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SWEDISH CHURCH ART
FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF
THE REFORMATION IN 1527 UNTIL
THE SYNOD IN UPPSALA 1593

INTRODUCTION

The 16th century in Swedish art history is traditionally called the Renaissance period of Sweden, sometimes also the Vasa-Renaissance, but as a matter of fact one can hardly speak of a Renaissance for the visual arts in Sweden in that time, rather as a period of decline; the reason was Gustav Vasa's introduction of the Reformation at the Riksdag in Västerås in 1527 which brought with it an abrupt cessation of almost all activities in the area of art in the realm, especially in the area of sacral art which comprised most if not to say all of the preceding period's art-production.

The story of how Gustav Vasa became King in 1523 is well known and does not need to be retold here. During the first four years of his reign the life of the Church continued relatively undisturbed, although friction with the Pope over the latter's interference in Swedish ecclesiastical affairs had led to the discontinuance of any official connection between Sweden and the papacy already in 1523. The decisions taken at the Riksdag in Västerås signified a definite change for the worse for the Church. The monarch was now given the right to confiscate property donated to the Church, including the suppression of monasteries.¹

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1 For the part of Stockholm, Gustav Vasa decided that most of the churches within and around "the Town between the Bridges" (today the Old Town of Stockholm) would be pulled down, this because the Danes had used the churches in their defence of Stockholm against Gustav Vasa's army.

All ecclesiastical appointments would hereafter require Royal approval. Furthermore, the clergy were placed under the civil law and the “pure Word of God” was to be preached in the churches and taught in the schools. In practice, this was an official sanction of Lutheran ideas.

A heavy blow to the country’s parish churches was the radical reduction of the economic means for church maintenance. Only the priest’s part of the tithes was left untouched, all the rest was changed into a tax to the State, something which in practice meant that all funds for church maintenance were withdrawn.²

Sweden’s final break with Rome came in 1536 when the Canon law was abolished. It was however not until the meeting of the “Succession Parliament” at Västerås in 1544 that the reforms began to be more agreed upon by the four Estates. The biggest changes were made in the ritual practice, including the elimination of holy water, incense, and the adoration of saints. Also requiem masses, pilgrimages and many holy days were eliminated.³

Until the 1520s the Church had been the principal patron of the arts. Now – and for several decades to come – almost no more commissions were coming from that end. The reasons for this were two-fold. First, the above-mentioned economic situation; second, the need for sacral art was filled for a long time ahead. Especially in the last decades of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th, lots of new objects had been donated to the churches with the result that many churches in Sweden at the time of the Reformation were equipped with a new altarpiece on the high altar.⁴ Due to the increased saints’ cult, the side altars in the churches had at the same time grown in numbers, each with its own altarpiece. A large crucifix may have replaced an old, smaller one in the triumphal arch. – Some of these new altarpieces, sculptures etcetera had been made in a Swedish workshop, most of them however imported from Flanders or from towns in Northern Germany.

This large input of new objects into the churches had been made possible by the stable economic situation in this period, in turn a result of the long peace period during the reign of Sten Sture the Elder (1471-95).

2 Ingun Montgomery, “The Institutionalization of Lutheranism in Sweden and Finland”, *The Scandinavian Reformation*, ed. by Ole Peter Grell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

3 James L. Larson, *Reforming the North 1520-1545. The Kingdoms and Churches of Scandinavia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

4 Inga Lena Ångström, *Altartavlor i Sverige under renässans och barock: studier i deras ikonografi och stil 1527-1686*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 36 (Stockholm : Almqvist & Wiksell), 31.

Very few churches were built but many were repaired or rebuilt and given star-shaped vaults.⁵ After the repairing or rebuilding, the walls and the vaults were often covered with murals. This was the time when the famous Albertus Pictor from Immenhausen in Germany and his workshop were active, but there were also other workshops busy with the interior decoration of the churches.

As I have shown in my treatise on Post-Reformation altarpieces in Sweden (1992), all, or practically all, the main altars' altarpieces, though filled with images of saints – whose cults were now forbidden – were retained in place long after the Reformation. The side altars with their images of saints gradually disappeared because of lack of use, but we don't know of a single altarpiece that was removed from the main altar in a Swedish church in connection with the Reformation.⁶ This happened much later, in several cases in the 18th century in the period of Neoclassicism, when the medieval altarpiece was replaced by maybe a simple cross or a painting of the Crucifixion. The church's interior was often white-washed at the same time, involving a covering of the old murals with their representations of saints, etcetera. These changes were most often due to a change in taste regarding church architecture in general and only occasionally based on theological reasons.

Why were the altarpieces not removed – or destroyed – and the murals not painted over earlier? The main reason is the tolerance, which the Swedish Reformation in general showed towards the old cult objects and images. A single case of iconoclasm occurred in 1526, in Stockholm, but this was soon struck down by Gustav Vasa and the leader sent out of the country, and when visitations were held in the 1540s in the parishes of Skara, Linköping and Växjö (which still had Catholic bishops), only such objects necessary for the Catholic cult – monstrances, superfluous cups and patens – were taken.⁷ In some cases the metal ornaments that decorated the sculptures of saints were removed, but the saints themselves remained in place. This lenient attitude towards the old cult images remained for a long time. Only in the first official Church Ordinance, from 1571, is there something stated about them, namely that images of

5 Some churches were so radically rebuilt that in practice they became “new” and were re-inaugurated. To celebrate this they could be equipped with a new altarpiece, a new baptismal font etc. See: Inga Lena Ångström Grandien, “Dalarnas medeltida dopfuntar”, *Kalejdoskop, Dalarnas hembygdsbok*, 83 (2013), 22-39.

6 Ångström, *Altartavlor i Sverige under renässans och barock*, 33.

7 *Ibidem*.

saints subjected to direct worship should be removed from the walls.⁸ Of the images of saints that the altarpieces were full of, nothing was said.

To the reformers' tolerant attitude toward the images of the saints must also be added a large amount of popular piety. The teachings of Luther and his followers were never wished for or wanted by many levels of society in 16th century Sweden. Many remained Roman Catholic in mind and spirit and worship of saints and the Mary cult continued quietly long after the introduction of the Reformation, not as an underground alternative to the official Lutheran faith, but rather as a supplement to the authorized faith.⁹

MURAL PAINTING IN GUSTAV VASA'S TIME

As told above no more orders were coming from the Church which meant that most of the sculptors, painters, glaziers, embroiderers, et-cetera that had produced goods for the churches and for the abbeys, suddenly stood without employ. The role as patron of the arts was taken over by the Royalty, but on a much lesser scale, since Gustav Vasa himself had no real interest in art and if he eventually wanted to buy some paintings, he sent for them from abroad.¹⁰ It is telling that of the 11 master painters with a workshop in Stockholm in 1520, only one, a certain Urban Målare, remained in 1540.¹¹ Where had the others gone to? Some might have left the country in search for their fortune elsewhere, others might have found employment at one of the castles that now were being built or rebuilt by Gustav Vasa.

Some painters may also have been involved in the decoration of one or two churches; there was namely one area of religious art in which

8 *Ibidem*, 42.

9 Jens Chr. V. Johansen, "Faith, Superstition and Witchcraft in Reformation Scandinavia", *The Scandinavian Reformation*, ed. by Ole Peter Grell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199.

10 Inga Lena Ångström, "Notices on the Artistic Connections between Sweden and the Baltic Region in the 16th and 17th Centuries", *Kunst und Architektur im Baltikum in der Schwedenzeit. 12 Homburger Gespräche and the 11th Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia, Stockholm, June 13-16, 1991*, ed. by Aleksander Loit and Lars Olof Larsson (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993), 41; cf. Sten Karling, *Baltikum och Sverige* (Lund: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1948), 38.

11 For this, and more examples of this kind, see Jan von Bonsdorff, *Kunstproduktion und Kunstverbreitung im Ostseeraum des Spätmittelalters* (Helsinki: Finnische Altertumsges., 1993), 42-43. For Urban Målare, see Inga Lena Ångström Grandien, "The Reception of the Classical Ideal in Swedish Sixteenth-Century Art and Architecture", *The Problem of [the] Classical Ideal in the Art and Architecture of the Countries around the Baltic Sea*, ed. by Krista Kodres, Piret Lindpere and Eva Närepea (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, 2003), 33-34.

there was some activity around the time of the Reformation; the area of mural painting. We know of around fifteen churches with murals, which for stylistic reasons, details in the figures' clothing and/or other reasons must have been painted in the period between 1510 and 1540.¹²

Whilst a more exact dating is impossible for most of these murals, there is a small handful that can be dated more exactly, amongst them the murals in the churches in Hökhuvud and Valö, both situated in Uppland and in the vicinity of each other. In both Gustav Vasa's coat of arms is/was part of the decoration (over-painted in Hökhuvud)¹³ and in the case of Hökhuvud there is also a year to go by. According to a now vanished inscription noted by both Johan Rhezelius and Johan Peringskiöld on their respective journeys in Uppland (1630s; early 18th century) the church in Hökhuvud was painted in 1534 ("Anno Domini M:D:XXXIII") "in honour of Our Saviour and Virgin Mary in the time of the illustrious Lord Gustav, King of the Swedes and the Goths, whose coat-of-arms is in this church" (translated from the Latin).¹⁴ – Both Peringskiöld and Rhezelius noted the King's coat-of-arms which was painted in the church's middle vault.¹⁵

The interior of Hökhuvud was whitewashed in 1754. When the murals were brought out in 1936, those in the nave were in a very bad condition; only fragments remained of the Passion scenes that once decorated the west wall and those on the east wall were so destroyed they could not be identified at all. The porch's murals were however relatively well kept and their motives identifiable, in the north vaulting cell the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel with Christ as a judge in its midst. In the west cell there is Cain killing Abel and in the south cell, above the exit, the Banishment of Cain.¹⁶ In the east vaulting cell there is the Man of Sorrows, Christ having risen from his grave attended by an angel. Next to him the Arma Christi, the torture tools of Christ, are shown.

