



# PRESENT ABSENCE

*Icons from the Collection of  
the Patriarch Athenagoras  
Orthodox Institute*

ПРИИДИ ДАЮЩЕ  
ТЕКОМ НСАМО  
ВЪ ВСИ ВРЕМЕ  
ТРУЖЕННИИ

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**Triptych with *Deesis***  
**Brass**  
**19<sup>th</sup> c. (?)**  
**Russian**



The medium of relief on this small piece challenges our understanding of what icons should look like, and reveals how they could take on various shapes to convey complex meaning. Metal relief is particularly noteworthy, for it reflects light and can thus be difficult to decipher. Depending on the way in which it is displayed, it can be veiled by darkness or by flashes of bright light, and thus become entirely incomprehensible or only partially visible.<sup>1</sup> This performance makes it clear to the faithful that the holy is not easily available, requiring adjustment and change, literally and metaphorically, in one's point of view.

The triptych was undoubtedly intended for personal use and is richly adorned with images and inscriptions, presupposing careful looking and close handling. Indeed, the facial features of the figures represented here are worn out, indicating frequent contact and sensual, tactile engagement. The individual panels are connected with hinges and can easily open or close. Similar metal icons were produced in large quantities and were meant to literally bring the church into the private sphere. They could contain the so-called feast cycle, as seen in an eighteenth-century brass polyptych at Princeton<sup>2</sup> or, like our triptych,

could display a tripartite composition known as *deesis*.<sup>3</sup>

When closed, our triptych shows the Vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which can be seen also on other metal icons from the same period. The composition is lavishly framed with vegetal motifs suggesting the life-giving properties of the image and its contents; at the center is a cross on both sides of which the Greek letters for Christ's name are inscribed. The rest of the inscriptions are in Russian—on top is seen the abbreviation for the "King of Glory," below the side bar appears the "Son of God," and in the middle, two letters, K and T, stand for the Russian word for Cross (Kr'st). The skull of Adam is at the base of the cross and two letters, G and A, identify the site as Golgotha. A prominent cityscape rises behind the cross and stands for the heavenly version of Jerusalem. The reference to the Crucifixion is unmistakable; its message is furthered by the fact that it appears on the same leaf as Virgin Mary, reminding of the prominent association between representations of the Mother of God and the Passion.<sup>4</sup>

When opened, the triptych displays Christ in the middle panel, Virgin Mary is on his right as is typical, and John the Baptist is on his left. Christ, like Mary and John, is represented half length; he is identified with the traditional Greek *sigla*—IC XC—and

1 Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 121-43.

2 Slobodan Ćurčić, "Polyptych," in *Architecture as Icon: Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art*, ed. Slobodan Ćurčić and Evangelia Hadjistryphonos (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 290-93.

3 On the meaning and iconography of the *deesis* see Yohana Yunker's entry in this catalog.

4 Maria Vassilaki and Niki Tsironis, "Representations of the Virgin and Their Association with the Passion of Christ," in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira, 2000), 453-63.

in Russian as The Ruler of All. In his left hand he supports a book inscribed with a passage from Matthew 11:28: “Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Virgin Mary, identified in Greek as the Mother of God, leans in the direction of the central panel with Christ; her right hand is lifted in supplication, and in her left she supports a scroll which unfurls unnaturally upwards. It is inscribed in Russian with the beginning of a prayer: “My most merciful Lord, Jesus Christ.” This representation of the Virgin is of particular interest because it invokes two different images of Mary—one, referred to as *paraklesis* or intercession, in which she holds a scroll with petition to Christ, and which appears as early as the eighth or ninth century,<sup>5</sup> and one known as the *hodegetria* or the one who shows the way in which the *Theotokos* supports the Child in her left hand, replaced in this triptych by the inscribed scroll, and gestures in his direction with her right. The *Hodegetria* was a large miraculous icon believed to have been painted by Luke; until the fifteenth century she was the protectress of Constantinople and spawned multiple copies that furthered her fame amongst the faithful, East and West.<sup>6</sup> In Russia, the iconographic type was utilized for other important icons like the Virgin of Smolensk and the Iverskaya. It is important to note here that the viewer of our triptych would have probably considered the scroll as a substitute for the Child Christ; theologically this makes perfect sense—he is after all the Word materialized in a human form. Indeed, the prayer on the scroll is articulated in relief; the words have taken on sensual appearance, inviting touching as well as reading, making it apparent that they had become palpable and real, just as the second person of the Trinity had at the moment of the Incarnation.

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5 Nancy P. Ševčenko, “Virgin Paraklesis,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan et al., 3 vols. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3:2177.

6 Christine Angelidi and Titos Papamastorakis, “The Veneration of the Virgin Hodegetria and the Hodegon Monastery,” in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira, 2000), 373-87; Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 109-43.

The image of John the Baptist presents an interesting iconographic puzzle. He is identified as St. John the Baptist (not the *Prodromos* or the Forerunner as is more common in Greek icons), and, as in other icons seen in this exhibition, he is represented with wings, which refers to him being identified by the Evangelist Mark (1:2) as a messenger or *angelos* in Greek. Such images of John appeared as early as the late thirteenth century and proliferated all over the Orthodox world, Russia included.<sup>7</sup> John holds a scroll, which unlike that of the *Theotokos*, flows downward; it is inscribed with a verse from the gospel of John (1:29): “Behold the Lamb of God.” These words are ‘translated’ into an image—instead of his head, as is more common and as seen on the painted icon exhibited here, the Baptist supports a paten with a small child—the Lamb—as the liturgical sacrifice. The name for this particular representation of the Christ Child, recognizable here because of his cruciform halo, is *melismos*, which literally means division in Greek. It refers to a particular ritual in the liturgy in which the consecrated bread is broken before Communion. In the course of the twelfth century, serious debates took place to clarify the understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, in the course of which the *melismos* was explicitly identified with Jesus’ living body.<sup>8</sup> The liturgical significance of John’s representation here is further confirmed by the way in which his right hand hovers over the paten, blessing the infant, as a priest would do before fracturing the bread. The church was thus brought into the house of the faithful who, while looking at the triptych, could choose to contemplate various aspects of Orthodox theology, such as the significance of the Eucharist and the power and meaning of supplication, of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion.

R. Schroeder

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7 For a discussion of this iconography see Colette Walker’s entry on the nineteenth-century icon of John the Baptist.

8 For images of the Christ Child in the altar apse as *melismos* see Sharon E. J. Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries: Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1999), 40-47.



**Our Lady of Kazan**  
*18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> c.*  
*Russian*  
*Tempera on wood*

Our Lady of Kazan is a Russian icon, the original of which was brought from Constantinople to the Russian city of Kazan in the thirteenth century. The icon disappeared shortly afterward and only resurfaced in the sixteenth century when the Virgin appeared in a dream to a ten-year-old girl and instructed her to dig up the icon from a garden near the ashes of a burned home. It was then taken to the Church of St. Nicholas where a blind man was cured by it the same day. The priest of the church later brought it to Kazan's Cathedral of the Annunciation. The icon moved to many places over the centuries with cathedrals dedicated to it in Kazan, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. It was carried in several significant battles against invaders,

making it a miraculous icon and a symbol of the Russian state.

This icon has a light ochre background with the ornate Greek inscription MP for *Miter* (Mother) and ΘΥ for *Theou* (God); meaning Mother of God. Written above the Virgin's left shoulder are the Russian words *Kazanskaia Presvetaia Bogoroditsa*, which translate as "Most Holy Mother of God of Kazan." To the right of the Child's halo is written IC XC, the Greek abbreviation for Jesus Christ.

The Virgin is facing forward, visible from the chest up, with her arms noticeably missing. Scholars have not attempted to explain this unusual iconographic element, which most likely evolved from earlier images in which she is seen from the shoulders up. It is

often said that this iconographic type emerges from the *Hodegetria* icon of Constantinople in which the Virgin is making an intercessory gesture toward the Christ Child, seated in her lap, and he answers her with his right arm raised in a blessing (see page 7 for further discussion of the *Hodegetria* type of Marian icon). This icon is most likely related to the miraculous *Hodegetria*, thought to have been painted by the Apostle Luke. However, in the *Hodegetria* type, Mary is communicating to her son through the gesture of her right hand, while in the Kazanskaia icon her hands are hidden and Christ is standing in front of her.

In this icon, the Virgin's head is tilted affectionately toward a miniature adult Christ while her eyes gaze absently past the viewer. Christ looks to his right, potentially at his Mother and lifts his right hand in a blessing. Mary is wearing a maroon mantle with *chrysography* (gold lines that run through her dress), typically associated with her and with the royalty of her position. Christ's robe is gold with maroon lines, likewise suggesting his elevated station. The similarity in their coloring and facial features suggests their oneness of relationship. The color palette is limited and is reminiscent of the artistic tradition of the Pskov region, which was in turn strongly influenced by the ascetic *hesychast* movement in Byzantine theology and the Byzantine idea of using color to convey religious ideas. The red-brown monochromatic colors do not startle the viewer but instead create an atmosphere that suggests quiet inward reflection in order to achieve an experiential knowledge of God.

