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MATERIALITY OF MAGIC IN ESTONIAN AND FINNISH MUSEUMS

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Abstract: This paper discusses objects connected with folk magic and medicine found in museum collections in Estonia and Finland. Our perspective is comparative as we compare these collections to other sources and to each other. The focus is on what kind of objects are found in the museum collections and how these differ between the two countries. We also explore how these materials have been acquired and collated. While we see general similarities between the magic objects in the two countries, there are also notable differences: remains of bears stand out in the Finnish collections while fossils are common in the Estonian ones. Although these observations may reflect a true difference in magic traditions, there are still potential sources of bias in the collections. Even though the museum collections in both countries were formed with romantic national overtones, the interests of individual collectors and curators influenced them in various ways.

Keywords: Estonia, Finland, folk magic, folk medicine, materiality, museums

INTRODUCTION

> *… divination was done such that a brooch was put in a sieve which was rattled. The answer to the question asked was deduced by how the brooch bounced and where it stopped. … From this kind of lot casting, cunning people got the name lot-casters* (arpojat)*, which is always used in Russian chronicles of Finnish and Estonian witches.*
> (Krohn 1875: 30. Translated by S. Hukantaival)

In traditional academic discussions, Estonia and Finland are often seen as sharing similar cultural phenomena. These neighbouring countries belong to the same linguistic family and this linguistic background links them to other Finno-Ugric peoples. Similarities in prehistoric material culture, especially from the Late Iron Age, strengthen the connectivity of these regions. Since the thirteenth century, the different histories of the countries are more easily identified. Finland came under the rule of the Swedish Crown and Estonia was divided between the Danish kingdom, the Teutonic Order, and the bishopric of Riga. The countries were united under the same ruler twice in their history: firstly the Swedish Crown for a short period in the seventeenth century and secondly the Russian Empire in the early nineteenth century. Still, their unique cultural attributes stemming from the Medieval and Early Modern periods prevailed. Despite the historical differences, scholars of folk culture and religion have traditionally stressed a shared distant (pre)history (e.g., Talve 2004; see also Salminen 2009). This is further strengthened by the common view that folk customs and traditions are relatively conservative phenomena, mainly connected with local nature and not linked to changing administrative systems or urban culture. Such a background has only emphasized the view of Finland and Estonia being a common cultural region. Still, contrary to the view that emphazises similarities, there are significant differences in the folk customs, religion, and magic practices of the two countries.

This paper explores objects connected with folk magic found in museum collections in Estonia and Finland. In Estonia, the main collections of objects used for magical purposes are stored in the archaeology collection of the Pärnu Museum and the ethnographic collections of the Estonian National Museum (ENM) in Tartu, with only single artefacts held in various, mostly archaeological collections across the country. In Finland, numerous magic objects are preserved in several museums, mainly in ethnological[1] collections. For this paper, we chose two of the largest collections: that of the National Museum of Finland in Helsinki and the Museum Centre Vapriikki in Tampere. Some Stone Age objects used in later magical practices are also found in the National Museum's

archaeological collections and these are noted here as well. The focus of this paper is on what is represented in the material sources in Estonia and Finland and how this relates to folk magic paraphernalia depicted in other sources. We also discuss how the material sources have been collected and collated. Our perspective is comparative; however, since the Finnish and Estonian museum collections are formed differently, comparisons are approached from a critical viewpoint. Instead of proposing comprehensive results of the materiality of folk magic of these countries, this paper highlights some similarities and differences in the respective collections and in their formation.

MAIN RESEARCH TRENDS AND PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF ESTONIAN AND FINNISH MAGIC

Magic has not been a popular subject of study with Estonian scholars, even though the earliest studies date as far back as the nineteenth century (Holzmeyer 1872; Buch 1897; Schroeder 1906). The nineteenth-century research of local "exotic savages" (Plath 2008) has set a national discourse that has continued to this day – the majority of the relevant studies focus on *Estonian* folk religion and magic. Such an ethnic approach is problematic in many aspects, as it ascribes magical practices only to ethnic and rural Estonians, ignoring similar practices among the contemporary multi-ethnic nobility despite available records already since the Middle Ages (e.g., Jung 1879: 14; Jürjo 2004: 185; Lukas et al. 2022).

This national approach makes it difficult to discuss Estonian folk magic in a broader European context. Contrary to Eastern Europe, the researchers' focus in the West has been on educated (book-learned) magic, while folk magic has been overlooked (Rider 2015: 303). The reason for such a distinction comes from differing source materials – a rich, sophisticated, and highly appreciated corpus of written materials dominates in Western Europe, compared to Eastern Europe, where such a corpus is absent and the emphasis is on orally transmitted folk customs and associative magic, with a clear national approach. Nevertheless, as folk customs, including folk magic, became one of the cornerstones of Estonian national identity in the 1920s–1930s (Johanson & Jonuks 2018), folk magic gets mentioned with more positive connotations here and there, especially in popular textbooks and novels. However, in academic studies magic has continued to be a marginal subject (Kõiva 2011, 2019; Hiiemäe 2012).

Similarly, all of the efforts to collect folk culture in Finland in the late nineteenth century were influenced by national and the need to preserve and display the unique history of the Finnish people. However, the research paradigm that

came to dominate folk culture studies in the early twentieth century was the historic-geographic or Finnish method that aimed to reconstruct the original "ur-forms" of folklore texts and to trace their place of origin and migration patterns (Krohn 1971; Wilson 1976; Dégh 1986). This called for large collections of material and a comparative approach. Thus, classic studies on folk culture include numerous examples of similar customs elsewhere in Northern Europe, and especially among other Finno-Ugric language groups (Harva 1948; Haavio 1967). Folk religion was understood as a relic of some previous religion. The prominent folklorist Kaarle Krohn believed that most of the late nineteenth-century folk religion was a remnant of medieval Catholic practices and beliefs, with only folklore about ancestors showing traces of "pagan" times (Krohn 1915). Still, the search for the "pagan" ethnic religion would dominate most of the classic discussions in Finland.

