

“Myths” and “Tales”: Tools for Reconstruction of Deep and of the Not So Deep Prehistory

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Etic interpretation of “myths and tales” as cultural elements subject to replication does not interfere with their study as emic phenomena that have a particular meaning for the people. At the same time it proved to be heuristically productive to differentiate etic units related to the cosmology and etiology (category A) from those that are related to the episodes of adventure and tricks (category B). Both kinds of units (which I name motifs and which include motifs-episodes and motifs-images) can be potentially used in any narrative but the probability to find them in the mythological prose or in the fairytales is different. The separate statistical processing of the A- and of the B-motifs demonstrates that the tendencies of their areal distribution are very different. The A-motifs are expected to find in narratives which are sacred or at least considered to be “true” and this makes their change and their borrowing slow and difficult. The change and borrowing of the B-motifs used in texts which are not sacred and are not believed to be “true” is more rapid and easy. The existence of similar folklore units in different traditions is an evidence of cultural interaction between people. Because of the different speed of change, the interaction spheres reconstructed thanks to the statistical processing of the A-motifs had to exist in the earlier times than the interaction spheres reconstructed thanks to the processing of the B-motifs.

In my report I present the results of such a processing selecting groups of motifs of different categories and subcategories and related to different territories, from Global to the East European scale.



Myth, Language, Origin: 19th Century Mythology Studies in Germany and Finland

Joonas Ahola (University of Helsinki)

This paper will discuss theoretical and methodological principles of German mythology studies during the first half of the 19th century and how these principles were implemented in Finnish research, notably in the work of M. A. Castrén who wrote an influential treatise of Finnish / Finnic mythology. This paper will also discuss how the theoretical and methodological choices affected the research results, thus reflecting ideological trends of the time in research results.

The Memory of Landscape: Place Lore and its Problems for Retrospective Approaches on the Example of Eyrbyggja saga

Matthias Egeler (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich)

This lecture discusses the account of the settlement of Þórsnes by Þórólfr Mostrarskegg as it is presented in *Eyrbyggja saga*. This account will be related to the question of the applicability of current thinking on landscape to the interpretation of Old Norse literature, with an outline of its implications for the use of place lore in retrospective approaches.

Current approaches both to landscape in general and to the construction of the landscape of Þórsnes in *Eyrbyggja saga* in particular tend to emphasise the function of 'landscape' as a medium conveying existential 'meanings' and acting as a repository of 'memories'. However, a close reading of the literary landscape of Þórsnes in *Eyrbyggja saga* rather suggests that much of the literary construction of this landscape should be seen as humorous, and intended to be understood as humorous by the saga's contemporary audience. Central for this reading is an interpretation of the place name *Dritsker* as meaning "Guano Skerry". This translation is required by the lexical evidence but has been avoided by previous critics, who chose to adapt their interpretations of the place name to the story told about it in the saga and thus missed a central clue for the interpretation of the saga episode. This misunderstanding allowed them to interpret a passage of the saga as a source for retrospective reconstructions of religion and beliefs. Contrary to this, I claim that the passage has no retrospective source value for religion but rather illustrates the extreme fluidity that place lore can have within Icelandic narrative culture.



Encounters with Supernatural Beings in Popular and Learned Discourse: Examples from Early Modern Sweden and Medieval Iceland

Daniel Sävborg (University of Tartu)

The difference between a learned and a popular discourse in earlier periods becomes especially visible when it comes to ideas concerning the supernatural. In 17th century Sweden several farmers, soldiers and fishermen were accused of having had sexual relations with nature spirits such as *skogsrået* and *sjörået*. All of them confessed and gave detailed accounts of what had happened. In the court protocols we can see that the court took the confessions seriously and agreed that a sexual encounter with something supernatural actually had taken place. But the members of the court, belonging to the learned elite, interpreted it in a way very different from the farmers, soldiers and fishermen on trial. While the latter group saw the nature beings as representatives of races of supernatural beings, basically physical, living in the woods and lakes, the former, learned, group saw these beings as manifestations of the Devil, in themselves spiritual. This kind of clash of different perspectives and beliefs – and sometimes interaction between them – will in my presentation be traced also in some Old Norse texts about supernatural encounters.



