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THE PRESENCE OF THE SACRED:
A 13TH-CENTURY CULT IMAGE
FROM SAAREMAA (ESTONIA)

INTRODUCTION

The items related to the medieval art legacy that has survived on the territory of modern Estonia are small in number, but provide individual cases that, due to their artistic quality, completion context, iconographic rarity and other aspects, make a contribution to the knowledge about the medieval cultural and art legacy of Northern Europe. To date, researchers have focused less on individual works than on the large late medieval altarpieces, which have survived nearly intact. This is probably because the reconstruction of the completion situations and utilisation contexts of the former is not an easy task. The complete works have not survived; there are few written sources or similar examples that could help to make generalisations; and “old-fashioned” style analysis combined with the historical context seems to have exhausted itself on today’s research landscape.¹

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1 Style criticism in present-day research is not restricted to the description of an object, the search for style of a region or specific artist, or the apparatus inherent to an individual master, but is primarily comprised of analysing and explaining an object based on the viewpoint that the “style” of a work of art is carrier of rich meaning, a means of communication, which expresses its time, but also the standards and ideas of the place, the intentions and internal attitudes of society i.e. the client. Robert Suckale, “Stilgeschichte zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts. Probleme und Möglichkeiten”, *Stilfragen zur Kunst des Mittelalters*, hrsg. Bruno Klein, Bruno Boerner (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 2005), 271-281.

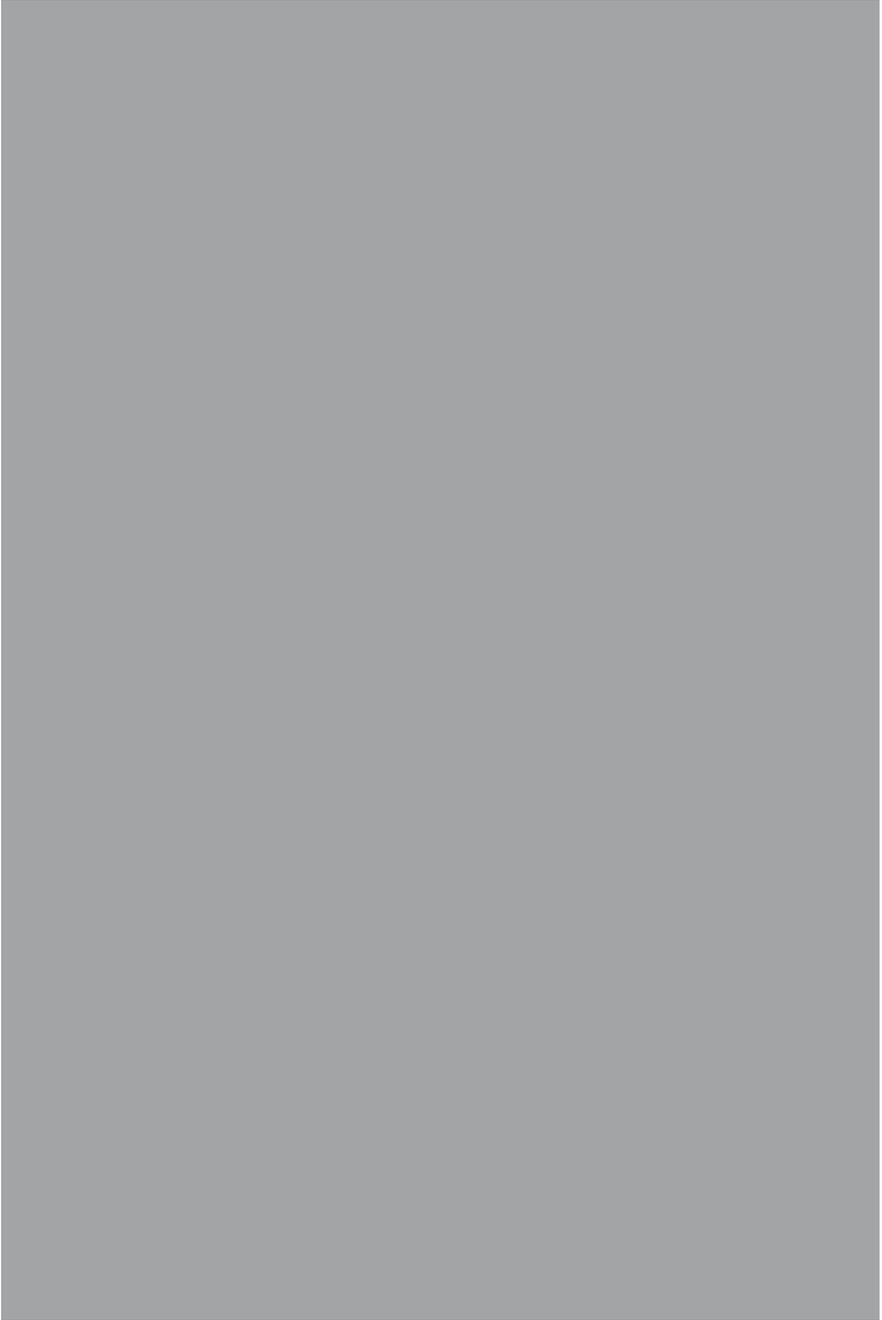


Fig. 1. Figure of Christ in the Saaremaa Museum. Photo: Krista Andreson.

In this article, I want to direct attention to a small-scale figure of the crucified Christ – a crucifix from the Kärla Church that is currently in the Saaremaa Museum in Kuressaare.² The original crossbar of the crucifix has not survived, it is covered with modern polychrome and there is no definite information about which church the sculpture originally belonged to. Furthermore, the assumed completion of the work dates back to a period from which we have the first written reports on Christian houses of worship on Estonian territory, but when the Christianisation of the people had yet to be completed and the network of churches was not fully developed. To help us reconstruct the initial function of the sculpture in the sacral context, we must rely primarily on the object itself; its distinctive features that are derived from its iconography and means of depiction; and on the results of technological examinations; and thereafter seek additional knowledge based on the network of relationships between the visual object and the literature and liturgy of the day. The depictions of Christ are the works of art that most clearly trace the new practices that have been performed during different periods, and this is true, above all, of the works related to the crucified Christ, who was the symbol of perfection and virtue for medieval people.³ Thus, in the course of dealing with this topic and the specific individual objects, aspects are discovered that reveal the connections between art and theology in the first half of the thirteenth century by providing a survey of the era's spiritual practices.

This is not the author's first attempt to deal with this sculpture. Fifteen years ago, when I was defending my BA thesis in the Department of History at the University of Tartu, I touched on the Kärla Christ among Estonia's other wooden crucifixes, and considered the issue of the style, age and origins of the work; the conclusions were introduced in several articles.⁴ The German art historian Gerhard Lutz has also briefly

2 Height of the figure: 52 cm; material: oak; cross secondary. Belong to the collection of the Saaremaa Museum, on display in the Kuressaare Castle, Saaremaa. For a discussion about its initial location, see below.

3 Rüdiger Schneider Berrenberg, *Studien zur monumentalen Kruzifixgestaltung im 13. Jahrhundert*. Dissertation der Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München (München: Verlag Rüdiger Schneider Berrenberg, 1977), 5

4 Krista Ivask, *Kaks keskaegset puukrutsifiksi Eestis*, BA thesis (University of Tartu, Department of History, Chair of Art History; 2000); Krista Ivask, "Kärla krutsifiks", *Saaremaa Muuseum, Kaheaastaraamat 2001-2002* (Kuressaare: Saaremaa Museum, 2003), 28-42; Krista Ivask, "Zwei mittelalterliche Holzkruzifixe aus Estland", *Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte im Baltikum, Homburger Gespräch 2003*, Heft 20, herausgegeben von Lars Olof Larsson (Kiel: Martin-Carl-Adolf-Böckler-Stiftung, 2005), 31-53.

turned his attention to the Kärle crucifix in his dissertation, which was published as a book in 2004.⁵ In both treatises, the Kärle Christ is examined in the context of Saxon crucifixes from the second quarter of the thirteenth century, by directing attention to the noticeable similarities in the depiction of the face and hair to the larger-than-life figure of the crucified Christ in the Halberstadt Cathedral. But before we re-examine the issues related to the dating and origins of the sculpture, and also the set of problems related to its original location, we should take a fresh look at the work itself, and its iconography and utilization context in the medieval church – in the case of this work, these aspects are being examined more broadly for the first time.

FROM TRIUMPH TO PASSION

The small-dimensional figure of Christ is attached to a cross that was not part of the original composition. The coat of paint visible on the sculpture is also secondary and although some of the original polychrome underneath has survived, the paint is not one of aspects under consideration in this article. Focusing on the sculpture's depiction style, the viewer is initially struck by the fact that the legs of the crucified Christ are parallel, and therefore, the figure is attached to the cross with four nails instead of the usual three. Changes started being made in the middle of the twelfth century to the number of nails and means of fastening to the cross depicted in art. However, only a few examples have survived in Europe that date back earlier than the early thirteenth century.⁶ A great breakthrough occurred around 1210/20 and the new depiction style had triumphed by the middle of the thirteenth century at the latest. This time period also provides the temporal framework for this study.