12 Mereth Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda. Om efterreformatoriska kyrkmålningar i Sverige cirka 1530-1630* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1983), 41.

13 Gustav Vasa's coat of arms is/was also found in the churches in Forsa and Delsbo in Hälsingland, painted by Märten Gad(d) in the 1530's, and in Stora Skedvi, Dalarna. They will however not be dealt with here.

14 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 41-42.

15 *Ibidem*, 41. See also Anna Nilsén, *Program och funktion i senmedeltida kalkmåleri. Kyrkmålningar i Mälardalskapen och Finland 1400-1534* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1986), 230.

16 In both Valö and Hökhuvud, Cain is depicted in a Jew's hat, a motif we also find in Albertus Pictor's murals. See: Viktoria Munck af Rosenschöld, *Om judar och judendom i medeltida danskt och svenskt kalkmåleri* (Lund: Inst. för arkeologi och antikens historia, ARK 404, Lunds universitet, 2007), 48.

The image of the Man of Sorrow is simultaneously and ingeniously made part of the Mass of St Gregory beneath it on the upper part of the east wall, in which Pope Gregory I (ca. 540-604) is shown saying Mass when a vision of Christ as the Man of Sorrows appears on the altar in front of him, in response to his prayers for a sign to convince a doubter of the doctrine of transubstantiation, that Christ is present in the sacrament. This motive had become popular in the 15th century and is found in several late medieval church murals in Sweden, but this would be the last time it appeared. In the light of Luther's heavy criticism of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the motive had become impossible to depict in a Lutheran church.

Below the Gregory mass but fused with it is the Good and Bad Prayers, in the words of Achim Timmermann "one of the rarest – and one of the most intriguing – pictorial creations of the later Middle-Ages". Paintings with this vanity motive are today known in only circa forty examples, nine of them in Sweden.¹⁷ In most "a pious, poor man and a distracted, rich man, both in attitudes of prayer, face one another on either side of the suffering Christ, shown either crucified or as the Man of Sorrows" – as here in Hökhuvud. The image of the pious man has vanished, but the distracted, rich man is there, depicted as a younger man dressed in a long, fur-lined mantle and standing in front of his two-storied, tower-like stone house. Behind him stands his wife holding a mirror and his son and daughter. There is also an open treasure chest, various containers including three goblets and sumptuous fabric.

The Good and Bad Prayers is most often found in the church porch together with "other moralizing, eschatological or exorcist images"¹⁸, a description that fits very well with the porch in Hökhuvud, which on its west wall has a memento mori motive, the Wheel of Fortune – interestingly enough turning backwards – with at its side Destiny, depicted as a blindfolded woman. On the north wall, on the left side of the entrance to the church there is an image of a young man dressed in "worldly"

17 Achim Timmermann, "Good and Bad Prayers, Before Albertus Pictor: Prolegomena to the History of a Late Medieval Image", *Baltic Journal of Art History*, 5 (2013), 131 ff. All Swedish examples are found in churches decorated with murals attributed to Albertus Pictor, something which indicates that the Hökhuvud-painter emanated from his workshop.

18 *Ibidem*, 131. See also Pia Melin, *Fäfångans förgänglighet: Allegorin som livs- och lärospegel hos Albertus Pictor* (Stockholm: Stockholmia, 2006), 121-133; Ingalill Pegelow, "Från Helga Lekamen till Blåkulla: Vapenhusmålningar i uppländska kyrkor", *Bild och betydelse. Föredrag vid det 4. Nordiska symposiet för ikonografiska studier, Kvarnträsk, 19-22 augusti 1974*, ed. by Louise Mille, Mogens Thøgersen (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1976), 215-227.



Fig. 1. Shoe-Ella. Hökhuvud, Uppland. Photo: Gunnar Ahlbäck, 2015.

clothes, representing the worldly side of life. On the right side of the door a bishop stands, representing the spiritual side.

On the opposite south wall on the right side of the exit door a diabolical figure is stretching a long pole over the top of the doorframe to a woman standing on the other side of the door (Fig. 1). On the pole there hang a pair of shoes; a reward for services rendered to the devil but he is in such fear of her, he can only give her them at the end of the long pole.

The woman is Sko-Ella (Shoe-Ella, sometimes Titta-Grå), the “woman who was worse than the devil”. The story of Sko-Ella goes back to at least the thirteenth century. The devil had long hoped to stir up trouble between a married couple and engages Sko-Ella to help him; if she succeeds she will get a pair of shoes. She tells the wife in the couple that her husband is unfaithful to her, and he will only stop being that if she cuts off a lock of his beard at night. Then she tells the husband that his wife is planning to kill him at night with a knife, and when the wife approaches him at night he jumps out of bed and cuts her throat. When he sees his mistake he is overcome by guilt and cuts his own throat. The result of Shoe-Ella’s intriguing makes the Devil believe that she is worse than he.¹⁹

Stephen Mitchell in his *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (2011) calls the story of Shoe-Ella a “moralizing tale about the evils that come from slander, gossip, and loose talk”.²⁰ The motive, which continued to be popular well into the 17th century, was frequently placed as here around the exit door, where it functioned as a final warning to a parishioner, female ones in particular, before leaving the church about proper behaviour, showing that “rancour and discord born of slander, meddling, and gossip are work of the devil”.²¹

The first impression when entering the church in Valö is that of coming into a late medieval church interior, maybe even one painted by the abovementioned Albertus Pictor (Fig. 2).²² A closer look reveals however that the painting style in Valö is more in line with Renaissance style

19 Stephen A. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 137. See also Pegelow, “Från Helga Lekamen till Blåkulla”, 216-218.

20 Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, 137.

21 *Ibidem*, 137-138.

22 The walls were whitewashed in the middle of the 1700s. The whitewash was removed in 1926 and all pilasters were taken down. – Mereth Lindgren does not discuss Valö in her study of Swedish Post-Reformation murals because she found it “full of saints”. Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 239.



Fig. 2. The Wise Virgins. Valö, Uppland. Photo: Iwar Andersson, 1940. ATA, Stockholm.



Fig. 3. A painter's workshop. Valö, Uppland. Photo: Iwar Andersson, 1940. ATA, Stockholm.

of painting whilst Albertus Pictor's style is definitely late medieval; the figures in Valö are for example more realistically rendered than in his paintings and their movements freer. There are also instances of a perspectival rendering of space in Valö, and if the Valö-painter had not had to "squeeze" his images into the vault fields' various shapes and sizes and instead could have painted them on a flat wall the high artistic quality of his work and even his "modernism" would stand more immediately clear to the spectator.²³ The pictorial program is mainly Christological with an overweight for the symbolism of the Sacrifice of Christ – in many ways "late medieval" but with a comparably small number of saints.

The porch has in the north vaulting cell a representation of Christ as Gardener, in the east the Resurrection, in the south, above the exit

²³ Hans Hildebrand, who never had been in the church, only seen photos of the murals, described the paintings as filled with "un-proportionally outstretched figures in unnatural positions" and thought them to be decadent compared to Alberti's. Hans Hildebrand, *Målningarna i Valö kyrka i Roslagen*, (Stockholm, 1878), 6-7.

the Wheel of Fortune and above that, in a spandrel, Sko-Ella.²⁴ In the west there is St. George and the Dragon. The motives in the porch are thus as “late medieval” they could possibly be. Yet there is something in the painted décor in Valö Church that clearly places, if not the murals themselves, the master behind them in the “Renaissance”. We find namely here, for the first (known) time in Sweden, a clear expression of a painter’s pride over his profession, unheard of in medieval times.²⁵ There is no other way of interpreting the placing of the painters’ guild’s coat of arms opposite Gustav Vasa’s in the nave’s first vault.²⁶ And that is not all. The painter has also added his own name and self-portrait to the interior, and that in a very cunning way. In the east field of the west vault we find an image of a painter’s workshop (Fig. 3). In the foreground the painters’ patron saint St. Luke is sitting, and, assisted by an elegantly dressed disciple, is putting a finishing hand on a painting of the Madonna on the wall above him, at the same time as another painter puts a finishing stroke of paint on Luke himself. This must be the master painter, in the inscription band above him named Örjan målare (painter). Also he has an apprentice, Ola, who is sitting astride a painter’s bench grinding paint.²⁷

The Wheel of Fortune is also to be found in the grave chapel for the Bååt family in the church in Sorunda in Södermanland, but here as the only non-biblical motive in the decoration, which makes it one of the first, maybe the very first (known) purely “Lutheran” church interior in Sweden (Fig. 4). The grave chapel was built around 1540 to house the remains of Peder Erlandsson Bååt, who died in 1540. His son Johan Pedersson Bååt paid for the building of the choir and probably also for the extensive painting-suite, which was executed and signed in 1549 by a certain Urian Olofson.²⁸ When the church was rebuilt in 1679 the chapel’s murals were whitewashed. They were brought out and restored

24 Nilsén, *Program och funktion*, 158-60.

25 Cf. Andrew Martindale, *The rise of the artist in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972).

26 The painters’ guild’s coat of arms is also found in the church in Skedvi in Dalarna. Henrik Cornell, Sigurd Wallin, *Uppsvenska kyrkomålningar på 1500-talet* (Stockholm: Humanistiska Sällskapet, 1960).

