

Medieval vernicle finger rings in Finland

By Visa Immonen

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Five Finnish Medieval finger rings of the vernicle type, depicting the face of Christ, and two later rings with a male face are discussed. Dates and find contexts are reviewed. The position of the vernicle in Late Medieval piety, in the cult of *Corpus Christi* and especially in the devotional life of Medieval women is important to contextualise the common interpretation of the vernicle rings as magic charms.

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The ring type and problems in research

In the Middle Ages, the Vera Icon, the Vernicle, the representation of the suffering face of Christ impressed upon the veil of St. Veronica (fig. 1) occurred on finger rings. Five rings of this kind, with the motif engraved onto a disc which was then mounted onto the ring's collet (fig. 2), are known from Finland. The diameter of the collets is about one centimetre. In these Medieval rings, the diameter of the hoop is about two centimetres and the surface of the hoop is smooth or sometimes decorated with leaf and braid motifs. Occasionally, inscriptions have been engraved on the hoop. One or two possible Late Medieval versions of the vernicle ring are also known from Finland. On these, the face has been cast with the rest of the ring.

In Late Medieval Scandinavia, vernicle rings were the most popular ring type together with Calvary rings representing the crucifixion on Golgotha (Backman 1963, p. 50, pp. 59–61). About 30 vernicle rings are known from Denmark (Lindahl 2003, nos. 159–188), and six from Norway (Hammervold 1997, p. 51). In

Sweden, the Museum of National Antiquities has 15 vernicle rings in its collections, and the collections of the Kulturen museum contain several rings, two of which are made of gold (Bengtsson 1974, pp. 56–57). Two vernicle rings from Estonia has been published (Buchholz 1892, p. 24, Kirme 2002, pp. 79–80).

The raw material of the vernicle rings was usually gilded silver, but plain silver, bronze, or even iron could also be used (Sjölund 1980, p. 169; Reinholdt 1986). The face of the Saviour and a nimbus were engraved on a separate disc. Usually the gold content of the disc is higher than that of the rest of the ring. Hans Hildebrand (1884–98, p. 415; cf. Kjellberg 1940, p. 88) considers the use of purer gold for Christ's face to be an indication of Medieval piety. Pierre Backman (1963, pp. 63–64), on the other hand, sees the reasons as more technical. He traces the phenomenon to the Byzantine goldsmiths, who developed a technique where the gold content of the different parts of an artefact was intentionally varied for a more lively visual effect. Of course, these two interpretations do not necessarily ex-



Fig. 1. St. Veronica with her veil. Mural in the chapel of John the Baptist in Turku Cathedral (Kanerva & Welin 1987, p. 101). —S:ta Veronica med svetteduken. Kalkmålning i Åbo domkyrka.



Fig. 2. The picture disc of the vernicle ring from Köyliö (NM Hist. inv. 39044:1). Diameter 10 mm. Photo by the author. —Klack på fingerring från Kjulo.



Fig. 3. Hoop and bezel of the ring from Suosmeri in Ulvila, Finland (NM Hist. inv. 8188). Photo by the author. —Ring från Svartsmark i Ulvsby.

clude each other. The deeper engravings on some discs indicate that the nimbuses could be enamelled. None of the Finnish rings has any remains of enamel left, but on some Danish rings, where traces of it have survived, the enamels used have been blue, red and bluish grey (Backman 1963, p. 61). In the final stage of the production process, the picture disc was mounted onto the ring's collet with a rivet, which is visible at the back of the bezel (fig. 3). All the Finnish vernicle rings have a rivet, and a similar use of rivets is also common in other Medieval ring types.

Except for their central motif, the vernicle rings do not in fact differ markedly from other Medieval finger rings, and, like the other rings, they have been treated mainly in two kinds of publications. On the one hand, there are articles where an individual find or artefact has been presented with a dating and a touch of cultural history (e.g. Nørlund 1933; Sjölund 1980); on the other, there are longer publications which treat all finger rings from a certain area, collection or time period (e.g. Backman 1963; Ham-

mervold 1997). In the latter category, the emphasis is on dating the types and creating a general cultural history of rings or jewellery. This dualistic situation creates problems for studies of a certain type of finger rings: all the rings of the same type seem to date from a single point of time, their find contexts and provenance are undervalued, and fragmentary iconographical observations substitute for discussion on the cultural contexts of their use. A case in point is the superficial interpretation of the inscriptions and iconography of Medieval finger rings as magical lucky charms and protection against evil (e.g. Lexow 1955; Sjölund 1980, p. 171; Lindahl 1985). The problem here is that the interpretation is just as suitable for the vernacular finger rings used in the Modern period after the Reformation, and thus the concept of »magic artefact» becomes so vague that it is in danger of losing its significance. Yet the concept of magic has a very complex and eventful history, and the term may not even be appropriate for describing past mentalities (Ankarloo & Clark 2002). This has led me to take just one type of finger rings, i.e. the vernicle rings, as a point of departure. I will present the Finnish Medieval vernicle rings and two younger rings with the Holy Face, and discuss the dating of the vernicle rings and the position of the vernicle in Late Medieval piety. At the end, I will return to the question of the alleged magical use of vernicle rings and interpret them on the basis of the cult of *Corpus Christi*.

Finnish Medieval vernicle rings

All the five vernicle rings from Finland (fig. 4) are of gilded silver and appear quite similar at first glance, but each has distinctive features and they have been found in very different contexts. The two northernmost rings have been found in the municipality of Ulvila (Ulvby). One is a 1922 stray find from a field owned by the primary school in the village of Suosmeri (Svartsmark; NM Hist. inv. 8188). The ring's most distinctive feature is the moulded shoulders, the rest of the hoop having been left smooth (fig. 5).

