

Workshop Hope & Despair in Premodern Societies – Cultural, Social and Religious Perspectives, Umeå University, August 21-22, 2020

ABSTRACTS

Charles Zika, University of Melbourne

c.zika@unimelb.edu.au

The Materialization of Hope: the power of sacred objects and images at the Austrian shrine of Mariazell

Pilgrimage shrines were spaces marked out by sacred objects, around which rituals were performed, and different benefits were sought. Pilgrims most commonly travelled to these sacred shrines and objects in order to be released or liberated from particular traumas – such as illness or injury, serious loss of life by children or family members, serious restrictions such as infertility or imprisonment, or ongoing attacks by devils in the form of diabolical possession. The successful release from such trauma rested heavily on hope.

This lecture will explore how various cultic objects and images at the Austrian shrine of Mariazell between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries were able to generate such hope in pilgrims, and the strategies pilgrims used to personalise such hope, in order to overcome, or at least more easily cope with, their trauma. This will also include so-called votive images, generally understood as objects pilgrims give in thanks for miraculous acts of divine intervention and liberation. But one also needs to consider the collective retention and display of these votive images, and how they then become objects not only of gratitude but also of hope. In these different ways sacred objects and images at pilgrimage shrines effectively become material signs and assurances of hope.

Ville Vuolanto, Tampere University

ville.vuolanto@tuni.fi

Hope as an emotion, virtue, and practice in the Roman World

My aim is to present a framework of how hope – or, to use the terminology of modern psychology, how the seeking of meaningfulness in life from the sense of hope – was conceptualized and put into practice in the Roman world. I will ponder three different aspects of hope and future-orientedness in Roman culture: hope as an emotion, hope as a virtue (or vice!), and hope as practice (or ‘strategy’), and how these could be studied in a meaningful way by a scholar interested in cultural and social history. To show the various forms hope and reaching for it could have taken in the Roman world, I will go through a series of cases, drawn from three very different contexts: life philosophy of the Roman elites (mainly Cicero; time allowing also some Roman historians); funerary commemorative texts by the (more) ordinary people, preserved in Roman epigraphy; and late antique discussions of the ‘proper’ hope in Christian life, when the life strategies of the people challenged the ecclesiastical writers’ more theologically oriented views of hope and futurity (Augustine, Sulpicius Severus).

Andreas Hellerstedt, Stockholm University

andreas.hellerstedt@idehist.su.se

“The strict course of fate”: Stoic fatalism and everyday misfortune in 17th and 18th century Sweden

This paper will consider discussions of fatalism in early modern Sweden. Ancient stoicism was regarded with suspicion by Lutheran theologians in the 17th century, but neo-stoicism was also one of the strongest philosophical movements of this period. Furthermore, stoic “fatalism” was increasingly associated with the rise of the new science and modern philosophy, such as those of René Descartes and Christian Wolff. I will provide some examples of how stoic conceptions of fate were discussed in academic discourse but also of how they were applied to everyday life in the handling of the misfortunes of war, disease and death which plagued early modern Europe.

Stefano Fogelberg Rota & Rolf Hugoson, Umeå University

stefano.fogelberg.rota@umu.se

rolf.hugoson@umu.se

Queen Christina of Sweden and the representation of the concept sovereignty

A plenitude of meanings arguably remains attached to the word sovereignty. Our paper focus Queen Christina’s roles – in the plural – when personal rule in the 17th century developed into more institutionalized forms of sovereignty, notably through the 1648 Westphalian Peace. The first part of our study investigates part of the broader semantic field. Taking our cue from Ernst Cassirer, we read Corneille’s neoclassical dramas and find sovereignty on a conceptual field together with words like vertu, gloire and honneur: Christina’s ”imperatives” according to Cassirer.

The second part of the paper is devoted to two parallel contexts, where Christina’s sovereignty was negotiated and affirmed. On the one hand, the court ballets performed in Stockholm to legitimate Christina’s royal status, again setting virtue, glory and honour in play; On the other hand, Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato’s influential panegyric *Historia Della Sacra Real Maestà di Christina Alessandra Regina di Svetia* (1656). Gualdo Priorato reaffirms Christina’s sovereignty in her very act of forsaking it. With a typical seventeenth century paradox, Christina’s royal status is legitimized in the moment in which she – by means of a Christian contempt of worldly matters – proves her capacity of overcoming herself and her role.