The study of magic in both countries was for long overshadowed by the interest in mythology and folk songs as "higher" forms of folk tradition. In spite of this, the Finnish Literature Society published an instruction booklet as a guide for collecting magic as early as 1885, with new editions in 1894, 1911, and 1936 (Mustonen 1936 [1885]; Stark 2006: 119). Similarly, one of the leaders of national awakening in Estonia, Jakob Hurt, published "A call to wakeful sons and daughters of Estonia" "to collect folk customs and folk religion, including magic", in 1888 (Paar Palwid 1888). Interestingly, magic is not defined in any way in these publications. In the Finnish booklet, topics are listed under such headings as "dwelling and household", "fishing and fish", "hunting and forest dwellers", "cattle and animal husbandry", or "agriculture". At the end of the booklet, we find headings like "the cunning person and lot-caster, divination and magic", "guardian spirits and heroes", "offerings and special places", and finally, "health, sickness", and "death". The lists include topics such as "the hunter's relationship with the forest guardian spirits, hunting offerings, addressing the forest guardian spirit, etc.", but also simply "the hunting dog, choosing the puppy, raising it, and caring for it" (Mustonen 1936 [1885]).

In this way, a wide range of everyday customs and beliefs, but also knowledge of herbal medicine, was implicitly classified as magic. In the call by Jakob Hurt, the final section under the heading "Old folk religion and superstition" holds a comprehensive questionnaire about different "supernatural" beings, beliefs about animals and weather phenomena, as well as beliefs about plants, minerals, and household utensils. According to Hurt, old customs and practices are very often connected with "superstition", which explains the detailed interest in daily practices. After the work of Jakob Hurt, magical beliefs and customs were meticulously collected by the questionnaires of the Estonian Folklore Archives (ERA) since its foundation in 1927. A slightly different approach was

taken in the collection policy of the Estonian Health Museum: in its call at the beginning of the 1920s, it encouraged the collecting of artefacts used in folk medical procedures (see Tupits 2009). Similarly, the Põltsamaa Museum placed an advertisement in the local newspaper in 1926, attempting to collect different artefacts connected with traditional life, including curing implements, like cupping and bloodletting equipment, ear stones, coins to cure swellings, etc. (Piisang & Tänav 2007: 207). As a result, single objects that we classify as "magic" have reached various museums in Estonia.

Both in Finland and Estonia, academic discussions on folk magic and its associative and cognitive magical practices have been dominated by folklore texts concerning incantations, cunning people, or specific topics such as guardian spirits (Hästesko 1910; Loorits 1932; Haavio 1942; Siikala 1994; Stark 2007; Issakainen 2012; Kõiva 2017). Some more comprehensive studies exist as well (e.g., Stark 2006). Due to the focus of folklore studies on oral culture, only a few papers discuss objects described in oral descriptions of magical practices (Rantasalo 1956; Valk 2004; Issakainen 2006; Piela 2011; Kuningas 2014). Historians have discussed folk magic using the evidence from witchcraft and superstition trial records (mainly from the seventeenth century), but here as well the objects associated with such practices are seldom mentioned (Nenonen 1993; Toivo 2016; Uuspuu 1937; Reoli 1964; Metsvahi 2015; Ruben 2016). As noted, the magic objects in Finnish museums mostly belong to the ethnological collections. However, after a few short publications in the early twentieth century (Sirelius 1906, 1921; Manninen 1933), ethnologists have largely overlooked these objects.

Lately, the materiality of magic has inspired discussions across Europe (Wilburn 2012; Houlbrook & Armitage 2015; Boschung & Bremmer 2015; Parker & McKie 2018). This trend has also reached Estonia and Finland, and this paper is part of this emerging avenue of research (Johanson & Jonuks 2018; Hukantaival 2018). In this paper, we see magic as everyday practices and beliefs, in which causality relies on symbolic, metaphorical, or metonymic relationships between phenomena. Within folk religion, magic refers to specific skills of influencing the interrelatedness of things in order to produce desired results in areas such as health, economy, or marriage. Often, these practices involve one or several material objects.

For this study, we have chosen artefacts accompanied by documentation that indicates magical usage. This approach helps the analysis of what kind of objects were used in folk magic but also what kind of objects were considered valuable enough to be collected and catalogued as "magical". In Finland, many local museums house a small selection of folk magic objects. The two most comprehensive collections (the National Museum in Helsinki and the Museum

Centre Vapriikki in Tampere) were chosen due to their representativeness and also since the magic objects in these two collections are classified in a way that makes them accessible for study. The National Museum of Finland has an old card catalogue for "magic objects" (*taikakalut*), which was used to find the relevant objects. The Museum Centre Vapriikki has an online catalogue (siiri.tampere.fi) where objects were selected using "magic object" (*taikaesine*) as the keyword. The objects in the collection of the National Museum of Finland were requested from storage and examined, while photographs in the online catalogue were relied on in the case of the objects in Tampere.

