

The Goat and the Cathedral – Archaeology of Folk Religion in Medieval Turku

SONJA HUKANTAIVAL

Introduction

Medieval written sources on everyday lived religion are scarce in the area of present-day Finland. However, large archaeological excavations where medieval soil layers are studied have lately been conducted almost yearly in the city of Turku. This fieldwork has unearthed finds that offer unique evidence of the local medieval worldview. Turku (Swe. Åbo) situates on the south-western coast of Finland (Fig. 1). During the medieval period, the area belonged to the Swedish kingdom. In the local chronology, the medieval period begins very late, around the beginning of



Figure 1. Turku (Swe. Åbo) situates on the south-western coast of present-day Finland.

the thirteenth century. Turku, founded around the end of the 1280s, is the oldest town and diocese in present-day Finland.

My recent doctoral thesis discusses traditions of ritually concealing objects in the structures of buildings during the historical period in Finland (c. AD 1200–1950).¹ It forms the background of this paper, but here I discuss evidence from the specific period and area of medieval Turku in more detail than was possible within the limits of that study. These concealment customs have often been concerned with ritual protection of the building, especially against misfortunes caused by witchcraft. In the thesis, I used a contextual multi-source method that I call ‘archaeology of folk religion’. The data consists of archaeological finds, archived folklore accounts, and a few historical sources. Most of the evidence is from post-medieval times, due to issues of preservation and documentation. Eleven of the 29 archaeological finds from the medieval period in my thesis study are found in Turku. The other locations are Vantaa (four cases), Hanko (three cases), Espoo (two cases), Porvoo, Raasepori, Tampere, Lieto, Paimio, Uusikaupunki, Liminka, Jomala, and Kurkijoki (in Russian Karelia). The areal distribution mirrors the intensity of conducted archaeological fieldwork in medieval soil layers; Turku has been intensively studied, as well as a few village plots in the Uusimaa region, but elsewhere excavations have been sporadic.

This paper considers three of the cases of building concealments from Turku and one additional find that was not found in a building. Three of the cases are found in the late 1990s or early 2000s during town archaeological excavations carried out by The Museum Centre of Turku. The first case is the skull of a goat that was found buried by a boundary marker between building plots in 2006. The second one is the head of a hammer found concealed in the foundation of a hearth during the same excavation project. The third case, unearthed in 1998, concerns objects that may have belonged to a Sámi shaman. The fourth case (Koroinen Old Bishop’s See) was excavated already in 1900–1902. This case differs slightly from the others since it belongs to a church context instead of the domestic sphere. The chosen cases shed light on the variety of the evidence while they also represent finds that are remarkable enough to have been very carefully documented during archaeological fieldwork. While the precision of documentation is crucial for discussing these finds, this point also causes an unfortunate bias towards the outstanding in the material.²

The purposes of this paper are, first, to introduce material signs of folk religion that archaeologists have discovered in the medieval soil layers of Turku. Second, to discuss how we can interpret these signs and what they reveal of everyday religion, and finally, to discuss the relationship of institutionalized religion with evidence of unsanctioned practices.

¹ Sonja Hukantaival, *“For a Witch Cannot Cross Such a Threshold!” – Building Concealment Traditions in Finland c. 1200–1950* (Archaeologia Medii Aevi Finlandiae 23) SKAS: Turku 2016 (<http://urn.fi/URN:IS-BN:978-952-67329-9-2>).

² Hukantaival 2016, 25–29.

Archaeology and Folk Religion

Defining the abstract concept of religion is not an easy task, as has been discussed to some extent among scholars in different fields.³ Whenever we communicate with language, we draw circles around phenomena in order to try to distinguish them from other phenomena. Language is powerful, since it contributes to how we experience the world. However, the process of dividing phenomena is always artificial, since in reality things are context-dependant, entangled, and complex.⁴ Still, as long as this fact is kept in mind, the notion that religion includes beliefs and practices that assume transcendent/otherworldly agency and often reverence and/or worship of such agency, is sufficient for the purpose of this paper. I use the concept of ritual to address action that is emphasized as special with different techniques (e.g. rule-governance, formality, repetition, archaic language).⁵

According to the folklorist Don Yoder ‘folk religion is the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion’.⁶ This definition contrasts folk religion with an ‘official religion’, which ultimately means an institutionalized religion. This causes a problematic dichotomy, on which ground these kinds of definitions have been criticized.⁷ Some scholars prefer to discuss lived religion: religion as expressed and experienced in the lives of individuals.⁸ As Meredith McGuire notes, at the individual level religion is an ‘ever-changing, multifaceted, often messy – even contradictory – amalgam of beliefs and practices that are not necessarily those religious institutions consider important’.⁹

However, when studying past practices in the light of archaeological finds this individual level becomes problematic. We can observe that something has been done, but usually we have no way of accessing who the actors were and in what state of mind they performed the deed. Someone

³ See e.g. Jack Goody, ‘Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 12 (1961), 142–64; Melford E. Spiro, ‘Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation’, in Michael Banton ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, re-print (Anthropology and Ethnography), Routledge: New York 2004 (1966), 85–126; Timothy Insoll, ‘Are Archaeologists Afraid of Gods? Some Thoughts on Archaeology and Religion’ in Timothy Insoll ed., *Belief in the Past. The Proceedings of the 2002 Manchester Conference on Archaeology and Religion* (BAR International Series 1212), Archaeopress: Oxford 2004, 1–6.

⁴ See e.g. Benjamin Lee Whorf, ‘Language, Mind, and Reality’, *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 9 (1952), 168–188; George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1980; Sonja Hukantaival, ‘Understanding Past Actions – Changing Attitudes towards Ritual, Religion, and Everyday Life’, in Arvi Haak, Valter Lang & Mika Lavento eds., *Today I Am Not the One I Was Yesterday: Archaeology, Identity, and Change* (Interarchaeologia 4), University of Tartu: Tartu 2015a, 183–96.

⁵ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 1992; Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 1997.

⁶ Don Yoder, ‘Toward a Definition of Folk Religion’, *Western Folklore* 33 (1974), 2–15, at 14.

⁷ See e.g. Leonard Norman Primiano, ‘Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife’, *Western Folklore* 54 (1995), 37–56; Leonard Norman Primiano, ‘Afterword: Manifestations of the Religious Vernacular: Ambiguity, Power, and Creativity’, in Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk eds., *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, Equinox Publishing: Sheffield 2012, 382–94; Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion. Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2008; James Alexander Kapaló, ‘Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice’, *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 7 (2013), 3–18; Kristiina Johanson & Tõnno Jonuks, ‘Superstition in the House of God? Some Estonian Case Studies of Vernacular Practices’, *Mirator* 16 (2015), 118–40.

⁸ E.g. McGuire 2008.

