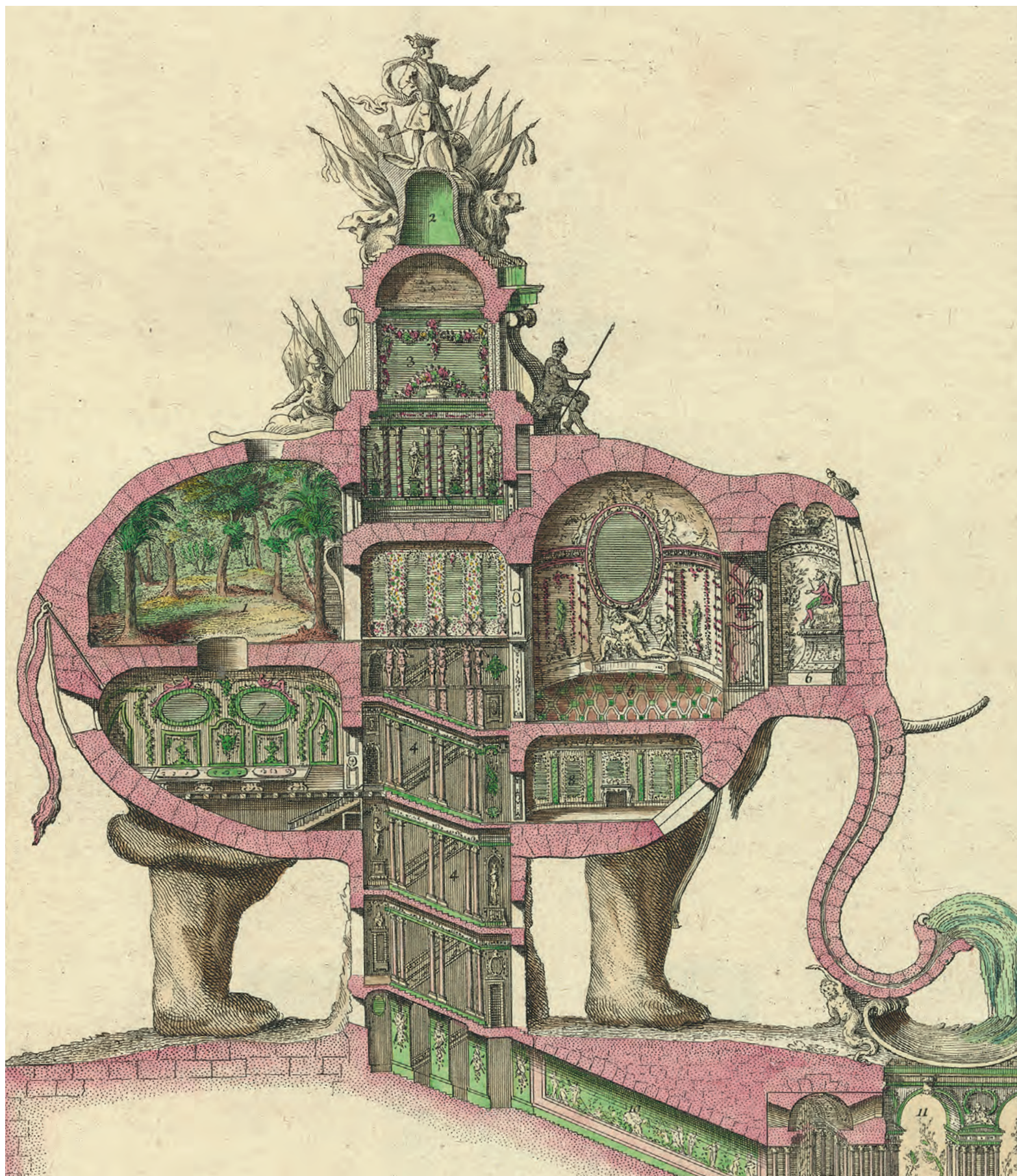




METROPOLITAN
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VOLUME 56 / 2021

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The *Metropolitan Museum Journal* is published annually by The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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Manuscripts submitted for the *Journal* and all correspondence concerning them should be sent to journalsubmissions@metmuseum.org. Guidelines for contributors are given on p. 8.

Published in association with the University of Chicago Press. Individual and institutional subscriptions are available worldwide. Please direct all subscription inquiries, back issue requests, and address changes to: University of Chicago Press, Journals Division, P. O. Box 37005, Chicago, IL 60637-0005, USA. Phone: (877) 705-1878 (U.S. and Canada) or (773) 753-3347 (international), fax: (877) 705-1879 (U.S. and Canada) or (773) 753-0811 (international), email: subscriptions@press.uchicago.edu, website: www.journals.uchicago.edu

ISBN 978-0-226-80562-7
(University of Chicago Press)
ISSN 0077-8958 (print)
ISSN 2169-3072 (online)

Library of Congress
Catalog Card Number 68-28799

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The authors are grateful to the peer reviewers of the *Metropolitan Museum Journal* for their suggestions and assistance.

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Typefaces: Calibre, Lyon, and Harriet
Printed on Arctic Matt, 150 gsm
Separations by Professional Graphics, Inc.
Printed and bound by Ofset Yapimevi, Istanbul

Front cover illustration: Attributed to Baselyos (scribe) and the Night-Heron Master (illuminator). Image (ሥዕል, ṣəʿəl) of *abba* Giyorgis [of Säglä] (አባ፡ጊዮርጊስ), fol. 1v in the *ʿĀrganonā Maryam (The Organ of Mary)*, late 17th century. Ethiopia, Lasta region. See fig. 1, p. 133.

Back cover illustration: Kneeling female figure, 15th–early 16th century. Mexico, Mesoamerica, Aztec. See fig. 5, p. 17.

Illustration on p. 2: Pierre Patte after Charles François Ribart de Chamoust. Section view of Ribart's elephant monument from Ribart 1758, pl. VI. Hand-colored etching. See fig. 4, p. 86.

Illustration on p. 4: Mask. Mexico. Olmec, 900–400 B.C. Jadeite, H. 5¼ × W. 5½ × D. 3 in. (14.6 × 14 × 7.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1977 (1977.187.33)

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MANUSCRIPT GUIDELINES FOR THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM JOURNAL

Founded in 1968, the *Metropolitan Museum Journal* is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal published annually that features original research on the history, interpretation, conservation, and scientific examination of works of art in the Museum's collection. Its range encompasses the diversity of artistic practice from antiquity to the present day. The *Journal* encourages contributions offering critical and innovative approaches that will further our understanding of works of art.

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ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*
MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.

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Icon, Contact Relic, Souvenir: The *Virgin Eleousa* Micromosaic Icon at The Met

MARIA HARVEY

Among the glittering enamels, illuminated manuscripts, the ivories, and painted icons displayed in the Church Apse gallery in The Metropolitan Museum of Art sits the micromosaic icon of the *Virgin Eleousa* (Byzantine, early 1300s) (fig. 1).¹ Measuring only 11.2 × 8.6 × 1.3 centimeters, the icon astonishes the viewer when hit by a moving, shimmering light, which makes the gold glitter, the background recede, and the Virgin and Child become three-dimensional. Each tessera—many only a few millimeters wide—catches the light differently and the icon's complex and fractured surface becomes captivating. The delicate chrysography on the robes of the Virgin and Child matches the tenderness with which the figures place their cheeks against each other, and the elongated fingers of the Virgin about to caress her son. On the

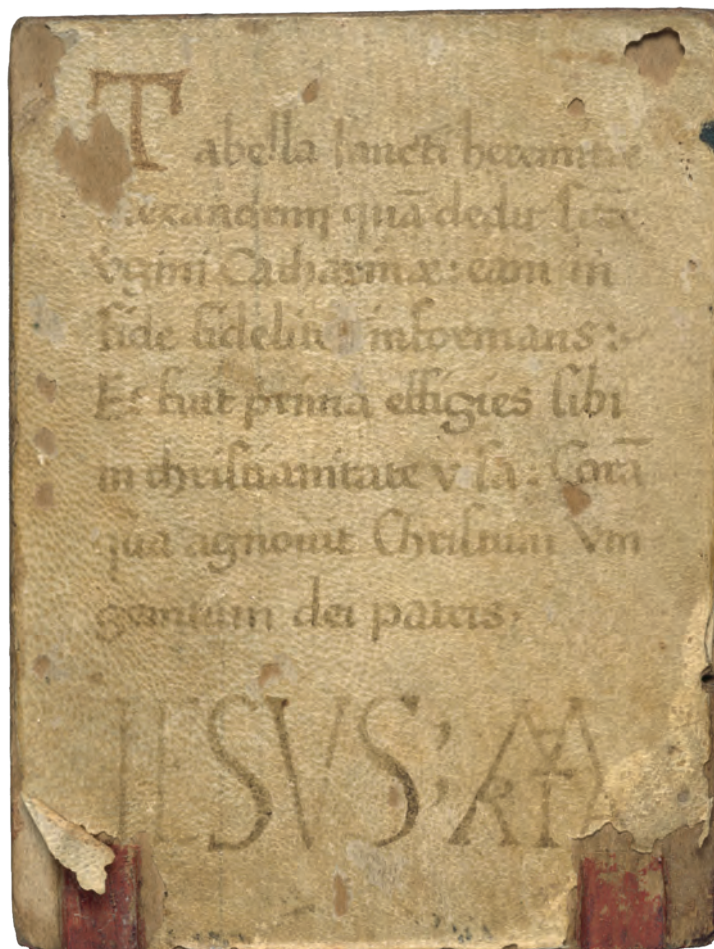


fig. 1 Portable Icon with the *Virgin Eleousa*, early 1300s. Attributed to Constantinople. Miniature mosaic set in wax on wood panel, with gold, multicolored stones, and gilded copper, overall $4\frac{7}{16} \times 3\frac{3}{4} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. (11.2 × 8.6 × 1.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John C. Weber, in honor of Philippe de Montebello, 2008 (2008.352)

