

## 4. SEA, LAKE AND RIVER CATTLE

According to the Estonian religion, there are sea cattle and horses as well as cattle and horses living in freshwater bodies. It is important to mention that the cattle are not similar to the Greek hippocampus, a mythological creature shared by antique mythologies that typically has the upper body of a horse and the lower body of a fish. Estonian water cattle are similar to ordinary animals. There are a few main motifs connected with this phenomenon, divided as follows:

### 1) Meeting with sea cattle

*Vee all elutsevatest lehmadest ma olen kuulnd, et peavad veel praegugi Särghaua aasal heina söömes käima. Sial piab neid näkilehmadeks kutsutama. Neid piab ainult kaugelt nähtama. Niipia aga, kui mõni lähenevat, kaduvat nad vee alla. Muud ei tia ma nendest kedagi.*

I've heard of underwater cows, and they still eat hay in Särghaua meadow. There they are called mermaid cows. They can only be seen from afar. As soon as one approaches, they disappear under the water. That's all I know about them. (ERA II 58, 63/4 (2) < Vändra, 1933)

2) a) water cattle present **among ordinary cattle**, or b) **they are caught** (by magic) and mingled into the herd

*Üitskõrd suveõhtu lännu üits vaene miis järvele kalu püüdma. Nännu juba kaugelt, et järve veere pääl heinamaal söönu suur kari lehma.*

*„Oot-oot, ma vaata, kelle lehma nii siin heinamaad sõkuve,“ mõtelnu miis ja hiilin karjale lähembes.*

*Kogemede astun aga miis ütte kuiva puuoksa pääle, nõnda et sii raksun. Raksu kuulden panden lehma järve poole juuskma, karranu sisse ja lännu vii alla. Nüüd saanu miis aru, et nii mitte õiguse lehma ei ole, vaid järvevaimude kari.*

*Et viilehma pidavad õige palju piima ja võid andma, sis miis otsusten mõnda lehma kinni püüda. Tõisel õhtul lännu ta varakult järve veere pääle põõsasse uutma, ligi võttes ka üte pika ja kõva kõue. Väha aja pärast hakkanugi järvevesi kohiseme ja terve kari tullu järvest välla, kige ehen suur uhke sõnn. Miis võtten sis kõue, tennu ütte otsa silmuse ja jäänu uutma. Väha aja pärast tullugi üits suur, ilus lehm õide põõsa manu. Sis võtten miis silmuse ja visanu ta kohe lehmale kaala. Ku lehm tunden, et kõus kaalan om, hakkanu ta edimelt hirmsaste rüükma ja rabeleme. Tõise looma panden seda kuuldan puha järve tagasi. Varsti jäänu ka sii lehm kõue otsan rahulises ja tullu mehele ilusti*

*järgi. Pärast käunu ta küll viil järve veere pääl heina sööman, kuid järve ta tagasi änamb es ole lännu. Aga piima anden ta palju, ninda et miis varsti rikkas lännu ja Tartumaal suure koha ostnu.*

One summer evening, a poor man went to the lake to fish. Saw from afar that a large herd of cows had eaten in the meadow on the water of the lake.

“Well, well, I’ll see whose cows are stamping in this meadow”, the man thought and crept closer to the herd.

But the man accidentally stepped on a dry branch, so that it cracked. Hearing the sound, the cows began running towards the lake, jumped into the lake and went under the water. Now the man realised that these were not the right cows, but a herd of lake spirits.

As water cows were supposed to give a great deal of milk and butter, the man decided to catch some cows. On the second night, he went to the lake early to wait in the bushes, holding a long, strong rope. After a short time, the lake water began to rustle, and the whole herd came out of the lake, a large proud bull in front. The man then took the rope, made a loop at one end, and waited. After a short time, a large, beautiful cow came close to the bush. The man took the loop and immediately threw it over the cow’s head. When the cow felt the rope around her neck, she began to bellow and struggle terribly. The other animals, hearing this, ran back into the lake. Soon the cow was calm on the rope and came after the man beautifully. After that, she went to the lake to eat hay, but never went back into the lake. Yet she gave a lot of milk, so the man soon became rich and bought a large place in Tartu. (ERA II 57, 148/50 (2) < Halliste, 1932)

3) Together with aquatic animals, a **cowherd** comes to the shore, later returning to the water. In several tales, the cowherd follows her animals, and in this case, the master later proposes to her. After some time, the woman finds herself near a body of water and goes back to her real home. In some stories, before leaving, for example, the woman leads the fishermen to better fishing places, and even after leaving, her connection with human companions and especially with the family, is not permanently broken as she brings beer from the sea to the men with a milk pail or goes home to change the children’s clothes. The tale of how a woman returning to the water, a cowherd of blue cows, goes home to feed children was published by Carl Russwurm in his collection *Sagen aus Hapsal, der Wiek, Oesel und Runö* (1861: 94–95).

Sea cows are productive and give a lot of milk, but still do not allow themselves to be experimented on:

*Kasna ninä piäle tuln kolm merelehmä mäele. Kaks tükkü suadud käde, üks suan viel mere. Nied oln nda iäd lehmäd, et mioksõ ristaga alla mindud, selle täve ann piimä. Aga teese ristassõ ei põlõ enäm lüpsn. Päräst üks valgõ piägä tüdrik nutn ikka kivi otsas, et lehmäd ollõ kadun. Viimes kadun ää.*

Three sea cows came up Kasna nina (Kasna nose, i.e. cape) from the sea to the mountain. Two were captured and one more made it to the sea. They had been such good cows that no matter what container you went with, they filled it full of milk. But not the second pail. After that, girl with a white hair was still crying on a stone, saying that the cows were lost. Finally, she disappeared. (ERA II 79, 519/21 (5) < Kihnu, 1934)

The cowherd could be old or young, there could be several cowherds, for example:

*Lats'kanõ (tütarlaps) ja poiskanõ. Poiss istno kivi pääl, tütarlats aga pand pää mättä pääle ja olõs nii kui magama jäänü.*

Lats'kanõ (i.e. a girl) and poiskanõ (i.e. a boy). The boy sat on a rock while the girl put her head on the grass and fell asleep. (S 93093/9 (10) < Setomaa 1934)

Both the cattle and the cowherd stay in the world of people for a certain time and then return to their homes, often with a marked incentive to leave for seven years, or they leave for violating a rule of some kind.

In Estonian and Livonian lore, water cows are like real livestock in that they are the same species living in the water world, a counterpart. In this respect, human-animal hybrids, for example, were not generally common in the folklore of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

The sea herd belongs among the water spirits and stories about them have common features with legends of the Pharaoh's people. Similar traditions are found in Finland (Jauhiainen 1998, L 301) and Sweden (Klintberg 2010, K). Bengt af Klintberg concludes: "Both *svjöra* and *havsfru* are believed to have a herd that sometimes came out of the water and mixed with farm cattle." (Klintberg 2010: 111) Similar motifs are found in Danish legends (Christiansen 1958, types 4050-4090: fairies of rivers, lakes, and the sea), in Norway and other parts of Northern Europe, as well as in Livonia (Loorits 1926).

In the 19th century, water cattle was already a small tradition, for which occasional notes are found in Baltic German publications (Russwurm 1855, 1861; later also Wiedemann 1876), while a few texts were published by Matthias Johann Eisen (1896, second edition 1919). Oskar Loorits published texts collected from the Livonians in the first part of his *The Folk Belief of the Livonian People* (Loorits 1926), among them the only writing about the cows of St Mary. Having become the head of the Estonian archives, Loorits asked local correspondents to send more

stories, but despite the campaign the number of texts did not increase significantly, although these stories did remain in folklore throughout 20th century, and interpretation of the traditions associated with them is culturally fascinating.

In the tales, the narrators also discuss questions of the plausibility of mythopoeias, and in the case of sea cattle there are discussions about the possible reality of this. In 1933, the owner of the Pulli farm told to Paul Ariste, in conversation, that this is a fairy tale, although he left the door to the fantasy world open because “one had a sea cow, they are placid cows, very good company.”