In contrast to Finland, the Estonian museum collections lack special catalogues for magic objects and these are dispersed throughout other sub-categories – jewellery items used for magic in the category of decoration, tools in the category of traditional life, etc. Many objects used for magical purposes are catalogued under the category of medical objects since healing forms a large part of folk magic. This means that selecting objects for this study was complicated. Even though most of the objects in Estonian museum collections are catalogued in the shared online database called Museums Public Portal (Museum Information System – MuIS, www.muis.ee), in many cases detailed information about the objects, and especially their use, is omitted. Thus, various keywords were used to discover magically used artefacts, e.g., *nõiakivi* (witch's stone), *ravikivi* (healing stone), and *piksekivi* (thunder stone), but the possibility remains that not all magically used items were detected. In all museums, paper catalogues as well as acquisition books and collection diaries (the latter in the case of the ENM) were used in parallel to electronic catalogues.

MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Finland

The two museums in Finland, the National Museum in Helsinki (KM) and the Museum Centre Vapriikki in Tampere (the Häme Museum collection, HM), house large ethnological collections of objects catalogued as being associated with folk magic. The objects that have been acquired and deposited at the National Museum and the (subsequently closed) Häme Museum date from the 1850s to the 1960s, with most objects belonging to the late 1800s and early 1900s. Here, the objects in question are identified as belonging to folk magic (*taikuus*) in the museum catalogues, with this categorization being attributed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the two museums, we find 451 main catalogue entries of objects used for everyday concerns: such as medicine,

to awake or eradicate love, to ensure good luck in livelihood and other daily activities, or as amulets protecting against harm. A few objects found within the collections are used for aggressive (curse) purposes: to destroy the growth of a field, the fishing equipment of a rival fisherman, or to punish a thief with a horrible disease. In addition, multiple Stone Age tools that have been used in magic practices of the same period are found in archaeological collections, and these are also addressed here (see also Hukantaival 2019). These objects were used by a wide variety of people: ordinary, uneducated persons, but also more specialized healers and cunning folk.

The National Museum of Finland (KM) was established in 1894 (until 1917 it was called the State Historical Museum) by combining the collections of the Historical-Ethnological Museum of Helsinki University, the university's student associations, and the Finnish Antiquarian Society (established in 1870). The collections of the museum of the university included folk medicine objects acquired by the Finnish Literature Society in connection with its efforts to collect oral culture. The ethnological collections of the students' associations formed the largest part of the new state museum. Students were encouraged to collect objects from their home regions during holiday breaks. Moreover, the student associations funded the collection work through scholarships. While the focus was on collecting folk costumes and decorative objects, some of the magic objects belong to these collections (Sihvo 1977). According to the museum's catalogue, 33 of the magic objects in the ethnological collections were deposited by the Finnish Antiquarian Society between 1876 and 1900. The largest number of magic objects that were added to the collection after the turn of the century were from the private museum of the temperance speaker Jalmari Matisto (Aaltonen 1933). In 1954, after the death of Matisto, 13 magic objects that he had collected during his speaking engagements were among the objects that the National Museum selected from Matisto's impressive ethnological collection. The magic objects received a small space in the exhibition of the National Museum, together with folk medicine objects (Kansallismuseo 1977: 61).

The student associations of Helsinki University were also behind the birth of the Häme Museum (HM) in Tampere (opened to the public in 1908), initiated by the archaeologist and politician Julius Ailio (who was curator of the Hämäläisosakunta, Tavastia Nation, an association of students from the Häme region). The collections were supplemented by scholarship holders and as a result of pleas to local communities through newspapers. In accordance with Ailio's vision, the ethnological section presented a wide scope of varying material culture with folk magic and medicine, forming their own subsection within the exhibition (Fig. 1) (Tirkkonen 2008, 2016). In fact, Ailio himself donated 15 magic objects to the Tampere collection (all from Utajärvi) in 1904. In 1907,

the Hämäläis-osakunta sent scholarship holders to Karelia to collect material and oral culture believed to have already disappeared in the Häme region, for example, incantations and magic objects. This interest inspired local collectors and two famous runo-singers,[2] Konsta Kuokka and Iivana Onoila, sold their private collections to the museum (Tirkkonen 2016: 24). Thus, 19 Karelian magic objects with quite detailed descriptions were acquired by the museum. The Häme Museum was permanently closed in 1998 and the Museum Centre Vapriikki now houses these collections.

Figure 1. *The early twentieth-century exhibition of Karelian magic objects at the former Häme Museum, Tampere. A bear skull and two bear paws are in the centre, surrounded by curiously shaped wooden objects. Below in the right corner is the skin of a flying squirrel. Photograph courtesy of the Finnish Heritage Agency, Ethnographic Picture Collection (KK1758:13, license CC BY 4.0).*

Other sources, contemporary to the museum collections, shedding light on the use of objects in folk magic and medicine in Finland, are the vast folklore collections of the Finnish Literature Society and the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland. However, as noted above, these oral tradition collections have not been published with a focus on the materiality of magic. Despite this shortcoming, it is evident that the types of objects depicted in this material represent a far wider array of choices than those in the museum collections (Ratia 2009; Piela 2011). Still, most, if not all, types of objects found in the museum collections also appear in the recorded folklore. The witchcraft and superstition trial records of the late sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries are another source of information, but again the focus has not been on the objects themselves. Objects that occasionally appear in publications, however, are similar to the ones known in later folklore accounts and the museum collections. However, comprehensive studies of the folklore and trial records focusing on the material aspects would be needed for a proper comparison.