fig. 2 Reverse of the Portable Icon with the *Virgin Eleousa* (fig. 1). Parchment label. Italian, 1450–1500.

reverse of the wooden tablet, a late fifteenth-century Italian label (fig. 2) identifies it as the icon that converted Saint Catherine of Alexandria (early fourth century) to Christianity. How did a fourteenth-century icon become a fourth-century relic in the mind of its fifteenth-century viewers?

The micromosaic was first displayed at The Met during the 2004 exhibition “Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)” and was donated to the Museum four years later by John C. Weber.² Previously, the *Virgin Eleousa* had been in a British private collection and little is known of its history before the late 1980s. In 2007, the owner’s daughter wrote to The Met stating that her father had discovered it in an antique shop in Italy, where a colleague had bought it for him as a gift.³ Any further information regarding the object’s provenance remains unknown. With no evidence outside of the artwork itself and the label attached to its back, this article studies an object that is detached from its place of production and subsequent contexts in which it functioned and was valued. The methodology is comparative in order to reconstruct a probable context and chronology for the micromosaic. Setting aside the

possibility that the icon’s association with Saint Catherine may have been manufactured, this article explores how the polyvalence of micromosaics authenticated the *Virgin Eleousa* as a contact relic of Saint Catherine.⁴

The discussion starts with an overview of Italian collecting habits, showing that Byzantine icons were simultaneously prized as reliquaries, relics, devotional icons, works of art, and historical artifacts and that these categories were often blurred. The article then argues that the *Eleousa*’s mosaic surface was not only central to its appeal, but also confirmed its early Christian date and Eastern origins, owing to a complex set of visual associations in which the icon acts as a sample of, a quotation of, and a metonym for the East. For fifteenth-century Italians, this late Antique, Eastern origin—intended as the icon’s place of production and acquisition, and as the spatial setting of the Catherinian narrative—was shaped by travel books and literature, frescoes, and panel paintings.

ICON AS COLLECTIBLE

Palaiologan (1259–1453) micromosaic icons were popular during the Italian Renaissance, when they were

fig. 3 *Christ Pantokrator*, 1150–75. Attributed to Constantinople. Miniature mosaic, 21¼ × 16⅞ in. (54 × 41 cm). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence (3 MO)

collected as relics, reliquaries, devotional icons, artworks, and historical artifacts. Eminently portable because of their small size, micromosaics could be found in large numbers in both church treasuries and private collections. Prominent, powerful patrons such as Lorenzo de' Medici, Niccolò Niccoli, Pietro Barbo (Pope Paul II), and Cardinal Basilios Bessarion owned more than a dozen each, attesting to their desirability. Of the forty-five surviving examples, one-third are or have been attested in Italy.⁵ The number of micromosaics on the peninsula was almost definitely much higher, as another fifty are mentioned in inventories.⁶ Few of them can be matched with the documentary evidence: of the fourteen once in the Medici collection, we can securely identify only the *Christ Pantokrator* (1150–75) now in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence (fig. 3).⁷ The mobility of these objects makes the study of their provenance particularly complex. For instance, scholars are still debating whether the *Christ Pantokrator*, which Pope Sixtus IV donated to Philippe de Croy, lord of Chimay, in Belgium in 1475, should be identified as one of the seven micromosaic icons that Bessarion had bequeathed to the Vatican a few years prior.⁸

Many micromosaics were in church collections, where they remain today.⁹ Notable examples include the Man of Sorrows in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and the *Christ Chalkites* in Santa Maria in Campitelli,



both in Rome; the *Saint Demetrius* in the Museo Civico Archeologico, Sassoferrato (previously in Santa Chiara); and the *Virgin Eleousa* in the Seminario Patriarcale in Venice (previously in Santa Maria della Salute).¹⁰ As a general rule, private collections often held up to a dozen micromosaics, while most treasuries owned just one. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Byzantine icons moved regularly between secular and ecclesiastic collections, as in the Chimay example, and could be found in major centers such as Rome, Florence, and Venice and in smaller ones like Palermo, Nicosia (Enna), and Galatina (Lecce). And yet, across these different contexts, micromosaics were collected for remarkably similar reasons.

There is little that can be said with certainty about the *Virgin Eleousa*, except that it was considered a contact relic of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. A “contact relic” is holy matter—dust, water, flowers, pieces of cloth, herbs, everyday objects, clothes—that had touched a saint’s living or lifeless body, or their tomb. This crucial piece of information comes from the label on the icon’s reverse, which covers the entirety of the available space. Eight lines of neat humanist Latin read:

*Tabella sancti heremitae // [A]lexandrini qua<m> dedit
s<an>ctae // v<ir>gini Catharinae: eam in // fide
fide<um> informans: // Et fuit prima effigies sibi // in
christianitate v[is]a: Coram<m> // qua agnovit Christum
uni//genitum dei patris. // JESUS: MARIA.*

A small painting belonging to the holy hermit
Alexandrinus which he gave to the holy Virgin Catherine:
[as he was] initiating her [Catherine] in her devotion to
the faith; And it was the first image seen [by her] in [her]
Christianity: in the presence of which she acknowledged
Christ [as] the only begotten son of God the Father.
Jesus: Mary.

Jonathan J. G. Alexander dated the writing paleographically to the second half of the fifteenth century and restricted the geographic profile to the Italian peninsula. He compared the MARIA monogram to laical ones used in charters and papal bulls.¹¹ The label, made to be visible and clearly legible, identifies the icon as a fourth-century artwork that the hermit Alexandrinus had given to Saint Catherine as she converted to Christianity. Although relic labels are ubiquitous, this one is particularly interesting because of its large size and format, and because it announces that the icon not only had belonged to Saint Catherine, but also that it

fig. 4 Pacio and Giovanni Bertini da Firenze (both Florentine, act. 1325–ca. 1351). *The Conversion of Saint Catherine* bas-relief (1350–1400) in photograph taken before the 1943 bombing. Complesso Monumentale di Santa Chiara, Naples



was present and instrumental in a pivotal moment of her life, her conversion to Christianity.¹²

The episode of Catherine's conversion was a late medieval invention, and, significantly, it is not included in Jacopo da Voragine's *Golden Legend* (ca. 1260), the most popular compilation of hagiographies in the late Middle Ages.¹³ Although the episode was alluded to in the mid-thirteenth century, the first securely dated written source is in a Latin text from 1337 now in the Cistercian monastery of Kasheim, near Donauwörth in Germany.¹⁴ It told of a young Catherine who, keen to maintain her virginity, visited the hermit, who informed her of a worthy suitor and gifted her an image of the Virgin and Child to pray to. That night, Catherine had a vision of the Virgin and Child, in which she learned that she needed additional instruction before she could marry Christ. This version became canonical and quickly spread throughout Europe, with fourteenth-century pilgrims reporting that Catherine was born and grew up in Cyprus. In 1394, Nicola de Martoni located the saint's conversion on the island in front of Famagusta.¹⁵

Images of the conversion started appearing in Italian visual culture in the 1330s and remained surprisingly consistent for about one hundred years. Catherine is represented kneeling, praying to or kissing a portable icon that the hermit either holds or is handing over to her. The image is always of the Virgin and Child, with the figures half-length, similar to the *Virgin Eleousa*. The earliest depiction of the conversion is in the *Vita* icon of Saint Catherine (ca. 1330) by Donato and Gregorio d'Arezzo now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.¹⁶ Shortly afterward, the story appears in a miniature of 1343 by the Pseudo-Niccolò; in the Pacio

and Giovanni Bertini da Firenze bas-reliefs for Santa Chiara in Naples (fig. 4); in the wing of a diptych attributed to the Pseudo-Jacopino di Francesco; and in the frescoes by Andrea de' Bartoli in the chapel of Saint Catherine in the Lower Church in Assisi. In the following century, similar images can be found in San Clemente, Rome; in Santa Maria della Rocca, Offida (Ascoli Piceno); in the Franciscan Basilica of Santa Caterina, Galatina (Lecce); in the Oratory of Santa Caterina delle Ruote, Bagno a Ripoli (Florence); in the Oratory of San Giorgio, Padua; and in the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, Parma.¹⁷ Although geographic profiles are hindered by survival rates, images of the conversion seem to have been popular throughout Italy. Combining this map with the one of the Italian locations of micromosaics shows the difficulty of identifying possible locations for the *Virgin Eleousa* in the quattrocento (fig. 5).

