

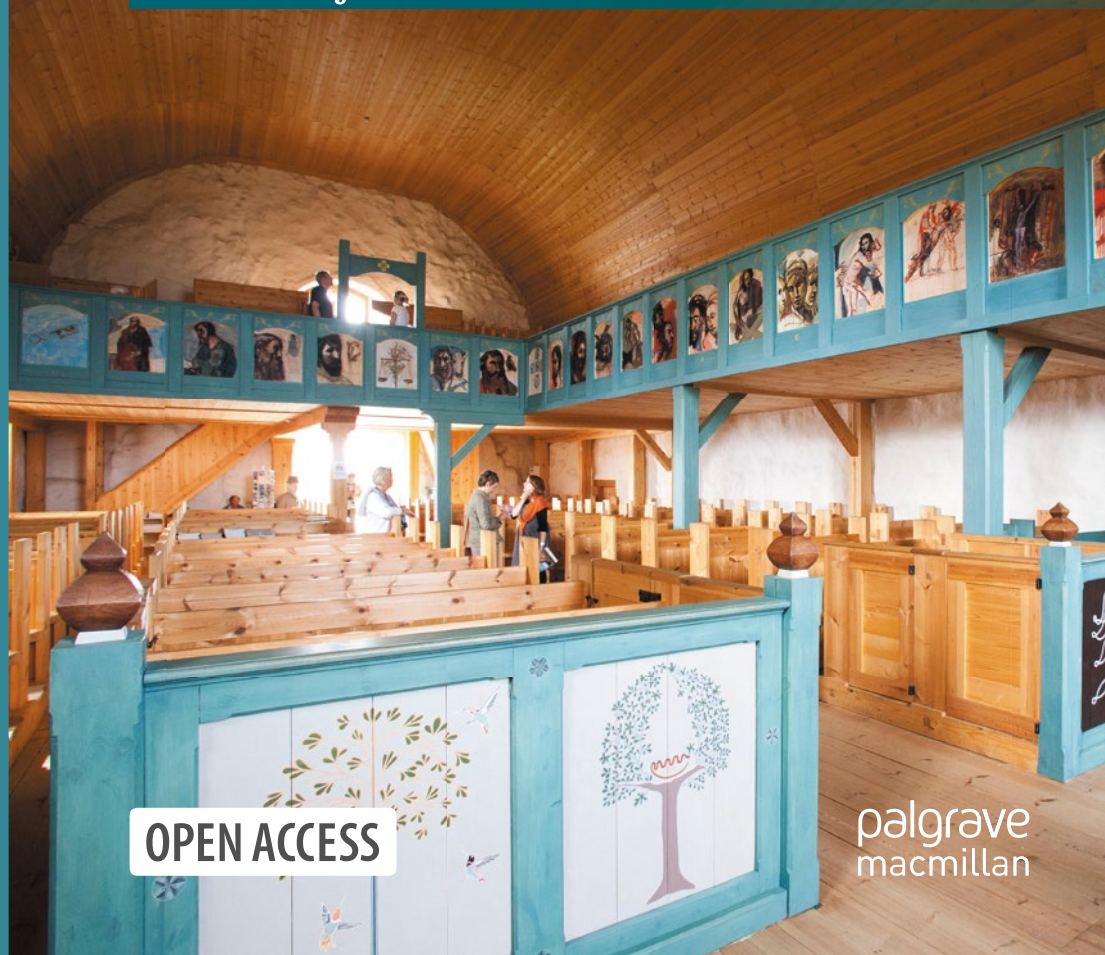


PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE HISTORY  
OF EXPERIENCE

# Histories of Experience in the World of Lived Religion

*Edited by*

Sari Katajala-Peltomaa · Raisa Maria Toivo



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This series, a collaboration between Palgrave Macmillan and the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experience (HEX) at Tampere University, will publish works on the histories of experience across historical time and global space. History of experience means, for the series, individual, social, and collective experiences as historically conditioned phenomena. ‘Experience’ refers here to a theoretically and methodologically conceptualized study of human experiences in the past, not to any study of ‘authentic’ or ‘essentialist’ experiences. More precisely, the series will offer a forum for the historical study of human experiencing, i.e. of the varying preconditions, factors, and possibilities shaping past experiences. Furthermore, the series will study the human institutions, communities, and the systems of belief, knowledge, and meaning as based on accumulated (and often conflicting) experiences.

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Editors

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*Editors*

Sari Katajala-Peltomaa  
Tampere University  
Tampere, Finland

Raisa Maria Toivo  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Tampere University  
Tampere, Finland



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Experience has become or is becoming a catchword among historical studies and the use of the word is variable. Despite being used frequently, experience has rarely been systematically conceptualized. The volume at hand is an attempt to lay grounds for the methodology of the study of experiences in history.

This collection of essays springs from the workshops where the contributors have shared their thoughts, ideas and preliminary papers. These workshops were part of activities of lived religion group within HEX: Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences. This eight-year Centre rethinks historical experiences, historical explanations and historical knowledge, and their place in the current world. Hex's roots are in the traditions of new social history and history of emotions. Our conceptual and methodological objective is the analytical history of experiences: how experience is defined and used as a key part of historical analysis.

We thank the Academy of Finland for the funding and opportunities the Centre of Excellence has provided. We are grateful to all HEX members for their comments and criticism. We thank Faculty of Social Sciences and Trivium—Tampere Centre for Classical, Medieval and Early Modern Studies at Tampere University for colloquiality and support. Matthew James has edited the language of the volume; we are grateful for his proficiency.

We would like to thank participants of seminar *Pour une histoire de l'expérience: le laboratoire médiéval* for comments and especially the organizers Professor Piroska Nagy and Xavier Biron-Ouellet. We are grateful to Professor Nagy for commenting on our introduction and sharing her thoughts about the volume.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Johanna Annola** is Academy Research Fellow in the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences (HEX) at Tampere University. She has published widely on poorhouses and institutional care in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Mervi Kaarninen** is Senior Lecturer and the Head of BA and MA programmes in History at Tampere University, research fellow in HEX, and has published widely on the history of childhood, youth, gender and education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Sari Katajala-Peltomaa** is a senior research fellow in HEX at Tampere University and Chair of Trivium—Tampere Centre for Classical, Medieval and Early Modern Studies. She has published widely on lived religion, hagiography, family and gender in medieval Europe.

**Ville Kivimäki** is a senior research fellow at Tampere University and leader of the Lived Nation research team of HEX. His publications include several works on the social and cultural history of World War II and its aftermath, with a particular focus on traumatic war experiences.

**Miia Kuha** is Finnish Academy Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, working on Lutheran culture in early modern Finland.

**Jenni Kuuliala** is a senior research fellow in HEX at Tampere University, with publications on disability and hagiography in early modern Europe. She is also one of the editors of the first book in the series “Palgrave

advances in History of Experience,” *Lived Religion and Everyday Life in Early Modern Hagiographic Material*.

**Pirjo Markkola** is Professor of History at Tampere University, Director of HEX and leader of the Lived Welfare team of HEX. She has published widely on working class women, gender and lived religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Riikka Miettinen** is a post-doctoral research fellow in HEX at Tampere University with several publications on suicide, disability and madness in early modern Sweden.

**Saku Pihko** is a doctoral candidate in History at Tampere University. He works primarily on medieval heresy and inquisition, and has specialized in methodological questions concerning the use of inquisition records as historical sources, as well as the history of experiences and lived religion.

**Raisa Maria Toivo** is Professor of History at Tampere University and leader of the Lived Religion group of HEX. She has published widely on the social history early modern religion, gender and domestic violence.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: Religion as Historical Experience

*Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo*

Experience resonates well in both current political and academic cultures in the 2020s, and in the years leading up to this decade. The concept has an appeal in populist rhetoric: since experience in its everyday meaning seems to put forward the events and occurrences in the life of the individual “small person”, it seems to validate those events as the basis for political and societal discourses. Academic circles, on the other hand, have been interested in deconstructing and, perhaps, transcending the populist usages of experience in the analysis of the “post-truth era”. Is experience a methodology of the 2020s? It at least seems to be gaining considerable traction. As we feel that a conceptual development needs to be a part of any “turn”, we aim at developing an analytical methodology of a history of experience within the sphere of lived religion.

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S. Katajalla-Peltomaa (✉) • R. M. Toivo  
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland  
e-mail: [sari.katajala-peltomaa@tuni.fi](mailto:sari.katajala-peltomaa@tuni.fi); [raisa.toivo@tuni.fi](mailto:raisa.toivo@tuni.fi)

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## LIVED RELIGION VIS-À-VIS EXPERIENCE

The collection of chapters discusses the history of experience in the world of lived religion, especially the relationship between individual subjective and shared collective or communal experience—questions of producing, sharing, cultivating, curating, and modifying experiences and of how those processes influence social/societal structures. Since religion-as-lived encapsulates both the intimate and the social, it is an apt lens through which to examine experience. Furthermore, secularization theory has been lately largely disputed, if not discredited, and religions and spirituality are increasingly acknowledged as major components of any given society. Therefore, lived religion is an eminently suitable approach for studying the interconnection of the micro and macro levels, which in turn form the core of experience as an analytical concept.

Lived religion is not a particularly new concept. *Religion vécue* was used already by French social historians in the 1970s, although it originally meant largely the same as popular religion. The shift from theology and ideology as well as from elites and structures to the “masses” reflects the democratic idea that the “popular” must have had more practical importance for ways of life, economic choices, and even political acts than theological jargon and dogma. The focus on the “popular” may have been a political choice reflecting “a postmodern fascination with popular culture” from the 1960s on. “Popular religion” as a focus of research bloomed during the 1980s, although it soon attracted criticism as well: the concentration on what many people did—instead of what a few men thought—led to a dichotomous still-life picture: the laity or the “ordinary” people versus the elite and the learned. This kind of approach often cultivated inherently judgemental or devaluative underpinnings. Since the 1990s, an approach emphasizing one shared Christian culture instead of the earlier “two culture model” has gained ground.<sup>1</sup> It has nevertheless brought along other conceptual problems. Christianity has never been one uncomplicated unity, not even during the Middle Ages.

The need for a more nuanced view of religion has emerged in recent decades. Already the early works of *la religion vécue* emphasized the impact and influence of faith and belief in people’s daily lives, which later came to

<sup>1</sup> Delumeau, “Le prescript en la religion vécue”, 177–211; Klaniczay, “‘Popular culture’ in Medieval Hagiography”, 17–44, Smoller, “Popular Religious culture(s)”, 340–56; Boureau, *L'événement sans fin*.



denote the essential core of “lived religion”.<sup>2</sup> However, historians of modern religion have faced similar challenges: how to define “popular” and “people” as well as their relationship with the formal and institutional. Historians of any era also need to tackle the concept of religion itself as well as definitions of its limits. Religion itself remains a controversial concept.<sup>3</sup> The earlier scholarly tradition of medieval and early modern Christianity associated “popular” religion with folkloric, “not fully Christianized”, or even heathen belief. Historians of the modern era need to take a stance on the secularization paradigm and seek the limits of spirituality. Scholars of all eras may struggle with questions of genuine devotion versus ceremony or outer habits. Religion as a concept and practice is not, however, easily classified according to these categories.

In general, religion has been brought back into focus within academia, and not only within historical research; however, considerable differences between branches of scholarship and national approaches remain. For example, in 2019 Callum Brown argued that a major part of research focusing on religion in twentieth-century Britain is being done by scholars of church history and religious studies, and he calls for an approach that puts religion firmly into the secular historian’s narrative.<sup>4</sup> Even if we, too, analyse the interconnection between religion and societal factors, more influential for our work have been the twentieth-century US historians and religious anthropologists Robert Orsi, David Hall, and Meredith McGuire, who first adopted and developed the lived religion concept in the anglophone sphere. The essential starting point was the observation that people did not adopt religious or theological systems in their coherent totality, nor as given, but rather they picked and chose as if from a buffet table. Hall, Orsi, and McGuire thought this was an element of modern religion, but since their time, many historians of the medieval and

<sup>2</sup> Delumeau, “Le prescript en la religion vécue”, 177–211; Arnold, “Histories and historiographies”, 23–41; Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, “Religion as Experience”, 1–18; Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 1–24.

<sup>3</sup> Nye, *Religion: The Basics*; Boyer, *Religion Explained*, DeVries, *Religion. Beyond a Concept*. See also Guerreau, *L’avenir d’un passé incertain* and Nagy, “Religious Weeping as Ritual”, 117–37.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain: Sex, Humanists and Secularisation, 1945–1980*, 9–10. One of the major arguments of his contribution is the secularization and general weakening of traditional values only from 1960s on. On discussion of interconnection between “popular” and institutionalized religion at the turn of the twentieth century, Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*; see also Sinnemäki, Portman, Tilli and Nelson, *On the Legacy of Lutheranism in Finland*.

early modern have pointed out that the people of those eras did the same. It was nevertheless important for lived religion scholars, especially perhaps for historians, that not every action qualified as lived religion: it had to be a purposeful and structural—ritualized—action through which the community or the church defined what it was to be religious or believed. As such, lived religion emphasized practices, intentionality, and orientation.<sup>5</sup>

In this volume, lived religion is a way to live, interact, and participate in one's community. It is not, however, synonymous with "popular religion" or folkloric elements within religion, even if status, age, gender, education, and other variables affected the way people "lived out" their faith. For us, lived religion is an active dynamic process, but religion-in-action is, nonetheless, connected to theory, theology, and dogma: it is a way to turn them into everyday social actions. "Lived religion" is the focus of the chapters in the volume; the term "religion" in this book refers to the multiplicity of Christian religious cultures from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century—not a single creed or a set of beliefs as defined by one institution. Christian theological thinking was infused with lived religion, and it frames the cases of this volume, yet a detailed analysis of theological changes is not possible in a volume covering seven centuries. The same or similar questions, like the role of the Eucharist, were discussed time and again, manifesting how Christian dogma was also bound by the temporal context—it was not an unchanging monolith. Heterodoxy and especially heteropraxis can be seen as persistent elements of Christianity, and here we focus particularly on the changing practices of faith and devotion—religion-in-action.

We fully agree with John H. Arnold's notion that to grasp the "lived" part of religion, it must be analysed concomitantly with social, cultural, economic, and political aspects. Religion is not lived or experienced solitarily but within a certain time and space, framed by societal and economic structures and affected by cultural categories—yet remaining individual and intimate while being public and shared. Therefore, we argue "experience" as an analytical tool is the logical next step within this field.

Works on lived religion often describe their findings as lived experience or even religion as lived experience. This is meant to emphasize the practicality and pragmatic nature of lived religion: it consists of real people's

<sup>5</sup>Hall, *Lived Religion in America*; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Norris & Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*; Ammerman, "Lived Religion"; Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*; Moore, *Touchdown Jesus*.

experiences in real life, how things really were as opposed to how things were supposed to be, or how they were hoped to be in prescriptive, legal, ideological, or didactic materials. Nevertheless, lived religion and religion as experience need not be the same. In this volume, lived religion is the *mise-en-scène* of our evidence and material, while experience and the ways in which it is socially created (and it still creates societies) are the focus and the methodology of the study.

Experience, like lived religion, has been interpreted in different ways in different contexts and by different historians. Where academics once enthused about discourse, experience now seems to be the catchword. Like many other catchwords, it is used for different purposes with different meanings, and sometimes without much thought at all, in a simplistic everyday meaning. It is a concept under much discussion, and this volume is our contribution to the field—an attempt to develop a methodology for the study of experience within historical studies further. As the field is rapidly evolving, it is important to clarify the premises and perspectives of the study of experience.

The word “experience” itself encompasses various meanings ranging from everyday observation to deliberation and purpose. It is, however, conceptualized differently in various languages, as is also visible in the meanings given to the word “experience” in various dictionaries from the late medieval period onwards. The words “*experientia*” and “*experimentum*” appear already in classical Latin. According to Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, in *A Latin Dictionary* they were synonymous meaning a trial, proof, test, experiment; the knowledge gained by repeated trials, experimental knowledge, practice, experience. Correspondingly, the verb “*experior*” meant to try, prove, put to the test or to undertake, attempt, make trial of, undergo, experience a thing.<sup>6</sup> Similar meanings were conveyed by medieval Latin: Papias, the eleventh-century lexicographer, defined “*experitus*” as not experienced but well-learned.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, a similar meaning of experimental knowledge was transferred to other contexts and languages.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines experience as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, the meanings of the word start from the later Middle

<sup>6</sup>Perseus Digital Library: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/> (Accessed 6 February 2021)

<sup>7</sup>DuCange et al., *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, t. 3, col. 371c. <http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/EXPERITUS> (Accessed 6 February 2021)

Ages: an experience can mean an event, the action of putting to the test (1393); a procedure or operation performed in order to ascertain or illustrate some truth, an experiment (1384, now obsolete); proof by trial and practical demonstration (1393, now obsolete); observation of facts or events (1377); a state or condition viewed subjectively; what has been experienced (1607); and knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone (1553). As a verb, the meanings are slightly younger: to experience means to make trial or experiment of, to put to the test (1541); to ascertain or prove by experiment or observation (1541); to have experience of, to feel, suffer, undergo (1588); and to learn by experience (1586).<sup>8</sup>

A considerable number of the chapters in this volume base their argument on source materials from Finland and Sweden, therefore it may also be relevant to consider what terms these languages used for experience, and whether they meant the same as those in English. The words for experience in Finnish are “kokemus” (noun) and “kokea” (verb). They bear more connotations of memory and social/cultural sharing than their English counterparts. According to *Dictionary of Old Literary Finnish (Vanhan kirjasuomen sanakirja)*,<sup>9</sup> the term “kokemus” first appeared in one of the first pieces of Finnish-language literature, the prayerbook *Ruconskirja* (1544) by Mikael Agricola, in the clarification of communion and the experience of taking part in grace by consuming the blood and body of Christ.<sup>10</sup> In some later literature, the word is also used for experimenting, trying out, and gathering and interpreting knowledge in later literature.<sup>11</sup> The word for “kokea” could also be used for “hunting with snares and fishnets”—in setting out the snare and experimenting whether something would get caught or not. The early modern Finns were said to experience cultivating rhubarb<sup>12</sup> and various agricultural methods<sup>13</sup>,

<sup>8</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*: [www.oed.com/](http://www.oed.com/)

<sup>9</sup> *Vanhan kirjasuomen sanakirja* <https://kaino.kotus.fi/vks/?p=searchresults>

<sup>10</sup> “ette se pyhe sinun Rumis ia weres cokemus, ionga mine epekeluotoin aijuon otta, olis minun Syndeni andxiandamus”. KOTUS: *Vanhan Suomen sanakirja*. AI578.

<sup>11</sup> KOTUS: *Vanhan kirjasuomen sanakirja*: *Alm* 1778 B6b “ettei yxikän yritys, cokemus ja hanke tule toiwotettuun aicomukseen waicuttawaxi”.

<sup>12</sup> KOTUS *Vanhan kirjasuomen sanakirja*: *As* 1762I 3 “[Raparperi] tehtyyn cokemusten jälkeen, lupaa palion menestystä täsä Maasa”. <https://kaino.kotus.fi/vks/?p=references#As1762I>

<sup>13</sup> KOTUS *Vanhan Suomen sanakirja*: *Alm* 1767 B8a “Tehdystä cokemuxesta on löytyy, leickuun tämän kylwön jälkeen andawan 11 ja 14 kertaisesti” and *Alm* 1785 B4b “Joka halajaa

meaning experimental experience. Experience also carried connotations of aiming at something and trying out various things by, for example, revolutionary treasonists<sup>14</sup> and exiles, or the governments that dealt with these<sup>15</sup>. There is a strong connotation of a conscious effort to gain experience and aim at a target, so most of those doing the experiencing are human groups and individuals, but there was also a note from 1806, where there was a pack of wolves and “violent experiences” that must be suppressed by the town guards.<sup>16</sup> There is also a term in Finnish, “elämys”, that corresponds to the German “Erlebnis”—considerably less often used, but of an old origin like “kokemus”. It was also first used with a religious meaning by Mikael Agricola in his prayerbook, referring to the “life” and feeling that is to know God, and to worship and serve Him.<sup>17</sup>

In Swedish, the words corresponding to experience are “erfarenhet” and “upplevelse”. “Erfarenhet” has a similar connotation to the Finnish “kokemus” and the German “ehrfahrung”, whereas *upplevelse* corresponds more closely to the German “Erlebnis” (and perhaps, Finnish “elämys”). According to *Svenska Academiens Ordbok (SAOB)*, “erfarenhet” has meanings that vary from our everyday experience, single events, and occurrences, to sometimes painful or happy “lessons from life”, to deliberate knowledge gathering and research. While the Finnish first usages reflect the fact that literate Finnish was created for religious purposes, the Swedish early usages reflect more the secular meanings of knowledge gathering. One of the first examples in the *SAOB* is from 1682, when a Swedish translation of *Reliotionis Curiosae* stated that “we know from experience that fire burns everything”.<sup>18</sup>

Various usages and comprehensions of the word are also visible in historiography. As “lived” histories, “experience” is likewise a part of “new histories” that drew attention to the histories of previously forgotten or

tietä saadansa, kuka mullan-lai hänen peldo-maasansa on waldijana, taitaa ja tulee tehdä samaa kokemusta”.

<sup>14</sup> KOTUS: *Vanhan Suomen sanakirja*: Polon 1790 121; As 1794d A1b.

<sup>15</sup> KOTUS: *Vanhan Suomen sanakirja*, Polon 1790 121: “tätä kokemusta [erottaa Suomi Ruotsista], joka uloswuoti yhdestä alinomaisesta maan-woitto-himosta” and As 1794d A1b “Hallitus oli saanut tilan hawaita ne nurian puoliset ja hämmenyxiin johdattawat kokemuxet”.

<sup>16</sup> KOTUS: *Vanhan Suomen sanakirja*: Alm 1806 B5a “Wahtimiehen pitä silloin kohta ulosmenemän ja estämän Suden kaikista wäkiwallaisista kokemuxista”.

<sup>17</sup> KOTUS: *Vanhan kirjasuomen Sanakirja: A I 650* “O Jumala rauhan teckijje—ionga tun-demus on elemys, iota paluella, ombi hallita”. (Gumm. 429 quem nosse viure—est)

<sup>18</sup> Svenska Academins Ordok: *Denna werldennes största tänckwärdigheetter eller dhe så kal-lade Relationes curiose*. Övers Stockholm, 1682. [www.SAOB.se](http://www.SAOB.se)

dismissed groups, like minorities, women, children, and people with non-Western geographical placement or ethnic background. In the Western world, this led to the development of women's and later gender history, as well as, for example, the history of the working classes and everyday history. "History from below" was both an approach that directed the interest of historians to the grassroots level of how societies were made and a methodology to criticize the previous concentration on the points of view of those in power during past historical developments. It was also a methodology that borrowed heavily from the social sciences, anthropology, and cultural studies.<sup>19</sup> One of the aims of new social history was to bring individual and individual agency back to the fore of study instead of the "mechanical" interaction of ideologies or structures; structural determinants were seen to be mediated by cultural beliefs, lived, embodied, and felt within individual selves. The "self", in turn, was not a simply discursive effect.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, the current "lived histories" and history of experience both also spring from a critique of the "new social histories" of the twentieth century, their perceived objectivism, and the binary power positions inherent in the research agenda of "history from below", including the history of popular religion. The methodology was also a critique against previous objectivism and positivism. All of these are characteristics that are still visible in the history of "lived histories" as well as the "history of experience". A history of "experience", in the sense of "how it really was for this and that group in history", was both a part of this movement, but also a critique against the most linguistically oriented branches of it: it sought to emphasize that not all the world was language, but that language described a world that was, if not independent of language, nevertheless not merely language alone.

The approach has been long criticized since the 1980s and 1990s by feminist and postcolonial historiography, most famously summed up by Joan Scott<sup>21</sup> and Martin Jay<sup>22</sup>, but also by the proponents of the German *Erfahrungsgeschichte*. The critique has taken two forms. Firstly, it

<sup>19</sup> Hobsbawm, *On history*; Hunt, *Writing history*; Thompson; *Making of the English Working Class*, Haapala & Markkola, "Se toinen ja (toisten) historia".

<sup>20</sup> Hunt, "The Experience of Revolution", 671–678 and Jarauch, "Towards a Social History of Experience", 427–43.

<sup>21</sup> Scott, "The Evidence of Experience", 773–97, cit. 797. Haapala & Markkola "Se toinen ja (toisten) historia".

<sup>22</sup> Jay, *Songs of experience*.

emphasized the role of language and communication, with Scott going as far as completely denying the existence of “immediate and authentic” experience. Secondly, the critique pointed at the political pressures and conditions that influenced experiencing, and that un-critical or anecdotal descriptions of experience would not serve as evidence of anything more than their own singularity. For us, it is evident that “authentic” experiences are already infused with culture and convention; “a self” completely separate from the surrounding culture and society is devoid of meaning within historical research. People are socialized to the norms and values of communities from childhood on (if not already in utero), and subjectivity is formed in—and is inevitably bound to—social interaction and cultural communication. By this, we do not mean to erase or even belittle individual characteristics, but to argue that all the above become significant when conveyed to and reflected with others via language, expressions, or gestures—or other means of communication. Likewise, questions of context, culture, power, and representativity are necessary parts of historical analysis (vs. description) of how experience is created by people living in social and cultural structures, and how experience, in turn, moulds those structures.<sup>23</sup>

The history of emotion and history of experience have long been close to each other, and many of the authors in this collection have a background in the history of emotions.<sup>24</sup> For many historians of emotion, “experience” is essential either as an experience of emotion, as the question of “what is it like to feel this emotion”, or alternatively as an event that causes an emotion. By these historians of emotion or affect, experience is something more immediate than and prior to the emotions, which are at the same time biological and social and cultural constructs.<sup>25</sup> While many authors of this collection also have a background in the history of

<sup>23</sup> Mack, “Religion, Feminism”; Mahmood, “Sexuality and Secularism”.

<sup>24</sup> The field is way too vast to be cited here in full. However, see for example, Boquet and Nagy, *Sensible Moyen Âge*, Boquet and Nagy, “Emotion historique”, Boddice, *Pain and Emotion in Modern History*, Scheer, “Are emotions a kind of practice”; Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, all the work done at the ARC for the History of Emotions at Australia, Jacqueline van Gent; Katie Barclay; Charles Zika, Andrew Lynch, as well as work at the QMUL and Thomas Dixon; and Max Plank institute for the history of Emotions and Ute Frevert; Pernaud et al (ed.) *Civilizing Emotions*; Frevert et al. *Learning how to Feel*

<sup>25</sup> See for example Moscoso “Emotional Experiences”. See Kivimäki, Suodenjoki, and Vahtikari, “Lived Nation” for the relationship between pre-discursive and social construction in German *Erfahrungsgeschichte* as well as discussion of the relationship between “emotion” and “experience”.

emotion, we have mostly come to think differently: emotion, as well as senses and sensibility, practice and ritual, and the production of knowledge and significance, among others, combine into experience and experience in turn influences them.

We are not completely alone in this, although there are fewer explicit pronouncements of it. For example, Susan Karant-Nunn ends the first paragraph of her influential *The Reformation of Feeling* with a note that her study “concentrates on efforts to alter religious experience”. She refers at this point to Norbert Haag as an authority on preaching and social policy, thereby at least implicitly showing that experience can be taken as a step from emotion towards the societal and social.<sup>26</sup> Another example of this field is Piroska Nagy and Xavier Biron-Ouellet’s analysis of the flagellant movement in thirteenth-century Italy, showing how the physical, sensorial, and affective, namely ritual practices and emotional dynamics involved, created the collective experience of the *Flagellanti*. Experience as a conceptual approach is a holistic attempt to combine emotions to the bodily, sensate, and material communities and spaces.<sup>27</sup> In the same vein, the authors of this collection also do not think of it as something more personal or individual than emotion, but rather as one of the mechanisms that connect individuals to their societies in the tradition of the history of society, where many of the authors of this collection also share academic ancestry.

### THREE LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE

Experience is always situational and different contexts and source materials illuminate the concept from various angles (Chart 1.1). One all-encompassing definition of the concept within historical studies will not be acquired, even after the field matures. It gets different meanings in our volume, too, and we aim to advance discussion and interaction within various perspectives. We approach experience on (at least) three levels:

First, there is the everyday meaning of the word, as in practical contact with and observation of facts or events, an event which leaves an impression on someone, or the act of encountering or undergoing an event or a circumstance. This everyday experience is part of social reality, what happens to people and how they understand it. This everyday experience

<sup>26</sup> Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 3, 258

<sup>27</sup> Nagy & Biron-Ouellet, “A Collective Emotion in Medieval Italy”.





**Chart 1.1** Producing experience. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo

might but does not necessarily mean “Erlebniss” (Swedish “upplävelse”; Finnish “elämys”), unmediated or pre-discursive “experience”, which the German historians of experience in the 1990s separated from “Ehrfahrung” as socially shared experiences. The English language does not make a distinction between this simple, immediate encounter with the world or its events and the more conscientious process of gathering and processing those experiences, but some historians and sociologists, as well as political scientists, have sought to emphasize the everydayness of the term by calling it “lived experience”.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*. For the impetus, theory, and results of the German *Erfahrungsgeschichte* on war and society, see especially Buschmann & Carl, eds, *Die Erfahrung des Krieges* and Schild & Schindling, eds, *Kriegserfahrungen*—

“Lived experience” is an expression that is repeated in the literature on the histories of medieval and early modern lived religion.<sup>29</sup> While lived religion is an established approach in history as well as in religious sociology, the history of experience is a more recent trend, arising both from the new social history tradition and the histories of emotions and the senses. Lived histories often emphasize the differences between “how things should have been” and “how they really were” in a specific historical society: the discrepancy between norms and ideals on one hand, and the mundane realities of everyday life on the other. As far as histories of lived religion are concerned, the expression also emphasizes the mundane nature of religion and the sacred itself—that religion was not experienced only within the church or in front of an altar, but in things like the seven-day week, the marking of morning and evening, in the soundscape of the streets in a town, and the division of work at home.

Past experiences are mediated to us via historical sources, and as historians, we also need to posit ourselves within the field of historical studies using these sources. We might take a moderately conservative stance, such as the German cultural historians did, emphasizing that without commenting on the existence of the pre-discursive, it is the discursive that we work with. Indeed, the temporal perspectives of this volume make it obvious that the further back we go in time, the more obviously the pre-discursive seems impossible to reach, even if we cannot say it never existed. This is not to say, however, that the discursive always has to take the form of a verbal language, but rather than non-verbal means of expression and communication are also just that: means of communication, even when they come in the form of outside forces and entities to be reckoned with.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, “experience” is not to be understood as a self-defining collection of anecdotal “evidence” nor anything universal or ahistorical. Rather, experience is, for us, a culturally and situationally bound social process, although in its everyday meaning, it usually concentrates on the individual subject(s) who supposedly do(es) the experiencing.

As the authors of this volume have further conceptualized experience, we have come to emphasize a second, conceptual level: experience as a

*Krieg und Gesellschaft in der Neuzeit*. See also Kivimäki, Suodenjoki & Vahtikari: “Lived Nation”.

<sup>29</sup>For example, Orsi, “Is the Study of lived religion irrelevant”, 171–72, two mentions; Ammerman, “Finding Religion”, 192.

<sup>30</sup>Barclay, “New materialism”.

social process. The second level highlights that experience is not only an immediate encounter with or observation of the world; most often, a more or less deliberate effort is made to gather these observations or encounters, and to explain them in ways that fit not only the world views of those doing the encountering, but also those of the people around them, their communities, societies, and cultures.<sup>31</sup> On this level, we examine the ways experience was produced, mediated, shared, and approved or disapproved of in communities with the help of verbal or other kinds of language or communication methods. Attention shifts from the experiencing subject to the social relationships and interdependencies in which experience is produced.

A third level of investigation is also implied in the dictionary meanings of experience, but it is even more clearly a methodological tool or category created by the researcher: as the processes of experience were repeated often enough by a significant number of people and communities, they came to form social structures that people learned to expect, count on, and despair of. This is the third level of experience that we are interested in: experiences as social structures have a temporal aspect to them, since they are formed based on communal memories of past experiences, and they shape both present interpretations of the world and the future expectations of individuals and entire societies.<sup>32</sup> The interconnection between “experience” and societal structure was already formulated by E. P. Thompson in 1963: societal structures did not only create experiences but the interconnection functioned the other way around, too. According to Thompson, “experience” was a less-articulated background element when compared to “consciousness”, but it was nonetheless central to his definition of class as a historical relationship. “Class”, therefore, emerges from the articulation of “experiences”.<sup>33</sup> In this volume, the “structure” at stake is not class; it rather ranges from social and cultural

<sup>31</sup> Koselleck, “Der Einfluß der beiden Weltkriege auf das soziale Bewußtsein”, esp. 324–32. Backman, “Äärellisyyden kohtaaminen”, 26–27; Toikkanen, “Välineen käsite”; Toikkanen & Virtanen, “Kokemuksen käsitteen ja käytön jäljillä”, 7–24.

<sup>32</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, cit. 259.

<sup>33</sup> In Thompson’s view, on the one hand, “experience” is both the starting point and the result: “The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily”. On the other hand, “Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms”. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 9. Middleton, “The Concept of ‘Experience’ and the Making of the English Working Class, 1924–1963”.

categories of “the miraculous”, “the magical”, and “the mad” to “the good death” and beyond.

As the authors have moved from immediate everyday experience to experiences as social processes and experiences as structures, some case studies and examples lose some of their unique subjective authenticity, and give way to scripts, conventions, cultural models, and modes—and the authors of this book generally treat that as an advantage to be benefitted from rather than a problem to be overcome. The advantages stem from questions of both epistemology and opinion. The second part of the critique levied by Scott and feminist, postcolonial, and “new social history” historiography<sup>34</sup> was that individual subjective experiences were, in the end, little more than coincidental, chance stories, and their value as evidence suffered if they were not properly scrutinized in terms of their representativity as well as the nature, context, convention, and origin of the production of these stories in the source materials. Focusing on the processes of the negotiation and mediation of experience also means a focus on exactly these questions in the production and nature of the source material itself. We hope that focusing on the shared and mediated, negotiated, or coerced in the experience itself makes the resulting observations, though less immediate to an individual, more representative of a certain culture.

Moreover, most authors in this book consider themselves historians of society, although not necessarily of the quantitatively oriented kind. Therefore, we are interested in society, the social relationships, constraints, and structures that shape experience and are shaped also in the history of experience.

Experience is also a methodology that guides both the questions the authors of this volume pose to our sources and the methods with which we seek to find the respective answers. We hope that the nature of experience as a social process gives us a way to connect the micro and macro levels in historical observation, investigation, and explanation, and to bridge the gap between empirics or source material and theory or explanation and generalization. Since experience is action as well as an analytical category, it can be used to study the forms of action and interaction that eventually create both the individual self and the community. However, as

<sup>34</sup>Scott, “The Evidence of Experience”; Jones, “Un autre histoire social”; Lepedit, *Les forms de l'expérience*; Carr, *Experience and History*; on the anthropology of experience, all articles in Turner & Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience*.

a contextual and situational phenomenon and approach, experience must always be a genuinely open question throughout time and space.

One of the results of studying experiences of religion across different points in time and culture is the understanding that experience in itself does not provide epistemological proof: it is possible to have empirical experience of things that, even at the same time, let alone in another culture at another time, not everyone believes really exist.

Likewise, it may be that people in various cultures have experience of things they did not know existed, or else knew but had no words to discuss. While experience as a concept has a long history that is not too far removed from the understanding this volume makes use of, it is also evident that experience itself is, and must be, a meta-concept historians use to make sense of the culture's past.

Most authors in this book find that the questions that we ask as historians must be answered on the basis of the historical source materials available, but the questions themselves arise at least partly from their relevance to our own society and culture today. To be able to connect the two, we use several meta-concepts, of which experience itself is the most self-evident umbrella; others will follow, namely cultural scripts, communities of experience, embodiments of experience, and agency.

### CULTURAL SCRIPTS: MODELS FOR EXPERIENCE

The cultural script is a meta-concept utilized by various disciplines, like cognitive linguistics and social psychology. It can be understood as “a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that define a well-known situation”.<sup>35</sup> In other words, a cultural script is a pattern of social interaction that is characteristic of a particular group, a shared expression, a common line of argument, or an expected unfolding of events; it is appropriate and expected and because of that, it offers a rationale or justification for events and expressions.<sup>36</sup>

Cultural scripts are learned through perceptions of the regular and repeated features of the world, as well as through anomalies and failures. They shape the production of emotion and memories.<sup>37</sup> Shared scripts

<sup>35</sup> Schank & Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding*, 422.

<sup>36</sup> Vanclay, “The Role and Functioning of Cultural Scripts”, 256–71.

<sup>37</sup> On interplay between cultural script and collective emotions, Nagy & Biron-Ouellet, “A Collective Emotion in Medieval Italy”, 135–45; Miyamoto, & Ma, “Dampening or savoring

may control and limit the range of options available, but simultaneously they provide convenience, give meaning to events and actions, and indicate a direction for response.<sup>38</sup> Cultural scripts include cultural norms, values, and practices and their articulation. They capture the norms, guidelines, and practices of social interaction as well as models for ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and speaking in a particular cultural context.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly enough, these scripts vary in time and place, and a nuanced understanding of context is a key factor in utilizing them in historical research, especially in the historical research of experiences. This is particularly underlined in this volume, as it covers various religious denominations, eras, and areas. It should be noted, however, that even within one cultural sphere, there are always various scripts at play. In the study of Christian religious cultures, the Bible arguably formed *the* script defining norms, ideals, and practices. In medieval Europe, for example, the Bible and the church's teachings can be seen as a universalizing discourse, yet it was divided into various sub-scripts based on the geography, status, and liaisons of the participants (e.g. religious order), and the context of the written source, and so on. A concrete example of a sub-script is given by Sari Katajala-Peltomaa in her chapter focusing on a model of experiencing a conversion to penance created by the priest brothers of Vadstena Abbey, while recording the miracles of Saint Birgitta and writing sermons. To treat medieval Western Christianity as one uncomplicated unity is misleading and will not offer a fruitful device for the analysis of experiences.

An example of the use of a cultural script in unravelling the interconnections between the individual and the shared is Pirooska Nagy and Xavier Biron-Ouellet's analysis of flagellant movements in medieval Italy, where biblical scripts were memorized and internalized up to the point that on a certain occasion they brought forth words, gestures, feelings, and

positive emotions", 1346–357; Harris, Lee, Hensley & Schoen, "The effect of cultural script knowledge on memory for stories over time", 413–31.

<sup>38</sup> Vanclay, "The Role and Functioning of Cultural Scripts", 256–71.

<sup>39</sup> Goddard and Wierzbicka, "Cultural Scripts: What are they and what are they good for?", 154–66. Goddard, "Cultural scripts": A new medium for ethnopragmatic instruction", 145–65. Ethnopragsmatics place particular importance on linguistic evidence. Aside from the semantics of cultural key words, other kinds of linguistic evidence which can be particularly revealing of cultural norms and values include common sayings and proverbs, frequent collocations, conversational routines and varieties of formulaic or semi-formulaic speech, discourse particles and interjections, and terms of address and reference—all highly "interactional" aspects of language, to avoid "terminological ethnocentrism".

movements producing a collectively shared emotional script.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Jenni Kuuliala in her chapter shows how a cultural script shaped the lived body: ideas of witchcraft and the miraculous formed the experience of illness and health as well as religious reasons and practices behind the change of condition.

The idea of cultural scripts can be seen as drawing their origin from Erving Goffman's theories of dramaturgical perspectives and stage metaphor. The furthest this perspective might have been taken is by Brian Levack in his analysis of demonic possession in Western culture, particularly in the early modern era. According to him, all demoniacs assumed dramatic roles following scripts that were encoded in their religious cultures. He claims all possessions were theatrical productions where each participant played a role and acted in a way the community expected him or her to act.<sup>41</sup> In the study of experiences, this appears too rigid a frame for analysing agency, and it puts aside concepts of individual experience and identity and their links to gender, age, ethnicity, and social status. All of these are crucial in understanding experience as an analytical concept.

A dramatic turning point does not equal an assumed dramatic role, rather cultural scripts as expectations formed a frame for experience. In early twentieth-century Finland, rather uneducated working-class women knew how to formulate their religious desires and inner feelings to produce a culturally accepted category of personal awakening, as Pirjo Markkola shows in her chapter. Within this religious landscape, revivalist movements enabled an option to follow God but also an opportunity for education and social advancement. Conversion was a personal experience but simultaneously a culturally negotiable and sanctioned category.

Furthermore, cultural scripts were not only something followed by those in a lower position within hierarchies. In the context of lived religion, cultural scripts may have created a model for experiencing, but forming a script was not only a top-down process: theological definitions and teachings were lived out in daily life and rituals, and corporeal phenomena affected the script (Chart 1.2).

<sup>40</sup> Nagy & Biron-Ouellet, "A Collective Emotion in Medieval Italy".

<sup>41</sup> Levack, *The Devil Within*.



**Chart 1.2** Building blocks of experience. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo

## COMMUNITIES OF EXPERIENCE

If we accept that experiences do not just happen, but were and are created and shared, sub-concepts necessarily arise from the mechanisms of this creation and sharing. Some of them arise more often than others in the chapters of this volume. The sharing of experiences creates smaller and larger communities that have shared past experiences and therefore share the rules and practices that regulate future expectations—and make it possible for them to share future experiences as well. We might call them experiencing communities or communities of experience like Miia Kuha, Mervi Kaarninen, and Ville Kivimäki, depending on which aspect we want



to emphasize. Miia Kuha's development of the term draws from social history, focusing on the social coherence or exclusion created by shared experiences,<sup>42</sup> whereas Ville Kivimäki's and Mervi Kaarninen's treatment draws more from the "emotional communities"<sup>43</sup> and "emotional regimes" developed in the history of emotions, emphasizing the shared rules of experience. In the end, the influence goes both ways: shared experience creates communities and communities create the rules according to which experience is created, evaluated, and approved—or not.

In Miia Kuha's chapter, the community of experience is the local and kin group that lived closely to each other, was in constant communication for a long period, and knew each other intimately. The chapter emphasizes the considerable power that such a community holds over its individual members. It is evident that these same communities could also be a lot of other things: families, groups of friends, certain political circles, or something else—it is only the historians' interest in experience which turns them into communities of experience. In Mervi Kaarninen's chapter, the communities are formed and kept alive in correspondence by writing letters in the manner expected of Quakers. Although the correspondents often lived far away—and discuss how they miss each other—these were long-term, often lifelong, relationships. The creation of experience did not take place only between the sender and receiver of a letter. Since the letters were often read aloud or forwarded to third or fourth parties, they formed a network community where experiences were discussed and curated. In Ville Kivimäki's chapter, we see communities that are more contingent and haphazard, and in many ways put together in frontline war conditions; the people might otherwise have had very little to do with each other. The various chapters together show how communities of experience overlapped with other communities and groups—such as family, kin, and neighbourhood—but were also separate from these and could be formed quickly by being thrown into the same situation—and fall apart just as quickly. People belonged to more than one community of experience, but even then, the communities competed for power to set the rules of experience. Sometimes they turned into exclusive regimes. Rosenwein's emotional communities have been criticized as conceptually vague,<sup>44</sup> but

<sup>42</sup> See for example Viitaniemi, "Muurarimestari Kustaa Stenman ja katumaton maailma", 76–77.

<sup>43</sup> Rosenwein, "Worrying about emotions", 842; Lynch, "Emotional Community", 3–6.

<sup>44</sup> For example Plamper, Jan. "The History of Emotions", 237–65.

we use the vagueness deliberately to point out the influence goes both ways: the community sets the rules for its members' experience, and the experiences, once shared, make the community, tying it together but also excluding those who will not or cannot share the rules of appropriate, acceptable experience and expression. As Raisa Toivo's chapter demonstrates, this concerns the successes and failures of communication, where not only words count, but also bodies, objects, and other material things in space and time. In time, as the rules are enforced by sharing often enough, they become societal structures, which also structure the future experience of the members of that society. Communities of experience were therefore essential to the stability of societies—when they splintered, societies were in danger.

### EMBODIMENT AND MATERIALITY OF EXPERIENCE

The interconnection between materiality and experience may be encapsulated from three different perspectives, that of built environments (or sites), material objects, and corporeality. All are present in the various chapters of this volume.

Material objects, things, give value to and create social relations.<sup>45</sup> Social conditions and values are created around material objects, which are used to express and create bonds, devotions, and emotions: in the field of religion, artefacts enabled religious participation through sight and touch. The sacred was manifested and available in various materials and their properties—from gold and crystal reliquaries to communion bread and amulets. Multi-sensory elements were part of both giving value to religious material and the outcome of this material's presence, contributing to the role of materiality in creating experiences.<sup>46</sup>

The body was the site where religion was experienced and the body affected the way religion was comprehended, felt, and practised. Proper gestures, signs, and rituals were important in orthopraxis, and proper ways to act and participate were important constituents of the religion(s) of all eras. Collective participation, like synchronized movements and shared

<sup>45</sup>Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture*, Bynum, *Christian Materiality*.

<sup>46</sup>Robertson "Medieval Things"; Hamling & Richardsson "Introduction"; Toivo & Van Gent "Introduction. Gender, material culture and emotions"; Delman & Rowland, "Introduction: People, Places, and Possessions in Late medieval England".

rhythms of kneeling and singing, added to the importance of embodiment and “embodied enculturation” within religion. Such rituals were a way to participate in one’s community as well as to turn one’s body into a message, to give meaning to and communicate past occurrences. Rituals were bodily practices and as such personal, even intimate, but simultaneously public and visible to others; they required contact and relations with other persons and could hardly be practised alone. Rituals were a means to communicate with the supernatural and at the same time social performances.<sup>47</sup> Religion was not a stable system, and therefore religious rituals were not a reflection of stable unity but an element in the process of integrating commonly held norms and values, giving meaning to past occurrences—turning them into experiences.

Like the body, space and place are equally obviously both material preconditions that shape experience and tools with which to experience and media with which to share experience—but they are also themselves shaped by experience.<sup>48</sup> As is evident in the chapters by Riikka Miettinen, Johanna Annola, and Ville Kivimäki, material locations could also convey an understanding of translocalities such as Lutheranism, the frontier, or modernization as “places”. Kivimäki’s chapter on the battlefield and frontier experience and Raisa Toivo’s chapter on church services that took place every Sunday in all churches virtually at the same time point out multilocal events and experiences, which could be turned into an experience of commonality and uniformity, but they could equally well localize into a personalized experience of plural simultaneities.<sup>49</sup> Place and space are important, and one of the efforts of this collection is to draw attention to places not as traditional geographical countries but as places and spaces as the more immediate conditions for human experience: they take place in the streets of towns, on the banks and fields of rural villages, at home, in church, in courts of law, in poorhouses, in prayer halls, and on the frontlines in wars. While we understand that experiences in the north and south of Europe must be different for both material and cultural reasons—for we do not believe in universal but only in contingent, situationally, and culturally bound experience—we have, in this volume, chosen not to use

<sup>47</sup>Turner, *The Ritual Process*; Geertz, *Local Knowledge*; Bell, *Ritual Theory*, Buc, *Dangers of Ritual*, Rolle-Koster, *Medieval and Early Modern Ritual*, Witthöft, *Ritual und Text*, Klaniczay, “Ritual and Narrative in Late Medieval Miracle Accounts”.

<sup>48</sup>Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 26.

<sup>49</sup>Jerram, “Space, A Useless Category”, 408, 419; Laitinen, *Order, Materiality*.

countries as political entities as our geographical placement guides. After all, during the centuries this volume stretches over, countries as political, national, and even cultural entities have changed over and over again, even in the areas from which the case studies in this volume draw their evidence. That experience must be situationally, culturally, and temporally bound instead of universal should be made even more apparent by putting side by side streets and homes from southern and northern Europe, or, for example, Finnish culture's political and cultural interconnectedness and finally an independent small culture in the midst of a global world.

### AGENTIC INDIVIDUALS

Agency, the active and knowing-doing, making, and driving (from Latin *agere, agens*), is a crucial component in constructing experiences. In modern sociology, agency is a value-laden word which usually refers to the capacity of an individual or a collective to actively choose a course of action and affect change; it is a mode of self-determination and a method to reaffirm or contest social norms and relationships.<sup>50</sup> For us, agency is not a category, a thing to be possessed, but a mode of acting: rather than “having” agency as a self-explaining category, individuals act agentially.<sup>51</sup> Within the field of religion, people had the opportunity and duty to choose from various options—and they did so, repeatedly and consciously. Simultaneously, we can debate how “free” or “unconstrained” these enactments were for any member of any society. Clearly enough, agency and agentic acts were interactive and needed to be negotiated within the community—like “experience” itself.

Agency only acquires its meaning within a specific context—it is not an ahistorical concept nor is it practised in a vacuum—while agentic practice within religious and spiritual living has shared components regardless of the denomination, like techniques of self-scrutiny and self-control. In medieval Christianity, this encompassed confession and penance: the individual conscience was understood to be the site of moral choice but its outcome, significance, and meaning were expressed corporeally. The mind-body unit of a person functioned within a framework of spirituality and devotional practices encompassing interaction that were

<sup>50</sup>For criticism of too loose use of the concept, see Boddice & Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*.

<sup>51</sup>Rüpke, “Religious agency, identity, and communication”, 344–66, esp. 346.

simultaneously directed at social control.<sup>52</sup> For us, religious agency is essentially operative: religion is performed as well as practised by connecting agency with the bodily. It is especially evident in various dissident practices, investigated for example by Saku Pihko in this volume, that religion is both embodied and challenged through corporeal performance encapsulating both the agentic capacity of the individual and the constraints of the norms and institutions, as well as manifesting them to the rest of society.<sup>53</sup>

Agency is created through situations and is always bound to contexts; it can also be seen as an activity of maintenance and not only making or contesting. Its usefulness has been contested within various fields of scholarship recently,<sup>54</sup> but for an analysis applying lived religion as a methodology, it is of crucial importance. The analysis of the agentic behaviour of participants is elementary in understanding and respecting religion-in-action. Furthermore, one can argue it is just as crucial for the study of experience: experience as a social process cannot exist without agency; the process of giving meaning to, arranging, managing, and categorizing everyday encounters and occurrences requires the ability to interpret, interact, and negotiate with and within one's community, society, and culture.

This leads us to questions of the individual, identity, and authenticity versus convention: how should their linkages be approached in the study of experiences? Premodern societies are deemed to be more hierarchal than modern ones; this does not automatically mean, however, that the closer we get to the modern day, the more individuals have agency in living out their religion. As Saku Pihko demonstrates, medieval people made active decisions even if sometimes in dire situations; furthermore, soldiers on the frontlines of the Second World War were thrown into situations where experiences were heavily conditioned by the surroundings, and the options for individual choices were meagre. Both of these contexts, as well

<sup>52</sup>Leming, "Sociological Explorations: What Is Religious Agency?", 73–92. Lutter, "Conceiving of Medieval Identities", 131–52, and Rüpke, "Religious agency, identity, and communication".

<sup>53</sup>Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*.

<sup>54</sup>Seminal work in this field is Johnson, "On Agency", 113–24 who argues that "agency" has been used as synonymous to "humanity" in the study of slavery for political reasons. Criticism towards "agency" as self-explaining, a-historical category, an argument rather than a concept has been presented also by Thomas, "Historicising Agency", 324–39. See also Gleason, "Avoiding the Agency Trap", 324–39.

as the rest of the chapters of this volume, share an understanding of the interconnection between agentic acts and identity in negotiating experience. Societal structures, which changed in time and place, created conditions and guided experiences, but did not determine them. Experiences are not the same for all members of the same group or class, for example. Agentic acts, including various degrees of individuality, explain different interpretations of a good death, for example, in rural poor houses at the beginning of the twentieth century, as Annola demonstrates.

### SOURCES AND CONTEXT

Geographically we start out from the point of view of Nordic and Finnish materials with excursions to the rest of Europe. Nevertheless, the volume is situated around the European or Western cultural context. In this context, the religion that the objects of study in this book “live” is mainly Christian. The many layers of religion and faith inherent in a study of lived religion include but are not fruitfully reduced to theology or dogma, but many of the themes present in the cultural scripts are recurring in the history of Christianity. First impressions of a Nordic religious culture often involve notions of stern Lutheranism, overt privatization, and strong secularism. Since our volume starts from Catholic times and expands towards the rest of Europe, these themes will be revisited and placed into a wider European context, simultaneously contributing to a discussion of both the shared and the individual nature of religion.

Our call for a holistic account and the avoidance of analysing religion as a separate part of life also requires multiple methodologies and a plethora of different source material. Obviously, the further back we go in time, the harder it is to find detailed personal experiences in the sources, even in the everyday meaning of the concept. However, we are not seeking a “simplistic ground of immediacy” to follow Martin Jay’s argument; rather, we start with the premises that all experiences are infused with convention and “the social”. Therefore, the more conventional, hierarchical, and at times anonymous sources from the medieval and early modern past suit our purposes to study experience as a social process and as a social structure.

Many chapters—namely those of Pihko, Katajala-Peltomaa, Kuuliala, Toivo, Kuha, and Miettinen—use judicial records as source material. They range from the ecclesiastical, like canonization or inquisition processes, to secular court records dealing with religious matters. Even if the contexts and judicial requirements are different in these chapters, the negotiable

nature of experience comes forth in all of them. The background situation, the everyday experience of unfitting behaviour or unexplainable illness was reassessed, interpreted, and set within a frame of heresy, demonic possession, malevolent magic, or madness. The collective act of giving meaning created these situations as experiences in their social meaning and, furthermore, turned them into cultural categories and institutions of the miraculous, witchcraft or prayer.

One is tempted to think that “authentic” experiences are more readily found in sources the closer we get to the modern day; this goes especially for ego documents, like letters, personal conversion narrations, and reminiscence collections, which are utilized in this volume by Kaarninen, Markkola, and Kivimäki. True enough, they offer marvellous insights into lived religion, but they are not devoid of conventions or cultural patterns, either. Customs of letter writing as well as the cultural script of proper conversion, for example, affected the way inner feelings, sensory elements, and emotions were expressed, while the passing of time has its inevitable effect on the meaning-making process as well. Not all everyday experiences become memories, the insignificant ones were forgotten while active reminiscing was a way to interpret the past in order to comprehend the present and plan for the future. This act of recollecting, however, turned personal occurrences into shared social processes.

Crucial for the study of experiences, and for the volume at hand, is thus the understanding of the unattainable nature of immediate experiences. Even our own past experiences are fused with social and cultural conventions by the acts of reminiscing, narrating, and interpreting them with others—are they still “authentic”? Other people’s experiences are available to us only in a narrated form: via language, a social contract. This availability is further limited for the experiences of people of the past. Understanding this basic methodological matter enables us to leave aside the question of immediacy and authenticity and focus on experience as an analytical concept. While we strive for a profound empirical analysis of the chosen topics, we acknowledge that all the source materials, albeit of a varied degree and nature, face this same methodological problem. Therefore, medieval or early modern sources are not more partial than sources from the twentieth century for the study of experiences; all source material calls for a nuanced comprehension of its nature and conceptual finesse in the analysis.

## STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

The chapters of this volume range from medieval heresy to the religiosity of Second World War frontlines. While the chapters are singular case studies embedded in different geographical and temporal contexts, together they show that the methodology is potentially productive for a wider range of historians of religion. Our main conceptualizations, experience itself on three levels, as well as cultural scripts, material embodiments, and communities of experience and individuals acting agentically, form the history of lived religion in all eras and periods, albeit differently. All the chapters in this volume utilize them in their analysis of experience from their own angles. Though we present the chapters in this volume in a chronological structure, it does not mean that the tools to analyse experience change profoundly, but experience as a context-bound phenomenon changes in time and place.

In “From lived reality to a cultural script: Punishment miracles as experience”, Sari Katajala-Peltomaa analyses the various levels of experience in a medieval context. The specific focus is an interaction with Saint Birgitta: the case of a punishment miracle leading to a demonic possession and eventually conversion to penance. This chapter combines the analysis of intimate sensorial elements, embodied enculturation, and production of a cultural script scrutinizing how a model for experiencing was produced in this context.

In “A taste of dissent: Experiences of heretical blessed bread as a dimension of lived religion in 13<sup>th</sup>- and early 14<sup>th</sup>-century Languedoc”, Saku Pihko focuses on inquisition records to investigate laypeople’s interaction with the so-called good men, a group of ascetics, ritual-working preachers, whose exemplary lifestyle and religious teachings attracted lay devotion. By analysing the space of actions, performances, and beliefs, he concludes that medieval people creatively interpreted and selectively appropriated religious ideas.

In “The religious experience of ill health in late 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italy”, Jenni Kuuliala examines the role of two cultural scripts inherent to lived religion in the formation of the experience of ill health in early modern Italy: the miraculous and malevolent witchcraft. The idea that an illness or a disability could be healed by a saint or caused by an act of black magic put the ailing human body, including the outer signs and the inner experiences of the patient, at the centre of communal negotiation, interpretation, and control. At the same time, as the cases analysed in this chapter



show, the infirm body was also a channel for obtaining knowledge and understanding of religious phenomena.

In “Prayer and the body in lay religious experience in early modern Finland”, Raisa Maria Toivo analyses prayer and praying as bodily and material processes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Finland and Sweden. As her material, she uses descriptions of prayer in both secular court record testimonies on religious or superstitious behaviour and instructive religious materials. She shows how prayer glued together past events and future expectations in the form of religious experience.

In “From individual expertise to communal experience: Extended families as religious communities of experience in late 17<sup>th</sup>-century eastern Finland”, Miia Kuha studies extended families and work partnerships as communities of experience in the eastern Finnish province of Savo in the late seventeenth century. The area was characterized by burn-beat agriculture, long distances, and a peripheral position near the eastern border of the Swedish realm. Through a case study of lower court records, Kuha analyses how practices of lived religion shaped the relationship of the community and the individual, and how religious interpretations gave meaning to the experiences of the people involved. Kuha asks if eastern Finnish extended families and work partnerships can be seen as communities of religious experience.

In “Constructing ‘mad’ religious experience in early modern Sweden”, Riikka Miettinen discusses the process of constructing religious experience as pathological and “mad” in early modern Sweden. By using two case studies as examples, she shows the participation of several actors and discursive authorities in shaping and controlling personal spiritual experience in an era of great religious plurality and strict Lutheran orthodoxy. The focus is on the nature of experiencing and the power dynamics in play in invalidating norm-breaching experiences.

In Mervi Kaarninen’s chapter, “The trials of Sarah Wheeler (1807–1867)—experiencing submission”, the protagonist, Sarah Wheeler, was the daughter of a British Quaker family living in Russia near St Petersburg at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Using Sarah Wheeler’s correspondence as source material, Kaarninen scrutinizes her spiritual life, her faith in God, and her coping with bereavements. The chapter follows Sarah’s life chronologically, focusing on themes of family ties and suffering creating a religious experience of submitting to God’s will.

Moving on to the twentieth century, in “Working-class women, conversion, and lived religion at the turn of the twentieth century”, Pirjo Markkola studies the various ways in which “religion” was lived and experienced in an industrializing Finland where new religious movements both strengthened and challenged mainstream Lutheran Christianity. She asks how urban working-class women practised religion at the turn of the twentieth century. Some women succeeded in adjusting to the norms set by their religious leaders, but others found their own ways of lived religion. Many women who were actively engaged in religious life were also questioning and challenging the normative patterns of revivalist spiritual life.

Johanna Annola’s chapter, “To the undiscovered country: Facing death in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Finnish poorhouses”, opens up a view on a modernizing society by analysing the ways in which the experience of a “good death” was negotiated in two early twentieth-century Finnish poorhouses. Focusing on two case studies, Annola discusses the intersection of a traditional and modern death experience.

In the last chapter of the volume, “At the moral frontier: Finnish soldiers as artisans of religion in World War II”, Ville Kivimäki discusses Finnish soldiers’ religious practices and beliefs. Thrown into the physical and moral borderlines of war, soldiers tried to deal with their experience by resorting to “frontline fatalism”. Their religious activities can be seen as artisanship, combining elements of formal church Christianity, folk beliefs, and the scarce material resources available at the front.

Ways of “living out” religion, and religious experience changed during this period. Society and culture were undeniably “modernized”, and once historiography saw this development as the rationalization, privatization, and secularization of religious life. Nevertheless, religious values and beliefs have not eroded, and secularization theory has been criticized especially from a global perspective, as the majority of the world’s population is as profoundly religious today as it has ever been.<sup>55</sup> In this volume, we are not arguing either for or on the basis of secularization theory, nor against it. Rather, we seek to analyse the ways in which the changes in society and cultural values altered the ways of experiencing; the processes of making, sharing, and evaluating experience; and the structures of expected experience and exclusive experience. We hope the various chapters from the late

<sup>55</sup> Berger, *A Rumour of Angels*; Norris & Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*; On the persistent role of religion in modern day America, see Moore, *Touchdown Jesus*.

medieval to the Second World War will combine into a *longue durée* analysis that enables a comparison of experiences of lived religion in different contexts of time and culture, not the construction of a teleological story.

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## From Lived Reality to a Cultural Script: Punishment Miracles as an Experience

*Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa*

This chapter focuses on experiencing religious change: conversion to penance after encountering an external incentive—that is, the malice of demons and the punishing ability of a saint. Rather than detecting what “actually happened” to and within an individual or “how it really felt,” an idea termed as a “simplistic ground of immediacy” by Martin Jay,<sup>1</sup> the mediated nature of events is acknowledged and they are here approached as a process of giving meaning. Thus, the experience is understood as an amalgamation of personal emotions, bodily signs and sensations, and the requirements of the miracle genre and cultural script produced and contributed to by local clerics. The experiences explored in this chapter are something that were collectively negotiated and accepted; they included identifiable details, like sensory elements to evoke memories of past occurrences in the minds of listeners, and therefore they had the potential to produce a model of experiencing. The geographical focus is late medieval

<sup>1</sup>Jay, *Songs of Experience*, 3.

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S. Katajalla-Peltomaa (✉)  
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland  
e-mail: [sari.katajalla-peltomaa@tuni.fi](mailto:sari.katajalla-peltomaa@tuni.fi)

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Sweden, more specifically Vadstena Abbey and its surroundings. The social and spiritual context is formed by those who compiled and heard versions of the chosen miracle recorded in Saint Birgitta's canonization process (1374—1380) and later sermons preached on her feast day.

### FROM A BLASPHEMER TO A DEVOTEE: CONVERSION AS A CULTURAL SCRIPT

In many respects, conversion is the most demanding and prominent religious experience. Etymologically *con-version* means a new orientation: a person turns towards a new ideal, leaving behind his or her old habits. A biblical prototype for this is obviously the dramatic events on the road to Damascus and St Paul's transformation from a persecutor of Christians into an apostle of Christ. Religious conversion is often described as a personal crisis and a transition to a new life, a second birth.<sup>2</sup> It is essentially internal, a change of heart, *cordis versio*, but detectable by outer signs, gestures, and deeds. An external influence was also a typical element causing it. It was available to every Christian: on the path of virtue one could turn from bad to good, from good to better, or from better to excellent.<sup>3</sup>

During the Middle Ages, conversion—whether to Christianity, religious life, or simply penance—took many forms. Be it on an individual or societal level, “conversion” was a process, not a singular occurrence that led rapidly to a complete renunciation of the previous beliefs and way of life. Rather, a gradual change was typical. The gradual progress and potential for relapses were well understood during the Middle Ages: various exempla warned religious people not to stray from their chosen path within a religious order or, for example, cautioned baptized Jews for not fully abandoning their former ways of worship. Both could be seen as apostasy, a renunciation of the true faith and the worst kind of converting one's habits.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter analyses the gradual transformation of religiosity in a less dramatic or traumatic context that transpires due to an outer intervention. This likely involved an internal process that can be observed by outer

<sup>2</sup>Pinard de la Boullaye, “Conversion”; Muldoon, “Introduction”, 1–10; Schott, “Intuition, Interpretation, Insight”.

<sup>3</sup>Caesar of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum* 1, II.

<sup>4</sup>Keyword “conversion” gives 579 hits in the database of medieval exempla: *ThEMA: Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi*, <http://thema.huma-num.fr/> Accessed 6.1.2021.

signs, like the production of emotions and bodily signs and practices. Experience is understood as a cultural process involving mediation to explain and make sense of an individual occurrence. Therefore, the interpretation of the chain of events is equally important. This chapter unravels this process of giving meaning: how some acts were categorized as detrimental in the religious context and their results comprehended as a punishment miracle. How was “lived reality” fused with convention and the media producing “experience”?

