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A Tool to Think With? Saint Birgitta as Cultural Heritage in Post-Reformation Finland

Birgitta Birgersdotter (1303–1373) was a Swedish noblewoman, wife, and mother of eight. Canonized in 1391, she was also one of the most well-known and influential medieval mystics. Her *Revelaciones* and the Birgittine order, *Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris*, had a continuing influence on medieval Christianity (and beyond) that continued long after her death. There is an exceptionally vast scholarship dedicated to her;¹ her influence was particularly notable in Sweden and other Nordic countries, which have constituted the heartlands of her cult. This article focuses on her afterlife in Finland after the Reformation. Finland was a part of the Swedish kingdom where the Lutheran Reformation took place – gradually – after King Gustavus Vasa’s (1496–1560, r. 1523–1560) proclamation in 1527. In 1809, after the Napoleonic wars, Finland was annexed by Orthodox Russia. This context would clearly have a major effect on the memory of a medieval saint.

While political and cultural transformations did not prevent the remembering of Birgitta, they changed the purposes it served. Birgitta became a part of the cultural heritage, which is understood here as a set of attitudes towards, and relationships with, the past. Rather than focusing on material remains, cultural heritage is approached here as a process of bestowing and transmitting meaning.² Birgitta was a “tool to think with” in the construction of collective identity – on the family, communal, and national levels. Birgitta featured in different yet entangled discussions; a distinction is made here between a “vernacular tradition” –

1 It is impossible to list all the relevant studies here. See, however: Maria H. Oen, ed., *A Companion to Birgitta of Sweden and Her Legacy in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Päivi Salmesvuori, *Power and Sainthood. The Case of Birgitta of Sweden* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). For international publications in Birgitta’s jubilee year of 2003 alone, see Birgitta Fritz, “St Birgitta and Vadstena Abbey in scholarly literature published during the jubilee year 2003,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 20 (2003): 277–86. There has been notable interest, especially in Sweden and Finland. See, for example, Annette Landen and Per Beskow, eds, *Birgitta av Vadstena. Pilgrim och profet 1303–1373. En jubileumsbok 2003* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2004); Päivi Setälä and Eva Ahl, ed., *Pyhä Birgitta – Euroopan suojeleuspyhimys* (Helsinki: Otava, 2003). See also Tore Nyberg, *Birgittinska festgåva: studier om Heliga Birgitta och Birgittinorden* (Uppsala: Svenska kyrkohistoriska föreningen, 1991).

2 Tanja Vahtikari, *Valuing World Heritage Cities* (London: Routledge, 2017), 44–61; Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 14–15.

that is, daily practices on a family and communal level – and official, political, and national discussions. These can all be seen as ways of “doing memory,” as conceptualized in the introductory chapter to this volume – an active process that can include various elements of veneration and remembrance.

In this chapter, I examine how Birgitta has been presented in these discussions. I trace different layers of traditions and discussions, from the Reformation era to the early 20th century. Within the wide field of studies dedicated to Birgitta, this kind of approach – Birgitta as cultural heritage in Finland – is largely missing; therefore, it is clear that this article can only provide an overview pointing to the potential for future research, rather than a definitive account.

Birgitta in Finland: The Medieval Background

Medieval Finland was not a territory with administrative autonomy or clearly-defined borders. It was a part of the Swedish kingdom, which enlarged its territory eastwards all through the medieval period. Finland – as we know it today – was not understood as a single unit; “Finland” initially meant the southwestern parts of modern Finland (still called Finland Proper), and it was only from 1419 on that the connotation of the word stretched to cover the whole country – except for the eastern province of Viipuri (Vyborg). Religion and church administration functioned as unifying factors. The medieval diocese of Turku (Åbo) covered the whole of Finland (with its evolving eastern border), and the bishop of Turku held considerable power over secular matters as well.

In a wider European perspective, Finland was Christianized late; the transformation only took place gradually, starting in the 11th century. Changes in burial practices testify to a peaceful cultural change, but traditionally what is referred to as the First Crusade, in the mid-12th century, has been seen as a major turning point. Its leading figure, Henry – considered the first bishop of Turku – was, according to legend, martyred during the expedition; he was subsequently referred to as the apostle of the Finns. He was the only indigenous medieval saint venerated in Finland. Later, both the First Crusade and Henry became crucial elements of Finland’s national history and in nationalist discourse around the Finnish past and national identity.³ During the Middle Ages, Henry was one of the most popu-

³ Saint Henry and the First Crusade have been an enduring topic within Finnish historical research. Most recently, see Tuomas Heikkilä, *Pyhän Henrikin legenda* (Helsinki: The Finnish Literature Society, 2005); for the research tradition, 38–46. Finnish historical consciousness is also analysed in the article by Anna Ripatti in this volume.

lar saints in Finland, but he was only one among many. The Virgin Mary was popular in Finland, as were various biblical and early Christian saintly figures. It was within this context that the cult of Saint Birgitta was introduced and consolidated from the 1370s on.

The cult of Birgitta took hold in Finland early on. There are Finnish cases registered in her canonization process (1374–1380),⁴ and Finnish pilgrims travelled to Vadstena Abbey (in Southern Sweden), the main monastery of the Birgittine order, to Birgitta's shrine all through the medieval period. A major hub of Birgittine devotion in Finland was Naantali (Nådendal) monastery (*Vallis Gratiae*) in southwestern Finland, established in 1438. It was an important learning centre in Finland, and preaching was listed as a major reason for founding it.⁵ Both church dedications and medieval calendars provide evidence of the importance of the cult of Birgitta in Finland.⁶

4 Isak Collijn, ed., *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte* (Uppsala: Svenska fornskriftsällskapet, 1924–31). On the medieval cult and Birgitta's miracles: Christian Krötzl, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag: Formen des Verhaltens im skandinavischen Mittelalter (12.–15. Jahrhundert)* (Helsinki: SHS, 1994); Anders Fröjmark, *Mirakler och helgonkult. Linköpings biskopsdöme under senmedeltiden* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 1992); Janken Myrdal and Göran Bäärnhielm, *Kvinnor, barn & fester i medeltida mirakelberättelser* (Skara: Skaraborgs länsmuseum, 1994); Cordelia Heß, *Heilige machen im spätmittelalterlichen Ostseeraum. Die Kanonisationsprozesse von Birgitta von Schweden, Nikolaus von Linköping und Dorothea von Montau* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008); Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, "Devotional strategies in everyday life: Laity's interaction with saints in the North in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries," in *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation in Northern Europe c. 1300–1700*, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo (Leiden: Brill, 2017): 21–45; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, "Arki, hoiva ja pyhiinvaellukset," in *Suomalaisten Pyhiinvaellukset keskiajalla. Kun maailma aukeni*, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Christian Krötzl, and Marjo Meriluoto-Jaakkola (Helsinki: The Finnish Literature Society, 2014): 163–79; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, "Fatherhood, masculinity and lived religion in late medieval Sweden," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 38, no. 2 (2013): 223–44.

