

*Petteri Impola, Juho-Antti Junno & Titta Kallio-Seppä*

## The Death Seat of Two Russian Soldiers – Folklore From the Great Wrath

### Introduction

#### *Great Wrath*

The Great Northern War in 1700–1721 started as a coalition of Russia, Denmark-Norway and Saxony declared the war on the Swedish Empire<sup>1</sup>. After a quite successful start the war did not go too well for the Swedish and Sweden could not effectively defend the eastern parts of its empire, specifically the area of modern-day Finland<sup>2</sup>. This allowed Russian military to take control of the Eastern Finland in 1710 and most of the other parts of the country including major towns by 1714.

Russian troops, under the command of Field Marshal Mikhail Golitsyn, implemented harsh measures against the Finnish population. The Russian military was ordered to demolish and destroy everything in Western Finland to prevent further land operations of the Swedish Army against Russia. The tactic known as scorched-earth policy was implemented on 100 km zone from the Bothnian Bay. Entire villages were razed, and civilians were subjected to massacres, torturing, raping and slavery. The most infamous incidents include the massacres in Isokyrö and Hailuoto. Many Finns fled to Sweden, while those who remained endured famine and poverty.

The situation in Northern Ostrobothnia was particularly severe due to its strategic importance and relatively isolated communities. The region suffered from extensive plundering and destruction of homesteads. Many civilians sought refuge deep in the forests or attempted to flee to Sweden. Russian forces used brutal tactics to suppress resistance, and several villages and towns, faced repeated raids. The harsh climate and lack of resources further exacerbated the suffering of the local population, leading to widespread starvation and disease. Despite this, Northern Ostrobothnia became a focal point of Finnish resistance, with guerrilla warfare tactics employed by local militias<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Petri Karonen, *Pohjoinen suurvalta. Ruotsi ja Suomi 1521–1809*. 4. uudistettu painos. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki 2014, 308–309; Nils Erik Villstrand, *Sveriges historia 1600–1721*. Nordstedt, Stockholm 2011, 203–206.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Schnakenbourg, “Great Northern War (1700–21)”. *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy*. Edited by Gordon Martel. 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Karonen 2014, 310–320; Villstrand 2011, 217–221.



In the autumn of 1714, the Russians advanced along Pyhäjoki-river to Haapavesi, which was the chapel parish of the mother parish of Pyhäjoki, and the following year the Russians destroyed systematically villages in nearby parishes. According to tax lists compiled in 1719, the house of Vaitiniemi was mentioned in the village of Ainali as being burnt and its people either completely or mostly murdered, i.e. as a deserted farm. Of the houses in the village of Ainali, the houses Paskoja, Sulkamäki, Oja and Mäyrä were also deserted. In addition, at least one boy from the village is also known to have been taken to Russia for forced labour. It is therefore certain that the enemy had been active in the vicinity of the house of Ojala.<sup>4</sup>

### *The story*

The local folklore from Haapavesi Northern Ostrobothnia tells a story about the local resistance that killed two Russian soldiers. According to the story the soldiers were shot through the window/opening in the wall while sitting on the bench inside a house called Ojala in Ainali village. The original house from the story does not exist anymore. According to the story, the soldiers were then buried in nearby forest. Some markings were made to the trunk of nearby pine tree. The exact location of the burial or pine tree is not known anymore. However, the part of the forest was named as Ryssänkorpi (Russian backwoods) to resemble the burial site. The story was narrated by the current owner of the bench, Antti Hankonen, and he had learned the tale from his father Pertti Hankonen. The story is also written by a local author Otto Merikallio. The narrative is thus part of the local family and village history<sup>5</sup>.

### *The bench*

The claimed death seat is apparently an old, crude, handmade bench (Figure 1). It is manufactured from single plank and four wooden legs round in their shape. The main structure of the bench is simple and used for centuries. The plank follows the shape of the trunk. From the other end the bench was 37 cm wide narrowing down to 32 cm in the other end. The length of the plank was approximately 264 cm. The height of the bench with current legs was approximately 44 cm. It is quite probable that the legs are not original.

