

# Summaries

## Two Late Medieval Enthroned Madonnas and Their Engraved Model. Methodological Reflections on Dating and Attribution Based on Analysis of Style – or: a Possible Virus in the Operative System

By *Henrik von Achen*

Since the dawn of art history as a discipline, the method of analysing stylistic features of a work of art in order to discern when it was made, where and if possible by whom, has been fundamental in the work of art historians. In its essence the method is comparative, basing its analysis on the phenomenon of «visual likeness» between works of art. While one may object to such a method that it is too subjective, too easily the victim of the art historian's need to discover, attribute or date, it cannot be denied that the method is still fundamentally necessary in view of the vast amount of anonymous medieval works of art.

The 'modus operandi' of this comparative method is based on the assumption that if works of art look alike, this indicates that they are somehow genetically linked. Discussing a late medieval enthroned Virgin and Child appearing in two different variations in southern Norway, Eksingedalen and Rollag, this paper points to a problem caused by the workshops' use of mechanically reproduced models, engravings or woodcuts, since the beginning of the 15th century. These two sculptures, probably produced in northern Germany in the decades around 1500, are based on an engraving from c. 1465 by the «Master ES». This use of an older model made in quite a different area, will necessarily cause a sort of «genetic leap», where stylistic features appear with no logic connection to the workshop. If one bases an attribution solely on visual similarity, the fact that such models were often used constitutes a pitfall, where the «genetic leap» connects age, master and area in

an arbitrary way, appearing to belong to the characteristics of a workshop or a woodcarver, but actually destroying any connection between visual similarity and genetics.

However, as the method of style analysis is still a necessary tool, art historians should not dismiss its legitimate role in contemporary scholarship, but try to refine it to make it more aware of the historical facts of medieval art production, as well as of the visual conventions of an age. The method may be refined simply by gaining more knowledge of the many various reasons why two works of art to some extent came to look like each other. The competence to analyse style and form, the knowledge of the field in question, the sheer 'connoisseurship', is thus not to be dismissed as outdated, but to be developed and refined, not least concerning its socio-economic aspects.

## German, foreign worker or local master. Four late medieval crucifixes in a different light

By *Britta Anzdersen*

Danish research in late medieval wooden sculpture has almost only dealt with high quality works of art, while less beautiful and well preserved pieces have been neglected. Over the years the prevalent attitude to the late medieval sculpture has been that high quality is due to import while low quality is supposed to have been produced in local workshops. This tradition is the theme of discussion in the present article, and the conclusion is that it is the amount of identical sculptures in a certain area and the fact that nothing quite like it can be found anywhere else that decides where it has

been produced. In other words it is not just the quality of the wooden sculpture that speaks for import versus local production. Furthermore the article argues for a different dating of four crucifixes from the east part of Jutland.

## The Imperialissima-master as a Problem of Categorization

*By Jan von Bonsdorff*

The author takes the so-called “Imperialissimameister” as a pretext to delineate different methodical approaches to the taxonomy of art-historical research on late medieval wooden sculpture in Northern Europe. One main working method during the earlier part of the 20th century was the attributional strategy. The positioning of the work of art in connection with a name was deemed as a final art-historical result. Furthermore, the author discusses a possible source of the inscription giving the name of the anonymous master: Imperialissima virgo Maria. The text is similar to typical mariological attributes from contemporary prayers. The author turns to works that formerly have been ascribed to the “Imperialissimameister”. He proposes a contextual approach, founded on the concept of the workshop, and presents three reasons why he thinks that most of the works are fabricated in small, local workshops on Jutland and in Slesvig-Holsten: the tradition is unbroken through predecessors and followers; the Lübeck production of wooden sculpture stagnates shortly after 1500; and there is no lack of craftsmen in local centres. Of course, the workshop is only a part of the over-all context. The author proceeds to discuss the panofskyian myth of the readable intellectual all-explaining context. He points to the fact that knowledge of iconographical content is unevenly distributed within the social net, and that the possibility of “empty signs” remains, i. e., that followers of the original work of art were designed without the knowledge of the intellectual program in the first work. Furthermore, the author states that the social, religious and cultural net makes place for the medieval work of art – but the craftsman is responsible for the visual solutions, i. e., also for “style”.

