

# PHARAOH'S WARRIORS

## INTRODUCTION

In addition to cultural needs, the diversity of folklore themes is determined by the specificity of the landscape and livelihoods. Estonia is rich in water bodies: surrounded on two sides by the sea, the third side is bounded by Lake Peipus, one of the largest lakes in Europe. There are more than a thousand lakes and more than 3,600 springs, in addition to rivers and large swamps. During and since the 19th century ponds that have a several functions have been dug near farms and manors. The sea also played an important role in the lives of other Finnic peoples such as Livonians and Finns, but Finland and Karelia are poetically referred to as the land of a thousand lakes). This richness in water is reflected in the traditional beliefs and worldview.

There are many reports of water being used in rituals (birth, marriage, and funeral customs), treating people and animals with water, using water for magic, and using water as a source of livelihood, as well as stories about mythical water spirits, numerous examples indicating the importance of water dwellers. Belief narratives about merpeople are a colourful part of this tapestry. The tradition includes tales of the king of the sea and the merpeople, the shepherd of the sea, the mermaid and the water spirit, the Pharaoh's People, and other creatures.

One of the books of the Pentateuch of Moses (Ex. 14:1–31) tells of the escape of the Jews from Egyptian captivity under the leadership of Moses. At the behest of the Lord, the waters of the Red Sea were divided before the Jews and closed over the heads of their pursuers. According to folk tales, the pharaonic warriors who followed the Jews turned into creatures with human torsos and fish tails. Now they swim in search of the pharaoh shouting “Pharaoh, pharaoh, pharaoh!” The pharaohs will become human only on the Day of Judgment, so part of the legend describes how they swim up to ships or boats to ask whether Judgment Day is coming soon (see Loorits 1935). The Estonian tradition also connects the Pharaoh's People with seals, and with mermaid and seal traditions. People with fish tails, i.e. the pharaoh's warriors, are widely known in European folklore (cf. the consistence of European ethnic traditions (Loorits 1935); special articles in the Baltic-Finnic regions (Loorits 1926, 1935) in Russian (Zelenin 1915: 858; Cherepanova 1996: 6, ff.; Kuznetsova 2012: 5–14), Ukrainian (Dragomanov 1876: 96; Ivanov 1893: 82–83), Belarusian (Federowski 1897: 108–109, Boganeva 2010: 54–56), Polish (Zowczak 2013: 172–174), Croatian (Bošković-Stulli 1975: 143), and Slovenian (Kropej 2003; Klobčar 2017)). Representations of and narratives about the pharaohs are known in the extensive space of the Baltic

States and more widely in Northern Europe, i.e. among the peoples of Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and the Saami of Lapland (Treyland 1887: 44-45; Loorits 1935: 2-165), in the Eastern and Western Slavic areas from Europe to Siberia, and in the Far East regions of Russia (Kuznetsova 2012).

What cultural needs are important over and above the specificity of the landscape and people's livelihoods? One important need is narrativity, the transmission of knowledge, values, news and even false news, short trivial reports on events, and elaborated narratives in either a fixed or open form. In folklore, we find inspiring and multi-faceted stories of human experience that reflect the worldview and transcultural interconnectedness of areas that are geographically close, as well as general topics and ideas. In our case, most narratives represent the diversity of legends and memorates as well as personal experience stories (cf. Labov and Waletzky 1997; Ochs and Capps 2009), in addition to which there are informative pieces, generalisations and records of vernacular philosophy. In the merpeople tradition the power of imagination, the transmission of knowledge and gaining knowledge from the imagination are influential. Having the text corpus of the Pharaoh's People and the larger corpus on all kinds of water spirits and merpeople makes it possible to examine these questions in detail. As the first step, the current article describes the Pharaoh's People and certain modes of representation of the topic by using the following categories: 1) origin, 2) appearance, 3) actions of the Pharaohs and narrated motifs, 4) habitat, 5) human and non-human communication, 6) intermediality and the influence of written sources and art. Parallels with folklore of other Finnic and Slavic people have been presented where relevant as are some examples from the North European tradition. The current analysis is based on the folklore materials stored in the Estonian Literary Museum (ELM) archive (Tartu) and in the Skriptorium digital tool. This article is based on 404 Estonian folklore texts and 54 texts available in Russian archives from the 1920s to 1940s available in Estonia, Russia, and Latvia (Boganeva, Kõiva 2019). The records available in Latvian territory included some texts from Polish, Belarusian, Gypsy and Russian informants. The Estonian folklore was collected from the late 19th century to the 21st century, although the golden age of mythical narratives goes back to the early 20th century when modernisation and urbanisation were underway, yet the old tradition was largely still alive.

