

# Spiritual Territoriality: Boundary-Setting and Place-Claiming in Burial Site Folk Stories — A Qualitative Study

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**Abstract:** Place-lore has been gathered and recorded by Estonian researchers since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, among which are a host of accounts relating to interactions with human spirits. This article examines place-lore texts relating to burial sites, stored at the Estonian Folklore Archive. Narratives that are interwoven into these folk stories reveal a recurring motif of entities asserting ownership over place or objects or imposing spatial restrictions regarding certain sites. This article analyses these cases and proposes that these behavioural patterns indicate a reflection of values and principles among the population.

**Keywords:** place-lore, burial sites, human spirits, folk narratives, boundary-setting, ownership and space

## Introduction

Place-attachment can be described as a process resulting in the association of place with meaning and emotional affection (Cross 2015). Place identity, however, has been defined as a component of personal identity, a process by

which, through interaction with places, people describe themselves in terms of belonging to a specific place (Hernandez *et al.* 2007). Both of these concepts tie into the premise of this article's hypothesis, aiming to examine the correlations between recurring spiritual territoriality-related motifs in Estonian place-lore stories.

The narratives of boundary-setting by various kinds of spirits in regards to natural places as approached in this article, has been inspected by researcher Veikko Anttonen, who set emphasis of boundaries among natural sites dubbed with the title '*pyhä*', estimating lines between sacred and non-sacred, while place-lore researcher John Björkman has contributed to the discussion of borders in folkloristics by interpreting the spirits' social meaning and their effect on the regulation of the activities of the local people associated with the spirit-related sites (Björkman 2021). As a contribution to the aforementioned discourse of boundary-setting and environmental experience among motifs relating to spirits in 19–20<sup>th</sup> century Estonian place-lore, the current article approaches the matter from the angle of narratives in which spirits are depicted as asserting ownership or dominion over places or objects. Folk narratives related to places can become closely entwined with the accumulation of meanings, layer by layer, although the same places can also obtain personal significance as awareness of them grows (Sävborg & Valk 2018). Meanings accredited to spirits in place-lore can be interpreted as a reflection on the beliefs and values of local inhabitants of the surrounding landscape and by understanding the clues in these narratives, we can make choices based on this insight to impose safety regulations or help local inhabitants. Elizabeth Bird (2002) described how local narratives are formed in response to gaps in current knowledge or other factors, offering cultural explanations for the ambiguity of landscapes or phenomena.

The dynamics of sacred and everyday meanings of landscape has been analysed from various focuses and regional ranges. Estonian folk tradition has been approached from phenomenology by Ivar Paulson (1967), he describes the spirits of the dead as territorial guardians and emphasizes the continuity between the living and the dead, and the spatial division between their domains, which are concepts that have shaped the conceptual foundation for this article. The other researcher of Estonian folk religion, Oskar Loorits (1947) provides a comparative-historic point of view, linking Estonian folk belief to the Finno-Ugic tradition and broader animistic logic, which is relevant to the Udmurdic

sources referenced in the analysis part of achieved materials. His approach affirms the perspective of this article of interpreting boundary-setting as moral and cosmological rules.

More broadly, the place-identity and place-attachment and their relations with meanings such as sacredness have been studied in (landscape) anthropology. Anthropologist Tim Ingold (Ingold 1993), who established the phenomenological anthropology, argues that landscapes are not static “containers” but are lived-with and co-created by humans and other beings, reflecting the perception that warnings, prohibitions, and territorial claims of spirits’ agentic belonging and that landscapes are entangled with non-human persons. Symbolic anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who frames culture as a system of symbols, concluding that rituals, stories, and symbols encode moral orders and social values, an approach that this article’s hypothesis is derived from. (Geertz 1973) In his work *Rites of Passage*, van Gennep identifies spatial and temporal thresholds where the ordinary order is suspended. Van Gennep’s (1961) definition of liminality supports this article’s basis for describing a spirits’ authority threshold. While the influences of Paulson and Loooris are relevant to this study by broader interpretation of spirit-related phenomenology, the works of noted anthropologists (Ingold, Geertz and van Gennep) are more directly relevant to the concepts used for analysis of the examples of narrative stories.

