

Ignorant Superstition?

Popular education on magic in early 17th century confessionalist Finland. The case of

Mary and the rosaries

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Please cite original publication as Toivo, Raisa maria ' Ignorant Superstition? Popular education on magic in early 17th century confessionalist Finland. The case of Mary and the Rosaries', in Louise Nyholm Kallestrup and Raisa Maria Toivo (eds.) *Contesting Orthodoxy in Medieval and Early modern Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan 2017. pp145-163.

This article investigates popular education concerning magic and superstition in the Finnish part of early 17th century confessionalist Lutheran Sweden. It shows how what at first seems to have been considered popular religious superstition slowly came to be considered magic, and that the nonconformity of the practice appears to have been deliberately downplayed throughout the period. Special interest here focuses on the cult of Mary and the rosary practices associated with it. The article uses popular education material of the church from the early 17th century and the model sermon collection of Bishop Ericus Erics Sorolainen to see what it teaches about Catholicism and the Rosaries and then contrasts it with (secular) court records in order to look at popular attitudes in practice. These are then put in the context of historiography on magic and superstition in Sweden and Finland. I will later revert to the relevant characteristics of the material as I attempt to interpret it.¹

¹ This work had been done as a part of a research project "The Orthodox Lutheran Confessionalism in 17th century Sweden and its European Context", and the Center of Excellence. Re-thinking Finland funded by the Academy of Finland.

Magic, Superstition and Witchcraft in Early Modern Finland

Magic and superstition in early modern Finland and Sweden were concepts whose content eluded precise definition. In popular thought they were closely connected with each other along with concepts like witchcraft, maleficium and heresy on one hand and faith and piety on the other. The clergy and other theoretical thinkers tried to draw clear boundaries between these different definitions, but could not reach an agreement and were clearly unable to enforce their views even among the secular authorities, let alone different groups or individuals of the populace.

In the legal or judicial context of early modern Finland, trials against magic and superstition belong to the same group of trials as those against witchcraft. These trials used the same terminology and operated on the basis of the same legal codification. There were four different kinds of trials on magic and witchcraft in the 17th century Finland, of which two major kinds concerned either traditional maleficium or magic and superstition. Maleficium trials for supernatural harm, witchcraft or *troldom* (Swedish for harmful magic and witchcraft), had been an endemic feature of court records since the Middle Ages. Benevolent or at least less harmful magic and superstition were usually grouped together under the same term of *vidskepelse*. These trials gain frequency in the middle of the 17th century. They were a complicated set of cases including healing practices or practices to increase the productivity of cattle or game by spells and prayers. They could include love magic, uncovering thieves or fortune telling. Court records also describe a variety of tangible actions such as hiding rowan tree branches or pieces of metal in secret places presumably to ensure protection, but the purpose often remains

unclear in court records.² The Swedish term of *vidskepelse* meant in Finnish court records both individual acts of magic, such as rituals or casting spells or reading prayers or using protective equipment, and the beliefs or indeed the world view in which these practices made sense. It is therefore difficult to make a distinction between magic and superstition. In Finnish language there are and were different terms for the following words/concepts: *taikuus*, which fairly pragmatically means magic, and *taikausko*, which can mean either superstition or more pragmatically a belief in at least some acts of magic work. These differences were lost in early modern court records, however, which translated both of these terms – if they ever were used in court – into the Swedish *vidskepelse*. It seems indeed that a distinction between magic as acts and deeds and superstition as beliefs and world views was not relevant for early modern Finns. As Linda Oja states, the meaning of the term *vidskepelse* also changes so that during 17th century trials it is considered close to witchcraft and at least in theory related to blasphemy and relationship with the Devil, but in the 18th century it takes on a meaning more like in modern dictionaries: a belief or practice resulting from ignorance. In both cases, however, it is relevant to notice that *vidskepelse* was a term imposed from above on practices and thoughts by outsiders who thought them incorrect. Likewise “superstition” is obviously a label imposed by outsiders on the practices and beliefs of people who would, if they existed at all, themselves describe their ways and thoughts with terms varying from piety to common sense or experience and in any case with words implying much more respect: no-one practices superstition.

² See e.g. Linda Oja, *Varken Gud eller Natur. Synen på Magi i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige*, (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings förlag Symposion 1999) for a lengthy discussion on the characteristics of these groups, but also Marko Nenonen, *Noituus, Taikuus ja noitavainot Ala-Satakunnan, Pohjois-Pohjanmaan ja Viipurin Karjalan maaseudulla 1620-1700, Historiallisia tutkimuksia 165*. (Helsinki: Societas Historica Finlandiae 1992), pp. 39-72 and also Marko Nenonen, ‘Envious Are All the People, Witches Watch at Every Gate’ in *Finnish Witches and Witch Trials in the Seventeenth Century, Scandinavian Journal of history* 18:1 (1993).

