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UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGE OF CHRIST IN DISTRESS IN LITHUANIAN FOLK CULTURE: THE CONCEPTIONS OF PASSION, SIN AND PREFIGURATION OF PROPHET JEREMIAH

KEY WORDS: piety, Christ in Distress, Passion of Christ, prophet Jeremiah, Christ in Distress, Seated Christ, prefiguration, sin, penitence, stone

SŁOWA KLUCZE: pobożność, Chrystus Frasobliwy, Pasja, prorok Jeremiasz, Chrystus siedzący, typologia, grzech, pokuta, kamień

Abstract

This article discusses a few aspects of the conception of one image found in the Lithuanian folklore and religious sculpture of the turn of 19th and 20th century. The author points out possible influences of the official Catholic Church liturgy, teaching, official religious art, devotional literature, sermons, chants on folklore and folk religious art. This article explores direct influences and the syncretism of these ideas in the peasant culture.

Introduction

In Lithuanian culture, wooden sculptures of Christ in Distress have passed the complicated way from multi-meaning religious image of art to symbol of Lithuania and her nation. The associations that sculpture of Christ in Distress expresses the national character and Lithuanian spirit have formed at the end of the 19th – in the beginning of the last century and rooted widely in the society in the 1920s and 1930s Ill. 1). Despite the popularity of symbol and image of Christ in Distress, there are only few publications on this subject, and the subject is still awaiting for the exhaustive analysis¹. However, the

¹ I have dedicated two publications to this theme: G. Surdokaitė, *Rūpintojėlio kultas Lietuvoje* [in:] R. Janonienė (ed.), *Vilniaus dailės akademijos darbai*, t. 54: *LDK Sakralinė dailė: atodangos ir*



III. 1. Mažeikiai district, Viekišniai neighbourhood, Plūgai village, ŠAM Neg. 11360. Photo by St. Ivanauskas, 1942

majority of my earlier articles aimed at revealing the diversity of iconography, different functions and complex conception of the image of Christ in Distress within the Catholic Church tradition².

The core of this article is the conceptions of passion, sin and prefiguration of prophet Jeremiah in a multi-meaning image of Christ in Distress. The text focuses on revealing of the conception of this image in the folk culture using the data from folklore and religious folk art. The second half of the 19th century – the first half of the last century (up to the Soviet occupation) was selected investigating the expression of Christ in Distress image in religious folk art. This period was determined by the survival of objects and recorded materials of ethnographers and folklorists. The situation of the researches in a field of religious culture, themes and art has dramatically changed in the Soviet period. These themes were

naujieji kontekstai, Vilnius 2008, p. 173–182; G. Surdokaitė, *Šiluva ir 1937 m. Paryžiaus pasaulinė paroda* [in:] L. Šinkūnaitė, R. Valinčiūtė-Varnė (ed.), *Meno istorija ir kritika*, 5: Šiluva Lietuvos kultūroje, Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2009, p. 123–129. Some aspects of this theme and about the sculpture of Christ in Distress for the main exhibition of the Lithuanian pavilion at the 1937 Paris World Exhibition are discussed in the book of G. Jankevičiūtė (G. Jankevičiūtė, *Dailė ir valstybė: dailės gyvenimas Lietuvos Respublikoje 1918–1940*, Kaunas: Nacionalinis M. K. Čiurlionio dailės muziejus, 2003, p. 47–72).

² G. Surdokaitė, *O znaczeniu pewnego wizerunku w życiu religijnym i sztuce: Chrystus Frasobliwy – jego funkcja i miejsce*, „Zarządanie w Kulturze” 2013, nr 14, vol. 2, p. 121–138; G. Surdokaitė, *Rūpintojėlio pirmavaizdžio problema* [in:] M. Iršėnas, G. Surdokaitė (eds.), *Vilniaus dailės akademijos darbai*, Vilnius 2004, t. 35: M. Iršėnas, G. Surdokaitė (eds.), *Pirmavaizdis ir kartotė: vaizdinių transformacijos tyrimai*, p. 99–111; G. Surdokaitė, *Susimąščiusio Kristaus atvaizdas XVII–XVIII a. LDK bažnyčiose: paskirtis ir paplitimas*, „Menotyra” 2005, nr 2, p. 23–29; G. Surdokaitė, *Balninkų Rūpintojėlio skulptūra*, „Menotyra” 2008, nr 3, p. 1–7; G. Surdokaitė, *Susimąščiusio Kristaus atvaizdo paskirtis*, „Menotyra” 2010, nr 1, p. 51–64; Г. Сурдокайте, *Иконография, распространение, назначение образа Спаса Полунощного в XVII–XX вв. в Великом Княжестве Литовском и Литве*, кн.: *Древнерусская скульптура*, т. 6: *Проблемы иконографии*, вып. I, Москва 2009, p. 50–66, 168–169; Г. Сурдокайте, *Иконография Спаса Полунощного в Литве* [in:] *Деревянная культовая скульптура: Проблемы хранения, изучения, реставрации*, Москва 2011, p. 210–225.

