

Medievalisms with a Difference: Estonia and the Finnish Pre-War Tradition of Antiquarian Art History^{*}

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The character of local medievalisms has been defined in geographically limited scholarly and national contexts. This article analyses medievalism in Finnish art history before World War II concentrating on three studies by three medievalists, Karl Konrad Meinander, Ludvig Wennervirta and Juhani Rinne. In reading their texts, I focus on Estonia and Estonian scholarship in their work. Despite their national leanings, the Finns were not cut off from the international disciplinary field. For them, due to a certain lack of comparative material and research literature, the Baltic countries remained an intermediary of German influences.

A comparative approach to the historiography of Finnish art history

The study of medieval art and architecture carries strong connotations of internationalism and a certain uniformity of methods and aims. Although these undertones may be based on actuality, medievalism or rather medievalisms have also localised identities, and their character has been defined in more limited scholarly and national contexts. Already the chronological frame of 'the Middle Ages' varies in Europe. In Finland, the era is conventionally dated from c. 1150 to 1523. More importantly, however, conceptions on the cultural significance of the Middle Ages are sensitive to the particular modernist contexts of medievalisms. Medievalism experienced profound transformations from the mid-nineteenth century to World War II. These changes can partly be associated with contemporary social and political circumstances, and subsequently with the place of the Middle Ages in the Finnish national project. By the time of World War II, art-historical scholarship on medieval antiquities had more or less

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acquired the basic form, i.e. the aims and the methodology of dating and organising material, which is still considered a valid way of carrying out art-historical research.¹

A comparative approach to the varying traditions of medievalism brings out their national differences. In the following, I analyse medievalism in Finnish art history before World War II through three studies by three scholars of medieval art: Karl Konrad Meinander (1872–1933), Ludvig Wennervirta (1882–1959) and Juhani Rinne (1872–1950). In reading their texts, I focus on Estonia and Estonian scholarship in their work. While the studies of the three men reflect the disciplinary trends and the position of Estonia and other Baltic countries in Finnish medievalism,² their careers display the Finnish disciplinary situation in institutional terms. Lastly, I will discuss their careers in relation to the University of Tartu and its new professorships.

In Finland, art history emerged as an academic discipline in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when Finland formed an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia. The relatively independent political life allowed the establishment of the cultural nationalist and romantic Fennoman (*Fennomania*) movement. This created a legitimate need for creating internationally credible Finnish scholarship as well as (re)constructing a distinct Finnish past and culture.

The country's antiquarian art history was explicitly part of the project to produce national identity. During the period of autonomy, the key importance was put on bringing Finland among the ranks of other nations, and the strategy for doing this was to emphasise how Christianity and the Middle Ages brought Finland into the realm of Western civilisation. Following this strategy, antiquarian art history had a strong practical orientation in cataloguing, describing and dating the old, especially medieval, Finnish architecture and artefacts as well as the oldest works in the visual arts. Thus, in 1908, Meinander could write that 'no other period in our art history is so well studied than the medieval'.³

Following World War I and the Russian Revolution, Finland gained its independence in December 1917 and plunged into a civil war in the following spring. These two events shifted the focus of the national project and affected the public uses of the past.⁴ The construction of a Finnish cultural unity was replaced by more militaristic, right-

1 The literature on medievalism is vast and only a few recent examples can be presented here: L. Valkeapää, *Mielikuvien vapaa aikakausi: Keskiajan käyttöyhteyksiä 1800- ja 1900-luvulla* [The free period of impressions: contexts of the use of the Middle Ages in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries]. – *Keskiajan rajoilla* [At the borders of the Middle Ages]. Eds. M. Lamberg, S. Niiranen. Jyväskylä: Atena, 2002, pp. 264–290; *Medeltid på tevetid: en dokusåpas historiedidaktik* [The Middle Ages in the TV age: the history didactics of a docusoap]. Eds. A. Högberg, H. Kihlström. Malmö: Malmö Kulturmiljö & Malmö museer, 2005; M. Alexander, *Medievalism: the Middle Ages in Modern England*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2007; *Cultural Studies of the Modern Middle Ages*. Eds. E. A. Joy, M. J. Seaman, K. K. Bell, M. K. Ramsey. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; *Defining Medievalism(s)*. Ed. K. Fugelso. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009; V. Immonen, 'Onko meille keskiaika takaisin palaamassa?' Suomen arkipiispansaunan valmistus vuonna 1931 [Are the Middle Ages returning to us? The production of the archbishop's crozier in 1931]. – *Teologinen Aikakauskirja / Teologisk Tidskrift* 2010, no. 2, pp. 2–16.

2 For a relatively recent account on the relations between Finland and Estonia during the Middle Ages, see M. Hiekkänen, *Near But Far: Finnish and Estonian Church Architecture in the Middle Ages*. – *Suomen Museo* 98, 1991. Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys, 1992, pp. 15–42.

3 K. K. Meinander, *Konsten [Art]*. – *Finlands kulturhistoria: medeltiden* [Finland's cultural history: the Middle Ages]. Eds. P. Nordmann, M. G. Schybergson. Helsingfors: Söderström, 1908, p. 187.

4 E. g. P. Ahtaiainen, J. Tervonen, *Menneisyyden tutkijat ja metodien vartijat. Matka suomalaisen historiankirjoitukseen* [Researchers of the past and guardians of the methods: a journey to the Finnish history writing]. *Käsikirjoja* 17 (1). Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1996, pp. 62–64.

wing politics, which underscored the independence of the Finnish state, and sought prehistoric and historical precursors to the politically united nation.

