

## Lost, sacrificed or buried?

### A story of coins found under the church floor\*

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Finland was monetised in the course of the Middle Ages, beginning in the coastal parts of the country in the thirteenth century and followed by the inland areas during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter coins were used almost everywhere where people interacted. As small objects coins have always been easy to lose, and coins are indeed a very common sight in the archaeological find material from historical periods. There are however few places that present such concentrations of coins as churches do. The church was both an institution and a place that endured from generation to generation. If a church was destroyed by fire, people did not hesitate to rebuild a new church on the same spot. The church was the focus of community life, and most people visited it regularly. Many of these people carried coins with them to church, as offerings, contributions to the collection and perhaps to use in transactions after the service. In the crowded, dark church coins were easily lost and difficult to retrieve.

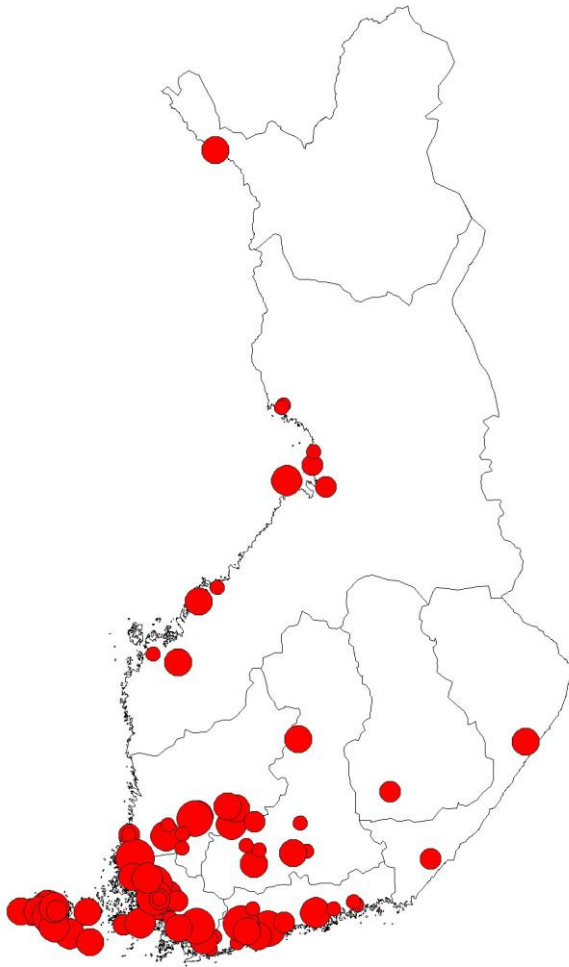
In Finland, including Åland, over 13,500 coins have been salvaged from 78 different churches. Around 15 % of these coins can be dated to the medieval period, while the largest numbers (75 %) derive from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. On the Åland islands the medieval coins form a bigger group, constituting almost 25 % of the total number of coins. This is because of the slightly earlier monetisation of Åland, as well as the condition of the church floors in later periods. On the mainland the richest material is found along the coast, in the areas that were the most densely settled already during the Middle Ages. These areas saw the construction of stone churches, which subsequently have been the target of archaeological investigations related to restoration works. Only a few of the post-medieval stone churches and churchyards in Ostrobothnia and inland Finland have been excavated. Thus the distribution of church finds follows the boundaries of early

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\* I wish to thank Elina Screen for correcting the English of my article.

<sup>1</sup> Henrik Klackenborg, *Moneta Nostra. Monetarisering i medeltidens Sverige*, Almqvist & Wiksell International: Stockholm 1992, 176.

monetisation, early densely populated areas and the medieval stone churches.<sup>2</sup>



**Fig. 1. Distribution of church finds in Finland.**

The big question that has troubled Scandinavian researchers ever since the 1950s is why all these coins ended up under the church floor? The church finds are generally explained as the result of accidental losses, deliberate sacrifices or deposits in connection with burials. In his dissertation Henrik Klackenberg launched the term *offertory wastage*, suggesting that the medieval coins can be explained as losses in connection with the official offerings at the altar, side-altars and

offertory chests.<sup>3</sup> In many Swedish churches this theory is supported by the fact that the coins are clearly concentrated in certain areas. Other scholars who have dealt with the subject before and after Klackenberg support this theory, as well as the assumption that most of both the medieval and the later coins were accidentally lost.<sup>4</sup>

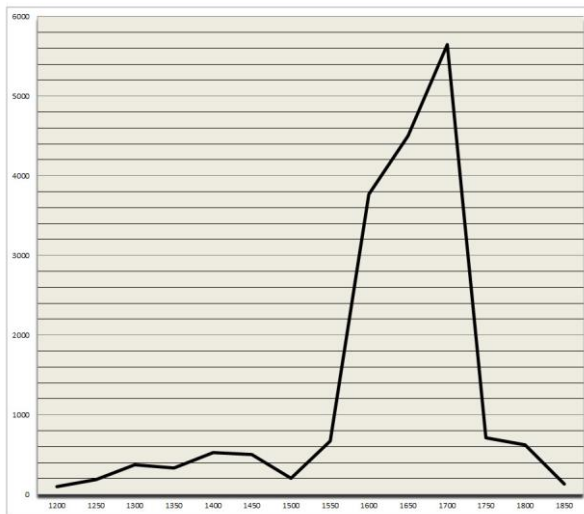
In this article I will take a closer look at this very difficult question from the perspective of the coins found in Finnish churches. Most of the

<sup>2</sup> For more on the chronology of Finnish stone churches see Markus Hiekkänen, *Suomen keskiajan kivikirkot*, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Klackenberg 1992, 34–38.

