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**The witch who moved to the wilderness:  
Religious control, distance, and family survival in Finland, 1670–  
1707<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** This chapter discusses how Risto Olavinpoika and his family moved – both socially and geographically – in order to prosper, stay together and survive in early modern Finland. The family initially resided in a somewhat remote but bustling hunting village and earned a living from fishing. When Risto, the father, faced charges of witchcraft, the family changed location and occupation twice, ending up on a large farmstead in remote southwestern Finland. This chapter uses court and tax records to explore the interdependency of family ties, geographical distance and reach in this family’s experience of dealing with and surviving state and church control and witchcraft accusations.

**KEYWORDS:** reach, scope, control, privacy, persecution, rural families

This chapter discusses the experience and meaning of distance and persecution in the life of a family moving – both socially and geographically – from one place to another in order to prosper, stay together and survive. Risto Olavinpoika and his wife and children initially resided in a hunting village in a marginally remote area, where Risto made a living fishing. There, Risto, being considered to have been a little too lucky on his hunting trips, faced suspicion and later charges of witchcraft. As he tried to refute and cope with the charges, Risto moved his family from one place and one occupation to another, ending up on a large secluded farmstead in remote southwestern Finland.

In some ways, the social and geographical journey of Risto and his family is unique, but it is representative in other ways. Geographical mobility was fairly common in early modern Finland for reasons such as work and marriage. People moved to neighbouring parishes, but sometimes they relocated to Stockholm, Tallinn, or Baltic

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towns in Germany and Poland.<sup>2</sup> They also travelled long distances to maintain their daily businesses: farmers and tar producers had to go to town to sell their produce and buy fabrics, salt, and other wares they could not produce themselves. Although the mercantilist trade laws of the era attempted to dictate which town people should travel to by imposing tolls and checks, peasant farmers stubbornly sought ways to enter markets that were more advantageous.<sup>3</sup> As much as Risto's story is about a family that managed to keep together in spite of accusations of witchcraft, it is also about a family that moved to prosper. As Risto moved, he crossed the boundaries of social status and wealth, starting from a non-landed position and ending up a free-holding peasant farmer. There is currently little research on social mobility in seventeenth-century Finland. During the eighteenth century, the ranks of the landed population were closed: it was rare for those born into families without landownership to gain it, but a lot more common for those born into families with land to die landless, though not itinerant. While it is generally assumed that this was also the situation in the seventeenth century, it may have been easier to rise socially for Risto, like many others, moved from a non-landed croft and cottage to a landed farmstead.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter explores the interdependency of family ties, geographical distance, control and survival in the life of Risto Olavinpoika and his family in early modern Finland. After introducing the physical, political and social environment of seventeenth century Finland as experienced by Risto Olavinpoika, this chapter draws on court and tax records to look at when, how and why Risto, his immediate family, and their growing household, moved in the face of evolving accusations of witchcraft, and eventually prospered in a 'one-house village' in the backwoods.

## **Seventeenth Century Finland**

During the early modern period, Finland was a part of Sweden, a Lutheran heartland and an aspiring great power. This meant Finland was involved in the major developments of early modern Europe, from the development of contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> Salminen, 'Uusimalaste', 183–257; Lamberg, 'Lurendrejare', 225–248; Lamberg, 'Ylirajainen', 31–66.

<sup>3</sup> Nenonen, 'Juokse sinä'.

<sup>4</sup> Risto himself and the other person who was accused with Risto of having bewitched the son of the house into which Risto's son wanted to marry (see below under "Follofing and family and household"). The latter person did not succeed on the first or second attempt, but eventually he found himself a farmstead.

controversial theology to the Polish Counter-Reformation and the Thirty Years' War. Sweden's aspirations demanded heavy taxation and continuous conscription: troops fought in the Thirty Years' War and in battles across Poland, Germany, Denmark, and Norway throughout the century. By the end of the seventeenth century, expensive expansive politics and warfare had brought Sweden to the limits of its power. It had not won a major war since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, but it continued to be engaged in northern European warfare – either by being drawn in or by actively seeking engagement. In 1700, Hannover, Prussia, Saxony, Denmark, and Russia launched a joint attack on Sweden, which defended itself successfully until the 15-year-old king Charles XII led his army on long marches into distant battles with the aim of conquering Moscow. Unbeknown to Risto, the Great Northern War (1700-1721) was effectively the end of Sweden as a great power. The Swedish army met its final defeat in Poltava, Ukraine. Russia, led by Peter I, then proceeded to occupy Finland for a seven-year period between 1713–1721, which Finns still refer to as 'the Great Wrath'.

There were relatively densely built up areas in the south and southwestern parts of Finland. The shores of the lakes and rivers with easily workable soils had been inhabited since the previous ice age. These lands were an integral part of the Swedish realm, and they were in relatively regular communication with the centres of power. Royal orders and stipulations were sent by postal routes to be read aloud by the parish priest every Sunday after the sermon. There were also systems of regular market days during which trade between the town and the countryside was supposed to take place, although people tended to travel for trade on other days too. Secular court sessions were held at least three times a year, and episcopal and parochial visitations were conducted at irregular but not infrequent intervals. These areas of Finland were, while not at the centre, relatively well attached to the centres of Sweden and, through it, Europe. Nevertheless, in areas with poor soils, and in the great forests, there were still unclaimed areas of land where settlers could go to make their fortunes, even in the parishes of Tavastia and Satakunta, where Risto lived.