⁹ McGuire 2008, 4.

might perform a ritual only because it is conventional to do so in the actor's community, for example. Thus, archaeologists often prefer to discuss the traditions of a community, as they are visible in repeated practices. Isolated cases are therefore less significant than ones fitting into a pattern. Correspondingly, the interpretation of the cases presented in this paper relies on a wider context of evidence.¹⁰ In this paper, the concept of folk religion is used to point towards views and practices of religion that are not explicitly part of an official theology. However, the borders of this concept are here allowed to remain ambiguous.¹¹

One body of evidence is the abundant knowledge of local folk religion from post-medieval periods.¹² However, documented in the seventeenth–nineteenth centuries, this (customary lore and superstition trial record) material is temporally removed from the medieval finds, and is thus not directly corresponding. Beliefs and practices are always the product of their own time and place. Still, some general remarks can be inferred from the later evidence when combined with medieval records from neighbouring areas. First, folk beliefs and practices are closely connected with very practical, everyday concerns of people: success in livelihood, health, and protection against any misfortune. Certainly, before modern social security, medicine, and insurances these issues were no less than questions of life and death.¹³ Secondly, instead of a mechanistic worldview the evidence of folk religion reveals a living world imbued with dynamic agency. Moreover, the understanding of causality included an active role of metaphor and metonymy such as the notion of sympathetic links between a whole and its parts (*pars pro toto*), objects that have been in contact (contagion), and things that resemble each other (imitation). These aspects seem to have been present also in the medieval period.¹⁴

The combination of an object and its immediate context reveal information about the meaning of the ritual act.¹⁵ Archaeologists can use this as a guide in interpretations. However, this requires a good understanding of the past worldview where objects and materials are more than inert matter. The symbolic meanings of objects offer one clue. Symbols are not arbitrary, since they are linked to how objects have been used or what their meaning has been in society.¹⁶ Still, this method is not infallible, since changes in symbolism and meanings are possible in different contexts. Moreover, the intention of the actor is one major factor. For example, the meaning is different when someone conceals an object in the structures of his/her own house (for protection) as opposed to doing it in the house of a neighbour (in order to destroy the luck of that household). These two acts may still

¹⁰ Hukantaival 2016.

¹¹ See also Hukantaival 2015a, 191–93. On the problematic dichotomy of popular/folk vs. elite/official religion, see also the article by Terese Zachrisson this volume.

¹² E.g. Laura Stark, *The Magical Self: Body, Society and the Supernatural in Early Modern Rural Finland*, (FF Communications 290), Suomalainen tiedeakatemia: Helsinki 2006; Kaarina Koski, *Kuoleman voimat: kirkonväiki suomalaisessa uskomusperinteessä*, SKS: Helsinki 2011; Tenka Issakainen, *Tavallista taikuutta. Tulkinta suomalaisten taikojen merkityksistä Mikko Koljosen osaamisen valossa* (Annales Universitatis Turkuensis C 347), University of Turku: Turku 2012; Raisa Maria Toivo, *Faith and Magic in Early Modern Finland* (Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic), Palgrave Macmillan: London 2016.

¹³ See e.g. Stark 2006, 452–58.

¹⁴ E.g. Stephen Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia 2011.

¹⁵ Hukantaival 2016.

¹⁶ Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 35–40; Hukantaival 2016, 125, 128.



Figure 2. The skull of a goat found concealed by a log marking the border between two plots. Photo by Sonja Hukantaival.

leave a similar trace in the archaeological record. Archaeology is, however, quite familiar with uncertainty; few interpretations that go even slightly beyond reporting material evidence are definite.

Case study 1: The goat

The first case to be discussed is not an object concealed in a building. Still, it seems to be part of a practice that was very closely related to building concealments. The find was unearthed in 2006 during the Museum Centre of Turku's archaeological excavations in the present-day Cathedral Square (the Varhainen Turku project).¹⁷ The case concerns the skull of a goat that was found buried by a log that marked the border between two plots.¹⁸ Based on other finds and dendrochronological dating, the buried skull belongs to the early fourteenth century. The east–west oriented border marker log had been placed between two ditches and secured in its place with posts. Earlier, a fence had marked the border. On the southern side of the border was a plot with several timber buildings. A smaller area of the northern plot coincided with the excavation area, and the observed part of it seemed to be a backyard or perhaps even wasteland. The skull had been turned upside-down, and supported by stones so it was kept securely in place (Fig. 2).¹⁹

¹⁷ Mika Ainasoja, Janne Harjula, Kirsi Majantie, Aki Pihlman, Tanja Ratilainen, Elina Saloranta, Liisa Seppänen & Tapani Tuovinen, *Turku I. Tuomiokirkontori (Varhainen Turku -hanke). Kaupunkiarkeologiset tutkimukset 2005–2006*, (Unpublished excavation report), Turun museokeskus: Turku 2007.

¹⁸ Elina Saloranta, 'Puurakentaminen ja puurakennukset Turussa 1300-luvulla', in Marita Söderström ed., *Varhainen Turku* (Raportteja, 22), Turun museokeskus: Turku 2010, 57–77, at 70; Sonja Hukantaival, 'Hare's Feet under a Hearth – Discussing 'ritual' Deposits in Buildings', in Visa Immonen, Mia Lempiäinen & Ulrika Rosendahl eds., *Hortus Novus. Fresh Approaches to Medieval Archaeology in Finland* (Archaeologia Medii Aevi Finlandiae, XIV), SKAS: Turku 2007, 66–75, at 72; Sonja Hukantaival, 'Finding Folk Religion – An Archaeology of 'strange' Behaviour', *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 55 (2013), 99–124 (doi:10.7592/FEJF2013.55.hukantaival).

¹⁹ Ainasoja et al. 2007, 10, 12, 27.

The first thing that the field archaeologist notes in a case like this is that there are clear signs of deliberate effort, and that this find is different from normal animal bone refuse material. For further interpretation, a wider perspective is needed. One thing that occurs in many different cultures is that when one communicates with the supernatural, or the ‘otherworld’, one does things in reverse to everyday action.²⁰ For example, in the Finnish tradition there are examples where one should turn their clothes inside-out when coming in contact with otherworldly phenomena.²¹ Thus, the clearly deliberate turning upside-down of this skull seems to imply a connection with the otherworld.

