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COMMUNICATING ACROSS THE BORDER: WHAT BURIAL LAMENTS CAN TELL US ABOUT OLD BELIEFS

The present article discusses how archaic cultures eliminated their fear of the dead; first and foremost in connection with laments as a folklore genre and lamenting as a ritual practice. Primarily, we examine the relevant Balto-Finnic and North Russian traditions, in which lamenting has retained its original function of balancing the relations between the spheres of the living and the dead, and of establishing borderlines, as well as of restoring the interrupted social cohesion. Lament texts can be viewed as a multifunctional genre that may even be addressed in various ways, but wherein nevertheless the interests of the community stand foremost, whereas personal psychological problems come only after, and related to them. The lamenter's role and function in the society will be viewed, too.

The second part of the article will, in connection with overcoming the fear of the dead, discuss exhumation – a phenomenon that has not been preserved in north European cultures but that can, in the light of treated bones or incomplete skeletons in the graves of Bronze and Iron Ages, be assumed to have at one time existed even in Estonia. In cultures where exhumation has remained a living practice up to the present (the Greek culture, for instance), it has probably also solved problems linked to the fear of the dead, since part of the person's skeleton is posthumously reincorporated into the society of the living, in the shape of an amulet or a talisman. The relevant rituals have been performed to the accompaniment of laments. The final part of the article will take a look at certain textual examples of the Setu laments for the dead, which may have preserved a distant memory of the practices connected with exhumation.

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Introduction

In modern culture, several archaic practices have either fallen into oblivion or else been restructured beyond recognition as concerns their function, manner of performance, and meaning. Several one-time religious customs that would once have determined a large part of a person's everyday behaviour, are now discussed either in a poetic key or as artistic fictions. Thus the acute tenets of yore, together

with the folklore genres (laments, invocations, folk tales, etc.) that used to ornament, comment upon, and make sense of them, as well as ways of behaving at the turning points of human life (e.g. birth, death, the rituals that accompanied changes in social status), may have dropped to the background, since the understanding of them and of the reality associated with them has transformed. The other approach characteristic of the modern person is to conceive of the archaic or the culturally different through an egocentric, unifying prism based on his or her personal habits and understandings. Probably this commonsensical feature has also found support from an Enlightenment-inspired desire to see human beings of all times as similar in all respects both psychologically and culturally. Still, not everybody is equal to the demand of seeing human beings in their spatial and temporal context – the project launched by the Annales school and requiring both knowledge and the desire to know.

Undoubtedly, death and everything related to it constitutes one of such constantly changing and highly culture-specific areas. The fact that death is a phenomenon that concerns each and every one of us means that cultural questions and answers concerning the essence of death, the position of human beings and communities related to it, and the corresponding views of what happens after death, have always existed. The scientific and/or highly symbolical (and frequently not telling very much) explanations need not bear much resemblance to the religiously concrete and relatively non-mystical views that prevailed or still prevail in traditional (or archaic) cultures. Various conceptions, however, have been employed not only in situations of death, but have also determined and influenced a very broad range of other areas of human life.

The present paper focuses on the genre and practice that have accompanied death and a number of liminal rites in general – laments and lamenting. Central to the discussion are examples of the said genre and practice in Balto-Finnic and North Russian cultural areas. The corresponding traditions of other regions will be referred to as useful parallels for delineating and discussing the research hypotheses. In its various manifestations, lamenting offers opportunities for intercultural comparative research, allowing for a hypothetical modelling of death-related views and tenets that have survived till our days only in fragmentary form. From an interdisciplinary point of view, such a discussion allows to combine folkloric, archaeological, anthropological, and also psychological, knowledge.

An approach from such an angle is also relevant for the Estonian culture and its more ancient history. On the one hand, lamenting has not survived in the Estonian cultural space as a living practice. On the other hand, there is no doubt that this universal phenomenon has existed here in earlier times.¹ Lamenting has, however, been preserved up to the very recent past or even the present among the Estonians' closest linguistic relatives – the Setu and other eastern Balto-Finnic

¹ The earliest report of it, of 1208, comes from the *Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*; some solitary folklore texts referring to or resembling laments have been recorded in eastern Estonia even as late as the beginning of the 20th century (cf. Tedre 2000, 228 f.).

peoples, such as the Votians, Izhorians, Ingrian Finns, Karelians, and Vepsians, where an areal symbiosis is taking place with North Russian regional cultures (cf. Chistov 1982, 109 ff.) in which the Orthodox superstratum has helped conserve several archaic features. The present article is an attempt to make sense of this folkloric phenomenon in archaic cultural contexts, associating it, among other things, with some references to archaeology.

The function and problem of the burial lament as a folklore genre

A central problem to be discussed here is the main theme of lamenting – is it an expression of personal grief or a more general effort to restore interrupted cohesion and balance? The answer would undoubtedly be that both aspects are intertwined in it, but the problem is, which of the two is dominant, and under what circumstances? Even when seemingly expressing only personal grief, a lamenter using the traditional language of the laments cannot do without certain conceptions crystallized in the words over the centuries, which, whether s/he likes it or not, speak a far more general archaic tongue than any egocentric problems s/he could raise (cf. Honko 1978, 80 f.). At the same time, every single case springing from a human life and cast into the traditional language of the lament demands on each occasion a new interpretation according to the abilities of the performer and/or experiencer, in order to be understandably and validly performed in each particular case.

A good example of such polyphony of the lament text is a lamenting session recorded by myself at a North (Onega) Vepsian cemetery in 2005 (village Yashezero, see Arukask & Lashmanova 2009). The performance – lasting over half an hour and consisting of 185 verses – combined traditional themes, such as the ritual waking of the deceased, the addressing of deceased kinsfolk, etc., with deeply personal concerns, primarily the desire to ward off the deceased person's nightly visits. The latter problem could, in the given case, be viewed both as a matter of traditional-general and of personal-particular nature. Certainly, however, the cause of lamenting was real, as was also the desire to find a solution through lamenting. The folkloric practice was represented here in its original function of restoring order; in communication with the otherworld, the borders between the two realms were (re-)established so as to avoid unforeseeable consequences and primarily guarantee the well-being of the living.