5 Gerhard Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel. Die sächsischen und westfälischen Kreuzfixe der ersten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2004), 260-261, Catalogue, no. 57. Many aspects of this text have served as an example for the writing of this study. See: Petra Marx, "Gerhard Lutz: „Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel“", *Sehepunkte*, Ausgabe 5, (2005), Nr. 10. <http://www.sehepunkte.de/2005/10/7610.html> (viewed 10.11.2014).

6 The first dated three-nail crucifix is on a crucifixion bas-relief on a baptismal font dated 1149 from Tirmont, which is preserved today in the Cinquantenaire Museum in Brussels. See: *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Bd I = LCI I (Rom [etc]: Herder, 1990), 552.; Since both depiction styles are presented side-by-side on Hermann von Thüringen's psaltery from 1217, the adoption of the crucifixion motif in book paintings can be verified in time *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Bd II = LCI II (Rom [etc]: Herder, 1990), 668.



Fig. 2. Christ on the cross. Photo: Krista Andreson.

However, finding **the reasons** for the changes in the style of depiction is more complicated than the time factor. The historical sources do not record the method of Christ's crucifixion exactly. Of the evangelists, St. John writes about the event most precisely⁷, but even he does not provide the details. Therefore, there was speculation about Christ's crucifixion and the position of his feet already in early Christian literature.⁸ Art historians have primarily seen the number nails as external, artistic background⁹, but in theological literature, this question has not generated much attention since the early thirteenth century.¹⁰ Although from an iconographic viewpoint, the

existence of four nails has been seen as a symbol of the four points of the compass or continents, this means of depiction did not become a canonical standard, and therefore, its replacement with three nails did not cause any wider public discussion.¹¹ The existence of four or three nails, as well as the location of the wound on Christ's left or right side was not considered important in regard to faith or the sacraments. However, it

7 "…There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews." (Joh. 19:18-19).

8 LCI I, 552.

9 See: Karl August Wirth, *Die Entstehung des Drei-Nagel-Crucifixus: Seine typengeschichtliche Entwicklung bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts in Frankreich und Deutschland*. Phil. Diss. (Universität Frankfurt a. M.: 1953), 198-200.

10 See: Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 49-50.

11 As an exception to the representatives of the conservative side, one should name the famous Bishop Lucas de Tuy (died 1249), who, in the letters against the Cathars (*De altera vita fideique controversiis adversus Albigensium errores, 1233-34*) demonstrated his displeasure towards those who acted with disregard to traditions and customs, and among other things, calling the fastening of the feet with one nail an abomination and destructive to belief in the Holy Father and the Holy Cross. For more, see: Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 50.

is clear that the suffering and torment of Christ could be better depicted by placing one foot on top of the other and using three nails to fasten him to the cross.

In the specialised literature, a popular opinion was that, in the previous so-called “Roman art period”, depicting Christ as dead on crucifixes was avoided, instead a living king was shown on the cross and iconographic means were used to depict, not the death and suffering on the cross, but the victory – triumph over Death.¹² Therefore, the early crucifixes show a crown above the king’s head and the body is not hanging, but standing before the cross, with legs parallel and supported by a *suppedaneum*.¹³ However, a more naturalistic means of depiction gained favour in the early thirteenth century. The living became the dying; the king’s crown was replaced by the crown of thorns; the support was removed from under his feet and the feet placed atop each other; and the body depicting as hanging heavily from the cross. The focus shifted from emphasising salvation to emphasising suffering.¹⁴

Thus, it can be generally stated that the fastening with three nails, which was introduced in the early decades of the thirteenth century, was a part of the process for stressing the humanity of Christ, a formal means of expressing his insufferable pain. This shift had been initiated almost a century and a half earlier and the roots of the visual changes were found in the reform movements in the ecclesiastical world – the spread of private devotional practices and the piety movements, which were a part of the change in the theological paradigm starting in the second half of the eleventh century. Namely, from the standpoint of pictorial design, before the eleventh century theology dealt primarily with the issue of Christ’s dual nature (“*humanitas*” and “*deitas*”), and the act of salvation was seen by the Latin Church fathers primarily as a battle between good and evil. In this situation, Christ was the *triumphator*, and man was cast in the role of the bystander.¹⁵ Thus, there was no need to pay

12 Maria Anczykowski, *Westfälische Kreuze des 13. Jahrhunderts*. Phil. Diss (Münster: Aschendorff, 1992), 5-7. Generally, the description of this process is correct, but from an analysis of the surviving material, it is clear that in reality is difficult to differentiate – earlier images also show signs of a living as well as dead Saviour, who was dead in the context of his humanity, but also its divine existence was still alive (Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 30).

13 Manuela Beer, *Triumphkreuze des Mittelalters. Ein Beitrag zu Typus und Genese im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert; mit einem Katalog der erhaltenen Denkmäler* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2005), 101.

14 A good survey of the iconographic changes in the depiction of crucifixes based on French materials: Paul Thoby, *Le crucifix, des origines au concile de Trente, Étude iconographique* (Nantes: Bellanger, 1959).

15 Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 30-33.



Fig. 3. Crist on the cross of Hemse Church (Gotland). Photo: Krista Andreson.

special attention to generating emotional associations between the religious and Passion events.

The changes initially took place in the eleventh century among the high-level clerics. Although Christocentrism was a legacy of the Benedictines, it achieved a new level with the Cistercians. This is alluded to in the theological literature by Bernhard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), as one of the key people, and also by numerous other theologians, whose tracts, biographies, visions and similar spiritual literature indicate that attention had shifted from the Resurrection to the Crucifixion and Christ's human side. The activities of Bernhard of Clairvaux,

the central figure in the 12th-century piety movement, as the founder of the ideas of Christocentric mysticism and *imitatio Christi*, initiated the popularisation of the private devotional movement related to the Passion of Christ, and therein, the so-called "folk piety" in the early thirteenth century.¹⁶ According to Bernhard, *imitatio Christi* indicates an extreme closeness to the crucified Christ through a virtuous life, asceticism and compassion. An important aspect of this concept is the mutual love between Christ and man, and the key role in this practice is played by the crucifix as a "proof of love" (German: *Liebesbeweis*) and the focal point for meditation. The idea of *imitatio* is also the basis for the meaning that Bernhard attributed in his principal writings to the sacrament of Holy Communion, by describing how the Apostles at the Last Supper experienced reassurance and support not only bodily, but primarily

16 Esther Wipfler, "Corpus Christi" in Liturgie und Kunst der Zisterzienser im Mittelalter", *Vita Regularis. Ordnungen und Deutungen religiösen Lebens im Mittelalter*. Hrsg von Gert Melville, Bd 18 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003), 13-21. Also see Jean Leclercq, *Bernhard von Clairvaux: ein Mönch prägt seine Zeit* (München: Neue Stadt, 2005).

spiritually and in their hearts.¹⁷ The clerics that followed Bernhard also paid heightened attention to the sacrament of the Eucharist, emphasising that spiritual communion was based on meditation related to the suffering of Christ, and at the same time, that material communion occurred in the form of accepting Holy Communion. These changes can be simultaneously observed in modern liturgy – starting in the second half of the twelfth century, with the presentation of body of Christ by receiving the Host, and as of the first half of the thirteen century, with the presentation of the blood of Christ as well. In 1215, the teaching of transubstantiation was declared a dogma for the Council of the Lateran by Pope Innocent III.¹⁸

Respect for the bodily Christ was at the centre of this process, and in the same period (late twelfth century), one can notice an explosive growth of sculptural crucifixes – Christ changed from being the focal point of the celebration of Mass and became visualised for the believers in three-dimensional form.

In summary, one can say that the noteworthy increase in the number of three-dimensional crucifixes in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and thereby the increased attention on the wounds of the Cross and other details related to the suffering, can be interpreted in the context of the era's spiritual searches, and primarily in the context of strengthened Passion piety. The purpose of visually emphasising the Passion was related to the idea of bringing the idea of and emotions related to the Crucifixion closer to the believers, and providing an opportunity for immediate identification.

Are the aforementioned changes expressed in the crucifix from Kärle Church, and if so, how?

Examining the Saaremaa sculpture in the context of the aforementioned changes, it is apparent that the fastening to the cross with four nails represents an old tradition. However, despite the parallel placement of the legs, which are supported by the *suppedaneum*, Christ's body

17 Wipfler, „Corpus Christi“ in Liturgie und Kunst der Zisterzienser im Mittelalter“, 15-16.

18 “There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being hanged (*transsubstantiation*) by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us“, see: H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 236-296. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp> (viewed 10.11.2014).



Fig. 4. Christ on the cross. View from the right. Photo: Krista Andreson.