<sup>4</sup> Jørgen Steen Jensen, 'Kirkegulvsmønter', *Hikuin* 3 (1977), 295–302, at 295; Jens Christian Moesgaard, 'Kirkegulvsmønter fra Gotland', *Nordisk Numismatisk Unions Medlemsblad* 6 (1987), 134–141, at 134; Kolbjørn Skaare, 'Om myntfunn i kirker', in *Kirkearkeologi og kirkekunst*, Alvheim & Eide: Øvre Ervik 1993, 81–91, at 83–86; Svein Gullbekk, 'Salvation and small change: Medieval coins in Scandinavian churches', in Gerd Dethlefs, Arent Pol & Stefan Wittenbrink (eds), *Nummi Docent! Münzen – Schätze-Funde, Festschrift für Peter Ilisch zum 65. Geburtstag am 28. April 2012*, Numismatischer Verlag der Münzhandlung Fritz Rudolf Künker: Osnabrück 2012, 227–234.

earlier studies of the subject have placed a strong emphasis on the medieval period. From a numismatic point of view the medieval coins certainly offer the most intriguing research material; likewise the coins are of greater importance when writing medieval history, as written sources often are lacking. Some of the big changes in medieval society can thus be described through the changes in the everyday circulation of coinage. To understand why the coins ended up under the church floors, however, I believe it is essential to analyse the church finds from all periods, including the less numismatically valuable coins from later periods.



**Fig. 2. Total number of coins per year in the excavated churches of Finland.**

Coins have been both lost and offered in all ages. During the Catholic period coin offerings in churches were an established part of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> The offerings could be left on the altars, put in the offertory chests or given directly to the priest. The nominal offerings can be seen as a promise given to God when his help was

needed.<sup>6</sup> Based on information in various early medieval diplomas it can, however, be concluded that the profits of these small offerings were by no means insignificant to the churches. The money was later divided between different ecclesiastical institutions or officials. In some parish church accounts from the late medieval period the offerings could constitute roughly ten percent of all the incomes.<sup>7</sup> Offerings could also be directed to a specific purpose as was the case in year 1333, when money was collected for a crusade lead by Philip of France. Pope John XXII ordered all the churches to lead separate prayers and place a specific offertory chest for this cause. At the same time indulgence was promised to the faithful attending the mass.<sup>8</sup> It is highly unlikely that such a strong custom of offerings would have vanished completely after the Reformation. A clear parallel can be drawn between this medieval custom and the collection in later periods.

<sup>5</sup> Gullbekk 2012, 227.

<sup>6</sup> Mauno Jokipii, 'Suomen ns. uhrirkirkkojen taustaa, historiaa ja tarinaperinnettä', *Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran vuosikirja* 89–91/1999–2001 (2002), 31–76, at 31.

<sup>7</sup> Klackenberg 1992, 36–37.

<sup>8</sup> *Finlands medeltidsurkunder*, Reinhold Hausen ed., 8 vols., Finlands statsarkiv: Helsingfors 1910–1935, no. 408.

Looking at other types of offerings, for example in buildings, it is also obvious that the magic power of the coins was not only connected to Christian beliefs. Coins are by far the most common objects in building deposits mentioned in folklore.<sup>9</sup> I shall therefore argue that we need to take a closer look at the coins from later periods found under the floor boards in the churches. When and why can different peaks in the material be distinguished? Is the importance of a coin always connected to its face value? What evidence supports the different options: are the coins lost, sacrificed or buried?

### The importance of small things

The coins found in churches clearly reflect the use of money at a grass-roots level. The coins were lost or deposited over a very long time span, by representatives of many different generations.<sup>10</sup> The coins are almost without exception of the smallest possible denomination, thus embodying only a small part of the general coinage in use at different time periods. In this way the church finds differ completely from other types of coin finds, hoards and single finds (hoards in particular include higher value denominations). The church finds play a very important role in determining the circulation of different kinds of coin types especially for the medieval period. Based upon the distribution of the church finds, for example, it is clear that a certain type of bracteate with an uncrowned 'A' was minted in Turku at the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Another good example of small coins found almost solely in churches are the Livonian *seestlings* and *scherfs*, previously known only from the Pirita convent in Tallinn, and a number of churches in southern Finland.<sup>12</sup>



**Fig. 3. Dorpat (Tartu) *scherf* minted in the name of Bishop Dietrich IV Resler (1413–1441), found in the church of Kirkkonummi (Liisa Kunnas/Coin Cabinet 2012).**

In later periods, the numismatic value of the coins found in

<sup>9</sup> Sonja Hukantaival, 'En hästskalle i murgrunden: Arkeologiska och folkloristiska exempel på byggnadsoffer i Finland under historisk tid', *Fornvännen* 106 (2011), 43–53, at 45–46.