Witnessing the presentation of the aforementioned lament was an impressive experience due to its real-life truthfulness. I have also had the opportunity to witness and record other Vepsian lamenters. At different sessions, I have had the chance to witness different degrees of empathy and orientation – from deep personal (albeit also evoked) spiritual feelings to “merely” technically masterful observances. The latter, although perhaps less convincing as to their “artistic empathy”, have nevertheless also been relevant and realistic, since during them, too, an authentic

act of communication ordering the relations between the spheres of the living and the dead has taken place.

From the viewpoint of archaic society, the psychological aspect of the laments has obviously been of more secondary nature (see also Alekseevskij 2007). The relatives have rather been known to see to it that the lamenter does not strain her senses too much, cautioning her or holding her back in situations appearing more critical. That latter behaviour I have had a chance to observe myself. Therefore, (semi-) professional lamenters have had a secure role in traditional societies, guaranteeing with their poetical and technical mastery both the successful accomplishment of the ritual and its emotionally rational calibration.

On the basis of the aforesaid, I would point out two main causes as departing points for lamenting in connection with death:

- the need to restore interrupted social cohesion;
- the archaic (albeit also very human) fear of the dead.

The first cause – the need to restore social cohesion – has been analysed with functional complexity by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown. In his famous study on the Andaman islanders, he notes that each lament and the embracing that precedes it (either upon a reunion after a long separation, in celebration of making peace in tribal wars, at the end of a mourning period, upon the exhumation of the deceased, getting married, or in initiation rites; Radcliffe-Brown 2006, 151 ff.) is essentially a way of restoring the relations that had been temporarily broken off. In various situations of real life listed above, the former continuity has, in principle, been interrupted – friends have drifted apart, tribes have gone on war-path, a person has died, the bereaved one has gone into mourning, the remains of the dead have been brought out of the grave, unmarried status has ended, a previous social status has come to an end. Understandably, in such situations the deeper task of the lament goes far beyond the expression of personal feelings. The one who has been away is wanted back into shared life, no matter what the new social form might be. The social ties that had temporarily been slackened, either because of circumstances or affect, are again tied close through the lamenting, and thus the lament would be an expression of unity rather than of rupture or end.

Arnold van Gennep (1984) who made a significant contribution into the theory of ritual a hundred years ago, distinguished three main phases in each liminal rite: separation, transition, and incorporation. The main participant in each rite would thus be the person whose status is undergoing a change – the deceased, the person entering marriage, or whoever else who is being initiated, whose social quality, position and also respective physical location are undergoing significant changes. When dealing with burials and death, we need not in this connection have in mind only the deceased one, who is being transferred from this world into the realm of the dead by means of a transitional phase, but equally also the person(s) close to him/her whose social position, particularly in traditional societies, no longer needs to remain the same. Often, it is precisely the person closest to the deceased who manifests his/her transformation through lamenting, unless that task is fulfilled by a specialist, the aforementioned (semi-) professional lamenter, instead.

Thus also in the Balto-Finnic cultural space the principal characters, the living as well as the dead, who participate in lamenting rites can be conceived as subjects changing their social role and personal identity, or as objects forced to undergo such change (Fig. 1). Although the modern common-sense view tends to conceive of death as the end of existence, a mutual typological similarity of liminal rites can be brought out in traditional cultures, which on the textual plane is expressed in an archetypical identity – going even as far as similar usage of words and images – of laments used in different kinds of rites. Thus, for the archaic mentality death and weddings², for instance, are far closer phenomena than for a modern person, since the archaic mind essentially does not recognize any absolute end to anything (human existence, the world), but rather views changes as transitions from one state to another. So-called “success” is never constituted in it by a triumphant finale of the kind we see in fairy tales, but by a successful transformation which must, among other things, be guaranteed by the sustained nature of the ritual.

On the basis of what has been said so far, we can conclude that in the more archaic culture associated with laments, we should understand death rather as a state than a fatal rupture – even if some personal and lyrical segments of the lament



Fig. 1. Vepsian woman performing a lament. Photo by Minni Saapar, 2010.

² On the similarities between death and weddings, and of the corresponding rituals, see Honko 1974, 52; Bernshtam 1979, 140 ff.; Chistyakov 1982, 119 f.; Bajburin & Levinton 1990; Buzin 2003, 156; Danforth 2006, 157 ff.

texts contradict such a view. Thus, we should indeed differentiate between the dynamic death concept of archaic cultures and the modern static attitude, in which emphasis is laid mainly on the symbolic aspect. Thus, in a traditional culture no personal experience is ever merely personal, but dependent on the cultural habitus. A lament is also a fulfilment of cultural expectations, both of the living and of the dead. A lament also requires an addressee/addressees among the living, and in extreme cases when there are no longer any, the person's own micro-universe will do, as I had a chance to witness during the aforementioned fieldwork of summer 2005, in Onega Vepsia, while recording the lamenting and death-related conceptions of a woman living in solitude. Although Lauri Honko has, in his tripartite classification of rituals (1979, 372 ff.), described liminal rites as mainly centred on the individual, it must be noted that a significant role in lamenting as a performance is, at least in a funeral or commemoration situation, played by the community as the audience whose presence and existence the lamenter consciously takes into account.