5 DF #2265. Birgit Klockars, *I Nådens dal: klosterfolk och andra c. 1440–1590* (Helsingfors: Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1980). The importance and popularity of Naantali monastery is evident in donations made by Finnish lay people; see Anna-Stina Häggglund, "Birgittine Sites of Memory. Memorial Services as Expressions of Lived Religion in Testamentary Bequests to St Birgitta's Monasteries in the 15th Century Baltic Sea Region," in *Birgittine Acts of Memory. Remembering Birgitta of Sweden*, ed. David Carrillo-Rangel and Helen Leslie (London: Routledge, 2024, forthcoming); Anna-Stina Häggglund, *Birgittine Landscapes. Three Monasteries in Their Local and Regional Environment Across the Baltic Sea Region c. 1410–1530* (Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2022), 163–213.

6 Circa ten churches were dedicated to Birgitta in Finland, and her major feast day, the feast of canonization, was usually celebrated as *duplex* or *totum duplex* in Finnish churches. Aarno Malin, *Der Heiligenkalender Finnland: Seine Zusammensetzung und Entwicklung* (Helsinki: Suomen Kirkkohistoriallinen Seura, 1925), 227–28; Kati Kallio, Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen, Senni Timo-

Besides the official liturgy, interaction with saints took many forms. The saint's powers were called upon amidst daily troubles; they helped and protected devotees, and in an agricultural society feast days functioned as signposts marking the rhythm of the year. We do not have a lot of hagiographic material from medieval Finland, and many of the practices and local nuances remain unclear. Everything we know, however, indicates that saints held similar positions on the Finnish side of the realm as in Sweden.⁷ Even if saints were not credited with intercessory powers in Lutheranism, their pious lives could be admired. The everyday need for saints' intercessory powers or the role of feasts as markers of collective identity did not disappear with the Reformation, as the post-Reformation vernacular tradition testifies.

Birgitta and Other Celestial Helpers in Early Modern Finland

Scholars have pointed out the conservative nature of early Lutheranism and have shown that old practices were firmly adhered to long after the Reformation. Only in 1571, with the introduction of the Lutheran liturgical order, were most saints' days removed from the church calendar of holy days. Among the days abolished was the feast of Birgitta; *Biritmässa* (October 7) continued to be part of the secular calendar, but it was not among the holy celebrations.⁸

In agricultural societies like Finland, interaction with saints was to a considerable extent motivated by the desire to protect cattle; saints' feast days also

nen, Irma-Riitta Järvinen, and Ilkka Leskelä, *Laulut ja kirjoitukset. Suullinen ja kirjallinen kulttuuri uuden ajan alun Suomessa* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2017), 130.

7 Krötzl, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag*; Fröjmark, *Mirakler och helgonkult*; Katajala-Peltomaa, "Arki, hoiva ja pyhiinvaellukset," 163–79.

8 Raisa Toivo, *Faith and Magic in Early Modern Finland* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2016), 9 et passim; Kallio et al., *Laulut ja kirjoitukset*, 131–32. See also Kaarlo Arffman, "Resistance to the Reformation in 16th-Century Finland," in *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation*, 255–73; Jason Lavery, "Mikael Agricola: Father of the Finnish language, builder of the Swedish state," in *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation*, 207–29. On peasants' religion in early modern Sweden as "traditionalism," see esp.: Göran Malmstedt, *Bondetro och kyrkoro: Religiös mentalitet i stormaktstidens Sverige* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2002). For the Finnish side of the realm during the Reformation era, see Toivo, "Protestantism, Modernity and the Power of Penetration: Saints and Sacrifice in 17th Century Lutheran Finland," in *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation*, 75–103; Miia Kuha, *Pyhänpäivien vietto varhaismodernin ajan Savossa (vuoteen 1710)* (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2016), <https://jyx.jyu.fi/handle/123456789/49350>.

served as markers throughout the agricultural year, giving structure to the yearly rhythm and a sense of control over the surrounding world. At first glance, Birgitta's cult seems to be particularly well suited to agricultural needs. She was celebrated by three different feasts (*dies translacionis*, May 28; *dies natalis*, July 23; *dies canonizacionis*, October 7). The feast of translation at the end of May and the feast of canonization in early October match the timing of many practices in the northern agricultural year.⁹ Mentions of Birgitta in protection rituals or practices linked to the agricultural year are not, however, easy to find.

A major problem for the study of the Reformation era in Finland is the scarcity of sources, especially for the 16th century. Obviously, invocations, votive offerings, or pilgrimages – not to mention miracles – were no longer reported or recorded after the Reformation. During later centuries, evidence of interaction with saints can be found in court records, antiquarian collections, and folkloric material.¹⁰ The early modern secular court records form an extensive set of data, and they are regularly used for the study of religious practices in Finland. In this material, mentions of unofficial holy days or unofficial ritual celebrations can be found; these often take place in the transitional stages of the agricultural year. Birgitta's feasts, however, do not feature among these cases.

Instead of Birgitta, saints like George, Olaf, and Catherine (of Alexandria) appear in the preserved material. All three saints share in common having a feast day that is conveniently located to mark changes in the agricultural year. Furthermore, they all belong to the first cultural layers of Christianization in Finland. St George's day (April 23) was the traditional occasion for letting the cattle out for the summer. This was often done in a ritualistic manner, with the cattle passing through a gate or arch

9 On Birgitta's feast days, see Roger Andersson and Stephan Borgehammar, "The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars at Vadstena Abbey," *Revue Mabillon* 8, no. 69 (1997): 209–36. For the schedule of milestones in the agricultural year, see Kustaa Vilkkuna, *Vuotuinen ajantieto. Vanhoista merkkipäivistä sekä kansanomaisesta talous- ja sääkalenterista enteineen* (Helsinki: Otava, 1983).

