Janika Aho

THINKING OF THE ENDS OF THINGS: THE PORCH AS A LOCATION OF MORALITY AND MORTALITY IN THE LATE MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTINGS OF RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

In this article, I discuss the wall paintings of Rymättylä Church in Finland (swe. Rimito). The Rymättylä Church resides in the historical province of Finland Proper, relatively close to the largest town, Turku (swe. Åbo). The paintings of Rymättylä Church are dated to 1514.[1] I shall focus on the morality motifs in the paintings of the porch, along with the large depiction of the Last Judgement on the east wall of the nave, and discuss how these images explained the concepts of justice, morality, and the end of the world to the viewer. The paintings in the porch prepared the viewer to face the monumental paintings in the nave of the church and, at the same time, had their own significance in the process of transitioning from the outside to the inside of the church. In this article, I argue that by passing through the porch and seeing the paintings there, the viewer accepted and renewed their relation to the shared Christian worldview. This worldview included an understanding of sins and transgressions against others and the consequences both on earth and in the afterlife.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.12697/BJAH.2025.29.01

1 Dating of the paintings, see Anna Nilsén, "Kalkmålningarna I Rimito kyrka och deras upphovsman", *Finskt Museum*, 89 (Helsinki: Finska fornminnesföreningen, 1982), 5–43.

FIG. 1. THE CHURNING OF MILK AND THE FATE OF SOULS, SOUTH WALL OF THE PORCH, RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

FIG. 2. THE LAST JUDGEMENT, EAST WALL, RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

The motifs in the porch form a unique combination among the surviving material in the early-16th-century wall paintings in Finland (1500–1530).[2] Motifs depicting "churning of stolen milk" or "gossiping" appear in several preserved medieval church wall paintings in Finland, but Rymättylä Church is the only one where they appear alongside a depiction of the fate of souls after death (Fig. 1). Similarly, the large-scale Last Judgement scene on the east wall of the nave is one of a kind among the preserved medieval wall paintings in Finland (Fig. 2). It is the only surviving painting of the Last Judgement that covers such a large area of the east wall of a church. All other preserved paintings of the Last Judgement are smaller and limited to the side aisles of medieval churches. Compared to these other paintings, the Last Judgement in Rymättylä Church is larger and considerably more visible in the church space.

The selection of motifs is centred around the Passion of Christ and finalised in the large Last Judgement scene on the east wall. The morality motifs in the porch reflect the theme of the paintings of the nave by replicating the hellmouth and the fate of sinners, as well as an angel carrying the soul of the virtuous. This scene is combined with morality images, which can be seen as a reflection of the suffering Christ by depicting the sins he died for. The painting cycle in the nave concentrates on the last days of Christ, his suffering, and death. Finally, the large Last Judgement scene depicts the last day of the world, where all this comes together: Christ acting as the ultimate judge.

The placement of the morality motifs in the porch is essential to the analysis. In this article, I analyse the paintings in the porch and the Last Judgement by using iconographical analysis.[3] I suggest that the porch, as a location, emphasizes the motifs' meaning, as it was the main entryway of the church. Images painted there were

2 I shall use the term "Finland" in this article to refer to the area of current-day Finland, which in the medieval context, was the diocese of Turku, belonging to the kingdom of Sweden.

3 I use the term "iconographical analysis" to refer to the whole process of interpretation used in the iconographical/iconological analysis. About the method and its modern use, see i.e. Colum Hourihane, "Medieval Iconography, an Introduction", *Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, ed. by Colum Hourihane (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 1–8; on iconography and iconology see Elina Räsänen, "Panopticon of Art History: Some Notes on Iconology, Interpretation and Fears", *Locus of Meaning in Medieval Art. Iconography, Iconology and Interpreting the Visual Imagery of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Lena Liepe. Studies in Iconography: Themes and Variations (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), 46–66.

the first things one would see when entering the church. In Finnish stone churches, the main entrance was on the south, marked by a porch.[4] The porch, in Finnish referred to as "asehuone" (weapons room or armoury, Swe. *vapenhuset*), is a significant feature of Finnish medieval stone churches. The term possibly comes from the word Waffenhaus (High German) and has led to the misconception that weapons would be left there during the Mass.[5] However, the porch was not this sort of a storage space, but an important feature of medieval church architecture and had ritual meanings, which I shall discuss later.

In this analysis of the porch as a location, I will use art historian Paul Binski's idea that the carved images on the portals of cathedrals were a form of art that connected the viewer with society and a shared worldview.[6] Binski's theory of the portals is derived from discussions based on liminal theory, developed in the writings of anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner.[7] In medieval art history, liminality has been widely used as a flexible concept and as a frame of analysis for various forms of art.[8] Liminality in general serves as a concept for the "in between". Therefore, the porch of a church or a cathedral is such an "in between" place, marking the *limen* of the outside world and the sacred place. Paul Binski argues that liminality is temporary and originally, in Van Gennep's thought, it was reserved for the rites of passage – singular, unique happenings in the life of an individual. According to Binski, however, liminal theory

4 Markus Hiekkanen, *Finlands medeltida stenkyrkor.* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historia akademien och antikvitetes akademien, 2020), 29; Markus Hiekkanen, *Suomen Kivikirkot keskiajalla* (Helsinki: Otava, 2003), 19.

5 Discussion on the unclear origins of the word, see Anna Nilsén, "Det medeltida vapenhuset: Om benämnigen och användingen", *Fornvännen*, 79 (1984), 181–194, here 186–187; see also Hiekkanen, *Suomen Kivikirkot keskiajalla*, 19.

6 Paul Binski, *Gothic Sculpture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 40–48.

7 Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage 1909* (London: Routledge, 2004); Victor Turner, "Betwixt and between: The Liminal Space in the rites of passage", *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society* (Seattle: American Ethnological Society, 1964), 4–20.

8 See i.e., *Thresholds of Medieval Visual Culture: Liminal Spaces*, ed. by Elina Gertsman and Jill Stevenson. Boydell Studies in Medieval Art and Architecture (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012); on architecture, see i.e., Margarete Syrstad Andås, "Art and Ritual in the Liminal Zone", *Medieval Cathedral of Trondheim. Architectural and Ritual Constructions in their European Context*, ed. by Margarete Syrstad Andås, Oystein Ekroll, Andreas Haug, and Nils Holger Petersen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 47–126.

is too ambitious to capture the ordinary social usage of doorways.[9] According to my understanding, Binski argues that the portals are not simply places where everyday life meets the sacred; regularly and habitually, whenever an individual entered the church, they were confronted by the images at the crossing, representing the sacred, pre-destined worldview. By making the crossing, an individual confirmed both their belonging to society and their acceptance of the shared worldview. In this article I analyse how this kind of an occasion is presented by the paintings in Rymättylä Church.

