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Images of Saints at Annual Fairs in Vilnius: Ritual Attributes, Souvenirs, Works of Art

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Abstract: The article examines images of saints made by folk artists and presented for sale at Vilnius religious fairs (St. Casimir's Day, Palm Sunday and Christmas). Based on field research conducted in 2012 and between 2019 and 2022 using interviews and participant observation, the study identifies a functional shift where religious images, once primarily devotional objects, are now largely perceived as souvenirs or decorative art. Findings reveal that while angels and the Pensive Christ remain the most popular motifs, their role has transitioned from essential religious attributes to souvenirs and interior decorations. Despite a declining demand for traditional large-scale folk sculptures, small souvenir statuettes maintain a stable market. The article also considers how commercialisation affects the supply and demand of folk art production. The article concludes that to remain relevant, folk artists need to modernise their creative strategies and interpretations to meet the changing expectations of today's buyers.

Keywords: St. Casimir, Palm Sunday, Christmas, markets, fairs, folk art, crafts.

Introduction

Several big fairs take place every year on the streets of Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. Some of them are connected with holidays or religious feasts. Many craftsmen and traders from the countryside and from other towns come to sell their work at these fairs. Among the abundance of goods, there are artefacts of a religious nature, such as images of saints. These images are of various types, from works of art (sculptures, paintings and graphic works) to souvenirs and items for home decoration, and are made of various materials (wood, ceramics, straw and paper).

In this article, I focus on images of saints made by folk artists and presented for sale at fairs during religious holidays: St. Casimir's Day, Palm Sunday and Christmas.

I gathered data on this subject during field research in 2012, and from 2019 to 2022. My first attempt at researching folk art production at the St. Casimir's Day Fair was in 2012, when I collected material on the theme of images of Lithuanian rulers in contemporary folk art. The St. Casimir's Day Fair seemed a very good choice to find images of the Lithuanian Prince Casimir made by many craftsmen in one place. I visited the fair for three days, and interviewed 11 folk artists (woodcarvers). My questions were related to images of Lithuanian rulers from different historical periods, but during our conversations other images were also mentioned, because the craftsmen exhibited many different sculptural themes at this fair. Semi-structured and unstructured interview methods were used to learn the reasons for creating sculptures, the sculptors' iconographic sources and commercial issues (price and demand). I returned to the topic of images of saints at fairs between 2019 and 2022. I carried out research at the St. Casimir's Day Fair in 2020 and 2022, and conducted semi-structured interviews with eight craftsmen. My main informant was a folk artist from the town of Alytus, who participates in the St. Casimir's Day Fair in Vilnius almost every year, and who provided me with various information and expressed his opinions on the organisation of the fair, the influence of mass-produced goods on folk art, consumers' expectations, etc.

I observed images of saints, their supply and demand at the Christmas Fair in 2019 and 2021, at the Palm Sunday markets by the Cathedral and the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in 2021 and 2022, and I spoke to five sellers of Palm Sunday palms in 2022.

As I conducted the interviews at the fairs, not all of the interviewees were able to speak for long, due to the constant stream of visitors who sought the attention of the woodcarver or vendor. Craftsmen selling their own products were more likely to express their opinions and thoughts. Other sellers limited themselves to short answers. I also used participant observation and photographic documentation methods, spending much of my time at the fairs observing, taking photographs, and writing detailed notes each day I visited.

Most of the data was collected at the St. Casimir's Day Fair by interviewing woodcarvers, the makers of the images. Therefore, the material presented in this article mainly reflects their opinions, their relations with buyers, and their attitude towards supply and demand. Due to the ethical responsibilities of the researcher, all the interviewees are anonymised, indicating only the district of their residence.

In this article, my aim is to review the images of saints presented at the Vilnius fairs, and to highlight which images sell best at the fairs and why. I also try to understand how commercialisation affects the supply and demand of folk art production.

