

Editorial Note

A favourite quote of Percy Bysshe Shelley's (1792–1822) is 'History is a cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of man'. Although what he actually wrote was not quite as terse, the sentiment about how history not only repeats itself but is mediated through memory is indeed memorable, and it works well as an introduction to this issue of *Temenos*. The subheading of *Temenos* is 'Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion', but its editors have never restricted the term 'comparative religion' to comparative studies alone. Instead, they have used it as a (now admittedly old-fashioned) translation of the German *Religionswissenschaft*. Over the years *Temenos* has featured articles from all the sub-disciplines of this field, perhaps with a little over-emphasis on ethnography. One of the fields that thus finds itself coming back to the fore is that of the history of religions, the focus of this issue.

In our first article Andreas Nordberg challenges the dichotomy proposed by some scholars of pre-Christian Scandinavia between the concepts of *religion* and the Old Norse *siðr*, 'customs'. The concept of *religion* is sometimes argued to be Christocentric, presupposing a churchlike institution and denoting a theological, essentialist monolith separated from other dimensions of society. Nordberg argues that this dichotomy is misleading for two different reasons. First, the separation of popular (religious) *siðr* and formal *religion* presupposes a two-tier model, which does not represent lived religion among either commoners or the elite in Viking and medieval Scandinavia. Second, the conceptualisation of pre-Christian *siðr* and medieval Christian *religion* is anachronistic, since the Scandinavian vernacular words *siðr*, *sedhvenia*, and cognates denoted both popular and formal Christianity in the Catholic Middle Ages. Nordberg proposes as a solution the concept of *lived religion* of Meredith McGuire and others as a more useful and inclusive category.

From pre-Christian Scandinavia we move in our second article to medieval Finland and the skull reliquary of Turku Cathedral. When the reliquary was found in a bricked-up niche inside the sacristy in 1924, it attracted considerable attention. By analysing the bone material and the narrative depiction of martyrdom embroidered on its silk wrapping, Finnish State Archaeologist Juhani Rinne (1932) identified the most important relics as belonging to the patron saint of Finland, St Henry of Uppsala (died c. 1156), who arrived in Finland in the first Swedish 'crusade' and converted the population to Christianity in the 1150s, until being hacked to death by the Finnish farmer Lalli. Some of his relics were known to have been kept in Turku Cathedral, but they were thought to have been taken to St Petersburg (and subsequently

lost) by pillaging Russian troops in 1720. However, Rinne's findings were disputed by Finnish State Archaeologist C. A. Nordman in a later study (1954), in which he instead identified the relics as belonging to St Eric, the patron saint of the Kingdom of Sweden and the leader of the crusade that brought St Henry to Finland. Now, through a careful combination of radio-carbon dates with a macroscopic osteological study, Aki Voitto Arponen, Heli Maijanen, and Visa Immonen can convincingly settle the matter (no, no spoilers here!), but more than this, they also show the complexity of medieval objects of devotion and how an interdisciplinary and detailed study of the materiality of the skull relic reveals a number of other material phenomena relevant for understanding the use of medieval devotional objects as part of the cult of relics.

In our third and final article Tuomas Äystö remains in Finland but takes us home to the 21st century and away from the framework of the history of religions. If Shelley is right in suggesting history is written upon the memories of men, Äystö's use of a discourse analytical framework is very apposite. In his carefully constructed article Äystö examines the cases of religious insult or blasphemy in Finland since 1998, the year the law against 'the breach of the sanctity of religion' (BOSR) came into effect. While the number of guilty verdicts since then (around twenty) has been small, Finland belongs to the most active countries in Europe applying such legislation. Äystö shows that the essentialist language of the BOSR law renders it a crude tool, protecting only 'central features' of 'established religions'. Importantly, Äystö notes how beneficial it is to broaden the scope of analysis in the discursive study of religion with categories empirically connected to it – in this case ethnicity and race – as such connections make the legal instruments intended to cover matters of 'religion' quite complicated. As so many stakeholders and trends coalesce in cases around religious insult and the related debate on freedom of speech, these instances offer many opportunities for studying contemporary societal conflicts.

With only three articles this issue of *Temenos* is smaller than usual. Being accustomed to four or five articles an issue, I must admit that three feels rather spare, but they do say that all good things come in threes. And again, Shelley wrote that history is a cyclic poem. The last time *Temenos* had three articles was in 2011 (issue 47/1), and that was followed by a very rich issue. So it is this time, as we have an exciting and extensive special issue scheduled for issue 55/1. See you there!

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