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Bear hunt rituals in Finland and Karelia: beliefs, songs, incantations and magic rites

Vesa Matteo Piludu

1. *Finnish bear hunt rituals: from transcribing runes to research*

In his classic monograph on bear rites in the Northern hemisphere, Hallowell (1926) divides them into two categories:

a. Bear hunt rites followed by ritual feasts and funeral rites
b. Rites connected with the slaying of a bear captured as a cub, raised in the village and killed in a complex ceremony.[1]

The Finnish and Sámi rites undoubtedly belong to the first category, which encompasses the Finno-Ugric, Siberian and Native American (Cree) bear rites. Hallowell advances the theory that the widespread bear ceremonials in the Eurasian and North America sub-Arctic area share a common origin. The idea is an intriguing one, and has more recently been returned to by Campbell (1983), who explored the links between the ethnographic and prehistoric evidence.

If we compare the different bear ceremonials, we see a common structure whose broad outlines can be summarized as follows:

1. This is the case of the Ainu rite in Japan.

1. The careful preparation of the hunt, which included magic procedures
2. The rites for approaching the den or the prey
3. The rituals connected with the moment of the kill
4. The rites for the hunters' return with the slain bear
5. The feast and the bear "festival" in the village
6. The rite of the skull or the burial of the bones in the forest

This is reminiscent of the more general Siberian hunting rites studied by Lot-Falk (1961). But the bear hunting rites usually involve a more complex and elaborate cerimonialism.[2] Despite certain structural analogies, the bear hunting rites performed by different ethnic groups also show major dissimilarities: there is an enormous number of variations on related themes. The information collected in the field can vary in quality. For example, the sources on the Sámi rites[3] include a fairly precise description of the stages, but do not provide the text of the ritual songs.

By contrast, the Finnish ethnographers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries collected an impressive quantity of ritual songs for the bear hunt, later published in the collection *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* ("Ancient Poems of the Finnish People", generally known by its acronym SKVR).[4] In addition to the songs, there is a vast number of manuscripts describing hunting rituals which, as they are for the most part still unpublished[5], must be searched for patiently in the immense Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society.[6]

Such abundance is due to the fact that the Finnish ritual songs were sung in the same meter as the epic songs – the

2. It should be borne in mind, however, that in other cultures, hunting certain marine mammals (whales) or cervids (moose) can involve equally complex ceremonies.

3. On the Sámi rites, see Pentikäinen, in this book.

4. The 33 volumes of the SKVR collection were published in Helsinki by the *Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura* (Finnish Literature Society) from 1908 to 1948. All of the songs can now be read in the original dialects online on the SKVR website (google skvr.fi)

5. An interesting selection of descriptions of magical hunting rites was edited and published by Varonen (1891).

6. The Folklore Archives are located on the ground floor of the Finnish Literature Society building in Helsinki. Website in English: http://neba.finlit.fi/english/kra/.

runot[7] studied by Domenico Comparetti (1891)[8] – and were thus included in the epic poem *Kalevala* (1849)[9] by Elias Lönnrot, a singular poet-ethnographer who pieced together thousands of epic and ritual songs in composing his work. Some of the texts of the songs included in the *Kalevala* were transcribed in the field by Lönnrot himself, others by his assistants. The final text of the poem, which aspired to be a *summa* of Finnish folklore, features significant changes to the original material[10]. For example, in *Rune 46*, the bear hunting songs, originally sung by hunters from different villages, are put in the mouth of Väinämöinen, one of the poem's heroes.[11] The entire hunt becomes part of the epic struggle between the mythical lands of Kalevala and Pohjola. Although the *Kalevala* is essentially a literary work, many non-Finnish scholars, including Hallowell and Campbell, have failed to grasp this fact, and quote the verses of the *Kalevala* as if they were the original ritual bear songs[12].

In Finland, after the *Kalevala* was published, many ethnographers and folklorists assisted by a sizable number of students and enthusiastic amateurs transcribed an enormous corpus of variants to the epic and ritual songs in the field[13]: after the international success enjoyed by Lönnrot's work, collecting folklore became something of a national duty, an irresistible call heeded by several generations. To-

7. A traditional song featuring a pentatonic melody and, from a poetic standpoint, making use of alliteration and parallelism.

8. On Comparetti's studies, see Comparetti (1891 and 1989) and Piludu (2015 and 2014).

9. The *Kalevala* has been translated into English several times, in both prose and verse. A translation of selections by John A. Porter in 1868 was followed by the first complete version by John Martin Crawford in 1888, which retained the *Kalevala*'s trochaic tetrameter but was not based on the original Finnish. Versions retaining the meter and based on the original Finnish were produced in 1907 by William Forsell Kirby and in 1969 by Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr. More recent translations include those by Eino Friberg (1988) and Keith Bosley (1989). Both the Crawford and Kirby translations are available in their entirety online, the latter also as an audiobook at: https://librivox.org/kalevala-the-land-of-the-heroes-kirby-translation-by-elias-loennrot/

10. For an extensive analysis of the process involved in compiling and writing the *Kalevala*, see Pentikäinen (2013 and 2014a).

11. On the bear songs in the Kalevala, see Pentikäinen (2015 and 2014b).

12. It should also be borne in mind that the *Kalevala* has been translated into more than seventy languages, whereas in the overwhelming majority of cases the ritual songs have never been translated into languages accessible to foreign scholars.

13. Later published in the SKVR collection; see note 4.

day, the rite of the bear hunt has disappeared in both Finland and Karelia[14], but the wealth of material transcribed between 1820 and 1940 permits a surprisingly accurate reconstruction of nearly every stage of the ceremonial.

Unfortunately, the scientific literature on Finnish bear rites is not as abundant as the transcribed ritual verses and archival material. The ethnographers of the nineteenth century were much more committed to transcribing and saving the songs "from oblivion" than they were to analyzing them. Later, anthropologists of religion or folklore have often written short sections on the bear hunt as part of more general discussions of Finnish mythology or ritual songs (see, for example, Krohn 1915). Monographs in Finnish are rare, and they frequently do not deal with the entire ceremonial, but only with specific songs, as is the case of Karhu's work (1947) on the *Births of the Bear*. In 1991, Sarmela published a paper in Finnish with a reconstruction of the ceremonial's historical evolution that sparked a certain amount of debate in Finland. In 1998, Tarkka published a long and very interesting paper in English on the bear songs and rites in White Sea Karelia[15], which contains quite good translations of certain verses of the original songs. The paper was then expanded for her doctoral dissertation in Finnish, which has recently been translated into English with some changes to the original Finnish text (2013). In 2007, Pentikäinen published *Golden King of the Forest*, a comparative text in English presenting the Sámi, Finnish, Khanty and Mansi bear traditions, as well as those of Ancient Greece.

14. Karelia is a vast border region, divided into many areas: only a small portion is still in Finnish territory, while most of the region now belongs to Russia. The Karelian languages are very close to Finnish. From the religious standpoint, Karelia is Orthodox, whereas Finland was Catholic and later became Lutheran. In both Finland and Karelia, pre-Christian beliefs survived for a long period alongside the official religions. Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden until 1812. From that year until 1917, it was an Autonomous Grand Duchy – but nevertheless an integral part – of the Russian Empire, from which it gained its independence in 1917. Part of Finnish Karelia was conquered by the Soviet Union during World War Two, and later remained in the Russian Federation.

15. White Sea Karelia or Viena Karelia is a large region of what is now the Republic of Karelia in the Russian Federation. In Lönnrot's day, Finland was an Autonomous Grand Duchy of the czarist empire, and the border between Finland and White Sea Karelia was thus open. This was the area where Lönnrot and his assistants collected the epic songs of greatest importance for the *Kalevala*, and one of the areas richest in ritual bear hunting songs.

Nevertheless, there is as yet no extensive analysis of the entire Finnish ritual and the abundant material provided by the songs and archives. This is a gap I have attempted to fill with a doctoral dissertation in English on the subject. Research is still under way, and in this chapter I will present some of the major issues I am currently addressing.

2. *The bear: human and superhuman*

As the ethnographic information and the tales in the Folklore Archives indicate, in Finland and Karelia the bear was considered to have human characteristics for a number of reasons: his paws were similar in structure to our hands; once skinned, his anatomy looks human, and it was believed that he might also be a man who had been "bewitched" and turned into a bear. Hunters also reported that they had heard of people who had found a "belt" or some other object under the pelt of a skinned bear. Another belief was that some Russians were able to turn themselves into bears after death. Likewise, certain Finns or Russians with magic powers could turn into bears at will by doing a somersault. According to another legend, there were once three brothers: one went into the forest and became a bear, the second went to the lake and turned into a frog, and the third stayed home and became a human. Other sources even say that men, bears and woodpeckers belong "to the same family". As is often the case in oral cultures, there are any number of variations, and similar beliefs are found in many other northern cultures. The fact that the bear was considered an essentially "human" animal or an "other" similar to us called for a complex ritual combining elements of hunting, funeral, wedding and feasting rites.