This is the first attempt to discuss this topic. It clearly requires a more thorough examination in the future. Lithuanian researchers have not yet directed their attention to the products presented at annual markets and fairs. In Lithuanian his-

toriography we can find just a few popular articles, and one abundantly illustrated book about the St. Casimir's Day Fair, with a short overview of the history of the fair (Klimka 2009). No one has yet focused on the products or the works of folk artists, except for a study by the ethnologist Jonas Mardosa about palms, one of the main items in the Palm Sunday markets and at Easter (Mardosa 2009). However, the supply and demand of folk art production at fairs and the influence of commercialisation were not examined by these authors. Meanwhile, researchers in other countries discuss more broadly the commercialisation process and its impact on traditional arts and crafts (Cohen 1989; Swanson, Timothy 2012; Sørhaug 2021), and the influence of consumerism on the production of crafts (Svašek, Meyer 2016).

An overview of some annual fairs in Vilnius

The biggest fair in Vilnius is held in early March, celebrating St. Casimir's Day (4 March), and is called Casimir's Fair (Lith. *Kaziuko mugė*). The origins of the St. Casimir's Day Fair go back to the 17th century, and are connected with the name of the Lithuanian Prince Casimir. He was famous for his piety, humility, purity and other virtues, died young in 1484, and was buried in Vilnius Cathedral. According to the evidence of contemporaries, some miracles occurred by Casimir's tomb. The process of his beatification started in 1517. In 1602, Prince Casimir was canonised, and in 1636 St. Casimir was acclaimed the first patron saint of Lithuania. From 1604, on the anniversary of his death on 4 March, celebratory processions began to be organised in Vilnius from the Cathedral to one of the town's gates, the Rūdininkai Gate (Klimka 2009: 21). Since the procession continued for almost the whole day, it was accompanied by traders in food, dainties and religious artefacts. The fair flourished in the 19th century, when merchants from afar began to take part, as did peasants selling their goods, mainly food and household utensils (Antanavičius 2017). Due to the growth of the commercial aspect, the character of the St. Casimir's Day event began to move away from the essence of a Church celebration. During the Soviet period the fair was moved two kilometres away from the city centre to the Kalvarijų Street market, with the intention of forgetting it, as it was connected to the religious holiday and had a national character: according to the Soviet authorities, all rulers of the independent state of Lithuania and their kin had to be forgotten, erased from the nation's memory. As the patron saint of Lithuania, St. Casimir particularly represents the independent state and its religion. The fair returned to its original place in Cathedral Square and the Old Town in 1991, after Lithuania regained its independence from the Soviet Union.

Historically, the St. Casimir's Day Fair specialised primarily in wooden artefacts made during the long winter period. Today too, a lot of handmade wooden articles are sold and are very popular, especially wooden kitchen utensils (chopping

boards, spoons, coasters and trays) and wicker baskets. The fair also has many food products, sweets, etc.

A distinguishing feature of today's fair is the large number of folk artists participating who offer handmade products, textiles, earthenware, wood and straw items, as well as paintings, graphics, sculptures, metalwork and jewellery. Today the St. Casimir's Day Fair in Vilnius is the largest gathering of folk artists and craftsmen from all over Lithuania.

Articles written by the ethnographers Balys Buračas and Marijona Čilvinaitė look at the past of the fair and help us compare the main attributes of the fair in the past with attributes of today's fair. They visited the St. Casimir's Day Fair in Vilnius in March 1940, and noted some of the most important products (Buračas 1940; Čilvinaitė 1998). Heart-shaped gingerbread and baked bread rolls (pretzels) were in great demand. The gingerbread was usually decorated with various inscriptions, mainly good luck wishes or words of love. Pretzels came in different sizes and flavours: with poppy seeds, mustard and honey. People seldom returned from the St. Casimir's Day Fair without a string of pretzels around their neck. These products are still plentiful at today's fair. Gingerbread is still decorated with loving inscriptions ("I love you", "With love"), and wishes ("Good health", "Happy Birthday"), as well as dedications to the fair ("St. Casimir's Day Fair. Vilnius 2022") and to family members ("To my son", "To Grandmother", "To Mum", "To my sister", etc). Today gingerbread and pretzels are also very popular and sell well.

