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I just found out that I am related to Saint Bridget of Sweden (1303–1373)

How I connected genealogically with my favorite 14th-century historical person.

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Gunnar Östberg



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The main topics of this story are genealogy, ancestry, the ancestors and descendants of Saint Bridget and Birger Jarl, the history of Swedish noble families, and the history of Viking kings.

A brief introduction

A few years ago, my wife and I visited the Abbey and the Abbey Church in Vadstena, Sweden, and took a guided tour.



Vadstena klosterkyrka (abbey church), inaugurated 1430.

I got hooked by the story of Saint Bridget (1303–1373) and her power in business and politics. Later, after some research, I wrote a short piece on Medium based on this. Then, I had no idea I could be related to Saint Bridget myself. However, yesterday, I discovered that I am.

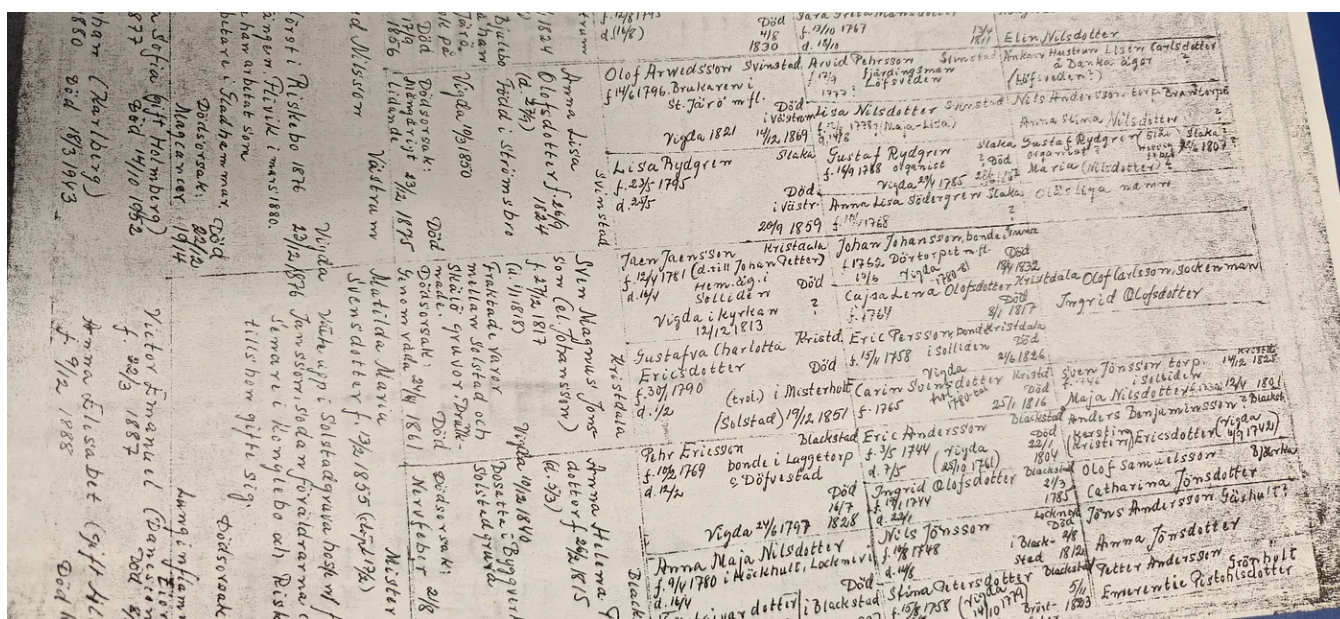
In this story, I describe how I discovered my genealogical connection to the most famous and influential female Swedish person of the 14th century, Saint Bridget (1303–1373). I'll try to give you the red line through the centuries.



Starting my discovery journey.

Ancestry research

The natural thing for me to do first was to start with my own family, working backwards in history as far as one can go. I have old relatives (now deceased) who had already done a tremendous job researching original genealogical materials, such as birth and death records, baptism records, and others, in churches and genealogical archives. I obtained all these handwritten lists and descriptions from my mother a long time ago, and I have typed in all the names and main connections on Geni.com, a well-established website that allows users to build a vast family tree without a monthly fee. I use it to share everything about my ancestors with my family, and to keep track of cousins and second cousins.

