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Illegal burial accessories? Bobbin lace from Postmedieval Northern Ostrobothnian church burials

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Abstract

Various examples of bobbin lace made from silk and plant fibres have been recorded both in archaeological funerary materials and inside coffins located below Northern Ostrobothnian churches. This lace was used to decorate caps and necklines of funerary attire, and pillows, particularly in children's burials. The chapter will present the context, purpose, and stitching techniques of eleven pieces of lace that date from the late 17th century to the early 19th century. Even though the number of pieces of lace studied is small, they provide us with information on the use and type of the earliest known lace in northern Finland and whether it was used in accordance with the contemporary sumptuary laws.

Keywords: bobbin lace, children's burials, Northern Ostrobothnia

20.1. Post-medieval lace-making in Sweden and Finland

In Sweden and Finland – Finland was a province of Sweden until 1809 – lace-making techniques were adopted from Central Europe, where Flanders was the main provider of high-quality bobbin lace (Levey 2003: 590). It is possible that some of the lace found in the Northern Ostrobothnian burials was made in continental Europe. However, as the sumptuary laws regulated the use and trade of lace, it is likely that many of it was domestic. In Sweden, Stockholm and Vadstena were important lace-making centres from the 1600s onwards. In the region of modern Finland lace-making was known to have been established in Rauma as early as by the 1740s. Other regions where bobbin lace-weaving was professional were Heinämaa in Orimattila and Tytärsaari in the Gulf of Finland (part of Russia since 1940). Much western and southern Finnish lace was influenced by the lace made in Flanders and France. The patterns were brought to Finland either directly from their original region or via Tønder in Denmark. Karelian lace (FI: *nyytinki*) is denser with smaller holes and thicker threads than that made in the southern and western parts of Finland. (Linnove 1947; 1963: 17, 33, 54, 56–58.) For different types of stitches, this chapter uses translations of the terminology that has for centuries been used by Finnish bobbin weavers (Figure 1; Honka-Hallila 2014).

Bobbin lace is made on a pillow filled with buckwheat chaff. The threads are wound around bobbins, often made from wood. In Finland, the pinning pattern attached to the pillow was marked on birch bark, paper, sheep's skin or dark woollen fabric (Linnove 1963: 24–28). In Finland, lace was predominantly made by women, especially in the regions where lace-making was professionalized. Among the higher social classes, it was expected that girls learned the skill of lace-making, made their own lace, and some for sale too. However, boys were also taught this skill. In the towns where bobbin lace-weaving was popular, children started to learn it by the age of five to six. Written sources reveal that in Rauma sailors made lace during winter, and many older men could pass the skill on to younger generations. It was common for people living in the “bobbin lacing towns” to know the pattern of one or a few simple lace types, but never learned more complicated patterns (Linnove 1947: 208–210, 1963: 17–18).

The use of bobbin lace was regulated according to sumptuary laws that were renewed quite often. In Sweden the use of lace was forbidden from 1644 until the end of the 17th century. In 1664, it was necessary to renew this prohibition implying that lace was being used illegally. In 1688 imported lace was again prohibited (Pyllkänen 1970: 44, 83). Regardless of the laws, in the Northern Ostrobothnian town of Oulu, lace was sold in stores, as witnessed by the probate inventories of two shopkeepers, Ture Pederson (1658) and Simon Pilckar (1699) (Lempiäinen 2016: 57, 69). From 1720, using narrow lace was allowed but imported lace of any material was prohibited and if this law was not followed, a 200 silver daler fine would be declared (Modée 1746: 926). In 1766, lace called *Wäskanter* made in Vadstena as well as *Blonder* were forbidden. It was also specified that the lace could not be wider than one inch (SWE: *tum*), that is, ca. 2.47 cm. If wider lace was attached to so-called *Robes de Cour*, the law says, they should be removed or a fine (100 silver dalers) should be paid. Lace narrower than one inch could be used in women's dresses (Modée 1774: 7114, 7296, 7594).