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<sup>4</sup> Kustaa H. J. Vilkkunen, *Viha. Perikato, katkeruus ja kertomus isostavivahasta*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki 2005, 56, 64; Matti Salo, "Vaitiniemen kyläkunnan ja Vaitiniemi-Uusitalon suvun historia 1500-luvulta 1900-luvun alkuun". *Petäjän juurelta maailmalle. Vaitiniemen kylän ja Vaitiniemi-Uusitalon suvun vaiheet 1500-luvulta uudelle vuosituhannele*. Edited by Matti Salo. Vaitiniemi-Uusitalon sukuseura, Haapavesi 2000, 23.

<sup>5</sup> An interview with Antti Hankonen 10.01.2025; Otto Merikallio, Personal notes 1948.



Figure 1. The bench.

### Placenames

Places around Junnonsaari have several examples that can be connected with the Great Wrath. At least according to local folklore, the name Pakolantie (road to escape) is an escape road towards hideout in the middle of the backwoods (Figure 2). The road begins in Junnonsaari and at the end of Pakolantie approximately 3,5 km from Junnonsaari there is a location named as Pakola (refuge or hideout).

Other interesting place names are Ryssänpörpi (Russian backwoods) and Ryssänpölkkiö (Russian rock/cliff). They are located a bit

more than one kilometre away from Junnonsaari and the house called Ojala, where the Russian soldiers were shot according to the folklore.



Figure 2. A map of the region. Ojala house marked with a triangle, current location of the bench with a circle and Ryssänpörpi with a cross.

## Materials and methods

As the bench was made of a single plank, it provided a good basis for dendrochronological dating. Dendrochronological dating is a scientific method used to determine the age of wooden materials by analysing tree-ring growth patterns. The technique is based on the principle that trees produce annual growth rings, the width of which varies depending on environmental conditions such as temperature and precipitation. By comparing the ring patterns of an unknown sample to a master chronology established from trees of known age in the same region, researchers can assign precise calendar dates to wooden structures or artifacts. This method is especially valuable in climatology, but also in archaeological and historical studies, as it allows for high-resolution dating and environmental reconstruction.<sup>6</sup>

In the Nordic countries, dendrochronology has been widely applied to date wooden structures and archaeological finds, particularly from the medieval and early modern periods.<sup>7</sup> In Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the method has been used extensively to date churches, buildings, urban constructions, and wooden artefacts preserved in both dry and waterlogged conditions. The length and resolution of tree-ring chronologies vary across the region. In southern Scandinavia, continuous oak chronologies extend over 7,000 years, while in the boreal zones of Sweden and Finland, long pine chronologies have been developed. In Finnish Lapland, the oldest securely dated tree-ring material extends back around 7,600 years, primarily from subfossil Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) preserved in lakes and peat bogs. These long chronologies are valuable not only for dating archaeological sites but also for reconstructing past climate and environmental changes in the North.<sup>8</sup>

Sampling is normally done by drilling the wood material from the surface to the core of the tree. When dating objects that are to be kept intact, tree rings can be

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<sup>6</sup> About the basics of dendrochronological dating see H. C. Fritts, *Tree Rings and Climate*. Academic Press, London 1976; Fritz Hans Schweingruber, *Tree Rings. Basics and Applications of Dendrochronology*. Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1989; Pentti Zetterberg, “Dendrokronologia historiallisen ajan arkeologiassa”. *Historiallisen ajan arkeologian menetelmät*. Edited by Marianna Niukkanen. Museoviraston rakennushistorian osaston julkaisu 20. Helsinki 1999, 61–63.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Aoife Daly and Jørgen Wadum, “Dating and Beyond: The Science of Dendrochronology for the Study of Late Medieval Wooden Objects”. *Sacred Medieval Objects and Their Afterlives in Scandinavia*. Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands 2024.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Zetterberg 1999; Pentti Zetterberg, Matti Eronen and Markus Lindholm, “Construction of a 7500-Year Tree-Ring Record for Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*, L.) in Northern Fennoscandia and its Application to Growth Variation and Palaeoclimatic Studies”. *Growth Trends in European Forests*. Edited by Heinrich Spiecker, Kari Mielikäinen, Michael Köhl and Jens Peter Skovsgaard. Springer, Berlin 1996, 7–18. See also Samuli Helama, Tanja Ratilainen, Juha Ruohonen and Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen, “Developing Millennial Tree-ring Chronology for Turku (Åbo) and Comparing Palaeoclimatic Signals Inferred from Archaeological, Subfossil and Living *Pinus sylvestris* Data in Southwest Finland”. *Studia Quaternaria*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2024, 1–11.