In his study on the relations between Finnish nationalism and conceptions of the past, Derek Fewster calls the inter-war period the era of militant medievalism when 'a highly militaristic interpretation was added to the national antiquity, mirroring the new 'other' of the Bolshevik threat'.⁵ Ideas of modernism and progress swept across the cultural elite at the expense of the Finnish past becoming more marginalised in its national ideology. Antiquarian cultural nationalism gave way to the banalisation of the national past, a project of bringing it to the masses. Moreover, the nationalistic fervour focused on the late Iron Age and early medieval period, the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, before the arrival of the foreign influences of the Swedish Kingdom and the Catholic Middle Ages. This early history before Swedish and Russian rule was depicted as a period of heroic warriors fighting to maintain their independence.

In this scheme, the position of the later medieval period was ambivalent. It was a period during which Finland was connected to Western civilisation and turned away from the East. On the other hand, the rule of the Swedish Kingdom and the Catholic Church both presented foreign and superficial elements forced onto authentic Finnish-ness. However, if characteristics of a particularly national flavour could be distinguished then the Middle Ages could still be shaped as the past of the Finns. In this vein, the Diocese of Turku could be interpreted as the pre-embryonic stage of the autonomous province of Finland, and its bishops as the first representatives of Finnish-centred politics.

When one looks for the place of Estonia and the Baltic countries generally in the national scheme and in Finnish art-historical texts on the Middle Ages, large-scale mutations in the national project are pivotal. Nevertheless, there are also other factors to be considered: the social and institutional structure of the disciplinary community, the generational situation of scholars, their personal connections and the ethno-linguistic tensions between the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking lobbies in society.

The institutional background of Finnish art history

The beginning of antiquarian art history is usually dated to the 1870s, when the Finnish Antiquarian Society was founded. In 1884, the State Archaeological Commission, predecessor of the present-day National Board of Antiquities, was established. In academia, art history began its institutionalisation in 1880 when Eliel Aspelin-Haapkylä (before Fennicisation in 1906 the surname was 'Aspelin'; 1847–1917) was appointed as the first docent in aesthetics and art history at the University of Helsinki. In 1897, Johan Jakob Tikkanen (1857–1930) became an extraordinary professor in art history, since 1920 he was the professor.⁶ The discipline was thus practised in two institutions – at the University of Helsinki and at the State Archaeological Commission.

5 D. Fewster, *Visions of Past Glory: Nationalism and the Construction of Early Finnish History*. (Studia Fennica: Historia 11.) Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2006, p. 24.

6 J. Vakkari, *Focus on Form: J. J. Tikkanen, Giotto and Art Research in the 19th Century*. (Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 114.) Helsinki, 2007.

According to Henrik Lilius, the twofold institutional situation led to the emergence of two traditions in art-historical writing, a division that did not dissolve until the 1950s and 1960s. The tradition that Lilius calls ‘antiquarian’ was practised at the Archaeological Commission, in cultural-historical museums and in the preservation of built heritage. Primarily focused on national architectural history, the cultural history of material culture and art produced before the mid-nineteenth century, antiquarian art history was highly descriptive and orientated to the material at hand, and it sought to produce chronological narratives of art phenomena. This tradition served the practical needs of the heritage administration since its researchers lacked often, though not always, academic education in art history.

In contrast, the academic art history writing was interested in international art or national art made after the mid-nineteenth century, and it aimed at producing doctoral dissertations of international importance. University scholars were highly cosmopolitan in the scope of their interests, Tikkanen being the prime example of a scholar whose academic appreciation was wide-ranging.⁷

Renja Suominen-Kokkonen argues that antiquarian and academic art histories had already begun to unite a decade earlier than Lilius suggested. Suominen-Kokkonen associates the paradigm shift in art-historical writing with Lars Pettersson (1918–1993), who worked on his dissertation *Die kirchliche Holzbaukunst auf der Halbinsel Zaonež'e in Russisch-Karelien* during the 1940s and was appointed professor of art history in 1951.⁸ Lilius's scheme may be further criticised for its overemphasis on architectural history – where the change in academic attitudes does indeed appear to occur around the 1950s – at the expense of other fields of art history. The two separate traditions are not as clearly definable in the study of visual arts, although the institutional duality remains apparent. The uneasiness of such a scheme is evident in the careers and works of Meinander and Wennervirta, for example.

In 1878, Eliel Aspelin-Haapkylä's dissertation on medieval winged reredoses in Europe was printed. It was the first art-historical thesis published in Finnish. The work is rather descriptive and is more or less a catalogue of the pieces Aspelin-Haapkylä saw in Germany, Flanders, France, Sweden and Finland.⁹ Among other Finnish winged reredoses, he noted the medieval altarpiece in Kalanti (then Uusikirkko) church, which later became known as the St. Barbara altarpiece, and which Meinander attributed to the circle of Meister Francke (Frater Francke). Aspelin-Haapkylä did not identify the saint as St. Barbara, and considered the altarpiece to be stylistically of Byzantine or

7 H. Lilius, Tutkimustraditio Suomen taidehistoriankirjoituksessa [Research tradition of art history writing in Finland]. – Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia / Konsthistoriska studier 20. Helsinki, 1999, pp. 106–113. The article was originally published in 1983.

