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## LATE MEDIEVAL DECOR AT ST MARTIN'S CHURCH IN MARTNA

A parish church of Old Livonia is like a puzzle whose outlines we can perceive, but we are still very far from finally solving the puzzle. It is a sad fact that we have lost a lot of our older heritage. For this we can only blame our geopolitical location, which has not favoured peaceful and continuous development through the centuries.

So what do we know about the interior design of an Old Livonian parish church? When speaking of the interior of a church, we picture stern whitewashed walls, vaults and ceilings. The inevitable impression is that the multitude of paintings we see on the north and south shores of the Baltic Sea had only a passing influence on our churches. The list of Estonian medieval churches with paintings is brief (mainly in the former Saare-Lääne Bishopric) and there are also very few paintings in the modern area. But the number of medieval churches alone is about a hundred in Estonia. Yet there is no basis for us to assume that, contrary to other countries bordering the Baltic Sea, the parish churches of Old Livonia were without any paintings.<sup>1</sup> Therefore we cling to the hope that the walls of our churches under dozens of layers of whitewash are brightly coloured, although frequent hostilities and the extension of churches in the 19th century have had profound effects, particularly in southern Estonia. Generalisations made on the basis of existing medieval wall and vault paintings reveal that there were both complicated figural compositions made by good masters and simpler paintings that merely stressed the architecture of buildings and its details in medieval parish churches of Old Livonia.

As St Martin's of Martna could be considered to be architecturally inexpressive, rather than rich, it was quite a surprise when paintings on the walls and the vault of the choir were discovered in the course of conservation work. Two late medieval layers with a red herringbone pattern and the imitation of a stellar vault, as well as one Baroque layer of angels

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<sup>1</sup> The view that medieval churches in Estonia had a stern and scanty interior design stubbornly persisted as late as in the 1960s when there was information of medieval wall paintings found in just three churches (Karja, Ridala, Muhu). See Villem Raam, "Mõningaid uusi andmeid vanast dekoratiivsest seinamaalist", *Kunst*, 1 (1966), 53–56.



*Fig. 1.* St Martin's Church in Martna. Photo by Kaur Altoa.

blowing trumpets, were found. Nine layers of finish were counted on the plaster and the first three had the above-mentioned pattern. The others were layers of whitewash of different shades. The second layer, representing the stellar vault, was chosen as the layer to be exhibited, as it was already apparent before the conservation work. This was done by a masterly hand and is a fine example of the late medieval décor of the interior of an Estonian church. It appeared after the removal of the layers of whitewash that the second layer of painting was in extremely good shape – the loss of paint was minimal and the colours were bright.

In the course of cleaning the star marking the boss of the stellar vault, fragments of an angel figure were found in the upper part of the west coping of the vault. The layer of paint, however, had become detached from the base layers and could not be rescued. In the course of sounding, fragments of an angel were also found in the north coping of the vault and, after it was cleaned, it turned out to be an almost fully preserved figure. Fragments of other angel figures were found during the sounding of the east and south copings of the vault, but it appeared that those figures had not been fully preserved. The simultaneous display of the stars of the second layer of painting and the angels painted in the same place on the next layer turned out to be rather complicated. It was decided not to clean the partly preserved angel figures on the east and south copings and to conserve the finishing layers over them. As a result, the stars of the second layer of painting were only partly revealed in these two copings. The angel figure of the north coping was conserved and, in order to better highlight it, the second layer of painting was partly covered with whitewash.

Exposure of the original painting of the choir turned out to be simpler. The red herringbone pattern is mostly covered with a layer imitating the

stellar vault, but on the springing points of the vault the upper layers had flaked off, with the original décor of the choir exposed. On the groins of the choir, around the windows and in the area of the triumphal arch, the red paint was cleaned off to the point where it would be possible to get as integral a picture of the painting as possible. At the same time, the opening was so small that it did not disturb the general design of the choir. The result achieved makes it possible to observe all three layers of painting that have decorated the choir of St Martin's through history.