In Christian symbolism, the goat has a thankless role: first, the goat shares its outer appearance with the Devil himself, and when people will be ‘divided into sheep and goats’ during the Last Judgement, it is the goat’s part to symbolise sin and damnation.²² In the nineteenth-century folk belief lore collected in Finland, goats appear rather seldom compared to other domestic animals. This is likely due to the fact that goats were never particularly common here, and their economic value was small.²³ Still, in widespread European beliefs the goat was a powerful symbol, exactly due to its connection with the Devil, sin, lust, and untamed masculinity.²⁴ Such demonised animals as goats, cats, toads, or snakes have had an important role in folk rituals, since the powerful agency religious authorities saw as demonic in them could, in the mind of people, be manipulated for many purposes.²⁵

In any case, in post-medieval times both animal and human bones have been used to create a supernatural guardian spirit, one that will protect an enclosed area against thieves and otherworldly harm, such as witchcraft or action of malicious spirits and devils.²⁶ Moreover, there are fifteenth-century references to deposited bones (under a stone by a stake) as a characteristic of a boundary mark between field or meadow strips in the law code of King Christopher (1442) and the Codex Aboensis (1430s).²⁷ However, the law texts do not explain why a bone was connected with a border. Still, in the light of the later evidence mentioned above, the goat skull found in Turku might be intended to create a goat-shaped guardian of that border. This could be a sign that the rela-

²⁰ E.g. Uno Holmberg, ‘Vasen käsi ja vastapäivään’, *Valvoja-Aika*, no. 1 (1925), 16–31; Toivo Vuorela, *Paha silmä suomalaisen perinteen valossa* (Suomi 109:1), SKS: Helsinki 1960, 37–38; Stuart Clark, ‘Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft’, *Past & Present* 87 (1980), 98–127; Jacob Pandian, ‘Symbolic Inversions. An Interpretation of Contrary Behavior in Ritual’, *Anthropos* 96 (2001), 557–62.

²¹ See e.g. Holmberg 1925, 20; Risto Pulkkinen & Stina Lindfors, *Suomalaisen Kansanuskon Sanakirja*, Gaudeamus: Helsinki 2016, 241, 411–12.

²² Matthew 25:31–46.

²³ Auli Bläuer, *Voita, villaa ja vetoeläimiä. Karjan ja karjanhoidon varhainen historia Suomessa* (Karhunhammas 17), University of Turku, Archaeology: Turku 2015, 129–36.

²⁴ David Siddle, ‘Goats, Marginality and the “Dangerous Other”’, *Environment and History* 15 (2009), 521–36; Kristina Jennbert, ‘Sheep and Goats in Norse Paganism’, in Barbro Santillo Frizell ed., *PECUS. Man and Animal in Antiquity. Proceedings of the Conference at the Swedish Institute in Rome, September 9–12, 2002* (Projects and Seminars 1), The Swedish Institute in Rome: Rome 2004, 160–66.

²⁵ See e.g. Kaarina Koski, ‘Conceptual Analysis and Variation in Belief Tradition: A Case of Death-Related Beings’, *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 38 (2008), 45–66, at 60–61; Hukantaival 2016, 147.

²⁶ Hukantaival 2016, 125, 160–61; Rafaël Hertzberg, *Vidskepelsen i Finland på 1600-talet* (Bidrag till Finlands Kulturhistoria), Suomen Keisarillinen Aleksanterin yliopisto: Helsinki 1889, 36–37, 44; see also e.g. *Maanviljelystaijoja*, A. V. Rantasalo, ed. (Suomen Kansan Muinaisia Taikoja 3), SKS: Helsinki 1912, C1, 2. 1024 §.

²⁷ *Byggningsbalken*, 27, Martti Ulkuniemi, trans., *Kuningas Kristofferin maanlaki 1442*, SKS: Helsinki 1978, 88, 180; Marketta Huitu & Tove Riska eds., *Codex Aboensis. Kommentarer och översättningar*, Koneen Säätiö: Helsinki 1977, 168.

tionship between neighbours was not too friendly (if both plots were inhabited), since quarrelsome neighbours were in later periods the main cause of fear of witchcraft.²⁸

Case study 2: A concealed hammer in a hearth

The second case is from about the same period as the previous one, the early fourteenth century. This concerns a concealed blade of a hammer²⁹ that was immured in quite an extraordinary oven structure. This case was also unearthed during the Museum Centre of Turku's archaeological excavations in the present-day Cathedral Square (the Varhainen Turku project) in 2005–2006. What made the structure special was that it was made of unfired bricks, raw mud bricks, but lime mortar was still used. Tanja Ratilainen, who has studied the oven, suggests that the raw bricks were leftovers from a larger building project, and they had been used to build this oven instead.³⁰ Fired bricks are more durable than unfired ones, so it is intriguing why the structure was built like this. Was it built in a hurry? Or had the leftover bricks simply been cheap? Unfortunately, there is no straightforward answer to this question.

What can be seen from the material remains is that the oven situated in the corner of a wooden (timber) building that was interpreted as an ordinary household building, but of someone quite wealthy. The hammer blade was, again, very clearly deliberately placed within the structure. As the heart of the building, ovens and other hearths have often been the stage for rituals in later folk religion. However, the most common later concealments in these contexts were animal bones that were concealed in order to keep vermin away.³¹ I think that another meaning may have been in the mind of the concealer of this object.

A hammer symbolises masculine force, might, justice, and revenge.³² Since the hearth is a female symbol, one could suggest that combining it with the masculine hammer could point to fertility symbolism. This is possible, but I think another explanation is more likely, especially since fertility is almost never mentioned as the reason for a ritual building concealment in later folklore.³³ Moreover, hard metal objects have been preferred in diverse rituals when powerful agency was needed.³⁴ Iron in itself was seen as a strong substance, and this strength was likely enforced by the masculine tool formed by the iron. Thus, when combining all the available data on the object and its particular context, it is most probable that this hammer was used to ritually strengthen the otherwise unstable structure. The raw bricks used were not as good as fired bricks, and the builder must have known this.

²⁸ Hukantaival 2016.

²⁹ Turun museokeskus, TMM 22367:ME2128:001.

³⁰ Tanja Ratilainen, 'Unfired Bricks Used for a Medieval Oven in Turku, Finland', in Tanja Ratilainen, Rivo Bernotas & Christofer Herrmann eds. *Fresh Approaches to Brick Production and Use in the Middle Ages* (BAR International Series 2611), Archaeopress: Oxford 2014, 93–101; Tanja Ratilainen, 'Tiilen käytöstä 1300-luvun Turussa', in Marita Söderström, ed., *Varhainen Turku* (Raportteja 22), Turun museokeskus: Turku 2010, 31–55.

³¹ Hukantaival 2016, 107–111.

³² Hans Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism. Cultural Icons and the Meanings behind Them*, James Hulbert transl., Facts On File: New York 1992. Naturally, the hammer was also known as the tool of the Scandinavian thunder god.

³³ Hukantaival 2016, 101, 103.

³⁴ Hukantaival 2016, 125; Vuorela 1960, 46; cf. Stark 2006, 277–81.

Case study 3: A shaman in medieval Turku?

