



Storied and Supernatural Places

Studies in Spatial and Social Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas

Edited by
Ülo Valk and Daniel Sävborg

Studia Fennica
Folkloristica

Studia Fennica
Folkloristica 23

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FI-00171 Helsinki

www.finlit.fi

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The publication has undergone a peer review.



This volume was supported by institutional research funding from the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (project IUT2-43 Tradition, Creativity and Society: Minorities and Alternative Discourses).

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A digital edition of a printed book first published in 2018 by the Finnish Literature Society.
Cover Design: Timo Numminen
EPUB: Tero Salmén

ISBN 978-952-222-917-5 (Print)
ISBN 978-952-222-994-6 (PDF)
ISBN 978-952-222-993-9 (EPUB)

ISSN 0085-6835 (Studia Fennica)
ISSN 1235-1946 (Studia Fennica Folkloristica)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21435/sff.23>

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BoD – Books on Demand, Norderstedt, Germany 2018

Contents

ÜLO VALK, DANIEL SÄVBORG
Place-Lore, Liminal Storyworld and Ontology of the Supernatural.
An Introduction 7

I Explorations in Place-Lore

TERRY GUNNELL
The Power in the Place:
Icelandic *Álagablettir* Legends in a Comparative Context 27

JOHN LINDOW
Nordic Legends of the Churchyard 42

KAARINA KOSKI
The Sacred and the Supernatural: Lutheran Church Buildings in Christian
Practice and Finnish Folk Belief Tradition 54

SANDIS LAIME
The Place Valence Approach in Folk Narrative Research:
The “Church Sinks Underground” Motif in Latvian Folklore 80

ÜLO VALK
Ontological Liminality of Ghosts: The Case of a Haunted Hospital 93

KRISTEL KIVARI
Webs of Lines and Webs of Stories in the Making of Supernatural
Places 114

II Regional Variation, Environment and Spatial Dimensions

FROG

When Thunder Is Not Thunder; Or, Fits and Starts in the Evolution of Mythology 137

MADIS ARUKASK

Sorcery, Holiness, the Third Sex – The Role of Herdsman in Finnic and North Russian Folk Culture 159

BENGT AF KLINTBERG

The Wonders of Midsummer Night: Magical Bracken 181

DANIEL SÄVBORG

The Icelander and the Trolls – The Importance of Place 194

MART KULDKEPP

A Study in Distance: Travel and Holiness in *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Eiríks saga víðförla* 206

III Traditions and Histories Reconsidered

JONATHAN ROPER

Folk Disbelief 223

DAVID HOPKIN

Legends and the Peasant History of Emancipation in France and Beyond 237

DIARMUID Ó GIOLLAIN

People, Nation and ‘Combative Literatures’:
Baltic, Celtic and Nordic Configurations of Folklore 256

List of Authors 269

Abstract 272

Index of Persons 273

General Index 276

ÜLO VALK, DANIEL SÄVBORG

Place-Lore, Liminal Storyworld and Ontology of the Supernatural. An Introduction

Places are far more than geographical locations; they are sites of memories and venues of extraordinary encounters in storytelling. Some of them have an intimate relationship with us as places of dwelling that determine our belonging; others are distant or remain in the world of imagination. Places can be monumental, grand, small, cosy, homely, holy, scary or repulsive, natural or man-made, familiar or strange – either belonging to our daily surroundings or being beyond our direct experience – and they can also be meaningful to us in a variety of ways. This collection of articles offers a variety of approaches to the construction of places in narrative genres, the relationship between tradition communities and their environments, the supernatural dimensions of cultural landscapes and wilderness as they are manifested in folklore and in early literary sources, such as Old Norse sagas. The storyworld that is evoked by these multiple modes of verbal expression can be conceptualised as a liminal realm between factuality and fiction, where everyday reality is transformed by imagination and where the subtle magical power of words evokes the supernatural. Sceptical folks, however, question the reality of this narrative enchantment, reinforcing the cognitive boundaries between the ‘real’ and ‘imagined’, between fact and fantasy. However, even analytical minds are often carried away by the ideological currents that shape societies. The folklore of place can thus become a part of national agendas and be used for political goals.