Modern ideas of religion as a personal set or an institutionalised system of religious attitudes, beliefs and practices, or in the European case, a belief in the existence of spiritual beings or of a cosmic order/power and the cultural systems which arise from the need of humans to form relationships with these powers. Magic is then any type of attempt to influence these powers, and is broad enough to comprise practically all possible models of thought of early modern Finns and therefore it serves no purpose in trying to pick out the points of definition among early modern Finns. The traditional way, suggested by James Frazer and Bronislaw Malinowski, of separating magic and prayer – that prayer is when one humbly begs for a Divine entity to intervene and this entity may or may not do it according to its own will, whereas magic is something coercive, something that in itself has the power to make the supernatural powers act – does not wholly serve this discussion, neither does Marcel Mauss' distinction that seeks to satisfy instrumental needs whereas religion satisfies a moral code, although it would have been close to the ideas which early modern Finns, both the general populace and the elites, held. Early modern Finns shared a Christian starting point in the evaluation, and an understanding that religion, piety and prayer were something moral and righteous, but that magic was the opposite. That beliefs, deeds and even persons could (and sometimes should) be divided into these two categories was clear, although the division as such was never complete. For the clergy and the educated elites such a distinction was built in their systems of belief. A vast majority of Finnish members of the populace, when accused of either *vidskepelse*, as magic and superstition, or of *trolldom* and *förgörning* as witchcraft, seem to have used prayers as part of their practices. They often used this fact as part of their defense, thinking that magic or witchcraft and religion were mutually exclusive: that that using Christian formulas placed them on the side of the respectable folk and therefore they could not be considered witches. Sometimes this was openly stated: e.g. a woman asked from her opponents in the court "Do not I mention God, too?", but more often the implication of citing prayers was left to be worked out by the court. The

elites, however, though thinking prayer and magic equally exclusive, were not ready to accept these ritual words as prayers, but rather as blasphemy. The debate among early modern Finns arose around which individual acts and beliefs belonged to which side of the divide.³ This produced a debate, in which the interesting point may not be the general impression that everyone usually held their own thoughts and deeds to be on the right side whereas the rest were less certain, but the ways in which people argued to support their beliefs against those of the others'. Superstition and magic were prosecuted as a criminal offence, a religious crime although there was also a possibility (used more and more often as the 18th century wore on) to prosecute superstitious acts of magic as fraud, at least if they were performed for money. At some points, such as in this article, silences and the decision to not prosecute were also seen of key significance.

Idolatry and Lip Service vs. obedient Mary

Whereas the Swedish Reformation was at legislative level abrupt, it was put into practice only slowly. The Diet of Västerås proclaimed in 1527 that all ministers in the country were to preach pure religion. However, only in 1593 did the clergy and the political powers of the country decide what pure religion was. At this point they also refused the so called Red Liturgy or Liturgy of King John that had had clear Catholic characteristics, and which, it seems, had had not insignificant support among the clergy and parishioners in Finland. The Church Order had included a liturgy in Swedish, but it took some time to establish a Finnish one.⁴ Despite a few

³ Further, see Toivo, *Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Society*, (Hampshire: Ashgate 2008), pp. 36ff and 120ff; Toivo, 'Lived Lutheranism and Daily Magic in Seventeenth-Century Finland' in Kathryn Edwards (ed.) *Everyday Magic in Early Modern Europe*, (Hampshire: Ashgate, forthcoming).

⁴ Pirinen, Kauko, *Suomen kirkon Historia I*, (Helsinki, WSOY 1991), p. 334; Hanska, Jussi, 'Revisionistista reformaatiohistoriaa maailmalla – milloin Suomessa?' in *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 1/2005; Knuutila, Jyrki, 'Liturgisen yhdenmukaistamisen toteutuminen Suomessa reformaatiokaudella 1537–1614', *Suomen Kirkkohistoriallisen Seuran Vuosikirja 77* (1987), pp. 28-29. See also Rüblack, Ulinka, *Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005), p. 94.

catechisms, the practice and daily experience of religion changed slowly until the first really affordable catechism had been published in 1666. This event also coincided with the rise in the number of trials for magic and superstition. It is unsurprising to find a relationship between confessionalisation and superstition trials, yet a simple correlation cannot be turned into causations. Despite that or perhaps exactly because of, the opposition between Lutheranism and Catholicism did not rise to such political importance as it did in Sweden,⁵ resulting in a long-lasting see-saw teetering between the various forms of cult, liturgy, ritual and dogma of the two denominations, a lot of early Finnish literature had polemic tendencies.

This applies even to the first major collection of model sermons in Finnish, *Postilla*, written by the Bishop of Turku, Ericus Eriki Sorolainen, and published in 1621. One of the aims of *Postilla* may also have been to establish Sorolainen's dogmatic position, as he had been a supporter of King John's Liturgy before the Uppsala meeting. There are points in which Sorolainen refers to recent developments in his sermons. Some of them are directed more to the clergy and meant as church politics than for instruction of the laity. For example, in the sermon on the first Sunday after Christmas, Sorolainen takes an example of the sin of Peter – denying his God – from "what has happened in our time, when the Pope's Mass book or Liturgy was imposed on the clergy both in Sweden and Finland and they had to adopt it or lose their office and their livelihood. And then many hearts were revealed as it was received it but many spoke against it".⁶ At first Sorolainen puts on an apologetic air, but then goes on in a more condemning tone despite the fact that his readers surely knew that he had not spoken against the Red Liturgy. It is said that

⁵ Knuutila (1987), pp. 28-29.