20.2. Bobbin lace from Northern Ostrobothnia

This chapter studies a total of eleven different pieces of bobbin lace found in seven children's burials. These burials were laid below the floors of three Northern Ostrobothnian churches, those in Hailuoto, Haukipudas, and Keminmaa (Figure 2). The lace can be dated based on its context and style to between the 17th and 19th century. The aim of this chapter is to describe and identify the origin of

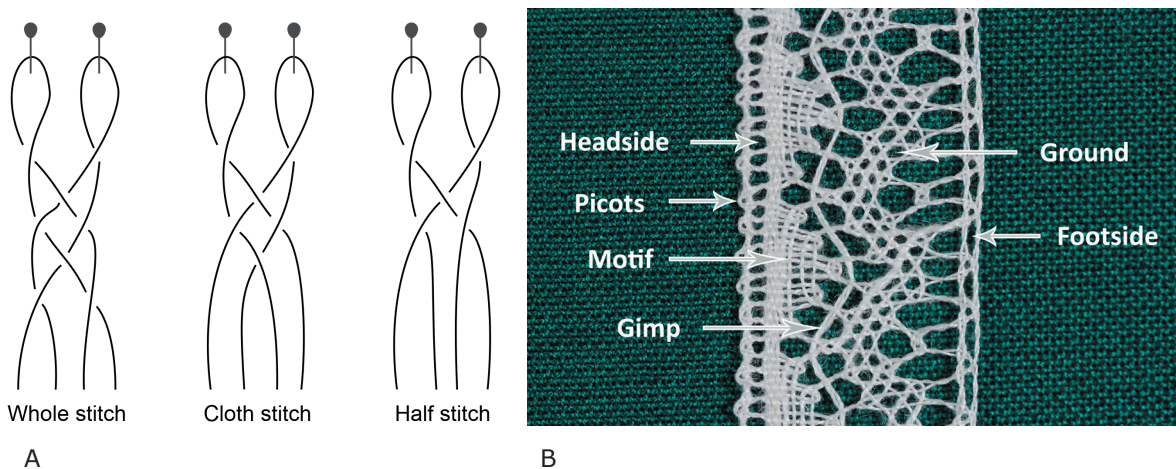


Figure 1. A) The basic lace stitches used in Finnish bobbin lace. B) The names of different parts of bobbin lace. (Images: S. Lipkin)



Figure 2. Bobbin lace described in this chapter has been found in Hailuoto, Haukipudas, and Keminmaa. (Image: CC0 1.0 Wikimedia Commons)

the lace as well as to consider what it can tell us regarding the trade and use of lace in the Northern Ostrobothnian region. In Haukipudas and Keminmaa, the lace was documented by photographs *in situ*, as the burials still lay below the churches. The lace from Hailuoto was excavated in the 1980s and was documented and studied in the Archaeology laboratory at the University of Oulu. The research is mostly based on photographs taken with either a regular (below floors) or macro lens (at the laboratory).

Previous research on lace in Finland is based on objects in museum collections (Linnove 1947, Honka-Hallila 2012). The lace of this chapter is the first to be studied in detail from a Finnish archaeological context, and most of it is earlier than that in the museum collections. As such, it is an important testimony of early lace used in Finland. Some lace has been found in the burials of Turku Cathedral (studied 1925), Oulu Cathedral (excavations 1996, 2002) and Senaatintori burial ground (excavations 2020), but these have not yet been studied in detail. I am also aware of other lace in the churches of Haukipudas and Keminmaa, as well as Tornio, but these have not been documented because of lack of proper access and extremely difficult working conditions.

The well-ventilated and cold conditions below the churches (Haukipudas, Keminmaa, Tornio, Turku Cathedral) are also suitable for textile preservation and preservation of other organic material. In the below-floor context, plant fibre bobbin lace is well-preserved because it is not in contact with soil. In these churches, some of the human remains have been mummified. In regular archaeological contexts (Hailuoto, Oulu Cathedral, Senaatintori burial ground) only lace made from silk fibres has been preserved, since the Finnish acidic soil is detrimental to other than animal fibres such as wool and silk (Lipkin et al. 2021b). Even though the space below the churches has been suitable for preservation, one example demonstrating the fragility of the plant fibre textiles in these contexts is a piece of bobbin lace preserved on the skull of an individual buried in Köyliö Church in southwestern Finland (Helamaa 2016 et al.). The burial was laid below the floor and initially had no soil contact. However after the church burial tradition ended, the space below the floor was filled with sandy soil, leading some soil to enter the coffin and starting the rotting process. The textiles in this burial had become dry and brittle except for the silk cap. The cap had a plant fibre bobbin lace (fibre samples remained unidentifiable)