The book consists of three parts that investigate these topics, expounding the dimensions and levels of narrative construction of places, and the broader framework of research. The first part “Explorations in Place-Lore” offers a set of case studies and analysis of local legends from North European traditions past and present. The second part “Regional Variation, Environment and Spatial Dimensions” broadens the comparative and historical aspects of place-lore, and shows the role of beliefs, legends and ritual practices in shaping the environment of tradition communities both in their daily surroundings and in the fictional landscapes of sagas. Thirdly, the last part of the book “Traditions and Histories Reconsidered” examines former scholarship, its historical formation and sources from reflective and critical perspectives. It carries the discussion from local traditions and single case-studies to the level of statehood, national ideologies and geopolitical

spaces. The introduction addresses the conceptual framework of the book, focussing on the basic notions of place-lore, the supernatural and genres of expression. It also links folkloristic approaches with current debates in some related disciplines, such as religious studies, anthropology and ethnology.

Place-Lore and Narrative Gravitation

Environment is not a mere background or surrounding for stories, songs and other expressive forms, it is a sensed and intimately known reality. Places acquire meanings – both personal and shared – through lives, experiences and narratives (Knuuttila 2006). We can talk about the stratification of places as they store their histories, and about their simultaneity, as multiple interconnected places often co-exist and overlap with each other (Knott 2005: 127). Some significant places emerge due to perceptual strategies by means of which certain landscape features are prioritised and perceived as special, charging local topography with the quality of sacrality (Anttonen 2014a: 120). Such an overall dynamism of places – either sacred or profane, emergent or with waning significance – indicates that they cannot be identified through some essentialist features, but are situational, undergo constant remaking and are lodged in changing circumstances (Heynicks et al. 2012). As seen from a folkloristic perspective, telling and listening to stories is the quintessential practice of building places. Frank J. Korom who has studied oral narratives about the advent of the local deity in a West Bengali village has shown that although stories often rely on widely spread traditional motifs, each narrative is born as a creative and independent work of verbal art. The relationship that people develop with locality, the belief systems and narrative theologies they share – and their very place in the world is thus unique, and differs from that of neighbouring communities. (Korom 2016.)

Some places grow in time and accumulate meanings, layer by layer, although the same places can also obtain personal significance as awareness of them grows together with life experience and memory. Keith Basso (1996: 107) has noted that relationship with place is both reciprocal and dynamic: “When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anybody’s guess”. Because it is animated by thoughts, emotions and memories, place becomes a powerful agent that attracts, inspires and bounds people. Edward S. Casey (1996: 25) has talked about the capacity of places to hold and gather, to generate particular configurations and senses of ordered arrangements of things. Places also hold their inhabitants within their boundaries and offer them protection, bringing people together. In some religions, the power of deities to reward and protect their devotees is limited to the vicinity of the abodes of these deities, thus people are firmly bound to place (Tuan 2001 [1977]: 152–153). In belief narratives, places can also act in a straightforward manner, without involving any supernatural agents: forests lead people astray or hide cattle, sacred places punish transgressors who violate taboos, displeased lakes travel long

distances to new locations. Human misdeeds trigger the dramatic reactions of places and those extraordinary events are remembered in local legends. Other places display the activities of giants, ancestors, saints or heroes who have left visible traces in the environment. Yi-Fu Tuan notes that among native peoples, mythic history is recorded in the landscape, in rocks and waterholes that these peoples can see and touch. A native finds there “the ancient story of the lives and deeds of the immortal beings from whom he himself is descended, and whom he reveres” (Tuan 2001 [1977]: 158). Places thus store collective memories of the mythic past, as is also shown by Cristina Bacchilega, in her monograph *Legendary Hawai‘i and the Politics of Place* (2007). She has explored such “storied places” in Hawaiian traditions, focussing on *wahi pana* – significant and celebrated places that appear in *mo‘olelo* – a narrative genre of the indigenous folklore. Bacchilega discusses how local stories have been translated and re-interpreted within the framework of Western notions of folklore genres and applied to produce legendary Hawai‘i, primarily for non-Hawaiian audiences.