Perhaps the most intriguing finds from medieval Turku in this connection may be associated with a Sámi shaman (*noaidi*). These were unearthed in 1998 during large archaeological excavations at the Åbo Akademi site. The objects in question were found under the floor of quite an ordinary wooden town building, with two rooms and a hearth in the middle of the south-eastern room. The building has been dated to the early fifteenth century.³⁵ Thus, these finds are around a hundred years younger than the previous ones.

Firstly, a T-shaped object made of antler³⁶ had been concealed within the birch bark insulation of the floor in the south corner of the north-western room. This 12.4 cm long object was recognized



Figure 3. The Sámi shaman hammer and juniper staff found concealed under the floor of an early fifteenth century two-roomed dwelling house. Photos: The Museum Centre of Turku / Martti Puhakka.

as a Sámi type drumstick, or so-called drum hammer.³⁷ In the middle of the second room of the same house, a 70 cm long staff made of juniper³⁸ was found concealed (Fig. 3).³⁹ The other end of the staff is carved into the elongated face of an animal or perhaps depicting an anthropo-zoomorphic transformation. The left side of the head has carved ornaments resembling a basket weave pattern and there is a carved inscription (possibly a house mark) on the opposite neck. It was soon noted that the staff is similar to a Siberian shaman's staff.⁴⁰ Still, if the more obvious drum hammer had not been found, this staff had perhaps not been interpreted as something likely associated with a shaman.

³⁵ Liisa Seppänen, *Rakentaminen ja kaupunkikuovan muutokset keskiajan Turussa. Erityistarkastelussa Åbo Akademin pääarakennuksen tontin arkeologinen aineisto*, University of Turku, Archaeology: Turku 2012, 406–14, 430.

³⁶ Turun museokeskus, TMM 21816:LU61.

³⁷ Maarit Ahola, Arja Hyvönen, Aki Pihlman, Martti Puhakka & Margareta Willner-Rönholm eds., *Got Woldes. Elämää Hansa-ajan Turussa. Turun Linna 18.06.2004–27.2.2005* (Näyttelyesite 34), Turun maakuntamuseo: Turku 2004, 244–45; Riitta Rainio, 'A Shaman Drum Hammer from the Medieval City of Turku, Finland', in Raquel Jiménez, Rupert Till & Mark Howell eds., *Music and Ritual: Bridging Material and Living Cultures* (Publications of the ICTM Study Group on Music Archaeology 1), Ekho Verlag: Berlin 2013, 307–26.

³⁸ Turun museokeskus, TMM 21816: KP14913.

³⁹ Johannes Karvonen, 'Puuastiat ja puuesineet', *SKAS*, no. 4 (1999), 48–54, at 53–54; Seppänen 2012, 413–15.

⁴⁰ Karvonen 1999, 53–54.

The T-shaped drum hammer of the Sámi is exceptional among shaman drumsticks.⁴¹ Archaeological finds from Norway show that this form was known already circa AD 1000–1200.⁴² The shaman's staff is a ritual object that often has the head of an animal on the upper end, and sometimes there are metal objects that make a jingling or rattling sound on the staff.⁴³ According to Mi-



Figure 4. The coat of arms of the Finnish town Kannus displays both the meanings of the word: the T-shaped Sámi shaman drum hammer and the star-shaped rowels of spurs. Design by Gustaf von Numers (1848–1913). Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

haly Hoppál, in Siberia both the drumbeater and the staff are believed to feature powerful magical agency.⁴⁴ Andrzej Rozwadowski points out that all the shaman's material attributes – costume, headdress, drum, and staff – symbolise animals, because the shaman is ritually entering the world of animals. In Siberian shamanism, the drum is perceived as an animated object, and the shaman's act of drumming is equated to riding the drum-animal. Likewise, the Siberian shaman's staff symbolises an animal on which the shaman journeys to other worlds (the underworld or heaven).⁴⁵ The idea of the drum as a steed that carries the shaman on his/her journeys may have been known also in Fennoscandia. One indication of this is the word *kannus*, which means both spur and the shaman's drum in Finnish (Fig. 4). However, the latter meaning is a Sámi loan and it is possible that these two meanings have completely different etymologies.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Mihaly Hoppál, *Šamaanien maailma*, Juhani Huotari transl., Atena Kustannus: Jyväskylä 2003, 116, 134.

⁴² Inger Zachrisson, 'The Saami Shaman Drums: Some Reflexions from an Archaeological Perspective', in Tore Ahlbäck & Jan Bergman eds., *The Saami Shaman Drum* (Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 14), Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History: Turku 1991, 86–88.

⁴³ Hoppál 2003, 137–39.

⁴⁴ Hoppál 2003, 133–35, 137–39.

⁴⁵ Andrzej Rozwadowski, 'Did Shamans Always Play the Drum? Tracking down Prehistoric Shamanism in Central Asia', *Documenta Praehistorica* 39 (2012), 277–86, at 281.

⁴⁶ Kaisa Häkkinen, 'Henrik Gabriel Porthan ja saamen kieli', *Auraica. Scripta a Societate Porthan Edita* 1 (2008), 49–50.

Research on the ritual paraphernalia of a Sámi shaman has largely concentrated on the drum,⁴⁷ while other possible material signs of the shaman have been overlooked. Thus it is not easy to find information on shaman's staffs, or even if these were common in a Sámi context. I found one mention from a narrative source in Swedish Lapland of a Sámi shaman's staff that supposedly was made of iron with rings attached to it.⁴⁸ As regards other possible equivalents, the Scandinavian Late Iron Age so-called *seiðr* staffs are quite different objects from the Turku staff,⁴⁹ and these may not have much in common besides that they are possible ritual objects. Two anthropomorphic elm-wooden objects from tenth–eleventh-century Novgorod, interpreted as idols or finials with pagan symbols, resemble the Turku staff more closely.⁵⁰ In fact, the shaft of the Turku staff is crudely carved and it has no polishing (so-called use-wear) as result of recurrently holding it in the hand, as a shaman's staff would have been. It might have been some kind of finial. Still, juniper is one of the wood species that have been seen as featuring powerful agency in later Finnish folk belief.⁵¹ Naturally, different staves and wands have been used in many kinds of rituals, as well as a symbol of status or power (for example the bishop's crozier).⁵² Thus, the Turku staff's connection with a Sámi shaman remains debatable, but its relation with the drum hammer makes this possible.

In any case, the context where these objects were found is interesting, since it was a quite ordinary house in a part of the town where craftspeople lived and worked. How did the drum hammer of a Sámi shaman end up there? It is inconclusive how far one had to travel from Turku in the early fifteenth century to encounter Sámi people. The so-called Lapps that lived in the inland were mobile fisher-hunter-gatherers and perhaps small-scale swidden farmers. However, the word 'Lapp'

⁴⁷ E.g. Ernst Mauritz Manker, *Die lappische Zaubertrommel: eine ethnologische Monographie*, Bokförlags Aktiebolaget Thule: Stockholm 1938; Tore Ahlbäck & Jan Bergman eds., *The Saami Shaman Drum* (Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 14), Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History: Turku 1991; Rolf Uno Algot Christoffersson, *Med tre röster och tusende bilder. Om den samiska trumman* (Religionshistoriska Forskningsrapporter Från Uppsala), University of Uppsala: Uppsala 2010; Francis Joy, 'Sámi Shamanism, Fishing Magic and Drum Symbolism', *Shaman* 23 (2015), 11–46.