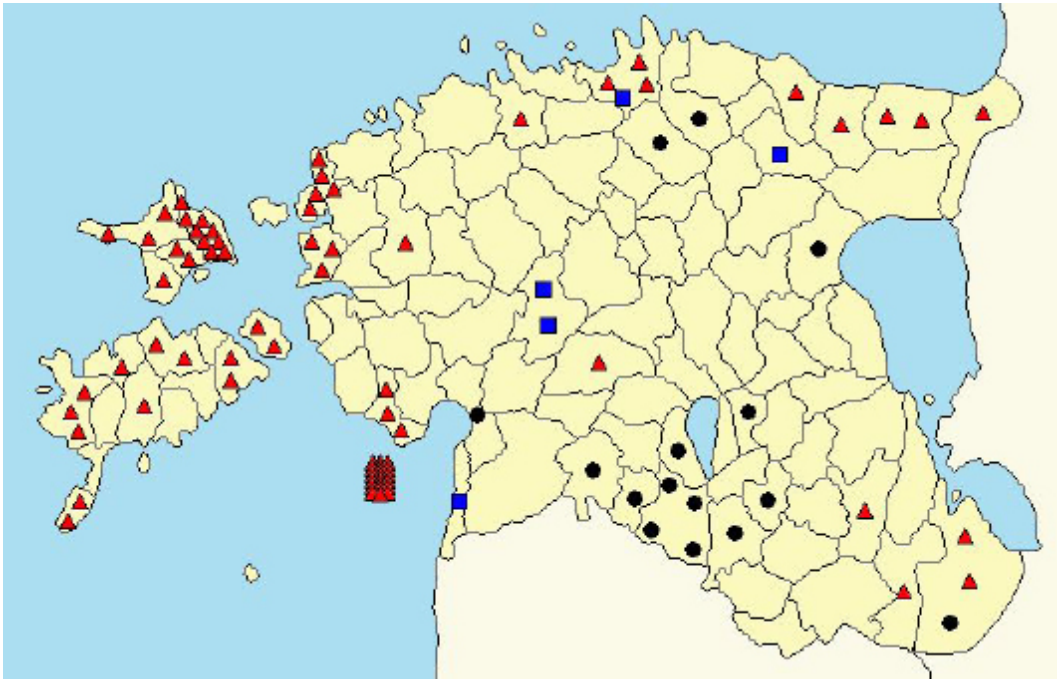
*Muinasjutud võivad olla merelehmad, usuga ei räägi enam ükski merelehmäjutte. Peris harilikud lehmad, olid sinikat karva. Kui palju see nüüd oli. Ühel ikka oli olnud, kangesti hääd seltsi lehmad, pidanud seda seltsi.*

Fairy tales can be about sea cows, in beliefs there are no more sea cow tales. They were ordinary cows, with blue fur. How true is that now? One had sea cow, a very good cow, belonged to his herd, he kept this company of cows.

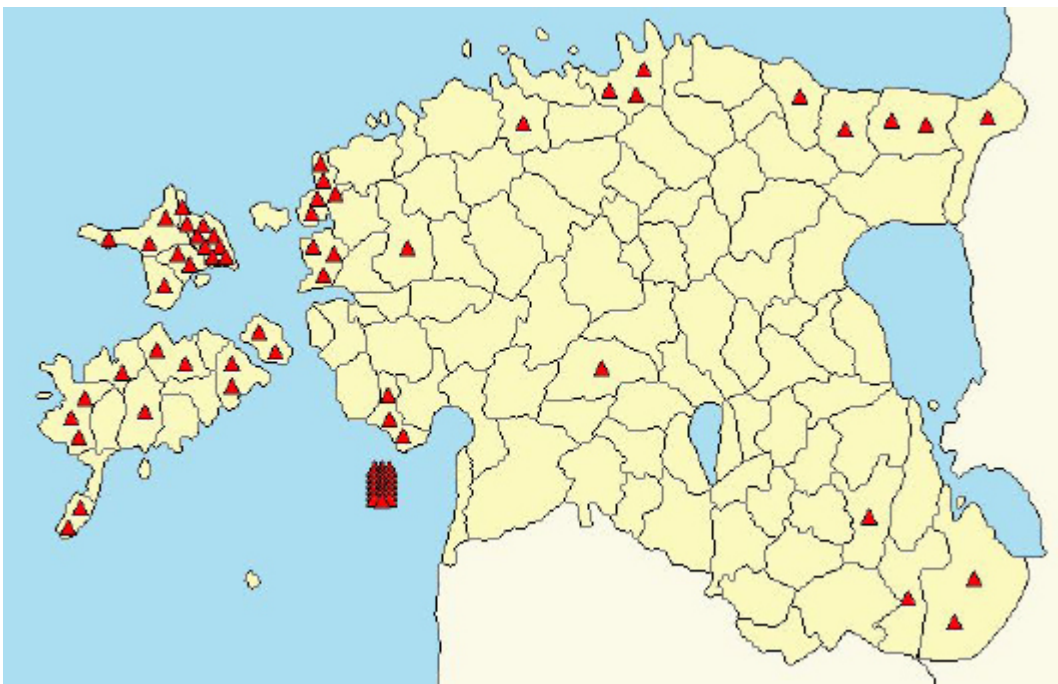
(RKM II 10, 179 (2) < Kihnu, 1933)

Sea, lake and river cows are useful and bring prosperity to the family (heifers are sold, milk and butter bring in money); they are devoid of demonic traits.

In general, both sea and freshwater cattle are similar, but there are also particular elements in the tales. For example, the bull and the ox are associated with the mermaid tradition and are important in the flying lake legends, where they walk in front of the lake and lead it to a new location. Sea sheep and sea pigs are known in lake and river tales and also appear in mermaid folklore. Let us take a closer look at the descriptions of these animals.



Map 5. The spread of beliefs and legends relating to the sea (red triangle), lake (black circle) and river herds (blue square). Mare Kõiva 2021.



Map 6. Spread of sea herds. Mare Kõiva 2021.

## 1. THE FORM

The existence of marine animals is explicitly justified by folklore experts because the same animals live both on land and in the water:

*Nad ütlevad, et meres peavad olema kõik samad loomad, mis maa pääl.*

They say that in the sea there must be all the same animals as on land. (E 60175 (17) < Noarootsi, 1927)

or

*Meres peab ka kõik loomad olema nagu maa peal. Inimesed ka seal.*

In the sea, all animals must also be like on land. People are there too. (ERA II 28, 198 (30) < Lügänuše, 1930)

A characteristic feature is the sudden appearance of these animals. They come from the sea, a lake or a pond to feed on pasture and go back there. There is also an emphasis on their temporary presence on land: they eat and return to the water, or they stay with people for seven years.

*Küll olen kuulnud, et oli merelehmi. Merelehmä tulnud ja läinud jälle meresse tagasi.*

I've heard there were sea cows. The sea cows came and went back to the sea again. (E 60179 (2) < Noarootsi, 1927)

*Meres on loomad ka, hallid loomad oo. Keivad koa vahest maal, nõnna kas rohtu võtmas. Enne on nähtud, et keind merest väljas söömas. On jälle meresse tagasi läind.*

There are animals in the sea too, grey animals. Sometimes they go to the land to take grass. I've seen them before, coming out of the sea to feed on the grass. They went back to the sea again. (ERA II 55, 94 (5) < Ridala, 1932)

A special feature of the sea herd is the extraordinary yield of milk, which is explicitly noted in almost every story. A good milk yield is a prerequisite for dairy farming, but the legends do not detail the amount of milk or many other facts. Milk yield is given simply as a large container filled full:

*Üks puõlpime Ruotsikülä naenõ lüpsn Piälrandas kogõmata oma lehmä pähä merelehmä ää. Suan terve sangu (= lüpsiku)täve piimä.*

A half-blind Ruotsikülä village woman accidentally milked a sea cow in Piälranda. She got a whole milk pail. (ERA II 58, 653 (8) < Kihnu, 1932)

Olga Sutt, from Kihnu, told a story to the dialect researcher Salme Tanning in which excessive experimentation and/or greed led to the realisation that the milk was not endless:

*Aga ükskõik mis riistaga nad lüpsn, ikka suan täüde. Aga ku nad siis teese päävä teese riistaga läin, kui kahe riistaga läin, siis põlõ suan täüde.*

But no matter into what kind of tool they milked; they still got the vessel full. But then the other day they went with two milk pails but they didn't get a full pail. (KKI MT 25, 97/8 < Kihnu, 1948)

The general assessment is that caring for the animals paid off because the cows were beautifully plump and gave a lot of creamy milk (e.g.: E, StK 43, 148/50 (2) < Jämaja, 1927; ERA II 37, 367/9 (42) < Jõhvi, 1931; ERA II 235, 216 (31) < Kihnu, 1939; ERA II 110, 252/3 (5) < Kuusalu, 1935), though in the end, the milk yield reduced (ERA II 59, 535 (1) < Kihnu, 1933).