<sup>10</sup> Christoph Kilger, 'På jakt efter människorna bakom mynten. Tolkningmöjligheter inom det numismatiska och historisk-arkeologiska forskningsfältet', *META medeltidsarkeologisk tidskrift* t 2005, 37–52, at 46; Klackenborg 1992, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Pekka Sarvas, 'Die mittelalterlichen Braktaten von Turku (Åbo)', *Festschrift till Lars O. Lagerqvist* (Numismatiska meddelanden XXXVII), Svenska numismatiska föreningen: Stockholm 1989, 357–64, at 359.

<sup>12</sup> Michail Nemirowitsch-Dantschenko & Franziskus Pärn, 'Seestlinge und Scherfe. Ein Beitrag zur Münzgeschichte Livlands', in Heinz Thormann ed., *Norddeutsches Jahrbuch für Münzkunde und verwandte Gebiete*, vol. 2, Auktionshauses Tietjen + Co.: Hamburg 1980, 61–96, at 75–85.

the churches is less obviously impressive. The material consists of very common copper coins, which were struck in great numbers at the time. Most of these coins are of the smallest possible denomination in use, and individually they were not worth very much at all. The most common coin from the first half of the seventeenth century is the quarter of an *öre* struck under Queen Christina, which would have bought approximately one egg at that time. These coins were followed by the  $1/6$  *öre SM*,<sup>13</sup> minted during the reign of Charles XI, which predominates in the finds from very many churches. This denomination was the first coin struck in Sweden in which the amount of copper did not correspond to the value of the coin. Even so the nominal value of this coin, as well as of the very common copper *öres* from the eighteenth century, was even lower than that of the aforementioned  $1/4$  *öres*.

The nominal value of a coin might however differ completely from its transcendental value for example during the act of offering. A direct reference to this fact is found in the parable of the widow's mite in the Bible.<sup>14</sup> Svein Gullbekk has already demonstrated that the coins found in Norwegian churches were of the lowest denominations available, both during the Middle Ages and in later periods. He argues that using small change was a common feature in the lives of Christians.<sup>15</sup> A brief look at coins in other forms of ritual deposits suggests that coins in offerings had a value beyond their nominal one in contexts outside the church too.<sup>16</sup> Depositing coins in buildings seems to have been quite a common tradition in Finland up to the beginning of the twentieth century. In Northern Finland in Rovaniemi one small silver coin and two copper coins from 1722-1810 were found under the roof tree in 1978.<sup>17</sup> Five years earlier a copper token from 1763 was found under the roof ridge in a house in Tervola in Lapland.<sup>18</sup> In 1880, a silver and a copper coin from the seventeenth century were found in demolishing the parsonage in Vörå, Ostrobothnia.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> SM = silver coin; the value of the copper coins struck as 'SM' represented a certain amount of silver.

<sup>14</sup> Mark 12: 41-44; Luke 21: 1-4.

<sup>15</sup> Gullbekk 2012, 228-229.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed survey on ritual deposits in buildings see Sonja Hukantaival, '*...Sillä noita ei sellaisen kynnyksen yli pääse!*' – *Rakennusten ritualistiset kätköt*, unpublished MA thesis, Department of Archaeology, University of Turku 2006 and Sonja Hukantaival, 'Hare's feet under a hearth. – Discussing 'ritual' deposits in buildings', in Visa Immonen, Mia Lempiäinen & Ulrika Rosendahl (eds), *Hortus Novus. Fresh approaches to medieval archaeology in Finland* (Archaeologia Medii Aevi Finlandiae 14), Suomen keskiajan arkeologian seura: Turku 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Pekka Sarvas, 'Nationalmuseets Myntkabinett Helsingfors 1978', *Nordisk Numismatisk Årsskrift* 1979-1980, 177-181, at 180.

<sup>18</sup> RK 73059, acquisition number of the Coin Cabinet, National Museum of Finland.

<sup>19</sup> SMY 6.10.1880, record of the Finnish Antiquarian Society, coins deposited in the Coin Cabinet, National Museum of Finland.

There is also some concrete evidence for coins used in other sorts of magic. In 1877 a copper coin used for curing diseases was found together with alder sticks in the old grave yard in Karttula, Northern Savonia.<sup>20</sup> In 1885 three copper coins and one silver coin from 1668-1749 were donated to the museum. These coins had been used for offerings and acts connected with offerings. The so-called seer had carved rust from the coins to bless springs and heal wounds, and during communal work the coins were sometimes put into the soup, so that the common people would not eat too much.<sup>21</sup>

The above-mentioned cases are just a few examples of coins being used as magical objects in popular belief. Like the coins found under the church floors these coins also generally represent small coins of low financial value. As Gullbekk concluded in the case of the Norwegian church finds, there is strong evidence for the significance of money in ritual use, regardless of the size of the particular offering.<sup>22</sup> Therefore one can conclude that, both in churches and elsewhere alike, the act of using coins in rituals meant more than the coins *per se*. As the official offerings of the Catholic period came to an end, arguably the ritual meaning of the coins was reinforced in later periods when coin sacrifices became detached from the formal beliefs of the Lutheran church.