⁴⁸ Bo Sommarström, 'Ethnoastronomical Perspectives on Saami Religion', in Tore Ahlbäck ed., *Saami Religion* (Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 12), Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History: Turku 1987, 211–50, at 215; cf. Hoppál 2003, 61.

⁴⁹ See e.g. Neil Price, 'The Archaeology of Seiðr: Circumpolar Traditions in Viking Pre-Christian Religion', *Brathair - Revista de Estudos Celtas E Germânicos* 4 (2004), 115–19; Leszek Gardela, 'Into Viking Minds: Re-interpreting the Staffs of Sorcery and Unravelling Seiðr', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008), 45–84; Oskar Olsson, 'Vikingatida stavar och deras funktioner. En komparativ studie om stavar funna i Skandinavien', bachelor's thesis, University of Uppsala: Uppsala 2016 (<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:934926/FULLTEXT01.pdf>).

⁵⁰ L. V. Pokrovskaja, 'Ritual Objects from Novgorod: The Finds from Troitsky Excavations 1973–1999', in Mark Brisbane & Jon G. Hather eds., *Wood Use in Medieval Novgorod* (The Archaeology of Medieval Novgorod 2), Oxbow: Oxford 2007, 399–417; Alexander Musin, O.A. Tarabardina, L.V. Kokutsa, and E.K. Kublo, 'Деревянные Предметы с Христианской и Языческой Символикой из Раскопок в Новгороде и Старой Руссе (Wooden Objects Bearing Christian and Pagan Symbols from the Excavations at Novgorod and Staraya Russa)', *Rossiiskii Arheologicheskii Ezhegodnik*, no. 5–6 (2016–2015), 157–70, at 161.

⁵¹ Pulkkinen & Lindfors 2016, 123.

⁵² F. S. Burnell, 'Staves and Sceptres', *Folklore* 59 (1948), 157–164; Egerton Beck, 'The Crozier in Heraldry and Ornament', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 24, 132 (1914), 335–40.

referred to this non-sedentary lifestyle, not necessarily an ethnic group.⁵³ In fact, the question of ethnicity is quite difficult in light of the Finnish archaeological record, since lifestyles and material culture seems to have been shared across believed ethnic borders.⁵⁴ Elsewhere in Scandinavia this distinction appears to be more prominent.⁵⁵

Still, the Sámi (or Lapps) were certainly known for their prowess in magic already in the medieval period. The oldest Scandinavian written record mentioning a Sámi shaman is found in *Historia Norvegiae* (about 1180), where the help of a Sámi shaman is sought to relieve a bewitched woman.⁵⁶ In fact, the medieval Norwegian laws specifically condemn seeking magical help from the Sámi.⁵⁷ Both medieval Scandinavian sagas and later Finnish narratives share the motif of seeking Sámi shamans for learning magic skills.⁵⁸ The theme of seeking magical assistance from Sámi magic specialists also occurs in Finnish witchcraft and superstition court records from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁹ Moreover, court records from 1585 and 1663 in Lohtaja, Central Ostrobothnia, tells that the accused cunning men, Heikki ‘the Lapp’ (1585) and Antti Tokoi (1663), owned and used a shaman drum. In the latter case witnesses guessed that the drum had been acquired from a Sámi shaman.⁶⁰ Perhaps the Turku object(s) came to the town in a similar manner. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Sámi drums have also travelled around Europe as souve-

⁵³ Jukka Korpela, ‘Migratory Lapps and the Population Explosion of Eastern Finns: The Early Modern Colonization of Eastern Finland Reconsidered’, in Charlotte Damm & Janne Saarikivi eds., *Networks, Interaction and Emerging Identities in Fennoscandia and Beyond. Tromsø, Norway, October 13–16, 2000* (Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia = Mémoires de La Société Finno-Ougrienne 265), Finno-Ugrian Society: Helsinki 2012, 241–61.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen, ‘Etnisiteetin määrittelyn ongelmat ja savolainen kaskikulttuuri. Kommentti’, in Paul Fogelberg ed., *Pohjan poluilla. Suomalaisten juuret nykytutkimuksen mukaan* (Bidrag till Kännedom av Finlands Natur och Folk), Societas Scientiarum Fennica: Helsinki 1999, 353–57; Visa Immonen, ‘Yhteiskunta ja yksilö’, in Petri Halinen, Visa Immonen, Mika Lavento, Terhi Mikkola, Ari Siiriäinen & Pirjo Uino eds., *Johdatus arkeologiaan*, Gaudeamus: Helsinki 2008, 394–18; see also Florin Curta, ‘Four Questions for Those Who Still Believe in Prehistoric Slavs and Other Fairy Tales’, *Starohrvatska Prosvjeta* 42 (2015), 286–303.

⁵⁵ E.g. Inger Zachrisson & Elisabeth Iregren, *Lappish Bear Graves in Northern Sweden: An Archaeological and Osteological Study* (Early Norrland 5), Vitterhets-, historie- och antikvitets akademien: Stockholm 1974; Noel D. Broadbent, *Lapps and Labyrinths. Saami Prehistory, Colonization and Cultural Resilience* (Contributions to Circumpolar Anthropology 8), Arctic Studies Center / Smithsonian Institution: Washington D.C. 2010.

⁵⁶ Åke Hultkrantz, ‘Aspects of Saami (Lapp) Shamanism’, in Mihaly Hoppál & Juha Pentikäinen eds., *Northern Religions and Shamanism* (Ethnologica Uralica 3), Akadémiai Kiadó & Finnish Literature Society: Budapest & Helsinki 1992, 138–45, at 139.

⁵⁷ Stephen Mitchell, ‘Learning Magic in the Sagas’, in Geraldine Barnes & Margaret Clunies Ross eds., *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, University of Sydney: Sydney 2000, 335–45, at 336.

⁵⁸ Mitchell 2000; Marjaana Kukkonen, ‘Lappalaiset suomalaisissa kansantarinoissa’, Master’s thesis, University of Oulu: Oulu 2016, 32–44 (<http://jultika.oulu.fi/files/nbnfioulu-201606302595.pdf>).

⁵⁹ Marko Nenonen & Timo Kervinen, *Synnin palkka on kuolema. Suomalaiset noidat ja noitavainot 1500–1700-luvulla*, Otava: Helsinki 1994, 132–34.

