

# The Place of Stone: Movement, Spatial Differences and Accumulating Stone Depositions in Finland and Karelia

## Preface

In different parts of the world, the accumulation of stone assemblages stands as a record of people's past and present movements. Whether we are talking about ancient Greece or Rome, North or South America immediately after the arrival of Europeans, ethnographically documented Africa or Asia, the Nordic countries described in folklore accounts, or present-day pilgrimages, the same general pattern is observable: as they moved, along the way people deposited, and in some places still do deposit, stones at particular important locations. This tradition – or rather, traditions – is in many respects diverse, and the reasons for doing so vary, but the outward result is often the same around the world: accumulating stones eventually build up into heaps (Muhonen 2015). Some of the outcomes of this custom are still accumulating cairns of monumental size, while others are barely noticeable in the forest or desert sand. Sometimes only a handful of stones, hidden in the crevice of a solitary boulder or at the bottom of a remote forest pond, remain to speak of past movements.

Aside from this general level, what do these stones and their accumulating depositions stand for? Under what circumstances and according to what notions were they deposited? What was the physical and mental landscape to which they were connected? How did the contemporary folk mentality influence people on their travels? And when time was a central matter related to the stones and their depositions, what were the moments that should be foregrounded? In this article, I discuss these issues mainly in relation to Finnish–Karelian examples (Figure 1). The perspective follows the basic idea that notions of ontologically different spaces, the inevitable boundaries between them, and the need to cross such boundaries successfully can explain the very core of the stone practice. Indeed, this practice is a concrete example of the simple fact that things happen not only within space but often because of space – or rather, differences between spaces.

The phenomenon of stone deposition depicted below was firmly connected with the folk perception of supernatural beings, and is therefore situated within the context of Finnish–Karelian folk beliefs. Fundamentally, the depositions speak of encountering points or larger areas in the landscape that were seen as special, as foreign, or as representing the Other. The supernatural beings involved had to be taken into account. This took place through boundary rituals, which helped people to cope with physical landmarks that were not only important but also dangerous or even otherwise impassable, and to move in and out of equally significant but potentially hostile wider areas. The cases presented thus basically demonstrate some of the ways – with a focus on the adding of stones to particular places – in which people were able to carry on their activities in their – in many ways demanding – surroundings.

At least from the eighteenth century onwards, various accounts begin to describe the practice of stone deposition, which was evidently of great importance in various contexts. In both a regional and a global sense, the traditions of casting down stones at particular places are related to a diversity of things. Here I approach the topic – for practical reasons – in particular connection with cattle-herding, but I also discuss certain other interesting cases so as to broaden the picture somewhat. In particular the first case – Mount Simpsiö in Southern Ostrobothnia – is notable, in that the related folklore is abundant, it is well-known from the literature, and it was documented relatively early on. It thereby provides a fitting introduction to the subject. This case also illustrates some of the elements of the stone practice that are essential in dealing with accumulating stone depositions, one of the central concepts being that of an offering. This concept requires definition and some further consideration, before proceeding to the next case. The focus then shifts to the *Vaivaaspoika*, a huge boulder formerly standing in Ostrobothnia, only some 45 kilometres from Mount Simpsiö. *Vaivaaspoika* in turn introduces folk notions, extensively discussed in connection with most of the following cases, regarding the forest, its supernatural master, and human fears involved in the grazing of cattle in the woods. I then discuss further examples of what can be called “herders’ boulders”, one of the typical locations of accumulating stone depositions, with the geographical focus still on Ostrobothnia. We then turn to the Karelian Isthmus, for which I present two cases connected with forest grazing. This is followed by a discussion of the other locale of stone accumulation presented in this article that I have myself visited – *Kukkarokanto* in Sysmä – this being one of the few of its kind that can be still located with certainty. The following practice from Virolahti is the basis of one of the last of the in-depth case-studies from Finland, after which some comparable customs from Estonia and Sweden are briefly referred to. But accumulating stone depositions may also exist underwater; in this connection, I present examples from Jyskyjärvi and Renko. The article ends with a discussion, where, in the attempt to arrive at the core of the accumulating stone phenomenon, among other ideas that of crossing spatial boundaries is foregrounded. The prac-

tice is then situated more closely in its broader context, specifically with respect to certain basic elements of contemporary Finnish–Karelian folk beliefs. Finally, I look at the topic in relation to archaeology. Indeed, although the article draws mainly on the study of folklore, ethnology and religion, the results reported are not its intended ultimate end. That, rather, is to characterize and analyse the phenomenon described for the needs of archaeological research and interpretations; much can be learned in this sense already in terms of explaining the origins of the stone depositions and cairns in which Finland is so rich. As the subject is little known among archaeologists – or even many scholars of folklore, ethnology and comparative religion – a relatively many-sided and in-depth approach is justified. In addition, so as to enable the reader to gain a broader and solidly based conception of the phenomenon, I present a sizeable number of case studies. These circumstances account for the length of the article.

The work on the article took place on several levels. The first task was the fairly extensive archival work, mainly carried out in three archives: the archive of the Department of Archaeology of the National Board of Antiquities, the Ethnological Archive of the National Board of Antiquities, and the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society. The case studies were decided chiefly on the basis of the material from these archives, i.e. from depictions of individual places where stones have been deposited. Adjunct cases were drawn from the literature. In addition, the digital database SKVR (*Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot*), and maps from the Digital Archives of the National Archives Service, were utilized to find possible support for conclusions suggested by the other material and literature, and to pinpoint the location of the places in question and their surroundings. In addition, I visited certain sites that might have been preserved and could still possibly be located, in order to make field observations and take pictures (Figure 1, sites marked with \*). Additionally, suitable images were sought from different archives.

## A rock and a hard place

To my knowledge the two oldest Finnish references to accumulating cairns date back to the eighteenth century. Both refer to the same place on Mount Simpsiövuori, a rise in the bedrock 132 meters above sea level in the parish of Lapua in Southern Ostrobothnia (Fig. 1: 6). In 1734, Per Niklas Mathesius<sup>1</sup> writes:

*”On this mountain all kinds of superstitious offerings have anciently been made, which is proven by the large stone heaps, where square silver coins have been found”* (Mathesius 1843: 259).

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1 Per Niklas Mathesius (1711–1772), Finnish clergyman and politician.

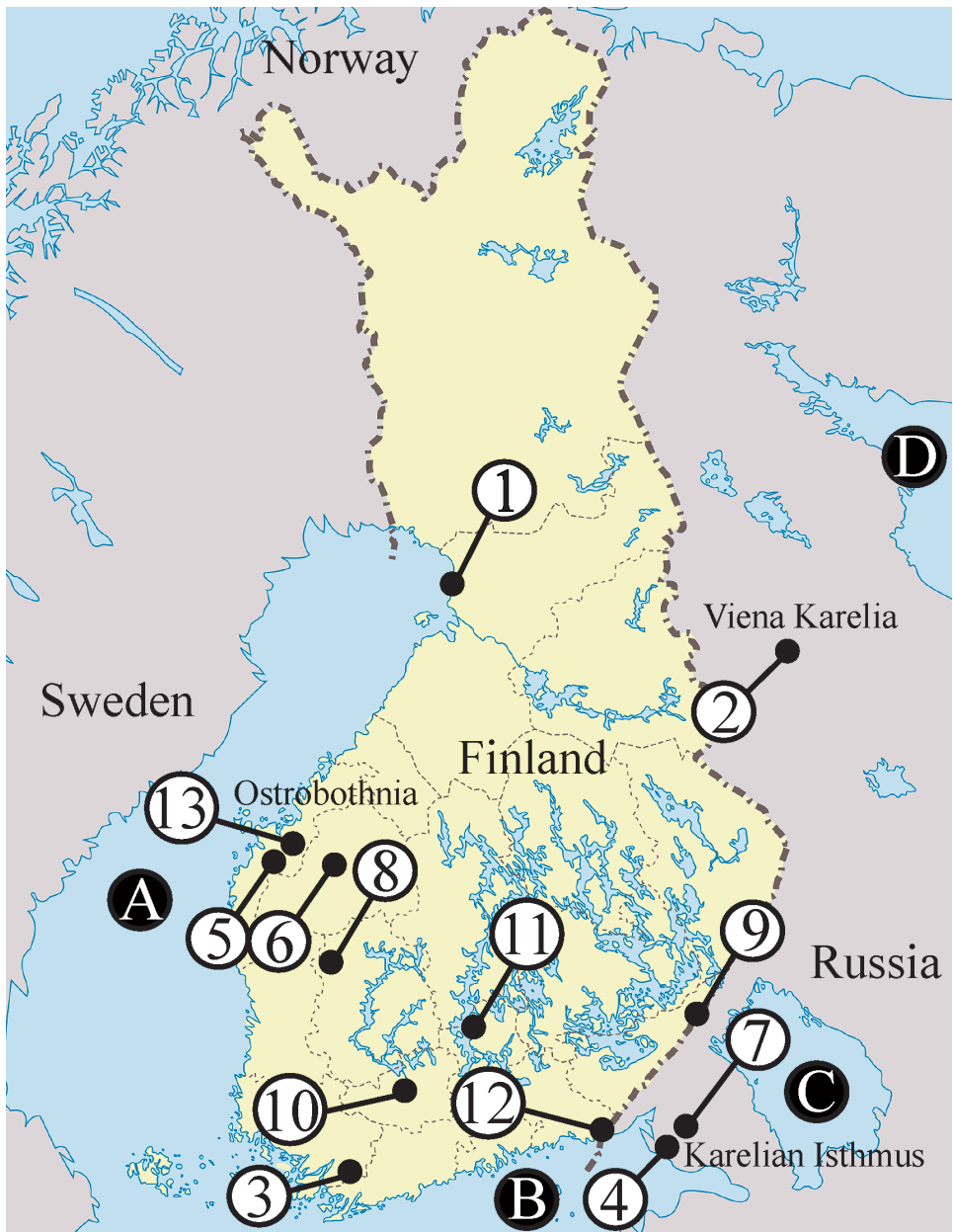


Fig. 1. Map of key Finnish and Karelian place-names mentioned in the text. (1) Äijänkivi Ii, (2) Jyskyjärvi, (3) Piruntulli Kisko\*, (4) Kuolemajärvi, (5) Vaivaaspoika Laihia, (6) Simpsiövuori Lapua, (7) Kirkonkukkarokolkka Muolaa, (8) Parkano, (9) Rautjärvi, (10) Tervalampi Renko\*, (11) Kukkarokanto Sysmä\*, (12) Raappo-heaps Virolahti, (13) Vörå.

(A) Gulf of Bothnia, (B) Gulf of Finland, (C) Lake Ladoga, (D) White Sea.

Places marked with an asterisk were visited by the author.

Mathesius does not tell us anything about adding stones to the heap (later descriptions mention only one cairn); according to a manuscript from 1754, however, if a traveller had not placed a stone or other offering there, he would have faced severe consequences. This manuscript is a description of Lapua parish, and the cairn is undoubtedly mentioned because it was a well-known and notable site:

*“On the topmost hillock of this mountain along the old Road there is a stone heap called the “offering place”, which is said to have been piled up in past times by travellers as an offering. If a traveller did not offer something there, he is said to have been captured and ill-treated: if he had nothing more, then he ought to throw a stone there. [The stone heap] is now destroyed, because coins, which travellers also are said to have been offered, are sought there. Some years ago two silver coins, looking like six öre coins,<sup>2</sup> were still found there, but [they had] lain rusty for so long that the coins could not be distinguished” (Wargelin 1754).<sup>3</sup>*

The cairn, which was still visible at the end of the nineteenth century, unfortunately no longer exists (Tuomaala 1950: 243–244). This is also attested by the most recent archaeological survey (Jussila 2009: 34–35). But folklore related to the cairn is abundant and consistent with the historical sources. The stone heap, ca. 10–11 meters in width (at least in its later size) and located on the topmost point of the old road over Mount Simpsiövuori (a road which led from Lapua church to River Kyrönjoki and to the old church of Isokyrö), apparently did in fact accumulate due to stones thrown there by passers-by. As far as ill-treatment is concerned, people believed that the place was inhabited by supernatural beings – mountain trolls (Fi.

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2 These cursory descriptions of the coin finds contain little information that is of use in dating the practice more closely, but some brief comments are in order. First of all, six-öre coins were 21–22 mm in diameter. Coins of this size were used in Sweden already in the Middle Ages, so it is impossible to identify the coins based on Wargelin’s description. Medieval coins are, however, relatively rare in Finnish finds. One possibility is that these coins were poor silver coins from the inflationary period of the late 16th century or coins from the 17th or 18th century. On the other hand, Finnish church finds indicate that silver coins have been on the whole rarely offered, and I see no reason to assume that the situation would have greatly differed at Mount Simpsiö. The square silver coins mentioned by Mathesius might be Swedish coins from the 16th century, but could also be simply a stereotype concerning curiosities from earlier times, rather than reliable information as to the actual finds (Tuukka Talvio, personal communication 30 and 31 August 2012).

On the other hand, depositing coins over a long period of time would not have been exceptional. An example comes from Kirkkokari (Church Rock) in Köyliö, a small island where a small memorial chapel dedicated to St Henrik was located. The chapel may have been built in the first part of the 15th century, but the rock quite likely had a meaning connected with the local tradition even before that (Hiekkanen 2007: 228–229). Among other finds, coin finds extending from the end of the 14th century to the 18th (Ahl 2007: 140), for the most part due to deliberate deposition, indicate the long-lasting religious significance of the place.

3 Part of this description was published almost forty years later (see Wargelin 1792: 2).

*vuorenpaikot*)<sup>4</sup> or mountain elves (Fi. *vuorenhaltijat*; describable as possessors and rulers), i.e. the supernatural masters of the place – and were said to be the cause of this; unless something was cast upon the heap, one was unable to move beyond the place unharmed or at all (SKS KRA Ylivieska. HAKS. Mirjam Malmivaara 6777. 1938.; SKS KRA Lapua. Väinö Tuomaala 1777. 1947.; SKS KRA Ylistaro. Paulaharju, S. b) 12819. 1930.; SKS KRA Lapua. O. K. Hautamäki 3. 1935.; Aspelin 1871: 173; Simsiö 1897; Koskimies 1908: 4; Huhtala 1912; Paulaharju 1932: 25–26; for the old road over Mount Simsiö, see also Luukko 1945: 525; Lehtinen 1963: 201–202; Kejonen 2008: 85).<sup>5</sup> It can be noted that another account from eighteenth-century Ostrobothnia speaks of local beliefs concerning mountain trolls. Christiern Salmenius<sup>6</sup> writes that some peasants had built a cairn (with a cross on top of it) on a mountain troll's path to prevent the creature from using its track. There is no reference to adding stones to the heap when passing by, but this piece of information demonstrates that people were actually ready to erect stone heaps and crosses because of such beings. Trolls were indeed perceived to be dangerous. Salmenius concludes:

*“In other respects, inhabitants have endless stories of trolls, which are able to do harm and take a person's life and property”* (Salmenius 1754: 54).