⁶ 'mitä meidän aicanam on tapattunut/cosca se Pawin Messukiria eli Liturgia pappein päälle tungettin sekä Ruozisa että Suomesa, että heidän piti taicka sen vastaanottama/taicka mistaman heidän wircans ja leipäns/silloin monen sydämen aiatoxet ilmoitettin/sillä monda otit sen vastan ia monicahdat sitä wastan sanoit.' Ericus Eriki Sorolainen, *Postilla* I. (Stockholm Christopher Reusner 1621, faximile Helsinki, Gummerus 1988), 1st Sunday after Christmas, p. 219, (187).

Sorolainen's polemic against other confessions – Catholicism and Calvinism – “remained moderate”, but his position was nevertheless clear. What is more uncertain is whether phrases like the above, or those cited below, reflect the genre expectations of the time for any religious text written at least partly for the laity or Sorolainen's real concern. Nevertheless, what Sorolainen says about Catholicism and superstition reflects the general educational polemics in early modern Finland.

The compilation of sermons in the *Postilla* begins rather ostentatiously with an admonition that it should not be used as an excuse for not going to church to hear a proper sermon given by a minister, but that it could be used for preparation before going to church or for meditation after the church proper – in short, *Postilla* claims to be meant for the use of laypeople. However, in reality not many laypeople could afford to buy it or invest the time in reading its 2,500 pages. This must have been known by Ericus Eriici himself, and he probably took it into account in his writing that most of his readers would, in reality, be clergymen trying to find inspiration and models for their own sermons. *Postilla* fluctuates between learned Latin quotations and tangible and emotional writing that relates to everyday life of at least elite women. When university students and parish ministers did read the book, they also disseminated its ideas in their own sermons in the more remote rural areas of early 17th century Finland.

Having previously defended a liturgy that had Catholic features, Sorolainen now refuted Catholic ceremonies already in the dedication of his work. He dismissed Catholicism as an outward cult of superficial actions and rituals only where people's thoughts could be far away from the numerous prayers that their lips may be citing. A number of “Papist delusions” are named, among them the elevation of the Host and the use of salt and candles and especially the use of rosaries, “[w]hen they can read hundred and fifty Ave Marias and fifteen Our Fathers ---

and they get indulgences and their sins forgiven no matter how far away their minds can be from their actions".⁷

The Elevation of the Host, the use of candles and the use of Hail Mary were in fact things that Ericus Erici had been supporting in the Liturgy of John III, which may be a reason why he now dwelled at length in the condemnation of outward forms of Catholicism. He says little of Catholic dogma in itself, however, considering the outward practices only. His superficial treatment of Catholicism is therefore in some contrast with the learnedness of the treatment of biblical material and Protestant teachings.

It is possible that the contrasting practicality of the treatment of the Rosary cult is due to its being meant to influence the populace directly. However, Sorolainen was not alone in attacking specifically the cult of Mary. There is, for example, a poem, spread around in manuscript form among the clergy of Finland, ridiculing the practices as meaningless outward deeds only, and paralleling Ave Marias and psalter-readings with fasting, wearing wool clothes and bare feet, flagellation etc.⁸ It seems indeed that the attack against Catholicism or Catholic practices in Finland were, at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries, that is in the early phase of confessionalization and the late phase of Reformation, largely embodied in an attack on the usage of Rosaries in particular and the cult of Mary in general.

However, at the same time, Mary had a strong place also in the Lutheran sermons. All medieval features of popular education – the imagery in churches, sermons speaking emotionally of Mary

⁷ "lucevat nimettäin /sata ja wijsikymmentä Engelin tervehdysta ja wijsitoistakymmentä (sic) Isä Meidän Rucousta --- ja sawat palio aneita ia syndins antexi waica cuinga caucana sydän ia aiatos siitä on" in *Postilla I*, pp. 7-8; *Postilla I*, p. 510

⁸ *En lithen wnderwisning fwl medh Papisters wilfarelser, ther hwar och en Christen skall taga sigh wara före. Stelt på rijm till Antichristi rpäst Huru han schall stella si handell wthi wercket*, printed in Kiiskinen, Terhi (ed.): *Fem källor från den Svenska Reformationstiden i Finland*, (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society 2010), pp. 287-297.

as the mother of Jesus, and also yearly ceremonies to bless the growth of crops by venerating her.

The Reformation in Finland included no wide-ranging iconoclasm and most murals in Finnish churches were not painted or chalked over before the 18th century but were left to be seen and contemplated by the populace, although new meanings were attached to them⁹. Mary is perhaps the most important of the figures who acquired a new set of meanings. In the murals painted during the 17th century, she is no longer the Queen of Heaven or even an intercessor between the sinner and God, but rather an exemplary mother and wife in the family of baby Jesus. In Lutheran sermons, she became an example of humility and obedience. Sorolainen used her as an example to all poor people - as did Luther and other preachers – by pointing out how she accepted the fate given to her and her son, accepted that she should give birth to the son of God and give Him up to fulfill His mission. She submitted and was taken care of so that God's plan was fulfilled. A good example of Mary's still important role in Finnish Lutheran sermons is Sorolainen's sermon on the first Sunday after Christmas. It began with Simeon's greetings to Mary and on Hanna's prophesy on Jesus. The theological point of the sermon is to demonstrate the simultaneously divine and human nature of Jesus. In this Mary was essential and the human nature of her motherhood is emphasised in the sermon. As the point was made by Ericus Erci, however, he began with Simeon's warnings of the suffering to follow: that a mother should not expect or even wish that everything should go well with her child. With Simeon's description of the swords that would pierce her soul, Ericus Erci grew especially emotive.¹⁰ In the context of high child mortality and dangers of war and childbirth, this would already have resonated with most women.

