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Christ in Distress in Lithuanian oral folklore and folk sculpture: The main aspects of perception

Abstract

The influence of official church art, devotional literature, sermons, chants and etc. on folklore and folk religious art were discussed by some researchers. This article explores direct influences of Catholic Church's teaching about Christ on the conception of Christ in Distress image and representation in folk/peasant culture. Here, interpretation of this image is closely related to the teaching of church, the religious literature and thus scarcely distanced from the official religiosity at all. The popular interpretation of Christ in Distress image was determined by the influence of various church texts on the distinctive peasant worldview.

Key words: piety, Christ in Distress, Passion of Christ, prophet Jeremiah, prefiguration

Introduction

Wooden sculptures of Christ in Distress carved by folk masters are considered symbols of Lithuania and her nation. Most frequently they are chosen to publicly and officially represent the Lithuanian state. However, Christ in Distress is, above all, a religious image. Therefore, my earlier publications aimed at revealing the diversity, different functions and complex conception of the image of Christ in Distress within the Catholic Church tradition (Surdokaitė 2004: 99–111; Surdokaitė 2008b: 173–182; Surdokaitė 2008c: 1–7; Surdokaitė 2010: 51–64; Сурдокайте 2009: 50–66, 168–169).

In fact, it is not easy to write about the phenomenon of Christ in Distress in the Lithuanian culture, because image reception for the majority of Lithuanians is heavily obstructed by the powerful associations with the symbol of Lithuanian nation

and state; moreover, it is widely believed that it expresses the national character and Lithuanian spirit. These associations have formed in the 1920s and 1930s. However, the article neither questions, nor discusses such phrases as “national symbol,” “cult of Christ in Distress,” “expression of the national character,” “contemplation of Lithuanian spirit,” etc. This research primarily focuses on the genesis of religious representation and imagery of Christ in Distress within rural culture context before the first half of the last century, when this Christian image was declared being the “expression of Lithuanian spirit” and this declaration rooted widely in the rural society. This image conveys a certain aspect of a believer’s approach towards the person of Christ. Therefore, the article integrates not only art historical research and folklore studies, but is also a part of broader investigations of the Christian culture.

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. There is a small number of folk sculpture examples in Lithuania dated to the 18th century; and sculptures of the first half of the 19th century form only a small group. The majority of them has survived from the second half of the 19th century – beginning of the last century. Moreover, the archive data, necessary for the investigation of the folk conception of Christ in Distress, exist only for sculptures and masters – god carvers from the end of the 19th century – first half of the last century. The same period was chosen analysing the conception of Christ in Distress in folklore. Such selection was determined by several factors. Firstly, it is important that the earliest necessary material for the investigation was recorded only in the second half of the 19th century. The majority of documentations used in this article was recorded in the 1940s and some even in the second half of the last century. In the interwar period, ethnographers and folklorists have collected numerous sources on the investigated topic. However, neither then nor later they have been used by folklore researchers because of the formed situation in the Soviet period. However, they are extremely valuable due to rapidly changing social-cultural conditions. Therefore, this publication is a tentative attempt to analyse the conception and imaginary aspects of Christ in Distress in folklore and religious folk sculpture. 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. Hence, the selection of chronological limit was determined by survived visual material and archival sources. The first half and middle of the last century mark interruption of the conception of Christ in Distress and, in general, of the whole tradition of religious folk sculptures’ creation determined by historical and social reasons.

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 Cross (Kruszelnicki 1959: 317).

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 texts (Kruszelnicki 1959: 307). 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.

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 later (Fehlemann 1990: 83). 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 places (Kruszelnicki 1959: 317–318). 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 1305 (Dobrzeniecki 1968: 284).

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) (Dobrzeniecki 1968: 279). 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 century (Dobrzeniecki 1968: 280–286).

Gert von der Osten affirms that the image of Christ in Distress has originated in Germany at the end of the 14th century (von der Osten 1952: 153).

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; differed the 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 Christ (*Hans Holbein...* 1965: 66–70).

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. 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). 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 prefiguration¹ has appeared in the Middle Ages, when the lamentations of Jeremiah (*lamentatio*) in the liturgy of Holy Week were performed in which he lamented the destruction

¹ 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].

of Jerusalem (Dobrzeński 1968: 288). “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) (Finaldi 2000: 120). 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, *Improperia*² 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?...” (Schuler 1951: 72; Fehlemann 1990: 86).

