

## The Crucifix from Taskula, Maaria – on the iconographic and stylistic Aspects of a Group of crucifix pendants

The crucifix from Taskula, Maaria (NM 11275: 29) (fig. 1) is one of Finland's best known late prehistoric artefacts and is mentioned without fail in discussions of Finnish prehistoric art or the spread of Christianity to Finland. Despite this, neither this artefact nor any of the even-armed two-sided crucifixes found in Finland have been studied from the point of view of the origins of the artefact form and of the iconography and style of the related depicted motifs.

The crucifix was found in 1938 in grave 10 of the Taskula inhumation cemetery in the former parish of Maaria (present-day Turku). The excavated grave was a male burial, which contained, among other artefacts, penannular brooches of silver, strap tags and dividers of bronze, a small spiral-grooved ring of silver and half a silver coin (Itkonen 1964). The coin (Köln, Hermann II, 1039–1056, minted 1036–1039) (Sarvas 1972, 35, 100) dates the burial to the mid-11th century. The crucifix is of cast silver, enchased, gilded and joined by a silver ring to a braided silver chain fixed with end mounts with animal head motifs. The crucified is depicted on one side in relief and on the reverse there is a figure of a woman in relief, interpreted as depicting the Virgin Mary (Kivikoski 1971, 92). The artefact is bordered on both sides by a raised edge.

Three other crucifixes found in Finland can be included in the same artefact group, one from the cremation burial ground of Virusmäki in Maaria (NM 6645: 1), a stray find from Juonennurmi in Mikkeli (NM 10880) and a find from a probable inhumation burial in Heinikkala, Laitila (NM 15140: 1). The latter find is dated to the early 11th century on the basis of a silver coin included in it (German Otto II, 973–983 or Otto III, 983–1002) (Sarvas 1972, 35–36, 93).

Equal-armed two-sided crucifixes have been found in Sweden in hoard finds from Lilla Klintegårda and Sandegårda in Gotland. The former is dated to the early 11th century (latest coin 1016), the latter to the late 11th century (latest coin 1080–89). The same group includes the Johanneshus and Allmänninge crucifixes from the Swedish mainland and the Ryd crucifix found on Öland (Stenberger 1947, 232, fig. 89, pl. 255: 1; 1958, 177–178, plates 43, 47: 1, 51: 13; Salin 1893, 296). Three of these crucifixes have been found in Denmark, a small silver specimen from the Store Taarnby hoard in Bjeverskov and two bronze specimens whose find locations are not known. In the Store Taarnby crucifix pendant the image is only on one side. The depiction of the crucified form is indistinct, but it displays features that are in common with the previously mentioned crucifix pendants, i.e. large outspread palms and the depiction of the loin-cloth as two parts curving outwards. According to the coin finds the hoard was deposited after 1051 (Skovmand 1942, 160–161, fig. 38; Horn Fuglesang 1981, 78, fig. 7). In Norway silver crucifixes of the group have been found in the Haukøy and Botnahamn hoards, dated to ca. 1030 (Sjövold 1974, 330, fig. 23) and in Bergen. Kielland mentions, however without notes, that similar ones have been found in the British Isles. In these specimens the dress of the crucified is

decorated more profusely with knots and bands than in the Scandinavian specimens (Kielland 1927, 61–62).

Several two-sided equal-armed crucifixes have been found in the Soviet Union (Sedov 1984, see article in this volume). The crucifixes have been found as single specimens in widely scattered locations throughout the country and their distribution does not permit any conclusions regarding centres of manufacture or trade.

The crucifixes in question were in use in the Nordic countries throughout the 11th century. Chronological groups cannot be identified in such a small material, but the motifs indicate three sub-groups. The crucifixes of the first group employ a fairly realistic manner of portrayal and include the Taskula, Maaria and Lilla Klintegårda specimens. In these two distinctly different persons are depicted on the two sides of the artefact. There are no nail-marks in the hands of the crucified, but the hands are bound at the wrists. In the second group there is a figure of the crucified on both sides with a diagonal cross or entwined knot of bands on the breast and with the hems of the loin-cloth curved outwards. These features are also to be found in the depiction of the crucified in the Taskula crucifix. There are raised streaks in the wrists or arms of the crucified and in most cases the nail-marks are depicted in the middle of the palms. The group consists of the Finnish specimens from Mikkeli and Laitila, the Swedish finds from Sandegårda, Johanneshus, Ryd and Allmänninge, the Norwegian finds from Haukøy and Bergen and the atypical Danish specimens. The third group consists of the crosses from Virusmäki, Maaria and the Botnhamn, in which the loin-cloth is depicted as a skirt with folds of even length and the arms in what corresponds mainly to a praying position.