The discussion of the relevance of belief in folklore has sparked different perspectives. Marilyn Motz has highlighted folkloristics’ ability to affirm and explore belief as a practice and its formation (Motz 1998). Estonian researcher Ülo Valk has described belief as a fundamental component in illuminating the relationship between individuals and stories, the values and ideas they carry, and the bonds between people and their engagement with the tangible and intangible worlds (Valk 2021). Although considering belief as a relevant tool in understanding the meaning of stories and narratives, American scholar Sabina Magliocco argues that belief is contextual and therefore a response to a particular set of factors (Magliocco 2012).

As an exoteric term in our contemporary society, *belief* calls into question its own validity and can often be treated interchangeably with “knowledge” (Motz 1998). As such, when a numinous high-stakes situation occurs and, Magliocco (2012) argues that those undergoing the experience go into a state of “participatory consciousness”, during which their past experiences and beliefs cast influence on given interpretations and these interpretations are

consequently expressed in the descriptions of their experienced stories. I pose an argument that burial site-related place lore accounts provide an opportunity of reflection on the beliefs and values of informants and that these insights are brought to light in the subsequent analyses of case studies.

Kaarina Koski has worked closely with materials at the Finnish Literature Society's (FLS) archives to interpret and analyse death-related entities in Finnish place-lore narratives. She discusses that belief toward the subject matter, if defined as an active and conscious reliance on a certain ontological and, consequently, normative option, presented in folk stories can play a relevant part in forming the narrators' attitudes and worldview, (Koski 2008) whereas Timothy Tangherlini (1990) argues that emergence of belief items in folk stories reinforces their status in folk belief and that folk belief motifs legitimate the message of the story.

## Material and methods

The material subject to analysis in this study is a selection of place-lore stories gathered by researchers at the Estonian Folk Archives in the XIX and XX century. I chose a sample of 315 accounts of encounters with various types of entities, both human spirits and others. The earliest narrative dates from 1889, the most recent from 1996, with most of the material focusing on the period 1930–1940. The material is spread out between the counties of Estonia as the administrative division was during the country's post-soviet era accordingly: Harjumaa – 61; Järvamaa – 48; Virumaa – 32; Läänemaa – 20; Saaremaa – 32; Pärnumaa – 11; Viljandimaa – 32; Tartumaa – 37; Võrumaa – 37 and Setomaa – 5 archived stories respectively. The reason for the unevenness of collected narratives stems possibly from the history of field work trips conducted in Estonia. During certain decades, some areas were more thoroughly inspected than others. (Tamm 2002) The criteria for looking into these specific cases were that, firstly, they have to be related to a specific localizable site, secondly, relation to a burial site, and thirdly, these cases are tied to the depiction of a spiritual entity. For clarification of what an entity is in the context of this article, Reet Hiemäe has provided Estonian explanatory dictionary's definition of a *vaimolend*, which I maintain as the keyword that I have used for research: “a disembodied spirit in various religious depictions”. (Hiemäe 2024) The cases selected for this study

showcase different ways in which humans have crossed boundaries of spirits and have invoked some sort of consequential response. Examples of these cases are provided in the latter part of the article.

Based on the nature of the infringements of spirit-set boundaries described in narratives, I have devised four categories of cases: (1) Spirits blocking pathways; (2) Spirits objecting to human presence; (3) Spirits prohibiting certain actions; (4) Spirits claiming objects; Examples are brought from each of these depictions of spirits expressing agency over certain aspects of our humanly tangible realm. While some recorded cases in the chosen sample belong to one devised category, many narratives overlap and thus describe multiple enactments of imposed boundaries.