10 One example of an antiquarian collection is Christfrid Ganander, *Mythologia fennica, eller förklaring öfver De Nomina Propria, Deastrorum, Idolorum, Locorum, virorum Etc.* (Åbo: Frenckellska Boktryckeriet, 1789). The oral folkloric tradition, Old Finnish poems, and *Suomen kansan vanhat runot* (SKVR) are accessible in an open searchable database hosted by the Finnish Literature Society: <https://skvr.fi/>. This database is based on publications which include nearly all Kalevala-type poems found in archives and literary sources. The secular court records from early modern Finland form a considerable corpus – to such an extent that it is impossible to go through them all for one article. I have utilized the "Tuokko" register, a 20th-century catalogue of the 17th-century rural district court records, which lists the cases by keywords. It was originally written by hand on card files and housed in the National Archives of Finland, but it has since been digitized: <https://digihakemisto.net/haku>. See also Toivo, "Protestantism, Modernity and the Power of Penetration," 83.

of birch or rowan tree. The occasion included an invocation of Saint George or a charm-like chant, urging him to bring the cattle safely back from the woods where they were to pasture during the summer. Saint Catherine's day (November 25) marked the other end of the agricultural year. On that day a special porridge was to be prepared and taken to the cattle shed; rituals also included a special beer and toasts, as well as charm-like songs or invocations. Saint Olaf's day (July 29), in turn, marked the end of hay season. Traditionally, Olaf was considered a protector of lambs, particularly associated with protecting them from bears. The feast day celebrations included a specially prepared meal of lamb as a ritual of protection.¹¹

Feast days had multiple functions, including but not limited to their strictly religious meanings. The dates of these activities, when sending cattle to pasture and at the end of summer harvest and the end of harvest season, do not fall too far from the feasts of Birgitta. Her name does not come up in the context of such festivities, though. While Birgitta had enjoyed popularity in medieval Finland, I have not been able to track down references to her feast day celebrations in early modern court records. As feast day celebrations and other ritual practices involving saints can be categorized under various headings in the registers of court records, it is possible that one or more references to Birgitta may have gone unnoticed.¹² Yet this would not change the big picture: interaction with Birgitta was not a significant factor when ritual activity with saints or feast day celebrations ended up in court in post-Reformation Finland.

The court material illuminates only a small minority of the lay rituals that involved ongoing interaction with saints. Saint's day rituals became hidden practices when they were no longer reinforced, shared, or tolerated on the parish level. As Raisa Maria Toivo argues, saint's day celebrations were adapted to the new context after the Reformation; they were not merely remnants of older traditions.¹³ They were integral to the way people lived their religion and sought protection and tried to secure their livelihoods – the Reformation did not lessen these needs.

11 Ganander, *Mythologia fennica*, 32–34, 65, 92–93, 110; SKVR IX3, 1111, 1129, 1178; SKVR XI, 2063. Kallio et al., *Laulut ja kirjoitukset*, 97, 132–33, 138, 199–210. For court cases involving feast day celebrations, see Toivo, *Faith and Magic*, 92, 98–99; Miia Kuha, “Extended families as communities of religious experience in late 17th-century eastern Finland,” in *Histories of Experience in the World of Lived Religion*, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Toivo (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022), 139–61.

12 I have gone through the “Tuokko” register with search words relating to church and clergy, religion and superstition, and remnants of the Catholic faith.

13 Toivo, “Protestantism, Modernity and the Power of Penetration.”

Communication is at the core of rituals; they are also a way to create, integrate, and disintegrate communities. In medieval Finland, rituals and official celebrations constructed identity and created coherence for the family, parish, and diocese, creating a devotional community that shared in the experience of Birgitta's intercession and protection. The communicative nature of interaction rituals continued in an evolving religious context – the message being conveyed was altered, as was the community of experience created by the practice.¹⁴

The ongoing presence of Birgitta within the Finnish mental landscape is confirmed by other source material. The oral tradition shows that Birgitta remained a tool to think with after the Reformation; she was a tool for managing the everyday and for creating identity. References to saints and saint's day celebrations are a commonplace in folkloric material. The verses, charms, and invocations of saints found in the SKVR collection of old Finnish poems form a syncretic whole, where several cultural layers are visible in an intertwined form. In other words, material collected and recorded during the 19th and 20th centuries also bears evidence of earlier practice.¹⁵ In these oral verses, Birgitta often appears with the vernacular variant of her name: Pirjo or Pirkko.¹⁶

In the folkloric material, Pirkko was associated with the ladybug, *Coccinella septempunctata*. Nowadays, the charm-like saying “Lennä, lennä leppäpirkko – Fly, fly ladybug” is a children's rhyme, but the oral tradition indicates that it used to be employed to predict the future. In the vernacular tradition, ladybugs were associated with many other female saints as well.¹⁷ The graceful flying insect was likely considered to be a messenger, and was often associated with female heavenly intercessors.

¹⁴ For early modern saint's day celebrations and community of experience, see Kuha, “Extended families as communities of religious experience.”

¹⁵ Anna-Leena Siikala, *Itämerensuomalainen mytologia* (Helsinki: The Finnish Literature Society, 2012). The oral tradition was undergoing rapid change at the time the verses were collected, and there were considerable local and temporal variations. On the timing and variation of this material, see Kallio et al, *Laulut ja kirjoitukset*, 45–51.

¹⁶ I have used as search words “Pirkko” (41 hits), “Pirjo” (3 hits), “Pirjotar” (1 hit), and “leppäpirkko” (19 hits). In the Swedish folkloric material collected and preserved by Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland, no references to Birgitta can be found. The material is vast and some remark(s) may have escaped notice. I thank the archival staff of Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland for help in searching for potential mentions. Translations of poems and later journal texts are my own.

¹⁷ On verses, see, for example, SKVR VI1, 2200; SKVR VI2, 7015; Kallio et al., *Laulut ja kirjoitukset*, 209. *Leppäkerttu* – Gertrud; *leppätriinu* – Catherine; in Swedish *Nyckelpiga* – the Virgin Mary. Eugène Louis Backman, *Jungfru Maria Nyckelpiga* (Stockholm: Kungliga Boktryckeriet, P.A. Norstedt, 1947).

In the folkloric material, Birgitta is not directly connected with invocations or charms of healing or to protect cattle, unlike many other saints, but there are signs implying such a role. Important evidence of Birgitta's position as a protector can be found in an oral poem or charm recorded in 1830 in Kaavi, in Eastern Finland. The poem links Birgitta to the birth of the bear; in other versions of this poem the saint in question is the Virgin Mary, St George, or in some versions the pre-Christian Finnish god, Ukko. To summarize, the poem states that Pirjo(tar), the Finnish version of Birgitta, was a short-tempered wife who did not want to care to spin or sow. She became agitated and threw the wool into a river; a fierce wind gathered the wool and eventually out of it the bear was born.¹⁸

The birth of the bear is a significant event, as the bear was not just a fearful beast that threatened humans and cattle pasturing in the woods. In the Finno-Ugric polytheistic tradition, the bear was a sacred entity and an important symbol. It was a source of animistic power, and many rituals guided the hunt as well as the feast after the killing. Traces of these customs and of the collective memory of the bear's importance in the supernatural landscape survived in Finland well into the early modern era.¹⁹ The syncretism of the folkloric tradition is clearly visible in this case. In the Finno-Ugric tradition, to know the birth of someone or something gave one power over them. Thus, following this logic, as Birgitta was responsible for the birth of the bear she also held power over it. In an agricultural society with dense forests and wildlife that threatened cattle and survival, this would have been an important attribute for an effective protector.