The religious ideology in early modern Finland was an inherently rural Lutheranism, where the experience and practice of religion was adapted not only to agricultural life – of seasonal and daily cycles, field work, and cattle rearing – but also to long

distances, self-sufficiency, material scarcity, and a constant awareness of the fluctuations in life's fortunes. Even an averagely wealthy farmer in early modern Finland was just a couple of rains or frosts away from penury. Peasant farmers were usually freeholders who held hereditary rights to their land, but, if they failed to pay taxes for three consecutive years, the crown had the right to confiscate the farmstead and offer it to somebody else in the hope that they would have greater success in paying taxes.<sup>5</sup>

The seventeenth century in Finland and Sweden is considered a period of confessionalisation and religious orthodoxy. The crown and the church together strived for discipline and control. Religion was a factor of shared identity, and it created the grounds for sorting people into 'us' and 'them'. Although this has been termed the 'age of persecution', there was flexibility in accommodating different viewpoints and practices both at the local and the official levels.<sup>6</sup> The populace was taught about Christianity through sermons and catechism teachings, supervised by the parish clergy. Church attendance was – at least theoretically – made compulsory by the 1680s, although the authorities well understood that cattle and fires could not be left alone for days in order for people to go to church: household members had to take turns. One could be fined for neglecting church attendance, however. The sermon and the sacraments were emphasised, and theoretically, attendance at communion was compulsory at least twice a year, although in practice most people took communion only once a year, at Easter in the medieval fashion. To be able to take part in the communion, one had to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the rudiments of religion, and one could not have any unresolved criminal matters pending. The church came to the aid of the crown in encouraging people to bring their disputes – both petty and serious – to the secular courts. In turn, the secular courts came to the aid of the church by taking over the investigation and punishment of religious deviance and misdemeanours.<sup>7</sup>

It is these investigations in the courts that form the basis of Risto's story. At the height of the witchcraft trials, from around 1660 to 1700, the formally accusatorial

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<sup>5</sup> Jutikkala, *Suomen*.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g. Dixon, Freist, & Greengrass, *Living*; Kaplan, *Divided*.

<sup>7</sup> Laine, *Yksimielisyys*; Laine, *Orastava*; Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien*.

Swedish system was gradually transforming into a more inquisitorial one, as officials and vicars adopted the role of public prosecution and the characteristics of the older system started to lose their importance. The talion principle – that individuals who brought but failed to prove charges risked the same punishments their opponents would have suffered, had the charges been proven – was used increasingly rarely, and the punishments were no longer the same; they were usually turned into small fines. Group testimonies, like water or fire ordeals and the group oath, where the community was given a chance to assess whether they thought the accused person was to be punished or not – were legally abandoned by 1695, and the assessment of formal evidence by an educated judge from outside the community was given increasing precedence over the defendant's reputation.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to answering witchcraft accusations, Risto was in court for many more mundane matters – to settle disputes over pasture and milling rights, to stand as a witness in his neighbours' affairs, and to protect his family and household members in various ways. The courts also functioned as a forum for publicly recognising debts, property ownership, and boundary arrangements. As such, the court records deal with any sphere of life that could have public significance. Consequently, the lower secular court records allow the modern historian to catch a glimpse of various aspects of the life of Risto and his family, indicating where additional information can be found in tax records and church records.

It is generally acknowledged that in Swedish rural courts, the actors consisted mostly of peasant farmers. Whether they dominated the action or were dominated themselves has been a subject of debate. Swedish historians have emphasised the active part played by farmers and the 'peasantry' in the countryside and the burghers and craftspeople in the towns, whereas many Finnish historians have emphasised that the courts were essentially a tool of control used by the crown on the populace. The part played by the *allmoge* – the landless workers, the elderly, and the poor – has received considerably less attention. The input of such people, where it has received attention, has been judged to be small. Accordingly, peasant farmers and their wives form the

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<sup>8</sup> Nenonen, *Noituus*, 263ff.; Ylikangas, *Valta*, 50–77.

largest social group in all roles in the rural courts of law.<sup>9</sup> The Finnish and Swedish court records indicate that there were relatively free discussions between the parties beforehand and with the judge and jury. It appears that there were no completely forced discourses. Although all hearings in Finnish trials were public, and could be confirmed or contradicted by a wide audience, there is no reason to assume that participants always told the truth. Participants were competitors, and they sought to present themselves in the best light and their opponents in the worst light. However, lies had to represent a culturally acceptable possible truth in order to be credible. Therefore, these testimonies can actually tell more – and with greater reliability – about the culturally common, the socially shared, and commonly representative than they tell about the individual case at hand.

## **The witch within and out of reach: following Risto's family and household**

### **The records**

Normally, family historians in Finland identify people through church records. Communion books are the easiest sources to access. They are also the most informative as they list populations by village, household, and family; and provide links to where individuals were baptised, married, relocated to, or buried. However, tracing people before 1721 can be difficult, since the records in many parishes were either destroyed by the invading Russians during the Great northern War or lost by the parish clergy who tried to protect the records by fleeing with them to Sweden. This is what happened to the records of the rural parish of Ulvila, where Risto lived.

