The Baltic Sea Region
Cultures, Politics, Societies
Editor Witold Maciejewski

A Baltic University Publication
Case Chapter

4 In search of the artistic identity of the Baltic Sea region

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1. Art of the Viking Age and the beginning of Christian art

The Viking Age. The artistic homogeneity of the Baltic coastal areas started to evolve in the Viking era. This dates back to ca. 800 AD, when almost the whole of the area was still pagan. Our knowledge of Viking art is fragmentary, as only some remains of the architecture, sculpture, painting and textiles have been preserved. Most surviving items are objects of artistic handicraft: jewellery, weapon irons, vessels, tools, and transportation equipment such as boats or sleighs. The artistic talents of the Scandinavians, coupled with their organisational and military skills, mobility and expansiveness, made their art the first artistic manifestation of the unity of the Baltic coastal region.

The Vikings set up their settlements not only in the whole of Scandinavia, but also in Rus, on the southern coast of the Baltic, in the British Isles, Ireland, Iceland, and Normandy. They even reached Greenland and America, and they had regular contacts with Byzantium. They brought their art with them, with the specific style, iconography and high skill level. Works of Viking art have been preserved in many locations the Vikings reached. They were produced in the newly established settlements, or occasionally brought by the Vikings to the areas they conquered or visited. They were also

The art of the Baltic

Like a keystone coupling the elements of a vault, the Baltic Sea links the Scandinavian countries with the small Russian areas on the Gulf of Finland and around Kaliningrad, separated from each other by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and with the northern areas of Poland and Germany. As one compares the art of this territory with the artistic achievements of other European regions, one cannot escape the impression that the Baltic coastal areas constitute something more than just a geographical category. In spite of the political, ethnic, linguistic and religious divisions, they must be treated as a homogenous artistic region. This distinct character has changed with the changing epochs, and it has varied in intensity. Shared artistic features have not been distributed evenly across the area, sometimes only including some parts of it, and there have also been periods where it was utterly impossible to point to individual features. This distinctness has shown up at various levels: in the forms, styles, artistic predilections, materials, technologies, iconography, content, sponsorship systems, ways of working and character of manufacturing centers. Naturally, many aspects of art in the Baltic region do have their equivalents in other artistic regions, but it is here that they make up a mosaic of elements that is not to be seen anywhere else.

Art historians have already identified a number of distinguishing features of the Baltic region but only for the Middle Ages (especially the Gothic) and the 16th century. The present sketch is an attempt at a broader look at the art of the Baltic, and at showing its specific character. It covers a much longer period: from about 800 AD up to the 20th century. This is a long period, and there have been no in-depth comparative works yet; this, coupled with some editorial factors, means that the attempt is not free from generalisations and only touches upon selected issues, just pointing to some others.
imported by the local rulers and noblemen who recognised their high artistic value. There were so many works of Viking art in various areas of the Baltic coast (although they have also been found in other European regions) that one may certainly say that there was some artistic unity and distinctness in the region even in the early mediaeval period (which was also a pre-Christian time in many areas). To mention just a couple of important examples, there are the treasures of Gnezdovo near Smolensk (Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg), Vårby, Sweden (Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm), Hiddensee, Rügen (Kulturhistorisches Museum, Stralsund), all dating to the 10th century, and the treasure of Hon, Norway (containing not only Scandinavian items, Universitetets Oldsaksamling, Oslo) dating to the 2nd half of the 9th century; there is the lost reliquary of St. Kordula dating to about 1000 AD from Kamien Pomorski cathedral; and there are many isolated jewellery objects, including the Gotland-produced, magnificently ornamented drum-shaped brooches which have also been found outside of Gotland – in other regions of Sweden, as well as Finland and Estonia. The art of those Scandinavian tribes is characterised by distinct ornaments with geometrical and animal motifs, such as winding ribbons and interweaving fantastic monsters forming dense, sometimes multi-levelled compositions totally filling up the ornamental space. The famous Oseberg (Norway) find of 1904 (Universitetets Oldsaksamling, Oslo) is representative for Viking art. Its main component is a magnificently sculpted and exquisitely equipped funeral boat more that twenty metres long, the burial place of a probable Viking queen and slave dating to ca. 800-850 AD. All kinds of objects were included in this splendid funeral, some of them richly ornamented and located not only on the boat itself but also around it (including a carriage and sleigh, cases, beds, chairs, tents, textiles and everyday objects).

**Early Christian art.** The adoption of Christianity in the 9th and 10th centuries never wiped away the Viking art; it came to be adapted to the new needs. This meant introducing new themes and iconographies; however, the style remained traditional or changed just slightly. One illustration of this synthesis of new and old elements is the famous *runic stone* that stood between two burial mounds at Jelling, Denmark, founded by the king of Denmark Harald the Bluetooth in ca. 965 as a dynasty monument in honour of his parents, commemorating the christianisation of the country at the same time. The stone depicts a crucified Christ in an exceptional manner, surrounded by some characteristically Viking intertwaving ribbons. This Christian theme borders on a typical Viking motif on the other side of the stone: a beast wrapped in a creeper-like ornament.