Several scholars have suggested that the idea of Birgitta not wanting to spin or sow comes from her *vita*. There we can find an account of twelve-year-old Birgitta struggling to do her needlework when the Virgin Mary comes to her assistance, producing an obviously remarkable work. For the lay audience, this scene may have been interpreted in relation to Birgitta's position as a noblewoman not wanting to do handicrafts and having a temper. In a similar vein, in Finnish, *Lankapirkko* is an insect that tangles up yarn, and *Äkäpirkko* is a nickname for a

18 SKVR VII5, 3936: "Pirjotar pikainen vaimo/ Jok ei keträtä kehahna/ Eikä ommella osanut/ Visko villasa vesillen."

19 On the cult of the bear in Finnish and Sami folklore, see Matti Sarmela, "Karhu ihmisen ympäristössä," in *Kolme on kovaa sanaa. Kirjoituksia kansanperinteestä*, ed. Pekka Laaksonen and Sirkka-Liisa Mettomäki (Helsinki: The Finnish Literature Society, 1991): 209–50. For a comparison between the Finno-Ugric and Scandinavian traditions, see Thomas A. DuBois, "Diet and Deities: Contrastive Livelihoods and Animal Symbolism in Nordic Pre-Christian Religions," in *More Than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices, and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions*, ed. Catharina Raudvere and Peter Schjødt (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012): 65–96; for bears, 86–90.

short-tempered female.²⁰ Interestingly enough, this folkloric connotation of Birgitta is not too far from the image of Birgitta as a saint: in her *vita* and *Revelaciones*, there are several episodes where Birgitta chastises those in power with harsh words. Correspondingly, in the miracles of her canonization process, she was essentially a saint who punished people for their sinful and disrespectful behaviour – in some cases, by letting demons torment them.²¹

It has been suggested that this episode might have been transmitted from the Latin *vita* to the Finnish folkloric tradition via images in an altarpiece of Vadstena Abbey, where Birgitta is depicted doing her needlework and later struggling with a demon. The demon, according to this theory, would have been mistaken for a bear.²² There are, however, other, more plausible paths of transmission. Birgitta's *vita* and her *Revelaciones* were both often used as sources for Birgittine priest brothers' sermons. Preaching – including to a lay audience – was a crucial part of the Birgittine monastic idea and, in addition to images, the preaching of Birgittine priest brothers was a key factor in spreading the *fama sanctitatis* of Birgitta.²³ Vadstena Abbey was an important place of pilgrimage for Finnish pilgrims, but some of the active preachers also visited Naantali monastery. One of these was Johannes Borquardi. He entered Vadstena Abbey in 1428 and died in 1447 after having come down with fever while travelling to settle some of Naantali monastery's administrative affairs in Finland. Johannes was a well-known and productive preacher; besides commenting on other brothers' texts, he also compiled three large collections himself.²⁴ Among his sermons on Birgitta there is one he delivered on the day of canonization with a reference to the *vita*, to the incident where the Virgin Mary helped Birgitta do her needlework.²⁵ We do not know whether this sermon was preached in Naantali, but it is quite possible. In my view, sermons constitute a more likely mode of transmitting the idea of Birgitta

20 Kallio et al., *Laulut ja kirjoitukset*, 208. Vilkuna, *Vuotuinen ajantieto*.

21 On the image of Birgitta as a thaumaturge doing battle against demons and sinful people, see Heß, *Heilige machen im spätmittelalterlichen Ostseeraum*, 201–4. On the role of demonic presence in constructing Birgitta's saintly powers, see Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion in Later Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 145–48. On the relationship between Birgitta and her political adversaries, see Salmesvuori, *Power and Sainthood*, 115–18.

22 Kallio et al., *Laulut ja kirjoitukset*, 139–40.

23 Andersson and Borgehammar, “The Preaching of the Birgittine Friars,” 209–36; Roger Andersson, *De birgittinska ordenprästerna som traditionsförmedlare och folkfostare* (Stockholm: Runica et Medievalia, 2001). Ca. 120 of Birgitta's feast day sermons are preserved in the remarkable collection of Vadstena sermons, which is currently housed by Uppsala University Library.

24 Andersson, *De birgittinska ordenprästerna*, 207–10.

25 Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, C-sammling 331 f. 142r.

sowing – even if not very successfully – to the Finnish side of the realm and to the Finnish oral tradition.

Antiquarian Interest as Identity-Building

In the early modern era, the earlier cultural tradition, including saints, was not only a question of religion; it soon became an element in an identity-building process and started to be of interest to more learned circles, for whom it represented a form of cultural heritage. In Sweden, this was connected with establishing the identity of the Swedish realm as a great power and a great nation. In 1666 a decree was issued instructing the parish clergy to collect and report information on historical matters in their parishes, including information on worship and saints from the Catholic period. Finnish clergy also participated in this endeavour, but in a rather haphazard manner. In reports from the Finnish parishes, one finds no references to cultic practices of Birgitta; instead, natural formations connected with pre-Christian traditions were listed.²⁶

Naantali monastery, as a material token of the past, was of major interest early on; already, in 1700, the monastery's remains were discussed in an academic thesis by Daniel Juslenius (1676–1752), and others followed his lead.²⁷ A more thorough antiquarian work was carried out by Christfried Ganander (1741–1790), who published *Mythologia Fennica* in 1789, listing places, rituals, and entities. Among its 430 entries (in alphabetical order), several references to saints and saint's day rituals can be found. The only reference to Birgitta occurs in an inventory of Salo church: Ganander mentions that it was the oldest church in Ostrobothnia and had, among other things in its possession, a parchment copy of Birgitta's *Revelaciones* and an artefact of fine workmanship, likely an altarpiece,

26 The actual results of the antiquity collection are included in Nils-Gustaf Stahre and Carl Ivar Ståhle, *Rannsakningar efter antikviteter I* (Stockholm: Kungliga vitterhets-, historie-, och antikvitets akademi, 1960). During the 17th century the first version of the oral ballad of Saint Henry, "Pyhän Henrikin legenda," was also recorded. Heikkilä, *Pyhän Henrikin legenda*, 246–56; Kallio et al., *Laulut ja kirjoitukset*, 447–92.