PAINTINGS IN RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH

The research history of the Rymättylä Church paintings began in 1896 when they were "discovered" under whitewash. The first catalogue of the paintings was then done by the early Finnish art historian Emil Nervander.[10] They were also documented in aquarelles by the artist Armas Lindgren, and some were photographed.[11] The paintings were restored in 1928 by Oskari Niemi.[12] Comparing the black-and white photos taken before and after the restauration it seems that it was done quite carefully. The paintings of Rymättylä Church were last the focus of study in 1982, when Anna Nilsén attributed the paintings to the painter Lars Snickare and dated them to 1514.[13] There are no records of the commissioning of the paintings, but Nilsén has based

9 Binski, *Gothic Sculpture*, 31. See also van Gennep, *Rites of Passage 1909*; Turner, "Betwixt and between: The Liminal Space in the rites of passage", 4–20.

10 The Finnish Heritage Agency [Helsinki, Museovirasto], Sign. HFA 84. Letter by Emil Nervander to Archaelogical Commission in 17th of June 1896.

11 Due to renovation of the archives of the Finnish Heritage Agency, the image collections could not be studied when this article was written.

12 For a discussion of the restoration and photos of the restored paintings, see Sigrid Rinne, "Rimito kyrkas medeltida kalkmålningar", *Finskt Museum*, 36 (Finska fornminnesföreningen: Helsinki, 1929), 15–32, at 16–29.

13 Nilsén, "Kalkmålningarna I Rimito kyrka och deras upphovsman", 5–43; the Rymättylä paintings have also been discussed by Rinne, "Rimito kyrkas medeltida kalkmålningar", 15–32; Ludwig Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta Länsi-Suomen ja Ahvenanmaan kirkoissa* (Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys, 1930), 190–203; Ludvig Wennervirta, *Suomen keskiaikainen kirkkomaalaus* (Porvoo: Wsoy, 1937), 150–158; Henrik Lilius, Sigrid Nikula and Tove Riska, *Suomen kirkot 6* (Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys, 1972), 167–173; Anna Nilsén, *Program och funktion i senmedeltida kyrkmåleri* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1986), 214–215; Tove Riska, "Keskiajan taide", *Ars Suomen taide 1*, ed. by Salme Sarajas-Korte (Porvoo: Welin&Göös, 1987), 116–180, at 176–178; Marianne Roos, "Vapenhusmålningar I Finlands medeltida kyrkor – marginella bilder I marginella utrymme", *Bilder i marginalen – Nordiska studier i medeltidens konst*, ed. by Kersti Markus (Tallinn: Argo, 2006), 353–362, at 359.

her attribution on a comprehensive stylistic analysis, comparing them to the St. Olof altarpiece of Värmdö Church (Sweden) signed by Lars Snickare in 1514.[14]

Rymättylä Church, built in the early 16th century and dedicated to the apostle St. Jacob, is a single-nave medieval stone church located in the archipelago of Turku.[15] The dating of the paintings to 1514 means that they were done during, or immediately after, the construction phase of the church. Snickare is mentioned in a 1514 letter by the diplomat and politician Hemming Gadh to the Turku Chapter House, recommending him as a skilled painter, who could aid in the preparations for the beatification festival of Bishop Hemming.[16] The residing place of Snickare in that letter is stated to be "Reffla or Stockholm", both of which are places in Sweden, suggesting he had not crossed the sea to Finland at that time. Therefore, the paintings were done at the earliest in 1514, but the dating could be a year or two later as well. Painting large murals in the church was only possible during the months when it was warm enough and the period of daylight was long. If Snickare started the work from scratch after May 1514, this would have meant a very tight schedule to complete the work during that summer. It is also possible that Snickare worked over two or more summers. He likely did not work alone. There is no clear evidence of another hand in the painting style, but it was a huge task, and he likely had assistants to aid in practical matters. Among the medieval wall paintings in Finland, Rymättylä Church is the only case where all the characters and details are painted consistently by the same hand in all of the paintings. Snickare can indeed be described as a master set out on a monumental task.

The porch of Rymättylä Church was originally almost fully painted, but what remains are vault ornaments and fragments of wall paintings. The motifs of the paintings do not form a storyline but share a theme of morality and show the direct outcomes of sinning. The best-preserved painting in the porch depicts a detail of the Last Judgement, combined with a morality motif of women churning

14 Nilsén, "Kalkmålningarna I Rimito kyrka och deras upphovsman", 33–37, 39–41. See also Anne Lidén, *Lars Snickare och S.Olofskapet I Värmdö kyrka*. Antikvariskt arkiv 71 (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie ach Antikvitets Akademien, 1984).

15 Hiekkanen, *Finlands medeltida stenkyrkor,* 180–181.

16 *Diplomatarium Fennicum*, DF 5715, see also Nilsén, "Kalkmålningarna I Rimito kyrka och deras upphovsman", 39.

butter, henceforth called a combination motif (Fig. 1). This kind of combination motif is unique in the preserved material of medieval wall paintings in Finland.

The nave of the church, consisting of three bays, is painted with similar vault ornaments, and the paintings in the nave form a cycle depicting the Passion of Christ. In addition, there are images of saints, some very fragmentary. The cycle begins on the north wall of the first bay, namely the chancel area, and proceeds to the right in a clockwise direction. There are no remains of paintings on the north wall, and none have ever been recorded to exist.[17] However, it would be logical that originally there would have been a painting such as the entombment of Christ, or some other motif, that would fit between the Descent from the Cross and the Resurrection. Again, it is entirely possible that for some practical reason, the wall was left empty by the painter, Lars Snickare.

The monumental Last Judgement on the east wall (Fig. 2) depicts the last day of the world, when graves open and people climb out to be judged, divided, and sent, either to the harmonious side of Heaven or the chaotic and grotesque side of Hell. The hierarchical structures are clear: there is Christ the Judge, sitting atop an arch of rainbow, hovering above the masses of small people rising from their graves. In the middle there are the intercessors: the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist.[18]

Among the early-16th-century medieval wall paintings of Finland, the images in Rymättylä Church differ from the rest in at least three different ways. First: the artistic style combines medieval tradition and influences of the Renaissance in a distinctively unique way.[19] What I call "Renaissance" here is a simple matter of compositional ideas used in the paintings. These include, for example, the use of

17 The Finnish Heritage Agency [Helsinki, Museovirasto], Sign. HFA 84. Letter by Emil Nervander to Archaelogical Commission in 17th of June 1896.

