

## Carved stone singer and shawm

### A late medieval window pillar fragment depicting musicians from the collection of carved stone at the Tallinn City Museum and other artefacts

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This article considers, from the perspective of research into the history of things, a fragment of a late medieval window pillar with depictions of musicians that was found in Tallinn City Museum's collection of carved stone. The particular carved stone fragment in question was included in the relevant collection of the City Museum during a general review of the collections in 1958; its original location or other provenance is unknown at present (III. 1). The inventory card of the artefact states only that Helmi Üprus, an art historian familiar with Tallinn's carved stone art, was consulted when dating it to the 16th century (TLM 4550 RMT). It is a fragment of the lower third part of what was originally a window pillar. This article was prompted by the mystery surrounding its provenance and the fact that the stone itself depicts musicians. The window pillars were originally part of a rather grand and luxurious room from the late medieval and early modern period and were located in the *dornse* or living room at the rear of a typical *diele/dornse* house, where they supported the wooden or stone lintel of a large window overlooking the courtyard. The window pillar fragment described in this article is a very interesting and impressive example of late medieval Estonian carved stone art, especially owing to its depictions of musicians. Late medieval stone carvings in Estonia are usually more lapidary and geometric: figures, however clumsily depicted, are rarely found. Three images can be seen on the window pillar fragment: a wind instrument player, a singer and a (caged?) bird. They are carved in a naive style. A closer look at the reliefs reveals that the wind instrument could be a shawm and the open-mouthed man in the beret a singer. In order to understand what the pillar might have looked like when it was *in situ*, the author has provided a sketch (III. 8) in which the preserved pillar part is shown as a photo and the remainder added by hand. The sketch has been made as simple, hypothetical and general as possible, as the detailed design of the capital, the exact size of the window, etc. are unknown. The type of watercolour-style sepia drawing used is a technique that makes it possible to give the viewer a general impression, as if it were a slightly blurred image from the memory, while at the same time allowing one to skip over the precise architectural details that remain unknown to us. In actual fact, the upper part of the pillar might have borne, for example, the insignia of the owners of the house or additional carvings similar to those found on the base, which together could have formed a complete set of images, or something else. Considering the context of the images of the musicians, we may suppose that they formed a musical ensemble. Though the stone musical figures do not make a sound, their interplay and harmony is made manifest in the iconography. Thus, the set of images on the pillar fragment could be entitled with the term 'sound'. It is not known what was depicted on the window parts that have perished, on the upper part of the pillar or on the sides of the window.

At first glance the inclusion of this carved stone in the collection of the Tallinn City Museum suggests that it was originally located in the city. However, whereas with some exceptions the carved details of Tallinn patrician houses were almost exclusively made of Lasnamäe limestone or Orgita dolomite, the stone in question here is made of Ungru stone from Läänemaa. Owing to this fact and to some similarity with a window pillar fragment from the Haapsalu Episcopal Castle in Läänemaa, which was built from local limestone, we cannot rule out that the stone with the musicians could have reached the Tallinn City Museum from Haapsalu. Further research is required to establish this with more certainty.

This window pillar with musicians gives us good reason also to examine other rare preserved artefacts depicting musicians from both Tallinn (where the medieval heritage is richest both materially and in terms of archival sources) and elsewhere in Estonia. Besides this window pillar with images of musicians, other artefacts mentioned in this article include a fragment of glass painted with an image of a musician found on Jahu Street in the coastal district of Kalamaja in Tallinn, a wooden flute found in

Tartu, a carved stone with a singer found on Vene Street in Tallinn Old Town, and an image of a jester, possibly singing, from the collection of the Tallinn City Museum.

In addition to such artefacts, places associated with musicians are also of importance. Of these, the *bude* of Tallinn city musicians on the corner of Kinga and Teenri streets (by the Town Hall square) has not survived, but the musicians' balcony in the Tallinn Great Guild Hall has been rediscovered in the search for architecture relating to musicians. The sources for researching the history of things does not need to be limited to the objects themselves but can also include, for example, records of objects in the city residents' lists of assets. In this article, to complement the window pillar, the lists of assets of three musicians are examined: Master Merten Kuntzman (1558, 1569), Jacob the *spelman* (1549) and Jost the *spelman* (1531). In particular, besides the items depicted on the window pillar, other items related to their work – instruments, as well as the jester's hat, which was probably part of the Jacob the *spelman*'s work costume – have been sought out and presented.

All these material and written sources help us to imagine the musicians of that time and the world that surrounded them, in addition to the actual written music that has survived from the Middle Ages.