## The alterpiece in Hviding by Ribe. The iconographic programme of the alterpiece and its churchhistorical/churchpolitical placing locally and internationally

*By Hans Jørgen Frederiksen*

The alterpiece was carved c.1520. Its main theme is The Trinity and Ecclesia Triumphans within a circular rosary. The alterpiece relates to a woodcut from 1514/15 by Erhard Schön from Nürnberg. The subject is a so called indulgence-motive typical for the last decades of the medieval periode.

The fact that the alterpiece survived the lutheran reformation is most remarkable. Many works of art from catholic times did in fact survive but only very few with an iconography so “papist” as this.

## Images in Use. Some Remarks on Private Devotion, Cult and Frankalmoins in Late Medieval Odense.

*By Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen*

During the last decade the corpus of Danmarks Kirker, edited by the Danish National Museum have published the descriptions of the churches and monasteries in medieval Odense. These descriptions form the starting point of a discussion on the use and function of images in the Late Medieval church, in particular related to the furnishing of the chancels of the monastery churches of the order of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem (St. Hans' Church) and of the Greyfriars (Gråbrødre Church).

The chancel in St. Hans resulted from a radical rebuilding of the monastery church, finished c. 1475 and to a large extent financed by donations from the nobility of Funen. After completion the chancel was embellished with wall paintings, an altar piece – a winged retable, displaying the image of the Rosary Madonna between St. Michael and St. John, and a rood screen between the chancel and the nave, crowned by a huge crucifix, the only existing item of the Late Medieval furniture. Lost is also the church treasure of the

vasa sacra and textiles, a.o. a reliquary in the shape of the head of St. John the Baptist.

An impression of the liturgical practice and the use of images in the church on particular feast days and in connexion with memorial services, relevant to single members of the community can be deduced from two important sources, the foundation document from 1468 of a Requiem service on behalf of the Counsellor of State, Eggert Frille, later buried in the chancel in front of the high altar, and the Royal account book of Queen Christine, wife of King Hans, covering the period c. 1504-21.

The imagery of the chancel in St. Hans' Church is compared with the even more exuberant decoration of the chancel in Greyfriars Church, furnished during the first decades of the 16th century by Queen Christine in order to serve as a Royal mausoleum.

## High altar, liturgy and devotion. Reflections on Bernt Notkes altarpiece in Århus Cathedral.

*By Søren Kaspersen*

The altarpiece is a pentateuch with two stationary wings and a baldachin, a box-like predella with three partitions and two wings, an upper shrine also with two wings, and a crowning crucifix. It was donated to the church in 1479 by bishop Jens Iversen Lange who is represented both in sculpture on the top of the baldachine, together with an angel originally displaying his coat-of-arms, and in painting on the outside of the first pair of wings, related to St. Anne, the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child in prayer and meditation. Two aspects of the altar are treated: its main positions related to the liturgy and its devotional dimension related especially to its closed position.

The discussion about the main positions of the altar is caused by a dominant conception in the literature of the last decades on the altarpiece, talking about a position for Advent (corpus closed but predella and upper shrine opened, cf. fig. 2), for Lent (corpus in middle position with the Passion cycle, predella and upper shrine closed, cf. fig. 3) and for the great feasts (corpus, predella and upper shrine opened, cf. fig. 5). In accordance with the few written

sources, the article argues in favour of a closed position (corpus, predella and upper shrine closed, cf. fig. 1) for workdays, an open position (corpus, predella and upper shrine opened, cf. fig. 5) for the great feasts, and a total covering of the retable with clothes/curtains during Lent. Furthermore it suggests a middle position (corpus in middle position, predella and upper shrine (?) opened, cf. fig. 4) for Sundays: the Passion cycle concluding with the Resurrection is then illustrative of the weekly commemoration (Wednesday, Friday and Sunday) of the redemptive act of Christ, while the panels with the Mass of St. Gregory (fig. 10) and the 'Prayer for acceptance of the sacrifice' (fig. 11) on the wings of the predella correspond with the Eucharist of the High Mass, which is also grounded in Christ's sacrificial death and His resurrection. From this hypothesis it is most likely that the upper shrine was also opened on Sundays.