In Finland and Karelia, the bear and other wild animals were even regarded as superior – in physical or magical terms – to human beings: the bear had the same "mind" or "intelligence" (*mieli*) as humans or even twice as much, and was "nine times stronger" than humans. The wolf, on the other hand, was as strong as humans, but nine times cleverer.

The bear had supernatural hearing and eyesight, and could hear what the hunters were saying and follow their actions from inside his den. He did not like being called by his "real" name (*karhu* or kontio), and if a hunter let it

slip he would wake up, furious. The "king of the forest" preferred to be called by "honorable names" such as "honey-paw" (*mesikämmen*). He was even considered a *tietäjä*, a magician who could "enchant" the hunters' rifles.

3. *The bears: the "children" or the "cattle" of the guardian spirits of the forest*

Bears' most important characteristic, however, was to be found elsewhere, viz., in their close connection with the *metsänhaltiat*[16], the guardian spirits of the forest. The bear was referred to by the same circumlocution used for Tapio, the "Master" of the forest: *metsän kultainen kuningas* (golden king of the forest). The *metsänhaltiat* were shape-shifters and could turn themselves into various wild animals, including bears. Several female forest spirits (Mielikki, Hongotar or the grimmer Pohjan akka) were thought to be one of the possible "mothers" of the bear or the "mistresses" of a "flock" of bears and wolves. Alternatively, the bear is called their "dog ". People believed that these "mistresses" of the bear fed him during hibernation, as demonstrated by this belief transcribed in the village of Pärnämäki, in Southern Savonia's Mäntyharju parish[17]:

> When I was young, I heard it said that someone had found a bear's den and fell into it. He stayed there for quite a while. Every night he saw the *haltia* give the bear a kind of white drink (SKS KRA Karhu J. 1936, 3271).[18]

Some variations indicate that the bear was fed honey, and that the day he was killed by hunters the *metsänhaltia* brought a red drink. As the bear has such a close link with the woodland spirits, the hunters had to perform a ritual to prevent both the bear and the *metsänhaltiat* from taking revenge.

16. In this chapter, the original Finnish names are given either in the singular (e.g., *metsänhaltia*) or in the plural (*metsänhaltiat*).

17. A region of east-central Finland.

18. The Finnish archive codes include the name of the archives (SKS KRA means "Finnish Literature Society Folklore Archives"), the name of the person who recorded the entry (e.g., Karhu J.), the year field work was carried out (1936) and, lastly, the number of the text and the manuscript (3271). Here, the original Finnish is as follows: *Kuuli nuorena ollessaan, että kerran mies kiertäessään karhun makuupaikkaa, putosikin karhun pesään. Mies jäi pesään pitemmäksi. Mies näki, että haltia toi karhulle joka yö valkoista juotavaa*.

The ritual (which included songs, prayers, sacrifices of molten silver, a great drinking party and "feast" offered to the bear[19] and the rite of the skull) was the "compensation" given to the bear and to the *metsänhaltiat* for having killed one of "their cattle". The revenge that this rite warded off could take the form of an illness (called *metsän nenä*, "the hatred of the forest"), a bear or wolf attack on the village cattle, bad luck in the hunt, misfiring weapons or even in the women begetting strange "children". Without the ritual, it was believed that the *metsänhaltiat* would never "grant" the bear to the hunters.

As he was protected by the guardian spirits, the bear took part in the forest's sacredness, which had both positive and negative aspects. The bear was considered to be "full" of *metsän väki* (the force of the forest), a dynamic magical power that could attack humans in various ways. A scratch by the bear's claws could cause an illness as a result of this magical force. The bear was so strongly identified with the forest that he was often called *metsä* (forest), *iso metsä* (great forest), *metsän omena* (forest apple), *metsän onni* (forest luck).

In more general terms, the entire forest was seen as another world: at once different, terrible and fascinating. And yet, it was an otherness that was close to man. One the one hand, the forest started right where the tiny villages ended. On the other, the "world" of the forest was modelled after human society: it has its "kings", "masters" and "mistresses" with "sons and daughters", "castles", "granaries" and "cattle" (wild game and the bears). And it was also inhabited by the *metsän piiat* or *metsän tytöt* (servant girls or maidens of the woods), sylvan spirits who often looked after the wild "cattle". The bear, too, has a "house" with "doors" and a "bed": all roundabout ways of referring to the den.

The fact that there is a "society" of the woods that "works" more or less like its human counterpart, made communication (through the ritual songs, the *runolaulut*) and ritual exchange possible with both the *metsänhaltiat* and the bear. Finland's tradition is particularly interesting because the archaic beliefs about the "guardian spirits" were fused with distinctly European elements: the shared references, for

19. In reality, the "feast" consisted of the slain bear's meat, but in the rite the bear (the skin and skull) was invited to participate and to sit in the "place of honor".

example, to the kings and castles of the forest, as well as to the farming and grazing economy.

This syncretism also applies to Christian figures, though they appear to have been absorbed by the world of pre-Christian hunting beliefs: Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, was called Annikki in the songs, and became the "daughter of Tapio". The Virgin herself could be called upon instead of Mielikki or another *metsänhaltia* to keep a firm hold on "her dog" (the bear).

Though the society of the forest was similar to human society, it seemed richer and more idealized: the *metsänhaltia* wore "silk" or were "gilded" or "silvery". Nor was there a lack of folktale or fable-like elements that were vaguely reminiscent of the tradition of other northern fairies. Though the masters of the forest could be pitiless in their revenge, they followed a moral code that the hunters were also expected to obey.

"Social" though it was, the forest was nevertheless "otherworldly": the hunter who entered it believed he was making an epic journey in another world.

4. *Innocent bears and treacherous sorcerers*

As they were "sacred" (*pyhä*), bears and the forest were also considered "pure, clean" (*puhdas*), or in other words innocent. It was believed that a normal bear was always innocent, incapable of harming people. A bear who attacked or killed cattle or people had, necessarily, been "bewitched" (*nostettu*). But the bear himself was innocent, the real guilty party, the wrong-doer acting in the shadows, was another human being: a foul sorcerer (*noita*), consumed with envy andprobably concealed in the nearest village. Anterus Kousa of Pärnämäki clearly stated that "the bear can do no wrong, unless he is bewitched"[20] (SKS KRA Karhu J. 1936, 3254). The hunter G. V. Karhu of Outila, near Mäntyharju, was even more specific:

> "People usually believed that the bear was just a big, playful forest creature, if sorcerers or other evil men didn't enrage him. Bears had been seen grazing on the same hill, together with the cattle … Tinkling the cowbells with their paws,

20. *Karhu ei tehnyt pahaa muuten kuin, että se oli nostettava.*

without hurting them. But if some sorcerer or grudge-bearer was angry with his neighbors, he could bewitch the bear and send it to do harm, and even kill all the cattle in the village" [21] (SKS. Karhu J. 1936, 3254).

Stark (2002) notes that this kind of moral idealization of the forest (which in Karelia was also called the "pure Creation of God") could also be influenced by the belief that the figures of the Christian tradition or the Orthodox saints "lived" alongside the *metsänhaltia*. The idea of the negativity of human society, often considered "sinful" and liable to manipulation through black magic, could have been influenced by forms of popular Christianity, grafted onto earlier beliefs. One of the oldest magic formulas (*loitsu*) used to bewitch bears was probably recorded in Savonia in the eighteenth century:

Karhun nostaminen	*To bewitch the bear*
Nouse karhu kankahasta,	Arise bear, from the woods
hiedasta hevoisen syöjä,	of sand, avid for horsemeat,
viiasta vihainen kissa,	furious cat, from the forest,
korvesta kovero-koura,	crooked hand, from the dark wood,
karvahassu halmehista,	furry buffoon, from the fields,
mullikoita murtamahan,	to tear the bullocks to pieces,
vasikoita vainomahan,	to terrify the calves,
hevosia haastamahan,	to assault the horses,
karjan laumaa kaatamahan!	to kill the livestock!