The methodology used for concluding the research findings were qualitative analysis of archived materials at Estonian Literary Museum, i.e. finding patterns between various texts to identify common codes (seeing/hearing spirits, accidents, illnesses, cautionary sounds, metamorphosis, two-sided conversations, physical interventions, nightmares, revenant spirits, rituals, omens etc), after identifying the codes, forming clusters of broader meaning led to creating the four main categories, subject to analysis in this article. The software used for conducting coding was the Miro mindmapping software. The criteria for validating a code was for the motif to reoccur in at least ten narrative stories found at the archive.

## Spirits blocking pathways

Crossroads as liminal zones have been described as places where restless spirits gather, whereas roads, edges of certain natural places such as lakes, mountains, forests etc may serve as markers for spirits that limit their movement and/or the area of effect of their power and influence (Lintrop 2021; Remmel 2022; Valk 2006). Human spirits have been thought to be associated with certain areas in a way that could be described as taking ownership of a place in nature or a structure (Björkman 2021). Such liminal spaces are governed by a set of regulations, expectations and boundaries, bypassing of which can be interpreted as a serious transgression with possible consequences (Kütt 2004; Sävborg & Valk 2018). If an encounter with a spirit takes place, regardless if physical or otherwise, bodily reactions such as heart pounding, paralysis or shivers are felt, often accredited to the energetic presence of a spiritual entity (Hiimäe 2024).

Among recorded accounts of spirit-related burial site place lore, folkloristic narratives about the physical boundaries imposed by spirits create a reverent stigma to certain sites, lending to oral heritage that is passed on to others, creating collectively known stories. Recorded cases of people losing their agency over physical space, regardless if the spirit causing this effect is visible or not, has in some cases been reported as an alarming notion and one that would be described as intentional frightening (cf ERA II 55, 694 (3; 4), 1932). While in some cases, the pathways or zones are thought to have a certain associated time restriction, such as a non-entry time frame of midnight until the sunrise (cf RKM II 63, 483 (8), 1957), other cases involve specific actions or rituals performed by the spirits that cause the affected areas and pathways to become inaccessible for the duration. Such ritualistic occurrences include the spirits returning to their homes (cf RKM II 63, 482/3 (7), 1957), in which cases it has been deemed that the spirits prefer to be undisturbed and conduct their affairs without distractions, and thus set up a sort of barrier, asserting the spirits' boundary and will.

Although the spirits claiming ownership over places are regularly described as ambivalent by their nature (Koski 2008; Lintrop 2021), limitations of human beings' movement can be far from the extent to which spiritual entities are willing to go in order to protect the areas that they set claim to, from intrusion:

That Törnämägi — they say there are also plague graves there. That's why people supposedly see spirits there. I connected it with the fact that several people have been hit by a train there. Maybe the spirits pulled them under the train — I don't know. Anyway, in more recent times, several people have been hit by a train near Törnämägi. It's between Kohila and Vilivere stations, more towards Vilivere, where there's kind of a hill, just a bit before the track starts going downhill toward Vilivere. Right by the railway (ERA DH 1942 (4) 2015).

This example highlights a recurring motif of spirits contending over spiritual territoriality i.e. enforcing a consequence when boundaries are crossed, even by means of causing harm to humans in the process. The train passing by Törnämägi's burial site invokes consequences whether or not the perpetrators are aware of their transgression or not. Much like the legal system in our modern day society – being aware of or oblivious to the state laws has the same

outcome upon breaking the rules. In this case, unwritten rules are still rules, even if unexplained, and no merit is endowed to good or ill intention.

But what if humans entertain the idea of reclaiming spiritual territoriality by attempting to create infrastructure or erect buildings on top of areas and pathways that have been claimed by the will of spirits? Is there a possibility of peaceful cohabitation based on the recorded cases stored at Estonian Literary Museum?

In the village of Leedri, there were countless ghosts at the chapel field. Once, they tried to build a church there, but it didn't work out — the church was torn down overnight. Then people feared that the ghost might suddenly start destroying the village houses as well. To protect against this, crooked fences were made on both sides, probably so the ghosts would walk against the walls in the dark at night. Roaming ghosts were feared there, and the fear still lingers today (ERA II 230 181 (4) 1939).