Egerer Fronleichnamspiel, the drama of the 15th century, narrates about Christ, which after the undressing seat on the Cross and lamented *Improperia*: “O My people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against Me!”³ 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” (*Rozmyślenia dominikańskie ...* 1965: 73)]. Therefore, the prophet Jeremiah is considered 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 wilderness.⁴

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

² *Improperia* – 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.

³ This quotation is taken from the Book of Micah, Old Testament (Mic. 6, 3) (Dobrzeński 1968: 289).

⁴ This quotation is taken from the Book of Lamentations, Old Testament (Lam. 4, 3) (Zrzelski 1740: 159).

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.⁵

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 1881.⁶

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; Tumasonys 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” (Kunczyńska-Iracka 1980: 150).

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”.⁷

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” (Urbonienė 2009: 33).

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. The most popular was a de-

⁵ For example, act of the visitation of Aleksandravėlė Church in 1830 (LVIA F. 669, AP. 2, b. 241, l. 598v).

⁶ Römer 1897: 340. The folk oration is recorded and published in the incorrect Polish language. Therefore, only narration will be provided: “Jesus mortified 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!”

⁷ This quotation is taken from *the Gospel by Lukas, the New Testament* (Lk 23, 28); (Zowczak 2000: 390).

votional representation or otherwise the iconographic type representing desolate pensive Christ with clothes or only with perizonius.⁸ 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 countries; 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*, *smūtkiukas*, *smūtkelis* (one who is in distress),⁹ *mūkiukas*¹⁰ (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 Convent.¹¹ The names established in folk express passion, distress and sadness of Christ. The folk name “*Plikdeivelis*”¹² 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. “*Smūtka 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 district.¹³ A small sculpture “*Jesus before suffering*” is known in Gelgaudiškiai village, Anykščiai district.¹⁴ Such names reflect the aforementioned episodes of religious texts, where events just before the crucifixion of Jesus are described. 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

⁸ 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.

⁹ ŽAM, inv. No. LM-602.

¹⁰ LNM, inv. No. EM6579.

¹¹ *Chronologia erectionis et fundationis konventus et custodiae Vilmensis ADS: (...) conscripta que per A. R. P. Thomam Digon 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.*

¹² ČDM, inv. No. LV510.

¹³ LNM, inv. No. EM6580.

¹⁴ ČDM, inv. No. LV2261.

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 image. (Urbonienė, 2009: 34. 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” (Kunczyńska-Iracka 1980: 150). The culture of the Catholic Church has provided such aspects of the representation of pensive 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” (Urbonienė 2009: 151). 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 devotion.¹⁵ 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” (Vaicekauskas 2005: 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 God (*Penitence* 1989: 982), 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.

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

¹⁵ “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” (Kunczyńska-Iracka, 1980: 150).

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 parish.¹⁶

Teaching of the Catholic Church, religious literature and folk tradition

Prevalence of the image of Christ in Distress in the peasant culture, in general, may be associated with the image of seated Jesus. Sometimes, a sculpture of Christ in Distress was simply called “sitting Jesus Christ”.¹⁷ Medieval texts, which functioned in later times as well, have influenced the origination of certain short prayers in folklore: “A white stone on the sea, Jesus Christ sat on the stone”.¹⁸ Several phenomena were intertwined in one prayer written in Kabeliai parish – love of Jesus, piety to the Virgin Mary and Christ. A similar short prayer was also recorded in Poland (Kunczyńska-Irackska 1980: 149). There it is only said that the Blessed Virgin Mary walked with Christ not on Earth, but in the Heaven. Thus, the events of Mary’s life are interwoven before and after her death.

The phrase “White stone on the sea, Jesus Christ sat on a stone” shows that Christ is connected with the local landscape – sea. This confirms, once again, that, in general, folk tradition naturally used biblical events to set to one’s own life realities. After all, *The New Testament* frequently refers to a body of water, which Christ used to journey to one or another region. The connection of Christ living time to their own surrounding and own land is characteristic for the Lithuanian folk etiological legends (Racénaitė 2008: 327).