Places thus appear differently to local people and to outsiders, and the related narrative traditions are transformed when they circulate in various media and across boundaries. Not only is folklore local, but there are also multiple folkloristic research traditions, bound to different languages and sociocultural contexts. In the 1990s a new concept emerged in Estonian folkloristics – *kohapärimus*, ‘place-lore’, which soon became a distinct field of studies, the importance of which has only increased in the years since. Growing public interest in place-lore has brought about several publications, both in hard copy and in digital form, and has led to a place-lore revival. In its “second life” (Honko 2013a [1991]), obsolete folklore is resurrected from archives and other dormant forms and brought back into circulation. Conserved place-lore resumes its life in the environment – often in its original dwelling places, with landscape becoming narratively re-loaded.

According to Mari-Ann Rimmel (2014: 67), place-lore is “mostly narrative lore, which is strongly bound to some toponym, site or landscape object, and which includes (place) legends, place-bound beliefs, descriptions of practices, historical lore, memories etc”. Mall Hiimäe has characterised place-lore as a set of traditions that focus on natural and cultural surroundings, such as hills, valleys, forests, wetlands, lakes, rivers, fields, rocks, old trees, graveyards, chapels, churches, roads, and terrain. She notes that the very existence of these objects in the neighbourhood supports the continuity of the related place-lore, which in turn attributes value to sites and objects, safeguarding them from destruction. Hence, place-lore is a concept that refers to a symbiotic relationship between tradition communities and their environment, between tangible reality and the storyworld. (Hiimäe 2007 [2004]: 364, 370.) When the Estonian term *kohapärimus* appeared, it seemed problematic to find a suitable equivalent in English. It was explicated as “place-related oral tradition”, and it took many years before “place-lore” gained traction as a more fitting translation (Valk 2009). Its definitions above reveal that place-lore is not an analytical label that pinpoints a certain genre but a synthetic concept that highlights a variety of expressive forms that manifest close bonds between humans, places and the environment.

Characteristically, place-lore contains elements from different time periods, but place-lore is also in constant formation as new memory places are being created (Rommel & Valk 2014: 387). The concept has close affinities with the notion of environment mythology (Finnish *ympäristömytologia*), defined by Veikko Anttonen (2014b: 76) as a web of meanings that come into being through the interaction between mobile humans and both rural and urban landscapes that are never natural in themselves but become naturalised through various practices and discourses. Ergo-Hart Västriik has noted that folkloristic interest in place-lore correlates with recent shifts in the humanities that have changed the research focus to include human relationships with the environment. This ‘human’ aspect has appealed to local communities and municipalities in Estonia, which have recognised the value of place-lore in regional identity building as well as in nature and heritage tourism. (Västriik 2012: 26–27.)

Thus, place-lore has the power to unite people, to protect them (Casey 1996), and to move them to action in their endeavours of protecting remarkable places in their locality. In addition, certain distant destinations enthrall people into making long journeys. Places with historical importance, such as sites of crucial battles, the birth places, homes and graves of great heroes and celebrities, and monuments of the past are visited by thousands of travellers. Innumerable pilgrims have been drawn to holy places by miracle stories of saints and of miraculous cures to receive blessings and return home with fresh stories to tell. However, as Jacob Kinnard notes, “there is nothing inherently sacred about any place or space or physical object; human agents give them power and maintain that power” (2014: 2). Places are empowered through narratives that are recycled in countless variants and which mark them out as extraordinary locations. Hence, we can talk about the social gravitation that certain sites exert through storytelling. This narrative gravitation field can fluctuate in time, increasing or waning, depending on the changing status of the place. The landscape, as it becomes storied, turns from a passive surrounding into an active participant in creating the supernatural environment. Lisa Gabbert has written about “performative landscapes” that participate in creation and shaping of the liminal reality where this world and the other world meet. People who enter this environment beyond the boundaries of everyday reality transform themselves ritually into story characters and become participants in the legendary realm. (Gabbert 2015: 162–164.) Thus, the storyworld, landscape and people all participate in the creation of this realm, in the supernaturalisation of places.

Regina Bendix (2002) argues that tourism relies to a great extent on narration and narrative potential to attract travellers – those who crave for something new, genuine and authentic – to the “aura of the touristic experience”. Here Bendix refers to Walter Benjamin’s understanding of aura as the irresistible attraction of certain works of art which bring into material proximity something which is felt to be inaccessibly remote. (Bendix 2002: 473.) Aura in Benjamin’s understanding is also a form of perception that endows a phenomenon with the “ability to look back at us”, to open its eyes or “lift its gaze” (Hansen 2008: 339). Notorious places appear as animated; they generate a sense of personal relationship and emotional awareness.