Scandinavia’s first Christian sanctuaries were structurally very simple and built of wood. None have survived but some fragments have been preserved under Romanesque churches erected in the 12th and 13th centuries. These were built of stone in Denmark and Sweden, while Norway continued the tradition of wooden structures. A
special church type evolved in Norway in the 12th century, known as the *stavkirke* (stave-church). The structure of a stave-church is characterised by wooden posts which were initially driven directly into the ground, and later into underpinning brickwork, and by steep shingle roofs. Classical Viking motifs of pagan origin also show up in these churches, for example the intricate plait-work of twigs and monsters in the famous *portal* dating to ca. 1060 and later transferred to the 12th-century stave-church at Urnes, or the sculpted dragon heads at the gable tops of the 12th century stave-church at Borgund. About one thousand such churches were erected in Scandinavia, with only about 30 surviving to our times in Norway. Romanesque stone architecture was brought into the area by Western European builders. The first stone church was erected in Roskilde in ca. 1027. Strong English (Lund cathedral, St. Alban’s church in Odense and Venge Abbey) and German (Dalby and Ribe cathedrals) influences are to be seen in the architecture of Danish stone churches. Lund cathedral, completed towards the end of the 12th century, has elongated *aisles*, a *transept*, a splendid *crypt* and a *presbytery* (ending in a tall *apse* decorated with blind arcades on the outside) and a pair of towers on the western side. It became the model for many Scandinavian temples. Viborg cathedral is its scaled-down replica. The first Danish brick churches started appearing in the second half of the 12th century. The brick arrived through contacts with Lombardy and remained the basic building material of the whole Baltic region for a very long time. The monastery churches in Ringsted and Sørø were Scandinavia’s first brick buildings; however, the most important brick structure of the period was Roskilde cathedral, inspired to a large extent by French architecture. Before the end of the 12th century, many small parish churches were built in Denmark. These were constructed of various materials and were mainly built on rectangular ground-plans, and modeled on English and German solutions. The round church form was also known, as can be seen, for example, in Bornholm churches. These temples were modelled, in turn, on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, even though the direct sources may have been Central European. English architecture also provided inspiration for Norwegian churches, e.g. Stavanger cathedral, St. Mary’s church in Bergen or St. Olav’s church in Trondheim. The English models were brought in by *Cistercian monks* from Fountains, Yorkshire who set up Lyse Abbey.
near Bergen in the mid-12th century. The form of the first Swedish cathedrals was then partially obscured by subsequent changes. The partially-preserved Cistercian abbey at Roma, Gotland, was among the most impressive pre-1200 buildings. A number of parish churches exhibit English influences here, too. As opposed to wooden churches, Scandinavian stone temples did not encompass any new architectural solutions. However, they are interesting for their impressive numbers, and their diversity. Additionally, they have been mostly preserved in their original forms – at least when compared with other regions.

Figural arts had a very important role to play. Bas-reliefs were used to adorn architectural elements, tombstones, baptismal fonts, and altar frontals. Mural paintings and fully plastic sculptures were placed in church interiors. Gotland became a leading manufacturer of stone sculpture, with mass production of sculpted stone baptismal fonts that can still be seen in many Baltic coast churches. Scandinavian sculptors working in wood achieved exceptional virtuosity, producing ornamental-figural relief decorations of churches and everyday items, both liturgical and secular, that were exceptional on a European scale. As wars spared Scandinavia, and the Reformation proved quite tolerant towards mediaeval sculpture, exceptionally large numbers of such objects have survived in the region. The earliest of them, dating to the first half of the 12th century, depict the Crucifixion of Christ, crucifixion groups, Mary with the Child, and the saints. Some were inspired by French, German and English motifs, and some were imports. A whole range of representations, including Christ Crucified and altar frontal depictions, were executed in a manner very frequent in Scandinavia: a wooden core was covered with a gilded copper plate in which the details were modeled. The Scandinavian sculpted altar frontals covered with gilded copper plates are among the most numerous monuments of this type that have been preserved in the Christian world. They adorned the frontal parts of altars in many Scandinavian churches, including parish churches. The most impressive one, dating to the 1150s, comes from the church in Lisbjerg near Århus, Denmark (Danmarks Nationalmuseum, Copenhagen). Its iconographic program is dedicated to Mary, who is depicted in the centre, with scenes from her life, representations of virtues and saints surrounding her. The golden Lisbjerg altar is equipped with a retable depicting Christ and the twelve apostles, capped with an open-work arcade. The altar from the church at Sahl, Denmark, dating to ca. 1200, is quite similar in its form. The two arched retabiles have no equivalents in European art, and as such can be regarded as specifically Scandinavian formulas. Two sculpture materials that were characteristic for the region (and for the North Sea coast) were amber and walrus tusks, chiefly used in small forms. Mural paintings showed monumental Passion scenes, the Last Judgment, depictions of Mary and the saints. One surprising phenomenon was the strong Byzantine and Byzantine-Italian influence visible in some Swedish and Danish mural paintings. This concerns both the style and the iconography. Examples of book painting are on the other hand scarce. It is noteworthy that some motifs appeared in the iconography of the Viking era that later became typical for the art of the region. One inherent, natural element of the Baltic coast landscape has always been ships. Depictions of ships can be found, among other places, on the Gotland picture stones from Ardre and Tjängvide, both dating to the 8th-9th centuries (Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm), and on the fabric from Tune, Norway.

