

Finger of a saint, thumb of a priest

Medieval relics in the Diocese of Turku, and the archaeology of lived bodies

The finger of St Eric as part of Turku Cathedral's collection of relics

The collection of medieval relics and reliquaries at the sacristy of Turku Cathedral, Southwest Finland, includes a small, rectangular wrapping of light-green textile (Fig. 1). Its size is about 3 cm by 2 cm by 1 cm. The package has a 6 cm long slip of parchment attached to its side. The slip is a so-called *authentica*, which identifies the contents of the reliquary. The phrase on the parchment states, in Latin, *de digito b[ea]ti erici*, or 'From the finger of St Eric', attributing the contents to Eric IX, the King of Sweden (Rinne 1932: 369). According to a hagiography (Heikkilä 2005), Eric IX led the First Swedish Crusade and sailed to Finland in the 1150s. The king was accompanied by an English Bishop, Henry of Uppsala, who baptised the natives, and subsequently became the province's first bishop. Parts belonging to the martyred and canonized Henry are also present among Turku Cathedral's relics. In fact, the whole building was consecrated in 1300 as the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Henry.

The relics of Turku Cathedral are remains belonging to the bodies of holy persons, different from ours, even today, although the cathedral is the see for the archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and relics are not on public display. Among the relics of the cathedral, there is a fragment of a radius, which according to its *authentica*, belongs to St Henry. Presently the relic is deposited as an object of veneration in the Catholic Cathedral of St Henry in Helsinki. It continues the tradition established and developed during the Early Church and the Middle Ages.

In medieval studies, since the 1980s, the cult of relics has come to be seen as one of the most characteristic aspects of western Christianity (Bynum & Gerson 1997: 3–4). The veneration of relics is a vantage point from which, among others, the social construction of holiness, various responses to religious images, and the religious significance of sacred bodies have been ana-



Fig. 1. A relic of Turku Cathedral is wrapped inside a textile. The size of the package is about 3 cm by 2 cm by 1 cm. A name-label of parchment associated with the relic states in Latin *de digito b[e]a[ti] erici*, or 'From the finger of St Eric', attributing the contents to Eric IX, the King of Sweden. Photo by Aki Arponen.

lysed. Relics and reliquaries were in the core of medieval piety, and the cult of saints had infused throughout the society (Montgomery 2010: 59). Due to their central position in culture, relics offer glimpses at a range of material, social and cultural phenomena related to medieval embodiment.

The archaeologist and antiquarian Juhani Rinne (1932: 398), who published the relic collection of Turku Cathedral in 1932, estimates that there are approximately thirty saints represented. He attributes some of them, besides Saints Henry and Eric, to Margaret, Benedicta, and Pancras, and the Holy Innocents, while small fragments of a stone from Gethsemane are related to Christ (Fig. 2). The assemblage also includes a relic with fragments of skull identified as belonging to St Bridget of Sweden, but the attribution remains debated, or even unlikely (Lahti 2003). However, as most of the relics and their fragments remain unidentified, it is difficult to calculate their precise number.

The material includes not only relics wrapped in textiles, but also fragments of bone, wood, textiles, paper, a bag for relics, pieces of wax seal, a medieval coin and so forth. The number of individual items in the collection reaches around 90. Yet no reliquaries of metal survive, mainly due to the confiscations of ecclesiastical property related to the transition from the Catholic to the Reformed Church during the sixteenth century. It is known from written records, though, for instance, that around the 1420s Bishop Magnus II Tavast (1357–1452) acquired precious containers for relics placed at the altar of Corpus Christi, and silver reliquaries in the shape of a head and arms for St Henry's remains from Italy (Paulus Juusten: 60).



Fig. 2. The relic containing a stone from Gethsemane at Turku Cathedral. Photo by Aki Arponen.

The Department of Archaeology at the University of Turku began to study the finger relic of St Eric and other items in the assemblage of Turku Cathedral in 2007 (Taavitsainen 2009). Relics and reliquaries are being opened and documented and organic as well as inorganic samples are being taken for a range of scientific analyses. So far the project has concentrated on building a chronological chart of individual artefacts. The oldest dating, calAD 255–408 (1706±30 BP, 95.4 %, Ua-40201), has been obtained from a piece of fur discovered inside the alleged reliquary of St Gertrud. Such an advanced age is exceptional, since the majority of the relics date to the fourteenth century, although much more recent datings have also been obtained. The challenge of the project is not to stop here, when a better understanding of materials, their origins and age has been accomplished, but to use the results as a stepping-stone into a study of the practices of medieval relic veneration. Medieval bodies and those material processes which authenticate relics, or distinguish saints' bodies from other human remains, are thus at the heart of the following discussion of embodiment.

Archaeologies of embodiment

The human body has been in the focus of archaeological interest since its foundation in the nineteenth century, mainly in the form of human remains, and the ornamentation and decoration of individuals. Only relatively recently, however, has the body 'as metaphor for society, as instrument of lived

experience, and as surface of inscription', as Rosemary A. Joyce (2005: 140) argues, come explicitly to occupy theoretical discussion. In its interest in embodiment, archaeology follows other disciplines studying human cultures, but according to Joyce, archaeology has three possible contributions to offer for the study of embodiment across the humanities. Firstly, by grounding its approach on the materiality of human experience, archaeology consistently emphasises physicality in its inquiry. Secondly, the particular sensitivity of the discipline on cultural repetitions and continuities over long stretches of time produces a highly unique view on the production, reproduction and transformation of bodies and embodiments. Thirdly, archaeologists, in trying to cope with the otherness created by the temporal distance, are highly aware of the gap separating the material vestiges of the bygone era from their views, and thus the discipline is potentially more aware of the violence inherent in interpreting the past.

Despite the three commonalities which archaeology as a discipline provides in outlining past bodies, archaeological approaches to embodiment are highly diverse. Joyce, nonetheless, brings out two main lines, semiotic and phenomenological, in recent approaches to the body. The former bears some proximity to descriptive and typological traditions of archaeology, since it sees the body as a scene of display and assumes a direct equivalence between specific bodily appearances—that is, age, race, gender—and previous social categories. The semiotic line distinguishes typologies of identities according to the variety of bodies appearing in archaeological material. The social is imprinted on the bodies as signs and representations, and consequently such bodies offer themselves to the readings of the contemporaries in the past as well as present-day archaeologists.

Two differing theoretical positions can be distinguished in the semiotic line (Meskell 2000). The first considers the body as a scene of display, where the discursive aspects of bodies—meaning their postures, gestures, ornamentations and representations—are in the forefront, while the second approaches the body as an artefact. Bodies as artefacts form series, or normative typologies, which function in the network of social forces, although, at the same time, they have the potential to produce and transform the same forces.