Estonia

The main collections of objects associated with magic in Estonia can be found in the Pärnu Museum and the Estonian National Museum (ENM), while only single objects connected with magic appear in other museums. The two mentioned major collections have not been collated with the purpose of curating magic items. In the case of Pärnu, the main influence was the local doctor Martin Bolz (1868–1917), who visited rural areas when treating patients in the early years of the twentieth century. As a man with antiquarian interests, he started to collect magic curing implements and antiquities, mostly Stone Age objects. In contrast to the general trend of the period, Martin Bolz did not only value the historical authenticity of objects (e.g., Stone Age axes), but also their contemporary use. As such he recorded stories of how rural people explained and used peculiar lithic objects in the early years of the twentieth century (Fig. 2). As a result, the Pärnu Museum has the largest collection of thunderbolts in Estonia (see Johanson & Jonuks 2018). Considering the large number of lithic axes collected from rural communities and deposited in other Estonian museum collections at the same time, it could be assumed they had similar folk belief backgrounds. However, as only the historical and seemingly scientific value of such finds was appreciated, the folkloric legends were not recorded and preserved. As a result, a number of possibly magically used lithic objects are stored with a scientifically correct, but rather incomplete label of "a stone axe" with only a few having been interpreted as being used as thunderbolts.

Figure 2. *An elliptical fire-striking stone from the collection of Martin Bolz (PäMu 3 A 519). According to the caption, it fell from the sky in front of the owner during a thunderstorm in 1872. It was kept at the owner's farm as a thunderbolt with great honour and it was only reluctantly given away. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2011.*

The background of the collection of magic objects at the ENM is different – the museum is an offspring of the late-nineteenth-century campaign to collect oral tradition and its main purpose was to collect and preserve the tangible and intangible culture of the Estonian nation. The latter is also the reason why this museum, different to all the other collections, also collected magically used objects and the stories behind them. However, folk magic was not specifically addressed even by this institution. Instead, magically used artefacts were catalogued according to their "primary" function; for example, there are a handful of brooches used for healing in the jewellery collection (Kuningas 2014). Medicine became one of the special topics to collect and as magic was part of folk medicine, magic objects were mostly catalogued in the collection of medical objects. Later on, other magically used artefacts (without a medical purpose) were also added to the same collection. As a result, the largest collection of magic objects in Estonia was formed, clearly dominated by the ones

with healing attributes. The majority of the objects were collected before World War II, while later additions are only occasional and rare.

The rest of the Estonian museums have only single objects that can be associated with magic, and even then, mainly with healing magic as following the collecting policy of the ENM. For example, two silver coins preserved at the Järvamaa Museum were used for scraping silver into water that was used to wash skin diseases (PM 1018 E 241 and PM 1019 E241). The archaeological collections of Tallinn University hold two ear stones that are fossils of bryozoans (AI 2643: 40–41). Two shaft-hole axes (AI 2671: 25, 3822: 17) and two adzes (AI 2490: 25, AI 3822: 12) in the same collection have been used as curing implements. The archaeological collection of the Estonian History Museum holds an elliptical fire-striking stone (AM A 130) and a shaft-hole axe (AM A 155) used to cure several illnesses. All these have a probable connection with the thunderbolt legend, but this has not been emphasized in the records. The single objects that are magical *per se*, such as a stone disc covered with zodiac-inspired symbols, are rather hidden and their magical potential is ignored and not exhibited (see Jonuks & Friedenthal 2020). So, with this evidence we can say with some confidence that magic has often been overlooked as a subject of study in Estonia and sometimes it was ignored when interpreting objects even when the context would suggest an association with magical practices. As a result, the material objects associated with magic found in museums do not represent the whole of what was actually present in the folk tradition.

The most comprehensive overview of folk magic can be found in the folklore collections at the Estonian Literary Museum. Several researchers have investigated charms (e.g., Kõiva 2019) and folk magic has been discussed in many studies, for example, in connection with specific illnesses, like erysipelas, also mentioning material objects (Veidemann 1985; Martsoo 2007), but a comprehensive overview, including folkloristic and material sources of magic in Estonia, is still missing. As a third corpus of sources for folk magic, though not much used, are newspaper articles, in which folk magic is often ridiculed in an unflattering manner (see Jonuks & Johanson forthcoming). This judgmental attitude aside, the newspapers present several examples that are evident neither in the collections of recorded folklore nor of material objects. In addition to this, a few material objects have been mentioned in historical sources about witchcraft trials, for example coins, copper rings, pieces of red woollen thread, green moss, dried bats, wax, salt, woollen thread, and stones (Reoli 1964: 57; Johanson 2018: 60, and references therein). As the purposes for collating these separate bodies of evidence were different, they complement each other, rather than provide the opportunity for comparison.

MATERIA MAGICA AND MAGICAL PRACTICE

Archaeologist Andrew T. Wilburn listed four classes of materials that were frequently employed in magical rites, *materia magica*, in Greek and Roman antiquity: 1) written or inscribed objects, 2) figurines and representations, 3) naturally occurring plants and animals (including parts of human bodies), and 4) household objects that have been repurposed for magical use (Wilburn 2012: 26). In both Estonia and Finland, the majority of the magic objects in the study collections fall into the last two classes – that of natural objects or artefacts of everyday usage (e.g., coins, brooches). Only a few examples are deliberately manufactured magic artefacts, such as figurines or objects with inscribed symbols. In Finland, the most common categories of objects associated with magic contained within the KM and HM collections (451 main catalogue entries in total) are animal remains (28%) and lithic objects (28%). More than half of the animal remains are parts of bears; for example, teeth (canines), claws, paws, windpipes, muzzle skins, skulls, penises, and even a heart. Where contextual information exists, most of these have been used either to heal an illness or as protection against harm. Windpipes of bears have been used to heal throat problems by pouring a liquid through them to give to the patient. These are common healing practices in Finnish folk magic, since other tube-like or holed objects have been used to transform some liquid into medicine by pouring it through the tube or hole while often visualizing a desired effect (such as curing constipation or urinary retention). In Estonia, the bear is represented by a single claw only, associated with uncertain "superstitious customs" (ERM 285:4). Another unique artefact, related to traditions recorded in Finland, is a seal's windpipe from Hiiumaa Island used to cure neck and throat problems (ERM 492:14).