Another special feature is related to the **colour** of the cows, which, on the islands, in Tõstamaa and in one Jõhvi story, are blue or bluish (7 texts), blue-grey (2 texts) or water grey (4 texts). On the islands and elsewhere on the coast, the cow is most often grey (15 texts), partly grey (2 texts), spotted (2 texts), white (1 text), red (1 text), black (1 text), or a black ox with a white forehead (1 text).

*Peris harilikud lehmad, olid sinikat karva. Kui palju see nüüd oli. Ühel ikka oli olnud, kangesti hääd seltsi lehmad, pidanud seda seltsi.*

Pretty common cows, bluish ones. How much of it was the truth now? One of them, a very good cow, belonged to this herd. (RKM II 10, 179 (2) < Kihnu, 1933)

*Vanaste tuln Olevi nuka juures vesihall sõnn ja lehm merest välla ja hakan mürama ja kaapin ja tuln mede karja sekka*

In the old days, at Olev's corner, a water grey bull and a cow came out of the sea and started making noises and scraping the ground and came among our herd. (AES, MT 57, 33 < KK, Tõstamaa, 1928)

*Hallid loomad piavad meriveissed olema.*

Grey animals must be sea cattle. (ERA II 1, 720 (3) < Emmaste, 1928);

*...võrgus must härg, valge lauguga otsal.*

...a black bull in the net with a white forehead. (ERA II 58, 33/4 (1) < Suure- Jaani 1933)

The colour definitions of sea cows in some tales are related to the different human perceptions of colours and the terminology of colours. Basically, the colour gamut, from blue and bluish to water grey and even grey, is quite close and its exact definition is not unambiguous. It is quite common to refer to certain grey undertones as blue (for example the Siberian blue cat, see Sutrop 2002, Uusküla and Sutrop 2014 for details on colours and their perception).

The colour and other conditions mean we can assume there may have been a real breed of animal behind the image of the sea cow. A breed from the Netherlands was proposed as one candidate, although there is another option: service on the Livonian Coast was a way for islanders to earn money at the beginning of the 20th century, and animals were also transported from Livonia to Saaremaa and the Estonian coast. This makes the blue cow living in Latvia, today a rare protected breed, a strong candidate for sea cow. The first official data on the unusual animal (Latvian blue cow) dates to the beginning of the last century). Latvian veterinary studies confirm that the Latvian Blue Cow is a native cattle breed (*Bos taurus*), in fact, it is one of the most endangered animal species and a breed on the list of genetic resources (AnGR) (Smiltiņa, Bāliņš and Grīslis 2015).

To date, there are only 89 animals, mainly in the northeastern part of Courland (Kuramaa). Blue cows allegedly belonged primarily to Livonians, which allows us to explain the Estonian tradition partly through Livonian lore. The internet references a Livonian legend according to which the first seven animals came from the sea, one of them got lost and ended up with a fisherman's herd. Veterinary scientists who have studied local Latvian breeds – blue and red cows – confirm that a blue cow can give a large amount of milk, from 15 to 30 litres per day, rich and creamy with a fat content of 4.5–6%. These sources highlight how animals are not susceptible to disease, they calve without human help, and tolerate cold, rain and wind (Petrovska, Jonkus, Zagorska and Ciprova 2017). As such, they were perfectly suited to be used as livestock by coastal people.

The explanations offered in folklore also lead us to the explanations that have arisen with translation between languages and cultures, for example, the seal is a *Seehund*, 'sea dog', in German, which in folklore was verbalised as water cow or sea dog.

The following explanations have been offered for sea cows by 20<sup>th</sup>-century folklore experts, according to which they are: a sea bear (ERA II 16, 319 (4) < Kihnu, 1929), a deer (ERA II 160, 482 (9) < Vastseliina, 1937), a bittern (in the texts it is identified with a long-tailed creature living in reeds; E 58802 < Muhu, 1926), a sea otter (E 60128 (10) < Noarootsi, 1927) and a seal (ERA II 34, 175 (28) < Karja, 1931), as well as a fish (ERA II 34, 128 (14) < Muhu, 1931) or even special stones in the sea, higher places inside the sea where fish spawn (ERA II 38, 628 (25) < Vaivara, 1931).



Each explanation is accompanied by argumentation, for example, Agrippina Hill, 54, suggested to Oskar Loorits that:

*Merihärjad ikki kutsuti sehaksed kalakotkad. Vähiksed ollid.*

Sea bulls were still called fish eagles. They were small-ish. (ERA II 34, 1 28 (14) < Muhu, 1931)

In the following example, a vague connection with the seal is created. The text fits into the tradition of the sea bull because the emergence of grey calves and sea cows comes into play:

*Emä kõneles. Sääl Pammana pool küla väljal ükskord oli merest pull tulnd, meresõnniks oli teda hüütud, mis loom ta oli, hülge või, ja see oli hall olnd ja sest ajast olla sääl halli tõugu lehmad.*

Mum spoke. There in the field in the village of Pammana, once upon a time, a bull had come from the sea, it was called the sea dung – what kind of animal was it, or was it a seal? – and it was grey, and since then there have been grey cows. (ERA II 34, 175 (28) < Karja, 1931)

In several texts, however, the connection with the seal is obvious:

*Meres on ka lehmad. Tulnud metsa sööma. Neid lastud püssiga. Naid süüakse ju, või ei tea mis rasvast tehtud.*

There are also cows in the sea. They come to the forest to eat. They were shot with a gun. They were eaten, or I don't know what is made of their fat. (E 60435 (18) < Noarootsi, 1927)

Among the inscriptions is a dialogue between family folk, typical of episodes with multiple narrators, where people have different views and ways of explaining things. The inscription comes from Karja Parish and was recorded by Oskar Loorits, in front of whose eyes a dispute develops between 60-year-olds. Among other things, there is also a hint in the text of a real breed of cow that resembles the sea cow in appearance:

*Sõrves olle merest see sugu jäänd. Vesihallid, nee olle merilehmade pojad ja pullid. Niisammu vanade inimeste käest. Hülgest olle lehm kokkund ja sellest olle see sugu tulnd. Hüljes olle merest randas olnd ja siis lehm olle kokkund ja sellest olle see sugu, teist moodi luudega ka.*

*(Naine seletab, et kokkumisest ei tule mingit sugu. Mees vastu: no kui ei jää, siis ma võin sulle selle sõna ütelda kah.)*

*Maatõugu on rusked. Nee hüitakse hollandi tõugu, halli ja laia konti.*

In Sõrve this breed left the sea and settled on land. Water grey cows, they are sons of sea cows and bulls. I heard from old people. The cow is terrified by the seal; and from it, the breed came. A seal came from the sea, was on the beach, and then the cow was terrified, and thus that breed appeared, with a different bone structure.

(The woman explains that no animal breed comes from fear. Man: If not, I can tell you that alright.) The country breed is red and brown. These cows are called the Dutch breed, grey and broad-boned they are. (ERA II 34, 183/4 (2 6) < Karja, 1931)

Collecting data for his dissertation in Noarootsi and on Hiiumaa, Paul Ariste wrote reports from Estonians and Estonian Swedes. As one explanation for the sea cow, he is offered a sea otter, described as a black beast with a long, stiff tail.