8 R. Suominen-Kokkonen, Changing Ideals in Art History: Onni Okkonen and Lars Pettersson. – Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia / Konsthistoriska studier 36. Helsinki, 2007, pp. 110–125. Cf. L. Pettersson, *Die kirchliche Holzbaukunst auf der Halbinsel Zaonež'e in Russisch-Karelien. Herkunft und Werden*. (Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 51.) Helsinki, 1950.

9 H. Selkokari, Kalleuksia isänmaalle. Eliel Aspelin-Haapkylä taiteen keräilijänä ja taidehistorioitsijana [Treasures of a patriot: Eliel Aspelin-Haapkylä as an art collector and art historian]. (Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 115.) Helsinki, 2008, pp. 76–77.

Russian origin.¹⁰ Aspelin-Haapkylä's work had its successors. In 1900, Hjalmar Öhman (1872–1930) published his doctoral dissertation *Medieval Choir Stalls in Germany, Scandinavia and Finland*.¹¹ It follows Aspelin-Haapkylä's scheme of describing and cataloguing, and thus belongs to the first phase of art-historical writing.

Emil Nervander (1840–1914) was another pioneering art historian in Finland. Nervander defended his master's degree in 1869, but never completed his doctoral dissertation. However, due to Nervander's involvement in art-historical surveys and studies, he became the key expert in Finnish medieval art during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Nervander directed five art-historical survey expeditions in Finland and compiled a large quantity of documentation and survey material. Altogether there were eight such undertakings.¹² In addition to the surveys, during the 1880s and 1890s he was responsible for restoring and repainting murals in several Finnish medieval churches.

Nervander followed romanticist ideals of restoration, and his approach came under heavy criticism from the generations of scholars after the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who emphasised authenticity. Moreover, Nervander's studies were highly practical and focused on the production and use of artworks in the Middle Ages, whereas early twentieth-century scholarship in art history was, for the most part, analysis of form and structure.¹³ Nevertheless, as Sixten Ringbom points out, Nervander was the first to consider style, iconography, chronology, sources and the provenance of medieval art in an integrated manner. Thus, Ringbom characterises Nervander's career as a 'romantic climax' and Nervander himself as the 'father of the history of Finnish art'.¹⁴

As the work of Aspelin-Haapkylä and Nervander shows, Meinander, Rinne and Wennervirta were not in fact the first to conduct research on their subjects. If they may be considered pioneers, it is in respect of their having written specialised studies on particular periods. Their approach involved application of formal analysis based on the idea of authenticity and style, and they also have in common their institutional ties with the Archaeological Commission. Both Meinander and Rinne made their entire careers there, and Wennervirta worked at the Commission collecting source material for his dissertation during 1926–1928. Meinander and Rinne were born in 1872, and the main period of their work began in around the 1910s, whereas Wennervirta was somewhat younger, born in 1882.

Although each of the three wrote their dissertations on Finnish medieval art – Meinander on reredoses and wooden sculptures, Rinne on early medieval castles, and Wennervirta on mural paintings in churches – there are also evident differences

10 E. Aspelin, *Siipiälttarit. Tutkimus keskiajan taiteen alalla* [Winged altarpieces: a study in the field of medieval art]. Helsinki, 1878, p. 102; S. Ringbom, *Art History in Finland before 1920*. Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1986, p. 57.

11 Cf. H. Öhman, *Medeltidens korstolar i Tyskland, Skandinavien och Finland* [Medieval choir stalls in Germany, Scandinavia and Finland]. Helsingfors, 1900.

12 L. Valkeapää, *Emil Nervander as a Pioneer of Finnish Art History and Antiquarian Interests in Finland during the Last Decades of the 19th Century*. – *Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia / Konsthistoriska studier* 36. Helsinki, 2007, pp. 40–52.

13 L. Valkeapää, *Emil Nervander...*, p. 48.

14 S. Ringbom, *Art History in Finland...*, pp. 31, 38.

between their careers and approaches. These differences may be partly explained by their various backgrounds. For example, Rinne and Wennervirta were both sons of Finnish-speaking families, whereas Meinander was a Swedish-speaking Finn. Also, both Meinander and Wennervirta had received academic education in art history, whereas Rinne had not. Further differences may be discerned with a closer reading of their studies.

Meinander between academic and antiquarian traditions

Karl Konrad Meinander primarily studied art history and was taught by renowned art historian Johan Jakob Tikkanen. As part of his training, Meinander visited Central European countries and became well acquainted with the international field of research. Nevertheless, Meinander chose a career with the National Museum of Finland and focused on local material. In fact, he was concerned that Finnish art historians had neglected the country's visual material. Meinander admitted, however, that 'the art of this province has been too insignificant to attract scholars with exacting taste'.¹⁵

Meinander published his doctoral dissertation *Medieval Reredoses and Wooden Sculptures in Finland's Churches* in 1908.¹⁶ Though Meinander later turned his interest toward paintings and other visual material of the post-medieval period, his dissertation remained the key work in the field until 1964 when Carl Axel Nordman's monumental *Medieval Sculpture in Finland* appeared.¹⁷

Meinander's study is rather typical of the early twentieth-century art history around the Baltic Sea region. It classifies Finnish wooden sculptures and reredoses on the basis of stylistic and, to a lesser degree, iconographic criteria. Then, the works of art are dated and lastly an overall picture of the period they represent is sketched. Meinander's chronological scheme extending from late romanesque (dated to the thirteenth century) to late gothic (dated between 1500 and 1525) does not differ markedly from the common international one, but he emphasises the period from 1460 to 1500 as the golden age of Finnish medieval art.¹⁸

Tracing of the origin and provenance of stylistic influences has a major role in Meinander's analysis. The model of stylistic transition is clear: artistic innovations and trends were set in Italy, France, the Netherlands and Germany, thus forming the primary framework of which the art of the Baltic Sea region presents a secondary reflection. The relatively lengthy descriptions of the situation and changes in Central European art probably display Meinander's academic education in art history.