Tax records are the next best way to identify and follow people, since copies of tax records were usually sent to the central government in Stockholm along with the yearly accounts. Although these records survive for many more parishes than the church records, including the parish of Ulvila, there are challenges and drawbacks. Land tax records were often out of date by the time they were logged and usually only recorded the one householder who paid the taxes. More people were included in poll tax records, although often only by position in the household rather than by name (eg. daughter, nephew, farmhand). Consequently, tracing women can be especially

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<sup>9</sup> Österberg, 'Bönder'; Andersson, *Tingets*; Karonen, *Pohjoinen*; Eilola, *Rajapinnoilla*.

difficult. As the records concentrated on the taxable workforce, they generally did not include children under the age of 15 or anyone too old or sick to be an asset to the household. Sons and daughters (as well as sons- and daughters-in-law) were also often recorded as farmhands and maids, since the crown thought that this ought to be the position of adult children who stayed at home. Ideologically, the situation of servant labourers and adult children was similar, with the master and mistress bearing patriarchal responsibility for their physical and moral care. In turn, the labourers and children were expected to reciprocate with obedience and respect – not that this was always the case in reality. Because many children in poorer families left to work in another household as soon as they were of age, they were therefore never recorded in their parental homes. Moreover, as tax records were only intended to record the yearly tax income, not to predict the following year's income, they do not record where people came from or went to in the previous or following years. This means that verifying family and household structures and the movement of people using just tax records is impossible. Fortunately, in Risto's case, further information is available in the form of the court records produced as a result of the witchcraft accusations against him. In the remainder of this chapter we follow Risto, as a fisherman, hunter and farmer across three locations, through these court records.

### **The prosperous farmer: the 1693 witchcraft accusation**

I first noticed Risto as someone who was entangled in two different witchcraft cases at the same time in the 1690s. This was not particularly surprising, since many of the accused witches in the area retained a reputation whether or not they were found guilty (the acquittal rate was about fifty per cent). What intrigued me was that in both cases Risto was defended by the very people who had initiated one of the cases against him: a couple who thought their son had been murdered by witchcraft and yet were keen on having Risto's son as a son-in-law who would run their farmstead. I was intrigued and wanted to know why and how had these people come to such a situation.

After losing Michel, their only son, to illness, the couple, a farmer and his wife, worried about who would inherit and run Sawo, their larger-than-average farmstead in the village of Pomarkku. Their two surviving children were daughters. The couple did not have much faith in their younger daughter's husband, whose ambitions, in their

opinion, were not matched by his abilities. They had placed their hope in the man their elder unmarried daughter was contemplating marrying – Risto’s son, Juha. Eventually uncertainty over the situation spilled out of the household and, by May 1693, a neighbour reported that Risto and the younger daughter’s husband had ‘had words’. During what was later described in court as a drunken brawl, Risto had reportedly said, among other things, ‘Well shall you be off the farm, when my son comes there’. He also called the younger man a thief. To this, the younger man replied, ‘If I am a thief, then you are the one who killed and bewitched Sawo’s son Michel’.<sup>10</sup> A witness testified in court that Risto had answered his accuser by stating, ‘if I am a witch, then you ordered the witchcraft killing’.<sup>11</sup> This was reported to the court and the case continued for five years. The dead boy’s parents presented charges, dropping them and then taking them up again at various times until 1698 when all charges were dropped as their unwanted son-in-law had moved out of the household.

Risto had a reputation as someone who would perform witchcraft for money, and he did not deny this accusation. Despite this, it was the man who had argued with him, the son-in-law, who became the focus of the case after the dead boy’s grandfather testified that although his grandson had dreamt of both men trying to hurt him, the younger man was so envious and hateful that he was a lot more likely to be guilty than Risto.<sup>12</sup> Although court records suggest the younger sister’s husband was an unlikeable man, it is noteworthy that the dead boy’s mother and grandfather unanimously accused their own son-in-law, who lived under their own roof, while excusing a known witch who had, by now, moved far away. It is telling that their daughter eventually married Risto’s son Juha, who became the heir apparent to their estate.

The court records linked to this case identify Risto as living in Kynäsjärvi. Poll and land tax records indicate Kynäsjärvi was a new settlement, a farm recently cleared from the forest. Risto had lived there since 1686. By the mid 1690s he lived there with his wife - Margetta or Marju, their son, Juha, and daughter Karin. In 1687, the

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<sup>10</sup> Ulvila 18–20 October 1693, 433–435. For details of the court records’ archival signums, please see the bibliography. See also Toivo, ‘Discerning’.

<sup>11</sup> Ulvila 17–19 June 1693, 80–181.

<sup>12</sup> Toivo, *Witchcraft*, 71–2, 101–4, 139–43, 145–6, 161–2, 168–9, 190, 92.



family was recorded as having a farm hand, Heikki, who was also later recorded as a son. Risto and Margetta had more children who were under 15 and therefore not registered in the mid 1690s. After Juha moved to Pomarkku in 1694 to marry the elder daughter of the Sawo farmstead, he sometimes hired his younger brothers as labourers. In 1695 the poll tax records state that Risto and seven other people lived in the household.<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 6: Risto's family tree with connections to the Sawo family.