The people of Lapua were still very afraid of mountain trolls in the nineteenth century, and it was thought that they resided in the frightening ‘forest cover’ (see below) and tried to snatch people to their caves (SKS KRA Lapua. Väinö Tuomaala 1087. 1945 < Amalia Lassila, farmwife, born 1864).

Although Samuli Paulaharju's conception, cited below, is expressed in the colourful language that he was famous for, it nevertheless points to the folk perception of nature and its non-human inhabitants who dwelt in particular places. Paulaharju writes about mountain trolls and other supernatural beings in Southern Ostrobothnia:

*“The homes of the old, strange beings were crude and rough places, black forests and ugly heaps of rocks, easily making a faint-hearted human tremble”* (Paulaharju 1932: 25).

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4 Beings living beneath the earth's surface or in mountain caves have been called mountain trolls in Southern and Central Ostrobothnia, where one of their typical abodes was inside the mountains (Sarmela 1994: 169–170, map 71).

5 It can be mentioned that one folk narrative explains the reason for casting things at the place differently: “some army officer”, whom people commemorated by throwing money and stones on his grave, had once been buried by the road (SKS KRA Lapua. KT 175. Perälä, Martti 43. 1937). This narrative contradicts the bulk of the tradition related to the place, and must be considered as an individual attempt to explain the origin of a custom that in the contemporary view seemed strange.

6 Christiern Salmenius (1734–1791) was the vicar of Lapua.



Fig. 2. Southern Ostrobothnian flat country – the ancient seabed – with its multitude of barns, seen from the top of Mount Simpsiö. Photograph: Town of Lapua.

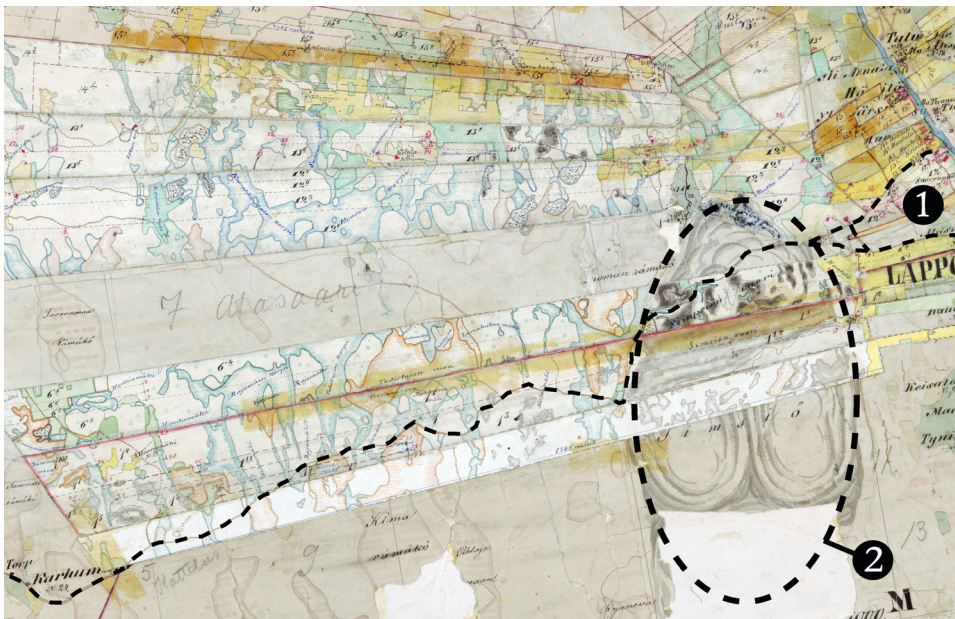


Fig. 3. Part of the parish map of Lapua (Lapua 2311 07 Ia.\* -/- -) (based on map material from the period 1749–1917; the patchy look is due to the original method of composition). 1 = Lapua parish village, 2 = Mount Simpsiövuori. The old road over the mountain is marked with a thin dashed line. This road is also drawn for example on the parish map from the year 1757.

It cannot be regarded as coincidental that the cairn of Mount Simpsiö stood on a rise which is exceptional in the otherwise flat topography of Southern Ostrobothnia (Figure 2). Furthermore, it stood precisely at the highest point along the old road over the mountain. From the traveller's point of view, this was the very heart of a spatial anomaly, one due both to topographical causes and to the related idea of an association with supernatural agents that were particularly harsh. As a rocky wall, Mount Simpsiö also presented a concrete natural boundary with the West for the people of Lapua (Figure 3). The mount's status, as a place located at the boundary of the community's concrete sphere of life, can be also seen from another perspective. According to folk memory, the mountain was a place where criminals were executed; this would have rendered the place as the threshold between this life and the next, where the unfortunate soul would continue to haunt (Eilola 2004: 149–150; SKS KRA Lapua. South Ostrobothian Finnish Home and Museum Society. H. Jyrkänne 71. 1937. Recorded in 1909 < Esa Pernaa; SKS KRA Lapua. Väinö Tuomaala 1665. 1947 < Salamooni Kangas, farmer, born 1860; SKS KRA Lapua. Väinö Tuomaala 1673. 1947 < Kaarle Kustaa Laurila, born 1865). Outcasts – those sentenced to death – were taken to a fitting place – the margin of their own society – where they turned into supernatural beings who could not harm the core of the community. Because of the presence of supernatural beings – mountain trolls/elves and the souls of the executed – Mount Simpsiö can furthermore be regarded as a boundary area against the dangerous 'other side', uninhabited by men. Crossing the rock meant that the traveller was forced to step into the liminal zone and thereby expose him or herself to supernatural threats. Due to this frightening situation, and to minimise these threats, stones and coins accumulated at the very topographical peak along the way past the *limen*, where the related danger was highest. We thus have enough reasons to characterise the stone heap as a boundary cairn, where both kinds of deposited objects functioned as offerings or payments.

## Offerings or payments?

The case just described raises the central issue of the definition of an 'offering'. Given that scholars have often spoken of offerings somewhat unthinkingly, the need for an analytical discussion is even more justified. One way to define the concept is to say that at its core, *an offering is something which is presented to a supernatural being (i.e. one whose existence cannot be justified by rational evidence and who is believed to be more powerful, in at least some sense, than human beings [Enges 2003: 403 endnote 1]), with whom the giver aspires to enter into or remain in connection (cf. Henninger 2005: 7997). What is relevant is that the object offered is comprehended as a gift (see e.g. Henninger 2005), meant to please the supernatural being (Levinson 2004: 379).*



This definition, however, gives weight to only one side of the subject, and offerings are indeed usually discussed as continuing dealings with supernatural beings. They are often connected with such things as for example the hope of a successful hunt or fishing catch, or of good fortune concerning crops or livestock. Given the demotic perception visible in folk belief, however, the definition needs to be discussed more closely. First of all, the supernatural recipient need not necessarily be an anthropomorphic, zoomorphic or other similar being; it may also be an inanimate object that is clearly and constantly observable – such as a large stone – as long as it possesses supernatural properties or abilities. This point connects to the ambiguity of non-explicit folklore accounts: it is often impossible to say with certainty whether people have (subsequently) truly perceived such objects as for example boulders as beings *per se*, as their embodiments or abodes, or ‘merely’ as significant places where offerings to particular beings were presented. All of these scenarios are possible. Secondly, the giver may *not* necessarily aspire to enter into connection with a given supernatural being. On the contrary, he or she may want to avoid the being, and the evil consequences caused by it, by giving it something. And sometimes there is no choice. This leads back to Mount Simpsiö: it is a matter of opinion whether only objects that are given voluntarily are to be regarded as offerings. There are Finnish folklore records – such as the ones involving the stone heap of Mount Simpsiö – which show that objects given to supernatural beings were in some cases obligatory. The idea of ‘paying’ for permission to pass can also be seen in the Finnish folk belief regarding, for example, a place aptly called *Piruntulli* (The Devil’s Toll). This is a place along an earlier road in the former municipality of Kisko (Fig. 1: 3) where a coin was to be thrown to the devil in order to pass through (Huurre 1963: 138; Piruntulli).

The third point – the notion of reciprocity – connects to the second one. Given the definition, we might say that the object offered must be a gift. But even a gift does not mean that the object in question must be given unrequitedly and without the hope of getting something in return (e.g. Muhonen 2015). It should also be emphasised that ordinary people have often interpreted the giving of objects as actually – or at least expectedly – ensuring a positive return from the supernatural recipient in question. This brings us closer to the concept of a payment, and an abundance of different practices demonstrates this idea. For instance, one form of building concealment in the Finnish-Karelian cultural area has been the hiding of coins in the foundations of the building. The idea is that the area for the building was ‘purchased’ at the building stage from the supernatural being that controlled the land (Hukantaival 2014). In another example, water taken from a spring for ritual purposes was paid for in silver; the person involved even said in this connection, “I buy water, I buy water” (SKVR IX<sub>4</sub> 1470). The payment was to the supernatural being whose domain the spring was. When the forest elf or water elf had cast an illness over someone, it was given red scraps of cloth, red wool and a coin. This practice is depicted in the following saying: “Money is taken into a

lake, into a forest, the illness is bought away” (Wartiainen 1935: 73). If a human bone was taken from the graveyard, it was paid for by casting down a coin at the place, saying: “I buy this bone from you” (i.e. from the deceased) (SKVR X<sub>2</sub> 3810 α). Likewise a favourable tailwind could be ‘purchased’ from the supernatural ruler of the weather by throwing a coin into the lake (SKVR X<sub>2</sub> 5168), and fishing and hunting luck could similarly be bought from the water elf or forest elf with money (e.g. SKS KRA Kinnula. Otto Harju 3772. 1946 < Toivo Turpeinen, s. 1889; Makkonen 1966: 352). In Viena Karelia,<sup>7</sup> fishermen placed stones under crosses to gain better fishing luck; if it did not work, they harshly cursed having brought offerings in vain (J. H. 1906). The final example comes from the municipality of Ii in Northern Ostrobothnia (Figure 1: 1), where there was a stone called the *Äijänkivi* (‘Old Man’s Stone’ [SKES VI 1978: 1868], where the word *äijä* relates, to quote Viljo Nissilä, to “mythological subjects” [Nissilä 1975: 116]). The name points to an imagined supernatural entity, and offerings such as coins and bronze rings were brought to it. According to the narrative, when the fishing catch had been poor for a long time, the fishermen threatened the stone, and then – when their fishing luck didn’t get any better – they stoned and abused it. Eventually they brought reeds from the shore and set them on fire by the stone, which turned burning hot. The leader then derisively said: “[It] was a greedy for gifts [literally “gift-arse”] when alive, but we see that now it lies in hell” (SKS KRA Haukipudas. Lauri Merikallio b) 209. 1909 – Penjami Ahola, about 80 years old; see also Calamnius 1868: 220; Snellman 1887: 54–55). Here the stone itself was thus possibly comprehended as the supernatural recipient, and was killed for not fulfilling people’s wishes. There is nothing extraordinary in this incident: it is known that the Sámi too could physically punish or even destroy those *sieidis* (in this case sacred stones to which offerings were brought) which did not assist people in their need; one *sieidi* stone, for example, was said to have been scorched and then broken into pieces because its worshipper became angry with it (Holmberg 1915: 36; Itkonen 1948: 319). The giving an object and a positive consequence has thus in many cases been perceived as the expected or even definite sequence, and the object could have easily been seen as a voluntary yet highly recommended or obligatory payment. We can also refer to it as an ‘offering’.

To conclude, the stones and coins thrown on the cairn of Mount Simpsiö can be regarded as offerings, if they were perceived as being given to a supernatural being. And this indeed seems to have been the case, at least with respect to part of the tradition in a later phase when it was still alive. I am thus rejecting for example the idea of stones exclusively as instruments in magically binding the beings to the place or otherwise magically hindering them from harming the traveller.

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<sup>7</sup> The Finnish name *Viena* is used throughout the article for the area that can also be called Dvina or White Sea Karelia.

## The poor boy and his stones

The following case of throwing stones at a particular place, likewise from Ostrobothnia, is chiefly based on folklore records (SKS KRA Laihia. Kotkanen, V. 327. 1936; SKS KRA Laihia. Kotkanen, V. 744. 1937; SKS KRA Laihia. Eino Risku 433. 1936). These records speak of a huge split stone called *Vaivaaspoika* ('Pauper Boy') that stood in Laihia parish (Fig. 1: 5), along the cattle path leading from Jakkula village (only some 45 kilometres west of Mount Simpsiö) to its hinterlands and the village of Allinen. The cleft and the shelf-like 'lap' of the boulder were the 'slots' for the stones cast in by passers-by. Unless this was done, some mishap could occur on the journey. The practice took place on the way to the hinterlands. It was also believed that failing to throw a stone might result in the *öksyttäjäänen* ('one that misguides'), i.e. a potentially malicious supernatural being, tricking children into following it to the forest and leaving them there. In the village history of Jakkula–Allinen, the *Vaivaaspoika* is called the *Panttikivi* ('Pawn Stone'); herders passing by the boulder cast a stone as a pawn, so that bad things would not happen to their cattle (Jakkula-Allisen kylähistoria 1997: 416, 418).

According to a narrative, "The road [from Jakkula to Allinen] was built in 1801 and, according to the stories, [V]aivaaspoika has been since the object of herders' attention" (SKS KRA Laihia. Kotkanen, V. 327. 1936). The route was indeed built during the year mentioned, and there is a memorial stone with this date hewn on it along the road (Luoma 1997a: 18, 20–21; 1997b: 185–186; Jakkula-Allisen kylähistoria 1997: 416, 418; SKS KRA Laihia. Kotkanen, V. 743. 1937). Eino Kotkanen, the son of Viljo Kotkanen who collected folklore about the *Vaivaaspoika* boulder, recalled that the boulder unfortunately could no longer be found; it had been located roughly where the memorial stone lies,<sup>8</sup> but was destroyed, moved or buried decades ago when the road was widened (Esko Luoma, personal communication 28 March 2013 and 29 December 2013; for Viljo Kotkanen, see Luoma 1997b).

In order to understand the circumstances related to the *Vaivaaspoika* rock, it needs to be situated in its wider context. First of all, another excerpt from Samuli Paulaharju points to the Southern Ostrobothnian perception concerning large boulders:

*"Large blocks the height of a room, which stood alone in the forest, the meadows or the fields alongside the road, were dwelling places of all kinds of männinkääset, pönkiääset, pöyröt and ghosts"* (Paulaharju 1932: 29).

Different kinds of supernatural beings were thus easily associated with large boulders. Paulaharju mentions for example a boulder called the *Tervakivi* ('Tar

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<sup>8</sup> According to one record, *Vaivaaspoika* lay 20–30 metres from the memorial stone (SKS KRA Laihia. Kotkanen, V. 744. 1937).