### **Lost in the dark**

Over the last decades, the generally accepted theory as to why the coins have ended up under the floor boards of the churches has been accidental loss, in conjunction with the making of offerings, the taking of the collection or simply by chance. The argument against the coins being losses has usually been the rarity of the coins and their higher value in past times. As shown above, the value of the coins that ended up under the church floor, especially in early modern times, was not very great, even for an ordinary peasant. As for the rarity of the coins, Klackenberg and many others dealing with church finds have already demonstrated that not many coins actually ended up under the church floor annually.<sup>23</sup> In Finland the highest frequency of loss is found in coins from the eighteenth century. Even in churches with finds of over a thousand coins, however, the relative number of coins lost per year does not exceed fifteen coins.

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<sup>20</sup> VHM 1844, record of the collection of the State Historical Museum 1877.

<sup>21</sup> SMY 17.11.1885, record of the Finnish Antiquarian Society, coins deposited in the Coin Cabinet, National Museum of Finland.

<sup>22</sup> Gullbekk 2012, 234.

<sup>23</sup> Klackenberg 1992, 34–35.

It is also true that the churches were dark, often crowded places with very limited lighting during the dark seasons of the year. In the Middle Ages the floor could just be a trodden earthen floor or covered with wooden boards. In later times too, the floor in the Finnish churches was wooden, often with fairly big gaps between the boards. Churches were often not renovated until the nineteenth century, when the windows were enlarged and the floors renewed in connection with the banning of burials inside the churches. Taking these conditions into consideration it is not surprising that many things, not only coins, were lost in churches.

Looking at the distribution of coins over time, it is evident that the number of coins found in Finnish churches increases at the end of the sixteenth century, at a time when coins with a record low content of silver were minted under John III. This might be due to the low value of the coins, but it is also possible that it is connected to the introduction of the collection. Collections were sporadically made already during the medieval period, but it was not decreed until the Church Order in 1571. There it is written that every religious holiday when most of the people gathers, one should go around with the hat, or as earlier was custom, with the collection sculptures (*medh Taflonne*). This can be seen as a direct continuation of the earlier offerings, except for that instead of leaving the coin on the altar or in a hat, it was now collected directly from the people. As in earlier periods handling coins was, however, customary in the churches and in connection to that a lot of coins might have accidentally been dropped.<sup>24</sup>

It is during this period that the number of coins found in the churches increases nearly everywhere, further raised by the introduction of copper coins in the 1620s. The same phenomenon has also been observed in Sweden.<sup>25</sup> The peak was reached in the middle of the eighteenth century, after which the number fell drastically, probably due to the banning of burials and the renovation of the floors inside the churches.

It is however quite perplexing that the variation in the coin types found in churches is so negligible. As already mentioned many times above, almost without exception only the smallest denominations are found under the floor boards. Gullbekk has stated that using the smallest change was universally accepted for the offerings in Catholic Christianity.<sup>26</sup> Can we then assume that the same habit continued for example regarding the collection? Looking at some of the few preserved written sources for the assets of different churches it is evident that the sums of money that circulated inside

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<sup>24</sup> Kyrkoordningen 1571:30, Sven Kjöllström ed., *Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571 jämte studier kring tillkomst, innehåll och användning*, Lund 1971, at 195.

<sup>25</sup> Valdemar Gerdin, 'Myntfynd i svenska landsorts kyrkor 1521-1611', *Myntstudier* 2009:2, 1-9, at 5-8. <http://www.myntstudier.se/pdf/hog0902.pdf> (last consulted 10.6.2015).

<sup>26</sup> Gullbekk 2012, 228.

the church buildings were made up of many other coins besides to the smallest denominations.<sup>27</sup>



**Fig. 4. The most common coin found in Finnish churches; 1-öre in copper from the eighteenth century .**

We can of course assume that smaller coins were easier to lose because of their size. During the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the copper coins of low value were, however, significantly larger than the small silver coins used at the same time, and yet silver coins from these centuries are only very rarely found in the churches. As Pekka Sarvas has pointed out, the  $\frac{1}{4}$  öres from the seventeenth century are already large enough to make it unlikely that they would disappear unnoticed.<sup>28</sup> An option is of course that not all the coins were accidentally lost. As they were of such low value people were perhaps not always so eager to go through the inconvenience of crawling after the coins on the crowded, dirty and dark church floor.

### **A coin for salvation**

In the medieval Catholic Church coin offerings were a central part of the official rituals. The offerings were left on the altar, given to the priest or put in the offertory chest.<sup>29</sup> In his dissertation Klackenberg draws a connection between the decrease in the number of coins and the Reformation at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Nowadays it is however well known that the Reformation did not result in striking changes overnight. In some churches in Finland the interior design did not change notably until the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> During the seventeenth century many churches got

<sup>27</sup> An example of this is found in the accounts (1469-1524) of Kalliala church, published in Reinhold Hausen, *Bidrag till Finlands historia* 1:2, Finlands statsarkiv: Helsingfors 1881, 357–420.

<sup>28</sup> Pekka Sarvas, 'Espoon kirkon rahalöydöt', *Suomen Numismaattisen Yhdistyksen tiedotuslehti* 2/1982, 41–47, at 46.