There are two stylistic traditions visible in Meinander's reading of the Finnish material: one is the Hanseatic sphere, with Lübeck as its centre; and the other is Swedish,

15 K. K. Meinander, *Taidehistoria ja taidearkeologia* [Art history and art archaeology]. – Suomi: maa, kansa, valtakunta 3. Henkinen elämä [Finland: country, people, realm. Vol. 3, Spiritual life]. Eds. A. Donner et al. Helsinki: Otava, 1925, p. 207.

16 K. K. Meinander, *Medeltida altarskåp och träsniderier i Finlands kyrkor* [Medieval reredoses and wooden sculptures in Finland's churches]. (Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 24:2.) Helsingfors, 1908.

17 Cf. C. A. Nordman, *Medeltida skulptur i Finland* [Medieval sculpture in Finland]. (Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 62.) Helsinki, 1964.

18 K. K. Meinander, *Medeltida altarskåp...*, pp. 290–297.

with the artistic focal point being first Gotland and later Stockholm. During the Nordic Early Middle Ages, stylistic influences came via Gotland, but after 1300 the Hanseatic trade became more prominent in influencing the distribution of art and style. In fact, the distinction between the Swedish and the Hanseatic influences vibrates throughout Meinander's analysis.

A feature of Meinander's work that is developed further in Rinne's text is the focus on individuals, whether Finnish bishops or masters. While acknowledging its seemingly Slavic characteristics, Meinander attributes the St. Barbara altarpiece to the circle of Master Francke of Hamburg (fig. 1).¹⁹ He also stresses the importance of Finnish bishops on the development of medieval art. In particular, he emphasises the role of Konrad Bitz (Bishop of Turku 1460–1489), whose time in office he considers to be a blossoming period of medieval art in Finland. It is also a time from which artworks are identifiable as having been produced in Finland and particular Finnish schools become recognisable, although the only identifying characteristic appears to be 'primitivity' and 'low artistic quality'.²⁰

Even as Meinander's work bears elements of academic and international art history, it still leans more towards the antiquarian tradition. Since Meinander was primarily interested in the Swedish and Hanseatic influences,²¹ the Baltic countries, as such, do not play a role in his approach – even references to Estonian material are non-existent. Instead, the major publications he refers to are from either Sweden or Germany. In his foreword, Meinander expresses his gratitude not only to Tikkanen and two other Finns, but also to Otto Janse in Stockholm, Johnny Roosval in Uppsala, and Harry Fett in Christiania (present-day Oslo). Their studies appear among his references in addition to Hans Hildebrand who represents the older generation of scholars. The German titles Meinander uses include Adolph Goldschmidt's *Lübecker Malerei und Plastik bis zum Jahre 1530*²², and Adelbert Matthaei's *Werke der Holzplastik in Schleswig-Holstein bis zum Jahre 1530*²³.

Wennervirta and the question of Finnish-ness

Meinander's work parallels, to a great extent, contemporary Swedish scholarship in art history, although the use of Finnish material poses a question of local characteristics. Finnish-ness is more prominent in Wennervirta's and Rinne's studies, which resonate with the climate of the inter-war period.

As a symptom of inter-war militarisation the ethno-linguistic confrontations between Finnish- and Swedish-minded parties were a major influence on cultural politics, despite the 1922 language law securing equal rights for the speakers of both

19 K. K. Meinander, *Medeltida altarskåp...*, pp. 158–177.

20 K. K. Meinander, *Medeltida altarskåp...*, p. 274.

21 Cf. L. Valkeapää, *Miten keskiaikaisista kirkoista tuli kulttuuriperintöä?* [How did medieval churches turn into cultural heritage?] – *Alue ja ympäristö* 2002, vol. 31 (2), p. 6.

22 Cf. A. Goldschmidt, *Lübecker Malerei und Plastik bis zum Jahre 1530*. Lübeck, 1889.

23 Cf. A. Matthaei, *Werke der Holzplastik in Schleswig-Holstein bis zum Jahre 1530*. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der deutschen Plastik 1–2. Leipzig: Seemann, 1901.

languages. However, parallel with the intensified use of the past in schools and in public education generally, the gulf between popular belief and the academic approach widened. The latter highlighted the need to maintain scholarly neutrality, while the former often showed a single-minded national understanding of the past.

