Summary

The Christ in Distress: From Religious Image to a National Symbol *Rūpintojėlis*[1]

Probably the majority of Lithuanians knows what *Rūpintojėlis* is. Some consider it is a symbol of the entire nation or Lithuanian character, some think that it is a small sculpture carved from wood by a folk artisan, some claim it is the patron and protector of the family, while others assert that it is a pagan god. Certainly, there are those who have no idea what it is. However, very a few among us could say where the image comes from, how, when and where it was formed, what a figure of a seated contemplative figure means in Christian art and how it was perceived by believers in the 16th–19th c.

The understanding of the concept of *Rūpintojėlis*, derived from folk sculpture, changed many times. Lithuanian god carvers (*dievdirbiai*) adopted this scene from examples of pensive Jesus, they saw in churches or religious pictures. Alongside, the concept was adopted through the teachings of the Church. In the late 19th – early 20th c., when the national liberation movement was at its peak, the relevance of folk art, as the essential source of national identity and existence, was particularly emphasised. In the context of active search for the Lithuanian spirit of that time, the "national" *Rūpintojėlis* was acknowledged as the result of folk creativity and ingenuity.

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1   *Rūpintojėlis* – untranslatable term, which is derived from Lithuanian words "rūpintis" ("to take care", "to worry") and "rūpestis" – ("care", "worry"). The suffix "ėl" in Lithuanian language indicates the diminutive form of the noun. *Rūpintojėlis* represents the sitting pensive Christ in Distress, but in the 20th c. gains the secular meaning.

A similar tradition of the representation of *Rūpintojėlis* is observed in the depiction of deities or human figures of various countries. It existed in the art of the Etruscans, Greeks, Romans, Ancient Indians, Siberian tribes and Polynesians. However, the concept of *Rūpintojėlis* reached Lithuania along with Christianity and does not go back to pre-Christian times. Readers of this monograph will get acquainted with the origins of the Lithuanian *Rūpintojėlis*, the interactions and influence between professional sacral art and folk art and the process of the formation of national symbolism.

The Christ in Distress in Churches: Conception and Functions of the Image

The image of the Christ in Distress depicted the sitting contemplative Jesus was formed in German art of the 15th c. However, this scene of the Saviour's life is not mentioned in the New Testament, and thus the image most likely is a result of individual contemplation, although many attributes and details of the scene have been taken from descriptions in the Gospels of John, Matthew and Mark.

The first and earliest narratives about the Christ in Distress are found in the texts of Franciscan monks about the Holy Land, the history of Christ's Passion and descriptions of the holy places from the 13th – 14th c. Therefore, the majority of Franciscan churches (Friars Minors and Friars Minor Conventuals) in the Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Lithuania had at least one image of the Christ in Distress in their interior or monastery. Hence, the image of the Christ in Distress recorded in the literary form in the 13th – 14th c. has acquired a substantial form in the 15th c. and became widespread in the art of Central and Eastern Europe in the 16th c. and in the art of Latin America in the 17th c. In Europe (Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands and Slovakia), it is found in churches, chapels and monasteries, wayside shrines and small chapels in cities, villages, roadsides and fields as well as in the orthodox churches of European part of Russia. Approximately at the same time (the late 15th – early 16th c.) when it was rapidly spreading in Europe, an image of the

Christ in Distress reached the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. An image of the sitting Saviour was painted on a wall of the Church of Observant Franciscan in Vilnius[2] at the beginning of the 16th c. The concept of this image in the late Middle Ages encompassed the suffering and pain of Christ as well as feelings of loneliness, desolation, not belonging and absence of a homeland. A seated and pensive Saviour in the 16th – 19th c. was a mundane, vulnerable, sensitive and touching Christ, who painfully contemplates for people's sins and His sacrifice. Since the Middle Ages, the depiction of Christ sitting on a stone was associated with the lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah over the lost Jerusalem. This prefiguration has originated from the lamentations of Jeremiah (*lamentatio*) performed in the Middle Ages as part of the liturgy of the Holy Week. In the art of the early 16th c., the depiction of the Saviour as the solitary pensive figure became predominant in sculpture and the concept of the Christ in Distress encompassed many aspects such as: *Ecce homo*, Christ imprisonment, flagellation, crowning with thorns, sneering and even *Vir dolorum*.

The images of sitting Jesus belong to the group of so-called devotional images which were intended for private piety and rather than for liturgical ceremonies from the late Middle Ages to late 19th c. Therefore, they are not representative images and are not directed towards the religious community. Although later their purpose has changed a little, initially they were held in the chancel, in the corner next to the high altar, in side naves, in the church porch, in cemetery chapels, and often they did not have any particular place in the praying house at all. The sculptures of the Christ in Distress were intended for funeral rituals, and they were held in cemetery chapels, where the bodies of the deceased were laid out. The Church documents record the facts that in certain cases the image of the Christ in Distress replaced the Crucifix. For example, such not survived sculptures were held in churches of Plokščiai, Leliūnai and Dusetos. They were held in the church porch near the

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2   In Lithuania, Observant Franciscans (Friars Minors) are commonly called Bernardines after
     St Bernardino of Siena and Conventual Franciscans (Friars Minor Conventual) are called simply
     Franciscans.

holy water vessel or were mounted above it. The sculptures held in sacristies or choirs of monks were only visible to church servants, priests and monks. The old documents also refer to non-survived sculptures or paintings of the Christ in Distress which were used in the liturgy of the Holy Week.

The treatise on the construction and equipment of churches by St. Charles Borromeo, the Archbishop of Milan, published in 1577 comprehensively described the construction as well as the decoration of church buildings. The treatise stated that the outside side and apse walls of the building must be bare, and only the facade wall should be decorated with images. These recommendations of the Archbishop reached Lithuania as well. The sculptures of the Christ in Distress were on the pediments of Pabiržė and Veiviržėnai cemetery chapels, but they deteriorated under the negative impact of weather.

