HEAVENLY BEINGS

Icons *of the* Christian
Orthodox World

Edited by Sophie Matthiesson & Gordon Morrison

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FOREWORD

Heavenly Beings: Icons of the Christian Orthodox World is an exhibition that highlights the profoundly beautiful and spiritual tradition of icons that is at the heart of Eastern Christianity. Featuring over 100 icons dating from the 14th to 19th centuries, and spanning a vast geographical area, from Crete, Cyprus and mainland Greece to Russia and Ethiopia, it introduces New Zealanders to the vitality and diversity of an ancient devotional art form. Painted for the most part with egg tempera on wooden panels, the icons in *Heavenly Beings* delineate the most sacred subjects of Christianity.

Western Christian imagery grew out of the Byzantine icon tradition, and the echoes of that tradition can be found in the early Spanish, Italian, French and German devotional images that make up the historical European art collection of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. But where the Italian Renaissance took devotional imagery in the direction of sculptural effects, perspective and naturalism, the eastern Byzantine tradition continued as an art that shunned materiality and worldly effects.

Viewed as 'windows into heaven' by the faithful, icons serve as living channels to the divine during the act of prayer, but even the non-religious viewer can recognise the spirituality that animates these richly coloured images. Their austere and simple forms, which direct the mind beyond the physical world, have inspired pioneers of modernism internationally and also in New Zealand, including the painters Rita Angus (1908–70) and Colin McCahon (1919–87).

It is over 40 years since icons of significant age and quality have been exhibited in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Eikon Inspired Art: Orthodox Church Treasures from the Wijenburgh Collection* comprised 100 icons and toured the world in the early 1980s, having a lasting impact on the imaginations of visitors. The present exhibition is the result of a fortunate opportunity to borrow the exceptional collection assembled by Australian senior diplomat John McCarthy AO over three decades of postings abroad. This collection is by far the most significant group of icons to be formed in the southern hemisphere and it was first exhibited

to wide acclaim at the Art Gallery of Ballarat in regional Victoria in 2014, soon after its owner's return to Australia.

We are delighted to present this survey of the icon tradition to Aotearoa audiences, and to use this occasion to draw together other fine examples of icons in private and public collections also in our region.

Aotearoa, like Australia, has a long and vibrant history of Orthodox Christian settlement and integration, beginning in the 1850s, with the first arrivals from the Middle East, followed in the 1880s by gold prospectors and gum diggers from Eastern Europe. Since then, revolutions and wars have propelled communities and individuals to settle in Aotearoa, a pattern that continues to the present day. Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland is the multicultural centre of New Zealand, and it is with great pride that our public gallery is able to present this profound tradition to all visitors, many of whom will be encountering Orthodox icons for the first time. For those who are part of that tradition, it is hoped that they will see something of themselves here.

Exhibitions of historical icons are rare and difficult to coordinate at the best of times. This exhibition and its accompanying publication was planned amid Covid lockdowns and travel restrictions. The strength of the trans-Tasman relationship was demonstrated time and again, as lenders, curators, designers, registrars, conservators and photographers found ways to work around the restrictions to bring this exhibition to fruition.

Thanks above all are due to John McCarthy AO for his generosity in making his collection available to us, and to Gordon Morrison, former director of the Art Gallery of Ballarat and academic editor of the publication, who worked closely with our own senior curator Dr Sophie Matthiesson. We would like sincerely to thank our lenders, Edith Cuffe OAM, director, Michael Strong, curator, and Jan Nargar, registrar, at The Abbey Museum of Art and Archaeology in Queensland; Rhana Devenport ONZM, director, and Tansy Curtin, curator, at the Art Gallery of South Australia; David Ellis, director, and Ann Stephen, senior curator, of the Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney; Cam McCracken, director, and Lucy Hammonds, curator, of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery; Louise Tegart, director, Victoria Garton, registrar, and Ben Cox, exhibitions and graphic designer, of the Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia; David Walsh, director, and Jane Clark, senior research curator, of the Museum of Old and New Art (Mona) in Tasmania; Stuart Coppock; Elizabeth Cross; Horia Pitulea and Rosemary Simpson.

We would also like to thank Carrillo Gantner AC, David Lloyd Jones, Allan Myers AC, and Sir Richard Temple for their support in securing loans; Martin Bould, Kathryn Ferguson and Helen Gill for assistance in conservation; Brenton McGeachie and Jon Rendell for assistance with photography; Robin Cormack, Jo Elford and Hugo and Simon Morsink for help with research enquiries and David Mahon for sponsorship of a keynote speaker.

Many departments and individuals within Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki team have contributed to this exhibition and publication and it has been our great privilege to act as kaitiaki (guardians) of these precious taonga.

Finally, this publication itself, which has been coordinated by Sophie Matthiesson and Gordon Morrison, is the result of a remarkable international collaboration, for which thanks to many eminent individuals are due. We would particularly like to acknowledge Angeliki Lymberopoulou of The Open University UK for her support of this project from its outset and Australian Byzantine scholar Ken Parry of Macquarie University. The willingness of specialist scholars to contribute their expertise to an exhibition project on the other side of the world is warmly appreciated, and this catalogue is immeasurably richer for the

contributions of Michele Bacci, University of Fribourg, Switzerland; Annemarie Weyl Carr, Southern Methodist University, Dallas; Maria Evangelatou, University of California Santa Cruz; Aidan Hart; Mat Immerzeel, University of Leiden; Verena Krebs, Ruhr University Bochum; Matthew Martin, University of Melbourne; Marina Pasichnik, University of Auckland, and Liv Deborah Walberg, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. For assistance with translations we thank Denis Nosnitsin, Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies, University of Hamburg and Anastasia Bakogianni, Massey University. For their work on bringing this new research together here, we would like to acknowledge the dedication and expertise of Imogen Greenfield, freelance graphic designer; Clare McIntosh, managing editor of publications, and Mary Trewby, freelance editor.

Kirsten Lacy
Director
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

PREFACE

Ken Parry

In the eighth century John of Damascus (c675–749) wrote: 'We use our senses to produce an image of the incarnate God himself, and we sanctify sight as the first of the senses, just as through words hearing is sanctified.'[1] This sums up the Eastern Orthodox attitude towards icons, which has remained its position through to the present. The two periods of iconoclasm (726–87 and 815–43) in Byzantium, when the use of imagery in worship was fiercely rejected, produced remarkable theological responses from John of Damascus and Theodore the Stoudite (759–826). Both saw what was at stake for the Christian understanding of matter and creation, and although their theology of icons may not be known generally, it underpins the current practice of venerating them.

It was the physical act of venerating material images that the iconoclasts found idolatrous and which they believed threatened the truly spiritual nature of Christianity. However, John and Theodore pointed out that Christianity was about a person who sanctified the world through his incarnation and thus made matter holy. To deny Christ's representation in a material icon amounted to denying his incarnation and its role in salvation. Paying reverence to his icon, to that of his mother who bore him, and to those of the saints who followed him, was the least Christians could do. Icons were no less essential than the gospels that spoke about him.
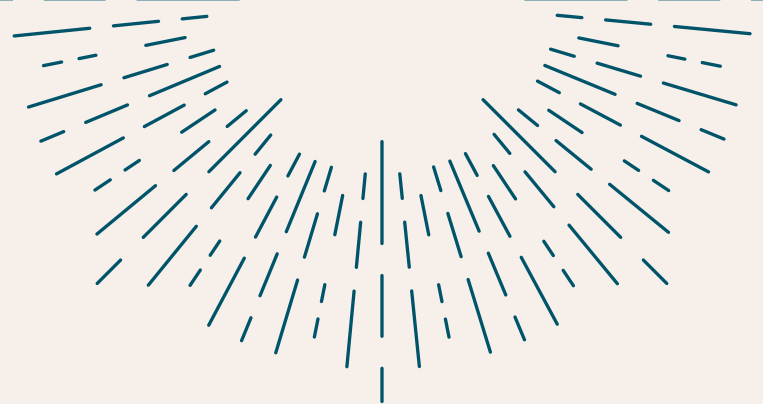
It is with these thoughts in mind that we can approach this exhibition *Heavenly Beings: Icons of the Christian Orthodox World*. Today icons from the Byzantine period (before the capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453) are found mostly in museum collections and ancient churches. However, many icons survive from the post-Byzantine period and are no less worthy of our attention. It is rare to find exhibitions of icons in public galleries in Australasia and this is only the second such exhibition in New Zealand. It is built around the McCarthy collection, with additional icons from private collectors and public institutions. By curating this exhibition of mainly Russian and Cretan icons, the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki offers a wonderful opportunity for visitors to further their knowledge of a tradition of sacred art that is still largely unfamiliar.

Whether you visit this exhibition intentionally or accidentally, you will be intrigued by what you see, and you will no doubt want to learn more about the background to icon painting. This catalogue of the exhibition allows you to start on a journey of discovery that will lead you into a world of stillness, needed no less today than when the icons were painted. Icons have an ability to make us do more than look: they also make us listen and reflect. It is not necessary to be a practising believer to benefit from them – each of us can find something that draws us into their world. No matter what catches our eye, whether it be the colours or the tranquility of the faces, we find ourselves on the threshold of a different life, a life that we are invited to be part of should we so wish.

The tradition of painting icons continues today in many parts of the world, as does the historical scholarship associated with them. Wherever Eastern Orthodoxy has put down roots, such as Japan, New Zealand and Australia, iconographers incorporate features and designs from their local cultures. Few icon painters signed their works because they preferred to remain anonymous within their communities, but we know the names of Andrei Rublev (c1365–c1428) from Russia and Andreas Ritzos (1421–92) from Crete, whose works stand alongside those of the old masters of western art. Several modern artists have been inspired by icons, including Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954). Painting an icon may begin from an act of piety but that does not prevent it from being considered a work of art. In the icon of the Mother of God, *Wider than the Heavens* (also known as Mother of God of the Sign), her embrace encompasses everyone, no matter where they are from.

Dr Ken Parry is honorary senior research fellow, Department of History and Archaeology, Macquarie University, Sydney

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1   *St John of Damascus; Three Treatises On the Divine Images*, translated by Andrew Louth, SVS Press, New York, 2002, p 31.

MAPS

Left Map

Rome

ITALY

Thessaloniki
Mount Athos

Corfu

GREECE

SICILY

Athens

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

AEGEAN SEA

Istanbul/Constantinople

BLACK SEA

TURKEY (Asia Minor)

SYRIA

Candia/Iraklion

CRETE

CYPRUS

LEBANON
Beirut
Damascus

IRAQ

Jaffa/Tel Aviv
ISRAEL   Jerusalem

JORDAN

Alexandria

Cairo

EGYPT

SAUDI ARABIA

Mecca

RED SEA

ERITREA
(previously part of Ethiopia)

YEMEN

SUDAN

Gondar

ETHIOPIA

Addis Ababa

SOMALIA

Right Map

NORWAY

BARENTS SEA

SWEDEN

WHITE SEA

Gulf of Bothnia

FINLAND

Solovetsky Monastery

BALTIC SEA

Tikhvin

St Petersburg

ESTONIA

Novgorod

RUSSIA (West)

Pskov

LATVIA

Suzdal
Vladimir

LITHUANIA

Moscow

Smolensk

POLAND

BELARUS

KAZAKHSTAN

Kyiv

Dnieper River

SVK.

UKRAINE

HUN

MOLDOVA
Odesa

SEA of AZOV

ROMANIA

Crimea
Sevastopol

CASPIAN SEA

SERBIA

BULGARIA

BLACK SEA

GEORGIA

ALB

Istanbul / Constantinople

TURKEY

TURKMENISTAN

TIMELINE

Sophie Matthiesson & Gordon Morrison

CE	c30–33	Death of Christ.
	45–80	Apostles Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude write their epistles.
		Matthew, Mark and Luke write their gospels.
	52	According to legend, Apostle Thomas takes Christianity to Kerala, India.
	60–68	Martyrdom of saints Peter and Paul under the Roman emperor Nero (reign 54–68).
	100s	First Christian imagery, in the form of motifs adapted from non-Christian art, and illustrations of saints and biblical subjects, emerges in burial chambers and private settings.
	301	Armenia becomes first country to adopt Christianity.
	300–05	The Roman emperor Diocletian (reign 284–305) embarks on campaign to eradicate Christianity and has thousands killed, including Saint George.
	313	Emperor Constantine (reign 306–37) legalises the Christian Church and ends persecutions.
	321	Constantine declares Sunday a holiday in honour of the Resurrection.
	324	Constantine moves the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium, on the Bosphoros, which he renames Nova Roma (New Rome), and then Constantinople in 330.

325	Convoked by Constantine, the Council of Nicaea condemns the Arian theological view that 'the Son is lesser than the Father'.
326	Empress Helena, mother of Constantine, makes pilgrimage to the Holy Land and 'discovers' the Cross of Jesus in Jerusalem.
342	Ethiopia becomes second country officially to adopt Christianity as state religion.
358	Basil the Great (c329–79) founds first monastery in Cappadocia, in present-day Turkey, and establishes rules for monastic life.
380	Emperor Theodosius I (reign 379–95) makes Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire.
381	Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, supported by Emperor Theodosius I, asserts the equal status of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit — the Holy and Undivided Trinity.
	Second Ecumenical Council ordains four jurisdictions for the Church, under patriarchal bishops: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch (joined in the fifth century by that of Jerusalem).
395	The Roman empire is split into a western (Roman) part and an eastern (Greek) part.
405	Saint Jerome translates the Bible from Greek into Latin; his version becomes known as the Vulgate (Latin: 'common version').
431	Third Ecumenical Council, or the Council of Ephesus, establishes Mary as the God-bearer or Theotokos, rejecting the teachings of the Constantinople archbishop Nestorius that she was simply the mother of Christ.
451	Fourth Ecumenical Council, known as the Council of Chalcedon, establishes that Jesus is both god and man, not a combination of the two natures, rejecting a 'miaphysite' position that Christ is divine and human 'unified in one person'. The majority of bishops in Egypt, Syria and Ethiopia break with Constantinople on this point, becoming the Oriental Orthodox Church. The Ethiopian Church is called Tewahedo, a Ge'ez word meaning 'being made one', or 'unified'.
5th–6th centuries	Earliest surviving icon panels are produced, using the encaustic technique borrowed from Egyptian funerary portraiture. The main examples are held in Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai.
532–37	Construction of the church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom)

	in Constantinople during the reign of Christian emperor Justinian I (reign 527–65).
565	On the order of Justinian I, Saint Catherine's Monastery is established on the Sinai peninsula, Egypt, enclosing the chapel built by the empress Helena (mother of Constantine) on the site where Moses was believed to have seen the burning bush.
692	A church council meeting in Constantinople rules that it is lawful to represent Christ as a man rather than symbolising him in the form of a lamb.
c695	First depiction of Christ on the gold coins of the Byzantine empire under Justinian II (reigns 685–95, 705–11).
726–87	First wave of iconoclasm ('breaking of icons'), a movement rejecting the tradition of carved, engraved or painted icons ('graven images') over concerns about idolatry.
754	At a church council in Constantinople, the iconoclast emperor Constantine V (reign 741–75) rejects the use of images of Christ and the saints.
787	Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea overturns the decision of Constantine V. It re-establishes the making and veneration of icons as showing an incarnate Christ made visible, but it forbids their worship. The Council upholds the ban against statues but acknowledges the authority of miraculous icons of Christ and his mother 'made without hands'.
813–43	Second wave of iconoclasm under Leo V (reign 813–20), Michael II (820–29) and Theophilus (829–42).
843	Following the death of her iconoclast husband Theophilus, Empress Theodora rejects iconoclasm. This event, known as the Triumph of Orthodoxy, is commemorated each year with a holy day on the first Sunday of Lent.
864	Tzar Boris I of Bulgaria (reign 852–89) converts to Christianity. Saints Cyril and Methodius bring Christianity to the Slavs.
988	Kyivan Rus' (encompassing much of present-day Russia, Belarus and Ukraine) converts to Christianity following its adoption by Grand Prince Vladimir of Kyiv (reign 980–1015).
1054	Patriarch Michael Cerularius (term 1043–59) and Cardinal Humbert, representing the See of Rome, excommunicate each other over minor points of doctrine. This is now taken to mark the permanent split of the two churches into the modern-day Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches.

	Monastery of Mount Athos, known as 'The Holy Mountain', is established as an Orthodox spiritual centre in northeastern Greece.
1204	The Fourth Crusade, led by the Venetians, is diverted to Constantinople, which is sacked and occupied. A 'Latin' empire is set up in its place, subject to the Roman Catholic Church. Looted relics, including miracle-working icons, are transferred to western cities, especially Venice. Venice takes control of Crete from the Byzantines, who retreat to Nicaea and Trebizond, both in present-day northern Turkey.
1261	The Byzantines of Nicaea under Michael VIII Palaiologos (reign 1261–82) reconquer Constantinople from the Latins, establishing the Palaiologan dynasty that rules until 1453.
	The arts thrive in the restored Orthodox capital of Constantinople, leading to a cultural flowering known as the 'Palaiologan Renaissance'.
1448	Balkans come under Ottoman rule.
1453	The Turks conquer Constantinople, ending the Byzantine empire and establishing their own Ottoman empire. Many artists flee to Venetian-occupied Crete.
	Muscovite Russia and the Principality of Georgia become the only independent Orthodox realms. In the new power vacuum Russia positions itself as the 'Third Rome' assuming the spiritual authority of Christianised Rome and Constantinople. Strengthened links between the Russian monarch and church glorify Russia as an Orthodox Christian power.
1459	Serbia comes under Ottoman rule.
1463	Bosnia comes under Ottoman rule.
1478	Albania comes under Ottoman rule.
1530–53	Muslim armies from Adal (present-day Somalia) led by Ahmad Grāñ (reign c1527–43) and aided by Ottomans conquer much of Ethiopia but are repelled by 1543 with help from Portuguese.
1551	Stoglav Synod, convoked in Moscow, gives precedence to Russian rituals over those of the rest of the Orthodox Church and forces icon painters to follow the austere, but harmonious, compositions of Andrei Rublev (c1365–c1428) and earlier Byzantine painters. Deviation is punishable by the tsar.
1571	Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in the Ottoman-Venetian War.
1589	The Patriarch of Constantinople grants the Metropolitan of Moscow the rank of patriarch.
1653	Russian patriarch Nikon (term 1652–66) tries to bring doctrines and rituals of Russian Orthodoxy into alignment with Greek Orthodoxy. Nikon's reforms trigger a schism between Nikon's New Believers and Old Believers, who fear that the essence of Orthodoxy is under attack. Waves of persecution and exile of Old Believers follow.
1667	Ottoman conquest of Crete.

THE LEGACY OF BYZANTIUM

Part I: Orthodoxy – A Shared Heritage

Sophie Matthiesson

The icons in this exhibition date from the years *after* the fall of the first Christian empire, the Byzantine empire, in 1453, but they carry within them the rich and complex legacy of the religion that was nurtured within that vast and powerful realm.

Christianity had spread quickly from its birthplace in Syria, transmitted by apostles – disciples who had personally known Jesus – who travelled widely throughout the Roman empire into the Parthian (later Persian) empire, Ethiopia and India. The languages in which it was communicated were Greek, the common tongue of the Eastern Roman empire and coastal Syria, and, to a lesser extent, Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, which was spoken in Persian regions.

Byzantium, the shortened term for the Byzantine empire, refers to the Christian empire established by Constantine the Great (reign 306–37) and governed from a city on the Bosphorus, the narrow sea strait separating Asia and Europe, named Byzantium which the emperor rebuilt from 324 and renamed Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), although it was initially known as New Rome.

Prior to the establishment of Constantinople, the main centres of Christianity were Alexandria, Antioch and Rome. These cities, along with Constantinople, were the seats of leading bishops, who in time gained the honorific of 'patriarch', with their respective sees known as 'patriarchates'. Jerusalem also acquired this status in 451 because of its centrality to the gospel narrative.

The Western Roman empire fell in 476, but the Eastern Roman empire, centred on the city of Constantinople, survived and thrived. By the fifth and sixth centuries, doctrinal differences among the patriarchates over the nature of Christ's divinity led to the 'eastern' branches diverging from Constantinople and Rome.

When the Third Ecumenical Council of 431, held in Ephesus, decreed that Mary was the 'god-bearer', the Nestorian churches, the present-day Assyrian Church, split from the main body. Another major schism occurred at the next ecumenical gathering, the Council

of Chalcedon, in 451. There the doctrine that Christ is both God and human with two separate natures was established, and those disagreeing left. The churches in the Antioch and Alexandria patriarchates effectively split, after which there were rival patriarchs in those cities. In Egypt a minority accepted the doctrine and are known as the Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria; the majority, the Coptic Orthodox Church, disputed the ruling, along with the Ethiopians, known as Tewahedo (Ge'ez: united). In the Antioch patriarchate, smaller groups split to form the Syriac and Armenian churches. The resulting Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian and Syriac Orthodox churches are collectively known as the Oriental Orthodox Church and their beliefs as miaphysite, to denote Christ's united nature – 'two natures united into one'.

The remaining Chalcedonian Orthodox patriarchates, centred on Rome and Constantinople – and known as the Latin and Greek churches after the languages they used – continued to co-operate as a single faith until 1054, when Rome split decisively from the other four, following disputes over jurisdiction and theology, in an event known as the Great Schism. The splitting away of the Roman church (which was already separate by virtue of its use of Latin) did not stem the vitality of the remaining patriarchates that comprised the Eastern Orthodox Church. One of their defining and unifying features was their privileging of the icon as a focus of prayer and veneration.

Orthodox missionary and diplomatic activity continued to be successful. In the sixth century Coptic missions had converted Nubia (in present-day Sudan) to Christianity. In the ninth century Constantinople missionaries such as Cyril (826–69) and Methodius (815–85) wooed the southern Slavs (Bulgarians and Serbs) and eastern Slavs (Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians), leading to the conversion of entire nations to Byzantine Christianity, including Russia (Rus') in the 10th century.

The divide between the Roman (Latin) papacy and the Eastern (Greek) Church, meanwhile, only grew. In 800 the Latin Church had created a loose confederation of German and Italian territories and crowned Charlemagne as the first Holy Roman emperor (reign 800–14). Within decades of the Great Schism, it began participating in crusades to the Holy Land, initially (in 1095) with the pretext of strengthening Byzantine power, but which culminated in the occupation of the Holy Land and the sack and pillage of Constantinople in 1204.[1] The Latin rule of Constantinople ended 57 years later in 1261, when it was finally recaptured by the Nicaean emperor, Michael VIII Palaiologos (Byzantine reign 1261–82), who reinstated a much-weakened Byzantine empire. Despite the empire's continued economic decline, the culture of Byzantium flourished during the nearly two centuries of dynastic Palaiologan rule. An artistic and intellectual recovery, known as the Palaiologan Renaissance, produced artist-monks whose classical learning infused icons with a new quality of emotional drama and a novel attention to nature and architectural space, developments that preceded and determined artistic developments of the Italian Renaissance

In 1453 the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks caused Byzantine elites to scatter. Many aristocrats and scholars fled to Italy, where they were warmly received in Venice. Artists moved to Venetian-held Crete, where workshops of Byzantine artists were already established. Others sought refuge in Russia or Christian kingdoms in the Balkans, such as Serbia and Bulgaria. Some remained in Constantinople and adapted to life under Ottoman rule.

Throughout the Orthodox world, the same essential images of Christ and the Virgin Mary were reproduced, derived from key prototypes that are believed to have been made miraculously – and thus have ongoing miracle-working properties. These prototypes were interpreted across the vast post-Byzantine world with local inflections and styles developing over time: this accounts for the significant variations apparent in this exhibition.

Heavenly Beings charts the continuity and the vitality of the icon tradition wherever Orthodox Christianity took root after the events of 1453. The icons shown form a survey of the earliest and finest examples available for loan in New Zealand and Australia. With a single exception – a Cypriot icon dating to the 14th century – all are 'post-Byzantine', in the sense that they postdate the fall of Constantinople. The emphasis of Australasian collections at the time of writing leans toward the icon-making traditions of Russia, Crete and mainland Greece. But a small number of Ethiopian, Egyptian, Syrian, Balkan and Palestinian icons are also included in the exhibition. They are vivid reminders of the many other vital icon traditions that flourished across the far-flung but inter-connected Orthodox world and that have their own distinctive local histories and meanings. All reflect their belonging to a tradition that incorporates the veneration of sacred images and that reaches back as far as the third century CE. What follows is an introduction to that shared tradition.

Part II: History & Symbol
Angeliki Lymberopoulou

The term icon is derived from the Greek εικών (image). Broadly speaking, 'icon' refers to any representation of a sacred person in any medium – wooden panel, manuscript illumination, fresco, mosaic, sculpture, etc – and of any size – monumental as well as portable. In a narrower sense, it usually indicates a painted wooden devotional panel of variable dimensions. Icons in their broadest definition form the core of Byzantine artistic production; in their narrowest sense, icons dominated the post-Byzantine period, when they were by far the most produced artistic and religious item.

Certain early icons were believed to have been created 'not by human hands', but by divine agency. Some were created through physical contact with a holy person, as in the case of the Towel of Edessa, otherwise known as the Mandylion, which Christ pressed to his face. Others were created by a holy person such as Saint Luke, who was believed to have painted a portrait 'from life' of the holy Virgin and Child, known as the Hodegetria. These special icons, called *acheiropoietoi* icons (Greek: not made by human hands), were often attributed thaumaturgic (wonder-working) powers of healing and protection conferred by the sacred figures they represented.

Acceptance of icons within the Byzantine (ie, Greek) Orthodox Church and ritual practice was not straightforward. Early Christianity had an inbuilt resistance to images, partly because the Old Testament takes a clear stand against any form of representation of the divine, in Exodus,[2] in Leviticus[3] and in Deuteronomy.[4] A number of early Christians, church fathers as well as lay people, opposed the representation of Christ and of any other
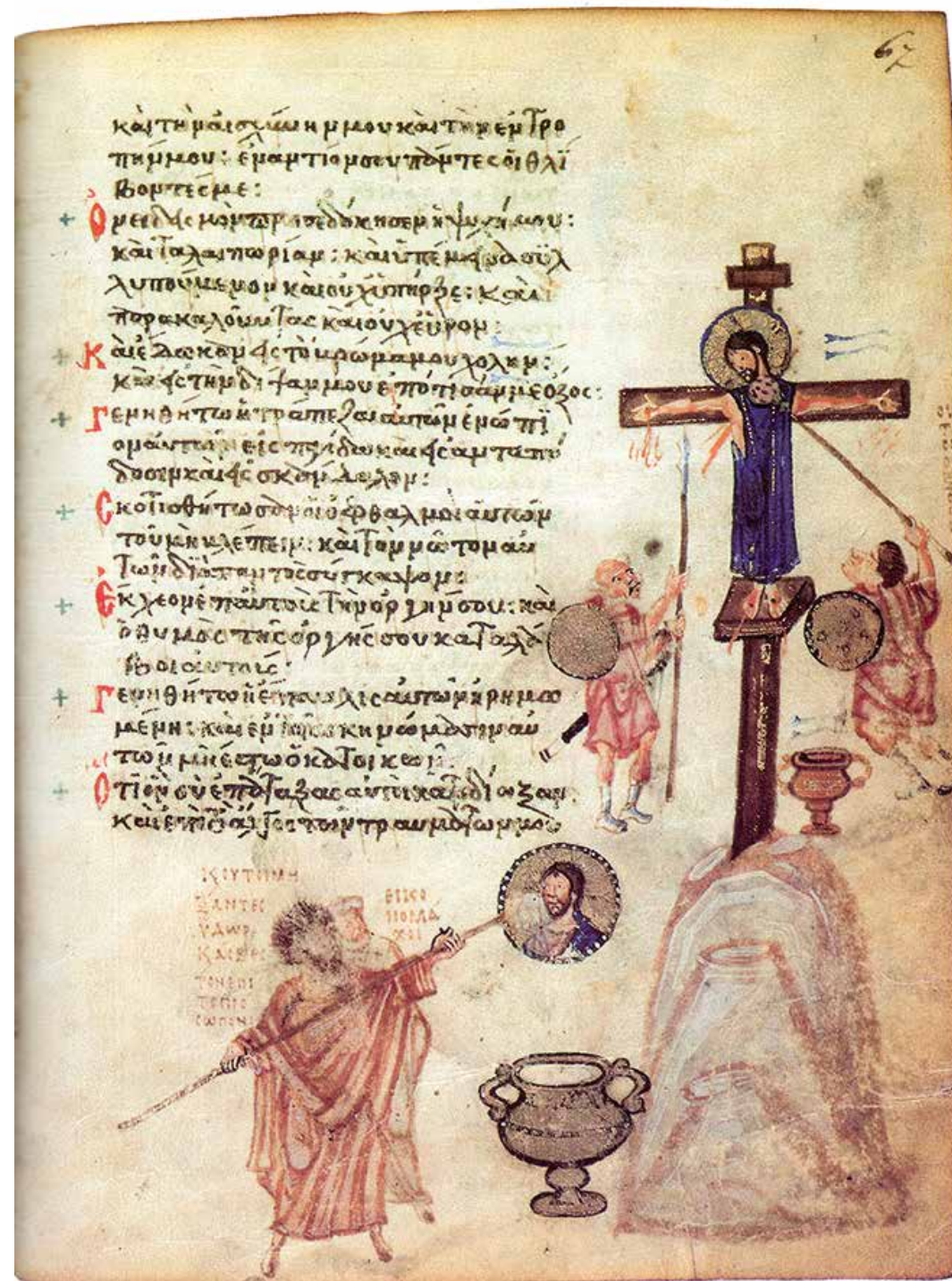
Fig 1. This imaginary scene from a book of psalms shows the iconoclastic Patriarch of Constantinople, John the Grammarian (837–843), whitewashing out an image of Christ. *Chludov Psalter*, Moscow State Historical Museum MS. D.129, folio 67r, c. 850–875, 195 x 15 mm.

holy person and event, while others defended it. This dispute marked and divided the early Christian world, escalating into the serious controversy in the eighth century, known in Greek as *eikonomachia* (struggle against icons) and more widely as iconoclasm (from the Greek *eikonoklasmos*, image-breaking) (fig 1). There were two phases of this controversy, between 726 and 787 and from 815 to 843. Icons emerged triumphant from this hard test. The Byzantine Church took every precaution to avoid encouraging idolatrous worship of icons.

Early theologians established that the icon serves as a channel of divine grace, one of the main arguments that iconophiles used in defence of icons. When Orthodox Christians venerate icons, they venerate the person depicted because, according to Saint Basil, 'the honour given to the icon passes to the prototype'.[5] The icon is the 'visual aid' to worship, not the object of worship. Because it represents a true prototype, an icon partakes in the holy nature of the sacred person and/or event depicted. Standing in front of an icon of Christ or
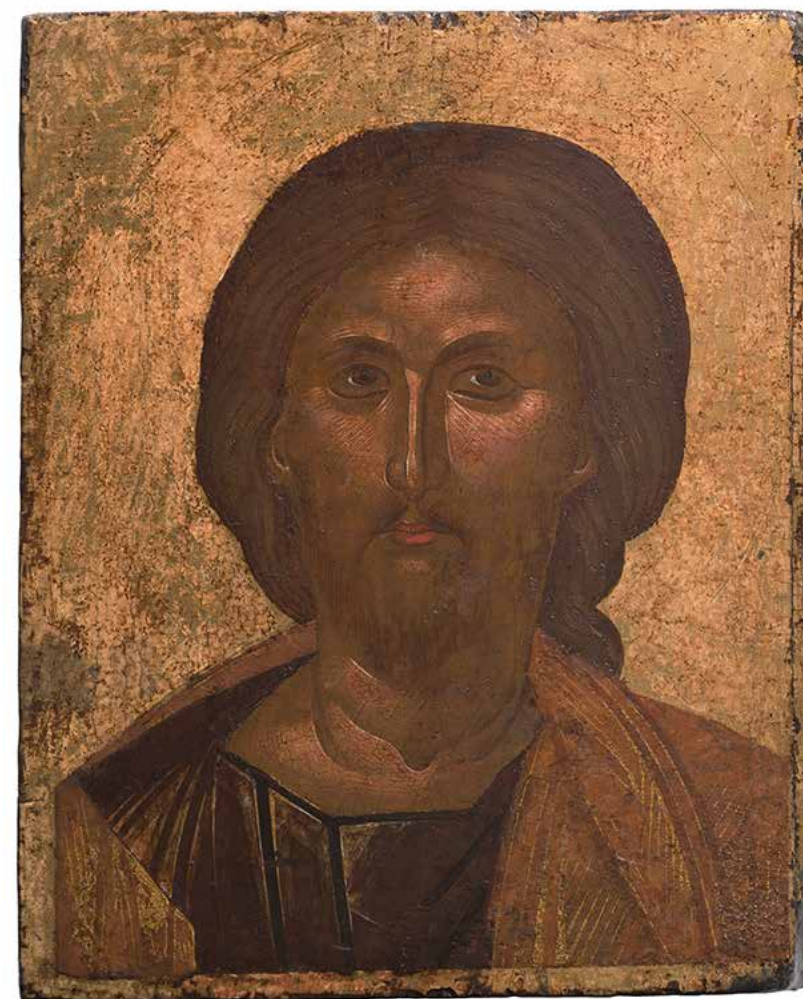

Fig 2. *The Saviour*, Crete, c1600, egg tempera and gold leaf and gesso on wood, 240 x 196 mm, private collection, Canberra.

Fig 3. The origin of this seventh century portrait of Christ, minted by the emperor Justinian II (reign 685–695) is obscure. It shows Christ on the reverse as the full-bearded Pantocrator (Almighty) in a form that changed little over subsequent centuries. *Solidus of Justinian II*, Constantinople, 692–695, gold, 4.46g, 19 mm (diam), Dumbarton Oaks, BZC.1948.17.2348.
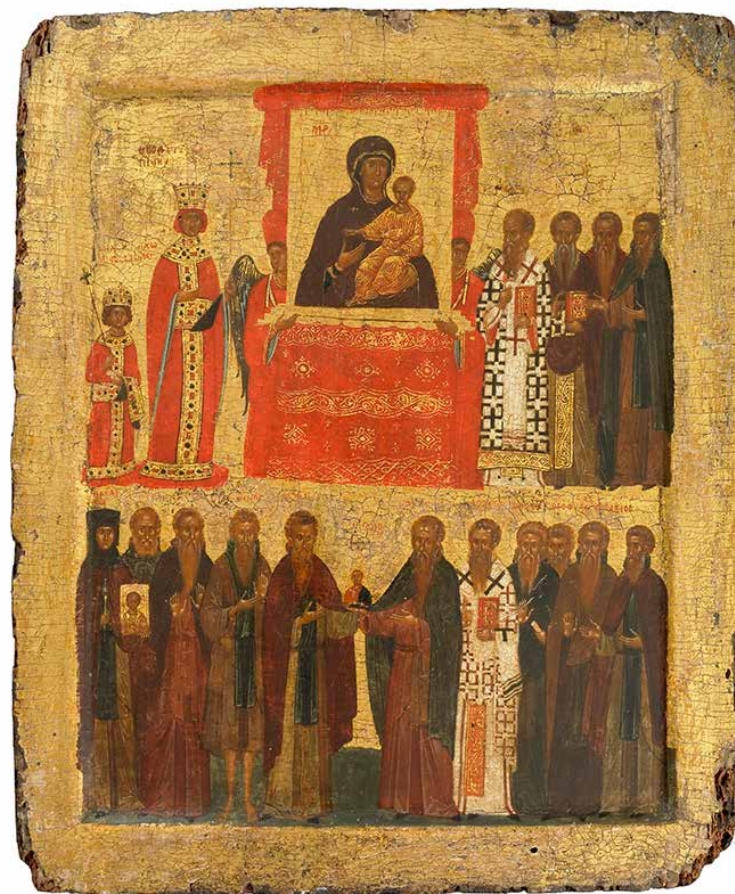

Fig 4. *The Triumph of Orthodoxy*, Constantinople, c1400, egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood, 378 x 314 x 53 mm © Trustees of the British Museum 1988,0411.1.

of the Virgin or of any other saint is equal to a face-to-face encounter with the sacred person. Furthermore, venerating the icon of Christ in particular is crucial because 'if anyone does not venerate the icon of Christ', as the church council of 879/80 declared, 'they will not see His form in the Second Coming'.[6] In other words, icons can be used as proof of identity for the sacred person depicted (figs 2 and 3).

Over the centuries the Byzantine artists reproduced faithfully and meticulously the specific identifying features of the sacred persons, so there would be no doubt regarding identity. This is one of the reasons Byzantine art has been criticised as repetitive and stagnant, an accusation that could not be further from the truth. Icons function as a door through which the faithful enter a *truly* sacred space and time and encounter the divine.

The official end of iconoclasm in 843, which gave the veneration of icons the seal of approval, is commemorated by the Orthodox Church with the feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, held annually on the first Sunday in Lent (fig 4). Those who defended the veneration of icons during its ban, either with their writings or with their lives, were sanctified. Furthermore, icon painting was (and is still) considered a highly spiritual undertaking, requiring contemplation and concentration, in accordance with hagiographic texts which often portray painters as 'inspired' and aided by divine guidance.

Part III: Construction & Use

Sophie Matthiesson

Construction

For an icon of a religious figure to be effective as a conduit to a higher power it requires first and foremost to be identifiable. Because lack of recognisability dilutes its power, it is paramount for the iconographer to adhere to established and authorised formulae for its depiction. The responsibilities of creating an icon in the correct manner were, and continue to be, significant. The icon painter, who until recent times was always male and often a priest or deacon, would first seek a blessing, and fast and pray. He would clean his environment and himself in a purification process. If he were part of a religious community such as a monastic order, he might also receive assistance through group prayer and chant.[7]

Panels

The icon-maker began by preparing a wooden panel, selecting a piece of seasoned wood. In the Russian context linden or pine was often chosen, but fir, larch, cedar and oak were also used. In Greece cypress was a common support. In Ethiopia, where icons have been made since the 13th century, olive and wanza (a type of cedar) were favoured timbers and were worked while the wood was still green.[8] In the large commercial centres of Greek icon production, such as Candia in Venetian-held Crete during the 15th and 16th centuries,
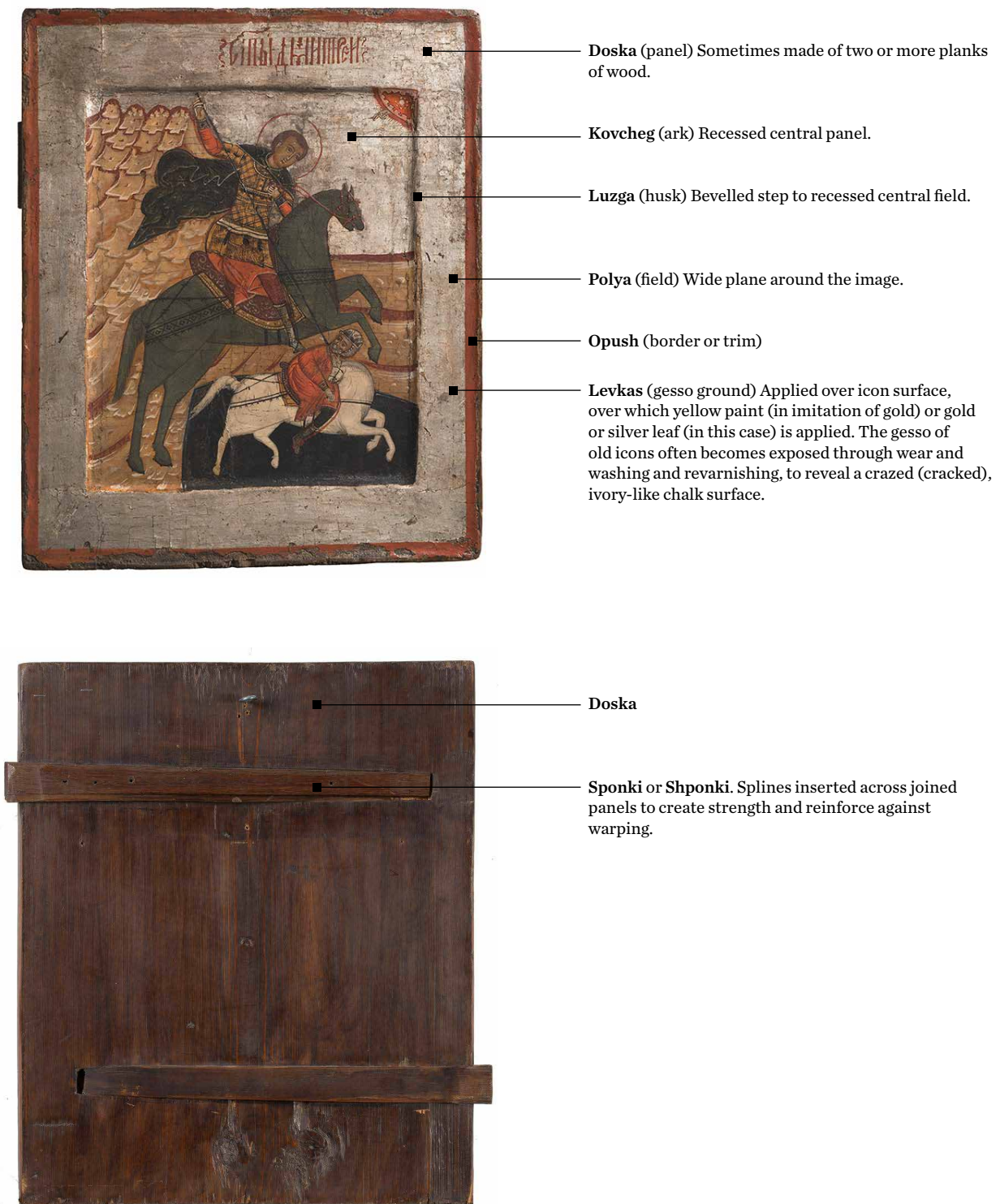
Doska (panel) Sometimes made of two or more planks of wood.

Kovcheg (ark) Recessed central panel.

Luzga (husk) Bevelled step to recessed central field.

Polya (field) Wide plane around the image.

Opush (border or trim)

Levkas (gesso ground) Applied over icon surface, over which yellow paint (in imitation of gold) or gold or silver leaf (in this case) is applied. The gesso of old icons often becomes exposed through wear and washing and revarnishing, to reveal a crazed (cracked), ivory-like chalk surface.

Doska

Sponki or **Shponki**. Splines inserted across joined panels to create strength and reinforce against warping.

Fig 5. Parts of a Russian icon.

receipts show that iconographers did not attempt to prepare their own panels but ordered them in bulk from local carpenters. This was also true of icon-making villages in the Suzdal region of Russia – Palekh, Mstera (Mstyora) and Kholui – 300 to 375 kilometres east of Moscow.[9] Small panels (for domestic icons) ran a lower risk of warping over time through changing moisture levels. To reduce bowing, larger panels were made of carefully chosen planks joined together using animal glue. On the reverse side the panels were strengthened by long struts known as *shponki* (Russian: splines, lath) driven into one or two channels incised across the joined planks, a wedging process that both braced and locked the sections together. These struts could be tightened as boards loosened. In Greece construction of panels was typically more rudimentary, with the struts simply nailed onto the back of the icon. Changes in the size and placement of the struts over the centuries can offer valuable clues to the date of an icon.

On the front of the panel the Russian icon-maker hollowed out a flat rectangular recess from the centre of the panel, leaving a raised margin around the edge. The resulting shallow-recessed surface is known as a *kovcheg* (ark). The bevelled edge between the two levels, called a *luzga* (husk), creates a small inset frame. The result was a protected surface, symbolically set apart from the material world, upon which to create an image of a holy subject. A similar process was employed in Ethiopia, although the raised edges was typically narrower.

The next stage was to smooth the surface and then to score it to create a key for a coating of glue, over which a piece of linen was laid. (In more recent times the creation of an ark and even the use of linen was often bypassed, and paper was used instead of cloth.) Over that surface as many as a dozen thin layers of *levkas* (gesso) were then applied to build up a chalky surface, a slow process because of the need to allow the layers of gesso to dry. The final stage was to burnish the matte eggshell surface to a silky finish resembling ivory, using an animal tooth or piece of agate.

Creating the image was similarly ritualised. An outline might be scratched or drawn freehand on to the gesso with dilute ink, but more likely a template was used. Various techniques were employed to trace or transfer a reversed image onto a bare surface. Pattern books and loose-leaf stencils were widely used. By the 19th century some standard reference works on iconography were becoming available. A well-known Russian *podlinnik* (guide), known as the Stroganov Pattern Book – a collection of 16th-century icon patterns owned by the eminent merchant family of that name and used by the iconographers who worked for the Stroganovs – was published in this period. In the Greek world of iconography artists could refer to a *hermeneia* (Greek: manual), of which the best known was a synthesis of earlier texts compiled by an 18th-century Greek iconographer-monk named Dionysios of Fourna (c1670–1745); known as the *Painter's Manual of Mount Athos*, a full printed edition did not become available until 1909.[10]

Gilding and painting

After the design had been laid down but before painting, the iconographer might choose to apply a gold ground or gold details, such as halos, to the design, a process that required a red earth layer, known as a bole, over which gold leaf could be applied and burnished, again with a tooth or piece of agate.

Knowledge of pigments was essential for the painting process. Organic and mineral pigments derived from plants and soils were ground and prepared, then mixed with an egg-yolk binder, creating a quick drying and opaque organic paint known as egg tempera.

The sequence in which colour was applied is dictated by the principle of 'dark to light', with the spiritual interplay between light and dark fundamental to the composition. The less significant parts of the image, such as the landscape, were painted first and the faces last, with skin tones built up from a green-brown tone known as *sankir* and ochres of varying intensity. Next the image was animated through white highlights, bringing a sense of heavenly light to the subject. At this stage fine gold highlights and striations could be applied using sticky garlic juice to which the gold leaf adhered. These lines, called 'assist' and applied through a process known as chrysography (drawing in gold), immediately indicate the heavenly nature of the subjects and their removal from the mundane realm.[11]

In order to complete an icon, it was essential for the name of the depicted saint or feast to be inscribed on it so that the icon could be recognisable and eligible for blessing and use. Once the inscription was added, the icon was sealed with a solution of linseed oil and resin known as *olifa*, bringing lustre to the matte tempera pigments and enhancing the harmonious interplay of colour. It was then ready for consecration in a church and participation in the devotional lives of the community or individual for whom it had been made.

Decorative coverings (revetments)

In Byzantium honour was paid to highly esteemed icons through the application of chased or jewel-encrusted covers, or revetments, made from silver or silver gilt, a tradition continued in Russia. The earliest type of revetment, known in Russian as a *basma*, consisted of thin metal strips stamped with ornamental patterns, and was usually fastened by nailing along the edges of the icon panel (cats 8 and 9). A later and larger type of revetment, which covered parts of the holy figure's body, was the oklad (from the Russian *okladyvat*, 'to edge'), or *riza* (Russian: chasuble) and was secured with tiny nails driven through the metal to the icon beneath (cat 10). Where revetments were attached over an inscription, that information was replicated on the metal surface, thus preserving the subject's identity and the icon's efficacy.

The addition of an oklad and other decorative embellishments, such as a halo, necklace or *tsata* (Russian: pectoral crescent), was considered to enhance an icon's function as a bridge between heaven and earth.[12] Icons of the Mother of God were often adorned with earrings and long strings of *riasny* (Russian: pearls), items recalling a noblewoman's wardrobe. Oklads of particularly prestigious icons were often commissioned by monarchs or wealthy patrons.[13] In the 17th century the hands and face of a holy figure were often the only parts of a painted icon that were left exposed, to allow for them to be kissed.[14]

In 1722 Peter the Great (reign 1682–1725) brought a halt to the lavish decoration of icons and ordered that their valuable revetments be removed to his treasury.[15] Despite signs of initial compliance in the form of more modestly designed revetments and halos, flamboyant elements soon began to re-emerge, such as halos in spectacular starburst formations and metal coronets that emulated 18th-century imperial regalia. Monarchs continued to commission magnificent revetments from the imperial workshops, especially for icons with political as well as devotional significance, such as the Kazan Mother of God (also known as the Kazanskaya). In the 18th and 19th centuries, private devotional icons were embellished with the rich jewel-encrusted oklads of earlier eras, and were housed in *kiots* (Russian: shrine-like cases) to emphasise their preciousness (fig 6).

Highly subject to changing taste, revetments on celebrated icons have often been replaced, updated or removed. In the communist era many were stripped off and sold or melted down. In the same period, state-run conservation programmes to remove overpaint and darkened varnish from early icons uncovered original bright colours and crisp

Fig 6 *Vladimir Mother of God Flanked by Saints Zosima and Savvatii*, **Russia**, Palekh School, 18th century, tempera and gesso on limewood in silver cloisonne enamel case, 9.5 x 11.0 cm 236-1982. Dunedin Public Art Gallery New Zealand. Note the inverted crescent-shaped pectoral ornament or *tsata* enclosing the Virgin and Child, symbolising their high rank in the heavenly kingdom.

compositions. Once these features were brought to light the oklads were not reinstated, as in the case of the *Old Testament Trinity* icon by Andrei Rublev (c1365–c1428), dated to about 1411, now in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. For these various historical reasons many early icons are now seen without the silver claddings they once possessed, the only evidence of their existence being tiny nail holes that pepper the surfaces of the icons.

Conservation

Orthodox icons have rarely existed as static objects in churches or homes. Regarded as living, communicative beings, with powers of protection and miraculous agency, icons have long been engaged with on a physical level and involved at significant junctures in community and family life. In churches they are regularly brought to the front of the congregation on relevant feast days, as ordained in the liturgical calendar, for veneration that might involve bodily contact, prostration, stroking, kissing and even hugging. Candles have traditionally been burned before special icons in the church, and also in the home, where they are kept

in alcoves known as 'beautiful' or 'red' corners. During festivals it is customary to carry key icons in processions and hand them from person to person. These interactions over sometimes centuries impact on the physical condition of icons, with significant parts, such as eyes, becoming worn down through touch or obscured by darkening *olifa* or varnish and candle soot.

The relationship between icons and their communities or individual owners has always been one of reciprocal care, with the physical maintenance of icons being regarded by the devout as a moral obligation.[16] The deterioration of an icon during its 'working life' has posed a theological problem for some iconophiles. Some have insisted that broken or damaged icons be destroyed because they were no longer true reflections of the prototype and so lost their status as icons,[17] but others have favoured extending and renewing the lives of icons through repair.

One of the most radical interventions in the life of an aged Russian icon was to graft it into a new wooden panel, or *vrezka*, once the support was split, warped or otherwise degraded. This was a complex process that required planing down the back of the old panel and resetting it in a sound and properly seasoned panel. That exacting task was often entrusted to the sect of ultra-devout Orthodox Christians known as Old Believers, for whom it was a spiritual duty to preserve the continuity of traditional forms that predated Patriach Nikon's church reforms of the 17th century. A number of icons in this exhibition have been rehoused in this way with a subtle skill undetectable to most viewers. The early *Baptism of Christ* is a case in point (cat 87). One might wonder whether, over centuries, the subject of symbolic immersion central to this archaic 'feast icon' of Christ's baptism had invited more annual immersions on the 6 January feast day than were physically good for it.

In today's context the ongoing obligations of icon care were highlighted in an icon online forum of 2009, where a participant asked about cleaning icons with rosewater as one priest has advised. A reader replied that 'I was persuaded to believe that only river water should be used to clean them, as Christ was baptised in the Jordan.' Another advised to simply dust them with paper or cotton wool and then burn the paper or cotton wool, noting that 'Even the dust from an icon is holy'.[18]

1   Ken Parry, *Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999, pp xiv–xvii.

2   'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them' (Exodus 20: 4-5).

3   'Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the Lord your God' (Leviticus 26: 1).

4   'Thou shall not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth. Thou shall not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them' (Deuteronomy 5: 8). 'Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image – an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place' (Deuteronomy 27: 15).

5   Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit (De Spiritu sancto)*, 18.45, in Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou (ed), *From Byzantium to El Greco: Greek Frescoes and Icons*, Royal Academy of Arts/Byzantine Museum of Athens, London/ Athens, 1987, p 37.

6   Liz James, in Antony Eastmond & Liz James (eds), *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium. Studies Presented to Robin Cormack*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2003, p 67 n 43.

7   Simon Morsink, *The Power of Icons: Russian and Greek Icons 15th–19th century: The Morsink Collection*, Snoeck Publishing, Ghent, 2006, p 26.

8   Erica E James, 'Technical Study of Ethiopian Icons, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution', *Journal for the American Institute for Conservation*, vol 44, no 1, Spring 2005, p 39.

9   Oleg Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, translated by Robin Milner-Gulland, Reaktion Books, London, 2002, pp 301–02.

10 See the introduction by Paul Hetherington in Dionysius, *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna*, translated by Paul Hetherington, Sagittarius Press/Oakwood Publications, London/Redonoda Beach CA, 1981, p ii.

11 On chrysography, see Jaroslav Folda & Lucy Wrapson, *Byzantine Art and Italian Panel Painting: The Virgin and Child Hodegetria and the Art of Chrysography*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015.

12 André Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du Moyen Age*, Institut héllenique d'études byzantines et post-byzantines, Venise, 1975, p 6.

13 Wendy Salmond, 'The Art of the Oklad', *The Post* (Hillwood Museum), vol 3 no 2, 1996, p 7.

14 As above, p 5.

15 As above, p 9.

16 On the relationships between the faithful and their Cretan icons, see Angeliki Lymberopoulou, '*"Pro anima mea"*, but do not touch my icons: Provisions for personal icons in wills from Venetian-dominated Crete', in Dionysios Stathakopoulos (ed), *The Kindness of Strangers: Charity in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean*, Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College, London, 2007, pp 71–89.

17 Ken Parry, 'Theodore Studites and the Patriarch Nicephorus on image-making as a Christian imperative', *Byzantion*, 59, 1989, p 181.

18 See http://forums.orthodoxchristianity.net/threads/cleaning-icons.19394/.

RUSSIA IN THE IMAGE OF BYZANTIUM

Sophie Matthiesson

The Christian art of Russia dates from 988, the year that Vladimir, *knyaz* (prince) of Kyiv (c958–1015), accepted baptism from the Byzantine (ie Greek) Church. Vladimir was ruler over a vast and ethnically diverse territory in northeastern Europe. His people, of mixed Slav, Viking and Khazar ancestry, were collectively known as the Rus'. Seeking a single faith to bind his peoples together, Vladimir famously dispatched envoys to investigate the great religions of the Muslims, Jews, Latins and Greeks. The envoys who went to Constantinople returned with the news that, upon arriving under the mosaic domes of the Hagia Sophia Church, they had heard singing and inhaled incense, and could not tell 'whether we were in heaven or on earth, for such beauty is not found on earth: it is impossible to describe. We only know that God dwells there among the people'.[1]

Other factors also influenced Vladimir to embrace Christianity. The prince craved the prestige and moral authority of an alliance with the great and prosperous Byzantine empire, ruled at the time by Basil II (reign 976–1025). Despite the fact that the Rus' had attacked Constantinople multiple times in previous decades, Basil needed Vladimir's military support to quell an internal revolt.[2] Vladimir was baptised at Cherson, a city on the site of present-day Sevastopol (in Crimea) on the Black Sea, prior to his marriage with Basil's sister Anna, and then had his subjects baptised in the new state religion by mass submersion in the Dnieper River. Two centuries after Vladimir's death, the fragile integrity of his Christianised territories came under threat repeatedly from Mongol invaders. His successors defended the territories through accessing the symbols of Christian faith and the power of the great Byzantine empire, using icons brought from Constantinople, such as the Vladimirskaya. A version of the miracle-working Hodegetria icon at Constantinople, this celebrated icon was said to have been painted by Saint Luke and to have saved the city of Moscow from defeat at the hands of the Mongols in 1395 (see cat 58).