Lived religion is concretized in what people do, see, hear, smell, and taste—in their emotions and actions. Inseparable parts of living one’s religion are, however, also teachings, memories, rituals, and learned practices. Therefore, a cultural script of how to react, what to feel, and how to behave was part of religion-in-action. Values and proper practices were propagated by the clerical elite, but they were internalized and put into practice in variable ways. This internalization had, in turn, its effects on values and practices; therefore, a cultural script within lived religion was not a unidirectional top-down process, but rather a circle or a spiral; theological definitions and teachings were lived out in daily life and rituals and corporeal phenomena affected the script.

Obviously, sacramental penance—the yearly confession of sins followed by penance before absolution—was mandatory for all Christians and a crucial constituent of the Western Christian culture after 1215 on the institutional, communal, and daily levels.<sup>5</sup> On the path towards salvation, the first step was a sense of sin: contrition for one’s sins and bad deeds was followed by penitence and reconciliation. Contrition could be concretized in spiritual pain, felt like a sting, a puncture of the heart, *compunctio*, which could have been either a personal or social feeling. The conversion process, understanding the need for penance, required not only an individual or communal emotional dynamic but that of God’s as well, since God’s wrath and love were crucial in the process.<sup>6</sup> He could also use an intermediary: a saint.

In the context of Italian flagellants, Piroska Nagy and Xavier Biron-Ouellet have identified a particular affective model: an emotional script

<sup>5</sup> It is well-known that this regulation and new practice was heavily propagated by the church, particularly by the Mendicants. On their preaching agenda and forms of penance, see Jansen, *Making of the Magdalen*.

<sup>6</sup> Nagy, *Le don de l’armes*: 425–30. On God’s wrath, see Nagy, “Liminaire. Emotions de Dieu au Moyen Âge”, 35–62.

leading Christians from damnation to salvation. This “script” can be understood as a sequence of predetermined and stereotypical actions defining a well-known situation. In the context of conversion to penance, an emotional script guided the spiritual path of the soul leading from hate to fear and shame, from pain and sadness to a joyful love.<sup>7</sup> A similar process of predetermined actions was also propagated in exempla, short stories including moral lessons to arouse a fear of sin in the listeners. Such a “script of conversion” can be found in a specific sub-category of miracles as well—that of punishment miracles.

Miracle narrations are, by their very nature, emotive scripts: the chain of events proceeds from one emotional level to the next. Emotions were part of proper ritual and narration. First, the need for divine aid was expressed by despair, anguish, and grief. Inner emotions could be expressed verbally, but desperation was typically conveyed in a ritualized manner by tears, the tearing of clothes and hair, and the beating of the chest. Such ritualistic language conveyed not only personal emotions but also social expectations. On the next stage, during the invocation, emotions—especially humility—were more readily expressed only in deeds and gestures. After the grace was bestowed, joy, gratitude, and enhanced devotion were expected elements in giving thanks for the miracle, a sign of genuine divine grace being the increase of devotion among the participants. Emotions were thus crucial for the comprehension of a miracle; they were not passive states but demanded a committed performance from the participants. Producing them marked the crossing over from one state to the next in the process of becoming a beneficiary of (or a witness to) a miracle. These emotions were part of the lived experience, but they were also part of the genre; together they formed a cultural script guiding the expectations of experiencing a miracle.<sup>8</sup>

As all canonization processes and miracle collections form a unique context of their own, it is clear there are differences and various nuances in the script of emotional stages. Emotions seem to have been more emphasized in the southern European context, within Italian urban settings, while lay participation was shunned in the Nordic cases: especially in the canonization process of Saint Birgitta, the witnesses were usually clerics, not lay members of the society. Furthermore, no lay invocations were

<sup>7</sup>Nagy & Biron-Ouellet, “A Collective Emotion in Medieval Italy”.

<sup>8</sup>Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 86–87 on emotional stages.

recorded meticulously, and on a general level, the laity's devotional practices, for example when manifesting gratitude after a miracle, were not emphasized.<sup>9</sup>

### THE CANONIZATION PROCESS OF SAINT BIRGITTA

Birgitta of Sweden<sup>10</sup> (1303–1373) was a member of a Swedish noble family. She was a married woman and a mother of eight, but also one of the most well-known and most controversial medieval saints. Her mystical visions, recorded in *Revelaciones*, and prophetic abilities gained her a reputation of sanctity. Furthermore, she did not shy away from using her powers also for secular ends. As a member of the nobility, Birgitta was well connected to both the secular and ecclesiastical elite, and she took part in political struggles. Birgitta held a controversial position since neither her political activity nor her sanctity after her death were unanimously accepted.<sup>11</sup>

However, soon after her death a canonization inquiry into her sanctity was launched, and she was officially canonized in 1391. In the late Middle Ages, official canonization was a papal privilege. Before adding a new candidate to the litany of saints, an official inquiry, *inquisitio*, of his or her life, merits, and miracles was due. For this, the pope usually nominated three commissioners of high clerical rank to carry out the investigation. Local proctors helped them in this endeavour and official notaries recorded the depositions. Witnesses, in turn, were summoned to testify and they took an oath before giving their testimonies.

Canonization processes were judicial hearings and canon law guided their implementation. The actual organization and methods of questioning were mentioned in the major rulings only briefly, and despite the shared background, the practicalities varied from one process to another, and preserved records come in many shapes. Birgitta's process in particular differs from many other contemporary canonization records. Hearings

<sup>9</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa, "Devotional Strategies in Everyday Life", 21–45.

<sup>10</sup> The scholarship on Saint Birgitta is vast, but her miracles have aroused less interest. See, however, Fröjmark, *Mirakler och helgonkult*; Myrdal and Bäärnhielm, eds., *Kvinnor, barn & fester*; Krötzel, *Pilger, Mirakel, und Alltag*; and Heß, *Heilige machen im spätmittelalterlichen Ostseeraum*, 99–204. On the practicalities of Birgitta's canonization, see Nyberg, "The Canonization Process of St. Birgitta of Sweden", 67–85.

<sup>11</sup> On Birgitta's and the royal couple's relations, see Salmesvuori, *Power and Sainthood*, 145–58 and 115–18 for the relationship between Birgitta and her political adversaries.

were carried out in Sweden, Rome, and Naples. Instead of being divided into parts concerning the life and miracles of the candidate, like many other medieval processes, Birgitta's process consisted of three parts, *Acta*, *Attestaciones*, and *Summarium*. *Acta* includes practical information about the process and miracles recorded by local clergy in Sweden as well as letters written by the Archbishop of Lund and the Bishop of Linköping Nicholas Hermansson, which also contain miracles.<sup>12</sup> This part will be the focus here. The clerics in charge of recording the miracles in Sweden were Gudmarus Frederici, Johannes Giurderi, and Katilmundus. They were all Birgittine brothers of Vadstena Abbey. Gudmarus had been Birgitta's chaplain, followed her on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and took part in the expedition which brought Birgitta's relics back to Sweden. Johannes Giurderi (Präst) was a well-known preacher, likened to Chrysostom in his abilities. He revised the earliest known version of Birgitta's *Revelaciones*. They were appointed to the duty by the Bishop of Linköping, Nicholas Hermansson, who also was an active supporter of Birgitta and her cult. All the aforementioned were men of authority and experience.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, they were not disinterested participants in the matter of canonization.

The cases registered by local clergy did not meet the requirements of canon law: witnesses were not apparently interrogated separately, a pre-set questionnaire—either *articuli* of the life and miracles or *Interrogatorium*, the papal ruling to validate the reliability of the testimony<sup>14</sup>—did not guide the interrogation. Depositions were not recorded verbatim or one by one but in the form of a synthesis. Furthermore, the office of public notary was not in use in medieval Sweden; the cases were recorded by the local clerics instead. The less strict judicial framework enabled a process of interpretation that better suited the needs of the local inquisitorial committee. Apparently, they wished to depict an image of Birgitta as a thaumaturge fighting against demons and urging Christians to confess their sins and turn to penance. This is demonstrated by both the demonic activity

<sup>12</sup> *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*. On contents of part *Acta*, see also Hess, *Heilige Machen*, 111–12.

<sup>13</sup> Berglund, *Guds stat och maktens villkor*, 69–71, 85 and Andersson, *De birgittinska ordenprästerna*, 195–96.

<sup>14</sup> On papal rulings, see Wetzstein, *Heilige vor Gericht*, 219–20, 244–76, 538–39 and Paciocco, *Canonizzazioni e culto dei santi nella christianitas*, 45–58; Krafft, *Papsturkunde und Heiligsprechung* and Katajala-Peltomaa & Krötzl, “Approaching Twelfth–Fifteenth-Century Miracles”, 1–39; on articuli Katajala-Peltomaa & Kuuliala, “Practical Matters: Canonization Records in the Making”.

recorded in the process and the quantity of punishment miracles. Both of them are notable characteristics of Birgitta's process and often linked: the demons punish disrespectful people in various ways for belittling Birgitta's powers or denigrating her.<sup>15</sup> This makes Birgitta's process an eminently suitable source material for this kind of scrutiny: a model—or a potential for a model—of a religious transformation, a conversion from sinful life to piety, was produced while recording Birgitta's saintly interventions among the laity.

### A DEVIL WHO FELL ON SLIPPERY ICE

The case chosen for closer scrutiny is that of Cristina, a newlywed wife who was delivered from demonic possession at the shrine of Birgitta at Vadstena Abbey.<sup>16</sup> She was apparently punished for her own and her parents' moral wrongdoings. The situation intensified only after her wedding, but Cristina had suffered from demonic molestations nearly all her life. The lengthy narration contains many specific details which imply Cristina's personal recollections are utilized in the descriptions but her own and her husband's depositions were not recorded. Instead, the case can be found in a letter written by the Bishop of Linköping, and it was also recorded in a local hearing of Birgitta's miracles. According to both versions, witnesses to the case were local clergymen, and Bishop Nicholas Hermansson's letter corroborates the much longer version recorded by the Vadstena clergy.

According to the records, Cristina was the daughter of a rich peasant from the town of Bro, Linköping diocese. She experienced severe demonic molestations in her early life. One of the symptoms was her inability to open her mouth to tell her parents what was happening. Her parents, however, detected that something was amiss and tried to ameliorate the situation: they invited a soothsayer, an *incantatrix*, to cure her, but Cristina only got worse after her visit. She started to see demons harassing her in the forms of a horse, wolf, dog, and snake. After a while another soothsayer, an *incantator*, performed incantations and tied magical items to her back. They were of no avail, and now, in addition to the animal-shaped cavalcade of demons, a new vexation arrived: a demon in the shape of an envious and cruel twelve-year-old boy who tormented Cristina

<sup>15</sup>Hess, *Heilige machen*, 201–04; Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 138.

<sup>16</sup>*Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, 120–3, 175–6.



without mercy. The parents, wishing to find a cure, intended to resort to magic (*maleficia*) yet again, but this time Cristina managed to say that their attempts would only punish her more severely.

Moral transgression in the narration is clear. *Incantator/ix* may refer to soothsayers or folk healing, but here the reference to magic seems plausible; the parents' next step, *maleficium*, meant harmful magic that transgressed ecclesiastical and secular law. A synodal statute written by Nicholas of Linköping, the same bishop who added this case in his letter, grouped poisoners, murderers, *incantatrices*, sacrilegious people, and those invoking demons all together.<sup>17</sup> Cristina herself may have been innocent as she was only a child, but nonetheless, the sins of the parents could be visited upon their children (Ex. 20:5). This is clearly what happened in this particular case, even if the affliction was initially brought about by the malice of demons and not by the punishing ability of a saint.

Years passed and Cristina came of age and she married; not much more is known of her social position or that of her husband. On the third day after the wedding, the demon, greatly agitated, came to her again and attacked Cristina so that she fell to the ground, became stiff, and pressed her legs together so tightly that no one could open them. It was as if her legs were nailed together with iron nails. She was unable to move her limbs and had difficulties in speaking, seeing, and sensing. She was merely lying like a useless trunk (*truncus inutilis*) and her speech was hardly intelligible; she only smelled a horrid stench and later lost her sight. She could only see the devil and a small circle around him.

Lost mental and bodily control were signifiers of a demonic presence, and the alterity of the demoniac was encapsulated in the bodily and sensorial symptoms. The inability to move and communicate intelligibly with others caused an inversion of identity. Cristina was not an agent in the social interaction any longer; rather, she was posited outside her ordinary roles, positions, and identities into a realm where the whole sensorium interacted with the supernatural and communicated this interaction to the surrounding community.<sup>18</sup> The bad stench of the evil spirit, for example, was a cultural convention signifying a demonic presence<sup>19</sup>; simultaneously

<sup>17</sup> Reuterdaahl, *Statuta synodalia veteris ecclesiae*, 63. "Item intoxicatores vel aliquando mortiferum procurantes seu consilium adhibentes, item sacrilegos et incantatrices, et quoscunque demones invocantes."

<sup>18</sup> On inversion of identity and alterity of demoniacs, Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 28, 93–8, 180–82

<sup>19</sup> On bad stench reflecting religious otherness Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*.

this kind of sensory experience was highly intimate—one cannot turn the olfactory system “off,” and it is literally felt and sensed inside oneself. The “inner feelings” or “lived reality” were used to produce a cultural pattern.

The devil continued to torment Cristina viciously. It tossed and crashed her against walls, whether she was lying down or sitting, and tore at her hair and limbs. On seeing her, people wondered how she could survive all these anguishes. The reason for her affliction was not given, but the timing just after the wedding, as well as the pressing of the legs together, implies that the reasons were linked to sexuality and her status as a newlywed. The timing could have been a deliberate rhetorical choice: the practice of the three chaste nights spent in prayer before consummating the marriage was known also in medieval Sweden and was presented as a model for pious couples.<sup>20</sup> The clerical construction of the event may imply that three chaste nights had passed and it was time to engage in a carnal relationship and consummate the marriage, or that this practice was not followed and therefore the demon gained power over the newlywed wife. The husband was, however, described as legitimate (*maritus legitimus*). This may have been a reference to the consummation of the marriage,<sup>21</sup> but it may also have been a way to emphasize his acceptable status; nothing illicit was going on in the marriage, contrary to the previous choices of Cristina’s parents.

Clear culpability is not given as a reason for the worsening of the situation. However, the clerics added a didactic exclamation to the narration, offering sin as the reason for the affliction. Simultaneously, they generalized the situation from Cristina as an individual to the general condition of Christians: “O how irrational and fixed is the harshness of a sinner, to regain one’s senses from the bad ones (*a malis*), to understand how malice punishes the soul which it [the malice] governs for its enormous evilness, in with such a fury it afflicts the body, which the soul does not fully govern.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Andrén, ed., *De septem sacramentis*.

<sup>21</sup> Consummation was a principal of valid marriage according to the canon law. In medieval Sweden, however, consummation was not mentioned in the secular matrimonial law. Instead, bedding, the ritual of leading the bride to the bed and the couple being publicly bedded together after the wedding banquet, was a legal constituent of a valid marriage. Korpiola, *Between Betrothal and Bedding*, 60–65.

<sup>22</sup> *Acta et processus canonizationis beate Birgittæ*, 121: “o insensata peccatorum obstinata duricia, vt a malis resipiscas intelligere, quanta malicia puniat animam, in quam secundum

After this exclamation, the narration continues chronologically: on 13 January 1376, the husband made preparations with some friends to take Cristina to Vadstena Abbey. According to the narration, Cristina's father was from Husaby parish, Linköping diocese, but it is not known where the newlywed couple lived. However, January was a suitable time for a peasant family to make a pilgrimage, since their journey to Vadstena took several days. On the journey, the devil followed them in the form of a "modern courtier." The depiction of the demon's lavish outfit may have been a remark on the interconnection between vanity and peril; it may have even been inserted to argue for a linkage between the king's court and the demonic. There are other references pointing to this direction among the miracles and the memory book of the abbey.<sup>23</sup>

The northern context exemplified in the conditions of travelling is specified in the text. The pilgrim group took a shortcut via frozen lake, and the devil fell on the slippery ice and started weeping. Cristina, being the only one who could see what happened, told this to her companions and they all started laughing. This infuriated the devil and when he got up, he tripped one of the travellers on the ice and another he treated like a beast of burden, riding him and hurting his mouth with a bit-like instrument, drawing blood. When they were in pain, the devil said, "once you laughed, but now the one laughing is me."

Wherever the companions took Cristina, the devil followed. The only place he dared not enter was Linköping cathedral; he waited by the graveyard. Clearly, the Bishopric seat of the initiator of the local hearing, Nicholas Hermansson, was too holy a place for the malign spirit to enter. Eventually, after a laborious journey, the pilgrims reached Vadstena. When Cristina was taken by cart to the shrine, many of the inhabitants of Vadstena and the surrounding areas came to see her. The demon resisted her entrance to the shrine; he made Cristina fall over so that she needed to be carried inside. The demon made her heavier and heavier for her husband and the man assisting him to get her inside the chapel. Once inside, the demon tried to drag her out so that her husband needed to grip her

scelerum suorum enormitatem plene preualet, cum tanto furore affligit corpus, in cuius anima dominium forte non possidet."

<sup>23</sup>A case in point is Hans Smek, king's knight who was possessed after defiling Birgitta. *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, 109–10; 147–48. The reign of Albert of Mecklenburg (1364–1389) was turbulent, German nobles playing an important role in the Swedish realm were heavily criticized. For more details, see Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 138–42.

head to hold her inside. The demon gnashed his teeth horribly, nearly breaking the hearts of the people present out of fear.

We may read this as an allegory of persistent temptation; the unwillingness to relinquish one's former ways. More than depicting an actual pilgrim's progress or soul's journey on earth, the scene at the Vadstena gate is a clear hagiographic topos: abhorrence of sacred places and items was a telling sign of demonic presence. Combat between supernatural powers: saints and demons—and demoniacs as their battlefields—is a recurrent theme in didactic miracle collections and exempla: it was an essential element in the interaction between the sacred and the diabolical that manifested the victory of the former and defeat of the latter.<sup>24</sup>

### BIT(E)S AND PIECES

Cristina's tribulations and subsequent delivery are not typical depictions for canonization processes, where sworn testimonies were typically constructed differently. The records made by local clerics show clear hagiographical reformulations, in line with Gábor Klaniczay's argument.<sup>25</sup> Didactic messages embedded into the narration are manifest. It is noteworthy that neither Cristina herself nor her husband were named among the witnesses. As Cristina was the only one to be able to testify to her childhood torments and visions, she was likely interrogated at the shrine. However, those listed as witnesses were clerics from Linköping and Husaby.

Appearing and tormenting demons are, obviously, part of Christian rhetoric from late Antiquity on. Animal-shaped demons are known from contemporary exempla and being punished after resorting to illegal or superstitious methods is a commonplace. Many of Cristina's childhood memories have a taste of daily life, and this pertains particularly to the envious and vicious twelve-year-old boy bullying a younger girl. Being bullied by older children is an experience belonging to many people's childhood memories, regardless of the era or social background.

Other minor details—like the knees pinned together with iron nails, Cristina as a tree trunk unable to move, the devil riding his victims with a bit in their mouth, and the slippery ice—give an impression of a peasant

<sup>24</sup> See also Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 225–35; on abhorrence of the sacred and other symptoms, Craig, “The Spirit of Madness”, 60–93.

<sup>25</sup> Klaniczay, “Speaking about Miracles”, 365–95. Other similar examples can be found in Birgitta's process, see for example *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgittae*, 125.

origin and illuminate the Nordic atmosphere. Nevertheless, these details should not be taken at face value, as they may have also been narrative conventions. This is clear at least for the expression *truncus inutilis*, as Cristina was not the only useless trunk we meet in the records. Others are described in the same way, for example, a paralyzed woman named Margareta and a monk insulting Birgitta and receiving his punishment in a form of epilepsy.<sup>26</sup> Clearly, this was an accustomed way to describe a severe inability to move and function. It is not a particularly compassionate expression sympathizing with the victims' suffering, but it does bring forth the bodily sensations in forming an experience—even if from the perspective of by-standers.

These details question Leigh Ann Craig's arguments about Cristina; she sees Cristina's case as a performance with her self-representation showing remarkable agency; all the participants played identity roles which helped the demoniac play her role.<sup>27</sup> Since the recorded narration is a clerical interpretation of Cristina's situation and symptoms, it is their interpretation of the performance and the role of the demoniac that emerges from the source material, not Cristina's self-representation or the immediacy of her feelings. Rather, the narration tells of generally accepted—or actively propagated—notions of sanctity and sin, forming a model of their experience.

Brian Leveck strongly argues that all demoniacs followed scripts that were encoded in their religious cultures; according to him, all possessions were theatrical productions where each participant played a role and acted in a way the community expected him or her to act.<sup>28</sup> Demonic possession was a general European phenomenon, and the general Christian "script" affected its conceptualization. Many of the aforementioned details may have been conventional tropes, ways of describing a situation and affliction like this. The local nuances of the cultural pattern are clear, too. Details, like the useless trunk, reveal ways the surrounding community saw conditions of this sort. The methodological problem that arises is that individual experiences cannot be separated from convention. The cultural models influenced the way people comprehended this kind of situation. As all experiences are mediated via language and culture, even intimate

<sup>26</sup> *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, 117 and 113.

<sup>27</sup> Craig, *Wandering Women and Holy Matrons*, 203–18.

<sup>28</sup> Leveck, *The Devil Within*. The idea of cultural scripts can be seen as drawing origin from Erving Goffman's theories of dramaturgical perspectives and stage metaphor.

experiences are social and shared in that sense. Therefore, conventions are an inseparable part of any experience. They form the background against which the occurrences are analysed, memorized, and communicated to others.

Sensory modalities were used to explain the situation and condition of Cristina, bridging the personal and the cultural. The motionless torso could have been inspected by others; it was not a highly intimate sensation out of reach of others, like the bad smell of demons. Impaired vision falls into the middle ground, as it can be recognized by others as well by outer signs and actions. How Cristina felt about these symptoms cannot be known; they did, however, require explanation and this process of interpretation and validation is the core of experience here. Her symptoms should be seen as embodied enculturation; this is not to agree with Brian Levack's argument that all demoniacs assumed dramatic roles—quite the contrary. Medieval people did not have the terminology to express mental alterity or the inversion of identity. Therefore, instead of words, corporeal expressions mediated such messages. The bodies of demoniacs became messages, and this language was read by the surrounding community and interpreted as demonic possession. General cultural assumptions of demonic presence and saintly powers enabled the elucidation of the symptoms, chain of events, and options for solving the situation. The situation needed to be understood as needing divine intervention, and a general consensus of the healing options was also required. These cultural patterns were encoded in the intimate details of Cristina's bodily sensations. Therefore, cultural models and "scripts" were present already on these first stages of communicating and explaining; without them it would have been impossible to see the condition of Cristina as demonic possession and understand that Saint Birgitta and her shrine at Vadstena Abbey offered the potential for recovery.

#### FORMING A SCRIPT: VADSTENA BROTHERS' RHETORIC IN CONSTRUCTING SANCTITY AND SIN

Vadstena was the head of the *Regula Sancti Salvatoris* monastic order founded by Birgitta. It was an important religious, intellectual, and political centre in medieval Sweden. The abbey had received land from king Magnus Eriksson and his queen, Blanche, even before Birgitta left for Rome. This, in addition to other donations, eventually made it a rich

monastic centre. The abbey served several times as a meeting place for the state council and political negotiations, and the turbulent state of affairs within the Nordic countries gave it an opportunity to gain authority in the political arena. An abbess was the head of the double monastery, while one of the priest brothers acted as a general confessor. Preaching, also to the lay audience, was a crucial part of the Birgittine monastic idea.<sup>29</sup> In the 1370s, during the collecting and recording of Birgitta's miracles, the position of Vadstena was not yet established or secure, since the abbey was not dedicated until 1384.

The priest brothers were eager to participate in the politics of the realm. They commented on the state of affairs in the memory book of Vadstena Abbey, and they did not shy away from using their sermons as channels for political advice.<sup>30</sup> It seems the recording of miracles played a similar role. The description of the chain of events leading to Cristina's cure at the shrine was a conscious choice on the part of the local clergy, a propagandistic tool in constructing Birgitta's sanctity. This is particularly emphasized in the words and deeds of the demon at the shrine. First, he tried his best to stop Cristina from entering the shrine. While his physical powers were overcome, he resorted to verbal persuasion. The combat of supernatural powers, and Birgitta's superior position in the outcome, is a core message of the narration.

In Cristina's case, this battle was not easily won, though. Once at the shrine, all who knew how to sing (*congregatis omnibus in loco cantare scientibus*) gathered around her during the next day and sang hymns and antiphons to create a sacral soundscape to expel the malign spirit. Finally, after a week at the shrine, Birgitta's head relic was placed on Christina's head and a silver cross was tied around her neck, a cross that Birgitta herself had placed on the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Cristina's presence in the sacred space and the vicinity of Birgitta's relics were not enough; her body needed to be enclosed, marked out by the sacred crystallized in specific items, the highly valued treasures of the abbey.

After this turning point, Cristina's recovery proceeded stepwise: first, she regained her speech, then her sense of smell, and then finally her sight.

<sup>29</sup> The first nuns and monks apparently arrived at Vadstena immediately after the donation in the 1340s; Birgitta's order (*Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris*) was approved in 1370 by Pope Urban V. On political relations, see Nyberg, ed., *Birgittinsk festgåva*. On brothers' preaching agenda, Andersson and Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars", 209–36.

<sup>30</sup> On the political agenda in the Vadstena diary, Gejrot, "Diarium Vadstenense", 131–47; on political messages in sermons, see Berglund, *Guds stat och maktens villkor*.

The return of the sensory faculties and the potential to communicate with others indicated her return to her former self. This did not mean she fully regained agency, though. She was able to move only after the former confessor of Birgitta came to her, a detail emphasizing the need for secular hierarchies in constructing supernatural ones. Cristina offered an oblation to the shrine and returned home. She was, however, possessed anew. The clerics recording the case surmised that she had not shown enough gratitude and was afflicted again. They clarified that only Jesus Christ knew all the secrets—including the reason for the second tribulation—but in their eyes Cristina's ungratefulness brought the misery upon her the second time. Cristina was not depicted as an innocent victim during the first round of tribulations, but the major part of the blame was placed on her parents. The second affliction was, however, her own fault; ingratitude was a typical incentive for a saint to punish a negligent petitioner with a renewed illness. Several punishment miracles can be found in Birgitta's process, as noted; furthermore, the punishment was often performed by demons. The renewed possession due to Birgitta's punishment is an important detail pointing to the need for hierarchy and the humility of the petitioner, not only in the face of the heavenly patron, but also when facing her loyal—clerical—supporters. They knew and were able to determine the sufficient amount of gratitude. Only after another pilgrimage and oblation was Cristina cured.

The narration emphasizes the importance of the local clergy's ritual participation, the singing and placing of relics upon her, not Cristina's own agency. She did participate in the rituals of thanksgiving after the cure, and they only underline her inability to participate independently. Rather than being an agent, Cristina was posited in an object-like position. She was a medium in the construction of the sanctity of Birgitta; her continuing and renewed tribulation affirmed both the malice of demons and the superior powers of the relics of Birgitta. At the same time, the narration reinforced the authority of the local clergy in handling the relics and controlling the sacred space.

The core message of the events was the superior powers of Birgitta and an affirmation of her saintly status. The tribulations of Cristina and the thaumaturgical powers of Birgitta are likened to a Biblical prototype: Jesus healing a paralytic by forgiving his sins and asking him to rise up and leave (Mark 2:5–12). The linkage stresses further the sinful nature of Cristina manifesting itself in paralysis, like in the aforementioned case of the insulting monk. Simultaneously Birgitta is positioned as a Jesus-like



thaumaturge: she can both redeem sins and exorcize demons.<sup>31</sup> Turning to penance and experiencing the miraculous needed intermediaries, however, as we will shortly see.

The devil took action once again when the relics were placed on Cristina's head and throat. Expressing his disgust clearly, he said in anger, "I have done a lot with you, and now they put the worst kind of stick on your head." He also protested against the intolerable stench of the relics, the priests around Cristina, and the vehement noise (the singing) resonating in the church. The speech of the demon fits well within the general role reserved for them in miracle narrations. Their words had theological significance in confirming the divinity and powers of Christ. "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24), as a demon inside a possessed man cried out to Christ in Capernaum. The saints were, after the Apostles, the successors of Christ and the holy ones of God.

The abhorrence of the demon in Vadstena was confirmation of the holy powers of Birgitta and the abbey as a sacred space. Here, again, the intimate sensations of Cristina were crucial; she was the only one to be able to hear the devil, and he spoke directly to her. Cristina was a medium, but her role was, however, crucial, and it is further underlined in the devil's exclamation upon his exit: "Woe, woe, since I can do harm to you no more!"<sup>32</sup>

It seems that the cultural script the Vadstena clergy was shaping circulated around the combat of sacred and diabolical powers. It is encapsulated in the time and space dedicated to the deeds and speech of the devil. Demons tend to be more verbal in didactic miracle collections and Cristina's tribulations are a case in point: no direct invocation is recorded, yet the words of the demon are quoted verbatim several times. Apparently, Cristina's change of heart and conversion to new religious habits were not clear enough, because she was possessed anew. Reverence was crucial in constructing the miraculous. A proper experience of Birgitta's sanctity was not constructed only by disavowing parental mischievousness; rather respect for the secular hierarchies was also needed.

The model of experiencing a religious change produced by the Vadstena clergy was not based on an emotional bond and affectivity between the

<sup>31</sup> I thank Xavier Biron-Ouellet for pointing out this perspective to me.

<sup>32</sup> "Ve, ve, quia iam nichil mali possum tibi facere!" *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgittae*, 122.

heavenly intercessor and her devotees, but the core of living out religion was the hierarchy between Christians and supernatural powers as well as the clergy and laity. The perseverance of these themes—the need for reverence and fear of sin—is underlined in the preaching activity of the Vadstena clergy. Clearly enough, the need for penance, to avert Christians from the path of sin, was obviously a major legitimation for all preaching activity. However, the priest brothers of Vadstena Abbey seem to have been particularly driven by this goal—and not without success. Around 1400, an anonymous Franciscan friar described the preaching of the Vadstena brothers as fervent and persistent in focusing on the vices of the listeners; they were not only uttering soothing words for itching ears. Because of this, they gained great fame among the laity and great envy among other members of the clergy. This led not only to the abuse of Birgitta and her words, but also to accusations and slander against these priests themselves.<sup>33</sup>

Vadstena was an important pilgrimage centre and Birgitta's feast days (*Translacio; Nativitas; Canonizacio*) among the most well-attended occasions at the abbey's church. Sermons on these days were to reach a wide lay audience, potentially thousands, and thus they were an important communicative channel. The specific liturgical moment enhanced the engagement of the audience: a sermon on a patron's feast day was more momentous than an ordinary Sunday sermon. The preaching activity of the Birgittine brothers was defined and regulated according to the words of Jesus given to Birgitta in her *Revelaciones*: they should preach in the vernacular with simple and few words, with no superfluous words or artificial expressions. Everything should match the capacity of the audience, which was defined as simple people. Apparently, this regulation was followed, as plainness is argued to be the most distinguished feature of Birgittine preaching.<sup>34</sup> Sermons on Birgitta's feast days do not seem to focus on an intimate connection with the heavenly patron. Instead, a major component in many of them is the avoidance of sinfulness and the demonstration of due reverence to Birgitta. Another persistent

<sup>33</sup>The text in question is an "epistola" against those attacking Birgitta and her *Revelaciones*. The text is translated in Andersson & Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars", 213.

<sup>34</sup>Andersson & Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars". *De sanctis* sermons increased especially during the thirteenth century because of Dominican activity. Saints' *vitae* were often the background text used in them, Ferzoco, "The context of medieval sermon collections on saints", 279–88.

undercurrent seems to have also been the propagation of Vadstena Abbey's reputation as a sacred place.<sup>35</sup>

A sermon for the feast of Birgitta's canonization (7 October) from the second half of the fifteenth century is a case in point. More or less a century after Cristina's recovery, Nicholas Ragvaldi (c. 1445–1514) estimated that “many come here [i.e. Vadstena] for the health of the body but are not liberated.” According to him, “God gives different kinds of infirmities or cures them. Some are cured to manifest the glory of God, [...] others as a sign of the purging of sins and exercising patience, and yet others are cured for God's occult judgement. All requests are not fulfilled—only those that please God.” He brought to the mind of listeners how Christ explained to his disciples, when they could not expel a certain demon, that some forms of demons were only cast out by prayers and fasts—not by the power of Apostles. Therefore, Christians should not judge saints if they did not perform miracles for all petitioners.<sup>36</sup> The sermon's message follows a similar logic to Cristina's case: penance and reverence were a crucial component in experiencing the miraculous.

The pilgrimage and physical presence at the shrine were prerequisites for Cristina's recovery, and the importance of pilgrimage is stressed in other feast day sermons. The adversaries of pilgrimages and sacred places

<sup>35</sup> Vadstena was an important learning centre with large library and active preaching agenda; approximately 5000 sermons were produced in Vadstena during 1380–1520. The collection is preserved in Uppsala university library in so-called C-Sammlung. Berggren, *Homilectica Vadstenensia*, VII–XI; ca.120 sermons for Birgitta's feast can be identified. *Mittelalterliche Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Uppsala*: Bd 8, 25. Due to the large quantity, the cases presented here are only a small sample of the whole and conclusions tentative. For closer scrutiny are selected sermons with references to miracles; a preliminary analysis suggests they form a small minority and the majority of the references is to *miracula in vita*. I wish to thank Roger Andersson and Stephan Borgehammar for letting me have access to their unpublished database of C-Sammlung sermons. Some of the transliterations of original material are from the database, some are my own, and all the translations are mine.

<sup>36</sup> “Sed forte dicit quis, quia multi huc pro sanitate corporis veniunt, qui tamen non liberantur. Respondendum est, quia infirmitas datur diuersimode vel permittitur a Deo. Nam aliqua permittitur ad gloriam Dei manifestandam, sicut Thobie cecitas et ceco nato et claudo ab vtero matris, vt in Actibus apostolorum habetur iii capitulo; aliis vero pro purgacione peccati et exercicio paciencie et etiam sepius ex occulto Dei iudicio; et ideo non omnes, sed quibus Deo placuerit, petita recipiunt. Eciam in ewangelio legitur Christum dedisse discipulis potestatem super spiritus immundos etc., et tamen demonem ab vno expellere non potuerunt, sed Christus ipsum per se expellere voluit dicens apostolis: Hoc genus demoniorum non nisi in ieiunio et oracione expellitur etc. Ideo caueat Christianus, ne iudicet de sanctis, quare non circa omnes faciunt miracula etc”. UB C 303 f 185v.

are likened to the adversaries of Jerusalem by the words of Tobit: “cursed are the ones who scorn you; damned are the ones who blaspheme you” (Tobit 13:16).<sup>37</sup> In addition to reverence, humility was presented as an inescapable element while experiencing the miraculous: Birgitta was able to supersede the powers of nature and answer humble and devoted prayers.<sup>38</sup>

It is not known if Cristina’s molestations were used as an example to show the necessity to beg for forgiveness for one’s sins and to express humbleness. The narration itself was filled with didactic remarks and miracles were typically remodelled to be reused as parts of sermons. Concerning the Vadstena sermons, it seems however that the details from Birgitta’s *vita* and especially extracts from *Revelaciones* were more readily used as material, while thaumaturgical powers do not stand out.<sup>39</sup> Miracles, not to mention the experiences of the miraculés, did not form an important element in the communication. When references to individual miracles can be found, they are typically stripped of details and anonymized so that different cases or beneficiaries are not identifiable. Potentially, then, the story of Cristina’s recovery could have been told under the title “how Birgitta liberated a woman brought to desperation and trembling by a devil.”<sup>40</sup> Close to a century after the canonization hearing, the cases recorded in the canonization records were likely forgotten from the collective oral memory, and the preacher could not resort only to the short, written remarks but needed to diverge from it by using other sources. The canonization dossier was used as a point of reference when composing the feast day sermons, but references to and quotations from the part

<sup>37</sup> “Maledicti erunt, qui contempserint te et condempnati erunt, qui blasphemauerint. Benedicti erunt, qui edificauerint te... Beati omnes, qui diligunt te et qui gaudent super pacem tuam”. UB C317, f 279r, this is an anonymous sermon from the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, see also C 389 f 141v.

<sup>38</sup> “Tanta enim est fama sanctitatis eius ob miraculorum chorcuscacionem, vt admirari non sufficiunt sensus auditorum. Nam in quacumque necessitate quis constitutus fuerit, si cum humili et fideli deuocione eius adiutorium postulauerit, siue in mari, siue in terra, siue sub terra, siue igne vel aere, ipsius meritis saluabitur, vt de illa verificetur illud ewangelicum: *Veni et mare obediunt ei*”. UB C 389 f 141v.

<sup>39</sup> *Relevaciones* as a source for sermons was given in the rule of the order. Andersson & Borgehammar, “The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars”.

<sup>40</sup> “Item qualiter liberavit quendam mulierem in desperatione et tremore posita a diabolo”. UB C75 132r.

compiled by the Birgittine brothers, *Acta*, are rare.<sup>41</sup> As to the trembling demoniac, there are other options for its origin, as cases of demonic possessions are numerous in Birgitta's canonization process, as mentioned.

A sequence of predetermined and stereotypical actions—including emotions and rituals—defining a well-known situation can be termed a cultural script. The script produced by the Vadstena clergy focuses on hierarchy and reverence whilst the personal, inner emotions are not manifest in the experience of the miraculous. Emotional stages so typical of the miracle process in general are not found in this context, nor are they underlined in the spiritual path of the soul to penance and redemption from sins. The script guides an individual to know how to react, but the underlined communal emotions, like shared manifestations of devotion by the laity, are not needed in the Vadstena context. Cristina is clearly depicted as a victim, albeit not necessarily an innocent one, and she is not able to function alone: she does not act agentically. The lay audience of a preacher was not in a similar situation, but they, too, needed the clergy as an intermediary. The proper reaction required collaboration and the interactive parties were the clergy and the listeners. The model for experiencing the miraculous and religious change was built on a hierarchal collaboration between priest brothers and lay pilgrims.

### CONCLUSIONS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN “LIVED REALITY,” CULTURAL SCRIPT, AND EXPERIENCE AS AN ANALYTICAL CONCEPT

The experience under scrutiny here, Christina's conversion to penance and the experience of the miraculous, was constructed on multiple levels, which were intertwined, inseparable, and yet distinct. The immediacy of Cristina's feelings and bodily sensations is available to us only in a mediated form; references with a quotidian flavour were also already the results of negotiation on the familial and communal levels. Her symptoms should be seen as embodied enculturation: the sensory, emotional, and cognitive were commingled, producing the understanding of the affliction and potential cure—for Cristina herself and the other participants. Her bodily

<sup>41</sup>Typically *Attestaciones*, deposition collected in Italy was the part of canonization process used as a background information—not *Acta*. See, for example, C9, 37r-; C286, 446v-50r; C303, 176r-86r; C 317; C331, 172v-78r; C335, 156v-59v.

signs and sensory modalities were interpreted by the local community in a certain way to give meaning and render the situation understandable and ameliorable.

The cultural script produced by the Vadstena clergy was an ideal image of piety confronted by its negative counter image. In this case, the Vadstena brothers had the moral power to form the prevailing interpretation and construct an experience of Cristina's tribulations in which narrative conventions and tropes were an inseparable part. On a general level, the punishment miracle was part of the general cultural script produced by the church, but Vadstena was a specific context nuancing the tribulations of demoniacs. Vadstena Abbey with its priest brothers formed a script, a subcategory to the universalizing discourse of the church, a script where the malice of demons was omnipresent and the fight against them was a crucial building block in Birgitta's sanctity. Her punishing ability as well as the priest brothers' interpretative activity were the outer incentive for conversion to penance. Demons' victims formed the medium carrying this message.

To conceptualize Cristina's tribulations as an "experience" shows how religion-as-lived was a culturally bound social process interacting with other social categories. The demonic presence gave meaning to problematic behaviour that did not fit into accustomed modes of conduct; it justified the preaching agenda and authority of the brothers and participated in the sacralization of relics and Vadstena Abbey. This process of mediation—the amalgamation of sensory elements and bodily signs as well as the requirements of the miracle genre and the patterns produced and contributed to by local clerics—created a model of experiencing, a context-bound way to understand the miraculous in terms of both conceptualization and concretization.

Experiences are social in their very nature, which means all experiences are mediated and situational. "Authenticity" cannot be separated from the medium. Inner sensations, like sensory elements, were used in the text to give meaning to the occurrence, to construct it as an experience in this spatiotemporal context. To give meaning to a personal occurrence, bodily sensations, and inner feelings, communication with others is required. The bodily and the verbal intertwined and were an inseparable part of the meaning-giving process. This inevitably fuses "inner feelings" and "lived reality" with convention and media. This is not a deficiency in the scrutiny of historical experiences—quite the contrary. Approaching "experience"

as an analytical concept rather than a singular occurrence in an individual's life enables us to see its meaning in a wider context that connects various levels. Experience is a holistic phenomenon cutting across the individual, communal, and cultural.

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## CHAPTER 3

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# A Taste of Dissent: Experiences of Heretical Blessed Bread as a Dimension of Lived Religion in Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-century Languedoc

*Saku Pihko*

## INTRODUCTION

Nutrition is necessary for the growth, function, and survival of any living organism. *Homo sapiens*, however, has a huge variety of foodways conditioned by cultural formations. Food is seldom “just food” and often acquires meaning and significance that surpass its nutritive function. Food practices mark identity, and commensality facilitates the formation of

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S. Pihko (✉)  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland  
e-mail: [saku.pihko@tuni.fi](mailto:saku.pihko@tuni.fi)

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bonds between individuals and cohesion within groups.<sup>1</sup> Most known religions ritualize and regulate the use of food and ascribe symbolic value to certain foodstuffs.<sup>2</sup> In the Middle Ages, food was of fundamental existential, economic, and religious concern, and eating could entail a heightened moral and spiritual charge.<sup>3</sup> Central to communal religious life and the salvation of all medieval Christians was the sacrament of the Eucharist. This ritual commemoration of the Last Supper consisted of consuming consecrated bread and wine, in which Christ was believed to be present in body and in blood. Religious foodways were also a point of contention,<sup>4</sup> and dissident groups often had their own food-related rituals and practices. Seen as perversions of orthodox practice,<sup>5</sup> they were of special interests for inquisitors policing lay religiosity, which makes them an interesting object of research for examining conflicting interpretations of experience.

This chapter investigates experiences of allegedly heretical foodways as a dimension of lay lived religion in the context of religious dissidence in medieval Languedoc. Situated in modern-day southern France, Languedoc was deemed a particular hotbed for heresy.<sup>6</sup> In the thirteenth century, papally mandated heresy inquisitors began work in Languedoc, attempting to eradicate heresy through means of legal persecution. They preached of the dangers of heresy and interrogated members of the local populace. An array of penances ranging from public acts of contrition to the

<sup>1</sup> Douglas, *Active Voice*, 124; Jones, *Feast*, 1–2; Kaplan, “Introduction,” 3–4; Lee, *Feasting the Dead*, 1–2, 9; McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 1–7; Méndez-Montoya, *Theology of Food*, 1–3, 5–7, 10; Montanari, *Food Is Culture*, xi–xii, 29, 93–103, 115, 123–125, 133–134; Pilcher, *Food in World History*, 1–4; Tomasik and Vitullo, “At the Table,” xi–xii; Woolgar, *Culture of Food*, 124, 237, 239. On the history of food in general, see for example Fernandéz-Armesto, *Near a Thousand Tables*; Toussaint-Samat, *History of Food*. On food in the Middle Ages in general, see for example Adamson, *Food*; Carlin and Rosenthal, eds, *Food and Eating*.

<sup>2</sup> Boylston, “Food, Life, and Material Religion,” 257–263; Fernandéz-Armesto, *Near a Thousand Tables*, 29–33; Fieldhouse, *Food, Feasts, and Faith*, xxi–xxiv; Kaplan, “Introduction,” 4.

<sup>3</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 1–2; Woolgar, *Culture of Food*, 1, 6–11, 233–235, 239. On food and medieval religion in general, see for example Adamson, *Food*, 181–204; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 140, 216–217, 222–225.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies*, 379 for a translated passage from Dominican inquisitor Bernard Gui’s famous inquisitorial manual, in which he reflects on the heretical practice of blessing bread as a perverse imitation of the Eucharist, using language that does little to hide his contempt.

<sup>6</sup> On medieval Languedoc, see for example Mundy, *Studies*; Paterson, “The South”; Paterson, *World of the Troubadours*.

possibility of being burned at the stake were given to those found guilty of religious transgressions. Inquisitors produced written records of their interrogations, many of which survive to this day.<sup>7</sup> Languedocian inquisition records entail a lot of information about laypeople interacting with so-called good men, a group of ascetic, peripatetic, ritual-working preachers, whose exemplary lifestyle and religious teachings attracted lay devotion. The inquisitors simply referred to them as heretics (*heretici*) in their records. Historians have traditionally known them as the Cathars, but this term is now heavily contested in scholarship, as it was not used at the emic level. Persecution forced the Languedocian good men and their lay supporters to lead an outlawed, clandestine existence before succumbing to permanent extinction in the fourteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Inquisition records contain many references to interactions revolving around food.<sup>9</sup> The good men shared meals together with laypeople, during which bread was often blessed in a ritualized fashion and consumed by those in attendance. The article at hand engages with the history of experiences and lived religion through the vantage point of this phenomenon. What kinds of experiences did the ritualized blessing of bread afford to and impose upon the Languedocian laity? How did these experiences bring about the phenomenon of lived religion, understood here both as the space of religious activities and beliefs for people in the past and as the historical object analysed by historians?

Historical experiences can only be examined in mediated form.<sup>10</sup> Legal records are often among the most promising sources for this pursuit, as long as their possibilities and inherent limitations are understood. This article is based on a wide reading of thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century inquisition records that deal with the heresy of the good men and

<sup>7</sup> On medieval heresy and heresy inquisitions in general, see for example Deane, *History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*; Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*; Peters, *Inquisition*; Prudlo, ed., *Companion to Heresy Inquisitions*.

<sup>8</sup> On the alleged heresy of the Languedocian good men in general, see for example Barber, *Cathars*; Lambert, *Cathars*. For an overview on the current debate about the historical existence of "Catharism," see Sennis, ed., *Cathars in Question*.

<sup>9</sup> Biller, "Why no Food?," 127–129.

<sup>10</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 12. Cf. Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 33 who note with optimism that "[t]he history of lived experience is possible. Experience is accessible. It is limited only in the same way that all histories are limited: by scarcity of sources, by partiality, by the limits of empiricism in the archives."

their lay supporters.<sup>11</sup> Inquisition records are approached from a perspective that understands these documents as selective abstractions of information that was produced through the spoken encounter between the deponents who gave testimony and the inquisitors who questioned them. After the interrogation, the authorities drew up a written record that contains their interpretation of the suspect's alleged transgressions and guilt that could be used as legal evidence. The extant information in these records was thoroughly conditioned and defined by the interpretations of multiple actors at multiple times, the memory of the deponents and their will to inform the authorities, the power wielded by the inquisitors and their ability to exert physical and psychological pressures on the deponents, the questionnaire used by the authorities to structure the interrogation, the shift from talk to writing, the selection of evidence based on the legal prejudice of the authorities, and the mode of representation used by the inquisitor's notaries who wrote the records. Historians interface with the end product of this elongated process of construction when attempting to interpret the past.<sup>12</sup>

In historical scholarship, the concept of experience is sometimes used in a simple, common-sense fashion.<sup>13</sup> In a bid to increase the analytical value of this concept, the chapter at hand utilizes the conceptual language of complexity and emergence borrowed from the natural and social sciences. A complex system is any kind of a system that emerges from interactions and relationships among its constituent parts, but it is always *more than* and *different from* the sum of these parts. The essential properties of a

<sup>11</sup> Languedocian inquisition records are available to historians both as archival manuscripts and modern editions. This article cites MS 609 of the Bibliothèque municipale, Toulouse and MSS Doat 21–28 of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Also cited are records edited in Biller, Bruschi and Sneddon, eds, *Inquisitors and Heretics*; Davis, ed., *Inquisition*; De Labastide, ed., *Registre de l'inquisition*; Douais, ed., *Documents*; Douais, ed., *Sources*; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* (volumes I–III); Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* (volumes I–II); Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*.

<sup>12</sup> For discussion on source-critical issues concerning medieval inquisition records, see for example Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*; Arnold, "Inquisition, Texts and Discourse"; Bruschi, "Magna diligentia"; Bruschi, *Wandering Heretics*.

<sup>13</sup> Kivimäki, "Reittejä kokemushistoriaan," 10. On the history of experiences as a scholarly field of focus in general, see for example Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 18–33; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 11–14; Kivimäki, "Reittejä kokemushistoriaan."

complex system are properties of the irreducible whole.<sup>14</sup> The proposal here is to understand historical experiences—in this case, experiences of allegedly heretical blessed bread—as complex phenomena that are emergent from more basic components like actions and interpretations. As a logical continuation, lived religion, too, is understood as a higher order phenomenon emerging from the interplay of more basic components, namely, individual experiences.<sup>15</sup>

An investigation into the intricacies related to blessed bread in medieval Languedoc can serve to illuminate wider dynamics that defined premodern experiences and lived religion. It is also one way to answer calls for more focus on laypeople involved in religious dissidence, as they have sometimes been ascribed only a passive role.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, examining dissident foodways places emphasis on the material, sensory, and embodied aspects of living out one's religion in the Middle Ages. Claire Taylor has even argued that from the viewpoint of the good men, the blessing of bread was a compromise ritual catering to the expectations of their lay supporters, as the good men seem to have held a dualist ideology that regarded all created matter as evil and tainted.<sup>17</sup> Despite these claims, no systematic treatment of the phenomenon that is based on a reading of all of the evidence in Languedocian inquisition records exists. Ultimately, the purpose of this article is to demonstrate the value of approaching medieval inquisition records from the viewpoint provided by the history of experiences and lived religion, as this can lead to deeper historical understanding and theoretical sophistication.

<sup>14</sup> Capra, *Web of Life*, 29–30, 36–37; Morowitz, *Emergence of Everything*, 14, 20. For more detailed discussion on defining complex systems, see for example Mitchell, *Complexity*, 12–13.

<sup>15</sup> This approach is inspired by the so-called Building Block Approach to human experience that has been developed by Egil Asprem and Ann Taves. However, the article does not adhere in any strict sense to their “reverse engineering” methodology. On the Building Block Approach, see Asprem and Taves, “Building Blocks.”

<sup>16</sup> Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 120, 122–123; Arnold, “Cathar Middle Ages,” 77–78; Pegg, “Innocent III,” 289–290, 300; Pegg, “Paradigm of Catharism,” 35, 52; Sparks, *Heresy, Inquisition and Life Cycle*, 1–2.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition*, 196. Taylor's argument seems to build upon Hamilton, “Cathars and Christian Perfection,” 16–17, who described the ritual of blessing bread shortly and noted that the good men attached no sacramental significance to the ceremony and “regarded bread as part of the evil creation, and one can only infer that they performed this ceremony because they had derived it from some more orthodox tradition of worship and believed it to be of apostolic origin.” Cf. Miller, “Materiality,” 1, who claims that an underlying principle found in many religions is that wisdom has been accredited to those who claim that materiality is merely an apparent façade behind which that which is real is hidden. Nevertheless, he notes that material culture is often the medium through which this conviction is expressed.

## EATING BREAD BLESSED BY THE GOOD MEN

Medieval lived religion took place at the core of communal life where religious ideas and concepts were experienced and expressed through everyday participation in collective performance and ritual. Rituals were far from hollow ceremonies or superficial forms, but an essential dimension of living out religion that afforded affective experiences to participants and enhanced social cohesion between them.<sup>18</sup> The sharing of food was often ritualized, and foodstuffs were routinely blessed in many contexts. Staple foods, like bread, were understood as having the potential of acquiring sacred qualities through the act of blessing.<sup>19</sup> The ritualized foodways of the Languedocian good men can be seen as derivative interpretations of these wider cultural themes.<sup>20</sup>

In the context of inquisitorial interrogation, the interaction between the deponents and the authorities was usually structured using a ready-made list of questions posed by the inquisitor to the deponent who testified under oath. These questions reflected the inquisitorial emphasis on suspicious actions and other external signs of religious non-conformity at the expense of deeper probing into dissident beliefs.<sup>21</sup> The questions were standardized, but they varied according to the specific transgressions of which the individual deponents were suspected. When someone was confronted under suspicion of interactions with the good men, usually referred to as heretics in the records, questions about sharing food and eating bread blessed by them usually ensued.

<sup>18</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 3–5.

<sup>19</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Vuolanto, “Religious Practices and Social Interaction,” 21; Woolgar, *Culture of Food*, 61–65, 219. On bread and religion in general, see Fieldhouse, *Food, Feasts, and Faith*, 73–77. See also Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams*, 17–18 for reflections on the potential polysemy of bread in the premodern mindscape.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 133 who notes that “[...] the rituals surrounding Catharism were not invented from thin air, but drew on existing interactions that performed a variety of symbolic meanings.”

<sup>21</sup> Biller, “Deep Is the Heart of Man”; Bruschi, *Wandering Heretics*, 190; Pegg, *Corruption of Angels*, 45–51; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, 134–135, 191.



Many of the deponents in Languedocian inquisition records denied having ever eaten bread blessed by the alleged heretics.<sup>22</sup> Some claimed they did not remember doing so.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, amidst these blanket denials there are also a great number of references to deponents admitting they had indeed eaten of the bread blessed by the good men or that they were aware of other people doing so. Admissions can be found throughout the Languedocian material, but certain inquisitors seem to have been especially interested in gathering evidence about heretical blessed bread. Typical, and thus illustrative, is an entry found in the 1240 deposition of a certain Petrus Vinol given to the Dominican inquisitor Friar Ferrier. Among other things, the record reads that the deponent and another man ate with certain heretics at the same table and of bread blessed by them. They also ate other foods that were placed on the table and said “bless” when they first tasted each available food and drink. To each “bless,” the heretics replied “may God bless you.”<sup>24</sup> For someone who is confronted by information from inquisition records for the first time, a description like this may seem like a privileged glimpse into the foodways of the Languedocian good men, but a seasoned reader of this material knows that the cited passage is a ready-made textual apparatus used by the notaries who drew up these records. Similarly, even verbatim iterations of descriptions of eating blessed bread are repeated *en masse* in Ferrier’s records, and analogous versions can also be found in the records of other inquisitors.<sup>25</sup> In these cases, talk during the interrogation is almost

<sup>22</sup>For references to explicit denials in response to being questioned about heretical blessed bread, see for example Douais, ed., *Documents*, 293; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* I, 207, 372, 412, 423, 437, 445, 484, 505; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* II, 17, 18, 153, 339; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* III, 71, 80, 98, 102, 309, 367, 386, 405; MS609, 164<sup>v</sup>; MS Doat 22, 207<sup>r</sup>–207<sup>v</sup>, 243<sup>r</sup>–243<sup>v</sup>; MS Doat 23, 87<sup>r</sup>, 117<sup>r</sup>, 118<sup>r</sup>, 126<sup>r</sup>, 143<sup>r</sup>; 151<sup>r</sup>, 153<sup>v</sup>, 156<sup>r</sup>, 219<sup>v</sup>, 223<sup>r</sup>, 225<sup>r</sup>, 228<sup>r</sup>, 232<sup>v</sup>, 240<sup>v</sup>, 247<sup>r</sup>, 346<sup>v</sup>; MS Doat 24, 11<sup>r</sup>, 13<sup>v</sup>, 14<sup>v</sup>, 20<sup>r</sup>, 20<sup>v</sup>, 29<sup>r</sup>, 49<sup>r</sup>, 121<sup>r</sup>, 124<sup>r</sup>, 126<sup>r</sup>, 174<sup>r</sup>, 175<sup>r</sup>, 177<sup>r</sup>, 196<sup>r</sup>, 208<sup>r</sup>; MS Doat 25, 4<sup>r</sup>–5<sup>r</sup>; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*, 150, 326.

<sup>23</sup>See e.g. Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* II, 470, 471, 474, 477.

<sup>24</sup>MS Doat 22, 256<sup>r</sup>: “ipse testis et dictus Bartholomeus comederunt cum dictis haereticis in eadem mensa de pane ab haeretico benedicto, et de aliis mense appositis, et in quolibet genere cibi, et in primo potu noviter sumpto dicebat quilibet per se benedicite, et haeretici respondebant in quolibet benedicite Deus vos benedicat.”

<sup>25</sup>For standardized references—sometimes as standalone entries, sometimes embedded within longer narratives—to people eating of the bread blessed by the alleged heretics once or multiple times, seeing others eat of it, or simply seeing bread being blessed, see De Labastide, ed., *Registre de l’inquisition*, 334, 356; Douais, ed., *Documents*, 11, 12, 17, 19, 25, 27, 34, 39, 43, 50, 53, 56, 59, 60, 63, 71, 78, 79, 82; Douais, ed., *Sources*, 126, 128;

completely obscured as a result of standardization and abstraction. All that can really be known is that in response to inquisitorial questioning, many deponents admitted to having eaten bread blessed by the alleged heretics.

Regardless of the epistemic limitations imposed upon the historian by notarial techniques and the inquisitorial mode of representation that defines the bulk of the extant evidence, the sheer quantity of these references points towards the prevalence of experiences related to consuming bread blessed by the good men. A great number of deponents subjected to questioning recalled having participated in ritualized interactions that revolved around food and eating, and experiences like these seem to have been very common for those Languedocian laypeople who saw spiritual value in the good men despite their outlawed status. Experiences of sharing food with the good men and eating bread blessed by them were a tangible, material, and sensory dimension of the process through which people lived out their religion amidst their daily lives.<sup>26</sup> While standardized entries reveal nothing about the nuances of these ritual interactions, they serve as important quantitative evidence regarding the ubiquity of the phenomenon of blessing bread practised by the good men, which should be kept in mind when proceeding with a closer reading of more detailed cases.

Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* I, 318, 399, 472, 482; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 458; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 117, 180, 251, 292; MS 609, 3<sup>r</sup>, 26<sup>r</sup>, 65<sup>r</sup>, 95<sup>v</sup>, 122<sup>r</sup>, 141<sup>v</sup>, 163<sup>v</sup>, 184<sup>v</sup>, 197<sup>r</sup>, 220<sup>v</sup>, 234<sup>r</sup> & passim; MS Doat 21, 186<sup>v</sup>–187<sup>r</sup>, 197<sup>v</sup>, 198<sup>v</sup>, 200<sup>r</sup>, 202<sup>r</sup>, 202<sup>v</sup>, 216<sup>r</sup>, 217<sup>r</sup>, 221<sup>r</sup>, 226<sup>v</sup>, 227<sup>r</sup>, 233<sup>v</sup>, 243<sup>r</sup>, 256<sup>r</sup>, 296<sup>r</sup>, 307<sup>v</sup>, 316<sup>v</sup>, 317<sup>v</sup>, 318<sup>v</sup>, 319<sup>r</sup>, 319<sup>v</sup>, 320<sup>r</sup>; Doat 22, 28<sup>r</sup>, 141<sup>r</sup>, 158<sup>v</sup>, 173<sup>r</sup>, 173<sup>v</sup>–174<sup>r</sup>, 174<sup>r</sup>, 175<sup>v</sup>, 182<sup>v</sup>, 207<sup>v</sup>, 208<sup>r</sup>, 208<sup>v</sup>, 215<sup>r</sup>, 234<sup>r</sup>, 244<sup>r</sup>, 256<sup>r</sup>, 261<sup>r</sup>, 267<sup>r</sup>, 276<sup>v</sup>; MS Doat 23, 4<sup>r</sup>, 9<sup>r</sup>, 13<sup>r</sup>, 23<sup>v</sup>, 36<sup>r</sup>, 42<sup>v</sup>, 60<sup>v</sup>, 71<sup>v</sup>–72<sup>r</sup>, 97<sup>r</sup>, 122<sup>r</sup>, 132<sup>v</sup>, 147<sup>v</sup>, 159<sup>r</sup>, 167<sup>r</sup>, 186<sup>r</sup>, 195<sup>v</sup>, 208<sup>v</sup>, 235<sup>v</sup>, 242<sup>r</sup>, 258<sup>v</sup>, 278<sup>r</sup>, 283<sup>v</sup>–284<sup>r</sup>, 301<sup>v</sup>, 318<sup>v</sup>–319<sup>r</sup>, 322<sup>r</sup>, 340<sup>v</sup> & passim; MS Doat 24, 32<sup>r</sup>, 33<sup>r</sup>, 38<sup>r</sup>–38<sup>v</sup>, 71<sup>v</sup>, 72<sup>v</sup>, 73<sup>r</sup>, 80<sup>r</sup>, 87<sup>r</sup>, 129<sup>v</sup>, 149<sup>v</sup>, 174<sup>r</sup>, 184<sup>r</sup>, 199<sup>r</sup>, 205<sup>v</sup>, 211<sup>r</sup>, 212<sup>v</sup>, 213<sup>r</sup>, 214<sup>r</sup>, 214<sup>v</sup>, 215<sup>v</sup>, 220<sup>v</sup>, 227<sup>r</sup>, 230<sup>v</sup>; MS Doat 25, 12<sup>r</sup>–12<sup>v</sup>, 30<sup>r</sup>, 68<sup>v</sup>, 83<sup>v</sup>, 85<sup>v</sup>, 92<sup>r</sup>, 142<sup>v</sup>, 144<sup>r</sup>, 246<sup>v</sup>, 299<sup>r</sup>, 299<sup>v</sup>, 302<sup>r</sup>, 305<sup>r</sup>, 311<sup>v</sup>, 312<sup>r</sup>, 313<sup>v</sup>, 314<sup>r</sup>, 315<sup>r</sup>; MS Doat 26, 14<sup>r</sup>, 16<sup>v</sup>, 74<sup>v</sup>, 290<sup>r</sup>; MS Doat 27, 102<sup>r</sup>, 198<sup>v</sup>; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*, 124, 304; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 212, 218, 234, 240, 244, 248, 264, 270, 274, 286, 292, 294, 296, 302, 346, 368, 370, 382, 386, 394, 406, 430, 516, 586, 638, 646, 696, 702, 706, 760, 792, 922, 948 & passim; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* II, 996, 1000, 1100, 1104, 1478. Cf. MS Doat 24, 8<sup>v</sup>; MS Doat 28, 150<sup>r</sup>; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 192, for references to deponents being uncertain whether bread given to them by the alleged heretics had been blessed. See also MS 609, 168<sup>v</sup>, 249<sup>v</sup>; MS Doat 21, 214<sup>v</sup>, 231<sup>r</sup>, 234<sup>r</sup>, 234<sup>v</sup>, 235<sup>r</sup>, 241<sup>v</sup>–242<sup>r</sup>, 249<sup>r</sup>, 254<sup>r</sup> for references to bread blessed by the Waldensians.

<sup>26</sup> For reflections on eating as a spiritual experience, see for example Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 139; Méndez-Montoya, *Theology of Food*, 1–2.

## THE RITUAL OF BLESSING BREAD

Rituals have the power of making the sacred real and visible to the senses amidst everyday life. Rituals were of central importance to medieval lived religion, which built upon ritualized corporeal experiences that entailed sensorimotor elements and bodily practices. While intimate and embodied, rituals are simultaneously social and interactive, as they tend to be culturally sanctioned and collectively performed. Oft repeated rituals can promote social cohesion and serve to enhance feelings of identification with one's group.<sup>27</sup> Witnessing the good men bless bread and then consuming it with them was one way to engage with the sacred that was available to the Languedocian laity.

Ceremonial meals of one kind or another, laden with ritualized gestures and symbolic significance, are a part of almost every culture and religion.<sup>28</sup> For the medieval inquisitors and other churchmen, the ritual practices of alleged heretics were perversions of orthodox rituals.<sup>29</sup> But what can inquisition records tell us about the ritual performance through which the Languedocian good men blessed bread? Reading through the evidence in search of descriptions of the ritual, one is confronted by a varying scale of abstraction regarding the level of detail and nuance. For example, Ramundus Fabri, a penitent sentenced in 1305 by the inquisitor Bernard Gui, is stated to have eaten of the bread that heretics hold in their hands while saying some words at the beginning of a meal.<sup>30</sup> Many references are even vaguer, as they resort to using ready-made notarial shorthand, simply stating that people had seen the way bread was blessed (*vidit modum*

<sup>27</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 181, 183; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, "Religion as Experience," 2–3; Katajala-Peltomaa & Vuolanto "Religious Practices an Social Interaction", 19; McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 13, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 136–137.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 125. Cf. Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 318, for a unique entry stating that one of the sentenced individuals had often eaten of the bread blessed by heretics, or rather cursed by them, that they call bread of the holy prayer. See also Wakefield and Evans, *Heretics*, 305, 331, 368–369, 382, for purported descriptions of the ritual written by various orthodox churchmen.