Buračas and Čilvinaitė also noticed a large number of souvenir hearts, made from cloth, cut out of wood, and painted with flowers, at the St. Casimir's Day Fair in 1940 (Buračas 1940: 7; Čilvinaitė 1998: 102). I did not find any such souvenir hearts at the fair today. I spotted only one vendor selling framed porcelain hearts decorated with lilies (a symbol of chastity and purity), an attribute of St. Casimir.

According to Buračas, in 1940 the fair was full of palms, especially so-called Vilnius palms (artistic compositions of dried flowers and herbs attached to a hazelwood stick) (Buračas 1940: 7), which are also very abundantly sold at the St. Casimir's Day Fair today. They appeared for the first time in the religious procession on St. Casimir's Day in 1938 (Klimka 2009: 24). Since then, Vilnius palms have become one of the main symbols and souvenirs of the St. Casimir's Day Fair. They are also a symbol of the preparations for the approaching Easter. Although the palms are widely sold at Palm Sunday markets, today they are also one of the best-selling items at the St. Casimir's Day Fair. Buračas and Čilvinaitė also noted artificial flowers (made of wood, paper, straw and fabric) being sold at the fair (Buračas 1940: 7; Čilvinaitė 1998: 103). Wood and straw flowers are also very popular at today's fair, along with ceramic ones, as a reminder of the approaching spring.

The St. Casimir's Day Fair is the first spring fair, as it takes place in the first days of March, so attributes and souvenirs related to spring are presented there too:

souvenir birds and eggs, and miniature nesting boxes. Moreover, in 2022 a bird was also chosen as the symbol of the St. Casimir's Day Fair, symbolising the return to the streets of the city with the fair after the pandemic lockdown. This apparently led to a lot of handmade birds, both large and small, hanging and standing, being produced from wood, clay and textile.



Fig. 1. Sculptures by wood carver Jonas Bugailiškis. The sculpture of an angel is in blue and yellow. St. Casimir's Fair in Vilnius, 2022. Photo: Skaidrė Urbonienė.

The St. Casimir's Day Fair in 2022 differed from previous fairs in one respect. A highlight of that year's fair was support for Ukraine. The war in Ukraine started on 24 February 2022. Very quickly, in just a week, the fair's organisers, manufacturers, folk artists, craftsmen, other producers and traders responded to the invasion. Ukrainian flags appeared everywhere, the decorations of the fair were repainted in Ukraine's national colours, and people began to use blue and yellow in their clothing. Moreover, next to the colours of the Ukrainian flag there was a significant increase in the number of Lithuanian national attributes, both in the decoration of the stalls and in people's clothing and accessories. In just one week, between the start of the war and the beginning of the fair on 4 March, many participants created a large number of souvenirs in the colours of the Ukrainian flag, and decorated their products (statuettes, ceramics, jewellery, toys), and even food products, in blue and yellow (Fig. 1).

The other two fairs take place at the time of the main calendar and religious feasts, Christmas and Easter. They are much smaller than the St. Casimir's Day Fair.

Christmas is one of the most important calendar feasts in Lithuania, providing three days off work, during which people exchange presents with family members, friends and colleagues. Although the tradition of giving Christmas presents be-

gan to catch on in Lithuania only in the early 20th century, today it is an integral part of the Christmas ritual. Ethnologists note that the custom of giving presents came to Lithuania from Germany through Lithuania Minor and from Russia (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2016: 55). The practice of giving presents to children began to spread at the beginning of the 20th century, and after the First World War adults began to exchange presents with each other as well (Kudirka 1993: 215). Giving presents was common by the interwar period (Senvaitytė 2013: 119).

Traditional Christmas markets date back to the early 20th century and took place all over Lithuania. In these markets, food products, small household items (wooden or ceramic cups and mugs, wooden cigarette holders, boxes), winter clothes (fur, knitted scarves, gloves, socks, felt or fur hats), and small clothing accessories (headscarves, ribbons and jewellery) were sold (Klimka 2008: 362–363). People were usually looking to buy food for the festive table (honey, cranberries, poppies, dried mushrooms, etc.) and small gifts (Klimka 2008: 363).