(SKVR VI 2.5414)[22]

This formula calls the bear by his real name, *karhu*. Evidently, the prohibited name was used to infuriate the bear and provoke him to attack the livestock. The other euphemisms for the bear ("furious cat" and "furry buffoon") appearing in the other verses were decidedly offensive: it is clear that the sorcerer wished to irritate the bear.

The people of Finland and Karelia were thus convinced that if a bear attacked the cattle, it was to be blamed on

21. *Kansassa oli yleensä se käsitys, että karhu on leikkisä metsäneläin, ellei sitä noidat ja pahansuovat ihmiset saa villiintymään. Karhujenhan oli nähty lehmän kanssa syövän samasta mättäästä heinää, sekä soittavan kämmäkällään lehmän kaulassa olevaa kelloa y.m. tekemättä pahaa lehmälle. Mutta jos joku noita tahi kadehtija vihastui naapuriinsa, niin se sai karhun tekemään tuhoa, jopa niinkin paljon, että se voi tuhota koko kylän karjan.*

22. References to the songs in the SKVR collection include the volume code (VI 2) and the song number (5414).

envious neighbors or sorcerers who uttered such formulas. Any contrast between the human community and the forest world could be traced to a conflict between two human villages. The bear's innocence, and the forest's, were still unscathed.

5. *The "births of the bear" and "women's force"*

To protect the livestock during the grazing season, an incantation was intoned to calm bewitched bears. In 1894, Ukko Timonen of Kitee[23] revealed such an incantation to the ethnographer Lönnbohm:

Missä ohto synnytelty,	Where was Ohto[24] born,
mesikämmen kiännätelty?	where was honey-paw weaned?
Tuolla ohto synnytelty,	Up there Ohto was born,
mesikämmen kiännätelty:	honey-paw was weaned:
yylähällä taivosessa,	high up in the sky,
otavaisen olkapäillä.	On the shoulders of the Big [Dipper.
missä se alas laskettiin?	How was he let down?
Hihnassa alas laskettiin,	With a thread he was let down,
hihnassa hopiisessa,	with a silver thread,
kultaisessa kätkyyssä,	In a golden cradle,
sitte läks saloja samuumaan,	to roam through the woods,
pohjanmoata poloylakemaan.	to wander through the North.
Elä sorra sontareittä,	Don't crush the dung-shank[25]
koa maion kantajoa,	don't kill the milk-bearer[26]
enemp' on emoilla työtä,	There will be more work for the [mothers,
suur(i) vaiva vanhemmalla,	much effort for the parents,
jos poikonen pahan tekööo.	If the little boy is naughty.
(SKVR VII 5, loitsu 3932)	

This incantation starts with the legend of the bear's heavenly origins, a legend that also appears in the traditional bear hunting songs of other Finno-Ugric peoples such as the Mansy and the Khanty. In the Finnish tradition, how-

23. A village in Finnish North Karelia.
24. Ohto is an "honorable" name for the bear.
25. The cow.
26. The cow.

ever, there are many other variants of the *Births of the Bear* (*karhun synty*)[27].

According to the unwritten rules of the Finnish magical canon, by singing of the mythical origins of an animal or object, the singer gained magical control over it. It is no coincidence that these *Births of the Bear* were followed by a command ordering the bear to leave the cattle alone.

In its complex style, this protective incantation was markedly different from the rough formula used to bewitch the bear. The bear is called by names that indicate respect and sweetness (honey-paw) and the bear's innocence is emphasized by terms that recall the purity of childhood (little boy): he is an innocent "big baby" who should not make trouble for the mothers. The song has a maternal tone, and not by accident: these verses were chiefly sung by women, who looked after the cattle both in the barns and in the pasture. The song was steeped in a conciliatory ideology which was also found in many hunting poems.

Not all of the variants are so acquiescent. At times, the song maintains that the bear was born in Lapland or in another, darker world (*Pohjola*) and orders him to go back, in no uncertain terms. At others, the bear is told to sink his teeth into a tree trunk instead of a cow. Knowledge of the magical origins gave a coercive power to whoever sang or uttered the verses. In some cases, the *Birth of the Bear* incantation is followed by a plea to the *metsän emäntä* (mistress of the forest) or Mielikki, Annikki or Maria, to muzzle "her dog" and hold him in check. As most of these songs were sung by women, we have a sort of faceoff between two "mistresses": the mistress of the livestock and the mistress of the "forest cattle".

Hunters could use more or less the same verses to ask the female spirit to keep the bears from attacking or mauling them: cases of intertextuality are by no means rare in the Finnish tradition. Verses from the livestock raising tradition can be found among those from the hunting tradition, and vice versa.

The women who looked after the livestock were also considered to have a dynamic magic energy: the *naisten*

27. On the complex concept of *synty*, see Stepanova 2014 and 2015.

väki (women's force, or in other words the force of female sexuality), in opposition to the *metsän väki*, the force of the forest. In the spring, when the cattle were put out to graze for the first time, they were led below the legs of a woman, whose sexuality filled the herd with *naisten väki*, protecting it from bears and wolves. Likewise, if a woman encountered a bear in the woods, she could make him flee by lifting her skirts and exposing her privates.

6. *The reasons underlying the hunting ritual*

If the incantations or rites for protecting the livestock from the bear failed to work, and the bear continued to wreak havoc among the herds, the only remedy was to organize a bear hunt, with all the complex ritual that this involved.

In a poor village economy, cattle were essential providers of butter and cheese, though naturally there could be other reasons – or a series of reasons – for killing a bear.

The oldest sources, such as the sermon given in 1640 by Bishop Isaacus Rothovius[28], hint at more strictly ritual motives. It appears that the rite ensured good luck in the hunt in some way:

> "When they catch a bear, a party is held in the dark, and they drink a toast for the bear out of its skull, and groan just as the bear does. Thus they would gain a greater good fortune!"[29]

Material from the following centuries also indicates that social prestige was an important consideration: killing a bear made a hunter highly respected as a "strong" man, not just physically, but also surrounded by a magical aura. For the villagers, slaying a bear was also a rare opportunity to eat their fill of meat, and to join together in drinking and enjoying themselves. It should come as no surprise that the bear feast was called the bear's "wedding", "funeral" or "drinking party", as they and the feast were all socially important rites that forge a tight-knit community and involve banqueting.

28. The sermon was given for the inauguration of the *Academia Aboensis*, the first university in Finland. The bishop railed against the bear rites, seeing them as proof that paganism had not been wiped out in Finland.

29. See Rothovius 1990 (1641), quoted in Pentikäinen (2015 and 2014b).

Later on, other economic motives came into play, some – such as the sale of the pelt – connected with the market economy. Signs of this can be seen in one of the ritual names given to the bear: *rahakarva* (money-fur). In addition, killing the bear provided a series of amulets or substances that were considered magical (the teeth, fat, bile and paws) and were used in many other rituals: healing, wedding and sexual rituals, rituals for protecting the livestock and treating their illnesses, and even farming rituals. In all likelihood, there was always more than one reason for going out to hunt a bear.

It should be emphasized that there is nothing remotely resembling an etiological or foundational myth: there is no explanation of how or why the bear hunting ceremonial arose. Many other cultures, including that of the Sámi, maintained that long long ago, in the dim and distant past, a bear had taken a woman as his wife and had taught their son the correct ritual for killing him. However, the Finnish tradition is particularly sparing with such information: the mythical origins of phenomena, objects or animals are important (as witnessed by the *Births of the Bear* discussed above), but the origins of the rites are never explained.

In any case, slaying an animal filled with the magical power of the forest, belonging to the cattle of the *metsänhaltiat* and regarded as "innocent" even when it killed livestock, was always an extremely risky business. Consequently, it had to be ritually justified.

The rationale for the ceremonial is very clear: the rites and the songs had to please both the bear and the *metsänhaltiat*, who had to feel sufficiently honored. Only thus could their future revenge be averted.

The ceremonial consisted of a number of stages which will be described in the following pages.