The triple ochre trim of Mary's robe forms the shape of a triangle at her chest, creating a natural v-shape that leads our eyes to her face. She is enrobed in dark clothing adorned with traditional ornamental soft white star-like shapes that represent her eternal virginity—retained before, during, and after her pregnancy. Christ covers the third star, suggesting perhaps that he is a star himself, and a source of light. The focal point of the icon is the Virgin's head and its relationship to the standing Christ. Their images are flattened, but the folds in their garments and soft hint of volume

in their necks invoke movement. The absence of Mary's arms creates a natural focus on her face, which is highlighted by a powerful light source from the upper left that is stronger than the yellowish background. Her eyes are large and almond shaped, gazing just beyond the viewer, her gaze sad yet her features calm. Her nose is highly stylized with an angled, thick straight line that emphasizes the tilt of her head toward her Son. The bridge of her nose connects to two curved lines just above her eyebrows, suggesting concern on an otherwise blemish- and wrinkle-free face.

The absence of her arms speaks to her inability to hold onto her Son. The features of his face are minimized and his clothing is an extension of her in color. While the lines of his garments are soft, hers are a combination of strong angles, soft folds, and beautiful adornments. The features of her face are large and beautiful while his are small and pushed together, with a forehead that is disproportionately large. His ageless appearance indicates that Mary had not given birth to an ordinary child. In the Middle Ages it was the childlike qualities of Jesus that were emphasized, as his divinity was no longer in question, and it was the human aspects of his existence that were seen as miraculous. As she leans towards him her mantle falls between him and his halo, demonstrating how his mission could not have taken place without her as the vessel to make his Spirit into flesh. This is similar to the iconography of the veil in the Virgin of Kykkos in which Christ is tugging on her mantle, symbolizing Mary veiling Christ's divinity in flesh (see page 6 for further discussion). Without her, the divine could not have become human.

A. Taylor



**Our Lady of Kazan**  
*late 18<sup>th</sup> early 19<sup>th</sup> c.*  
*Russian*  
*Tempera on wood, silver-gilt*  
*revetment and enamel*

This icon, labeled in Russian “Our Lady of Kazan” in blue letters at the bottom of the frame, depicts a sad-faced Madonna shown from the chest up, shrouded in a robe with her arms hidden. Her child stands to her left portrayed as a small youth shown from the knees upward. Their bodies and halos take up the majority of space within the elaborate cloisonné enamel frame. Directly in the center of the Virgin’s garment is a very tiny stamp from the workshop of the famed Russian jewelry firm Fabergé. The firm had five locations at one point, but the majority of work was produced in St. Petersburg and Moscow. While the St. Petersburg location handled most of the imperial work, the Moscow location, where this icon was most likely made, produced the commercial work. A

similar icon to this one was produced by the Mishukov family in the Moscow branch, who ran the firm from 1880-1900 and specialized in the reproduction of fifteenth- through seventeenth-century Russian enamels.

The Virgin of Kazan is one of the most popular images of Russian identity. The icon was often carried in processions and battles and was famous for miracle-working powers. The revetment of this particular icon is made of silver with a cloisonné enameled frame and halos. The figures’ faces and the Child’s right hand, raised in blessing, are the only visibly painted elements of the icon; the rest are hidden by the revetment. Earlier *Kazanskaia* icons housed in Kazan, Moscow, and St. Petersburg cathedrals were

heavily decorated with precious jewels fastened to an ornamental gold or silver sheet which covered the background and frame. The *Kazanskaia* icon that is housed today in the Vatican and believed to be the original, for example, is decorated with diamonds, emeralds, and a gold revetment.

The use of revetments goes back to the immediate aftermath of Iconoclasm. As early as the tenth and eleventh centuries, icons were being embellished with precious metal frames or halos, but it was not until the thirteenth century that the design flourished. According to one Russian scholar, they possibly derived from the tradition of antique bas-relief sculpture, which was similar in its three-dimensional use of material. They may also have been an aesthetic response to the increased usage of precious metals and stones for liturgical furniture and elaborate sanctuaries.

The faces of the two figures are solemn, with Mary's showing more sadness than that of her Son, who seems to have a sense of calm about him. Christ is staring directly at the viewer while Mary leans her head toward him and looks off into the distance just to the right of the viewer. Their clothing is cast in the silver of the revetment. The bottom of Mary's garment has a fringed trim, an element that began to appear in Marion icons from the fourteenth century onward. Occasionally such trim would be inscribed with an excerpt from Psalm 44, interpreting Mary as the heavenly bride. The presence of these fringes might have contributed to the practice that arose of giving copies of the Virgin of Kazan icon as wedding gifts.

The monochromatic metal effect makes the clothing of the two figures look heavy due to the multiple folds in the fabric. We can see the weight of the world literally on their shoulders. This heaviness and solidity in material is counterbalanced by Jesus' outstretched hand offering a glimpse of flesh amidst the mass of silver and creates a triangular focal point between their heads and his hand. It is also balanced by the small, colorful, intricate detail of their halos and the frame surrounding them. Mary's halo has the most elaborate design with a floral pattern on the

inside consisting of light and dark blue, and red and white flowers with green leaves. Flowers have long been associated with the Virgin—particularly roses, symbolizing love, and lilies representing her purity. The rim of her halo displays the same repeating pattern that outlines Christ's halo, further making visible their connection to one another. His halo is slightly more subdued with a white cross and blue Greek letters that stand for the "One Who Is," seen on other images of Christ in this exhibition.

The figures are related to one another through their overlapping silver garments that almost appear as one continuous piece of clothing and the decoration in their halos, which is similar to the patterned design in the frame. The frame displays floral motifs that, while articulated with similar colors, differ from those on the figures' halos in their greater naturalism. The corners are additionally emphasized with square plaques adorned with enamel flowers that suggest roses. It is not uncommon to see ornamental arrangements of this kind in other contemporary icons with metal revetments. In this icon the floral frame literally encloses Mary, invoking the symbolism of the Virgin and the enclosed garden, a symbol of the Immaculate Conception taken from the Song of Solomon 4:12: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." It might also be symbolic of the discovery of the icon buried in a garden in 1579.

A. Taylor





**Our Lady of Kykkos**  
18<sup>th</sup> c.  
Greek  
Tempera on wood

According to tradition, a hermit named Esaias was told by God to bring the original icon of Mary, painted by the Apostle Luke, from Constantinople to Cyprus, where it eventually was donated by the emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) who also provided a bequest to have a monastery built at Kykkos to house it. Although a fire occurred at the monastery in 1365, the icon was miraculously saved and the monastery was rebuilt by the French Queen Eleanor. It was after this event that the name *Kykkotissa* was given to the icon and the iconographic type spread throughout the Orthodox world. The original is said to be housed to this

day at the Kykkos monastery, fully hidden within a metal revetment and a woven skirt known as a *podēa*. The image on the revetment displays a representation of the painted icon, giving us a hint of its original appearance, despite its not having been uncovered since the fourteenth century. A different tradition, still preserved by the Cypriots today, claims that before the monastery was built a bird with a human voice was seen flying around the area singing:

Kykkou, Kykkou, Kykkos' hill  
A monastery the site shall fill  
A golden girl shall enter in  
And never shall come out again.

The Kykkotissa icon in our collection dates from the eighteenth century and is made of tempera painted on wood. It might have been used in personal devotion or it could have been located in a church. Either way, it has suffered much damage and its left side has broken off. All that remains are the heads, halos, and partial upper body of Mary and her Son, along with the Greek inscription that identifies her as “Our Merciful Lady of Kykkos.”

The reference in this icon to the Virgin Mary not only as *Kykkotissa* but also as *Eleousa* or “merciful” is of particular interest. In the eleventh century, a new theme emerged in the depiction of the Virgin, referring to her as the Mother of Tenderness. The term was popular in hymnography and homiletics, and was invoked to refer to the compassionate nature of Mary and her intercessory powers. It also acquired a visual aspect—in *Eleousa*-type icons, the *Theotokos* (Mother of God) is represented cradling her Child, their cheeks touching, his little hand wrapped around her neck in a gentle embrace. Like other representations of the Virgin, these images are visual complements to texts that relate the immense love and touching sadness inherent in the relationship between the Mother and Son. The earliest account of this image comes from an *Eleousa* monastery founded in 1085 in the Balkans where an account of a large panel of the standing Virgin describes “the Child nestling against her breast and babbling sweetly with her.” A concrete example of the type is the well-known *Vladimirskaia* icon today in Moscow, considered since the twelfth century one of the holy protectors of the Russian state.

In this iconographic type of the Virgin of Kykkos, Mother and Son are in a relaxed embrace. His right arm is thrown over hers as his head leans upon his shoulder. She presses her son to her face while his bare legs, no longer visible here due to damage, would most likely have been squirming as he tries to free himself from her arms. This was the first iconographic image to display the Christ’s uncovered legs, interpreted not as simple child’s play but symbolically read as indicating his readiness to accept his destiny. His generously revealed flesh is also a reference to his humanity,

rather than divinity. The passion of Mary’s embrace is mirrored by the passion in Christ’s legs: he is ready to take off on his human journey of suffering; she holds him tight, her gesture filled with love and compassion.

Although it is not visible because of the damage, Christ would have been grabbing his mother’s veil with his left hand, the veil standing as a metaphor of human flesh and by extension of the role Mary plays in the Incarnation—veiling God with her flesh, creating “the garment of his divinity.” The Kykkos Virgin traditionally wears a double veil, which may refer to her epithet *Theoskepaste*, meaning “covered by God,” but may also suggest the symbolic marriage veil that Mary wears as the Bride of Christ. With his right hand, Christ is holding a parchment scroll representing the Divine Logos; he may be giving it to Mary, or alternately she may be giving it to him. Made of animal skin, the scroll stands not only for the Word, but also for the Incarnation.