The description of the semiotic line is necessarily a simplification of the subtlety of archaeological discussions, and more recent work following its principles approaches bodies as sites of construction, not merely a reflection of material culture and the social sphere. Nevertheless, Joyce's characterisation reveals the core of the semiotic line: the focus on chains of signs inscribed on bodies and individuals, and on the movement of these signs on the surfaces

of social and discursive structures. These movements of signs and structures form individuals and set up the landscape for their actions.

The problem of such an approach, pointed out by both Joyce (2005) and Lynn Meskell (2000) (see also White 2009), is the lack of concern with the body as a site of lived experience, where corporeal practices, and idealized representations are combined and negotiated into gestures, affects, personhood, and consumption practices. Without lived and positioned bodies, the notions of agency and the body as a site of subjectivity have no point of reference, and the analysis of embodiment remains truncated.

The concept of the lived body belongs to the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. In archaeology, the phenomenological way of approaching the world and its phenomena has gathered rather notorious connotations during the recent decades. This is mainly due to the interpretative strategies practiced under its guise and particularly how they address temporal differences between the past and present. For instance, in a recent review article Benjamin Edwards voiced concern that increasing number of recent archaeological works present interpretations which advance

[e]ssentialist views of how people of the past may have ‘felt’ in particular circumstances. This is the readvancement of a discredited phenomenological agenda beneath the banner of studies of embodiment and personhood (Edwards 2010: 255).

Some of the critique of phenomenology’s tendency to present-centeredness, perhaps with a tint of narcissism, can be traced back to the reactions evoked by British landscape archaeology. Especially Neolithic monuments have been interpreted through the bodily experiences of archaeologists in a phenomenological framework. In spite of the impact which the approach has had on the development of landscape archaeology, even archaeologists situating themselves into the phenomenological tradition have criticized landscape archaeology for effacing the difference between present and past lived bodies. For instance, John C. Barrett and Ilhong Ko (2009: 280) distinguish three premises on which the phenomenologically informed British landscape archaeology is based, but subscribe only two of them. The first premise states that ‘the archaeological record cannot be understood without a human presence’, and the second that ‘the body is the medium through which this engagement occurs’. According to Barrett and Ko, in addition to the two premises, sounding almost trivial in today’s atmosphere of theoretical awareness, however, there is the third claim, that by using archaeologist’s own body as

the medium of engagement we encounter the past experience and grasp the meaning of the archaeological record as such. The bodies of past and present become, in effect, too simplistically aligned.

In their revisioning of the fundamentals of landscape phenomenology, Barrett and Ko turn to Heideggerian thought. An alternative point of entry into the phenomenology of the body is provided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although his earlier works display convergence with the phenomenology practiced in British landscape archaeology, his late writings, in particular, sketch out another way of understanding the aims and assumptions of phenomenology. In his last writings, Merleau-Ponty begins to re-evaluate the basis of his philosophical project, and address issues of difference and intersubjectivity, often pointed out as the key problems of phenomenological thought.

From body schema to the flesh of the world

In works such as the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty launched a sustained critique of the self-sufficient and detached Cartesian *cogito*. The latter considers a human subject primarily as a thinking mind, and only secondarily as a bodily presence in the world. Throughout his writings, Merleau-Ponty develops the concept of the body-subject as an alternative for this idea of a mind-subject. The notion of the body-subject, furthermore, refers to the first-person point of view in the world, though not in the sense of a modern personal or subjective individual (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 250, 405; Carman 2008: 94). Rather, the body-subject denotes that in perception the surrounding world and human body are intertwined and mutually engaged in forming a consciousness. Perception is thus a primary situation that takes place in the midst of being in the world. The body-subject has no capacity of perceiving the world before entering into it, or perceiving the world outside it.

For Merleau-Ponty, perception is essentially a dimension of being a body in the world instead of an inner subjective experience, or an external set of objective facts. Since it forms the middle ground between subjectivity and the object, inner and outer, bodily perception is passive in the sense that is based on previous experiences, it is historical; but at the same time it is an active, bodily skill. Perception enables the interpretation and transformation of the world: 'The structure of the world, which is a double moment of sedimentation and spontaneity, is at the centre of consciousness' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 150).

The idea of bodily *sedimentation*, a concept borrowed from geology, is of particular interest for archaeology. Sedimentation describes how previous grounded bodily experiences and gestures are always present in every new posture that the body acquires. It has a kinaesthetic memory, even before conscious remembering and memorising. In archaeology, sedimentation draws attention to the ways in which patterns of repetition, whether spatial or temporal, are identified in the material record and interpreted. Another archaeologically useful concept of Merleau-Ponty's is the *body schema*, denoting how the body's sedimentation constitutes its precognitive familiarity with itself and the world, with the movements and gestures that are available to it. The body schema, like perception, lies between the body and the world. It orientates the body towards the world and provides it with the dynamic capacity to act in the world (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 114–15). The body schema is created in interaction with the world, and it exemplifies the duality of sedimentation and spontaneity.

In the late 1950s, primarily in his posthumously published *The Visible and Invisible* (1964), Merleau-Ponty began to question the underpinnings of his previous phenomenological analyses. He considered them still to function in too dualistic a framework and in the realm of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's new insights do not necessarily mark a departure from phenomenology, but a further development of its basic attitudes (Carman 2008: 79). He, nevertheless, introduces the new concept of *flesh* to describe the common ground upon which the body and the world dwell in and emerge from. They do not form a reaction–response system, but a much more intimately integrated connection, or a *chiasm* in a single fabric of being (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 214–15). Flesh is the shared ontological condition, or ground, for the world and body: 'It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between, it is their means of communication' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 135).

Although flesh as such remains beyond naming, Merleau-Ponty characterises it with the idea of *reversibility*. The reversibility of a touching body-subject means that the act of touching is at the very same time an event of being touched by the world and other bodies. When I touch the world, it touches back as a sensation of itself and my place in it. He especially presents the act of the left hand touching the right one as a paradigm for all connections of the body with the world and other beings (Stawarska 2006: 92–3). In this co-presence of active touching and the passivity of being touched, there is a constant reversal between active and passive. But this reversibility is never complete, never the same: 'My left hand is always on the verge of touching

my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 147). This incessant escaping of touches as the same is not a failure, though, but in flesh, there is always this ontological difference, or pregnancy of possibilities between touches (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 148, 250).

The critics of phenomenology

John Carvalho (1993: 44) summarizes the impediment of which phenomenology is often accused as its claim to be a theory that unifies all experiences under one single structure of meaning and being. This erases prospects of alternative ways of being. Especially feminist and post-colonial thinkers have posed the question as to whether Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh avoids the trap of ontological sameness. For instance, Frantz Fanon (1998) argues that phenomenological ontology conceals difference, particularly the white mythology, which has always already structured the body schema available for people of colour to be as body-subjects (Weate 2001). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis of a single lived world is simply inadequate in describing and approaching different kinds of bodies. Along similar lines, Luce Irigaray (1993) exposes the apparent gender neutrality of Merleau-Ponty's vision of the world, bodies, and the flesh in and around them. Instead of reversibility between bodies, she argues, there exists certain incommensurability, or sexual difference, between bodies, which has to be acknowledged. Beata Stawarska (2006: 92) expands Irigaray's critique and argues that his monolithic ontology effaces an even larger series of differences. The claim of the reversibility of flesh forgets that the bodies of others occupy radically different positions in the world, and thus their peculiarities cannot be simply reduced into the common flesh of the world.