The other ring (SatM inv. 18055:579; Jäkärä 2002, p. 132) is a find from archaeological excavations in 1973 at Isokartano, the site of the Medieval town of Ulvila (Pihlman 1981, pp.



Fig. 4. Map of find spots of vernicle rings in Finland. 1. Ulvila Suosmeri, 2. Ulvila Isokartano, 3. Eura Sorkkinen, 4. Köyliö Kirkkoluoto, 5. Alastaro, 6. Turku. — Finska fyndplatser för ringar med svvetteduksmotiv.

9–18, 117). This ring also has a smooth hoop except the shoulders, which are decorated with a quatrefoil and what appears to be an engraved plant motif (fig. 6). The ring was found near the remains of a wooden building (excavation area I, structure 3a), which has been dated on the basis of the pottery to the younger phase of the site or to the 16th century (Pihlman 1981, pp. 114–115). However, the excavated cultural layer was



Fig. 5. Ring from Suosmeri in Ulvila, Finland (NM Hist. inv. 8188). Photo by the author. —Detailj av ring från Svartsmark i Ulvsby.



Fig. 6. Ring from Isokartano in Ulvila, Finland (SatM inv. 18055:579). Photo by the author. —Ring från Isokartano i Ulvsby stad.



Fig. 7. Hoop of ring from Kõyliõ, Finland (NM Hist. inv. 39044:1). Photo by the author. —Detailj av ring från Kjøulo.

very thin and relatively mixed (Pihlman 1982, pp. 102, 109–111), which undermines the possibility of dating the ring with the aid of stratigraphy or ceramic phasing.

Two other vernicle rings were also found at archaeological excavations, but their contextual information is even weaker than that of the ring from Ulvila. The first find is from a small islet called Kirkkoluoto («Church islet») in the municipality of Kõyliõ (Kjøulo), where, in 1904–05, the vicar Viktor Salminen excavated remains of a small chapel dedicated to St. Henry (Salminen 1905; Jaakkola 1911; Rinne 1911). Within the building's foundation, fragments of a vernicle ring were found (NM Hist. inv. 39044:1; figs. 2 and 7). The disc with the engraved vernicle was found unattached to the broken collet and bezel. Salminen believed that there had been a space for a small relic between the bezel and the disc. He may have got the idea from Medieval pilgrim badges representing the vernicle, since some of them were made by joining two circular discs protecting a relic between them (van Beuningen & Koldewij 1993, pp. 133–134). However, no vernicle rings containing relics are known,

and there are no written sources to support the interpretation. The shoulders of the Kōyliö ring are decorated with four granulation balls. Around the ring's hoop runs a groove with a pair of silver braids soldered onto it. Juhani Rinne (1911, p. 40; 1932, pp. 94–108), referring to Hildebrand, dated the Kōyliö ring to the 15th century, possibly to its earlier part. The foundations of the chapel of St. Henry revealed a number of 15th century coins, two of which can be dated to the earlier part of the 15th century (director of the NM Coin Cabinet, Tuukka Talvio, pers. comm. 7.8. 2002). The latest coins found were minted during the reign of Adolphus Frederick (1751–71).

At the heart of Medieval Turku (Åbo), in front of the Katedralskolan school building by the river Aura, two small areas were excavated in 1972 (Pihlman 1995, p. 340). One of the areas revealed a golden ring (fig. 8; TPM inv. 21511:87). Unfortunately, since no excavation report has been filed in the archives of the Turku Provincial Museum, more detailed information on the excavations is not available. The ring has been badly damaged, perhaps by fire, and the engraved image on its collet is beyond recognition. The collet is circular and its diameter 12 millimetres. There are four granulation balls around the collet, and the disc is fastened to the collet with a rivet which is faintly visible on the back of the bezel. The ring is undoubtedly Medieval in shape, and it is likely that the disc was decorated with the face of Christ. On the other hand, some Calvary rings are very similar to the vernicle rings, the only difference being within the collet (cf. Kirme 2000, p. 30). In Calvary rings, however, the Golgotha scene is usually engraved in a much higher relief, and thus its contours should be more prominent on the surviving ring (cf. Tamm 2002, p. 113). Additionally, on the shoulders of the Turku ring, one can detect traces of engraved decorations similar to the decorations on the vernicle ring found in Ulvila (SatM inv. 18055:579). Bearing this in mind, it is likely that the Turku ring was indeed a vernicle ring.

The fifth vernicle ring was found in Sorkinen in the municipality of Eura at an unknown date (RM inv. 1598:37), and was later, in 1911, deposited in the Rauma Museum by Aarne Euro-

pæus (Sjölund 1980, pp. 168–173). The ring is a stray find from the potato field of the Ranta-Anttila farm situated by the Eura River. The ring was later stolen from the Rauma Mu-seum (curator Virpi Nurmi, pers. comm. 20.5. 2002), but photographs show that the hoop was decorated with a pair of braids like the Kōyliö ring; also the granulation balls on the shoulders resemble those of the Kōyliö and Turku rings. Jari Sjölund dated the ring to the 15th century.

Dating the vernicle rings

Vernicle rings have been dated mainly on the basis of their stylistic characteristics (Backman 1963, p. 49), since there is only one Scandinavian vernicle ring which can be dated with any certainty by its archaeological context. The ring is from the excavation of Specksrum 1–2 in Visby (Swanström 1978, pp. 105–106) and was found in a collapsed latrine. The cultural layer in the latrine revealed 15th century ceramics, and the vernicle ring was found in its upper part. It is decorated with acanthus ornamentation and enamelling, of which only traces remain. Eric Swanström dated the ring to the 15th century.