The inability to construct buildings of worship, roads or other structures has been shared in many cases, some of which involve spirits inhibiting the creation of infrastructure over and over again (KKI 38 146/7 (3) 1965). In some particular cases, when a community realizes they cannot widen their own territories or protect what they have created, countermeasures such as verbal or physical boundaries are set in place to fend off what might feel like an assault by an unknown opposition, potentially instilling fear among the community. Verbal spellcrafting for protection purposes has become a less widely used practice, although in smaller, close-knit village based communities, it is that is still well-known (Remmel 2014). These practices act as resources for members of a community, reinforcing confidence in their ability to defend themselves.

## **Spirits objecting to human presence**

The rules and regulations set by spirits based on folk narratives can be rigorous to follow, given that no obvious threshold is provided as to which limitations and boundaries have been crossed. Many places have been said to be ominous due to the area being possessed by certain spirits (Panina & Vladykina 2021). Interacting with spirits within their domains, if done deliberately, can bring substantial benefits such as protection from other, sometimes malignant entities,

however in such a scenario, a set of rules may then apply for this transactional sort of relationship. These rules range from keeping a respectful attitude towards the land, being quiet in certain areas, to making animal sacrifices in exchange for good relations with the governing spirit as well as gaining good fortune (Jonuks & Äikäs 2019; Vladykina & Glukhova 2021). The roles of the spirits in narratives are often tied to the physical features of their governed landscape and are thus associated to certain specific objects on the terrain such as stones, trees, springs etc.

In cases where the protagonists of stories have fallen asleep on burial sites, statements of audible warnings are not uncommon. Regardless of the person's awareness of the nature of the place in question, "Do not sleep on my grave", or "Get off me" are widely reported. These could be a simple one-time warning, after which the person would be merely frightened (H II 16 461/2 (5) 1888), but could also incorporate the appearing of the spirit, whereas usually the spirit would appear in plain white, black or gray garments and speak in an imposing manner and coming to a close proximity (ERA II 287 171/2 (11) 1940). Although physical confrontation on the side of the spirit is more rare among cases at the Estonian Literary Museum, some spirits do not shy away from inflicting harm to the people crossing their boundaries. Whether or not a warning is issued, might not be relevant, but in a particular case, a man who fell asleep in the forest on a place later confirmed as a burial mound, was dragged through the forest a fair distance before he would say a prayer in his mind, after which the confrontation ended (ERA II 13 11 (1) 1929). In some cases, the health-related effects become apparent after a prolonged time after the encounter:

Anyone who has traveled 10–11 versts [about 10–12 km] from Tartu along the Riga road has also seen Pähni Hill, as the Riga road goes directly over the mentioned hill. And about this hill, there are many old folk beliefs and legendary meanings in this region. This likely stems from the fact that many decades ago (possibly even centuries ago), there used to be a chapel or a burial house there. Forty years ago, there was still a thick alder thicket there. Even the foundations of the buildings were still faintly visible. Wild raspberries and strawberries grew among the undergrowth. One time, a group of children went there to pick berries. Suddenly, a young woman appeared to them, wearing a long headscarf with a tall fold. She didn't say a single word to the children. One child tried to tug at her dress to check whether the woman was wearing fine clothes. After that, the child fell ill



and did not get better until sand was brought from the place where the woman had stood. This sand was mixed into drinking water and used for washing. Only after that was the child cured (H II 30 577/8 (1) 1889).

When a person has overstayed their welcome at particular sites where spirits roam, they can fall ill as a consequence. As per the above example, it is a common motif for people who come in contact with or experience the presence of a spirit, to experience physical or mental effects that may be hard to explain with common knowledge (Hiimäe 2025). The sand used to heal the child who became sick can be interpreted as a symbolic way of making amends with the woman's spirit for the possible offense and thus severing the bond that was created by the child, albeit unintentionally. In some instances, it is believed that a person can fall to poor health by merely visiting certain burial sites or after visually spotting the revenant spiritual governor of the area. This sort of intrusion of health occurred when the formerly deceased baron and ruler of a local manor house was seen driving his carriage and horses through a forest, floating above the ground and bushes, vanishing abruptly. The onlookers included a local man who had known this baron from past times, and his distracted barking dog (RKM II 50 96 (20) 1956).

