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Doing Memory: Medieval Saints and Heroes and Their Afterlives in the Baltic Sea Region (19th–20th centuries), ed. Cordelia Heß, Gustavs Strenga, De Gruyter, Berlin–Boston 2024, 10 + 300 pp., ISBN 978-3-11-135062-2, e-ISBN 978-3-11-135119-3.

This well-presented and fascinating edited volume focuses on the afterlives of medieval saints and heroes in modern history of the Baltic region and is organised around four themes or sections: popular culture, local case studies, national memory, and shared heritage. The authors trace how various medieval personages, big and small, 'have been remembered, commemorated, interpreted, [and] used' (p. 5) in the nation-building process in the Baltic, and ask what was their role in shaping group and regional identities. Methodologically this volume positions itself in the 'doing memory' camp and theoretically stands at the intersection of heroism studies, memory and medievalism studies and, among others, takes inspiration from the French don of *lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora.

The first, absorbing chapter by Sari Katajala-Peltomaa focuses on a relatively obscure medieval female saint and shows how she has been mobilised for the construction of collective Finnish identity. Birgitta Birgersdotter, or Pirjo/Pirkko in vernacular, was a noblewoman in fourteenth-century Finland who became 'a tool to think with' about Finish cultural heritage and collective memory. Fighting scarcity of sources, the author explains how at first the saint was popular in the agricultural, medieval Finnish society because of her ostensible power to protect cattle, help with needlework, and chastise sinful behaviour. By the early modern era, Brigitta became an important source of political legitimacy for many Finnish families who were eager to trace their patrilineal genealogy to the noblewoman to establish their own noble descent. In the process, the idea of Finnishness among the elite was reinforced. When Finland was annexed by the Russian Empire in the early nineteenth century, it 'placed new weight on identity construction via religion' (p. 35) and here Birgitta was useful once again. Along with other religious figures, Birgitta became not only a manifestation of national consciousness but tied Finland to Western Europe more generally through her religion. As a matter of fact, both Finnish and Swedish intellectuals re-invented Birgitta for their respective national projects. By the early twentieth century, she was a symbol of woman's suffrage movement and even appeared in the children's literature.

The second chapter by Kristina Jõekalda explores the deployment of two female figures in personification of Estonia, similar to how the French Marienne or the American Lady Liberty work to personify their respective nations. Does Estonia have its own Lady Liberty? The author argues that both the Virgin Mary, who played a key role in Christianising the region in the thirteenth century, and Linda, the mythical mother figure from an Estonian epic, combined to provide just such personification of the Estonian nation, especially in the nineteenth century, during the national awaking. Jõekalda draws on archaeology and art history, utilising many visual materials as well

as artefacts and sculptures as her sources. Continuing the theme of the volume about heroes and saints the chapter does a wonderful job of bringing two historical narratives together, one Christian and the other, pagan.

Gustavs Strenga's chapter about the Latvian medieval hero, Imanta, concludes the 'Popular Culture' section of the volume. The case of Imanta shows how a medieval figure was mobilised during the Enlightenment for cultural purposes, and then deployed during the age of nationalism in the nineteenth century. According to medieval chronicles, the twelfth-century Liv warrior Imanta (or Ymaut) assassinated the German Bishop Bethold at the site of the future Latvian capital Riga. At first Imanta emerged as a hero in literary works of the Enlightenment, written by Baltic German intellectuals. Most likely, Imanta was picked because he was not a noble and because he fought against the Teutonic crusades. Either way, by the nineteenth century there was a dire need for a national history and national heroes and in Imanta Latvian intellectuals found a mythical figure around whom national narrative could emerge. By the 1850s, from under the pens of Young Latvians such as Krišjānis Valdemārs and Krišjānis Barons, Imanta began to embody the Latvian struggle for freedom and resistance against foreign conquests. By the start of the twentieth century Imanta 'was fully appropriated by the Latvian cultural and intellectual elites' and was introduced to the wider public through their work in literature, music, and theatre. By the 1920s, the medieval Liv hero would fall out of with the times. Despite his national appeal, the rise of academic historians meant there was 'unease with him as a hero' (p. 102). Literary critics at the start of the twentieth century suggested that Imanta was just another version of the German literature about Barbarossa, academics argued that Imanta was a fictitious character as sources about him are scarce, and others questioned whether a killer of a priest 'should be seen as a national hero' (p. 102). By the 1930s, Imanta had played out his role as a symbol of Latvian struggle for freedom from the German and Russian domination, and as Strenga concludes, 'more "real" heroes were needed in the age of authoritarian regimes' (p. 106).