documented for the dendrochronological analysis by photographing or scanning the surface.<sup>9</sup>

As the bench has historical value, the analyses were planned and performed to preserve the current condition of the bench. No samples were cut for analyses. The other end of the plank was carefully grinded with fine sandpaper and then scanned on site. The scanning resolution used was 2,400 pixels per inch, so that even the smallest annual grooves would be clearly visible (Figure 3).

From the scanned images, areas where the annual rings were best visible were searched. In addition, the aim was to get as close as possible to the last years of the tree's life<sup>10</sup>. From these areas the thickness of the annual rings was measured from the surface of the tree to the core using the version 9.4 of the Coorecorder software<sup>11</sup> from four different measurement lines. The tree species of the sample was determined based on the frequency, size and location of the resin pores and the change of the annual rings between spring and summer wood<sup>12</sup>.

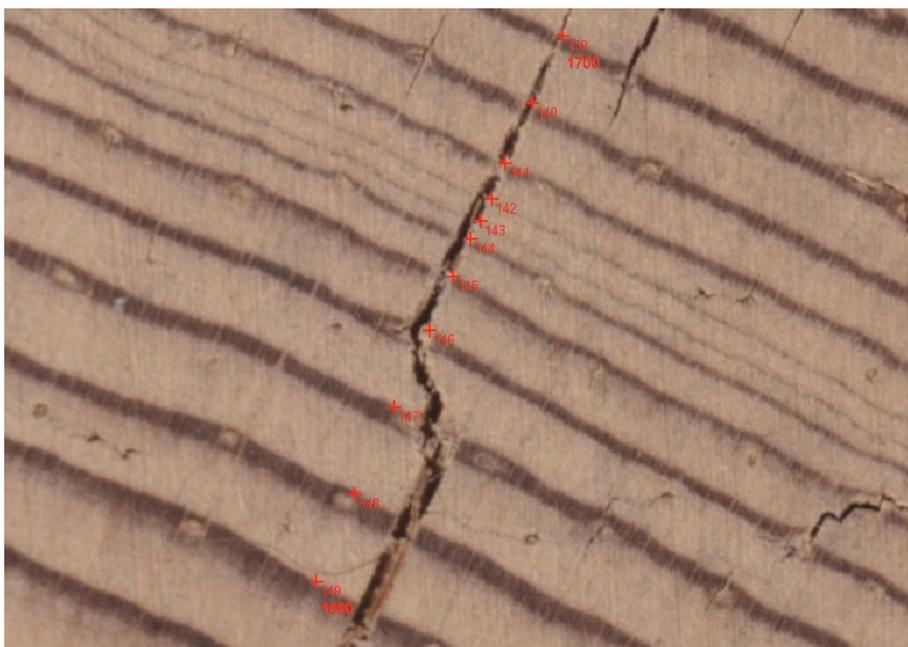


Figure 3. A section of the scanned image for the dendrochronological dating.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Kjersti Myhr, Terje Thun and Håkan Hytteborn, “Dendrochronological Dating of Wooden Artefacts using Photography”. *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 40, 2, 2007, 179–186.

<sup>10</sup> Tuomo Wallenius, Haapaveden penkin dendrokronologinen tutkimus 2.3.2025.

<sup>11</sup> Coorecorder 9.4. Cybis Elektronik & Data Ab, Sweden.