According to inventories, pilgrimage chronicles, and other documentary evidence, the vast majority of contact relics were things: the coals used in the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence; Saint Jerome's hat; Saint Hedwig's beaker, and the devil's stick with which he hit Saint Nicholas of Tolentino. Icons and other images, with the exception of those attributed to Saint Luke, seem to have been rarely considered contact relics.¹⁸ More often, images were valued for *doing* something: appearing in a vision, making it rain, curing a devotee.¹⁹ Notable exceptions are works of art such as the Saint Zenobius dossal in Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence, and the *Aniketos* icon in San Marco, Venice, both made of material that had become miraculous as a result of contact with a holy figure or their relics.²⁰ Simultaneously contact relics and cult images, the Saint Zenobius panel and the *Aniketos* defy easy categorization. As a contact

relic and an icon, the *Virgin Eleousa* raises similar ontological questions about the nature of cult images, relics, and icons.²¹

With the exception of *acheiropoieta* (literally, “not made by [human] hands”), scholars have mostly focused either on relics and reliquaries or on cult and miraculous images, neglecting icons and images that were considered relics in and of themselves. For instance, images attributed to Saint Luke the Evangelist have been studied from the perspective of cult and/or miraculous images, rather than as contact relics of the Evangelist.²² Although popular throughout the Middle Ages, many Byzantine icons were first attributed to Luke in the later fifteenth century.²³ Examples include the *Nikopeia* in San Marco; the Virgin and Child in the Santuario della Madonna di San Luca, Bologna; and two icons in Padua, one in the cathedral and another in Santa Giustina.²⁴ Interestingly, the Venetian chronicler Marino Sanudo the Younger (1466–1536) listed, among two hundred noteworthy relics in Venice, “La imagine della Beata Verzene, di musaico, fatta per man di San Luca,” that is, an image of the Virgin Mary, of mosaic, made by Saint Luke.²⁵ Although the (micromosaic?) icon does not survive, its existence demonstrates that icons/contact relics such as the *Virgin Eleousa* were

not exceptional in the religious landscape of quattrocento Italy.

Micromosaics seem to have been particularly prone to inhabiting this liminal space between relics, reliquaries, and images, as shown by two icons that became contact relics of early Christian saints and were incorporated into reliquaries in the Renaissance. The *Christ Chalkites* micromosaic in Santa Maria in Campitelli is currently set in an eighteenth-century wooden panel, which contains a relic of the Nail of the Cross, and is protected by what may have originally been a silver book cover, with a central image of the Crucifixion. Early eighteenth-century documentary evidence describes the ensemble as the portable altar of Saint Gregory Nazianzus (ca. 330–ca. 390) and indicates that it existed in a configuration similar to what we see today. It is probable that the micromosaic was first associated with Gregory Nazianzus in the Renaissance.²⁶ A couple of kilometers southeast, the famous *Man of Sorrows* in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (fig. 6) was also placed into a reliquary.²⁷ The heraldry on its Italian frame indicates that it was donated to the basilica in the late fourteenth century, and Jack Freiberg has shown that it was placed into the current reliquary at the end of the quattrocento.²⁸ By this time,

fig. 5 Map of Italy showing cycles of the Life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria that include the scene of the conversion (green triangles), and the location of lost and surviving micromosaic icons in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (circles)

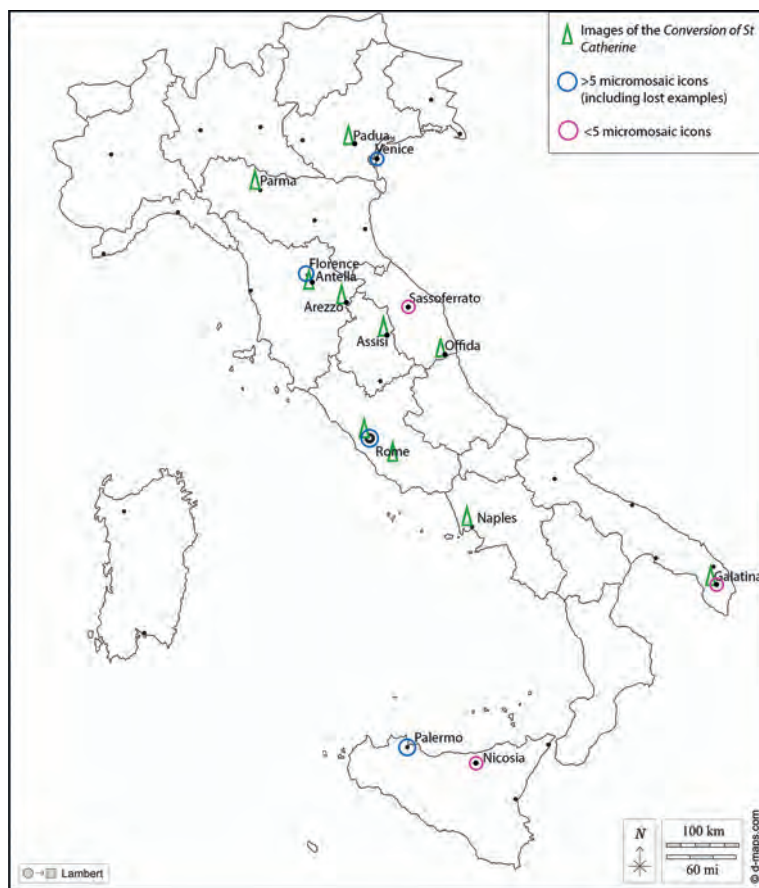


fig. 6 Triptych of Saint Gregory. Micromosaic icon of the *Man of Sorrows*, ca. 1290–1310. Without frame $7\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{8}$ in. (19 × 13 cm). Metal revetment frame with coats of arms, 1380s. Silver and enamel, $11 \times 9\frac{1}{8}$ in. (28 × 23 cm). Triptych, 1490s. Wood, metal, paper identification and silk wrappings for the relics, $38\frac{3}{8} \times 38\frac{1}{4}$ in. (98.7 × 97.1 cm) with open wings. Museo della Basilica, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome

the icon was identified as the image commissioned by Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604) after his vision of Christ as the Man of Sorrows during mass (an event called “The Mass of Saint Gregory”).²⁹ As in the case of the *Virgin Eleousa*, legendary connections to saints were invented for the Campitelli and the Santa Croce icons, transforming Palaiologan micromosaics into early Christian contact relics.

In other cases, micromosaics were not placed into reliquaries as relics but rather became reliquaries. Before donating his collection to Santa Chiara, Sassoferrato, Niccolò Perotti set his micromosaic of *Saint Demetrius* into a new frame, an Italian fifteenth-century piece that included an ampulla with manna from the saint’s shrine in Thessaloniki (fig. 7). The frame is decorated with the *tetrabasilion* (the imperial four-headed eagle) and inscriptions in Greek invoking Emperor Justinian, while the early fourteenth-century micromosaic may have been modified to include Perotti’s coat of arms in the saint’s shield.³⁰ By creating a “fake,” Perotti transformed the micromosaic into a “Byzantine” reliquary for the saint’s manna. Many other micromosaics also held relics in their frames. The frame of the Berlin *Crucifixion*, for example, has

ten round cavities; some relics survive and are labeled in Latin.³¹ As indicated in Bessarion’s will, we know that three of his micromosaics were framed by relics: icons of *Christ*, the *Entrance into Jerusalem*, and the *Archangel Michael*.³² The framing of works of art—Western and Eastern—with relics was commonplace in the Middle Ages, transforming them into objects that were simultaneously images and reliquaries, relics and portable altars. Together, this overview shows that the categories of contact relics, reliquaries, and icons often overlapped for micromosaics, providing us with a useful context to understand the transformation of the *Virgin Eleousa* into a contact relic of Saint Catherine.