Generally, the stylistic characteristics of the ring type have been interpreted as pointing to the 15th and 16th centuries. Hildebrand (1884–98, p. 415) dates the type on the basis of its decoration to the 15th century. Carl R. af Ugglas (1951, pp. 178–184, 191) follows the same lines as Hildebrand and dates the vernicle motif to the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries when treating the date of two silver bowls found near Stockholm. On the bottom, both bowls have a medallion representing the face of Christ (cf. Andersson 1983, pp. 48–49, 65–66). af Ugglas compares them with an *Agnus Dei* capsule of unknown origin (SHM Inv. Nr. 6812) dated to the beginning of the 16th century with a representation of Christ's face on its back (Hildebrand 1884–98, pp. 407–408, Fig. 331) and the Late Gothic monumental crucifixes known from Swedish churches. At least some of these crucifixes were made by North German masters. On the basis of the medallions and crucifixes, af Ugglas dates the bowls around the year 1500.

Backman (1963, pp. 60–64), however, would rather date the characteristic features of the

vernicle rings to the 14th century if not to an even earlier period. Firstly, the vernicle engraved on the rings has a cross nimbus around Christ's face, which, according to Backman, was replaced in representations of Christ by a radiating nimbus at the beginning of the 15th century. Secondly, lily decoration on the shoulders of the rings, rich leaf ornamentation and complex engraving, all typical of 15th and 16th century rings, are absent from vernicle rings. Thirdly, the *émail champlevé* technique used for decorating the nimbus was typical for the German goldsmiths of the 13th and 14th centuries.

Despite the complexity of Backman's argumentation, it loses its plausibility on closer examination. Firstly, when he discusses Christ's nimbus he ignores the lily cross behind the face of Christ on the above-mentioned *Agnus Dei* capsule (Hildebrand 1884–98, pp. 407–408), the Bridgettine custom of combining the lily cross and Christ's face in the treatment of the vernicle motif (Nordman 1956a; Riska 1978), and North German wooden sculpture from the end of the 15th century (af Ugglas 1951, pp. 181–185), which still features a cross in the nimbus around Christ's face. One should remember that sculpture had a major influence on Medieval goldsmith work as a source of models (af Ugglas 1933; Campbell 1991, pp. 118–119). In the illustrations of the *Missale Aboense*, a mass book printed in 1488, the only figures represented with cross nimbus are the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (Parvio 1984, p. 181). Secondly, in the general development of rings, Passion motifs, including the vernicle, became more and more widespread during the 15th century (Andersson 1959, pp. 266–267; Oldeberg 1966, pp. 136–137). Furthermore, although Backman states that vernicle rings do not have lily decorations or leaf ornamentation, the Finnish vernicle rings do have quatrefoils and plant motifs engraved on their hoops.

One of the rings that Backman dated to the 14th century is the ring from Suosmeri in Ulvila. The moulding of the ring's shoulders and the simplicity of the hoop have parallels in three Calvary rings found at excavations of the Bridgettine nunnery of Pirita in Estonia (Raam 1980, pp. 50–52). There are, of course, major differ-

ences in the Crucifixion scene represented, and, unlike the Suosmeri ring, the Pirita rings have four granulation balls attached to the collet. It has not been possible to date the Pirita rings on the basis of their find contexts, but on stylistic grounds they have been dated to the 15th century or rather around the year 1500 (Tuulse 1938, pp. 55–56; Raam 1980, pp. 50–52; Kirme 2000, p. 30; Tamm 2002, pp. 113–114). With reference to these three rings, the ring from Suosmeri, Ulvila, can be seen as an artefact of the 15th or even the 16th century, which, again, contradicts Backman's arguments.

Backman's third argument for an early date of the vernicle rings is based on the use of enamelling. Indeed, Andreas Oldeberg (1966, pp. 207–209) states that the art of enamelling had its peak during the 14th century in the Church's liturgical silver, i.e. patens and chalices, which had rich decorations in enamel. However, while the art of enamelling lost its significance in 15th century liturgical silver, it was still used on a smaller scale in the decoration of buttons, book-clasps, brooches and rings. The enamels used on vernicle rings were mainly blue, red and bluish grey, but there is one important exception from Norway. This ring differs greatly from other vernicle rings and has been dated to the 14th century independently of Backman (Kielland 1927, pp. 156–158; cf. Lindahl 2003, 160–161). The ring has a conspicuously large disc with an engraved face of Christ and an enamelled nimbus. The enamel is green. Thor Kielland bases his early dating on a comparison with an illustration from an Icelandic manuscript.

Instead of using the iconographic characteristics of Medieval rings, Alf Hammervold (1997, pp. 43–48) attempts to anchor their dating to the general development of the ring forms. Unfortunately, his typology is not very useful for the dating of the Finnish vernicle rings, as all five Finnish rings belong to Hammervold's group IIA1 dated to a period from the end of the 13th century to the 15th century. His dates show (Hammervold 1997, p. 51), however, that it may be unnecessary to try to date all vernicle rings to one certain century. The ring type may nevertheless well have been in use from the end of the 13th century all the way to the 16th



Fig. 8. Vernicle ring in the Ostrobothnian Museum (OM inv. 3055). The height of the bezel is 19,1 mm. Photo by the author. —Ring i Österbottens museum, Vasa.

