

# The Theme of the Exodus in Russian Folklore: The “Pharaoh” Mythical Creatures, According to the Archive of the Estonian Literary Museum

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In this article, we will consider the Russian folklore retellings of the Exodus, with special emphasis on the narratives about mythical creatures called “pharaohs”. The current analysis is based on a Russian collection of folklore. The data were collected in the 1920–‘40s in the territories of Estonia, Russia, and Latvia (Lutsi region, Estonian settlement) in the context of Slavic belief systems and legends about these characters. Currently, folklore materials are stored in the archive collection of the Estonian Literary Museum (ELM) (Tartu), and in the Skriptoorium. The article gives an overview of the most characteristic motifs, the origin, appearance, and habitat of these mythical creatures. The actions of the Pharaohs are described in more detail.

KEYWORDS: Exodus, parabiblical motifs, Russian folklore, Pharaoh people, myths, mermaid

Why were the Tartu archives of the ELM chosen for the consideration and analysis? First, because the materials of this archive about the pharaohs have not been published generally. Several texts published in Russian by Olga Cherepanova in her book “The Mythological stories and legends of the Russian North” are an exception (1996: № 187, 188, 190, 191) as well as one text (№70) in the book by Olga Belova and Galina Kabakova “At the origins of the world. Russian etiological legends” (2014: 74, text no.70). There are several interesting developments in the Estonian pharaoh tradition. It was Oskar Looris who earlier pointed out that Livonians and Estonians had developed a peculiar mythological connection between the seal and pharaoh people (Loorits 1926, 1935). We believe the connection between pharaoh people, mermaids, and seals as well as between pharaoh people and mermaids to be even more significant. There are some connections with Northern traditions about seal-humans, and these stories can be understood by today reader through the emotional and humane message. In narratives, creatures can be distinguished by appearance. For example, a creature with female characteristics who complains about babies staying home is caught in fisherman nets or is displayed at a fair. At the same time, they have emerged from the Pharaoh people, Pharaoh warriors, but residing in the Baltic Sea.

Nevertheless, such exciting developments are a separate topic and an interesting subject influenced by the Bible literary materials and parable texts, which evolved in the folklore in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and supplemented the mythology. However, researchers in various regions have also pointed to some interesting developments in antiquity and the Middle Ages, such as the Pharaonic or Selkulla developmental characteristics (Kropej 2003, Klobčar 2012, Klintberg 2018, *et al.*).

Meanwhile, the texts of the archive of the ELM contain both transnational and original motifs, which can significantly expand the notion about these mythological creatures. Some of these original motifs have parallels in the folklore of other European peoples. Pharaohs or people with fishtails are widely known in European folklore, in the Baltic-Finnish regions (Kõiva 2018-2019), Livs (Loorits 1926), in Russian (Gorodtsov 1907: 408-409, Zelenin 1915: 858; Cherepanova 1996: 6, 36, 96; Ivleva 2004: 145; Kuznetsova 2012: 5-14;), Ukrainian (Dragomanov 1876: 96; Ivanov 1893: 82-83, Gnatyuk 1897: 17; 1902: 33-34; Chubinsky 1995: 208), Belarusian (Dobrovolsky 1891: 147; Federowski 1897: 108-109; Boganeva 2010: 54-56), Polish (Zowczak 2013: 172-174), Croatian (Bošković-Stulli 1975: 143), Slovenian (Kropej 2003, Klobčar 2017: 145-177), and Serbian (Loorits 1935) materials.

Representations and narratives of the pharaohs are also known in the extensive space of the Baltic States and Northern Europe, to the peoples of Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and to the Saami of Lapland (Treiland 1887: 44-45, Loorits 1935), England (Marwick 1974), and even in Asia (Mongols, Loorits 1935).

One of the books of the Pentateuch of Moses (Ex. 14: 1-31) tells of the escape of the Jews from Egyptian captivity under the leadership of Moses. At the behest of the Lord, the waters of the Red Sea were divided before the Jews and closed over the heads of the persecutors. According to folk tales, the Pharaoh warriors who followed the Jews turned into creatures with a human torso and a fishtail. They swim in search of the Pharaoh and shout: “Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Pharaoh!” The pharaohs will become human only on the Day of Judgment, so part of the legends describe how they swim up to ships or boats (or rock them) with the question of whether Judgment Day is coming soon (see Loorits 1935: 40; Kõiva 2018: 63).

Our representative collection includes 54 texts about pharaohs recorded in the 1920s and ‘40s (for comparison: there are 404 Estonian texts about pharaohs in the archive of the ELM; there are only 12 in Belarusian in the archive of the database of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences have only<sup>1</sup>). In the Lutsi region (which was Estonian-speaking in 1920–‘40s), in Latvia, the Estonian collector Paulopriit Voolaine recorded texts about pharaohs in the Russian language using the Latin alphabet or in the Estonian language. The nationality of the informant was not always indicated, so we included texts in Estonian from informants who had Slavic names. Materials of Russian folklore archives of the ELM strikingly reflect the process of assimilation of Russians in Estonia, many of whom in the second generation were speaking in the Estonian language, although they

<sup>1</sup> Given that Belarus is a landlocked country, the very fact of the presence of “sea” characters in Belarusian folklore is indicative; 9 of the 12 texts were recorded in the modern period from 1998 to 2018.

still could pass on the tradition learned from their Russian parents. Latvian records also included some texts from Polish, Belarusian, Roma, or Polish people.<sup>2</sup>

Let us consistently consider the collection of Russian texts about pharaohs in the following categories: 1) names and terminology, 2) origin 3) appearance, 4) actions of the pharaohs in relation to people and of people in relation to the pharaohs, 5) acoustic characteristics, 6) habitat.