Many recorded cases reflect the will of people continuing to live on through actions, words and restrictions, which can be tracked especially in situations where the intentions regarding the owner's worldly property or land were known before they passed away (RKM II 212 19 (15) 1966). In the mentioned case where a landowner explicitly told his family that his grandson would inherit the house and not his son nor would he be welcomed to visit, once the son did in fact enter the house of his father, he would be scared away by a familiar voice echoing from the chimney, stating "Who said you could come into this house?" The son then built himself a new house and reburied his father, turning the coffin sideways, since the restless soul of his father had continued to roam his former house and torture the horses. The occurrences at the property then ceased.

Another burial site in the village of Hellamaa, was known for spirits gathering to hold celebrations (Jung 1910: 99/100 (11)). Spirits had been seen gathering around a bonfire in white robes, dancing and chanting. It was told by a third party that a young man from the village had gone to talk to a mysterious girl sitting on a stone and making a braid of flowers while singing. When the young man went into the forest and was lost from line of sight, thick fog rose

and the bonfire along with the celebrating people in white, had disappeared. The young man had been found dead in the morning at the edge of this forest.

## Spirits prohibiting certain actions

The study of border spirits is a long-spanning tradition, revisited by various researchers throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Korolainen 2024), although interpretations in border studies and the concept of ‘borderscapes’ is still explored and the value and meaning of borders is debated in our contemporary politically diverse world with rapid technological advancement (Krichker 2019). In folkloristics, among other belief narrative researchers, Kari Korolainen stands out as one who views narratives of specific spirits such as the border spirit, through a focused lens, aimed at dissecting the depiction of these spirits in a thorough analysis. In his writing, Korolainen expands on multiple archived cases where spirits express place-attachment and their need to assert space-related boundaries by prohibiting certain actions and disclosing existent taboos as well as the sacredness of a given area (Korolainen 2024). In this spirit, I bring an example of a narrative highlighting an entity’s territorialism:

Where the Swedish church is, they’ve marked everything—where the cellar is and so on. The forest warden went and stuck markers everywhere with his stick. I said: “Why are you doing that? A spirit walks there. There’s a dead person there—you mustn’t disturb it.” And the next day I saw: there was a long-haired woman at our place, across the corridor. A long-haired woman, slightly reddish—like a Swede. I would’ve asked: “Who are you?” But I got scared. Didn’t ask. Then she vanished. You’re not supposed to make a racket or break anything there. But our old man went too, started breaking and clattering around. I said right away: “You mustn’t disturb that place — there’s a dead person there.” I even went up the ladder to check for tracks. There weren’t any. Spirits don’t leave tracks. It was exactly the next day that it happened. And you’re not allowed to dig in that old church cellar or cut down trees in the area either. (RKM II 362 248/9 (1)).

In this case, the sanctity of the burial site is highlighted by the belief that causing a disturbance by either making loud noises or marking the area is forbidden. Seeing the apparition of a long-haired woman was interpreted as an effect of

the actions performed by the people of the story, which is a common theme among burial site-related narratives. The spirits of the stories seldom appear to people and speak, whereas separate instances of these are well-recorded (E 15076/7). Presumably, as the narrator had explained his insight to the other characters of the story with a tone of caution, the knowledge of spiritual possession of the area will have been a known factor before the incident. The taboo of digging in that area also compounds to the notion that a spirit would be evoked and possibly become enraged or disturbed, when their resting place is defiled in some way. Cutting down the trees in the surrounding area as a disallowed practice brings forth a belief that the place claimed by the residing spirit is wider and more elaborate than the specific plot of dirt in which the human remains were buried, but more intricately the surrounding forest, making the task of determining the measure of a spirit's domain more complex and tricky.