Stone') alongside the road to the church, where such ill-tempered beings resided that they often stopped the traveller (Paulaharju 1932: 29; 2005: 78). This was a haunted place, whose dwellers are said to have been "crude elves" (Fi. *karkiat haltiat*) (SKS KRA Ylihärmä. Paulaharju, S. b) 13156. 1930 < Juha Rannanjärvi, sheath master, 56 years old, Rannanjärvi; SKS KRA Ylihärmä. Paulaharju, S. b) 13157. 1930 < Juha Kattelus, grandfather Haane, the old man of the farm 74 years old, Kankaankylä).<sup>9</sup> In this rather common Finnish folk belief, the points of resemblance to the case of Mount Simpsjö are obvious.

Should we thus conclude that the Vaivaaspoika rock was another location associated with a general sense of fear? Briefly, the answer is negative. The boulder was not an isolated or unconnected dreaded point in the landscape, to be passed with frantic haste; it functioned as the mediator between two spatial categories in a particular situation. It was therefore fundamentally linked both to these spaces and to their relationships in the surrounding landscape. I next explore this issue more closely.

Among those who crisscrossed the landscape most often were herders, for whom the Vaivaaspoika was apparently very significant. Furthermore, the circumstances under which herders cast stones into the Vaivaaspoika were not random but of a particular kind. In the summertime, the cattle of Jakkula were driven to graze in the hinterlands, and every morning and evening the animals and their herders walked along the already mentioned forest path running between Jakkula and Allinen villages (Figures 4 and 5) (Nurminen E 1997: 297–298).<sup>10</sup> One ac-

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9 Another example from Ostrobothnia which can be mentioned is the *Vasikkakivi* ('Calf Stone'). This too was a large boulder located by the road to the church; it was believed that one could not pass the stone on horseback in the dusk without dismounting because the animal would be halted by supernatural beings. It is thus easy to understand why the boulder is referred to as a "place of terror" (SKS KRA Kaustinen, Vintturi. Katri Ojala TK 69:2. 1961 – Matti Tastula, year of death 1932; SKS KRA Kaustinen. KT 176. Salo, Heikki 13. 1936). A third example from Ostrobothnia is a boulder called the *Isookivi* ('Large Stone'); people were afraid of the place, as they had seen *kummajaasia* ('strange beings') by the stone (SKS KRA. Ylihärmä. Paulaharju, S. b) 13160. 1930 < Matti Hietämäki, farmer, 53 v. Yliluama).

10 Traditional grazing was much about utilizing natural resources as they existed in the environment. After having spent the long winter indoors on winter fodder, the cattle were let out in the spring when the grazing season finally began. The exact moment, as well as the date in the autumn when the grazing season ended and the cattle were brought indoors, nevertheless varied (see e.g. Virtanen 1922: 34–39; Mansikka 1943: 166–167, 169–170; Rantasalo 1955: 75–76, 208–209, 227–228; Talve 1990: 245, 250; Vilkuna 1994: 112–116, 122, 125–126, 131–134, 282, 287–288, 291; Laiho & Heikkinen 2010: 169, 188, 192–193, 207, 223, 319, 331).

One important setting in the traditional herding system was the forest, which was among the few key places where cattle could graze (see e.g. Paulaharju 1932: 187–202; Virtanen 1933: 62–65; Vuorela 1975: 200–206; Heikinmäki 1988: 276–277; Talve 1990: 81–82; Korhonen 2003: 430; Björn 2003: 610–611). At the end of the 18th century, it was



Fig. 4. Part of the Laihia parish map from 1912 (Laihia n:o 124/L 128). 1 = Jakkula village, 2 = Allinen village, 3 = Location of Vaivaaspoika boulder. The forest path from Jakkula to Allinen is marked with white dash line.



Fig. 5. Part of Laihia parish map from 1845 (Laihia 1333 04+07 Ia.\* -/- -). The forest path constructed in 1801 is not marked on the map, probably because back then it was a modest route. The location shown for the Vaivaaspoika boulder is therefore only a rough estimate. 1 = Jakkula village, 2 = Area wherein Vaivaaspoika is estimated to have stood; it is clear that it did not lie exactly where the village with its fields changed to forest, but further away towards the hinterlands. The outer dashed line marks the village boundary.

count says of the rock: “*Its cleft is piled high with small stones, and herders [as well as] older people always cast a stone into the cleft as they pass by*” (SKS KRA Laihia. Kotkanen, V. 327. 1936). The first mentioned refers to herder children: it can be inferred from the accounts that among others specifically young cowherds were in danger of being lost in the woods because of the öksyttäjäänen.<sup>11</sup>

As a phenomenon, grazing in the forest was nothing special in Finland. It was a common practice for herders to either drive the cattle to the woods in the morning and then return home, or to stay and watch over the animals all day. Once in the forest, the animals found their own grazing. In the evening, they were driven back home for milking. Herders’ practice of casting a stone into the *Vaiivaaspoika* rock was fundamentally linked with this daily cycle. As ‘normal’ as it may have been, however, grazing in the forest entailed many dangers for the cattle and their herders. Apart from the fear of being lost in the forest, the herder children were thus concerned about their herd as well. In throwing stones into the *Vaiivaaspoika* to prevent bad things from happening to their cattle, cattle luck in general was one reason for doing so. And there was much to worry about: the animals could hurt themselves against the rocky heaps; they could get caught in tree roots, in stony terrain or a bog, drown in a swamp, or be mauled by bears or wolves.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, cattle could also stray from the herd, be bitten by snakes, or fall victim to the malevolent magic of neighbours. The herd could also have been hard to find at all in the forest, and the consequences might have been severe.<sup>13</sup> It is thus easy to

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lamented that cattle in Southern Ostrobothnia were driven “into the gloomy forest far away from the barnyard to get its food from watery bogs and crags, being vulnerable to beasts and often so far away that several hired hands had to be sent to fetch them” (Alanen 1947: 153). The forest remained an important form of pasture over a century later. My local informant Esko Luoma (born 1929), former chairman of the Laihia Home and Museum Society, told me that herding in the forest was still practiced in Laihia in the 1930s and 1940s, and that he himself had herded cows in the forest when he was ten years old and even younger (Esko Luoma, personal communication 28 March 2013).

11 At the time in question, cowherds in Ostrobothnia were indeed often children. The situation, however, varied across time and place; see e.g. Paulaharju 1932: 194–202; Virtanen 1933: 62–63; Heikinmäki 1988: 277).

12 Although at the beginning of the 20th century the last-mentioned was no longer of serious concern in Laihia; it is said that the last wolf in the parish was killed around 1875–1880 (Luoma 1997c: 203–204).

13 To gain a better and more vivid view of traditional herding, an excerpt from a memoir describing life in Southern Ostrobothnia during the latter half of the 19th century is also worth noting. It tells of the age when the writer was still a boy: “Herding and fetching cows from the forest in the evening has especially stuck in my mind from my early years. (...) There were no roads [in the common forest], only cattle paths (...). It was difficult for the herder or fetcher to find cattle at such places at all, from half a *peninkulma* [5 kilometres] and even further away. It happened, too, that the cattle were not always found but stayed in the forest, even overnight. The consequences are easy to understand. This responsible job, which in our home life was difficult to manage well and which

understand that the herders would try to avert ill luck where possible.

The supernatural being associated with the Vaivaaspoika, the öksyttäjäänen, was a particular kind of entity. The öksyttäjäänen did not ‘just’ startle passers-by, but, as the name implies, could specifically lead people – in this case young cowherds – astray to the forest. This treacherous being can be associated with the forest elf (Fi. *metsänhaltija*). According to the very common Finnish-Karelian belief, the forest elf (along with other supernatural beings and malign folk) was thought to be able to place people and domestic animals in a state of helplessness called ‘forest cover’ (Fi. *metsänpeitto*), thereby hindering them from finding their way home. Young cowherds were in particular danger of finding themselves in this ‘forest cover’ (Stark 2006: 367), which surely awed the young herders about to enter the vast woods. It was often emphasised that both animals and human beings could be restored from this state only by specific procedures, which not everyone had mastered (for being under ‘forest cover’, see e.g. Holmberg 1923; SKMT IV<sub>2</sub> 1933: 707–785; IV<sub>3</sub> 1934: 1993–2012; Rantasalo 1955: 152–162; Tarkka 1994: 82–84; 2005: 292–295; Stark-Arola 2002: 195–196; Stark 2006: 357–380; Kaarlenkaski 2014: 290–291).

The öksyttäjäänen and the forest thus had a relevant connection, and what herders did at the Vaivaaspoika boulder can be partly explained on the basis of the related circumstances. As the Vaivaaspoika was essentially connected with movement from the village to the forest, the importance of the location between the two cannot be overestimated. It means that on their way to the hinterland woods, herder children cast stones because they were gradually leaving the domestic sphere and entering the forest, the domain of particular physical and what we might call metaphysical dangers. The Vaivaaspoika boulder came to represent the sometimes imprecise boundary between these two spaces. In this connection, it should be added that not every boulder was significant to herder children in the belief-related sense or associated with frightful beings (see Paulaharju 2005: 76–79). The Vaivaaspoika was definitely a special case, among other reasons because it stood in a ‘suitable’ place along the road between the two spaces.

The name of the boulder also needs to be considered and situated in the right context. The name Vaivaaspoika (‘Pauper Boy’) refers to a pauper-figure, a ‘man-at-arms’, or, a human figure carved out of wood (Fi. also e.g. *vaivaisukko*; Sw. *fattig-gubbe*; Figure 6). These figures are above all an Ostrobothnian phenomenon, and in Southern Ostrobothnia they were also referred to specifically as *vaivaaspoika*. In the nineteenth century, the Laihia church too had its own pauper-figure. These

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therefore in my opinion was an unpleasant task, was for a long time one of my daily duties, as I was the youngest in the house who could more or less take care of the task and less able to do heavier work. One had to leave around five o’clock in the afternoon to fetch the cattle and got home regularly only around nine or ten o’clock – with the cattle, but sometimes without them. Already around noon I started to worry in my mind about where I would find the cows in the evening” (Kunnari-Kaukoranta 1948: 118–119).

figures date from the eighteenth century onwards; they had (and sometimes them still do) the function of collecting money for the poor, and are therefore equipped with a slot or box for donations. This function was and is maintained by the church. It is clear that the name of the *Vaivaaspoika* boulder was derived from the pauper-figures, but how did the former, at first glance so different, come to be called by this name? First of all, we have to consider who in general paid attention to the *Vaivaaspoika* boulder and to the pauper-figures. The typical location of these wooden figures was at the side of a church or bell-tower, but they could also be placed elsewhere along the village road.<sup>14</sup> The central outdoor location in the middle of the village ensured that every passer-by, not merely churchgoers, was a potential benefactor for the distressed.

Yet charity was not the only reason for giving money to the pauper-figures. It is important to note that the donor and the pauper-figure were in a form of contractual relation (Vauhkonen 2013: 29). For example, money could be promised for such a figure before a difficult or important task or journey, to be given if it were successfully completed – i.e. if one had good luck (see Present till Munsala fattiggubbe 1900; Rikas “vaivaispoika” 1901; Paulaharju 1911; Leppo 1967; Santaholma 2001; Rudnäs 2006; Vauhkonen 2013: 30). One could also slip a coin into a pauper-figure and ask for its help or good luck in the future (H. Lg. 1893: 3; Stark 2006: 419; Knuuttila 2013: 25; Vauhkonen 2013: 31). Thus the aspect of luck acquired by means of a deposit is one of the common denominators with respect to *Vaivaaspoika* boulder and the pauper-figures. Giving coins to the pauper-figures was not purely about charity in another sense either; there are often wooden boards in connection with pauper-figures that have biblical requests written on them. The boards may promise, for example, that “Blessed is he that considereth the poor” (Ps 41), “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto Jehovah, And his good deed will he pay him again” (Prov 19:17) and “Give, and take, and sanctify thy soul” (Sir 14:16) (see Leppo 1967: plates; Santaholma 2001: 15–152; Rudnäs 2006: 9–143; Kantokorpi 2013: 74–251). These texts emphasise the idea that the giver himself will also receive something, and donors most certainly took the aspect of reciprocity into account. This same aspect was also involved in the practice related to the *Vaivaaspoika* rock, whose ‘alms’ were likewise valuable for their reciprocal meaning. The notions of this practice and that connected with the pauper-figures

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14 According to a description from 1772 there were pauper-logs – the predecessors of the pauper-figures – all over Sweden, along the roads and sometimes not more than some five kilometres apart (Finnsson 1935: 50). The Englishman Edward Daniel Clarke travelled in Sweden a little later, in 1799, and saw collection boxes on posts at every turn along the roads, occasionally also pauper-figures (Clarke 1997: 106). As Finland was at this time part of Sweden, Ostrobothnians too may have seen pauper-logs and pauper-figures along the roads and consequently placed coins in them. Anyway, the giving of money in a Christian context in passing by a special place along the road was firmly known in Ostrobothnia in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. This is the period referred to in the folk narratives describing the *Vaivaaspoika* rock.





Fig. 6. The later pauper-figure of Kurikka by the church (some 45 kilometres from the town centre of Laihia). The text above the figure reads: *Anna mielelläs niin sinullekin annetaan, ja pyhitä sinun sielus* ("Give, and take, and sanctify thy soul") (Sir 14:16). Photograph: Timo Muhonen.

were thus in this respect not so different, and further facilitated the drawing of a parallel between the two.

To conclude: the *Vaivaaspoika* boulder obviously had nothing to do with helping the poor, but since passers-by deposited something in it similarly to the pauper-figures, a name from an ecclesiastical context was adopted to describe it. At a general level the two phenomena were close enough, and the viewpoint of reciprocity certainly did not make the connection any weaker. The next remark is noteworthy on this score, showing clearly the close relationship between the forest elf and the pauper-figures. Part of the vernacular worldview was that the supernatural masters of the natural environment (i.e. elves) were petitioned for success in matters related to the environment in question. In return for success, a 'payment', for example in grain, fish, quarry or home-distilled spirits, was promised and given. Over the centuries, this idea was applied to dealing with the pauper-figures (Knuuttilla 2013: 26). This is illustrated for example by a narrative according to which a pauper-figure was petitioned for fishing and hunting luck and two coins was slipped into it (Vauhkonen 2013: 29; cf. the above-mentioned custom of

purchasing fishing and hunting luck from the respective supernatural master of the natural environment). Just as naturally as matters associated with the forest elf could later be assigned to the pauper-figures, so could a site associated with the elf thus be named mutually as Vaivaaspoika.

One might also add that naming a boulder Vaivaaspoika is somewhat humorous, and could reflect a situation in which people related more closely to the pauper-figures than to the rock. It would nevertheless also have been based on an equation between the two things. It is clear that the boulder – unlike the pauper-figures – eventually lost its significance, and that the herder children were most likely the last ones to continue the related practice of casting stones. This is also indicated by cases from the Swedish-speaking area of Ostrobothnia, to which we turn next; there too, herder children were apparently by and large the last to perpetuate the practice of casting stones in connection with particular boulders.

