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Front cover: Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, *Saint Mary Magdalene at the Sepulchre*, ca. 1530s, oil on canvas, 92.7 x 79.4 cm. Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 97.PA.55 (photo: J. Paul Getty Museum)
Back cover: Julia Stankova, *The Hospitality of Abraham*, 2004, tempera on primed wooden panel and lacquer technique, 46 x 41 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova
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Editor's Greeting

Welcome to the second issue of the *Journal of Icon Studies (JIS)*, an annual publication of The Museum of Russian Icons in Clinton, MA. The Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed resource for the interdisciplinary study of icons around the globe, from the Byzantine period to the present. It offers an international forum for new scholarship on the history, meaning, and function of icons, their place within a broad cultural and artistic context, and their conservation, collecting, and exhibition.

The move to an online format has been inspired by the example of pioneering publications like the *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art, Nineteenth-Century Art WorldWide,* and *British Art Studies.* We are grateful to our authors for their willingness to publish original scholarship in this digital format. Their contributions demonstrate the exciting potential of icon studies as a sphere of interdisciplinary research. The current issue explores the experiential function of Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo's *Magdalene* paintings; the role of icons in the spiritual lives of the Chuvash; Leonid Chupiatov's religious paintings during the Leningrad Seige; and the contemporary icons of Bulgarian painter Julia Stankova. *JIS* employs a double-blind peer-review process that relies on the expertise of numerous reviewers. We thank each of these anonymous readers for their generosity. We also thank our book reviewers for taking on the important task of evaluating new publications in the field.

A heartfelt debt of gratitude is due to Mary Delaney for her enthusiastic embrace of creating a new, born-digital format for the Journal and for bringing her elegant design sensibility to the task. Thanks also to our copy editor Melanie Trottier for her expert skills, to Eric Chimenti and the Ideation Lab at Chapman University

for scanning help, and to Justine Lim of Chapman's Leatherby Libraries for help securing image sources. Kent Russell, Director of the Museum of Russian Icons, and the Museum's Board of Trustees have been enthusiastic supporters of the Journal from the start, and Raoul Smith, its inaugural Editor, a valued mentor. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge *JIS*'s distinguished Editorial Board, especially Amy Singleton Adams, Elena Boeck, Sarah Pratt, and Vera Shevzov, for their support and guidance.

With this second issue, *JIS* will apply to be listed with Portico, an electronic archiving service initiated by JSTOR and supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Ithaka, and Library of Congress. After the third issue, scheduled for Fall 2020, we will apply to ISI Web of Knowledge, a database run by Thompson Reuters. In the meantime, we are posting articles to academia.edu and will make every effort to ensure the recognition and distribution of our authors' work. Our membership in CrossRef allows us to register each article with a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) that provides a persistent link to its location on the Internet. All *JIS* articles are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY) License.

We invite you to consider *JIS* as a venue for your own publications. In addition to longer scholarly articles, we welcome translations of primary sources and seminal texts of interest to a broader readership; shorter pieces on museum and private collections and on individual icons; and book and exhibition reviews.

The submission deadline for volume 3, to appear in Fall 2020, is December 15, 2019, although we welcome submissions at any time. Guidelines may be found at www.museumofrussianicons.org/jis.

Wendy Salmond, Chapman University, Editor

Contributors

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Savoldo's *Magdalene*: "True Reformations Are Internal"

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Michael Calder

Savoldo's *Magdalene*: "True Reformations Are Internal"[1]

Abstract

The subject of Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo's series of *Magdalene* paintings has long been a matter of debate. Looking at the series in the context of the reform movement in Venice in the 1520s and 1530s, when Christ's resurrection could be viewed metaphorically, this article aims to demonstrate that Savoldo adopts a number of motifs to convey the idea of a renewing of life, which identify "Mary" as the mother. The case made here is that Savoldo's paintings move beyond representation to the actual process of transformation, with an experiential function where the beholder was an active participant and narrative function was subordinated.

Keywords: Savoldo, Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Resurrection, Garment of Glory, Eucharist, Pauline theology, Italian Reformation, Italian Renaissance, Venice.

> The great Paul, that great profundity among the apostles,
> expounded the mystery, which is now spoken of clearly.
> The great beauty that had been veiled has now come out into the open,
> and all the peoples of the world behold its luminosity.
> The betrothed made the daughter of day to enter a new womb,
> and the testing waters of baptism were in labour and gave rebirth to her:
> he rested in the water and invited her: she went down, clothed herself in him and ascended;
> in the Eucharist she received him, and so Moses' words, that the two shall be one, were established.
> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 79: *Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face* [2]

Introduction

A recent groundbreaking paper by Charlotte Nichols reconsidered the established interpretation of a series of *Magdalene* paintings by Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo (ca. 1480–ca. 1548), questioning both the subject and the implied narrative of the encounter between Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ as recounted in the Gospel of John (20:14-16).[3] Nichols put forward a thesis that Savoldo created a multivalent image with an intentional lack of narrative clarity, in part to accommodate conflicting textual accounts over the roles of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene at the Resurrection, but also to address the *intellectual* demands of patrons for deliberately ambiguous subject matter.

However, this article seeks to question the likely function and appeal of the paintings within the context of not only contemporary iconographic developments but, importantly, also the reform movement in Italy, specifically Venice in the 1520s and 1530s, which has hitherto been largely overlooked in the discussions on these paintings. The aim is to demonstrate that these works, which reflect Savoldo's characteristically introspective approach to devotional themes,[4] were not intended to represent Christ's resurrection as a narrative and to limit faith to just the cerebral. Rather, they convey the idea of victory over death by focusing on symbolic elements that once served an experiential function, similar to that of a Byzantine icon. Through abstract conceptualization and reflection, the beholder became an active participant, developing a personal relationship with the divine.

The paintings may have met a demand at the time for a more personal and sensory religious experience, where the writings of Saint Paul in particular were presented as the source for a renewal of one's inner nature (2 Cor. 4:16).[5] Central to Pauline theology is the idea that human beings enter into relation with God by means of a Christ-mysticism; a union with Christ. Such a union involves a change in the person, so that one is "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), and Christ lives in and through the believer (Gal. 2:20).[6] As Augustine comments: "Christ is 'formed' in the inner self of the believer through faith" (Gal. 4:19).[7]

This article sets out to discuss two particular themes that point to the need for a reconsideration of the subject of the paintings: the vase as a symbol and the garment of glory. This analysis then leads to a review of how the paintings may have functioned within the context of iconographic developments at the time and in relation to the movement for religious reform in Italy. Firstly though, a brief outline of the sociocultural context of the series of paintings is included, followed by a short summary of the history of interpretation to date.

Versions and Sociocultural Context

There are four accepted *Magdalene* variants by Savoldo in existence, plus an engraving that appears to be of a fifth version,[8] which have been dated to between the mid-1520s and ca. 1540 (figs. 1–5).[9] Creighton Gilbert placed the Berlin variant (fig. 1), the only version that bears a signature, but that lacks the vase, as the earliest in the series. Whilst opinions differ on the order of the series of variations, Nicholas Penny has provided a convincing argument that the paintings with a cropped composition and a dawn setting, the London and Florence variants (figs. 4 and 5), are likely to be the last in the series.[10] Penny also points to the fact that the shawl in the Berlin version is more reminiscent of draperies worn by angels in the Pesaro altarpiece, dateable to the mid-1520s (see fig. 18).[11] Savoldo, who signed his paintings "de Brisia," of Brescia,[12] is recorded as being in Venice regularly from 1521,[13] and has been connected with a small number of painters associated with the regions of Lombardy and Veneto, including Lorenzo Lotto (ca. 1480–1556/7), Girolamo Romanino (ca. 1485–1566) and Alessandro Bonvicino, known as Moretto (ca. 1498–1554); the latter two, like Savoldo, coming from Brescia.[14]

Fig. 1 Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, **The Venetian Woman (Saint Mary Magdalene)**, ca. 1527–40, oil on canvas, 94.2 x 75.3 cm. Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, cat. 307 (photo © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie / Jörg P. Anders)

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 2 Lorenzo Lorenzi, **The Magdalene,** ca. 1750, engraving after drawing by Giuseppe Zocchi recording a painting by Savoldo, 39.8 x 31.3 cm. Venice, Correr Museum (photo with permission of Archivio Fotografico, Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia)

Fig. 3 Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, **Saint Mary Magdalene at the Sepulchre,** ca. 1530s, oil on canvas, 92.7 x 79.4 cm. Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 97.PA.55 (photo: J. Paul Getty Museum)

Fig. 4 Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, **Mary Magdalene,** ca. 1535–40, oil on cawnvas, 89.1 x 82.4 cm. London, National Gallery (National Gallery Picture Library; photo: © The National Gallery, London)

Fig. 5 Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, **The Magdalene,** ca. 1535–40, oil on canvas, 84 x 77.5 cm. Florence, Contini Bonacossi Collection (photo with permission of Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi)

Following the outbreak of the Reformation in 1517, which had implications Europe-wide, the period before the Council of Trent (1545–63) in Italy was a turbulent one in both the political and the religious spheres, with invasions by foreign powers and the sack of Rome in 1527.[15] The 1520s and 1530s saw a debate, within different spiritual circles, over reform of the Church but it was also a time of religious "experiments," with spiritual needs no longer satisfied by traditional ritual forms.[16] In Venice from the fifteenth century there had been an increased

demand for "more personal, sensory and affective modes of religious experience."[17] The *Beneficio di Cristo*, said to have been written by a Benedictine monk and one of the most influential books of spiritual devotion in sixteenth-century Europe, sold particularly well in Venice and the second edition was published there in 1543.[18] The *Beneficio di Cristo* encouraged a direct relation between the believer and God, mediated by Christ,[19] a Christ-mysticism that was central to the thinking of Venetian "evangelical" communities for whom, in the early sixteenth century, the writings of St. Paul were a source for spiritual renewal:[20]

> "Christ has already begun to penetrate Italy, but I would like him to enter in glory, for all to see, and I believe Venice will be the gateway." (Bernardino Ochino, 1542)[21]

> "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." (Col. 3:3-4)[22]

As early as 1520 Martin Luther's works had been on sale in the Venetian Republic,[23] whose citizens' cosmopolitan outlook and openness to religious diversity were key factors in the development of heterodox ideas and practices. Such ideas had initially made their way into elite circles but quickly gained wider interest.[24] These new sociocultural trends in religious thinking and devotion overlaid a special Venetian identification of the sacred with Byzantium,[25] and by the first half of the sixteenth century, Venice, which had become the center of Greek learning in the West, was known for the practice of Orthodoxy associated with the Eastern Church.[26]

History of Interpretation

The earliest written record of any of Savoldo's *Magdalene* variants is a mention in 1620 by Octavio Rossi, who describes a painting by Savoldo in the house of Averoldo in Brescia as "a beautiful Magdalene in the white cloth."[27] This is considered to be the London variant,[28] the only known version with Mary in a silver-white shawl, whereas in the other painted versions her mantle, or veil, is gold. It was Carlo Ridolfi though who, in 1648, is first recorded as interpreting the narrative context of this painting as Mary Magdalene walking to the tomb, and who also indicated that it was "a famous painting, from which are derived many copies."[29] When the Berlin version, which lacks the vase, first surfaced at the start of the nineteenth century, it was only recorded in secular terms, originally simply as a "cloaked young woman" or a "female figure" and later in the nineteenth century as a *Venetian Lady*.[30] The fact that the face of the Berlin version had been overpainted, and the whole painting had become severely

discolored, is likely to have compounded difficulties in interpretation.[31] Following restoration in 1989 it began to be seen as "deliberately ambiguous."[32] Even the London version has had its interpretation questioned: for a period in the nineteenth century, before acquisition by the National Gallery in 1878, when it was wrongly attributed to Titian, it was also known as *La Zingara* (The Gypsy Woman).[33]

Mary Pardo's seminal study on Savoldo's *Magdalene* paintings, published in 1989, which focused principally on the London and Florence versions on the basis of their more pronounced lighting effects,[34] considered the images in the context of theories of pictorial illusion, and the link between literature, poetry and painting. Pardo placed the paintings within the narrative of Mary Magdalene's meeting with the risen Christ, and specifically as representing the events in verses 14 and 16 of John 20, which describe the action of Mary turning and her recognition of Christ's true identity.[35] Mary, Pardo argued, is depicted in the process of turning towards the source of light, who is Christ, but we, the viewer, "intercept her glance."[36] That interpretation became generally accepted, although some have maintained that Mary Magdalene is represented as a Venetian courtesan.[37] Nicholas Penny, in an overview of interpretations of the paintings in the National Gallery Catalogue (London) published in 2004, expressed "no doubt" that the painting refers to Magdalene's recognition of Christ, albeit that it may represent a woman casting herself in that role.[38]

Fig. 6 Paolo Veneziano, *Lamenting Virgin*, fourteenth century, detail of Pala Feriale (painted cover to the Pala d'Oro), basilica of San Marco in Venice (San Marco, Venice; photo: Cameraphoto Arte Venezia/ Bridgeman Images, under license)

However, questions remain over the identity of the main subject. Charlotte Nichols has reconsidered the established interpretation and notes the Marian characteristics of Savoldo's Magdalene figures. Nichols makes the case that Savoldo may have been responding to Byzantine, or Byzantine-inspired, prototypes, and suggests in particular the Lamenting Virgin or Mater Dolorosa, in the form of a veiled full- or half-length figure with fabric completely covering the hair and part of the forehead.[39] Examples cited are Paolo Veneziano's fourteenth-century *Lamenting Virgin* on the painted cover of the Pala d'Oro, the altarpiece of the basilica of San Marco in Venice (fig. 6), and the Mary in a white mantle in Rogier Van de Weyden's *Crucifixion* (ca. 1460, Escorial Palace, Madrid). She also argues that the cult of the Virgin Mary was particularly strong in Venice, because of its ties to the East, specifically Constantinople, and was more prevalent than the cult of Magdalene, despite the latter having existed there since the twelfth century.[40]

Pulling the evidence together, Nichols concludes that, on the basis

of Western textual sources which describe Christ's appearance first to his mother,[41] it is possible to interpret all of Savoldo's *Magdalene* images as representing the mother of Christ. Nichols sees this interpretation as particularly convincing in relation to the Berlin painting, the one without the "ointment jar." Here, as Nichols observes, the woman is clearly middle-aged and appears older than in the other three surviving versions.[42] Nichols argues that it is the "presence of the vase" in the other versions, "and its role in Renaissance painting as the Magdalene's most widely recognized attribute" that has led scholars in recent decades to treat the subject of all Savoldo's variations unconditionally as Mary Magdalene.[43] It is therefore to this we must first turn.

Analysis

A—The Vase as a Symbol

"However, what of the presence of the vase . . . ?"[44]

It is principally the presence of the vase in all but the Berlin version that leads Nichols to question the potential interpretation of any of the variants as simply the mother of Christ, and to read the subject as multivalent and the identity of the woman as intentionally ambiguous.[45]

It is important to first consider the context in which the jar, or vase, sits. Pardo suggests that Savoldo in a number of works uses ruins to designate a "rustic setting" and that they evoke a symbolism of decay and renewal.[46] Both Pardo and Penny are of the opinion that the arched ruin behind "Mary" may possibly represent sepulchral buildings, which Pardo believes may stand for the enclosure for Christ's tomb.[47] Both Pardo and Penny also note the low wall that Mary stands beside that is in all versions except the Berlin one, and they describe the arched, or square, "niche" feature in the wall, which is immediately behind the "saint's attribute,"[48] a feature which is considered by Matthias Weniger to represent the open tomb.[49]

In the nineteenth century J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, commenting on the London version, describe the "vase" as sitting on a "table,"[50] an interpretation which leads Pardo to exclaim: "the ointment jar on a stone ledge!"[51] Whilst Penny describes the jar as a "small vase" of alabaster, or perhaps porcelain, he also sees it as sitting upon a "ledge" in front of the niche.[52] However, the stone feature does not appear to be a ledge, in that it is not projecting from the wall. In all the versions in which the vase is included, its position near the back edge of the raised stone block or "table" makes it clear that this feature must be set

Fig.7 Detail of Lorenzo Lorenzi, **The Magdalene** (fig. 2) showing the vase

slightly away from the wall and is more than likely freestanding. Whilst narrow, the feature has the appearance of a freestanding stone table, plinth or podium, particularly in the Getty version (see fig. 3) and in the engraving (fig. 7). The sun rising beyond the table and niche in the London and Florence versions, and in the engraving,[53] suggests the feature is located at the eastern end of the ruined building in which "Mary" stands, thus raising associations with the altar in a church. It may therefore be taken to be an altar table, which is reinforced by the fact that the altar is traditionally associated with Christ's sarcophagus in Easter ceremonies.[54] In a study by Karl Young of the development of the *Quem quaeritis in sepulchro* (Whom do you seek in the sepulcher) trope attached to the Mass, the altar was found in numerous versions of the ceremony to be suggestive of the sepulcher, with the ceremony in Brescia, of which Savoldo was a native, taking the most dramatized form.[55]

In Renaissance churches, images of the Virgin Mary might be located on an altarpiece,[56] or on the building fabric, either in the conch of the apse or on an eastern chancel wall, where they were seen juxtaposed with the altar, potentially indicating a link between Mary and the Eucharist.[57] Barbara Lane has argued that the altar is often alluded to in images of Mary in early Netherlandish painted altarpieces, and that in many cases the paintings associate the container for the consecrated host, the tabernacle, with the Virgin Mary's body and specifically her womb.[58] This may relate to two traditional metaphors for the Virgin, likening her to an altar and the tabernacle.[59] Netherlandish paintings have been noted as having a strong influence on Venetian artists, such as Giovanni Bellini,[60] and also Savoldo, whose wife appears to have been Flemish.[61] Whilst the issues around the transmission of motifs are complex,[62] Peter Humfrey has pointed to a number of fifteenth-century Venetian altarpieces featuring Mary that appear to allude to the Eucharist. Although with subjects such as the Virgin and Child enthroned it is difficult to be sure the extent to which a reference to the host and tabernacle was intended, some works, including Giovanni Bellini's San Giobbe altarpiece (ca. 1478–80), seem to present a reasonably persuasive case.[63] Such altarpieces were perhaps meant to bring the mind of the viewer to the Eucharistic rite. Romanino from Brescia, who, as mentioned earlier, was connected with Savoldo, certainly appears to allude to Mary as the tabernacle: in his *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* altarpiece for the Church of San Francesco in Brescia, ca. 1516 (fig. 8) Mary looks within the setting to be enthroned upon an altar with the Christ-Child slumped in her lap; in his altarpiece for the

Fig. 8 Etching after Girolamo Romanino, ***Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Altarpiece*** (ca. 1516) in the Church of San Francesco (Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi), Brescia, Italy, published in 1884 (photo: license from iStockphoto)

Fig. 9 Girolamo Romanino, ***Mass of Saint Apollonius Altarpiece***, ca. 1525. Brescia, Santa Maria in Calchera (photo: Mondadori Portfolio/Electra/Sergio Anelli/ Bridgeman Images, under license)

Church of Santa Maria in Calchera in Brescia, ca. 1525 (fig. 9) he includes within the painting an actual altar, together with an altarpiece that depicts Mary holding the dead Christ, positioned directly above the celebrant, who is shown standing in front and holding the paten with hosts. The presence of vessels in works of art associated with the Virgin Mary has also been said to emphasize her role in the incarnation and reinforces the concept of her as the container of Christ.[64]

Alexander Nagel has noted how in the early sixteenth century a controversial practice developed in northern Italy of placing a container for the host, the sacrament tabernacle, upon the high altar, replacing a sculpted or painted image as the central focus.[65] It was only after the Council of Trent that this develop-ment became accepted Church practice; before that time it was seen, according to Nagel, as ideologically challenging, having been initiated first in Florence in 1497 by the reformer Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98). Peter Humfrey has pointed to the small, now lost, Venetian Church of San Sepolcro where in 1510 the tabernacle became the principal element of the altarpiece.[66] In 1518, in the basilica of San Marco, a sacramental altar was placed directly behind the Pala

d'Oro in the apse, but perhaps more pronounced developments took place in the Veneto region in the 1530s. Nagel points to works on the high altars at Vicenza Cathedral by Aurelio dall'Acqua, who was associated with heterodox circles in Venice, and at Verona Cathedral, where in both cases a sacrament tabernacle became the central focus. At Verona Cathedral, which was dedicated to the Mother of God, the renovation works included the semi-circular *tornacoro* (iconostasis or choir screen), which with the apse formed an elliptical enclosure, and a raised tabernacle that could be seen as presenting Christ's body at the altar. Nagel suggests the interior architecture at Verona Cathedral could be understood as an animated body containing Christ's presence, with the bodily metaphor potentially extending to Christ in the Virgin's womb: he interprets the *tornacoro* as completing a feminine ovoid enclosure encircling the tabernacle, and forming an extension of the Marian program of the apse of the cathedral.

Timothy Verdon has pointed to examples of the Lamentation in late fifteenth-century Italian art where Mary's womb is juxtaposed with the open tomb, and has also highlighted a devotional text from around the same time which states that the tomb "stands for the virginal womb of his mother," echoing an older womb-tomb analogy.[67] Michelangelo's *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* (ca. 1540, fig. 10) was interpreted by Colonna, who was closely associated with

Fig. 10 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna,* ca. 1540, black chalk on cardboard, 28.9 × 18.9 cm. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (photo: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum from Wikimedia Commons; artwork in the public domain)

sixteenth-century reformers,[68] as Mary making of her body "a sepulcher,"[69] and was considered by Leo Steinberg to intentionally evoke childbearing before the body is lowered into the tomb.[70] According to Nagel, this motif emphasizes the theological point of Christ's death as a source of regeneration, so that his death is "inseparable from the renewing of life, the giving of birth."[71]

In the versions of Savoldo's painting where the vase sits on the table, what is clearly significant is that the top is open; the vase is unstopped or unsealed. When Mary Magdalene is represented at the tomb, she is most commonly depicted holding the ointment jar, and Susan Haskins has suggested that, as the jar in Savoldo's *Magdalene* appears to have been left, it might imply that Mary Magdalene had already been to the sepulcher.[72] Whilst such an interpretation might fit with the narrative in John (20), if Mary had now returned to the tomb after first going to the sepulcher when still dark to find it empty, in such a scenario the ointment would be unused, and the jar would presumably still have its lid on, or stopper in, as is conventionally shown.[73] Given that a jar, as a container, can symbolize a womb,[74] a stopped vase might represent the Virgin Mary's anatomical virginity, the sealed

Fig. 11 Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, *Annunciation*, ca. 1530–35, oil on canvas, 173 x 114 cm. Venice, Accademia, cat. 1529 (Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia; photo: Archivio fotografico G.A.VE granted by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism)

Fig. 12 Detail of Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, *Annunciation* (fig. 11) showing the sealed vase on the shelf (photo: © author)

womb. Of note here is Savoldo's *Annunciation* (ca. 1530–35) where behind Mary in the dark, on a shelf, between two books standing upright is a vase with a lid on (fig. 11, fig. 12).[75] This may be a reference to the sealed womb, or to the sealed tomb that is to follow: as Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306–373) says, "Mary's womb, like the grave, bore an unbroken seal."[76] In the West, throughout the medieval period, Church theologians interpreted the Gospel of Matthew such that the angel "rolled back the stone" from the sepulcher, not to enable the risen Christ to come out, but to demonstrate to the holy women that the tomb was empty, when he announces that "He is not here; for he is risen" (Matt. 28:1-6).[77] However, in Italy, between the fourteenth and latter part of the sixteenth centuries, the Resurrection was frequently depicted with an open tomb, with Christ emerging from it or often floating in the air above similar to an Ascension, none of which was described in scripture, leading the Council of Trent to object to both the open tomb and the floating figure in Resurrection images.[78] The reason for portraying the Resurrected Christ hovering above an open tomb appears to stem from the evolution of that image in Western art from manuscript illumination, where the Resurrection scene and the Women at the Tomb (the empty tomb with the angel) became merged into one.[79] In images of Christ emerging, the tomb may have been shown open simply in order to visually communicate the Resurrection message more explicitly. In both cases the embellishment of the scriptural message involved a process of consolidation where the angel's

purpose became obsolete and he was often left out. By contrast, the open, or unsealed, vase in Savoldo's *Magdalene* paintings may have been used as a device to symbolically represent the act of making known that the Resurrection had occurred, as recounted in Matthew, replicating the function that the radiant angel performs when he rolls back the stone.[80]

In conclusion, it seems entirely possible that Savoldo's vase, sitting upon what might be seen as an altar table, bears an association with the mother's womb, paralleling the dramatization of Mary's relationship with the altar and the tabernacle at a time of increased devotional focus on the Eucharist and the symbolism of the tabernacle, but linked to liturgical ceremonies performed at the altar relating to Easter, such as those previously referred to where the altar symbolizes the sepulcher. Of particular note are two medieval liturgical rites, *depositio* and *elevatio*, performed as part of the Easter ceremony connected with the *Visitatio Sepulchri* (Visit to the Sepulcher).[81] In the first rite the host was inserted into a pyxis or "sealed container" placed on an altar, and then on Easter Sunday, in the *elevatio,* the host was taken out of the container as a symbol of the Resurrection.[82] Savoldo's unsealed vase upon the altar may signal the occurrence of the Resurrection, reminiscent of the *elevatio* ritual.

B—The Garment of Glory

> "Whatever its ultimate filiation, the shawl is singular by virtue of its structural role in the design, which is partly a matter of scale and partly of optical richness. Resembling metal beaten to a shell-like thinness, the very quality that makes it mirror-like and elusive, it differs noticeably from the more fictile drapery in the majority of Savoldo's paintings."[83]

Mary Pardo described Savoldo's painted veil as "a virtuoso demonstration of luministic surface description."[84] In his study of painting in sixteenth-century Venice, David Rosand suggested that Titian's work needed to be seen within the context of the traditional use of luminosity in Christian imagery, where light symbolically functioned as the carrier of divine significance, but where such luminosity was now being realized through the new medium of oil painting, building on the work of Venetian artists such as Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione, and before them Jan van Eyck in the Netherlands.[85] The representation of luminous reflections on drapery through tonal highlights was an acknowledged specialism of artists from Brescia, including Titian's contemporaries Romanino and Moretto, and particularly Savoldo.[86] The case being made here is that Savol-

do's *Magdalene* paintings need to be seen in the context suggested by Rosand: as a new realization of the special role that the imagery of light plays in its association with divine significance. The luminosity of "Mary's" veil in Savoldo's *Magdalene* paintings, where brilliant gold or silver highlights on the drapery produce the effect of light coming from an external source,[87] goes so far as to create the appearance that the subject herself is transfigured. Christ is usually represented wearing white and gold garments in both the icon of the Resurrection and the icon of the Transfiguration, an effect for which, in the latter case, Dorothy Lee has coined the expression "garments of divine light."[88] In all three Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration Christ's garments displayed radiance, which echoed the fact that in every Greco-Roman mystery religion the outward symbol of the *transfiguratio* was "the garment."[89] The transfigured appearance of Savoldo's subject has been noted by some scholars, but the established interpretation of the figure as Mary Magdalene is still followed.[90]

The normal convention in paintings of the Virgin Mary is for her *maphorion* to be dark blue, but there are examples, most notably from within the small group of painters from Brescia associated with Savoldo, where Mary wears a silver or white robe, such as in Romanino's *Nativity* (ca. 1545) and Moretto's *Apparition of the Virgin* (ca. 1534).[91] Similarly, whilst Mary Pardo points out that Romanino's Magdalene in the *Feast in the House of Simon the Pharisee* (ca. 1532–33) is in a gold cloak, Charlotte Nichols has cited contemporary examples where the Virgin Mary is clothed in gold, such as Romanino's *Madonna and Child between Saint Bonaventure and Saint Sebastian* (ca. 1517–18), and she argues that the use of a gold veil would more likely have carried Marian associations for a sixteenth-century north Italian audience.[92] However, it must be said that the color of the subject's veil in Savoldo's paintings is not in itself enough to determine whether the figure was intended to represent the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene, or indeed both. Also, whilst a red dress such as the one visible under the subject's shawl might in many circumstances be seen as an additional indicator that Mary Magdalene was intended, in that she is traditionally represented in a red dress, the Virgin Mary is often depicted in a red dress as well, particularly by Savoldo, including in his *Annunciation*, ca. 1530–35 (fig. 11), and his *Madonna and Child in Glory*, ca. 1525 (fig. 18).[93] What we can say is that the red dress lends weight to the suggestion that the subject is one or other of the Marys, or both.

Arguably of greater significance than the color of "Mary's" veil is what Savoldo is trying to convey, through its reflective luminosity, about her relationship with the actual source of the radiant light (glory). This might make a better case

Fig. 13 Central Apse, Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta, Torcello (Venice), eleventh to twelfth century, mosaic (photo: L'archivio fotografico dell'Ufficio Inventario della Curia patriarcale di Venezia)

Fig. 14 Tiziano Vecellio, **Malchiostro Annunciation**, ca. 1520, oil on panel, 210 × 176 cm. Duomo Treviso (photo: Didier Descouens from Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of CC BY-SA 4.0, http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)

for interpreting the transfigured subject as the Virgin Mary. The argument here is that the "shawl's brilliance" was intended primarily as a reference to the Virgin Mary's role as counterpart to the sun and "the herald of the sun."[94]

Mary Pardo notes that Jacobus de Voragine's entry in the *Golden Legend* for Mary Magdalene starts with the etymological significance of the name "Mary" as "light-giver" or "enlightened," and as a result Pardo considers the shawl to be a device conveying a "process of enlightenment" that might be associated with Mary Magdalene.[95] However, whilst the *Golden Legend* is without doubt an influential text for the interpretation of medieval and Renaissance art, the role of the Virgin Mary, rather than the Magdalene, as the light-bearer (Lucifera) is arguably more developed, and as Catherine Oakes has argued, finds expression in a number of medieval Marian titles such as Aurora (Dawn), Ortus Solis (Sunrise) and Stella Solem (Star to the Sun).[96] In some churches the spatial juxtaposition of the altar with images of the Virgin Mary on the building fabric, mentioned earlier in relation to the symbol of the jar, often incorporates a central window, said to symbolize Christ as the "rising sun" or "light of the world" (John 1:9; 8:12), as at Torcello in the Venetian lagoon, in its cathedral once dedicated to the Mother of God (fig. 13).[97] The versions of Savoldo's *Magdalene* that have been assumed by scholars to be set at dawn can be seen as demonstrating a correspondence with this conjunction of rising sun, Mary, and altar.

The radiant "Mary," in all versions of Savoldo's painting, is depicted catching the light from an external source. The effect produced has parallels with the use of cloud symbolism in Christian art based on the Marian epithet of the cloud as a "shimmering covering" containing the brilliance of the sun.[98] Cloud symbolism features in Titian's *Annunciation* altarpiece for Treviso Cathedral, ca. 1520 (fig. 14), which includes two levels of light, as in Savoldo's *Magdalene* paintings, but in this case "natural" light floods in from the right, as if from the real window located to the side of the altar in the Cathedral, and "divine" light emerges from the clouds to enter Mary, the new container, "the tabernacle from which its divinity, incarnate, will shine forth."[99] What is also striking about Titian's painting is that the end of the chancel is shown completely open to the elements, somewhat similar to

the setting in the London and Florence versions of Savoldo's *Magdalene*, where the sun is emerging above the low ruined altar wall.

Saint Ambrose compared the Church to the moon, because the Church shines with no light of its own, but with that of Christ.[100] The Virgin Mary, who came to be equated with the Church as the bride of Christ, principally from commentary on the Song of Songs,[101] has similarly been compared to the moon:[102] "Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?" (Song of Sol. 6:10)[103] Paolo Veneziano, possibly the most important Venetian painter of the fourteenth century, in his polyptych *Coronation of the Virgin* altarpiece for the Church of Santa Chiara in Venice, includes the symbol of a moon below the Virgin and a sun below Christ, which followed the use of this symbolism in the thirteenth-century *Coronation* mosaic in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. It has been suggested that this equation of Mary and the Church with the moon, reflecting the light of Christ, the sun, upon the world, is in line with Neoplatonic tradition "favoring reflection as metaphor for the indirect apprehension of truth,"[104] following Plato's cave allegory, where light from an "invisible sun" is seen only by reflection.[105]

In Savoldo's London variant, where "Mary" has a silver-white sheen, she may resemble the moon,[106] as she acts as counterpart to the invisible sun, but whether her garments are gold or silver, she always forms a symbiotic relationship with the Son, one "glory" depending on the other, visual testament to Paul's view that there were different glories:[107] "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory" (1 Cor. 15:41). In all of Savoldo's variants "Mary's" role resembles that of the prophets in the Transfiguration, where, according to Luke's Gospel account (9:28–31) and patristic tradition, Moses and Elijah appeared "in glory" next to Christ,[108] but here the viewer might be said to play the role of the apostles who are normally on a "lower level" and are "indirectly invited to behold and participate in [Christ's] glory."[109]

The emphasis placed on the shawl in the image, given its context within the symbolism of decay and renewal, and the symbolic associations to womb and tomb discussed earlier, might suggest Savoldo is making reference to the metaphorical "garment of glory."

