



# Introduction: Religion as Historical Experience

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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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## 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 Sydeni 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 löyTTY, 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 *Reliatiōnis 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 Academiens 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. Ethnopragmatics 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 agentially, 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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