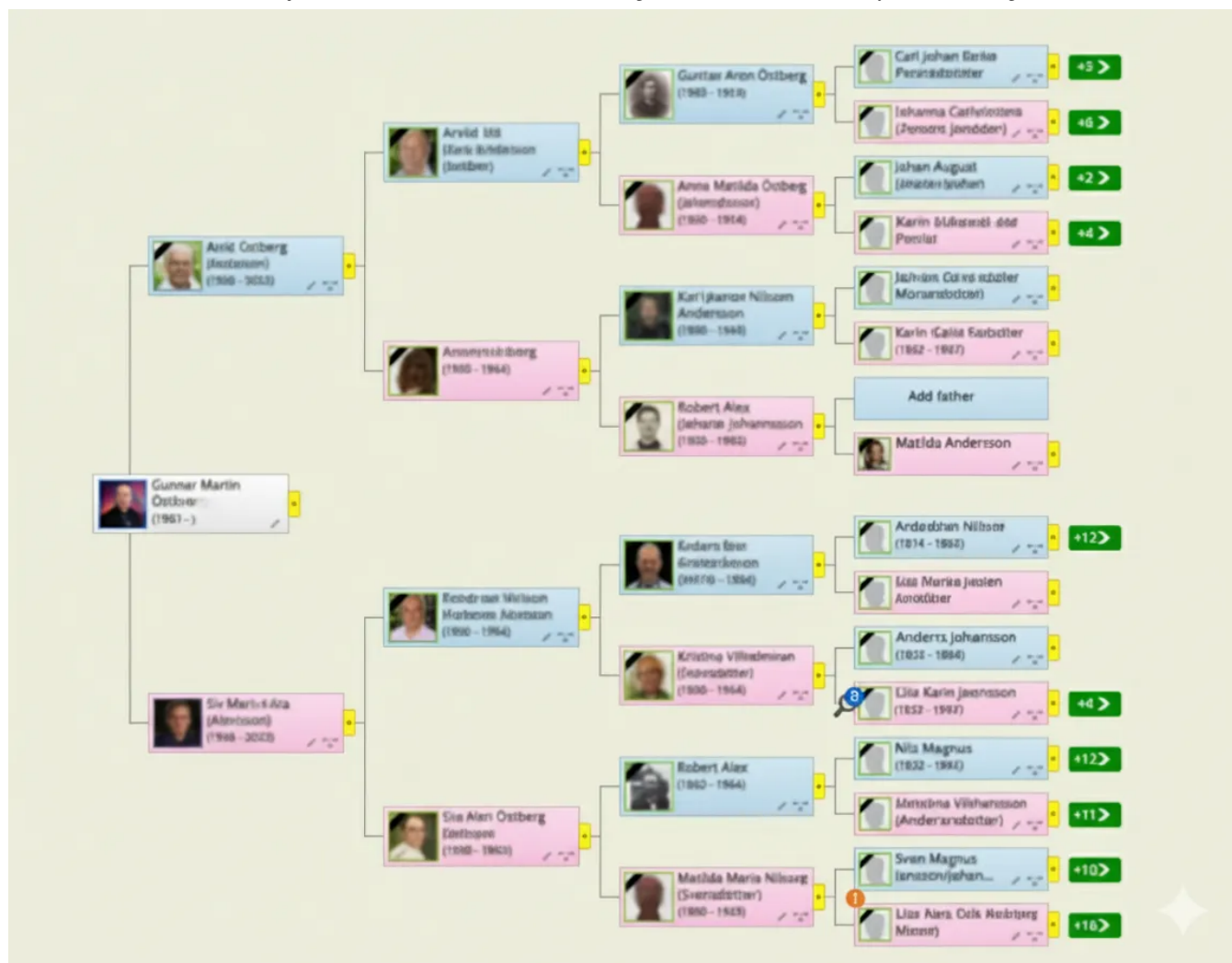


My mom's aunt's genealogy research.

My boring ancestors (present time — ~1700)

When I manually entered the data of the old relatives, nothing inspiring emerged in my family tree. In my tree, which contains several hundred people, there are only miserable paupers from the primeval forests of Småland and Östergötland (old provinces in Sweden), who all seem to have lived in simple huts, cottages, and cabins. No fancy people. They were all farm workers or small farmers and had the same names (no multiculturalism).

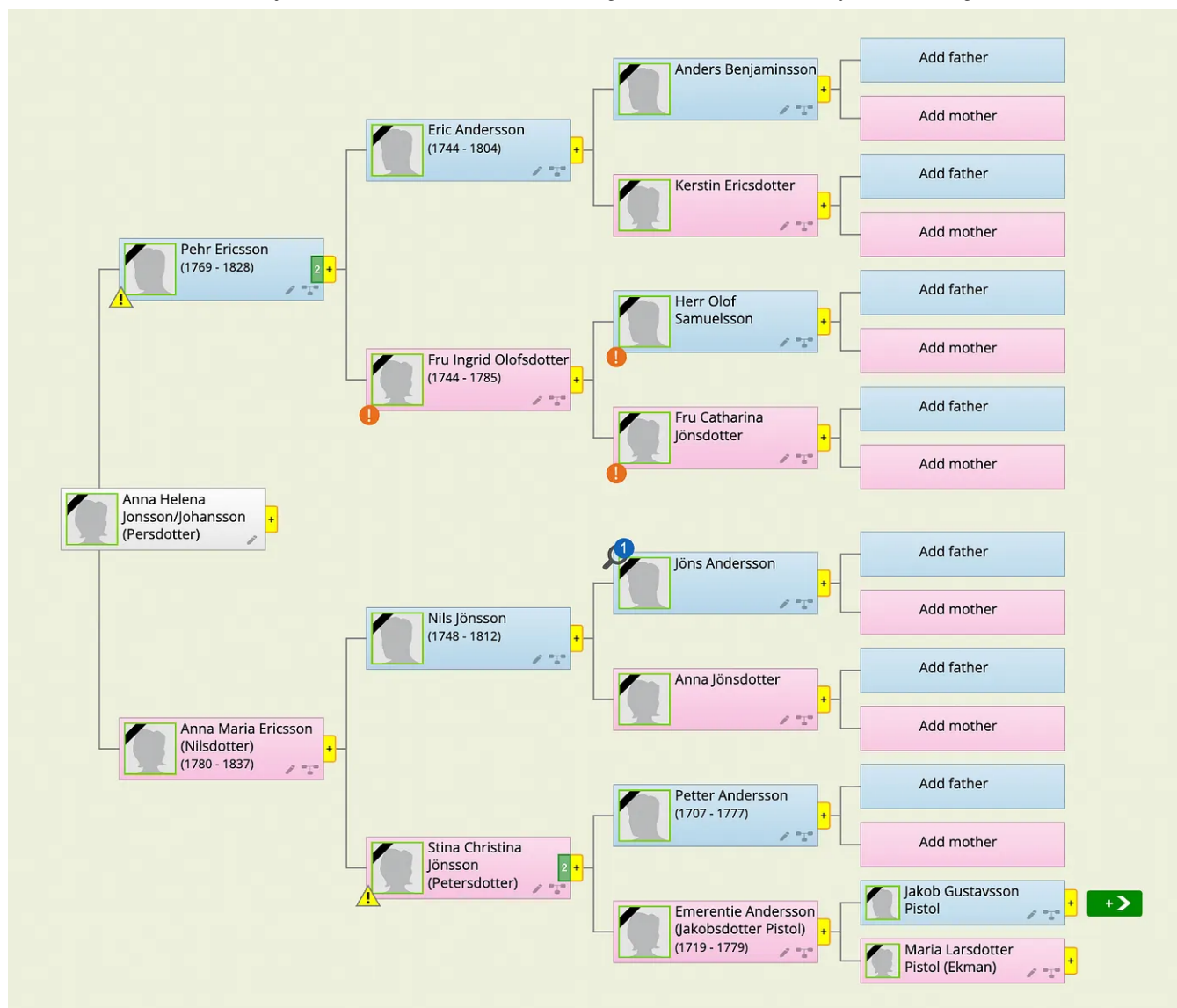
At best, I went back as far as the 17th century. My friends have bragged that they are related to the famous Swedish king Gustav Vasa (1496–1560) and that they were members of such family associations. But I didn't have any fun at all — just insignificant and forgotten poor people.



My tree (half fake; synthesized for illustration purposes).

The emergence of a portal (~1700 — ~1600)

However, when I follow my mother's mother backwards, her mother's mother's mother's mother's mother was born Emerentie Jakobsdotter Pistol. As you can see in the picture below, bottom right, there is a green arrow, which indicates that Geni has automatically linked an existing branch to my entry for Emerentie, who has a clear and entirely specific identity in the Geni model. This means I would be able to trace my ancestry back further through the generations and possibly find some exciting things. Perhaps I will discover that I am descended directly from a Viking king. That would be cool. Let's move on.