27 Earlier the name Andreas Martini, which is found in two places in the church, was thought to be the name of the painter. Nilsén suggests he was the parish priest at the time. Nilsén, *Program och funktion*, 494.

28 Urian Olofson also filled the walls in the church of Danderyd, Uppland with murals, probably donated by Axel Nilsson Banér (d. 1554). Though only fragments remain, it has been possible to establish that they are also based on woodcuts from the *Doctrina*. Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 50-51.

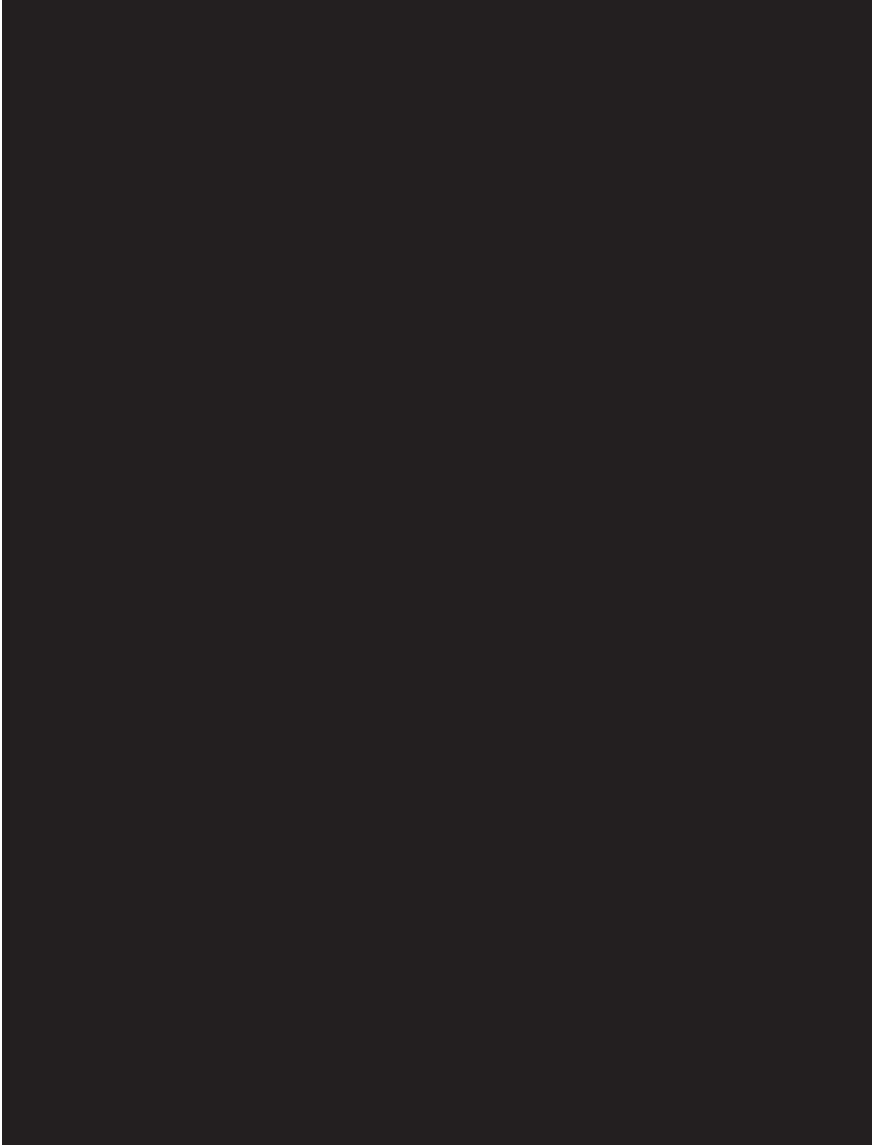


Fig. 4. The Bååt Grave Chapel. Sorunda Church, Södermanland. Photo: Åke Nisbeth, 1954. ATA, Stockholm.

in 1898-1901, but rather insensitively and given a hard, linear character with harsh colours.

The motives are mostly taken from New Testament with a concentration on the Life of Christ and the Passion. As pointed out by Mereth

Lindgren, in her thorough investigation of post-reformation mural painting in Sweden (1983), the images with motives from the New Testament have great similarities to a series of 47 woodcuts by Hans Schäuuffelein, published in Hagenau in 1516. Some of the images are however not found in that publication, which shows that the painter must have had access to a later edition, called the *Doctrina, vita et passio Jesu Christi*, published in Frankfurt am Main in 1537, in which the original woodcuts had been supplemented with another 26 woodcuts made by another hand.²⁹ The texts in Latin that go with the images in the *Doctrina* have been carefully copied in the chapel whilst the images themselves have been used very freely, sometimes only for the composition and even then often very loosely. In some paintings only a detail remains, as the unusually long sticks in the Crowning of Thorns.

The pictorial program starts on the south wall with a row of images depicting Christ's public activity, mostly miracles scenes in which Christ abolishes bodily suffering or death, in other words motives very suitable for a grave chapel as for example Christ healing ten men with leprosy, Christ healing the bleeding woman and the Raising of the son of the widow of Nain, however surprisingly not the Raising of Lazarus but as argued by Lindgren this might have had its place in an over-painted area on the south wall. The series finishes with Christ Weeping over Jerusalem, a motive that also forebodes his coming suffering, something which explains why it is directly followed by a Passion-suite consisting of seven scenes of which the last, the Crucifixion, takes up the whole of the east wall beneath the Ascension in the vault.

In the vault we find three motives from the Old Testament, the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel, the Sacrifice of Abraham and the Copper Serpent, all three foreboding the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ on the cross. In the vault there are also four prophets. The west wall there is a painting of the Last Judgment. A detail from this motive, showing how the condemned are sent to Hell, has been saved for the upper part of the north wall (Fig. 5). There we see a devil which on his back carries a man to the open jaws of Hell, accompanied by music from a second devil, which is playing a lute. Another devil carries firewood to the eternal fires of Hell. Also this scene is taken from the *Doctrina*, but is for some reason more vividly painted than the others in the chapel.

29 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 48.

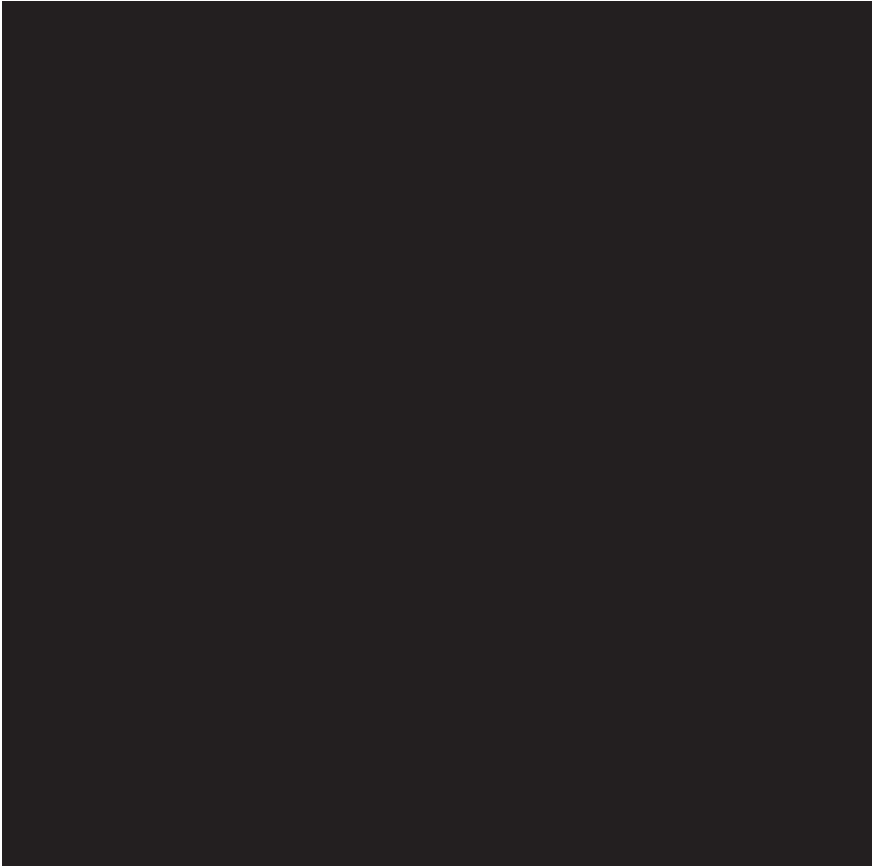


Fig. 5. Detail of Last Judgment. Sorunda Church, Södermanland. Photo: Sören Hallgren, 1971. ATA.