forbidden by the Soviet authorities. However, neither in the interwar period nor later after restoration the independence, the recorded materials have not been used by ethnographers, folklore researchers or historians of art. However, they are extremely valuable due to rapidly changing social-cultural conditions. In the 1920s and 1930s, the main conception (popular in the 16–18th century) of consolidation with Saviour in the sense of *imitatio* and *compassio*, which is based on the empathy in the Passion of Christ, has changed. At that time, the association have been formed that seated and pensive Christ in the representation of Christ in Distress is suffering together with nation and people. This idea has become a support in a Soviet period in a resistance and underground movement. It was comprehended as a source of consolation, relief and strength. It seems that earlier understanding of this image is forgotten. Therefore, this publication is a tentative attempt to analyse the conception and imaginary aspects of Christ in Distress in folklore and religious folk sculpture until the middle of last century.

During the investigation, it was also noticed that the folk conception of Christ in Distress is determined by the culture of the Catholic Church of the late medieval period and the 17–18th century, and is a natural continuation of it. As we shall see later, conception of the image and representation of Christ in Distress is not homogeneous; it covers several aspects which were influenced by devotional literature, meditation guides and descriptions of the Passion of Christ. The class of conservative folk culture has preserved such concept of the image until the middle of the last century.

The Passion of Christ and prefiguration of prophet Jeremiah

Researchers have not established until now in what context functioned the image of Christ in Distress in the 15th century. However, approximately at the end of the 15th – beginning of the 16th century, the figure of seated Jesus was started to be represented in the Passion of Christ, and, in particular, in the Way of the Cross³. However, it should be noted that, even from the works of St. Bernard of Clairvaux (*Bernard de Clairvaux*, 1090–1153), the conception of Christ as a historical suffering man appears more often. St. Bernard of Clairvaux theologically grounded and gave importance to the human nature aspects of Jesus, its passion and death. Furthermore, he was a theoretician of mysticism, the first have practised empathy of the Passion of Christ (*compassio*). By going deeper into the life of Christ and passion, in particular, it is turning back to the non-canonical texts⁴. The image of a naked Christ resting on a stone which is non-canonical and even the non-apocryphal in its primary implication was a result of individual meditations.

³ Z. Kruszelnicki, *Ze studiów nad ikonografią Chrystusa Frasobliwego*, „Biuletyn Historii Sztuki” 1959, nr 3–4, p. 317.

⁴ Z. Kruszelnicki, *Ze studiów nad ikonografią...*, p. 307.

First of all, interest in the Passion of Christ has uprose with the crusades. The travelling to the Holy Land and passing the way of the Passion was an attempt to transfer into the place and the events of the Crucifixion. When Jerusalem was conquered (1187, 1244), this possibility has been lost for a certain period. Therefore, first detailed descriptions of saint places appeared and they were commented later⁵. The appearance and spread of these descriptions and their comments was influenced by the rise of devotion of the Way of the Cross in the Holy Land, Jerusalem. It was an old tradition to mark important places on the way to the Golgotha with stones and chapels. Eventually, some places of Jesus falls marked with stones were identified with his rest places⁶. Stories about the stone on which Christ was sitting have originated ca the 12th century. Later they are observed in literary sources as well. For the first time, such legend was recorded in the writings of Ubertinus de Casali, OFM (1259–1329) in 1305⁷. Franciscan Ubertino da Casale in the work *Arbor vitae crucifixe Jesu Christi* published in 1485 wrote: “Therefore, it is said there that with pale face and with some seeming of pain signs in the face, like dispirited and all spear by swords, like a scorned and sorrowful sat on a stone there”⁸. Tadeusz Dobrzeniecki, researcher of the medieval literature, has noticed that sitting Christ in all medieval texts is mentioned in the last stage of *Via dolorosa*, entitled as *Ductio ad locum crucifixionis* (leading to the crucifixion place)⁹. Besides U. de Casali, Antonius de Cremina (1320, 1327), as well as St. Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444) and Heinrich von St. Gallen (1371–1391) wrote about this. Bernhard von Breitenbach (1486) has mentioned resting Christ in the description of St. Jerusalem from the 15th century. The image of sitting Christ is found in the works by Christianus Andrichomius, Francesco Queresmi and Bernardyn z Krakowa from the 16–17th century¹⁰. The fourth scene of preparations for the crucifixion Christ being sat on a stone, as the crucifixion preparation works are going. “Bared Mr Christ was sat down on the stone on Calvary hill”, – it is said and represented in the miniature of the manuscript *Rozmyślania dominikańskie*¹¹. Stone was also mentioned in the visions of Augustinian Anne Catherine Emmerich which were very popular and published several times in Lithuanian and Polish in the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century¹².

⁵ S. Fehleemann, *Christus im Elend: vom Andachtsbild zum realistischen Bildokument* [in:] *Ikonographie: Anleitung zum Lesen Bildern*, München 1990, p. 83.