> "[C]lothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 13:14)

> "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Gal. 3:27)

Sebastian Brock has detailed how clothing imagery, specifically the "robe of glory" or "robe of light," was used in the Syriac Christian tradition to express not only baptism, but also birth and deliverance from death, with all three central events of the Incarnation being seen as descents of the Divinity into successive wombs: the womb of Mary, the womb of the Jordan, and the womb of Sheol. Syrian Orthodox writers such as Ephrem in the fourth century, following the metaphor used above by Paul, equated the metaphorical garment which the Christian puts on with "Christ," or more specifically his "Spirit"; through it the Christian might ultimately attain the status of divinity.[110] Ephrem emphasized in particular that Christ's mother put on his glory.[111]

This is not to suggest that Savoldo would have made any direct link with early Syriac Christianity, but according to Brock such symbolism continued to be favored by the liturgical poets in the East and individual elements of this imagery are found in Greek and Latin writings.[112] Moretto, Savoldo's contemporary from Brescia, certainly appears to have made reference to the clothing metaphor used by Paul in Romans 13:14 in his *Christ with an Angel*, ca. 1550, painted for the Chapel of the Holy Crosses in the Duomo Vecchio in Brescia: a weeping angel, standing behind Christ, holds up a silvery robe in the center of the painting that acts as a backdrop to the slumped Christ, who looks directly at the beholder (fig. 15).[113]

Fig. 15 Moretto da Brescia, ***Christ with an Angel,*** ca. 1550, oil on canvas, 214 x 125 cm. Brescia, Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo (photo with permission of Civici Musei d'Arte e Storia di Brescia)

Comparisons might also be drawn here between the robe of glory and the more widely recognized motif of the "cloth of honor," which was used in Christian iconography in the West to establish divine status and perhaps most frequently to honor the Virgin Mary.[114] In the thirteenth century, many central Italian painters had applied gold leaf to Mary's garments, a technique known as chrysography, to indicate her role as Queen of Heaven. However, the cloth of honor, placed behind the Virgin Mary, became a standard device for Italian painters in the fourteenth century, including Paolo Veneziano in Venice in his *Coronation of the Virgin*, mentioned earlier, and in his tomb panel *Doge Francesco Dandolo and His Wife Presented to the Virgin* (fig. 16). The cloth of honor was used less frequently in Italy in the fifteenth century, but was often adopted by Giovanni Bellini in Venice, and was common in the Netherlands, in full-length paintings of the Virgin Mary and Child, such as Robert Campin's *Madonna and Child* (1430; Städel, Frankfurt am Main) and Jan van Eyck's *Madonna at the Fountain* (1439). By the early sixteenth

Fig. 16 Paolo Veneziano, **Doge Francesco Dandolo and His Wife Presented
to the Virgin**, fourteenth century tomb panel. Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa
dei Frari, Venice (photo: Didier Descouens from Wikimedia Commons, courtesy
of CC BY-SA 4.0, http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)

century it was still in use in Italy in paintings of the Virgin Mary, especially by
artists from Brescia, for example, in Vincenzo Foppa's *Madonna and Child between
San Faustino and Santa Giovita* (ca. 1501–09), Romanino's *Madonna Enthroned*
altarpiece (ca. 1516, fig. 8), and Moretto's *Coronation of the Virgin* (ca. 1512–13).[115]
In such images Mary's garments were generally made of plain fabric, whilst the
cloth behind her was often decorated, such as in the example by Campin, which
featured a block-like pattern and symbols for the sun emanating gold light. Carol
Purtle has suggested that the cloth of honor, when carried by angels, such as in the
two Paolo Veneziano paintings referred to above, was consonant with heavenly
light, often replacing the golden halo or mandorla.[116] Rona Goffen has further
argued that the cloth could denote the triumph of immortality,[117] echoing the
"garment of glory" motif with the clothing metaphor in 1 Corinthians 15:53–54
and 2 Corinthians 5:4, where immortality is put on like a garment when "Death
is swallowed up in victory."[118]

In terms of Renaissance imagery that more specifically recalls the "garment of
light" or "garment of glory," of particular note is the association that developed in
the West between Mary as Queen of Heaven and the "woman clothed with the
sun" in the Book of Revelation 12:1,[119] who often appears standing on a serpent or
dragon, as in the *Glorification of the Virgin* by Geertgen tot Sint Jans, ca. 1490–95
(fig. 17), also known as the *Maria in Sole*.[120] The combination of radiant clothing

Fig. 17 Geertgen tot Sint Jans, **Glorification of the Virgin** (Maria in Sole) ca. 1490–95, oil on panel, 24.5 x 20.5 cm. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (photo: Wikipedia Commons, www.google.com/culturalinstitute; artwork in the public domain)

Fig. 18 Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, **Madonna and Child in Glory with Saints**, Pesaro altarpiece, ca. 1525, oil on wood, 475 x 307 cm. Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera, inv. 148 (photo with permission of Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan)

imagery with the motif of a triumphant figure trampling a defeated enemy has parallels with the depiction of the Resurrection in the icon known as the *Anastasis* or *Descent into Hell/Hades*, or later in the West, *Christ in Limbo*, as recounted in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and retold in the *Golden Legend*. Here demons are depicted in the shadows being defeated by the light coming from Christ, or Hades is shown as a figure under Christ's foot, often squashed under the broken gates of hell, as in the *Anastasis* mosaic in the basilica of San Marco in Venice, where Christ wears a garment with golden chrysography that physically reflects the light. The defeated figure can be understood as a personification of "Death."[121] Leena Mari Peltomaa has noted how clothing metaphors like those in the Syriac tradition, in particular the robe of glory as it relates to Sheol/Hades imagery, were used in the early Byzantine Akathistos Hymn, a composition in praise of the Virgin Mary that has exerted a strong influence on Marian poetry and literature in the East and the West.[122]

> Hail, through whom Hades was stripped bare
> Hail, through whom we were clothed in glory
> (Akathistos Hymn, extract from strophe 7)

According to Peltomaa's interpretation of the Akathistos Hymn, victory over death, like baptism, occurs in the womb of Mary, who is likened to the Church, as she is in interpretations of the woman in Revelation 12.[123]

In Savoldo's *Madonna and Child in Glory with Saints* altarpiece for Pesaro, ca. 1525 (fig. 18),[124] Mary is shown elevated to "heaven," emphasizing her role in connecting heaven and earth. Mary holds the Christ Child, surrounded by an aureole of light alive with Cherubim and Seraphim and fringed with dark clouds. The motif of angels framing an aureole of light appears earlier in Titian's *Assumption* altarpiece for Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, ca. 1515–18, in which Mary ascends to heaven in a radiant aureole; however, that altarpiece as a whole appears to carry a wider meaning of glorifying the Virgin. Among the heads of the angels are inscribed the initials "BE VI" (Blessed Virgin), on the left, and "GLO" (Glorious) on the right, and it is often remarked that the image recalls the "woman clothed with the sun" in Revelation 12:1.[125] As David Rosand has pointed out, the triumphal arch of the architectural frame is crowned with the resurrected Christ, thereby complementing Mary's ascent by Christ's own Resurrection, with "triumph over death" being "the guiding idea behind the altar."[126]

In all of Savoldo's *Magdalene* paintings "Mary" could be interpreted as being clothed in the "robe of glory," and whilst this image is not combined with the motif of the trampling of a defeated enemy, it nonetheless can be read in the context of victory over death. The jar, as we have already seen, has an association with the mother's womb and, juxtaposed with the empty tomb, alludes to Christ's rebirth, with the dawn setting, when included, heralding victory over darkness.[127] The brilliant gold or silver highlights on the veil represent Christ's divinity as in the iconography of the Anastasis, where the flashing light coming from Christ represents his divinity.[128] At the same time, the motif of the "garment of glory" in Savoldo's paintings may function in a similar way to the cloth of honor, glorifying Mary as Queen of Heaven, where she acts as counterpart to Christ the sun. In Savoldo's Berlin variant (fig. 1), where there is no jar and the wall behind Mary is higher, the eye is particularly drawn to the opening to the blue sky beyond, against which the curved hood of Mary's golden veil is set, the color forming "the crucial complementary value."[129] This is perhaps a visual metaphor for the hole in the roof of a cave as an opening allowing contact with heaven,[130] as well as a reference to Mary's role as Queen of Heaven,[131] clothed in a "vesture of gold" (Ps. 45).[132] A fifteenth-century poem by the humanist and Carmelite reformer Baptista Mantuanus (1447–1516), associated with Mantua in Lombardy, describes Mary uniting heaven and earth: "Her face was neither smiling nor sad, but a mixture of the two; her body dwelt on earth, her mind in heaven."[133]

The connection between the Virgin Mary and the container for the consecrated host, the tabernacle, has been mentioned already, but Mary was also linked

with the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant, the gold-covered chest that contained the golden urn of manna. The Ark of the Covenant appears in the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews (9:4), but also in the Book of Revelation (11:19), where it is immediately followed by the chapter on the Woman of the Apocalypse (Rev. 12). As the Ark contained the golden urn, comparisons with Mary were frequently made, including in numerous hymns in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[134] "Mary's" gold garment in Savoldo's paintings might therefore reference the gold-covered chest. Perhaps more importantly, though, Rona Goffen, in her discussion of the "cloth of honor" in relation to Giovanni Bellini's half-length Madonnas, drew attention to the idea of the cloth, or veil, being closely allied to honoring the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle of the Old Testament, which contained the Ark of the Covenant and according to Hebrews (9:3) was screened by a curtain or veil.[135] The "garment" as a "veil" in the sense of a curtain, as suggested above, may have been used for identifying and honoring Mary as Queen of Heaven. Furthermore, Goffen notes, the veil may also have carried a theological reference to Hebrews (9:8; 9:11–12) where "the way into the sanctuary remains unrevealed" as long as the first tabernacle, or tent, remained, but Christ is then said to have come through the more perfect tabernacle and entered the sanctuary.[136]

Mary Pardo suggested that the veil is lifted from "Magdalene's" face to reveal the passing of sorrow,[137] but she also acknowledged Creighton Gilbert's observation that in several other works by Savoldo a veil is lifted over the luminous infant Christ, sometimes by the infant Christ himself, or by a saint or donor as they look directly at the viewer.[138] This gesture is most commonly assigned to the Virgin Mary, a popular motif said to derive from Saint Bridget's *Revelations* in the fourteenth century, in which Mary reveals the radiant, nude child to the shepherds.[139] However, in other contexts the "unveiling" can take on further meaning, the theological point, according to Gilbert, being that "the Old Law veiled what the New Law revealed."[140] Whilst Hebrews refers to the curtain and the tent, or tabernacle, the Christological veil-motif also has a New Testament origin in Mark and Paul.[141] The motif of a veil over Moses's face, originating in Exodus 34:33–35, is used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:12–18 with the suggestion that the veil is removed with the advent of Christ. Alexander Nagel has suggested that Italian reformers sought to restore a Christological emphasis associated with the early Church,[142] therefore Savoldo's focus on this motif in a number of his works might possibly have been seen by the supporters of the reform movement as promoting a move towards "re-establishing" all things in Christ, an illumination by faith (2 Cor. 4:4–6).[143] Some of the reformers, such as Juan de Valdés (ca. 1500–41), on whose thoughts the *Beneficio di Cristo* was largely based, held to the principal that hidden Christian truth can only be

revealed internally by means of a "spiritual light," the illumination of the spirit that comes from Christ.[144]

Savoldo's *Magdalene* paintings warrant further consideration in the context of 2 Corinthians 3, particularly verse 18, which follows the phrase "whenever one *turns* to the Lord, the veil is removed" in verse 16, and has been subject to considerable theological debate:

> "And we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory
> of the Lord, are being transfigured into the same image from
> glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."[145]

Second Corinthians 3:12–18, rather than expressing a contrast between Moses and Christ, has been considered by some, such as George Caird, to be a contrast between Moses, and Paul and his fellow Christians: "the one hiding with a veil the transitory nature of the radiance on his face, the others with unveiled face displaying a radiance which is becoming permanent under the creative influence of the Spirit."[146] With this interpretation of the wider passage, it follows that in verse 18 Christ is not the one in whom God's glory is seen mirrored, but rather is "the source of the glory." Believers are therefore "beholding" indirectly that glory, as they themselves are being transformed.[147]

This motif might possibly explain why in Savoldo's *Magdalene* series "Mary," unlike Moses, has the veil lifted from over her face, and why she displays radiance through her robe of glory, which, like "metal beaten to a shell-like thinness," as Pardo says, possesses the faculty of reflection, reflecting Christ's glory "as in a mirror" (2 Cor. 3:18). A metaphor used by Jacobus de Voragine, the compiler of the *Golden Legend* in the thirteenth century, in his *Sermones aurei de Beata Maria* (Sermons of the Blessed Virgin Mary) was: "Mary the mirror—Christ the image,"[148] with the "unspotted mirror" said to be one of the most frequent medieval epithets of the Virgin, deriving from the *Book of Wisdom*: "For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God."[149] A link between Mary and mirror is also potentially suggested by the Aachen pilgrim's mirror badge, of which numerous variations were produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for pilgrims traveling to Aachen, where the gown of the Virgin Mary was one of the cathedral's relics.[150] Pilgrims' mirror badges, which were made of a perforated plate of lead or pewter, are supposed to have functioned by collecting divine light from relics. In the Aachen case, the beholder looked upon Mary's garment, which was usually held above Mary by two angels, while divine light was reflected back, either by way of a small circular mirror above (fig. 19), or, as with Johannes Gutenberg's 1439 mass-produced version, by the mesh pattern of the metal gown itself.[151]

Fig. 19 Aachen pilgrim's mirror, 1400–50, pewter, 11 x 6.5 cm. Private collection (photo with permission of numisantica.com)

Review: The "Icon" and the Mirror

Having considered the vase and the garment of glory as central motifs allowing for a deeper understanding of the possible intentions behind the paintings and pointing to a reading of the central subject as the Virgin Mary, it is necessary to now consider how the paintings may have functioned for a contemporary viewer, in the context of iconographic developments during a period of changing religious practices.

Creighton Gilbert observed that Savoldo's saints sometimes seem portrait-like, but portraits transformed by a narrative.[152] In interpreting Savoldo's *Magdalene* series, one of the consequences of working on the assumption that the vase is an ointment jar, besides it functioning as an attribute, is that in the context of the scene it imports a narrative implication. For Mary Pardo, "it is precisely this 'narrative implication'—already fully acknowledged in Ridolfi's seventeenth-century remarks on the *Magdalene*—that [is] taken . . . as a guide to the subject of Savoldo's invention."[153] However, in questioning the assumption that the vase is an ointment jar, this article has raised questions about the identity of the subject, and so it is necessary to review the extent to which there may have been a narrative.

Pardo considered Savoldo's *Magdalene* within the contexts of the "holy portrait" and of specific developments in northern Italy in the last quarter of the fifteenth century associated with the half-length picture, which is widely recognized as an appropriate format for devotional pictures.[154] It is important to

mention here, though, that Pardo focused her analysis of Savoldo's *Magdalene* on the two paintings where the composition is cropped, as a result of which they are closer to a "half-length" format, whereas the others, particularly the Berlin version, approach three-quarter length, a less common form for devotional pictures at the time.[155] Pardo drew attention to the portrait-like iconography associated with the half-length Magdalene, and focused particularly on the over-the-shoulder "turning pose," where sometimes, such as in the version by Luini, ca. 1525 (Washington DC, National Gallery of Art), her head is turned to face the viewer.[156] However, as Pardo noted, after 1400 the preference in paintings of Mary Magdalene was to show her fashionably clothed in contemporary dress, whereas Savoldo's figure "in contrast to those typical of his day, is cloaked like a mourner in a 'scenic' representation of the Entombment [. . .] in Renaissance paintings this garb is more usual for the Virgin than the Magdalene." The Virgin Mary in Titian's *Entombment*, ca. 1520 (fig. 20) is cited as an example. It should also be noted that in the half-length Magdalene Pardo referred to, where the ointment jar was used for identification, the jar, following the convention discussed earlier, was shown with a lid.

In the Italian Quattrocento the half-length single Madonna was more common, and has indeed been said to be omnipresent.[157] Giovanni Bellini along with other Venetian painters used the portrait motif consistently for paintings of the Virgin Mary and Child.[158] As Rona Goffen argued in her study of Bellini's half-length Madonnas, the format would have been appropriate for the Virgin as Queen of Heaven, given the ancient association of the bust motif with kingship, and Goffen suggested it would have also been used to express the inexplicable nature of divinity.[159] Bellini avoided using overt material symbols such as the crown, and along with the half-length format, the only other indicator of divine royalty identified by Goffen was the cloth of honor placed behind the subject, as discussed previously.

Pardo, although keeping to the narrative of Mary Magdalene at the tomb, suggested Antonello da Messina's half-length *Annunciate* Virgin Mary in Palermo, ca. 1476 (Palazzo Abatellis), as a possible forerunner to Savoldo's *Magdalene* in terms of the painting's "narrative quality" and the reaction of the subject to a light source outside the image.[160] It is worth reiterating here that, besides John's Gospel account of Mary Magdalene meeting the resurrected Christ, in both the East and the West there existed a line of textual sources, which stated that Christ

Fig. 20 Tiziano Vecellio, detail of **The Entombment of Christ**, ca. 1520, oil on canvas, 148 × 212 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: The Yorck Project from Wikimedia Commons; artwork in the public domain)

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Fig. 21 "Annunciation" type: Albrecht Dürer, **Christ Appearing to His Mother** (from **The Little Passion**), ca. 1509–10, woodcut, 12.7 x 9.5 cm. Washington DC, National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.3662 (photo: National Gallery of Art)

Fig. 22 Antonello De Saliba (after Antonello da Messina), **The Virgin Annunciate**, late 15th century, oil on panel, 47 x 34 cm. Venice, Accademia, cat. 590 (photo: Architas from Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of CC BY-SA 4.0, http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)

after his Resurrection meets his mother.[161] From the fourteenth century, in the West,[162] a new visual motif developed to represent Christ's appearance to his mother, using existing imagery as prototypes. Erwin Panofsky pointed out that, as Christ was believed to have either met the Virgin Mary near the sepulcher or to have visited her in her house, most depictions in the West drew either upon the Noli me tangere motif for the first scenario or upon Annunciation imagery for the latter.[163] The more common images are of Mary at home, especially ones of Christ approaching a seated Mary (fig. 21), which have a clear iconographic parallelism with the heralding of the Incarnation by the Archangel, where Christ's announcement to his mother of his Resurrection is seen as "the fulfillment of that Incarnation."[164] Savoldo's *Magdalene* "Mary," whilst not set in the context of her home, still shows some signs of mimicking an Annunciation scene. "Mary" in Savoldo's paintings has her right hand veiled and lifted. Whilst this gesture may relate to a convention for weeping mourners at the scene of Christ's death, the Virgin Mary is often shown in an Annunciation pose with her right hand raised to acknowledge that something in happening before her, particularly in Byzantine art and, like Savoldo's "Mary," her head is often bent.[165] However, as Mary Pardo noted, there are particularly strong parallels with Antonello Da Messina's *Annunciate* Virgin Mary in Palermo, a copy of which, attributed to Antonello's nephew, appears to have been in Venice since the time that he is believed to have lived there at the end of the fifteenth century

(fig. 22).[166] Both Savoldo and Antonello appear to "zoom in" on "Mary," providing a close-up of the subject that largely isolates her from any assumed narrative context, whilst playing on the effects of a light source outside the image frame that illuminates the scene.[167] The sense of drama is muted, the facial expressions of both "Marys" being hard to read; instead, their body gestures read as a reaction to the very moment they become aware of the source of the light.

According to Hans Belting, in both of the known versions of Antonello's *Annunciate*, the one in Palermo, and the other in Munich (Alte Pinakothek), the annunciate angel is not included in the image, because it would have disturbed the intimate "face-to-face" relation of viewer and icon.[168] The absence of the angel certainly directs attention to the figure of Mary and to her centrality.[169] The devotional function of the image is widely accepted and Claudia Cieri Via has recently argued that the Palermo *Annunciate* concentrates on the moment of the incarnation through non-representative and therefore non-narrative elements.[170] Savoldo's *Magdalene* could also be said to focus on symbolic rather than narrative elements—the luminosity of the robe, the ruined buildings, the opening to the sky, the dark niche, the form of the unsealed vase, and the dawn breaking—in an image of what is essentially an abstract concept: victory over death and resurrection.

Focusing on Antonello's Munich *Annunciate*, where Mary has her arms crossed in front of her chest, Belting has pointed to the Icon of the Virgin in Fermo Cathedral as a possible prototype, which is also of the Virgin alone in an enclosing veil and may have originally been a Lamenting Virgin.[171] Charlotte Nichols has similarly argued that Savoldo's *Magdalenes* recall icons of the veiled Lamenting Virgin but with one hand raised to the face in the more typical lamenting gesture, such as in the example from the Pala d'Oro by Paolo Veneziano (see fig. 6). Savoldo's lone veiled figure of "Mary," like Antonello's, is centrally placed. However, in contrast to Antonello's *Annunciate* Mary, Savoldo's "Mary" is not frontally posed but is instead depicted in the process of turning, and critically is observed facing the viewer. As a result, the face-to-face relation between viewer and subject extends to the subject directly engaging the beholder, which is not the case with Antonello's *Annunciate* Mary in either of the two versions. The standard Renaissance pictorial model is of a window opening onto a vista, or occasionally a "neutral zone" or "shared space" created between viewer and viewed, in which the window might function as a two-way mirror with one or more subjects looking outwards, potentially aware of a presence beyond. However, here the space that opens in front of the pictorial field is actually "activated" by the exchange of gaze between the beholder and the subject, as it is with an icon when an image becomes "animated" by the viewer.[172] Savoldo's "Mary" acts

as if the viewer is involved, turning the beholder from external witness to active participant.[173] She returns the look of the viewer who is invited to behold "as in a mirror" the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). The writer and leading pro-reformer, Vittoria Colonna, mentioned earlier, in her writing on the Passion in the text *Pianto sopra la Passione di Cristo*, which focuses on the lamentation episode, argued that divine grace is transmitted first to the Virgin by means of the faith sustained at the death of Christ, and then to humankind.[174]

The *Beneficio di Cristo*, which reflected Italian religious reform thinking, expounded the doctrine of salvation by faith alone (sola fide), as Luther did through his translation of Romans 3:28.[175] Unlike Protestantism, though, the reform movement in Italy was not a protest movement; instead, it merely proposed change within the Church through a spiritual renewal and internalization of faith by each individual, stressing the need for an "inner experience" of "Christ within."[176] As Eva-Maria Jung has noted, it "could offer nothing but . . . an introverted mysticism, a 'beautiful inwardness.'"[177] A number of other scholars have also noted that it was a culture based on the individual and not a coordinated movement that was deeply rooted.[178] It has already been mentioned that it sought to restore a Christocentric focus, and Alexander Nagel has highlighted that Christ's resurrection was a "topos of reform rhetoric" and a metaphor for "purification and restoration after abuse and exposure."[179] With the reform movement centered primarily on the experience of the individual, practitioners may have been attracted by Savoldo's introspective approach to this subject, which sought to engage the beholder in developing a personal relationship with the divine.

By the early sixteenth century, devotion without images appears often to have been seen as a higher form of meditation, although private devotional images were still commonly regarded as practicable instruments to lead from the visible to the invisible.[180] In Renaissance spiritual literature, a recurring theme was the "mirror" and the Pauline notion of the indirect apprehension of truth (1 Cor. 13:12). The theologian and humanist Nicholas of Cusa, an advocate of Church reform, adopted Pauline theology in his *On the Vision of God* (1453) and argued that beholding a painted icon of Christ was like observing oneself in a mirror, so that "the beholder is the image."[181] Luther is widely known for arguing that the text of the Bible, the Word of God, revealed the true path to salvation, but in a statement actually against iconoclasm, in 1525, he likened our inner portrait of Christ to a reflection, where Christ's "image" projects itself and is formed in one's heart.[182] The anonymous author of *Die Grote evangelische Peerle* (The Great Evangelical Pearl), published in Antwerp in 1538, following a shorter version in 1535, discussed the mirroring of Christ, where the "mirror" is used as a meta-

phor for the soul's image of Christ, and we are mirrored in an image of Christ's divinity: his "humanized divinity."[183]

Between 1520 and the early 1540s, contemporaneous with the development of the above Pauline ideas on the imaging of Christ in oneself, a small number of painters from Brescia, including Romanino, Moretto and Savoldo, were developing what Stephen Campbell has termed a "sacred naturalism": whilst adopting a restrained emotional character in the direct representation of Christian doctrine in the everyday world, they sought to place the sacred within the realm of immediate sensory experience, closer to the ideal of the Eucharist as the highest mode of representation of Christ's body, in an attempt to make the divine more directly available to the beholder.[184] Savoldo's *Magdalene* paintings, which are believed to date from the mid-1520s to ca. 1540, can be seen as being highly experimental, not only in terms of providing access to the divine, but also in their means of representing the concept of the Resurrection and specifically Christ's "spiritual" body following a process of transmutation.[185] Christ's resurrected spiritual body is "there and not there,"[186] so is in essence unrepresentable, and as the Gospel of John reminds us, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). Savoldo's *Magdalene* paintings allowed the beholder to experience through Mary, the one who humanizes Christ's divinity, that divinity mirrored in themselves, so that one could be said to be "in Christ," where through "faith," as Augustine says, Christ is formed in the inner self of the believer.

However, the Counter-Reformation Church sought to establish authoritative control over religious images, following prescriptions in the Council of Trent's 1563 decree, with a return to more traditional modes of sacred depiction while, as Klaus Krüger says, "simultaneously establishing control and canalization of the religious gaze and imagination, and over the powers of inner experience activated thereby."[187] The Council of Trent reemphasized the value of collective worship. As a result, direct forms of communication between the sacred and the individual without the mediation of priests, such as those that might be fostered by "sacred naturalism," came to be seen as too closely associated with Protestant ideas.[188] As for the specific subject of the resurrected Christ's appearance to his mother, which James Breckenridge suggests symbolized "the direct personal contact possible between the individual and the Godhead," with a move towards a more impersonal message about the Redemption after Trent, the "intense personal significance" associated with it became lost.[189]

Seen in this context, it becomes more explicable that Savoldo's highly unusual interpretation of the Resurrection theme could have been misinterpreted as early

as the seventeenth century by both Ridolfi and Rossi. From the mid-nineteenth century, when the paintings re-emerged from obscurity, to the present, perhaps too much weight has been placed on that seventeenth-century interpretation.

Conclusion

In the Berlin version of Savoldo's *Magdalene*, which does not include the vase and is considered here to be the first in the series, Savoldo renders the subject's identity particularly ambiguous. It includes no background setting, simply an enveiling wall behind "Mary," producing a scene that Crowe and Cavalcaselle described as "full of mystery."[190] At first sight, and without reference to the other later paintings, this three-quarter-length portrait-like subject does not obviously recall a devotional image or have a story. However, that surface reading belies what I believe is an underlying Christological devotional purpose that locates the mystical in the psychological realm of personal experience, and where narrative function is subordinate, making Savoldo's painting more akin to an "icon." The intense radiance manifested in the "garment of glory" that is central to the composition encodes a process of transformation in relation to the absent Christ, who, in resurrected rather than earthly form, is now a "spiritual body."[191] Furthermore, not only do the brilliant gold highlights of the veil represent Christ's divinity, but by a form of osmosis the garment also comes to symbolize the Virgin Mary's own glory, serving to both identify and honor her as Queen of Heaven, the herald of the sun. Set against the blue sky her golden hood emphasizes her connection between heaven and earth, while her associations with motherhood and the source of life amplify the notion of a rebirth.[192]

It is contended here that after painting the Berlin original, Savoldo added the open vase to subsequent versions of the painting, no doubt anticipating that many viewers would interpret this as an ointment jar, but introducing this symbol at a time when a container placed prominently on what could be taken to represent an altar table would have been seen by many reform-minded viewers as ideologically emblematic. The traditional association of a liturgical container with the mother's womb, combined with the fact that the container in this case is unsealed, echoing the *elevatio* liturgical ritual, would have in itself implied a renewal of life. However, when these symbolic elements are read alongside the "garment of glory" motif where the Virgin Mary, cloaked like a mourner, brilliantly reflects the light, they would have reinforced the idea of the triumph of immortality, with the rising sun, when included, heralding victory over darkness.

Mary, with unveiled face, not hiding her radiance as Moses did, but rather displaying it through the outward symbol of the garment, "reveals" the way through

a mirror function that enables the believer to behold the glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Looking at the veil the devout beholder might in effect experience Christ's divinity mirrored in him- or herself: "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:3-4). The realization for beholders is that they, through Mary, are also participating in the process of being changed, a transformation which will ultimately lead from one glory to the other, from an earthly glory to a heavenly one.[193] The Italian reform movement was focused primarily on the inner experience of the individual and so practitioners may have been attracted by Savoldo's idiosyncratic and introspective approach to this Resurrection theme, which required an experiential faith to fully envision its intended purpose; reserving a special role for the Virgin Mary, but one set within a Christocentric work.[194]

However, in Italy, both the movement for reform and attempts through the visual arts to make the divine more directly accessible were short-lived. Due to wider cultural changes, in particular the success of the Counter-Reformation in establishing authoritative control over religious images as well as the religious imagination, the deeper functional significance of Savoldo's paintings was soon lost, together with the meaning behind the symbolism. The artist's act of concealment was indeed so effective, and the images so unorthodox that, with the changes in both spiritual practice and visual expectations after the Council of Trent, in less than a century after the images were painted their meaning was reduced to a single one-dimensional interpretation as Saint Mary Magdalene. When the Berlin painting resurfaced, at the start of the nineteenth century, any religious significance that version might once have had was lost altogether and a secular interpretation stubbornly persisted throughout most of the twentieth century.

Notes

1 The quote "Queste sono le vere riformatione interiore" is from a letter from Gasparo Contarini (1483–1542) to Alfonso Avalos, the Spanish governor of Lombardy, dated March 29, 1542, cited in William Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of the Republican Liberty* (1968; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 126. Bouwsma translates as "True reformations are internal," whereas Elizabeth Gleason, in *Gasparo Contarini* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 279, translates more literally as "These are the true interior reformations."

2 Sebastian Brock, "Jacob of Serugh on the Veil of Moses," *Sobornost* 3, no. 1 (1981): 70–85, 75.

3 Charlotte Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes*: A 'Muddle of Maries'?" *California Italian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 175–203, http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1n76034t.

4 Mary Pardo, "The Subject of Savoldo's *Magdalene,*" *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 1 (March 1989): 71.

5 Dermot Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 2–14.

6 E. P. Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 81–90; Andreas Andreopoulus, *Metamorphosis, The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), 256n4.

7 Quote from Eric Plumer, trans., *Augustine's Commentary on Galatians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 191.

8 The engraving ca. 1750 by Lorenzo Lorenzi, after a drawing by Giuseppe Zocchi (d.1767), made when the painting, now untraced, was in the Gerini collection in Florence. See Nicholas Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. 1 (London: National Gallery Company, 2004), 351; Renata Stradiotti, "L'Opera del Savoldo Attraverso la Grafica," in *Giovanni Gerolamo Savoldo Pittore Bresciano*: *Ateneo di Brescia*: atti del convegno, Brescia 21-22 maggio 1983, (Brescia: Edizioni Del Moretto, 1985), 132–3.

9 See Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 351; Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene,*" 68; Creighton Gilbert, *The Works of Girolamo Savoldo* (New York: Garland, 1986), 555. See also Renata Stradiotti, entry in *Giovanni Gerolamo Savoldo* (exh. cat.), Redona Begni, Pier Virgilio, Elena Lucchesi Ragni, Renata Stradiotti, et al. (Milan: Electa, 1990), 150–2.

10 Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues,* 351. Closer framing heightens the effect of a suspense close-up. See Lorenzo Pericolo, "The Invisible Presence: Cut-In, Close-Up, and Off-Scene in Antonello da Messina's Palermo *Annunciate,*" *Representations* 17 (2009): 1–29, 3–4.

11 Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 351–2, 337.

12 With variations. Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 337; Gilbert, *The Works of Girolamo Savoldo*, 46–49.

13 Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 337–8; Andaleeb Badiee Banta, artists' biographies in *Painters of Reality*, ed. Andrea Bayer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 242.

14 Andrea Bayer, "Bergamo and Brescia," in *Venice and the Veneto*, ed. Peter Humfrey (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 318; Bayer, *Painters of Reality*, 24, 106; Francesco Frangi, "Tiziano e Brescia. Esperienze pittoriche al bivio tra colorismo e naturalismo," in *Tiziano e la pittura del Cinquecento tra Venezia e Brescia*, ed. Francesco Frangi (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2018), 11–27.

15 Kenneth Gouwens, "Clement and Calamity: The Case for Re-evaluation," in *The Pontificate of Clement VII*, eds. Kenneth Gouwens and Sheryl E. Reiss (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005), 3–19; and Alexander Nagel, "Experiments in Art and Reform in Italy," in *The Pontificate of Clement VII*, 385–411. See also Elizabeth Gleason, "Confronting New Realities," in *Venice Reconsidered*, eds. Jeffries, Martin and Romano (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 168–80.

16 See Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143–47, 178–79; Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, 13–14. On experimentation, see Quercolo Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender and the Self in Renaissance Italy* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 137–9.

[17] Margaret Morse, "From '*Chiesa* to *Casa*' and Back: The Exchange of Public and Private in Domestic Devotional Art," in *Reflections on Renaissance Venice*, eds. Mary Frank and Blake de Maria (Milan: 5 Continents, 2013), 143–54, 146.

[18] John Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 73–96; Massimo Firpo, *Juan de Valdes and the Italian Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 1-58.

[19] Nagel, *Reform of Art*, 145-6.

[20] Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, 6–14. Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*, 27, 35, 73–96. See also Eva-Maria Jung, "On the Nature of Evangelism in Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Journal of History of Ideas* 14, no. 4 (1953): 511–27, 513. *Evangelism* was only used as a term from the twentieth century. Associates of the movement for reform were known as *Spirituali*, but even that term appears relatively late, in 1540 (see Stephen Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation: Vincenzo Querini and the Religious Renaissance in Italy* [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 219.) It may be more helpful to think of its supporters as the practitioners of a culture (see later discussion).

[21] From a letter by Bernardino Ochino (1487–1564), cited in Firpo, *Italian Reformation*, 71 and Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*, 25–26 (the source being an article by Paolo Piccolomini published in 1905).

[22] Unless otherwise indicated quotes from the Bible are from the New International Version.

[23] Firpo, *Italian Reformation*, 1–67.

[24] Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*, 26–28; Firpo, "Lorenzo Lotto and the Reformation in Venice," in *Heresy, Culture, and Religion in Early Modern Italy*, eds. Ronald Delph, Michelle Fontaine and John Martin (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2006), 26–27; Firpo, *Italian Reformation*, 67–78. "Evangelism" was also strong in Brescia.

[25] Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong, eds., introduction to *Bellini and the East* (London: National Gallery Company, 2005), 7–8.

[26] In the fifteenth century the exile from Constantinople Cardinal Bessarion declared that Venice seemed "almost another Byzantium." Cited by Caroline Campbell in "The Bellini, Bessarion and Byzantium," in *Bellini and the East*, 36–65, 44, 48-9, 54. Rona Goffen, "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas," *The Art Bulletin* 57, no. 4 (Dec. 1975), 487–8, and William McNeil, *Venice: The Hinge of Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 97, on Greek learning and printing. Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes*," 197n83, citing Giorgio Fedalto, *Ricerche storiche sulla posizione giuridica ed ecclesiastica dei greci a Venezia nei secoli XVI e XVI* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, Editore, 1967).

[27] Ottavio Rossi, *Elogi Historica di Bresciani Illustri* (Brescia: Forni, 1620), 502.

[28] For the provenance of the London version see Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 352, 356–8.

[29] Carlo Ridolfi, *Le Maraviglie Dell'Arte*, 1648 (Padova: Tipografia e Fanderia Cartallier, 1835), 354–5.

[30] The provenance of the Berlin version before the nineteenth century is unknown, but the presence on the frame of the seal of the new Accademia in Venice, established by Napoleonic Decree in 1807, was noted by Erich Schleier, "Savoldos 'Magdalena' in der Berliner Gemäldegalerie. Zur Wiederherstellung eines Meisterwerks der Brescianer Cinquecentomalerei," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 33 (1991): 136. The painting was certainly in Edward Solly's collection in Berlin by late 1818, as it appears in inventories made then (Dr. Robert Skwirblies, pers. comm., 2015). It was recorded as a work of Caroto: *Verhüllte junge Frau, Kniestück* (cloaked young woman, kneepiece). In the nineteenth-century Königliche museum catalogues, it was attributed to Savoldo and was recorded simply as a "female figure," but by the 1870s it was commonly referred to as a "Venetian" woman after the link with the London painting, which was interpreted as being set in Venice, had been established: *Eine Venezianerin*, "Venetian Lady" (Giovanni Morelli, *Italian Masters in German Galleries*, trans. Louise M. Richter [London: George Bell & Sons, 1883], 408), or "Venetian Girl" (J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, *History of Painting in North Italy*, 1871 [London: John Murray, 1912], 317).

[31] On restoration see Schleier, "Savoldos 'Magdalena,'" 135–47.

32 *Gemäldegalerie Berlin,* Museum Guide (Munich: Prestel, 1998), entry by Matthias Weniger, 140–1.

