

Rávga – the soul of a drowned person

Rávga. This word, which was used by the Norwegian and Finnish Saami to refer to a wandering dead soul, is derived from the Norwegian draug drowned . Among the Kvens (Finnish-speakers living in Finnmark) it is called meriraukka sea wraith .

The rávga is usually described as a long-haired and large-mouthed creature with a human form and is regarded as the soul of a drowned person. Death by drowning – when the body has not been found and properly buried – is generally regarded in the folk tradition as causing a state of displacement until the required rite of passage (burial and, in the Christian era, a funeral service) is performed. Probably this is ultimately based on the principle of life attached to the skeleton, which enabled an after-life in the other world and the possibility of re-birth; when the skeleton disappeared, it was uncertain whether the dead person s soul could reach the other world, and this led to haunting and similar phenomena.

A rávga was not really dangerous, nor was the state of ráimhallan associated with it (cf. eáhparaš), but it sometimes harassed sailors and people on the shore by calling out, often imitating the speech of the living. It could be driven away by reading out the funeral service to it.

Unlike the rávga, a čahcerávga water wraith was not thought to be a real being; it was an imaginary bogey used to scare children. It was said to appear in all areas of water where children were not supposed to go, including such places as wells. It was described as being a long-necked, scary creature which might carry off a child.

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