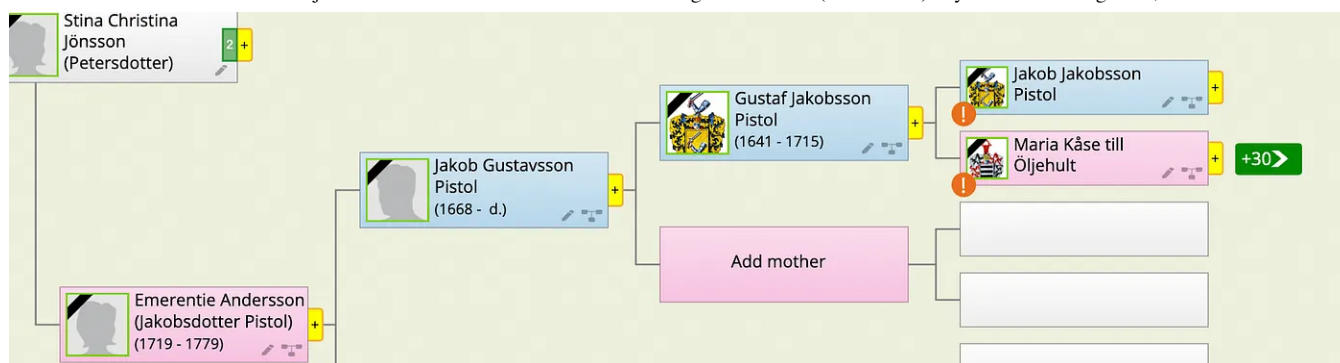


Emerentie is my fifth great-grandmother (7 generations of mothers before me). Emerentie had eight children, resulting in numerous descendants, and many people are researching her family tree, checking sources, and correcting errors.

Emerentie happened to be the daughter of a military man whose great-grandfather was knighted with the name Pistol. As we see in the picture below, Emerentie is the great-granddaughter of Maria Kåse of Ölkehult and Jakob Jakobsson Pistol.

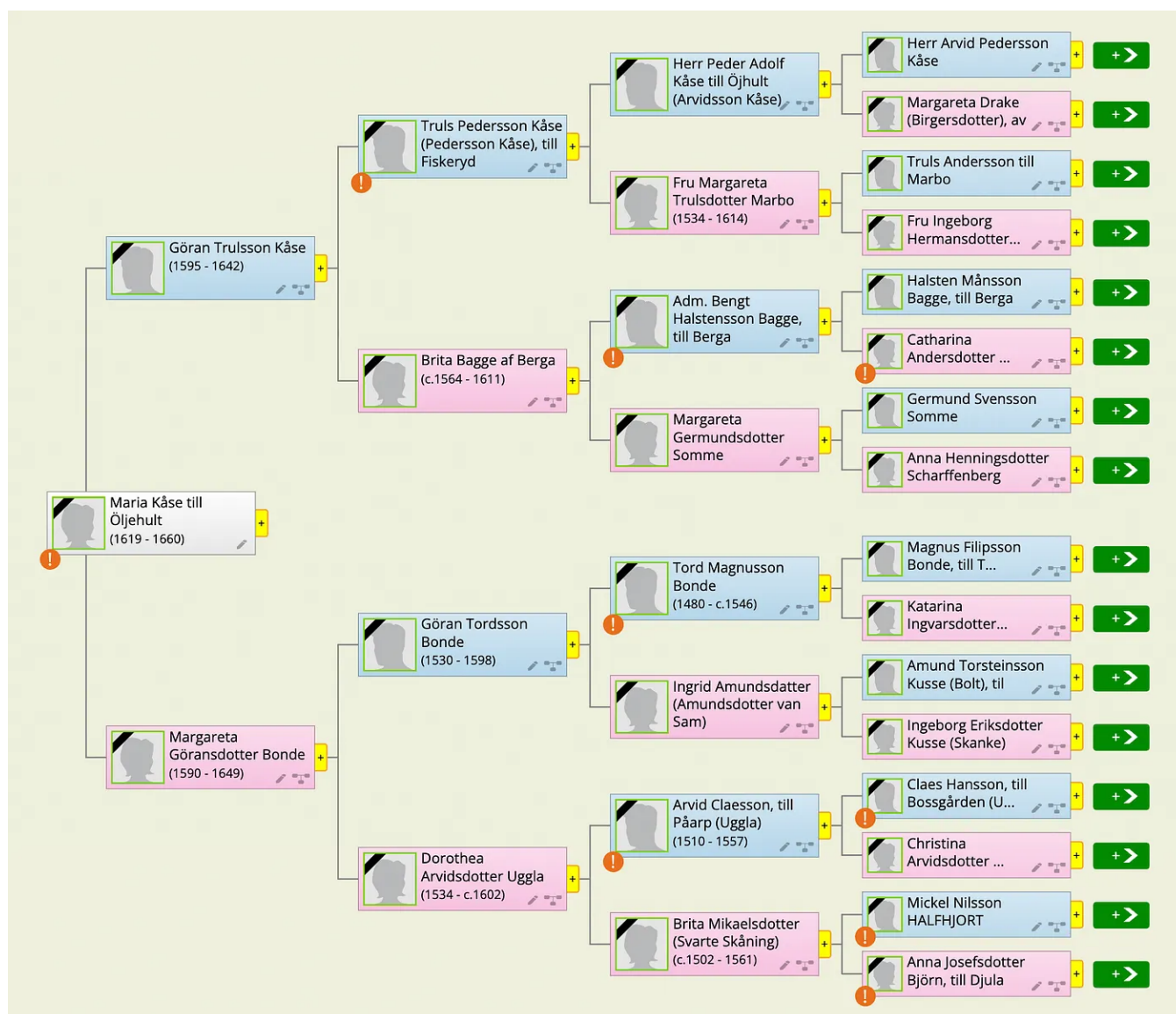
This is the portal!

This is the gateway to the noble world, where I can find tons of reliable genealogical data. Nobility is very well researched. Maria Kåse of Ölkehult was nobility by birth, and she married a gunman who was knighted. Three or four generations later, their offspring were paupers.



Let's follow the green arrow. Have you ever entered a portal to a new world before?