33 Odorici, 1853 (cited by Stradiotti, *Savoldo*, 150), and Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Painting in North Italy*, 318.

34 Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene,*" 72. The London and Florence versions are noted as including the "sunrise." Note: The Los Angeles version, at that time, was not generally accepted as by Savoldo, and the Berlin version was restored in 1989.

35 Ibid., 73–75.

36 Ibid., 75.

37 Monika Ingenhoff-Danhäuser, *Maria Magdalena: Heilige und Sünderin* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1984), 59–61, is most often cited in relation to the interpretation as a Venetian courtesan, with discussion in Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 348; and Tawny Sherrill, "Who was Cesare Vecellio?" in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles,* vol. 5, eds. Robin Netherton and Gale Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), 185–7. Nichols, "Savoldo's *Magdalenes,*" 198, also suggests that a multivalent interpretation also allows the viewer to interpret as a portrait of a former prostitute.

38 Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 348.

39 Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes,*" 180–9. Nichols notes that Byzantine influences may have come in part via Northern painting.

40 Ibid., 185.

41 Textual sources cited include Pseudo-Bonaventura and Aretino, as well as the *Golden Legend*, where Jacobus de Voraigne cites two important early Western authors, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (340–97), and Sedulius, the fifth-century poet (Nichols, "Savoldo's *Magdalenes,*" 191–5). As Nichols notes, the *Golden Legend* gives conflicting accounts of whether it was Mary Magdalene or the Virgin Mary who first met the risen Christ.

42 Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes,*" 178, 195. Note: The interchangeable identities of the Virgin Mary herself, as mother, or, stemming from commentary on the Song of Songs, as "bride," might plausibly explain why in Savoldo's *Magdalene*, the age of his "Mary" is not rendered consistently in all versions, and, as Nichols notes ("Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes,*" 178), in the London version she appears more "youthful." (I thank Dr Sarah Jane Boss for pointing me to Leo Steinberg's discussion in his article "The Metaphors of Love and Birth in Michelangelo's *Pietàs*," in *Studies in Erotic Art*, ed. Theodore Bowie and Cornelia Christenson [New York: Basic Books, 1970], 236–9).

43 Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes,*" 195; Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 348.

44 Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes,*" 195.

45 Ibid, 198: Nichols describes the result as a "*fusion*" of the two Marys, allowing a "wide-ranging commentary by a variety of viewers," including referencing contemporary debate over Mary Magdalene's identity, making intimations to an alternate Marian identity, and possibly even viewing as a secular portrait of a specific individual. Nichols believes the different detailing of the theme, including the background, was influenced by the "tastes and budgets" of patrons (Ibid., 178).

46 Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 72n20. See also Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), on ruins as a metaphor for loss, 138; process and change, 141. Nichols notes use of ruins in Savoldo's earlier variations on *Flight into Egypt* ("Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes,*" 178.)

47 Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 73n24; Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 348.

48 Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 72n16; Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 348.

49 Weniger, *Gemäldegalerie Berlin,* 140–1.

50 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Painting in North Italy*, 318.

51 Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*", 70.

52 Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 348.

53 The London and Florence paintings have been interpreted as having a dawn setting by both Pardo ("Savoldo's *Magdalene,*" 72) and Penny (*National Gallery Catalogues*, 348). The background in the Gerini engraving resembles the Florence painting (Stradiotti, *Savoldo Pittore Bresciano*, 133), which Pardo also interprets as a dawn sky (Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene,*" 72n16). There is no fundamental optical difference between a sunset and a sunrise, although the sun rises at an angle and to the right, which does appear suggested by the Florence version.

54 Yrjö Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine* (London: Macmillan, 1912), 69, 492n9; Ilene Haering Forsyth, "Magi and Majesty: A Study of Romanesque Sculpture and Liturgical Drama," *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 3 (Sept. 1968): 222; Barbara G. Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 100.

55 Karl Young, "The Origin of the Easter Play," in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 29, no. 1 (1914): 49; Neil Brooks, *The Sepulcher of Christ in Art and Liturgy* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1921), 59–61; Karl Young, *The Drama of the English Church*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), Appendix A on "The Easter Sepulcher."

56 In Venice traditional themes for altarpieces at the start of the sixteenth century were the Virgin and Child enthroned, or airborne, and the Coronation. See Peter Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 224, 304–8.

57 Timothy Verdon, *Mary in Western Art* (2004; Manchester, VT: Hudson Hills Press, 2005), 19, 56–9. On altarpieces see also John Shearman, *Only Connect . . . : Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 71–72. On the Virgin and the Eucharist see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 142–7.

58 Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece*, 13–35. Whilst Craig Harbison, *Jan van Eyck: The Play of Realism* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1991), 91, has questioned whether Mary actually stands *for* the altar, in that Mary was the original support for the Christ-Child symbolised *by* the altar: that there exists an association between Mary and altar and tabernacle is nevertheless clear. On the association with the tabernacle, Lane cites twelfth- to fourteenth-century literary sources. See also Carol Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 6–8.

59 Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 74–76, points to the traditional metaphors for the Virgin, which include Ara Coeli (Altar of Heaven).

60 Keith Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," in *Giovanni Bellini and the Art of Devotion*, ed. Ronda Kasl (Indiana: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2004), 38.

61 Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes*," 182n24: "Savoldo married a widow from Tiel, to which he may have travelled." Beverly Louise Brown, "From Hell to Paradise: Landscape and Figure in Early Sixteenth-Century Venice," in *Renaissance Venice and the North*, eds. Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 428–9, 444, 474. Cited in Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes*," 182, 187.

62 Michael Jacobsen, "Savoldo and Northern Art," in *The Art Bulletin* 56, no. 4 (Dec. 1974): 534.

63 Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 74–76, 206. Rona Goffen, *Piety and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 53, has also argued in relation to Bellini's *Frari Triptych* in the Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice (ca. 1485) that Mary actually occupies the place of the altar and the Child is meant to be identified with the Eucharist.

64 Katherine Brown, *Mary of Mercy in Medieval and Renaissance Italian Art* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 98;

Catherine Oakes, *Ora Pro Nobis: The Virgin as Intercessor in Medieval Art and Devotion* (Turnhout: Harvey Millar, 2008), 219–21; and Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, 454. Also, see Goffen, *Piety and Patronage*, 86, on the "illusionistic stone tabernacle" on the frame of Titian's altarpiece for Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice (ca. 1515–18).

[65] Nagel, "Experiments in Art and Reform," 403–9. See also Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 52–53; and Stephen Campbell, "Renaissance Naturalism and the Jewish Bible," in *Judaism and Christian Art*, eds. Herbert Kessler and David Nirenberg (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 295–300 in relation to Brescia and the increase in devotional focus on the Eucharist.

[66] Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 52, 291.

[67] Verdon, *Mary in Western Art*, 166-168, 217; Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, 337–8.

[68] Susan Haskins, *Vittoria Colona, Chiara Matraini and Lucrezia Marinella: Who is Mary?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 19.

[69] Nagel, *Reform of Art*, 170, 180, 184–5.

[70] Steinberg, "Michelangelo's *Pietàs*," 265–8.

[71] Nagel, *Reform of Art*, 184–5.

[72] Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 280–1.

[73] When the vase of ointment acts as an attribute of Mary Magdalene it is generally shown with a lid. See James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects & Symbols in Art*, rev. ed. (1974; London: Murray, 1996), 318.

[74] The analogy of a woman to a container is found in classical mythology. See Ellen Reeder, "Women as Containers," in *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*, ed. Ellen Reeder, (Baltimore, MD: Walters Art Gallery, 1995), 195–9. The second-century Greek physician Soranus noted that "a woman's body is closed when she is a virgin, but once she has first engaged in sexual intercourse, she becomes like an unstopped jar" (Lorenzo Garcia Jr, "G. W. Pabst's Hesiodic Myth of Sex in *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)," in *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World*, ed. Monica Cyrino [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013], 17–18). The "alchemical vase" is also said to be "the mother's womb, in which new birth takes shape, hence the belief that the vase holds the secret of transmutation" (Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, eds., *Dictionary of Symbols,* rev. ed. [1982; London: Penguin, 1996], 1061). The interment of bodies in all types of ceramic vessels, known as pot burials or jar burials, was a widespread practice in the ancient world, and a number of scholars have proposed the analogy with the womb, with the possible implication being that the practice assisted in a metaphorical rebirth (R. Power and Y. Tristant, "From Refuse to Rebirth: Repositioning the Pot Burial in the Egyptian Archaeological Record," *Antiquity* 90, no. 354 [2016]: 1474–88.)

[75] Francesco Frangi, *Savoldo: Catalogo completo* (Firenze: Cantini, 1992), 86, observes "some books and a vase of flowers" on the shelf. However, the vase appears sealed with its lid on. Two books, one either side of the vase, stand upright, which may represent the Old and New Testaments, with the Annunciation marking the transition from one era to the next. See discussion on two books on the shelf in Jan van Eyck's fifteenth century Ghent Altarpiece *Annunciation* in Purtle, *Jan van Eyck*, 26n41.

[76] Quoted by Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, 339.

[77] Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, 336–41.

[78] Hall, *Subjects & Symbols in Art*, 263, argues that after the Council of Trent it became more usual to see Christ standing before a closed tomb. See also Stefano Zuffi, *Gospel Figures in Art*, 2002, trans. Thomas Hartmann (Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 2003), 338–42.

[79] Elly Cassee and Kees Berserik, "The Iconography of the Resurrection: A Re-Examination of the Risen Christ Hovering above the Tomb," *The Burlington Magazine* 126, no. 970 (Jan. 1984): 20–24.

[80] The angel appeared radiant with light in a similar fashion to how the transfigured Christ is described in Matthew (17:2).

[81]   Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 294–7; Natalia Teteriatnikov, "When Art Depicts Ritual: The Salerno Plaque with The Women at the Tomb," in *The Salerno Ivories,* eds. Francesca Dell'Acqua, Anthony Cutler, Herbert L. Kessler, Avinoam Shalem, and Gerhard Wolf (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2016), 167–78, 176–7. See also Colin Morris, *The Sepulcher of Christ and the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 113–4; and Barbara G. Lane, "'Depositio et Elevatio': The Symbolism of the Seilern Triptych," *The Art Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (Mar. 1975): 21–30.

[82]   Teteriatnikov, "When Art Depicts Ritual," 175; Young, *Drama of the English Church*, vol. 2, 510, on the sepulcher as "a small structure or receptacle upon the altar-table"; also see vol. 1, 115. Mention in Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, 69.

[83]   Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 81–83.

[84]   Ibid., 83.

[85]   David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto,* 2nd revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 51–57. The main attribute of divine light in Byzantine and early Christian art has been said to relate less to its hue than to its luminosity; see Gage, *Colour and Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 58; Dominic Janes, *God and Gold in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 147–8. Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes*," 183, highlights that with new oil-based paints Savoldo is able to achieve effects analogous to Venetian mosaics. For the influence of Byzantine mosaic arts upon Renaissance Venice, see Caroline Campbell, "The Bellini, Bessarion and Byzantium," 54; and Paul Hills, *Venetian Colour: Marble, Mosaic, Painting and Glass 1250-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 47–55.

[86]   Frangi, "Tiziano e Brescia," 22.

[87]   Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 351.

[88]   Dorothy Lee, *Transfiguration* (London: Continuum, 2004), 2; Andreopoulus, *Metamorphosis*, 164.

[89]   Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions*, 3rd edition 1926, trans. John Steely (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Publications,1978), 334.

[90]   Stradiotti, *Savoldo*, 146.

[91]   Frangi, "Tiziano e Brescia," 22.

[92]   Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes*," 183–5.

[93]   Nichols highlighted Savoldo's use of red dresses in his paintings of the Virgin. Ibid., 183.

[94]   Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, 467–8. For early textual references to Christ as the divine Sun see Andreopoulus, *Metamorphosis*, 85.

[95]   Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 75.

[96]   Oakes, *Ora Pro Nobis*, 169–72. See also Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, 465. Aurora was the Roman goddess of the dawn, corresponding with the Greek goddess Eos, who renews herself every morning announcing the arrival of the sun, and in Homer's *Iliad* she wears a "robe of saffron" to "bring light to mortals and immortals" (19.1).

[97]   Verdon, *Mary in Western Art*, 9 and 19. See also Patrick Reuterswärd, *The Visible and Invisible in Art* (Vienna: IRSA, 1991), 45–56; Herbert Kessler and Johanna Zacharias, *Rome 1300* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 118–24; also see Claudia Cieri Via, "The Invisible in the Visible: The 'Annunciation' by Antonello da Messina from Narrative to Icon," *IKON* 9 (2016): 263.

[98]   Rosand, *Sixteenth-Century Venice*, 53; Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, 467; Loren Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Venice 1400-1600* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 137–41 suggests radiance contained within a cloud evoking Ecclesiasticus chapter 24:6-7, which alludes to the "Virgin as the vessel of the incarnate divine light and as the universal Church."

[99]   Rosand, *Sixteenth-Century Venice*, 53. See also Purtle, *Jan van Eyck*, 31.

100   Ambrose, "Fulget Ecclesia non suo sed Christi lumine," cited in *30 Days: In the Church and in the World* (2009), http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_21714_l3.htm.

101   Early Syriac Christian writings interwove the "Church" and "Mary" as types (Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* [London: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 142–7, 334). In the West, Ambrose connected Mary with certain verses in the Song of Songs (Michael O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopaedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 1982 [Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1986], 327–8), but it was only after commentary on the Canticle in the twelfth century that the Church and Mary were more widely equated. Following Ephesians 5:24–33, Christ was identified with the "bridegroom," as he was in relation to the nineteenth Psalm, and the "bride" was identified with the "church," who was later equated with Mary. See Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, vol. 1 (New York: Icon Editions, 1971), 145; Marilyn A. Lavin and Irving Lavin, *The Liturgy of Love: Images from the Song of Songs* (Lawrence, KN: Spencer Museum of Art, 2001), 1–2; Oakes, *Ora Pro Nobis*, 31 and 213–9.

102   Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, 465; Paul Hills, *The Light of Early Italian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 14. The thirteenth-century *Coronation of the Virgin* mosaic in the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome includes a sun below Christ's feet and a moon beneath Mary's (see Kessler and Zacharias, *Rome 1300*, 142; Verdon, *Mary in Western Art*, 16, 40 and Fig. 33.)

103   Haskins, *Who is Mary?*, 19.

104   Hills, *Early Italian Painting*, 14.

105   Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 167; Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15. Also 1 Cor.13:12: "Now we see in a glass darkly, then we shall see face to face."

106   The London version was described by Adolfo Venturi, *Storia Dell'Arte Italiana* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1928), 764–5, as moonlight reflected on water. While S. J. Freedburg, *Painting in Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 343, describes Mary in the London variant as having a "shining moonlit mantle" which "reflects, as from a counter-moon."

107   Sanders, *Paul*, 82–83.

108   Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis,*108–11, highlights that as a result the prophets are occasionally depicted inside a mandorla.

109   Ibid., 163.

110   Sebastian Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition," 1982, in *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature and Theology*, ed. Sebasatian Brock (Hampshire UK: Variorum; Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1992), 15–16.

111   Ephrem, "His mother, whose body he had put on, put on his glory," cited in Brock, "Clothing metaphors," 24.

112   Brock, "Clothing metaphors," 11, 22

113   See discussion on the painting in Bayer, "Brescia and Bergamo", 111–2. When in the Duomo Vecchio the painting is said to have been the object of great popular devotion. The painting may also reference the seamless robe referred to in the Gospel of John (19:23).

114   Goffen, "Icon and Vision," 496–8.

115   See Stefania Buganza, "La Formazione di Romanino e Moretto e l'Esempio Di Tiziano," in *Tiziano e la pittura del Cinquecento tra Venezia e Brescia*, ed. Francesco Frangi (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2018), 52–57. Also on Moretto's *Holy Family with Saint Anthony of Padua* (ca. 1522–26) see Andrea Bayer "Cose bresciane de Cinquecento: A new devotional Painting by Moretto da Brescia," in *Coming About… A Festschrift for John Shearman*, eds. Lars R. Jones and Louisa C. Matthew (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001), 123–6.

116   Purtle, *Jan van Eyck*, 159.

117   Goffen, "Icon and Vision," 496–8.

118   Sanders, *Paul*, 36.

119   Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 107, 135–6.

120   Haskins, *Who is Mary?*, 19. On the *Maria in Sole* motif see Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, 1965 (Doornspijk, Netherlands: Davaco, 1984), 27 and John Decker, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geetgen tot Sint Jans* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 37–65; Geertgen tot Sint Jans' *Maria in Sole* once formed part of a diptych.

121   Anna Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of An Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1986), 73–74; Leena Mari Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 158–60,

122   Ibid., 158–60. See also O'Carroll, *Theotokos*, 8–9.

123   Peltomaa, *The Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*, 159–60, 133–4.
Peltomaa dates the Akathistos Hymn to between 431 and 451.

124   The Virgin and Child altarpiece is of the *in aria* type: see Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 163–5. Also, see Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 139–40, 308.

125   For example Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Venice*, 140.

126   Rosand, *Sixteenth-Century Venice*, 43.

127   Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 72, argues that the sunrise "can be broadly taken as a conventional allusion to the Resurrection." A dark background with dawn breaking notably features in Titian's *Resurrection*, Averoldi Altarpiece, 1521 (San Nazaro e Celso, Brescia). It is also worth noting that scholars have highlighted the use of the Virgin Mary's veil in Byzantine and early medieval Western art to reference Christ's birth. See Henry Maguire, "Body, Clothing, Metaphor: The Virgin in Early Byzantine Art," in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium*, eds. Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham (Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 46; Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Threads of Authority: The Virgin Mary's Veil in the Middle Ages," in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York, Palgrave, 2001), 64.

128   Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 71.

129   Schleier, "Savoldos 'Magdalena,'" 138.

130   Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 169–70. The cave is the archetype of the maternal womb and the place of rebirth. There is a cave opening in Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin of the Rocks*, 1483–86 (Paris, Louvre).

131   In Christian art the color blue has been used to denote the boundary between earth and heaven, or as symbolic of heaven itself (Herbert Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing* [Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000], 204; Hall, *Subjects & Symbols in Art*, 324). Ultramarine is seen as a fitting pigment for the robe of the Queen of Heaven (Hills, *Early Italian Painting*, 26).

132   "Upon Thy right hand did stand the Queen, in a vesture of gold," Psalm XLV, ver. 9 (from Saint Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms Vol.1.*, ed. and trans. Arthur Cleveland Coxe, (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1886), 240; para. 22. Nichols, "Savoldo's *Magdalenes*," 184–5, cites Atwater (1956).

133   Cited by Verdon, *Mary in Western Art*, 217. The reformer Savonarola also pointed to the paradox of the Virgin's lament: "She did not appear entirely sad, but happy and sad" (cited by Alexander Nagel, "Christ in Ecstasy: The Passion According to Michelangelo & Rosso," in *Coming About . . . A Festschrift for John Shearman*, 243–50, 243.)

134   Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece*, 27, cites *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (ca. 1324)

and refers to numerous hymns of the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Also see Goffen, *Piety and Patronage*, 87, citing Petrus Thomae from ca. 1316–27.

135   Goffen, "Icon and Vision", 497–8, cites letter to Hebrews.

136   Ibid.

137   Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 88; see also Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues*, 348–50.

138   Gilbert, *The Works of Girolamo Savoldo*, 533.

139   Vida J. Hull, "The Sex of the Saviour in Renaissance Art: The *Revelations* of Saint Bridget and the Nude Christ Child in Renaissance Art," in *Studies in Iconography* 15 (1993): 77–112. Also see Brown, "From Hell to Paradise," 428, 474.

140   Gilbert, *The Works of Girolamo Savoldo*, 533; Pardo "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 86n70. See also John Moffitt, "The Veiled Metaphor in Hugo van der Goes' Berlin *Nativity*: Isaiah and Jeremiah, or Mark and Paul?" *Oud Holland* 100, no. 3/4 (1986): 157–64.

141   Moffitt, "The Veiled Metaphor," 158–60. With reference also to Exodus 34:33–35, see Brock, "Jacob of Serugh," 70–85. *Velatio/revelatio* has separately been identified as a word play that derives from Augustine: Catherine Tkacz, "Velatio," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1999), 864; Catherine Tkacz, *The Key to the Brescia Casket: Typology and the Early Christian Imagination* (Paris: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 96–98.

142   Nagel, "Experiments in Art and Reform," 182, 295.

143   Lucas Cranach the Elder, who is known for the illustration of Lutheran doctrine, in his *Allegory of the Law and the New Testament* etching (ca. 1530), stresses the distinction between the Old and New Testaments, between Moses' Commandments and Christ's Gospel, which was a "fundamental dialectic in Luther's thought." See Chrysa Damianaki, "Pontormo's Lost Frescoes in San Lorenzo, Florence: A Reappraisal of their Religious Content," in *Forms of Faith in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, ed. Abigail Brundin and Mathew Treherne (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009), 91–93. See also Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 22–23: Luther wrote: "Moses does not concern us" in the treatise *Instruction on how the Christians should use Moses,* published in 1527. On the Christological veil motif see John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 122–3, 267.

144   Firpo, *Italian Reformation*, 41–47.

145   Translation here is that of Dorothy Lee as given in: Lee, *Transfiguration*, 112–13 (with emphasis added to 3:16).

146   George Caird, "Everything to Everyone: The Theology of the Corinthian Epistles," in *Interpretations* 13 (1959): 391–2.

147   Ibid., 391–2. See also N. T. Wright, "Reflected Glory: 2 Corinthians 3:18," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 144–5. Wright favors the translation "*behold* as in a mirror," but some, e.g. Sanders, *Paul*, 39, 82, still prefer "*reflect*." Whilst the gospel accounts of the Transfiguration, in Matthew and Mark, are of an external visible transformation of Christ, the "transfiguration" in 2 Cor. 3:18 is generally seen as an internal transformation of believers.

148   Heinrich Schwarz, "The Mirror of the Artist and the Mirror of the Devout," in *Studies in the History of Art Dedicated to William E Suida on his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Rush H. Kress (London: Phaidon Press, 1959), 104. Also in the thirteenth century Mary is described as the mirror reflecting the sun by Conrad of Saxony in *Speculum Beatae Mariae Virginis* (Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "Speculations on Speculation," in *Deutsche Mystic im abendländischen Zusammenhang*, ed. Walter Haug and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin [Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000], 368). See also the earlier discussion on the equation of Mary with the moon.

149 *Book of Wisdom* 7:26; Schwarz, "The Mirror of the Artist," 99; Panof-
sky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 148; Purtle, *Jan van Eyck*, 124.

150 Schwarz, "The Mirror of the Artist," 101–5; Read Mercer Schuchardt, "The Reformation as
Media Event," in *The People's Book*, ed. Jennifer Powell McNutt and David Lauber (Illinois: Inter-
Varsity Press, 2017), 91–5. For examples of variants see H.J.E. van Beuningen, A.M. Koldeweij
and D. Kicken, *Heilig en Profaan 2: 1200 Laatmiddeleeuwse insigne suit openbare en particuliere collec-
ties* (Cothen: Stichting Middeleeuwse Religieuze en Profane Insignes, 2001), 310–25.

151 The Aachen pilgrim's mirror usually contained three interconnecting circles, or mandorla, with Christ at the
top and the Virgin Mary, or occasionally the enthroned Emperor, in the bottom circle. The small central connect-
ing circle is believed to have contained a small glass mirror. However, Gutenberg's 1439 version does not appear
to have contained a glass mirror as such; rather, the gown itself, part of the metal plate with a mesh pattern, may
have functioned metaphorically as the mirror (see Schuchardt, "The Reformation as Media Event," 91–95)

152 Gilbert, *The Works of Girolamo Savoldo*, 323, 376, 444.

153 Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 72.

154 Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*,
1965 (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1984), 39–71. The fifteenth-century development of the visual aid to private piety is
termed by Ringbom the "dramatic close-up." On the half-length, which has been seen as closely associated with por-
traiture, and holy images, see also Rona Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 25–27.

155 Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 72. Ringbom, *Icon to Narra-
tive*, 59 refers to three-quarter length in the fifteenth century.

156 Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 80–81. Besides the clothed type there was a nude type, which was rep-
resented primarily by Titan's *Mary Magdalene Repentant* (Palazzo Pitti, Florence, ca. 1531–55).

157 Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 93–106.

158 Goffen, "Icon and Vision," 496.

159 Ibid., 496–8. See also Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," in *Giovan-
ni Bellini and the Art of Devotion*, ed. Ronda Kasl (Indiana: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2004), 32.

160 Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*," 77. Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes,*" (190n51
and 195n73) also considers the painting in her discussion on Savoldo's *Magdalene*.

161 James Breckenridge, "'Et Prima Vidit': The Iconography of the Appearance of Christ to His Mother,"
in *The Art Bulletin* 39, no. 1 (Mar. 1957): 15–18; Euthymios Tsigaridas, "The Mother of God in Wall-Paint-
ings," in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira, 2000),
133. The origins of the tradition date back in textual sources to at least the second century (Stephen Shoe-
maker, *Mary In Early Christian Faith and Devotion* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016], 84–86).

162 For the narrative scheme of the Resurrection of Christ, in the East after the sixth century, scholars have
identified the Virgin Mary as being included in versions of the Holy Women at the Tomb, as well as in the
Chairete motif where two Marys are depicted meeting the risen Christ based on Matthew 28:9. See Tsigaridas,
"The Mother of God," 133; Haskins, *Who is Mary?*, 9; and Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes*," 190.

163 Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian: Mostly Iconographic* (New York: New York University Press, 1969),
39–41. Depictions in an interior setting are considered to be based on the fourteenth-century Pseu-
do-Bonaventura's account of Mary being at home (see Nichols, "Rethinking Savoldo's *Magdalenes*," 193).

164 Breckenridge, "Et Prima Vidit," 26–27. The most frequently cited example of this is a panel from Rogier
van der Weyden's *Miraflores Altarpiece* (1440–44), which has been suggested became a model for the Annunci-
ation type. Dirk De Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden: The Complete Works* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1999), 230.

165   In early Christian iconography the raising of the right hand is also a more general gesture of worship (Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "On the Visual and the Vision: The Magdalene in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and Culture," in *Mariam, the Magdelen and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre Good [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005], 141).

166   Antonello de Saliba is believed to have lived in Venice between 1480 and 1497.

167   Pericolo, "The Invisible Presence," 3–4; Pardo, "Savoldo's *Magdalene*", 76–77.

168   Hans Belting, "The Invisible Icon and the Icon of the Invisible: Antonello and New Paradigms in Renaissance Painting," in *Watching Art: Writings in Honour of James Beck*, ed. Lynn Catterson and Mark Zucker (Perugia: Ediart, 2006), 77.

169   In relation to icons from the East, Annemarie Weyl Carr has pointed to the centrality of the Mother, and to a need in understanding such icons to associate the iconic with Mary herself. Annemarie Weyl Carr, "The 'Virgin Veiled by God': The Presentation of an Icon," in *Reading Medieval Images,* ed. Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Tomas (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 215–27.

170   Cieri Via, "The Invisible in the Visible," 261–8. The formal classification as an "icon" is challenged by Pericolo, "The Invisible Presence", 24.

171   Belting, "The Invisible Icon and the Icon of the Invisible," 75–6. See also Giuseppe Capriotti, "Defining the Boundaries of the Lawful Cult: History of an Adriatic Icon," *IKON* 9 (2016): 243–6. It has recently been suggested that the Fermo icon, which is generally assumed to be an image of the Virgin Annunciate rather than a Lamenting Virgin, was a depiction of the Coronation of the Virgin emulating a Byzantine icon. See Elizabeth Yoder Ross, "Framing the Holy: Revetments on Late Byzantine Icons" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2016), https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/82410

172   Shearman, *Only Connect*, 33–107; Robert Nelson, "To Say and to See," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance,* ed. Robert Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 158–9; Bissera Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 3–7.

173   In relation to Antonello's *Annunciate,* Pericolo ("The Invisible Presence," 9–10) argues that the beholder only attends as a witness.

174   Nagel, *Reform of Art*, 182, 184, 274n60: "Colonna thus preserved a role for the Virgin but subsumed it firmly within a Christocentric orientation." According to Nagel, Colonna, whose text *Pianto* may have been composed between 1539 and 1542, offered a "reformed" version of the Catholic tradition of Marian piety, but she nonetheless gave a special role to the Virgin. Furthermore, as regards Savoldo's paintings, these need to be seen in the context of the particular importance of the Virgin Mary in Venice, in what has been called a "Cult of the Madonna" (Goffen, *Piety and Patronage*, 138–54). It may also be noted here that Martin Luther was relatively tolerant of Marian images provided they did not deny the primacy of Christ (Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts*, 36).

175   Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation*, 218; Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*, chap. 3. For interpretation of Rom 3:28 see Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1996), 250–1.

176   Firpo, *Italian Reformation*, 44, citing Juan de Valdés (*c.*1500-1541), on whose thoughts the *Beneficio di Cristo* was largely based.

177   Jung, "On the Nature of Evangelism," 523; Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, 14; Nagel, *Reform of Art*, 179n43.

178   Nagel, *Reform of Art*, 179, 271n45.

179   Nagel, "Experiments in Art and Reform," 395–7. See also Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 39 and 88–95.

180 Sixten Ringbom, "Maria In Sole and the Virgin of the Rosary," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 25, no. 3-4 (1962): 326–30, 328; Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 19–22; Decker, *The Technology of Salvation*, 135; Klaus Krüger, "Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy," in *Image and Imagination*, eds. Reindert L. Falkenburg, Walter S. Melion and Todd M. Richardson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 37 ("*per visibilia ad invisibilia*").

181 Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), 161; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 544–5, quoting Nicholas of Cusa: "I presently only contemplate eternal life as in a mirror, an icon, a symbolism," . . . The one who looks unto You does not bestow form upon You; rather, he beholds himself in You . . . the beholder is the image."

182 Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, 159–61.

183 Walter S. Melion, "Introduction," in *Image and Imagination*, eds. Reindert L. Falkenburg, Walter S. Melion and Todd M. Richardson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 3-11. The author of *Die Grote evangelische Peerle* stated that "Any approach to the formless image of divinity is solely by way of this mirror of and in the soul."

184 Campbell, "Renaissance Naturalism," 295–316: The Brescians sought to go beyond the model of "poetic invention" adopted by Titian amongst others. Also see Bayer, "Brescia and Bergamo," 111–2, citing various works by Valerio Guazzoni published in the 1980s.

185 Following the resurrection the transformed body would not be a "natural" body (i.e. a walking corpse), but it would be a "spiritual" body (1 Cor. 15:44, 46). For a Pauline overview see "the nature of the resurrection" in Sanders, *Paul*, 35–37.

186 Nagel, "Experiments in Art and Reform", 394: describes Rosso Fiorentino's *Dead Christ* (*with Angels*) of 1527 (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts), as having undergone a process of transmutation, which Platonizing humanists at the time called *immutatio*, into "subtler spiritual form" to become a "body that is there and not there": the resurrected "body that can pass through walls, the body that Mary Magdalene is allowed to see but not touch, or, conversely, the body that the apostle Thomas can probe forensically and yet, at Emmaus, disappears from one moment to the next."

187 Krüger, "Authenticity and Fiction," 48–49.

188 Stephen Campbell and Michael Cole, *A New History of Italian Renaissance Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 525.

189 Breckenridge, "Et Prima Vidit," 28–32.

190 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Painting in North Italy*, 318.

191 1 Cor. 15:44, 46.

192 I thank Dr Sarah Jane Boss for pointing me to Julia Kristeva's 1977 essay "Stabat Mater," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1-2 (1985), 144.

193 Sanders, *Paul*, 82, suggests Christians being changed from one glory to another in 2 Cor. 3:18 recalls 1 Cor. 15:40.

194 See note 174 above.

Unorthodox Orthodoxy? The Icon's Role in the Reception of Russian Orthodoxy by the Volga-Kama Chuvash

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Abstract

This article discusses the icon's role as a visual, sensory, and material means of encounter with the sacred realm in the context of Russian Orthodox missions in the Volga-Kama region of Russia. It argues that the icon facilitated engagement with Russian Orthodox worldview and rites before the introduction of vernacular textual learning owing to its capacity to resonate with indigenous understandings of the sacred and divine. The article draws on prerevolutionary ethnographic texts describing the role played by icons in Chuvash religious rites and argues that, rather than the *dvoeverie* and paganism attributed to them by the missionaries, the Chuvash were by the early twentieth century practicing an indigenous, inculturated Orthodoxy.

Key words: Christian mission, Volga-Kama region, Chuvash, paganism, *dvoeverie*, vernacular religion, material culture

Introduction

Questions such as how and why religious faith, worldviews and rites have been mediated between different cultural contexts, as well as the impact of such mediation, have been pivotal issues in much recent historical, theological, and anthropological scholarship. Scholars have grappled with complex questions concerning the nature of religious experience and conversion, a dilemma expressed well in Richard Fletcher's enquiry: "At what point may one say of an individual, or a society 'He (or she, or it) has become, is now Christian [or any other faith]'"?[1] Such questions revolve around the efficacy and reception of different media, textual and non-textual, used to arouse religious experience and teach faith in new cultural contexts. They also involve the correlation, overlap, and mutual influence of different religious worldviews and the ways they are embodied, lived out, and mediated through different aspects of human culture.

Regarding the Christian faith, which was actively propagated in imperial contexts during the two hundred years before the mid-twentieth century, historians have focused much attention on the broader cultural and social impact of Christian mission on indigenous cultures, worldviews, and identities, often depicting missions as complicit in their destruction. Lamin Sanneh presents a more nuanced view arguing that, on the contrary, Christian mission has frequently led to "indigenous cultural revitalization" as "Christianity has sought indigenous coefficients and used them to propagate the Gospel."[2] Such a view has arisen from the study of processes of indigenization and inculturation where the Christian faith has become embedded in local cultural particularity, passing "into all those distinctive ways of thought, those networks of kinship [. . .] that give the nation its commonality, its coherence, its identity."[3]

While much of the recent historiography has been devoted to the mediation and reception of the Christian faith in the context of Western European empires, there has been a growing body of literature devoted to the cultural impact of Russian Orthodox missions on the indigenous, non-Slavic peoples of the Russian Empire.[4] Such studies have also grappled with such issues as the missionary impact on the traditional religions, customs, rites, and morals of indigenous peoples; the people, communities, methods, and media through which Orthodoxy was communicated; as well as wider processes of cultural and social change that both fostered and were ignited by the reception of the Orthodox Christian faith.

One region of the Russian Empire which has provided particularly fertile ground for considering these issues is the multi-cultural and multi-confessional Volga-Kama region.[5] The western borders of this region, today represented by the republics of Mordovia, Chuvashia, and Mari El, lie as little as 500 miles from Moscow and so the religious, cultural, and civil allegiances of its Turkic and Finno-Ugric inhabitants were of crucial significance for both the Russian state and church even before the Russian conquest of Kazan in 1552. Recent scholarly studies of the late nineteenth-century Orthodox missions which promoted the use of the vernacular mother tongues of these peoples have frequently disregarded the evidence that non-textual ways of mediating the Orthodox faith, among them the icon, had promoted the diffusion of Christian beliefs and rites from the sixteenth-century, and possibly even earlier.