Up to ca. 1200, the artistic development of the Baltic region was quite uneven. Scandinavia was the leader (not all of it, however: northern Sweden and Norway, along with Finland, remained peripheral areas), while the eastern Baltic coast was only in the early stages of its artistic development. The southern area was the best developed one, with the Romanesque St. Michael’s church at Hildesheim occupying a prominent place. The above-mentioned Danish church at Dalby was modeled on it. During the second half of the 12th century, some important temples were started, including the cathedrals in Lübeck, Brandenburg, Ratzeburg and Kamien Pomorski, the church at Jerichow (considered to be the first brick church), and the Cistercian abbeys at Kolbacz, Oliwa and Lehnin. The Cistercian order, which grew rapidly and built new branches of the already established abbeys (that was, for example, how the Polish Kolbacz abbey was built as an offshoot of the Danish Esrom monastery), played an important role in the dissemination of related forms of the modest and austere architecture in the Baltic region.
2. Art in the period of the flourishing of the Hanseatic League

The rise, flourishing and fall of the Gothic style between the early 13th century and the first quarter of the 16th century laid out a new epoch in the history of the region. The period was intertwined with the history of the Hansa, the growth of Baltic coastal cities and commerce, and with the economic, political and cultural expansion of the burghers. The activity of the Hansa was undoubtedly the most important factor that cemented the Baltic region between the 13th and 16th centuries – possibly the strongest such factor in history. The Hansa also played a role in the formation of the region’s artistic landscape, as works of art also traveled along the commercial routes laid out by the merchants. A specific lifestyle, mentality and aesthetic taste developed among Hanseatic burghers. However, not all the phenomena of the Gothic art of the Baltic region were wholly related to the Hansa; for instance, the art of the Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia was an exception. The artistic development of the Baltic region followed, for the most part, a path of its own which was, at the same time, detached from political or economic developments. The production of the works of art, as well as their importation and exportation, took place in spite of the conflicts, wars or economic embargoes.

Art mainly developed in the cities, which also gave support to the Hansa. Lübeck, founded in 1159, played a leading role. It was the most important city of the Hanseatic League, and also – from the beginning of the 16th century onwards – one of the most dynamic creative centers on the Baltic coast. The centers took part in the exchange of artistic experience. Within all branches of art, a number of phenomena developed that were specific for the region.

Churches. A characteristic building material appeared in architecture, and specific types of temples and secular buildings developed, along with some extremely individualist solutions. This basic building material was brick, but there were also local “deviations” from this rule: for example, limestone was used in Gotland, while most Finnish structures employed granite, with bricks only used for details (here, brick only became more popular in the 15th century). Lübeck’s St. Mary’s church, erected at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, became the model for many Baltic coastal cities. Replicas, repeating the model to varying extents, were built in Malmö, Uppsala, Schleswig, Wismar, Lüneburg, Doberan, Schwerin, Rostock, Parchim, Stralsund and the distant Riga, Reval (today’s Tallinn) and Dorpat (present-day Tartu). The most important element of the temples was the adaptation and transposition of the basilica scheme of French Gothic cathedrals, with a presbytery surrounded by an ambulatory and a circle of chapels, a system of buttresses and flying buttresses, and two towers on the western side. The type of a choirless hall temple with decorative gables – with St. Mary’s church in Greifswald as a leading exponent – was inspired by Westphalian and Cistercian architecture, and became popular in Mecklenburg and Pomerania in the 14th century. The Dominican and Franciscan orders propagated a different temple type, with an elongated presbytery and a main body with two or three aisles. One striking feature of the sacral architecture of the Baltic coast is the diversity of the spatial and construction systems used: next to the hall churches that are so characteristic for the area, there are also basilicas and pseudo-basilicas. As far as the scale is concerned, Gdańsk’s St. Mary’s Church, completed in 1502, is among the largest and most impressive. At times, apart from the sacral function, the churches also performed extemporaneous social, commercial or military functions. There are some so-called merchant churches in the region which, in addition to liturgical space, had rooms intended for warehouses, counting–houses or exchanges. St. Michael’s church in Stralsund had such a complex function: it was a parish church but also a town hall and a covered market. St. Mary’s church in Visby, Gotland, was also a warehouse and archive where the merchants kept their documents. The military character of the state of the Teutonic Order in Prussia was reflected e.g. in the cathedrals in Königsberg, Frombork and Kwidzyn, which were parts of the fortification systems both architecturally and functionally.