Entering the portal (~1600 — ~1400)



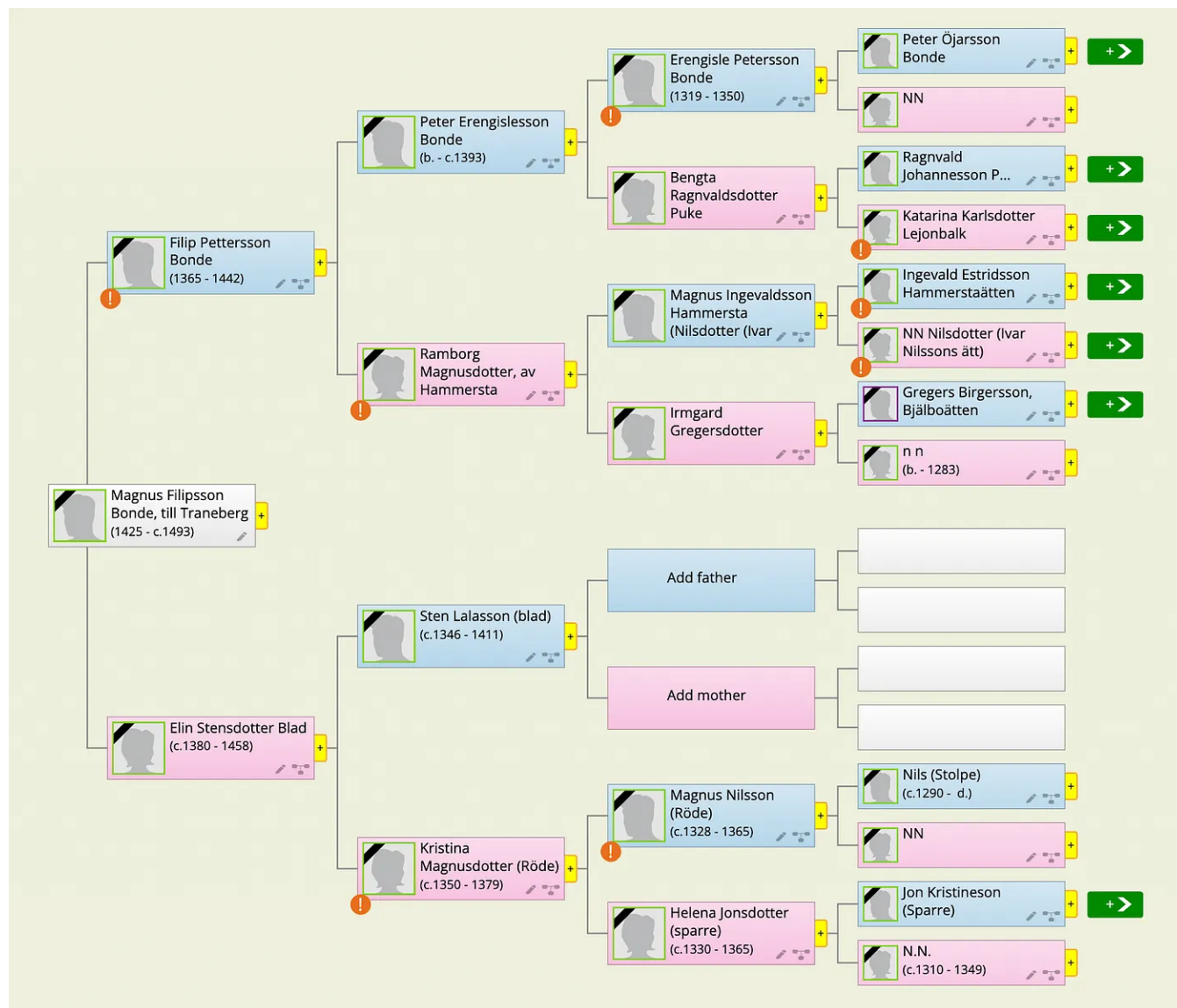
After entering the portal to the noble world. Now find Magnus Filipsson Bonde.

The world of nobility and kings

From Bonde to Bjälbo (~1400 — ~1200)

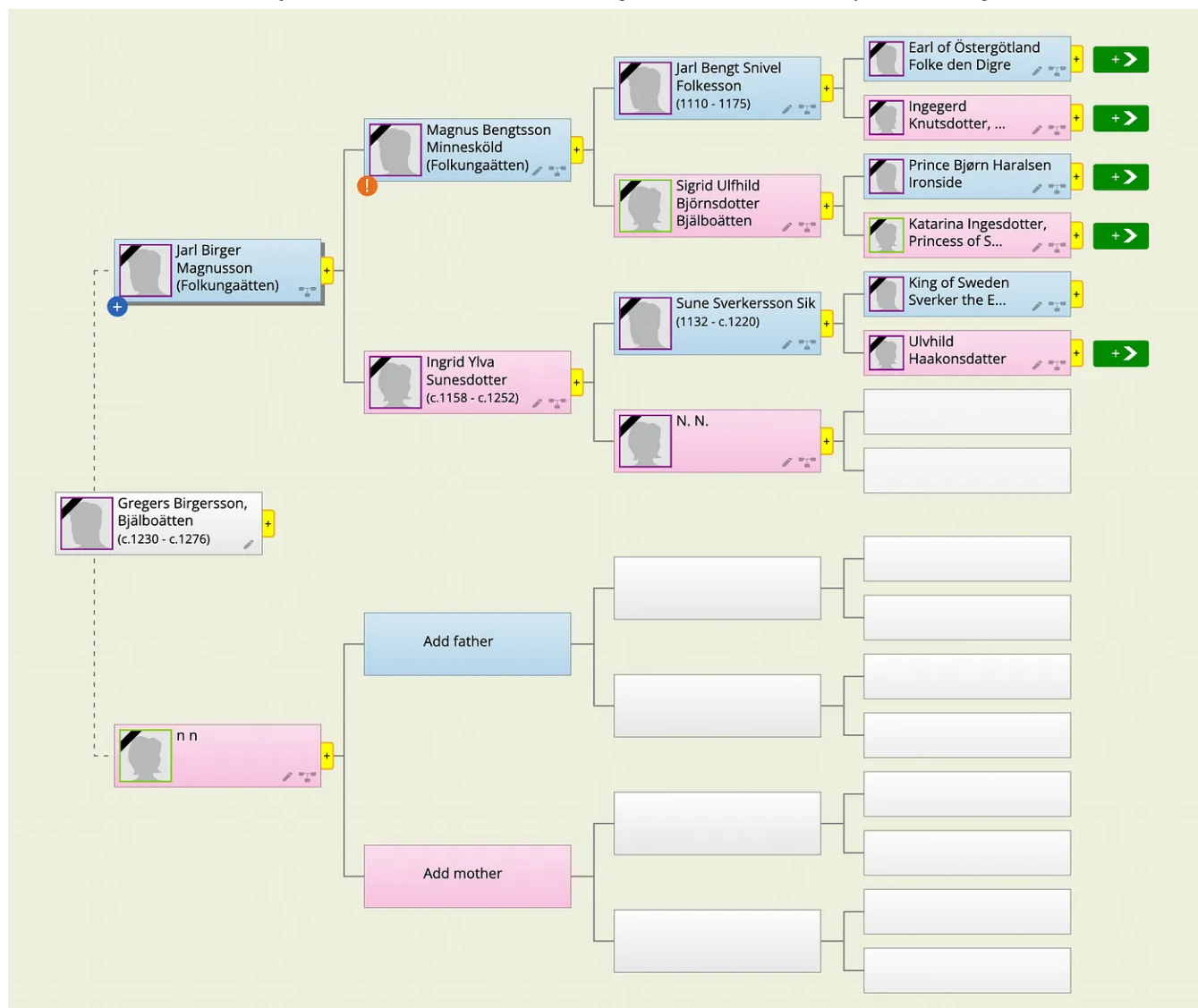
Bonde is a well-known Swedish noble family. I count seven generations of Bonde. In the picture below, with two ladies in the middle, I notice Gregers Birgersson