At this stage there was no single Russia but rather a plethora of princely states ruled by members of Vladimir's family, who were known collectively as the Rurikids, after a legendary Viking ancestor, Rurik. Kyiv was the pre-eminent city until sacked by the Mongols in 1240. After this time cities farther north became more prominent. In the far northwest, Novgorod prospered through trade and fostered a regional culture of icons. Images of early Christian figures, such as saints George (cat 25), Nicholas (cat 19), Flor and Lavr (cat 16) and the prophet Elijah (cat 37) are just some of the heavenly army that the people of Novgorod enlisted to answer the particular needs of daily life in their area. Novgorodians also successfully repelled other Russian armies, again with the supernatural help of icons, allegedly with an icon of the Mother of God of the Sign (cat 73), which they placed on their city wall, causing the armies from Suzdal to melt away at the sight of it. Unlike other Rus' cities, Novgorod threw off its allegiance to the family of Rurik and became a mercantile republic, somewhat similar to Venice. Meanwhile, to the south of Novgorod, the small town of Moscow gradually assumed a position of dominance over the remaining Rurikid cities.

The regional centres of medieval Russia nurtured separate traditions. In the case of Novgorod, the arrival in the 14th century of the esteemed Cretan artist-monk Theophanes the Greek (c1340–1410), also known as Theofan or Feofan Grek, from Constantinople, introduced a new level of sophistication and learning to the city, where he undertook fresco, mosaic and book illumination before being lured to Moscow.

The most senior figure of the Russian Church at this time was the metropolitan, the seat of whom moved from Kyiv to Vladimir after the siege of Kyiv by the Mongols in 1240, and then to Moscow in 1326. The growing aspirations of the Moscow-led church and successive princes to usurp the prestige and power of Constantinople fuelled rapid monumental building with an ambitious programme of icon painting to match. As he had done in Novgorod, Theophanes demonstrated his mastery of the graceful and expressive style associated with the Palaiologans, the last ruling dynasty of the Byzantine empire. Theophanes trained an assistant, Andrei Rublev (c1365–c1428), to help him decorate Moscow's Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in the Kremlin and the Cathedral of the Annunciation.

This period coincided with a period of intense religiosity. Monasticism and a culture of individual spiritual eremitism (monastic seclusion) were becoming widespread, especially in the remote north, where the Solovetsky Monastery was founded in an archipelago of islands on the White Sea (cat 10).[3] It was in this Russian context of fervid piety, around 1400, that in the churches the low dividing barrier, which was a structural feature designed to separate believers from the sanctuary, developed into the familiar icon-covered wall known as an iconostasis (Greek: icon screen).

In 1453 the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks suddenly left Moscow as the largest Orthodox stronghold. Emboldened by these events, in 1478 Ivan the Great (1440–1505), grand prince of Vladimir and Moscow, annexed the vast territory of the republic of Novgorod in a bid for Muscovite political and religious sovereignty.[4] Ivan greatly enhanced his status in 1472 by marrying Sophia Palaiologina (c1449–1503), a niece of the last two Byzantine emperors, a marriage which had been arranged, ironically, with the endorsement of Pope Paul II (papacy 1464–71). The claims by autocrats and hierarchs to have inherited the divine grace of Byzantium were confirmed in a triumphant letter by the Pskov monk Philotheus (Filofei) (1465–1542) around 1510: 'two Romes have fallen and the third exists and there will not be a fourth!'[5]

The following decades witnessed attempts by the Russian Orthodox Church based in Moscow to control icon production, with the backing of Ivan's grandson Tsar Ivan IV, known as Ivan the Terrible (reign 1547–84). Rublev's style became formally enshrined after 1551,

when a decree issued by a Moscow church council, known as the Stoglav Synod, endorsed by Ivan IV, compelled icon painters to emulate Rublev and the Byzantine tradition. Driving this was the powerbroker Macarius, metropolitan of Moscow (term 1542–63), an icon-painting cleric and influential former tutor of the recently crowned Ivan. Rublev had distinguished himself by finding a way to depict God the Father, who had been theologically deemed unrepresentable, a problem that had exercised the Synod. Rublev's representation of God as the three angels of the Holy Trinity (see cat 50) was endorsed by Macarius as an acceptable solution and in 1554 he issued the decree that icons should be painted in the ancient tradition, like the Greek (Byzantine) artists painted them, especially like Andrei Rublev and his followers, and in the manner that Rublev's Holy Trinity was painted.[6]

Rublev's icon style, distinctive for its ascetic, spiritual quality and gently animated forms and colour harmonies, became the touchstone of a mystical and dematerialising approach to devotional painting. His prototypes were much copied, mythologised and venerated as miracle working.[7] Macarius, meanwhile, established an icon workshop at the Kremlin and fostered painting with a refined and miniaturised character.

Over the following century the Moscow workshops were supported by devout and wealthy nobles (boyars) as well as by the Romanov dynasty, who ruled from 1613 and became virtual dictators. Also prominent was the Stroganov family, a dynasty of colossally rich Novgorodian merchants, under whose patronage workshops of Moscow artists produced an even more refined and decorative icon style in the later 16th and 17th centuries, with miniaturised and architectural elements, rich patterning and golden hues.

The ownership of icons was not restricted to social elites. A Syrian archdeacon called Paul of Aleppo (1627–69), who was visiting Russia in the mid 17th century, observed that

> in each house there is a countless multitude of icons, adorned with gold, silver and precious stones, and not only within houses but also at all doors, even at house-gates, and this is true, not only of Boyars, but of peasants in the villages, since their love and faith towards the icons is very great.[8]

He also noted that in domestic settings in Moscow the presence of small-scale versions of iconostases effectively transformed homes into microcosms of the church (see cats 8 and 9).[9]

The mid 17th century was plunged into violent disagreements when the monk Nikon (term 1652–66) was elected patriarch of Moscow in 1652 and attempted to realign Russian liturgical practices more closely to the Byzantine practices of Constantinople. His ruling to make the sign of the cross with three fingers in the Greek manner rather than with two caused uproar, with an opposition group emerging, known as the Old Believers, or Old Ritualists, who resolved to adhere to the old forms at all costs (cat 25).

Peter the Great (reign 1682–1725), who had a taste for western culture, exacerbated the crisis between conservative and progressive forces. Along with modernising the military and reforming the economy in the manner of the European enlightenment, Peter welcomed western art styles in the forms of Catholic and Protestant religious paintings and prints. The result was a new naturalism in icons, most notably in the realistic construction of interior space, and the introduction of modes and subjects previously avoided in Orthodox imagery (cat 80).

In relocating his court from Moscow to the new city of St Petersburg in 1712, and restyling himself emperor, Peter broke away from the traditional forces that were dominant in the old capital. He further cemented the changes by suppressing the office of the Moscow

patriarchate in 1721. It was only in Peter's time that the state he ruled came to be known as Rossiya – Russia. Up until then, in the west it had been referred to as Muscovy.

Peter's ascent did not dampen enthusiasm for icons, but rather contributed to an explosion of icon production that followed the new trends while discreetly catering to the Old Believer forms as well – despite decrees forbidding their production. By the mid 18th century entire towns and monasteries were dedicated to icon production on an industrial scale. Certain villages in the Suzdal region focused on specific aspects of the process, such as brush-making or board preparation, and individual painters often specialised in a single feature of an icon, such as backgrounds or faces. These icon-producing centres had at their disposal great stores of pre-17th century prototypes, salvaged by the Old Believers to use as models (see cat 91). They also collected and recycled old panels, with the village of Mstera (Mstyora) receiving 28,000 old boards for repainting in the year 1879 alone.[10] In the community of Kholui, a town in the Vladimir-Suzdal region, villagers were said to neglect seasonal demands such as sowing and ploughing to focus on meeting orders from *ofeni*, travelling peddlers who traded icons across Russia.[11]

By the 19th century the facility of artists for making icons in the manner of earlier and disparate regional styles and for re-utilising old boards might be viewed as signs of creeping pastiche, debasement and deception, which in the west is connected to the rise of industrialisation. Alternatively their methods might be seen as the logic of the sacred prototype at work, Byzantine in origin but which by now had become indelibly associated with salvation, miraculous intervention, military victory and Russia's glorious past.

1   Thomas Riha, *Readings in Russian Civilization. Volume I: Russia before Peter the Great, 900-1700*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago IL, 2009, p 9.

2   Simon Franklin, 'The Origins of Russia and its Culture', in Roderick Grierson (ed), *The Gates of Mystery: The Art of Holy Russia*, Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 1992, p 29.

3   Robin Milner-Gulland, introduction, in Oleg Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, translated by Robin Milner-Gulland, Reaktion Books, London, 2002, p 17.

4   Andrew Kahn, Mark Lipovetsky, Irina Reyfman & Stephanie Sandler, *A History of Russian Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018, pp 15–16.

5   Dimitri Strémooukhoff, 'Moscow the Third Rome: Sources of the Doctrine', *Speculum*, vol 28, no 1, January 1953, p 94.

6   Leo Teholiz, 'Religious Mysticism and Socialist Realism: The Soviet Union Pays Homage to the Icon Painter Andrey Rublev', *Art Journal*, vol 21, no 2, Winter 1961–62, p 73.

7   As above, p 74.

8   Paul of Aleppo, 'The Journey of Patriarch Makarios of Antioch to Russia in the Mid -17th century, part 2', p 32, cited in Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, p 38.

9   Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, pp 38–43.

10 As above, p 54.

11 As above, p 55.

CRETAN ICONS: TRADITION & CHANGE

Angeliki Lymberopoulou

Cretan icons, produced on the island in the post-Byzantine era (ie, after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453) when the island was under Venetian domination, have attracted considerable scholarly attention, especially since the mid 1970s. Manolis Chatzidakis's landmark publications on Cretan icons and painters put the subject firmly on the academic map.

The Venetians took over Crete on 12 August 1204, as part of the Byzantine empire's spoils following the sack of Constantinople that same year by the troops of the Fourth Crusade. They retained control of the island, which proved to be a most valuable possession for their trade interests, until they had to cede it to the Ottomans in 1669. The coexistence of Cretan Orthodox inhabitants and the Roman Catholic Venetians for over four centuries provides one of the most prolific cross-cultural case studies in the Mediterranean. The pragmatic Venetians were eager to hold on to the island and therefore accommodated the Cretans' continued production of Byzantine art.

Broadly speaking, Venetian domination is divided into two distinct phases. The first lasted until 1453, the year of the fall of Constantinople. Much of the art of the late Byzantine era, also known as Palaiologan art, named after the empire's last dynasty (1261–1453), is found in countless regional churches still peppering the magnificent Cretan landscape. These churches provide a rich source for the study of wall paintings and testify to a thriving regional trade.

The second phase lasted between 1453 and 1669, and is generally referred to as post-Byzantine because it continues the cultural tradition beyond the 'official' end of the empire. This second era marked the 'rise of the icon', as panel painting became almost synonymous with Cretan artistic production. The number of frescos created for churches decreased substantially as the population started migrating from the island's regions to the main cities on the north coast in search of more stable and safe living conditions. In turn, this prompted the production of panel painting. Cretan icon painters established a strong reputation in this medium and, in line with the evolving status of the artist in renaissance Europe, began

signing their works with their full names, breaking the Byzantine tradition of preserving the anonymity of the icon creators.

Through this practice we know a number of Cretan artists by name: in the 15th century we have the celebrated work of Angelos Akotantos (c1400–57) and that of his talented students, Andreas Pavias (1440–c1512), Andreas Ritzos (1421–92) and Nikolaos Tzafouris (active 1487–1501); in the 16th century that of Georgios Klontzas (1535–1608), Theophanis Strelitzas Bathas (also known as Theophanes the Cretan, 1490–1559) and Michael Damaskinos (c1533–c1593); and in the 17th century that of Victor (c1633–97), Emmanuel Tzanes Mpounialis (1610–90) and Theodore Poulakis (1622–92). The most famous of them all is Doménikos Theotokópoulos, better known as El Greco (1541–1614), who started as an icon painter in post-Byzantine Crete, moved to Italy and finally settled in Toledo, Spain, where he made his mark in world art history.

These Cretan artists had a very difficult task: on the one hand they had to continue the Greek Orthodox tradition, by producing established Byzantine iconography. The fact that Theophanes Strelitzas Bathas was commissioned to decorate the Stavronikita Monastery – which is sited on Mount Athos, in the northern Greek province of Macedonia, known as the cradle of Orthodoxy after 1453 – is a testimony to this.

At the same time, the demands of the mixed Cretan clientele – Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic – as well as influences from the west, mainly from Venetian art, led these artists to incorporate western elements into Byzantine iconography and to create 'bilingual' types which were popular among both the Orthodox and the Catholic. One of the most important such examples is the *Madre della Consolazione*, introduced into post-Byzantine art by Nikolaos Tzafouris. It is generally accepted that the inscriptions that often accompany these subjects – in either Greek or Latin – point to the cultural and religious affiliation of their patron.

The iconographic type of the Virgin and Child, so important for worship for both Orthodox and Catholic believers, was in great demand from Cretan painters. A famous contract, dated 1499, reveals that two merchants commissioned 700 icons of the Virgin from three Cretan painters to be delivered in 42 days, with the three artists liable for loss of profit if they did not deliver the icons within the specified time frame. The works were destined for the western European market, and the number and tight schedule would strongly suggest that icons were big business at the time.

It is highly likely that the three Cretan painters were *madonneri* painters, painters who specialised in producing icons of the Virgin and Child (for an example of work by a *madonnero* painter, see cat 68). This large commission is evidence of workshops that undertook the production of icons of the Virgin and Child, but it does not mean that the painters produced works of inferior quality. We know that the Cretan painters made use of *anthibola* (Greek: cartoons, or working drawings), which would have facilitated the process without compromising quality.

Saint Francis, the prominent Catholic saint and founder of one of the most important mendicant orders, was very popular among the native Cretans, and was adopted by the Orthodox congregation (cat 34); the Greek version of the saint's name, Fragiskos, is still used on the island. Other popular saints who recur in Cretan icons include Saint Jerome in the desert (cat 35), often with a red hat, a reference to his mistaken and anachronistic identification as a Catholic cardinal; and Saint John the Hermit, a saint who had local significance (cat 116).

The transformation of certain iconographic subjects, such as the Crucifixion, is

also a notable characteristic of Cretan icons. In Byzantine art this subject is characterised by a 'serene' atmosphere, but a number of Cretan artists depicted this pivotal event of Christianity as a very crowded, noisy and emotionally charged scene with animated gesturing, conveying vivid feelings with which all the faithful would have been able to identify (cat 93).

The hybridity of post-Byzantine icon painting is Crete's contribution to the Renaissance, and evidence that the tradition could embrace change. Byzantine visual culture had to adhere to tradition to ensure the truthful representation of the divine, part of the aftermath of the trauma of iconoclasm. By keeping a part of its tradition intact, the post-Byzantine era allowed the icon to flourish in its 'bilingual' iconographic types and its artists to assume credit for their work. Some artists continued to sign only with their first name (eg, Angelos, Victor), probably as a compromise between Byzantine anonymity and the new, and perhaps uncomfortable, domain of eponymy (naming). And with El Greco it became obvious that post-Byzantine icon painting also could evolve into works that changed the world of art.
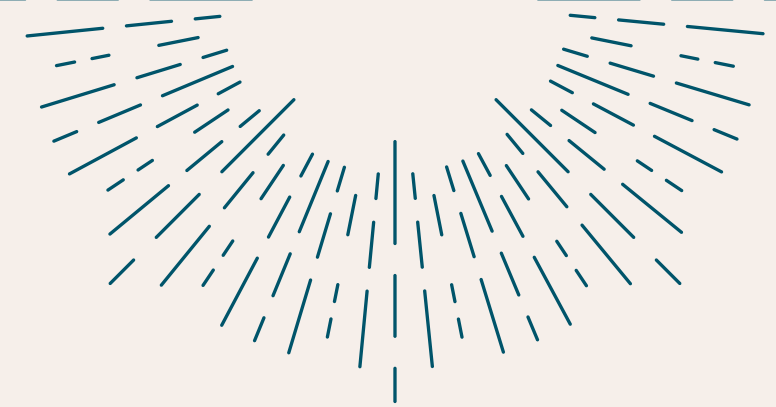
PLATES

HOLY THRESHOLDS

Sophie Matthiesson

Embrace [icons] with the eyes, the lips, the heart, bow before them, love them
— John of Damascus, eighth-century theologian[1]

For millions of Orthodox Christians over centuries, icons have been a fundamental part of life. Although they are now widely appreciated for their beauty by secular audiences, to believers the aesthetic experience produced by icons is not an end in itself but a pathway to a spiritual connection with God. Their veneration is central to church and home life and, wherever they may be, the space around them is sacred.

Icons did not initially feature in the physical structure of the Orthodox church. But by the seventh century they began to play a crucial role in modifying its material form and function.[2] Conceived as a version of the original Temple of Jerusalem and as a symbolic heavenly kingdom, an Orthodox church is removed from earthly existence, time or place. Dedicated to an eternal God, there is no need for clocks within its walls. Dictated by symbolism, its layout provides a spatial progression from earthly to spiritual existence and entry into Heaven – and icons serve as both guides and conduits for that transition.

Upon entering an Orthodox church one passes through two earthly zones. The first is the vestibule, known as the narthex, which represents the moment before the sinful fallen world beyond the church comes before God. Passage through the zone requires a shedding of the distractions of worldly life in preparation for a state of prayerful concentration. Images of Old Testament scenes often line its walls, foreshadowing the holy events of the New Testament highlighted in the following space. The journey from the narthex to the nave evokes a progression from sin towards virtue, culminating in the place where the divine liturgy is enacted and where the sacraments may be received.

A sacred boundary divides the space of the nave and the space of the sanctuary, a secluded area that corresponds with the 'Holy of Holies' in the Jewish temple, where the altar stands and where the sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated. Over time the boundary, called the templon, assumed a more substantial form, first as a low wall or balustrade, and
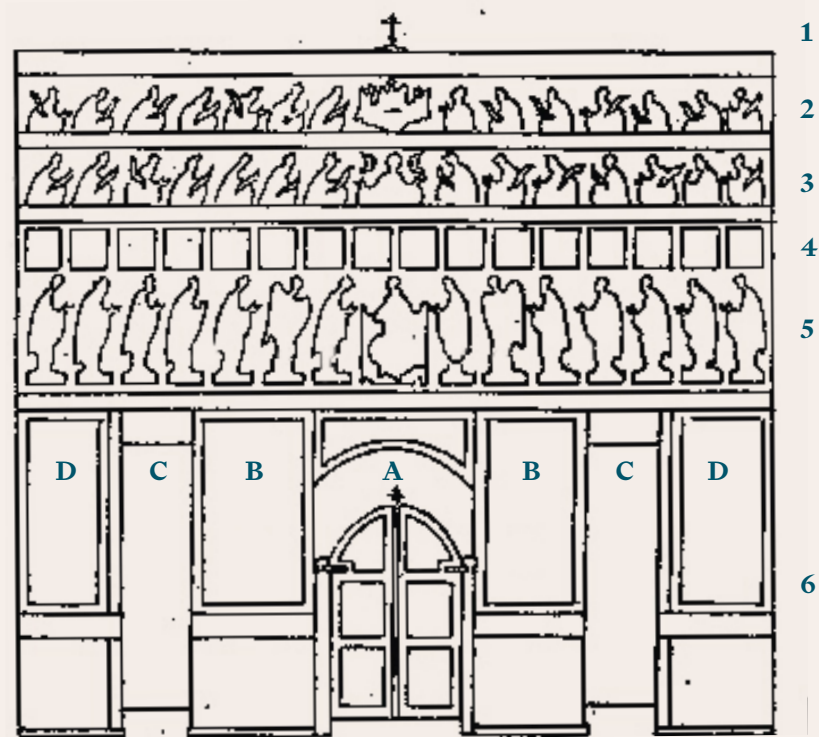
Fig 1 The icon screen (iconostasis)

1. Crucifix
2. Old Testament patriarchs with the Hospitality of Abraham in the centre
3. Old Testament prophets with the Mother of God and Child in the centre
4. Great Feasts.
5. The deesis (enthroned Christ at the centre, flanked by the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist and other saints)
6. Entrance level
   A. The royal doors with the Annunciation and sometimes the Four Evangelists and the Last Supper above
   B. The despotic icons with Christ or patron saint of the church to the right and the Mother of God to the left of the royal doors
   C. North and south doors with deacons or angels
   D. Additional optional icons

it gradually grew in height, forming a wall or screen pierced with doorways. It thus formed the interface between the world of humanity within the nave and the sacred realm on the other side, the sight of which it also blocked. In Constantinople it was on this all-important and symbolically bridging wall that icons first came to be placed.[3] The most significant theological images – the figures of Christ flanked by Mary and John the Baptist – were the earliest to appear, in a combination known as a deesis, sited in a central and commanding position across the top. The term deesis is derived from the ancient Greek word for prayer or supplication, but it is now understood in reference to intercession.

It was in this rudimentary but novel form that the iconostasis is thought to have been first introduced to Kyivan Rus' in the 11th century. Other elements were gradually added to

the screen: a monumental image of the Holy Virgin and Child representing the Incarnation of Christ on one side of the sanctuary doors, and a similarly imposing image of Christ in Glory, visualising the Second Coming of Christ, on the other; also included is the saint after whom the church is named, who is traditionally positioned to Christ's right. Sometimes called the despotic (Greek: Lord, or Christ), or veneration tier, the feet of the majestic persons depicted on it may be physically touched by the congregation. As it grew higher, the screen also came to link the believer with a vision overhead of the dome or vault, decorated to represent Heaven, while remaining anchored to the earth below.

The main entrance to the sanctuary, located in the centre of the screen between the despotic icons, is blocked by shutters known as the royal doors, royal gates or beautiful gates. Used only by the priest, movement through them symbolises Christ's 'royal' entry into Jerusalem. Opening them also symbolises the unlocking of the gates of Paradise through Christ's sacrifice. Closed and often curtained when not in use, they usually present the mysterious image of the Annunciation, the moment when God took human form, and the Four Evangelists, who chronicled the birth and death of Christ. Above was added an image of the Mystical Supper, known in the west as the Last Supper but which in eastern Christianity refers primarily to Christ's symbolic transformation of the bread and wine into his sacrificed body and blood (the Eucharist). It is in front of the royal doors, surmounted by the Mystical Supper icon, and between icons of the Mother of God and Christ, that Holy Communion is celebrated, during which the devout take part in the mystery of the Eucharist.

In Russia, over the 13th and 14th centuries, further tiers were added to the screen to accommodate icons of saints, Old Testament prophets and church patriarchs, as well as the key narratives of Christianity, known as the Twelve Great Feasts. By the 15th century the templon had evolved into the spectacular Russian icon screen, or iconostasis (Greek: icon stand), that we know today. The icons displayed across its tiers offer a comprehensive and intelligible set of statements about humanity's relationship with God through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Over the following centuries the iconostasis was adopted across the Orthodox world.

Icons should not be thought of in isolation or in the cultural cocoon of the museum setting. Their meanings manifest through interaction. In the home it is through daily engagements with family icons, through prayer, the process of lighting lamps and ritual duties of cleaning. Their importance is heightened during significant days of the liturgical calendar and at times of difficulty or celebration within the family. In the church setting their meanings become manifest in the context of the other adjacent icons, but also in the other-worldly and cavernous interior of the church. They are animated by the words of the liturgy, the sounds of bells and hymns and the fragrant wafts of incense smoke seen floating through shafts of light. As the flickering light of votive candles glances off the icons' silver revetments and gold grounds, believers in a state of prayer enter the eternal world of Christ, the Mother of God and all their heavenly consorts, who appear silently before them.

1   John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, translated by David Anderson, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood NY, 1980, pp 57–58.
2   Thomas F Mathews & Norman Muller, 'Isis and Mary in early icons', in Maria Vassilaki (ed), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2005, p 3.
3   Leonid Ouspensky & Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, translated by Gerald Palmer & Evgeniia Kadloubovsky, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood NY 1989, p 59.

Royal Doors with the Annunciation
ALBANIA OR NORTHERN GREECE

Rejoice, heavenly ladder, by which God descends
Rejoice, bridge guiding the earthly to heaven
Rejoice, wonder much celebrated by the angels
Rejoice, wound much lamented by the demons
Rejoice, for you ineffably bear the Light . . .[1]

Thus cries the paean of Orthodoxy, the Akathistos hymn to the God-bearer: a greeting of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary at the moment of her divine conception. Luke 1: 26–38 provides the bare bones of the Annunciation story. Orthodox hymnographers went far further in imagining a sacred dialogue between the holy messenger and the future mother of God.

In Orthodoxy the Annunciation is not simply the news of Mary's conception but an event with cosmic ramifications, the announcement that the uncontainable God deigns to take on the trammels of humanity. The Logos, or Word, becomes flesh for the redemption of the entire world. For this reason in Greek the feast of the day is called Evangelismos, the good news. As the first event of the Incarnation (the act of God being 'made flesh'), it is a fitting image to be depicted on the royal doors that separate the nave and sanctuary through which anointed priests bring out the sacrament during the divine liturgy.

This masterful work dates to the middle of the 16th century. It has recently been attributed, on convincing grounds, to Onoufrios of Neokastro (present-day Elbasan, Albania), a priest-iconographer who was active in Albania and northern Greece in the mid 1500s. The attribution is based on several points of close correlation with known works by this master, including other representations of the Annunciation. These include similarities in the facial expressions of the two figures and the modelling of their robes, and the stance of the limbs and the skilful handling of the garments of the archangel. Most importantly, the colouring of the robes of both the Virgin and the angel is highly distinctive. Onoufrios was well known in his time as a master of colour, renowned for his use of fiery oranges, reds and subtle pinks, all of which are on display in this work. These colours were achieved by blending cinnabar, a highly toxic sulphide of mercury, with various ochres.

Little is known about Onoufrios other than that he was a priest of the rank of protopope – the highest level attainable by the non-monastic clergy. He is known to have worked in Kastoria in the region of Macedonia in northern Greece, as well as Elbasan, Berat and the village of Valshe in present-day Albania. He may also have travelled to Venice, but this remains conjectural. It has been noted that on the frescoes where he included inscriptions, his spelling of Greek was exemplary – something unusual in this era, but consistent with his priestly background. The region of Albania, where Onoufrios spent much of his life, was strategically important, being situated on the Via Ignatia, which was the ancient land route from Rome to Constantinople. For several centuries after the Fourth Crusade it was the heartland of an independent Byzantine principality, the Despotate of Epirus, which included large parts of western Greece. The rulers of this state were important patrons of painters and many of the cities of the region such as Arta, Kastoria and Ohrid boasted churches with magnificent frescoes and mosaics. Whether Onoufrios was an ethnic Shqiptar (Albanian) or not, he has become a national hero in the land where he lived

Cat 1
Onoufrios of Neokastro (active 16th century)
Royal Doors with the Annunciation, 16th century
Albania or northern Greece
egg tempera and gesso on canvas over wood
1226 x 775 mm
on loan from a private collection, London

and worked, lauded as the first great painter of the Albanian nation. It is certainly true that Onoufrios founded a school of painters that lasted well beyond his own time.

As to the aesthetic qualities of these royal doors, the figures are absolutely compelling – elongated and elegant, but not frozen. The Virgin stands like a column, a stance that in Byzantine art indicates that she possesses the quality of apatheia, meaning freedom from earthly passions.[2] Her robes form a perfect harmony of deep red and ultramarine and she has a serene expression. The archangel is shown at the moment of alighting from the heavens, his feet not yet planted on the ground and his right hand extended in blessing. His wings are an extraordinary array of coloured feathers, like a liturgical fan.

The elongation of both figures conforms to the canons of bodily proportions devised by the artists who worked in Constantinople at the height of the Palaiologan renaissance, a movement that is best known today for the mosaics and frescoes in the early 14th-century Chora Church in Istanbul. A telling comparison can be made between these royal doors and a mosaic icon of the Annunciation now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which comes from the same milieu if not the same workshops as the Chora masterpieces.[3] **GM**

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1   Akathistos to the Theotokos, Oikos 3 Hymn of Saint Romanos the Melodist, *The Lost Gospel of Mary*, translated with footnotes by Frederica Mathewes-Green, Paraclete Press, Orleans MA, 2007, unpaginated.

2   Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1996, pp 66–68.

3   Byzantine, *Annunciation*, c1320, miniature mosaic, gold, silver, lapis lazuli and assorted semi-precious tesserae, 15.3 x 10.2 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Cat 2
Sorrowful Mother of God, 1650–1700
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
312 x 258 x 25 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Sorrowful Mother of God
RUSSIA

The Virgin appears as a frail figure beneath the folds of her crimson maphorion (mantle) and veil. A dark blue-green kekryphalos (hair net) is visible beneath her veil. Her eyes are swollen and her chin crumpled as she holds a handkerchief close to her face. This icon depicts the sorrowing Mother of God and is an image of intense grief.[1] Mary's right hand hovers over her heart, as if to embrace the son who has died, clues that this icon would once have been paired with an icon of the crucified Christ. Powerfully resonant of loss and the trauma of the unseen but recent crucifixion, this image has evidently been much venerated over centuries, with visible repairs and signs of extreme wear along its lower edge, the only part of an icon that could be respectfully touched by the devout.

There are many theories about the symbolism of the handkerchief that appears in Orthodox and Catholic images of Mary and pious women. In a ceremonial context it has been interpreted as a mappula, an embroidered cloth denoting church or imperial authority, which has led to its identification with social status in the secular realm. In the context of Christ's crucifixion, it is usually read as a marker of profound sorrow. One scholar has noted that cloths of this kind were used by women during Communion to receive the Eucharist (body of Christ) without touching it with their hands.[2] The mappula is given particular prominence in Ethiopian icons of the Virgin from the 16th century onwards (see cat 113). **SM**

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1   A 14th-century pairing of the Sorrowful Virgin and the Man of Sorrows is in the Monastery of the Transfiguration in Meteora, Greece.

2   Rafca Youssef Nasr, 'Priestly Ornaments and the Priesthood of the Mother of God', *Chronos*, 40, 2019, p 126 ff.
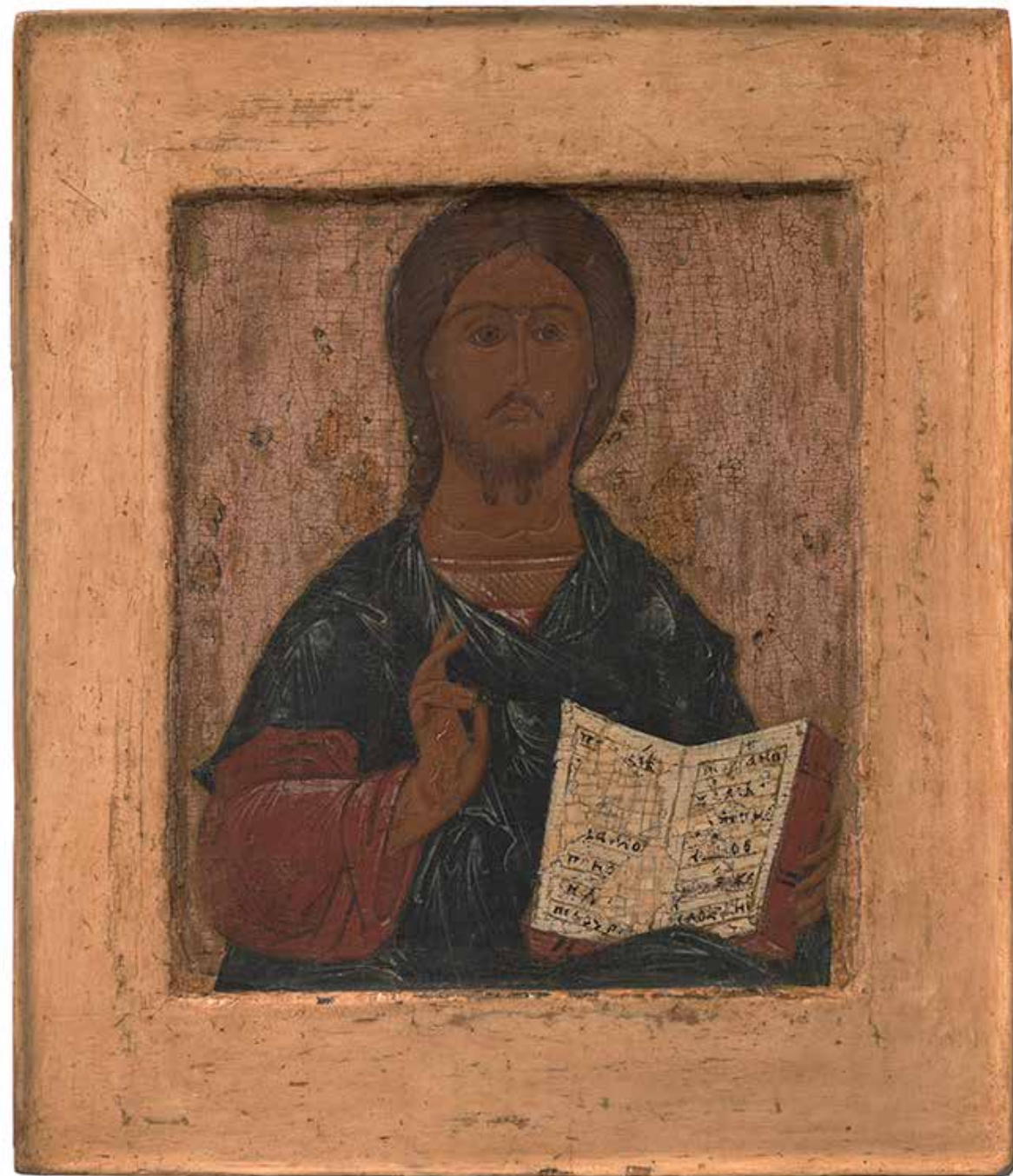
Cat 3
Christ Pantocrator, early 17th century
Russia, Novgorod
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
310 x 265 x 32 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Christ Pantocrator

RUSSIA, NOVGOROD

Alternative name Almighty or Vsedersitel in Russian

The image of Christ gazing directly outwards, holding a gospel in the left hand while making a sign of blessing with the other, is one of the oldest images of Christ in the Eastern Orthodox Church and is known as Christ Pantocrator (Almighty). His double gesture symbolises the dual human and divine natures of Christ, a dogmatic position that prevailed after centuries of debate that caused the miaphysites (who regarded Christ as having a divine nature only) and the Arians (who considered him fully human) to split from the church. The image therefore implies the triumph of Orthodoxy over heretics. This icon shows Christ making the sign of the cross with two fingers, as was customary before the reforms of the Patriarch Nikon (term 1652–66) in the 17th century introduced the 'three-fingered' blessing. The form seen here was upheld by conservatives, known as the Old Believers, who broke with the mainstream church over Nikon's deviation.[1]

Christ's expression is intended to convey severity mixed with tenderness. In this image the open gospel page reads: 'I am the light of all the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness' (John 8:12). Although some saints are shown holding gospels, they always hold them deferentially with their hands covered by their sleeves, in the manner of Byzantine courtiers. Only Christ is ever shown holding a gospel with his uncovered hand because he is the Word itself. This fusion of human and Word is reinforced by Christ's gesture with his fingers, forming the shape of his own monogram 'IC XC', initials which would also once have been repeated on either side of his halo. A faint shadow around Christ's head indicates a gold-leaf halo, long since worn away. Pinholes indicate the icon was once fitted with a *riza* or metal revetment.

This icon was conserved by the Saint Petersburg-based Old Believer, Makary Samsonovich Peshekhonov (1780–1852), who was officially noted as being 'fairly good at icon painting and retouching old icons'.[2] An inscription in Old Slavonic in a circular label on the reverse reads:

> Looking from high above, accept the needy, support, save and visit us, embittered by our sins, All-Merciful Lord. With the help of Our Lady give our souls the great mercy. This holy icon of the old Novgorod icon-painting school was renewed in the ruling city of Moscow in the year since the creation of the world 7342, after the Birth of creation after Christ 1834, 10th day of May by the master M.S.

SM

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1   See Oleg Tarasov, I*cons and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, translated by Robin Milner-Gulland, Reaktion Books, London, 2002, pp 128–29. For a discussion of the Old Believers, see cat 74.

2   Gerol'd I Vzdornov, *The History of the Discovery and Study of Russian Medieval Painting*, translated by Valerii G Dereviagin, Brill, Leiden, 2018, p 30. See also Zhanna Belik, 'The Peshekhonovs' Workshop: The Heritage in Icon Painting', PhD thesis, Jyväskylä Studies in Humanities, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, 2008.

Cat 4
Saint John the Forerunner, c1700
Russia, Novgorod
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
314 x 270 x 26 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint John the Forerunner
RUSSIA, NOVGOROD

Feast days 24 June (birth), 29 August (beheading), 23 September (conception), 24 February and 25 May (finding of the head), weekly day of remembrance Tuesday

John the Baptist appears in this Novgorodian icon as a sombre-clad figure, crisply delineated against a pale ground. Silhouetted within a perfect halo, the rough spikes of his hair, matted from years in the desert, make him instantly recognisable to the devout. Icons of northern Russia around Novgorod typically have pale grounds, imparting an austere spirituality while heightening graphic lucidity.

Although John's roles as baptiser and bestower of blessings are emphasised in other icon types, this icon shows John paying tribute to Christ with upraised hands. The gesture identifies it as an all-important deesis icon which would once have been seen to the right of a centrally positioned icon of Christ in an iconostasis or its domestic equivalent. John's renowned powers as an intercessor seem apparent from his bowed head and cradling, persuasive hand gestures, which would have precisely mirrored the gestures of the Mother of God on Christ's left. John's sincerity is conveyed by his bright glance, created by enlivening touches of white in the corners of his eyes, and by the kindly set of his mouth. **SM**

Deesis
RUSSIA

The deesis row of the iconostasis usually contains full-length images of the saints turned towards each other as though in dialogue. When only the heads and shoulders are shown, as in this rectangular panel, the deesis is displayed over the royal doors, or altar entrance, or in the centre of the iconostasis.

Christ faces the viewer with his right hand raised in blessing and the Gospel in his left hand. His chiton is red, the colour of sacrifice, while his himation is blue, a colour associated with divinity. All three figures have gold halos – only Christ's could be shown with a cross – and the light is concentrated on their faces. The clothes have touches of white, symbolising the holiness of their wearers. The background, with traces of gold leaf still visible, refers to Heaven.

Interceding on behalf of humanity, Mary and John lean in, receptive to Jesus's word. Mary wears a dark red maphorion (mantle) over a blue dress. The deep red associates her with humanity and the blue (derived from lapis lazuli or a cheaper mineral substitute) with Heaven. The white stars on the head and shoulders of her maphorion refer to her virginity. She has one hand on her heart and the other is raised towards Jesus in prayer

Like Christ, John the Baptist wears red as symbolic of his sacrifice; in his case martyrdom. His unkempt hair and long beard indicate his asceticism in the wilderness. Asceticism was important to the Russian Church, which believed that purification through fasting, prayer, chastity and God's grace was the key to the goal of deification, or unity with God. John makes the sign of the cross with his right hand and in his left holds a scroll. In these types of icons, the text on the scroll reads 'John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). **MP**

Cat 5
Deesis, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
260 x 450 x 21 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Deesis
RUSSIA

Although this icon dates from the 17th century, it imitates the style of the 12th to 13th centuries with its dark cinnabar and brown Byzantine palette and sombre form, particularly that of the deesis icons from Dmitrievsky Cathedral in Vladimir, which were painted by Byzantine masters working in Russia. This makes it unusual for its time because 17th-century icons tended to be dominated by the highly ornamented style made popular by the Moscow Armoury School. Another difference from other deesis icons of this period is that it shows only the heads and shoulders of the three figures when usually they would be shown standing.

Christ faces forward, gazing directly at the viewer. The Virgin Mary on the left and John the Baptist on the right are turned towards Christ. The poses are static, giving the figures an eternal, contemplative quality outside of time. The contrast between light and dark tones heightens the austere spirituality of the icon, as does the subdued colour palette. All three figures wear dark red clothes with some gold highlights, with Christ featuring more of this chrysography. Mary's maphorion has the traditional white stars which symbolise her virginity. John the Baptist's clothes and hair are rough in appearance, in keeping with his asceticism. The faces of all three figures are calm and expressive. In this respect they are less formal than their Byzantine prototypes. **MP**

Cat 6
Deesis, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
195 x 333 x 25 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Triptych with Deesis and Four Patron Saints
GREECE

This small wooden portable icon functions as a tiny church, with references to ecclesiastical architecture: niches, columns and hinged doors. Unfolding the doors opens a portal to the divine, creating a heavenly space shared by the viewer and the depicted saints. Along the upper tier is a deesis, with Christ Pantocrator making a sign of blessing with his right hand and holding a closed gospel in the other. He is flanked by the Mother of God and John the Baptist, who petition for the salvation of humankind.

The lower tier comprises a set of named holy figures who were popular choices for portable triptychs: on the left wing is the Archangel Michael, angel of light, who watches over the world. In the centre are the holy bishops of the first Nicene Council of 325, saints Nicholas and Athanasius. They were noted defenders of Orthodoxy against the Arian heresy, which denied the true divinity of Christ. On the right wing is Saint Stylianos, the wonder-working hermit of sixth-century Paphlagonia (Asia Minor). Recognisable by his long beard and the swaddled baby he is holding, Stylianos was a revered protector of unborn children and infants. In the upper corners of the deesis two six-winged seraphim hover, hiding their blinding brightness with their wings; the seraph motif was sometimes misunderstood by later iconographers, who mistook it for a petalled flower. This triptych, with its careful adherence to prototypes and expressive saints, represents a sophisticated example of a domestic icon made for a moderately well-off citizen of the Ionian islands or the southern Peloponnese. **SM**

Saint Peter and *Saint Paul*

RUSSIA, MOSCOW

Feast day 29 June

Regarded as the princes of the apostles and the foremost teachers of the early church, Peter and Paul are central figures in the New Testament. Representing the Church of Law and Church of Grace respectively, they are depicted by iconographers as virtual mirror images of one another in size, attitude and dress, as if to suggest that, despite their occasional clashes, they are spiritually one. They are often portrayed together on a single panel as the pillars of Christianity, jointly holding a miniature church or kissing in reconciliation and they share the same feast day. Both died martyrs' deaths in Rome between 64 and 67 CE.

In this pair of icons they are rendered with particular delicacy. The fine brushwork of the faces, hands and draperies suggests a metropolitan workshop. Peter has short curly hair and holds keys to the heavenly kingdom, while Paul is balding with a long dark beard and holds a gospel to symbolise his writings. The two saints stand on a symbolic strip of green that denotes the ground, but their tiny feet float outside the frame. Sacred figures are often represented with miniature feet and spindly legs to suggest their weightlessness. They are shown as so suffused with the holy spirit that their himations (robes) billow around them. The saints are clothed in showers of divine uncreated light, indicated by silvery painted highlights over their garments.

These 16th-century icons are remarkable for having retained their original metallic covers, known as *basmas*, which were intended to protect and adorn the holy image. *Basmas* from this period were typically sheets of beaten silver-gilt with vegetal patterns hammered from the back to create a repoussé relief surface. The silver sheets were then fitted in strips around the image and secured with small nails. In this case tiny silver labels and specially shaped halos have also been tailored to the individual saints. One scholar has recently argued that these textured metal coverings heightened the experience of prayer by interacting with flickering candlelight to make the holy images more lifelike.[1] *Basmas* were often casualties of revolution, war and politics, removed for their silver content and melted down for cash.

The presentation of these saints in profile on separate but identical supports relates to a monumental iconostasis in Moscow's Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Kremlin, dated to the 1560s, which is a clue that this pair might once have been part of a set commissioned by a wealthy patron for a miniaturised iconostasis for domestic use, of the kind observed by the visiting archbishop Paul of Aleppo (1627–69) in the mid 17th century.[2] **SM**

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1   Bissera V Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual and the Senses in Byzantium*, Pennsylvania University Press, University Park PA, 2010, p 2.
2   Paul of Aleppo, quoted in Tarasov, *Icons and Devotion*, p 39.

Cat 8
Saint Peter, late 16th century
Russia, Moscow
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood, covers beaten silver
314 x 170 x 25 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 9
Saint Paul, late 16th century
Russia, Moscow
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood, covers beaten silver
315 x 175 x 24 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saints Zosima and Savvatii
RUSSIA

Feast day 2 March

Zosima (died 1478) and Savvatii (died 1435) were monks who founded the large island monastery of Solovetsky on the edge of the White Sea in Russia's deep north during the 15th century. In addition to being a major religious centre in the region, the monastery evolved into a significant economic power in its own right, drawing income from seafood production, trapping, fisheries, mica works, ironworks and pearling. Fortified, wealthy and remote, Solovetsky served for centuries as a stronghold and refuge for religious dissidents as well as a major pilgrim destination.[1] In 1566 the relics of Zosima and Savvatii were interred in the Cathedral of the Transfiguration, the monastery's main church, an event that may have propelled the creation of the first commemorative icons. Between 1668 and 1676, the Solovetsky monks rebelled against the reforms of Patriarch Nikon (term 1652–66; see cat 64). The monastery was captured by the forces of Tsar Alexis (reign 1645–76) and most were killed, with survivors becoming spiritual leaders of the Old Believer movement. In 1765 the Solovetsky Monastery became stauropegic, meaning that it was placed under the authority of the Holy Synod rather than a local bishop, a shift that eroded much of its historic autonomy.

This double portrait shows Zosima and Savvatii holding up a model of their religious institution, which resembles a small medieval city, for the approval of a miracle-working icon of Mary, known as the Mother of God of the Sign, an example of which was located above the entrance to the monastery (see cat 73). Although Zosima and Savvatii never met in life (Savvatii died before Zosima's arrival at the monastery), this icon unites them for posterity.

The silver oklad, covered with finely chased foliate scrolls, has a Moscow mark that dates it to the 1760s. **SM**

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1   In the Soviet era the isolated monastery was used as a gulag prison, but it has since regained its religious function.

Cat 10
Saints Zosima and Savvatii, c1760
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood with silver and gilt oklad
318 x 284 x 35 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint John the Forerunner
RUSSIA

Alternative names Forerunner, Prodromos
Feast days 24 June (birth), 29 August (beheading), 23 September (conception), 24 February and 25 May (finding of the head), weekly day of remembrance Tuesday

The last and most important of the prophets and the first of the saints, John was the son of Mary's cousin Elizabeth and was six months older than his cousin Christ. Descended from priests on both sides, John received the authority of baptism from his father, the high priest Zechariah. Following a life of self-denial, John became a hermit and desert preacher in Judea (between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea), where he exhorted people to renounce selfish ways and to repent their sins. He lived on locusts and wild honey and wore an itchy camel hair shirt beneath his mantle.

According to the New Testament, John anticipated a leader greater than himself. For this reason he is also known as the Forerunner (Prodromos). John is portrayed as gaunt, with rough, unkempt hair, recalling his life in the wilderness. His customary garb is either a melote (Latin: an unshorn sheepskin), or a rough garment of camel hair with a leather belt. Because of his importance as forerunner, prophesier and baptiser of Christ, John is shown on the right hand of the Saviour in the deesis. Here, as he sombrely raises a hand in benediction, his scroll exhorts the faithful to: 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew 3:1–3). **SM**

Cat 11
Saint John the Forerunner, c1600
Russia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
238 x 197 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy, 2017
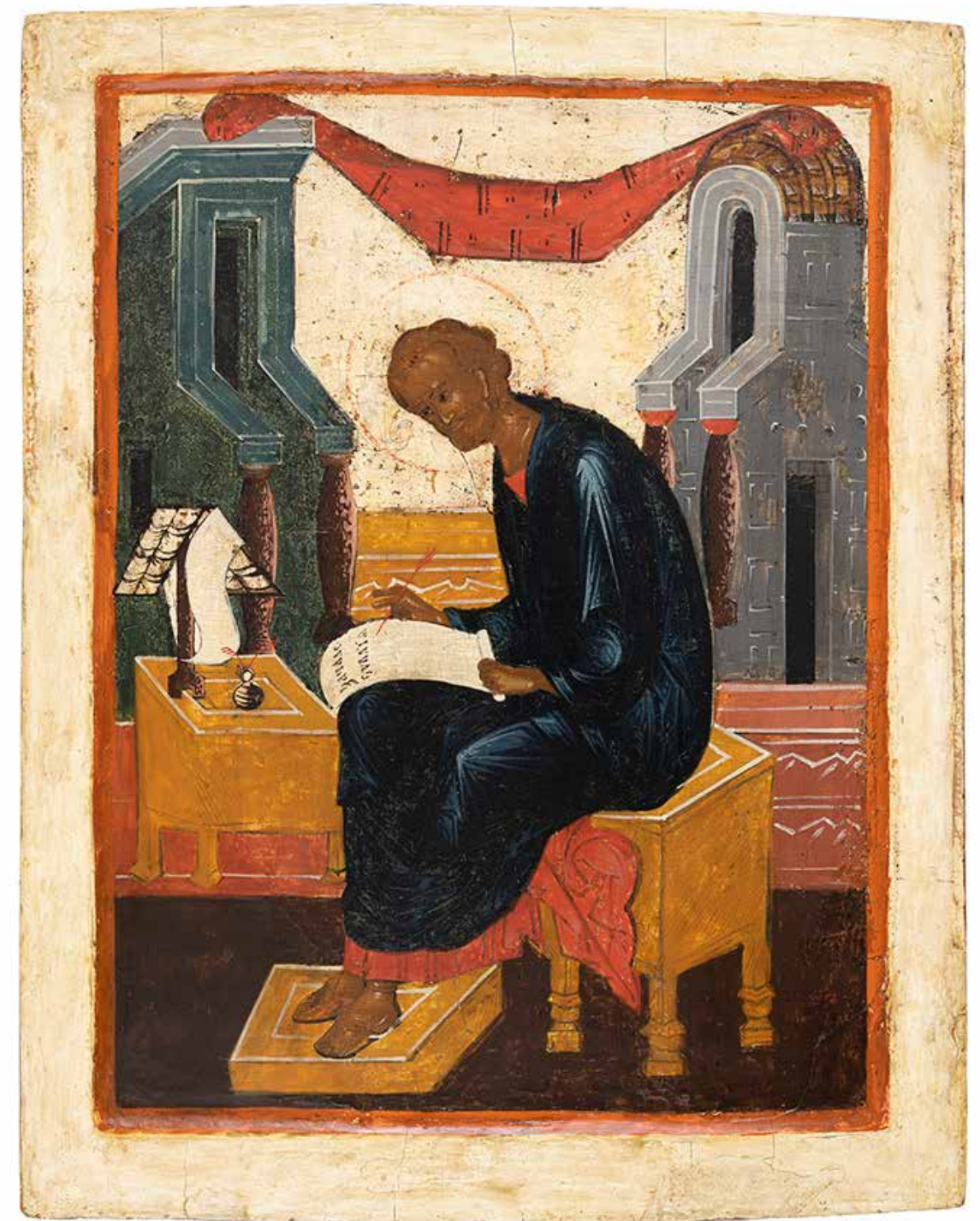
Saint Mark the Evangelist

RUSSIA

Feast day 25 April

Mark is one of the most important figures in early Christianity because of his role as the author of a gospel. He is regarded as the founder of Christianity in Africa and of what became the Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria, one of the greatest cities of the Roman empire, as well as the Coptic Orthodox Church. At the same time, he is venerated in Italy as the apostolic missionary to the Veneto region. Mark's bodily remains held in Alexandria were coveted by the Venetians, who regarded their possession as a key to their moral authority in the northern Adriatic. Stolen by Venetians in 828, his relics were later divided between Cairo, Alexandria and Venice

Mark is most often depicted as a winged lion or in his role of evangelist, writing or holding the gospel that is attributed to him. In this icon Mark is shown according to Byzantine conventions writing indoors, indicated by the device of a canopy of red cloth, or velum, draped between the two buildings. His feet are perched on a stool, and he has an inkpot at hand. Mark uses the same hand to hold his quill and to make a sign of blessing, a clue that the gospel on which he is occupied is sacred. The divine, or uncreated, light that falls across his face and dark blue mantle are further signals that he is writing under divine inspiration.

In the Orthodox Church the Four Evangelists are traditionally shown on the sanctuary (royal) doors, which symbolise the entrance into the kingdom of Heaven. This is because of their important role in recording Christ's life and teachings for posterity. Luke and John are typically shown on the left, with Matthew and Mark on the right, usually in bust length.[1] **SM**

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1   See, for example, the pair of royal doors painted in the 1420s by Andrei Rublev and his workshop for the Holy Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius Lavra, and the pair of royal doors in the Church of the Deposition of the Robe in the Kremlin.

Cat 12
Saint Mark the Evangelist, 16th century
Russia
tempera and gesso on linen over wood
585 x 410 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint Gregory the Theologian
NORTHERN GREECE

Alternative name Gregory of Nazianzus
Feast day 25 January

Saint Gregory is regarded as one of the key figures of Eastern and Western Church history. Gregory was born to wealthy parents near Nazianzus in Cappadocia, northeast Turkey, in the fourth century, and through his scriptural scholarship rose to the rank of archbishop of Constantinople. Gregory brought a new sophistication to Byzantine theology and oratory in the Greek, or hellenistic, style and helped to formulate thinking on the nature of the Holy Trinity (see cats 49 and 50). By tradition, he is regarded as one of the Three Holy Hierarchs of the Eastern Church and is often shown on icons standing beside Saint John Chrysostom ('the golden mouthed') and his friend and fellow Cappadocian, Basil the Great.

Orthodox icons portray Saint Gregory as an old man, with a large, bulging forehead, a receding hairline and a wide, luxuriant beard. He is typically vested as a bishop, with an *omophorion* (stole) and *phelonion* (cape), and holding a gospel while making a gesture of blessing with his right hand. In this icon, Gregory is shown in bust length with his name inscribed in red above each shoulder. Hovering on a gold ground, only his silent inward gaze conveys his stature as one of the early church's most penetrating thinkers. The icon's truncated and impassive frontal format recalls the second-century funerary portraits of the Faiyum area of Egypt painted with encaustic on panel, early precursors to the Byzantian icon painted on a wooden panel. **SM**

Cat 13
Saint Gregory the Theologian, c1500
Northern Greece
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
215 x 150 x 32 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Holy Prophet Hosea
RUSSIA, NOVGOROD

Feast day 17 October

This full-length figure of the Old Testament prophet Hosea would once have occupied the prophets tier in a majestic iconostasis, with an image of the Virgin and Child presiding at the centre. The prophets tier contains images of Old Testament prophets who predicted the coming of the Saviour. Ranged across the upper registers of the icon screen like a holy team, they uniformly demonstrate their deference to the Mother of God, to whom they gesture with one hand in supplication, while holding up the evidence of their contributions to the faith in the form of scrolls.

Hosea, whose name means 'salvation', was born in Samaria (northern Israel) in the eighth century BCE and he ministered there his entire life. His book of writings warned against idolatry in his region. Hosea was one of the Twelve Minor Prophets. Although his teachings are rich with messages of redemption, he is often regarded as a harbinger of doom. He is identifiable here by his scroll, which reads 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.'