Fig. 2. The choir of St Martin's of Martna. Photo by Tõnis Padu.

### ST MARTIN'S OF MARTNA

St Martin's of Martna (Ummere in earlier records) is one of the last stone churches built in the medieval period in Estonia, dating from the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. The building master of the church was Bishop Johannes II Orgas (1491–1515) of the Bishopric of Saare-Lääne. The first mention of the church, however, is from a somewhat earlier period. *Ecclesia beati Martini Ummere*<sup>2</sup> figures in interrogation records drawn up in 1312 by Franciscus de Molino, an auditor of the pope. The question arises of whether extensive reconstruction work of the church (or its ruins) took place on the initiative of Bishop Orgas, or whether it was the erection of a totally new structure.<sup>3</sup> Architecturally, St Martin's

<sup>2</sup> August Seraphim, *Das Zeugenverhör des Franciscus de Molino (1312). Quellen zur Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens* (Königsberg: Thomas & Oppermann, 1912), CXLV.

<sup>3</sup> For the first time building work during Bishop Orgas's period is mentioned as a reconstruction of an existing substance by Armin Tuulse, "Die spätmittelalterliche Steinskulptur in Estland und Lettland", *Suomen Muinasmuistoyhdisyksen aikakauskirja*, XLIX:1 (Helsinki, 1948), 81. An article by Juhan Kilumets that thoroughly reflects the building history of the church does not provide an answer to the question either: Juhan Kilumets, "Martna püha Martini kirik", *Martna kihelkond, Artikleid ja mälestusi* (Martna, 1998), 3–20.



Fig. 3. Three layers of paintings on the vault of the choir. Photo by Kaire Tooming.

of Martna is a simple rectangular structure comprised of both a choir and a nave, and the separation of the two rooms becomes evident only in the interior. The laconic interior originally had windows with soffits narrowing in steps (a crude copy of the Haapsalu Cathedral) in the east and south walls, as well as flat pointed-arch niches marking windows on the north side.<sup>4</sup> Only the choir was vaulted and, because of the low springing points of the groin vault, the impression is rather stubby. In the nave, work did not progress farther than the necessary preparations for vaulting.<sup>5</sup> After major reconstruction work in the 1860s, only the portals, the east window and a niche marking a window in the north wall of the choir survived of the late medieval interior.

**RED HERRINGBONE PATTERN.** The first monochrome painting, a red herringbone pattern running over a white background, is the original décor of the

<sup>4</sup> Kilumets, “Martna püha Martini kirik”, 10.

<sup>5</sup> The author tends to agree with Juhan Kilumets’s theory that the nave was never vaulted (Kilumets, “Martna püha Martini kirik”, 13) than with the more widespread theory that the vaults were destroyed (Ville Raam, “Martna Martini kirik, *Eesti arhitektuur*, 2 (Tallinn: Valgus, 1996), 30).



*Fig. 4.* Two late medieval paintings in the course of conservation work. Photo by Kaire Tooming.

choir applied to the plaster at the time of construction. The décor of the corner posts supporting the springing points of the vaults has largely been destroyed or has become indistinguishable from later layers; the impostes were red. The red herringbone pattern marked with red outlines runs in a narrowing fashion higher along the groins of the vault from the impost to the boss bearing the coat of arms of the building master, Bishop Orgas. The sides and the upper surface of the boss were red, while the crest with lozenges was white.

Similarly to the vault ridges, the herringbone pattern surrounds the windows and the aumbry, highlighting their original form, which disappeared in the course of later reconstruction work, the two-stepped soffits of the windows and the quadrangular opening of the aumbry, instead of the present pointed-arch opening.

In addition to the pattern marking the groins, windows and aumbry, red lines marking the ashlar of the triumphal arch from the impost upwards, both on the side of the choir and the nave, are a part of the original décor of the church.