⁹ Hiekkänen, Markus, *Suomen keskiajan kivikirkot*. (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society 2007), p. 50.

¹⁰ Sorolainen, *Postilla I*. Sunnuntai joulun jälkeen, p. 207, pp. 209-211 (p. 175, pp. 177-179). See also Toinen, joulupäivän saarna (2nd sermon on Christmas Day), *Postilla I*, p. 201 (p. 169)

Instead of changing the image of Mary, this enforced the female experience of the rosary practice. Mary was legitimately present in the Protestant church life. Therefore people felt that she could be as legitimately present in their personal religious lives too.

Traces of the Cult of Mary in the Lutheran county of Satakunta

There is a handful of court records from the beginning of the 17th century which mention the use of Rosaries or the cult of Mary in Lower Satakunta in western Finland. The number of these records (I have found five, but for various reasons would estimate a few more to be waiting to be found, up to the total number of approximately ten¹¹) is so small compared to the total number of cases connected to witchcraft, magic and superstition in one way or another (around 2,000 according to Nenonen's estimate) that they appear at first totally insignificant. For any general explanation or characterization of what is important in Finnish witchcraft or magic, they would be close to useless.

However, to gain more insight into the relationship of confessionalisation and the concepts of superstition or magic, they may shed some special light despite their small number. In fact, their small number is partly what makes them potentially interesting: in fact there should be none at

¹¹ References to these court records have been collected using local- or church histories and the 'Tuokko' register of rural court records, local histories and scholarly works on church or religious history of witchcraft and superstition in Finland. Tuokko is a 19th century catalogue over 17th century rural district court records, which lists the cases by search words. It was originally written by hand on card files and has been housed in the National Archives of Finland, but is currently undergoing digitalization is accessible via the internet at <http://digi.narc.fi/digi/dosearch.ka?new=1&haku=tuomiokirjakortisto>. I have used search words relating to church, religion and superstition. In addition to the obvious search word 'traces of Catholic religion' cases like these should be expected to turn up for example under headings like 'communion' or 'church punishment' because the suspected parishioners would often be banned from communion. There are plenty of cases when someone was noted to be banned from communion, but the reasons are fornication and crimes of violence, and a couple of times 'ignorance of the rudiments of religion', which means that the person had failed his catechism hearing. Likewise one would expect that entries on 'visitation' included cases like these, but it seems not so. Nenonen (1992), pp. 405-410 includes an almost complete list of witchcraft and magic trials in Lower- Satakunta, where some of the cases are also noted.

all. Religious irregularities were crimes usually punished by the church, although it was also legally possible for the secular courts to take these matters up, and at times they did, as can be seen in the existence of the cases noted here. Competition between the church and the crown had brought punishments by the church to the jurisdiction of secular courts already in the middle ages. During the 16th century this trend grew stronger so that secular courts came to have precedence also in sentencing church punishments. However, the initiative which the church legally had often meant that the local Vicar would act as a prosecutor in a secular court. But at the beginning of the century the custom was that matters of minor religious deviation were dealt most often within church courts or during visitations. In secular courts rosary practices were not cases in themselves, they were only recorded by accident, because somebody took a special initiative or because something else took place in connection with rosary practices, something that was within the remit of a secular court.¹² That the rosaries in Ala-Satakunta made it to court records even if the court was not interested in them may actually mean that they were more important to the lives of the people who talked about them than the matter at hand.

The first thing that strikes the eye when reading these cases is that they did not start as trials against superstition. The first few of them were court cases on something else, and the records mention the use of rosaries almost in passing. Indeed, one of them is an inheritance inventory, in which one article was *"a couple of strings of stones that old wives at the time used to read upon"*¹³. The old wives' practices merited no further attention and they seem to have been mentioned most pejoratively in order to denote the small monetary or practical value of the

¹² Ankarloo, Bengt, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*. (Lund: Nordiska bokhandeln 1972), pp. 82-86; Nenonen (1992), pp. 256ff. Unfortunately the church court and visitation records from the early 17th century Lower Satakunta do not survive.