In the section on laments of her monograph *The Pragmatics in Folklore*, the Russian folklorist Svetlana Adon'eva who, in the 1990s, did fieldwork in the Vologda oblast's Russian areas with a Vepsian substratum, discusses changes in the role and identity of the participants in the ritual, and their stereotypical reflections in specific lament texts (Adon'eva 2004, 216 ff.). She also characterizes the interpretability of the seemingly very personal phenomena in a broader social context. In the North Russian lament vocabulary, a changed/changing social status is marked by terms such as *sirota* (orphan), used for a close relation of the deceased (child, mother, father, sister, or brother); and *dedushka/batyushka* (grandfather), used for a deceased male person but marking more generally the fact that now he belongs among the ancestors, beyond the grave.³

The status of an orphan mentioned above brings with it certain legal, material and social obligations and rights; in the case of orphaned children, for instance, the right to pay more visits in order to find moral support or beg alms ("*hodit po miru*" – go around in the world/community), a behaviour not recommended to children living in normal circumstances. The words *gore-goryushka* (sorrow) often encountered in the Russian lament vocabulary mark, for the people surrounding the lamenter, an initiatory experience and a greater openness for him/her of the borders between this and the other world, signifying his or her changed status not only for the period of mourning, but for the whole life (Adon'eva 2004, 227 ff.). Thus, public lamenting is first and foremost a declaration of status change, which the collective is forced to accept. From that point on, the main character in that ritual is also something of an expert in the issues or events connected with dying that may befall the community in future. The orphaned child is a full and equal participant in visiting his or her dead parent's grave. That status is also charac-

³ On use of metaphors in Balto-Finnic laments see Honko 1974, 34 ff., 54 ff.; Nenola-Kallio 1982, 33 ff., 50 ff.; Stepanova 1985.

teristic of the motherless and fatherless orphans of Balto-Finnic necromantic Kalevala-metric songs, who are charged with the task of mediating between different spheres.⁴

The lamenter's role as a mediator between the worlds, but also as the guide who leads the deceased into otherworld, has – according to an Ingrian-Finnish example – been analyzed by Lauri Honko (1978). Honko points out the lamenter's active participation not only in the role in establishing and delimiting the respective spheres of the living and the dead, but also in the role of the (shamanic) guide leading the deceased into the otherworld. Instead of a lyrical mourner, we here have an active role whose agency largely forms a key to the success of the liminal rite.

The change of social status is accompanied by a change of the identity of the ritual's main participants or world view which, as we saw above, acquires new dimensions. After the interruption, social cohesion needs to be restored or, in other words, the person redefined by the ritual must learn a new social role that would harmonize with what is preordained for him or her. The Estonian word *osa* (share, part) in the sense of fate or destiny agrees pretty well with the archaic concept of the preordained – it is something divisible and at the same time, redivisible (cf. also the Russian *dolya*/share, lot ~ *delit/divide, distribute*; or the Latin *moira*/fate ~ Russian *merit*/measure ~ Estonian *määrama*/determine, ordain, mete out). Following the preordained path has also conceptualized the terms *oma elu* (one's own, i.e. right kind of, life) and *oma surm* (one's own, i.e. right, death). Since in the animistic system of beliefs everything was shared and divisible, there has also existed a notion concerning the limit (that is, age) up to which a person has the right to stay in this world, which in its turn has legalized ritual killings and suicides. Not always would a person live the appropriate length of his/her days, it might also come to pass that s/he exceeds the right measure (cf. Sedakova 1990). Rudiments of that conception can still be found in the comments of elderly informants who, although aware that from a Christian viewpoint their yearning for death is sinful, nevertheless sense that in the archaic, “meted out” world it is in a way an even graver misdeed to live on as a feeble old person.

Women's ritual suicides after the death of their husband – the breadwinner and protector – have constituted normative behaviour not only in Indian culture. The widowed woman's duty to follow her husband has been motivated economically, religiously and socially – she has become a burden to her community and it has been her duty to follow her master, together with the other appropriate possessions; on the social plane, however, ritual suicide may also have been associated with preordained role behaviour. Such widows' suicides were also known in pre-Christian Russia (cf. Bernshtam 1979, 140 f.), and as such, this

⁴ That kind of a character is, in some Estonian songs of *regilaul*, also called *ilmätütar* (“the world's daughter”). About Estonian and Votian necromantic Kalevala-metric songs, see also Valk 2000; Lintrop 2001; Arukask 2004; 2009.

conception⁵ may have made its way into the north Eurasian lament poetry – an issue we shall return to later in the current paper.

Communication with the otherworld

The deceased him/herself is a “colleague” of the lament rites’ orphan, in the sense of being another border-crosser, albeit in a different direction: in the situation where s/he is, on commemoration days but also on the mornings s/he still spends in his/her home, woken up with specific lament formulae and certain observances, in order to go on communicating with him/her. One widely known way of waking the deceased consists in making sweeping movements, for example with a towel, over the grave and/or dead body (Fig. 2). Sweeping or raking has been interpreted as an imitative-magic rite aimed at provoking the elements of the four cardinal directions and of thunder – the powers necessary to re-evolve the original act of creation in the world order. As Mircea Eliade has pointed out, each ritual re-enacts the original act of creation (1959, 68 f.), as we can observe also in the given case. The activity imitating sweeping has, on the verbal level, been accompanied by corresponding lament formulae. The North Russian laments begin by invoking the winds to come and wake up the deceased one:

<i>Уж ты дай-ко богородица,</i>	<i>Oh, Mother of God, give</i>
<i>Только ветры неустойные.</i>	<i>Restless winds only.</i>
<i>Уж вы повеите, ветерочки,</i>	<i>Oh, flow winds,</i>
<i>Разнесите-ко песочки!</i>	<i>Scatter the sand!</i>
<i>Ты раскройся, гробова доска,</i>	<i>You, stave of coffin, open up,</i>
<i>Покачнись-ко тело мертвое,</i>	<i>Incline yourself, dead body,</i>
<i>Ты, личушко же блеклое!</i>	<i>You, white face!</i>
<i>Уж ты дай-ко богородица,</i>	<i>Oh, Mother of God, give</i>
<i>В ясны очушки-то зреньице,</i>	<i>Sight to the bright eyes,</i>
<i>В уста же – говореньице,</i>	<i>Speech to the mouth,</i>
<i>В белы ручушки – маханьице.</i>	<i>Waving to the white hands,</i>
<i>В резвы ноженьки – хоженьице!</i>	<i>Walk to the fast legs!</i>
<i>/.../</i>	<i>/.../</i>

(Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941, 109).