The unsigned and undated murals in the church porch of Badelunda, Västmanland, painted over in 1672 and brought out in 1959, are for stylistic reasons ascribed to the same Urian Olofson and were probably painted around the same time as those in Sorunda, i.e. the 1540s. The chosen motives and their placing follow the same pattern as in the porches discussed above. In the star vault there are angels with the torture tools of Christ, in the east vaulting cell the Crucifixion, above the entrance to the church an image of Christ Blessing and above the exit the Offering of Cain and Abel. Only fragments remain of the scenes in the west vaulting cell but enough to show that they showed the story of the milk-stealing witch (cf. below).



Fig. 6. Vika Church, Dalarna. North wall. Photo: Calle Eklund.

Sometime after the middle of the 16th century, the interior of the church in Vika in Dalarna was decorated with mural paintings (Fig. 6). In connection to a large rebuilding of the church, they were painted over in 1775. When they were brought out in 1917-18, they caused a minor sensation since it turned out that underneath the whitewash had been hiding one of the most remarkable Early Post-Reformation church interiors in Sweden.

At first sight it looks like a typical late medieval interior with a tendency towards *horror vacui*. All available space in the church, walls as well as vaults, is covered with large, a bit stiffly drawn figures in bright colours against architectural backgrounds. In between the figure fields there are borders of a late medieval so-called keyhole-type, painted with the help of a stencil. A closer inspection reveals however that the vegetative ornaments as well as the other ornaments are of a Renaissance character and the figures are definitely influenced by the Renaissance. Then there are the motives, which radically differ from those of a late medieval church interior. All the murals in the nave and in the choir – with one exception – have motives from the New Testament, starting with Christ entering the Temple and ending with the Passion and Judgment Day. The exception is painting of the Sacrifice of Abraham on the east-

ern choir wall above the altar, placed there as a typological image for the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ which is actualised in the Communion.³⁰

The decoration of the rest of the choir is unique. On the walls there are, originally 15 now 11 oversized Evangelist symbols, provided with numbers and small symbols, which allude to the content of the various chapters in their respective Gospels. The unknown painter has found the models for the Evangelists' symbols in a book called *Rationarium evangelistarum* from 1505, which in turn go back to woodcuts from ca. 1470.³¹

But how can we be sure Vika was painted after the Reformation, if the Evangelist symbols are made after models from 1505? The answer lies in the images of the four Evangelists in the choir vault, which are not found in the above-mentioned book. They are, as pointed out by Mereth Lindgren, made after woodcuts in the *Biblia Frankfurt*, a bible illustrated with woodcuts by Hans Brosamer after woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer, Lucas Cranach and Hans Holbein and printed in Frankfurt am Main in 1551. This gives us a *terminus post ante quem* for the paintings.³² Judging from the old-fashioned character of the ornamentation, they were probably executed during the period of 1555 till 1560, in any case not much later than that.

The unknown painter has however not copied the woodcuts slavishly, and has for example provided all the Evangelists, even those that are sitting indoors, with a background of trees and tower-adorned buildings, and has placed a baldachin over St. Matthew.

THE PERIOD OF ERIK XIV

During the reign of Erik XIV (1560-67) quite a large immigration of Dutch and French Calvinists to Sweden took place, in spite of the fact that Calvinism was forbidden there. The Calvinists were welcomed because of their renowned capability, *nota bene* only after having professed themselves adherent to a pure and Christian doctrine and having promised not to disturb the religion of the country. But the Calvinists soon found a good deal of "Catholic left-overs" in the Swedish divine

30 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 55.

31 The large Evangelists' images from the *Rationarium evangelistarum* are also found in the porch of Ekeby Church in Uppland. Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 55; cf. Nilsén, *Program och funktion*, 71.

32 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 55. The same picture bible was used in the churches in Vårdsberg and Hägerstad in Östergötland, painted by Mats målare, and also in Bladåker in Uppland and Landeryd in Östergötland (which also may have been painted by Mats målare). *Ibidem*, 275.

service they most decidedly disliked; the images, the vestments, the burning candles on the altar, the elevation, preceded by the ringing of bells, the adoration, the making of the cross sign etcetera. An extensive Calvinist propaganda was started, and seeing that several of the French Calvinists had prominent positions and belonged to the King's trusted people, it did not take long to awaken his sympathy for their cause. King Erik might have been especially susceptible to the teachings of the Calvinists because of his most important teacher, the French Calvinist Dionysius Beurreus. Quite probably it was through the teachings of Beurreus and the studying of the books he recommended, together with the daily intercourse with the Calvinists at the court, that Erik became sceptic towards the many Catholic ceremonies in the Swedish church.³³

At the Riksdag in 1561 in Arboga, Erik made a first attempt to clear away some of these Catholic remains. No protocol has been kept to show what decisions were taken, but it stands from other documents clear, that it was decided that the superfluous side-altars were to be removed together with the "images that simple and misbelieving people use to run to".³⁴ At the following Riksdag in Stockholm in 1562, Erik presented a long list of changes he wished to make in the mass itself, hereto certainly influenced by Beurreus who in turn was supported by his brother-in-law, the then vicar of Stockholm Johannes Nicolai Ofeegh.³⁵ Especially interesting to the subject of this article is the discussion regarding the images. The Calvinists had managed to draw the King's attention to the Decalogue, according to which no images of God were allowed.³⁶ Luther and his followers stated that God himself had invalidated the ban on images at the very moment he sent Christ down to Earth as a living image of himself, but the Calvinist theologians insisted on the validity of the prohibition against pictures. – Now it was decided that no images or sculptures would be tolerated in the Swedish churches apart from the Crucifix and those that were part of the altarpiece.³⁷

It cannot be proved, however, that it was because of Calvinist influence that only one (known) church was decorated with murals in Sweden during Erik's reign. This may also have been a consequence of

33 Sven Kjällström, "Striden kring kalvinismen i Sverige under Erik XIV", *Lunds universitets årsskrift. Ny följd*, Band 31:2 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups Förlag, 1935), 39, 82.

34 *Ibidem*, 83.

35 *Ibidem*, 86.

36 Ångström, *Altartavlor*, 36.

37 *Ibidem*, 37.

the worsening economic situation for the parishes and/or of a lessening of interest from the side of the wealthy to pay for this kind of thing. – On the other hand, why was there an increase in the area of church painting during the reign of his follower on the throne, John III, when at least six churches were decorated, maybe more (cf. below)?

The church in question is Liden's old church in Medelpad, which an unknown painter according to a now vanished inscription decorated in 1561. The church was by then relatively new; the same inscription said it was built in 1510. The murals were white-washed in the 1750s. When they were brought out in 1928, they were in a very poor condition and are now hardly visible.³⁸ Enough remained though to establish that those on the north wall depict the Paradise, the Creation of Adam and Eve, the Fall of Man and the Expulsion from Paradise. On the south wall there is an image of Jacob and his twelve sons, their names written above their heads. This is the first and last time that motive appears in a Swedish post-reformation mural painting.

In the same year of 1561, the first (known) Swedish Post-Reformation altarpiece was produced and put up in the church in Västra Husby in Västergötland. It contained a painting of the Last Supper.³⁹ Who-ever chose this motif might have been familiar with Luther's words: "Wer die Lust hätte, Tafeln auf den Altar lassen zu setzen, der sollte lassen das Abendmahl Christi mahlen".⁴⁰

Also in 1561 a large wooden tablet inscribed with a text in Latin was put up in the main church of Stockholm, St. Nicolai, the so-called Storkyrkan (Fig. 7).⁴¹ The text is framed by a painted cartouche, made up of scrollwork, putti, masks and lion heads. In its upper part Christ is depicted in half figure. Surrounded by light, he has one hand raised and holds in his other hand an open book, i.e. the Book of Life. In the corresponding place in the lower part of the cartouche there is a larger version of only his head.

The Latin text consists of eleven quotations from the Bible which all underline the importance of the sermon in the service. Until the begin-

38 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 28, 44, 296.

39 Ångström, *Altartavlor*, 38.

40 *Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 31; I (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1913), 415; cf. Oscar Thulin, "Reformatöriska och fröhpötestantiska Abendmahldarstellungen", *Kunst und Kirche*, 16 (1939), 31.

41 An X-ray investigation has revealed that it originally was a wing to a medieval altarpiece, which has been painted over.



Fig. 7. Painted wooden tablet. Storkyrkan, Stockholm. Photo: ATA.

ning of the 18th century, when the tablet was put in its present place in the west, it was hanging on a pillar in front of the pulpit; the idea being of course to remind the priest of the importance of preaching. In Lutheran churches in Germany it had around the same time become common usage to hang an image of Luther in a place near the pulpit, the implicit message being the same.