A stone is also referred in other expressions. For example, “Mr Jesus is sitting on the white stone, white hands have dropped, sacred eyes closed”.¹⁹ A stone on which Christ sat during the Way of the Cross is mentioned in the works of such

¹⁶ LNB RS, f. 127, b. 95, l. 32.

¹⁷ LNM, inv. No. EM8698.

¹⁸ The whole text of the short folk prayer is following: “The sun has risen in the early morning of Sunday. Virgin Mary with Jesus Christ was walking in the Heaven led by the hand. A white stone on the sea, Jesus Christ sat on the stone. Oh, Jesus, how I loved you, the entire world looked after. Who this short prayer will say three times daily, as many leaves are on trees, as many soils are on the Earth, so many sins will be absolved” (LTR 793/8/).

¹⁹ The whole evening and morning prayer: “I am going to lay down in the evening, and carrying a cross through the bed, Blessed Virgin cross me, Mr Jesus christen me, I am not afraid of any evil, when Blessed Virgin crosses me, Mr Jesus christens me. Two angels are sleeping, two angels are on watch, two angels are sitting in the Heaven. Mr Jesus is sitting on the white stone, white hands have dropped, sacred eyes closed. St. Peter with St. Paul are going and telling for the whole world.” Who this short prayer will say in the evening and by getting up in the morning, the bright Eden will be opened, dark hell will be closed. “Mr Jesus Christ, open the bright Heaven through the endless centuries to be joyful. Amen” (Mažiulis 2002: 933).

medieval authors as St. Ubertinus de Casali, OFM, St. Bernardino da Siena, Heinrich von St. Gallen, Antonius de Cremina, John Poloner, St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P., etc. (Dobrzeńiecki 1968: 281–284). A phrase “Then, Christ walking further with his own cross, sat down for the rest elsewhere, and, being grateful to people, who allowed him to do this, prayed” (Vitkauskas 1937: 138; Urbonienė 2009: 35) can be treated as a direct medieval quotation of description of the Passion of Christ. Tadeusz Seweryn pointed out to a Polish legend, in which Christ travelled across the world with thorn crown, sat on stones by the road when he was tired and sorrowfully cried. People, being grateful for these tears, started to represent him not as punishing, but as a merciful God (Seweryn 1958: 175).

An attention should be drawn to the white stone referred in the previous paragraph. Magdalena Zowczak affirms that white stone is a symbolic centre of the world, a foundation and corner-stone, a sacrificial place as well (Zowczak 2000: 392).

Krzysztof Wrocławski was the first one who paid attention to the christologic symbolic of the white stone. A live, exclusive and valuable cornerstone is in the message of the Apostle Peter (Zowczak 2000: 392).²⁰

On the other hand, a stone found in the Lithuanian folklore is related to the expression of distress, passion and pain. A stone mentioned in folk songs on which sits down during the sufferings and distress:

I sat
On the small stone
And sighed:
My God,
Oi lylia lylia,
Oh sorrowful hour,
And sighed:
My God...²¹

In the oration recorded by A. Römer, alone, abandoned Jesus, who have no place to rest is also mentioned. This image has originated from the conception of Christ in Distress in the late Medieval time. At that time, it included not only the Passion of Christ and pain, but also “combined feelings of loneliness, desolation, not belonging and absence of a homeland” (Sabrine 1990: 82).

In this iconographic type, Christ shows as a human for the last time. He is mundane, living, vulnerable, sensitive and, therefore, exciting (...). His depressed seat marks not the physical distress caused by tiredness, but first of all, the “desolation” of Christ in the initial meaning: lack of homeland, loneliness, retreat of the closest followers and negation of any relations – this *desolatio Christi* was a very favourite subject in the then devotional literature (von Borries 1972: 10–15).

²⁰ See also a message of the Apostle Peter (1 Pet 2: 4–8).

²¹ *Lietuvių liaudies dainynas*, t. 3, d. 1: Karinės-istorinės dainos, kn. 1, ed. Pranė Jokimaitienė, Zofija Puteikienė, Vilnius 1985, p. 483, No. 474.