18 The "levels", or hierarchies of the Last Judgement are discussed i.e., by Aila Viholainen, *Katseita keskiaikaisiin kuviin* (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 2015), 214–222; see also Claire Sandford-Couch, "Changes in the Late-Medieval artistic representations of Hell in the *Last Judgement* in North-Central Italy c. 1300–1400", *The Art of Law. Artistic Representations and Iconography of Law and Justice in Context, from the Middle Ages to the First World War*, ed. by Stefan Huygebaert, Georges Martyn, Vanessa Paumen, et al. (Cham: Springer, 2018), 63–83, at 64–68.

19 The influences of Renaissance painting have previously been noted: Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta Länsi-Suomen ja Ahvenanmaan kirkoissa*, 201 and Riska, "Keskiajan taide", 177. However, the question of Renaissance style in the late-medieval wall paintings of Finland requires a more extensive study.

FIG. 3. THE DEPOSITION OF CHRIST, SOUTH WALL OF THE NAVE, RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

FIG. 4. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, NORTH WALL OF THE NAVE, RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

central perspective and the clothes of the characters, especially in the paintings depicting the Deposition (Fig. 3) and the Resurrection (Fig. 4). Second: the selection of motifs in Rymättylä Church is more spare compared to the very rich ensembles of other wall paintings from the early 16th century, such as those in Hattula Church or Siuntio Church.[20] Third: Rymättylä Church is a single-nave church, whereas most wall paintings from the beginning of the 16th century are painted in churches with a large nave and narrow side aisles on each side (excluding Inkoo Church, which is two-naved, and Kumlinge Church, with one nave). Therefore, the visual and spatial context of Rymättylä Church paintings is unlike the rest.

20 For research on Hattula Church paintings, see Riska, "Keskiajan taide", 168–175; Helena Edgren, *Mercy and Justice. Miracles of the Virgin Mary in Finnish Medieval Wall-Paintings*. Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 100 (Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys, 1993), 66–81, 87–119, 132–134, 187–196; Viholainen, *Katseita keskiaikaisiin kuviin*, 214–239; on Siuntio Church paintings, Riska, "Keskiajan taide", 164–166; Merja Ilola, *Siuntion kirkon keskiaikainen kuvaohjelma* (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 2008).

THE PORCH AS A LOCATION OF MORALITY AND MORTALITY

When entering Rymättylä Church from the south door, one can see the most well-preserved painting of the porch on the right side, namely on the eastern wall of the porch. The image combines a morality motif depicting the churning of butter, with the lower part of the Last Judgement, the fate of souls (Fig. 1). This image depicts only part of the events of the Last Day, as neither Christ nor intercessors appear, only the opening graves and the division of people according to their deeds. The churning of butter is a common morality motif, depicting women churning stolen milk into butter, aided by a devil, whose presence indicates sin or even witchcraft.[21] The morality motif is positioned on the left of the painting in a large scale, and next to it, the dead body of a man, clad in a tunic, lies on the ground. His good fate after death is indicated by an angel flying above him, carrying his soul upwards.[22] The soul is depicted as a small, naked body with a loincloth.

Beneath the man, and on his right side, are graves opening and people climbing out. In the right corner of the painting is the hellmouth, in the shape of a dog's head, flames coming from its mouth. A devil with a pitchfork drags a woman by the hair towards it, and another devil stands on top of the hellmouth, holding a pitchfork as well. Two naked people are standing before the hellmouth, one gesturing towards it and the other towards the woman being dragged. The scene emphasizes the fate of sinners, as there is only one person whose soul is being carried by an angel.

Above the main entrance of the church, on the south wall, is a fragmentary motif of a person in a long dress, sitting on a rock or a mound, with a jug next to them on the left side (Fig. 5). This figure has

21 For discussion of the churning of butter motif as it appears in the churches of Espoo, Lohja and Kalanti, see i.e., Janika Aho and Katja Fält, "Maito, naiset ja paholaiset – Magia Suomen keskiaikaisissa kirkkomaalauksissa", *Magia ennen ja nyt*, ed. by Sonja Hukantaival (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2024), 42–66; Ann-Sofi Forsmark, "Den tjuvmjölkande kvinnan – ett motiv i den teologiska utmarken", *Bilder i marginalen – Nordiska studier i medeltidens konst*, ed. by Kersti Markus (Tallinn: Argo, 2006), 289–303; Katja Fält, "Women and Demons in the Late Medieval Wall Paintings in the Church of Espoo (Finland)", *Mirator*, 18:1 (2017), 1–35.

22 The image of the dead dressed man has also been interpreted as a depiction of a sudden death. See Hiekkanen, *Finlands medeltida stenkyrkor,* 183.

FIG. 5. THE WOMAN AND THE JUG, NORTH WALL OF THE PORCH, RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

been interpreted as a man and the motif as the sin of drunkenness.[23] As the figure obviously wears a long dress, it could also be a woman. The other motifs of the porch also feature women committing sins. Although most of the image has disappeared, the object next to the person appears to be a jug and therefore could indicate the sin of drunkenness or even gluttony, considering there could have once been other details depicting food. However, the identification of this motif would require a more extensive study.

On the left side of the main entrance, on the west wall of the porch, one can see another morality motif (Fig. 6). The preserved parts show, on the left side, women gossiping and quarrelling, and on the right side, a devil dragging a man with a hook. The two women stand opposite each other and the woman on the right

23 Lilius, Nikula and Riska, *Suomen kirkot 6*, 173; Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta Länsi-Suomen ja Ahvenanmaan kirkoissa*, 199; Roos, "Vapenhusmålningar I Finlands medeltida kyrkor – marginella bilder I marginella utrymme", 359. Anna Nilsén states that the figure is a person, without discussion of the gender. Nilsén, "Kalkmålningarna I Rimito kyrka och deras upphovsman", 17.

FIG. 6. THE GOSSIPERS AND A MAN DRAGGED TO HELL, WEST WALL OF THE PORCH, RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

FIG. 7: FRAGMENT OF THE MOTHER OF MERCY, NORTH WALL OF THE PORCH, RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

has grabbed the other on the shoulder. The women wear aprons and hair veils, indicating their married status. A devil stands on their shoulders and pulls them together, to interact. I suggest that the motif is indeed two women gossiping, depicting the sin of idle talk and sowing discord in the community.[24] On the right side of the women, the painting is fragmentary, and only a small part is visible. It depicts a person, most likely a man dressed in fancy clothes, being dragged downwards by a devil with a boat hook.[25] This indicates that the motif is a warning against sin. Whether the man is meant to be connected to the women or not, his fashionable, fancy clothes suggest that his sin is vanity.[26]

Directly opposite the entrance of the porch lies the entrance to the nave. Above the door are remains of a painting (Fig. 7). The preserved parts contain the hem of clothing worn by a person sitting or standing in the middle of a building or portal, indicated by a brick wall. Around the hem of the dress or cloak of the person in the middle are men and women, holding their hands in prayer, pictured as small compared to the central figure. When Emil Nervander catalogued the paintings of Rymättylä Church after their revealing in 1896, he stated that this painting was too fragmentary to identify, and no carbon paper copies were made of it.[27] Later suggestions have been that it depicts St. Jacob with the congregation, Christ as a judge, or *Mater Misericordiae* (Mother of Mercy, also called *Schutzmantelmadonna*). [28] I suggest that the fragmentary painting is indeed Mother of Mercy.[29] The fragments of the painting in Rymättylä show a similar composition of small

24 Regarding the ill-talk of women in morality motifs, see Fält, "Women and Demons in the Late Medieval Wall Paintings in the Church of Espoo (Finland)", 28–34.