⁶ Z. Kruszelnicki, *Ze studiów nad ikonografią...*, p. 317–318.

⁷ T. Dobrzeniecki, *Chrystus Frasobliwy w literaturze średniowiecznej*, „Biuletyn Historii Sztuki” 1968, nr 3, p. 284.

⁸ “Unde et ibi dicitur quod quibusdam signis dolorosis et palloribus praetensis in facie quasi angustianus et totus gladius super lapidem ibi positum quasi despectuose et dolorose resedit”, – T. Dobrzeniecki, *Chrystus Frasobliwy...*, p. 282.

⁹ T. Dobrzeniecki, *Chrystus Frasobliwy...*, p. 279.

¹⁰ T. Dobrzeniecki, *Chrystus Frasobliwy...*, p. 280–286.

¹¹ „Pana Jezwsza obnazonego na kameyneyv posadzono nagorze kalwaryey” – *Rozmyślania dominikańskie*, wyd. i oprac. K. Górski i W. Kuraszkiewicz; oprac. ikonogr. Z. Rozanow; wstęp komparatyst. T. Dobrzeniecki, t. 1, Wrocław 1965, p. 73.

¹² A.K. Emmerich, *Sopulinga muka Vieszpaties musu Jėzaus Cgristaus Pagal apdumojimu Onos-Kotrinos Emmeryk, zakonikes Augustinionu*, Vilniuje 1864, p. 102.

Gert von der Osten affirms that the image of Christ in Distress has originated in Germany at the end of the 14th century¹³. However, his hypothesis is grounded by the mistaken dating of two sculptures. The oldest remaining samples of this image are dated to the end of the 15th century. Hence, it took almost three centuries until the imaginary of pensive Christ, recorded in the literary form for the first time, was materialized in the art. The image of Christ in Distress at the beginning has appeared in various art forms – paintings, miniature, graphics (the first carving dates back to 1478). However, usually it was a sculptural image. From the end of the 15th – first quarter of the 16th century, the sculptures are found in the whole territory in which the image of Christ in Distress was spreading (German lands, Lesser Poland and Greater Poland, Czech Crown, etc.). Cycles of the Passion of Christ were of various structures until the 18th century. It was different number of Stations and its content. Therefore, the image of Christ in Distress was inserted when representing the different Stations in the art. In 1494–1500, Hans Holbein (1460–1524) has painted a cycle of pictures “Die Graue Passion”, which consists of twelve linens representing the Passion of Christ¹⁴. The pensive Christ surrounded by soldiers is shown in the ninth picture.

In the beginning of the 16th century, the representation of alone, seated Christ has crystallized from the multi-figure compositions in religious art. Such representation of Christ in Distress was recognized as a symbol of all passions, experienced by Christ, and in sacral place he, usually sculpture, was standing separate from other works. The works representing alone pensive Christ in the European religious art more often were created until the end of the 18th century (in Lithuania until the last century) and later generally disappeared (Ill. 2). The tradition of representing the image of Christ in Distress in folk art continued longer until the last century (this tradition is still alive in some countries, e.g. Lithuania, Poland). However, such representation of Christ in the religious art was included in the common conception of Catholic Church’ decoration and was a part of the Passion of Christ or Way of the Cross.

The scene of pre-crucifixion (or waiting of crucifixion) is an episode of the Passion of Christ in which descriptions of the seated Christ’ image are found. In this scene, the representation of Christ seated on a stone is considered as a prefiguration of the lamentations of Jeremiah for destructed Jerusalem. This prefiguration¹⁵ has appeared in the Middle Ages, when the lamentations of Jeremiah (*lamentatio*) in the lit-

¹³ G. Osten von der, *Christus im Elend, ein niederdeutsches Andachtsbild* [in:] *Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte Kunst und Volkskunde*, Bd. 30, Münster 1952, p. 153.

¹⁴ *Hans Holbein: Der Ältere und die Kunst der Spätgotik*: [Exhibition catalogue], Augsburg 1965, p. 66–70.

¹⁵ Prefiguration – a term used to demonstrate how the Old Testament is directly related to the elements of the New Testament. Hence, some characters of the Old Testament (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Elias, Jeremiah, etc.) are recognized as prophets of the message of Jesus Christ. Christians recognized the prophesies from Jeremiah as a prophesy of the Passion of Christ. “Jeremiah never wanted to be a prophet, throughout all years of activity he has struggled with the power of God’s word and tried not to speak on the behalf of God. However, did not afforded to do this, and proclaimed the forthcoming Messiah with his life”, *The Bible* (The third revised and supplemented ecumenical edition), Vilnius 2005, p. 1136.



III. 2. Krakės St. Mathew Church (relocated from Krakės St. Katharina Church). 3th qr. of the 18th c. Wood, polychrome, H 73 cm. Photo by R. Valinčiūtė, 2007

urgy of Holy Week were performed in which he lamented the destruction of Jerusalem¹⁶. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me <>.” (Lam. 1, 12)¹⁷. This fragment from the *Book of Lamentations* usually was interpreted not only as a prophecy of the Passion of Christ, but used also to express the passions.