The color palette consists of greens, white, red, and gold. Against the dark green background, the bodies and garments of the two figures are light colored with highlights of green and gold. We can see remnants of a characteristic floral motif on Mary’s veil, the metaphor of silky petals indicative of the flesh she gave to God. The colored contour lines of their garments create a softness that is mirrored in the color of their faces and complemented by the golden glow of their halos. Both Jesus and Mary have blushing cheeks and rose-kissed lips, giving the otherwise plain faces a sense of warmth and humanity. There is no doubt the two are related; his face is a miniature version of hers. Despite the extensive damage, the repetition of round shapes and a warm color palette convey a sense of calm, while the distant gazes of the forward-facing figures tell of the pain that is yet to come.

A. Taylor

**Virgin Mary and  
St. George Diptych**  
18<sup>th</sup> c. (?)  
Ethiopian  
Tempera on wood



The development of the painted panel icon in Ethiopia was connected with the rise of the veneration of Virgin Mary in the middle of the fifteenth century. The emperor Dawit I (1382-1418) created a text, *The Miracles of Mary*, that gave rise to the production of Marian icons and made their veneration a central feature of Sunday services. As a result, patrons commissioned pictures of the Virgin painted on wood to use in private as well as public devotions. These were usually square in format and were carved with an engaged frame. The colors used in the paintings were limited to the available pigments, namely: red, yellow, charcoal, white, and indigo blue, the latter imported from India. These pigments were mixed with an animal protein to create tempera, which was applied directly to a prepared panel. Marian icons continued to grow in popularity throughout the sixteenth century and by the seventeenth century small wooden diptychs and triptychs similar to this one seem to have been produced in mass quantity; many were small enough to be worn or carried as amulets.

The left panel contains an image of Mary holding the Christ Child on her lap. She 'speaks' to him with her right hand

and he responds with a gesture of blessing. This type of Marian iconography is referred to as the *Hodegetria*, meaning "one who shows the Way." The image originated in Constantinople and is believed to have been an authentic portrait of Mary, painted by her contemporary, the Apostle Luke. In it, Mary is pointing to her Son as the way to salvation and he responds in a blessing to her and, ultimately, to all of humanity. The right panel is a two-tiered composition: on top is St. George and below is an image difficult to identify. It appears to represent a crowd looking at a figure, possibly Mary, who is in turn pointing to a bearded man, possibly Christ, holding a yellow bag.

The Marian iconography of this particular Ethiopian icon was developed from a *Hodegetria*-style icon, the *Salus Populi Romani* (the Salvation of the Roman People), which the Jesuit missionaries introduced to Ethiopia in the early seventeenth century. Mass-printed copies were brought by the missionaries to use as a conversion tool to Catholicism. The Ethiopians were not very receptive, however, and remained affiliated with the Oriental church, while utilizing the icon for their own devotions, making it a

popular prototype for Mary and Child images.

In the *Salus Populi Romani* panel, today in the Santa Maria Maggiore church in Rome, Jesus holds a book in his left hand, raising his right hand in a blessing as he looks up towards his Mother. Mary's gaze is directed toward the viewer. She looks to the people, drawing them with her gaze to focus on her divine Son. While in most *Hodegetria* images, Mary's right hand is pointing to Christ, in the *Salus Populi Romani* her right hand holds a handkerchief and crosses over her left hand in a gentle embrace of her Child. The handkerchief may reference the cloth she will use to wipe her eyes in the Crucifixion, its presence thus anticipating the sacrificial death of her Child. For a Roman woman to have a handkerchief also would have indicated that she was of high status—to have this extra piece of cloth was a considerable luxury. By giving Mary a kerchief, the painter also indicated that she was a noble woman, literally because she was born to a rich family (as the Protoevangelium of James recounts) and metaphorically because she was chosen to become the Mother of God.

The image in this icon follows the stylistic conventions of the fifteenth-century Ethiopian painter Fre Seyon known for his distinctive physiognomy: round faces, long noses, small mouths, an occasional burst of rippling drapery, and angels who provide shelter for Mother and Child with their wings. In this icon we can see the contour lines of Mary's robe made of repeated thick, dark lines, similar to Seyon's depictions of extravagant cascading hems that contrast with long, straight, stiff drapery folds outlined in darker shades. Mary also wears a blue—now faded to black—*maphorion*, or cloak, modeled after that of the Roman icon. In the Ethiopian iconography her fingers have become exaggeratedly long. We also notice different patterns of fabric on Christ's robe, the angel's garments and the cushion on which they are sitting. These could represent the elaborate fabrics brought over from India, an important trade partner for Ethiopia since antiquity. The two angels closest to Mary—Gabriel and Michael, perhaps—hold swords. At the Ethiopian court, the sword was a nobleman's accessory that

signified his status as a royal courtier; already in the fifteenth century Fre Seyon had used this attribute to suggest the high placement of the archangels in the hierarchy of the celestial court. The umbrella-like arrangement of the angels' wings also held imperial associations as they stand in for the canopy placed above the emperor's head to indicate his authority.

The placement of Michael and Gabriel and the juxtaposition of Marian imagery alongside St. George are traditional in Ethiopian imagery. Since the Crusades, Mary and military saints had often been depicted together, given the distinct militant associations of the Virgin who was frequently invoked as an unconquerable general and a leader of troops. Her interventions were essential in defending cities from Constantinople to Siena from their enemies. In Ethiopia, St. George is represented more than any other saint, except for Mary. From the seventeenth century onward, he is often pictured alongside the Virgin, possibly suggesting equal veneration. Although he was martyred in 313, his stories were not written down until the eleventh century. This diptych depicts the imagery most often associated with St. George: he is shown in a green garment with Seyonesque pleats, riding a white horse and spearing a green dragon in front of a lake.

The last image on the bottom right is difficult to decipher, because the iconography is unusual and there are no discernable inscriptions. It is possibly a depiction of the Wedding at Cana, where Jesus' performed his first miracle in response to Mary's intercession (John 2:1-11). Mary informs Jesus the wedding hosts are out of wine and urges him to intervene. Although he first tells her that his time has not come, he subsequently changes water into wine. In this reading, Mary, in the far left, is pointing to her Son who is holding a wineskin. A crowd is gathered in front of them with their arms crossed against their chests symbolizing, perhaps, that they are holy people. In the miracle he changes many vessels of water into wine, here he is shown with just one wineskin.



**Two Virgins with Saints**  
*18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> c.*  
*Tempera on canvas and wood*

Icons such as this one, with its composition divided into two tiers of images, appeared as early as the twelfth-century in Byzantium. This icon is similar to that of the Feast of Orthodoxy dating to ca. 1400 wherein a Virgin of the *Hodegetria* type—flanked by angels as well as the sainted Empress Theodora, her son Michael and several bishops—is seen in the upper half of the image, while several saints, most of them monastic, appear in the lower half. Another possible analogue is the twelfth-century icon depicting several miraculous images of the Virgin from Constantinople above representations of Christ's ministry. It is frequently difficult to interpret the relationship between such tiers. The same is true of our icon, as it appears that the two Virgins and the saints below do not relate to one another in any particular way. It is possible, then, that this icon was made for private use and the saints depicted had personal significance to the worshiper.

The two Virgins depicted in this icon are of the miraculous type and appear to be communicating with one another

through their gaze and gestures. They are dressed similarly, wearing the blue and red clothing typical of depictions of Mary. Their dresses and crowns are lavishly embellished with pearls, frequently symbolizing Mary's tears at the crucifixion or her sparkling purity. Along with the crowns they are wearing, the double veil implies imperial association. Both Virgins have the inscriptions *MP* and *ΘΥ* (Mother of God) and the one on the left contains *ΙC ΧC*, the Greek abbreviation for Jesus Christ.

The Virgin on the left is known as the "Delivery of Those Who Suffer," the identification spelled out in Russian above the image. There are two miraculous icons of this type: one from Moscow and the other from the town of Liudinovo. The latter dates to the eighteenth century and was commissioned by an industrialist named Demidov. There is a hymn performed before her every week, the text of which contains references to "Mary as a star that chases away the darkness," which may help to explain why her cloak is covered with gold stars. The name above her derives from

this very hymn, an example of the long tradition of giving Marian icons poetic names. This type resembles the *Hodegetria*: Mary is pointing to her Son as the way to salvation and he responds in a blessing.

The icon on the right is known as the Nicene Icon, which developed in Russia around the seventeenth century. According to legend, its miraculous powers first emerged in the fourth century when a man threw a stone at the icon during a siege on the city of Nicaea. That night, the Virgin visited him in a dream and told him he would be punished. He was killed in battle shortly afterwards. The two words above this particular icon appear to be from a hymn sung before this icon and can be roughly translated as “Thy womb is the holy festal table.” This iconographic type is similar to the Virgin Platytera, seen in the apse of Orthodox churches, where Christ is shown encircled in a mandorla in front of the Virgin’s womb. The type relates the miraculous way in which the divine took on human form. The Christ Child set within a medallion conveys the coexistence of the human and the divine within his nature. The cup is symbolic of the Holy Communion, and Christ’s presence within it makes visible his real presence in the Eucharist.