27 Eva Ahl-Waris, *Historiebruk kring Nådendal: och den kommemorativa anatomin av klostrets minnesplats* (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 2010). Juslenius, like other intellectuals of the time, argued strongly for the importance and benefits of Finland being part of the Swedish – that is to say, Western – cultural sphere, even if this had required a crusading war. Pertti Haapala, Mervi Kaarninen, Katja-Maria Miettunen, Ilona Pikkanen, Nils Erik Villstrand, and Johanna Wassholm, "Kertomus Suomen historiasta," in *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan historia 1400–2000*, ed. Pirjo Markkola, Marjaana Niemi, and Pertti Haapala (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2021): 475–528, esp. 482–83.

depicting Birgitta.²⁸ No explanation was offered as to why a Latin text dealing with a medieval saint remained preserved centuries after the Reformation. Even if this is only a minor detail, it is noteworthy since the majority of Finnish parchment manuscripts were transformed (after being torn to pieces) into covers of tax rolls and administrative reports during the Reformation era.

The interest in uncovering and identifying a glorious past was not limited to the national level, but could also be reflected in the construction of family identity. After the re-organization of state power and administrative changes that were consolidated by the end of 16th century, it became important for elite families to be able to trace a patrilineal genealogy showing noble descent. In this, Birgitta featured prominently, as she was of royal lineage on her mother's side. In this new context of state building and of the institutionalization of the nobility as an estate, she served, not as a holy intercessor, but as an ancestor to be called upon to certify the noble lineage of several families. One of these was the Brahe family, which was active in Finland. Clearly, in many instances, this kind of genealogical rhetoric – linking the family to Saint Birgitta – would not stand up to modern critical scrutiny, but it was a response to the demands of the time: a nobleman in a high position serving the crown needed to have a noble family background.²⁹ Birgitta not only united the different families but also offered an instrument for identity work in an era of diminishing kin power and emerging state control.

Interest in the medieval past increased during the era of National Romanticism in Finland, just as it did in the rest of Europe. The Middle Ages were considered to be the era in which the ground had been laid for the nation's roots. In Finland, *Boken om Vårt Land/ Maamme kirja*, the history of Finland published by Zachris Topelius (1818–1898) in 1875, was emblematic of this interest. The book covered the entire history of the country from the imagined pre-Christian past to the time of its writing. The book was very popular and was used in schools in various revised editions until the 1950s.

The fourth chapter of the book was dedicated to the Catholic era; Saints Erik and Henry feature prominently in the text, as do later bishops of Turku. The Lutheran tone of the text is, however, clear: Henry is mentioned as a bishop, not as a saint, and the miracles listed in his legend are referred to as folktales or fairy tales. As for Birgitta, Naantali monastery is considered an important sign of the nation's past, a symbol of identity worthy of greater attention. In the section de-

²⁸ Ganander, *Mythologia fennica*, for references of saints' day customs, 28, 32–34, 37, 55, 65, 69, 92–93, 110; for Salo church and Birgitta, 83. Actually, Salo is located in Finland Proper.

²⁹ Tiina Miettinen, *Juuria ja juurettomia. Suomalaiset ja suku keskiajalta 2000-luvulle* (Jyväskylä: Atena, 2019), 82–99.

voted to Naantali monastery, the general tone is quite positive: the monastery was an asylum and a centre for learning and healing. Even if the glory days of the monastery were long past, Birgitta herself was still present protecting her own: the monastery burnt down 1862 because of the hunting of a jackdaw. According to Topelius, the actual reason was that a projectile set the roof on fire, but people explained the incident as Birgitta's punishment – all living things at the monastery were under her protection, and the hunting of the jackdaw violated this rule.³⁰

This case is part of the process of remembering Birgitta and simultaneously reiterates her essential characteristics: Birgitta was a noblewoman who demanded respect and was able and willing to punish those found lacking in this regard – just like in her hagiography. Even though Topelius claims that belief in her ongoing presence was limited to the credulous, the collective memory of Birgitta hovers in the background of this kind of shared understanding of Birgitta's character.

Birgitta and European Connections in Constructing Finnish Identity

Birgitta was already a symbol of identity during the Middle Ages. She was a patron of the realm in Sweden and her cult was utilized in power struggles by both the nobility and Vadstena Abbey.³¹ All throughout medieval Europe, saints and their cults were connected with political power, and Finland was no exception. When Birgitta was stripped of her intercessory powers during the Reformation, her role in constructing power alliances was altered but did not end. Birgitta as a rhetorical tool was adapted to changing contexts.

The year 1809 was a major turning point in Finnish history. After what is known as the Finnish War (part of the Napoleonic Wars), fought between Russia and Sweden, Finland was annexed by the Russian Empire. Thus, Finland was no longer the eastern part of the Swedish kingdom but became an autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire. After their long common history with Sweden was severed, the Finns were forced to think of their identity and its links

³⁰ Zachris Topelius, *Boken om vårt land: läsebok för de lägsta läroverken i Finland* (Helsingfors: Söderström, 1937), 254–56. For a Church historical perspective on the text, see Erika Boije, “Kyrkohistoriskt historiebruk som menings- och identitetsskapande narrativ praktik i Boken om vårt land,” *Ennen ja Nyt* 16, no. 5 (2016), <https://journal.fi/ennenjanyt/article/view/108762/63759>.

³¹ Louise Berglund, *Guds stat och maktens villkor. Politiska ideal i Vadstena kloster, ca 1370–1470* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003).

to language and religion from a new perspective. Being annexed by an Orthodox empire obviously disrupted the balance of power and placed new weight on identity construction via religion, as Lutheranism was one of the elements distinguishing the Finns from the Russians. As the Russian Empire was a multi-ethnic complex with different religions, Finns were allowed to remain Lutheran. The Finnish Church, as an entity separate from Sweden's, was born in the 19th century; the milestones in this process were the 300th anniversary of the Reformation in 1817 and the new Church law of 1870.³² Religion had already been a clear identity marker in the Baltic Sea region during the Middle Ages: in religious rhetoric, the Orthodox had been labelled schismatics, and Birgitta herself had been eager to promote a “crusade” against them.³³ Their Catholic past clearly separated the Finns from the Russians, yet saints were also a central aspect of the Orthodox faith and tradition.