### NAMES (NAMES, TERMINOLOGY)

The semantic field of the lexeme “pharaoh” (phonetic variants “paraon”, “paramon”) in the texts of the Estonian Literary Museum unites 1) metaphorical names 2) designations of mythical hybrid characters (half-human/half-fish), the origin of which presumably comes from Pharaoh’s army.

The word “pharaohs” in a metaphorical sense could mean:

1. Representatives of the ruling aristocracy and power state institutions (kings, princes, police, etc.).

*Фараонами называли палицейских, раньше бывала жандармов называли фараонами. Откуда ано взявши эта слова – Бог ведает, такое паулашное [уличное] слово. И царей называли фараонами.*

The police were called pharaohs (formerly gendarmes). Where did they get that word – God knows, just such a kind of the street vocabulary. The tsars were also called pharaohs. [ERA, Vene 15, 661 (11) < Setomaa, D. Budowizh village - Olga Brandt < Klaudia I. Znamenskaya, born 1880 (1940)].

2. A dirty word.

*Фу, фараоны египетские, идите от окошка прощ. [детей ругают].*

[Children are reprimanded]. Fui, Egyptian Pharaohs, get away from the window! [ERA, Vene 15, 638 (13) < Setomaa, D. Kirshino (Kiršino k.) - Olga Brandt < Pavel G. Shpilev, born in 1865 (1940)].

3. Bears (single interpretation)

*Фараоны — это медведи в ледавитам океане. Аны абрывают падводные суда.*

Pharaohs – these are bears in the frozen ocean. They sneak/attack ships in the water. [ERA, Vene 15, 645 (6) < Setomaa, Kirshino village - Olga Brandt < Maria K. Lozina, born in 1894 (1940)].

As for the bears, this interpretation, although single, but perhaps not accidental, is not so much metaphorical as mythological. In particular, if you recall that, in the traditional beliefs of Estonians, Finns, Scandinavians, and Saami, the drowned Pharaoh army became seals (about the pharaohs in the form of seals, we will talk further). It is possible that the Russian informant identified polar bears and seals by one polar habitat, especially in her message bears-pharaohs pose a threat to ships.

<sup>2</sup> Belarusian Catholics could feature self-identification “the Pole”, today they call themselves “Poles” not by nationality but by religion.

4. The word “pharaohs” could designate the representatives of peoples (the Gypsies, the Egyptians, and seldomly the Jews.

*Считали, что цыганы из Ягипта вышедши, фараонава племя.*

The Gypsies were thought to be Pharaoh tribes that emigrated from Egypt. [ERA, Vene 15, 598 (21) < Setomaa, Zabolotie / Sootaga village - Olga Brandt < Phrasenja V. Yurkina, 45 yrs (1940)].

*Some old Jewish woman I meet in Ludza on 13 Krosu Street. III 1934 refers to the Pharaoh's people who remained in the sea: „Цыгане вроде гнались за евреями.“ / “Seems like Gypsies were chasing the Jews”. [ERA II, 79, 644 < Lutsi, Ludza I. - Paulopriit Voolainen < old female, Jewish (1934)].*

However, here too, as in the case of the seal bears, the metaphorical meaning is mixed and becomes mythological. Roma in the representations and folklore of different European nations can be identified as descendants of Egyptians involved in the Exodus, in connection with which they were marked as descendants of the ancestral line of the Pharaoh. The fact that the Roma come from Egypt, according to the names of the Roma in European languages: *Gypsies* (Eng.), *Gitanos* (Span.), *Gitans* (Fr.), *Pharao nerek* — the Pharaoh's people (Hun.), *Tso'anim* (עִינְוִים) — comes from the name of the biblical Zoan province in Ancient Egypt, etc. (see: Strakhov 2004: 282-283).

So, let us move on to the mythological meaning of the words “Pharaoh”, “pharaohs”, in which the concept is inseparably linked with the origin of these creatures.

## ORIGIN

Pharaohs – people-fish, whose name comes, according to the oral Bibles of different peoples, from the “pharaohs” – the Egyptians who persecuted the Jews when they crossed the Red Sea.

The biblical text:

“And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry land: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. [...] the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it, and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen of all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters [were] a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left” (Exodus 14: 21–23, 26–29).

In oral traditions, the biblical text “is specified”, short, focused on the main activities, it acquires new episodes and details which are not present in the original.

*Маисей вел явреев через залив. Он вдарил жезлом, и вада ушла. А когда Фараон пагнался са своим народом за Моисеем, то вада нахлынула, и ани утанули. Есть сказание, что эта и есть фараоны. Живут в Черном море — галава целовецьа плюсни [ноги] рыбье и весь сам как рыба. Зла человеку не применяют, а живут сами по себе.*

Moses led the Jews through the Gulf. He hit with the stick, and the water receded. But as Pharaoh hastened with his people after Moses, the waters returned, and they were drowned. It is said that these are pharaohs. Living in the Black Sea – they have human heads, fish legs and themselves are a type of fish. They do not harm people but live on their own. [ERA, Vene 15, 394/5 (9) < Setumaa, Kolpino village – Olga Brandt < Tatiana Federovna Pavlushina, born 1905 (1940)].

In some texts of the Russian archives, there are “clarifications” about how the event of the Exodus occurred. In particular, it is said that Moses did not divide the sea with a wave of his hand but waved his handkerchief — and a bridge appeared across the sea (a motif peculiar to fairy tales).

*M. T. talks about the difference between the people [of which] the pharaohs and Moses [descended].*

*От еврейки родился Масьяш. Царь цыган был фараон. Фараон плыл 12 дней через море Египта. Массей перевел свой народ через море; платочек кинул, махнул, сделался мост. Цыгане, которые гнались за ними, утонули.*

Masiah was born from a Jewish woman. The Gypsy tsar was Pharaoh. Pharaoh swam for twelve days across the Egyptian Sea. Moses led his people across the sea, grabbed a stick, waved with it, made a bridge: The Gypsies who were chasing them drowned. [ERA II 109, 135/6 (1) < Lutsi - Paulopriit Voolaine < Magdalena Tumaševič, 80-year-old Gypsy (1935)].