Louise Berglund, Uppsala University

louise.berglund@hist.uu.se

Fashioning influence: St Birgitta and the loci of the sacred

When St Birgitta was about 40 years old, around 1343, she began receiving the visions that were to transform her from a mighty and learned noblewoman in Sweden into an influential agent in the intertwined spheres of politics and spirituality. Her very first political revelation appeared to her in Arras, positioning her as a transnational agent from the outset. In this presentation I wish to discuss how St Birgitta crafted her position as an international woman

of influence. Key aspects are the time and place of her key revelations, and her interaction with specific saints and holy objects, in reality as well as in visions. These interactions ranged from meditations before sacred objects in churches, to experiences of sacred objects in her own home, and to encounters with saints in visions and on pilgrimages and journeys. I will analyse the effects these interactions had on her subsequent success as a transnational visionary woman and as a canonized saint.

Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Tampere University

sari.katajala-peltomaa@tuni.fi

From despair to hope – from a blasphemer to a devotee. Emotional steps in punishing miracles of Saint Birgitta

Miracle narrations are, by their very nature, emotive scripts: the chain of events proceeds from one emotional level to the next. First, the need for divine aid was expressed by despair, anguish, and grief. In the next stages, during the invocation and thanksgiving for the miracle, humility and then joy, gratitude, and enhanced devotion were expected elements. Punishment miracles add new elements to this emotional process, since pride, shame and ingratitude were integral parts of them. Birgitta's miracles are eminently suitable for this kind of analysis since, as a thaumaturge, she was depicted as fighting against demons and sinful people: punishing miracles are particularly numerous in her canonization process. This paper looks at miracle narrations in Birgitta's canonization process (1374) and later ad sanctos sermons (-1450) in Vadstena Abbey to see how the emotional steps from a blasphemer to a devotee were constructed.

Sanna Joska, The National Archives of Finland

sanna.joska@gmail.com

Any Room for Hope? Hope and Despair in Commemorations of Children in Imperial Rome

This paper examines the themes of hope and despair through an "ultimate" case: the death of a child. This is a topic that has faced quite a turn in the studies of premodern history, concerning especially the reaction of parents to the death of their child. This has shifted from indifference to the acknowledgement of the parents' emotions, but there is more to be studied. This paper asks especially if we can connect hope to the occasion of a child's death or whether despair (or perhaps some other negative emotion) is the only possible emotion in an occasion that leads an individual or a family to a crisis of future and continuity.

The paper examines reactions to a child's death in the ancient Roman Empire through two types of sources: literature and epigraphy. This approach allows the study of both the upper classes' view on a child's death as well as that of the lower classes and gives the opportunity to examine both literal and visual evidence connected to the commemoration of children. As with all study of emotions in premodern societies it is important to evaluate whether emotions can be examined from ancient sources such as commemorative art and philosophical literature that are in their nature formulaic, normative and rhetorical.

Oana Maria Cojocaru, Umeå University oana.cojocaru@umu.se

Family crisis and strategies of hope in Byzantine hagiography (9th-12th c.)

In medieval societies, children were seen as a human capital that would assure the continuation of lineage, transmission of inheritance, and psychological and financial security of parents in their old age. In spite of the patriarchal character of Byzantine society, women manifested their influence in different aspects of life: religious practice, legal status, education, and political life. Even though elite women are the most visible in textual sources, there are also other women of a lowly social background who are presented as acting alone in the upbringing of their children, in making decision regarding children's future, in taking initiative in the preservation and transmission of cultural values, or making efforts in establishing family alliances by arranging the marriage of their offspring. But how did the Byzantines react when faced with hardship and tragedy such as economic crises, sterility problems, the risk of losing their children due to long-term diseases and traumas, or the sudden death of a child? What strategies of survival and social advancement they could develop and what sort of coping mechanisms they employed in such situations in order to give their lives a meaningful purpose? My paper will discuss several such cases described in the Byzantine hagiographies of the 9th to the 12th centuries, seeking to reconstruct the role played by gender and social status in the construction of strategies of hope and continuity in the Byzantine family, as constituents of a meaningful life.

Simon Berggren, Umeå University simon.berggren@umu.se

“Most Gracious King! Listen to a Pleading Mother” – Negotiating Transgressions and the Language of Despair in 17th Century Supplications for Mercy.

This paper examines the emotional rhetoric contained in petition letters for mercy, specifically in the context of negotiating with the authorities for a lesser punishment than death. While social circumstances of every petition and the crime it petitioned was different to each other, the themes of hope and despair saturated the language of most petitioners, as well as pleas for the king to personally intervene, outlining popular perceptions of the monarch as the supreme arbitrator of justice. The question to ask is how such emotional concepts framed the negotiation of legal consequences in the highest court of Sweden in the 17th century.