⁶⁰ Marko Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus ja noitavainot Ala-Satakunnan, Pohjois-Pohjanmaan ja Viipurin Karjalan maaseudulla 1620–1700* (Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 165), Societas Historica Finlandiae: Helsinki 1992, 53; Nenonen & Kervinen 1994, 134.

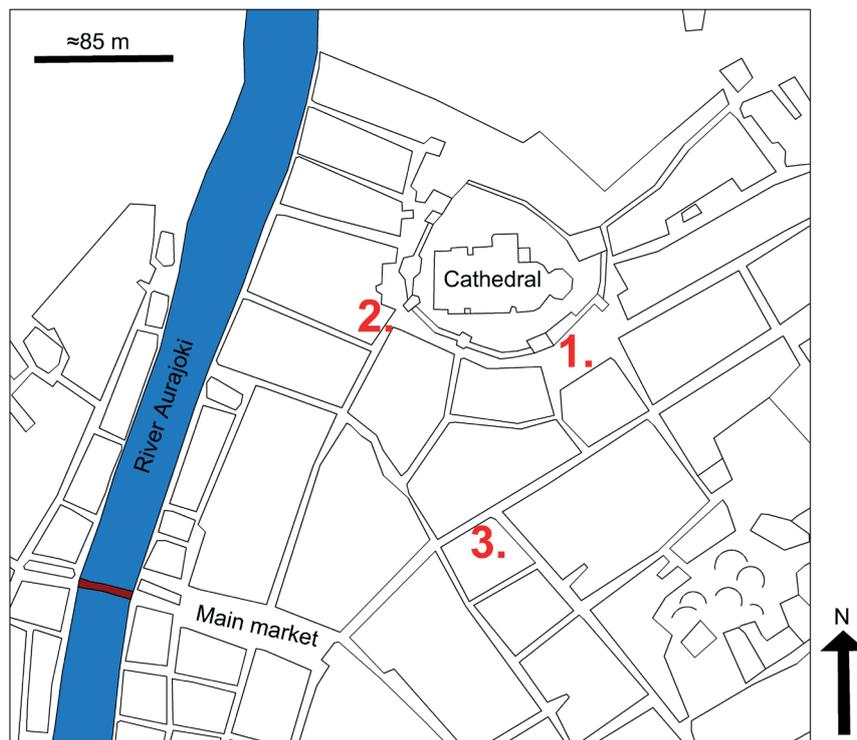


Figure 5. The find locations of case studies 1–3 on the map by Olof Gangius (1634). 1) The goat skull, 2) the concealed hammer blade, and 3) the shaman's objects. Drawing by Sonja Hukantaival.

nirs and curiosities, but this phenomenon was most likely triggered by the publication of Johannes Schefferus's *Laponia* in 1673.⁶¹

At some point, the Turku object(s) had fallen out of active use in a shamanistic ritual context, since it/they ended up concealed within the floor structures of the building. Since the objects were found in different rooms in a position where they would have not been easily retrieved, I do not think that they were hidden as a 'shaman's cache', but they served a purpose in their place. Riitta Rainio has discussed the drum hammer quite extensively from a music or auditory archaeological perspective.⁶² She argues that the hammer might have been concealed as a sound deposit: the sound of drumming was transported to the transcendental world, where it protected the household. This is one possible interpretation, but I suggest that believed powerful agency in the object would alone suffice for it being concealed. Likewise, even if the staff never belonged to a shaman, it is likely to have been seen as a powerful object due to both its juniper-material and the depicted face. Thus, its agency could be useful for a protective concealment.

Interlude: The Cathedral

Before moving on to the last case study, one aspect of the cases discussed above needs attention: the location of the find sites within the town. The oldest map of Turku dates from the seventeenth century, so it is post-medieval, but the street plan was still in its medieval form at that time. Figure 5 shows how the find spots of case studies 1–3 situate in the centre of the town and in relation to the cathedral with this oldest known map (Olof Gangius, 1634) as background. Here we can see

⁶¹ Juha Pentikäinen, 'The Saami Shamanic Drum in Rome', in Tore Ahlbäck ed., *Saami Religion* (Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 12), Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History: Turku 1987, 133–36.

⁶² Rainio 2013.

the cathedral in the upper middle part of the map and the main market square down to the left. The river Aurajoki is visible to the left as well. The cathedral (or its wooden predecessor) was finished in 1290–1300,⁶³ so it should have been there (at least as a construction site) at the time of all of the case studies discussed above.

As is visible on the map, all of these objects were found very close to the cathedral, the see of the bishop. Previously it has often been thought that folk religion is something that is found in peripheries where the influence of religious authorities was loose.⁶⁴ However, these cases show another picture, and it is more widely evident that folk religion lived in the centres as well as peripheries.⁶⁵ In a larger perspective, people were not simply passive receivers of religion, but participated actively in its interpretation and in drawing the line between acceptable and forbidden practices.⁶⁶

Naturally, we must consider what Christianity and the Catholic Church meant in the medieval period. Religion must have been different, say in the fourteenth century when Turku Cathedral was consecrated, than today. Traditionally, it has been believed that the local medieval Catholic Church easily turned a blind eye to folk practices, at least when compared with the aggressive approach of the seventeenth-century Lutheran Orthodoxy.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, not many medieval local records have survived where the attitude of religious authorities towards folk interpretation of religion would be explicit. However, the Swedish nun Bridget (1303–73, canonised as St. Bridget in 1391) and Conrad Bitz, the bishop of Turku in 1460–89, disapproved quite strongly of pan-European folk magic practices, including divination, healing and love magic, and magic protection against harm.⁶⁸ Moreover, especially Norwegian medieval laws condemned folk magic in quite a detailed way.⁶⁹ However, the Swedish laws were only concerned with magical harm, which was seen as parallel to poisoning.⁷⁰ Thus, it might well be that authorities showed less interest in the majority of folk religious practices before the Lutheran Orthodoxy. Still, even if this was the case, the medieval Church was certainly not indifferent towards unorthodox practices; they were simply defined less strictly than later.⁷¹ However, not even the aggressive Lutheran Orthodoxy did manage to wipe out these practices, even from the immediate proximity of churches.⁷²

⁶³ Markus Hiekkanen, *Suomen keskiajan kivikirkot*, 3. uudistettu painos (Kirjokansi 87), SKS: Helsinki 2014, 191–93.

⁶⁴ See e.g. Yoder 1974; William A. Christian, 'Folk Religion: An Overview', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 1, 2. edition, Macmillan Reference: Detroit 2004.

⁶⁵ See e.g. Hukantaival 2016.

⁶⁶ Jari Eilola, *Rajapinnoilla: sallitun ja kielletyn määrittelemisen 1600-luvun jälkipuoliskon noituus- ja taikuustapauksissa* (Bibliotheca Historica 81), SKS: Helsinki 2003; Stark 2006, 224–53; Toivo 2016, 98.

