



# **BALTDENDRO 2018**

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## **Mystery of the miraculous painting of the Mother of God at Krekenava Basilica of the Assumption: science confirms the legend**

Rūtilė Pukienė

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Marian devotions are very important among Catholics in Lithuania and there are several highly venerated icons of the Virgin that are believed to be miraculous. One of such images is the miraculous painting of Our Mother with the Child or Our Lady of Snows in Krekenava Basilica of the Assumption (Panevėžys district). The prototype of the painting is the venerated icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary titled *Salus Populi Romani* from the Santa Maria Maggiore Basilica in Rome of the old iconography type Hodegetria.

Two main legends are related to this painting. One states that the icon dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> c. and was brought to Krekenava by the missionary Albert from Krakow. The other refers to the miraculous salvation of the painting from the huge fire, which destroyed the church in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. This also gave the fame of the rescuer from fires to the painting.

Stylistic of the painting contradicts the 15<sup>th</sup> c. dating, and this legend is now used for popularisation only. Earliest existing documents, which mention the painting as an import from Italy, are from the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Nevertheless, there was a controversy among scientists about the origin and dating of the existing painting. Art critics who investigated its stylistic in the 1960' dated it to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. However, other scientists have believed that the salvation of the icon from a fire in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. was a pure legend and the existing painting was much younger.

The painting has been under restoration at the P. Gudynas Restoration Centre in Vilnius for last four years and this makes possible to investigate its panel. Wood identification has revealed the panel is made of Scots pine boards. This quite uncommon panel material has rejected the Italian origin but held forth a hope to apply the dendrochronological analysis.

The analysis has demonstrated that three of the four-panel boards were made from the same tree. The last existing ring was dated to 1611 against local pine chronologies. The fourth board was made from older pine and its last ring was dated to 1593.

P. Gjerdrums' (2003) rule was used to estimate the missing sapwood rings and possible felling dates. The coinciding interval of most possible felling dates of the trees is 1642–1645.

Thus, the scientific investigation has proved the legend of the salvation of the painting from the 18<sup>th</sup> c. fire and unravelled its local origin at the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.