At times, however, micromosaics were simply used as private devotional icons.³³ Although it is somewhat of a truism to say that many Byzantine icons and reliquaries were considered important devotional objects, deeply ingrained disciplinary boundaries make it easy to overlook the centrality of these works of art in quattrocento spirituality.³⁴ The Bargello *Christ* and another four micromosaics hung in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s bedchamber, indicating that they had an active religious function.³⁵ And although we do not know where Bessarion’s icons were kept, the three micromosaics with relics also signal a private devotional function, similar to the *Saint Demetrius* before it was donated to the Clarissan monastery in Sassoferrato. As Nino Zchomelidse and Beth Williamson have argued, relics in frames were used to render objects more potent, to authenticate the image, and to guide the viewer to consider questions of sanctity and the incorruptibility of saints’ bodies.³⁶ The *Virgin Eleousa* may have been a potent object for private devotion, especially if owned by a woman.³⁷ As we have seen, Catherine’s mystical marriage was intimately tied to the icon, and Victor Schmidt suggested that the conversion story may have developed out of the popularity of mystical marriages narratives.³⁸ Owning and praying to Catherine’s own icon may have been particularly powerful to women involved in the new types of mysticism that swept through Italy in the late medieval period.³⁹

At the same time, some of the most important collectors of the period were fascinated by Palaiologan micromosaics, acquiring them by the dozen. The Renaissance habit of collecting contemporary art and small Greek religious works of art is sharply criticized by Giovanni Battista Armenini in his *De’ veri precetti della pittura* (1587). Armenini describes villas covered in Titians, Correggios, and Giulio Romanos as “decorated with incredible art with the exception of the paintings of the Sacred images.”⁴⁰ These, he wrote, “were almost

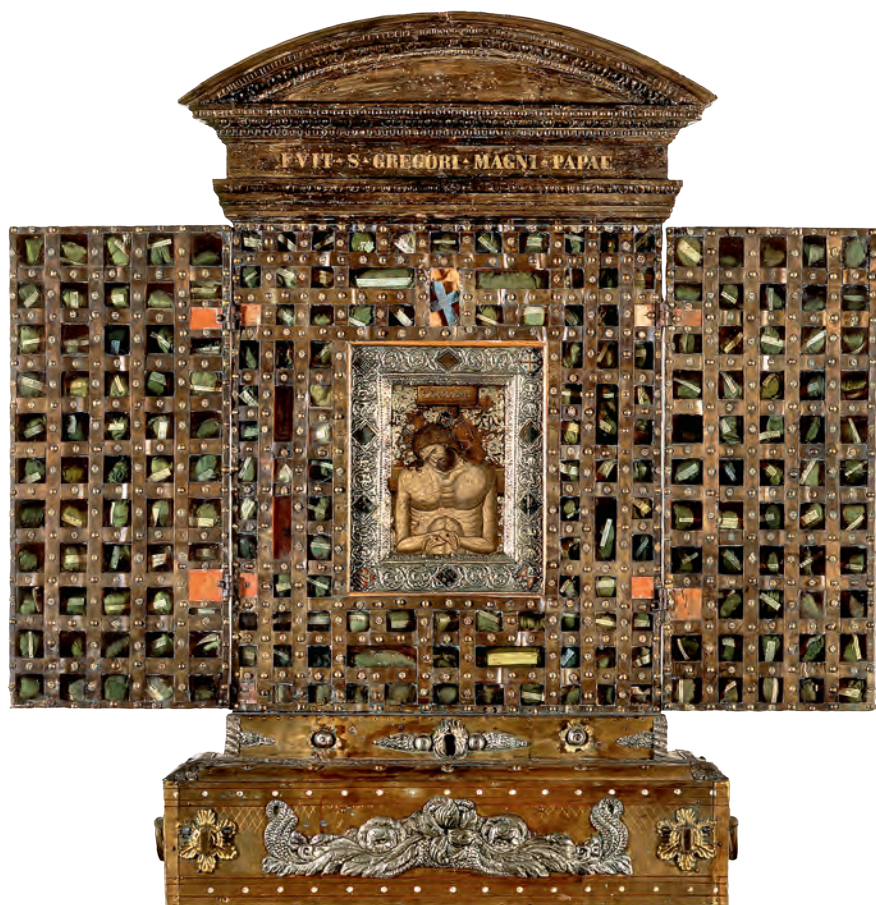




fig. 7 Portable Icon of Saint Demetrius, 1320–50, attributed to Constantinople or Thessaloniki. Miniature mosaic, with frame $9\frac{7}{16} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ in. (24 × 16.5 cm). Museo Civico Archeologico, Sassoferrato

all small panels of certain figures, made in the Greek manner, very awkward, not pleasing, and blackened by smoke.”⁴¹ However, Byzantine icons and micromosaics were collected in such large numbers that they must have also been valued for their aesthetics and not just their devotional power.⁴² As we have seen, Lorenzo de’ Medici kept part of his collection in his *studiolo* and had acquired them for a cost similar to that for contemporary art.⁴³ We do not know how micromosaics were displayed, but by the mid-fifteenth century collectors mounted coins, medals, cameos, and gems, or held them in trays and tablets so that both sides could be admired more easily.⁴⁴ The small size of the *Virgin Eleousa*, the legibility of the label on the back, and the two indents at the bottom, made after the label was

attached, may indicate that the icon had a stand, similar to Lorenzo’s famous Tazza Farnese cameo. The presence of a stand does not preclude a treasury object, however, and the two indents could have been for a processional carrying shaft. The boundary between “devotional icon” and “art object” was porous, and micromosaics belonged to both categories, as best demonstrated by Lorenzo’s own micromosaic collection. The *Virgin Eleousa* was probably prized for its early Christian associations, for its aesthetic qualities, and for its materiality, which, as we shall see, reinforced its religious power.

There is no mention in the documentary evidence of the artistry and virtuosity of micromosaic icons, but it is impossible to overlook. Smaller and lighter than a modern smartphone, the *Virgin Eleousa* invites the viewer to hold it and look at it closely and intimately. Its surface may seem painterly, but it is made of minuscule tesserae, some .50 microns in width. Even from up close, it is almost impossible to ascertain whether details such as the Virgin’s mouth and eyes are made out of mosaic, and the artist has taken the time to give Mary fingernails (a single white tessera for each nail) and a thin white veil underneath her *maphorion*. They have played with the different textures and refractive qualities of the materials, which allow the Virgin and Child to become three-dimensional as light hits the gilded-silver *coupons*. The glimmering surface must have reinforced the icon’s perceived prestige and exoticism, for no Italian panel or fresco has a comparably complex surface texture, and none reflects light in the same way—not even Simone Martini’s beautiful sgraffito and punched surfaces. It is worth noting that other collectibles, including Isabella d’Este’s small gilded bronzes and cameos such as the Tazza Farnese, also changed, moved, and were activated by light and touch.⁴⁵ And, although more difficult to prove, objects in treasuries were also prized for their aesthetics, virtuosity, and what Bissera Pentcheva has termed *poikilia*, an object’s ability to glitter, move, and come alive.⁴⁶ As examples of artistic virtuosity, micromosaics fit well within eclectic collections—both secular and religious—that displayed a keen interest for *curiositàs* and included contemporary art, unicorn (narwhal) tusks, Chinese porcelain, reliquaries, and hardstone vessels.⁴⁷

Inventories, although not a particularly loquacious type of documentary evidence, can help us understand how and to what extent micromosaics were valued as works of art. They are generally described as icons, made in Greece or in the Greek style (*maniera greca*), of mosaic, sometimes characterized as made of the

smallest tesserae. They are often called “antiques.”⁴⁸ The terminology is problematic, and scholars have long debated the exact meaning of such terms, which seem to variously indicate date, origin, style, and even quality.⁴⁹ “Mosaic” is the most precise term, but it was not always used to describe micromosaics.⁵⁰ *Smaltato* (enameled) and *d’argento indorato* (of gilded silver) both appear in the written evidence, and sometimes the medium is not mentioned. Mosaic was understood as an ancient art form by the fifteenth century, but “antique” covered a disparate range of objects, from Palaiologan micromosaics to fragments of classical statues and even copies of those statues made by contemporary artists, such as Antico (Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi). Painted panels of the Virgin and Child were also sometimes described as *all’antica*, variously indicating the antiquity of the prototype, the date of the object, or the style of the image—or all three aspects simultaneously.⁵¹ The phrase *maniera greca* was used interchangeably for both pre-Giottesque and Byzantine works of art, and appears often in Cretan contracts for the bulk production of icons, which could be made in either the Latin or the Greek style.⁵² In the writings of the Dominican Fra Giordano (d. 1311) and of Fra Giovanni Dominici (d. 1419), the *maniera greca* provided images with authority. By the sixteenth century it was used disparagingly, to describe “awkward,” “coarse,” “disproportionate,” and “monstrous” works.⁵³ This contradictory and often puzzling terminology is best represented by the portrait of Giotto (1490) in Florence Cathedral, where the artist is depicted as a mosaicist of icons, while the inscription identifies him as the father of naturalism and the artist who rediscovered antiquity.⁵⁴