Between 1671 and 1678, the poll tax records show one Christer Olofsson Fiskare – i.e. Risto Olavinpoika the fisher – and his wife Maria living in a croft in the village of Otamo (along with a maid servant in 1675 and a farmhand in 1676). The wife's name is different at first sight, but Maria is close enough to Margetta to be a Swedish translation of the same Finnish-speaking woman, whose family and neighbours would have called her something like Marju or Maiju. Court records indicate that in 1679 Risto and his family moved from Otamo to Hyvelä.<sup>14</sup> A note in the sowing tax (a tithe collected by the church until the crown appropriated it after the Reformation) confirms this move for when Risto moved from Otamo to Hyvelä, he took up half a farmstead. The taxes due on both crofts were to be paid to the admiralty rather than The Crown.<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 7: Maps showing Finland's main roads in the 17<sup>th</sup> century AND Risto's domiciles marked with a cross.

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<sup>13</sup> General Register over Settlement in Finland (SAY), Ulvila 1694–1713, draft lists f. 121; Ulvila, draft lists, years 1674–1693, folds 87, 159 and 168 and poll tax records 7350:1387. For more about the SAY (*Suomen asutuksen yleisluettelo*) see Koskinen, *Sine anno*.

<sup>14</sup> Poll tax records, 7370:2429.

<sup>15</sup> Poll tax records, 7370:2429.

Although we can plot the moves of Risto's household, it is impossible to be exactly sure of the structure of his household at any one time. What we can ascertain from records is that it grew from a nuclear family of parents and children to a multigeneration household, employing labourers when needed. As time went on, these labourers, as well as siblings and marriage partners, lived under the same roof for periods of time, effectively making Risto's household a network-family based on multiple places and multiple persons. Because of the witchcraft accusations, Risto's household may have faced increasing geographical marginalisation, yet, with spacial mobility came upward social mobility. The remainder of the chapter follows Risto and his household, exploring how Risto took advantage of opportunities to raise and protect his family in difficult circumstances. In doing so, it demonstrates that the stability and resilience of such a family community came not from rigid hierarchies, but from its adjustability.

### **The hunter and fisher: the 1682 witchcraft accusation**

Risto Olavinpoika was widely reputed to be a witch in the 1690s because he had been accused before. The first time was in 1682. As there was no jail anywhere near the geographically widespread parish of Ulvila, and imprisonment was difficult to arrange, custody was reserved for criminals who were expected to flee (usually those who had a relatively certain death sentence awaiting them). Since accused witches were most often acquitted or fined, they rarely merited incarceration. This meant Risto was free to go about his business. Normally, the accused had to hear the charges in person, otherwise matters could not be taken further in court. Therefore, not abiding by a court summons was a punishable offence. Risto, however, was noted to have been with the crown surveyor and crown bailiff at the time of the court hearing, surveying a small farmstead he was considering buying in Hyvelä village. As he had a legal reason for his absence, he was excused and the witchcraft charges were postponed to the following session next winter.<sup>16</sup> The following March, the witnesses were heard in court. Most of their stories consisted of drunken brawls in which insults

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<sup>16</sup> Ulvila 22–24 September, 1682, 104v (633v).

and threats had been exchanged among men drinking either in a tavern or at a wedding in Pori. Risto did not remember anything about these exchanges, and apparently the court was inclined to believe that whatever had or had not been said during these exchanges, it was of little consequence. Significantly, the majority of the accusations against Risto concerned men falling ill, or their crops being spoiled, after suggesting to Risto that they suspected his good ‘luck’ in calving, hunting, and shooting birds was unnatural. The accusations relating to illness came from Risto’s previous and current neighbours in Otamo and Hyvelä. Risto could not deny that such accusations had been made and rumours existed, but simply claimed they were mostly caused by envy.<sup>17</sup> Since some witnesses were not present, the matter was again postponed. At the time of the next two court sessions in the following summer and autumn, however, the chief accuser, Matti Sipinpoika Sigfredsson, was ill. In February 1684, both Risto and Matti were present, but other witnesses had given up and stayed at home, so the matter was further postponed. This is why the case was not taken up again before the 1690s, when the case of the Sawo family brought Risto and witchcraft together in the minds of the court officials.<sup>18</sup>

The first charges of witchcraft were presented just after Risto moved from Otamo to Hyvelä, and they related to his life in in Otamo. Otamo is situated about 45 kilometres away from Pori and slightly further away from the centres of Ulvila. At that time, most travel was on foot or horseback, often carrying a load on one’s back. The only roads passable by carriage were those from Ulvila towards Turku and Hämeenlinna, and even then part of the journey was usually on foot because even the better roads featured steep hills and areas where the surface was rocky or soft. This meant that one could reasonably expect to travel around 20–30 kilometres per day, and so Otamo to Pori took around two days.<sup>19</sup> The villages of Pomarkku and Merikarvia, which were relatively significant villages at the time, were about a day’s journey away. Because of these distances, Otamo enjoyed its own privacy – and lack of control by the local authorities – in a way the more central areas did not. Nevertheless, Otamo had long been the place where visiting peasants from the inland parishes – especially Mouhijärvi and Suoniemi in Häme – owned coastal fishing and hunting cabins. By

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<sup>17</sup> Ulvila 3. & 5.-6. March 1683, 79 (372).

<sup>18</sup> Ulvila 26–28 February 1684, 5v (527v).