New Hope for Melancholic Murderers?

On December 18th, 1767 the king of Denmark-Norway, signed a law regarding so-called melancholic murderers. This law is a rupture with the previous principle of *jus talionis* deducted from the Bible, and breaks with the regulations that have been termed Mosaic Law imbedded in the Danish Code of 1683. The occasion for this step was a new perception of the pathological character of the murderers, but a new enlightened, humanistic understanding did not drive it. A break was already proposed in 1757 and thus predates the famous work of Cesare Beccaria. In the archives, one can trace its roots to the work of some of the most influential – and radical – pietistic theologians in the kingdom and their interest for the inner person or subjectivity.

This paper explores a couple of paradigmatic cases from the first half of 18th century, before we turn to some of the theories of the motives behind these murders and not least how to stop them. Were they considered insane, pious or desperately ill? We shall then discuss if the source material from these cases, and the changing view and treatment of them, can illustrate a more general development in the view of pietistic subjectivity and the birth of the subject. Was the departure from the Mosaic Law and death penalty a dematerialization? Furthermore, could we then view the pathological perspective on the subject as a new materiality?

Death wish, insanity or a shortcut to salvation? Finnish suicidal murder as a historical phenomenon in the 1690-1820 – dissertation research plan.

Suicidal murder was a crime type in which the perpetrator murdered an innocent bystander to get sentenced to death. Crime type was born in the 1600s in Protestant European areas and became a major judicial problem in the 1700s, especially in Stockholm and Copenhagen. Often, before committing murder, a suicidal murderer had considered committing suicide, but the thought of eternal damnation was such a terrifying that the perpetrator decided to find another solution. A criminal – no matter how horrible his crime was – received absolution before the execution and, therefore, some believed that they could enter Heaven despite sin and crime of murder. In this workshop, I will present the plan for my dissertation about Finnish suicidal murders in 1680-1820. In my presentation, I will focus on mental aspects of Finnish suicidal murder and explain by examples how perpetrators justified their deed in the court.

Raisa Maria Toivo, University of Tampere raisa.toivo@tuni.fi

Cursing in 17th-Century Finnish Funeral Sermons (likpredikningar) – emotion, experience and power

Funeral sermons usually emphasise not only a hope but a certainty of salvation and justification of both the deceased and all the other faithful believers in the life hereafter. However, the funeral sermons also point to people and deeds who, they claim, will be denied salvation. They even curse some people and some actions. The selection of these people and actions is not surprising – persistent and wilful sinners, suicides, blasphemers, heretics and those who lure other people to sin, etc.. What is more interesting is to ask when and why these cursed people were mentioned at all in some sermons – and not at others. What was the emotional function of cursing in the context that is otherwise supposed to give comfort in the sorrow of losing a loved one and in the fear before death itself? The paper uses the collection of 16th century funeral sermons in the Institute for Languages in Finland digital collection (KOTUS) and shows how the balancing act between redemption and damnation was used in funeral sermons to control emotion and experience, create submission and to emphasise the power of God and his vicars on earth.

Jenni Kuuliala, Tampere University / HEX

jenni.kuuliala@tuni.fi

Surviving black magic. Illness, witchcraft, and lived religion in late medieval and early modern Italy

My presentation will discuss the relationship of emotions, bodily experience, and lived religion in Central and Northern Italy between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. The main point under discussion will be miracle narratives, where a (bodily) illness was considered to be caused by witchcraft. I will approach the topic by analysing canonization testimonies where a saint healed such an infirmity and compare their descriptions of survival, hope, and fear with other types of miracle narratives as well as the records of the Roman inquisition. Both the veneration of saints and the belief in witchcraft as a cause of illnesses belong to the same religious milieu of the period, and both were areas, which the Church sought to control and, during the Catholic Reformation period, renew. Yet, they often appear as strangely separate phenomena. In hagiographic sources, the outset of a condition caused by witchcraft could be a dramatic incident followed by a personal and/or communal crisis, or it could appear simply as a stated fact, which was not questioned by the conductors of the hearings or the scribes of the miracle collections. Emotions and sentiments of the parties involved were, however, crucial for the narrative. My paper seeks to ask what kind of a communal role these miracle narratives served, and how they reproduced and created the experience of surviving black magic.