This article will focus on the icon as an agent in the processes of mediation and transition that appears to have readily resonated with indigenous coefficients. It argues that the icon facilitated engagement with the Russian Orthodox worldview and rites by the Mid-Volga's indigenous inhabitants even before the

introduction of vernacular textual learning about Orthodoxy. In the twentieth century, scholarly discourse about the reception and indigenization of Orthodoxy in new cultural milieus has been dominated by the Cyrillo-Methodian heritage with its emphasis on vernacular textual translation as the predominant means of cross-cultural communication of the Christian faith. Icons as a visual, sensory, and material means of encounter with the sacred realm, more transportable than church buildings and schools, challenge this focus on textual translation and literacy in the mediation of faith. The article will demonstrate how icons played a significant role in spreading the Orthodox faith in a largely illiterate society scattered in isolated villages where the encounter with the divine and sacred was already expressed through visual and material forms.

Gabriel Hanganu argues that there is a great need to rethink the role of materiality in religious mediation more generally. He points out that recent anthropological scholarship emphasizes the importance of studying material aspects of religion in the context of practices associated with their production and consumption, thus complementing—and sometimes challenging—previous theological and art historical approaches.[6] Vera Shevzov also sees the need for a shift from focusing exclusively on art historians' and theologians' interpretations of the icon, reminding us that the meaning of icons for individual believers and for the faith community at large has also stemmed from the story behind a particular icon and from believers' experiences associated with an icon.[7]

One obvious reason to focus on the role of the icon in the transmission of Orthodoxy in the Volga-Kama region is the large amount of space devoted to icons in pre-revolutionary ethnographic literature about its Turkic and Finno-Ugric peoples at a time when their religious culture was still perceived to be pagan. Such texts reveal that the Mid-Volga peoples shared a similar agrarian lifestyle with the Russians in nearby villages, or sometimes the same village, and so assimilated some of the popular Orthodox traditions associated with the annual agrarian and liturgical cycle. The indigenous population had trading contacts with Russians in towns and at fairs which were often held on Orthodox feast days associated with locally venerated saints and their icons. It is this kind of evidence relating to the role of the icon in the religious culture of the Chuvash, and to a lesser extent the Mari and Tatars, that will be explored in this article.

The article begins with a brief history of the encounter between the Russian Orthodox Church and the peoples of the Mid-Volga up to the beginning of the educational and missionary movement of the early nineteenth century, and continues with a discussion of the way that encounter has been portrayed in

nineteenth-century, Soviet and post-Soviet scholarship. We shall see how the beliefs and ideologies of each generation of ethnographers and scholars have influenced their perceptions and how we need to be aware of their presuppositions as we read their texts.

The main body of the article contains nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnographic descriptions which enable us to see the role played by icons in Chuvash religious rites, even if sometimes through the distorted lens of the observer. We shall seek to become more aware of how and why the observers' lenses were frequently distorted and how this affects their description and interpretation of their observations. We shall also explore the reflections of some of the first indigenous Chuvash Orthodox priests on native perceptions of the icon, as well as their own understandings of the transformation of Chuvash religious identity at the turn of the twentieth century.

After exploring Chuvash practices and perceptions concerning the icon, we will broaden our focus to consider briefly the wider role played by icons in the reception of Orthodoxy by other non-Slavic peoples within the late Russian Empire and reflect on how this can contribute to a wider understanding of the icon's role in the mediation of Orthodoxy. In conclusion we shall raise questions about the nature of the icon itself: what is it about the nature of the icon that meant it was drawn into indigenous religious rites so easily?

Scholarly Discourse on the Encounter with Russian Orthodoxy in the Volga-Kama Region

From the tenth through thirteenth centuries the Volga-Kama region was dominated by a loose confederation of tribes known as Volga Bulgaria which was located around the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers. After a mission was sent by the Caliph of Baghdad in 922 AD, ruling elites and town dwellers are believed to have adopted Islam whereas the forest-dwelling peoples continued to adhere to their indigenous animistic beliefs and rites, which nevertheless reflected contact with surrounding Muslim, Christian and Jewish peoples.[8] After the conquest of the region by the Mongol-Tatars in the early thirteenth century and the creation of an independent Kazan Khanate in 1438, the Finno-Ugric Mari, Mordva, and Udmurts and the Turkic Chuvash became tribute-paying peoples subordinate to the Kazan Tatars, whose Muslim faith left its imprint on local religious practices. There is nevertheless evidence of contact between the indigenous inhabitants and the Russian Church at this time. The Charter granting lands along the river Sura to the Spaso-Evfimiev monastery in Suzdal in 1393 speaks of Russians as well as *tutoshnikh starozhil'tsev* (the local indig-

enous inhabitants) who came to work the monastery lands.[9] Abbot Makarii of the Monastery of the Yellow Waters Lake is also believed to have baptized some of the local non-Russian population in the early fifteenth century.[10]

Russians began moving into the Kozmodemiansk district of Kazan province, the most westerly district inhabited by Chuvash and Mari, in the first half of the sixteenth century when the local population submitted to Moscow in return for help against the Kazan Khanate. After Ivan the Terrible's conquest of Kazan in 1552, a series of fortified lines and Russian forts were founded more deeply into native lands in the seventeenth century. This helps to explain why, despite much aggressive resistance by the Mid-Volga peoples in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there were also small numbers who were baptized into Orthodoxy and began more peaceful collaboration with the Russian settlers, moving to work or protect the land alongside them.[11]

If before 1740 only small numbers of the Mid-Volga peoples were baptized, between 1740 and 1764 almost 95 percent of them, apart from the Muslim Tatars, were drawn to Orthodox baptism through material incentives such as exemption from military conscription and taxes.[12] There was increasing construction of church buildings and the creation of Orthodox parishes so that by 1764, churches had been built in thirty-nine Chuvash villages of the Kazan diocese, and twenty-three villages of the Nizhnii Novgorod diocese.[13] Although the first attempts at writing instructive catechisms in local languages and educating indigenous clergy also date to this time,[14] widespread use of native languages in village schools and parishes only began from the 1870s. Until that time, church services took place in Slavonic and the Russian priest was often considered to be a state official who rarely visited the village.

Scholars have generally portrayed an extremely negative picture of Russian missionary work in the Volga-Kama region in the eighteenth century, usually emphasizing the use of mission, along with outward measures of violence and coercion, as a means of russification and assimilation into the Russian state, which meant Orthodoxy remained outside the inner world of the indigenous inhabitants. They write of the mechanical fulfillment of obligations in eighteenth-century conversions as neither voluntary nor sincere, and that adherence to Christianity was largely formal.[15]

It should be pointed out, however, that these historians have often relied on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century church historians who were defending the use of vernacular languages and texts in churches and schools at a time when such use was being questioned or even severely threatened.[16] These prerevolu-

tionary historians' criticism of the superficial Christian faith brought about by church and state policies in earlier times aimed to emphasize the great advances brought about through use of native languages, texts and personnel during the late Imperial period.

While there was undoubtedly much truth in the claims of these historians, their views, and those of post-perestroika historians who have relied on them, are based on the presupposition that textual learning, and especially vernacular textual learning, is the most effective, if not exclusive, means of communicating religious truth and arousing genuine religious faith and experience. They have consequently paid little attention to the ways that nondiscursive, experientially based knowledge of the sacred was being aroused, or it may be more accurate to say "discovered," among the Mid-Volga peoples before the onset of the vernacular-language educational movement.

Scholarly accounts of the history of the Mid-Volga peoples have also frequently been based on a presupposition closely related to that of the greater efficacy of textual learning: that there was a lack of overlap or correlation between Orthodox worldviews and the pre-Christian indigenous belief systems and rites of the Volga-Kama peoples. This assumption has led to perceptions of an absence of the "indigenous coefficients" to which Sanneh refers, on which the authentic inculturated reception of the Christian faith could be based. This assumption has, in its turn, arisen out of the concept of *dvoeverie* (dual or double faith), the perceived simultaneous practice of Christian and pagan rites, a concept which has permeated much prerevolutionary, Soviet, and post-Soviet study of religious rites and worldviews among both Russians and non-Russians. It is this framework of *dvoeverie* which has undergirded the discourse which divides the history of the Mid-Volga into a period of "superficial" adherence to Orthodoxy when paganism, superstitions, and idolatry persisted, followed by a period of more "genuine" Orthodoxy emerging as a result of the nineteenth-century vernacular educational movement.

The concept of *dvoeverie* arose out of the wider dilemma that ethnographers, missionaries and scholars faced in their conceptualization and description of the syncretic nature of native religious worldviews and rites after the initial contact with Orthodoxy.[17] That this dilemma had surfaced already in the nineteenth century is seen in the writings of two of the most significant researchers into what was termed the Old Chuvash Faith in the 1870s, N.I. Zolotnitsky and V.K. Magnitsky, both sons of Russian priests in Chuvash villages. They pointed to mistaken information and attitudes due to lack of linguistic knowledge, especially among Orthodox priests who started from the presupposition that the

Old Chuvash Faith was "devil worship" and then made distorted generalizations.

> As sometimes on the lips of missionaries the shamanist views of the natives, together with their prayers and sacrificial offerings to the supreme Divinity and its ministering spirits, are summed up under the title "devil worship," so in the writings of authors describing the lifestyle of the Chuvash and Cheremys the same is called "Kiremet worship." [. . .] This depends partly on a lack of linguistic knowledge, partly on insufficient knowledge of the foundations of the "black faith."[18]

It was partly to correct such mistaken research that Zolotnitsky and Magnitsky set themselves the task of "a scholarly restoration of the meaning and state of the Old Faith" and left ethnographic accounts which are considered valuable to this day.

While the terminology of paganism, superstition and idolatry was used to characterize the Old Chuvash Faith right up to the 1917 revolution, it was not the only interpretation. For example, the Kazan missionary and linguist Nikolai Ilminsky (1822–91), whose promotion of native vernaculars in schools and parishes led to the first generations of literate native teachers and Orthodox clergy among the Chuvash, wrote in 1865:

> Viewing the natives from the psychological viewpoint, it is strange for me that some missionaries persecute with every available method [. . .] and try to destroy shamanistic beliefs and rites as if they were positively the work of the devil. In my opinion, these beliefs and rites are no more than the aspiration to the divine and mystical, deeply implanted in human nature by the Creator Himself, but interpreted by the childlike tribes in accordance with their simple, highly undeveloped concepts.[19]

Despite Ilminsky's own texts at times using the terminology of paganism and *dvoeverie* to describe native religious practices, and his view of the natives as childlike and undeveloped, his relatively nonjudgmental view of indigenous culture and religious beliefs led him to advocate a policy of transforming traditional rites into more standard Orthodox rites, rather than simply annihilating them.[20]

Scholars exploring the traditional Chuvash worldview and rites at the turn of the twenty-first century have not only had to sift through nineteenth-century texts with their presuppositions and terminology but have also had to deal with the weight of Soviet ideology and terminology. Fletcher sums up the Marxist view of Christianity as "a kind of crust upon the surface of popular cul-

ture. Paganism went underground, subsided into [. . .] a *culture folklorique*, mute symbol of a downtrodden peasantry's resentment against its oppressors."[21] This kind of viewpoint had two specific consequences in the Soviet era. One was a preoccupation with the persistence of traditional cultural forms or *perezhitki* (cultural survivals), which needed rooting out as obstacles on the road to modernization.[22] P. V. Denisov's 1959 book *Religioznye verovaniia chuvash* (Religious Beliefs of the Chuvash) expressed this late Soviet approach:

> In the prerevolutionary period the backward peasantry, stupefied by the poison of religion, wasted a mass of time on celebrating various religious festivals. [. . .] Religious festivals, as all religion as a whole, have the same origin: they can be explained by causes rooted in false notions of nature in peoples' consciousness and the feeling of the powerlessness of man before the might of the elements.[23]

Another contradictory viewpoint arising from the Soviet banishing of Orthodoxy from historical and ethnographical studies was that a false model of folk culture was created which exaggerated the pagan elements in folk piety and remained silent about the Christian basis of many aspects of religious rites and worldviews.[24] Eve Levin commented that "The concept of *dvoeverie* demanded that scholars attempt to sort out what is pagan from what is Christian leaving no room for overlap between the two systems, or for the development of beliefs that draw on both pagan and Christian concepts."[25]

This latter viewpoint has persisted into much post-Soviet scholarship, including Chuvash scholarship, as is illustrated by A. Salmin's 1994 monograph *Narodnaia obriadnost' chuvashei* (Folk Rituals of the Chuvash), which enables us to see how these issues aroused not just scholarly discussions but agonizing existential dilemmas for the post-Soviet Chuvash intelligentsia raised on assumptions such as those expressed by Denisov above. Salmin writes of "the mass religiosity of the Chuvash intelligentsia aspiring to demonstrate at all costs their love for their national culture. [. . .] guilt feelings and awareness of the necessity to change value orientations give no peace. The dilemma is not the easiest—either we go back to the caves or come to ruin in the clutches of civilization."[26]

Despite Salmin's desire to change value orientations, he reveals the continuing bias in his scholarship: "As regards the history of our question, we must have a particularly reverential attitude to the unbaptized Chuvash who were able to preserve and pass on to us the faith and rites of our distant ancestors at a time of social and religious oppression."[27] We see in this viewpoint, and even more so in the content of his monograph, the presuppositions of the Soviet view of

dvoeverie prevailing, that only among the unbaptized, non-Christian Chuvash had the true faith and rites of the distant ancestors been preserved. It is perhaps for this reason that Salmin sees only two equally unappealing solutions to his dilemma.

Salmin's approach also raises dilemmas for those seeking to use the nineteenth-century ethnographic material about the Chuvash to determine what were "the faith and rites of our distant ancestors." On the one hand the material was almost exclusively collected and written down by baptized Christian Chuvash or Russians, on the other hand the material reveals how intertwined Orthodox rites and beliefs were with purportedly pagan or traditional elements so that sorting out what is pagan from what is Christian is not only a hopeless task, but a task for which it is hard to find criteria for the sorting process.

In early twenty-first-century scholarship on the history of Russian Orthodoxy in the Mid-Volga region we see both a relaxing of the framework of *dvoeverie* alongside continuing attempts to conceptualize the religious rites and worldview of the Mid-Volga peoples after their encounter with Orthodoxy. The Chuvash historian Taimasov writes of the "deformation of worldviews […] in which the traditional foundation of former beliefs had been preserved."[28] Determined to avoid the label of *dvoeverie*, he writes of *slaboverie* (weak faith), "oscillating Christians" who viewed themselves as Orthodox but preserved many elements of the traditional faith, and "Orthodox pagans" who bore the label "Orthodox" but were in fact still pagan.[29] Geraci writes of the Finno-Ugric tribes which "had practiced polytheistic tribal religions involving shamanism, ancestor worship and animal sacrifice," and considers that by the nineteenth century "native and Christian elements had often mixed together into an idiosyncratic mélange."[30] Paul Werth writes of how "among both Russians and non-Russians, popular or 'lived' Orthodoxy was characterized by deviation from officially prescribed Orthodoxy" and he expresses views closest to those of Ilminsky and Sanneh when he describes how, by the early twentieth century, some of the baptized Tatars had "constructed an indigenous Orthodox Christian identity."[31]

This change in attitude in recent scholarship has taken place against a broader concern of exposing the "academic myth" of *dvoeverie* by such scholars as Stella Rock who argues that it is "a historiographical construct that developed in the nineteenth century out of a preoccupation with the 'folk' and a belief that by sifting through the sediment of traditional culture one can find preserved pure elements of pre-Christian paganism."[32] It is highly significant that she identifies the first modern use of the term *dvoeverie* in the journal of the Theological Academy in Kazan in 1861. This was the very decade which witnessed the

emergence of the vernacular missionary movement and the accompanying rise in ethnographic studies of remnants of paganism in the Mid-Volga region, thus supporting Rock's argument that popular practices have been conceived of as pagan by reforming clerics and those involved in educational movements which have promoted cognitive Orthodoxy and rejected the magical, miraculous, or supernatural.[33] We shall see further evidence of this correlation of educational movements and the terminology of paganism and *dvoeverie* later in the article.

These scholars' discussions revolve around the pivotal issue of whether the traditional, pre-Christian worldviews and rites of the peoples of the Russian Empire were something entirely distinct from the Christian faith, as the term *dvoeverie* suggests, or whether there were coefficients, common aspirations to and understandings of the divine which enabled genuine engagement with and indigenization of the new faith. Were there, in the words of S.A. Mousalimas, "vital characteristics within their own ancestral cultures that corresponded to and could engage with the Russian Orthodox faith and practices" so that the transition to Orthodoxy could be both indigenous and corporate?[34]

It is in order to answer questions such as these that we shall now examine ethnographic accounts about the Chuvash from the 1840s to the early twentieth century in order to ascertain what light the icon's role in Chuvash practices can shed on the issue of Chuvash religious identity. Reliable ethnographic material about the Chuvash is sparse before the 1840s–50s and yet the first native Chuvash collectors of ethnographic material from that time make us aware of the role the icon already played in Chuvash religious culture by then. It is to these accounts that we will first turn, before continuing with an analysis of attitudes to Chuvash religious identity in the early nineteenth-century texts and the legacy of this period for future scholarship.

Practices and Perceptions Concerning the Icon in Chuvash History and Culture

In 1583, a wooden fortress was built on a promontory jutting out into the river Volga at Kozmodemiansk, as well as a watch-point six kilometers to the east in the direction of Kazan, at the village of Vladimirskoe-Basurmanovo where Chuvash and Mari soldiers loyal to the Russian Tsar were housed. The village was named after the icon of the Vladimir Mother of God brought to the Kozmodemiansk fort in 1587 to protect the town from attack. By the time of Spiridon Mikhailov, a native Chuvash who wrote ethnographic accounts of the Chuvash and Mari published in the *Kazanskie gubernskie vedomosti* (Kazan Provincial News) in the 1850s,[35] the Vladimir icon had acquired the status of

a miracle-working icon. A procession with the icon in 1654 had led to the end of an outbreak of plague, the icon alone had been saved when the church had been burnt down by the Mari around 1690, and nine other miracles had been recorded between 1765 and 1839. After 1847, the icon was taken annually on procession around nearby Chuvash and Mari villages after a cholera epidemic. By the 1870s the icon was brought to Kozmodemiansk for ten days every June before the feast of the Vladimir icon (June 23/July 6) when many pilgrims came not only from adjacent villages but also from the nearby Nizhnii-Novgorod province. Pilgrims often went on to venerate the Tikhvin icon in the Chuvash town of Tsivilsk on its feast day (June 26/July 9), sometimes calling in at the Chuvash village of Ishaki to venerate the icon of Saint Nicholas on the way.[36]

The name of the Tikhvin monastery in Tsivilsk is a reminder of how it was founded in the midst of conflict and resistance in the seventeenth century. An icon of the Tikhvin Mother of God had appeared to a local widow when Stenka Razin's Cossacks, together with local Chuvash and Mari, besieged the town in October 1671 (fig 1). According to local tradition, the town was miraculously saved when, after a two-week siege, the insurgents went blind and began fighting among themselves. This was attributed to the intercession of the Mother of God and the monastery was built in 1675 to house the icon and to serve as a refuge from further attacks.[37]

Further east along the bank of the Volga from Vladimirskoe, a chapel was built and dedicated to Saint Elijah. An eight-pointed cross brought there in 1695 soon attracted the veneration of both Chuvash and Russians so that in 1720 the chapel became the Ilinskaia Pustyn, a hermitage of the Spaso-Iunga monastery founded in 1625 a short distance inland from Kozmodemiansk.[38]

The village of Pokrovskoe, upstream from Kozmodemiansk, was settled in the sixteenth century by Russian peasants who belonged to the Archbishops of Suzdal. Many of the inhabitants worked in the center of Russia but would be given holiday time after the harvest at the feast of Pokrov (the feast of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God on October 1/14) when they would return to the village, often taking with them their wares for sale. A Pokrov fair had therefore developed in the village and Mikhailov commented on the influence of such fairs on the local non-Russian population:

Fig. 1 Icon of the Tikhvin Mother of God from the Tsivilsk women's monastery, Tsivilsk, Chuvashia, seventeenth century (image from A.I. Mordvinova, *Tserkovnoe iskusstvo Chuvashii* [Cheboksary: Chuvashskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 2012])

The Pokrov fair brings the significant benefit that, through it, the natives, coming into contact with Russians, adopt their ways and customs. [. . .] The Mountain Mari[39] of many nearby villages, observing such Russian habits, have adopted them themselves and instead of the former, semi-savage rites after the threshing of the grain, have begun to celebrate the feast of Pokrov in the same way as the inhabitants of Pokrovskoe.[40]

Evidence of the significance that the icon had already acquired in Chuvash religious culture by the early nineteenth century also comes from Mikhailov's descriptions of the beginnings of veneration of the icons of Saint Nicholas in the Chuvash villages of Ishaki and Chemeievo. While the above villages of Vladimirskoe and Pokrovskoe were on the banks of the Volga in territories inhabited by Russians, Ishaki, and Chemeievo were located more deeply in native territory. In the 1850s there were six hundred Chuvash inhabitants of Ishaki, as well as twenty-five Russians who were all from one family of russified Chuvash. The fear aroused when a Russian priest and deacon moved to the village in 1746 and occupied four households near the flour mill is revealed in the fact that, "with the settlement of Christian clergy, the original inhabitants, Chuvash who do not love an influx of unknown people, moved away to the other side of the gully and formed a separate hamlet, Kiudiuk-Sirma."[41]

This fear appears to have been gradually overcome after a black stone icon with Saint Nicholas on one side and the Archangel Michael and Saint Basil the Great on the reverse "appeared" to a baptized Chuvash as he was ploughing in 1751 (fig. 2). The son of the Cheboksary merchant Mikulin who owned the Ishaki flour mill gave the money to build a stone church in honor of the icon and many Russian pilgrims began to visit the parish. When the village, apart from the church, was destroyed by fire in 1793, repair work was carried out and pilgrims gave gifts to have icons portraying the history of the Old and New Testaments painted on the inner walls of the church. An iron foundry and a sawmill were set up, improving prospects of employment for the villagers who had previously worked as barge-haulers on the Volga.

Fig. 2 Stone Nikola.jpgFig. 2 Stone icon of Saint Nicholas from Ishaki, fourteenth century, slate, 5 x 4 cm (image from A.I. Mordvinova, *Tserkovnoe iskusstvo Chuvashii* [Cheboksary: Chuvashskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 2012])

Increased economic activity in the village led to a three-day fair being held around Saint Nicholas' spring feast day (May 9/22). When Mikhailov visited in the 1840s–50s, between 3000 and 4000 pilgrims and traders descended

on the village at that time every year, while there would be a daily stream of pilgrims throughout the year who venerated a large wooden cross in a chapel built on the site of the spring where the Ishaki icon was found. Mikhailov noted that such a pilgrimage was more a feature of Chuvash religious practice than visiting the local parish church, concluding: "It can be said without exaggeration that Ishaki in the eyes of the native people, especially the Chuvash, is a 'metropolis' in the direct sense of the word,[42] and they come here to pray more than to their parish churches."[43]

A similar icon of Saint Nicholas with Saints Boris and Gleb on the reverse had been discovered in 1777 in the nearby village of Chemeievo after the local clergy had been brutally killed by the Chuvash during the Pugachev revolt. A small chapel had been built at the site of the icon's appearance and many Chuvash came to venerate the icon, with a special influx of pilgrims and Chuvash and Russian traders for a one-day fair on the spring feast of Saint Nicholas. Mikhailov regretted that a more spacious chapel had not been built as "a religious procession (*krestnyi khod*) could be established from Chemeievo with intercessory prayer services (*molebstviia*) instead of that superstitious celebration carried out at *Semik* by the Chuvash in the field."[44]

Semik was the popular Russian name for the Sunday of Pentecost/Trinity[45] which is preceded by Memorial Saturday when special prayers for the dead are held. In the Chuvash annual cycle there were four occasions of rites for the dead, *khyvni,* when food would be prepared, and the bathhouse would be heated for the spirits of the ancestors who were believed to come out of their graves and visit their families. One of these times was the Thursday before Pentecost, known among the Chuvash as *Shimek.* The departed were believed to frequent relatives' homes during the following week and so the Chuvash planted trees by their windows for them to sit on and relatives gathered for communal meals until the Thursday after Pentecost, *Lesser Shimek*, when the departed were accompanied back to the cemetery.[46]

Mikhailov's understanding that Orthodox rites with icons could replace the Chuvash non-standard "superstitious celebration" at *Shimek*, as well as his encouragement of preaching and education in local vernaculars, was shared by those becoming more actively involved in Orthodox missionary work in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Mikhailov makes us aware of this new wave of missionary work when he comments that it was not just the icons which were drawing the Chuvash to Ishaki and Chemeievo and transforming the old ways, but also the preaching in the native Chuvash language. He wrote of Ishaki that "Here there have been, and there are now, worthy pastors to evangelize

the native people, preaching the true God in the native Chuvash language." He dreamt that parish schools would be set up in Ishaki and Chemeievo precisely because the natives came here on pilgrimage to the icons. "I know that Chuvash children in similar parishes study better than in ordinary villages."[47]

We shall now turn to examine the impact of the educational and missionary movement from the 1830s–40s on Chuvash religious practices themselves, but also more significantly on the way their rites and worldviews were perceived. The texts make us aware that the Orthodox missionaries, and not just ordinary believers such as Spiridon Mikhailov mentioned above, realized the capacity of the icon to resonate with indigenous coefficients and so emphasized the role of the icon in the missionary process.

The Icon and Perceptions of Chuvash Identity Amidst the Nineteenth-century Educational and Missionary Movement

In 1827, concern over more frequent cases of the practice of non-Christian rites among the Mari of Viatka province led Archbishop Filaret of Kazan[48] and Bishop Kirill of Viatka[49] to draw up "Rules for teaching and affirming the Newly-Baptized in the Christian faith"[50] to provide guidance for the clergy of their dioceses. These rules emphasized that clergy should know local languages, while the Epistle, Gospel, Creed, Lord's Prayer, and sermons for Sundays and feast days should be read in local vernacular languages during the Liturgy. Filaret's letters and reports also show that he was convinced that Orthodox rites with icons should be emphasized as a means of replacing traditional rites. In an 1829 letter to Bishop Kirill he wrote:

> I have instructed the priests to act in the following way: that instead of their superstitious rites, they should try in every way possible to teach them the sacred, sanctifying and instructive rites of our Church, and even, where possible, not to change either the time or the place of these sacred rites. For example, they make sacrifices at the beginning of sowing. Why should a priest not hold intercessory prayers (moleben) with the holy icons in the open field and so on?[51]

Filaret's recommendation helps to explain the increasing number of accounts of intercessory prayers with icons being used to replace traditional rites as the nineteenth century progressed. Fr. Viktor Vishnevsky,[52] the son of a russified Chuvash Orthodox priest, was one of those charged with implementing Filaret's proposals. In an 1844 report, *O religioznykh pover'iakh chuvash* (On the Religious Beliefs of the Chuvash), compiled after visiting sixty Chuvash parishes,

he reproached priests for not going on processions with icons in the fields after the harvest and during drought, which meant the Chuvash continued their own rites.[53]

Despite Vishnevsky sharing Archbishop Filaret and Mikhailov's view of the Chuvash rites as idolatrous and pagan superstitions, his writings about Chuvash religious practices enable us to see how the Chuvash had, by this time, appropriated to some extent Orthodox feast days and saints and the agrarian practices associated with them, while using the terminology of their own religious culture to describe them. The baptized Chuvash had told him that "the Chuvash recognize twelve good beings subordinate to the Almighty, as the Savior had twelve apostles, that their *Pulekhse* is the same as the Archangel Michael for Christians, that *Mun ira* is the Guardian Angel, *Pikhambar* is Saint George on whose feast day the farm animals are let out to pasture for the first time, *Kherle sir* is Saint Nicholas near whose spring feast day the spring sowing ends…"[54] The final sentence of this text contributes to our understanding of why the icon of Saint Nicholas had come to be particularly venerated among the Chuvash, as religious rites connected with the spring sowing had previously played a very important role in their agrarian cycle.

Vishnevsky also contributed to satisfying Archbishop Filaret and Mikhailov's desire to make Orthodox teaching more accessible to the Chuvash, by translating Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow's Short Catechism[55] into Chuvash in 1832 and compiling a textbook with a Chuvash grammar and dictionary for teaching the Chuvash language in church schools.[56] These efforts to promote vernacular education and preaching among the Chuvash were part of what Gregory Freeze identifies as a broader process of "inner mission" taking place throughout Russia between 1750 and 1850, which was oriented chiefly toward the more verbal forms of preaching and catechism. The aim was to implant a more conscious, cognitive Orthodoxy among the common folk, and consequently such missionary efforts were accompanied by a very critical view of popular religion which was frequently labeled as superstition and idolatry: evidence of the "superficiality" of the Orthodox faith of the Russian people themselves.[57]

Although the Chuvash had only recently been baptized and so were the objects of what could be termed "initial mission" rather than "inner mission," this promotion of preaching and catechism to foster cognitive Orthodoxy was as much a hallmark of the 1830s–40s missions in the Mid-Volga as was the icon, as we have seen above. And the tendency to accompany missionary efforts with a critical view of popular religion can also be observed. Fr. Viktor Vishnevsky described the Chuvash rites as paganism and "an empty and seducing fabrica-

tion of your shamans," while Spiridon Mikhailov interlaced his pleas for schools among the Chuvash with descriptions of what he termed their "semi-savage rites" or "superstitions" as in his above description of *semik*.

While this kind of language continued into later ethnographic accounts, there were those, such as the Kazan University lecturer Vasilii Sboev, who began to question this terminology even in the 1850s. Sboev grew up in a priest's home in a Chuvash village, spoke the Chuvash language [58] and participated in the autumnal Chuvash rites of *chuklene* as a boy in the 1820s. He has left us a description of these rites which took place after the harvest, and which Mikhailov refers to as "the former, semi-savage rites after the threshing of the grain." The word *chuk* referred to a sacrificial offering accompanied by prayers, the central feature in the rites which had traditionally taken place in the tenth month, *chuk-oiykh* (month of sacrifice). The new grain, in the form of bread and beer, was placed on the table and prayers of thanksgiving asking the supreme God, *Tora*, for future abundance and protection of the harvest were said. According to Sboev:

> Orgies were then part of the rite; thanksgiving was made to many pagan divinities.[…] It was the *iomzi*[59] (Chuvash folk healer) who said the thanksgiving prayers to the supreme god, to the mother of the gods, to god the creator of the world, to god the creator of souls, to the god of the sun, to the goddess of the sun, to the god of the moon, to god who reveals himself in prophetic visions [. . .] in conclusion the Chuvash turned to the icon, fixing a wax candle to it. All those present made the sign of the cross and bowed before the icon while the *iomzi* declared: Russian God! Save and have mercy, Mother of God, save and have mercy! Angel of God! Save and have mercy! God Nikolai! Save and have mercy![60]

Sboev continues by comparing the rites as he experienced them in the 1820s with his current experience of them in the 1840s. He comments that such rites are comparable to Russian rites of praying over and making the sign of the cross over any first fruits before eating them for the first time and he is adamant that they are not now pagan. "They celebrate in a similar way the completion of any important task [. . .] in the prayers and invocations themselves used at *chuklene* there are no noticeable traces of paganism."[61]

What is particularly significant for us in Sboev's 1820s account is that, even though he was trying to emphasize that the rites were in their former pagan form, the icon played an important role. If the Chuvash "turned" to the icon in

conclusion it was because the main thanksgiving prayers were said in the direction of the door of the house which was always built facing east, whereas the icons would have been in the corner opposite the door.

N.I. Zolotnitsky's description of *chukleme* in Iadrin district in the 1870s also tells us that after the main prayers the master of ceremonies would turn to the icon and pray "God have mercy! Do not abandon us! God in the corner! [i.e. the icon] save us from all evil!" And three cups of beer would be drunk. He would then turn to the men and say on behalf of the householder: "Up to now we have eaten and drunk but not remembered the Mother of God: he proposes from the bottom of his heart to drink a cup to Her name; are you in agreement"? The men would agree and then he would ask the same of the women. After their agreement he would say: "This is the cup of the Mother of God. May the fields have boundaries and meadows have limits [i.e. be protected from harmful, outside influence], may the waters be navigable and the barley so heavy that a horse cannot carry it and the hops so that a man cannot lift them."[62]

Many Chuvash traditional rites took place at the boundaries of fields or villages, or at crossroads, as these were considered particularly sacred locations. Such rites frequently involved the casting out of evil or requests for protection from evil coming from the outside.[63] This may explain why prayers to the Mother of God had been drawn into the rites of *chukleme* and that, as we learnt from Mikhailov above, the Chuvash had even started to celebrate Pokrov, a feast which revolves around prayers for the Mother of God's protection from evil, instead of their traditional autumnal rites.[64] There is also evidence that Pokrov was not the only autumnal Marian feast day which had resonated with indigenous coefficients and become entwined with Chuvash rites of thanksgiving and prayers for the harvest to be kept free from harm and evil.

Magnitsky's 1881 list of Orthodox feast days, which the Chuvash knew well, includes both *Pokrav* (Pokrov) and *Kerkhi Kasanski* (the autumn feast of the Kazan Mother of God icon on October 21/ November 4) which is celebrated three weeks after Pokrov and so is closer to the traditional time of holding *chukleme* in *chuk-oiukh*. A report from the Chuvash parish of Proleika, Samara province in 1899 informs us that the local Chuvash had attached the rites of *chukleme* to the feast of the Kazan icon, which was their patronal feast, rather than to Pokrov. One of the first native Chuvash priests, Fr. Daniil Filimonov, tells us that when he went with the festal icon to parishioners' homes to serve a *moleben*, one woman asked him, "*Batiushka*, can we carry out sacrifice with the new grain and beer? We formerly did this at the feast of the Kazan Icon." To which Fr. Filimonov replied that "to make sacrifice is a great sin and not only

does God not accept such prayers, but he is angry with them."[65]

Although Sboev's above description of *chukleme* in the 1820s speaks of prayers to "pagan divinities," he then continues to tell us that the prayer was addressed to the supreme God whom the Chuvash knew as *Tora.* In Sboev's list of other "gods" to whom the Chuvash prayed, there is a strong emphasis on knowledge of a Creator God who reveals himself to humankind through dreams. Magnitsky's description of *chukleme* published in 1881 gives an even more detailed description of sixty-one "gods" to whom prayers were addressed including Tora, *Tor amysh* (God's mother), the Giver of children, the One who gives fertility to the grain and makes it sway, the Giver of domestic animals, the Giver of bees, the strength of the wind, the father, mother, ears, wings and legs of the Sun, the One who gives life as an inheritance and gives prohibitions.[66]

While such lists of Chuvash "gods" led many nineteenth-century commentators to describe the Chuvash traditional faith as pagan or polytheistic,[67] the above lists also suggest that the Chuvash at this time were monotheistic but with a strong sense of the sacred and divine manifested in all aspects of the natural world. Both views were expressed by native Chuvash Orthodox priests of the late nineteenth century who were trying to explain indigenous understandings of the icon and in the process sought to clarify Chuvash understandings of the divine.

The Chuvash Traditional Pantheon and Indigenous Perceptions of the Icon

One of these priests was the abovementioned Fr. Filimonov who in a report written in 1896, when he wanted to open an icon-painting workshop at Ishaki school, wrote of the extremely reverent attitude towards icons of his fellow villagers when he was a boy in the 1860s.