It was impossible to identify the purpose of some surviving sculptures in the church interior because of the specific tradition in the descriptions of church inventories in Lithuania when sculptures that did not have any specific place in church interior and did not hold in altars were often not included in the descriptions of church inventories. This applies to artworks of any subject. However, despite the devotional nature of the image, the images of the sitting Saviour were used in altars from the 17th c. to the early 20th c. Some of them still rejoice and solace the believers and are respected by them. Others were destined to lose their importance or end up in various museums due to changes in church interior, piety or as a result of disasters. However, using the descriptions of churches and parishes from the 17th – early 20th c., we can reconstruct their primary function and purpose in the interiors of churches.

It has already been mentioned that the purpose of the devotional image is the promotion of personal piety. Therefore, a question may naturally trigger why the sculpture of the Christ in Distress appeared on the altar and whether this fact changed its purpose or not. Art historian Dr. Hubertus Lossow states that a "devotional image does not distinguish from the liturgy in general, but rather complements it instead. Liturgy encompasses the prayers of the believers' community expressed as a specific form of prayer.

However, in front of a devotional image, the liturgy is supplemented with an individual disposition, forms are abandoned and a personal meditative prayer is used for praying." Hence, the incorporation of a devotional image in the altar does not change its initial purpose. It is intended for a personal prayer, even when it was incorporated in the retable of the altar. Such paintings or sculptures depicting the Passion of Christ attracted very often the believers on Fridays, when the painful events of the Crucifixion were remembered and the story of Salvation was recalled. The sculpture of Ross Church (now in Belarus) that was famous for its miracles and graces since the 17th c. is exceptional in this aspect because we can already attribute the signs of a public cult to it.

In general, the image of the Christ in Distress was often included in cycles of the Way of the Cross with a varying number of Stations until the mid-18th c. For example, a person who compiled the inventory of Vandžiogala Church in 1740–1741, has mentioned among 10 paintings "Jesus Falls under the Cross", "Jesus is Laid in the Coffin" and the Crucifix in addition to the Christ in Distress. In 1731, Pope Clement XII (1730–1740) has set the rules of the Way of the Cross and the scene of resting Jesus was not included in the defined fourteen Stations. However, the image of the Christ in Distress was incorporated in altars dedicated to the subject of the Passion of Christ. All altars in the church and paintings held in them functioned sometimes in a way as the Stations of the Passion of Christ. Unfortunately, no examples of such compositions survived, but their existence is testified by the descriptions of the churches from the 17th – 18th c. For example, in 1663, the high altar of Čekiškė Church was consecrated, which, in addition to the painting of the Christ in Distress, contained works about the whipping and crowning with thorns of Christ, and another work depicting the Holy Trinity.

Since the early 16th c., the image of the Christ in Distress was already associated with the episodes of evangelical mocking and whipping of Jesus. At the same time, another aspect of the concept appeared: a seated and pensive Saviour mourns over human sins and ingratitude. All these aspects of the image concept existed in Lithuania as well. In the 17th – early 20th c.,

the believers in Lithuania perceived the pensive Saviour similarly as in the rest of Europe, where this image was widespread. Lithuania and Poland were distinguished by the fact that the sculptures or paintings of the Christ in Distress remained relevant to local congregations until the early 20th c.

Sculptures of the Christ in Distress were very often placed in dedicated niches in churches. In Poland and Germany, such niches were also covered with metal lattice, e.g. the sculptures of the Christ in Distress in niches imitating the Christ imprisonment are held in the Fransiscan and Dominican Churches in Krakow and the Church of St. John Nepomuk in Munich. In 1761–1763, when repairing the Friary of Observant Franciscan in Vilnius, a latticed niche was built in the corridor of the monastery and a sculpture of the Christ in Distress is held inside it. Such composition of the image is not accidental. One of the aspects of the polysemantic concept of the Christ in Distress states that this is the way to depict Christ imprisonment.

Small sculptures of the Christ in Distress were mounted in the niches of churchyard gates. Such sculpture was found in the niche of churchyard gate of the Church in Alanta, while a sculpture of sitting Saviour, which was held at the churchyard gate in Paberžė in the first quarter of the 19th c., was moved to the wall chapel on the facade of the church in 1966 and still remains there. A similar tradition is observed in Polish art.

In the depiction of the Christ in Distress, two sculptures from the Church of Balninkai (the early 17th c.) and the Church of Gruzdžiai (second quarter of the 18th c.) can be distinguished. On the back side of the sculptures, the drapery of perizoma is lowered so much that the buttocks of the Saviour are bared. The stripping of Jesus was one of torturing methods because it is stated that his mental sufferings were bigger than physical tortures. The nudity of Christ in art is the visual depiction of the theological term of kenosis. Kenosis is a voluntary choice of death, a moment of 'self-emptying' and renunciation consisting of the refusal of incarnate deity's light and the exchange of the God`s shape for the existence of a slave for the sake of mankind. In the Christian tradition of art, nudity is the sign of a slave or a humiliated person. In the history of theology, kenosis, being the highest

expression of love has always been and is permanently emphasised when referring to the solidarity of Jesus with the humiliated.

The most important attributes in the depiction of the Christ in Distress are: stone (rock, throne), reed, cloak, column or pillar and crown of thorns.