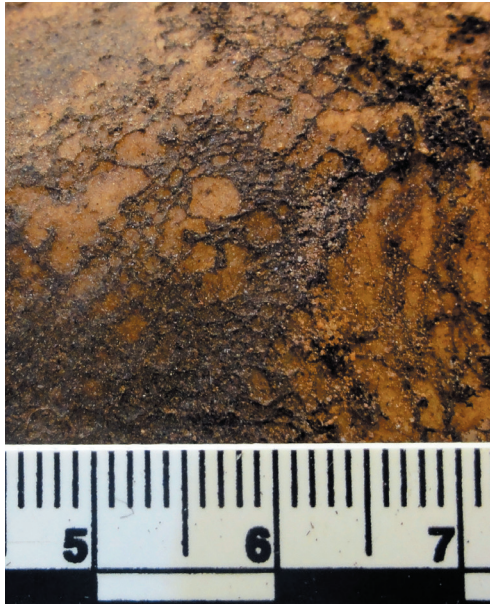


Figure 3. A fragment of lace preserved on the surface of a female skull in a burial at Köyliö Church, southwest Finland. (Photograph: S. Lipkin)

that had been preserved in a small area on the surface of the skull (Figure 3). The threads were so badly preserved that the lace could not be removed from the skull, which has already now been reburied. However, the pattern was still visible, consisting of a floral design with a simple point ground. Even though the laces found in the burials below floors and presented in this chapter are extremely well-preserved, the conditions are not optimal and the preservation of the textiles is not guaranteed. Next I will present the find context and description of the studied bobbin lace and later I will ascertain its date and most likely origin of manufacture in order to discuss whether the lace was put into the burials in accordance with the sumptuary laws.

20.2.1. Hailuoto

Three pieces of silk bobbin lace were found in burials below the church on Hailuoto Island. This church burned down in 1968 and excavations were conducted at the site between 1985 and 1987. Based on historical sources, most of the burials date between 1620 and 1756 (Paavola 1998). In Hailuoto Church very few plant fibre

textiles have been preserved. As with most of the archaeological textiles, the lace from Hailuoto is now brown even though it used to be white.

A piece of lace made from silver-coated silk threads was found associated with an infant buried at the feet of a male individual (Figure 4). The lace was found in two pieces with a total length of ca. 13 cm and width 2 cm. The motifs are small tallies. Many of the tallies have unravelled, but it is likely that they formed floral ornaments.

A broad piece of silk lace from a child's or adolescent's burial was associated with 39 beads, hair, and numerous pieces of silk cap (Figure 5). The lace has a five-hole double ground that is also known as Flanders lace. From the late 18th century to the early 19th century, only this type of double ground was used in Finland, especially in Rauma (Palo 2014a). The width of the



Figure 4. The edges of the lace in Burial 154 (Chamber 1) on Hailuoto are rounded and made with whole stitches (KM87131:86a). (Photograph: S. Lipkin)