The words used in inventories for micromosaics suggest a combination of origin, date, and taste, elements that probably reinforced one another in emphasizing the antiquity, illustrious origins, and exotic style of a given object, thus enhancing its cultural, if not monetary, value. Scholars of Renaissance collections, such as Paula Findlen and Leah Clark, have shown that inventories capture only the financial value, but it was the cultural one that drove the Renaissance interest in collecting.⁵⁵ The terminology used in inventories is notarial rather than art historical, and the prices reflect the amount of gold or silver used in the revetment frames.⁵⁶ For example, in the inventory of Pietro Barbo (the future Pope Paul II), the most expensive micromosaic icon is specifically described as “not beautiful,” but with a decoration made of the “purest gold, and [with] four pieces on which there are sculptures that weigh ten and ¾ ounces.”⁵⁷ At the same time, the price of the

icons is comparable to that of contemporary paintings: the *Adoration of the Magi* was valued at eight ducats, slightly less than the icons with revetments, although it also had a silver frame.⁵⁸ Rembrandt Duits has argued that the Barbo inventory follows the display order of the thirty-seven icons, showing a fascination with their aesthetics: the two most expensive icons and the *Virgin and Child* images in the center, then the other micromosaics on each side, the painted panels, and finally the stone (steatite?) ones as bookends.⁵⁹

Florentine written evidence confirms that micromosaics were collected as works of art, and that they were used as part of a larger rhetoric of artistic patronage because of their virtuosity and alleged antiquity. In a particularly valuable and telling passage on the Tuscan milieu, Vespasiano da Bisticci wrote that people sent the famous humanist Niccolò Niccoli (ca. 1364–1437) “gifts, whether marble statues or vases made by the ancients, sculptures, marble epitaphs, autograph paintings by important masters, and many mosaic tablets.”⁶⁰ According to his postmortem inventory, Lorenzo de’ Medici collected micromosaic icons alongside antiques, to which he added natural curiosities and contemporary works of art.⁶¹ As we have seen, the micromosaics were hung both in his chamber, where they were the only religious works of art alongside Donatello’s *Ascension*, and in the *studiolo*, where they appeared among antiques, exotica, and other examples of artistic virtuosity. Coins, hardstone vessels, fragments of classical statues, cameos (including medieval ones), many Byzantine painted panels, and micromosaics were all considered antiques.⁶² The private collections of the late fifteenth century thus seem to demonstrate that while micromosaics were valued as devotional icons, relics, and reliquaries, they were also collected as works of art. Small and light, the *Virgin Eleousa* may well have been in a private collection, hung on a wall in a bedchamber or displayed in a *studiolo* alongside cameos and porcelain.

In addition to being valued as an ancient work of art, the *Virgin Eleousa* was likely considered a historical artifact. Micromosaics seem to have been considered genuine witnesses to history by both lay and religious owners, and often misdated by about a thousand years: the Campitelli and the Santa Croce micromosaics were considered to be fourth- or fifth-century objects; the lost (micro?) mosaic icon in Venice was attributed to Saint Luke. We do not know why Perotti commissioned an archaizing frame with the *tetrabasileion* and inscriptions invoking Emperor Justinian as the original patron for his *Saint Demetrius*, although it is possible he was

creating a “fake” to use as a conversation piece with fellow humanists. However, the fact that he later donated the object (icon, frame, and ampulla with the saint’s manna) to the monastery of Santa Chiara suggests that he may have commissioned a frame that he deemed appropriate for the icon’s age. This insistence on the antiquity of micromosaics should be understood as part of a broader interest in the material knowledge of the past, with Italians engaging with cameos, coins, statues, and ruins alongside classical literature. As Findlen has argued, Renaissance Italians “saw the past as an embodied presence.”⁶³ It is during this period that Italians started the first archaeological voyages in the Eastern Mediterranean, actively searching for what Melissa Meriam Bullard has termed “tangible remnants of a distant past”—a definition that is also easily applicable to relics such as the *Virgin Eleousa*, which bore witness to historical people and events.⁶⁴

Historical objects that blurred the line between artifacts, antiques, and relics could already be found in the Middle Ages, when Roland’s horn was held in the treasury of Saint Denis.⁶⁵ By the sixteenth century, there was a wealth of these “relics” in both secular and ecclesiastic collections: an autograph manuscript by Petrarch, drawings by Michelangelo, Lorenzo Monaco’s hands.⁶⁶ Though these objects could not perform miracles in the manner of saints’ relics, their value lay in their proximity to a revered historical figure. The status of previous owners often increased an object’s value, strengthening its ties to the past.⁶⁷ For example, the most expensive objects in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s collection, the Sigillo di Nerone and the Tazza Farnese cameos, were thought to have belonged respectively to Emperor Nero, and to Frederick II and a Persian prince of Samarkand.⁶⁸ Similarly, micromosaics were collected for their tangible connection to important figures such as Pope Gregory the Great, Emperor Justinian, the sainted theologian Gregory Nazianzus, and the martyred princess-scholar Catherine of Alexandria.

The understanding of religious relics as historical artifacts fits within the late medieval fascination with materiality and the growing interest in the discipline of history.⁶⁹ Modern philology, the study of language and its historicity, was founded in the Renaissance and famously led humanist Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457) to demonstrate that the Donation of Constantine was a forgery.⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter, Antonio degli Agli (1400–1477) started collecting lives of saints for his *De vitis et gestis sanctorum* and, in the process, realized that there was no evidence that Catherine had ever existed.⁷¹ He was not the only person to doubt the authenticity of the

Alexandrian virgin, although she remained astonishingly popular throughout the period.⁷² At the same time, the *Eleousa* itself was seen as proof of Catherine’s existence, as material remains and images were considered as authoritative as the written word.⁷³ For example, as early as the 1270s, Martino da Canale used archival evidence to corroborate his story of Venice, before stating that the images in San Marco confirmed his narrative.⁷⁴ Similarly, Lorenzo Valla pointed to the absence of coeval material, no “gold seals, marble inscriptions,” as indication that the Donation was a forgery.⁷⁵ We now turn to a consideration of what allowed for a fourteenth-century icon of the Virgin and Child to authenticate its own origin and status as a contact relic of Saint Catherine. To be sure, it benefited from the polyvalence outlined here, its location within a nexus of interrelated meanings—simultaneously a relic, an antique, a historical artifact, a collectible, and a virtuosic work of art. However, arguably, its effectiveness lies in its material and technique. The painstaking assemblage of minute pieces of glass into a luminous whole allowed the icon to bridge time and space.

ICON AS SOUVENIR

All relics require authentication. As Nino Zchomelidse, Holger Klein, and others have demonstrated, oral and written narratives were essential to substantiate the veracity of a relic, which then had to be corroborated by the relic itself.⁷⁶ In other words, for things to become relics, they needed both external and internal validation. While the former generally came in the form of provenance (often proven through contracts or sworn statements), the latter could encompass a broader variety of processes, depending on the object.⁷⁷ In a particularly stark example, when Florence acquired a finger of John the Baptist in 1394, the city asked Nicoletta Grioni for documentary proof of the provenance. A half century later, however, they doubted the relic’s authenticity, and decided to see if it fit with the Baptist’s right arm that was held in Siena Cathedral.⁷⁸ The two pieces fit together, effectively authenticating both.

In the case of the *Virgin Eleousa*, we can only posit the existence of some type of narrative that would have tied the object directly to one of the places connected to Catherine (Sinai, Alexandria, or Cyprus). The icon is dated to the early 1300s and attributed to Constantinople. With a few exceptions, micromosaics are generally considered a court product, a narrative corroborated by later Italian sources.⁷⁹ However, Liz James has recently challenged the centrality of Constantinople in mosaic production, demonstrating that it was a truly

pan-Mediterranean phenomenon.⁸⁰ Analyzing the dynamics of glass production and its economic underpinnings, James argued that workshops were itinerant and the work seasonal.⁸¹ In theory, micromosaic icons could have been made in any center active in the thirteenth century, including Constantinople, Venice, Florence, Rome, Thessaloniki, Damascus, Cairo, and Jerusalem.⁸² We do not know if mosaic icons were produced in the winter, during downtime, or whether they were made with waste material, for instance.⁸³

Wherever the *Virgin Eleousa* was produced, its label places it on the Italian peninsula by 1450–1500. Assuming it was not made in Italy, it may have arrived there as early as the end of the trecento, similar in that chronology to the *Christ Chalkites* in Galatina, the *Man of Sorrows* in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, the *Twelve Feasts* diptych and the lost *John the Baptist* in Florence, and the five lost Sicilian icons.⁸⁴ Although the Latin Conquest of Constantinople in 1204 and the Council of Ferrara-Florence of 1439 often appear in the literature as the two pivotal moments for the importation of Byzantine objects, the majority were actually procured on diplomatic missions, pilgrimages, and the many ongoing mercantile contacts.⁸⁵ The *Man of Sorrows* and the *Christ Chalkites*, for example, were probably acquired during such travel.⁸⁶ Considering the popularity of Saint Catherine and of pilgrimages to Sinai in the trecento, the icon was probably commissioned during or after a pilgrimage, or obtained at a site associated with the saint.