<sup>29</sup> Klackenberg 1992, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Klackenberg 1992, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Hanna Pirinen, 'Luterilaisen kirkkointeriöön muotoutuminen Suomessa. Pitäjänkirkon sisustuksen muutokset reformaatiosta karoliinisen ajan loppuun (1527–1718)', (*Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen Aikakauskirja - Finska Fornminnesföreningens Tidskrift* 103), Helsinki 1996, 9.



their pulpits, pews and galleries<sup>32</sup>, but most of these changes were not linked to changes in beliefs, as they can be seen as part of a general development. Old conceptions and traditions could live on for generations, such as for example the votive cult and the cult of saints.<sup>33</sup> The beliefs of the people did not always correspond to Lutheran doctrine; instead the saints were still used as an intermediary when asking God for health, good harvests and peace.<sup>34</sup>

Since the church was the foremost scene of the Reformation it is obvious that the official offerings related to Catholic Christianity ceased quite swiftly. While side altars and rood screens were mainly removed during the sixteenth century,<sup>35</sup> the medieval main altar could be left in the church for many centuries.<sup>36</sup> Saints' sculptures might also remain in the churches for decades. The continuous ritual use of these is visible in coins found in some of the saints' sculptures in Finnish churches. A bracteate from the last decades of the fifteenth century was found in the statue of St. Jacob from Sääksmäki church.<sup>37</sup> Six small silver coins were found in a statue of a saint from Oripää church; one was a medieval bracteate but the rest were from the sixteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Finally, in an old statue of saint from Urjala church three coins were found, including a medieval bracteate and two coins from 1564 and 1573.<sup>39</sup>

Another interesting example of coins ending up in the 'wrong' place after the Catholic period is found on the Church islet in Köyliö. According to the legend Saint Henry was murdered on the ice of Lake Köyliö in 1156. The island later became a place of pilgrimage for Catholics and at the beginning of the fifteenth century a small chapel was built in memory of the saint. The small wooden church was still in use during the eighteenth century, but as time went by it fell into decay.<sup>40</sup> Because of the peculiar story of this site one might assume that the medieval coins would form a much larger part of the find material compared with other churches. Instead only seventeen bracteates from the later part of the fifteenth century have been documented

<sup>32</sup> Hiekkänen, Markus, *Suomen kivikirkot keskiajalla*, Otava: Helsinki 2003, 181.

<sup>33</sup> Monica Weikert, *I sjukdom och nöd. Offerkyrkoseden i Sverige från 1600-tal till 1800-tal*, Historiska institutionen: Göteborgs universitet 2004, 12–14.

<sup>34</sup> Göran Malmstedt, *Bondetro och kyrkoro. Religiös mentalitet i stormaktstidens Sverige*, Nordic Academic Press: Falun 2002, 127.

<sup>35</sup> Pentti Laasonen, *Suomen kirkon historia*, vol. 2, *Vuodet 1593-1808*, WSOY: Porvoo 1991, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Markus Hiekkänen, "The stripping of Altars" on the fringes of Europe. The 17th Century Relocation of Finnish Medieval High Altars after the Reformation', in Krista Kodres & Merike Kurisoo (eds), *Art and the Church. Kunst und Kirche. Religious Art and Architecture in the Baltic Region in the 13th-18th Centuries. Conference dedicated to the centenary of Sten I. Karling in Tallinn, Sept. 6-9, 2006*, Institute of History, Estonian Academy of Arts: Tallinn 119–130, at 120–124.

<sup>37</sup> KM 3510, acquisition number of the National Museum of Finland, 1910.

<sup>38</sup> HY 495, acquisition number of the University's coin collection, deposited in the Coin Cabinet.

<sup>39</sup> HY 495.

<sup>40</sup> Hiekkänen 2007, 228–229.

on the island. Here too, most of the coins are from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Georg Haggrén has argued that at least some of the coins were deliberate sacrifices, brought to this special place of interest.<sup>41</sup> Markus Hiekkanen has also pointed out that even though the coins might have been lost by occasional visitors to the island (which had no permanent settlement), it is unlikely since the place was not really suitable for fishing or other forms of exploitation.<sup>42</sup>

The above-mentioned cases are just some examples of coins being used as offerings in a Christian context after the Reformation. Even if the church statutes and laws officially urged the people to renounce the old customs, one can assume that the old way of sacrificing lived on for a long time. In the old tradition of sacrifice the coins were *de facto* always the most common form of offering in Finland.<sup>43</sup> During the Reformation some of the old ecclesiastical rituals were abandoned, but soon the same old habits reappeared inside the Lutheran liturgy slightly altered. When the church no longer offered direct transcendental help to its parishioners, a new need for folk religion and its related security emerged.<sup>44</sup>

Looking at the material from the Finnish churches, it becomes clear that the decrease in the number of coins during the Reformation is not very prominent. Swedish coins from the reign of Gustav Vasa are in general quite rare, but there is no clear diminution in the Livonian coins still used in the southern and eastern parts of the country. Therefore the slight reduction in church finds at the beginning of the sixteenth century might also be explained by changes in the monetary system as a whole, not just in Christian beliefs. During Sweden's period as a great power the ecclesiastical organisation was developed, to improve control and facilitate superintendence.<sup>45</sup> This resulted in a new stricter Church code in 1686, the purpose of which was not only to confirm the relationship between church and state, but also to strengthen the uniformity of the Lutheran church.<sup>46</sup>

It is worth noting that it is during this tightening of control that the number of coins under the church floor jumps to a clearly different level. This might of course also be connected with the extremely low value of the

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<sup>41</sup> Georg Haggrén, 'Katolinen traditio ja sitkeä kansanusko – Köyliön Kirkkokarin Pyhän Henrikin kappelin löydöt, Aarnivalkeita ja ratsastavia ritareita', *Köyliist* 7/2006, 56–69, at 62–63.