The simple vertical format and flattened shapes of this stately image are hallmarks of the Novgorod icon-making region of the Upper Volga, which evolved from a mural-painting tradition. The Novgorodian tradition is particularly noted for its use of white or light ochre grounds, harmonious bright colours and the articulation of forms through long, rhythmically flowing lines. **SM**

Cat 14
Holy Prophet Hosea, c1600
Russia, Novgorod
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
950 x 369 mm
on loan from a private collection, Melbourne

Holy Prophet Isaiah
RUSSIA

Feast day 9 May

This austere icon of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, painted in an archaic and monumental manner, would once have been seen on the left-hand side of the prophets tier of an iconostasis. He turns towards the Mother of God holding her son, whose icon would have appeared in the centre, and he gestures to a scroll stating his key prophesy: 'The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14).

The prophecies of Isaiah inspired some of the most memorable imagery of the Christian tradition: the Annunciation; the ox and the ass recognising the baby Christ in his stall (Isaiah 1:3); and the tree that sprang from the abdomen of the sleeping Jesse, with its branches showing 42 generations of Christ's ancestors (Isaiah 11:1–9). The clarity and exactness of Isaiah's predictions caused some to call him the 'fifth evangelist'.

Isaiah is occasionally depicted with a pair of tongs and a burning coal, used by a seraph to purify the prophet's lips before he replied to God's callings (see cat 61). Here, however, he is shown as an elderly and grey-haired ascetic sage. Glints of divine light in Isaiah's beard and on the angular folds of his robe indicate his holiness. Pale grounds are typical of Russian icons intended for iconostases in the 17th century. **SM**

Cat 15
Holy Prophet Isaiah, c1600
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
410 x 332 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy, 2017

HOLY GUARDIANS: ANGELS, SAINTS & MARTYRS

Sophie Matthiesson

It was many centuries after the death of Christ before images of holy figures were openly venerated, although evidence suggests they were being privately prayed to as early as the second century CE and throughout the era of persecution of Christians.[1] The Ephesian official Lycomedes, for example, was described as having a painted portrait of the apostle John in his bedroom, which he had surrounded with wreaths and candles.[2] Other sources from the third and fourth centuries describe private houses filled with images of recent Christian martyrs or ascetics.[3] The earliest portrait icons are generally agreed to be a continuation of the Roman practice of portraits painted on panel with encaustic (coloured wax). Examples of such portraits from communities of the Faiyum Oasis in Egypt, made in a funerary context and dating from the first to third centuries, bear striking formal affinities with later icons of Christian saints.

Even after Emperor Constantine (reign 306–37) legalised Christianity and ended persecution in 313, venerating religious portraits was problematic, because it was perceived to be akin to pagan idolatry and a contravention of the Second Commandment of Moses. The physical remains of saints, on the other hand, could be honoured because holiness was considered to inhere in the bodies of saints after death. Through proximity to a saint's relics, it was thought that a believer could enter into the living presence of that saint and gain a direct pathway to the divine and ultimately to heaven.[4] In due course, this came to be believed of portraits (icons) of saints as well.[5]

The Eastern Orthodox Church recognises many categories of holy personage: evangelists, theologians and prophets, those who have taught or toiled for Christ (known as 'equal to the apostles'), those who have suffered for their faith (confessors) or ultimately died for it (martyrs). It also acknowledges military and medical saints, and religious ascetics ('fools for Christ'). Some saints had particular regional significance, and took on the features, roles and powers of earlier local pre-Christian deities, such as Elijah in Novgorod whose identity elides with Perun, the Slavic god of thunder. Others, such as the third-century saints George and Paraskeva, were so widely venerated that many regions laid claim to them. The

most popular saints were credited with healing powers, as were the medical saints. [6] Saints were perceived as capable of addressing human needs and making miraculous interventions, thus sparing believers the need to appeal directly to the Mother of God, John the Baptist or Christ on lesser matters. The perceived agency of saint icons made them indispensable in the lives of communities who had few forms of protection, and it explains their ubiquity.

Debates around the burgeoning use of icons, known as the iconoclast controversy, led to the first ban of icon use – by Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (reign 717–41) between 726 and 787 and a second ban instigated by Leo V the Armenian (reign 813–20) and his successors between 814 and 842. The reinstatement of icon use in 843, known as the Triumph of Orthodoxy, was on the understanding that the prototype of the image is the subject of veneration, not the image itself, as had been outlined by Basil the Great (c330–79) and John of Damascus (c675–749).

For an icon to be legitimate and effective, it had to be an authentic representation of the saint depicted, since it was the holy person rather than the icon that possessed the power. This meant an icon had to portray particulars of the saint's attributes, such as age, hair and clothing, to render that saint readily recognisable. At the same time the figure must be shown in a schematic, incorporeal and depthless way, avoiding perspectival space, so as to appear detached from earthly time and place, thus allowing the believer to see through the image to the spiritual realm in which the holy person now dwelled. [7]

Information about saints' appearances came from written descriptions of their lives, including reported visions, which were later consolidated in *synaxaria*, compilations of the lives of saints. For guidance on church-approved or canonical forms, later iconographers could also turn to *hermeneia* (Greek: manuals) often written by monastics, such as the Athonite monk, Dionysius of Fourna (c1670–1744), or *podlinniki* (Russian: pattern books), notably the Stroganov Pattern Book of the early 17th century. Dionysius's *hermeneia*, gives a physical description of each prophet as well as the prophesy on his or her scroll, which allows the figure to be identified. For those saints who had been martyred, it includes details of their deaths. [8]

While textual descriptions of male saints provided often generous detail, the relative absence of information about the appearance of female saints resulted in a generic quality in depictions of them – they can be hard to tell apart, especially where an identifying inscription (titulus) is missing or illegible. They are typically portrayed as young and beautiful – proof of their moral purity – in red martyrs' robes. Notable exceptions are Mary of Egypt, whose haggard appearance identifies her as a penitential desert saint (cat 117) and Saint Anna, who was elderly and was childless until she gave birth to the Virgin Mary (cat 77).

Every depicted feature of a saint has symbolic meaning. Large open eyes gaze on to a spiritual reality, closed eyes suggest inward sight, high foreheads denote holy wisdom, thin lips sinlessness, clenched lips silence and self-denial, and large ears receptiveness to God's voice. [9] As the unblinking gaze of a saint is a channel of divine grace, the gaze of treacherous figures cannot meet the eyes of the believer. For this reason, although profile views are rarely used, Judas Iscariot or the Devil himself are typically shown in profile.

The presence of a saint rendered the space around it holy. In Orthodox households small panels were often commissioned by believers for their homes, and for births, christenings or weddings. The inclusion of supplementary saints might reflect the figures after whom the family or recipient was named. Alternatively, a user's needs and circumstances might have determined the choice of healing or protective saints depicted. [10]

In the 17th century, a Dutch visitor to Russia noted the local habit of people scanning a room upon entering to locate the icon, and that they then made the sign of the cross while uttering the words 'Lord have mercy' or 'peace be to the house and all who dwell therein' before greeting their hosts. [11] A later Danish witness observed that Russian devotees kissed the saints and apostles 'right on the lips and faces', while in images of the Mother of God and the Saviour they kissed only the hands and the feet, a practice also followed in Greece. [12]

Small portable icons, such as diptychs, triptychs and polyptychs, were also used by travellers and to sanctify roads, or 'wayfaring space', through placement in roadside chapels or on posts. [13] Pope Gregory II (papacy 715–31) stipulated to the Byzantium emperor Leo III (reign 717–41) that 'all virtuous and godly people' should undertake journeys accompanied by an icon – a popular belief in Moscow was that prayer while travelling would be rendered ineffective without one's personal icon. [14] A Russian lullaby went, 'Here's a holy icon to help you on your way; / let it be a banner for your journey; / pray it never leaves you.' [15]

1   Scholars now trace domestic icon use back to pre-Christian private icon cults. See Thomas F Mathews & Norman Muller, 'Isis and Mary in Early Icons', in Maria Vassilaki (ed), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2005, p 3.

2   Michele Bacci, 'Devotional Panels as Sites of Intercultural Exchange' in Maya Corry, Marco Faini & Alessia Meneghin (eds), *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, Brill, Leiden, 2018, p 273.

3   As above.

4   Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Bristol Classical Press, London, 2012, p 11.

5   As above.

6   Eugenia Russell & Teodora Burnand, 'Donors, texts and images: Visualisation of the hagiographical cycle of St Panteleimon' *Byzantion*, vol 81, 2011, p 290.

7   Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1996, pp 16–19, 143.

8   Dionysius, *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna*, translated by Paul Hetherington, Sagittarius Press/Oakwood Publications, London/Redonoda Beach CA, 1981. A major recent publication which reproduces many of the surviving post-Byzantine Greek drawings used by icon painters is: Maria Vassilaki, *Working Drawings of Icon Painters After the Fall of Constantinople: The Andreas Xyngopoulos Portfolio at the Benaki Museum*, Benaki Museum Publications/AG Leventis Gallery/AG Leventis Foundation, Athens, 2015.

9   Andrzej Dudek, 'On some aspects of word, image and human values as reflected by Russian Orthodox icons and western religious Paintings', *Politeja*, 44, 2016, p 74.

10 Bacci, 'Devotional Panels as Sites of Intercultural Exchange', p 285.

11 This was the Protestant artist Cornelis de Bruyn (1652–1727): see Oleg Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, translated by Robin Milner-Gulland, Reaktion Books, London, 2002, p 62.

12 This was the Danish diplomat Jens Juel (1631–1700): Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, p 62

13 Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, p 72.

14 As above p 69.

15 Alfredo Tradigo, Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church, translated by Stephen Sartarelli,The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles CA, 2006, p 33.

Archangel Michael with Saints Flor and Lavr
RUSSIA, NOVGOROD

Alternative names Florus and Laurus
Feast day 18 August

According to the Orthodox hagiography, during the rule of Hadrian (117–38 CE) Flor and Lavr were twin brothers and stone carvers from Byzantium who were apprenticed to Christian masons in Illyria in the western Balkans. The brothers were commissioned by Likaion, the prefect of Illyria, to build a stone temple to Roman pagan gods, which they did in a state of pious fasting, while dedicating their wages to the poor. When the siblings cured the injured son of a pagan priest, the priest and other witnesses converted to Christianity and sought to rededicate the temple to Christianity. As a punishment Likaion had the brothers thrown down a well and buried alive. The martyrs' relics were said to have been found uncorrupted. They were transferred to their home town, by then renamed Constantinople.

Pilgrims from Novgorod were much struck by this story and brought back to Kyivan Rus' relics that were believed to have cured a local horse plague. Other stories elaborate the brothers' powers over animals. On one occasion the brothers' horses ran away and they called upon the Archangel Michael, who helped them retrieve their animals, an episode depicted in this icon. The scene includes three holy herdsmen that Flor, Lavr and the Archangel Michael were said to have trained: Elasipp or Elashippus (meaning 'horsebreaker'), Persipp or Speushippus ('horse-seeker'), and Mesipp or Melashippus ('hunter of black horses').[1]

The Flor and Lavr icon first emerged in 15th-century Novgorod, a great mercantile city of northwestern Russia, where their cult remained strongest and where merchants patronised church building and icon production in a vigorous and unpretentious style. In this icon, which is painted in the Novgorod manner, the Archangel Michael appears against a heavenly gold ground, with the bearded Flor on his right and the beardless Lavr on his left, and confers his blessing on the brothers, who in turn transmit their skills to their three saintly trainees. The legend of the horse-taming twin-brother saints, who were also masons, is a Christian continuation of the Dioscuri myth of the Roman twin brothers Castor and Pollux, who also had stone cutting and horse-healing skills. Many rural rituals evolved around the veneration of the saints in recognition of their protection of local livestock. At an annual horse festival traditionally held in late summer – on 18 August, the feast day of Flor and Lavr — horse handlers took the day off work and bathed and groomed their horses at a pond before leading them to their church for blessing and processions. Special biscuits named in memory of the saints were baked as treats for horses and were imprinted with a hoof mark. **SM**

Cat 16
Archangel Michael with Saints Flor and Lavr, c1600
Russia, Novgorod
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
376 x 290 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy

1. In its bid to suppress variations of popular icons, the 1722 Holy Synod rejected the inclusion of the three additional rider figures in the Flor and Lavr icon, on the grounds that they had no basis as historical figures: see Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, p 185.

Saint Nicholas

GREECE

Feast days 6 December, 9 May

The patron saint of Greece, Nicholas is the guardian of many: sailors, merchants, reformed thieves, archers, prostitutes, brewers, pawnbrokers, unmarried people, students and children. Also known as Nicholas of Myra or Nicholas of Bari, he is said to have been born during the Roman empire to wealthy Christian parents in the Greek seaport of Patara, Lycia, in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Nicholas's numerous acts of discreet generosity led to his evolution into the enduring figure of mythic benevolence known as Santa Claus. Because of the many miracles attributed to him, including exorcism and healing, he is also known as Nicholas the Wonderworker.

Nicholas is easily recognisable by his prominent balding forehead, regarded as a sign of his virtue and wisdom, and by his trim grey hair and soft beard. In this icon traces of red cinnabar paint delineate his name above each shoulder and a faint halo, punched into the gold ground, encircles the round crown of his head. Nicholas wears the vestments of a bishop during the liturgy, which include a white *omophorion* (stole) decorated with black crosses and a black-and-white checked *sakkos* (chasuble). From beneath this garb his right hand and richly cuffed wrist appear in a gesture of blessing while his left hand, which is covered in his *sakkos* holds a closed jewel-encrusted gospel, a reminder of the bishop's role as a teacher of scriptures. A slightly worried expression renders the saint warm and approachable. **SM**

Cat 17
Saint Nicholas, 17th century
Greece
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
330 x 220 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint Nicholas of Myra
RUSSIA

Feast days 6 December, 9 May

Few saints are more loved in the Orthodox world than Saint Nicholas, after whom many are named. Among the first saints to be adopted in 988, in the earliest days of Christianity in Kyivan Rus', Nicholas (or Nikolai) was adored by all classes, but most of all by ordinary people, who saw in him an ideal of the virtuous peasant: unsophisticated, kind, wise and deeply pious. He is frequently shown as an everyman. Regarded as second in importance only to the Mother of God, a Russian proverb says: 'If God should die, we will still have Saint Nicolas'.

Portrait icons, which show only the face of the saint, were reserved for the most important and widely recognised saints. They were often smaller than standard icons, and of correspondingly simpler construction, with only a single bracing *shponka* (Russian: spline or lath) holding the panel together on the back. This of course also made them more affordable for private veneration. In these shorter format icons, also known as prayer icons, the head and shoulder of a saint filled the panel, and the halo often extended out into the viewer's space, accentuating the saint's physical and psychological presence.

In the example here, Nicholas is shown with few symbols of his public office as a bishop. An emphasis is placed instead upon the saint's slightly asymmetrical eyes, which convey a sense of kindly watchfulness, and his gentle smile, a reminder of Nicholas's importance as a guardian over the everyday lives of ordinary Russians. Portrait icons of Saint Nicholas are mostly of early date, with few being found later than the 18th century. **SM**

Cat 18
Saint Nicholas of Myra, c1700
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
315 x 267 x 37 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker
RUSSIA

Feast days 9 May, 6 December

In addition to his skills as a miracle worker, healing the sick and exorcising the possessed, Saint Nicholas was a stout defender of the Christian faith against heresy. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, he slapped the heretical bishop Arius, for which he was defrocked and imprisoned. That night Nicholas dreamed that he saw Christ presenting him with the gospels and the Mother of God restoring his bishop's stole to him in approval of his actions. The next morning Nicholas's jailors were astonished to find him miraculously released and clothed in bishop's vestments.

In this imposing icon, Nicholas's calm gesture of blessing imparts a mood of peace and equilibrium, but miniature images of Christ and the Mother of God in medallions behind the saint recall the episode in which he displayed his quick temper. Nicholas is not the endearing 'little Russian' that devotees kept at home as personal talismans, but rather is almost life-sized. His physical presence is accentuated by the panel's planks, which have bowed over time and propel the saint bodily into the viewer's space.

The icon, once darkened by soot and discoloured olifa (a linseed oil varnish), has been cleaned, revealing the vivid contrasts of orange-red, olive and crisp black and white associated with the late Novgorod school. Nail holes indicate that a metal halo once framed the saint's head, which would have added a twinkling aspect to the icon when seen through the flickering candles lit in front of it by the devout. **SM**

Cat 19
Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, 16th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
714 x 625 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy

Saint Paraskeva
RUSSIA

Alternative name Pyatnitsa ('Friday')
Feast days 26 July, 14 October, 28 October

Paraskeva is among the most popular and venerated female saints in the Orthodox Church. Named after the day Friday – in honour of Good Friday, the day of Christ's crucifixion – she suffered great torments for her refusal to worship pagan idols. Paraskeva appears to be an amalgam of several saints of that name. One was the second-century Paraskeva the Roman (feast day 26 July), regarded as the 'great martyr', a wealthy young woman who was executed during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (reign 161–80 CE). Another was the third-century Paraskeva of Ikonion (feast day 28 October), a hermit and missionary, who became a great martyr after her beheading in the period of Diocletian (reign 284–305 CE), and the third was the 11th-century Paraskeva of Epibatas in Turkey (feast day 14 October), who was born and died on Turkish soil.

Despite her composite origins, Paraskeva is recognisable by her still and upright pose, and by her martyr's garb of a red maphorion and her cross, but the detail that distinguishes her from other female martyrs is the scroll, which was originally linked to Paraskeva of Ikonion and which professes her faith, the Nicene Creed: 'I believe in one God, Father Almighty'. Paraskeva's virtue and her composure during torture impressed and converted her persecutors.

Paraskeva is credited with powers of healing, in particular the ability to cure the blind and lame and to assist women conceive. The tomb of Paraskeva of Rome in Thesprotia, Greece, is still visited as a pilgrim site, and earth from her grave, which has the status of a 'touch relic' from its proximity to the holy person, is believed to have miraculous powers. In this icon Paraskeva is depicted as a Byzantine noblewoman, wearing a pearl-edged robe and a crown of martyrdom over her linen head covering. Her headdress was said to have been made from the sacred cloth that had the face of Christ divinely imprinted on it. **SM**

Cat 20
Saint Paraskeva, c1625
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
314 x 270 x 38 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint Paraskeva
RUSSIA

Alternative name Pyatnitsa ('Friday')
Feast days 26 July, 14 October, 28 October

Paraskeva's clarity of faith made her a formidable opponent of Emperor Diocletian (reign 284–305), whose polytheism she pitted herself against. In this simplified 16th-century representation of the third-century saint, she is recognisable by the combination of her red robe of martyrdom, which indicates her death for her faith, and by a scroll which she holds with both hands while staring directly at the believer. The scroll is inscribed with the Nicene Creed: 'I believe in one God, Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible.'

In Russia Paraskeva is closely associated with marriage, rural life and trade. She presided over the traditional fairs and markets that took place on Fridays. In 1207 the farmers and traders of the merchant city of Novgorod built a church dedicated to Paraskeva at the local marketplace to maximise her good influence over commerce and the women of the market. Paraskeva may have taken on some of the qualities and functions of the pre-Christian goddess Mokosh, who had been popular in the region, where she too had been honoured on Fridays and associated with women's welfare.

Nail holes around the saint's head indicate this venerated image was once adorned with a metal halo, which would have reflected candlelight around the saint's face, bringing life and movement to her expression. The extensive losses to the lower section of the panel indicate a long history of veneration: the extreme wear is consistent with much kissing and possibly washing. **SM**

Cat 21
Saint Paraskeva, 16th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
264 x 210 x 20 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint Paraskeva

RUSSIA

Alternative name Pyatnitsa ('Friday')
Feast days 26 July, 14 October, 28 October

The half-figure of Saint Paraskeva is presented in a simplified way in this 19th-century icon, but the drapery is elegant. In Eastern Orthodox icons, the saints retained the physical characteristics that they had in real life with the addition of symbolism indicating that they were deified. Paraskeva is shown with short dark hair peeping out from her creamy white head covering. Her small hands, long nose and elongated body indicate her spiritual status. Paraskeva wears the plain red cloak of martyrdom. The focus is on the folds in her headdress and outer clothing, because these are a metaphor for her deification, a term in Orthodoxy meaning a state of grace achieved through close union with God. She holds symbols associated with her faith: the small Orthodox cross and the scroll of the Nicene Creed.

The imagery of Paraskeva reconciles contradictions in her veneration. She was said to have had a beautiful face, yet she was also ascetic. At age 10, having heard a priest recounting the gospel story in which Christ said to the rich man, 'Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor ... and follow me' (Matthew 19:21), she gave her clothes to a poor girl as she left the church. Despite choosing to live in poverty, she was venerated in Novgorod as the patron of trade: here she has pearls decorating the cuffs and waist of her dress. Her virtue was abstinence, but she is the patron of marriage and childbearing. Although Paraskeva's exact origins are unclear, several Orthodox countries venerate her as their own. Her relics were relocated several times – the remains of Paraskeva of Epibatas now rest in the Metropolitan Cathedral in Iasi, Romania. **MP**

Cat 22
Saint Paraskeva, 19th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
179 x 149 x 27 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saints Cosmas and Damian
GREECE

Alternative names Anargyroi, Bessrebreniki
Feast day 1 November

Healing saints, among whom Cosmas and Damian of Asia are the best known, inspire a special reverence among the Orthodox faithful and are known as *Hagoi Anargyroi*, meaning saints 'without silver' because they treated the poor without accepting a fee. Two brothers who were born in Arabia, Cosmas and Damian studied medicine in Syria and practised in Cilicia (southern Turkey), where they also spread the word of the gospel. As well as ministering to the sick, they cured camels, and on one occasion removed a snake from a peasant's belly. Their most famous feat was to transplant the healthy leg from a dead man onto an amputee. During the reign of Diocletian (284–305), the Roman prefect of Cilicia ordered the siblings to renounce their faith, and they were tortured and beheaded when they refused. Their renown spread throughout the Eastern Roman empire. When the seventh-century ascetic monk Saint Theodore of Sykeon fell desperately ill, a vision appeared to him of the brothers, who were said to have looked exactly like their icon, an anecdote which is sometimes cited as evidence that Theodore endured his illness with an icon of the healing saints at hand. Theodore subsequently recovered.[1]

In this Greek example, intended for personal devotions, Cosmas and his younger brother Damian are depicted according to the classic Byzantine iconography: the siblings are shown full-length wearing himations (Greek: square-necked cloaks) and *dalmaticas* (Latin: wide-sleeved tunics) with longer gold-trimmed tunics underneath. Each saint holds a container with medicinal powders, and Damian would have once held out a long spoon with a cross on the handle, indicating the importance of spiritual as well as bodily healing and reminding the viewer that all cures are by the grace of God. Traces of cinnabar paint indicate the saints' names. They would once have read *Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΚΟΣΜΑΣ* (Saint Cosmas) on the left and *Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΔΑΜΙΑΝΟΣ* (Saint Damian) on the right. **SM**

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1   Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and its Icons*, George Philip, London, 1985, p 30.

Cat 23
Saints Cosmas and Damian, 19th century
Greece
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on panel
238 x 194 mm
on loan from University Art Collection, The University of Sydney
Donated through The Hon R P Meagher bequest 2011

Saint George and the Dragon
CRETE

Alternative names George of Lydda, George the Victory-Bearer
Feast day 23 April

This action-filled icon depicts the popular legend of Saint George fighting a dragon that is about to devour a princess, who has been reluctantly surrendered as a human sacrifice by her royal parents. According to this story, which originated in 11th-century Cappadocia in Anatolia (but which was later transposed to Libya), the king and queen witness their daughter's rescue from a palace tower and gratefully reward George with the keys of their city. Images of equestrian warriors who slew monsters long pre-date the George legend and can be found in ancient Egypt and Roman times, as well as in the Christian period when a number of 'holy rider' figures evolved whose mission it was to combat evil.

The theme of Saint George had a particular resonance with both Catholics and Orthodox Christians in the 15th and 16th centuries. With the continual incursions of the Ottoman Turks into Byzantine territories between 1265 and 1479, George's conflict with the dragon was understood in terms of an existential war between Christianity and Islam.

This composition of Saint George triumphant on a rearing white horse as he drives his spear through a two-footed, ridge-backed dragon has become the definitive image of the George legend and its propagation is traceable to the workshop of the Cretan icon painter Angelos Akotantos (c1400–57), who was active in the capital of Candia in about 1450. Angelos, one of the first Orthodox artists to sign his works, was a specialist in military saints and many of the hallmarks of his style can be seen here, including the harness tracery over the knotted tail, the fluttering short *chlamys* (Greek: cloak) and the dragon's tail that curls perilously around the horse's back leg. Whether Angelos coined the iconography is still debated, as elements can be found in metalwork and wall decorations as far away as Georgia. However Angelos and the workshops associated with him were so successful in disseminating this version of Saint George that it may be the case that the form found its way to Georgia from Crete, rather than the other way round.[1]

Important archival research by Maria Vassilaki and others has revealed that working drawings were closely held by communities and transferred between workshops and from one artist generation to the next through sale or inheritance. As a result, images such as the Angelos George could be reproduced with remarkable fidelity across many decades.[2] **SM**

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1   Maria Vassilaki, 'Some Cretan Icons in the Walters Art Gallery', *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, vol 48, 1990, pp 75–92.
2   Maria Vassilaki, 'A Cretan Icon of Saint George', *Burlington Magazine*, 131, March 1989, pp 208–15.

Cat 24
Saint George and the Dragon, c1500
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
431 x 364 x 45 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint George and the Dragon
RUSSIA, MSTERA

Alternative names George of Lydda, George the Victory-Bearer
Feast day 23 April

This icon type is known as George the Victory-Bearer or George the Victorious. It shows a dragon occupying the pond that is the life-source of the arid city of Silene in Libya. The dragon has demanded a supply of living sacrifices from the townsfolk in exchange for access to the water supply, which it is also polluting. Having run out of beasts to offer up, the king imposes a lottery system of human sacrifices. When the name of his daughter Princess Elisava is drawn, he regretfully surrenders her, dressed as a bride. At the crucial moment Saint George arrives. After making the sign of the cross, he spears the dragon and tells the princess to tie her belt around its neck, making a collar, whereupon the injured beast meekly follows her away. Uncreated light falls across the rocky ground, signifying the divine nature of the event. At God's signal, an angel swoops down to place a crown on George's head. The townspeople who witness the scene convert to Christianity.

This meticulously rendered 19th-century icon was likely painted by an artist from the Old Believers sect, which maintained styles pre-dating the reforms of the patriarch of Moscow, Nikon (term 1652–66). The maker was probably based in Mstera (Mstyora), a town in the Vladimir region renowned for its icon workshops and for its practice of retaining old icon patterns and drawings.[1] A number of features hark back to styles of the earlier Palekh and Stroganov schools – bright colours, miniaturisation, ornate architecture and black line tracery (niello) evoking engraved metal. Anachronisms of this kind were intentional, and signal an ongoing refutation of Nikon's modernising efforts and Russia's increasing openness to western influence. Among Nikon's most despised reforms was the compulsory realignment of traditional hand-blessing signs with those used by the Greek Church (see cat 3). In this icon, George makes the 'correct' sign of the traditional Russian cross (ie. two fingers straightened and three folded) with the hand that holds the righteously vanquishing lance. In this case the two-footed dragon has assumed semi-human characteristics: the Old Believers' foe was never Islam, but rather heretics from within their own faith.[2] **SM**

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1 Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, p 302.
2 On the Old Believers' characterisation of Nikon as the Antichrist for forcing 'all to make the sign of the cross with the pinch', see Aleksandra Sulikowska-Bełczowska, 'Old Believers and the World of Evil: Images of Evil Forces in Old Believer Art', *Ikonotheka*, 27, 2017, p 73.

Cat 25
Saint George and the Dragon, 19th century
Russia, Mstera
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
352 x 302 x 25 mm
on loan from a private collection, Melbourne

Saint Demetrius
NORTH RUSSIA

Alternative names Demetrius of Thessaloniki, Holy Great-Martyr Demetrius the Myroblyte
Feast day 26 October

Seen here on a rearing horse and with a fluttering *chlamys* (Greek: cloak), the third-century saint Demetrius is venerated as a great Christian defender of the city of Thessaloniki. Whereas early images show him in the aristocratic civilian garb of the late Roman empire, later images picture him as a Byzantine soldier, as in this example. Accounts differ as to the identity of the helmet-wearing man that Demetrius is shown spearing. He is usually identified as either the pagan emperor Maximian (reign 286–305) or the Bulgarian tsar Kaloyan (reign 1196–1207). The territorial nature of the victory is suggested by the holy light falling in the landscape around the saint and the black abyss into which Demetrius has driven his foe. The scene of Demetrius's miraculous slaying of Kaloyan, said to have taken place in 1207 during the siege of Thessalonica, has long been celebrated in woodcuts and popular art forms.[1]

Saint Demetrius was born into a family of clandestine Christians. He is thought to have been a deacon who was martyred at Sirmium (northern Serbia) in 306 during the persecutions of Emperor Maximian (reign 286–305). Many miracles are associated with him. Slavic armies attacking Thessaloniki were said to have retreated at the sight of the radiant young Christian above the city walls. Demetrius's repeated interventions on behalf of his city saw him gradually re-visualised as a soldier and he often appears together with his contemporary Saint George, another great military saint (see cat 24 and 25). Both are usually depicted on horseback, with Demetrius spearing an infidel and George a dragon. The saints are both youthful and unbearded and are affectionately known as 'holy riders'.

Demetrius was embraced by peasants and shepherds in the Middle Ages. In Greece his rise in popularity as a patron saint of agriculture is linked by scholars to the demise of the cult of the pagan goddess Demeter. His relics were said to stream a sweet-smelling myrrh, leading to his name Myroblyte, or 'Myrrh-gusher'. This icon, which was once owned by Johnny Stuart, the renowned Scottish expert in Russian icons, is distinctive for its silver ground and vivid energetic style, typical of northern Russia. **SM**

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1 See Piotr Grotowski, *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints*, Brill, Boston & Leiden, 2010, p 104.

Cat 26
Saint Demetrius, 18th century
North Russia
egg tempera, silver leaf and gesso on linen over wood
375 x 312 x 26 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint George and his Vision of Christ

RUSSIA

Alternative names George of Lydda, George the Victory-Bearer
Feast day 23 April

The widely venerated Saint George was executed in 303 for refusing to make sacrifices to pagan gods during the persecutions of Emperor Diocletian (reign 284–305). Here he is shown as a martyr of Christ, having reached the place where he is to be gruesomely tortured and put to death. George asks the guards for privacy and then takes up his cross and prays for strength.

George is portrayed as a high-born soldier. He wears an elaborately decorated suit of armour with niello (black-line tracery). This refined detailing places the icon in the early 17th century, within aristocratic circles around the Stroganov family, who owned a book of icon prototypes known as the Stroganov Pattern Book, dated to around 1600. The Stroganov school is the name used to describe the Moscow-trained artists who worked for the court of the tsar but who were also patronised by the wealthy merchants of northwest Russia. Works of this school can be identified by their sophisticated miniaturist style and extensive use of gold and rich decorative effects, achieved with the thinnest haired brushes. Holy figures are shown as graceful and high waisted, with small hands, heads and feet, and light fluttering clothing. Stroganov icons were frequently book-sized, intended for the home and private devotion.[1] Many emphasise a meditative quietness and a calm communion with the divine, qualities seen in abundance in this icon.

A similar icon painted on lime wood, which depicts George frontally with a shield, is in the National Museum Stockholm. It is presumed to be a luxurious personal icon, commissioned for a Muscovite boy named George (Jurij) after the depicted saint. Known as a *zakaznaya ikona* (Russian: commissioned icon including the client's eponymous saint), this is probably the function of the present icon also. **SM**

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1   See Roderick Grierson (ed), *Gates of Mystery: The Art of Holy Russia*, Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 1992, p 70.

Cat 27
Saint George and his Vision of Christ, c1650
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
307 x 224 x 35 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 28
Saint George, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
410 x 334 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of
Edwin and Margot McCarthy, 2017

Saint George

RUSSIA

Alternative names George of Lydda, George the Victory-Bearer
Feast day 23 April

George's stance in this bust-length icon indicates that it was once displayed on the upper tiers of an iconostasis as part of a deesis row, in which Christ occupies the centre, flanked by saints who turn towards him in supplication. Saint George was typically mirrored by a right-turning image of his contemporary and counterpart, Saint Demetrius. Demetrius is also young and curly haired, but his locks are cropped short. The sweet-faced George, in his simple martyr's robes, is not a warrior in this setting, but acts instead as a gentle intercessor between the faithful, to whom he silently looks, and God, to whom he gestures with his hands. **SM**

Cat 29
Saint George and the Dragon, c1700
Greece
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
352 x 297 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat. Gift of John McCarthy through
the Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

Saint George and the Dragon
GREECE

Alternative names George of Lydda, George the Victory-Bearer
Feast day 23 April

The immense charm of this rustic vision of Saint George on his rearing horse owes much to its assured brevity of handling, which endows the scene with a crackling energy. George drives his spear into the tonsils of a gaping dragon, whose tail dangerously snags his horse's back hoof. The familiar motifs reveal knowledge of the well-known prototype by Angelos Akotantos (c1400–57, see cat 24) and are rendered in a loose, freehand technique that combines elements of drawing, sgrafitto and abrasion. Decorative details are used sparingly and to great effect: a plaited mane, a brocade sleeve, an embossed cuirass, a head of close-cropped curls. This piece of folk painting has a vitality that workshop icons, reproduced by traditional methods with the help of *anthibola* (Greek: pricked cartoons, working drawings), sometimes lack. **SM**

Two Martyr Saints
EASTERN GREECE OR ASIA MINOR

In western religious imagery martyrs are often depicted with the instruments of their torture and death, which helps greatly in their identification. In the Byzantine tradition, however, saints are shown as having passed through suffering, and their icons serve as 'windows to heaven'. Having lost their inscriptions over time, the identities of the saints in this rustic folding diptych are difficult to establish with certainty, yet their generic function as robust images of protection and inspiration is unambiguous.

The female saint in the left panel wears a red martyr's robe and is shown grave-faced in the *orans* (Latin: prayful) stance, holding up the open palm of her hand as she holds a small cross in the other. She might be Tatiana, Anastasia, Paraskeva, Marina or one of the many other pious women killed in the waves of persecution of Christians carried out by Roman emperors until the fourth century.

The male saint in the right panel is shown as eternally calm upon a rearing horse. He wears the apparel of a Roman soldier and conforms to a category of saint known as a holy rider, an armed equestrian defender of Christianity. The majority of warrior saints come from the period of persecutions ordered by the pagan emperor Diocletian (reign 284–305). They were typically Roman soldiers or officials who converted to Christianity and were punished for refusing to follow the pagan practices of the Roman military. This figure might be Theodore, Demetrius, Mercurius, Artemius of Antioch or George. **SM**

Cat 30
Two Martyr Saints, 17th century
Eastern Greece or Asia Minor
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
240 x 295 x 35 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Archangel Michael, Guardian of the Host
EGYPT

Alternative name Archangel Michael
Feast days 8 November, 6 September

Whereas many depictions of Saint Michael show him as weightless and caught mid-action (see cats 32 and 106), this is a frontal, imposingly stolid image of the archangel. Michael's stillness and implacable distant gaze imply other qualities of permanence and guardianship. The two fluted and gilded columns edging this monumental icon suggest it was once part of a wooden iconostasis or templon, possibly flanking the royal doors to a church sanctuary, with an image of the Archangel Gabriel on the other side. Michael appears not as a military commander, but in the splendid, jewelled fabrics of a Byzantine emperor, in which form he is understood to be representing the heavenly court. Michael wears a *loros* (Greek: belt) of embroidered cloth, criss-crossed around his torso. In his right hand he holds up a medallion containing an image of Christ Emmanuel (the Hebrew word Emmanuel means 'God is with us'), a motif that appears in depictions of archangels from the 12th century onwards. In his left hand he holds a cross on a long staff.

The origins and dating of this icon have puzzled many scholars, who have hypothesised that it was Syrian, but current scholarship now points to an Egyptian context.[1] Mat Immerzeel has drawn attention to key similarities between the present icon and several icons linked to a Greek Orthodox church in Faiyum, southwest of Cairo, noting the geometric pattern in the garments, the gilded garment borders with jewellery and the embossed nimbus.[2] Immerzeel proposes that the Greek lettering and absence of Arabic inscriptions point to an Egyptian Greek Orthodox painter. **SM**

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1   The icon was originally acquired as a 17th-century icon by the English historian and spiritualist John Sebastian Marlow Ward (Honduras 1885–1949 Cyprus).

2   The writer gratefully acknowledges Mat Immerzeel for sharing his observations, along with a photograph of a comparative example; email, 11 December 2021.

Cat 31
Archangel Michael, Guardian of the Host, 18th century
Egypt
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
510 x 315 mm
on loan from Abbey Museum of Art and Archaeology Caboolture,
Sunshine Coast, Queensland

Archangel Michael, Leader of the Heavenly Host, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
309 x 255 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy
in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy, 2017

Archangel Michael, Leader of the Heavenly Host
RUSSIA

Alternative name Archangel Michael
Feast days 6 September, 8 November

Archangel Michael is shown here as he appeared to Joshua in the Book of Revelation, as Archistrategos, commander of the heavenly guardian angels:

> [W]hen there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship (Joshua 5:13–14).

Several imposing early Moscow icons depict this precise episode.[1] It is therefore unsurprising that this 17th-century icon, painted hundreds of years later and in an aristocratic Moscow context, should remain so like them in essential details. Michael stands turned slightly to the left, as if addressing the unseen Joshua rather than the viewer. His wings are open, his forearms and upper legs exposed, and he is dressed as a Roman general, in a red himation (Greek: cloak) knotted on the left, a *lorica squamata* (Latin: scaled metal cuirass) and a *pteryges* (Greek: protective skirt). While capable of summoning up great earthly and heavenly force, Michael is paradoxically insubstantial, suffused with a holy spirit that is at once ineffable and immaterial. This idea is conveyed by his long legs, which taper down to small feet that scarcely hold him to the earth, and by the mottled shimmery backdrop that evokes the heavenly realm from which he has briefly descended. The ground itself is holy, as Michael informs Joshua, who then removes his sandals. The holiness is indicated in this icon by the white highlights of uncreated light striking the rocky terrain at Michael's feet. **SM**

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1   *Joshua's Vision of Saint Michael* (1210), tempera on wood, 50 x 35.8 cm, Dormition Cathedral of Moscow, Kremlin, Moscow, and *The Archangel Michael with Scenes from His Life* (c1410), Cathedral of the Archangel, Kremlin, Moscow.

Archangel Michael Chastising the Soul of a Rich Man
GREECE

Alternative name Archistrategos
Feast days 6 September, 8 November

In addition to being the leader of the heavenly armies (Archistrategos), Michael the prince of angels has unique duties in relation to death. He is the weigher of souls at Judgement Day and so is often shown with a pair of scales, and he is also a psychopomp (Greek: guide of souls), an angel who escorts the souls of the dead to the afterlife. In Macedonia Michael was believed to suck a person's soul from their body with a stick. It was also thought that if Michael stood by a person's chest then that person would die, but if he stood by their feet the person would recover. In this icon he is shown with his foot upon the chest of a wealthy dying man, chastising him as someone who has 'laid up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God' (Luke 12:16–21). The man's soul is represented as an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, which Michael holds by the hair in one hand along with a scroll. Although the inscription on this example is now illegible, messages on images of this theme typically exhort the believer to tremble at this final moment of reckoning.

The subject is thought to have emerged from a fusing of the parable of the rich man in the Gospel of Luke with the trope of Michael as a balancer of souls, an image that was found in baroque paintings by Catholic artists such as Guido Reni (1575–1642, Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini in Rome) and subsequently absorbed into Orthodox iconography through European engravings. **SM**

Cat 33
Archangel Michael Chastising the Soul of a Rich Man, 18th century
Greece
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
300 x 230 mm
on loan from a private collection, Sydney

Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata
CRETE

Feast day 4 October

Saint Francis (c1181–1226) was a medieval Catholic friar, deacon, mystic and preacher born in Assisi in Italy, who was venerated for his embrace of poverty and for his communion with animals. A great traveller, Francis founded several religious orders, most importantly the peripatetic order of the Franciscans, which has maintained a presence in the Holy Land since 1217. In 1223 Francis curated the first nativity scene, a living re-enactment of the holy story, near Assisi to 'kindle' popular devotion to the birth of Christ.[1]

This Cretan icon shows Francis in 1224 at the dramatic culmination of his spiritual life. The location is the mount of La Verna (Alverna, Tuscany), a retreat that had been given to him by an admirer, Count Orlando Cattani of Chiusi della Verna, as a place where the devout could do penance. In the background is the small hermitage that was built in 1213. The tonsured Francis appears in a state of ecstasy, receiving a vision of a floating crucified Christ with the wings of a seraphim. Francis's body is braced, with one foot flung back to withstand the force of this unusual communion that left him semi-blinded and with five bleeding stigmata on his hands, feet and side, corresponding to the wounds of the crucified Christ. The episode was witnessed by Francis's secretary and confessor Brother Leo, who had been praying with him. Francis died two years later, still bearing the marks of Christ's Passion.

Francis's self-imposed poverty and purported powers to heal sick animals endeared him to the poor. Like Saint Jerome, Francis was not an Orthodox saint, but he acquired popularity in the Orthodox communities of Crete, thanks in part to the many Venetians who lived there, and his icon appears in both Orthodox and Catholic churches on the island.[2] One of the largest and wealthiest churches in Crete in the 16th century was a Catholic church dedicated to Saint Francis in Candia and its presence fuelled a local market for his imagery.

Cretan workshops became adept at catering to customers' preferences for a devotional subject in either the Greek (Byzantine) or Latin (Italian) manner, but their images of Francis reveal a hybridisation of both modes. This three-quarter view which became very popular departs from the Byzantine tradition of portraying saints frontally.[3] Once part of a small portable triptych, it shows signs of surface wear from touching during prayer, though this is no longer so visible following recent restoration. The hovering image of Christ on the cross was especially worn, as is the case of a close version now in the Benaki Museum, Athens.[4] In both versions the red rays, which emanate like laser beams from Christ's body and sear into the corresponding parts of Francis's anatomy, remain clearly visible. **SM**

1   Francis D Klingender, 'St. Francis and the Birds of the Apocalypse', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol 16, no 1/2, 1953, p 23.

2   Vassilaki, 'Some Cretan Icons in the Walters Art Gallery', pp 75–92.

3   Saint Francis, *The Little Flowers [Fioretti], Legends, and Lauds*, translated by N Wydenbruck and edited by Otto Karrer, Sheed & Ward, London 1979, p 244.

4   Benaki Museum Athens inv. o. 3055. For a discussion of the Athens version, see Drandaki, *The Origins of El Greco*, pp 78–79.

Saint Jerome

CRETE

Feast day 30 September

The image of the fourth-century theologian Jerome alone in the rocky desert of Chalcis (Syria) epitomises the medieval conception of a holy man who has shunned worldly temptations. Although Jerome was, strictly speaking, a Catholic saint, his example of ascetic piety also appealed to Orthodox Christians, especially in Venetian-controlled 16th- and 17th-century Crete (Candia), which had a mixed Italian and Greek population. Cretan workshops produced many versions of this popular composition, with only minor variations. In this example, the emaciated saint is shown kneeling outside a cave, stone in hand, gesturing up to a crucifix on a tall pole. Next to him is the lion who appointed itself Jerome's faithful companion after the saint extracted a thorn from its paw. Jerome is dressed in a simple himation, which he has pulled open to expose his bony chest in order to beat it with a stone. Although much tormented by the temptations of the flesh, Jerome committed himself to study and he translated the Bible from Greek into Latin.

After his spell in the desert, he travelled to Constantinople and studied scripture with Gregory of Nazianzus (cat 13) and later returned to Rome, but he retained his ascetic ways. The cardinal's hat is an anachronism as cardinals did not exist in Jerome's lifetime. It does however reflect the high position Jerome had held as secretary to Pope Damasus I (papacy 366–84). The image of Jerome was especially important for 14th-century Catholic orders of hermits who followed the saint's example, such as the Hieronymites near Florence, but it was also popular among wealthy female devotees, to whom Jerome addressed many of his writings.

This icon type is related to the work of the leading 15th-century Cretan painter, Nikolaos Tzafouris (active 1487–1501). A tiny image of this kind could have been purchased as a single panel or as a component of a winged portable triptych. In Cretan triptychs Jerome was commonly paired with an image of Saint John the Baptist in the desert as inspiring exemplars of eremitic life.[1] An image of the Virgin may once have occupied the central panel. Small portable triptychs were popular items of private devotion in the late 15th century, and Cretan workshops produced them in large numbers for both the eastern and western Christian markets.

A number of clues indicate a Catholic patron: the Latin spelling of Jerome's name in gold, *S[anctus] Ieronim[us]*, inscribed across the entrance of the cave; the presence of a western-style crucifix (without three crossbeams) and the presentation of Jerome in three-quarter profile. The jagged cave, on the other hand, is depicted according to the Byzantine tradition and recalls the grotto of the Nativity and the cave beneath the rock of Golgotha where Christ's cross was placed (see cat 94). A very similar image of Jerome has recently appeared on the market as the right-hand panel of a complete triptych. Featuring an image of the Virgin in the centre, it seems likely to be from the same model and workshop.[2] **SM**

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1 Vassilaki, 'Some Cretan Icons in the Walters Art Gallery', p 86.
2 See Morsink Icon Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands ALR Ref. No: S00150706.

Cat 35
Circle of Nickolaus Tzafouris (active 1487–1501)
Saint Jerome, c1490–1500
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
238 x 176 x 3 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Forty Martyrs of Sebaste
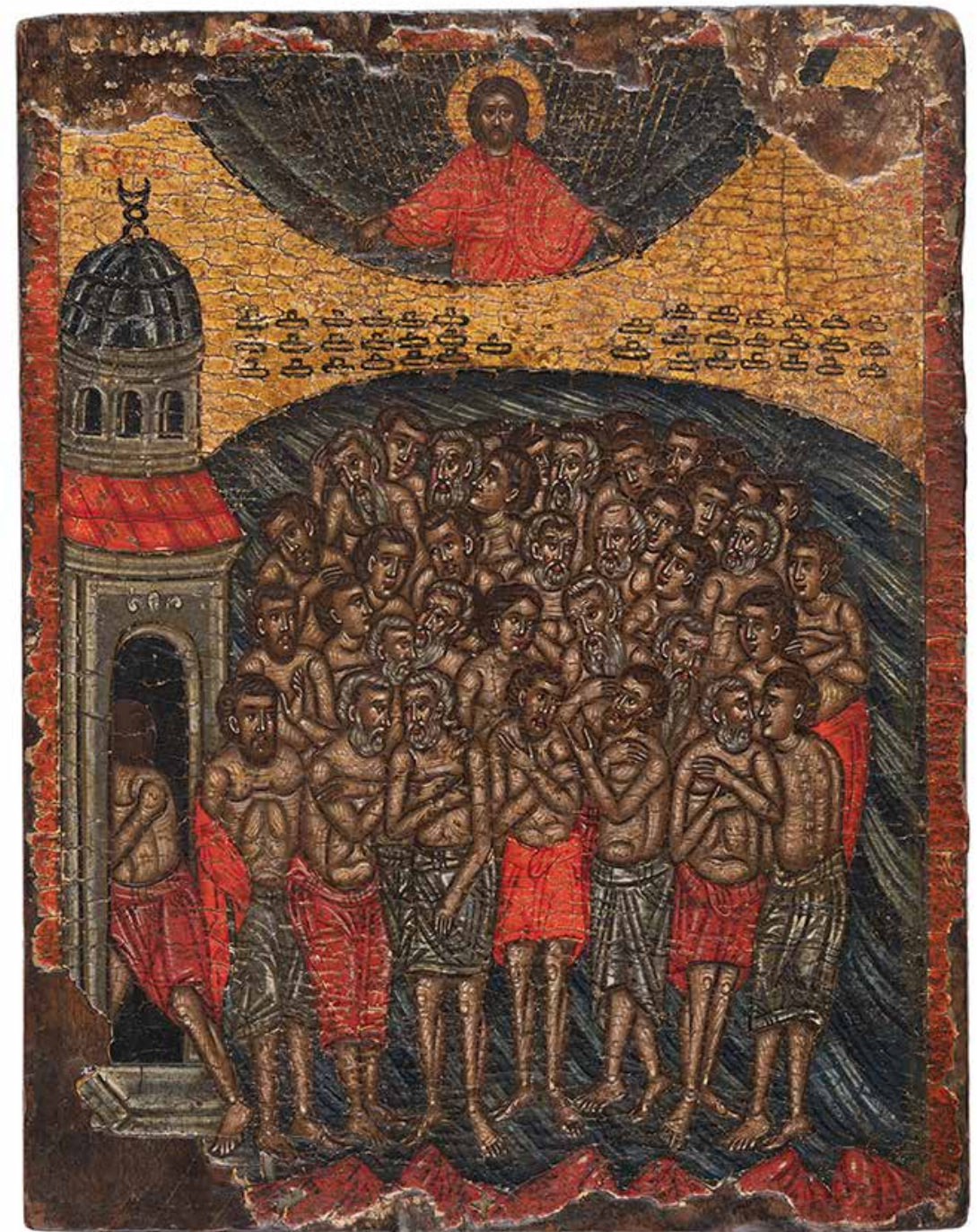## MAINLAND GREECE

Feast day 9 March

Although Constantine the Great (reign 306–37) established Christianity in the Roman empire in 313, his co-ruler and brother-in-law Licinius I (reign 308–24) continued to persecute Christians and to purge their armies of Christian soldiers. In 320 in the Armenian city of Sebaste (present-day Sivas in Turkey), Licinius challenged a garrison of 40 Christian legionnaires in the elite Legio Fulminata ('armed with lightning') to renounce their faith. Left naked on a frozen solid lake to perish from cold, the men were offered inducements to reject Christ, including a warm bath in a tepidarium, which is shown close to the edge of the ice. The crescent finial on the building's domed roof is the horned symbol of Baal worshipped by pagans, but its similarity to the Turkish crescent is unlikely to be coincidental.[1]

When a junior soldier succumbed to the temptation, the heat of the water caused him to go into shock and die, which coincided with a flash of divine light. A Roman soldier who witnessed the scene converted to Christianity. Identified as Aglaius (or sometimes Candidus), he flung off his clothes and joined the 39 soldiers, thus making up the garrison's number. Forty tiny crowns float overhead as the men suffer stoically, watched over by Christ in a cloud above.

One of the martyrs, Meletius, survived long enough to record the events in a testimonial, in which he listed each man's name in the hope that they would be buried together, but their bodies were burned and their remains were thrown into the river. In this highly stylised depiction, men of all ages converse as they huddle and shiver in their underwear. The fourth-century Saint Basil, who was born only a generation after the event, described them as 'forty men in one soul'.[2] **SM**

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1   In *Icon and Devotion* (pp 196–97), Tarasov notes that the story of the 40 martyrs of Sebaste became popular in the Balkans following the executions of local Orthodox Christians by Ottoman authorities during the 16th century.

2   Basil of Caesarea, Homily 19, 'On the Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebastea' [c373, original in Greek], quoted in Pauline Allen, 'Basil of Caesarea', in Johan Leemans, Wendy Mayer, Pauline Allen & Boudewijn Dehandschutter (eds), *'Let us die that we may live': Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. 350–c. 450 AD)*, Routledge, London, 2003, pp 67–77, p 68.
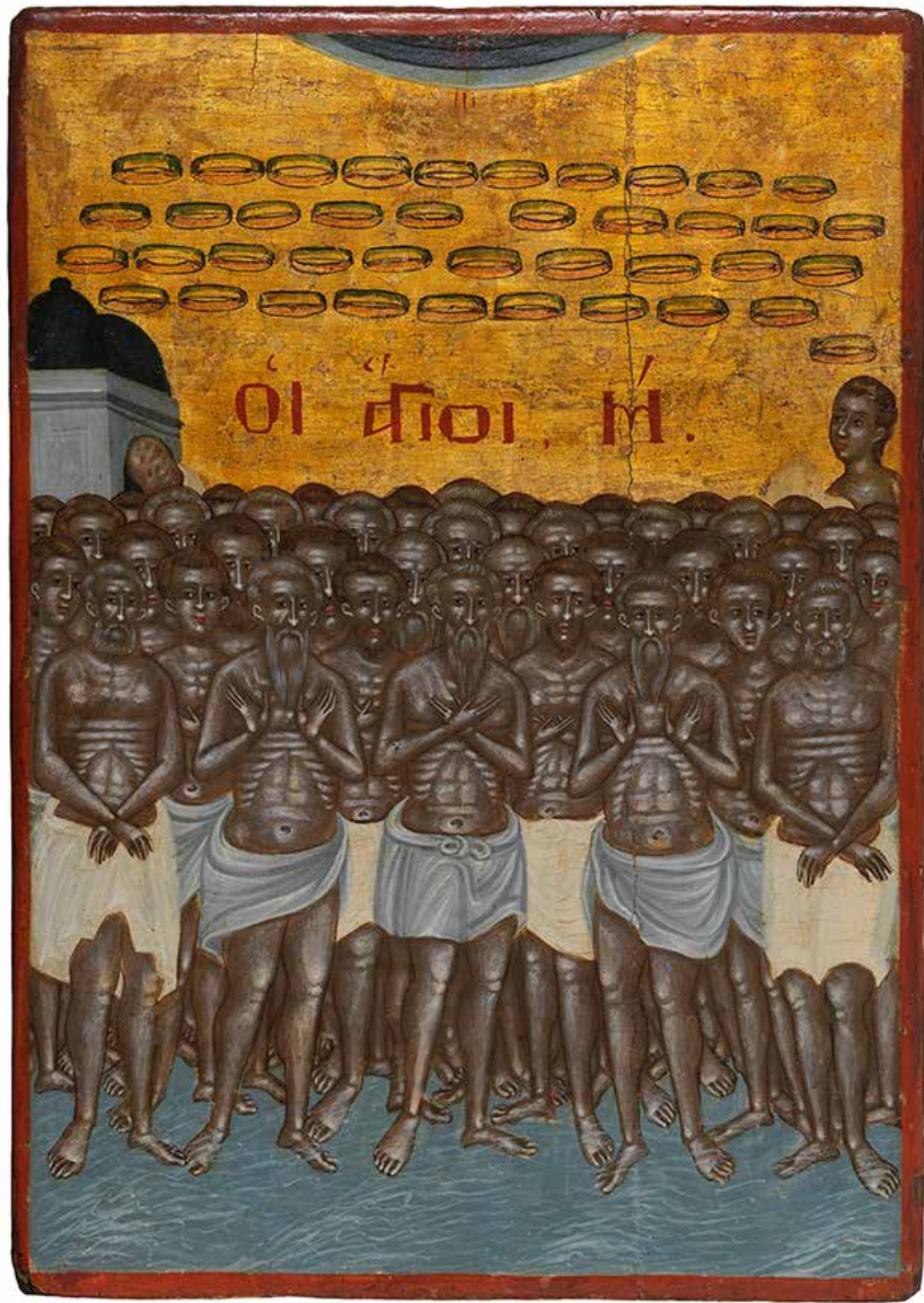

Cat 36
Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, 17th century
Mainland Greece
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
282 x 223 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 37
The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, c1700
Greece or Asia Minor
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
275 x 385 mm
on loan from Abbey Museum of Art and Archaeology Caboolture, Sunshine Coast, Queensland

The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste
GREECE OR ASIA MINOR

Inscribed OI AGIOI M (The Holy 40)
Feast day 9 March

The charred relics of the dead martyrs of Sebaste (see cat 36) were gathered up and distributed throughout the Orthodox world, and many churches were consecrated in their name, leading to the martyrs' widespread veneration. The image of 40 men freezing to death in solidarity appealed to the popular imagination as an exemplary model of collective suffering and piety. There is a considerable degree of freedom in the way that icon painters have treated this famous subject in a bid to render the experience of extreme cold and vulnerability in all its horror and poignancy. Each man's name and biography was separately recorded, and icon manuals even stipulated what each martyr looked like.[1]

In this example, the artist has chosen to portray the icy cold lake with a liberal use of pale blue and white. Compared with the slightly earlier version overleaf, the soldiers appear quiet and ominously passive as they slowly turn blue with cold. They prayed with one voice: 'We have come to combat: grant that forty may be crowned'.[2] Above them is the golden realm where their martyrs' crowns await. Their guard, the soldier Aglaius, who witnesses the scene and converts, is shown slightly apart to the right with a crown awaiting him also. **SM**

1. Dionysius, *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna*, pp 58–59.
2. Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints: With Reflections for Every Day in the Year*, Benziger Bros, Cincinnati NY, 1894, p 102.

