

Archaeologists experienced an unexpected blessing in the yard of the Dome Cathedral of Riga in autumn, year 2000 – after a century and a half a likely idol's image was found anew – the so-called stone head from Salaspils. The discovery was unique due to two reasons. Firstly, such a strange and simultaneously problematic moulding has not been known either in the rest of the territory of Latvia, or in the nearest neighbouring countries. Secondly, the repeated presentation of a once lost monument of the past is a special event by itself. Systematic archaeological excavations in the yard of the Dome Cathedral or in the so-called Dome garden started in 1986 and continued until year 2000. The need for them was determined by the reconstruction and developments in the yard. As a result of the archaeological excavations the Dome yard is now known as the most comprehensively studied 13th – 18th century graveyard in Latvia. It has provided significant evidence about the history of constructing the Dome and the first educational institution in Riga – the Dome school. The highlight of the last year of excavations was the recovery of the stone head of Salaspils. Disregarding the previously mentioned information the discovery of the sculpture was a surprise that became the top event in the archaeology of Latvia. To tell the truth, the Dome yard has only an indirect connection with the image carved in granite – as a place where it for an unknown reason was buried at the end of the 19th century or beginning of the 20th. The following is what has up to now been known about the strange stone formation. It was for the first time described in the weekly edition “Das Inland” in 1852 where it reported the proceedings of the meeting of the History and Ancient time researchers society of the Baltic provinces of Russia. The inspector of the former Himzels' Museum K. Bornhaupts reports that in winter of 1851 – 1852 together with other boulders a peasant from the area of Salaspils had brought to the stonecutter of Riga P. Hāke a processed granite piece. The stone was cut in the form of a human head with primitive, however, expressive features – eyes, eyebrows, ears, nose, mouth and decoratively bent lines standing for curls. In 1852 the stonecutter presented the image to the museum. There is no information where the acquisition was initially stored because the sculpture could have arrived to the in the Dome ensemble, i.e., in the premises of the newly created museum only in 1891 together with other collections of antiquities. K. Bornhaupts delivered a more informative report to the meeting of the History and Ancient time researcher society in year 1875 by passing the just made stone image photos into the possession of the society. The museum inspector specifies that the sculpture was found in autumn, 1851 in some field at the postal road between Salaspils and Ikšķile. Stonecutter Hāke had bought it for using as a foundation for a grave cross. Having found the traits of processing the reported the interesting find to the town counsellor A. Berkholcs and to previously mentioned K. Bornhaupts. After cleaning the stone image from moss the stone image was carefully drawn and measured. The height of the granite sculpture was 930 mm, width - 855 mm, thickness - 655 mm, however the weight was around 1906 Russian pounds, i.e., approximately 780 kilograms. Of a rather big importance is K. Bornhaupt's note that the surface of the image since its very start had been processed in a form of a rectangle area. The workers at the stonecutter's workshop just slightly increased it and while grinding eliminated “one curl”. After 50 years in the monthly edition on art and ancient times “Latvijas Saule” two of the photos borrowed from the History and Ancient Time Researchers Society were placed showing the front and back of the image. Until year 2000 it was the only confident source for learning the looks of the Salaspils “stone head”. In a short annotation A. Birģele-Paegle presented the information on the discovery conditions of the image and its sizes as well as indicated that the location of the sculpture is not known any