In Finland, pig canines and snouts are the most common parts of domestic animals in the magic object collections but these are entirely missing from the Estonian material. The snouts have been used to heal skin problems by pressing the snout to the affected area or to ensure good crops by keeping it in a seed basket. One catalogue entry also mentions that girls would keep a pig's snout in their pocket to make them more attractive (KM KF2131). The pig canines have also been used in healing practises, but the catalogues give no details of how they were used. Of other domestic animals, the collections include two ox penises, one of a ram, and the foot of a rooster (KM KF2126–8; KF1554). According to the catalogue entries, a small piece of an ox penis is fed to a calf to make it a "strong eater", and pieces of a yellow rooster's foot are given as medicine to someone suffering from jaundice. In the Finnish collections, wild animal species are more common than domestic ones. In addition to bears, there are also snakes (vipers), frogs, squirrels, bats, elk, wolf, lynx, badger, stoat, mole, and some birds present.

Contrary to Finland, animal parts are not common objects for magical purposes in the collections of material objects in Estonia and they are rare in the oral tradition as well. The few existing objects were part of unique vernacular practices, in which suitable materials have been exploited, rather than part of systematic patterns of magical behaviour. For instance, the ENM collection of folk medicine holds a wolf's tail used to whip girls in the sauna to help them get married (ERM 35:1) or a penis of an ox was used to heal urinary problems of domestic animals (ERM 282:110). However, folklore records describe using animal body parts for protective and healing magic. Snakes, especially vipers, have been most popular in this respect; for example, vodka with a viper in it was a popular curing implement for joint problems and boils (see Kõivupuu 2004). In addition, body parts of frogs, cats, mice and rats and European minks as well as pieces of honeycomb are also present in the folk medicine records.

Although the majority of magic items were everyday utensils and natural objects, it does not mean that they were perceived as ordinary. Objects used in magical practices were somehow different and special. In the case of natural objects, it is often their appearance that made them special. In Estonia, the obvious example is that of fossils, one of the most popular kind of objects used in magical practises (roughly a couple of dozens are found in museum collections). These usually had a special form or texture, making them attract attention in the field to be picked up and ascribed certain supernatural qualities to. Because of this special form and/or texture, fossils have sometimes been associated with certain body parts and thus considered suitable for curing specific diseases. For instance, the conical fossils of Bryozoa are described as good at treating earache when the heated stone is put in the ear. The practice associated with Bryozoa is special among the magical practices in Estonia as this is the only example where one type of object is used to cure a specific illness – the fossil was heated and then put into the aching ear. Alternatively, hot steam resulting from pouring water on the heated fossil was directed into the afflicted ear. In the majority of the other examples, the data leads to the interpretation of how objects considered special are associated with different diseases on a very personal level (Fig. 3). There are no fossils in the two Finnish museum collections. The obvious explanation is the different geological background of the two countries, as the Estonian limestone is rich in various kinds of fossilized animal and plant remains, which are missing from the Finnish granite bedrock. One coral fossil is mentioned to have been donated in 1862, together with a cunning person's pouch (KM K754), but it is unclear whether these objects were connected. In any case, this coral fossil is not included in the "magic objects" card catalogue. It is notable that no other types of objects used to heal earache are present in the Finnish collections.

Figure 3. *a) The "stone-heart" (ERM 283:1) from Jõelähtme, northern Estonia, used as a healing attribute to treat boils. According to the catalogue entry of the object, a human has been transformed to stone by witchcraft and this is the heart. b) An ear-stone (ERM 502:124): "an aching ear was treated by heating the stone up, pouring water on it and the steam was directed into the ear". Photographs courtesy of the ENM.*

However, apart from fossils, various other lithic objects – quartz crystals, pebbles, and prehistoric stone artefacts – have been used for magical purposes in both countries. The most common stones found in the Finnish collections are natural, small, smooth, round or oval-shaped pebbles. Many of these are water-polished flint pebbles and they are most often labelled as "snake's court stones" (*käärmeenkäräjäkivi*). In addition to their appearance, the belief of how these stones were formed caused their special nature. According to folklore, vipers would pass a pebble from mouth to mouth during their court gathering in spring (Lehikoinen 2009: 199–201). Many of the catalogue entries refer to this story. As a result of the snakes' believed behaviour, the stone became a powerful object that was kept in the pocket as an amulet when travelling or going to a rural law court (Fin. *käräjä*). This type of artefact has also been documented as being used to heal pains and swellings on the skin by pressing the stone to the ailing area. In some cases, pebbles are called "raven stones" (Fin. *korpinkivi*, Est. *kaarnakivi*) as in folklore these were found in a raven's nest (Rantasalo 1956). The catalogue entry of seven raven stones in a knitted pouch at the Finnish National Museum repeats the popular story that the raven would bring the pebble from the Jordan River to revive its young if they had been harmed (KM K7928:59). These particular pebbles had been used to heal tooth problems. Snake's court stones and raven stones are almost absent among magically used artefacts in Estonia as well as in Estonian folklore records. Only a single raven stone exists, with the legend that a raven had brought it from the coast to its nest and it was used to heal swellings (ERM 7797).