(Bjälboätten), 1230–1276, as one of my direct ancestors. This is interesting, as the Bjälbo family, or dynasty, was once a ruling house in most of present-day Sweden, particularly in the geographical areas from which all my relatives originate.



From House of Bonde to House of Bjälbo.

As I move on backwards in time, it really starts to become interesting.

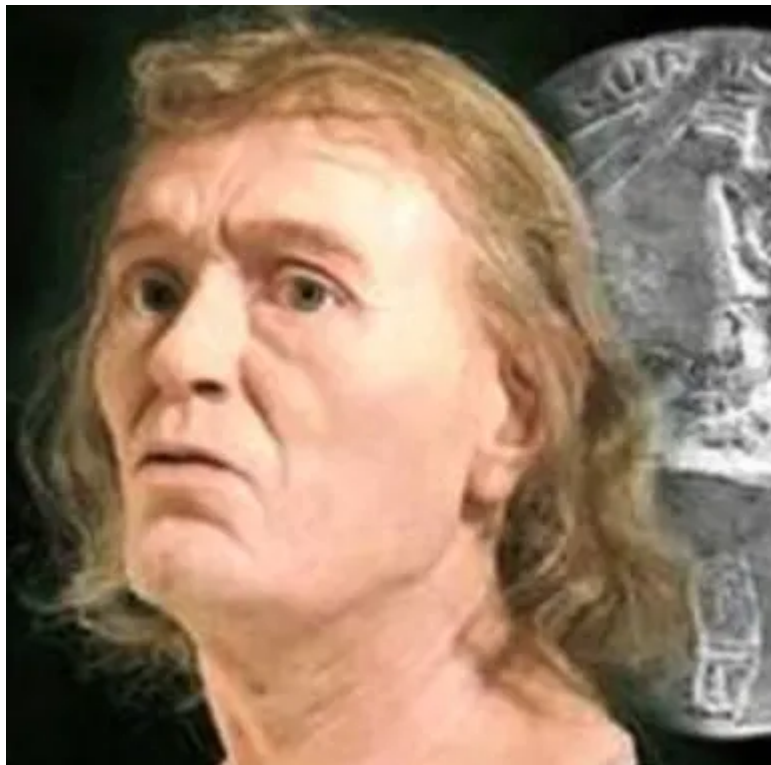


Birger Jarl (top left).

Birger Jarl

Gregers Birgersson's biological father was Birger Magnusson (1209–1266), also known as Birger Jarl, due to his significant influence as a powerful jarl of Sweden. Jarl was, until then, the title given to the person who acted as the king's right-hand man, often as guardian and de facto leader of the kingdom, especially when the king was a minor or absent.

Birger Jarl, in fact, ruled Sweden alongside his young son, King Valdemar, during a period of conflict between the Sverker and Erik dynasties, from 1248 until he died in 1266. Later, in 1275, his other son, Magnus, also known as Magnus Ladulås, became King of Sweden as well.



Birger Jarl. Reconstruction based on remains.

Birger Jarl is known for founding Stockholm around 1252 and for promoting trade and stronger laws in the kingdom, for example, by introducing peace laws that protected the sanctity of the home, the church, the court, and women.

Birger Jarl was a significant historical figure in Sweden, centralizing royal power. According to the presented Geni tree, he was my direct ancestor, 18 generations removed from me.

What about the Viking kings?

Actually, when I researched my Geni tree backwards, I found many Viking kings, all of whom are my ancestors.



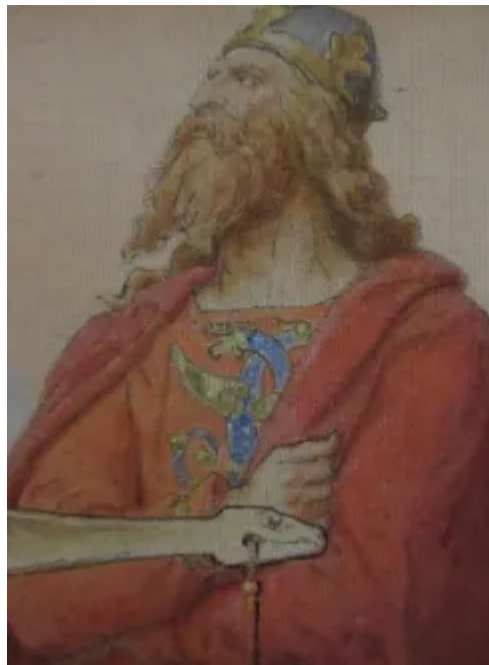
- Canute IV “The Holy”, King of Denmark (b.1042/r.1080 — d.1086). Generation 25 from me.
- Eric I “The Good”, King of Denmark (b.1056/r.1095 — d.1103). Generation 26 from me.
- Sweyn II Estridsson, King of Denmark (b.1019/r.1047 — d.1076). Generation 27 from me.
- Magnus “Barefoot” Olavsson, King of Norway (b.1073/r.1093 — d.1103). Generation 26 from me.



- Haraldur III “Harðráði” Sigurðarson, King of Norway (b.1015/r.1046 — d.1066). Generation 27 from me.

Harald Harðráði was a true Viking king who, before becoming king of Norway, had spent approximately 15 years in exile, serving as a military officer in Kiev Rus and in the Varangian Guard of the Byzantine Empire. He was defeated at the Battle of Stamford Bridge by the King of England in 1066.