<sup>42</sup> Markus Hiekkanen, 'The Cult of Saint Henry of Finland, Sites, Remains, and Traditions 1400-1700 AD', In B. Scholkmann, S. Frommer, C. Vossler & M. Wolff (eds), *Zwischen Tradition und Wandel, Archäologie des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts, Tagung an der Universität Tübingen, 21.-25.2.2007* (Tübinger Forschungen zur historischen Archäologie 3), Verlag Dr. Faustus, 153–160, at 157–158.

<sup>43</sup> Jokipii 2002, 31, 37–38.

<sup>44</sup> Robert W. Scribner, 'The reformation, popular magic, and the "disenchantment of the world"', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993), 475–494, at 483, 487–488.

<sup>45</sup> Malmstedt 2002, 11.

<sup>46</sup> KL 1686, Church code of 1686, published by Samfundet Pro Fide et Christianismo: Stockholm 1936.

small copper coins at this time, as well as the use of coins becoming more and more widespread. As already mentioned above, the sacrifices both in churches and elsewhere have however always consisted of coins of the lowest possible value; this makes it difficult to exclude the possibility that these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century coins might have been sacrificed by people taking their salvation into their own hands.

The high number of coins found under the floor boards in the churches can even be interpreted as a backlash against the advance of the Reformation. Laying down coins under the floor can be seen as an adaption of the old tradition of offerings, in a form more suitable for Lutheran theology. These kinds of offerings are not self-evident and cannot be distinguished from lost coins. The theory is nevertheless supported by the fact that many other pre-Reformation rites, such as the sacrificial churches at Köyliö church island and elsewhere, continued even through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>47</sup> The unofficial cult of works still flourished after the cult of saints was prohibited in the seventeenth century.<sup>48</sup>

### Money for the dead

Some of the coins found in the churches might also originate from burials inside churches. People were buried under the church floor in Finland from the establishment of Christianity and the building of the first churches onwards.<sup>49</sup> Burial deposits were quite rare during the medieval period, but from the seventeenth century onwards it became more common to place a piece of jewellery or some other personal item in the grave.<sup>50</sup> At the same time the number of burials inside churches increased. Even though attempts were made during the eighteenth century to ban burials under the church floor for reasons of hygiene and superstition, the real ban did not come into force until 1822.<sup>51</sup>

Coins found in graves have often been interpreted as some kind of payment for Charon. In antiquity a coin was placed in the mouth of the dead, as compensation for the ferryman. Over the course of time the custom changed and the coin was not necessarily always placed in the mouth. Placing coins on the eyelids of the deceased has always been another

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<sup>47</sup> Malmstedt 2002, 186.

<sup>48</sup> Bente Lavold, 'Holdinger til katolske altertavler etter reformasjonen', in Hanne Sanders ed., *Mellem Gud og Djaevelen. Religiøse og magiske verdensbilleder i Norden 1500-1800*, Nord: Köpenhamn 2001, 155–176, at 174.

<sup>49</sup> Kirsti Paavola, *Kepeät mullat, kirjallisiin ja esineellisiin lähteisiin perustuva tutkimus Pohjois-Pohjanmaan rannikon kirkkohautoista* (Acta universitatis Ouluensis. B humaniora 28), Oulun yliopisto: Oulu 1998, 30–37.

<sup>50</sup> Hiekkanen 2003, 158.

<sup>51</sup> Paavola 1998, 38–43.

common habit.<sup>52</sup> The coin was also not always intended for the ferryman; instead it could be seen as gift to the dead. The gift of a coin could protect the dead against the powers of darkness and harmful influences. As the use of coins spread their meaning was also secularized, but long-established customs like this generally retained their importance in popular belief.<sup>53</sup>

In Sweden it was quite common for the most personal items of the deceased to go with him to the grave, such as a pipe or a tobacco pouch. Additionally, it was also customary to put a silver coin in the coffin, otherwise the dead would not rest in peace.<sup>54</sup> In Swedish folk tales from the eighteenth to the twentieth century one can still detect the conception that a coin needed to be given for the last journey. On the one hand money was needed in the hereafter, on the other hand the coin prevented the dead from coming back to haunt the living.<sup>55</sup>

Taking into consideration how common the custom of putting coins in the graves seems to be according to the folklore, it is very interesting how few places show actual evidence of this practice. In his study of coins in late Iron Age burials Pekka Sarvas found only one case that can be directly linked to the theory of payment for Charon. In the cemetery of Visulahti in Savo a thirteenth-century bracteate was found in the mouth of one of the deceased. In all the other cases the Viking age coins seemed to be sporadically thrown into the grave. At all events Sarvas sees these coins as deliberate gifts or offerings for the dead.<sup>56</sup> In his dissertation on Viking-Age coin finds in Finland Tuukka Talvio also stresses the irregular use of coins in burials.<sup>57</sup>