Places are of different kinds. They can be familiar, homely or unknown, or mysterious, or even dangerous. Places can become lived experiences and as such they can evoke different feelings. Visiting a cemetery can generate a sense of peace and tranquillity or bring back sweet memories, yet the same surrounding can evoke feelings of loss or regret, even mystery and fear, when the graveyard appears in the darkness of the night. American folklorists have studied the tradition of legend questing and legend tripping – visits to haunted places and scenes of horrific tragedies (Ellis 1996; Kinsella 2011; Gabbert 2015; Tucker 2015). Analyses of the psychological side of these visits reveals a strongly emotional aspect – on the one hand the need to induce fear, and on the other hand developing methods to cope with it, such as relying on comforting companionship (Thomas 2007: 58–59).

Place-related legends and traditions about the supernatural are the focus of the largest single group of chapters in the present volume. In his piece, Terry Gunnell examines Icelandic legends directly connected with specific places in the landscape, *álagablettir* ('enchanted spots'). They were seen as cursed and dangerous to visit. Legends have served to preserve knowledge of these places as well as the belief in their status as enchanted, even up to the present day. Three chapters in the volume are concerned with a certain type of place, the church. Kaarina Koski investigates the role of church buildings in Finnish folk belief. She describes how the "supernatural otherness of the church" is expressed in many folk traditions and legends. They depict dangerous encounters with otherworldly beings in the church at night as well as the different kinds of spirits found there. The special status of church buildings is closely connected with their sacrality and the special rituals conducted there. Church buildings in folk tradition are also in focus in Sandis Laime's chapter. He develops what he calls "place valence approach", an understanding of why a certain place has the capacity to attract certain narrative motifs. In his piece he specifically analyses the motif of churches sinking underground in Latvian folklore. John Lindow devotes his chapter to the churchyard and the Scandinavian folk legends that relate to it. He emphasises the liminal status of the churchyard, situated inside the church wall, but outside the church building. In many folk legends, the churchyard is a place where the dead communicate with the living. In Ülo Valk's chapter another type of place is in focus. He examines stories of hauntings in a particular hospital in Tartu. Here the *place* of the supernatural encounter is further emphasized by the fact that the hauntings are connected with specific areas within the hospital. Kristel Kivari investigates several phenomena that are generally seen as pseudo-science, including place-related ideas such as "energy lines" in the earth, which are supposed to influence dowsing rods and pendulums. In an important way this chapter also problematizes the concept of 'supernatural', since firstly, the idea of energy lines has a connection with accepted sciences such as geology, and secondly, the direct purpose of some of the investigations of the phenomenon in her discussion was to give the supernatural *natural* explanations.

Regional Variation, Environment and Spatial Dimensions

The physical environment is closely connected to narrative traditions. Folklore is always born in certain social and physical settings and is shaped by these surroundings. Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, who was interested in the dissemination of traditions, noticed that in the course of transmission folklore becomes adapted to a certain milieu – i.e. it appears in ecotypes. He remarked: “The narrower the cultural area is, the more uniform will be the development and the more distinct the oicotypification” (von Sydow 1948: 16). Later research has revealed that folklore cannot be considered an isolated phenomenon of culture and that the notion of ‘uniform tradition’ is incompatible with its endless live variation, and is, in fact, an oxymoron rather than a useful theoretical construct. However, there is no reason to doubt that folklore of the pre-Internet age bears a regional character. It is not only recorded in local dialects from people who reside in certain places, but it is often flexibly harmonized with nearby sites and adjusted to surrounding landscapes. Lauri Honko (2013b [1981]: 174) called these processes the ‘milieu-morphological’ adaptation of folklore, which he sees as consisting of operations and devices, such as familiarisation and localisation, “linking a certain tradition to a spot or place in the experienced physical milieu”. The fusion of boundaries between the narrative plot and its physical and social environment is one of the distinctive features of legend as a genre. According to Timothy Tangherlini, local traditions reflecting culturally-based values and beliefs exert influence upon legends. Therefore, the legend can be considered as a highly ecotypified genre (1990: 385).