25 Nilsén suggests that the women would be fighting over the man. See Nilsén, "Kalkmålningarna I Rimito kyrka och deras upphovsman", 17.

26 On clothes and the sin of vanity, see Pia Melin, *Fåfängans förgånglighet. Allegorin som livs- och lärospegel hos Albertus Pictor* (Stockholm: Stockholmia förlag, 2006), 145–190.

27 The Finnish Heritage Agency [Helsinki, Museovirasto], Sign. HFA 84. Catalogue of the Rymättylä paintings from Emil Nervader to Archaeological Commission dated 17th of June in 1896.

28 Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta Länsi-Suomen ja Ahvenanmaan kirkoissa*, 199; Lilius, Nikula and Riska, *Suomen kirkot 6*, 173; Nilsén, *Program och funktion i senmedeltida kyrkmåleri*, 215; Roos, "Vapenhusmålningar I Finlands medeltida kyrkor – marginella bilder I marginella utrymme", 359.

29 For research on the Virgin of Mercy in the paintings of Hattula and Lohja Churches, see Edgren, *Mercy and Justice*, 67–71, 87–97.

people gathered on the sides of a bigger figure and sheltering under something such as a cloak or a building. It could symbolise the church itself, protected by Mary.

A noteworthy feature of the fragmentary painting in Rymättylä Church is indeed the small people in it. The painting is placed right above the entrance to the nave. Members of the congregation entering through the porch would first see the morality-motif paintings and the fate of souls at the Last Judgement. This would enforce the message that sinful life was something that would lead to damnation and the porch, as a location, was the place to contemplate this before stepping into the church itself. If the fragmentary painting indeed is Mother of Mercy, the final entry into the church was to happen under the image of the Mother of Christ, sheltering the congregation under her cloak – in a building. The symbolism in this motif is quite straightforward, as if telling the viewer: step into the church, step into the protection of the Holy Mother. The mercy of the Virgin Mary, in turn, was an elemental aspect of the Last Judgement, as Mary was the intercessor and embodiment of mercy in the iconography of the Last Day.[30] The intercessory powers of the Virgin Mary are also established in Legenda Aurea which was read widely in medieval Finland.[31] The two images of the Last Judgement on the east wall of the porch and the Mother of Mercy over the entrance, resonate also with the content of the 14th century manuscript *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, where God is said to have established two kingdoms: one of Justice and one of Mercy, for Christ and Virgin Mary to reign over, respectively. [32]

Although the selection of motifs in Rymättylä Church is unique, the theme of morality is not. Especially in the Uppland region of Sweden, several preserved medieval wall paintings in the church porches include morality motifs as well as *memento mori*-themed motifs, such as the Wheel of Life. In Finland, a few examples of

30 Edgren, *Mercy and Justice*, 21–28; Catherine Oakes, *Ora pro nobis: The Virgin as Intercessor in Medieval Art and Devotion* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2008), esp. 91–94, 135, 223–224.

31 Edgren, *Mercy and Justice*, 17, 61–62.

32 On the Virgin Mary in *Speculum* literature, see Oakes, *Ora pro nobis*, 91. Previous research on the medieval church wall paintings has established the influence of illustrated *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* books as model images for the wall paintings. See Olga Alice Nygren, *En Medeltida Frälsningspegel* (Tammerfors: Tammerfors Handelstryckeri, 1957).

morality motifs in porches have also been preserved.[33] Common examples of these motifs are milking on the sly and then churning the stolen milk and gossiping, of which the two latter are also present in Rymättylä Church. The gossiping and churning motifs have both been analysed as warnings against unwanted behaviour. The gossip motif warns not to speak idle words in the church or sow discord in the community.[34] The churning motifs have complex and layered meanings, representing immoral sexual behaviour as well as warning against witchcraft and stealing.[35] Considering all the paintings of the porch together, the morality motifs and reminders of mortality stand in stark contrast to the image of the Virgin Mary. In the small space of the porch, themes of judgement and mercy, good and bad meet.

The theme of visualizing morality and mortality exists also in a wider European context of church entrances. As I mentioned earlier, art historian Paul Binski has discussed the elaborately carved Gothic portals as places of engagement with society, and as offering an occasion where individuals choose the presented worldview. According to Binski, these kinds of entrances were monumental works of art, where the dogmatic meanings of images encountered the free will of an individual.[36] This can be understood as a "fundamental way of dramatizing choice".[37] At the same time, the experience of the medieval portal should be understood as an opening statement to what follows – the church hall with its images and the ritual of the sacrament.[38]

I would like to extend this thought from portals to porches and state that the porch most likely had the same meaning in a rural parish church that portals had in urban Gothic cathedrals. The medieval parish churches in Finland did not have monumental

33 Of the wall paintings dated between 1500–1530, the ones in Lohja and Hattula Churches include morality paintings in the porch. Of the earlier, 15th-century paintings, morality motifs have been preserved in the porch of Kalanti Church (paintings c. 1470).

34 See Fält, "Women and Demons in the Late Medieval Wall Paintings in the Church of Espoo (Finland)".

35 See i.e., Fält, "Women and Demons in the Late Medieval Wall Paintings in the Church of Espoo (Finland)"; Aho, Fält, "Maito, naiset ja paholaiset – Magia Suomen keskiaikaisissa kirkkomaalauksissa", 56; about stealing milk, see also Catherine Ekholst, *Punishment for Each Criminal: Gender and Crime in Swedish Medieval Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 48.