¹³ *ett paar stene båndh som käringar i den tijdh hade läst opå*. National Archives of Finland (NA), Ala-Satakunta I KO a 3, 304v. Kokemäki, 17.-20. November 1634.

inheritance. The rosary practice was not seen as important, it was merely something that old people used to do before, not something that would be a threat or a serious heresy. It seems apparent from the court records that no-one was too interested in prosecuting or persecuting them: not the neighbors and relatives nor the authorities. Whereas the courts at the beginning of the century operated largely on an accusatorial basis and rarely took the initiative in prosecuting cases without an individual plaintiff or petitioner, although they did so in serious matters. Neither did the parish minister take up the matter the issue of rosaries, although they followed matters up in secular courts at the beginning of the century – a practice which was legally required of them and which grew, by the second half of the century, so common that the ministers pursued not only religious errors but also some of the more mundane matters of their flock such as the inheritance rights of old widows or the unpaid wages of servants.¹⁴ The old wives rosaries were not deemed important, it seems from the court records. Why then did the rosary practices did leave a mark in the court records which, in the early 17th century usually limited their notes to important things?

The seeming lack of interest is in line with the policy of not normally punishing superstition and magic with a secular punishment before 1660's. Sometimes a public confession was thought of as an appropriate remedy, and sometimes the secular courts turned the matter over to the church court institutions (either local church court, the cathedral chapter or parochial visitations by the Vicar or the Bishop). At this point in time, none of these had legal options to impose a secular punishment. The offenders were usually banned from communion until they mended their ways, confessed and were absolved – and sometimes, by the mid-century were

¹⁴ Wilskman, Sven, *Swea Rikes Ecclesiastique Werk I Alphabetisk Ordningh, Sammandragit Utur Lag oh Förordningar, privilegier och Resolutioner Samt Andra Handlingar, I.* (Örebro 1781.)

often also given a secular punishment in the form of a fine.¹⁵ Moreover, at the turn of the century the country had behind it a recent cruel civil war, which usually in Finland is not interpreted as religious but related to economics and foreign policy, but which however could not fail to reflect in some measure the opposing religious parties in Swedish royalty. Therefore, a constant discussion among the parish clergy and the parishioners was slowly cooking under the lid of church jurisdiction. There was an interest in small scale religious deviation, which brought them to court, but at the same time, there was a will to keep it quiet and not cause trouble.

Two of the records that mention rosaries also mention church punishments. In August 1624 in Huittinen district court, a woman accused her parish minister of denying her communion. The minister explained that she *“used Rosary (läseband) and Old Papist Fallacies. Her husband -- admitted this was true and therefore the he [the minister] had been given reason to send her away from Church until she would discard such practices”*.¹⁶ The secular court concluded that the minister's procedure was in accordance with Church Ordinances, and therefore acquitted the minister. It is clear from the context that the woman herself considered herself a good Christian and entitled to communion, and most likely did not think it was adverse to Lutheranism either – it may be possible that such discussion was deliberately left out from the court records as the whole issue was understated.

The woman in Huittinen is an example of a person who still adhered to what in the neighbouring parish was called “old wives' practices”. This woman did not make such a clear distinction between different forms of Christianity. Put into the context of not only rosary practices but of

¹⁵ Ankarloo (1972), pp. 82-86; Nenonen (1992), pp. 256ff.; Nenonen Marko & Kervinen, Timo (1994) *Synnin palkka on kuolema*, Table on different types of witchcraft and magic in Finland 1620-1700, no page number. Otava, Helsinki.

¹⁶ National Archives of Finland Ala-Satakunta I KO a 2, 254v, Huittinen 30.-31. August 1624. *‘hon brukar Läsebandh och gammal Påwesck willfarellse. Hwilcket hennes Rychte man Hindrich Madzon bekiende för Rätten. Och förthenskuld haffwer honnom giffues Orsak at sättia henne ifrån Kyrckian till dhez hon sådant afståår’*.

superstitious magic in the second half of the 17th century, she does not seem unique.¹⁷ This is especially true as for a decade afterwards the Vicar of Huittinen indicted several women for having held a Convent or a "Resolia" at home. At these events they read a sequence of prayers, prepared and enjoyed a dinner with beer on the table and performed a rite during which they stepped "with iron on flint stone". The nature of the meeting, however, is somewhat unclear, not only because of the spelling of the name of the meeting but also because the Ave Maria was not mentioned among the sequential prayers, but only the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, all of which were read nine times.¹⁸

At certain points a hint of deliberate nonconformism is discernible. Ten years after the case in Huittinen, a woman in the neighbouring parish of Ulvila was fined 3 marks for "*practicing mariolatria during church services and therefore staying away from church*".¹⁹ This was a secular punishment, ordered by a secular court, although the fines were to be paid to the church. In addition, the spiritual side of the matter was recorded to be sent to the Cathedral Chapter for confession, absolution and guidance. The woman considered her practices alternative to those of the church, and although it is quite possible that she did not consider them mutually exclusive, she was treated as if she did.

However, a decade later in 1646 there was a case in which the former Vicar of Punkalaidun was indicted of organizing rosary meetings "*with old women*" and collecting alms for yearly meetings and processions possibly related to blessing the fields and the harvest. As the court record went on, an outdated old wives ritual was at the same time presented as a regular function of village farmers: while the Vicar denied everything, one male farmer of the parish admitted having spent two nights at such meetings with three other men and their families.

¹⁷ Cf e.g. cases in Toivo (2008).

¹⁸ NA. Ala-Satakunta I KO a 6, 192v. Huittinen 16.-18. November 1646.

¹⁹ NA. Ala-Satakunta I KO a 3, 275v. Ulvila 31. March 1634, "*hon I Kyrkiotijden hade brukat Mariolatria och således varit ifrå Kyrckian*".