Although the shortcomings of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology might appear devastating, it is noteworthy that both Irigaray and Fanon engage in a double gesture. They do criticize Merleau-Ponty for forgetting other bodies, but at the same time, they situate themselves within the phenomenological tradition and develop their own thinking through it. They bring difference into the core of phenomenological project. A similar appropriating gesture continues in Judith Butler's (2006) and Gail Weiss' (2006) re-readings of Irigaray, and Jeremy Weate's (2001) re-reading of Fanon.

According to Butler (2006), the embodied status of a body-subject installs it into the flesh of the world, but the reversibility between the seer and seen

does not mean that the latter is reducible to the former. There is always temporal non-coincidence between seeing and being seen. In fact, this temporal non-coincidence of reversibility is in the ontology of flesh. The body-subject is thus already in some sense lost, or decentred in the world. To be implicated elsewhere from the start suggests that the body-subject, as flesh, is primarily an intersubjective being. It finds itself in the midst of the world as other. The body-subject's being is part of relations that are never fully recoverable or traceable. Butler thus introduces the concept of power into the flesh. Moreover, in a similar vein, Weate (2001; see also Biernoff 2005) argues that Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body schema implicates a conception of history as difference, because cultural continuity, or the intelligibility of a culture, is based on the agency of body-subjects. These body-subjects, in turn, are sites of their own continuous differentiation. Consequently, the historical horizon of living bodies is always open to alteration, transformation and disruption.

More important than any single concept or precise methodology practiced by individual phenomenologists is the style in which the tradition approaches phenomena and writes of them. Installing oneself into a hermeneutic circularity, or to put it differently, intertwining oneself with the tradition of phenomenology is vital in order to find alternatives for conceiving embodiment as a representation or discursive construct. The lived experience and its material complexity are evasive phenomena, but are still crucial points of departure for understanding bodies, and bodily differences.

After positioning oneself within the phenomenological tradition, there remains a question of how to proceed with the analysis of medieval relics. Merleau-Ponty (1968: 136) is quite poignant in that he 'does not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask', and what is more, flesh has, according to him, no name in philosophy. Any attempts of exposing its essence deflect the analytic eye.

Although flesh as such is inhuman and in a constant state of differentiation, this still does not mean that the actions of body-subjects would not affect flesh or the ground of their emergence in the world. Inquiry into the human is not futile, but its groundedness on the inhuman, on flesh, is not to be bypassed. Flesh as the differentiating ground of the body-subject and the world divests archaeology from attempting to uncover the lived body of the past and its experience without a temporal and spatial difference. Can one even speak of *the* experience of a body? Any and all body-subjects inhabit unique positions in the world, which can be approached but not grasped and communicated without acknowledging the radical difference between them

and in them. Hence the reversibility of flesh opens up a prospect of approaching relics and medieval embodiment through the difference created, for example, in the encounter of the relics and parishioners. Through difference, it is possible to trace past trajectories of movements and intensities of action as trajectories through which the past bodies and experiences emerged.

The difference between embodiments entails also that there was never only one, homogenous conception of the body. Paul Veyne (1988) notes that in antiquity the symbolic field was Balkanized, and this was reflected in each 'mind'. In other words, every body-subject inhabited a range of modalities of belief and embodiment, which may well have excluded each other, but which still resided in the same body. The spectrum of embodiments was inhabited without conscious reflection and thinking, depending on the situations in which the bodies found themselves.

This plurality of modalities is sometimes questioned when the embodiment of the Christian Middle Ages are being scrutinized (McCarthy 2009). Indeed the majority of medieval written sources seem to evince the Christian theological conception of the body as a battleground between matter and spirit. The body bound people to a transient world of sin, pain and death, and only by transcending the body could one attain eternal life. Nonetheless, Caroline Bynum points out that there existed a cacophony of bodily discourses besides the theological one. They are exemplified by a range of texts (Bynum 1995b: 7), not forgetting the diverse folk traditions across Europe. One way of approaching the body was medical, deriving from classical medical authors, who saw the human body as being composed of four humours. Imbalances in these humours were the source of illnesses and other bodily disorders. The other, more vernacular conception of the body saw it a source of vitality, pleasure and expressiveness—something experienced abundantly in eating, drinking, sexual acts, and work. It was celebrated in such activities as hunting, and in such genres of literature as courtly romance.

The intertwining of the sacred and secular

The most obvious feature of the relics in Turku and of medieval relics in general is their fragmentary state. Peter Brown (1981: 78) has epitomized the phenomenon of relics as the one of inverted magnitudes: such tiny relics have such a great role in linking heaven and earth. Besides the small finger relic of St Eric, Turku Cathedral very likely also had the finger relic of St Henry of Uppsala, although nowadays no such item survives (Lahti 2003). After he had

arrived into the country and converted the pagans, St Henry was martyred by a Finnish farmer, Lalli, who killed him with a blow of an axe. Lalli also cut St Henry's finger off, because he wanted to get the saint's episcopal ring, but the finger, with its ornament dropped into to the snow and was lost (Heikkilä 2005: 162). In the following spring, however, a boy and blind man found the ring floating on a piece of ice. A folktale adds that at the moment the finger was found, a miracle occurred and the man recovered his eyesight (Heikkilä 2005: 160-3, 173-4, 257-9, 410-11). This event of discovery is engraved on one of the brass plaques fitted on St Henry's sarcophagus in Nousiainen Church in Southwest Finland (Fig. 3). The plaque is one of the scenes illustrating the saint's hagiography and was produced, as was the whole monument, in Flanders in the 1420s.



Fig. 3. The miraculous discovery of St Henry of Uppsala's finger as engraved on one of the 1420s brass plaques fitted on the saint's sarcophagus in Nousiainen Church in Southwest Finland. Photo: Edgren & Melanko 1996: 43.

The art historian Lena Liepe (2003: 127) indicates the size of the depicted finger. It is as big as the crow beside it, or even larger than the two men in a rowing boat. She explains the finger's proportions by its value in the medieval relic cult. Any part of a saint's body acquired a significant status, because the holy person continued to influence the world through her or his bodily remains, regardless of their size. 'When the body is divided,' the fifth-century father of the church Theodoret of Cyrus states, 'the grace remains undivided' (Bentley 1985: 95). Like Christ, who was in his complete presence in each and every consecrated Eucharist host, the relics were the saint *pars pro toto* (Geary 1990: 39; Montgomery 2010: 59). Thus even the tiniest piece of the body had the entire presence (*praesentia*) of the saint.