<sup>12</sup> Kurt Fagerstedt, Kerttu Pellinen, Pekka Saranpää and Tuuli Timonen, *Mikä puu – mistä puusta*. 2nd edition. Yliopistopaino, Helsinki 2004.

Dating was performed by comparing the variation in the growth of the annual growth rings of the measurement lines to each other and against a previously timed reference chronology<sup>13</sup>. The CDendro program, developed for this purpose, was utilized to conduct this task<sup>14</sup>.

In this work, Pentti Zetterberg's unpublished pine data from Ostrobothnia was used as a reference chronology. These samples cover the time period of years from 1261 to 2000. The temporal length of the reference chronology is sufficient for the assumed age of the sample.

The reliability of the results was assessed by calculating a statistical t-test value for the obtained timing results and comparing it with the model calculations of Torbjörn Axelson and Lars-Åke Larsson<sup>15</sup>.

## Results and discussion

### *Dendrochronology*

The bench turned out to be made of old pine. This was expected. It was possible to measure 252 annual rings from the plank. However, no measuring line reached the core of the tree, so the tree was probably almost three hundred years old when it was fell. The last measurable annual ring indicated year 1839. However, this year does not represent the last year of the tree's life with full certainty, because the surface had apparently been carved to some extent, at least next to the measuring line. However, judging by the curved shape of the surface, not so many years are missing. The bench was probably made shortly after 1839.

The average chronology of the sample measurements had a t-value of 6.5 with the reference chronology. Judging from the modelling by Torbjörn Axelson and Lars-Åke Larsson, the probability of an incorrect timing by chance, when at least 80 growth rings have been measured and the t-value is at least 6.5, is less than one in two thousand. The dating of the bench is therefore very reliable<sup>16</sup>.

Our direct main results thus indicate that the bench was not in use during the Great Wrath. This raises several questions such as the authenticity of the whole story. Was there another bench that became replaced at some point? Were there Russian soldiers in Ojala and were they killed by local resistance? How reliable are the local, sometimes very detailed narratives of the Great Wrath?

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<sup>13</sup> Wallenius 2025.

<sup>14</sup> CDendro 9.4. Cybis Elektronik & Data Ab, Sweden.

<sup>15</sup> Torbjörn Axelson and Lars-Åke Larsson, *What is a good Test value to ensure a dating?*. 2013, <https://www.cybis.se/forfun/dendro/TTEST/index.htm>. Accessed 26.5.2025.

<sup>16</sup> Wallenius 2025.

*Collective memory and local stories of the Great Wrath*

In Finnish historiography much has been written about the Great Wrath from both general and local perspectives. Although in early modern period the eastern border of the Kingdom of Swedish with Tsardom of Russia was at times troubled, it was the brutal period of the Great Wrath that most strongly imprinted the idea of the persecutor (*vainooja*) from the East in the minds of Finns before the experiences of the Second World War. Already half a century after the events, in the 1770s, when the concept of the Great Wrath (*Isoviha; Den Store Ofreden*) was first used in public, the popular narrative of the invasion had begun to condense into a story, or myth, in which the places, times and people were mainly verifiable, but parts of the story that were not part of real events had been added. The popular narrative of the Great Wrath was extensive and long repeated orally, but later also in writing, mixing parts of earlier Finnish but also European invasion and migration stories and, where appropriate, more recent representations about Russians – such as the experiences of the Russo-Swedish War of 1741–1742 or Finnish War in 1808–1809.<sup>17</sup>

Folklore studies and historians in particular have long been interested in the correlation between oral tradition and actual historical events – to what extent, for example, local accounts of the past can be considered reliable sources. On the other hand, especially in the 2000s, the rise of so-called *oral history* has emphasised the view that it is in principle not appropriate to compare what has or has not happened objectively. The subjectivity of memories and of those who recall them is in itself an interesting subject to study from the point of view of oral history. The aim is not to find out what is “true”, but to analyse narratives as significant descriptions of the past in their own right, whose various narratives tell their own valuable story, which is meaningful in its own right to those who experienced it or told it afterwards. The layering and intermingling of stories and memories is thus a self-evident starting point and, to that extent, reflects how an individual, a village community or even a nation-state has understood its past in a way that is meaningful to it.<sup>18</sup> In the Finnish canon, it has been the Great Wrath that has provided an event rich in content, the recollection of which has been studied with its meanings.