In Estonia, the medical collection of the ENM also includes ten "witch's stones". Many of these are round or oval naturally polished pebbles, but in a few cases, we are dealing with completely inconspicuous pieces of limestone. According to the accompanying documents, only one had been used in witchcraft (ERM A 371: 14) and one for curing snake bites and against strokes (ERM A509: 6369). The rest had no information about their use whatsoever, despite the label of "witch's stone". However, of the seven thunderstones preserved in the ENM medicine collection, six had, according to the record, knowingly been used to cure different illnesses and the remaining case stated that "perhaps it was used for witchcraft" (ERM 16152). In some cases, it is also evident that the donators did not know how these peculiar objects had been used. For instance, a fossilized nautiloid (ERM A 353:3) that was recovered from a box in a granary together with a "meteor", was described by the original owners as "perhaps a medical implement". There are other similar cases, in which magical qualities are ascribed to peculiar-looking objects (often fossils) by collectors and donators without them actually having been used as such (Johanson & Jonuks 2018). This is especially pertinent for the witch's stones, as it appears that this label

may have been a general term for peculiar stones that may or may not have been used for magical purposes, but kept for some other reason and given or sold to the donators.

So-called "thunderbolts" form a broad category of objects represented at the Pärnu Museum and at the ENM. It is interesting to note the difference in usage – the catalogue entries of the thunderbolts at the Pärnu Museum state that thunderbolts were found and then kept at the farm or carried along as luck-securing amulets, while their healing ability is mentioned only rarely. True, Martin Bolz (1914) mentions a number of healing objects that people held at farms, but were unwilling to sell. The oral data of thunderbolts at the ENM, on the other hand, emphasize the curative ability of thunderbolts. Apparently, this variation is a result of the different collecting policies (see above), indicating the importance of understanding the curatorial processes behind the formation of the collections. While the ENM looked for curative objects, Bolz focused on Stone Age artefacts – both of these categories included magical use, but in a different manner.

In Finland, the lithic objects used in magical practices also include "thunderbolts". However, only a few (13 main catalogue entries) Stone Age tools that have been used as "thunderbolts" have been catalogued in the ethnological folk magic collections (Fig. 4). Instead, most of the known thunderbolts (191 entries) are included in the archaeological collections (see Hukantaival 2019). The KM catalogue even mentions, in connection with one pouch that originally contained some Stone Age tools together with other "witch's stones", that the prehistoric stones have been moved to the archaeological collection, thus dispersing the assemblage (KM KF472). Some Stone Age lithic objects, collected originally as thunderbolts, were also transferred from the ethnography collection of the ENM to the archaeological collections. Still, not all stone objects labelled as thunderbolts are Stone Age tools. The Finnish ethnological collections include thunderbolts that are whetstones, round pebbles, and natural wedge-formed stones. Estonian folkloristic descriptions also add shiny rocks and white pebbles to this class. In some cases, the stone is so worn from its use as medicine that it is not possible to assess whether it is a prehistoric tool or not. Slivers of thunderbolts were often shaved into a drink given to a patient, but the stones could also be heated and pressed against sore skin. These objects were also useful in protecting buildings from harm, controlling or putting out a fire, and ensuring good crops (Hukantaival 2016: 181–184; 2019; Johanson 2009).

Figure 4. *This Stone Age chisel that was kept in a leather pouch is one of the thunderbolts catalogued in the ethnological collection at the National Museum of Finland (KM K3495:5). According to the catalogue entry, it had been kept in the seed basket during sowing, in the drying barn when the sheaves were dried, and in the inside chest pocket when visiting the rural court of law. The master of Kurhila farm in Hollola donated it to the collector Atte Salmi in 1897. Photograph by Timo Ahola 2020. Ethnological Collections, National Museum of Finland.*

Wooden formations form 12% of the Finnish folk magic collections while in the Estonian collections they are represented again only by a small number of examples. The largest group of wooden formations is small natural wooden gnarls found under the bark of a tree, often called "things that have not seen the sun" (Fin. *päivännäkemätön*). These objects have mainly been used to heal swellings or boils by pressing the gnarl onto the skin. There are also three plates made of oak, used in diverse healing practices (KM KF1303; KF1293; HM 1220:10). Other common wooden formations are branches or roots that have grown to form a circle (Fin. *umpipuu*). This is a widely-known practice, represented in various places, including documentary sources from the Early Modern Age (e.g.,

Vaitkevičius 2009). In Finland, they were used to heal constipation and urine retention by pouring a liquid through the hole and giving this medicine to the patient. The only Estonian example is labelled as a "witch's eye" without any more elaboration (ERM 446:1462). Other objects in this group include burrs (that are not called by the same name as the smaller gnarls), witches' brooms, and other curiously shaped natural formations. Again, it was their curious shape that marked them out for use in magical practices.

The special qualities of an object can also be linked to its old age. In Estonia, an example of this is the usage of a copper coin, the scraped copper filings of which were used to help bones to recover, adding that "older coins were used since modern coins do not consist of pure copper" (ERM 14356). A common criterion to consider something special is also to preserve its original condition; for example, a fragment of a belt, donated to the ENM as a century-old object used to cure erysipelas, came with the comment that the belt "will lose its healing power when washed" (ERM 282). Old objects often appear in the folklore of magic, where old prints of the Bible and other books are preferred in magical rituals (Kõiva 2017: 144). The use of old objects is also documented in Finland. This is often motivated by a preference to use objects with an unknown maker (Hukantaival 2016: 140). Still, the catalogue entries reveal that many of the magic objects in the museum collections had been passed down within families for several generations.