Secular architecture. Within secular architecture, a characteristic town hall type appeared, with a magnificent frontal facade. Excellent examples of this are the town halls of Lübeck, Rostock and Stralsund. Another town hall type, with a tall tower, inspired by Flemish models, is to be found in Gdańsk, Torun and Reval. Artus and Blackhead houses formed a functionally exceptional type. Their names derive
form the legendary King Arthur and the dark skinned St. Maurice. Such buildings were built exclusively in Pomerania and Livonia, although they seem to have Western European origins. Artus Courts were built in Torun, Elbląg, Gdańsk, Braniewo, Königsberg and Stralsund, while Blackhead Houses were erected in Reval, Riga and Dorpat; the oldest date to the early 13th century. They were situated close to the key municipal edifices – the parish churches and town halls. They had gable facades, and were erected on rectangular ground-plans, with presentable, arched halls with columns and auxiliary rooms. Meetings and games were held in them, and theatrical plays staged; the tradition of chivalry was also cherished. The societies that used them were elitist organisations. Burgher houses usually had narrow facades with decorative gables facing the streets, and the interiors divided into an entrance-hall, living-room floor and warehouse space. A recurrent motif of the landscape of Hanseatic cities was the granaries, preserved e.g. in Gdańsk and Lübeck, and the hoisting cranes which are still to be seen in the ports of Gdańsk and Lüneburg. Defence structures developed rapidly. Walls with towers guarded access to the cities (preserved in large parts in Visby and Reval), as did fortified gates (e.g. the monumental Holstentor in Lübeck). Castles, erected by the kings, princes, knights, bishops and monks, had very diverse forms. The architecture of some of them was adapted to the surface relief, others had regular, rectangular shapes. The Teutonic Order castles in Prussia constituted an exceptional phenomenon regarding their proliferation, number, homogenous character and artistic value. They performed a complex military, administrative, economic and religious function. They were built on approximately square ground-plans, with four wings, a cloister yard, and towers rising from the corners, one of which was always given a monumental form. The most important rooms – the chapel, refectory and chapter-house – were on the first floor. The castles were surrounded by moats and had extensive commercial approaches. The leading edifices of this classical style were erected between the late 13th century and the 1330s, including the castles in Gniew, Golub, Radzyń Chełmiński and Malbork (the High Castle). The subsequent expansion gave the latter castle a number of individual features which made it one of Europe’s most magnificent defence and residential complexes. The Grand Master’s palace, added in the late 14th century, is among masterpieces of mediaeval architecture. References to the Malbork castle may be seen in the mid-14th century King’s Hall and castle chapel in Turku, Finland. As one tries to understand the artistic connections between the various parts of the Baltic region, one has to note that star-vaultings also appeared in 15th-century Finnish churches, possibly under the influence of Prussian architecture. In turn, the above-mentioned Turku castle and cathedral were started by Swedish builders but completed by Reval masters. Among those Baltic basin architects whose names we do know, one outstanding figure was that of Henrik Brunsberg of Szczecin, active between the end of the 14th century and the 1430s in Pomerania and Brandenburg. He created some exceptionally presentable, harmonious and elaborately decorated churches in Brandenburg, Prenzlau, Szczecin and Stargard, as well as the Tangermünde town hall.

Painting and sculpture. Within painting and sculpture, Scandinavia was still the leader at the beginning of the 13th century, being an intermediary in the dissemination of French and English influence. Soon, north German centers took
In the early 14th century, the first winged **retables** appeared in northern Germany, in the monasteries in Cismar (1301) and Doberan (1310). Those were triptychs shaped like flat cases, divided into parts by rows of arcades, in which figures of saints and relics were placed. They were an important development stage in the history of Gothic retables. The compositional scheme they used, with the rows of figures, survived in numerous Baltic coast retables until the late Middle Ages. In the 14th century, Lübeck-produced bronze baptismal fonts, chandeliers and liturgical vessels made their way into many Baltic coast churches. They were among the earliest examples of the standardisation and industrialisation of artwork manufacturing. At the other extreme were some exceptionally original works of prominent artists who enjoyed widespread fame. Their works set the aesthetic and quality standard, providing the inspiration and model to be copied in many variations, more or less faithful. There were a number of outstanding individuals among the Baltic region artists who laid out the directions of artistic development. Master Bertram of Hamburg, active towards the end of the 14th century, was one prominent painter. He used light-and-shade modeling and some elements of perspective, showing moving figures, introducing some landscape components and enriching the Gothic convention with realist elements. Konrad von Soest, working in Dortmund at the end of the 14th century, was a very influential figure. He created paintings that were characterised by an elaborate elegance of form, slender figures and light colouring. Master Franke, who worked in Hamburg in the first half of the 15th century was a highly renowned artist. His works, charming with their fairy-tale poetics, were commissioned, among others, for the Turku cathedral (St. Barbara retable, before 1412, today at the National Museum, Helsinki) and by the Blackhead Fraternity for St. Catherine’s church in Reval (a lost retable, before 1436). Sculpture achieved a very high level at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, thanks to the works of such outstanding masters as the Master of the Madonna of the Darssow family of St. Mary’s church in Lübeck (destroyed) and Johannes Junge, the author of, among other things, the Madonna of Niendorf (St. Annen-Museum, Lübeck), and the Master of the Torun Madonna of St. John’s church in Torun (lost). Their works, full of elaborate grace, harmony and lyricism, are among the finest examples of European sculpture of those times. They had widespread artistic consequences visible in the whole of the region, sometimes even in the 1450s. One of the most impressive chapters in the history of the late-Gothic art of the Baltic region was the work of the versatile painter and sculptor Bernt Notke of Lübeck (ca. 1440--1509), who made quite a career not only as an artist but also as a businessman and civil servant. His works proliferated to all parts of the Baltic region, and even reached Frankfurt am Main. They were characterised by a richness of form and lively stage-setting, and made their way to churches in Lübeck, Uppsala (lost), Århus, Reval and Stockholm. Stockholm’s St. Michael’s church houses his famous sculpture of St. George fighting the dragon, commissioned by the Swedish leader Sten Sture to commemorate his 1471 victory over the Danes. The works of other late-Gothic north German artists also had a widespread influence, from Scandinavia to Reval, including Herman Rode, Benedikt Dreyer, Claus Berg, Hans Brüggemann, and Henning van der Heide.

