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## The encounter between East and West : some remarks on marvellous images

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# *The Encounter between East and West. Some Remarks on Marvellous Images*

Maria Ołdakowska, Lublin

“With the help of God they defeated the emperor Murzuflos and he himself was nearly taken captive; he lost his imperial banner and one icon that they carried before him, he believed in it greatly and so did other Greeks: on this icon was depicted Our Lady [...]”<sup>1</sup>

Commencing our considerations with a quotation from the Champagne chronicler we have moved to the Constantinople of 1204, the year of its capture by Franks. Not only did the Byzantine military forces fail but the faith in the miraculous power of the Maria Hodegetria icon turned out to be futile and did not protect the city from the nightmare of destruction by Frankish and Flemish armies. The count of Flanders, Baldwin II became the ruler of the New Latin Empire.<sup>2</sup> Both the events described by Villehardouin and their later effect on the contacts between the East and the West, to which we will return later in the text, were not without consequences for the issue that is the focus of our interest, that is, an encounter of Byzantine art and Northern European medieval painting. The aim of our text is to present several Byzantine icons that were brought to the area that is situated now on the border of contemporary Belgium and France, and significantly influenced fifteenth- and sixteenth-century painting. These works are located in the parish of St Peter and St Paul in Chimay (Fig. 1), the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Laon (Fig. 2), St Paul’s cathedral in Liège (Fig. 3), and the Notre-Dame cathedral in Cambrai (Fig. 4). Due to the character of this text, which is not intended as an elaboration containing exhaustive monographs of all these works, we propose a succinct presentation of each icon with the exception of the Mary with

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<sup>1</sup> G. de Villehardouin, *Zdobycie Konstantynopola*, ed. Z. Pentek, Poznań 2003, pp. 87–88.

<sup>2</sup> On the events of the year 1204 see, among others: M. Angold, *The Fourth Crusade. Event and Context*, London 2003; D. Nicol, *Byzantium: Its Ecclesiastical History and Relations with Western World*, especially chapter: *The Fourth Crusade and the Greek and Latin Empires 1204-1261*, pp. 275-330; Z. Pentek, ‘Z historii IV krucjaty (1198–1204) – zagadnienia polityczne wyprawy i punkty zwrotne w czasie jej trwania’, in: *IV Krucjata. Historia, reperkusje, konsekwencje*, ed. Z. Kijas, M. Salamon, Kraków 2005, pp. 55–106.

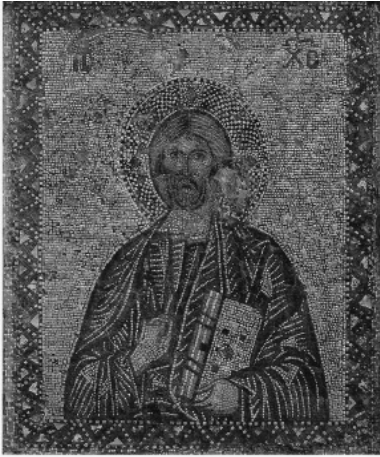


Fig. 1. Christ Pantocrator, 1330-1350, Parish of St Peter and St Paul in Chimay



Fig. 2. Holy Face of Christ, early thirteenth century, Cathedral in Laon

the Infant from Cambrai, which—in view of its history and numerous later imitations—will be discussed in more detail.

It is worth mentioning here that the problem of migration of certain motifs typical of Byzantine art into medieval Italian art has been considered self-evident, and for long been the subject of penetrating studies by art historians from various parts of Europe<sup>3</sup>. The issue of the influence of Eastern painting on the art of Northern Europe, however, has been hardly ever considered.<sup>4</sup> This state of affairs has been precipitated by the huge number of Byzantine works of art that have been preserved in the territory of Italy, whereas the situation in Northern Europe is radically different because there are very few examples of Byzantine art preserved there. Their destruction or removal can be blamed on iconoclastic riots in the Netherlands in the sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

The exhibition *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* put up in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2004 can therefore be considered a breakthrough of sorts. Various objects were on display, such as icons, coins, plaques, liturgical vestments,

<sup>3</sup> Cf. O. Demus, *Byzantine Art and the West*, New York 1970, pp. 205–240; E. Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West*, London 1976, pp. 337–378; J. Stubblebine, 'Byzantine Influence in Thirteenth-Century Italian Panel Painting', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 20 (1966), pp. 85–102; K. Weitzmann, 'Crusader Icons and Maniera Greca', in: *Byzanz und der Westen: Studien zur Kunst des europäischen Mittelalters*, ed. I. Hutter, H. Hunger, Wien 1984, pp. 143–170.