- Sweyn I “Forkbeard” Haraldsson, King of Denmark, Norway, and England (b.963/r.986 — d.1014). Generation 28 from me.



- Harald “Bluetooth” Gormsson (Jelling), King of Denmark (b.935/r.964 — d.986). Generation 29 from me.
- Gorm “The Old”, King of Denmark (b.890/r.936 — d.964). Generation 30 from me.
- Olaf “The Powerful” Björnsson, King of Svealand, Sweden (b.899 — d.971). Generation 30 from me.



- Ragnar “Lodbrok” Sigurdsson, King of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway (b.767–d.845). Generation 33 from me.
- Eymund Hringsson, King of Holmgård (Novgorod) (b.430 — d.455). Generation 41 from me.

What is fun with Eymund is that he ruled from the very spot where Putin's favorite dacha now stands, on Lake Valdai, a few miles east-southeast of Novgorod. My ancestor ruled there first, 1,570 years ago — Putin is far behind.

How many Viking kings do you have in your ancestry?

One must understand that from the Viking era, there are no reliable sources or verifiable facts; the Geni tree is carefully composed based on stories, sagas, and songs written down hundreds of years after these guys died. The last kings on my list may not even have existed; they are more like mythical legends. So, this is just a fun bonus chapter.

Recap and restart

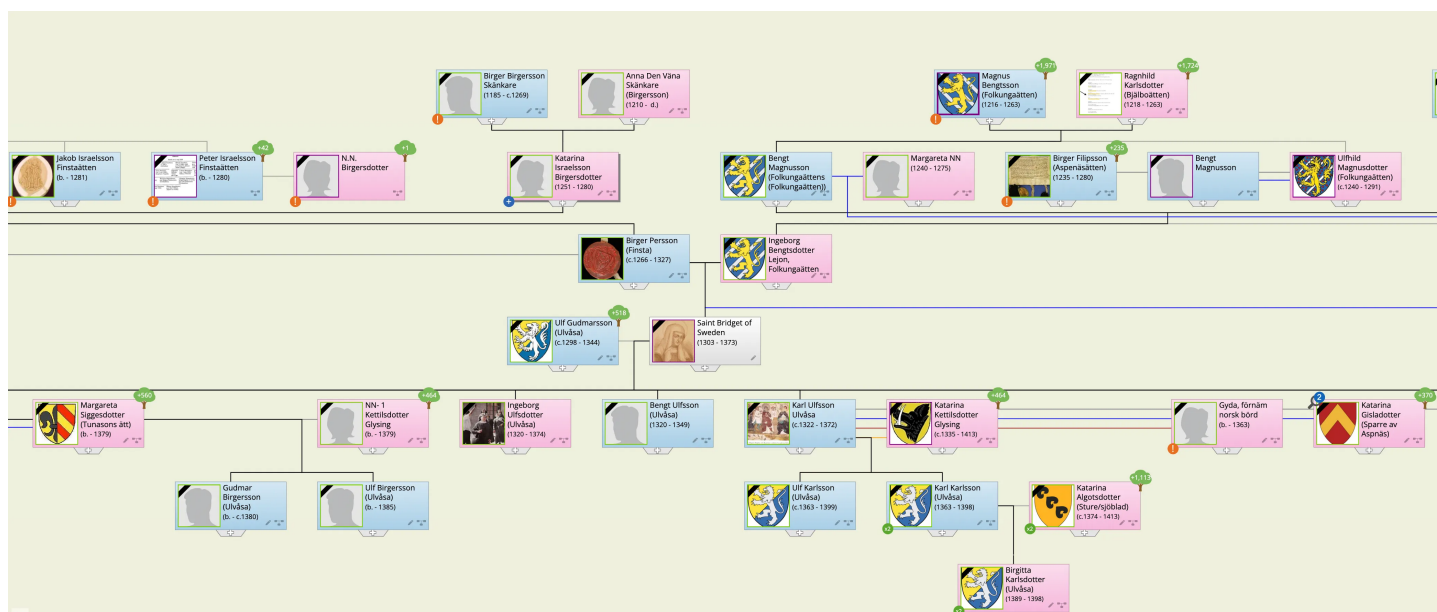
Now wait! I have already reached the mid-1200s, and apart from that, it led me astray for several hundred years on uncertain ground.

Saint Bridget lived in the mid-1300s. No sign of her, yet.

Up to now in this story, I have worked reliably backward in time from my present-day self to medieval times. Let's now dive into Saint Bridget, and after that, how I made the discovery and put the puzzle together.

Saint Bridget and her family

So, we now start at the other end, with Saint Bridget. Her name was Birgitta Birgersdotter, and in Sweden, she is known as Den Heliga Birgitta (The Holy Birgitta, also referred to as Saint Bridget in English).



Saint Bridget of Sweden in the center.

Saint Bridget wasn't poor.

Birgitta Birgersdotter was born in a rich, noble, and influential family. Each of the family men owned several farms, lands, and estates. However, home buildings were small and simple, with the farm buildings nearby.

Birgitta Birgersdotter was born in 1303 at Finsta Farm in Uppland as the second daughter in her father's second marriage.

Her father was Birger Persson, the first lawman of Uppland, and her mother was Ingeborg Bengtsdotter, a close relative of King Magnus Eriksson of the House of Bjälbo.

Upbringing at Aspenäs

When her mother died in 1314, Birgitta was 11 years old, and she was taken in by her aunt, Katarina Bengtsdotter, along with her three-year-old sister, Katarina Birgersdotter.

Katarina Bengtsdotter was married to Knut Jonsson, and they lived at the Aspenäs Farm by Lake Sommen in Ydre parish. Knut Jonsson was himself an influential figure, serving as King Birger Magnusson's steward (regent and also roughly equivalent to a minister of justice).

It was during the years at Aspenäs that Birgitta had her first revelations.