There is a vast amount of scholarship dedicated to understanding how objects bridge time and space. In 2010, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood published *Anachronic Renaissance*, which focused on how “out of time” objects (like the *Virgin Eleousa*) hesitate between temporalities. Their study explored not what artworks are, but what they *do*, qua art.⁸⁷ Nagel and Wood’s work is heavily dependent on a long line of scholars of medieval art, chiefly Richard Krautheimer, Hans Belting, and Gerhard Wolf.⁸⁸ In 2012, Wolf criticized Nagel and Wood for limiting images’ substitutional chain to a temporal realm, when medievalists have long argued that substitution works both spatially and temporally.⁸⁹ To rethink these dialogical systems of relations, Susan Stewart’s *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1993) proves helpful. Although she is interested in mass-produced, modern souvenirs, she theorizes the relationship between the point of origin, the narrative, the object, and the role of memory and longing in the creation of meaning.⁹⁰ Discussing how souvenirs displace

the narrative’s “point of authenticity” and become its “point of origin,” Stewart identifies a common feature of souvenirs, relics, heirlooms, and any type of object removed from its original context that becomes proof of the story to which it is connected.⁹¹ She describes how souvenirs are othered and exoticized, and signal out-of-body experiences that cannot be replicated or explained, until they become the very evidence of the encounter. This shift (or what Stewart calls “substituting power”), when the souvenir does not need but becomes the narrative, has been discussed by many medievalists working on relics, the Holy Land, memory, and imagination.⁹² We can think of the *Virgin Eleousa* as both a relic and a souvenir, not because we know its mode of acquisition, but because of how the icon’s style, mosaic surface, and iconography authenticate a fantastical oral narrative that places the icon at the center of a major event, Catherine’s conversion.

Stewart’s work is also useful for considering the role of visual elements in processes of authentication. She posits that souvenirs are fundamentally incomplete and partial, and that they function as quotations, metonyms, and samples.⁹³ In its relationship to glittering gold wall mosaics, the micromosaic is perhaps best understood as a metonym or a quotation. As a quotation, the *Virgin Eleousa* is a smaller part of something larger, a portable, partial section of a wall mosaic that could be brought home. At the same time, the micromosaic is its own finished piece, delicately framed by black and white single tesserae (and originally a metal revetment).⁹⁴ A metonym is a figure of speech, in which the name of an object or concept is used to describe another, of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated. In this sense, the micromosaic icon is a substitute for wall mosaics. It is a bound, finished artwork that encapsulates, symbolizes, and references a larger whole. Whether it was viewed as a sample, quotation, or metonym (or all three), the micromosaic’s visual and technical similarities with the wall mosaics and icons of the Eastern Mediterranean—especially in Sinai—authenticated it, giving it meaning and value as a sample, a token of the East.

Understanding the *Virgin Eleousa* as a “portable monument” means contextualizing it not only within *studioli* and church treasuries, but also within the built environment of Italy and the Mediterranean. To better appreciate the relationship between the souvenir/relic and the whole, it is important to include both the reality of the Eastern Mediterranean in the fifteenth century and how Italians knew and imagined it, from re-creations of the Holy Land in art and architecture to travel literature.⁹⁵

fig. 8 Nave interior of the Church of Saint Catherine on Mt. Sinai, Egypt

Golden wall mosaics and icons abounded in images and structures that referenced, depicted, or re-created both the real and the Heavenly Jerusalem, copying the golden surfaces of Hagia Sophia, the Dome of the Rock, and the Church of Saint Catherine on Mt. Sinai (fig. 8). In his pilgrimage account (1394–95), Nicola de Martoni commented on Sinai’s marbles, lamps, icons, and mosaics.⁹⁶ And when Niccolò da Poggibonsi, a Tuscan monk and pilgrim, wrote the *Libro d’oltramare* (1346–50), he included in-depth descriptions and drawings of the Holy Land for the first time, bringing to life churches of marble and porphyry that were glittering with mosaics.⁹⁷ On Sinai, he paused at the doors of the *katholikon* of Saint Catherine’s to mention a mosaic (icon?) of the Virgin and Child, with Moses and Saint Catherine.⁹⁸ For late medieval Italians, the East was characterized by golden wall mosaics and icons—of which the *Virgin Eleousa* was a sample, a quotation, and a metonym.



It is this very connection to its imagined “original” context, its fragmented existence, that we may argue facilitated the transformation of the icon into a relic. For Stewart’s souvenirs and for relics, the meaning and value do not necessarily come from the object itself, but from the location and experience to which the object is connected. Relics acquire their power from the narrative, which is not only anchored in, but also based on, their origin.⁹⁹ The importance of the narrative for the production of meaning for a relic can hardly be overstated, as shown by the many images and texts that were commissioned to document a relic’s *translatio*. Like Stewart’s souvenir, the relic is partial—signaling a whole that is often geographically distant. Relics are quotations and samples of whole bodies, and they are metonyms for the saint, who is fully present to the praying devotee. The fragmentation of the relic, and especially the fact that its power lies in fragmentation, is discussed by Findlen, too, who compares it to how humanists understood the ruins that entranced them and the fragments of classical statuary they collected.¹⁰⁰ The authentication of the *Virgin Eleousa*, simultaneously a relic and an antique, thus depended on this very fragmentation, on its relationship to the “whole,” intended as the aggregate of knowledge about the East.

As we have seen, things need both internal and external validation to become relics. We do not know if the *Virgin Eleousa* had a documented provenance, and its parchment label gives no indication of its *translatio* narrative. More extensive than a treasury label but without witness statements or documentation to prove provenance, the label may have confirmed an oral tradition, simply informing the viewer that the icon had belonged to Saint Catherine.¹⁰¹ Because of its size, extensive narrative, legibility, and the elegance of its writing, the label’s sole *comparanda* is the long narrative on the back of the Santa Maria della Salute micro-mosaic (fig. 9). This sixteenth- or seventeenth-century illustrated parchment authenticates it, providing a myth for its creation (a Master Theodosius of Constantinople made the diptych, of which only the Venetian Virgin survives, in 1115, and gave it to Manuel I Komnenos) and devotion (the icons were shown at Hagia Sophia on the Thursday of Holy Week and processed to the Chora Church [Kariye Camii]). It does not explain how the icon reached Venice, instead highlighting the importance of the icons’ mosaic surfaces, made over a twenty-year period with “great skill, by means of hand-painted mosaic tiles.”¹⁰² It suggests that the two icons were venerated as relics in Hagia Sophia at least in part because they were micromosaics.

fig. 9 Portable Icon of the Virgin Eleousa (reverse), 1500–1700. Parchment label, 8½ × 6¾ in. (21.6 × 17.1 cm). Seminario Patriarcale, Venice



While the Venetian label explicitly mentions the micromosaic medium, the parchment on the *Virgin Eleousa* does not. However, the icon's mosaic surface played an essential part in its authentication, constantly (re)producing its meaning and value. Although micromosaics were produced only during the Palaiologan period, the technique allowed for the icon to be dated to the fourth century and strengthened its attribution to Saint Catherine. In Renaissance Italy, mosaic was not understood as a typically Constantinopolitan, Byzantine product, but as characteristic of early Christianity and classical antiquity, found in Rome, Venice, Byzantium, and the Holy Land. In his *Treatises*,

Filarete (ca. 1400–1469) spoke of mosaic as a long-lost form, seldom used since Giotto and Pietro Cavallini's time, which he had the occasion to see in a small Greek icon in Venice. Although he believed micromosaics to be made of eggshells, he still connected the panel to wall mosaic as if the Venetian image were a synecdoche for Giotto's and Cavallini's works of art, themselves the last examples of an ancient art form.¹⁰³

This understanding of mosaic as characteristic of an interrelated spatial (the Holy Land) and temporal (classical antiquity and early Christianity) realm arose in part from the geographic distribution of wall mosaics. Rome and Venice were indisputably the two major

fig. 10 *Dispute with the Philosophers*, ca. 1415–23/25. Fresco. Santa Caterina, Galatina

Italian centers, but mosaics can also be found in Orvieto, Pisa, Ravenna, Palermo, Naples, Messina, and elsewhere.¹⁰⁴ The importance of San Marco cannot be overstated, although James thinks enough mosaics existed in Venetian monastic and parish churches for golden domes to have become a ubiquitous symbol of church spaces.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, for the fifteenth-century viewer of the *Virgin Eleousa*, Venice was the major port for pilgrimage to the Holy Land.¹⁰⁶ San Marco's glittering surfaces functioned as a preview of the Justinianic Church of Saint Catherine on Mt. Sinai, but also for the wall mosaics found at other Catherinian sites, such as Alexandria of Egypt and Cyprus. Mosaics were common in the East, where they decorated the exterior of mosques and the interiors of churches, and most famously adorned the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, also founded by Justinian.