Many of the cases among the discussed corpus of narratives overlap in the four overarching categories, which I titled after initial coding. For example, human presence can be described to be intrusive for spirits alongside with specific actions that had been conducted, thus, it might not be a straightforward task to separate one from the other, unless it is explicitly indicated or referenced within the story. A recurring motif among boundary-related place lore stories is one where people, oftentimes unknowingly, set up camp to rest for the night in a place where the ground is elevated somewhat. Unsuspecting of the terrain, they thus have placed their tent(s) on top of a burial mound, causing unease to the spirit or group of spirits that reside in the area. One recorded case told of a sailor who set his tent on a well-known burial site on the lands of a farmland and went to tell of his experiences of the past night to the family of the farm house. Once he had started to fall asleep in his tent, a tall woman, wearing a blue hat came to him and started applying pressure to his body, all the while asking "Why are you sleeping of my grave?" In the morning, the man left a tormented impression. The narrator added that later a military garrison was erected on that site, but it had to be moved to another location because most of the soldiers stationed there could not sleep at night due to disturbances and sounds of different kinds (ERA II 114 511/4 (33) 1935).

Mostly, those who experience the presence of an incorporeal spirit, live to tell the tale, even in cases where the crossing of boundaries leads to mental or bodily harm to the human. Some burial sites are infamous for leading people astray and creating a state in which the affected person would lose their senses,

their sense of self, or their understanding of reality, in the most profound way (Kõiva *et al.* 2025). However, in some cases, the people who are lead astray can end up being abducted, thus, they would not be seen or heard from for some time or ever again. In a case of a burial site near the sea, it was acknowledged by local inhabitants that swimming near this place was forbidden due to roaming female spirits who would entice the swimmers to go deep into the water, never to return (ERA II 233 343 (14) 1939).

## Spirits claiming objects

In his article about Spiritual Possession and Real Estate, Ülo Valk goes into lengths at discussing spiritual ownership, possession of objects and how attachment to objects can develop through the accumulation of symbolic and sentimental meaning. He leans on the idea that if living humans can become engrossed in places and objects, then this can transfer to spirits of these people after they pass on to the next realm of existence (Valk 2006). I tend to share this view of spiritual ownership and attachments to objects and in the context of this article, will bring examples of cases that illustrate this belief, first from the side of those who experience the spirit in the waking realm and then those who have had interactions with spirits laying claim to objects in their dream states, as interactions have been reported in various states of consciousness (Hufford 1982).

A forest guard once went walking in the woods. He went to a certain cross by the path and muttered to himself: “Others always say they see spirits here, but I’ve never seen anyone. I want to knock over this cross, let’s see whether I’ll be able to sleep at night or not.” When the forest guard had reached the cross, he heard his dog growling behind his back. The forest guard looked at the dog—the dog was standing timidly behind him, staring past the cross into a small clearing. The forest guard didn’t see anything there and kept walking forward, thinking maybe a forest thief was hiding nearby.

Suddenly he saw a woman in white standing in front of him — she truly looked like a spirit. The forest guard didn’t dare move a muscle; he waited to see what would happen. All at once, the spirit came up so close that she could have touched him with her hand and stared intently into his eyes.

After standing there for a moment, she turned and left. The forest guard was paralyzed with fear. After a while, when he had recovered a bit, he started heading home — but the dog wouldn't come! The dog was soaking wet, with a drop hanging from every hair, and its head was tilted so far sideways that one eye was looking over its back. The forest guard tried to straighten the dog's head, but it stayed slightly twisted. After that day, the dog never came into the forest again; it would shiver and hide wherever it could. Sometimes the forest guard carried the dog into the woods in his arms, but as soon as he let go, it would immediately run home. From that time on, the forest guard himself approached the forest with caution (E 15076/8 1895).