A stone is one of the most important attributes for the depiction of the Christ in Distress originating from the literary texts about the Holy Land. Since the old times, stones and chapels were used to mark important places leading to Golgotha in Jerusalem. Over time, some places where Jesus had fallen under the Cross marked with stones were identified as the places of his rest. The first stories about a rock on which Christ had sat appeared approximately in the 12th c. Later, they are also found in literary sources. Franciscan authors, e.g. Ubertini de Casali (1259–1329), Henry of Saint Gallen (he created in 1371–1391), St. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444), Antonio de Cremina, Iohannes Poloner (? – circa 1440) and Dominican St. Vincent Ferrer (1350–1419) in their texts refer to a stone on which Jesus sat during the Way of the Cross. In various religious texts from the Middle Ages, Renaissance or Baroque, it is said that Jesus was seated on the stone right after the whipping or during the preparation for the Crucifixion. The latest mention of the stone on which Jesus sat is found in popular descriptions of visions of Anne Catherine Emmerich, an Augustinian nun, which were also published in Lithuanian in the 19th c. All these picturesque narratives that encouraged their reader to contemplate and empathize with the torture suffered by the Saviour have acquired a certain expression in art as well. In the sculptures of the Christ in Distress, the figure of Jesus with his head supported with his hand is sitting on a stone or rock depicted in one way or another. This way of depiction is also characteristic for folk sculpture. In addition, in folk sculpture the figure of Jesus is usually depicted on a throne or on a pedestal which transforms to a support of irregular shape which, in its highly decorative shape, reminds an armchair or the backrest of a chair decorated with openwork or profiled in various ways.

A reed is a symbol of the mocking of Christ. It is mentioned in the Gospels of Mark and Matthews in scenes of mocking and crowning with thorns. For example, the Gospel of Matthew narrates: "... then twisted together a crown of

thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff[3] in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" ... (Matthew 27:29). In the 17th and 18th c., a symbol of reed was not only carved from wood. However, many sculptures of Jesus of various subjects venerated by the believers in Lithuania were decorated with silver and copper plated with silver or gold details, depicting crowns of thorns, reeds or perizomas.

The earliest image of the Christ in Distress with a cloak found in Lithuania is dated to the second half of the 17th c., while this method of depiction became popular, in particular, in the second half of the 18th c. The cloak used in the depiction of Jesus, with his head supported by his hand, originated from the descriptions of his torturing and mocking. A cloak or a purple mantle is mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John. "They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him", narrates the Gospel of Mark, while Matthew tells us that "... Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again". Based on the Gospels, we can state that the Christ in Distress depicted in this way symbolises the scenes of mocking and the crowning with thorns, in particular. On the other hand, one of the aspects of the polysemantic concept of this image denotes the depiction of the imprisonment of Christ in this way. This episode is mentioned in many popular stories on the Passion of Christ written by various authors in the 16th–17th c.

The Gospels state that the crown of thorns, one the torturing instruments of Christ, was made of the branches of thorn twisted together and was set it on Christ`s head by the soldiers of Pontius Pilate in the Praetorium immediately after the order of the prefect to flog Jesus. Crowning with thorns

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3   Reed, stick

is mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew (Matthew 27:29), Mark (Mark 15:17) and John (John 19:2). The crown of thorns on Christ`s head has been depicted in art approximately since the 13th c., while in the late 16th – 17th c., when the devotion to the Passion of Christ was revived and strengthened and emphasising the torture suffered by the Saviour, the crown of thorns in the images is depicted as wide and high. Sometimes, the crown of thorns was depicted as consisting of several rows to intensify the suffering of the Saviour. Therefore, the figure of Christ from Kriaunos Church was crowned even with a triple crown of thorns.

In the depictions of the Christ in Distress, a motif of column is quite frequent and is typical, in particular, for the religious approach of folk masters. The symbol of the Passion of Christ was taken by the folk sculpture from the professional art. This symbol is also found in devotional images. A column near the sitting pensive Saviour is also mentioned in church paintings and sculptures of the Christ in Distress created from the 17th – 19th c., which have not survived until present day.

In religious folk art, a low pillar is depicted in all cases. Jesus is depicted as sitting and leaning on it. This pillar is the flagellation column of Jesus. The flagellation of Christ is mentioned in all three Gospels. However, in the late 16th c., a question was raised: at high or low column Jesus was scourged? Christian Kruik van Adrichem (1533–1585) in his work on Jerusalem states that Jesus was flogged at a pillar which is referred by St. Jerome. However, according to the author, one part of this pillar remained in Jerusalem on Calvary Hill, while the second part was brought and stored in Rome, Vatican. Van Adrichem had in mind a low pillar stored in the Chapel of St. Zeno in Basilica of St. Praxedes in Rome. This post was displayed again to the payers in the 16th c. However, another explanation became predominant in the second half of the 16th c. It states that two whipping columns of Christ existed in Jerusalem. The first one was the portico of the temple (a high pillar), where Jesus was scourged on the night of suffering. St. Jerome wrote about this post. The second post, the low one, is the small baluster-shaped column stored in Basilica of St. Praxedes in Rome. It was used in the flogging of Jesus

for the second time in the praetorium of Pilate`s mansion. This explanation ended the theological dispute and the low column of the scourging of Jesus has become predominant in religious art since the late 16th c. and is depicted more frequently than the high pillar.

The existence of the motif of a column in the depiction of the Christ in Distress indicates the popularity of the flogging theme in art. In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, like in the whole Northern and Central Europe, probably the most frequent depiction (except for the painting of the Crucifix) of the Saviour from the cycle of the Passion depicted in various branches of art including painting, graphics and sculpture was Jesus at the pillar. The depiction of the Christ in Distress was the second subject which often contained hints to the theme of scourging. Polish art historian Tomasz Dziubecki stated that the "act of whipping was a theme of suffering which was not usually depicted in art, but was the most comprehensively analysed theme, after the Crucifixion, in sermons and other theological literature." However, in the late period, i.e. during the 19th – 20th c., this column in the depictions of the Christ in Distress is no longer identified as the flogging pillar of Jesus neither by sculpture carvers nor by believers.