Ludvig Wennervirta (his surname was 'Wennerström' until he changed it to a Finnish name in 1926) completed his matriculation examination in 1903 and subsequently entered the University of Helsinki. Like Meinander, Wennervirta studied art history under the guidance of Johan Jakob Tikkanen. At the same time, Eero Järnefelt taught him in visual arts at the drawing school of the Art Society of Finland. Wennervirta gained his master's degree in 1908, licentiate in 1931 and doctorate in 1932. Throughout his career he was greatly interested in medieval art, but also wrote extensively on contemporary art and artists; for example, on Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Eero Järnefelt, Marcus Collin, Kalle Carlstedt, and Ester Helenius. In 1927, Wennervirta published his general survey *Finnish Art* that had been first published in Swedish.²⁴

By the 1910s, Wennervirta had not placed any emphasis on the relevance of German culture to Finnish art and culture,²⁵ but during the course of the 1920s he adopted national socialism as his political and cultural ideology, and he visited Germany several times during the 1930s and 1940s. Wholeheartedly accepting German propaganda, he supported the idea of the common fate of the peoples around the Baltic Sea, as well as the importance of race and boreality – the latter referring to the conception that the North is the fundamental feature of Finnish art.²⁶

Wennervirta's political leanings led him to become active in propagating German exhibitions and disseminating cultural propaganda as well as inviting visiting German lecturers to Finland. His position in the ethno-linguistic conflict was relatively extreme. According to Wennervirta, the hegemony of Swedish-speaking scholars in Finland had led to the exaggeration of Swedish influences in art. He argued that Swedish-speaking scholars lacked either the appropriate knowledge or the desire to be properly interested in Finnish national art.²⁷

Due to his political views since the 1920s, Wennervirta tried to shift the focus of his art-historical research away from Sweden and towards the Baltic countries and northern Germany. Aside from the Swedish, one must also take into account the Danish and German influences on Finnish art, Wennervirta claimed. Moreover, Finnish medieval ecclesiastical art should be regarded as parallel to the Swedish case, rather than a part of it.²⁸

Wennervirta's doctoral dissertation of 1930, titled *Gothic Monumental Painting in the Churches of West Finland and the Åland Islands* (fig. 2), was based on the visual and

24 Cf. L. Wennervirta, Suomen taide: esihistoriallisesta ajasta meidän päiviimme [Finnish art: from prehistory to the present day]. Co-authors A. Europaeus et al. Helsinki: Otava, 1927. Originally published as: L. Wennervirta, Finlands konst: från förhistorisk tid till våra dagar. Co-authors A. Europaeus et al. Helsingfors: Söderström; Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1926.

25 Y. Levanto, Kirjoitetut kuvat: Ludvig Wennervirtan taidekäsitys [Written images: Ludvig Wennervirta's conception of art]. (Taideteollisen korkeakoulun julkaisusarja A10.) Helsinki, 1991, pp. 9–10.

26 Y. Levanto, Wennervirta, Ludvig (1882–1959). – Kansallisbiografia-verkkójulkaisu. (Studia Biographica 4.) Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2007, <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi> (accessed 4 May 2010).

27 Y. Levanto, Kirjoitetut kuvat, pp. 32–34.

28 Y. Levanto, Kirjoitetut kuvat, pp. 32–34.

written material in the archive of the National Museum, which had been collected by Nervander among others. The overall design of the work is reminiscent of Meinander's dissertation. As with Meinander, the Central European background, presented in the introduction and chapters preceding the analysis of Finnish art works, holds a prominent position in Wennervirta's study.

Wennervirta organises his material into chronological order, church by church, and presentation of each individual church begins by stating when the chalk paintings were uncovered and by whom. Wennervirta then proceeds to describe and compare that particular example with other Finnish, Swedish, Danish and North German paintings. Based on that comparison, a date is determined. Finally, in the concluding chapters, as with Meinander's work, the results of dating and stylistic comparisons are weaved into an art-historical narrative.

According to Wennervirta, North German influences are dominant in the oldest Finnish church paintings, dating from between the fourteenth century and the 1450s.²⁹ During the fifteenth century, the Åland Islands lost their primary importance for the Finnish mainland; and then, around the mid-fifteenth century, Swedish influences acquired a more important role than the North German style.³⁰ Moreover, following Meinander's model, he dates the blossoming of medieval wall painting to the latter part of the fifteenth century when several powerful bishops were in office and the first signatures were added to the paintings.³¹

In spite of their similarities, Wennervirta's work is separated from Meinander's by over two decades and comparison between the two reveals several differences. Although Meinander himself pointed out errors and problems in Nervander's work, Wennervirta was an especially harsh critic of Nervander: 'Many of the paintings restored by Nervander are more or less clumsy reproductions. Nervander wanted, like Viollet-le-Duc in France, to restore the lost world of beauty. In his enthusiasm, he overdid it.'³² Wennervirta also takes aim at Nervander's interpretations of the paintings and his estimation of their ages.³³

The weight Wennervirta places on the influence of individuals also differs from Meinander, and more particularly from Rinne. Although Wennervirta points out Bishop Hemmingus's (Bishop of Turku c. 1339–1366) significance for the development of art in Finland, he generally finds individuals to be of lesser consequence and their role remains more abstract.³⁴ His idealisation of gothic art is grounded on the style's communal character, which transcends the historical agency of individuals.

Most importantly, Wennervirta is able to characterise 'Finnish-ness' in the local wall-painting tradition using more positive terms than 'primitiveness'. Based on ornamentation, Wennervirta distinguishes a particular group among the wall paintings

29 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta Länsi-Suomen ja Ahvenanmaan kirkoissa* [Gothic monumental painting in the churches of West Finland and the Åland islands]. (Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 38.) Helsinki, 1930, p. 240.

30 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, p. 214.

31 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, pp. 207–208, 213.

32 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, p. 29; see also pp. 101, 107, 110, 112, 131, 189.

33 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, pp. 48–49.