The main Nordic studies on equal-armed two-sided crucifixes are Bernhard Salin's article from the 1890s »Några krucifix och kors i Statens Historiska Museum» (Certain crucifixes and crosses in the State Historical Museum), Wilhelm Holmqvist's study »Övergångstidens metallkonst» (Metal art of the transition period) from the 1960s and Signe Horn Fuglesang's article »Crucifixion Iconography in Viking Scandinavia» based on a paper presented at the eighth Viking congress held in Århus in 1977. These studies can be generally summarized by stating that Salin derives the equal-armed two-sided crucifixes from the eastern encolpion crosses while Holmqvist stresses the Anglo-Saxon features of their style. Horn Fuglesang's starting point is purely iconographic without striving to elucidate the origin of the artefact type.

Salin's suggestion of Nordic manufacture, mainly in Gotland with small bronze encolpion crosses from Novgorod as prototypes, is interesting from the point of view of the Taskula crucifix. In these artefacts the depiction of the figures was achieved by engraving and niello-work and the crucified is depicted on one side and the praying Virgin Mary on the other. Correspondingly in the Lilla Klintehamn crucifix one figure depicts the crucified Christ and the other the Virgin Mary, whose features include a veil around the head and a beardless face (Salin 1893, 298–300). These are the main grounds for the view that the Virgin Mary is portrayed also on the Taskula crucifix.

However, through increased material and possibilities for refined dating, Salin has, at least partly, been proven wrong. The small encolpion crosses, which came into use in Novgorod in the late 11th century (Sedova 1959, 234–235) could not have been the prototypes for the Nordic two-sided crucifixes, which were in use since the beginning of the said century. If, on the other hand, the figure on the reverse side of the Lilla Klintegårda cross is not the Virgin Mary, whom does it then depict? With respect to the Taskula crucifix it can be questioned, whether the figure is at all that of



Fig. 1. The Crucifix from Taskula, Maaria (KM 11275: 29)

a woman, as it differs strongly from both images of the Virgin in church art of the period and portrayals of women in Nordic art in general. Spirals or circles similar to those in the assumed figure of a woman in the Taskula crucifix are to be found i.a. in the images of the crucified of the Gåtebo encolpion cross (Holmqvist 1963, 36, fig. 18) and a small crucifix from Tarto (Lõugas-Selirand 1977, 279). The details do not portray a woman's breasts or shoulder brooches, but are a stylistic feature of Nordic art of the 11th century, which occurs especially in animal figures but in many cases also in the portrayals of human figures (Christiansson 1959, figs. 102, 125, 127–128, 140–141, 144, 147–148).

According to Horn Fuglesang the other figure in the Lilla Klintegårda crucifix may portray the predecessor of Christ, the young Immanuel (Horn Fuglesang 1981, 73–75). Christiansson, again, suggests two possibilities; the figure on the reverse



side could be Thor or one of the crucified thieves (Christiansson 1974, 81–82). Although the Novgorod eolpion crosses were not the prototypes, Salin's assumption of a portrayal of the Virgin Mary as the starting-point still seems the most plausible one. The artisans who made the crucifixes copied certain features from it, without being aware of their significance or even without the intention of portraying a woman.

Another iconographic problem of the crucifix group is the reason for depicting the crucified Christ as having been tied to the cross at the wrists instead of being nailed. This feature occurs the Lilla Klintegårda, Taskula and certain other specimens of the group. Horn Fuglesang presents the conclusion that this manner of portrayal reflects a movement based on Gnosticism, that occurred alongside the official iconography of the church. The earliest examples of this, according to Horn Fuglesang, are two

Early Christian portrayals of the crucified Christ, engraved in jewels, possibly from 2nd or 3rd century Egypt. This manner of portrayal was transmitted through Coptic art to folk art and it reached Western Europe in the 8th century via the areas of Slav settlement. The portrayal of the crucified in Early Christian art as tied to the cross is based on knowledge of the actual method of crucifixion (Horn Fuglesang 1981). On the other hand the portrayal was well suited to the Gnostic way of thought, which recognized only the divine person of Christ and maintained that his sufferings on the cross were only apparent. The crucified person could also be nailed along with having been tied to the cross, which in the story of the Passion is referred to indirectly in mentioning the nail-marks in the hands of Christ (St. John 20: 25–27).