<sup>30</sup> Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 290: "comedit de illo pane quem heretici tenent in manibus et dicunt aliqua verba in principio mense."

*benedictionis dicti panis*),<sup>31</sup> or that the alleged heretics blessed bread according to their rite (*secundum ritum suum*),<sup>32</sup> according to their way (*more suo*),<sup>33</sup> or in the heretical way (*modo hereticali*).<sup>34</sup> References like these, once again, tell nothing about the ritual, only that the deponents admitted it had taken place and that the authorities then chose to represent information about it in a thoroughly standardized manner. In some cases, the vagueness is attributed to the limits of the deponent's comprehension and memory.<sup>35</sup>

Alongside these standardized entries, certain unique cases can be found, which afford more details about the ritual practice. For example, the record of the deposition given to the authorities in 1308 by Petrus de Lusenacho reads that at the beginning of a meal Petrus Auterii, who was one of the good men, took one half of a bread and standing on his feet held it using a cloth towel that he wore around his neck. He began saying the Lord's Prayer over the bread and then continued to speak softly between his teeth for a while. After this, he broke the bread into pieces with his knife and placed the pieces on the table, first before himself and then in front of all the others. According to the record, he also told the deponent that they call it the bread of holy prayer.<sup>36</sup> The deposition of de Lusenacho is exceptional in the sense that he was a cleric trained in reading and writing, and when he was cited to appear before the inquisitor Geoffroy d'Ablis, he came with a written confession—much of which was copied into the record of his deposition. Due to this unusual arrangement, the record affords information about the way in which the deponent himself chose to represent the ritual of blessing bread.

<sup>31</sup> Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 228, 232, 260, 278, 374, 376, 380, 390, 410, 412, 416, 452, 464, 470, 672; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* II, 1000.

<sup>32</sup> Davis, *Inquisition*, 127; MS Doat 22, 51<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> MS Doat 21, 316<sup>r</sup>; MS Doat 23, 203<sup>r</sup>, 211<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 175, 177, 178, 183, 189, 190, 191, 199, 202, 208.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. Davis, *Inquisition*, 256; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*, 268, 334.

<sup>36</sup> Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*, 388: "in principio mense dictus Petrus Auterii accepit usque ad dimidiam placentam et stans pedes, tenendo dictum panem cum manutergiis que posuerat in collo suo, incepit dicere desuper 'Pater noster' et postea loquutus fuit suaviter inter dentes per unam pausam. Postea fregit dictum panem cum cutello suo et posuit in mensa coram se primo et coram quolibet nostrum et dixit tunc michi quod hoc vocabant ipsi panem orationis sancte." Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 298, 300, 318, also makes three distinct references to heretical blessed bread as the bread of holy prayer.

Details of the ritual can also be found in the long and nuanced records of multiple subsequent depositions given to the bishop-inquisitor Jacques Fournier in 1323 by Petrus Maurini, a long-time affiliate of the good men, who had often been present when bread was blessed. His records entail a description of the ritual very similar to that of de Lusenacho's.<sup>37</sup> Another entry describes how the lay participants stood up uncovering their heads when the bread was blessed, and how the bread was handed out to those in attendance. Moreover, the good man who blessed the loaf reminded them not to leave behind any crumbs.<sup>38</sup> Maurini also recalled multiple occasions on which bread was blessed in a secretive manner adapted to the situation at hand,<sup>39</sup> which implies situational flexibility to these ritual solemnities. Sometimes it also seems to be the case that once a longer description of the ritual was recorded, later references to similar activities could be represented using concise shorthand.<sup>40</sup> Less standardized entries like these found in de Lusenacho's and Maurini's depositions provide at least some notion of the way in which the rituals were described to the

<sup>37</sup> Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 173: "In principio etiam cene dictus hereticus sollempniter panem benedixit modo hereticali, ponendo unum caput tersorii super humerum suum, et cum alia parte tersorii tenendo panem benedicebat dictum panem, dicendo verba submisse, que ipse loquens non audivit. Deinde fregit dictum panem et dedit partem ipse loquenti et aliam dicte Ramunde; quam cum acceperunt dixerunt: 'Benedicite senher', et hereticus respondebat: 'Deus vos benedicat'; et comederunt de dicto pane ipse et dicta Ramunda et dicta Guillelma et cum hoc de carnibus." See also Davis, *Inquisition*, 124, for a shorter description of the ritual.

<sup>38</sup> Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 232: "[...] quando benedicebatur panis per hereticum modo supradicto, omnes credentes stabant pedes et deponebant capucium, quousque dictus panis fuisset benedictus. Et quando scinderat dictus hereticus dictum panem, primam cissionem dabat primo credenti, et secundam secundo, et sic successive; et quilibet quando recipiebat dictam cissionem dicebat dicto heretico: 'Benedicite, senher', et dictus hereticus respondebat: 'Deus vos benedicat et ducat ad bonum finem'. Et si de dicto pane benedicto credentes faciebant offas, oportebat quod extegerent cum alio pane scutellam vel cifum, sic quod nulla mica remaneret ibi de dicto pane."

<sup>39</sup> For example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 165: "Et unus de dictis hereticis benedixit panem in principio mense modo hereticali secreta, non tamen sollempniter modo ponendo tersorium in humero." For similar references, see Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 148–149, 158, 164, 186, 187.

<sup>40</sup> The use of shorthand references was a standard part of scribal practice in the context of heresy inquisitions. For references to heretics blessing bread *modo supradicto* or with other similar shorthand, see for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 32, 37, 41, 71; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 137, 153, 198, 231, 232.

inquisitors.<sup>41</sup> While it cannot be known how much similar information was suppressed in cases where the authorities opted for a more standardized representation, these more unique descriptions do imply that laypeople were exposed to and actively engaged in these rituals and could later remember details about them when subjected to inquisitorial questioning. Participating in the ritualized blessing of bread and its consumption afforded laypeople embodied experiences that provided sensory input through vision, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. This multimodal nature of the sense experiences afforded by blessed bread underlines its prominence as a dimension of material lived religion in the context of Languedocian dissidence.

Details about the ritualized gestures and speech acts that formed the core of these dissident solemnities are certainly interesting. However, it should not be forgotten that the lived experience of attending a ritual performance emerges from the totality of the situational context in which it is embedded. One aspect of this ambient situation that by necessity contributed to the experiences of participation in the blessing of bread was talk about the ritual and its meaning. Turning again to Petrus Maurini's deposition, there is a unique entry related to oral propagation in the context of blessing bread. After describing the ritual in a familiar fashion, the record purports to represent information about a discussion concerning the meaning of blessed bread. It reads that the good man told the deponent that he blessed bread in the same manner as God had blessed it and that he had blessed it in representation of the significance given by God to this blessing. He also said that those who are of the Roman church say that bread becomes the body of God, which it nevertheless was not. He added that the heretics themselves say that it is blessed bread and that it was so, because God had instituted it thus. Giving some of the bread to the deponent and another man, he told them that when receiving bread from him, they ought to say "bless, *senher*," to which he would reply "may God bless you." After this, he broke the bread into pieces and told them to say "bless, *senher*" when they began eating it, and to eat the bread at the beginning of their meal. Moreover, he warned them not to leave behind any crumbs of this bread as it was a great sin and claimed that believers should always carry with them some of the bread and eat it at the beginning of each meal, saying "bless." The record states that the deponent did

<sup>41</sup> For more discussion on the details of the ritual, see for example Duvernoy, *Religione dei Catari*, 185–186.

as he was told to by the heretic.<sup>42</sup> This didactic dimension is usually obscured in the records,<sup>43</sup> but it seems that at least on some occasions the ritualized blessing of bread was accompanied by teachings regarding the significance of the act and its juxtaposition with Catholic practices. There seem to also have been prescriptions regarding how laypeople were expected to behave and participate, and how the bread was to be treated and utilized after it had been blessed.

Moreover, it seems that laypeople, too, sometimes contributed to the interpretative context of the ritual situation by talking about blessed bread. One unique entry, found in the 1321 deposition of Arnaldus Cicredi, presents a nuanced but familiar description of the ritual blessing and distribution of bread during a shared meal. However, the record also reads that a laywoman called Guillelma told the deponent that the bread had been blessed. Afterwards, when the deponent had seen the same heretic frequently bless bread in a similar manner at the beginning of meals, he asked Guillelma about the virtue of the bread. According to the record, Guillelma replied that the bread had a hundredfold the virtue of the bread

<sup>42</sup> Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 133–134: “dictus Iacobus Auterii hereticus benedixit panem modo infrascripto; posuit enim partem cuiusdam tersorii super collum suum, et postea cum manu dextra involuta cum dicto tersorio accepit placentam, et dicens aliqua verba submisit que non audivit ipse loquens, ut dixit, dictus hereticus modo hereticali benedixit dictum panem. Dixit ipsi loquenti quod illo modo Deus benedixerat panem sicut ipse benedixerat eum, et in representationem significationis quo Deus panem benedixerat, hereticus benedixerat dictum panem; et quod illi qui sunt de Ecclesia romana in illa significatione dicebant quod panis efficiebatur corpus Dei, quod tamen non erat. Set ipsi heretici dicebant quod erat panis benedictus, et ita etiam erat, quia sic Deus instituerat de pane benedicto. Dedit ipsi loquenti et dicto Petro Montanerii dictus hereticus, et dixit eis quod dum dictum panem recipiebant ab eo, debebant dicere: ‘Benedicite, senher’, et dictus hereticus respondebat: ‘Deus vos benedicat’. Deinde dictus hereticus dictum panem fregit, et postea dixit eis quando inceperent comedere dictum panem dicerent: ‘Benedicite, senher’, et quod dictum panem in principio comestionis comederent, et etiam quod si non haberent appetitum comedendi, non ponerent ipsum in scutella vel cifo quod ibi remanere posset aliquid de dicto pane benedicto, set quod ipsum comederent siccum; si vero appetitum comedendi haberent, tunc dictum panem possent ponere in scutella vel cifo cum alio pane, et precaverent tamen sibi quod nulla mica vel pars dicti panis in scutella vel cifo remaneret, dicens quod magnum peccatum erat dimittere aliquid de dicto pane. Dixit etiam eis dictus hereticus quod credentes semper debebant portare de dicto pane et comedere de eo in principio cuiuslibet comestionis, semper dicendo ‘Benedicite’, et ipse loquens predicta fecerat ut dixerat dictus hereticus.” Duvernoy, *Religione dei Catari*, 187, also notes this case.

<sup>43</sup> For somewhat similar cases that entail information about teachings related to the ritual and peripheral activities, see for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 41–42; MS Doat 23, 211<sup>r</sup>.

that was blessed by priests in church on Sundays, even though the bread was not signed with a cross nor sprinkled with holy water.<sup>44</sup> This implies that experiences of dissident rituals could also entail a dimension of lay interpretations and communication about the value of blessed bread. The meaning of ritual performances was not handed down to laypeople from above. Rather, acts and ideas were interpreted by their audience, who then formulated their own interpretations and spoke about them to other people in their communities. This information could subsequently influence the meaning attributed to future experiences. Guillelma's alleged words also imply that even the laity sometimes juxtaposed dissident rituals with their perceived orthodox counterparts. This reminds us that while inquisitorial sources frame information about lay experiences in light of their allegedly transgressive qualities and thus perhaps twist the evidence to emphasize conscious dissidence at the expense of fluidity and nuance in religious ideas and practices, the option to dissent really was a choice some laypeople were confronted with at the level of lived experiences prior to inquisitorial interpretations and categorizations.

While inquisition records seldom contain information about the details and practicalities of the ritualized blessing of bread, a few rare but evocative cases suggest that participating in ritual dining with the good men offered laypeople a dynamic context of engagement with religious practices and teachings. This dimension of lived religion was delineated, in part, by peripheral talk and propagation that ascribed potential meaning to the experiences of the participants, affording them with information and opportunities for interpretation and agency.

<sup>44</sup> Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 27: "ibidem dixit dicta Guillelma ipsi loquenti quod dictus panis erat benedictus [...]. Et cum ipse postea frequenter videret quod dictus hereticus taliter panem benedicebat in principio mense, interrogavit dictam Guillelman quam virtutem habebat ille panis sic benedictus, que respondit ei quod dictus panis maiorem virtutem cencies habebat quam panis quem benedicatur per sacerdotes in ecclesia in die dominica, licet non fiat signum crucis super dictum panem nec spergatur aqua benedicta."



## DISTRIBUTING BLESSED BREAD IN THE LANGUEDOCIAN COMMUNITIES

Lived religion was and is a way for people to interact and participate in their communities.<sup>45</sup> The bread blessed by the Languedocian good men seems to have provided opportunities for such participatory interactions, as inquisition records imply that it was often distributed on a person-to-person basis in local communities. When the authorities found out that laypeople had taken it upon themselves to supply others with blessed bread, they seem to have favoured documenting it in above average detail. For the historian, this amounts to interesting evidence about lay initiative and agency in the context of lived religion.

Coming into contact with laypeople distributing blessed bread was one way of encountering dissident proselytization. The highly standardized and often repetitive record of a mass-inquisition conducted in 1245–1246 reads that one day, the deponent Willelmus Andrea had met another man identified as Willelmus de Vilarsel on the street in the village of Laurac. According to the record, the man asked the deponent if he wanted blessed bread, to which the deponent responded that he did. The man gave the deponent some of the bread and afterwards the man told the deponent that the bread he had given him was bread blessed by heretics.<sup>46</sup> Variations on the same theme can also be found in other records. For example, a certain Johanna, one of the penitents sentenced by Bernard Gui in 1312, had allegedly received a small piece of bread from a woman who told her that it was the bread of God and that it was sent to her by Petrus Auterii (who was one of the good men) so that she could eat it. Johanna had accepted the bread and placed it in a certain unspecified location.<sup>47</sup> Many such entries are quite terse,<sup>48</sup> but it is worth turning, once again, to the depositions of Petrus Maurini, in which an entry states that Maurini had

<sup>45</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, “Religion as Experience,” 2.

<sup>46</sup> MS 609, 76v: “quada(m) die obviavit W(ille)mo de Vilarsel i(n) quada(m) carreria apud Laurac et tu(n)c d(i)c(tu)s W(ille)l(m)u)s dix(it) ip(s)i t(esti) si volebat de pane b(e)n(e)d(i)c(t)o et ip(s)e r(espon)dit q(uo)d sic et tu(n)c d(i)c(tu)s W(ille)lmus dedit ip(s)i t(esti) de illo pane et postea ip(s)e W(ille)l(m)u)s dix(it) ip(s)i t(esti) q(uo)d ille panis q(ue)m ip(s)e ded(er)at erat panis b(e)n(e)d(i)c(tu)s ab her(eti)cis.”

<sup>47</sup> Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 616: “[...] quadam vice dicta Petrona portavit dicte Johanne unam parvam petiam panis, dicens quod erat panis de Deo et Petrus Auterii mittebat eum sibi ut comederet et ipsa accepit et posuit in quodam loco.”

<sup>48</sup> See for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* I, 284–285; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 422, 479–480; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 270; MS

gone to a certain village bringing with him bread that had been blessed by a heretic. On behalf of this heretic, he gave the bread to a woman saying that *le senher* had sent her blessed bread. The woman accepted the bread, said “bless” and kissed the bread. The record also describes how she then broke the bread and gave some to her daughter, telling her that it was blessed bread.<sup>49</sup> It seems that the role played by Languedocian laypeople who distributed blessed bread in their communities could be of vital importance, as it allowed for participation by proxy for those who had not attended the ritualized meals. It is likely that the perceived importance of such options even increased towards the end of the thirteenth century, as inquisitorial persecution intensified and drove the good men and their lay supporters more and more towards a clandestine existence. For those who stepped up and took initiative, the experience of participating in the upkeep of these dissident structures in the face of persecution was a concrete, practical way to live out religious choices.

Nonetheless, while the evidence concerning the social practicalities of distributing blessed bread implies some sense of communality among those who saw spiritual value in the good men and their bread, it is quite possible that these communities were fluid and situational in lived reality. For the authorities, participation in the distribution of blessed bread was clear evidence of religious transgression, and thus a sign of the suspect belonging to a heretical sect. The inquisitor’s perspective emphasized heretical depravity as the driving force of such activities, effectively obscuring other underlying motives. The motives that brought about experiences of distributing blessed bread in one’s community are irretrievably lost to us and may not always have been clear to the historical actors themselves. Nonetheless, it seems pertinent to attempt seeing these activities from a wider perspective and to remember that they were embedded in the general dynamics of social life. Collaboration of all kinds is typical to

Doat 25, 5<sup>r</sup>, 7<sup>r</sup>–7<sup>v</sup>, 210<sup>v</sup>–211<sup>r</sup>; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 396, 444, 610–612, 684, 690, 892, 900, 904; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* II, 1480.

<sup>49</sup>Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* III, 177: “Et in crastinum mane dictus hereticus benedixit modo hereticali unam placentam et dedit ipsi loquenti, ut ipsam portaret supra dicte Mersendi apud Beysetum ex parte eius [...]. Et ipse loquens ivit apud Beysetum, et portavit dictam placentam per dictum hereticum benedictum, quam dedit ex parte dixti heretici dicte Mersendi, dicens ei quod le senher mittebat ei de pane benedicto; quam placentam accepit dicta Mersendis dicendo ‘benedicite’, et osculata fuit dictam placentam. Deinde fregit eam et dedit panem dicte Iohanne filie, dicens ei quod panis benedictus erat [...] et tunc dicta Mersendis et dicta filia eius comederunt de dicto pane benedicto.”

humans and people tend to be helpful to each other in a variety of ways.<sup>50</sup> We are often driven by an innate aspiration to be relevant, and in order to appear as such, we must be in possession of something that can be shared with others for their benefit. Even risks and other costs to the individual are not always enough to limit such activities. This inherent drive to be relevant can be seen as essential for understanding all human communication.<sup>51</sup> It necessarily acquires historically specific avenues of manifestation and can arguably be interpreted as influencing a whole variety of social actions. Looking at our evidence, it seems that distributing blessed bread to others, informing them of what it was and what it was worth, and prompting them to eat it for spiritual benefit are examples of ways in which people in medieval Languedoc could be relevant in their communities. This is not a call for the biological reductionism of these experiences nor a denial of possible sectarian loyalties and conscious dissent as motivating factors. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the myriad ways in which experiences were embedded in their wider context. These subtle entanglements illustrate the irreducible complexity of these emergent phenomena.

#### INTERPRETATIONS AND BELIEFS CONCERNING THE VALUE OF BLESSED BREAD

The world is not first experienced and then interpreted, as experience itself emerges as a result of an on-going interpretative process, without which reality would appear as chaos. Experiences cannot exist without meaning, as they reflect the ways in which people make sense of and explain reality from their own contextualized and spatiotemporally situated position. Religion-as-lived revolves around the interpretation of religious ideas and practices. As an analytical framework, the history of experiences draws attention to these interpretative processes and ascribed meanings.<sup>52</sup> When investigating baked goods of spiritual worth, it should be noted that while meaning per se is something that material things do not inherently possess but is something ascribed to them by people, it is also the case that the material world influences historical actors through its sheer physicality,

<sup>50</sup>Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, 5–7, 13, 72–73, 82–88, 185–186. See also Tomasello, *Why We Cooperate*.

<sup>51</sup>Dessalles, *Why We Talk*, 276–281, 290–293, 325, 350, 354.

<sup>52</sup>Chandler, *Semiotics*, 2, 8, 11; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 11–13; Lehtonen, *Merkitysten maailma*, 16.

which cannot be completely reduced to language. Material things, in this case blessed bread, are by no means passive, meaning-bearing vessels, but a vibrant, tangible part of historical experiences.<sup>53</sup>

Dissident rituals were given a highly specific interpretation by the authorities who documented information about them as proof of heresy. But what can inquisition records tell us about the beliefs and meanings that laypeople ascribed to bread blessed by the good men? Based on the evidence, it seems that many individuals in medieval Languedoc saw spiritual value in the bread blessed by the alleged heretics, even though details about lay interpretations are often obscured under the standardized façade of the records. For example, a woman identified as Guillelma Molceria, who was sentenced for her religious transgressions in 1309, is stated to have eaten once of the blessed bread of the heretics, and the record adds that she had great devotion towards it.<sup>54</sup> An earlier deposition from 1243 reads that a man gave the deponent certain bread to eat and told him he ought to value it as if St Peter had blessed it, because the good men had eaten from it and it survived them.<sup>55</sup> There is also a longer, more detailed entry that suggests similar sentiments. The 1324 deposition of Bernardus Martini (son of the above-mentioned Petrus Maurini) reads that together with his brother Arnaldus, he met two good men who were hiding in their father's dovecot. When they were leaving, Arnaldus allegedly told the deponent to fetch bread from their house and to bring it to him. The deponent did as he was asked but remained outside while his brother re-entered the dovecot with the bread. According to the record, the deponent did not see what was done with it, but after a while his brother came out bringing him a piece of bread and a cup of wine, telling the deponent to drink the wine and eat the bread because the holy men had blessed them. The deponent admitted doing as he was told and believing that it

<sup>53</sup> Immonen, "Sotkuinen aineellisuus," 194–196. For discussion on the growing scholarly emphasis on material religious practices, see for example Jones, "Introduction"; Kvalicova, *Listening and Knowledge*, 5–6.

<sup>54</sup> Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 462: "comedit semel de pane benedicto hereticorum et habebat in eo namam devotionem.

<sup>55</sup> MS Doat 23, 91<sup>r</sup>: "dedit eidem testi de quadam panada ad comedendum dicens eidem testi, quod tamen vobis valebat quod si sanctus petrus benedixisset eam, quia boni homines comederant de ea, et illud quod superfuerat eis." The passage is noted and translated in Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 267 n.197. Cf. MS Doat 25, 302<sup>r</sup> for a deposition stating that the deponent would have willingly induced his own son to eat of the blessed bread of the heretics if he had been able to.

was holy bread, because it had been blessed by the heretics.<sup>56</sup> Not everyone seems to have agreed on the spiritual value of blessed bread, as there are also a few cases that refer to critical or indifferent attitudes,<sup>57</sup> but it does seem that devotion towards it was a part of the experiences and lived religion of at least some Languedocians.

The ideas and beliefs that people appropriated were always selectively received, reproduced, and reinterpreted. Sometimes religious teachings and demands could be interpreted in idiosyncratic ways.<sup>58</sup> In the context of the meanings ascribed to bread blessed by the alleged heretics, there is an especially intriguing case in a deposition given by Raymundus Basserii, a Caraman resident who appeared spontaneously before inquisitors in 1276. According to the record he denied all knowledge of heresy with the exception that when he was living with lady Nichola, he saw a dry and old piece of bread in a casket that belonged to Nichola's sister Navarra. The deponent asked his wife Lombarda, who was also the niece of Nichola and Navarra, what kind of bread it was. His wife told him that she did not know, but that Navarra had instructed her from prison via Nichola to be sure to keep the bread with her, like the eye in her head, or to send it to her. According to the record, the deponent's wife also told him that when Navarra was released from prison, she had come to the house asking to have the bread back, and that she told her that the bread was as good to a person as the good men at the moment of death if one was unable to have them present. Navarra also told her that it was the bread of the good men,

<sup>56</sup> Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 256: "Arnaldus dixit ei quod in quadam fenestra que erat in solario dicte domus iuxta ignem, in quodam doblerio inveniret IIIor placentas quas ipse emerat apud Taraschonem, et quod dictas placentas acciperet et deportaret ei, quod et ipse loquens fecit. Quas placentas cum dedisset dicto fratri suo in dicto boali iuxta hostium dicti columbarii, dictus Arnaldus intromisit in dicto columbario dictas placentas, ipso loquente remanente extra, et non vidit illud quod factum fuit de dictis placentis. Set post pausam dictus Arnaldus, frater eius, exivit ad eum de dicto columbario, et portavit ei unum modicum cancellum de una placentam et unum cifum vini [...], et dixit ei quod biberet dictum vinum ibidem, et quod comederet dictam placentam, quia dicti sancti homines benedixerant eam, ut dixit. Quod ipse loquens fecit, credens quod dicta placentam erat panis sanctus, quia erat benedictus per dictos hereticos."

<sup>57</sup> For cases referring to critical or indifferent attitudes towards blessed bread, see for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* I, 383–384; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 199.

<sup>58</sup> Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 160; Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 28–29; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 3; Sparks, *Heresy, Inquisition and Life Cycle*, 110. Ammerman, "Introduction," 6–8, who notes that religious traditions almost always entail a certain level of plurality, hybridity, and bricolage.

which the deponent understood to mean that it was the bread of the heretics.<sup>59</sup> One of the central tenets of being a good man was providing salvation to followers through the performance of a ritual administered to willing laypeople on their deathbeds.<sup>60</sup> Evidence for this ritual was highly sought after by the authorities and thus piles up in the records. However, the reference regarding Navarra's faith in the salvatory value of the blessed bread is unique—similar interpretations cannot be found elsewhere in Languedocian inquisition records. While the entry does not grant access to her beliefs, only information about talk reported to the deponent by his wife and later recalled by him in the interrogation, it does imply that at the level of individual lived religion, people had the prerogative to interpret and adapt teachings about the sacred, including the functions of blessed bread.

Furthermore, beliefs are often deployed in actions and social practices,<sup>61</sup> which allows the inclusion of additional evidence into the discussion: references to the practice of treasuring pieces of blessed bread. In a previous case there was already an indication of people sometimes being told to do so, and it seems that these prescriptions were taken seriously. For example, a woman called Geralda, sentenced for heresy in 1312, is stated to have been in possession of bread blessed by a heretic due to the devotion and faith she had regarding the possibility of salvation in the faith of the heretics. She had eaten some of it, but also saved the rest, conserving it for

<sup>59</sup> Biller, Bruschi and Sneddon, eds, *Inquisitors and Heretics*, 648–651: “vidit in quadam caxia dominae Navarrae, sororis dictae Nicholauae, quoddam frustrum panis siccum et consumptum prae nimia antiquitate, et quaesivit a Lombarda uxore ipsius testis, nepte dictarum dominarum, cuiusmodi panis erat. Quae respondit ipsi testi quod nesciebat, sed quod domina Navarra mandaverat ei de muro per Nicholauam praedictam, quod dictum panem bene reservaret sibi sicut oculum capitis, vel mitteret eidem Navarrae. Dixit insuper quod postmodum, cum praedicta Navarra esset educta de muro, venit ad domum praedictam de Belaval, ubi fuit morata, et audivit ipse testis dici a supradicta Lombarda, uxore ipsius testis, quod dicta Navarra repetiit dictum panem ab eadem Lombarda, et quod dixit ipsi Lombardae quod tantum valebat ille panis ei, qui vellet habere bonos homines in obitu et non posset habere eos, et quod erat panis bonorum hominum, quod ipse testis intellexit haereticorum.” Duvernoy, *Religione dei Catari*, 188, also notes this case.

<sup>60</sup> On this deathbed ritual (referred to as the *consolamentum*) in general, see for example Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 124–130; Barber, *Cathars*, 90–94.

<sup>61</sup> Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 170. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 162, also argues that medieval laypeople perhaps understood belief differently from how inquisitors and historians understand it, suggesting that performing certain religious activities did not necessarily indicate, but rather constituted belief. For discussion on belief in the context of Languedocian heresy in general, see Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 116–163.

many years only nibbling on it from time to time. The summary of her transgressions also states that she had been given a pair of gloves that were said to have been made by a heretic. Out of devotion, she also saved the gloves and kept the blessed bread inside them, conserving the package in a coffer.<sup>62</sup> This case, together with other similar entries,<sup>63</sup> attests to the practical and material side of lay devotion towards the bread blessed by the good men. The experience of treasuring this bread as a relic and slowly consuming it over time was one potential way to interface with the sacred.

Lived religion is a dynamic social process emergent from an amalgam of concrete practices and processually changing beliefs.<sup>64</sup> According to Ann Taves, people draw on three core processes when they perceive and categorize things as religious: imagination that allows for the generation of novelties and alternate realities; the process of setting apart that distinguishes certain things as more salient than others; and the process of valuation that assesses and orders the significance of things and phenomena.<sup>65</sup> All three of these processes can arguably be seen at work in the context of lay interpretations concerning the meaning and value of the bread blessed by the good men. These interpretations were manifest in the past as talk and deed, now visible in abstraction through inquisition records. Religion-as-lived can be viewed as an affective, experiential dimension that works to address the deep-seated human desire for meaning.<sup>66</sup> In medieval Languedoc, the ritualized transformation of cooked dough into something so much more could afford laypeople with objects of devotion, and for some, like the aforementioned Navarra, even the perceived means to salvation.

<sup>62</sup> Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 778: “fecit fieri de pane benedicto per dictum hereticum propter devocionem et fidem quam habebat, quod posset salvari in fide dicti heretici et accepit de dicto pane et comedit et partem reservavit et multis annis conservavit et aliquando de illo pane comedit [...]. Item ibidem fuerunt date dicte Geralde cirotece, de quibus dictum fuit sibi quod fecerat eas quedam heretica, quas devotione multis annis conservavit et in eis de pane benedicto heretici tenebat et conservabat in archa sua.”

<sup>63</sup> For more similar references to people conserving and treasuring bread blessed by the alleged heretics, see for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 75; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 784, 924.

<sup>64</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 2; McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 3–5, 12–17, 67, 98, 118, 185, 208–213; Rüpke, *On Roman Religion*, 4–5, 42–43.

<sup>65</sup> Taves, “Reverse Engineering,” 202–203.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Chandler, *Semiotics*, 11; Park and McNamara, “Religion, Meaning, and the Brain,” 67–75.

## CONCLUSIONS

Experiences of participating in activities related to the allegedly heretical practice of blessing bread constituted a potential and seemingly common dimension of lived religion for laypeople in thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Languedoc. Many deponents participated in meals shared with the good men, during which bread was often blessed and consumed in a ritualized fashion. These communal, multisensory experiences were a tangible and apparently memorable way to live out religious beliefs together with others. The interactions in which bread was blessed sometimes entailed oral teachings about the significance of the ritual, and the bread could be extracted from the ritual situation and diffused around the local community, which allowed for a wide sphere of participation. Moreover, the evidence points to the potential variety of lay beliefs concerning the value of blessed bread and the apparent devotion towards it, emphasizing the prerogative of medieval people to creatively interpret and selectively appropriate religious ideas. The active role taken by at least some laypeople in distributing blessed bread and speaking about it to others reminds us that religion-as-lived cannot be a passive affair. Evaluating Claire Taylor's audacious claim that the blessing of bread was a mere compromise ritual for the good men proved difficult based on the content of inquisition records. What is clear, however, is that experiences related to it were a prominent dimension of material religion and that the good men themselves seem to have made efforts to assure proper belief and conduct. During interrogations, deponents were forced to reinterpret past experiences in a new light, and the inquisitorial perspective frames information about encounters with blessed bread in rigid categories and language that stress the heretical nature of these experiences. While perceptions concerning the boundaries between licit and illicit religious practices may have been more flexible at the level of lived reality, inquisition records do imply that at least for some, indulging in bread blessed by the good men was a conscious taste of dissent.

Evaluating the implications of this case study concerning blessed bread in medieval Languedoc from a more general standpoint, it seems fair to argue that medieval inquisition records, when approached with adequate epistemic diligence, are an exceptionally promising source for studying the history of experiences and lived religion. For this endeavour, a stratified perspective utilizing the concepts of complexity and emergence can prove useful. According to this view, lived religion emerges from but is never reducible to the blooming variety of experiences related to engaging with



the numinous in daily life. These experiences, taken as events that prompt reflective perceptions and afford the spatiotemporally situated subject with mental and embodied qualia, are also phenomena that emerge from the on-going act of the brain-body interfacing with the world through actions and interpretations. Thus, both experiences and lived religion can be understood as emergent and complex phenomena located on distinct but interacting levels of the processual unfolding of reality. Deployed as a theoretical context for specific historical investigations, this approach allows for the shifting of attention back and forth between these strata,<sup>67</sup> which can help us extrapolate their components and understand the dynamic interplay driving these simultaneous emergences.

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Capra, *Web of Life*, 37.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# The Religious Experience of Ill Health in Late Sixteenth-Century Italy

*Jenni Kuuliala*

### INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 1597, a Tuscan friar named Giovanni Bronsius ate a plate of *maccheroni* that was offered to him in the *osteria* of a bath. Sometime afterwards, he started to feel very ill. He went to see several physicians, who administered medicines but could not heal his condition. Months later, he had become even more infirm, being unable to get up from his bed and feeling terrible pain and discomfort everywhere in his body.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, some 50 kilometres south, a Roman cleric by the name of Marcello Ferro also encountered an unfortunate dish. He ate a fig, but soon sensed bitterness in his mouth and started to worry that something was amiss. He spat out the fig, but he still ended up in bed with stomach pains and constant vomiting. He received help from a physician

<sup>1</sup>Vatican City, Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede (ACDF), Siena Proc. 4, *busta* 13.

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J. Kuuliala (✉)

Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland  
e-mail: [jenni.kuuliala@tuni.fi](mailto:jenni.kuuliala@tuni.fi)

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and had to take medicine for a number of days. Unlike Giovanni Bronsius, at the time he reported his experience, he was fully healed.<sup>2</sup>

These two narratives of infirmity, portrayed in a religious context, share several similarities as the bodily experience of ill health and medical experience intermingle with lived religion. In other words, they can be analysed as examples of how lived religion was experienced through a body, and how bodily experience formed and shaped lived religion and religious experience of an individual and even of a community.<sup>3</sup> As argued by Meredith McGuire and Jacalyn Duffin, among others, in the pre-modern period, “medicine” and “religion” were not separated in the way they are in our modern, Western societies; instead, they were two parallel and adjacent belief systems that influenced each other and played a role in the ways people interpreted their bodily experiences.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, illness in the early modern period was not just a bodily state but a religious experience and a period when the sufferer’s faith was tested.<sup>5</sup>

In the early modern construction and investigation of religious phenomena, religion and medicine often went hand in hand. This was also the case with Giovanni Bronsius and Marcello Ferro. The modern reader’s knowledge of their illnesses is based on inquiries done with papal authority, conducted by officials of the Roman Curia. In both cases, their primary goal was to investigate people’s bodily and religious experiences and interpretations of them, and to find possible juridical proofs for these interpretations. Both inquiries played a significant role in the campaigns of the Catholic Reformation Church. There was, however, one big difference. Fra Giovanni interpreted his illness and its incurability as a result of malevolent witchcraft conducted by a local woman, Cassandra di Marco Pieri, and the case was investigated by the Siena tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition.<sup>6</sup> Marcello Ferro, on the other hand, did not view his infirmity as being caused by any magic. He equally viewed the condition

<sup>2</sup> *Il primo processo per San Filippo Neri*, Vol. III, 62–64.

<sup>3</sup> See Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 13, who specify that experience is “based on both observation and interpretation, and while always communicated between humans, it is created not merely in language; it is an essential part of social reality.”

<sup>4</sup> Duffin, *Medical Miracles*, 190; McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 131–37.

<sup>5</sup> See also Sawday, “Self and Selfhood in the Seventeenth Century,” 39.

<sup>6</sup> The ACDF, formerly known as Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition, was called the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office between 1908 and 1965. The congregation, as well as the archive, got its modern name after the Second Vatican Council, and the archive has been open for scholars since 1998.



as being incurable by human means, but attributed the eventual cure to the merits of St Filippo Neri (1515–1595). His healing was recorded in Neri's canonization process.<sup>7</sup>

The interplay of medicine and lived religion is part of the phenomenon named “medical pluralism” that was prevalent in late medieval and early modern societies. It was a synchronized attitude towards healing and the interpretation of illnesses and disabilities. Bodily or mental infirmity could be the result of an imbalance of the humours, caused by accident, witchcraft, demonic presence, or God's punishment—or by some or all of them. At the same time, a patient could choose from a wide array of healing methods, including what we might label “medical” and “religious” options, such as the help of physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, charlatans, folk healers, exorcists, and saints.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, one healthcare provider could have varying roles. Living saints could perform rather mundane medical operations, and someone accused of witchcraft could be called *medica*, a (female) physician.<sup>9</sup> How the patient and their communities decided on the healing options or interpretations was not a straightforward or unanimous process but subject to constant negotiations between the members of the local community, and often with medical and/or Church authorities.

Sociological and historical studies on disability have since the 1960s and 1970s been rather unanimous that the views and attitudes of a society are a crucial factor in the experiences of those with bodily or mental illnesses and impairments. Nowadays the preferred theoretical framework in historical studies is the cultural model of dis/ability, which sees “impairment” and “illness” as fluid and culturally defined, and “dis/ability” as a cultural construct.<sup>10</sup> It is obvious that in pre-modern societies,

<sup>7</sup>The investigation into Filippo Neri's life and miracles began only three months after his death. Between 1595 and 1612, testimonies were collected and evaluated in several phases, mostly in Rome but also “extra urbem.” Filippo was beatified by Paul V in 1615 and canonized by Gregory XV in 1622. See Incisa della Rocchetta and Vian, “Introduzione,” V–XIV.

<sup>8</sup>See Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing*; Park, “Medicine and Magic.” See also Jütte, ed., *Medical Pluralism*.

<sup>9</sup>See Kuuliala, “The Saint as Medicator”; O'Neil, “*Sacerdote ovvero stregoni?*”; Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*, 146–47.

<sup>10</sup>These studies have been largely influenced by the social model of disability which separates “impairment” as a factual state from “disability” which is created by the marginalizing attitudes and practices of the society. Especially during the past decade, this view has also been criticized. For the cultural model and pre-modern disability history, see Frohne, “The Cultural Model of Dis/ability,” and also Eyler, “Introduction.”

religion—and lived religion in particular—played a crucial role in the ways any problems or variations in health or functional abilities were viewed, experienced, and treated. These mechanisms were inherently interlinked with the bodily experience. Here the concept of “lived body,” worded by Meredith McGuire, is of vital importance. She has pointed out the importance of the body for the study of religion, writing that the “lived body” is “our vehicle for perceiving and interpreting our world.”<sup>11</sup> B. Hughes and K. Paterson had a similar starting point in their criticism towards the social model of disability. They wrote that “[t]he impaired body is a ‘lived body’” and that “impairment is experienced in terms of the personal and cultural narratives that help to constitute its meaning.”<sup>12</sup>

In this chapter, I will examine lived religion as a cultural narrative, or a cultural script, that shaped the lived body during a time of infirmity in early modern Italy. What aspects of lived religion created and shaped the bodily and social experience of ill health? What was the role of the canonization or Inquisition process in this construction? The cases of friar Giovanni Bronsius and the cleric Marcello Ferro will act as the examples used in the analysis; therefore, the sections of lived religion and cultural scripts that are focused on are witchcraft and the miraculous. The role of bodily experience was twofold in these trials: the officials of the Church investigated it among other things, while the experiences of bewitchment and miraculous healing had a significant role in initiating the trials. In these processes, a personal experience of ill health was shared and interpreted with the community as well as with the religious authorities, while the community and the authorities also influenced and even controlled the meanings given to it.

Both phenomena—the veneration of saints and belief in witchcraft—belong to the same medico-religious milieu of the period and both were areas that the Church sought to control and renew. The canonization of saints had been a papal prerogative since the early thirteenth century.<sup>13</sup> During the inquests, laypeople, clerics, and monastics were interrogated about the putative saint’s life and deeds in order to find out if the holy person in question truly was a saint. In the early modern period, especially

<sup>11</sup> McGuire, “Religion and the Body,” 284.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes and Paterson, “The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body,” 334–35.

<sup>13</sup> For the medieval process, see Sari Katajala-Peltomaa’s article in this volume.

in the aftermath of the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church sought to renew the practices of investigating sainthood. Among the most important reforms were the founding of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (*Sacra Rituum Congregatio*) in 1588 and the office of the *promotor fidei*, active since 1631.<sup>14</sup> The process of St Filippo Neri was still conducted largely in “medieval” terms, with a great number of miracles and witnesses, who were given a relatively large amount of freedom to recall their memories.

Like the canonization of saints, investigating and condemning witchcraft had its roots in the Middle Ages. The largest Italian witch-hunts occurred in the northernmost and Alpine regions of the peninsula in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The documents of these trials have mostly been lost. In the mid-sixteenth century, Protestantism came to be seen as the biggest threat to the Catholic Church, and in 1542, Pope Paul III founded a special committee for managing the prosecution of heretics: the Holy Office of the Inquisition, often called the Roman Inquisition to distinguish it from the Spanish one.<sup>15</sup> Its six members had absolute control over the forty-five local tribunals. Initially, the trials of those accused of magic and witchcraft were a rarity, but in the aftermath of the Council of Trent, there was a shift. As the threat of Protestantism lessened and the Catholic Church sought to control and renew the laity’s religious practices, controlling and limiting the use of supernatural powers and superstitious beliefs became more important. At this time, the prosecution and investigation of magic as a form of heresy became more common again.<sup>16</sup>

Compared to the secular courts in charge of the witchcraft prosecutions north of the Alps, the Roman Inquisition had a cautious attitude

<sup>14</sup>The process also became two-phased: first there had to be an “ordinary” process, usually conducted by the local bishop, and if that was accepted in the curia, there was the second, “apostolic” hearing, conducted under the authority of the Pope. For these developments, see Burke, “How to Be a Counter-Reformation Saint?”, 49–51; Copeland, *Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi*, 9–10; Ditchfield, “How not to be a Counter-Reformation saint.”

<sup>15</sup>Paul III’s bull *Licet* ab initio, dated 21 July 1542. His intention was to take control over the local inquisitions and their erroneous actions. For a summary of the development, see Aron-Beller and Black, “Introduction.”

<sup>16</sup>For an overview of the developments in the Church’s thinking about witchcraft and the developments in Italy, see Duni, *Under the Devil’s Spell*; Kallestrup, *Agents of Witchcraft*, 13–28; Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 13–76. For the organization of the Roman Inquisition and its communication with the local tribunals and authorities, see Fosi, “Conflict and Collaboration.”

towards witchcraft. It did torture alleged witches and would consciously ignore trials and executions of witches that were sanctioned by local courts in order to secure their collaboration. However, few people faced the actual threat of execution: public repentance and acts of penitence were much more common forms of punishment, and studies suggest that making amends with the Church was also the preference of the accused.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the Roman Inquisition acted according to a strict set of rules and was by no means trying to force the accused to admit to demonic pacts or witches' sabbaths. Instead, material evidence, physiological symptoms, and other concrete signs were the kinds of evidence they sought.<sup>18</sup>

Based on the preserved documents, it is impossible to make far-reaching statistical analyses about how often people living in Italy at the turn of the seventeenth century considered their infirmities to be healed by saints or caused by malevolent witchcraft. While healing miracles were abundantly investigated in canonization inquests, harmful magic to make another person ill is not the topic in the majority of (preserved) denunciations,<sup>19</sup> and the "operative" handling of witchcraft is mostly elusive to us.<sup>20</sup> Instead, the documents studied here offer a window onto the formation and reporting of the experiences of ill health and healing within the sphere of lived religion, and onto the ways an infirm body was lived in the religious context.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell*; Kallestrup, *Agents of Witchcraft*, 7, 31–32.

<sup>18</sup> Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Accusations of love magic, divination, and so on are more common. In general, it turns out that those residing in urban areas accused other people of making them ill by means of witchcraft more rarely than those living in the rural areas. Di Simplicio, "On the Neuropsychological Origins of Witchcraft Cognition," 522. Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*, 60, has calculated that *maleficio* was involved in 16% of the cases investigated by the Siena tribunal. In Venetian inquisition records, the accusation was also depending on the person's social status. Witchcraft, including harmful *maleficio*, was mostly performed by women from lower social standing, whereas elite men were accused of natural magic. Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 12, 59–60.

<sup>20</sup> Oscar Di Simplicio defines the term "operative handling of witchcraft" as the informal system of controlling witchcraft and the existing counter-forces of witches within local settings outside witch hunts. Di Simplicio, "On the Neuropsychological Origins of Witchcraft Cognition," 509.

<sup>21</sup> For a summary of recent methodological discussion on early modern Italian Inquisition trial records, see for example Kallestrup, *Agents of Witchcraft*, 5–8.

## ACQUIRING THE INFIRMITY

In October 1598, the Siena tribunal of the Holy Roman Inquisition<sup>22</sup> arrived at the house of a man called Ludovico in Città della Pieve. The reason for their arrival was the interrogation of Ludovico's brother Fra Giovanni Bronsius, which initiated the trial against Cassandra di Marco Pieri from San Quirico d'Orcia in Tuscany, located circa 35 kilometres southeast of Siena. Usually the tribunals of the Inquisition did not act in such a manner, but this time an exception was made because Giovanni was bed-ridden and "greatly ill" (*valde ergotante*). This was also the reason why he no longer resided in his convent of San Franco in San Quirico d'Orcia. Typically, trials were initiated by a denunciation sent to the Inquisition, but Fra Giovanni was unable to write because of his condition. His testimony does, however, resemble one, as it includes a lengthy accusation and the grounds for it. The amount of questioning from the inquisitor is also relatively small.<sup>23</sup>

The Inquisition's first question concerned the time and manner in which Giovanni acquired his condition, and his reply about his goings-on with Cassandra is very detailed.<sup>24</sup> This is one of the instances where Inquisition trial records significantly differ from canonization records, as the two records frame the infirm, lived body with differing emphases. For those whose conditions were healed by a saint, the aetiology was rarely part of the recorded narrative. When the cause was witchcraft, the situation was obviously quite different, as the malevolent act was precisely the lens through which the painful experience was formed and investigated.

The way Giovanni acquired his illness already places his lived body at the centre of negotiations regarding various healing activities. His narrative starts at Bagno Vignone, a bathing location in the hamlet of San Quirico d'Orcia near his convent. One day in the previous June when he

<sup>22</sup>The documents of the Siena tribunal are among the five complete archives of those preserved in Italy, with records from between 1580 and 1721. Originally, there were forty-five provincial tribunals. Besides Siena the archives of Modena, Aquileia, Venice, and Naples are preserved. Herzig, "Witchcraft Prosecutions in Italy," 253. For the Siena collection, see Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria* and *Inquisizione, stregoneria, medicina*.

<sup>23</sup>The denunciation could be done orally, or be delivered as a written document. Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 45. The records (ACDF, Siena Proc. 4, f. 565r) state: "in qua quidem domo reperit eiusdem fratrem Johannem valde ergotante et in lecto iacente ita qua per se ipsius non potest scribere, et propterea omnia denunciate eius manu faciendo ipsum deceuit examinare propter examinavit modo et forma propter infra f."

<sup>24</sup>ACDF, Siena Proc. 4, f. 565r.

arrived there, the hostess of a local osteria, Giovanna *alias* La Longa, told him that Cassandra wanted to talk with him, but she did not know why. The following day the two met. Cassandra asked Giovanni if he had brought her napkin/towel (*sciugatore*). Giovanni replied that he had not, and the two ended up having an argument. Later, the inquisitor asked Cassandra to explain the napkin, and it turns out to have been a piece of cloth made of black silk, some type of an amulet or a *breve*, which was used in baptism but was also considered to have healing powers. When interrogating Cassandra, the inquisitor was very keen on obtaining information about the *brevi* she had in her possession. She first explained having received them from a nun, then from capuchin brothers, but later admitted that Fra Giovanni had given them to her.<sup>25</sup>

After his heated discussion with Cassandra, Giovanni went to the public rooms of the *osteria* and ate a plate of *maccheroni*. He did not remember who had brought the plate to him, but he did not see Cassandra again that day. According to the hostess, Cassandra prepared the *maccheroni* as she was working in the establishment.<sup>26</sup> Right after finishing his dish, Giovanni started to feel pain in his stomach, which, in the course of the following days and weeks increased and took over his whole body. At some point during this time, and presumably caused by the doctors' inability to help him (discussed below), Giovanni started to blame Cassandra for his situation. It is not revealed how his firm suspicions came to the knowledge of the Inquisition. In general, however, a witchcraft trial had to include a culprit and the motive, and the act itself had to be proven, and these were supposed to be investigated already before the accused was interrogated.<sup>27</sup>

How and why did Fra Giovanni end up blaming Cassandra for his infirmity? Witchcraft—like the miraculous—can be seen as a way to make sense of traumatic or unexplainable experiences. Witchcraft turns the meaningless coincidences of the natural world into something that one can grasp—that is, a social world. Therefore, in addition to getting an explanation, the victim gained an enemy, a target for his or her fear and anger.<sup>28</sup> Malevolent

<sup>25</sup> ACDF, Siena, Proc. 4, f. 588r.

<sup>26</sup> ACDF, Siena Proc. 4, f. 569r.

<sup>27</sup> Kallestrup, *Agents of Witchcraft*, 29–30, also writes that the late-fifteenth-century influential *Instructio pro formandis processibus in causis strigum, sortilegiorum et maleficiorum* warns that the inquisitor should *not* allow the victims of witchcraft to point out the alleged culprit themselves; if they really were bewitched, they would be under the Devil's power.

<sup>28</sup> Kounine and Ostling, "Introduction," 10.

witchcraft was a cultural script that had existed since the Middle Ages. It was not a top-down phenomenon, but like lived religion in general, formed as a social and cultural process where the interpretations of communal and individual occurrences influenced the more learned discourses and controlling mechanisms, and vice versa. Being poisoned was part of that script, as the difference between it and witchcraft was not always clear.

Being bewitched was not a label that was automatically forced on experiences of illness occurring after arguments like Giovanni had with Cassandra, nor did the victims blame their community members randomly. Although they may have invented parts of their narrative, the narratives had to be full of cultural truths in order to be legally convincing.<sup>29</sup> Food as a means of bewitchment was commonly known.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Cassandra's person and reputation fit in the script of witchcraft accusations. Giovanni explained that one reason for his suspicion was that Cassandra had the reputation of having done such *malie*. He also said that others could testify about her reputation as she was called a "woman of a bad life" (*donna di mala vita*),<sup>31</sup> although she was married. This was a derogatory term used of women who were considered to have a low moral and social status, and they often appear as the accused.<sup>32</sup> In the first seventy years of the records of the Siena tribunal, between 1580 and 1650, 71% of the accused were women.<sup>33</sup> There was no correlation between gender and witchcraft, and men—and even clerics—were accused of practicing *maleficio* as well,<sup>34</sup> but in the region of the Siena tribunal, women were accused of the crime more frequently. In Cassandra's case, it is noteworthy that she is not called a "true witch," *strega*, in the document; instead she was accused of *maleficio* and having superstitious objects in her possession. During the trial, she was imprisoned and tortured, but she was ultimately acquitted on 3 February 1599, with the obligation to present herself to the Inquisition every time she was requested to do so.<sup>35</sup>

The apparent contradiction between Fra Giovanni's status as an educated, elite clerical male and the argument he had with a woman like

<sup>29</sup> Kallestrup, *Agents of Witchcraft*, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 69, 213.

<sup>31</sup> ACDF, Siena, Proc. 4, f. 568v.

<sup>32</sup> Kallestrup, *Agents of Witchcraft*, 94.

<sup>33</sup> Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*, 59.

<sup>34</sup> For masculinity and witchcraft see, for example, Rowlands, ed., *Witchcraft and Masculinities*; Toivo, "Male Witches."

<sup>35</sup> ACDF, Siena Proc. 4, *busta* 13.

Cassandra over a dubious religious object undoubtedly played a role in the way he interpreted his illness. Both explained that Cassandra had been a servant making bread for Giovanni's convent, and Cassandra also said that she had "greater affection" for Fra Giovanni than for her husband, as the former always gave her good advice.<sup>36</sup> The exact nature of their relationship cannot be deduced from these statements, as Fra Giovanni may have wished to downplay their intimacy and Cassandra portray them in very amiable terms, but it is nevertheless obvious they had known each other for quite a while. Their relationship was by no means that of two equals, either in the secular or the religious sense of the word.<sup>37</sup>

The argument about the *brevi* adds another layer to Giovanni's interpretation of the course of the events. In his study on Venetian Inquisition records, Jonathan Seitz has concluded that the Franciscans "tolerated a more mystical outlook" than the Dominicans did, and especially the Observant branch received criticism from the Roman Inquisition for their suspected magical practices. Furthermore, the Holy Office issued several orders that commanded the Franciscan friars to hand over the magical objects they possessed.<sup>38</sup> Again, the testimonies do not give evidence of what really was going on with the amulet. It is, however, intriguing that an object that seems to have held an important religious meaning—also in the sphere of healing—for the community prompted the events that made Giovanni ill.

A seemingly similar onset of infirmity with a completely different explanation was given by Marcello Ferro, who testified in 1610 in one of the several canonization inquiries of Filippo Neri, the founder of the Oratory of Rome.<sup>39</sup> Among Marcello Ferro's long witness account was a testimony of his own miraculous experience. A year earlier, in September 1599, he was residing in the house of the Minim brothers of Trinità delli Monti in Rome. The house had a garden where figs grew. One morning, a woman who was serving Marcello had her daughter Maddalena da Ricci bring him

<sup>36</sup> ACDF, Siena, Proc. 4, f. 566v; f. 583v: "Io gli portavo maggiore affettione che il mio proprio marito, perché lui sempre mi ha dati buoni consigli."

<sup>37</sup> For witchcraft accusations and power relations, see Toivo, "Marking (Dis)order."

<sup>38</sup> Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 224–25.

<sup>39</sup> *Il Primo processo*, vol. III, 39–74; he had also testified in 1595 (*Il Primo processo*, vol. I, 77–91). The significance of Marcello's testimony especially pertaining to the use of images in the processes of the period is discussed in Ruth S. Noyes, *Peter Paul Rubens and the Counter-Reformation Crisis of the Beati moderni*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017.



a plate of figs. He took one fig, and after finding out it was good, took a second one. This time he sensed great bitterness.

According to Marcello's testimony, the fruit looked fine despite the bitter taste, which was why he decided to eat it. He also stated that he had sometimes tasted bitterness in food but it had done him no harm. However, soon he was inspired by the voice of Filippo Neri to spit the fig out. Despite doing so, he still sensed bitterness in his mouth as well as breathlessness, and so he threw himself onto his bed. Then he suddenly vomited half a basin of yellow, viscose, bitter, and toxic-like liquid. He was medicated for quite some time until the stomach pain and other symptoms disappeared, and the physician Baldassare who gave him the medication told him that the fig had been poisoned.<sup>40</sup>

Marcello's testimony concerning his miracle is much shorter than that of Giovanni Bronsius. It is, however, exceptional in the genre because of the importance it gives to the reason of his illness; as mentioned above, the reason for infirmity was typically of secondary importance. Marcello told the auditors that he had asked Baldassare how the fig could be poisoned, which does not reveal if he had any suspicions about the two women's role at this point. The physician told him that in the garden where the figs grew, there was an old wall. Venomous frogs lived near it and must have injected their poison into the fig.<sup>41</sup> Marcello appears to have accepted the doctor's opinion. After all, frogs were considered to be a common source of poisoning, and antidotes for their poison were described in medical manuals. Poison was commonly feared in the period. The reason for this was that it worked in a similar manner to witchcraft, and demons could even possess a human body through poison.<sup>42</sup> Here, poison became evidence of a different cultural script compared to that in Giovanni Bronsius's narrative.

If Marcello had any suspicions about the origins of the poison, they were not recorded. Perhaps he simply saw no reason to accuse the two women, particularly as a physician gave him a purely scientific explanation. If he had had to figure out the reason by himself, or if the physician had been unable to explain why the fig made him sick, the situation might have been different. Furthermore, it is not certain that even if Marcello had thought he had been poisoned on purpose, it would have ended up being

<sup>40</sup> *Il Primo processo*, vol. III, 63–64.

<sup>41</sup> *Il Primo processo*, vol. III, 64.

<sup>42</sup> Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing*, 103–04; see also Gibbs, *Poison, Medicine, and Disease*.

recorded in his testimony. Witchcraft as a cause for illness to be healed by a saint is not a non-existent phenomenon, but such miracles appear as rare, individual cases in canonization processes and miracle collections. In the vast documents of Filippo Neri's inquests, there is only one miracle where such a reason for illness was given, that of a woman named Lucrezia Cotta.<sup>43</sup> Marcello did not choose this kind of a framework for his experience. His reasons were primarily rooted in medical science, but presumably there was nothing in the reputation of the two women that would have given grounds for another interpretation.

### PAIN, MEDICINE, AND HEALING

In both cases analysed in this article, the way bodily sensations were interpreted was deeply intertwined with religious and medical methods. Meredith McGuire has written that "illness' is a disturbance in body processes or experience that has become problematic for the individual."<sup>44</sup> This was quite literally so in the premodern period as well, given that according to the medical ideas of the time, all infirmities were caused by a problem in the balance of the humours. When the cause of infirmity was witchcraft, the disturbance in body processes was even more profound, as one person's bodily disorder was proof that something was amiss in the community. This connects "suspicious" bodily disorders directly with lived religion.<sup>45</sup> Bodily experiences like Fra Giovanni's had significance in a wider communal setting—after all, there had to be a common reputation about the situation before the Inquisition would investigate the accuser's experiences.

Giovanni's testimony portrays the interpretation of his bodily experience shifting from the medical to the religious. These two intermingled scripts were the ones he could choose from when trying to make sense of what was happening to him. This intermingled nature of religion and medicine was not new to the Catholic Reformation period, but medical science's importance in the investigation of religious phenomena grew even greater than before. In the proceedings of the Holy Office, physicians' advice was sought to make sense of the events—this pertains to both

<sup>43</sup> *Il primo processo*. Vol. III, 112–13, 123–25, 392–93.

<sup>44</sup> McGuire, "Religion and the Body," 286.

<sup>45</sup> This is also inherent in cases of demonic possession. See Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession*, 1–2, 181–82.

the people writing denunciations and to the inquisitors seeking evidence.<sup>46</sup> In *maleficio* cases, physicians' inability to recognize the illness and/or to provide treatment could denote witchcraft as its cause. This was not, however, always as straightforward as it sounds. In general, illnesses that were of a supernatural origin could not be treated by human means, although physicians (and laypeople) were well aware that there were also natural illnesses that were incurable.<sup>47</sup>

After Fra Giovanni's stomach issues had lasted for some days, he sought a solution from physicians. This is the part of his narrative where he took an active role as a patient, the other instance being his (unspecified) decision to address the Holy Office. The medical men suggested that he should go to San Casciano. This probably refers to San Casciano dei Bagni, a popular location with healing waters situated circa 30 kilometres south-east from Quirico and bordering Fra Giovanni's hometown of Città della Pieve.<sup>48</sup> Physicians there suggested purging and drinking the healing waters, which Fra Giovanni did, but these routines did not help. Instead, his condition got worse day by day, and the *medici* did not understand what was wrong with him as they had "never seen anything like it."<sup>49</sup>

If there were any suspicions about the origins of Fra Giovanni's illness at this point, they were not prevalent or the physicians had been unwilling to state their opinion. This might indeed be the case, as in his analysis of Venetian cases, Jonathan Seitz has discovered that testifying physicians were unwilling to step beyond the borders of the natural.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the treatment and their inability to help indicated in Giovanni's testimony that there was reason for a suspicion to be formed, and at least these aspects excluded the possibility of a curable, natural illness. Interestingly, in her testimony Cassandra said that she had heard that Giovanni got ill only *after* having taken the waters of San Casciano.<sup>51</sup> Although this may

<sup>46</sup>Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 23–24, also points out that historians have traditionally been more interested in the relationship of witchcraft and medical science in the learned discourse than in the level of practice and everyday life.

<sup>47</sup>Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 167; see also Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession*, 82–84, for doctors and spiritual illnesses.

<sup>48</sup>In a book published in 1558, the physician Andrea Bacci writes that the hot waters of San Casciano are, for medical use, the "most praised in Italy" (*le piu lodate in Italia*): Bacci, *Del Tenere della natura*. On Bacci, see Long, *Engineering the Eternal City*, 25–27.

<sup>49</sup>ACDF, Siena Proc. 4, f. 566r: "il mio male i Medici ad l'hanno mai potuto conoscere."

<sup>50</sup>Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 166–167.

<sup>51</sup>ACDF, Siena, Proc. 4, f. 565v.

just have been her attempt to defend herself, it highlights the varying communal interpretations that formed the *fama*.

In Marcello Ferro's case, healing and the formation of his overall experience overlap even more profoundly. In canonization inquests, the physician's most crucial role was to bring a scientific background to the alleged miracles and to prove that the cure could only have been possible because of a saintly intervention.<sup>52</sup> In the established script of a miracle, the future beneficiary turned to them first and invoked the saint when medical practitioners could not help. In Marcello's case, the order was different. At the moment when he sensed the bitterness in his mouth, he happened to be in his room, in front of an oil painting representing Filippo Neri. He looked at the painting, and suddenly heard the holy man's voice saying "spit it out, spit it out." After doing so, he wiped the inside of his mouth and flushed it four or five times with water. Precisely this command of Filippo Neri was the miraculous part of Marcello Ferro's illness and healing, which is in itself an illuminating example of the multifaceted nature of experiences that could be interpreted as miraculous.

The formation of Marcello Ferro's view regarding his illness was, at least in the way he presented it to the auditors, born of his interaction with Baldassare the physician, who was also the physician of the Minim friars Marcello was visiting. Baldassare made Marcello take theriac and *bel-zuarrow*, and, as already mentioned, informed him that the fig must have been poisoned. Marcello also testified that he had immediately told Baldassare about Filippo Neri's command, and the physician was greatly astonished (*restò meravigliato*) by this information; according to him, Marcello had every reason to thank Filippo, because had he not spat out the fig, he would have died, as there was nothing left of the fig except for perhaps a tiny amount in his saliva, and yet it made him very unwell.<sup>53</sup>

Marcello's motivation for emphasizing his intercourse with Baldassare was undoubtedly a way to convince the auditors. However, the physician's authority also helped in forming his own interpretation. The voice Marcello had heard and the interpretation of the events formed in the course of the interaction were the key moments that turned his acute

<sup>52</sup> See Duffin, *Medical Miracles* and for physicians examining saints' bodies, Bouley, *Pious Postmortems*. In the Middle Ages, physicians already testified in canonization processes as well as in cases under investigation in secular courts, such as murder investigations. See Lett, "Judicium Medicine and Judicium Sanctitatis"; Ziegler, "Practitioners and Saints."

<sup>53</sup> *Il Primo processo*, vol. III, 63–64.

illness and recovery into a miracle. Or, to put it in another manner, these were the key elements that made the cultural script that explained and structured Marcello's experience a miraculous one. That he still had to take medicine for some days until he was fully healed was no longer important. The warning of the saint provided the physician a way to successfully complete his task and gave Marcello an opportunity to recover.

In the field of disability history, pain has often been overlooked. This may partly be due to the influence of the social model of disability, which has shifted the scholars' view away from the body and to the structures of the society. Partly, however, the problem has been the elusive nature of pain, as recognized by several scholars in the field. Everyone knows of its existence, but the experience of acute or prolonged pain and its influence on the everyday life of the sufferer are difficult to access.<sup>54</sup> This does not mean, however, that those investigating early modern miracles or witchcraft would have been insensitive towards pain or that they would not have considered it important. Pain was frequently reported as one of the symptoms that the saints of the period healed, and it was one of the proofs for malevolent witchcraft. Pain was, after all, the first and foremost symptom of most illnesses and of many impairments, and it denoted all kinds of unpleasant sentiments.<sup>55</sup>

The ways pain is experienced, communicated, and responded to are greatly influenced by the personal experience of pain and suffering as well as observing them. Therefore, although the sentiment itself may be the same, our reactions to and conceptualizations of it vary.<sup>56</sup> The pain felt by Giovanni and Marcello thus both unites and separates their experiences. The primary indicators that something was amiss, the stomach-ache and vomiting, were similar, but their cultural interpretation varied. Vomiting and stomach-ache could be a symptom of a natural illness, or as in the case of Marcello, the sign of a digested harmful substance. At the same time, vomiting was commonly associated with infirmities caused by witchcraft, as it suggested the corruption of the body.<sup>57</sup> These varying interpretations are examples of how early modern descriptions and understandings of

<sup>54</sup>For this discussion, see for example Petridou, "The Lived Body in Pain," 239–40.

<sup>55</sup>Newton, *Misery to Mirth*, 98–99.

<sup>56</sup>See Boddice, *Pain: A Very Short Introduction*, 3; Petridou, "The Lived Body in Pain," 241–42.

