered sites on village maps reveals a new aspect of boundaries in folklore – that of administrative boundaries between communities such as villages, parishes, or farms. These boundaries exist to set apart yours from mine and can be seen as emic, as they have been defined by the affiliated societies. By separating spaces claimed by different owners, borders play an important role in the creation of social order. The folklore of the spirits inhabiting such places, punishing or frightening people who breach the social order by moving border stones or moving around at night, functions as tools for thought, exemplifying social rules.

As a consequence of the insecurity around the mastery and ownership of a shared border, an external master over that zone is required. A local spirit, sometimes a *haltija*, *rådare*, a ghost, or something else, bears the authority of both (or all) societies sharing a border or common area. These spirits are parts of thought models, acting as symbolic guardians of a cultural and socially ordered environment, including its norms and restrictions, both in the household and wilderness. This may explain why the spirits seem absent in the furthest reaches of the wilderness, which must have been used very seldom.

Like the farm and village, the forest was also a culturally significant shared space. Before the Partition process, all forests were shared between several villages and exploited together. Some forests remained common property even after the Partition. Different agreements were employed to make sure no one overexploited them (Laine 2020, 31–4). But as people often operated independently in the forest, the knowledge or thought model of watchful and fearsome spirits could help enforce these agreements.

The places of the spirits are charged with stories delineating taboos and threats, creating an aura of both fear and reverence. Some of the records describe ritual actions like leaving offerings at the sites. Such acts may have been a way of heightening the meaning of the place of the spirit. This can also be seen as a way of ritually marking borders and performing the social cohesion of the group, as well as marking the group's claim to the land (see Pyysiäinen 2008, 287ff., Laine 2020, 61). I suggest it is possible that ritual actions at shared borders or spaces may also have marked the participant's use of the space, thus reinforcing their engagement with and right to it.

The material from Southwest Finland studied here has revealed the shared nature of the border. Another kind of border, that between the inside and outside, which has been emphasized in previous research by Anttonen

and Stark-Arola, for example, can also be distinguished in some cases: above all the house's outer boundaries, but also its walls, corners, attic, and floor, which are all known as abodes of the household spirit. A possible explanation for the difference between border types is the settlement density in Southwest Finland. Even the more remote locations of wilderness spirits, including islands, were then less than four kilometres away from the nearest habitation. The material used by Stark-Arola comes mostly from Eastern Finland and Karelia, where the distances between habitations are greater. Denser population and settlements also increase the need for precise, mutually agreed borders and respect for them.

This study has merely opened the possibility of historical maps as a source material for a detailed understanding of the context of folklore. This requires further exploration. The examples of the sauna and *riihi* also reveal borders in time and work. A comparison and juxtaposition of physical and temporal borders in folklore could yield very interesting results concerning vernacular conceptions of spatiality.

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