The practice of tying to the cross may also be related to the bands running diagonally across the breast of the crucified in equal-armed two-sided crucifixes. There are examples of this also in other corresponding portrayals. Both Christ and the crucified thieves are portrayed with diagonal bands in a Syrian paten dated to the 6th–7th centuries (Schiller 1968, fig. 322). There is also a diagonal cross in the portrayal of the crucified Christ in the Lismore bishop's staff (Holmqvist 1963, 47, fig. 26). The section on the crucified Christ in the Rabula codex from 586, however, shows clearly that these were actually bands by which the thieves next to Christ were tied to their crosses (Schiller 1968, 440, fig. 327).

I have not found parallels in contemporary Nordic or Central European art to a special feature of the portrayals in the third group, the depiction of the loin-cloth as curving symmetrically from the middle. It may be a mere coincidence but the same detail occurs in the abovementioned Early Christian jewel engraving (Horn Fuglesang 1981, 82, fig. 12). Two other details of the clothing of the crucified, the hood or helmet on the head and boots on the feet, can be seen in a bronze specimen from the Idestam collection (NM I:454), better preserved than other crucifixes of the group. Similar clothing as well as a short skirt with the hems curved outwards can be observed in a 9th century find from Mikulcice of a belt mounting portraying a local dignitary in a praying position (Poulik 1975, 11, plate II: 2a, 17).

The Nordic countries, often Gotland, have been regarded as the manufacturing area of the equal-armed two-sided crucifixes. The artefact form, however, did not come about here, as Salin assumed. Equal-armed crucifixes with raised edges occur from the 9th century onwards at least in the western Slav area, from where they have been found in the present territory of Czechoslovakia, i.a. in Mikulcice and Dolni Vestonice. The artefact form spread to Great Moravia from Byzantium, but because of the rich metal industry of the area also local manufacture occurred (Poulik 1975, 13, plate III: 1–2, 18, 28; 1950, 80, fig. 39b). Although a large part of the specimens found in the Nordic countries were made there, this need not apply to all. The origin of the artefact form is to be found in the two-sided pendant cross type which came about in the West Slav area as a result of Byzantine influence. Evidence of West Slav contacts include Swedish finds of silver filigree earrings imported from the above area. A filigree cross found in Birka and dated to the 10th century and generally regarded as being of Nordic manufacture may also be from the West Slav region. The figure greatly resembles the crucified figure from Mikulcice with its short arms and crosswise bands at the wrists.

Of the above pendant crosses only the Taskula crucifix displays clear features of 11th century Nordic art. However, it cannot be connected with any particular style. The appeal of band ornament to Nordic artisans is shown by the bands and knots of certain specimens. It is possible that they also reflect Anglo-Saxon influences in 11th century Nordic art. Although the plaited band on the breast of the crucified in the

crucifixes occurs in some English stone crosses (Bailey 1980, 154, fig. 35), the actual artefact form, an equal-armed metal cross, is foreign to the Anglo-Saxon material. Nor are there parallels to the crucifix figures in the portrayals of humans in rune stones. Characteristic of both is a maladroit clumsiness in human portrayal in comparison with the rich and expressive animal figures of Nordic art.

In this paper connections for the motifs and iconographic features of the artefact group have been found in the materials of chronologically and geographically distant cultures. The iconography of sacred images is however very rigid and in copying motifs the aim has been to preserve the original details in as pure and original a form as possible. These have explanations based on Biblical texts and are regarded as sacred in themselves. For this reason religious art, irrespective of style, may preserve features of the original image for hundreds of years. In archaeology the study of iconographic features is a means of investigating the routes of cultural influences. However, it requires a much more thorough study of the artefact material than has been possible above.

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