The Holy Prophet Elijah and Four Saints
NORTHERN RUSSIA

Feast day 20 July

The Old Testament prophet Elijah was born in Tishbe, a city of Transjordan, in the ninth century BCE and he preached in the kingdom of Israel during the rule of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (c874–c853 BCE) in a region where the fertility cult of Baal was widespread. Elijah's very name, which means 'God is My Lord' ('Yaweh is God'), reflects his mission to worship the one god. His frontal address to the onlooker, while making a gesture of oration or blessing with his right hand, suggests he is in an act of preaching. The text on his open scroll has become illegible but it may well have contained one of his characteristic messages of stern caution not to stray from the faith.

Elijah is recognised by his serious expression, his greying unkempt hair and beard, seen here flecked with silver highlights, his black-and-white neck scarf, his yellow chiton (under-robe) and his fringed maroon mantle fashioned from hair, which refers to his years of ascetic self-exile in the wilderness. The same cloak will later be grasped by Elijah's terrified disciple Elisha when he sees his mentor ascend into Heaven in a fiery chariot (see cat 39).

In Russia the rugged Elijah became one of the best-loved saints, especially in rural areas, where he was regarded as a guardian of farmers, invoked against lightning. The supplementary saints flanking the prophet on the *polya* (Russian: margin, border) also had protective functions: a deacon, possibly the first-century Stephen (beloved for his care of the poor) and Paraskeva occupy the upper register and the third-century 'doctor saints' Cosmas and Damian, who treated the poor for no charge, occupy the lower register. **SM**
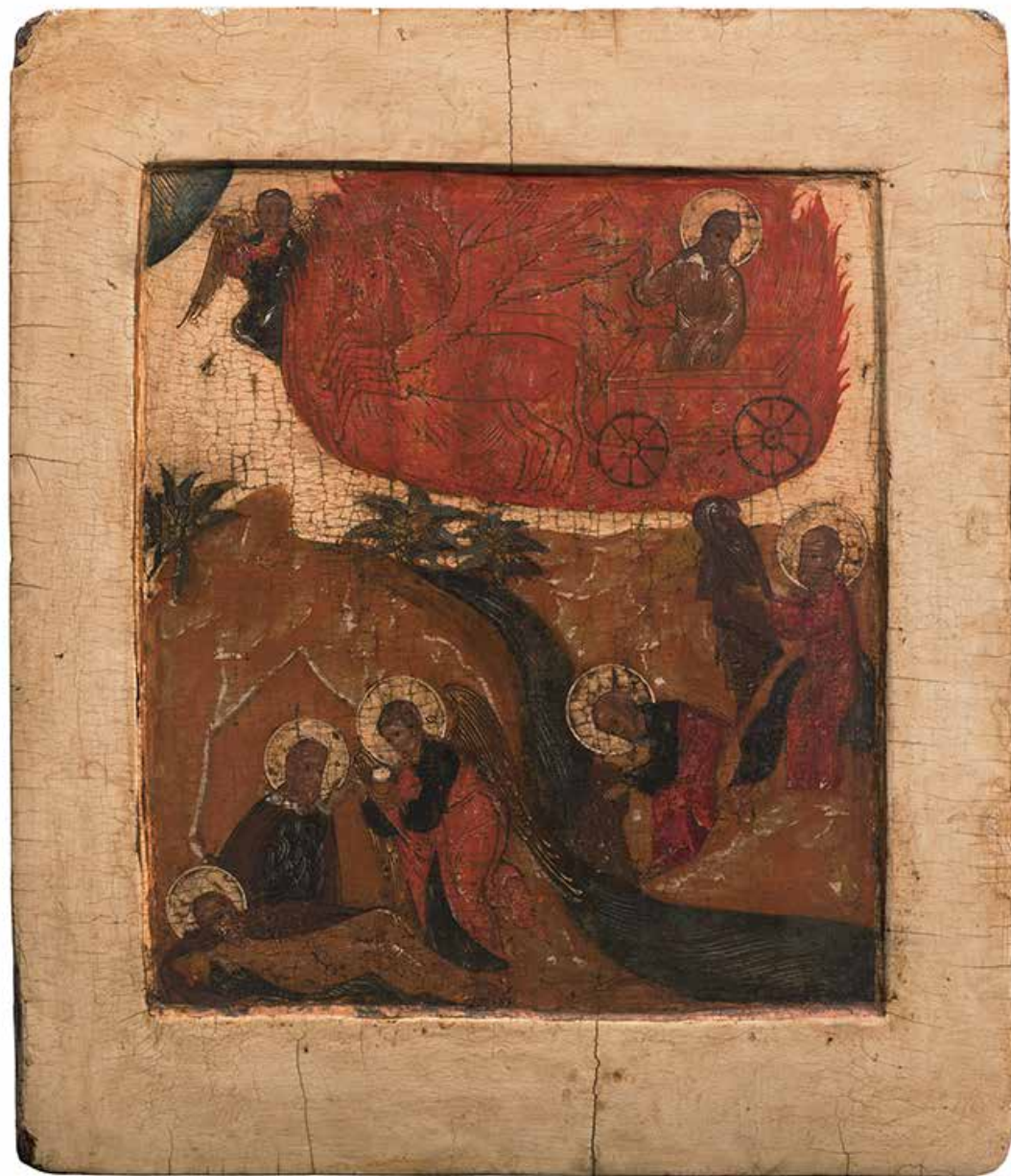

Cat 38
The Holy Prophet Elijah and Four Saints, 16th century
Northern Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
328 x 290 x 45 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

The Fiery Ascent of Elijah
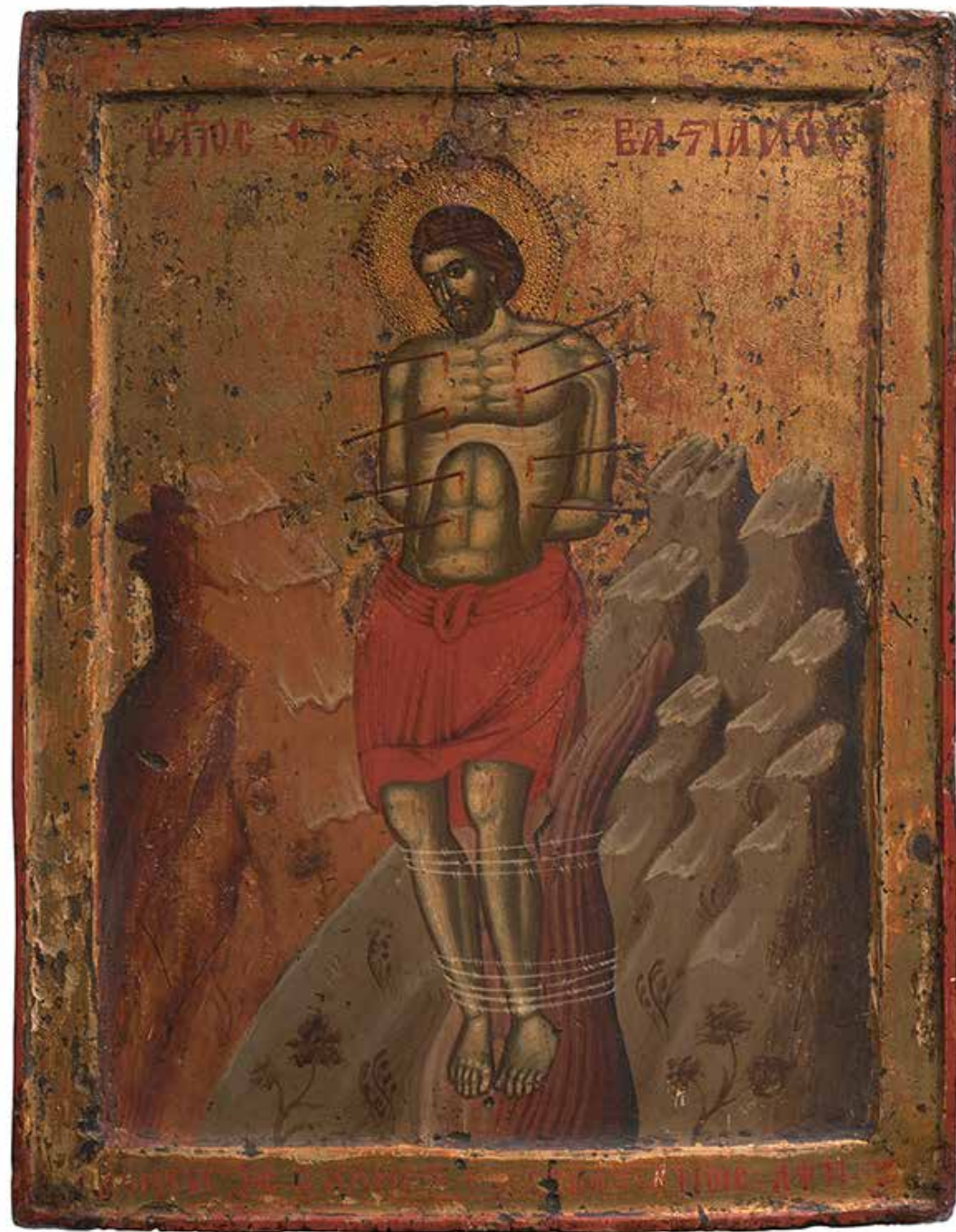### RUSSIA, NOVGOROD

Feast day 20 July

This vibrant icon, with its energetic zig-zag movement from bottom to top, features scenes from the life of the prophet Elijah, a figure who was important in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and who was particularly popular in Russia. Elijah appears in the lower left soon after executing 400 prophets of the fertility god Baal and fleeing into the desert. He lies down beneath a juniper tree and prays to die, but an angel appears with bread for him. Elijah is then shown travelling towards the River Jordan with his servant Elisha, whom he has been advised to anoint as his successor. Elijah parts the river by striking it with his cloak. He is then lifted to Paradise by a fiery *quadriga* (four-wheeled chariot) before the eyes of a terrified Elisha, who reaches out to seize his mentor's cloak. In some versions an angel takes Elijah's cloak and drops it down to Elisha (2 Kings 2:11–13). In this version Elisha is seen simply catching it. He then uses it to part the Jordan and return home.

Veneration of Elijah in Russia dates to the 10th century and was most fervent around Novgorod, where a church was dedicated to him in the late 12th century.[1] This favoured iconography of the prophet in the desert first developed in the Palaiologan period (1259–1453). The detail of Elijah's fiery cloud-like aureole, with licking flames at the edges, held aloft by a hovering Saint Michael, is a 14th-century innovation. Elijah occupies a special place in Russian folklore and rural piety. The prophet was twice brought bread in the desert (first by a raven and the second time by an angel), giving rise to a superstition that those who kept icons of Elijah in their homes would never go without bread.[2] Some believed that Elijah never died but moved between Heaven and Earth helping people in emergencies. Elijah was also credited with protecting cattle and controlling storms. Thunder was believed to be generated by the turning wheels of his fiery chariot as he drove across the cloudy skies. The association of Elijah with weather effects reflects a gradual conflation of his powers with those of his pre-Christian precursor in Russia, the god Perun, who was associated with fire and lightning. This merging of belief systems in a single figure is known as *dvoeverie* (Russian: double faith).[3] **SM**

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1   Church of the Prophet Elijah, Novgorod, founded in 1198.
2   Simon Morsink, *The Power of Icons: Russian and Greek Icons 15th–19th century: The Morsink Collection*, Snoeck Publishing, Ghent, 2006, pp 140–42.
3   On *dvoeverie* and the limitations of the concept, see Stella Rock, *Popular Religion in Russia: 'Double Belief' and the Making of an Academic Myth*, Routledge, New York, 2007.

Cat 39
The Fiery Ascent of Elijah, 17th century
Russia, Novgorod
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
310 x 266 x 11 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Saint Sebastian

GREECE

Inscribed Ο ΑΓΙΟC CE/ΒΑCΤΙΑΝΟC (Saint Sebastian; at the top of the icon to the left and right of the saint's head in red, majuscule Greek letters) ΔΕΗCΗC ΤΗC ΔΟΥΛΗC ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ CΕΒΑCΤΙΑΝΟΙC ΑΨΝ (Prayer of the servant of God Sebastianis, 1750; at the bottom of the icon in red, majuscule Greek letters)
Feast day 18 December

The icon depicts Saint Sebastian, as identified both by the inscription at the top part of the icon and the iconography. The saint was a popular martyr of the Christian faith, originally a Roman soldier who converted to Christianity and was condemned to death by arrows. He was particularly popular in the west and in the Catholic faith as a protector against the plague, because his arrow wounds resemble the plague's effects on the body.

This is a rare representation of the saint within the Byzantine Orthodox visual tradition. Sebastian is depicted in the centre of the panel, in full frontal view, tied to a tree and with his hands behind his back. He has short brown hair, a short brown beard, and bears a halo outlined with punched decoration in its outer circles.[1] Around his waist he wears a red loincloth that covers his upper legs; the rest of his body is naked.[2] Eight symmetrically placed arrows, four on either side, pierce his torso, causing blood to run from the inflicted wounds. Sebastian's head is tilted to the left and his face looks serene without any signs of his bodily suffering. The martyr is flanked by mountains in the background, with those seen to the right following the Byzantine visual tradition – steep and jagged ascending ridges forming angles at the point where they meet the main 'body' of the mountain.

The small dimensions of the icon are indicative of private devotion, confirmed by the inscription on the lower edge, which informs us that it was commissioned by and for a woman named Sebastiani (female version of the name Sevastianos/Sebastian). In other words, she was named after the saint who would have been her protector. Within the Greek Orthodox faith, it is common for individuals to own icons depicting their patron saints. The date provided in the dedicatory inscription is given in Greek letters, which was the customary manner of recording dates in Byzantium.[3] **AL**

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1   The painters' manual by the 18th-century Byzantine artist Dionysius of Fourna, describes the saint as 'a young man with an incipient beard': see Dionysius, *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna*, pp 57, 75.
2   In western iconography this convention allowed artists to both experiment and demonstrate their dexterity in depicting the naked human body.
3   Alexander P Kazhdan (ed), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol 3, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, p 1501.

Cat 40
Saint Sebastian, c1750
Greece
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
274 x 212 x 25 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 41
Martyrdom of Saint George, 18th century
Ethiopia
egg tempera and gesso on wood
238 x 355 x 30 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Martyrdom of Saint George

ETHIOPIA

Inscribed Ge'ez inscription on verso
Alternative names George of Lydda, George the Victory-Bearer
Feast day 23 April

Saint George is the patron saint of both Ethiopia and the Orthodox Church. He is therefore the most frequently depicted holy figure in Ethiopian devotional imagery with the exception of Saint Mary.[1] Particular emphasis is placed on the extreme sufferings that George endured for his faith, a trend that dates back to the icons of Nicolò Brancaleon (c1460–c1526), an artist-monk from Venice who settled in Ethiopia in around 1480.[2] Iconographers turned to the Coptic text *Encomium on Saint George* for details about the torments inflicted upon him by Dudeyanos, mythical king of Persia.[3] While such focus on the gruesome details of George's treatment fell out of favour in Ethiopia in the 17th century, it had returned with gusto in the 18th century, when this icon was painted.

This brightly descriptive triptych, which is constructed according to 18th-century methods, with a raised edge around each panel, shows only a selection of the sufferings George endured to defend his faith in Christ. In the centre of the left panel the saint, who is depicted as a flawless youth, has his head set beneath a pot 'large enough to cover his face and ears', under which a fire will be lit, in accordance with Dudeyanos's stipulations.[4] In the scene beneath, George's hands and feet are fitted with spiked iron shoes on which he is forced to walk around on all fours in a manner known as *debyata* or *debut.* In the lower centre panel, George is bound to a wheel with a crank shaft and pushed through a saw, causing blood to flow from his head and legs. The adjacent scene shows him being pushed into a drum, often depicted as an Ethiopian church drum, with his head sticking out. On the bottom register George is made to sleep on an iron bed with a fire under it and in the next scene he is boiled alive in a pot, a procedure known as the 'brass cauldron torture'. At the top of the right panel, George is shown being decapitated. Beneath that he is chopped into 10 pieces and in the bottom vignette he is crushed by stones.

As he prepared to die George prayed for divine retribution against the perpetrators, and his prayers were answered. The gratifying scene of George's tormentors being consumed by fire is not included here. **SM**

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1   Stanislaw Chojnacki, 'The Iconography of St George in Ethiopia: Part I', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol 11, no 1, January 1973, p 57.
2   Ian Campbell, 'A Historical Note on Nicolò Brancaleon: as Revealed by an Iconographic Inscription', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol 37, no 1, June 2004, pp 83–102.
3   Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *George of Lydda, the Patron Saint of England: A Study of the Cultus of St. George in Ethiopia*, Luzac, London, 1930, pp 169–276. The *Encomium* is ascribed to Theodotus, bishop of Ancyra. See also a description in the Church Calendar or Synaxarion, in Stanislaw Chojnacki in collaboration with Carolyn Gossage, *Ethiopian Icons: Catalogue of the Collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa University, Skira/Thames & Hudson, Milan/London, 2000, pp 390–92.
4   Stanislaw Chojnacki, 'The Iconography of St George in Ethiopia: Part III: St George the Martyr', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol 12, no 1, January 1974, p 114.

CHRIST

Sophie Matthiesson

The preeminent image of Christ throughout medieval Christendom was the miraculous icon of his face on a cloth, known as an *acheiropoietos* (Greek: not made by human hands). While tradition acknowledges the existence of several such images, the chief image for the Eastern Church was the Cloth of Edessa. According to legend, when Abgar V (died 50 CE), king of Edessa (southwest Turkey), was afflicted with leprosy, Christ sent a messenger with an imprint of his own face on a towel, which subsequently cured the ailing king. The miraculous and miracle-working 'life portrait' became the prototype for all images of Christ.

The legendary cloth bearing Christ's face was supposedly rediscovered by the Persians in a wall in Edessa in 545. The icon was so powerful that it was said to have etched its own imprint onto the tile that hid it, creating another image-relic known as the Keramion, or Holy Tile. The Edessa cloth's divine origin echoed the mystery of Christ's divine incarnation in the womb of his mother. Its portrait-like aspects were cited as evidence, during the eighth-century disputes about imagery, that the prohibition in the Ten Commandments against making images of the sacred no longer applied, and that the painters who reproduced this divinely authorised face of Christ were merely servants to a pre-existing holy prototype.

The charisma of the 'image of Christ on the cloth' increased after it was taken to Constantinople in 944, following the Byzantine conquest of Muslim-held Edessa. Also known as the Mandylion (Arabic: face towel), its supreme authority as an authentic and wonder-working image made it one of the most coveted objects in the Middle Ages. Faithful copies of the Mandylion were believed to contain the original's supernatural powers, just as the Keramion had received the miraculous properties of the cloth. The Byzantines displayed the Mandylion in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and embraced it as their imperial banner and palladium (a sacred relic or icon believed to have a protective role over a city or army). Emperors and commanders presented versions of it to battalions to inspire them in battle. In 1204 it disappeared during the Fourth Crusade, then resurfaced in the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, built by Louis IX (reign 1226–70) to house his collection of Passion relics (objects associated with the suffering and death of Christ), but it vanished again in the French Revolution.[1]

The Mandylion is recognisable by the disembodied face of Christ floating on a cloth, a support that itself seems to 'float', sometimes with the help of angels holding it up by its knotted corners. Christ's face is framed by long hair, which falls in waving tendrils, and a pointed, sometimes forked, beard. His gaze seems eternal and his expression both grave and patient. Encircling his head is a halo that is divided by an internal cross, with Greek letters in three of the four quadrants, reading: Ὁ ὮΝ (Greek: The Being) and IC XC, the abridged name of Jesus Christ.

Another important iconographic type is the Christ Pantocrator (Almighty), an image that represents the Son, the Creator and Redeemer as ruler of the universe. Typically shown seated on a throne, the Pantocrator makes a blessing with his right hand and with the other holds a scroll or a book, sometimes open to show a text from the gospel. The Pantocrator appears in many configurations: full or half length, with or without a throne, alone, in a deesis, or encircled by saints. When depicted in a public monumental form, such as in a church-dome mosaic or fresco, a stern face of judgement is emphasised. When he is portrayed for a private context such as on a personal icon, in the more intimate bust or half-length format known simply as the Saviour, his compassionate aspect prevails. Among images of Christ listed in Russian household inventories in the 18th century, the Saviour was the most widely owned image, followed by an *acheiropoietos* icon (but none, it might be noted, was as popular as the Mother of God, for whom there were an estimated two icons for every image of Christ).[2]

An image related to the Pantocrator is the icon of Christ as high priest, showing him seated wearing the full vestments of a metropolitan bishop of the Orthodox Church, including the *kamelaukion* (Russian: mitre), an image of temporal and divine authority combined. A subject that emerged in the Palaiologan period (1261–1453), its political aspect may have contributed to its vogue in the post-Byzantine period, when it was much painted by Cretan artists.[3] Christ also appears in a number of symbolic youthful forms in Russian icons. As the stiffly frontal Christ Emmanuel, he sometimes occupies the centre of a deesis, flanked by angels, although he is more often seen in a miniaturised format inside a medallion, held over the breast of the Virgin, in the icon known as the Mother of God of the Sign (cats 73 and 74).

Christ also assumes youthful angelic forms. As the Angel of Great Council, or Blessed Silence, he is shown beardless, grave-faced and quiet of spirit, a silent governor of eternal peace, according to Isaiah (9:6). As Sophia Wisdom of God, he appears enigmatically as an aspect of Christ before the Creation and the divine Logos (Word). In this manifestation he is shown as a winged and crowned female figure, with flame-red face and hands indicating the fire of the spirit within. His best known youthful appearance is perhaps that of the Trinity, but his identity here is enigmatic too: he is presumed to be the central angel, wearing a deep red tunic to signify his human nature, and a blue himation to indicate his divine one.[4]

1   Jannic Durand, 'Les reliques de Constantinople', *Dossiers d'Archéologie*, 264, June 2001, pp 60–65.
2   Daniel H Kaiser, 'Icons and Private Devotion Among Eighteenth-Century Moscow Townsfolk', *Journal of Social History*, vol 45, no 1, Fall 2011, p 130–31.
3   Manolis Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos: Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting*, translated by Thetis Xanthaki, National Bank of Greece, Athens, 1985, pp 66–67.
4   Aidan Hart, *Festal Icons: History and Meaning*, Gracewing, Leominster, 2022, pp 367–68.

The Saviour
CRETE

Alternative names Christ the Merciful, Our Saviour, Christ with the Forbidding Eye

In Greece this shortened bust-length portrait of Christ, which was a very important and popular icon type in the 16th and 17th centuries, is sometimes referred to as Christ with the Forbidding Eye, a title that links it with the Russian icon, Christ of the Fiery Eye (cat 45). In Greece and the Venetian territories the face of Christ was rarely produced as a stand-alone private devotional image, but traditionally formed part of what is known as a head deesis, few of which have survived intact.[1] This little panel should therefore be imagined with bust-length images of the Mother of God and John the Baptist as its natural companions.

The exceptionally fine quality of the modelling, using fine radiating lines, links this panel with the heads of Christ painted by the Cretan artist Emmanuel Lambardos the elder (c1560–c1635). The crisp folds of Christ's garments, delineated in gold parallel lines (chrysography), are offset by the undulating contours of his features. His throat is portrayed as slightly swollen, indicating its suffusion with the Holy Spirit, and his brow and cheekbones are delicately modelled by means of faint highlights. Earthy umbers and warm browns predominate. Tiny well-placed flecks of white in the eyes endow Christ with a clear and lively glance. **SM**

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1   Erik Vandamme, *Golden Light: Masterpieces of the Art of the Icon*, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten/ Snoeck-Ducaju en Zoon, Antwerp/Ghent 1988, p 38, cat no 5.

Cat 42
The Saviour, c1600
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
240 x 194 x 30 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 43
Mandylion (Image Not Made by Human Hands), 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
308 x 257 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin
and Margot McCarthy, 2017

Mandylion (Image Not Made by Human Hands)
RUSSIA

Alternative names Holy Face of Edessa, Acheiropoietus, Nerukotvornyi, Ubrus
Feast day 16 August (transfer of the Mandylion to Constantinople)

In this most famous and reproduced likeness of Christ in the Orthodox world, Christ's face appears on a knotted cloth. He is shown as a young man, looking straight out, with a faint smile and an almost perfectly symmetrical face. His hair and his beard are centrally parted, and his long curling hair falls neatly in two strands on either side of his face. Embedded in the halo are the words in red: 'The One that Is'. An old Slavonic inscription above the icon announces its divine origin and special status as 'Not By Hands Made Image of the Lord'.

Miraculously produced images of Christ and the Mother of God were cited in the defence of icons during the iconoclasm controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries and they have legitimated icon production ever since. Conformity to the exact details of the holy original is essential for subsequent versions to retain the undiluted miracle-working powers of the prototype.

The earliest Mandylion documented in Russia was a version that was taken to Novgorod, and displayed in the Church of the Redeemer in 1199 as material proof of Christ's incarnation.[1] The production of large numbers of Mandylion icons in Russia reflects a couple of factors. The first is that the icon, 'not made by hand, shining brighter than the sun', was thought to offer a pathway to enlightenment and the kingdom of heaven when it was venerated on its annual festal day of 16 August (the anniversary of when it was said to have arrived in Constantinople).[2] Veneration of the Mandylion was slightly different to other icons. Generally speaking, strict conventions govern where an icon may be kissed – usually only the hem of a garment, the feet or the hands — but in the case of the Mandylion, kissing the towel or the hair was considered acceptable.

The other reason for the Mandylion's popularity was its significance for the Russian military, who placed it on *khorugvi* (Russian: banners) as the ultimate symbol of a Christian force.[3] The image had particular importance for the military city of Veliky Ustyug in Vologda, northwest Russia, during its clashes with Moscow in the 15th century. It was flown as a banner by Ivan the Terrible (reign 1547–84), and it appeared on the flags of the Russian and Bulgarian armies during World War I. It was customary for all Russian soldiers to own a personal travel icon of the Mandylion as a talisman and focus for private prayer. **SM**

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1   Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, University of Chicago Press, Chicago IL, 1994, p 215.
2   Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, p 62.
3   Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p 215.

Saint Veronica Holding the Veil
CRETE

Alternative names Sudarium, Vernicle, the Veronica, Vera

The eastern and western Christian traditions venerate different images of the face of Christ miraculously imprinted upon cloth. The Eastern Church claims an image that Christ was said to have created by pressing a cloth to his face to send King Abgar V (died 50 CE) in Edessa who needed healing. The so-called 'Edessa cloth', or Mandylion, which may be linked to the shroud of Turin, has special miracle-working status, as an *acheiropoietos* ('made without human hands'). Occasionally it is shown held aloft by the archangels Gabriel and Michael. Considered a 'true' portrait, it shows Christ with a corona of brown hair, two wavy strands of hair on either side of the face and a neat beard. The alternative version, claimed by the Western Church, is the *sudarium* (Latin: sweat cloth) given to Christ by Veronica to wipe his brow on the way to Calvary. That prototype, which is now lost, is also upheld by Catholics as the *vera* (Latin: true icon), and the face shown on it manifests a much greater naturalism. It is startling, therefore, to see a Cretan icon in which Veronica is shown holding the Edessa cloth rather than the customary *sudarium*. The blending of iconography reflects the hybridisation of eastern and western devotional traditions on Venetian-ruled Crete, where Greek artists who had fled from Muslim-ruled Constantinople painted for both Greek Orthodox and Italian Catholic patrons. The workshops catered to the constant maritime traffic past the strategically situated island in the eastern Mediterranean.

The few known examples of this iconography are linked to the workshop of the Cretan artist Nikolaos Tzafouris (active 1487–1501). The arched format and scale of this diminutive panel indicates it was once part of a multi-winged portable triptych of the kind produced in large numbers by his shop. Clients could select their preferred wings, but the central panel would typically feature a pietà, an image of the Virgin Mary cradling the dead Christ on her lap. An icon of Saint Veronica holding the Mandylion, now preserved in the Monastery of Great Lavra on Mount Athos, may offer clues to the images that once accompanied the present panel. The Mount Athos version is one of two wing panels dismantled from a small polyptych (multi-winged altarpiece) attributed to Nikolaos Tzafouris: the second wing depicts saints Peter and Paul. Further components from the original object are now in the Benaki Museum Athens and the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens. Nikolaos Siomkos believes the scheme may also have included a vision of Saint Francis (of a kind similar to cat 34) and a *Noli Me Tangere*, an image of the resurrected Christ rebuffing the touch of Mary Magdalene in the Garden of Gethsemane, flanking the central panel of a pietà.[1] **SM**

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1 Nikolaos Siomkos, 'Painted works by Nikolaus Tzafouris and his workshop', *ΔΧΑΕ ΛΔ*, [Bulletin of Christian Archaeological Society], 34, 2013, pp 253–266, English synopsis p 266.

Cat 44
Saint Veronica Holding the Veil, 16th century
Crete
egg tempera and gesso on wood
158 x 115 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

The Saviour

RUSSIA

Alternative title Saviour of the Fiery Eye (Russian: Yaru Oko)

An idea of divine justice, delivered by an all-seeing God, was intrinsic to the Byzantine need for moral order.[1] From the 14th century, images of the Christ Pantocrator with enlarged eyes appeared in mosaic and fresco on a monumental scale inside the apses and domes of churches, to emphasise this concept of the Eye of Justice.[2] In Russia in the late 16th century smaller variants began to emerge, known as the Christ of the Fiery Eye (Russian: Yaru Oko) in which Christ remains all-seeing but becomes a more loving presence. The set of his small mouth and thin downturned moustache remains terse, but is not without pity or mercy, and his stare has faintly mellowed. 'The Pantokrator's firmness of will has given way to a more intimate expression, a gaze that attracts'.[3] The popularity of this icon type in the 16th century was fuelled by a belief that praying before such an icon was necessary for salvation: in the words of John of Damascus (paraphrasing Genesis 32:30): 'I saw the human face of God, and my soul was saved'. In this icon the polya (Russian: border) is stripped back to bare wood, suggesting that the gessoed edge may have become so worn by handling that it was eventually removed altogether. **SM**

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1   Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1996, pp 115–18.
2   Precedents are the dome of the Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Moscow Kremlin, and the deesis by Andrei Rublev for the Cathedral of Zvenigorod, c1420, now in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.
3   Alfred Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, translated by Stephen Sartarelli, The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles CA, 2006, p 246.

Cat 45
The Saviour, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
333 x 288 x 25 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Christine Emmanuel
NORTHERN RUSSIA

Despite an appearance of youth, this image is not a literal reflection of Christ at a particular age. If anything it is intended to convey the opposite: the presence of a mysterious God, young and old at once, infinitely wise and yet unknowable. The image of Christ Emmanuel relates to Isaiah's prophecy of his incarnation, and his name means 'God is with us'. He represents the eternal, pre-existent Word of God (Logos) and Gabriel's announcement of the Incarnation. His forehead bulges with wisdom of a holy nature, indicated by the white accents of divine 'uncreated' light that fall on his brow. This icon would probably once have formed the centrepiece of an angel deesis, in which Christ Emmanuel is flanked by the bust-length images of the archangels Gabriel and Michael inclining towards him. Angel deeses are rare, and examples on this modest scale were probably intended for private devotion.

The panel is a *vrezok*, meaning that it has been removed from its original *kovcheg*, recessed wood panel, and inlaid in another. This process of respectful renewal and conservation was typically undertaken by the devout sect known as the Old Believers, who regarded themselves as keepers of the traditional forms and liturgy of Orthodoxy. **SM**

Cat 46
Christ Emmanuel, 17th century
Northern Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
322 x 275 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy, 2017

Christal Enthroned
NORTHERN RUSSIA

Inscribed (upper border in gold) IC XC, *Jesus Christos*; in the nimbus are the Greek letters Ω ON ('O ON'): 'I AM THAT I AM' and either side of Christ's head, also in gold, GOSPOD VSIEDERZHITIEL' *The Lord of All Life*; i.e. The Pantocrator.'
Gospel text: (Old Slavonic) *'Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden'* (Matthew 11:28).

With a grandeur of attitude that belies its small scale, this icon shows Christ Pantocrator seated with a hand raised in blessing upon a wide and ornate throne and his feet upon a stool, a visualisation of Isaiah's words: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool' (66:1). Christ's open book contains an invitation to the pious to 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden' (Matthew 11:28). In the western tradition the subject is known as Christ in Majesty.

Christ seems dwarfed by his capacious throne. Elements of baroque extravagance include a heightened attention to decorative architectural features and a corresponding reduction in the scale of the holy figures.[1] In this case, the doll-like qualities, meticulous brushwork and golden sandy hues are hallmarks of the 17th-century Moscow workshops. The highly wrought gold hatching (chrysography) on the chair may indicate later repainting by a workshop around Palekh, a region known for its intricate decorative style. The figure of Christ Enthroned, which comes from the medieval tradition of the 14th and 15th centuries, is relatively rare in later Russian icon painting. A tiny ivory relief carving of the same subject, also of Moscow origin and dated to the late 16th century, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.[2]

This icon may once have formed the centrepiece of a small deesis, with icons of the Mother of God and John the Baptist on either side, acting as intercessors for humanity. Its modest scale is a clue it was intended for private devotions in the 'beautiful corner' of a Russian home.[3] **SM**

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1   Natalia Kostotchkina, 'The Baroque in Seventeenth-Century Art', MPhil thesis, University of London, 1994, p 156.
2   Victorian and Albert Museum, London, acc. 381-1871.
3   Gordon Morrison, Alexander Grishin & Sophie Matthiesson, *Eikōn: Icons of the Orthodox Christian World*. Art Gallery of Ballarat, Ballarat, 2014, cat 37, p 118.

Cat 47
Christ Enthroned, c1700
Northern Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
322 x 275 x 38 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Christ as the Angel of Great Counsel
RUSSIA

Alternative names The Saviour of the Blessed Silence (*Spas Blagoe Molchanie*), Angel of Great Counsel, The Holy Wisdom

Only a few icons depict Christ in the form of an angel or holy messenger. This esoteric icon, which is known by a number of names, shows Christ as Emmanuel, young and beardless and with wings. He wears a full-sleeved sticharion (deacon's outer liturgical garment) embroidered with pearls. The dominant reds evoke the garb of seraphim, the highest order of angels. A star-shaped nimbus around his head, with eight points, denotes his divinity. The points are made up from two superimposed squares, a red square to signify the Passion and a green square to signify the Holy Trinity.

The imagery for this icon type evolved in 14th-century Greece and slightly later in the Russian principalities, where its theme of sacred silence linked it to a mystical tradition of hesychia (Greek: purifying silent prayer) which was practised in the monasteries of Mount Athos and the Kyiv Caves Lavra. The image is intended as a visual expression of what Peter described as the 'ornament of a meek and quiet spirit' (1 Peter 3:4).

The icon of Christ as the Angel of Great Counsel, or the Saviour of Blessed Silence, became popular in the 18th and 19th centuries, especially among the dissident Old Believer community. It was prohibited by the official church as an uncanonical image, on the grounds that Christ the Creator cannot logically be shown as an angel, since he is the creator of angels; rejected icons were regularly burned by the Moscow office in charge of policing schismatic images.[1] The depiction of a six-winged seraph at Christ's breast in this icon is considered unique. One theory is that it refers to Christ as the crucified seraph. **SM**

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1   Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, p 193.

Cat 48
Christ as the Angel of Great Counsel, c1700
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
305 x 268 x 43 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Christ as Sophia, Holy Wisdom
RUSSIA, NOVGOROD

Inscribed *София Премудрость Божия* (Sophia Holy Wisdom)
Feast day 17 September

In Greek the word for wisdom, *sophia*, is female. Since 'wisdom' is an integral characteristic of the Word of God, in Orthodox theology Christ has an aspect that can be perceived as female. This image is just one such depiction, with Christ depicted as the angelic, flame-faced Holy Wisdom of God. Many great churches in the Orthodox Christian world were dedicated to the Word of God as Holy Wisdom: in Constantinople, Thessalonika, Nicea, Trebizond, and later in Kyiv and Novgorod. The red colour of her face and robe symbolises the contact between the bright light of divine energy and the dark earthly realm. Arrayed in Byzantine courtly dress, the winged Sophia Holy Wisdom wears a jewel-studded crown. Special white ribbons known in Russian as *toroki* or *torotsi*, flutter out from beneath the ears, symbolising the spiritual hearing of the angels. Inscriptions within the halo identify the female winged figure as Christ: his initials *IC XC*; the abbreviation of his name *IHCOYC* and the first and last letters of Jesus Christ *XPICTOC*.

The Holy Wisdom iconography emerged in the region of Novgorod, where a church was first dedicated to Hagia Sophia in 1050. The earliest recorded icons of this subject date from the 15th century. The Moscow grand prince Vasily III (reign 1505–33) venerated an early version that was reputed to be miracle working. In 1510 he instructed that a candle be kept continually alight in front it. The palette of brown and mossy greens and expressive vigour in this icon reflect a rustic northern Russian style.

The half-length presentation of Sophia Holy Wisdom is rare: the divinity is usually shown seated on the throne of the Last Judgement, surrounded by the Virgin and John the Baptist in the manner of a deesis. Portable icons of the Holy Wisdom were produced in the archiepiscopal workshop of the Cathedral of Saint Sophia and were popular among pilgrims and Novgorodians as gifts to distinguished visitors.[1] This unusual icon type has recently been the subject of a detailed study by Ágnes Kriza, who describes it as a 'late derivation of the Novgorod Sophia iconography'.[2] Another bust-length format is in the Ikonen-Museum Recklinghausen. **SM**

1   See the catalogue entry for *Sophia the Wisdom of God* by Irina Shalina in Evgeniâ Niolaevna Petrova (ed), *Sacred Arts and City Life: The Glory of Medieval Novgorod*, Walters Art Museum/Palace Editions, Russian State Museum, Baltimore MD/Saint Petersburg, 2005, p 228, cat 205.
2   Email to the writer, 12 May 2021. See also Ágnes Kriza, *Depicting Orthodoxy in the Russian Middle Ages: The Novgorod Icon of Sophia, the Divine Wisdom*, Oxford Studies in Byzantium, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2021.

Cat 49
Christ as Sophia, Holy Wisdom, 17th century
Russia, Novgorod
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
303 x 265 x 40 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Old Testament Trinity
RUSSIA, UPPER VOLGA

Feast day Monday after Pentecost (movable)

In formulating his celebrated 1411 composition of the Holy Trinity, upon which this icon is based, Andrei Rublev (c1365–c1428) was influenced by the ideas of Sergius of Radonezh (1314–92), a Russian ascetic and monastic reformer, who devoted himself to the theology of the Trinity and founded a monastery near Moscow in its name. During a period of disunity in Russia, Sergius interpreted the Trinity as an ideal of human unity and fellowship. Rublev's image of the seated angels evoked the idea of perfect harmony in the 'ineffable grace of their mutual bows, in their peaceful unwordliness, and their infinite submissiveness to each other'.[1] For many, the Trinitarian dogma, and Rublev's icon illustrating it, offered 'a possible way to save the real state'.[2]

In 1551 the Stoglav Synod, a church council that was set up to standardise religious practice and regulate the activities of writers and icon painters, pointed to Rublev's icon of the Trinity as the canonical interpretation to be used in all future icons. In 1554 the powerful Macarius, metropolitan of Moscow (term 1542–63), instructed iconographers to paint the subject 'in the manner that Rublev's Holy Trinity was painted'.[3] Rublev's prototype, which was made for the church at Sergeyev Posad (formerly Zagorsk) housing the shrine of Saint Sergius, was therefore replicated countless times. Sergius himself came to personify the qualities of humility and lovingness that he preached. Widely loved, he has been described as the 'Saint Francis of the Russian people'.[4]

An icon of this type and size was known as a house icon, intended for the 'beautiful corner' of the home as a focus for domestic devotions. Rublev's much larger original now hangs in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. **SM**

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1   Alexander V Voloshinov, ' "The Old Testament Trinity" of Andrey Rublyov: Geometry and Philosophy', *Leonardo*, vol 32, no 2, 1999, p 103 n 4.
2   Anita Strezova, *Hesychasm and Art: The Appearance of New Iconographic Trends in Byzantine and Slavic Lands in the 14th and 15th Centuries*, ANU Press, Canberra, 2014, p 185.
3   Leo Teholiz, 'Religious Mysticism and Socialist Realism: The Soviet Union Pays Homage to the Icon Painter Andrey Rublev', *Art Journal*, vol 21, no 2, Winter 1961–62, p 73.
4   Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, p 355.

Cat 50
Old Testament Trinity, c1700
Russia, Upper Volga
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
441 x 362 mm
on loan from a private collection, Melbourne

The Old Testament Trinity
NORTH RUSSIA

Feast day Monday after Pentecost (movable)

The mysterious unity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, known as the Holy Trinity, is at the centre of Christian belief, yet for centuries the idea of God as three persons sharing one divine nature was considered unrepresentable. Eventually an episode from the scripture, which described God appearing in the form of three angels to Abraham and his childless wife Sarah, was used to illustrate the concept (Genesis 18:1–15). That scene, known as the Hospitality of Abraham, shows the three angels disguised as travellers seated at a table outside Abraham's house at the Oaks of Mamre (present-day Hebron). Although the subject traditionally includes Abraham, Sarah and their servant, in the famous version by Andrei Rublev (c1365–c1428), which the present icon reproduces, they have been excluded in order to focus attention upon the divine 'council' itself.

The identities of the three persons of the Trinity have always remained unspecified, but the standard reading is that Christ the saving son sits at the centre in front of the oak, which signifies the wood of the cross or the tree of life; the creating Father sits at the left before a temple, which symbolises the Church; and the animating Holy Spirit sits quietly to the right. Equal and one, they are engaged upon the work of humanity's salvation.[1] As the nature of the meeting is divine, the humble items on the table are translated by Rublev into sacral or eucharistic vessels, and the table itself into an altar.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity, in which the Holy Spirit descends and manifests as the third figure of the Trinity, is closely linked with the feast of the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended to join the community of apostles. Rublev's version of the Old Testament Trinity is sometimes used to represent the Pentecost (Trinity Sunday) in icons of the Twelve Great Feasts of the year. **SM**

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1   David Coomler, *The Icon Handbook: A Guide to Understanding Icons and the Liturgy, Symbols and Practices of the Russian Orthodox Church*, Templegate Publishers, Springfield IL, 1995, p 10.

Cat 51
The Old Testament Trinity, c1650
North Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
322 x 275 x 45 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 52
Triptych with Christ as High Priest and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, c1550
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
167 x 220 x 17 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Triptych with Christ as High Priest and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V
CRETE

This object stands out for its unconventional features.[1] Its diminutive size and distinctive shape are mostly associated with painted domestic tabernacles, consisting of a central, larger panel with side-wings that enable its closing and opening. This action was experienced by believers as a performative repetition of the ways in which the doors of iconostases were ritually opened to allow the laity to glimpse the altar and officiating clergy in special moments of the liturgy. As on the royal doors of an iconostasis, the Annunciation scene is also displayed on the external wings of the closed panel. Once opened, the inner sides show two censing angels in deacons' garb who, in their movement, direct the viewer's sight towards the central image. In the latter, Christ is represented sitting on a throne of cherubim and appearing in the cloud of God's glory, flanked by the living creatures of Ezekiel's vision, who hold books displaying the incipits (the first few words) of the four gospels.

The red titulus (Latin: label) close to the Lord's head declares his identity as 'the Great High Priest'; this sacerdotal role is made even more evident by his Orthodox patriarchal garments, including a round-shaped mitre, a half-sleeved sakkos (Greek: liturgical tunic, chasuble) decorated with crosses housed within medallions, an omophorion (Greek: stole) bearing golden crosses, and a white sticharion (deacon's outer liturgical robe). As is frequent in Byzantine and post-Byzantine images of Christ, he holds an open book in his left hand, whereby he signals his condescension towards humankind. Much less conventional is the gesture of his right hand: instead of blessing, as one might expect, it holds a staff crowned with a cross and a banner displaying a two-headed eagle against a golden background. At his feet, a kneeling figure, wearing a long golden mantle and an ermine cape with the jewelled necklace of the Order of the Golden Fleece, is clasping the lower end of this same staff. Close to him are a crown and a scroll bearing the Latin inscription 'Carolus V + Imperator', thus revealing his identity as Holy Roman Emperor Charles V of Habsburg (reign 1519–56).

The image was made by an artist who was well acquainted with both western (Venetian) and Cretan arts as practised around the mid 16th century. The iconography is unique and can only be explained as the outcome of the special historical and political circumstances of the period. The most striking feature is the representation of the kneeling emperor, which is modelled on contemporary prints that enjoyed a wide circulation in Europe and the Mediterranean, in combination with the image of Christ the High Priest. Since the late Byzantine period, this was strictly associated with the self-representational strategies of the Orthodox patriarchate of Constantinople, since it laid emphasis on the divine origins of ecclesiastical authority and the latter's primacy over secular power.[2] The inscription on the Lord's open book makes clear that the highest political institution of the western (Catholic) world is being invested with a mission that is of relevance for the Orthodox church. This is explicitly confirmed by the special way in which the two figures interact, with the emperor receiving the staff from Christ. Furthermore, the text displayed in the open book – 'Stand up, oh King, and rule in the midst of your enemies, and make them the footstool of your feet. Indeed, I am with you' – echoing psalms 109 and 110, make this investiture even clearer: Charles V is being encouraged to take up arms against the enemies of faith and assured that in doing so he will enjoy divine assistance.

Overall, this odd composition resounds with the same messianic expectations that underlay some contemporary claims from sectors of the Orthodox church, which viewed the Holy Roman emperor as the new Constantine, elected by God to overthrow the sultan's army and free Eastern Christians from Ottoman rule. Strong affinities can be detected with the poetic work of Ioannis Atzagioli (active 1532–50), a Byzantine-rite Christian who was descended from the former Florentine rulers of Athens, the Acciaiuoli. In his verses, written in Greek around 1550, Atzagioli imagined the triumph of Charles V over the Turks, his solemn entrance into Constantinople, and the performance of a liturgical thanksgiving in the Hagia Sophia, which would have culminated with the acclamation of the western emperor as the new ruler of Byzantium, the glorification of the Holy Cross, and the elevation of the eagle as a symbol of power on the top of the sultan's palace.[3] The emphasis on the eagle, in both the poem and the image, underlined the simultaneous glorification of both Charles V's imperial eagle and the bicephalous bird that was by then used as the symbol of the patriarchate of Constantinople. **MB**

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1 Lara Fernández Piqueras, in Lara Fernández Piqueras & Simon Morsink, *Icons at the Crossroad of Cultures: 14th–17th Century*, Morsink Icon Gallery, Amsterdam, 2018, cat no 5, pp 22–25.

2 Titos Papamastorakis, Ἡ μορφή του Χριστού-Μεγάλου Ἀρχιερέα' ['The figure of Christ the Great High Priest'], *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Ἀρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* [Bulletin of the Christian Archaeological Society], series 4, no 17, 1993–94, pp 67–78.

3 See the text edited by Georgios Theodorou Zora, *Ἰωάννου Ἀξαγιώλου Διήγησις συνοπτικὴ Καρόλου τοῦ Ε´* [Ioannou Axagiolou, Diegesis synoptike Karolou tou E' (kata ton Vaticanon codika 1624) A Concise Narrative about Charles V, by Ioannes Axagiolos (according to Codex Vat. Graec. 1624)], Spoudastīrion Byzantinīs kai Neoellīnikīs Filologías tou Panepistīmíou Athīnōn [School of Byzantine and Modern Greek Philology of the University of Athens], Athens, 1964. On the political context, see José M Floristán, 'El emperador y la herencia política bizantina (1519–1558): ¿Κάρολος Ε´ βασιλεῦς καὶ αὐτοκράτωρ Ῥωμαίων?' [Charles V as emperor and ruler of the Byzantines?], in Inmaculada Pérez Martín & Pedro Bádenas de la Peña (eds), *Bizancio y la península ibérica de la Antigüedad tardía a la edad moderna*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, 2004, pp 449–95.

MOTHER OF GOD

Sophie Matthiesson

The figure of Mary was an elusive subject in the fourth century. Little information about her existed beyond gospel accounts of the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi and Flight into Egypt. Christian thinkers, who recognised her as key to better understanding Christ and the duality of his divine and human natures, combed the Old and New Testaments for evidence to define her role and authority in relation to her son.[1] Critical questions included the mystery of Mary's ascetic and perpetual virginity on the one hand, and the physical circumstances of Christ's birth on the other. As the fourth-century theologian Ephraim the Syrian put it: 'If Your mother is incomprehensible, who is capable of [understanding] You?'[2]

In 431 a council of bishops was convened at Ephesus near present-day Selçuk in Turkey, which confirmed the status of Mary as Theotokos (God-bearer), a term that came to be interchangeable with *Meter Theou* (Mother of God) in the following centuries. It was only after the Ephesus decision that Mary began to appear in liturgical, doctrinal and artistic contexts. Her first appearances in public formats, such as church mosaics, date from the fifth century, but even then special displays of veneration were avoided because of concerns about pagan idolatry.[3] By the seventh century images of Mary began to appear on many types of domestic objects, in particular on the clothing and jewellery worn by the rich and later on in the adornment and homes of ordinary citizens, material evidence that points to the growth of a private cult of the Theotokos.[4] In this period the most universally recognised image of Mary first appeared on imperial seals.[5] Known as the Hodegetria (she who points the way), it shows her carrying her son in the crook of her left arm and gesturing towards him with her free right hand.

In the eighth and ninth centuries debates known as the iconoclast controversy reversed official support for the popular cult of icons. Religious and imperial authorities argued that physical matter was an unworthy vehicle for the representation of the divine, including the Theotokos, whom they held in particular esteem.[6] In reply iconodules – supporters of icons – maintained that Mary's importance lay in her sanctification of the

matter that Christ assumed at birth. They further asserted that Luke the Evangelist had painted the Hodegetria from life and that her image was therefore divine and non-material in origin.[7]

Two centuries after the iconodules' eventual 'triumph' of 843, icons of the Hodegetria featured in liturgical processions in Constantinople in the form of painted panels. A Latin pilgrim described the ritual at the Hodegon monastery,

> in which resides the glorious icon of the Theotokos painted by Saint Luke, as the Greeks say. The icon is in full veneration in Constantinople … so that throughout the year, on Tuesdays, it is carried by the clergy with the greatest honour across town, with an exceeding multitude of men and women walking in front of it and behind it, singing praises to the Theotokos and carrying burning candles in hands. … she is distinguished … by her merciful face and gesture.[8]

This weekly public spectacle in Constantinople 'catapulted' the Hodegetria to fame as the city's supernatural ally in times of warfare and natural disaster, and established it as one of the most venerated and coveted icons of the medieval Christian world.[9] During the attacks on the city by the armies of the Fourth Crusade directed by Pope Innocent III (papacy 1198–1216) the icon disappeared and later resurfaced, only to be destroyed by Janissaries (elite troops) of the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II (reign 1444–46 and 1451–81) after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Copies survived and rapidly assumed the status, renown and sanctity of their prototype and were regarded as authentic icons by Saint Luke.

During the 12th century, the most famous version to enter Muscovite Rus' was the Vladimirskaya (Vladimir icon); others were named toponymically after the regions with which they were linked, such as Tikhvin, Kazan and Smolensk. The Vladimirskaya was 'dressed' in gold and precious stones and was prized as the palladium of the city of Vladimir, where it was taken in 1155.[10] After the collapse of the Byzantine empire, the icon, which by this time had been transferred to the Dormition Cathedral of the Kremlin, was regarded as evidence of Moscow's moral authority and entitlement to style itself as successor of Constantinople and as a third Rome.

In Russia the Mother of God in her many forms is venerated as a sufferer, protectress, mediator and intercessor.[11] The Hodegetria's hand gesture 'showing the way' made her image a favourite for travellers.[12] Almost half the prayers in Russian church services are directed to her, and the most renowned and endearing miracles are those associated with her icon.[13] By the early 20th century over four hundred specially revered icons of the Mother of God were said to be circulating through towns and villages across Russia, where they were venerated by host parishes.[14]

In Renaissance Italy, in preference to devotional panels by Latin artists in the latest style, the faithful often chose Mother of God icons by Greek artists because they were regarded by many Italians as more efficacious, by virtue of their adherence to holy prototypes.[15] Despite the disdain towards Greek icons expressed by leading Italian artists,[16] the devout often sent to Constantinople or – after 1453 – to Crete for a serious 'working' icon with the necessary intercessory powers.[17] This was also true of people in Spain, Germany, Flanders and Ethiopia, countries that similarly had their own industries of religious imagery.[18] Crete's attraction as a source lay in the fact that the Greek artists who

fled to the Venetian-ruled island were said to produce icons of the Virgin and Child that 'conformed to the most sacred form established by the evangelist Luke'.[19] This made them, almost by definition, miracle working. At the same time, Cretan artists borrowed elements from fashionable Italo-Gothic imagery, such as the triptych of the Mother of God acquired by a member of the Ethiopian court in the 16th century, which shows the Virgin arrayed in a malachite green gown as queen of Heaven, with a Gothic tracery crown in the western Catholic manner (cat 109).[20]

1   Averil Cameron, 'The Early Cult of the Virgin', in Maria Vassilaki (ed), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, Skira/Thames & Hudson, Milan/London, 2000, p 3.
2   As above, p 10.
3   Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Bristol Classical Press, London, 2012, p 13.
4   Henry Maguire, 'Byzantine domestic art as evidence for the early cult of the Virgin', in Maria Vassilaki (ed), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2005, pp 183–87.
5   Bissera V Pentcheva, 'The "activated icon": the Hodegetria procession and Mary's Eisodos', in Vassiliki, *Images of the Mother of God*, p 196.
6   Niki Tsironis, 'The Mother of God in the Iconoclast Controversy', in Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God*, p 28.
7   The legend is both apocryphal and anachronistic as Saint Luke could not have painted the figures from life nor have known Christ as a child. See Marsha Libina, 'Divine Visions: Image Making and Imagination in Pictures of Saint Luke Painting the Virgin', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 61. Bd., H. 2, 2019, pp 240–41.
8   Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park PA, 2006, pp 135-6.
9   Michele Bacci, 'The Legacy of the Hodegetria: Holy icons and legends between east and west', in Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God*, pp 321–36.
10   Oleg Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, translated by Robin Milner-Gulland, Reaktion Books, London, 2002, p 92.
11   As above, p 95.
12   As above, p 105.
13   As above.
14   Vera Shevzov, 'Icons, Miracles, and the Ecclesial Identity of Laity in Late Imperial Russian Orthodoxy', *Church History*, vol 69, no 3, September 2000, p 612.
15   Michele Bacci, 'Devotional Panels as Sites of Intercultural Exchange', in Maya Corry, Marco Faini & Alessia Meneghin (eds), *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, Brill, Leiden & Boston, 2018, p 282.
16   Margarita Voulgaropoulou, 'From Domestic Devotion to the Church Altar: Venerating Icons in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Adriatic', *Religions*, 2019, 10, 390, pp 4-5.
17   Bacci, 'Devotional Panels as Sites of Intercultural Exchange', p 282.
18   Kim Woods, 'Byzantine Icons in the Netherlands, Bohemia and Spain during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', in Angeliki Lymperopoulou & Rembrandt Duits (eds), *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe*, Routledge, London & New York, 2016, pp 135–56.
19   Bacci, 'Devotional Panels as Sites of Intercultural Exchange', p 283.
20   As above, p 290.