It was within this context that national history was born – or invented – in Finland by a group of nationally minded intellectuals who drew upon the ideas of contemporary European philosophers and historians, especially those of the German Romantic tradition. As Pertti Haapala argues, the historical dimension was crucial to national identity: “the nation’s past, present, and future were logically contingent and tied to each other as narrative structure.” Continuity was important, and the Middle Ages were recognized as holding great potential for the narrative of the national past.³⁴ In Finland, national history was an invention of academic writers who constructed Finland as a single unit; Finland’s emergence as a nation among other nations was the main theme of the narrative. The past and various historical actors were evaluated from a modern-day perspective: actors and deeds that enhanced the unity of the country and the autonomous position of Finland, whether through an increase in taxes or war, were evaluated positively. Within this context, medieval Finland was sometimes presented as a

32 Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Raisa Maria Toivo, Miia Kuha, Nils Erik Villstrand, and Pirjo Markkola, “Uskonto erontekona keskiajalta 2000-luvulle,” in *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan historia 1400–2000*: 205–39, esp. 220–23, 232.

33 On Birgitta’s relation to the royal couple, see Salmesvuori, *Power and Sainthood*, 145–58.

34 Pertti Haapala, “Lived Historiography: National History as a Script to the Past,” in *Lived Nation as the History of Experiences and Emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*, ed. Ville Kivimäki, Sami Suodenjoki, and Tanja Vahtikari (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021): 29–57, quotation at 36; Monika Baár, “Heretics into National Heroes: Jules Michelet’s Joan of Arc and František Palacký’s John Hus,” in *Nationalizing the Past. Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, ed. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010): 128–48.

(quasi-)autonomous country, under the rule and jurisdiction of the bishop of Turku.³⁵

On a European level, the “nationalization of religious heroes” was typical in nationalistic history writing; this meant that saints, heretics, and other religious figures were turned into national heroes, forerunners of the Reformation, or figures whose actions were early manifestations of class consciousness.³⁶ Medieval saints found their way into national identity construction via history writing in Lutheran Finland, too. In Finland, the most prominent figure was Saint Henry. He did not, however, appear as a saint but as the first bishop of Turku. The First Crusade and Henry’s role in Christianizing Finland became a major part of the identity construction: even if they left Finland under the rule of the Catholic Church and Sweden, they simultaneously tied Finland to the Western cultural sphere and sowed the seeds for its birth as a nation. Birgitta was only mentioned in relation to Hemming, the bishop of Turku and her close friend, who was seen as one of the main protagonists.³⁷

In Sweden, Birgitta played an important role in the nationalist narrative; she was seen as an essential part of national history, as a counterweight to the kings and wars. She continued to be a political figure in early 20th-century Sweden; Birgitta was used as a rhetorical tool, especially by liberal movements and right-wing actors. Birgitta was already being linked to anti-Russian positions by the end of the 19th century, and this view later found a place in an anti-communist agenda.³⁸

By the turn of the 20th century, the same actors were active in both Sweden and Finland “using” and re-inventing Birgitta in collective memory. These were researchers and their close contacts active in the high church movement; many of them had Catholic sympathies, and some even converted to Catholicism. They par-

35 Pertti Haapala et al., “Kertomus Suomen historiasta.” The national paradigm continued well into the 20th century. On Finland as a quasi-autonomous area, see Jalmari Jaakkola, *Suomen historia IV: Suomen sydänkeskiaika. Itämaan synty ja vakiintuminen* (Porvoo: Werner Söderström Oy, 1944); Jalmari Jaakkola, *Suomen historia V: Suomen myöhäiskeskiaika I: Unionin alkukausi* (Porvoo: Werner Söderström Oy, 1950).

36 Baár, “Heretics into National Heroes,” 129–30.

37 Yrjö Koskinen, *Oppikirja Suomen Kansan historiasta* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden Seura, 1869), 51; Magnus Gottfrid Schybergson, *Finlands Historia. Förra delen* (Helsingfors: G.W. Edlund, 1887), 81.

38 Ingemar Lindaräng, *Helgonbruk i moderniseringstider. Bruket av Birgitta- och Olavstraditionerna i samband med minnesfiranden i Sverige och Norge 1891–2005* (Linköping: Linköpings universitet, 2007); Eva Ahl-Waris, “Birgittakorset: intresset för Heliga Birgitta och två forskares tankar kring grundandet av en ‘S:ta Birgittas orden’,” *Ennen ja Nyt* 16, no. 5 (2016), <https://journal.fi/ennenjanyt/article/view/108771/63768>.

ticipated in nation-building and emphasized Finland's Western heritage, which had clear religious connotations.³⁹ In order to highlight this historical heritage, the *Societas Sanctae Birgittae* (SSB) was established in Sweden in 1920; one of its aims was to restore Vadstena Abbey, which combined both material and immaterial elements of cultural heritage. Interest in Birgitta was manifested in various ways; for example, by once again celebrating her feast days.

A similar movement took place around Naantali monastery in Finland; the area surrounding the monastery was excavated and memorial monuments were erected. The interest in material heritage can be seen as a continuation of the earlier antiquarian interest, but in this new context it was also a rhetorical tool: Naantali monastery was a place of memory – part of the cultural heritage, a part of the nation's past, and, as such, part of the nation-building process.⁴⁰

The Catholic past, medieval monuments, and Birgitta as a person were all intertwined in these discussions. As part of creating Naantali as a place of memory, Birgitta's feast was celebrated by holding vespers at the monastery on her death day (July 23).⁴¹ The first vespers in Naantali took place in 1921, before the Act on the Freedom of Religion came into force in 1923. The event was widely reported in the newspapers. While some newspapers described this traditional Catholic service as a legitimate Lutheran event, in other papers the main organizers were fiercely criticized. Questions were raised as to their religious convictions (were they Lutheran or Catholic?), and they were mocked for believing in saints and in particular for having Saint Birgitta as their patron saint (whereas a decent Lutheran believed only in God).⁴² Despite the 1919 constitution having severed the connection between the state and the Church, Lutheranism was still seen as a major element of Finnish identity.

³⁹ Ahl-Waris, "Birgittakorset."

⁴⁰ Ahl-Waris, *Historiebruk kring Nådendal*.

⁴¹ Ahl-Waris, *Historiebruk kring Nådendal*, 152–67.