The first layer of painting in the choir is mostly covered with the next layer, but it is apparent from the few exposed areas that the painting was

done in a rough hand. The outlines framing the painting run in shaky lines and the painter attempted to straighten out some of the very crooked lines by means of repeated brush strokes, as a result of which the outlines of the painting are often exceptionally wide. The line of the pattern constantly widens and narrows. The painting was done by free hand, without the aid of any auxiliary instruments. The craftsman who did the painting had clearly received no specialist training and the rough surface of the vault and the materials and tools at his disposal did not contribute to the situation. The whitewash that served as the background paint, as well as the primer, has large lumps of lime in it and a brush with coarse bristles was used in the work, with the bristle lines clearly visible on the surface. Similarly, the painting itself was also done with a brush with strong bristles, revealed by the prominent lines of the herringbone pattern around the aumbry painted on plaster and primer that had not fully dried. The colour and texture of the painting change in the upper part of the groins. While in the lower part of the painting and around the ashlars of the triumphal arch the colour is a cold red, there was a change in pigment higher up and the tone of the painting is warmer. In addition to the change in colour, the traces of the brush disappear as the priming and the painting were done on plaster that had already dried.

**STELLAR VAULT.** The second late medieval painting lies immediately on the red herringbone pattern. It represents the stellar vault, marked with a herringbone pattern of grey, red and black segments for tiercerons and liernes, and large red and white stars with black points for bosses. A characteristic black outline surrounds all the motifs and the coloured segments of the herringbone pattern alternate with white ones. The corner posts were grey with black lines running in their interior corners. The impostes were red with black outlines. The herringbone patterns marking the tiercerons rise from the impostes and run along the groins to the boss and in the direction of the centre of the coping. At the crossing of the two tiercerons, there are red-and-white stars with black points marking the bosses of the stellar vault. The black points form a segment of the herringbone pattern. The liernes end with black segments and this gives the impression of a shaft of rays surrounding the boss. The edge of the boss is black and its upper surface red. A black line runs along the edges of Orgas's crest. The crest itself is black, with grey lozenges edged in black.

A herringbone pattern also runs around the windows and the large blind niche of the north side. At the sides facing both the choir and the nave, the



*Fig. 5. Boss with Bishop Orgas' crest at the crown of the vault in choir. Photo by Kaire Tooming.*

ashlars of the triumphal arch are highlighted in grey with a black outline. A wide grey band outlined in black and running round the sacristy door, the aumbry and the niche of the south wall is conditionally divided into ashlar. Similarly to the choir, there was a herringbone pattern of grey, red and black segments running round the windows of the nave and the blind niches of the north wall, and their fragments can still be seen on the ceiling of the nave today.

A new craftsman with new ideas and of a high professional level arrived at St Martin's of Martna comparatively soon after the completion of the first interior design of the choir. We can deduce this from the unbleached bright red herringbone pattern, as well as the fact that the new paint was applied to the white primer painted immediately on the previous layer. Contrary to the painter of the first layer, the craftsman who painted the stellar vault was skilful in his trade – the painting has a good composition and was skilfully done.

Before the actual painting, a sketch was made on the surface of the vault. In places it only served as a rough guide for a better composition of the painting. The herringbone pattern, representing tiercerons and liernes, is a freehand drawing that was applied to the surface of the still wet primer



*Fig. 6. Sketch under painting depicting stellar vault. Photo by Kaire Tooming.*

with a blunt-tipped tool. The drawing that remained under the black outline was applied to the surface with red pigment. The central line aligning the tips of the points of the herringbone drawing is colourless. The stars were drawn using compasses.

The compositional basis of the painting is the boss and the stars around it, situated at 180–185 cm from the crown. All the stars are of the same size, with a radius of 31.5 cm. The location of the stars was established first and the pattern representing tiercerons and liernes were later adapted to the given system. The structure of the tiercerons and of the liernes is flawless – the segments of the paintings are of the same size and the sequence of the colours is regular. The alternation of grey, red and black is the same everywhere but, in the case of the tiercerons of the west and north copings, the alternation of the colours is not from the impost to the star but proceeding from the star, as a result of which these herringbone patterns have a “backward order” of colours. But that slight misfit in the painting is hardly noticeable. The problem caused by finding the right rhythm of the coloured segments of the liernes on the north and the south copings is slightly more conspicuous.