Mother of God Hodegetria
NORTHERN GREECE OR ASIA MINOR

The emotional and expressive qualities of this icon may help explain the unusual degree of physical wear along its edges. The essential type is the Hodegetria, the most significant image of the Virgin due to the purportedly sacred origins of its prototype, which was said to have been made by Saint Luke. The image is further inflected with the painful psychology of the Passion, indicated by Jesus's vulnerable upturned foot, a hallmark of this type, and by the Virgin's wistful, far-off stare. The pathos is amplified through strong colours, sweeping folds of red fabric, and an exaggeration of details: the Virgin's huge eyes and long curving fingers direct attention to the tiny child, who sits bolt upright like a small adult, registering his mother's soulful expression. The organically worn contours of the panel and extensive paint loss at the edges are consistent with centuries of holding and kissing. Heat and smoke from candles and annual 'washing' may also have played a part in the object's present state: a certain naïve boldness of colour and form is probably the result of many repaintings to perpetuate the legibility and life of this venerated holy image. **SM**

Cat 53
Mother of God Hodegetria, 16th century
Northern Greece or Asia Minor
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
210 x 188 x 18 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 54
Mother of God Umilenie, late 16th century
Russia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
265 x 197 x 25 mm
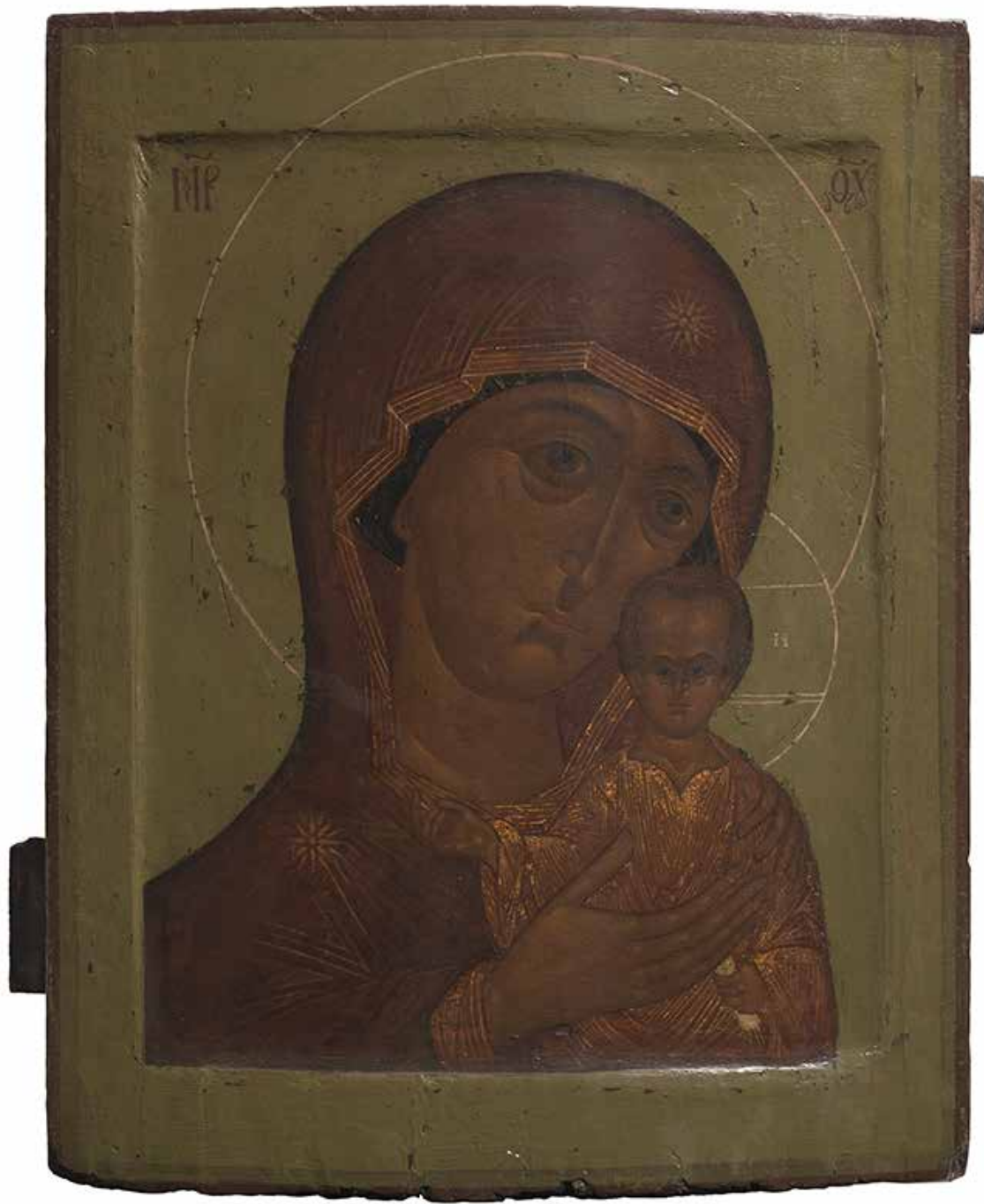on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God Umilenie
RUSSIA

Alternative names Korsunskaya, Umilenie (Russian: tenderness); Eleousa (Greek: tenderness), Virgin of the Sweet Kiss
Feast day 9 October

The focus of this exquisitely painted icon is the tenderness of the relationship between the Virgin, who gazes sadly outwards, and her infant son, who serenely comforts her by pressing his face to her cheek. Its immensely loving quality identifies it as an Umilenie or Eleousa icon, a less formal variant of the Hodegetria prototype, designed to amplify the closeness of the Holy Mother and Child for the praying beholder. The tilt of the mother's head towards her son, and the tightly cropped format identifies it yet more specifically as a Korsunskaya, a type of Umilenie icon that first became known in Cherson (Korsun), a Greek-speaking and formerly Byzantine enclave on the south coast of Crimea, in modern Ukraine, through which missionaries and travellers en route to and from Constantinople would have passed.[1] The significant details are framed within an oval, with the sweeping curve of the Virgin's veiled head completed by the crossing hands of mother and son.

Despite the engaging naturalism of this type, significant elements of the Hodegetria's formality are retained. Mary's hand still points to her son because he is 'The Way'. For all that he snuggles up to his mother's face, Christ is not exactly a baby but is rather a classical philosopher-teacher, who gestures in blessing with one hand while holding a closed scroll in the other. He sits upright in his ochre philosopher's robe, the voluminous folds of which are flattened and abstracted with a web of straight lines and gold striations (chrysography). **SM**

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1   Gordon Morrison, in Gordon Morrison, Alexander Grishin & Sophie Matthiesson, *Eikōn: Icons of the Orthodox Christian World*, Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria, 2014, p 176.

Cat 55
Mother of God Kazanskaya, c1700
Russia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
305 x 255 x 35 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God Kazanskaya
RUSSIA

Alternative titles Petrovskaya, Virgin of Saint Peter of Moscow
Feast day 24 August

With a faint inclination of her head the Mother of God invites the viewer to contemplate Christ, and yet she herself gazes soulfully away with her large, expressive eyes, unable to smile. She holds her son against her heart, with her cheek brushing the back of his head. A triple star-shaped cross, the Syrian symbol of virginity, embellishes her maphorion. The Christ child sits rigidly upright and makes a gesture of blessing in one hand while holding a scroll with the other. His scholar's robes are rendered at once regal and holy by a subtle web of chrysography.

This rare and exceptionally finely painted version of the Hodegetria icon is known as the Petrovskaya, after the 14th-century monk Peter, who painted in the Ratsk Monastery near Volhynia, western Ukraine, in 1307. The Petrovskaya type shows the Theotokos with a long, narrow face against an olive-green ground. Peter gave it to the Metropolitan of Kyiv, but it eventually was returned to him after the Mother of God was said to have predicted Peter's elevation to the metropolitan post of Kyiv and all Rus' (term 1308–26). Since then, it has been regarded as a miracle-working icon, venerated by Grand Duke Ivan III (reign 1462–1505), and taken to great affairs of church and state in the 16th and 17th centuries. The original is missing. **SM**

Mother of God of the Fiery Face
RUSSIA

Alternative name Ognevidnaya
Feast day 10 February

This icon shows the Virgin from shoulders upwards and without her child. Her face, which is suffused with redness, is related to Moses' vision of the burning bush, and indeed the icon of the Mother of God of the Burning Bush (cat 62). It literally represents the idea of Mary as a symbolic bush that 'burned with fire, and the fire was not consumed'(Exodus 3:2). Not only was Mary's purity inviolable, the fire of divinity, represented by her unborn child, could also burn within her without harm.

The concept was popular with Old Believers, for whom fire was respected as a purifying element. While icons that associate the Mother of God with fire are known only from the 18th century onwards, the concept can be traced back to seventh-century mystical texts and the Akathistos hymn in honour of the Virgin, which was composed in thanks for the rescue of Constantinople from the siege by the infidel – Sassanid Persians, Avars and allied Slavs – in 627: 'Moses perceived in the burning bush the great mystery of your giving birth, holy and immaculate Virgin, and the Youths prefigured this most clearly as they stood in the midst of the fire and were not burned. Therefore we sing your praise to all the ages.'[1]

This icon type is credited with being miracle working. **SM**

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1   Ode 4 Second Canon Irmos of the Akathist Canon for the Festival of the Transfiguration of Jesus. See also Gordon Morrison, *Deësis: Prayer and Image*, Art Gallery of Ballarat, Ballarat, 2017, p 31.

Cat 56
Mother of God of the Fiery Face, 18th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
355 x 300 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy, 2017

Mother of God of Kazan
RUSSIA

Alternative name Kazanskaya

This is a version of the Hodegetria icon, famous for the large almond-shaped eyes of the Virgin Mary, which amplify her air of solemnity and tenderness as she inclines her head in deference to the baby Jesus. Only the head and shoulders of Mary and the figure of Christ from the knees upwards are visible. This icon has near-identical iconography to its namesake, the Kazanskaya (Mother of God of Kazan) icon. The original, from Constantinople, was lost in the Tartar siege of 1438. It is said to have revealed its location in a vision to a girl in Kazan in 1579 and then miraculously reappeared at the top of the ruins of a house fire.

Copies of the original Kazan icon were also considered to have miracle-working properties, which in turn gave rise to feasts in their honour. A copy of the Kazanskaya was carried by the Russian army and is credited with repelling a Polish invasion of Moscow in 1612 and the Napoleonic army in 1812. Each copy is considered to glorify the original prototype and the Virgin Mary and Christ. The icon connects Mary and Jesus with the divine protection of Russia and it was especially associated with the Romanov dynasty.

This icon, which was most likely intended for private devotion, dates from around 1850. The painting is recessed within the silvery brass background of floral and vine motifs, which makes the haloes stand out in relief. It is a variation on the flat gold background which was more common to this icon type. There is an inscription just visible in the *riza* (Russian: liturgical tunic, chasuble) that indicates that the icon was intended for a literate audience.

Like its prototype, this icon has brown highlighting behind the eyes and the top of the noses of Mary and Christ, features that were introduced by the tsar's workshops in the second half of the 17th century. The white lace borders are another contemporary reference because they resemble those in clerical vestments of the times. Mary has two white stars visible on her cinnabar maphorion, on the head and right shoulder. The stars refer to her three-fold virginity, and if her left shoulder were visible there would be another star there. The red and gold trim in Mary's clothing matches that in the baby Christ's himation, further unifying them.

Christ is really a baby-sized figure with an adult face. In Russian icons he was always depicted as God even when a baby, and his adult face symbolised this. He stands front-on to the viewer but looking towards Mary, with his right hand in blessing. This icon is unusual in that it includes a winged guardian angel in white on the left at the foot of the painting and the Cappadocian father Basil the Great, who was instrumental in shaping the Byzantine divine liturgy, on the right. **MP**

Cat 57
Mother of God of Kazan, mid 19th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood with brass *riza*
307 x 262 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, purchased with funds from Maria Ridsdale, 2017

Cat 58
Mother of God Eleousa, 16th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen
over wood
212 x 183 x 34 mm
on loan from a private collection,
Canberra

Mother of God Eleousa
RUSSIA

Alternative names Korsunskaya, Vladimirskaya, Glycophilousa, Elousa

The Virgin and Child are shown in a cheek-to-cheek embrace. Their oneness is reinforced by a shared inner contour outlining the overlapping heads and the outer contour of haloes and crimson garments. The gesture of Christ tugging at his mother's garment symbolises the unity between Christ and the church. The dominant red of the image, which extends into the haloes, underscores the Passion to come. Vivid white highlights in the eyes of mother and son animate their mutual affection but also imply an intelligent clear-sightedness about the future. The intimate format of this icon indicates that it is a prayer icon for private devotion. Painted in a plain manner typical of northern Russia, encrusted layers of paint indicate centuries of use and periodic renovation to maintain the legibility of the details. **SM**

Cat 59
Mother of God Vladimirskaya, mid 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
275 x 230 x 32 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God Vladimirskaya
RUSSIA

Alternative name Umilenie
Feast days 21 May, 23 June, 26 August

This icon belongs to the group of Umilenie ('tenderness') icons, which focus on the tender relationship between the holy Mother and Child. The prototype upon which it is based is the most revered icon of medieval Russia. Despite dating to the 11th century, it is believed to have been made by Saint Luke during the Virgin's lifetime and is thus a true likeness and miracle working. Claims were even made that it was painted on a board from the table that had belonged to the Holy Family.[1] Sent to a Kyiv prince by a Constantinople patriarch in 1155, for centuries it has been known as the Vladimirskaya after the town in which it was later kept. The Vladimirskaya was *the* protective icon, par excellence, within Russia. It belongs to a special category of icons known as palladium icons: holy images upon which a town's safety and existence depends.

In 1395 the Vladimirskaya was taken to Moscow to fend off the invasion of the Turco-Mongol Tartars under Tamerlane (reign 1370–1405). Successful in repelling their attack, the icon was kept in Moscow from 1480; it is still there today. Over centuries the Vladimirskaya was widely copied, with little or no variation other than slight shifts in the direction of the heads and gazes, and its faithful copies were held in great veneration by many towns across Russia. A characteristic feature of the Vladimir iconography is that the left foot of the Child is bent underneath him to show the heel and underside of the foot. Gordon Morrison has pointed out that the only significant variation from the Vladimir prototype in the present example is the white robe of the Virgin, which follows an icon of the Vladimirskaya painted by Andrei Rublev (c1365–c1428) in the early 15th century.[2] The original is now in the Moscow Church of Saint Nicolas in Tolmachi, designated as part of the Tretyakov Gallery Moscow.

Small holes indicate this 17th-century icon once had a metal revetment or oklad, in emulation of its prototype. As a mark of esteem, soon after its arrival in Kyiv from Constantinople the original Vladimirskaya was clad in a gold- and jewel-encrusted oklad. The Vladimirskaya has been displayed without its revetment by the Treyakov Gallery Moscow since 1919. **SM**

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1   Wendy Salmond, 'The Art of the Oklad' *The Post*, Hillwood Museum, vol 3, iss 2, 1996, p 7.
2   Gordon Morrison, Alexander Grishin & Sophie Matthiesson, *Eikōn: Icons of the Orthodox Christian World*, Art Gallery of Ballarat, Ballarat, 2014, p 182.

Cat 60
Mother of God Vladimirskaya with Saint Nicholas, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
272 x 238 x 40 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God Vladimirskaya with Saint Nicholas
RUSSIA

Alternative names Umilenie, Eleousa

This icon combines two of the most beloved subjects in the Russian Orthodox world: the Mother of God with her son, and Saint Nicholas. Mary holds Christ to her cheek, a variant of the Hodegetria that emphasises the tender love between the mother and child. Christ holds onto his mother's veil while reaching an arm around her neck. This naturalistic version of the more formal Hodegetria is known as the Mother of God of Tenderness (Umilenie or Eleousa) or Vladimir type (Vladimirskaya). Like its prototype, this icon is also associated with protection. With his right hand raised in blessing and his left hand holding the gospel, Saint Nicholas's gestures echo those of Christ Pantocrator. **SM**

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1   David B Mille, 'Legends of the Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir: A Study of the Development of Muscovite National Consciousness', *Speculum*, 1968, vol 43, no 4, October 1968, pp 657–70.

Enthroned Mother of God with Fourteen Saints and Angels

RUSSIA

The image of the Mother of God sitting and looking outwards with Christ on her lap is an archaic one with truly ancient visual precedents. The earliest use of the term Theotokos (God-bearer) has been traced to Egypt where it was applied to the goddess Isis, the mother of Horos (Harpocrates). Statuettes of Isis show her seated frontally on a throne staring outwards with the infant Horos on her lap and with her feet on a footrest: the number of surviving examples points to her widespread veneration as a divine mother figure in domestic shrines.[1] The earliest known Christian adaptation of that iconography is a sixth-century encaustic (coloured wax paint) icon on panel at the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, which shows a statue-like enthroned Virgin and Child surrounded by figures.[2]

In the Orthodox tradition the image of the Mother of God Enthroned reflects and cements the approved church position of Mary's divine maternity and status as the Theotokos, which became official during the Council of Ephesus in 431 after centuries of debate. The Greek term for this icon type is *Panagia platytera*, meaning 'All holy and wider than the heavens' in reference to the divinity contained in Mary's womb. Although Mary sits on a material throne, it is her womb and her lap that are the true thrones, forming a protective setting for her divine infant. Early images show her seated and queen-like, receiving the Magi, who have arrived to pay homage to her child. After the fifth century other figures emerged in place of the three kings and are arranged around the Mother and Child, to whom they give allegiance. Eventually rulers appeared in the place of the three kings.

In this version the Mother of God sits on a golden cushion, her feet resting on a pink suppedaneum (Latin: footrest). She is surrounded by haloed church hierarchs, winged archangels and red-cloaked martyrs. In the top left corner King David watches on, and at the lower right a second crowned figure, King Solomon, kneels at her feet. Both these Old Testament saints foretold the Incarnation, which this image also celebrates. **SM**

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1 Thomas F Mathews & Norman Muller, 'Isis and Mary in Early Icons', in Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God*, p 4–5.
2 *Icon of the Virgin and Child Between Archangels Accompanied by Two Saints*, 6th century, encaustic on wood, 68.5 x 49.7 cm, Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, Egypt. See entry by Robin Cormack, in Maria Vassilaki (ed), *Mother of God Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, Benaki Museum/Skira, Athens/Milan, 2000, cat 1, p 262.

Cat 61
Enthroned Mother of God with Fourteen Saints and Angels, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
310 x 272 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy, 2017

Mother of God of the Burning Bush
RUSSIA

Feast day 4 September

This famous icon type visually likens the Mother of God, who gave birth to a child while retaining her virginity, to the bush at Mount Sinai, seen by Moses, that perpetually 'burned with fire, and … was not consumed' (Exodus 3:2). Opinions differ as to when and from where the idea of Mary as a burning bush first appeared in Russia. One theory is that it arrived in the 14th century via Sinai; another is that it emerged after Greek scholars and theologians fled there from Constantinople after its fall in 1453.

The burning bush metaphor, coupled with a notion of Mary as a commander of natural forces, generated a highly distinctive icon, the details of which were fully developed by the second half of the 17th century. The Old Believers sect went to great lengths to codify its symbolism, and even published a text entitled the *Alphabetical Book on the Burning Bush*.[1]

In the corners are visions of Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jacob. The upper left shows the burning bush of Moses and the upper right the seraph purifying Isaiah's lips with a piece of burning coal held with tongs. In the lower left is Ezekiel's vision of the Temple, with its closed door as a symbol of Mary's purity. The lower right corner depicts Jacob's Ladder, with angels climbing up and down. Within the rhombus at the centre of the icon is a symbol of the church, Mary's vessel. Mary is in turn a vessel for Christ holding a globe. This icon type often shows Mary as the ladder seen in Jacob's dream (Genesis 28:12), upon which God descends and humanity ascends. In this example the ladder is faintly visible in her arms. Mary is also the place where God's ladder touches the earth, what Jacob declared to be 'the house of God' and 'gate of heaven' (Genesis 28:17), a gate through which God alone may pass (Ezekiel 44:2).[2] The red points contain each of the four evangelists: Matthew the Man, Mark the Lion, Luke the Ox and John the Eagle. In the interstitial lobes are angels and archangels representing divine forces of wind, fire, ice and darkness. Above the action at the pinnacle of the icon is God the Father, who blesses the scene.

This formulation is regarded as a uniquely Russian image of the Mother of God. The first example, now lost, is thought to have been painted around 1547 for a church in the Moscow Kremlin. Although the mainstream church forbade the iconography at the Holy Synod of 1722, images of the Mother of God of the Burning Bush were beloved because they affirmed popular beliefs in Mary's powers over thunder and fire: they were typically displayed opposite the household stove, where they were thought to offer protection from fires and lightning strikes.[3] Its reputed powers were corroborated when a woman was reported to have emerged unscathed from a house fire, clutching the protective icon to her body.[4] **SM**

1   Oleg Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, translated by Robin Milner-Gulland, Reaktion Books, London, 2002, pp 105, 186–88.
2   Aidan Hart, *Festal Icons: History and Meaning*, Gracewing, Leominster, 2022, p 85.
3   Cathy Frierson, *All Russia is Burning: A Cultural History of Fire and Arson*, University of Washington Press, Seattle WA, 2012, pp 25–26.
4   Daniel H Kaiser, 'Icons and Private Devotion Among Eighteenth-Century Moscow Townsfolk', *Journal of Social History*, vol 45, no 1, Fall 2011, p 129.

Cat 62
Mother of God of the Burning Bush, c1800
Russia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
368 x 323 x 45 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 63
Nemeh Nasr al-Homsi (active c1847–69)
Mother of God Flanked by Saint Elian, Saint George,
Holy Prophet Elijah and Saint Demetrius, circa 1847–69
Syria
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
292 x 355 mm
on loan from a private collection, Sydney

Mother of God Flanked by Saint Elian, Saint George, Holy Prophet Elijah and Saint Demetrius

SYRIA

The central panel of this portable triptych, very likely used for private devotion, shows the miraculous Hodegetria image, the seated Virgin pointing to the infant Christ on her lap. In this version Mary (with abbreviated Greek inscription meaning: Mother of God) is being crowned as queen of Heaven by two archangels (Arabic inscription: Michael, Gabriel) and Christ (abbreviated Greek inscription: Jesus Christ) holds a *globus cruciger* (Latin: orb and cross), a symbol of Christ's power in the world. This attribute identifies Christ as *Salvator Mundi* (Saviour of the World). This initially Roman Catholic motif became common in oriental Christian art from the 17th century.

The selection of supporting saints includes robust figures of protection. In the upper left wing is the mounted figure of the third-century Saint Elian, whose remains are buried in the Greek Orthodox church dedicated to him at Homs (Arabic inscription: Saint Ilian al-Homsi, the doctor). Although venerated as a medical saint, symbolised by the medicine box he holds in his left hand and the mortar to the right, he is usually depicted on horseback.[1] He is shown trampling what is very likely a female demon who defends herself with hooks. The two other equestrian saints are the third-century saints George (inscription: Saint Georgios), who slays the dragon with the princess he saved in the background, and Demetrius (Arabic inscription: Saint Demetrius) killing the Bulgarian tsar Kaloyan (reign 1196–1207). In the upper right wing, the prophet Elijah (Arabic inscription: Elijah the prophet) is brought bread by a raven while hiding in a cave (1 Kings 17: 4 and 19:9–13); in Syria and Lebanon he is one of the most popular saints because of his voyage to Damascus (1 Kings 19:15). Multiple hiding caves in the region, three of which are situated in and near Damascus, attracted pilgrims of the three monotheistic religions.[2]

The icon was painted by Nemeh Nasr al-Homsi, who left his signature to the right of Christ. This artist from Homs was active in the Christian-populated Qalamun area between Damascus and Homs and the Syrian capital between 1847 and 1869 at least.[3] His icons reflect the influence of the Cretan artist Michael Polychronis (active 1809–21), who worked in Syria and whose example had a lasting impact. The details of the Virgin's garments are clearly Cretan as are the decorative 'neo-baroque' crowns on the Virgin and Christ traced in niello (black linework). **MI**

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1   Mat Immerzeel, 'The Wall Paintings in the Church of Mar Elian at Homs: A "Restoration Project" of a Nineteenth-Century Palestinian Master', *Eastern Christian Art*, 2, 2005, pp 149–66.

2   Mat Immerzeel, 'Hidden in a Cave: The Tradition of the Prophet Elijah and Interreligious Convergences in the Damascus Area,' *Eastern Christian Art*, 11, 2016–17, pp 37–53.

3   Mat Immerzeel, *The Narrow Way to Heaven: Identity and Identities in the Art of Middle Eastern Christianity*, Peeters, Leuven 2017, pp 207–10.

Vladimir Mother of God Flanked by Saints Zosima and Savvatii

RUSSIA, PALEKH

In the central scene in this triptych, Mary looks down tenderly at the baby Jesus who nestles against her cheek in what is known as the Eleusa type. Mary appears sad and reflective, perhaps in contemplation of the martyrdom that had been prophesied for her son. The 15th-century saints Zosima and Savvatii are shown as small full-length figures on either side in the wings of the triptych. Their gestures indicate that they are in prayer to Mary. These two saints are usually shown together although they never met in real life. Zosima continued the work of Savvatii in establishing the Solovetsky Monastery in the remote Bolshoy Solovetsky Island in northern Russia (see also cat 10). They were said to have worked together in the miracles attributed to them after their deaths. These saints became particularly prominent in northern Old Believer churches after their monastery took a stance during the years 1668 to 1676 against the church reforms of Patriarch Nikon (term 1652–66).

All the figures wear cinnabar-coloured clothes and shades of red and brown with some dark green highlighting. These are colours associated with the earthly path to Heaven. Their haloes are also dark green. Mary's halo includes the decorative motifs that form part of the background. Instead of a painted gold background to symbolise Heaven, this icon is set in a silver and enamel case with detail that resembles gemstones. Symbolically, this setting functions in the same way to show the beauty of Heaven. The letters MP and OY, derived from the Greek abbreviation for the Mother of God, form part of the background detail. The Palekh style was a form of folk painting established in the village of the same name in the 19th century and was known for its intricate miniatures. This triptych, in a portable case that can be closed, was most likely used for private veneration and prayer. **MP**

Cat 64
Vladimir Mother of God Flanked by Saints Zosima and Savvatii, 19th century
Russia, Palekh
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood in silver cloisonné enamel case
95 x 110 mm
Dunedin Public Art Gallery, given 1982 by Mary Dora and Esmond de Beer
through the National Art Collection Fund

Triptych of the Mother of God of the Passion and Saints
MACEDONIA

Inscribed MP (faint) upper left *Ἅγιος Νικόλαος και ο Ἅγιος Χαράλαμπος* (Saint Nicholas) and (Saint Haralambos); *Ἅγιος Ναουμ της Οχριδος* (Saint Naoum of Ochridos); *Ἅγιος Ναού της Οχρίδος και Ἅγιος Θεοδόσιος ο Τύρων* (Holy Church of Ochridos and Saint Theodore the Recruit, Theodoros Tyron)
Feast day Saint Naum 20 June

This tiny folding icon shows the Mother of God holding Christ in her left arm. He makes a gesture of blessing with his right hand and balances a *globus cruciger* (Latin: orb and cross) with the other. Angels hover around the Virgin's halo, veiling their hands with their sleeves. Flanking her on either side are full-length portraits of regionally popular saints; the fourth-century Nicholas the second-century saint Charalambos on the left wing, the ninth-century Naum and the third-century Theodore the Recruit on the right.[1]

Remarkably vivid and legible despite its small size, the icon is undoubtedly a pilgrim souvenir from the church of Saint Naum in Ohrid, Macedonia, where Naum built the Church of the Holy Angels around 900. Naum receives special veneration as the first Bulgarian saint and for having translated the Bible into Old Church Slavonic. In Ohrid, where his relics are kept, reports of his miraculous powers to restore sight gave rise to an enthusiastic Macedonian cult in the late 18th century and drew both Christians and Muslims to the region in great numbers.

Portable icons such as this painted example served as souvenirs, objects of private devotion and propaganda for the region. The nearby hospitals, springs and the church of Saint Nicholas of Hospitality in Ohrid were all related to health and healing. This tiny folding triptych is dated to the 1760s and identifies the Holy Church of Ohrid and the saints associated with the area. The cult of Naum was actively fostered between the years 1800 and 1806 through the commissioning of frescos in the chapel and church that were dedicated to him. Naum's shrine attracted pilgrims throughout the year but especially on his feast day on 20 June, when great crowds converged in the town.[1]

Many of the stylistic elements of this icon were perpetuated in the 19th century by the eminent Macedonian artist Dimitrija Krstev, known as 'Dičo Zograf' (1819–72), who worked throughout the Balkan region and in the Ohrid-Struga area. Krstev's *hermeneia,* a compilation of painting manuals and technical notes on iconography, helped to codify icon painting in the region and to define a distinctive style. **SM**

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1   Snežana Filipova, 'Notes on the Continuous Multi-Confessional use of Shrines, Cult Places, Christian Relics and Springs of Holy Water in the Republic of Macedonia', *Systasis*, 25 , 2014, p 6.

Cat 65
Triptych of the Mother of God of the Passion and Saints, 18th century
Macedonia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
60 x 250 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 66
Holy Virgin and Child, c1849
Italy
watercolour in a silver frame within a gilt filigree case
100 x 70 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Moss Davis, 1928

Holy Virgin and Child
ITALY

The small 12th-century Comnene icon of the *Nicopeia* (Bringer of Victory) has rested in the basilica of San Marco, Venice, since at least 1251. Believed to have been the icon carried into battle by the emperors of Byzantium, by the 16th century it was considered the palladium of Venice and was carried in procession through the Piazza San Marco in times of plague, inclement weather and most especially military conflict. In 1618 a golden shrine and new marble altar were constructed for the painted wooden panel in its gold and enamelled frame, leading to the composition of motets and litanies honouring the little Theotokos by San Marco's famous *maestro di capella*, Claudio Monteverdi.

The tiny reproduction of this famous icon in its silver frame, enclosed beneath glass in a gold case and donated to the Auckland Art Gallery by Moss Davis in 1928, appears at first to be a typical religious souvenir of the type collected by enthusiasts on the Grand Tour in the 19th century. The image itself is a coloured print or pen-and-ink drawing, which only approximates the appearance of the icon in its bejewelled revetment at the time of its creation. The Virgin's mantle is red, rather than the ultramarine of the original work, and the style is western, pointing to the possibility that a contemporary prayer card, or *santino,* may have been the inspiration for its creation, or may have actually been re-serviced for the work. Covered by a layer of fine white gauze, the image appears to reference mosaic tesserae, paying homage to the 10.4 square kilometres of mosaics adorning the interior of the basilica in which the original icon is displayed. Nevertheless, the silver frame is a near exact copy of its golden precursor, definitively linking the 19th-century work with the original *Nicopeia*.

But the date on the case, 1849, points to a far more important, and poignant, political moment in Venice's history – the short-lived Republic of San Marco. Founded at the outset of the First War of Italian Independence, when a number of regions in Italy and the island of Sardinia battled to free themselves from the domination of the Austrian empire, the San Marco republic, under the leadership of Daniele Manin, was the inevitable outcome of Venice's revolt initiated against the Austrians in March of 1848. The republic was short lived. In April 1849 the Austrian general Josef Radetsky besieged the city on the lagoon, and on 4 May bombarded Venice with over sixty thousand projectiles. That day the women of Venice were congregated before the icon of the *Nicopeia*, imploring her to bring victory to their defenders.[1] By August the Venetians were forced to capitulate, their leaders executed or compelled to flee. The Veneto remained under Austrian rule until October of 1866, when the region finally joined a unified Italian kingdom.

The date of 1849 on the icon case could not possibly signify when a tourist purchased this souvenir, because the city was blockaded and too dangerous to visit. Rather, it renders the little icon, a seemingly cheap touristic reproduction, a poignant remembrance of those tragic days, and is more probably a product created for a Venetian than a foreigner. The use of precious metals in its adornment points to the importance of this little image to its owner, and, in fact, the gauze covering the image may bear some as yet unknown meaning associated with the conflict, a personal remembrance, the significance of which is lost to us. **LDW**

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1   Francesco Carrano, *Ricordanze storiche del risorgimento italiano, 1822–1870*, F Casanova, Torino, 1885, p 227.

Mother of God
CRETE

It is highly likely that this small icon has been cut down from a larger panel. This is suggested by the top part of the icon, where the halo of the Virgin seems incomplete, and from Mary's position facing three-quarters to the right. This is usually the placement of the Virgin in a deesis, where Christ is depicted in the middle, flanked by his mother and cousin, John the Baptist, to the left and right respectively. The Virgin and Saint John are the major intercessors for the salvation of humankind to Christ, and the iconography of the deesis is a visual representation of this act on behalf of the faithful. Mary is depicted from the shoulders up, which could indicate a half-length deesis. She is wearing her customary attire of a red maphorion (Greek: mantle). Her halo bears decorative punchwork. The modelling of her face shows large areas with white highlights, especially around her cheeks and neckline. This treatment of the flesh is a characteristic of 16th-century Cretan icon painting, as exemplified in the art of the famous Cretan icon painter Michael Damaskinos (c1533–c1593).[1] **AL**

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1 For the 16th-century Cretan icon painter Michael Damaskinos, a contemporary of Doménikos Theotokópoulos (El Greco), see Maria Konstantoudaki-Kitromilides, 'Michael Damaskinos', in Graham Speake (ed), *Encyclopedia of Greece and the Hellenic Tradition*, vol 1, Routledge, London, 2000, pp 443–45.

Cat 67
Mother of God, c1600
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
274 x 228 x 30 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God and Child
CRETE

The Virgin and Child is by far the most popular representation in Byzantine visual culture. The market demand for such icons is attested by a Cretan contract dated to 1499, where an order for the production and delivery of 700 icons of the Virgin within 42 days is outlined and involves three different painters.[1] The representation of the Virgin and Child has many iconographic types; among the most famous are the Hodegetria ('she who shows the way'), the Eleousa ('merciful'), the Virgin *Glykophilousa* ('sweet kissing') and some types introduced in post-Byzantine art by Cretan icon painters such as the Virgin *Kardiotissa* ('of the heart'), the Virgin of the Passion, and the *Madre della Consolazione*.[2] In this icon, the Mother of God acquires a 'blocky' appearance, reminiscent of the figures of the Italian painter Giotto (c1267–1337).[3] She is depicted waist up, turned three-quarters to the right against a gold background and wearing her characteristic attire of a red maphorion. The typical colours of the Virgin are red and blue; here, underneath her red mantle the Virgin seems to be wearing a black garment, but it is highly likely that this was originally blue. Underneath her head piece a stylised fine coif can be discerned, which is usually visible in her representation in the type of *Madre della Consolazione*.[4] Her right hand is reminiscent of the Hodegetria pose, where she points at her son, the only true way, according to Christian teaching.

The Virgin makes direct eye contact with the faithful rather than assuming the aloofness so often encountered in Byzantine icons; this engagement with the viewer was introduced in post-Byzantine art by Cretan icon painters. The Christ child reaches out to his mother with both hands and his right cheek touches her left cheek, in a gesture characteristic of the Virgin Eleousa and/or *Glykophilousa*. Hence this present icon seems to be referencing different iconographic types of the Virgin. The Child's himation (Greek: shirt) is rendered in chrysography (gold striations), which is his typical attire in Byzantine art.[5] The Virgin supports the Child with her left hand, in a manner that defies the laws of gravity – this is an exquisite and clever means by which Byzantine art visualised and conveyed the immateriality of Christ, the fact that he is more spirit than flesh, and his bodily presence on earth was not subjected to the laws of nature. **AL**

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1   For a discussion of this contract, see Angeliki Lymberopoulou, 'Audiences and Markets for Cretan Icons', in Kim W Woods, Carol M Richardson & Angeliki Lymberopoulou (eds), *Viewing Renaissance Art*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT & London, 2007, pp 171–206, especially pp 187–92; for a translation see Carol M Richardson, Kim W Woods & Michael W Franklin (eds), *Renaissance Art Reconsidered: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, Blackwell Publishing, Maldon MA, 2007, pp 371–73 (3.5.3).

2   For examples of depiction of the Mother of God, see Chrysanthi Baltoyianni, *Icons: Mother of God in the Incarnation and the Passion* [Χρυσάνθη Μπαλτογιάννη, Εικόνες Μήτηρ Θεού], Adam Editions, Athens, 1994; Angeliki Lymberopoulou, 'The Painter Angelos and post-Byzantine Art', in Carol M Richardson (ed), *Locating Renaissance Art*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT & London, 2007, pp 175–212, especially pp 200–09.

3   For good colour reproductions and an overview of Giotto's work, see Luciano Bellosi, *Giotto*, Scala, Florence, 1981.

4   Angeliki Lymberopoulou, 'The *Madre della Consolazione* Icon in the British Museum: Post-Byzantine Painting, Painters, and Society on Crete', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 53, 2003, pp 239–55.

5   Jaroslav Folda & Lucy Wrapson, *Byzantine Art and Italian Panel Painting: The Virgin and the Child Hodegetria and the Art of Chrysography*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015.

Cat 68
Mother of God and Child, 17th century
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
307 x 258 x 37 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Head of the Virgin
CRETE

It is highly probable that this icon has been cut down to its present size, placing the head of the Virgin in a frame with columns with decorated capitals. In all likelihood this was originally an icon presenting the Virgin and Child, possibly of the type of *Madre della Consolazione* (see *Mother of God and Saint Joseph with the Archangels Gabriel and Michael*, cat 109), a popular iconography of the Virgin and Child in post-Byzantine painting. The Virgin wears a green maphorion over a red under-mantle. A pinkish undershirt is visible at the height of her collarbone. The stylised, diaphanous head kerchief and the brooch which holds the maphorion together are both characteristic of her attire in the *Madre della Consolazione* iconographic type.[1] Her halo bears punched decoration. The modelling of her face shows large areas with white highlights, especially around her cheeks and neckline. She maintains the aloofness so typical in the Byzantine representation of the Virgin (and in contrast with the previous example). The icon is attributed to the circle of Konstantinos Tzanes, also known as Mpounialis (1633–82/85), a post-Byzantine Cretan artist from the northern coastal city of Rethymnon and a member of a well-known family within 17th-century artistic circles: he was the brother of the renowned artist Emmanouel Tzanes Mpounialis (1610–90) and of the poet Marinos Tzanes Mpounialis (1620–90).[2] **AL**

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1 Lymberopoulou, 'The *Madre della Consolazione* Icon in the British Museum', p 243.
2 Chatzidakis & Drakopoulou, *Greek Painters after the Fall 1450–1830*, vol 2, pp 424–26.

Cat 69
Workshop of Konstantinos Tzanes (1633–85)
Head of the Virgin, 17th century
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
660 x 550 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God Galaktotrophousa
CRETE OR DALMATIA

Alternative names Virgin Nursing; Virgin lactans; Mlekopitatelnitsa
Blessed Womb (Blazhenoe Chrevo); Virgin of Barlovsk (Barlovskaia)
Feast days 12 January; 3 July

The image of the infant Christ breastfeeding in his mother's arms is known in Greek as the *galaktotrophousa* ('she who nourishes with milk') or in the Italian tradition as *Virgo* or *Maria lactans*. The subject itself is ancient and is found in pre-Christian imagery – for example, the Egyptian goddess Isis suckling Horus – but it is relatively uncommon in the Orthodox tradition and its adoption reflects the post-Byzantine interactions between artists of Orthodox Greece and Catholic northern Italy. While the infant Christ usually makes eye contact with the viewer, in this icon he is shown nodding off to sleep, fully sated – a surprisingly naturalistic touch. The abundant chrysography on his garment indicates his holy radiance. The exquisite gold-embroidered edges of Mary's maphorion are pseudo-kufic (imitation Arabic script), a contemporary reference to the origin of the Virgin and Child. Recent scholars have suggested that the archaic appearance of Arabic calligraphy in these contexts may have had been thought to possess apotropaic (protective) value as well as decorative appeal.[1]

The strong demand for images of the Virgin nursing the infant Christ in the *maniera Latina* during the 16th and 17th centuries fuelled production of this subject in both Cretan and Dalmatian workshops. The subject of the infant Christ's need for nourishment underlines his physical needs and the theology of his incarnation. The inclusion of the Archangel Michael holding a spear, lance and sponge reinforces this point, as these instruments symbolise the prospect of death. **SM**

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1   Silvia Pedone & Valentina Cantone, 'The pseudo-kufic ornament and the problem of cross-cultural relationships between Byzantium and Islam', *Opuscula Historiae Artium*, 62, Supplementum, 2013, 120–36, p 122.

Cat 70
Mother of God Galaktotrophousa, c1550
Crete or Dalmatia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
178 x 135 x 13 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God Tou Harou
CRETE OR IONIAN ISLANDS

Alternative names Panagia tou Harou ('All Holy [Mother of God] of Death'); Rus: 'Akhtyrsk', Achtyrskaja; Mater Dolorosa
Feast day 23 August

The image of the Mother of God cradling a crucifix, as seen here, poses no problems in the Catholic tradition, which never renounced sculptural imagery as an aid to devotion, but its acceptability within the Orthodox tradition is more complex. The prohibitions against sculpture and its representations as 'graven imagery' for the Orthodox church are profound. Nevertheless, there are instances of tolerance for certain images. The icon known in Greece as the *Panagia Tou Harou* (Mother of God of Death), or in Russia as the *Akhtyrsk*, dates from the 18th century. The composition is an adaption of Italian devotional images from the counter reformation.[1] The punched decorative halo is a clue that this example was possibly produced by a Cretan workshop.[2] While many close versions exist, this icon is notable for its sober palette.[3]

The existence of such images is only possible through the intermingling of Catholic and Orthodox cultures over time, whether through trade and travel, print culture or co-habitation, as took place in the Venetian-held islands of the Adriatic from the 15th century onwards. Both Greek and Russian icons of this subject have long been credited with miracle-working powers. The *Tou Harou* is the focus of a festival on the Greek island of Leipsoi in the northern Dodecanese on 23 August each year, while the *Akhtyrsk* has been linked to healing events in the city of Okhtyrka, in the Sumy region of Ukraine, since 1739. **SM**

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1 Images of the Virgin, Mary Magdalene or sometimes Saint Catherine cradling the crucifix are common in baroque painting of the 17th century.
2 Maria Vassilaki, 'Some Cretan Icons in the Walters Art Gallery', *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, vol 48, 1990, p 78.
3 A similar icon featuring extensive use of pale blue is in the Coptic Museum Cairo.

Cat 71
Mother of God Tou Harou, 18th century
Crete or Ionian Islands
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
375 x 285 x 43 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Pietà

CRETE

Inscribed M(a)t(er) d(omin)i (Mother of God, in majuscule and miniscule red letters in Latin, to the left and right of the Virgin's head); Yh(sou)s Xh(ris)t(o)s (Jesus Christ, in majuscule and miniscule red letters in Latin, to the left, above Christ's head)

The Virgin Mary is depicted seated on a rock against a gold background, holding the body of the dead Christ in her lap. There is no equivalent in the gospel narrative for this iconography, but it is an extension of the Lamentation, an iconographic subject which allows for the Virgin to have a private moment with her son and her grief.[1] The origins of this iconography are rooted in the Byzantine iconography of the Man of Sorrows (Utmost Humiliation /*Akra Tapeinosis*), the earliest example of which dates to the 12th century.[2] The type found its way into western art where it evolved – to include the pietà version we see here – and eventually bounced back into post-Byzantine art, where it was originally considered a western influence. The renowned Cretan painter Nikolaos Tzafouris (active 1487–1501) is credited with some pietàs in post-Byzantine art.[3]

The iconography reflects the rising popularity of the cult of the Virgin in the late medieval and renaissance eras, a popularity that underlines her role as the main intercessor to her son for the salvation of the human soul. The Virgin wears a red maphorion with a white headdress, which covers her hair and throat. This headdress, characteristic of the Virgin's attire in this iconographic type, is rooted in Italian art and does not form part of her attire in Byzantine art.[4] Her grief-stricken face looks down at the lifeless body of her son, whose head has been placed to the left and is being supported by Mary's right hand. The Virgin also supports Christ's right hand with her left. He wears only a white loincloth around his waist and his body appears to be almost draped on his mother's lap with his legs hanging down on the right side. His stigmata is visible on his hands and feet. The Latin characters used for the abbreviations for the Mother of God and Jesus Christ could suggest a Latin-speaking patron, since the choice of the language of the inscriptions in icons (Greek, Latin, Russian, etc) usually points to the language of their intended audience. **AL**

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1   The Lamentation is referred to in the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, see Angeliki Lymberopoulou, *The Church of the Archangel Michael at Kavalariana: Art and Society on Fourteenth-Century Venetian Crete*, Pindar Press, London, 2006, pp 78–83.

2   The earliest iconographic example is considered the bilateral icon in Kastoria, mainland Greece, dated to the 12th century, see Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou (ed), *From Byzantium to El Greco: Greek Frescoes and Icons*, Royal Academy of Arts/Byzantine Museum of Athens, London/Athens, 1987, p 150, no 8.

3   For Nikolaos Tzafouris, see Angeliki Lymberopoulou, 'The Painter Angelos', in Acheimastou-Potamianou, *From Byzantium to El Greco*, pp 203–09.

4   As above.

Cat 72
Workshop of Nikolaus Tzafouris (active 1487–1501)
Pietà, c1500
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
453 x 363 x 27 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God of the Sign
RUSSIA

Alternative names Virgin Orans; Bogomater Znamenie; Vaster than the Heavens; Great Panagia; Blachernitissa; Znamenskaya
Feast day 27 November (Novgorod)

This highly venerated icon, showing the Mother of God in a posture of prayer (*orans* in Latin) with raised arms and palms faced outwards, owes its charisma to its reputation throughout Orthodox Christendom as a palladium, or protective, icon of unbounded powers. Presiding over city gates, processed through cities and carried into war, most commonly this image of Mary is found at the pinnacle of an icon screen (iconostasis). It became a symbol of the city of Constantinople and its fame spread to Russia in the 12th century. Venerated in Kyiv and Yaroslavl, it was credited with saving the northern Russian city of Novgorod twice: once from invading Suzdal armies in 1170 and a second time from the plague in 1352.

The open-palmed, all-encompassing gesture is an ancient iconic type, found as early as the fourth century and is known in Greek as *platytera*, meaning 'wider than heaven'. In this attitude Mary appears to address the heavens and earth at once. The letters MP ΘΥ, short for *Meter Theou* (Greek: Mother of God), appear on either side of her head. Over her heart and womb, in a medallion, is the image of her son in the form of Emmanuel. The format resembles the medallions worn by members of the Byzantine court depicting the effigy of their emperor. In this context the image functions as a reminder of the prophesy in Isaiah (7:14) telling Mary of her immaculate conception and role as Theotokos. Christ is shown in liturgical vestments, making a sign of blessing and holding the scroll that recalls his teachings.

The decorative colour scheme and ornamental framing device of a baroque cartouche date this example to the late 17th century. **SM**

Cat 73
Mother of God of the Sign, late 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
430 x 341 x 32 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God of the Sign
RUSSIA

The Mother of God of the Sign is most closely associated with Novgorod, where it was known as *Znamenie*, meaning 'apparition' or 'sign' in Old Russian on account of its miraculous powers. It was kept in a number of churches, including the Cathedral of Saint Sophia the Wisdom of God. The *Znamenie* (Mother of God of the Sign) is an image that has long been hailed as a protector of all Russia. During the 12th and 13th centuries the highest-ranking clergy of Kyivan Rus' used a seal of the Mother of God of the Sign on official correspondence.[1]

One of the earliest and most enduring images of the Theotokos, it can be found in every medium: wood, mosaic, ivory, stone, cloth and glass. This 18th-century version, in a reduced 'hand-sized' format, is known as a piadnitsa. Typically measuring 25 by 23 centimetres or smaller – the span between the thumb and finger of an outstretched hand – its small size made it the perfect souvenir for the religious tourist and the perfect protective travelling companion, given its long pedigree as an effective palladium icon in Byzantium and Russia. **SM**

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1   Tsvetelin Stepanov, *Waiting for the End of the World: European Dimensions, 950–1200*, Brill, Leiden, 2020, p 111.

Cat 74
Mother of God of the Sign, 18th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood with silver *basma*
180 x 150 x 40 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

FEAST ICONS

Aidan Hart

Icons of feasts depict important sacred events. Chief of the feasts is Easter, the 'feast of feasts'. Next in importance are the Twelve Great Feasts: the Nativity of the Virgin Mary; Exaltation of the Cross; Presentation of the Virgin; the Nativity of Christ; Christ's Baptism (Theophany or Epiphany); Presentation of Jesus at the Temple; Annunciation; Palm Sunday; Christ's Ascension; Pentecost; the Transfiguration, and the Dormition (falling asleep of Mary). Although technically not a feast, the Crucifixion also has its icons. There are then other 'lesser' great feasts.

Context is key to understanding festal icons. They are an integral part of the Orthodox Church's choreography of worship, a liturgical drama that spans the year. They utilise the five senses: together with incense smelled, communion tasted and hymns heard, festal icons are part of the multi-sensory experience of worship, not just looked at but touched. They are often literally worn down through use. On its feast day, the festal icon is placed on an *analoi* (Greek: stand) inside the church's entrance. On entering, the faithful cross themselves and kiss the icon by way of venerating the holy persons who are depicted on it. Besides this, the great feast icons will often be set into an upper tier of the iconostasis. If the church is dedicated to a feast, a large version will be set into the bottom tier, to be venerated at every service. The homes of the devout might also have small festal icons in their prayer corner.

A festal icon is intimately partnered with the hymns of its commemoration. These texts are composed especially for the feast. They are theological, poetic and copious; English translations of these hymns fill over a thousand pages. The hymns interpret the icon, and the icon interprets the hymns. Time is also fundamental to festal icons. Orthodox theology has words for two types of time: *chronos* (χρόνος) is 'clock' time, and *kairos* (καιρὸς) is when God acts in order to open *chronos* to divine life and eternity. *Kairos* is thus considered divine time, inasmuch as the category of time can be applied to the divine. An Orthodox feast therefore commemorates an event that occurred within human history, but together with its icon treats it as a sacred event that never ceases to be effective, flowing forward into the present and on into 'the ages of ages'. *Kairos* is thus like a spring that emerges in a particular place but

then continues forward as a river. This is why the word 'today' is a frequent refrain in hymns – 'Today the Virgin gives birth to Him who is above all being' – and why people in icons often look out at the viewer, engaging them in the present.

With the above in mind, it might be said that the Māori wharenui (meeting house) has many parallels with this Orthodox understanding of time, tradition and the role of sacred art. The wharenui represents the body of its tribe's forebears, who remain a living part of the community. This unity and continuity through time is affirmed through the wharenui's carvings of tribal ancestors.

The development of festal icons is complex, each type having its unique story.[1] The seventh-century destruction of Christian images by Muslim iconoclasts obfuscates their history, as does the later Byzantine iconoclasm. However, it is worthwhile outlining what is known of the Nativity icon's history, since it has elements common to many other festal icons. The oldest depiction of the Nativity is an early third-century mural from the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome. It shows Mary with Christ on her lap and the prophet Balaam pointing to a star. Other simple catacomb paintings follow in the next century, along with sarcophagi carvings of the Magi.

The essentials of what became the common format were established by the sixth century. These images add Joseph, the crib and cave, the ox and ass. One of the oldest versions of this type, now in the Vatican Museum, is a reliquary lid painted with six feasts. It was made in Palestine, where this Nativity format may have originated. By then, great numbers of pilgrims from as far west as Britain were coming to the Holy Land, many taking back such reliquaries and tokens to their homelands. Vials containing holy oil called ampullae were popular. These bore icons in relief of the event associated with a particular holy site. Such portable items helped spread the influence of the icons they bore. By the seventh century we have the complete Nativity format, which now included midwives, shepherds, Magi and angels, as seen in a Coptic icon at St Catherine's Monastery in Sinai.

Though festal icons might appear naïve at first sight, they reflect profound theological insight when traditionally painted. This catalogue's entries for Resurrection or Anastasis icons, for example, explain how their composition and content are informed by theology rather than the painter's whim. This is not to say that the icon tradition is rigid. When healthy it has responded to external changes, be they pastoral, cultural or practical, while remaining faithful to theological truth. The diminutive size of the Harrowing of Hell icon (cat 104), for example, led the painter to increase the size of the heads so that the all-important faces might remain clear. And the washing of baby Jesus by the midwives was probably introduced to affirm the genuine physicality of Christ, against any docetic beliefs (Greek: *dokeīn*, 'to seem') asserting that God had only *appeared* to become flesh.

All that feast icons stand for could be summarised in the words of Saint Augustine of Hippo: 'Perhaps it might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future'.[2]

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1   For an account of the development of feast icons, see Aidan Hart, *Festal Icons: History and Meaning*, Gracewing, Leominster, 2022.
2   Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, Book 11, translated by A C Outler, Westminster Press, Philadelphia PA, 1955, chapter 20, para 26, p 196.

Cat 75
The Twelve Principal Feasts, late 18th century
northwest Russia
Brass, enamel and iron
177 x 415 x 7 mm
on loan from a private collection, Melbourne

The Twelve Principal Feasts
NORTHWEST RUSSIA

1   For comparable examples, see Stefan Jeckel, *Russische Metall-Ikonen – in Formsand gegossener Glaube*, Verlag Gebr Rasch, Bramsche, 1979, pp 146–49, and Svetlana V. Gnutova & Elena Y. Zotova, *Crosses, Icons, Hinged Icons: Artifacts cast from brass 11th–early 20th century from the Andrey Rublev Central Museum of Ancient Russian Culture and Art*, Interbook Business, Moscow, 2000, pp 125–31.

The Old Believers were those members of the Orthodox Church in Russia who rejected the reforms to traditional rites that had been promulgated in 1664 by Nikon, patriarch of Moscow (term 1652–66). They withdrew from communion with the church, believing it to have become defiled if not satanic. This event became known as the *raskol* or schism.

One group of Old Believers, the Bezpopovtsy (priestless ones), held that the end of days was near, and that since no more priests and bishops would be ordained in a world that had become utterly corrupted, they ceased to perform the divine liturgy. Less radical groups continued to accept priests who renounced the new ritual order: these Popovtsy (priested believers) eventually reinstated a hierarchy and revived all the sacramental practices of the church, following the pre-1664 forms.

All sects of Old Believers were proscribed in the Russian empire until 1905. It was illegal for them to own or build churches or to use the old texts and rituals publicly. Having rejected the official church so completely, the Old Believers were left with two focuses of practice: the private recital of prayers and chants according to the old rubrics, and ritualised devotion to icons of the types that had existed before the *raskol*. This was the situation throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

Over time Old Believer icons came to serve a primarily domestic use. They were often small and portable – and thus capable of being hidden from the authorities. The faithful could no longer worship in a church that they believed had become defiled, so instead the entire church and its holy images had to be fitted in the Old Believer's home. Thus many of their icons were incorporated into elaborate groupings of images. In these complex multi-faceted works it almost seems as if the entire iconostasis of a medieval church has been amalgamated in one object.