<sup>57</sup>Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 67–68, also points out that one reason for this was that it was the exact inversion of the idea of the incorruptibility of saints' bodies. Vomiting is also often reported as the aftermath of exorcism, as the patient threw up suspicious objects that had been inside their bodies.

bodily sensations and pain were largely corporeal and physical, yet could create and absorb meanings—which often were religious. In the words of J. F. van Dijkhuizen and K. A. E. Enenkel, “it is precisely through the importance of the body in the early modern notions of pain that the cultural dimensions of pain become clear.”<sup>58</sup>

The duration of the two clerics’ infirmities differed greatly. Marcello Ferro’s illness was short-lasting before his cure. He described his vomiting in detail and stated that the poison caused him “great suffering” (*gran travaglio*). The antidote helped soon, however, because “in order to make sure that he would live,” the physician told him to take it “for a few mornings.”<sup>59</sup> Fra Giovanni’s situation was the complete opposite. In principle, the antidote to witchcraft was provided by an exorcist. If Giovanni had looked for help from one of them, that had not helped him; this part of his experience is out of reach. Successful religious healing could, however, be a part of the experience of witchcraft as well. A woman called Margarita testified in a trial conducted by the Siena tribunal in 1583–1588 against Angelica di Gherardo and her daughter, Antea, from Roccastrada. She stated that Angelica had bewitched her by the order of the mother of her husband’s first wife. She also acquired an infirmity, the main symptom of which was her inability to stand her husband or wear her wedding ring. Here too the experience of bewitchment was very corporeal, as she explained having suffered, feeling like being suffocated when wearing the first wife’s clothes, and felt ill the whole day if she encountered Angelica and Antea. Her infirmity was removed by *frater* Andromacho, apparently in the ritual of exorcism. While she was still worried that something ill would happen to her, the exorcism removed her pain and restored order within her family. This healing was an important part of the inquisitorial narrative, as a remark of it was recorded in the beginning of her deposition.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, as mentioned above, there is a smallish selection of

<sup>58</sup> Dijkhuizen and Enenkel, “Introduction: Constructions of Physical Pain,” 5.

<sup>59</sup> *Il primo processo*, vol. III, 64: “Et, per assicurarmi della vita, volse il detto medico, che, per alcune matine, io seguitassi a pigliare alcune prese di triaca.”

<sup>60</sup> ACDF, Siena, Proc. 17, f. 627v–29r: “che dica il caso della sua infirmità, e malia che più anni sonno li fu fatta, et che mediante l’aiuto di Dio e per opera di frate Andromaco et altri ministri della sancta chiesa fu liberata.” Most witnesses in the trial accused Angelica of bewitching their children; reportedly, she also took money for healing them.

miracles in hagiographic sources of the period where a saint is reported as having healed an infirmity caused by bewitchment.

In the absence of healing, Fra Giovanni's testimony is thoroughly coloured by his ongoing suffering, and it gives a very detailed and corporeal account about it. He testified that he felt he could not live: he found peace nowhere, for three months he could not sleep, he had to go to the "stables" all the time. He was like an "irrational animal," he had "mania," he had pain that moved around in his feet, back, and arms as well as elsewhere in his body without ever ceasing.<sup>61</sup> This did not happen daily but every hour. He also felt "empty" (*vuoto*) in his teeth and could not eat, he was hoarse and speaking was difficult for him, and he could not stay still but felt the need to move constantly, turning around in his bed without finding rest.<sup>62</sup>

It has been observed that chronic illness and pain alter a person's conception of time, and of the patient's relationship to the past and future. Furthermore, it results in problems of the sense of self, being a bodily reminder that things may never be right again. The damage illness causes is made more profound if it is experienced as being overwhelming or uncontrollable.<sup>63</sup> This seems to hold true for Fra Giovanni's account of his ever moving, restless pain that defined his whole existence. Being under a malevolent spell was, in general, a very corporeal experience. At the same time, it is evident that he, like the other witnesses to such cases, knew that listing their symptoms was an important proof, and that *maleficia* could cause an array of symptoms, from death to severe, chronic illness or derangement, or a milder infirmity.<sup>64</sup> Fra Giovanni mentioned almost every possible component of suffering that was listed in the manuals of the time as being possibly caused by witchcraft. These included symptoms that could be labelled "mental" as well as "physical," giving a fine example of

<sup>61</sup> ACDF, Siena, Proc. 4, f. 566r: "mal'trattato e condotto di maniera tale che non posso più vivere, non potendo io dormire mai già tre mesi e mezzo sono, non posso stare in letto, ne trovo quiete in luogo nessuno, son necessitato tal'volta andarmene nella stalla, et in una stalla dov'è poglio, et cui buttarmi, et stratarmi come un animale irrationale per la gran' mania ch'io sento nella vita mia, ne perciò in detti luoghi non trovo riposo, io sento dolore nelle gambe, il quali in un momento mi si parte, alla schiena, dalla schiena alle braccia, et in altre parti del corpo mio, che mai si ferma in un luogo, ne mi lassa offesa alcuna in quelle parti dove sento il detto dolore."

<sup>62</sup> ACDF, Siena, Proc. 4, f. 566r.

<sup>63</sup> McGuire, "Religion and the Body," 287; see also Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 25–46.

<sup>64</sup> See Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 60 n.2, 67.

the fluidity of the two concepts.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps the only wider category of symptoms that he did not include in his statement are the possible functional disabilities like paralysis, which occasionally pop up elsewhere, but at the same time, he was so greatly afflicted that he was rendered incapable of functioning physically.

As for Marcello Ferro, his short-term condition, of which he was already healed, may have been frightening and potentially resulted in a similar situation or—according to the physician—death. In hagiographic texts, prolonged, uncured suffering not experienced by a saint is very rarely recorded. Only in the case of so-called partial cures do we encounter illnesses or disabilities that continued after a miracle. Even then, however, precisely the miraculous moment defined the experienced suffering and gave the beneficiary an ownership of the experience, putting them at the centre of the events.<sup>66</sup> As a contemporary example, a Roman man Atilius Tinazi testified in Capuchin friar Felice da Cantalice's (1515–1587) inquest that in 1584, he developed great pain in his right shin that prevented him from lying in bed, covering the leg with a sheet, or bearing any weight. Fra Felice's visit healed him—yet six days later, the pain arrived in his left shin and joints. He explained that this pain was not as severe as the first one, and he was grateful that it was “just gout” and not the illness that Felice had healed. He had later some pain in the healed leg as well, but it was not too severe.<sup>67</sup> Such depositions are very rare and must therefore be analysed with caution. Nevertheless, healing or an alleviation that the beneficiary interpreted as a miracle could change the message that a body in pain delivered. It was no longer a signal that things were not and would not be right, but a signal of quite the opposite. A miracle placed an infirm lived body at the core of lived religion as well, but this time as a sign of grace from the saint. Although the narratives of recovery in miracle accounts were inherently tied to the personal experience and the signs of recovery in one's body, they too were also communally negotiated and the remedy and relief were observed and interpreted by friends and family members, who usually partook in the veneration of the particular saint and could therefore share the religious experience.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> For these lists of symptoms, see Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 135–40.

<sup>66</sup> For this result of a miracle, see Duffin, *Medical Saints*, 171–72.

<sup>67</sup> *Processus Sixtinus fratris Felicis*, 192–93; for partial cures in medieval miracles see Kuuliala, “Heavenly Healing or a Failure of Faith?”.

<sup>68</sup> For the observation of recovery, see Newton, *Misery to Mirth*, esp. 95–98, 112–27.



## CONCLUSIONS

The formation of (religious) experience of ill health in early modern Italy was a complex, multifaceted process. This article has discussed the ways lived religion and the cultural scripts that were part of it influenced and created this experience. A central concept in this discussion is the lived body, a body as an experiencing agent that interprets and perceives the world—in this case particularly spiritual events and agents. Lived religion and the lived, infirm body therefore had an influence on each other. While lived religion had an impact on the ways infirmities and bodily crises were perceived and experienced, the phenomena visible on and experienced by a suffering body created, shaped, and accelerated religious processes and phenomena like the miraculous and witchcraft accusations. The experience delivered in the testimonies was the result of a lived religious process that was shaped and accelerated by communal encounters and existing cultural scripts, and formatted in the course of the inquisitorial procedure in the interaction between the witness and those conducting the inquiry.

The two cultural scripts, sainthood or the miraculous and witchcraft, were two sides of the same coin yet very distinct phenomena. Both are, however, examples of the ways the spiritual world demonstrated itself on the human body, as both phenomena were experienced through and by the body. Although not every illness or disability had spiritual origins or was healed by spiritual methods, both scripts fundamentally influenced the ways bodily sentiments could be conceptualized and how the experience of ill health was formulated and constructed in early modern Italy. Pain and suffering were not alien or unexpected to premodern people; rather, in the absence of effective medical methods to alleviate them, they were an ever-present, looming threat in everyone's life that could not be ignored. In other words, they were an important aspect of lived experience in the early modern period; something that each individual and community had to manage and negotiate. Interpreting one's painful experience as being caused by witchcraft or being alleviated by a saint was a way to make sense of and give structure to the bodily and also social disorder that illness and disability could cause.

Religious interpretations of ill health also allowed the patient an active role in taking control of their experience. As lived religion was largely something people *did*, the actions and rituals were inherent to religious experience of infirmity. Looking for help from a saint, an exorcist, or a

spiritual healer, or alternatively reporting one's suffering to the Inquisition were all ways to actively create and distribute religious experience and even take control of the unfathomable. These explanations were partly derived from the physical elements of suffering, and partly from the interaction with one's community that sanctified or even proposed an interpretation. At least in the context of the early modern inquisitorial processes, medical professionals could have a crucial role in the process. At the same time, the inquisitorial demands of a canonization or Inquisition process shaped the interpretation of bodily phenomena. The religious experience of ill health was therefore a process; an experience that was fluctuating and formed gradually as a result of religious rituals and interpretations, communal negotiations, and in the case of people such as Giovanni Bronsius and Marcello Ferro, also in their interaction with Church authorities.

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## Prayer and the Body in Lay Religious Experience in Early Modern Finland

*Raisa Maria Toivo*

In 1676, Agata Pekantytär stood before the rural district court in Ulvila, west coast of Finland, at the time part of Sweden, accused of witchcraft and magic in fishing, among other things. Her maid testified to her suspicious fishing habits, telling how Agata had cut three eyelets from each of her neighbours' nets and tied them to her own. In her defence, she asked her maid: "Do I not mention God, too, sometimes?" And indeed, the maid cited a rhyme Agata used when casting those nets: "Eyes of pike, eyes of salmon, eyes of every fish, look into my nets, in the name of the Father, Son, etc."<sup>1</sup>

As Agata offered her words in defence against charges of witchcraft, she also suggested they would be interpreted as a godly prayer—something clearly incompatible with witchcraft. The court, however, apparently

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<sup>1</sup>“Nembnär jagh intet Gudh ibland?’ ... ‘Lohen sjlmät, Sijan sjlmät, Minun vercoin Catzocat, Nimen Isen Poian etc.” District Court records, Ulvila 11–12 Sept 1676; Bielkesamlingen vol. 27: 53–5. SRA.

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R. M. Toivo (✉)  
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland  
e-mail: [raisa.toivo@tuni.fi](mailto:raisa.toivo@tuni.fi)

interpreted her words and actions as a charm and, “according to her own confessions”, fined her the considerable sum of 40 marks.

Many witches seem to have offered their use of prayer as a defence. Wallborg Andersdotter from Lapua confessed to “curing toothache with salt, of helping mothers in labour with natural means and by reading the Lord’s Prayer upon them, but nothing else”.<sup>2</sup> She was also convicted, because she admitted to using the Catholic practices of salt and sequential prayers. Similarly, one can find court cases of superstition and witchcraft where the accused had cited the Lord’s Prayer or the Hail Mary, sometimes also the Creed: the discussion in court then revolved around whether this was prayer or superstition. Historians have used cases like these to study witchcraft and good or evil magic, Christianity and animism, Protestantism and Catholicism, and their popular and elite conceptions. These discussions have, for some time now, often included discourses of “lived experience”, which is often understood as “how things really were” in the past, in contrast to how they should have been according to the norms and ideals of the past.

These narratives belie an array of different types of experiences of prayer, of the same events and circumstances. This chapter focuses on the systematization of some aspects of these different experiences along with the three levels of experience described in the introductory chapter of this volume—everyday experience, experience as a social process, and experience as a social structure—and analyses how these differences of religious experience were personalized and shared through the materiality of the human body and the surroundings of experience.

### PRAYER, EXPERIENCE, AND MATERIALITY

Defining prayer was not a simple matter in the seventeenth century, nor is it now. For the pragmatic purposes of my present analysis, I will define prayer as something that fulfils two criteria: first, someone described it as a prayer and, secondly, it is presented as a communication directed to—or at least mentioning—a (Christian) sacred character. There was a lot of disagreement on the proper nature of prayer and the differences between Christian prayer and devilish magic, as well as between proper Lutheran

<sup>2</sup>The case was summarized in Åbo Tidningar 23 February 1795 (no. 8).



prayer and what the Lutheran clergy called “papist lip service”.<sup>3</sup> For the analysis of a material experience of prayer, these discussions can be set aside for the moment, as it is not necessary to know what the actions and events described “were really meant to be”; it is more important to analyse how the experience of prayer was created—or how it failed. As will be seen, early modern prayer was understood as a holistic act including not only verbal communication; it was also a physical, bodily action, that was preferably communal. The materiality and corporeality that emerge in this context are indeed entangled material practices, to use Karen Barad’s phrase, that constructs the mental as well as the material simultaneously. It is important to understand that such materialities are indeed practices. They are acts, actions that are performed and done: roasting meat and baking bread, brewing ale, kneeling, touching, eating, making sounds, hearing them, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

The experience of prayer is understood as social and cultural on three levels, as described already in the introduction to this volume. It is not a singular occurrence or event even when it is discussed on the everyday level; it is always connected to past memory and future expectation. Moreover, experience is a process of observing the world and its events, connecting these observations to previous ones, and then interpreting them in a way that connects one’s own collection of previous observations to the present one but also to the expectations of the surrounding community or culture. This simultaneous four-way process is, an important part of the structure of my analysis here. The processes of sharing and personalizing experience eventually consolidate into structures of experience.<sup>5</sup> Understood this way, experience will always include elements of the worldviews of all participants, even those transcultural influences that participate only remotely, like Christianity, Lutheranism, or State power. Therefore, it is not fruitful to try to separate clerical, dogmatic, and lay influences here, nor to split the elite from the popular—rather, experience is about the entanglement of these influences.<sup>6</sup>

The source material used here illustrates this. I use examples from both prayers that are instructed in the church liturgy as well as catechisms and

<sup>3</sup>Oja, *Varken Gud*, 173–177; Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus*, 39–72; Ankarloo *Trolldomsprocessena*, 82–86; Toivo *Faith and Magic*, 36–40.

<sup>4</sup>Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 55 f.; Laitinen, *Order, Materiality*, 23–24.

<sup>5</sup>Kivimäki “Reittejä kokemushistoriaan”; Toivo “Kapitalismista kokemukseen”.

<sup>6</sup>Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 1–24.

other didactical material, some of it more unofficial than others, and prayers that were described in secular court records in connection to religious misdemeanours or crimes.

A number of catechisms and liturgy books were used to teach people how they were supposed to fulfil their duties towards God in their daily life. These books were usually quite outside the purchasing power of ordinary people. Still, they influenced lay piety, as they were read aloud for various purposes.<sup>7</sup> While the official catechisms (Luther's Catechisms and the Finnish translations by Michael Agricola, Paavali Juusten, and Johannes Gezeliuss) were approved by the church, other prayer manuals circulated in manuscript form. While the official material was written and approved by the church censors, other texts were written or copied by the local clergy and kept where they were used, in the rectories and parish church archives.<sup>8</sup> They tell not only about how the populace was taught to pray, but also about how they did pray. Sometimes they allow a glimpse of how the official generic material was adapted to individual needs, such as was the case with the prayers in Erich Falck's *Comfort Book for Expectant Mothers*.<sup>9</sup> While the material is verbal, it gives bodily instructions to kneel, stand up, sing, recite, and listen. The clerical manuals also give some instruction on gestures: blessing, turning to face the parish or the altar, and so on.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of these materials was to guide emotion and experience, both of the clergy directing the rituals and of the parishioners participating in them.<sup>11</sup>

As religious offences were prosecuted, the court records form another source for early modern religious experiences. Both secular courts and church courts dealt with religious crimes, although one can usually see that if the church courts took up a case and recorded it, it was usually also transferred to the secular courts even before the church law of 1686, which made it mandatory to hand over all cases that could possibly be criminal to the secular courts. Descriptions of the lay prayers can be read in various court records, where the praying practices were sometimes investigated as part of superstitious practices. I have used trial records for religious offences, superstition, and witchcraft in the seventeenth century,

<sup>7</sup> Laine, "From learning the Catechism", 138–154; Laine, *Aapisen ja katekismuksen*.

<sup>8</sup> Tapio Salminen, "Kokemäen käsikirjakoodeksi".

<sup>9</sup> Falck, "Tröstebok".

<sup>10</sup> Knuuttilla, "Liturginen yhdenmukaistaminen"; Salminen, "Kokemäen käsikirjakoodeksi"; Agricola, *Rucouskirja*; Agricola, *Käsikiria*.

<sup>11</sup> Malmstedt, *Bondertro*.

and it is usually the second layer of the court record narratives that is useful, although the first layer does actually include prayers, too, at least at the beginning and end of every court session. Corroborating materials can be found in church account books, where the prayers' donations were recorded, and sometimes, the prayer can be approached through material evidence—by looking at church murals, paintings, and holy or donated objects—but the court records are what I will chiefly examine, namely the records of trials for religious offences and witchcraft.

The material must be looked at against a background of normative theology and law, and it includes various degrees of instruction on how to produce the desired experience so the “authentic”, individual experiences of any participant must remain unreachable. However, in the end, it is that social process of producing experience that I am interested in, the entanglement of influence and experience as the connecting bridge between the individual and the community.

#### PRAYER AS A MATERIAL, EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE

My materials contain roughly two kinds of prayers. The first consists of prayers given in normative materials, such as prayer books and catechisms. Their character is more or less prescriptive and normative depending on who wrote and compiled the literature in question, but it was accepted, at least, since the publication of this type of literature was always subject to censorship in early modern Sweden.<sup>12</sup> The second type of prayers can be found in corrective and punitive rather than prescriptive material: it is most often found in the church and secular court records as a result of prosecutions of a religious offence, in most cases superstition, but sometimes blasphemy, witchcraft, or even heresy—in cases such as Agata's fishing methods.

The source materials usually record a sequence of words or the verse that was used. The prayer books record the verbal prayers in full. Court record descriptions of prayer cite verbal prayers that were not canonized. These could be verses that were used over and over again in similar ritual situations, such as the fishing prayer used by Agata. Her prayer combined a few verses with an alliteration trochee mode that commanded various kinds of fish to swim into her nets to the standard liturgical statement of exercising power, “in the name of the Father the Son, etc.”, and they were

<sup>12</sup>Laine, “From learning the Catechism”; Laine, *Aapisen ja katekismuksen*.

used often enough and in a sufficiently similar form that her maid could recite them in court.<sup>13</sup>

The court record's description of the prayers reveal they could also be verbal sequences that were adapted ad hoc when the need arose—often a combination of something that remained the same, like an invocation of divine power, and a request for a general blessing and protection for something more situational and conditional, like naming the object that was now in need of curing or protection.<sup>14</sup> Often the court records also refer to a commonly used religious formula, such as the Lord's Prayer or the credo, combined with naming the need at hand. Some other examples were less forceful, but still combined a description of a personal action by the user of the prayer with a sanctioned prayer formula. A peasant woman in Åland, who was accused of having made a pact with the devil, confessed to praying for her sick cattle by saying “‘My cow has been robbed of spirit, my cow has been robbed of blood, my cow has been robbed of flesh, but I will give you malt and salt, and you will get your strength back’, and thereafter she read the Lord's Prayer”.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the court records also mention quite a number of prayers used to heal or cure illness or to secure protection from beasts without giving any information of their verbal content.

Such prayers illustrate the nature of prayer as lived religion and the process of taking elements of religion and belief, dogma, and ritual, adding everyday needs, and amalgamating the mixture into contingent acts of faith. As such, they formed events or occurrences, the observation and partaking of which left an impression on someone, an experience in the “everyday” meaning of the word.<sup>16</sup> This is evident from the fact that the modern researcher is familiar with such prayers, because they were treated with suspicion and led to investigation and trials for superstition or worse religious crimes, as not everything in them was according to religious instruction. It seems at first sight that the gap between the normative Lutheran teaching of “how things should have been” and the practical reality of everyday religion in the rural parishes of early modern Finland

<sup>13</sup> District Court records, Ulvila 11–12 Sept 1676; *Bielkesamlingen* vol 27: 53–5. SRA.

<sup>14</sup> See also Eilola, *Rajapinnoilla*, 65 and 134–135 about naming in spells.

<sup>15</sup> “Mijn koo är modstulen, mijn koo är blodstulen, mijn koo är köttstulen, men jagh skall gifwa dig malt och salt, och du skall få dijn mackt och kraft åther.” District court record draft Kastelholm 6 August 1666 in Hausen 1894–98, 266.

<sup>16</sup> Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*. See also the “Introduction” for this volume.

was vast. However, rather than being readily separable into learned instruction and popular belief, lived prayer seems to form a web of meanings that anchored and connected the various elements that were present in the rural religious life of early modern Finland. It shows lived religion, or in this case, lived prayer, was a dynamic process instead of something stable and given.<sup>17</sup>

Since lived religion, and indeed experience, should be understood as a web of connecting rather than a gap of dividing influences, there is a need to examine these influences more holistically also in the case of prayer. One way to do this is to look past the verbal parts of the prayers and to consider the act of praying as a whole. Indeed, this may be essential for the study of the experience of prayer. Since experience is something that connects past memories to future expectations, it is essential to look at what happened before, during, and after the prayer. What kind of situations did people pray in? Did they do so in regularly recurring rituals, such as in Sunday services or when going to bed every evening, or more or less spontaneously when the need arose? Did they pray in a church or a chapel, at an altar or a holy place, or wherever they happened to be—camping, in the cowsheds, or laying their fishnets? What exactly did they do when they prayed, and what did it lead to?

Looking at the fishing prayer used by Agata Pekantytär, the experience of the prayer started with the need to catch fish, and it went on with the processes of trying to communicate with the supernatural and tie it to the natural by cutting and tying fishnet eyelets and invoking divine power when casting the nets and commanding the fish. According to the court records, Agata's catch of fish was substantial enough to make her neighbours suspect she might be using witchcraft, while at the same time as she herself seems to have felt blessed.

The court records abound with similar stories. They mention touching and blessing salt—or in some cases bread or dough—and feeding it to those that people prayed for as well as touching those people or things that were prayed for, both in connection to prayer and to forms of magic that did not mention a divine power.<sup>18</sup> Other records also report kneeling and

<sup>17</sup> See for example Hall, *Lived Religion in America*; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Norris & Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*; Ammerman, "Lived Religion"; Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*; Moore, *Touchdown Jesus* and, on Finland, esp. Toivo, *Faith and magic*.

<sup>18</sup> *Åbo Tidningar* 23 February 1795 (no8); District court records Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a5: Eura, 29 & 31. October. 1695, 524–28; Kokemäki 14–15. June 1633, 230v–232

walking or crawling around those that were prayed for, those that were prayed to, or those one wished to protect.<sup>19</sup> A telling example comes from the court records of the parish of Huittinen in 1646, where a group of women were indicted for having held a rosary prayer meeting or a “Rosolia”, at a home with the intention of helping a fellow woman in the village whose eyesight was failing. The women had slaughtered a calf and prepared a meal from it with beer on the table, they drank the beer and ate the calf, and they read a sequence of prayers: “The ten commandments, the credo and Our Father, each nine times on their knees and they struck iron on flint stone.”<sup>20</sup> The significance of the physical action, of doing things, is emphasized in the record.

In the more official instructive materials, praying is “doing” rather than merely saying words and even less thinking thoughts to God. The church liturgies instruct parishioners to stand up and bow their heads, to recite the prayer, and to sing praises afterwards.<sup>21</sup> Erick Falk’s prayer book for expectant mothers instructs those praying with the labouring mother to hurl themselves down before God.<sup>22</sup>

It is obvious that for the early modern layperson in Finland—and for the clergy—prayer did not consist of words or thoughts alone, but also of actions. Descriptions of prayer include physical, bodily activities. It is safe to say that the early modern layperson’s prayer was a material and mental combination of thought, word, and action. A significant part of the materiality of the experience of prayer consisted of the bodies of both the persons praying and also those of everyone else involved—the beneficiaries,

(new page number 197v–199); 7. December 1633, 266–v, new page number 233–v.; 20.–21. March 1634, 298–v (new page number 264v–5) and 17.–20.11. 1634, 336 (new page number 303); Ala-Satakunta II KOa 6: Ulvila 19.–21. October 1691, 530–31; Ala-Satakunta II KOa7: Ulvila 10.–11-October 1692; 471–3. NA.; See also Kastelholm 6. August 1666 in Hausen ‘Ransakningar’, 266–274 and Sund 12.–13. December 1666 in Hausen ‘Ransakningar’, 285–293.

<sup>19</sup> *Konglig Majjt:tz Placat och Pâpud*; Ståhle, *Ransakningar efter antikviteter*. These evaluations are discussed, e.g. by Wangefelt-Ström, *Heligt, Hotdullt*. District Court Records Ala-Satakunta II, KO a2, Ulvila 11.–13. July 1687. 225–229. NA.

<sup>20</sup> “Tio Gods buds, troon, Fadhren wår nio gånger hwardera på knään läsit.” District court records, Ala-Satakunta I KO a6, Huittinen 16.–18. November 1646, 192v. NA.

<sup>21</sup> Knuutila, “Liturgisen yhdenmukaistamisen”, 9–40; Laasonen, *Luterilaisuus*, 73; Malmsted, *Bondetro*, 145–5.

<sup>22</sup> Falck, “Trostebook”, 340–341.

the bystanders, and, at least sometimes, the divine or the holy. Experience is never immediate nor is it ever completely internal or private; it happens in a community and a culture, in a place that is socially defined. An “authentic” experience true to an individual’s self is not only unattainable but it probably never existed, since, as we saw, already the everyday meaning of experience includes pre-existing expectations; it is preconditioned by outside influence and takes place in a web rather than a separation of influence.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in order to study the prayer experience, it is important to take into account this physical action with its materiality and its bodily nature.

The process of experience was further defined by what happened later on: it depended on whether the communication with the supernatural appeared successful or not and whether, indeed, it was understood as such by other people, dismissed as nonsense, or, as in Agata’s case, interpreted as speaking God’s name criminally in vain. Experience is then a process of experimenting with and observation of the world, which always includes an attempt to explain and interpret the observations made. This makes experience the “nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior”—everything at once in an inseparable amalgam.<sup>24</sup> As many of the stories in the court records testify, experience needed to be approved by a community or society. The case descriptions provide evidence of a process in which the events were turned into different types of experience as presented by different parties, either in conflict to or corroborating each other, and where people at least implicitly discuss their evaluations. They determine whether the experience was one of legitimate prayer or forbidden superstition or worse. It is the process of control and approbation or disapprobation that is the focus of this chapter. The rest of this chapter will look at how these experiences were formed and how they were shared, not only through words but also through bodily action and the senses.

<sup>23</sup> Jay, *Songs of Experience*, 6–7.

<sup>24</sup> Jay, *Songs of Experience*, 6–7; Newton, *Misery to mirth*, 28–30; Millard, 2020, 194ff.; Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 30–31.

## THE MEDIUM FOR THE PERSONALIZATION PROCESS OF EXPERIENCE

The unified forms, places, rituals, and words of early modern prayer could be prescribed in catechisms or prayer books, which often gave these directions as straightforward guidelines and commands to think a certain thought, possess a given rationale, and feel a certain emotion. They are in this similar to the devotional literature of medieval Catholicism, the works of which have been interpreted as intimate or affective scripts: they are quite literally directions for the performance of feeling, and through performance the experience of a feeling. By performing certain exercises, by repeating certain words that could function as “emotives”, by gazing at images, and by picturing narratives, people were immersed in devout and Godly feeling.<sup>25</sup>

The early modern prayer books were, however, often less intimate and more patronizing, not so much leading the devout readers’ way to correct emotions but rather giving direct orders of what the rationale of experience should be. Much of the normative material, prayer books, catechisms, and sermon collections also change the direction of the emotions in prayer: moving away from the medieval hope that divine intercession would change the fates of those praying in a better direction, the purpose of Protestant (and to an extent, reformed Catholic) religious prayer was to confirm the convictions that an omniscient and omnipotent God had already arranged everything for the best, and the only sensible thing a faithful Christian could do was to calmly submit to His will. Even the attached thoughts and goals of prayer were often prescribed, since prayer should be humble in its utter undeservingness, yet confident in the knowledge that God will help—and if the help did not always come in the ways human nature hoped for, it was nevertheless a Christian duty to think that it was for the best.<sup>26</sup>

This is well visible in some of the materials from early modern Sweden and Finland. For example, Erich Falck’s prayer book for expectant mothers exhorts mothers to embrace pain and bodily suffering as a grace given by God—it is their chance to take part in the punishment of the sins of Adam and Eve, to console themselves with the result when the baby is

<sup>25</sup> McNamer, *Affective*; Reddy, *Navigation*; Scheer, “Are feelings?”; Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession*.

<sup>26</sup> Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of feeling*; See also Atherton, “The pursuit of power”.



born, and to trust in God's help. If that help seemed to come slowly, it was only to let poor humans properly see His power and the futility of their own effort, and to let humans practice their patience and faith. Experiencing His fatherly discipline and rod should bring women to love Him more when the pain eventually lifted. Should the mother perish in pain, no harm was done: since she died in fulfilling her divine calling of motherhood, she was freed from her sins and her miserable life, and she would enter eternal rest in heaven.<sup>27</sup> Though the prayers performed by people who appeared in the court records seem to have hoped for rather more immediate relief, there is a strong attempt to guide not only the forms and verbal expressions of prayer, but also the related internal emotions and thoughts and hopes—the whole range of human response that forms experience.

While careful instruction was given on the uniform integration of religious thinking and feeling, both the same instruction and other descriptions of prayer also show that often, material and bodily cues were used to tie prayer back to the personal sphere. This was already visible in the places of prayer, as church prayers took place within the pews assigned to individual households often in an order displaying wealth and status, as well as gender, marital status, and age.<sup>28</sup>

Court records also described prayers in cowsheds, fields, and pastures, and, like Agata's, in fishing places and hunting grounds. While some forms of prayer took the prayer far, even to the sacrificial churches of other parishes, which demanded long pilgrimage-like journeys to enact the prayer,<sup>29</sup> most often people prayed where they lived or close by, amid their daily work. While these places were often owned and used commonly by the villagers, they were always connected to the named individual who performed or was the beneficiary of the prayer—or if not to the person, then to the household, meaningful relationships, or a more or less daily task. These were personal, though not private, spaces.<sup>30</sup> Performing a prayer in these places also connected the prayer to the personal sphere, even when the verbal part of prayer was, word by word, a commonly used Lord's Prayer. Catechisms and prayer books also instructed prayer in the

<sup>27</sup> Falck, "Tröstebok", 314–319, 324–331.

<sup>28</sup> Saalasti, *Penkkisijakiistat*.

<sup>29</sup> Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 91–102; Toivo, *Faith and Magic*, 50–60.

<sup>30</sup> Laitinen, "Materiaalinen kaupunki".

household, at the meal table and in bedrooms.<sup>31</sup> This brought the place of prayer into the privately owned, personal, and sometimes intimate sphere.

Bringing prayer to the intimate and personal—if not personalized—places and spaces had the power to make even otherwise common and prescribed prayer personal. Place and space, and indeed time are not to be understood as just the backdrop of action, but parts of the experience of early modern prayer itself. It was not detached from place; place and prayer intra-acted as entangled material practices. As these entanglements took place in certain individual and personal places, the common and shared in them became simultaneous pluralities.<sup>32</sup>

Using the bodies of those who prayed as part of the prayer was an even more powerful way of re-connecting the prayer to personal experience. This did not mean only standing up, kneeling, or prostrating oneself for prayer as was instructed in the prayer books and church liturgies, nor using one's personal bodily voice to utter the verbal parts of it—or the cries of pain, grief, or joy that may have accompanied the words—things that were done with or came out of the personal body.

Many of the prayers include some form of eating blessed salts, blessed bread (sometimes but not necessarily oblates, although the clergy was certainly worried about the possibility of misusing communion bread),<sup>33</sup> blessed dough, or blessed milk—or feeding them to sick people or cattle.<sup>34</sup> These descriptions also combine elements of ritual eating, probably deriving from communion and other celebratory meals. The description above of the women in Huittinen emphasized the organizing of a full meal for a prayer meeting, from slaughtering a calf and brewing the beer to consuming the meal during the prayer meeting.<sup>35</sup> The unofficial celebrative meal in honour of the saint may also have reflected the Catholic practice of distributing the Eulogiae or blessed (non-consecrated) bread at the back of the church at the end of mass. As the bread was not transubstantiated,

<sup>31</sup> Agricola, *Ruousskiria, Bibliasta*; Getzelius, *Yxi Lasten Paras Tawara*.

<sup>32</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 55 f.; Laitinen, *Order, materiality*, 23–24; Jerram, “Space: a Useless Category”, 408, 419; Barclay, “New materialism”.

<sup>33</sup> Laasonen, *Johannes Gezelius*, 227–8; Gezelius, *Casuum conscientiae*, 302, 303. *Kicko-Laki* 1686 XI: 10.

<sup>34</sup> District Court Records Ala-Satakunta II, KO a6: Ulvila 19.–21. October 1691, 530–31; Ulvila 10.–11. October 1692. Ala-Satakunta II, KO a7:471–73. Kastelholm 6 August 1666 in Hausen, “Ransakningar”, 266.

<sup>35</sup> “Tio Gods buds, troon, Fadhren wår nio gånger hwardera på knään läsit”, District court records. Huittinen 16.–18. November 1646. Ala-Satakunta I KO a 6, 192v. NA.

consuming it unprepared and unworthily did not pose the same danger of desecration as the real communion bread. It allowed the laity to play a part in the social side of the communion, partaking in community activities enhanced by the common sacred event.<sup>36</sup> Eating or being eaten was a way of entering the body, and while eating evil or cursed things could pollute the body in witchcraft, so would eating blessed things bless the body and let the sacred powers enter it. Eating blessed bread, milk, or salt was a way of literally internalizing the prayer. This effect is not only discernible in the court records' testimonies of people who were accused of superstitions; it corresponded to official theology as well: the real presence and the immediate touch of the material manifestations in the communion were important and discussed elements of seventeenth-century Lutheranism.<sup>37</sup>

The use of bodily action in prayer also brought attention to the sensory elements of feeling and experience, such as coldness, warmth, smell, and light or darkness, as well as to physical sensations of anxiety and expectation—the pressing or lifting of the heart<sup>38</sup> that the early modern prayer books recount instead of the modern butterflies in the stomach, or indeed the sense of satiation and fullness or relief related to a successful experience of a helpful prayer meeting.

Attention to the material surroundings and the body emphasizes experience as a social process that is not only an immediate encounter with or an observation of the world, but rather a more or less deliberate effort to gather, produce, and make sense of these observations or encounters.<sup>39</sup> While experience takes place as a web of influence, this web is anchored to the personal and individual as they are reflected in the surrounding place and space, physical materiality, and the body of those doing the experiencing. While the “authenticity” or immediacy of an individual’s true experience is unattainable and possibly non-existent, some form of authenticity was actually created in the materiality of early modern prayer: there was the successful application of the expected elements of experience to oneself

<sup>36</sup> Bossy, “Blood and baptism”; Burnett, “The Social History of Communion”, 87–8; Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 88–90.

<sup>37</sup> Getzelius, *Perbreves*.

<sup>38</sup> Eyice, *An emotional landscape*, 60–63.

<sup>39</sup> Koselleck, “Der Einfluß der beiden Weltkriege auf das soziale Bewußtsein”, in *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes: Eine Militärgeschichte von unten*, ed. by Wolfram Wette (München: Piper, 1992), esp. 324–32. Backman, “Äärellisyyden kohtaaminen”, 26–27; Toikkanen, “Välineen käsite”; Toikkanen & Virtanen, “Kokemuksen käsitteen ja käytön jäljillä”, 7–24; Scott, “Evidence”. See also the “Introduction” to this volume.

and one's situation through the material place and the intimate body. Once thus applied, the praying person was able to recognize the experience of prayer as his or her own, as personal and specific, despite it being constructed under cultural and social influences. This is more than William Reddy's "emotive success",<sup>40</sup> which means matching an inward feeling to cultural expectation. Rather, authenticity in experience must mean the process of creating the web of experience in the inner and the contextual together. Like a spider's web, the web on experience cannot be disentangled: removing almost any part will make the whole web collapse. The inner and the outer of authenticity simply do not exist without each other. Physical and material as well as bodily points of experience serve as the anchor points and joints of that web, authenticating it, but this is an authenticity that is created as the process of experience is carried on, as a result of it, rather than as a base or basic point before the start of the cognitive.

The authenticity here is related to a subjectivity that is also not given, but constantly created in connection—intra-action even—with the rest of the world.<sup>41</sup> In such a situation, attention shifts between the experiencing subject and the social relationships and interdependencies in which experience is produced. Above, I have looked at the personalizing and "authenticating" of experience. Next, I will look at the sharing of it.

### THE MEDIUM FOR SHARING AND STRUCTURALIZING EXPERIENCE

In the example of the fishing prayer at the beginning of this chapter, Agata offered her prayer as evidence that she was a good and godly person instead of the evil witch she was accused of being. What her maid had heard when they went fishing, and what the court's audience heard when the maid recounted it, however, was instead a spell or a charm. When the judge and jury heard it in court, they heard someone at least taking God's name in vain with superstitious if not evil intent. Even though Agata did catch a lot of fish, the rest of the community did not perceive or experience this as a sign of divine approval or a response to her prayer, but rather as proof that she had indeed engaged in efficient witchcraft that stole the

<sup>40</sup> Reddy, *Navigation*; Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense Experience*, 31–32.

<sup>41</sup> Mack, "Religion, Feminism"; Eustace, *Passion*; Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense Experience*, 25–6.

catch from the rest of the villagers. While personal and specific, involving her own body, her own boat, her own fishing nets in the place where her household had a right to fish, her experience cannot be defined as successful. Agata's experience of what she did and what happened differed from that of her maid and the rest of the villagers. In the evaluation that followed the events, in the local gossip as well as in court, her version of the interpretation was not approved. She lost both the court case, being fined a substantial sum of 40 marks for witchcraft and superstition, and the right to define what had happened.<sup>42</sup>

The experiences around Agata's fishing prayer could be compared with those of the women organizing the prayer meeting for the woman who was going blind. These women were brought to court likewise on suspicion of superstition. However, what comes forth from the court records is a totally different situation from that in the investigation around Agata and her fishing. Both cases were initiated by the local pastor, but in Agata's case, she had been first denounced by neighbours and relatives in her village, people who suspected her and were prepared to testify against her. The women in Huittinen, on the other hand, had only come to the attention of the new pastor of the parish because he was appointed to his office. The former pastor was not deceased but only deposed. This was an exceptional circumstance, the former pastor had no wish to leave, and the new one initiated an investigation into the former pastors' demerits: he was said to drink, quarrel, neglect his office, and hold suspicious religious views. The women were brought to court as evidence against the former pastor, who had not only condoned such superstitious practices—including Catholic Rosary use—but encouraged it. Their testimonies were congruent. Despite strong ritualistic implications in the numbers of prayers and credos repeated, in the meals and in the "striking iron with flint", no one suggested that it was not a prayer meeting; it was just a slightly erroneous one. In addition, no one contested that the prayer had apparently been heard: the woman going blind had improved as a result. Whereas the court agreed with the new pastor that this was not quite the way a proper prayer meeting should be held, the women were not punished for their action; they were merely sent home and told not to do it again.

<sup>42</sup> "Nembnär jagh intet Gudh ibland?" ... 'Lohen sjlmät, Sijan sjlmät, Minun vercoin Catzocat, Nimen Isen Poian etc.'" *Bielkesamlingen* vol. 27: District Court records, Ulvila 11–12 Sept 1676, 53–5. SRA.

The origins of the investigations obviously have an effect on how the investigation went and was described in the court records. The differences in the origins of the court proceedings in turn originate from the differences in the experience of what happened in the respective events of prayer—where, how, and by whom they took place. The one most obvious difference is that Agata performed her fishing prayer almost alone. Agata’s maid had witnessed the prayer often enough for her to be able to recite it word for word in court. Nevertheless, the maid’s experience was markedly different. Conversely, the women in Huittinen shared a similar, united experience. This is centrally related to the physical material and bodily context of praying.

It was Agata who performed the fishing prayer, using her own hands, her own voice, in her own boat at a fishing place to which her household held the rights. She even called the fishnets “my nets”. Her maid watched, helping as she was bound to do by her work contract, but essentially only obeying the commands of her household mistress. The women in Huittinen, on the other hand, acted together. While it is likely that for the sake of convenience, they collected in someone’s house and therefore in a private space, they had prepared a meal and brewed ale together, they ate and drank together, they stood up and knelt down together, and struck iron with flint together, moving and using their bodies at the same time for the same purpose. When they recited their verbal prayers, they did so in (relative) unison.

Experience was part of this process: a bodily sensation of touch, of cold or warmth, or of smell or sight was not necessarily the same for everyone, but there was likely such a sensation for almost everyone, or at least almost everyone had some previous experience that allowed them to imagine such sensations. While not necessarily the same to begin with, these sensations could be assigned meanings that were similar enough to allow people to negotiate a shared interpretation. The body was not only a means of an individual experience of faith and gender, but also a means of sharing and negotiating them with other individuals and whole communities.<sup>43</sup> The body and the material surroundings were part of what bridged individuals and communities, and transferred one-time actions into rituals and eventually social structures.

We could use Karen Barad’s New Materialist theory, which states that material bodies intra-act on a deeper-than-molecular level, and are

<sup>43</sup> See also Mahmood, *Politics of piety* and Ahmed, “Some Preliminary Remarks”.

“neither individual entities, nor mental impressions, but entangled material practices”.<sup>44</sup> Barad’s theory essentially means that in nature, bodies—or any material objects—have no fixed essence. Rather, they are constantly changing, “coming-to-be” something that is influenced by everything else. Early modern people did not think in terms of quantum physics, but, on a much more practical level, they understood that their surroundings moulded them, and they in turn moulded their surroundings. When thought of in terms of “coming-to-be”, gender and sexed bodies could also refer to maturing and ageing. In particular, female corporeality was unstable because of the reproductive life course; the female body transgressed categories, manifested noncompliance to norms, and signified decay, but as the women in Huittinen proved, female bodies could also bridge, come together, and renew life and well-being. It was the body that was—despite its intimately personal, physically specific, and infinitely variable nature—similar enough for everyone to provide an anchoring point for a shared experience, allowing different individuals to explain their observations and encounters in the world in ways that fit not only the world views of those doing the encountering, but also those of the people around them—their communities, societies, and cultures.<sup>45</sup>

The bridging or sharing of the power of (female) bodies was harnessed in ritual action—in action that could be and was shared often enough and for long enough by a sufficient number of participants to increase its significance. The women in Huittinen cited the Lord’s Prayer nine times. The church, too, used similar rituals during the divine services, having people recite prayer in unison, stand up, kneel, and sit down as a united congregation during the liturgy. Indeed, it was part of Lutheran theology that a shared prayer was more powerful than an individual one, and this is why Rogation day services were compulsory for the whole parish community.<sup>46</sup> As the ritual processes of experience were repeated often enough by a significant number of people and communities, they began to form social structures that people came to expect, count on, and despair of.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 55 f.

<sup>45</sup> Koselleck, “Der Einfluß der beiden Weltkriege”, 324–32. Backman, “Äärellisyyden kohtaaminen”, 26–27; Toikkanen, “Välineen käsite”; Toikkanen & Virtanen, “Kokemuksen käsitteen ja käytön jäljillä”, 7–24; Scott, “The Evidence”.

<sup>46</sup> Schmedemann 1709, 453–454; Lempiäinen, *Pyhät ajat*, 217–222; Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 64–66; Malmstedt, “In defence”.

<sup>47</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past*.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the experience of prayer on the three levels of experience described in the introductory chapter of this volume—everyday experience, experience as a social process, and experience as a social structure. It has shown the material and the corporeal nature of the early modern prayer to play an essential part in the ways the religious experience of a prayer was constructed, personalized, and shared.

Praying was “doing” in a much more holistic sense than merely saying words or even less thinking thoughts to God. Early modern descriptions of prayer, both in prayer books or liturgies and in lived religion, for example in court records, show clearly that early modern prayer was, indeed, a profoundly bodily process that included touching, kneeling, walking around things, singing, and eating. These descriptions show prayer as a material, physical action that had sensory resonance in the body. The body and the material surroundings of the prayer form a space where the experience takes place, even “a tool” to experience with. The early modern Finns, who prayed, did that with their whole body, kneeling, standing up, and touching either a representative of the object they prayed for—a fishnet or a sick cow—or a representative of the sacred force they prayed to—a blessed meal, blessed salt, communion bread, or a church building. They took their prayer close to the places where the prayer needed to work—to the church but also to their fishing waters, cowsheds, and homes.

As a sense of place is preconditioned by the experiences related to it, the experience of prayer also transformed these places from merely mundane spaces to spaces that had a spiritual and religious aspect to them, just as the places brought hope for a sacred influence on mundane everyday life.

Attention to the material surroundings and the body emphasizes experience as a social process that is not only an immediate encounter with or observation of the world, but rather a more or less deliberate effort to gather, produce, and make sense of these observations or encounters.

The observation that experience is materially situated in a very specific place and often a bodily process draws attention to questions of how personal or authentic experience can be. While “authenticity” in the sense of the direct, unmediated individual’s “true” experience is unattainable—if it even exists—some form of personality and, through it, authenticity was created in the material and bodily “taking place” of the prayer, where the outside social conditions of experience were matched with the personal conditions of one’s intimate world. It is nevertheless worth noting that



this type of authenticity is far from a “starting point”, a “real” feeling that could be exposed once all the layers of cultural influence are removed. This is an authenticity that is created as the process of experience is carried out, as a result of it rather than before the start of the cognitive process.

The physical body and the material place were also media of sharing experience. Despite its intimately personal, physically specific, and infinitely variable nature, the body was also similar enough for everyone to provide an anchoring point for a shared experience. The material aspects of the place were likewise something that could be observed and understood in reasonably recognizable ways by different people. Together, they allowed different individuals to explain their observations and encounters in the world in ways that were recognized as a reasonable fit, both by themselves and those around them, their communities, societies, and cultures. This, eventually, allowed for similar enough processes of experience to be shared by significant enough numbers of people to enable them to form social structures that guided and formed the experiences of whole communities and societies. When the bodily action of lived religion is reconnected to the cognitive process and mediated discussion of experience with one’s community, the body, too, gains more importance than just as a tool to act with or a container for one’s cognitive processes: the body and material surroundings were part of the process that bridged individuals and communities, and turned one-time actions into understood experiences, and eventually social structures.

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## CHAPTER 6

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# Extended Families as Communities of Religious Experience in Late Seventeenth-Century Eastern Finland

*Miia Kuha*

### INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1681, a young peasant woman named Helga Mielotar stood before the district court of Sulkava, a parish close to the eastern border of the Swedish realm, swearing an oath with her confirmers, 11 men, that she had not practised any witchcraft or superstition. Helga, who had married into an extended family from another parish, had ended up at the bottom of the household hierarchy. As a conflict inside the family escalated after the death of the former master, Helga and her husband separated from the household. After some quarrels over the inheritance from the shared household, Helga's stepdaughter accused her of bewitching another young woman in the family. However, at this point, Helga was already hosting religious festivities in her new neighbourhood, and in the

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M. Kuha (✉)

Department of History and Ethnology, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland  
e-mail: [miia.p.kuha@ju.fi](mailto:miia.p.kuha@ju.fi)

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end, she was able to get confirmers to swear an oath with her that she had done nothing illegal.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the experience of exclusion in the common household turned into a situation where Helga seems to have had an accepted and even central role in the community. Religious interpretations and practices in an agrarian community were central factors in this process.

This chapter examines religious practices and meaning-making on the grassroots level of social organization in the eastern Finnish province of Savo in the late seventeenth century. The area was characterized by long distances, a harsh climate, and a peripheral position near the eastern border of the Swedish realm. Extended families were common in the eastern areas of the Swedish kingdom in the early modern era.<sup>2</sup> They were often connected to the burn-beat cultivation prevalent in eastern Finland that demanded a large workforce.<sup>3</sup> In eastern Finland, people did not live in densely inhabited villages, and settlements consisted mostly of single farm households that were almost entirely self-sufficient and often located at great distances from each other. This sparse settlement pattern gave the household great importance as a unit of social and economic organization,

<sup>1</sup>District Court Records (Kihlakunnanoikeuksien renovoidut tuomiokirjat, hereafter DCR): Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, Pien-Savo, KO a: 2: 7–12, The National Archives of Finland, Helsinki (hereafter NAF); DCR Sulkava 14–15. January 1681, Pien-Savo, KO a: 2: 5, NAF. The cases are available at the Digital Archive of the National Archives of Finland, <http://digi.narc.fi/digi/> (Cited 21.10.2020).

<sup>2</sup>Extended families were not only an Eastern Finnish phenomenon, but there was a certain kind of an “eastern family system” that was common in a large area in Eastern Europe. John Hajnal’s theory on western and eastern family models has been complemented by later research. See John Hajnal, “Two kinds on preindustrial household formation system”, in *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, ed. Richard Wall et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Peter Laslett, “Family and household as work group and in group: areas of traditional Europe compared”, in *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, ed. Richard Wall et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kirsi Sirén, *Suuresta suvusta pieneen perheeseen. Itäsuomalainen perhe 1700-luvulla* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1999), 9–15, 91, 101–104.

<sup>3</sup>Beatrice Moring, “Widowhood options and strategies in preindustrial northern Europe. Socioeconomic differences in household position of the widowed in 18th and 19th century Finland”, *History of the Family* 7 (2002): 80–82. In the province of Savo, the majority of extended families consisted of two married couples, but there were even families of up to five couples. It is not possible to get a complete number or share of all large families through taxation records, because the authorities could document family units separately despite of their at least partial cohabitation. See Kauko Pirinen, *Savon historia II: 1. Rajamaakunta asutusliikkeen aikakautena 1534–1617* (Pieksämäki: Kustannuskiila, 1982), 319–321.



especially in the case of extended families.<sup>4</sup> Extended families usually inhabited the same household, but there were also extended family units formed of separate households and burn-beat partnerships that only worked together in activities related to burn-beat cultivation.<sup>5</sup>

I will approach eastern Finnish rural communities through their religious practices and understandings using the concept of lived religion. Lived religion is understood here as a social process and a part of daily life: it was a way to interact with and participate in one's community.<sup>6</sup> Behind this process, there was an understanding of the world where the realm of the sacred or otherworldly was an integral part. Fundamental ideas about the structure of the cosmos, people's ultimate values, and their efforts to order their reality were expressed in sacred rituals, symbols, and practices.<sup>7</sup> Religion-as-lived is "made up of diverse, complex and ever-changing mixtures of beliefs and practices" that are not necessarily coherent.<sup>8</sup> In the lives of early modern eastern Finnish peasants, the religious ideas and practices taught by the Lutheran church intermingled in varying ways with traits from local religious traditions that reflected the needs of the agrarian society and its ways of explaining and ordering the world.<sup>9</sup>

Using secular lower court records as source material, I will analyse the process of negotiation that led from labelling the young peasant woman Helga Mielotar a malevolent witch to entrusting her with the position of hosting rituals crucial to the success of the agrarian community. Through the case example, I examine how practices of lived religion shaped the

<sup>4</sup>Laura Stark-Arola, *Magic, Body and Social Order. The Construction of Gender through Women's Private Rituals in Traditional Finland* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1998), 74–76.

<sup>5</sup>Sirén, *Suuresta suvusta*, 92–93; Elina Waris, *Yksissä leivissä: Ruokolahtelainen perhelaitos ja yhteisöllinen toiminta 1750–1850* (Helsinki: Suomen historiallinen seura, 1999), passim.

<sup>6</sup>Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo, "Religion as Experience", in *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation in Northern Europe c. 1300–1700*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo (Leiden: Brill 2017), 2–3; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion in Later Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2.

<sup>7</sup>See Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of the 115th Street. Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950*. Third edition (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010 [1985]), lxi–lxii; Laura Stark, *Peasants, Pilgrims and Sacred Promises. Ritual and the Supernatural in Orthodox Karelian Folk Religion* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002), 20–23.

<sup>8</sup>Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion. Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 185.

<sup>9</sup>Miia Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto varhaismodernin ajan Savossa (vuoteen 1710)* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2016), 37–39.

relationship of the community and the individual, and how religious interpretations gave meaning to the experiences of the people involved. Within extended families, the individual's social standing in the household—affected by age and gender—played an important role in forming these experiences. The extended family system had special consequences for the position of women, and age and gender hierarchies have been considered to have been stronger in areas where complex family structures were common.<sup>10</sup> According to Raisa Maria Toivo, gender roles were reinforced in religious practice, but religious experiences could also be empowering and allow the negotiation of individual and communal identities.<sup>11</sup> This negotiation is at the centre of this chapter.

Using the term “communities of experience” as an analytical tool, I will consider the nature of eastern Finnish extended families as communities of religious experience. Like “emotional communities”, social communities can be analysed as “communities of experience”, emphasizing that communities are formed around certain shared experiences. People often belong to many communities of experience simultaneously, and these communities can change over time.<sup>12</sup> A community of experience is formed by the shared experiences of people in a certain social situation. On the one hand, when the subjective experiences of each individual are verbalized and interpreted in a given context, these experiences become shared and they create communities of experience.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the community makes the rules on how to experience for its members, so

<sup>10</sup> On the age and gender hierarchies in extended families, see Sirén, *Suuresta suvusta*, 142–147.

<sup>11</sup> Raisa Maria Toivo, “Gender Performance in Early Modern Religious Life”, in *Revisiting Gender in European History, 1400–1800*, eds. Elise Dermineur, Åsa Karlsson Sjögren & Virginia Langum (New York: Routledge, 2018), 181.

<sup>12</sup> On emotional communities, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History”, *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 842; Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional communities in the early middle ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 23–25. On communities of experience, see Ville Kivimäki, “Reittejä kokemushistoriaan. Menneisyyden kokemus yksilön ja yhteisön vuorovaikutuksena”, in *Eletty historia. Kokemus näkökulmana menneisyyteen*, eds. Johanna Annola, Ville Kivimäki & Antti Malinen (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2019), 25; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Raisa Maria Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 4–5.

<sup>13</sup> Ella Viitaniemi, “Muurarimestari Kustaa Stenman ja katumaton maailma. Pietismi, kirjoittaminen ja kokemuksen siirtäminen länsisuomalaisella maaseudulla 1700-luvun jälkipuoliskolla”, in *Eletty historia. Kokemus näkökulmana menneisyyteen*, eds. Johanna Annola, Ville Kivimäki & Antti Malinen (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2019), 76–77.

that certain experiences are accepted, while those who will not conform to appropriate experiencing and expression can be excluded.<sup>14</sup> Through the case studied here, it is possible to analyse this process of negotiation that led to both acceptance and exclusion.

As source material, I will use secular lower court records from the province of Savo dating from the late seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup> Especially in the late seventeenth century, secular authorities strove to push through religious uniformity among the populace. Thus, secular court records include the prosecution of religious crimes, such as witchcraft, superstition, blasphemy, and negligence in participating in the official religious practice of the church. Even though the celebration of saints' days and other holy days that had been abolished after the Reformation was considered superstition and idolatry, and the clergy often warned about their celebration from the pulpit, those who carried on celebrating them were not usually prosecuted.<sup>16</sup> However, information regarding the celebration of saints' days sometimes comes up in connection to the examination of other crimes. Then, the accused, the witnesses, the jurors, and the court audience were asked about the nature and prevalence of these festivities. The scribe wrote down the Finnish-speaking rural inhabitants' testimonies in Swedish, and in addition, he translated them from oral culture to be understandable in the learned and legal environment. However, researchers agree that the authorities or the legal culture did not dictate the content of the records; they contain material that the parishioners produced themselves, like how they gave meanings and interpretations to certain events. These explanations also had to be understood and shared by others to be credible.<sup>17</sup> Thus, different kinds of religious practices and patterns of thought and belief can be examined through court records.

<sup>14</sup> See the "Introduction" chapter in this volume.

<sup>15</sup> The cases have been collected as part of the author's PhD study on the observance of holy days in early modern Eastern Finland. See Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 26–29.

<sup>16</sup> Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 133–135. On the reduction of holy days after the Reformation and their continuing celebration, see also Göran Malmstedt, *Helgdagsreduktionen. Övergången från ett medeltida till ett modernt år i Sverige 1500–1800* (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> On using lower court records as source material, see also Riikka Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden: The Crime and Legal Practice in the Lower Courts* (Tampere: University of Tampere, 2015), 46–55; Jari Eilola, *Rajapinnoilla. Sallitun ja kielletyn määritteleminen 1600-luvun jälkipuoliskon noituus- ja taikunustapauksissa* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2003), 41–45; Toivo, "Gender Performance", 170.

Court records can also be used to study family relations, even though the information they give about a certain family is limited and fragmentary. In the courtroom, the focus was on finding out if a crime had been committed, and thus it was not necessary to go deep into the family history of the accused. Thus, to complement this material, I have studied personal tax records. There are certain deficiencies also in this material, especially in the documentation of women, whose names are often missing, and they are instead merely recorded as someone's wife.<sup>18</sup> However, in some cases, these two series of sources can be combined to gain information on the relationships and the lived experience of individuals within these families.

### WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS IN A DIVIDED FAMILY

A peasant woman named Helga Mielotar was accused of witchcraft in the winter court of 1679 in the parish of Sulkava in southern Savo. One of the witnesses, a young girl named Malin, told the court that in the previous spring of 1678, Helga had baked dark bread and sent her stepdaughter to take it to another peasant woman, Margetta Pellitär. However, Margetta was not at home, and instead, her 12-year-old daughter Anna took a small bite of the bread. Malin, who was then with her, noticed that there was something unusual about the bread, so she broke it and threw it out of the window. However, after tasting the bread, Anna would sometimes get dizzy or confused (*ybr i hufvudet*) and tend to fall over, which the members of the household soon ascribed to Helga and the bread she had baked. After Pellitär's family had made the interpretation of witchcraft, Helga's stepdaughter reported her stepmother to the authorities.<sup>19</sup>

Malin described the bread to the judge, saying that it was made of rye flour as usual, but there was some burned salt in it, and some calf hair. According to Malin, the hair belonged to a calf that Helga had inherited

<sup>18</sup>Women were usually marked in the record with the abbreviation *mb*, short from *med hustru*, with wife. The personal tax was only collected from people between 15 and 63 years of age, and others were often left out from the records, except for household masters over the age of 63. In addition, extended families were not always recorded as individual units but scribes might have unified their records by documenting them as nuclear family units. See Moring, "Widowhood options", 81; Veijo Saloheimo, *Savon historia II:2. Savo suurvallan valjaissa 1617–1721* (Kuopio: Kustannuskiila, 1990), 153; Waris, *Ruokolahdelainen perhelaitos*, 17.

<sup>19</sup>DCR Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, KO a: 2: 7–8, NAF.

from the shared household with Margetta Pellitär's family after she and her husband had separated from it two years earlier.<sup>20</sup> When a family member separated from the farm, he or she was usually given movable property. Women's property mainly consisted of clothes, jewellery, and especially cattle.<sup>21</sup> Malin suspected that Margetta Pellitär had bewitched the calf, which indicates that she was aware of a disagreement between Helga and Margetta. Helga defended herself, saying that she had made the bread for her own children. However, she had given a piece to her stepdaughter to take along when she went to help her father carry the turnips that they were going to plant in the spring. Helga denied having sent anything to Marketta. She said that Anna's dizziness or confusion could be explained by her aunt's insanity, which made the woman run from one village to another. However, nobody knew of Anna having been unhealthy before eating the bread.<sup>22</sup>

The court testimonies reveal how young girls had ended up in the middle of a conflict between the adults of an extended family that was now divided, and how they tried to make sense of the events and their position in the changed situation of the household. Anna's experience of the threatening situation was very corporeal. In early modern culture, difficult emotions could be expressed through symptoms of the body, and social conflicts could be made visible by bodily signs of misfortune. The early modern self was closely interlinked with the community, and the boundaries of the body were understood as permeable, so it was believed that the somatic states of an individual could be influenced by others.<sup>23</sup> When Anna's bodily experience was discussed and shared with the other members of the household, it was interpreted and thus experienced as witchcraft. This experience led to Helga's exclusion and being seen as potentially dangerous to her former community.

What had happened in the extended household that was now split? Both Helga Mielotar and Margetta Pellitär had lived as wives at the Paunola household in the parish of Sulkava in the early 1670s. Before that, the household consisted of two married couples, the master Mats Matsson

<sup>20</sup> DCR Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, KO a: 2: 7–8, NAF.

<sup>21</sup> Waris, *Ruokolahtelainen perhelaitos*, 105; Anu Pylkkänen, *Puoli vuodetta, lukot ja avaimet. Nainen ja maalaistalous oikeuskäytännön valossa 1660–1710* (Helsinki: Lakimiesliiton kustannus, 1990), 196.

<sup>22</sup> DCR Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, KO a: 2: 8, NAF.

<sup>23</sup> Jacqueline Van Gent, *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 8, 89, 165–166, Ebook Central.

with his wife, and his brother Grels—Helga’s husband-to-be—with his former wife. By 1673, Mats had died, as had Grels’ wife. The new master, Mats Bertilson, lived in the main household with his two brothers, one of whom was married. There were also children in the household, but they were not included in the records. At this point, Grels Panain is recorded as a lodger (*inhyyses*) in a separate house, and it is not clear how he was related to the master.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the situation in the farm had gone through a major change in the space of four years. Grels was now in an inferior position, probably living in his own cottage on the farm.<sup>25</sup> At about this time, he decided to remarry and Helga moved to Paunola, to the lowermost position in the household, as the lodger’s second wife. In the records of 1675, Grels and Helga had already disappeared from the farm, but instead Grels’ name pops up in the village of Partala, where he is recorded as being a crofter living on the lands of a manor with his wife.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the separation had occurred three years before the accusations of witchcraft took place (Fig. 6.1).

Helga Mielotar had not been born in the parish of Sulkava, but in the neighbouring parish of Puumala, where she had lived until marrying into the household.<sup>27</sup> Thus, she was an outsider who had come from another parish, and the conflict in her relationship with the other members of the extended family had probably emerged already at the beginning of her married life. Immediately after the accusation of witchcraft had been reported to the authorities, Helga fled back to Puumala, probably to her father’s house.<sup>28</sup> Since Helga had been married for six years and women usually married young in this area, she was probably younger than thirty,

<sup>24</sup> Records of personal tax 1669, 1670, and 1673, in receipt books 8663, 8664, and 8671. Provincial collection of accounts (*Läänintilit*): province of Vyborg and Savonlinna, NAF. According to Sirén, lodgers formed a very heterogeneous group in large families and their position was especially tied to their ability to work. They were needed as temporary workforce in burn-beat cultivation. See Sirén, *Suuresta suvusta*, 67–72.

<sup>25</sup> The patronym indicates that the new master was not the old master’s son and it remains unclear how he was related to Grels and his deceased brother. Sometimes there were two different family lines in a household, and that could be the case here too.

<sup>26</sup> Records of personal tax 1675 (8678). Provincial collection of accounts: province of Vyborg and Savonlinna, NAF. There is also a court case from the autumn 1675 that mentions Grels Paunonen as the nobleman Abraham Pistolekors’ crofter, which means that the separation probably took place already then and not in 1676–1677, which the court records refer to. DCR Sulkava 8.–10. November 1675, KO a: 2: 65, NAF.

<sup>27</sup> DCR Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, KO a: 2: 7, NAF.

<sup>28</sup> DCR Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, KO a: 2: 7, NAF.



**Fig. 6.1** The Paunola house is marked with letter A in the left page of the land taxation map drawn in the 1640s. Helga Mielotar lived in the house in the beginning of her married life. NAF, Maanmittaushallitus, Maanmittaushallituksen uudistusarkisto, Maakirjakartat (Land taxation maps), Lille Saffwolax Heradth Sulkava Sochn, MHA C 1: 223–224. The map is available at the Digital Archive of the National Archives of Finland, <http://digi.narc.fi/digi/view.ka?kuid=23740356> (Cited 6.5.2021)

and thus it is likely that her parents were still alive.<sup>29</sup> She might have felt more secure in her father's home than in her new household, but it was also common for people to flee to another locality when they were suspected of a crime. However, she was brought back to Sulkava to be tried.