Ecotypes and regional variation in legends and traditions are discussed in three of the chapters in the present volume. Frog examines ATU 1148b, “The Theft of the Thunder-Instrument”, a tale that is spread over the Scandinavian and Baltic area; his main focus is regional variation. He particularly analyses how the ATU 1148b tradition has been attached to local landscapes in Sámi traditions to a specific sacred site and in some Norwegian versions to a road through scree. Madis Arukask presents several aspects of the role of the herdsman, both certain rituals and different kinds of supernatural connections in the Vepsian culture area. He points out some features that differ remarkably from the traditions of herdsman magic in southern cultures, and explains them as differences between burn-beat agriculturists and cattle breeders on the one hand and large-scale corn cultivators on the other. Bengt af Klintberg conducts a survey of the legends and beliefs about bracken and its magical flower that blooms at Midsummer Night. The chapter shows close connection between spatial and temporal dimensions in legends and the role that belief narratives play in the supernaturalisation of the everyday world. Bracken legends can transform the well-known environment into the realm of the supernatural, manifesting the “chronotope of enchantment”, to take up the term that Camilla Asplund Ingemark has used to characterise the generative principle of some narrative genres (Asplund Ingemark 2006). Bracken legends often merge with legends about buried treasures and express one more aspect of place-lore – namely the awareness that some singular places close to human neighbourhoods remain hidden, even

inaccessible, and they only occasionally reveal their secrets. The temporal aspect of legends – the magical time of special nights – plays an active role in making the supernatural places.

These three chapters address the impact of folklore upon the perception of local natural surroundings which sometimes then acquires an otherworldly character. Lotte Tarkka (2015: 17) has drawn a distinction between “the environmental or social spaces that are the ‘other’, such as the forest or neighbourhood village” on one hand, and the empirically inaccessible otherworlds (such as the land of the dead) (cf. also Tarkka 2013: 327–428). For Max Lüthi the contrast between the nearby and a remote otherworld was found in the distinction between the down-to-earth legend and the marvellous folktale (German *Sage* vs. *Märchen*). He states that “folktale characters do not feel that an encounter with an otherworld being is an encounter with an alien dimension” (Lüthi 1986 [1982]: 10), while the opposite is the case in the legend. When it comes to physical or geographical distance, Lüthi (1986 [1982]: 7–8) describes a sort of paradox: although the legend emphasises that otherworld beings belong to another world, they are physically close to human beings, living with or close to them; in the folktale the opposite is true: hero has to wander far and wide before he meets otherworld beings, whose dwelling places remain distant. Lüthi concludes (1986 [1982]: 8–9): “In legends otherworld beings are physically near human beings but spiritually far. In folktales they are far away geographically but near in spirit and in the realm of experience.”

The next chapters in the volume explore the relationship between the remote and nearby otherworlds and spatial dimensions in sagas. Daniel Sävborg discusses the generic features of Icelandic sagas, focussing on the relationship between supernatural elements and spatial distance. He applies Max Lüthi’s contrastive model of legends (*Sagen*) as two-dimensional narratives and folktales (*Märchen*) as one-dimensional stories to Old Norse literature. It appears that two-dimensionality is a characteristic of stories about events in the vicinity of tellers, whereas one-dimensionality increases with geographical distance. Mart Kuldkepp addresses other aspects of distance in Old Norse literature, analysing travelogues about the spiritual quest of two heroes who convert to Christianity and start preaching in their home countries. Imaginary holy lands outside everyday experience function as gateways from the natural to the supernatural realm and display liminal qualities. The geographical distance between places is converted into spiritual distance between heathendom and the holiness of Christianity. Kuldkepp’s approach successfully reveals a common pattern in two sagas usually treated as belonging to entirely different genres.