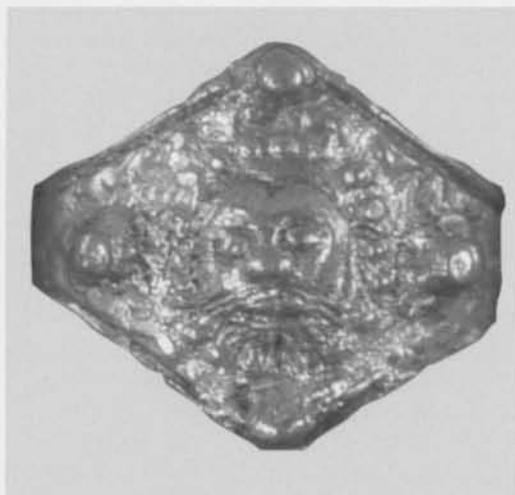


Fig. 9. Ring from Alastaro (TPM inv. 2989). The height of the bezel is 19,2 mm. Photo by the author. —Ring från Alastaro.

century, but, judging by the style of their decorations, it seems more likely that at least the Finnish rings were produced in the 15th century or at the beginning of the 16th century. As for individual rings, the Kōyliö ring and its stylistically closest parallel, the Eura ring, are clearly earlier than the other Finnish vernicle rings. Here, the curling of Christ's hair and beard and the cross in the nimbus resemble the 14th century Norwegian vernicle ring more than the other rings. The two rings from Ulvila and probably also the ring from Turku are later than the Kōyliö and the Eura rings, since the find context of the ring from Ulvila town and the moulding and the leaf decorations on the shoulders of the Suosmeri ring point to the latter part of the 15th century or even to the beginning of the 16th century.

Two vernicle rings of late type and one misinterpretation. The St. Veronica motif appears also in one or two rings of late medieval type. The first one is a gilded silver ring in the Karl Hedman silver collection of the Ostrobothnian museum (fig. 8; OM inv. 3055). Its provenance unfortunately remains unknown, although the main part of

the silver collection originates from Ostrobothnia (Airola 1990). The rather coarsely cast ring has a hoop widening from back to front. The face on the front is narrow and remains of a ray nimbus can be detected above the forehead. Around the face there are four balls imitating granulation and some sort of floral motifs and a rope motif circling around the edges of the hoop. The ring has the typical form of Late Medieval iconographic rings dating to the early part of the 16th century (cf. Lindahl 2003, nos. 186–187).

The other late ring is a more difficult case. This gilded silver ring (fig. 9; TPM inv. 2989) was found in the municipality of Alastaro and sold to the Turku Provincial Museum in the late 19th century. No detailed provenance information was recorded. The ring's hoop widens to form a rhomboid bezel decorated with a relief representing a bearded and puffy male face. The face is encircled by a row of raised dots. Four balls imitating granulation are placed at the corners of the rhomboid, but they have been cast in one piece with the rest of the ring. This cast ring can be classified as belonging to Hammervold's (1997, p. 46) type IC2, which he dates to the 15th and 16th century (cf. Hildebrand



Fig. 10. Ring from Hiitola (NM Ethn. inv. 3273:8). The size of the bezel: 17.7 x 15.4 mm. Photo by the author. —Ring från Hiitola i Karelen.

1884–98, pp. 416–417; Andersson 1959, pp. 267–268). The shape of the hoop and its decoration indicate that the ring is probably not older than the 16th century. However, similar rings with Gothic and Renaissance characteristics have been produced vernacularly as late as in the 19th century (Fagerström 1989, p. 161). The face with its chubby nose and rounded eyes does not resemble the face of Christ but is rather grotesque and has better parallels e.g. in the moulded bearded masks on the necks of Bartmann vessels (Husband 1980; Taavitsainen 1982). Still, similar male faces with bulging eyes and scabby beard have been used in connection with a lily cross and crown of thorns to depict Christ (Janiak 2003, 101, 103; cf. Lindahl 2003, no. 183), and the Wild Man as a decorative motif is unusual for medieval and 16th century rings in Scandinavia. The face depicted on the Alastaro ring has no clear attributes to guide the interpretation, and thus three possibilities remain: the face could represent Christ, a Wild Man or John the Baptist.

The ethnographer U. T. Sirelius ([1915] 1990, p. 278) published a drawing (fig. 10) of a silver ring (NM Ethn. inv. 3273:8) with an engraving on the oval collet which could be reminiscent

of a bearded face encircled by a radiating nimbus. Indeed, Sirelius interpreted the decoration as a highly stylised face of Christ. The ring is a stray find from Hiitola on the northwest coast of Lake Ladoga, Karelia. The location, the stylised decoration and the general form of the ring point to a group of rings studied by Pekka Sarvas (1973). The distribution of this late 16th century ring group is concentrated on the north and northwest coast of Lake Ladoga, eastern Estonia and eastern Lapland, although rings belonging to the group are also known from the Medieval churches of Lempäälä and Espoo in western Finland (Hiekkanen 1986, p. 94; 1988, p. 48). According to Sarvas, the non-Christian decorations of the ring group include lions, archers, birds and chequered patterns derived from Russian lead seals and the imagery of 14th and 15th century coins. However, these sources do not appear to include any immediate models for the Hiitola ring (cf. Spasskij 1962).

There are about 80 ancient silver rings from the northwest coast of Lake Ladoga in the collections of the National Museum of Finland. These rings can be divided into two classes, one comprising the group analysed by Sarvas and another to which the Hiitola ring belongs. The engravings of the latter group imitate the coats of arms on signet rings (Sihvo 1987). Pirkko Sihvo argues that the model for the coats of arms was in a motif used on flags and standards of the soldiers of Charles XII of Sweden. The motif consists of a crown and a pair of palm leaves. It was adopted as the insignia for the soldiers of Peter the Great's bodyguard, and in this form it served as the model for the Karelian signet rings. Thus the Hiitola ring must have been made after the Great Northern War (1700–21) and its decoration has nothing to do with Christ's visage. Sirelius apparently examined the ring upside down and erroneously interpreted the palm leaves as a radiating nimbus.

St. Veronica and the cult of Corpus Christi

Engraving Christ's suffering face on the picture discs of rings is a part of an old tradition, begun in late antiquity, of depicting a cloth or kerchief upon which his features were miraculously im-

pressed. The oldest record of such a cloth impressed with Christ's face is from 3rd century Edessa, present-day Urfa in southeast Turkey (Corbin 1947, pp. 3–27). The Edessa cloth is a part of the Byzantine *Mandylion* («little handkerchief») tradition also known as the Saviour Uncreated-by-human-hands, which represents the serene face of Christ on a cloth. This eastern tradition still survives in Slavonic ecclesiastical art.