Another important attribute in the depiction of the Christ in Distress is the symbol of the skull of Adam. This motif appears in the iconography of the Christ in Distress since the 15th c. However, it is not very common in church art. A symbol of the skull is more usual in images of the Crucified Christ to us, but in the European church art, a skull is placed under the right foot of the Christ in Distress or on his knee as a support for his arm. In Lithuania, this element is only observed in folk art because only very few of the old church images of the Christ in Distress have survived. Even it has not been found in surviving examples from churches, there can be no doubt that such images existed.

Usually, so-called "god carvers" do not depict the skull of Adam with precision, so it becomes a sphere under the foot of Christ or a support for his arm instead. This transformation of the scull of Adam may have been caused by lack of knowledge on the meaning of attributes and symbols of the image or

by the lack of ability to carve it. Over time, already available examples were repeated and finally nobody even tried to interpret this element in another way. The research carried out in Poland revealed that people could not explain what the skull near the Christ in Distress means. It was not associated with Adam. The motif of the scull of Adam alongside the Christ in Distress can be perceived as the reminder of the affinity between Adam and Christ, when Christ stops on his way before the Crucifixion on the Hill of Golgotha. Benas Ulevičius states that "the Early Church believed that the place of the crucifixion of the Lord was not accidental. The first parents were buried at Golgotha. This is why the Saviour chooses it as a place for his suffering and death." In the New Testament, Christ is treated as a second Adam, a new Adam, redeemer of the original sin of the humans. According to Jacques Dupuis, "Jesus and Adam are compared in order for us to better see the link between the human causality and the free gift of God in the person of Jesus Christ." Therefore, the depiction of the symbol of the scull of Adam together with a figure of the Christ in Distress is the expression of devotion to the redeeming suffering of Jesus.

The Christ in Distress in Lithuanian Folk Sculpture:
Understanding and Function

The efforts to ascertain when the image of the Christ in Distress appeared in religious folk art and started spreading were unsuccessful. Jonas Grinius stated that the Jesuits used to attach little crosses and other devotional images to trees in their effort to expel the pagan cult of holy trees in Lithuania. They attempted to provide the Christian content for pagan temples. It is likely that the image of the Christ in Distress was spread in a similar way. In Poland, the image of the Christ in Distress in wayside shrines and small chapels spread in the 17th c. It was one of the signs of the Counter-Reformation activities. The construction of these monuments intensified even more in the 18th c.

It is untrue that Lithuania remained a pagan country for a long time. However, relics of paganism were observed for quite a long time. The documents as early as the 16th c. record crosses at roadsides or at the borders

of the lands in the entire territory of Lithuania. Crosses were important for the local topography and for the description of the position of the object. The spread of crosses in the landscape of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the first half of the 17th c. is related to the renewal of the teachings of the Church. The erection of crosses was encouraged by bishops, parish priests and monks during their missions. In the first half of the 17th c., crosses became abundant in churchyards, cemeteries, roadsides as well as memorial places. In the second half of the 17th c., crosses became a customary attribute of a living place or a journey. A description of Samogitian crosses published by Aubrey de la Motraye in 1732, points to deeply rooted folk piety: not only crosses, but also small chapels with sculptures of the saints were built. Based on the analogies from the 19th c., small chapels and sculptures of saints referred by the French author can be attributed to religious folk art sculpture, the existence of which, unfortunately, cannot be confirmed by more reliable or comprehensive sources.

In the contrary to J. Grinius, Povilas Reklaitis introduced an idea that probably the Friars Minor started building small chapels and crosses and thus spread this tradition in the province of Lithuania. The folk names ("smutkas", "smūtkiukas", "smūtkelis" and "Mūkiukas) which were used in the folk to describe sculptures of the Christ in Distress probably were taken over from the Friars Minor, who used them to name the image of the Christ in Distress. In the 18th c., the chronicle of Vilnius Convent refers to the Christ in Distress as "Smūtnas Ponas Jėzus" ("Sad Lord Jesus"). The definition of "smūtnas" Jesus can also be found in descriptions of Lithuanian churches from the 19th c.. Such an entry was made in the record of Joniškis Church visitation in 1844. Broader descriptions of the Christ in Distress have been taken over from the concept of the Church. A little sculpture from Plungė district had a descriptive name of "Smūtkas prieš kančią savo" ("*Smūtkas* before his torture"). A very similar name, "Smūtkelis prieš kančią savo", was given to another sculpture in the village of Pakutuvėnai. A sculpture in the village of Gelgaudiškiai, Anykščiai District is known as "Jėzus prieš mūkas" ("Jesus before torture"). Such names reflect the episodes of various

religious texts describing events immediately before the crucifixion of Jesus. At the same time, they demonstrate the medieval perception of the Christ in Distress which is used to express the idea of solitary and desolate Christ with his head supported by his hand contemplating on his future sufferings. The survival of the concept of Christ in Distress from the 15th and 16th c. until the beginning of the last century is evidenced by the fact that these sculptures are usually found alone and are rarely composed together with sculptures on other subjects. The folk names expressed the suffering, sorrow and grief of Christ. Folk name "Plikdeivelis" ("Little Naked God") also emphasises the sufferings of Christ, i.e. his public humiliation by stripping him.

In some areas, the Christ in Distress was called "The Provider", "The Giver" and "The Remover of All Disasters" ("Aprūpintojas", "Aprūpintojėlis", "Rūpintojas") by villagers. Sculptures called by these names were usually kept in the home interiors and small chapels at homesteads. The function of a protective and compassionate God for home, family and farm is given here to the pensive Jesus. In Eržvilkas town (Jurbarkas district), a small sculpture of the sitting Saviour was called the "The Remover of All Disasters." Parents carved the small sculpture of Christ in Distress when children fall ill, believing that God will take care of a sick child. These sculptures were erected when other Saints with their specific patronage area did not fit the situation. For example, a story about a small chapel next to which beggars used to pray was recorded in Onuškis neighbourhood (Trakai district) in 1938. A sculpture of the Christ in Distress in Dvelaičiai village (Skaisgiris neighbourhood, Joniškis District) was considered by local people to be the patron of girls. Unmarried women who had a child used to pray to it. Antanas Rūkštelė described an event, when small sculptures of St. Mary of Graces and Christ in Distress were erected in a small chapel of one homestead in the hope that life will be filled with graces because "they believe that *Smutkelis* – sitting Christ with his head supported by his hand – has promised not to punish people any more."