**Outside influence.** The Baltic region also absorbed art from outside. This was a result of transfers of style, artwork importation, and the importing of foreign artists. Some circles enjoyed special recognition. Between the late 14th century and the early 15th century, the painting and sculpture of the Baltic region were strongly influenced by Czech art. More or less at the same time, English alabaster sculpture was imported in large amounts. Until the end of the Middle Ages, Rhine and Westphalian elements were important components of Baltic region art. However, the Netherlands remained the strongest influence. Artistic ideas were imported from there, as were artists, such as the sculptor Jan Matten, working at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries in Prussia. Works of art were also brought in, chiefly painted or painted and sculpted retables, including such masterpieces as the ones executed by Hans Memling in 1491 for Lübeck cathedral (St. Annen-Museum, Lübeck). Moreover, artists from the Baltic region went on study trips to the Netherlands, e.g. Michel Sittow of Reval, who learned his trade in Memling’s workshop itself. Some influences of south German art appeared in the painting and sculpture of the region at the beginning of the 16th century. Among others, the styles of Veit Stoss, the so-called Danube school and Lucas Cranach were copied.
Albrecht Dürer’s engravings were in widespread use, while the painter Michael of Augsburg worked in Gdańsk, receiving his commissions from Finland, among other places.

**Iconography.** The iconography of Baltic region art often included those saints whose lives and legends were somehow associated with the area, such as St. Olav, or those who were the patrons of important professional, social or religious groups: St. Nicolaus (the patron saint of merchants and sailors), St. James the Elder (the patron saint of pilgrims and travellers), St. Leonard (the patron saint of imprisoned merchants), St. George (the patron saint of knights and nobility), and St. Gertrude of Nivelles (the patron saint of travellers). Secular themes infiltrated into art, leading to depictions of urban life and town-dwellers: the functioning of the justice system, the loading of a ship, marine transportation, commercial transactions, e.g. on the stalls at St. Nicolaus’ church, Stralsund, founded by a merchant corporation dealing with Russia’s Novgorod, or the portraits of the Gdańsk patrician Georg Giese, painted by Hans Holbein the Younger in 1532 (Staatliche Museen, Berlin). Knight motifs were characteristic for the art of the Teutonic Knights.

**Founders and craftsmen.** Burghers were among important founders of works of art in the Baltic region. Individuals, trade societies or fraternities founded them for churches and chapels with a view to ensuring redemption for themselves. But at the same time, those foundations were also manifestations of some well-defined aesthetic tastes. Sometimes, the founder strongly influenced the form, iconography and content of the work commissioned.

In the Middle Ages, not only in this region, paintings, sculptures and especially altar retables (combining a number of artistic genres) were usually collective works, created by many craftsmen. The notion of the artist in the modern sense was non-existent. Usually, the craftsmen had to be members of some professional organisation — a guild. In contrast to other German-speaking regions, where it was known as the “Zunft”, the guild was called the “Amt” or “Werk” in this area. A guild would often consist of craftsmen of several specialisations, e.g. wood-carvers, painters and goldsmiths. Guild statutes regulated the ways the trade was taught and performed. Artistic production was subject to strict materials and quality control; for example, guild regulations in some Baltic coastal cities stated clearly which kinds of wood might be used for sculptures.

**Regional unity.** At the end of the Middle Ages, the development of art encompassed more or less the whole of the Baltic region. A number of great artistic centers had evolved, such as Lübeck, Stockholm, Reval and Gdańsk, but there were also some smaller centers. In comparison to other Central European artistic centers, those in the Baltic region were more sparsely distributed. The craftsmen of the time were extremely mobile, much more so than in the subsequent period, which aided the dissemination of artistic innovations, and helped the unification of the region to a considerable extent. Another integrating factor was the above-mentioned importation and exportation of works of art. What its scale was may be testified by the fact that about 600 altar retables were exported from Lübeck to Reval in the 15th century, and some of them traveled even further north, to Finland, which also imported large numbers of artworks from Prussia. Many retables from the Netherlands were brought in, too. Several dozen of them have been preserved in the Baltic region, mostly in Sweden (36).

### 3. Art of the period of the Reformation

The modern times in the Baltic region were ushered in by the Reformation, which was almost universally accepted in the region by the 1550s, and which marked a clear turning point in art. The Reformation caused changes in the patronage system, as well as in the form, function, iconography and content of works of art. These transformations coincided with the proliferation of Renaissance forms, mainly in the Netherlandish variety. The Reformation meant that the role of the church as a patron of art was greatly diminished. In Sweden, this role was taken over by the royal Vasa court (1523-1654), who financed, among other things, the construction of the Gripsholm, Vadstena, Uppsala and Svartsjö castles. Later, the nobility also entered this field. A similar situation existed in Denmark, where, among other things, the royal castles of Kronborg and Frederiksborg were built. In Mecklenburg, Prince Ulrich III financed the conversion of his Güstrow castle. In Gdańsk, the nobility financed a number of projects. The approach to some types of works of art was changed. No more free-standing sculptures or side altar retables were commissioned for...
churches; instead, the demand for tombstones and epitaphs rose. Within secular art, many residences, private houses and public buildings appeared, and these were furnished with paintings, sculptures and appropriate equipment of all sorts. Motifs associated with the Virgin Mary disappeared almost totally from sacral iconography, while secular art developed allegorical and historical themes, as well as portraits.