<sup>19</sup> Nenonen, ‘Juokse’, 274.

the seventeenth century, Otamo was no longer right by the sea due to rapid post-glacial rebound. Indeed, the town of Pori was built in 1558 because Ulvila had lost its harbour.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, salmon fishing was still common in the river that connected the lake to the sea, and many other fish were to be found in the lake. Game abounded in the surrounding woods.<sup>21</sup>

Risto and his family inhabited a croft with a small piece of land from 1671 onwards.<sup>22</sup> They had a small fishing cabin for the fishing season, which visiting fishermen and hunters from Ikaalinen and Mouhijärvi probably utilised. Tax records suggest Risto made his living combining professional fishing with temporary employment as a farm labourer – a common scenario even though it was supposedly illegal. Although tax officials rarely recorded the work of wives outside the home, Marju probably worked too. During the winter Risto, Marju and their children would have lodged on their employer's farm, either in a sauna or more likely sharing the one main room of the house with other household members, sleeping on the benches around the room while the owner's family shared the beds. Such a life made them a part of what Joachim Eibach has called the open house (*Öffene Hause*), a space that was accessible to many if not all passers-by, although not necessarily always to the same degree of openness. Such a household was a place where neighbours, authorities, servants, and family came, went, and came again.<sup>23</sup> Privacy in such circumstances did not constitute secrecy, but a more symbolic withdrawal from what was not considered one's business. For example, the goings-on in the master and mistress' bed were ignored, but similar goings-on on the cabin benches were not afforded the same discretion. Privacy in such circumstances was also a matter of social place and status: the owners of the house had more of it, with people like farmhands and lodgers having considerably less. Hunting and fishing parties were also communal: when the hunting party was in the woods, everyone saw what went on. When they did not or could not explain what they saw, suspicions arose, and when suspicions were shared, the threat of witchcraft was created.

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<sup>20</sup> In the following 400 years, the shoreline has moved out a further 10 kilometres.

<sup>21</sup> Koskinen, 'Premodern', 94–96, 506.

<sup>22</sup> SAY, Ulvila 1654–1673, draft lists, 87.

<sup>23</sup> Eibach, 'Das Öffene'.

The most dangerous witchcraft accusations against Risto – made by testifiers who did not admit to being drunk at the time of the events – concerned his excessively good luck as a hunter and fisherman. Since luck was thought of as a limited good in the universe, receiving more of it than one's fair share was considered theft and a danger to the community.<sup>24</sup> Witches and their accusers were always known to each other in Finland (as they usually were elsewhere), and usually from the same village or locality. The closer a witch lived, the more he or she was feared, but if one wanted to hire the help of a reputed witch, such as a person would likely be sought further away from one's own village.<sup>25</sup> Witches usually had families who acted to protect them and thus, by extension, the families protected themselves. Spouses appeared in court alongside their accused wives or husbands and took care of them if they were imprisoned. This was what they were expected to do, so much so that they were not charged for helping family members escape.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, when individuals really were unwanted members of the community, their families would turn against them, just as the Sawo family turned against their never-do-well son-in-law.<sup>27</sup>

It is possible that while in Otamo, Risto offered magical services for money in order to make ends meet. In a number of localities in Germany and the Low Countries men involved in magic acted as cunning men, healers, and diviners, whereas the local maleficent witch was invariably a woman. In rural Sweden, however, both men and women were known to perform all sorts of general-purpose magic as well as maleficent witchcraft. Under such circumstances, performing magic for money could bring status and income, but it could very easily become a liability.<sup>28</sup> As Risto lived in shared quarters in Otamo, having a reputation for performing magic would have made him particularly vulnerable. Moreover, by moving to Hyvelä, Risto effectively increased the scrutiny he and his family came under, for the village stood in the densely populated central area of Ulvila beside the road heading north to Vaasa. There, the dealings of the inhabitants were witnessed by many more people than in the remote Otamo. Hyvelä was an area where everyone lived on top of each other,

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<sup>24</sup> Dillinger, *Evil*; Toivo, *Witchcraft*, 125.

<sup>25</sup> Muchembled, *Popular*, 88–90; Nenonen, *Noituus*, 198–200.

<sup>26</sup> Briggs, *Communities*, 255.

<sup>27</sup> Gregory 'Witchcraft', 30–66; Pylkkänen, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> On Germany, e.g. Rowlands, *Witchcraft*; Dillinger, *Evil*. On the Netherlands, de Blécourt, *Evil*. On Sweden, Oja, 'Kvinnligt' 43–55.

secrets were hard to keep, and the clergy and the crown authorities kept a keen eye on order. For a reputed witch like Risto, a place too close to one's neighbours may not have been the best choice: he was now not only closely scrutinised, but near enough to make the fear personal.

The reason Risto made the move from Otamo may have been because he knew that, as a hunter-fisherman, especially one who did 'suspiciously well', he was more vulnerable to suspicion than a settled landowning peasant. By taking up a landed estate in Hyvelä he may have hoped to remedy the situation. It is also likely that he was looking for a permanent, settled, and less seasonal livelihood for his growing family. Although the tax records at this stage do not yet show any children over the age of 15, it is evident that there were several about to mature for there is one adult child by 1686, then four or five soon after. A parish map from the latter half of the seventeenth century shows that agricultural land in and around Hyvelä was already scarce, which explains why Risto initially shared a farm with another peasant owner.<sup>29</sup> This was a not an uncommon solution on bigger farms that needed more labour than one family could provide. Although such an arrangement forced some communality on both parties, it also meant the farm's produce had to be divided, which may not have been ideal for a growing family. The court record of 1682, which excused Risto from the witchcraft trial because he was with a land surveyor, shows that he was looking – initially unsuccessfully – for another farmstead to settle on.