The prevalence of the image of the Christ in Distress in province among peasants can be generally related to the representation of sitting Jesus. Sometimes the sculpture of the Christ in Distress was simply called "Sitting

Jesus Christ." Medieval texts, which functioned in later times as well, influenced the origination of certain short prayers in folklore. The analogues of short prayers were recorded in Poland too.

The folk understanding of the image of the Christ in Distress was influenced by the teachings of the Catholic Church. The image of pensive Christ with his head supported by his hand is found in individual prayers created or rephrased by the peasants themselves, Easter orations, legends and fairy tales. Besides, in addition to the concepts of suffering, atonement and repentance, the image of the Christ in Distress was given the meaning of a protective and compassionate God. The idea of a merciful God is also reflected in the folk approach of the Christ in Distress. Here, the conception of this image is not uniform interconnecting several aspects instead. First of all, it is a generalized symbol of all sufferings undergone by Christ. On the other hand, semantic of the image is associated with a cult of Christ the Saviour. Therefore, it is closely related to the categories of sin and penance. A tendency to associate the image of the Christ in Distress with a moment of Christ Resurrection is also observed. Sometimes, it is associated with the prefiguration of prophet Jeremiah lamenting over the lost Jerusalem. All these categories of conception are found in the peasant culture as well. Here, the image approach is closely related to sermons, religious literature and is little distanced from the official piety. A folk interpretation of the image and representation of Christ in Distress was determined by the influence of various ecclesiastical texts to the peculiar world-view of peasants. Folk names used to describe the sculptures of the Christ in Distress expressed his suffering, sorrow and grief. They reflect the remnants in the folk culture of the tradition of devotion to the salvation of the Passion of Christ, which was popular in the 17th – 18th c. The changes in religious culture that took place in the 19th – first half of the last century barely influenced the conception of this image and folk sculpture, in general.

Syncretism that is typical of the folk mindset brings specific corrections into the conception of the Holy Trinity. The dogma of the Holy Trinity was perceived by Lithuanian folk in their specific way; Jesus was identified with God the Father. Therefore, the semantic field of the image of the Christ

in Distress was expanded by the representation of the Flood. For example, a small sculpture of pensive Christ in Sotkalnis village, Pakražantis neighbourhood (Kelmė district) was called "God the Father." It was said that "Jesus became sad after he made the Flood; he regretted punishing the people," or "Distressed Mister Jesus regrets the Flood did."

When creating the sculpture of the Christ in Distress, the carvers did not always know who will be the end-owner, except when performing orders. Masters, or so-called "god carvers", used to sell their works in fairs that took place during church feasts and, sometimes, in the markets. Therefore, the image of the sitting Saviour in the house interior or monuments of small architecture was composed by the client or owner. The majority of such small sculptures were found in tombstone monuments, interiors of houses, small chapels and column shrines at homesteads and in roadside shrines. The chapels at homestead and roadside chapels were mainly small, and so we the sculptures that they contained (15–40 cm).

The small sculptures of the Christ in Distress used to stand alone in the chapels at homesteads and roadsides: sculptures on other subjects were rarely placed nearby. According to the statistics of Ignas Končius (1912–1943), 105 figures of the Christ in Distress out of 132 recorded by him were standing solitary in their small chapels. The most common place for the sculpture of the Christ in Distress was at roadside shrines. Polish art historian Tadeusz Dobrzeniecki originated this tradition from the late medieval custom of building the sculptures of the Christ in Distress at roadsides: the images intended for pilgrims were suggested by Jordan of Quedlinburg (ca. 1300–1370 or 1380).

The Christ in Distress is one of the few "deities", which were kept inside the living house on a window sill or dedicated shelf. A cross with a Crucifix was usually held in this place. A statue of the Christ in Distress performed the function of the patron. The statue protected from all disasters and took care of the house. Sometimes, the sculptures of the Christ in Distress were transferred to a house from the deteriorated homestead wayside-shrines and small chapels.

In Lithuania, crosses were usually built in cemeteries. However, sculptures of the Christ in Distress are recorded on the tombstones monuments. Tombstone monuments with such sculptures have been known in Europe since the 16th c. For example, a gravestone epitaph with an image of the Christ in Distress was created in the 16th c. by a sculptor Stephan Rottaler in a Gerzen parish church (Germany). The efforts to ascertain when the image of the Christ in Distress was started to compose in the tombstone monuments in Lithuania were unsuccessful. However, the custom to decorate gravestones with this image was already deeply rooted in Lithuanian provincial cemeteries in the 19th c. The tradition to erect sculptures of the Christ in Distress in cemeteries has survived until our days. Shrines with the sculptures of the Christ in Distress used to be built not only in cemeteries, but also in sites of accidents, most often involving someone's death.

Small sculptures of the Christ in Distress were often placed in niches made in the pediments of shrines standing on the ground. This tradition is most likely taken over from the wooden sacral folk architecture; the image of the Christ in Distress was sometimes held above the entrance to a church or chapel.