In Rome, the connection with early Christianity was not only admired but also actively reproduced. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, Filippo Rusuti, Jacopo Torriti, Giotto, and Pietro Cavallini had created many important mosaics, all in early Christian basilicas: Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Maria in Trastevere, San Giovanni in Laterano, and San Pietro in Vaticano. Later, Melozzo da Forlì (1438–1494) would decorate the ceiling and walls of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in mosaic.¹⁰⁷ Ravenna, an increasingly popular destination because of Dante's tomb, was covered in Justinianic mosaics. And in Florence, the Baptistery, which was considered a Roman temple, was adorned with a massive mosaic program attributed to Cimabue. According to James, mosaic had gone “bust” by the 1450s, but a notable

exception is Lorenzo de' Medici's patronage of the Saint Zenobius chapel in Santa Maria del Fiore. Only a single figure was completed, but Lorenzo envisioned a much larger program, aiming to decorate Filippo Brunelleschi's dome with mosaic and stucco.¹⁰⁸ In the same period, a few portable mosaic icons were also made in Florence.¹⁰⁹ The connection between mosaic, early Christianity, classical antiquity, and the Eastern Mediterranean was visible in the region and often reiterated through a number of major commissions, setting in stone the association between golden glass tesserae and the origins of Christianity.

An analysis of depictions of Saint Catherine shows the same combination of antiquity and the Eastern Mediterranean that underpinned mosaics' meaning, demonstrating why (micro)mosaic may have been particularly apt, even powerful, for an object that had allegedly belonged to the martyr saint. In cycles of the life of the saint, antiquity was often suggested through the inclusion of a classical statue as a pagan idol, as in Galatina, where the philosophers surround a statue of Hercules (fig. 10), or in Antella, where Spinello Aretino depicted the emperor ordering Catherine to pray to a statue of a male nude. In Padua, Altichiero painted a blindingly white classical statue in the center of the busy *Miracle of the Wheel*. The Eastern location of the narrative is often simply referenced by depicting the emperor with a turban and/or as an Eastern despot. Altichiero's frescoes in Padua are an exception (fig. 11), with many figures racialized, wearing turbans, caftans, and Tartar hats (amusingly, one of them holds a shield of the Holy Roman Empire). In the medieval period, Catherine had been represented as a Byzantine princess, as in Margherito d'Arezzo's dossal (1250–1300) now in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa (fig. 12). By the trecento, however, Catherine had become a universal figure, and signs of her otherness were rarely included in her representations.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, this combination of antiquity and Eastern origin probably served to strengthen the authentication of the micromosaic of the *Virgin Eleousa* to its viewers, emphasizing similar connotations as the mosaic medium itself.

Finally, the *Virgin Eleousa*'s opulence probably contributed to the attribution to Saint Catherine. As discussed earlier, micromosaic icons were highly prized, held in major secular collections and in important church treasuries. They had a similar value to contemporary art, were given as diplomatic gifts, and often had legendary pedigrees that placed them at the Byzantine court. Micromosaics are sometimes described as *icone*



fig. 11 Altichiero da Zevio (Veronese, act. ca. 1369–88). *The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine*, 1378–84. Oratorio di San Giorgio, Padua

fig. 12 Vita icon of Saint Catherine, 1240–60. Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel, 44 1/8 × 46 7/16 in. (112 × 118 cm). Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa

indorate in inventories: “golden icons.” The tesserae of the *Virgin Eleousa* are malachite, lazurite, and marble, and the silver *coupons* were individually gilded before being placed in the beeswax.¹¹¹ In other words, the icon is made of precious and semiprecious stones, silver, and gold. The splendor of the icon’s surface is only compounded by its weightlessness, making it feel particularly fragile—an experience only heightened by its silver revetment frame. The opulence of the *Virgin Eleousa*, coupled with its small size and the delicacy of its artistry and materiality, was probably considered appropriate for a princess like Saint Catherine, who was first depicted in the traditional Byzantine imperial *loros* and *prependoulia* and then in golden Tartar silks and jeweled crowns and tiaras.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown how an early fourteenth-century icon became a fourth-century contact relic by exploring the relationship between narrative, aesthetics, materiality, origin stories, imagination, and memory. Micromosaics fluctuated between categories: exotic and local, relics of the Eastern Mediterranean and of early Christianity. Collected as relics and reliquaries, devotional icons and works of art, historical artifacts and antiques, micromosaics were polyvalent objects in



Renaissance Italy. Their shimmering surfaces reinforced their aura of uniqueness and prestige, for mosaics and Byzantine icons became alive when hit by light, moving and shifting. Activated and animated, the *Virgin Eleousa* moves, the child reaches up, the mother hugs her son tighter, the gold shines and sparkles.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research for this article was supported by an Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship (2018–19) at The Met. I am especially indebted to Melanie Holcomb for her brilliant insights and perceptive feedback, and am particularly thankful for the time she dedicated to my work during the Covid-19 pandemic. I also thank Helen Evans and Lucy Donkin, who read the first draft and provided encouragement and profound observations. I extend further thanks to Stefania Gerevini, Bella Radenovic, Donal Cooper, Joanna Cannon, Milly Peck, Cyril V. Uy II, and everyone at Giotto’s Circle.