*Kargas klokk, klokk. Tuli veest velja mu roogude piiale. Pidi kuri loom olema, meresaarmas või ilmutis. Mu kallale ei tulnud.*

A ‘klokk’ sprang out. Came out of the water on my reeds. Must have been an evil animal, a sea otter, or a ghost. It didn’t attack me. (E 60128 (10) < Noarootsi, 1927)

The next theme is the events that happened **far away or in time immemorial**, including once drowned animals whose spirits go haunting, and creatures seen in distant lands called sea cows. This motif is more clearly revealed by the lake herd, which is discussed below. The story, told by 84-year-old Ranna Jürg (Sandmann) to Rudolf Põldmäe on Kolga shore, characterises the sea herd and at the same time attempts to portray a unique prehistory:

*Veeral maal peavad olema lehmad meres. Seal on vee ala jäänd, siis kummitavad. Tuli on purskand üles, sinna on jooksnud meri asemele, see on ajalugude sees. Näitab vahel [ennast inimestele], see on nende vaimu kummitused; seda ei ole meil.*

There must be cows in the sea in a foreign land. There they are submerged, then haunted. The fire has burst up, the sea has run into it, it is written in the histories. Sometimes they show themselves to people, they are the ghosts of spirits. We do not have this. (ERA II 114, 388 (55) < Kuusalu, 1935)

Although direct contact with monsters and strange creatures was rarely recorded, there are quirky descriptions. For example, in 1929 the well-known ethnomusicologist Herbert Tampere recorded a fantasy-filled story about a monster:

*Põdra sarvete moodi sarved oln, isi sinist karva. Kui inimesed vaatama tuln, läin jälle merre tagatsi.*

Elk antlers – like horns they were, themselves blue fur. When people came to see, they went back to the sea. (ERA II 16, 344 (6) < Kihnu, 1929)

There are also exceptional reports of hybrid creatures:

*Merelehmad olle sinised oln. Hännad olle luumel seoksed oln nagu kalal – kahearakalised.*

The sea cows were blue. The tails were like those of a fish – forced. (ERA II 306, 191 (34) < Tõstamaa, 1943)

In stories of the sea herd, we find little connection with magic and repelling incantations (there is no reason to repel such useful animals); in the foreground is the direct relationship between a particular (supernatural) animal and its shepherd. As an exception, fishing magic and experience with Sõrve witches is described in more detail, which was discussed above. This story coincides with the concept of witchcraft, according to which the periphery and northern regions are places where special knowledge and witchcraft abilities are common. Ordinary islanders and some mainland Estonians place a witchcraft centre on the Sõrve Peninsula, and according to mainland Estonian beliefs, witches are islanders. This is partly due to the willingness of summer seasonal workers to take on the roles of witches, the reasons for which could be fun at the expense of others' superstitions, the desire to get jobs more easily, or the use of the expected stereotype for their own benefit.

The image of the northern witch includes the witches of Lapland, and the Laps in general, who, in the mythology of the 19th century, play an important role as people who bring disease and steal souls. In addition to which, Lapland was a place where people with witchcraft skills lived and where there were mythical characters (Paal 2014; Loorits 1926; on the example of island witches, Kõiva 2023). The system was much more complex than just the place of origin or belonging to a local ethnic group and included physical, mental, and behavioural parameters, as well as the consideration of traditional lines (Kõiva 1995). Usually, the content of the story indicates that it was not easy to decide whether the character had a suspicious accident or was the target of a real witchcraft attack. Written in 1913, the story features an unusual treasure and two episodes of witchcraft that allude to the witches' hostility, as well as their help in balancing the situation.

At the end of the season, the young man does not find a suitable occupation and decides to go to the Sõrve Peninsula to catch cod together with two boys of similar status. The equipment they need will be available in a couple of days and they will sail to the peninsula. Let's continue with the narrator's words:

*Kolmandal pääval oleme tähendatud koha peal, Jämaja külas Saaremaal.*

*Nemad keisid kord oma vanemid vaatamas, mina võtsi oma tuttava juure kortli niikauaks, kui sääl tahame püüda. Nemad tulid paari pääva pärast tagasi. Lähme homiku randa. Ostame räimi sööda tarvis õngedele otsa panna, õhtu merese minna, paneme otsa.*

On the third day, we are at the designated place, in Jämaja village on Saaremaa.

They [other young people] went to see their parents, I took my acquaintance to my dwelling for as long as we wanted to fish there. They came back in a few days. We went to the shore in the morning. We buy herring to put on the end of the fishing rod for bait and go out to sea in the evening, we put the herring on the end of the fishing line.

With their successful fishing, the boys manage to make the local fishermen envious, who think they are trying to empty the sea. They part, seemingly amicably, but when they check the fishing rods there is an unexpected result. After initial silence and dismay, one laughs happily as on the fishing line there are cows, 1,500 large multicoloured cows, with “more on the other line” as they reel it in from the water. If the cows are taken to the countryside and sold off in Riga, the home will become wealthy. Starting to laugh is a fatal mistake and a violation of the norm. In the tale, such creatures, either a trick of the eye or a creation of fantasy, are difficult to materialise and make real. This also happens here – the cows escape the fishing line and disappear again to the seabed.

The local young men know the remedy instantly and go to a sage:

*“Sellele saab abi. Nemad tegevad ike niisugusi vigurid siin.”*

*Teine vend läheb tarka otsima, tuleb homiku tagasi: “Asi kordas, lähme jälle täna õhtu merese!”*

*Läksime ka. Homiku oli mitusada turska. Meie püüdsime niikaua, kui järeolud lubasid, ei näind pärast enam lehmi.*

The Sõrve brothers say: “This can be helped. They still do such pranks here.” The second brother goes to seek the sage, comes back in the morning:

“It’s all right, let’s go to the sea again tonight.”

We went, too. In the morning, there were several hundred cod on the fishing lines. We fished as long as the ice conditions allowed, we didn’t see any more cows afterwards.

The story concludes with a comment on the possibility of such witchcraft:

*Minul oli see juhtumine esimene näha. Ma siiski ei uskund, et inimene võib midagi oma nõidusega teha, aga praegu ma usun küll, et neid Sõrvemaal on.*

*Mina sõitsi oma paadiga Pärnu tagasi. Sõrve poisid jähid oma kodu talveks.*

It was the first time I have seen it happen. I didn't think a man could do anything with his witchcraft, but right now, I do believe there are such people in Sõrve.

I went back to Pärnu on my boat. The Sõrve boys stayed in their home for the winter. (E 48608/9 (2) < Kuressaare, 1913)

Laughing at an inappropriate moment and talking at the wrong time is a common cause of failure in legends, so here too the wrong reaction is an external factor that triggers loss (see Kalda 2019 for a closer analysis of the topic).

## LAKE HERD

Ghosts and drowned animals are a more frequent motif in lake cattle stories, partly due to their association with the legend of wandering lakes – i.e. both people and the herd remain underwater, and both become ghosts and/or water spirits.

A couple of legends with a specific range and structural composition are also associated with the lake herd. Stories about a lake herd being called back home follow the plot of receiving a gift from a mermaid, with a water cow given as a gift for a certain time. In one of the lake tales, to soothe her sorrowful weeping, the farmer's wife receives a message from God in a dream about a cow that was given to her for seven years with a milk pail:

*... raha ei ole lehma osta, nutab ja palub taevaisalt abi. Üks kord öeldas perenaesele unes:*

*“Homminku, kui sina üles ärkad, siis mine karja-aia juure, seal on üks punakas lihav lehm, nübsig on sarve otsas ja tema tuleb sulle vastu. Võta nübsig sarvist ja hakka nübsma. See lehm jääb sinule seitse aiastat. Sel lehmäl on ega aiastega lehmikvasik – neid pead sina keik seitse üles kasvatama.*

*Seitsme aiasta järele tuleb see vana lehm koos pojaga ärä ja see kõige varem poeg jääb sinule ühes selle vana lehma nübsikuga.”*