In the late nineteenth century, the Nicene Icon became known in Russian as The Lady of the Inexhaustible Cup. According to legend, in the year 1878 a retired soldier who had drunk away his pension and became paralyzed had a dream in which a man appeared to him and said, “Go to the city of Serpoukhov; at the monastery of the *Theotokos* you will find an icon of the Holy Mother called The Inexhaustible Cup. Say a prayer before it and you will be healed.” He dragged himself to the monastery, where no one had heard of this icon. They started to search for it, and eventually noticed one hanging in the passage to the sacristy that bore an image of a chalice. On the back of the image was written “The Inexhaustible Cup.” The man was healed and news about the miraculous icon spread all over Russia, eventually leading to the creation of an all-Russian Brotherhood of Sobriety. To this day it is used as an icon for alcoholics and others dealing with issues of addiction.

The assemblage of saints in this icon is unusual, and is made even more mysterious by the dark mark left by a candle that had been placed too close to the icon. From left to right the saints are: St. Longinus, St. Blaise, St. Modestus, St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, St. Eudocia, and an unknown female saint. St. Longinus, a military saint recognizable by his sword and dress, is said to be the Roman soldier who pierced Jesus’s side with his lance and declared “in truth this man was the Son of God,” and who later converted to Christianity. St. Blaise or Blasios was an early fourth-century doctor and bishop in Armenia who exercised his art with miraculous ability, good will, and piety. As he was being arrested for his faith, a mother brought to him her child who was choking on a fish-bone, and the child was cured immediately. Regardless, St. Blaise was beaten, his flesh ripped with iron combs, and was subsequently beheaded. Often he is depicted with his iron comb as his attribute. St. Modestus or Medost often appears together with Blaise. He is represented with a crown because he was a patriarch of Jerusalem. St. Ignatius, also known as Ignatius Theophorus, or “the God-bearing,” was the third Bishop of Antioch and a student of John the Apostle. St. Eudocia of Heliopolis, before her conversion, had led many into sin by her beauty through which she amassed a great fortune. She converted to Christianity in the late first century and eventually became a nun. Her depiction here may also be a reference to the Russian St. Eudocia, duchess of Moscow, with whom she is often conflated. She is represented with a scroll, a relatively uncommon attribute for a female saint. While there is nothing in the first-century saint’s story that would lead her to be portrayed with a scroll, the Duchess of Moscow was highly educated and the scroll thus likely stands for her learnedness. The last saint is difficult to identify due to the damage to her inscription. She appears to be of noble descent, judging from her lavish red cloak and white head scarf, and was likely martyred at some point, as suggested by the delicate white scroll she supports in her left hand.

A. Taylor

**Enthroned Christ with Virgin  
Mary and John the Baptist  
(*deesis*) with St. Nicholas  
and St. Charalamos**  
18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> c.  
Greek  
Tempera on wood



In Eastern Orthodoxy, the *deesis* is a traditional representation of Christ *Pantokrator* (Ruler of All) in the company of Mary and St. John the Baptist. Sometimes other saints and angels appear in a *deesis* as well. Similar compositions are often placed within churches on the iconostasis, the barrier that separates the nave from the sanctuary. The word *deesis* is derived from Greek and means prayer or supplication. Christ here appears in a seated position suggesting that he is enthroned. He carries the Scriptures, held with his left arm, opened to a passage in the Gospel of John (8:12): “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Christ’s right arm is elevated and his hand assumes a gesture of blessing. He is flanked by the figures of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist, who

appear to have the same height as the seated Jesus, symbolically reminding the devout that Christ is the most distinguished figure in this representation.

Christ’s garments are lavishly adorned with gold striations, which combined with the traditional employment of blue and red colors of his attire announce his divinity and nobility. These colors are echoed in Virgin Mary’s vestments and are reminders that she, too, participates in his divine economy. *Deeses* usually portray the Virgin and St. John in positions of supplication with their hands directed towards Christ. This gesture of intercession, adopted here by the Virgin Mary, suggests an earnest plea for Christ’s favor and blessing upon humanity, and is echoed by the inclination of the figures’ bodies towards Christ. To Christ’s right

and better side, a delicate portrait of the Virgin is shown beautifully adorned in red, blue, and gold. Christ's left side is reserved for the representation of St. John the Baptist, who mirrors the supplicant gesture of the Virgin Mary. However, in this particular *deesis*, St. John assumes an unusual iconographic posture—his hands are not extended towards Christ; instead, they are crossed over his chest, which may indicate the liturgical function of the icon, for this is the exact posture assumed by the community of believers right before partaking in Holy Communion. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the liturgy culminates in the Eucharist in which the community of saints and believers sacramentally encounters God.<sup>1</sup> The fact that St. John's gesture occurs in the presence of the Virgin and of Christ allows viewers to realize that they are not ordinary and individual spectators—they have “been included in the communion of saints who are gathered” to fully participate in the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion.<sup>2</sup> It is also important to observe that it is under the church's dome that Holy Communion takes place. In the icon, the dome-like wooden frame, encircling the bodies of Christ, Mary, and John, reiterates the possible liturgical function of this particular *deesis* icon. Although accurately defining how icons function liturgically is a challenging task, seeking to understand how they may have operated by means of the pictorial evidence they offer<sup>3</sup> is essential to uncovering how icons were and continue to be infused with multiple layers of theological and social meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Directly below St. John the Baptist is the figure of yet another holy figure—Nicholas, the historic fourth-century Greek saint who also assumed the role of mediator of divine blessing to those in need. Directly below Christ's right and better side, Saint Charalambos, a third-century Greek saint and Bishop of Magnesia, is depicted. He is known for having spread the Gospel

through his region and was martyred for confessing his faith in Christ. His name means “glowing with joy” in Greek. His position directly under Virgin Mary, who is placed on Christ's right, may indicate that this icon was made for a community that venerated Charalambos. The Greek inscriptions in this particular image speak to the authority of the Byzantine icon. The somewhat non-naturalistic style of the painting also underscores that these icons were not intended simply to invoke the appearance of the historical Christ, of the historical saints, and of Christ's mother—it is not as though the artists were unable to depict precise human attributes. Above all, they were meant to invoke Christ's holiness and were to function as means of devotion and communion with Christ and the assembly of saints.<sup>5</sup> It was by engaging faith and imagination sensually that seeing led the devout to the act of believing, drawing God “within reach of eyes and hands, or more accurately within reach of eyes as hands.”<sup>6</sup> Icons such as these had the immense task of synthesizing centuries of tradition in which the disclosed appearance of the embodied Messiah had to be held in tension with the undisclosed mystery of God. The artists, then, had the complex task of maintaining a tradition of harmonizing divine and material nature without emphasizing one at the expense of the other. These artists were able to develop and preserve a pictorial tradition that was both robust and withstood the test of time in such a way that it remained recognizable and engaging to present and future audiences.

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1. Thomas F. Matthews, “The Sequel to Nicaea II In Byzantine Church Decoration,” *Perkins Journal* (1998), 18.

2 *Ibid*, 14.

3 Nancy Ševčenko, “Icons in the Liturgy” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45 (1991), 45-57.

4 Hans Belting, “An Image and its Function in the Liturgy: the Man of Sorrows in Byzantium” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 34/35 (1980), 1-16.

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5 *Ibid*, 13.

6 Georgia Frank, “The Pilgrim's Gaze in the Age before Icons,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 109, emphasis in the original.





**The Holy Napkin  
(Mandylion)**  
19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> c.  
Russian  
Tempera on wood

This icon is part of an enduring Byzantine tradition that affirms that Christ miraculously created a self-portrait by imprinting the image of his face onto a cloth, namely, the *Mandylion* (from the Arabic word for towel—*mandy*). This particular icon combines two distinct techniques—that of painting in its own right and of areas tooled and painted to resemble metal relief work. Such painting intended to mimic another medium is seen in icons since at least the twelfth century, and is meant to invoke the preciousness of noble metals and various other materials, such as precious stones, while also suggesting the difficulty of working with these materials. Some of the techniques from the Byzantine icon painting tradition were preserved throughout the centuries through painter's manuals, one of which compiles instructions from Dionysius of Forna, a

Greek icon painter born around 1670, who became an established artist after having moved to Mount Athos. In the manual, the icon painter addresses fellow artists, stressing the paramount need to be precise in the preparation of materials and masterful in the execution of their artistry. To him, icon painting is a consecrated and reverent activity that can only be carried out by those who are not only trained in the arts but who are also deeply aware of the theological significance of the icons. In the manual, Dionysius explains in great detail how each aspect of the faces, the flesh, and garments are to be painted.<sup>7</sup>

In that sense, this particular icon follows the Greek

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<sup>7</sup> Dionysius of Forna, *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Forna*, Paul Hetherington tr. (Oakwood Publication, 1990), 1-11.

Orthodox tradition of encapsulating the doctrine of the divine incarnation in painting. The miraculous *Mandyllion* is full of tensions, which speak to both the divine and human attributes of Christ. Though his face is understood to be imprinted on a cloth, his image remains undistorted even where the fabric is visibly folded, alluding to Christ's dual nature. His rigid halo also seems to remain unchanged by the malleability of the cloth. The golden opulence of the background contrasts with both the skin tones of the face and the gentle blue hues of the fabric. While the cloth itself could allude to Jesus' corporeal and humble reality, the pattern depicted along its bottom edge suggests his divine essence—the precious pearls are emblematic of the pristine character of Christ. Going along with the motifs of nobility and divinity versus that of modesty and humanity, Christ's realistic face is imprinted on what appears to be very expensive fabric—perhaps silk, given the way it is represented as shimmering towards the bottom.