In addition to the broad natural-material-based categories, various everyday utensils occur as objects used in magic. Again, the Finnish collections provide more diverse categories of artefacts. In Estonia, everyday objects associated with magical practices have only rarely reached museum collections; however, oral tradition suggests that these were often used for healing, divination, and apotropaic magic. The everyday objects include, for example, keys, knives, scissors, fire-making equipment, and spindle whorls. In Finland, for instance, a fire steel was tied to a horse's tail when bathing it to protect the animal from the malicious water spirit called *näkki* (KM KF271). A cowbell to ensure that the bull stayed with the cattle herd was used in the following manner: salt was carefully poured through its hoop after which the salt was put in water given to the bull to drink before letting it out onto the pastures in spring (HM 515:18). Copper or bronze objects, like coins, were commonly used in healing practices. Silver brooches have been common in healing practices in both countries, especially to shave "silverwhite" to offer it to healing springs (KM KF1545; Kuningas 2014).

The most intriguing of the manufactured magic artefacts in Estonia is the *kratt/pisuhänd/tont* (ERM A 291: 503) – a schematic anthropomorphic creature, which was supposed to be animated by making a contract with the devil. The

doll was expected to carry wealth to its owner from nearby villages, farms, and manors, and when the contract ended, the soul of the owner belonged to the devil. The folklore describing the *kratt* is rich and recorded across Estonia; however, only a single actual material example is known. It is also interesting to note that this creature was recovered from the ground in Tartu-Maarja parish but, based on its condition, it had not lain in the ground for very long. In 1928, the newspaper *Sakala* (Ebausk 1928) referred to a lecture by folklorist M. J. Eisen, who related that a spinster from Raadi Manor, Tartu-Maarja parish, made a *kratt* that was supposed to bring her a husband but the "ghost" nevertheless remained lifeless. The preserved creature and the story are not directly connected, but they still demonstrate the variability of how the *kratt* appears in the tradition. The corresponding magic creature to the *kratt* is known in Finland as a *para* (Holmberg-Harva 1928), but no material manifestations of the *para* survive in the two museum collections. However, there is a metal snuffbox containing communion wafers in the KM collection. According to the catalogue entry, these could be used as medicine, to make a rifle shoot better, or as the heart of a *para* figure (KM KF1825).

In the Finnish collections, the most remarkable objects that have been specifically manufactured for use in magic are the miniature coffins that contain either a frog or a wooden human figure (KM KF1253; K3442:1; KF277). Three additional coffins have contained squirrels, but these animal remains had been thrown away before the objects were delivered to the museum (KM K7604:1–3). The coffins that contain frogs or squirrels were found in two churches: the Kuopio Cathedral and the Kiihtelysvaara Church. Folklore accounts associate such practises with counter-magic against witchcraft (Hukantaival 2015). The collections also include two objects that comprise a wooden handle with bear claws attached to one end. According to the catalogue, these have been used to scrape away headaches (KM KF280; KF2243). Another object is the replica of a "fish god" (*kalajumala*): a crude human face made of birch bark, which has been used to protect a spawning structure for fish against the evil eye (KM K7876). There are also a few crosses made of kindling splinters that are meant to protect against the "night-hag" creature (*painajainen*).

As noted earlier, while magic objects are less common in Estonian museum collections, they are mentioned in other sources, such as in Estonian newspaper articles. These in particular describe objects in contexts where the material objects cannot end up in museum collections, like "molten silver" (possibly mercury) poured into the walls of barns to protect animals (Pärnumaa 1944). In these records we can find special witchcraft dolls (Moodne nõidus 1934) and more unusual natural objects – dried snake heads, wasp combs, toads, various insects, and other objects that were perceived as hazardous (Nõelussipeadega

1936; Õudne leid 1930). These records also mention more unique objects, which most probably only had meaning in this particular context and for these participants, like a "witch's horn / antler" used to harm other people (Mõndasugust 1884). Moreover, in folklore, foodstuffs that appear in unusual locations are mentioned as hazardous objects, like a ham hidden in a haystack or eggs placed in a pasture or at the entrance of a shed (EKLA, f 199, m 16a, 25/6; Ebausk 1940). Of the objects mentioned in the Estonian newspapers, snakes' heads, wasps' nests, and two glass vials that have contained mercury are also present in the Finnish object collections. Still, the vast corpus of Finnish folklore material depicts the use of numerous objects that have not ended up in the museum collections. These include, for example, human bones, nails and bodily fluids, horse skulls, dog skulls and canine teeth, cats' tails, milk, eggs, bread, almanacs, and hymnals (Hämäläinen 1920; Vuorela 1960; Ratia 2009; Hukantaival 2016). However, as mentioned, the folklore material is still largely unanalysed from the point of view of the materiality of magic.

DISCUSSION

The true understanding of the magic objects in Estonia and Finland requires placing them in their cultural contexts and worldviews in which reality was constructed differently from how it was done in westernized modernity (Stark 2006). While a thorough discussion on this aspect is beyond the scope of this paper, some remarks can be made. There is a reasoning in the choices of objects even though it might not be obvious to people of today. As noted, the majority of both Estonian and Finnish *materia magica* can be described as natural objects or everyday utensils, which are somehow special, either because of their curious appearance, the unusual location where they were recovered, or the special time when the artefacts were collected. Thus, the naturalness and everydayness of these objects is only superficial. Moreover, the Finnish material includes catalogue entries depicting rituals conducted when retrieving a natural object or manufacturing a magic artefact (Hukantaival forthcoming). Similarly, in Estonian folklore records various rituals accompanied the using of pebbles for healing practices, including the practices of retrieving as well as discarding these after use (Johanson 2018). These rituals also make the objects in question special and thus suitable for use in magical practices, compared with similar objects that had not been subject to such.