# 1. ORIGIN: CREATING STORIES ABOUT AND AETIOLOGIES OF SEA SPIRITS

Twentieth-century religious scholars Oskar Loorits, Uku Masing and Ivar Paulson considered it conceivable that the concept of water fairies evolved from the idea of spirited and living water during the course of stadial and, to some extent, hierarchical development (Eisen 1919; Loorits 1949; Paulson 1964). At the same time, popular aetiologies contain both newer and older beliefs along with contradictory arguments. The vernacular creation stories point out that sea fairies:

1) similar to other nature fairies (protectors, patrons, ghosts) are part of the inhabited world. Their origin is unknown, but they have the ability to convey messages to people about future events that are beyond human knowledge. A peculiar kind of animistic approach is characteristic of the Estonian folklore. For example, the narrator generalises the presence of spirits as follows:

Spirits/fairies are everywhere – in the forests, houses, the sea. If you happen to see them they do no harm, they do no damage to anyone. Yet, the conclusion is always that there will come some sort of change. (ERA II 192, 186 (57) < Kuusalu, 1938)

2) They arose from warrior angels who lost the battle of heaven and were thrown down in punishment. They fell to various places where they live until Judgement Day comes when they will be redeemed. This is a universal explanation for the appearance of fairies and can be found in the folklore of many nations (for Slavic folklore see Vinogradova, Levkievskaya 2012; Belova 2004; for Estonian folklore see Loorits 1949). In the following text example, the fallen creatures are evil, with the archangel placed in the role of the one throwing the angels out of heaven:

*[S]iäl valõti verd jõe viisi, kooni viimäte päähingli Mihkal vanast taast ülemb sai ja kõik ta kammandu siält üle pää kaala taivast alla pill. Suurõmb jago pillu näid vessi sisse, niigu noid vessi no-ks ilmu pääl rohkõmb om, nii näid rohkõmb kah vette sattõgi.*

*Siält sai sis hulk vannu näksõ, kiä siäl, kohe nimä sattõ, ka elämägi piävä. Egah järveh, jõeh, mereh ja mõtselah om näid hulk, kes kõik inemisi vette tahtva vitä, hinele seldsimehist.[--]*

God appoints the Archangel Michael His chief.] Blood was spilled there in the form of rivers, until at last the Archangel Michael prevailed, and at his command, all were cast down from heaven. Most were thrown into water because there is more water in the world, that is why more of them fell down into the water.

That is where the old water spirits were born, who have to live where they ended up. In every lake, river, sea, forest, there are many who want to drag people into the water to accompany them. [---] (H II 73, 272/3 (44) < Setumaa, 1906).

The motif of fallen angels can also be found in the tradition of the Pharaoh's People.

3) They are the souls of people who have drowned. These are creatures who attract new victims as if they were avenging their deaths. One correspondent makes a generalisation:

*Näkideks saivad emade poole uputatud lapsed, need inimesed, kes ennast ise ära uputasivad ja ka näkkide läbi uputatud inimesed. Nad elasivad järvedes ja jõgedes. Näkkidel oli kala ja inimese kuju. Püüdsivad inimesi uputada. Haugutasivad ja meelitasivad inimesi. Kuumaks aetud riistu kartsivad.*

Those who became water spirits were children drowned by their mothers, people who drowned themselves and people who were drowned by the water spirits. They lived in lakes and rivers. The water spirits have the form of fish and humans. They tried to drown people. They nagged and seduced people. They were afraid of hot iron. (E 25135 (3) < Tarvastu, 1896)



Illustration 2. One of the most famous legends of the Faroe Islands is about Kópakonon (The Seal Woman).

The Seals used to be humans who drowned in the ocean, but come ashore once a year and marry with humans. The statue was erected in August 2014 near the village of Mikladur on the island of Kalsoy. Sculptor Hans Pauli Olsen, Photo by Nicole Franken.

The importance of this motif in the Slavic tradition has been discussed in the Polish example by Lehr 2012; in the examples from different parts of Russia by Zelenin 1915, Vinogradova 2000, and Belova 2004; and in the Baltic Finnic mate-

rial by Loorits 1926, 1949. In belief narratives, some of the stories make a direct connection between the soul of the drowned person and the water spirit. However, the place of drowning is a source of danger and is the subject of lengthy warnings.

4) They were the Pharaoh's People, who arose from the pharaoh's warriors who drowned in the Red Sea; they became creatures with human bodies and fish tails.

## 2. APPEARANCE

In oral traditions, motifs acquire new usage and details that are not present in the original text. For example, there are other explanations for the miracle of Moses in the Russian tradition: in a text from Lutsi, Latvia, there are 'clarifications' explaining how the Exodus happened. In particular, Moses is not said to have divided the sea with a wave of his hand but with a wave of his handkerchief, making a bridge appear across the sea (a motif peculiar to fairy tales, ERA II 109, 135/6 (1) < Lutsi, 1935, see the Ukrainian motif associated with the appearance of the bridge, Dragomanov 1876: 96).

In the second version Moses read from a book "when the sea diverges": "Moses read from a book, when the sea diverges. He led his people and the pharaoh drowned with his." [-] (ERA II 109, 138/9 (4) < Lutsi, 1935).

There are also variations of the story. The emergence and appearance of the Pharaoh's People is associated with:

### 1. A particular ethnic group

Most Estonian stories (103 texts) say that the warriors of the Egyptian pharaoh became the Pharaoh's People. Variants also describe how the pharaoh himself drowned in the Red Sea (ERA II 58, 35 (1) < Vändra, 1933), or that the Pharaoh's wife (ERA II 57, 15 (13) < Märjamaa, 1932) or his daughter or children drowned.