This particular rendition of Jesus' features seems to be related to the Russian Novgorod *Mandyllion*, which dates to the twelfth century and depicts Christ with similar physiognomy and perfectly groomed hair.<sup>8</sup> In our *Mandyllion*, Christ's right side features three curls that may have a Trinitarian significance; on his left side only two curls are depicted, perhaps representing his dual human and divine nature. His hair appears perfectly painted and the care with which the artist handled the meticulous brushstrokes conveys Christ's palpable presence on Earth amidst humans. The way the cloth creases below Christ's chin may also point to the corporeal presence of the otherwise invisible body of Christ. His dual nature is also perceptible by the way his face is painted, featuring lifelike skin tones while its unusual symmetry may perhaps reveal a persistent ideal of beauty. The brilliant halo placed on Christ's head identifies him in Greek as the "One Who Is." Such inscription attests to his divinity—the icon and its prototype are joined "semiotically by a shared name" allowing the viewer to

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8 Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 216.

read and recognize—in the name—Christ himself.<sup>9</sup> The use of the Greek initials IC XC, (an abbreviation for "Jesus Christ"), seen here on both sides of Christ's head, outside of his halo, is the traditional way of identifying the image of Christ, even for audiences who did not speak Greek. Outside of Byzantium, the Greek letters become as iconic as the portrait of Christ itself and thus inseparable from it. The Russian inscription below Christ's chin, "nerukotvorni obraz gospoden," identifies this as "the image of the Lord not made by human hands." Such inscriptions, which are not seen on Byzantine *Mandyllia*, also refer the viewer to the archetypal icon of Christ—the original *Mandyllion*. The angels holding the imprinted cloth likewise are identified by abbreviated Greek inscriptions in their halos—alpha and gamma—that identify them as angels (*angeloï* in Greek, *angeli* in Russian). They seem to assume a ceremonial manner, perhaps ushering the miraculous cloth into a symbolic ritual. They are painted with beautiful, shimmering garments and wings, which appear to emerge from the golden background and are outlined with fine black colored lines. This type of iconography seems to be part of the Russian tradition of depicting the *Mandyllion* presented by two angels—such heavenly figures also appear in a thirteenth-century liturgical book from Moscow. While this icon is part of the long-standing tradition of *acheiropoiotos* images—"not made by human hands" as the inscription contends—the hands and gesture of the artist who painted it, albeit anonymously, are paradoxically and substantially present in the painting. All of these features, combined with the relatively small size of the icon, seem to intimately appeal to the viewer's sense of holy embodiment, present absence.

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9 Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Leo of Chalcedon and the Icons" in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, Kurt Weitzmann and D. Mouriki, et al, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 581.

**The Holy Napkin  
(Mandyllion)**  
17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> c.  
Russian  
Tempera on wood



This particular icon shows significant signs of its age—portions of its surface are compromised and layers of paint are flaking—yet the most critical features of the icon remain discernible. A careful observer will notice that the portions that have remained visible reveal a painted textile upon which the representation of Christ is imprinted. The edges of a cloth can be seen on the top and bottom left corners of the icon, and the fabric continues below Christ's chin, confirming that this icon is a depiction of the *Mandyllion*, or the Holy Napkin. The Greek inscriptions on Christ's halo which identify him as the "One Who Is," the splendor of the carefully applied gold leaf, the use of darker skin tones typical of *Mandyllion* images, the meticulous brushstrokes of the cheeks, eyes, forehead, and hair, the curves and movement of the cloth

against the unwrinkled and undisturbed face of Christ, his neck covered by folds of the cloth, all work jointly to depict the moment of Christ's performative miracle of imprinting his image onto cloth. This particular depiction also bears resemblance to Latin Veronica imagery (*vera icon* or true image) that arose in the thirteenth century, after the Latin conquest of Constantinople. During this period the *Mandyllion* from the imperial chapel in Constantinople disappeared and was later brought to Rome.<sup>10</sup> In its Western development, the imprint of Christ's face onto a textile became a universal image prominent in public and private devotion.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard Wolf, "From Mandyllion to Veronica," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, Herbert Kessler and Gerhard Wolf, eds. (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1998), 167.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-175.

The iconography of the *Mandyllion* is based on stories that emerged in early Byzantium; by the seventh century an authoritative narrative emerged about how the self-portrait of Christ came to exist. According to Eusebius, King Abgar of Edessa had hoped to persuade Christ to come heal him of an incurable disease. Abgar sent his servant Ananias to deliver a letter to the Lord beseeching him to come meet and cure the king, and instructed the man to paint Christ's likeness if the latter was not able to travel to Edessa. The king wanted to know what Christ looked like, and hoped, perhaps, that the painted image could replace the absent Christ. Jesus was unable to come to see King Abgar, but he gave Ananias a towel with which he had wiped his face. The moment Christ pressed his face against the cloth it left a faint imprint. That image is said to have performed miracles ever since, including the cure and conversion of King Abgar and the duplication of its likeness onto other cloths, tiles, and surfaces.<sup>12</sup> This *acheiropoietos*, or image not made by human hands, came to be seen as confirmation of Christ's consent to participate in the image-making process, which endorsed the practice of making and venerating images in Eastern Orthodox tradition.<sup>13</sup>

The *Mandyllion* also served as the archetype that addressed theological issues of how God, while fully divine, could also assume fully human form, and thus become representable. Furthermore, the *Mandyllion* eased concerns about violating the Biblical commandment against idolatry—an image that is created by divine miracle corroborates not only the viability of portraying the holy but also communicates God's desire for such practice. Images of Christ, thus, had the right to exist and had a divinely rendered prototype to follow.<sup>14</sup> The Edessa Face was also a kind of threshold that stood as evidence of the Incarnation—reflecting the mystery that Christ simultaneously inhabited the sensorial

world of our mundane existence as well as the spiritual and divine realm.<sup>15</sup> This true-portrait, not made by human hands, offers the viewers an opportunity to encounter God by means of an image in which visible reality meets invisible mystery. Icons such as this one may have been used either for private devotion or would have been installed on the top of the church iconostasis that separated the sanctuary from the nave. They were also used by the faithful to invoke the presence of the holy by means of image, faith, and imagination. While the believer venerates these icons, the centuries that separate the historical life of Jesus and the act of present devotion seems to collapse. The trained eyes of the devout quickly identify symbolic and iconographic language that reveals and transforms material likeness into religious presence.

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Guscini, *The Image of Edessa*, (Boston: Brill, 2009), 11-45.

<sup>13</sup> James Trilling, "The Image Not Made by Hands and the Byzantine Way of Seeing" in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, Herbert Kessler and Gerhard Wolf, eds. (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1998), 110.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Belting addresses the issue of the mechanic trace and imprint in the article "In Search of Christ's Body: Image or Imprint, *Ibid.*, 3.

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<sup>15</sup> Herbert L. Kessler, "Configuring the Invisible by Copying the Holy Face", *Ibid.* 138-139. Here Kessler also addresses the fact that, in configuring the invisible in archetypal manner, the inapprehensibility of the *Mandyllion* makes all copies authentic originals, 151.



**Christ the Ruler of All**  
19<sup>th</sup> c. (?)  
Russian  
Tempera on canvas and wood

This awe-inspiring icon features Jesus Christ as *Pantokrator* or a Ruler of All. This tradition of representing Christ differs from that of the *Mandylion* as it usually depicts more than just the face of the Messiah, instead showing him bust-length, enthroned, or standing and full-length. This type of representation of a frontal Christ looking straight at the viewer originated from conventional images of both gods and humans that were used in antiquity for memorial, votive, and cultic purposes.<sup>16</sup> It also invokes coin iconography, which associated the Messiah with imperial images.<sup>17</sup> In our icon, Christ's halo arrests and orients the viewer's

gaze towards his face. It is particularly prominent here not only because of its golden brilliance but also because of its size in relation to the rest of Christ's bust. The halo is also the container of three Greek letters that identify this icon as the image of the Holy One. Inscriptions that appear in Greek are a fundamental feature of icons because they corroborate the unchanging authority of the Byzantine icon and the relationship of the present image to the distant prototype.

Here, only Christ's bust is shown, yet his gesturing hand, embellished garments and frontal gaze invite viewers into contemplative and affective engagement. The Orthodox tradition does not urge only an intellectual relationship to icons. Instead, believers are "expected to be personally and emotionally involved

<sup>16</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: a History of Image before the Era of Art*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 78-98; 102-109.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

in the viewing.”<sup>18</sup> The Second Council of Nicaea approved such manner of encounter by stating that the more beholders engaged icons affectively, the more they would yearn for the person represented in the icon, namely Jesus Christ and the saints.<sup>19</sup> In his treatises on divine images, St. John of Damascus also spoke about the ways images lead believers to actively remember and worship a God who took on human form.<sup>20</sup> The present *Pantokrator* follows such tradition of interaction as it shows Christ visually “communicating” with viewers, almost seeming to expect from them some kind of response. With his right hand he offers a blessing—a gesture that is evocative of his care and love towards humanity. With his left hand he holds an open book inscribed with a message from the Gospel of Matthew (11:28-29): “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.”