Relics had a special power, *potentia* or *virtus*, conferred by God to saints alone. This power was revealed by distinct physiological signs (Snoek 1995: 11; Vauchez 1997: 36, 427–8). The saint's flesh was incorruptible and beyond deterioration or degeneration. After their death, the body tissue of holy persons became as soft as that of a child. It also emitted the odour of sanctity, the pleasant scent of God's anointed. The souls and bodily remains of saints, and even the objects with which they were in contact, were through and through imbued by *virtus*. Hence closeness and bodily contact with relics was a fundamental element in approaching them. Relics, parts of human flesh, secured a palpable and thoroughly human connection with the saints and sacred (Brown 1981: 61, 68).

In principle, all fragments of a saint were equally important and drenched in sanctity, but there were theological classifications of relics according to their wholeness (Bentley 1985: 51–2). *Reliquare insignes* included, if not the whole body, at the minimum its head, arms and legs, while *reliquare non insignes* were individual limbs. The latter ones could be further distinguished either as *notabiles*, or hands and feet, or as *exiguae*, referring to fingers and teeth. The preference for certain parts of the body is also visible in the surviving reliquaries of the so-called speaking type. They are metallic containers which speak or express the body part underneath. Caroline Bynum and Paula Gerson (1997: 4–5) note that most popular of them are heads and arms, 'the most expressive and communicative parts of our bodies.' Also fingers could be added to the list (Trumble 2010: 69–70). Heads, arms, and fingers occupied an emphasised position in the liturgy and cult, for instance, as the body parts used for making the sign of the cross. Bynum and Gerson remind that many of the body-part reliquaries, in fact, did not contain the body part they imitated. Instead their shapes seem to have depended more on the referentiality of certain body parts and the function of each reliquary, not on its contents.

The divine character of the relics and saints' bodies is mirrored in the profane body and in the effects of its dismemberment. About 1495, Paulus Scheel, who worked as the canon of Turku Cathedral, and the secretary of the Bishop of Finland, was returning by ship with his employer from the east to the episcopal residence, Kuusisto Castle near Turku. To signal their arrival at the castle, the bishop ordered Scheel to fire a bomb (*bombarda*), or a weapon of some sort. As a man of the church, Scheel apparently was not very accustomed to using such items, and the action cost him his thumb. The documents of the event and its aftermath (FMU 4781, 4782, 4783), however, do not focus on the pain of losing a body part, or even the physical difficulties it must have caused, but on the judicial obstacle which it posed for Scheel's clerical career. According to Canon Law, a man with abnormalities in his body was unfit to serve Mass and thus to act as a priest (Salonen 2003).

The severed body of Paulus Scheel threatened his vocation as a priest and his professional career in the diocese. The missing thumb subsequently put his position in the network of the medieval society at stake. This forms a stark contrast between profane and sacred bodies. Such a situation resembles Mircea Eliade's (1959: 14) phenomenologically grounded thoughts on the sacred and profane as two modes of being in the world. In the pre-modern period, he argues, the sacred, saturated with being, was equivalent to power, to reality. The sacred constituted a space of significance and vitality, while the profane spaces unfolded around it as formless expanses without structure and consistency. In this divided world, hierophany denotes the manifestation of the other mode of being in the mundane. It is a fixed point which breaks the homogenous space of the profane and provides an orientation for lived bodies. Moreover, Eliade describes objects of hierophany as ordinary things which become something else, yet continue to remain themselves. These objects, like relics, participate in both modes of being, and establish a passage from the profane to sacred.

Anthropologist Maurice Godelier (1999: 171–9), in an argument based on Marxist dialectics, conceives the relationship between the sacred and profane in an opposite light. He concurs that the sacred is a certain relationship with the origin of things, but this relationship replaces real humans with their imaginary replicas, imaginary forces. 'The sacred can appear only if something of human beings disappears' (Godelier 1999: 171). This means that humans as active body-subjects, as social beings, have to fade away to enable them to become objects to be acted upon. Hence this relationship inverts the structure of cause and effect, and divests humans of their agency. It creates the body of powerlessness, which desires for mediated agency and claims to open itself to the intercessory agency of God and the saints (Clucas 2000: 115–16).

The approaches of Eliade and Godelier seemingly exclude each other, and consequently present diametrically opposed notions of the sacred. They nevertheless share the idea of a division separating the sacred from the profane and establishing a desire to overcome the two modes of being. The sacred manifests itself as hierophany in the person or event acting as an intercessor between the two orders. Eliade, however, does not analyse the constitution of the sacred; it remains a given, whereas Godelier follows it back to the profane, to the body-subject whose agency is removed from the sacred.

Instead of overcoming the difference between Eliade and Godelier, however, the present article will focus on the bodies which the reversibility between the two modes of being bring forth. The flesh of the world is the ground from which both these varieties of bodies emerge and which allows the communication between the sacred and profane. Lastly, the flesh denotes something shared, though inverted, in these embodiments, a quality which can be expressed with Merleau-Ponty's term *chiasm*. The significance of chiasm in the following analysis can be clarified with the manner in which it is formulated in linguistics (Butler 2006): chiasm is the application of two or more clauses that are related to each other through a reversal of structures. An example of chiasm is the phrase from the Bible: 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed' (Gen. 9:6). Chiasm is a structural inversion and repetition of grammatical elements, which produces a difference in meaning. In the case of relics, the bodies of the devotee and holy persons establish a chiasmic relationship.

Traces of alternative cult practices, and the body–house–cosmos homology

Theological views of the saintly body allowed various experiences of embodiment, and even more importantly, co-existed with a range of conceptions of the body. Many medieval texts outside Finland, for instance, provide ample evidence of highly differing responses to relics and reliquaries, from fear to familiarity (Bynum & Gerson 1997: 5). In Finland, the scantiness of written sources hampers possibilities of approaching the whole variety of conceptions of the body, since even most of the ecclesiastical cult practices have to be reconstructed on the basis of sources and secondary literature from other parts of Europe. This probably overemphasises the homogenous theological cult of the relics. Nonetheless, the relics of Turku Cathedral were for the most part in the hands of the Church and controlled by the ecclesiastical administration.

The cult and its development probably followed the theological and dogmatic views or at least were conditioned by them. Yet a few glances at a vernacular and somewhat unorthodox cult of relics can be seen in the continuing tradition of their veneration (for the Lutheran view of the cult of relics, see Hirvonen 2004).