In the Western tradition, the face of Christ at first also had a serene expression, but the Passion imagery became prevalent with the legend of St. Veronica. Although her name is not mentioned in the gospels, she was later identified with the anonymous woman who was miraculously cured by touching Christ's mantle after suffering for twelve years from bleeding (Matthew 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–34, Luke 8:43–48). The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* and other later traditions tell how a woman named Beatrice/Veronica wiped the blood-stained face of Christ with her veil while he was on his way to the Golgotha, and the veil became imprinted with the features of the suffering Saviour (Degert 1912; Kuryluk 1991, pp. 4–7, 91–111). St. Veronica is said to have later taken the veil to Rome and used it to cure the emperor Tiberius of an illness. To distinguish the veil as the oldest and best-known of such images it was called the vera icon («true image»).

The association between St. Veronica, the Passion and the Eucharist was based on the suffering of Christ and his sacrifice, repeated at the Holy Communion (Rubin 1991, p. 106, pp. 308–310). The approval of the dogma of transubstantiation by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, during the papacy of Innocent III, led to the creation of the feast of *Corpus Christi* in the 13th and 14th centuries, the feast becoming universally established at the beginning of the 14th century (Corbin 1947, pp. 16–27; Pirinen 2000, p. 5–9). The creation of the feast was accompanied by the establishment of the Passion iconography, where the Man of Sorrows and the St. Veronica motif were two central images. The image of the Man of Sorrows spread from Rome around Europe with pilgrims returning home (Rubin 1991, pp. 122), and, especially in Italy and Germany, it became the

most important theme of the *Corpus Christi* iconography (Rubin 1991, pp. 207). The returning pilgrims most probably had also seen the veil of St. Veronica, which was one of the most important relics in Rome. The vernicle first appeared as a Passion theme with the rise of Eucharist piety at the end of the 12th century, and the earliest surviving Passion legend on the veil of St. Veronica was recorded in about 1300 (Kilström 1975, pp. 659–662; Riska 1978, p. 240). Finally, the dogma of transubstantiation led to the organization of a cult to venerate the vernicle (Hammervold 1997, p. 51; Pirinen 2000, pp. 5–9), and in 1216, Innocent III wrote a prayer to honour the Holy Face (Lewis 1986, p. 100). According to the church, prayers addressed to the vernicle gave absolution from sins. Originally the length of the period of absolution was 10 days, but later it was expanded to 40 days, then to 10 000 years and finally to 30 000 years (Lindahl 2003, p. 32). The relic considered to be the original veil of St. Veronica was destroyed during the unrest at the sack of Rome in 1527 (Parvio 1984, p. 178), but this did not affect its popularity in Catholic Europe.

According to Kilström (1975, pp. 659–662) the legend of St. Veronica was well known in Scandinavia in the 15th and 16th centuries, and representations of the vernicle held up by St. Veronica herself were common in the murals of Medieval churches. The earliest painting of St. Veronica in Sweden is on the triumphal arcade wall at Tuna cathedral in Södermanland, dated to c. 1400. It was more common, however, to place the image of St. Veronica in the north vault of the porch or above the main entrance of the church, a very conspicuous position. The face of Christ was also a common theme in patens and relic containers, wooden sculpture and embroidery, and was even put on spoons (Andersson 1983, pp. 48–49). There are also Scandinavian wills which show that the decorations of certain silver bowls could be described with the term *Veronica* (af Ugglas 1951, pp. 178–184; Andersson 1983, pp. 48–49).

Vernicle imagery in Medieval Finland

The Passion mass and especially the *Facies Christi* mass had a significant position in the devotional

life of Medieval Finland (Parvio 1984, p. 191). Also the imagery connected with the Passion and the vernicle was widespread. The first altar in the diocese of Turku dedicated to *Corpus Christi* was founded by the bishop Magnus Tavast in the 1420s (Pirinen 1956, p. 71–72). The vernicle theme is most prominently present in the former convent church of Naantali (Nädendal; Lilius et al. 1972, pp. 47–50, 59; Riska 1978, pp. 235–240), where, above each of the twelve circular consecration crosses in the church interior, Christ's face with a cross nimbus has also been painted. In addition, there is an image of Christ's face adorned by angels painted above the chancel window. The same motif is also present in the church's wooden furnishings and silverware. A wooden sculpture of Christ's face has survived in the church, probably of mid-15th century North German make (Riska 1978, p. 235). Furthermore, the face of Christ is shown on the late 15th century wooden tabernacle, although on a smaller scale. On the church's silver paten, which the Bridgettine monk Jöns Budde donated or had made after 1461/62, the beginning and end of the inscription circling its border is marked by a face of Christ (Tuhkanen 2000, pp. 38–42).

The face of Christ can be found in the seal of the Naantali (Nädendal) convent from about 1440, but also in other Bridgettine seals. Hallberg et al. (1973, pp. 78–95) present 29 Bridgettine seals, five of which have a representation of Christ's face in a cross nimbus. They date the five seals to the 15th century or the beginning of the 16th century. The seals mainly belonged to Bridgettine brethren. In addition, the clerks of Vadstena often used the image of Christ's face on their seals (Riska 1978, pp. 237). The seal of Jöns Jakobsson, a priest in Parainen (Pargas), known from the year 1381 also seems to depict the face of Christ in cross nimbus (Hausen 1900, nr 46; cf. Hiekkänen 1997, pp. 47, 51).