Nation, People and Folk: Traditions Reconsidered

Folklore studies from the 19th century often express a craving for the glory and wisdom of the distant past. Several monumental source publications were conceptualised as memorials to past generations. Folklore was seen as revealing their spiritual heritage and was envisioned as a treasury, as

a resource-rich asset to be deposited in the national archives and to be used for the development of literary culture. Awareness of the historical value of folklore thus did not mean that the glance of scholars was turned backwards only. The approaching 20th century engendered high expectations of general progress, enlightenment, modernisation, and liberation of peoples from poverty, ignorance, and social and political suppression. Patriotic idealism, folklore collecting, the publication of epics, interest in and research into pre-Christian mythologies and histories all created a sense of ethnic unity, in several cases leading to the foundation of nation states. Folklore represented their national heritage and was labelled with ethnonyms as a marker of ownership. When folklore was designated as Estonian, Finnish, German, Latvian, Russian, Swedish or some other ethnic heritage, these compartmentalisations also charted the geopolitical map of European nation states. The temporal dimension of folklore thus came together with the notion of countries as territorial units. Early folklorists were often provincial scholars with in-depth knowledge of local dialects and lore that was specific to places and which marked off these places as unique. It was not only differences in landscape and material culture that distinguished sites from each other, but also differences in local psyche and tradition, including beliefs in magic and the supernatural. These traits marked folklore as fundamentally different from the intellectual traditions of the educated urban people. However, the opposition between the ‘superstitious’ folk and the rationally minded ‘elite’ might be nothing more than a cognitive construct of modernist thinkers who were drawing sharp boundaries between their own enlightened mindset and the backward mentality of the past. In his chapter, Jonathan Roper problematises this distinction. While folklorists have for a long time been concerned with folk belief as opposed to educated scepticism, Roper argues that we also have to take the concepts of folk disbelief and educated belief into account. He shows that sceptical narratives that contradict the pattern of depicting the folk as credulous have often been recorded by open-minded non-folklorists. It appears that their works sometimes offer a more nuanced picture of the intellectual life in the countryside than those of the folklorists with their bias towards focussing on tale types and supernatural beliefs. The chapter by David Hopkin also addresses narrative traditions among local communities. Whereas Roper looks for alternative sources to study the mentality of the people, Hopkin examines folklore collections to study peasant history. He shows that historical legends of the peasantry express social divisions and group ideology and can be re-examined as important sources for studying the history of peasant emancipation. Because of their ‘truth value’, legends can help scholars to understand why people behaved as they did, they are also expressions of ‘peasant historiography’. However, Hopkin argues that “legends, despite their historical character, are not really about the past, they are about the present and future.” Hence they have a great role to play in the formation of social identities and political realities. Hopkin’s article also discusses the construction of the Celt in France. In the 18th century, the division of the French population into three estates – the clergy, the nobility, and the commons – was frequently connected with the allegedly different origins of the classes: the nobles were descendants of the

Franks who had conquered and oppressed the Roman-Celtic population, whose descendants were the commons. Diarmuid Ó Giolláin sheds light on a common assumption about folklore – the idea of its national quality, which has led to the perception of folkloristics as being a ‘national science.’ Ó Giolláin discusses the construction of the concepts *Baltic*, *Nordic* and *Celtic* and the interest in collecting the folklore of these supposed cultures. These attempts, as well as the founding of folklore societies and university chairs, are analysed in connection with national movements and nation building in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The three articles in the third section of the book lead us from the rural communities – i.e. from the grassroots level of folklore – towards folklore’s political uses in constructing and reinforcing national identities. From places and localities we reach the concept of homeland and geopolitical spaces. Romantic national ideologies, in turn, became important factors of collecting folklore, which leads us back to a small community, tied to a place, which is “an extremely meaningful component of individual identity”, as Alan Dundes (1989: 13) argues in his essay “Defining Identity through Folklore”, where he demonstrates the complexity of the dynamics of belonging and self-identification. The last chapters thus also illustrate the multi-layered nature of folklore in relation to social, political and territorial identity formation.