## Poor men all over the countryside

In terms of the link between the name and the pauper-figures, it is to be noted that the Vaivaaspoika boulder at Laihia is far from unique in Ostrobothnia. We have an abundance of related material from a relatively small Swedish-speaking area of the region, actually quite close to Laihia. In this area, the pauper-figures were known as *fattiggubbar* ('poor old men') and the same name was given to many isolated rocks as well. This is illustrated by the following description:

*"Over a sandy heath, Kangas, near Bärby in Vörå [parish] leads a road, close by which there are some rather big boulders that all have names. One first comes to Fattiggubben, on whose smooth top there is a set of small stones, cast there by passers-by. It is a matter of course in the area that everyone who goes by makes an offering to the Fattiggubben"* (Landtman 1919: 767, see also 768).

This Fattiggubben boulder was 3.5 metres high. According to Jacob Tegengren, its top surface contained a large concavity; every morning and evening herders, as they passed the boulder, cast a stone into this concavity (Tegengren 1919: 58; 1921: 21). In Vörå parish (Fig. 1: 13), a particular group of rocks carried the same name as well, as did some other single boulders:

*"Here [in Alunnbacken] reigns the 'Alunnback-master' or the 'Old man of Alunnback'. It is said that in the old days one needed only mention this name for the 'more diffident' herders to start to tremble, and it is still said that the herder girls barely dare to go over the hill in broad daylight. We, however, gather our courage and move on. Soon we come to three flat rocks, about one metre high, standing so close together that there are only narrow gaps between them. The boulders are called Fattiggubben, and herders are in the habit of casting a stone into every gap and saying: "I give Fattiggubben ten (hundred) marks". A bit away from*

*the Fattiggubben, on the same (...) side of the road, stands a stone 2½ meters high, called the Olis' Ann'. (...) Every herder who passed by here had to offer up a small stone, or, as an old woman put it: "Olis' Ann' has to be bribed with a stone"* (Tegengren 1921: 28; his emphasis).

*"Some 100 metres eastward from the houses on Brännan (...) on Fåhällen [Cattle Rock] along the cattle path stands a stone about 3 metres in height named Fattiggubben. It is split from top to bottom. When herders drove cows to the forest, they used to cast a stone into the cleft, saying: "I give you this, if you give me the cows!" Upon return in the evening, one or more stones were again cast into the cleft, in return for the cows being found"* (Tegengren 1922: 59; his emphasis).

A more general naming convention with respect to this boulder phenomenon thus existed in Ostrobothnia. It is also interesting to note that some Ostrobothnian boulders, to which a similar stone practice was connected, were called by a name referring to the Sunday church collection bag. The following example illustrates this:

*"[Lipp]stenen [Sunday Collection Bag Stone], which lies on the right side of the road, is about 2 metres high, and some time ago still had a cleft which divided it in two. But now half of the stone has been broken up and hauled away. Every herder who drove his cows past the stone was supposed to cast some small stones into this cleft for the sake of herding luck. One was supposed to offer up to Lippstenen again on the way home – now in return for having all one's cows with one"* (Tegengren 1922: 56–57; see also 58).

There are also abundant other records – especially from the same relatively small region in Ostrobothnia – showing that herders have thrown or placed stones on particular boulders or in their crevices when they took their cows past them. This practice was often connected explicitly with ensuring good cattle luck, for by doing so herders were able to (quickly) find their cows and bring them home in the evening (see e.g. Landtman 1919: 766; Tegengren 1919: 56–58, 61; 1921: 25, 29; 1922; 1923: 22; 1924: 84; Wikman 1922: 27). For whom or into what were these stones cast, and how can we characterize them? In his review discussing this stone practice, Karl Robert Villehad Wikman writes:

*"To which powers were herders offering? According to folk belief, the forest of ten took and held cattle as its booty. The spirits of the forest, above all the forest elf [Sw. skogsrådet] dwelt in the stones in the forest. The herder had to protect himself against the forest elf by magical means and offerings (...)"* (Wikman 1922: 30).

While it is easy to agree with Wikman about the offerings, there are certain points which need to be considered. Fundamentally, the tradition is probably older than its most visible elements suggest. These elements have probably been incor-

porated into the practice at various times, and reflect different and changing views concerning it. For example, the names of some of the boulders –beginning with Fattiggubben – can be understood as the result of a similar quite late train of reasoning concerning the Vaivaaspoika rock at Laihia. In this connection it should be noted that Vörå parish too had – and still has – a pauper-figure (Leppo 1967: plates 6–7; Santaholma 2001: 79; Kantokorpi 2013: 95). In addition, what we can think of as one of the most recent developments of the tradition apparently preserved the boulders as an important element in the practice, but in some cases they were now viewed altogether differently. They had become objects in a practice where neither giving nor supernatural agents played any role. For example:

“[Lippstenen; Sunday Collection Bag Stone] (...) *lies on the left side of the road, a bit away from it. In size it is not considerable. There is a saucer-sized round concavity in the stone. The herders have the custom of aiming a stone at ‘the collection bag’ (the concavity) while standing in the road. The one who hit the target would have especially good cattle luck*” (Tegengren 1922: 57).

Throwing stones thus seems to have become a test of skill, with a sought-after magical positive outcome.<sup>15</sup> Even based on this practice alone, we can quite easily say that in many cases the supernatural recipient seems to have subsequently become obscured. During late times, however, the tradition was clearly not entirely about magic: some people gave stones to something or someone, and these stones were apparently pleasing to the recipient (for different interpretations of the practice, see e.g. Tegengren 1921; 1922; Karsten 1922; Wikman 1922; Olrik & Ellekilde 1926–1951: 341–342). This can best be seen in the words which accompanied casting to a particular boulder (“I give you this, if you give me the cows!”). The ‘bribing’ of Olis’ Ann’ also indicates that people perceived the stones they cast as gifts (cf. Tegengren 1922: 56; Wikman 1922: 28). We cannot determine definitely whether the supernatural recipient was a being associated with the boulder, or the boulder itself; the sources employed in this article never explicitly mention that the stones were given to a being (such as the forest elf) residing either within or outside the boulders. Ultimately, given the definition of an offering as formulated above, it does not really matter. With respect to part of the tradition, the recipient could have been an external supernatural being, or such a being dwelling within the stone, or the boulder itself. In all such cases, we can speak of offerings.

One point should be made in connection with this conclusion: many of the boulders were called by the name *Offersten* (Offering Stone), and it might be reasoned that this is the most compelling indication that people subsequently considered some supernatural entity to be the recipient of their stones. This, however, would be too hasty a deduction. According to Wikman (1922: 28), in folk language

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<sup>15</sup> However, it cannot be claimed that the element of test was an absolutely novel and late idea. It is possible that the skill test derives from a similar, earlier procedure based on the idea of hit stones = accepted offerings; missed stones = rejected offerings.

the word ‘offering’ meant a religious gift in general; thus people have given ‘offerings’ at the altar, to the priest, to the poor, at weddings, to the supernatural beings of folk belief, etc. My observations of Finnish-Karelian folk beliefs correspond to Wikman’s point: in their minds, people could indeed have given ‘offerings’ even if the recipient was not necessarily perceived as a supernatural being, or indeed without any clear recipient at all. In other words, people may have deposited or given objects in general under belief-laden circumstances as ‘offerings’.

Yet we can probably identify an older layer in the tradition. One record suggests that at least some people (once) actually conceived of an external supernatural being as the recipient of the cast stones. A woman named Brita Bertils, who had already been dead for a long time,

*“...is said to have greatly valued ‘the old man’ [a boulder with a cleft; the stone was called the Fattiggubben], and had strictly forbidden her children to harm it by stealing his ‘money’ from the cleft (the small stones deposited there). If someone did so, the forest elf would abduct him or cause him some serious injury as a punishment” (Tegengren 1923: 23).<sup>16</sup>*

Thus we are led once again to the forest elf. Ultimately, the coins deposited on or in boulders by the cattle paths may also at one point have been offerings to the same being. It is indeed worth noting that coins were given as well as stones; in one case, coins are said to have been placed in the crevice of a boulder in order to find the cows (Tegengren 1922: 59), while another case speaks of a Fattiggubben boulder that was gifted with small stones as well as coins (Tegengren 1922: 57; Wikman 1923: 86). Parenthetically, in terms of the overall phenomenon, I do not believe that the later idea would have been to replace coins with something ‘valueless’ like stones. It is more probable that coins were actually a later addition to the tradition, given due to their obvious value, and/or because coins were the objects deposited in the pauper-figures (cf. Tegengren 1922: 56; Olrik & Ellekilde 1926–1951: 342).

A particular supernatural recipient can be also seen in another respect. Herders also cast stones in hollow tree stumps, not exclusively in or on boulders, to win cattle luck (Tegengren 1922: 59, footnote 1; Wikman 1923: 87). Boulders and tree stumps can therefore be compared in this respect. Now, it is known that tree stumps have functioned as points suitable for communication with the forest elf. For example, a coin could be given as an offering to the elf, placing the coin on a stump located in the pasture, so that the elf would send the cows home at a certain time (in the evening) (Landtman 1919: 641–642). In case the cows had been ‘covered’ in the forest (see below), a coin could be placed on a stump for the forest elf in order to recover them. One could also put coins under stones in the forest or

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16 It is to be noted that pauper-figures could also avenge mistreatment or the theft of their money (Knuuttila 2013: 27). The idea of a sanction was thus associated with robbing the forest elf or the pauper-figures of their property.

cast one into the forest to gain the release of the cows (Landtman 1919: 323–324); these too were offerings to the forest elf.

Based on this scenario, by the beginning of the twentieth century the boulder tradition in this Swedish-speaking area had been transformed to a considerable degree. The particular supernatural being once connected with the boulders had become obscured, although it was still clearly present in one way in the latest phase of the beliefs associated with the Laihia Vaivaaspoika rock. The circumstances under which stones were cast – movement between the farmsteads and the forest – nevertheless remained in both cases largely the same. The explanation that is taking shape is thus basically the same as with respect to the Laihia Vaivaaspoika boulder. We can say that Wikman's idea of the fear of the forest elf is indeed apt. We can only guess how far back in time this might take us, but it is important to keep in mind that one explanation of the practice – offerings to the forest elf – does not mean that it can be carelessly applied to the whole 'ancient phase' of the tradition. A related conclusion – one way or another – is simply impossible based on the rather late collections of folk beliefs.

Whatever the truth, the tradition connects again to the relationship and boundary between culture and nature. There is no reason to question that the tradition was earlier related to it as well. The context is indicative of this boundary crossing, which was ritualized by casting a stone. It was often done in order to get the cows home in the evening or to signal that they were happily on their way; the driving force behind the practice was thus a concern that the animals might not return from the forest. Like their Finnish-speaking neighbours, Swedish-speaking Finns believed that the supernatural beings of the forest could severely hinder the work of herders. At Vörå, for example, where much of the material referred to above was collected, it was thought that mountain trolls (Sw. *berg troll*) could disturb the cattle and prevent them from grazing in their area; the animals were then unable to move from where they stood (Rancken 1862: 3). It was also believed that because of beings like the forest elf (Sw. *skogs rådet*) and mountain trolls, cows could end up inside a mountain. It was also thought that above all children, cowherds and cows were vulnerable to the malevolence of the forest elf: they could be halted, covered, lost and engulfed in the forest (Landtman 1919: 310–330; see also Lamberg 2005: 25). The comparable idea of the frightening 'forest cover', where humans and their livestock could get lost, is thus found in the folk beliefs of Swedish-speaking Finns as well.

We can easily see the common denominator between Mount Simpsiö and what we might call 'herders' boulders'. Both mountain trolls and the forest elf had the ability to completely halt cattle moving in the forest; in the case of the cairn at Mount Simpsiö, it is clear that precisely the same kind of supernatural beings associated with it could restrain people from moving if they did not cast a stone or a coin on the heap.<sup>17</sup> It was presumably for a similar reason – to prevent a standstill

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17 Although in the case of Mount Simpsiö the forest elf was for topographical reasons

which would rule out the home-coming of the cows – that Swedish-speaking Finnish herders only some 40 kilometres northwest of Mount Simpsiö threw stones into the crevices of boulders. If the cowherds failed to act properly at the boundary, they would risk the ability of cattle to move within a domain. Movement between the two categories of culture and nature, a key element in the traditional herding system, thus becomes threatened by the most serious possible counterforce: immobility in a potentially hostile domain.

There are at least three basic variables that made a particular natural object important in the eyes of the herders. Firstly, huge boulders have often ‘drawn’ folk tales, and various narratives about them can be found all over Finland. One fundamental reason for this is their sheer monumental size; it is something distinctive, drawing attention to them and making them stand out in terms of stories as well. This is especially the case in the landscape of the Ostrobothnia flatlands; to quote Rauno and Outi Lauhakangas (2002: 238), “If nature is comprehended as a field of various potentials yielding signals, even a small anomaly in an extremely flat landscape is a signal that will fix the human mind.” As dominant topographical features, huge boulders have what can be termed enormous ‘presence’, and this evoked the idea of something supernatural residing at the place.

The general Ostrobothnian perception of boulders as natural objects associated with diverse supernatural beings, however, does not entirely or in all cases explain their use as places for the depositing of stones. It is not a coincidence that the boulders described contained concavities, clefts or other special physical features, which were the specific points where stones were cast and added to. Already Wikman (1922: 27–28) took notice of this. While these features might be explained to have conveniently existed, and hence to have been ‘natural’ depositing places for stones, I consider them to have been influential in a different and more profound sense. They were among the factors which made certain boulders special and thus initially contributed to the process whereby particular boulders were ‘selected’ as important objects in a belief-related sense. Although most of the records available speak of boulders, the physical form of the object was less relevant than its location: ultimately, the anomalous object could become meaningful only if it stood in the path followed by the herders. This means that the object had to have been located by a cattle path running between the farmstead and the forest. If all of these criteria were fulfilled, the object was more likely to be singularized from other objects. This is also the case with the Laihia Vaivaaspoika boulder: the stone was meaningful in terms of the general perception of large boulders and due to its anomalous appearance (the cleft and the shelf-like ‘lap’), but it was above all the traffic along the adjacent road which raised and fixed the boulder as a consistently important part of the landscape. This is also expressed in the already cited words of an informant, according to whom the road from Jakkula to Allinen was built in

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replaced by mountain elves.

1801 and Vaivaaspoika rock had since then been the object of herders' attention.