At the time when the tablet was made, the above-mentioned Johannes Nicolai Ofeegh was vicar in Storkyrkan. If not an outright Calvinist he supported many of the Calvinist ideas. The tablet cannot however be said to be strictly "Calvinist" seeing that it contains images of Christ.⁴²

THE PERIOD OF JOHN III

The King's church art and architecture

John III, who ruled 1567-92, was the Vasa king most engaged in ecclesiastical affairs. This interest of his was founded on a genuine religious devotion, which only was strengthened after his marriage to the deeply pious Polish Princess Catherine Jagiellon, who had been given permission to continue to practice her Catholic faith in Sweden and had brought with her two father confessors from Poland.

Very soon after John had come to power, he involved himself in the affairs of the Church, expressing a wish that two new holy days would be introduced, Corpus Christi and the Day of the Transfiguration. The latter was accepted by the bishops and included in *KO 1571* as a holy day, but since Corpus Christi had been abolished as late as in 1540 because of its incompatibility with the ideas of the Reformation, they refused to reintroduce also that day.⁴³

At a synod in 1575 the King forced the priests to accept an addition to the *KO 1571* called the *Nova Ordinantia Ecclesiastica (NO)*, which aimed to persuade the Swedish Church to take a middle position between Catholicism and Protestantism. Both the Birthday of Mary and the day of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven were now reintroduced as feast days. The year after, in 1576, the King let publish a bi-lingual Swedish-Latin mass-order, the *Liturgia svecanae ecclesiae Catholicae et orthodoxae conformis*, popularly called the "Red Book" (Röda boken), because of its

42 Ångström, *Altartavlor*, 38.

43 *Ibidem*, 42 ff. and suggested further reading.

binding. With a preface by Laurentius Petri Gothus, the Liturgy immediately became the subject of intense debate because of the richness of its ceremonial provisions and because of its Eucharistic prayer.⁴⁴ There was a soon coming strong objection from the priests, the strongest from those in the diocese of Strängnäs, which was under the leadership of Duke Karl, the brother of John III, later king under the name of Karl IX. They refused flatly to accept either the *NO* or the *Liturgy*.⁴⁵ The fight over the *Liturgy* culminated in the middle of the 1580s, when the priests issued a statement, conferred by the Duke, in which they took objection of all the church reforms that had been made since *KO* 1571. The King answered by issuing a manifest in which he called the priest “Satanists” and declared them as outlaws. The fight only ended with the King’s death in 1592, and a year later the *Liturgy* was abolished by the Synod of 1593 in Uppsala.

There is one hitherto not much observed passage in the *Nova Ordinantia Ecclesiastica* that deals with the sacral art in the churches showing that the King had a special feeling towards the old, Catholic art – or was it towards what the images represented? The first part of the passage has the same wording as the corresponding part in the *KO* (cf. above), stating that if an image of a saint had been subject of worship it should be removed from the church walls. To this has however been added an exhortation that instead of throwing these images away one should move them to the sacristy. It is also stated in the *NO* that apostles, prophets and martyrs may very well be represented in the Swedish churches and also two specific saints, namely St. George and St. Christopher, but only as allegories, St. George as an allegory of the worldly power, “that does not bear the sword in vain” but fights against unbelief and all other kinds of evil that threaten the realm, and St. Christopher, the “Christ carrier”, as a Christian teacher.⁴⁶

44 Frank C. Senn argues that the *Liturgy* is inspired by the writings of Melanchthon and his patristic orientation, and by the mediating theology of Gerge Cassander (which had impressed John when imprisoned in Gripsholm). Petrus Fecht, the King’s secretary and probably the writer of much of the book had been a student of Melanchthon. Frank C. Senn, *Liturgia Svecanae Ecclesiae. An attempt at Eucharistic restoration during the Swedish Reformation* (Michigan: University of Notre Dame, 1979), 34-36.

45 Ångström, *Altartavlor*, 84. The subject has been extensively treated by Åke Andrén in “Strängnäsprästerne i strid med kungamakten vid 1500 -talets slut”, *Öppna gränser. Ekumeniskt och europeiskt i Strängnäs stift genom tiderna* (Stockholm: Proprius: Samf. Pro fide et christianismo, 1992).

46 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 241.

The King did not dare, though, to openly confront the priesthood by donating images of saints and martyrs to the churches, and the altarpieces he bestowed, in those cases we know their motives, had motives taken from the Passion of Christ. In 1575 he gave an altarpiece representing the Last Supper, painted by his court painter, Johan Baptista van Uther, to the Gråmunkekyrkan (The Grey Friars' Church) in Stockholm, presently Riddarholmskyrkan. For his own Castle Church in Stockholm he let make a very expensive altarpiece with a frame made of silver taken from his own store. The frame surrounded two paintings placed on top of one another, the lower one representing the Crucifixion, the upper the Resurrection.⁴⁷

In 1582 the Cathedral in Linköping received from King John the grandest gift of all, both in size and in artistic value, an altarpiece in the form of a large triptych, which had come from the St Lawrence Church in Alkmaar. It was painted in 1538-1542 by the Dutch artist Maerten van Heemskerck (1498-1574) and had been placed in the church in 1543. With its over 5.5 meters high and almost 8 meters wide (when open) it is the largest altarpiece ever created in the Northern Netherlands. Its motives when open are in corpus Christ carrying his Cross and the Crucifixion – the triptych's central image – in the left wing Ecce Homo and the Flagellation, in the right wing the Resurrection and the Crowning of Thorns. When closed, the wings show the Last Supper and the Birth of Christ and two scenes from the life of St. Lawrence, him giving alms to the poor and his martyrdom.

In the summer of 1566 the Netherlands erupted into a frenzy of iconoclastic violence spurred by the sermons of Calvinist preachers. Large and small mobs descended on hundreds of churches throughout the country, stripping them of their "idols". Although several of Heemskerck's works in other places were destroyed, the triptych in Alkmaar survived somehow this iconoclast and also a second one in 1576.

In November 1581, the same year the northern Low Countries declared themselves free from the Spanish king, a certain Albart Nolleman in Alkmaar bought the triptych for 250 Golden. He resold it directly to

47 Ångström, *Altartavlor*, 54.

the Swedish king who in turn bestowed it to Linköping.⁴⁸ Why did the St Lawrence church sell the triptych when it had outlived two picture storms? The explanation may be that in 1581 the church had been taken over by the Dutch Reformed Church, founded in 1571 and based on the teachings of Calvin and other Reformers of this time, who shared the Calvinists views on images. Additionally Heemskerck's triptych contains a portrait of the Bishop of Utrecht George van Egmond, one of the strongest opponents of the Reformation in the Netherlands, furthermore in a prominent place: he is kneeling in the Resurrection on the right wing. By selling the triptych the church was freed of a less suitable object and could simultaneously improve its finances that surely had suffered during the lootings.

Of the triptych's representations, only the St. Lawrence-scenes, with their non-biblical motives, could possibly be offensive to the Evangelical eye but since they were on the back of the wings they would not be seen by the church-goers. Or that is how it was planned. In the end it would ironically enough be the representations on the doors' outsides that the congregation most often saw during mass; due to its large size the triptych was kept closed most of time and only opened on the large church festivals.⁴⁹

The Sanctum Sanctorum in Vadstena

Which motives that were depicted within the enclosure of an abbey, was another matter. – The nuns in the Convent of the Bridgittines at Vadstena in Östergötland had lived in very small circumstances ever since the Reformation Riksdag 1527, after which the monks had been driven away and the Abbey church had been turned into a Protestant church for the town parish. The nuns had been allowed to stay but with radically reduced means. Erik XIV continued to pay their meagre yearly allowance but took no personal interest in the fate of the sisters. First after John III's coming to power was there a real improvement of their conditions. Already in his first year on the throne, he and his queen

48 The receipt was earlier in the church archive to Alkmaar. Bengt Cnattingius, Axel Romdahl, *Maerten Heemskercks Laurentiusaltare i Linköpings domkyrka* (Stockholm: Nordisk Rotogravyr, 1953), 26; cf. Bengt Cnattingius, "Maerten Heemskerck's S. Lawrence Altar -piece in Linköping Cathedral. Studies in its Manneristic Style", *Antikvariskt arkiv*, 52 (1973).

49 In 1812 it was moved from there because it made the church too dark, and placed in the south side of the cathedral. In 1936 a new, large triptych, painted by Henrik Sörensen, was put in the choir and has ever since been much discussed.

Catherine Jagiellon gave the large sum of 1330 Mark to the nuns together with large quantities of food and wine. The King also saw to that their yearly allowance was raised considerably and – most important of all – he gave back the land areas which had been confiscated to the State. For this he received papal approval.⁵⁰

In 1580 he gave means for the foundation of a relic chamber in the Abbey, intended for the relics of St. Bridget, her daughter St. Catherine of Vadstena and St. Ingrid, who in 1281 had founded the first Swedish Dominican convent in near-by Skänninge. Shortly thereafter the King paid to have the relic chamber, which was named *Sanctum Sanctorum* painted with murals (Fig. 8). When the decoration was finished in 1582 the Sanctum Sanctorum had become the Swedish Post-Reformation period's most unreserved and also most grandiose celebration of the Catholic saints as well as a manifestation of the Catholic doctrine.