Kirsi Jylkkä-Karppinen, who has studied the phenomenon of coins in burials in the medieval graves at Valmarinniemi in Ostrobothnia, demonstrated that coins were the most common objects in graves from around 1330 to the end of the fifteenth century. Coins were placed on the chest or the neck, on the pelvis, inside the palm, on the bottom or on top of the burial, in the fill and even in cremation burials.<sup>58</sup> Another churchyard in

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<sup>52</sup> Torgny Segerstedt, *Mynts användning i döds kulten* (Lunds universitets årsskrift. Ny följd. Avdelning 1, Teologi, juridik och humanistiska ämnen 2:2), Ohlson: Lund 1907, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Segerstedt 1907, 27, 44.

<sup>54</sup> Segerstedt 1907, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Kirsi Jylkkä, 'Matkaraha Manalaan', *Lähde – historiatieteellinen aikakauskirja* 2006, 163–175, at 171–172.

<sup>56</sup> Pekka Sarvas, *Länsi-Suomen ruumishautojen raha-ajoitukset. Suomen ja Skandinavian arkeologian liseniaattitutkielma*. (Helsingin yliopiston arkeologian laitos, moniste 6), Helsinki 1972, 7–9.

<sup>57</sup> Tuukka Talvio, *Coins and Coin Finds in Finland AD 800-1200* (Iskos 12), Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys: Helsinki 2001, 67–72.

<sup>58</sup> Kirsi Jylkkä, *Kruunun pajasta Kemin maahan. Keminmaan Valmarinniemen rahalöydöt*, unpublished MA thesis, University of Oulu 2004, 50–57; Jylkkä 2006, 169–170.

Ostrobothnia, in Ii, also presents burials with coins.<sup>59</sup> On the coast of Northern Ostrobothnia the custom of putting coins in burials was still known at least during the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.<sup>60</sup>

Apart from these examples from Ostrobothnia the use of coins as grave goods seems to be even rarer during later periods. In the churches that were excavated in the mid-twentieth century this could be explained by the crude methods used during the excavations, which prevented more detailed exploration of the graves. However it is worth noting that the burials were often examined more thoroughly than the rest of the area and that churches excavated during the last three decades also seem to lack concrete evidence of coins in the burials. For example in the church of Renko in Tavastia not a single coin could be directly connected with any of the graves.<sup>61</sup> According to the archaeological evidence the coins under the church floor might thereby occasionally derive from the burials under the floor, but all the thousands of coin finds can by no means be explained as gifts to the dead.

### Confusion under the floorboards

In some cases it is possible to draw some conclusions as to the meaning of the coins by looking at the distribution of the finds. If they form a specific pattern it may indicate the location of an altar or an offertory chest. As already mentioned above, the medieval coins in many Scandinavian churches often seem to be concentrated in the sanctuary or to the east side of the nave, where the side altar was often situated. In some cases it has also been possible to perceive a higher number of finds near the entrance, where there might have been space for a chest or an image of a saint.<sup>62</sup>

In the churches on the Åland Islands it is possible to see some of the same patterns in the find distribution as elsewhere in Scandinavia. For example the medieval coins in the church in Finström are principally found in the chancel, the sacristy, outside the porch and in the area to the left of the sacristy. Also in Jomala church most of the medieval coins were found in the chancel, with another big accumulation in the northeast corner of the nave. In the church in Lemland the medieval coins derive from the chancel, the west entrance and the north long side of the church; in Saltvik church they are mostly from the northwest corner of the nave. The coins from the

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<sup>59</sup> Kirsi Jylkkä-Karppinen, 'Rahalöydöt – varhaisia jälkiä monetarisoituvasta pohjoisesta', in Titta Kallio-Seppä, Janne Ikäheimo, Kirsi Paavola (eds), *Iin vanhan Haminan kirkko ja hautausmaa. Arkeologisia tutkimuksia*, Oulun yliopisto: Oulu 2011, 77–87, at 83.

<sup>60</sup> Paavola 1998, 168.

<sup>61</sup> Markus Hiekkänen, 'Rengon kirkon historia', in *Rengon historia*, Rengon seurakunta: Renko 1993, 53–252, at 77.

<sup>62</sup> Klackenborg 1992, 35–36.

churches on Åland Islands have most commonly been documented using a grid with squares of one to two metres.

In contrast the material from the rest of Finland is problematic, given the very mixed archaeological layers, as well as an insufficient level of documentation in some cases. When Juhani Rinne excavated the episcopal church of Koroinen in 1900–1902 his methods were exceptionally precise for the time, as a grid of five by five metres was used.<sup>63</sup> When Rinne later conducted archaeological excavations in Turku Cathedral the method was not as systematic. The information on the bags of finds is approximate, with labels such as 'from the west part of the church', 'from the closet in the sacristy' or 'the chapel of Bartholomew'. All the other church finds from the beginning of the twentieth century were almost without exception recovered without any kind of documentation.