Christ’s garments are carefully painted with the dark blue and red colors associated with nobility and are decorated with a pearled neckline, an embellishment also visible on the cuff of his right sleeve. A beautifully adorned frame with vine-like motifs encloses his figure. While the frame might suggest the notion that icons can function as windows into otherworldly reality, this particular icon also prompts the viewer to engage with its surface in kinesthetic, corporeal, and participatory contemplation. By looking at this half-length and rather small bust image of the Lord, the believer is invited to “complete” the figure by imagining the missing portion of Christ’s body, an action that subverts the notion of the image as a mere window or transparent surface that leads to a mysterious reality.<sup>21</sup> Here the divine is apprehended and manifested precisely in the embodied presence of the icon. The beholder who carefully

observes the signs of the icon’s deterioration, particularly visible on its lower corners and on Christ’s face, would become rapidly aware of its materiality. Such noticeable deterioration reveals that this image was painted on canvas stretched onto wood. That a holy icon should display such perceptible signs of temporality is an indication of its ambiguous and corporeal ephemerality, which is capable of encapsulating a theology of Incarnation in which God assumes human flesh in order to realize a salvific plan to restore the damaged condition of humanity.

Christ’s face is also quite ambiguous in this particular *Pantokrator*. The right side is painted with more brilliant hues and sophisticated brushstrokes that trigger a sense of intricate form and depth; the left side displays less-refined qualities. This visual paradox holds in tension Christ’s dual nature—while he is perfectly divine, he also assumes an incarnate and inevitably imperfect body. In a way, icons like this one invite beholders to ponder how God’s inaccessibility, unknowability, and utter Otherness, can be made materially available. Picturing Christ in a bodily form is both a risky and courageous act—it reassures believers of the Christian doctrine and theology of a God who is utterly absent, yet irrevocably present. Representations of the face of Christ “served as the conduits to the living God above. And while the face of Christ confirmed the past and served the present, it also offered a glimpse of the future.”<sup>22</sup> In the face of holy icons the believer encounters both present consolation and guarantee of salvation.

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18 Thomas F. Matthews, “The Sequel to Nicaea II In Byzantine Church Decoration,” in *Perkins Journal* (1998), 14.

19 Ibid., Council of Nicaea (XIII, 377) as quoted in Thomas F. Matthews.

20 St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, David Anderson, tr. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 22-26.

21 Annemarie Weyl Carr, “The Presentation of an Icon at Mount Sinai” *Deltion of the Christian Archeological Society* 35 (1994), 248.

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22 Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf, *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, (Bologna, Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1990), IX-X.

**Christ the Ruler of All**  
1896  
Russian  
Tempera on wood with  
silver-gilt metal revetment  
and enamel



This relatively small Russian icon of Christ *Pantokrator* combines the techniques of painting on wood and relief metal work. It features a Russian inscription (*Gospod Vsederzhitel'*) that identifies the icon as the Lord Almighty. Two Greek inscriptions identify the figure as the “One Who Is” and as Jesus Christ. The exquisite metal revetment, encircling the painted face of Jesus, is comparable to the splendor achieved by other iconographic means where the golden halo frames the face of Christ. He is depicted half-length and is wearing embroidered and decorated vestments suitable for nobility. The garments are made in metal repoussé, a technique of working with a hammer to delicately mold the metal from the inside out.<sup>23</sup> The visible parts of Christ’s body—his face and

<sup>23</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 123-126.

hands—are painted directly onto the wood, while his vestments, halo, and book are executed in metal. Christ holds an open book in his left hand and offers a benediction with his right. The text written in the Gospel is quite difficult to read, but after careful study reveals itself as lines from the Gospel of John (13:34): “A new command I give you. Love one another.” Perhaps the intellectual struggle to untangle the words on the book points to the fact that we must exert ourselves in order to apprehend the complete meaning of God’s holy message.

Christ’s face is painted in a naturalistic style while the hues of his skin and the length of his hair are consistent with his traditional iconography. Scholars have contended that depictions of Christ with long hair suggest a reference to imagery of ancient philosophers and wise men—the sixth-century icon

of Christ *Pantokrator*, today at the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, for example, has been compared with an earlier bust of a philosopher from Istanbul.<sup>24</sup> Such appropriation of pagan iconography serves to equate the figure of Christ with that of a wise teacher. The chestnut hair of our Christ is also in correspondence with later Byzantine images of Christ, such as the thirteenth-century *deesis* mosaic in the galleries of Hagia Sophia. The long hair of Christ may also indicate “his separateness and lifelong consecration.”<sup>25</sup> The somewhat darker yellowish tones of his skin can similarly be seen as emphasizing Jesus’s sanctified and paradoxical attributes—while his incarnate body may be fully visible, his divinity is veiled, hence the darker skin tone that echoes the iconographic tradition of the darker *acheiropietos* face of Christ on the *Mandylion*.

In Byzantine iconography, faces are regarded as a particularly potent part of the body.<sup>26</sup> By prompting sensorial engagement by the faithful, the depiction of the face of Christ functions as a reminder that God is both present—as seen in the image of his face and the materiality of the icon—and absent, as the rest of his body remains unseen. By partaking in the act of contemplation, the faithful proceed from physical encounter to a level of spiritual seeing.<sup>27</sup> The physicality of the icon is especially prominent in mixed media icons such as this one. Decorating the portrait of Christ or a saint with metalwork, gemstones, enamel, and glass was prevalent in the Byzantine Empire since the twelfth century, and was continued in the Russian icon tradition. The cloisonné technique, employed in the framing revetment of our icon, enhances its tactile properties and alters the way it interacts with its setting as well as with its viewers. In Byzantium, as Bissera

Pentcheva has argued, the “environment in which icons were displayed was subtly manipulated so as to maximize the effect of animation before the viewers.”<sup>28</sup> Such dynamism allows for a constant unfolding of performative enactment animated by the presence of the spectator and the changes within the environment the icon inhabits. Likewise, the image of Christ is indivisibly intertwined with God’s invisible and material reality—one does not exist apart from the other, as Leo of Chalcedon explained in a letter dating to the late eleventh century.<sup>29</sup> Through the agency of the devout, the icon is activated and infused not only with meaning, but also with spirit. Just as the bodies of pilgrims in motion move within internal and external landscapes of faith, so too the eyes of the faithful travel performatively and spiritually through the topography of the icon of Jesus. Searching for divine blessing, the eyes and the spirit of the faithful travel from eyes, to halo, to inscriptions, to hands, imbuing corporeal reality with spiritual perception.

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24 Michele Bacci, *The Many Faces of Christ* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 190.

25 *Ibid.*, 219.

26 Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf, *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, (Bologna, Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1990), IX-X.

27 Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: the Mother of God in Byzantium*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 152.

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28 Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon*, 123.

29 Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Leo of Chalcedon and the Icons,” in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, Kurt Weitzmann and D. Mouriki, et al., eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 580-581.



**St. Nicholas  
the Wonderworker**  
19<sup>th</sup> c.  
Russian  
Tempera on wood



Although he left behind no written work of his own, St. Nicholas has long been a beloved saint venerated in the Eastern Orthodox as well as the Roman Catholic church, and has also been venerated by Muslims for his equal treatment of all.<sup>1</sup> St. Nicholas, whose feast day is celebrated on December 6<sup>th</sup>, is considered the patron saint of Russia and of children, a protector of the poor and oppressed and of sea-farers, defender of the church, and intercessor for the faithful. The saint that we see on icons combines elements from the lives of two historical figures by the name of Nicholas: the fourth century St. Nicholas, bishop of Myra in Lycia (in modern-day Turkey) and St. Nicholas of Sion, a sixth-century abbot of the Monastery of Holy Sion near Myra,

1 Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*. (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 120; Nancy P. Ševčenko, *The Life of Saint Nicholas in Byzantine Art*. (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1983), 22.

later ordained Bishop of Pinara in Lycia.<sup>2</sup> This composite saint is remembered above all for his life dedicated to the service of others. Many legends tell of his aiding and protecting of those in need and coming to the rescue of those in danger or falsely accused, both during his lifetime as well as posthumously—in fact the jolly old man of Christmas developed from tales and tradition of this saint's charitable deeds. In one frequently recounted legend, St. Nicholas secretly provided dowries for three sisters, whose impoverished father faced the prospect of selling them into slavery, by throwing three bags of gold into their house in the dead of night.<sup>3</sup> Other tales are more miraculous, as when the spirit of St. Nicholas appeared in a dream to the Emperor Constantine to intercede on behalf of

2 Ševčenko, 18-19.  
3 D.L. Cann, *St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra: The Life and Times of the Original Father Christmas*, (Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, 2002), 183; Ševčenko, 87.

three Roman generals who had been falsely accused of treason, resulting in their pardon.<sup>4</sup> In one of many stories of the saint's posthumous miracles, St. Nicholas rescues a boy, Basil, kidnapped and enslaved by Saracens, miraculously transporting him home to his parents.<sup>5</sup>

The icon in the exhibition is representative of images of St. Nicholas, which typically depict him with a high, balding forehead, suggesting his goodness and wisdom, with short gray hair and with a full rounded beard. Although these characteristics make images of St. Nicholas highly recognizable, the inscription in red at the top of the image leaves no room for doubt, identifying him as "St. Nicholas the Wonderworker." The saint is depicted frontally, his serene gaze directly engaging the viewer, with head and torso centered in front of a pale blue-green background, the entire composition framed in creamy yellow ocher. His unembellished golden halo pierces this frame, seemingly bringing the figure forward into the viewer's space. As is common in images of St. Nicholas, the figure is clothed in richly decorated bishop's robes of the *polystravriion* (many crosses) type, his rose-colored chasuble covered with golden crosses surrounded by decorative filigree and enclosed in roundels. His green bishop's stole, or *omophorion*, is likewise embellished with larger golden crosses and filigree. The saint lifts his right hand in a gesture of blessing and holds an open book in his left, nestled in a fold of his clothing to demonstrate his reverence for it. The inscription is in Russian and cites Luke 6:17: "He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem." Fittingly, this passage introduces Christ's "Sermon on the Plain" in which he urges his followers to live their lives in charitable service to others. It is traditionally read on the saint's feast day, and often appears in Russian icons of

Nicholas.<sup>6</sup> The saint's face is delicately rendered with careful attention to the modeling of features and hair reflecting a greater naturalism appearing in Russian icon painting during the nineteenth century. Flanking the saint are small roundels depicting Jesus (to the left) and Mary (to the right), each shown from the waist up and turned toward him, presenting to him the main attributes of his office. Each is haloed, and emits golden rays of light, radiating from their bodies to fill the enframing circles. Jesus, like Nicholas, holds a book in his left hand and gestures with the other as if speaking. Mary holds out an *omophorion*, offering it to Nicholas. These flanking figures quite frequently are depicted in icons of St. Nicholas, appearing as early as the eleventh century, and refer to a tale told about him by St. Methodius, patriarch of Constantinople (842-846). St. Methodius relates that soon before his election as bishop of Myra, St. Nicholas had a premonitory vision of his investiture in which Jesus and Mary both appeared to him to bless him, Jesus holding the Gospels and Mary placing the *omophorion*, symbolic garment of the office of bishop, on his shoulders with her own hands.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Cann, 187-191.