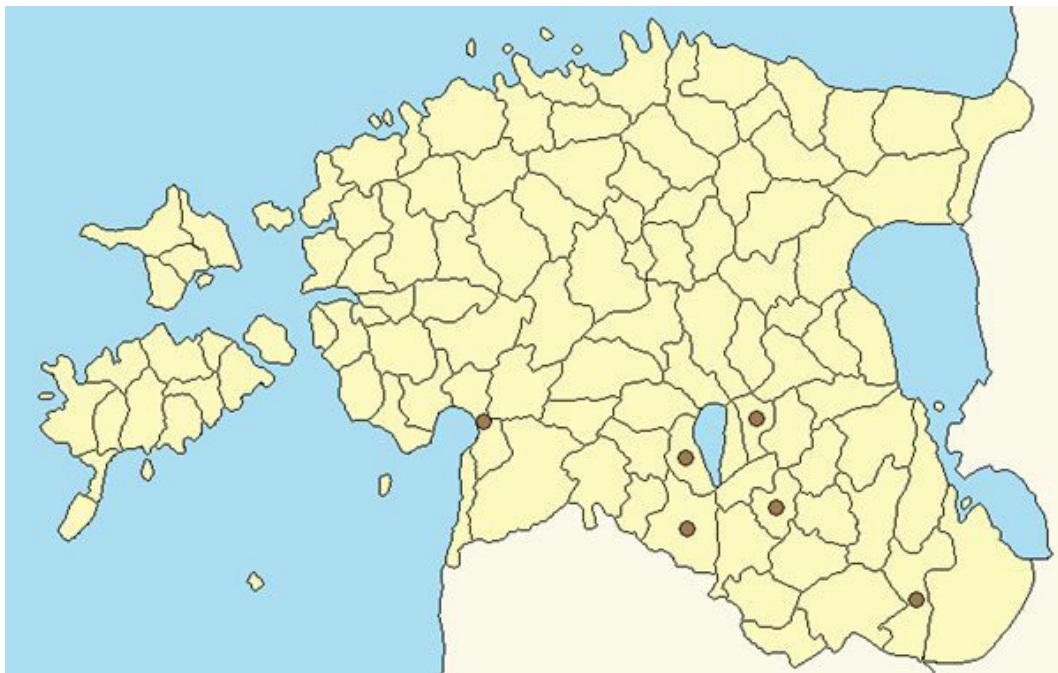
... there is no money to buy cows, she cries and asks the Heavenly Father for help. The housewife is told in a dream:

“In the morning, when you wake up, go to the cattle yard, there is a plump, red cow with a milk pail on one horn, she will meet you. Take the pail from the horn and start milking. This cow will stay with you for seven years. This cow has a calf every year – you must raise all seven of them.

After seven years, that old cow will go away with her son, and the oldest calf will be with you with that old cow’s milk pail”. (E 47464/5 (b) < Pärnu, 1910)

Although variants of the story have been written elsewhere, most of the action revolves around Helme Valgjärv’s lake, although in the legends the cow comes from the lake into the herd and there is no warning that she is only temporarily with the family. For seven years, she gave plenty of milk and gave birth. At length, the family sells all the other cows, and when after seven years there is a call from the lake, “Vitsi, vitsi Maarik, seven sons Saarik!”, the cow that came from the lake runs back into the water with its offspring, and the family is left empty handed.

Outside Helme Parish, the formula varies: “Vitsi-vitsi (H)Ellike!”<sup>1</sup> (ERA II 241 , 617/8 (3) < Puhja, 1939; H II 71, 195 (59) < Vastseliina, 1903); “Vissi, vissi, vissi!” (RKM II 310, 450/1 (1) < Torma, 1974).



Map 3. Lake cow stories – ‘There is a call from the lake’. Map by Mare Kõiva 2021.

<sup>1</sup> Vitsi vitsi, or vissi vissi is a call to the cow or calf. Bossy bossy, in English.

This legend has a close parallel with the Swedish (Klintberg 2010: P 94) and the Livonian traditions, in which the lake cow cowherd is ordered to drive the cows back into the sea: “Griet, drive the cows into the sea!” (Loorits 1926).

We find reports of **river herds** coming to the riverbank, but they do not approach. The informant calls them mermaids (ERA II 58, 63/4 (2) < Vändra, 1933). In Kuusalu the story relates how they also go back into the water; a man also takes home a cow with a large udder that has left the river. The cow gives him a calf every year, and these calves become cows with a good milk yield. When the cow has seven offspring, she goes back to the river with them (ERA II 57, 259 (19) < Kuusalu, 1932). The narrator heard this story from his parents.

## 2. ACTION, WARNINGS AND PENALTIES

As a feature of the sea, lake and river herd legends, cattle most often voluntarily come and join a herd on land. We have seen that a cow can be a gift from a water creature, that sometimes the master has the cattle for seven blessed years, or one year to improve the family’s life (cf. the biblical seven rich and seven poor years). But most of the time, people don’t know how long a herd of water cattle has been assigned to them.

*Üks karjane olnud ühel päeval suure mere ääres ja hoidnud karja. Äkki jäänud karjane magama. Kui ta ärkanud, olnud suur valge lehm teiste juures. Õhtul, kui karjane ajanud lehmad koju, tulnud ka see lehm kaasa. Kodus olnud kõikide imestus suur, kui nähtud suurt valged lehma karja juures.*

*Perenaine kohe küsima:*

*“Kust see tuli?”*

*Poiss seletanud, et ta jäänud magama, ja kui üles ärkanud, olnud see võõras lehm karja juures. Perenaine lüpsnud ka võõra lehma ära ja vaata imet, lehm andis kõige rohkem piima. Perenaine teinud mandist võid ja juustu. Iga päev käinud see karjamaal. Ja niimoodi kuni üks aasta. Jaanilaupäeval olnud karjane jälle säääl ja lehm läinud suure jookuga merre tagasi, ei tulnud enam karja juurde. Vaid iga jaanilaupäeval on neid säääl näha. Kui mõni neid kinni tahab püüda, jooksevad nad merre tagasi.*

One day a cowherd was by the great sea tending his herd. Suddenly the cowherd fell asleep. When he woke up, there was a big white cow with the others. In the evening, when the cowherd led the herd home, this cow also came with him. At home, everyone was surprised to see a large white cow with the herd.

The farmer's wife immediately asked:

“Where did it come from?”

The boy explained that he fell asleep, and when woke up there was a strange cow in the herd. The farmer's wife also milked the foreign cow, and, look at the miracle, the cow gave the most milk. The woman made butter and cheese from the cream. Every day the cow went to the pasture for up to one year. On Midsummer's Eve, the cowherd was there again at the sea, and the cow went running back to the sea, no longer returning to the herd. You can see her every Midsummer day. If anyone wants to catch her, she is running back to the sea.] (ERA II 110, 252/3 (5) < Kuusalu, 1935)

In legends, over time the master becomes self-confident, selling off the ordinary animals, so the departure of the water cow is a disaster for the farm. In one particular case, the departure is known about in advance, although the wealth produced by the cow lasts seven years.

However, the herd does not always come to the person voluntarily, rather, special techniques are used to get the cow, for example, it is caught with a rope. The techniques presented here are traditional: using spells and word magic, limiting a cow using drawn boundaries, i.e. making a circle around a creature or phenomenon, the power or spread of which needs to be limited. Iron also has a protective effect and is important in overcoming some forces: a sage could prevent the return of sea cows by his utterance: E 8 XII, 100 (318) < Tallinn, 1932– 1933; one could make a circle around the herd, i.e., impose man's will on them: ERA II 16, 342 (8) < Kihnu, 1929 ; ERA II 58, 365 (34) < Kihnu, 1932; a person in shoes with heeltap must go to meet a herd as it comes from the sea: ERA II 1, 526 (2) < Pühalepa, 1928; ERA II 9, 13 (1) < Pühalepa, 1928.

The importance of name magic is obvious in these variants. In a legend written by Karl Lurich in Väike-Maarja in 1890, a black-spotted cow comes into the herd from the pond, giving the most milk, but the surprised master spoils his luck by calling the cow a mermaid. As a reaction, the cow disappears, leaving behind a blue smoke, characteristic of demonic beings. Further discussion with the collector of the story about the nature of mermaids leads to the opinion that they not only do bad, they also do good, and as an example, the narrator cites toys given by them to attract children, which change form and of which only stones or sea grass remain in the children's hands (H II 12, 842/3 (4B) < Väike-Maarja, 1890).