Passing by a powerful spatial anomaly of this kind was in many ways different, because it was perceived to be connected with what could happen in the forest. Such a singularized object always presented a relational and conditional spatial boundary for those who had to pass it: it marked the beginning of a space where what happened depended on what took place – or failed to do so – in passing by the object. In a legal sense, the forest was the property of the state or of one or more particular individuals, or was common forest; nevertheless it was uninhabited by human beings. In the folk perception it represented an alien space, with its own supernatural rulers, who perceived human beings and domestic animals as strangers and intruders in their domain. Cattle-herding in the forest was thus ultimately about the clash of the categories of culture and nature, in which cultural beings, including animals adopted into the sphere of culture, entered the 'wrong' place – the wilderness; in such cases, special procedures were needed (Kaarlenkaski 2014: 295). The boundary character of the boulders is also indicated by the fact that they did not reside where the cowherds were going, i.e. within the forest pasture, but instead specifically along the way there. This is because it would have been too late to gain protection against the dangers of the forest if the cows had been already brought there; the boundary between the human domain and that of the supernatural beings of the forest would have already been violated without appropriate rituals. Cattle luck – the ostensible reason given for the practice of casting stones – was the 'wrapping' over this idea. At a later time, it may have been the only remnant of the intimidating supernatural beings of the forest, which – as they could bring misfortune to the cattle – had once been an integral part of the custom.

## More stones for the Sunday Collection Bag

Another example of casting stones in a particular place comes from the former parish of Muolaa (in the Karelian Isthmus, Fig. 1: 7). In this case there is no boulder, however, but a patch of land. According to an account there

*“...was a small field, to whose corner herders casted a stone on their way to and from the forest and the name 'kirkonkukkarokolkka' [Church Purse Corner, i.e. Sunday Collection Bag Corner] came out of it, every boy gave a kind of Sunday collection” (SKS KRA Muolaa. Maria Virolainen 1564. 1948).*

Pauper-figures are not a Karelian phenomenon and it is also quite probable that their influence did not reach Muolaa from the western side of the present Finnish-Russian border (see Leppo 1967; Santaholma 2001; Kantokorpi 2013). That is probably one of the reasons why naming of the place was not influenced by the phenomenon, but it is interesting that it still was influenced by the ecclesiastic



sphere.

The explanation for the place-name mentioned in the narrative seems perfectly valid; it also strengthens the argument of naming the Sunday Collection Bag Boulders specifically after everyone's 'donation' to these huge stones. In other words, the place was named after a collective ecclesiastical practice familiar to every Christian, because all passing herders had to contribute something there. If such a practice continued for several decades at the same place, a stone heap of notable size would have accumulated.

The context of the practice has already become familiar. At Muolaa as well, herders took the cows every morning to the forest to graze and brought them back to the farmsteads in the evening; thus there was regular traffic between the two places during the pasture season. Using the forest for pasture is said to have been common in the parish at the end of the nineteenth century, and still played an important role in animal husbandry at the end of the 1930s (Repo 1952: 124–125). The accumulating assemblage thus formed at the perceived boundary between the farmsteads and the forest.

In this connection, we may mention another, related case from the Karelian Isthmus. The record is once again laconic, but contains enough information to enable a solid interpretation. In the former parish of Kuolemajärvi (Fig. 1: 4), there was a huge stone with a hollow underneath. The stone is connected with a tale of murder, according to which some people were burned alive in the cavity during "a great war". Nowadays (i.e. the latter half of the nineteenth century) herders have filled the hollow with small stones (Saari 1890: 128–129). Although the murder tale itself is highly questionable – the common people have typically connected various kinds of conspicuous places with past wars and their tragedies – there is no doubt that it was strongly believed in the nineteenth century. In the minds of the herders, the stone was thus the locale of a tragedy, a place where an anomalous way of death had confronted innocent people. This rendered the place frightening, and the souls of the victims were most probably associated with it. Such a place lay between this world and the next, haunted by unfortunate souls. The boulder thus constituted a boundary inhabited by potentially evil-intentioned supernatural beings, and herders passing by it ritualized the event by throwing stones in the cavity beneath it in order to safeguard their cattle against this threat.

### ***Kukkarokanto* – another name from the ecclesiastical sphere?**

Given the naming of places in the previous cases, a description from Sysmä parish (Fig. 1: 11) is interesting: it describes a cairn called *Kukkarokanto*, where passers-by formerly always cast stones (Salovius 1897: 56–57). It is impossible to explain the name in any definite way, although an ecclesiastical connection seems quite possi-

ble in this case too. In the ecclesiastical documents from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the word *kukkarokanto* is rather rare (Jyrki Knuutila, personal communication 17 September 2014), and more generally it has not been an established term in Standard Finnish (Kaisa Häkkinen, personal communication 18 September 2014). Already these circumstances render the matter somewhat uncertain. The word *kukkaro*, however, has been used in an ecclesiastical context in two senses: 1) the Sunday collection bag (Fi. *kolehtihaavi*), 2) the poor box (Fi. *köyhäinlipas*) (Esko M. Laine, personal communication 28 September 2014). *Kanto* in this case refers to ‘collecting’ (see e.g. Laamanen 1889; Kirkonkokouksessa... 1889), and an interpretation of *Kukkarokanto* as referring to the Sunday collection using either of these two ecclesiastical objects is thus plausible. Given that the names of many similar places have been adopted from the ecclesiastical sphere, this seems even more likely.

However, other explanatory models should also be briefly discussed. Another interpretation might be based for example on a common Finnish folktale, according to which there were once giants who for certain reasons carried huge stones in their purses. The creatures, however, were unlucky: their purses tore open and the stones consequently fell at a particular spot, forming stone assemblages. People have then displayed these stone formations and referred to the explanation given in the tale. As *kanto* can also mean merely ‘carrying something’, the name of the cairn could be interpreted as meaning that the stones had fallen there from a purse carried by a giant. Another explanation is also worth considering: in the vernacular, *kukkaro* has referred not only to a purse but also for example to a boulder (Kaisa Häkkinen, personal communication 18 September 2014). It is thus possible that the name given to the cairn has arisen out of the topography. As *kanto* can also mean a tree stump, *Kukkarokanto* could then be translated literally as ‘Boulder Stump’, referring to a tree stump standing on a boulder.<sup>18</sup>

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18 Tree stumps have been associated with the forest elf in Finnish folk belief as well. Certain prohibitions related to stumps show this connection and the stumps’ meaning for herders. It was for instance believed that a herder was not supposed to sit on a stump; if he or she did, the cows would stray. If a herder relieved himself or herself on a stump, a wolf would attack the cattle (SKMT IV2 1933: 703; cf. IV3 1934: 1976). These imagined consequent misfortunes fit very well with the folk conception of what the forest elf was capable of, and how it avenged itself on cattle owners when it (and what belonged to its domain) was not treated respectfully. The practice of placing a coin on a stump in connection with hunting (see SKVR VII5 3573) is another indication of the connection between the forest elf and stumps, as is the tradition of bringing gifts – butter, bread and milk – to the same being on Michaelmas morning, probably in return for letting the cattle graze in peace in the woods over the previous summer. The gifts were placed on a stump covered with moss; this was called the Table of the Forest (Fi. *mettänpöytä*) (SKS KRA Asikkala. Osmo Niemi. 460. 1936 < Konsta Lindholm, 58 years old, Sysmä, Käenmäki). According to another folklore record, cheese and roast veal were formerly placed on the Stump of Tapio (Fi. *Tapion kanto*) (SKS KRA Kajaani, Murtomäki. Samuli Paulaharju 7471. 1916 – Kaisa Reeta Tormulainen); Tapio was identified with the forest



Fig. 7. Part of the parish map of Sysmä (combined from two maps: Sysmä 3122 04 Ia.\* -/- -; Sysmä 3122 07 Ia.\* -/- -) (based on map material from the time-frame of 1749–1917; the patchy look is due to the original method of composition).

1 = Taipale village, 2 = *Kukkarokanto* cairn. The old path running North-East from Taipale village is marked with dashed line. The location of the cairn is not shown on the parish map, and is estimated on the basis of the older survey map (Koivunen 1966: 57) and of the author's field observations.

The cairn is also mentioned in two archaeological survey reports for the Sysmä parish (Koivunen 1966; Seppälä 2000). In 1965 the stone heap, which lay on a hill slope, was covered in moss; in size was 3 × 3.2 metres, and about 1 metre in height. According to a local landowner, there had been an old path running from the northern part of Taipale village past the stone heap, and everyone who travelled the path cast a stone on the cairn as they passed it (Fig. 7). The reason for this practice was unknown. Pentti Koivunen, who classifies the cairn under the heading of possible Iron Age graves and cemeteries, considers it conceivable that the heap was a grave cairn, made higher by passers-by (Koivunen 1966: 25–26). In the later

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elf, the supernatural master of the forest (for *Tapio*, see e.g. Siikala 2012: 375–380).

survey, the cairn could not be identified with certainty; a stone heap was found fitting the description given in the earlier report, but apparently the earlier classification as a grave cairn was so confusing as to the assemblage found that it was now treated with caution. It was said that the assemblage recalled a boundary marker or other such construction rather than a grave cairn; it was therefore classified as a “boundary cairn?”. The report adds, however, that the cairn mentioned in the earlier report could also have been destroyed or partly dismantled (Seppälä 2000: 8, 71). Based on the later survey report, the assemblage is defined in the register of the National Board of Antiquities as a boundary marker (Puolalahti 781010069).

I visited the place in August 2013, and found that the old path had disappeared (at the latest when recent clearcutting took place in the area). However, I managed to locate the cairn quite easily. A comparison of Koivunen’s notes with my own field observations shows with certainty that the same stone heap still exists. The size of the cairn is the same, and it lies at an equal distance from the road. The stones forming the cairn are still loose but are covered with thick moss. The smallest visible stones are about the size of a fist or even smaller, and could easily have been carried by one person even over a distance, as the oral tradition relates (see Salovius 1897: 56) (Figures 8 and 9).

It is unfortunately left unsaid why stone casting was practiced, but “above the cairn” (i.e. higher up the slope), apparently quite close to it, there was a pine tree on a huge stone.<sup>19</sup> The tree was supposed to be embraced when cattle-herding began in the spring (Salovius 1897: 56–57), i.e. when the cows were taken to the woods. Why this tree in particular was important in this connection may be due to its location on a boulder; because of this it was probably considered anomalous.<sup>20</sup> The fragments of evidence suggest that the pine and the cairn could well have belonged to the same sphere of ideas. In any case, embracing the tree was undoubtedly part of the ritual of letting out the cattle; such rituals were very common in the Finnish-Karelian folk culture. It took place when the boundary between the farmstead and the forest was crossed for the first time after a long winter, and its purpose could have been to protect cows against any harm that might befall them in the woods. Possible interpretations of the rite of embracing the tree are that it was either about greeting the forest – showing respect and good intentions towards it, in the hope that the forest would show reciprocal good will towards the cowherds and their herds – or about freeing oneself of the fear of the woods and its predators.<sup>21</sup> The

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19 This large stone could not be located with certainty, as the description written in 1897 is far too vague on this score.

20 The anomalous combination of a boulder and a tree, as a place for important rituals, is also found elsewhere. For example one account speaks of *Pihlaskivi* (the Rowan Stone), where a rowan tree grew in the crack of a huge split stone; bread, milk and meat were brought there as offerings (Siikala 2012: 89).

21 Both views can be validated. For example, the farmwife, after taking the cattle to the forest for the first time in the spring, could shake hands with a tree to appease the forest



Fig. 8. *The cairn at Sysmä Puolalahti in 1965.*  
Photograph: Pentti Koivunen, National Board of Antiquities (F31279).



Fig. 9. *The same cairn in 2013.* Photograph: Timo Muhonen.

practice of casting a stone on the slope below the tree – i.e. where the path apparently ran closest to the standing pine – was hence not about raising a grave cairn higher; it can instead be explained as something that occurred when a special place associated with the domain of the forest elf was passed. It is therefore possible that the stone practice too was linked with the crossing of the boundary between the village and the forest, performed by everyone walking along the path. Ultimately, the stone heap can thus indeed be seen as a boundary cairn, but in a different sense than that apparently intended in the second survey report.

## Flames at the end of the pasture season

The next case comes from Virolahti parish (southeastern Finland, Fig. 1: 12). In his work on the folk life of the parish, Eljas Raussi mentions the following herders' practice:

*“Alongside a cattle road leading to the hinterlands, herders have here and there an assemblage of twigs and sticks, to which [they] daily give something as an offering, such as twigs, sticks and stones, and upon casting [they] say: “Raappo raappo, don’t lose my cattle, twig in the forest, cattle home”.<sup>22</sup> Which [they] burn on Michaelmas, when they are no longer forced to go with their cattle further from there to the hinterlands.”* (Raussi 1966: 411)

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so that it would not be hostile towards the cattle (SKMT IV1 1933: 664–665; see also IV3 1934: 1950). On the same occasion, the herder could say to a pine tree: “May you be as kind to me as I am to you!” The cows then remained healthy for the summer (SKMT IV2 1933: 690). On the other hand, according to Finnish-Karelian folk belief, if one was afraid of something such as a stump or a dead body, he or she could dispel the dread by embracing the object of fear (see e.g. SKVR I4 2054; VII5 5207; VII5 5208). Similarly, a herder could get rid of his or her fear of the forest by embracing one of its trees (SKMT IV2 1933: 673); according to another account, the herder should hug stumps to dispel a fear of bears (SKMT IV3 1934: 1952).

22 This practice obviously relates to the custom of throwing a twig in the forest when the cows had first been taken there; upon casting, it was said: “Twig in the forest, cattle home” (SKVR VI2 5365; cf. e.g. VI2 5358; XIII4 13136; SKMT IV2 1933: 686–687). Another account speaks of a similar practice. When the cows were brought home from the forest for the first time in the spring, the herder said the same words, along with others, and then cast his switch towards the forest, ensuring that the cattle would not be lost, nor a single cow stray from the herd (SKVR VI2 5359), i.e. for the same reason as in Virolahti. The differences, however, are equally obvious. First of all, the custom described in the latter two accounts took place in the forest or after the herder had returned home, while in Virolahti the casting occurred on the way to the forest. Secondly, the latter two accounts give the impression that twigs could be cast anywhere in the forest or even towards it, meaning that no twig heaps would have accumulated as they did in Virolahti.

Unfortunately, the text does not explain why particular locations became meaningful spots for twigs and stones. In topographical terms, for example, there may not have been anything special about these locations; Raussi's account is relatively detailed, and he would probably have mentioned further features of the custom if they had been striking. Given the details that are described and the material already discussed, however, I interpret this practice as having been about the daily crossing of the boundary between the spheres of the home and the forest. The appeal or command which accompanied the practice clearly shows the underlying concern. Given their own words, herders were specifically worried in this connection about losing their cows, not about other harm, such as injuries, that might befall them in the rough terrain. I consider this to be of extreme significance, as it points directly to the potential actions of a particular supernatural being. For several reasons, herders feared that their cows could get lost in the woods. In terms of 'rational' reasons, in the thick woods the animals might stray out of the herder's sight either spontaneously or driven by a predator. Taking 'irrational' causes into account, the same might happen because the cows were under the 'forest cover'.