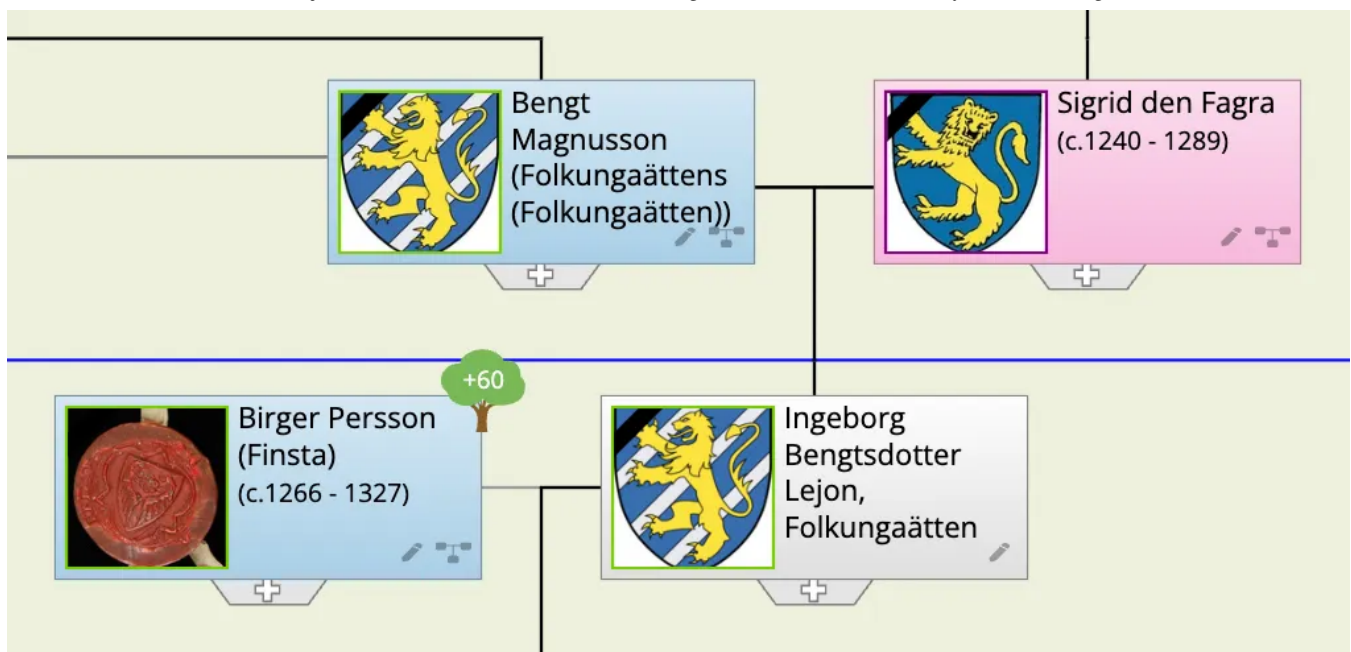
“Katarina (Bengtsdotter) was a strict and authoritative woman, who did not seem to have spared the rod in her upbringing.”

Birgitta was married off at the age of 13

In 1316, Birgitta was married to Ulf Gudmarsson from Loholm, who later became the lawman in the Närke province. They settled on Ulf's farm, Ulvåsa, where Birgitta bore her husband no fewer than eight children.

My interest in Katarina@Aspenäs

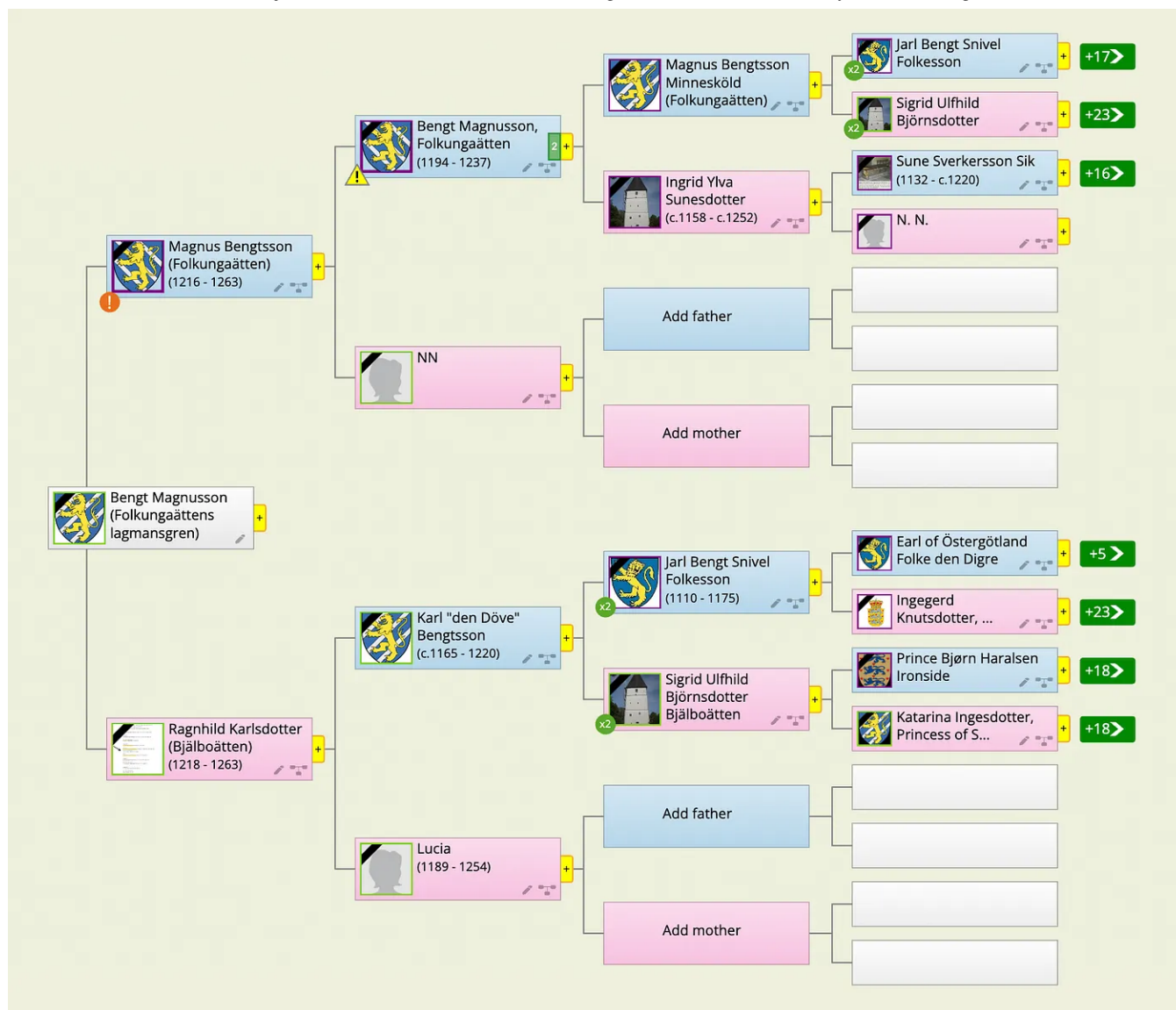
Since I have several living farming relatives only miles from Aspenäs (but on my father's side), I became interested in this strict aunt of Saint Bridget, Katarina Bengtsdotter, so I looked her up. The parents of Katarina and Ingeborg were Bengt Magnusson and Sigrid the Fair.