A market has been held in today's Vilnius on Cathedral Square, where people can buy Christmas gifts, since 2013. It bears the name Christmas Town and usually runs from the end of November to the first days of January. The market focuses on small gifts, interior decorations for the festive period, and food delicacies. The Christmas market in Vilnius is a new tradition based on European Christmas fairs.

At the Christmas Town market every year, traders sell products that fall into three main groups: miscellaneous gifts suitable for women, men and children (outfit accessories like leather handbags, wallets and jewellery, small items of clothing for the winter season such as gloves, socks, hats and slippers, cosmetics, and toys for children); interior decorations (wax candles, ceramic candlesticks, Christmas decorations and artificial Christmas trees); and food products (sweets, gingerbread, handmade cakes and bread, apple cheese, spices, herbal teas and honey).

The Christmas market in Vilnius has not yet acquired a more original form, perhaps due to the fact that it does not have a long tradition, and perhaps because producers are not interested in presenting more original products during this massive gift buying period, and limit themselves to the most predictable items to be purchased as gifts. According to research by Rasa Paukštytė-Šaknienė, men usually buy cosmetics, jewellery, clothes, sweets, household items and utensils as Christmas gifts for women. Gifts for men are cosmetics, clothes, slippers, household items, alcoholic beverages, tea and coffee. The most popular gifts for children are toys, as well as clothes, sweets, and jewellery for teenage daughters (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2016: 58–59).

The Easter fairs are the smallest compared with the other two, and take place near churches on Palm Sunday. The main attributes of Palm Sunday fairs were and are palms (traditional juniper branches and decorated Vilnius palms). As the Palm Sunday markets take place a week before Easter, souvenirs related to the oc-

casion (Easter cards) and items of home decoration (bunches of dried plants, table decorations, and candles) are presented, in addition to palms, which are the main attributes. In recent years, items that are suitable for the Easter table and the Easter holiday have also been sold, such as clay bowls and wicker baskets for Easter eggs, ceramic dishes, wooden kitchen utensils, and wooden chutes for the traditional Easter game of rolling eggs. For several years it has been noticeable that items symbolising spring, such as souvenir nesting boxes and birds, wood and ceramic flowers, and fresh tulips and fresh birch sap have also been sold.

Images of saints at fairs and markets: past and present

Historically, images of saints were sold at markets outside churches for parish holidays. Dealers sold pictures of saints, which they acquired from workshops or printing presses, but sculptures of saints were usually sold by the carvers, self-taught sculptors called God carvers or God makers by local people.

According to ethnographic literature, in the early 20th century woodcarvers sold their products at Church fairs in the nearest town. Some travelled further afield to larger towns and more prominent Church holiday fairs. Up to 20 woodcarvers (God makers) would come with their carved sculptures (Buračas 1998: 81). They sold their wares directly from the carts in which they came to the fair, or built stalls and displayed the sculptures. As the ethnographer Buračas pointed out, they used to look like exhibitions of sculptures, which were quite successful as they attracted many curious visitors and buyers (Buračas 1998: 81). In order to increase their sales, the God makers sought recognition as renowned craftsmen. This recognition was based mainly on the opinion of the parish priest (Urbonienė 2017: 101–102). Priests praised realistically carved sculptures and criticised primitive statues, even refusing to consecrate them (Buračas 1939a: 354). Craftsmen who were criticised by the priests were considered less worthy and usually sold their sculptures at a lower price. Craftsmen whose works were favoured by parish priests were considered distinguished and sold their works for a higher price (Urbonienė 2015: 223–224). But villagers also bought cheaper, often unblessed, statuettes. The reason for choosing a cheaper piece was economic: not everyone could afford the more expensive consecrated sculptures. For example, the story of the life of one woodcarver, nicknamed Jūdpauparis, mentions that the priests did not consecrate his work, but people bought them anyway because he sold them cheaply (Buračas 1939b: 3). The low price works, whether approved by a priest or not, were in great demand. One such sculptor, Nikodemas Mockus, who sold his statuettes in large quantities at low prices, was nicknamed "the Father of the Gods" (Buračas 1944: 3).