The majority of the church finds originate from the decades after the Second World War, when many of the medieval stone churches were restored. Even during this period the methods were pretty crude, however, with very large grids of three by three metres, if indeed a grid was used at all. Perniö church in Finland Proper has the most interesting medieval numismatic material, but unfortunately there is no documentation whatsoever for the find spots of the coins. The whole church was emptied, and the mixed layers were mechanically sifted outside the church. A big wing (21 x 58 cm) from an angel sculpture, an axe and small silver bracteates were found in the same sift.<sup>64</sup>

However, the few better documented churches (for example the churches in Laitila, Lohja, Nousiainen and Raisio excavated during the 1960s, and churches excavated more recently such as Espoo, Hailuoto, Lempäälä and Renko) indicate that the distribution of the coins on the Finnish mainland was much more random than in the rest of Scandinavia and on the Åland Islands, already in the medieval period. Some concentrations can be found both among the medieval and later coins, but it is difficult to assess whether this is due to the location of furnishings such as altars, the condition of the floor or the poor lighting. Very few of the coins can be related with the burials, and for example in Hailuoto in Ostrobothnia the coins found next to the graves are all from very mixed layers and different types of fills.<sup>65</sup>

Looking at the existing data it seems that there is no fixed pattern to detect among the coins found in Finnish churches. In some churches the

<sup>63</sup> Pentti Koivunen, 'Medeltida myntfynd i Korois', *Åbo stads historiska museum Årsskrift* 40 (1979), 6–118.

<sup>64</sup> NM 62106: 11, 62106: 25 & 63047, acquisition numbers of the National Museum of Finland.

<sup>65</sup> Kirsi Paavola, *Hailuodon kirkon arkeologiset tutkimukset vuosina 1985–1987*, Tutkimusraportti, Oulun yliopisto 1991, 10.

coins are concentrated to the north, in others to the south of the building. In the church of Espoo many of the medieval coins were found in the chancel;<sup>66</sup> in the remainder of the churches often no coins at all are found in the chancel. In the church of Renko most of the medieval coins are found in the south part of the nave,<sup>67</sup> while in the church in Nousiainen most coins clearly derive from the north part of the nave.<sup>68</sup> Over the centuries the earth-layers under the church floor have been thoroughly confused as a result of numerous burials and later restoration works. In many cases the probability of the coins remaining *in situ* where they were originally dropped or lost, is in fact quite low.

## Conclusion

The coins found in churches reveal the use of coins by ordinary people in everyday life. The material is mainly uniform and consists of coins of the very lowest value. The use of coins in churches has continued uninterrupted from the Middle Ages to the present. The church finds in Finland do normally not reflect individual historical events, unless these are directly connected with the history of the church in question. They do however shed some new light on the beliefs of the people, the customs and the conception of money at different times.

It is quite impossible to find an absolute answer to the question as to why these coins ended up under the church floor. The medieval coins can nevertheless most often be connected to the official offering cult and so-called offertory wastage. These coins can thereby be seen as accidentally lost, as they were not deliberately hidden under the floor boards. The vast masses of early modern coins found in the Finnish churches cannot be explained in the same way. Many of the coins might of course have been lost in connection with the taking of the collection or other transactions inside the churches. Perhaps not all these losses went unremarked, but the low value of the coins might have reduced the trouble people were prepared to take in order to retrieve their coins. The crowding and the poor lighting might of course also have played their part.

On the basis of both the archaeological material and the ethnographical sources I would however argue for the possibility that sacrificing continued actively in the churches also after the Reformation. Even though the church statutes and the law urged people to renounce their

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<sup>66</sup> Markus Hiekkanen, *Här har släkte efter släkte... Ur Esbo kyrkas framgrävda förflutna*, Esbo församling: Esbo 1989, 50–51.

<sup>67</sup> Hiekkanen 1993, 75.

<sup>68</sup> Frida Ehrnsten, 'Kirkonlattian aarteet', *Muinaistutkija* 3/2013, 28–44, at 37–38.

old habits, one can assume that old habits did not change overnight. Coins have always been the most common form of offerings and especially during the seventeenth century some of the gifts in kind were replaced with gifts of coins. The account books also suggest that the heyday of the sacrificial churches took place during the Lutheran period.<sup>69</sup> Even if these gifts did not end up under the church floor, it supports the theory of coin offerings continuing in the early modern period too. It is quite possible that the sacrificing of coins became more common especially during difficult times (as famine or wartime), when people took appealing God into their own hands. Some of the coins might also originate from burials that have gradually mouldered away under the floor, but there is no concrete archaeological evidence for this phenomenon. Coins in burials can however be seen as sacrificial gifts, as they generally consciously were placed with the deceased in the grave. These gifts for the dead were a Catholic custom that lived on for centuries into the modern period, even though they were expressly banned in the Lutheran church ordinances in the seventeenth century.



**Fig. 5. Coins found under the church floor.**

It is very likely that many of the coins found under the floor boards of the churches were accidentally or in some cases knowingly lost. The lost coins from the medieval period are generally seen as connected with the official offerings that took place inside the church, but the transcendental meaning of the later coins has often been overlooked. I suggest that, taking into

<sup>69</sup> Jokipii 2002, 37–38.



consideration the importance of monetary offerings during the Catholic period, the ethnographical sources, and how generally held beliefs normally live on despite the laws of the authorities, one must admit the possibility of direct sacrifices continuing also after the Reformation.

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