7. *Preparatory rituals*

Before the rite of the hunt itself, there were many preparatory rituals. If the hunt took place in the winter or the late autumn after the first snowfall, the den the bear had entered to hibernate was first found. The hunters then walked around the den in an incomplete circle, occasionally marking trees or rocks with symbols. This also served a practical purpose, in establishing coordinates so that the

position of the den could be remembered. After every snowfall, the hunters would return and walk around the den in a smaller circle, taking care not to be noticed by the bear. If they were, there was a danger that the bear would run away and look for another den (Varonen 1891: 69). At the same time, however, this "bear circling" (*karhun kierronta*) entailed an infinite number of magic rituals to prevent the bear from fleeing. On the one hand, we have practices and beliefs that are typically Finnish and probably archaic: the hunters sang the *Birth of the Bear* and, when walking, did not "close the circle". In other words, they avoided returning to the exact spot where they had started, and left a sort of imaginary "door" open. In this way, they prevented the forest master or mistress – the *metsänhaltia* – from realizing what they were doing and rushing to warn the bear (see SKS KRA Meriläinen II 632, quoted in Varonen 1891: 70). The ritual songs called on the bear to remain in the den and not to "go out and gambol about", to stay in his "coniferous castle", "beside the daughters of nature" (the *metsänhaltiat*). In Orthodox Karelia, Pyhä Kusmoi Jimjana (probably a local and syncretic version of Saints Cosmas and Damian, who assumed the traditional role of the *metsänhaltiat*) was asked to "keep watch" over the circle" (SKVR VII5 3364). There were also several rituals that seem more "European", though it is difficult to advance hypotheses about their actual origins. When the hunters were walking in a circle, for instance, and found the first three paw prints in the snow, they turned them upside down and, with a sword that had been "used in war", drew pentacles on them[30]. There are rules about how many times the hunters are to walk clockwise and how many counterclockwise, or about the objects to be brought on the hunting trip. Some of the rules may seem rather bizarre, but they have a logic of their own: the hunters had to circle with the heads of three woodpeckers, as the woodpecker was believed to be the bear's pet. Seeing the woodpecker heads, the bear would feel safe. Once they had finished circling, the hunters made a small offering of molten silver (generally from a few small coins) in the "door" and then left the

30. The pentacle "closes" a space magically, proventing the bear from leaving it. The symbol is very frequent in Finnish tradition. Pentacles were also drawn on the ground when a bear approached the hunters.

path with their eyes shut, without looking at their footprints: this was the only way of ensuring that other hunters could not find the circle, and other animals would not disturb the bear's sleep (SKVR I4 1198). These are only a few examples, but they give an idea of the complexity and the quantity of the available ethnographic information.

Equal care was taken in preparing the weapons and the dogs: all weapons and dogs were rubbed with bear grease, probably to cover their scent magically. The forged spears were sharpened from the tip downwards, to ensure that they would pierce the bear's flesh better. Afterwards, the spear was "empowered" by sticking it in an anthill to absorb the "venom". As it was believed that the bear could bewitch the rifles and bullets, these too were "empowered" with meticulous rites: the hunters scratched a pentacle on the bullets, taking care to load them so that the tip of the pentacle pointed towards the rifle muzzle.

8. *Leaving the village: liminality and rites of passage*

The departure from the village was a particularly delicate moment. When passing from the profane space of the village to the sacred space of the forest[31], the liminal territory was literally full of all sorts of magical danger. Crossing the border put dynamic forces in motion that could be both aggressive and invasive. Consequently, the hunters sang protective songs like the following:

Jospa mies mettähän lähen,	If I depart, as a man, into the [stronger
nurokorvella kovemmin,	wood, into the forest,
niin varsin varottelem	I will certainly sing an incantation
oven suussa, ala orren,	at the doorway, below the beam,
pirtin pihti puolisissa.	on the threshold of the cabin door.

(SKVR I4. 1231)

Velhoj[a] on joka veräjä,	There are bewitchers at every gate
kat[eita] on k[aikki] p[aikat].	Envious ones are everywhere.
kun noita noitunoo,	if the sorcerer casts a spell,
itse noita noivukoon	let the sorcerer be ensorcelled [himself.

(SKVR I4 1085)

31. For a definition of sacred (*pyhä*) in the Finnish tradition, see Anttonen 1994.

The hunter proceeded slowly, singing incantations at every step until the forest was reached. The verses clearly indicate that the hunters were expert in magic: they recall those of the *loitsut*, or healing spells, where the *tietäjä* (seer, sage, healer) prepared to do battle with the sorcerer (*noita*) who sent the disease. Several sources emphasize that there had to be a *tietäjä* in the group of hunters "to make sure that everything was done in the right way", while others state that, if possible, there should even be two good *laulajat* (*runot* singers, experts in magic songs).

The hunters feared the envy of sorcerers, the neighbors or other hunters. By casting the evil eye, the envious could "ruin" the rifles or confuse the dogs so that they would get lost. The hunters also had to "purify" or mask their scent with smoke, and gain the acceptance of the spirits of the forest. They greased themselves with bear fat or bile, wore specific clothes, or held their clothing over the smoke. As they left the village, they brought many objects imbued with magic power opposite to that of the forest. There was a wide range of such objects, from old flints to brooches used at a wedding. The situation was ambivalent: on the one hand, the hunter sought to become part of the forest by masking his scent, while on the other hand, he carried objects that would defend him from the powers of the forest and the bear. A variety of strategies were thus used to prepare oneself for the hunt.

This liminal stage was lengthy. The rituals were like rites of passage, with a fundamental difference: the hunters' status changed during the hunt, but the change was not permanent. When the hunters returned to the village after the hunt, it was necessary for them to resume their normal status by performing other liminal rites.

Women's role was especially ambivalent. As Karelian hunters left the village, they also sang incantations to prevent the wives from having "clay babies" or "strange brats" (SKVR I4 1206). There is the impression that if the hunter were to enter the forest inappropriately, like an invader, the forest would have exacted a cruel revenge, invading the wombs of the village women. Pregnant women were thus considered to be particularly vulnerable. But for the women who were not pregnant, the power of their sexuality

could also be used to protect the hunters. A usage in North Karelia is particularly interesting in this respect:

> If someone goes to kill a bear, it won't bite him if he passes between his wife's legs. (SKS SKRA Krohn 10531)

The rite was called *harakoiminen* and was also performed to protect the cattle put out to graze in the spring, though in this case the "women's force" protected the husband. Stark (1998: 45) notes that the rifles or trapping gear could also be drawn between women's legs.

9. *Entering the forest: wonder, eroticism, falling in love and humility*

When the hunters left the village, the style of the songs changed radically. They often began with introductory verses:

Mitä siitä lauletaan,	What are we going to sing
kuim männäh ohon ovilla,	when we go towards the doors of [*ohto*[32],
sini-piiparin pihoilla?	the yards of a blue piper[33]?
(SKVR I4 1207)	

Suddenly, the tone is more joyful, but extremely metaphorical. The bear, called by honorific or poetic names that change frequently, had a "house" with "yards" and "doors": this, obviously was the den. Evidently, there is a desire to give the impression of making a friendly visit. The hunters rarely said what their real intentions were. If they did, they used euphemisms:

Nyt on Ohto otettavana,	It is time to get Ohto
rahakarva kaattavana	to shoot down the money-fur[34],
mielusassa Metsolassa,	in the pleasant Metsola,
tarkassa Tapiolassa.	in the rigorous Tapiola.
(SKVR XII 6467)	

The last two verses clearly indicate that the hunt occurred in another world, a mythical place: the "pleasant" Metsola, the charming realm of the mistress of the forest, and Tapiola, the kingdom of Tapio, master of the forest. Tapiola was

32. Typical name for the bear in hunting songs.

33. The piper could be the bear or a *metsänhaltia* who protects the bear.

34. The bear.

probably referred to as "rigorous" because precise rules had to be observed while advancing through it. Other verses in which the hunter indicated metaphorically what he was really looking for ran as follows:

Mieleni minun tekevi,	Desires wakes in me,
aivoni ajattelevi	the craving, in the mind,
lihoa lehen alaista,	for meat under the leaves,
kuuta kuusen juurellista,	fat among the spruce roots,
talven maannutta talia.	fur that sleeps in the winter.

(SKVR XII 6470)

The last three verses indicate the prey, the bear. The tone is both "gastronomic" and sensual, and becomes even more erotic in the singular variation sung by the renowned Karelian rune singer Arhippa Perttunen[35] and transcribed by Elias Lönnrot:

Mieleni minun tekisi	My mind is set,
mieli käyä Metsolassa	set on visiting Metsola
metsän neittä naiakseni,	to make love to the forest maidens[36]
metsän mettä juoakseni,	to drink the forest honey,
lihoa lehen alaista,	flesh from under the leaves,
kuuta kuusen juureihista	grease from the birch roots
[. . .]	[. . .]
Ota, metsä, mieheksesi,	Take me, forest, as your husband,
urohiksesi, Tapijo,	As your virile hero, Tapijo,
korpi kolkkipoijkesi!	As your young bowman, wild wood.
Metsä haisuo havulta,	The forest smells of pine,
Mies haisee meen maulta.	But the man smells of the taste of [honey.