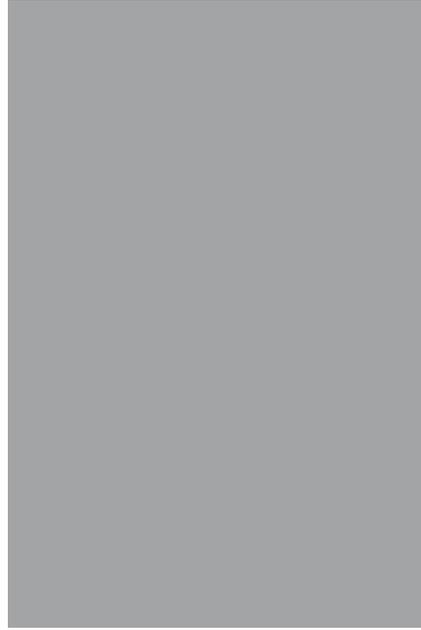


Fig.5. Figure of Christ. View from the left. Photo: Krista Andreson.

is hanging – this is emphasised by the curved pose of the muscular hands, tense upper body, arched chest and bulging stomach. The impression of hanging becomes especially apparent when looking at the sculpture from the side – the body visibly protrudes from the cross and is only attached with the nails through the hands and the feet. Small holes are visible in the hair around Christ's head – these have probably been created by the initial fastening of a crown of thorns. The initial polychromatic studies also allude to the existence of green paint in the hair area.¹⁹ In addition to the wounds on the hands and feet, there is a pronounced wound on the crucified Christ's right side. Christ's face is depicted in great detail: the eyes are open, the mouth and lips slightly ajar, and the gaze directed down and to the right.

The Kärle crucifies provides a key for interpreting the relationship between the work and the viewer. Namely, the means of depiction in which Christ's mouth is slightly open and his gaze directed down, which was popular in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, is

¹⁹ Signe Vahur's (University of Tartu, Institute of Chemistry, Chair of Analytical Chemistry) verbal information.



Fig. 6. The head of Christ with nail holes in the hair. Photo: Krista Andreson.

connected to a specific form of hymn popular in theological literature and Passion poetry (as it was called in the vernacular), which was sung in front of the image of the crucified Christ and in which Christ directly addressed the believers.²⁰ Approaching the Kärle crucifix from the right, we see the open mouth and eyes of a Christ who is looking at us, and who, by addressing the believers, is also directing attention to the open wound in his side, from which blood is flowing. The fastening for the loincloth is also located on the right side of the sculpture, thereby focusing greater attention on the right side compared to the left. We are dealing with a living, corporeal crucified Christ that is hanging on the cross, and whose intention is to communicate with the viewer.

FUNCTION

If, in the case of a life-sized triumphal cross, it is possible to localise their positions in the church, then reconstructing the initial positions of a small-dimensional crucifix is clearly more complicated. Considering the

²⁰ Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 45, ref. 334.



Fig. 7. Christ on the cross. View from the rear.
Photo: Krista Andreson.

structure of the figure, in which the back and rear portion of the loincloth have also been carved, although in a concise way, it is apparent that the Christ was intended to also be viewed from the side and rear. Therefore, it cannot be precluded that, in its day, the Kärle crucifix was used in mobile religious processions. At the same time, it is also possible that the work was used simultaneously as an altar crucifix.²¹ In most cases, small-dimensioned examples are considered to be altar crucifixes; however, the Kärle crucifix's positioning and out-of-proportion upper body, as described above, alludes to the viewers seeing the crucifix from below, i.e. the work was positioned

above the viewers' line of sight. Thus, it is possible that the crucifix was located above the high altar (German *Hochaltar*), on a beam or arch in the church, similarly to the few examples from twelfth- and thirteenth-century rural Scandinavian churches²² and Westphalia²³. In the known early cases, the crucifixes that were of modest dimensions were combined with the altarpieces located below them.²⁴ At the same time, it is clear that in addition churches, crucifixes were also used, for example, in the chapter houses and refectories of cloisters.

21 Attention was also directed to the possible function of the work as an altar crucifix by Gerhard Lutz: *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 261.

22 Ebbe Nyborg, „Kreuz und Kreuzretabel in dänischen Pfarrkirchen des 12-13. Jahrhunderts. Zur Genese der Ring- und Arkadenkreuze“, *Entstehung und Frühgeschichte des Flügelaltarschreins*. Hrsg von Hartmut Krohm, Klaus Krüger und Matthias Weniger (Berlin: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2001), 27 (fig 5 a-d). Ebbe Nyborg, „Goldene Kirchenschätze und Wandschmuck“, *Wikinger, Waräger, Normannen: die Skandinavier und Europa 800-1200*. 22. *Kunstaussstellung des Europarates*, hrsg. von Else Roesdahl (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1992), 212-215.

23 German: *bogenförmige Aufbau*, see: Lutz, Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 24.

24 Nyborg, „Kreuz und Kreuzretabel in dänischen Pfarrkirchen des 12-13. Jahrhunderts“, 27; ref. 29.

ON THE RESEARCH

At the initiative of the Kanut Conservation Centre in Tallinn, work was carried out on the Kärļa crucifix in 2013-2014, where there was an opportunity to conduct various technological and materials examinations.²⁵ Although more detailed technological analysis is yet to be conducted,²⁶ I would like to direct attention to an intriguing discovery, which significantly expands the knowledge about the crucifix's initial completion situation and presumed utilisation context. Namely, during the technological research, a CT scan was performed to obtain additional information about the sculptures construction and identify any possible additions or hidden damage. From the initial visual examination, it seemed that Christ's back has been hollowed out in places – across the nape and shoulders and the hips, and sealed from the outside with two very precisely fitted plates. However, the internal examination of the sculpture showed that the entire length of the figure is hollowed out – from the shoulders to the bottom edge of the loincloth and a thin horizontal connection has been installed in the back above the waist. If the hollowing of large-dimensioned sculptures is usually explained by a wish to reduce their mass, then in the case of a sculpture that is 55 centimetres long, such a large cavity caused heightened interest. Upon closer examination of the CT scan, a small asymmetric "find" about four to five centimetres long became visible in the upper portion of the cavity in the chest. Thereafter, in order to obtain more information about the size and material of the find, an endoscopy was performed. The endoscope was inserted into the sculpture through an opening between the legs, directed to the interior of the figure to the place of interest and a picture was made with a camera. Briefly, it can be say that the find turned out to be a hollow nest, four to five centimetres long and made of a mortar-like substance (pieces

25 In addition to cross-section samples for determining the structure and chemical composition of the crucifix's paint layers x-rays were also performed at the Institute of History, CT cans (computer tomography) at the East-Tallinn Central Hospital and the endoscopy at the North Estonia Medical Centre. I want to thank Dr Ülle Rohult from the East-Tallinn Central Hospital and Dr Indrek Seire, Dr Karl-Gunnar Isand and nurses Tatjana Levišnova, Tatjana Jaroševitš from North Estonia Medical Centre.

26 Based on the research results, an joint article is being prepared by Krista Andreson (University of Tartu, Institute of History and Archaeology, Department of Art History), Pia Ehasalu (Kanut Conservation Centre) and Signe Vahur (University of Tartu, Institute of Chemistry, Chair of Analytical Chemistry).

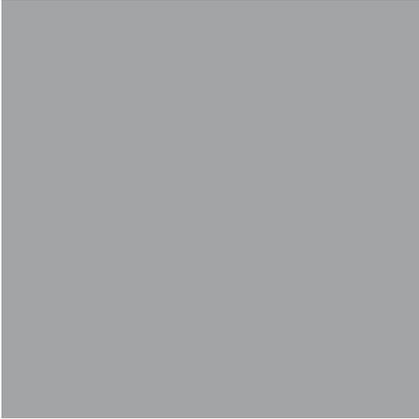


Fig. 8. CT scan of the figure of Christ: the light stripe on the chest alludes to a repository.

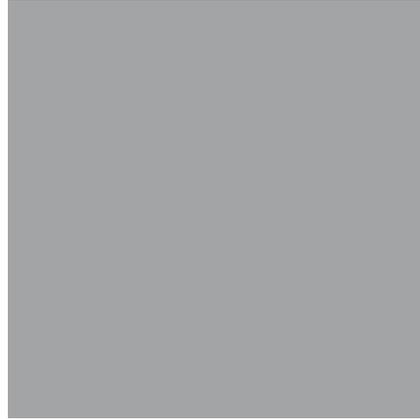


Fig. 9. CT scan of the figure of Christ showing a mortar "nest" attached to the edge of the cavity for holding a deposit in the figure's back.

of lime and sand). However, the "nest" was damaged and empty. Nevertheless, based on the existing information, I would suggest that this is not an incidental ball of mortar in Christ's chest, but is probably a specially inserted repository, of which only the "shell" has unfortunately survived. One can speculate about what was initially contained in the mortar nest; below are some possibilities.

RELICS IN MEDIEVAL WOODEN STATUES

As we know, sculptures of both saints and the crucified Christ could function as reliquaries. Moreover, the interior of a sculpture might conceal not one but several relics. The possible deposits could include the remains of a venerated saint or pieces of items related to Christ's life and Passion – the most desired relics were related to Christ's blood, the "True Cross", etc. More specifically, the interior of crucifixes could conceal both the remains of saints and items related to Christ's Passion. Another widespread practice was the placement of sanctified Communion bread, the Host in Christ's chest.