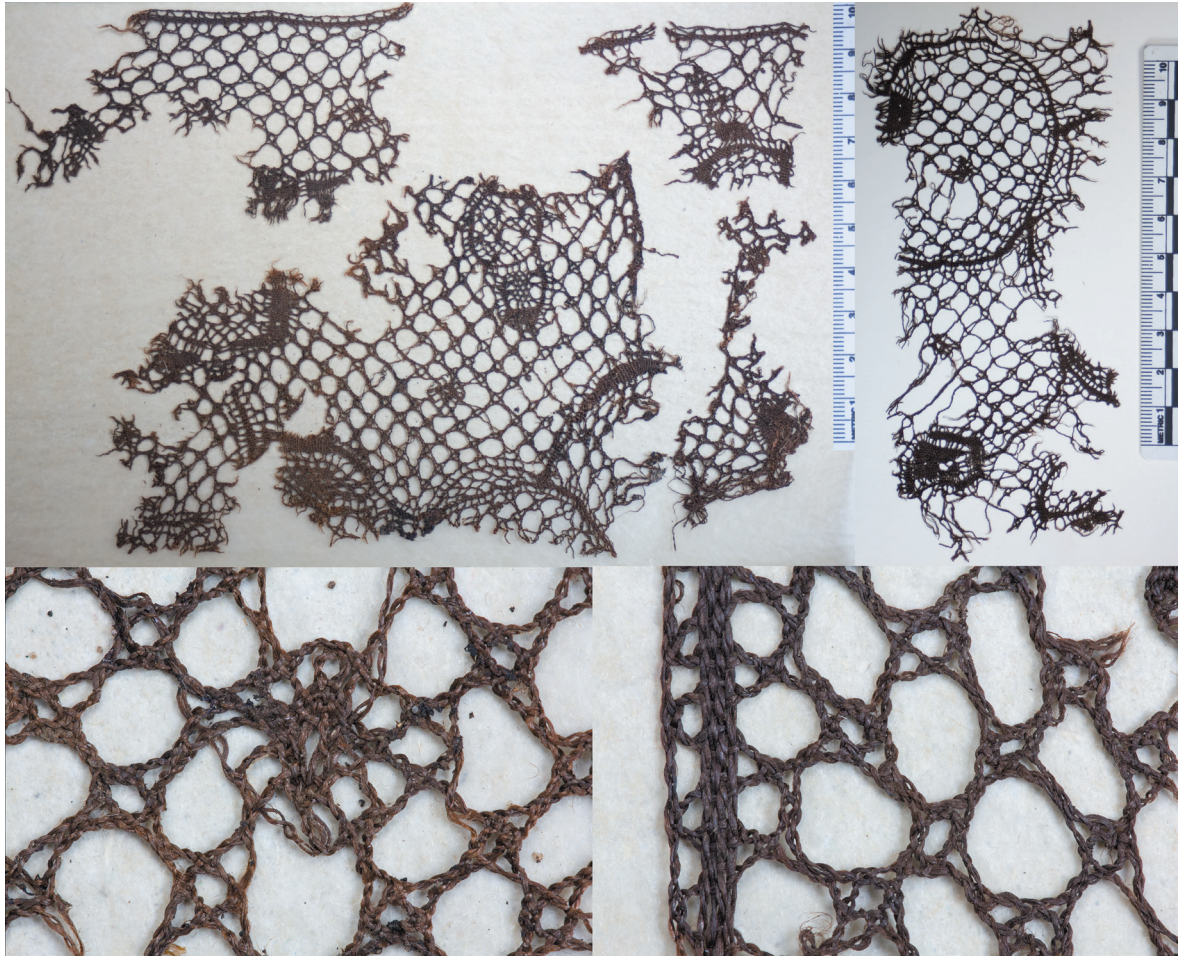


Figure 5. In the broad piece of silk lace in Burial 204 (Chamber 5), the footside is made with whole stitch + twist and reinforced with cloth stitches of four pairs (right below). The headside has not been preserved. Goose eyes (left below) are used among other motifs (KM87131:395g). (Photograph: S. Lipkin)

lace has not preserved but has a minimum of 12 cm. The filling of the lace is composed of irregular floral ornaments made with cloth and half stitches. Motifs include a series of spiders and rectangular goose eyes.

Another piece of silk lace was found along with a broad brocaded silk ribbon on the chest and waist area of a deceased person buried in the same chamber as the previous individual (Figure 6). This deceased was 140 cm tall, but the excavation report does not indicate the age. Even though the individual may be a child, they may have also gained their full growth, since during the time and



Figure 6. In the lace in Burial 118 (Chamber 5), the footside is made with whole stitch + double twist and reinforced with cloth stitches in two pairs (KM86088:526). (Photograph: S. Lipkin).

region in question, 140 cm was not unexpectedly short for women or even men (Partanen 2010: 90–92). In the lace, the motifs form concentric circles made with combinations of half stitch + twist as well as braids. The width of the lace is more than 5 cm.