One of these men denied his part, others were not present to admit or deny their participation and the matter was left open.²⁰

It is obvious that practitioners of Rosaries used them both religiously and magically, but they described and defended their practices as religious. The notion that practices like rosaries were not only mumbo jumbo distracting the relationship between the believer and God, but should be regarded as magic and witchcraft, had certainly reached Sweden and Finland by this time if not long before. Paulinus Gothus wrote in 1630 on magic or *vidskepelse* that among the forbidden kinds of magic was the reading of word formulas, the names of the Trinity, Jehovah, quotations from the Bible, the Lord's Prayer, Ave Maria and the rosary saints as well as "other, nonunderstandable words," and the use of the sign of the cross. Gothus grouped superstition and magic and witchcraft all together, in the way that was common in the learned theory of magic and witchcraft of the time.²¹ On the level of theory Ericus Erici did not make this distinction either, but on the level of content he spoke of superstition as erroneous religious practice. It is clear that those who took the matter up in court and wrote it down in the records thought it at least useless superstition, and towards the end of the century clearly also reprehensible superstition. However, even in the case against the first Vicar in Punkalaidun, the practice of the rosaries appears slight among the other complaints of the parishioners, and the most important feature of them in general seems to be the Vicar's tendency to drink beer on all occasions, including church services and the rosary meetings. Even though the new Vicar seems to have wished to get rid of his predecessor, the focus was kept on the way he carried out his Protestant duties, not on his possibly heretical practices.²²

A Tradition of Catholic Reformation and Lutheran Superstition?

²⁰ "med kärtingar" NA. Ala-Satakunta I KO a 6, 148. Huittinen den 4.-5. June 1646.

²¹ Laurentius Paulinus Gothus, *Ethicae Christianae Pars Prima. Thet är catechismi förste deel. Om Gudzens Lag...* (Strängnäs 1633), pp. 188-194.

²² NA. Ala-Satakunta I KO a 6, 147v-149. Huittinen den 4.-5. June 1646.

The cult of Mary seems to have been spread in Lower-Satakunta in the specific form of Rosary practices partly because this was an area where the Catholic faith had gained a strong foothold before the reformation. though, Also, it was remote enough from Turku for the old influences to survive the Reformation. Lower Satakunta was also actively placed in terms of communication, trade and outside influences, since both Rauma and medieval Ulvila towns achieved a notable level of foreign trade in addition to domestic business. It has been suggested that the rosary piety, or the guild piety that it was connected with, came to Satakunta directly from Northern Germany around 1500.²³

There is little reason to assume that traces of the cult of Mary existed only in Satakunta. Folklore stories and poetry about Mary were collected in Southern Finland and Häme later on, although they are difficult to date. The small geographical area of the court cases may be only a result of one eager judge or court scribe. It can generally be noted that scribes performed their duties with varying zeal and both session and case descriptions in Satakunta and the province of Viipuri were generally longer than those in Häme throughout the 17th century.²⁴ The narrow

²³ Suvanto, Seppo and Jari Niemelä, *Punkalaitumen historia I*. (Vammala: Punkalaitumen kunta ja seurakunta, 1986) p. 158; Lehtinen, Erkki, *Suur-Ulvilan historia I*. (Pori: Porin maalaiskunta, Ulvila, Kullaa ja Nakkila, 1967, pp. 35-36.

²⁴ An example of a folklore story mixing Marian mythology with Finnish "pagan" religion might be a story from Hauho (again in Häme) depicting an offering tree (these were mainly thought to be offerings for ancestors or forest Gods, in this case possibly also to Ukko, the God of Heaven and Thunder or War, since the offerings were preferably of iron) and Mary revealing herself sitting up the tree every New Years Day. The story was passed on orally, and recorded at the beginning of the 20th century; it claimed to speak about a tree that had been standing on a hill from the 17th century. Palmroth, W., *Kertomus Hauhon seurakunnan vaiheista. Muistojulkaisu 600 vuotisjuhlaa varten*. (Hauho & Hämeenlinna: Hauhon seurakunta, 1929, 168. The Finnish

geographical scope of the court records noting a rosary cult suggests that these cases may not be representative of the cult of Mary in Finland as a whole. It seems plausible that in Satakunta the cult of Mary had either acquired or retained a more defined form than elsewhere in Finland, centering on the Rosary instead of merging with other religious festivities or mythology.

Lower Satakunta had been the main operative area of the Franciscan order in pre-reformation Rauma. The Franciscans preached devotion to the Virgin Mary in the Lower Satakunta area during the late Middle Ages and only left their convent in 1538. Before the Reformation people from Lower Satakunta attended the church of the Brigittine cloister in Naantali, close to Turku, in the spirituality of which Mary had a strong mythological place. Even after the brethren left Rauma, their church – with the elaborate imagery of the Holy Virgin painted on its walls and ceilings - remained in the use of the local parishes in a town that was relatively frequently visited by the populace of the area. The importance of the Franciscans was not restricted to preaching: the convent owned land and had various other economic contacts in Ulvila. There is also evidence of long term influence, for example, names like Frans and Clara which seem to have been remarkably common in the area still during the 17th century.²⁵

literature Society houses a collection of folk legends in the Finnish Literature Society Archives, Manuscript card files, Perinnelajikortistot: Legendat. See also Rausmaa, Pirkko-Liisa and Kristiina Rokala (eds.), *Catalogues of Finnish Anecdotes, and Historical, Local and Religious Legends* (Turku: Nordic Institute of Folklore, 1973).

