

Madonna of the Sun and the Moon — Virgin Mary as an Apocalyptic Woman and the Representations of the Picture Type in Finland (summary)

The Madonna of Finström, Åland (Photo: Anu Vuorela).

The topic of this article is a special type of picture of Virgin Mary, an apocalyptic Madonna. Even though there are all in all 14 representations of the picture [five frescoes (Finström, Pyhtää, Hattula, Rauma, Kumlinge), six sculptures (Uusikaupunki, Pälkäne, Lohja, Pedersöre, Kisko, Karjalohja) two Madonnas in altar cabinets (Somer, Houtskär), as well as one glass painting (Nauvo)], in this article I will concentrate solely on the group of wooden sculptures. This picture type has received its appearance from the Book of Revelations in the Bible, in which the text of the verse 12:1 describes a crowned woman dressed as the sun while standing on the moon. This picture type became more common in the late Middle Ages, and its role was pronounced in propaganda purposes especially during the crises times of the Church, in the time of the Reformation and the Turkish wars of the 15th century. The apocalyptic Madonna, similar to the entire Book of Revelations, was mystical and multifaceted. Primarily the apocalyptic woman has been perceived as symbolizing the Church and Israel. In addition to the iconographic description of the artworks in the study I will deal with Virgin Mary and the cult surrounding her, as well as the Book of Revelations and the pictures it inspired. The Book of Revelations describes clearly the signifying marks of a Madonna (crown, sun, and moon), yet some of these are missing in some of the artworks. My basic principle has been that a piece of art is apocalyptic even when based on just one of these marks, even though for some of the pieces other interpretations are possible. The biggest differences among the Madonnas arise between the groups of artworks and

apply to the method of describing the different attributes. For example, in the frescoes the moon that is beneath the Madonna's feet, when it is included in the picture, has been painted as a crescent moon. In the wooden sculptures the moon has instead, without exception, a human face. Even though one of my chief aims in carrying out this research was to prove that all the representations of this picture type that have been discovered in Finland were apocalyptic by nature, the identification process did not turn out to be so simple. Absolute interpretations and exact classification of the pieces may not be the most important goal after all, and not even always possible.

The article is based on my Master's Thesis with the same title, approved in the spring of 2002 at the Department of Art History, University of Turku.

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Translated from Finnish by Jari Eloranta.