36 Binski, *Gothic Sculpture*, 40–48.

37 Ibid., 45.

38 Ibid., 31.

stone carvings on the doorways, but they had porches painted with images. The porch is an entryway into and out of the church and marks the border of the sacred area and the sacred ground of the churchyard – a sort of final border between the outside world and the house of God. Even when sacred and secular did not stand in stark contrast in medieval thought, there was a need to separate the locations of the holy from the ordinary life.[39] In the research literature on medieval art and architecture, the porches of churches or entryways in general have been understood to possess liminal qualities.[40] A need for the separation of everyday activities and the holy rituals is also reflected in how churches, their entrances, as well as their churchyards, were targets of regulation. There are several records from medieval Europe, where everyday activities, such as trading, are banned in the churchyard or its close vicinity and inside the church itself.[41]

The porch was a ritual space, especially for rituals of cleansing or becoming part of the community – such as the exorcism before baptism.[42] Research shows that in a European context, the porches of churches also held social functions, like oath-swearing, making announcements, and practicing law.[43] The iconography of the carvings, paintings, and sculptures of the porch were meant to mark the liminal space and emphasize the functions happening there.[44] All the possible functions of the porches of medieval churches in

39 For discussion of sacred and secular, see i.e. Alicia Walker and Amanda Luyster, "Mapping the heavens and treading the Earth: negotiating secular and sacred in medieval art", *Negotiating Secular and Sacred in Medieval Art*, ed. by Alice Walker and Amanda Luyster (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 1–16, 3–8.

40 See i.e. Andås, "Art and Ritual in the Liminal Zone", 50–53.

41 Sarah Hamilton, Andrew Spicer, "Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space", *Defining the Holy. Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Andrew Spicer and Sarah Hamilton (London: Ashgate, 2005), 1–26, here 17. Analysis on the lay and sacred contexts of images, see Michael Camille, "At the sign of the spinning sow", *History and Images, Towards a New Iconology*, ed. by Axel Bolvig and Philip Lindley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 250–276.

42 Andås, "Art and Ritual in the Liminal Zone", 58–67; Hiekkanen, *Finlands medeltida stenkyrkor*, 29.

43 Hamilton, Spicer, "Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space", 10–13; Åndas, "Art and Ritual in the Liminal Zone", 56, 84–93.

44 Åndas, "Art and Ritual in the Liminal Zone", 56; see also Peter Claussen, *Chartres-Studien: Zu Vorgeschichte, Funktion und Skulptur der Vorhallen* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1975), 10–13. For the secular functions of liminal zones of church building in the High Middle Ages, see Peter Scott Brown, "Witness Images and Oath-Stones: On Law and Pictorial Culture in the Eleventh Century", *Gesta*, 62/2 (2023), 187–218; see also Binski, *Gothic Sculpture*, 44.

Finland are yet to be researched, but it is likely that the place was considered part of the church and could contain an altar as well.

To come back to Paul Binski's thought, the portal is not just liminal in nature, for liminality lacks the aspect of habitually crossing the threshold. The doorways and transit through them should also be understood as a type of social engagement, and the art on doorways as reflecting a social consensus on what matters.[45] This thought aptly applies to the medieval porch; traveling through it was a social act, accepting the prevalent worldview and taking part in the choice presented in the narrative of the good and bad, visualized by the images present. In the porch of Rymättylä Church, the paintings present a vivid image of sinners accompanied by devils, next to the outcome of the sins. On the other hand, mercy and relief from sins was also present in the image of the Mother of Mercy. In the porch, the viewer would face these fundamental aspects of the medieval Christian worldview and by entering the church, they would accept that worldview by making the good choice, which led to mercy and belonging.

ENTERING THE NAVE

Entering the nave of Rymättylä Church, one can experience almost all the paintings on the walls at one glance. The architecture of a single nave leaves open space for monumental paintings on the walls. In this article, I focus on the Last Judgement in the chancel, as it finalizes the theme that is introduced in the paintings of the porch. The entrance set the tone for what was to come: the medieval viewer entered the nave after engaging with the visualizations of good and bad and symbolically making the choice to step into the mercy and protection of the Virgin Mary and the church itself.

The Last Judgement (Fig. 2) to the east of the nave takes up the whole upper part of the wall. It is possible that there were wooden constructions, such as a chancel screen, restricting the entry to, or visibility of, the chancel in the medieval period.[46] However, considering its high place and large scale, it is evident that the Last

45 Binski, *Gothic Sculpture*, 19–20, 31, 37.

46 For discussion on the medieval chancel or choir screens, see Anna Nilsén, *Focal Point of the Sacred Space. The Boundary between Chancel and Nave in Swedish Rural Churches*. Figura Nova Series 30 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003), 29–89, 91.

Judgement was meant to be seen by all. In the painting, the Judgement happens in a barren landscape with mounds or mountains in the background. The front of the landscape depicts the ground where graves open and people climb out to attend the Last Judgement. In the centre of the painting, above the horizon line, Christ sits on a rainbow that is painted in a simple manner: an arch of two lines. Christ wears a long robe, which is opened at the centre to reveal his outstretched arms and the naked mid-part of his torso. His bare feet are visible under the hem of the robe. Above him, on both sides are fragments of horns played by angels. Next to his outstretched arms hover the symbols of mercy and judgement: on his right side, a lily, and on his left, a sword.

At the ends of the rainbow-arch, kneel the Virgin Mary, on the left (right side of Christ), and St. John the Baptist, on the right (on the left side of Christ). This composition of the two intercessors, called *deesis*, emerges in the Last Judgement scenes of 12th-century Gothic sculpture and subsequently became a standardized composition in Christian art of the late medieval period.[47] On the left side of the painting, on the ground, is the gate of Heaven in the form of a simple church building. St. Peter, holding a large key in his hand, is leading a line of three people, the saved, to the door. The people are naked, and the first one is holding their hands in a gesture of prayer. The next two, a woman and a man, are covering their genital areas with their left hands, and their right hands are embracing the person before them.

On the right side of the painting is the hellmouth: a large head of a dog with an open, flaming mouth.[48] Three people, the damned, are standing in front of the hellmouth, in a row, facing the viewer. The middle one is covering her chest and genital area with her hands while the two others, a man on the left and a woman on the right, are each holding one hand on the central figure's back while covering their own genitals with their other hands. Around them are three devils with human-like postures and clawed feet. One of the devils is on the ground, stretching out a long-shafted tool to, presumably,

47 See Oakes, *Ora pro nobis*, 78–80.

48 On the iconography of the hellmouth as an animal head, see Aleks Pluskowski, "Apocalyptic Monsters: Animal Inspirations for the Iconography of Medieval North European Devourers", *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. by Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 155–176.

drag out a person coming up from under the ground. The end of the tool, and the target the devil is reaching for, are missing. One devil is positioned near the horizon line, holding a whip with three tails. The third one is squatting on top of the nose of the hellmouth, defecating.