Ukrainians have a similar motif associated with the appearance of the bridge. [Translation from the Ukrainian:] And the pharaohs, who are they? It was Moses who led the people through the water. God told him to wave over the water. Moses waved his hand, and the bridge was over the water] (Dragomanov 1876: 96).

In one of the texts, Moses did not divide the sea but read from the book, “when the sea diverges”.

*Paraons — half fish, half human. With a head like a man, and the tail of a fish. Paraon chased the Jews from Egypt. Moises read from a book, when the sea diverges. He led his people and the paraon drowned with his. They ask: “How soon is the end of the world?” When they say, ‘Soon!’, then they rejoice. Will [dwell] in the sea until a judgment day. [ERA II 109, 138/9 (4) < Lutsi, Nirza v. - Paulopriit Voolaine < Kazakevič, 70-year-old female (1935)].*

In the Russian archive of the ELM, there are several original interpretations of the origin of the pharaohs (one text). So, pharaohs descended:

1. From the Gypsies, who were punished for their pride and disbelief.

*Израилы перешли через море, а фараоны были гордые, не малились Богу. Они утонули и сделались как рыба (нижня часть), и как человек (голова). Они были цыгане. Волоса курчавые. Когда тихая погода, тогда красиво спевают.*

The Israelites went by the sea, but the Pharaohs were proud and did not pray to God. They were drowned and made like fish (bottom body) and humans (head). They were Roma. Curly hair. When the weather is nice, they sing beautifully. [ERA II 109, 143 (10) < Lutsi, Plitnitsa village - Paulopriit Voolaine < Mikalina Stachovska, 66 yrs. (1935)].

2. From the Jews, who doubted the correctness of the path that Moses took.

*Мойсей вел фараонов через море. Царь начал мучить фараонов. Они стали молиться Богу. Бог и послал им своего посланника Мойсея. Тот государь (täh. vaarao) был волшебник и сильный царь, вел своих людей тоже через озеро. Он некоторых перевел, а некоторые дошли в озеро до груди и сказали: “Не так идем! Нужно назад вернуться!” Но как Мойсей ударил жеслом, так они (т.е. которые хотели назад (вернуться) остались до груди в море. У них сделался рыбий хвост, а верхняя половина осталась как у человека. Они кричат в море: “Скоро ли второе происшествие?” Когда будет второе происшествие, тогда выходят они на суд.*

Moses led Pharaohs through the sea. The tsar began to bother the Pharaohs. They started praying to God. God sent his envoy Moses to them. This ruler (i.e., Pharaoh) was a wizard and a strong tsar, led his people as well through the lake. He led some people through the water, but some went into the lake up to the chest and said: “We took the wrong way! Let’s turn back!” However, when Moses hit the water with a stick so that they (those who wanted to go back) stayed in the sea up to the chest. They had a fish tail, but the top part remained human. They scream in the sea: “Is it Doomsday yet?” When Doomsday comes, they will go to trial. [ERA II 109, 137/8 (3) < Lutsi, Zvirgzden region, Gorka village - Paulopriit Voolaine < Egorov, 75 yrs, Russian (1935)].

From the text, it is not quite clear what kind of king “the wizard and the strong king” was, but it is about Moses most likely. Then the pharaohs, according to this version of the legend, are not Egyptians, but those people of Moses (Jews?), who doubted the correctness of the road along which they were led by Moses, and they wanted to turn back.

3. From the sinful angels that God threw from heaven into the sea.

*Парамоны — были ангелы, они согрешили. Бог стихнул с неба в море. Кричат с моря до Бога: “Когда будет конец свету?” От неба говорит ангел: “Один Бог знает, когда будет конец свету. Ни ангелы, ни горубоны не знают”.*

*Когда будет судебный день, парамоны будут как люди. Теперь у них рыбий хвост.*

Paramons — were angels, they have sinned. God shoved them into the sea. They shout from the sea to God: “When will the end of the world be?” From heaven says an angel: “God alone knows when the world will end. Neither the angels nor goruboni know.” When the Day of Judgment comes, the paramons will be like people. Now they have a fishtail. [ERA II 109, 140/1 (7) < Lutsi, Põlda region - Paulopriit Voolaine < Mutyanka, 45 years. female (1935)].

A parabiblical motif of the angels who sinned, of which the spirits of the loci and of the element occurred, became an integral part of the oral tradition of the Slavs, and it is presented in diverse versions (see about Tolstoy 1995: 245–249; Belova 2004: 275, 289, 291; Belova, Kabakova 2014: 58–76, 342–350). The manuscript contains an unclear word “gorubons”, it might be a local name of some mythological creatures, though no analogues have yet been found.