ANGELS. The third layer of painting is Baroque and lies immediately on the layer imitating the stellar vault. The painting is found only in the upper part of the vault and its composition has four angels floating in the air and blowing trumpets. The angels wear robes of a yellow top and a grey skirt. The trumpets and the wings are yellow (golden). The figures were painted in fine detail. Due to the strong glue paint used to paint both the ivory background and the angel figures, the third layer of painting is in a very poor condition. Only the north figure has fully survived, but even there a serious loss of paint is evident and, as a result, the finer layer of painting has largely perished.

### PARALLELS AND DATING

As pointed out above, medieval interior paintings are quite rare in Estonia and in all of Old Livonia today, hidden under countless layers of plaster and paint or perished without a trace. As a result, we do not have sufficient local material for comparison. Consequently, it is necessary to turn for parallels to other Baltic Sea countries because, in addition to similar ideas, travelling master masons using the same motifs and models moved around in the connected cultural space.

Paintings underlining the architectural form of the church or its different details, whether by means of a simple coloured line or a pattern strip, are a favourite motif in medieval wall and vault paintings. Marking of the architectural form may be the only element of décor, but mostly it serves as a background for different figural, geometrical or other compositions. In the case of medieval interiors of Estonian churches, we can speak of figural, ornamental and geometrical wall and vault paintings,<sup>6</sup> as well as of extremely laconic interior design, where the main accent is a mono-

<sup>6</sup> See: Helen Bome, "The "Marginal" Motifs of Karja Church – Magical or Mystical?", *Bilder i marginalen (Nordiska studier i medeltidens konst)* (Tallinn: Argo, 2006), 223–234; Helen Bome, Kersti Markus, "Karja kirik – kõige väiksem katedraal", *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi* 4 [14] (2005), 9–51; J. Gahlnbäck, "Mittelalterliche Wandmalereien in den Kirchen Mohn und Karris auf der Insel Ösel", *Sitzungsberichte der Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde der Ostseeprovinzen Russlands aus dem Jahre 1913* (Riga, 1914), 207–213; Sirje Helme, "Veel kord märkidest Karja kirikus", *Kunst*, 1 (1975), 53–56; Villem Raam, "Ühest vähetuntud kunstiloost Muhu saarel", *Kunst*, 64, 2 (1984), 50–59; Villem Raam, "Valjala seinamaalidest, nende vanusest ja päritolust", *Kunst*, 68, 1 (1986), 59–65; Anneli Randla, "Uusi leide Muhu kirikust", *Ars estoniae medii aevi grates Villem Raam viro doctissimo et expertissimo* (Tallinn: Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts, 1995), 57–64; Anneli Randla, "Meister Geometres ja teised Hanila kirikus", *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi*, 11 (2002), 7–31.

chrome line underlining architectural features.<sup>7</sup> The herringbone pattern familiar from the choir of St Martin's of Martna can be seen in the wall or vault painting of quite a few late medieval buildings in Estonia. One of the famous examples is the colourful herringbone pattern on the transverse arches and on the slender octagonal pillars of the Citizens' Hall of the Tallinn Town Hall.<sup>8</sup> It is not a feature alien to the interior design of churches either. From examining exposed fragments, it is clear that herringbone patterns were present, in addition to in St Martin's of Martna, in the churches of Kose, Rannu, Käina<sup>9</sup>, Hanila and Ridala, to name but a few.

**RED HERRINGBONE PATTERN.** The red herringbone pattern of the choir of St Martin's of Martna is easily dated to the construction of the church, as the pattern was applied to the primary layer of plaster in the choir. The construction of the church (or its major reconstruction) took place at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries and the arms of Bishop Orgas, then the head of the Saare-Lääne Bishopric, adorn the crown of the vault, and date it.