The interpretation of the soul is based on the cross nimbus, which is characteristic for the representations of Christ's face. However, the name Jöns Jakobsson seems to undermine the interpretation since the name Jöns is derived from Johannes and hence associated with John the Baptist, whose face was usually represented without the cross nimbus in medieval art (Taa-

vitsainen 1981, Fig. 4; Talvio 2002, pp. 21–22). Consequently, the interpretation can only be accepted with some hesitation. There do not seem to be other seals or coats of arms in the surviving medieval material from Finland which could be interpreted as bearing the St. Veronica motif (Hausen 1882; 1900). In Denmark, Henrik Jensen, a priest in Dalby parish, used the vernicle in his seal in 1520 and 1523. The vernicle was depicted inside a Gothic shield, which was surmounted by the initials H J (Lindahl 2003, p. 49).

In addition to the convent church of Naantali, the vernicle motif is known from other Finnish Medieval churches. In late 15th century murals, the face of Christ is occasionally represented conspicuously on the eastern surface of the first or second chancel vault. The motif can be seen on the vaults of churches in Laitila (Letala), Taivassalo (Tövsala), Kaarina (St Karins), Maaria (St Marie), Perniö (Björnå), Korppoo (Korpo), Kumlinge and Pyhtää (Pyttis; Riska 1978, pp. 240–241; Ahlström-Taavitsainen 1984, pp. 74–76; Hiekkänen 1997). In Turku Cathedral, an image of St. Veronica holding up the vernicle decorates the chapel of John the Baptist (fig. 1). The vernicle motif has also been used on ecclesiastical silverware. The paten of Rusko Church, made in 1500–06, has an engraving of Christ's face. The motif is present in the 15th century patens of the Eckerö and Iniö churches (Riska 1978, p. 241; Nikula 1973, pp. 210–219). A paten in Hauho Church has the Holy Face indicating the end and beginning of the border inscription as on the Naantali paten (Nordman 1980, pp. 27–28). On the Ejby and Hollola chalices the face has been placed on the knot joining the cup and the base, inside a quatrefoil. Both chalices have been dated to the latter part of the 15th century (Nordman 1980, pp. 15–20). Hollola Church has also revealed a fragment of a choir-stall with a relief of Christ's face and a Maltese cross inside a circle (Hiekkänen 1997). On the chalice of Juva (Jockas) Church, the Holy Face appears on all six projecting settings of the knot, and on the paten of the church, the motif is found engraved on two medallions. The paten was made in Tallinn in the late 16th century, and apparent-

ly came to Finland as war booty in the 17th or 18th century (Komulainen 1999). It has to be kept in mind that any or all of the Finnish Medieval silver and gold artefacts may have been booty and can have been ended up in Finland at a considerably later date than that of their actual production.

The use of the Holy Face was not limited to ecclesiastical contexts. A pewter flagon bearing the Holy Face in a medallion on its inside bottom has been found on the plot of the present-day town hall of Turku, near the Medieval market square. Rinne (1909, pp. 133–134) dated the flagon to the 15th century or possibly the beginning of the 16th century, and he noted that the one who poured liquid from the flagon, came face to face with Christ. A 15th century pewter flagon from Nesodden in Norway has a similar medallion placed under the lid so that the Holy Face was visible when one filled the jug (Grieg 1933, pp. 136, 139). The manufacturing process of the jugs left a hole in the bottom which was filled with a stamped medallion or a cast from a coin or a pilgrim badge (Oldeberg 1966, p. 104).

Vernicle rings and Late Medieval piety

The North European vernicle rings, although numerous, form a relatively homogenous group which has led to discussion of their possible common origin. For instance, Sjölund (1980, p. 170) thinks that the rings from Köyliö and Eura could be the work of the same goldsmith. Backman (1963, p. 64), whose work has a larger scope, suggested that it might be possible to trace the homogeneity back to the pilgrimages to Rome. In Rome, the vernicle was exhibited to the pilgrims on certain festival days. St. Bridget among others often took part in these events when she was in Rome (Klockars 1979, pp. 131–132). Although the most important shrine in Rome was the tomb of St. Peter (Jarrett 1911), the vernicle became so popular that it was eventually more recognised among pilgrims as the symbol of Rome than images of St. Peter or St. Paul (Rydbeck 1968, p. 316; Hammervold 1997, p. 51). When St. Bridget is represented as a pilgrim, she usually has an image of the Holy Face attached to her hat (Hallberg et al. 1973, p. 69; Riska 1978, p. 239).

Pilgrims visiting Jerusalem could buy finger rings as souvenirs. Although these rings were decorated with the Mount Olive, Backman asked (1963, p. 64; Bengtsson 1974, pp. 56–67) whether the vernicle rings might also have been made for pilgrims in Rome. The idea acquires more substance with Jeffrey F. Hamburger's (1997, pp. 125, 194; cf. van Beuningen & Koldewij 1993, pp. 133–134) account of St. Veronica's status in Northern Germany. The vernicle motif could be drawn several times on a sheet of paper which was cut in pieces, and the pieces then given to pilgrims as devotional souvenirs. Pilgrim badges representing the vernicle have also survived. For nuns, these images of the vernicle could become the point of departure for inner pilgrimages. Hamburger refers to the dialogues of mystics like St. Gertrude of Helfta (1256–1301/2) and Mechthild of Hackeborn (1241/2–1298), which were performed in front of the Holy Face as spiritual pilgrimages. Thus, the association between the St. Veronica motif and pilgrims is very strong, but nothing supports Sjölund's (1980, p. 171) interpretation of the vernicle rings as having been made in Rome and spread around Northern Europe through pilgrimages (Fagerström 1989, p. 161). Vernicle rings are not unknown in Italy (Scaribrick 1993, pp. 22–23), but there is no evidence of systematic production for the needs of pilgrims or of any connection between the northern and the southern rings. It should also be kept in mind that the picture discs of the vernicle rings could have been placed on the collets later, and thus the picture discs could have been made separately as souvenirs.