It is known that the valuable objects were placed in Christ's interior in containers or wrapped in fabric, and in fortunate cases, a piece of the parchment that sheds some light on the contents of the find has also survived. There were several ways that holy relics were placed in the in-



Fig. 10. Virgin Mary wearing a robe decorated with a translucent brooch with the Christ Child in her lap. From the altarpiece of the main altar in St. Nicholas' Church (Hermen Rode's workshop, 1478-1489). Detail. Photo: Krista Andreson.

teriors of sculptures. The surviving material shows that one possibility was a cavity in the chest of the sculpture, which was sealed with a translucent rock crystal.²⁷ In this way, the rock crystal magnified the tiny piece of a relic, enabling the viewer to partake visually in the existence of the relic.²⁸ However, there are also numerous cases where the fragments viewed as relics were concealed in the interior of sculptures – in a cavity in the head, which was later sealed with a plug, or a cavity in the back, which was sealed with a concealing plate. It is not always possible to track down these cases – often the plug from the cavity or the plate from the back has been removed. Thus, one can only conjecture whether the hollowed-out sculpture initially functioned as a reliquary, contained a Host²⁹ or other supplementary information

27 For example, the Christ figure from Gärdslov Church, Scania, Sweden, first half of the thirteenth century. Historical Museum of Lund University, see: Lena Liepe, "The Presence of the Sacred: Relics in Medieval Wooden Statues of Scandinavia", *Paint and Piety: Collected Essays on Medieval Painting and Polychrome Sculpture*. Ed. by Noëlle L. W. Streeton, Kaja Kollandsrud (London: Archetype Publications, 2014) 39–50, fig. 5. I want to thank Lena Liepe for allowing me to use her unpublished material.

28 Fig. 10. Some examples from late-medieval Livonia has survived until the present day. For example, the Virgin Mary holding the Jesus child on her lap, located in the centre of the lower row of saints visible on the altarpiece of the main altar in Tallinn's St. Nicholas' in its open position, is wearing a brooch with a translucent cover, which may conceal a holy relic.

29 On notable example is the so-called Gero Crucifix, the oldest large sculpture of the crucified Christ north of the Alps, commissioned by Cologne's Archbishop Gero (969-976). A later written source related to this crucifix has also survived, in which chronicler Thietmar from Merseburg says that the wooden crucifix that hangs in the centre of the church was artistically produced at the archbishop's request. However, when Gero notices a crack in Christ's head, he cured it, without personally interceding "with the blessed help of the highest artist" by placing a piece of the "miraculous cross" in the gap in Christ's head. In his work that was published in 1963, Reiner Hausherr assumed that the sculpture contained a *sepulchrum* (from the Latin: "grave", "burial place", means a "chamber" inside the sculpture, which contains a relic). Reiner Hausherr, *Der tote Christus am Kreuz. Zur Ikonographie des Gerokreuzes*. Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde der Philosophischen Fakultät der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (Bonn: University of Bonn, 1963), 14. In the course of the restoration work carried out in 1970, it assumption was not confirmed and Gerheard Lutz directs our attention to the fact that according to Thietmar vom Merseburg, Gero placed a Host not a relic in the crack. Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 184, ref. 162. See also: Annika Elisabeth Fischer, "Cross altar and crucifix in Ottonian Cologne: past narrative, present ritual, future resurrection", *Decorating the Lord's Table On the Dynamics between Image and Altar in the Middle Ages*, ed by Søren Kaspersen and Erik Thunø (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2006), 43-61.



Fig. 11. The CT scan shows a cavity or hypothetical *sepulchrum* in Christ's head.



Fig. 12. Figure of Christ, a view of the top of the head sealed with a plug. Photo: Krista Anderson.

about the time when the sculpture was produced.³⁰ As a rule, we have discovered the existence of the deposits from finds that are revealed in the course of restoration work³¹ or on the basis of written sources.³²

The use of the back cavity as a repository is also one of the possibilities that we can highlight in the case of **the Kärla crucifix**. However, a separate question in the context of our sculpture is the use of the head as a "*sepulchrum*"³³. Namely, in regard to triumphal crosses, Manuela Beer points to the possibility that the holes, which were initially drilled in the heads for technical reasons,³⁴ have in several cases been later used as repositories for relics.³⁵ The small head of the Kärla crucifix also conceals a small cavity, which is sealed on the outside by a very precisely fitting plug. In addition, on closer examination of

30 For example, in the course of restoration work on the Lübeck Triumphal Cross in the 1970s, the names of the master Bernt Notke and his co-workers were found on a parchment note inside the sculpture. For more about the restoration of the Lübeck Triumphal Cross, see Eike Oellermann, „Das Triumphkreuz von Bernt Notke im Lübecker Dom. Zur Restaurierungsgeschichte“, *Bernt Notke. Das Triumphkreuz im Dom zu Lübeck*. Hrsg. von Hildegard Vogeler, Uwe Albrecht und Hartmut Freytag (Kiel: Ludwig Verlag, 2010), 63–84.

31 The discovery of the repository in the Kärla crucifix is noteworthy in the context of the case of the famous *crucifixus dolorosus* in St Maria im Kapitol in Cologne, where an endoscope camera inserted into the side wound revealed the existence of small relic bags fastened with wooden nails to the inside of the chest. Anton Legner, *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult zwischen Antike und Aufklärung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 238–239.

32 Gerhard Lutz directs our attention to the written information regarding crucifixes containing relics from the mid-12th century. Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 27.

33 from the Latin: “grave”, “burial place”, means a “chamber” inside the sculpture, which contains a relic.

34 In connection with fastening it to the workbench when carving and/or covering it with polychrome.

35 Beer, *Triumphkreuze des Mittelalters*, 57.

the CT scan, an area is visible in the bottom of the cavity that is not trans-illuminated. However, the technical studies to date do not provide any basis for a more precise identification of the contents, and therefore the existence of a deposit in the head area of the sculpture remains an open question.

Internationally, the phenomenon of relic statues has been recorded since the tenth century. One of the oldest examples of a relic statue is considered to be the statue of St. Foy of Conques, which dates from the tenth century, and the head of which survived as a reliquary and was attached to an artistically created body.³⁶

The earliest information regarding crucifixes that contain reliquaries or Hosts also dates from the tenth century. Several examples date back to the twelfth and thirteen centuries, and the tradition continued until the Late Middle Ages. The majority of the cases known to the author have been covered in the specialised literature through the mediation of German or Scandinavian researchers³⁷, who have paid special attention to crucifixes from this viewpoint. One fortunate example from Scandinavia, that we should mention is a crucifix from the Vitaby Church (Scania) in Sweden, which was made in the mid-12th century, and which has a drilled head hole that contained two pieces of textile, a piece of string, a fragment of bone, three splinters of wood, and a slip of parchment with the words *lingnu dn* (short for *lingnum Domini*, “the wood of the Lord”, i.e. the Holy Cross)³⁸. As the most famous example in the German cultural space, I would like to mention the large *sepulchrum* in the triumphal cross of the Halberstadt Cathedral in Saxony, which was not discovered until 1996. It contained a fragment of Greek text from about 1200, a Byzantine relic tablet about 3.5 cm in diameter, a piece of Christ’s True Cross and three little silk bags with small relic pieces.³⁹ It is presumed that these relics were a gift from Konrad von

36 Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (München: Beck, 1991), 335-336; 595-597. Legner, *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult*, 232.

37 As an example: Hausherr, *Der tote Christus am Kreuz*, 38-40; Hans Dünninger, “Zur Frage der Hostiensepulchren und Reliquierekondierungen in Bildwerken. Ein Korreferat”, *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* NF 9/ 1986, 72-84; Walter Pötzl, „Bild und Reliquie im hohem Mittelalter“, *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, NF 9/ 1986, 56-71; Legner, *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult*, 232-255; Belting, *Bild und Kult*, 331-347; Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 26-28; Beer, *Triumphkreuze des Mittelalters*, 57-59; Liepe, „The presence of the sacred“.

38 Height of the Vitaby figure: 150 cm. Lena Liepe, *Den medeltida träskulpturen i Skåne. En bild-dokumentation* (Lund: University Press, 1995), 362; Liepe, “The presence of the sacred”, 40, fig 1.

39 Hans Joachim Krause, „Der Halberstädter Reliquienfund“, *Denkmalpflege in Sachsen-Anhalt*. H. 1, 10/ 2002, 4-25.



Fig. 13. The Calvary group in the Halberstadt Cathedral. Photo: CC-BY www.guelcker.de.

Krosigk, who was elected Bishop of Halberstadt in 1201 and held that position until 1208/09.⁴⁰ These relics were part of the spoils brought home by the bishop from a crusade to Constantinople.⁴¹ The Halberstadt Cathedral crucifix was completed in 1220 at the latest, during the tenure of the next bishop, Friederich von Kirchberg.⁴² This work will also be briefly discussed below.

40 After giving up his position, Konrad von Krosigk joined the Cistercian Monastery in Sittichenbach and around 1213 participated in the preparations for the Fifth Crusade in the Ecclesiastical Province of Magdeburg.