Already in the 1700s and 1800s, a wide variety of poems, chronicles and local historical records were written about the Great Wrath. Researchers have been particularly interested in stories about local communities, families and individuals, and relationship of those stories to the actual events of the Russian invasion. Priestly

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<sup>17</sup> Kari Tarkiainen, *Se vanha vainooja. Käsitykset itäisestä naapurista Iivana Julmasta Pietari Suureen*. Suomen Historiallinen Seura, Helsinki 1986; Vilkuna 2005, 515–516.

<sup>18</sup> *Muistitietotutkimus. Metodologisia kysymyksiä*. Edited by Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo and Ulla-Maija Peltonen. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki 2006; Cf. Anne Heimo, *Kapina Sammatissa. Vuoden 1918 paikalliset tulkinnat osana historian yhteiskunnallisen rakentamisen prosessia*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki 2010.

families in particular were diligent recorders of local invasion descriptions, but even among the clergy the stories were mainly oral. These narratives were characterised by biblical metaphors of suffering and survival, even miraculously. Stories of the Great Wrath have also been handed down and shaped mostly orally in peasant families for centuries.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the narrator, the rhetorical rules of the Great Wrath stories were shaped by who the audience was.<sup>20</sup>

Part of this extensive oral history has been preserved in written form, particularly in the Finnish Literature Society's folk poetry archive, which contains extensive collections of folklore about the persecutions and wars like the Great Wrath. This folk poetry archive also contains a story about Ojala's house, according to which a wife and child killed during the Great Wrath were buried near the house.<sup>21</sup>

Many of these local stories have also been published in newspapers, which means that they have been retold and partly reshaped from 18th century up to the present day, as part of the history of suffering of the Finnish people.<sup>22</sup> The region's most prominent newspaper, *Kaleva*, has recorded stories from the village of Ainali during the Great Wrath, for example in the 1910s, 1930s, and 1950s.<sup>23</sup> These newspaper articles do not contain the exact story about the bench at Ojala's house. Instead, there is a story that a ten-man Cossack patrol drove up to the nearby Ollila house in Vaitiniemi and took their horses into the farms main room. Inside the house, they made holes in the table and tied their horses to the table to eat the food supplies of the house. According to oral tradition, the table in question with the holes in it was still visible sometime in the 1800s or 1900s, but "it no longer exists." Thus, folklore from the Great Wrath could be linked to objects, such as furniture, that someone had allegedly seen at some point. It was a matter of concretizing the story into something physical.<sup>24</sup> But however, Russians are also mentioned as having stayed at Ojala's house during the Finnish War a hundred years later (1808–1809), and frightened the Finns who arrived at the scene.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the folk poetry archive contains a story in which Swedish army soldiers shot two Russians in Ojala's house in 1808.

<sup>19</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 294–295, 330–335, 517–518; Kustaa H. J. Vilkuna, *Paholaisen sota*. Teos, Helsinki 2006, 323–328.

<sup>20</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 298–300.

<sup>21</sup> The Finnish Literature Society's local history and tradition index, Persecutions and wars (Z Vainoajat ja sodat / Vainolaisten vastustaminen), Yksinään liikkuva vainolainen [...], Paikallistarinat laatikko 41, Haapavesi 1911.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Kustaa H. J. Vilkuna, "Suomen kansan kärsimyshistoria 1810–1900". *Suomen sodan jälkeen. 1800-luvun alun yhteiskuntahistoria*. Edited by Piia Einonen and Miikka Voutilainen. Vastapaino, Tampere 2020, 43–66.