**Netherlandism.** In comparison to the Middle Ages, there were fewer elements in the region's art of that period that could be considered to be integrative. The most important feature was the “Netherlandism”. The Netherlands were, at that time, one of Europe's leading artistic centers; Netherlandish artists achieved a high artistic level, and created formal and stylistic models that were characterised by a predilection for elaboration and abstract-grotesque ornamentation. One renowned artist was the Antwerp sculptor and graphic pattern-book author Cornelis Floris. It was to him that several patrons from the Baltic region turned to, asking to design an epitaph for the Danish Princess Dorothea (1552), a tomb for her husband Prince Albrecht I (1574) in Königsberg cathedral, a tomb for Frederik I of Denmark in Schleswig cathedral (after 1553), and a tomb for the king of Denmark Christian III in Roskilde cathedral (1569-1576). Netherlandish artists were ubiquitous on the Baltic coast in the 16th and (partially) 17th centuries. Willem van den Blocke, who settled in Gdańsk in 1584 and became one of the region's most prominent sculptors, learned his trade in Floris' Antwerp workshop, and later collaborated with his master in Königsberg. He was a virtuoso of the chisel, creating psychologically convincing portraits and elaborate compositions; he was responsible for the dissemination across the whole of the Baltic region of a type of tombstone with kneeling figures. In Königsberg, he left behind a tombstone of Queen Elisabeth, the wife of Prince George Frederic of Prussia (1578-1582), and also executed a number of works in Gdańsk, including the exquisite epitaphs of Johann Brandes, his wife Dorothea (1586) and Eduard Blemke (1591) at St. Mary's church, and the tombstone of the Kos family (ca. 1620) at the Post--Cistercian church in Gdańsk Oliwa. He also executed external commissions, including the tombstone of John III Vasa (1594-1596) ordered by Sigismund III Vasa and the Swedish Senate (and only put in its place at Uppsala cathedral in 1817-1818), the tombstone of the Ture Bielke family at the Linköping cathedral (ca. 1615), the epitaph of Christoph von Dohn at St. Canute's church in Odense (1596), and of Stanisław Radziwiłł at the Bernardine church in Vilnius (1618-1623). There were also other Netherlandish architects, painters and sculptors in the then exceptionally prosperous Gdańsk. The most prominent of these were the architect, painter and art theorist Hans Vredeman de Vries (responsible for the 1592 conversion of the Artus Court, the paintings therein and the paintings at the town hall) and the architect Antoon van Opbergen, the designer of, among other things, the Great Arsenal, a masterpiece of northern architecture of 1605-1605. Other Baltic cities also employed Netherlandish artists: the architect and sculptor Willem Boy worked in Sweden under the protectorate of the Vasas, at Svartsjö castle (1570-1590) and Uppsala cathedral (the impressive tombstone of Gustav I and his two wives, 1560-1570), among other places; the sculptor Antonius Timmerman (d. 1592) was involved in the conversion of Turku castle; the architect and construction expert Hans van Steenwinckel worked in Denmark under Frederick II (who ruled 1559-1588); and Arent Passer executed the architectural design and sculpture decoration of the Blackhead House in Reval (1597).

**Italian influence.** Italian forms were a little less popular than Netherlandish ones. Northern Italian Renaissance reached a number of Baltic coast centers thanks to some members of the Parr (Pahr, Parrio) family that originated from the shores of Lake Como in northern Lombardy. After spending some time in Silesia, they worked at the Güstrow castle in Mecklenburg as architects and sculptors (1558-1565), as well as at Schwerin castle (1560-1563) and in Swedish palaces and castles in Kalmar, Borgholm, Uppsala, Nyköping and Eskilstuna (after 1572).

Lithuania was a somewhat different area. The Reformation did not prove very popular here, and other artistic sources were exploited. Florentine Renaissance dominated in this area, mainly thanks to the activities of the architects and sculptors Bernardo de Gianotis, Giovanni Cini, Filippo da Fiesole and Giovanni Mario Mosca Padovano, who worked at the Grand Duke's palace in Vilnius, having spent some time in southern Poland.
Other links. Artists whose work created links between the various centers also included the German painter Jacob Binck, who worked at the royal court of Christian III in Copenhagen, and then for Prince Albrecht I in Königsberg. Binck was instrumental in propagating the works of Floris in the Baltic area, mentioning him to the patrons and acting as a mediator in the commissions.

However, the art of the period used more than just the new trends. How profound the influence of the brick Gothic was may be attested by the numerous brick churches which were still erected in the 17th century, both in Sweden and Poland. Mediaeval forms also found a continuation in the structures of Finnish wooden churches.

4. Looseness of artistic relationships in the period after 1600

After the 17th century, there were fewer integrating features in the art of the Baltic region. The individualism of tastes was pronounced more strongly, both on the part of the patrons and creators. Netherlandism ceased to be a distinguishing feature, even though it remained an important component of the region’s art. Netherlandish artists were still invited to the Baltic area: the Dutch painters Pieter Isaacsz, Karel van Mader III and Abraham Wuchters worked at the 17th-century Danish royal court of Christian IV, and the sculptors Adrian de Vries and Geraert Lambertz were at the castle in Frederiksborg. The Flemish artist Thomas Quellinus was active in Copenhagen (creating, among others, the tombstones in Vor Frue). The Dutch sculptor Nicolas Soeffrens (d. 1694) was active in Latvia, while a considerable number of Netherlandish artists remained in 17th-century Gdańsk. Many artists went on study trips to the Netherlands, where they saw the works of the most prominent European artists, whose styles they imitated or creatively expanded. The painter David Beck and the Frenchman Sebastien Bourdon (remaining under the influence of Van Dyck) worked in 17th-century Sweden. The most prominent Swedish painter of the time, David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl, was partially trained in the Netherlands. Among the Gdańsk painters who studied in the Netherlands, three were the most prominent: Andreas Stech, Bartholomäus Strobel and Daniel Schultz the Younger, an artist of European format (his style evolved in contact with the works of the circle of Rembrandt, Bartholomäus van der Helst and Ferdinand Bol).