41 The relics brought back from Constantinople are listed in the contemporary work *Gesta Episcoporum Halberstadensium*. Stefan Tebruck, "Kreuzfahrer, Pilger, Reliquiensammler. Der Halberstädter Bischof Konrad von Krosigk und der vierte Kreuzzug", *Kunst, Kuntur und Geschichte im Harz und Harzvorland um 1200*, hrsg. vom Landesamt für Dnkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, Arbeitsberichte 8 (Halle (Saale): Michael Imhof, Petersberg, 2008), 26-48. See also: Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, kap. 7.2.4.

42 Manuela Beer, "Die Halberstädter Triumphkreuzgruppe. Höhepunkt eines Mittelalterlichen Bildtypus im Europäischen Kontext", *Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte im Harz und Harzvorland um 1200*, 186-198.

THE ONTOLOGY OF THE RELIC STATUE⁴³

Whether in a visible place, protected by a rock crystal or hidden in a cavity in the head of the statue or a hollowed opening in the its back – the existence of holy relics, the Host or other deposits changed the meaning of the statue, as evidence of medieval cult practices related to images. On the one hand, according to the teaching of the Western church, the sculpture/image could not be the object of religious worship. Based on the Augustinian, and later Aristotelic, understanding of images as markers that allude to or signify, i.e. are a “help” to the religious, the Western church did not equate the signifier with that being signified. On the other hand, the work of art exceeded its didactic or illustrative role as soon as it contained a part of what was “holy”.

In the case of the statues of saints, which included repositories, the principle of *pars pro toto* applied, that is, that through a part, the saint was physically present in the form of a three-dimensional sculpture, which is presented as real.⁴⁴ The relic added authenticity and venerability to the image of the saint, and as such, sculptures that were associated with miraculous stories became the focus of the piety movement.

It was also important that the figures of the saints be associated with parts of the saints’ physical bodies; the figures of Christ, who did not leave any bodily relics behind, represented another ideology of cult images. According to Hans Belting, crucifixes are a consequent of the early cross cult, which itself existed as a relic.⁴⁵ Christ on the Cross and the Cross itself (Calvary Cross) were understood in two ways. On the one hand, as an object (“res”), which cannot be equated with Christ himself but, on the other hand, a crucifix was seen as a symbol, which similarly to the crucified Christ, was venerated, and appealed to, for instance, at Mass during Holy Week.

In the crucifixes that contained the sanctified Host, the divine was even more present. Here, the visual representation of the crucified Christ and his actual presence in the Host merged into a Eucharistic totality. The carved figure of Christ served as a didactic clarification of the true nature of the Host – as stated by Lena Liepe: „although it showed Christ in the very form that allowed a person to identify him as the incarnate

43 Most recently on this topic: Liepe, “The Presence of the Sacred”, 46-47.

44 Belting, *Bild und Kult*, 333.

45 Ibid., 333-334.

divinity and sacrificed son of God, it was only a visual, second-hand representation of the sacred verity: the true presence of Christ resided, invisibly, in the Host".⁴⁶

Although it is not possible to delve more deeply into the theological background of cult practices here, it should be emphasised, that relics were not only important in medieval cult practice, but were also a precondition for establishing churches. During the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, a requirement was established that relics had to be used in the consecration of churches, and throughout the Middle Ages, it was emphasised in religious texts that the altar in a church should include a sepulchre with the relics of a martyr. Thus, Guillaume Durandus (1230-1296) writes the following: "there cannot be a consecration of a fixed altar without the relics of Saints, or if none can be found there, without the Body of Christ...The relics are examples of both Testaments; authorities for the sufferings of the Martyrs and the lives of Confessors, that were left us for their imitation."⁴⁷

ON THE DATING AND ARTISTIC BACKGROUND

In previous treatments of the Kärle Christ, it has been viewed in the context of crucifixes from the second quarter of the thirteenth century – the undersigned first directed attention to the similar of motifs in the depiction of the loincloth in comparison to the classical Saxon sculptures and monumental figures of the crucified Christ in Gotland. On several occasions, heightened attention has been paid to the depiction of the face and hair of the triumphal cross in the Halberstadt Cathedral, which was completed by 1220 at the latest – the facial features of the Kärle crucifix are very detailed and precisely outlined and are clearly similar to the Cathedral's Christ.⁴⁸ But it is clear, that in regard to many other aspects, including from an iconographic viewpoint, the Cathedral sculpture and Kärle sculpture are not comparable. Although in both cases, we

46 Liepe, "The Presence of the Sacred", 48. Fischer, „Cross altar and crucifix in Ottonian Cologne“, 43-61.

47 Timothy M. Thibodeau, "On the Dedication of the Altar", *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum of William Durand of Mende. A New Translation of the Prologue and Book One* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 83.

48 Ivask, „Kärle krutsifiks“, 33-34. Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 260: „Haltung und Detailgestaltung des Kopfes lassen deutliche Ähnlichkeiten mit dem Triumphkruzifix im Halberstädter Dom erkennen.“



Fig. 14. Figure of Christ. Detail. Photo: Krista Andreson.



Fig. 15. Figure of Christ in the Halberstadt Cathedral. Detail. Photo: CC-BY www.guelcker.de.

are dealing with a four-nail-type of crucifix, the Kärle Christ is living, and in contact with the viewer, while the Christ in the Halberstadt Cathedral is dead on the cross. The signs of suffering are also depicted differently. In the Kärle sculpture the wounds are emphasised and in the Halberstadt sculpture they have been forgone completely – there are no wounds on the chest or feet of the Cathedral crucifix. It is clear that the works were initially planned to fulfil different functions. Entirely different is the structure of *perizonium*, in which case the motif searches allude to slightly later works; in the Saxon-Gotland context, for instance, to the crucified Christ figures in the Halberstadt Liebfrauenkirche (ca. 1220), Merseburg (1235-40) and Alva (ca. 1240, Gotland), Lau (1225-1230, Gotland) and Fide (1240-1250, Gotland).⁴⁹ In the context of this study, when comparing the cascading folds of these examples with the Kärle crucifix, we are struck by the more modest system of folds in the garment of the latter; there are also other differences.⁵⁰ It is clear that based on the great differences in the dimensions of the figures, a closer comparison

49 Similarities between these crucifixes and the Kärle crucifix include: a clearly detached apron, rolled up bulge at the upper part of the waist, the raising of the fabric in connection with the lengthwise and diagonal folds, the central axis of which form a “fishtail” pattern.

50 See Ivask, „Zwei mittelalterliche Holzkruzifixe aus Estland“, 45-47.



Fig. 16. The Calvary group in the Halberstadt Cathedral. Photo: CC-BY www.guelcker.de.

of the listed examples and the Kärle sculpture is difficult – the 52-cm-high Kärle crucifix, as compared to the large triumphal crosses of the Halberstadt Cathedral (252 cm), Liebfrauenkirche (239 cm) or Alva (219 cm), was initially planned for closer viewing.⁵¹

It is known that the artistic relationship with the triumphal crosses in Saxony and Gotland have interested researchers since the late nineteenth century.⁵² However, not all the researchers are of the same mind. For instance, Johanna Wolska believes that style trend that expressed in Gotland in the second quarter of the thirteenth century did not come directly from Germany, but was based on parallel themes that have a common origin in French art.⁵³ On the other hand, Gerhard Lutz, pointing out the common traits of the Alva and Merseburg crucifixes, assumes that the master who settled in Gotland and established a workshop came from Saxony.⁵⁴

51 Maybe also because of this, greater attention is paid in the Kärle Christ to the precise carving of the details, thereby rendering anatomically naturalistic details: tense neck, the nipples marked with separately added wooden pegs, etc.

52 For the historiography, see: Wolska, *Ringkors från Gotlands medeltid: En ikonografisk och stilistik studie* (Stockholm: Stockholms Univ, 1997). Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 158.

53 Wolska, *Ringkors från Gotlands medeltid*, 338.

54 Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 159.