²⁵ Hiekkänen (2007) pp. 246-251. On the Franciscan connections and otherwise on the relative wealth of the area, see Tapio Salminen: Suomen "pienet" kaupungit keskiajalla? – keskiajan kaupunkien tutkimuksesta Suomessa sekä Ulvilan ja Rauman keskiajan erityispiirteistä ja mahdollisuuksista. [Medieval towns in Finland], in: *Satakunta XXVIII: Kauppa ja Kaupungit Satakunnassa* (Helsinki: Satakunnan historiallinen Seura 2011), pp. 8-63; Suvanto, Seppo, *Satakunnan historia III. Keskiäika* (Pori: Satakunnan maakuntaliitto ry, 1973, p. 409; Salmesvuori, Päivi, 'Birgitta – aatelisneidosta kosmopoliitiksi' in Setälä, Päivi and Eva Ahl (eds.), *Pyhä Birgitta, Euroopan suojeluspyhimys* (Helsinki: Otava 2003), pp. 9-54; Salmesvuori, Päivi, *Power and authority: Birgitta of Sweden and her revelations*, dissertation (Helsinki: University of Helsinki 2009).

Of the three parishes in which the rosary cult was noted down, the parish of Kokemäki hosted a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. It was, however, a wooden church apparently with no paintings. Likewise, churches of Ulvila and Huittinen seem not to have had wall paintings inside, but both hosted a number of statues or at least an altar cabinet with several saint's figures. Although no statue of Mary alone has survived or has been recorded, both include an arrangement of St. Anne²⁶. Anne's role, it has been suggested, has been to strengthen the importance of Mary, both because they are often portrayed as a trio together with the baby Jesus, but also because they emphasize the femininity of the religious experience of women and make it both symbolically and pragmatically stronger by implying giving birth and caring children as well as the kinship chain, and last, but not perhaps least, by including both a young and an old woman in the range of figures to identify with.²⁷ In both churches the altar cabinets seem to have been in use until the 18th century. In short, Lower Satakunta was one of the heartlands of Finland, where material culture still reflected the deep rootedness of Medieval Catholicism. It was a far cry from the backwoods in eastern and middle Finland, where Protestant historians have concluded that the Reformation had been very easy to achieve since Catholicism had never properly won people's hearts.

In Pre-Reformation Europe, and also in the areas close to monasteries in Finland, one of the most important outlets of lay religion was through the Cult of Mary. Women's religiosity found a way of experiencing and practicing their devotion through the cult of Mary, not only with rosaries but also other material aids: dolls, embroidery and paintings or drawings were used to build a personal relationship with Mary and her son. It was a tangible form of devotion which

²⁶ Hiekkänen (2007), pp. 219-274. On the church of Huittinen esp. pp. 220-223, Kokemäki, pp. 224-227, Ulvila pp. 266-269.

²⁷ Räsänen, Elina, *Ruumiillinen esine, materiaallinen suku. Tutkimus Pyhä Anna itse kolmantena –aiheisista keskiajan puuveistoksista Suomessa*, (Helsinki: Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 116 2009), pp. 130ff.

was accessible even to the illiterate and unlearned – and yet one that would require a certain amount of wealth and leisure, which could be found in the richer parts of rural Finland like Lower Satakunta.²⁸ Consequently, it is unsurprising that the cult of Mary would be one of the longest surviving elements of medieval Catholicism, especially as she also held a place in Protestant teaching.

In church history these cases can be used as evidence for the slow progress of the Reformation from the more or less orthodox centres of Turku and Uppsala to the peripheries that had hitherto been almost heathen. Herein lays, however, a misconception. Lower Satakunta was no periphery at the time. On the contrary, it was a fairly densely populated area and these parishes had been established in the 13th or 14th centuries. In the 17th century the parishes were relatively wealthy. The *livings* of these parishes were sought after and valued, and new chapels were being established. It may be that the persistence of the cult of Mary in such a specific form as the rosaries was due to the centrality of these areas even before the Reformation. This was part of the area in Finland where Catholicism had been best established.