<sup>4</sup> The scholar who has paid attention to this question in his works is Hans Belting. A doctoral thesis—in the moment not accessible to us—has been published in the US: S. Thomas, *Forging the Missing Links: Robert Campin and the Byzantine Icons*, Case Western Reserve University 1998.

<sup>5</sup> D. Freedberg, *Iconoclasm and painting in the revolt of the Netherlands. 1566–1609*, New York 1988; Idem, 'The Hidden God. Image and Interdiction in the Netherlands in the Sixteenth Century', *Art History*, 5 (1982), no. 2, pp. 137–154.



Fig. 3. Mary with the Infant, first half of fourteenth century, St Pauls Cathedral in Liège



Fig. 4. Notre Dame de Grâce, c. 1340, Cathedral in Cambrai

examples of miniature painting, board painting, drawings, and graphic art. For our considerations, the question of the juxtaposition of objects at the exhibition is of paramount importance. Objects imported directly from Byzantium or made in the territory of Italy in the style of *maniera greca* were placed side by side with objects that corresponded to them in style or iconography, but were made by artists active in the territories of Flanders and Holland from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. Such a juxtaposition facilitated the comparison of earlier works with later artifacts and enabled the viewer to perceive to what degree Northern European artists imitated works that came from the East by copying them and subsequently transforming these models to suit artistic tendencies influential in a given place and at a given time.

When writing about the New York exhibition, one must not overlook a very valuable collection of essays that was published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in its aftermath. Maryan Ainsworth's article from this collection seems particularly important for our consideration.<sup>6</sup> The author points to inventories as a source of information on by now lost objects from art collections that belonged to Burgundy princes, French kings, and aristocrats from those territories. Illuminated manuscripts from the fifteenth century also provide rich material for this area of study.<sup>7</sup>

The presence of Byzantine icons in the territories of Belgium and France does not come as a surprise when we realize what international contacts — in particular exchanges be-

<sup>6</sup> M. Ainsworth, "À la façon grèce": The Encounter of Northern Renaissance Artists with Byzantine Icons', in: *Byzantium. Faith and Power*, ed. H. C. Evans, New York 2004, pp. 545–555. All information given below concerning dimensions, techniques of execution, inscriptions and dating of objects are from this catalogue.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 547–548, il. 17.3, 17.4.

tween the West and the East — looked like in medieval Europe. The year 1261, which opens the period addressed by the New York exhibition, also marks the end of the weak Latin Empire. A talented ruler of Nice, Michael Paleologue (1261–1282) ascended to the emperor's throne after re-conquering Constantinople against practically no resistance from the Latin emperor Baldwin II.<sup>8</sup> Michael Paleologue was a true diplomat, consistently striving to maintain the capital and re-conquer the territories that belonged to Byzantium before their occupation by the Latin crusaders at the turn of the thirteenth century. That is why he very deftly carried out negotiations with the Holy See. When the negotiations with the papacy did not bring the desired results, Michael Paleologue turned to the king of France, Louis IX, for help in the mediations.<sup>9</sup>

Michael Paleologue's successors, such as John V Paleologue (1341–1391), who converted to Catholicism during his notorious journey to Italy, Manuel VII (1391–1425), John VIII (1425–1448), and Constantine XI (1448–1453), also tried their hand at negotiations with the Western Church. This resulted in the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1445)<sup>10</sup> whose decisions unfortunately remained only on paper. The atmosphere of adversity towards the Western Church, and a complete lack of awareness concerning a tragic situation of the empire threatened by a Turkish invasion, is best conveyed by a pronouncement, most frequently quoted in historical texts about this period, made by one high-ranking official of the empire, Loukas Notaras, who said "I would rather see a Muslim turban in the midst of the City (i.e. Constantinople) than the Latin mitre".<sup>11</sup>

Deposing the Flemish dynasty princes from the imperial throne did not in the least lead to stopping contacts between the rulers of the East and the West. On the contrary, the situation compelled successive emperors to continue diplomatic efforts which prolonged the existence of the empire — remaining in internal chaos and constantly threatened by both Europe and Asia — for nearly two hundred years. Therefore it is no surprise that in the period under discussion Byzantine rulers sought to marry western princesses.<sup>12</sup>

The selected historical facts — out of necessity discussed very succinctly — presenting the situation of Byzantium after re-conquering the empire by Michael Paleologue show

<sup>8</sup> Ch. Diehl, 'Historia Cesarstwa Bizantyńskiego w zarysie od 1204 do 1453', in: *Bizancjum. Wstęp do cywilizacji wschodniorzymskiej*, ed. N. Baynes, H. Moss, transl. E. Zwolski, Warszawa 1964, pp. 43–56.