This narrative is a vivid example of a person not holding the appropriate reverence towards a site known to be governed by a spiritual entity. While the forest guard knew of stories related to the place, in a way, he held a provocative attitude. When a spirit is dared to commit an action, appear or, in some cases, apply force to something or someone in the physical world, in certain circumstances it is possible, which is also the case here. In many cases, the intention of an individual is more important than whether they say it aloud or if it is an internal thought. Regardless of the form, his words held power to evoke strong emotions in the spirit who in turn deemed it relevant to show up and make it clear to the intruder that she is indeed safeguarding that site and its cross, for whatever reason the spirit might have had. Another recorded story speaks of a single large stone cross deep in the forest thought to have been erected in honour of a military officer during a war a long time ago. One time, a man had gone to that cross and pushed it over. That night, the man went to bed and a dark figure stood at the foot of his bed and asked him: "Why did you knock over that cross? Go set it back up!" The man woke up but did not see anyone. When he tried to sleep again, a cold hand grabbed his hand and once more said: "Go set the cross back up!" The next day, the man set the cross upright — and that night, he was able to sleep peacefully. Disturbances during bedtime of this kind have been distributed to it being easier for spirits to get their message through to those who face these occurrences, since the person is more vulnerable and in a restful state of mind, or entering a resting phase (Hiimäe 2024). Being confronted in one's bed can be an alarming experience. Another site tied to cases of nighttime tormentings (*luupainaja* in Estonian)

is near Rangissaare, a sand-covered cliff where locals said to have buried the dead from times when the plague ravaged the nearby villages, leaving but a few survivors. During the times when the narrator gave account of this site, sand had been excavated and taken away for building and many buckles and brooches had come out, made entirely of gold and silver, along with other more mundane objects such as knives and nails. All of these objects were left in a hole at the mountain, because it was a widespread belief among the locals that all of these items were cursed. Those, who had dared to take the items from this burial site, would soon after be unable to sleep and be tormented at night. There are multiple of these cases recorded, all of which ended with the sleep-deprived person taking the object back and then reclaiming their peace (ERA II 221 308/12 (13)). Another noteworthy detail is that the skeletons of people from this grave were measured up to 2,80 metres long, instilling an understanding in the locals that the people of this area at that time were giants.

Although it is rare among these stories for spirits to take the time and explain their motives, intentions, hopes and wishes in a polite way, not all cases are those of violent self-expression. One instance of a narrative traced a man who was a landowner who went to dig a hole for a new potato patch. He dug deep into the ground and found, much to his surprise, a completely clean silk handkerchief. He found it nice and took it home. On consecutive nights, he was greeted in his dreams by a young lady, who kindly asked the land owner to return this handkerchief to its original place (ERA II 222 30 (29)). Similarly, there is a story of a girl who found a fleshless finger with a golden ring attached to it from a burial site, plucked the ring in hopes of turning it into a fortune. Upon falling asleep that night, she was confronted by a shadowy figure who screamed just outside of her window, demanding her to return the ring. This continued for several nights until she took the ring back. In both of these narratives, the spirit left the person to rest only after they took the object back. Taking that into consideration, it can be interpreted that the spirit felt a sort of attachment towards these objects, attributing personal meaning to these items, even if the exact nature of their relationship to the objects remains unproclaimed. The notion of spirits going to lengths in order to protect this property leaves a hint of sentimental or practical value.

Among the analysed narratives was a tale of a young peasant boy who went to collect stones from his employer's quarry at a burial site and came across a wooden barrel. Upon hearing this, he was instructed to go ahead and open it, but once he hit the wooden barrel with his axe, it clearly rung as if made of

stone and upon closer inspection, had indeed turned into stone. The next day, the barrel had morphed back into wood, creating true genuine curiosity toward whether there was something valuable inside. When the night fell, a man with long hair appeared into the young peasant boy's room and came very close, stating he would hurt the boy, would he ever try to open that barrel again. The boy could feel the man's wet hair on his body, yet after delivering this message, the long-haired man vanished (ERA II 227 568/70 (7) 1939).