Those present in court were asked if anyone knew of any previous quarrelling having taken place between the two women, but nobody could tell. However, their husbands had argued over the inheritance when they

<sup>29</sup> In the eighteenth century, women in Eastern Finland usually married at the age of 20 or 21, whereas in Western and Southern Finland the common age at marriage was 24 or 25. Sirén, *Suuresta suvusta*, 117.



separated from the common household.<sup>30</sup> According to Elina Waris, a separation from the extended family was only conducted in extreme circumstances, even though male members did have the formal right to separate themselves.<sup>31</sup> Witchcraft accusations also usually arose only after a conflict had lasted for a long time.<sup>32</sup> Thus, there seems to have been a serious and long-term conflict in the shared household before the separation of Grels and Helga. Households with indirect relationships, such as new spouses and stepchildren, were more likely to fall into crisis. Crises were also more likely to be caused when there was a change in the head of the family.<sup>33</sup>

The experience of young women upon entering marriage was very different in extended families when compared to nuclear family households. In extended families, households were not formed through marriage, but through dividing and merging.<sup>34</sup> According to the patrilineal family structure, women were still considered members of their original kin, and kept their former surnames.<sup>35</sup> Upon entering the household, the bride could be seen as a threat, a potentially dangerous “other”, since she represented a different household from that of the groom’s relatives.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it seems that Helga’s position in the household was experienced as problematic by both her and the other members of the household right from the start, and it is possible that she did not conform to her inferior role. The young daughter-in-law who married into the household was subordinate not only to her husband but also to her parents-in-law and her brothers-in-law and their wives. Thus, younger women did not have the authority of the mistress of the house when entering the household, but they gained more authority with age, and a widow was able to govern the household.<sup>37</sup> Even if the position of the newly wed young wife was inferior, the position of women in general was not poor. Instead, the work effort and experience

<sup>30</sup> There is one very briefly recorded court case from 1675 where Grels demands money from the household. DCR Sulkava 8.–10. November 1675, KO a: 2: 65, NAF. The court records have not survived from the years 1676–1678 when the alleged argument probably took place.

<sup>31</sup> Waris, *Ruokolabtalainen perhelaitos*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> Eilola, *Rajapinnoilla*, 272, 309–310.

<sup>33</sup> Waris, *Ruokolabtalainen perhelaitos*, 51, 184.

<sup>34</sup> Pylkkänen, *Puoli vuodetta*, 194–196; Sirén, *Suuresta suvusta*, 103, 133–134, 141–143.

<sup>35</sup> Olli Matikainen, *Verenperijät. Väkivalta ja yhteisön murros itäisessä Suomessa 1500–1600-luvulla* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura 2002), 57.

<sup>36</sup> Stark-Arola, *Magic, Body and Social Order*, 156–158.

<sup>37</sup> Sirén, *Suuresta suvusta*, 133–134; Pylkkänen, *Puoli vuodetta*, 194.



of women were valued, and as they got older, women were able to gain positions of authority within the household.<sup>38</sup>

After Malin, the next witness—Bertil, the nephew of Helga’s husband, who was also from the same Paunola household—stepped forward and presented a piece of cloth that had been wrapped around some material that seemed like mash, rye grains, and a piece of green and black bread. He claimed that Helga had left the wrap behind when she left the farm. In addition, she had threatened him with words that implied that he would suffer from hunger in the future.<sup>39</sup> Helga replied that she had not cursed him but wanted to punish him with her words for being so hard on her and making her leave the household with such a small inheritance. Helga also explained that there was only natural medicine for healing illnesses in the cloth wrap. The mash was a mixture of spruce tips and lard, and it was meant for healing dysentery (*blodsot*). There was a cake baked with meze-reon berries that she called *näsänisi* and hoary cinquefoil that she knew as *riisiruoho*, “rickets grass”, for healing rickets (*rijs*). The members of the jury were able to explain that the berries would first make the patient dizzy and nauseous, but then better.<sup>40</sup>

Helga seems to have had some expertise in using medicinal herbs and knowledge of diseases, which makes the case even more interesting. In light of this information, it is also easier to understand why the interpretation of witchcraft was made in the first place. Everyone learned some basic rituals to deal with different situations in everyday life, but Helga’s knowledge of medicinal herbs seems to exceed the everyday level and imply that she had special skills in this area, since other people could not recognize the cakes and mixtures that Helga had prepared. When accused in court, experts in healing often claimed that they used only herbs and no other means, like verbal magic, to avoid punishment. Still, they often knew and used other rituals to cure different kinds of wounds and illnesses, such as incantations. It was also common knowledge that someone who could use

<sup>38</sup> Waris, *Ruokolabtelainen perhelaitos*, 107–110, 187.

<sup>39</sup> “*Wielä sinun sydämes tuima*”. DCR Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, KO a: 2: 9, NAF. I have translated the meaning of the sentence, which does not easily translate to English as such, according to a Finnish lexicon from the eighteenth century: “*tuimaa sydäntä* i.e. *hju-kaa, ra-axi menee sydän nälkä tulee – blir hungrig*”. Christfrid Ganander, *Nytt Finskt Lexicon* (1787). *Christfrid Gananderin Uusi suomen sanakirja III S–Ö* (Porvoo & Helsinki: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 1940), f. 176v.

<sup>40</sup> DCR Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, KO a: 2: 10, NAF.

magical means for good purposes could also use them for ill.<sup>41</sup> It was the shared experience of the situation and context that determined how the skill was interpreted by others.

### THE ST GEORGE'S DAY FEAST "AT HELGA'S"

After examining the witchcraft accusations, the focus of the trial turned to a feast that had taken place the previous spring. Helga was asked about "the toast (*wako*) they had drunk in the woods". Helga said that they—the participants were not named—had not been in the woods but at her home. One peasant woman, who had apparently participated in the feast, was now ill and had to stay at home, but her husband assured the court that she had not been involved in any superstition. When the judge inquired about the event, Helga explained that they prayed to God for their cattle's well-being and protection from wild animals in the summer pastures. When Helga, the witnesses, and the court audience were scolded for not having a better way to pray than in "such drunkenness that would rather make it abuse of God's name", they answered that their ancestors had done the same at sowing time, when it was also time to let the cattle out for the summer season. The jurors, who were farmers in a trusted position, explained that some people would still do this in the countryside, but most had ceased with it, and even those who held on to the custom would now sing godly hymns instead of pagan songs. The local clergymen added that since something like this was forbidden, it was done secretly, and thus it was not possible to know anything more of it.<sup>42</sup>

For eastern Finnish peasant households, religious practice was inherently connected to the agricultural year, and annual celebrations formed an important part of religious life, with local variations between parishes and even smaller units within them. These calendar celebrations, situated at important turning points of the agricultural year, gave people the chance to rest from work and concentrate on maintaining their relationship with the sacred or divine, which was done by bodily and tangible practices, eating, drinking, and performing rituals usually related to livestock and crops. Christian prayers and hymns were a central part of the celebrations, and the same people who took part in them also regarded themselves as good Christians, learned their Catechism—at least to a certain extent—and

<sup>41</sup> For the ambiguity of magic, see Van Gent, *Magic, Body, and the Self*, 159–161.

<sup>42</sup> DCR Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, KO a: 2: 8–9, NAF.

attended church on many Sundays and holy days of the year. During one of these feasts, a participant claimed that he had come to the feast “to give thanks to God and eat served food”.<sup>43</sup> These celebrations, with their shared rituals and eating and drinking together, strengthened the cohesion of the participating community, and the celebration provided a chance for active religious participation. The meal and the ale carried multiple and multi-layered symbolic meanings that had accumulated over centuries but were also constantly changing. As Raisa Maria Toivo has suggested, the social element that was retained in the Lutheran Communion can also have served as a model for the meal as a means of religious integration between men and the divine, as well as among the members of the community.<sup>44</sup>

At Helga’s trial, one of the jurors testified that another farmer, who was already deceased, had been “at Helga’s” (*hoos Hellga*) at the feast on St George’s day drinking ale in 1677. The juror claimed that this man had gone out of his mind after drinking there, but this did not seem to be of much interest to the judge.<sup>45</sup> Thus, it seems that Helga hosted the festivities at least twice, in the springs of 1677 and 1678. In popular culture, St George’s day was the traditional occasion for letting the cattle out for the summer.<sup>46</sup> From the parish of Ruokolahti, 70 kilometres south of Sulkava, a court case survives where the celebration of St George’s day is described in more detail. There, a witness told the court that the cattle were let out through a gate to which a Rowan tree was tied with red wool yarn. This was done particularly by children and shepherds who watched the cattle, so that the cattle would keep together better. On the same day, in the morning, ale, bread, butter, and other foods were set on the table, but eating was not allowed before putting a part of each course on a separate dish to make offerings. After eating, people would drink all day and rest from work.<sup>47</sup> Thus, St George’s day was a feast day that included drinking, eating, resting from work, making offerings, praying and singing, and performing certain rituals that aimed at the protection of cattle. Men, women, and children were all involved in the festivities, but in this particular feast,

<sup>43</sup>DCR Visulahti 15. July 1648, KO a: 2: 788v–791v, NAF.

<sup>44</sup>Toivo, *Faith and Magic*, 92–100; Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 135, 145–149, 163.

<sup>45</sup>DCR Sulkava 16.–17. January 1679, KO a: 2: 9, NAF.

<sup>46</sup>Kustaa Vilkkuna, *Vuotuinen ajantieto. Vanhoista merkkipäivistä sekä kansanomaisesta talous- ja sääkalenterista enteiseen* (10th edition, Helsinki: Otava, 1983 [1950]), 106–112. See also Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 142–144.

<sup>47</sup>DCR Ruokolahti 1.–3.6.1685. Jääski, Ranta & Äyräpää, II KOa3: 310–314, NAF.

the focus seems to have been on women and perhaps also children.<sup>48</sup> The celebration was a shared social and religious experience that included many tangible, sensory, and bodily elements.<sup>49</sup>

Calendar celebrations in the eastern parts of the Swedish kingdom were often male events, even though women did take part in them. In these celebrations, both men and women performed their religious duty as household masters or mistresses.<sup>50</sup> It seems that women took the leading role in the religious feasts that were connected to their areas of work in the household, especially those related to tending to the cattle. The gender-specific tasks were associated with certain calendar celebrations. The feast day of St Catherine on 25 November is one example of a celebration that centred around female duties in the household, the tending of cattle in particular. Women were also the ones who performed the central rituals of the day, eating porridge and praying together in the cowshed.<sup>51</sup> The evidence of St George's and St Catherine's feasts shows that even in the area of extended families and a strong gender hierarchy, women could have a central role in the religious tasks that were connected to certain areas of agricultural work.

Thus, the communities of experience that were created by the celebrations seem to have been gendered according to the nature of the particular celebration. The community participated as a whole, but the focus on either men or women depended on the focus of the feast, creating gendered sub-communities of religious experience. For example, the feast of St Stephen in December was a particularly male celebration.<sup>52</sup> The role of women in the celebration of St George's day was probably strengthened by the beliefs of an inherent dynamistic force (*väki*) in the woman's body. The protective power of female sexual organs could be used to protect men, children, and cattle in critical border-crossing situations by stepping over those being protected. There are references in the Finnish folklore collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that on St George's

<sup>48</sup> See also Toivo, *Faith and Magic*, 98–99.

<sup>49</sup> See also Raisa Maria Toivo's contribution in this volume.

<sup>50</sup> Toivo, "Gender Performance", 175.

<sup>51</sup> Kati Kallio et al., *Laulut ja kirjoitukset. Suullinen ja kirjallinen kulttuuri uuden ajan alun Suomessa* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2017), 202–203; Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 138, 140–141.

<sup>52</sup> Miia Kuha, "A Parody of the Church Service in Seventeenth-Century Finland. Reconstructing Popular Religion on the Basis of Court Records", *Frühneuzeit-Info* 23: 1–2 (2012); Kallio et al., *Laulut ja kirjoitukset*, 153–155, 184.

day, the mistress of the house stood above the cowshed door with her legs spread as the cattle were let out. The purpose of the ritual was to protect the cattle from predators and getting lost in the forest.<sup>53</sup> This kind of ritual is not mentioned in the seventeenth-century cases studied here, but it is still possible that it was used, and the rowan gate can be understood as a similar symbol. Rowan is a sacred tree in the Finnish popular tradition, where it was seen as particularly feminine and believed to have protective power. Both women's genitalia and the rowan were seen as liminal: something that was situated between the inner and outer worlds, the worlds of control and chaos. It was important to protect the cattle ritually when they were crossing the border between the household and the wilderness.<sup>54</sup> The division between the inside and the dangerous outside was an important element in how early modern people experienced the world around them. The boundaries of the body, household, and community were permeable and needed to be protected in certain situations. According to Laura Stark, rituals performed by women in eastern Finland were especially aimed at protecting the boundaries of the household against the forest, other farm households, and the village.<sup>55</sup>

Regarding the celebration of St George's day with all its different rituals and activities, preparing and doing everything in a proper manner must have required knowledge and earlier experience of what was supposed to happen and how it was done. Those who participated had certain expectations based on their earlier experiences, most likely since their childhood. Thus, the person who hosted the celebration among a certain community needed to know how to prepare the food and ale, how to put the offerings aside, what rituals to use to see the cattle off to the pastures, what to sing, and how to pray. Even if something gradually changed with the

<sup>53</sup> Laura Stark, "Gender, Sexuality and the Supranormal. Finnish Oral-Traditional Sources", in *More than Mythology. Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions*, eds. Catharina Raudvere & Jens Peter Schjødt (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), 164–169, 173.

<sup>54</sup> Satu Apo, *Naisen väki. Tutkimuksia suomalaisten kansanomaisesta kulttuurista ja ajattelusta* (Helsinki: Hanki ja jää, 1995), 22–25; Veikko Anttonen, "Pihlaja, nainen kiima ja kasvuvoiman pyhä locus", *Elektroloristi* 4, no. 1 (1997), <https://doi.org/10.30666/elope.78213>; Stark-Arola, *Magic, Body and Social Order*, 224–227.

<sup>55</sup> Stark-Arola, *Magic, Body and Social Order*, 166. See also R. W. Scribner, "Symbolising Boundaries. Defining Social Space in the Daily Life of Early Modern Germany", in *Religion and Culture in Germany*, R. W. Scribner, ed. Lyndal Roper (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Eilola, *Rajapinnoilla*, 133–139; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996 [1966]).

festivities—for example, the replacement of traditional songs by Christian hymns—it was probably important that enough of the celebration stayed the same from one year to the next. Tradition linked the experience to those of past generations, giving it more validity.

It is apparent that Helga had the knowledge and experience to host the festivities of St George's day, which explains her prominent role in the celebration. The feast had taken place "at Helga's", which directly refers to her and not her husband's or family's household. She also seems to have hosted this celebration more than once and invited her neighbours, both men and women, to participate. Unlike some other calendar celebrations that seem to have been organized in a different household every year,<sup>56</sup> this feast was organized by Helga at least twice in a row. It was written in the record that Helga spoke ambiguously about the drinking of the toast, because first she said that they had drunk in the forest and then that they had done so in the house. It implies that at least some of the rituals had been performed in the forest, and probably the meal had been served in the house. The toast drunk in the forest was also more suspicious in the eyes of the judge, which might be the reason for emphasizing the celebration inside the house.

Finally, the jury and the court audience were asked about Helga's circumstances before these events, and no one knew of any ill rumours about her. Helga presented a letter written by the mistress of Ahola manor, which stated that Helga had conducted herself honestly while staying at the manor. Apparently, she had served as a maidservant there for some time. She also showed the court a wooden stick with carved signature marks (*bomerke*) from peasants in the parish of Puumala where she was originally from. Thus, the process of negotiation regarding Helga's respectability had also taken place in the neighbouring parish. The support probably affected the sentence, which also reflects the uncertainty of the court and the lack of evidence. The judge stated that the "*wako*" (toast) always counted as a superstition, and even though people said that they would pray to God in heaven, there could be some other superstition involved. The act of witchcraft seemed possible, but the main witness was an under-aged girl and the cake could not be demonstrated to have caused any harm. Thus, Helga was sentenced to free herself with an oath of

<sup>56</sup> Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 149.

purification with “herself as the twelfth” (*sieľf toľffte*).<sup>57</sup> She was to swear, together with her confirmers, that she had not used any witchcraft connected to the cake or the wrap, and that she had not practised any superstition (*widskepelse*) during the feast. Thus, there was no need to deny that the feast had taken place altogether, but only that there was superstition involved. The case was then handed over to the Court of Appeal, and it took quite a long time before the oath of purification could take place: it was conducted two years later, at the winter court of Sulkava in 1681. It was plain and simple: Helga had her confirmers; she swore the oath first herself, then the 11 men took the oath for her, and she was discharged and free to go on with her life.<sup>58</sup>

### THE MEANING OF RELIGIOUS EXPERTISE: FROM A THREAT TO AN ASSET OF THE COMMUNITY?

The case examined above indicates that even a young woman who came from outside the parish could assume a certain amount of religious authority in the community. Helga Mielotar seems to have had better than average skills in making medicines out of herbs, which could in specific circumstances be interpreted as the forbidden use of magic, but which could also be useful for the community, since there was no access to any professional healthcare. She also knew the right way of celebrating St George’s day, since she was able to host the feast. It is likely that she came from a house where traditional skills and festivities had a more central role than in some other households in the area. It is a possible interpretation that these skills were considered a threat in the Paunola household, perhaps more ascribed to religious rituals and interpretations of the church, but that the subsequent neighbourhood gave them more value.

Helga’s earlier experience of living in an extended family household was probably one of exclusion and marginality. It was affected by her age, gender, and position in the household, and the fact that she came from

<sup>57</sup>The oath was commonly used in court processes throughout the seventeenth century until it was forbidden in 1695. Pylkkänen, *Puoli vuodetta*, 111. The confirmers of the oath, usually either six or twelve men, could not be relatives or friends of the accused, but they were expected to be well aware of the case and person in question. It was possible to order women as confirmers if the matter was closely related to feminine matters, such as in child homicide cases. Olli Matikainen, *Verenperijät. Väkivalta ja yhteisön murros itäisessä Suomessa 1500–1600-luvulla* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2002), 123–125.

<sup>58</sup>DCR Sulkava 14.–15. January 1681, KO a: 2: 5, NAF.

outside the parish, but also by her healing skills. After the separation, every time Helga visited Paunola, she was considered an outsider who posed a threat to the integrity of the household. When Helga left the household and the conflict remained, material items that she brought or sent to her former household were easily interpreted as violations of the integrity of household boundaries.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, she expressed anger towards her former household's members, an emotion that was disruptive to order and could be associated with witchcraft.<sup>60</sup> These events and the negotiation of their interpretation led to the shared experience of the household being the target of witchcraft. Grels and Helga's separation from the Paunola household also caused a crisis in the life of the young stepdaughter, who now found herself in a difficult situation between the two households. Having lost her mother earlier, she now also lost her former extended family and finally reacted by accusing her stepmother of witchcraft. However, it should be emphasized that it was not only her individual interpretation that led to the accusation—it was a process of negotiation that included the whole household.

For Helga, the result of the separation was more positive. In her new position in the divided household after the separation, and through the experience of hosting the religious festivities, Helga moved from the margins to the centre of her new community through another process of negotiation. Helga's later community had not shared the experience of witchcraft and thus had no reason to mark her as dangerous. The celebration probably provided Helga with an empowering experience of regaining a connection with the community. From her point of view, the feast of St George's day was both a shared religious experience as well as an individual experience that was strengthened by the connection to the sacred created by the means of the rituals. The fact that Helga was able to get 11 men to confirm her oath reflects Helga's reputation and acceptance in the community. However, the sources fail to reveal if it was easy to get the confirmers or if the process of negotiation lasted for the whole two years that it took from the sentence to the occasion of swearing the oath.

In the former extended household, Helga's husband Grels seems to have represented an older generation that might have considered the annual religious festivities of the agrarian community more important than his younger family members. The popular education of the Catechism

<sup>59</sup> Eilola, *Rajapainnoilla*, 192.

<sup>60</sup> See Van Gent, *Magic, Body and the Self*, 61.



was intensified in the later seventeenth century and it especially focused on children and youths.<sup>61</sup> Thus, there might have been a generational difference in the religious way of life as the younger generation in the family achieved adulthood and control of the farm. Moving away from the farm, the couple found a religious community that better provided to their needs and could also make use of Helga's special skills. Helga's religious expertise gave her a certain authority in the area of religion, which could also explain why the festivities were precisely said to have taken place "at Helga's". Her skills and expertise became the core around which the particular local religious community of experience on St George's day was formed.

## CONCLUSIONS

In a peripheral region close to the eastern border of the Swedish realm, the peasant population experienced religion not only in churches, but also within the households spread around large parishes covered with forests. Practices, meanings, and experiences of lived religion played an important part in forming, shaping, and consolidating communities on the local level. The inhabitants of the parish formed one community of experience through church practice and the liturgical year, but unofficial celebrations and other religious practices in smaller localities around the parish divided the parish into several partially overlapping communities of religious experience. In eastern Finland, extended families and work partnerships can be seen as communities of experience, sharing the daily experience of work, and it seems that they cannot be separated from religious communities when defining communities of experience. The communal nature of the work and divine protection were crucial to the success of the work. Thus, it seems obvious that the same group that did the work would also organize the ritual protection of their livelihood. Through religious rituals and celebrations, the community could also re-organize itself and negotiate its internal roles.<sup>62</sup> This was crucially important in an area where people needed to build trust between both family members and non-kin partners for the success of their work. It also helped create flexibility in crises and

<sup>61</sup> See Tuija Laine, *Aapisen ja katekismuksen tavaamisesta itsenäiseen lukemiseen: Rahvaan lukukulttuurin kehitys varhaismodernina aikana* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2017); Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto*, 106–107.

<sup>62</sup> See Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 145.

provided a way of restoring community harmony in a changed situation. In crises, the community could negotiate and interpret the experiences of its members in such a way that provided the possibility of regaining harmony, even if by excluding those who could or would not conform. Thus, approaching a group of people as a community of experience seems to offer a chance to understand better its fluidity and direct attention to the breaches of harmony within the community.

In the lives of early modern people, religious practices provided an important way of creating order both in this world and in the otherworldly sphere as well as in social relationships.<sup>63</sup> Religious practices were inextricably connected to the creation and shaping of communities, whereas religious interpretations gave meaning to events and experiences. Through negotiation, an individual experience of infirmity could become a shared experience of witchcraft. The case examined here illustrates the importance of protecting the integrity of the self, household, and community. Within annual celebrations, constructing and experiencing the sacred together enhanced the cohesion of the community. The religious celebrations that were unofficially celebrated in eastern Finland also constructed gender relations, but not in a way that would exclusively have enforced male superiority. Instead, in certain celebrations, women performed the central rituals, providing the experience of creating order in the world for both the male and female members of their communities.

In the rural localities of eastern Finland, both social and religious life were inextricably connected to the household. Young men often stayed on at their father's farm, whereas young women moved from their father's farm straight to the farm of their husband's family when they got married. For many people, there was no middle phase between childhood and adulthood—for example, working in different houses as maidservants and farmhands, such as in most western areas. Thus, the lived experience of both men and women was tied to the family and as such was profoundly local. The world was experienced from within the household, from the "inside", whereas the outside was always seen as potentially dangerous. For the extended families of eastern Finland, the sharing of limited resources could prove difficult, which led to separations from the family farm. In these situations, the household temporarily lost its integrity and

<sup>63</sup>R. W. Scribner, "Cosmic Order and Daily Life. Sacred and Secular in Pre-Industrial German Society", in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany*, ed. R. W. Scribner (London & Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1987).

became vulnerable to influences from the outside. The conflicts in these situations of separation could result in accusations of witchcraft that reflect early modern understandings of the interconnectedness of the body, the social community, and the household. The communication and interpretation of these experiences among the community made them understandable and meaningful to its members, and sometimes it led to the exclusion of individuals for the sake of the community.

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## Constructing “Mad” Religious Experiences in Early Modern Sweden

*Riikka Miettinen*

In 1724, a former captain called Carl Forss had an experience that profoundly transformed his life. Early in the morning a young man dressed in black, whom he perceived to be an angel from the heavens, appeared to him: the being anointed him with oil and ordered him to proclaim “God’s truth” to the King and all his people.<sup>1</sup> All of a sudden, Carl felt that God gave him full understanding of the Scripture. Among other things, he became convinced that Jesus had died for all beings on Earth, including animals and plants, and that every living thing could thus join the eternal

<sup>1</sup>“en swartklädt yngling, hwilken han förment wara en ängel uppenbarats honom bittida om mårgeonen, smort honom med olio och befalt honom förkunna Gudz sanning för Öfwerhet och alt hans folk”. National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet, from now on RA): Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss: Letter of the Chapter of Turku dated 5 August 1725, also published in Akiander 1857 (vol. I), 53–66.

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R. Miettinen (✉)

Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland  
e-mail: [riikka.miettinen@tuni.fi](mailto:riikka.miettinen@tuni.fi)

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afterlife. He soon began to publicly promulgate his revelations, in both his home parish in Southwestern Finland and the town of Turku, and wrote about the “commands he had received directly from God” to the King, privy council, Turku Court of Appeal, and other state and Church authorities.<sup>2</sup> This instigated a long process that involved not only the local clergy and the bishop and Chapter in Turku, but also the governor, the Court of Appeal, and even the King and the royal council in the Swedish realm’s capital, Stockholm. Several actors took part in making sense of the captain’s experience, transforming it into something completely different from what he personally insisted.

This chapter examines the formation and negotiation process in which religious experiences were deemed “mad” in early modern Sweden (which included the lands that now comprise Finland). Religious experiences are the kind of personal sensations and events that are given religious and supernatural connotations. In this case, they are also experiences that are far from mundane and the range of expected or everyday spiritual repertoire. Such extraordinary sensations, encounters, behaviours, or events could involve hearing voices, seeing beings, or, for example, observations of nature or weather that were interpreted within the religious framework—entailing meanings and messages from the divine or elsewhere from the spiritual sphere. This interpretation, or experiencing, is a social process in its essence: firstly, the prevalent religious cultures and discourses offer the interpretative framework and vocabulary, and secondly, when shared with others, the surrounding communities and authorities participate in the meaning-giving, further shaping or clashing with personal experience.<sup>3</sup>

Here, the focus lies on the process and the ways in which religious experiences were deemed extraordinary, norm-breaching and, in particular, *mad* in early modern Sweden. These were personal experiences that the contemporary surrounding communities and/or authorities would have deemed abnormal and pathological if those terms had been available to them. An experience is deemed “mad” if the person him/herself, or, more typically, the surrounding community and authorities interpret it as

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. and RA: Riksarkivets ämnessamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss: Extract of the notary’s letter at the Turku Town Court dated 19 August 1725. Forss spread his word especially in his home parish Kokemäki and in the town of Turku in Southwestern Finland.

<sup>3</sup> See also Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, “Religion as Experience”; Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*.

something detached from the reality that other people experience and—more or less—agree upon. From the perspective of lived religion, they are the experiences that, on the one hand, manifested the heterogeneity of faith and spirituality, but on the other hand, clashed with culturally acceptable faith as defined by the prevailing discursive authorities. The aim is to discuss the situational construction of religious experiences and the power and control dynamics in play in classifying experiences as folly and products of “insanity” as understood in early modern Sweden, rather than as legitimate, credible religious experiences. Moreover, the chapter develops the theoretical understanding of experiencing as a process.

The discursive formation and classification of religious experiences are examined especially based on two case studies of deviant religious experiences from early eighteenth-century Sweden. Both involve extraordinary angelic encounters envisioned by two laymen, a farmhand named Henrich and the aforementioned captain Carl, in the area of Southwestern Finland in the 1720s. The case studies are deployed to empirically examine and exemplify the construction of religious experiences and the power dynamics in classifying such experiences as legitimate and credible or as invalid and mad. The selected cases are fruitful in many respects: they include vivid and elaborate descriptions of multi-sensory experiences, conflicting and temporally changing, fluid interpretations, and ambivalent, competing discourses. Most importantly, they manifest the process-nature of experiencing (meaning-giving) and the power hierarchies in play. Very few religious experiences of laypeople earned that much attention from the authorities; it appears that Henrich’s and Carl’s visions caused such a commotion locally that they needed to be dealt with on all the judicial tiers.<sup>4</sup> As narratives of personal religious experiences and their reception, they are exceptionally verbose at over 150 pages each, but they consist of excerpts and letters in a non-chronological order that were sent to the highest judicial organ, the royal council.<sup>5</sup> They include several temporal layers as the investigations into both cases continued for well over a year in different

<sup>4</sup>RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson and Carl G. G. Forss n.p. For the judicial system in early modern Sweden, see Österberg and Sogner, *People meet the Law*.

<sup>5</sup>However, the preserved documents concerning captain Carl Forss mainly deal with his death. Unfortunately, for both cases the original documents of Turku Court of Appeal, the Chapter of Turku, and the lower court records have not been preserved; however, the compilations include excerpts, copies, letters, and descriptions of these. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson and Carl G. G. Forss n.p.



courts of law before the final decisions were reached by the King and his council.

The research material consists of ecclesiastical and other court records as well as correspondence between authorities discussing the “problematic” religious experiences. The lack of ego documents means that such official documents are the only available sources on these experiences. Thus, it cannot be overlooked that the official settings and their accusatory atmosphere influenced what people chose to share and how they talked about their experiences. After all, these are the experiences of lay-people who were summoned to court and had to explain themselves to officials and clergy at the risk of criminal punishments. The nature and content of their testimonies are framed by the interests and discourses of the judiciary; moreover, the judicial, religious, and medical experts present in the investigation can have the authority to impose interpretations and thus affect the experiences. Most of what is recorded is already the interpretation of the authorities and consists of narratives of the experiences that people recall. Nevertheless, personal voices and experiences also come across, especially in interrogations (question-answer form), testimonies of pre-trial events, and negotiations over differing opinions, although obviously filtered by scribes and, at times, translations from Finnish to Swedish. Although these types of sources offer only glimpses of people’s mindsets, the discourses and power dynamics that were shaping the experiences are richly present.

Research on early modern religious experiences and lived religion offers important starting and comparison points. In general, research on mentalities, beliefs, and religious discourses gives information about the symbolic universe from which those participating in the “experiencing” draw connotations and inspiration. The topics of this chapter are related to religious pluralization, competing pieties, and the negotiation over orthodox and heterodox beliefs and experiences that have all been widely studied across early modern Europe.<sup>6</sup> Most importantly, this chapter is about the “pathologization”—in particular the medicalization and invalidation—of religious experiences and the power/control dynamics in the process.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>For example Beyer, *Lay Prophets*; Dixon, *Living with Religious Diversity*; Karremann, *Forgetting Faith?*; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion*; Laborie and Hessayon, *Early Modern Prophecies*; Lutton, “Geographies and Materialities of Piety”; Mach, *Visionary Women*; Stitzel, “God, the Devil, medicine and the Word”; Walsham, “Frantick Hacket”.

<sup>7</sup>Similarly, most studies in the history of insanity since Foucault emphasize the social construction of madness and the power hierarchies involved.

Thus, also early modern understandings of madness are relevant here,<sup>8</sup> especially the spiritual forms of mental “derangement” and views on the connections between spirituality and insanity.<sup>9</sup> Various extraordinary and pathologized religious experiences have already been studied in Swedish and Finnish history,<sup>10</sup> but not so much from the perspective of how such experiences were shaped and classified.

Analysing the construction of “religious madness” is a fruitful way to tackle questions of how personal (religious) experiences and agency are controlled, interpreted, and given—in this case very negative and “medicalized”—meanings when they are performed, communicated, or otherwise shared with others. There were rarely unanimous interpretations, but rather heterogeneous and even ambivalent religious experiences; for example, what to a zealous believer might be revival or religious enthusiasm could be totally mad to another. The line was thin between credible or accepted and “mad” spiritual experiences, and individual experiences could conflict with communal or official interpretations (experiences).

### FORMATION OF “RELIGIOUS” EXPERIENCES

One Saturday afternoon in March 1721, a 22-year-old farmhand named Henrich Michellsson encountered a strange man on his way home from work. Dressed in white, the man called him to come over. Terrified, Henrich approached the man, who told him not to be afraid and that he had something to tell him. Based on the man’s appearance, Henrich

<sup>8</sup> I am using the umbrella term “madness” here to refer to conditions that were considered insanity and affecting the mind in early modern Sweden, although it must be emphasized that as a concept it is too vague and all-encompassing to aptly describe all the variations of “mental” disorders and afflictions that they early modern people spoke about. See also Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State*, 154–155. The early modern Swedish terminology referring to disordered minds was rich and difficult to translate, including for example *hufwudswaghet* (‘weakness in the head’); *därhet*, *galenskap* (madness); *galen*, *ursinnig* (mad); *afwita* (insane), *fäbn*, *fäne/a*, *däre* (crazy); *intet wid sitt förstånd*, *intet wid sina fulla sinnen* (not in one’s right mind), and specific illnesses such as *melancholia*, *mania*, *furor/raseri*.

<sup>9</sup> For example Classen, *Mental Health, Spirituality, and Religion*; Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State*, 145–196; MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*; Rubin, *Religious Melancholy*; Sena, “Melancholic Madness”; Szarka, “The devil behind the eyes”.

<sup>10</sup> For example Anderson, “Order in insanity”; Eklund, “Drängen Henrich Michelssons änglasyster”; Eriksson, *Vägen till centralhospitalet*, 73, 80–83, 85–92, 132–137; Häggblom, “Den heliga svagheten”; Johannisson, *Kroppens tunna skal*, esp. 148ff; Olli, *Visioner av världen*; Tuohela, “The Ordeal of the Soul”; Sulkunen, *Liisa Eerikintytär*.

initially considered him to be an angel. The man began to talk about how all the water that people cleaned themselves with is in God's eyes only blood, and the birch switches (used in the sauna) were heavy with blood. He told Henrich not to use the birch switch on his body, and that going to the sauna on Saturdays is a sin. Before leaving, the man told him to be God-fearing, go to church diligently, and listen to what the priest says. Or this is at least how Henrich recounted it when he was questioned about his several encounters with "angelic" beings the following year in the local court. Seven more encounters followed between July of 1721 and January 1722, during which Henrich met more angels, including three angels flying with swords dripping blood in their hands. On some occasions, the angels whipped him. The angels had various divine messages to mankind concerning sinning and declared that the inhabitants of Turku and the surrounding parishes should be warned and punished for not following the Ten Commandments. The angels even revealed to Henrich concealed crimes and sins that angered God. His fourth vision was the most extravagant: in October 1721, he met God and was whipped by Him for all the sins of the world (though he later changed this story).<sup>11</sup> At times, Henrich visited the dean to share these revelations, once showing him and others his bloody back as proof of the whipping and bringing a stone that had fallen from the sky. According to the dean, Henrich had explained that "if people did not mend their ways, God would feed unrepentant sinners with such (stone) bread" or otherwise destroy them with a bloody sword. However, Henrich himself recalled that the message had been that if people would not repent, they would be punished with raining stones.<sup>12</sup>

Henrich was quick to attach religious meanings from various dominant contemporary cultural narratives to his envisioned encounters. The beings he met had all the characteristics of angels and messages inspired by Christianity and the Bible. Thus, Henrich had a particular type of experience: a religious (or spiritual) experience in which observation, sensation, or feeling is given meanings from the sacred and preternatural world or from the learnt precepts of religion rather than from the ordinary, temporal, or material sphere. They are given religious connotations, such as

<sup>11</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, 18–107.

<sup>12</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, 53, 69–70, 104; Letter from dean Ritz to Bishop Witte dated 10 January 1722. Translated quote: "Om intet bätring skie skulle, wille Gud med sådant bröd mätta de obotfärdige Syndare".

causes, origins, and purposes, and thus the contents of this type of experience are shaped by religious culture and/or the institutionalized religion. Like the interpretations, also the language for expressing (verbally and bodily) what is going on comes from religion.<sup>13</sup> As is well known, religious cultures and discourses guide the interpretation and meaning-giving, and thus experiencing, of sensations and events. For example, interpretations for hearing things, or auditory hallucinations, vary in different cultures and religions: both the tone and messages of the voice and the interpretation of whose voice people hear vary. Religions influence the experience: the voices can be ascribed to divine or supernatural beings familiar in one’s cultural setting, such as Hindu deities or Christian beings.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, for example, in the Catholic world, experiences of encounters and apparitions of saints were prevalent while after the Reformation angels increasingly took their place across all Lutheran cultures.<sup>15</sup>

Experiences of apparitions, encounters, and conversations with angels were not uncommon in medieval and early modern Europe.<sup>16</sup> Spiritual or preternatural visionary encounters, be it with angels, demons, fairies, or spirits, had some similarities around early modern Europe. They were typically vivid, multi-sensory, and traumatic experiences characterized by two-way communication and asymmetrical power relations with the being. Like Henrich, many suffered physical injuries at the hands of the beings and experienced such encounters in moments of crisis.<sup>17</sup>

Henrich constructed his experiences in the social and cultural setting in which he lived, based on cultural scripts and elements that shape situated meaning-giving, both conscious and unconscious. Although the shared cultural framework influences this experiencing, the same event or sensation can be experienced in multiple ways.<sup>18</sup> To give an example, the sensation of a presence while wandering the forests can be experienced in

<sup>13</sup>For constructivist views on religious experience, see for example Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* and Katz, “Language, Epistemology and Mysticism”.

<sup>14</sup>For example Luhrmann et al., “Differences in voice-hearing”.

<sup>15</sup>Beyer, *Lay Prophets*, passim, for example 48–57.

<sup>16</sup>For example Beyer, *Lay Prophets*; Copeland and Machielsen, *Angels of Light?*; Marshall and Walsham, *Angels in the Early Modern World*; Powell and Saunders, *Visions and Voice-Hearing*; Raymond, *Conversations with Angels*; Walsham, “Invisible Helpers”.

<sup>17</sup>For example Brock et al., *Knowing Demons, Knowing Spirits*; Goodare, “Away with the fairies”.

<sup>18</sup>See also Backmann, “Äärellisyyden kohtaaminen”, 26–27, 35–37; Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 50–51. Generally for example Quinn and Holland, “Culture and Cognition”, esp. 19–22. See also the “Introduction” of this book.

drastically different ways: one can interpret it as transcendental or as the presence of a supernatural being—and thus have a religious experience—while for another it is an optical illusion or passing wildlife. The question of the validity of these experiences is not of interest here, no more than is imposing modern diagnostics onto the past. The visions, supernatural encounters, and the like can be very “real” for the person experiencing them, and at times, they are also regarded as real phenomena by others. Rather, the experience is real in any event when it is perceived as real and meaningful, and thus has actual impacts for the person or the community, or even more widely for the society. For example, Brita, a soldier’s wife who lived in Ostrobothnia in Finland in the 1680s, was convinced that when it was windy or rained, God made the weather so to declare or announce her sins.<sup>19</sup> This conviction caused great anguish and had impacts on coping with her everyday life. In other words, her religious experience shaped her other experiences and thus had relevance at least in regard to the lives of Brita, her family, and the household.

Some of what the “angels” told Henrich, presenting their messages as God’s opinions and divine will, were clearly inspired by contemporary Swedish Lutheran Orthodox teachings and sermons promulgating the dangers of sinning and the wrath of God. The beings he met fervently repeated their warnings about sinning and divine vengeance and continued to whip him for the sins of mankind. They also continuously tasked him to admonish people for sinning and to urge the clergy to preach repentance. Such messages were common motifs among early modern Protestant and Lutheran angelic apparitions.<sup>20</sup> The idea of God punishing unrepentant sinners with storms, pestilences, and other disasters was well known and widely preached.<sup>21</sup>

This wrath had manifested itself almost continuously in the area in recent decades. Henrich had his visions at the end of a long period of crises in Finland, from the Great Famine of Finland in 1695–1697 to the Great Northern War in 1700–1721 and the related Russian occupation of Finland in 1713–1721. The war continued for over five months after

<sup>19</sup> “tahlat enär det hade blåst och rådden varit på himmelen, sådant Gudh alt för hennes synder låthå pålysa”. National Archives of Finland: Collection of lower court records: Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 3: 162–163, Liminka 9th–12th February 1683.

<sup>20</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets*, 10, 48, 84, passim; Walsham, “Invisible Helpers”. For similar themes in early modern prophecies, see Laborie and Hessayon, *Early Modern Prophecies*.

<sup>21</sup> Lappalainen, *Jumalan vihan ruoska*, 26–28; Miettinen, *Suicide, Law, and Community*, 68, 137; Olli, *Visioner av världen*, 93–94.

Henrich’s first vision. He had personally lived through the war and the occupation all his childhood and youth. Being only 22 years old, he was clearly affected by this period of turmoil. A few months after the war ceased, the angels told him about the terrors that had taken place, including the Russians skinning people’s backs, cutting women’s breasts off, and breaking people on the wheel. They passed Henrich a grave warning: if people would like to continue the peace, they had to live in a godly way, but if they would not mend their ways, the enemy would strike even harder and God would make fire, sulphur, and rocks rain from the sky.<sup>22</sup>

One can note that most, if not all, elements in Henrich’s “visions” were characterized by religious and Biblical motifs. For example, the idea of water being blood is related to common Christian themes about the connection between water, blood, and life. The divine threats of bloody swords, raining fire and stones, and stone bread are associated with God’s punishment, or the latter perhaps to the story of Satan tempting Jesus to turn stones into bread to eat.

Although especially the themes of divine punishment fitted well with the contemporary dogma of the Church, some of the topics—like the angels and God himself beating Henrich and the “angel bread” he had been given and consumed—were far from the Lutheran teachings. When the local vicar questioned Henrich about his experience of being taken to Heaven and meeting a bearded God, Henrich told him about a woman who had had similar experiences. The vicar interpreted this to mean that Henrich had heard about such an event that had allegedly taken place some time ago in Ostrobothnia.<sup>23</sup> Henrich attached religious connotations also to everyday life and customs, namely the sinfulness and the prohibitions of going to the sauna on Saturdays and using birch switches. In general, people experience(d) their envisioned preternatural encounters and messages in terms of familiar cultural models, applying, living out, and

<sup>22</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, 58–60.

<sup>23</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, 87: (Henrich) “gifwit exempel om en qwinna som skall hafft lijka Syner som han, och hwilcken blifwit lefwandes till Himlen optagen. Om denne qwinna har Hr. Fonselius doch ingen richtighet af honom då erhålla kunnat, hwarcken till tiden, orten eller namnet. Utan förmemeente Hr. Fonselius att han sådant mötte tagit af andras tahl, hållst för en tid sedan en sådan i Österbottn skall hafwa varit”.

reproducing cultural scripts that existed,<sup>24</sup> be it in the Bible or in other dominant narratives and everyday practices.

Similarly, the experiences of Captain Carl Forss, like his anointment and the angel's outward appearance, were heavily influenced by religion. He was described as a well-read man who read "fanatic" and "mystic" books. Some of the things he spoke about, not specified in the documents, were considered similar to those preached by two radical Pietists that had been recently active in the town of Turku, Lars Ulstadius and Petter Schaefer.<sup>25</sup> One can assume that he was also well-versed in the topic of the salvation of animals, which had been a long-debated issue in the Protestant world.<sup>26</sup> No doubt, like Henrich, he was also familiar with the dominant angel narratives and discourses and had heard of other angelic encounters and prophesies around Sweden and beyond, perhaps even about Henrich's that took place only a few years earlier some 100 kilometres south.

Both Henrich's and Carl's cases fruitfully exemplify the competing and complementing religious discourses that were available in early modern culture. The plurality of early modern spirituality and faith provided several avenues to interpret and experience extraordinary events and sensations. Although the Swedish Lutheran state and Church attempted to make religion uniform and root out syncretistic, "heterodox", and magical beliefs and practices, religious culture was far from homogeneous in early modern Sweden.<sup>27</sup> Religious pluralization only increased in (and after) the 1720s, as was noted by the authorities of the time, who were worried about the threat that Pietism and various sects and mystics posed. The aforementioned crisis period was followed by a proliferation of prophets and religious movements particularly in western Finland, also in part

<sup>24</sup> See also Goodare, "Away with the fairies"; Quinn and Holland, "Culture and Cognition", esp. 19–22; and the introduction and Sari Katajala-Peltomaa's and Jenni Kuuliala's chapters in this book.

<sup>25</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss: esp. Extract of the Turku Town Court notary's letter dated 19 August 1725 and Letter of the Chapter of Turku dated 5 August 1725. Ulstadius caused great commotion in Turku in the 1680s while Schaefer was active in Turku until the 1710s, and even after that via writing while imprisoned in Gävle until his death in 1729. Odenvik, *Lars Ulstadius*; Pajula, *Pietismi ja uskonnolliset liikkeet*, 67–83, 121–134.

<sup>26</sup> See for example Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, esp. Chapter 3, IV.

<sup>27</sup> For example Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion*; Malmstedt, *Bondetro och Kyrkoro*; Toivo, *Faith and Magic*.

because some of those having escaped or been imprisoned abroad returned inspired by new spiritual ideas.<sup>28</sup>

### POWER DYNAMICS AND ACTORS IN NEGOTIATING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

Henrich continuously talked about his angelic encounters with his parents and also with some neighbours and other locals. The local vicar had escaped due to the war and the Russian occupation of Finland (1713–1721), but Henrich had often shared his experiences and shown his wounds to the parish assistant, who acted as a stand-in preacher. As mentioned, he had also at times visited the dean. It was not until December 1721 when the new local vicar found out about Henrich’s visions, presumably because he was only recently appointed to his office. The vicar, Fonselius, had run into Henrich and his father on his way back home from Turku. Henrich was worried about his encounters and asked for advice. Fonselius told him to come visit to talk more. Two days later, Henrich arrived at the vicarage with his mother. At the time, Henrich was still describing his fourth experience as a meeting with God, who had even talked to him about the “false idol’s corpse” depicted in the local church. To Fonselius, Henrich’s experiences were senseless and outrageous. According to Fonselius, Henrich was very ignorant and confused in his knowledge of Christianity. Fonselius spent hours questioning and teaching Henrich about his visions and their improbability, giving Biblical examples of “true” prophets and Satan giving false visions, and using various theological arguments. According to the vicar, Henrich had stepped into the shoes of the clergy who, rather than simple men like Henrich, or God-sent angels, had been tasked to preach and tend to the souls and possible punishments of people’s sins. Severely reprimanded, Henrich cried and now considered all his experiences to be only “the Devil’s treachery”.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, early on the local religious and discursive authorities took part and a major role in (re)constructing Henrich’s experiences. The authority to recognize credible religious experiences, divine messages, and the like rested with the clergy, first the local vicar and other lower clergy, and at a

<sup>28</sup> Pajula, *Pietismi ja uskonnolliset liikkeet*, esp. 112–173.

<sup>29</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, 48–53, 84–88 (Fonselius’ testimony), 103–104, passim.



higher level, the bishop and chapters.<sup>30</sup> It has been interpreted that generally the lower clergy were more inclined towards prophets than the higher clergy,<sup>31</sup> but the clerical reception of Henrich's experiences was at first mixed. The parish assistant and dean appear not to have been as authoritative, or dismissive, of his visions as the vicar.

Although upon talking with the vicar in December 1721, Henrich ended up experiencing his visions as devilish treachery, he later shifted his views. He had two final encounters in January 1722, but had then been much more suspicious about the beings and their nature, wanting to see their feet, as others had told him one could that way recognize whether they were good or bad angels. After his last encounter, he went to talk about his experiences again with the parish assistant and the dean.<sup>32</sup> These last visions appear to have convinced him again about the godly character of his experiences. A later investigation reveals that Henrich had at least in the winter continued to pass on the angelic messages to others and had still during the first special investigation in May talked about having been whipped by God and angels.<sup>33</sup>

The dean whom Henrich had spoken with wrote to the bishop of Turku on 10 January, after which the Chapter of Turku briefly investigated the case. The Chapter forwarded the case to the highest judicial organ of the Swedish realm, the royal council in Stockholm, already in March 1722.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, in Captain Carl Forss's case, the local clergy in his home parish soon intervened, writing to the bishop of Turku. Forss himself got many officials involved by writing to them about the "God's truth" he had received. His arrival and preaching of "harmful heresies" in the town of Turku in the summer of 1725 resulted in him being placed under house

<sup>30</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets*, 228.

<sup>31</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets*, 227–228.

<sup>32</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, 91–106.

<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, the original documents of the Chapter of Turku, Turku Court of Appeal, or the lower court records concerning the case have not been preserved. However, later documentation provides information about these. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, 91–106.

<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, the original documents of the Chapter of Turku concerning the case have not been preserved. However, later documentation provides information about these. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson, esp. Announcement of the Chapter of Turku dated 5 March 1722; RA: Justitierevisionens arkiv: Justitierevisions Utslagshandlingar, ansöknings- och besvärsmål March 12 1722.

arrest by order of the county governor. The Chapter of Turku carried out investigations, organized hearings, and passed a sentence of exile in August 1725, after which the royal council reviewed the case.<sup>35</sup>

The power dynamics come across clearly in the negotiations and official classifications of extraordinary religious experiences. The Lutheran Church held the monopoly over teaching and interpreting “God’s word”. Secular and ecclesiastical authorities had the ultimate power in this interpretation process, as they had the hegemony and legitimacy to determine the “correct” religion and deal with unorthodox religious views and behaviours with drastic measures, categorizing them, for example, as blasphemy or heresy and punishing those experiencing and sharing them with incarceration, exile, or even death.

In religious matters such as those of Carl and Henrich, the chapters,<sup>36</sup> presided over by the bishop and with learnt men such as theology professors and lectors as members, were the organs with the most expertise and thus discursive authority. They generally dealt with ecclesiastical matters but also acted as members of judicial courts, hearing, interrogating, and sentencing defendants over religious crimes. In Carl’s and Henrich’s cases, they had the task of interpreting their experiences and testing their theological grounds. The Chapter of Turku, presided over by the bishop Herman Witte, took different measures in handling Henrich’s and Carl’s revelations. Henrich, a young, “simple” (*enfaldig*), and illiterate landless farmhand of no status, was not questioned in person; his case was weighed by reading the descriptions sent in by the local dean, whom Henrich had already previously talked with and whom they had tasked with inspecting the matter. No separate trial was arranged, for example, in the lower court of his home parish near Turku. Instead, the Chapter issued a letter, dated 5 March 1722, for all preachers and their flock outlining answers and theological arguments about how to deal with such angelic visions and more specifically what to make of Henrich’s visions and prophesies. It forwarded the information and interpretations about the case to the royal council, enquiring what to do if Henrich would not give up his claims and cease to spread them.<sup>37</sup> Thus, at first Henrich’s case was not given a great

<sup>35</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss, n.p.

<sup>36</sup> Diocesan or archdiocese cathedral chapters, *konsistorium*, *domkapitel*. At the time, most of the area of Finland was under the diocese of Turku, with some eastern parts under the diocese of Borgå/Porvoo.

<sup>37</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: esp. Announcement of the Chapter of Turku dated 5 March 1722; RA: Justitierevisionens arkiv:

deal of attention—probably both because of his low status and because he appeared not to have caused enough disturbance. Still, the Chapter announced a letter about the outcome and instructions, which suggests that it wanted to take a public stance on this and future cases. However, Carl was an outspoken former captain and leaseholder of higher standing and wealth, and he caused commotion both in his home parish and in town, so besides reviewing his writings, he was heard and questioned by the Chapter several times.<sup>38</sup>

Visions, dreams, and messages from angels could be considered credible and acceptable religious experiences as long as their contents did not contradict the prevalent religious dogmas or question the Church as an institution. However, physical encounters with angels were more problematic in the theological sense; many Protestants argued that angels are spirits rather than appearing as bodily beings in the physical world. Prophets were dealt with, case by case, by carefully investigating the angelic apparitions (and other extraordinary religious experiences) and comparing them first and foremost against the Bible. If the angels did not look, behave, or speak in accordance with the Bible, and in particular, when they were introducing new teachings, the vision was to be rejected and the spirits were of the Devil. Since the late seventeenth century, very few orthodox theologians would support visions, as most “prophets” and their revelations were associated with Pietism or other “separatist” movements that were considered threats to the Church.<sup>39</sup>

Both Henrich’s and Carl’s angelic experiences and messages were rejected out of hand by the bishop and Chapter in Turku. The revelations could not be “divine”—and thus the “angels” had to be devilish spirits—as the contents of the experiences and the messages they had received were in drastic contradiction with the Lutheran orthodox interpretations. In Henrich’s case, it was both what the “beings” did and what they said: according to the Chapter, angels did not spread the word of God and warn people of sinning as those were the tasks of the clergy, and God did

Justitierevisions Utslagshandlingar, ansöknings- och besvärsmål, 12 March 1722.

<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, the protocols of the hearing have not been preserved but a “sentence” letter of the Chapter of Turku mentions that the conclusion was reached based on Carl’s writings, his “confession” in the chapter as well as letters sent by the local clergy from Carl’s home parish. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss: Letter of the Chapter of Turku dated 8 August 1725.

<sup>39</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets*, 188–200; Olli, *Visioner av världen*, 147; Walsham, “Invisible Helpers”. See also for example Stitzel, “God, the Devil, medicine and the Word”, 332–334.

not whip men nor feed them stones. However, most of the long theological arguments given against Henrich’s experiences discuss Biblical texts and examples of the Devil tricking people and appearing as an angel. The Chapter was not convinced that Henrich’s experienced encounters had taken place at all, or if they had, they were of Satan and his “false spirits”.<sup>40</sup> In Carl’s case, it was the problematic contents of “God’s truth” that he had received; they outraged the Chapter by attacking several central articles of faith as well as the Church. The Chapter used a great amount of time debating with him and tens of pages for theological arguments against his claims about the salvation of all beings, the body and blood of Christ being present in all that one eats and drinks (thus attacking the Holy Communion), and that philosophy and other “worldly” subjects taught at universities and schools were of the Devil. He had even threatened the bishop and the county governor with God’s punishments and believed that the devil made the bishop forsake his divine message. Most abominably, he claimed to speak “God’s truth” and in God’s words, experiencing that he had suddenly received a full understanding of the Scripture and had the power of God within him to the extent that he could undergo severe fasting and cold exposure without harm.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, as their experiences had a distorted theological basis, they could not be real angelic encounters, and another predominant cultural script was adopted for their interpretation. The royal council in Stockholm agreed with the incredibility of their revelations. The weight of the Chapter’s expertise in spiritual matters was heavy, and it convinced many of the invalidity of Henrich’s and Carl’s visions. The Chapter of Turku discussed and explained both cases especially in the demonological framework that was still strong in the early eighteenth century in the Lutheran discourse and popular culture; indeed, it was used as an explanatory model.<sup>42</sup> However, neither Henrich nor Carl agreed with the Chapter of Turku,

<sup>40</sup>The chapter stated that it should be first examined if other boys had tricked the “simple” Hendrich and put on white clothes, or if Hendrich might have made up his experiences to get attention, even whipping himself to produce the wounds. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: esp. Announcement of the Chapter of Turku dated 5 March 1722. Similar theological arguments as in Hendrich’s case were generally used against angelic apparitions and visions. See Beyer, *Lay Prophets*, 188–200.

<sup>41</sup>RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss: esp. Letter of the Chapter of Turku dated 8 August 1725.

<sup>42</sup>Eklund, “Drängen Henrich Michelssons änglasyster”, 59–61, 66–67; Eriksson, *Vägen till centralhospitalet*, 75–85, 131–133; Heikkinen, *Paholaisen liittolaiset*, passim; Olli,

as they did not begin to experience their past encounters as devilish. Instead, Henrich was in later investigations more vague and doubtful about his experiences, but at no point did he ascribe them to or refer to the Devil.<sup>43</sup> Carl continued to be steadfast and unwavering about his experiences. He stated that he would “rather die than take any of his words back”. The Chapter sentenced him to be exiled from the Kingdom.<sup>44</sup>

Henrich’s ordeal was far from over. In March 1722 the royal council, which had received the documentation from the Chapter, still required more investigation. This soon continued in Henrich’s home parish, Pargas, and in Turku. Thus, alongside the local clergy, the bishop and the Chapter of Turku, and the royal council in Stockholm, more actors—including the lower court and its audience in Pargas, the Turku Court of Appeal lawyers, and a professor and doctor of medicine—participated in the meaning-giving and classification of Henrich’s experiences.<sup>45</sup> More discourses than the religious, demonological, and juridical were taken thoroughly into consideration, providing new meanings and possible explanations for his unusual encounters and visions. These came especially from scholarly medicine and will be discussed next. In turn, in Carl’s case, when the Chapter of Turku forwarded their investigation and sentence to Stockholm, the royal council set a new interpretation, and thus reconstructed Carl’s experience as being drastically different from Carl himself or the Chapter.

*Visioner av världen*, 87–88, 92, 98–104. For similar continuities, for example, in eighteenth-century England, see Davies, “Talk of the Devil”.

<sup>43</sup> Hendrich’s case was further investigated in May and July 1722 in the lower court of Pargas and in November and December 1722 at the Turku Court of Appeal. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722 and Copy of the records of Turku Court of Appeal 16 November–17 December 1722.

<sup>44</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss: n.p., in various documents in the compilation. Translated quote: “helre wil mista sit lif än taga et ord tillbaka” from the Letter of the Chapter of Turku dated 8 August 1725.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. note 42 and RA: Justitierevisionens arkiv: Justitierevisions Utslagshandlingar, ansöknings- och besvärsmål, 12 March 1722.

## MAD OR “FANATIC”? PATHOLOGIZING AND MEDICALIZING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

As we have seen, the authorities determined Henrich’s and Carl’s experiences to be invalid when it came to their “divine” character, but there were still many options as to what they could be. In early eighteenth-century Sweden, there were several complementing explanatory models and frameworks that could, besides the Devil and malevolent spirits that the Chapter had suggested, produce such extravagant religious experiences. Religious, demonological, moral, and medical discourses and world views did not compete but rather accompanied and supplemented each other. For example, medicine did not exclude the influence of the spiritual world, as illnesses could be instigated by the supernatural, and recovery was considered to rest ultimately in God’s hands.<sup>46</sup>

Interpretation of the *cause* of sensations, feelings, and the like was central for constructing the experience, as different explanations had very different connotations. Take, for example, ascribing one’s sensation to God or the Devil, or explaining an illness as God’s punishment of a personal sin or with one’s diet: the attached cause entails different feelings, social ramifications, and distinct modes of expression, such as vocabulary and bodily and behavioural expressions.<sup>47</sup> For example, in the aforementioned explanations, the personal and social reactions could range from guilt, shame, and moral judgement by others to piety and reverence. In other words, the cultural scripts providing meanings to similar or even the very same sensations, events, and situations varied depending on the interpretation of the cause or instigator.

Although in March 1722 the Chapter of Turku ascribed Henrich’s visions to the devil, they had in fact already briefly pondered other possibilities. The first were the pragmatic and the simplest ones: perhaps other

<sup>46</sup>Eklund, “Drängen Henrich Michelssons änglasyster”, 59–60; Johannisson, *Kroppens tunna skal*, 138, passim; Olli, *Visioner av världen*, 87–88, 92, 98–104. See also Cunningham and Grell, *Medicine and Religion* and MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, esp. 173–179.

<sup>47</sup>For example, examples of distinct, dramatic bodily sensations and expressions when people ascribed their sensations to the Devil: Eriksson, *Vägen till centralhospitalet*, 80–83, 132–137 (descriptions of cases of possessed women in Sweden from 1701, 1709, and 1782); Olli, *Visioner av världen*, 101, 103, 142–145, passim. The influence of the ascribed causes and thus selected cultural scripts can be seen in various cases where somehow afflicted people describe and “live out” their experiences and explanations for their anguish. See for example Fasshauer, “Thick blood” and Engelhardt, “Anxiety, Affect. and the Performance”. See also for example Fischer and von Tippelskirch, *Bodies in Early Modern Religious Dissent*.

people, like young boys, had dressed up in white and tricked Henrich, who was after all, based on the description in the dean's letter, "very simple" (*mycket enfallig*). Or might Henrich have made it all up to get attention? The Chapter had tasked the dean with examining these options and Henrich's personality, conduct, and physical and mental condition. Thus, also some natural causes were taken into consideration. However, Henrich's character was calm and decent, he showed no signs of insanity or illness, nor had he ever been ill, and he slept peacefully at night. Medical explanations were thus inapplicable, at least based on the dean's opinion after he had observed and talked with Henrich and his family and his employer's household. In addition, as Henrich slept well, it was interpreted that he could not have dreamt it all. After these natural causes were ruled out, the Chapter opted for the supernatural explanation, namely the Devil.<sup>48</sup>

However, the royal court still required more information before passing a criminal sentence, if such was necessary. The case was thoroughly investigated in the lower court of Pargas twice, in May and July 1722, and at the Turku Court of Appeal in November and December 1722. Now Henrich himself was repeatedly questioned and more experts and witnesses were heard. The matter was taken seriously at the local level: the copy of the lower court record of Henrich's investigation in July 1722 comprises 130 pages. In particular, the interrogation of Henrich and his parents, written down in question-and-answer form, is very detailed.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: esp. Announcement of the Chapter of Turku dated 5 March 1722. The Chapter's interpretations over Henrich's case have already been briefly discussed from the point of view of early modern demonological and medical explanations of deviant behaviour: Eklund, "Drängen Henrich Michelssons änglasyster". Similar lines of enquiry and inductive reasoning were applied in classifying extraordinary religious experiences elsewhere in early modern Europe, see for example Beyer, *Lay Prophets*, 193 and Stitzel, "God, the Devil, medicine and the Word", 327–334.

<sup>49</sup> The second investigation in July 1722 was organized because the records of the first from May 1722 were accidentally lost by the district judge. Thus, unfortunately, not much information is available about the first lower court sessions in May, although in July the lower court tried to recreate it and ask the same questions. Moreover, the participants still recalled some of the answers given earlier and noted many discrepancies. The material includes copies of the records of the July 1722 investigation, the Court of Appeal hearings, and letters providing information about all the investigations. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: esp. Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722; Copy of the records of Turku Court of Appeal 16 November–17 December 1722; Letter from Turku Court of Appeal to the King dated 19 April 1723.

Besides going through each of Henrich’s eight angelic encounters in turn, he was closely, but with very simple questions, interrogated about his knowledge of Christianity, including his catechetical knowledge and various basic tenets of faith, such as the concept of sin, God, and Jesus.<sup>50</sup> The possible natural explanations for Henrich’s experiences were now more thoroughly investigated. The lower court found it particularly suspicious that his stories on many relevant details had changed between May and July. Although other boys teased him often for his “dumb simplicity” and considered him a “fool” (*giäck och narre*), it was ruled out that he had been tricked by them because witnesses said that they would have noticed it. Also, it was considered unlikely that Henrich had made his experiences up, because of his simplicity and lack of wit. Even a moral explanation was pondered, but Henrich did not have any known vices or anything on his conscience. This religious-moral explanatory model was connected also to the demonological model: a person with sins and compunctions was considered more vulnerable to fall into the Devil’s grasp. Even the possibility of haunting and ghosts was discussed. Henrich and his family were also further questioned about the possibility of him experiencing his encounter in a dream, but Henrich firmly denied it, stating that he had never had dreams like that and his encounters had taken place in broad daylight.<sup>51</sup>

Instead, other medical-physiological grounds for his experiences were given more emphasis, both in the lower court and especially in the Court of Appeal of Turku. Although the dean’s initial examinations for the Chapter of Turku had found no applicable explanations based on health or bodily, mental, or emotional conditions, the lower court hearings revealed more interesting and vital information about his mind or disposition (*sinne*). He had nothing wrong with his sense or comprehension (*förstånd*), nor had he had fantasies or madness (*galenskap*), but had been “very dumb and simple-minded” (*mycket dum, enfalldig*) since childhood, to the extent that as a hired farmhand, he could only do some of the simplest physical work tasks and had to be guided through his tasks while having

<sup>50</sup>The questions were presented to him in a very short and simple form, for example, “Are you a Christian?”, “How many Gods are there?”, and “Was Jesus a human being?”. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, 2–15.

<sup>51</sup>RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, esp. 107–126. On dreams in early modern mentality and world view, and their use as explanations for extraordinary experiences, see for example Vilkkuna, “Katse menneisyden ihmiseen”, 60–70.



his hand held. Moreover, he was reported to have a melancholic disposition or mind (*Melancholisk sinne*).<sup>52</sup> This was a point that the Court of Appeal some months later emphasized.