<sup>9</sup> This was an exceptionally clever move because Louis IX was a brother of Charles Andegaven, whose growing power seemed, to the Byzantine, the greatest threat to the empire. For detailed information on the contacts of Michael Paleologue with the papacy and Louis IX: M. Dąbrowska, *Bizancjum, Francja i Stolica Apostolska w drugiej połowie XIII w.*, Łódź 1986.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych*, vol. 3: *Konstancja, Bazylea, Ferrara, Florencja, Rzym*, ed. A. Baron, H. Pietras, Kraków 2004.

<sup>11</sup> M. Dąbrowska, 'Dekadencja Bizancjum i losy spadku po drugim Rzymie', *Znak*, 46 (1994), p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Eadem, *Łacinniczki nad Bosforem. Małżeństwa bizantyńsko-łacińskie w cesarskiej rodzinie Paleologów*, Łódź 1996; S. Origone, 'Marriage Connections between Byzantium and the West in the Age of the Palaiologoi', in: *Intercultural Contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. B. Arbel, London 1996, pp. 226–241.

convincingly that in the period under discussion contacts between the West and the East flourished. It thus comes as no surprise that many Byzantine icons found their way to the West. Besides being captured as loot, especially after the events of 1204, Byzantine icons also travelled to the West as a result of the Paleologue dynasty's efforts to maintain "political balance". Like relics,<sup>13</sup> they often served as gifts to rulers, aristocrats, and clergy. In particular icons were taken to the West during an intensive campaign for the unification of the Churches, and as a result of various diplomatic strategies—advantageous marriages with Latin princesses can be counted among these—aimed at forestalling any attempts to re-gain Constantinople lost by the Latin world in 1261.

In this context it seems interesting to dwell for a while on the facts concerning the first of the icons mentioned earlier, a mosaic icon of Chimay.<sup>14</sup> It was made, in mixed technique of mosaic and encaustic painting, in Constantinople and can be dated at the years 1300–1350. This rather small image (the dimensions of the icon 12 x 10.6 cm) depicts the half-figure of Christ Pantocrator, represented against a golden background. The figure of Christ has been presented in a dark robe and purple-red cloak. The effect of breaking folds is well conveyed by alternating rows of small golden pieces that remain in contrast with the darker background on which they have been placed. In the Savior's left hand, we can see a closed Book of Gospels, while the right one is raised in the gesture of blessing. Over Christ's head there is a cross-nimbus formed by rhomboidal jewels. Above, in the right- and left-hand upper corners are inscribed Greek letters which stand for the "Jesus Christ" full name. The whole is placed in a frame filled with precious stones situated opposite one another in the shape of triangles. What seems to catch the viewer's eye right away is a novelty in the depiction of Jesus Christ whose figure appears very small in relation to the empty space of its golden background.

The icon is known to be directly connected to the count of Chimay, Philippe de Croy, knight of the Golden Fleece. Serving as an envoy of Charles the Bold, the Prince of Burgundy, to the court of Ferdinand of Aragon, the king of Naples, he was presented with the icon of Christ Pantocrator by Sixtus IV during his visit to Rome. Some scholars point out that the icon of Chimay might be one of the seven icons presented to St Peter Basilica by Bessarion (1403–1472), the archbishop of Nice, later a Roman cardinal, a humanist who was concerned with the unification of the Churches. He left Byzantium in 1443. The information about Bessarion's gift is confirmed by the inventories of 1462 and 1489. It is diffi-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. M. Mergiali-Sahas, 'An Ultimate Wealth for Inauspicious Times: Holly Relics in Rescue of Manuel II Palaeologus' Reign', *Byzantion*, 76 (2006), pp. 264–275.