Elaborate cast metal icons became a specialty of the Old Believers. This mode of production fulfilled several aims. It ensured that ancient iconography was replicated en masse, preserving traditional formats. In the hands of a skilled metal worker – the Old Believers were famous for their dexterity with mining, smelting and casting – an extraordinary level of detail could be achieved even on small items. The combination of inexpensive brass and glass enamel enabled artisans to produce objects that had the appearance of gold and jewelled icons from the glory days before the schism.

In its lower registers this example presents 12 of the Great Feasts of the church as well as four of the most talismanic images of the Mother of God of old Russia.[1] Surmounting these, in arch-shaped panels recalling the domes of a church, are images of the Crucifixion, the New Testament Trinity, the Exaltation of the Cross, and the Glorification of the Mother of God. When the object is folded, the panel that faces outwards shows the cross of Calvary before the walls of the holy city of Jerusalem.

Folded upon itself this object reduces to a compact block of roughly 18 by 10 centimetres. It was designed to be portable, and very likely filled the pocket or satchel of a travelling Old Believer merchant. The exceptionally fine detailing of the figures and inscriptions, and the restrained use of deep blue and white enamel, point to this work being a product of the Vyg community of Bezpopovtsy artisans, who worked in far northwestern Russia in the 18th and early 19th centuries. **GM**

Nativity of the Mother of God
GREECE

Feast day 8 September

This sumptuous banquet scene describes the culmination of events around the miraculous birth of Mary to an aged childless couple, Anna and Joachim, as described in the apocryphal 'Infancy gospel' of James (*Protoevangelium*), a late second-century narrative of the life of the Virgin. Mary's birth, celebrated on 8 September, marks the beginning of the festival cycle, charting the events leading up to the birth and death of Christ, and humankind's salvation.

Successive moments are shown in this complex depiction of the miraculous nativity, set against a shimmering ground with a dominant palette of bright red. The earliest episodes appear in the top left background and the most recent in the foreground; the key figures of Anna, Joachim and the infant Christ are repeated. At the rear Joachim is blessed by the Archangel Gabriel who announces the conception of a child called Miriam (the Virgin Mary). Gabriel foretells that when Joachim comes to the golden gate of Jerusalem, Anna shall be there watching for him. Joachim and Anna are shown at the far right embracing at the gate. In the middle ground, the most important scene, Anna reclines on her bed, enveloped in a red maphorion. Handmaids proffer small cups, eggs and sweetmeats from a marble-topped carved gilt table. In the left foreground an angel watches over the swaddled baby. Joachim appears for a third time, in the foreground, watching as midwives bathe his newborn daughter, a scene that will be repeated a generation later, when Mary herself is shown in her childbirth bed, having just given birth to the infant Christ. **SM**

Cat 76
Nativity of the Mother of God, c1500
Greece
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
265 x 220 x 23 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra
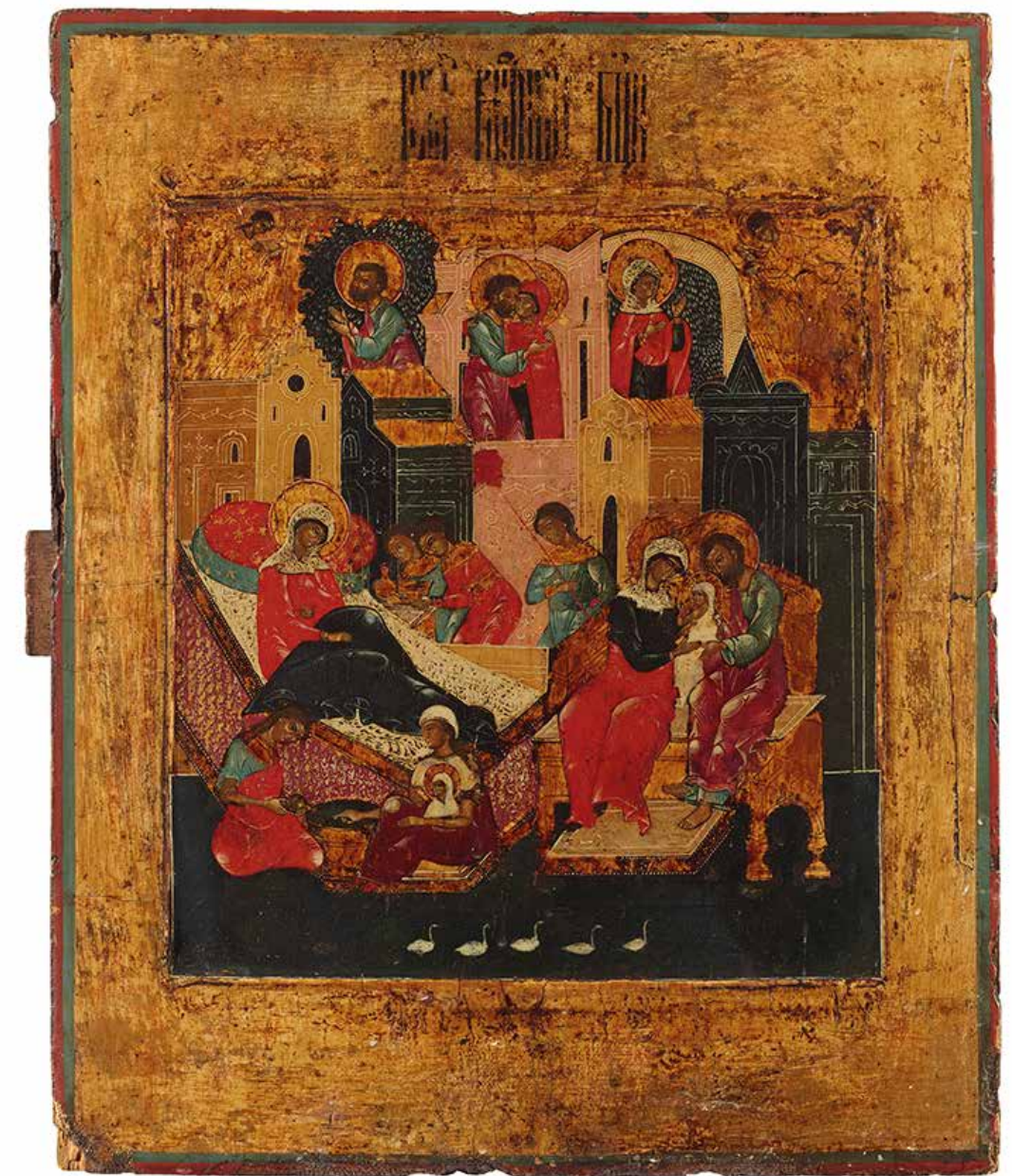
Nativity of the Mother of God
RUSSIA

Feast day 8 September

As with the earlier Greek scene of Anna's delivery of Mary (cat 76), the joyous colour red reverberates throughout the panel, and is also worn by the well-wishers who celebrate the miraculous birth. Attention to Anna in the Greek tradition dates from the sixth century, whereas she hardly appears in Latin art before the 12th century. Above we see the events that have led up to this occasion: an angel whispering a message to Anna's husband Joachim, Joachim's embrace of Anna and Anna's prayers of thanks. At the centre of the scene Anna sits in the white bed that signifies immaculate conception: to the right the loving couple cradle their daughter. Compared with the Greek interpretation of the same events, this later Russian version stresses a tender closeness between husband and wife and a psychological transformation brought upon them by unexpected parenthood.

The lower part of the icon depicts swans swimming near a fountain, a motif found in 15th- and 16th-century Russian icons of the Virgin. Mary was often likened to a fountain or stream, who irrigated Paradise and brought abundance.[1] **SM**

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1   Leslie Brubaker & Mary B Cunningham, *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, 2011, p 49.

Cat 77
Nativity of the Mother of God, c1700
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
358 x 292 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, purchased with
funds from Maria Ridsdale, 2017 Acc. 2017.372

Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple
CRETE

Alternative name Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple
Feast day 21 November

This scene represents a set of key events in the life of Mary. It was probably intended for the epistyle (top outer row) of an iconostasis. The narrative comes from *The Protoevangelion of James*, a gospel narrating Mary's life until the death of the high priest Zacharias soon after Christ's birth. The icon presents two episodes compressed into one. The first is when the infant Mary is presented to Zacharias in the Jewish temple by her parents, Anna and Joachim. Zacharias stands at the entrance. Mary and her parents are followed by six other virgins, carrying tapers, who propel Mary forward, 'so that the child not turn backwards and her heart [not] be held captive outside the temple of the Lord,[1] The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (6:1) states that when Mary was three, 'she walked with a step so mature, she spoke so perfectly, and she spent her time so assiduously in the praises of God, that all were astonished at her, and wondered; and she was not reckoned a young infant, but as it were a grown-up person of thirty years old.'[2] The second part describes the aftermath, when Mary is seated at the top of the seven steps, close to the ciborium that covers the altar. She is shown receiving spiritual nourishment from an angel.

The elevation of this event to a major feast was instigated by the patriarch Germanos I of Constantinople (term 715–30) on behalf of the Church of the Theotokos Chalkoprateia. Germanos's promotion of this feast and the Nativity of the Virgin was designed to boost the church over its local rival, the Blachernae church, which had its own Marian icons and weekly procession.[3] The composition replicates an authoritative Palaiologan (late Byzantine) model that Cretan artists followed from the early 15th century onwards.[4] The Italianate palette of ravishing pinks and pistachio greens is a nod to modernity and reflects the shifts towards a baroque mannerism on the Italian peninsula. For all its decorative freshness, the immense solemnity of the subject is underlined by the serious facial expressions and by the austerity of the Virgin's Syrian dress. The icon conforms closely to a larger example by Angelos Aketantos (c1400–57), now in the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens.[5] Angelos is credited with formulating the Cretan interpretation of the Byzantine model and Emmanuel Lampardos the elder (c1560–1635) for perpetuating it.[6] It is a mirror image, thematically and compositionally, of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (cats 85 and 86). **SM**

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1   *Protoevangelion of James*, ch 7:2.
2   'The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew', *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol 8, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Arthur Cleveland, 1886.
3   Dirk Krausmüller, 'Making the Most of Mary: The Cult of the Virgin in Chalkoprateia from Late Antiquity to the Tenth Century', in Brubaker & Cunningham, *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium*. See also Hart, *Festal Icons*, p 47.
4   Manolis Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos: Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting*, translated by Thetis Xanthaki, National Bank of Greece, Athens, pp 78–79 no 26.
5   Inv. no A 209 Loverdos Collection, Byzantine Museum, Athens.
6   See entry by Antonis Bekiaris on the Angelos version, in Maria Vassilaki (ed), *The Hand of Angelos: An Icon Painter in Venetian Crete*, Benaki Museum/Lund Humphries, Athens/Farnham, 2010, pp 166–67, cat 32.

Cat 78
Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, early 17th century
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
650 x 540 mm
on loan from a private collection, Melbourne

Annunciation

RUSSIA

Feast day 25 March

The feast of the Annunciation honours the divine motherhood of Mary, officially decreed in 431 by the Council of Ephesus. The Annunciation is the episode in which the Archangel Gabriel is sent to earth by God to inform Mary of her divine conception of God's son with the words: 'Hail, thou that are highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed are thou among women' (Luke 1:28). The episode therefore forms the beginning of the narrative arc of Christ's life and death and is celebrated as a key feast or festival on 25 March, precisely nine months before the feast of the Nativity.

In this classic 17th-century Russian interpretation, Mary is dressed in green, the symbol of life and hope, with a crimson maphorion. She stands on a footstool, separated from the ground to indicate her divinity. Behind her is the Temple of Jerusalem. Her head is bowed as she receives Gabriel, whose still-fluttering robes and open wings show that he has just flown in. He holds the sceptre of command, attribute of God's special messenger. As he delivers his tidings, he raises his right hand in a gesture of benediction. Mary listens, contained and column-like. Between her hands are traces of the skein of royal purple wool that *The Protoevangelion of James* (the key account of Mary's early life) tells us she was spinning for the temple, a symbol of the unborn child she is now carrying (11:1–3). Mary turns towards the angel but does not quite comprehend what she has been told: 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?' (Luke 1:34) She then presses her palm to her breast in a gesture of acceptance while bowing her head in assent: 'be it unto me according to thy word' (1:38). Overhead is the image of God the Father, as a white-haired old man with a star-shaped halo, known as Lord Sabaoth (or Yahweh in Hebrew). **SM**

Cat 79
Annunciation, late 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
306 x 232 x 40 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Annunciation
GREECE, IONIAN ISLANDS

Inscribed Ο ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙCΜΟC (The Annunciation)
Feast day 25 March

In this version of the Annunciation, which reveals the influence of Renaissance western architecture and perspective, the Archangel Gabriel enters a terrace. Instead of his messenger's staff, he carries lilies. He interrupts Mary, who has been seated reading a book, according to Catholic convention. She is shown having risen to her feet, standing on a low platform that separates her from the ground. From the divine realm above the Holy Spirit, in the form of three rays symbolising holy conception, descends upon Mary. As Gabriel gestures to God above, Mary raises her hand as if in protest, before accepting her role as Theotokos (God-bearer).

Beyond the balustrade is a small tree. Trees play no part in Russian iconography of the Annunciation, but they often appear in the backgrounds of Greek interpretations: Henry Maguire notes they date back to at least the 11th century in Byzantine iconography.[1] Cretan versions depict the tree as tall and leaning from the left into the centre of the background.[2] In this example the tree is small and conical in form, on a short, branchless trunk. It occupies the same position as the Mamre oak in the Hospitality of Abraham (cats 50 and 51). In that context it is associated with the archangel's announcement – annunciation – to Sarah of the birth of Isaac. The use of a thick red border to encompass sacred texts or images is typical of Ionian icons, where the subject was particularly popular. It may be a rustic local version of similar compositions being produced in the Ionian islands by Cretan artists a century earlier.[3] A 17th-century version attributed to a Cretan painter working in the Ionian islands is in the British Museum.[4] **SM**

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1 Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium,* Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2019, pp 48–49.
2 Vassilaki, 'Some Cretan Icons in the Walters Art Gallery', *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, vol 48, 1990, p 77.
3 See the discussion by Eleni Dimitriadou, 'Icon with the Annunciation', in Robin Cormack, Maria Vassilaki & Eleni Dimitriadou, *A Catalogue of the Byzantine and Greek Icons in the British Museum*, 2015, online at https://www.museumofrussianicons.org/annunciation/.
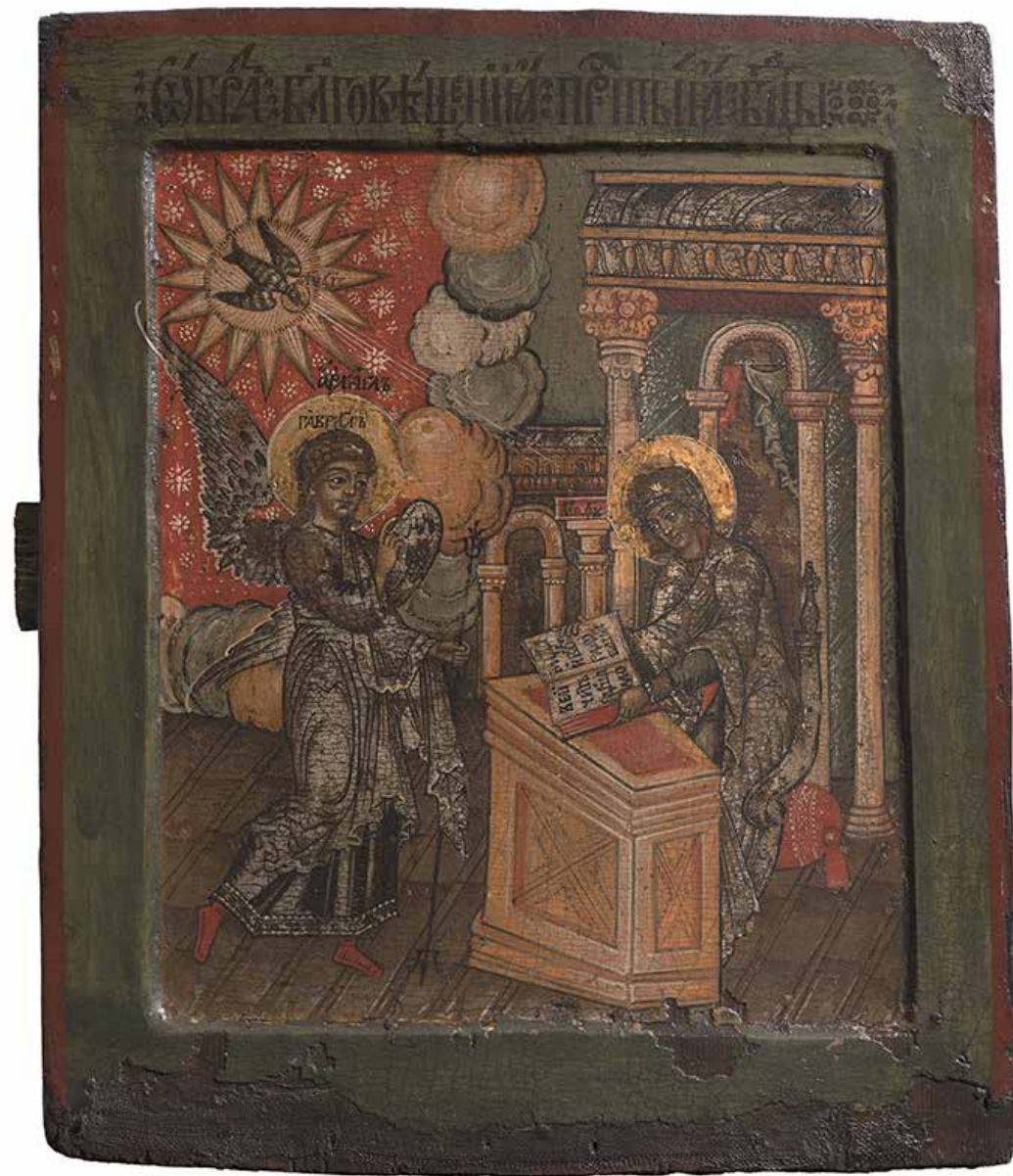4 Acc. 1998,1105.2.

Cat 80
Annunciation, c1750
Greece, Ionian Islands
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
345 x 302 x 45 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Annunciation

RUSSIA

Feast day 25 March

The theatricality of western Annunciation scenes was appreciated by some Orthodox Christians in the 18th century as they became familiar with the use of perspective in the prints and paintings that began flooding Russia during the rule of the modernising tsar, Peter the Great (reign 1682–1725). The miraculous events taking place acquire plausibility by virtue of the realistically rendered space through which the Holy Spirit flies in the form of a dove. Archangel Gabriel enters the scene from the left and advances towards Mary. Holding a messenger's staff in his left hand, he makes a gesture of blessing with his right. The Virgin is shown in a green mantle, seated on a crimson cushion against a stylised architectural background. She reads a book at a wooden lectern, in the western Renaissance manner. On its open leaves is her reply to Gabriel, words from the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise upon finding herself pregnant with Jesus: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit exalts in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaid; for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed' (Luke 1:46-55).

The liberal use of green is typical for this subject. The colour of nature and living things, iconographers used green in scenes that narrated new life on earth, such as icons of the Annunciation and the Nativity. **SM**

Cat 81
Annunciation, late 18th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
310 x 270 x 40 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Nativity

RUSSIA

Feast day 25 December

In this greatly enriched telling of the Nativity, every episode is presented as a continuous narrative, as described in *The Protoevangelion of James* and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*. In the centre, the Mother of God lies in a red mandorla outside the mouth of a black cave reminiscent of Christ's tomb. At her side is the newborn child swaddled as if a corpse, in a coffin-like manger, looked over by the ox and the ass. Three angels worship Christ, their hands covered deferentially with their sleeves in the manner of Byzantine courtiers. At Mary's feet the midwife Salome bathes the child. Nearby Joseph sits, worried, doubts being sown in his mind by the Devil, disguised as a shepherd.

Word is spreading of the Christ child's birth. At the upper left an angel guides the Three Wise Men, or Magi, towards Bethlehem, pointing to the guiding star above. They travel to the stable and pay homage to Jesus on his mother's lap seated inside a niche that resembles a tiny church, a metaphor of the Virgin herself. Bearing gifts including myrrh, they will be mirrored upon Christ's death by the three women who take myrrh to his tomb (cat 102). Nearby Joseph sleeps under a bush and in a dream is instructed by an angel to: 'Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him' (Matthew 2:13). To the upper left the Magi are counselled by an angel to return home by another route. In the upper right they are shown heeding the advice.

In the lower half the dramatic events of the Flight into Egypt and the Massacre of the Innocents are shown unfolding. Mary holds Christ as she rides a brown horse, guided by Joseph's son Jacob, and followed by Joseph with their belongings tied in a bundle on his stick. In the lower left King Herod hears that a child who will usurp him has been born and declares a purge of children below the age of two. The priest Zacharias, who refuses to reveal the whereabouts of his son, John the Baptist, is slain between the steps and the altar of a temple (Matthew 23:35). His wife Elisabeth hurries into the hills with the infant John. **SM**

Cat 82
Nativity, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
310 x 275 x 38 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Nativity
CRETE

Feast day 25 December

We are told in the Book of Isaiah (1:3) that at the Nativity of Christ the animals were the first to acknowledge a holy presence in their midst: 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.'

In this harmonious fusion of Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, the unknown Cretan artist has included the beasts, but made his focus Christ's first recognition by humans – his mother the Virgin Mary and his earthly father Joseph, who fall to their knees to adore the infant, radiant in his humble stall. Through these details the artist registers the influence of the early 13th-century Saint Francis of Assisi, who fostered devotion to Christ through humble, everyday symbolism. Also evoked is the vision of the 14th-century mystic Saint Bridget of Sweden, who described the Christ child as emitting a light so bright that it extinguished the earthly light of a candle.[1] A less humble detail, but a distinctly Catholic one, is the decorative punchwork in the gold haloes, a technique that Greek iconographers adopted in Crete.[2]

Other elements in this image are purely Orthodox: Mary's crimson maphorion identifies her as a married woman and the golden stars denoting her purity derive from the Byzantine tradition, as does the corpse-like swaddling of Jesus, a reference to Christ's destiny. The shepherd's crozier Joseph is holding is tau-shaped in the Byzantine manner (named for its shape after the Greek letter T). Finally, the stylised cubic mountains are portrayed in a symbolic trio, to signify the Trinity, and their stepped planes are bathed in divine uncreated light. **SM**

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1 'The Prophecies and Revelations of Saint Bridget of Sweden', VII, 21, in Isak Collijn, *Iconographia Birgittina Typographica,* Almqvist & Wiksells, Upsala & Stockholm, 1915, p 23.
2 Vassilaki, 'Some Cretan Icons in the Walters Art Gallery', pp 75–92.

Cat 83
Nativity, c1600
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
245 x 302 x 25 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Adoration of the Magi
RUSSIA

Feast day 6 January

According to the Orthodox calendar, the feast of Jesus's birth is celebrated on 6 January, the date that Catholics commemorate as the Epiphany or the Adoration of the Magi (the three noble kings 'from the East'). The adoption in Russia of a Catholic feast reflects the hybridisation of iconography that took place in the Venetian-ruled Orthodox territories where Greek artists fled, following the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453. Refugee artists began catering to a mixed clientele of Orthodox Christians and Italian Catholics and some of the resulting images made their way to Russia. Further sources of Catholic imagery in Russia were western prints and Catholic icons from the neighbouring kingdom of Poland and the grand duchy of Lithuania. The earliest examples of crossovers date from around 1500.

For a long time such images, with their unfamiliar use of blue and their 'naturalistic' groupings, must have seemed like exotic curiosities to the Orthodox devout, as their departure from Eastern conventions was profound. For a start, the postpartum Mother of God does not lie recumbent in her jagged cave, prophetic of the cave beneath Golgotha where Christ would later be buried. Rather she sits in a stable rendered with western perspective, which has architectural vestiges of a grander building. This curious location is a blending of two western elements alien to Orthodox iconography: the ruined palace of King David near the site where the Nativity was supposed to have taken place, and the homely stable popularised by the Franciscans in the 13th century.

The Mother of God does not wear the crimson maphorion of the married Syrian woman, with stars denoting her virginity. Instead she wears the blue gown of the Catholic Virgin Mary. Nor are Christ's visitors wearing the Persian dress and pill box hats as Byzantine tradition visualised them, but instead are richly attired in royal ermine and velvet as might have befitted kings of Renaissance Europe. For an Orthodox consumer to choose an image such as this over a traditional nativity was to choose worldliness and modern fashion over spiritual timelessness. **SM**

Cat 84
Adoration of the Magi, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
315 x 267 x 38 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 85
Presentation of Christ in the Temple, 16th century
Russia, Upper Volga
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
420 x 375 mm
on loan from a private collection, Melbourne

Presentation of Christ in the Temple
RUSSIA, UPPER VOLGA

Feast day 2 February

Mary's presentation of her child to the Temple of Jerusalem, a key event in Christ's infancy, is recorded in the Gospel of Luke. It takes place on 14 February, 40 days after the Epiphany, or Adoration of the Magi, which was the first opportunity since Jewish lore required 40 days' purification for women following childbirth. The elderly prophet Simeon receives Christ inside the sanctuary of the Temple and blesses him. In the background Joseph carries a ritual offering of two doves and the elderly prophetess Anna holds a scroll stating that 'This Child consolidated Heaven and Earth'. Simeon recognises the infant that he holds in his arms over the altar and knows that he represents salvation for humanity. He tells Mary that Christ will die on the cross and that she will have her soul pierced by a sword (Luke 2: 34–35). Profoundly moved, the aged seer prepares to die in peace for he has been advised by the Holy Spirit that he will not die until he has seen the Lord's son.

Simeon holds a special status among the prophets, as 'he had seen the Lord's Christ' (Luke 2: 26). The event is one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Orthodox calendar and the icons depicting it emphasise the quiet majesty of an occasion where Christ's significance is understood by an old prophet close to death. This icon would originally have been displayed in the festival tier of an iconostasis, most likely of a smaller church. **SM**

Presentation of Christ in the Temple
CRETE

Feast day 2 February

The subject of Christ's Presentation in the Temple was especially important as it was in the temple that Simeon prophesied Christ's death on the cross. The episode is celebrated as a major feast and therefore occupies a key place of the festival tier in any iconostasis. This version is based on a model from the Palaiologan dynasty (1261–1453), the last phase of the Byzantine empire. The immense authority of the prototype is evident from its perpetuation, with very minimal variation, in both Russian and Greek contexts throughout the next centuries. In Crete it became the default model and was copied numerous times by a local master, Nikolaus Ritzos (c1450–1507) and his workshop.[1]

As with the Upper Volga version of the same subject (see cat 85), this Greek icon emphasises the handing of Christ across the holy threshold of the sanctuary, which in this case is indicated by a small pair of holy gates. Behind it an altar draped in red cloth is protected by the high pink canopy of an elegant ciborium (canopy) on slender twisting columns. Both icons portray Simeon on an elevated platform. In this Greek version Simeon, Joseph and Anna avoid directly touching the sacred items out of deference and use their sleeves. Similarly, Simeon holds Christ by the hem of his clothes. **SM**

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1   Howard Hibbard, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Crescent, New York, 1980, pp 102, 104. See also Manolis Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos: Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting*, translated by Thetis Xanthaki, National Bank of Greece, Athens, 1985, no 26, pp 77–78.

Cat 86
Presentation of Christ in the Temple, c1600
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
435 x 363 x 42 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Baptism of Christ
RUSSIA

Feast day 6 January

Having heard of his cousin John's preaching in the desert of Judea, and his baptising of people 'unto repentance' in the River Jordan, Jesus went in search of John to be baptised himself. The iconography of this event has been established since the sixth century. In this 15th-century Russian icon the narrative details are reduced to their essential elements. Jesus stands in the river. He wears a small loincloth made from a knotted tallit, recognisable by its striped edges, which is both a traditional Jewish prayer shawl and a burial cloth. The rocky landscape of the Jordon valley temporarily breaks open and the river becomes a vast whirlpool, a moving 'liquid sepulchre'. The rounded form of the river evokes a womb, equating the baptism with a cleansing re-birth.[1]

From the left bank John, in his camel-hair cloak, reaches out and blesses his cousin, which Jesus acknowledges by pressing his right hand to his heart while making a small blessing action with his left hand to settle the waters around him. Trinitarian symbolism abounds. Three angels look on, representing the Holy Trinity on earth, ready to receive the body of the new Adam. Overhead the dove of the Holy Spirit sheds three rays of light. The Gospel of Mark describes the voice of God announcing: 'Thou art my beloved Son, with thee I am well pleased' (Mark 1: 11). This is the theoretical moment after which Jesus becomes known as Christ and John becomes known as the Baptist.

The sacrament of Baptism, which is regarded as more important than the Nativity itself, is one of the Twelve Great Feasts or dodekaorton. Its extreme holiness may account for the icon's considerable wear. Because of its subject, veneration in this case might well have included ritual washing as well as touching over centuries. In order to extend the lives of particularly important icons, owners would entrust them to the conservative sect of Old Believers, who specialised in renewing old icons. This they did by rehousing the central panel in a new vrezok (Russian: inlaid board), which is a procedure that has been performed on the icon here. **SM**

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1   Kilian McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MI, 1996, pp 54–55.

Cat 87
Baptism of Christ, 15th century
Russia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
278 x 215 x 42 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

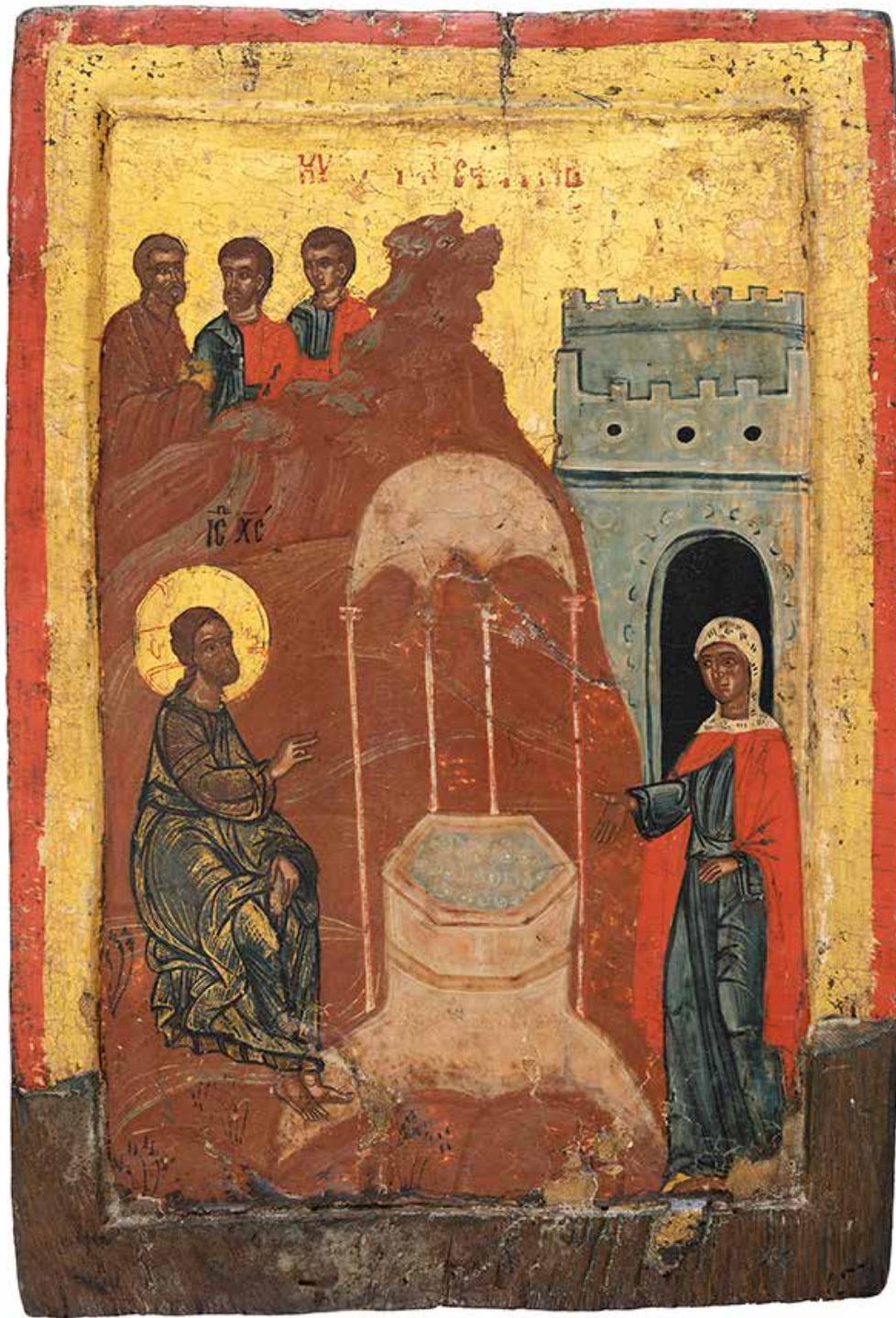## *Transfiguration*
RUSSIA, NOVGOROD

Feast day 6 August

In this modest Novgorod icon we see one of the most profound and mystical moments in the life of Christ, in which he appears in a blaze of light to his disciples Peter, John and James, whom he has guided into the wilderness.

Having led his companions up the holy Mount Tabor to pray, the men are awoken the following day by the startling sight of Christ floating above the mountain at Galilee. He is flanked by the prophets Elijah and Moses, who stand serenely talking to him from two rocky outcrops. Moses holds his stone tablets of the law. Clothed in a raiment 'white as light' and holding a furled scroll, Christ hovers within a blue-and-white ringed aureole, which represents divine uncreated light, and makes a sign of blessing. As the disciples, still 'heavy with sleep', stare with amazement to see him in his deified humanity, a voice speaks out from a cloud: 'This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him' (Matthew 17:5). Three rays of divine light descend from this 'bright cloud' and dazzle the men, who are 'sore afraid'. In confusion they scramble and fall. John loses a sandal. James stumbles and shields his eyes. Peter is the first to recover himself and manages to look up to Christ.

A mystical movement within Orthodoxy known as Hesychasm (from the Greek *hēsychi*, meaning stillness) maintains that monastic seclusion and silent contemplation can train the mind to see the divine Taboric light of the Transfiguration.[1] Orthodox monks regard the painting of this subject and its mysterious Taboric light as an early and important test. The Transfiguration, which is described in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, is celebrated on 6 August. **SM**

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1   On Hesychasm and Taboric light, see Richard Temple, *Icons and the Mystical Origins of Christianity*, Element Books, Shaftesbury, 1990, pp 151–56.

Cat 88
Transfiguration, 17th century
Russia, Novgorod
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
315 x 280 x 40 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 89
Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Fountain, 16th century
Greece
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
295 x 200 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Fountain
GREECE

Feast day Fifth Sunday after Easter

According to the Gospel of John, while on his way to Galilee with his disciples, Christ paused at a well dug by the patriarch Jacob, grandson of Abraham, near the town of Sychar and Mount Gerizim in Samaria, while his disciples went into town in search of food.

A Samaritan woman who was drawing water looked at Christ in surprise when he asked her for a drink, as Jews did not ordinarily speak to Samaritans. Moreover it was frowned upon for any man to address an unknown woman in public. More surprising still, Christ suggested that she accept his water of eternal life, a metaphor for religious instruction, and told her something that indicated a knowledge of her personal circumstances that only a prophet could have known. The woman accepted his offer and was baptised with the name Photina, meaning 'light'. In this icon Christ is shown seated by the well in the act of blessing his new acquaintance as his disciples appear from Mount Gerizim. Photina's enthusiastic embrace of Christianity was said to have made her 'equal to the apostles'. Emperor Nero (reign 54–68 CE) later demanded she recant her new faith but she refused. After being tortured, she was thrown down a dry well.

The well dug by Jacob was fed by underwater springs and was considered sacred by early Christian communities for its links to Christ and Abraham before him. A number of churches were built on the site and today the monastery of Bir Ya'qub envelops it. The stone bench on which Christ was said to have sat was a prized relic and was at one time held in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.[1] **SM**

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1   Jelena Erdeljan, 'History and Instruments of Constantinople's Jerusalemization', in Jelena Erdeljan, *Chosen Places: Constructing New Jerusalems in Slavia Orthodoxa*, Brill, Leiden & Boston MA, 2017, p 93.

Christ's Entry into Jerusalem
CRETE

Alternative names He Baiophoros ('the Palm-bearing'), Vkhod Gospoden ('Entry into Jerusalem')
Feast day Palm Sunday

Six days before the Crucifixion, Christ rode into Jerusalem on a humble donkey to observe Passover. The manner of his entry is a reversal of the traditional symbolism of royal entries staged by war-mongering rulers, who arrived on horseback with their entourages.[1] Matthew interpreted Christ's entry as a fulfilment of the prediction by the Old Testament prophet Zechariah: 'Behold, thou King cometh unto thee: he *is* just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass' (Zechariah 9:9).

The people of Jerusalem, who have heard of Christ's feat of raising of Lazarus from the dead, hurry out to hail him with the words, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Psalm 118:25–26) and 'Hosanna!', from the Hebrew *hoshi'a na*, meaning 'save us please'. The disciples (or in this case children) strew the ground with cloaks and greenery for Christ's donkey to walk on. Although the Gospel of John describes the use of palm fronds, many icons depict a combination of olive branches and palm fronds, the olives symbolising peace and the palms triumph and later martyrdom. The fanfare with which Christ was greeted on the Sunday was resented by the city's religious leaders and four days later, on Holy Thursday, he was arrested.

Bright colours – red, pinks, green and blue – often associated with Italian mannerism, convey the celebratory atmosphere of the event in contrast to the darkness of the days to come. The composition relates to an example by the influential painter-monk Theophanis Strelitzas Bathas, known as Theophanes the Cretan (c1490–1559), who worked between Mount Athos and his home in Candia (now Heraklion), Crete.[2] Theophanes in turn based his own compositions on earlier Byzantine models from the Palaiologan era (1261–1453).

Palm Sunday is a movable feast held on the Sunday before Easter and to this day is celebrated in churches with the distribution of palm fronds. **SM**

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1   See Maria Vassilaki, *The Painter Angelos and Icon Painting in Venetian Crete*, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, 2009, especially chapter 13, 'An Icon of the Entry to Jerusalem and a Question of Archetypes, Prototypes and Copies in Late and Post-Byzantine Icon-Painting,' pp 285–306.
2   Now in the Stavronika Monastery, Mount Athos.
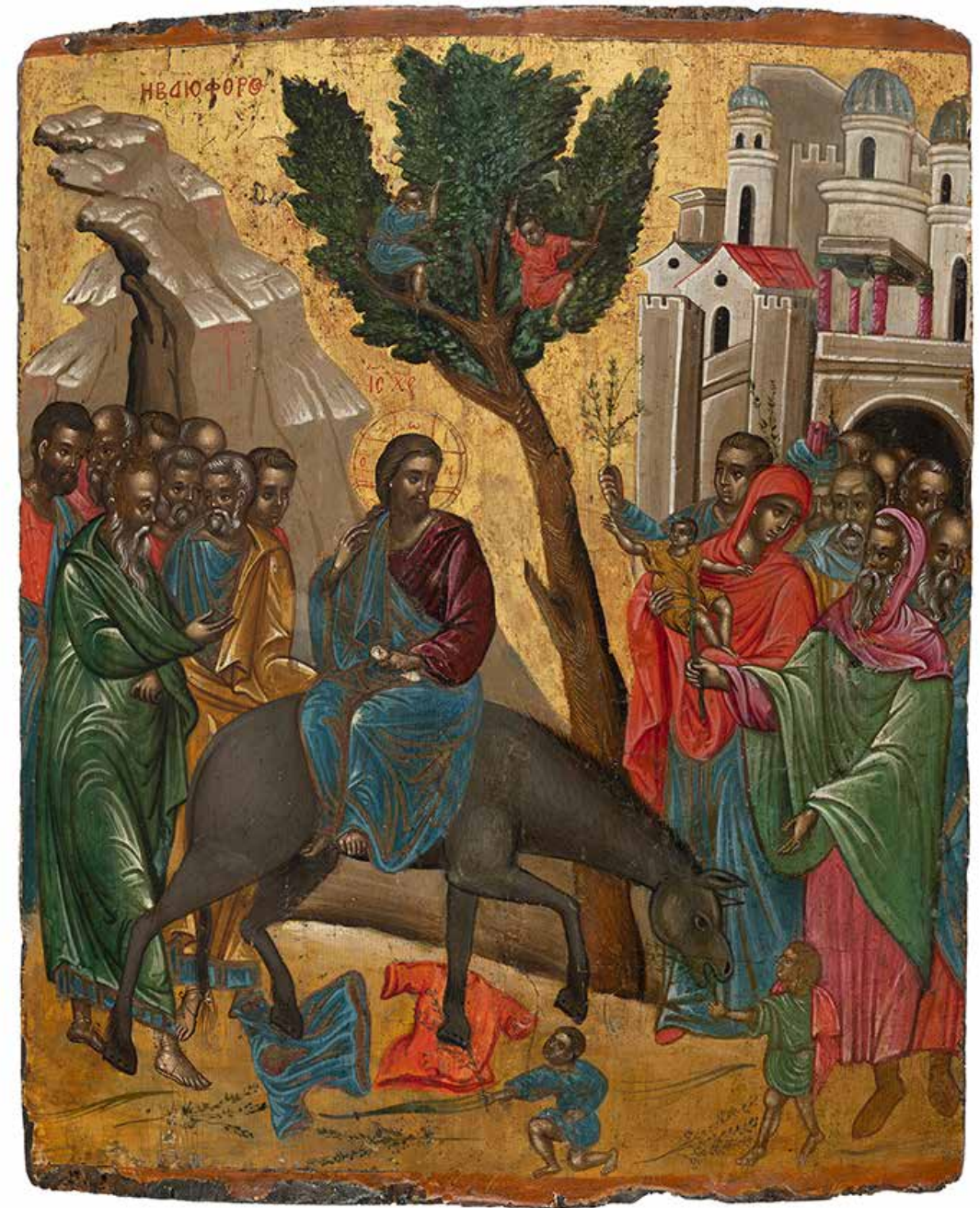
Cat 90
Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, late 16th century or early 17th century
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
370 x 305 x 14 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Christ's Entry into Jerusalem
RUSSIA

Alternative names He Baiophoros ('the Palm-bearing'), Vkhod Gospoden ('Entry into Jerusalem')
Feast day Palm Sunday

This icon has many of the hallmarks of 16th- and early 17th-century Novgorod icons: a pale ground, restrained palette, detailed architectural background and small expressive faces. However it is thought to be a later version by Old Believers, the schismatic group that adhered strictly to early icon forms pre-dating the reformation of the Russian church in the mid 17th century. It may therefore be an example of one of the highly skilful 'counterfeit' icons made by the Suzdalian icon painters for an Old Believer clientele, who esteemed pre-reform icons as exemplifying the true and genuine tradition. Suzdalian painters were adept at painting in the Novgorodian, Muscovite and Stroganov styles and used recycled icon boards with *kovchegs* (Russian: recessed panels), the imperfections of which, combined with darkened varnishes, could deceive all but the most trained eyes.

The form of Christ's entry into Jerusalem became fraught after 1656, when the reforming patriarch Nikon (term 1652–66) altered the Easter ritual of the Palm Sunday procession in Moscow, which re-enacted the entry, known as 'the donkey walk'. His initiative triggered a tussle between the patriarch and tsars as to who was entitled to represent Christ in the procession.[1] In this icon Christ is shown making the two-fingered blessing of the pre-Nikon reforms. **SM**

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1   Michael S Flyer, 'Court Ceremony in an Age of Reform: Patriarch Nikon and the Palm Sunday Ritual', in Samuel H Baron & Nancy Shields Kollmann (eds), *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia and Ukraine*, Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb IL, 1997, pp 73–95.

Cat 91
Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, late 18th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
320 x 290 x 30 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Christ's Entry into Jerusalem
RUSSIA

Alternative names He Baiophoros ('the Palm-bearing'), Vkhod Gospoden ('Entry into Jerusalem')
Feast day Palm Sunday

Known in the Western Church as Palm Sunday, Christ's entry into Jerusalem for the Passover festival marks the start of the Passion cycle and is a major feast within the liturgical year. All four gospels state that Christ planned the journey while in Jericho and that he instructed two disciples to go to Bethphage (30 kilometres away), telling them that they would find a donkey and her colt in that town: 'Untie them and bring them to me . . . Say that the Lord needs them.'[1] Accompanied by a growing crowd who had heard of his recent miracles, Christ then rode into Jerusalem on the donkey. In Russia, where donkeys are unfamiliar, iconographers interpreted his mount as a horse.

In this icon the Mount of Olives is shown behind Christ, its split or bevelled rock (known in Russian as *leshchadka*) illuminated by sacred light. Christ glances back to his disciples while making a gesture of blessing with his right hand. Ahead of him are townsfolk who have come out to welcome him, as was the custom for greeting an important visitor. A child strews a cloak on the rocky ground beneath Christ's steed and another climbs a tree to cut olive branches. In Russia and northern Europe olive branches are often used as substitutes for palms. **SM**

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1   Matthew 21:1–11, Mark 11:1–11, Luke 19:28–44 and John 12:12–19.

Cat 92
Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, 17th century
Russia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
486 x 392 mm
Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Purchased 1987 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

Crucifixion
CRETE

Inscribed IC XC (abbreviation for Jesus Christ in majuscule, red letters, placed on the horizontal beam of Christ's cross)
Feast day Good Friday

The Crucifixion is one of the most important feasts of Christianity, since it marks Christ's sacrifice on the cross for the salvation of humankind, and it is narrated in all four gospels.[1] This crowded crucifixion is quite a departure from the austere Byzantine representation of the scene encountered in monumental decorations of the middle Byzantine period (ie, the 11th-century mosaics of Hosios Loukas and Daphni in mainland Greece).[2] Instead, it is closer to the icon painted by the Cretan artist Andreas Pavias (1440–c1512), currently in the National Gallery, Athens, which draws on 14th-century Italian art.[3]

The icon is divided in parts horizontally, top and bottom. This underlines the lack of perspective so characteristic of Byzantine icons: icons offer a window into the heavenly realm, and as such the artists were not preoccupied with depicting the real world. The crucified Christ occupies the middle of the icon and dominates the panel both vertically and horizontally. The two thieves who were crucified with him are depicted to the left and to the right.[4] Christ's feet at the bottom of the cross are flanked by eight figures, four on either side – some appear to be soldiers, some are on horseback. The figure placed third from the right bears a halo, which may suggest this is the Roman centurion who believed in Christ.[5] In the lower part of the icon, in the middle, four Roman soldiers are depicted seated around in a circle casting lots for Christ's clothes, which were divided after his crucifixion.[6] To the left a group of women are supporting the fainted Virgin, with Saint John also looking after her, having been appointed as her son just moments before by Jesus on the cross.[7] To the right is a group of five people, depicting the chief priests, scribes and elders mentioned in the gospel narrative of Christ's death on the cross, and a Roman soldier, who holds a large shield and stands with his back turned to us, looking up at Christ.[8] Behind the crucified Christ is a depiction of a wall, a detail that is customary in Byzantine art. The background is gold; the frame seems to have been carved out from the same panel as the icon. The panel's small dimensions would suggest a private owner. **AL**

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1 Matthew 27: 33–56; Mark 15: 22–41; Luke 23: 33–49; John 19:17–37.
2 John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, Phaidon, London, 1997, figs 135 and 154 respectively.
3 Angeliki Lymberopoulou, 'The Painter Angelos', in Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou (ed), *From Byzantium to El Greco: Greek Frescoes and Icons*, Royal Academy of Arts/Byzantine Museum of Athens, London/Athens, 1987, pp 200–03, p 201 plate 5.24.
4 Matthew 27: 38; Mark 15: 27; Luke 23: 33; John 19: 18.
5 Matthew 27: 54; Mark 15: 39; Luke 23: 47.
6 Matthew 27: 35; Mark 15: 24; Luke 23: 34; John 19: 23–24.
7 John 19:26–27.
8 Matthew 28: 41; Mark 16: 31.
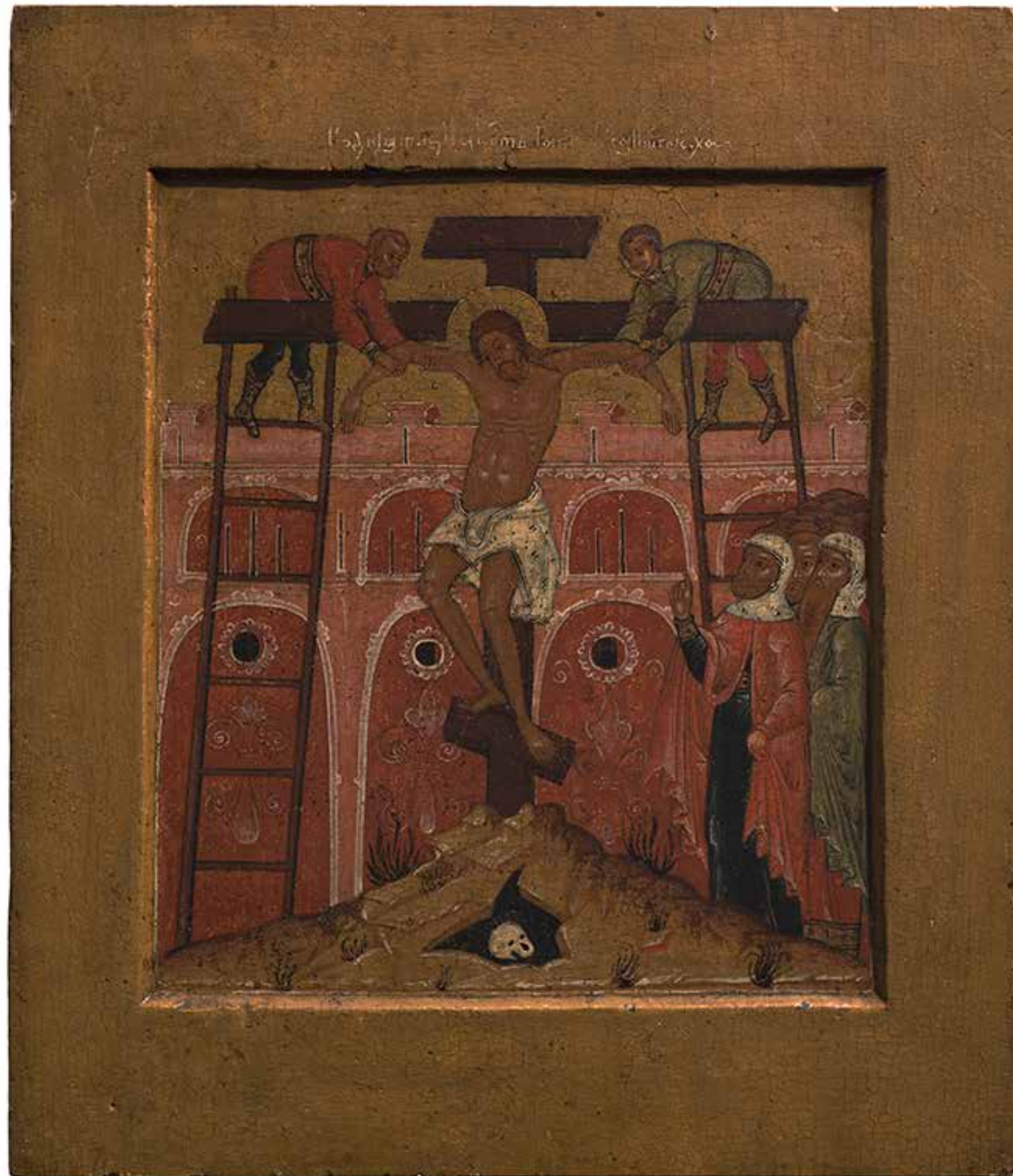

Cat 93
Andreas Pavias (attributed)
Crucifixion, 1460–1500
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
424 x 346 x 43 mm
A R Ragless Bequest Fund 1958 Art Gallery of South Australia
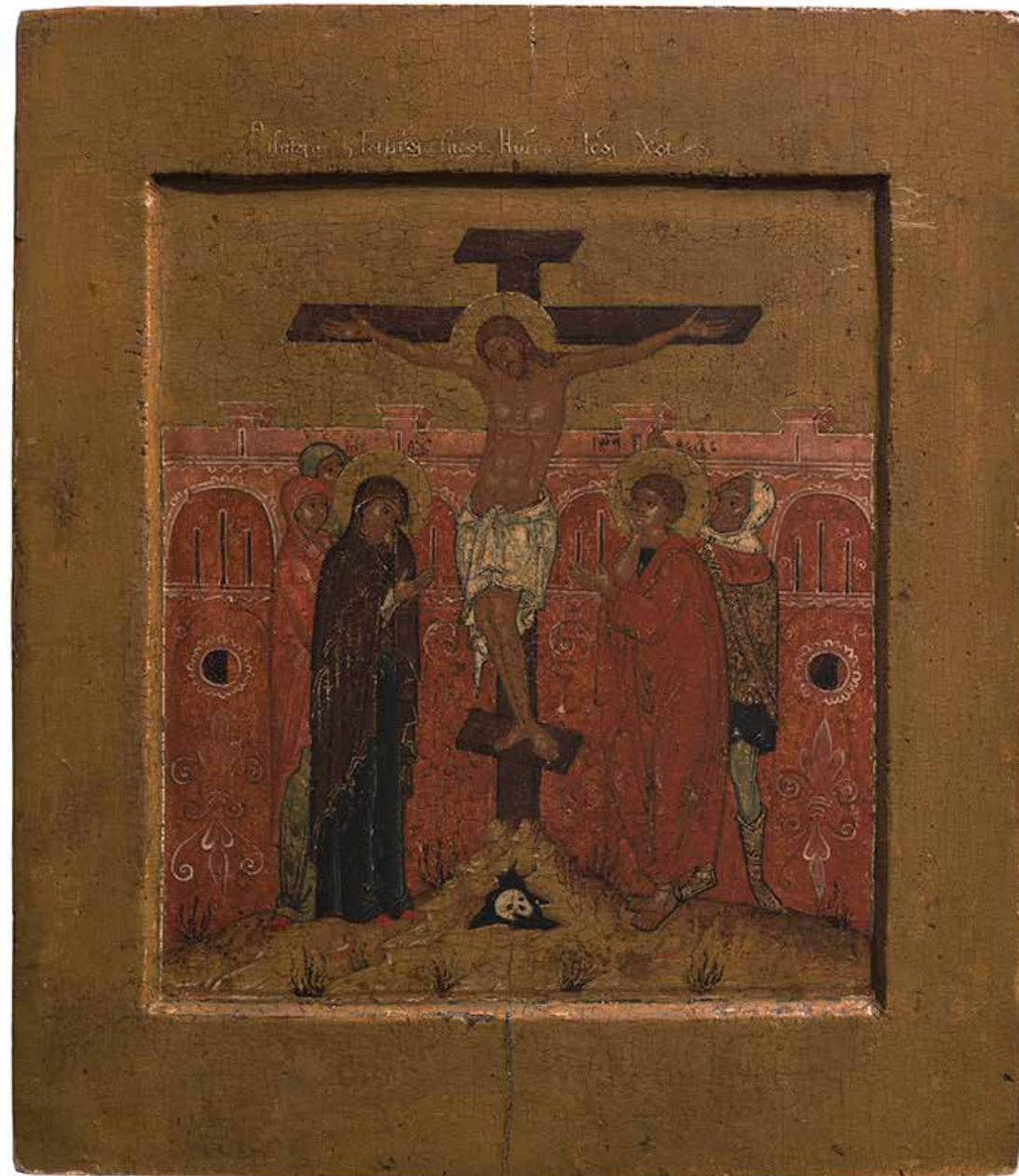
Christil raised up to the Cross
RUSSIA

Feast day Good Friday

In the first of this set of three icons, Christ is raised up to the cross by two men on ladders. He wears only a loincloth, which is in contrast with the boots and ornamented belts of the fully dressed men lifting him. Christ's gold halo and the brilliant luminosity of the loincloth dominate an otherwise muted palette. The musculature in Christ's form, with splashes of bright white light on his torso, hands, and feet, lends expression to his pose. His upper body appears limp, and he looks downwards, but there is still strength in his legs which support some of his weight on the foot bar of the cross. The foot bar, a defining feature of Orthodox iconography, is a historically accurate detail because it would be impossible to suspend a person by nails alone. Christ would have had to stand on the foot bar to raise himself up so that he could breathe. The foot bar has symbolic significance because it points up to Heaven on the right of the cross and Hades on the left. It is also a reference to the crucified Good Thief on the right entering Paradise and the Bad Thief going to Hell. This icon is in an abbreviated form and so it does not include the two thieves. The two men with white caps in the forefront on the right with the crowd behind them may be Annas and Caiaphas, Jewish high priests.