#### 4. From the persecutors of Jesus Christ.

*When Jesus was born, the king ordered many children to be killed. The king wanted to kill Jesus because he was told that Jesus would be the ruler of all. But the angel told the child's parents to take him to Egypt. When they were running across the sea – they were being chased by the pharaohs. And God closed the sea before them, and they were half in the sea. The part of the body that's in the sea is like a fish. Starting from the middle to the head, they are completely like all people. They're black. They mumble (speak dimly). And they sing well and pray beautifully to God.*

*When the pharaohs are told that the end of the world will not be soon, they cry. And when they are told that it will be soon – then they laugh and rejoice.*

*The narrator says, among other things, that once he had seen one of the Pharaoh in Ludza. [ERA II 61, 145/6 (1) < Lutsi, Ludza city - Paulopriit Voolaine < Helena (Gel'ka) Katkevitiš, 70 years, Polish, female (1933)].*

The interweaving of motifs of the Old and New Testaments are characteristic of many Slavic traditions. Magdalena Zowczak notes the symbolic likeness of some persons and events of the Old and New Testaments, which are characteristic of oral traditions of the Poles and other nations: Pharaoh and Herod; the drowning of Jewish children — the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem, the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt — the Holy family's fleeing to Egypt; the Pharaoh's army – the army of Herod (Zowczak 2013: 316). The observation by M. Zowczak is also fully confirmed by the Belarusian material, which apart from such interweaving is also characterised by substitutions: Eve - Virgin Mary (among other things there is a phonetic correspondence: Jeva – Deva, Moses – Christos). The Russian archive also contains a text (ERA II 79, 630/2) where Christ gives Moses a “stick” with which Moses divides the sea.

In the Russian literature from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the manuscript tradition existed about people-pharaohs with different titles — “The legend of the crossing of the Red Sea”, “The Legend of the Moscow merchants about the fish”, “The walking of Vasily Poznyakov”, “The walking of Tryphon Korobeinikov” (for details, see Belova 2004: 292–293, Kuznetsova 2012: 5-14). In the tale of the crossing of the Red Sea, the pharaohs are described as follows:

*[--] люди же Фараоновы обратились рыбами; у тех рыб головы человеческие, а туловища нет, только одна голова, а зубы и нос человеческие; а где уши, тут перья, а где затылок, тут хвост, и не ест их никто. А кони и оружие превратились в рыб, а на лошадиных рыбах шерсть лошадиная, а кожа на них толстая на палец в толщину, ловят их и кожи с них снимают [---]. А из кож обувь и подошвы шьют. Воды те кожи не терпят, а если носить посуху, то долго носят, на год хватит. [ПЫПИН 1862: 49–50].*

[...] the people of Pharaoh turned into fish; those fish have human heads, but there is no body, only one head, and human teeth and nose; and where ears should be – feathers seen, and where the back of the head, there is a tail, and no one eats them. And horses and weapon turned into fish, and on the horse-fish there is the horse fur, and skin on them is thick – a finger in thickness; they are caught and skin from them removed [...]. And leather shoes and soles are sewn from the skin. That skin cannot stand water, but if worn on dry land, then it can be worn a long time – for a year they will last. [Pypin 1862: 49-50]

As you can see, the pharaohs of the “Tales...” and the pharaohs of the oral traditions of different nations are different. The appearance of “literary” pharaohs differs significantly from the pharaohs of folklore. The “Tales...” describes creatures with one head without a body, while the folklore pharaohs – anthropomorphic or zoomorphic – always have a body. Information about that skin received from converted Pharaoh horses being used for making shoes has no analogues in oral tradition. Also, the literary source does not have motifs about the actions of the pharaohs towards people (questions about the end of the world, beautiful singing, etc.), which are widespread in oral traditions, in particular, in Russian tradition (these motifs will be discussed further). In this regard, as rightly noted by Vera Kuznetsova, “the similarity of the literary version of the plot and Slavic folklore tales about the same events is more of a typological nature, rather than geneticism which is how the mechanism of inclusion of pre-Christian ideas and beliefs brought into this biblical story in its interpretation by the bearers of the folk tradition” (Kuznetsova 2012: 13).

In some cases, pharaohs as mythological characters can be identified with mermaids.

*Некоторые говоря, што русалки – это утопленники... А только это не так! Русалки – это фараоново отродье. А фараоны эти были вот какие: слышала, наверно, как Моисей свой народ из Египту выводил? Вот яму нужно было свой народ через одно море вести – как быть? А враг (это фараоны-то со своим войском) гоница, скоро уже догоня! Вот Моисей помолился хорошенько и получил вразуменье, как спастись. Образовалась в море как бы суха дорога, и народ пошел по ней, а фараоны погнались сзади. Да только, как зашли часть из них на середину моря, вода и залила их. Так яны вси и утонули... А только яны не погибли вовсе, а стали русалкам! Но только яны не остались только в одном море, а расселились повсюду, потому русалки умеют и по суши ходить!*

Some say mermaids are drowned folk ... But only it's not so! Mermaids are the Pharaoh's spawn. And them, pharaohs, were like this: did you hear how Moses led his folk out of Egypt? He alone had to lead his over one of the sea – how to be? And the enemy (it's the Pharaohs with their army) is chasing, soon will catch up! So, Moses prayed well and received the words of how to be saved. Something like a dry road was formed in the sea, and people came along it, and the pharaohs chased behind. Yes, but when half of them came to the middle of the sea, the water poured over them. So, they all drowned... But only they did not die at all but became mermaids! And they did not remain in one sea, but settled everywhere, because mermaids know how to walk on land! [ERA, Vene 8, 415/6 (375) < Tartu city < Kodavere parish, Peipsi region – Valeria Jegorova < Anna Lovjagina, 58 years (1936)].

Such interchange of characters also exists in the Belarusian traditions. According to modern Belarusian records, mermaids are usually not called pharaohs, even if they have some characteristics of pharaohs: they live in the sea, sing beautifully, are dangerous for sailors who are fond of their singing and break the ship on the rocks. But the plot about the origin of the pharaohs can be explained with reference to mermaids (Boganeva 2010: 56), similar to the text referred to from the Russian archive.



## APPEARANCE

The appearance of pharaohs according to the Russian archive of the ELM can be anthropomorphic, hybrid-anthropomorphic with zoomorphic features and zoomorphic (in the form of seals).

Most often, pharaohs are described as hybrid creatures, half-human-half-fish, which combine anthropomorphic and zoomorphic features (31 texts).