> Not all will paint icons: only those who wish are capable and godly. Sinful icon painters in Chuvash villages could offend the religious feeling of their fellow Chuvash who, despite their lack of development concerning Christianity, have particular ideas about icons [. . .]. When I was small and lived at home, I heard from my fellow villagers that holy images are painted by righteous people.[68]

Filimonov, an educated schoolteacher and priest, emphasizes here that despite the Chuvash "lack of development concerning Christianity," which we can take to mean their lack of the kind of cognitive understanding of Christian teachings

provided by the schools that Filimonov actively promoted, they nevertheless had great reverence and experiential understanding of the holiness of the icon. In an 1890 report from his Chuvash parish of Musirma, Filimonov makes the same point that the Chuvash had a reverential attitude towards the holiness of the icon even if they had not received "correct" Orthodox teaching about the icon and had filtered the teaching they had received through their indigenous religious conceptions.

> Seeing how Russians venerate holy icons the Chuvash themselves began to have a reverential attitude to religious objects venerated by Russians. The Chuvash were taught then (and unfortunately even now some teach) that each icon is *Tura* i.e. God. In the end the Chuvash acquired a false impression of icons as of Russian or church gods. The Chuvash native understanding of God and of their relationship to Him remained as before—pagan. True Orthodox teaching about God, the Mother of God, angels, saints and icons and their veneration was not assimilated by the Chuvash. As a result, in their heads they transferred their basic pagan view onto Christian holy objects; accepting Christianity as the Russian faith, they understood it in their own way, and acquired the same attitude towards icons and churches as they had towards their kiremets: as earthly, evil, secondary divinities. The only difference was they began to relate to icons as Russian divinities and not as their own Chuvash divinities.[69]

Although Filimonov interprets Chuvash experience of the icon through the prism of *dvoeverie,* and this leads him to make a fundamental dichotomy between the Chuvash "pagan" worldview and "true Orthodox teaching," a crucial point in this text is that he considers that the Chuvash had been able to transfer their basic religious worldview onto Christian holy objects and therefore understand the icon "in their own way." Despite the unhelpful teaching Filimonov describes, which had presumably been given by Russian priests struggling to express Orthodox teaching in the Chuvash language and had led to misunderstandings and unhelpful terminology, the Chuvash would appear to have grasped something of the holiness of the saints depicted on icons and acquired a reverential attitude to them. According to Filimonov, this was the same attitude as they had towards the *kiremets,* the sacred groves which were their own places of encounter with the divine. Although Filimonov claims that the Chuvash associated the *kiremet* with "earthly, evil, secondary divinities," he is being forced by his framework of *dvoeverie* to contradict himself. He tells us that the Chuvash had transferred their attitude to the *kiremet* onto icons and churches and stresses in both above passages that the Chuvash had a reveren-

tial attitude towards the icon, thereby implying that the Chuvash reverence for the sacred location of the icon was a continuation of their reverence for the sacred location of the *kiremet*. Vasilii Sboev maintained that the association of the *kiremet* with evil was the result of Orthodox missionaries labeling the Old Chuvash Faith as devil worship, and that the original native understanding had associated *kiremets* with both good and evil.

Another of the first native Chuvash Orthodox priests, Fr. Aleksei Rekeev, also discussed the Chuvash use of the word "god" to speak of icons in a more general discussion of Chuvash understandings of the sacred and whether the Chuvash were polytheists as some nineteenth-century ethnographers and missionaries claimed. He criticizes Sboev and Zolotnitsky for writing superficially and concluding that the Chuvash are polytheists, "as they see the divinity in all things [. . .]. In the thinking of the Chuvash God is only one, *Tura* or *Asla Tura*, Great God, and they never confuse him with the *kiremet*. In Scripture there are different names for God and the Chuvash have the same."[70] According to Rekeev, there are other good spiritual beings which the Chuvash call God, but he feels the Chuvash are confused, just as for Russian peasants Zosima and Savvatii are the patron saints of bees and the village people call them *pchelinye bogi* (bee gods). "The Chuvash themselves cannot explain why they *call* these beings gods but maintain that they are *not* gods. [. . .] You can see that the Chuvash presuppose that there are various spiritual beings in the world with different names, just as the Russians believe in the existence of invisible, unclean powers."[71]

It could be argued that Rekeev was writing at the very end of the nineteenth century (1896) when the Chuvash worldview had been strongly influenced by the monotheistic worldview of their Orthodox and Muslim neighbors, or that as an Orthodox priest he was seeking to emphasize the similarities between the traditional Chuvash and the Orthodox worldviews. Yet Rekeev's text is significant as he has shaken off the prism of *dvoeverie* and the terminology of paganism and argues that there is actually an overlap between the Chuvash seeing the divinity in all things and acknowledging the presence of numerous spiritual beings in the material and immaterial realms, and the Orthodox belief in the existence of invisible powers and patron saints who protect different aspects of human life and earthly activity such as beekeeping. He also makes us aware that in their reception of Orthodoxy the Chuvash had not only had to contend with receiving Orthodox teaching from those who often had an inadequate command of their language, as Filimonov informs us. The Orthodox faith was as much transmitted through the worldview, terminology and experiential devotion of the Russian peasant and so did not always correspond to the catechisms and theological textbooks as much as the missionaries and first native Orthodox priests such as Filimonov would have liked.

The discussions of these first native Chuvash Orthodox priests provide us with keys to reading the more abundant ethnographic texts of the late nineteenth century, which make clear how the icon had been drawn in multiple ways into Chuvash rites connected with healing, remembrance of the dead, and the annual agricultural cycle, owing to the icon's capacity to resonate with indigenous coefficients and conceptions of the sacred. Yet at the same time, the language used to describe icons and the saints they depict, such as "gods" or *Tora,* makes us aware of why outsiders, and even insiders such as Filimonov, continued to describe them as pagans and polytheists.

The Icon in Chuvash Practices in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

There are many texts which reveal how, by the late nineteenth century, the icon played a significant role in Chuvash practices related to healing. When a Chuvash fell ill, the *iomzi* would discover by divination which god had been angered. Bread, wax, water, and icons were used in this process. The names of gods would be listed and if a piece of bread on a thread moved in a certain way when a god was named, the *iomzi* knew he or she was angry. "Usually divination was carried out using all the gods not excluding the domestic god, i.e., the saint whose face was depicted on the icon in the home of the sick person."[72] The *iomzi* would send a relative to place candles in the local church. "The *iomzi* indicates before which icon to put candles. The Chuvash have many gods and the *iomzi* knows which church icon corresponds to which Chuvash god."[73]

When the Chuvash gathered to remember the departed on Thursday or Friday evening for six weeks after their death, each would put up a candle before the icons, or on the wall near the door of the house, then break off a piece of each kind of food, and pour wine saying, "May this be before (name of the departed)!" We notice here the two opposing sacred locations of the icon-corner and the door of the house, as we have seen in the rites of *chukleme*. Those who received a large inheritance from a departed relative would take his or her icons into their home "and in this way, as it were, replace the departed and take on themselves the duties of the departed towards the god of the home and the ancestors."[74]

Il'in den' (Prophet Elijah's Day on July 20/August 2) was known among the Russians by such names as *Gromoverzhets* (Thunderer) or *Gromoboi* (Thunder clap), partly due to Elijah's connection with rain, but also as his feast falls at the time stormy weather sets in at the end of the summer. With the strong Chuvash sense of the influence of the powers and spirits of nature over human life, thunder was particularly feared by them. They took a sacred rowan branch in hand at the sound of thunder to frighten away the evil spirit they believed was being

chased away by the thunder god.[75] One of the Chuvash divinities was *Asla-ati* (Great Father), the spirit controlling thunder. Fr. Aleksei Rekeev tells us: "This spirit replaces for the Chuvash the Russian prophet Elijah, as he is imagined in popular beliefs."[76] According to G. Komissarov, Prophet Elijah's day was known to every Chuvash,[77] there was a prohibition on work, and a foal was sacrificed.[78]

Fr. Viktor Zaikov relates how he made use of Chuvash reverence for this day during a procession with icons and intercessory prayers in the fields on this feast in 1887. He preached a sermon to the villagers of Polevaia Shentakhova about observing Sunday rather than Friday, which at first they agreed to do, but then refused under the influence of a wealthy Chuvash who refused to come to the village assembly on the matter. "I was forced to go to his home myself and [. . .] having made him listen to reason, I returned with him to the people. Then after [. . .] telling them the story of Elijah the prophet and his sacrifices and comparing them [the Chuvash] with the Israelite people, I managed to persuade them to stop observing Friday."[79]

Similar incidents unrelated to Prophet Elijah's Day took place when the inhabitants of thirty villages in the Tsivilsk district went to carry out traditional sacrifices, near a sacred lake, due to poor crops in 1889. The new native priest served the Liturgy, then gathered all the faithful Orthodox and went with an icon procession to the place of sacrifice. He held a prayer service and then tried to prove to the gathered Chuvash the uselessness of blood sacrifice, causing an angry uproar.[80]

When Fr. Grigorii Filippov arrived in the parish of Bichurino in May 1890 he was asked to go on procession with icons to the fields due to drought, although in only one village did many Chuvash take part. After he had carried out catechetical talks with the help of school pupils, the Chuvash agreed more readily to have their homes blessed with icons and holy water, and he blessed the rye before the spring sowing.[81]

Chuvash Pilgrimage Practices and the Ishaki Icon of Saint Nicholas

Accounts of the pilgrimage to the icon of Saint Nicholas in Ishaki continue be a marked feature of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings about the Chuvash. According to these texts the Chuvash were prompted to set off for Ishaki for a variety of reasons. In the 1870s in Iadrin district, after the spring sowing, beer was brewed in honor of the Sorma *kiremet*,[82] then prayers and offerings were held in the fields, after which one member of the community was selected to set off to venerate the icon of Saint Nicholas at Ishaki[83] (see fig. 2).

Fr. N. Arkhangelsky wrote in 1899 that when someone fell ill, blood sacrifices were made, but if there was no improvement "the *iomzi* would in the end advise someone in the family to go to […] Ishaki to pray to Saint Nicholas and put up as many candles as the *iomzi* said." He nevertheless added, "it is already rare that the *iomzi* recommends sacrifices. Now they usually advise [. . .] either to go to Ishaki […] or to put up candles to the icon of the Savior in the parish church."[84]

N. Ostroumov, describing the rites connected with illness among the Chuvash in general in 1876, says that after the *iomzi* by means of divination had discovered which god had been angered, they would send a relative to put up two candles before an icon corresponding to the Chuvash god in the parish church. A third candle was broken into pieces according to the number of chapels along the way home, where they were left so that the small chapel gods would ask for healing before the god where the main candle had been put. In cases of serious illness, the *iomzi* would order candles to be put in especially sacred places, at crossroads, on bridges and sacred trees, or before a wonderworking icon such as that at Ishaki.[85] In Musirma, Tsivilsk district in the 1880s,

> If someone falls ill they go on pilgrimage to Ishaki and on the way back call in at Tsivilsk monastery, Bagildino and Kovali as the Musirma parishioners say that the old God lives in Kovali.[86] From the Kovali church they set off for their own parish church and put up candles there. The order of visiting churches is not infringed. When someone in the family goes to Ishaki, those at home do not put up candles before the icons at home before he has returned and been in the parish church.[87]

The Musirma parish was formed in 1882 from villages which formerly belonged to Kovali parish and their calling in to the "old God" was a traditional practice which they had drawn into their Orthodox pilgrimage routes. According to Fr. Aleksei Rekeev, when Chuvash moved to live in a new location, they believed that the *kiremet* spirit stayed in the old location and the Chuvash continued to pray to it from afar, "but sometimes the *kiremet* in the old place is not satisfied with worship from afar and requires that those who have moved come to it and worship in person—then the Chuvash have to go on pilgrimage whether they like it or not."[88]

V.K. Magnitsky wrote in 1877 that Ishaki was visited even by unbaptized Chuvash and Cheremys,[89] and P. Mike, describing Tsivilsk district in 1898, wrote that it was above all the pagan Chuvash, or the baptized not yet affected by the educational movement, who called Saint Nicholas "Nikola-god" and went to put up candles in Ishaki on the advice of the *iomzi*.[90]

The pilgrim would often set out with precise instructions from the *iomzi* as to how many candles to put before which icons.[91] According to Mike, they would wrap up the promised offering, often a 25-kopeck coin, and put it in a place where nobody would notice.[92] The way candles and coins were used as offerings in Chuvash practices is illustrated by a *kiremet* near Shumatovo in Iadrin district where, until the 1850s, an elm tree had stood, known as Priests' Elm. The Orthodox clergy from Shumatovo had been hanged there during Pugachev's revolt. Nearby stood another oak where the bodies of a further thirty-two people hanged by Pugachev had been buried. When M. Vasiliev wrote his account in 1904, the trees had long since been cut down and the oak replaced by a chapel, "but the people know well the places where they stood and throw wax candles and copper coins at the tree stumps."[93] That the Chuvash wrapped up the coin and put it in a secret place was probably related to their practice of hanging coins in a pouch or cloth[94] in an outhouse or barn. A description emphasizing how Christianized the Chuvash were by 1910 says the coin was put before the domestic icons rather than in a secret place.[95]

The pilgrims would set out for Ishaki in secret, usually at night, so that no one would notice their absence from the village, and so that the sacrifice "would be pleasing to the menacing Russian god."[96] By 1910 preparations involved the family washing in the bathhouse, then one family member going to the local church to put up candles so that the local icons would not begrudge the veneration of a distant, unfamiliar saint. On the road the pilgrim was to be a model Christian and "try to behave himself as well as possible, avoid superfluous affairs and conversations with other travelers."[97] He was to have no arguments or even listen to them.[98] The pilgrim took nothing with him and was to bring nothing back apart from one candle for the local church.[99]

According to V.K. Magnitsky in 1877, on arrival in Ishaki

> the Chuvash have no intention of serving a *moleben* as Russians and Cheremys do, but only light a candle and make their request to God, often in the form of a threat. [. . .] As they leave the church in Ishaki, the Chuvash light candles and leave money and pieces of bread by the brick chapel by the fence at the carved Crucifix by the outer wall of the church, on the door at the entrance under the bell-tower, by the wooden chapel at the spring where, according to tradition, the wonderworking icon of Saint Nicholas was "found." [. . .] as a result of the enormous daily throng of Chuvash pilgrims, even from the Samara and Orenburg provinces [. . .] poor Chuvash manage to collect whole sacks of pieces of bread and then dry small pieces for sale by the *pud*.[100]

N.I. Zolotnitsky tells us that the pilgrims bought bread buns specially made in the village, and by the chapel stood a chest for the bread so that dogs and ravens would not eat the vast offerings that accumulated.[101] A 1910 article emphasized that the Chuvash already ordered *moleben*s before the icon, whereas formerly they had splashed vodka on the chapel wall and thrown pieces of bread into the spring.[102] In a less flattering 1909 report, a graduate of the Kazan Missionary Courses,[103] G. Stepanov, tells us that pilgrims put up a candle with a request to punish their enemies.[104]

If Chuvash made their requests as a threat, it was due to their ideas about a very human Saint Nicholas. He was considered to be capricious and would complain to God if pilgrims did not venerate him alone, which was why on the way home some Chuvash did not call in at other parish churches.[105] According to the above Stepanov, "Saint Nicholas is considered the angriest of gods and some are afraid of venerating him, fearing to anger him. They think he is a pagan idol or *kiremet*."[106] An archival chronicle (*letopis*) of Musirma parish, Tsivilsk district tells us that "they call Saint Nicholas God and believe he demands they put up candles in Ishaki or he will send illness to the family."[107] Zolotnitsky gives an example of a prayer at Ishaki: "Look here, Migula-tora (Nicholas-god)! Perhaps my neighbor Maksim has said something to you about me or tells tales. Don't you listen to him. I've done nothing wrong to him and wish him no evil—he's a good-for-nothing and a show-off."[108]

The Russian priest Vasilii Smelov in 1880 reported a humorous story recounted by the Chuvash which helps us to understand how they had transferred what Smelov perceived as their conception of the *kiremet* as a threatening spirit that needed appeasing to Saint Nicholas and the "Russian God." The story goes that once Saint Nicholas and God came down to earth and got lost. God sent Saint Nicholas in the direction of some smoke to enquire of the way, and he came upon a bathhouse where a woman was giving birth. "Nikola, mistaking the bathhouse for a house, decided to walk straight into the bathhouse; but he had scarcely opened the door when the midwife flew at him shouting, 'Where do you think you're going, you Russian'? and hit Nikola with her switch of branches." An angry Nikola returned to God and asked him to deprive the newly-born of happiness in life, at which his parents and their livestock died, their house and possessions all burnt down, and the crops were ruined by hail.[109]

The significance attached to the Ishaki icon is shown by the fact that, if a person could not go themselves, there were a variety of means of showing that you intended to go but for the moment could not, or of cancelling the trip entirely. The Iadrin Chuvash had chapels on the market squares in Khora-kasy, Ikkovo

and Unga where they could pass on candles to Ishaki.[110] Sometimes a Chuvash would add another coin to the one already promised and ask Nikola to wait. If all else failed, others "take the coin secretly at night out into the yard and throw it into the neighbor's yard. [. . .] In this way the duty of venerating the Ishaki icon is transferred to the neighbor. The one finding such a coin sees it as a bad omen and sets off immediately for Ishaki despite all obstacles. Sometimes people take the promised coin out into a field and throw it in the direction of Ishaki."[111]

Although the Ishaki icon was the most revered, there were other icons to which the Chuvash went on pilgrimage or called in on their way to Ishaki, or which were taken on procession so that believers could venerate them. The human-sized, carved wooden icon of Saint Nicholas from the Holy Trinity men's monastery in Cheboksary was much venerated and carried round nearby villages on his feast days.[112] (fig. 3) A significant example is that of Tsivilsk district where in the 1870s all the churches were largely empty apart from Bagildino where much-venerated icons of Saint Nicholas and the Mother of God "Joy of All Who Sorrow" drew many pilgrims.[113] Before the 1830s, the local Chuvash had gathered at a *kiremet* at some elm trees in the Kunar forest a few *versts* from Bagildino church. According to local tradition, not far from the trees a Chuvash had dug up an icon of the Crucifixion of the Savior which he had given to the local mill-owner. News of the icon's appearance had caused even more Chuvash to visit the site, at first at night then more publicly in daylight. When the Bagildino priest Fr. Ioann Akramovsky ordered the trees to be chopped down,
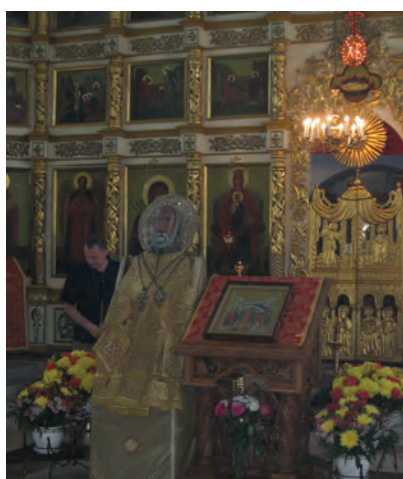

Fig. 3 Carved wooden icon of Saint Nicholas in the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, Cheboksary, Chuvashia. With kind permission of Archimandrite Vasilii, Abbot of the monastery (photo: author)

the Chuvash continued to go there so Akramovsky had a wooden chapel built and put icons from the church there. The wooden chapel burnt down due to a lighted candle and a stone church was built which, due to a legal dispute with a neighboring parish over ownership of the site, was eventually taken down and the icons taken to Bagildino church. After that, pilgrims went to the church rather than the *kiremet*, according to an 1872 report in the *Kazan Diocesan News*.[114] Magnitsky, writing in 1877, tells us that Chuvash pilgrims on their way to Ishaki and other locations would call in at both Bagildino church and at the Kunar *kiremet*.

A striking account of how Archbishop Vladimir of Kazan used the pilgrimage to Ishaki to encourage the Chuvash to abandon the Old Faith and acquire new understandings of the Ishaki pilgrimage occurs in the chronicle of the Church of the Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God in Musirma, Tsivilsk district.[115] Archbishop Vladimir presided over a Liturgy at the church on

September 19, 1893 when two choirs were formed of seventy-five pupils from local schools. So many parishioners attended that it took two hours for them all to venerate the cross at the end of the service. When the Archbishop asked them to do something special to commemorate this event, the villagers made an agreement to no longer turn to the *iomzi* for advice, nor carry out sacrifices nor open wine stalls.

In response the Archbishop decided to make them a gift of an icon of the Tikhvin Mother of God, but rather than just sending the icon, he asked the new Chuvash priest, Fr. Gavriil Spiridonov, and his parishioners to walk to Ishaki to attend the consecration of a new church and receive the icon. The parishioners expressed "willingness to go for the icon. The pupils of the parish schools with their teachers set off on foot for Ishaki in good time."[116] On June 14, 1894, after walking for two days, three hundred members of the Musirma parish received the icon from Archbishop Vladimir who reminded them of their promise to leave their pagan ways and asked Fr. Gavriil to repeat his words in Chuvash in Musirma.

The icon was carried home accompanied by the singing of the school pupils. On the first evening they reached Tsivilsk where the icon was placed overnight in a chapel on the Market Square before being met next morning by a procession of all the town's clergy and parishioners who accompanied the icon to the Tsivilsk monastery for the Liturgy. When the icon set off again it was greeted in each village with bread and salt and a *moleben* was served.[117] On the evening of June 15, the icon was placed in the school-church in Staro-Arabosy where the Novoisheevo clergy served a *moleben* the next day, before accompanying the icon to the edge of the village. As the icon approached Musirma, the bells rang and the villagers gathered to accompany the icon to their parish church. The parishioners sent a message to the Archbishop saying that "apart from minor exceptions they had all left their pagan rites and customs." Not entirely satisfied, the Archbishop replied that they were all to tell their relatives to give up pagan ways so that "not one servant of the devil remained."[118]

Shevzov's comment that "the routing of specially revered icons [. . .] had the practical effect of incorporating otherwise isolated communities into a broader body of the faithful with a shared experience"[119] helps us to appreciate Archbishop Vladimir's strategy here. The Tikhvin Mother of God, as we have seen, was not only the protectress of the Musirma parish, but also of the Tsivilsk monastery, the spiritual center of the Tsivilsk district. As the icon journeyed from Ishaki to Tsivilsk, it would have created communal coherence not only between the district's isolated parishes but also with the wider faith commu-

nity represented by the Archbishop, the Tsivilsk Tikhvin monastery and the Orthodox parishes of the Tsivilsk district. The communal coherence would have extended as far as Ishaki with its pilgrims who flocked from several provinces and Fr. Daniil Filimonov, the Musirma parish's beloved former priest who had been transferred to direct the new Ishaki Teacher Training School.

The way that the Tikhvin icon and the Ishaki icon of Saint Nicholas developed communal coherence and belonging exemplifies recent anthropological research which shows that the clear distinction between persons and objects taken for granted in Western Europe and North America is in other societies made along different lines, "with objects and people connected through networks of relations" so that "their present meanings are partly determined by the persons with which they interacted and the events they were part of."[120] Hanganu therefore refers to material culture elements such as the icon as "relational nodes connecting the material, social and spiritual worlds,"[121] an apt description of the network of relations in which the Tikhvin icons of the Tsivilsk district and the Ishaki icon of Saint Nicholas were entangled.

The Expanding Geography of Pilgrimage and Changing Perceptions of the Icon

The way that icons "linked individuals and local ecclesial communities into a larger body of the faithful"[122] is reflected in the way that, with the increasing knowledge of the Russian language provided by late nineteenth-century schools, the Chuvash gradually began to go further afield than sacred locations on Chuvash territory. An educated Chuvash from Teneevo (Tsivilsk district), Sergei Aleksandrov, was healed of an illness brought on by his mother's curse when in 1898 he travelled to Kazan and Sviazhsk to venerate the relics of the Kazan wonderworkers.[123] The mother of a teacher from Iadrin district, A.P. Prokopiev, on abandoning the Old Faith "decided to travel around the monasteries and pray only to one God."[124] In 1910 Fr. Daniil Filimonov wrote that, "Within the last 20–30 years religious natives have begun to go on pilgrimage to monasteries. During the Apostles' Fast and Lent they go to take communion in the monasteries, order prayers for the departed, make offerings of bread, money, farm animals etc. Nothing similar could be observed among the natives previously."[125]

Nikolai Ilminsky wrote in 1886 about his concern that a twenty-six-year-old pupil of Simbirsk Chuvash Teachers' School had taken a liking to travelling to distant holy places, including a desire to go to Jerusalem.[126] Ilminsky again wrote in 1890 of how the Chuvash of Kazan province had gone to the Sed-

miozernaia and Raifa monasteries[127] for communion in Lent, including two who had walked 350 *versts* from Samara province.[128] Fr. Gavriil Spiridonov in 1910 attributed the increasing numbers of Chuvash becoming monks or nuns, or going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem or Mount Athos, to the spiritual movement which had arisen due to the use of the native language in churches.[129]

As the Chuvash began to expand their ecclesial horizons to outside their own territories, and as education gave them access to more standard Orthodox teaching on the icon, a concern to improve Chuvash popular understanding of icons seems to have emerged. We have seen above Fr. Daniil Filimonov's 1890 report on his Musirma parish in which he expressed concern at the Chuvash popular understanding of icons.

In 1894 Filimonov was transferred to serve as priest in Ishaki in order to direct the new two-class teachers' school and to preach in Chuvash to the crowds of pilgrims. During 1894–95 he and two other teachers at the school wrote two brochures in Chuvash, one explaining holy communion and another about the icon of Saint Nicholas at Ishaki, 3000 copies of which were published for free distribution to pilgrims (fig. 4, fig. 5).[130] Filimonov was concerned not only that the Chuvash should have a truly Orthodox understanding of the icon, but also that icons should be painted in a canonical way, and to this end opened an icon-painting workshop in 1896 at Ishaki School. An 1898 account from the village of Teneevo in Tsivilsk district shows us Fr. Filimonov's icon booklet

Fig. 4 Fr. Daniil Filimonov, *O sv. chudotvornoi ikone nakhodiashcheisia v tserkvi sela Ishak Kozmodem'ianskago uezda Kazanskoi eparkhii na chuvashkom iazyke (*On the Holy Miracleworking Icon in the Church of the Village of Ishaki, Kozmodemiansk District, Kazan Diocese in the Chuvash Language), 2nd ed. (Kazan: Bratstvo sviatitelia Guriia, 1896), title page. With kind permission of Bishop Ignatii (Suranov) of Mariino-Posad, Chuvashia (photo: author)

Fig. 5 First page of Fr. Daniil Filimonov, *O sv. chudotvornoi ikone nakhodiashcheisia v tserkvi sela Ishak Kozmodem'ianskago uezda Kazanskoi eparkhii na chuvashkom iazyke* (fig. 4)

being used to try to bring more standard ideas about the icon to the Chuvash.

When one hundred *pudy*[131] of oats went missing from a communal barn, all the men of the village gathered at an assembly (*skhod*) and resolved to meet in a gully outside the village where a huge oak, considered sacred by the Chuvash, had formerly stood. According to the traditional rites of the village, each man had to stand before the stump of the tree at this *kiremet* with earth in his mouth, and swear an oath asking God that his body would dry up like the stump if he was guilty of the crime.

At this time, half of the population of Teneevo had been baptized into the Orthodox faith, while the other unbaptized villagers the author describes as pagan. In 1887, a primary school had been opened for the first time in the village where almost everyone had previously been illiterate. On hearing of the men's intention to discover the thief "using pagan rites," the village school-teacher sent Aleksandrov, the literate Chuvash in whose home he lived, to the village assembly to persuade the men to give up their pagan practices. Aleksandrov remonstrated with them: "We baptized people should not pray by a tree somewhere in the gully; the place for prayer is God's church and there before the holy icons we should pray to God asking him for help and protection, and not before a soulless tree." In his efforts to convince the men, he took out Filimonov's booklet which explained the Orthodox meaning of the holy icons in the Chuvash language. When he finished, however, they began to object: "You tell us that worshipping God in the gully is idolatry. Is it not the same as your worship of icons? They are made from wood with human hands; so you, just like us, are praying to a tree."

According to the author, a Kazan educational official, Aleksandrov's story made such an impression on the Teneevo Chuvash that they decided not to take the oath.[132] The account draws attention to the role that the written word was beginning to play in Chuvash culture at the turn of the twentieth century. It is the schoolteacher, a figure who had only been present in the community for ten years, who sends the literate Aleksandrov, armed with a recent publication in the vernacular Chuvash language, to challenge the pagan practices. The response of the Chuvash—"you, just like us, are praying to a tree"—also helps us to understand why the sacred wood of the icon had been able to become a point of correspondence with the sacred tree in Chuvash traditional rites, and had facilitated the way that in the late nineteenth-century journeys to *kiremets* and their sacred trees were being transformed into pilgrimages to Christian holy places and miracle-working icons.

The Role of Icons in the Reception of Orthodoxy in Other Regions of the Russian Empire

Similar phenomena to those we have observed among the Chuvash—the way that icons had become indigenous religious objects drawn into local beliefs and practices, as well as the common perception of such beliefs and practices as paganism, superstition, or superficial outward expressions of Orthodoxy—have been observed in many former regions of the Russian Empire. The Finno-Ugric Seto, who today live in the borderlands straddling southern Estonia and the Pskov region of Russia, encountered Russian Orthodoxy as early as the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries and possibly earlier. Although today their Orthodoxy is entirely integral to their Seto identity, their practices such as feeding, bringing presents to, and making oaths before icons, as well as surrounding a wooden statue of Saint Nicholas with offerings of food on Saint Nicholas' Day, have led to their faith being described as paganism, superstition, primitive, and outward by Estonian Lutheran observers, while Russians have described them as "half-believers" (*poluvertsy*).[133] Similar criticisms of paganism and superstition have been leveled at the Turkic Gagauzes of the northeast Balkans who are considered to have adopted Orthodoxy in the thirteenth century and for whom, like the Seto, their Orthodoxy is a vital element of their ethnic identity. Their culture has retained many archaic elements adopted from surrounding Orthodox Balkan peoples, as well as many Turkic elements, and has many similarities to Chuvash beliefs and practices as described by nineteenth-century observers.[134]

Znamenski writes of the reception of Orthodoxy by the peoples of the Altai mountains in Siberia that "specific artifacts of Orthodoxy did not necessarily contradict indigenous tradition and as such could be easily adjusted to native beliefs."[135] He notes in particular how Saint Nicholas was absorbed into indigenous religious practices among the Altaians, the Khanty of the Ob river basin, and the Alaskan Tlingits, whose reliance on fishing led to especial veneration for Saint Nicholas as the patron saint of fishermen.[136] Sergei Kan concludes that "the fact that the Russian Church offered its members a variety of potent sacred objects made it more attractive" to the Tlingits who had great reverence for icons, crosses, and candles, which were seen as powerful protectors.[137] He considers that it was precisely because of the Orthodox Church's use of symbolic acts and sacred objects that the Tlingit could develop a more indigenized form of Christianity as they assigned their own meanings to Orthodox symbols without deviating in any major way from Orthodox ritual practice.[138]

Where the Boundary Between Heaven and Earth Becomes Thin: The Icon in Orthodox Theological Understanding

What is it about the icon that enabled it to play this role of mediator in the above situations and resonate so readily with indigenous coefficients? In his discussion of the symbolic nature of the Orthodox mysteries or sacraments, Andrew Louth comments that symbols invest the visible and material with a meaning that transcends them and that "icons can be seen as a particular extension of the symbolic world, founded on matter."[139] Thus the materiality of the icon provides not only an image of the reality it depicts, but provides access and direct encounter with that reality, and thus comes to partake of the holiness of the people or events depicted.[140] Louth reminds us that Celtic spirituality, both pagan and Christian, sometimes speaks of places where the boundary between heaven and earth becomes thin. He considers the icon to be such a place of "thinness" so that the "beholder of the icon [. . .] finds him- or herself passing through the in-between and entering this other world."[141]

This understanding of the icon emerges out of a broader perception of the unity of the visible and invisible worlds which is expressed in the following way by the seventh-century theologian Saint Maximus the Confessor: "The world is one . . . for the spiritual world in its totality is manifested in the totality of the perceptible world, mystically expressed in symbolic pictures for those who have eyes to see. And the perceptible world in its entirety is secretly fathomable by the spiritual world in its entirety. . ."[142] This interpretation of the world as a theophany (manifesting God or the divine) is described by Olivier Clément as "that grand contribution of the ancient religions to understanding" and he argues that it finds a full place in Christianity.[143]

For the Chuvash and other peoples of the Mid-Volga, the sacred groves and trees, the graveyards, and the boundaries of village and fields also represented such places of "thinness" where communication between the visible and invisible worlds took place. They were the "in-between spaces" where it could be understood from personal experience that the spiritual world is manifest in the totality of the perceptible world. These indigenous coefficients would appear to have contributed to their reception of the Spirit-bearing matter of the icon during the time when word-based mediation of Orthodoxy was hindered by the Slavonic language of the liturgy, and the lack of vernacular literacy and a native language-speaking clergy.

The way that icons and other forms of Orthodox spirituality have become woven into the very fabric of Chuvash culture helps to account for the per-

Fig. 6 Aleksandr Kuzmin and Andrei Kurushin, fresco of Saint Peter Walking on the Water, Refectory of the Holy Trinity Monastery, Cheboksary, Chuvashia, 2013 (photo: author)

Fig. 7 Aleksandr Kuzmin and Andrei Kurushin, fresco of Christ Feeding the Five Thousand, Refectory of the Holy Trinity Monastery, Cheboksary, Chuvashia, 2013 (photo: author)

sistence of Orthodoxy among the Chuvash despite the tragedy and turmoil of twentieth-century Russia. The seventeenth-century Tsivilsk Tikhvin icon of the Mother of God and the life-sized wooden icon of Nikola in Cheboksary are still venerated by hundreds of pilgrims, while new icons and frescoes on thwalls of monasteries and churches in Chuvashia are witnesses to a living iconographic tradition (fig. 6, fig. 7).

New life has also been breathed into old sacred sites while new ones are emerging, such as the chapel built over a spring at the Metochion of the Tsivilsk women's monastery in Pervoe Stepanovo, Tsivilsk district (fig. 8). On the Feast of the New Martyrs of Chuvashia (Third Sunday after Pentecost), thousands of pilgrims throng to the site of the labor camp in Pervomaiskoe, Alatyr district where the Divine Liturgy is held in fields which contain the bones of those who perished there, and the canvas iconostasis unfurled among the trees reveals how Chuvash understandings of sacred space have been fully integrated into their Orthodoxy (fig. 9, fig. 10).