(SKVR I 4.1095)

In these verses, the hunter not only declares his readiness for an erotic adventure with the "forest maidens", but even asks for the forest's hand in marriage. Though the hunting songs often emphasize the hunter's virile spirit, Tarkka (1998) see these verses as the most erotic in the Finnish tradition. Hunting songs with such an intense sexual charge

35. On the social and national importance of the Karelian singers, see Pentikäinen 2013 and 2014a.

36. The *metsänhaltiat* or their "maids".

are in fact rare, though the themes of sexuality and seduction are recurrent. We must not forget that Arhippa was a particularly skilled rune singer. On the whole, it is difficult to find anything similar in the traditions of other peoples. In Ancient Greece, flirting with the nymphs meant certain death. Willerslev (2007) observes that according to the Yukaghir hunters of Eastern Siberia, if the female spirit of the forest fell in love with the hunter, she would kill him so that he would always be by her side in the other world. But the Finnish hunter seems not to have run this risk. Using an oft-repeated formula, the hunter asked to be accepted by the forest in romantic verses that speak of falling in love:

Mielly, metšä, miehihini,
Kostu, korpi, koirihinìi!

Become fond of my men, you forest,
fall in love, you wild wood, with my
[dogs

(SKVR I4 1193)

As Tarkka (1998) pointed out, the entire forest is seen as a female being. The reference to marriage with the forest in Perttunen's song is also important. Many scholars (Sarmela 1994; Pentikäinen 2007; Tarkka 1998; Ilomäki 1998, 2014) have noted that the bear hunting verses have parallels in the wedding songs.

The analogy between the prey and the bride is found in a number of traditions. Ilomäki (1998: 151) notes that in Viena Karelia, the images presented in the wedding rituals were as masculine as those of the hunting rites: the man "goes hunting" for the bride in another world (that of the bride's family) just as the hunter seeks his prey in the wood. It is not by chance that the weddings songs of Viena Karelia call the bride by the names of game animals: "great hare" or "summer fox".

An unusual point that has rarely been noted is that in this seduction, the hunter did not woo the prey (the bear), but the female spirits of the forest or the forest itself. Again, this no coincidence: Arhippa's verses were followed by a series of requests to the *metsänhaltia*. The relationship is one of exchange: the hunter offers sexuality and marriage, asking for the prey, and protection from the prey, in return. After the forest "falls in love", it is "enchanted" and turns into a place of marvelous sights and sounds:

Tuolla korpi kuumottaapi, There the wild wood shines,
mehtä siintääpi sininen. the blue forest looms[37].
(SKVR VI 4.4886)

Soita, metsä, kanteloj(a), Play, forest, the *kantele*[38]
lähtiessäni metsälle! When I leave for the wilds!
(SKVR I 4.1211)

When the forest "played", it granted a prey. Once the group of hunters had been accepted, the forest was "enchanted" and became a world of harmony and wonder, a pleasant, feminine place that the hunters found truly entrancing. The love between the hunters and the forest was thus mutually requited. The hunting songs express a sincere "joy" in traveling through the forest, seen as a manly, virile activity. The hunter declared that he wanted to go:

nuijen miesten mehtimaille, into the forest of other men
urosten urisalolle, into the deep woods of the male [heros[39]
jossä kuusen oksat kuuna [paistaa, where the spruce boughs shine like [the moon
honganoksat hopiana, the pine boughs like silver,
mehtä haisoo havullek, the woods smell of conifers,
katajoille katkuaa smell of juniper
(SKVR XII 6475)

When singing of himself or his hunting party, the hunter often employed two opposing strategies. One the one hand, he extolled his masculinity, on the other he belittled himself, and in particular denied that the hunt was dangerous:

miehet nuoret, koirat pennut, the men are young, the dogs are [puppies
suvikuntaset urohot. males are fit only in the summer.[40]
(SKVR I4 1098).

37. In the ritual songs, blue often indicates the presence of magical power. At certain times of day in the winter, however, the snow-covered forest does indeed seem blue.

38. A traditional five-stringed zither. In the epic songs, the *kantele* is the instrument of the hero Väinämöinen, whose playing enchanted nature and its spirits.

39. References to the other hunters.

40. Clearly, the hunt takes place in the winter.

The extolling served to fascinate the forest or its female spirits, or to boost the hunters' magical force. Belittling the group served other purposes: to ensure that the bear did not take fright, or that the *metsänhaltia* did not consider the hunter too arrogant or cocky. To obtain his prey, the hunter had to demonstrate his humility. The self-pitying verses often introduce one of the many formulas with which the hunters made requests or pleas to the *metsänhaltiat*.

At times, the self-congratulatory verses are followed by self-pitying ones or, conversely, the hunter declared that he skis too slowly or clumsily, and then immediately added that his skis were smoking, so great was his speed. Or he may have sung:

Mie oun mies vähä väkinen — I am not a strong man,
uros olen hieno haltiani — I am male, my *haltia*[41] is excellent
(SKVR VII 5. 3666)

With verses of this kind, it appears that the hunter sought to confuse the bear or the *metsänhaltiat*, who would thus not have a clear idea of who they were dealing with.

The idealization of the forest, the eroticism of certain verses and the declarations of humility point to a conciliatory ideology, where the hunter tried everything in order to avoid conflict with the denizens of the forest. He employed many rhetorical devices to convince the *metsänhaltiat* to help him.

10. *Requests to the forest spirits*

Requests and pleas addressed to the various spirits that governed the forest were essential in order to obtain the prey. If the spirits were moved by the songs' beauty or sentiments, they would offer the bear to the hunter. In these verses, the hunter presented himself as a humble "supplicant" or a desperate beggar looking for the bear: submission and respect were the keys to moving the *metsänhaltiat*. A typical request took the following form:

41. The second verse is intended to charge the *haltia*, i.e., the hunter's personal spirit, with magical energy.

Metän kultainen kuningas, Golden king of the forest[42],
metän ehtoinen emäntä, generous mistress of the wood[43],
saata sille soarekselle, take me to that hill,
kuleta sille kunnarelle, guide me to that place,
josta soalis soatasihin, where I could get the prey,
metän vilja vietäsihin, and bring away the grain of the forest
aina akoille iloksi, that always makes wives happy
kotiväelle kaunoseksi! makes the people at home beautiful![44]
(SKVR XII 6473)

The use of the circumlocution "grain of the forest" for the bear is interesting. The expression indicates that the *metsänhaltiat* live in a parallel dimension, but one that is human in its economy. Thus, bears were referred to as products of the farming economy: grain (*vilja*). In the magical song, the "grain" could also be the cattle, called *emännän vilja*: the grain of the mistress of the house. These circumlocutions adhered to a precise logic. The abundance of grain was a symbol of wealth, as the grain produced by smallholders in many parts of Finland and Karelia was not enough to feed the household, and a certain amount had to be bought. Not surprisingly, the *sampo*, the miraculous object of the epic[45] and of the songs of the Finnish farming tradition, produced "grain"[46] among various other types of wealth. In his plea, the hunter paid homage to the *metsänhaltiat*, emphasizing that they were rich in "grain" (wild game), "golden", and "generous". Not infrequently, he asked them to open "the granary of the forest" (SKVR VII5 3293), or in other words to grant him a bear. There was an enormous number of variations on these "requests" to the *metsänhaltiat*: for example, the hunter could ask them to carve signs on the trees so that he could find the prey (SKVR XII 2 6464), or to be led by the sleeve or the ski pole (SKVR I4 1193), or by a mysterious "golden thread" that a *metsänhaltia* would unwind from her hair. In other cases, he pled with them to send the prey's scent towards the dogs' nostrils (SKVR 14 1095)

42. The supreme male *metsänhaltia*, sometimes called Tapio.
43. The supreme female *metsänhaltia*, sometimes called Mieliki
44. The last two verses refer to the joy that the bear festival brought to the villages.
45. The *sampo* cycle is also the fulcrum of the complex plot of Lönnrot's *Kalevala*.
46. On the symbology of grain and the *sampo*, see Tarkka 2014 and 2015.

or to make the dogs run so fast that they would roll (SKVR VII 3372). The name of the spirit to whom the pleas were addressed often changed: it might be Tapio, Mielikki or a more specific sylvan spirit, such as Tuometar (the mistress of the bird cherry or hackberry) or Kuitio (the mistress of the bear). The *metsänhaltia* were frequently asked to keep their dog (the bear) under control, often with a "bite" or two. The sky-god Ukko was asked to make fresh snow fall so the hunters could ski. At times, the invocation is directed to a figure in the Christian pantheon (the Virgin Mary or St. Anne) who fulfilled the same role as the *metsänhaltia*, to the point of being conflated with them: St. Anne is called "daughter of Tapio" or "mistress of the forest". Not infrequently, the hunter presented himself as a poor orphan in need of a "guide" (SKVR XII 2 6553, I4 1193). In many cases, the pleas were made to female beings, though some requests could be addressed to a "couple" of forest deities, to Tapio alone, or to the "king of the forest". In the longer songs, the hunter might ask for several things from different forest spirits. The pleas were often accompanied by small sacrifices: usually a few drops of molten silver from a coin.