Although it is easy to position the painting on a time line, it is much more complicated to find parallels. The red herringbone pattern cannot be categorized in any certain stylistically homogeneous group. It is tempting to view it as representative of 'primitive' paintings known in Scandinavia. But the only link between the first painting of the Martna choir and its Scandinavian counterparts, apart from a common time span,<sup>10</sup> is the fact that the person who did the painting was not a professional craftsman specialising in wall and vault paintings. At the same time, it is one of the criteria which define the fact that the painting belongs to the above-mentioned group.<sup>11</sup> Despite this, the author does not dare place the original painting of St Martin's of Martna in the same group as the Scandinavian primitive paintings. Relying on the exposed fragments, the red herringbone painting, along with the ashlar painting surrounding the triumphal

<sup>7</sup> See Kersti Markus, Tiina-Mall Kreem, Anu Mänd, *Kaarma kirik. Eesti kirikud I* (Tallinn: Muinsuskaitseamet, 2003), 78–81.

<sup>8</sup> The Tallinn Town Hall acquired its present appearance in the course of major reconstruction in 1402–04 when also the stately rooms of the first floor, the Citizens' Hall and the Council Chamber, were completed (Rasmus Kangroopool, "Raekoda", *Eesti arhitektuur*, 1 (Tallinn: Valgus, 1993), 190).

<sup>9</sup> Raam, "Mõningaid uusi andmeid vanast dekoratiivsest seinamaalist", 54.

<sup>10</sup> Helena Edgren, "Primitiva målningar?", *Bild och känsla från antik till nyantik* (Åbo: [Åbo Akademi], 1994), 50.

<sup>11</sup> Helena Edgren, "'Primitive Paintings': the Visual World of Populus Rusticus", *History and Image: Towards a New Iconology. Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe*, 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 301.



Fig. 7. Plaque with the coat of arms of Bishop Orgas above the north portal. Photo by Kaire Tooming.

arch in St Martin's of Martna, were the only decoration of the interior. In the case of Scandinavian examples, figurative and ornamental details complement the simple architectural painting.

But let us return to the craftsman of this coarse painting. The builders of St Martin's of Martna were probably craftsmen who belonged to the bishop's building yard at Haapsalu castle, and their main work must have been to build massive defence structures.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the Haapsalu Cathedral served as an example for architectural details that were coarsely copied. At the same time, we cannot overlook the fine workmanship of the building master's coats of arms, but we will return to that below.

There are a few examples from Finland and Denmark where the building yard which built a church did the 'primitive' painting on its walls and vaults after the work was completed.<sup>13</sup> By the end of the 15th century, the paintings in churches became features of such importance that the building of a church was not considered completed without them. It was regarded as one of the reasons for such a practise.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Kilumets, "Martna püha Martini kirik", 17.

<sup>13</sup> Edgren, "Primitive Paintings", 315.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

This may also have happened at Martna, where the church building itself stands in an amazing correlation with the artistic level of the primary painting. The craftsmen, who had mainly built defensive structures until that time, could have been in a situation where, in addition to building a House of God, they also had to take care of decorating its interior. So the brush ended up in the hand of a craftsman who may have been an expert builder of vaults but his knowledge and skills were not sufficient for doing vault painting. It could naturally be assumed that in such a case the job was ordered from outside the building yard. We can also find an example of such activity in St Martin's of Martna, where a plaque with the coat of arms of Bishop Orgas made in the workshop of the outstanding Old Livonian stone carver Reynken was inserted into the wall above the north portal of the nave.<sup>15</sup>

It may look strange that a work of art at a high European level and efforts by a homespun craftsman coexist in the same Old Livonian parish church, but we should not let ourselves be distracted by modern aesthetics. A medieval person's contact with art was rare and so painting need not have been exceptional for the local people.<sup>16</sup> Because of that, the building master may not have had the need to subcontract a job that local craftsmen could do.