However, whether cows were lost because they were 'covered' in the forest or because they were chased by wolves or bears, their most dangerous predators in the Finnish-Karelian forests, the same being could be held responsible: the forest elf. According to one belief, wolves and bears were thought of as the 'cattle' or 'dogs' of this being, or of the forest – a domain over which it reigned (see e.g. Rantasalo 1955: 52, 81, 162; Tarkka 1994: 76; Stark-Arola 2002: 196).<sup>23</sup> This means that the master of wolves and bears was responsible for its beasts, or, if appropriately dealt with, at least could influence their actions in a favourable manner from the perspective of the cattle-owners and cowherds. Cattle-owners could hence appeal to the forest elf, or alternatively to its successor Saint George, considered as the protector of cattle (Sarmela 1991: 237), to secure the well-being of their stock against predators. The following practice, which took place at a critical point – annually when the cattle crossed the boundary between the sphere of the home and the forest for the first time that year – serves as an illustrative example. This custom too has been recorded in southeastern Finland. According to the informant, when the farmwife took her cows to the forest pasture for the first time after the long winter, she would run ahead of them and, upon entering the forest, fall to the ground, greet Tapio (the forest elf; the supernatural master of the forest) in a respectful manner, and pray to him (for *Tapio*, see e.g. Siikala 2012: 375–380):

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23 According to a comparable folk belief (based on later Catholic influence), wolves were the 'dogs' of Saint George; he could shackle them – and control bears – for the summer, i.e. restrain these predators from harming the cattle grazing in the forest (see e.g. SKVR IX<sub>3</sub> 1111; IX<sub>3</sub> 1117; IX<sub>3</sub> 1123; IX<sub>3</sub> 1135; IX<sub>4</sub> 1313 a; X<sub>2</sub> 4245; X<sub>2</sub> 4246; X<sub>2</sub> 4303; X<sub>2</sub> 4305; XI 2063; XIII<sub>4</sub> 13083; XIV 2549; Mansikka 1943: 192–195; Rantasalo 1955: 60; Vilkkuna 1994: 112–116).

*“Hail forest and Tapio,  
 Renowned king of the forest,  
 Blissful grace of the forest!  
 Give peace to the cattle,  
 Peace of life to the horses,  
 Secure feeling to the calves,  
 Decent peace to the pigs,  
 Peace to the vein-legs!  
 Keep your bears in shackles,  
 Bridle in the mouths of your wolves,  
 Let them run after a hare,  
 In the tracks of the bent-knee!”* (SKVR XIII<sub>3</sub> 9716)

This custom expresses the same genuine and urgent concern which can be found in an almost endless number of Finnish-Karelian folk practices relating to the moment when the cattle were let out of the cowshed for the first time that year. The function of the practices varied, but was often the same as above, as was the goal of many of the practices which took place at some other time in spring: to protect the cattle during the grazing season, one particular goal being protection in the forest against the predatory dangers involved in the traditional form of forest grazing (see e.g. SKMT IV<sub>1</sub> 1933: 372–407, 410–670; IV<sub>3</sub> 1934: 1653–1711, 1713–1951; Mansikka 1943; Rantasalo 1955: 52–60, 75–98, 292–298; Sarmela 1991: 233–234; Stark-Arola 2002: 194–195; Rainio 2005; for traditional forest grazing, cattle herding and related beliefs and practices, see also e.g. SKMT IV<sub>2</sub> 1933: 671–706; IV<sub>3</sub> 1934: 1952–1993; Rantasalo 1955: 108–122, 152–162, 208–209, 227–233; Soininen 1975: 218–220; Kaarlenkaski 2014). However, the cattle owners’ focus with respect to the pasture season was on the time in the spring season when the animals were first taken to the forest; the practices related to this were meant to ensure the safety of their cattle for the whole season. In addition to this more general time, the herders’ focus was often on the current day, i.e. on one day at a time. This can be explained by the transfer of responsibility. During the grazing season, the daily well-being of cattle was the duty of the herders, and it was therefore important for them to secure it on daily basis. Casting a stone a particular place was among such related and repetitive practices. The situation before the transfer of responsibility is clearly seen for example in the practice of casting stones when the cattle were taken to the forest pastures for the first time in spring, i.e. when the boundary between the domestic sphere and the forest was first crossed that year. This was a critical time for the future well-being of the cattle. For instance in Rautjärvi in Karelia (Fig. 1: 9) the farmwife, i.e. the owner who was in charge of the cattle,<sup>24</sup> cast three small stones into the forest before bringing the cows from the cowshed, and then addressed the supernatural beings of the woods:

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24 In the domestic sphere, it was women who were responsible for the cattle.



*“Old man of the forest,  
Old woman of the forest,  
Little maid of the forest,  
Give peace to the cattle,  
Peace to the dirt-cloven hooves!”* (SKMT IV<sub>1</sub> 1933: 434)

According to another account from Parkano (Fig. 1: 8), when the farmwife had taken her cows to the woods, she cast three stones into the forest; one for the (forest) elf, one for the bears, and the third for the wolves (i.e. the elf’s ‘livestock’ or ‘dogs’). By so doing, she ensured that the cows came home in every evening (SKMT IV<sub>1</sub> 1933: 434). What role was played by the stones in these two cases, i.e. how they were perceived to function, is nevertheless uncertain. In any case, however, after this the owners of the cattle handed over responsibility to the herder, who, as we have seen, could perform an outwardly similar protective practice daily at the perceived boundary between the domestic sphere and the forest.

To backtrack to the assemblages described by Raussi: *raappo* does not refer to some supernatural being but to the heap of twigs and stones itself.<sup>25</sup> From these assemblages, herders thus hoped for sympathy for their cattle, which were entering the domain of the forest elf. That is why the practice was no longer required in the autumn, when cattle-herding in the farm and village hinterlands came to an end. Michaelmas, the day commemorating the Archangel Michael, was an important annual turning point in traditional animal husbandry, and was a highly popular choice among the possible dates for bringing the cattle indoors for the winter. Grazing in the forest could therefore end on Michaelmas eve, and the herders’ responsibility for the success of the working season was then over (Virtanen 1922: 38–39; Rantasalo 1955: 209, 227; Vilkkuna 1994: 282; Laiho & Heikkinen 2010: 319). Consequently, the *raappo* heaps lost their significance and could be burnt.<sup>26</sup> It is to be noted that fires were widely lit around Michaelmas, and the custom was followed by herders as well (see e.g. Waronen 1898: 172; Rantasalo 1955: 228;

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25 Undoubtedly based on Raussi’s description, referred to above, *raappo* is explained identically in the dictionaries of G. E. Eurén (1860: 319) and Elias Lönnrot (1880: 329): as a pile of brushwood by a roadside, where herders ‘in ancient times’ made offerings to protect their flock. (In the 19th century, many folk practices were eagerly seen as relics from ancient times; the word ‘ancient’ merely represents these authors’ thinking, which was consistent with the common conception of the time and obviously does not mean that they had any deeper knowledge of the origin of the custom.) In addition, however, the dictionaries do offer an explanation of the procedure to which *raappo* was related. The word could be connected to the verb *raapottaa*, which means, among others things, casting, throwing away and hurling (Eurén 1860: 318; Lönnrot 1880: 329). *Raappo* is thus explained by the related action, the throwing of twigs, sticks and stones, and the word would refer to the concrete result of this casting, i.e. the heap).

26 It can also be pointed out that burning is one of the appropriate ways to destroy ritual matter (thanks to Sonja Hukantaival for this remark).

Talve 1990: 250; Vilkkuna 1994: 282, 288, 311). At a general level, burning the no longer needed *raappo* heaps precisely at Michaelmas thus also fit in very well with the customs of the season. It also fits in with another idea in Finnish-Karelian folk beliefs, which can be seen as underlying a myriad of spells and magic practices connected with the time when the cattle were first let out of the cowshed after the winter: that each outdoor pasture season began ‘from scratch’. This meant that the previous year’s procedures for securing the safety of the cattle in the open air were no longer valid, and that using the forest for grazing had to be ritually renegotiated every spring (see also Stark-Arola 2002: 196, 210). If twigs, sticks and stones were cast at the same places every year, the new outdoor pasture season meant the accumulation of *raappo* heaps over the ashes of the previous autumn, thus denoting the termination of the former, now void negotiations.

## Offering Chests and missing cows

On the south side of the Gulf of Finland, accumulating heaps have been connected with knowing the whereabouts of the cattle. In discussing beliefs related to ‘forest cover’, Uno Holmberg (Harva) mentions the Estonian practice of casting stones or wood on piles when a missing animal is being sought. He regards it as an offering practice (Holmberg 1923: 54). Holmberg refers to J. B. Holzmayer, who writes that a place where a couple has been caught in a disgraceful act is called *Rju* or *Riju*; the person who discovers this immediately casts stones at the place. Both the old and the young do the same, especially when someone is looking for his missing cattle. Then he throws down wood or stones, saying: “Rju! I bring you wood, let me find my lost cattle quickly” (Holzmayer 1872: 73, see also 109). In the dictionary of Ferdinand Wiedemann, *rihu* is explained as “*Steinhaufen abergläubischen Ursprungs*” (Wiedemann 1893: 954).

The location of such stone heaps was apparently in a sense arbitrary, as it was related to an event that might take place anywhere rather than being decided according to particular physical elements of the landscape. But in this case too the particular place became meaningful to the society, and was marked over and over again by its members. The concept of boundary can be discerned at a basic level in this case as well: stones and wood were thrown where someone had crossed the line or had violated the norm boundary between what was considered socially proper and improper. The territory of a given society forms some kind of “island [sic] of idealization” for its members (see Lamberg et al. 2008: 100; 2011: 301), and it is thus logical to say that improper behaviour tends to be externalized to its fringes or outside of it. The phenomenon can reflect a spatial and material level as well: when someone stood at the *riju/rihu* place, he or she was thus actually standing at the edge of the society, where something not belonging to it had been situated and concretely marked. Future material additions at the place reaffirmed

its meaning to the society, retaining and recalling its important moral values. We can assume that, as in the Finnish tradition, the missing cattle were seen as having crossed another kind of boundary – that between the familiar and visible (one's own society) and the Other. The place, now denoting the margin of the society, could therefore function as a corresponding boundary marker, where the return of the cattle to the human sphere could be appropriately ritually negotiated.

The place for finding cattle was not, at a concrete level, the same in Swedish-speaking Finnish Ostrobothnia, where it was linked with the same physical elements of the landscape that were important to cowherds in other respects as well. These elements were the large boulders described above. Jacob Tegengren, for example, describes a boulder four metres in height in Vörå parish:

*“It is called the Fattiggubben, and is cracked from top to bottom. When herders went to look for the cows, they cast a stone into the cleft in order to find them quickly”* (Tegengren 1922: 58–59; his emphasis).

In Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia, the practice was also connected for example with a huge vertically cracked boulder called the Offering Chest (*Offerkistan*). Giving this name of the rock was logical already due to the shape of the crevice.<sup>27</sup> When cows or berries were being sought, one stood on the adjacent road and tried to cast three, seven or nine stones in the crevice of the Offering Chest. Success brought luck in the forest, but failure would be followed by misfortune (Landtman 1919: 768; Tegengren 1919: 61). Once again, success in the forest was thus tied to stopping by a particular boulder along the way and casting stones into its crevice. Given the points discussed above, it is by no means surprising that attempts to find cows grazing in the forest resorted to a practice related to a boulder representing the forest and its supernatural beings. Domestic animals which were in a different domain could thus be recovered by a procedure taking place at its gates.

Given the toponym *Offerkista* and the associated practice, we can briefly refer to a Swedish custom described by Johan Nordlander:

*“In order to protect the cattle against bears and all other evil, it is said that offerings were also made. In the forest of Styrnäs near Stekpannbäcken lies a cairn which is called the Offering Chest [Offerkista], and which would have been formed by small stones being cast there to protect the cattle. According to an unofficial report, such a cairn can also be found in Ödsgård village in Edsele parish. The heap is called the*

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<sup>27</sup> Given that the practice of casting stones, at least in Finland, has often been connected to a point named after an ecclesiastical phenomenon, it is possible that the naming of the Offering Chest was also influenced by a comparable model: offertory trunks, pauper-logs and/or offering chests (for offertory trunks, see e.g. Klackenborg 1992: 35–38, 40 Fig. 1).

*Offering Cairn [Offerröse], and it is said to have formed by herders every evening casting a smallish stone there when they had returned safely home from the forest. For that purpose they chose small, smooth, round stones from the nearby rapids“ (Nordlander 1885: 24).<sup>28</sup>*

These Swedish cairns can once again be linked to the daily crossing of the boundary between the domestic sphere and the forest, indicating that a similar tradition existed on both sides of the Gulf of Bothnia.

## Ripples in the water

The above examples almost all depict a practice where stones were thrown at a particular point. But crossing spatial boundaries could also involve casting stones over a larger area, and a heap thus did not necessarily form. An example from Jyskyjärvi (in Viena Karelia, Fig. 1: 2) demonstrates this:

*When a herder goes into the forest with his cattle for the first time in spring, [he] drives his cattle to the shore of a pond where from [he] waters them for the first time and casts into the pond three stones, which [he] has taken from the roots of a southward-fallen tree,<sup>29</sup> and upon casting says [“]water to us, money to the king[”], so the water will not hate the cattle, for if one did not do so, then the water could drown [the cattle] in the pond or a river etc. (SKS KRA Jyskyjärvi. H. Meriläinen II 777. 1889).*

With this action, a herder could ensure safety for his or her cattle against the dangers of the wilderness waters. This safety would last throughout that outdoor pasturing season. Stones –in this case offerings – are once again associated with money, and were meant for a supernatural recipient who literally reigned over the water (the ‘king’). But why were stones cast only after crossing the boundary between the domains of the home and the forest? The answer lies in the supernatural recipient of stones: security was sought specifically against the perils of water, so the stones were intended for the water elf, not the forest elf. They were cast specifi-

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28 The practice of depositing a stone at a particular place sometimes entails the idea that the stones are to be taken from a certain prescribed place (Muhonen 2015). This idea has followed the logic for example of folk belief, but the precise meaning of the latter place is always case-specific. See also footnote 29 below.

29 The roots of a tree which has fallen southward point north, and are not reached by sunlight. In Finnish–Karelian folk belief, north is the place where evil dwells in a land without sunlight; in a Christian context, it was accordingly considered an appropriate place for ‘pagan’ things. In this case, stones may have been associated with this land and its forces, and were thus considered to be special. As the ruler of water is in this case a non-Christian supernatural being, it could have been seen as pleased by such stones. See also footnote 28 above.

cally when the donor was standing on the shore – the boundary of the water elf's territory – and about to cross it for the first time after the winter.

Sometimes the practice of casting a stone into the water may no longer have involved the related conception of a supernatural being. In the former parish of Renko (Fig. 1: 10), there is a small pond, *Tervalampi* (Tar Pond; *Tervalammi* on present-day maps) along the back road from Oinaala village to the back-fields of Maarahuhta (Figure 10). At least as late as the 1920s, when the pond was passed while driving cattle or going to the haymaking, it was customary to cast a stone into the pond both on the way from the village and back to it. It bode ill for anyone who did not do so; no other motive to the practice was known (MV:K 17:77/50). When we consider the practice as one case among the comparable Finnish–Karelian tradition, we can conclude with certainty that it originated because of a supernatural being dwelling in the pond. The custom, in being related to luck, was so important that it remained alive even though the concepts previously underlying it had become meaningless and were therefore forgotten.