34 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, pp. 63, 207.

that he calls the 'Uusikirkko group' and points to Pietari Henrikinpoika, whose name appears among the signatures, as one of the group's 'main masters'.³⁵

Wennervirta's analysis of the artistic quality of Finnish masters is primarily based on the architectonic treatment of surfaces via which murals are organically connected with the interior of the building. Firstly, Wennervirta describes the overall visual impact as that of a 'leaf house' (*lehtimaja*). Secondly, *horror vacui*, which is typical for the churches of the Kumla group in Sweden and the Finnish churches of Lohja and Hattula, is absent from the ornamentation of the churches of West Finland; and this creates an 'atmosphere of noble moderation'. Thirdly, the style of the Finnish masters does not show any three-dimensional treatment of painterly space. 'But this limitedness has become a virtue.'³⁶

Wennervirta associates the special character of Finnish wall paintings with the early dominant presence of the Dominican order in Finland. The order pressed its mark on the liturgy and art of the diocese: 'We can thank those same Dominican monks for the unique flavour which they gave to the main group of our monumental painting distinguishing it from Swedish art.'³⁷

Despite Wennervirta's explicit emphasis on the Baltic countries and his conviction that the connections between Finland and Estonia were as active as those between Finland and Sweden, his ambitions in that respect were hampered by the availability of comparative material and research literature: 'In Estonia and Latvia, only a few medieval church paintings have survived. The vaults of Riga cathedral are decorated with heraldic lilies similar to Turku cathedral and there are a few faded pictures in the porch hall.'³⁸ Due to such circumstances, Wennervirta's growing interest in Estonian art was actualised only in relation to more recent art, and by organising visits of Finns to Estonia and furthering scholarly contacts between the two countries.³⁹

Rinne's architectural visions

Besides the wooden sculptures and wall paintings, medieval churches and castles attracted the attention of antiquarian scholars very early on.⁴⁰ Juhani Rinne was one of the most prominent pre-war scholars to have pursued architectural history as his vocation. In 1899, Rinne graduated as a teacher of the Finnish language, but then in the same year he began as a trainee at the State Historical Museum of Finland. There he made a successful career studying medieval and post-medieval architecture using archaeological methodology. His doctoral dissertation, published in 1914, discussed ear-

35 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, p. 216. Uusikirkko here refers to Kalanti, the signed paintings are dated to the 1470s.

36 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, pp. 237–239.

37 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, pp. 241–242.

38 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, p. 20; see also pp. 31–33. Wennervirta does not provide references for his account on the paintings in Riga cathedral.

39 L. Wennervirta, *Goottilaista monumentaalimaalausta...*, p. 29.

40 Carolus Lindberg's (1889–1955) doctoral dissertation (C. Lindberg, *Om teglets användning i finska medeltida gråstenskyrkor* [On the use of bricks in Finnish medieval grey stone churches]. Helsingfors: H. Schildt, 1919) was not submitted at the University of Helsinki but at the Institute of Technology. The dissertation is basically a collection of technical drawings of stone churches with a brief introductory text.

ly medieval castles in Finland. In 1929, after having completed a major restoration of Turku cathedral (fig. 3),⁴¹ Rinne was appointed to the post of State Archaeologist. The cathedral's central position in the official Finnish historical imagination is comparable to that of the Pirita convent in Estonia, so the restoration gained a lot of publicity.⁴² In addition to the cathedral, Rinne also directed other large restorations of medieval monuments, such as the castles of Turku and Olavinlinna (the latter in present-day Savonlinna).

In 1932, Rinne published a large and detailed study of the medieval material traces of St. Henry of Finland, and from 1941 onwards, a three-volume study on Turku cathedral, *Turku Cathedral in the Middle Ages (1941–1952)*. This large work was based on documentation and other materials produced during the restoration. Sigurd Curman, the State Antiquarian of Sweden, was the main consultant of restoration, and other prominent Swedish scholars, such as Johnny Roosval, also visited the cathedral. According to the written records, there was no involvement from art historians based in Estonia.⁴³

Some of the elements already present in Meinander's work are also characteristic of Rinne's study of Turku cathedral. Firstly, Rinne traces the origins of each architectural feature using comparisons, and he dates the various parts of the cathedral on that basis. Secondly, the two main directions of architectural influence are again from Sweden and Germany. For Rinne, when speaking of the early medieval phases of the architectural monument, Lund, Sigtuna and Gamla Uppsala are the major points of reference; but in later phases the Teutonic Order as well as German cathedrals and masters increase in importance. For example, he traces the glazed-brick ornamentation in the walls of the cathedral's choir to Livonian castles. This is pivotal for Rinne's dating of the first construction phase to the thirteenth century.⁴⁴ Thirdly, Rinne directly interrelates the building phases of the cathedral with the succession of bishops in the diocese. A revealing example is the way in which Rinne discusses the first written testament of a master working at the cathedral – Conradus Pictor, whose name appears from 1336 onwards. Rinne argues that the master came to Turku from abroad, and that he had a close connection with the Finnish bishops and their aspirations to expand the cathedral.⁴⁵

In spite of the similarities, Rinne's work shows significant divergences from Meinander's and Wennervirta's texts. Firstly, his references to Baltic and Estonian architecture and scholarship are far more marked. To a degree, this must be due to the written sources relating to Turku cathedral: according to Rinne, the written sources mention altogether eleven masters to have worked at the cathedral, and he classes sev-

41 C. J. Gardberg, Rinne, Juhani (1872–1950). – Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu, 2006, <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi> (accessed 4 May 2010).