The section about local case studies opens with Steffen Hope's chapter about Odense eleventh-century king and saint Knud Rex. The chapter explores how the memory of Knud has become to inform the city's urban identity. There are many reasons Knud is remembered in Denmark today, including for his role in bringing Christianity to his kingdom. Hope builds on the concept of 'urban medievalism' to assess Odense identification with the medieval king. He shows how over time various generations connected the city with its medieval past, and explains the purposes behind the deployment of this medieval figure. By 'urban medievalism' the author means the use of medieval past in contemporary context for the purposes of shaping urban spaces. This process can be observed in anything from names of street to names of coffee shops to municipal seals that harken back to the Middle Ages. Hope then distinguishes between primary and secondary medievalisms, the former being an instance when an object has a direct link to the past, and the latter happens when this link is more incidental rather than intentional. The chapter uses several examples of iconography to explain this in the context of Odense, including coat of arms, naming of places around the city, image and displays. Kund has been hard at work indeed. All of the evocations of his aura work together to construct a distinct urban, modern identity of Odense.

The next contribution in the section is by Marianna Shakhnovich, who explores the veneration of Princess Olga, tenth-century ancient Rus' ruler who was not only the first female 'on the Kiev throne but also the first Christian' (p. 145). Shakhnovich shows how even into the early twentieth-century, places associated with Olga, who later became for all intents and purposes a saint, acquired special significance in popular imagination. The spring where Olga washed herself and the stones, she sat on acquired healing powers. Ecclesiastical authorities in Imperial Russia apparently were concerned enough about the cult of St Olga to try and suppress it. Perhaps the authorities had a right to be worried. The persistence of paganism and lack of basic understanding of the Orthodox scripture among the masses is illustrated by a fascinating excerpt from the late nineteenth-century conversation between a priest and one of his parishioners, who named several gods, including Michael the Archangel and Easter (p. 152). With that said, the chapter focuses more on folk/popular religion or *doeverie* (in Russian – a dual belief encompassing both pagan and Christian traditions) than on the theme of remembrance of saints and heroes and their role in shaping national discourses.

The national section starts with a reflection on the tension between memory, nationalism, and colonialism by Anna Ripatti. The chapter focuses on the memory of Tyrgils Knutsson, fourteenth-century Swedish military leader who built Vyborg Castle, presently in modern Russia, and who conquered parts of Finnish Karelia and brought it under Christian and Swedish rule. Ripatti traces how different groups have revied Knutsson's memory in the nineteenth century and in the process shows how this historical figure crystalised key debates within Finland and how 'his memory has served as a tool for imagining political autonomy in both the past and present' (p. 165). Pro-Finish intellectuals saw him as a colonizer and oppressor while to many Swedes he was 'a proto-Lutheran model statesman' (p. 167). For the pro-Finnish movement in the late nineteenth century Knutsson was responsible for brutality and war against the Finns while for the Swedish nationalists he was the man who brought Western civilisation to Finland. His castle was a symbol that demarcated a line between the Orthodox world of Imperial Russia and politics of despotism, and the freedoms of the Western world (p. 177).

Henrik Ågren's final chapter in this section is dedicated to the memory of the twelfth-century King Erik Jedvardsson of Sweden, who became a native royal saint and political symbol. The chapter is a summary of Ågren's larger monograph findings, but focuses specifically on the effects of the Reformation and the Enlightenment on the historical writing about St Erik and how these cultural and intellectual events shaped the memory of the saint. The chapter sketches out the elusive background of a man who was shrouded in myths and legends. By the 1500s, Erik came to symbolise justice, good government and power of Sweden. As far as the Reformation was concerned, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers downplayed Catholic aspects of Erik's past. Ågren writes that they 'were not interested in creating conflict between past and present […]' (p. 203). With time, as new monarchs replaced St Erik's memory and deeds, he became less significant as a role model and a symbol. The legacy of the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on secularisation, social criticism, and challenge to authority, proved to be more lasting than that of the Reformation. After the eighteenth century, St Erik was only marginal in the collective memory of the people of Sweden.