Another important rule in religious tales states that mythical animals from the other world must be treated with care and respect. The herd must not even be accidentally hit or insulted with a word, neither should they be threatened or encroached. The reason for their return may be the sale or slaughter of an old cow:



*“Homme tapame vana lehma ära! Hakkab juba vanaks jääma ja on ju meil nooremaid küll nii palju, et neist liigagi jätkub.”*

*Ütelnud seda lehmade kuuldes ja vanagi lehm kuulis seda. Peremees pole osand arvata, et lehmad tema nõust ja jutust aru saavad, kuid järgmisel hommikul olnud kogu kari kadund – olid peremehe nõust kuuldes tagasi merre läind ja peremehel ei jäänd enam ühtegi lehma.*

“Tomorrow we will kill the old cow! It’s getting older and we have so many younger ones that we have enough of them.”

Having said it, the old cow heard it. The master had not expected that the cows would understand his statement and his story, but the next morning the whole herd disappeared – they went back to the sea when they had heard the master’s words, and there were no cows left for the master. (E, StK 43, 148/50 (2) < Jämaja, 1927)

The same rule applies to the lake bull:

*... Viimaks tahtnud kalur härja ära müüa. Lihunik ostnud härja ära. Tee tapamajasse läinud mere äärest. Umbes samal kohal, kus kalurid härja püüdnud, tõmbanud härg vankri küljest lahti ja jooksnud merde.*

... Finally, the fisherman wanted to sell the bull. The butcher bought it. The road to the slaughterhouse went from the seaside. At about the same place where the fishermen caught the bull, the bull pulled off the cart and ran into the sea. (ERA II 58, 33/4 (1) < Suure-Jaani, 1933)

Analysing Scottish lore, Aude Le Borgne (2003) cites (unintentional) kicking, a promise to sell the animal, and the cow being roped as reasons for leaving. Tying the animal was not an issue with Estonian coastal grazing, because the herd was mostly free-range, although sometimes the lead animal was roped; rather, the herd moved freely around the species-rich but nutritionally poor coastal meadows and returned at milking time.

Thus, there are a few warnings in the tales. Rather, friendly communication is assumed and happiness is given to a person for a certain time; the punishment is the loss of former advantages or ruin following the departure of the animals.

### 3. PLACE AND TIME

Place is indicated in a total of 73 texts, or just under half. A closer view of place identifiers indicates that they are general and formal: in 20 stories, the type of water body (sea, lake) is given, without specifying the location on the shore, hill, rock, or

farm that is beside the water body. A place is indicated by a landmark, a general location or a general definition that links what is happening to the world of water:

— sea (5 texts): ERA II 254, 498/9 (22) Reigi, 1939; S 93093/9 (10) Setumaa, 1934, Jämaja 1896; ERA II 110, 252/3 (5) Kuusalu 1935; E, StK 43, 148/50 (2) Jämaja, 1927;

— lake (3 texts): KKI 34, 73/4 (5) Helme, 1962; ERA II 178, 156 (45) Kuusalu, 1938; H II 73, 434/8 (67) Setumaa, 1927;

— on a hill (3 texts): ERA II 33, 180 (6) Pühalepa, 1931; RKM II 1, 522/3 (1) Kihnu, 1948; ERA II 58, 671 (31) Kihnu, 1932;

— in one farm, under which there was a lake (1 text): H III 21, 671/2 (10) Otepää, 1895;

— on the shore (1 text): ERA II 133, 99/101 (3) Kihnu, 1935;

— by a rock (1 text): H II 9, 66 (1) < Viru-Nigula, 1889.

The references providing place names are not exact, for example, the Saaremaa coast, which is given in a Tõstamaa text, does not say much, although looking at the communication routes of the time, something more specific could be offered. Nor could I, growing up by the river, define a place by the name Lemme River, near Mustjõe River, or in relation to other similar places, for example, Mustjärve Lake, near the Sea of Maasi. The action takes place at a certain point in space, although the place remains vague.

Thirty-seven place names are unique (see the register for details), for example Ala-Valgjärve Farm by Utsujärv Lake (E 47464/5 (b) Pärnu 1910), Utsujärv Lake and Linsi farm (EKRK I 45, 321 (7) Helme, 1963). There are other details in the individual texts that specify the place, for example on the Pootsi shore on Latika Cape (ERA II 168, 496/7 (2) Kihnu, 1937); near Neitsiliiv Kiideva village (E 60338 (5) Noarootsi, 1927); four texts are set in Kihnu Piälrand (ERA II 58, 653 (8) Kihnu, 1932; ERA II 58, 379 (56) Kihnu, 1932, ERA II 58, 655 (11) Kihnu, 1932; ERA II 235, 216 (31) Kihnu, 1939).

In general, a larger local unit is indicated, which seems sufficient for verification. Of the ten texts set at Valgjärve Lake, six are related to Helme Valgjärve Lake, and the rest are divided among other lakes of the same name in southern Estonia; one text is localised to Järva county.

In only two stories is the place associated with a foreign body of water (Ladoga or the sea), and in the second story, the narrator from Kihnu, a sailor, has indicated long-distance travel routes as the place of action (at the mouth of the White Sea).

Time is indicated in 15 texts, and although predictably the sea cowherd was seen primarily during the day, *a priori* this is the reader's logic, it does not appear in the text and in most cases time is not indicated at all. In one of the texts, a specific year is indicated, as expected the event took place in the summer: in 1907 I did some construction work (1907. a, tegin ehitusetööd): E 48608/9 (2) < Kuressaare, 1913.

The time is sometimes logically determinable, for example, in the following text the time of action is probably a suitable time for haymaking, i.e. June: The child began to scream and cry terribly during the most bitter storytelling (Laps hakanud kõige kibedamal loo võtmise ajal hirmsasti karjuma ja nutma): ERA I 2, 723/5 (1) < Palamuse, 1929.

Summertime from June to August is indicated by swimming at lunchtime: the farmhands were swimming at lunch, having seen when the herd came they drove to the manor (Moonamehed õld lõuna ajal ujumas, on näind, kui kari tuld, siis aasivadki mõisa): ERA II 37, 367/9 (42) < Jõhvi, 1931.

Times of day, etc., are mentioned, with the common characteristic being a time normally suitable for work: One summer evening, a poor man went to the lake to fish. He saw from far away, that a large herd of cows were eating in the meadow at the edge of the lake (Üitskõrd suveõhtu lännu üits vaene miis järvele kalu püüdma. Nännu juba kaugelt, et järve veere pääl heinamaal söönu suur kari lehmi): ERA II 57, 148/50 (2) < Halliste, 1932.

Once the farmer's wife heard in a dream: "In the morning, go to the cattle yard." At midnight, a terrible rumble sounded. By morning, there was no Manor, no Church, but two lakes were visible (Üks kord öeldas perenaesele unes: „Homminiku, mine karjaaia juure.“ Kesküüse hirmus kolin. Hommikuks es ole ei mõisat, ei kirikut, paljalt kats järve): EKRRK I 42, 428/9 (8) Helme, 1962.

One autumn in foggy weather, a large beautiful Dutch dairy cow came to a farm near Valgjärve Lake (Ühel sügiseseil udusel ilmal tulnud suur ilus Hollandi tõugu lüpsilehm Valgjärve poolt ühte seal ligiolevale talule): EKRRK I 42, 366/7 (21) < Helme, 1962.

Of specific calendar days, reference is made only to Midsummer, the central time of magical occurrences, when, apart from weather magic and the great summer upheaval, folk belief has legends about cities, or in some cases treasure, rising from the earth, at the time that is also synonymous with the appearance of supernatural beings. The time of this event is Midsummer's Eve or around Midsummer's Day:

— You can see them every Midsummer's Eve (Iga jaanilaupäeval on neid sääl näha) (2 texts): ERA II 110, 252/3 (5) < Kuusalu, 1935; ERA II 242, 352 (41) < Otepää, 1939;

— Every year before Midsummer and sometimes after it (Iga aasta enne jaanipäeva ja vahest pealt seda) (1 text): EK nS 48, 43 (112) < Ambla, 1908.