<sup>14</sup> J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, 'L'art byzantin en Belgique en relation avec les Croisades', *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art*, 56 (1987), p. 43. On the icon of Chimay there is a text in manuscript to be found in the Section of Medieval Art in Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. It is inaccessible to us at the moment: J. Buchin, *La mosaïque Byzantine de Chimay et son coffert, approche descriptive et historique, étant actuel des connaissances locales*, 2003.

cult, however, to determine unambiguously that the icon of Christ Pantocrator was indeed among the works of art presented to the Roman basilica.<sup>15</sup>

Another icon brought from Rome is an image of the Holy Face of Christ, a South Slavic work of the early thirteenth century, kept at present in the treasure vault of Laon cathedral.<sup>16</sup> The work (44 x 40 cm) was executed in tempera on cedar wood. It depicts the Face of Christ against a golden background. Christ's face, with dark eyes and symmetrically falling half-long curls of undulating hair on either side and a centre-parted beard, is surrounded by a cross nimbus. In either upper corner we can perceive an inscription, as in the case of the icon of Chimay, while at the bottom there is an inscription in Slavonic: "The face of the Lord on the Cloth".<sup>17</sup> The whole is presented on the stretched cloth with rhombic decoration.

The history of the image is as follows: in 1249 Sybilla, the abbess of the Cistercian convent of Montreuil-en-Thiérache asked her brother Jacques Pantaleon de Troyes, the papal chaplain and treasurer, later the pope Urban IV (1261–1264) for a miraculous image of the Holy Face of Christ impressed on the veil of Veronica from St Peter's Basilica in Rome.<sup>18</sup> As Hans Belting remarks, this put Jacques de Troyes in an awkward situation because he could not remove the relic from Rome. He thus presented his sister with an icon representing the Face of Christ and emphasized that he sent it "in place of the Veronica".<sup>19</sup> The work remained in France until around the mid-seventeenth century. It was then moved to the convent of Montreuil-les-Dames La Neuville, not far from Laon, where it was placed in a silver reliquary. In 1792 it was sent to the parish church and since 1795 it has been kept in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Laon.

The subject of pictures considered marvelous due to their genesis — that is, "not-made-by-human-hand", such as the image of Christ's Face impressed on a veil — is a complex problem with a huge amount of literature.<sup>20</sup> The significance of these pictures

<sup>15</sup> A. Effenberger, 'Images of Personal Devotion: Miniature Mosaic and Steatite Icons', in: *Byzantium. Faith and Power...*, p. 211.

<sup>16</sup> A. Grabar, *La sainte face de Laon. Le Mandylion dans l'art orthodoxe*, Prague 1931.

<sup>17</sup> H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A history of the Image before an Era of Art*, transl. E. Jephcott, Chicago 1994, p. 218.

<sup>18</sup> Cf.: H. Wojtyska, 'Kult Świętego Oblicza Chrystusa', in: *Kult Męki Pańskiej. Historia i terażniejszość. Materiały z sesji naukowej w Olsztynie 3–4 marca 2001*, ed. H. Wojtyska, Olsztyn 2001, pp. 205–217.

<sup>19</sup> H. Belting, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>20</sup> As we mentioned at the beginning of this text, we limit ourselves to drawing attention to certain interesting phenomena. To further study the question related to representing the Holy Face and how widespread this iconographic motif was in the Middle Ages on the territories under discussion see: G. Wolf, 'From Mandylion to Veronica: Picturing the «Disembodied» Face and Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West', in: *The Holy Face and Paradox of Representation. Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Biblioteca Hertziana, Rome, and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996*, ed. by H. L. Kessler and G. Wolf, Bologna 1998, pp. 153–179; M. Smeyers, 'An Eyckian Vera Icon in a Brugges Book of Hours, ca. 1450 (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. 421)', in: *Serta devota. In memoriam Guillelmi Lourdaux*, ed. W. Verbeke, Louvain 1995, pp. 195–224; E. Balicka-Witakowska, 'The Holy Face of Edessa on the Frame of the *Volto Santo* of Genoa: the Literary and Pictorial Sources', in: *Interaction and Isolation in Late Byzan-*

rose considerably in periods of intensifying iconoclastic tendencies. The defenders of icons employed the marvelous pictures as a weighty argument: if Christ, so to speak, “painted” his Face himself, there is no satisfactory counter-argument to prove that depicting His image is inappropriate.<sup>21</sup>