The ladders and architecture of the pink-ochre walls of the city of Jerusalem are in plain abstract form so as not to draw attention away from the figure of Christ. The cross is on Golgotha outside the city walls and beneath it is the skull of Adam. This relates to the biblical text: 'For in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive' (1 Corinthians 15:21–22). **MP**

Cat 94
Christ raised up to the Cross, late 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
248 x 215 x 25 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Crucifixion

RUSSIA

Feast day Good Friday

Christ is shown with his arms stretched out on the cross. His eyes are closed, indicating he has accepted his impending death. There are three women on the left at the foot of the cross. The Virgin Mary is identifiable in the foreground by her dark red maphorion, blue dress and gold halo. Her head is bowed and her right arm is raised in prayer as she gestures towards Jesus. Her left hand supports her chin in a pose from ancient antiquity that is associated with grief. The two women behind her are identified in the gospels as Mary Magdalene and Mary Cleophas.

On the right, the beloved apostle John has a gold halo and red robe. Behind him stands Saint Longinus, the centurion in military garb with his sword across his body. John has his left hand stretched out in supplication and his right hand on his face in grief. The scene relates to the biblical text where Christ saw Mary at the foot of the cross with John and said, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to John, 'Here is your mother' (John 19:26–27). **MP**

Cat 95
Crucifixion, late 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
248 x 215 x 30 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Deposition
RUSSIA

Feast day Good Friday

In the third of this set of three icons, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus remove the nails that bind Christ to the cross, while Apostle John raises his hands in prayer. In a poignant display of sorrowful restraint, Mary cradles Jesus's head. She stands on a pedestal, which both elevates her and separates her from the other figures. Two of the weeping women of Jerusalem bow their heads with their hands supporting their chins in grief, and Mary Magdalene stands upright on the left behind the Virgin Mary. This icon is similar to icons of the Lamentation, which take up the account of what happened immediately after Christ died and was taken down from the cross.

These three icons, a set that was meant to be viewed together, are a visual representation of the Good Friday liturgy. The figures are unified by the soft pinkish-red and green palette with creamy white contrasts. In the Crucifixion and Deposition icons, which only show holy figures, the rhythmic poses create further harmony. **MP**

Cat 96
Deposition, late 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
248 x 214 x 28 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Great Patriarchal Crucifixion

RUSSIA, MOSCOW

Alternative name The Crucifixion with the Mourners and Selected Icons

The Great Patriarchal Crucifixion is the most elaborate of the cast metal images produced by the Old Believers.[1] It is named for the central element of the crucified Christ upon Golgotha, and includes a plethora of scenes and saints, and is surmounted by no fewer than 21 seraphim. It is called *Bolshoe Patriarshee Raspatie,* the Great Patriarchal Crucifixion, not from association with an individual but on account of its sheer grandeur and complexity.

For all its size, this object remains a house cross, the central component of the icon corner of any Old Believer home. In addition to the crucifix and the seraphim, 19 medallions have been fused together to form this assemblage. Thirteen feasts are arrayed around the cross, plus an icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker. When read clockwise from lower left to right, these festal images appear in order, following the Orthodox liturgical calendar from the New Year in September through to August. At the top of the cross is an image of Lord God Sabaoth. This representation of God the Father was used only by the priested Old Believers known as Popovtsy.

Compared with the fine detail that can be seen in the four-folded Great Feasts icon (see cat 75), the casting of the Crucifixion is rather crude. This example is even miscast, the molten metal having failed to fill the mould on the centre righthand side, leaving some figures without facial features. This would have been a serious problem because the Old Believers considered that an image of a saint without eyes was effectively 'dead'. In order to save this object so it could still be sold, the artisan has 'given sight' to the figures in this zone by creating crude 'eyes' with a hole punch. Cast icons of this format are quite rare and were presumably expensive. They appear to have been made in the vicinity of Moscow, which had a large community of Popovtsy in the 19th century. **GM**

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1 For comparable examples, see Gnutova & Zotova, *Crosses, Icons, Hinged Icons*, p 43, and Jeckel, *Russische Metall-Ikonen*, pp 184–85.

Cat 97
Great Patriarchal Crucifixion, 19th century
Russia, Moscow
cast brass, enamel, gilding
390 x 235 mm
on loan from a private collection, Melbourne

Cat 98
Giovanni (Ioanes) Maria Scupula (active 16th century)
Triptych with the Crucifixion, early 16th century
Southern Italy, Otranto
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
126 x 233 x 17 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Triptych with the Crucifixion
SOUTHERN ITALY, OTRANTO

Otranto in Puglia in the kingdom of Naples has a long history of Byzantine culture. Strategically located on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, the Ottomans invaded three times in 60 years: first in 1480 and again in 1535 and 1537. When this icon was made, the territory was occupied by the Spanish, who ruled from 1504 until 1714.

The Cretan-trained icon painters Giovanni (Ioanes) Maria Scupula, or Scupola, and his brother Fabrizio (active c1500–20s) settled in Otranto in the early 16th century.[1] By the 1520s the siblings had established a successful school of painting, which was idiosyncratic but still distinctly Byzantine in character. Giovanni Scupula is noted for developing small-hinged devotional triptychs – a format long been associated with Crete – into a much more elaborate form, with multiple panels. His tiny narrative scenes are executed using a fine miniaturist painting technique and a limited, but vivid, range of colours against a black ground. This triptych offers a high-keyed emotional experience when opened: the treacherous kiss of Judas can be seen on the left, with the Crucifixion in the centre. In this panel Christ's blood drips from his pierced hands onto his grief-stricken loved ones. The next scene shows Christ's triumphant resurrection or the devotee could close the left panel and contemplate the penitent Jerome beating himself with a rock.

One scholar has suggested that Scupula's intricate devotional aids were inspired by a fashionable genre of luxury prayer-objects in the French international Gothic style: tiny folding panels in ivory and precious metal bearing narrative scenes from the Passion of Christ and related subjects.[2] Others have suggested that engravings were a source of inspiration. In either case it is clear that Scupula kept a stock of iconographic models that he could re-use, as several scenes in the present triptych reappear on other identically sized panels, either as stand-alone images or as parts of other polyptychs. The similarities are close enough to suggest Scupula made use of *anthibola* (Greek: cartoons or working drawings) to transfer designs, the normal practice in Cretan workshops.

As with many hinged and multi-part devotional objects at this time, the precise combination of images (and the number of wings) was variable. Latin signatures and titles on a number of icons point to western – probably Catholic – patrons. Others however were likely sold in the neighbouring eastern Adriatic coast and hinterlands of the western Balkans, to the Slavic-speaking communities who followed the Greek rite.[3] A number of surviving works are jointly signed Scupula and Fratelli Bizzamano. Scupula occasionally enlisted two fellow Cretans, Angelo Bizzamano, also known as Bitzamanos or Pitzamanos (1467–1535), and his brother Donato, possibly to help fulfil larger orders. **SM**

1   Margarita Voulgaropoulou, 'Transcending Borders, Transforming Identities: Travelling Icons and Icon Painters in the Adriatic Region (14th–19th centuries)', *Rebus*, 10th anniversary issue: Mobility, Movement and Medium: Crossing Borders in Art, 9, Spring 2020, p 46.
2   Victor M Schmidt, 'Portable Polyptychs with Narrative Scenes: Fourteenth-Century de Luxe Objects between Italian Panel Painting and French Arts Somptuaires', *Studies in the History of Art*, 2002, vol 61, Symposium Papers XXXVIII: Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento (2002), pp 394–425.
3   Voulgaropoulou, 'Transcending Borders', p 61.

Crucifixion Flanked by Scenes from the Old and New Testaments
RUSSIA, MOSCOW

When closed, this winged portable triptych appears as a little church with an onion dome and fretwork gates. The action of opening it invites imaginative entry into the sacred space of an actual church. The revealed imagery within revolves around the deeply sombre centrepiece of the Crucifixion with flanking episodes from the Old and New Testaments, vertically organised on the inside faces of the opened slender wings.

Presiding over this miniaturised devotional world is a tiny Mandylion, beneath which the archangels Gabriel and Michael swoop and hover over the execution taking place outside the walls of Jerusalem. Christ's body is slumped lifelessly on the cross and the Mother of God and John the Evangelist stand at its foot, overwhelmed with grief. They are supported by two figures, who represent the saints John and Ilya; it is possible that these saints share the names of family members of whoever commissioned this icon. Beneath Christ's feet is a glimpse into the yawning cave that contains the skull of Adam. Christ is the new Adam. The mount is Golgotha ('Place of the Skull') and the cross is the tree of eternal life. According to medieval mythology, three seeds of earthly paradise were planted inside the mouth of Adam, one of which germinated and grew into the cross. This central panel bears comparison with a larger example dated to 1600.[1]

The top corners of the wings relate the moment of the Annunciation, corresponding to the imagery on holy doors within a church (see cat 1). Descending the right-hand wing are two Old Testament episodes: the Holy Trinity (after the Andrei Rublev prototype), and the Fiery Ascent of Elijah. Down the left wing are the beheading (decollation) of John the Baptist outside his prison and the Resurrection. A silvery *basma* frames each scene, evidence of the preciousness of the holy events depicted but also providing a glittery animating foil to the images when seen in candlelight during prayer. Such icons travelled with their affluent and pious owners, in accordance with the observation of Gregory II (papacy 715–31) that no good Christian would undertake a journey without an icon: 'Thus do all virtuous and godly people behave'.[2] The delicate treatment of the decorative architecture suggests a Moscow origin. **SM**

1   Erik Vandamme, *Golden Light: Masterpieces of the Art of the Icon*, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten/ Snoeck-Ducaju en Zoon, Antwerp/Ghent, 1988, cat no 88, p 116.
2   Oleg Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, translated by Robin Milner-Gulland, Reaktion Books, London, 2002, p 69.

Cat 99
Crucifixion Flanked by Scenes from the Old and New Testaments, 17th century
Russia, Moscow
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood, mounted with silver *basma*
204 x 257 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin
and Margot McCarthy, 2017

Mother of God of the Passion

RUSSIA

Alternative name Mother of God *Strastnaya*

It was generally held among the Orthodox faithful that when an icon became worn or obscured by grime it lost its efficacy. The holy personage that it represented was believed to have parted from the physical image. Icons in this state could be retired by being buried or placed in water, or they could be renewed by repainting. Several works in this exhibition show signs of this process (cats 3, 46 and 87).

For Old Believers who maintained that the physical world had suffered a grievous spiritual blow in the 1650s and 1660s with the reforms of Patriarch Nikon (term 1652–66), it was considered to be an act of piety to reclaim old icons that had survived from the time before the schism. Sometimes this involved repainting the surface, but sometimes a more radical approach was adopted. Here an old icon of the Mother of God has had sections mortise-cut into it and cast brass plaques have been inserted in place of the original painted image.

The small medallions in this icon depict various feasts of the church and belong to the common repertoire of Old Believer iconography.[1] Comparable plaques can be found on the other cast icons in this exhibition (see cat 75). The larger central image is of the type known in Russia as *Strastnaya* – the Mother of God of the Passion or Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. The pedigree of this type is discussed in the entry on a much older example (cat 118). **GM**

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1   For comparable examples see Gnutova, & Zotova, *Crosses, Icons, Hinged Icons*, p 67, and Jeckel, *Russische Metall-Ikonen*, p 86.

Cat 100
Mother of God of the Passion, 19th century
Russia
cast copper, brass and champlevé enamel inset into an earlier (pre-18th century) icon panel
355 x 300 mm
on loan from a private collection, Melbourne

Weep Not For Me, Mother,
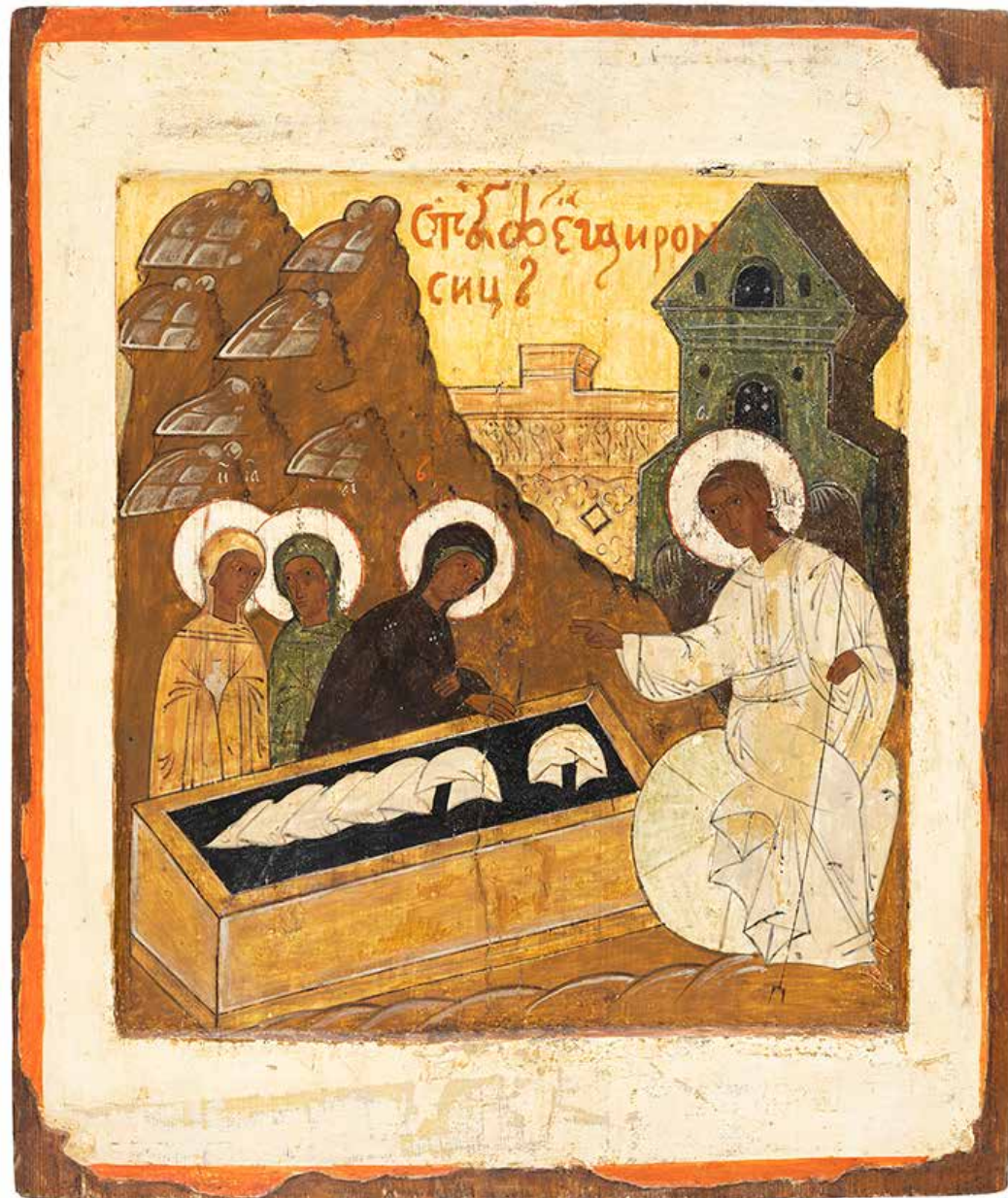### CENTRAL RUSSIA

Alternative names Pietà
Feast day Holy Saturday

The icon known as Weep Not For Me, Mother depicts an overwhelmingly poignant moment between the Mother of God and her dead son, in which Mary holds her son upright in his tomb and presses her face to his. Christ's face and body is flecked with highlights of divine uncreated light to indicate his holiness even in death. Behind is the looming form of the cross and the wall of Jerusalem. The purple-brown stone of Christ's tomb recalls the colour of the Stone of Unction, the slab upon which Christ's body was prepared for burial, which is now inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.

The icon returns to touching images from Christ's infancy, in which the Mother of God snuggles her baby to her face and heart. For all its palpable sadness the icon offers hope and consolation because it illustrates a canticle (hymn) prophesying the Resurrection: 'Weep not for me, Mother, seeing in the tomb the son, conceived without seed in the womb, For I shall arise and be glorified, as God I shall exalt with glory unceasing those who with faith and love magnify you.'[1]

The subject draws upon 15th-century Passion imagery from the Catholic tradition: from examples of the Man of Sorrows (*Ecco Homo*), Deposition and the Pietà, which were introduced into the iconography of the Orthodox East via Crete in the late 15th century. The earliest known examples in Russia date to the 16th century. The Orthodox tradition uses the miraculous Mandylion and Holy Shroud prototypes, showing Christ with the same four symmetrical strands of hair. The image symbolises Christ as a bridegroom and his selfless love for his bride, the church, is represented by the Mother of God. In the first service of Easter week, on Palm Sunday evening, the Orthodox priest carries an icon of Christ the Bridegroom to the front of the church for veneration until Holy Thursday. Nail holes show that this icon once had a metallic covering or oklad. **SM**

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1   Canon for Holy Saturday.

Cat 101
Weep Not For Me, Mother, mid 17th century
Central Russia
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
317 x 270 x 38 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Three Marys at the Tomb
RUSSIA, UPPER VOLGA

Inscribed С[вя]ты[х] же[н]ъ мироносицъ: of the Holy Myrophores
Alternative titles The Myrophores, Myrrh-bearing Women
Feast day Second Sunday after Easter

The Resurrection is described through a series of events, which feature on feast icons displayed on their own tier of an iconostasis. Following the Resurrection, on Easter Monday three holy women arrived at Christ's sepulchre. They were Mary Mother of God, Mary Magdalene and Mary of Cleophas, known collectively as the Holy Myrophores because they came with myrrh with which to anoint Christ's crucified body. The city wall of Jerusalem and the rocky area of Christ's interment appear behind them. Seated on the stone that has rolled away from the mouth of the cave is an angel, 'his appearance like lightning and his raiment white as snow'. He points to the empty but undamaged shroud from which Christ's body has floated, like a butterfly from its intact chrysalis. They 'were much perplexed'. The angel responds, 'Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen' (Luke 24:5–6). The empty tomb is black, a sign that Christ has risen beyond the darkness of death and sin. The icon captures a shift of mood from grief to joy.

This iconography, which follows the gospel account of the discovery of the tomb, was the earliest representation of the Resurrection. It was supplemented in the seventh century by the image of the Harrowing of Hell, which shows Christ victorious over death and focused upon humanity's salvation. From the 15th century the subject of the Holy Myrophores was included on the festal row of icons and was honoured on the second Sunday after Easter. Like the Samaritan woman Photine (cat 89), they were accorded the special status of 'equal to the apostles'. **SM**

Cat 102
Three Marys at the Tomb, c1600
Russia, Upper Volga
egg tempera and gesso on wood
490 x 415 x 30 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Anastasis, or the Harrowing of Hell
RUSSIA

Alternative titles Anastasis, The Resurrection, Descent into Hell
Feast day Easter Sunday

The image known as the Harrowing of Hell shows Christ's dramatic descent into Hades, breaking open its gates to release the righteous dead, his himation (Greek: square-necked cloak) fluttering behind him to show the speed of his arrival. He is framed by a dark blue mandorla (Italian for almond), which represents the divine uncreated light of Christ and illuminates the chasm of Hell. Holding a scroll in his left hand, 'the bond which stood against us', he straddles the freshly adzed broken timbers, which form a cross at his feet, reminding the devout of Christ's own recent triumph through resurrection on the cross. Christ begins his task by turning to Adam on his right, to whom he extends a hand before turning to Eve on his left. Behind Adam are the kings David and Solomon, Saint John the Forerunner and Daniel, in a Phrygian cap, who foresaw the end of time. Behind Eve stands her son Abel as a shepherd, and three youths who were thrown into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). In the background rocky mountains recall Matthew's description of the Crucifixion as chaotic and noisy and how 'the earth did quake, and the rocks rent' (27:51). The gap between the split mountains creates the path by which Christ will rise from Hades after releasing its prisoners.[1]

This dramatic episode, which symbolises the universal prospect of redemption, is one of the most important of the major feast icons. Its theatricality is brought to life each year in every Orthodox church, which the devout find locked when they arrive in the dark on Easter Sunday. The priest knocks on the doors with his cross, demanding that the doors be opened to the King of Glory. Behind the doors a sacristan shakes bolts and chains to simulate the sound of breaking gates and the faithful walk into a suddenly light-flooded space to see the Anastasis (Resurrection) icon, encircled by flowers on a lectern in front of the iconostasis. **SM**

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1   Anna D Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1986, p 208.

Cat 103
Anastasis, or the Harrowing of Hell, c1550
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
311 x 248 x 26 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Cat 104
Anastasis, or the Harrowing of Hell, c1600
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
244 x 195 x 27 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Anastasis, or the Harrowing of Hell
RUSSIA

Feast day Easter Sunday

The astonishing events of the Resurrection are here depicted in their most essential form. This abbreviated icon depicts just one moment rather than a long process: Christ's fluttering robe suggests his rapid descent, while Adam and Eve, whom he immediately releases from their tombs, hurriedly rise to their feet. Eve's hands are covered with her sleeves in respectful anticipation of his sacred touch. To either side of Christ the righteous await release: the kings David and Solomon with John the Baptist in front of them on his right and other Old Testament figures on his left. Everyone else will follow. These few immediate acts are sufficient to signal Christ's redemption of humanity.

The small scale of this icon suggests it is a *piadnitsa* (Russian: small replica of a well-known icon). The name derives from the Russian *piad*, or span, which is the distance between the thumb and the middle finger of an open hand, approximately 25 centimetres. Such icons were often purchased at churches by pilgrims and worshippers as holy souvenirs or as domestic or travel icons. **SM**

Anastasis, or the Harrowing of Hell
GREECE OR BULGARIA

Alternative titles The Resurrection, Descent into Hell, Harrowing of Hell
Feast day Easter Sunday

The icon depicts the moment after Christ's burial on Good Friday but before the discovery of his resurrection on Easter Sunday, when he rose from the tomb and descended into Hell to raise up the worthy souls imprisoned there. 'The bronze gates were broken in pieces and the bars of iron were snapped; and all the dead who were bound were loosed from their chains … the King of Glory entered like a man, and all the dark places of Hades were illumined' (Gospel of Nicodemus, or Acts of Pilate, XXI: 3). The light radiating from Christ in his glory is framed by a blue mandorla. Christ and his robes are calm, but the three-tailed banner of resurrection flutters, symbolising eternal life and victory over death, a detail emphasised in cats 98, 111 and 112. The light Christ sheds allows us to see Hades depicted as a person, lying on his back, bound and conquered in the gaping black hole beneath Christ's feet. The power of the Devil and death has been conquered through Christ's own triumph over death (Hebrews 2:14). **SM**
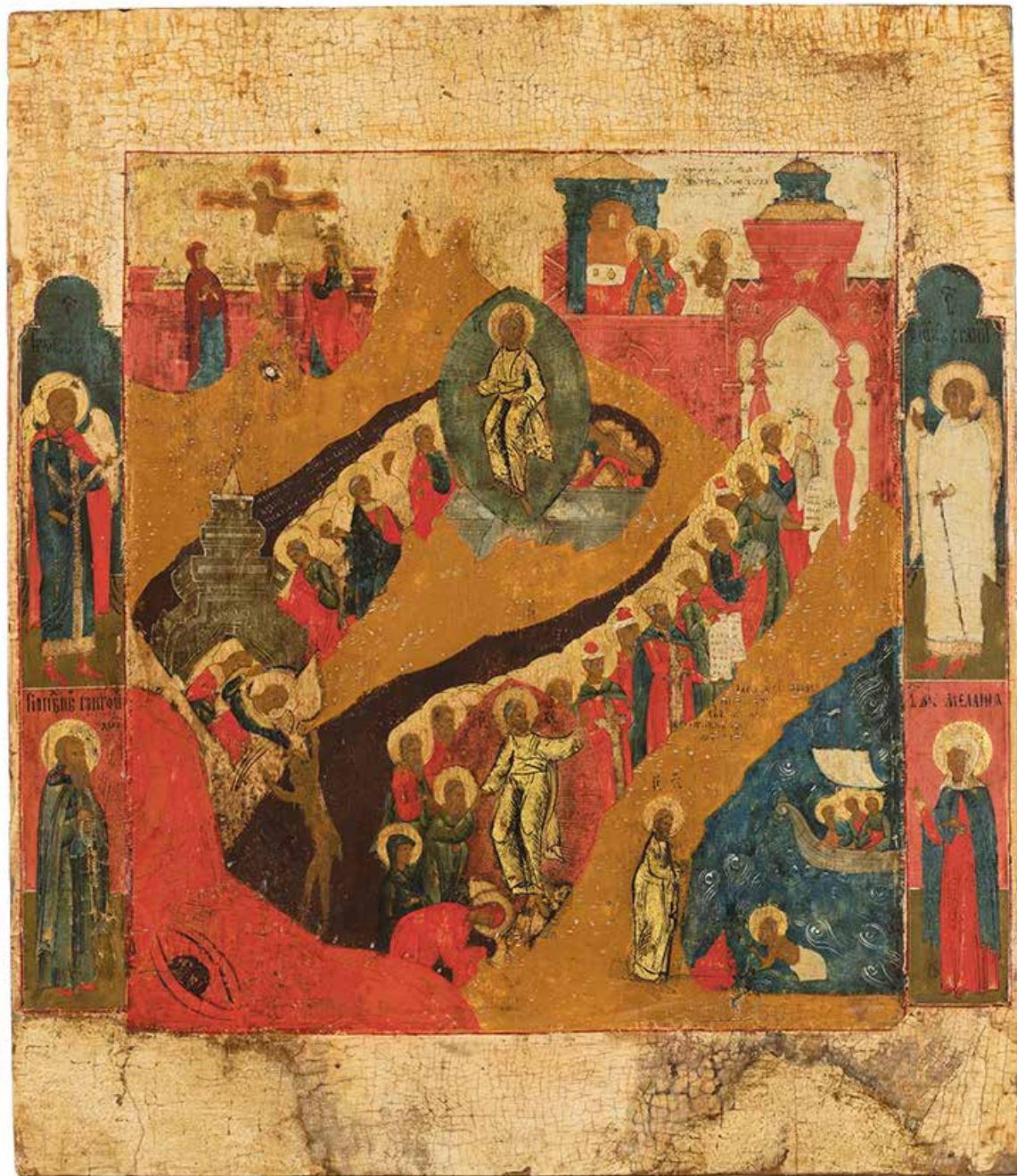

Cat 105
Anastasis, or the Harrowing of Hell, 16th/17th century
Greece or Bulgaria
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
370 x 300 x 40 mm
on loan from University Art Collection, The University of Sydney Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson 1865

Cat 106
Resurrection and the Harrowing of Hell, 19th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
358 x 310 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, purchased with funds from
Maria Ridsdale, 2018 Acc. 2018.18

Resurrection and the Harrowing of Hell
RUSSIA

Feast day Easter Sunday

This is the most complex depiction of all Orthodox Resurrection images developed in the late 17th century in Russia. Possibly inspired by the epic effect of the Last Judgement scenes depicted in 12th-century frescoes in western churches, Russian artists added further episodes to the central image of the Resurrection, drawing upon the account in the apocryphal Book of Nicodemus. The inclusion of scenes depicting the Crucifixion, the Descent into Hell and the Procession of the Just amplifies the sense of emotional turbulence around the bewildering events of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

The dramatic catalyst is Christ's death on the cross, shown in the upper left. In a chain reaction, angels, headed by their leader Michael, begin to descend from Christ's tomb towards the subterranean gates of Hell. Michael leans down into the bowels of Hell to fight Satan. Christ has already arrived and has started dragging out the righteous, beginning with Adam and Eve. As Christ grasps Adam, a procession, which includes the kings David and Solomon and the prophets (identifiable by their scrolls and tablets), begins making its way up into the light, towards the pearly gates of Heaven where the Good Thief Rakh can be seen in conversation with the holy forefathers, Enoch and Elijah. As justice and freedom are delivered, Christ appears a second time, floating above the scene in his mandorla, symbolising hope and the miracle of the Resurrection. In the lower right a vignette shows the resurrected Christ appearing to the disciples at the sea of Galilee. The *polya* (Russian: border, margin) of the icon features two angels (an archangel and a guardian) and beneath them the fourth-century saint Gregory and the early fifth-century saint Melania (the younger). **SM**

Analepsis or Ascension
GREECE

Feast day 40 days after Easter Sunday

The feast of the Ascension is one of the most important events in the Christian calendar and takes place 40 days after the great feast of Easter (the Resurrection). It commemorates Christ's last bodily appearance and the conclusion of his earthly ministry, when he led his disciples to the Mount of Olives. After telling them to await baptism with the Holy Spirit, Christ made a gesture of blessing and 'while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight' (Acts 1:9).

Confused, the disciples are shown standing on tiptoes and straining to watch his departure. But angels appear and reassure them. The Mother of God stands amid them, but at the same time apart. She alone is serene, flanked by two angels in white, and makes a gesture of blessing. Overhead a mandorla of radiant light envelops Christ, who is seated on a rainbow holding a scroll. He is framed against a gold ground as angels bear him ever upwards into the heavenly realm. Beneath the miraculous ascent, white accents of paint that denote uncreated divine light shower the participants with visible holiness. The highlights also serve to accentuate the sheer drama of the event; the worried expressions, agitated drapery and general sense of disorientation of Christ's followers left behind. The composition is based on a monumental Palaiologan model developed in the early 15th century by Cretan workshops: this example is virtually identical in scale to earlier models now in Athens and Tokyo.[1] **SM**

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1   Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens BM 8441/T 2725; Andreas Ritzos, *Icon: Ascension of Christ with the Hetomasia*, National Museum of Western Art Tokyo 71.0 x 47.0 cm, p.1973-0004.

Cat 107
Analepsis or Ascension, c1700
Greece
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
560 x 440 mm
on loan from a private collection, Sydney

Dormition of the Mother of God
NORTHERN GREECE

Alternative titles Koimesis
Inscription Η Κ[Ο]ΙΜΗΣΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΘΚΟΥ (The Dormition of the Virgin),
IC XC, MP ΘY. Inscriptions of the gospel books are not in Greek.
Feast day 15 August

When Mary and Joseph first brought the infant Jesus to the temple, the priest Simeon prophesied to Mary that one day 'a sword shall pierce through thou own soul' (Luke 2: 35). Recognition of Mary's painful destiny, and the gracious way in which she bore it, registers in the grief-stricken faces of those who cluster around her in the last moments of her life. According to tradition, after her son's crucifixion, Mary lived in Jerusalem in the house of John the Apostle (also known as John the Beloved) who had been appointed by Christ to look over her.

In the Orthodox context the Death of the Virgin is thought of as a falling asleep (*koimesis* or *dormition*) in contrast to the western tradition which associates her death with her uplift into Heaven (the Assumption). Mary lies on a bier, surrounded by the twelve apostles who have been miraculously spirited to her side from around the world to pay their final respects. Peter and Paul, regarded as the two princes among the apostles, lead the mourners. Peter swings the censer in front of Mary's catafalque and Paul prays at the foot. John the Apostle is at her head.[2] As the apostles sing hymns in Mary's honour, they experience a vision of Christ with the heavenly host and saints arrived to carry Mary's soul to heaven. Accounts of Mary's death, who was said to be aged in her 50s, are believed to have been written in the first and second centuries CE by Dionysius the Areopagite and Ignatius of Antioch, who were known as 'hieromartyrs' because they died for their faith. Dionysius and Ignatius, depicted in their bishops' *phelonia* (Latin: liturgical vestments), are on either side of Christ, who stands in a mandorla with the swaddled figure of Mary's soul in his arms. A large red seraph hovers over the scene. Buildings in the background represent the house Mary shared with John, and the Temple of Jerusalem where the apostles will later carry her body. A group of women stand at the base of the buildings. The compression of so many figures in the foreground of the narrow composition enhances a sense of intimacy and the personal impact Mary had upon the lives of Christ's followers.

The status of Mary as Theotokos was only affirmed by the Council of Ephesus in 431, so the formal celebration of her life and death post-dates this recognition of her elevated status. In 588 the Byzantine emperor Maurice (reign 582–602) adopted the feast of the Dormition into the official liturgical calendar of the Byzantine world and ascribed it the feast day of 15 August. Around the Orthodox world, the Dormition, which concludes the Great Marian Cycle of the Life of the Virgin, is preceded by two weeks of fasting, beginning on 1 August with rituals known as the Procession of the Cross and the Blessing of the Water. **SM**

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1   In some icons of this subject John appears with his head on Mary's chest (John 13: 23). This version does not show Athonius (Iefonyia) who often appears in the foreground; he was the Jewish priest who dared to touch the funeral couch of the Mother of God and whose hands were cut off by an invisible angel. Upon repenting, his hands were restored by the apostle Peter.

Cat 108
Dormition of the Mother of God, 16th century
Northern Greece
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
590 x 419 x 33 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

THE ETHIOPIAN ICON TRADITION

Matthew Martin

The northeast African highland plateau has a long and rich history of Christian civilisation. According to the traditions of the Ethiopian Church, Christianity reached the region in the first century CE.[1] Archaeological evidence suggests that the spread of Christianity in Ethiopia occurred in the wake of the conversion of King Ezana (reign c320–60), ruler of the northern kingdom of Aksum, by a Syrian Christian known as Frumentius, in the first half of the fourth century.[2]

In 451, at the Fourth Ecumenical Council of the Christian church at Chalcedon convoked in Bithynia (in present-day Turkey), the doctrine that Christ is both God and human with two separate natures was established, causing the Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian and Syriac Orthodox churches to split from the mainstream church of the Byzantine empire (referred to today as the Eastern Orthodox Church). These churches became known as the Oriental Orthodox Church, aligned through their miaphysite belief in Christ's united nature – 'two natures united into one'. At this juncture the Ethiopians called themselves the Orthodox Tewahedo (Ge'ez: united) church.

Art has constituted a vital expression of Ethiopian Christianity from this period down to the present day. Some of the earliest surviving Ethiopian Christian images are to be found in two gospel books, one of which is dated to the fifth or sixth century.[3] Stylistic and iconographic elements reveal close affinities with contemporary Coptic Egyptian manuscript illumination, but also the productions of Syrian and Armenian workshops.[4] Under the Aksumite kings, Ethiopia was a wealthy country highly involved in Red Sea trade, which in turn connected it to Egypt, the Levant and the eastern Mediterranean. The decline of the kingdom of Aksum, beginning in the seventh century, and its eventual collapse three centuries later, saw contact with the wider Byzantine Christian Mediterranean world become limited. The resulting isolation led to the independent development of a rich but idiosyncratic visual tradition in the Ethiopian Church. Monumental church architecture, processional crosses, illuminated manuscripts, illustrated talismanic scrolls and painted icons and murals all functioned to render the divine visible and the sacred accessible to the

profoundly devout and ascetic people of medieval and early modern Ethiopia.

The first surviving Ethiopian panel icons date from the 15th century, some two centuries after the richly decorated gospel book tradition that flourished around the end of the 13th century. The earliest of these icons were produced by artists trained in monasteries, then centres of book production, which explains the visible influences of manuscript illumination.

The production of panel icons had been relatively rare prior to the time of Emperor Dawit (reign 1382–1413), a member of a dynasty who claimed descent from the biblical King Solomon. Dawit was particularly devoted to Mary, praying daily before an icon of the Virgin.[5] He ordered the translation from Arabic of the book *The Miracles of Mary* into Ge'ez, the liturgical language of the Ethiopian church. Dawit also despatched an ambassador to the Republic of Venice to request artisans, among them a painter, be sent to his kingdom. The Venetians complied by sending a Florentine-trained artist. Slightly later, Dawit's son Yeshaq (reign 1414–28) requested Alfonso V of Aragon (reign 1416–58) send other craftsmen.[6]

These were the first of a series of exchanges with European painters that would influence the development of the Ethiopian icon tradition. These foreign artists introduced elements of western iconography, as well as the technique of painting in tempera on gesso-covered wooden panels. The succession of Yeshaq's brother, Emperor Zar'a Ya'eqob (reign 1434–68) in the mid 15th century saw a continued emphasis on Marian devotion: Zar'a Ya'eqob and his descendants actively encouraged the use of panel paintings in church rituals, issuing instructions that an image of the Virgin Mary be present during the celebration of the Mass.[7]

Among the local artists influenced by the emigrés first invited by Dawit was the monk Fre Seyon (active 1445–80), who quickly established himself as one of the greatest Ethiopian icon painters. A court painter to Zar'a Ya'eqob, Fre Seyon produced many of the monumental, powerful yet refined Marian icons that were a direct expression of the emperor's liturgical reforms. Followers of Fre Seyon produced numerous painted panels to meet the new demand for Marian images for use in the Mass.[8]

Later, under the reign of Emperor Eskender (reign 1478–94), Nicolò Brancaleon (c1460–c1526), a monk from Venice, arrived at the Ethiopian court where he painted for more than 40 years.[9] Possibly owing to his monastic background, Brancaleon favoured international Gothic influences in his painting of Ethiopian icons, introducing new iconographic elements such as the martyrdom of Saint George and the miracles of the Virgin Mary, while absorbing local artistic traditions. The resulting images, which had a highly distinctive and original style, enjoyed great popularity in court circles.[10]

After a series of religious conflicts in the 16th to 18th centuries, icons gained special prominence as emblems of the survival and continuity of the Christian tradition in Ethiopia. Around 1600 Jesuit missionaries introduced printed images of the famous icon of Mary and the infant Christ from the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, an image believed to have been painted by Saint Luke. These prints had a powerful impact on Ethiopian Marian imagery.[11] The Jesuit influence led to the controversial conversion of Emperor Susenyos I (reign 1606–32) to Catholicism. In the wake of a religious civil war and the ruler's eventual abdication, Susenyos's son Fasilädäs (reign 1632–67) re-established Orthodoxy, expelling the Jesuits and closing Ethiopia to Catholics from the west, a ban that lasted for nearly two centuries. As part of the Orthodox revival, Fasilädäs commissioned richly illustrated manuscripts of the gospels and *The Miracles of Mary*. These manuscripts, which made great use of white grounds and a red and yellow palette, were executed in a new style and were

based upon earlier images of the late 15th and early 16th centuries, a period rightly termed the golden age of Ethiopian painting. Referred to as Gondarine (for the new royal capital at Gondar), these manuscripts influenced panel icons, which are recognisable for their red highlights on pink faces, drapery rendered with fluid parallel lines and an exuberant sense of warm colour.

The history of artistic exchange between Ethiopia and the Christian Mediterranean world saw western influences in Ethiopia constantly transformed through interaction with the venerable and distinctive indigenous panel painting tradition. This ongoing dialectic between tradition and innovation lends the Ethiopian icon tradition its enduring vitality.

1   This was as a result of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch described in Acts 8:26-38.
2   See Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol 21, Paris,1849, pp 478–89; Robert Hussey (ed), *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Academic Press, Oxford, 1853, pp 113–17.
3   These are preserved today in the monastery of Abba Gärima in Tigray.
4   Jacques Mercier, 'Ethiopian Art History', in Deborah E Horowitz (ed), *Ethiopian Art: The Walters Art Museum*, Third Millennium, Lingfield, 2001, p 48; Marilyn Heldman with Stuart C Munro-Hay, *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT & London, 1993, pp 129–30, cats 52, 53.
5   Getachew Haile, 'Documents on the History of Asé Dawit (1382–1413)', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 16, 1983, p 31.
6   See Verena Krebs, *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2021.
7   Zar'a Ya'eqob had the *Introductory Rite* added to his father's translation of *The Miracles of Mary*, which made the veneration of Marian images through censing and hymning a central element of the ceremonies associated with the Sunday service and Marian feasts: Marilyn Heldman, 'The Role of the Devotional Image in Emperor Zär'a Ya'eqob's Cult of Mary', in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, University of Lund, 26–29 April 1982, pp 131–42, African Studies Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing MI, 1994, p171
8   Marilyn Heldman, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Ṣeyon: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage and Spirituality*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1994.
9   Stanislaw Chojnacki, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting, Indigenous Developments, The Influence of Foreign Models and their Adaptation from the 13th to the 19th Century*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1983, pp 378–98.
10 Mercier, 'Ethiopian Art History', p 56.
11 Richard Pankhurst, 'A note on the coming to Gondar of the painting of the Virgin of Santa Maria Maggiore', in Paul B Henze (ed), *Aspects of Ethiopian Art from Ancient Axum to the Twentieth Century*, Jed Press, London, 1993, pp 93–94.

Cat 109
Mother of God and Saint Joseph with the Archangels Gabriel and Michael, 16th century
Crete with Ethiopian additions
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood
370 x 585 x 33 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God and Saint Joseph with the Archangels Gabriel and Michael
CRETE WITH ETHIOPIAN ADDITIONS

Inscribed left ሥዕለ፡ ቀዱስ፡ ሚካኤል፡'Picture of Saint Michael'
Inscribed right (in red): ዘሥዕል፡ ዘቴዋ/ዱስየስ፡/ዘነሥኦ፡/ውጉዝ፡ ለይኩን፡ 'This picture belongs to Tewodosyos, whoever takes it, be excommunicated'; 'Picture of Saint Michael' (very faint in Ge'ez')
Inscribed centre (black on the green curtain): 'Image of our Lady Mary with her Beloved Son'. 'This Image' (red on gold background).

This triptych of the Madonna and Child, flanked by archangels Gabriel and Michael on lateral panels, is one of roughly three dozen still extant icons imported by members of the Ethiopian nobility to the Solomonic Christian kingdom in the 15th and 16th centuries.[1] Most likely originating from a Cretan or eastern Mediterranean workshop, it is a 16th-century *maniera Greca* post-Byzantine icon similar to that of the *Madre della Consolazione* type, depicting the Virgin wrapped in sumptuous clothes of deep green with a red mantle, painted on a gilded background with a crown and haloes stencilled onto it. The Child on her right arm is garbed in a starry blue robe and red cloak; he presents a golden orb in his left hand to the viewers. On the lateral panels, Michael and Gabriel are depicted in late Byzantine fashion, finely shaded and detailed. On the left panel, the winged and haloed Archangel Michael is standing on a red footstool wearing a short red tunic and full armour. A dark yellow cloak is draped over his shoulders, the raised sword in his right hand with the empty scabbard held loosely in his left. On the right panel, Gabriel is depicted with a golden halo on a red footstool, clothed in a white and yellow tunic covered by a red cloak. He holds a spear and shield, framed also by dark bronze wings. To this day, a remarkably similar imported triptych – called the Ṣə'əlä Adḫəno, the Image of Salvation, and held to be a Saint Luke icon – is located in the monastery of Tädbabä Maryam in the Amhara Sayənt region of central Ethiopia.[2]

On its arrival in Ethiopia, this triptych was modified. In keeping with local tradition, several inscriptions were added. They identify the depicted figures – naming the Virgin and Child, as well as Michael and Gabriel – and relate the name of an erstwhile owner, a man called Tewodosyos. Most remarkably for this type of foreign icon, a small figure was added onto a damaged section of the central panel, just beyond the shoulder of the Virgin: a bearded, dark-haired man, in a green tunic and a brown cloak, his arms crossed in front. The style as well as the shading of face and garments suggest a dating of this addition to between the 16th and 18th centuries. Assumed to be a depiction of Saint Joseph —a hypothesis supported by a faintly stencilled halo – a small inscription on the right side of the central panel offers an intriguing alternative identification: it states ambiguously that 'this image' was of the owner of the icon. The name Tewodosyos is rather unusual – Ethiopian names ending in -osyos are more commonly found in the 18th century. **VK**

1. Verena Krebs, 'A Catalogue of Post-Byzantine Icons Present in Solomonic Ethiopia Prior to 1530', in Asfa-Wossen Asserate & Walter Raunig (eds), *Orbis Aethiopicus XVII*, HJ Röll Verlag, Dettelbach, 2020, pp 189–227.
2. Diana Spencer, 'In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia,' *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol 10, no 2, 1972, pp 67–95.

Cat 110
Hand cross (Yaegg Masqal), 17th century
Ethiopia
iron
235 x 93 x 8 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Hand cross (Yaegg Masqal)
ETHIOPIA

The cross has a prominent place in the Christian culture of Ethiopia, where not only churches but also houses are marked by crosses and many of the faithful tattoo the sacred sign of Christianity on their forehead or other parts of their body. Hand crosses, held in the hand by their long vertical shaft, play a central role in the religious experience of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Made of wood or metal, such crosses belong to members of the clergy and monks or are liturgical objects and are therefore traditionally handled by men. A hand cross is held by a priest, bishop or patriarch during all their ecclesiastical functions, marking them as agents of Christ (eg, when they make the sign of the cross over the eucharistic bread and wine, the baptismal water, or a couple being wed, or bless the congregation). Deacons carry a large hand cross against one shoulder when they incense during the liturgy.

While liturgical hand crosses are usually between 30 and 60 centimetres, personal hand crosses, like the example shown here, are usually smaller, between 10 and 25 centimetres. Clerics and monks always carry their personal cross with them as identification and a protective device against evil. They display it when they are photographed, and hold it when immersed in devotional reading. They bless members of the congregation according to a brief ritual performed through the grace of their hand cross: they touch the bowing devotees on their forehead with the tip of the cross, and then the devotees kiss the top part of the cross and its base. In Ethiopian paintings saints are often depicted holding hand crosses, emphasising their holy status and their ability to bless and protect the faithful.

The cross displayed here is a typical Ethiopian example, which is characterised by a prominent lower part or base under the vertical shaft. Often this part has a rectangular, box-like appearance. It may be meant to symbolise the Ark of the Covenant with the Tablets of the Law, a holy object that Ethiopian Christians believe was brought to their country by the ancient Ethiopian king Menelik I (son of Solomon and the queen of Sheba) and is still guarded today in a chapel at the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in Aksum. Every Orthodox church also owns a *tabot* (ark), a sacred tablet on which the Eucharist is celebrated, thus ritualising the connection between the Ark of the Law and Christ's sacrifice on the cross (which is re-enacted in the Eucharist). If the Ark of the Covenant is indeed symbolised by the lower part of hand crosses, then it affirms the continuity between the Old and the New Testaments that is especially important in the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, marking the procession from the Age of Law to the Age of Grace under Christ (and from the wood of the Ark of the Covenant to the wood of the cross). This continuity and unity are recognised when Ethiopians kiss both the top and the bottom part of hand crosses presented to them by clerics or monks.

Ethiopian hand crosses are decorated in an inexhaustible variety of motifs that often have important symbolic associations. It is common to see smaller crosses sprouting out of the body of the cross, as in this example, to visualise the life-giving and regenerative power of the holiest sign of Christianity. At times, fruits and birds decorate the cross, turning it into a verdant tree and evoking its association with the Tree of Life – Christ himself, who through his sacrifice on the wood of the cross reversed the Fall caused by the Tree of Knowledge. The hand cross seen here is decorated with small roundels which could be meant to evoke the fruits of the Tree of Life that heal the damage caused by the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. **ME**

Cat 111
Mother of God Flanked by Two Angels, 17th century
Ethiopia
egg tempera and gesso on wood
400 x 562 x 22 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God Flanked by Two Angels
ETHIOPIA

Occupying the centre panel is the Virgin with her son, who holds a gospel in one hand and makes a gesture of benediction in the other, in the manner of the Byzantine Hodegetria icon known as the Virgin of Santa Maria Maggiore or the *Salus populi romani* in Rome. This much-admired prototype, reputed to have been made by Saint Luke himself, was introduced into Ethiopia through prints, after Pope Pius V (papacy 1566–72) in 1569 allowed the Jesuits to reproduce the image and distribute it as propaganda to their missions around the world.[1] Mary's left hand holds a mappula (handkerchief), in imitation of the Italian prototype. Two guardian angels with raised wings and swords are figures retained from earlier Coptic images of Mary. Mary embodies the triumph of the church here. In a lower register the adult Christ is shown with black hair and beard, seated as he teaches the Twelve Apostles. This scene, known as the Faith of the Fathers, symbolises the triumph of Ethiopian Orthodoxy and the miaphysite belief in Christ as both human and divine. The saints carry small hand crosses of the kind seen in cat 110.

On the right wing the Crucifixion dominates the upper register. Below it is the crowning of Christ, where Roman soldiers hammer a plait of thorns into Christ's head, an episode in Ethiopia known as Kwer'āta Re'esu, the 'striking of the head'. At the top of the left wing is a scene of the Harrowing of Hell (Resurrection) showing Christ seizing Adam and Eve and dragging them up by the hands. Below them are two holy men, possibly the 14th-century bishop Mädhaninä-Egzi and the ancient desert saint Abuna Gabra Manfas Qeddus, the latter identifiable by his lion.[2] In the bottom register is Saint George and the Dragon. George's ubiquitous presence in Ethiopian devotional imagery reflects his national status as the chief defender of the Christian faith. **SM**

1   Stanislaw Chojnacki in collaboration with Carolyn Gossage, *Ethiopian Icons: Catalogue of the Collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies*, Skira/Thames & Hudson, Milan/London, 2000, p 33.
2   Heldman with Munro-Hay, *African Zion*, p 245, cat 105.

Mother of God and Christ with Saint George, Saint Samuel of Waldebba, the Crucifixion, Saints Peter and Paul and Tekla Hāymānot and others
ETHIOPIA

In this 17th-century triptych Mary fills the centre panel, her expansive maphorion forming a protective umbrella over the faithful, in accordance with the distinctive Italian medieval image of the Virgin known as the *Mater Misericordiae* (Latin: Mother of Mercy). She in turn is protected by the archangels Gabriel and Michael, who hold unsheathed swords and join their wings to form a sheltering canopy over her head. The icon contains numerous hallmarks of what one scholar has called the 'parallel lines style', a graphic geometric mode which emerged in the Tigray region in the 16th century and which features brightly striped garments, rounded collars and angels' wings with dagger-like feathers.[1]

The Virgin sits on a striped rug on the ground, cradling Christ in the crook of her right arm. Christ looks up into his mother's face and clutches a tiny finch-sized bird in his hand, another Italianate element and a symbol of the Passion. In the lower register the third-century Saint George is shown on his trotting white horse, trampling the dragon. Adjacent is a scene of Christ preaching before the early church founders, saints Peter and Paul. Standing beside them is Tekle Hāymānot, a revered 13th-century monk who lived a life of austerity, devout prayer and evangelism and founded the monastery at Debra Libanos. Their small hand crosses are outlined in black to indicate they are made of common iron and not a luxurious metal (see cat 110).[2]

The left wing features the resurrected Christ in a blue mandorla, holding a white three-pennoned banner of Victory. Christ grasps Adam and Eve by their wrists and hauls them up from their barrel-like tombs. Beneath this scene is the saint Abbā Samuel on his lion, a late 14th-century monk and ascetic who tamed wild animals and performed numerous miracles. The right wing shows the Crucifixion, with wingless angels using chalices to catch the precious blood flowing from the wounds that pierce Christ's side and hands. The dark cross is set on a mound above the skull of Adam, a feature also common to Russian and Greek icons (see cats 93 and 94). Mary stands smiling, one arm above her head in a gesture that dates from the 16th century.[3] The Crucifixion and angelic interventions were unknown in early Eastern Christian iconography until Italianate Passion imagery arrived by means of embassies and missionaries (see cat 118). **SM**

1   Chojnacki with Gossage, *Ethiopian Icons*, cat 156, pp 399–400.
2   As above, p 37.
3   As above, cat 220, pp 440–41.

Cat 112
Mother of God and Christ with Saint George, Saint Samuel of Waldebba, the Crucifixion, Saints Peter and Paul and Tekla Hāymānot and others, 17th century
Ethiopia
egg tempera and gesso on canvas over wood
282 x 204 mm (closed); 282 x 428 mm (open)
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy, 2017

Virgin Hodegetria with Scenes of Saint George and the Crucifixion
ETHIOPIA

This private devotional triptych reflects the 'second Gondarine style', the style associated with Gondar, the northern capital and trade centre of Ethiopia near Lake Tana in the reign of Emperor Iyyasu II (reign 1730–55). Hallmarks of icon painting in this period include round and rosy faces with shading in darker browns, and elegantly flowing robes. The Virgin wears a white pleated coif underneath her mantle, a detail borrowed from Italo-Cretan icons (see cat 83). She fills the central panel, enveloping the infant Christ, who holds a gospel. The right side of the icon shows the Crucifixion, with Mary and Saint John standing dolefully to either side of Christ and a pair of donor or supplicant figures below (another new feature of this style).

Saint George appears twice on the left wing. Despite the prolonged and savage torture that he has endured, he appears miraculously whole in this scene (see cat 41). Shown shortly before submitting to the executioner's blade, George prays for, and then witnesses, the death by fire of his persecutors, who are preparing to celebrate his execution. He then looks up to Heaven and calls to God with the words, 'O my Lord Jesus Christ, who dost make fire come from heaven by the words of Thy servant Elijah the Prophet and devour ... these seventy lawless governors.' George's prayers are answered with gratifying speed: 'And while the words were yet in his mouth, fire came forth from heaven and devoured the seventy lawless governors who held their cups of wine untasted in their hands.'[1]

In the lower section George appears rescuing the princess Birutāwit from a dragon. George's prominence emphasises his close relationship with the Virgin Mary as her 'soldier of God' and foremost devotee. **SM**

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1   Theodotus, bishop of Ancyra, 'The Encomium of Bishop Theodotus, Bishop of Jerusalem', in *The Martyrdom and Miracles of Saint George of Cappadocia*, edited and translated by Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, D Nutt, London 1888, p 319.

Cat 113
Virgin Hodegetria with Scenes of Saint George and the Crucifixion, 18th century
Ethiopia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
420 x 470 mm
on loan from a private collection, Sydney

Mother of God and Christ with scenes of Saint George and the Crucifixion

ETHIOPIA

Despite an era of intense modernisation in Ethiopia during the 19th and early 20th centuries, icon painting remained remarkably faithful to the second Gondar style of the previous two centuries.[1] The composition of this late 19th-century triptych, for example, essentially conforms to images of the Hodegetria painted at least a century earlier (see cat 111). A curious point of difference is a string of cowrie shells placed around Christ's neck, an apotropaic (protective) adornment worn by local Ethiopian children to protect them against harm.[2] As with the earlier version of this icon, Saint George appears twice on the left wing, standing with both hands raised in a final prayer before being beheaded.[3] Six crowned heads, which peep out from the flames of the fire on either side of George, represent the 72 kings who will be consumed as punishment. In the lower scene George spears the dragon as the maiden looks on from the safety of a tree, a theme that was unknown before the 15th century.[4] On the right wing the upper section shows the Crucifixion and the moment when the Roman centurion Longinus pierces Christ's side with a spear. Longinus, who is shown in profile on the back of a brown horse, was said to have been blind in one eye. When blood fell into his eye his vision was restored and he immediately converted to Christianity. In the background the veil of the Temple has been rent in two at the moment of Christ's death, in affirmation of Christ's divinity and the salvation of humanity. In the lower right two supplicants proffer up a dove before a vision of Christ.