— Midsummer's Eve (Olnud jaanilaupäev) (1 text): ERA II 218, 749/50 (6) < Simuna, 1939.

The mythical "seven years" occurs in a specific type of legend whereby a sea herd is called back into the water, primarily in connection with legends of the lake herd (10

texts): E 47464/5 (b) < Pärnu, 1910; H I 9, 679/80 (108) < Helme, 1898; EK RK I 42, 36 6/7 (21) < Helme, 1962; E 25059/60 (3) < Tarvastu, 1896; E II 36 (182) < Otepää, 1925; ERA II 241, 617/8 (3) < Puhja, 1939; ERA II 247, 705/11 (1) < Valga, 1939; H II 71, 195 (59) < Vastseliina, 1903; RKM II 310, 450/1 (1) < Torma, 1974; ERA II 62, 666/7 (6) Kullamaa, 1933.



Illustration 1. Several of the legends have been given a new life by the ballads of Marie Under. Richard Sagrits's "Sea Cows", illustration for Under's poetry collection *Sea Ballads* (1939).

## 4. CHARACTERS

The set of characters is small: the person who sees what happens, the master, the cowherd of the sea animals, and the sea cows. Of the background characters, fishermen appear in some variants, and rarely children, who testify to their mother's continued help after she leaves home.

Men are mainly affected in the texts, but also women or fisherwomen, which leads the legends to tie in with fishing as a livelihood, especially on the islands where women fishing was a common practice. Most of the characters are younger people, given the development of the mythopoetic plot; in total the character is named in nine texts, although only one is a man.

- an old woman: E 57096 (5) < Karja, 1926;
- some old women who go to sea with their plaice nets: AES, MT 101, 4 (4) < Ridala, 1929;
- a young man from Pärnu: E 48608/9 (2) < Kuressaare, 1913;
- a young man from the sea brought by a tidal wave: S 93093/9 (10) < Setumaa, 1934;
- a Kihelkonna boy: E 25562/6 (12) < Jämaja, 1896;
- a bachelor fisherman: ERA II 178, 156 (45) < Kuusalu, 1938;
- a Saarnagu man (an old man): RKM II 60, 217/8 (18) < Käina, 1956;
- a farm hand from Kalvi: ERA II 37, 367/9 (42) < Jõhvi, 1931;
- Koksi Tutt: ERA II 58, 655 (11) < Kihnu, 1932.

Usually, the focus of legends is on the sea cattle and related topics: encounters and making sense of what happened. The characteristics of sea cows were discussed above. The legends speak of the acquisition of sea cows, the human welfare that comes with them and its disappearance when the sea cows leave, and the unusual cases when an ox or cows turn up in fishing nets or on fishing lines. About the young man, the future master, or his residence, we cannot learn anything essential from the stories. They show sympathy for the grieving cowherd who is ready to make agreements for their return; he marries a cowherd who has grown into a beautiful maiden, but the marriage is only mentioned, it is not central. The legend inevitably leads the cowherd to return to his real home. Some texts show, for example, that a man was at sea with his wife in the spring and that “this man’s wife was also with him cooking food”.

We learn something more about sea cowherds, that several could have come ashore, who were different in gender and age. However, age and gender are not always defined. Across the stories identification is limited to cowherd, and in one text to two cowherds, two adolescents (a boy and a girl, in four texts), more often a girl, a little girl or a woman (seven texts in total).

In some variants, the farmer goes to a crying stranger and hears that his cattle have run into someone else’s pasture and will not return. For the trouble of searching, the cowherd promises the man a cow from his herd.

*Maaloomad läin senna merekarja sekka. Pullid oln ka. Nee jätnud sugu. Merekari kadun ära, naine kadun ka. Sest saan halli selts maale. Jah naine istun sääl, varraste kott käävarre pääl.*

The land cattle mingled together with the sea herd. The bulls too. They left the family behind. The sea herd disappeared; the woman also disappeared. From

this incident, the herd of grey cattle gained land. Yes, the woman was sitting there with a knitting bag on her arm. (ERA II 1, 552 (11) < Pühalepa, 1928)

However, the cowherd can also be a boy (two texts), an old man (one text), a little man (one text), all of whom leave and go back to the sea. The connection of small people and children with supernatural water creatures is obvious. Their activities are also associated with the fantasy world, for example, the owner and master of the cowherd or of the animals is a sea maiden, a mermaid, or four virgins; a single text highlights the nudity of a supernatural character.

A closer distribution of cowherds is seen here:

- a cowherd (5 texts): ERA II 110, 252/3 (5) < Kuusalu, 1935; E R  
A II 59, 551/3 (1) < Kihnu, 1933; ERA II 79, 437/9 (6) < Kihnu, 1934;  
E 4787/8 (2) < Tõstamaa, 1893; ERA II 306, 191 (34) < Tõstamaa, 1943;
- an alien (1 text): ERA II 168, 496/7 (2) < Kihnu, 1937;
- two cowherds (1 text): ERA II 37, 367/9 (42) < Jõhvi, 1931;
- two cowherds, more precisely a boy and a girl (3 texts): E 25562/6 (12) < Jämaja, 1896;  
H II 73, 434/8 (67) < Setumaa, 1906; S 93093/9 (10) < Setumaa, 1934;
- a young girl (1 text): ERA II 254, 498/9 (22) < Reigi, 1939;
- a blond girl (2 texts): ERA II 79, 519/21 (5) < Kihnu, 1934;  
KKI MT 25, 97/8 < Kihnu, 1948;
- three- or four-year-old girl (1 text): RKM II 1, 522/3 (1) < Kihnu, 1948;
- a miss (1 text): RKM II 1, 523 (2) < Kihnu, 1948;
- someone female (2 texts): EKns 48, 43 (112) < Ambla, 1908) =  
E 47766 (8) < Ambla, 1911; ERA II 1, 552 (11) < Pühalepa, 1928;
- a boy (1 text): RKM II 60, 217/8 (18) < Käina, 1956;
- a little boy (1 text): RKM II 60, 217/8 (18) < Käina, 1956;
- an old grey man (1 text): ERA II 57, 139 (2) < Pöide, 1932;
- a tiny/little man (1 text): ERA II 58, 671 (31) < Kihnu, 1932;
- a mermaid (1 text): ERA II 33, 180 (6) < Pühalepa, 1931;
- a female water spirit (1 text): ERA II 57, 259 (18) < Kuusalu, 1932;
- four virgins (1 text): H II 9, 66 (1) < Viru-Nigula, 1889.

Only the girl cowherd follows her herd, stays to take care of them, and later marries the master. In some variants, a woman does not know her origin, which is one of the characteristics of women who have settled with people from the other world. In one example the woman wants to know and tries to find an answer. In another text, a

woman suggests making a hole in a wall with a wimble so that she can leave (usually supernatural women enter through the wimble hole, but do not leave through it).

Upon hearing of the origin, the next phase of the story begins with the woman returning home; further meetings are brief:

*Naine küsinud mitu korda seda oma mehelt, aga mees ikka ei vastanud. Kord küsis naine veel: „Kust sa mu said?“ Siis viimaks mees ütles: „Ma sain sinu merest“. Samal hetkel kadus naine ära, ega olnud enam kuskil, kuigi mees otsind oma naist igalt poolt.*

The woman asked her husband several times, but the man still did not answer. Once she asked again: “Where did you get me?” Then at last the man said, “I got you from the sea”. At the same moment, the woman disappeared, and was no longer anywhere, although the man sought her everywhere. (ERA II 178, 156 (45) < Kuusalu, 1938)

As indicated above, a woman from the sea may, for example, lead someone to a good fishing spot on her father’s land, or she may bring her father to taste beer, or she will laugh if her father gets hurt while brewing beer:

*“Ma naeran, et mu isa teeb praegu väliköögis õlut ja säde läks ta käe peale ja auras ära, ma naeran seda.” Ise sulpsti üle paadi ääre ja kadund. Iga aasta keind tagasi oma last vaatamas.*

“I laugh because my dad is making beer in the outdoor kitchen right now, and a spark went onto his hand and evaporated, I laugh it off.” She quickly climbed over the edge of the boat and disappeared. Every year she went back to see her child. (ERA II 254, 498/9 (22) Reigi, 1939)

With a man or a boy, the action is shorter. He does not go with the herd but leaves and goes back to the sea.