Neoclassicism. French art increased in importance: the French architect Jean de la Vallée (1620-1696) worked in Sweden and fabrics and paintings by, among others, Francois Boucher and Nicolas Lancret were purchased in France for the newly-built Christiansborg palace in Denmark after 1740. The French painter J. F. J. Saly worked in Denmark after 1753. Many artists of the Baltic region, especially Scandinavians, trained in France or were influenced by French art. France offered art that partially satisfied the local demand for styles full of elegance but devoid of exaggeratedly dynamic forms, or ornaments obscuring the structure.

The trend towards simplicity and accentuation of the tectonics of forms became a distinguishing feature of Baltic region art after the 17th century, covering all the subsequent styles with a cloak of a neoclassicism of a sort. The neoclassical coolness and simplicity dominate in various 17th and 18th-century architectural projects on the Baltic coast: Stockholm’s knight school, completed by Jean da la Vallée in 1641; Kalmar cathedral started in 1660 and built...
by Nicodemus Tessin the Elder; one of North Europe’s largest buildings – the Royal Castle in Stockholm whose construction was supervised by Nicodemus Tessin the Younger after 1727, and completed by Carl Harleman in 1742; the projects of the German architect Samuel Berner who worked in Turku and erected, among other things, the Court of Appeal building in Vaasa (1780-1787); and the Turku Academy, designed by Carl Christopher Gjörwell (1766-1837), and completed by Carlo Bassi. Neo-classicism also permeated almost all of the architecture of the remaining part of the Baltic region.

The projects of Bartolomeo Francesco Rastrelli (1700-1770), who worked in St-Petersburg and Livonia, were more decorative and rococo-like: the Winter Palace of tsaritsa Elisabeth I, and the Rundale (Ruental) residence of the Livonian vice-regents Ernest-Johann Biron and his son Peter.

Again, Lithuania was in a different position, where the Baroque style marked the churches and palaces of Vilnius, Kaunas and Nieswiezys with a lushness of forms and decorations, alluding to Italian models.

Forms that emanated simplicity and calmness were also present in the works of a number of painters working in the Baltic area at that time, and especially in those of the sculptors, who had a number of outstanding figures among them: the internationally renowned Swede Johann Tobias Sergel (1740-1819), Stephan Sinding – the only 19th century Norwegian sculptor of European repute, and the Dane Johannes Wiedeweld who lived in Rome between 1754 and 1758, where he befriended the main theorist of classicism, J. J. Winckelmann. The main figure of international neoclassicism in sculpture was the Dane Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), who worked in Rome for more than 40 years and returned to Denmark in 1838, using antique models in search of an ideal harmony of forms.

Orthodox art. Next to the restrained forms of neoclassicism, a new common element appeared in the architecture of the eastern coast of the Baltic in the 18th century. During this period, many orthodox churches came to be erected in the vast area of the western provinces of the Russian Empire, from the Grand Duchy of Finland to the Baltic Provinces, to historical Lithuanian lands, the Kingdom of Poland and the Ukraine. They were not only used for religious purposes, but also served as demonstrations of the political and military power of the Russian Empire. They were erected at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in styles reminiscent of the Russo-Byzantine, Russian, Baroque, Neo-Romanesque, Neo-Gothic and Neo-Russian styles. Sometimes, temples of other denominations were given the form of orthodox churches. For example, in the case of the Lutheran St. Nicolaus cathedral in Helsinki (1830-1852), this was supposed to symbolise religious tolerance in Russia on the one hand, but also to remind one – through the huge dimensions of the building – of the power of the Russian Empire on the other.

Neo-Gothic. Exceptional were the classicising or Gothic-like buildings of the most prominent 19th-century German architect Carl Friedrich Schinkel and his workshop. They started appearing on the southern coast of the Baltic, from Hamburg to Vettin, Gransee, Annenwalde, Szczecin, Kołobrzeg, Torun, Braniewo and Lidzbark in the first half of the 19th century. The works of this architect, and his activities as an art restorer, gave rise to the interest in the mediaeval period in Pomerania. As a result, the second half of the 19th century was a Neo-Gothic period here, both in religious and secular (private and municipal) architecture, e.g. in Szczecin, Gdańsk and Torun. The Neo-Gothic wave also submerged...
other Baltic areas - references to mediaeval architecture were present in the 19th-century churches of Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, northern Germany and Norway (the so-called “dragestil” style, borrowing from the decorations of stave-churches, became fashionable in the latter country).

**Painting.** In the 19th century, a number of common threads appeared in painting in the Baltic area in Germany and Scandinavia. Between 1790 and 1840, the contacts between various exponents of Romanticism became much stronger. One thing that made this possible was the fact that artists from various countries might study at the same academies, e.g. the German painters Caspar David Friedrich, Philip Otto Runge, Georg Friedrich Kersting and the Norwegian Johan Christian Dahl all studied at the Danish Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. In turn, the Danish got to know German painters at the Academies in Dresden and Munich, and in Rome, where they formed a circle focused around Bertel Thorvaldsen. There were some themes that united the artists who worked on the southern and northern shores of the western tip of the Baltic, such as an interest in light, concealing some defined philosophical, religious and artistic issues. Apart from the above-mentioned, these artists included – to name just the most prominent ones – the Germans Carl Gustav Carus and Jacob Gensler, and the Danes Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg and Christen Kobke. The themes were unveiled through similar topics, such as a seaside landscape, dusk, a nocturne, clouds in the sky, a window. Views of specific places on the Baltic coast also appear in the compositions: the shores of Rügen, views of Greifswald, Copenhagen, and old churches and castles, which were characteristic for the interest of that period in the local environment and its history.