*Фараон — хвост рыбий, а голова члавечья.*

*Pharaon – has a fishtail, but the head is human.* [ERA, Vene 16, 432 (30) < Tallinn < Setumaa, Nartyshovo village – Olga Brandt < Anna Zimova, 40 years (1942)].

In one text, the pharaohs have the appearance of anthropomorphic beings, but with one zoomorphic sign — they have webs between the toes that makes them easier to paddle in the water to swim.

*Фараоны в Черном море живут. Женщины и мужчины с долгим валасами. Как прайдешь, так или в воду. У них такие же руки и ноги, только между пальцами перепонки, так что они могут гребитца.*

The Pharaohs live in the Black Sea. Women and men with long hair. If you pass, they go into the water. They have the same hands and feet, but between fingers and toes there are flippers, so they can scrape [ERA, Vene 15, 515/6 (13) < Setumaa, Kulje village – Olga Brandt < Andrei Semenovoch Vetlev, born 1875 (1940)].

In three texts about the pharaohs, they are described as ordinary people, but there is a sign of other-worldness that distinguish them from ordinary people — they are short.<sup>3</sup>

*Ишла я мимо озера Дряби и вижу: в вады што-то плавая, подошла я поближи и што-ж! Плавают в воды маленьки человеки, мужик и баба. Мужик с бародой, плавают голыи, на спины. А сами таки маленьки. Спужалася я дюжа. Стала в их бросать каменя, а яны все плавают, я и убегла. А мне надо было крыкнуть: «Вы кто таки?» — яны и исчезли б. А это были фараоны. Можя слышала, что были таки фараоны, аише яны утопли в мори, кагда гналися за явреям. Яны ждуть конца света, тагда снова будут, как и мы, человеки.*

I went past Drabi Lake and I saw something floating in the water, and I got closer and see what! Floating in the water are little people, a man and woman. The man had a beard, swimming naked, on their back. Well, such little ones. I started throwing stones at them, but they would keep swimming, and I ran away. I should have shouted: “Who are you, people?” and they would have disappeared. But they were Pharaohs. I guess I heard they were the kind of pharaohs that drowned in the sea while chasing the Jews. They’re waiting for the end of the world; then they’re like us again – the people. [ERA, Vene 13, 539/40 (7) < Setumaa, Brod village – Zoia Zhemchuzhina < Daria Beregova, 46 years (1939)].

In one text, the pharaohs are compared with cats, but any conclusions about their appearance cannot be drawn based on the text.

<sup>3</sup> According to Sergei Neklyudov, “much more often the lower mythology characters appear to be very small creatures” (Neklyudov 2012: 85-122).

*В Вильне фараоны рыженькие, тёмненькие, как кошки, вышли из воды. Сын мой хотел убить их, но не попал. На берег плавали.*

In Vilna, the pharaohs, red-haired, dark as cats, came out of the water. My son wanted to kill them but missed. They swam to the shore. [ERA, Vene 5, 286 (1) < Setumaa, Staryi Izhborsk < Lithuania, Vilnius – Menda Ehrenberg < female in the retirement house (1934)].

In one text, the narrator calls the pharaohs “seals”.

*„Параоны” sõidavad laevadel, nad mõtlevadki kõiksugu laule välja. Paraon” on pool kala, pool inimest. Selle juures nimetan Aleksander „тюлени” („tül’ni”), kel on koera pää.*

*„Параоны” плавают на кораблях и придумывают разные песни. „Параон” наполовину человек, наполовину рыба. При этом Александр называет их «тюлени», у которых собачья голова.*

“Paraons” float on ships and dream up different songs. A “paraon” is half man, half fish. At the same time, Alexander calls them “seals”, which have a dog head. [ERA II 33, 72 (14) < Latvia, Lutsi region, Kukuevo village – Paulopriit Voolaine < Maria and Alexandr Kulakov (1931)].

The motifs of the transformation of warriors of the Pharaoh into animals or birds (whales, marine fish, certain types of noisy sea birds or seals) are widely known in folklore in the Estonian Islands and in the coastal villages of Livs. In Estonia, the social and economic situation on the islands contributed to this (Kõiva 2018: 12). In Western Estonia, hunting for seals was an important source of food, so the motif of turning into a seal is the most common (95 texts), it is also known in the folklore of the Livs (Loorits 1926: 159). Records show that the seal was sometimes identified as a mermaid, and mermaids were in the guise of seals. The appearance of a mermaid in the guise of a seal is also familiar to Estonian Swedes:

*Der Neck, eine Art kleiner Teufel in Gestalt von Seehunden mit scharfen Zähnen, zieht den Menschen bei den Beinen ins Wasser.*

Mermaid: a small demon with sharp teeth appears in the guise of a sea dog and drags people by the feet under the water. (Russwurm 1855: 250).

Narratives about the appearance of the pharaohs in the guise of seals are known in the natural habitat of seals on the Northern coasts of Europe. Since the body of the seal is similar to that of a human, it is believed that they too were once humans. Oskar Loorits (Loorits 1926: 159) concluded that the narrative of the Pharaoh warriors is the reason that the Livs treated them with respect, did not eat their meat and did not even want to sell the seal caught alive. In the expedition to Hiiumaa Paul Ariste wrote the following:

*Seals are half-brothers of men. I heard that. They appeared when the Egyptian army drowned.* [ERA II 1, 584 (10) < Reigi khk, 1928].

Ideas about the pharaohs-seals of the Northern peoples are typologically similar to the Ukrainian and Balkan beliefs about the pharaohs-dolphins. As Ivanov said:

*The wide popularity of the present plot [about pharaohs] is caused by the fact that many peasants of the Kupyansky district<sup>4</sup> serve on merchant ships as sailors, the Black Sea and upon a return home tell about the wonders seen by them, including about sea dolphins which, according to storytellers, make Pharaoh’s army.* (Ivanov 1893: 82).