Melancholia had several meanings in early modern culture: either it was an illness as a pathological humoral condition, or it could refer to a sorrowful mood and melancholy passions or a person's natural disposition and temperament in humoral thinking.<sup>53</sup> In particular, the illness of melancholia and having a melancholic disposition were associated with "deviant" spirituality. The illness, characterized by sadness, low spirits, and fears, could manifest itself as a subtype, religious melancholy. It typically drove the sufferers to excessive religious zeal, immoderate worry over one's salvation and sinfulness, and over-enthusiasm in spiritual matters and practice, but it could also entail hallucinations in the form of supernatural visions.<sup>54</sup> A melancholic constitution was also linked to extraordinary religious experiences and behaviour. Firstly, melancholics were considered especially prone and susceptible to illusions and hallucinations that were sent by the Devil.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, this constitution could manifest itself in religious non-conformity and enthusiasm.<sup>56</sup> Many early modern writings reveal the close relationship that contemporaries envisioned between religious enthusiasm, religious melancholia as an illness and a form of insanity, and a melancholic disposition.<sup>57</sup>

Like in many places around Europe,<sup>58</sup> in Sweden this was a time when religious and demonological explanations for "madness" still held ground, although "secular" medical psychopathology was on the rise. Deviant behaviour, including religious enthusiasm,<sup>59</sup> was increasingly medicalized and forms of insanity were explained by natural rather than supernatural causes. However, in early modern Sweden, scholarly medicine and doctors

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> See for example Gowland, "The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy".

<sup>54</sup> MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, 153–158, 218–229; Rubin, *Religious Melancholy*; Sena, "Melancholic Madness". See also Schmidt, *Melancholy*, esp. 49–64.

<sup>55</sup> Heikkinen, *Paholaisen liittolaiset*, esp. 332, 337, 340.

<sup>56</sup> For example vicar Samuel Wacklin considered in 1751 that religious separatists "are partly disturbed by natural *Melancholi*". Swanström, *Separatistledare*, p. 193, 203 (esp. note 452).

<sup>57</sup> See the three previous notes and Rosen, "Enthusiasm".

<sup>58</sup> See for example Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State*, 19–241; MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, 229–231; MacDonald, "Religion, Social Change, and Psychological Healing", esp. 101–106, 125.

<sup>59</sup> Rosen, "Enthusiasm", esp. 412–421; Sena, "Melancholic Madness".

did not yet have the exclusive authority over the determination of in/sanity, especially in criminal trials, although they increasingly participated in the process.<sup>60</sup>

The Turku Court of Appeal wanted to take into consideration the two dominant discourses in interpreting extraordinary religious experiences, and thus it heard both theological and medical experts. The lower court in Pargas had been content with hearing primarily lay witnesses, the local peasantry, but also the local vicar. However, Turku Court of Appeal turned to bishop Witte and a professor and doctor of medicine, Pehr Elfving. Furthermore, they summoned and interrogated Henrich and subjected him to careful examinations. By this time—November and December 1722—Henrich had already toned down his claims and was much more obscure and less sure about his envisioned encounters, probably because he had become more concerned about the outcome of the prolonged judicial process. An appearance before the elite lawyers of the Turku Court of Appeal no doubt made him nervous, and he might have been informed that if he did not moderate his claims, he might face serious penalties. Or perhaps Henrich had started to doubt his experiences, as he now, for example, stated upon questioning that it is possible that it was fantasy and that he did not know who had whipped him.<sup>61</sup>

Doctor Elfving introduced a new diagnosis and explanation for Henrich’s experiences. When he was conducting his medical examination of Henrich in the town of Turku, he found out that Henrich was in love with a maidservant whose father was against their marriage; the doctor connected it to Henrich’s anxieties. The doctor interpreted that other people, who had known about their relationship, had beaten him, which Henrich shyly admitted. Being asked if he would give up his ideations if he could marry the maid, he answered that he would never be anxious about these things, and asked permission to return home to Pargas. According to the doctor, Henrich “was suffering from delirious love-melancholy, that is delusions without fever or fury”.<sup>62</sup> In early modern medical thinking, it was well established that love troubles could cause madness, and

<sup>60</sup> Eriksson, *Vägen till centralhospitalet*, 83–87, 104–127, 140, passim.

<sup>61</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Copy of the records of Turku Court of Appeal 16 November–17 December 1722.

<sup>62</sup> “han wore bekajad med *delirio Melancholico ab amore; hoc est delirio sine febre et rabie*”. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Copy of the records of Turku Court of Appeal 16 November–17 December 1722, n.p. 4 December 1722.

love-melancholy was a commonly known malady and subspecies of the melancholia illness.<sup>63</sup> In Henrich's case, his envisioned relationship with the maid was interpreted as folly; the maidservant claimed she had never even spoken to or seen him.<sup>64</sup> The Court of Appeal considered that already his shifting stories and vague talk proved he was insane (*fåne, afwita*). Moreover, his "physionomy" showed that he was not in his right mind but a "Delirant" whose melancholy induced angel visions were "mere fantasy and groundless delusions".<sup>65</sup> Like the lower court in Pargas, the Turku Court of Appeal passed no sentence on the case, but simply referred it to the royal council. Although the final outcome is unknown, one can assume that the royal council agreed with the Court of Appeal. Thus, as an insane person, Henrich was not to be held criminally liable for his folly. Instead, he was most likely left unpunished, and further encouraged to give up his claims and instructed in Christianity by the local clergy.

Labelling persons who had norm-breaching religious views and experiences as "mad" was one measure to uphold the discursive hegemony over religion and silence dissident voices. Accusing or classifying someone as being insane was a common early modern strategy of theological disqualification, and a much-utilized tool in campaigns against religious "enthusiasm".<sup>66</sup> For example, André Swanström's studies have shown that a declaration of insanity and confinement to mental asylums was not uncommon for religious non-conformists—some of whom had no apparent mental problems whatsoever—in early modern Sweden.<sup>67</sup> These were typically individuals who were publicly declaring their views and gathering followers, and thus they were posing a threat to the existing order and the discursive authority of the Swedish Lutheran state Church.

<sup>63</sup> MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, 89–92; Wells, *The Secret Wound*, esp. 19–70.

<sup>64</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Copy of the records of Turku Court of Appeal 16 November–17 December 1722.

<sup>65</sup> Incl. "af dess Physionomie lättel:n slutas kan det han intet är aldeles Compos mentis eller wid sine fulla sinnen" and "Henrich Michelsson är en Delirant den der regeras af ett melancholiskt gifna Ånglasyster härrörande af ijdel phantasi och fåfång inbilning pröfwad wara uthan grund och af intet wärde". RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: esp. Copy of the records of Turku Court of Appeal 16 November–17 December 1722 (esp. 13 December 1722); Letters from Turku Court of Appeal to the King dated 8 February 1723 and 19 April 1723.

<sup>66</sup> For example Rosen, "Enthusiasm", esp. 412–421; Sena, "Melancholic Madness"; Walsham, "Frantick Hacket".

<sup>67</sup> Swanström, *Separatistledare*.

Both Henrich and Carl Forss were problematic individuals in exactly this sense: they had publicly promulgated their “divine messages” and spread the word about their experiences. As mentioned, Henrich spoke about his encounters with many locals, and he appears to have had at least a few curious followers, gaining notoriety and stirring up rumours.<sup>68</sup> Forss had even declared “God’s truth” at Turku cathedral after the Sunday sermon. His activities were described as causing “danger” and “anger” in his home parish and in the town of Turku.<sup>69</sup> Awaiting the sentence from the royal council in Stockholm, he was kept under house arrest and had started fasting upon God’s order, refusing to eat or drink anything. But he still kept on spreading the word, continued to attract more followers, and appeared more credible to some of the “curious” because of his godly conduct and fasting.<sup>70</sup>

The Chapter of Turku sentenced Carl as a dangerous fanatic to be exiled in August 1725, but they were still awaiting the confirmation and final sentence from the royal council in Stockholm, which did not arrive until late September. The royal council concluded that, taking into consideration all the circumstances, Carl was not in his right mind but a crazy person (*dåre*), and was thus sentenced to be confined to the Själö hospital on an island near Turku. It also stated that this would make it impossible for him to spread his “harmful” teachings, presumably a significant motivator for this ruling. The royal council did not list the grounds for his classification, except that his stubbornness only further proved his insanity (*oförstånd och dårheet*).<sup>71</sup> No doubt, his extravagant and dangerous spiritual practice—including freezing himself in the river and his extreme fasting that endangered his life—contributed to this conclusion. Carl’s behaviour was not uncommon in the era; for example, fasting was a

<sup>68</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Henrich Michelsson: Lower court records of Pargas 19–21 July 1722, esp. 112–119.

<sup>69</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss, esp. Letters from the Bishop and Chapter of Turku to the King dated 28 July 1725 and 12 August 1725.

<sup>70</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss: Letters from the Bishop and Chapter of Turku to the King dated 15 September 1725 and 22 September 1725.

<sup>71</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss: Resolution letter of the royal council dated 29 September 1725 and Letter from the King to the county governor dated 29 September 1725.

common mode of self-denial, asceticism, and piety among the evangelicals.<sup>72</sup> In fact, Carl's story ends as his life ended, as a result of this fasting in September 1725, before the resolution of the royal council had arrived. His death instigated an even longer investigation as to whether his demise should be punished as a suicide or not. The aftermath reveals how he had gathered many supporters and followers, who sought to ensure Carl a Christian burial; this was later allowed by the Court of Appeal.<sup>73</sup>

Both Henrich and Carl are good examples of how power hierarchies influence what is considered righteous and what heretic, and the classification of some personal sensations as valid, credible religious experiences and others as incredible products of folly. Moreover, the cases exemplify the discursivity and negotiation of religion in general—like history has shown, theology and dogma are products of renegotiations and are subject and adjustable to changes.

Swedish history certainly has its fair share of noted “mad” religious prophets, mystics, and visionaries. In the early modern period, they include many famous persons such as Lars/Laurentius Ulstadius (d. 1732),<sup>74</sup> Margareta in Kumla (d. after 1628),<sup>75</sup> Eva Margaretha Frölich (d. 1692),<sup>76</sup> and Karin (Catharina) Pehrsson (d. ca. 1785),<sup>77</sup> who gathered some followers but ended up classified as insane. Many were inspired by the Pietist, Moravian, Anabaptist, and other religious movements that the Swedish Lutheran Church regarded as separatist. Also, the Raskol movement and its most radical group, the Old Believers—formed by the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church and active since the mid-seventeenth century—had followers especially in the eastern parts of the realm.<sup>78</sup> Thousands of people were involved in mystic or ecstatic movements and cults, such as the *Gråskoltarna* (Grey Robes) in Stockholm in the 1730s

<sup>72</sup> Beyer, *Lay Prophets*, 117–120, 217–219; Fischer and von Tippelskirch, *Bodies in Early Modern Religious Dissent*, passim; Rubin, *Religious Melancholy*, 48–49, 56–58, 87–90, 164–167.

<sup>73</sup> RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar: Acta Ecclesiastica vol. 114: Carl G. G. Forss: incl. Letters from the Bishop and Chapter of Turku to the King dated 22 September 1725 and Letter by the Chapter of Turku dated 9 October 1725.

<sup>74</sup> See for example Odenvik, *Lars Ulstadius*.

<sup>75</sup> Eriksson, *Vägen till centralhospitalet*, 73; Linderholm, “Margareta i Kumla”.

<sup>76</sup> Andersson, “Order in insanity”.

<sup>77</sup> Höggblom, “Den heliga svagheten”, esp. 107–114, 120–128.

<sup>78</sup> For example, a Royal letter from 1688 mentions them as a threat advancing in Sweden. Pajula, *Pietismi ja uskonnolliset liikkeet*, 73. For more information on the Old Believers, see for example Robbins, “Religious Mass Suicide”.

and *Lillhärdalsläsarna* (the Lillhärdal Readers), or following the above-mentioned people or other religious movements. Many of the cults and sects were subjects of famous scandals that were publicized in their time.<sup>79</sup> As these movements did not prevail, that is, did not gain enough of a foothold in the state church or a widespread enough following, they have largely been forgotten in the main narratives of Swedish (and Finnish) history. However, unlike the cults, sects, heresies, and superstitions of their time that “lost”, some experiences won and were given legitimacy, at least later when they were interpreted as accepted revival movements and construed as monuments of religious change and transformation in Lutheranism and the Swedish Lutheran Church.<sup>80</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The extraordinary religious experiences of farmhand Henrich Michellsson and Captain Carl Forss set in motion long judicial, theological, and medical negotiation processes in the early 1720s. Though they were certainly not the most famous, prolific, or influential religious lay “prophets” in eighteenth-century Sweden,<sup>81</sup> their cases illustrate the bewilderment and conflict that such norm-breaching spiritual experiences produced among the authorities and communities.

Their experienced “angelic encounters” and divine messages exemplify the early modern diversity of religious understandings and experiences. In both cases, the men constructed their experiences with symbols, vocabulary, and an interpretative framework coming primarily from Christianity and its branches. Their cultural and social environment, especially religion and the cultural scripts and long traditions of angelic encounters and

<sup>79</sup> For example the incident known as The Passion Play of Stora Bjurum in 1738–1741 and the sect involved. Countess Eva Margareta Clerck/Stenbock (d. 1743) housed and supported the sect in her manor in Bjurum and her reputation was ruined after that. Bergstrand, *Separatistiska oroligheter*, 89–124. The scandal was discussed in many letters and, for example, in the diary of Metta Magdalena Lille. Eriksson, *Metta Magdalena Lillies dagbok*, 174.

<sup>80</sup> For example the Swedish Lutheran Church later adopted Pietist elements into Lutheranism. For example, Abraham Achrenius, Lisa Eriksdotter, and Anna Rogel similarly proclaimed unorthodox religious views and manifested aberrant and ecstatic behaviours but were not classified as insane and are now considered important historical figures in the Lutheran Revivalism in Finland. See for example Sulkunen, *Liisa Eerikintytär* and Häggblom, “Den heliga svagheten”, 101–105, *passim*.

<sup>81</sup> For more noted self-acclaimed prophets or “separatists” in eighteenth-century Sweden, see for example Swanström, *Separatistledare* and Akiander, *Historiska upplysningar*.

prophetic messages, provided them with the meanings and ways to make sense of the sensations, visions, voices, and events they envisioned. However, it was also their personal backgrounds and past lives that influenced their meaning-giving and construction of experiences.<sup>82</sup> Both had lived through a long period of crises, of war and occupation. Henrich had been clearly affected by the turmoil, as suggested by the divine warning messages he experienced. He had also talked about his unrequited love. For both men, these experiences were moments of crises in themselves, irreversibly changing their lives.

Constructing such experiences as “mad” was only one way to handle them, though it was commonly used to discredit unorthodox religious experiences and views. As in general, in defining and classifying in/sanity, the negotiation between “mad” and “sane” experiences was characterized by distinct relations of power. Henrich’s and Carl’s experiences were considered invalid because they conflicted with the dogma of the Swedish Lutheran Church, after which several possible explanatory models and cultural scripts were adopted and attached to them by different discursive authorities. Though demonological explanations were still valid in the early eighteenth century, the medical pathologization of supernatural experiences and religious enthusiasm was slowly but surely gaining more ground. Mental derangement, or other natural or medical causes, were taken up and emphasized by the educated jurists and medical experts especially in the higher judicial levels, namely at the Court of Appeal and royal council. Views about the relationship between madness, especially religious melancholia, melancholic humoral disposition, and delusional religious experiences, manifest the era’s secularized or naturalized views of insanity. Indeed, modern psychology has built on these, noting the prevalence of religious delusions among patients with certain psychotic and serious mental illnesses.<sup>83</sup>

However, neither Henrich nor Carl appears to have shifted their personal interpretations, and experienced them as suggested by others, either first as devilish or later as folly. Carl refused the experiences others tried to pass onto him, adamant of his initial interpretations. Henrich started to downplay his claims, probably in order to avoid penalties and to get back home from the prolonged interrogations, presenting himself as much more uncertain about what had taken place. In the Court of Appeal, he

<sup>82</sup> See also for example Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 50–51.

<sup>83</sup> For example Huguelet, “Spirituality, religion, and psychotic disorders”.

sidestepped the questions and provided more vague answers. On the other hand, as we have seen, Henrich’s case includes several temporal layers in which his experiences (and interpretations by others) change. His stories changed throughout the investigations, perhaps also because his memories faded, or as his memory changed his experiences over time.<sup>84</sup> It is also possible that the authoritative lawyers and doctors questioning him were successful in persuading him and transforming his personal experiences, like the local vicar had for a while convinced him of the devil’s instigation and false visions. After all, experiencing is a continuous process that is shaped and reformulated by cultural scripts, power structures, and the implementation of new discourses. But in the end, their religious experiences “lost”, as the authorities were able to invalidate and impose medical discourses onto their experiences, ultimately censoring them and transforming their religious experiences into folly.

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<sup>84</sup> See also for example Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 24.



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## CHAPTER 8

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# The Trials of Sarah Wheeler (1807–1867): Experiencing Submission

*Mervi Kaarninen*

Surely we have abundant reason to be thankful into Him and bless His name when we look back on the mercy that has followed us through all the trials meted out which we still feel to be compassing us about.<sup>1</sup>

The above citation from Sarah Wheeler's letter to Margaret Finlayson after the death of Jane, Sarah's sister, includes repeated features of Sarah's writings. Her life was full of trials, responsibility, and loneliness, but her confidence in the Lord was unconditional.

Sarah<sup>2</sup> was the eldest daughter of Daniel Wheeler Sr., Minister of the Gospel and missionary of the Society of Friends, and she is the main

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<sup>1</sup>ELKA. Central Archive for Finnish Business Records. Finlayson Co's Archive. Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10 mo. 8/26 1837. This chapter uses the same date system as used in the original letters.

<sup>2</sup>Sarah Wheeler was born at Sheffield (7th mo. 15th 1807). Her father Daniel Wheeler received a membership with the Society of Friends in 1797. In 1816 Daniel Wheeler was recorded as a minister. In 1849 Sarah married William Tanner and used name Tanner. About

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M. Kaarninen (✉)  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland  
e-mail: [mervi.kaarninen@tuni.fi](mailto:mervi.kaarninen@tuni.fi)

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character of this chapter. In 1818, at the age of 11, Sarah left England, her native country, for the next 20 years. Her father had received a job, an extensive land reclamation project near Petersburg,<sup>3</sup> from the Emperor Alexander, Czar of Russia. Daniel Wheeler, his wife, children, their tutor, servants, and farm workers sailed on 22 June 1818 from Hull over to Denmark and the Baltic. The Wheeler family settled on the far bank of the Neva near the village of Ochta, about one and a half miles from the city.<sup>4</sup> Young Sarah lived with her family first in Ochta. They moved to Moscow Road and from 1828 they lived in the isolated Shoosharry estate, several miles from any other houses. Daniel Wheeler described their circumstances in Shoosharry, noting that they seldom saw the face of a visitor of any kind.<sup>5</sup>

Daniel and his wife Jane had six children: William, Joshua, Sarah, Charles, Daniel Jr., and little Jane. At the age of 22, Sarah Wheeler received the inward light of Christ. This spiritual experience changed her life and meant a new beginning. In Quakerism, the primary basis is on inner experience, and this meant transforming experience “convincement”, as the Quakers called a deep conviction, and true worship. The deep conviction in Sarah’s life meant a thankful acceptance of the love and mercy of God.<sup>6</sup> For Sarah, living in a foreign country in isolated circumstances meant family ties developed especially intensively, and her family was her most important emotional community. After ten years in Russia, in the late 1820s and the early 1830s a new phase began in Sarah’s life when the Wheeler family broke up due to illnesses, deaths, and travels abroad. This meant hard bereavements for Sarah, and it changed her life.

family Wheeler and Tanner and the Quaker circle and the connections around these families, see Stanley, *Quaker Women*; Ford (ed.), *Memoir of William Tanner*, 170–172.

<sup>3</sup>Wheeler family called their new city Petersburg not St Petersburg because saints did not belong to the Quaker culture. I will use the official name St Petersburg which was used in the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup>From the 1840s has been published many biographies, memories, and studies on Quaker minister and missionary Daniel Wheeler and Family Wheeler’s time in Russia: Greenwood, *The Story of Daniel Wheeler in Russia*; Scott, *Quakers in Russia*; Benson, *Quaker Pioneers in Russia*, 63–66; McMillin, “Quakers in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia, 567–579”; Dunstan, *Sarah Biller of St Petersburg*, 50. See also: Walker, “Enlightenment and Religion in Russian Education in the Reign of Tsar Alexander I”, 343–360. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3685>.

<sup>5</sup>Scott, *Quakers in Russia*, 75; Wheeler, *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labours of the Late Daniel Wheeler*, 85–86, 155–159.

<sup>6</sup>Dandelion and Angelle, “Introduction”, 20–21.

In this chapter, I analyse Sarah Wheeler's spiritual life by asking how she lived through her bereavements and how her emotions, like sorrow and fear, gradually evolved into an experience that defined her life and gave direction to her view of her own and her family's future. The hard bereavements in Sarah's life caused emotions like anxiety, fear, and deep sorrow, or at least this is how she expressed herself in her letters. This chapter pertains specifically to ideas of experience as a process in which one evaluates one's own and one's community's encounters with the world according to the cultural script of the Quaker tradition. I will study the process by which she lived her religion and process of experiencing God's presence and mercy in her life. She saw the mercy of God in all her delights, sorrows, and sufferings, and used phrases like "unchanging almighty" in her writings. Tracing the process of Sarah Wheeler's experience in her letters also highlights the impact of her religious community on her experience. The structure of this chapter follows Sarah's life chronologically, focusing on themes of family ties and suffering, creating a religious experience of submitting to God's will.

I will consider Sarah Wheeler's spiritual life and her identity using as source material letters she sent from her home, St Petersburg, Ochta, and Shoosharry to Margaret Finlayson. At the age of 11, Sarah became an acquaintance of Margaret Finlayson (née Wilkie) and she was about 13 years old when Margaret moved in 1820 from St Petersburg to Tampere, Finland. Soon after this, Sarah wrote her first letter to Margaret Finlayson.<sup>7</sup> This chapter concentrates on a short time period, less than ten years in Sarah's life, when she lost her family community and lived in trying times. This study will proceed by presenting first Sarah's pen friendship with Margaret Finlayson and then by following Sarah's bereavements. The key concepts are the sense of bereavement and suffering.

The Quakers suffered for their faith, and there was a common belief that those who suffered the most and under the worst conditions best exemplified a commitment to God. In the Quaker community, suffering

<sup>7</sup>These letters include a wider context in the Quakers' community and to the Quaker's correspondence tradition as the tool for communication, see Scheider, "Introduction", 2–11. Gary Schneider has classified the scholarship of early modern British letters and religion into five groups: studies on women's letters and religion, general studies of epistolary writing (relationship between religion and letters) literary and historical studies of religious topics in which letters are examined or figure significantly in the analysis, studies of individual Churchmen and their letters, religion in the personal letters or in epistolary fictions of literary writers.



had been an integral part of the early Quaker identity, and the correspondence in the Quaker network focused in the late seventeenth century on accounts of suffering.<sup>8</sup> The Quakers had been constantly in trouble with the law, and their interpretation of God's law rather than English law led to them being imprisoned. In the prison letters, the suffering was described as both spiritual and physical in nature.<sup>9</sup> The Quakers understood that it was their obligation to suffer in order to demonstrate their covenant with God. Sarah upheld Quaker traditions by writing of her sufferings and dealing with her own emotions, like anxiety and fear. Sarah's charity, and later her submission to God's will in personal losses, belonged to her conviction and identity formed by the Quakers' cultural script.

The context of my chapter is based on early nineteenth-century Quakerism and the gender system of the Society of Friends.<sup>10</sup> Sarah Wheeler gives an intricate example of a Quaker woman's life in how she lived in isolated circumstances and loneliness, kept up her domestic duties, took responsibility for her younger siblings, and wrote letters and forwarded messages around the world to British missionaries. Sarah was responsible for maintaining the household, nursing the sick, and transmitting information between family members abroad. Sarah stood as an emotional pillar and stayed at Shoosharry when others were moving on. Her other family and emotional community consisted of her Christian friends, whom she kept up contacts by writing and forwarding letters. Her letters prove that she adopted the Quaker women's identity to help the poor and sick in the way that was possible in her circumstances. The early part of the century was a period of intense evangelical activity in Britain. During the nineteenth century, Quaker women participated in social reform movements and engaged in work among poor children and in education and prisons.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup>From the late seventeenth century, the Quakers began to collect and publish accounts of their sufferings. These included detailed accounts on of imprisonments, distrains, and other penalties levied on Quakers for crimes: illegal meetings, non-attendance at church. See Ames, *Margaret Fee, letters, and the Making of Quakerism*, 123–143; Miller, “A Suffering People’: English Quakers and their Neighbours c. 1650–c. 1700”, 71–103. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3600832>.

<sup>9</sup>Ames, *Margaret Fee, letters, and the Making of Quakerism*, 123–143.

<sup>10</sup>Tarter and Gill (eds.), *New Critical Studies on Quaker Women, 1650–1800*; Stanley, *Quaker Women*; Garman, “Quaker women's lives and spiritualities”.

<sup>11</sup>Rogers, “Quietist Quakerism, 1692–c. 1805”, 111–114; Garman, “Quaker women's lives and spiritualities”, 393–397; Rosslyn, “Women with the mission”.

## SARAH AND MARGARET AS PEN FRIENDS

Sarah sent her first two letters to Margaret Finlayson at the beginning of the 1820s. The correspondence continued sporadically but became regular in the 1830s. When Sarah wrote her last letter in July 1838, she was 31 years old and Margaret was about 62 years old.

Margaret Finlayson was born in Abbey Paisley, Scotland, and had emigrated to St Petersburg in the early 1810s, living there and mixing with the Quaker circle and British missionaries.<sup>12</sup> In Tampere, Margaret's husband, James Finlayson, began a machinery project and Margaret organized her own textile business and worked among the local orphaned children. During these 20 years, Sarah Wheeler grew up, and this correspondence created a friendship between a younger and an older woman. In the summer of 1838, after nearly 30 years abroad, Margaret Finlayson returned to Govan, Scotland, from there to Ireland, and then back to Scotland—this time to Edinburgh—where she died in 1855.<sup>13</sup>

Sarah Wheeler's letters to Margaret Finlayson had several purposes. Every letter included a part where Sarah explained her own relationship to God, and her writings proved how Sarah lived her religion. Her letters to Margaret expressed her relationship to God as the most essential part of her life. In her letters, Sarah took a role as a mentor. The Lord's hand, confidence, and divine blessing were the key concepts in Sarah's world view and she wanted to write to Margaret about them.<sup>14</sup> Sarah processed her faith and she assured herself and her correspondent of divine guidance, protection, and mercy. She also dealt with grief, loneliness, and trials, and these letters served as a diary where she had an opportunity to speak about her feelings. Sarah told how despite her losses, she had gained a strong

<sup>12</sup>About British missionaries and their community in St Petersburg in the early nineteenth century, see Bawden, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals*; Rosslyn, "Women with a mission", 231–236; Dunstan, *Sarah Biller of St Petersburg*, 50–52; Scott, *Quakers in Russia*, 79, 85; Benson, *Quaker Pioneers in Russia*.

<sup>13</sup>Kaarninen, "Margaret Finlayson", 30–31. James Finlayson 1835–1836 sold his mill and Sarah's brother William Wheeler played an important role in these negotiations. He put up one-third of the total capital of 300,000 rubles banco with Nottbeck and Rauch each investing another third. William Wheeler was not listed as a partner in the legal document but the Wheeler family was not connected to the Finlayson company and this relationship gave a new meaning to Sarah's and Margaret's pen friendship. See also Selleck, "Quaker Pioneers in in Finnish Economy Development", 32–41.

<sup>14</sup>Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 4th mo. 30/6 1836.

experience of God's grace.<sup>15</sup> As a Quaker, she understood that her suffering belonged to her life, and her duty was to write about her suffering. The early Quakers had written about their experiences and suffering in prison. In Sarah's circumstances, her own lonely home in a foreign country became her prison. This correspondence gave her an opportunity to write about her thoughts and her relationship with God. Sarah processed her religion and God's presence formed an experience in her life. Additionally, Sarah's letters consoled Margaret in her sufferings. She also felt loneliness and unfamiliarity in a foreign place without friends who spoke her own language.

In her letters, Sarah tries to advance the Quaker mission.<sup>16</sup> Her aim is to convince her correspondent of God's omnipotence so that the correspondent could feel and reach this same experience. This was her duty as a Quaker, where mission work and the practical transmission of news were connected. In this way, Sarah fulfilled her Quaker conviction.<sup>17</sup> Sarah reminded Margaret how the gracious Father would support her when Margaret felt discouraged, and Sarah wanted to make sure that Margaret understood the mercy of God and trust in it.

...it has at some reasons been my sincere and heart felt wish that the Lord would in his mercy, wake thee a rich partaker of those consolations which a sense of his love shed aboved in the soul can alone impart and which He often in boundless compassion is pleased to vouchsafe to his children when in the ordering of his providence he sees met to withdrawn them from bouncers of outward enjoyments. And surely the enjoyments of his presence is a rich compensation for every inferior loss and the more no because in proportion as we are enabled to walk with Him...<sup>18</sup>

In Sarah's faith, the Lord's hand could be seen everywhere. She wanted to convince her correspondent of the indications that the Lord would help Margaret in her work with orphans, and this belief gave her strong confidence in every case and in her difficulties. This pen friendship provided an opportunity to handle contradictory emotions. Sarah recommended to Margaret John Bunyan's famous story *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This*

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 8th mo. 10th 1830, 10th mo. 24th 1832.

<sup>16</sup> Dandelion and Angelle, "Introduction", 21; Ford (ed.), *Memoir of William Tanner*, 170–172.

<sup>17</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 24th 1832.

<sup>18</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 24th 1832.

*World to That Which Is to Come*, and sent it to Margaret. Sarah wrote that “It is a favourite work of mine and ours that I read some time ago with much interest and I would hope with some profit.”<sup>19</sup> This story meant a lot to her because Bunyan demonstrates the experience of conversion in a story about turning towards God.<sup>20</sup> Sarah did not express in her letter if Bunyan’s story had made her see the light.

Additionally, Sarah’s letters included family news and news from their common friends in St Petersburg and missionaries around the world. Sarah received fabric, thread, linen, and stocking orders from their friends in St Petersburg to be forwarded to Margaret for their production in Tampere. Sarah reported on health conditions (illnesses), the family events of the missionaries, and, most importantly, the state of her father’s mission.<sup>21</sup> She had several pen friends and her correspondence took up much of her time. As the daughter of a Quaker minister, Sarah maintained the Quakers’ letter tradition in the Quaker network. Sarah understood it as her duty to write, copy, and forward letters:

I enclose some extracts from Father’s journal, which we thought some of your member might like to see, thó (though) probably a first of them may have been already at Tammerfors in manuscript. We have also received similar extracts from the journal of James Backhouse & his companion & from others of our Society who have been travelling thró (through) various parts of the continent of Europe. If any of you would like to see these, we will send them with pleasure.<sup>22</sup>

The Quakers had their own epistolary pattern. In seventeenth-century England, the Quakers had taken on the Pauline tradition of letter writing, communicating with fellow “Friends” by writing letters and trying to reach out to potential converts among the mass of human beings.<sup>23</sup> Sarah’s letters to Margaret are identifiable by these Quaker conventions. As Susan E. Whyman notes, the Quakers developed a common epistolary language and conventions, and adapted them to religious purposes. The Quakers’

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 8th mo. 10th 1830.

<sup>20</sup> Machosky, “Trope and Truth in the Pilgrim’s Progress”, 179–198.

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 8th 1830; Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 4th mo. 30/6 1836; Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 2nd mo. 10/22 1836.

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 7th mo. 6/18 1836.

<sup>23</sup> Barbour, “Thomas Brown”, 37–48.

letter writing system protected and promoted their community.<sup>24</sup> The network of letters united the Quakers, who were spread around the world as missionaries. Since the seventeenth century, the Quakers had by a network of letters promoted their community and united the faithful who were physically scattered. The Quakers thought that it was important to copy letters. Authors asked the correspondent to make copies to be sent to specific people or to be circulated throughout the community.<sup>25</sup>

Quaker letters followed the classical form of salutation, narration, request, and conclusion. The letter begins with the words of greeting, “My Dear Mrs Finlayson”, and later Sarah uses the salutation “My Dear Friend”. This is the typical structure in Sarah’s letters to Margaret. All of Sarah’s letters to Margaret followed a similar structure and form. The salutation was followed by the purpose of the letter and it included thanks for the correspondent’s last letter or apologies as to why it had taken so long to answer. Another of the most typical conventions in each letter are the explanations for the reasons of the delay of the letter. “For some time, I have thought I should like to write thee”.<sup>26</sup>

#### “FAMILY AS A SCATTERED BAND”

The Wheeler family followed Quaker traditions. As a Quaker minister, Daniel Wheeler organized meetings of worship for his family and other people in his household. Occasionally, there were British visitors participating in these gatherings.<sup>27</sup> The parents expected that children would experience God’s almighty power, mercy and love like they did, and in the way of the Quaker tradition. The children had to respect their parents, take their advice obediently, and submit to their parents’ will. Daniel wanted to supervise his children’s religious life and to know how they lived religion in their everyday life and duties. For Sarah, this was

<sup>24</sup>In the Quaker letters were not used the names of pagan months and days. A special dating system replaced the names with numbers: 1st month meant first January and 1st day was Sunday. Sarah’s first letter to Margaret is written by child’s clear and beautiful cursive handwriting. She had dated it with the Quaker dating system 1st mo 22nd 1821. In the Quaker letters were used pronouns “thee” and “thy” instead of you. Rogers, “Quietist Quakerism, 1692–C. 1805”, 105–107; Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, 145–151; Ames, *Margaret Fee*, letters, and the Making of Quakerism.

<sup>25</sup>Ames, *Margaret Fee*, letters, and the Making of Quakerism.

<sup>26</sup>Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson Shoosharry 1st mo. 6/18 1838.

<sup>27</sup>Allen, *The Life of William Allen*, 319, 321–322; Dunstan, *Sarah Biller of St Petersburg*, 50.

self-evident and she wanted to be a good daughter. Her father always trusted her.

Sarah encountered a great disappointment when her parents and younger sister Jane decided in the autumn of 1830 to stay the winter months in England because of Jane's health. In the St Petersburg area, the cold winters and repeated influenza epidemics caused serious health problems for the Wheeler family, which in turn made them miss England. British people were not accustomed to the Russian weather conditions. Sarah's letters to Margaret addressed her emotions in the exceptional situation and Sarah sympathized with Margaret, as they both lived in secluded circumstances far away from home and friends. Sarah wrote:

I trust however we shall be united one nor do I doubt that though father and mother forsake us that in infinite mercy the Lord will take us up and watch over us for good as in humbly endeavour to seek his guidance and protection. It seems probable that only William, Charles, myself will remain here. Two of my brothers have been long resident in England and Jane is going to be placed there at school.<sup>28</sup>

The absence of family members was hard for Sarah to take because her affections towards her family were very strong and she had difficulties in making friends in Russia.<sup>29</sup> During the years in Russia, the Wheeler family had many contacts with England. As a Quaker minister, Daniel maintained communion with the Society of Friends in Sheffield.<sup>30</sup> Sarah's elder brothers were sent to study in Britain and later to participate in business there.

The home became quiet after their departure. Sarah's prayer was that the family would be together and no longer separated.<sup>31</sup> Sarah had the feeling that her parents had abandoned them, but her faith in God assured her they were safe. On the other hand, Sarah also trusted her parents' decisions and did not want to challenge them. She trusted that her parents had left them under God's care. Sarah's voice includes depression and

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 8th mo. 10th 1830.

<sup>29</sup> TEMP MSS 366. Daniel Wheeler papers. Volume 4: letters (1817–1839). Box 1: (1/1–1/12) family papers and papers and notebooks relating to his work in Russia. Friends House library.

<sup>30</sup> McMillin, "Quakers in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia", 567–579; Benson, *Quaker Pioneers in Russia*, 48–49; Dunstan, *Sarah Biller of St Petersburg*, 52; Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 7th mo. 6/18 1836.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 8th mo. 10th 1830.

hopelessness when writing that the family would in the future meet in the after world when God, in undivided grace, had desired and decided.<sup>32</sup>

In 1831, the family received shocking news: Daniel Wheeler informed his family that he felt called by God to go on a missionary journey to the South Seas, Australia, Hobart, Society Islands, and Hawaii. Daniel Wheeler was a forerunner in Quaker missionary work.<sup>33</sup> His vocation and projected long missionary voyage caused Sarah confusion. She described to Margaret the feelings of the family, and she supposed that her father's voyage would be a trial for her mother. However, she admitted that the family was interested in Daniel's work, even though it was challenging for the family and made it now a scattered band. Sarah relied on God and thought that He who had called for the family's sacrifice would still watch and protect them and prove Himself a shield to their beloved father.<sup>34</sup> The situation in the family became more difficult when Sarah's mother died of influenza and Daniel was preparing for the voyage. Daniel began his voyage in the companionship of his son Charles, and it was estimated that their absence would be four years.<sup>35</sup>

Sarah's most important duty was to stay at Shoosharry and to take care of the others, although she had lost her parents and three brothers were far away. Sarah wrote letters to her friends and waited for news from her father's and brother Charles's voyage eagerly. Sarah was ready to admit that her family had richly received things to enjoy and her earnest prayer was that all the proofs of God's love that they had so perpetually received might bind their hearts more closely to the great and gracious Giver of them all. Sarah referred to a Psalm, "He crowned thee with loving kindness and tender mercy", to praise the Lord, which characterizes Sarah's lived religion.<sup>36</sup> She understood the health of family members as a gracious gift from the Lord. Sarah's letters concretized her feelings at Shoosharry,

<sup>32</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 8th mo. 10th 1830. Lord in his unmerited mercy grant that we may all meet at least where we shall be called to part no more and the anticipated separation that waits in this is my most earnest petition.

<sup>33</sup> Stevens, "Travelling ministry", 495–496; Daniel Wheeler to his Children 9th mo. 26th 1832, Daniel Wheeler to Sarah Wheeler 2nd mo. 20th 1833. In Wheeler, *Memoirs of the life and gospel labors of the late Daniel Wheeler*, 109–119.

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 24th 1832.

<sup>35</sup> About Daniel Wheeler's voyage, see Wheeler, *Memoirs of the life and gospel labours of the late Daniel Wheeler*; Beck, *Daniel Wheeler*.

<sup>36</sup> Psalm of David: 103:4.

the anxiety and uncertainty while waiting for news from her father's journey:

And now my Dear Friend I must tell thee we have had a letter lately from my brother Charles—the last day of which is I think 8th mo. 10th 1835. It brings us good tidings of them so far and did not fail to raise in our hearts a feeling of adoring gratitude to Him who has been so graciously pleased to lead about and instruct them and who will I trust still deign to guide and sustain them by his everlasting arm. They were still at Tahiti when my brother wrote but expected to cross to those adjacent island of Maore (Maori). as soon as their sailors who had been ill should be sufficiently recruited.<sup>37</sup>

They have enjoyed almost uninterrupted health and seem to have been mercifully cared for every way, both temporally and spiritually, so that surely both they and we have the abundant cause humbly to thank God and take courage.<sup>38</sup>

Sarah always wanted to fulfil her responsibilities and follow the will of God. Daniel had great confidence in Sarah and he wrote to her to discuss the spiritual lives of his children. He contemplated in his letter to Sarah that his most earnest desire was that his children would not suffer themselves to lose sight of the wondrous mercy that had been so plainly and marvellously extended, nor to let the remembrance of it depart from their minds. Daniel thought that the fear of the Lord kept the heart clean and remain forever.<sup>39</sup> In Daniel's religious thinking, trials guided one to find the right path and peace for the soul. Daniel interpreted that his sons' trials had been greatly blessed in their spiritual good, leading them to seek those things which bring a sense of peace, and support for his soul. Like Daniel, Sarah also worried that her brothers lived abroad without the saving knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ. In this way of thinking, suffering was good for the soul and taught thankfulness.<sup>40</sup>

Sarah had no desire herself to enter a world that she saw as polluted.<sup>41</sup> She thought that she was called to tread a solitary path. Sarah wrote that

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 2nd mo. 10/22 1836.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 7th mo. 6/18 1836.

<sup>39</sup> Wheeler, *Memoirs of the life and gospel labours of the late Daniel Wheeler* (letter to one of his children 2nd month 20th, 1833) 114–115.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 24th 1832.

<sup>41</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 24th 1832.



she sympathized with people whose trials arose from loneliness, and in this way she told Margaret that she understood her feelings because they both had immigrated and lived in the strange land: “Though it is now nearly 18 years since we first tred in its stone and we still look to England as our home and perhaps the first earthly wish of some of our heart is again to ‘dwell among our own people’ and again take sweet counsel with those with whom we could go to the house of God in company happily the real followers of Jesus are not confined to any country or any home...”<sup>42</sup>

In Sarah’s life, the disintegration of the family and loneliness in isolated circumstances made her seek safety and comfort even more from religion. This led to an experience through which she began to see the repeated bereavements as belonging to her family’s cycle. In her daily life, living her religion gave her consolation and produced the experience which she began to accept as her destiny. Sarah gave her unhesitating submission to the divine will, and living in the middle of her trials, she remembered that her family had received God’s mercies. Sarah was comforted by the thought that every breath depends on the will of the inerrant Father.<sup>43</sup> In the middle of her bereavements and sufferings, she always felt great confidence in the Lord, and she understood she was fulfilling her Quaker conviction.

Sarah felt thankful for the quiet, retired nook that was allotted to her.<sup>44</sup> Analysing her own feelings in solitude, she began to understand some of the peculiar trials that had occurred, but when she contemplated the innumerable mercies that surrounded her family and their utter unworthiness, she felt called upon to bless the Lord and could not desire that their situation would be otherwise. She thought that if she had campaigned against her circumstances at Shoosharry, it would have meant that she did not trust in the divine grace, and that meant unfaithfulness.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 4th mo. 30/6 1836.

<sup>43</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 6th mo. 13/25 1836.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 24th 1832.

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 24th 1832.

“...EVERY STROKE IS GIVEN BY FATHER’S HAND”: SARAH  
AND THE SAD SHOOSHARRY

In early 1836, at the age of 29, Sarah described to Margaret how she saw the wheel of life carried an irresistible speed, but for her all was unimportant when it does not bear a reference to the eternal future. Sarah thought that it was a mercy that duty and happiness were inseparably linked and most important in her life. She also thought that with steady and persevering endeavours, every duty to the Lord would be performed.<sup>46</sup> Sarah had written about the sickly winter among her countrymen and she always remembered to say how thankful she was when her own family had been permitted to enjoy good health while many were suffering around them.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, she mourned the illnesses and the circumstances of her Christian missionary friends in Siberia and all around the world.<sup>48</sup>

However, the summer of 1836 proved to be a tragic turning point in Sarah’s life and the beginning of a period filled with heavy disappointments and bereavements in a fight against difficult pulmonary diseases in the Wheeler family.<sup>49</sup> William caught a cold and his lungs were affected. Sarah was anxious because William’s health had always been feeble. As the head of the family, William had been responsible for the younger siblings at home as well as for the land-recovery work and his ordinary duties as a foreman.<sup>50</sup> In the following six months, Sarah struggled with the circumstances of William’s illness. Sarah’s letters to Margaret described how Sarah lived her religion during this difficult period and how she saw the Lord’s hand in this tragedy.

During William’s illness, Sarah experienced numerous disappointments. Sarah watched her brother’s declining state of health and his depressed mind. William was passive when he was normally actively engaged in work. Sarah wrote: “I feel that we are still surrounded by mercies that call loudly on our gratitude but I find it difficult at seasons to avoid looking anxiously forward to the coming winter.”<sup>51</sup> She thought

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 2nd mo. 10/22 1836.

<sup>47</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 2nd mo. 10/22 1836.

<sup>48</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 2nd mo. 10/22 1836.

<sup>49</sup> McMillin, *Quakers in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia*, 567–579; Benson, *Quaker Pioneers in Russia*, 48–49; Dunstan, *Sarah Biller of St. Petersburg*, 52; Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 7th mo. 6/18 1836.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 6th mo. 13/25 1836.

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 7th mo. 6/18 1836.

that only the possibility was to commit the family to the Lord's hand, hoping that He would direct their steps and whatever lay in store for them, be it trial or suffering. Sarah trusted that the Lord would vouchsafe them according to their need, as He had hitherto been rich in mercies.<sup>52</sup> In Sarah's Christian conviction, people would stay healthy if they faithfully followed divine grace.<sup>53</sup>

Sarah was obliged to accept the next severe disappointment when her brother William travelled to England and settled on the Isle of Wight because of his bronchitis.<sup>54</sup> Sarah and her siblings felt in Shoosharry that they had lost their safety after William's departure. Sarah confessed that the loss of William's company left a feeling of emptiness in their enjoyments and deprived the home of one of its most decent and valued inhabitants. She remembered, however, to say that they were still thankful for the many undeserved mercies that yet remained to them.<sup>55</sup> Sarah received a great consolation from her religion when she thought that it was divine will for William to go. Her confidence was not shaken, and she trusted that the same good hand that took William forth would sustain and direct those who remained. However, Sarah admitted that they felt themselves to be a feeble band. Sarah's letter to Margaret illustrates Sarah's thinking in her religion:

I believe I can truly say our trust is in the Lord alone and after the large experience we have had of his unfailling goodness, we should indeed be faithless could we doubt that He will still be with us and grant us light and grace according to our need of watchfulness and a constant looking into Him be but maintained on our past. I feel the indispensable nature of these conditions and humbly hope thró (through) divine brace to be enabled to perform them and then I cannot doubt that a peaceful resting in His will, will he mercifully vouchsafe even thó (though) discouragement may often abound. What a mercy is it in this fluctuating world that none of its changes can take away from the soul of the humble pilgrim that peace which was our dear Redeemer's precious legacy to his followers and which we still find to be sickly shed abroad at seasons in the heart by Him who is our faithful to his promises and who remains the same yesterday to day for ever.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 7th mo. 6/18 1836.

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 4th mo. 30/6 1836.

<sup>54</sup> Wheeler, *Memoirs of the life and gospel labors of the late Daniel Wheeler*, 318–319.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 11th mo. 5/17 1836.

<sup>56</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 8th mo. 17/27 1836.

Sarah hoped that family members and friends would be optimistic about William's health and they should take a cue from his courage. Sarah saw mercies vouchsafed William everywhere, when the Lord had been pleased to raise up for him in his retreat very good friends who seem disposed to give assistance and solace.<sup>57</sup>

Sarah felt a great desperation and contradictory emotions when William stayed so far away. For her, it was difficult to wait patiently and contentedly when her dear brother would have needed her and the assiduous attentions of affection would have been so valuable to him. Sarah would have liked to take care of William, but she understood that her duty was to stay at Shoosharry with her siblings Jane and Daniel, especially as Jane—the youngest in the family—needed Sarah's attendance and care. Sarah prayed for grace to cheerfully acquiesce in this situation and to commit her into the Hands of the heavenly Parent, whose loving kindness and tender mercy had been thus far been so conspicuously manifested. Sarah admitted to Margaret that the bitter tear will at seasons fall, but the same she said that these kinds of feelings were weak and faithless and need to be subdued by the power of divine grace until God's will be done "remains to be the only desire of the chastened soul"<sup>58</sup>

William Wheeler died on the Isle of Wight in November 1836. The news of William's death nearly crushed Sarah. She wrote she felt like sinking beneath the weight of nature's anguish and the wound was incurable. The siblings Sarah, Daniel Jr., and Jane were deeply afflicted in Shoosharry. Sarah complained that brother Joshua in England had not been with William at the time of his death. Joshua as a family member mourned his brother, and Sarah wrote that she could not but humbly hope that the death of one brother may prove the Divine Blessing—the spiritual life of another.<sup>59</sup> It was Sarah's duty to write letters to their friends and inform them of William's death. The sorrow and great bereavement did not shake Sarah's faith. "I feel that I can now more than ever adopt as my own the language of David:<sup>60</sup> 'The Rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God'."<sup>61</sup> Daniel Wheeler Sr. received a letter with the message of William's

<sup>57</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 11th mo. 5/17 1836.

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 11th mo. 5/17 1836.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 1st mo. 19/31 1837.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 12th mo. 29th 1836

<sup>61</sup> Psalm 18: "In God is my salvation and glory: the Rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God."

death after six months, when he was on his way to Hobarton (Hobart town).<sup>62</sup>

Sarah's letters tell about her feelings and her deep faith in divine guidance also in the case of the death of her beloved brother and her deep sorrow. Sarah referred again to a Psalm and David's words on the day of his calamity, the "Lord is my stay".<sup>63</sup> In Sarah's lived religion, her family had abundant cause to trust in God in the future and they had found Him hitherto a very present help in every time of need. Sarah thought that the same good Hand which had thus early conducted her brother to his eternal home was still around for those who remained to bless and to give unspoken support.<sup>64</sup> In Sarah's faith, even though she felt extremely depressed under the sense of "the removal" of her beloved brother, she experienced such a realization that he was now at the bosom of the Redeemer.<sup>65</sup> Sarah managed to console herself by thinking that life seems so brief and eternity so near that it seems childish to feel sorrow for a separation.<sup>66</sup>

Jane, Sarah's only sister, became ill a couple of months after William's death. Sarah wrote to Margaret about her new severe trial. Jane had caught a cold, which soon caused inflammation in the lungs, and she suffered from the same illness as William. Sarah spoke about the alarming illness "with which it has pleased our heavenly Parent to visit her". This meant that Sarah's time was taken up with attending to Jane. She informed Margaret that her days and nights were spent watching Jane.<sup>67</sup> In Sarah's thinking, the illness and her trial came from God's hand. Like her Brother Daniel, Sarah feared that there would seem to be every reason Jane would follow their brother William to the grave.<sup>68</sup> Sarah wrote that she had not had time for leisure or rest, and she admitted that at seasons she sank under the deep anxieties that overwhelmed her but she trusted in the mercy of the heavenly Father. In Sarah's world view, she was on the path of duty and this way was predefined for her.<sup>69</sup> The merciful Father would

<sup>62</sup> Wheeler, *Memoirs of the life and gospel labors of the late Daniel Wheeler*, 318–319.

<sup>63</sup> Psalm 18:18–19.

<sup>64</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 1st mo. 19/31 1837.

<sup>65</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 1st mo. 19/31 1837.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 1st mo. 19/31 1837.

<sup>67</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 3rd mo. 30th 1837; Sarah Wheeler, *Some particulars of the last illness and death of Jane Wheeler daughter of late Daniel Wheeler*, 3–6.

<sup>68</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 3rd mo. 30th 1837.

<sup>69</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 4th mo. 9/21 1837.

not lay more on her than He would give her strength to bear, as Sarah wrote: “At times indeed I do feel very faithless and ready to be overwhelmed but thus far I desire humbly to bless the Lord for all the mercies which He mingles in our cup of trials.”<sup>70</sup> Sarah saw around her the mercies of the Lord when they had friends around who did all in their power to lighten Sarah’s burden.

After an illness of six months, Jane died at the age of 21. This paralysed Sarah, and the sorrow caused a break in Sarah’s and Margaret’s pen friendship.<sup>71</sup> Sarah’s silence lasted about four months, and she finally summoned the courage to take up her pen. Sarah felt unable to return at once to the ordinary duties of life. Afterwards, she wrote how she had gone through a difficult period of severe suffering and she described how every exertion was painful. This was the period Sarah needed to accept the death of her sister and understand the meaning of God’s hand in the bereavements and sufferings of her family: “But, I bless the Lord that he now again enables me to go cheerfully on my way & thó my tears often flow when I call to mind our heavy bereavements.”<sup>72</sup> Sarah felt that consoling assurance was granted them and the mercy of the dear Redeemer gave those who had left them rest and peace and when natures of regrets are silenced. She thought that only they could wish for those they love than blessed commemoration. “I feel that we have rather excuse to thank God and take courage in a review of his mercies to those who are taken than selfishly refine over our own loss in their removal”. Speaking of the death of her brother and sister, she used the concept of removal, and she thought that a glorious reunion awaited them in their Father’s house. Two days after Jane’s death, Sarah wrote: “This scene of suffering has at length closed on our dear Jane for ever, and her purified spirit, we feel an humble confidence, has entered better home, which she so much longed to reach.”<sup>73</sup> After Jane’s death, the impression conveyed to the reader is one of tangible deep sorrow. Later, when she had recovered and had time to grieve, she mentioned the mercy the Lord had given when she had had some of her friends with her during the difficult winter months.

<sup>70</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 4th mo. 9/21 1837.

<sup>71</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10 mo. 8/26 1837; Greenwood, *The Story of Daniel Wheeler in Russia*, 16.

<sup>72</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10 mo. 8/26 1837.

<sup>73</sup> Wheeler, *Some particulars of the last illness and death of Jane Wheeler daughter of late Daniel Wheeler*, 27.

After the death of her sister Jane, Sarah waited constantly for news of her father's and brother's arrival in England. She also began to plan her own journey to England—her native country, as she called it. Sarah lived in a lonely place on the Shoosharry estate, where she could feel like a prisoner without parents and siblings; only her brother Daniel stayed in Russia with her. In her deep sorrow, Sarah was anxious to know whether her father had received the letters concerning Jane's illness and death. Sarah's worries continued because she could not forget the dangers of her father and brother's long voyage. Additionally, Sarah felt it painful to send news of Jane's death. It would distress her father, as Sarah wrote that Jane was his favourite child.<sup>74</sup> The situation seems contradictory when Sarah was afraid for them, but she remembered that "He who has led them in safety through so many dangers will still we trust be near them to preserve from every ill and to His guardian providence we desire to commit them". Sarah felt that her brother and father were in the hand of One who cannot err. Sarah seemed to have taken a view that none of them would be surprised if a similar summons would be sent to them and their trials would continue in the future.<sup>75</sup> However, in the future Sarah saw that her duty would be plain: she would be her Father's companion and contribute to the comfort of his declining years.

During Jane's sickness, Sarah had written a diary in which she commented on her sister's status and the progression of the illness. Later she published a booklet, *Some particulars of the last illness and death of Jane Wheeler*. The introduction of this book is dated 1840, but Sarah delivered it as a handwritten copy as early as the spring of 1838 to her friends. This booklet was published in 1867. Several such memory books (accounts) were published in the nineteenth century and were usual in the community of the Society of Friends and among British missionaries.<sup>76</sup> In her diary, Sarah gives detailed information about Jane's illness and her mood day by day. This describes Sarah's emotions in the distressing situation and it is part of her grieving process, but the text has other aims. Sending informative letters, extracts of letters, and journals was part of the Quaker

<sup>74</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 4th mo. 9/21 1837.

<sup>75</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 8/26 1837.

<sup>76</sup> Swan, *Memoir of the late Mrs. Paterson wife of the Rev. Dr. Paterson of St. Petersburg; Memoir of the late Hannah Kilham*.

These memory books present modern religious letter culture in the transitional period in the early nineteenth century. The memory books are a tribute to the dead family member or friend and books belonged to the culture of mourning.

culture of keeping contacts. In the preface, she says that the book was written for the absent members of the family because they were distant. The aim of the later edition was that the book could be instructive for young people of Jane's age. Sarah wrote that the book could lead young people of Jane's age to think in time of health and the will of God.<sup>77</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Sarah Wheeler's relationship with God and faith was an inseparable part of her personality and her Quaker identity. Her writings have been described in the context of the Quaker letter culture and they are lauded for her genuine submission to the divine will and acknowledgement of all the mercies experienced in the midst of such great and complicated trials.<sup>78</sup> God was present in all her daily duties and Sarah's deep faith defined her relationship to her parents, siblings, and friends. Young Sarah was shy, and as an adult, she has been remembered for the beauty of her character.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, her husband William Tanner writes how Sarah had a force of character, with a deep tenderness of feeling.<sup>80</sup> Sarah wrote about her trials and sufferings, and this was the way she lived her religion and Quaker conviction.

Sarah's letters convey how the sense of bereavement developed in the experiences. Sarah was dispirited and her bereavements influenced how she now looked at her life and her future. This process of constructing experience in the middle of deepest sorrow directed her more towards the Kingdom of God than her life on Earth. She began to see more clearly the frailty and the vulnerability of life. Sarah wrote that the last five years had brought her different feelings because she had not earlier realized the uncertainty of life. The trials made Sarah familiar with death and the shortness of life. Through her bereavements, Sarah felt that she would not be surprised to be summoned, and she would desire to live "with the wing guiding and the lamp burning so as to be ready to go forth and meet her

<sup>77</sup>Wheeler, *Some particulars of the last illness and death of Jane Wheeler daughter of late Daniel Wheeler*, 3–6.

<sup>78</sup>About family Tanner and the Quaker circle and connections between the Quaker families, see Holton Stanley, Sandra, *Quaker Women*.

<sup>79</sup>"Introduction: Letters to Daniel Wheeler in England from his family in Russia 1832–3", Daniel Wheeler archive. Friends House, London.

<sup>80</sup>Ford, John (ed), *Memoir of William Tanner, compiled chiefly from autobiographical memoranda*, 194.



Lord when He pleased to call her”.<sup>81</sup> Her bereavements processed her experience of submission to God’s will and her thankfulness for all the mercies they had received earlier was connected to this submission. In this situation, Sarah began to think about eternal life and mercy, and now she thought that she was but a pilgrim and a stranger and eternity was at hand. This was the way she lived her religion, into which she had been raised, which she had learnt, and which she had experienced. As a Quaker woman, she had always known how suffering belonged to life and the Quaker identity, but now she had learnt and experienced suffering and come to understand it through her tragic losses.

In her letters, Sarah described her strong faith in God, and she tried to strengthen Margaret’s faith and teach her how she should feel. Sarah wanted to guide Margaret to find God’s almighty power and to be ready to receive His mercies. Sarah’s letters to Margaret present individual emotions in the middle of sorrow and distressing circumstances, as well as how Sarah began to process this as an experience. In the larger context, her feelings and experiences present a daughter’s duty and status in the Quaker community in isolated circumstances during the time of British evangelical activity connected to British imperialism. Sarah’s letters to Margaret and British missionaries around the world as well as the memory book of her sister Jane transmitted Sarah’s experience to a much larger audience. In her letters, Sarah gave written form to her emotions, suffering, and experiences, and she forwarded them to Margaret Finlayson and the Quaker network. Her individual experiences would give a model of how to live through the trials and how to continue life and to prepare to receive bereavements in the future.

Planning her future, Sarah wrote that everything was in the Lord’s hands, and she thought about the life that she would desire to live so as to be ready to go forth and meet her Lord when He pleased to call her.<sup>82</sup> Sarah left Russia in the summer of 1838 and met her father and brother in England. Her bereavements were not over, and within the next ten years she lost her father and three brothers. Sarah married Minister William Tanner in 1849 and had a happy marriage. She participated in her

<sup>81</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 10th mo. 8/26 1837.

<sup>82</sup> Sarah Wheeler to Margaret Finlayson 1st mo. 6/18 1838, 3rd mo. 25 1838, 5th mo. 7th 1838.

husband's religious work in the Society of Friends and even occasionally spoke at the meetings.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Ford, (ed.), *Memoir of William Tanner*, 194.

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## CHAPTER 9

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# Working-Class Women Living Religion in Finland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

*Pirjo Markkola*

### INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century was an age of popular revivalist movements. In Finland, the mass revivals that emerged in the eighteenth century swept across the country and reached the eastern and northern peripheries by the latter part of the nineteenth century. Despite some differences, all major revivalist movements were essentially based on Pietism, and all of them emphasized the personal experience of awakening. The movements changed the religious landscape by making religion more visible: faith was made a matter of choice, and a conscious experience of awakening and conversion became a crucial part of religious life, which was to have tangible consequences as well. Some revivalist movements concentrated on

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P. Markkola (✉)

Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

e-mail: [pirjo.markkola@tuni.fi](mailto:pirjo.markkola@tuni.fi)

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conversion and the practice of a reborn spiritual life, whereas others were particularly active in charitable social work among the poor and the suffering.<sup>1</sup> By emphasizing the awakening and religious conversion as a choice, revivalist movements opened up the religious landscape not only for the option of following God but also of opting out of religious observance.

Until the twentieth century, Lutheran Christianity was the official confession of Finland. Close ties between the state and the church were loosened by the Church Law of 1869, but the Lutheran Church remained the established church and freedom of religion was not granted until the early 1920s. The Dissenters' Act of 1889 recognized other Protestant denominations; some of them had followers in Finland already in the 1860s. While the established church and most revivalist movements preserved preaching as a male privilege, some new groups were more open to the active role of women in evangelization.<sup>2</sup> Revivals constituted new gendered positions and fostered tensions between the clergy and the laity.

Among the working classes, religion played a significant role as well. Leaders of the labour movement often complained that factory women in particular were too religious and blinded by their spiritual leaders, both the clergy and the new revivalist preachers.<sup>3</sup> In the gendered and classed context of revivalist movements, women's religious experiences and their ways of practising religion were promoted and controlled by a wide spectrum of religious groupings. My aim here is to analyse how religion was lived in an industrializing society in which new religious movements and other civil society organizations both challenged and strengthened mainstream Lutheran Christianity. I concentrate on the town of Tampere, which was renowned for its female industrial labour force. The religious landscape of the industrial town is explored by asking how and where urban working-class women practised religion and shared their religious experiences. My research is informed by an intersectional approach in which gender, class, ethnicity, and other dimensions of inequality intersect

<sup>1</sup> Hope, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism*, 377–378; Sulkunen, *Liisa Eerikintytär*; Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims*; On revivalism and social reform, see e.g. Hartley, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads*; Kruczek-Aaron, *Everyday Religion*; Markkola, “The Calling of Women.”

<sup>2</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 29–31; Heikkilä & Heininen, *A history of the Finnish*; Antikainen, *Suuri sisarpiiri*; Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*; Braude, “Women's History,” 87–107.

<sup>3</sup> McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 156–168; Kemppainen, *Sosialismin, uskonnon ja sukupuo- len*, 38, 43; Markkola, “Työväenhistoria taivastielle,” 42–59; Haapala *Tehtaan valossa*, 201–202.

and overlap.<sup>4</sup> The practices of intersectional relations are based on fluid and constantly re-negotiated, historically changing conceptions.

All revivalist movements and new Protestant denominations that reached Finland in the nineteenth century introduced their own normative notions of religious commitment. However, as Meredith McGuire argues, these conceptions of how people ought to believe and act fail to reach the ways in which people are touched by religion in their daily life: “At the level of the individual, religion is not fixed, unitary, or even coherent.”<sup>5</sup> My research draws inspiration from this understanding of religious practices. However, as Nancy Ammerman and some other scholars of lived religion warn, it is not particularly fruitful to simply contrast the experience of ordinary people and institutionally defined forms of religion. Religion was lived in a wider social context, consisting of formal and informal religious and mundane settings.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, my study of religion as lived and shared by working-class women explores both women’s everyday practices and those collective gatherings where religious practices were introduced, shared, and developed.

Religious practices cannot be understood apart from the meanings people give to them.<sup>7</sup> Many studies of spirituality also emphasize practices and take seriously the women’s own self-understanding and experience.<sup>8</sup> Based on Meredith McGuire’s definition of lived religion, I understand “experience” as an individual phenomenon as well as a social and shared one. Indicating close links between belief and practice, she concludes that lived religion is deeply social. Moreover, she points out that “the individual is able to experience, rather than simply think or believe in, the reality of her or his religious world.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup>“Intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to challenge unidimensional approaches to race and sex in critical legal studies and antidiscrimination politics. Intersectionality became soon a widely deployed concept in humanities and social sciences. Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies,” 787–794.

<sup>5</sup> McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ammerman, “Lived Religion as an Emerging Field,” 88–89, 95; Kupari, “Lived religion and the religious field,” 215–216.

<sup>7</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, “Introduction to Medieval and Early Modern,” 1–24; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; Hall, *Lived Religion in America*; McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes*; A concept “popular religion” has usually been rejected as problematic because of the dualism between popular religion and official religion.

<sup>8</sup> Stuckey, *Feminist Spirituality*, 5–8; Van Die, “A Woman’s Awakening,” 51–52.

<sup>9</sup> McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 13.

Thus, in my reading, “experience” is not only what happens to an individual; it is also a social process. “Experiencing” is part of the everyday life of human beings. People experience outward circumstances, events, interactions, encounters, and other aspects of their material, social, and emotional surroundings. These experiences are intellectual, emotional, sensory, conscious, and unconscious. Experiences become social when they are reflected, shared, and confirmed. Experiences do not just remain individual and social reflections; when shared, experiences constitute collective resources, a social stock of knowledge, and accumulate in social institutions. Therefore, various communities of experience and “scenes of experience” (prayer houses, associations, and families) have an impact on the ways in which human beings belong to their communities. Further, a Koselleckian understanding of historical time as constructed in tensions between the space of experience and the horizon of expectations is relevant for my discussion of the lived religion of working-class women.<sup>10</sup> For the urban working-class women, the processes and practices of sharing religion formed their spaces of experience and their horizons of expectation.