A number of variants (10 texts) call the Gypsies the Pharaoh's People. In some texts, the Gypsies were transformed into the pharaohs, but a more common explanation is that they were the only ones who were not changed and became a travelling people. According to folk narratives, some of the troops stayed with their chariots on the seashore; they were in no hurry to chase anybody but were aware of a prophecy that allowed them to escape the fate of the rest of the army. As punishment, they must foretell future and change horses for ever.

When the people of Israel fled from Egypt, the Pharaoh's People pursued them. But in the Red Sea Yahweh drowned the pharaoh's warriors. Not all went to the Red Sea, some were left on the shore to change horses – the horses were tired of the chase. Those who were left on the shore became Gypsies. Because

they were chasing after the Israeli people, they now have to change horses forever and wander around the world. (ERA II 86, 171 (2) < Kullamaa, 1934)

The same motif can be found in the folklore of the Livs (Loorits 1926) and Slavic peoples (Belova 2004; Badalanova 2017; Kuznetsova 2012; Estonian Russians Boganeva & Kõiva 2019).

For example, Russians call Gypsies drowned and transformed people who were punished for their pride and disbelief (ERA II 109, 143 (10) < Lutsi, Latvia, 1935); the Jews, who doubted the correctness of the path that Moses took (ERA II 109, 13 7/8 (3) < Lutsi, 1935) call them sinful angels:

*Бог стихнул с неба в море. Кричат с моря до Бога: “Когда будет конец свету?”*

*От неба говорит ангел: “Один Бог знает, когда будет конец свету. Ни ангелы, ни горубоны не знают”.*

God shoved them into the sea. They shouted from the sea to God: “When will the end of the world be?”

From heaven an angel replied: “God alone knows when the world will end. Neither angels nor goruboni know”. (ERA II 109, 140/1 (7) < Lutsi, 1935)

Some also call Gypsies persecutors of Jesus Christ. (ERA II 61, 145/6 (1) < Lutsi, 1933).

These variants have been reported from the areas of multi-ethnic Lutsi in Latvia, as has the following story from a Polish woman that begins with a familiar biblical motif of an order to kill all the boys and ends somewhat unexpectedly with the motif of the Pharaoh's People. (ERA II 61, 145/6 (1) < Lutsi, 1933)

The interweaving of motifs of the Old and New Testaments is characteristic of many cultures. The Russian archive also contains a text (ERA II 79, 630/2) in which Christ gives Moses a “stick” with which Moses divides the sea. The Old and New Testament characters swap places in Estonian healing words (Moses and Jesus, Kõiva 1990, more about Slavic motives Boganeva & Kõiva 2019).

**2. Pharaoh's People are associated with mythical creatures.** In a few texts, the pharaoh's warriors became sea spirits or mermaids, and there are common features with the folklore of sea horses (The Pharaoh's horses must come to the shore to eat. ERA II 70, 69/71 (4) < Kullamaa, 1934). In one text, the Pharaoh's People are associated with *koerakoollane* (*cynocephalus*), evil creatures with a human body and a dog's head that were cannibals and marauders, depicted here as a symbiosis of the pharaoh, dog-headed, and aquatic dweller.



*Koerakroonumehed old vee-elajad, kippund laevade kallale. Üks silm old otsa ees nagu silgukarp. Suured pikad küüned old, löönd laeva sisse, raudlaevade sees old suured küünejäljed. Ise ikka karjund need koerakroonumehed: „Varao, varao!“*

*Need old vanad varao sõjamehed, neist see sugu jäänd vee sisse, pidand praegu ikka seal olema. Vanad madrused reakisid seda asja.*

The dog-heads were water creatures, they wanted to harm ships. They had one eye on their forehead like a can of salt herring. They had big long nails that they dug into the ship, there were big nail marks on the sides of iron ships. And these men with dog noses kept screaming: pharaoh, pharaoh!

These were the pharaoh's warriors, starting from whom the race stayed in the water, where they are still supposed to remain. This was told by old sailors. (ERA II 27, 486 (34) < Nissi, 1930)

3. Stories of the pharaoh's warriors becoming **fish, animals or birds** form a separate group of motifs relating to whales, sharks (ERA II 57, 388 (1) < Võnnu, 1932) and unspecified fish (5 reports, including a peculiar description of a semi-mythical human-fish-bird association: “fish, whose face is half-human and who have wings on their backs, sometimes fly above the water and scream ‘pharaoh, pharaoh’ in the Red Sea.” H I 10, 61/2 (11) < Risti, 1896)

Pharaoh's warriors became seabirds or other birds that screamed loudly, and the Russian texts also mention a bear, a cat-like creature, and a seal in one text (Boganeva & Kõiva 2019).

Undoubtedly, the most popular motif in Estonian folklore is related to the creation of **seals** from the pharaoh's warriors (74 texts); the same motif is also well-known in the folklore of the Livs (Loorits 1926) and northern peoples like the Danes, Swedes and Finns (Loorits 1935: 7–23).

Seal hunting was an important livelihood on the islands of western Estonia, which is why motifs related to seals are so prominent in the explanatory models of the Pharaoh's People. Narratives about the appearance of the seals as humans are known in the natural habitat of seals on the northern coasts of Europe, where folk stories are known about selkies – half-seal, half-human beings (in Scotland Marwick 1974; for other mythical motifs about Selkulla cf. Klintberg 2018).