References to St. Bridget and two female mystics in connection with the vernicle motif focus attention on the emphasis which the Eucharist and Christ's sacrifice on the cross had in the spiritual life of Medieval female communities (Pirinen 2000, p. 8). St. Veronica could be understood as the spiritual bride of Christ and the vernicle as the offspring of their union (Kuryluk 1991, p. 125). In Finland, the concentration of vernicle imagery to the church of the Bridgettine convent in Naantali makes even more significant the question of who the users of the vernicle rings were. In Bridgettine devotional life, the Holy Body, the

Passion and blood mysticism had a central position (Nordman 1956a, pp. 571–573); and the veil of St. Veronica, on the other hand, played an important part in the Christ's Passion and Bridgettine imagery (Nordman 1956b, pp. 577–578).

The use of a certain Medieval ring type as the sign of female spiritual communities has previously been considered in relation to Calvary rings. Andreas Lindblom (1956) argued that the Calvary ring was given to a Bridgettine novice by a bishop as a symbol of her engagement to Christ. The Calvary ring of silver found under the floor of Vadstena convent church, the three rings found in the Bridgettine convent of Maribo (Nørlund 1933) and the three Calvary rings found in the ruins of the Pirita convent in Estonia (Tuulse 1938, pp. 55–56; Raam 1980, pp. 50–52; Tamm 2002, pp. 113–115) support this argument. Never the less, Backman (1963, pp. 56–59) considered the conclusion based on eight Calvary rings too hasty considering the total number of surviving Calvary rings. According to Backman, the wide and scattered distribution of all Calvary rings in Norway, Denmark and Sweden undermines Lindblom's conclusion. However, such a distribution might be the outcome of the convents' economical distress after the Reformation. The convents may have been forced to sell the precious rings (Lindblom 1956, pp. 34–35).

Armin Tuulse (1938, pp. 55–56) and Ella Vende (1967, pp. 44) interpreted the function of the Calvary rings differently. They suggested that the Calvary rings of the Pirita convent did not belong to the Bridgettine sisters but were the signet rings of the priests and monks working there. This interpretation is hardly tenable when comparing the Calvary rings with Medieval signet rings (Tamm 2002, pp. 113), which have flat bezels with clear engravings and much less decorations. Furthermore, the idea does not lead much further than the assumption that the Calvary rings were the sisters' engagement rings. Although the male members of the Bridgettine communities had better possibilities of travelling outside the convents, which would explain the distribution of the rings, there is no further evidence to support the interpretation.

Although Calvary rings cannot be conclusi-

vely labelled as engagement rings of the Bridgettines, they do have some sort of association with the material culture of Bridgettine convents. Perhaps the association is on the one hand religious and, on the other, related to the social background of the Bridgettines. The material culture of nunneries has not been examined thoroughly enough, but it seems to parallel the contemporary material culture of upper-class women outside nunneries (Gilchrist 1994, pp. 185, pp. 188–193; Klockars 1979, p. 71; Tamm 1993, p. 208; Tamm 2002). Thus Calvary rings could be connected with the devotional life of Medieval women as a wider group.

Only one vernicle ring has been found in a Medieval nunnery. An unusual vernicle ring was found at excavations of the ruins of the Benedictine Ring nunnery near Skanderborg in Denmark (Reinholdt 1986). The hoop of the ring is formed of twisted bands of gold, silver and iron, and the face of Christ is shown with a radiating nimbus. One ring is hardly enough to support the conclusion that all vernicle rings were owned by nuns, but the connection between the vernicle rings and devotional life remains. Eucharist piety was not confined to the female communities, and Bridgettine art had a great impact on Late Medieval European imagery (Nordman 1956b, pp. 577–578). Although the find contexts of the Finnish vernicle rings do not have an obvious connection to nuns or monks, they do strengthen the rings' association with devotional life. Sjölund (1980, pp. 171–173) argues that the Finnish vernicle rings have been found at major catholic shrines. The Köyliö ring is from the ruins of a chapel to St. Henry, and there are indications that Ulvila was a significant place for the worship of St. Olaf (Suvanto 1973, pp. 184–187, pp. 370–373). From Sorokinen in Eura, where one of the rings was found, there is a record of a barn destroyed by fire in 1830. It was claimed that St. Henry had preached in the barn (Suvanto 1973, pp. 384), which could be interpreted as the last traces of a Medieval devotional tradition. It is impossible to connect the Turku ring to any specific religious context, but its find spot is not far from the cathedral or the site of the Dominican convent of St. Olaf.

The vernicle rings in the context of Medieval material culture

Pierre Backman (1963, p. 64; Sjölund 1980, p. 171) did not see the vernicle rings merely as rings but also as protective amulets. His view is supported by the iconography of the vernicle. In Vadstena Convent, for example, a special function of the Holy Face was protection from accidents (Riska 1978, p. 240). The magical quality of the vernicle rings can also be inferred from their engraved inscriptions. Although the Finnish vernicle rings do not have any inscriptions, other vernicle rings have magical formulas inscribed on them. One of the formulas is »CASPAR (or IASPAR) MELCHIOR BALTHASAR» (e.g. Hammervold 1997, pp. 65, 124) referring to the names of the three Magi. Another formula used on the vernicle rings is »BURO BERTO BERIORA» (e.g. Buchholz 1892, p. 24; Lexow 1955, p. 81). The three words of the formula are not Latin. Neither their origin nor their exact meaning is known, but Olof Kolsrud (1943, p. 168) considers it possible that the beginning BER- can be associated with the name Βερενίκη/Berenice/Veronica (on the development of the name see e.g. Solin 2000). Sometimes this formula is accompanied by the word »IHESU». These two formulae appear inscribed on the hoops of other medieval ring types as well. Kolsrud (1943, pp. 170–175) showed their connection to the stemming of bleeding.