We have already mentioned that the image of the Christ in Distress in churches replaced the image of the Crucifix in certain cases. Similarly, the Christ in Distress was sometimes placed on a cross instead of Crucifix in peasants' culture as well. This phenomenon was observed in the 1920s – 1940s. It was criticised by Jonas Grinius who claimed that the Christ in Distress "should never appear in the intersection of the cross which is a place for the figure of Crucified Saviour." However, we cannot agree with this statement because it is an old tradition originating from the church art and religious cards from the late 15th – 17th c., where the contemplating Saviour is depicted sitting on a cross laid on the ground. Jesus is also depicted in this way in a fresco in the Church of Observant Franciscan in Vilnius created at the beginning of the 16th c. Quite often, there have been small shrines on both sides of the intersection of the cross. Skaidrė Urbonienė states that "The image of Crucifix used to be placed in one of them and an image of another

subject in the other one, which probably depended on the intention of the erection of the cross."

It is obvious that there is a close relation between the professional church art and the creation by god carvers in Lithuania as well. In the Soviet period a myth was created that folk masters were illiterate, and the sculptures that they carved were a fruit of their imagination. However, the comprehensive research of religious folk art revealed that it was not the case. At least the majority of god carvers from the second half of the 19th c. to the first half of the 20th c. were literate and well versed in the lives of the saints. They used to take the carved sculptures of the saints to a local priest to be consecrated, as otherwise nobody was willing to buy them. All the elements in the folk interpretation of the Christ in Distress are also typical of the professional church art as well. Folk masters of religious art have directly followed the established iconographic traditions of the Catholic Church and no other interpretations have been discovered.

Several varieties of the image of the Christ in Distress exist. The images of the first type depict Jesus naked, only with perizoma, the second one depicts him with a cloak and the third one features a long robe (tunic) covering the whole body. All these varieties of the image are typical for both the professional works and creation by provincial craftsmen, and god carvers as well. Moreover, the same modifications of the subject are characteristic not only for Lithuania, but also from Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Austria and Latin American countries. Only the prevalence and popularity of one or another variation of this type in a certain area differs. However, it is not possible to distinguish any single iconographic variant of the Christ in Distress, which would be typical of a certain region and could not be found in another region.

The oldest form of depiction of the Christ in Distress is the following: contemplating Jesus is sitting on a platform (a stone or rock) with his head supported by his right hand. His body is almost naked, covered only with perizoma. A crown of thorns is put on his head, and sometimes he is holding in his hand a branch of palm or a reed. This type of depiction is typical of

the oldest church images in Lithuania, which have survived to the present day. In the religious folk sculpture, the sculptures of the naked Christ in Distress who is only covered with perizoma comprise about thirty percent of all sculptures on this subject.

The third type of the contemplative Christ depicts the sitting Saviour with his head supported by his hand and dressed in a long robe, which only displays his feet and hands. In Lithuania, only examples of the folk sculpture of this variety have survived to the present day. They have been found in the Western, Northern and Central Lithuania and comprise the absolute majority of the images of the Christ in Distress in these areas (54%). In Poland, this variety can be found both in professional and folk art. This interpretation is also observed in the territories of present Belarus and Russia.

A wide prevalence of this variety testifies that the prototype, which was probably a miraculous image, should have been well known at least in the larger part of the territory of the Samogitian Diocese from the 17th c. to the first half of the 19th c. Unfortunately, the reasons of the popularity of this variety and its prototype have not been identified so far. We believe that third type of the Christ in Distress could become popular in Lithuania through a custom to dress sculptures with real fabric clothes and under the influence of the iconography of *Ecce Homo* in the depiction of various scenes from the life of Christ. The iconography of the sculpture of the Christ in Distress with a long robe (tunic) can be identified by a method of the depiction of sitting Jesus with a cloak. In the Church art, this occurrence can be illustrated through the representation of another scene: Christ in the front of Pilate. Some authors depict Christ with a cloak, while others portray him dressed in a long robe or tunic.

The majority of sculptures of the Christ in Distress held in Lithuanian museums is collected in the Samogitian region. The Samogitian raw sculpture was the first, which attracted the interest and it received the most attention in publications of researchers as well. However, the analysis of the folk art collections in almost all Lithuanian museums has shown that the subject of the Christ in Distress has mostly prevailed in the Samogitian ethnographic

region, and was very occasionally found in Dzūkija or Suvalkija. It has been noticed that certain neighbourhoods contained much more of the sculptures of the Christ in Distress than others. Sometimes the subject of the Christ in Distress was popularised in some neighbourhoods by folk masters who loved it, e.g., Juozapas Paulauskas (1860–1945) and Kazimieras Varnelis (1871–1945).

The Birth of Rūpintojėlis as a National Symbol and Its Transformations in the 20th Century

The image of the Christ in Distress originating from the religious texts spreads in the art of the Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. It can be found in the churches of Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, Mexico, Ecuador and Columbia. The painting of a sitting Saviour was painted on a wall of the Church of Observant Franciscan in Vilnius almost at the same time (the 15th – early 16th c.) when it started rapidly spreading in Europe. Later, provincial craftsmen as well as god carvers without any artistic knowledge also began creating images of the Christ in Distress. In the late 19th c. – early 20th c., when the search of the definition and symbolism of the national identity was at its peak, the "folksy" *Rūpintojėlis* slowly gave rise.

In the first half of the last century, the Christ in Distress acquired a form of a secular image and, simultaneously, a meaning which was absolutely different from the perception of sitting Jesus with his head supported by his arm of the 14th – 19th c. In the 20th c., the Christ in Distress became a cultural and political symbol of Lithuania and the source of this phenomenon was the interest in Lithuanian folk art and several cultural figures began to give special attention to folk sculptures of the Christ in Distress, which were called "smūtkeliai" or „Rūpintojėliai". Around the late 1920s – early 1930s, the former church image, which still did not have a general and universal name at that time, became the folksy *Rūpintojėlis*.

The image of *Rūpintojėlis* as the national symbol developed in the late 19th c. – early 20th c. as a result of national liberation movement because people were searching for their national peculiarities, identity and roots.