As previously described, Risto's troubles with witchcraft accusations ceased for almost a decade after he moved to Hyvelä, and changed his occupation from hunter, where he had suspiciously good luck, to farmer, where he was rather like the rest of the villagers. Not only was he in a more privileged social position and therefore more in control of his own privacy, in such a densely populated environment his neighbours could reasonably assume that what they did not see or hear, did not happen.

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<sup>29</sup> Hans Hansson: Ulfsby Socn/Ulvila Parish Map (Sine Anno).  
<https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/20443/FHK-Pf-61-nr-1-Ulvilan-pitajankartta-1600-luku.jpg>

## **Keeping family in the ‘one-house village’ in the backwoods**

In moving to Kynäsjärvi in 1686, Risto put his family in a different position again. Although the frequent crop failures of the Little Ice Age meant it was not unusual for small- and medium-scale landowners to engage in all sorts of trades and crafts on the side, and not pay their taxes, there are no signs that the farm in Hyvelä had any trouble paying taxes.<sup>30</sup> It is more likely that the reason for Risto’s move was to seek a living for his four sons and daughter nearing the age of 15. However, Kynäsjärvi not only had the advantage of having sufficient land to provide a living for an extended household, it had the advantage of isolation. It had previously been a hunting ground for the inhabitants of the inland parishes of Sastamala and Hämeenkyrö (just as Otamo was for the manors in Mouhijärvi) but the owners had long ago given up their rights. Risto cleared a new farmstead, about a hectare and some hay meadows, and built his house in what was virgin forest. According to a tax inspection, the farmstead included a cabin house, a kitchen, a sauna, a shed, a stable with a barn, three other animal shelters, two storehouses, and a drying barn. Risto was given six years’ exemption from taxes. When the six years had passed, his land was assessed for tax purposes at half a mantal, which was good when viable farmsteads were often assessed at a quarter of a mantal. Nevertheless, at the following court session Risto protested this assessment and said a third of the land attributed to his farmstead was only rented from the next parish. On his farm he had two horses – a luxury perhaps justified by its distant location – ten cows, some calves and sheep, plenty of timber and firewood in the forest, some slash-and burn land, and a small mill about a quarter of a mile from the house that could be powered by a spring when the water level was high. Risto was not doing badly at all in his newly created private village.<sup>31</sup>

By moving to Kynäsjärvi, Risto had located his household in a place of safety. It was certainly not an open house, for there were no neighbours. Kynäsjärvi was a completely uninhabited wilderness for although it was not much further from the towns of the area than Otamo, it was more difficult to reach because it was further away from the public roads. The journey from Ulvila to Kynäsjärvi took two or three days and was complicated by the fact that the farmstead lay on the far side of a lake

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<sup>30</sup> Lehtinen, *Suur-Ulvilan*, 91.

<sup>31</sup> Ulvila 19–21 October 1691, 514; Ulvila 7–9 January 1692, 4. Compare to the average amounts of cattle in Nummela, ‘Karjanpito’.

and so the only way to reach it was to have someone from the house fetch you in a rowing boat. Strangers to the area could not find the house without preparation. Without a local guide and cooperation, law enforcers once spent a whole day and night lost in the woods.<sup>32</sup>

Not only could the family control who went in and who went out, they had a free run of the surrounding wilderness. Regarding the scope and reach of the inhabitants of the forested Swedish areas, Ylva Stenqvist Milde points out that they were not only in control of their own surroundings, they were in control of their own travel, venturing much further than their household. They went into the woods to hunt, pick berries and gather fuel and other foodstuffs, and on to their parish centres, neighbouring parishes, and even further. Although the political and governmental organisation of traffic for economic or political needs may have been rigid, stable, and institutionalised, people were well prepared to use both roads and less official routes for their own travel needs.<sup>33</sup> Once Risto was established at Kynäsjärvi, the geographic, social and economic scope of his activities actually appear to have been wider than ever. He travelled for trade to Turku (around 170 kilometres away) and to Pori (50 kilometres away).<sup>34</sup> Tradesmen from Pori visited his home, in spite of the restrictive mercantilist toll policies of the time.<sup>35</sup> Risto's trading partners may not have been the most powerful merchants, but they kept him up to date with the gossip, information, fashions, and trends of the worlds. Risto was also given full credibility as a landowning member of the community. He provided surety for other farmers' tax duties and was also embroiled in the usual disputes between farmers in the law courts, for example, over rights to use waterpower for milling.<sup>36</sup>

Landownership was important in magic and witchcraft, as well as in society: the success of one's own farm and cattle compared to that of one's neighbours was a constant theme. The farmsteads were usually run by a couple in partnership, both men and women being responsible for the success of household and farmstead, and

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<sup>32</sup> Ulvila 13–16 February 1704, 283–304.

<sup>33</sup> Stenqvist Milde, *Vägar*.

<sup>34</sup> Ulvila 27–28 June 1704, 985–987.

<sup>35</sup> Ulvila 8–9 November 1704, 158v–159.