On the Russian topographic map from 1884 (Figure 11), *Tervalampi* lies where the settlement of the Oinaala village ends, right at the edge of a very large field area and of the forest. At this point, the topographical difference is enormous: the river valley, with its settlement and open field landscape, changes to largely uninhabited forest. Beyond this point, to the north and northeast there are only a few isolated farmsteads. The area of Maarahuhta, nowadays a field, lies in the middle of a wide forest tract and is depicted as a mixture of bog, watery forest, watery meadows, meadows and small fields. It was a perfect place for cattle to graze and – with its dozens of barns shown on the map – for cutting and storing hay for winter fodder.

It is, however, by no means certain that stone-casting was practiced because *Tervalampi* was conceived of as the boundary between the village and the forest. One explanation for the custom may be that the pond had played – or was believed to have played – a part in an unfortunate event, such as a murder; according to the common folk belief, stones and twigs were consequently cast at such places. Indeed, only some 70 metres from *Tervalampi* there was another pond (nowadays a swamp) where, according to the local tradition, a woman had drowned her illegitimate baby (Ilola 2004: 55). This does not explain why stones were thrown specifically in *Tervalampi*; if the practice had been related to this unfortunate event, they would have been cast in the other pond. It is, however, entirely possible that a similar event had once taken, or was thought to have taken place, on the shore of *Tervalampi*. Whatever the case may be, *Tervalampi* is clearly a topographical anomaly along the path from Oinaala village to Maarahuhta.



Fig. 10. Tervalampi pond in May 2013. The pond is very shallow, and the bottom is covered with tree trunks and a soft layer of decomposed organic matter. No stones are thus visible on the bottom, except right below the North-Eastern shore. They are most likely there due to natural causes, as the ridge ascending from the shore is very stony. The water is very clear and flows constantly from the pond, which may possibly contain a spring. Photograph: Timo Muhonen.

## **Discussion: crossing boundaries**

To put it simply: the history of traffic, of people's movements within the landscape, always involves the crossing of boundaries (Nenonen 1999a: 17). Indeed, the landscape within which movement takes place is not a single space but a set of spaces, belonging to categories with different meanings. People never merely move about in space, but cross more or less clearly definable boundaries – topographical, territorial, social, religious etc. – that exist within that general space. Folk belief, some aspects of which have been discussed above, offers an insight into one aspect of this, indicating how different spaces were perceived and how movement into and through them was possible. This could take different material forms, of which we have seen just a few. These are concrete examples of the simple fact that things not only happen within space but often because of space, or rather of differences



Fig. 11. Part of the Russian topographic map from 1884 (Vehmas XIII 27).  
1 = Oinaala village, 2 = Tervalampi, 3 = Maarahuhta.

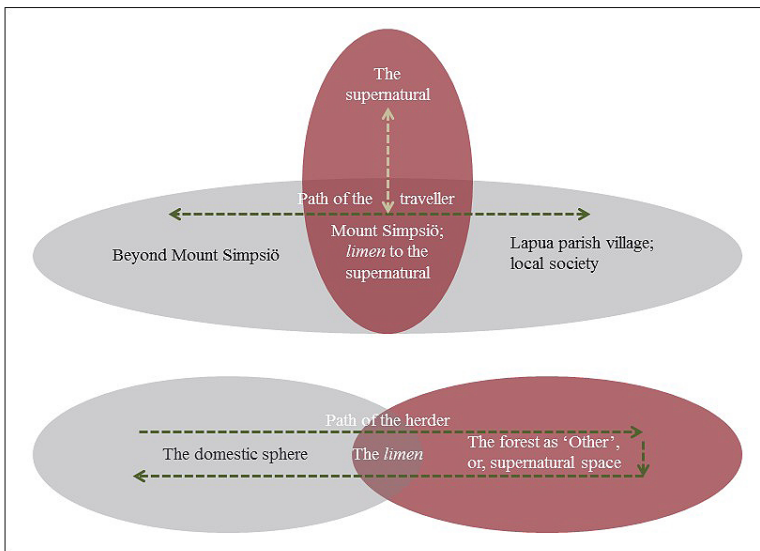


Fig.12. Two of the cases presented in which ‘passers-by’ have cast stones at a particular place, from a spatial point of view. In both scenarios, these places were located in liminal zones along the route. For example Mount Simpsiö, where the intersection of spaces can be understood as a T-shaped crossroads, formed an entryway into the supernatural world. Similarly, large boulders represented gateways into the forest; the latter can be described as ‘the other side’ (Fi. *tuonpuoleinen*): a supernatural domain, with non-human masters and other inhabitants as well as supranormal threats. The scenarios outlined could also be applied to many other cases involving the ‘passing-by’ contribution of a stone or some other object.

between spaces.

This brings us to another point. The common factor in the practice of casting a stone at a particular place was a supernatural threat towards what can be generally regarded as human. This happened at places that were spatially anomalous – where the boundary between the familiar and the foreign was crossed, or where one was temporarily inside the boundary zone; in other words, in situations where something that belonged on the inside ended up on the outside or at the edge between them. In this connection, an orthodox ritual offers a propitious gateway to crossing the anomaly. While almost all the cases presented in this article can be said to relate to passing by a special place – which is how the event is often referred to in the literature, and which may in physical terms be correct – a deeper approach reveals that the expression is quite a misnomer. Fundamentally, stones were cast not because one was passing by a place but in order to successfully pass through a boundary zone (and onward within a space with a different meaning) (Figure 12).

Most of the cases presented relate to boulders, but this should not be taken to mean that large isolated stones were the most important type of physical object or spatial point involved in the practice of casting stones. Of course, boulders as part of a certain form of the tradition have dominated at least in Ostrobothnia near the town of Vaasa; the practice may indeed have assumed distinct regional patterns or forms. Yet at a deeper level, even this regional tradition was actually very little about boulders *per se*. The practice did not have to be connected specifically with large stones; tree stumps could function in the same role as well. Examples from outside Ostrobothnia lead to the same conclusion: where stones were cast was not decided according to prescribed characteristics of the place. What mattered more was the location of the boulders in relation to the route travelled, and the special meanings associated with them; accordingly, boulders could come to play a central part in the practice. (Later, of course, particular places could become something that was sought primarily as a location, and we can refer to this as for example a ‘boulder tradition’.) Thus we should not seek to explain the practice of casting stones merely in relation to particular natural features or places, because of their supposed physical stand-alone meaning in the tradition. In other words, the practice may have existed *wherever it had to do with the crossing of a zone perceived as the boundary between two (or more) highly contrasting spatial categories*.<sup>30</sup> What

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30 The importance of ritual actions at a liminal zone can also be seen for instance in cases of death by misfortune. In different parts of the world, ‘passers-by’ have cast stones and other things precisely where someone has died by misfortune. These points also presented spatial anomalies along the traveller’s path. Things were not necessarily thrown there because of the death itself, but because of the perception of an anomalous death. Rather than the physical/topographical qualities of a given point, an anomalous event has in these cases rendered the places spatially exceptional. There, in the liminal space between the realm of the living and that of the dead, the unfortunate soul may haunt travellers. This idea is very widespread: liminal places, such as crossroads, have in different parts of the world been perceived as points where ‘passing-by’ rituals, such as the



is noteworthy, however, is that it is in general topographical anomalies that have often been perceived as such liminal spaces under particular circumstances: they are places that separate humans from the supernatural.

## The practice in its context

From a present-day perspective, the casting of a stone may seem a matter as trivial as its outward character suggests. But we should not make the mistake of considering the related sentiments of those who cast the stones to have been shallow, or the circumstances of the practice trivial. Those sentiments involved worries, and even fears, that were absolutely real. Whether it was about travelling 'past' a fearsome place or entering the forest with one's cattle, the situation, though it might be frequently recurrent, was not casual. In both cases, it was about stepping on a threshold into the supernatural, where there was much at stake: the well-being of people and domestic animals. If one wished to make an important journey or carry out significant daily tasks such as cattle herding, problematic critical thresholds in the landscape simply could not be avoided. In their study of the rural living sphere of Toivola village in the southern Finnish province of Häme, Lamberg et al. (2011: 309) remark that frightening places did not necessarily prevent traffic past them. My observation with respect to Finnish-Karelian folk belief is consistent with this: although some places/spaces were perceived as unsafe, persons knowledgeable about ritual could carry on their affairs within or through them without having to worry much about consequent misfortunes or danger. Necessity required that danger had to be confronted and overcome rather than avoided, and the way to do so was through rituals: the means that facilitated safe movement outside one's own sphere of life. From the psychological point of view, the practice of casting a stone can be said to have reflected the sense of danger and vulnerability felt by someone travelling outside the safety provided by their society; rituals were the means whereby these emotions were to be controlled.

In traditional Finnish-Karelian agrarian communities, attempts were made to achieve travel luck with respect to various setbacks and malevolent agents. In his part of a survey of the history of movement and traffic in Finland, Marko Nenonen notes that everyone on the road felt fear; misfortunes such as losing one's way, accidents, predators, violence and robberies forced people to wish for luck. Under those conditions, magical means, spells and prayers were often the only resort (Nenonen 1999b: 303–304, 328). It is to be added, however, that the word 'only' should not be understood to mean that people in the past did not have real faith in the practices in question; on the contrary, they were not seen as a 'last resort' but were perceived as very powerful.

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practice of depositing stones, are necessary (Muhonen 2015).

When it comes to the agents that raised dire concern, people did not perceive only malevolent or downright criminal individuals or wild beasts as belonging to the group. Setbacks along the road were furthermore not often regarded as resulting from what we would call ‘rational’ or ‘natural’ causes, but as related to malevolent human magic or malicious non-human agents. Such reasoning was not exceptional. In this connection, it is informative to refer to certain concurrent basic folk conceptions as to the supernatural. In her study of the worldview in Early Modern rural Finland, Laura Stark points out that beliefs in magical harm flourished among rural Finns, who over-estimated the possible mechanisms of threat such as supernatural contagion, curses and incantations (Stark 2006: 69); other supernatural threats can be added to this list as well. According to Stark, “[e]arly modern rural persons tended to have very clear ideas about what they considered ‘normal’, and these concepts helped them to quickly deduce a supranormal cause if unexpected, and especially unwanted events occurred. [...] In the context of strict notions regarding what was ‘normal’, beliefs in intentional, supernatural and malicious causality provided the ‘logical’ deterministic explanation when something out-of-the-ordinary occurred” (Stark 2006: 43–44).

Given these viewpoints, the past meaning of the stones deposited in simple heaps, in the crevices of boulders and in similar places far exceeds what can be said about their humble appearance. We can never say that what people earlier did with these stones was trivial, or merely a magic trick, with a light and carefree hope of good luck. Cattle-herding presents a particularly strong case of this. It is, however, striking that some scholars have not realized the true significance of practices related to the well-being of cattle. For example Aulis J. Alanen considers magic related to cattle luck to have been a minor matter (Alanen 1947: 154). It may at first glance seem to be so, but any deeper reasoning will end in the opposite conclusion. Livestock was among the most valuable good most smallholders had, and was of vital importance – either directly or indirectly, above all in the production of manure to fertilize the fields – to their subsistence (e.g. Soininen 1975). There was, however, a huge discrepancy between the value of the cattle and what could be done non-ritually to safeguard their well-being, since the herders were literally on their own in the vast woods.

## **The passage to the forest**

My basic conclusions concerning the locations where cowherds cast stones, and the relationship between these locations and the surrounding spaces are consistent with many of the observations presented in Finnish studies. Here I am referring specifically to studies where the dichotomy between culture and nature, and the relationship and crossing of the boundary between the domestic sphere and the forest, is discussed in relation to the traditional Finnish-Karelian cultural sphere

(e.g. Tarkka 1994; Stark-Arola 1998; 2002; Rainio 2005; Tarkka 2005; Stark 2006; Ilomäki 2014; Kaarlenkaski 2014; Tarkka 2014). These studies have also shown that entering the alien wilderness was a highly significant event, both cognitively and concretely; the underlying notion of a juxtaposition of categories is a widespread idea (Eilola 2004: 141). Therefore, as Veikko Anttonen remarks with respect to the Finnish tradition – and it should be added that the same applies to Swedish speakers in Finland – entering the forest has been a boundary crossing that in relevant cases has been ritualized (Anttonen 2010: 177). In the cases dealt with in this article, and given the cultural, agricultural and financial value of cattle (Soininen 1975; Kaarlenkaski 2014: 296), that relevance needs no further underlining. The depth of the category contrast appears for example in the study by Lotte Tarkka, who points out in relation to the Viena Karelian traditional culture that the forest belonged to the sphere of the ‘other side’ (the hereafter; Fi. *tuonpuoleinen*), extraneous to human society (Tarkka 2005: 287). The related conception long remained similar in Finland as well (see e.g. Ilomäki 2014). Laura Stark writes appositely: “the forest represented a danger zone conceived to be fundamentally different from the world of humans, as the definitive ‘Other’ opposed to both the human body and human community. In fact, the contrast between the forest and the human sphere of habitation was *one of the most fundamental dichotomies in folk thought*” (Stark 2006: 361; my emphasis). This dichotomy resulted in rites of passage during the transition from the farm household to the forest (see Tarkka 1994: 58; Stark-Arola 1998: 183). Given its character as a means of crossing spatial boundaries, I would interpret the practice of casting a stone, under the circumstances discussed in this article, as such, or rather as a rite of terrestrial passage. This was probably once much more common and widespread than is suggested by the late and sporadic references. In this connection, it can be mentioned that adding a stone as a rite of terrestrial passage is known in Viena Karelia as well, where people – albeit in a different topographical setting – crossing the boundary between culture and nature deposited stones at specific places, thus forming heaps. And indeed, casting a stone at a particular place has actually been a rite of terrestrial passage worldwide (Muhonen 2015).<sup>31</sup> Liminality – being situated between two ontologically different things – in connection with rites of passage is a useful notion here too, and Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner should therefore be referred to in this context (van Gennep 1960; Turner 2011).