At larger fairs, where works by other craftsmen were displayed nearby, the God carvers tried to attract buyers by promoting their products in an unusual way. For

example, in order to lure customers, Juozapas Paulauskas emphasised his and his family's piety, and the fact that he had studied woodcarving under a famous craftsman (Petrulis, Žemaitytė 1966: 22). He also liked to point out that he had been commissioned by priests to make sculptures for churches, which meant that his carvings were well regarded by the clergy (Urbonienė 2015: 220). He used to say that several of his sculptures of saints had become famous for working miracles, which impressed villagers in the early 20th century who believed in the magic powers of saints (Urbonienė 2011: 179).

The woodcarvers presented sculptures of saints on a variety of themes at fairs. Each customer could choose a statuette of a certain saint. Lithuanians especially respected the Blessed Virgin Mary (Urbonienė 2002: 109), so craftsmen had many different versions of the her. Crucifixes and images of Jesus, such as the Pensive Christ and Jesus of Nazareth, were also in demand (Urbonienė 2002: 124). It was customary in Lithuania for a domestic monument (a cross or a shrine) to have images of patrons whose names corresponded to the names of family members (Vaižgantas 1903: 79). Therefore, sculptures of patron saints with various names were eagerly purchased. Statuettes of saints with the most popular names prevailed: St. Anthony of Padua, St. John of Nepomuk, St. Joseph, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Casimir, St. Peter, St. Anne, St. Agatha, St. Barbara (Urbonienė 2002: 111–112). People at fairs also looked for images of saints with less common names, so some craftsmen carved figures of saints such as St. Christopher, St. Ignatius, St. Teresa, St. Catherine and St. Elizabeth (Urbonienė 2019: 316–319). In addition, people also happily bought statues of saints who were considered protectors of the family, crops and buildings from various disasters. In the countryside, the patron saints of crops and livestock (St. George, St. Roch and St. Isidore) were very popular, as were guardians against fire (St. Florian and St. Agatha). Therefore, craftsmen always displayed sculptures of these saints at fairs (Petrulis, Žemaitytė 1966: 24).

Thus, in the first half of the 20th century, images of saints were mainly sold at fairs held during Church holidays. It is not known exactly when images of saints began to be sold at the St. Casimir's Day Fair in Vilnius, but they were certainly not for sale at the fair in the mid-20th century. This is evidenced by Buračas' article. When describing the St. Casimir's Day Fair in Vilnius in 1940, he did not mention any images of saints, which he would have noticed as he was very interested in folk art. His attention was attracted only by dolls depicting various farming jobs and rural customs (Buračas 1940: 7). The sale of statuettes of saints at the St. Casimir's Day Fair probably began in the 2000s with the participation of folk artists.

Today, folk artists display their work at the St. Casimir's Day Fair on stalls or stands, creating small exhibitions, just as at traditional Church holiday fairs, as mentioned above. Each craftsman tries to decorate his or her stall in his own way and to select the most beautiful works. This way of displaying products attracts

visitors as they can observe the sculptures or hanging pictures easily. Folk artists' stands at the fair are distinguished by their aesthetic appearance, which makes them easy to notice.



Fig. 2. Sculptures of angels and the Pensive Christ (in the foreground), Jesus Carrying the Cross, Jesus of Nazareth, St. Casimir, Our Lady of Grace. Sculptor Valentas Survila. St. Casimir's Fair in Vilnius, 2022. Photo: Skaidrė Urbonienė.

As mentioned above, woodcarvers sold sculptures of various saints at traditional fairs. Today, the variety of sculptural themes is rather limited. The largest numbers of statues are of angels and the Pensive Christ (Fig. 2). According to the craftsmen themselves, these images are the most sought after, which is why they try to bring enough of them to the St. Casimir's Day Fair. At the 2022 fair, I found only a few sculptures of other themes, such as the Crucified Christ, Jesus Carrying the Cross, Jesus of Nazareth, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Grace, St. Casimir, St. John of Nepomuk, and St. Roch. The situation was very similar at the 2020 fair. In addition to the above-mentioned scenes, there were also sculptures of the Virgin and Child, St. Anthony, and St. Peter. Remarkably, some craftsmen also had statuettes of St. Christopher. One of them, a craftsman from the Marijampolė district, said that he was hoping someone would buy a statue of St. Christopher as a souvenir of Vilnius, as St. Christopher is the patron saint of the city.