<sup>4</sup> Ukraine.

*[Dolphins] descended from Pharaoh's warriors, whom God drowned in the Red Sea and turned into fish.* (Bošković-Stulli 1975: 143).

#### ACTIONS OF THE PHARAOHS AGAINST PEOPLE AND PEOPLE AGAINST THE PHARAOHS, ACOUSTIC PERFORMANCE

As the beautiful singing and questions to people (acoustic performance) are inextricably linked with the actions of the pharaohs, we will consider them together. Most often, pharaohs swim up to the ships to ask people a question about the end of the world (14 texts of the Russian archive in the ELM). If people answer that the end of the world is coming soon — the pharaohs rejoice and “sing beautifully”. If the answer is “not soon”, the pharaohs cry with disappointment. In the texts of the Russian archive of the ELM, the pharaohs, as a rule, are peaceful, harmless and do not cause harm to people. Only in one case, it is said that the pharaohs, having heard a negative answer about the end of the world, are in grief and trying to turn away the ship.

*[Фараоны] догоняют моряков и спрашивают: «Скоро ли конец света?» Когда отвечают: «Не скоро!» — так <они> хотят корабли вернуть (перевернуть).*

*[Pharaohs] catch up with the sailors and ask: “How soon will the world end” When they are answered: “Not soon!” — then [they] want ships return (turn).* [ERA II 79, 633/4 < Lutsi, Tsibla region - Paulopriit Voolaine < Anton Rublevski, 55 yrs, Polish (1934)].

Belarusians and Ukrainians have a motif that the Pharaoh singing is dangerous for seamen because when sailors hear it, they repel the pharaohs with shots (Chubynsky 1995 a: 208; Boganeva 2010: 55-56). In the Russian archives, some texts explain why the pharaohs are concerned about this question and answers to it. One of the explanations is that at the end of the world, they will become human again, and it is from them that the “new world” will arise.

*У фараонов, которые утонули, сделался рыбий хвост. Они спрашивают от людей: «Скоро ли конец свету?» Если отвечают: «Не скоро», тогда они плачут. А если говорят, что скоро, тогда радуются, поют песни.*

The pharaohs who drowned grew a fishtail. They ask people: “Is the end of the world coming soon?” If they are answered: ‘Not soon,’ then they cry. And if they are said that will happen soon, then *rejoice, singing songs.*”

*Küsimusele: “Aga kui saab maailmale ots, mis siis neist saab?” vastab A. T.: На вопрос: когда будет конец света, что с ними будет? Отвечает А. Т. <Александр Тумашевич>. «Как будет конец свету, они будут первые свет плодить, как они первые плодили свет. У них не будет рыбьяво хвоста. Будут как люди».*

To the question: when the end of the world comes, what will happen to them?

A. T. [Alexander Tumashevich] answers.: “As the end of the world comes, they will be the first to produce light, as they were the first to produce light. They won’t have a fishtail. Will be as people.” [ERA II 109, 130/1 (6-7) < Lutsi - Paulopriit Voolaine < Aleksander Tumashevich, 75 yrs (1935)].

In the oral Bibles, there is a cyclicity in the perception of time (as opposed to the linear concept of time in Christianity) and the idea that at the end of the world someone will remain to start a new world. In particular, such motifs about changing worlds also exist in Polish and Belarusian folklore eschatology (see Zowczak 2014: 201-218, Boganeva 2016: 464-467).

In ten texts of the Russian archive of the ELM and texts of the Ludza region, the beautiful singing of pharaohs is noted, as it brings together these characters with images of “sea people” singing, mermaids and “sirens”,<sup>5</sup> peculiar to the Ukrainian and Belarusian traditions. These are not the sirens of antiquity, which feature only typological similarities with the East Slavic pharaohs and mermaids. Francisco Molina-Moreno, who studied the question of the ratio of East Slavic mermaids and ancient sirens, concludes that “the relationship between sirens and mermaids could be described not just as parallel, not even as divergent development of mythological characters, but in the form of two lines, which alternately either diverge or approach, and even almost touch” (Molina-Moreno 2015: 220).

Michal Federowski quotes an informant: “Sirens — the sea people, in a good day they come to the beach, sit and sing, or cry. And when they see a person, they ask: “Will the end of the world be soon?” If they are answered that it will be soon, they play and splash with their flippers. And when they are said that will not be soon, they cry and shout; because when the end of the world and other people will be, they will not be in the water, but on the land, as we are now, and instead of tails will have legs” (Federowski 1897, 108). Federowski notes that the informant speaks about pharaohs under the name of sirens.

In the archives of the ELM there is a text that speaks of the pharaohs singing songs, and people “copy” them.

*Музей вывел евреев из Египта. Пан Езус дал Муисею палку. Он как подошел к морю и кинул палку, так дорога (<no>шла) на 2 половины. Где море с водой, он палку кинул, и сухая дорога сделалась. Как перешел он море, и он как кинул опять палку, так сделалось опять море. Параоны, которые гнались за ними, утопились. Когда тепло, летом, чуть солнышко восходит, поют они красивые песни. (Этих песен много списано).*

Musei led the Jews out of Egypt. Pan Jesus gave Musei a stick. As he came to the sea, and threw the stick, so the road [went] into two halves. Where the sea is with water, he threw the stick, and the road became dry. As he crossed the sea, he threw the stick again, so there was the sea again. The pharaohs that were chasing them drowned. When it is warm in summer, and the sun rises, they sing beautiful songs. (A lot of these songs have been written down). [ERA II 79, 630/2 < Lutsi. - Paulopriit Voolaine < Breidak, 60 yrs, female (1934)].

Belarusians and Ukrainians also have a motif that songs sung by the people were made by the sea people” (Chubinsky 1995: 208) or by mermaids (BFELA, 83).