5 Lilia Evseyeva, et al., *A History of Icon Painting: Sources, Traditions, Present Day*, trans. Kate Cook, (Moscow: "Grand-Holding" Publishers, 2002), 70; Ouspensky and Lossky, 121; Ševčenko, 143-144.

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6 Simon Morsink, ed. *The Power of Icons: Russian and Greek Icons, 15th-19th century: The Morsink Collection*, (Ghent: Snoeck Publishers; New York: Distributed Art Publishers (distributor), 2006), 178.

7 Ouspensky and Lossky, 120. Ševčenko, 79.



**St. Paraskeve**  
18<sup>th</sup> c. (?)  
Russian  
Tempera on wood

This painted panel depicts the head and torso of a female saint, St. Paraskeve (“Piatnitsa” in Russian), patron saint of trade and of women’s work, and the protectress of women. Her name, which means Holy Friday, alludes to the Friday of Christ’s Passion, a name given to her by her pious parents either at birth or at her baptism, according to differing accounts.<sup>8</sup> Her association with this key event in the life of Christ and subsequently in the Christian liturgy has led to her acquiring a rather archetypal status—she is venerated not only as an individual saint but also, if not more so, as a personification of Good Friday, and as such

<sup>8</sup> Ouspensky and Lossky, 136; Morsink 162.

is often depicted carrying the symbols of Christ’s Passion—lance, sponge, nails, and container of vinegar.<sup>9</sup> This downplaying of her historical personhood is echoed in the fact that several individuals bearing this name have become conflated over time. Chief among these are St. Paraskeve of Rome, martyred under Emperor Antonius Pius c. 140 AD, and St. Paraskeve of Iconia in Asia Minor, executed during Diocletian’s persecutions in the late third century. In both cases, the saint is said to have avidly studied the Bible from an early age—an indication of literacy and education unusual for

<sup>9</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan et al., 3 vols. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3:1586.

women at the time—and to have become a bold preacher of the Christian faith, courageous and unyielding even under torture. Her feast days are July 26<sup>th</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>.

The icon includes a number of elements usually seen in depictions of St. Paraskeve. On a gold background, framed by a deep red painted frame, the saint is depicted frontally, clothed in a rich gold cloak and head covering, the latter surmounted by a crown somewhat reminiscent of the Russian imperial crown. Her black gown, visible beneath the cloak, is likewise embellished with gold patterning. Her clothing, as well as her halo, which breaks through the frame at the top, is further decorated with patterns impressed into the surface of the panel. In her right hand she holds a slim cross, symbolizing both her faith and her martyrdom, and in her left she holds a scroll—an unusual attribute for the depiction of a female saint, but common in images of St. Paraskeve—indicating she is both literate and learned. The scroll bears the beginning of the Nicene Creed: “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty.” Her face, more fully rendered than the rest of the image, appears serene, contemplative. Rather than engaging the viewer directly, the saint’s gaze is shifted slightly toward a tiny image of the head of Christ floating in the upper left-hand corner, whose eyes are likewise turned toward her. Somewhat unusual for such images of Christ within icons of saints, this depicts not a bust-length view of the Savior, but only his head, surrounded by a halo. Close inspection reveals folds of draped cloth and even a tasseled border below his chin, revealing this to represent a *Mandyllion*: an image of Christ’s face “not made by human hands,” but miraculously transferred to cloth. The inscription in red lettering running horizontally across the gold background at the level of the saint’s neck reads “The Image of Holy Paraskeve,” drawing attention to its status as an image of the prototype, rather than the prototype herself. This distinction has been an important one within Orthodox debates over icon veneration, used by iconodules—those in favor of devotional use of icons—to counter iconoclasts’ charges of idolatry.

The icon has sustained significant damage, including extensive insect damage visible on the edges, especially on the lower right corner. There are two diagonal scratches starting at the center of the right edge extending downward and to the left towards the bottom center of the panel, with a fainter vertical scratch in the lower right corner. On the saint’s face, too, there is noticeable damage, with areas of paint loss around her eyes and brow, and cracks running through her right eye and from the right of her nose extending down past her chin, some of which may have been the result of devotional practices.

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**St. John the Baptist**  
19<sup>th</sup> c. (?)  
Bulgarian (?)  
Tempera on wood

John the Baptist ranks exceptionally high within the hierarchy of Christian saints, considered the first—after Mary—to recognize Christ’s divinity and, due to his role as forerunner, relative, and friend of the Savior, seen as uniquely able to intercede on behalf of believers.<sup>10</sup> In keeping with this, he is frequently represented near the center of *deesis* (“prayer”) images, which depict assemblies of saints surrounding and worshipping Jesus (see, for example, page 11). In such groupings, St. John and Mary are typically depicted standing directly next to Christ, with Mary to his right and John to his left, suggesting their intimate access to the Lord and thus the efficacy of their prayers of intercession.

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10 Annmarie Weyl Carr, *Imprinting the Divine: Byzantine and Russian Icons from the Menil Collection*, (Houston, Texas: Menil Collection; New Haven, Conn.: Distributed by Yale University Press, 2011), 52.

Both Orthodox and Roman Catholic liturgical calendars include several feast days in honor of St. John the Baptist commemorating his conception, birth, death, and the discovery and translation of his relics.<sup>11</sup>

As is typical of images of St. John, this icon includes references both to his ministry of preaching and baptizing in the desert of Judea and to his martyrdom. The icon is dominated by the three-quarters-length figure of St. John against a gold background, his identity indicated by the inscription in red lettering at the top of the panel that reads St. John the Forerunner, as well as by characteristics denoting his embrace of the ascetic life: the slight disarray of his hair and the rough texture of his camel-hair inner garment. Prior to the fourteenth century, St. John would have

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11 Ouspensky and Lossky, 104.

more typically be shown turned in three-quarter view towards an image of Christ, either included in an upper corner of the icon or at the center of a *deesis* grouping. In late Byzantine and Russian iconography, however, it became common to depict him frontally, as is the case here, summoning the viewer to personal repentance.<sup>12</sup> In this icon, the saint is presented *en face* and engages the viewer with a steady gaze, lifting one hand in a gesture of blessing, his exhortation to the viewer underscored by the passage from Matthew 3:2, held in his left hand, which reads “Repent, the heavenly kingdom is near.” This hand also holds a golden vessel containing his own severed head, a reference to his beheading, ordered by King Herod at the request of his vengeful wife and her daughter Salome. The image thus combines two aspects of St. John’s story—that of his preaching in the wilderness and of his death. At the same time, it also includes in a single image two enduring ontological states through which the saint is understood to aid believers: St. John is presented both as holy relic (his severed head) and as supernatural intercessor.<sup>13</sup> Underscoring his supernatural state, the figure is crowned by a halo decorated with a simple geometric pattern and—most strikingly—bears large angelic wings, an element unusual for the images of saints generally, but often seen in depictions of St. John the Baptist, especially after the fourteenth century. Such images of John as “Angel of the Wilderness” play upon his role as “messenger” (in Greek, the words “messenger” and “angel” are the same) and on the popular conception of the ascetic saint as otherworldly—a kind of “terrestrial angel.”<sup>14</sup> In the lower corners of the composition appear much smaller figures of two military saints. Each is enclosed in an arched, golden background, holding a slim, white martyr’s cross and a spear, their heads encircled by halos consisting of simple white lines. The inscriptions arching over their heads

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12 Carr, 52.

13 For further discussion of the inclusion of multiple ontological states within a single icon see Paroma Chatterjee, *The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy: The Vita Image Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 67-126.

14 Ouspensky and Lossky, 106; Evseyeva, 109.

identify them as, to the right, St. Menas, a late third-century Egyptian soldier in the Roman army who, like St. John the Baptist, embraced an ascetic life before his martyrdom, and to the left, St. Nikitas—perhaps St. Nikitas the Goth, a fourth-century Germanic soldier and a valiant defender of the faith.<sup>15</sup> Their inclusion on the icon may serve to underscore St. John’s characteristic boldness in preaching repentance and preparing the way for Christ, even unto death.