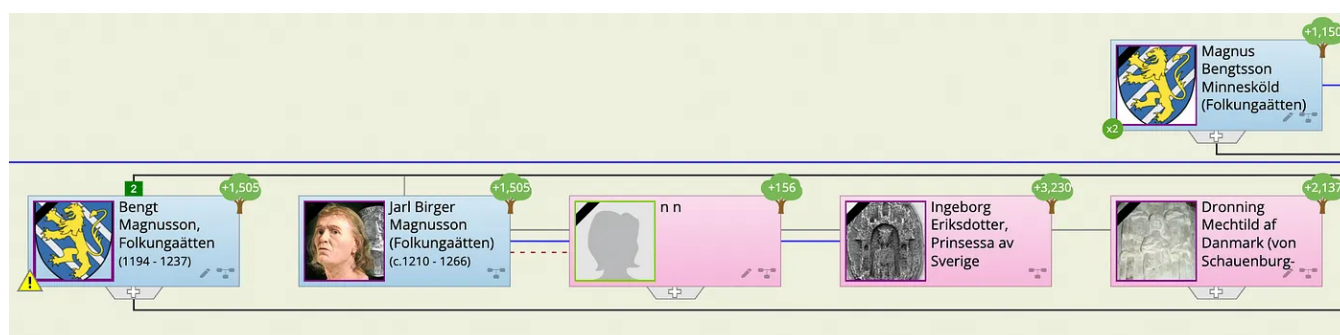
Saint Bridget's mother, Ingeborg, and Sigrid, her beautiful grandmother.

Connection time

Bengt Magnusson was the lawman (lawspeaker, roughly equivalent to a chief judge) of the province of Östergötland.



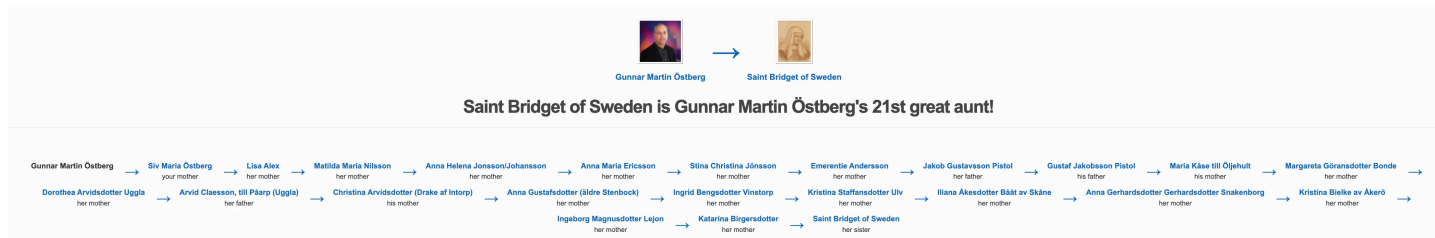
Look here — his father's uncle was Birger Jarl!



The grandfather of Saint Bridget's father was brother to Birger Jarl, my ancestor.

One further research step

Now that I know that there exists a relationship (a “bloodline”) between Saint Bridget and me, I can optimize it. In such a long chain of connections, there are often many ways to be connected. To do this, I utilize a feature of the Geni.com program, and voilà.

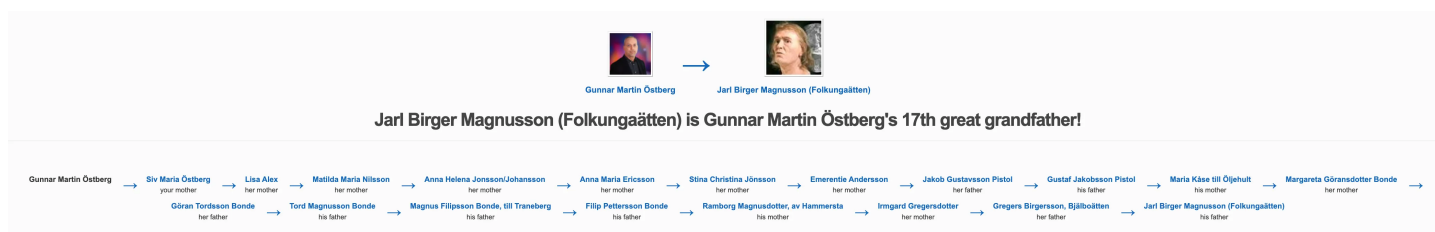


Saint Bridget is my 21st great-aunt.

Katarina Birgersdotter, Birgitta's older sister, is my direct ancestor.

Here, Geni found a mostly female path to Saint Bridget of Sweden. There are only three men on this long chain of ancestors.

I also optimized my path to Birger Jarl.



Birger Jarl is my 17th great-grandfather.

Summary and Conclusion

Findings

I have discovered and shown a trustworthy genealogical relationship with my favorite 14th-century historical figure, Birgitta Birgersdotter, also known as Saint Bridget, although she isn't my direct ancestor. Instead, her sister, Katarina Birgersdotter, is, so Birgitta is my 21st great-aunt.

I also discovered that Birger Jarl is my direct ancestor, 18 generations removed, and noted that he is the uncle of Saint Bridget's grandfather.

When I started genealogy research, I couldn't have dreamed of this result.

I always thought that all my ancestors, dating back to the Iron Age, were paupers. To find the portal was the key.

About the Geni tree

Geni.com features a wiki-like structure, where multiple users contribute data and correct one another, providing relatively reliable genealogical connections,

depending on the quality of the sources.

For historical people from medieval times onwards, there are reasonably reliable sources (original legal historical documents), and the data quality is generally reasonable. Sources are given in the Geni master profiles.

There can, of course, be errors.

Note! I am not affiliated with Geni.com in any way. Geni is just a free tool I use.

What about DNA?

I have conducted a personal DNA analysis, and no evidence has been found to disprove what I have written in this story; in fact, consistency seems probable.

However, since there do not exist any quality public DNA profiles for any of these ancestors, it is impossible to verify biological genetic ancestry.

Both Saint Bridget and Birger Jarl have remains that have been subjected to DNA analysis. Still, the quality of the data was not sufficient for comparative tests, and the raw data have not, to my knowledge, been published or given to any commercial DNA analysis company.

If quality public DNA profiles of these individuals can be established in the future, it would be a great feature.

Do you know who your most surprising ancestor is?

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