Comparing the 2012 fair with the 2022 and 2020 fairs shows that sculpture themes were much more diverse at the former. At the 2012 fair, I noticed the following subjects: the Crucified Christ, the Pensive Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, the Virgin and Child, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Grace, St. Casimir, St. John of Nepomuk, St. Roch, St. Michael the Archangel, St. Joseph, St. Anthony, St. Peter, St. Christopher, St. Cecilia, St. Agatha, St. Barbara, St. Veronica, and angels. At all the fairs, sculptures of the Pensive Christ and angels were the most numerous.



Fig. 3. Sculptures of angels, St. Casimir and the Pensive Christ. Sculptor Rimantas Paunksnis. St. Casimir's Fair in Vilnius in 2012. Photo: Skaidrė Urbonienė.

Although a huge figure of St. Casimir wandered around the fair each year to greet visitors and traders, it was not easy to find an image of St. Casimir among the works by folk artists. At the fair in 2020, I spotted only five folk artists (four sculptors and one graphic artist) who had images of the saint. In 2022 the situation was similar: three woodcarvers had sculptures of St. Casimir, and one folk artist had a graphic work with an image of St. Casimir. However, at the 2012 fair I had seen more of them: seven craftsmen exhibited sculptures of St. Casimir, and each one had at least three on offer. It is noteworthy that some craftsmen place the figures of St. Casimir at the centre of the stall (Fig. 3) for visibility and as a highlight. In this way, they emphasise the Fair's name, and also commemorate St. Casimir's Day.

According to the folk artists themselves, a sharp drop in the number of buyers has been observed in recent years, even before the pandemic. Although the St. Casimir's Day Fair in Vilnius is the main event at which sculptures of saints made by folk artists can be purchased, demand is declining every year. A folk artist from Alytus said that earlier, a decade ago, people would come to the fair looking for statuettes of saints with particular names, such as St. Anthony, St. Roch, St. Rosalia or St. Veronica. He noted that customers who asked for a statuette of a particular saint wanted a family member to have their own patron saint. Due to the demand, the craftsmen brought various works. Gradually, the demand started to dwindle, and in recent years, according to an artist from Alytus, visitors were no longer looking for sculptures of saints: now they are only interested in buying small items. And indeed, as was shown earlier, a comparison of the data from 2012 and

material I collected in 2020 and 2022 shows that the variety of sculpture themes has decreased significantly. In 2012, not only was the variety of themes much greater, but people were more interested and bought more than now. Although most of the artisans I interviewed in 2012 emphasised that the best-selling pieces were small sculptures, which were inexpensive and suitable as gifts or souvenirs, most were satisfied with their sales at that time.

A craftsman from Pasvalys whom I interviewed in 2020 said that he only brings small figures of the Pensive Christ and angels to the St. Casimir's Day Fair in Vilnius because people only buy small statuettes. Another craftsman from the Vilnius district said he had been exhibiting only small statues of Christ, Mary and the angels for several years because he had noticed that people were looking for small and inexpensive statuettes. In his opinion, customers buy them as souvenirs, and sometimes as works of art. According to a folk artist from Kaunas, customers who are interested in sculptures as a religious attribute are very rare, and they order a specific image of a saint directly from the folk artist rather than looking for one at a fair.

I noticed far fewer folk artists at the fair in 2022 than in previous years. For example, in 2020 there were ten folk artists selling images of saints. In 2022, I found eight folk artists selling images of saints. A decade ago, at the 2012 fair, I counted 14 folk artists selling sculptures, with a few more selling pictures such as graphic works and paintings depicting saints, making a total of about 20 craftsmen selling images of saints. Such a gradual decrease in the number of folk artists participating in the fair was observed even in the pre-pandemic period, with the pandemic further thinning the ranks of the Fair's participants. Why is this happening? Obviously, it is not just the effect of the pandemic.