As we noted, the primordial elements (roaring winds, rumble and clatter) have not only been described in laments, but also imitated in practice. The above-mentioned Onega Vepsian lamenter also made wind-raising sweeping movements over the grave; upon arriving on the grave, she also pronounced the formula,

⁵ On the ethnical level, this kind of preordained (by omens) submissiveness may have brought about voluntary self-destruction of whole ethnic groups feeling that their time was running out. A characteristic example of that in the folklore of the peoples of North Russia is the theme of the Chuds’ self-burials (cf. e.g. Pimenov 1965, 117 ff.; Oinas 1969a; Ligi 1980).



Fig. 2. Vepsian woman sweeping ritually the grave monument. Photo by Madis Arukask, 2008.

“Здравствуй дедушка, Христос воскрес! Все покойнички пришли” (Welcome, daddy, Jesus has risen, all the deceased have come), as though thereby carrying yet again out the cosmogonic waking act, the specific function of which was to begin communication with the deceased in a customary manner (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941, 109; also Honko 1974, 29 f.; Bajburin & Levinton 1990, 82 f.; Chistov 1994).

The microcosmic counterpart of the world’s (re-)generation is the waking of the dead in order to communicate with him/her – in order to send messages to the otherworld, ask for blessings to this world, solve personal problems. In a Karelian epic song, Lemminkäinen’s mother wakes her son from the dead on Tuonela river, by raking his body parts; and the present-day visits to the graves in Estonia involve as the first and obligatory part, cleaning and ordering it – sweeping and raking – before it is considered appropriate to address the deceased one, in our thoughts. Thus, our modern behaviour in cemeteries also exhibits archaic features

which follow the blueprint of waking up the deceased one and communicating through lament. Even where lamenting itself has dropped out of the culture or is ideologically suppressed,⁶ the communication code of laments and the corresponding register in relevant situations need not be lost.

This waking up of the deceased serves a preventative purpose. The lost one is thereby temporarily afforded the status of a guest to this world. Thus, his/her relationship with this side of the grave is temporarily legalized, or at least an attempt is made to avoid his/her possible appearance as a non-guest – the revenant, the undead. The “vocabulary” of lament motifs of various peoples is rife with prayers, threats, promises, and flattering – all aiming (or having been aimed, in cases where the more modern lamenter no longer “remembers” it) at gaining control over the comings and goings of the dead. In Estonian customs, such predetermined times for waking and commemorating the dead have fallen into oblivion; generally only the “all souls’ time” (*hingedeaeag*), operating according to the same logic, has been preserved. In the folk belief systems with an Orthodox superstratum, however, the commemoration days are known and observed more exactly.

Accordingly, the lamenting session as such constitutes an example of legal communication with the dead, opened and closed by calling up the dead one, discussing various subjects with him/her and then sending him/her back. This guarantees control over possible unexpected projections from the otherworld, a problem that has always been acute in traditional (Orthodox) folk culture (cf. Stark 2002, 75 f., 138 ff.). Even if a great part of the textual body of some given lament consists of the lamenter’s personal and deeply tragic complaints over his or her present situation and misery, it is nevertheless not quite identifiable with, say, a modern person-centred posing of the problem – as it is represented, for example, in the popular ballad genre (cf. also Arukask 2009). Laments combine the description of one’s own personal distress and misery with accusing the dead – part of the sorting out of power relations between the two worlds, or the diplomacy relevant to it. Thus, a very practical magical combat between the here and the afterworld goes on in laments, a combat in which the lamenter is a kind of gate-keeper and medium. Setu laments include attempts to bring death to justice, and the attitude towards a recently departed person may be quite aggressive. The note of accusation is also very characteristic of Russian laments performed immediately after death (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941, 106 f.).

It seems that it is in the central issues of burial laments listed above – in controlling the deceased’s returning to this world, and in restoring social cohesion – that the greatest ruptures took place as a result of the arrival of Christianity and, still later, the process of modernization. One indicator of this is the problem of

⁶ Particularly the folk cultures with a Lutheran superstratum (as, for example, Estonian and Finnish), have not, for religious reasons, favoured the Catholic “magical” subordination of the dead to clerical jurisdiction (cf. e.g. Martin Luther’s “Disputatio pro Declaratione Virtutis Indulgentiarum”, theses 8–29), the impact of which is visible also in the gradual suppression and disappearance of lamenting as a practice in the Finnish and Estonian cultures, for instance.

mourning or, more precisely, the difficulties faced by the *orphan* – the bereaved one – in finding a new identity; a process that took place more naturally in the environment of the animistic belief system. It is not always that (folk) Christianity can provide a coherent solution to all problems, or at least the quest for control over the deceased persons' behaviour may in some fields and some cultural areas turn out to be longer and more painful than in others. In the north Eurasian folk belief systems with an Orthodox superstratum, from Setu to Siberia, the commemoration times and length of mourning period have, nevertheless, been settled. One temporal boundary may have been the Russian *sorokaust* or Karelian *kuusnädal*: a 40 day period at the end of which the deceased's soul was supposed to have departed from this world (Honko 1974, 40 f.; Joalaid 2000, 266 ff.; Buzin 2003, 168 f.). The first anniversary of death, the second significant boundary, has marked the end of customary lamenting and mourning. The observance of later anniversaries (3, 9) has already been rarer. It seems, however, that the ritual ending of the mourning period has not been managed with equal success, particularly from the 20th century on – the time from when, however, we only begin to get more complete folkloric reports.