The Meaning of the Knowing Cobra

Maarit Tevanlinna Alvarez (University of Tartu)

I propose to bring to you a story from South Africa. I am not sure if it serves for advancing the methodology of deciphering of myths, or advance what might be the applications of finding the meaning or meanings in a story you will hear. We have at hand a piece of African folklore, though not ancient, which contains some of the elements that are found in stories, including The Genesis. It involves a serpent, which seems to possess remarkable abilities unusual for a snake. Roland Barthes's ideas of deciphering a myth and analyzing the *signifiers* and *signifieds* seem lofty and perhaps ill-fitting in this particular instance. The story could be viewed from the point of view of phenomenology. "This happened ..." says the speaker. It could be spoken about from the point of view of discourse analysis. But I am offering the story to be heard, and I leave it for the audience to decide ultimately how to approach this (despite the warning that such a maneuver of letting the reader fill in the blanks is forbidden for a thesis maker). This is one of many I was told in South Africa ties together with the central idea, a neologism I coined in writing about streetscape visual culture in a South African Black township, *Mamelodiness*.*

My questions would be about truth and false value of the story, and weighing the moral meanings, battle of righteousness and wrongdoing, crime and punishment, vices. Did this really happen, or it a hoax?

And this is how the story begins:

This happened in Moreleta Park. The Indian people there were the neighbors of those people where I was working ...

**Mamelodiness* is a noun derived of Mamelodi township, where I observed, photographed and queried of ideas that photography of billboards there evoked in residents.

Dynamics of Authority between Mythology, Verbal Art and the People who Use Them

Frog (University of Helsinki)

We tend to take for granted the status of certain types of verbal art in pre-modern societies, as well as the status of mythology and the specialists who use these. On the other hand, the authority of the verbal art, mythology and specialists all clearly change over time. Our assumptions of their authority are most often simply a projection of our (Romantic) intuitions and expectations of an ideal era of the tradition, often one or more steps removed from the sources that we have. Traditions not only vary and evolve continuously, their authority and that of their users also evolves and can sometimes change quite fast and in surprising ways. It is therefore methodologically significant to develop perspectives on this process and how it works.

This lecture opens an approach to looking at verbal art, mythology and the people who use these as forming a three-part system in which the authority of each is constructed in relation to the others within the context of practices. Finno-Karelian kalevalaic incantations and epic will be taken alongside and Karelian laments to illustrate the long-term development of interfaces between verbal art and mythology in relation to the authorities who use them. The authority that each of these develops becomes most apparent when the authority of one of the three is used strategically in a new way. Examples of this will be taken from Old Saxon, Old English and Old Norse poetries in the context of religious change, where poetry that had long been interfaced with vernacular mythology and ideology is used for Christian aims. These Germanic poetries are from the Middle Ages with very little information about the social and historical processes surrounding them. The recent mobilization of Rotenese ritual poetry in the 20th century in order to advance the conversion to Christianity will be taken to consider the social dynamics of authority that first make the use of this form of verbal art desirable and then lead it, and the associated specialist users, marginalized from their earlier authoritative roles.



Hunting for Vampires in Polish Folklore and Archaeology: The Problems and Possibilities of Retrospective Studies

Leszek Gardęła (University of Rzeszów)

Almost any book on vampirism contains passages about Poland. It is often argued that throughout the centuries the people living in Central Europe were deeply superstitious and feared that some of their dead could return from their graves and pose a threat to the living. Extant textual sources show that the Slavs usually called these revenants *upiór* or *strzyga* and it seems that these beings were largely synonymous with the widely-known concept of a *vampire*. Folkloristic accounts from 19th and 20th century Poland abound with descriptions of strange rituals conducted among rural communities with the intention to hold the dangerous dead in their graves. These acts often involved exhuming the bodies, turning them face down, staking, decapitation or burning the corpses to ashes to ensure the dead would never return. One of the many questions that bother scholars of these phenomena today is how deep in time do the roots of such apotropaic acts grow? Is it possible to find tangible traces of similar practices in more distant past and among the Slavic population that settled the Polish lands in the Early Middle Ages?