STELLAR VAULT. It has to be admitted that attempts to find parallels to the stellar vault painting of the choir of St Martin's of Martna have not produced any results. As pointed out above, architectural painting was widespread in medieval times. The transfer of architectural form into wall and vault paintings is not a phenomenon alien to Estonia – we can see illusory windows in the north wall of the choir in the churches of Karja and Kaarma, while illusory rose windows can be found in the west walls of the churches of Valjala and Muhu. True, from the point of view of the stellar vault painting in the choir of St Martin's of Martna, these examples are rather too early, but they are characteristic enough to show that, if necessary, the architecture of a church could also be complemented by visual effects. If the above examples are strongly connected with important iconographic issues, then could there have been copying of architectural form for clearly aesthetic reasons? Is it plausible that the patron, fascinated by the beauty of the stellar vault, could have wished to see an elegant architectural form transferred into a vault painting instead of a clumsily executed herringbone pattern? As it is not possible to give an

<sup>15</sup> Tuulse, "Die Spätmittelalterliche Steinskulptur in Estland und Lettland", 81.

<sup>16</sup> Edgren, "'Primitive Paintings'", 314.

unambiguous negative answer to the question, let us look for examples of the star vault painting in architecture.

The golden period of the spread of the stellar vault in Estonia was in the 15th century. The Teutonic Order played an important role as the propagator of that type of vault in Old Livonia and in other Baltic Sea areas.<sup>17</sup> The first examples of stellar vaults are found in Tallinn, where the choir of St Olaf's was given stellar vaults in the course of reconstruction work in 1423.<sup>18</sup> Work in the novel style continued and, by 1450, the nave had also received stellar vaults.<sup>19</sup> The building of stellar vaults in Tallinn continued and, by 1424, the hall of St Olaf's Guild<sup>20</sup> had also received stellar vaults and that vault system was probably used in the eastern part of the Church of St Bridget's Convent, which was consecrated in 1436.<sup>21</sup>

Stellar vaults can also be found in southern Estonia and in Latvia, where the Riga Cathedral (stellar vaults in the aisles) and St Peter's of Riga (stellar vaults in the choir and the aisles)<sup>22</sup> serve as examples. The earliest example of stellar vaults in southern Estonia is the choir of the Rannu Church, from the second quarter of the 15th century.<sup>23</sup> In the context of the paintings in the choir of St Martin's of Martna, the fact that the ribs of the stellar vaults in Rannu were covered with a herringbone pattern, which has unfortunately perished,<sup>24</sup> adds an intriguing touch. In the second half of the 15th century, a stellar vault was inserted in the choir of Karula Church,<sup>25</sup> and in the last decade of the same century in the choir of Puhja Church.<sup>26</sup>

We find the nearest stellar vault, in terms of both geography and time, in the Church of St Nicholas of Pärnu (which has perished), where stellar vaults had been built in the nave, under the supervision of a Tartu mason, by 1529, in the course of restoration work after a fire in 1524.<sup>27</sup> Uus-Pärnu,

<sup>17</sup> Kaur Altoa, "Märkmeid Lõuna-Eesti keskaegsetest kirikutest", *Ars Estoniae medii aevi grates Villem Raam viro doctissimo et expertissimo* (Tallinn: Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts, 1995), 81.

<sup>18</sup> Rasmus Kangroopool, Mai Lumiste, "Mõningatest Tallinna 15. sajandi arhitektuuri dateerimise küsimustest", *Töid kunstiteaduse ja -kriitika alalt*, 2 (1977), 277.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 267.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, 274.

<sup>21</sup> Villem Raam, *Pirita klooster* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1984), 22.

<sup>22</sup> The author thanks Anneli Randla for drawing attention to Riga churches.

<sup>23</sup> Altoa, "Märkmeid Lõuna-Eesti keskaegsetest kirikutest", 73.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, 76.