Exhumation in death culture

The relationship with the deceased is different in such cultures where the customs related to death involve the phenomenon of exhumation – digging out the deceased's remains, after a certain period, and providing them with a new identity as it were, re-initiating them into the society of the living in a new role, either as relics or amulets. As described by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown in his study of the Andaman islanders mentioned above, the part of the deceased that does not belong into the otherworld can be brought back to his/her relatives there through yet other rites including laments. That act puts a decisive end to any problems related to the unwanted appearances of the deceased, but also to the need of grieving his/her absence. As Radcliffe-Brown writes:

(t)he dead person is now entirely cut off from the world of the living, save that his bones are to be treasured as relics and amulets. The weeping over the bones must be taken, I think, as the rite of aggregation whereby the bones as representative of the dead person (all that is left of him) are received back into the society henceforth to fill a special place in the social life. It really constitutes a renewal of social relations with the dead person, after a period during which all active social relations have been interrupted owing to the danger in all contact between the living and the dead (Radcliffe-Brown 2006, 154).

Exhumation is not just an archaic cultural phenomenon characteristic of the “third world” peoples but familiar also to the peoples of southern Europe. The “lament belt” stretching from the Balkans to the White Sea (cf. Honko 1974, 14; Nenola-Kallio 1982, 16) indeed marks the last area in Europe where lamenting has survived, but the more southerly area is different from the northern parts precisely in that exhumation is practised there. It is true that in the modern world, where the dead in some cases can be buried only for a limited stretch of

time because of expensive burial plots, exhumation is making a weird sporadic renaissance elsewhere, too, but for our present purposes this is quite a different topic.

Loring M. Danforth has described exhumation and the lamenting practices accompanying it in modern Greek death culture, emphasizing again its essential similarity to weddings. The deceased one's skull is given a kiss of greeting and money is placed on it as though for a wedding gift. The returning of the remains into the society is comparable to the bride's leaving her home and entering public life:

(a)n exhumation is similar to a wedding in several respects. This is particularly true when the person whose remains are exhumed never married. The greetings of the skull at the exhumation by the kissing it and placing money on it corresponds remarkably to the greeting the bride and groom receive at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony, when those present greet the newly married couple with a kiss and pin money to their chest. /.../ The analogy between exhumation and wedding is also suggested by the fact that the movement in both rites of passage is one of the emergence. When the remains of a widow's husband are exhumed, she comes out into society. Similarly, when a woman marries, it is said that she will go out into society, or that her husband will take her out into society (Danforth 2006, 162).

Apparently some form of exhumation has been known in the Estonian burial customs, too. We know that skeletal remains found in stone-cist and *tarand*-graves have exhibited signs of having been used for other purposes or treated after burial. There are burials lacking skulls (e.g. Tõugu IIA and Tandemägi III graves – Lang 2007, 154); or others where the bones have been taken out of the graves for a time and something has been done with them (the Tõnija *tarand*-grave – Mägi 2005, 117; cf. also Lang 2007, 179 f., 221 ff.; Jonuks 2009, 173 ff.). Some graves have been unexpectedly empty of bones (e.g. the Ülpri *tarand*-grave – Lang 2007, 201 f.). Just like the graves themselves have served social purposes as landmarks and property marks, so their contents, too, can have been part of public social life either for ritual or practical purposes.

As for the manipulations performed with the deceased one's physical remains, only pre-burial washing has been preserved in the northern cultural area, as well as procedures of apotropaic or medical magic (like, for instance, combating the fear of the dead or treatment of "Bible bump"/ganglion cyst, called in Estonian *kooljaluu* – "dead person's bone"). The pre-burial touching or stroking of the dead (in contemporary times even more frequently of only the coffin) constitutes one of the last surviving relics of a one-time propitiation practice in which again lamenting played an important role. The repertoire of laments used on the occasion of death and the procedures accompanying it (from washing the body to interment and commemoration) has been relatively well elaborated among various peoples. Different stages of the observances have been accompanied by different lament themes and speech acts incorporated in them (cf. Ajuwon 1981, 277 ff.). In the laments used immediately after death, in the Karelian Russian tradition it has been common to express astonishment or ask for the reasons of leaving behind one's living relatives, as well as rebuke him/her for it (Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941, 106). Weeping has continued during the various stages of preparations for

the burial, made over three days. Upon carrying the dead body out, lamenters have described the journey ahead of him/her and invited him/her to make peace with the living in all the issues that might have arisen during his or her lifetime (ibid. 106 f.; on the motif of journey in Russian laments, see also Bajburin 1979, 116 f.; Chistyakov 1982; Nevskaya 1990, 137 ff.). The laments used on the way to the cemetery have contained messages to dead relatives, and while lowering the coffin into the grave, once again forgiveness has been asked for everything (Fig. 3).

In the Karelian tradition, lamenting could begin during the washing ceremony and again involve expressions of astonishment – addressed to the washers – over the causes for their activity (Honko 1974, 38). The lamenter being usually the person closest to the deceased one, has figured as an onlooker of the events, posing questions and commenting on things. Again, personal internal tensions have been solved in this form, while keeping the theme socially visible and at the same time holding a diplomatic ritual dialogue with the deceased person and through him or her, the afterworld. The same functions have continued, in different phrasing, through the following stages of the ritual and the corresponding laments addressed to the coffin-makers, grave-diggers, and bell ringer, side by side with whom the deceased one him/herself and the community of the dead have figured as addressees (ibid. 38 ff.).



Fig. 3. Vepsian graves look like high hand-hewn earthfills, resembling this way the dwelling for the dead. Photo by Madis Arukask, 2007.

It can be said that particularly up to the burial and the funeral feast, as well as throughout the forty days during which the deceased person's soul is supposedly moving between the two worlds, lamenting had thematically and functionally to reduce social rather than personal tensions, or rather, the personal has been allowed to take place only through social functionality. Later, outside of the framework of commemoration days and customs, the so-called occasional laments have been wept either on the grave or in ordinary daily environment, in which the complaining of personal problems may tend to increase. Almost half of the 185-verse occasional lament I recorded in Onega Vepsia, in the summer of 2005, consisted of personal complaints and fate and of recalling the good times spent together. Although in the given case more than a year had passed from the death of the lamented husband, the time had not reduced the lamenting widow's regret and grief; besides, she had problems connected with the appearances of the husband in her dreams and his nightly visits to their house. Thematic passages linked to the customs turned up rather accidentally in the lament, instead of structuring it. The occasional lament spoke primarily about the lamenter herself and her husband, neither of whom had quite successfully made the passage from the liminal phase of the ritual: one in the role of the *orphan*, the other in that of the *deceased*.