⁴² *Hufvudstadsbladet*, August 8, 1923. "Tämäniltaisessa Vesperjuhlassa luetaan seuraava kaunis, aitoprotestanttista henkeä uhkuva kohta ilmestysten II:n kirjan 15 luku lat. teksti, 7 luku ruots. teksti," *Turun Sanomat*, July 23, 1922. One of the criticisms of Amos Andersson, who was one of the key figures in the rehabilitation of Naantali monastery and the organizing of the vespers: "Här nämnes herr Amos Andersson. Det kan förtjäna antecknas, att man just nu i hela den svenska landsortpressen får läsa artiklar, som sysselsätter sig med ett så skört och ömtåligt ämne som frågan om herr Anderssons själ. Är han lutheran eller är han katolik? Toro hon bara på den tree-nige guden eller tror han därejämte på jungfru Maria, Sankt Petrus, Sankt Henrik, Sankt Erik och de övriga sankterna. Icke att förglömma Sankta Birgitta, som man på goda skäl gissar att han valt till sitt privata skyddshelgon." *Arbetarbladet*, August 31, 1923. Andersson had already felt obliged to explain that vespers were not a typical mass. *Åbo Underrättelser*, July 23, 1921.

In addition to vespers at Naantali, Birgitta herself appeared surprisingly often in Finnish newspapers in the early 20th century.⁴³ Even if Sweden and Finland had a close shared history, it was by no means self-evident that a Swedish figure might function as a rhetorical tool in a Finnish nationalist context. Newspapers were an important tool to produce and disseminate public discourse on cultural heritage. They reflected and influenced the values, beliefs, and ideologies of their intended audience; in this case, they helped reinforce the collective memory of Birgitta. It would appear that Birgitta was a known figure and that her life resonated well with the disseminated values, for it was discussed in a variety of newspapers and journals, both in Finnish and in Swedish and with both left-wing and right-wing readerships.⁴⁴ Birgitta was used in religious rhetoric, in the arguments of the feminist movement, and in women's magazines; she even found her way into children's magazines.

In these newspapers and magazines, Birgitta does not appear as a saint but as an exceptional figure. As religious rhetoric experienced a comeback, she was also used in anti-Catholic accounts: Birgitta was depicted as denouncing Rome as a nest of snakes and the pope as worse than Judas, more deceitful than Pilate, even on a par with Lucifer himself.⁴⁵ Notwithstanding the fact that Birgitta was a Catholic saint, she fortified Finnish Lutheran identity. A minor trend seems to be the attempts to depict Birgitta as a wise woman, albeit one constrained by her participation in the Catholic faith; all she could do was to make it more spiritual⁴⁶ while more daring challenges were still taking form. In this kind of rhetoric, the medieval mystic became a forerunner of the Reformation. Her most important merits were her enthusiasm to translate the Bible into the vernacular and to edu-

⁴³ I have used the digitized collection at the National Library of Finland (<https://digi.kansallis.kirjasto.fi>) to search through newspapers and journals. I have used the search words "(Pyhä) Birgitta" and "(Heliga) Birgitta" and have then gone through the results separately. Among the results, there were many references to place names (like churches) and several advertisements for a single play. The cases presented are a sample of the most important examples in terms of cultural heritage.

⁴⁴ For example, *Kansan ystävä*, March 10, 1898; *Hufvudstadsbladet*, July 25, 1926; *Svenska Pressen*, June 12, 1929; *Kodin Viikkolehti*, nos. 51–52 (1931).

⁴⁵ "Ja Roomalle hän lausuu säkenöiden pyhää vihaa: muurisi ovat raunioina, niiden sijassa kasvaa vain ohdakkeita ja vilisee käärmeitä. Lain kymmenen käskyä olet muuttanut yhdeksi ai-noaksi: tänne rahaa. [. . .] Pyhällä istuimella hän näki istuvan pimeyden ruhtinaan Luciferin. [. . .] Paavia hän nimitää sielujen tappajaksi, joka oli Juudastakin häijympi ja Pilatustakin kunnottomampi." *Haminan Sanomat*, August 18, 1898. See also *Kansan ystävä*, March 17, 1898.

⁴⁶ *Koti ja yhteiskunta*, no. 12 (1902); *Haminan Sanomat*, August 18, 1898; *Kansan ystävä*, March 17, 1898.

cate the laity.⁴⁷ She was a voice calling in the wilderness, seeking to awaken the medieval church; she became the prophet and pioneer of the Reformation.⁴⁸

Notable religious figures were frequently used in the nationalist history writing of the time, but Birgitta's role in Finland was particularly complex: she was not just a local hero, she was proclaimed to be a saint by the authority of the pope and was venerated as such by the whole Catholic Church at the same time as these texts were being published. In addition to testifying to the importance of Lutheranism, the newspapers simultaneously provide evidence of Birgitta's familiarity. She was known and remembered enough by the audience for this kind of rhetoric to be useful.

In Sweden, Birgitta was a multifaceted political symbol; she was used as a symbol for women's emancipation by the women's suffrage movement. By the turn of the 20th century, several biographies of Saint Birgitta had been written by educated women – all in a praising tone. Their work was influenced by the contemporary fight for women's rights. A dissenting note was struck by history professor Henrik Schück (1855–1947), who portrayed Birgitta as a power-hungry woman – further commentary on the political situation at the time. In Sweden, women won the right to vote in 1921,⁴⁹ but in Finland the situation was different: women had already received the right to vote in 1906. This did not mean, however, that there was no need for feminist rhetoric, and Birgitta served as a handy tool for this purpose in Finland, as well.

Biographies of Birgitta were published in Finnish women's journals.⁵⁰ Both right-wing and socialist journals discussed Birgitta and her role as an exemplary woman, towards whom the current generation should be grateful. *Koti ja yhteis-*

47 “Rohkeutta tuollaisiin lauseisiin oli Birgitta saanut p. raamatusta jota hän tahtoi käännettävän kansan kielelle ja jo aikoja ennen Lutheria panee siis arvoa äidinkielelle ja kansanvalistukselle.” *Haminan Sanomat*, August 18, 1898; *Kansan ystävä*, March 17, 1898.

48 *Joulutähti*, December 1, 1908; *Kansan ystävä*, March 17, 1898; *Toveritar*, nos. 22–24 (1939).

49 Elisabeth Hallgren, “Birgitta's Character. A Debate around 1900,” in *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena. Papers from a Symposium in Stockholm 4–6 October 2007*, ed. Claes Gejrot, Sara Risberg, and Mia Åkestam (Stockholm: Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets akademien, 2010): 268–75.