The icon has sustained a degree of surface damage, as has its decorative metal frame, and there are indications that it may have been partially repainted at some point. This is especially visible in the green cloak of St. John, which in some places displays a distinctively different sheen from the rest of the icon and which appears to have been mistakenly repainted over the lock of hair falling over the saint’s right shoulder. The white detailing on the saint’s belt is also unusual, and raises questions about whether it is original or possibly a later amendment to the image.

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15 *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan et al., 3 vols. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 2:1339.



**Archangel Michael**  
18<sup>th</sup> c.  
Russian  
Tempera on wood

This icon depicts an image drawn from the Apocalypse of St. John (Rev. 12: 7-9; 20:1- 2), in which Archangel Michael leads the host of heaven in celestial battle against the Dragon and his angels, ultimately overcoming and binding him for 1000 years.<sup>16</sup> In Orthodox liturgical texts, angels are held to be incorporeal beings of a nature “like fire, like flame, like light,” thus presenting a challenge to their representation in visible, physical form.<sup>17</sup> They are typically depicted with wings, suggesting their orientation and motion toward heaven, and with uniform perfection of physical

16 Ouspensky and Lossky, 108; Martin, 153.

17 *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan et al., 3 vols. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1:97 and 1:155.; Ouspensky and Lossky, 108-109.

beauty. At times, their spiritual flame-like nature is suggested by representing their bodies twisted in contortions no human would be able to achieve, a figural style termed *figura serpentinata*. Only a percentage of images of Archangel Michael depict him on horseback, though as chief general of the heavenly army (*Archistrategos*) he is typically represented wearing military garb and armed with sword or spear, in contrast to the Archangel Gabriel who is more frequently shown in his role of heavenly messenger, bearing a staff and dressed in imperial regalia.<sup>18</sup>

18 Linette Martin, *Sacred Doorways: A Beginner's Guide to Icons*, (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2002), 153; Ouspensky and Lossky, 108.

St. Michael is shown here in the manner of a military saint, astride a fiery, winged steed. Although his torso, with arms flung wide, is depicted frontally, his lower body and head turn partly toward the right, in the direction that his horse—oriented parallel to the picture plane—appears to be moving. Archangel Michael, his halo a subtle golden circle around his head and his wings mere traces in comparison to the fully rendered wings of his steed, holds a lance or spear in his right hand, and may have once held one or more objects aloft in his left—if so, these have been abraded beyond recognition. Based on similar images of St. Michael, these items most likely would have been a Gospel book and possibly a censer, both of which would have been held in his left hand. As in other images of the Archangel on horseback, a faint bowed line arcs between his two outstretched hands, suggesting either the dome of heaven or a rainbow symbolizing God's covenant with humanity.<sup>19</sup> Although such Apocalyptic images of St. Michael often depict him blowing a trumpet, there is no indication that this image ever included such an instrument. The figure's head and face have been much damaged—especially around the eyes—but he appears to wear a hat or headdress of some sort, perhaps over chainmail covering his head. His torso is encased by a golden, patterned garment suggesting a metal breastplate, like those worn by Roman soldiers, worn over a short skirt. His gold-and-rose cloak swirls vigorously around him, blending seamlessly in one place with the horse's wing. This added element of dynamism, combined with the horse's rearing stance, provides a stark contrast with the seemingly eternal quietude and equanimity of the angel's face. The horse and rider appear within a largely undetailed landscape, with the exception of the small pond beneath them, in its blue depths the fires of hell into which St. Michael has presumably already cast Satan and his demons. In addition, under the saint's booted foot is a strange double-ovoid formation, recognizable from other depictions of the Archangel as a stylized cloud. In the upper left-hand corner is a small face of a youthful Christ enclosed in a circle.

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<sup>19</sup> Evseyeva, 211.

The surrounding frame bears the inscription "Image of the Holy Archangel Michael" in Russian.

The icon has sustained much damage, including the abrasion to the face, head and wings, some of it, perhaps, due to devotional use. Also, additional surface scratches and an extensive crack—reaching from center bottom up through the lower two-thirds of the image—was likely a result of the panel warping over time. At the bottom, it appears an attempt was made to patch the crack, though this attempt was not particularly successful. Also, in several places, lines are visible inscribed into the substrate, especially noticeable where they are similar to—but not exactly aligned with—the final painted design (see especially the area around the horse's legs and the saint's cloak as well as his left sleeve). Possibly these may have been guidelines drawn before the under-drawing was finalized and the image was painted.

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**St. Tryphon**  
*late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> c.*  
*Russian*  
*Tempera on wood*



In this icon, the saint, wearing a blue tunic and a red cape and riding a black, prancing steed, dominates the image. Although his cape swirls behind him and his horse's step is lively, the figure sits calmly upright in the saddle, the reins held loosely in his left hand, and with his right hand holds aloft a white bird. His smooth, youthful face projects a calm, composed sweetness as he gazes toward the lower right of the composition. Above him, in the upper left-hand corner, appears an image of Christ, depicted two-thirds length and enclosed in a segment surrounded by swirling clouds, his right hand raised in blessing toward the saint, and his left holding a Gospel book. Christ's posture echoes that of the saint, and like him he is clothed in red and blue, accented with gold. The horse and rider are set in a space

surrounded by rock formations, with a body of water, perhaps a lake, containing four swans in the foreground. Although these elements suggest the natural world, the sky behind the saint is depicted as patterned gold—gilded gesso tooled to suggest metalwork, a technique also used to create the saint's halo and that of Christ in the upper left corner. Much of the golden surface of the sky has worn away with time and use, revealing the red under-layer typically used to prepare a panel to receive gilding. The icon is enclosed by a decorative framing device of golden interlace pattern punctuated by rich pastel blues and greens, and with stylized floral motifs at the four corners, the whole giving the impression of a nineteenth-century fairy-tale illustration. The style and especially the border clearly are related to those of

the small Russian *Mandyliion* icon in this collection, the two almost certainly painted in the same workshop, if not even by the same artist. Markings on the back indicating relative positioning within a series of icons suggest that they most likely were hung together at some point.

Although abrasion to the inscription at the top has made his name illegible, the saint depicted here is identifiable as St. Tryphon, a third-century healing saint who was born in Campsada in Phrygia (now Turkey) and is considered one of the patron saints of Moscow. St. Tryphon, who as a boy tended geese, exhibited a gift for healing both people and animals from early youth, and in adulthood became one of the so-called “Holy Unmercenaries”—a Christian physician who accepted no payment for his services, instead pointing his patients toward faith in Christ. Among tales told of his miraculous deeds is a story in which St. Tryphon saved his native city from famine by turning back a plague of locusts through his prayers; on another occasion, the saint is reported to have delivered the daughter of the Emperor Gordian from an evil spirit. Although Emperor Gordian was thereafter kindly disposed toward Christianity, his rule was soon followed by that of Trajan Decius, who resumed severe persecution of the faith. Under his rule, St. Tryphon was taken to Nicaea where he was tortured and martyred for proclaiming his faith. His feast day is celebrated on February 1<sup>st</sup> in the old Orthodox religious calendar and on February 14<sup>th</sup> according to the new calendar.<sup>20</sup>

St. Tryphon is considered the patron saint of agriculturists, especially vintners, and is traditionally called upon for removal of pests from fields. His kindness to animals has remained one of his celebrated characteristics, and in this regard he is often referred to as an Eastern counterpart to St. Francis. In Russia, he is considered patron saint of birds and is especially beloved of Russian falconers, due to his miraculous intervention on behalf of one of their brethren in the sixteenth century, the account of

which provides the subject matter of this icon: a young falconer by the name of Tryphon Patrikeiev was out hunting with the tsar, Ivan the Terrible, when he accidentally loosed the tsar’s favorite falcon. Enraged that the bird had flown away, the mercurial ruler demanded that the young man find and return the bird within three days or face execution for his carelessness. The falconer searched far and wide, finally collapsing with exhaustion and despair and calling out to his namesake, the martyr Tryphon, to come to his aid. The falconer then fell asleep and dreamed of a youth on a white horse, holding the tsar’s falcon in his hand. The youth told him, “Take the lost bird, go to the Tsar and do not grieve.” Upon awakening he saw the falcon in a nearby tree, and was able to return it to the tsar. In gratitude to St. Tryphon for saving his life, Tryphon Patrikeiev built a chapel on the spot where the saint had appeared to him.<sup>21</sup>

Although St. Tryphon was traditionally identified as a healing saint, icons directly referencing the dream of the Russian falconer, as this one does, rely upon conventions more typical of military saints on horseback, which in turn draw upon late antique depictions of mounted mythological and military heroes. In fact, the iconography seen here is nearly indistinguishable from that of the icons of Archangel Michael and St. George in the exhibition—like them, he is mounted on a fine horse, calm while his steed and cape display lively motion, and rides over a body of water. Especially unusual here is the iconographer’s inclusion of four swans in the water beneath the horse’s feet, in place of a roiling dragon or hell-fire, and the clear departure from the traditional account of Tryphon Patrikeiev’s dream by placing the saint on a black rather than a white horse.

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20 Petar Kostadinov, Lucy Cooper, “Trifon Zarezan Day,” *The Sophia Echo*, Mon, Feb 13 2006. [http://sofiaecho.com/2006/02/13/643178\\_trifon-zarezan-day..](http://sofiaecho.com/2006/02/13/643178_trifon-zarezan-day..) Accessed 12/17/14.

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21 Orthodox Church in America, “Martyr Tryphon of Campsada Near Apamea in Syria” <http://oca.org/saints/lives/2014/02/01/100397-martyr-tryphon-of-campsada-near-apamea-in-syria>). Accessed 12/10/2014.