Craftsmen participating in the fair complained that for several years now fewer people had been buying sculptures, and that it was no longer worth coming to Vilnius from more distant places. A woodcarver from the Kaunas district whom I met at the 2020 fair admitted that he does not participate in the fair because he sees no point in it, as people only look at the sculptures as though they were exhibitions and are not interested in buying them.

According to the folk artist from Alytus, fewer woodcarvers now participate in the St. Casimir's Day Fair in Vilnius, because it is no longer profitable. He did not want to go to the St. Casimir's Day Fair in 2022 because his sculptures are quite large and heavy, require a lot of work and are therefore expensive. He attended the fair only because of his wife, who was selling decorated Easter eggs. Not expecting any interest in images of saints, as several years of experience had shown him, he carved bird sculptures for that Fair, as the bird had been announced as the emblem of the 2022 St. Casimir's Day Fair. In addition, birds symbolised the approaching spring, and, in the context of recent years, the end of the pandemic. The craftsman

hoped that he would be able to sell at least the wooden birds. The birds carved by him are very beautifully painted and adorned with carved decoration and therefore attract much attention. In addition, they are a very suitable interior decoration for the Easter period, and a beautiful decorative feature for the home all year round. His expectations were met. On Sunday, the last day of the fair, this folk artist was in a good mood and informed me that he had sold most of the bird sculptures, and even several figures of angels.

After talking with other craftsmen on the last day of the 2022 fair, it turned out that small statuettes (five to 15 centimetres high) were the main purchase, the majority being angels. According to the artisans interviewed, the second-best-selling item was a small sculpture of the Pensive Christ. According to the woodcarvers, these small sculptures are bought as souvenirs, especially when they cost around ten to 15 euros. A few woodcarvers did not manage to sell larger statuettes of angels (30 to 40 centimetres), although the price they asked was low. This suggests that buyers were looking for small sculptures that would take up little space in the home.

Despite the general trend, there were exceptions. A folk artist from the Anykščiai district carves statues of angels that are 30 centimetres high or more. In 2022, the craftsman was selling them for 30 to 80 euros. He sold almost all of his angels in the first two days of the Fair, not only the ones with an average price (30 to 50 euros), but also the more expensive ones (70 to 80 euros). He had also done well at previous fairs. In his opinion, an angel is associated with goodness and spirituality, so it is natural that people want to have an image of an angel in their home, or give them to loved ones. It is said that each of us has our own guardian angel. According to the craftsman, with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine that year, people began to look more intensely for signs of God's protection, so a sculpture of an angel is a very relevant object, both as an interior decoration and as a symbol of that protection. The angels carved by the folk artist from Anykščiai may also have been in demand because their shapes are abstract and stylised and are in subtle natural wood tones. Such sculptures are suitable for various interiors, including those of modern design.

It is hard to find an image of a saint at the Christmas market. Among the miscellaneous small gifts, interior features and decorations for the Christmas period, the majority of figurines at the Christmas Town Fair are angels. They are the same every year, made of wood, clay or straw, and generally mass-produced. Wood and ceramic statuettes, both large and small, are intended for home decoration. Some small wood and ceramic figurines, together with straw angels, serve as decorations for Christmas trees. There are also candles and ceramic candlesticks made in the shape of angels. Small pictures and Christmas cards with images of angels are also on sale.

Angels have become an integral part of the Advent period as Christmas symbols representing immortality, morality, peace and love. They are mentioned in many

Christmas legends (What Is the Significance …). Angel figurines are often used as Christmas tree or interior decorations to create a sense of peace and security in the home. Small angels are also given to loved ones to symbolise the care of a guardian angel.