Conclusion

The above prerevolutionary ethnographic accounts reveal the way the icon was drawn into the everyday lived religion of the Chuvash and became an object

Fig. 8 Chapel but over a spring at the Metochion of the Tsivilsk women's monastery in the village of Pervoe Stepanovo, Chuvashia, 2014 (photo: author)

Fig. 9 Service for the Sunday of the Chuvash New Martyrs, Pervomaiskoe, Alatyr district, Chuvashia, 2018 (photo: author)

Fig. 10 Service for the Sunday of the Chuvash New Martyrs, Pervomaiskoe, Alatyr district, Chuvashia, 2018 (photo: author)

of veneration and pilgrimage, thus contributing to the transmission of Orthodoxy before the spread of education and literacy among the Chuvash from the 1830s. They also suggest that icons as "relational nodes connecting the material, social and spiritual worlds"[144] corresponded to indigenous coefficients such as the sacred trees and groves, thus arousing genuine religious experience and laying the groundwork for later textual transmission of Orthodox teaching at the time of the vernacular educational movement. They thus challenge the *dvoeverie*-inspired division of the history of the Volga-Kama region and other regions of the Russian Empire, into a period of pristine traditional ancient ancestral faith, followed by the superficial imposition of syncretistic Orthodox faith. The proponents of the missionary movement themselves greatly contributed to perceptions of nineteenth-century Chuvash religious practices as paganism and thus promoted the concept of *dvoeverie* which they considered to have been the result of previous non-textual means of mediating Orthodoxy. Yet it is doubtful that the educational movement would have had such an impact without media such as the icon both preparing the ground and continuing to be a mediator of faith alongside more cognitive forms of education.

The way that the materiality and spirituality of the icon were drawn into indigenous religious experience challenges the very basis of the concept of *dvoeverie* and its assumption of a lack of common ground between the pre-Christian religious experience and beliefs of the Volga-Kama peoples and Orthodox Christian cosmology. We have seen how this assumption and its accompanying terminology were largely the fabrications of the missionaries themselves, arising out of their desire for more standard practices and understandings of Orthodox belief and ritual. Their use of the language of paganism and syncretism which accompanied a desire for uniform practices as an expression of institutional centralization and unity, raises the question of whether room can be made for

local diversity within Orthodoxy. It reveals a need for greater appreciation of how Orthodoxy as a living tradition can be creatively received and indigenized in contexts outside of traditionally Orthodox territories.

A greater acceptance and acknowledgement of such local diversity would point to a third, more viable alternative to the dilemma described by Salmin, between going back to the caves or coming to ruin in the clutches of civilization. Further understanding of the way that the icon has contributed to Christianizing the ancient religious culture of the Chuvash, as well as the other non-Slavic cultures referred to above, could enable scholars to recognize that an indigenous Orthodoxy has been, and could increasingly become, a way of retaining much of the ancient culture of indigenous peoples, albeit in a transformed way.

The role played by the icon among the Chuvash also points to a greater need to study not only the icon, but other "sensuous expressions of the sublime,"[145] other non-textual media such as music, sound, taste and fragrance in the context of Orthodoxy's encounter with new social and cultural milieu both within and outside its familiar territories.[146]

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Notes

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19   N.I. Il'minskii, *Kazanskaia tsentral'naia kreshcheno-tatarskaia shkola: materialy dlia istorii prosveshcheniia kresh-chenykh tatar* (Kazan: Tipografiia V.M. Kliuchnikova, 1887), 121–2.

20   See for example N.I. Il'minskii, "Zapiska N.I. Il'minskago o perevodcheskoi komissii," *Prilozhenie k Otchetu Brat-stva Sv. Guriia za 1875–76* (Kazan, 1875–76), 64–65.

21   Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion,* 238.

22   See C.J. Chulos, "The End of Cultural Survivals (perezhitki): Remembering and Forgetting Russian Peasant Religious Traditions," in *Studia Slavica Finlandensia* 17 (2000): 191.

23   P.V. Denisov, *Religioznye verovaniia Chuvash* (Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennyi Institut Gumani-tarnykh Nauk, 1959), 119, 134.

24   See Chulos, "The End of Cultural Survivals," 193.

25   Eve Levin, "*Dvoeverie* and Popular Religion," in S.K. Batalden, ed., *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine and Georgia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 36.

26   A.K. Salmin, *Narodnaia obriadnost' chuvashei* (Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gumanitarnyi Institut, 1994), 7–8.

27   Salmin, *Narodnaia obriadnost',* 8.

28   Taimasov, *Pravoslavnaia tserkov',* 70.

29   Taimasov, *Pravoslavnaia tserkov',* 445.

30   Geraci, *Window on the East,* 33, 196.

31   Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, 7; P.W. Werth, "From 'Pagan' Muslims to 'Baptized' Communists: Religious Conversion and Ethnic Particularity in Russia's Eastern Provinces," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 3 (2000): 497.

32   Rock, *Popular Religion*, 118

33   Rock, *Popular Religion*, 89, 146.

34   Mousalimas, *From Mask to Icon*, 88.

35   Spiridon M. Mikhailov (1821–61) is today considered the first native Chuvash ethnographer and writer. His experience as a clerk and translator in the *volost* administration and *zemstvo* court provided material for his statistical and ethnographic accounts of the Chuvash and Cheremys which were published in *Kazanskie gubernskie vedomosti* (Kazan Provincial News) in the 1850s.

36   "Chudotvornye i osobenno mestnochtimye ikony i krestnye khody v Kazanskoi eparkhii," *Izvestiia po Kazanskoi eparkhii* (hereafter cited as *IKE*) 13 (1872), 23–25; S.M. Mikhailov, *Trudy po etnografii i istorii russkogo, chuvashskogo i mariiskogo narodov* (Cheboksary: Issledovatel'skii Institut pri Sovete Ministrov Chuvashskoi ASSR, 1972), 220, 239.

37   "Chudotvornye i osobenno," 393.

38   "Chudotvornye i osobenno," 227–8; Mikhailov, *Trudy*, 126.

39   The mountain Mari lived on the right bank of the Volga near Kozmodemiansk where there were more hills than on the left bank. The Chuvash living in this region were sometimes known by this name too.

40   Mikhailov, *Trudy*, 169.

41   Mikhailov, *Trudy*, 177.

42   Mikhailov uses the actual word "metropolis" and by the "direct sense of the word" he would appear to be refer-ring to the term "metropolia," an ecclesial administrative unit supervised by a Metropolitan.

43   Mikhailov, *Trudy,* 181.

44   Mikhailov, *Trudy,* 232.

45   From the Russian word for seven (*sem'*) as Pentecost is held seven weeks after Easter.

46   Magnitskii, *Materialy,* 186. See also Salmin, *Narodnaia obriadnost',* 84–88.

47   Mikhailov, *Trudy*, 181–4, 233.

48   Archbishop Filaret (Amfiteatrov), 1779–1857.

49   Bishop Kirill (Bogoslovskii-Platonov), 1788–1849.

50   E. Malov, "Pravoslavnaia protivomusul'manskaia missiia v Kazanskom krae," in *Pravoslavnyi sobesednik* (1870) ch. 2, 233–60.

51   S. Vasil'evskii, *Sviatitel' Filaret (Amfiteatrov) Mitropolit Kievskii i Galitskii i ego vremia* (Kazan: Tipo-Litografiia I.S. Perova, 1888), vol. 2, 43–44.

52   Fr. Viktor Vishnevskii (1804–85) grew up in Sugut-Torbikovo (Iadrin district, Kazan province) speaking both Chuvash and Russian. He became a lecturer at Kazan Seminary in 1826, then from 1843 was a missionary who toured Chuvash villages. See V.G. Rodionov, *Viktor Vishnevskii. Pis'mennaia kul'tura rannego prosvetitel'stva,* (Cheboksary: Izdatel'stvo Chuvashskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta, 2004)

53   Nauchnyi Arkhiv Chuvashskogo Gosudarstvennogo Instituta Gumanitarnykh Nauk (hereafter cited as NA CGIGN), otd.1, ed. khr.222, l.63, 71, 285–92.

54   V.P. Vishnevskii, *O religioznykh pover'iakh chuvash. Iz zapisok missionera Protoiereia V.P. Vishnevskago* (Kazan: n.p., 1846), 26.

55   In the 1820s Metropolitan Filaret (Drozdov) of Moscow (1782–1867) wrote the catechisms which were used for basic instruction throughout the Russian church and state during the nineteenth century.

56   V.P. Vishnevskii, *Nachertanie pravil chuvashskogo iazyka i slovar', sostavlennye dlia dukhovnykh uchilishch Kazanskoi eparkhii* (Kazan: Universitetskaia Tipografiia, 1836) and *Nachatki khristianskogo ucheniia, ili kratkaia sviashchennaia istoriia i kratkii katikhizis na chuvashskom iazyke* (Kazan: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1832).

57   Gregory Freeze, "The Rechristianization of Russia: The Church and Popular Religion, 1750–1850," in *Studia Slavica Finlandensia* 7 (1990): 102–4.

58   Vasilii Sboev (1810–55) was a Russian who grew up in the Chuvash village of Koshki-Churashevo (Cheboksary district, Kazan province). After studying at the St Petersburg Academy from 1829 to 1833 he returned to Kazan to become a Professor of Russian Literature at the University. His *Zametki o chuvashakh* published in 1856 were written originally as letters for the *Kazan Provincial News* in the 1840s–50s.

59   The *iomzi* was the Chuvash folk healer and specialist in traditional rites and beliefs.

60   V.A. Sboev, *Issledovaniia ob inorodtsakh Kazanskoi gubernii. Zametki o chuvashakh* (Kazan: Gubernskaia Tipografiia, 1856). Republished as a facsimile (Cheboksary: Chuvashskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2004), 50–52.

61   Sboev, *Issledovaniia,* 41.

62   N.I. Zolotnitskii, *Kornevoi chuvashsko-russkii slovar' sravnennyi s iazykami i narechiiami raznykh narodov tiurkskago, finskago i drugikh plemen* (Kazan: V tipografii Imperatorskago Universiteta, 1875), 220.

63   Arkhangel'skii, *Chuvashi Kazanskoi gubernii,* 6; Magnitskii, *Materialy,* 126–7.

64   *Trudy*, 169.

65   Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv Chuvashskoi Respubliki (hereafter cited as GIA CR), f.350, op.1, d.4, l.112v.

66   Magnitskii, *Materialy*, 62–65.

67   Sboev, *Issledovaniia*, 43; Rodionov, *Viktor Vishnevskii*, 219, 227–8; V.Smelov, "Besedy s chuvashami o vere khristianskoi," *IKE*, 4 (1879): 102–9.

68   I.A. Iznoskov, "Missionerskaia, Bratstva sv. Guriia shkola v sele Ishakakh (Kazanskoi gubernii)," *Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik* (hereafter cited as *PB*), 22 (1895): 270.

69   D. F. Filimonov, "Doklad sviashchennika sela Musirma, Tsivil'skago uezda, Daniila Filimonova," *IKE,* 5 (1890): 98–99.

70   A. Rekeev, "Iz chuvashskikh predanii i verovanii," *IKE* (1896): 337–41.

71   Rekeev, "Iz chuvashskikh predanii," 418.

72   N. Ostroumov, "Prigotovlenie umiraiushchego k smerti u kreshchenykh chuvash Kazanskoi gubernii," *IKE* (1876): 400-4, 402.

73   Ostroumov, "Prigotovlenie umiraiushchego," 402.

74   V. Smelov, "Ocherk religioznykh verovanii chuvash," in Magnitskii, *Materialy,* 258–9.

75   Salmin, *Narodnaia obriadnost',* 158.

76   Rekeev, "Iz chuvashskikh predanii," 420.

77   G. Komissarov, "Chuvashi Kazanskogo Zavolzh'ia," in *Izvestiia Obshchestva arkheologii, istorii i etnografii pri Kazanskom universitete* 27, no. 5 (1911), 390.

78   N.V. Nikol'skii, *Kratkii konspekt po etnografii chuvash* (Kazan: Tipografiia O.P. Liustritskoi, 1908), 139.

79   V. Zaikov, "Raport sviashchennika Tsivil'skogo uezda, sela Koshelei, Voznesenskoi tserkvi Viktora Zaikova," *IKE* (1890): 175.

80   P. Mike, "Po Chuvashskim prikhodam. Iz moego dnevnika za 1898 g.," *IKE* (1904): 703–4.

81   G. Filippov, "Chuvashi Bichurinskogo prikhoda," *IKE* (1891): 124–7.

82   The *Sorma kiremet* was a sacred location where representatives of all villages in Cheboksary and Tsivilsk districts gathered for prayers and sacrifices after the spring ploughing. See Magnitskii, *Materialy*, 9.

83   G. Spiridonov, "Iz proshlogo v zhizni chuvash," *IKE* (1910): 1090.

84   Chuvashskii Natsionalnyi Muzei, Cheboksary (hereafter cited as CNM), f. 20 (uch. no. VM 4490), l. 5, 12.

85   N. Ostroumov, "Prigotovlenie umiraiushchago," 402–3.

86   GIA CR, f.498, op.1, d.1, l.19v. The Musirma parish was formed in 1882 from villages which formerly belonged to Kovali parish.

87   GIA CR, f.498, op. 1, d.1, l.19v.

88   Rekeev, "Iz chuvashskikh predanii," 422.

89   Magnitskii, *Materialy*, 227.

90   P. Mike, "Po chuvashskim prikhodam," 723–6.

91   N.I. Zolotnitskii, *Kornevoi chuvashsko-russkii slovar'*, 167; Nauchnyi arkhiv Chuvashskogo Gosudarstvennogo Instituta Gumanitarnykh Nauk (hereafter cited as NA CGIGN), otd. 1, t.166, l.218.

92   Mike, "Po chuvashskim prikhodam," 726.

93   M. Vasil'ev, "O kiremetiakh u chuvash i cheremys," *IKE* (1904), 242–3, 251–2.

94   This was known as an *irikh*. Vasilii Timofeev describes in detail the same practice among the Old Baptized Tatars. Coins were hung in the pouch after the birth of a child and further coins were added in times of illness. When a daughter-in-law came into the family, she brought her own *irikh* with her. The *irikh* was only taken down when the person died. The coins were thrown into the grave of the unmarried to pay for their wedding in the next life, or they were used to buy bread to feed the dead. See N.I. Il'minskii, *Kazanskaia Tsentral'naia kreshcheno-tatarskaia shkola; materialy dlia istorii khristianskago prosveshcheniia kreshchenykh Tatar* (Kazan: Tipografiia V.M. Kliuchnikova, 1887), 20–21.

95   S.M., "Chuvashskoe pochitanie ikon," *Sotrudnik Bratstva Sviatitelia Guriia* (hereafter cited as *SBSG*), (October 1910): 783.

96   Mike, "Po chuvashskim prikhodam," 726.

97   S.M., "Chuvashskoe pochitanie," 783.

98   Mike, "Po chuvashskim prikhodam," 726.

99   Ostroumov, "Prigotovlenie umirasiushchego," 403.

100   Magnitskii, *Materialy*, 227–8. See also note 132 below.

101   NA CGIGN, otd. 1, t. 166, l.218; Zolotnitskii, *Kornevoi slovar'* (1875), 168.

102   S.M., "Chuvashskoe pochitanie," 783.

103   The Kazan Missionary Courses were set up in the 1890s to give theological teaching to native clergy who did not have the educational qualifications to enter the seminary.

104   NA CGIGN, otd. 1, t. 166, l. 217.

105   S.M., "Chuvashskoe pochitanie," 784.

106   NA CGIGN, otd. 1, t. 166, l. 218.

107   GIA CR, f. 498, op. 1, d. 1, l. 19v.

108   Zolotnitskii, *Kornevoi slovar'*, 167.

109   Smelov, "Ocherk religioznykh verovanii chuvash," 243–61.

110   Spiridonov, "Iz zhizni," 1091.

111   S.M., "Chuvashskoe pochitanie," 784.

112 Magnitskii, *Materialy,* 229.

113   I.A. Iznoskov "Religiozno-nravstvennoe sostoianie inorodtsev zhivushchikh v severo-vostochnoi chasti Tsivil'skago uezda, Kazanskaia guberniia," *PB,* 5 (March 1897): 220.

114   "Chudotvornye i osobenno," 401.

115   GIA CR, f. 498, op. 1, d. 1 Letopis' Tikhvinskoi tserkvi.

116   GIA CR, f. 498, op. 1, d. 1, l. 8.

117   Bread and salt are offered to guests as a sign of hospitality in Russian culture.

118   GIA CR, f. 498, op. 1, d. 1, l. 9–9v.

119   Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy*, 189.

120   Hanganu, "Eastern Christians and Religious Objects," 48–49.

121   Hanganu, "Eastern Christians and Religious Objects," 51.

122   Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy*, 173.

123   Mike, "Po chuvashskim prikhodam," 726.

124   A.P. Prokop'ev, "Prosvetiteli i zashchitniki khristianstva sredi chuvash i cheremis Koz'modem'ianskago uezda (Iz zapisok i vospominanii sel'skago uchitelia)" *IKE* (1906), 336.

125   D. Filimonov, "Ob inorodcheskikh monastyriakh i obshchinakh Volzhsko-Kamskago kraia," *SBSG* (October 1910), 759.

126   N.I. Il'minskii, *Pis'ma Nikolaia Ivanovicha Il'minskago* (Kazan: Tipo-litografiia Imperatorskago Universiteta, 1895), 188.

127   Both located near Kazan.

128   Il'minskii, *Pis'ma*, 340.

129   Spiridonov, "Iz zhizni," 1093.

130   Iznoskov, "Missionerskaia, Bratstva sv. Guriia shkola," *PB* (1895): 269.

131   The prerevolutionary unit of weight the *pud* is the equivalent of about 40 lbs or 16 kgs. One hundred *pudy* would therefore be just over one-and-a-half metric tons.

132   Mike, "Po chuvashskim prikhodam," 723–6.

133   A. Kalkun, "Russkaia vera ili vizantiiskoe nasledie? Reprezentatsii pravoslaviia narodnosti setu v XX v.," in *Pravoslavie v Pribaltike: religiia, politika, obrazovanie 1840–e–1930–e gg.* ed. I. Paert (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2018), 344, 346–8; J. Engelhardt, *Singing the Right Way: Orthodox Christians and Secular Enchantment in Estonia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 199–216; Iu. Trusman, "Poluvertsy Pskovo-Pecherskago kraia" *Zhivaia starina* 1, no. 1 (1891): 31–62.

134   E.N. Kvilinkova, "Kalendarnaia obriadnost' gagauzov v kontse XIX-nachale XX vv." (Kishinev: Unpublished Candidate dissertation, 2001), 130–8, 142. See also J.A. Kapalo, *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

135   Znamenski, *Shamanism and Christianity*, 221, 224–8.

136   Kan, *Memory Eternal,* 410; Znamenski, *Shamanism and Christianity,* 222; A.M. Ablazhei, "The Religious Worldview of the Indigenous Population of the Northern Ob' as understood by Christian Missionaries," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 3 (July 2005): 138.

137   Kan, *Memory Eternal*, 412.

138   Kan, *Memory Eternal,* 419.

139   A. Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013), 101, 113.

140   Louth*, Introducing*, 116.

141   Louth, *Introducing,* 115.

142   Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, 2 (Patrologia Graeca, Migne 91, 669), quoted in Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (London: New City: 1993), 219.

143   Clément, *Roots*, 221.

144   See Hanganu, "Eastern Christians and Religious Objects," 51.

145   The phrase is used as a subheading for articles relating to religious images and music in Hann and Goltz, *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective.*

146   For a further recent study with such an approach see Sonja Luehrmann, ed., *Praying with the Senses: Contemporary Orthodox Christian Spirituality in Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

The Soul of the Leningrad Blockade: Leonid Chupiatov's *Bogomater of the Protecting Veil*

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Abstract

The present essay is the first article devoted to the religious paintings of the Soviet artist Leonid Chupiatov (1890–1941), with special attention to his *Veil of the Mother of God over the Dying City,* created during the desolate Leningrad siege-winter of 1941-42. Dmitry Likhachev memorably called this work the "soul of the siege." The article analyzes what it offers the viewer directly, as a modern version of the traditional image. It goes on to place the painting in the context of Chupiatov's religious production, both during the siege and previous to it, and to explore the circumstances which ensured its preservation against all odds. An apocalyptic context which challenges even divine compassion and saving grace, one which recapitulates the forty days of Christ in the desert— such is the immediate context of Chupiatov's icon of the Protecting Veil in his artistic work from the winter of 1941–42. In the end, the survival of this powerful image becomes comprehensible through the connections of a fragmented religious-philosophical confraternity. The article thus represents a step towards finally acknowledging the presence of the religious image in the artistic response to the Leningrad siege.

Key words: Leonid Chupiatov, V*eil of the Mother of God over the Dying City, Bogomater* (1941), *The Wrathful Angel, Temptation,* or *Forty Days in the Desert, Angels,* Dmitry Likhachev, Igor Anichkov, Saint Seraphim of Sarov.

The author dedicates this essay to the memory of Nina Perlina (1939–2019), survivor of the Leningrad siege and distinguished scholar.

Fig. 1 Leonid Chupiatov, *The Veil of the Mother of God over the Dying City*, 1941, oil on canvas, 84 x 76.5 cm. Private collection (image from *Rakurs Chupiatova*, ed. Tat'iana Leontieva [St. Petersburg: Petronii, 2013])

"Hail, Thou who providest the bread of life against hunger of body and spirit, / Hail, Thou who turnest aside the thunder and lightning, / Hail, Thou who savest us from the invasion of foreign nations and treacherous murderers . . . Protect us from every evil by thy holy veil."[1]

There exist only a few brief discussions of Leonid Chupiatov's icon of the Pokrov, or Protecting Veil (fig. 1). They rightly quote from the following passage in Dmitry Likhachev's memoirs, dealing with the desperate winter of 1941-42 during the Leningrad blockade. In apartments without heat, light, or telephone the city's trapped inhabitants suffered bombardment and starvation.

The artist Chupiatov and his wife died of hunger. As he was dying, he sketched and painted. When he ran out of canvas he painted on plywood and cardboard. He was an artist with "left" leanings, from an old aristocratic family; the Anichkovs knew him. The Anichkovs handed on to us two sketches that he painted before he died: an apocalyptic angel with red countenance, full of quiet wrath at the depravity of the evil-doers, and a Savior—with something of the look of the starving Leningraders in the form of his head with outsized forehead. His best painting the Anichkovs kept: a dark Leningrad courtyard like a well, dark windows falling away downward, without a single light in them. Death has triumphed over life there, though life may still be present, but just too weak to kindle a smoky siege-lamp. Over this courtyard, against the background of a dark night-sky is the veil of the Mother of God. She has bent her head, looking down in horror as if seeing everything that is happening in those dark Leningrad apartments, and she has spread out her raiment. On it is represented an Old Russian church (perhaps the Church of the Protecting Veil on the Nerl—the first Church of the Protecting Veil). The heavens have parted and the dying have seen God. This painting must not be lost. The soul of the blockade is reflected in it more than anywhere else.[2]

This is a stirring tribute from a siege survivor and eminent scholar of Old Russian culture. It was written in 1957, coinciding with the post-Stalinist Thaw and the

250th anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg (celebrated four years late). That year, exhibits covering the siege reopened in the city history museum, after being suppressed and dispersed when the original siege museum was closed in 1949.[3] A black-and-white reproduction of the icon was published in the posthumous edition of Likhachev's memoirs, and, miraculously, the painting itself did survive, as discussed later in this essay. However, Chupiatov (1890–1941/2) remains a little-known artist. The corpus of his work was not brought to light and rediscovered until the 1970s, and a retrospective exhibition of his paintings took place only in 2013.[4] But the icon of the Protecting Veil has been seen as one of his most notable creations.[5] It deserves a more developed interpretation than Likhachev could give it, first for what it offers the viewer directly, and second for its artistic and historical context, treated in that order below.

Chupiatov's intentions in creating the Protecting Veil are unknown, so it may equally well be called an icon or a religious painting. To some it will read as a modern icon, since it is certainly informed by iconographical typology. Others will prefer to see it as a religious painting conceived outside the practice of image veneration. Chupiatov's active interest in iconography went back at least to his participation in the 1918 expedition which his teacher, the painter Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, organized for his students to Novgorod, where they took measurements of ancient churches and sketched from frescoes and icons.[6] Chupiatov spent other periods in Novgorod and also several years working in Kiev during the 1920s. No doubt he was familiar with those of Petrov-Vodkin's works situated on the fluid boundary between icon-creation and easel painting, works sometimes termed "icon-paintings," such as the well-known *Petrograd Madonna* (1920).[7] Chupiatov was by no means a specialist in religious themes, however, and often found work not only in painting, but in the theater arts and in film.[8] He buttressed his artistic endeavors with scientific pursuits, studying physics and optics.[9] When Chupiatov turned to religious subjects, he brought his own experimental approach to bear, "both following the iconography and diverging from it, treating canonical subjects in a modernistic way [...] intensely feeling and experiencing his times."[10] Thus Chupiatov's icon of the Protecting Veil stands at the intersection of the old and the new.

The present article, though not comprehensive, is the first essay devoted specifically to Chupiatov's religious works. It also represents a step towards finally acknowledging the presence of the religious image in the artistic response to the Leningrad siege. As Vera Shevzov has written, icons in Russia could serve as "carriers of collective memories," becoming "deeper cultural resources," and helping the population to "make sense of their fate."[11]

Chupiatov's Icon of the Protecting Veil: Tradition and Transformation

To gauge what makes Chupiatov's modern and personal treatment of his theme unique, it is useful to establish its original context and customary pictorial handling. The traditional icon of the Pokrov of the Mother of God has no surviving Byzantine prototypes and is usually considered particular to Russia. It has its own Russian feast day—October 14 (October 1 Old Style) —and its own founding legend, recounted in the tenth-century life of Saint Andrew the Holy Fool and anchoring it in the Byzantine past. As the story goes, the population of Constantinople gathered for the all-night vigil in the Church of Saint Mary of Blachernae, home to the holy relic of the Virgin's robe. There they were said to have been vouchsafed a vision of the Mother of God. She knelt at the altar, praying fervently, shedding tears and supplicating God on their behalf. Then she spread her luminous veil over them, assuring them of her divine protection.[12] The "pokrov" or covering is the symbol of her intercession. Thus the Pokrov icon becomes a palladium or safeguarding image.

There are two common types of icons of the Bogomater of the Protecting Veil.[13] In one type the Mother of God stands on a cloud amidst the church while the veil is held aloft above her head and stretched over the scene by two flanking angels. In the other she herself stands and proffers the veil, draped over her arms, which are outstretched above the waist as if in the orans style of prayer. The veil generally describes an arc falling across her body, visually balancing her head and its nimbus. In the second type of image, the Bogomater may appear alone, in an architectural setting or against a plain ground, but is often accompanied by many other figures, who enact the historical legend or receive her protection. Saint Andrew the Holy Fool is sometimes pointing to the vision above to alert bystanders.[14] The veil held aloft by angels is usually red (fig. 2), while the one held by the Bogomater is generally white and may display a central cross or crosses (fig. 3). In either case, her figure typically faces the viewer to offer protection and invite prayer.

It is immediately evident that Chupiatov's image transmits the essential of the iconic tradition: the figure of the Mother of God with her veil. With its representation of a devastated city in the background, it also references the time-honored situation of a military siege warded off by the intervention of the Theotokos.[15] However, Chupiatov's version uses neither accepted position of the veil. Instead, the Bogomater is shown as if in the process of removing the veil from her head, or perhaps holding it there aloft in an undulating wave, like a banner. Her hands are poised above her head in a gesture which expresses fervent

Fig. 2 Pokrov icon, ca. 1401–1425, Novgorod. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery (photo: Tretyakov Gallery from Wikimedia Commons, artwork in the public domain).

Fig. 3 Pokrov icon, eighteenth–nineteenth century, tempera on wood, gilding. Olsztyn, Museum of Warmia and Masuria (photo: Andrzej Otrębski from Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of CC BY-SA 3.0 - https://creative-commons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en)

prayer, but also might be interpreted as lamentation. Similar gestures of both arms uplifted are found in icons of the Entombment, depicting the intense grief of Mary Magdalene (fig. 4).

The Old Russian and folkloric lament unhappily proved its vitality during World War II when so many cities in Russia were destroyed. Likhachev records

how refugees returning to a devastated Novgorod fell to the ground, crying out, "O our lovely Novgorod, what have they done to thee? What then is left of thee?" (*Novogorod ty nash prekrasnyi, chto zhe s toboi sdelali? Chto zhe ot tebia ostalosia?*)[16]

In addition to presenting an action *in medias res* rather than its result, Chupiatov's Bogomater also renounces the calm security of the traditional icon of the

Fig. 4. **The Entombment**, late fourteenth century, tempera on wood, 90 × 63 cm. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery, inv. 12041 (photo: Tretyakov Gallery from Wikimedia Commons, artwork in the public domain)

Pokrov. One of the comforts offered by the usual iconic image is the peace and composure of the Bogomater as she offers her protecting veil in a time of turmoil. In Chupiatov's version, even the Holy Mother seems to have been shaken from her serenity during the blockade. Looking down and away, she appears troubled. She participates in the drama: her bent head and fixed downward gaze shift the focus to the invisible population of the suffering city. Though Likhachev remembered the background only as a dark night-sky, in fact its ruddy color suggests clouds reflecting a fiery glow, that is, the city under bombardment. The hope offered to the viewer is mainly concentrated in the colors of the painting, where the traditional red-and-blue combination of Mary's robes is replaced by a luminous palette of white and gold. Slavonic versions of the vision of Saint Andrew the Holy Fool relate that the Theotokos solemnly removed her great and fearsome veil, which flashed "like lightning," or shone "like the sun," or like "precious gold and silver" (*iliktr*).[17] In Chupiatov's painting the shining figure of the Bogomater looms large over the dark cityscape, in simple, monumental drapery. The drapery's outside edges, of vaguely Byzantine form, echo the broken, angular shapes of the buildings, which have rectangular voids instead of windows, inscribing the Bogomater into the city which she protects. These voids may well represent the emptiness of the blockade apartments where no living tenants remain, known as the "*vymorochnye kvartiry*." Yet the generous curves of Mary's mantle and the circle of her nimbus, gold like the sun, rejoice the eye.

The blockade was often described as an encirclement or a "ring" constricting the city (*blokadnoe kol'tso*). In the late months of 1941, evacuation was virtually impossible. But in his description of Chupiatov's painting Likhachev writes of another deliverance, accessible to the faithful: "The heavens have parted and the dying have seen God." Chupiatov's image contrasts the brightly-lit divine figure of Mary reaching high into the sky with the inert framing wings of the dark buildings. Likhachev identifies the setting as a Leningrad courtyard, but it is also possible to see the cityscape below as a ring curving around behind the Marian figure. Chupiatov's treatment of the background makes the usually unstated siege situation specific and concrete. The Bogomater is foregrounded against the city, abiding with the unseen inhabitants and embodying her traditional function of protectress in war. Her immense figure towers over the miniaturized cityscape, rising to solitary heights without any visible footing, in an image of transcendence. She inhabits a space bigger than the "real" world but just next to it. The Mother of God here embodies the attributes of the Slavonic Marian Akathist hymn which hails her as a *stolp* and *stena*, a pillar and defensive wall: "unshakeable pillar of the Church," and "impregnable wall of the Kingdom."[18]

The center of the veil resting on the Bogomater's forehead displays a gold cross.

Fig. 5 **Nurse with Cross on Headdress in Leningrad Soldiers' Ward** (detail), 1942 (photo: N. N. Shatalov; image from *Sestry miloserdiia Rossii* [St. Petersburg: Liki Rossii, 2005])

Fig. 6 N. D. Alekseev, **In the Field Hospital,** 55.8 x 40.6 cm (Moscow: Tipolitografiia Chelnokova, 1914/1916?) Poster collection, RU/SU 32, Hoover Institution Archives

This would be traditional for one way of representing the Pokrov veil, though not always for the maphorion of Mary, which is commonly marked by a star in that position. Chupiatov painted it with the star in other renditions of the Theotokos (Bogomater, 1941) (see fig. 7). To a modern viewer, the central cross might evoke the image of the "sisters of mercy," as Russian nurses were originally called, whose visual image would have been familiar to Chupiatov (fig, 5, fig. 6). During the blockade he worked as an artist for the Institute of Blood Transfusion, which served the state's need for patriotic donors.[19] The Red Cross sent 1,800 of its members to the Institute in the first months of the war. [20] Large sums were regularly allocated by the few remaining Leningrad churches specifically to the Red Cross.[21] In fact, the uniform of Soviet nurses in WWII could still include the cross, not only in the pectoral position but also on the headdress. Thus the divine-mother figure in Chupiatov's icon also suggests a compassionate sister of mercy.

Russian nursing had religious roots before being professionalized, and one prominent religious nursing community in St. Petersburg had been the Pokrovskaia obshchina or Sisterhood of the Protecting Veil. Nurses there took vows similar to lay-sisters. Their garb was blessed before investiture and included a pectoral cross with an icon of the Protecting Veil on its face. So the nurses wore a bodily image of the Pokrov.[22] Chupiatov's Bogomater also wears an image of the

Pokrov in the place of a pectoral cross, but one of a different kind, an architectural image.

In fact, one of the most striking aspects of this modern icon is the image of the Church of the Pokrov, superimposed upon the image of the Bogomater of the Protecting Veil, simultaneously reinforcing and complicating the message. There would seem to be no visual precedent for the representation of a church on the garments of the Mother of God.[23] It is like an inversion of the original story of the icon: instead of a vision of Mary with her veil, as seen in a church, we are shown a vision of a church upon the mantle of Mary. Looking closely, it emerges that this church is not imprinted on the fabric of the mantle, but is visible through and under its folds, as if projected from within. That is, this church, the Church of the Pokrov, is immanent to Mary and rests near her heart. It occupies the actual center of the painting. This makes sense theologically, since Mary's womb was the house of God, and the Akathist hymn addresses her as an "incarnate temple."[24]

The church occupies a position in the painting similar to that of the Christ medallion in the icon of the Sign (*Znamenie*). By analogy, this church is a sign to the believer; certainly another sign of Mary's protection. Though Likhachev may be right in seeing the building specifically as the Church of the Pokrov, it is also possible to generalize from the plain, almost archaic form of the structure. There had been a dozen churches of the Intercession in St. Petersburg, many specially dedicated to those needing protection, like orphans. But they all had been destroyed by the militant official atheism of the 1920s and 30s, together with countless other Russian Orthodox churches of every description.[25] The church as an institution and religious collective was itself in a state of permanent siege and apparently dying. The Bogomater of Chupiatov's icon may reveal to the believer a hidden image—a sign—of "the Church." The Old Russian church represents the affirmation of the long heritage of the Russian community of belief, from which the Bogomater's protection stems. This church is still alive: in front of the harmonious white building, whose color is already an eloquent contrast to the bleak cityscape, lies a patch of green grass. Projected on the conventionally flattened image of the Bogomater, the church stands out for its three-dimensionality, inviting the viewer into its reality. The dying artist has painted an icon within an icon. Just as precious as the preservation of the lives of his compatriots is the preservation of their cultural and spiritual heritage. Mary extends her protection over the church itself. It seems appropriate that the "Blockade Church," erected in today's St. Petersburg as a memorial on the site of mass burials from the siege, is a simple church of one dome, not unlike the image in Chupiatov's icon.[26]

Chupiatov's Icon of the Protecting Veil in its Defining Context

The superimposed ideogram, or pictogram, of the church acts as a visual riddle in the icon of the Pokrov. Chupiatov used a different superimposition of image in another Marian icon painted the same year, this time not on canvas but on cardboard, his *Bogomater* (fig. 7).