For all the many iconographic continuities with earlier icon schema, there is also striking evidence of modernity, most obvious in the synthetic yellows and blue pigments of an intensity never seen before, imported in solid form from Arabia. From the early 18th century, icon makers began to adopt foreign methods of triptych construction, seen in the present icon, which has a ledge across the top and bottom of the central panel to allow the wings to close snugly and without damage to the inner wings. Other details, however, point to a decline of traditional methods, such as the cord-and-hole system for attaching the wings, which in earlier icons was usually very discreet. **SM**

1 Stanislaw Chojnacki, 'A Catalogue of Ethiopian Icons', in Walter Raunig, *Äthiopien zwischen Orient und Okzident: wissenschaftliche Tagung der Gesellschaft Orbis Aethiopicus*, Köln, 9–11 October 1998, 2004, p 147.
2 See Chojnacki with Gossage, *Ethiopian Icons*, cat 27 p 320.
3 See as above, cat 208 p 432
4 María-José Friedlander, *Ethiopia's Hidden Treasures: A Guide to the Paintings of the Remote Churches of Ethiopia,* Shama Books Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 2007, p 41.

Cat 114
Mother of God and Christ with scenes of Saint George and the Crucifixion, 19th century
Ethiopia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
412 x 495 x 35 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Processional cross (Yamasaor Masqal)
ETHIOPIA

The cross has been an important element within Ethiopian liturgy since the fourth century, and is used to commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ and to protect against evil. Over time the form evolved from simple metal or carved wood hand crosses into large processional crosses mounted on long wooden staffs, often commissioned by a member of the congregation. Two main types of processional cross exist: an indigenous form, with an almond-shaped outline evoking mandorlas or leaves, and a 'Greek' cruciform design, which is more familiar in the west, and which was introduced to Ethiopia in the 14th century.

The present example is a modern casting of a processional cross associated with the Amhara region in northern Ethiopia. 'Armed' crosses of this type are known as *wänfit*, or 'sieve' crosses, because of the numerous tiny internal crosses which transmit light. The reiteration of the cruciform motif is an assertion of the cross's life-giving powers and derives from early interlaced manuscript decoration. Crosses were once mostly struck from wax models but today they are often cut from flat sheets of silver alloy.

Since the Mass is conducted in the sanctuary away from public view, the cross serves as the focus of the congregation's attention, and after the service is brought outside to the accompaniment of drums, lyres and sistra (rattle-like instruments). Because it symbolises the body of Christ, a processional cross is often 'dressed', by tying rich fabrics and ribbons to the closed lower loops.[1] In the 16th century the Portuguese missionary Francisco Álvares (c1465–1536/41) recorded seeing church services conclude with a procession of several crosses carried in the left hand with a censer in the right.[2] The ritual continues unchanged today: crosses are processed through the crowd by deacons who bless the faithful and the surroundings. On feast days they are carried three times around the outside of the church.[3]

SM

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1 Stanislaw Chojnacki in collaboration with Carolyn Gossage, *Ethiopian Crosses: A Cultural History and Chronology*, Skira, Milan, 2006, p 31.

2 Father Francisco Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the Lands of Prester John, being the Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520*, translated and edited by Lord Stanley of Alderley (1881), revised and edited with additional material by CF Beckingham and GWB Huntingford, vol 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, for the Hakluyt Society, 1961, p 77.

3 Csilla Fabo Perczel, 'Art and Liturgy: Abyssinian Processional Crosses', *Northeast African Studies*, vol 5, no 1, 1983, p 21.

Cat 115
Processional cross (Yamasaor Masqal), 20th century
Ethiopia
silver alloy
700 x 530 mm
on loan from a private collection, Melbourne

HOLY JOURNEYS, HOLY LAND

Sophie Matthiesson

In the third and fourth centuries the desire for spiritual enlightenment drew early Christians in startling numbers to the deserts of Egypt and Syria. The ascetic Saint Anthony the Great left the city of Alexandria in around 285 to live alone in the desert, inspired, we are told, by Christ's words to 'sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me' (Mark 10: 21). The presence of so many other hermits living in caves in the area led Anthony to organise loose communities, for which he is called the Father of Monasticism. Soon after, in the Upper Nile area another monk, Pachomius, established monasteries of 'cenobitic', or communal, living resembling the monasteries we know today. The movement quickly spread to the deserts of Palestine and Syria, into the wilderness between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, where the Essenes, a mystic Jewish sect, had gathered in former centuries and where Christian ascetic groups were already present.[1] Deserts were holy places. According to the scriptures, the prophet Elijah, John the Baptist and Jesus himself had retreated there. Whereas Saint Jerome described the great desert movement of the fourth century as a retreat from persecution, the growing appeal of asceticism has also been viewed as a response to the perceived laxity that followed mass conversions around the time of Constantine's emancipation of the church in 313.[2]

The idea of desert monasticism captured the imagination of the Christian world in the later fourth century, attracting a stream of eminent church figures including saints Sabbas, Simeon and Basil, and Jerome himself (cat 35), all of whom later fostered monastic communities. The famous monasteries at Mount Athos and Solovetsky were deeply influenced by the hermetic example of the Desert Fathers and adopted their mystical practice of hesychasm, a form of psychophysical meditation with its linguistic roots in the Greek *hesychia*, meaning to be still. Hesychasm promised union with God through silent prayer in a state of profound detachment (see cat 88).[3] Located in inaccessible places, such as the precipitous tops of mounts Sinai and Athos, or along the banks of the White Sea in Russia's far north, these institutions served as sanctuaries during persecution and bastions of ancient tradition.[4] The sixth-century monastery of Däbrä Dammo in Ethiopia, near the

Eritrean border, is still only accessible by rope. Their founders are now venerated as national saints: figures such as the 12th-century monk Tekle Hāymānot, founder of the Debre Atsbo Monastery (later known as the Debre Libanos Monastery) and the early 15th-century cave-dweller Samuel, who established the Waldebba Monastery (cat 112), the fourth-century ascetic John the Hermit in Crete (cat 116) and the 15th-century saints Zosima and Savvatii in Russia (cat 10). Many of the communities they created were also highly active in the acquisition and production of icons.

The idea of Palestine as a holy land also took root in the fourth century, at this time of heightened piety. The first recorded pilgrimages to the Holy Land and Jerusalem date from this period.[5] Helena, the mother of Constantine (reign 306–37), was an early pilgrim and thousands followed, not only to *see* the Holy Land for themselves, but also to *touch* it in the belief that the sanctity of holy people, holy objects and holy places was 'somehow transferable through physical contact.'[6] The church fathers encouraged the dissemination of holy relics with which to sacralise churches. Constantine, who never visited Jerusalem, but who called it 'the most marvellous place in the world', recognised the unique potential of relics to confer spiritual authority upon his empire.[7] He proceeded to name parts of Constantinople after sites in Jerusalem and built his city on the Bosphorus into a vast stronghold of relics, amassing fragments of the true cross, relics of the Passion and items worn by the Mother of God, among other venerable trophies.[8]

Constantine was not the only ruler to lay claim to building a 'New Jerusalem'. In 1187 in Ethiopia the Zagwe emperor Lalibela (reign 1181–1221), constructed a church complex cut from rock, with a river Jordan, and hills named Calvary and the Mount of Olives, turning the site into a centre of pilgrimage. It was said that 'He who does not make his way to the holy city of Lalibela is like a man who feels no desire to see the face of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'.[9]

When pilgrimages to Jerusalem became impossible at various times, the newly built churches which housed relics from the Holy Land served as alternative destinations. From the 13th century, Venice was a city that was both abundant in relics (many seized from Constantinople in 1204) and a major departure point for Europeans travelling to the Holy Land: it largely controlled access to the region, thanks to its good relations with Mamluk governors and its monopoly of the sea routes. Latin pilgrims set out from Venice, where they could visit the relics at San Marco, then hire guides and interpreters for their onward journey. A typical 15th-century sea route followed the Dalmatian coast and stopped at Corfu, Methoni, Crete, Rhodes and Cyprus, before arriving in Joppa (Jaffa), now the port of Tel Aviv.[10] Opportunities abounded for holy travellers to purchase locally painted icons by the diasporic Greek artists who had fled Byzantium after 1453, not least examples of the miracle-working Saint Luke icons for which Crete was becoming known.

The importance of spiritual pilgrimages did not diminish in the 18th and 19th centuries, but additional factors propelled them. For Balkan and Greek Christians under Ottoman rule in the 18th century, for example, undertaking a pilgrimage came to be seen as a test of character equivalent to the Muslim hajj. For the fortunate few who could afford the long journey to Jerusalem, returning with the pictorial evidence in the form of a painted map of the holy sites, brought social status and boosted economic prospects.[11] The perennial need of pilgrims to return with visual evidence of their spiritual encounters in the form of icons only confirms one of the enduring arguments in defence of icons and their production: that to see is to believe.

1   Such as the community of bnay qyama, or Sons of the Covenant, who occupied the desert in the forth century. See Roderick Grierson, 'Dreaming of Jerusalem', in Marilyn Heldman with Stuart C Munro-Hay, *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT & London, 1993, p 14.
2   This account has relied on James W McKinnon, 'Desert Monasticism and the Later Fourth-Century Psalmodic Movement', *Music & Letters*, November, 1994, vol 75, no 4, pp 505–21.
3   See Richard Temple, *Icons and the Mystical Origins of Humanity*, Element Books, Shaftesbury, 1990, chapter 5, pp 53–69.
4   Peter Charanis, 'The Monk as an Element of Byzantine Society', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol 25, 1971, p 64.
5   Julie Ann Smith, ' "My Lord's Native Land": Mapping the Christian Holy Land', *Church History*, vol 76, no 1, March 2007, p 1.
6   Gary Vikan, 'Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol 38, 1984, p 66.
7   Georges Kazan, 'Arks of Constantinople, The New Jerusalem: The Origins of the Byzantine Sarcophagus Reliquary', *Byzantion*, vol 85, 2015, p 79.
8   Jelena Erdeljan, 'Chosen Places: Constructing New Jerusalems' in Jelena Erdeljan, *Slavia Orthodoxa*, Brill, Leiden & Boston MA, 2017, p 77.
9   Marilyn Heldman with Stuart C Munro-Hay, *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT & London, 1993, p 13.
10 Lia Scheffer, 'A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Mount Sinai in the 15th Century, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, vol 102, 1986, p 147.
11 Valentina Izmirlieva, 'Christian Hajjis: the Other Orthodox Pilgrims to Jerusalem', *Slavic Review*, vol 73, no 2, Summer 2014, p 322.
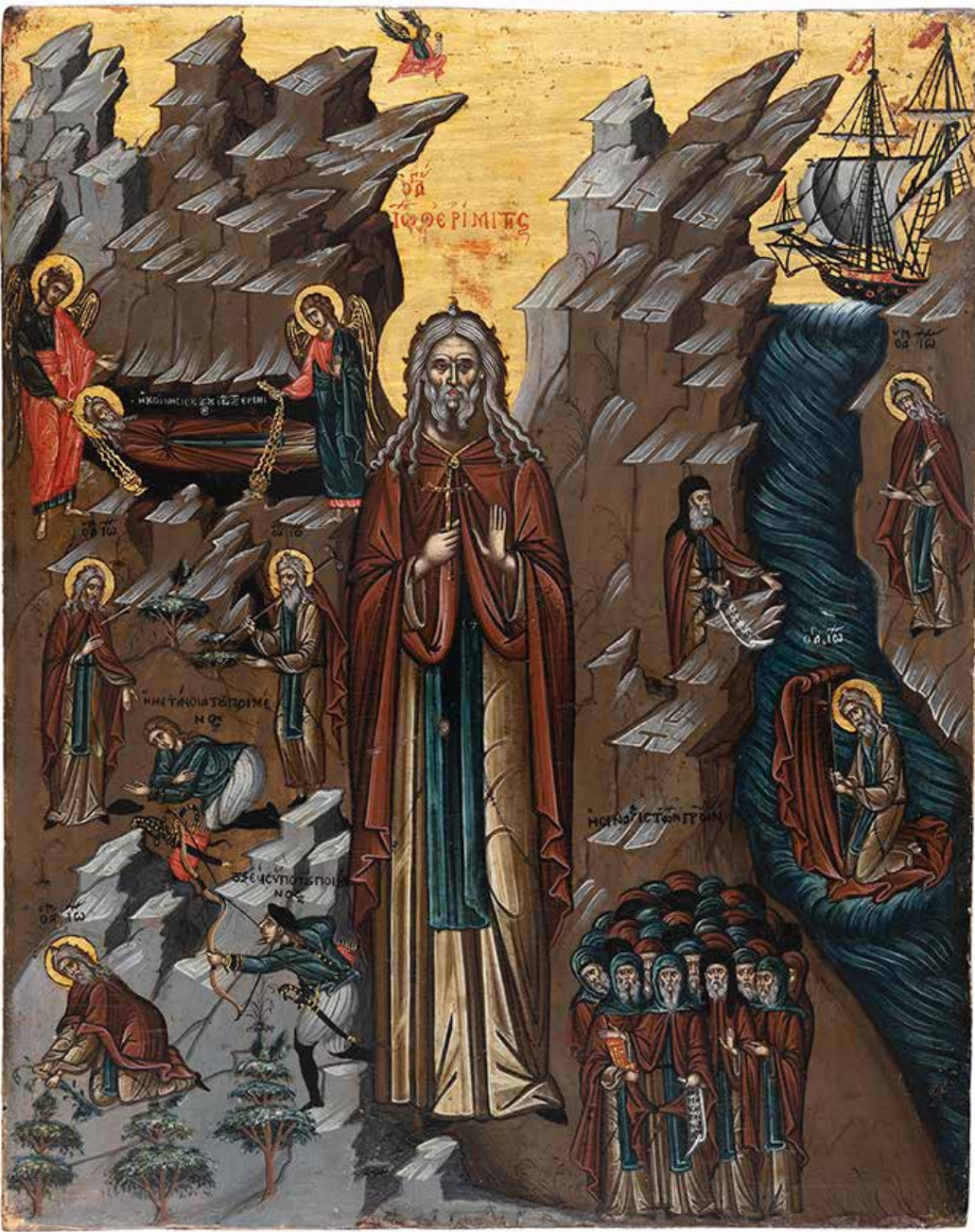
Saint John the Hermit
CRETE

Feast day 12 June

An enthralling and almost certainly legendary account of the life and death of John the Hermit is depicted in this richly detailed vita icon (a narrative icon recording the key deeds and sufferings of a saint), painted on the island of Crete where his story had special significance. Often confused with John of Armenia, John the Hermit is presumed to have been born in Egypt and to have taken a community of followers from Egypt and Cyprus to Attaleia (Antalya in present-day Turkey). Eventually the men headed to Crete, but because of bad weather wound up on the small island of Gavdos, just south of their destination. On resuming the journey to Crete the community, which was said to have grown to 99 members along the way, realised it had left John, who had been sleeping, behind.

The icon shows John at the right, stranded on Gavdos, with a monk beckoning him from the opposite shore on Crete. Fortunately John was able to use his staff as a mast and his cloak as a boat and sailed on his knees across the stretch of rough waters in three hours. Above him is the ship he missed and lower down is an assembly of older monks. John's followers settled in caves around Azigores in southwest Crete; to this day a chapel to Saint John is maintained on the supposed site of the original hermitage. In quest of greater solitude, however, John took himself farther away to Akrotiri on the island of Santorini. With his knees ruined by constant praying, John foraged for food on all fours and was shot by a hunter who mistook him for a beast. The remorseful assailant is shown in the icon asking John for forgiveness. After dragging himself to a cave, John died flanked by angels. The hunter went in search of John's followers to tell them the news but the hermits had already learned of it by divine means and had already joined him in death.

The story of John and his community was resurrected in Crete during the 16th century, around the time of the building of a monastery at Gouverneto on the northwest coast, which included chapels dedicated to the saint. The first vita icons featuring John date from that time. The extant examples, which are almost identical, include signed versions by the monk Jeremiah Pallades (c1586–1659), Emmanuel Tzanes (1610–90) and Victor of Crete (c1633–97).[1] A related version is in the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens.[2] On the back of this panel is a 19th- or early 20th-century inscribed *apolytikion* (Greek: hymn), visible only with infra-red light, which partially reads: 'Citizen of the desert and embodied angel, and proved to be miraculous, our father Ioannis who carries God; fast; fast, vigil, prayer, receiver of celestial charisma, you heal the sick and the souls of the faithful who come to you. Glory to the power that was given to you, glory to what was crowned to you, glory to what activates and heals.'[3] **SM**

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1   Titus M Sylligardakis, *Cretan Saints*, translated by Timothy Smith (1980s), Adastra Press, Easthampton MA, 1998, p 223.
2   Loverdos Collection, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens BXM 13049. See Manolis Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos: Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting*, translated by Thetis Xanthaki, National Bank of Greece, Athens, 1985, p 157.
3   Text discovered by Dr Nikos Livanos, translated by Petros Malamidis, Temple Gallery website (http://www.thetemplegallery.com/main.php?mode=12&p1=2806).

Cat 116
Saint John the Hermit, post 17th century
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
310 x 245 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

Mother of God and Saint Mary of Egypt
RUSSIA

Feast day 1 April

Mary of Egypt (344–421) was greatly venerated as a Desert Mother in the Eastern Orthodox and Coptic churches, on account of her extreme asceticism and capacity for penance. A former prostitute, she was said to have sought sex among strangers in Alexandria and even from pilgrims who were travelling to Jerusalem for holy feast days. When an invisible force suddenly blocked her entry to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, Mary was forced to remain outside its doors, where she encountered an icon of the Mother of God. Renouncing her past life, she crossed the River Jordan and dwelt naked in the wilderness for 47 years, living on berries, in the same desert where John the Baptist had preached. A year before her death she encountered Saint Zosimus of Palestine, who gave her a mantle.

Mary of Egypt is depicted as a deeply tanned, emaciated old woman with unkempt grey hair, half covered by Zosimus's mantle. She is shown in the final year of her life, aged 76. In his *Vita* of the saint, the writer and patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius (c560–638), described her skin as burned black by the sun and her hair as white as wool. In her lack of self-consciousness she exhibits the quality of *apatheia* (Greek: a blessed state of freedom from human passions).[1] Mary's body, which Sophronius compared with a shadow, was capable of levitation and walking over water.[2] Zosimus later discovered her body and buried her with the help of a passing lion.

The vital role played by an icon in Mary's repentance was cited at the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 in defence of the restoration of icons.[3] A female counterpart to Saint Anthony the Great, who also wrestled with physical temptation, Mary of Egypt is associated with the austerities of Lent, during which her feast day is honoured. Highly popular in Russia, she was the subject of numerous popular *lubki* (Russian: woodcuts). **SM**

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1   Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1996, p 66.
2   As above, p 75.
3   Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p 193.

Cat 117
Mother of God and Saint Mary of Egypt, late 17th century
Russia
egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood
309 x 255 mm
on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy
in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy, 2017

Mother of God with Archangels
CYPRUS

Dominated by the gentle ovoid of Mary's face, this icon conveys tender stillness.[1] Yet the Child twists in her arms to look away from her, and the blunt smoothness of her face is challenged by the broken tactility of the icon's plaster relief. Raised plaster spangles Mary's brooch and cuff, patterns both haloes and inscribes legible letters around the figures.

To Mary's left the traditional abbreviation M[ήτη]P Θ[εο]Y proclaims her sacred identity as Mother of God; to the Child's right, his sacred initials, I[ησού]C X[ριστό]C, name him as Christ. Further letters lie along the top frame. To the left they read O [αρ]X[άγγελος] ΓΑΒΡΙΗΛ: Archangel Gabriel. Below them, an incised circle defines the halo of what was once a striding figure, surely Gabriel. To the right are O ΑΡΧΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ MI: Archangel Michael. A now-fragmentary halo is visible here as well, its barely perceptible wearer plunging head down to face Christ. Between them, in plaster relief, a bucket contains a slender cross and four small uprights: the nails of the Crucifixion. Michael offers the infant the implements of his death. This infuses Christ's childlike dynamism with meaning: he turns from his mother to confront his Passion.

The earliest known instance of angels bearing intimations of the Passion in icons of the Virgin and Child is the famous mural icon of 1192 in the Church of the Panagia tou Arakos in Lagoudera, Cyprus,[2] where Mary cradles her child between two archangels bearing instruments of the Passion. This symmetry was later canonised in the icon type known as the Virgin of the Passion,[3] a name often given to the present icon too.[4] It is not clear that the two archangels are symmetrically engaged here though, for they move very differently. As Michael plunges to his fatal message, Gabriel strides towards Mary with raised arm. He must have appeared here as the angel of the Annunciation. Far from pensive quiescence as implied by Mary's face, the icon is a dynamic narrative balancing multiple scenes.

Significant features suggest that the icon originated in Cyprus. Especially indicative are its silver rather than gold ground and the plaster relief.[5] Raised plaster ornament was used extensively in Cyprus, in both panel and mural painting.[6] Usually patterned with impressed moulds, it was also squeezed free-hand onto the surface, as here, although rarely to form words. The silver ground and raised plaster virtually 'say' Cyprus. Iconographically too the icon evokes Cyprus, not only in its figure of Michael but in its averted child. Cyprus favoured images with Christ turning from Mary. The most frequently replicated was the type known as the Kykkotissa, after the still-venerated miracle-working icon at Kykkos Monastery,[7] but there were also variants on the Kykkotissa's posture that played upon the Child's restless, averted posture.[8] Often, as here, the Child is dressed in brilliant red.[9] Stylistically, the pale, oval purity of Mary's face evokes the taste for linearity that pervaded the crusader states, including Cyprus, in the 13th century, suggesting that is when this icon was made.[10]

However, three features challenge a 13th-century date. The round brooch under Mary's chin originated in Gothic art and became current in Byzantine imagery only in the 15th century.[11] Equally notable is the crown in Mary's halo. Mary was not accorded regalia in Byzantium; it was in western art that she was crowned. The third interesting motif is the bucket with cross and nails. The bucket appeared among the Passion instruments in Gothic art, but not to contain nails. A container of nails did appear in Byzantine painting, but it was a chalice rather than a bucket, and it appeared from the late 12th century onwards in

Cat 118
Mother of God with Archangels, 14th century
Cyprus
egg tempera, silver leaf and gesso on wood
320 x 264 x 27 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra

front of the Etimasia, the throne prepared for the Last Judgement, as an emblem of Christ's Passion.[12] It contained four nails, not the Gothic three, for the Greek Church maintained its traditional belief that Christ had been crucified with four nails. A bucket with four nails is thus a curious hybrid. Each of these motifs stands out as a Gothic adoption. They remind us that since 1196 Cyprus had been a crusader kingdom ruled by kings from France. Gothic elements entered its art slowly in the 14th or even 15th century. They place the icon well into the 14th century; indeed, carbon-14 tests suggest a date of 1330 to 1399.[13]

The icon's style looks disconcertingly retrospective for such a date in Cyprus. Yet Cyprus had multiple artistic currents, including knowingly retrospective ones,[14] and it is hard to dismiss the testimony of the silver ground, raised plaster and red-clad, averted child. Moreover, the balance of the messenger archangels, Gabriel announcing Christ's birth and Michael heralding his death, continued to appear in Cyprus. In the carved iconostases of the 16th century, the Annunciation almost always appeared on the main door,[15] and Gabriel presenting the chalice with cross and nails to Mary and Child often occupied another.[16] With its two annunciations of birth and death, the icon thus takes its place within a Cypriot legacy. **AWC**

1 Richard Temple, *Icons and Byzantine Objects*, Temple Gallery, London, 2014, no MM011, who cites Gordon Morrison, Alexander Grishin & Sophie Matthiesson, *Eikōn: Icons of the Orthodox Christian World*, Art Gallery of Ballarat, Ballarat, 2014, cat 53, p 162.

2 Chara Konstantinidi, 'Byzantine Painting in the Church of the Panagia tou Arakos,' in Athanasios Papageorghiou, Charalambos Bakirtzis & Christodoulos Hadjichristodoulou (eds), *The Church of the Panagia tou Arakos,* Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, AG Leventis Foundation & Bishopric of Morphou, Nicosia, 2018, pp 67–68, plates 91, 95; Andreas Nicolaïdès, 'L'église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra, Chypre: Étude iconographique des fresques de 1192,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 50, 1996, pp 5, 110--11, figs 3–5; Andreas Stylianou & Judith A Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus: Treasures of Byzantine Art,* 2nd ed, AG Leventis Foundation, Nicosia, 1997, pp 157–85, fig 85.

3 Matthew J Milliner, 'The Virgin of the Passion: Development, Dissemination and Afterlife of a Byzantine Icon Type', doctoral thesis, Princeton University, 2011; Chrysanthi Baltoyanni, *Icons: Mother of God in the Incarnation and the Passion*, Adam Editions, Athens, 1994, pp 153–210.

4 See Temple, *Icons and Byzantine Objects*.

5 Annemarie Weyl Carr, 'Thirteenth-Century Cyprus: Questions of Style', in Jean-Pierre Caillet & Fabienne Joubert (eds), *Orient et Occident méditerranéens au XIIIe siècle: Les programmes picturaux,* Picard, Paris, 2012, pp 67–68 and passim.

6 Geoffrey Meyer-Fernandez, 'Donner du relief à l'icône: les décors en stuc des icônes de Chypre au XIIIe siècle', *Cahiers archéologiques*, 57, 2018, pp 75–92 with earlier bibliography, especially Ioanna Kakoulli, Michael Schilling & Joy Mazurek, 'The Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa: A Technical Examination', in Annemarie Weyl Carr & Andreas Nicolaïdès (eds), *Asinou Across Time: Studies in the Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Cyprus*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 43, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington DC, 2014, pp 344–45; Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, 'Διακοσμημένοι φωτοστέφανοι σὲ εἰκόνες καὶ τοιχογραφίες τῆς Κύπρου καὶ τοῦ Ἑλλαδικοῦ χώρου', in Theodoros Papadopoullos & Athanasios Papageorghiou (eds), *Πρακτικὰ τοῦ δευτέρου διεθνοῦς κυπριολογικοῦ συνεδρίου (Λευκωσία, 20–25 Ἀπριλίου 1982), Τόμος Β': Μεσαιωνικὸ Τμῆμα*, Nicosia, 1986, pp 555–60.

7 On Kykkos Monastery and its icon, see Agamemnon Tselikas, Stylianos K Perdikis & Menelaos N Christodoulou, Ιερά Μονή Κύκκου´ Εικών ενεσπερού Φωτός [Holy Monastery of Kykkos: Images of Evening Light], Kykkos Monastery Cultural Foundation, Athens, 2010.

8 See especially the lovely Virgin from Asinou, now in the Byzantine Museum in Nicosia (Athanasios Papageorghiou, *Icons of Cyprus*, Nagel, Geneva, 1969, pp 20–21) and the Virgin in the church of Saints Barnabas and Hilarion in Peristerona Morphou, in Costas Gerasimou, cat 6 entry, in Lefki Michaelidou (ed), Ιερά Μητρόπολις Μόρφου [Holy Metropolis of Morphou], Nicosia, 2000, pp 254–55.

9 For example, the icon from the Panagia Theotokos church in Kalopanayiotis, now in the Icon Museum at the Monastery of St John Lambadistis there: see Christodoulos Hadjichristodoulou, no 91 entry, in Helen C Evans

10 (ed), *Byzantium, Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004, pp 169–70.

10 See the many 13th-century Cypriot icons reproduced in Ioannis A Eliades (ed), *Maniera Cypria: The Cypriot Painting of the 13th Century between Two Worlds,* Byzantine Museum of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation, Cypriot Tourism Organization, Nicosia 2017.

11 The brooch is especially prominent in icons of the *Madre della Consolazione* type, widespread in the 16th century but assigned a 15th-century origin by Baltoyianni, *Icons: Mother of God in the Incarnation and the Passion*, pp 273–76.

12 See the Etimasia in the vault mosaic at Monreale in Sicily, reproduced in Ernst Kitzinger, *I mosaici del period normanno in Sicilia,* vol 5, Accademia nazionale di scienze lettere e arti di Palermo, Palermo, 1994, p 3, fig 85, and the beautiful Etimasia on the back of icon BXM 1002 from the second half of the 14th century in the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens.

13 Temple, *Icons and Byzantine Objects*, no MM011.

14 A clear example is the 15th-century icon of the Mother of God Acheiropoietos with an Arab Christian family: Ioannis A Eliades, *Icons of the Virgin Mary in the Byzantine Museum: Churches and Depictions of the Virgin in the Art of Cyprus*, Byzantine Museum and Art of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation, Nicosia, 2009, p 38, plate 37.

15 Especially fine are the bema doors at the church of the Panagia Katholike in Pelendri: see Sophocles Sophocleous, *Icones de Chypre, Diocèse de Limassol, 12e-16e siècle*, Centre du patrimoine culturel, Nicosia, 2006, plate 155.

16 See the doors from the church of the Archangel Michael in Choli and the very beautiful doors from the church of St Kyriaki in Polis tis Chrysochous, both now in the Byzantine Museum of Pafos: see Sophocles Sophocleous, *Icons of Cyprus: 7th–20th Century*, Center of Cultural Heritage, Nicosia, 1994, cats 48, 55.

Cat 119
Proskynetarion or Pilgrim's Memento of the Holy Sepulchre within the City of Jerusalem, c1795
Palestine
egg tempera on canvas
920 x 1140 mm
Collection Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), Hobart, Australia

Proskynetarion or Pilgrim's Memento of the Holy Sepulchre within the City of Jerusalem
PALESTINE

Derived from *proskynesis*, Greek for worship or kneeling, the term *proskynetarion* refers to both guides for pilgrims to Jerusalem and painted topographical representations of the Holy Land, combined with related biblical and apocryphal scenes, as seen through Greek Orthodox eyes.[1] These illustrative 'maps' were particularly successful memorabilia, painted in Palestinian icon workshops and brought back home as souvenirs by pilgrims who visited the city at Easter time from different parts of the Orthodox world.[2] To facilitate transport, the maps were painted on linen, which could be rolled or folded, and measured between 100 and 200 centimetres in width. Unlike their book forms, painted *proskynetaria* do not tell pilgrims where to go but where they have *been*. For this reason Jerusalem is placed in the centre and seen from the west. The city is identifiable by its perimeter walls, the oversized cross-sectional view into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, several minor churches and monasteries, and the Islamic Dome of the Rock.

The upper zone shows the Last Judgement below the River Jordan and surrounded by narratives such as the Annunciation and the Baptism of Christ, Saint Mary of Egypt receiving communion from Saint Zosimus, and the Monastery of Saint Sabbas near the Dead Sea. The composition also includes larger icon-like panels representing the Virgin with the Child, Christ bound with chains after his arrest and the third-century mounted saints, George and Demetrius, defeating malicious enemies of Christianity. The depictions inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – Christianity's most venerated sanctuary – combine the Passion of Christ with the relevant sacred spaces in its interior, such as Christ's tomb in the Rotunda with his resurrection. The scene of the Greek Orthodox patriarch receiving the Holy Fire from angels illustrates the miraculous lighting and distribution of the fire on Easter Sunday.[3] In the lower zone the harbour of Jaffa (port of present-day Tel Aviv), where the pilgrims went ashore, can be seen to the left. The scenes illustrating the story of the Tree of Life allude to the extramural Monastery of the Holy Cross (not represented here). According to tradition, it marks the place where Lot planted the Tree of Life which later provided the wood for Solomon's temple and Christ's cross. The black rectangle in the bottom right corner was meant to commemorate the pilgrimage of the object's owner. It reveals part of the standard inscription 'Haji ... Pilgrim to the All-Holy Tomb', which normally should be completed with the pilgrim's name and the year of visit once the purchase had been concluded. In this case, the buyer is named George.

Almost 200 *proskynetaria* have been documented. Their production spans the second half of the 17th century until the first decade of the 20th century, when hand-made souvenirs were superseded by cheaper mass-produced prints. The earliest dated specimen, painted in 1704, perfectly illustrates early designs of *proskynetaria* as topographic overviews of the Holy Land inspired by western models.[4] The *proskynetaria* from the succeeding decades are marked by an increasing visualisation of biblical and apocryphal narratives, local legends such as the story of the Tree of Life, and episodes from saints' lives. Based on its style and composition, the present example is linked to a number of dated specimens from the 1790s, which display a more or less symmetrical division of the surface in rectangular fields and a strong reduction of landscape elements.[5] This group shows the gradual transition of the *proskynetarion* as a

Upper zone:

1. The Virgin Kykkotissa and Child (ΙΣ ΧΣ; Υ ΕΛΕΩΣΑ ΤΟΥ ΚΙΚΩ)
2. Christ bound with chains (nimbus: Ο[Ω]Ν abbr. 'The existing one'; to the right: Ο Ε[Ρ]ΚΟΜΕΝΟΣ Ο ΚΡΙΣΤΟΣ)
3. Saint George slaying the dragon (Ο ΑΓΙΟ[Σ] ΓΕΟΩΡΓΙΟ[Σ])
4. Saint Demetrius slaying King Kaloyan (ΟΓ Ο [Α] ΓΙΟ[Σ] [DIM] ΙΤ[ΡΙΟΣ])
5. Symbol of Evangelist John: eagle (ΙΟ)
6. Symbol of Evangelist Matthew: man (MAT)
7. Symbol of Evangelist Luke: ox (LΩ)
8. Symbol of Evangelist Mark: lion (MAP)
9. The Last Judgement
    a. The Holy Trinity (nimbus: Ο Ω Ν)
    b. *Hetoimasia*: Throne of the Second Coming between Adam and Eve (ΑΔ, ΕΒ)
    c. The Weighing of Souls (near archangels: illegible)
    d. Heaven
    e. Hell
10. The Mount of Olives (ΟΡΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΕΛΕΟΝΟ[Σ])
11. Saint Mary of Egypt receives Holy Communion from Saint Zosimas (Υ ΟΣΗΑ ΜΑΡΙ[Α] ΑΒΑ? ..[ΖΟΣ]ΙΜΑ[Σ])
12. The baptism in the River Jordan
13. Saint Sabbas and his monastery (Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΣΑΒΒΑΣ)
14. The Annunciation (Ο ΕΝΑΓΕΛΗΣΜΟΣ)
15. The blind man healed at the Pool of Siloam (ΣΗΛΟΑΜ)
16. Judas hanging from a tree (ΥΩΔΑ)
17. The vision of the prophet Baruch (ΒΑΡΑΡΩΚ Ζ)
18. The Dormition of the Virgin Mary (Υ ΚΗΜΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΥΚΩ])
19. The Nativity in Bethlehem (top: Υ ΓΕΝΗΣΗΣ; bottom: illegible)
20. The Massacre of the Innocents (Η ΒΡΟΚΤΟΝΙΑ)

Jerusalem:

21. City Walls
22. Dome of the Rock
23. Interior of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre
    f. The Resurrection; the Holy Sepulchre
    g. The Patriarch of Jerusalem receives the Holy Fire from angels
    h. The Crucifixion
    i. Lateral buildings; the open and closed doors of the church
    j. The Lamentation

Lower zone:

24. The port of Jaffa ((ΙΑΦΑ)
25. The legend of the Tree of Life
    k. Lot receives three branches of the Tree of Life from Abraham (ΕΔΟΣΕΗ Ο ΑΒΡΑΜΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΤΡΙΣ ΔΑΛΟΥΣ ΤΟΥ ΛΟΤ)
    l. Lot waters the Tree of Life
    m. The Devil drinking the life-giving water (Ο [Δ]ΗΑΒΟΛΟΣ ΠΗΝΗ ΤΟΥ ΝΕΡΟ[Ν] ΑΡΟ ΤΟΥ ΛΟΤ)

topographic design into a patchwork of smaller icons in the final quarter of the 18th century. Considering its width of 114 centimetres, this piece can be classified as one of smaller and therefore probably less expensive *proskynetaria*. **MI**

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1   Rehav Rubin, 'Proskynetarion: One Term for Two Kinds of Jerusalemite Pilgrimage Souvenirs', *Eastern Christian Art*, 10, 2014–16, pp 97-111.

2   See Pnina Arad, 'Landscape and Iconicity: *Proskynetaria* of the Holy Land from the Ottoman Period', *The Art Bulletin*, vol 100, no 4, 2018, pp 62–80; Mat Immerzeel, 'Souvenirs of the Holy Land: The Production of Proskynetaria in Jerusalem', in Bianca Kühnel, Galit Noga-Banai & Hanna Vorholt (eds), *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2014, pp 463–70; Mat Immerzeel, *The Narrow Way to Heaven: Identity and Identities in the Art of Middle Eastern Christianity*, Peeters, Leuven, 2017, pp 182–87.

3   The Distribution of the Holy Fire is an annual Orthodox tradition which can be traced back to the fourth century. On Holy Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday, the Greek Orthodox patriarch leaves the tomb of Christ with two miraculously lit candles and distributes the fire among the attendants.

4   Château-Musée de Saumur, France; Rubin, 'Proskynetarion', pp 99, 106, pls 2, 7c, 8a.

5   For example, the proskynetarion purchased by the pilgrim Demetris in 1793 in the Byzantine Museum at Athens (inv. no 01837; 84 x 86 cm); Waldemar Deluga, 'Latin Sources of 18th and 19th Centuries Proskyneteria', *Apulum*, 51, 2014, pp 39–47, fig 2; Byzantine Museum website (https://www.byzantinemuseum.gr/en/permanentexhibition/from_Byzantium_to_Modern_Era/everyday_life/?bxm=1837).
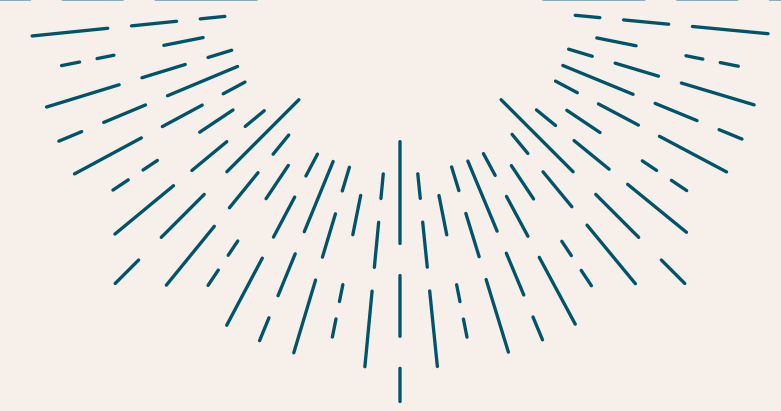
GLOSSARY
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GLOSSARY

acheiropoieta (Greek: images not made with human hands) Holy images that appear miraculously without human intervention, such as the imprinted face of Christ upon cloth. See also **Mandylion.**

Akathistos (Greek: not sitting) A long sixth-century hymn in honour of the Mother of God.

ampulla In ancient Rome, a small round vessel used for sacred purposes.

analoi A tall stand with a sloping top, on which an icon or gospel is placed for veneration in a church.

Anargyroi (Greek: the silverless) Saints who accept no fee for services. Also called Unmercenaries.

Anastasis (Greek: to stand up) The Resurrection: the episode in which the risen Jesus is believed to have descended into Hell to 'raise' humanity. Also known as the **Harrowing of Hell**.

Annunciation Archangel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she would miraculously conceive and give birth to the Son of God.

anthibolon or **anthivolon** Working drawing used by iconographers as models.

apocrypha (Greek: something hidden, secret) Biblical or related writings not forming part of the accepted canon of scripture.

apotropaic (Greek: to ward off) Having the power to avert evil influences or bad luck.

archangel Angel of high rank: the best known are Michael and Gabriel. Although strictly speaking they are *'bodiless powers'*, in icons angels are shown inhabiting bodies.

Archistrategos (Latin: chief commander) Term referring to Archangel Michael in his capacity as supreme general of all the bodiless powers (angels).

Arianism Fourth–sixth century heresy advanced by the Alexandrian priest named Arius (c250–c336). The heresy denied that Christ is divine in the same sense as God the Father.

Ark of the Covenant The gold-plated wooden box built at God's orders by Moses upon Mount Sinai to house the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. Thought long lost by some, but according to Ethiopian tradition, the Ark of the Covenant is held in the ancient holy city of Aksum. The Ark is the most sacred relic of the Jewish people.

assist Fine cross-hatching of gold and white, used in iconography to provide the effect of light emanating from the saints. See also **chrysography.**

assumption The bodily entry of a saint into heaven. The assumptions of the Mother of God and of Elijah are frequently depicted in icons.

aureole A radiant light surrounding a holy figure.

basma (Russian: type of revetment) Ornamental metal plating, usually engraved or embossed, framing an icon.

beautiful corner or **red corner.** The corner on the east side of a Russian house where icons were kept, which serves as a shrine and domestic altar.

bema (Greek: platform) The usually raised area in the eastern end of a church behind the iconostasis containing the altar. Also called the sanctuary.

boyars Rich landowners of the northeast Russian principalities, second in power only to the ruling princes in the 13th and 14th centuries.

canon (Greek: rule, standard) An official guideline or standard for church discipline, liturgy or theology. Icons are governed by canonical regulations. Also a type of hymn.

catafalque A raised platform or bier supporting a coffin or body of a dead person during a Christian funeral.

cenobitic (Greek: common, life) A monastic tradition based on communal living.

chiton A simple Greek tunic that fastens at the shoulder.

chlamys A short cape or cloak fastened at the shoulder worn by men in ancient Greece. An item of military apparel and state dress in the Byzantine empire. Also worn by military saints and archangels.

chrysography Writing in gold. Hatching using gold leaf, mainly seen on garments and mandorlas, applied in the last stage of icon production.

ciborium A protective canopy structure supported by columns, covering an altar or other sacred place.

cinnabar Scarlet paint derived from highly toxic mercuric sulphide, often used in icon painting.

Comnene Byzantine Greek noble family who ruled the Byzantine empire from 1081 until 1185.

deacon's doors Side doors of the iconostasis through which deacons pass during the liturgy.

deification Participation in Christ's divinity through purification of mind (prayer) and body (asceticism). Also known as theosis.

deesis or **deisis** (Greek: entreaty) The Virgin Mary, John the Baptist and sometimes other saints depicted together interceding with Christ on behalf of humankind. The deesis is sited in a central, commanding position on an iconostasis.

Desert Fathers, Desert Mothers Saints who lived an ascetic life in the wilderness of Egypt and the Levant during the third to seventh centuries.

despotic icons (Greek: master) The large icons on the iconostasis directly flanking the **royal** doors.

docetic Early Orthodox doctrine, ruled heretical, that Christ did not have a real body during his life on earth but only an apparent or phantom one.

dodekaorton (Greek: 12 feasts) A series of icons representing the **Twelve Great Feasts**.

Dormition (Latin: falling asleep) One of the **Twelve Great Feasts**. The death, or 'falling asleep', of the Mother of God, followed by her assumption into Heaven. Also known as the Koimesis.

Ecumenical council A meeting of bishops and other church authorities to consider and rule on questions of Christian doctrine, administration, discipline and other matters.

Eleousa (Greek: she who has mercy) Icon type depicting the Virgin and Child with Jesus's cheek touching his mother's face.

Emmanuel Christ as a child or beardless youth.

encaustic Ancient form of paint created by mixing coloured pigment with heated wax.

Epiphany One of the **Twelve Great Feasts**, commemorating the Baptism of Christ. See **Theophany**.

epistyle The lintel of the iconostasis above the royal doors.

equal-to-the-apostles A title bestowed upon certain saints, including the **Myrrhbearers**.

eremitic A person who seeks solitude; hermit.

Etimasia or Hetoimasia The motif of the empty or prepared throne, indicating either the presence of Christ (used when the representation of Christ was problematic), or a readiness for his Second Coming.

evangelists The authors of the four gospels, often symbolically depicted as a human (Matthew), lion (Mark), lamb (Luke) and eagle (John), symbolism derived from the vision of Ezekiel 10.

Exaltation of the Cross One of the **Twelve Great Feasts**, honouring the cross upon which Christ was crucified and to commemorate Saint Helena's discovery of its relics in 326 and its later retrieval from the Persians in 629. Also known as the Elevation of the Cross.

fools for Christ Giving up one's worldly possessions to enter the religious life. Feigning insanity in order to expose hypocrisy and learn humility.

Forerunner Epithet for John the Baptist, Christ's older cousin, who preached about God's Final Judgement and baptised repentant followers in preparation for it.

galaktotrophousa (Greek: the milk-giver) Icon type showing the Mother of God breast feeding Jesus.

gesso A hard-drying, chalk-rich white paint used as a base layer for painted and gilded icon panels.

globus cruciger An orb surmounted with a cross symbolising Christian authority over the world.

Glykophilousa (Greek: of the sweet kiss) Icon type depicting the Virgin Mary and Child embracing one another. Jesus is often shown gently touching the chin of his mother, who is saddened by a sense of his destiny.

hagiography (Greek: holy writing) Biography of a saint.

Harrowing of Hell See **Anastasis**

hermeneia (Greek: interpretation) Guide, patterns, for icon painters.

hesychasm (Greek: silence) A tradition of silent monastic prayer.

hierarchy of angels Pseudo-Dionysius in the fifth or sixth century defined nine levels of spiritual beings divided into three spheres: *first sphere* – seraphim, cherubim, thrones; *second sphere* – dominions, virtues, powers; *third sphere* – principalities, archangels and angels.

himation (Greek: outer garment) Heavy cloak worn in ancient Greece by men and women over a tunic or **chiton**.

Hodegetria (Greek: she who points the way) Icon type in which the Virgin Mary is depicted pointing towards her child. It is the most important icon of Mary because it is believed to have been originally painted by Saint Luke and therefore is miraculous in origin. Many variants, often named after their location, are based on this type.

IC XC Initials of Jesus Christ.

icon or **eikon** (Greek: image) A holy image for use in liturgy or private devotion.

iconoclasm (Greek: destruction of images) A political-religious movement in the seventh to ninth centuries, enforced by Eastern Roman emperors, which rejected all imagery as idolatrous and promoted their destruction. The end of iconoclasm is celebrated annually (on the first Sunday of Lent) as the **Triumph of Orthodoxy**.

iconodule (Greek: one who serves images) A defender of the veneration of icons.

iconostasis (Greek: icon wall) The screen of icons separating the sanctuary from the nave in a church. Also called the **templon**.

incipit First few words of a manuscript, early printed book or chanted liturgical text.

Kazanskaya or **Mother of God of Kazan**. A famous miracle-working icon associated with the Russian city of Kazan.

kekryphalos (Greek: hidden) A coif or light cloth to cover the hair, worn by female saints including the Mother of God under her **maphorian**.

khorugv A religious banner in Russia consisting of an icon of Christ, the Mother of God or a saint.

knyaz Slavic prince.

kovcheg The hollowed-out centre of a Russian icon panel which symbolises the ark of salvation.

kiot A protective wood or metal casing for a small or portable icon, often with a shrine-like shape and doors.

lavra Monastery consisting of cells or caves that house religious monks.

lorica squamata A type of scaled armour worn by the ancient Roman military during the Roman republic (c509–27 BCE); in icons often worn by military saints.

loros A long narrow, jewel-encrusted belt or scarf worn by the imperial family and high-ranking members of the Byzantine court and by archangels in attendance on Christ.

made without hands (Нерукотворные) An icon type, known as the **Mandylion**, depicting an image of Christ miraculously created when he wiped his face on a cloth. The term is also applied to other miraculously created images. See also **acheiropoieta.**

majuscule Large lettering, capital letters.

mandorla Also called doxa or glory. A circular or almond-shaped aureola or frame surrounding the glorified body of Christ or the Mother of God.

Mandylion (Arabic: towel) A cloth or shroud that received the impression of Christ's face and was later said to have been sent to King Abgar of Edessa. See **made without hands**.

maphorion (Greek: shawl) A shawl or cloak worn by married women in late antiquity that covered the whole body.

mappula A large handkerchief or napkin carried in the hand by people of high rank and carried over the arm of the clergy during the liturgy.

melote (Latin: unshorn sheepskin) Hairy garment worn by prophets such as John the Baptist and Elijah. Also called milot.

miaphysitism Doctrine that Jesus is fully divine and fully human, in one nature. Also known as monophysitism.

miniscule Lower case letters in an inscription.

MP ΘΥ Greek initials for *Mētēr Theo*, meaning Mother of God.

Myrrhbearers Mary Mother of God, Mary Magdalene and Mary of Cleophas, the three women who discovered the empty tomb of the resurrected Christ, considered equal to the apostles.

narthex Entrance or lobby area of an Orthodox church.

nave Main part of a church.

Nicene Creed A formal summary of Christian beliefs promulgated at the first Council of Nicaea in 325, which begins by expressing belief in the one God in three persons.

niello Decorative black linework on metalwork, sometimes etched or engraved.

nimbus Golden halo around the heads of Mary, Christ and saints.

ΟΩΝ Trigraph of 'I am that I am' (Exodus 2:14) inscribed inside Christ's halo.

ofeni Wandering merchants in Russia who sold icons.

oklad A metal revetment which covers an icon with cutouts showing the figures' faces. Also called a **riza**.

Old Believers Schismatic group that was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1666 after refusing to accept the liturgical reforms of Patriarch Nikon (term 1652–66). Persecuted by the state, they preserved old icons and the most conservative forms of icon painting.

Old Testament Trinity Icon type symbolising the Holy Trinity as angelic visitors to the house of Abraham (Genesis 18).

omophorion (Greek: stole) A white stole worn by a bishop over the shoulders, symbolising the lost sheep that was found and carried on the shoulders of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

orans (Greek: prayful) A praying posture in which the palm of the hands are lifted up.

Palaiologan dynasty A Byzantine Greek family who became the last and longest reigning dynasty of the Byzantine empire, ruling from 1259 to 1453.

Pantocrator (Greek: almighty) Title given to an image of Christ as the ruler of the universe. An icon type.

palladium A sacred relic or icon believed to have a protective role in military contexts for a whole city, people or nation.

patriarch The head of one of a number of Eastern Christian churches.

phelonion A liturgical outer vestment worn by a priest during a service.

piadnitsa A small replica of a famous icon.

podlinnik A collection of icon patterns. See also **hermeneia.**

proskynesis (Greek: worship, kneeling) Veneration given to icons and relics of the saints.

Protoevangelism of James Also known as the Infancy Gospel or *Proto-gospel*. A second-century apocryphal work containing influential narratives of the life of the Virgin Mary and the birth of Jesus.

proskynetarion Souvenir map depicting the key biblical sites in and around Jerusalem commissioned by Orthodox pilgrims to the Holy Land. Also a guide in book form.

pseudo-kufic Imitation Arabic Kufic script, used in the Renaissance to evoke the Orient.

pteryges (Greek: feathers, protective skirt) Strip-like lappets (decorative flaps) attached to armour to protect the upper limbs, worn by soldiers in the Roman armies and by military saints.

riasny Long strings of pearls derived from Byzantine court headdresses, used to 'dress' icons of the Mother of God.

riza (Russian: robe) Metal cover or revetment of an icon, also known as an **oklad**.

royal doors In a church, the central doors or gates in the iconostasis leading to the sanctuary, which usually depict the Annunciation. also known as beautiful doors.

sacerdotal Relating to priests or the priesthood: priestly.

sakkos (Greek: chasuble) A large wide-sleeved tunic worn by a bishop.

sankir Green-brown tempera paint, used for a saint's face and exposed body parts in Russian icons.

seraph (Hebrew: to burn) Angel with six wings of fire. Plural is seraphim.

sticharion A full-length sleeved garment worn by priests and deacons.

Stoglav Synod Church council convened in 1551 in Moscow to centralise church authority, define and enforce canonical forms, regulate icon and book production and establish codes for the Orthodox clergy.

suppedaneum (Latin: under the feet) Footstool or crossbar on the cross beneath Christ's feet.

synaxarion Compendium of lives of the saints arranged in order of their anniversaries.

tempera (темпера) Paints made with the yolk or yolk and white of eggs.

templon See **iconostasis**.

tepidarium Warm Roman bathhouse offered to the freezing 40 martyrs of Sebaste to induce them to recant their Christian faith.

thaumaturgic Wonder- or miracle-working.

Theotokos (Greek: she who gave birth to God) The Mother of God (*Mētēr Theo*).

torotsi or **toroki** Ribbons in the hair of angels, representing a current of divine hearing.

Triumph of Orthodoxy The end of iconoclasm, declared a heresy at the behest of Empress Irene (reign 780–802) at the Second Council of Nicea in 787, then reaffirmed in 843 and celebrated as an important feast day, on the first Sunday of Lent.

tsata An upturned crescent-shaped pectoral symbolising high rank in the heavenly kingdom.

Twelve Great Feasts In the Orthodox calendar, the 12 major events in the life of Christ, his mother and the church itself, comprising fixed feasts which occur on the same day each year, and movable feasts which are linked to the shifting dates of Easter. The feasts are: the Nativity of the Virgin Mary; Exaltation of the Cross; Presentation of the Virgin; the Nativity of Christ; Christ's Baptism (Theophany or Epiphany); Presentation of Jesus at the Temple; Annunciation; Palm Sunday; Christ's Ascension; Pentecost; the Transfiguration, and the Dormition (falling asleep of Mary).

Umilenie Icon type, variant of **Eleousa** in which the Virgin holds her son in the right arm.

velum (Latin: cloth, covering, awning, curtain, veil) A large red cloth used in icons as a canopy over holy figures, to indicate an indoor setting.

vita icon An icon that depicts episodes in the life of a saint.

Vladimirskaya, or Mother of God of Vladimir. A wonder-working icon of the Mother of God, painted in Constantinople in 1131 and highly venerated in Russia. Named after the city of Vladimir.

vrezka or **vrezok** A highly valued old icon which has been inserted into a new plank, in a process developed by **Old Believers**.

zakaznaya ikona (Russian: commissioned icon) Personalised icon that includes the client's eponymous saint.

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Australiensia 6, Melbourne 2006) and on ritual language in the late antique Eastern Mediterranean ('Writing divine speech: Greek transliterations of Near Eastern Languages in the Hellenistic East', *Mnemosyne-Leiden-Supplementum*, Brill, Leiden, 2007).

Sophie Matthiesson is senior curator of international art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki and was previously curator of international painting and sculpture at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2006–19). A specialist in French revolutionary art (PhD, Leeds and Monash universities, 2016), in 1997 she completed an MA in Byzantine visual culture with Liz James at Sussex University. In 2014 she collaborated with Gordon Morrison on the exhibition *Eikōn: Icons of the Orthodox Christian World* at the Art Gallery of Ballarat.

Gordon Morrison is former director of the Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria (2004–17) and was previously registrar and head of exhibitions and collection management at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. In 1997 he co-curated with Jeremy Spier the exhibition *San Marco and Venice* at the National Gallery of Victoria. In 2014 he curated the exhibition *Eikōn: Icons of the Orthodox Christian World*, Art Gallery of Ballarat.

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Cover image:
Saint George and the Dragon, c1500 (detail)
Crete
egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood
431 x 364 x 45 mm
on loan from a private collection, Canberra