The case of marvelous images painted by St Luke and depicting Virgin Mary with the Holy Infant is similar. We refer here to a belief that Virgin Mary had, presumably, been portrayed during her lifetime. In the Middle Ages the portrait was kept in Constantinople and was copied many times.<sup>22</sup> It was believed that several such pictures could also be found in the medieval Rome. At some point it was supposed that St Luke painted portraits of Mary in different poses which corresponded to particular iconographic types.<sup>23</sup> In many cases we encounter legends according to which the supernatural intervention of God led to the finishing of a work. When St Luke falls asleep when painting the picture, angels sent from heaven finish working on the painting for him. Not only did the pointing to the marvelous genesis of the painting serve as an argument for visual representations in general, but it invested a concrete depiction with an aura of eeriness that contributed to the picture’s fuller reception in popular consciousness. The story about St Luke’s painting of Virgin Mary became a topos which we can encounter when studying histories of various Marian images. This was a result of a great need for direct contact with sacrum, which led to the acquisition of the status of relics by those pictures.

It must be noted that during the negotiations concerning the unification of the Eastern and Western Churches the need for depictions of Mary rose sharply. The awareness of the deepest respect owed to Virgin Mary as the Mother of God was the meeting-point of the two Churches.

One icon that has the status of a picture painted by St Luke is a Hodegetria-type image of Mary with the Infant from the treasure vault of St Pauls Cathedral in Liège. Although the work was executed in tempera on wood in Byzantium in the first half of the fourteenth century, we deal here, no doubt, with western fifteenth-century additions. The whole picture (34 x 29 cm) is covered by a silver-gilt revetment from under which only the half-length figures of God’s Mother and the Infant are visible. Mary is presented frontally, as a young girl with a delicate face, with fair curly hair falling from under a maphorion, her eyes directed towards the Infant. Her left hand supports the Son, while her right hand is presented in a gesture in which her three fingers point to Him. Mary is clad in a violet robe, she has

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*tine Culture. Papers Read at Colloquium Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul 1–5 December, 1999*, ed. J. Rosenqvist, Istanbul 2004, pp. 100–132.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. D. Freedberg, *Potęga wizerunków. Studia z historii i teorii oddziaływania*, transl. E. Klekot, Kraków 2005, pp. 384–434.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. M. Skrudlik, ‘Legenda o świętym Łukaszu malarzu Najświętszej Panny’, *Ateneum Kapłańskie*, 21 (1928), pp. 436–455.

<sup>23</sup> R. Cormack, *Malowanie duszy. Ikony, maski pośmiertne i całuny*, transl. K. Kwaśniewicz, Kraków 1999, pp. 50–51.



a maphorion on her head, underneath which she wears something in the manner of a veil. Over the robe and the veil are scattered golden stars—remnants of the original, Eastern depiction. The infant is presented in three-quarter length, with blond curls, in a purple-red garb, on which a geometrical design is fairly visible. With his right hand he is making the gesture of blessing, while in his left hand he has an unrolled scroll. Over the heads of the figures are silver-gilt halos. On either side, in small cartouches, are Greek letters, two (one round and one rectangular) on the left and four (three round and one rectangular) on the right. They stand for “Hodegetria” and “Jesus Christ”. The background around the figure of Mary with the Infant is covered in filigree. The frame of the picture consists of twenty small plaques (twenty rectangular and twenty square) decorated with a plaited motif. As we learn from accessible literature, the corner plaques, in which originally might have been placed representations of Four Evangelists or Church Fathers, were changed and replaced by rosette motifs with half-length depictions of St Lambert in the fifteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, our knowledge of the history of this picture is very limited. It is certain, however, that the picture was first recorded at the exhibition of relics in St Lambert’s Cathedral in 1489. The oldest mention of the icon reads as follows: “Primo imago Beatae Mariae depicta a Beato Luca Evangelista.” Due to the lack of source information, it is difficult to determine unequivocally how the icon found its way to Liège, and therefore we have different hypotheses concerning this problem. Tradition has it that it was presented to the cathedral by Frederick II (1212–1250). This version, however, is inconsistent with the style of the revetment dated at the first half of the fourteenth century.<sup>25</sup> It seems possible that the icon travelled to Liège during the negotiations concerning the unification of the Churches. Some scholars think that, like other Hodegetria-type eastern images of Mary with the Infant, the icon could have served as “palladium of the city”, which sheltered particular places from enemy invasions and other disasters. This might be supported by the fact of changing the plaques for the likenesses of St Lambert, an emblematic figure of the church in Liège.<sup>26</sup>