This picture has a static, frontal presentation and an austere character, deriving from hieratic Byzantine icons. But it goes beyond their grave pathos; Chupiatov's figures seem frozen and transfixed. Here the Mother of God and the Christ Child do not relate to each other by any gesture or posture, unlike the holy pair in other Marian icons such as the Eleusa type. Though their pose is frontal, they do not so much engage the viewer as

Fig. 7 Leonid Chupiatov, **Bogomater,** 1941, oil on plywood, 111.5 x 102 cm. Moscow, private collection (image from Rakurs Chupiatova, ed. Tat'iana Leont'eva [St. Petersburg: Petronii, 2013])

stare at some unfathomable horror, their eyes wide and round, their lips pressed shut. The riddle of this horror is contained in the image projected on the pupils of the Bogomater. The viewer cannot see into her eyes and access the icon for prayer, because the sight of the Divine Mother is blocked by the reflection of the apocalypse visited on Leningrad in the form of a tiny window frame, knocked askew and giving onto a scene of fire and ice. The center of the window frame suggests a broken-off cross. The scene may specifically allude to the immense fire caused by the Nazi bombing of Leningrad's main food warehouse on September 8, 1941, often understood as a terrible omen of starvation.[27] How does this miniature window frame come to be projected onto the eyes of the Bogomater? Perhaps Mary sits looking into a window placed where the viewer is standing, one which reflects back, showing the city in flames. (Such a reading is not excluded, considering Chupiatov's interest in what he called the "law of relative beholding.")[28] More likely, what the Holy Mother sees is a conceptual image made visible, manifesting the idea of the city's catastrophe. The color of the vivid, red flames there is picked up in the enormous red halo around Mary's head and the red shirt of the Christ Child. The critic Vladimir Perts interprets the flames in the superimposed window as flashing back from the Bogomater's eyes. In his view this is a "militant" image.[29] Yet the mother and child look stunned and exhausted, as seen in the prominent dark circles around the eyes of the Mother of God and the almost blank look of the Christ Child. As in the Pokrov icon, the holy ones themselves seem overwhelmed by the tragedy which they witness, and the religious image does not offer the traditional sense of comfort and security. On the other hand, the viewer sees the divine personage

of Mary as visibly marked by the suffering of the blockade. The Bogomater, with spiritual sight, now looks through the eyes of a Leningrader. Her attitude might best be described as immovable in the face of horror. It is, of course, possible that Chupiatov modeled his iconographical faces on the visages of the starving Leningraders, whose look of stupor has often been described in the literature about the blockade.[30]

The window reflected in Mary's eyes is askew, as if life has been knocked off its foundations. Earlier in his career Chupiatov had experimented with rendering architectural elements, like windows or staircases, on eccentric axes, expressing dynamic points of view and emotional intensity.[31] In her well-known blockade memoir, Lidiia Ginzburg describes how the siege changed the Leningraders' perception of the components of their houses. "There was a new relationship to houses. Every building was now both a defense and a threat. People counted the floors—two ways—how many floors might defend them and how many might fall down on them. We learned the volumes, the proportions and the materials of the buildings."[32] "It turned out that staircases really did hang in the air [. . .] Throwing back his head, a person measured the length of the staircase rearing up, a staircase up which, by his own will, with his own body, he would have to carry the water that crushed him with its weight like a stone."[33] For Chupiatov as well, a window that is askew acquires a new, existential meaning during the blockade.

As we have begun to appreciate, Chupiatov's icon of the Protecting Veil arose as part of a group of religious paintings which he created during the terrible blockade winter of 1941-42. This group included the Bogomater just discussed and at least two other subjects: The Wrathful Angel, in the iconic vein, and a biblical theme, Temptation, or Forty Days in the Desert. It is uncertain if Chupiatov himself titled these paintings or if they have been named by others. For example, Likhachev refers to The Bogomater of the Protecting Veil as The Pokrov of the Bogomater over the Dying City (nad umiraiushchim gorodom), but the 2013 exhibition catalog labels the painting more neutrally as The Pokrov of the Bogomater over the Besieged City (nad osazhdennym gorodom).

The red countenance of Chupiatov's Wrathful Angel is indeed very expressive, filling most of the picture space in a close-up (fig. 8). The painting is quite small, however—about half the size of the Marian subjects. Strong white highlights are essential to the dramatic effect, and the red and white scheme harks back to the tradition of frescoes by Theophanes the Greek, most memorably in the Church of the Transfiguration on Ilin Street in Novgorod (Spas na Il'ine), which Chupiatov must have known from his stays in that city (fig. 9).

Fig. 8 Leonid Chupiatov, **Wrathful Angel**, 1941, oil on plywood, 48 x 48 cm. Private collection (image from *Rakurs Chupiatova,* ed. Tat'iana Leont'eva [St. Petersburg: Petronii, 2013])

Fig. 9 Feofan Grek, **The Trinity**, 1378, detail of fresco in the Church of the Transfiguration on Ilin Street, Novgorod (photo: anonymous from Wikimedia Commons, artwork in the public domain)

Chupiatov's youthful angel has a noble aspect, despite the wrath ascribed to him, and a powerful energy radiates from his nimbus. If Likhachev is right that this is an angel of the Apocalypse, such angels have many roles there. An angel stands behind the inspiration for the entire book of Revelation, since God sends one to Saint John to reveal everything that will soon come to pass (Revelation 1:1). "And I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things" (22:8). "I, Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches" (22:16). Early on in Revelation we read, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches …" (Revelation 1:20). John writes, for example, a message for the angel of the Church of Smyrna, "Be thou faithful unto death" (2:10). "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore and repent" (3:19).[34] So the message of Chupiatov's angel remains open for interpretation. Though the Day of Wrath is certainly announced in Revelation, the book also prophesies the coming of a new earth.

The large, uncompleted painting, *Temptation, or Forty Days in the Desert* is supposed to have been on Chupiatov's easel when he died (fig. 10).[35] In its unfinished state

Fig. 10 Leonid Chupiatov, **Temptation, or Forty Days in the Desert** (unfinished), 1941, oil on plywood, 110.5 x 110.5 cm. Collection of Oleg Loginov (image from *Rakurs Chupiatova,* ed. Tat'iana Leont'eva [St. Petersburg: Petronii, 2013])

the picture has a blurry, almost hallucinatory quality. It demonstrates Chupiatov's familiarity not only with iconographic tradition, but also with works like Aleksandr Ivanov's biblical sketches.

No doubt the painting was inspired by the circumstances of the blockade—the trials of the Leningraders in their desolate city over many long months. The Gospels tell how for forty days Christ wandered through the desert, fasting, and was tempted three times by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). First the devil challenges Jesus to still his hunger by turning stones into bread, but Christ replies, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'" Surely this passage spoke to the starving religious artist, suffering together with his city, and gave rise to an image which attested to the overcoming of the temptations of Christ through divine power. Next, the devil suggests that Christ should presumptuously cast himself down from the heights to be saved by angels, and finally that he should fall down and worship Satan in exchange for the kingdoms of this world. Upon which Christ replies, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," and then "Get thee hence, Satan." No one particular temptation is referenced in the painting, which shows the cunning Satan as a sprawling, golden dragon at the feet of Christ. Christ stands as if conversation with him. His resistance to temptation is expressed in a blue aura streaming down from on high through his nimbus, which also shoots flames upward, in answer to the demon. Christ's hands, too, seem to speak: his left hand is extended palm up, in a gesture of prayer or appeal to God, while his right hand is raised to ward off Satan ("Get thee hence"). Yet the right hand could be seen, paradoxically, as blessing Satan. It brings to mind the enigmatic moment in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* when Christ does not answer the Grand Inquisitor—who boasts of the church's misplaced power to seduce the benighted world with bread, power, and riches—but instead silently kisses him. Much of Chupiatov's painting is done in tones of brown, rendering desert colors. Rows of dark, menacing figures loom out of the background, with abstract, totemic heads, perhaps idols or psychological monsters. They point up the humanity of the graceful Christ figure, who seems to have walked past them and eluded their grasp, making his way out of the picture space. The place where he once paused his step shows traces of the divine light, shed against the dark backdrop of the monsters.

An apocalyptic context, a context which challenges even divine compassion and saving grace, one which recapitulates the forty days of Christ in the desert— such is the immediate context of Chupiatov's icon of the Protecting Veil, as we see it in his artistic work from the winter of 1941–42. But the ownership history of the painting of the Pokrov yields additional clues to its wider religious-phil-

osophical and sociological context. Likhachev wrote in his memoirs, "the Anich-kovs knew him [Chupiatov]" and mentioned receiving some of Chupiatov's sketches from them. The Anichkovs are said to have kept the icon of the Pokrov, whose fate troubles Likhachev. These statements require to be analyzed, because they lead into the milieu which valued and transmitted the icon, and one in which the artist was a known quantity.[36]

Chupiatov was understandably worried about the fate of his work as he began to realize that he would not survive. Appealing for help from a fellow artist in early December 1941 he wrote, "You know the situation of our native land and all of us now. I will die here, my family, too; that is our decision . . . I am perish-ing as an artist, and all my paintings along with me, created sincerely, with no thought of commercial gain (*chestno, beskorystno*) . . . ."[37] Accounts differ about what occurred after the artist's death. Perhaps his apartment was bombed and many paintings burned, though some were found at a neighbor's after the war. Perhaps his brother went to the apartment and took some canvases. Perhaps some of them were given to the Hermitage and the Russian Museum but then handed over to the brother in 1947 and stored, rolled up in his barn until the late 1960s.[38] In the early 1970s the intrepid cultural detective Leonid N. Chert-kov helped locate and collect Chupiatov's work, introducing it to the art critic Vladimir Perts.[39]

But what of the Anichkovs, who became the guardians of some of Chupiatov's paintings? Who were they, what was their place in the cultural life of Lenin-grad, and what was the basis of their relationship to Likhachev? Likhachev is referring to Igor Evgenievich Anichkov, a major linguist and unpublished religious-philosophical writer, who considered the latter profession to be his real calling in life.[40] Likhachev was picked up by the secret police in 1928 and given a five-year term at the Solovki labor camp in part for belonging to a reli-gious circle, the Brotherhood of Saint Seraphim of Sarov. Another strike against him was his half-jesting defense of the pre-revolutionary old orthography at another Leningrad group, the "Cosmic Academy of Sciences." In it the young Likhachev argued against the Soviet alphabet reform by "the powers of the Antichrist," who also decreed that the name of God shall not be capitalized.[41] Anichkov, who had given a talk at the Brotherhood of Saint Seraphim entitled, "Russia and the Antichrist," also received a five-year term.[42] While at Solovki, Anichkov and Likhachev did not fraternize extensively, since they were placed in different brigades. But both of them were Josephites. That is, they rejected the officially sanctioned Sergian branch of Russian Orthodoxy, which had rec-ognized the legitimacy of the Soviet state, and adhered instead to the dissenting Josephite movement, which in their eyes represented the true church.[43] Infor-

mal services were held at the camp by priests who themselves had been exiled for their non-conformist beliefs. In heady discussions, Likhachev sometimes found himself transported back to the "atmosphere of the 'Resurrection' circle or the Volfila" (Free Philosophical Association, 1919–1924), from the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance of the turn of the twentieth century.[44] It was at the camp that Likhachev also received a deeper appreciation for Old Russian art and iconography while working with figures like the famous restorer and critic A. I. Anisimov in the Solovki Museum and cathedrals, where Likhachev inventoried ancient icons.[45]

Igor Anichkov was released at the end of his original term but immediately sentenced to another. He returned to Leningrad in 1938, in time for the purges, the war, and the blockade. He was sent out of the city in September of 1941, while his wife remained behind.[46] This explains the references to "the Anichkovs," plural, as owning paintings by Chupiatov. Anichkov and his wife were sincere Orthodox believers and observed many domestic religious rituals, like grace before meals. So it is obvious that Chupiatov's accomplished religious paintings would have found an audience in their house, as well as with Likhachev, who had shared so many experiences with Anichkov. Iconographical innovations and departures from tradition would also have been accepted in a milieu with ties back to the unorthodox religious currents of the Russian Symbolist era. After all, in his memoirs, Likhachev mentions hearing kindred religious-philosophical debates at the Solovki labor camp, while the paper for which Anichkov was arrested, "Russia and the Antichrist," expressed the following sentiments:

> I am awaiting a new religion which will include communism among its components but which will be the fulfillment of Christianity and not its abolition, as Christianity represented the fulfillment and not the abolition of the religion of the Old Testament. It will be a third force coming as a synthesis after the thesis of Christianity and the antithesis of Leninism. That is what Aleksandr Blok thought, who often visited my father's house and whom I knew personally.[47]

After the 1930s, Orthodox believers of the Josephite persuasion remained targets of repression by both church and state and tended to merge with the underground "catacomb" church.[48]

Though the Anichkovs were likely responsible for saving Chupiatov's *Bogomater of the Protecting Veil* after the siege of Leningrad, Anichkov's appreciation for Chupiatov's work was not limited to his icons. When in need of funds in the 1960s, Anichkov sold the artist's important *White Still Life* to the Russian

Museum, turning down a much higher offer from a private collector.[49] Anichkov had returned to Leningrad in 1953, after the death of Stalin. In the meantime, his wife had moved into a cramped communal apartment, leaving some of their things in the old place. So it is unclear whether the Chupiatov icon was still in their possession by the 1960s, when Anichkov devoted himself to his unpublished theological and religious-philosophical works. Igor Anichkov died in 1978, his wife in 1974, just as Chupiatov was beginning to be rediscovered. According to the 2013 catalog of the retrospective exhibition, the icon of the Protecting Veil is currently in an unspecified private collection (144).

Why might Chupiatov have had connections with the Anichkovs, for his part? Vladimir Perts has introduced a valuable document about Chupiatov's religious beliefs and artistic interests from the diary of Vsevolod Voinov, a Soviet artist and art historian. Here Voinov paraphrases a conversation with Chupiatov which took place in August of 1923:

> He is attracted to religious painting, to frescoes and mosaics, which he wants to take up seriously. He has been greatly persecuted for his religious compositions. Their basis is his admiration and amazement at icon painting as an artist. As he says, the icon is one of the greatest wonders of art. You feel a deep conviction in his words, even the kind of fanaticism that is willing to be burned at the stake.[50]

This conversation took place in Leningrad before Chupiatov's period in Kiev (1926-28), when a person who knew him there recalled seeing large canvases of his with "some kind of fantastic battles."[51] The allegation of "persecution" might seem too strong, since evidently Chupiatov was never arrested or sent to the camps. However, taken in conjunction with his strong interest in the figure of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, we may understand it as an expression of fierce resistance to the cultural devastation of the Soviet anti-religious campaigns, at the very least.

The holy elder Seraphim of Sarov lived from 1754 to 1833. In 1903 he became one of the last saints canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church before the revolution, a status for which he was actively championed by Tsar Nicholas II. He was widely beloved, and his example proved to the faithful that holiness could survive into modern times. In 1927, the saint's monastery was closed by the Soviet state, his relics were removed, exposed for anti-religious purposes, and secretly taken to the basement of the Kazan cathedral in Leningrad, which had been transformed into a Museum of Atheism.[52] Likhachev describes a secret service for Saint Seraphim in 1927 which inspired a special feeling of

devotion.[53] The saint's relics were not restored to holy ground until 1991, this time at the Diveevo convent near Sarov, where the nuns had been his spiritual daughters.[54]

Saint Seraphim of Sarov is portrayed in several Chupiatov paintings from the 1920s and 30s which form part of the background for his religious works of 1941. The year 1922 was marked by an aggressive state campaign of confiscation of church valuables, leading to many protests. The cult of relics was also a particular object of official contempt.[55] A study of Chupiatov's from that year known as *Angels* may possibly show the deceased saint being taken up to heaven by two winged messengers (fig. 11). But more likely it illustrates a moment from the legend known as "the Great Secret of Diveevo." This states that Seraphim would die, be resurrected to preach repentance, and find rest at last at the convent.[56]

Fig. 11 Leonid Chupiatov, **Angels**, 1922, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 70.5 cm (photo: courtesy of MacDougall Arts Ltd.)

Fig. 12 Leonid Chupiatov, **Saint Seraphim of Sarov**, 1920s–1930s, oil on canvas, 72 x 135 cm. Collection of Valentina Shuster (image from *Rakurs Chupiatova*, ed. Tat'iana Leont'eva [St. Petersburg: Petronii, 2013])

In this canvas, dynamically elongated fiery angels swoop down on a winter's night to take up Saint Seraphim, shown as if rising bodily from the grave. The saint grasps the Eastern Orthodox cross, which probably marked his spot in the cemetery and symbolizes his holiness and faithfulness unto death. A substantial Russian church, located in the background outside the cemetery, forms the apex of the composition. Atop its single dome, a tall, steady flame burns in place of the accustomed cross, as if the church stands as a candle of faith in the cold winter night. Candles held a special place in the pious practices of the saint, and were continually burning in his cell. "He used to compare human life to a lighted candle. 'The wax symbolizes faith, the wick hope and the flame is love which joins all together.'"[57] Already, as in Chupiatov's Bogomater of the Protecting Veil, the motif of a church occupies the center of the composition.

The venerable elder is also prominently represented in an image from the 2013 exhibition catalog of Chupiatov's work (fig. 12). Here he is depicted in one of the typical episodes of his iconography: stooped after a brutal attack by

brigands, but undeterred, he makes his way through the Sarov forest towards his hermitage.[58] Chupiatov renders the forest as a warm autumnal landscape and takes an elevated viewpoint, making the length of the road travelled visible, which suggests that the saint's symbolic path is nearing its end. His faithful figure engages and welcomes the viewer.

It is possible that Chupiatov visited the monastery at Sarov before its despoiling by the state in 1927. It was a popular place of pilgrimage. There he could have seen the chapel erected over the saint's tomb, where an image showing Serafim walking towards his hermitage was hung directly under an icon of the Pokrov, embodying the special protection of the Bogomater, to whom the holy elder was devoted (fig. 13). This protection also encompassed the Diveevo convent which the saint envisioned would enlarge her cult. Thus, the Pokrov added to the aura surrounding Saint Seraphim and would have been held dear by those, like Chupiatov, who honored his memory, in spite of baneful state policies.

Fig. 13 Chapel at Tomb of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, photograph from 1903 (image from *Letopis' Serafimo-Diveevskogo monastyria*, 2nd ed. [St. Petersburg: Tip. M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1903])

Perts comments that the fantastic battles which Chupiatov is supposed to have painted in the 1920s might have been inspired by the apocalyptic prophecies attributed to Saint Seraphim. The saint told of a time "when Antichrist would come and snatch crosses from churches and destroy monasteries. It will be a time of such distress as never has been seen since the beginning of the world; the angels of God will hardly have time to gather up the souls from the earth."[59] Needless to say, this prediction fit the Soviet experience of militant state atheism all too well. In 1928, when Likhachev, Anichkov and others were swept up in the arrest of the Leningrad members of the Brotherhood of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, Chupiatov was working at a distance, in Kiev. Perts is surely correct that Chupiatov must have been somehow in the orbit of religious-philosophical seekers akin to the Brotherhood, though not necessarily identical to it. Another apocalyptic prophecy attributed to Saint Seraphim, one of "tribulation followed by triumph," was preserved in the archive of the theologian Pavel Florensky, for example.[60] As Perts points out, it was in 1928 that Chupiatov painted the Self-Immolation of the Narodovolka (fig. 14).

Here a female fighter for the "People's Freedom" party has set herself on fire to protest harsh tsarist penal conditions. Persecuted for

Fig. 14 Leonid Chupiatov, *Self-Immolation of the Narodovolka* (woman adherent of the "People's Freedom" Party), 1928, oil on canvas, 184 x 104 cm. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery (image from *Rakurs Chupiatova,* ed. Tat'iana Leont'eva [St. Petersburg: Petronii, 2013]

Fig. 15 Leningrad during the blockade, 1942, with Viktor Ivanov and Olga Burova's poster, **Death to the Child Killers!** (photo: ITAR-TASS News Agency / Alamy Stock Photo)

Fig. 16 Leningrad during the blockade, 1942, with Boris Kudoiarov's poster, **Soviet Soldier, Protect us!** Private archive (photo: https://russiainphoto.ru/photos/70001/)

her beliefs, she becomes a martyr of conscience. Despite its apparent political correctness in glorifying a revolutionary, the theme of radical intransigence here brings to mind the self-immolation of the Russian Old Believers. The analogy to Soviet reality is unmistakable, as is Chupiatov's anguished response. The dynamic image seems to surge upward together with the flames and skews off center. The striking visual motif of arms flung up in agony and consternation links the painting of the Narodovolka and her jailor with the expressive gesture of arms upraised in Chupiatov's 1941 *Bogomater of the Protecting Veil.*

In the 1930s, Chupiatov privately expressed particular attachment to his "mystical" (i.e. religious) paintings.61 Thus, it is no wonder that Chupiatov's Bogomater of the Protecting Veil found a home with the Anichkovs during the siege. The survival of this powerful image becomes comprehensible through the connections of a fragmented religious-philosophical confraternity. It would not be surprising if Chupiatov were buried in Leningrad's Serafimovskoe cemetery where 100,000 siege victims found rest, presided over by a small church dedicated to Saint Seraphim of Sarov. Fittingly, the church (built in 1906–07) contained a chapel dedicated to the Protecting Veil.62

Many memorable, symbolic images, popularly called "iconic," were created and invoked during the Leningrad siege in the course of the Great Patriotic War, as

World War II is known in Russia. These included secularized images of mother and child which were inevitably engraved upon the psyche of the Leningrad population and undoubtedly known to Chupiatov. "Death to the Child-Killers!" proclaimed the larger-than-life poster seen on Leningrad streets, showing a mother facing the viewer and bearing the body of her lifeless child, like a war-time Pietà (fig. 15). "Red Army fighter, protect us!" cried the woman in another poster photographed in the city, where the mother and her little one shrink melodramatically before a Nazi bayonet, recalling the biblical subject of the slaughter of the innocents (fig. 16).

These militant, secularized images were dominant. But there was also a need for true religious images if the blockade were to have a soul. The 1937 census had revealed that a surprising fifty-seven percent of the nation identified as believers, even after the religious repressions of the1920s and 30s, and the population flocked to the remaining Russian churches during the war.63 When, at the end of September 1941, German forces were stopped just short of Leningrad the legend sprang up that this was thanks to the intercession of heavenly powers.64 The recruiting anthem of the military was christened "Holy War." Nevertheless, despite the concessions which Stalin made to the official church for its support of the war effort, the Supreme Leader was far from calling for the Mother of God to extend her protecting veil over the land. In a now-famous speech, broadcast in November 1941 on the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, he invoked another palladium, saying instead, "May the unconquerable banner of the great Lenin o'erspread you! Onward to victory under the banner of Lenin!"65 Chupiatov's siege images have none of this militant, warlike tone, though iconographic tradition includes the Bogomater as an invincible general.66 If, as Likhachev thought, his icon of the Protecting Veil expresses the "soul of the siege," its spirit is one of suffering, compassion and steadfast faith.

Fig. 17 Motherland statue, **Rodina-Mat'**, 1960, Piskarevskoe cemetery, St. Petersburg (photo: Kulturnoe-nasledie.ru from Wikimedia Commons, artwork in the public domain)

The presence of the religious image in the artistic response to the Leningrad siege remains almost unacknowledged. Though several art exhibitions were mounted in the

city during the war, as early as January 2, 1942, their content was exclusively secular and topical.[67] In 1960, when the time came to commemorate the innumerable victims of the siege, a monumental statue of the Motherland was made the centerpiece of the Piskarevskoe memorial cemetery outside of Leningrad (fig. 17).

Facing the beholder from a height, before a wall inscribed with Olga Berggolts's plangent poetry, with great dignity the Motherland proffers a plaited garland of oak leaves, drooping under its own weight. This garland is a classical reference, deriving from the civic crown of Roman times. Originally this was a reward due to those who had saved a life in battle, while here it has become a general kind of solemn tribute.68 So there is nothing overtly religious in the image. Yet to those with wider cultural sensibilities, this figure of the Motherland recalls the abiding figure of the Bogomater holding in her outstretched arms the Protecting Veil.

Notes

All translations are the author's.

1 *Akafist of the Pokrov*: Ikos 9, www.orthlib.info/Akathist/05_Theotokos-Protection_ak_pokr.pdf.

2 Dmitrii Likhachev, "Ia vspominaiu," in *Kniga bespokoistv: Vospominaniia, stat'i, besedy* (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), 188. A posthumous 2006 edition reproduces the icon (p. 307), but a similar phrase about "seeing God" appears several paragraphs earlier and not in this passage: *Vospominaniia, razdum'ia, raboty raznykh let,* vol. 1 (Petersburg: Ars, 2006), 286–7. Two such phrases were present in the first publication of Likhachev's blockade memoirs ("Kak my ostalis' zhivy," *Neva*, 1991, no. 1: 21–2).

3 *St. Petersburg Encyclopedia*, "St. Petersburg Museum of History" http://www.encspb.ru/object/2804034289?lc=en and also "Leningrad Blockade and Defense Museum" http://www.encspb.ru/object/2804034308?lc=en.

4 See Vladimir Perts, "Khudozhnik-issledovatel'," *Tvorchestvo*, no. 5 (1982): 30–33. (This article is inaccurately footnoted in the 2013 catalog *Rakurs Chupiatova*.) Scattered comments on Chupiatov appear in *100 years of Russian art 1889–1989: From private collections in the USSR*, eds. David Elliott and Valery Dudakov (London: Lund Humphries, 1989), 12, 37, 47, 130. See John Milner, *A Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Artists 1420–1970* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1993), 113. See also Aleksandr Borovskii, "Leonid Chupiatov," and Vladimir Perts, publication and commentary to "Prilozhenie," both in *Rakurs Chupiatova. Katalog vystavki 25 oktiabria–22 dekabria 2013 goda*, ed. Tat'iana Leont'eva (St. Petersburg: Petronii, 2013), 8–50, 55–69, as well as Liudmila Shekhurina, "Khudozhnik-myslitel'," in *Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin i ego shkola*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Galeev Galereia, 2015), 158–61. Many sources say Chupiatov died in the winter of 1941, but Likhachev et al. put the date of death in the early months of 1942 (Anichkov, 22n36), and *100 years of Russian art* lists Chupiatov's dates as 1890–1942 (47).

5 See Shekhurina, "Khudozhnik-myslitel'," 161; Borovskii, "Leonid Chupiatov," 48–50, both citing Likhachev.

6 Shekhurina, "Khudozhnik-myslitel'," 158. She calls Chupiatov the "most faithful student" of Petrov-Vodkin's "science of seeing," though "not a blind follower." Chupiatov studied with Petrov-Vodkin in 1916–18 at the Zvantseva School of Drawing and Painting, following him to the Petrograd State Free Art Studios and participating in his group from 1918 to 1921, spending the summer of 1918 in Novgorod. At that time Chupiatov was already beginning to exhibit and teach on his own and "combined elements of Tatlin's constructivism with Petrov-Vodkin's 'spherical perspective'" (ibid.).

7 See Wendy Salmond on the idea of the "icon-painting" in Petrov-Vodkin in the essay "Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin's *1918 in Petrograd (The Petrograd Madonna)* and the Meaning of Mary in 1920," in *Framing Mary: The Mother of God in Modern, Revolutionary, and Post-Soviet Russian Culture,* eds. Amy Singleton Adams and Vera Shevzov (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2018), 165–72.

8 Borovskii, "Leonid Chupiatov," 26; Perts, "Prilozhenie," 61n2.

9 Shekhurina, "Khudozhnik-myslitel'," 159.

10 Borovskii, "Leonid Chupiatov," 4.

11 Vera Shevzov, "Scripting the Gaze: Liturgy, Homilies, and the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Late Imperial Russia," in *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia*, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Heather J. Coleman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 73, 80, 83.

12 Text in A. M. Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo v slavianskoi pis'mennosti* (Moscow: Azbukovnik, 2000), 398–400.

13 Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 151–2, and V. I. Antonova and N. E. Mneva, *Katalog drevnerusskoi zhivopisi. Opyt istoriko-khudozhestvennoi klassifikatsii*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963), 101–2.

14 Often the Pokrov theme in the upper part of the icon is combined with the miracle of Saint Roman the Melodist below: he recovers his lost voice upon singing his famous Christmas hymn to the Theotokos. This amalgamation was based on the fact that the Pokrov was celebrated on October 1 (Old Style), like the feast of Saint Roman the Melodist (*The Meaning of Icons,* 152).

15 On the siege context, see Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 37ff.

16 Likhachev, *Vospominaniia, razdum'ia, raboty raznykh let,* vol. 1, 246–7.

17 Moldovan, *Zhitie.* "Mafor eia, iako molniino vidinie imeia, ezhe na prechistem eia verse lezhashche, otvivshi ot sebe i prechistyma svoima rukama vzemshi, strashno zhe i veliko sushche, verkhu vsekh liudei prostre, stoiashchikh tu" (399, lines 5032–6, for variants see notes to line 5038).

18 *Akafist*, stanza XXIII, http://www.orthlib.info/Akathist/01_Great-Akathist-Theotokos_akafbogor.pdf.

19 Shekhurina, "Khudozhnik-myslitel'," 161.

20 *Ocherki istorii Leningrada,* vol. 5, *Period velikoi otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo Soiuza 1941–45*, ed. V. M. Koval'chuk (Leningrad: Nauka, 1967), 504.

21 Richard Bidlack and Nikta Lomagin, *The Leningrad Blockade 1941–44: A New Documentary History from Soviet Archives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 174–5, http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/stable/j.ctt5vm646.

22 On the religious roots of Russian nursing, see Laurie S. Stoff, *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More than Binding Men's Wounds* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 17-28. On the Petersburg Pokrovskaia obshchina see *Sestry miloserdiia Rossii* (Petersburg: Liki Rossii, 2005), 92–99, 341–3 (the sisterhood as recently renewed).

23 See *Architecture as Icon: Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art,* ed. Slododan Ćurčić and Evangelia Hadjitryphonos (New Haven: Yale University Press for Princeton University Art Museum, 2010), 3: "Such representations enjoyed a meaning and status equivalent to those of the saints depicted on icons as primary objects of religious veneration."

24 *Akafist*, stanza XXIII, "odushevlennyi khram."

25 On Petersburg churches and their destruction, see V. V. Antonov and A. V. Kobak, *Sviatyni Sankt-Peterburga: istoriko-tserkovnaia entsiklopediia v trekh tomakh*, 2 vols. (Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Chernysheva, 1994, 1996). Notable examples are Tserkov' Pokrova Presviatoi Bogoroditsy v Kolomne, closed in 1932 and razed in 1934: see vol. 1, no. 86, 209–11, and Tserkov' Pokrova Presviatoi Bogoroditsy Eparkhial'nogo Bratsva Presviatoi Bogoroditsy (Borovaia ulitsa, 50), closed in 1936: see vol. 1, no. 87, 213–4. Both were active centers of faith and charity. Also Tserkov' Pokrova Presviatoi Bogoroditsy pri Pokrovskoi obshchine sester miloserdiia, closed in the early 1920s: see vol. 2, no. 300, 256–8. All these churches were functioning during Chupiatov's formative years.

26 Khram Uspeniia Presvatoi Bogoroditsy na Maloi Okhte, dedicated 2001. Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad 1941–1995: Myths, Memories and Monuments* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 282–3.

27 Borovskii, "Leonid Chupiatov," 48.

28 Ibid., 36: "*zakon otnositel'nogo smotreniia.*"

29 Perts, "Prilozhenie," 65n5.

30 I thank one of my anonymous reviewers for this observation.

31 Chupiatov shares these spatial innovations with his teacher Petrov-Vodkin, as Wendy Salmond points out.

32 Lidiia Ginzburg, *Prokhodiashchie kharaktery: Proza voennykh let; Zapiski blokadnogo cheloveka*, ed. Emily van Baskirk and Andrei Zorin (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2011), 325.

33 Ibid., 319.

34 King James version; the Slavonic version does not appreciably vary. Angels multiply in the book of Revelation. There is the "angel ascending from the east" saying "hurt not the earth . . . till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads" (7:3); the famous seven angels with the seven trumpets (8); the angel "crying 'Babylon the Great is fallen'" (18:2); the angel with the keys to the bottomless pit who chains up Satan (20) etc.

35 Perts, "Prilozhenie," 65n5. The piece of plywood measures about 43 x 43 inches (110.5 x 110.5 cm).

36 According to Likhachev et al., Anichkov received Chupiatov's paintings "from the artist himself." See D. S. Likhachev, S. S. Zilitinkevich, V. P. Nedialkov, "I. E. Anichkov. Biograficheskii ocherk," in I. A. Anichkov, *Trudy po*

iazykoznaniiu, ed. V. P. Nedialkov (Petersburg: Nauka, 1997), 22.

37 Written to Mikhail Tsekhanovskii, a leading animator at Lenfilm, with whom Chupiatov had worked on "The Tale of the Silly Little Mouse" (*Skazka o glupom myshon'ke*) in 1940. Tsekhanovskii himself barely survived the siege. Borovskii, "Leonid Chupiatov," 50. Borovskii quotes the letter only in part. In saying this was their decision Chupiatov probably means that they have rejected evacuation. On Tsekhanovskii see Laura Pontieri, *Soviet Animation and the Thaw of the 1960s: Not Only for Children* (Herts: John Libby for Indiana University Press, 2012), 22ff.

38 Perts, "Prilozhenie," 68n2.

39 Ibid., 56, note. In 1942 a commission was sent out into the city to buy art from private persons for the museums, no doubt including artists' estates. Over eighty artists perished in the blockade. *Ocherki istorii Leningrada,* vol. 5, 634–5.

40 On Anichkov, see Likhachev, Zilitinkevich, and Nedialkov, "Biograficheskii ocherk," 5–48. Anichkov, 17.

41 On the Brotherhood, see Likhachev, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 1, 134–8. On the 1928 defense of the old orthography see 355–63.

42 Likhachev, Zilitinkevich, and Nedialkov, "Biograficheskii ocherk," 18–19.

43 On the church schisms, see Bidlack and Lomagin, *The Leningrad Blockade,* 180-82. On the attraction of the Josephites see Likhachev, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 1 (2006) 135–6, 207–8.

44 Likhachev, "Ia vspominaiu," 136–7.

45 Likhachev, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 1 (2006), 198.

46 Likhachev, Zilitinkevich, and Nedialkov, "Biograficheskii ocherk," 20, 22.

47 Ibid., 19n11.

48 M. V. Shkarovskii, "Religioznaia zhizn' Leningrada v gody voiny," *Leningradskaia epopeiia: Organizatsiia oborony i naselenie goroda* (Petersburg: St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 1995), 282.

49 Likhachev, Zilitinkevich, and Nedialkov, "Biograficheskii ocherk," 22.

50 Perts, "Prilozhenie," 65.

51 Perts, "Prilozhenie," 66, note.

52 See http://www.roadtoemmaus.net/back_issue_articles/RTE_14/Diveyevo_A_Pilgrims_Chronicle.pdf, 4.

53 Likhachev, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 1 (2006), 138.

54 http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2013/07/translation-of-holy-relics-of-saint.html, with period images.

55 Dimitry V. Pospielovsky, *Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions: Volume 2* of *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1988), 47ff, 19.