During the Christmas season, churches were and still are decorated with Nativity scenes portraying the birth of Jesus. Every year a large Nativity scene is also put up in Cathedral Square in Vilnius that attracts many visitors, especially families with children. Since 1998, competitive exhibitions of Nativity scenes made by folk artists have been held annually at the Rokiškis Regional Museum. Craftsmen prepare for the exhibition all year round, and happily participate. Despite this, it was extremely difficult to find a Nativity scene as a home decoration or as a souvenir at Vilnius' Christmas market in 2022. On one of the stalls, next to the amber jewellery, a small wooden souvenir Nativity scene was displayed. On a ceramics stall, among the figurines of angels, a clay Nativity scene consisting of three figures (the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and the Baby Jesus lying in a manger), was barely visible. Meanwhile, in Europe, Nativity scenes are very popular as souvenirs and as home decorations at Christmas, but seemingly the Nativity scene as a souvenir or an item of home decoration has not yet been discovered by Lithuanian craftsmen. Demand for such souvenirs was evident at the international exhibition of Nativity scenes in the Lithuanian Church Heritage Museum at the end of 2021 (Jovaišaitė 2022), during which paper Nativity scenes from Germany were on sale and were in great demand. I would guess that small souvenir Nativity scenes could be among the more original Christmas souvenirs.

Images of angels are the most popular at Palm Sunday markets. For several years now, some craftsmen have incorporated ceramic figures of angels and crucifixes into palms or bunches of dry plants. Easter cards with images of angels have also been on sale for several years. In 2022, at the market by the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, one vendor was selling straw souvenir angels and small crosses made of straw with metal figures of the Crucified Christ, as well as pictures of saints (printed reproductions of paintings by European artists) in straw frames. These were the only images of saints seen at this fair, other than angels.

Concluding remarks

My research shows that the most popular images at Vilnius fairs are images of angels. Their meaning as personal guardians and universal symbols of security and peace is suitable for all calendar and religious feasts, and family occasions and celebrations. Images of angels are purchased as gifts for family members or loved ones, and as souvenirs of the fair, with a wish for peace and love, and as a suitable home decoration for the Christmas and Easter periods.

The second most popular image is the Pensive Christ. At present, a statuette of the Pensive Christ is regarded less as a religious object or an object of faith and has a more secular meaning. In the early 20th century, through the efforts of Lithuanian intellectuals, the image of the worrying and depressed Christ (the Pensive Christ) was associated with the woes of the people, and proclaimed a symbol of the character, destiny and history of the Lithuanian nation (Galaunė 1930: 176; Rūkštelė 1931: 303; Šalkauskis 1989: 17). During the Soviet occupation and among Lithuanian émigrés abroad, and later in the first decades of the newly restored state, the Pensive Christ was considered to be a symbol of the nation's moral and ethnic values, an expression of resistance to russification and the Soviet occupation (Urbonienė 2012: 65; Surdokaitė 2008: 163). This image became very popular, not only in folk art but also in professional art and in literature, a meaning that is alive in society and is probably the main reason to purchase it today.

In the opinions of craftsmen, people generally buy images of saints as souvenirs, works of art, or interior decoration. Their function as a religious attribute was important in the 19th century, and even up until the middle of the 20th century, when images of saints fulfilled people's religious needs. They sought to protect their daily lives and activities with images of the saints; their magic-protective function was also important (Urbonienė 2015: 321). Today the religious function remains significant in only some cases, when an image is purchased as the patron saint of a particular person, or in circumstances of uncertainty or political tension in order to secure the symbolic protection of God.

There is not yet enough data to draw conclusions about the impact of commercialisation on the demand and supply of folk art. The question of how commercialisation affects folk art production awaits future research, bearing in mind that, according to the cultural anthropologist Erik Cohen, commercialisation is neither an isolated nor a uniform process. It is interwoven in a complex way with a broad array of economic, religious, cultural and political factors (Cohen 1989: 161). So far, we can only say that there is a decline in demand for folk art artefacts at fairs. People may admire works of folk art, but only a few people buy them. They settle for inexpensive souvenirs. Demand for small souvenir sculptures remains quite stable and they are bought willingly, especially if they cost about ten to 20 euros.

Folk artists trying to sell images of saints at fairs have to reconsider their strategy, instead of complaining about the reduced demand. They should find new themes, interpretations of traditional religious scenes, and modern shapes and forms, corresponding to the rapidly changing circumstances, new types of customer, and changing demand. Or, to paraphrase the scholar Christian Sørhaug, they have to develop strategies to entice potential buyers at markets in order to get the best possible price (Sørhaug 2021: 373). From a few of the examples given in this article,

it is evident that some craftsmen have already found a way to satisfy demand with their production in new circumstances.

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