20.2.2. Haukipudas

Several well-preserved, still elastic and in many cases white, pieces of bast fibre bobbin lace have been found in the burials under Haukipudas Church. Five of these pieces of lace were studied in more detail. These were found in burials belonging to children buried most likely during the late 1750s and early 1760s. The last burial below the church was made in 1765 and belonged to a one-week-old girl.

In Burial 1, a seven-year-old girl is buried wearing a white cap decorated with ca. 2.5 cm wide lace with a five-hole double ground (Figure 7). The width of the lace is barely within the regulation of the 1766 sumptuary law. The cap seems to have been an old cap taken out of use. The lace sewn encircling the neckline and cuffs has a simple mesh-type groundwork (half stitch + twist, which resembles an ordinary needlepoint ground) with fan-like edges (Figure 8). The lace is ca. 1.5 cm wide. This is a faster pattern in contrast to double ground (Palo 2014b). It seems that the fabric with the lace edge was cut into narrow strips and tucked (not sewn or pinned) below other fabrics laid on the deceased. The fabric was cut into strips about 2 cm in width along the neckline and 5 cm on the cuffs. It is likely that the lace was sewn on the edge of the fabric already while it was being used for its original purpose. The girl is a priest's daughter who died in 1764.

The girl is buried in funerary attire arranged from exactly similar fabric to the funerary attire of a newborn baby girl in Burial 2. It is likely that these children were members of the same family and the reused fabric dressing the deceased was stored particularly for this purpose (Lipkin et al. 2018).



Figure 7. The white cap on the girl's head was decorated with lace with a double ground, Burial 1 at Haukipudas. In the double ground, also known as Flanders lace, the ground stitch has five visible holes. (Photograph: S. Lipkin)



Figure 8. Fabric with a lace lining was cut into strips and used to decorate girl's funerary attire at the neckline (above) and cuffs (below), Burial 1 at Haukipudas. (Photograph: S. Lipkin)

Indeed, two newborn sisters of the seven-year-old priest's daughter were buried below the church in 1759 and 1763. Possibly the newborn was one of them. The funerary attire of the newborn was decorated with ca. 2 cm wide lace pinned along the neckline (Figure 9). The stitches form a tight appearance that is typical of Karelian lace (Sirelius 1928: 28). However, this lace has a similar pattern to western ones. The lace sewn on the cap is similar in width but more elaborate. The lace has a five-



Figure 9. In Burial 2 at Haukipudas, the lace was pinned along the neckline (left below and right). The motifs of the lace in the cap (left above) are made with cloth stitches. (Photographs: S. Lipkin)



Figure 10. In Burial 6 at Haukipudas, the foot-side of the lace is made with whole stitch + double twist and reinforced with cloth stitches in two pairs. The headside has picots. (Photograph: S. Lipkin)

hole double ground that is typical of 18th century lace from Flanders (Linnove 1947: 174). Its edge has picots. The cap is made of two different kinds of white plant fibre fabric, one coarser than the other, suggesting that it was made particularly for the burial.

Strips of lace were used to decorate another newborn's cap and chest in Burial 6 at Haukipudas (Figure 10). Both pieces of lace have the same pattern, and the funerary attire was folded and pinned from old textiles. The lace was also pinned on the neckline of the garment, but on the cap the effort of sewing was made. The cap is made from similar simple white fabric that was also used for

the funerary attire. The ground of the lace is made with half stitch + twist. The motifs form a diagonal effect, with a pair of gimps encircling fillings that alternate between floral ornaments made with cloth stitches and whole stitches. The lace is about 2.5 cm wide.