From the early Middle Ages, *Impropria*¹⁸ was performed in the liturgy of the Good Friday; it was also inserted in the subsequent Passions and dramas. The image of Christ sitting on the stone or cross is found in them. Already in the Late Middle Ages, the representation of Christ in Distress expressed the sincere personal relationship of believers with Christ. This illustrates lamentations of the Saviour read on Good Friday. The undressed Christ in dramas talks to the folk with the words while sitting on the cross: “O My people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee?...”¹⁹. *Egerer Fronleichnamspiel*,

the drama of the 15th century, narrates about Christ, which after the undressing seat on the Cross and lamented *Impropria*: “O My people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against Me!”²⁰. Meditations on the Passion of Christ *Rozmyślenia dominikańskie* written in 1532 are narrating how Christ was seated on a stone, and put his legs in the stocks (“And sat the Lord of all the world in this stock on stone with hand supported head”²¹). Therefore, the prophet Jeremiah is considered

¹⁶ T. Dobrzeniecki, *Chrystus Frasobliwy...*, p. 288.

¹⁷ G. Finaldi (ed.), *The Image of Christ*, London 2000, p. 120.

¹⁸ *Impropria* – antiphons chant on Good Friday during service of the Holy Cross. They express a conversation of the Saviour with his folk. Such way of singing in Europe gradually spread from the 9th century, and was included in the Roman Rituals in the 14th century.

¹⁹ E.A. Schuler, *Die Musik der Osterfeiern, Osterspiele und Passionen des Mittelalters*, Kassel 1951, p. 72; S. Fehleemann, *Christus im Elend...*, p. 86.

²⁰ This quotation is taken from the Book of Micah, Old Testament (Mic. 6, 3); T. Dobrzeniecki, *Chrystus Frasobliwy...*, p. 289.

²¹ *Rozmyślenia dominikańskie*, p. 73.

as a prefiguration of Christ. “Then Pashhur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the High Gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord. And it came to pass on the morrow that Pashhur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks”. Then said Jeremiah unto him: “The Lord hath not called thy name Pashhur, but Magormissabib!” (Jer 20, 2–3).

The parallel of sitting Christ and prophet Jeremiah is popular in the Baroque period as well. It is often found in the printed and manuscript meditations and sermons of the Passion of Christ in Grand Duchy of Lithuania (hereinafter – GDL). For example, Jan Zrzelski, Jesuit, Rector of the Jesuit College in Minsk (1740–1748) wrote in 1740:

The sweetest Christ, as prophet Jeremiah once, seated on a stone which was given to him instead of the throne, started to sing sorrowful laments. but the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness²².



Ill. 3. Christ in Distress from Aleksandravėlė Church called as Jesus lamenting for Jerusalem, beginning of the 17th c. Wood, remains of polychrome, H 75 cm. VDKM inv. No. BM 47. Photo by K. Driskius, 2003

As we can see, there was not a single fragment from the Book of Lamentations used to express the Passion of Christ. Each author on this subject selected a quotation, which, in his view, best suited to express sufferings of the Saviour. The sculptures of Christ in Distress in the inventory or visitation acts of the catholic churches from GDL were also identified as Jesus lamenting for Jerusalem (Ill. 3)²³.

Popularity of the parallels of sitting Christ and the prophet Jeremiah in the Baroque period has influenced the folk image of Christ in Distress. This is illustrated by the Paschal folk oration recorded by Alfred Römer in Švenčionys powiat in 1881²⁴.

²² This quotation is taken from the Book of Lamentations, Old Testament (Lam. 4, 3) (J. Zrzelski, *BOLESŁAW albo Krol Bolesci < ... > Podany W. X. Jana Zrzelskiego Soc: Jesu. Na ten czas Rektora Collegium Mińskiego, W Wilnie w Drukarni J. K. M. Akademickiey Soc: Jesu. Roku 1740, p. 159).*

²³ For example, act of the visitation of Aleksandravėlė Church in 1830 (LVIA F. 669, AP. 2, b. 241, l. 598v).

²⁴ E. Romer, *Oracja Wielkanocna, „Wisła” 1897, t. 11, p. 340.* The folk oration is recorded and published in the incorrect Polish language. Therefore, only narration will be provided: “Jesus morti-

Rozalimas City mentioned in the oration is probably Jerusalem. The place-name Rozalimas in Lithuania originates from Jeruzolimas – the masculine form of the ancient Lithuanian name of Jerusalem. There are several Jeruzolimas in Lithuania. A small town and village Rozalimas are in Pakruojis and Kupiškis districts; Tumasony's village in Kupiškis district was called Jeruzolimas as well. Therefore, it is likely that Rozalimas mentioned in the oration is not a specific place of Lithuania, but the Lithuanized biblical name of the town.