In this chapter, I argue that working-class women gave meaning to religious and social practices and experienced those practices in ways that can be analysed by using both the source material produced by them and the material telling about them. My major sources consist of applications to the Helsinki Deaconess Institution sent by working-class women in Tampere. In those applications, they describe their religious lives and their motivations to become a deaconess. Another set of material consists of letters to evangelical preachers, also sent by working-class women in Tampere. Additional material is collected from newspapers, periodicals, and statistical surveys. The religious landscape of Tampere is charted, and some key elements for the working-class women are discussed, such as the range of religious activities, the deaconess movement, and the working-class family as a site of religious practice. Further, women’s commitment to religious communities as well as their failure to adjust to normative conceptions or even to rebel against norms is explored to give a fuller account of lived religion in an industrial setting.

<sup>10</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, “Introduction to Medieval and Early Modern,” 11–13; Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 267–76; Kivimäki, “Reittejä Kokemushistoriaan,” 17–19; Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction*, 54–56, 85–89; *Within HEX*, ‘scene of experience’ as a theoretical concept has been developed by Minna Harjula and Heikki Kokko.



## THE SCENES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

The turn of the twentieth century was a turbulent period in Tampere. Between 1890 and 1917, the population doubled up to 45,000 inhabitants. During the most dynamic years in the 1890s, the annual increase of the industrial labour force could be as high as 1500 workers. Many of the new workers were women coming from the countryside. In the Finnish context, Tampere was the leading site of large textile factories; for example, at the turn of the twentieth century the Finlayson cotton mill employed over 3000 workers. Several other textile factories also recruited an increasing number of young female workers. The youth of Tampere was heavily dominated by women: in 1910, for example, the female-male ratio of the 20–29-year-old age group was 1.8 to 1. Consequently, Tampere remained a town where single working-class women constituted a significant share of the inhabitants until the latter part of the twentieth century. There were always more women than men in the church and civil society organizations, with the exception of some trade unions and political labour organizations that were dominated by men.<sup>11</sup> In this context, the religious experiences of working-class women were formed in a demographically biased setting.

Industrial towns offered working-class women several new opportunities to share their experiences. Factory workers toiled long hours, but as soon as their working day was over, the short evenings and long Sundays were not regulated by their employers. In contrast to farm servants and domestic maids, factory workers lived on their own and could choose how to spend their leisure time. If we look at a local newspaper in Tampere, all kinds of events were available. For example, an ordinary Wednesday night in February 1899 offered access to libraries, choir practice at a workers' institute, a free concert at a temperance house, bible study at a prayer house, a meeting of a youth association, and a lecture on relations between parents and teachers in child raising, among others.<sup>12</sup> On a dark winter's

<sup>11</sup> Haapala, *Tehtaan valossa* (1986), 217–223; Pirjo Markkola, *Työläiskodin synty: Tamperelaiset työläisperheet ja yhteiskunnallinen kysymys 1870-luvulta 1910-luvulle* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1994), 43–45; Pertti Haapala & Jarmo Peltola, *Globaali Tampere, Kaupungin taloushistoria 1700-luvulta 2000-luvulle* (Tampere: Vapriikki, 2019), 91–92.

<sup>12</sup> *Aamulehti* 15.2.1899. The diversity of working-class pastimes is shown e.g. by Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, Hartley, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads*, Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*.

night, working-class women did not have to stay at home if they wanted to spend some time with their friends and comrades.

In the same February week, Sunday was full of leisure activities. Some events, such as the philanthropic ball at the social club, were too exclusive, but many other entertainments were expressly designed for the working classes. At least five social evenings were advertised by temperance associations, the labour movement, and the youth association. Dancing, drama, music, and popular speakers attracted audiences to these events. Two events with a more serious programme were announced as being free of charge. One social evening organized by a temperance union was proud to present a famous missionary as its speaker. Two popular concerts by a local orchestra, a skating competition, and several meetings were also arranged on Sunday.<sup>13</sup> Further, as soon as the first movie theatres were opened in Tampere, the diversity of pastimes increased even more.

Religious meetings competed with social events offered by temperance unions and the labour movement. For example, on the same Sunday, a total of 15 religious events were advertised in the local newspaper. Sunday sermons in Finnish and Swedish were available in two churches, the Lutheran Prayer house, and three other prayer houses. One of the events in a prayer house was targeted at youths.<sup>14</sup> The established church was rather rigid in its structures, providing Sunday services and evening sermons in the two or three churches of the town. At the turn of the twentieth century, fewer than 10 per cent of the inhabitants in Tampere attended Sunday services. Religious holidays, such as Easter and Christmas, attracted larger audiences, however.<sup>15</sup>

While the physical distance between the church buildings and the fast-expanding working-class neighbourhoods increased, religious associations and revivalist movements acquired their own meeting rooms and prayer houses in order to come closer to their congregation. The geography of faith was in constant change. Some years later, the number of prayer houses and meeting rooms was much higher and the message to be shared gained new dimensions. Not only conversion and salvation but also

<sup>13</sup> *Aamulehti* 18.2–19.2.1899.

<sup>14</sup> *Aamulehti* 18.2–19.2.1899. Evangelical prayer houses in Viinikankatu 7 (Methodists), Puutarhakatu 17 (free church) and Rautatienkatu 12; *Aamulehti* 25.3.1905; Baptists' prayer house Pellavatehtaankatu 25. *Kansan Lehti* 5.4.1902.

<sup>15</sup> Estimated by Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 283–284; On competition between religion and other institutions, see Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, 146–149.

Christian perfection, sanctification, and holiness were preached in local prayer houses.<sup>16</sup> Experiences of religion could be shared in differing ways.

New religious spaces provided by associations formed material settings in which religion was practised, shared, and sensed.<sup>17</sup> Applications sent to the deaconess institution indicate that those spaces were meaningful sites for young working-class women. The Lutheran Prayer House Association, founded in 1891, was heavily dominated by working-class women, mainly factory workers. The association built an impressive house in 1894. In 1896, around 75 per cent of its members were women, and other figures from 1900 reveal that 80 per cent of members came from the working classes; the rest were artisans, burghers, and some members of the educated classes. Events in the house attracted non-members as well. Another religious arena for working-class women was formed by the Evangelical-Lutheran Youth Association, founded in 1894. The next year, a total of 375 members had joined; the share of women was as high as 75 per cent. This association, too, was popular among the factory workers.<sup>18</sup> These slightly different associations became noteworthy scenes of experience for working-class youth and women to share their religious life and live their religion in a visible manner.

As a scene of experience, the Lutheran Prayer House became a local hub of revivalist movements and missions. One of the revivalist preachers, missionary Frans Hannula (1855–1914), was a regular visitor of the house, and a new revivalist movement, the so-called Hannula movement, was founded around him. Having worked as a missionary in Ovamboland, he gathered wide audiences not only in his prayer meetings, but also in mission festivals, which could attract over 10,000 participants. When Hannula entered the town, the prayer house was filled even within short notice.<sup>19</sup> One of the deaconess candidates, a factory worker, described how she was

<sup>16</sup> Sanctification/holiness preached by Aksel Skutnab and his followers who believed to be free from sin. *Sanomia armosta* 1.9.1907; Baptists' prayer house in Pinninkatu 29. *Tampereen Sanomat* 19.1.1908; In February 1909 new Lutheran prayer houses were in the outskirts of Tampere (Pispala) and nearby in Messukylä, other new prayer houses and meeting rooms were provided by the Salvation Army, YMCA, YWCA, and new evangelical sects. *Aamulehti* and *Tampereen Sanomat* 20.2–21.2.1909; *Kansan Lehti* 20.2.1909.

<sup>17</sup> Materiality is a crucial aspect of lived religion. Ammerman, "Lived Religion as an Emerging Field," 91.

<sup>18</sup> Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 250–253.

<sup>19</sup> Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 251–252; Junkkaala, *Hannulan herätys*, 87, 93–96, 127.

reborn in a meeting arranged by Hannula; since then she had frequently attended services at the church.<sup>20</sup> The beloved preacher was also described by one woman, a worker in a warp knitting factory and a member of the Evangelical-Lutheran Youth Association, thus: “He is really born to be a preacher. We have to thank God for sending us such a man full of the Lord’s spirit to preach the Gospel and for the opportunity to hear his Word. While listening to his Word, I thought that I want to belong to Jesus from this day onwards.”<sup>21</sup>

It was no coincidence that the preacher was popular. It was often mentioned that he was a talented speaker. Moreover, he was able to navigate the rocky road between the church and the labour movement. As a missionary, he spoke in the meetings of the Christian labour movement, and he did not side with the church leaders against the labour movement. On the contrary, he argued that the clergy had provoked some negative attitudes among the working classes, and, on behalf of the clergy, he even apologized to the working classes for social injustice.<sup>22</sup> In an industrial town, massive audiences could hardly be attracted by a preacher without some understanding of the conditions of the working classes.

### DEACONESSES IN THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Some working-class women were touched so deeply by the message of churches, revivalist movements, and Christian associations that they were willing to work for the Kingdom of God. One such option for women coming from a humble background was provided by deaconess institutions.<sup>23</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, several young women from working-class families in Tampere applied to enter the Helsinki Deaconess Institution, which was founded in the 1860s. Almost all of them had worked in industrial labour, mainly the textile industry.<sup>24</sup> These women consciously sought to make their faith visible and live according to religious ideals. As deaconess candidates, they naturally represented an exceptionally devoted part of the working classes. However, they also reveal

<sup>20</sup>National Archive of Finland (NAF). Helsinki Deaconess Institution (HDI) Ba:1. Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 191.

<sup>21</sup>NAF, Hämeenlinna. The Evangelical Free Church of Finland (EFCF) I Fb:2. Antti Mäkinen’s correspondence. Naima Andersson to Antti Mäkinen.

<sup>22</sup>Junkkaala, *Hannulan herätys*, 239; Junkkaala, “Hannula, Frans.”

<sup>23</sup>Ivalo, *Diakonian lukukirja*; Paaskoski, *Ihmisen arvo*; Markkola, “The Calling of Women.”

<sup>24</sup>NAF. HDI Ba:1. Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, e.g. sisters 191, 208, 227, 256, 261.

more general patterns of the ways in which working-class women shared their religion and populated the scenes of experience in an industrial town.

Many working-class women learned the new vocation in their encounters with deaconesses hired by the City Mission of Tampere. The first woman wearing a deaconess suit, sister Hanna Mellberg, walked the streets of Tampere in the 1890s. Some years later, she was followed by other deaconesses. From 1908, a total of three deaconesses were based in the mission houses established in the working-class neighbourhoods.<sup>25</sup> Their distinctive presence strengthened the idea of the deaconess vocation as a realistic alternative for young women who were interested in faith, education, and work outside factories. Periodicals and other publications by the institution were also distributed to the working classes. They encouraged young women to accept the calling of the deaconess as a vocation, a life-long devotion in the service of God. The City Mission introduced deaconess education to working-class girls and fuelled their spirituality. Regular meetings and sermons in the mission and prayer houses provided remarkable scenes of experience, where working-class women could share their religious emotions and strengthen their understanding of the proper Christian lifestyle.

Nordic deaconess education mainly followed the German model deriving from the Kaiserswerth Deaconess Institution. Deaconess education consisted of practical skills in cleaning, doing laundry, caring, and nursing, as well as classes in religion and some other educational subjects. The main line of work was to nurse the poor sick, but deaconesses were also involved in education and social work among the poor.<sup>26</sup> The institutions explained that deaconesses were not Protestant nuns; however, the similarities were striking. The deaconessate represented a clearly marked choice to follow God: deaconesses belonged to the community of their institution, wore a deaconess suit, and were not paid for their work. The community took care of their daily needs and provided social security if illness or old age kept them from working.

<sup>25</sup>NAF. HDI Ba:8. Catalogue of deaconesses and parishes ca 1898–1960; “Drag ur Stadsmissionens i Tammerfors verksamhet,” *Betania* 8–9/1908, 130–134.

<sup>26</sup>The first deaconess institution was founded in Kaiserswerth in 1836 by Protestant minister Theodor Fliedner and his wife Friederike Fliedner. On deaconess education in Germany see Prelinger, “The Nineteenth-Century Deaconessate,” 215–225; Soine, “The Motherhouse and its Mission(s).” On the deaconess institutions in the Nordic Countries, see Markkola, “Deaconesses Go Transnational”; Martinsen, *Freidige og uforsagte*; Leis-Peters, “Hidden by Civil Society and Religion?,” 105–127.

In Tampere, deaconesses became role models for working-class girls who otherwise had few options beyond industrial work. Moreover, the deaconess institution in Helsinki sent pastors to Tampere to promote the deaconess cause. One of the girls from Tampere, Hilja, arrived at the deaconess institution in 1904; Olga and Eva arrived in 1911. All of them had learnt to know deaconesses employed by the City Mission. Olga was impressed by sister Hanna Mellberg, who walked the streets while visiting her patients, and Hilja mentioned sister Hanna as her inspiration. Two girls, who had a devout mother, explicated an experience of awakening. For example, during a period of revivalism “after the general strike” (i.e. the autumn of 1905) a pastor from the deaconess institution preached in Tampere. Eva, who was only 15 years old, experienced a religious awakening and wanted to enter the institution. The pastor advised her to wait, which only increased her motivation to apply. However, she had to wait several years before she was accepted.<sup>27</sup>

The message of the institution was also heard by Maria, whose father had died when she was six years old. At the age of 12, Maria underwent a tonsillectomy and then experienced a religious awakening, which led her to a decision to stop reading novels and other stories. She finished primary school, and after confirmation classes at the age of 16, she entered the cotton mill in Tampere where she worked for more than seven years. She had read about deaconess institutions, subscribed to their bulletin, and went to listen to a sermon by the director of the Helsinki Deaconess Institution. After four years of consideration, she applied to the institution in 1900.<sup>28</sup> All these elements—the religious awakening, a new Christian lifestyle without secular literature, reading the bulletin, attending prayer meetings, and showing much deliberation—made her lived religion very suitable in the eyes of the deaconess leaders.

Another working-class woman from Tampere who presented acceptable ways of practising religion was Aina. Her father worked in a cotton mill, and she started factory work at the age of 14, after finishing primary school. At the age of 18, she was awakened by the sermon of missionary Frans Hannula and experienced conversion. She frequently went to church. Another sermon by a pastor from the Helsinki Deaconess Institution encouraged her to submit an application. She had also read their bulletin. Not even health problems during her early years, such as

<sup>27</sup>NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sisters 208, 347, 349.

<sup>28</sup>NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 38.

appendicitis, hysterical attacks, and the occurrence of abscesses hindered her from the deaconess call, and the institution did not turn her down. At the age of 38 she was consecrated, and she had a lengthy career serving the deaconess community.<sup>29</sup>

Religious revivalism also brought Rosa to the Helsinki Deaconess Institution in 1907. She was only two years old when her father, a working man, died; her mother made a living for the family's six children by selling milk. Rosa received a primary school education and stayed at home until the age of 16, when she entered a wool-weaving mill as a weaver. Her mother was a devout believer and an active prayer who prayed for her children. Rosa's five siblings were not awakened, but Rosa, the youngest, believed herself to be a disciple of Jesus. Her friend had persuaded her to attend a prayer house; during her second visit, she was touched by God and could not resist the call. She was eager to share her religion by joining the Mission Association, attending events organized by the City Mission, and learning to know the deaconesses, with whom she talked about her calling.<sup>30</sup> Obviously, the deaconess leaders were satisfied with the quality of her faith, and the vocation of a deaconess became a visible sign of her practice of religion.

For the deaconess institution, it was crucial that only those women who believed they had been called by God could successfully join the community. The institutions underlined that deaconesses could not choose their vocation; they had to believe that they were called upon to serve the poor and the sick. Following Nancy Ammerman, the deaconess community can be understood as an institutionalized spiritual tribe which taught its members to "speak religion."<sup>31</sup> In their work as deaconesses, they had to be capable of explicating the experience of awakening and be able to share their religion in a proper manner while working with the sick and the suffering.

### "DISSENTERS" IN THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

As soon as the Dissenters Act was passed in 1889, small Protestant denominations enriched the religious landscape of Finland. New religious movements provided particular scenes of experience for working-class women

<sup>29</sup>NAF. HDI Ba:1, Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 56.

<sup>30</sup>NAF. HDI Ba:1, Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 256.

<sup>31</sup>Ammerman, "2013 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture," 200.

and other interested people. One of the revivalist movements that appealed to the emotions of the working classes and offered them new arenas was represented by the wide spectrum of evangelicalism. The evangelical free church movement, which in the 1860s and 1870s arrived in Finland via the country houses owned by the nobility and was supported by the Swedish-speaking upper classes, soon reached the working classes. For practical reasons, some free church missions were locally divided into Swedish and Finnish chapters; however, the division also involved and strengthened a class boundary, with the Finnish chapters consisting mainly of members of the lower social strata. The free church movement worked actively to promote home missions in urban working-class neighbourhoods. In Helsinki, for example, they founded a “chapel for the miserable,” where they engaged in evangelization and social work.<sup>32</sup>

Tampere became one of the strongholds of the evangelical free church movement.<sup>33</sup> Revivalist meetings in their prayer house attracted young working-class women. One of these women was Anni, born in 1893, who worked mainly as a waitress in temperance restaurants. One of her workplaces was run by the labour movement. Anni experienced her awakening in a meeting in which two famous travelling preachers spoke. She joined the prayer house, and became a member of the Christian Endeavour, a Protestant youth organization.<sup>34</sup> Anni’s mother belonged to the YWCA, a Christian association for women, but her father was not interested in religion. Being a “dissenter” or a “sectarian”—as the Lutheran church classified the free church revivalists—did not hinder Anni from applying and entering the Helsinki Deaconess Institution.<sup>35</sup>

In Tampere, the free church movement gathered both Swedish- and Finnish-speaking members into one chapter. This was praised by some visiting preachers. As one of them argued, a bi-lingual chapter led by a

<sup>32</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 75–83; As free church revivalists did not form their own church until the 1920s, their membership is difficult to be estimated. According to their own statistics, the number of members in 1912 was 1988; of them a total of 1441, i.e. 72 per cent were women. *Suomalainen* 17.11.1913.

<sup>33</sup> Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 261–262.

<sup>34</sup> United Society of Christian Endeavour (CE) was an interdenominational organization for Protestant youth, founded in 1881 in the USA. The first CE in Finland was founded in 1899 in Turku. The Jokinen brothers (Eeli and William) were itinerant preachers of the CE.

<sup>35</sup> NAF. HDI Ba:1, Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 465; The Lutheran Church called free church revivalists sectarians, members of a sect. Annual Report of the Lutheran Church, 1908–1912. *Viipurin Sanomat* 3.12.1913; Antikainen, *Suuri sisarpiiri*.



single preacher created a cosy atmosphere without class boundaries. In practice, however, the Finnish and Swedish sermons and prayer meetings were held separately. The free church movement in Tampere got its impulses from the work of its first preacher, Antti Mäkinen, who was born nearby as a son of a tenant farmer. After a religious conversion, he interrupted his studies in theology and entered evangelical preacher training in London. His frequent visits to Tampere attracted working-class followers.<sup>36</sup> The social background of the preacher gave him credibility among the industrial working classes. He was also admired and adored by working-class women; many letters sent to him cannot be read as anything other than fan mail.<sup>37</sup> These letters assured Mäkinen that he was missed in Tampere.

One of the Anglo-American newcomers was Baptism, which reached both the upper social strata and the working classes. In Tampere, Baptism became expressly the faith of working-class women. Their first meetings were held in 1890, and small Baptist prayer houses were opened in working-class neighbourhoods,<sup>38</sup> but a formal congregation was not registered until 1906. Directly, 12 working-class families and two other families were transferred from another Baptist congregation to the local one, and 17 working-class families and 6 single workers left the Lutheran church to join the Baptists. The number of baptized adults was slightly higher: in 1890–1905 a total of 334 converts were baptized in Tampere—72 per cent were women.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the Methodist church was established in Tampere in the 1890s. One of the prayer houses advertising in the local newspaper belonged to the Methodists, who also for some years ran a theological seminar in Tampere.<sup>40</sup> Several small religious groups

<sup>36</sup> P. Viitanen, “Kaupungeissa ja maaseuduilla,” *Suomen Viikkolehdi* 28.9.1899, 311; P. Viitanen, “Kaupungeissa ja maaseuduilla,” *Suomen Viikkolehdi* 19.10.1899, 334; Markkola, “The Calling of Women,” 127; Annola, “Tehe minusta itselles,” 160–161.

<sup>37</sup> NAF, Hämeenlinna. EFCF I Fb:2. Antti Mäkinen’s correspondence.

<sup>38</sup> “Täkäläisten baptistien tai uudesta-kastajain seurakunta,” *Tampereen Uutiset* 18.5.1895; *Aamulehti* 28.11.1896.

<sup>39</sup> Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 262–265. In 1910, the number of Lutherans in Finland was over 3 million. The number of Orthodox Christians was 52,000, Baptists 4460, Methodists 676, and Catholics 423. In 1900–1910 the increase of Baptists was 56 per cent and Methodists 21 per cent. Annual report of the Lutheran Church, 1908–1912. *Viipurin Sanomat* 3.12.1913.

<sup>40</sup> Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 265–267; Metodismi Suomessa. <https://turku.metodistikirkko.net/?p=67> (accessed 27 November 2020).

challenging the Lutheran church offered new spiritual homes to working-class women and the other inhabitants of the industrial town.

At the turn of the twentieth century, working-class families and their children were reached by the Salvation Army. Following the international model, the Salvation Army focused on social work and popular revivalist meetings. In Tampere, for example, an impoverished working-class family allowed their six children to attend the Salvation Army's evening gatherings in which the participants received presents.<sup>41</sup> Presents and other forms of social work increased the Army's credibility among the workers. Both male and female Salvation Army soldiers were recruited from the working classes. In particular, social work—so-called slum work—became a new field of work for working-class women. In 1901, the first slum station and a day nursery were founded in a working-class neighbourhood in Tampere.<sup>42</sup>

Revivalist meetings arranged by the free church movement, Baptists, Methodists, and the Salvation Army, among others, appealed to the emotions, senses, and imagination. As an experiential evangelical religion, the Salvation Army in particular offered the working classes new bodily and spiritual ways to express religious feelings.<sup>43</sup> Among the evangelical revivalists, the practice of “post-prayer meetings” was commonly used. After a prayer meeting, people were invited to stay at the prayer house to talk and pray with the preachers. During the post-prayer meetings, all preachers and other activists of the congregation talked to people and held private prayers with them. These meetings sometimes lasted until midnight. Some preachers proudly reported that many new converts had joined the movement.<sup>44</sup> In these meetings, working-class women were heard, comforted, and offered caring attention, but they were also pushed to experience an awakening. Religious emotions and religious choices were as much shared

<sup>41</sup> Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattityöläisten*, 114–130; Nieminen, *Pelastussotaa Suomessa*.

<sup>42</sup> Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 126; On the Salvation Army and the working classes, Taiz, *Hallelujah Lads and Lasses*; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*; Hartley, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads*, 102–104.

<sup>43</sup> Taiz, *Hallelujah Lads and Lasses*, 74; Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*, 83–87.

<sup>44</sup> P. Viitanen, “Muistoja matkaltani Suomessa II,” *Suomen Viikkolehti* 16.2.1899, 51; P. Viitanen, “Kaupungeissa ja maaseuduilla,” *Suomen Viikkolehti* 19.10.1899, 334; Discussion on post-meetings, e.g. Auk. Oravala, “Jälkikokouksista,” *Ylhäältä apua* no. 11, 1.11.1912, 166–168; “Jälkikokouksista,” *Herättäjä* no 17, 26.4.1912; *Suomen Viikkolehti* no. 26–27, 29.6.1929; Critical remarks “Kenen hoitoon,” *Kotimaa* no 29, 11.3.1912.

as they were produced and imposed, and in some cases manipulated as well.

### “IMMATURE” WOMEN AND MISTAKEN FAITH

Many women lived their religion according to the standards set by themselves, not by the institutions or religious associations. Some working-class women had to interrupt their training and leave the deaconess institution. Some of them were sent home for health reasons, whereas others were turned down because of their mistaken faith. Hilja was one of the working-class girls from Tampere who heard that sister Hanna was trained in the deaconess institution. Hilja did not read God’s word, nor did she read about the work of deaconesses, but she prayed to God to let her enter the same institution. Her prayers were heard, and she entered the deaconess institution in September 1904. However, already the following April she was advised to return to the factory floor. She was deemed to lack talent, and her spiritual life was considered underdeveloped.<sup>45</sup> Obviously Hilja should have read more, and she should have been able to explicate her experience of conversion. Lived religion that was based on silent prayer and the admiration of deaconesses did not meet the normative conceptions of religious commitment. She did not speak religion.<sup>46</sup>

Another woman from Tampere, born in 1885, entered the Helsinki Deaconess Institution in 1907. Her family background was complex. Her mother was reported to be a devout believer and her aunt was a deaconess, but her stepfather was described as having been hard. She was drawn to God as a child. At the institution, she stated that the world attracted her later but also caused a crisis of conscience, and by the time she applied to the institution she believed herself to belong to God.<sup>47</sup> The first years of deaconess training were obviously successful; however, after four years, she was directed to leave the institution. According to the records, she did not seem to understand her calling. It was also noted that she made a slightly immature impression. Consequently, she was not consecrated, but her training guaranteed her a position as an assistant nurse in a public hospital. Four years later she married.<sup>48</sup> This is an example of a religious

<sup>45</sup> NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 208.

<sup>46</sup> McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 11; Ammerman, “2013 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture,” 200.

<sup>47</sup> NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 261.

<sup>48</sup> NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 261.

experience that was not deemed stable enough. She was drawn to God, she believed herself to belong to God, she knew one deaconess personally, and she had read the institution's journal. Many elements of her faith resembled the experiences of more devout deaconesses, but something was missing. The ways in which she shared her religion did not meet the standards set by the institution. One key factor was the lack of convincing language: the experience of awakening needed to be verbalized to make it plausible in the deaconess community. It is also possible that her faith faded or changed over time.

The failure of this aspiring deaconess resembles the earlier fate of a rural woman who joined the institution in 1891 and was consecrated five years later at the age of 26. She seemed to be more interested in nursing than in spiritual work. According to the records, she decided to leave the institution because she was not called to the deaconessate and the motherhouse community. However, after leaving the deaconess community, she continued to direct the same hospital she directed as a deaconess.<sup>49</sup> The work of deaconesses did not become the vocation of these two women, but they received useful vocational training. They benefitted from the nursing classes provided by the institution, and they were able to continue their professional careers and practise their religion more freely, according to their own standards.

The combination of health and faith was another tricky issue for the deaconess educators. Weak health was not a problem if the practice of religion otherwise met expectations. However, health issues served as an additional negative if the applicant's motivation was found to be suspicious. Another Hilja from Tampere, born in 1884, failed to convince the institution. After eight months, she was found to be unfit. Hilja had based her motivation to become a deaconess on her difficult home situation and the sinful life she saw on the streets. Moreover, as an awakened Christian, she felt that she had to suffer in the market hall where she worked. All these factors urged her to serve God. Her father hated pastors and did not attend church, and her brothers were all atheists. However, her father stuck to customary Christianity, prayed every night, and read a sermon on Sundays. A family full of contradictions was suspicious enough; moreover, according to a dentist's inspection, Hilja's teeth were so bad that long and thorough dental care would have been needed. In sum, Hilja was

<sup>49</sup> NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 9.

considered “hardly capable of development in this call.”<sup>50</sup> If we compare the records of Hilja and the previously mentioned Aina with her hysterical attacks and other problems, it is clear that the deaconess institution was willing to invest in the health of their sisters if their faith was convincing.

In the 1960s, when the scholars of folklore became interested in labour history, religion was mainly dismissed as irrelevant. Still, some working-class women spoke about religion as a natural part of their life course. As an example, we can consider a woman born in 1891. She belonged to her factory’s gymnastic club, sang in a choir called the Luther Choir, and was active in the Christian labour movement, but did not join other labour organizations. In the Finnish Civil War of 1918, she joined the service troops of the Red Guard. Being part of the workers’ (failed) revolution resulted in a prison sentence of six months, and afterwards also caused problems with her family. Nevertheless, singing in the Luther Choir, working with a Christian association, and providing the Red Guard with food were compatible in her lived religion.<sup>51</sup> Lived religion consisted of many layers, and people might have picked differing elements in their faith and changed their positions over their life course.

### FAITH IN FAMILIES

Homes are fundamental scenes of experience, and one might expect that religious values were often shared by family members. Many deaconess candidates certainly referred to their religious mother in their decision to apply to the institution. However, other aspects of family life could also motivate young women. Hilja, the awakened applicant mentioned above, portrayed her problematic home where her brothers were atheists and her father held prayers and sermons but hated the church.<sup>52</sup> The diversity of religious experience was explicit in this family.

A closer look at some other working-class families may help to contextualize women’s religious experiences. Interestingly, religion as lived is present in the first Finnish household budget data from 1908 and 1909. In addition to large statistical data, some family descriptions were published to depict various aspects of working-class morality, living

<sup>50</sup> NAF. HDI Ba:1 Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 227.

<sup>51</sup> Tape 82/1965. Tampere University Folklore Archive; McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 12; Ammerman, “Rethinking Religion.”

<sup>52</sup> NAF. HDI Ba:1. Roll of deaconesses 1867–1906, sister 227.

conditions, and lifestyles. Special attention was paid to their “cultural stage,” which meant the education, reading habits, and church attendance of family members.<sup>53</sup> Six family descriptions were presented from Tampere. One family, including a male factory worker and his wife running a catering service, was more interested in the labour movement than the church, whereas an unskilled worker who was a widow with four children found contentment in her limited leisure time from religion. Her children, aged 8 to 15 years, read a newspaper and a religious children’s magazine. The widow was not keen on reading; instead, she attended the church and the prayer house meetings. Quite often, her ten-year-old daughter followed her, but the other children were not interested.<sup>54</sup> In this family, the practice of religion seemed to be rather private and family members did not fully share their religious practices.

For some working-class families, the Christian labour movement was important. The movement and its publications comforted a mother of four children aged 2 to 12 years, who supported her family by selling bread. Her husband led an irregular life and was often unemployed. All the books in their home were religious; they gave her hope, as she explained she had seen too much misery in her life. Nevertheless, she belonged to a local Christian labour association and followed the societal and political news in the Christian labour movement’s newspaper.<sup>55</sup> Another family from Tampere represented a decent Christian working-class home in which the father had internalized his role as the family’s religious leader. The Canadian historian Lynne Marks has pointed out that many married working-class men considered church involvement a crucial part of responsible manhood.<sup>56</sup> The father of the family was active in the parish; moreover, he belonged to the choir of a Christian labour association, and he used to read religious literature. The family subscribed to a religious journal and attended church regularly.

Regular church attendance was also mentioned by other families. An unskilled worker with a large family explained that they read the New Testament every Sunday and went to church every second Sunday, the husband more often than the wife. He had left the labour movement, and the family with seven children could not afford to attend any other leisure

<sup>53</sup> Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattiyöläisten*, 114–130.

<sup>54</sup> Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattiyöläisten*, 115.

<sup>55</sup> Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattiyöläisten*, 120.

<sup>56</sup> Hejlt, *Tutkimus ammattiyöläisten*, 122–123; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 14.

activities.<sup>57</sup> A couple comprising an unskilled worker and a washerwoman attended church every second Sunday, too, and they reported that it had been their habit to receive Holy Communion once a year. This frequency met the standards of the Church Law; however, for some reason it was commented in the survey that this couple did not care about public issues, and “hardly about religious issues either.”<sup>58</sup>

These examples show that working-class families lived religion in a variety of ways. Regular church attendance was still part of their religious practices; however, differences between family members were tolerated. Religion was lived by reading books and journals, sharing the message of the New Testament at home, or listening to sermons in church and the prayer houses. These fluid practices became shared experiences. Some workers admitted that reading was not their way of taking part in worship. Some men emphasized good Christian habits, such as home prayers, Sunday prayers, and Holy Communion every year. Women’s visible practice of religion included both reading at home and going to church and religious meetings.

### BELIEVER’S PROTEST

The socialist labour movement criticized working-class women for being too religious and humble in front of the clergy and other representatives of the upper classes. It is known from the turn of the twentieth century that women working in factories were more active in their religious life compared to working-class men.<sup>59</sup> However, some working-class men were devoted Christians in a pronounced way, as the examples above suggest. Moreover, it can be questioned whether working-class women lived their religion in a humble and obedient way. It is also possible that they gave other meanings to their faith and sought empowering elements from their lived religion. This can be scrutinized with the help of one letter that a female factory worker in 1900 sent to a preacher, whom she clearly

<sup>57</sup> Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattityöläisten*, 127–129. Until 1911, all confirmed parish members were obliged to take Communion once a year. It was a precondition for entering marriage. In 1905, 40 per cent of male and 51 per cent of female unskilled workers in Tampere received Communion. Industrial workers were more active: 46 per cent of male and 55 per cent of female factory workers took Communion. Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 292–293.

<sup>58</sup> Hjelt, *Tutkimus ammattityöläisten*, 124–126.

<sup>59</sup> Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*, 294.

appreciated and admired.<sup>60</sup> She was a converted evangelical who had no reason to give a negative image of herself.

In the letter, the writer clearly indicates her experience of conversion. There had been a time when she did not have peace of mind. However, by saying “here I am, send me,” she received an inner peace. She felt herself to be a chosen one and also heard a call, “I need you.” She replied, “your will be done, but what are you going to do with me?” She tried to obey the congregation, but the leadership did not match her inner call. Thus, she was expelled from the religious community, and she states in the letter that she cannot submit to discipline. She was a believer, but her ways of living religion were not supported by the local free church community. When forced to do something against her own will, she could not help but fight.

The letter ends with a lengthy description of an incident that not only bothered the writer but also illustrates her lived religion. At work she had to sew long bags on a piece-rate basis, whereas other women sewed short bags. Sewing long bags took a longer time and she felt that she was treated unfairly. She spoke first to her foreman and then to his supervisor, but the piecework conditions were not changed. She realized that the supervisor was behind these instructions, and her peers confirmed it. This led to a row with her foreman, whom she blamed for being stupid and unfair. The row escalated and the argument ended in a tussle. According to the woman, the foreman twice put remains of snuff in her mouth and she spat it into his eyes. He tried to remove her from the hall, but she refused. However, she was shivering, felt bad, and went home for some time. It did not help her: she still had to sew long bags while the other women sewed short bags. She concluded that the supervisor and the preacher Braxen<sup>61</sup> had agreed on this arrangement. It is not clear if the supervisor was part of the Free Inner Mission movement, but this woman seems to believe that she was punished by the religious community, whom she wanted to belong to on her own terms.<sup>62</sup>

The heated message reveals several aspects of working-class women’s spiritual and mundane life. This woman had asked for inner peace and got it; in other words, she expresses the experience of religious conversion. Although full stops and commas were missing from her writing, she

<sup>60</sup>NAF, Hämeenlinna. EFCF I Fb:2. Antti Mäkinen’s correspondence.

<sup>61</sup>The local preacher of the Free Inner Mission.

<sup>62</sup>NAF, Hämeenlinna. EFCF I Fb:2. Antti Mäkinen’s correspondence.



mastered religious discourse in which letters were introduced with appropriate Biblical greetings. She trusted the preacher and saw him as her sympathizer and comforter while the local preacher did not understand her. It seems obvious that this woman was hot-tempered and stubborn, but she justified these characteristics by referring to her spiritual difference. Her exclusion from the revivalist congregation was presented as a problem of incompetent leaders rather than a woman who followed her own inner call. As a daughter of God, she could not obey authorities who acted against her inner call. As Nancy Ammerman points out, religious practices were not confined to single institutions, such as the prayer house community or the free church movement.<sup>63</sup> This female worker's faith, her lived religion, was a source of justice in her social and working life. She was empowered to demand fair conditions at work.

Thus, the letter tells us about factory floor discipline and the ways in which defiant women were treated. The woman's fight with her foreman did not correct unfairness in the piecework; however, despite her bad behaviour, she did not lose her job either. The story of the foreman using the remains of snuff as a physical punishment could of course have been invented, but on the other hand there must be some cultural context for telling this kind of a story by which a working woman wanted to appeal to the preacher in a convincing manner. Obviously, both the workers and the foremen could behave quite brutally. The inner voice—lived religion—could empower working women to resist that brutality. Moreover, the local preacher and the supervisor could also refer to Christian rhetoric by stating “whom I love, I also punish.”

Not all believers spat at their foremen. The daily practices of faith and the lived religion of individual working-class women varied remarkably. Unfortunately, documents such as the previous letter are very rare. Nevertheless, the letter hints at the multidimensional and complicated relations between class, gender, and religion. On the factory floor, industrial workers were subjected to the will of their foremen and supervisors. In the parish, members were expected to adjust to the codes of conduct defined by the religious leaders. These hierarchies could also be questioned if one's personal faith was strong enough. Conversion as an experience produced new horizons of expectation and emancipatory elements in the lives of working women. This daughter of God was not ashamed of

<sup>63</sup> Ammerman, “Rethinking Religion,” 13.

reporting her conflicts to her dear preacher. She seemed to be convinced that it was an appropriate way to live according to the standards of her faith.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

For the religious landscape of Tampere, the turn of the twentieth century spelled turbulent times. A rapid increase of population coincided with a multitude of religious movements. Not only new Lutheran revivalist movements and associations but also evangelical nonconformist denominations were established. All new prayer houses, associations, and churches offered working-class women a wide spectrum of arenas to practise religion. These arenas constituted scenes of experience where individual experiences were acquired, interpreted, shared, confirmed, and turned into collective resources. The scenes of experience provided working-class women an institutional setting to give meaning to their religious experiences and taught them how to talk religion. Explicit instructions and normative undercurrents trained working-class women how to believe and act in a revivalist context.

Nevertheless, various scenes of experience contributed to the manifold religious experiences. Many working-class women were happy to share the values and norms set by the mainstream Lutheran church. They practised religion and shared their religious experiences by reading devotional literature, going to church, and attending prayer meetings. For exhausted working-class wives, the practice of religion meant rest, safety, and comfort in their daily routines and hardships. Religious indifference was also increasing. At the same time, however, the space of experience and the horizon of expectations regarding women's spiritual life were altered by the new prayer houses with their evangelical message. While some rather marginal groups preached Christian perfection and holiness, all revivalist and nonconformist communities demanded a conscious experience of conversion. They formed communities of experience in which the members were expected to share the personal experience of awakening and make their conversion visible by witnessing verbally or by serving the community. As a result, some awakened women entered the deaconess institution or joined the Salvation Army. For them, lived religion turned into an experience that changed their life course.

In addition, a considerable number of women found their own ways to practise religion. They might have admired deaconesses without being actively involved in a religious group, or they attended the prayer house

meetings and assumed some suitable parts of the message in their religious life. They lived religion according to the standards set by themselves. Further, some women could be exceptionally empowered by the conversion. In line with other women, working-class women gave differing meanings to faith and practised religion in a variety of ways. However, working-class women could express their lived religion in such a manner that was beyond the horizons of women from the upper classes. For the converted evangelical mentioned above, demanding justice at work and in the religious community resulted in a violent protest. Religious experiences and meanings given to faith by working-class women were full of nuances. Being a believer might have brought about obedience to authorities and capitalists, as the labour movement feared, but it could also motivate resistance.

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# To the Undiscovered Country: Facing Death in Early Twentieth-Century Finnish Poorhouses

*Johanna Annola*

## RELIGION, THE POORHOUSE, AND MODERNIZATION

Northern European workhouses and poorhouses<sup>1</sup> were an outcome of nineteenth-century liberalist legislation, according to which an able-bodied individual could only receive poor relief at an institution.

<sup>1</sup>In the Finnish scholarly discussion, the term “workhouse” (*työlaitos*) is used to refer to the state-maintained penal institutions for hardened vagrants and other criminals, while the term “poorhouse” (*köyhäintalo*) is used for the locally managed municipal poor relief institutions established after the poor relief reform of 1879. The Finnish poorhouses were decidedly smaller than the English New Poor Law workhouses but were likewise intended to implement “the workhouse test”, followed the principle of “less eligibility” and had resident staff. This sets them apart from the earlier Finnish attempts at institutional care for the poor, that is, the old parish poorhouses (*köyhäintupa*) that usually lacked the obligation to work as well as resident staff. For similarities between English and Finnish poor law institutions, see

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J. Annola (✉)

Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

e-mail: [johanna.annola@tuni.fi](mailto:johanna.annola@tuni.fi)

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Conditions in a poorhouse were austere in order to deter people from resorting to poor relief and to punish those who did.<sup>2</sup> In Finland—at that time annexed to the Russian Empire as an autonomous Grand Duchy—a network of poorhouses was built after the passing of the 1879 Poor Relief Act. Finnish poorhouses were managed by local administrative parishes but monitored by state poor relief officials: an Inspector and three Instructors. The day-to-day management of the poorhouse was often entrusted to a female director, a matron.<sup>3</sup>

The Christian patriarchal order that underpinned the poorhouse system took the form of the constant surveillance of the inmates and the discipline imposed on them. Religion played an important role in this process. Previous research has shown that while the Finnish Poor Relief Act rested upon a Lutheran understanding of poverty, there were no guidelines for religious practice in poorhouses in principle. An ample body of instructions was instead distributed by state poor relief officials through guidebooks and their regular inspections of poorhouses.<sup>4</sup>

In the guidebooks, daily prayers, for instance, were portrayed as a disciplinary practice on the one hand. Prayers were a compulsory part of the rigid daily routine of the poorhouse, the meaning of which was to familiarize inmates with the benefits of a regular lifestyle, and to make the inmates control themselves through self-imposed conformity to contemporary upper- and middle-class norms. Prayers were normally led by the matron but occasionally also by visiting pastors or preachers.<sup>5</sup>

Annola, “Maternalism and Workhouse Matrons”; for British discussion on terminology, see Reinartz and Schwarz, “Introduction”, 2; King, “Poverty, Medicine, and the Workhouse”, 230–232.

<sup>2</sup> King, *Poverty and Welfare in England*; Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*; Markkola, “The Lutheran Nordic Welfare States”; Annola, “Maternalism and Workhouse Matrons”.

<sup>3</sup> The geographical area of modern Finland formed the eastern part of the Kingdom of Sweden until 1809, when the area was annexed to the Russian Empire as a Grand Duchy with a central administration and legislative bodies of its own. Finland gained independence in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917. For more on the ideal of female leadership in Finnish workhouses, see Annola, “Maternalism and Workhouse Matrons”. For more on how taking up the role of a matron affected individual women’s lives, see Annola, “Out of Poverty”, 145–155; Annola, “A Place in the Sun?”, 190–195.

<sup>4</sup> Annola and Miettinen, “Piety and Prayers”, forthcoming 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Annola and Miettinen, “Piety and Prayers”, forthcoming 2022. Christian devotion, the “living fear of God”, was an integral part of the mindset of a good nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poorhouse matron.

On the other hand, it appears that prayers were also expected to have a spiritual relevance to poorhouse inmates. By choosing her words wisely, the matron could instil “the fear of God” into the inmates’ minds and help them meekly resign to their fate.<sup>6</sup> In order to truly reach the inmates’ souls, the matron was not to repeat the same prayer day after day but instead keep her protégées in her prayers. She was to bring their everyday worries to the Lord. It was stated in one of the guidebooks that an honest, “living” prayer like this would make the inmates feel welcome in the institution “in the name of Jesus”, despite their flawed lives, and encourage an inner change in them.<sup>7</sup> While the guidance literature thus prepared some room for personal devotion in everyday life in the poorhouse, it should also be noted that a docile, devout inmate was regarded as an easy one to control. Thus, ultimately, devotion can be considered as one means of discipline.

Death was a regular guest in poorhouses. Despite the common image of the poorhouse as a “bastille” for the able-bodied,<sup>8</sup> most inmates were in fact infirm and died in the institution.<sup>9</sup> According to the 1879 Health Care Act, a dead body was to be buried before it was decomposed to the point where it would be harmful to its surroundings.<sup>10</sup> The rules for a Lutheran burial in Finland were stipulated by the Finnish Church Law (1869, 1908), according to which the deceased was to be buried either in a common grave or in a separate burial plot no longer than six months after death, and in all cases, a Christian funeral ceremony was to take place.<sup>11</sup> However, neither the Poor Relief Act nor the guidebooks provided any further instructions on the practicalities around the death of a

<sup>6</sup> Annola and Miettinen, “Piety and Prayers”, forthcoming 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Helsingius, *Köyhäinhoidon käsikirja*, 101–102.

<sup>8</sup> Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*.

<sup>9</sup> Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, 67–68, Annola, *Äiti, emäntä, virkanainen, vartija*, 49–53.

<sup>10</sup> In case it was “under certain circumstances” necessary to keep the dead body unburied for a longer period, it was to be stored “in a morgue or other such place where it would cause no harm”. Health Care Act 1879, VI, 41–42§.

<sup>11</sup> Church Law 1869, XI, 80–88§; Church Law 1908, XI, 80–88§. Unlike the Church Law of 1686, the more modern legislation no longer contained sections on, for example, the pastor’s duty of announcing the name of a dead parishioner “from the pulpit during the next service or an hour of prayer”, or on bell-ringing and preparing the body for the burial. Church Law 1686, XVIII, 1–5§. For the development of burial practices in Finland, see for example Viitaniemi, “Hautauskäytäntöjen muutos Länsi-Suomen maaseudulla”; Gardberg, *Maan poveen*.

poorhouse inmate. The sporadic source material hints that in some cases dead inmates were buried anonymously in a common grave at the expense of the local Poor Relief Board, while in other cases the relatives of the departed might volunteer to pay for a more elaborate coffin and a separate burial plot in the local cemetery.<sup>12</sup>

Previous research has identified the time between death and burial as a liminal state in which a person is no longer counted among the living members of the community but has not yet become one of its deceased members. In order to guarantee the departed a respectful and safe transformation from one stage to another, day-to-day life must be put “on hold” and a specific set of procedures must be followed. The fundamental purpose of these procedures is to draw a clear boundary between the dead and the living members of the community.<sup>13</sup> As there were no specific guidelines for dealing with the poorhouse’s dead, the liminal state was a grey area with plenty of room for negotiation and conflict.

This chapter discusses the death of two inmates at the Juuka and Liperi poorhouses in eastern Finland in the early 1900s. In both cases, the passing of the inmate resulted in a conflict, and the matron or the master of the poorhouse was publicly accused of showing disrespect to the departed and his kin. I ask how lived religion was manifested in the liminal stage, and how the conflicting understandings of a good and a bad death reflect a Lutheran society that stood at the threshold between the premodern and modern.

I understand lived religion as a set of shared everyday practices that carry a spiritual meaning or dimension. These practices relate to life in all its variety: giving birth, facing death, contracting a marriage, dealing with economic (mis)fortune or (ill) health, and carrying out daily duties. In the case of death, the practices include for instance funerary arrangements and, more precisely, dealing with the dead body. The practices are a means of establishing a link between the ordinary and the divine, and as such, they provide individuals with tools for arranging their everyday experiences and seeing purpose in their lives. These practices are negotiated within a specific community where they serve as a way of creating and maintaining communal cohesion. As such, the shared practices also mark the boundaries of the community.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief, Finnish National Archives.

<sup>13</sup> The term “liminal state” was in this context launched by Arnold van Gennep. See for example Gittings, “Thanatos ja Kleio”, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, “Religion as Experience”.

The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Finland was characterized by industrialization, urbanization, democratization, and medicalization. However, the speed of modernization should not be exaggerated, and the development was not consistent throughout the country. While urban areas, inland industrial centres, coastal regions, and the old cultivated areas of southern Finland were at the forefront of modernization, the northern and eastern “hinterlands” remained untouched by railway and telephone networks, elementary schools, poorhouses, and health care facilities, and most people in these areas continued to live in a traditional way well into the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, modernization was a layered process: in all areas, there existed simultaneously modern and traditional practices. By focusing on lived religion in the Juuka and Liperi poorhouses, it is possible to yield more nuanced information about the gradual modernization of eastern Finland.

The main body of source material consists of poorhouse inspection records and digitized newspaper articles. The inspection records were produced by state poor relief officials, who inspected poorhouses on a regular basis, but also paid visits to institutions upon request if there were problems or conflicts such as in the two poorhouses in question.<sup>16</sup> As the records arose from a situation in which the normal routine in the institution was interrupted by state officials, it is likely that problems are over-represented in the material. However, it is often through these contested situations only that we may see a glimpse of the shared and negotiated practices that carried a spiritual meaning—in other words, lived religion in a poor relief institution. That being said, it is also important to bear in mind that even though the death of an inmate resulted in a conflict in the two poorhouses discussed in this chapter, this was not always the case.

This chapter proceeds in a chronological order. In the first section, the liminal state is approached through people’s reactions to an inmate’s death in Juuka poorhouse in 1905. The second section discusses the liminal state by analysing the turmoil around the dead body of an inmate in Liperi poorhouse in 1912. The findings are then summed up in the concluding section.

<sup>15</sup> Haapala, *Kun yhteiskunta hajosi*, 90–91.

<sup>16</sup> Pulma, “Valtio, vaivaiset ja kuntien itsehallinto”; Annola, “The Initiation of State Control”, 207–209.

## DEATH FAR AWAY FROM HOME

In August 1905, an inmate, a married man, suddenly died in Juuka poorhouse as a result of a “cramp-like” seizure.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the same month, a local newspaper published an open letter to Ida Karlsson, the matron of the poorhouse. The letter had been written by N. W. Troupp, a civil engineer, who was the technical manager of Juuka soapstone mine in Nunnanlahti village.<sup>18</sup> He accused the matron of delaying the death notice so the widow missed the burial of her late husband altogether.<sup>19</sup> In her open reply, the matron defended herself, explaining that as neither the poorhouse nor the widow’s cottage had a telephone, she had tried to “send the widow a word with some people”, who lived close by her and were visiting the poorhouse.<sup>20</sup> The engineer was not convinced of the matron’s explanation, maintaining that she had not done everything in her power to make sure that the widow received the notice in time. “There is no excuse for your behaviour”, he wrote, “And now a question arises: are you suited to take care of the Christian upbringing of the inmates?”<sup>21</sup>

In the end, the matron turned to the Inspector of Poor Relief for practical advice, asking how one should proceed “if an unexpected death takes place and the relatives of the departed have not arrived in three days”. She went on to explain that “in winter it is possible to keep [the departed here] for a longer time, but in summer it is difficult as there is no cold cellar in the institution”.<sup>22</sup> As a result, one of the Instructors was sent to Juuka to negotiate with the local Poor Relief Board, which took the matron’s side. The Instructor seemed equally unwilling to lay the blame on the matron, who, according to him, had always taken care of her duties in an exemplary manner. The Instructor also felt that as the death had occurred during the busy harvest time, it would have been less than ideal to disengage someone from work and send such a person to the nearest telephone,

<sup>17</sup>Torsten Lindberg to Gustaf Adolf Helsingius, 29th November 1905, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:35 (Juuka), Finnish National Archives; Juuka Parish Archives, Deaths and Burials 1900–1906, 108.

<sup>18</sup>See for example *Karjalatar*, September 8, 1904; *Karjalatar*, August 14, 1906.

<sup>19</sup>N.W. Troupp, “Open letter to Ida Karlsson”, *Karjalatar*, August 28, 1905.

<sup>20</sup>Ida Karlsson, “Open letter to N.W. Troupp”, *Karjalatar*, September 5, 1905.

<sup>21</sup>N.W. Troupp, “Open letter to Ida Karlsson”, *Karjalatar*, September 26, 1905.

<sup>22</sup>Ida Karlsson to Gustaf Adolf Helsingius, October 26, 1905, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:35 (Juuka), Finnish National Archives. It is unclear whether the length of the liminal period in summer, exactly three days, was derived from the 1879 Health Care Act, or if it was dictated by common sense.

which was seven kilometres away from the poorhouse. The Instructor ended up laying the blame on the visitors, who were supposed to deliver the death notice to the widow but had proved negligent.<sup>23</sup> Although no further measures were taken, the matron resigned the following year.<sup>24</sup>

Juuka poorhouse had opened in 1904, one year prior to the incident. The premises comprised a main building for 60 inmates, an infirmary with 20 beds, and a separate building for the mentally ill. The institution was of considerable size for a Finnish rural poorhouse, and as the main building had been constructed according to the model blueprints introduced by state poor relief officials, the premises were intended to be functional.<sup>25</sup> However, both the matron and the Instructor indicated that the poorhouse, albeit new, was not modern enough: in their opinion, the conflict had arisen because there was neither a proper cold mortuary nor a telephone in the institution. What they failed to see or express was that these technical inadequacies were a problem only because the man in question had died in an *institution*, far away from his home village.

Previous research has suggested that the transition from the so-called traditional death at home to the “modern death” in an institution took place relatively late in Finland.<sup>26</sup> While the local people in Juuka may not have regarded a death in a poorhouse as a bad death by default, it certainly was an unfamiliar one to them, as they were still new to the poorhouse. Death in the rudimentary hospitals had traditionally been reserved for the urban poor who could not afford a doctor at home or were ill with an infectious disease.<sup>27</sup> As there were no hospitals in rural areas, poorhouses were the first care institutions to intervene in traditional agrarian communities and separate the poor from their kith and kin.<sup>28</sup> Even though poorhouses were preferably located in parish centres or close by, there were always some inmates who hailed from the more distant villages. In the Juuka case, the family of the departed lived in Nunnanlahti village,

<sup>23</sup>Torsten Lindberg to Gustaf Adolf Helsingius, November 29, 1905, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:35 (Juuka), Finnish National Archives.

<sup>24</sup>Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:35 (Juuka), Finnish National Archives; *Vaivaishoidonneuvajat, Suomen vaivaistalojen matrikkeli*, 97.

<sup>25</sup>*Vaivaishoidonneuvajat, Suomen vaivaistalojen matrikkeli*, 96–97.

<sup>26</sup>Pajari, Miettinen and Kanerva, “Kuoleman historian ääriivivoja”, 16. For periodization of death, see Walter, *The Revival of Death*.

<sup>27</sup>Pajari, “Kuolema maalla ja kaupungissa”, 107.

<sup>28</sup>For medical care in Finnish poorhouses, see Harjula, “Health Citizenship”; Annola, “Bad Nursing?”.

26 kilometres away from the poorhouse.<sup>29</sup> Because of the geographical distance, the wife was alienated from the death of her husband, and the slow delivery of the death notice became an issue.

In his open letters, the engineer portrayed the matron as a cruel gate-keeper who had turned the inmate's death into a bad one. According to him, the matron had not respected the feelings of her fellow human beings enough to deliver an important message in time. "How would you feel if your loved one, say, your own mother, was buried at the Poor Relief Board's expense [--], and you [--] were informed neither of her death nor of the date of burial?",<sup>30</sup> the engineer asked. He went on to suggest that there were rumours of other similar incidents at the poorhouse where "as soon as death had occurred, the dead body was placed in the coffin and the lid was nailed down".<sup>31</sup> By making such remarks, the engineer proposed that the poorhouse robbed the bereaved and the community of an experience of a proper liminal stage. In his opinion, this was the very thing that turned a death in a poorhouse into a bad death.

The shared rituals that traditionally took place between death and burial were a way of recognizing the worth of the departed to the community and giving him/her a new status as one of the dead.<sup>32</sup> If these rituals were not performed in an appropriate way, or if they were not shared, the send-off was disrespectful and incomplete. Previous research has shown that throughout Europe, the preparations after death usually began by washing the dead body before rigor mortis occurred. In Finland, like elsewhere, washing was normally performed by the members of the household or a close friend of the deceased as a duty of honour, but there were also professional body washers who received the dead person's clothes as a reward for their work. The corpse was then shrouded, that is, dressed in a burial costume. In the Lutheran areas of Finland, it was customary to place the dead body on a bier (a wooden board, *ruumislauta*) in an out-building for a couple of days before placing it in a coffin.<sup>33</sup> On the funeral

<sup>29</sup>Torsten Lindberg to Gustaf Adolf Helsingius, November 29, 1905, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:35 (Juuka), Finnish National Archives.

<sup>30</sup>N.W. Troupp, "Open letter to Ida Karlsson", *Karjalatar*, August 28, 1905.

<sup>31</sup>N.W. Troupp, "Open letter to Ida Karlsson", *Karjalatar*, September 26, 1905.

<sup>32</sup>Fingerroos, *Haudatut muistot*, 23–263, 271–272.

<sup>33</sup>In the Greek Orthodox areas of eastern Finland, the dressed-up body was placed in the family's place of worship, the icon corner, for three days before burial. Rytkönen, *Savupirttien kansaa*, 62; Paulaharju, *Syntymä, lapsuus ja kuolema*; Pentikäinen, *Marina Takalo*, 231;

day, people arrived at the house of mourning to take a final look at the departed, after which the funeral procession embarked on its way to church.<sup>34</sup>

For the community, shared rituals were also a means of placing the dead body under social control.<sup>35</sup> In the folk belief tradition, the dead body was regarded as a potential threat to the living. The corpse—as well as everything that had been in contact with it, such as the washing water, the bier, and even the outbuilding—were believed to be imbued with *kalma*, the infectious power of death that could be harmful to the living.<sup>36</sup> In early twentieth-century Finland, it was still considered crucially important to treat the dead body in the right way so that none of the living would get a *kalma* infection and the departed would stay in his/her grave.<sup>37</sup> The fear of the dead also comes up in the Juuka case, as the engineer alluded to another strange rumour that allegedly originated from the poorhouse: a dead body “had been placed in the outbuilding in the evening but found the next morning with its legs twisted”.<sup>38</sup> The engineer himself dismissed the rumour as a mere ghost story, but at the same time he apparently wanted to emphasize that some people felt that dying in a poorhouse was not a good thing.

It is not known how the widow of the inmate felt about the death and burial of her husband: only the debaters’ contradicting second-hand descriptions of her reaction survive. The matron explained in her open letter that she had met the widow in the parish centre a week after the incident. The matron claimed that she had then asked whether the widow was sorry for not having been able to view the dead body of her husband. According to the matron, the widow had replied calmly: “What do I care of his dead body, if only his soul were intact.”<sup>39</sup> In her account, the matron portrayed herself as a humane poorhouse director, who was compassionate enough to inquire after the widow. She also depicted the widow as an elevated mourner, who ignored the corporeal aspects of death and instead

Talve, *Suomen kansankulttuuri*, 170, 232; Gittings, “Thanatos ja Kleio”, 43–44; Koski and Moilanen, “Kuolema ja tuonpuoleinen”, 69–70.

<sup>34</sup> Pajari, “Kuolema maalla ja kaupungissa”, 112.

<sup>35</sup> Eilola and Einonen, “Peukalot silkkirievussa”, 198–199.

<sup>36</sup> Koski, *Kuoleman voimat*, 154.

<sup>37</sup> Koski, *Kuoleman voimat*, 88–89; Koski and Moilanen, “Kuolema ja tuonpuoleinen”, 90–91.

<sup>38</sup> N.W. Troupp, “Open letter to Ida Karlsson”, *Karjalatar*, September 26, 1905.

<sup>39</sup> Ida Karlsson, “Open letter to N.W. Troupp”, *Karjalatar*, September 5, 1905.



emphasized the spiritual ones. In so doing, the matron perhaps wished to hint that the engineer was, in fact, paying attention to matters that were of secondary importance when it came to judging whether the death of the poor man had been a good or a bad one.

The engineer, however, claimed that the matron was lying: according to the widow's "sworn statement", the matron had inquired no such thing. The engineer also highlighted the widow's emotional reaction: "She was not calm but instead wept bitterly."<sup>40</sup> In his version of the story, the widow was not an eloquent and devout mourner but a wretched woman whose heart was broken by the bad death of her husband.

In the end, the Juuka case presents two outsiders discussing how local people should deal with death and what kind of practices were acceptable in the liminal state. Both matron Karlsson and engineer Troupp had arrived in eastern Finland in the wake of modern innovations, a poorhouse and a soapstone mine, and by virtue of their profession, both belonged to the emerging Finnish middle class. Karlsson, who was in her early thirties, was apparently a nurse by training and had managed the newly renovated Lohja poorhouse in southernmost Finland between 1902 and 1904.<sup>41</sup> During this period, one of the Instructors reported that some people who lived in close proximity to Lohja poorhouse inflicted "many difficult moments on the matron by unfounded meddling and spreading false rumours".<sup>42</sup> Thus, it appears that the co-existence of the poorhouse and the local community was not without conflicts in southern regions, either. However, it is impossible to judge whether these recurrent problems were due to Karlsson's personality or a mismatch between modernity and the more traditional way of life.

Engineer Troupp's reasons for developing such a keen interest in the ritual aspects of death are unknown. It is possible that his intervention resulted from a desire to cultivate an appropriate public image in the turbulent times of the early 1900s. In 1905, the defeat of Russia by Japan temporarily weakened imperial Russian rule, which gave rise to a large-scale political mobilization in both Russia proper and in its dominions. In Finland, the unrest culminated in a general strike at the end of the year. It

<sup>40</sup>N.W. Troupp, "Open letter to Ida Karlsson", *Karjalatar*, September 26, 1905.

<sup>41</sup>Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:3 (Lohja), Finnish National Archives; Vaivashoidonneuvajat, *Suomen vaivastalojen matrikkeli*, 14–15, 96–97.

<sup>42</sup>Inspection record, April 25, 1903, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:3 (Lohja), Finnish National Archives.

appears that Troupp, who had in 1901 publicly objected to the Russification policy of Emperor Nicholas II,<sup>43</sup> suddenly became active again. In a public demonstration that took place in Juuka in November 1905, Troupp was chosen as one of the three “representatives of the people”, who demanded the immediate resignation of the allegedly pro-Russian Minister State Secretary of Finland.<sup>44</sup> In December, he appealed to the Governor’s Office against Juuka local council’s resolution to fine those who rented their premises for illegal dances.<sup>45</sup>

Were Troupp’s open letters to Ida Karlsson part of this process? It may be that by expressing his concern over the bad death of a poorhouse inmate, Troupp rendered himself a spokesperson for “the people”. His attitude may thus reflect the relationship between the nationalist-minded Fennoman part of the Finnish middle class and the uneducated rural people in general. On the one hand, the members of the middle class were to investigate the rural people, because Fennoman ideologists believed that the true essence of “Finnishness” lay in the humble lives and old traditions of the rural population. On the other hand, the middle class was to protect and educate the people, in other words, help the rural population become the best possible version of itself—albeit never as civilized as its mentors.<sup>46</sup>

### RODENTS IN THE MORTUARY

The second case discusses the proceedings after the death of an elderly male inmate in Liperi poorhouse<sup>47</sup> in March 1912. A couple of weeks after his burial, the local socialist newspaper published an article titled *Dead Body Robbed of Clothes*,<sup>48</sup> after which the story circulated in national

<sup>43</sup> According to a memoir published in *Karjalatar* in 1906, engineer Troupp had in 1901 objected to the new Conscription Act that weakened the autonomous status of the Grand Duchy of Finland. When the Act was read aloud in church as was customary, Troupp interrupted the Vicar by shouting: “There is no need to read that for us!” *Karjalatar*, January 16, 1906.

<sup>44</sup> *Karjalatar*, November 28, 1905.

<sup>45</sup> *Karjalatar*, December 16, 1905.

<sup>46</sup> Ollila, *Suomen kotien päivä valkenee*, 48. See also Rojola, “Sivistyksen ihanuus ja kurjuus”, 31–34; Vares, “Naisen velvollisuusetiikka”, 273, Annola, “A Place in the Sun?”, 195.

<sup>47</sup> Liperi poorhouse was opened in 1894. In 1908, the institution comprised five different buildings, some of which were new. Vaivashoidonneuvajat, *Suomen vaivaistalojen matrikkeli*, 90–91.

<sup>48</sup> “Ruumiilta vaatteet varastettu”, *Rajavahvi*, March 19, 1912.

newspapers.<sup>49</sup> According to the article, two Helsinki-based women had travelled to Liperi poorhouse in order to bring a ready-made coffin for their deceased father. They were promised that the corpse would later be dressed and placed in the coffin by poorhouse farmhands. On the funeral day, the women wanted to take a final look at the departed as he lay in the coffin. To the women's utmost horror, it appeared that not only had their late father been robbed of his burial gown but that rats had gnawed at his dead body, making it necessary to cover it with a rag.<sup>50</sup>

An Instructor was sent to the poorhouse to find out exactly what had happened. After questioning the poorhouse master and some of the inmates, he concluded that the story was heavily exaggerated. First, the women were not daughters of the departed but his kinswomen. Second, the women had refused to shroud the corpse personally and instead had chosen to leave the poorhouse, after which the body was placed in the coffin by two inmates, a man and a woman. Third, the said inmates, one of whom was the "mentally disabled son" of the departed, assured that there had been no burial gown in the coffin in the first place. This was later confirmed by the carpenter, who had sold the coffin to the kinswomen. Fourth, the dead body had not been attacked by rats but by *mice*. As these had nevertheless done some damage to the corpse, the Instructor advised the master to relocate the bier to avoid such incidents in the future.<sup>51</sup>

In his record, the Instructor dismissed the newspaper article as a typical socialist exposé—a shock story. According to him, these stories were not written by "true sympathizers of the poor and the suffering" but by "malevolent troublemakers, who sought to shake the legitimate societal order".<sup>52</sup> It appears that the Instructor was deeply suspicious of socialists, perhaps partially because he had already visited Liperi poorhouse only a couple of days earlier to inquire into a similar matter. That time, the same socialist newspaper had, under the headline *Human Torture in Liperi Poorhouse*, accused the master and the male mental health nurse of brutally abusing two elderly male inmates on a Sunday morning before shutting

<sup>49</sup> See for example *Työ*, March 21, 1912; *Työmies*, March 21, 1912; *Uusi Suometar*, March 22, 1912; *Aamulehti*, March 23, 1912; *Satakunnan Sanomat*, March 24, 1912; *Vaasa*, March 26, 1912.