The Last Judgement was generally painted in almost every church that had wall paintings in the late medieval period. In the preserved early-16th-century wall paintings in Finland, the Last Judgement exists in seven other churches: in Espoo, Hattula, Hollola, Inkoo, Kumlinge and Lohja Churches as a whole painting and in addition, a fragment of the Last Judgement scene is preserved in Siuntio Church. All of these paintings are contemporary with the Rymättylä Church paintings, namely 1500–1530.

The usual way of structuring a "pictorial program", so to say, in an early-16th-century Finnish parish church was a narrative timeline of the salvation history of humankind. It began with creation, continued to the life of Christ, and ended with the Last Judgement. The model images have been traced back to typologies appearing in illustrations of *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, and it is evident that *Speculum* literature heavily influenced the way of creating the pictorial ensembles in parish churches.[49] However, the paintings in Rymättylä Church do not depict the whole of salvation history, but emphasize the end of it.

The point of the Last Judgement motif was not just to illustrate what would happen to individual people after death, for this was culturally far more complex than just their fate at the Last Judgement.[50] The Last Judgement is an essential eschatological depiction and can also be seen as a *memento mori* image, as it reminded the viewer that everyone must die to wake up again on the Last Day. It also reminded them about the importance of a good life by reminding them that everyone would finally meet their deeds before the all-knowing judge, Christ. As the dogma of salvation was complex, the

49 Nygren, *En Medeltida Frälsningspegel*, 175–188; Nilsén, *Program och funktion i senmedeltida kyrkmåleri*, 463.

50 See Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 21–69; see also Thea Tomaini, "Introduction", *Dealing with the Dead. Mortality and Community in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Thea Tomaini (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1–16, here 1–3.

motif of the Last Judgement can be seen as a simple visual model of the end of the world and the hierarchies of salvation.[51]

The Last Judgement seems to represent the imagery of judgement as a concept, not just the actual biblical event of the Last Day. This has been discussed in the context of the iconography of justice.[52] In relation to the morality motifs in the porch, the concept of justice creates another level of understanding of the paintings of Rymättylä Church. As secular judgement can be seen as a reflection of the heavenly one, in the medieval context, the Last Judgement can be understood as a reminder of the essential power structures of society: law and order on Earth. Here we come again to Binski's idea of the "dramatized choice". The fate of an individual in the Last Judgement reflected their earthly life and their choices between good and bad. On a concrete level, this meant being a good member of the community and abiding by the laws of society. The monumental Last Judgement in Rymättylä Church can be seen as a reminder of this choice.

The other motifs of Christ in the chancel area, namely the Flagellation of Christ and Crown of Thorns, support his authority as Judge. At first glance, the arrangement of these motifs in the chancel may raise some questions. The fact that the Flagellation of Christ appears on the north wall of the chancel and the Passion cycle begins there, being "interrupted" by the Last Judgement on the east wall, seems to disrupt the narrative. I would like to suggest an explanation for this composition of motifs.

The Flagellation is painted right above the sacristy door. The sacristy was the place where the holy bread and wine was stored with the communion vessels. When Christ was whipped, he bled – usually graphically depicted in late medieval paintings of the subject. The Flagellation of Christ in Rymättylä Church is extremely fragmentary and only the tails of the whip are preserved, so the

51 See Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*, 164–214, especially regarding the lack of visual representation of Purgatory: 188–203.

52 Axel Bolvig, "Notion of Jurisdiction in Danish Medieval Wall Paintings", *The Medieval History Journal*, vol. 3/1 (2000), 119–138; Sandford-Couch, "Changes in the Late-Medieval artistic representations of Hell…", 63–83; Mia Kopriola, "Medieval iconography of Justice in a European Periphery: The case of Sweden ca. 1250–1550", *The Art of Law. Artistic Representations and Iconography of Law and Justice in Context, from the Middle Ages to the First World War*, ed. by in Stefan Huygebaert, Georges Martyn, Vanessa Paumen, et al. (Cham: Springer, 2018), 89–110.

FIG. 8. THE CROWN OF THORNS, SOUTH WALL OF THE NAVE (CHANCEL), RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

blood is not visible anymore. However, on the opposite wall, the image of the Crown of Thorns is preserved, and the blood of Christ can be seen dripping on his forehead and neck (Fig. 8). His blood was also concretely present in the holy wine that was consumed during the sacrament of the eucharist. The two images show the origins of the spilled blood of Christ. At the same time, the two images of the suffering Christ in the chancel, on each side of the Last Judgement, allude to his sacrifice for the sins of humankind. They create a juxtaposition of the suffering, bleeding Christ, and Christ as Judge on the Last Day. The whole ensemble of the paintings in the chancel area emphasizes the bodily sacrifice of Christ and his role as a saviour of humankind. At the same time, the ensemble draws attention to the endings: of the life of Christ in his bodily form and of the whole world at the Judgement Day.

The paintings of Rymättylä Church, however, are not just about endings. In the medieval Christian belief system, the world began at creation. This was also illustrated in the creation motifs of medieval Christian art, where God creates Adam and Eve, and all the living

FIG. 9. ST. ANNE, THE VIRGIN MARY AND THE CHRIST CHILD, NORTH WALL OF THE NAVE, RYMÄTTYLÄ CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

creatures within the confines of paradise. The Last Judgement is a similar explanation about the end of the world—the counterpart of creation. The endings emphasized in the Rymättylä Church paintings were not just endings, but beginnings as well. The death of Christ led to his Resurrection and Ascension, and in Christian belief the Judgement Day leads into a new beginning, the afterlife. In addition, even though there is no actual image of the creation of the world in Rymättylä Church, there is a notion of creation and beginning – in the form of an image of St. Anne with Virgin Mary and the Christ Child (Fig. 9).

Directly opposite the entrance of the nave is the image of St. Anne, together with her daughter, the Virgin Mary, holding the Christ Child in her arms. St. Anne is holding an apple, which the Christ reaches toward.[53] This composition of the maternal line of Christ is an image of his beginning and the beginning of the Virgin Mary. As I discussed before, the role of the Virgin Mary, as the source of mercy at the Last Judgement, is also present in the Mother of Mercy motif on the porch. The people entering the church would have stepped into the church below the Mother of Mercy painting and again, would have been reminded of the maternal line of Christ in the nave. Among the images of the Last Judgement and the Passion of Christ of Rymättylä Church, the motif of St. Anne with her daughter and grandson can be seen as the ultimate source of mercy.