The boundary between the domestic sphere and the forest, although already extensively discussed, now needs to be characterized in more detail. This boundary – as represented, for example, by large boulders with clefts – understandably did not always follow the actual topography; it was not necessarily located at the

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31 One could also add that the elementary role of stone heaps as demarcators is most likely age-old in the North as well, and can perhaps be seen for instance in some of the ancient cairn structures in the Arctic region. It has been suggested that these, too, could mark the boundary between domestic and wilderness spaces (Mizin 2013).

precise edge of the woods. In many cases this would have been quite a coincidence; it is apparent that cattle roads and paths may have run along the edge of the forest or actually within it for some time, before reaching a special place with which the boundary could be associated (as in the case of the Laihia Jakkula *Vaivaaspoika* boulder). It is likewise possible that such a special place was found already before reaching the very edge of the forest. Stark(-Arola) has made an observation that relates to this. In her study of Orthodox Karelian folk belief, she speaks of a boundary *zone*, as opposed to a one-dimensional boundary: the boundary between the farmhouse or inner sphere of the human society and the outside wilderness was not a clearly defined line (Stark-Arola 2002: 193–194). I believe that the same applied to many if not all of the cases discussed above. For this reason the boundary that was identified with a particular spot was conceptual (cf. Stark-Arola 2002: 212) rather than topographical. Since a particular place within the boundary zone was nevertheless obviously needed, it was ultimately about where the more or less gradual transition between the two spheres could be ritually localized. The practice of casting a stone not only concretely marked this necessary location, but also constantly materially sustained and reinforced the perceived prevailing territorial division. There is thus full reason to characterize the places in question as boundary markers; they retained their significance for a remarkably long time, sometimes down to the beginning of the twentieth century. This is largely because in many parts of Finland and Karelia where forest grazing was still practiced, the forest took the form of vast tracts of wilderness in many respects dangerous to humans and cattle. There good luck was a necessity.

## Topographical anomalies as boundary markers

The process of ritual localization was based on a number of criteria, discussed above, according to which particular places became important as mediators between culture and nature. Here I comment further on the general perception of a topographical anomaly, which ‘produced’ ritually important places at which the boundary could be fixed. First of all, the perception of a topographically anomalous feature (i.e. something that stands out clearly from its surroundings), and the consequent process of setting it apart as ritually important, due to its cognitive foundation has repeatedly given rise to places of special cultural value across the world. Among such features are for example openings in the ground and cracks between rocks and caves; the list could be continued with mountains, hills, springs and rapids (Anttonen 2013a: 13–14) – and boulders.<sup>32</sup> As points of contact, these

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32 Topographically anomalous elements in the landscape are also special in another sense: they have often ‘demanded’ an explanation. This has in many cases resulted in narratives that are mythological in character; large boulders are no exception on this score (see e.g. Enges 2014: 94–96).

too presented liminal places between ‘us’ and ‘other’: human and supernatural. With respect to the conception of particular landscape elements as suitable to act as boundary markers, Lamberg et al. (2011: 289), for example, note that “[s]ingle elements that stand out from an environment can also be perceived as boundaries, or at any rate border sites, through which people trace the limits of their existence and governance – in other words, those lines that separate ‘us’ from the ‘others.’” Thus for example what the herders – in addition to those who travelled along the old road over Mount Simpsiö – did was nothing unique, but on the contrary represented a fundamental mechanism of the perception of natural features that can be defined as universal. The same phenomenon of perception has been discussed, for example, with respect to the Sámi *sieidis* (e.g. Lauhakangas & Lauhakangas 2002: 238) – sacred places, usually incorporating a large boulder; many of these rocks have other anomalous features as well. With respect to the ‘herdsmen’s boulders’, it is interesting to note that these features include cracks, hollows and flat natural ‘shelves’, which functioned as altars for gifts to the supernatural. They were among the factors that marked the boulders as special. Due to their sheer size, such huge rocks were already perceived as somehow standing out from their surroundings, and many of them even dominate it (Anttonen 2004: 503; Lahelma 2008: 126, 129; Äikäs 2011: 63–65, Table 6, 77–78, 148).<sup>33</sup> The same phenomenon is often found behind other kinds of *sieidi* sites too; it is even considered that almost all of them are places that have an eye-catching topography and can therefore be seen as distinct from the surrounding landscape (Bradley 2000: 6; Rydving 2013: 398). Physical/ topographical anomalies hence often presented *limens* for human–supernatural communication in the case of *sieidis* as well. On the other hand, it is also

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33 There are archaeological indications of the same phenomenon far south, for example in the regions of Southern Savonia, Tavastia Proper and Ostrobothnia. The first case is an impressive large boulder (two different measurements are given: ca. 15 x 20 x 7 metres and ca. 10 x 7 x 5 metres) with fissures, standing in the middle of a level heath in the former municipality of Ristiina. The boulder is classified as a ‘*sieidi*’. An archaeological survey found a spearhead, a pin apparently from a brooch, a fragment of a third iron object, and 10.5 grams of burnt bone. The burnt bone, the pin and the iron fragment were lying on the side of the boulder; the spearhead was hidden in a hollow. Based on the form of the spearhead, the site is dated to the Merovingian period (Sepänmaa 1992: 51–53). It is quite possible that due to its character as the dominant object in its surroundings and its anomalous appearance, the boulder was selected as the depositing place of the finds. The same can be said with respect to a large boulder in the former municipality of Lammi, known as the *Rehukivi* (the name could be translated as Fodder Stone, but animal feed is probably not its original meaning) and lying on the highest point of a rock (Nurminen K 1989: 166). Burnt bone and a Swedish coin from the 17th century were found by the boulder in 2010 (Jasse Tiilikkala, personal communication 17.12.2014). The third example comes from Vaasa, where a C-type axe was found in the cleft of a huge boulder (Esantönkkä-Kurkunmäki-Mäkihaka 942010012). C. F. Meinander dates the axe probably to the late Merovingian period (Meinander 1950: 192). These examples alone already indicate that much more attention should be paid in archaeological surveys to large and/or anomalous-looking boulders.

remarked that a place may have become significant due to its location in relation to ordinary daily tasks; topographical particularities thus did not always play a role in making a place special (Äikäs 2011: 66, 78). This apparently applies for example to the cases of the *Kirkonkukkarokolkka* and *raappo* heaps as well.

Because of the same phenomenon of perception, it is not a coincidence that particular natural objects have often become boundary markers also in circumstances that some might consider purely 'secular'. I am referring to very large boulders during the Medieval period, and later, in Finland (Melander 1933: 75). It is of particular interest that, as for example Seppo Suvanto highlights, cracked boulders are often mentioned among them (Suvanto 1972: 127–132, 143–155). The situation – as Suvanto points out – is hardly coincidental.<sup>34</sup> Rather, it is the result of deliberate choices made in the terrain, and is connected to a general idea of the time: boundaries were attached to sufficiently distinguishable features found in nature. On the other hand, man-made constructions were also useful in demarcating the landscape, and artificial boundary markers were erected when necessary (Melander 1933: 74–76; Lamberg 2005: 15–16). Boulders are very suitable in this respect; when they also happen to have a crevice, they bear a distinctive physical feature that makes their identification more secure.

In this case too, the cracked boulders thus lay within the zone defining the boundary points, and where possible the precise boundary was drawn explicitly according to these special rocks. The underlying idea was obviously to identify points that stood out from their surroundings and were thus eye-catching and undeniable – and, where possible, indestructible and unmovable – in case of a possible boundary dispute. However, another factor in the selection of boulders as boundary marks can also be suggested. The later practice may have been 'only'

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34 Suvanto considers that the splitting of stones was caused by human action, by the burning of fires on the boulders (Suvanto 1972: 138, 143–144, 147, 153, 169). While this could occasionally have happened when water froze on the surface of stones weathered by fire, this scarcely explains the matter in its entirety. All stones tend to crack, so natural processes alone usually account for crevices even on very large boulders. When the boulder is big enough and lies on top of the ground, its own weight and weathering by frost will begin to split it. A huge boulder often splits down the middle, or into three stones of similar size if it is oblong. In addition to water, tree and other plant roots penetrate the cracks; tree roots in particular are powerful breakers of stone. It is also to be noted that boulders may have broken into pieces already when covered by the ice sheet during the Ice Age; in moving the boulders, the glacier may have produced various forms of torsion. We can therefore conclude that the relevance of bonfires in the splitting of huge boulders is marginal (Matti Saarnisto, personal communication 12 October 2014; Aimo Kejonen, personal communication 16 October 2014). Another argument against Suvanto's idea is the fact that many cracked boulders that have not functioned as boundary markers can be found in Finnish forests, and it would be absurd to claim that fires were burned categorically on top of them as well. These points lead me to conclude that the splits in the boundary boulders as well originated primarily through natural processes.

about tradition and about selecting clearly distinguishable landmarks as boundaries, but this tradition may derive originally from folk belief. According to that belief, supernatural powers resided in huge boulders. They were thus widely known and their violation was avoided for fear of supernatural retribution. When boundaries were being drawn, such boulders thus not only presented indisputable points, but the prohibition against violating them also extended to their function as ‘mundane’ boundary marks (Aimo Kejonen, personal communication 16 October 2014). They were thus at the edge of two spaces of ‘us’ (human beings) and ‘the other’ (the supernatural). As already existing space dividers, it was comprehensible to use these special places to distinguish significant points from another aspect of spatial separation. The cracks added another meaning to the boulders: they divided something concretely, and thereby already included the idea of a boundary line running through them. It can also be suggested that the cracks were perceived as gateways into the supernatural, and that the special character of the boulders was emphasized through this feature. These additional aspects are probably equally accurate with respect to the ‘herders’ boulders’ as well.

To conclude: the process of selecting huge boulders as boundary points in the case of ‘mundane’ land ownership took place according to the same fundamental cognitive mechanism according to which for example herders selected some places to function as boundary markers between culture and nature. Boulders could thus easily become points demarcating territorial boundaries, whether between two groups of people or between people and supernatural beings – in either case, between ‘us’ and the ‘other’. This fundamental line of thought can also be seen in the case of prehistoric Finnish *pyhä* (‘sacred’) toponyms (see also Lamberg 2005: 15–16). According to Anttonen, the ‘original’ meaning of *pyhä* was a territorial boundary, which separated one’s own land and that which was foreign or common. Topographically exceptional places in the area offered candidates for a boundary point that became a ‘*pyhä* place’ (Anttonen 1994: 27; 1999: 13; 2013a: 19–20; 2013b: 388–390).

## The temporal dimension

Thus far I have discussed space as a key concept in relation to the practice of casting stones at a particular place. But things never happen in space alone; they also involve a temporal dimension; this I briefly comment on here. We have seen that the times at which people cast stones were often specific. When casting stones was connected with the occasion of taking the cattle to the forest for the first time in the spring, what triggered the practice was the significance of the moment, a

threshold in time. Where farmwives stood simultaneously at the gates or *limen* of another domain and the *limen* of the new agricultural season with stones in their hands, another critical time was the end of the pasture season, after which safeguarding the cattle in the woods was no longer necessary for the rest of the year. The building where cattle stayed in for the winter and its doorstep – i.e. the critical boundary which had to be ritually ‘locked’ – then became the main arena of cattle-tending rituals. The rituals that took place at that moment focused on the well-being, productivity, fertility and safety of the cattle shut up inside the building (see SKMT IV<sub>2</sub> 1933: 876–920; IV<sub>3</sub> 1934: 2041–2060). In relation to the cattle, the boundary between safety and danger shifted to the doorstep of the cowshed, and the corresponding summer boundary against the forest became insignificant. The *raappo* heaps thus lost their meaning and could be burnt.

## The archaeological aspect

Lastly, the archaeological aspect of the subject needs to be briefly discussed. As the material presented demonstrates, for example the Finnish and Karelian landscapes contain lasting evidence of people’s movement between the domestic sphere and the forest. As a material sign of ritualized crossing, there is hardly anything more resistant than stones. Individually cast stones are naturally beyond our reach, but some of the relatively recent stone assemblages are probably still both sufficiently accessible to observation and worth consideration. How they can be identified as boundary markers in the sense suggested is obviously much more problematic, but the same basic difficulty of identification applies to many of the other types of stone assemblages as well. Yet stone heaps found here and there in the forest are often too easily interpreted for instance as clearance or boundary cairns in a ‘rational’ and utilitarian sense. Indeed, Finnish archaeology has not so far shown much interest in the interpretation proposed here. Stone heaps in what archaeologists would call atypical locations have nevertheless sometimes been noted; for instance in Laihia, the home parish of the *Vaivaaspoika* rock, some stone heaps lie fully or partially on boulders (Miettinen 1998: 60, 65, photographs and captions). Another publication also shows some ‘atypical’ Ostrobothnian stone assemblages connected with boulders (Herrgård & Holmblad 2005: 131–132, 137, photographs and captions). While these assemblages could also have been formed for other reasons, the possibility should be considered that some of them came about through the deposition of stones in passing by a ‘special’ place. This practice may also explain some of the interpretatively ‘vague’ cairns, with or without central boulders, that are considered outwardly ‘typical’.

There are at least two compelling reasons why the situation needs amending, although it is obviously problematic. First of all, these stone assemblages – or rather the single stones in them – were evidently highly important and belong



to the sphere of archaeology as much as any other place where the material remains of past people can be found. As Richard Bradley, whose study highlights the previously much neglected meaning of natural places from an archaeological perspective, writes: “[n]atural places have an archaeology because they acquired a significance in the *minds* of people in the past. That did not necessarily make any impact on their outward appearance, but one way of recognising the importance of these locations is through the evidence of human activity that is discovered there” (Bradley 2000: 35; his emphasis). Of course, finds of assemblages of mere stones are the exact opposite of an obvious clue to the significance of a place: can they be established as the result of human activity in the first place, or are they seen as natural formations? Even when human agency is accepted, it is ‘safer’ to conclude that their existence is due to ‘someone who has just thrown some stones together for fun’. One hindrance to an interpretation of significance is actually posed by the orthodox archaeological view (or rather non-view) regarding ordinary, unmodified stones: alone or in modest assemblages, they are not seen by default as important or as signifying something worth noting. A major part of the problem thus has to do with what we recognize as possible in general regarding ‘mundane’ and seemingly meaningless objects (see also Muhonen 2013).

The other reason is that the practice of casting stones at spatial transitions in general may contribute to our understanding of why and how stone assemblages and cairns may have come about and been built up. Aside from their straightforward relevance for the interpretation of relatively young stone heaps, the same conceptions that gave rise to these could also have produced earlier and even prehistoric cairns under similar circumstances.

Rather than using the stone practice as a direct analogy in particular cases, I thus think that more can be achieved by analysing the general circumstances related to it and carefully applying the pattern found in a broader sense. The material presented above and elsewhere (Muhonen 2015) suggests that one of the most common situations in which the practice took place was in crossing a liminal space. As the same practice occurred repeatedly under different conditions but essentially in the same functional context, it is worth considering it as a general *modus operandi*; one which can provide an explanatory model covering a broad spectrum of possible related instances of stone accumulations. Some of the stone assemblages thus formed might be modest while others might form cairns of considerable size, depending on the size of the stones and on how long, how frequently and by how many people the practice was carried out in a given place. This interpretative theoretical model alone can obviously neither provide exact knowledge of the nature of a particular boundary nor uncover the details of the past practice. It can nevertheless suggest something essential about past movement and the perception of space, adding to our knowledge of the interactive dynamic between the landscape, the human mind, and ancient stone assemblages.

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