The appearance of the water spirit as a seal was also familiar to Estonian Swedes:

*Der Neck, eine Art kleiner Teufel in Gestalt von Seehunden mit scharfen Zähnen, zieht den Menschen bei den Beinen ins Wasser. (Russwurm 1855: 250).*

The water nymph, a small devil with sharp teeth, appears in the form of a sea wolf and drags people into the water, grabbing them by their legs. (Russwurm 1855: 250)

Since the body of the seal is similar to that of a human, it is believed that they too were once humans. Oscar Loorits (1926: 159) comes to the conclusion that the narrative of the pharaoh's warriors is the reason why the Livs treated them with respect, did not eat their meat, and did not even want to sell a seal that was caught alive. On his expedition to Hiiumaa linguist Paul Ariste wrote: "Seals are half-brothers of men. I heard that. They appeared when the Egyptian army drowned". (ERA II 1, 584 (10) < Reigi, 1928)

**4. Natural phenomena.** There is only one text about the Northern Lights, which is a complex of diverse religious beliefs. Here the connection with the Pharaoh's People is probably a random development.

**5.** The category of **items** connected with the event is small: the text about the pharaoh's chariot wheel can be considered a random development.

### 3. ACTIONS OF THE PHARAOHS AND NARRATED MOTIFS

In the aetiological narratives a number of topics were left in the background: what happened to the horses of the pharaoh's warriors, what was the gender of the resulting creatures? These questions are answered in other stories, for example, with vernacular mention of the horses that says they were the only part of the army that remained on the shore, or they turned into water dwellers. The most popular narrated topics are:

a) One of the most popular motifs (36 transcriptions from Estonia and 14 from Russian archives) forms a story about the Pharaoh's People in which they swim up to ships to **ask** people about **the end of the world**. The emotional tone of the story and the details vary with the texts: the Pharaoh's People cry or sing depending on the answer. One North Estonian story locates all activities inland, by the Emajõgi River:

*Mu isa rääkis mulle, et Emajões on kalu, kellel on nii ilusad lокkis juuksed ja naise nägu. Sellel on ka naise rinnad, kuid põhi on nagu kalakeha ja lõpeb kalasabaga. Kaldal seistes tuleb vahel ja küsib:*

*"Kas homme on kohtupäev?"*

*Kui ütlete seda:*

*"Jah, on!", on nad nii õnnelikud. Nad ujuvad kohe mööda vett edasi.*



*Aga kui ütlete: „Ei!“, on nad kurvad. Nad on tegelikult inimesed, kuid nüüd on needuseks need kala ja millal nad kohtupäeval vabanevad needusest. Neid nimetatakse: vaarao kala.*

My father told me that there are fish in the River Emajõgi that have such beautiful curly hair and women's faces. They also have women's breasts, but the bottom is like a fish body and ends with a fish tail. When you stand on the shore, they sometimes come and ask:

“Is tomorrow the Judgement Day?”

If you say “Yes, it is” they are so happy. They immediately swim further along the river. But if you say “no” they will be sad. They are actually human, but now they are cursed to be fish who will be free of the curse on Judgement Day. They are called the pharaoh's fish. (ERA II 258, 302 (310) < Väike- Ma arja khk, 1939)

Some texts explain why the Pharaoh's People are concerned about this question and the answers to it. One of the explanations is that at the end of the world they will become human, or mortal, again:

*Küsimusele: kui saabub maailmalõpp, mis neist saab? vastab A. T. [jutustaja]: „Kui saabub maailmalõpp, hakkavad nad esimesena valgust tootma, nagu nad olid esimesed. Neil ei ole kalasaba. Neist saavad inimesed.“*

To the question: when will the end of the world come, and what will happen to them? A. T. [narrator] answers: “As the end of the world comes, they will be the first to produce light, as they were the first to produce light. They won't have a fish tail. They will be as people.” (ERA II 109, 130/1 (6- 7) < Lutsi, 1935)

According to Boganeva, in Russian tradition beautiful singing is a typical feature of the Pharaoh's People; in addition, Belarusians and Ukrainians have the same motif of singing, although in these traditions the sounds is dangerous to seamen and so when they hear it, they repel the Pharaoh's People with shots (Boganeva 2010: 55-56; motifs about the end of the world: Loorits 1926, 1949; Zowczak 2014: 201-2018; Federowski 1897: 108).

b) The second popular motif is connected with a narrative that tells of how **captured Pharaoh's People are released back into the water** to take care of a child (26 texts, the motif is also known among the Livs as *Anfangene Pharao* by Loorits, although unknown in Russian versions). In such stories, a woman with a fish tail, who howls sadly, has been caught in the fishermen's net. They search for a person who can understand her speech, usually, there is someone there, a Jew or a Gypsy,

who can communicate with the creature. It transpires from their conversation that the creature has left an infant or small child in the sea, who needs to be fed. In all stories, the Pharaoh's People who were caught in the net are released back into the sea.

The sailors caught a pharaoh fish behind Naissaar Island. After all, the pharaoh's army had become fish in the Red Sea when they drowned. That fish was a human in the front, a fish from behind; it had fins and all, and it spoke the pharaoh's language.

Then there was no one who would understand this language. But there was a crone who spoke to it, she understood the pharaonic language.