‘Beware of the Devil’ – the eighteenth-century physician Nils Gissler’s afflictions and early Lutheran advice books on repentance and salvation

In the 1750-ties Nils Gissler (1717-1771) naturalist, disciple of Linnaeus, Doctor of Medicine, member of the Royal Scientific Academy and the first practicing physician in northern Sweden, became mentally ill for a period of several years. After recovering, he wrote down his experiences in a detailed and extensive account. What is peculiar in his disease story is the presence of the Devil, not in visions and imagination, but as a most physical being and force, penetrating his whole body and senses. Gissler lived in a century that has routinely been labelled the age of reason, but the eighteenth century was also a time of ecstatic religious movements, visionaries and persons claiming to be possessed either by divine inspiration or demonic influence. In this respect Gissler was not unique, but as a naturalist scientist and professional physician he appears highly interesting in a time of increasing rivalry between medical diagnosis and spiritual revelation. It will be argued that Gissler did not see any contradiction in this – on the contrary he regarded his afflictions as a school of experience which could be put into practice in his medical profession. Furthermore it will be argued that his main inspiration came not from the spiritual movements of the day but from early Lutheran advice books on how to find comfort in faith and resist despair which he elaborated into a kind of cognitive therapy.

Coping with Insanity – Spiritual Healing and Pastoral Consolation in Early Modern Sweden

The paper discusses some of the religious activities and practices that were aimed at finding cure for insanity, and thus gave hope for the ‘ill’ themselves and helped them and their families and other community members in coping with mental conditions in early modern Sweden (incl. Finland). Spiritual healing, therapies and pastoral care were integral parts of early modern healing and health care in general. This aspect of ‘lived religion’, i.e. religious healing practices and spiritual care for the ‘insane’ and mentally afflicted, manifest how religion influenced people’s everyday lives both on the individual and communal levels. Religion provided not only culturally and socially acceptable means to alleviate impairments but also means to participate in the healing process. Religious healing of the insane in early modern Sweden entailed many rituals and forms, including personal devotions, pastoral counselling and intermediation, communal prayers in church, and at times even making offerings and exorcisms. The modes of care manifest religious pluralism and syncretism in the Lutheran Swedish kingdom; moreover, even though many Catholic traditions, such as pilgrimages and worship of saints, had been officially rejected, there were many continuations in the healing practices. The material consists of case descriptions and instructions involving healing the insane or mental impairments by means of religion in various types of sources, including lower court records and other judicial documents, journals and a selection of printed medical and Lutheran theological treatises.

The troubled life of a pastor's wife. Clerical family and local community in Eastern Finland in the late 17th century.

In this paper, I will focus on crises and misfortunes in social life as experienced by clergymen's wives and widows in the diocese of Vyborg in Eastern Finland. What kinds of strategies for survival did they have, and what were the limits and possibilities of their individual agency in these situations? I will present a case study of a clerical family in Eastern Finland, especially focusing on the pastor's wife, Christina Brudgum. Her eldest son suffered from a mental illness that made him extremely violent, particularly towards his mother. Even the father of the family, who became the pastor of Puumala after serving as a military pastor in Riga, physically abused his wife to the extent that was not seen as acceptable in a patriarchal society. I will use secular lower court records to analyze how Christina coped with the situation as well as how she secured her and her children's livelihood after the death of her husband, and discuss the role of the local peasant community and local authorities in the events. I argue that building and maintaining local networks was an important strategy of survival both to the pastor's family as a whole and to its individual members.

Learning the rules of the game – status elevation and mental strain in the Life Description of Pehr Stenberg, 1770-1800

Pehr Stenberg (1758-1824) was born the son of a farmer of modest means in the northern Swedish town of Umeå. After being allowed to beg for his tuition from village residents, Stenberg was given the opportunity to become a priest through studies at Åbo Academy (present-day Finland). During his studies, Stenberg first worked as a tutor and later as a so-called house priest for aristocratic families in the countryside outside of Åbo.

These experiences are depicted in a unique 5 000-page manuscript that Stenberg worked on for 40 years. Written with explicit intention to document his innermost thoughts and feelings, Stenberg's manuscript gives a unique insight into the experiences of a man with a peasant background attempting to rise through the social ranks of the late 18th-century Swedish realm.

This paper explores the way in which everyday practices of the 18th century marked social boundaries of exclusion and belonging and served to uphold sharp social hierarchies. These exclusionary functions are presented in stark detail in Stenberg's account. With no prior knowledge of how to move in bourgeois and aristocratic circles, Stenberg is continually unmasked as the peasant son that he is and the shaping of a new class identity comes with significant emotional toil. With time, Stenberg learns to manage the social mores of the upper classes and completes his class journey – ultimately expressing contempt for the social class from which he came.