MARIA HARVEY

Rome Fellow 2020–21 at The British School at Rome



NOTES

- 1 Evans 2004, 217–18, no. 128.
- 2 Object file for MMA 2008.352 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters. Upon acquisition, the icon was examined, treated, and documented by Peter Dandridge, conservator, Department of Objects Conservation. Initial research included visual, microscopic, analytic, radiographic, and spectral imaging. Subsequent treatment involved the proper orienting of previously misaligned sections of tesserae as well as the integration of losses where the original design was apparent.
- 3 Sue Sutton, handwritten letter, April 4, 2007, in object file for MMA 2008.352 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.
- 4 Hahn 2020, 5, has a similar disclaimer.
- 5 Pedone 2012.
- 6 This article discusses objects only described as Greek and/or of very fine mosaics; the result almost certainly undercounts the number of icons. See Moretti 2013 on the interchangeability of the terminology for micromosaics and enamels.
- 7 All numbers are approximate; see Clark 2018 for the mobility of works of art. The *Annunciation* now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (7231-1860), may have belonged to the Medici; Ryder 2007, 289n569.
- 8 The *Saint Theodore Theron*, now in the Vatican, had probably belonged to Bessarion; it is included in the 1498 inventory of Saint Peter's; see Müntz and Frothingham 1883, 112. For Chimay, see Evans 2004, 223, no. 132.
- 9 A (micro?)mosaic icon is attested in the Cappella Palatina, Palermo, in 1309; see Andaloro 2006, 108n73. Four were donated to the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (Martorana) in Palermo in 1333; see Garofalo 1835, 152, and M. Johnson 2010. A *Saint John the Baptist* was given to Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence in 1394; see Cornelison 1998, appendix G, doc. 2; Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Carte Stroziane*, ser. IIa, LI.3, f. 7r. Gentile Bellini donated a mosaic panel of the Virgin to the Scuola Grande di San Marco in 1506; Rembrandt Duits (2013, 170) identifies it as a micromosaic.
- 10 Others include the *Christ Chalkites* in Santa Caterina, Galatina (Lecce); the *Saint John the Baptist* in San Marco, Venice; and the *Twelve Feasts* diptych in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence. The *Crucifixion* (Staatliche Museen, Berlin, no. 6431) probably comes from a church treasury in Nicosia, Sicily; the Louvre *Transfiguration* (ML 145; OA 924) is attested in Palermo before 1797. Evans 2004, 215–33, nos. 126–39; Ryder 2007, 63–160.
- 11 Object file for MMA 2008.352 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.
- 12 On relic labels, see Smith 2014.
- 13 Jacopo da Voragine 1995, 334–41.
- 14 Muir 2012, 18. The conversion is first mentioned in a rhymed French text (1251) from Verona.
- 15 Nicola de Martoni 2003, 112–13; Calvelli 2014; Bacci 2016.
- 16 J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 73.PB.69.
- 17 Schmidt 2001, 26–27; Kaftal 1965, 258. Master of the Orcagnesque Misericordia (Italian, Florence, act. second half of the 14th century). *The Vision of Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, second half of the fourteenth century. Tempera on wood, gold ground, 8¼ × 13½ in. (21 × 34.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.62), represents the vision rather than the episode of the conversion specifically.
- 18 Or they may be rarely studied. For example, the list of relics (1487) from Santa Caterina in Galatina mentions a drawing that had allegedly belonged to Saint Francis. Transcribed in Cenci 1994.
- 19 On cult images, see Garnett and Rosser 2013. It is impossible to ascertain whether the *Virgin Eleousa* was considered miraculous.
- 20 Cornelison 1998; Maguire 2010.
- 21 Bolgia 2013, 122: “relics and icons are ontologically different.”
- 22 Alexander Nagel (2010, 214) does not differentiate between Saint Luke icons, the *Man of Sorrows* in Santa Croce, and the *Mandylion* (known as *sudarium*, *Vera Icon*, or *Veronica* in the West).
- 23 Wolf 1990.
- 24 Bacci 2015.
- 25 Sanudo 1980, 164.
- 26 Pedone 2012.
- 27 The standing female figure on the reverse of the *Man of Sorrows* was transformed into a Saint Catherine in Italy. Carlo Bertelli (1967) argued that it commemorated Prince of Taranto Raimondo del Balzo Orsini's (1350/55–1399) Sinaitic pilgrimage, but there is no evidence of it; see Harvey 2019, 53–56. Corinna Gallori (2016) suggested it memorializes its hypothetical original patron, Princess Thamar of Epirus, who took the name Catherine when she converted to Latin Christianity to marry Philip of Anjou (1276–1331), prince of Taranto.
- 28 Freiberg 2018.
- 29 Gallori 2016.
- 30 Evans 2004, 231–32, no. 139. Martin Dennert (2019) argues that the revetment is Byzantine.
- 31 Evans 2004, 220–21, no. 130.
- 32 Müntz 1879, 298.
- 33 See Voulgaropoulou 2019.
- 34 See Holmes 2013.
- 35 The iconography of a sixth (micromosaic?) icon is unclear; for the inventory, see Simone di Stagio dalle Pozze 2020; English translation in Stapleford 2013, with introduction.
- 36 Zchomelidse 2016; Williamson 2018.
- 37 The only documented female owner is Nicoletta Grioni, who donated the *Twelve Feasts* diptych and the *Saint John the Baptist* (lost) to the city of Florence.
- 38 Schmidt 2001, 21–22.
- 39 Bynum 1987 and Jantzen 1995 remain foundational.
- 40 “con mirabil'arte fornite di eccetto di pitture delle Sacre imagini.” Armenini 1587, 188.
- 41 “erano la maggior parte quadretti di certe figure, fatte alla Greca, goffissime, dispiacevoli e tutte affumicate.” Ibid.
- 42 For the limited impact of Byzantine on Italian art, see Nelson 2013.
- 43 Of the eighteen *tavolette* in the inventory, nine are described as being of *musaico*. Of these, one appears as *musaico fine* and another as *lavoro greco*. Considering that they are catalogued together, they may have all been micromosaics and/or Byzantine. Stapleford 2013.
- 44 Bullard 2006, 89.
- 45 G. Johnson 2012, 191.
- 46 Pentcheva 2016.
- 47 Mariaux 2006.
- 48 For Bessarion's testament, see Müntz 1879, 298.
- 49 The literature on the *maniera greca* is vast. Belting 1994 remains essential; see also Weitzmann 1984, Cutler 1994, and Corrie 1996. Nagel and Wood (2010) propose a different temporal framework to the problem.
- 50 See Nagel 2008, 147, for Filarete's and Vasari's misidentification of the material (eggshell).

- 51 Voulgaroupoulou 2019, 17.
- 52 Ibid., 15.
- 53 Ibid., 4–5, and 6–10, for the post-Tridentine admiration for Byzantine icons.
- 54 For different interpretations of this image, see Hamburger 1998, 321; Nagel 2008; Wolf 2012, 138; and Kim 2018.
- 55 Findlen 1998; Clark 2011.
- 56 Clark 2011, 220.
- 57 Ryder 2007, 290–93.
- 58 Duits 2011, 135. This comparison may be somewhat misleading if we have lost the section of the Barbo inventory on contemporary art, as Xavier Salomon (2003) argues.
- 59 Duits 2011, 134.
- 60 “. . . gli mandava o statue di marmo, o vasi fatti dagli antichi, sculture, epitafi di marmo, pitture di mano di singolari maestri, e di molte cose di musaico in tavolette.” Vespasiano da Bisticci 1859, 480.
- 61 Stapleford 2013.
- 62 For example, the *Noah's Ark* onyx cameo at the British Museum, London (1890,0901.15), has been dated to the classical, Swabian, and Renaissance periods.
- 63 Findlen 1998, 95.
- 64 Bullard 2006, 88.
- 65 Nagel 2010, 213.
- 66 See *ibid.*, 214; and, on Petrarchan fragments dispersed as talismans, see Findlen 1998, 107.
- 67 Clark 2011.
- 68 Bullard 2006, 97; Clark 2011, 190.
- 69 Holmes 2011; Bynum 2015.
- 70 Valla 2007.
- 71 Frazier 2003.
- 72 Ibid., 222–23.
- 73 See Nagel and Wood 2010, chap. 20 (“The Fabrication of Visual Evidence”), 241–50.
- 74 Gerevini 2019.
- 75 Valla 2007, 57.
- 76 Zchomelidse 2016; Klein 2017.
- 77 There are many examples of how relics’ provenance authenticated them, and how this was communicated to the public through their modes of display. Of particular note are Gerevini 2019 on Siena’s relics and Klein 2017 for the two True Cross relics in Venice.
- 78 Cornelison 1998, 174.
- 79 See Cutler 2000. Edmund Ryder (2007, 197–222) identifies Ioannis Kanabes, member of the Constantinopolitan elite, as the patron of the *Twelve Feasts* diptych.
- 80 James 2017.
- 81 See *ibid.*, 31 (on Venice, where workshops closed from August to January), and 68 (on Orvieto, closed December and January).
- 82 It remains open to debate whether mosaicists made micromosaics.
- 83 Micromosaics use gilded silver *coupons* and not glass tesserae, which could not be made of the required size; James 2017, 35–37.
- 84 Anthony Cutler (2000) provides an overview of the movement of Byzantine objects into Italy, although he overlooks South Italy.
- 85 Salomon (2003) analyzes the original copy of the Barbo inventory, and convincingly argues that the Byzantine objects were all added by Hand B (Barbo himself?) after 1439.
- 86 Gallori 2016; Harvey 2019, 54–56.
- 87 Nagel and Wood 2010, 14.
- 88 Krautheimer 1942; Belting 1994.
- 89 Wolf 2012. David Perry (2014) built on this, using vectors to theorize how material culture created Venetian identity.
- 90 Stewart 1993.
- 91 Ibid., 136.
- 92 Ibid., 135. See Moore 2017 on how the Holy Land was imagined and constructed through travel literature, and Hahn and Klein 2015 and Robinson, De Beer, and Harnden 2014 on relics and reliquaries.
- 93 Stewart 1993, 19, 136.
- 94 There are matching holes for small nails around the icon’s wooden frame.
- 95 Moore 2017.
- 96 Nicola de Martoni 2003, 65.
- 97 Moore 2009.
- 98 “Above this said door there is mosaic work, a Virgin Mary with her son in her arms; on one side that precious saint, Catherine, and on the other Moses.” See Niccolò da Poggibonsi 1881, chap. CCXI, 132: “Sopra la detta porta si è lavorato, d’opera musaica, santa Maria col suo Figliuolo in braccio: dall’una parte sta quella preziosa santa Caterina, e dall’altra Moisè.” Anastasia Drandaki (2006, 501) argues that these were mosaic icons.
- 99 Klein 2017.
- 100 Findlen 1998, 109.
- 101 Collectors, such as Lorenzo de’ Medici and Isabella d’Este, inscribed their names permanently on objects.
- 102 “Nobilis quem dicunt Joannes ipsius imperatoris baronis duas nimis magnitudinis figuras, hanc dominae Virginis Mariae, alteram Christi resurgentis per eum miro ingenio ope musaici pincti manu constructas.” Ryder 2007, 91–95, at 93, no. 191.
- 103 Filarete 1972, 671–72. See Nagel 2008, 147, no. 16, for the misidentification of the material.
- 104 For a thorough catalogue, see James 2017.
- 105 Ibid., 445.
- 106 Chareyron 2005.
- 107 Notable exceptions are Baldassare Peruzzi’s mosaics in the Chigi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.
- 108 Vasari 1996, 432.
- 109 Ryder 2007, 233.
- 110 Stollhans 2014.
- 111 Object file for MMA 2008.352 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.

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