In some places, Christ in Distress was named by rural people as “Aprūpintojas” (provider), “Aprūpintojėlis”²² (small provider), “Rūpintojas” (one who takes care).²³ So called sculptures, mostly were standing at homes or chapels of farmsteads. A function of God is given here for the pensive Christ, who takes care and protects their homes, family and economy. A small sculpture of Christ in Distress in Eržvilkas town (Jurbarkas district) was called “Estranger of all disasters”.²⁴ Balyš Buračas in Acokevai village (Siaulėnai voltage) in 1920 wrote an event when one old woman before the death asked the household to put her beloved Christ in Distress, “who took care of her all the time” in the coffin (Buračas 1993: 294; Urbonienė 2009: 34).

The small sculpture of Christ in Distress parents carved when children fall ill, believing that God will take care of a sick child. For example, one story tells that children have died again and again in a family, and householder gave a promise and carved a sculpture of Christ in Distress. Three children have survived, although being weak (Urbonienė 2009: 34).

A typhoid fever epidemic raged in Lithuania in 1919. In ca 1919–1920, a chapel was put into a tree in Kadaičiai village, Šateikiai neighbourhood (Plunge district) by Liudas Šatkauskas asking God to recover his daughter from typhus fever (Vatka 2006: 136).

The sculptures of Christ in Distress were erected when other Saints, which had a specific patronage area did not fit. A story about the chapel next to which beggars were praying was written during the expedition in Onuškis neighbourhood (Trakai district) in 1938 (Buračas 1978: 258). A sculpture of Christ in Distress was in Dvelaičiai village, Skaisgiris neighbourhood (Joniškis district) which people recognized as the intercessor of girls. The girls gave birth of bastards were praying next to it.²⁵

Antanas Rūkštelė described an event, when small sculptures of Gracious Mary and Christ in Distress were erected in the chapel of one homestead in the hope that life will be full of grace because “Smutkelis – sitting Christ with a hand supporting face is believed to promised not to punish people more” (Rūkštelė 1941: 3–4; Urbonienė 2009: 34).

The idea of merciful God is reflected in the stories about Christ in Distress recorded in Poland (Kunczyńska-Iracka 1980: 150). Such concept of Christ in Distress may be affected by the image of Good Sheppard which has spread at the end of 19th – beginning of the last century. The representations of the Good Sheppard in the catholic churches from this period have expressed the idea of listening and patronizing God (Smilingytė-Žeimienė 2003: 16). Hence, S. Urbonienė stated that besides the perception of passion, a meaning of patronizing and protecting God is given to the image of Christ in Distress (Urbonienė 2009: 35).

²² ČDM, inv. No. LV91, LV105.

²³ ČDM, inv. No. LV25.

²⁴ ČDM, inv. No. LV96.

²⁵ ČDM, inv. No. LV161.

Christ is not a frequent character in Lithuanian verbal folklore. Radvilė Racėnaitė has noticed that

Christ and others Saints in most genres of the narrative folklore (tales and etiological legends) act only episodically. Moreover, a generalized image of God occurs more often in the narratives, when it is not always clear whether this character should be compared with the Father, Jesus Christ, or with a pre-Christian belief in God (Racėnaitė 2008: 323).

For example, Christ in Distress in Sotkalis village, Pakražantis neighbourhood (Kelmė district) was called “The Gods Father”.²⁶ This shows the folk perception of the Trinity dogma. The Trinity dogma defines that it is one God in three substantial persons: “The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit; one God, but not three Gods (...) Nobody is previous or later, more or less, but all three persons are equally everlasting and equal in this Trinity (Petraitis 1991: 366).

Action of persons of the Trinity mentioned in the Bible in the folk piety is not being separated; it becomes an action of one God or the action of persons is confused, although the topics of Christian theology were commented in the Catholic Church’ sermons and chants. Mikas Vaicekauskas has investigated Lithuanian Catholic chants of the 16–17th century and noted that a considerable attention in them is given to the teaching on the Trinity, emphasizing the nature of three heavenly persons, their equality, and separate functions (Vaicekauskas 2005: 159). Syncretism typical for the folk thinking brings its own corrections into the conception of the Trinity. Therefore, image of the Flood has appeared in the perception of Christ in Distress. “Jesus was saddened, the Flood has done; had pity to people punished” (Galaunė 1930: 73), “distressed Mr Jesus regrets the Flood did” (Urbonienė 2009: 34). In these expressions, a conception of merciful God/Christ was recorded as well. Similar expressions are known in Poland too: “Concerned Christ with hand supported head thinks after the Flood” (Kunczyńska-Iracka 1980: 150), Mr Jesus supported head with hand and decided that will not punish people with other penalties because a lot of them have already died during this Flood (Zowczak 2000: 390).