*[--] Nutnd niisammuti nagu inimene, pannud kaks kätt silme ette ja nutnd. See vana naisterahvas rääkind tääga. Ütend eidele, et: "Mool jäi väike kolmepäevane laps Naissaare taha halli kibi ääre." Siis oli ta lastud lahti. Läind kange ujumisega Naissaare poole peale.*

It cried just like a human, covered its eyes with its hands, and cried. That old woman spoke to it. It said to the crone: "I left a little three-day-old child at a grey stone behind Naissaar Island." Then it was released. It swam very fast towards Naissaar Island. I wasn't working then, but my dad was in town working at the time. This [creature] had been in a vessel or a tub on the ship. [Father] saw this on the ship. It was not possible to touch it, it went under the water at once. It was more than forty years ago, either forty-two or -three. (ERA II 171, 334/5 (36) < Kullamaa, 1937)

c) **Being exhibited** at exhibitions is present in the Estonian tradition, with 32 texts; in the Russian archives, there are 5 records from the area of multi-ethnic Lutsi, Latvia. The narrative tells of how Pharaoh's People are caught in the sea and shown at exhibitions, fairs and zoos. This motif is also known in the Slavic tradition (Belova 2004: 315).

The connection of the stories with personal experience is highlighted by witnesses and previous narrators, for example, the narrative is made credible precisely through the inclusion of particular people. Personality is characteristic of memoirs and of legends but is inseparable from the genre of modern or urban legends. Connections with locations are also high for the sake of the same credibility; one could even generalise that the stories have similarities to contemporary news lore. The following story is a mediated experience of the Pharaoh's People in their long journey:

In the olden times, when men were going to work in cities, they were shown strange animals in a water tub in the town of Riga: the front was like a human, the behind was like a fish. [--] (ERA II 57, 733 (1) < Hargla, 1932)

d) Some of the motifs relating to the Pharaoh's People are also known in connection with **other mythical creatures**, although the number of variants is limited. Such transmissions are common and there is an overlap with another similar creature such as the water nymph (Est. *näkk*). These include texts about one of the Pharaoh's People seen nursing a baby on a rock in the sea. This creature generally disappears into the sea when it notices observers. In other stories, they sit on the water or come out of the sea with rain, but immediately leave when they notice observers. This motif resembles the typical behaviour of water nymphs. The motif of the Pharaoh's People dragging people into the water to drown them (a single record) can also be considered a transmission of water nymph behaviour attributed to Pharaohs. There is also a single instance of one of the Pharaoh's People committing cannibalism, which has parallels in the Russian tradition (Belova 2005: 293).

In individual stories, a man marries one of the Pharaoh's People, a story that has common features with legends of the sea shepherd, or a nightmare, or the story of a seal woman in which a girl of unknown origin is married, and the married couple live happily only because her origin is unknown to her. The solution here is similar: the member of the Pharaoh's People escapes back to the sea when hearing of her origin. These texts are obviously close to the selkie tradition, who return to the sea after realising their origin.

There is also a variant in which a man asks for beer from the sea. The Pharaoh's People bring kvass from the sea in a jug, although again, this is a transmission from water nymph narratives.

e) The narratives of how the Pharaoh's People come to fishing boats when they return with a catch and **beg for fish**. As an alternative they swim to the port to beg for fish, both stories being close to the behaviour of real seals.

#### 4. HABITAT, LOCATION

Of the 404 tales about the Pharaoh's People found in Estonia, 124 (a quarter) mention the Red Sea as the location while two mention the Black Sea, other locations are the sea in general and, in seven reports, inland waterbodies. If we look closely at texts related to the Black Sea, the background of one narrator is revealed as follows:

*[--] kuulnud selle Türgi sõjas käinud invaliidilt Toomas Kaselt (Avinurmest). Toomas Sild (minu isa, kirjutaja) kuulnud seda ka Mart Soolt Avinurmest, kes vanem sõjainvaliid, võtnud osa Poola mässust ja Balkani sõjast [--]*

The story was heard from a disabled person Toomas Kask (from Avinurme) who was in the Turkish war. Toomas Sild (my father, the writer) also heard this from Mart Soo (from Avinurme), a war invalid who had previously taken

part in the Polish rebellion and the Balkan war. (ERA II 57, 740 (1b) < Tormakhk, 1932).

The second record was made in 1972 in Setu in the village of Polovina, an Estonian–Russian mixed area. Both texts are transcultural influences, specifically the Black Sea is a common location in the Russian tradition (probably through the influence of apogryphs, see Kuznetsova 2012; Loorits 1935).

In 23 out of 32 variants of a specific story (the captured Pharaoh persons are publicly displayed), the narrator has made a connection with a specific place: Pärnu 6, Tartu 5, Narva 1; as well as Rakvere, Naissaar, Paikna fish farm, Paslepa, Mustvee, Lake Peipus, Vaiatu. Outside of Estonia, two historically important economic and cultural centers are named – St. Petersburg twice and Riga once. One text speaks of military service in the Umyr town of Kyiv province, where the protagonist “went to the circus with two other soldiers – ‘we paid 50 dengis’ – and saw a creature ‘nabani kui tütrek, niza’ suurõ” [‘like a girl down to the navel, the boobs were large’].”