ALLEGORY AND MEANING IN THE MORALITY MOTIFS

The entwinement of the themes of morality and the upcoming end of days is constantly present in the late medieval visual world. One of the most famous examples of this motif is the wood panel painting the Seven Deadly Sins, attributed to Hieronymus Bosch, and dated to around 1505–1510. It combines depictions the of seven cardinal sins with the four Last Things at the end of the world.[54] Understanding

53 Elina Räsänen, *Ruumiillinen esine, materiaalinen suku: Tutkimus Pyhä Anna itse kolmantena -aiheisista puuveistoksista keskiajan Suomessa*. Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 116 (Helsinki: Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys, 2009), 90.

54 On the painting and its attribution, see Henry Luttikhuizen, "Through Boschian Eyes: An Interpretation of the Prado Tabletop of the Seven Deadly Sins", *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture. The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. by Richard G. Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 261–281.

sins as well as the structure of world history and its ending were all-important features of the late-medieval world view. The pictorial and literary motif of "the happenings before the end of the world and the Last Judgement" is an example how the ending of the world was understood: not just as something suddenly happening one day, but as a whole process of dismantling Creation.[55] Similarly, an ideal death seen as gradual process and a sudden, unanticipated death was considered to be bad for the fate of the soul.[56] Since the world and human fate were all destined to end up at the Last Judgement, it was the responsibility of an individual to live a good life and die a good death. These can also be seen as societal responsibilities of an individual.

The pictorial motifs depicting moralities and *memento mori* themes demonstrate the core of these beliefs. Rymättylä Church is a unique example in Finland when it comes to the visual juxtaposition of morality motifs and the outcome of a sinful life. However, the tradition of combining morality motifs with *memento mori* images occurs often in late-medieval wall paintings of Finland and the Uppland region in Sweden. The most prominent example in Finland is the *memento mor*i ensemble in Inkoo Church. It includes the *memento mori* motifs of Death Sawing a Tree, the Wheel of Life and the Dance of Death. Above them there used to be a morality motif of Shoe Ella, which is currently under a layer of whitewash. All these paintings are located on the north wall of the nave and the characters of the Dance of Death march – or dance – towards the chancel and the image of the Last Judgement on the eastern end of the north wall.[57]

Another kind of ensemble of morality motifs with a hint towards their outcome is found in Siuntio Church.[58] Located in the vaults

55 About the motif and its explanation, see Daniela Wagner, *Die Fünfzehn Zeichen vor dem Jüngsten Gericht – Spätmittelalterliche Bildkonzepte für das Seelenheil* (Berlin: Reimer, 2016).

56 See i.e., Stina Fallberg Sundmark, "Hyvä elämä, hyvä kuolema", *Hyvä elämä keskiajalla*, ed. by Kirsi Kanerva and Marko Lamberg (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2014); Jyrki Nissi, "Communal Acts in the Process of Death: A Comparison Between Nordic and South European 15th-Century Hagiographic Material", *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 46 (2) (2021), 149–171.

57 Janika Aho, "*Memento mori* Inkoon keskiaikaisessa kirkossa", *Tahiti*, 10 (2–3), 2020, 32–55, here 51.

58 For research on the Siuntio Church paintings, see Nilsén, *Program och funktion i senmedeltida kyrkmåleri*, 217–219; Riska, "Keskiajan taide", 164–166; Ilola, *Siuntion kirkon keskiaikainen kuvaohjelma*; Fält, "Women and Demons in the Late Medieval Wall Paintings in the Church of Espoo (Finland)", 20–21, 24–27.

FIG. 10. FRAGMENT OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS, 3RD VAULT OF THE SOUTH AISLE, SIUNTIO CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

of the south nave, these include the motif of St. Michael as Soul-weigher, and an allegorical depiction of the Seven Deadly Sins – a body out of which seven sins crawl in the form of snakes or other animals.[59] St. Michael weighing souls, or *psychostasia*, is an allegorical depiction of the judgement of one's deeds after death. It symbolically refers to the Last Judgement but at the same time is an allegory of justice itself.[60] It features St. Michael the archangel holding a scale with a naked person (the good soul) sitting in one bowl and demons (the sins or bad deeds) in the other. The scale is always tipped on the side of the good soul. This motif appears to be one of the standard motifs painted in medieval churches

59 See also Nilsén, *Program och funktion i senmedeltida kyrkmåleri*, 259–260; Ilola, *Siuntion kirkon keskiaikainen kuvaohjelma*, 12–15.

60 On St. Michael the Soul-weigher in the context of iconography of justice, see Mia Korpiola, "Souls in the Balance: Archangel Michael, the Weighing of Souls, and Its Imagery in Late Medieval Swedish Wall Paintings", *En mänsklig rättshistoria. Vänbok till Carl Gustaf Spangenberg*, red. by Marianne Dahlén and Mats Kumlien (Uppsala: Iustus Förlag AB, 2019), 89–110.

and Finland and it has been preserved in four church paintings dated to the early 16th century.[61]

The Seven Deadly Sins in Siuntio Church is the only preserved example of this motif in Finland. Only the upper part of the motif is preserved (Fig. 10), but what can still be observed is a head of a man, on the left side of the image, with a snake-like creature crawling out of his eyes. Also, part of his hand, with which he holds a similar creature, is preserved. On the right side of the paintings, there is also a third creature, which most likely crawls out of the man's mouth.[62] These kinds of medieval images depicted the idea of the fundamental connection between the body and sins. Each body part represented – or was prone to – a certain sin.[63] As a macabre presentation of the human body combined with allegory, the image is a good example of a visualisation that can be understood both as a moralising motif and a *memento mori*. It depicts the embodiment of sins and, at the same time, reminds the viewer of death and the temporary nature of the (earthly) body. However, these two allegorical images do not have a direct visual connection to the image of the Last Judgement, located on the second vault of the northern aisle.

Siuntio Church also features the morality motif of gossip in the church – interestingly in two separate paintings.[64] These two paintings are located on the side aisles of the church, one on the south side depicting two men and a devil, and the north one depicting two women and a devil (Fig. 11). The motifs include a subtle hint towards the Last Judgement: the lower part of the painting depicting women features flames under the three figures. The painting is fragmentary, but parts of the narrow flames are still visible. These are, without a doubt, the flames of Hell. Like in the porch of Rymättylä Church, the outcome of bad deeds is

61 See Korpiola, "Souls in the Balance"; also, Nilsén, *Program och funktion i senmedeltida kyrkmåleri*, 47, 207.

62 The same motif has been preserved in Ärnetuna Church from c.1435, see brief description by Anna Nilsén, "Man and picture", *History and Images, Towards a New Iconology*, ed. by Axel Bolvig and Philip Lindley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 323–340.

63 Sins and their locations on the body were sometimes also connected with the body of Christ and his torments. See Holly Johnson, "A Fifteenth-Century Sermon Enacts the Seven Deadly Sins", *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture. The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. by Richard G. Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 107–131.