Nevertheless, the 17th century Cult of Mary should not be regarded as a remnant of the Medieval Catholic tradition only, but rather a product of Reformation and Counter Reformation cultures in Finland, not least because medieval source material on such a cult is sporadic at best. These traditions begin to appear only after the Reformation, and many of them only after the reigns of King John III, Queen Catherine Jagiellonica and Sigismund I – the former with strong Catholic tendencies, and the two latter ones were openly Catholic. Jesuit Antonio Possevino who worked in Sweden during the reign of King John III indeed pronounced that he thought Finland especially suitable ground for Counter Reformation. The contacts, who made him think this, lived in Lower Satakunta. This is also the area where the most famous of the 12 young students

²⁸ Rubin, Miri, *Mother of God. A History of the Virgin Mary*. (Yale: Yale University Press 2009), p. 261, pp. 364-5.

who left Sweden came to seek education in Jesuit colleges at the end of the 16th and early 17th centuries.²⁹ Possevino met personally at least one of these men, Olaus Marci Sundergelt, originally a Lutheran clergyman from Pori, and ordered him to translate a Roman Catholic Catechism into Finnish. The job was concluded by another eager Jesuit student from a prominent Lower-Satakunta family, Johannes Jussoila from Rauma. The Catechism unsurprisingly never reached print, but as Jussoila's three brothers had also left for Jesuit schooling, it is plausible to think that the work was discussed in the family circles and that excerpts may even have been circulated and that the knowledge could not always be kept wholly secret from all (servant) members of the household. In any case, the number of men leaving for Catholic schooling from Lower Satakunta in the late 16th century shows both a receptivity towards Catholicism and a comparatively tight connection to Catholic Reformation. At the same time, it shows that the Lutheran teaching in Finland in general and in Lower Satakunta specifically was not of the nature that would have made Catholicism seem repellent or dangerous in this or the life hereafter. The cult of Mary was thus embedded in a post-Reformation culture which included both Lutheran and Tridentine ideas. It was at the same time accepted as piety, contested as superstition and condemned as papist fallacy. The name of heresy was, however, carefully avoided. Nothing of the sort of trials that went on in Sweden for the *Missio Suecia* adherents were wanted here.

Early 17th century Magic and Superstition as Ignorance

As the 17th century wore on, a rise in religious popular education took place. It included very little practical teaching on magic or superstition, but rather concentrated on learning the commandments and the Pauline quotations on the Table of Duties in the Catechism. Model

²⁹ Pirinen, Kauko, *Suomen kirkon historia I* (Helsinki, WSOY 1991), pp. 326-7, pp. 339-341; Garstein, Oskar, *Rome and the Counter-Reformation in Scandinavia I*, (Leiden: Brill 1992), p. 185.

sermons and the like instructions had more details on matters like magic and superstition, including the influences of competing religions such as Catholicism and Calvinism for the most part of the mid-century. The rise of religious popular education seems to have coincided with the development where secular courts started more often to mete out secular punishment for superstitions and harmless magic. After the 1660's transferring superstition cases to church courts was rare. The development was such that by the end of the century, one was more likely to be accused of or punished for superstition than for maleficent witchcraft, although these were by no means always distinguished between.³⁰ The reasons for this change were manifold. Changes in the court and judicial system obviously explain some of the change. Social and religious control did become tighter and the system more inquisitorial. It has been concluded that whereas injured neighbors were likely to prosecute for maleficium, both secular and clerical authorities were much more likely to prosecute for superstition.

At this point the courts started to act according to the theories circulating around Europe and also in Sweden: magic grew to be considered more and more harmful. Whereas the Finnish courts never were very interested in the witches' connections with the Devil, they still grouped witchcraft, magic and superstition in the same category of reprehensible and evil practices to be punished and repressed. During the 18th century, as Linda Oja has shown, Enlightenment rationality changed the emphasis and matters of magic were no longer considered harmful but only useless superstition, ignorance. In the context of the history of magic trials, one of the interesting points in this article has been that the rosary practices show how similar the attitudes towards magic and superstition were in the beginning of the 17th century to what they came to be after the witch hunt phase. They were old wives' ignorant beliefs: useless, outdated

³⁰ However, even during the second half of the seventeenth century, more than half of those accused of either witchcraft or superstition were acquitted. Nenonen (1992), pp. 129-135, pp. 256-257.

but not threatening. The change in the attitudes during the hunt period was comparatively abrupt and short lived.

For some reason Mary and the rosary practices seem to have disappeared from the court records at the time when magic and superstition trials became common. It is hardly probable that Mary disappeared from the popular culture, however. Quite the contrary, evidence from the folkloristic materials suggest that she continued to enjoy an important place in the religious life or at least the semi-religious ritualistic festivities of rural villages. Mary only disappeared from the court records.

On the other hand, rosary practices in Lower Satakunta seem to have been deemed unimportant in the court records, but the downplaying of the practices as ignorant and outdated may also have been deliberate. Indeed, the fact that the practices reached a secular court at all when most small scale religious misdemeanors were taken care of on the church arenas, seems to point that they carried more significance than appears at first sight. The courts, consisting of the local people as well as local and Finnish elites may have deliberately wished to avoid drawing more attention to matters that had already proven disruptive in other parts of Sweden. It is also clear from the court records that the local secular district court had no wish to overstep the boundary to the jurisdiction of the church, and the church likewise had little interest in inviting the secular officials to their business. Most importantly, the treatment of the rosary practices reflects the very advice given by later bishop of Turku, Johannes Gezelius, to the parish clergy in Finland: although papist superstition was not to be tolerated, some old traditions, though false as such, were established and trying to force people to abandon them could cause more disruption than such a diaphora was worth.³¹

³¹ Laasonen, Pentti, *Johannes Gezelius vanhempi ja suomalainen täysortodoksia*. (Helsinki, Suomen kirkkohistoriallinen seura 1977), pp. 227-8.