The prefiguration of the prophet Jeremiah in the conception of Christ in Distress has also been documented in Poland. Anna Kunczyńska-Iracka provided the following descriptions: “Mr Jesus cares about Jerusalem, because it is bad there”, “Mr Jesus with a thorn crown is concerned for Jerusalem, because shall not be left one stone upon another from it”²⁵. Magdalena Zowczak associated the lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah, read on Good Friday, with the *Gospel of Luke*. Christ said to the women: “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children”²⁶.

The folk interpretation of Christ in Distress' theme was influenced by a combination of various texts of the Catholic Church with the peculiar world-view of peasants. “Interpretation diversity of the theme was determined by the unidentified precise moment in the life of Christ, because there is not a direct equivalent of this theme in the New Testament”²⁷. A variety of subject's interpretations shall be also valid for the representations of this image in the art of the Catholic Church.

All ways of representation of Christ in Distress which is observed in the art of the Catholic Church also exist in the folk approach. Folk masters of religious art have directly followed the established iconographic traditions of the Catholic Church and its atypical representations do not exist (see Ill. 2, 4). The most popular was a devotional representation or otherwise the iconographic type representing desolate pensive Christ with clothes or only with perizonius (Ill. 5)²⁸. The Passion of Christ is only marked by the blood drops on the body and thorn crown. The internal pain of Christ is emphasized in the art works, and dramatic representation of the Passion of Christ has been avoided. We can discover iconographically the same representation of Christ in Distress in Europe and Latin American coun-

fied and put into the coffin; omnipotent God has resurrected this Easter Day. Overcame King Satan, went to the city, Rozalimas city. Jesus is sitting on a stone, ruefully crying. And you, Christians, do not be Jews < ... >. Small animals and birds have their nests, they rest where they want, but I, unhappy Son of God, do not have such a place. Please, accept Christians, by the merciful heart, welcome the Noble Lady. Please, give God to live through this year, to wait for the next year with greater [perhaps, a mistake? Should be “smaller” – G. S-V.] sins, with greater joys. Hallelujah!”.

²⁵ A. Kunczyńska-Iracka, *Chrystus Frasobliwy i jego miejsce w tradycyjnej religijności ludowej*, „Polska Sztuka Ludowa” 1980, nr 3–4, p. 150.

²⁶ This quotation is taken from *the Gospel by Lukas, the New Testament* (Lk 23, 28); M. Zowczak, *Biblia ludowa: Interpretacje wątków biblijnych w kulturze ludowej*, Wrocław 2000, p. 390.

²⁷ S. Urbonienė, *Religinė liaudies skulptūra Lietuvos kaimo kultūroje (XIX a. II pusė – XX a. I pusė)*: Doctoral dissertation, Vilnius 2009, p. 33.

²⁸ Perizonium – a piece of stylized or natural shape cloth with different gather covering the waist and hips of tortured, crucified, and sometimes resurrected from the tomb, Christ in the religious art works.

tries; differs only the prevalence and popularity of one or another variation of this type in a particular area. However, it is not possible to distinguish any single iconographic type of Christ in Distress which would be typical of only one region and would not be found in another region. In general, my earlier investigations indicate that particular copies of prototype have spread in different regions of Europe and Latin America, and they have determined predominance of one or another variation of Christ in Distress representation in that territory. Perhaps, the terms used to describe Christ in Distress in the folk such as “smutkas”, “smūtkiuukas”, “smūtkelis” (one who is in distress)²⁹, “mūkiukas”³⁰ (one who suffers) have been taken over from the Bernardines, who so named the image of pensive Christ. Christ in Distress is named as “Mr Jesus in distress” (in Polish – smutny Pan Jezus) in the chronicle of Vilnius Convent³¹. The names established in folk



III. 4. Siautuliai village, Šilalė district, 1823. Wood, polychrome, H 300. ŠAM inv. No. D-LS 100. Photo by V. Balčytis, 2005

express passion, distress and sadness of Christ. The folk name “Plikdeivelis”³² also emphasizes the Passion of Christ, i.e. his public humiliation – undressing.

More comprehensive characterizations of Christ in Distress have originated from the conception of the Catholic Church. “Smūtkas before own suffering” – this explanatory name had a small sculpture in Plungė district. Similarly, “Smūtkelis before own suffering”, is called one more small sculpture in Pakutuvėnai village, Šateikiai neighbourhood, Plungė district³³. A small sculpture “Jesus before suffering” is known in Gelgaudiškiai village, Anykščiai district³⁴. Such names reflect the aforementioned episodes of religious texts, where events just before the crucifixion of Jesus are de-

²⁹ ŽAM, inv. No. LM-602.