Up to the 1860s, the then famous Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf was popular among the painters of the Baltic region. Scandinavian and Estonian artists studied there. Later, the artists of the region went to Paris more and more often, where they got acquainted with the new trends – realism and impressionism.

**Scandinavian realism,** even though it was French-inspired, had a special, local variation. This was visible, for example, in the works of the painters associated with the rise in the 1880s of the Skagen artistic colony in Jutland: the Norwegian Christian Krohg, and the Danes Anna Ancher and Peder Severin Krøyer who mainly focussed on depictions of the typical local landscape and the life of the local people. Typical for Swedish and Danish painters was also the emphasis they placed on the traditional simple Scandinavian lifestyle, and the distance they had towards western industrialisation and urbanisation. This thread is also present in the works of some artists originating in other artistic trends, e.g. in those by the prominent exponent of symbolism, the Dane Vilhelm Hammershøi, whose compositions depict extremely modest, empty living rooms, filled with an atmosphere of nostalgia and loneliness. Similar references to traditional values, associated with the fight for the preservation of national identity, are present in Norwegian and Finnish painting, e.g. by Gerhard Munthe and Akseli Gallen-Kallela, who used themes from Nordic myths and sagas, and forms originating in folk art.

**Symbolism** had a very special form in Scandinavia, often taking up topics associated with erotic life, fears, alienation, and the dark, untamed side of human nature. The most prominent exponent of this trend was the Norwegian Edvard...
Munch, who created some exceptionally expressive works. The topics were also touched upon by another Norwegian, Eilif Peterssen, the Swede Richard Bergh, the Finn Hugo Simberg, and the above-mentioned Hammershoi and Krøyer. In sculpture, the most outstanding Scandinavian symbolist was the Norwegian Gustav Vigeland, who executed some complex, dynamic compositions, such as the Wheel of Life (1934, Vigeland Park, Oslo). The Lithuanian painter and composer Nicolaus Konstantin Cˇiurlionis, working at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, was also associated with symbolism. In his pictures, e.g. in the Sun Sonata cycle (1907-1909, Kaunas Museum), he tried to create plastic equivalents of musical compositions.

References to the regional tradition in 20th century art. Various subsequent avant-garde 20th-century art movements had their exponents in the Baltic region. Some of them, like the excellent Finnish architects Eliel Saarinen and Alvar Aalto, came to be internationally renowned. It is difficult to find threads that would be characteristic for the whole region in the highly individualist creations of the modern artists. One manifestation of regional identity might be the various references to the area's artistic history. Some of them, such as the Stockholm town hall, alluding to mediaeval brick architecture, and completed by Ragnar Östberg in 1925; the Copenhagen town hall built by Martin Nyrop between 1892 and 1905; the West Prussian Bank in Gdańsk, designed by Kurt Hempel in 1904-1905; the buildings of the Central Station in Gdańsk (1904) and the Gdańsk Polytechnic building (1900-1904) that allude to northern mannerism, may be seen as continuations of 19th-century historicism. However, some quite modern buildings, post-modernist structures, using pastiche and free stylisation, such as the 1987 Municipal Library in Uppsala, seem to look back towards the historical forms of the brick architecture of the Baltic region. 20th-century sculpture also alludes to the region's history. The German expressionist Ernst Barlach (1870-1938), for example, referred to the extraordinary achievements of the late Gothic, especially to the works by C. Berg. The 1970s works of the Danish artists P. Kirkby and R. Winther seem to be inspired to some extent by the neo-classicism that was once so widespread in the region.

5. The Baltic Sea area as an artistic region

The links that integrate the Baltic region and define its distinct character have developed in various ways over time. In the early Middle Ages, they developed as a result of the marked domination of one centre, which radiated out into the less developed areas via various channels, mainly through the exportation of works of art and artists. In the Hanseatic period, the links became much stronger and more complex, leading to the strongest consolidation of the Baltic region in the whole of its history, in spite of the local differences. That was when a number of strong centers developed, remaining in bilateral contact, with people of similar mentalities, financial abilities and aesthetic needs who worked in those centers. Some outstanding artists appeared, sometimes active at a number of different locations that may have been quite distant from one another. Sometimes, they would produce for export, and inseminate the minds of less talented artists with the strength of their art. Some artistic problems were solved in ways that proved so exceptionally attractive that they were copied. Mass production of some kinds of artefacts developed. All these circumstances meant that a strong, multi-layered artistic community evolved, stretching out over an area that overlapped with the Baltic coast. In the subsequent periods, the links grew weaker.

In the 16th century, the Baltic region was united again by the fashion to follow the style of one foreign centre. Later, the predilection for some distinct stylistics, ways of expression or topics proved to be the binding medium, as did the interest in similar artistic problems. In addition to all these factors, there was one more: the references that appeared in the local art of the various periods, directed towards the most characteristic and splendid elements of the region's artistic history. Various references to the Gothic brick architecture, encountered along almost the whole coast, the Norwegian dragestil, or the travesties of Netherlandish mannerist projects in early-20th-century Gdańsk architecture all meant that some historic artistic links within the region were amplified ex post, finding reflections in the mirror of the art of the following periods.
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