20.2.3. Keminmaa

In Keminmaa only one burial including bobbin lace has been photographed in detail. Adequate photographs to study the lace have been taken from Coffin 10, which belongs to an infant ca. 3–6 months of age (Lipkin 2021a). The type of bobbinet tulle in the coffin was manufactured beginning in 1809 (Marks 1956: 569). The infant was clothed in light blue silk fabric. These kinds of fabrics were made in Sweden around the mid-19th century (Ciszuk 2012: 40–51). The infant's pillowcase is decorated with lace (Figure 9) that has the same pattern as one sold by Johanna Lundström in 1916 in Rauma with the name of *Fiiniaukko – Fine eye* (Honka-Hallila 2012: 62–63, KM A8605). The cuffs and neckline are decorated with similar, but a little more complicated lace (Figure 9). Typical of the lace made in 19th-century Finland, gimps are used to encircle the motifs. The infant wears a cap made from embroidered tulle. On the forehead the seam is covered with two



Figure 11. The lace encircling a pillowcase in Coffin 10 at Keminmaa has a pattern called *Fiiniaukko – Fine eye* that was sold in Rauma in 1916 (above). Gimps were used to encircle the motif in the lace used to decorate the cuffs (left below). A lace attached to tulle decorates the cap (right below). (Photograph: S. Lipkin)

different types of silk tape. Tulle with lace on the edge is tucked below the tapes. The appearance of the cap's lace is very light, but the quality of the photographs is too poor to say anything more than that the edges seem to have picots (Figure 11).

20.3. Lace: illegal burial accessories?

In 17th-century Europe, a demand existed for expensive and elaborate as well as cheap and simple lace (Levey 2003: 589). The bobbin lace found in the Northern Ostrobothnian burials includes both simple and elaborate examples. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the level of the skill of the lace-maker based on the selected pattern. Throughout Europe, the most elaborate and complex lace was made by professionals in workshops, but simple linen bobbin lace could be made by less-skilled makers who could work in charity schools, almshouses, or convents, or by well-to-do housewives, or even by children (Levey 2003: 588–588).

The lace with silver-coated silk threads from Hailuoto is probably one of the earliest pieces in this collection (Figure 2). During the 17th century, metal lace was initially made in Venice and Milan, but it was also made in most capital cities of Europe (Levey 2003: 590). Such lace was elaborate and valuable. Similar lace has been found in the 17th-century burials of nobles and traders in Turku Cathedral (these funerary textiles are stored in the cathedral, and I have access to the catalogues).

The pattern in the broad silk lace from Hailuoto (Figure 3) resembles the patterns in Flemish linen lace (early 18th century) which have no continuity in design. The patterns of this lace were complex and spring from those of contemporary French woven silks (Levey 2003: Figure 14.8, 595). It is impossible to know if this lace was brought to the country before the 1720 sumptuary law that prohibited wide lace (Modée 1746: 926).

From the mid-17th century onwards, coloured silk bobbin lace was produced in considerable amounts, and this lace was usually black (Levey 2003: 593). The silk lace from Hailuoto is undyed, and that from Burial 118 (Figure 4) could be an example of the fashionable 18th-century simple *blonde* lace made from unbleached silk thread. Paris was an important production centre for this lace, which usually had a zig-zag pattern (Levey 2003: 593). *Blondes* were prohibited in the 1766 sumptuary law (SWE: *Blonder*). The lace was put into the burial before that, but the width of the lace (ca. 5 cm) suggests that it was too wide and as such one of the forbidden types of lace. (Modée 1774: 7114, 7594)

Both the silk material of the lace pieces in Hailuoto and their elaborate design suggest that they were import products from Europe. Throughout its history, Hailuoto has been a remote place where most of the inhabitants were fishers and farmers. In Hailuoto, excluding priests and their families, most of the individuals buried below the church floor were ordinary people. Nevertheless, some of these individuals were buried wearing clothing assembled from silk fabrics and the accessories in the burials included elaborate silk bands, stockings, and lace. One possible option for the unexpected use of precious materials for burials is the fact that Hailuoto was situated along the marine routes to Oulu, and even though it was forbidden to rob shipwrecks, this may have happened. In addition, it is also possible that some people from Hailuoto belonged to sea rescue troops, who were allowed to keep what they found in the ships if the owner of the cargo was not interested in paying for the rescue. This would have been the case when the value of the cargo was less than the expenses of the rescue troops (Tikka 2014: 20). Valuable textiles were worth saving and those could have been used to express identities in burial, too.