The representation of Christ in Distress is also found in folktales. A folktale *A Boy Feeds Christ in Distress* was recorded in Lithuania; in several versions of it, an image of Christ in Distress is found. For the first time, this folktale was recorded by Mečislovas Davainis-Silvestraitis in the 19th century.

According to the catalogue of the Lithuanian narrative folklore at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 27 versions of this folktale have been recorded. The type of work in the catalogue of folktales is labelled by No. ATU 767,²⁷ and in the catalogue of the repertory of Lithuanian folktales prepared by B. Kerbelytė it is named by No. AT 767. The inventory of this work is following:

²⁶ VDKM, inv. No. BNN 3424.

²⁷ The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, part I III, by Hans-Jörg Uther, FF *Communications*, No. 284–286, vol. I, Helsinki.

A boy giving his food to Christ in Distress / Statue of Mary / is put on the altar – is invited to dinner together with the priest; both suddenly die / rises to the Heaven. / A widow treats beggar – God in the evening of Christmas Eve; she is invited to the Heaven. / A Boy heard words that will enter the Heaven through the cross, and is carrying a cross on his shoulders. A man passes into the palace, stays for a few days; he is told still to return home. Upon returning, he finds that three hundred years have passed (Kerbelytė 2002).

A folktale *Boy Feeds Christ in Distress* is attributed to the tales-legends. “This genre of folktales is considered to be quite late. It is supposed that subjects have formed by coalescence of religious stories about the God and Saints with traditional folk stories” (Šlekonytė 2008: 303).

The folktale has its origins in the work by Guibert von Nogent *De pignoribus sanctorum* from the 12th century in which a legend “Acolythus puer imaginem alloquitur, cui et ipsa dedit responsum” was recorded (Bolte, Polívka 1918: 474). It tells that a boy carried a paten with the Host prepared for sacrifice. In front of the wall, near the grave of St. Quirinus (martyr) was the image of the Crucifix. By going through it, the boy asked the image: “Do you want my bread, my Lord?” The Crucifix responded him: “I will give you my bread in the near future.” The boy heard this felt ill, and died after a few days, becoming a participant of the heavenly feast. He was buried in front of the image, which has promised to him that.

From the 13th century, the story functioned as the so called *Exempla*. It is a picturesque didactic story inserted into the medieval sermons. In a similar way, spread the other story, when a boy proposes bread for sculpture of the Blessed Virgin Mary with a Child (*Enzyklopädie...* 1996). This story was recorded for the first time in the legend *De miraculis b.v. Mariae* by Gautier de Cluny (?–1155) (Bolte, Polívka 1918: 474–475). In the work *Speculum exemplorum* is written about a young monk, who daily offer food for baby Jesus. A bowl is found empty after some time. Suddenly, Jesus invites him to eat. The monk invites abbot as well. Both of them die in Pentecost. A motif of the abbot is found in this story for the first time; later it appears in several other legends. In the majority of such stories, a child/monk offer food not to the child Jesus, but for the picture of Blessed Virgin Mary (*Enzyklopädie...* 1996: 518).

The discussed type of the folktale (ATU 767²⁸) is highly widespread in Europe and Latin America. German folklorist Hans-Jörg Uther has prepared the international catalogue of folktales in 2004. Here, it is mentioned that this folktale is known in Ireland, France, Spain, Catalonia, Portugal, Holland, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, Romania, Greece, Chile and Mexico (Uther 2004: ATU 767). However, it is not clear whether the image of Christ in Distress is found in the national versions of folktales.