Surrounded by meandering, elegantly drawn vegetative ornaments, over twenty saints wander across the walls, on the east wall – to mark its importance – St. Bridget, St. Catherine of Vadstena and the Mystical Betrothal of Saint Catherine of Alexandria but there are also the Nordic saint kings Erik and Henrik with St. Olaf on the opposite west wall. On the other walls we find St. Sebastian, St. Paul, St. Matthew (here as apostle) and, as to the rest, only female saints; St. Ingrid of Skänninge, St. Apollonia, St. Lucia and St. Mary Magdalene. There is also an image of St. Veronica's veil with the Christ-face.⁵¹

On the west wall there is an image of the Virgin as the Madonna of the Apocalypse, and on the north wall an image of the Seat of Mercy. These two, which illustrate two of the dogmata of the Roman Catholic Church, the Virgin birth of Jesus and the Trinity, differ from the other images, which almost all depict saints that had suffered martyrdom, i.e. the martyrs which John III had recommended as suitable motives for the Swedish churches.

In the vault, decorated with the same kind of stem design as the walls, are pictures of the Evangelists. They are sitting writing at their desks, each above two images in the lower part of the vault, below St. Marc in the east vault an image of Christ and one of Mary and the inscription "MARY MATER DEI", below St. John in the south St. Andrew and St.

50 Andreas Lindblom, "Johan III och Vadstena nunnekloster", *Antikvariskt arkiv* 16 (1961), 32-34.

51 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 68. See also Ångström, *Altartavlor*, 45.



Fig. 8. Sanctum Sanctorum. Vadstena, Östergötland. Photo: Iwar Andersson, 1979. ATA.

Matthew, below St. Luke in the west Ecce Homo and Christ carrying his Cross and finally, below St. Matthew in the north the Man of Sorrow and St. Peter. – No models have been found for the rooms figurative paintings apart for the Evangelists in the vaults, which are made after *Neuwe Figuren des Newen Testaments* that was published in Frankfurt in 1565.⁵² The unknown painter was a skilful artist probably working in

52 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 70.

the Vadstena Castle, which was undergoing a thorough rebuilding and fitting up during John III's reign.⁵³

Church murals from John III's reign

Compared to Erik XIV's reign, when only one (known) church was decorated with murals, relatively many, altogether six (known) churches, were painted during John III's reign. Two of them are in Uppland, the churches in Morkarla and Skäfthammar, which both are filled with an almost overwhelming richness of images that renders them a superficial likeness to a church interior from Catholic times, and in the 18th century both were thought to be medieval and were painted over. That is however almost all the two interiors have in common. Their murals are painted in different styles and the pictorial programs differ totally between the two.

According to a now lost inscription in Morkarla, a certain Erik Nilsson from Gävle decorated the church in 1584. In 1788 the murals, said to be "full of the Middle Ages' superstitious spirit and bad taste", were painted over.⁵⁴ They were brought out a first time in 1897 but, considered ugly and revolting, only to be painted over again. The final bringing out of the murals took place in 1955-56.

During this last restoration, the restorers found particularly one image that in itself explains the twofold painting-over of the murals: in the vault above the pulpit a grinning devil (Fig. 9). It was probably placed there, in good view of everybody, to show what happens to sinners seeing that the motives of some of the paintings around him are connected to sin, the Fall of Sin, Cain killing Abel and the story of the Golden Calf. The devil gives the spectator a welcoming wave and licks his lips in happy expectation of what he shall do with the unlucky that get into his power.

Of the interior's 62 scenes Mereth Lindgren has identified all but ten, most of them with the help of the images in *Horae dive virginis Marie secundum verum usum Romanum*, a series of books of hours printed in Paris from 1485 till 1520, after which Erik Nilsson painted a majority of

53 The style of painting in the *Sanctum Sanctorum* is close to the paintings on a pulpit in the Abbey church in Vadstena; made in 1576 for the Vadstena parish church St. Peter and moved to the Abbey in 1829 when St. Peter was pulled down. It has five panels with figures painted in lively colours, showing Christ as Salvator Mundi, Moses, the prophet Micah (who prophesied that Messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem), St. John the Baptist (?) and St. John the Evangelist. Lindblom, "Johan III och Vadstena nunnekloster", 32-34.

54 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 72.



Fig. 9. A devil and The Wheel of Fortune. Morkarla, Uppland. Photo: Bettina Ångström Nelson, 2015.

the scenes; she was, however, unable to establish which of the various editions Erik Nilsson has used, seeing that the illustrations vary a little from one edition to another and none of them alone contains all the images he has copied. He did not copy them slavishly, though; he changed the clothing of the non-biblical figures (not the biblical) and gave them contemporary, even royal dresses to wear. The man sitting on the top of the Wheel of Fortune (Fig. 9) is for example dressed very similar to John III in a portrait from 1582, and the young man, who kneels in front of the sarcophagi at the foot of the wheel, is dressed almost exactly as John's son Sigismund in a portrait from 1584-85.⁵⁵

The unusual and rather complicated pictorial program was probably drawn up by the vicar of Morkarla (and Alunda), Christopherus (Christopher) Laurentii, known as an ardent follower of John III's above-mentioned *Liturgy*.⁵⁶ The images seem indeed chosen with the intention of visualising the middle position between Catholicism and Protestantism which is characteristic of also the King's *Nova Ordinantia*

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 73. Sigismund's portrait is now in the Uffizi, Florence.

⁵⁶ He is also known for having treated the priests in Hälsingland badly, for which he had to make amends at Uppsala Meeting in 1593. Cf. *Uppsala stifts herdaminne*, I (Uppsala, 1842), 103.

Ecclesiastica (cf. above). This is most manifestly demonstrated in the east choir vault, which houses a figure-rich representation of the Holy Kinship. Other medieval motives in the choir are the Crucifixion of St. Peter and, below a depiction of the Man of Sorrows, two moralities: the Love of the Worldly Goods (a rare motive, unique in Swedish mural painting) and the Wheel of Fortune, which we have seen already in a number of church porches but never before in a choir.

The rest of the surface of the choir is taken up by images depicting the Childhood of Christ, completed by two unusual pre-figurations for the Massacre of the Innocent from the Old Testament: Saul killing 85 priests and Atalja killing the royal children. Centrally in the choir vault there is a series of four images, one depicting St. John on the Island of Patmos when he receives the Book of Revelation, the other three some of St. John's visions. In the first vault the fourth angel is sounding a trumpet, in the second the fifth angel is doing the same. In the third choir vault we see four angels with swords holding back the winds of the earth, above a scene showing how the saints' foreheads are marked by the seal of God. – These scenes from the Apocalypse can be tied to the Wheel of Fortune in the choir with its memento mori motive, and explain why that, as well as the vanity motive the Love of the Worldly Goods next to it, has it has been depicted in such an unusual place.⁵⁷

In the nave there is a Genesis-suite which surprisingly also contains three scenes with Moses, and a Passion-suite. Also in the latter suite there is an image with a motive which does not really belong there, a very rare motive as well, Christ, who shows a young boy to his disciples, saying "For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest". – The west wall is taken up by the Last Judgment, the traditional place for it.

Despite the fact that most of the images in Morkarla are painted after illustrations in a book of hours, there is none that can be said to be strictly "Catholic". There are no saints, for instance, not even the woman with a glory holding a large cross in the most western travé is a saint. She was earlier believed to be St. Helen, the mother of Constantin, who found the True Cross in Jerusalem. With the help of the *Horae*, Lindgren has however convincingly shown that she is Sibylla Hellespontina, who carries a cross in predilection of the Crucifixion.⁵⁸

57 Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 242.

58 *Ibidem*, 79-81.

In the porch to Morkarla only the vault's murals remain. They turn out to be more traditional both regarding their motives and their placing than those in the nave. In the uppermost part of the east vaulting cell there is an image of the Blessing Christ and beneath him, standing side by side, are St. Veronica and St. Michael. In the south vaulting we find Shoe-Ella in her usual place in the vicinity of the exit, this time above it (cf. above). The rest of the vaulting cells are used for images with motives from one particular story, the story of the milk-stealing witch. In one a tall-legged animal similar to a calf is greedily drinking milk from a cow's udder whilst a devil is holding the cows head.⁵⁹ The image shows a cow that is being milked by a "Milkhare"; there was a belief that a cow that unexpectedly went dry had been "milk robbed" by a witch with the help of a Mjölkhare or Milkhare, a creature she had fashioned from the bodies of animals, heddles, brooms and string and brought to life by her own blood.⁶⁰

The next image shows one of the episodes following this, the churning of the stolen milk; when the "hare" has returned to his owner the woman, he throws up the milk and she churns it to butter. But she will not go unpunished, and it is an important part of the story what punishment she gets. A "milkhare" can only be made if the woman makes a pact with the devil, which means that the devil owns her soul after death, and in the next image a devil is pushing the woman, who is being ridden by another devil, into the gaping mouth of Hell.⁶¹

Images with motives from the story of the milk-stealing witch and the devil together with the story of Sko-Ella are found in many medieval church porches and, as we have seen, this type of motives continued to be popular far into the 17th century. Stephen Mitchell likens the medieval church porch to a "large open book concerned with social conduct for women",⁶² seeing that these motives most often are placed above or around the entrance to the church respectively above or around the exit, where no one could avoid seeing them. Apparently, the need for showing women what happened to them if they made pacts with the devil, or they meddled and gossiped etcetera, existed still at the end

59 Ann-Sofi Forsmark, *Den tjuvmjölkkande kvinnan. Om ett medeltida motiv i uppländska kyrkor och om bilder som historiska källor* (Uppsala: Upplands Fornminnesförenings Förlag, 2003), 9.