Similarly to in Hailuoto, in Haukipudas the use of lace was also not in accordance with the sumptuary laws. The lace presented here was used to decorate children's funerary clothes. Much of it

was attached to the fabrics with pins and a few pieces were sewn. In general, along with other funerary fabrics, the lace was likely chosen for the burials from a selection of old clothes or other household textiles. The 1731 sumptuary law guides to wrap the dead in a linen shirt and to use an old sheet (Modée 1746: 928). As shirts were used both under daily clothes and while sleeping, this enactment corresponds well together with an idea of lining the coffin as a bed where the deceased could sleep while waiting for the Resurrection (Lipkin et al. 2021a). The lace could have been collected for the burial purpose and put into storage to wait for reuse for burial. It is likely that the lace found in the burials was not made particularly for the burial but was a few years or even centuries old when it was used to embellish the funerary attire. In fact, the 1731 sumptuary law explicitly forbids buying new or using valuable fabric for burial and orders using old ordinary and available fabric. The coffin needed to be sealed after dressing the deceased and the use of “unnecessary adornment such as wigs, laces or such” was forbidden (Modée 1746: 928):

“Wid dödsfall och Begräfningar förordnes [...] 2:o bör, wid lika wite, til den dödes swepning ei annat brukas, än et ordinairt lintyg, och et sådant brukat lakan, som i huset kan finnas, utan at därtil köpes och användes något nytt, eller i huset befinteligt dybart: icke heller må någon onödig prydnad, såsom Peruquer, Spezar eller dylikt, på liken fåttjas, utan straxt efter swepningen låcket tilslutas.”¹

The law was renewed in 1766 (Modée 1774: 7146). Even though the lace from Haukipudas seems to be narrow enough not to have been illegal, it seems that its use for funerary attire was forbidden at the time of burial.

20.4. Traditional lace patterns used for a long time

The lace in Hailuoto dates to the 17th and early 18th century and represents European lace-making traditions and fashions. This lace is different in style from that from Haukipudas. Most likely it represented trade products from Europe, but the burials in Haukipudas are also younger, from the 1750s and 1760s, which may explain the shift in style. It is likely that this lace was made during the early 18th century, or the latest the mid-1700s. This lace exhibits the style that later, during the 19th century, became prevalent in Finland.

The lace in the burial from Keminmaa exhibits typical 19th-century lace made in Finland. From 1809 onwards, Finland was the Grand Duchy of Finland in Russia, but evidently cultural traditions such as clothing and funerary attire did not change overnight. During the 19th century, lace was designed by skilful Finnish lace-makers and lace was displayed and awarded prizes in exhibitions (Honka-Hallila 2012). Many of this lace uses gimps similarly to the lace in the newborn's burial. Only one of them – *Fiiniaukko* in the pillowcase – could be identified based on the available literature. As the burial is dated around the mid-1850s, this example testifies that many lace patterns remained in use for decades, if not centuries; in this case, by 1916, the pattern had already been in production for at least 70 years. Oral tradition also suggests that some lace patterns were used for a long time; Aino Linnove (1947: 83) mentions that in 1932 old women living in Dalarna, in Sweden, still knew how to make the 300-year-old lace garter that was originally made to hold the stockings of King Gustaf II Adolf.

¹ In case of death and burial it is ordered [...] 2. should, with the same fine, for burial clothing anything else to be used than ordinary linen cloth and a used sheet that can be found in the house, thereto without buying and using something new, nor valuable that exists in the house: nor may unnecessary adornment such as wigs, laces, or similar, to put on the body, but right after wrapping the lid should be sealed.

20.5. Conclusions

Even though this chapter studies only eleven pieces of lace from Northern Ostrobothnia, the collection suggests that beautiful and precious lace was transported and used in this rather distant region of Europe at least from the 17th century onwards. As the lace was found in children's burials, it testifies to the attitudes regarding the burial of a dead child. It seems to have been important to provide them with a beautiful burial that was crafted from old fabrics. Some of the lace was too elaborate and wide to have been legal in accordance with the sumptuary laws. During most of the 18th century, it was forbidden to put any lace in burials. It seems that many people living in the region did not care to follow the laws. It is also possible that exceptions were overlooked in children's burials. The communities controlled law and order by themselves and the laws legislated in distant Stockholm were probably not always regarded as very useful. Selling lace in local stores would also suggest rather nonchalant attitudes regarding the law.

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