Such folktale is known in all regions of Lithuania. As the majority of folktales, this tale has its own internal diversity resulting from the influence of the above-mentioned medieval legends. According to some versions, a boy is feeding

²⁸ The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, part I III, by Hans-Jörg Uther, FF *Communications*, No 284–286, vol. I, Helsinki.

sculpture of the Crucifix, Christ in Distress or simply a statue of Christ; more rarely food has been brought to the sculpture of Blessed Virgin Mary. The synthesis of peasants religiosity and images of Christianity gave unique results during the long re-narrative process. Works have appeared which were capable to modify easily (Šlekonytė 2008: 303) adapting to the historical realities, where actualities of one or other period have been revealed and one Christian images are replaced by other images. How the version of the tale can change rapidly illustrate one of them from the tale about a boy feeding Christ in Distress recorded in Lazdijai in 1933.²⁹ The actualities of the Catholic Church' culture from the 19th – beginning of the last century are reflected in some variants of these tales – character of the tale (a girl, not a boy) brings food for the sculpture of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Piety of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus has gained marked popularity and was encouraged by the Holy See from the second half of the 19th – first half of the last century. The cult of the Jesus Heart has acquired an official character in that period; paintings and sculptures of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus have spread widely (Smilingytė-Žeimienė 2003: 186–187). Because Christ in Distress is important in our research, we will discuss only those versions of the tale *A Boy Feeds Christ in Distress*, where it is mentioned. The change of a crucifix image into the other image of Christ – the image of Christ in Distress perhaps is not accidental. Sometimes a liturgically common place of the crucifix in Catholic churches is taken by the sculpture of Christ in Distress. In Dusetos and Leliūnai churches, the sculpture of pensive Christ stood at the entrance to the church next to the Holy water font. A pensive Christ donated by Kiellerów family in ca. 1790 stood in the porch of Dzieviatkaūcy church, specially-equipped niche over the Holy water font (Surdokaitė 2010: 52).

Lithuanian folklore researchers note that the image of God as old man deeply infiltrated in the Lithuanian narrative tradition; and involved the role of Jesus Christ's person in this field of meanings (Šlekonytė 2008: 304). Therefore, this folktale is exceptional, because a specific representation of Christ is named in its versions – the Christ in Distress. In addition, such modifications of the folktale indicate that Christ in Distress was highly important to peasants. It was mentioned that, in total, 27 versions of the folktale *A Boy Feeds Christ in Distress* have been recorded in Lithuania. Six of them have a representation of Christ in Distress (Šiauliai, Kunigailiai village (Šiauliai county), Salakas (Zarasai county), Paverknė II grange (Aukštadvaris volost, Trakai county). Five of them were recorded in the 1930s,³⁰ and one in Vilnius in 1969 (the narrator was born in Raseiniai).³¹

The folktale begins in several ways. At first, the narrator enters listener into the rural reality:

²⁹ LTR 692/22/.

³⁰ LTR 406/229 /, 1497/15 /, 1713/89 /, 1406/416 /.

³¹ LTR 4029/5/.

In one village was a baby. His parents were dead long ago. Countrymen have taken the child for nursing. So, bear his cross orphan by walking from one house to another. Once, a priest arrived in the village. The priest liked the orphan very much, and he took the boy with him.³²

In other versions, staying of a character to the parson is not mentioned; the fact that he was there, is immediately stated:

A little boy, relative of parson, orphan is living at one priest, parson.³³

According to one version of the folktale, a girl Zosytė found Christ in Distress on a windowsill:

Christ in Distress is put by the window; you know, in some places such figure of Christ in Distress was named a small God.³⁴

In the 19th – beginning of the last century, Christ in Distress is one of the few figures of “small gods,” which was held in the rural house on a window sill or in the specially equipped shelf. A folktale mentions that the character has found this house in a dug pit:

She has dug such pit that she may climb into it. She climbs into the pit and see now; it seems that small house was here before. There is a small window, of course, without glass.³⁵

It seems that this scene of the folktale reflects one of the aspects of the conception of Christ in Distress related to the cult of Christ in prison. Sculptures of Christ in Distress in Catholic churches were standing very often in the niches bricked for them. For example, until the beginning of the last century, Christ in Distress in Vidiškiai church stood in such niche, on the right side at the entrance. At present, a big sculpture of crucifix hangs here. In Poland and Germany, such niches were additionally covered with metal bars. For example, the sculptures of Christ in Distress in niches imitating Christ in prison are standing in Krakow Franciscan and Dominican churches as well as St. Johann Nepomuk church in Munich. In 1761–1763, a niche was made in the corridor of the monastery during the renovation works in the Vilnius Bernardine Convent, and Christ in Distress was placed here.³⁶ Such composition of the image of Christ in Distress is not accidental. In the multi-meaning semantics of Christ in Distress, one of the aspects of conception states that so is represented the Christ in prison. This scene is one of the episodes, where it is stated that the Christ alone on the hill of Golgotha sat on a stone which was in a pit, called *Carcer Christi* (Dobrzaniecki 1968: 281). This

³² LTR 406/ 229/.