The best known icon of Mary with the Infant, according to tradition painted by St Luke, but in reality a work by an artist from Ambroggio Lorenzetti’s circle and brought to France from Rome in the Middle Ages, is a depiction of Notre Dame de Grâce in the cathedral of Cambrai.<sup>27</sup> The work (35.5 x 26.5 cm) is dated to around 1340 and was executed in tempera

<sup>24</sup> J. Puraye, ‘L’icône Byzantine de la Cathédrale St. Paul à Liège’, *Revue Belge d’Archéologie et d’Histoire de l’Art*, 9 (1939), nr 3, pp. 193–200. The author mentions also the gifts which the count of Flanders – the emperor Baldwin II – gave to the St. Lambert’s Cathedral.

<sup>25</sup> Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> *Byzantium. Faith and Power ...*, pp. 252–253, il. 150.

<sup>27</sup> Substantial body of literature exists on the icon of Cambrai. References to this peculiar depiction appear in connection with discussions on other subjects. Cf.: G. Bauman, ‘Early Flemish Portraits 1425–1525’, *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 43 (1986), nr 4, pp. 5–6; A. Chastel, ‘Medicats imaginis: Le prestige durable de l’icône en Occident’, *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 36 (1988), pp. 107–109; R. Frinta, ‘Searching for an Adriatic Painting Workshop with Byzantine Connections’, *Zograf*, 18 (1987), pp. 17–18; L. Silver, ‘Fountain and Source. A rediscovered Eyckian Icon’, *Pantheon*, 1983, nr 3, p.102.

on cedar wood. It shows the figure of Eleusa-type God's Mother with the Infant in three-quarter length against a golden background. Mary is clad in a dark blue robe with red and golden trim with pseudo-Arabic signs. On the maphorion over Mary's forehead and on her right shoulder we can see golden stars. God's Mother holds up the Infant wrapped in a purple-red garb. The Infant's face is turned towards the viewer, while his little hands stretch out towards His mother, the right one embraces her chin, while the left one touches the rim of her maphorion. Above the figures' heads we can see the elaborate punchwork of the halos, on whose either side there are Greek letters which refer to an inscription: "Mother of God, Jesus Christ".

As far as the history of the icon is concerned, it is certain that in 1440 Canon Fursy de Bruille brought it from Rome. It is also known that he received it as a present from Jean Allarmet, the cardinal of Brogny and the pope's legate to the Council of Constance (1414–1418). The second half of the fifteenth century witnessed the development of the cult of Notre Dame de Grâce. In 1451, on the eve of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the icon was moved with pomp to the chapel of the Holy Trinity, while in 1453 a brotherhood was founded whose aim was to take care of and worship the marvelous image that was first carried in a procession in 1455, during the holiday of Assumption.<sup>28</sup> The fame of the marvellous icon attracted contemporary celebrities such as Philip the Good, Charles the Bold, and King Louis XI to Cambrai. The most interesting episode in the history of the icon are two mysterious commissions for copies of the marvellous image of Cambrai. In 1454 Jean de Bourgogne the count of Estampes ordered three copies from Petrus Christus for the sum of twenty pounds. A year later the chapter of the cathedral commissioned twelve copies from Hayne of Brussels for the sum of twelve pounds.<sup>29</sup>

The copies of the icon of Notre Dame de Grâce became the focus of attention of many scholars on account of the riddle of Jean de Bourgogne's commission, which has not been solved so far. Historians of art have attempted to give an answer to the question of what so many copies of the marvelous image were needed for. Why was Petrus Christus paid twenty pounds for three copies, whereas Hayne of Brussels received only one pound for each copy? Another question with which the scholars are preoccupied is the problem of attribution of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century copies.

In the accessible literature we encounter a fairly interesting hypothesis concerning the commission by Jean de Bourgogne. As it is well known, the year 1454 is a time just after the fall of Constantinople, when the rulers of Western Europe were discussing a possibility of organizing an expedition in order to re-conquer Constantinople from Turkish hands.<sup>30</sup> Doubtlessly, preparations for such an expeditions called for broadest possible engagement

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<sup>28</sup> Belting, *op. cit.*, pp. 438–439.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 440.