64 Discussed by Fält, "Women and Demons in the Late Medieval Wall Paintings in the Church of Espoo (Finland)", 24–27; see also Ilola, *Siuntion kirkon keskiaikainen kuvaohjelma*, 81–82.

FIG. 11. WOMEN GOSSIPING, VAULT ABOVE THE WEST WALL, NORTH AISLE, SIUNTIO CHURCH. PHOTO: JANIKA AHO.

clearly visible—the delicate flames are visually just a bit more discreet than the gaping mouth of Hell in the combination motif of the Rymättylä Church painting.

The approach to sins and the End of Days in the Rymättylä paintings appear to be centred around human experience. They lack the allegorical images, such as St. Michael the Soul-weigher or *memento mori* motifs that approach morality and mortality on the level of symbols and ideas. The concrete approach towards sins and their outcomes presented in the combination motifs of the porch is reflected in the painting cycle of the nave featuring Christ, who suffers, dies and is resurrected for sins and for the salvation of the souls of humankind. Other early-16th-century paintings such as those in Siuntio, Espoo, Hattula and Lohja Churches feature more layered and complex painting cycles, even if the overall purpose is the same as in the Rymättylä Church paintings: to feature the salvation history of humankind and to convey an overall understanding of "all the things important". In other early-16th-century church paintings in Finland, the cycles are centred around salvation history, usually by means of Old and New Testament typologies.[65]

Earlier researchers have also noted the emphasis on human experience in the Rymättylä Church paintings. Due to the `Renaissance influence´ in the visual appearance of the paintings, the Christ-centred motifs made early art historians Sigrid Rinne and Ludvig Wennervirta speculate on their dating.[66] According to Wennervirta, they "are an omen of the upcoming Reformation" and he estimated them to be among the very last Roman Catholic paintings in Finland.[67] However, as Anna Nilsén has proven, they date to c. 1514. Since the dating of all the other early-16th-century wall paintings in Finland is estimated to be between c. 1510 to c. 1522, the Rymättylä Church paintings do not stand out

65 Nygren, *En Medeltida Frälsningspegel*, 178–188. The motifs and their placements in the other early-16th-century paintings in the churches of Finland, see Nilsén, *Program och funktion i senmedeltida kyrkmåleri*, 189–199, 200–201, 203–210, 217–219. About the medieval tradition of salvation history pictorial cycles, see also Soren Kaspersen, "Framing history with salvation", *History and Images, Towards a New Iconology*, ed. by Axel Bolvig and Philip Lindley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 379–414.

66 Rinne, "Rimito kyrkas medeltida kalkmålningar", 31–32; Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta Länsi-Suomen ja Ahvenanmaan kirkoissa*, 190–203.

67 Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta Länsi-Suomen ja Ahvenanmaan kirkoissa*, 202–203; Wennervirta, *Suomen keskiaikainen kirkkomaalaus*, 157–158, 197, 200.

as an especially late example.[68] Therefore the Rymättylä Church paintings prove that these kinds of Christ-centred ideas in the selection of motifs appeared in the same period as the more complex, medieval painting cycles, which continued in some other churches.

CONCLUSIONS

In Rymättylä Church, the person entering the church would first encounter the morality motifs in the porch. On the walls to the left and right, they would see paintings depicting milking on the sly and gossip, as the outcomes for a sinful soul at the Last Judgement. These images represent sins and unwanted behaviour, both of which had consequences for the individual as a member of society as well as in the afterlife. When entering the church from under a painting of the Virgin Mary, the visitor would symbolically step into the mercy and shelter of the Church. In the nave, they would encounter the great image of the Last Judgement on the east wall and be reminded of the sacrifice of Christ by the other paintings on the walls of the nave. Together, the morality paintings of the porch and the large scene of the Last Judgement on the east wall connected committing sin with imagery of the Last Judgement directly on a visual level. They presented the outcome of the world and explained the dismantling of creation.

The porch can be seen as a symbol of engagement with society: it was a place where one faced the choice of belonging, both to the congregation and to society in general. The status of a member of society was first established in baptism and upheld by going through the porch of a church repeatedly during earthly life. In this crossing, people took part in the societal process of viewing the images and experienced the shared understanding of the world, its structures, and of its endings and beginnings.

The focus of the Rymättylä Church paintings is human, and the images are stripped of complex allegories. They present matters on a concrete level, giving the impression of the whole setting of the church and its images as a scene of the dramatized choice of good

68 About the dating of the other early-16th-century wall paintings in Finland, see i.e. Wennervirta, *Suomen keskiaikainen kirkkomaalaus*, 124, 148; Riska, "Keskiajan taide", 161; Edgren, *Mercy and Justice*, 187.

and bad. However, considering the images of the Mother of Mercy in the porch, St. Anne and the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus on the north wall, and again the Virgin Mary as an intercessor on the large painting of the Last Judgement on the east wall, the aspect of mercy is also present. The paintings of Rymättylä Church centre around endings: of human life, of the life of Christ, and of the whole world on the Last Day. At the same time, the beginnings are present in the images of the Virgin Mary and St. Anne. When entering the church, the churchgoers engaged themselves with the worldview that was based on the importance of thinking of the ends of things, and how to live well before that.

Janika Aho: Thinking of the Ends of Things: The Porch as a Location of Morality and Mortality in the Late Medieval Wall Paintings in Rymättylä Church
Keywords: wall paintings; late medieval; church art; church architecture; northern Baltic Sea region

SUMMARY

In this article I analyse the late medieval wall paintings in Rymättylä Church (Finland), dated 1514. I focus on the wall paintings in the porch and the large Last Judgement painting on the east wall of the nave. The porch, considered a liminal zone, serves as a transitional area that marks the boundary between the secular outside world and the sacred interior of the church. I argue that the morality motifs and the Mother of Mercy motif depicted in the wall paintings in the porch prepared the viewers to enter the church and see the Last Judgement scene in the nave. The themes of bad morals and mercy in the images of the porch played an important role in reinforcing the passion history of Christ and the salvation of the soul at the Last Judgement. Via images, the porch played a crucial role in reinforcing the shared Christian worldview, as individuals passing through it symbolically renew their commitment to this worldview. Drawing on the theories of liminality, as well as art historian Paul Binski's ideas on cathedral portals, the article situates the porch within the broader context of medieval art, highlighting the societal functions of images therein.

CV

Janika Aho is a PhD researcher in art history, University of Helsinki. Her dissertation studied late medieval wall paintings in Finland, focusing on the themes of morality and memento mori. She teaches art history and medieval studies at the University of Helsinki. Her PhD research project, completed in 2025, was funded by the Kone Foundation (2019–2024) and the Emil Aaltonen foundation (2024–2025).