³³ LTR 1713/89/.

³⁴ LTR 4029/5/.

³⁵ LTR 4029/5/.

³⁶ Chronologia erectionis et foundationis konventus et custodiae Vilnensis ADS: (...) conscripta que per A.R.P. Thomam Digon praedicator generalem Patrem provinciae ac chronologum sub officio A.V.P. Stephani Romanovicz custodis ac gardiani Vilnen: Anno Dñi 1668, VDKM S 111105, l. 206.

place in which Jesus Christ sat on a stone mentioned Ulrich Pinder in the book *Speculum passionis* (1506), Franciscan Francesco Quaresmi (1583–1656) in *De carcere Christi Domini* and other authors.³⁷ A book *Das ist der Gang den unser Herr Jesus ging aus des Pilatus Haus baladen mit dem schweren Kreuze zum Kalvarienberg* (...) was published in Antwerp in ca 1499. In this book, among the thirteen named Stations of the Cross, the ninth is described in the following words: “How Jesus sat on a stone in the place which is called *Carcer Christi*” (Kruszelnicki 1959: 317). A cave in which Christ sat on the stone was also described in Polish manuscript *Rozmyślanie dominikańskie* from the beginning of the 16th century. He sat there with hand supported head (*Rozmyślania...* 1965: 287–288). Hence, representing of Christ in Distress in a special niche imitating prison has reflected one of its aspects of conception and is closely related to the cult of Christ in prison.

It should be noted that in all stories the fact is emphasized that the sculpture of Christ was kept somewhere in a loft, i.e. thrown disrespectfully, forgotten. In addition, this sculpture was very desiccated:

A sculpture of Christ in Distress was thrown to the loft of one parsonage. Christ in Distress was shrank and face supporting with one hand.³⁸

The character went upstairs and found an old dusted small God, which is called Smutkiukas. Has taken in the hands and saw that it is so slim – shrank.³⁹

Here, a man from the folktale is faced with God. The image of the sculpture awakes religious feelings, motivates to correct the current unacceptable situation. Human compassion awakes for the folktale character, seeing the “hungry” God. In the majority versions of folktale, the selflessness of the main character is revealed. He establishes transcendental relations with Christ, feeds him and speaks with him. When invited for dinner, he asks for the permission to get the parson too. This part of the folktale can be considered as a certain challenge for the character. The human behaviour towards God and his respect for Christ’s person is evaluated in the subject of the folktale. The sharing of food with Christ is a certain expression of *compassio*. It is far from the so-called *compassio* (empathy) concept of mysticism of the 16–18th century, which is based on the empathy in the Passion of Christ. However, by refusing his own part of the food character of the folktale tries to relieve and feel for the subsistence of small God.

The echoes of medieval legends are also found in the folktale. Alike in these legends, Christ after some time speaks to a man and invites him to dinner. Furthermore, a boy asks to come with priest in some versions. These are the responses of the aforementioned medieval legends about the monk and abbot, and having spoken images of Christ or Blessed Virgin Mary. The situation is simplified only in

³⁷ For more information see: Dobrzeńiecki 1968: 285–287.

³⁸ LTR 1497/15/.

³⁹ LTR 350/202/.

Lithuanian folktales. The action takes place in the rural environment. Therefore, a role of the monk fulfils the pupil of priest, footman, and abbot character – priest.

The outcome of the events from folktale – death of the character, metaphorically expressed access to the heavenly feast. We need to recognize the death not as a penalty, but as a handsome reward for love and sympathy. Fate disadvantaged (he was an orphan) or characterized by moral values (was a very devotional, a diligent), the character of the folktale gets there, where is intended to be only for favoured. The image of heavenly feast is important to the Christian culture. It expresses an important believer's hope that it will be able to overcome death, and safely establish with God. Heavenly feast is a place of bliss. *The New Testament* indicates that the Christians should seek for what is in the Heaven ["If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God" (Col 3, 1), because it is their homeland ("For our abiding is in Heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3, 20); "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb 13, 14)].