42 L. Kaljundi, Pirita klooster Eesti ajaloomälus: mitte ainult kloostri taga metsas [The Pirita convent in Estonian historical memory: not just in the forest behind the convent]. – *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 2007, vol. 16 (4), pp. 111–140.

43 J. Finnberg, Turun Tuomiokirkon vuosisataiset vaiheet [Turku cathedral through the centuries]. Helsinki: Otava, 1929. See also: E. Ahl-Waris, Networks, Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and the Use of History in the Medieval Monastic Sites in Finland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Case Study of Naantali. – *Mirator* 2009, vol. 10 (1), p. 61, <http://www.glossa.fi/mirator/artikkelit.html> (accessed 4 May 2010).

44 J. Rinne, Turun tuomiokirkko keskiaikana I. Tuomiokirkon rakennushistoria [Turku cathedral in the Middle Ages. Vol. I, Construction history of the cathedral]. Turku: Turun tuomiokirkon isännistö, 1941, pp. 52, 166, 211–212.

45 J. Rinne, Turun tuomiokirkko keskiaikana, p. 215.

en of them as artists from Tallinn or the Baltic countries.⁴⁶ However, that inference was partly due to the availability of new research such as the 500th-anniversary publication about the Pirita convent, which appeared in 1936. For example, Rinne's comparison of the limestone portal of Turku cathedral to those of the Dominican convent in Tallinn and the Pirita convent was based on Sten Karling's article in this publication.⁴⁷

Secondly, Rinne uses rather nebulous rhetoric while placing the cathedral in the Finnish Middle Ages. For example: 'The cathedral was originally erected with high hopes for the future of the Finnish church. [...] In the fourteenth century, the church received its richest body in the architecture of the Teutonic Order with high gothic influences; at the same time, it was elevated to the class of major cathedrals.'⁴⁸

For Rinne, Turku cathedral – showing the influence of Teutonic architecture – and the Catholic Church in general were the institutions forming the basis for the unification of the nation, both spiritually and culturally. Thus, the bishops had a central role in his work – they were the nationally minded leaders of the pre-national phase. In the Finnish art-historical tradition, even during the inter-war period, Christianisation was ultimately a process of becoming European and thus gaining respectability among the other nations; and so monuments and other traces of the Middle Ages were important for the national history. This forms a stark contrast to the Middle Ages of the Estonian tradition where the period and its built heritage were primarily a reminder of the Teutonic Order and German dominance.

Finnish art history and the University of Tartu

Despite their national leanings, neither Meinander, Wennervirta nor Rinne were cut off from the international disciplinary field. In the development of medieval art, the importance of Germany versus that of Sweden was a topical issue during the inter-war period in the Baltic Sea region. Whereas German scholars considered Lübeck to have played the leading role in Northern art throughout the Middle Ages, in 1921 Johnny Roosval, a Swede, introduced the idea of an art region covering the entire Baltic Sea area and displaying artistic fluctuations instead of a single origin for innovations. Finnish art historians and another Swede, Sten Karling, who was working in Estonia, favoured the Swedish model, but were at the same time trying to find its local adaptations in Estonia and Finland.⁴⁹ For the Finns, oscillations between Swedish and German influences were important for approaching their material, because the model provided them a way of finding Finnish products and local appropriations of international trends. In Rinne's study, this is explicitly associated with the Finnish church and ultimately with national history.

46 J. Rinne, Turun tuomiokirkko keskiaikana, p. 405.

47 S. Karling, Piritas ställning i Estlands konsthistoria. – Pirita klooster / Birgittaklostret vid Tallinn 500, 1436–1936. (Pirita Kaunistamise Seltsi väljaanne 12.) Pirita, 1936, pp. 81–92; J. Rinne, Turun tuomiokirkko keskiaikana, p. 212.

48 J. Rinne, Turun tuomiokirkko keskiaikana, p. 402.

49 K. Markus, Armin Tuulse ja kirikute uurimine [Armin Tuulse and the study of churches]. – Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi 2008, vol. 17 (3), p. 26.



Målningarna på altarskåpet i Nykyrko.

1.

K. K. Meinander was able to attribute the early-fifteenth-century St. Barbara altarpiece of Kalanti church to the circle of Master Francke of Hamburg. Illustration from Meinander's *Medieval Reredoses and Wooden Sculptures in Finland's Churches* (1908), p. 163.



Kuva 12. Pyhimyskuvia — Heiligenbilder, Taivassalo (schw. Töjsala).

2.

Mural paintings with saints in Taivassalo church, an illustration from Ludvig Wennervirta's doctoral dissertation. For his study, Wennervirta used the visual and written material in the archive of the National Museum. Illustration from Wennervirta's *Gothic Monumental Painting in the Churches of West Finland and the Åland Islands* (1930), p. 45.



3.

Juhani Rinne standing in the funerary chapel of the Tigerstedt-Wallenstjärna family in Turku cathedral in the late 1920s. He is holding a bone, perhaps one of the medieval relics found in the cathedral during the 1920s restoration.

Photo: National Board of Antiquities of Finland, Helsinki.

However, although Wennervirta was very articulate in his fascination with Estonia and Estonian art, none of the three studies analysed here ascribed a major role to Estonia or Estonian influence. In these studies, due to a certain lack of available research material and comparative literature, the Baltic countries remained an intermediary of German influences.