## Discussion

Among the various beliefs inspected throughout this article, attachment to places and objects stands out as the prevailing link. Dissecting narratives about spiritual territoriality reveals a host of beliefs that point toward the real-life experiences of people who lived in the corresponding areas related to the stories. These stories hold clues and information about social norms as well as depiction of values prevalent at the time of recording. The agency of spirits described in my chosen corpus of narratives shows the recurring theme of social taboos, often acted out by spirits. These taboos are both psychological and physical. The crossing of spirit-set boundaries among the narratives can trigger an array of effects ranging from audible verbal warnings to loss of self-awareness and bodily harm. The unclear and, in a way, invisible nature of interactions with the spirit realm and its inhabitants may lead to an understanding that these relationships are one-sided, whereas, similarly to the human's world of communication, the spirit-human realm can also be collaborative and filled with mutual respect. This hints at the belief that staying in good regards with the unfathomable side of life such i. e. spirits may give people more of a feeling that they are in control of their life. As discussed in the previous chapters, the analysed narratives reveal that a change in attitude or revising of actions can bring forth a turn of events or change the dynamic of the relationship between spirits and people. A change in tone or a vow for further respect towards a spirit-possessed site can act as a description of atonement as a valuable socially relevant measure, valued in the time of recording. Returning of intentionally or unintentionally misplaced objects, as well as the reinstalment of a tomb stone can be a relevant way to show one's respect toward a burial site, its property and its spirits.

The belief about the grasp of spiritual possession is more spatially defined and more complex than what might seem at first glance. Burial sites, their geographic measures and human-defined scope of influence reaches wider and is more layered if taken into consideration the spiritual possession and claiming of objects around the burial site or those buried within the site. Spiritual ownership of objects described in the narratives describes what a person would experience when forming an attachment to items they hold dear to them. If an item with deep sentimental meaning is lost or stolen, emotional responses are triggered and the owner would try to reclaim it. As a form of negotiations, the spirit would ask the transgressor to return stolen object to the spirit's proclaimed domain or to restore the defiled burial site to its former state. If these negotiations are failed, the spirits in these stories were believed to possess the agency to take further measures to enforce their boundaries and will. Such narratives hold insight into the values of people who form emotional attachments to their personal belongings and project these values onto narratives when telling stories about local lore.

Narratives that describe the beliefs and values of people can hold significant relevance in how places are perceived and treated. Description of taboos in certain areas in nature can point to dangerous spots, this may be for an array of reasons. Similarly, insight from narratives can provide understanding about the thinking patterns, hopes, fears and sense of self of the respondents. Scientists from different fields can draw leads when inspecting the described narratives and in certain cases, breakdowns of terrain, natural phenomena and descriptions of implied taboos can help lead to actual practical safety enforcements for both people and nature.

## Conclusion

In this article, I inspected an archived corpus of 315 texts of narratives. The chosen texts were collected by Estonian folklorists from 1889 to 1996, although most of the chosen texts were collected in the 1930s. Key theoretical influences for this piece of writing were former works of folklorists Mari-Ann Rimmel and John Björkman. The three criteria for choosing texts for this research were that the texts were: 1) descriptions of spirits based on the definition provided in the Introduction part above; 2) the locations described in the narratives are localizable; 3) narratives chosen had to be related to burial sites in Estonia.



The chosen texts passed a phase of qualitative analysis and coding and were then divided into four categories based on the content of the interaction between spirits and people. The categories were named: *spirits blocking pathways*, *spirits objecting to human presence*, *spirits prohibiting certain actions* and *spirits claiming objects*. Examples of folklore materials were brought to highlight and exemplify each of these categories.

As an attempt to unveil certain beliefs and values of people who had narrated these stories, the presented interactions and taboos can be examined as representations of patterns that took place both in the lives of the respondents between them and their contemporaries as well as occurrences that took place in nature due to different reasons, some of which may be topical to this day.

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