<sup>5</sup> Not ancient sirens (on the ratio and Genesis of images of ancient sirens and East Slavic mermaids see (Molina-Moreno 2015: 197-220), and East Slavic sirens, similar mermaids and pharaohs. In general, the nomination of “siren” is not characteristic of the Eastern Slavs, Federowski introduces the microregional name of the image “from Rawhide and Svisloch”, on the Belarusian-Polish borderland.

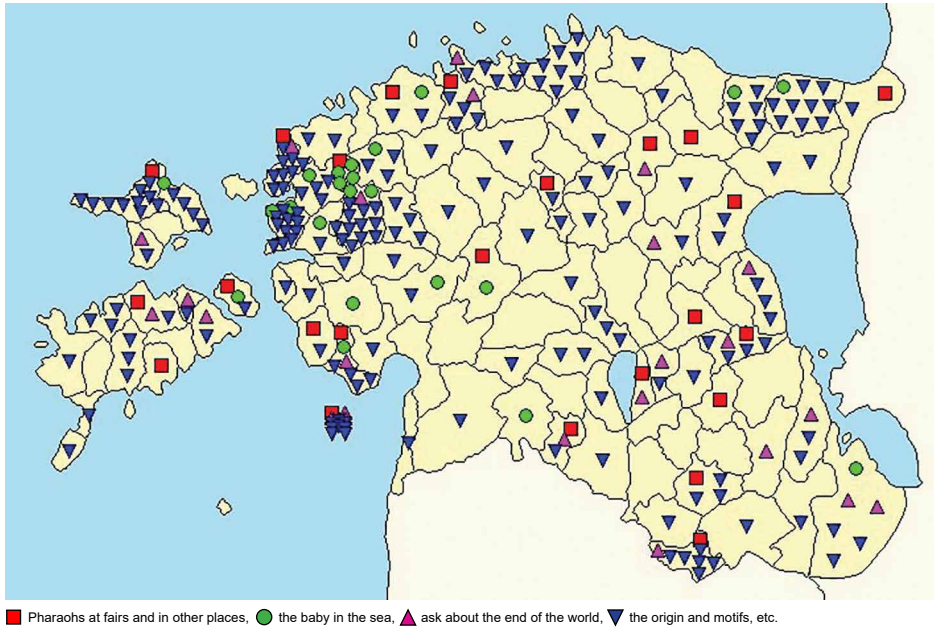


Fig 1. Narratives about the pharaohs in Estonian folklore

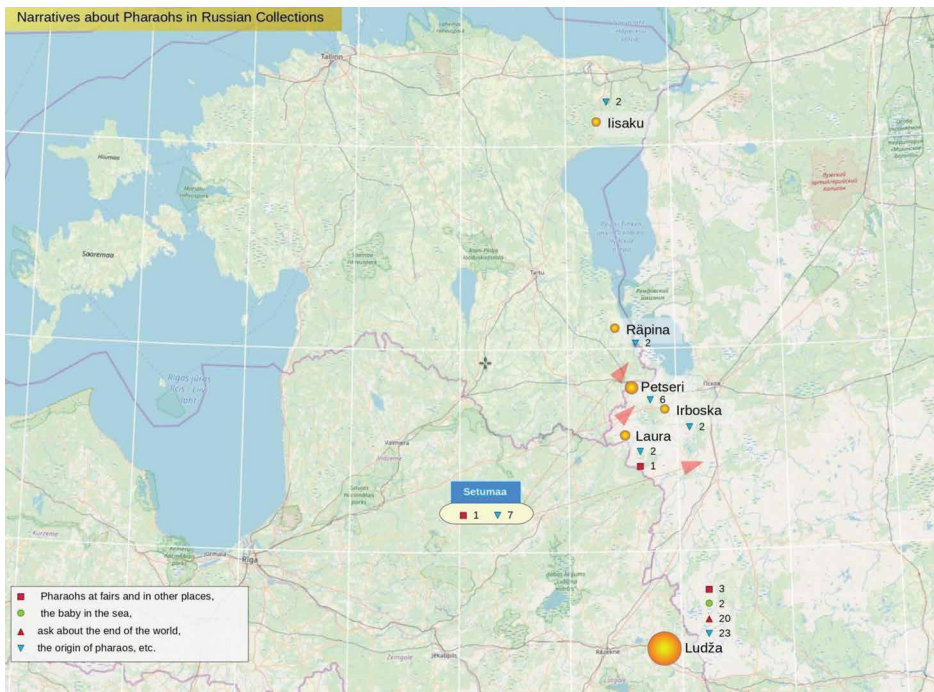


Fig. 2. Pharaohs in Russian Collection.

There is a text in the Estonian archive with the motif of how a woman from the sea asks the sailor to give her medicine to make her human again.

*Ехали морем. Женищина из моря просила что-то, какое-то лекарство. Моряк исполнил просьбу женищины. У женищины исчез хвост рыбы. Она получила ноги, но потеряла речь. Ходила на балы, танцевала, но языка не было.*

We were going by sea. The woman from the sea asked for something, some medicine. The sailor complied with the woman's plea. The woman's fishtail disappeared. She got her legs but lost her speech. Went to balls, danced but had no language. [ERA II 79, 637/8 < Lutsi, Zvirgzdeni village - Paulopriit Voolaine < Urtans, man, 30 years (1934)].

An ordinary seaman could get the necessary "medicine" the turned a half-fish-half-human into a woman. Further, the pharaoh lives as a secular woman, but a sign of other-worldness remains: she loses the ability to talk.

Among the acoustic characteristics of the pharaohs, it is also noted that in addition to singing songs, or crying, or laughing, they can talk in a secret language inaccessible to people (3 texts), produce "inhuman sounds" like squeaking (2 texts), and "pray beautifully to God" (1 text).