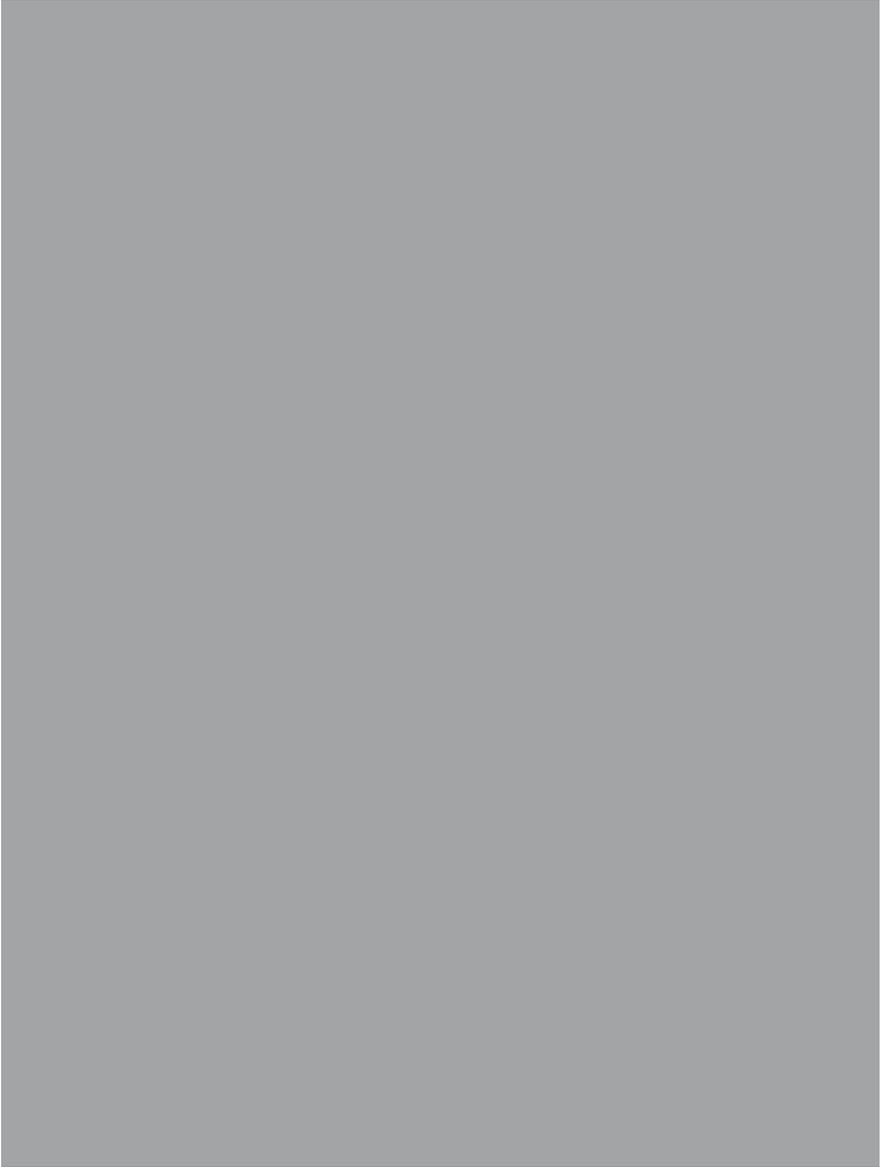


Fig. 17. Christ on the cross from Alva Church (Gotland). Photo: Krista Andreson.

Although the variances that appear when comparing the works may be based on the dimensions, functions, and year or place of completion, considering the utilised motifs and style of depiction, the completion date of the Kärle crucifix is **in the second decade of the thirteenth cen-**

tury. However, dating on the basis of style and type has its pitfalls, and strictly speaking, one cannot preclude the possibility that the model has been an older, notional work, which, for some reason, served as a basis of reference. As a parallel, the Christ in the Schönhausen Church (Elbe), which is attached to the cross with four nails, should be mentioned. Based on earlier research it was dated around 1210/20⁵⁵, but dendrochronological research in 1999 showed that the work could not have been completed before 1231, and probably not until approximately 1240.⁵⁶ As mentioned above, such cases cannot be interpreted solely in the context of style development, but the context in which the work was completed must be examined – this is especially true if the work has been completed or commissioned outside of the centre associated with the original prototype.

THE ORIGINAL LOCATION OF THE KÄRLA CRUCIFIX

In the thirteenth century, the Kärla area was part of Kaarma Parish, and a separate parish was apparently not created until the early fourteenth century, although the written sources do not mention the Kärla Parish until 1438.⁵⁷ The medieval Kärla Church has not survived until the present. It was demolished in 1842 and a new church built to replace it. There are also reports that the medieval church burned to the ground already in 1556 and a new church, which was consecrated in 1614, was built on its walls.⁵⁸

The completion date of the medieval church is also somewhat unclear. According to Villem Raam, the medieval church was presumably built in the third quarter of the thirteenth century.⁵⁹ However, it has also been thought that the church may have been built somewhat lat-

55 Lutz, *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, Kat. Nr. 84.

56 Whereas it is important to note that adoption of older depiction methods in works that are dated later also occurs in other cases in the cultural space of Northern Germany. For instance, Tilo Schöfbeck says that this tendency appeared in architecture until the 1270s. Tilo Schöfbeck, Karl Uwe Heußner, „Dendrochronologische Untersuchungen an mittelalterlichen Kunstwerken zwischen Elbe und Oder“, *Die Kunst des Mittelalters in der Mark Brandenburg. Tradition-Transformation-Innovation*, hrsg. von Ernst Badstübner, Peter Knüvener, Adam S. Labuda, Dirk Schumann (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2008), 173.

57 Enn Tarvel, „Piiskopi- ja orduaeg 1227-1572“, *Saaremaa. 2. Ajalugu, majandus, kultuur* (Tallinn: Koolibri, 2007), 77-142; 111.

58 Bruno Ederma, Asta Jaik, *Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu kirikud* (Tartu: K.Jaik, 1939), 153.

59 Villem Raam, „Kärla Maarja-Magdaleena kirik“, *Eesti Arhitektuur 2. Toimetaja Villem Raam* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1996), 68.

er, during the first decade of the fourteenth century. An inscription on a plaque found in the Kärļa Church in 1779 makes reference to this by saying “The Church of Mary Magdalene built of stone and consecrated in 1313 on the Feast day of Mary Magdalene 22 July”.⁶⁰ The stone baptismal font exhibited today in the Kuressaare Museum also dates from the time that the parish was established, during the first decades of the fourteenth century.⁶¹ Both the aforementioned notice and existence of the baptismal font are grounds for believing that a stone church was built to replace a wooden one in the early 14th century⁶², which then achieved the status of a parish church. According to Kaur Alttoa, before the new church was built in 1842-43, dimensioned drawings were made, which await further analysis. However, based on Alttoa’s initial assessment, the stone Kärļa Church belongs to the same period as the Valjala and Kaarma churches.⁶³

Although the corresponding entry is lacking in the Saaremaa Museum’s inventory list, it has been assumed that the crucifix under examination arrived in the museum from the Kärļa Church, although the date it arrived is unknown. In a survey compiled in 1929, a wooden crucifix, with dimensions that correspond to the figure of Christ, is listed among the property of the Kärļa Church and according to the visitation minutes, it came from the “old church”.⁶⁴

Both the information regarding the construction of the church, as well as the most recent information, provide reason to be cautious about equating the initial location of so-called “mobile” inventory with its last known location, i.e. the Kärļa Church. The second quarter of the thirteenth century, when the Kärļa crucifix was probably produced, was

60 *Templum Mariae Magdalena ex lapidibus extractum et dedicatum MCCCXIII Festo Mariae Magdalena die 22 Jul.* Martin Körber, *Oesel einst und jetzt*. Bd III. (Arensburg, 1915), 102.

61 Merike Kurisoo, “Ristimise late”, *Eesti kirikute sisustus. II* (Tallinn: Muinsuskaitseamet, 2009), 64-65.

62 Körber, *Oesel einst und jetzt*, 102.

63 The author’s correspondence with Kaur Alttoa (21.11.2014). Alttoa also referred to Villem Raam’s observations that one of the vaulted consoles from the old Kärļa Church is similar to the Kaarma sacristy consoles (Villem Raam, „Ehitismälestisleid Kärļas“, *Kingissepa rajoonis* (Tallinn, 1985), 113-119; 115-116.) However, according to Alttoa, the Kaarma sacristy was the first room to be completed in the church which must have existed already around the middle of the 13th century. (see Kaur Alttoa, „Püha kirikust, Kaarma käärkambrist ja Böömi meistritest Saaremaal“, *Saaremaa Muuseum, Kaheaastaraamat 2009-2010* (Kuressaare: Saaremaa muuseum, 2011), 50-52.)

64 The Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books at the University of Tartu Library = TÜRKH (f.55, n.3, s.91), 29. The first time the reference was published: Kurisoo, „Ristimise late“, ref. 125.

Many objects from the inventory in this church have been taken to the Kuressaare Museum, including the pieces of the pulpit’s barrier that dates from 1623. Körber, *Oesel einst und jetzt*, 102.

a time when the Christianisation process in Livonia had not been completed and the network of churches had not been fully developed. This was a complicated period in Estonia's and Saaremaa's history, which is why we should consider the question of the context of the Christ against the broader context of what was happening in Livonia and Saaremaa at that time.

The first reports of churches being established in Livonia date back to the late twelfth century (1184), when Bishop Meinhard (the former choirmaster from the Segeberg Abbey, who was descended from *ministeriales* the Bremen archbishop) built a church in Üksküla, near Riga (Latvia).⁶⁵ The existence of churches in specifically Estonian areas at the turn of the thirteenth century has not been confirmed by written or archaeological sources.⁶⁶ Although the chronicler Henry of Livonia describes baptisms of the Estonians on several occasions, the first mention of churches being built in Estonia are related to the Swedish campaign in Läänemaa in 1220.⁶⁷ Thereafter, Henry mentions churches in several reports, and talks about the Estonians and Saaremaa inhabitants, who, after the capture of the Tartu fortress, sent their emissaries with gifts to Riga, concluded a peace and started to build their villages and churches **again**.⁶⁸ This has provided a basis to believe that a network of churches existed in the Estonian areas before the uprising of 1223-24.⁶⁹

To counterbalance the Germans in Riga, the Danes built their own fortress and church in Tallinn in 1219⁷⁰, the latter is first referred to around 1233 and the oldest churches in Northern Estonia were also built around 1220-21.⁷¹ In addition to the Danes, who aspired to conquer Saaremaa in the early thirteenth century (1202⁷²), the Riga Germans and Bishop of Riga were also interested in the island. It is known that the Danes invaded Saaremaa in 1222, when the construction of a stone fortress was started. It was manned by Danes along with a few knights

65 *Henriku Liivimaa kroonika* (= *HLK*). Translated by Richard Kleis, edited and annotated by Enn Tarvel (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2005), I, 3.