Thus what I propose is that particularly in such cultures that do not involve exhumation in the funeral rites (which would cover the Balto-Finnic and North Russian traditions), the two central problems of the lament genre mentioned afore: 1) the restoration of social cohesion and overcoming grief, and 2) overcoming the fear of the dead that obsesses the community of the living ever since the moment of death, remain unsolved. The Christianization of Europe has here been accompanied by a suppression of the archaic death culture, taking place in at least two stages. The belief in bodily resurrection has required that the body be buried intact and kept in peace, which may well have seemed shocking, particularly during the earlier centuries of transition, since the deceased one in his/her bodily form has evoked the greatest fear among the living, a fear that obviously explains the early cremation burials, but also other manipulations of the skeleton: the cleaning of its bones, taking its scalp, perhaps other similar procedures. The second stage would be constituted by the institutional separation of the worlds of the living and the dead, a separation suffered primarily by the Protestant cultural space and explaining pretty well the suppression and retreat of the lamenting as a most immediate communication channel and speech act, in it over the last centuries.

Genre problems and thematically interesting motifs of the lament texts

In the Baltic and North Russian area, the surviving lament traditions can be split into two groups according to their genre. The Karelian-(Vepsian)-North Russian traditions are rather autonomous and poetically well developed, as to their form. The monumentality of the laments of this region is outstanding, therefore they have also been described as epical (cf. Vinogradov & Lozanova 1941, 113 f.;

Honko 1974, 18 ff.; Chistov 1982, 103 f.). Leaving aside few exceptions, the Karelian laments exhibit no obvious similarities with the Kalevala-metric song tradition. In the North Russian laments there may be more carry-overs from the *bylina*'s, but still they are rather free from personal lyrics and flights of imagination. In the context of eastern Slavic culture, it is precisely this aspect in which the more southerly, as well as the Byelorussian and Ukrainian, laments are not comparable to those of North Russia.

The situation is quite different in Ingria and especially in Setu, where lamenting has become quite lyrical over time, and laments for the dead possibly also less bound to the stages of the ritual. In any case the orientation of the Setu laments for the dead has ever since the times of Jakob Hurt (i.e. since the end of the 19th century) been pretty much centred on the lamenter, thematically and functionally perhaps less concerned with the completion and success of changes in social status. Motifs and thematic blocks of the narrative Kalevala-metric songs can be encountered in the Setu laments in a manner which would be completely unthinkable in the Karelian lament tradition. It seems that only a small step still separates the Setu laments from becoming rather non-improvisational performances comparable to the wake and valedictory songs of the Hungarian funeral tradition (cf. Katona 1981, 80 ff.) or the waking laments collectively performed at South Slavic commemorations.

Regardless of what was said above, interesting motifs occur in the Setu burial laments, which in my view could be explained by the phenomena of death culture discussed earlier in this paper, and by forgotten parts of the ritual, such as exhumation. Towards the end of the article, I shall point out some of the more conspicuous.

In the Setu laments (as well as songs) there are textual motifs obviously referring to parts of the human skeleton. The importance of the parts of the human skeleton in the vocabulary of Setu burial laments has stressed also by Vaike Sarv (2000, 136). By way of example, I quote from a lament where a daughter is weeping over her mother:

*Kui näet iks mu, neio, ikvat,
sääļ silmi pühk'vät,
mullõ anna_ks jäl käsi kääpäst,
annaq sõrm sõmõrast!
Käega_ks ma aja armujuttu,
sõrmõga_ks ma sõna kynõlõ,
sys meelüs iks mino meeļekene,
sütüs mino süämekene.*

*When you see me, maiden, weep,
wiping my eyes,
stretch me a hand out of your grave,
give me a finger out of the sand!
To that hand then I'll talk sweetly,
to that finger I'll say some words,
then my mind will be calmed,
my heart will be healed.*

SL III 1848 (H, Setu 1903, 20 (12) < Helbi k. – Jak. Hurt < Miku Ode (1903)).

In this motif pretty wide-spread in Setu burial laments, the longed-for post-burial physical contact with a part of the deceased one's skeleton guarantees a kind of satisfaction or relaxation of tensions, corresponding to the function of ritual exhumation as exemplified above.

The possibility of bringing the deceased one back into this world is expressed by washing the body:

<i>Neio, tii_ks ma lipõ linnasist,</i>	<i>I, the maid, shall make lye of malt,</i>
<i>tii_ks ma vii verditsõ,</i>	<i>I shall make fermenting water,</i>
<i>leotõllõ ma_ks mant maa lõhna,</i>	<i>I shall soak the smell off you,</i>
<i>kaputist iks mõsõ kalmu lõhna.</i>	<i>I shall wash the smell of grave off your stockings.</i>

<i>Peläku-i_ks tarrõ tullõh,</i>	<i>Don't then fear when you come home,</i>
<i>kahiku-i_ks tarrõ kalduh!</i>	<i>don't cast an evil eye when you come home!</i>

SL III 1832 (H, Setu 1903, 173 (83) < Helbi k. – Jak. Hurt < Miku Ode (1903)).

With this example I allude to washing as a manipulation, just like ritual washing (and/or *vihtlemine*, swishing oneself with birch boughs) constitutes part of a liminal rite, not hygiene. The point of this motif in the given lament is the desire to recover the deceased breadwinner and supporter as a participant in the community of the living – not as the unforeseeable and unwanted visitor we spoke about earlier, the figure on which the archaic fear of the dead is grounded. Thus, the person is called back home here rather in the role of ancestor and protector that we saw in the process of exhumation, although at more recent times, that textual motif may have been understood rather as a lyrical utopia or a Christian allegory of resurrection (cf. Valk 2000, 258 ff.). The puzzling motif of melting-washing the hands and feet of the brother off his reins and stirrups as he returns home from war/the otherworld occurs also in the Setu Kalevala-metric *Brother's War Song*, causing embarrassment even to Felix Oinas in his attempt to explain it comparatively by searching for parallels in Slavic songs (Oinas 1969b, 114 ff.).