<sup>27</sup> Heinrich Laakmann, "Das mittelalterliche Kirchenwesen Neu-Pernaus", *Sitzungsberichte der Gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft 1922* (Dorpat, 1923), 129.

situated in territory that then belonged to the Teutonic Order, was a prosperous trading town in the first half of the 16th century and, as such, an attractive centre for the vassals and officials of the Saare-Lääne Bishopric, where they acquired real estate and settled, where loans were given to citizens, where marriages were concluded, where there was tutelage of the citizens, etc.<sup>28</sup>

As a result, looking for parallels to the paintings in the choir of St Martin's of Martna, we should not overlook St Nicholas's of Pärnu as one of the most impressive ecclesiastic buildings in the region. The influence of the stellar vault of the nave of St Nicholas's of Pärnu on the vault in the choir of St Martin's of Martna seems quite likely, considering the importance of Uus-Pärnu in the area. The nave of St Nicholas's of Pärnu, of a novel and grand design, is quite suitable as an example for the painting in Martna's church.

Bearing in mind that the red herringbone pattern can be dated to the turn of the 15th and the 16th centuries, and that the angels are Baroque, what might have been the time limits of the stellar vault painting? As pointed out above, a new layer covered the original décor of the choir at a time when the red herringbone pattern had not yet seriously faded or been damaged in some other way. If we presume that the stellar vaults of St Nicholas's of Pärnu were the impulse for the new décor of St Martin's of Martna, the earliest dating would be in the 1530s. The latest time for the painting to be completed would be the second half of the 1550s, because the Livonian War, which started in 1558, was an ordeal for all of Old Livonia and it was hardly possible to undertake such major work as the renewal of the interior of a church at a time of general destruction.

ANGELS. The last layer of painting in the choir of Martna Church is clearly from the modern period. The chorus of the trumpeting angels<sup>29</sup> was done by an artist of the Baroque period. The need for a new painting must have arisen relatively soon after the completion of the painting imitating the stellar vaults, which can be assumed by the exceptionally good condition and unfaded bright colours of the second layer of painting. If we attempt to date the trumpeting angels slightly more accurately, then one of the

<sup>28</sup> Inna Põltsam, "Saare-Lääne piiskopkonna vasallide ja ametnike karjäär ning tegutsemine Uus-Pärnus 16. sajandi esimesel poolel", *Saare-Lääne piiskopkond. Artiklid Lääne-Eesti keskajast* (Haapsalu: Läänemaa Muuseum, 2004), 99–100.

<sup>29</sup> The author thanks Prof. Krista Kodres and Merike Kurisoo, who drew the author's attention to the fact that the trumpeting angels represent a choir of angels rather than the heralds of Doomsday of the Revelations.



*Fig. 8.* Stellar vault at St Nicholas' Church in Pärnu. Photo by Armin Tuulse, 1943 (Art Historical Photograph Collection of the University of Tartu).

points of support is the disk in the upper part of the chandelier chain in the choir, decorated with a coat-of-arms with a two-tailed lion, the donor's name (Gerhardt Lewe der Jünger) and the date 1631.<sup>30</sup> The hand of the artist who painted the disk is very similar to the one that painted the angels. Both display similar colouring and fine workmanship.

#### IN CONCLUSION

The paintings found during the conservation work in the choir of St Martin's of Martna help us to solve the puzzle of the parish churches of Old Livonia.

<sup>30</sup> In 1630 Gerhardt Lewe the Younger has donated the chandelier of the choir with the text: ANNO 1630 DEN 12 SEPTEMBER / HABE ICH GERDT \* LEWE DER / IVNGER DIESE GRONE IN DE / KERCHE \* S \* MARTTEN ZU GOTTES / EHRE GEGEBEN (Tartu Ülikooli Raamatukogu, Käsikirjade ja haruldaste raamatute osakond [University of Tartu Library, Collections of Rare Books and Manuscripts], 55-3-99, 31).