The survival of the relics in Turku Cathedral in the first place is one symptom of an unorthodox continuity. In the sixteenth century, after the Reformation was launched in the kingdom of Sweden, the relics and their reliquaries of textile remained in the cathedral. Some of them were placed in the late-medieval wooden casket traditionally attributed to the Blessed Hemming, which has been kept in the cathedral throughout the centuries (Fig. 4). The items lay deposited inside the casket until the twentieth century. The rest of the relics were found in a bricked-up recess in the sacristy wall in 1924 (Fig. 5), when the cathedral underwent a thorough restoration. Juhani Rinne (1932), director of the restoration, suggests that the recess was not sealed until as late as the early nineteenth century, after which their existence was forgotten.

Another hint of continuing cult practices are the ruins of the Chapel of St Henry on Kirkkoluoto Islet in Köyliönjärvi Lake, West Finland (Salminen 1905, Ahl 2005). According to the oral tradition, the chapel was founded by



Fig. 4. The late-medieval wooden casket traditionally attributed to the Blessed Hemming is on display at Turku Cathedral. Photo by Visa Immonen.



Fig. 5. The sacristy of Turku Cathedral. Part of the relic collection was found in a bricked-up recess in the wall in 1924. The recess, which now has a fitted wooden door, is the furthest one from the camera. Photo by Visa Immonen.

St Henry of Uppsala himself. The site was quite clumsily excavated in the early twentieth century, but the finds nevertheless include medieval artefacts: a pilgrim badge, fragments of window glass, a gold ring, and coins from the first half of the fifteenth century onwards (Hiekkanen 2008: 157–8). Interestingly, a significant portion of the coins were minted as late as the eighteenth century. They have been interpreted as offerings made by locals to St Henry long after the official end of the relic cult.

Admittedly, the two examples of the continuation of Catholic cult practices or, at least, of the appreciation of the old tradition after the Reformation do not reveal non-ecclesiastical, alternative practices of the Middle Ages. However, there survive traces of a practice which did not conform with Christian views held during or after the medieval period. The long-lived custom of depositing a gift in the foundation of a house, usually in the form of artefacts or animal remains, is attested to in the Nordic countries. In Finland, Sonja Hukantaival (2007) has identified nine medieval houses with such deposits, sixteen houses from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and nineteen houses built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. No pre-Christian Late Iron Age deposits are known from the country, probably because so few houses from the period have been excavated, but Ann-Britt Falk (2006, 2008), who has stud-

ied the same phenomenon in Southern Scandinavia, detects an uninterrupted continuation from the pre-Christian to the modern period. Because there was no real break in the tradition, Falk considers building deposits as a highly dynamic and adaptable practice. In fact, the clergy seems to have been rather indifferent to them. There are no medieval written sources claiming such deposits as being either heresy or acceptable in the eyes of the church.

Falk paraphrases a legion of scholarly interpretations of the practice. According to ethnographical sources, the custom was a means of bringing good luck to the household, or guarding the house against evil, while the pre-Christian practice has been seen as an agricultural fertility ritual. Such deposits have, moreover, been considered as offerings made in order to manipulate supernatural forces, or as ways to transform the house from an entity of nature into a cultural thing. Falk (2008: 60) does not refute these interpretations, but shifts her attention from symbolic concerns to an analysis of depositing as an activity. She argues that the deposits were indeed ritual acts, and thus significant, but not necessarily religious at all. The deposited artefacts are often household utensils or personal items, not objects with particularly religious connotations.

In a similar vein, Hukantaival (2007) approaches pre-modern and early modern buildings as physio-social units with boundaries, which were in need of reinforcement against malicious agents and deeds. Deposits were often laid in the horizontal and vertical outer perimeters of the house, in other words, at its concrete and symbolic borders. They thus played an important role in the maintenance of boundaries. Vesa-Pekka Herva (2010) goes on to argue that houses were person-like structures, and consequently in a need of continuous nurturing, which included strengthening them with deposits. Deposits were part of establishing reciprocal relations between people and buildings. This suggests an ontology in which the lines between animate and inanimate, as well as human and inhuman are drawn differently than in the modern period. Consequently, following these lines, the experience of a lived body is necessarily constituted differently.

Through Herva's interpretation of houses as person-like and deposits as gift-like relational phenomena, there seems to emerge a homology which Eliade (1959: 30, 32, 57, 172–9) calls as the body–house–cosmos. According to him, because the body-subject is open to the world, through that openness it has the potential to communicate with gods. Dwellings and houses are similarly microcosmic sites, which communicate with the cosmos aligning with it. The consecration and simultaneous delineation of a territory, a building, or a body, is the repetition of a cosmogony, equivalent to turning them into a cosmos, setting their borders and giving them a meaningful structure.

From this perspective, building deposits appear as a parallel or reversible case to the creation and maintenance of bodily borders.

House deposits emphasise the importance of connecting the analysis of body-subjects and their borders with other kinds of material thresholds and divisions. Body-subjects inhabit spaces which echo and enforce the making of bodily differentiations and divisions. Sacred bodies as material entities also share spaces and the flesh of the world with profane bodies. This is the bodily condition for their communication. However, the body–house–cosmos homology in the form revealed by the house deposits is not directly applicable to the embodiments related to the cult of relics. Although the deposition of house gifts and the relic cult are chronologically simultaneous phenomena, which appear to be structurally congruent, and were possibly practiced even by the same people, they represent two different traditions and orders of embodiment. Having said that, however, the possibility of the same body-subject emerging through both of these different orders, and perhaps living one through the other cannot be excluded.

The sacred and secular bodies at the point of disintegration

Among the finds from the chapel of St Henry in Köyliö, as mentioned, there is a fifteenth-century finger ring of gilt silver (Immonen 2009b: Cat. 23:21). Its engravings and use provide further insights into the relations between secular bodies and medieval relics. The ring has a circular disc, c. 1 cm in diameter, mounted on its bezel. The disc has the engraved face of suffering Christ, a popular medieval motif referring to the cloth of St Veronica on which his face was imprinted during the passion. The cloth with the ‘true image’, or *vera icon*, is a relic venerated at the St Peter’s Basilica in Rome, but copies of it were spread to every corner of Christian Europe during the Middle Ages.

The vernicle motif engraved on the disc is not a relic, but a depiction of one. Relics were also worn, however, as part of personal jewellery during the Middle Ages (Immonen 2009a: 187). In Finnish written sources, there are two references to privately owned reliquaries. The first is a ‘silver chain with a reliquary’, which Henrik Klasson Dieken bequeaths to the nunnery of Naantali in his wills dated 1449 and 1452 (FMU 2817, 2908). The other reliquary, attached to a silver chain, in addition to three silver belts and undefined object copper, was given to Peder Eriksson in 1477, when he sold a farm to the bishop (FMU 3688). It is conceivable that the reference to a chain indicates that the two reliquaries were also attached to a belt or dress. Whether

this was indeed the case or not, the phenomenon of private relics in the Middle Ages, and their close relationship with profane bodies nevertheless emphasises the intertwining of sacred and profane bodies and their borders.