11. *Singing to the bruin: Births of the Bear and commands*
Other runes were sung to the bear, who was thought be always listening. In many stages of the hunting ritual, the hunters sang one of the *Births of the Bear* (*karhun synty*). As in the case of the songs to protect the livestock, the purpose of this incantation was to gain magical control over the bear. Unsurprisingly, such verses were almost invariably followed by orders to the bear. Here again, the *Births of the Bear* varied from village to village or from singer to singer. In the hunting songs, references to the bear's heavenly origins are quite rare (SKVR XII 6464). Very often, the bear was said to have been born:

Pimeässä Pohjolassa	in the dark Pohjola,
Tarkassa Tapiolassa	in the rigorous Tapiola
(SKVR XII2 6479)	

These are more or less the same mythical places where the hunt took place, according to the verses sung as the hunter

advanced into the forest. More rarely, the "mother" of the bear is indicated, while the father is never mentioned. In some versions, the mother is Mielikki, the mistress of the forest (SKVR XII 6479), others refer to Hongotar (the Pine Lady, in SKVR VII5 3385). The longest version of the *Birth of the Bear* sung during the hunt was transcribed in 1888 and sung by the famous Karelian singer Iivana Malinen, who had heard it from his grandfather Ontrei[47]. In this version, *Pohjan akka* (the Crone of Pohja, a variation of *Pohjolan emäntä*, the Mistress of Pohjola) gave birth to a lynx, a wolf and a bear under a pine tree and "baptized" them with these names (SKVR I4 1191). The grim mother is impregnated in Pohjola, a hellish place near the "Hill of Pain" and the "fiery rapids", "in the deep woods of Lapland"[48]. Pohja or Pohjola (the Northland) is a mythical land that appears frequently in the epic and ritual verses: among other things, it is the birthplace of diseases and ice, and illnesses could be banished to it after they were expelled from the patient's body. In Lönnrot's *Kalevala*, Pohjola and its Mistress stand in opposition to *Kalevala*, the land of "positive" heroes. In the ritual verses, *Pohjan akka* appears to be a darker, negative version of the more "generous" Mielikki, the Mistress of the Forest. But the underlying idea is the same: the bear always has a mythical origin. Iivana's verses go on to provide interesting details: the bear is born without claws and the mother makes them out of various parts of different trees in the forest. The most dangerous parts of the bear were thus imbued with the trees' magical power, which Iivana neutralizes by singing of the birth of the bear and his claws, followed by verses in which he ordered the bear to make himself harmless:

Kytke kynnet karvohisi,	Hide your claws in your fur,
hampahat ikenihisi	your teeth in your gums
(SKVR I4 1191)	

To make the order more convincing, Iivana emphasized that his magical knowledge was secret:

47. On these Karelian singers, see Pentikäinen 2014a.

48. For a translation of the entire *runo*, see Pentikäinen 2014b.

Siinä on syvin synty,	There is the deepest origin,
sitä ei tiijä poijat puoletkaan,	half the lads do not know it
arvoa yheksät urohot.	Nine heroes cannot guess it

(SKVR I4 1191)

12. *Waking the bear: Rise now, sooty maiden*
When the hunters had sung enough to satisfy the mistresses of the forest and control the bear, they approached the den. In the winter, killing the bear while he was sleeping was forbidden. In Viena Karelia, the bear had to be woken by singing the following verses:

Nousep' pois, nokine(n) neit'[i],	Rise now, sooty maiden.
nokiselta nuotiolta.	From the sooty fireplace,
Havuselta vuotielta,	from the pine needle bed,
Hakoselta peänalalta;	from the pillow of twigs;
Jo olet viikon moassa moannun',	you have long slept [underground,
Kauvon lehtossa levännyñ',	you have long rested in the [forest,
Viikon kuuluit, kauvon viivyit	a week has passed, some time [ago
Viron moata käyessäsi.	you are traveling in Estonia.

(SKVR I 4.1206)

The hunter woke the bear by singing gentle, courteous verses. He was careful to choose sweet, loving words: the bear was treated like a young girl who had overslept. Similar verses were used in the wedding songs to wake the future bride before she was taken to the home of the groom's family. In the bear songs, the variation "sooty lad" also appears, but the tone changes very little. The verses were intended to bring images of youth and romantic love to mind. The reference to traveling in Estonia was probably meant to confuse the bear, misleading him about the location of his slaying.

13. *Explaining the bear's death as "an accident"*
After the bear was killed, the conflict caused by the slaying was denied, as the hunters explained that they were entirely innocent. With a poetic stratagem, the hunters claimed that they had not shot the bear. It had all been an accident:

Empe mine ole sinua pañut, I did not shoot you,
eike toinen toveri, and neither did my friend,
ite pa harjaiti havolta, you yourself slipped from the pine,
ite vierit vempeleltä, you crashed from the curving tree,
kuavut koivun konkeloita fell from the bent birch,
halko marjaisen mahais, the berry-filled belly is torn
halko kultaisen kupuis. the golden belly is broken.
kätke kynet karvoihis! Hide your claws in your fur,
villa on suus, villa on piäs, your mouth is wool, your head is [wool,
villa on visi hamastais. your five fangs are wool.
(SKVR VI 4.4885)

In these verses, the bear's status changed once again: from being a young bride or groom who had overslept, he became a species of inattentive child who had hurt himself by falling out of a tree. The song, however, avoided admitting that the bear was dead: just that the belly was torn. The main verses are very delicate, but they are followed by a command similar to those sung after the *Birth of the Bear*.

14. *Skinning as an exchange benefiting the bear*
In the ritual verses, even skinning[49] the bear was portrayed as "an exchange entirely to the bruin's advantage":

Anna kättä, käyrän poika, Reach out your hand, hunched boy,
hongan oksalla ojenna, stretch it out from the pine bough,
vaihtakaamme paitojamme, let's trade our shirts,
nurikaamme nuttujamme, take off our jackets,
anna mulle villa paita, give me the wool shirt,
ota multa rauta paita, take from me an iron shirt,
rautanen risuissa lujempi, the iron one is firmer in the [underbrush,
kuusikossa kestävämpi. It lasts longer in the spruce forest.
(SKVR I4/1244)

The "iron shirt" was probably an oblique reference to the knife used to skin the bear. If the bear was somewhat unconvinced, the singer added that the knife had not been forged by the hunter, but came from far away. If the bear wanted revenge, he would have to look for it in another country:

49. The bear could be skinned in the forest, after it was killed, or later, in the village.

Ei ole veitsi minun tekema	The knife isn't a work of mine,
eikä toisi kumppailini,	nor of the other fellow,
Virossa on veitsi tehty,	The blade was forged in Estonia,
saatu Saksan kaupungissa	made in a German city
(SKVR I 4.1244)	

15. *Returning to the village: the bear as guest of honor*
In the next stages of the ritual, the hunters carried the bear's carcass slung on a pole borne by two men or dragged it on a sledge, continuing to sing as if the animal were still alive. Again, the bear's status changed: now, the songs celebrated him as the village's guest of honor, invited to take part in a staged wedding (mentioned almost exclusively in a few of the older sources) or in a feast with plentiful drink. He was no longer an awakening bride, a reckless little boy slipping off a branch, but a respectable grown man. In Viena Karelia, the bear was officially invited to join the human company with these words:

Lähe nyt, ohto, kulkomah,	Leave now, *ohto*, to roam
Hopie, vajeltamah,	silver, to wander,
Rahakarva, koalamah	money-fur, to ramble,
Uroisehe väkeh,	to the heroic people,
Miehisehe joukijoh	to the manly company,
Kullaista kujoa myöti,	along a golden path,
Hopijeista tietä myöti	along a silver way.
(SKVR I4.1203)	

The return to the village resembled the outward trip in many ways. On his way into the forest, the hunter was concerned with being accepted by its spirits; now he strove to ensure that the bear felt welcome among the group of hunters and in the village, and thus accepted the invitation. Here again, the scene had mythical features (golden and silver paths), and the hunter asked the forest spirits to make marks on the trees and rocks so that he could find his way home.