In the religious speech, not only folk, heavenly feast and heaven rejoicing may be a metaphor of the fullness of shepherd or human bliss expected from God. This metaphor is characteristic for meditations, visions, sermons, and church chants. God is gracious for the character of the folktale *A Boy Feeds Christ in Distress*, therefore he got a place in the Heaven. The image of the feast is related to joy and revel, and this is one of the most important grace given by God to man. M. Vaicekauskas has analysed the catholic chants in Lithuania from the 16–18th century and noticed that "The man of chants expects a good, happy death, entering to the Heaven, «revel» of the Heaven because if God is gracious to someone in the Earth, this person will get a place in the Heaven" (Vaicekauskas 2005: 166–167). He "asks Jesus Christ to forgive sins and rejoicing over the world through the grace with love (...) or allow wait for the heavenly rejoicings (...), i.e. after the death to get into the place of rejoicing – the Heaven; to communicate with Saints there and to see a face of God" (Vaicekauskas 2005: 167). A metaphor of heavenly feast and heavenly rejoicing towards the discussed Lithuanian folktale probably came from the post-Tridentine teaching of the Catholic Church and the various texts from that period, when a considerable attention was given in the training of parochial clergy when parochial pastoral care has deepened and intensified.

Hence, a certain teaching aspects of the Catholic Church are clearly reflected in the folktale *A Boy Feeds Christ in Distress*. Although the work has its origins in the medieval legends, versions of the folktale have been highly modified by the Baroque culture and adapted to the realities of life. The representation of Christ in Distress in the discussed folklore examples tells about the viability and exclusive importance to the Lithuanian peasantry.

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. 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. The folk interpretation of the image and representation of Christ in Distress was determined by the influence of various texts of the Catholic Church to the peculiar world-view of peasants. Folk names used to describe the sculptures of Christ in Distress expressed the Passion of Christ, distress and sadness. These are residues of folk culture from the 17–18th century, when piety traditions to the salvation of the Passion of Christ have prospered. 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 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.

The dogma of the Holy Trinity was distinctively recognized in their own way by Lithuanian folk. Christ in Distress was interconnected with the meaning of God Father. Therefore, the meanings of the image were expanded by the representation of the Flood. The image of pensive, seated Christ is found in individual prayers originated by the peasants themselves, Easter folk orations, legends and folktales. In addition to the passion, ransom of sins and perception of penance, the conception of patronizing and protecting God was given to the image of Christ in Distress. The idea of merciful God is also reflected in the folk approach of Christ in Distress.

Abbreviations

- AT – The Types of the Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen (FFC No. 3), translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson, *Folklore Fellows Communications*, 1964, No. 184.
- ATU – The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, part I–III, by Hans-Jörg Uther, *FF Communications*, No. 284–286, vol. I, Helsinki.
- 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).
- LNМ – National Museum of Lithuania (Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus).
- LTR – The Lithuanian Folklore Archives of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.
- LVIA – Lithuanian State Historical Archives (Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas).
- VDKMS – “Vytautas the Great” Lithuanian War Museum (Vytauto Didžiojo karo muziejus).
- ŽAM – Samogitian Musiem “Alka” (Žemaičių muziejus “Alka”).

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Сурдокайте Г.

2009 *Иконография, распространение, назначение образа Спаса Полунощного в XVII–XX вв. в Великом Княжестве Литовском и Литве*, [in:] *Древнерусская скульптура*, т. 6: *Проблемы иконографии*, выпуск первый, Москва, p. 50–66, 168–169.



1. Kriaunos the Divine God (Dievo apvaizdos) Church. 17th c., wood, polychrome, H 66.5 cm.
RKrM inv. No RKM-4152. Photo of V. Balčytis, 2005



2. Mažeikiai district, Viešniai neighbourhood, Plūgai village, ŠAM Neg. 11360.
Photo by St. Ivanauskas, 1942



3. Kalnelis Chapel, Joniškis district, end of the 18th – beginning of the 19th c. Wood, polychrome,
H 67 cm. ŠAM inv. No. 1041. Photo of V. Balčytis, 2005