⁶⁷ E.g. Nenonen & Kervinen 1994, 189; Eilola 2003, 54–55.

⁶⁸ Gustaf E. Klemming ed., *Heliga Birgittas uppenbarelser efter gamla handskrifter*, vol. 3 (Samlingar Utgivna av Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet 14), P. A. Norstedt & Söner: Stockholm 1861, 292–93; Hertzberg 1889, 1.

⁶⁹ Mitchell 2011, 146–74.

⁷⁰ Huitu & Riska 1977, 184–85; Ulkuniemi 1978, 133, 135–36.

⁷¹ Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion 1250–1750*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2010, 77–139; Mitchell 2011, 2–3.

⁷² E.g. Koski 2011; Sonja Hukantaival, 'Frogs in Miniature Coffins from Churches in Finland – Folk Magic in Christian Holy Places', *Mirator* 16 (2015b), 192–220; Emmi Lahti, *Tietäjiä, taikoja, hautausmaita: taikuus Suomessa 1700-luvun jälkipuoliskolla*, Ph.D thesis, University of Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä 2016 (<https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/handle/123456789/48290>).

Another thing that must be pointed out is that practices outside the official theology could also be part of approved, semi-official, practices within the institutionalized religion. The last case study of this paper may well be one example of this phenomenon.

Case study 4: Possible votive deposit at the Koroinen old Bishop's See

When a new baptismal font was built for the church at Koroinen in the late fourteenth century, a coin concealment was placed under its base. The concealment consisted of five, possibly six, bracteate-coins that had been placed under one brick in the structure. These were found during archaeological excavation in 1900–1902.⁷³ The Koroinen site is on a small cape formed by the rivers Aurajoki and Vähäjoki about 1.6 kilometres upstream from the medieval town of Turku. This is where the bishop's see situated before it was moved downstream to the current location around the year 1290. The cape housed an active church until the beginning of the fifteenth century.⁷⁴

The baptismal font has most likely belonged to the second church building on the cape. This building dates from the middle of the twelfth century to the 1390s.⁷⁵ Three of the coins are minted in the 1360s and one in the thirteenth century. One of them cannot be dated since it is so badly worn. The sixth coin was not found at the same time as the others, but it is likely to belong to the same concealment. This coin dates from the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

Pentti Koivunen has interpreted this concealment as a wealth deposit (intended to be retrieved). He reasons that a builder's concealment would have situated in the middle of the structure instead of in its eastern side where these coins were found. He also interprets the oldest coin as accidentally connected with the concealment (made in the 1360s or 1370s); instead, it has been lost under the floor of the older church.⁷⁶ However, there is no reason why a ritual concealment should be found in the middle of a structure, and these have not only been made at the initial building stage but also in finished buildings, for example as part of annual or crisis rituals.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the lack of detail in the early twentieth-century archaeological documentation makes it impossible to assess reliably whether the thirteenth-century coin belongs with the concealment or not. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to find coins of different age in a ritual concealment; for example, in the coin concealment found under the altar of Kuopio Cathedral the oldest coin was a hundred years older (minted 1715) than the church building (consecrated 1816).⁷⁸

⁷³ Pentti Koivunen, 'Koroisten keskiaikaiset rahalöydöt. Medeltida myntfynd i Korois', *Turun Kaupungin Historiallinen Museo. Vuosijulkaisu 1976. Åbo Stads Historiska Museum. Årsskrift 1976*, 40 (1979), 5–122, at 45–46.

⁷⁴ Hiekkänen 2014, 184–86.

⁷⁵ Tanja Ratilainen, 'At the Dawn of Masonry Architecture. Church Remains and Associated Brick Structures at Koroinen, Turku', *Estonian Journal of Archaeology* 20 (2016), 65–66; on the dating, see Hiekkänen 2014, 184–87.

⁷⁶ Koivunen 1979, 46.

⁷⁷ Hukantaival 2016, 144–45.

⁷⁸ 'Wanhoja Rahoja', *Savo-Karjala*, 10 July 1895; Hukantaival 2016, 357.

The symbolic or otherwise meaningful concealments made inside churches have been discussed especially within Southern Scandinavian and British contexts.⁷⁹ Ann-Britt Falk suggests that medieval coin concealments in churches symbolize secular power since coins were minted by the king. This includes the assumption that the secular elite member who initiated the church building project concealed the coins.⁸⁰ On the other hand, Roberta Gilchrist interprets concealed objects in churches as ritual offerings to saints that were equivalent to prayers.⁸¹ In the context of the medieval Catholic Church, this kind of practice is often called votive offering. Votive offerings are ‘things vowed or dedicated to God, or a saint, and in consequence looked upon as set apart by this act of consecration’. A votive offering was often connected to prayer, but it could also be part of more general acts of veneration and humility.⁸² The Catholic Church adopted the practice of votive offering from the Romans and other classic cultures.⁸³

How then can a votive concealment be recognized and differentiated from a wealth deposit? Sometimes it is stated that a wealth deposit is formed of valuable objects while a ritual concealment consist of less valuable coins.⁸⁴ However, the issue is not quite as simple.⁸⁵ It is true that the act of offering is often more important than the value of the gift. Thus, the offered gift may be a coin of small value, or even a mere pebble.⁸⁶ Still, there are situations where the gift needed to be valuable. For example, when a church was built in Koivisto, South Karelia, the offered coin needed to be golden, as an elderly man narrated in 1938:

My father told that when he was participating in the building work of that old church of Koivisto, the one that they then sold to the people of Vyborg, they put a coin inside a hole in the foundation timber; it had to be a golden coin. It was like an offering to the guardian that protected the church.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Fritze Lindahl, ‘Om mønter och medailler som bygningsofre’, *Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark*, 1956, 93–102; Niels-Knud Liebgott, ‘The Find-Contexts of the Hoards’, in Jørgen Steen Jensen et al. Eds., *Danmarks Middelalderlige Skattefund c. 1050–1550. Del 1. Denmark’s Medieval Treasure-Hoards c. 1050–1550. Part 1.* (Nordiske Fortidsminder, B 12,1), Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab: Copenhagen 1992, 128–34; Ann-Britt Falk, *En grundläggande handling: byggnadsoffer och dagligt liv i medeltid* (Vägar till Midgård 12), Nordic Academic Press: Lund 2008, 152–63; Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course*, Boydell Press: Woodbridge 2012, 234–36.

⁸⁰ Falk 2008, 154.

⁸¹ Gilchrist 2012, 236.

⁸² Bede Jarrett, ‘Votive Offerings’, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert Appleton Company: New York 1912.