66 *Eesti ajalugu II, Eesti keskaeg*, koostanud ja toimetanud Anti Selart, (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli ajaloo ja arheoloogia instituut, 2012), 30.

67 *HLK*, XXIV, 3; *Eesti ajalugu II*, 252.

68 *HLK* XXIX, 1.

69 The establishment of the network of churches on Estonian territory, see: *Eesti ajalugu II*, 252-255.

70 Gerhard Lutz refers briefly to the Danish conquests in Northern Estonia in *Das Bild des Gekreuzigten im Wandel*, 261. However the connection between this reference and the initial location of the Kärla crucifix and the Danish invasion.

71 *Eesti ajalugu II*, 254.

72 *HLK* X, 13.

of the German Order and Theodor, the brother of Riga's Bishop Albert. However, the Saaremaa inhabitants soon conquered the fortress, "leaving no stone standing, and sending the word across Estonia that they have conquered the Danish king's fortress and cast the Christians out of their land".⁷³ Now, the Riga Germans rose to head up the conquest of Saaremaa, and led by Bishop Albert conquered the fortresses in Muhu and then Valjala in 1227. During the subsequent decades, complicated divisions of religious and secular power took place in Saaremaa, primarily between the Livonian Brothers of the Sword and the Bishop of Riga, with the Danes being entirely eliminated from the game.⁷⁴ In the same year, the Bishop of Riga united Saaremaa and Läänemaa into one diocese and ordained the Cistercian Gottfried as bishop. In 1228, Gottfried concluded an agreement regarding the division of his diocese with the Order of the Brothers of the Sword. Perhaps it is of interest, in the context of the article, that in the written sources, Gottfried is first mentioned together with several other clerics, including Winemar, the abbot of the Pforte Abbey (Saxony), among the witnesses to the legal document issued to the Cistercians' Altzelle Abbey in the fortress of Henry, Margrave of Meissen in Strauf in 1225. In the document, Gottfried is called the *servus sancte crucis et monachus Portensis*.⁷⁵ The local gentry – the bishops and the Order of the Brothers of the Sword (later Teutonic Order) – were primarily responsible for building the parish churches. In 1199, Albert von Buxhövdén, a canon from Bremen who was named bishop, recruited knights and clerics for his raids on Livonia from the Weser and Elbe river basins – from Northern Germany, Westphalia and Hessen; including, among others, Cistercians from Loccum and Pforta and the Premonstratensians from Magdeburg and Ratzeburg. Most of the liege lords and clerics that established themselves on Estonian territory in the

73 HLK, XXVI, 4.

74 Tarvel, "Piiskopi- ja orduaeg 1227-1572", 77-142.

75 Thereafter, he was among the confidants of the former Abbot of Cîteaux, papal legate and Bishop of Porto, Konrad von Urach. He arrived in Livonia in the retinue of the papal legate Modena Wilhelm and then, according to the Chronicle of Alberich de Trois Fontaines, became the Bishop of Saare-Lääne. Afterwards, when, in the autumn of 1228, Gottfried was made a liege lord by the bishopric's Henry, King of the Romans, he did not return to Livonia and power on the island was shared by the Bishop of Riga and the Order of the Brothers of the Sword. Holger Kunde, *Das Zisterzienserkloster Pforte. Die Urkundenfälschungen und die frühe Geschichte bis 1236. Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte Sachsen-Anhalts*. Hrsg von der Historischen Kommission für Sachsen-Anhalt, Bd 4 (Köln (Weimer, Wien): Böhlau Verlag, 2003), 245-46. Tiina Kala, „Saare-Lääne piiskopkonna käekäik“, *Saare-Lääne piiskopkond. Artiklid Lääne-Eesti keskajast* (Haapsalu: Läänemaa Muuseum, 2004), 9-37.

13th century came from the same areas (Northern Germany, Magdeburg and Westphalia) as the first Crusaders and Knights of the Order.⁷⁶

The oldest **stone** building in Estonia and also the earliest sacral structure in Saaremaa is considered to be the stone chapel built in Valjala.⁷⁷

Villem Raam associated the establishment of the chapel in 1227 with the large-scale raid on Saaremaa that ended a process that had gone on for more than a quarter century, and which finally won Livonia for the church.⁷⁸ In regard to the next stage of construction stage at the Valjala Church in 1240, when the chapel that has been completed a few decades earlier was reconstructed into the choir of the parish church, it has been presumed that Riga or the metropolitan centre provided the direction as the mediator of architecture from Westphalia (and Bremen⁷⁹) to Saaremaa – primarily when it came to the construction of the vaults.⁸⁰ However, the artistic models for the initial Valjala Chapel, which had been completed a few decades earlier, have been found in early 13th-century Saxony.

BRIEFLY ON THE MURALS OF VALJALA CHURCH

In the 1970s, a fresco-secco frieze was discovered on the north wall of the choir in the Valjala Church. The horizontal belt is approximately seven metres long and 2.15 metres high and covers almost the entire wall below the windows.⁸¹ The frieze depicts an arcade comprised of six semicircle arches, divided by columns topped by characteristic crocket capitals, the stems of which are decorated, to quote Villem Raam, “with vertical fractured and wavy lines, which have been used to create an illusionary image of the spiral columns with their rich forms popular in

76 *Eesti ajalugu II*, 174.

77 Villem Raam, “Valjala kirik”, *Eesti Arhitektuur* 2, 82; Kaur Altoa, „Saaremaa keskaegne sakraalarhitektuur“, *Saaremaa. 2. Ajalugu, majandus, kultuur*, 803.

78 *HLK XXX*, 3-6. Villem Raam, “Mõningaid uusi probleeme Valjala kiriku ehitusloost”, *Restaureerimisalaste artiklite kogumik* (Tallinn, 1976), 72-82, siin 77.

79 Bremen as the mediator of art contacts has also been referred to in connection with the Valjala baptismal font that was made in the mid-13th century. See: Kurisoo, “Ristimise late”, 39-45.

80 Among other details, the connection between the Valjala masters and the construction of the Riga Cathedral is that, in the case of the vaults and the hiding places in the western gable, bricks have been used, but as a rule in Saaremaa, it was taken for granted that limestone or dolomite would be used. Kaur Altoa, “Mõningaid Valjala ja Kaarma kiriku ehitusloo probleeme”, *Saaremaa Muuseum, Kaheaastaraamat 2001-2002*, 3-27; here 21. Villem Raam, “Valjala Martini kirik”, 83.

81 Villem Raam, “Valjala seinamaalidest, nende vanusest ja päritolust”, *Kunst I/1986*, 59-65.



Fig. 18. Mural in the choir of Valjala Church. Photo: Sille Sombri.

the Late Roman period.”⁸² Under the arcade, six figures wearing antique clothing, who are presumably the Apostles, are seated on low throne-like steps – holding long ribbons of text with haloes above their heads. Three-quarter figures of angels with their wings spread out are placed in the groin vaults between the arches. Villem Raam associated the completion of the frieze with the period when the initial chapel was built in the mid-1230s, and he saw parallels with the south wall enclosure (German: *Chorschranke*) in the Church of Our Lady (Liebfrauenkirche) in Halberstadt, as well as with a similar composition in St. Michael’s Church in Hildesheim. According to recent research, the Halberstadt choir screen is a classic example of Saxon art that was completed around 1200/1210⁸³, in which, unlike the Valjala murals, the figures are made of stucco and the arcade from wood, and only the angels are painted.

82 Villem Raam, “Valjala seinamaalidest, nende vanusest ja päritolust”, 59.

83 Susanne Beatrix Hohman, *Die Halberstädter Chorschranken: ein Hauptwerk der niedersächsischen Kunst um 1200* (Neue Forschungen zur deutschen Kunst) (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2000).



Fig. 19. Mural in the choir of Valjala Church. Detail. Photo: Kaur Alttoa.



Fig. 20. Mural in the choir of Valjala Church. Detail. Photo: Conservation Department, Estonian Art Academy.



Fig. 21. Mural in the choir of Valjala Church. Detail. Photo: Conservation Department, Estonian Art Academy.



Fig 22 The south wall enclosure in the Church of Our Lady in Halberstadt. Photo: CC-BY CC-BY www.guelcker.de.



Fig 23 The south wall enclosure in the Church of Our Lady in Halberstadt. Photo: CC-BY CC-BY www.guelcker.de.

Although the material is different, one is immediately struck by the considerable similarities in the composition – in both cases, the figures are presented in live poses – turned towards each other, or when divided into groups of three, with the central figure facing forward and the bodies and knees of the others turned toward the central figure. The arcades are also very similar. Villem Raam describes the Valjala example as follows: “in a prominent way, the columns supporting the arches are marked throughout with three stripes of colour that resemble archivolt in order to increase the architectural gravity, thereby imitating the three-step moulding of real arches.”⁸⁴ We also encounter this approach in Halberstadt. However, other differences exist between the Halberstadt and Valjala friezes besides the material; for example, in the way the folds of the Apostles’ robes are depicted.