*Fig. 9. The imitation of the stellar vault on the vault of the choir. Photo by Kaire Tooming.*

We can see that paintings became an important feature of interior decoration in the late medieval period in Estonia and, although in a primitive manner, the church was born complete with paintings. At the same time, the period during which one layer of painting was exhibited need not have been very long. If there was enough opportunity and inspiration, a layer of painting in quite good condition could have been replaced by another one for clearly aesthetic reasons. The further we move in time, the more monochrome the interior of Martna Church becomes. Of the nine layers of finish in the choir, only the first three were decorated. In the case of the others, we only need to note white lime paint of different shades. But we should not regard this as a generalisation of Modern Era developments in other Estonian parish churches. Despite continuing warfare and plague, quite a few congregations managed to decorate their churches with magnificent paintings and the 19th century saw the rise of the Historicist spirit, which once again brought a period when many churches were given colourfully decorated interiors.

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*KOKKUVÕTE: Hiliskeskaegsed maalingud Martna püha Martini kiriku kooriruumis*

Martna püha Martini kirik on üks viimaseid keskajal ehitatud kivikirikuid Eestis, pärinedes 15. ja 16. sajandi vahetusest. Kiriku ehitusisandaks oli Saare-Lääne piiskop Johannes III Orgas, millest annavad tunnistust piiskopi vapi kujutised põhjaportaali kohal ning kooriruumi päiskivil. 2004.–2005. aastal toimunud kooriruumi interjööri restaureerimistöode käigus tulid ilmsiks kaks hiliskeskaegset (punane kalasabamuster ja tähtvõlvi imitatsioon) ning üks barokne (trompetit puhuvad inglid) maalingukiht ruumi seintel ja võlvil.

Martna kiriku kooriruumi punane kalasabamaaling on dateeritav kiriku ehitusaega. Selle paigutamine kindlasse, stiililiselt ühtsesse gruppi on keeruline. Seda maalingut võiks võrrelda Skandinaavias tuntud nn primitiivsete maalingutega, kuid ühiste ajaliste piiride kõrval on ainsaks sarnasuseks, et maalingu tegija ei ole olnud professionaalne selle ala meister. Skandinaavias lisanduvad lihtsale arhitektuursele maalingule ka figuraalsed ja ornamentaalsed detailid. Soomest ja Taanist on näiteid, kus kiriku interjööri maalinguid ei teinud mitte professionaalne meister, vaid kiriku ehitanud meisterkond, kes maalis seintele ning võlvidele ka nn primitiivsed maalingud, seda põhjusel, et kirikute seina- ja võlvimaalingud olid muutunud oluliseks interjööri osaks, milleta ei peetud kiriku ehitustöid lõpetatuks. Sarnase praktika tulemusena võis sündida ka Martna kiriku esimene maaling.

Tähtvõlvi imiteeriva maalingu puhul võib leida eeskujusid arhitektuurist. Tähtvõlvi leviku kuldaeg Eestis jääb 15. sajandisse ning seda võib kohata nii Põhja- kui ka Lõuna-Eestis. Nii geograafiliselt kui ka ajalisel kõige lähedasema tähtvõlvi näite leiame tänaseks hävinud Pärnu Nikolai kirikust, kus pikihoones valmisid 1529. aastaks tähtvõlvivid Tartu meistri juhtimisel. Uus-Pärnu oli 16. sajandi esimesel poolel jõukas kaubalinn ja Saare-Lääne piiskopkonna vasallidele ja ametnikele tõmbekeskuseks. Seega näib Uus-Pärnu positsiooni arvestades tõenäoline tähtvõlvi jõudmine Martna kiriku koori võlvile mõjutatuna Pärnust. Ka ajalisel sobivad Pärnu Nikolai kiriku tähtvõlvivid Martna kiriku maalingule eeskujuks ning varaseimaks dateeringuks võiks olla 1530. aastad. Maalingu valmimise hiliseimaks ajaks võiks olla 1550. aastate teine pool, sest vaevalt Liivi sõja ajal nii mahukat tööd ette võeti.