The bear's entry in the village had many aspects in common with the hunter's departure from it. The situation was liminal, and extremely delicate. Once again, the hunter's song described the events of the journey "step by step": the bear had to enter following a specific route. Bringing one of the "forest people" into the village entailed a high risk of

a "magical contagion" of some kind. The hunters also had to purify themselves and remove any traces of the "forest force" that they might be carrying with them.

15. *The role of the women at the bear's arrival in the village*
Women played a complex role when the bear arrived, as they had at the beginning of the hunting ritual. Those who were pregnant had to hide, because if the bear scented that they were expecting a boy, or in other words a future hunter, he might attack them. Beliefs of this kind show that the bear's spirit was still considered dangerous and, in a certain sense, alive.

Some of the women who were not pregnant acted as the "mistress of the house" (*emäntä*) and welcomed the bear and the returning hunters with the following verses:

Mipä lienńou miehillänńi,	What is happening to my men,
ku kumma urohillanńi,	what strange thing are my heroes,
kuin on lauloan tuletta	who sing as they walk,
hyreksien tänne šoatta,	bringing as they hum?
metisenköš anto mettšä,	The honeyed one[50] has been given by [the forest?
kultasńenköš moan [kunńinkaš?	The golden one[51], by the king of [the earth[52]?
jopa teäl' on penkit pesty,	The benches are already clean,
jo on l(attiet) l(akaistu)	and the floor, swept
tul(ovalla vierahalla),	for the guest who is coming[53],
šoav(alla käkievällä).	dear guest in arrival.
Jopa vuotin vierastani	I have waited for my guest[54],
jalkanńi šulah om mo(a)ha.	until the dirt melted under my feet,
šulat moat somerikoikse.	the dirt melted into sand.[55]

(*SKVR* I4 1223)

In this case, the "mistress of the house" welcomed the bear to the village. Femininity appears to have been essential in the liminal stages. We have seen how the departing hunt-

50. The bear.
51. The bear.
52. The spirit master of the forest or of the earth.
53. The bear.
54. The bear.
55. The bear.

ers passed under the women's legs, and how a "mistress of the forest" or the forest itself as a female being, accepted the hunters as the hunt began. The final three verses of this last rune recall the wedding poems: they are similar to those in which the bride spoke of the long wait for the groom. This "matrimonial" atmosphere is clear in another of these songs:

Tuota toivoin tuon ikäni,	I waited for him[56] all my life,
niinkuin neiti nuorna miestä,	like a maiden waits for a youth,
kapo kaunis sulhasia.	A pretty girl her suitors.

(SKVR XII 2 6531)

The situation is interesting because the bear, as we saw earlier, could be frightened by the "women's power" and by their sexuality. Perhaps the presence of a woman at the edge of the village served to unnerve the bear enough to prevent him from being aggressive. In any case, the words of the "mistress" are very warm: her song is intended to make the bear feel he is an honored guest, expected by the community.

As they arrived, the hunters urged the bear not to be alarmed by the women, and not to frighten the livestock they protected. The women were told to look after the "grain of the mistress" (*emännän vilja*), i.e., the cattle:

Varokaatte nyt, raukat vaimot,	Beware now, poor wives,
ett'ei karja kaipastuisi,	that the cattle won't vanish
viipastuisi emännän viljat	that the grain of the mistress[57] [won't disappear,
ohon tullessa tupahan	when *ohto* is coming into the [cabin.

(SKVR I4 1219b)

In a curious variation of this song, noted by Tarkka (1998), the wives are told to defend the mistress's hair or wool (i.e., her genitals) from the strange sexual attentions of the bear:

Varokate vaimot raukat,	Beware, you poor wives
kuin ma kultanńi kuletan,	when I move my golden one[58],
jott' ei karva kaipastuise,	so that the hair won't vanish

56. This can be interpreted as meaning "I have waited so long that I have ground the dirt under my feet into sand".

57. The cattle.

58. So that the bea does not scatter the cattle, in other words.

epeä emännän vil'l'a	the mistress's wool won't fail
ohon tullessa tulilla,	when *ohto* is coming to the fireplaces
kartanoh kalun met'isen	the honeyed dick[59] to the estate.
(SKVR I4 1206)	

This is the only example of this distinctly erotic variant, which hinges on the similarity between *karja* (cattle) and *karva* (hairs); *vilja* (grain) and *villa* (wool). More frequently, the bear fears the women. But this type of variant could also demonstrate the ambivalence of certain relationships between bear and woman: if there are signs that a certain attraction may be possible, it is felt by the mistress, who for her part declares that she has long awaited the bear. The hunters, far from encouraging such embarrassing situations to continue, urged the other women to protect the mistress. Another possible interpretation is that the distinction between the wives in the first verse and the mistress in those that follow is merely poetic, and that the wives were told to protect their cattle and their own sex.

In the verses following the mistress's "welcome", the hunters tell the "maids"[60] to move aside when the bear enters the house:

Poispa poiat por[s]tuvesta,	Go away, boys, from the porch
piiat pihtipuoliselta,	maids, from the doorjambs
urohon tultua tupahan,	when the male[61] is entering the [room
miesten mäntyä mäjelle!	when the men[62] go into the cabin!
Tupa on tehty miesten tulla,	The room is made for men to come [in,
talli seisoa hevosten.	the stable for horses to stand in.
(SKVR XII 2 6544).	

This, too, is not easy to interpret. The bear was considered an honored guest, and thus a "man" of high social standing: the humbler villagers, i.e., the servant girls and the chil-

59. The bear's penis.

60. The "maids" were not "slaves" in the worst sense of the term, but were probably dependent on the master or mistress of the house: farmhands and skivvies working for room and board or some other form of compensation.

61. The bear.

62. The hunters together with the bear.

dren, were told to make way for him. On the other hand, despite the rather harsh and peremptory tone, the verses might also have had a protective purpose: "doorjambs" and "porches" are liminal spaces, and as such are very risky from a magical standpoint[63]. The reference to the fact that the horses should stay in the stable reflects the fear that the bear could revenge himself on them.

The women's role appears to have depended on their status: the "mistresses" welcome the bear; the "wives" must guard the cattle; the "maids" must move out of the way when the bear enters the house; the pregnant women must defend themselves and the child in their womb, and must thus stay far from the bear. However, how strong the social distinctions could have been between mistress and servant in these remote and rather poor villages is by no means clear. One possibility is that these terms were applied to women in general, depending on their role: when the role was important, they were given the honorable name "mistress", while the more the dismissive term "maid" was used when they had to stay away for some reason. In reading these verses, we often have the impression that the ritual sought to draw attention to certain affinities between human society and the society of the forest. Since the *metsänhaltiat* had their hierarchies of wealth (they were divided into kings, masters and a variety of servants or maidens), the village also had to show that it had its own hierarchies, at least in the songs addressed to the bear, so that he would feel "at home".

15. *The problematic "wedding of the bear" in the Viitasaari Text*

A fairly complete description of the bear ceremonial is given in the so-called "Viitasaari Text" of around 1750, one of the oldest documents on the Finnish bear ceremonial:

> When the bear had been successfully killed and flayed in the forest, and the flesh with skin was brought back home to the settlement, a day was settled upon when the so-called *Couvon paaliset* or *häät*[64] would be celebrated. For this important celebration, some barley was gathered to brew beer and spirits. When the arranged day arrived, people gathered in

63. See the protective incantations in Section 8.

64. "The supper of *kouvo* or the wedding of *kouvo*". *Kouvo* is the bear.

> church clothes[65] at some house. Here a boy was chosen in honor of the bear as a bridegroom and following the custom of the land a girl clad in bridal costume was chosen as bride. When the food was brought in, the cooked dishes included, among other things, the own flesh of the deceased[66] served with pea soup[67].First to be brought in was the head[68] and then the rest of the meat, which had to be carried from the cooking hut in a special order. (…) The dish with the head was placed at the head of the table, and the other meat in order, below the head. The people then sat down, and the bridal pair at the end of the table. After the meal the bridal company dined on special dishes. Note: nothing was to be thrown away, not even a bone, everything had to be collected in the dish. (SKVR IX4 1096)

Though the ritual has many similarities with the bear ceremonials found among other peoples, it is not without its problematic aspects. First, the bear is called *kouvo*, which can mean a deceased person, a ghost or an ancestor. Second, the relationship between the young bridal couple and the bear is not very clear. Some scholars, Sarmela and Pentikäinen in particular, are convinced that this document demonstrates that the bear was considered in more ancient times to be a totem or ancestor who had to be "married" periodically to a young man or woman of the village, after the pattern of the ancestral marriage between a bear and a woman narrated by other Finno-Ugric peoples (Sámi, Khanty and Mandy). Other scholars such as Tarkka (1998) are very skeptical of this theory, and point out that the bear is treated as the "guest of honor" at a staged wedding between two young people. Tarkka notes that the Finnish origin myths indicated that the bear had human origins, or was born to a supernatural female being. But there was no archaic myth about the coupling of a bear and a woman, from which a clan of bear hunters had sprung.[69]

65. In their best clothes, as for holidays or Sunday service.

66. The deceased is the bear.

67. Pea soup was also eaten during ordinary funerals.

68. All parts of the head had to be eaten (including eyes, ears and tongue) in order to magically transfer the bear's powerful senses (sight, hearing) or his magical power (the tongue is associated with the magical song) to the village community.