An initial visual examination seems to prove the position that the painted frieze in Valjala dates from the so-called “initial chapel” period, or before the choir was vaulted. This is supported primarily by visual observations on site – the painting seems to be cut off in the corner between the support for the northeast overhang and the north wall of the choir; the composition is not finished logically. Yet, the results of subsequent technical examinations provide cause for caution.⁸⁵ The examinations show that the layer of plaster under the paintings in this zone is not broken off, but compressed against the overhang support, which, according to researchers should have existed before the painting was executed. Thus, a hypothesis has recently been proposed, according to which the frieze dates from the period of the vaulted choir. Since the dating of the work, which is based on an analysis of the architectural history of the initial Valjala Chapel, is closely related to the figural paintings in the choir, a closer analysis of the latter would provide additional information for dating the building.

Assigning a date to the palmette frieze that runs above the row of figures in Valjala is also complicated. In Halberstadt, a frieze also runs below and above the row of figures, but, in the medallions, the figural scenes (for instances, monkeys, centaurs, etc.) alternate with botanic mo-

84 Raam, “Valjala seinamaalidest, nende vanusest ja päritolust”, 59.

85 Hilikka Hiiop, “Mõningaid maalitehnilisi ja stratigraafilisi täpsustusi Valjala kiriku kooriruumi Apostlimaalingu kohta”, *Muinsuskaitse aastaraamat 2007* (Tallinn: Muinsuskaitseamet, 2008), 99–101. See also: Werner Schmidt, *Valjala Püha Martini kiriku stratigraafiliste ja maalitehniliste uuringute tulemused. Aruanne*. http://kirikud.muinas.ee/pdf/ryxqr4882fa846c780_stratigraafia_screen.pdf (viewed 10.11.2014)

tifs. According to the current view, Valjala's palmette frieze, in which heart-shaped motifs are uniformly woven into the design, belongs to a later period, probably to the period when the church was completed.⁸⁶ However, more recent technological research shows that the palmette frieze was painted onto the same layer of plaster as the Apostles, which means it is a single integrated composition.⁸⁷ Therefore, this again raises the question of the temporal sequence of the initial chapel, the vaulting of the choir, the Apostle frieze and the palmette frieze.

Unfortunately the discrepancies based on style and motifs between the Halberstadt and Valjala figures are not within the scope of this article. However, we can say that, although we encounter compositions that include figural friezes similar to those in Valjala, Halberstadt and Hildesheim in the murals and book paintings of the early 13th century, and the so-called *zackenstil*, which is characteristic of Valjala, in the depiction of robes during a longer period and in other places throughout the 13th century, in this case, we should not ignore the significant similarities. The Valjala frieze imitates a composition scheme that was popular in Germany in the early 13th century⁸⁸, although the folds in the robes seem to indicate that the frieze in Valjala was completed a few decades after the Halberstadt example.

IN CONCLUSION

Let us again summarise the research results to date. The small-dimensioned figure of the crucified Christ on display in the Saaremaa Museum in Kuressaare, which is also called the crucifix from Kärla Church, reflects the various events characteristic of a so-called "transition period." On the one hand, the figure attached to the cross with four nails is the carrier of an earlier tradition, when Christ was depicted standing with dignity on the cross having triumphed over Death. On the other hand, the crucified Christ's traits of suffering, or the wound suffered on the cross, allude clearly to a world of ideas in theology and religious literature, as well as visual culture, that developed in the 12th century and established itself in the first half of the 13th century, which emphasised Passion piety, respect for the bodily Christ, and the mutual closeness

86 Raam, "Valjala seinamaalidest, nende vanusest ja päritolust", 60.

87 Hiiop, "Mõningaid maalitehnilisi ja stratigraafilisi täpsustusi".

88 It is noteworthy that the height of the Halberstadt and Valjala figural friezes are the same height.

between man and Christ – a process that developed continuously until it culminated in the early 14th century in the form of the extreme *crucifixi dolorosi*.

Viewing the Kärle crucifix from the right side, we see a Christ with an open mouth and eyes looking towards us, who while addressing the believers is also drawing attention to the wound in his side from which blood is flowing. This type of depiction is related to a specific kind of hymn that appears in the theological literature of the day, but also in the vernacular Passion poetry, which was sung in front of the figure of the crucified Christ and in which the living, carnal Christ who is hanging on the cross turns directly towards the believers in order to communicate with them. This aspect, as well as the angle and dimensions of the figure suggest that the Kärle crucifix probably functioned initially as an altar crucifix above the Communion table; however the fact that it could have been used as a procession crucifix should not be precluded.

Hidden inside the figure of the crucified Christ is a nest made of mortar, which is four to five cm long and probably contained a relic or piece of the Host. Today, it cannot be determined what material it contained; the “nest” is partly disintegrated and empty. However, based on the discoveries, the undersigned ventures to state that, in its day, the Kärle crucifix was a special cult image. On the one hand, this topic is related to the existence of deposits (the Host or relics) inside medieval sculptures and the change in the ontological meaning of the figures based thereon. On the other hand, relics were not only important in medieval cult practice, but were also a precondition for establishing churches. It is important to keep this aspect in mind in the context of the initial geographical context of the Kärle crucifix, i.e. early 13th century Livonia.

Namely, the depiction method of the Kärle crucifix, which is characterised by four nails used to attach the body to the cross, a body that is physically precise and naturalistic, and an asymmetry between the left and right sides, indicates that the figure was completed around 1220/1230. The first written reports of Christian houses of worship on Estonian territory date from this period, but it is also a time when the Christianisation of the Estonian areas and the creation of the network of churches had not been completed. The Christianisation of Saaremaa reached its culmination in the course of the conquest of 1227, and presumably the oldest stone structure – the so-called initial chapel of Valjala Church – dates from that period. However, we should keep in mind that

the dating of this building is based mostly on the Apostle frieze on the north wall of the choir.

It is notable that the similarities found in the Kärļa crucifix and Valjala paintings place both examples in the same geographical and temporal art context – in Saxony (incl. Halberstadt) in the early 13th century (1220-30). This knowledge cannot be the basis for considering the Valjala Church, instead of the Kärļa Church, to be the initial location of the crucifix under examination, but it does indicate that, during the early period of Christianisation, historical Saxony should be considered along with Westphalia and the Rhineland, as the regions of origin for immigrants to Livonia. At this point, I would also like to emphasise the risks of dating based on style and type – if the work has been completed or commissioned outside of the centre associated with the original prototype, it should not be interpreted solely in the context of style development – one cannot preclude the possibility that the model has been an older, notional work, which, for some reason, served as a basis of reference.

KRISTA ANDRESON: THE PRESENCE OF THE SACRED: A 13TH-CENTURY CULT IMAGE FROM SAAREMAA (ESTONIA)

KEYWORDS: FOUR NAILS CRUCIFIX, MEDIEVAL CULT IMAGE, 13TH CENTURY CHURCHES IN SAAREMAA, MEDIEVAL MURAL PAINTINGS

SUMMARY:

This article undertakes a closer examination of the small (52-cm) oak figure of the crucified Christ on permanent exhibit at the Saaremaa Museum in Kuressaare. The original crossbar of the crucifix has not survived, it is covered with modern polychrome and there is no definitive information on which church the sculpture initially belonged to. If we wish to reconstruct the initial function of the sculpture in the sacral context,

we must rely primarily on the object itself, its particular iconographical properties and style of depiction, as well as the results of technological research. In addition, we can seek additional information from the network of relationships between visual objects and liturgy of the past.

On the one hand, Saaremaa's crucified Christ is characterised by an "old-fashioned" method of attachment to the cross using four nails, and on the other, Christ's chest wounds and the traits characteristic of a tense, hanging body are emphasised. Since changes in the number of nails and method of attachment to the cross started to appear in the middle of the 12th century, and the great breakthrough did not occur until the late 1210s and early 1220s, and it became prevalent by the middle of the 13th century at the latest, this time period establishes the temporal framework for the completion of the Saaremaa crucifix. The Saaremaa crucified Christ is also characterised by a specific iconography, which alludes to Passion piety and respect for the bodily Christ in the first half of the 13th century.

Recent technological research provides a basis to believe that the back (and probably the head) of the figure initially contained a *sepulchrum*, which traditionally contained a relic or piece of the Host. As such, the Saaremaa crucified Christ is a medieval cult image, and in addition to the existence of the repository, is unusual due the fact that it dates back to the period of the first written information on the existence of Christian houses of worship on Estonian territory. However, the Christianisation of the Estonian area had yet to be completed and the network of churches was still in the process of being developed. The sculpture's artistic parallels point to a group of crucifixes of German origin completed in the second quarter of the 13th century – to comparative material from a region, from which, along with ecclesiastical and political contacts, artistic impulses arrived in Saaremaa, and more broadly in Livonia during this period.

CV:

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