Laughter also causes a point of upheaval here and highlights the connection with the supernatural world. This is the beginning of the end of communication between the two worlds: the characters belong to a different space, even if friendly relations persist, after laughing and admitting their origin, the possibility of living together in the same space disappears.

## 5. COMMUNICATION: DIALOGUES AND MONOLOGUES

The previous list of appearance, place and time of the sea cowherd indicates that the narrator was free to shape the text. The oral discourse of sea cowherd legends ap-

pears in some texts, which are the written opinions and assessments of the participants in the narration situation. Most dialogues are short, representing first-person experiences, although they do not exactly imitate dialogue in real situations – this is already limited by their form and presentation. Characteristically, folkloric texts follow the established practices of the written medium, and since the spoken details cannot be expressed in writing, the purpose of the dialogue is to express the person's views and deeper reflections. The text can convey the conversation of two or more characters, and most of the dialogue expands and explains what is happening, clarifying the knowledge and views of different parties.

The sender can use the dialogue two or more times in the text. The multi-use of dialogue and direct speech utterances characterises the texts dealing with cows caught on a fishing rod by witchcraft, described above, where the narrative episodes are followed by dialogue and a total of three episodes of direct speech.

Coming back to the text about fishing at the Sõrve peninsula, when the young men start fishing, relations with the locals are friendly, until the conversation leads to seemingly friendly recommendations, which in retrospect turn out to be malicious and indicate no catch.

*Meie paneme söötasid otsa, kaks meest tulevad meie juure, küsivad: „Kas saate kalu ka?”*

*Meie vastu: „Ja, saab. Meie ei ole siin veel kaua püüdens, ei tea mere kohti, kus keige rohkem kalu on. Õpetage meid, teie olete siit Türju ranna mehed.”*

*Teine lausub: „No ägaks teie ei või keik meie kalu kinni püüda, meie tahme isi ka saada.”*

*Mina ütlen: „Paljuks meil tarvis on! Kui selle paadi laadungi saame, siis sõidame ära.”*

*Teine mees ütleb: „No te saate homme hommiku niigi palju, et paat ei kannä ära!”*

*Meie täname veel hea soovi eest ja mihed lähevad minema, teine näitab veel kogu:*

*“Minge natuke Jämaja poole, seal on suured tursad.”*

We run out on the bait, two men come up to us, ask: “Getting fish too?”

We respond, “Yeah, we’re getting. We have not been fishing here for a long time, we do not know the places in the sea where the most fish are. Teach us, you are men of this Türju shore.”



The other says, “Well, you can’t catch all our fish, we want to get them ourselves.”

I say, “We don’t need a lot! When we get this boat loaded, we’re off.”

Another man says: “Well, you will get so much tomorrow morning that the boat will not carry them away!”

Our thanks for more good wishes and the men go away; another shows more:

“Go a little towards Jämaja, there are big cod.”

Solving a difficult situation is taken on by brothers from Sörve:

“Sellele saab abi. Nemad tegevad ike niisugusi vigurid siin.”

“It can be helped. They still play such pranks here.”

Another brother goes looking for a sage and reports in the morning:

“Asi kordas, lähme jälle täna õhtu merese!”

“It’s okay, let’s go to sea again tonight!”

The text continues with a description of the course of the fishing trip. (E 48608/9 (2) < Kuressaare, 1913)

The most common element is one episode of direct speech in the legend, which makes the story more dynamic but does not represent the first-person position:

*... Kodus olnud kõikide imestus suur, kui nähtud suurt valged lehma karja juures.*

*Perenaine kohe küsima: “Kust see tuli?”...*

... At home, everyone was surprised to see a large white cow in the herd.

The farmer’s wife immediately asks: “Where did it come from?”... (ERA II 110, 252/3 (5) < Kuusalu, 1935)

Apart from humans, sea creatures also speak in legends, for example, a human-like body emerges from the sea, waving a whip and shouting: “Kiirak, drive the flock home!”(E 57096 (5) < Karja, 1926), after which the cows leave and go back to the water.

In exceptional cases, more dialogue is used, making the text more like literary production (seeing a female sea cowherd leads to good fishing spots: S 93093/9 (10) < Setumaa, 1934), although the specific transcript, which has a lot of dialogue, is probably an example of the personification of the writer’s personal style.

In the texts there is no change in language code, i.e. there is no verbal control, the only fixation concerns a ghost calf who disappears when calling for God's help:

*“Jumal, tule appi, missi küll nüüd on.” ... Kus sis kadund ku maa alla [vasikas], ku jumalat nimetand.“*

“God, help me, what is this now.” ... Where then did the calf disappear to if



Illustration 3. Vive Tolli (1928–2020), illustration to Marie Under's ballad "Sea Cows", by V. Tolli 1963.

not under the earth, when he called God.” (ERA II 192, 658/9 (237) < Viljan di, 1938)

## 6. THE PRESENCE OF EMOTION IN THE CORPUS

Emotions are little reflected in the tales of sea herds, the main thing is the cry of a cowherd for a lost flock from a rock or elsewhere (ERA II 79, 519/21 (5) < Kihnu, 1934; ERA II 168, 496/7 (2) < Kihnu, 1937; RKM II 1, 522/3 (1) < Kihnu, 1948; RKM II 60, 217/8 (18) < Käina, 1956); he cries lamentably (ERA II 59, 551/3 (1) < Kihnu, 1933) or cries for three days in the sea (ERA II 79, 437/9 (6) < Kihnu, 1934); in a single text the cowherd milks a cow and cries (RKM II 1, 523 (2) < Kihnu, 1948).

Reports of laughing represent a symbolic dismissal of the event (see above) and occur in two texts: a woman laughs at her father's mishap in the underwater kingdom (ERA II 254, 498/9 (22) < Reigi, 1939); and a surprised young men discover live cows on their fishing lines in the morning begin to laugh ("We were all silent and watching, no one said a word to the other. Finally, we all started laughing." (*Keik olime vakka ja vaatsime, üks ei ütlenud teisele sõna. Viimati keik haksime naerma*" (E 48608/9 (2) < Kuressaare, 1913).

Fear occurs once (EKNS 48, 43 (112) < Ambla, 1908 = E 47766 (8) < Ambla, 1911), and one text also characterises the behaviour of a frightened animal when it is captured, mentioning a fearful growl and a struggle (EKNS 48, 43 (112) < Ambla, 1908 = E 47766 (8) < Ambla, 1911).

## 7. OCCURENCE IN OTHER FOLKLORE GENRES

The sea cow is rarely encountered in other genres of folklore, although colloquially sea cow is used as a mock name for inhabitants of the southern villages of Muhu island. "Specifically, unscrupulous and indifferent people are called sea hippocampi and sea cows" (E 58802 < Muhu, 1926). We also find references to the sea herd in weather forecasts. Here, in fact, by sea cows we mean the so-called *ambuja* bird, believed to be the bittern, which lives in reeds by the sea:

*Kui merelehm ammub, siis tuleb midagi muudatust, kas ilmad lähevad teisuguseks või juhtub midagi muud sarnast muudatust*

When the sea cow bellows, there will be a change, either the weather will change or something similar will happen. (E, StK 42, 8 (8) < Pöide, 1927).

## SUMMARY

Fascinating legends about the sea-, lake- and river cattle form a small separate type of folklore, whereas Estonian and Livonian folklore have considerable common fea-

tures, the whole tradition is close to Swedish legends (belief narratives). The motives for inviting the herd back to the water body coincide with Finnish folklore.

One aspect of sea folklore is the colour of the sea cows. Blue cows have been mediated into today's culture by poet Marie Underi and artists. In fact, the lore may be related to a real breed of cattle because the legends have surprising connections with specific realms. In creations intertwined with symbols and fiction, we find indications of connections between different worlds. The life of a sea cowherd on a terrestrial farm and the life of the sea and lake cows as farm animals point to the limits of fiction and resemble the folklore of the peoples of northern Europe.