<sup>23</sup> *Kaleva* 4.11.1911, no. 255, 4–5; 28.7.1938, no. 169, 5; 12.11.1950, no. 261, 4; 6.8.1955, no. 188, 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Kaleva* 12.11.1950, no. 261, 4; 6.8.1955, no. 188, 5; Cf. Vilkuna 2020, 49, 54.

<sup>25</sup> *Kaleva* 28.7.1938, no. 169, 5.

According to oral tradition, before their deaths, the Russians crouched in fear in the corner of the main room, under a bench.<sup>26</sup>

The possible events in Ojala's house are a typical part of this medley of hundreds of stories about the Great Wrath. All in all, it has been said that the brutal period, which lasted for years, violence, terror and kidnapping remained in the *collective* or *social memory*. It should be noted that, although different regions, families and households developed their own local memories of the events, it was precisely because of collective memory that stories were combined and simplified to fit more into a widely shared *historical memory*. The more time passed, the more mythical the local stories became.<sup>27</sup> Unique events within a family or house were fitted into a broader and more widely known canon – highlighting shared collective experiences and, on the other hand, the fact that destruction also had common features across wide areas. This is underlined by the fact that already in the 1700s, the typical narrator of a story of Great Wrath was in the we-form (the first-person plural pronoun), even the victim of a single incident was not a single person but we, referring, for example, to all peasants, collective victims. In contrast, the enemy, i.e. the Russian soldier or the Tsar, was described in the singular.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, although the experience of brutality was shared, it was typical of the stories to emphasise that it was their own village or parish that had suffered the worst atrocities. And while one's own story was framed as part of a wider collective narrative, the evidential value of the personal account was emphasised in the details, particularly the role of eyewitnesses.<sup>29</sup>

It is the local, but subsequently intertwined, narratives that have been at the heart of how the image of the past of Great Wrath has been constructed. In the folklore of local communities, houses and families, certain themes and narrative devices recur in descriptions of violent times.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the story of Ojala's house in the village of Ainali also contains at least two clear narrative motifs that are common in the collective memory of the Great Wrath. Firstly, many stories, like the one from the house of Ojala, show intransigence against a vicious enemy, resistance to the Russians.<sup>31</sup> Over time, even supernatural elements have been added to these stories in order to explain and understand a wave of violence that is perceived as incomprehensible and traumatic. In this way, the violent conqueror, the Russian enemy, could also be reified and his actions explained, even as supernatural evil. The contemporaries believed that the hateful invasion that soon followed the Great Famine of 1695–1697 was part

<sup>26</sup> Z Vainoajat ja sodat / Vainolaisten vastustaminen, Yksinään liikkuva vainolainen [...], Paikallistarinat laatikko 41, Haapavesi 1916.

<sup>27</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 294–296, 515; Vilkuna 2006, 330–331; Cf. Anna-Leena Siikala, *Tarina ja tulkinta. Tutkimus kansankertojista*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki 1984, 131–132.

<sup>28</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 295; Vilkuna 2006, 323–326.

<sup>29</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 20, 248, 311–314; Vilkuna 2006, 324–325.

<sup>30</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 515–516.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Vilkuna 2005, 66, 125, 264, 283, 338, 359, 369, 464.

of God's wrath, a collective punishment for the collective sins of the Swedes and Finns. Therefore, the traumatic memory also became a collective one, where local stories were combined with details from shared narrative.<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, where the Christian tradition offered biblical suffering to explain the Great Wrath, it also offered a story of salvation, even as a miracle. Folklore repeats stories of highly improbable rescues, where, for example, the old mistress of the house may have used her ingenuity and cunning to kill the Russians who had forced their way into the house – in these narratives, the Russians play the role of fools. The stories of the Great Wrath were also typically accompanied by rhetorically suspenseful plot twists, and the listener's interest was heightened by descriptions of the atrocities. The story of the Ojala house, where two enemy soldiers were shot through the window/opening in the wall, could also be linked to this narrative tradition. It is relatively typical for the tales of resistance and rescue that not just one enemy was fought, but usually several.<sup>33</sup>