There are altogether eight such so-called vernicle rings known from Finland (Fig. 6) (Immonen 2009a: 277–81). Although the Finnish examples do not have engraved magical formulae or invocations to holy persons, their parallels in other Nordic countries and Central Europe do. Rather typical is the formula *Caspar (or Iaspar) Melchior Balthasar* referring to the Three Magi (e.g. Hammervold 1997: 65, 124), and associated with epilepsy and its cure. Other formulae were also resorted to in the search for protection for the wearer's body, especially against sudden flows of blood (Kolsrud 1943: 160–75). The meaning of another formula, *buro berto beriora* (e.g. Buchholtz 1892: 24; Lexow 1955: 81) remains obscure. It appears to be nonsensical Latin, but Olof Kolsrud (1943: 168) suggests that the beginning *ber-* is related to the name *Βερενίκη/Berenice/Veronica* (see Solin 2000). Veronica and the vernicle motif have a connection, in turn, with the medieval cult of the Holy Blood. In medieval tradition, St Veronica was associated with the anonymous woman, mentioned in the Bible (Matt. 9:20) and cured by Christ of the flow of blood, which she had suffered for twelve years. In addition to the vernicle, other motifs typical for late medieval finger rings—a garland with five flowers referring to Christ's five wounds, the *Arma Christi*, heart, and Golgotha scene—can also be associated with blood and the cult of the Holy Blood.

Olof Kolsrud (1943: 188–93; cf. Hildebrand 1884–98: 417–18) states that since ancient times, the finger upon which the ring was put was important. The *digitus medicus*, or the ring finger on the left (or right) hand was very significant, since it was considered to have a nerve or vein leading straight to the heart. Carl af Ugglas (1951: 191–5) connects the *digitus medicus* belief to the heart symbolism present in the late medieval rings. The use of magical rings on the ring finger made them transmitters of a sort with a direct line into the core of the user's soul. The devotional dimension of finger rings can be thus connected with the medical belief that there was a direct physiological link between the ring finger and the heart.



Fig. 6. A fifteenth-century vernicle finger ring of gold found in Ulvila. Photo by Visa Immonen.

The prevention of cramps and especially bleeding appears rather a tame reason for using such powerful devices as the religious symbolism present in finger rings. This disproportion can be explained, however, by the medieval notion of an enclosed body. According to Bettina Bildhauer (2006: 69–70), although medieval attitudes towards the body were fluid in comparison with modern ones, the integrity of the body still concerned people. The corporal incoherence, however, should not be understood in terms of any actual danger to life and health, but rather as a transgression of the body's boundaries. In many European legal systems a bleeding scratch was deemed more serious than concussion, because it meant a danger to the conception of the body as always enclosed. Moreover, the popularity of maces as weapons of war was justified by the avoidance of bleeding wounds without compromising the lethal outcome. Any bleeding was a terrible threat, a transgression of the rigid, but vulnerable limits of the bounded body. In a similar, though reverse way, the focal position of the Eucharist and the suffering body of the Christ in medieval culture exemplified the anxiety invested in the violated boundaries of the body. Scheel's missing thumb, its abnormality, also transgressed the idea of a unified body, although, at the same time, the orders of Canon Law are explained by highly practical concerns of performing liturgical and clerical duties.

The chiasmic structure between holy and secular bodies is repeated also in the realm of smell. The vile odour of death, of corpses, never touched saints. Instead, relics emitted, as an indication of their holiness, the sweet scent of sanctity (Bentley 1985: 196–7). Profane smells, in contrast, potentially constituted a threat to the integrity of the body. The plague and other diseases were thought to spread as stench. Scents had thus significance, and people such as Thomas Aquinas were sensitive to them when describing the motives for using censers during the liturgy: one reason was theological; the incense symbolizes the elevation of the soul towards God in the form of rising smoke, and the other reason was practical, as the scent obscured the foul odours of the gathered people (Lilja 1978: 140).

Both relics and ordinary corpses share the horizon of death; the moment when the body breaks down and its borders collapse. Their fate after the event were, however, very unlike. In the late medieval theology, body and soul were intimately related to the extent that one's soul was depicted and described as a corporeal entity. In a way, the soul was somatised, and conversely the body was an integrated part of an individual. The holy and the ordinary were crucially their bodies, not only their souls. In this concept of self, physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, identity, and ultimately to salvation. At the moment of death, however, soul and body parted. The

corpse became a source of contamination. The opening of graves, or handling of remains of the dead was abhorrent. Hence the remains of the dead were normally quickly and definitively disposed through burial. The wages of sin were, after all, death, the fragmentation and disintegration of one's profane body (Bynum 1995a: 186–99, 291–305).

As Scott B. Montgomery (2010: 59) points out, the saints were 'very much alive, cognizant, and interactive' in their relics. At the same time, the cult of relics crucially involved the transformation of a mundane corpse into a holy body. Although, when speaking of relics, it might seem self-evident that they are pieces of *dead* bodies, it is important to acknowledge that relics are indeed dead and *therefore* active. The transformation from a living body to a dead body was vital for saints' body parts to function as relics, as entities with agency. An extreme indication of the death's importance was the danger that holy persons could face—the danger of been murdered by someone wanting to extract a relic (Geary 1986: 177).

Caroline Bynum (1995a) argues that the fear of disintegration of one's worldly body was the reason why it was important to depict saints unaffected by their physical torments, whether due to the violence or asceticism. Their bodies were kept intact by faith. In ecclesiastical art, saints, especially women, were represented in highly stereotypical fashion which expressed eternal and unblemished beauty corporeally. The cult of relics was consequently a sort of physical rehabilitation of holy bodies. According to Peter Brown (1981: 78) the detachment of the relic from its original physical associations, in fact, reveals the imaginative dialectic of saintly bodies, and the way in which their continuous existence suppress the fact of death.

With a slight shift in emphasis, Karmen MacKendrick (2010) considers relics, not so much as instances of overcoming bodily fragmentation, but rather as sites of multilocation. The relics of a saint are partaking in the singular incorruptibility of soul and thus the same body could be spatially scattered. The wholeness of relics lay in the multiplication of their presences, not as reunification into one body. This helps to understand, as MacKendrick suggests, why in the Middle Ages there was such a disregard for the proper provenance of individual relics, and why there could be multiple versions of the same body part belonging to a single saint.

Eliade (1959: 25–7) writes that there exists a boundary, threshold of some kind that distinguishes and opposes the two modalities of the sacred and profane. It is that paradoxical space where those worlds communicate, and a passage from one to the other becomes possible. He describes it as 'the solution of continuity in space immediately and concretely', and argues that there is often

a desire for the emergence and discovery of such a site of hierophany. This place emerges through signs of sacredness. 'When no sign manifests itself, it is provoked', Eliade concludes.