<sup>50</sup> "Ruumiilta vaatteet varastettu", *Rajavahti*, March 19, 1912.

<sup>51</sup> Bruno Sarlin to Gustaf Adolf Helsingius, April 5, 1912, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:33 (Liperi), Finnish National Archives.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

them up in solitary confinement. Upon his investigation at the poorhouse, the inspector had found the accusation to be groundless.<sup>53</sup>

Socialists saw things differently: they regarded the poorhouse system as a prime example of inequality in municipal decision-making and the oppression of the poor. From the socialists' point of view, the main problem was that even though the Grand Duchy of Finland had in the aftermath of the previously mentioned Russo-Japanese war managed to introduce universal suffrage in national elections, the reform did not apply to local governmental elections. At the local level, the right to vote was still based on property qualifications, and the poorest people did not have a chance to participate in decision-making on poor relief, for example. In order to draw public attention to this grievance and to the bad living conditions of the poor in general, socialists were in the early 1900s eager to publish exposés such as the one in question here.<sup>54</sup>

Underneath the political wrangling, the Liperi case shows a mixture of old and new practices associated with the liminal state and understandings of a good death. For example, the kinswomen's decision to leave the poorhouse without shrouding the body seems peculiar, given that they had travelled 400 kilometres from Helsinki to Liperi to participate in the funeral, and that shrouding was traditionally considered a duty of honour. One reason for their reluctance may be that they were in fact late: as mentioned earlier, the corpse was usually washed and dressed immediately after death had occurred. By the time the women arrived at the poorhouse, the body of the departed had lain on a bier for a couple of days, and it is likely that the corpse was still stiff with rigor mortis. Was it more convenient for the women to leave the dead body to the poorhouse staff and the inmates? If this is so, the women's attitude marks a step towards the more modern approach to death: people were to a growing extent alienated from dealing with the dying and the dead, and instead preferred to leave these matters to professionals in hospitals, nursing homes, and funeral parlours.<sup>55</sup> For them, the lack of familial involvement in preparing the dead body for the funeral did not necessarily equal neglect or a bad death.

<sup>53</sup> "Ihmisräökkäystä Liperin vaivaistalolla", *Rajavahti*, March 16, 1912; Bruno Sarlin to Gustaf Adolf Helsingius, March 29, 1912, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:33 (Liperi), Finnish National Archives.

<sup>54</sup> Annola, *Äiti, emäntä, virkanainen, vartija*, 234–239; Annola, "Kackerlackor i såsen?".

<sup>55</sup> See for example Eilola, "Johdanto", 31–33; Pajari, Miettinen and Kanerva, "Kuoleman historian ääriiivoja", 9–12.

As the women decided to leave, the corpse was left on a bier for one more night. According to the Instructor's record, there was no lock on the mortuary door, because the inmates were "known to usually be afraid of dead bodies". The mentally disabled son of the departed had nevertheless entered the mortuary the day after the kinswomen's visit and noticed that "a mouse had gnawed at the corpse a bit". One of the female inmates had then agreed to help him place the dead body in the coffin to avoid any further damage—without the master's permission—"as a favour to the departed". The two inmates placed the pillow under the head of the departed, and "covered him with the veil".<sup>56</sup>

In addition to this, the female inmate covered the face of the departed "with a clean handkerchief that had belonged to him and had been washed by her".<sup>57</sup> In the socialist newspaper article, this "greyish-blue piece of cloth" was portrayed as a lousy attempt at covering the damage "rats" had done to the body.<sup>58</sup> For one reason or another, the writer failed to note the old custom of covering the face of the dead person. However, it may be that in taking the trouble of washing the handkerchief and covering the dead man's face with it, the female inmate was indeed following this custom. It seems likely that *her* understanding of a good death included covering the face of the departed—her fellow inmate—because of respect on one hand, and because of marking the boundary between the dead and the living on the other.<sup>59</sup>

The source material gives an ambivalent description of the involved parties' reaction to the discovery on the funeral day of the damage the rodents had done to the corpse as well as the fact that the burial gown was missing. The Instructor's record gives an impression that there were no emotional reactions to the incident. According to the poorhouse master, the sane son of the departed had told him that "a mouse had gnawed at the lip of the departed a little".<sup>60</sup> When the master asked him whether the mouse had done any further damage, the son replied vaguely: "Not that much."<sup>61</sup> Similarly, the kinswomen only mentioned the missing gown in

<sup>56</sup> Bruno Sarlin to Gustaf Adolf Helsingius, April 5, 1912, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:33 (Liperi), Finnish National Archives.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> "Ruumiilta vaatteet varastettu", *Rajavahti*, March 19, 1912.

<sup>59</sup> Rytönen, *Savupirttien kansaa*, 62.

<sup>60</sup> Bruno Sarlin to Gustaf Adolf Helsingius, April 5, 1912, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:33 (Liperi), Finnish National Archives.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

passing: “Why, we told him [the carpenter] to include one in the coffin”, and the sane son stated: “They [the kinswomen] were supposed to purchase a gown.”<sup>62</sup> None of the bereaved thus laid the blame on poorhouse staff or inmates but instead kept their tone matter of fact, almost chatty. The record is in sharp contrast with the socialist newspaper article, according to which the kinswomen were “filled with absolute horror” because of the incident with the rodents.<sup>63</sup>

Why are these accounts on the handling of the dead body so different? While it is possible that the writer of the newspaper article was exaggerating heavily, it is nevertheless true that he/she was trying to catch the readers’ attention by describing the breach of social norms in detail. Given that the writer wanted to depict the poorhouse as a wretched place where poor people were deprived of their dignity even in death, the story was spot on. The dead body of a poor man, ravaged by rats and robbed of his funeral gown, was clearly something that would arouse sympathy in readers. As for the inspection record, it may be that it was in the interests of the poorhouse master to downplay the reactions of the bereaved, or that emotional expressions simply did not merit the Instructor’s attention as he was writing the record.

Another option is that the kinswomen and the sane son of the departed simply were not that shocked. It may be that rodents’ attacks on corpses were not uncommon enough to mar their experience of a good death or shame the involved parties in the eyes of the community. Another option is that the relatives did not associate a good death with the traditional ways of handling of the dead body so much as with giving the old man a send-off that would be regarded as impressive by more modern standards.

The mere fact that the kinswomen had purchased a ready-made coffin makes their take on funeral arrangements modern and even imposing. In the early 1900s, ready-made coffins were commonly used in urban areas, while in rural areas the coffin was usually built by a household member or the parish carpenter at home only after death had taken place.<sup>64</sup> It is likely that the Helsinki-based kinswomen were used to urban habits—or that by purchasing a ready-made coffin, they wished to draw a clear distinction between their deceased relative and the poorest of the rural poor, who

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> “Ruumiilta vaatteet varastettu”, *Rajavahti*, March 19, 1912.

<sup>64</sup> Pajari, “Kuolema maalla ja kaupungissa”, 116; Talve, *Suomalainen kansankulttuuri*, 232.

were buried very plainly. In the Liperi case, the coffin was not merely a wooden box but included (or was expected to include) a pillow and a veil with some elaborate embroidery—and a burial gown, which itself was a sign of a modern burial.<sup>65</sup>

Although the old man had died in an institution, the family and the community participated actively in his funerary ceremony. This time the notification of death had reached the bereaved in good time, allowing the kinswomen of the departed to travel from Helsinki to Liperi. The news of the old man's death had reached others as well: on the day of the funeral, people from near and far gathered at the poorhouse already in the morning, and many of them visited the mortuary to view the coffin, "as was customary".<sup>66</sup> When the kinswomen and another son of the departed arrived at the poorhouse, the mentally disabled son opened the coffin lid in order to "bid farewell to the departed, and to show the corpse to mourners". The coffin was then taken the one-kilometre trip to the church by poorhouse horse.<sup>67</sup>

Overall, it appears that apart from the confusion with the gown, the funeral day proceeded in a manner that apparently satisfied all involved parties' expectations of a good death. This is in line with the results of previous research, according to which the meanings attached to a funeral changed slightly over time, while funerary ceremonies, that is, the sequences of rituals connected with the burial, remained unchanged for a longer period.<sup>68</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Both Juuka and Liperi are located in eastern Finland, which has often been regarded as a more backward area in terms of modernization. This chapter shows that the truth is not that straightforward. First, the poorhouse itself was a sign of modernity, as was the soapstone mine in Juuka. Second, even though there was no railway coverage in these two parishes, they were connected to the wider world through a telephone network (albeit sparse),

<sup>65</sup> White burial gowns had become increasingly popular in Finland towards the end of the nineteenth century, but in some eastern and northern regions, the dead were still buried in full suit as late as in the early 1900s. Talve, *Suomalainen kansankulttuuri*, 170, 232.

<sup>66</sup> Bruno Sarlin to Gustaf Adolf Helsingius, April 5, 1912, Archives of the Inspector of Poor Relief Fb:33 (Liperi), Finnish National Archives.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Haverinen and Pajari, "Kuoleman julkisuus ja yksityisyys", 320.

newspapers, and people. There were those who hailed from elsewhere, such as engineer N. W. Troupp and matron Ida Karlsson, and those who had moved to the capital but returned every once in a while, such as the kinswomen of the late inmate in Liperi, bringing new tidings and new habits with them. The Fennoman proceedings of Troupp as well as the articles published by socialists clearly indicate that the political currents of the early 1900s also reached the parishes under scrutiny. Overall, these two cases reveal an eastern Finnish region that was far from being backwards.

The cases also show the challenges present in a society that stood somewhere between premodern and modern. In the early 1900s, family networks were to a growing extent fragmented by migration from rural parishes to urban areas. In rural communities, poorhouses pulled inmates away from their home villages. As physical distances between individuals grew wider but the telephone network was not dense enough to mitigate this, the risk of information breaches and misunderstandings increased. At the heart of both cases lay such a failure: the matron of Juuka poorhouse failed to deliver the notification of death in time, and in the Liperi case there was clearly some kind of confusion over funeral arrangements between the Helsinki-based kinswomen and the bereaved in Liperi.

In these cases, lived religion manifests in the practices associated with the liminal stage, and the negotiations around a good and a bad death. The key problem seems to have been the different expectations and experiences associated with the handling of a dead body. While poorhouse staff and some of the bereaved in the Liperi case were mainly preoccupied with the storing of the corpse in a morgue, in an outbuilding, or in a coffin, others, such as the Juuka-based engineer, the socialists in Liperi, and probably also the feeble-minded son of the departed and his female aide, also emphasized the spiritual aspects associated with these proceedings. For all parties, a corpse was certainly something to be stored, transported, and eventually disposed. However, the surviving records imply that their answers to the question “How?” were at least partially different.

These answers—the different practices as aspects of lived religion—open up opportunities for a more nuanced discussion on the layered nature of the modernization process. It appears that there existed traditional beliefs and practices, such as the fear of dead bodies and the shelters that were used to store corpses prior to burial. The boundary between the dead and the living was marked by covering the face of the departed with a piece of cloth, and by viewing the body together prior to closing the



coffin lid for the last time. At the same time, however, more modern practices had found their way to eastern Finland: people died in institutions and were therefore sometimes buried without the presence of their kith and kin. In some cases, the bereaved were not interested in preparing the departed for the funeral but instead left these proceedings to contemporary care professionals. Perhaps related to this, coffins were no longer necessarily crafted and furnished at home but purchased ready-made from a carpenter.

As mentioned in the introduction, shared religious practices are used to create and maintain cohesion within a specific community. In both cases discussed in this paper, the complainants regarded a proper liminal state as essential for both the departed and his community. In the Juuka case, engineer Troupp portrayed the poorhouse as a place where dead bodies were hastily placed in coffins and buried at short notice, thus robbing the community of a chance to bid farewell in an appropriate way. In the Liperi case, the socialists felt that the humiliating incident with rodents and the missing burial gown shamed the dead old man and ruined the funeral for his community. In both cases, then, the poorhouse was regarded as something that severely disrupted traditional communality. It should be noted, however, that in these cases the complainants' shared appreciation for traditional practices probably stemmed from different ideological backgrounds.

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## CHAPTER 11

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# Artisans of Religion at the Moral Frontiers: Finnish Soldiers' Religious Practices, Beliefs, and Attitudes in World War II

*Ville Kivimäki*

### INTRODUCTION

The meaning of religion in people's lives tends to increase in times of crisis. Especially in situations that include a threat of mortal danger and a breaking of moral norms, religious questions concerning the transcendental may become acute and occupy people's minds to a considerable degree. This is the case in wartime, when whole national communities enter a liminal sphere outside normal, everyday life.<sup>1</sup> In my chapter, I will study lived religion in a time of crisis by looking at Finnish soldiers' religious experiences and practices during World War II. In 1939–1945, approximately 800,000 Finnish men out of a total population of 3.7

<sup>1</sup>Leed, *No Man's Land*, 15–16, 39 ff.

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V. Kivimäki (✉)

Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

e-mail: [ville.kivimaki@tuni.fi](mailto:ville.kivimaki@tuni.fi)

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million served in the army. The majority of them were in frontline service at some stage of their military duty; the share is probably even higher. Almost 100,000 soldiers died in the war, and about the same number was permanently injured. In a nutshell, the war years were a major crisis for Finnish society, they took a heavy toll on the country's population, and they hit hard especially the youngest age cohorts of Finnish men, several hundreds of thousands of whom spent years in a row in harsh and violent frontline conditions.<sup>2</sup>

First in the Winter War of 1939–1940 and then in the so-called Continuation War of 1941–1944, Finland was at war with the Soviet Union, in the latter case as a “brother-in-arms” with Nazi Germany.<sup>3</sup> In both wars, religion played an important role in Finnish self-understanding and war propaganda. In contrast to the “atheist Bolsheviks,” the Lutheran faith was perceived of as an integral part of Finnish identity and tradition. In the Winter War, Finnish soldiers were described as defending “Western values”—including or synonymous with Christianity—against “Eastern barbarism.” In the heyday of the Finnish-German offensive in 1941, the Finns were depicted as “crusaders” defeating Bolshevism. And still in the desperate battle for survival in the summer of 1944, God's providence was sought, for example, through a collective prayer campaign launched by the Finnish president's wife, Gerda Ryti. Public rhetoric in wartime Finland was heavily influenced by religious motifs and discourse, and Lutheran priests and bishops had a prominent place in Finnish culture.<sup>4</sup>

Public Lutheranism intertwined with people's individual experiences and religion's role in them. Whether in consigning meaning to personal losses, in writing letters to and from home and the front, or in celebrating Christmas, religion was a part of Finnish wartime culture. Much of the religious talk was aimed at soldiers' relatives at home. However, religion was strongly present also on the frontlines: both in the soldiers' subjective experiences and as a cultural and ideological framework that was constructed to give these experiences a nationally cohesive meaning.<sup>5</sup> Most

<sup>2</sup> On this general history in English, see Kinnunen & Kivimäki, eds, *Finland in World War II*; Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War*.

<sup>3</sup> In the so-called Lapland War in 1944–1945, Finnish army fought the German troops in Northern Finland, yet this conflict was not experienced as such a total and existential struggle as two previous wars—except for the people in Lapland.

<sup>4</sup> Wunsch, *Punainen ubka*; Luostarinen, *Perivihollinen*; Kempainen, *Isänmaan ubrit*; Tilli, *Suomen pyhä sota*; Soikkanen, “Kirkko ja uskonto.”

<sup>5</sup> Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves*, 246–52; Kivimäki & Tepora, “Meaningless Death.”

crucially, as Ilona Kemppainen has shown, a soldier's death in wartime Finland was interpreted in thoroughly religious terms as the ultimate sacrifice for the nation. This was a collective interpretation, but it was arguably also a deeply felt personal experience among many soldiers and civilians alike, who had to come to terms with their losses.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas there is a solid research tradition on the public role of religion in wartime Finland and especially on the Lutheran church and the clergy,<sup>7</sup> the chapter at hand will have an empirical focus on the less-studied grass-roots subject of soldiers' religious beliefs and practices on the frontlines. Like the other chapters of the book, I will look at this topic from the perspective of lived religion, which I understand as a way of using religion—or engaging with religious practices—to make sense of one's experiences in a particular context of personal life events and their circumstances.<sup>8</sup> As Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Toivo state in the introduction to this book, "lived religion is a way to live, interact, and participate in one's community"—and I will thus be looking at the role of religion in the particular community of frontline soldiers. In addition to religious beliefs and thoughts, I think it is important to pay attention to the materiality and the "doing" of religion: how it is practised in rituals and other acts that are not necessarily expressed verbally. When looking at such "doings," it is not always clear whether they are a religious matter in the strict sense of the word. People's engagements with the fundamental moral dilemmas of life and death typically include ritualistic behaviour, existential ponderings, and transcendental references. For a study of lived religion, I consider it fruitful to accept this "messiness" of religious and semi-religious practices and thoughts, instead of focusing solely on the clearly defined "religious sphere" of people's lives.<sup>9</sup> My approach is connected to the first two levels of experience as defined in the book's introduction: first, the shaping of religious experiences in the everyday encounters with the violent frontline realities and, second, religious experiences as a social process in which the experiences are shared and constructed in the community of soldiers.

<sup>6</sup> Kemppainen, *Isänmaan uhrit*; see also Kivimäki "Sankariuhri ja kansakunta."

<sup>7</sup> Please see the footnotes above, as well as Heikkilä, "Uskonto ja hengellisyys sota-aikana"; Muukkonen, "Hengellinen huolto."

<sup>8</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, *Lived Religion*, 2–5; for a similar application of "lived nation," see Kivimäki, Suodenjoki & Vahtikari, "Lived Nation."

<sup>9</sup> This is in line with the lived religion research tradition, which has emphasized the intertwinement of religion with other spheres of people's lives, in contrast to focusing on theological dogmas; see the introduction to the current volume.

If religion is studied through people's lived experiences, it inevitably means that religious experiences are seen as contextual and situational. People do not simply renew religious beliefs and traditions in their everyday lives, but they actively re-assess, apply, interpret, and practise religion to suit their changing life events and concerns.<sup>10</sup> In this way, every occasion of lived religion is a unique combination of internal and external factors, starting from a person's earlier life course, existing social relations, cultural influences, and finally the immediate circumstances in which the religious experience gains its meaning and manifestation.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, being considered contextually and situationally contingent does not only point towards a singular character of each and every experience. Although historical contexts and situations are never identical, there are patterns and structures that arch over time and place. Whether we recognize change or continuity in the appearance of religious experiences is a matter of empirical research—and also a matter of choice in contextualizing the experience either in relation to situational factors or to transtemporal parallels.<sup>12</sup> The two contexts that interest me in this chapter are, first, the “frontline” as the physically immediate and mentally acute circumstance of soldiers' experiences and, second, the Lutheran faith, which served as a cultural resource of meanings and practices to make sense of one's experiences and to deal with them in a “proper” way. As I will demonstrate, the soldiers' experiences of lived religion took form at the intersection of these two contexts. There is, thus, a link to the third level of experience as defined by Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo in the introduction: experiences as social structures, in this case the role of Lutheran faith as an existing structure for shaping soldiers' religious experiences.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT, RESEARCH QUESTION, AND SOURCES

Before turning to a more precise research question and the sources of my chapter, I want to highlight three further notions on the historical context of Finnish soldiers' religious experiences. First, Finland in the 1930s was a country where the Evangelical Lutheran church had a very strong formal position. In 1940, as much as 96 per cent of Finns were members of the

<sup>10</sup> Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, *Lived Religion*, 12–13.

<sup>11</sup> For a useful itemization in this regard, see Koselleck, “Der Einfluß der beiden Weltkriege,” 324–32.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Boddice & Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 20–3.



church, while 1.8 per cent belonged to the Orthodox church, and 1.9 per cent were on the civil register, that is did not confess any religion. Thus, Finland was seemingly monocultural in religious matters; yet there were several prominent revivalist movements and sects *inside* the Protestant church, which could have a powerful if not dominant role regionally.<sup>13</sup> In every case, in the first decades of the twentieth century, both upbringing in the home and education in schools were still closely bound to the Christian faith. Besides the Lutheran clergy, Finnish elementary school teachers had a strong role in combining religious and nationalistic teaching for their pupils.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, though, it is possible to recognize signals of growing secularization in Finnish society. The high share of formal membership in the Lutheran church does not reveal the whole picture; urbanization, the labour movement, the market economy, and other hallmarks of modernity had a profound impact in Finland, too. This may be encapsulated best by saying that although religion remained an important and influential cultural factor, it started to lose its overarching character and began to form a separate (and slowly shrinking) sphere of its own inside society.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, besides church religiosity and the tendencies of secularization, many features of traditional everyday religious practices still lived on especially in rural communities. Finland in the 1930s remained an agrarian country, and the majority of Finns who served as soldiers in 1939–1945 had their roots in the countryside. Even for urban dwellers, their parents and grandparents had mostly led a rural life, which often included the use of spells, chants, beliefs, and small chores that had a spiritual meaning, even if they would be taken only half-seriously. There were geographical differences here, too: the cultural transformation took place first in the urbanized areas of Southern and Western Finland, whereas in the most eastern parts of the country, for instance, there were stronger traces of the old Orthodox influence and also animistic traditions.<sup>16</sup>

Third, as was noted above, as a collective crisis the wartime itself accentuated the role of religion in Finnish culture. It is hard to know to what extent exactly this mirrored people's actual experiences. Nevertheless,

<sup>13</sup> *Suomen Tilastollinen Vuosikirja 1942*, 48; Kakkuri, *Suomalainen herätys*, 156–8.

<sup>14</sup> Tuomaala, *Työntekevistä käsistä*, 204–7.

<sup>15</sup> Kortekangas, *Kirkko ja uskonnollinen elämä*; see also Jalonen, *Summan tarina*, 133.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pajari, “Kuolema maalla ja kaupungissa”; for a first-hand account on popular beliefs and rituals in the eastern borderland, see Enckell, *Rajan vartio*.

religion and the clergy were strongly mobilized to support the war effort and this created an atmosphere of religiosity, which could then foster personal expressions of religion more readily than in normal peacetime. Wartimes tend to sharpen national self-images, which are contrasted against the stereotype of the enemy—in the Finnish case, this meant underlining the Christian-Lutheran tradition in defining Finnishness against the Soviet Russians.<sup>17</sup>

My research analyses Finnish frontline soldiers' expressions of religion during World War II. I am interested both in "formal" religiosity—that is adhering to religious practices promoted by the Lutheran church—and in the "informal" sphere of religion, which consisted of soldiers' self-fashioned thoughts and acts with a transcendental element. In the first part of the chapter, I will analyse the phenomenon of "frontline fatalism" and how it materialized in various practices of religious "artisanship," as I have called the soldiers' attempts to interact with the transcendental. I will then look at how soldiers constructed "protective identities" to survive mentally in the borderland of life and death—and how this fashioning was closely connected to questions of morality and purity. Here, religion does not appear so explicitly, but as I will claim, the act of balancing between purity and dirt was crucial for the soldiers' moral dealing with death—and thus it was inseparably intertwined with the practices of frontline religiosity.<sup>18</sup> Finally, I will study the meaning of formal Lutheran religion for soldiers on the front and the work of the military chaplains as the representatives of the church among the troops. The key idea of the chapter is to show how the Finnish soldiers' experience of lived religion took shape in the intersection of two cultures: the frontline as an existential, moral borderland and the Lutheran version of Christianity as a system of religious meanings and practices.

My empirical work on soldiers' religious thoughts, beliefs, and practices is based on a large reminiscence collection on everyday life in the trenches during World War II, gathered by the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society in 1973.<sup>19</sup> The collection's informants were Finnish war veterans, who were invited to send their reminiscences through

<sup>17</sup>See, e.g., Heikkilä, "Uskonto ja hengellisyys sota-aikana"; Soikkanen, "Kirkko ja uskonto."

<sup>18</sup>The first and the second part of the chapter are largely based on my PhD thesis; Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves*, esp. 246–59.

<sup>19</sup>Nowadays called the Finnish Literature Society Archives (FLSA).

advertisements published in newspapers and some relevant magazines. The respondents were encouraged to forget the battle stories and to send instead their memories of “informal” life and experiences in the trenches. This included, for instance, soldiers’ devotional services, the celebration of Christmas and other festivities, supernatural experiences, and pastime activities. The collection received reminiscences from 265 informants, altogether about 12,000 pages of written text.<sup>20</sup> It gives a multifaceted and extensive picture of how different forms of religion appeared on the front, although the reminiscences were gathered around 30 years after the war. It seems that the memories of lived religion were relatively stable—or at least the most common features in the reminiscences can also be found in the wartime materials. It is also useful that the reminiscences are plentiful, and so it is possible to have some control regarding how representative or singular each and every reminiscence is. It is nevertheless true that the ex-soldiers’ reminiscences are not best suited for analysing particular events on the front, the detailed memories of which would have easily been transformed and distorted over the years—and thus I am rather reading them to get an overview on the structure and content of lived religion in terms of its general outlines.

### MANIFESTATIONS OF FRONTLINE FATALISM

In November 1941, two priests, Rolf Tiivola and Ensio Lehtonen, published a small peculiar book, *Risti-Ritari* (“Crusader”). As the editors of the Finnish military chaplains’ periodical *Koti ja Kasarmi* (“Home and the Garrison”), Tiivola and Lehtonen had a chance to gather a large collection of Finnish soldiers’ religious experiences. Apparently following a call published in the paper or circulated among the fellow military chaplains serving the troops, they had received around a thousand letters, which they now used to compose the book on the “frontline soldiers’ experiences of prayer, of reading the Bible, and of God’s protection,” as was its subtitle.<sup>21</sup> The book was published in the heyday of Finnish-German “brotherhood-in-arms,” when the Finnish Army had occupied a

<sup>20</sup>The name of this so-called *Korsuperinne* Collection translates roughly as “Dugout Tradition.” The collection is available for researchers at the Finnish Literature Society Archives in Helsinki and I will refer to it in the following as FLSA, Korsu 1973, followed by the volume number, the respondent’s initials, and the page numbers.

<sup>21</sup>Rolf Tiivola & Ensio Lehtonen, *Risti-Ritari: Rintamamiesten kokemuksia rukouksesta, Raamatun lukemisesta ja Jumalan varjeluksesta* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1941).

large part of Soviet East Karelia and a Soviet defeat seemed imminent. Thus, both the book's title and its content reflected the popular war rhetoric of the time, which depicted the advancing Finnish soldiers as "crusaders" of Lutheran Christianity and the Finnish nation, about to create a Greater Finland and vanquish the Finnish people's "eternal archenemy" in the east for good. Military chaplains in the Finnish Army had a key role in combining religious and nationalistic rhetoric in this vein.<sup>22</sup>

Yet despite this ideological tendency, which must have influenced the selection of "representative" stories to be chosen for the book, Tiivola and Lehtonen's call had clearly received a substantial response in the autumn of 1941. The stories were printed with the soldier's name and his unit's field post code as well as the letter's date, so they seem to have been authentic and willing testimonies of religious experiences on the front.<sup>23</sup> Following the book's subtitle, these experiences were divided into three parts. First, there were the stories of prayer, the Finnish soldiers' "secret weapon." The second part consisted of the stories of how the Bible and the "armour" provided by the Word had manifested in the soldiers' life on the front. And third, the book included a collection of stories of "miraculous protection," providence, supernatural omens, and the power of faith. Tiivola and Lehtonen framed these experiences as demonstrating how the Finnish "crusaders" had departed for the holy battle "escorted by the blessing and the strength of the cross."<sup>24</sup> Yet the book's religious stories can also be read against a different context: as messages from the borderland of life and death.

When looking at the soldiers' religious practices on the front as they manifest in the Finnish Literature Society's reminiscence collection gathered in 1973, I have recognized three phenomena that stand out as characteristic: a widespread culture of interpreting signs and omens, the seeking of relief through praying and other (semi-)religious practices, and the use of amulets as material objects of protection. These three phenomena are the core of the stories also in Tiivola and Lehtonen's book, albeit with a thick icing of wartime Lutheran rhetoric. Starting with omens and supernatural prophecies, they became visible in the soldiers' habit of interpreting their dreams as well as in observing noteworthy signs while awake.

<sup>22</sup> Tilli, *Suomen pyhä sota*.

<sup>23</sup> Most of the letters date to October 1941, so this was a fresh endeavour. Almost all the respondents were rank-and-file soldiers or non-commissioned officers.

<sup>24</sup> Tiivola & Lehtonen, *Risti-Ritari*, 10.

Most typically, a soldier had a premonition of his wounding or survival. In the summer of 1944, a young frontline officer was responsible for an important front sector and after a month of heavy fighting and casualties, he felt that he was close to breaking point. Dozing off early in the morning, he suddenly heard the voice of his father just next to him: "My son, not a hair will be cut from your head without me knowing it." The officer woke up immediately:

My father was not to be seen, of course, but those words had changed me. I felt myself at peace and safe. After that I didn't get tired anymore, and I believed that we would survive. [...] My father's appearance while I was asleep gave me the strength I needed.<sup>25</sup>

This experience resembles passages of Biblical revelations where Christ, an angel, or the voice of God brings an important message. In another dream, recorded in a diary already during the war, a soldier dreamt of being in a brightly lit hall that had a strangely beautiful Christmas tree standing in the middle. The hall was kept by young maidens in white clothes. One of them invited the soldier to play around the tree. He was attracted, but then suddenly felt frightened and snatched away his hand. The maiden looked at him with sorrowful eyes. After the dream the soldier decided to stay in his safe assignment behind the frontlines and not to search for any adventures.<sup>26</sup> Here, too, the reference to angels in heaven seems obvious.

Next to the reminiscences of survival, a very common story tells of how a person had learned of his impending death beforehand. Obviously, such persons were no longer around to reminisce about their experiences; the stories were told by their fellow soldiers. Accordingly, having a dream or some other omen of one's imminent death usually resulted in making preparations, such as sharing one's belongings or bidding farewell; behaviour that was considered out of the ordinary.<sup>27</sup> Again, announcing one's imminent death and starting to prepare for it brings to mind Christ's last moments with his disciples, as if the soldier was also getting ready for a sacrifice. Usually the other soldiers first refused to take such preparations seriously:

<sup>25</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 17, E.H., 24–5.

<sup>26</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 5, V.M., 9–10.

<sup>27</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 8, E.P., 107.

Right after he [a fellow soldier] woke up in the morning, he said, “Today I will surely die, I dreamt that my dog tag was cut and my mother cried a lot.” We laughed and made fun of him, and we said that he who believes in his dreams is afraid of his shadow. The same evening we carried him wounded to a dressing station. He was conscious and asked for sugar, and told me, do you remember [A.] what I said to you all in the morning. His life ended before we reached the dressing station.<sup>28</sup>

One respondent tells how he had developed an uncanny instinct for recognizing the next soldiers to die from the signs in their eyes. Shocked and suspecting his own sanity, he started to observe his own face for any such signs, but he could not recognize anything. He perceived also other changes in the behaviour of those about to die: two of them stopped singing or playing cards, another one returned to his childhood memories, one wrote a farewell letter to his wife and daughter, and one went to say his last greetings to the ladies working in a nearby canteen.<sup>29</sup> Such changes can be seen as performing a “good death” that corresponded loosely with the Christian ideas of preparing to die in a conscious and calm way.<sup>30</sup>

The soldiers did not only search for signs of death or survival; they also took an active role in working with their destiny. This became visible in an apparently popular habit of carrying different kinds of amulets and tokens. Some of these could be more or less arbitrary objects that became important for one reason or another, but often the amulets were connected to the significant others in soldiers’ lives. This could mean carrying a lock of hair from one’s girlfriend, a photograph of one’s wife and children, a letter from one’s mother, or some other emotionally charged object from a person who was important to the soldier. In a similar fashion, the amulets could also be religious objects such as small crucifixes, pocket Bibles, or hymn books. Ideally, the personal and the religious would come together, so that the amulet was, for instance, a Bible given by one’s mother:

In our group of soldiers there were men who had mascots [sic]. I don’t know how seriously they believed in them, or whether they believed at all. There was a lucky coin that could include whatever protective powers. One shouldn’t lose that. For many boys the New Testament was a certain protection and a provider of necessary strength, and so one had to carry it always

<sup>28</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 5, A.M., 25.

<sup>29</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 4, E.K., 8–9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Kempainen, *Isänmaan uhrit*, 55–8.

in one's pocket. One mate even told me as a big secret that he had such a lucky charm that as long as he carries it with himself nothing bad will happen and the devil won't poke him. Well he didn't die in the war and the devil didn't poke him.—The lucky charm was a woman's lace handkerchief, given by his girlfriend who had put such a strong spell on this handkerchief that the man survived in the turmoil of war.<sup>31</sup>

It seems to have been important that as material objects these amulets were tangible and usable; they were a concrete link to those personal emotions and religious beliefs that were important for the soldiers. In a moment of crisis or insecurity, looking at a photograph, touching a lucky charm, or feeling it in one's pocket could alleviate stress and fear. They were thus an important material part of individual practices and rituals. A respondent tells how the men of an infantry company learned about a counterattack that they knew to be very risky: "Many men took from their pockets a soldier's hymn book, a collection of Bible verses, or some other sombre kind of a book and studied them in a way I had never seen before."<sup>32</sup> Besides such serious exercises, the rituals could be quite banal, such as organizing one's belongings in a certain order or urinating before a dangerous task. It was also important to avoid things that could cause bad luck.<sup>33</sup>

Of all the religious practices, praying was probably the most common one and something that the soldiers had learned at home and in school. "Both in the Winter War and in the Continuation War, whenever it felt that one cannot survive, I prayed silently by myself and this alone gave me a feeling of salvation," a war veteran reminisced.<sup>34</sup> Often the prayer that was most readily available was the one learned by heart in one's childhood home, which connected the act to the memory of one's mother or other close relatives.<sup>35</sup> It seems that usually praying and other religious rituals were considered a deeply private matter that the soldiers wanted to practise quietly by themselves.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 5, A.M., 26.

<sup>32</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 9, T.S., 7.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 9, H.R., 20–1.

<sup>34</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 10, E.T., 3.

<sup>35</sup> For military chaplains' reminiscences in this regard, see Salminen, "Oli ilo saada palvella," 147; Teräs, "Kuormankantajia kysytään," 166.

<sup>36</sup> On praying, see also Kempainen, *Isänmaan ubrit*, 223; Tepora, *Lippu, ubri, kansakunta*, 278–9.

There is no need to contemplate the factual nature of all these phenomena—it is enough to note that they were clearly very important and widespread among the frontline soldiers. As coping strategies, they were attempts to control the uncontrollable. One of the most distinctive features of modern warfare has been its faceless, mechanistic, and massively destructive force, which, for a single combatant, has created an experience of powerlessness and insignificance. A Finnish frontline soldier in the trenches rarely saw the enemy and his individual perspective on the vast battlefield was very restricted.<sup>37</sup> By resorting to prayers, tokens, omens, and rituals, the soldiers tried to find some order in the apparently chaotic environment; their death or survival would not be only a random event but a consequence of fate or some greater force, to which the soldier could have a direct personal connection through, for instance, an amulet or prayer. In this way the soldier became an active individual agent and not merely a passive, arbitrary victim of war. Frontline fatalism helped soldiers cope psychologically by easing the anxiety of being responsible for their own survival. If everything was, in the end, determined by some higher power, then one could stop worrying about it and concentrate on the practical tasks at hand. Furthermore, the symbolically charged tokens were also material objects; in them soldiers could store their most valuable emotions and memories and hold onto them.<sup>38</sup>

In this way, the soldiers tended to return to the roots of religion and became spiritual “artisans.” The practices they employed were not just habitual, routine-like repetitions of formal religion but stemmed from the direct experiences of death, violence, and moral insecurity, which are at the core of religious rituals. The frontline experience created a demand for spiritual practices, which, in turn, gave these experiences shape and meaning—and in this cycle, religion became a lived-through experience.

### PROTECTIVE IDENTITIES ON THE MORAL FRONTIERS

Being sent to the front meant that the young men were separated from their everyday human relations, civilian identities, and peacetime norms. They entered, instead, a strange and hostile environment, which was

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, much of the Finnish frontline experience in 1941–1944 resembled rather the static trench warfare of World War I than the more mobile operations of 1939–1945.

<sup>38</sup> Watson, “Self-deception and Survival,” 251–3, 257–61; for similar observations on frontline fatalism in Finnish soldiers’ letters, see Hagelstam, “I stridens hetta,” 37–8.



characterized by the constant presence of violence. Soldiers witnessed the death and mutilation of their comrades, and they were expected to commit acts of lethal violence themselves. Consequently, the frontline experience meant a full reversal of what had been considered normal or abnormal in one's earlier life. This experience was reflected in the soldiers' language and slang, which was saturated with expressions of irony.<sup>39</sup> Having to cope with this reversal was a moral problem, and the front can be seen as a moral frontier where questions of life and death were acutely present. The habits of carrying amulets, praying, or interpreting omens were one important aspect of adapting to these strange conditions by seeking a personal connection to the transcendental. At the same time, soldiers had to change or adjust their identities in order to survive mentally on the front. While this identity transformation was not a straightforwardly religious phenomenon, it was definitely an integral part of the same moral enterprise as the explicitly religious practices of frontline fatalism.

Reading Finnish soldiers' wartime correspondence and drawing on the classic anthropological ideas of rites of passage and liminality, ethnologist Sonja Hagelstam has written that Finnish soldiers during World War II were very conscious of the exceptionality of the "timeless" or "detached" moment they were experiencing on the frontlines compared to normal, civilian peacetime.<sup>40</sup> They also understood the peculiar circumstances of the front and its transformative potential, hence the frequent references in the war reminiscences in the Finnish Literature Society's collections: "war is war," "you can't understand it if you haven't been there," "this must be incomprehensible for a civilian," and "the war changed everyone who experienced it on the frontlines." The experience of entering the battle was called the "baptism of fire," which gave birth to new men of the frontlines, to "brothers-in-arms." Emphasizing the liminality of the frontline experience, reminiscences often narrate war as a "journey," as a travel outside everyday life. The ex-soldiers constantly referred to their war experiences as a "voyage" (*taival*, *reissu*, or *retki*), "path" (*polku*), "logging site" in the wilderness (*savotta*), and a "stint" or "slog" (*urakka*).<sup>41</sup>

The most remarkable thing that separated this "voyage" from any everyday travel was that it was made to a place where a person's life was

<sup>39</sup> Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves*, 257–9; for a comprehensive collection of Finnish military slang in wartime, see Hämäläinen, *Suomalainen sotilasslangi*.

<sup>40</sup> Hagelstam, "Krigets tid."

<sup>41</sup> See also synonyms for "war" (*sota*) in Hämäläinen, *Suomalainen sotilasslangi*, 322.

constantly under threat and the civilian norms had been turned upside down. The mastery of death and violence changed the soldiers' identities, or at least these experiences were made much more tolerable by harnessing protective layers of one kind or another. This "mental insulation" became visible in the soldiers' appearance. It was a common habit to grow a "frontline beard," to customize one's kit, to dress in an emphatically "front-soldierly" fashion, and to carry formal or informal insignia such as the death's skull on one's dress or helmet to mark soldierly status. Collecting war trophies from the dead or captured Soviet soldiers was very popular. The trophies were usually small items like Soviet cockades, badges, coins, and wallets, or things with some practical use such as warm winter boots, fur clothes, weapons, and wristwatches.<sup>42</sup> Sometimes the trophies were more macabre, such as skulls, bones, or gold teeth.<sup>43</sup> Similarly to the lucky charms and amulets discussed in the earlier section, these objects were emotionally and symbolically charged and contained protective powers.

The frontline soldiers were physically dirty; mainly, of course, because of the nature of their tasks and bad hygienic conditions, but this dirtiness was also consciously used to emphasize one's status as "true workmen" of war and to distinguish the men of the frontlines from the tidy "gentlemen" behind the lines. Soldiers in their dugouts also used coarse language, and extremely black humour was a distinctive marker of their status.<sup>44</sup> All in all, the frontline community tended to surround itself with signs, language, and appearances stressing the special circumstances of the front: the harshness, violence, and dirt. The nature of these conditions was generally understood as strongly masculine, whereas the home front and the service troops in the rear took on feminine or unmanly connotations.<sup>45</sup>

Constructing a status distinction between the "real men" of the frontlines and the despised and ridiculed (but also envied) "home front heroes" was one function of these cultural phenomena. They also helped the soldiers cope psychologically. As Joanna Bourke has written, the trophy-collecting culture highlighted prowess in active combat and, at the same time, in handling the grotesque experience of killing; it provided a

<sup>42</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 12, T.V., 18; Vol. 13, A.A./M.T., 170; Vol. 23, P.K., 34–7.

<sup>43</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 8, A.P., 6; Vol. 9, H.R., 16; Vol. 12, O.V., 7.

<sup>44</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 1, P.H., 1; Vol. 2, A.H., 23; Vol. 5, E.L., 64, 68.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Pipping, *Infantry Company*, 208–9.

carnavalesque demonstration of the inversion of normal civil morals and behaviour.<sup>46</sup> Bourke also notes a peculiar identification with, even attachment to, the enemy in the trophy collecting. The trophies showed that the enemy “was like us” and made visible the bond between the dead and the living.<sup>47</sup> Such identification can be seen, for instance, in the Finnish soldiers’ habit of looking through and collecting the photos carried by a dead enemy; they raised discussions on the identity and family of the fallen and pondered the similarity of the young soldiers on both sides of the front.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, as the violence on the front reached levels of unreal brutality, the trophies helped to provide physical evidence of this experience. Collecting war trophies and fashioning one’s frontline appearances also had a mentally protective function. Following Anna Freud’s psychoanalytic thesis on defence mechanisms of the self, just as a child afraid of ghosts dresses up as a ghost to counter the alleged threat, the soldiers tried to control their fears by becoming the masters and carriers of what they feared; they identified themselves with the threatening aggression.<sup>49</sup> This explains the keen interest in the symbols of death, violence, and dirt. The dirtiness of the front was both physical and moral in nature, and it emphasized the liminality of the frontline experience. The soldiers were forced both to conduct and endure acts of normally taboo violence and to live in the midst of this violence. Many accounts of dirtiness and filthiness in the reminiscences seem to reflect the morally threatening nature of the war experience which troubled the soldiers. The dirt symbolized the out-of-order, liminal qualities of the front.<sup>50</sup>

One special and culturally distinctive practice must be noted in regard to the soldiers’ balancing between purity and moral threat. Bathing in saunas takes a prominent place in the soldiers’ war reminiscences, and it seems to have been one of the most warmly remembered aspects of Finnish frontline culture. Whenever the soldiers knew that they would be staying at the same spot for a longer period, they started to build a sauna—they even prioritized sauna-building over constructing their living facilities and making defensive preparations.<sup>51</sup> This prioritization, together with the detailed and focused descriptions of the saunas in the reminiscences, tells

<sup>46</sup> Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing*, 37–43.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, 40–1, 146–8; see also Leed, *No Man’s Land*, 107–9.

<sup>48</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 12, S.V., 9–10.

<sup>49</sup> Freud, *Das Ich*, 125 ff.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. the famous thesis of Mary Douglas in her *Purity and Danger*.

<sup>51</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 2, M.J.H., 11; Vol. 3, J.J., 9; Vol. 3, A.K., 13–4.

of their cultural significance beyond the obvious hygienic one. The sauna stories stress the spiritual element of bathing as an inner purification. Physical washing went hand in hand with moral cleansing.<sup>52</sup> The sauna was understood as an elementary part of the Finnish way of life, thus marking the Finns' existential difference from the "filthiness" of the Soviet soldiers.<sup>53</sup> It is also worth noting that in Finnish culture, saunas were traditionally holy places of healing—also insanities were treated in saunas—and bathing included ritualistic behaviour and rules.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, bathing together had an important bonding function.<sup>55</sup> In Finnish sauna culture, women and children used to bathe separately from men, and for a youngster, being allowed to bathe together with the men was a sign of growing into manliness. Thus, the frontline saunas were also gendered places emphasizing the masculinity of the soldiers.

Growing a beard or going to the sauna were not "religious" practices as such, yet they seem to have had an implicit spiritual element as markers of a specific experience of living in the outskirts of one's parent civilian community. This experience can be conceptualized using anthropologist Victor Turner's idea of *communitas*, which refers to the extraordinary community among initiates during the liminal phase in rites of passage. *Communitas* is more than a strong community in normal social relations as it is marked by those liminal circumstances that give rise to it. These circumstances require that the chosen group of initiates be sent outside the everyday structure of their society, that they go through transformative rituals and experiences, and that they return after a period of time with a new social status. Many experiences in the liminal phase are paralleled with death: the initiates cease to exist in their earlier persona inside their normal society; they are without a clear status and qualities. They are not bound by everyday norms and sanctions but are allowed—even required—to break them for the sake of initiation. The initiates gain "secret knowledge," usually tabooed in everyday life, while formal norms and hierarchies lose their power or are turned upside down. The initiation is at the same time "impure" and "sacred" as the normally fixed dichotomies of the society blend with each other.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Zhong & Liljenquist, "Washing Away Your Sins," 1451–2.

<sup>53</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 2, O.H., 17; Vol. 9, S.T.R., 4.

<sup>54</sup> Hakamies, "Sauna ja kansanomainen terveydenhoito," 275–80.

<sup>55</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 12, O.V., 7; Vol. 12, V.V., 4–5.

<sup>56</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94 ff.; cf. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*.

Seen from this anthropological perspective, drawing a line between the front and the rest of the society—and fashioning one's frontline identities accordingly—was not only a way to construct a distinctive social status; it was also a way to make an existential difference between those who had crossed the border to the moral frontier of life and death and those who had not. Despite some culturally specific practices, such as the sauna bathing, this was by no means a Finnish phenomenon but widely recognized as a characteristic for the transnational culture of frontline soldiers as border crossers.<sup>57</sup> The same extraordinary, occasionally transcendent qualities repeat themselves in the studies of soldiers' war experiences: the frontline soldiers are separated and estranged from their civilian identities; the frontline community exists outside the normal structures of ordinary life; the landscape of war is perceived as an otherworldly terra incognita; and the front experience transforms the soldiers thoroughly in a change described as a kind of “baptism” or “masculinization.”<sup>58</sup>

With their ritualistic practices and expressions of frontline fatalism, Finnish soldiers were a part of this culture of the front, which was characterized by the vicinity of sudden violence, the upheaval of moral norms, underground existence in trenches and dugouts—and, usually, the gendered understanding of the frontline as “manly” and masculinizing.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, these circumstances shaped the experience of frontline religion and gave it similar expressions in places that were not necessarily otherwise culturally connected.

## LUTHERAN SOLDIERS

In the two previous parts of the chapter, I have studied Finnish soldiers as artisans of religion and moral issues at the grassroots of frontline experience. While we can recognize the influence of a Lutheran upbringing, for example in saying one's prayers, in its essence this “artisanship” was not bound to the particularities of Finnish culture but represented the much more general phenomenon of having to cope with the violent conditions on the frontlines. We can find, for instance, very similar religious and

<sup>57</sup> On the military community as delegates and border crossers, see Marvin & Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice*, 98 ff.; Tepora, *Lippu, ubri, kansakunta*, 46.

<sup>58</sup> On the classic Anglo-American works in this field, see, e.g., Fussell, *Great War*; Holmes, *Acts of War*; Hynes, *Soldier's Tale*; Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing*.

<sup>59</sup> For a summary on the vast literature on war's “masculinizing” effects, see Goldstein, *War and Gender*.

ritualistic behaviours among the Soviet soldiers of World War II, although the Red Army was formally atheist and the long Orthodox tradition in Russia was also different from Finnish Lutheranism.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, there was also a distinctively Finnish culture of frontline religiosity. It was based on the general role of the Lutheran faith in Finland as well as on the specific institution of military chaplaincy, which was an integral part of the Finnish Army. During the Continuation War of 1941–1944, there was one military chaplain in every battalion (or an equivalent unit of ca. 500 to 1000 men), plus a number of senior military chaplains on the higher levels of the military hierarchy. Most of the chaplains had also been trained as reserve officers, and they usually belonged to the younger members of the Finnish clergy. At the end of 1941, altogether 500—or one-third—of all Finnish priests were called to serve as military chaplains. Their work was directed and administered by the Ecclesiastical Department of the Finnish Army High Command, led by Field Bishop (*kenttäpiispa*) Johannes Björklund.<sup>61</sup>

Military chaplains had the special duty of taking care of the fallen soldiers. This was one of the most sensitive areas of frontline culture. The bodies of fallen comrades troubled the soldiers' minds and required special attention; the soldiers took lots of trouble to ensure that the fallen were evacuated from the front back to their home parishes. Proper handling of the bodies was very important, and the lack of it caused uneasiness and outrage.<sup>62</sup> It was considered harmful for a soldier's mental endurance to look too closely at the fallen, and the soldiers leaving for furloughs were warned against taking part in military funerals or visiting military hospitals. Despite the generally coarse language common among the frontline soldiers, the fallen were almost always addressed with high respect:

I often wondered how the boys seemed to be somehow horrified to see one of their own, a Finn, lying there dead. They did not say a word and looked away. But at the same time they looked at a Russian soldier's corpse curiously, without horror. They could strip the felt boots from the corpse, and in some lucky cases even a fur coat which they might don themselves straight away. They never took the shoes of their own fallen, although shoes were

<sup>60</sup> Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 168–9.

<sup>61</sup> Kansanaho, *Papit sodassa*, 160–4; Heikkilä, “Uskonto ja hengellisyys sota-aikana”; Muukkonen, “Hengellinen huolto,” 99–104.

<sup>62</sup> Pipping, *Infantry Company*, 102–3, 167, 204.

very hard to come by. They even made jokes about Russian corpses and wondered whether they were Mongols or something else.<sup>63</sup>

The Finnish system of sending the dead to be buried in the “Hero’s Cemeteries” in their home parishes proved a comforting practice for the soldiers, as it showed that the fallen were respected and taken care of. It emphasized the emotional link between the front and the home front and situated the soldiers’ sacrifices at the centre of each locality, both physically and symbolically. Therefore, the formal role of military chaplains in charge of this process was very important and it bound the death of every soldier to the formal religious structure as defined by the Lutheran church. Consequently, the soldiers found consolation in imbuing the experience of their comrades’ deaths with religious meanings of Christian martyrdom and Christ-like sacrifice.<sup>64</sup>

Finnish military chaplains had a dual role: they were responsible for religious worship as well as for the more propagandistic tasks of upholding morale and patriotic spirit in the troops. As has been demonstrated by earlier research, they had internalized their spiritual role in the national war effort and in their rhetoric wove inseparably together the Christian faith and the destiny of the nation.<sup>65</sup> If the soldiers saw the chaplains as mere megaphones of blunt propaganda, they could react very allergically and ignore the chaplains altogether—just as they usually ignored other patronizing attempts to promote patriotism and sacrifice through explicit indoctrination.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, many of the chaplains were aware of the danger of being seen merely as propaganda tools of the army. Consequently, they saw their primary mission in preaching the traditional Christian gospel.<sup>67</sup> Most of the military chaplains were relatively young, they had often acted as frontline officers, and as long as they shared the risks and hardships of their men, they were probably highly esteemed among the

<sup>63</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 16, J.K.H., 75.

<sup>64</sup> Kemppainen, *Isänmaan uhrit*, 65–74; Kivimäki, “Sankariuhri ja kansankunta.” On the analogous phenomenon of consigning death with religious meanings in World War I France, Smith, *The Embattled Self*, 62–75.

<sup>65</sup> Kemppainen, *Isänmaan uhrit*, 156–60, 170; Tepora, *Lippu, uhri, kansakunta*, 276–80; also Kansanaho, *Papit sodassa*, 197–208.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Salminen, *Propaganda rintamajoukoissa*, 50–1.

<sup>67</sup> Kansanaho, *Papit sodassa*, 58–63, 116, 268–71; see also Honkanen, “Mutta minä sain laupeuden,” 35.

soldiers.<sup>68</sup> On this everyday level of interaction between the chaplains and soldiers, the matter was about simple religious counselling. Here, the message was hardly as “patriotic” or “propagandistic” as in the most cited public sermons, but the chaplains, nevertheless, tried to assure the soldiers of the collective meaningfulness of their personal sacrifices: their hardships would not be in vain; they happened in the name of Christ and for the survival of the fatherland.

As long as the chaplains stuck to simple religious counselling and the gospel, the frontline community seems to have been a fertile ground for their work. Finnish pioneer sociologist Knut Pipping, who served in a machine-gun company in 1941–1944 and wrote his doctoral dissertation on the soldiers’ informal norms and behaviour, testified to this. The lumberjack soldiers from northern Finland whom he observed were hardly Sunday school pupils; yet they took part readily in holy communion and other field services. When some soldiers appeared on the civil register instead of the church register—that is they were not members of the Finnish Lutheran church—the rest of the men took a mildly disapproving stand towards them and could not understand their motivations.<sup>69</sup> As a war veteran later reminisced in the collections of the Finnish Literature Society:

At least in those troops where I served on the front, the hours of devotion were willingly attended. Knowing that death was our close companion must have caused this. [...] At least for my part I can say that the hours of devotion were comforting and encouraging, albeit sometimes sad events, as they usually reminded us of the peacetime Sunday schools and church attendance, and of course one’s homefolks. Before a battle, the prayer meeting somehow gave a feeling of security and even courage to go there.<sup>70</sup>

Another soldier mentions that they did not think too highly of their military chaplains, but this did not prevent them from seeking consolation from religion:

They [the soldiers] held a healthy suspicion towards all propaganda. Whereas regarding God, this was not talked about, but I’m sure that in a tough situation every one of them prayed. Priests were not especially esteemed—we

<sup>68</sup> Kansanaho, *Papit sodassa*, 48, 102–9, 160–1, 173–7, 266, 271–5.

<sup>69</sup> Pipping, *Infantry Company*, 187; see also Heikura, *Rintamajoukkojen mieliala*, 128–30.

<sup>70</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 17, E.H., 8–9; see also Vol. 5, M.M., 17.



preferred direct connections. But sometimes when we were transferred to a place from where there was a continuous stream of fallen and wounded soldiers, we could take communion. The altar was a white trunk of a birch and we kneeled down on another birch trunk. In order to preserve our courage we needed to have settled relations with God and other people.<sup>71</sup>

As these examples demonstrate, the Lutheran traditions, rituals, and upbringing served to structure soldiers' religious experiences and offered a set of practices to express them, even if a soldier would not have considered his military chaplain a religious authority. According to wartime surveys, religion had the most prominent role among older reservists and soldiers from the rural areas, whereas younger conscripts and city-dwellers showed somewhat less interest in religious matters. Religious upbringing and traditions in childhood fostered positive attitudes towards religion also in wartime; the influence of soldiers' mothers was especially important hereby.<sup>72</sup>

Sometimes the soldiers' spontaneous religious activity took an organized form that surpassed the military chaplains. One veteran tells that while there was only one military chaplain in his battalion of 800 soldiers, the men started to gather for Bible-reading on their own. The members of these groups came from different religious confessions and movements but this did not cause any trouble. They started to plan a common room for the meetings, which then materialized in the building of a "Dugout Church" (*Korsu-Kirkko*) with seats for 60 people. The church served as a site for meetings and sermons, organized by the men themselves. The military chaplains were glad to participate in this activity, but they were not the prime movers of the matter. This was rather a manifestation of a kind of ecumenical bottom-up awakening or spiritual longing.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to see how the experience of religious curiosity and thirst took the form of establishing a "congregation" and a "church," thus institutionalizing this experience.

Finally, the most wide-spread and jointly shared form of Lutheran Christianity took place at Christmas. Celebrations on the frontlines—the singing of hymns, a field service in the dugout, letters and parcels from home, and a modest feast—were the events to which many soldiers linked

<sup>71</sup>FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 4., E.K., 3.

<sup>72</sup>Muukkonen, "Hengellinen huolto," 119–20, 124.

<sup>73</sup>FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 2, A.H., 8.

their religious memories. The Christmas traditions seem to have acted as an emphatic point of contrast to the “atheist Bolshevism” on the other side of the frontline; it marked a strain of war experience understood as specifically “Finnish” in its Christian ethos.<sup>74</sup> Besides the explicitly religious meanings, Christmas also offered pivotal opportunities for the soldiers to experience a connection. Whereas the characteristic feature of the wartime was the physical and experiential separation of the home from the front, the simultaneous celebration of Christmas in a similar fashion all over the country strengthened, for a moment, the impression of a binding unity and common fate.<sup>75</sup> The following excerpt from a soldier’s reminiscence may sound overly romantic, but it grasps well the emotional power of Christmas on the frontlines:

One more verse from *Angel in Heaven*. What it felt like in the dugout was that we had been released. [...] Experiencing that Christmas was like feeling the hand of the beloved caress the face from the corner of the eye down to the cheek and touch the back of the hand; the angels danced in a ring around the red-hot heater. Then there was nothing but to sleep into Christmas, on a plank bunk. Others left for their shifts in the dark nest, squeezing the cold stock of the rifle, realizing that Christmases will never end in the hearts of Finland’s people.<sup>76</sup>

While this is an ideal image, and the frontline Christmases could also be depressive and demoralizing experiences that underlined one’s separation from home,<sup>77</sup> the quotation tells that the Christmas celebrations had a capacity to foster an amalgamation of personal experiences, religious meanings, and national sentiments. In such a symbolically and emotionally charged moment, the soldiers’ lived religion could go hand in hand with formal church Lutheranism. In the bigger picture, Lutheran religion as internalized in upbringing and represented on the front by the military chaplains could give a culturally specific substance to those experiences of violence, mortal danger, and threatened morality that were characteristic to any soldier serving on the front in any army. This was, of course, a complex process with very different outcomes depending on a multitude of factors—and this short presentation has only managed to outline some

<sup>74</sup> For a similar self-understanding in the German army, see Kühne, *Kameradschaft*, 160–1.

<sup>75</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 8 (L.V.N.), 2; Vol. 9 (M.S.), 21–2.

<sup>76</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 2, A.H., 28.

<sup>77</sup> FLSA, Korsu 1973, Vol. 7, A.N., 145–8.

general characteristics of frontline religiosity. However, religion clearly gained special significance on the front. This had to do with the vicinity of death, as is demonstrated, for instance, by the soldiers' increased need for spiritual support during the times of heaviest fighting. Similarly, as the military chaplains noted, many soldiers' religious feelings tended to fade soon after the fatal threat eased.<sup>78</sup> There was a kind of opportunistic flavour to the lived religion on the frontlines; it was bound to a very specific time and place on the moral frontiers—and as with various superstitious rituals and beliefs, it was also exercised as a kind of life insurance, just in case.

### CONCLUSIONS: RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES IN THE FRONTLINE COMMUNITY

Finnish soldiers' lived religion on the frontlines of World War II was based on the combined experience of mortal and moral danger. Trying to survive—both mentally and physically—in an environment where soldiers could face death and mutilation almost at any moment made questions of transcendence very imminent. The soldiers sought to connect with the otherworldly through various acts, rituals, objects, and beliefs that constituted a culture of frontline fatalism. They invested time and energy in these emotionally charged practices to find comfort and protection. However, the frontline experience was not only about suffering and surviving; it was also about committing acts of violence—or at least about living in the midst of violent acts, even if one would not have committed them. The moral reversal of peacetime norms required profound adaptation, and I have argued that this resulted in constructing specific frontline identities and taking part in activities that reflected the experience of living in a morally liminal sphere.

At the beginning of the chapter, I stated that soldiers' lived religion can be understood through two different “contexts”: the frontline and the Lutheran faith. Now at the end, this point of departure requires refinement. I would recognize altogether four overlapping contexts that are necessary for the understanding of this phenomenon in its totality. Focusing on each of them underlines somewhat different features.

First, in the widest sense, the particular manifestation of Finnish soldiers' religiosity can be connected to an almost timeless phenomenon of

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Muukkonen, “Hengellinen huolto,” 120, 124–6.

soldiering, where chosen members of the community are sent to battle to kill and die. The acts of war have always included ritualistic behaviour to cope with the proximity of death and violence. On this level, it is possible to apply anthropological theories such as Victor Turner's idea of liminal *communitas* and Mary Douglas' analysis of purity and dirt in how people react to moral disorder. Such a perspective will reveal overarching patterns and continuities in the human experience of martial violence and in attempts to use religious beliefs and practices to manage this experience. This can explain the general structure of Finnish soldiers' religious experiences, but it does not say much about their particular content and shape as they appeared in 1939–1945.

Second, there was the transnational culture of the frontline. In a stricter sense than the anthropological model above, we could talk of the European culture of modern warfare roughly in the first half of the twentieth century. It included many features in common, such as mass conscription armies, underground trench warfare, field post service, and the introduction of modern weaponry, which all structured soldiers' experiences in very concrete, material ways. Regarding the experience of lived religion in this (European) context, a very important aspect of this culture was the close intertwinement of nationalism as a civic religion and the Christian ideas of suffering and martyrdom. Young citizen-soldiers' death on the front was culturally constructed as a sacrifice for the nation—and despite the national differences in emphasis and style, this cultural pattern fashioned soldiers' experiences in both world wars.

In the Finnish case, the meaning of religion was probably accentuated, as Finnish nationalism was so closely bound to the rather homogenous Lutheran faith and, consequently, the institution of military chaplaincy had a very prominent role in the wartime army. The third context for the frontline lived religion is the particular Finnish culture of Lutheranism. In practices such as praying, celebrating Christmas, visiting field services, and carrying Bibles or hymn books as protective amulets, Lutheranism gave specific content and meaning to soldiers' experiences. For instance, the system of evacuating the bodies of the fallen to their home parishes was a culture-specific, historically “Finnish” response to the general question of cherishing the sacrifice of soldiers—and it clearly corresponded well with the idea of a “good death” among the Finnish population. As was demonstrated by the case of the “Dugout Church,” the soldiers' spontaneous craving for religion became modelled according to the Lutheran conventions of establishing a congregation and building a church for it. Whereas

the two contexts above are best suited to point to similar structures and parallels, this third context of Finnish Lutheranism pays more attention to the detail and cultural contingency in how the soldiers' religious experiences took shape.

Finally, there is still a fourth context that has to be pointed out, although the present chapter has not managed to use this approach. Within the three above-mentioned contexts, each and every soldier had a personal experience of religion, too, which was an outcome of a multitude of social and biographical factors. With a different set of sources, we could study the individual history of lived religion, with its unique characteristics. Thus, for example, the wartime biography of the future Finnish president Mauno Koivisto (1923–2017) reveals many common features of frontline religiosity, such as praying and reading the Bible to find spiritual security and comfort; and yet also a singular combination of Adventist-style Lutheranism and a working-class background, which were fostered by Koivisto's single-parent carpenter father.<sup>79</sup>

As a historical phenomenon, Finnish soldiers' experiences of lived religion on the frontlines can be understood through each of these four contexts, as happening at their intersection. The choice of context has an effect on whether we recognize a continuity and pattern or a particularity and contingency in our sources. Yet it is also good to note that this itemization is purely analytical, and the experience of religion cannot be conclusively reduced to any of the four contexts. With the concept of "artisanship," I have referred to the soldiers' active performance of the religious experience, which took social, cultural, material, and ideological elements from all the above-mentioned contexts and combined them into practice. This doing was an integral part of the experience, its site in time and place. The moral borderland of the front fostered various forms of religious artisanship, which were meaningful only in these peculiar circumstances, and the soldiers used whatever resources they had at their disposal to make sense of these conditions. In this way, their lived religion usually had a situational and pragmatic stance, despite the military chaplains' best efforts to promote a coherent Lutheran worldview.

<sup>79</sup> Bergholm, *Kiibkeä Koivisto*, 57–79, 86–8.

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# Correction to: Working-Class Women Living Religion in Finland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

*Pirjo Markkola*

## CORRECTION TO:

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Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 267–76; Kivimäki, “Reittejä Kokemushistoriaan,” 17–19; Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction*, 54–56, 85–89; *Within HEX*, ‘scene of experience’ as a theoretical concept has been developed by Minna Harjula and Heikki Kokko.

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