Ontology of the Supernatural

Our analytical and reflexive era of knowledge production presupposes a critical examination of the categories that we use. We have discovered that many concepts have roots in European epistemological traditions and their potential to illuminate and encompass other cultural realities can either be limited or even distorting. Thus, ‘religion’ has turned out to be a problematic term, as it is too often understood ‘prototypically’, which means viewing its diverse phenomena through the lens of some particular religion, usually that of Christianity (Alles 2005: 7704). Several authors argue that religion as a category is pre-theoretical, culturally constructed and ineffective, especially if we look beyond the boundaries of the Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Along the same lines, the fundamental dichotomy between nature and society, human and non-human in Western epistemology appeared as a late construct, which spread with the ideas of modernity, only becoming firmly established quite recently (Latour 1993). Anthropologists representing the ontological turn have rejected the notion of inanimate nature, which lacks agency and personhood, and have shown the human relationship with the environment in a new light. In Western epistemology, personhood as a category can only be applied to self-conscious individual humans, but this is not the case for many peoples who are not affected by the theory of the great divide between nature and culture. In addition, animals, birds, fish, spirits, deities, rocks and trees can be recognised as (other-than-human) persons – as far as they relate to humans (and to each other) in a particular way (cf. Harvey 2012).

These interactions reverberate in the indigenous theories that Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998) has called perspectivism – consistent ideas in Amazonian cosmologies concerning the way in which humans, animals and spirits see themselves and one another. According to this outlook “animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators)” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 470). Philippe Descola (2013) has developed the theory of basic configurations, how humans are related to nature, and described animism as one of those cognitive modes. He points out that in animist ontologies, plants, animals and other elements of the physical environment are endowed with a subjectivity of their own; and that different kinds of person-to-person relationship are maintained with these entities. In animist thought, both humans and non-humans possess the same psychological dispositions (interiority) with the latter also being bestowed with social characteristics (Descola 2011: 19). The counterpart of animism is the prevailing Western ontology of naturalism, which “can be defined by the continuity of the physicality of the entities of the world and the discontinuity of their respective interiorities” (Descola 2013: 173). Thus, in the Western world, humans are singled out by their intellectual and ethical capacities and are seen as surpassing the rest of living nature, although they share essentially the same substance of their physical bodies.

Graham Harvey (2005: 185) notes that animistic thought does not require concepts such as ‘nature’ nor ‘supernature’ because various persons, such as animal-, tree- or human-persons, and according to some animists, places as relational persons, co-exist and interact within the same domain. In light of these deliberations, the category of the supernatural might seem problematic. The compound *super-naturalis* reflects some basic Western dichotomies of matter and spirit, body and mind, nature and something which is superior to physis. It implies a hierarchical world where the divine consciousness transcends the earthbound biological reality that is governed by the laws of nature. Morton Klass (1995: 27) finds the term ‘supernatural’ uncomfortable, especially in cross-cultural study, because many societies make no distinction between the two realms of Western ontology, and the concept is “irremediably ethnocentric and thus leads inevitably to confusion and misinterpretation”. (However, Klass [1995: 28] finds it a perfectly acceptable term in certain contexts, such as “tales of the supernatural”). In 2003 a special issue of *Anthropological Forum* was published, dedicated to the notion of ‘supernatural’ as a contested concept in anthropology with its controversial cultural baggage and the implied dichotomy it bears with the ‘natural’ world, something which in non-Western cultures may be associated with colonial domination (Lohmann 2003). Some authors reject it, especially as an etic category, although others find it cognitively useful. Thus, according to the provisional definition of Thomas Raverty (2003: 188), the supernatural is “a general categorical perspective, whether insider or outsider (emic or etic), wherein human metaphorical and analogical capabilities, especially in imaginatively enlarging upon sense data and empirical reality, are given free rein”. This notion of the supernatural, which refers to imaginative cognition, seems broad enough to encompass

This collection of articles addresses the narrative construction of places, landscapes and their supernatural dimensions, the relationship between tradition communities and their environments, and the spatial conditions for encounters with the supernatural as they are manifested in European folklore and in early literary sources, such as the Old Norse sagas.

Articles in the book discuss places cursed and sacred, churches, graveyards, haunted houses, cemeteries, grave mounds, hill forts, and other tradition dominants in the micro-geography of the Nordic, Baltic and Baltic-Finnic peoples. It emerges that places accumulate meanings as they are layered by stories and memories about personal experiences. In addition to the local dimension of place-lore, the book scrutinizes the history of folklore studies, its geopolitical dimensions and its connection with nation building. It also sheds light on the social base of folklore and examines vernacular views of legendry and the supernatural.



STUDIA FENNICA
FOLKLORISTICA 23
ISBN 978-952-222-917-5
86.14
www.finlit.fi/kirjat