Naturally the death we encounter in the Setu laments, recorded at the end of the 19th century, is not a new state in the archaic chain of continuity, but a fatal end one cannot accept and must try and oppose, something that only Mary and sweet Jesus can help with:

<i>Kuul iks tegi kur'astõ,</i>	<i>Death was cruel,</i>
<i>katsko väega kalõstõ,</i>	<i>the pest very heartless,</i>
<i>kuul iks koolõt' kogonist,</i>	<i>death killed relentlessly,</i>
<i>maalõ vei viimätses,</i>	<i>buried in the ground,</i>
<i>jäti_ks ime ikma!</i>	<i>left the mother weeping!</i>

SL III 1860 (H, Setu 1903, 515 (57) < Kolovinna k. – Jak. Hurt < Martini Ir'o (1903)).

A motif repeatedly voiced in the Setu laments is yearning for death. No doubt the Setu lament belonged among the genres where the woman could (just like in lyrical songs) express her forbidden feelings and fantasies, among them the yearning for death. In the funeral situation, however, it need not have been just playing on the boundary of the forbidden, but probably (depending, of course, on the details) the yearning was at times realistic. But could we also trace here the archaic feeling of superfluity after the loss of the supporter as the other half of the whole, in all senses? Why should a genre not establish its deep-rooted imperatives for the performer, or putting it differently – what else could the stable preservation of

genres rely on, if not on the surprising recognitions and expressions opening up through the text in the relevant situation?

Conclusion

With the present paper I wished to demonstrate that by looking at what is expressed in a given folklore genre from an angle different from the habitual, we can set up argumented hypotheses, interpretations, and deductions concerning segments of tradition that may seem unclear or explainable as mere lyrical fantasies. In this sense, the burial lament is a thankful genre in which the common part between the real-life experience, custom, and poetic text is much “thicker” than in many other kinds of folklore, but also experientially much better understandable to everyone – whoever has had chance to experience actual lamenting in a form more profound than mere declamation.

Thus, the communicative function of laments has not consisted in mere channelling of personal affect, but even more in the protection of the communal interests of the living. Throughout the period from death to funeral, laments have controlled and secured the relations with the deceased one and the afterworld – a task they have also fulfilled during communication with the deceased one over the commemoration period. Thus, each lament session has also been yet another redrawing of the boundaries between the communities of the living and the dead, another reaffirming of the location and identity of each side. The lament texts are full of direct and hidden diplomacy and hints, the personal feelings in them have been cast into traditional formulaic language, the message of which, however, is rather of the communal kind.

Yet all this has not necessarily guaranteed an unproblematic communication with the otherworld. Fear of the deceased one and frequent inability to control it effectively, as expressed in various genres, has been known in the traditional folklore of all peoples. I presume that in fighting and overcoming the fear of the dead, exhumation – the re-incorporation of the deceased one into the world of the living through digging up his/her physical remains – has (had) a significant role. The Balto-Finnic and North Russian cultural areas lack reports of exhumation in historical times; archaeological data, however, allow to presume its one-time existence. Also, references to exhumation can be discerned in lament texts regardless of the fact that significant changes of meaning and interpretation may have taken place in them, over the centuries.

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Madis Arukask

SUHELDES ÜLE PIIRI: MIDA MATUSEITKUD VANADEST USKUMUSTEST KÕNELDA VÕIVAD

Resümee

Käesoleva artikli fookuses on surma ja muidki üleminekuriitusi saatnud folkloorne žanr ning praktika – itk ja itkemine. On keskendunud ennekõike näidetele läänemeresoome ja põhjavene kultuuriruumist, kuid paralleelainesena uurimis-

küsimuste püstitamisel ning käsitlemisel tuleb mängu ka muude piirkondade vastav pärimus. Sellisel lähenemisenurgal on tähtsus ka eesti kultuuri ja selle vanema ajaloo seisukohast. Ühelt poolt pole itkemist eesti kultuuriruumis elava praktikana säilinud, teisalt pole kahtlust, et see universaalne žanr ja praktika on siin varem eksisteerinud.

Traditsioonilises itkukeeles näiliselt vaid isiklikku leina väljendav esitaja ei saa läbi aastasade jooksul sõnadesse kristalliseerunud kontseptsioonideta, mis tahes-tahmata räägivad palju üldisemat arhailist keelt mis tahes enesekesksest probleemiasetusest. Surmaga seotud itkemise lähtekohana võib välja tuua järgmised kaks peamist põhjust:

- katkenud sotsiaalse sidususe taastamise vajadus,
- arhailine (ehkki samas ka üldinimlik) surnukartus.

Läänemeresoome kultuuriruumi itkuliste riituste peaosalistes – nii elavad kui ka surnud – on käsitletavat kui oma sotsiaalset rolli ja isiklikku identiteeti vahetavad subjektid või vahetama sunnitud objektid. Sotsiaalse staatuse muutumisega muutub ka rituaali peosaliste identiteet, omandades uusi dimensioone. Pärast vapustust tahab sotsiaalne sidusus taastamist ehk rituaalis uuestimääratlutele – nii lahkunule kui ka *orvustunud* lähedastele – peab selgeks saama ta uus sotsiaalne roll, kooskõlas ettemääratusega. Määratu järgi käimine on kontseptualiseerinud ka *oma* (st *õige*) *elu* ja *oma surma* mõisted. Kuna animistlikus uskumussüsteemis on kõik olnud jagatud ja jagatav, on eksisteerinud ka arusaam, mis piirini (st mis vanuseni) on inimesel olnud õigus siin ilmas viibida, mis omakorda on legaliseerinud rituaalseid surmamisi ning enesetappe. Lesestunud naise järgnemine oma mehele on olnud põhjendatud nii majanduslikult, usundiliselt kui ka sotsiaalselt. Sellised abilelunaiste enesetapud on tuntud olnud ka kristluse-eelses Venemaal ja sellisena on see kontseptsioon võinud jõuda ka põhjajaeuraasia itkupoessiasse, väljendudes itkudes esile tuleva surmaihana.