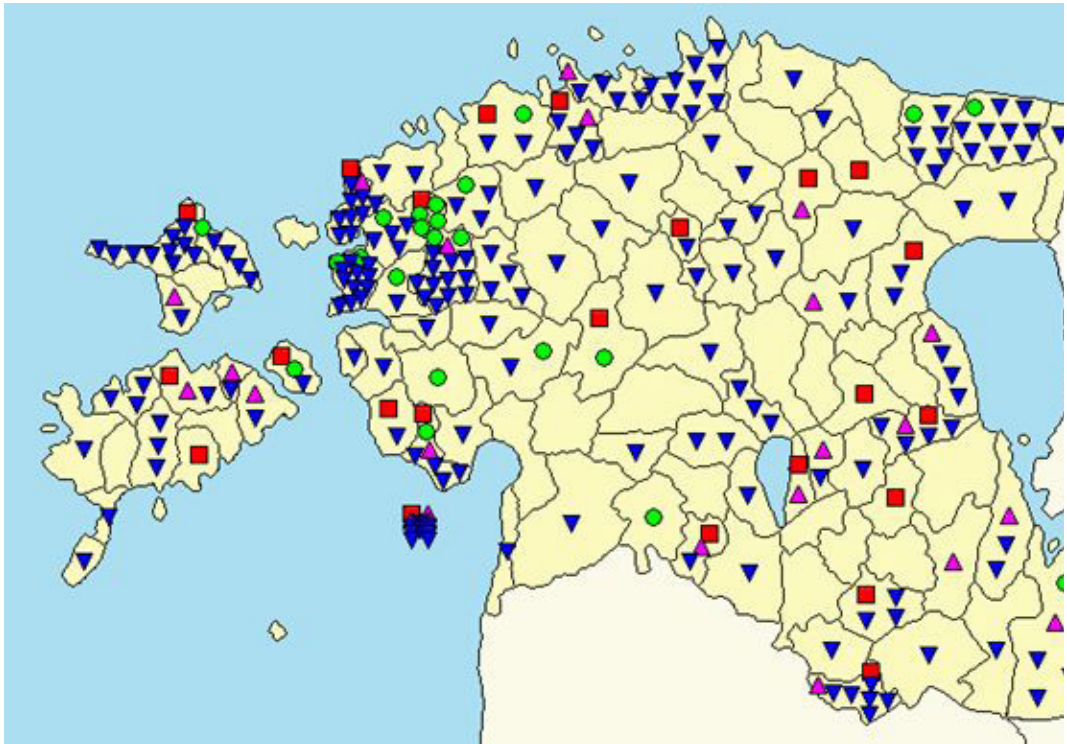
Places in Estonia are largely related to the seashore around Pärnu in western Estonia and the areas on the northern coast. Tartu, in the middle of the country, is an exception, but in the same folklore is a place often associated with fantastic motifs (book of Moses’ wisdom, treasure tales, etc.). In the Russian texts, the most common indication is that the Pharaoh’s People live in the sea (27 texts). At the same time, in the texts there are often clarifications related to actual seas: the Black Sea (6 texts), the Mediterranean Sea (1 text), the Baltic Sea (1 text), and the Red Sea in some texts. The Pharaoh’s People can also be associated with rivers (1 text), lakes (1 text), and unspecified water bodies (1 text) (Boganeva & Kõiva 2019, Pharaohs chapter).

## 5. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HUMANS AND NON-HUMANS

Both the place names and the highlighting of personal experience in speech acts here serve the purpose of enhancing the truth and credibility of the information. The forms of communication between humans and supernatural beings are an intriguing topic. Mythological creatures in belief narratives enter into dialogue with people in distorted local or foreign languages (for example German and Russian). Such use of language emphasizes the different origins of the creatures and attempts to imitate the speech of supernatural beings, which is different from human speech. Part of the narrative implies dialogue, for example, a characteristic feature of the Pharaoh’s People is the vocalisation *pharaoh*. This is repeated in most of the stories of the Estonian text corpus, defining the connection with the origin.

In the Estonian corpus, the Pharaoh people do not sing, but shout “pharaoh, pharaoh”. Only one text calls this shout singing: “Now the seals are singing: ‘pharaoh, pharaoh’. Some think that seals have become of the old pharaoh’s army. These really sing this way. It does have five fingers like a human, similar to a monkey.” Two more stories indicate that the Pharaoh’s People laughed with happiness when they heard about the end of the world.

In 10 texts from the Russian archive at the ELM and texts from the Lutsi region, the beautiful singing of Pharaohs is noted. Singing is more typical for descriptions of Estonian mermaids and merpeople. In the Estonian folklore, the singer is a water



Map 1. The Pharaoh's People. Mare Kõiva 2019.

1. ■ stories about Pharaoh's People exhibited in zoos and at exhibitions;
2. ● stories about children drowned in the sea;
3. ▲ stories about Pharaoh's People asking about Judgment Day;
4. ▼ aetiology, origin.

nymph. Using the search terms ‘song’ (‘singing’, ‘to sing’), one can find 382 singing water nymphs in the text corpus at the Skriptoorium. Among the acoustic characteristics of the Pharaoh’s People, one can note that in addition to singing, crying

and laughing, they can talk in a secret language inaccessible to people (three texts), produce “inhuman sounds”, i.e. squeak (two texts), and “pray beautifully to God” (one text).