more. Slightly later a note could be read in the chronicle section of "Latvijas Saule": the long-term Dome Museum employee N. Bušs reports that the stone has been buried in the yard of the Dome Cathedral, however, he did not mention when and why it has happened. Since 1970s archaeologist J. Urtāns studied the ancient cult monuments. Although he did not insist on his interpretation of the sculpture, he compared it with the much more primitive idol image found in Mārtiņsala archaeological excavations under the guidance of archaeologist Ē. Mugurēvičs in 1970. Archaeologist A. Caune had once interpreted this stone formation uncovered in the place of the 14th-15th century sacrifices as an evidence of the home spirit cult. It must be added that both of the above-mentioned images currently are the only finds of this kind in the territory of the Daugava Līvi. What are the interpretation possibilities of the Salaspils stone head today after recovering it anew? The previous information shows that two significant facts. Firstly, the granite image was created before 1851 and based on the layers of moss and lichen it had happened considerably earlier. For moss, an especially lichen to cover such a stone surface several ten-year periods would be necessary. Secondly, the creation place of the sculpture can in no way be connected with the stonecutter's workshop. This is suggested by the records of Himsels' Museum inspector K. Bornhaupt. In the excavations it was found out that also the bottom of the sculpture was processed. The bolder had first been split off and then on one side slightly levelled. There are obvious differences in the way the top and bottom of the image were processed. The top surface is more even – this might refer to the stonecutters' interence mentioned by K. Bornhaupt, however, the rest of the surface is made considerably simpler. The initially made grooves had certainly been made with an iron tool, the operational surface of which had been chilled. There is no doubt that such processing required a skilled craftsman. The professional trimming is also suggested by the generally symmetrical face features. However, the dating of the Salaspils stone head remains rather problematic. Although the processing time of limestone is nowadays rather successfully established with the help of ion radiation analysis, it is impossible to establish the dating of granite in such a way. For this reason the likely chronological time limits of the sculpture can be established only approximately – starting from the iron age and up to the beginning of the 19th century. As unclear are the reasons for burying the stone head in the Dome yard. There is no doubt that the image disappeared after 1876 and before 1926 when the publication of its photos appeared as well as the report by N. Bušs. It is possible that the sculpture was buried in the period between 1891 and 1894 when large development works took place in the Dome yard. This possibility is indirectly confirmed by the fact that in the Dome Museum guides published at the beginning of the 20th century the Salaspils stone head is not mentioned. What made the church representatives owning the dome yard take such a strange action? A possible reason could be the intolerance of the Lutheranism against any kind of paganism expressions. As problematic is the functional explanation and authenticity of the image. The approximate information in our disposal about the location of the sculpture and conditions does not allow establishing its connection with any of the archaeological sites of the lower part of the Daugava River. Similarly, there are no direct analogues, although idol images imitating human figure are known in Latvia, Prussia and in the NW regions of the ancient Russia. If the Salaspils stone head has been an object for worshipping deities, it should be ranked among the most outstanding monuments of this kind – such a careful and expressive approach has not been found with any of the idol images in Latvia. Here we certainly should not forget about the possibility of a sham. Among such ones there already are the fake rune stone from the Jeri parish and

“Egyptian” obelisk on the coast of Āsteri Lake. However, archaeological evidences and written sources provide information on the sustainability of the ancient pre-Christianity time beliefs not only in the medieval times, but also later. Namely the documents of the 16th-17th centuries are the ones most often reporting on the fight of the church against idolatry. Obviously, the remains of paganism and syncretic perception of the world among the natives of Latvia facilitated the creation of new idol images also in the medieval and beginning of the modern times therefore the creation of the Salaspils stone head found in the Dome Yard should not attributed to the time before the 13th century by all means. This assumption is confirmed by both the Mārtiņsala find as well as the data provided in written records about the production of idol images in the territory of Latvia in the 16th century and even in the middle of the 18th century. The founding of the image on the field could be explained by the sanctions applied by the Lutheran Church where it might have been found after eliminating another shrine. It must be added that in the processing of the sculpture a considerably high professional skilfulness is evident, however no traces of the historic art and architecture styles can be seen in its expressive form. This makes looking for other, alternative interpretation versions difficult. (A. Celmiņš. Granite Statue in the Dome's Yard. Calendar of Latvian Nature and Monuments 2002 (Granīta tēls Rīgas Doma pagalmā. Latvijas dabas un pieminekļu kalendārs 2002), Zinātne, 2001, pp. 82-86)