In general, the studied Finnish museum collections are more comprehensive than the Estonian ones. While Estonian narrative sources provide a broad range of various reasons for why and how magical practices were conducted and how

some material objects were used, the examples in the Estonian museum collections refer predominantly to healing magic. This is apparently due to the collecting policy but it sets certain limits on the further studies of magic. Despite the presence of a special collection of medical artefacts, magical practices were also conducted with objects located in other Estonian collections; for example, the jewellery collection holds silver brooches, which have been used to scrape silver from for curing purposes (Kuningas 2014). Due to that, it is difficult to quantify all magically used objects and potentially their number can be significantly increased with future in-depth studies of these museum collections.

While the difference in the volume and formation of the museum collections in the respective countries makes comparisons difficult, some general observations can be made. Thunderbolts occur in both countries in a fairly similar way, though with some nuances. The lack of fossils in the Finnish collections and their abundance in the Estonian ones may reflect a true difference that is in line with the differences in the geology of the nations. Unlike Estonia, fossils are rare in the Finnish Precambrian bedrock. Still, it is noteworthy that flint pebbles occur often as magic objects in Finland, although this mineral is not found locally. However, flint has been imported to Finland as a raw material and used in fire-making both in the prehistoric and historical (arriving, e.g., as ballast) periods (Costopoulos 2003; Terävä 2016: 147, 159). Perhaps this made the mineral more accessible than the fossils that were mostly introduced to the area accidentally in imported limestone (Terävä 2016: 147). For the time being, however, it is uncertain whether the absence of fossils in the Finnish magic collections truly reflects their absence in magical practices.

Another striking difference between the collections in the two countries is the emphasis on animals and especially the bear in the Finnish collections. Body parts of bears form a large proportion of all magic objects. The special relationship between Finns and the bear has been romanticized due to studies connecting the evidence of mythological beliefs surrounding the bear and the hunting rituals connected with it with an ancient pan-Finno-Ugric (even pan-Arctic) bear cult (Sarmela & Poom 1982). Thus, it is possible that the body parts of bears have attracted special interest during the collection process in Finland. It is remarkable that a similar idea of the bear cult has not influenced the collections in Estonia and the bear has no prominent position in Estonian narrative sources about magic either.

In Finland, the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) was distributed throughout the country until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Due to intensive hunting, at the end of the nineteenth century, bears seemed to be extinct in most areas of Finland except in the north and in the east (Ermala 2003). In Estonia, as well, bears were found in large numbers all over the area until the end of

the eighteenth century, while intensive hunting during the nineteenth century significantly reduced the population (Kaal 1976: 333). Since the distribution of the animal (and the availability of its body parts due to hunting) was similar in the study areas, this aspect is unlikely to have caused the observed difference in the magic traditions. The bear may truly have had a special role in Finnish folk magic in contrast to the situation in Estonia, but there might also be some bias in this picture.

As seen above, folk magic was collected as culture believed to be in danger of disappearing or already having vanished from some regions. This was part of the view that folk culture was a static phenomenon and folk magic was largely inherited from a pre-Christian religion. This has resulted in a broadly used concept of folk religion that is disappearing together with the elderly generation. Such views were already established by the first scholars during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and Romanticism and they have been repeated ever since. Folk culture was endangered in the changing modern world and while this change was welcomed, it was important to preserve the history of the people for future generations. The scholars of the time were interested in the distant "pagan" past that these objects represented and less in what they meant for the people using the objects at the time of the collection efforts. The idea of folk magic being static obscures its dynamism and the possibility of innovative practitioners of magic.

In both countries, folk traditions, including folk religion, were highly valued since the 1880s when folklore collecting was organized systematically. Still, the interest of particular collectors had a great impact, and this is likely to be the reason why *materia magica* in Estonian museums is so dominated by curing implements. The other forms of magic, on the other hand, are represented only in rare cases and perhaps were ignored as something low-valued. Thus, the *materia magica* in museums represents what was valued at the time and in the context of collecting objects. The whole picture of what people did in magic practices and what kind of objects were used is another story.

CONCLUSION

While there are many similarities between Estonian and Finnish culture, these neighbouring countries have their own histories that have shaped them in unique ways. Moreover, many aspects have contributed to the formation of the museum collections: the national romantic ideas of Finno-Ugric cultural roots, the histories of the museums themselves, the interests of individual collectors and curators, and, naturally, the willingness of people to share their heritage

with antiquities collectors. It may seem that the voice of the practitioners of magic became muted, but their view can still be found. The catalogue entries accompanying the objects often record how these objects were used and how they were found, manufactured, and treated. In future research, these could be complemented with use-wear or organic residue studies. Moreover, both Estonia and Finland have vast folklore collections that include accounts of magic practices. It is also interesting that folklore collections and the catalogue entries accompanying magic objects seem to correlate only partly. A multi-source method utilizing folklore, historic records, and object collections would have great potential in shedding some more light on the materiality of magic in both countries.

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NOTES

[1] These are called ethnological collections due to the local research tradition; however, ethnographical would be more correct.

[2] Runo-singers are people adept in performing poems in the vernacular Finnic poetic metre (the Kalevala-metre of Kalevalaic poetry) (see, e.g., Tarkka & Stepanova & Haapoja-Mäkelä 2018).

ABBREVIATIONS

AI – Archaeology collection at Tallinn University

AM – Estonian History Museum

EKLA – Estonian Cultural History Archives, Estonian Literary Museum

ENM – Estonian National Museum

ERA – Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum

ERM – Collections at the Estonian National Museum

HM – Häme Museum collection at the Museum Centre Vapriikki, Tampere, Finland

KM – (Kansallismuseo) National Museum of Finland, Helsinki, Finland

PM – Järvamaa Museum, Estonia

PäMu – Pärnu Museum, Estonia

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