Interesting communication styles appear in variants that deal with the Pharaoh's People who have been displayed publicly and then released back to the sea. There is a search for a foreign language speaker who can understand the story told by the captured member of the Pharaoh's People. The speaker turns out to be a Gypsy:

*[E]lukas rääkinud ka üht keelt, mida ükski ei olla mõistnud. Kui keik keeled olnud kõneldud, kutsutud mustlane, et ehk vahest see oskab. Mustlane katsunud omakorda – saanudki aru..*

[T]he creature also spoke a language that none could understand. When all languages were spoken, a Gypsy was called, hoping that he might understand. So it was the Gypsy's turn to try – and he could understand. (E 31027/8 < Halliste, 1897)

Or a Jew:

*[P]ärast on toodud üks juut, see on saand aru.*

[L]ater a Jew was brought, and he was the one who understood. (ERA II 37, 272/3 (45) < Jõhvi, 1931)

## 6. LINKS WITH NON-NARRATIVE FOLKLORE GENRES AND THE VISUAL ARTS

In the previous section, we saw complex intertwinings of women and men as Pharaoh's People as well as the transfer of motifs from other mythological creatures. The Pharaoh and the Pharaoh's People also appear outside narratives in several folklore genres suggesting the adaptation and well-known motifs. For example, the pharaoh is talked about in newer rhymed village songs, and the pharaoh and the passage through the Red Sea occur in healing spells (H II 30, 175 (4) < Puhja, 1888). They also have a place in figures of speech and sayings, such as when saying to screaming children:

*Te karjute nagu vaarao lapsed, kas te ei saa suud kinni hoida!*

You are screaming like the pharaoh's children, can't you keep your mouths shut! (ERA II 57, 737 (4) < Hargla, 1932)

Or:



*14 aastat tagasi ütles üks vana inimene Mustjalast Saaremaal: „Veel üks mu sugulane sai jälle vaaraoks“ – Ma küsisin: „Mida see tähendab?“ – Mees vastas: „Uppus ära.“*

14 years ago, an old person from Mustjala on Saaremaa Island said: “Another one of my relatives became a pharaoh again”. I asked: “What does this mean?” The man replied: “They drowned”. (ERA II 70, 23 (2) < Emmaste, 1934)

Recollections of going through the Red Sea and of Moses are also found in riddles (Krikmann & Krikmann 2012; cf. Loorits 1935). The Pharaoh's People and the Pharaoh act as frightening figures and occur in micro-toponymy. Meteorological and fate-related death omens form a separate subgenre of folklore in which we find motifs, such as seeing the Pharaoh's People foretelling of death and shipwreck, while in the popular meteorology of the coastal people, seeing them predict rain, bad weather or storms. Their presence in other folklore genres indicates how adaptable the base story is.

## 7. THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA AND ART

As an intergenerational core text, the Bible inspired folklore and a dense corpus of vernacular material that was able to fill cultural space. In the case of the Pharaoh's People, the motif spread from one folklore genre to another linking different mythological beings and influencing the media and the arts.

Almost all Estonian and most Estonian-Russian reports also have the Bible-based historiola (Boganeva & Kõiva, 2019), with the same found in, for example, Slovenian tradition (Kropej 2003).

In their cover letters, correspondents emphasize how narrators tell the story in such a similar way to the Bible that they think it is meaningless to re-write them, and many have failed to write stories down because of this. The proximity to the Bible text is to be expected since re-tellings of the Old Testament have appeared in Estonian calendars since 1713 (see [www.folklore.ee/kalender](http://www.folklore.ee/kalender)), the spread of church literature in Estonian also helping this. Ülo Tedre has highlighted how, because publications were expensive in the 19th century, people read books, newspapers and other publications to each other in the tavern. In addition to creating awareness, it was a great opportunity for argumentation and discussion (Tedre 2003).

Estonian narrators recall that stories about the Pharaoh's People were told during evening Bible readings and that their father and mother recounted them.

*Lapsepõlves, kui sai rohkem piibelt ja piiblilugusid loetud, kõneles minu kadunud isa, et vaarao rahvas olivad Punases meres, kuhu nemad iisraelidele*

*järele tormasivad, muudetud kaladeks – pool inimene, pool kala ja praegust-ki häälitsema kaebehälega: “Varao, varao...”*

In my childhood, when we read the Bible and Bible stories more, my dead father said that the pharaoh's peoples were in the Red Sea where they were chasing after the Israelites, and where they were turned into fish, half man, half (the tail) fish, and they are supposed to moan to this day “pharaoh, pharaoh...” (RKM II 11, 94 (116) < Paide, 1947)

The following text refers to the spread of stories based on first-person memorates. The narrator does not argue against the possibility of the creatures' existence, but summarizes the narrative in the following words: “And so they might have existed”. (ERA II 28, 451 (11) < Viru-Nigula, 1930).

The narrators recall having read about the Pharaoh's People in a book, but the title is always missing, Loorits connects the data with the publication of *Ilus Melusine* (Beautiful Melusine) by Hofmann (in Estonian 1898), some Estonian texts are influenced by the Little Mermaid by H. Ch. Andersen.