The devotional aspect of the altarpiece is especially delineated by the Gethsemane scene on the predella (fig. 6), showing the three stages of Christ's heartfelt and intense prayer before His sufferings, 'repeated' in the prayer of bishop Jens Iversen Lange to the Virgin Mary ("mater dei sis se[mper] . . ."), depicted just above (fig. 7a-b), and in his meditations on the three 'stages' of the Incarnation. This representation with its window frames is interpreted as a meeting between the bride and bridegroom based upon the medieval understanding of the Song of Songs 2, 9 and as a metaphorical 'utterance' on body and soul, on sight and hearing as the windows of the soul. Finally, the flower presented to the Child by Mary is connected with a certain genre of devotional books comparing the soul with a garden, as e.g. *Kleine Middelnederlandse boomgaard-tractaat* from the end of the 14th century and *Thoofkijn van devotien* (Garden of devotion) from 1487.

## Gender Codes in Medieval Reredoses

*By Lena Liepe*

The issue of this article is the representation of female vs. male figures in the late medieval reredoses in Scania in medieval Denmark, and in North-Norway. The main purpose of the paper is to suggest outlines for a study of a medieval material from a gender-defined perspective. In this context, images are seen as carriers

of meaning that participate in the shaping of a wider social and cultural context. The ordering of the church imagery during the Middle Ages, in point of formal properties as well as iconography, has produced and re-produced attitudes towards the sexes that can be analysed in terms of gender specific, or rather gender specifying, codes. In this first draft for such a study, the proportions of female and male figures respectively in the altogether 34 redoses are accounted for, and questions are raised concerning how to analyse the representation, both as regards quantity and quality, in terms of the construction of medieval femininity and masculinity.

## Danish Wooden Sculpture 1100-1400 – Home Production, Import and Export

*By Ebbe Nyborg*

It is well known that perhaps the majority of Danish late medieval altarpieces, images of saints and Holy Roods were imported from the Hanseatic regions. During the high Middle Ages, the kingdom must have been almost self-sufficient with such church imagery. As reliable criteria for determining locally produced items can be mentioned rough workmanship (figs. 1-2, 13-14, and 16-17) and a clustered distribution of closely related sculptures from a common workshop (figs. 9 and 10-11).

A twelfth-century Holy Rood in Vitaby church (Scania) might have been imported from Western Germany (fig. 4), and three sculptures of pinewood are probably Norwegian (fig. 5). During the heyday of the Danish realm in the early 13th century there was even an export to the Baltic area comprising such excellent pieces as the mourners from Bro church on the island of Gotland (fig. 6, beechwood), and the Holy Rood of Skokloster in central Sweeden (fig. 7).

A ringed Holy Rood in Viöl in southern Schleswig (fig. 12) can be dated about 1250 and may be an early instance of import from

Lübeck. But even in the 14th century material, Hanseatic work seems to be sparse. However, it is evident that Northern Germany had an increasing impact on Danish home production (figs. 18-20).

## A crucifix on Funen with relations in southern Jutland

*By Susanne Wenningsted-Torgard*

During my work concerning an analysis and grouping of all the crucifixes preserved in Denmark from the 14th century, a total of about 110 pieces, I realized that a small, fine exemplar in Roerslev Church on Funen is closely related with a group of crucifixes from the southern part of Jutland /North Schleswig, i.e. a crucifix in Randerup Church, one from St. Catherine Church in Ribe, one in Vester Nebel Church, and one of two pieces in Nørre Løgum Church.

The figure in Randerup Church has earlier been related to one of two crucifixes in Gram Church, and according to a frontal view of the two sculptures the comparison seems reasonable. Yet, problems arise when one takes a side view of the figures, and through my investigation I have realized how important the profile of the figures is, not only for a stylistic analysis and classification but also for a judgement on the expressive character of the crucified Christ.

In the Roerslev-Randerup-grouping the loin of the figures is or has been pushed backward towards the tree of the cross, the stomach is emaciated and hollow, the left shoulder is turned forward and the knees are bent. Through a view from the side we get a clear impression of a dead Christ, of a figure hanging heavily on the cross. The Gram crucifix, on the other hand, has an 'optical' swaying forward of the loin, whereby a rounded stomach protrudes while the shoulders are pressed back. This results in a to-and-fro movement contrary to the first group and also gives the impression of a rather vertical figure, of a Saviour still alive.