<sup>36</sup> Ulvila 17–19 June 1692, 182–183; Ulvila 14–15 September 1694, 277–278; Ulvila 4–5 October 1695, 394–395; Ulvila 26–28 June 1699, 535–537.



consequently, both men and women used magic in the role of the household master or mistress.<sup>37</sup> However, as we have seen, when witchcraft accusations against Risto resurfaced in the 1690s, they were more connected to family than agriculture. Land ownership may have been central to the affair, but Risto was only involved because his son was aspiring to enter into competition for the would-be in-laws' inheritance. At the same time as this case, the 1680s witchcraft case was taken up again but, by this time, further accusations had been filed against Risto: that of performing witchcraft for money. It was alleged that a man from Pori had hired him to bring forth bears to kill someone else's horses. He was further accused of teaching a man in a neighbouring village methods of causing crop failures, spoiling the beer brew of a burgher in Pori, and causing and curing cattle diseases by either frying a deceased animal's meat in an iron pan or burying its head under the kitchen hearth.<sup>38</sup> While the charges of 1682 had been aimed at a hunter/fisherman, by the 1690s these had been escalated to include charges targeting a landowning farmer.

While the list of accusations against Risto was long, by the 1690s, the court still did not reach any conclusion of his case. Risto seems to have gone on with his life, raising a family of at least four sons – who grew up and married well – and keeping a household with young servants. Risto even played host to friends who occasionally stayed with him. It is also evident that Risto's past friends remained his allies, just as his past enemies continued to be his adversaries. Many of his visitors came from a place he had been connected to before living in Otamo: the inland parish of Ikaalinen. In 1695, Risto's maid committed fornication with his visitor from Ikaalinen and the witch that had supposedly taught Risto how to summon bears was also from Ikaalinen. It is interesting to note that visits of young men could cause problems, for the only 'crimes' that could be proven to have taken place in Risto's isolated household were a couple of fornications committed by maids – the evidence being the birth of illegitimate children.<sup>39</sup> The ongoing connections to the parish are also reflected in Risto's co-swearers when he was ordered to take an oath of compurgation in 1695 for the 1680s witchcraft charges. A compurgation oath was a method

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<sup>37</sup> See the critique in Oja, 'Kvinnligt', 49–50.

<sup>38</sup> Ulvila 8–10 January and 4–5 October 1695, 30, 368; Ulvila 27–28 June 1702, 130–132; Ulvila 13–16 February and 27–28 June 1704, 346–52, 985–7.

<sup>39</sup> Ulvila 8–10 January 1695, 30; Ulvila 4–5 November 1695, 367–8, 376; Ulvila 16–17 September 1701, 2–4; Ulvila 13–16 February 1704, 346–352; Ulvila 27–28 June 1704, 985–987.

sometimes used in cases where there was not enough formal evidence to either acquit or convict. Risto took his oath and presented five co-swearers, whose origin had to reflect his status in the community. However, as four out of the five co-swearers Risto presented were from the parishes of Ikaalinen and Mouhijärvi, and their reputation for truthfulness was therefore unknown; a report on them was required. Failing to obtain such a report, Risto presented a new oath and new co-swearers. They included a burgher from Pori, two soldiers, and two farmers (one from another parish, but vouched for by a juror as a man of good repute). Among the co-swearers was also a servant from the Sawo household in Pomarkku, the household whose son was allegedly killed by witchcraft and which Risto's son had married into.<sup>40</sup> This reflects the important connections in Risto's new life, namely his position as a farmer and trader with Pori and his connection to Pomarkku via his son. His eldest son's success in Pomarkku may at first have incited the accusation of witchcraft, yet, in time, it also meant that the accusations were dropped. Juha was in a position to oversee and inherit the Sawo estate and his wife's family would not have wanted to alienate him by helping convict his father of witchcraft. Thus, Pomarkku became another important place for the family. Juha employed his brothers in Pomarkku, both in official labour contracts and otherwise. Although Risto's family was dispersing, the four sons grew up and looked for employment outside home, the members kept in contact.

The amount of contact and travel that it must have taken for Risto to keep up these contacts is significant, as Stenqvist has shown.<sup>41</sup> John McKinnel and Jukka Korpela have noted that in prehistoric and medieval Nordic cultures, travel between the home and outside community was mentally connected to travel between the physical world and the world of the dead, spirits, and divinities. Therefore, travel was always shamanistic or sacred in the Durkheimian sense.<sup>42</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, Nordic countries were Christianized, but travel still retained great symbolical religious value, and the Lutheran Church encouraged pilgrimage-like travel to specific churches.<sup>43</sup> There was absolutely nothing shamanistic in any of the descriptions of

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<sup>40</sup> Ulvila 8–10 January 1695, 30; Ulvila 4–5 October 1695, 368. .

<sup>41</sup> Stenqvist Milde, *Vägar*.

<sup>42</sup> McKinnel, *Meeting*; Korpela, 'In deep'. On sacred space, see also Döring, 'Introduction', 7–31; Coster & Spicer, *Sacred*; Besserman, *Sacred*. The prehistoric era was staggered in various parts of the Nordic area. First written source from Finland can be found in 1316, but in the very northern Sami areas written sources are rare still in the sixteenth century.

<sup>43</sup> Toivo, *Faith and Magic*, 50-60; Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien*.

what Risto did, nor did his witchcraft accusations include travel to other worlds, Sabbaths, or witches' meetings. Indeed, all of Risto's travel had a rational purpose: for the benefit of his farm, for trade, or for other financial gain. Nevertheless, the suspicions of others against him grew as the frequency and distance of his travels grew. This was perhaps because forests were usually considered dangerous in early modern Finland. Not only were they populated by beasts, spirits, and violent criminals, they also were dangerous entities themselves, which could disorient, lead astray, and 'cover' humans and cattle so that they could never be found.<sup>44</sup> Risto's household, however, exploited the wilderness for economic gain – they mention gathering berries and logging – and used it to escape outside control, seeming to control the dangers of the woods. To return to McKinnel's theory, this travel between the woods and the home was a domesticated version of equating the travels between this and the other world to those between the home and the outside community. If not sacred in the Durkheimian sense of marking universal boundaries, it was definitely suspicious in the eyes of everyone else.