50 See, for example, *Naisten ääni*, nos. 7 and 16 (1922). *Naisten Ääni* was established by the Naisallialitto Unioni (today the Finnish Women's Association Unioni); it was published from 1905 to 1949 and was connected with liberal political parties, at first Nuorsuomalainen Puolue and then Kansallinen Edistyspuolue. Arja Turunen, “Naistenlehdet Suomessa 1880-luvulta 1930-luvulle,” *Media & viestintä* 37, no. 2 (2014): 38–56. Several of the women's journals were associated with societies and organizations that played an important role in building civil society in Finland; see Irma Sulkunen, “Naisten järjestäytyminen ja kaksijakoinen kansalaisuus,” in *Kansa liikkeessä*, ed. Risto Alapuro, Ilkka Liikanen, Kerstin Smeds, and Henrik Stenius (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1987): 157–72.

kunta, the journal of Suomen Naisyhdistys, described Birgitta as enabling and strengthening the interaction between Sweden and the rest of Europe. It is easy to agree with this argument, but the claim that Birgitta was the most noteworthy woman in Sweden – having more influence in her own time and after than any other Swedish woman, ever – is more open to debate.⁵¹ *Toveritar*, the journal of the Social Democrat party, argued that “we, the women of posterity, should thank Birgitta.”⁵² On the other hand, *Suomen Nainen*, the women’s journal of the Finland’s conservative party (Suomalainen puolue; after 1918, Kokoomus), took a more clearly feminist approach: it, too, described Birgitta as a proto-reformer while simultaneously criticizing the Lutheran Church for its masculine culture. The journal claimed that one of the biggest shortcomings of Protestantism was its failure to adequately utilize women’s help.⁵³ As such, Birgitta could embody various elements of immaterial cultural heritage, depending on the needs of the present.

Perhaps the most important evidence of Birgitta’s lasting presence in Finnish culture comes from a children’s magazine. Birgitta was a suitable figure – extraordinary, yet familiar enough – to be represented in various kinds of texts. Apparently, she was to be well known in the future, too, since it was deemed important to familiarize new generations with her. In children’s magazines, Birgitta’s life was transformed into an educational tale dressed up in a fairy tale–like tone. Such texts were not just made up but were taken from Birgitta’s *vita*, which had been translated into Swedish. The stories of Birgitta were spiced up with some vivid details; thus, the story in *Pääskynen* begins with a shipwreck that Birgitta’s mother was in when she was pregnant with Birgitta. The setting is described in detail: “It was the summer of 1303. On the eastern side of Öland Island, a gorgeous, gold-plated ship cut through the foamy waves. Its sails bulged in the wind and the statue of a saint on the stern got a splash of water on its face from

51 *Koti ja yhteiskunta*, no. 12 (1902). Suomen Naisyhdistys (Swedish: Finsk Kvinnoförening; the Finnish Women’s Association) was established in 1884 and published *Koti ja yhteiskunta* journal from 1889 to 1911. It contained a mixture of the typical contents of women’s magazines, like fashion tips and articles dealing with family issues, with those of a general journal, in addition to texts about women’s position and role in society. Its agenda was the legal, moral, and economic uplift of women. Turunen, “Naistenlehdet Suomessa,” 38–56.

52 *Toveritar*, nos. 22–24 (1939). In the 1930s, *Toveritar* was the only journal aimed at working-class women.

53 *Suomen nainen*, nos. 22–23 (1920): “Ruotsin Birgitta on loistava esimerkki sen ajan nunnista, jotka olivat erinomaisen kaunopuheisia; he asettivat korkealle kirkko-ihanteen taistellen sen puhtauden puolesta ja jättäen jälkimaailmalle lukusia, Lutherin käytäntöön soveltamia julistuksia. Yksi protestantismin suurimpia erehdyksiä on ollut, että se meidän päiviimme saakka on ollut niin täydellisesti maskuliininen, ettei se ole käyttänyt naisten apua edes hyväntekeväisyydessä.”

time to time.” According to *Pääskynen*, Birgitta was of most noble background and was a special child – enjoying, “with shining eyes,” stories about pilgrimages, martyrs, and saints.⁵⁴

Pääskynen does not limit itself to tales of her childhood, however, but covers Birgitta’s whole life, ending with her death and her role as harbinger of the Reformation. Centuries have passed, it is true, but Birgitta remains an important figure: “We inhabitants of the Protestant North have healthy religious habits and do not venerate Birgitta as a saint. But we, too, see in her a noble and uplifted soul, a great spirit who reached from the dust of the earth towards the glory of God.”⁵⁵

Clearly, this narrative was meant to be part of a religious upbringing, combining both morality and Finnishness. Media and journals provided a means to socialize children into the norms and values of the surrounding community. Birgitta’s life encapsulated such norms, which enabled her to function as an emblem of cultural heritage; she, as a historical figure, was malleable enough to find a place in discourses of moral uplift and in political rhetoric.

Conclusion

Saints were and are potent symbols, used to manifest patriotic pride and identity. Saints hold an enduring position within the mental landscape. Birgitta and the memory of her life possessed elements that fit into the demands of the changing society of post-Reformation Finland; she was an interpretative frame who could serve various needs. Birgitta created an emotional tie to the past, bridging the past and the present: she enabled the participation of various groups in the creation of a collective memory and collective identity.

Cultural heritage was an active process, formed at the intersection of material objects and spaces – in Birgitta’s case, Naantali monastery and churches dedicated to her – as well as practices, like poems, charms, and lore, and narratives that in the 20th century were employed in journals and newspapers. Many of the details of which corroborate the understanding of cultural heritage as being formed in the present but reflecting concerns about the past. Birgitta served as an element of collective identity for various communities – families, societies, and localities – for whom she bestowed and transmitted meaning. The Finnish nation

⁵⁴ *Pääskynen*, nos. 9–10 (1926). *Pääskynen* was a children’s journal written, edited, and illustrated by well-known Finnish authors and artists. It was published by the Otava Publishing Company from 1906–1935.

⁵⁵ *Pääskynen*, nos. 9–10 (1926).

and its identity – be it religious, that is the proper Lutheran faith, or else its belonging to the Western cultural sphere – was an important framework, which gave shape to the needs of the present and in which Birgitta was a useful reference point.

In the early 20th century, with the renewed interest in Birgitta and the new religious rhetoric about her, Birgitta continued to be a tool to think with, as she had been for centuries. Saints' symbolic power is manifest in their enduring presence: they have managed to find their way into modern Lutheran nation-states. Birgitta enabled “doing memory” of the national past for the national present. She served as a national symbol in Sweden, but in Finland Birgitta was used as a symbol for smaller groups – families, religious subgroups, and feminist movements – within nation-building and identity-creating discussions. Concerning Birgitta's position in Finland, we may conclude with the words of *Arbetarbladet*, the journal of Swedish-speaking social democrats in Finland, from 1943: Birgitta may be out of work, like the other saints, but she is ours – “fixed in our historical consciousness.”⁵⁶

56 “eller vår egen Birgitta vilka dock är fixerade i vårt historiska medvetande.” *Arbetarbladet*, December 27, 1943.