Kolsrud (1943, pp. 188–193; cf. Hildebrand 1884–98, pp. 417–418) stated that since antiquity it has been important on which finger a ring is put. The *digitus medicus* or the ring finger of the left (or right) hand was significant since it was considered to have a nerve or vein leading straight to the heart. af Ugglas (1951, pp. 191–195) criticised Kolsrud for forgetting the important question why bleeding and blood were so central in Late Medieval finger ring magic. Heart symbolism referring to blood was richly applied in the decoration of rings, and there are even rings with a heart on the collet. Some of the vernicle rings also have heart decoration. The collections of the Museum of National Antiquities in Sweden include two vernicle rings with hearts on their hoops. One has hearts on both shoulders, and on the other, a heart has been

placed on the hoop opposite the bezel (Hildebrand 1884–98, fig. 364&365).

af Ugglas connected the *digitus medicus* belief to the heart symbolism of the Late Medieval rings. The use of magical rings on the ring finger made them Morse code transmitters of a sort with a straight line to the core of the users soul. Furthermore, heart symbolism is a part of the Late Medieval cult of the Holy Body, devotion of the Sacred Heart, and blood mysticism, which inspired the images where a nun and Christ are partaking of the Eucharist inside a large heart (Nordman 1956a; Hamburger 1997, pp. 137–75). According to Miri Rubin (1991, pp. 305), one could carry a small piece of paper with a drawing of the five wounds of Christ or the figure five. This talisman protected the owner and stemmed bleeding. The connection between St. Veronica and blood symbolism is strengthened by the biblical story of the woman furthermore suffering from bleeding.

When considering the dense network created by the find contexts, iconography and theology around the vernicle rings, the type appears to have magical as well as religious meaning. However, this characterisation is inappropriate for describing the Late Medieval spiritual and devotional sphere where the concept of magic referred to witchcraft and the Devil (Jolly 2002, pp. 22–23). To call something magical was, and to some extent still is, to simultaneously classify it as marginal, the notion of marginal being historically determined. In the Late Medieval world, a belief in Christ's aiding power was not considered as magic. Additionally, it was characteristic for Medieval thought to layer various traditions and ideas into a single phenomenon (Thomas [1971] 1991, p. 33, pp. 46–57): the legend of St. Veronica, the pilgrimage tradition, the Eucharist, the avoidance of bleeding, protection against evil and classical medicine was simultaneously and seamlessly present. A strict demarcation between the religious and magical spheres in the modern sense began only with the Reformation, which did not approve of the dogma of Transubstantiation or the miraculous power of images associated with St. Veronica. Thus all that Martin Luther saw when looking at the vernicle was a cloth hanging on a board (Lewis 1986, p. 100). This transformation in the church's con-

ceptions undoubtedly changed the position of the vernicle rings in contemporary material culture. In Finland, this change was relatively slow. In the writings and illustrations of the Finnish church reformer Michael Agricola, significant traces of Passion mysticism remain (Parvio 1984, pp. 192–198). Nevertheless, there are no vernicle rings from Finland produced in the post-Medieval period, although they were still popular in Continental Europe in the 18th century (Chadour 1994, pp. 242).

The meaning of the vernicle rings to their users remains elusive. Something can be concluded from their find spots, which are in the central areas of Medieval Finland: Turku, Ulvila and the chapel of St. Henry in Köyliö. The owner of a vernicle ring took part in Late Medieval Passion mysticism and showed it to the community. Thus the intertwining of artefacts with cultural practices has to be read contextually, whether the issue is their religious or magical dimensions or the meanings they gathered in the totality of medieval material culture. Interpreted in this fashion, the bond between pilgrim badges and the picture discs mounted on the older vernicle rings might not be as concrete as earlier studies suggest. There are Medieval rings depicting religious scenes or figures in a rectangular field imitating wooden altar screens (Lindahl 2003, p. 35) and establishing an association between rings and other religious artefacts. Also the pewter jugs where the hole of the bottom was closed alternatively either with a medallion or a cast of a pilgrim badge create a link between circular medallions and pilgrim badges. Perhaps, arguing in the same vein, also the vernicle rings, or at least some of them, were not souvenirs for pilgrims but created their devotional meaning contextually in association with other religious artefacts like pilgrim badges, medallions and relic containers sharing the same circular form.

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Abbreviations

FA	Fennoscandia archaeologica, Helsinki
KLNM	<i>Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid från vikingatid till reformationstid</i> Malmö.
NM Hist.	National Museum, the Department of History, Helsinki.
NM Ethn.	National Museum, the Department of Ethnology, Helsinki.
OM	Ostrobothnian Museum, Vaasa.
RM	Rauma Museum, Rauma.
SatM	Satakunta Museum, Pori.
SHM	Statens historiska museum, Stockholm.
SM	<i>Suomen Museo</i> , Helsinki.
TPM	Turku Provincial Museum, Turku.

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Sammanfattning

Fem fingerringar från medeltiden funna i Finland bildar utgångspunkt för denna studie. De tillhör svettedukstypen som kännetecknas av att ringarna avbildar Kristi ansikte på svetteduken. Författaren daterar typen till 1400-talet och det tidiga 1500-talet. Två senare ringar med mansansikten diskuteras också kortfattat.

Svetteduksringarna kan sättas i samband med den heliga Veronika och den senmedeltida kulten av Smärtomannen och Corpus Christi, Helga Lekamen. Andra avbildningar av svetteduken

förekommer ganska ymnigt i tidens kyrkokonst i Finland. Svetteduksringarna hör hemma i fromma och förmögna miljöer, bland annat nunnekloster med särskild tonvikt på birgittinerorden.

Ringarna har tolkats som skyddande amuletter med förmågan att stämma blod och starka associationer till kristen blodsmystik. Författaren argumenterar emot beteckningen av detta som en magisk föreställning då den alls inte ansågs marginell eller ockult i relation till den medeltida kristendomen.