The situation may be compared with the wider disciplinary and political circumstances. The cultural ties between Finland and Estonia gradually intensified from the 1860s onwards, but the Swedish-speaking cultural elite in Finland saw little relevance in Estonia, since their main orientation was toward Scandinavia. However, academic relations between Estonians and Finns intensified during the inter-war period as the idea of Finnic tribes and their cultural interconnectedness gained acceptance.⁵⁰ Wennervirta's work is one example of this trend, but otherwise art-historical activity between Estonia and Finland remained rather weak.

This scarcity of Finnish–Estonian interaction is in marked contrast with the migration of professors of art history from Sweden to Estonia, following the restructuring of the University of Tartu after 1918, and other connections between Swedish scholars and Estonia, exemplified by Sigurd Curman's activity in Pirita in 1930s. The university reform aimed to create an explicitly Estonian university to replace the previous German-dominated institution and this involved the establishment of several new professorships, for which a number of foreign scholars were invited. Tor Helge Kjellin, a Swede, was professor of art history from 1921 to 1924 (although initially Austrian art historian Josef Strzygowski had been chosen for the professorship; he rejected the position and never acted as a professor in Tartu). Next professor of art history was also a Swede, Sten Karling, who worked in Tartu from 1933 to 1940.⁵¹

Before Karling took up the position, even Wennervirta had given some thought to the possibility of acquiring a professorship in Estonia. In December 1930, lecturer of Finnish language and literature at the University of Tartu, Aino Suits, with Finnish archaeologist Aarne Michaël Tallgren acting as intermediary, inquired whether Wennervirta would be interested in the professorship of art history. In January 1931, Wennervirta visited Tartu to discuss the professorship with the rector. According to the preliminary plan, Wennervirta would begin by giving lectures in German at the university and at the higher art school Pallas. Eventually, as Wennervirta's biographical notes show, he rejected the offer following various discussions that revealed the laborious nature of the new position.⁵²

Apart from Wennervirta, there were no other ambitious young art historians with international research interests available to be approached in Finland. Nonetheless, several scholars did go to Tartu from Finland: professor of geography Johannes Gabriel Granö, professor of Balto-Finnic languages Lauri Kettunen, professor of political

50 T. U. Raun, *Finland and Estonia: Cultural and Political Relations, 1917–1940*. – *Journal of Baltic Studies* 1987, vol. 18 (1), Spring, pp. 7, 10–11.

51 *Tartu ülikooli ajalugu 1632–1982* [The history of the University of Tartu, 1632–1982]. Vol. III, 1918–1982. Eds. K. Siilivask, H. Palamets. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1982, pp. 87–155; T. Rui, *Ulkomaiset tiedemiehet Tarton yliopistossa ja virolaisten opintomatkat ulkomaille 1919–1940* [Foreign scholars at the University of Tartu and the study trips of Estonians abroad, 1919–1940]. Joensuu: Joensuun yliopiston humanistinen tiedekunta, historian laitos, 2001, p. 107.

52 Y. Levanto, *Kirjoitetut kuvat*, pp. 29–30.

economy and economic policy Eino Kuusi, professor of analytical mathematics Kalle Väisälä, professor of physical chemistry Yrjö Kauko, and lecturer in Finnish Hilja Kettunen. Furthermore, Aarne Michaël Tallgren became the first professor of Estonian and Scandinavian archaeology, Arno Rafael Cederberg the professor of Estonian and Scandinavian history, and ethnologist Ilmari Manninen the director of the Estonian National Museum. These men and one woman had in common their relatively young age and dissatisfaction with their academic positions in Finland.⁵³

The absence of Finnish art historians in Estonia was in marked contrast to another discipline related to antiquarian scholarship, i.e. archaeology. Tallgren, professor at the University of Tartu since 1920, organised the teaching and practice of archaeological work throughout the country. Other Finnish archaeologists were also interested in Estonian prehistory as it was closely connected with the search for the prehistoric roots of the Finno-Ugric people. By 1930, Estonia had come to be regarded as a self-evident element in the narrative of 'Finnish migration', the myth of the origins of Finns.⁵⁴ Besides the importance of Estonia for Finnish prehistory, another essential factor in the difference between the two disciplines was probably generational. Wennervirta, Meinander and Rinne were older and already more established in Finland than Tallgren, who was born in 1885 – the same year as Kjellin.

It might be considered purely coincidental that Wennervirta chose not to take the professorship and that no other Finnish art historians were active in Tartu or Estonia. Indeed, local circumstances, academic connections, and the contributions of individual scholars all played a pivotal role in shaping the various medievalisms. Nonetheless, analysis of the three studies by the three antiquarians and comparison of the disciplines of Finnish archaeology and art history shows that Estonia attracted only minor attention from scholars with national leanings – unlike Sweden, where the national and disciplinary circumstances were very different. Moreover, Finnish art historians had adopted the Scandinavian model, but still saw the Baltic countries more or less as intermediaries of German influence. Also, the availability of documentation and published literature affected the conception of Estonian art. The manner in which Estonian medieval material was referred to in Finnish scholarship demonstrates how medievalism held different connotations for the two local traditions.

53 T. U. Raun, *Finland and Estonia*, pp. 5–20; T. Rui, *Ulkomaiset tiedemiehet Tarton yliopistossa...*, pp. 59–60, 86.

54 T. Salminen, *Finland and Estonia in Each Other's Images of Prehistory: Building National Myths*. – *Estonian Journal of Archaeology* 2009, vol. 13 (1), pp. 6–11.