The most common among the motifs of human actions in relation to the pharaohs is the motif in which pharaohs are caught in the sea and shown at exhibitions, fairs, zoos (5 texts).

*В Двинсае показывали живого фараона. Была женщина: груди, сиськи и все как у женщины была. Половина рыбина; от пояса как рыба. Сидела в бочке и спрашивала: "Когда будет кончина свету?"*

A living Pharaoh was shown in Dvinsae. There was a woman: breasts, tits and everything like a woman was. Half a fish; from the belt like a fish. Sat in a barrel and asked:

"When will the end of the world be?" [ERA II 109, 135/6 (1) < Latvia, Lutsi area - Paulopriit Voolaine < Magdalena Tumashevich, 80 years, Gypsy (1935)].

With such texts, narrators assert the authenticity, "not-fairy-taleness" of their stories about the pharaohs, it is a unique attempt to adapt mythologic creatures to the modern reality. In addition, the Russian and their neighbours were undoubtedly influenced by the tradition of oral stories about the pharaohs in Estonia. The popularity of this tradition is evidenced by the following map.

## HABITAT OF PHARAOHS

The Slavic texts describe the habitat of the pharaohs. The most common indication is that the pharaohs live in the sea (27 texts). At the same time, in the texts, there are often clarifications related to real seas where the pharaohs are found: in the Black Sea (6 texts), the Mediterranean Sea (1 text), of the Baltic Sea (1 text). Pharaohs can also be associated with rivers (1 text), lakes (1 text), undefined water space (1 text).

It is interesting that all Belarusian texts about pharaohs are connected exclusively with the seas (although Belarus does not open to any sea). Modern Belarusian storytellers, as a rule, refer to familiar sailors who told them about pharaohs, or to the Bible, or to anonymous "books" noting pharaohs.

The motifs of the Russian-language texts of the “pharaohs” in Estonia reveal parallels and correspondences both with the Slavic (Belarusian, Ukrainian, Polish) folk Bibles and with the Estonian, Finnish, and Scandinavian traditional notions about the sea spirits. In all these cases, the biblical narrative served as a template for building new etiological concepts.

## CONCLUSIONS

The archive texts reflect the existence of mythological stories about the pharaohs and the perception of the events described by the narrators with a view of authenticity. Among our selection of pharaohs, there are texts of different genres (ethiologies, personal experience narratives, memorates, legends (equivalent to the East Slavic genre of “bylichka” describing contacts of people with supernatural characters),<sup>6</sup> descriptions of beliefs (what pharaohs look like, where they live, how they interact with people, etc.). As a rule, one text may combine the appearance of the pharaohs in connection with the biblical events of the Exodus, a description of these creatures and evidence of meetings with them. Some texts show that the narrator himself saw the pharaohs; at the same time, some narrators say that the pharaohs were not seen by the narrators, but by some of his relatives or acquaintances. Five texts tell us about the appearance of the pharaohs in specific localities (Daugavpils, Riga, St. Petersburg, etc.) at exhibitions, fairs, zoos. Only in one text (ERA II 79, 633/4) does the narrator, after a detailed story about the origin of the pharaohs, refer to eyewitnesses of their display, descriptions of their actions and habits, and somewhat unexpectedly summarises: “That’s nonsense. They [old men] never were there! It’s all fairy-tales.” Whereas the collector of Paulopriit Voolaine mentions between the brackets: “It is strange, but Rublevski believes in many other tales!”

Thus, based on the analysed texts, we can conclude about the active living state of beliefs in the sea people from the 1920s-‘40s among the Slavs present in the alien ethnic environment. This fact was promoted by the following factors: 1) a close contact of the Slavs with the indigenous population of the countries of the Baltic region (in our case, first of all with Estonians) and the influence of their traditional beliefs in spirits of the sea, which, at the time, were relevant and widespread (see Map 1); 2) the state of the folk religiosity of the Slavs themselves, who predominantly practised the oral transmission of traditional knowledge, including on biblical topics<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> From the viewpoint of storytellers — these are texts about actual events.

<sup>7</sup> The dominance of oral tradition among the Slavs in this period is evidenced, in particular, by the volumes of the Russian archive of the ELM (17 handwritten volumes). These volumes contain approximately 1000 mythological texts about the different characters of the lower mythology (nixies, boggards, forest spirits, water spirits, mermaids, bath-house spirits, etc.), evil spirits, people with supernatural powers, werewolves, revenant, sworn treasures.

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Skriptoorium – Digital Archives and tool, EKM, department of Folkloristics

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MOTIVIKA EKSODUSA V RUSKI FOLKLORI: MITSKA BITJA  
»FARAONI« V GRADIVU ESTONSKEGA LITERARNEGA MUZEJA

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V članku je raziskana ruska slovstvena folklor, ki se nanaša na biblijski Eksodus s posebnim poudarkom na mitskih bitjih, ki so v izročilu imenovna »faraoni«. Analiza je osnovana na ruskem gradivu, ki je ohranjeno v Estonskem literarnem muzeju (Estonian Literary Museum) v Tartuju in v njihovem digitalnem arhivu Skriptorium ter je bilo zbrano med letoma 1920 in 1940 na ozemlju Estonije, Rusije in Latvije v regiji Lutsi, kjer živi estonska manjšina. Izročilo je prilagojeno slovanskim verovanjskim predstavam in ohranja povedke o bajeslovnih bitjih, ki so jih povezovali z Eksodusom. V članku je podan pregled najbolj značilnih motivov, ki se pojavljajo v teh pripovedih; predstavljeni so tudi izvor, podoba in življenjski prostor – habitat teh bajeslovnih bitij, pri čemer je glavni poudarek na vlogi in pomenu mitskih bitij, poimenovanih »faraoni«.

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