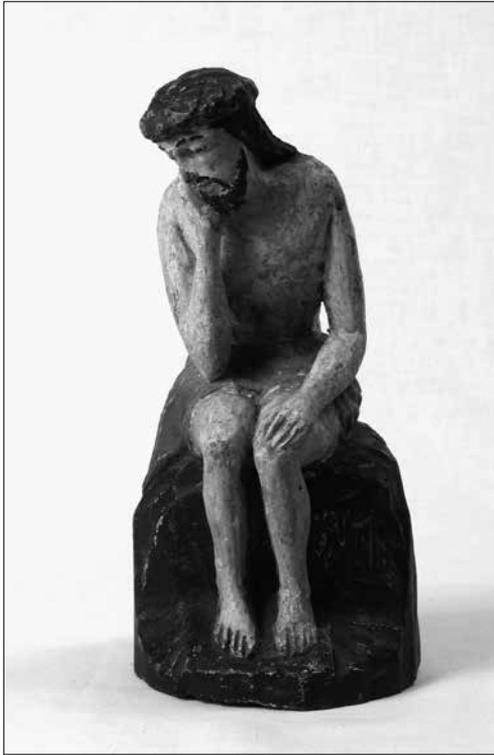
³⁰ LNM, inv. No. EM6579.

³¹ Chronologia erectionis et foundationis conventus et custodiae Vilnensis ADS: <...> conscripta que per A. R. P. Thomam Dignon praedicator generalem Patrem provinciae ac chronologum sub officio A. V. P. Stephani Romanovicz custodis ac gvardiani Vilnen: Anno Dñi 1668, VDKM S 111105, l. 206.

³² ČDM, inv. No. LV510.

³³ LNM, inv. No. EM6580.

³⁴ ČDM, inv. No. LV2261.



Ill. 5. Zarasai region, 4th qr. of the 19th c. Wood, polychrome, H 20 cm. RKRm inv. No. RKM 4794. Photo by V. Balčytis, 2005

scribed. At the same time it shows the mediaeval devotional concept of Christ in Distress, which express the idea of alone, abandoned and seated Christ, contemplating about the future suffering. The concept of Christ in Distress from the 15–16th century has preserved until the beginning of the last century. This is confirmed by the fact that his small sculptures are usually found alone; they are composed rarely with other iconography sculptures. Moreover, Skaidrė Urbonienė has stated that place in the monument stresses the suffering because the sculptures of Christ in Distress are sometimes composed in crosswise of the cross, in the usual place of the crucifix image³⁵. Folk descriptions of Christ in Distress recorded by ethnographers in Poland illustrate the idea of sitting and suffering Christ before the death. “Mr Jesus is meditating before his death”, “Mr Jesus is put in prison, when he was tortured”³⁶. The culture of the Catholic Church has provided such aspects of the representation of pen-

sive Christ in the 17–18th century. “The folk perception of such suffering, sadden God can well understand a person down on one’s look, i.e. suffering and sorrowful. Therefore, it is worth for him to pray and beg for grace”³⁷. A. Kunczyńska-Iracka based on expressions about Christ in Distress written in Poland has concluded that Christ in Distress is considered to be a contributor for meditating the suffering of Jesus as well as a person in the folk devotion³⁸. On the other hand, salvation of the Passion of Christ is reflected in such concept, it is revealed in the religious texts and folk surrounding: “Jesus Christ suffers physical and spiritual sufferings submissively, perceiving his mission on Earth predetermined by God’s will to die on the cross”³⁹.

³⁵ S. Urbonienė, *Religinė liaudies...*, p. 34.

³⁶ A. Kunczyńska-Iracka, *Chrystus Frasobliwy i jego...*, p. 150.

³⁷ S. Urbonienė, *Religinė liaudies...*, p. 151.

³⁸ “It was said that Mr Jesus has been suffering because all the people have suffered earlier”, “All the people have suffered earlier, and therefore they knew that he is in distress” (A. Kunczyńska-Iracka, *Chrystus Frasobliwy i jego...*, p. 150).

³⁹ M. Vaicekauskas, *Lietuviškos katalikiškos XVI–XVIII amžiaus giesmės*, Vilnius 2005, p. 163.

Influence of the concept of post-Tridentine sin and Sacrament of Penance

The general Council of Trent of the Catholic Church has defended the doctrine of the Sacrament of Penance, and one chapter and fifteen canons has dedicated for penance in 1551. It is stated that this sacrament is established by the Christ itself that believers can conciliate with God⁴⁰, because sin, first of all, is perceived as an offence to God. The increased importance of sin and its ransom as well as the Sacrament of Penance after the Council of Trent provided more implications to the image of Christ in Distress. The results of this influence are found in the GDL only from the 17th century. The representation of pensive Christ was used in the teaching of the Catholic Church in the acknowledgement of sins; it is used to express the idea of sorrow and pensive Christ because of human sins.