While sometimes exaggerated, or even supernatural, aspects of local stories of the Great Wrath have been found, researchers have been able to show that in most cases the local stories had some real roots and often even a solid basis – “the myths were real”, so to speak.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the Great Wrath is known to have left its mark on the local placenames, such as that found near the Ojala house with its escape route and hiding place.<sup>35</sup> Whether or not the story of the Russians slaughtered on the bench of the Ojala house actually happened exactly as narrated in the folklore, it can be assumed that something very similar took place in Ojala or at least in the village during the Great Wrath that has remained in shared experience and has been repeated for generations to come. Potentially the story has, to some extent, merged with the broader collective memory and its narrative motives.

## Conclusions

At least the placenames combined with oral tradition are telling the same story. “Ryssänkorpi” is relatively rare place name in Finland and no other explanation for the name is available apart from current narrative being the burial site of Russian soldiers. Further investigations such as archaeological excavations in Ryssänkorpi could provide further support for the story. However, finding a 300 year old, unmarked burial site from forest could be a task too challenging.

<sup>32</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 240–242; Vilkuna 2006, 55–57.

<sup>33</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 133, 330–335, 516, 518; Vilkuna 2006, 324–327; Satu Apo, *Ihmesadun rakenne. Juonien tyypit, pääjaksot ja henkilöasetelmat satakuntalaisessa kansansatuaineistossa*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, Helsinki 1986.

<sup>34</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 516; Vilkuna 2006, 324, 330.

<sup>35</sup> Vilkuna 2005, 515–516.

Although the dating of the bench proved that it was not in use in the early 1700s, the bench is still part of the living history and local tradition of the Great Wrath. The story told from the bench is valuable in itself and reflects a generational need to explain and remember the Great Wrath and its local events as part of a collective memory and history that has been accumulated over generations. The story of the bench and the Russians killed on it contains widely exploited narrative devices and motifs from the collective memory of the Great Wrath. On the other hand, research on the Great Wrath shows that local stories usually have a real event behind them, even if the details, place and even time have changed – this may well be the case with the Ojala house, even if the bench does not corroborate the story. In any case, the bench has been local part of the commemoration of the Great Wrath, even if it was made more than a hundred years after the bloody Russian invasion.

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### **Abstract**

The period known as the Great Wrath was associated with the Great Northern War (1700–1721) and the Russian invasion to Finland therein. The Great Wrath lasted from 1714 to 1721 being an extremely painful epoch especially for Northern Ostrobothnia. The devastation caused by the Russian Military was so complete that the conventional written sources from that time, such as parish registers, are almost absent. Most of the houses and churches in the area were burnt and people killed or enslaved. In addition, the great majority of the local authorities fled to safer regions. Thus direct historical sources and material culture associated with this period are sparse. Significant part of the information about the everyday life and particular events is based on oral tradition being generated 300 years ago.

This study was focused on a particular tale from Haapavesi, Northern Ostrobothnia. An old wooden bench being the main character of this story. According to the folklore, at some point during the Great Wrath two Russian soldiers were sitting on the bench, then located in a house called Ojala and killed by the members of local resistance. The soldiers were then buried in nearby forest. The burial place was later renamed as Ryssäänkorpi (Russian backwoods) to reflect this incidence. There are also other local names that are potentially associated with the Great Wrath such as flight routes and hiding places.

In this study we take a closer look at the old wooden bench that potentially represents an exceptional artefact, directly related to incidences of the Great Wrath. To confirm the authenticity of the bench a dendrochronological analyses were performed to provide accurate dating for the wood that was used to construct the bench.

The results of dendrochronological analyses indicated that the pine tree that was used as raw material for the bench had grown at least until 1839. The bench was thus probably manufactured

in 1840s. This is more than hundred years after the Great Northern War. The bench was thus not linked with Great Wrath or killings of the Russian soldiers. It is possible that the original bench has disappeared at some point or the accuracy of the folklore is weak. Oral tradition can not be considered as accurate. Places, names and points of time tend to change.