60 Janken Myrdal, "Women and cows - ownership and work in medieval Sweden", *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 38 (2008), 61-80.

61 Forsmark, *Den tjuvmjölkkande kvinnan*, 25.

62 Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic*, 187.



Fig. 10. A Woman and a Devil Churning Milk. Asmodeus in the background. Morkarla, Uppland. Photo: Bettina Ångström Nelson, 2015.

of the 16th century. In fact, the belief in milk-witches and other kind of witch-craft would only grow stronger in the 17th century and result in the witch-processes in the 1650s-1660s.

The devil in the first of these three images, the one who holds the cow's head has his name written to the right of him (Fig. 10). He is Asmodeus, the evil spirit mentioned in the apocryphal book of Tobi, which killed the seven husbands of Sarah, daughter of Raphael, on their wedding night. He also occurs several times in the Talmud, as king of the demons.⁶³ For instance, he is mentioned in the story of the construction of the Temple of Solomon. Solomon forced Asmodeus to assist in building the temple of Jerusalem and in virtue of some secret communicated to him by Asmodeus he finished the temple without hammer axe or any iron tool

63 Ronald H. Isaacs, *Ascending Jacob's ladder. Jewish Views of Angels, Demons, and Evil Spirits* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1997, 1998), 53, 96, 102-103, 139.

making use of the stone Schamir which cuts stone as the diamond cuts glass.⁶⁴ However, it also says in the Talmud that it was Asmodeus' love of Sarah that made him destroy those who married her which also has made him into a personification of lust.

In the second church in Uppland painted in John III's time, Skäfthammar, altogether 64 images, small and large, divided by ornaments of a medieval character cover the walls and the vaults (Fig. 11). The murals were painted over in 1757 in connection to an enlarging of the windows on the north side and brought out and restored in 1915.

Of the 64 images, 17 are narrative. These are, as Mereth Lindgren has shown, based on a series of woodcuts originally made in 1560 by the monogrammist Æ.⁶⁵ However, the first complete issue of the altogether 21 woodcuts was not printed until in 1587 in Copenhagen, in *Historien om Jesu Vor Frelseris Pine og Død*, which means the murals must have been painted after 1587 – but not much later because of the style of the clothes the people wear.

The narrative paintings are part of a typological pictorial program with its images placed according to traditional, medieval principles – though with here and there a department from the rules. The non-narrative paintings show the apostles and angels with the torture tools of Christ. There are also a small number of figures, whose identities are not established. One of these is however tentatively identified as St. Christopher, one of the two saints mentioned in the *Nova Ordinantia* as a possible motive in the Swedish churches. - The pictorial program in the church was probably drawn up by the vicar in Skäfthammar (and Hökhuvud) around that time, one Michael Erics, another one of the priests who had accepted John III's Liturgy.⁶⁶

The other saint mentioned in the *Nova Ordinantia*, St. George, is found in the church in Veta in Östergötland, which according to an inscription in the church was painted in 1588, i.e. also during John III's reign. In the second half of the 18th century the murals were white-washed. They were brought out in 1913 and restored 1935-37, but only the two images, one in the choir and one in the nave were in such a state they could be

64 John W. Bell, *Bell's New Pantheon Or Historical dictionary of the Gods, Demi Gods, Heroes* (1790; reprint London: Forgotten Books, 2013). <https://archive.org/stream/bellsnewpantheo00bellgoog#page/n10/mode/2up> (viewed 19.07.2015).

65 Not 'Master A F' as he is called in Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 85-90.

66 *Uppsala stifts herdaminne*, II (Uppsala, 1843), 137. He was also one of the priests who signed in Uppsala 1593.

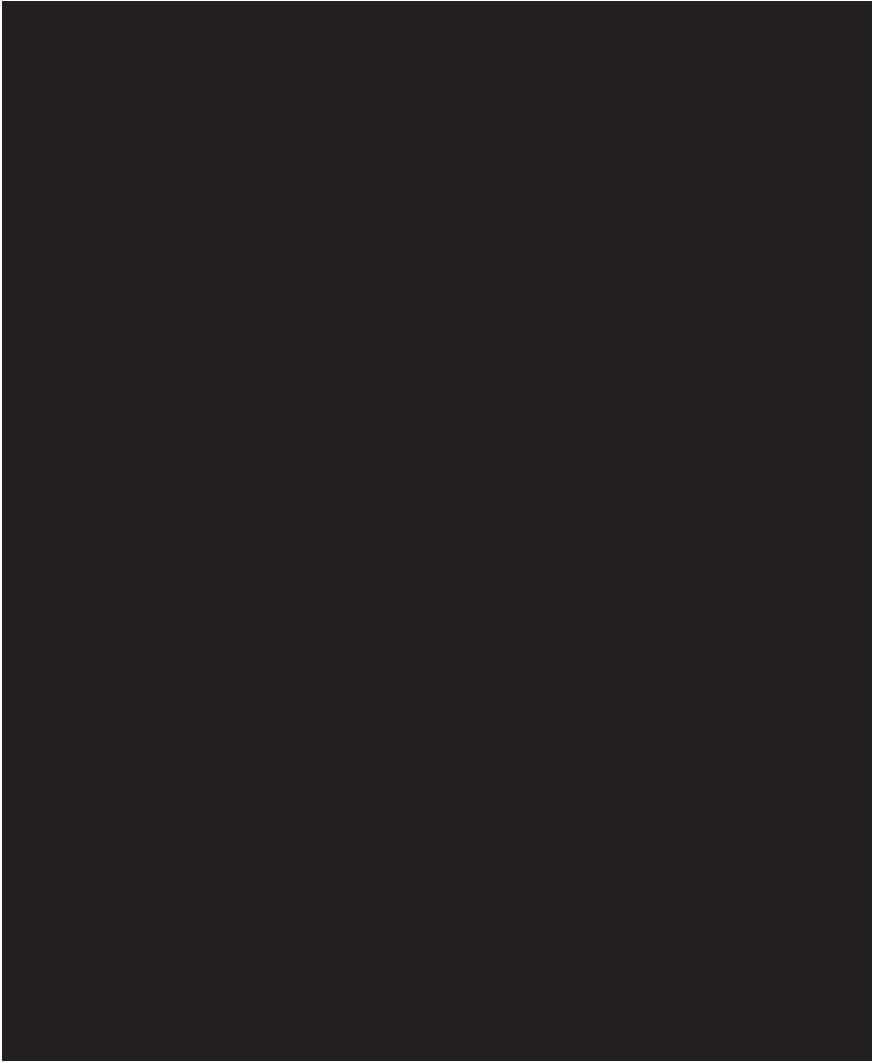


Fig. 11. Skäfthammar, Uppland. Photo: Sigurd Curman, 1916. ATA.

kept. They show Samson and the lion and St. George and the Dragon (Fig. 12). The image of St. George is clearly inspired by the famous St. George-group in Storkyrkan in Stockholm.⁶⁷ As in that sculpture, St. George sits on a rearing grey horse that has a large plume on its head and a unicorn's horn in its forehead. He has drawn his sword to give the

67 Cf. Jan Svanberg, *Sankt Göran och draken* (Stockholm: Tidens Förlag, 1993), 157.



Fig. 12. St. George and the Dragon. Veta, Östergötland. Photo: Anders Qvarnström.

dragon a finishing blow after having already put his lance through its throat. The dragon has not quite given up yet, though; it holds its gap wide open showing the terrible rows of teeth and a tongue full of nails. Above St. George the princess is kneeling in prayer with her lamb beside her. To the left of her is the town of Silene wherefrom her father worriedly follows the ongoing battle between St. George and the dragon.

Three churches in Duke Karl's duchy were painted with murals during John's reign. Of these the church in Glanshammar in Södermanland is the most outstanding when it comes to the artistic quality but it is also the largest with almost 70 images. The vaults have never been painted over; the wall-paintings were chalked over in 1726 after a fire and brought out again in 1910.

The church was decorated in 1589 by a painter with the initials "A I R", which are written in one of the choir vaults, probably Anders Jordansson Ryttare, a painter who from 1588 was living in the parish of Lännäs in Närke.⁶⁸ The painting-suite was donated to the church by Councillor Erik Abrahamsson Leijonhufvud and his wife Katarina Åkesdotter Soop, who let paint their coats of arms above the choir window.