The image of pensive Christ painted in the confessional is described in the visitation of Vilnius Cathedral in 1743⁴¹. This joinery work confessional stood in front of the St Charles chapel. It consisted of three parts. In the place, where a priest sat was a picture of pensive Christ, which was quite professionally painted. On one side of the penitents was the image of St Peter, performing penance, while on the other – the image of St. Mary Magdalene. Thus was formed merciful God's idea in a believer's consciousness, because both St. Peter and St. Mary Magdalene performing penance were absolved. The representation of St. Mary Magdalene performing penance was very important in the post-Tridentine art until the beginning of the 19th century. On the other hand, these images related to the spread of the piety to Christ Saviour and Redeemer. In addition, they have done a direct catechization function. In one of the sermons from the 18th century, said in the folk mission, is stated that priest in the confessional is sitting instead of Christ and becomes a spiritual doctor of the penitent⁴². The parallel of pensive Christ and priest in the confessional may arose because of their postures similarity. The duty of priest to cure a soul injured by sin was developed in the tractates of moral theology in the 18th century. Jakub Bartold (1656–1753), a pupil of Vilnius Jesuit novitiate and a lecturer of several Jesuit colleges, has analysed a ternary function of priest, listening to confessions – judge, doctor as well as a teacher and adviser in the work *Corona decenni* in 1752⁴³.

A parallel of the Christ in Distress and priest in the confessional is also reflected in the history of the Christ in Distress from the Church of Roś (village). In the Church of Roś the first miracle attributed to the sculpture of the Christ in Distress took place in 1618. A woman, blind from birth, has confided dream that she will regain sight in this church. Therefore, she was taken a few miles to the Church of Roś. However, she was late for the service; only organist and beggar (old man) were in the church. The

⁴⁰ "Penitence" [in:] *Dictionnaire de le Spiritualité*, t. XII, Paris 1989, p. 982.

⁴¹ J. Kurczewski, *Kościół zamkowy, czyli katedra wileńska w jej dziejowym, liturgicznym, architektonicznym i ekonomicznym rozwoju*, t. 2, Wilno 1910, p. 279.

⁴² Concio de Confessione in Missionibus dicenta [in:] LVIA, f. 604, ap. 1, b. 249, l. 18v.

⁴³ A. Derdziuk, *Grzech w XVIII wieku. Nurty w polskiej teologii moralnej*, Lublin 1996, p. 53.

blind unfortunate asked an organist to invite a priest, because she wanted to make a confession. He shown her mockingly the sculpture and said: “That is sitting, confess to Him”. The woman, while kneeling before a statue, confessed her sins, has received absolution and went to the altar already sighted and without a chaperone to take a sacrament⁴⁴.

For example, in 1938 during the expedition to Onuškis neighbourhood (Trakai district), a story about chapel by which beggars were praying was recorded⁴⁵. The sculpture of Christ in Distress was in Dvelaičiai village (Skaisgiris neighbourhood, Joniškis district), which was considered by peoples to be the intercessor of girls. Girls unmarried and gave birth were praying by him⁴⁶. After having significantly changed some moral rules in the 19th century, gave birth of a bastard in the rural community was considered to be a great shame and sin.

Identifying of the image of Christ in Distress with the reflection of sins was also taken over by the Lithuanian folk tradition. For example, Pranas Bručas (born ca 1860) from Pavinkšniai village, Smilgiai neighbourhood has decorated the churchyard with own works after the order of the parson of Smilgiai in ca 1907. Different wayside shrines with various sculptures were erected in all four his corners. Christ in Distress was erected in the one of them, which conveyed “your sins is pressing me”, St. Jurgis in the other teaching to resist against “evil” and in other wayside shrines – patrons of the parish⁴⁷.

A skull of Adam is sometimes represented under foots of pensive Christ. This representation is a metaphor of the contemplation of humanity’s sins. The motif of Adam’s skull under foot of seated pensive Christ is known since the 15th century. It is not very common in the sacral art. This motif is also in the folk approach of the Christ in Distress in all his iconographic forms. A symbol of the skull is more common for us in the iconography of the crucifix. In the iconography of the Christ in Distress, it is represented under right feet or on knee of Christ as a support to hand. According to A. Kunczyńska, a motif of Adam’s skull in the iconography of the Christ in Distress in the Polish folk art is usually found in the territories in which spread the sculptures of Gothic medieval guilds⁴⁸. In Lithuania, this element has been observed only in the folk sculpture. We can do the presumption that such sculptures have not survived (it is known only few Gothic sculptures representing different personages in present Lithuania). Because the motif of Adam’s skull under foot or on knee of seated Christ is not observed in the survived religious sculpture. However, folk masters do not model exact representation of the skull; it turns into the ball under the feet of Christ or the support of hand (Ill. 6). Such transformation of Adam’s skull

⁴⁴ D. Piramidowicz, *Cudowne wizerunki Chrystusa „z drzewa rżnięte” w dawnej diecezji wileńskiej* [in:] R. Sulewska, M. Wardzyński (ed.), *Artyści włoscy w Polsce*, Warszawa 2004, p. 602.

⁴⁵ *Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas*, t. 11, Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, 1978, p. 258.

⁴⁶ ČDM, inv. Nr. LV 161.

⁴⁷ LNB RS, f. 127, b. 95, l. 32.