Itkuriituste *orvu* paariline teisesuunalise piiriületajana on lahkunu ise – seda situatsioonis, kus teda mälestamispäevadel, aga veel ka kodusolemise hommikutel, spetsiifiliste itkuvormelite ja teatud toimingutega äratatakse, et temaga siis edasi suhelda. Lahkunu selline äratamine teenib preventatiivset eesmärki. Kadunule antakse sellega ajutiselt külalise staatust siinilmas. Sellega legaliseeritakse ta suhte teatud ajaks siinpoolsusega ja hoitakse või vähemalt püütakse ära hoida ta võimalik ilmumine mittekülalisena – kodukäijana, elava laibana. Sellega on tagatud kontroll võimaliku ettearvamatus üle teispoolsusest, mis probleemina on traditsioonilises (külakristlikus) rahvakultuuris alati esil olnud.

Näib, et eelnimetatud itkukultuuri peaprobleemides – surnu tagasikäimiste kontrollimises ja sotsiaalse sidususe taastamises – on toimunud kõige suuremad kärisemised seoses kristluse tuleku ning veelgi hilisema moderniseerumisprotsessiga. Selle üheks indikaatoriks on leinaprobleem, täpsemalt mahajäänu, *orvu* raskused oma uue identiteedi leidmisel. Suhe lahkunuga näib teistsugune kultuurides, kus surmakombestikus on tuttav ekshumatsiooni fenomen: lahkunu maiste jäänuste väljakaevamine teatud perioodi järel ja neile n-õ uue identiteedi andmine, nende uues rollis taasinitsieerimine elavate sootsiumi kas reliikviate või amulettidena.

Ilmselt on ekshumatsioon mingil kujul tuntud olnud ka siinses varasemas matusekombestik. Teatavasti leidub kivikirst- ja tarandkalmetest leitud skeletijäänustel vahepealse muuks otstarbeks kasutamise või töötlemise märke. Leidub matuseid, kust puuduvad kolbad, luid on kalmetest vahepeal välja võetud ja nendega on midagi tehtud, on ka luudest tühje hauaehitisi. Nii nagu kivikalmed on olnud ühiskonna teenistuses omandi- ja maamärkidena, on ka nende sisu võinud olla osa avalikust ühiskondlikust elust kas siis rituaalsetel või praktilistel eesmärkidel.

Lahkunu füüsisega tehtavatest manipulatsioonidest on põhjapoolses kultuuriruumis säilinud vaid matmiseelne surnupesemine, aga ka surnu füüsi kasutades tõrje- või ravimaagilised protseduurid. Arvatavalt on lahkunu matmiseelne puudutamine või paitamine kaasaegses kultuuris viimaseid reliikte kunagisest lepituspraktikast, milles on tähtis koht olnud taas ka itkemisel. Neis kultuurides, kus surmakombestik ekshumatsiooni ei eksisteeri (seda siis ka läänemeresoome ja põhjavene traditsioonis), jäävad lahenduseta kaks itkužanris esile tulevat varem nimetatud põhiprobleemi. Euroopa kristianiseerimisega on siin kaasas käinud arhailise surmakultuuri tõrjumine. Usk ülestõusmisse on sundinud laipa tervelt sängitama ja tema rahu säilitama, mis on võinud eriti varasematel üleminekusajanditel šokeeriv olla, kuivõrd kadunu on oma lihalikul kujul olnud elavate silmis kõige kardetum.

Eelöeldule vaatamata leidub surnuitkudes huvipakkuvaid motiive, mis võivad olla seletatavad siin varem käsitletud surmakultuuri fenomenide ja unustatud rituaaliosade, muuhulgas ka ekshumatsiooni kaudu. Setu itkudes leidub tekstimotiive, kus on ilmseid vihjeid inimskeleti osadele. Neis tagab matusejärgne, tagaigatsetav füüsiline side lahkunu skeletiosaga mingisuguse rahulolutunde või pingelanguse, mis vastab rituaalse ekshumatsiooni funktsioonile. Võimalikkust kadunut siia ilma tagasi saada väljendatakse ta pesemisega. Vihjan sellega pesemisele kui manipulatsioonile, kui osale siirderiitusest. Selle motiivi mõte itkus on soov lahkunud kaitsja-katja tagasisaamine just nimelt elavate kogukonna osalisena, mitte ettearvatu ja ebasoovitud külalisena, millel arhailine surnukartus põhineb.

Itkude kommunikatiivne funktsioon pole niisiis seisnenud vaid isikliku afekti kanaliseerimises, vaid ennekõike elavate kogukondlike huvide kaitsmises. Itkud on kogu surmast matusteni kulunud perioodi jooksul kontrollinud ja turvanud suhet kadunukese ning teispoosusega, see ülesanne on neil olnud ka mälestamisperioodil lahkunuga suheldes. Iga itkuesitus on seega järjekordne elavate ja surnute kogukonna vahelise piiri taasmarkeerimine, kummagi poole ettenähtud asukoha ja identiteedi ülekinnitus. Kõik see pole siiski tarvitsenud tagada probleemideta lävimist teispoosusega. Rahvaluules tuleb sageli esile hirm lahkunu suhtes ja võimetus seda efektiivselt kontrollida, mis avaldub erinevates folkloorižanrides. Arvan, et surnukartuse tõrjumisel ja sellest ülesaamisest on/oli tähtis koht ekshumatsioonil, füüsilise säilme üleskaevamise läbi toimunud lahkunu taasinkorporeerimisel elavate ühiskonda, ning et seda on varem sel eesmärgil praktiseeritud ka meie kultuuriruumis.