The last section of the volume is dedicated to shared heritage and hosts three fascinating chapters about Estonia, Schleswig-Holstein, and Karelia. Mark Kuldkepp explores the memory of the destruction of Sigtuna in 1187, a major town in medieval Sweden. His chapter shows how the memory of razing Sigtuna has been mobilised by Estonian intellectuals and 'instrumentalized in the service of modern nation-building projects' (p. 208). The raid on Sigtuna was most likely conducted by pagan Baltic tribes from regions of Latvia or Estonia, or even further afield. The raid precipitated the decline of what was a commercial and royal centre and corresponded with the rise of Stockholm. By the middle of the nineteenth century, during the fermentation of the Baltic national movements, Estonian intellectuals seized on this distant historical event and began to claim the raiders as their own, often using tendentious source material and imagination rather than historical records. The story was meant to celebrate ancient worthiness of Estonians before they were subjugated by Swedish and Russian Empires. The raiders were presented as Estonian Vikings who were capable of destroying neighbouring capitals and extending the power of their ancient lands. Not only this claim wrote Estonians into the Viking Age, but more important, it had subtle political implications. Perhaps Estonians' were meant to belong to the Nordic world of Scandinavians, and their 'natural place was not in the Russian Empire' (p. 215). Over all, this distant historical event helped to anchor Estonian national history into the broader age of European medieval history and aided in the construction of Estonian identity.

The section then moves west, to the land of Schleswig-Holstein and the memory of Gerhard III. Jan Rüdiger's chapter uses Gerhard to explore 'the narrative's offside' and the memories of Gerhard, one-and-a-half memories to be precise (the half memory is for how he is remembered in Germany), in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After briefly tracing the history of the medieval power broker who was assassinated by a local knight and his retinue in 1340, Rüdiger explains how the memory of the count became divisive even in the Middle Ages. For all intents and purposes, Gerhard, a Holsteinian count, was the ruler of Denmark by the time of his death, a rule that was deeply resented by local Danish aristocracy. He was celebrated both as a unifier of Slesvig and Holstein but also as a scoundrel who wanted to subjugate Denmark. Rüdiger does a great job explaining what the memory of Gerhard meant for Denmark and how he ended up as 'the narrative's offside' in Holstein. The count is now relegated to playing a villain in children's books, occasionally mentioned in pop songs, and shows up in free magazines.

The final chapter by Kati Parppei focuses on the medieval Orthodox saints of Finnish origins in the region of Karelia, particularly on the Brotherhood of Venerable Sergei and Herman. The chapter asks if the nationality or locality of the figure mattered and explores the relationship between the Orthodox Church and nationalism. Parppei does a great job explaining how the process of incorporating Russian medieval saints into Finnish collective memory took place. The tsarist government and church control over Karelia was very lose in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when efforts began to develop a network of local saints in the region. The incorporation of the Orthodox saints into the local Karelian memory was not a decisive effort by a single group but instead was promoted by several Orthodox priests, especially in the first part of the twentieth century. The saints' Russianness was subtly adapted to accommodate the local Finnish culture and collective memory.

Anti Selart's conclusion provides a deep reflection on lives and meaning of medieval saints and heroes, and their power to connect groups and communities. For small nations of Northern Europe it was especially important to invent their own glorious pasts and here medieval saints had an important role to play, and often became national heroes by the nineteenth century. By mentioning contemporary Russian nationalist constructivist discourse that sees nations as 'imagines communities', Selart deftly gives the subject of the book urgency and importance.

There is much to recommend in this volume. At its core, *Doing Memory*, is a thoughtful meditation on remembering and forgetting, on how memory is constructed, used, and sometimes abused – so pertinent in contemporary world. The volume should be commended for inclusion of female saints among the familiar pantheon of white, dead, sometimes bald, men. On a more technical note, unlike so many other collections, this one retained the footnotes, which always invites the curious reader to follow the sources. If there is one theme that this volume could have unpacked further, it would be militarism. The Virgin Mary was militarised in Estonia in the services of war, Linda was likewise presented as a war goddess (p. 69). The Latvian medieval hero Imanta was a highly militaristic figure whose memory was neatly mobilised during the time of conflict (p. 99). Tyrgils Knutsson of Sweden was likewise a military man *par excellence*, whose memory also became militarised (p. 183). St Erik was a warlord who undertook a military expedition against the Finns (p. 202) and the story of destruction of Sigtuna is also a highly militaristic memory (p. 208). Indeed, militarism seems to be a thread that runs through most of the chapters. Many of the saints and heroes were performing acts of war in a cultural sense and participating in acts of violence in their lifetime. Their memories produced highly militarised imagery that was connected to conquest, which reminds us that memory is often made through painful experiences of death and loss as much as through experiences of jubilation and victory.

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Bibliography

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