<sup>30</sup> A. Grunzweig, 'Philippe le Bon et Constantinople', *Byzantion*, 24 (1954), pp. 47–61; R. Walsh, 'Charles the Bold and the Crusade: Politics and Propaganda', *Journal of Medieval History*, 3 (1977), pp. 53–86.

of members of nobility in order to amass sufficient financial means. The count of Estampes is known to have been engaged in the issues concerning the preparations for the crusade planned. In order to persuade the greatest possible number of members of Burgundy nobility to support the idea of the crusade a fund-raising events such as the Feast of Pheasant in Lille on 17 February were organized. During various celebrations spectacles were staged that were intended to show through the means of image the woes of the Church in the East, crying for help in the Turkish captivity.<sup>31</sup> Jean Wilson suggests in this context that the commission for the copies of the icon of Cambrai could be directly connected to the count of Estampes' seeking for political and financial support of the crusade. The image of Mary with the Infant of Cambrai might have been "the nearest and most precious piece of the East that he had at his disposal for his efforts to raise funds for the crusade".<sup>32</sup> Therefore the copies of the marvelous image were perhaps intended as presents for those participants of the 1454 events who had decided to join the supporters of the expedition or for those to be yet persuaded.

Several works that have survived until now can without doubt be regarded as copies of the icon of Cambrai. The painting considered the most faithful imitation of the original prototype is kept in the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.<sup>33</sup> The picture from St Martin's Church in Frasnès-lez-Buissenal (Hainault) is also executed in keeping with the Byzantine convention.<sup>34</sup> The most "free" copy that conveys the style characteristic of the artist who painted the picture and artistic tendencies that reigned in Northern Europe in the fifteenth century is the work from Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City (Fig. 5).<sup>35</sup> It replicates the composition of the Cambrai icon, but the presentation of figures in the picture differs considerably from that in the Cambrai



Fig. 5. Virgin and Child, fifteen century, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City

<sup>31</sup> J. Wilson, 'Reflections on St. Luke's Hand: Icons and the nature of Aura in the Burgundian Low Countries during the Fifteenth Century', in: *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. R. Ousterhout, L. Brubaker, Urbana 1994, pp. 137.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> C. Périer D'Ieteren, 'Une copie de Notre Dame de Grâce de Cambrai aux Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique à Bruxelles', *Bulletin Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, 17 (1968), nr 3-4, pp. 111-114.

<sup>34</sup> P. Rolland, 'La Madone Italo-Byzantine de Frasnès-le-Buissenal', *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art*, 17 (1947/1948), nr. 3-4, pp. 97-106.

<sup>35</sup> J. Dupont, 'Documents Hayne de Bruxelles et la copie de Notre-Dame de Grâces de Cambrai', *L'Amor de l'Art*, 6 (1935), nr 10, pp. 363-366.

painting. The artist breathed life into the image in showing Mary and the Infant embracing, with glances full of tenderness, the gentleness of their gestures (the Infant delicately supports Mary's chin with His little hand). The softly falling folds leave no room for doubt that we are dealing here with a kind of realism. Despite the golden background, the stiffness and hieratic character of the depiction has disappeared. There is also the issue of, so to speak, the "added" lower part of the representation—below the half-length figure of Mary, in the golden background we can see a coat of arms side by side with the inscription "Maria mater gracie/mater misericordiae/Tu nos ab hoste protégé/et ora mortis suscipe/O mater dei memento mei."

Due to the lack of source information that would enable us to determine unambiguously which of the previously mentioned artists could be the author of the copy in question, various scholars have come up with conflicting hypotheses that attribute the copy to Hayne of Brussels or Petrus Christus.<sup>36</sup> In our discussion we intend to avoid relating and evaluating their arguments because the aim of the present article is not adjudicating the problems concerning the attribution of the work but only to use it to draw attention to an interesting process of adapting and transforming certain motifs from Eastern painting to suit the quickly changing religious needs of fifteenth-century society in Western Europe.