Rūpintojėlis was one of the subjects noticed by researchers from the late 19th – early 20th c., who mentioned or described the wooden memorial monuments built in Lithuania. In the first half of the 19th c., Adomas Jucevičius was the first who draw attention to the Lithuanian crosses, shrines and small chapels. However, he did not even mention sculptures of the Christ in Distress. He referred to St. John the Baptist as a very traditional sculpture in shrines. St. John the Baptist, the patron of Samogitia, is the only one mentioned in a newspaper *Tygodnik powszechny* in 1884. The fosterer of Lithuanian spirit, Povilas Višinskis (1875–1906), was probably one of the first to draw attention to *Rūpintojėlis*. In 1896, he wrote that he interested by one type of sculpture that "is found in crosses everywhere"[4]. It represents the severely grieved sitting Jesus Christ with his head supported by his hand contemplatively looking into the distance." In 1902, a photograph of the *Rūpintojėlis* sculpture from the Žibikai village (Viekšniai neighbourhood, Akmenė district) created in 1834 was published by Adam Jaczynowski (1862–1931). In 1916, Bronisław Ginet-Piłsudski (1866–1918) wrote that in small shrines on trees, the figures of *Rūpintojėlis* were mostly found; the sculptures of the Blessed Virgin Mary are observed much rarer. The publication "Samogitian Crosses and Chapels" by Michał Brensztejn (1874–1938), which appeared in 1907, probably made the greatest influence on the formation of the opinion prevailing in the first half of the last century that *Rūpintojėlis* was one of the most popular image in Lithuanian folk sculpture. Michał Brensztejn was a researcher of Lithuanian culture and history, ethnographer and archaeologist and was an undeniable authority both to Polish and Lithuanian intellectuals. The author of this publication was the first who described *Rūpintojėlis* as a phenomenon typical of Poland and Lithuania. He has not only mentioned "Smūtkelis" (*Rūpintojėlis*) as one of the most popular images on the theme of Christ in Samogitia, but also associated it with the spirit of the Samogitian land. "It may be that this figure of "sorrowful" Christ best reflects the spirit of a Samogitian and the scenery of

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4   The readers should be noted that in the late 19th – early 20th c., all religious memorial monuments were called crosses, i.e., which are now perceived by modern Lithuanians as crosses, shrines, roofed pillars and small chapels.

his land," the author wrote. According to Jolita Mulevičiūtė, "the Lithuanians have stepped over the threshold of freedom still upholding the concept popular in Neo-Romanticism: folk art is the expression of the spirit, therefore, it must be valued and preserved." Formed in the 1910s – 1920s, the image of "Lithuania as the Land of *Rūpintojėlis*" became an unquestionable statement in the 1930s.

After the restoration of Independence in 1918, in the inter-war period politicians, philosophers, writers, artists and other intellectuals continued to create the image and symbolism of *Rūpintojėlis*. The symbolism was associated with the people's sufferings during the long years of oppression, national rural culture and Lithuanian values. Circa 1920s – 1930s, the "*Rūpintojėlis*" even became a common word of the Lithuanian language.

In 1919, Stasys Šalkauskis (1886–1941) published a book "Between Two Continents" in Geneva and a publication "Lithuanians, a Nation of Historical Paradoxes" in 1937. In both works, he expanded the idea of the mentioned cultural figure Michał Brensztejn and associated Rūpintojėlis with Lithuanian spirit and painful historical events of our country. In 1922, Bronisław Ginet-Piłsudski wrote in his publication "Lithuanian Crosses" (published after the author`s death) that *Rūpintojėlis* was the favourite image in folk sculpture.

In 1926, the researcher of Lithuanian folk art, Paulius Galaunė (1890–1988), wrote: "The image of Christ the Provider (Rūpintojėlis, Smūtkelis) was strongly loved by the entire Lithuanian nation and frequently found both in ordinary chapels and, particularly, in forest shrines hanging on the stem of trees. The Christ who is portrayed with his hand resting against his knee and deeply contemplating is probably the pure result of the perception of Lithuanian carvers symbolising the contemplative and concentrate spirit, and character of the nation as well as the painful events during the centuries, which it has survived." This comparison of *Rūpintojėlis* with a national character and Lithuanian history can be found in practically all earlier and later texts of the first half of the last century, which have any references to this image. Only a priest Kristupas Čibiras (1888–1942) introduced a religious aspect as well: "*Rūpintojėlis* is the expression of his soul: suffering but also

dignified and directed towards the Heaven." Among the abundant publications on this subject, an article published in 1929 by Józef Perkowski (1896–1940) in the newspaper *Dzień Kowieński*, where the author demonstrated a different approach to *Rūpintojėlis* considers it as a wider phenomenon and fundamentally discussing its origin and spread in the European art, seems to have been left unnoticed.

The publications on this subject were important to the spread of the gradually developing representation and image of secular and cultural *Rūpintojėlis* rather than the religious image of the Christ in Distress. Such creation of a national symbolism is very typical and essential to a young state. According to Jolita Mulevičiūtė, folk art "was an effective, visual and attractive tool to spread the national ideology and develop civic consciousness." The search for Lithuanian national identity leads to the actualisation of the rural culture and folk art. They became the source for the search of individual and specific for Lithuanian nature features. Lithuanian aprons, folk sculptures, sculpture of *Rūpintojėlis*, in particular, and decorated crosses became probably the main representatives of independent Lithuania in foreign countries. It is difficult to answer why *Rūpintojėlis* was chosen as one of these national symbols? However, we can assume that the authority of Michał Brensztejn who was the first in Lithuania to collect religious folk sculpture should be emphasised again. His idea about the closeness between *Rūpintojėlis* and Samogitian spirit expressed in the very beginning of the last century was transformed to the affinity of *Rūpintojėlis* and Lithuanian spirit. However, according to Dangiras Mačiulis "the development of national identity that became the greatest concern of the inter-war period and the experienced crisis of historical-cultural identity did not allow limiting it only to symbolic signs of nationality, but required the construction of tradition to establish the nationality." The representation and image of *Rūpintojėlis* had acquired a strong position in the literature and visual arts in Lithuania.