69. For a comparative analysis of different versions of this myth among native North Americans and Eurasion peoples, see Spagna 1998.

To make matters more complex, there are few if any references to the "wedding of *kouvo*" in the nineteenth and twentieth century sources: no songs sung by the bridal pair, no songs indicating the presence of the bride and groom. Scholars transcribed the runes, but very few had personally attended the ritual. In his rare eyewitness account of 1899, Heikki Meriläinen makes no mention of either the wedding or the bridal pair. In many regions, the bear ceremonial was called *karhun peijaiset* or *hautajaiset*: the funeral of the bear. There are also versions where the feast is called *vakat*, or the bear's "drinking party". Many feast songs stress the importance of "the bear's" vodka and beer. To the Finnish mind, drinking parties were essentially male gatherings, and the songs emphasize the masculinity of the situation.

It is possible that the ritual of the bear's wedding existed only in certain local variants. It may also be that it gradually disappeared, probably because it was incompatible with the ideal of the Christian family and the conception of "women's force" as something opposing the power of the bear. Given the paucity of sources, the question remains open.

One thing that is clear, however, is that the verses in which the bear is woken in the den and the mistress's welcoming songs continued to refer to weddings. But these verses are metaphorical and poetic, and are never very direct. Also of interest are the rare verses where the hunter signs of his "desire" to marry the forest or have a sexual adventure with the *metsänhaltia*. Note the mirroring that takes place in this situation: first, the hunter is accepted by the forest with a species of wedding, seduction or falling in love; later, the bear is accepted in the village as a species of bridegroom, or at least as the guest of honor at a wedding with a mock bridal pair. The two young people undoubtedly served a practical purpose: to convince the bear that he had been invited to a "real" wedding, not to his funeral. But the hunter's main concern was to move the women as far as possible from the bear, as soon as possible. The relationship between women and bears was best kept within bounds.

It should also be noted that, even though the bridal pair disappeared, the ritual worked perfectly well without them: the essential point was that the bear be convinced that he was the special guest at a socially important occasion, be it

a feast, a wedding or a drinking party in his honor. The Finnish songs are full of variations on such themes.

16. *The feast*

The festivity – regardless of the form it took – doubtless served to strengthen the bond between the bear, the "forest people", and the villagers. The desire to merge together is represented in very physical, concrete terms. As the hunters ate the meat and the organs of the bear's head, they sang:

Korvampa otan Oholta	I take the ear from *Ohto*,
Itse korvin kuullakseni	myself, to hear with ears,
Silmänpä otan oh(olta)	I take the eye from *Ohto*,
Itse silmin nähäkseni	myself, to see with eyes.

(SKVR I 4.1242)

In this case, the hunter sought to transfer the bear's s powerful "supernatural senses" to himself: as we have seen, the bear had extraordinary eyesight and hearing. By eating the bear's flesh, the hunter also "absorbed" the creature's strength, courage and "spiritual power". Some sources indicate that there was music and dancing during the feast, at times imitating the bear's movements. There was also a dietary prohibition: the bear's meat could not be eaten together with butter or cheese. The power of the forest was not to be brought into contact with that of the cattle, as otherwise the bear could have attacked or killed the livestock. As for the women, some sources indicate that they ate the bear meat, others report that they refused to touch it, as the skinned bear resembled the body of a woman.

17. *Rituals for the skull and bones*

In the last part of the bear ceremonial, the hunters and villagers bore the bear's skull and bones in procession into a pinewood. Here, a pine was selected and the bones were buried beneath its roots, while the skull was tied to one of its branches with a red string. At the end of the ritual, the hunters of Ilomansi (Finnish Karelia) usually sang a dialog. One asked the other where he had taken the "prey", and the latter answered:

En oo jäälle jättänynnä,	I haven't left it on the ice,

uhkuhun upottanunna,	I haven't sunk it in the slushy snow,
enk' oo tiehen tellännynnä;	I haven't chucked it on the road;
panin puuhun puhtahasen,	I hung it up on a pure tree
petäjähän pienimmähän[!],	on the smallest of the pines,
honkahan havusatahan,	on an old pine of a hundred sprigs,
panin kuuta kahtomahan,	I set it up to watch the moon,
otavia oppimahan,	to learn the stars of the Big Dipper,
päiveä tähystämähän.	To observe the sun.
(SKVR VII 5.3396)	

Clearly, the bear had to be brought back to the land of its birth so that it could be reborn. In the Khanty ritual, the bear relates the events in the first person, and describes how he was taken back to his birthplace in the sky, raising himself up on a chain. But the Finnish hunters did not refer to this in such precise terms, and above all never mentioned the bear's resurrection. We must not forget that for the entire second part of the ritual, they firmly denied the bear's death and treated him as if he were still alive. Singing of his rebirth would have meant admitting his death. In some variations, the hunters point out that the pine was near a gulf full of fish: a paradise for the bear, from which he would never have to move.

The skull ritual also had its festive elements, some quite dramatic. The drinking party continued at the pine tree: bear was poured into the skull, and the hunters drank it from the nostrils. The Vittasaari Text tells us that the bridal couple also participated in the skull ritual, as if to emphasize once again that this was a wedding procession, not a funeral.

18. *Conclusions: a killing masquerading as a festivity*

The Finnish bear ceremonial is remarkable in many ways: archaic elements have survived through the ages and adapted to a mixed economy and the remnants of a highly syncretic popular Christianity. The wealth of ethnographic details about each stage of the ritual makes it of interest to students of hunting rituals in general, even those who are not specialists in Finno-Ugric cultures. The abundant material regarding the liminal stages is particularly intriguing. Some of the anthropological and ethnographic consider-

ations that emerge from an analysis of the ceremonial are summarized below:

1. The bear had human characteristics, but was at the same time closely linked to the "forest people" and in particular to a *metsänhaltia* that protected him.
2. For this reason, the bear was endowed with the power of the magical forest.
3. The forest was another world, but its organization reflected the economy, the hierarchies and the structure of human society. It was richer, and had a magical power that inspired fear. However, the forest people abided by moral principles and rules.
4. A number of protective rites and songs were necessary when crossing the border separating village and forest.
5. The resemblance between the forest and human society made it possible for the hunters to communicate with the forest through the *runot*, or ritual songs.
6. The forest "granted" a bear after various requests and pleas by the hunter, who had to demonstrate that he had a good knowledge of the forest people's rules and of a sizable number of magic rites and songs.
7. Some hunters had to be true *tietäjä* (experts in magic) and *runolija* (skiled singers of r*unot*);
8. The ceremonial is an integral part of the exchange: the hunters offer the entire ceremonial, respectful songs, the bear feast and the skull ritual in exchange for the bear.
9. The bear's status changed during the ceremonial.
10. The roles of the village women were complex.
11. The ceremonial as a whole forestalled revenge on the part of the bears and the *metsänhaltiat*.
12. Masks were not used during the ceremonial, but it was all a masquerade, where everything was often turned upside down: the bear who killed livestock was innocent; the hunters who killed the bear were innocent and incapable of doing harm; though they slayed the bear, the hunters acted as "seducers" of the "forest maidens" who protected him; the bear had not been killed, but had fallen "on his own" from a branch; the knife that

skinned him was an iron shirt that could prove useful in the woods; the slain bear was not really dead, but became an honored guest; the occasion on which the bear's meat was eaten was presented as "the wedding" of the bear or a "festivity", a "feast" and a "drinking party" in his honor; when the skull and bones were taken to the pine tree, the bear continued his life in an enchanting place, admiring the stars.

Thus, the entire ceremonial hinged on erasing the memory of the bear's slaying, which was deliberately transformed into a series of songs and rites that celebrate the life and the union of the forest and the village community through social rituals of conciliation and communication.

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