Graphic art played not-so-small role in the process of disseminating the images showing Christ Pantocrator, His Holy Face, and Hodegetria- or Eleusa-type images of Mary with the Infant. Both in miniature painting and board painting of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries we encounter a great deal of images whose prototypes were icons. The best example of this phenomenon are paintings executed in the years 1455–1460 by Dieric Bouts (Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York) and Rogier van der Weyden (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) that show a half-length figure of Mary with the Infant (Figs. 6–7).<sup>37</sup>

In both pictures God's Mother is shown as a young girl with beautiful and subtle features with her eyes, full of love, directed at the Infant she embraces. The composition of these works could be described as a distant echo of Eleusa-type icons of Mary, but we face completely different representations. In both cases the half-figures fill the whole space of the work and, as it were, do not fit its frame and seem to step outside, beyond it, which, so to speak, makes them closer to the viewer. We can observe tremendous changes in the way the figures into which the artist breathed life are shown. Evidence can be found in delicate wrinkles in the necks of Mary and the Infant, and their blushing cheeks. Mary's headgear, the narrow headband of which in the case of Rogier's painting is studded with flower-shaped jewels, is pushed back so that her long, brown hair waving down her shoulders is visible. Figures in the pictures are presented in such a way that, especially in Dieric Bouts's

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<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 363. Cf. Rolland, *op. cit.*, pp. 103–104.

<sup>37</sup> Out of necessity we limit ourselves to presenting only two pictures even as we are aware how huge is the illustration material on the basis of which the phenomenon in question could be analyzed. Cf. Belting, *op. cit.*, pp. 409–457.



Fig. 6. Dieric Bouts, *Mary with the Infant*, second half of fifteen century, Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York



Fig. 7. Rogier van der Weyden, *Mary with the Infant*, second half of fifteen century, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

works, they can be mistaken for portraits of women with children; the signs of sanctity are impossible to find — above the heads of the Mother and her Son there are no halos and the golden backgrounds have disappeared.

Sixten Ringbom makes a very pertinent comment on the function of this type of representation. Therefore, it seems justified to quote his words: “The intimate quality of the half-length icon made it particularly well suited for the private devotion and profound empathy of the individual. Its character of a «close up» gave to meditation the immediacy of a quiet conversation; it had the «nearness» so dear to the Good-seeking devout”.<sup>38</sup> It is general knowledge that a need for this type of depiction was growing along with the *devotio moderna* that, in the period in question, was spreading all over Western Europe, especially in the Netherlands. It was of a more practical, Christocentric character that emphasized imitating Christ through a deep internal relationship to God.<sup>39</sup> Contact with the Creator, coming nearer to Him, were facilitated by meditation in front of pictures in which both Christ and His Mother were shown not in a symbolic manner but rather as creatures very much like people living on the earth. As a result, sanctity did not seem an unattainable

<sup>38</sup> S. Ringbom, *Icon to narrative. The rise of the dramatic close-up in fifteen century devotional painting*, Abo 1965, pp. 48; Cf. Idem, ‘Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions. Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety’, *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 73 (1969), pp. 159–170.

<sup>39</sup> For detailed information on the founders and characteristic features of *devotio moderna* See: W. Bielak, *Devotio moderna w polskich traktatach duszpasterskich powstałych do połowy XV wieku*, Lublin 2002.

sphere, solely a domain of monks and hermits, but as a road for which everybody is called. It became accessible to every pious person who did good deeds.

As we mentioned above, in order to understand causes of the penetration of pictures made in the East into Western Europe in the Middle Ages, and then copying and transformation of particular motifs to suit the new religious needs of the West, we must take into account the complex situation in Europe at that time as a whole. Contacts between the East and the West, negotiations concerning the unification of the Churches, marriages of the Byzantine emperors with daughters of Latin rulers, all this facilitated the penetration of Northern Europe by the images of Byzantine or Italo-Byzantine origin. Out of necessity we made a very succinct and brief presentation of several icons that in the Middle Ages found their way to the area that is now situated on the border of contemporary Belgium and France. Unfortunately, we do not have at our disposal a complete knowledge of the historical facts concerning these icons. Therefore we often attempt to reconstruct those facts on the basis of scarce information derived from mentions in sources and we are also compelled to provide connections as is the case with the presumable relation between the image of St Lambert in the icon of Liège and the role the picture might have played at moments difficult for the city.

While our considerations begin with a quotation from Villehardouin's chronicle that testified to the palladium function of the famous God's Mother Hodegetria image from Constantinople, it is worth pointing to an interesting issue at the end. A history of the representation of God's Mother of Cambrai and its copies discussed above shows that precisely two hundred and fifty years later (1454) the work of eastern provenance might have been used in raising funds for an expedition to re-conquer Constantinople. An analogy can be observed. Although we deal here with another icon of Mary with the Infant, it was also playing the role of palladium. The graphic art of seventeenth century and later epochs could be adduced here. The marvelous image might have also been functioning in the popular consciousness as crucial for saving Byzantium.