The first efforts to represent the nation in Europe using folk art were observed in the world expo in Paris in 1900, while Lithuania was still incorporated in the tsarist Russia. Later, on the eve of the exhibition of decorative

arts at Monza (Italy) in 1925, Adomas Varnas (1879–1979) claimed that Lithuania can only "show itself abroad" through its folk art. He offered the tactics, which quickly rooted "instead of organising separate exhibitions of Lithuanian art, we should only participate in some international exhibition exclusively with the most typical showpieces of our folk." Later, when assessing the works of Adomas Varnas, Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas (1907–1997), already in exile, drew attention that the former "enormously contributed to the reborn of our own, Lithuanian artistic culture." Encouraged by ideas prevailing in the 1920s – 1930s, when Lithuanians were excited in the search for national culture, the committee of the Lithuanian section in the world expo in 1937 wanted at first to introduce the visitors with Lithuanian folk art and to *Rūpintojėlis*, which was considered a national symbol of Lithuanian nation at the time. Although the sculpture of *Rūpintojėlis* intended for this exhibition was carved by instructors from the school of crafts and was finished by Vytautas Kašuba (1915–1997) who was a student of Art School in Kaunas, the official booklets published in French claimed that the sculpture, based on a model by Juozas Mikėnas (1901–1964), "was carved by an old peasant who has still not forgotten the traditions of god carvers". Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, art historian, wrote: "A gigantic *Rūpintojėlis* in the Lithuanian exposition of the expo in Paris in 1937 was already a work of an ideological nature, consistently surrounded by various legends, which mystified both the exhibited sculpture and the traditional Lithuanian sculpture."

1910s – 1920s saw the changes of the concept of *Rūpintojėlis* in provincial regions as well. The quantitative ratio with folk sculptures of other subjects has changed. More sculptures of *Rūpintojėlis* were built in roadside and homestead shrines. Although the old tradition of cross carving was rapidly disappearing. A more comprehensive analysis of the material of ethnographic expeditions revealed that these sculptures represented approx. 5% of all discovered iconographic types in Samogitia in the beginning of the century (in 1912). The situation was also similar in 1932. However, the sculptures of *Rūpintojėlis* comprised as much as 13% among newly built sculptures, and they were only outnumbered by sculptures with

the iconography of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Ignas Končius (1886–1975) who performed the research did not classify sculptures depicting Mary into separate iconographic types.

It is also very important note that one more concept of *Rūpintojėlis* as the suffering Christ has changed in the inter-war Lithuania. During the 17th – 18th c., meditations on the sufferings of Jesus were spreading, and they were perceived to be the best method to unite with the Saviour by feeling his pain. However, the essential accents had shifted in the interwar period: sitting and contemplating Christ suffer together with the nation. Philosopher Šalkauskis stated that "Lithuanian *Smūtkelis* or *Rūpintojėlis* is the expression of endless pain and suffering. However, the suffering of Christ, represented here, is caused not by his own cross, but, instead, by his painful concern over peoples living on Earth, their miseries, pains, faults and sins. He is a Saviour who proceeds with his mission among people and suffers together with them." During the inter-war period, one more concept of *Rūpintojėlis* was developed. He was understood as a protector of moral values. Poet, Juozapas Albinas Herbačiauskas (1876–1944), wrote "We are the revivers of Lithuania`s life, the *rūpintojėliai* of its honour," It gained importance in the Soviet and post-Soviet period, when people who suffered from Soviet authorities for fostering the Lithuanian spirit saw the image of *Rūpintojėlis* as a source of consolation, strength and resistance. For example, Father Stanislovas OFM Cap. (Priest Mykolas Dobrovolskis, 1918–2005) was one of the main promoters of the sculptures of *Rūpintojėlis* in the Soviet Lithuania. On his order, folk master Pranciškus Mikutaitis (1890–1988), has been constantly carving sculptures of folk style since the 1950s.

In 1939–1940, the "national" *Rūpintojėlis* was placed in the Church of Saint Michael the Archangel (Garrison Church). However, the paraphrases of folk art and catholic devotion in the professional church art were often seen in the art of Lithuanians living in exile. The sculpture of "Lithuanian" *Rūpintojėlis* was placed on the facade of the Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary visited by the Lithuanians in Chicago. In 1953, Vytautas Kašuba repeated the showpiece of the 1937 expo in Paris

and created a sculpture of *Rūpintojėlis* for the Lithuanian Franciscan Church in Toronto (Canada). This work was ordered and later given as a gift for the altar of the Lithuanian Catholic Parish of Resurrection by Franciscan Provincial Superior Father Jurgis Gailiušis (1912–2002). In 1963, the figure of the Christ in Distress against a background of wooden churches and belfries was depicted by Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas in a wall mosaic in the Chapel of Our Lady of Šiluva of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. *Rūpintojėlis* also is held in the Church of St. Casimir in San Casimiro de Gueripa town in Venezuela. In 1967, Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas created a stained glass in the chapel of the St. Anthony`s Franciscan Monastery in Kennebunkport. However, all these works should be treated as the expression of nationality and aspirations of "Lithuanian" culture rather than the expression of Catholic devotion and the old religious concept of the Christ in Distress in art. Nevertheless, in the 20th c. very little information can be found about the functioning of the image of the Christ in Distress in church art, and it was totally dissociated from religious connotations. When presenting the altar sculpture by Vytautas Kašuba in the Lithuanian Church of the Resurrection in Toronto, Father Leonardas Andriekus OFM (1914–2003) introduced the readers of the "Aidai" magazine that "even though it originates from a religious source and is related to the existence of the Lithuanian nation, *Rūpintojėlis* was never worshipped in churches."

Translated by Ona Stankevičiūtė, Adomas Vitas