As a sign hierophany has fundamentally a material and social dimension, and thus it is also a phenomenon of the flesh, of the ground upon which body-subjects dwell. The relics as bodies have to attract intelligibility, or in other words, they have to be recognized as bodies. This leads to the question which Montgomery (2010: 60) aptly poses: how is the power and status of relics as relics recognized? His answer is the reliquary image, which 'fleshes-out the accepted truths about the relics, giving them form'. He reminds us, however, that the relic and the image cannot work without each other. The relic needs the image to make its meaning visible, while the image is powered by the bodily remains of the saint. It is undoubtedly true that medieval relics needed images in order to perform their devotional task, but diverging from Montgomery, the crux does not lie so much in the duality between relics and images, but in that which they share, namely their materiality. Through materiality, through material bodies, relics acquire their position and affective properties in the cult. Here archaeological emphasis on material practices makes an important contribution to the study of medieval relics.

Communal acceptance as a material process

Any special corpse which emitted signs of the sacred had to be recognized as such in order to become a venerated relic. The classification of a body part as a relic acknowledged its agency and potential to engage in social practices (cf. Gilchrist 1997: 46). The recognition or acceptance that each relic required was always made communally. Again the relic was caught in a chiasmic structure where its existence required an accepting community, but on other hand, this community and its collective memory was partly formed through the act of recognition. The possession of a saint's relics unified communities (Brown 1981: 90–103), like the bones of St Henry of Uppsala, who was the patron saint of Turku Cathedral and the whole diocese, and who inspired long-lived local oral traditions.

The authentication of a body part as a relic was an issue that frequently preoccupied clergy and laymen. Patrick Geary (1986: 175–6) identifies three interrelated beliefs required for the communal acceptance of relics. Firstly, during the saint's life and after her death, the individual had to have a special connection with God, manifested through her actions. Secondly, the corpse or

its body part had to be authenticated as belonging to a particular saint. Thirdly, the remains of such a person were to be prized and treated in a special way.

The recognition of a relic involved a formal ceremony called *inventio*. It was carried out by assessing the relic candidate, and evaluating whether it met the extrinsic and intrinsic standards for a true relic (Geary 1986: 176). The extrinsic criteria involved the formal processes of investigating the tomb or reliquary and an examination of *authenticae* documents. Internal criteria denoted the miracles the saint performed after her death. The saint usually indicated where the body parts were to be found, and during the authentication process, she showed by supernatural interventions that the remains were indeed genuine. If its results were affirmative, the relic was presented for public veneration in a ritual known as *elevatio*, and when relic was moved from a location to another, a *translatio* took place involving a series of formal ceremonies and possibly a procession.

Two instances of relic transportation have been recorded in the written sources related to the Diocese of Turku (Klockars 1960). In 1493, the Bishop Magnus Stjernkors wrote a letter to the Archbishop of Nidaros (Trondheim, Norway), and requested for relics of St Olaf, which were needed for many churches consecrated to the saint in the diocese (FMU 4505). In return, he offered some relics of St Henry of Uppsala. Five years later in 1497 the Pope granted permission for Hemmingus (1290–1366), Bishop of Turku, to be venerated as blessed (*beatus*) (FMU 4759, 4829). This was a step towards his canonization. However, Hemmingus's remains were moved from his tomb to a reliquary in a grand ceremony in Turku as late as 1514 (FMU 5714, 5715). In the same year, a bone from his left arm was transported to Stockholm in a festive procession (FMU 5736). Although the process of canonizing Hemmingus came to halt due to the Reformation in the 1520s, the multilocalisation of his remains had already started before that.

The communal acceptance of relics was not limited to these ceremonial events of heightened public attention. It was crucially also a continuous material process in which relics were framed and made into objects of veneration. The presentation of a relic was a concrete manifestation of, and support for, communal acceptance. An obvious aspect of this process was the placing of relics into sumptuous reliquaries. The relic containers of precious metals have vanished from Turku Cathedral, although, for instance, the stone of Gethsemane has traces of silver mixed with tin and gold on its surface. They are probably left by a reliquary in which the stone was at some point stored. Nevertheless, the ostentatious wrappings around the relics, made of imported luxurious silks and gold brocades, still echo the sumptuousness of their pres-

entation. The use of valuable materials follows the same idea as ecclesiastic art, where saints were depicted as physically impeccable. Moreover, in the medieval representations of human figures and their particular identity, the social position was communicated primarily through dress and dress accessories (Liepe 2003: 58).

As Montgomery (2010: 60) shows, pictorial narratives in reliquaries gave further support for authentication. Such visualisations are lacking in the assemblage of Turku, with one notable exception (Fig. 7). The skull relic of St Henry or St Eric—the attribution is disputed (Lahti 2006)—is wrapped in Chinese red silk damask with an embroidered figurative scene. Here a knight stands wearing chainmail and holding a sword. He has cut off the head of a kneeling man with hands raised in prayer. The head lies on the ground between the two men. The saint has just been martyred. Placed in front of the skull's face, the pictorial scene weaves together the narrative of martyrdom with the bones underneath the silk. In effect, the relic and its reliquary form a highly expressive entity.

Another indication of the authentication process in the collection of the cathedral might be the mysterious fragments of wax seals. They are rather poorly preserved, and although their appearance is medieval, the fragments cannot be identified or attributed to any person or institution. Similarly it is not apparent, why they have been kept with the relics. On the basis of the aura of seals as identity technology *par excellence*, however, it can be suggested that their presence in the collection supported in a way or another the authentication and authorisation of the relics.

The results of scientific datings of the relics develop further the idea of an on-going process of authentication. The assemblage has the relic of the Holy Innocents, or the young male children who, according to the Gospel of Matthew (2:16–18), Herod the Great ordered to be massacred so as to get rid of the newborn King of the Jews. The relic in Turku comprises a bone wrapped in textile and a slip of parchment attached to them. Altogether four samples have been obtained from the materials. The results reveal that the bone itself is from the tenth century (1080 ± 31 BP, 95.4 %, Ua-39383), while the surrounding textile (565 ± 37 BP, 95.4 %, Ua-38642) and the *authentica* (563 ± 34 BP, 95.4 %, Ua-38643) date back to the fourteenth century, and the thread used to stitch them to the fifteenth or sixteenth century (428 ± 33 BP, 95.4 %, Ua-38273). Similarly differing dates have been acquired from the other relics of the assemblage. This is an indication how the relics have been continuously taken care of and freshened up over the centuries.

A closer examination of St Eric's finger relic revealed that the textile wrapping does not contain any kind of bones at all, but instead a piece of black textile. The textile (575 ± 30 BP, 95.4 %, Ua-37859) and the thread (560 ± 30 BP, 95.4 %, Ua-37853) date to the fourteenth century, while the parchment is from the eleventh to thirteenth century (881 ± 36 BP, 95.4 %, Ua-38647). There are several ways of interpreting the situation, but perhaps most likely option is that an erroneous parchment slip was added to the wrapping at some later period. In multispectral filming, where parchments were exposed in various light spectra, the *authentica* of the relic did not reveal palimpsests or other signs of reuse, but still the slip is older than the wrapping around the relic. This could be read as supporting the idea of a wrong *authentica* being attached to the relic at some point in time.