In the choir vault we find also the name of the vicar in Glanshammar at the time, Johannes Severini, who in 1569 had been appointed vicar there by Duke Karl. It was most certainly he who drew up the pictorial program, a difficult task seeing the church has two naves and also a complicated star vaulting system. Of the two naves, the south one is the foremost and houses the choir. That is also where the pictorial program begins with the Trinity in the vaulting cell above the altar. It is flanked by two angels, one playing a lute, the other a harp. In the surrounding cells there are the three theological virtues, Faith, Hope and Love (Fig. 13), followed by a long suite of virtues and vices, depicted as winged women standing with their respective attributes. All of them are, as shown by Nils-Arvid Bringéus, made after *Icones Catecheseos*, an illustrated German Catechism printed in Wittenberg in 1558.⁶⁹ First among the virtues comes *Pietas*, then *Caritas Romana*, *Justitia*, *Fortitudo*, *Temperantia* and *Castitas*. The suite ends with the vices *Invidia*, *Ira* and *Superbia*.

The virtues and the vices are the only Renaissance element – and non-biblical – in the church's pictorial program which otherwise is almost totally based on the Old Testament; of the 70 images in the church only 10 have motives from the New Testament, the others show events and people – prophets and kings – from the Old Testament. The kings are all forefathers to Christ, they represent thus the Tree of Jesse, a thought that is accentuated by them all sitting in flower-cups as in the medieval depictions of the same motive.

In the fourth vaulting cell there is the Creation, followed by an extensive Genesis-suite on the north wall. In the vaults there are also the

68 The interpretation was made by Nils Strömbom. See S. Curman et al., "Glanshammars kyrka", *Sveriges kyrkor*, 92 (1961), 452. Fragments of murals in the churches of Torshälla and Ytterselö show great similarities with the paintings in Glanshammar and must also have been made by Anders Jordansson Ryttare, those in Torshälla probably sometime after 1594, since the parish that year asked for financial help from Duke Charles. Lindgren, *Att lära och att pryda*, 72.

69 Nils-Arvid Bringéus, "Caritas Romana och de bevingade dygderna", *RIG, Tidskrift utgiven av Föreningen för svensk kulturhistoria*, 52 (1969), 58.



Fig. 13. Faith and Hope ("SPES VNICA CHRIS"). Glanshammar, Södermanland. Photo: Nils Lagergren, 1940. ATA, Stockholm.

story of Cain and Abel, the Sin Flood, and many more motives from the Old Testament. Those from the New Testament are concentrated to the west wall, starting with the Annunciation and ending already with the Adoration; there is for example no Last Supper and, most surprising, no Crucifixion(!). This last motive, which traditionally would have its place above the altar, is, however, replaced by a painting of Abraham's Sacrifice, which is its typological equivalent.

A QUIET PROTEST

Having come almost to the end of the article, the reader might have started to wonder if there were no signs of criticism of the Catholic dogmas in the religious art in Sweden of the time. Most of the saints vanished together with other motives closely connected to Catholicism, but was there nowhere a more outspoken protest?

The only one such that I have found is in a naively painted, wooden altarpiece in Gamleby church, Småland (Fig. 14), which both for stylistic and iconographic reasons must be dated till sometime around 1600.⁷⁰ It is made up of three parts, a predella, a centre part and a top.

The motive in the centre is the Last Judgement, with Christ sitting on a rainbow with his feet on the Globe. The Sword of Judgment, the Lily of Mercy and two angels playing trombones surround his head. He has Mary on his dexter side and John the Baptist on his sinister. Above him, in the partly ruined upper section of the altarpiece, is the Dove of the Holy Ghost. It seems quite safe to assume that there was originally a depiction of God in the very top of the altarpiece, in that way the whole of the Trinity would have been complete. Beneath Mary and John the Baptist the dead are rising from their coffins, while those already resurrected throng behind them. In the lower right corner a devil pushes the damned into the gaping mouth of a wild beast, while St. Peter on the left is seen helping the blessed through the gates of Heaven. The unknown painter seems to have used a woodcut in *Een Bönebook* from 1553 as a model, made by Hans Brosamer as a variant of a woodcut by Albrecht Dürer in *Kleine Passion*.⁷¹

But where is the criticism against Catholicism? The answer is, in the predella. There we find the whole colleague of apostles, standing in a row as witnesses to the Last Judgment. This is in itself an unusual motif, but one which stems from Christ himself as it is stated in Matthew 19:28. It has seldom been taken as literally as here, though. What is even more unusual and surprising is that they all – thus not only St. Peter – hold a key in silent protest against the Catholic Church, which, according to the Lutherans placed too much emphasis on the primacy of Peter as Christ's representative on earth.⁷²

70 The Last Judgment was always a popular motive towards the end of a century. The altarpiece was earlier in the old church in Gamleby, which was pulled down and replaced by the new one in 1875. The linear, abbreviated painting style is reminiscent of the paintings from 1606 in the church in Dalhem near Gamleby (the church is pulled down, only photographs remain), as well as of the paintings on a pulpit in the church in Fröjel, Gotland. Ångström, *Altartavlor*, 85-90.

71 *Ibidem*, 86.

72 This unusual motive is not commented on in the iconographic literature. I have found only one other representation in which, if not all, at least three apostles besides St. Peter hold a key, the cover for *Postillen oft Sermonen* by Jan van Hockstraten from 1528, which shows the moment when Christ sends the apostles forth. The four apostles in the foreground all have a key in their hands. *Ibidem*, 90.



Fig. 14. Painted wooden altarpiece. Gamleby, Småland. Photo: Albin Dahlström, 2015.

INGA LENA ÅNGSTRÖM GRANDIEN: SWEDISH CHURCH ART FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF THE REFORMATION IN 1527 UNTIL THE SYNOD IN UPPSALA 1593

KEYWORDS: SWEDISH REFORMATION; VASA-PERIOD; 16TH CENTURY SACRED ART; ALTARPIECES; MURAL PAINTING; MEDIEVAL MORALITIES; ICONOGRAPHY

SUMMARY:

This article is a survey of Swedish church art from the Reformation, introduced in 1527 by Gustav Vasa, until the Uppsala Synod in 1593 and the beginning of Orthodoxy. The tolerance shown towards the old cult objects was typical of the Swedish Reformation. At the same time, there was an almost total cessation in the production and import of sacral art, this mostly for economic reasons, but also because there was no need for more cult objects. Especially toward the end of the 15th century, there had been a large influx of such items to the churches.

Only in the field of mural painting was there some activity after the Reformation, and about 20 (known) churches were decorated with murals from 1530 to 1590. However, their motifs remained very much in the Catholic tradition with one difference – non-biblical subjects such as saints (apart from St. George and St. Christopher) were excluded.

Motifs from the Old Testament dominated and were often put in a typological context. Medieval moralities also lived on: *Memento mori* (Wheel of Fortune), *Vanitas* (Love of the Wordily Goods, the Good and Bad Prayers) and Devil-scenes (Shoe-Ella, Asmodeus).

Several murals stem from the reign of John III (1567-92), the Vasa king most engaged in ecclesiastical affairs. In 1575 he forced the priests to accept an addition to the Church Ordinance, the *Nova Ordinantia Ecclesiastica*, which aimed to persuade the Swedish Church to take a middle position between Catholicism and Protestantism, a thought which is reflected in murals from his time. It is, however, also here that we find proof that Renaissance ideas had come to Sweden: Vices and Virtues (Glanshammar), a painter's self-portrait (Valö).

During the reign of his predecessor Erik XIV (1560-67), a large immigration of Calvinists to Sweden had taken place. They had drawn the king's attention to the Decalogue, according to which no images of God were allowed. A possible sign of Calvinist influence is a wooden tablet from 1561 in Storkyrkan in Stockholm, containing eleven quotations from

the Bible (in Latin) that stress the importance of the sermon in the service. Also in 1561, the first known Swedish Reformation altarpiece was installed in Västra Husby, Västergötland, with a motif the Last Supper. Thereafter, more and more new altarpieces replaced the old, but their motifs remained more or less the same as in Catholic times (with the above exceptions).

A painted, wooden altarpiece from ca. 1600 in Gamleby, Småland, contains the period's only known protest against Catholicism. In the main part there is a depiction of the Last Judgement, in the predella, all the Apostles are holding keys in silent protest against the Catholic Church's teachings that only St. Peter was allowed to carry the keys to the gates of Paradise.

CV:

Dr. Phil., Docent, Inga Lena Ångström Grandien, Stockholm, formerly of the Department of Art History at Stockholm University and Dalarna University in Falun, has, among other things, specialized in Swedish post-Reformation art and the Renaissance and the Baroque in Sweden. Example of her articles include: "In the Name of God. Religious works of art taken as war booty by Swedish troops in the Thirty Years' War", in *On the Opposite Sides of the Baltic Sea* (2007), "The Riddarholmen Church in Stockholm as a Burial Church for Swedish Heroes from the Thirty-Years-War" (2009), and "The Making of a Queen. A Study of the Residences of Johan III of Sweden and Katarina Jagellonica", in *The Jagiellonian Court* (2010). She has written many articles for the *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*, and a survey on Swedish art from 1945 until today, which was published in *Kunst im Ostseeraum. Greifswalder Kunsthistorische Studien*, 6 (2015).