⁴⁸ A. Kunczyńska, *Chrystus Frasobliwy w polskiej rzeźbie ludowej*, „Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa” 1960, nr 4, p. 215.

could be a result of ignorance of the meaning of all attributes of the iconographic type or because of ineptitude to carve it. Eventually, repeating the existing examples, this element is not even tried to interpret otherwise. The research in Poland has shown that people could not explain the meaning of skull in the representation of the Christ in Distress. It was not associated with Adam's person⁴⁹.

A motif of Adam's skull in the iconography of the Christ in Distress can be understood as the reminder of the relationship of Adam and Christ just before the crucifixion on Golgotha Hill. "The Early Church believed that the crucifixion place of the Lord was not accidental. The first parents were laid to rest in Golgotha. That is why, the Saviour choose it as a place of his suffering and death"⁵⁰. Christ in The New Testament was treated as the second, the new Adam, Redeemer of the native sin of people. Christ may retrieve the guilt of ancestor because stood alongside him as "another man" or the exact copy of the first human. According to St. Augustine, Adam and Christ is "a man and a man: a man for the death and a man for the life"⁵¹. According to estimates of the biblical chronology, Christ from Adam is separated by 4000 years.⁵² St. Luke the Evangelist derives the genealogy of Christ from Adam through the 72 generations (Luk. 3, 23–38). "Jesus and Adam are compared to see better a connection between the human causality and a free God's gift in the Jesus Christ"⁵³. The existence of Adam's skull in the image of the Christ in Distress is a piety' representation of the Passion of Christ.

One Polish legend tells about the Saviour sitting under the cross, who looking at the Adam's skull is contemplating about human sins⁵⁴. This is a rather late interpretation. In my opinion, the attribute of Adam's skull is related to the teaching of St. Paul.



III. 6. Aco kavai village, Radviliškis district. 1770 (?). VDKM inv. No. BBN 8798. Photo by B. Buračas, 1930s

⁴⁹ A. Kunczyńska, *Chrystus Frasobliwy...*, p. 223.

⁵⁰ B. Ulevičius, *Kaukolė po kryžiumi: Adomo kapo reikšmė išganyto dramoje* [in:] G. Surdokaitė, *Pamaldumas Išganytojai Lietuvos kultūroje*, Vilnius: Kultūros, filosofijos ir meno institutas, 2008, p. 48.

⁵¹ B. Ulevičius, *Kaukolė po kryžiumi...*

⁵² J. Dupuis, *O jūs kuo mane laikote? Kristologijos įvadas*, Vilnius 2004, p. 238.

⁵³ J. Dupuis, *O jūs kuo...*, p. 237.

⁵⁴ T. Seweryn, *O Chrystusie Frasobliwym. Figurki – legendy – świątkarze*, Kraków 1926, p. 21.

According to him, Christ is the second Adam, who dedicating upon the cross has absolute human sins. This parallel does not relate directly to the 17–18th century's category of sin. This mentioned Polish legend is narrating about the sacrifice of the Saviour.

Conclusions

The conception of the image of Christ in Distress was influenced by devotional literature, meditations guides and descriptions of the Passion of Christ. The conception of this image is not homogeneous; it combines several aspects. First of all, it is a generalized symbol of all the Passions of Christ. The image and representation of Christ in Distress found in rural culture reflect the medieval devotional image conception, which expresses the idea of alone and abandoned Christ, contemplating about the future suffering. Here are also incorporated feelings of loneliness, desolation and of not belonging found in the approach of Christ in Distress since the late medieval period. On the other hand, the image semantic is associated with the cult of Christ Saviour. Therefore, it is closely related to the categories of sins and penance. The tendency is also noticed to associate the image of Christ in Distress with the moment of Christ Resurrection. Sometimes, it is associated with the prefiguration of prophet Jeremiah laments for the destroyed Jerusalem. The nuances of the concept of the image depend on the context in which it is, and from a specific literary source, whereby interprets the subject of Christ in Distress. All of these categories of conception are found in the peasant culture as well. Here, the image approach is closely related to the teaching of the Catholic Church, religious literature and is little distanced from the official piety.

Folk names used to describe the sculptures of Christ in Distress expressed the Passion of Christ, distress and sadness. These are relicts of the 17–18th century culture. The changes of the religious culture which took place in the 19th – beginning of the last century have little changed the conception of this image and folk sculpture in general. The conception of the passion, ransom of sins and perception of penance was given to the image of Christ in Distress.

Abbreviations

- ČDM – M.K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art (Nacionalinis M.K. Čiurlionio dailės muziejus)
- LNB RS – Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania the Department of Manuscripts (Lietuvos nacionalinės M. Mažvydo bibliotekos Rankraščių skyrius)
- LNM – National Museum of Lithuania (Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus)
- LVIA – Lithuanian State Historical Archives (Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas)
- VDKM – ‘Vytautas the Great’ Lithuanian War Museum (Vytauto Didžiojo karo muziejus)
- ŽAM – Samogitian Musiem ‘Alka’ (Žemaičių muziejus „Alka”)

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