Despite, or because of, Kynäsjärvi's remoteness and Risto's dubious reputation, the farmstead was a safe haven for the family. It is evident the household was lively and people came and went depending on seasonal labour demands. Poll tax records indicate that by 1701 Risto's son, Heikki, had married and brought in his wife, a daughter, and one or two maids and farmhands to live at Kynäsjärvi. At some point, a Johan Matson and his wife from Ikaalinen also lived at the farmstead.<sup>45</sup> In 1704, the Great Northern War increased the demand for soldiers in the Swedish army. Two of Risto's sons, Petter and Juha the younger, were conscripted. When they were summoned to court for not signing up, Juha the younger explained that he had been serving his brother in Pomarkku under a legal contract. His brother would not let him go to war because, he explained, having paid his wages, his brother felt entitled to his labour. In fear that the crown officials would take 'any Juha just as well as one', both brothers, Risto, all the families who worked with him in Kynäsjärvi and Pomarkku, their servants, and the sons from Petter's employer in Längelmä – hid at Kynäsjärvi. As crown officials had to ask for the household's help to get across the lake,

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<sup>44</sup> Holmberg, 'Metsän'; Knuuttila, 'Eksyminen'.

<sup>45</sup> SAY, Ulvila 1694–1713, draft lists f. 121; Ulvila, draft lists, years 1674–1693, folds 87, 159 and 168 and poll tax records 7350:1387.

Kynäsjärvi was an effective refuge. A bailiff even described trying to sneak across (*tiählandes*) the lake by building a raft, but he and his accompanying officials were spotted. The men hid in the woods and did not return before nightfall. The women, children and old folk of the household claimed the men were hunting, gathering berries, or on some other business. There was always something to do, so who could prove they was not engaged in some legitimate task?<sup>46</sup>

The witchcraft accusations against Risto were never solved. The compurgation oath he took in October 1695 was declared void as such oaths were dispensed with that year. In 1702, an investigation was attempted but could not proceed as Risto was having his farmstead assessed for its tax-paying abilities at the same time. In 1704, Risto attended court, but the crown official who acted as prosecutor failed to show, and the documents from the Court of Appeal were missing. The court tried to interrogate a witness from another parish, but he was too drunk and the hearing had to be postponed. When the witness turned up sober a couple of weeks later, Risto had gone to handle some business in the town of Turku. Risto died of natural causes in 1707, leaving his son Heikki to take over the management of the farmstead.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored Risto's journey from a fishing village, to a central farming community, and then on to what was essentially a one-house village in the backwoods. The home in the fishing village of Otamo had been a refuge for the small family, yet it was well connected to the outside world. Society's values, however, meant that the family had a better chance of survival if it had access to farmland and they achieved that by moving to the more central and densely populated Hyvelä. Court records indicate that here Risto became a recognised member of the landowning community in the parish and a valued trade partner for the nearby townsfolk. For a reputed witch, however, a place too close to one's neighbours may not have been the best choice as he would have caused his neighbours trepidation and been closely scrutinised. By moving to the isolated Kynäsjärvi, and clearing a large

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<sup>46</sup> Ulvila 13–16 February 1704, 283–304.

<sup>47</sup> Ulvila 8–10 January 1695, 30; Ulvila 4–5 October 1695, 368; Ulvila 27–28 June 1702, 130–132; Ulvila 13–16 February 1704, 346–352; Ulvila 27–28 June 1704, 985–987; Ulvila 27–28 June 1707, 356v–358v.

farmstead for his extended household, Risto not only raised the living standards of everyone involved, it enabled him to escape the immediate pressure and control of suspicious neighbours. Although he still had a reputation as a witch, Risto was protected by his environment, and the contacts he had made in and around that environment, and could no longer be effectively hunted. The newly cleared farmstead also enabled him to gain status. As trouble hit again in the form of war and conscription, the isolated one-house village became a physical haven for the family, including those now scattered across surrounding villages and parishes. Risto had found a way of protecting himself and his clan – controlling the intrusion of the outside world even when something that was defined as a serious crime had been committed by a member of that household. By the 1690s, Risto appears to have become a prosperous farmer whose peripatetic lifestyle allowed him to grow and maintain a flourishing household.

While both his transience and success gave rise to suspicion and yet more accusations, Risto still managed to establish a large extended family base in the backwoods, keep this household together, and use the interdependencies of kin, family, and patronage in the rural communities and the trading world. The concept of what Joachim Eibach has called ‘the open house’ – and the existence or lack of privacy and control within it – is key here, for the balance of privacy and outside control was essential in both creating and dispelling the suspicion and experience of witchcraft. The way Risto manipulated distance caused the same dichotomy for, as McKinnell explains in his ideas of sacred travel, distance, as it always creates travel, was often considered suspicious even by the end of the seventeenth century. This suggests that in moving location, Risto effectively pulled off a balancing act. By maintaining contacts, working hard and grasping opportunities he got on with life despite the witchcraft accusations hanging over him. In doing so, he not only kept his family together, he ensured their safety and increased their prosperity.

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