Fig. 7. The skull relic of St Henry of Uppsala or St Eric of Sweden at Turku Cathedral is wrapped in Chinese red silk damask with an embroidered figurative scene. Photo by the Turku and Kaarina Parish Union.

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Chiasms of corporeality

The material intricacies of medieval reliquaries, and the multilocal spatiality of relics would have remained muted without encountering the body-subjects or the devotees. In Turku, these encounters took place in the cathedral, a sacred space, where the body in all its aspects was given a central position. The immediate situation of the devotion was a bodily event, but even such turning points of one's life as baptism, marriage, and burial took corporeal form in the confines of the church (Liepe 2003: 87). Spaces orientate bodies, or rather encourage them to make particular postures and gestures. In a sacred place, these bodily stances organize the relations between the profane and sacred, and enable communication with the other mode of being (Clucas



Fig. 8. A reliquary cross, found in the medieval altar of Föglö Church. The piece is c. 6 cm in height and made of gilt silver in the early sixteenth century. Photo by Visa Immonen.

2000: 116). Stephen Clucas (2000: 115–16) describes this bodily constitution of a sacred space as translation of the body: the lived body and its desire for an invulnerable soul are articulated spatially and translated into space.

The exact presentation of the relics in Turku Cathedral is poorly known due to the lack of adequate sources. Nevertheless, much of their positioning can be discerned from general medieval ecclesiastical practices. Some of the relics were hidden and walled into

a small cavity, *sepulcrum*, made in the body of an altar. In this way altars become the resting places of saints, and Masses were concretely celebrated on the tombs of martyrs. Sepulchral reliquaries could be made by folding undecorated sheets of lead around the valuable contents, as with the remains of a sepulchral reliquary found in the excavations of Finström Church (Immonen 2008), while some of them were elaborately produced works. One such sumptuous piece is the early-sixteenth-century reliquary cross of gilt silver with a figure of Christ, found in the altar of Föglö Church (Fig. 8). The reliquary contained the relic of St Mary Magdalene (Immonen 2009b: Cat. 10:1). The contrast between the sepulchral reliquaries of Finström and Föglö show that the reliquaries not intended to be seen by the parishioners and clergy were not necessarily visually less impressive than those produced as objects of visual devotion.

Many of the relics at Turku Cathedral were placed inside impressive reliquaries, some of them shaped as arms and heads, to be seen and perhaps even touched by visitors. These reliquaries were distributed on the altars of various saints or special shrines. The number of medieval altars in the cathedral was at least 30, but perhaps over 40, although these figures include all references to altars regardless of temporal fluctuations (Rinne 1948: 2–3; Hiekkänen 2007: 206). The basic plan of the cathedral was an elongated rectangle. The

numerous chapels were placed along each of its long sides. This rather typical west–east scheme of a late-medieval church suggests certain lines of movement for approaching and departing from the altars and chapels.

All of the senses were engaged in establishing the sacred space of the cathedral. It was scented by humans as well as incense, and perhaps by the odour of sanctity. Also visually, through lighting and works of art, the cathedral was distinguishable from profane spaces. Here visitors were faced with the remains of saints, or, to be more precise, the reliquaries in which they were deposited, since in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that relics were not to be displayed outside their containers (Herrmann-Mascard 1975: 214–16, 348–9). Particularly body-part reliquaries were like an epidermal layer over the saint's body, facilitating the conflation between the bodily presence of saints and their representations (Montgomery 2010: 60). They encouraged a sensory contact with the sacred.

Both the body-subject and the relic lived in the flesh of the world, but this series of bodies and body parts emerged in the situation very differently, although they all shared the reversibility of the flesh and the communicativeness that it enabled. Relics dwelled in the two modes of being, and were thus spatially multilocated and sources of *virtus* in this-worldliness. By entering the cathedral, profane bodies sought to connect with them, perhaps through the gestures of kneeling and praying, or by lifting and focusing their eyes to the relics, or closing them (see e.g. Hayes 2003).

The encounter with relics was an encounter with invulnerable otherness, while, in contrast, the profane body was established as spatially bounded and vulnerable. The three fingers mentioned; Scheel's secular thumb, and the sacred fingers of Saints Henry and Eric, constitute three human body parts representing these various positions available for embodiment. Together they provide highly differing views of medieval bodies, and reveal the ways in which the boundaries between various bodies were drawn. They also bring forth a range of material processes affecting bodies and body parts. In the face of this complexity and in respect to the maintenance of bodily relations and borders, the vernacular tradition of house deposits is a congruent phenomenon. Nevertheless, such deposits belong to a different bodily order, which diverges from relics both chronologically and institutionally.

Scheel's accident exemplifies the vulnerability of an ordinary human. Such a fragile body could be protected from the fearfully uncontrollable discharges of blood, for instance, with the means of finger rings and other private objects. In them, piety and the desire for invulnerability is present and tangible through the use of pictorial motifs, and their positioning on bodily surfaces.

Lastly, the case of Scheel shows flexibility in approaching bodily abnormalities. After applying a special permission from the Pope, Scheel was eventually granted a dispensation to continue as a priest (Salonen 2003). It appears that certain bodily injuries could be accommodated into the social fabric without severe consequences.

Sacred bodies had a corporeal existence and consequently they participated in the materiality of the world. The finger of St Eric, revealed by new studies to be misidentified, was an element in the tangible practices of authentication and their particular ways of treating and presenting relics. Scientific datings have also contributed to the understanding of the temporal dimension of the material processes affecting the relics. The tiny relics and their wrappings show centuries of careful upkeep and resuscitation. The smallness of bodily remains forms a stark contrast with the inhuman proportions which St Henry's engraved finger has gained on his sarcophagus. The depiction contributed to the veneration of his relics by focusing attention to a part of a holy body and creating a framework for valuing and approaching it.

Spaces and body-subjects dwell in the flesh of the world, one extending into the other. The space of a sanctuary is materially circumscribed and bounded to allow this bodily extending to take certain shapes. It persuades us to repeat certain practices and sediments them into the body schema. The phenomenological analysis of embodiment proceeding in these lines situates the encounter of relics and devotees into the flesh of the world. A reading and rereading of the phenomenological tradition shows also that although the act of interpretation is indeed corporeal, this does lead to equating the present and past bodies in a single structure. By contrast, revealing the difference in the reversibility of the flesh, phenomenology rejects both subjective and objective ways of approaching embodiments. Instead, bodies of the past and present emerge through the spiralling inquiry into their differences. In this way, the social aspect of embodiments is acknowledged, but crucially anchored into the inhuman flesh of the world, into its material sedimentations and moments of spontaneity.

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