In the corpus there are data about illustrated books that people saw in their youth:

*Kaarma mõisas oli härira, tal oli raamat, seal olid pildid, kus vaaraoinimesed, suured nagu seateo karbid, harulised, inimesed olid sees, pikad juuksed peas. Rinnust saatik inimesed, alt nagu haugikalad. Ma arvasin, et on vaaraoinimesed. Need pidid ka olema alt kala ja ülevalt poolt inimene.*

There was a lord in Kaarma manor, he had a book that had pictures in it. There were Pharaoh's People, large as pig snail shells, pronged, there were people inside, long hair on their heads. Human from the waist up, like a pike fish in the bottom. I thought these were the Pharaoh's People. They were supposed to be fish at the bottom and humans above. (ERA II 70, 27 (7) < Kullamaa, 1934)

In the Russian tradition of the 16th-19th centuries there were re-writings of manuscripts that include the story of Moses. Based on a comparison of the apographs and the popular text corpus, Vera Kuznetsova believes it is a different tradition (Kuznetsova 2012). Indeed, we can find the Black Sea and the human-headed creatures in the Russian apocrypha, demonstrating the influence of the manuscripts on the Russian vernacular tradition. Russians in southeastern Estonia also quote the Black Sea:

*Моисей вел явреев через залив. Он вдарил жазлом, и вада ушла. А кагда Фараон пагнался са сваим народом за Моисеем, то вада нахлынула, и ани утанули. Есть сказание, что ета и есть фараоны. Живут в Черном*

*море — галава целовецьа плюсни [ноги] рыбье и весь сам как рыба. Зла человеку не применяют, а живут сами по себе.*

Maisei led the Jews through the sea. He hit the sea with the stick and the water receded. But when Pharaoh and his people went after Moses, the water returned, and they were drowned. It is believed that these are the Pharaohs. They live in the Black Sea – they have a human head but the legs are from the fish and they are totally fish-like. They do not harm people, but they keep to themselves. (ERA, Vene 15, 394/5 (9) < Setumaa, 1940)

Visuality and art is the next important influencer of knowledge and narrativity. The next information about the influence of works of art is valuable:

*[n]agu vahest on piltide peal..*

I have seen them myself in a picture. (ERA II 60, 183 (8) < Kolga- Jaani, 1932)

*Minu isa ütleb, poisiksepõlves näind Tallinnas uulitsanurkel pilte, kalad mehe peaga, suud lahti, öeldud vaarao kalad olevad, et ta ei teadnud rohkem küsida vanematelt, siis pole ka seletust saand nende kohta [--]*

My father says that when he was a boy, he saw pictures on street corners in Tallinn, fish with a man's head, mouth is open, it was said that these were pharaoh's fish, but since they were not wise enough to ask their parents about them, they did not receive any further explanation. (ERA II 38, 191/3 (58) < Väike- Maarja, 1931)

Reference is also made to wooden figures:

*Muuga mõisas on neid kujusi mitmel pool, puust tehtud.*

In Muuga manor these figures are in several places, made from wood. (ERA II 62, 613/4 (33) < Kullamaa khk, 1933),

or at the ships (ERA II 62, 613/4 (33) < Kullamaa, 1933).

## CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that the Pharaoh's People in their various forms were still a living folklore in the 1970s. In 1974, in a documentary called *The Pharaoh's Warriors* by Mark Soosaar, people from Kihnu island prepare for a seal hunt. They talk about motifs relating to, and discuss the special features of, seal hunting.

Symbioses with other mythical sea creatures indicate that the tradition was suitably adapted and expanded from the original motifs of the Pharaoh's People, redeeming them on Judgement Day in a thematic way, taking over some of the motifs associated with sea people, water nymphs and other creatures and evolving towards humane and emotional motifs (the child left at sea, the grateful fairy, etc.). The main story, the scriptural passage telling of the Jews fleeing through the Red Sea, is represented in one or other allusion in most narratives. The texts transcribed in Latvian territories and in the Russian villages of Setumaa contain more unexpected elements as well as modifications of biblical motifs and the structure of events and character exchanges. It is obvious that these variants have many parallels in Slavic tradition, including traditions belonging to Bulgarians in Ukraine (Badalanova 2017).

Vernacular developments in the Bible passage relate to aetiologies and rely on ontological explanations. In particular, the mythologisation of seals illustrates the everlasting process of myth-making and connections with northern cultures. At the same time in the southern Slavic area, we can find a mythical creature called the Faraonika (Kropej 2003).

When comparing the numerical data relating to Estonian texts that include various mythical sea creatures, we see unevenly distributed text corpora: water spirits, who live in streams, ponds, rivers, lakes or the sea, easily prevail over all other creatures, followed by the Pharaoh's People (more than 400 texts), Kotermann/ Klabautermann (400 texts), and the sea herd (more than 140 texts). The text corpus features tales of the sea devil, sea people and other kinds of water fairy, drowning, and other widely known motifs that have not achieved such popularity. Estonian Swedish data are close to Estonian and both are similar to Northern Europe in many ways while the Estonian Russian tradition is closer to Slavic folklore.

The stories of the Pharaoh's People were well-known throughout Estonia, but the motifs were of different origins. More unusual motifs were spread in the coastal area, among fishermen. The association of the motifs with Bible literature can be believed spread from the Pskov and Pechory areas close to Estonia, to the Amur, to many parts of Ukraine, and all the way to Bulgaria and Hungary.