Archaeological excavations conducted at various sites that date from the late 10th to 13th centuries provide startling examples of funerary behaviour that deviates considerably from what we would usually regard as a normative Christian burial. Some of the dead are found buried in a prone position or with their bodies covered with stones, while others have their heads cut off and placed at the feet. There are also instances of partial exhumation of the bones and their cremation *in situ*. For a long time such acts have been interpreted by Polish archaeologists in the light of ethnographic sources and seen as attempts to protect the living against the undesired activity of the dead. Even a special label “anti-vampire burials” has been coined for them. But is it really justified to interpret every single instance of an unusual burial as reflecting fear of vampires? Was the concept of a vampirism actually known among the medieval population of Poland? Can deviant burials signal other meanings than merely the intention of the mourners to hold the deceased in their graves? This paper will take a critical approach to funerary practices in medieval Poland and discuss the various methodological problems that archaeologists, historians and ethnographers should be critically aware of while dealing with the problem of vampirism in Central Europe.



Suggested reading for the workshop:

Leszek Gardela 2015: Vampire Burials in Medieval Poland. An Overview of Past Controversies and Recent Reevaluations. *Lund Archaeological Review* 21, pp. 107-126.

Leszek Gardela 2015: Face Down: The Phenomenon of Prone Burial in Early Medieval Poland. *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoiviensia* 10, pp. 99-136.

Comparative perspectives:

Leszek Gardela 2013: The Dangerous Dead? Rethinking Viking-Age Deviant Burials. In: *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, Slupecki, L., Simek, R. (eds.). *Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia* 23. Vienna. Fassbaender, 96-136.

Additional paper for discussion:

Leszek Gardela 2013: 'Warrior-women' in Viking Age Scandinavia? A Preliminary Archaeological Study. *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoiviensia* 8, pp. 273-314.

The Devil and the Spirit World in Nineteenth-Century Estonia: From Christianization to Folklorization

Ülo Valk (University of Tartu)

Oral narratives about supernatural encounters have been systematically documented in Estonia since the late-19th century, when the extensive project of folklore collecting started. Protestant Christianity had gained the dominant position in the society but it was challenged by the romantic ideology of nation building with its endeavours to study and revive the pre-Christian mythology. At the same time, the Enlightenment and scientific materialism gained ground and undermined the validity of folk beliefs that were re-interpreted as worthless and harmful superstitions. Folk narratives about the supernatural reveal conflicts between co-existent belief systems and ideologies, contradictions between frames of interpretations, and ambiguities of vernacular religion as a creative realm of variations.

The Devil maintained his significant position in Christianity throughout the 19th century both in the institutionally constructed cosmos and the corresponding cosmos of folklore. He was a powerful outcast, the Other, who was systematically marginalized but tended to be omnipresent, appearing constantly in narratives that were kept in circulation and sometimes turning up in accounts of personal experiences. We can also witness the folklorization of the Lutheran Devil, who appears as the stupid Old Nick or a minor spirit who is localized to a certain place in nature or in a village setting. The Devil cannot be clearly distinguished from nature spirits as many of their appellations, beliefs and narrative plots overlap. Like fallen angels, nature spirits had been integrated into a folk demonology that existed in a dialogic relationship with clerical doctrines about the powers of evil. As the discursive and intellectual environment changed, the life of spirits could not remain unaffected and they received new roles and functions. Demonized by Christianization and displaced by the Enlightenment, they finally received much more prominent positions in the imaginary realm of folkloristic heathendom as it appeared in the works of scholars and also in the work of corresponding agents throughout the countryside who were recording old Estonian heritage.

This lecture discusses the trajectories of theological and vernacular beliefs within the frameworks of changing discursive settings in 19th century Estonia. The textual examples to be analysed are drawn from the Estonian Folklore Archives, early newspapers and clerical literature.