⁸³ Vincent T. van Vilsteren, ‘Hidden, and Not Intended to Be Recovered. An Alternative Approach to Hoards of Mediaeval Coins’, *Jaarboek Voor Munt- En Penningkunde* 87 (2000), 51–64, at 61.

⁸⁴ E.g. Douglas P. Newton, ‘Found Coins as Indicators of Coins in Circulation. Testing Some Assumptions’, *European Journal of Archaeology* 9 (2006), 211–17, at 213.

⁸⁵ See e.g. Ester Oras, ‘Sacrifice or Offering: What Can We See in the Archaeology of Northern Europe?’, *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 55 (2013), 125–50, at 133–38.

⁸⁶ Timo Muhonen, ‘A Hard Matter: Stones in Finnish-Karelian Folk Belief’, in Anu Kannike & Patrick Laviolette eds., *Things in Culture, Culture in Things* (Approaches to Culture Theory 3), University of Tartu Press: Tartu 2013, 114–38.

⁸⁷ Helsinki. SKS KRA. Koivisto. Ulla Manonen 5978. 1938; Hukantaival 2016, 187; translated by the author.

In reality, there seems to be no watertight way to differentiate between votive and wealth deposits. The interpretation must be case-specific, and both the object and its particular context should again be considered carefully. Still, the occurrence of coins of different age, which have not been in circulation when concealed, is one indicator of ritual practice. Baptism was and is one of the most important sacraments of the Church,⁸⁸ and the font as the container of holy water has acquired symbolism of purity and renewal.⁸⁹ Thus, the base of the font could well attract a votive concealment. In fact, I suggest this as the most plausible interpretation of this particular case: the coins were not intended to be retrieved; they were set apart to God or perhaps some saint (for example John the Baptist).

Some practices of ritual concealments in buildings seem to have been approved by the church, even though they were not part of the official liturgy. Still, there is a difference between a semi-official votive offering or foundation ritual and folk magic practiced in a church. There are abundant signs of the latter in post-medieval times.⁹⁰ It is evident that the church had an important role as a centre for otherworldly power in folk practices and many different kinds of practices were aimed at communicating with this power, or manipulating it.⁹¹

Discussion and Conclusion

The last notion in the previous chapter brings us back to the definition of folk religion by Yoder that I presented in the beginning. It was based on a dualistic relationship contrasting folk religion with an ‘official’, institutionalized religion. As mentioned, we define things by drawing circles around them and contrasting what is inside to that what is outside the circle. However, in the complex reality, this is artificial; it never completely tells the true situation. Even though the quote below by Alan Watts is not written in a scholarly context, it is quite insightful:

Problems that remain persistently insoluble should always be suspected as questions asked in the wrong way, like the problem of cause and effect. Make a spurious division of one process into two, forget that you have done it, and then puzzle for centuries as to how the two get together.⁹²

I think that this should be kept in mind when discussing the relationship between folk religion and institutionalized religion. They are part of the worldview, which may include contradictory elements without discomfort for the individual. Moreover, as Ilkka Pyysiäinen has discussed, folk religion is easier for human cognition and more relevant for everyday concerns than ‘official’ theology.⁹³ Even the ‘official’ theology has been defined and re-defined many times, so it was certainly

⁸⁸ William Fanning, ‘Baptism’, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert Appleton Company: New York 1907.

⁸⁹ John Bertram Peterson, ‘Baptismal Font’, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert Appleton Company: New York 1907.

⁹⁰ E.g. Hukantaival 2015b; Johanson & Jonuks 2015.

⁹¹ See also Koski 2008; 2011; Lahti 2016.

⁹² Alan W. Watts, *The Book on the Taboo against Knowing Who You Are*, Reissue edition, Vintage Books: New York 1989, 60.

⁹³ Ilkka Pyysiäinen, ‘Folk Religion and Theological Correctness’, *Temenos*, no. 39–40 (2004), 151–65.

not a clearly outlined, fixed system.⁹⁴

Another important point is that the understanding of what was ‘superstition’ and what was simply custom or tradition has also varied. One very illuminating example of this is the trial against the accused sorcerer Christer Olofsson in Ulvila in 1689.⁹⁵ One of the witnesses revealed how the accused had advised him to cure his calves from the ‘circling disease’ by burning one affected animal’s forehead with a branding iron or alternatively by cutting off its head and concealing it under the kitchen hearth. However, the lay judges affirmed that this was not superstition, but the customary way to deal with circling disease in the region, and this notion passed even the Court of Appeal. Thus, Christer was acquitted at the Ulvila court in 1695. One reason why there could be folk religious practices in the immediate vicinity of churches is the fact that, essentially, folk religion is a scholarly construction. The fallacy that whatever is seen as ‘superstition’ (or religion for that matter) today, would be seen as that in the past, is an easy trap to fall into.

The above-discussed case studies show that it is seldom straightforward to interpret the meanings of material signs of local medieval folk religion. A good knowledge of the later, more abundant evidence is quite necessary. However, in this lies a danger: preconceptions about the subject might blind the interpreter to difference in the medieval context. The remedy for this is, first, to be very aware of the danger and second, to familiarise oneself with local medieval religion, symbolism, and society more generally. Where these differ from their post-medieval equivalents, differences in folk religion should be expected. This is due to folk religion’s close relationship with everyday concerns, such as health, success in livelihood, and more generally, good luck in all endeavours.

This paper shows, first, that archaeology reveals material evidence that tell about everyday customs and beliefs (folk religion). Interpretation of these signs is based on the combination of object and context and supported by analogies of known practices in later periods. This method is not infallible, but when used skilfully, it is sufficient. Despite of challenges in interpretation, archaeological finds offer a unique, constantly growing, body of evidence of local practices and beliefs.

Moreover, it is discussed that the relationship of institutionalized religion with evidence of ‘unsanctioned’ practices is complex and intertwined. The border between these two aspects of the worldview is blurry and constantly re-negotiated. The dynamic relationship of these two in the area of medieval Finland is likely to be revealed in more detail as new material evidence is unearthed.

Sonja Hukantaival

School of History, Culture and Arts Studies, University of Turku

sonja.hukantaival@utu.fi

Acknowledgements: The Museum Centre of Turku. Writing this paper was made possible by the project ‘At the Dawn of the Middle Ages – An archaeological analysis of the thirteenth-century episcopal site of Koroinen, Finland’, funded by the Kone Foundation.

⁹⁴ See e.g. Cameron 2010.

⁹⁵ Helsinki, Kansallisarkisto, Alasatakunnan renovoidut tuomiokirjat 1689. II KO a:4; Vehmaan ja Alasatakunnan renovoidut tuomiokirjat 1695. II KO a:5; Antero Perttula, *Isäntä velhona: Kepluttelua, käpykaartia, kosiomatkoja* (Kannustaja), Esa Print: Lahti 2011.