56 Sergei Nilus, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Palomnik, 2002), 756–7. Quoted in Richard Price, "The Canonization of St. Seraphim of Sarov: Piety, Prophecy and Politics in Late Imperial Russia," 9, http://publications. heythrop.ac.uk/1087/1/EHS.2009-10.Serafim.doc.

> "It was decreed by the Lord God that I should live for far more than a hundred years. But since by that time the bishops will have become so wicked that in their iniquity they will surpass the Greek bishops at the time of Theodosius the Younger, with the result that they will no longer even believe in the most important doctrine of the Christian faith, it is pleasing to God to take me, the wretched Serafim, for the time being from this transient life and afterwards to raise me up; and my resurrection will be like the resurrection of the seven youths in the cave of Okhlon in the days of Theodosius the Younger.
>
> Having revealed to me this great and dread mystery, the great starets informed me [Motovilov] that after his resurrection he will move from Sarov to Diveyevo and there begin preaching worldwide repentance. At this preaching, but still more at the miracle of resurrection, a great multitude of people will gather from all the ends of the earth [. . .] And when preaching repentance at Diveyevo, Father Serafim will uncover four relics there, and on uncovering them he will himself lie down among them. And then there will shortly come about the end of everything."

57 Valentine Zander, *St. Seraphim of Sarov,* trans. Sister Gabriel Anne (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), 112.

58 *Prepodobnyi Serafim Sarovskii: Agiografiia, pochitanie, ikonografiia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2004), 266ff., 422. On other images of the saint from the 1910s onward: 432–52.

59 Zander, *St. Seraphim of Sarov*, 34.

60 Price, "The Canonization of St. Seraphim of Sarov," 10.

61 Perts, "Prilozhenie," 69, reminiscences of Natalia Zavalishina.

62 http://www.saint-petersburg.com/cemeteries/serafimovskoe-cemetery/; http://www.ipetersburg.ru/cerkov-svyatogo-prepodobnogo-serafima-sarovskogo/; http://www.moi-slovari.ru/slovari/enc_spb/serafimovskoe-kladbishche.php. The artist Pavel Filonov was buried there in 1941.

63 On the church during the blockade see Bidlack and Lomagin, *The Leningrad Blockade,* 164–183; on the 1937 census, 165; on church attendance, 170.

64 Shkarovskii, "Religioznaia zhizn' Leningrada v gody voiny," 265–6.

65 November 7, 1941, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kkIJ9DuCE4. "*Pust' osenit vas nepobedimoe znamia velikogo Lenina*"; "*Pod znamenem Lenina vpered k pobede*." Many war posters illustrate this dictum, with Lenin's face or profile imprinted on an enormous banner.

66 On the Bogomater as general, see Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 66, 94. The chief Slavonic Marian Akafist begins, "*Vzbrannoi Voevode, pobeditel'naia*" (O most valiant commander, victorious).

67 A. Zemtsova, "Vystavki," in *Khudozhniki goroda fronta: Vospominaniia i dnevniki leningradskikh khudozhnikov* (Leningrad: Khudoznik RSFSR, 1973), 74–91.

68 "Corona civica," in William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London: John Murray, 1875), 360.

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The Hospitality of Abraham in the Work of Julia Stankova, Painter of Bulgarian Icons

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Abstract

This article seeks to make the work of the Bulgarian icon painter Julia Stankova better known to readers. It does so first by presenting her person, her trajectory, and her iconographical work. Then it offers an overview of her reflection on the relationships between the Bible and the icon. Finally, it analyzes a dozen icons that she has produced over the past twenty years on the theme of the Hospitality of Abraham as recounted in Genesis 18.

Keywords: Old Testament Trinity, Julia Stankova, Hospitality of Abraham.

After centuries of oblivion or misapprehension, Eastern Christian art, especially the art of the icon, was the object of a veritable rediscovery in the West during the twentieth century.[1] This rediscovery unfolded in several stages. The first was the shock felt in Russia upon the cleaning of Andrei Rublev's icon of the Old Testament Trinity in 1905 and the removal of its *riza* (metal cover). Then came the diffusion of Prince Eugene Troubetzkoy's writings[2] and the impact of artists such as Matisse traveling to Moscow (1911). Most influential of all was the constitution, in a number of European capitals, of Orthodox "parishes" around great figures driven from Russia after the Revolution of October 1917. This included, *inter alia*, the arrival of thinkers like Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925) and André Grabar (1896–1990) in Sofia,[3] Prague, and Athens, and of Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944), Vladimir Lossky (1903–58), Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), and iconographers like Fr. Gregory Krug (1908–69)[4] and Leonid Ouspensky (1902–87)[5] in Paris. But their presence

had a limited effect at the time; it would not reach a large number of Catholics until the sudden spread of the Charismatic Movement from 1972 onwards[6]—it is, incidentally, symptomatic that the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) hardly speaks of the icon at all.[7] And yet from this date onward the icon spread throughout Catholic churches, and all the more swiftly as "the mysticism of the white wall" that followed the Second World War emptied them to the point that believers no longer knew in which direction to turn when they prayed together. This was the time when reproductions or copies of icons in general and of Rublev's icon of the Trinity in particular were introduced, within a period of only a handful of years, into an incalculable number of Catholic sanctuaries. The greater availability of books on icons also played a role in this process, beginning in 1952 with *Der Sinn der Ikonen* (The Meaning of Icons), coauthored by Vladimir Lossky and Leonid Ouspensky.[8] Other works took up the baton, particularly in France. There were the works of Paul Evdokimov, Leonid Ouspensky, and Egon Sendler,[9] to cite just three. Christoph von Schönborn's book played an important role too. Published in 1976, it treated the theological foundations of the icon of Christ.[10]

But for Western citizens today—whether Christian or not, historian, art historian, sociologist of religion, or simply the cultivated dabbler—knowledge of the world of icons remains fragmentary. Many of these investigators more or less ignore everything that has happened in the study and painting of icons for the past few decades. Some biases continue to reign unchecked. Among those who have an admiring view of the history of European art—of its great strides and successive stylistic mutations—the art of the icon may seem entirely linked to immutable canons about its profound meaning (validated by the Church type after type), a meaning which moves beyond its technical fabrication and beyond the spirit that ought to preside therein. As a result, this art must remain forever fixed.[11] Not only does it seem to such observers impermeable to everything that makes up the development of art and that has driven the avant-gardes in the West, from Impressionism to Cubism to abstract art—and *a fortiori* since Marcel Duchamp. But indeed the gap between the two worlds, far from lessening, has actually widened. This is because theologian-historians linked to Orthodoxy, both those mentioned above and others more recently, denounce from the rooftops the real or putative derivations of western artists, "Christian artists" included. Among other reproaches we hear of "naturalism," "sensualism," "worldliness," "arbitrariness," and "subjectivism," while their more recent epigones unreservedly excoriate as "false icons"[12] every kind of pious image painted "after the manner of icons" but having not a single root in the tradition. Such images take up, for

instance, every sort of supposedly traditional subject (for example, the Holy Family) or more recent, non-canonized figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Dom Helder Camara. Here there is no small risk of construing a perfectly dualist idea of the situation of religious art inspired by Christianity: on one side you have Western art, which is supposedly "free" and innovative, and on the other Eastern art, which is perceived as "shackled."

And yet the art of the icon and the various currents of icon painting rooted in Byzantine and post-Byzantine tradition are far more complex. First of all, the icon's ability to do justice to regional sensibilities and to tolerate a certain amount of "inculturation" is in clear evidence over many centuries. This is especially evident since the fall of Constantinople in 1453 in many regions—from Armenia to Crete and from Russia[13] to Cyprus.[14] On the one hand, we can observe that, in recent times, there are trends in several Eastern European countries that campaign for a renewal of iconography—in Poland and in the Czech Republic, for example. Artists such as Anton Wollenek in Austria[15] and Jerzy Nowosielski in Poland[16] have acquired a reputation and a certain authority in this realm. In a completely different vein, which some might call illicit, we are witnessing the emergence of "divergent," "scandalous," even "desacralized" icons, such as those painted by Stelios Faitakis, an artist from Athens born in 1976. During November and December of 2018, a young Serbian who now lives in Hamburg, Nikola Sarić, displayed in a Paris art gallery a series of icons that were innovative (to put it mildly) from a stylistic point of view, but also in their subject matter—the Gospel parables, for instance.[17] Still elsewhere, especially in Eastern European countries and in the studios of iconographers working in the West under the guidance of Orthodox thinkers (we think of a mosaic artist such as Marie-Noëlle Garrigou in France, and of Bose and Seriate's studios in Italy), in a far less showy and more tranquil manner certain iconographers have begun to reflect fundamentally upon the danger presented by the very idea of a "canon" in this domain.

Such is the case of the Bulgarian icon painter Julia Stankova (b. 1954). This article seeks to make her better known to readers. It does so first by presenting her person, her trajectory, and her iconographical work. Then I offer an overview of her reflection on the relationships between the Bible and the icon. Finally, in order better to understand her ongoing evolution and her own vantage point, I analyze a dozen icons that she has produced over the past twenty years on the theme of the Hospitality of Abraham as recounted in the eighteenth chapter of the book of Genesis.

Julia Stankova and Her Oeuvre

The artist's portrait we paint below derives from three principal information sources. The first is her website, along with publications that either she has written or that were written about her and her work. There we find much already; Julia Stankova is one of those artists who can disclose herself without dissimulation. The second source, which has greatly helped clarify the first, is the respectful and warm friendship that has developed between us. The desire to meet her in person led to our encounter at her home in Sofia, where we were able to converse in a leisurely way. The resulting relationship—rooted in mutual knowledge and stimulated by the convergence of our fundamental interests—has proved to be a source of encouragement to realize our respective potential to this very day. The third is the iconographical analysis I undertook of her works, particularly those that focus on subjects I had explored as a theologian and historian of art with several decades of experience. I did this, of course, while presenting my interpretations to her. I was struck straightaway by the originality of her creations; I had to learn more about them by taking a closer look.

Julia Stankova was born in 1954 in an Orthodox environment and grew up in Sofia, Bulgaria. She says on her website[18] that she knew from childhood that she was born to be an artist, and that she remembers as a young girl contemplating the frescoes of the small church in her grandparents' village. At thirteen years old, she began taking private lessons in design and painting so that she could enter the National Academy of Arts, which she did six years later. But her life took a turn—she is silent about the circumstances and reasons behind this change. She became a mining engineer, graduating from the University of Mining and Geology of Sofia in 1978, and began her professional life by working in this field for twelve years. She says that she did this, though, without ever abandoning the idea of one day becoming a full-time artist.

In 1989, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc with its diverse cultural and socio-political consequences for the erstwhile "Eastern countries," she decided to quit her engineering profession and to devote the rest of her life to fulfilling her first desire. She was thirty-five at the time and was able to gain employment as an assistant in a studio for icon restoration. This experience was undoubtedly as decisive for her pictorial practice as it was for her theoretical reflections; it allowed her to examine closely, day after day, the specifically Bulgarian style of icons from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which were painted by anonymous iconographers. The finesse of the sensibility that emanated from these icons progressively inspired her with the idea of studying the Bible, and then "the philosophy of the Byzantine pictorial

system." Hence she enrolled in the Faculty of Theology at the Saint Clement University of Ohrid in Sofia, where women, for a long time excluded, were admitted once more. Two years later she left the restoration studio. By that time, she says, she had already mastered the technique of painting icons on wooden panels. This opened for her the possibility of becoming an independent artist. At that point she started to develop a sort of symbolic art. On the one hand, she did this in light of her knowledge of the Byzantine pictorial heritage; on the other, in light of what she calls her "emotional attraction" to the Biblical text. This whetted her appetite for a master's degree in theology, which she obtained in 2000, before devoting herself to painting icons.

She progressively developed her own technique founded on those of the Byzantine masters. Soon she was painting in a style at once rooted in tradition and very original. She then developed her own subjects, to the point that it is doubtful whether she will for much longer be considered, in Bulgaria and other Orthodox countries, a painter of icons in the usual sense of the term, that is, in every way reliant upon and without deviation from the tradition. This is despite the fact that she gladly claims to be an adherent of the specific form of iconographical painting that emerged in the Balkans, a conjunction of local sensibility and Byzantine culture. She explains that this original current, which was thought to have been extinguished after the Ottoman invasion at the end of the fifteenth century, is in the midst of rising once more from its ashes to write new pages of its history. Indeed, she means to apply herself to that very purpose.[19]

Her art soon aroused interest. Since 2000, she has enjoyed no less than forty personal exhibitions: in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Greece, but also in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany, Italy, and France. In Sofia itself there is a permanent presence of her works in several places: in the Astry, Natalie, and Paris art galleries, and in Saint Nedelya Cathedral, to name but a few. She regularly publishes essays, poetry, theological analyses, and articles on art in Bulgarian journals and magazines.[20] Her oeuvre has already been the subject of several publications. There is for instance a catalogue of her paintings (Sofia, 2008),[21] a booklet called *Healing* (2011) which assembles icons that depict Christ's miraculous healings,[22] a lovely notebook dedicated to angels (2013),[23] and the catalogue from an Easter exhibition in London (2015).[24] Finally, in 2016 she published a booklet entitled *Watercolor Bible*, carefully designed and reproduced, assembling those of her works inspired by the first chapters of the book of Genesis. There she presents her interpretation of the creation of the world and of humankind in watercolor designs.[25] Two collections of poems were also published, along with reproductions of her paintings.[26]

In 2018, Julia published a meticulously produced booklet depicting sixteen of her painted icons in color, with both Serbian and English descriptions.[27] These icons are painted on wooden panels, and are inspired primarily by the Gospel of Mark. Julia says she especially appreciates Mark's Gospel because of its brevity and simplicity, but also because of the characteristic care with which it recounts in detail Christ's healing gestures. This collection includes one icon of the Baptism of Christ and another devoted to the Stilling of the Storm, but here once more Julia focuses on Christ's healing miracles (though now in a more systematic manner than in *Healing*), notably the Gerasene Demoniac, whose healing appears in Mark 5:1–19, the Hemorrhaging Woman (Mark 5:22–34), Jairus's Daughter (Mark 5:35–43), the Deaf-Mute (Mark 7:31–7),[28] the Blind Man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22–6), and Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52).[29] The booklet closes with certain scenes from the Passion-Resurrection cycle: the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, the Anointing at Bethany, the Last Supper, Christ at the Column, the Myrrhbearers at the Tomb, and the Ascension. Julia's artistic productivity continues with the same endurance and coherence. She has indicated that in December of 2018 she tendered her application to the Senate for an exhibition in the Galerie du Palais du Luxembourg in Paris, which should open in the summer of 2019 with a dossier on "The Women of the New Testament." She foresees with good reason that sooner or later she will continue this theme in another pictorial campaign, this time focusing on the women of the Old Testament.

In sum, then, Old Testament theophanies and the cycle of Christ's life already figure prominently in Julia Stankova's pictorial creation. It seems that her attention inclines principally toward the encounters and the contact between God's messengers or Christ and human beings, and does so in a thoughtful and attentive climate that excludes the spectacular in order to privilege a certain sweetness, which we could nonetheless without exaggeration qualify as "miraculous."

The Bible and the Icon According to Julia Stankova

As Julia's artistic production is readily accessible on the Internet, one can easily follow its development from year to year.[30] After discovering her work online, and having been touched by its freshness, its density, and its novelty, I had the strong desire to meet her and so went with my wife to Sofia during Easter 2017. I returned with an idea for an article on one of her icons (since published[31]) and above all with the desire to learn more about and help better publicize her work. This encounter allowed me to converse at length on several occasions with her and her husband, as well as to contemplate a number of her works. Then I studied different catalogues of her exhibitions. All of these sources deeply piqued

my curiosity and stirred my own reflections in equal measure. Our discussions focused particularly on a point whose significance she herself has never ceased to emphasize, namely the structural link between Byzantine painting and the Bible. In her view, this link's principal characteristic is to relate a certain number of human-divine facts which are expressive, even paradigmatic, but to do so in such a way that they are never interpreted either verbally or pictorially. The reader is left to do that work and to draw the consequences, while the artist must translate them into visual representation. It is precisely the particular silence of the Biblical texts that births within the reader, whether painter or not, the desire to contribute to the birth of a complete language—hence, according to Julia, the appearance of pictorial, iconographical language. Julia Stankova draws on the consequences of this approach to the Bible, which she perceives as a text that keeps sufficient silence as to create free spaces that call for creative response. Only this inspired text can be considered divine. All the paintings we can make from it, however, will be *de facto* human. The error, she never shrinks from stressing with vigor, would therefore be (or rather *has been*) to "canonize," even to "sacralize" or to "divinize" this pictorial echo, particularly that of the first icons that treat Biblical subjects. This echo too is but human. It must therefore remain living, evolving, changing. Every generation, every country—if we adequately grasp our vocation—is tasked with making the invisible pass into the visible, passing this on to subsequent generations by stirring within them the same reactive and inventive response to God's call. A given generation's new wine of perceiving Holy Scripture must be put into new wineskins, that is, poured into an original iconographical language, lest it be spoiled by bursting the old wineskins—the old iconographical styles.[32] This conviction comes quite close to the one expressed for the first time with such clarity in the Roman magisterial tradition. It appears in the seventh chapter of Vatican II's famous constitution, *Sacrosanctum concilium* (1965), where we find the substantial declaration that "the Church has never made any style its own."[33] Each epoch and region is left to invent its own style; here the Church recognizes in persons a non-programmable "right of response" and the fact that every baptized person is called to invent his or her own form of sanctity.

Julia Stankova is not afraid to oppose certain theoretical and practical consequences of the very first theoretical exaltation of the icon. This exaltation was conceptually forged by restoring full legitimacy to the icon after the iconoclastic controversy and the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II) in 787. Especially after the council, under the pretext of protecting the icons, there was a tendency to bestow upon them a sanctity equal to that of the Bible itself and therefore an iconographical fixity allegedly intended by the Fathers of the council in question. Julia unambiguously rejects this tendency, and with good

reason,[34] insisting that this view leads to all kinds of illusions. Principal among them is the notion of an "iconographical canon," which is an invention of seventeenth-century Russia. It was indirectly encouraged by the Russian Orthodox Church's increasingly antagonistic relations with the West and its conception of religious art, and exacerbated even more during the time of Communism, when the Church favored a sort of rigid stiffening regarding icons *qua* symbols of the believers' resistance against atheistic Marxism. The logical consequence of such a conception, precipitated by this series of circumstances, is a stillborn art that, in order to avoid theological errors, consists mainly in recopying what was made in former times. However, for Julia Stankova,

> Creative work, including iconography, is one of the ways given to people to get closer to the secret of their existence, to discover the face of God, which resides in every one of us. Through seeking and finding the image the artist sets reference points and treads a path for others to walk on as well. The way of art is one of the ways to the Heavenly Kingdom, to the face of God, which we all begin to recognize from the created images.[35]

This bouquet of convictions joins those of other creators of modern icons, with the exception that Julia Stankova does not "canonize" any period or trend. But it is clear that she is not the only artist with Eastern roots to plead in favor of a profound renewal of iconography.[36] She believes in the possibility of renewing iconography from within. It seems to me that she contributes to proving this possibility. And if she wants her icons, which respect the canons but speak to twenty-first-century people, to be the place of an encounter, then I think this wish has every chance of being granted. That is the sense I would now like to convey about the following subject.

Julia Stankova's Icons of the Hospitality of Abraham

I wanted to see how these ideas were illustrated and borne out in her work on a Biblical passage highly respected in iconography—the Hospitality of Abraham as recounted in chapter 18 of the book of Genesis, which inspired *inter alia* Andrei Rublev's much celebrated icon of the Trinity. Why did I choose this subject and Julia Stankova's treatment of it as a test? For two reasons: first and most important, because the theme of the Trinity accompanies her, as it were, all throughout her artistic production—she has depicted it twelve times since 1993 and in several rather different ways, as we will see; second, because I have become quite familiar with the legacy of this Old Testament passage, a legacy spanning several centuries.[37] This background will help, I think, to grasp

Fig. 1 Julia Stankova, **The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah**, 1993, oil pastel and watercolor on paper, 56 x 77 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

Fig. 2 Julia Stankova, **The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah,** 2012, tempera on primed wooden panel and lacquer technique, 30 x 40 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

the originality of Julia Stankova's icons depicting this archetypical subject of iconography.

We can divide eleven of these twelve icons into four categories according to the respective places reserved for the couple, Abraham and Sarah, on the one hand, and for the three angels that visit them on the other. A fifth category is represented by a single icon; it links the Hospitality of Abraham to the Annunciation to Mary. To keep things simple, I designate all of these images as "icons," even though Julia's website classifies only certain of these as icons proper.[38]

1. When Abraham and Sarah predominate. In the very first Hospitality of Abraham Julia Stankova painted (1993), the patriarch and his spouse occupy the foreground of the scene (fig. 1). They are seated facing each other. The patriarch is old while Sarah seems very young. He places his hand tenderly on hers and they gaze at one another, while in the central opening of a triple window, outlined with a light trace against the backdrop of a blue sky, the closely unified group of three angels—their backs turned, wings folded, their figures depicted on a very small scale—depart after their visit, each of them with a small, plate-like halo (what German art historians call a *Tellernimbus*) suspended above its head. The tender gesture between the two spouses can undoubtedly be interpreted as the effect on them of the announcement of Isaac's coming birth (Gen. 18:10), which made Sarah laugh, given the advanced age of her husband. The painter, herself a woman, was very likely reticent (like many artists across centuries before her) to depict Sarah as an old woman, "having ceased to have what women have" (Gen. 18:11). Painted in quite different hues and in a much smoother pictorial style, yet noticeably in accordance with the same compositional schema, we have the Hospitality of Abraham from 2012 (fig. 2)—again with an old, baldheaded Abraham to the left and a young, veiled Sarah to the

Fig. 3 Julia Stankova, **Trinity,** 1998, tempera on primed canvas and lacquer technique, 50 x 65 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

Fig. 4 Julia Stankova, **The Hospitality of Abraham (Angels on the Road)**, 2016, watercolor on paper, 35 x 50 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

right—but this time the patriarch's tender gesture consists in placing his forearm on his spouse's.

2. The Three Angels Alone. At the other extreme, so to speak, are the icons where Julia Stankova's contemplation favors the three angels instead, by removing the initial recipients of the angels' visit. Abraham and Sarah are actually absent for the first time in the icon from 1998, entitled *Trinity* (fig. 3), which shows the Three seated around a semi-circular table with a bowl containing the head of a horned animal in the center. None of their arms are visible. The central angel is endowed with a more powerful silhouette than the other two and appears absorbed in contemplation. He also seems to lack wings, though it is better to imagine that they are invisible. The angels are gaze and presence before all else; they have no need of any attributes that might be required *to do* anything. Their clothes are pale blue and green, while only the central angel has a red robe beneath a deep blue tunic. Each of the three is encircled with a uniform halo. The central angel's head is raised toward the sky while the other two seem to gaze fixedly at the table with a thoughtful or contemplative air. The background contains no landscape detail.

Julia has two other icons that represent the three angels alone. The first (2016) is a watercolor painting on paper that shows them in motion taking up three-quarters of the backdrop (fig. 4). Each is surmounted by a halo traced in thick brushstrokes, and they are at some distance from a village in the upper-right corner, symbolized by the architecture of a domed church flanked by buildings, one of which is a bell tower. We might be tempted to imagine that the icon shows them, not in the midst of arriving and heading toward Abraham's and Sarah's dwellings, but rather departing, and that these latter two watch the angels (as in figs. 1 and 2) as they move away from the couple and head toward Sodom—although

the text of Genesis suggests only two of the three angels go to Sodom to punish it while the third returns to heaven (Gen. 19:1). Their wings are covered with broad bands of very vivid watercolor; red prevails, a color that could announce the imminent fate of the sinful city, but refers rather to the energy, grace, and fire of the Holy Spirit. (We must here leave aside another image Julia painted that same year and with the same technique. It is reproduced on the back of her booklet from 2016 and depicts three angels dancing completely nude—an unprecedented subject—without relation to the Hospitality of Abraham.)

The other icon (2017) appears to be a faithful replica of Rublev's icon (fig. 5). Rublev may have been one of the very first painters to decide to represent the three angels for themselves, without Abraham and Sarah, in their own perfect communion (their *perichoresis* or *circumincession*, to quote the Greek and Latin theologians, respectively).[39] Julia's icon is warm and relaxed, rendering the gaze of the Three very lively indeed. The resemblance between Julia's icon and that of her predecessor by six centuries is not a superficial one; it is immediately striking because it remains faithful to Rublev's depiction on more than one point— from the compositional schema all the way to certain details, like the recessed compartment of the altar table or the *suppedaneum* upon which each of the lateral angels places their feet. In a similar vein, the angel to the left—whom many of Rublev's interpreters have identified as God the Father—here too performs a gesture of benediction, and the other two regard him. The differences, which are minimal, comprise above all the color, the climate, and the style. Julia placed the sun in the upper left-hand corner; she also slightly displaced the building behind the corresponding angel.

3. The Three Angels with Abraham but without Sarah. One icon from 2004 and another from 2008 show the Three seated at table. Depicted on a band beneath the table and in a completely different scale, as if viewed from a distance, is the figure of Abraham who is crouched, asleep, beneath a tree positioned between a highly structured city and a rock. In the icon from 2004 (fig. 6), it is certainly the patriarch dozing off under the oak tree at Mamre "in the full heat of the day" (Gen. 18:1). On the table beside the bowl with the head of a sacrificial animal, two plates are visible: one contains white food, the other is filled with a brown beverage. The angels reveal only one arm each. In the 2008 icon (fig. 7), the angels are

Fig. 5 Julia Stankova, **Old Testament Trinity** (after the icon of Andrei Rublev), 2017, tempera on primed wooden panel and lacquer technique, 26 x 36 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

Fig. 6 Julia Stankova, **The Hospitality of Abraham**, 2004, tempera on primed wooden panel and lacquer technique, 46 x 41 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

Fig. 7 Julia Stankova, **The Hospitality of Abraham**, 2008, tempera on primed wooden panel and lacquer technique, 45 x 35 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

tightly arranged around a table, which seems to be elevated to the level of their shoulders, and covered by a kind of tablecloth with plant motifs that alternate between greens and reds. The central angel again gazes up toward the sky, the two others gaze at each other. Abraham is found crouching between a tree bearing red fruit, which we recognize with difficulty as the oak tree of Mamre, and a house with a sloped roof—this time, though, underneath a starry sky containing a crescent moon and four distinguishable falling stars.

Fig. 8 Julia Stankova, **The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah,** 1997, tempera on primed wooden panel and lacquer technique, 30 x 23 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

4. The Three Angels with Abraham and Sarah. Two icons fall into this category. The first (fig. 8) dates from 1997. The three angels are standing, haloed (but without the sign of the cross), feet bare. They approach on bumpy ground, and face us frontally, each with the staff of a divine messenger, surmounted respectively by a verdant tree for the central angel, a rock for the angel on the left, and a building for the angel on the right. Abraham and Sarah await them, each bearing an offering and represented by their faces situated in one of the bottom corners. Sarah is on the left presenting a loaf of bread and Abraham is on the right with a bowl of wine, their offerings carrying quite a clear Eucharistic connotation.

Three other rather similar icons place the three angels with Abra-

Fig. 9 Julia Stankova, *The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah,* 2000, tempera on primed wooden panel and lacquer technique, 21 x 42 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

ham and Sarah behind a table. This makes them all dinner companions, for just this once, in a way that could be called "audacious." The first of the three icons, from 2000 (fig. 9), represents them behind a table that stretches from one side of the oblong icon to the other, and has the peculiarity of being covered with fruit—apples and pomegranates, to be precise. This motif or detail might seem accidental or anecdotal, but it is deeply rooted in the Byzantine tradition and the practices of Orthodoxy regarding the monastic customs that recommend offering fruit to pilgrims and guests to refresh themselves, relax, and even inhale their agreeable odor: it is one of the most traditional symbols of benevolence and hospitality. This hospitality is like an invitation extended to the contemporary spectator of these icons: the table covered with fruit is so accessible that it becomes synonymous with invitation.

The three angels are situated head-on with their chests but not their arms visible, with halos and blondish hair. Between them, a bit toward the back and on a slightly reduced scale, the busts of Abraham (still an old man) and his wife Sarah (visibly much younger than her husband) are inserted. The second icon, from 2014 (fig. 10), of comparable dimensions, follows the same composition, but this time places the protagonists on a green ground beneath small clouds; Abraham and Sarah are identified by an inscription above their halos. A third, very similar icon (fig. 11) was commissioned from Julia Stankova in 2017. It preserves the same compositional schema, though it varies the colors, manifestly embellishes the clouds, and endows Abraham with an inscription in Cyrillic characters that designates him as "the holy patriarch Abraham," while the inscription above his spouse, who is depicted as being as beautiful and young as the three angels, reads "Saint Sarah."

Fig. 10 Julia Stankova, **The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah,** 2014, tempera on primed wooden panel and lacquer technique, 27 x 40 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova.

Fig. 11 Trinity (2017) 50 x 102 cm.JPGFig. 11 Julia Stankova, **The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah,** 2017, tempera on primed wooden panel and lacquer technique, 50 x 102 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova.

5. *The Hospitality of Abraham* and *The Annunciation* (fig. 12, fig. 13) are associated in a triptych from 2015, classified as an icon on Julia Stankova's website. Closed, the triptych depicts two heads in profile facing each other, between them a bundle of stalks that bear red or green apples, and two birds with multi-colored wings. The text in Cyrillic characters comes from Luke 17:20–21, which begins with the question posed to Jesus by the Pharisees on the coming of the Kingdom of God and terminates with the response: "the Kingdom of God is among you," which indicates how to interpret the open triptych. Its central panel depicts the Hospitality of Abraham: the three angels are seated at table without their hosts Abraham and Sarah, and the compositional schema is once again inspired by Rublev's icon, even if the style of a contemporary artist (especially in the design of the faces) is easily recognizable. As for the Annunciation painted on the wings, it shows the archangel Gabriel gazing at the Virgin Mary, while Mary gazes at the spectator; both figures are standing. This association betrays an unfathomable richness of theological meaning, simultaneously suggesting that Mary's gracious hospitality of Jesus' birth is rooted in Abraham and Sarah's hospitality of the improbable birth of Isaac, in such a way that the fundamental unity of the Old and New Testaments emerges as the unity of the hospitality shown to life itself as a gift from God. One can sense an implied, still profounder link—more secret and more mysterious too—between the child Mary must birth, who will die on a cross, and the child Sarah births, whom God will ask Abraham to sacrifice for Him. But both are destined for life beyond death.

Conclusion

As we observed in the icons of the Hospitality of Abraham, Julia Stankova's inventive freedom comes through in the creation of compositional schemas, new figures, and unprecedented bearers of meaning. But it is just as evident in her varied and subtle use of colors, which delights the eye and above all refreshes the

Fig. 12 Julia Stankova, **Old Testament Trinity and Annunciation Triptych** shown closed, 2015, tempera on primed wooden panels and lacquer technique, 40 x 60 cm. Courtesy of Julia Stankova

Fig.13 Julia Stankova, **Old Testament Trinity and Annunciation** *Triptych* (fig. 12) shown opened

soul, all the while showing a sweetness and a restraint which go hand in hand with an art that excels at painting expressive faces, moved and moving without being naive. If the Bible and theology are her principal sources of inspiration, and if her choice of subjects extends this tradition in a certain sense, her way of treating them is very original and refreshing.

A commonality in all these icons is the beauty of the angels: their youth, the sweetness and the affability of their faces that renders them profoundly lovable and that points to the idea of the angelic nature—even above that, of divinity and indeed of the Trinity—casting away all *terribilità*. God, to the degree one senses Him through the art of this painter, is a being of great beauty and sweetness who approaches without blinding you. And that, from a vantage point no longer solely aesthetic but theological, is perhaps the principal characteristic that I think we should take away from the work of Julia Stankova. That characteristic is so valuable that we should forgive her other more questionable features, such as the stubborn and formally inaccurate discrepancy between Abraham's and Sarah's respective ages[40]—undoubtedly connected to a centuries-old distaste in religious art (Eastern as well as Western) for depicting the aged woman just as she was, especially when she assumes an important role in salvation history.[41] But the most original thing about her creation is also the most touching and the most unexpected—to have dared to emphasize the conjugal love between Abraham and Sarah and its consecration by the visit and message of the Three, without omitting the effect of the announcement of Isaac's undreamt-of birth

on the two spouses. To my knowledge, iconography has never ventured into such territory. Nor has Western Christian art, which was immensely "gossipy" when it came to depicting Sarah presenting Hagar to Abraham, or the latter driving Hagar and Ishmael away from his home. One would be hard pressed to find a tableau that shows Abraham and Sarah delighting in one another and exchanging a tender gesture after the departure of their three visitors.

A final remark about what might be inferred from the format of these works. Their small dimensions seem to imply a purpose and use characteristic of private devotion and typical of icons. Julia Stankova appears not to have created monumental canvases that bear her name, nor mural paintings nor mosaics. Most of her works, in other words, are of small or even of *very* small dimensions. Her works rarely represent crowds. And even when she depicts compact groups, such as the Twelve Disciples, Christ's figure is emphasized, head-on, in such a way that the most traditional function of icons is reaffirmed—to make of them occasions for an encounter between the "prototype" and the spectator. From this vantage point, Julia Stankova, all the while profoundly renewing the language of icons, remains faithful to what is essential to them.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] This is far from true of monumental art and mural paintings in sanctuaries and monasteries; on this subject, see François Bœspflug and Emanuela Fogliadini, *La Crucifixion dans l'art, un sujet planétaire* (Paris: Bayard, 2019), particularly chapters 10 and 13.

[2] Eugène Troubetzkoï, *Trois études sur l'icône* (Paris: YMCA-Press/O.E.I.L., 1986).

[3] Given the orientation of our research, we should note that Kondakov was named professor at the University of Sofia in 1920, a post he held until 1922 when he left for Prague. For his part, André Grabar left Russia in 1920 for Bulgaria, where he was appointed Assistant Curator at the Archaeological Museum of Sofia for three years, after which he departed for Paris and became Gabriel Millet's student at the École Pratique des Hautes Études de la Sorbonne.

[4] Gregory the Monk, *Carnets d'un peintre d'icônes*, Écrits sur l'art (Paris: Éd. L'Âge d'homme, 1994); Barsanuphius the Abbot, *Icônes et fresques du Père Grégoire* (Marcenat: Monastery of Znamenie, 1999).

[5] Léonide Ouspensky, *La théologie de l'icône dans l'Église Orthodoxe* (Paris: Cerf, 1980).

[6] François Bœspflug, "La décret de Nicée II sur les icônes et la théologie française contemporaine," *Connaissance des religions*, special edition (*Lumière et Théophanie: l'Icône*) (December 1999): 7–23; François Bœspflug, "La redécouverte de l'icône chez les catholiques. Le cas français," in *Présence de Byzance*, ed. J.-M. Spieser (Gollion, Switzerland: Infolio, 2007), 31–54, 138–49; François Bœspflug, "L'icône et l'art chrétien d'Occident," interview by Tudor Petcu, *Hermeneia. Journal of Hermeneutics, Art Theory and Criticism* (Bucharest), no. 15 (2015): 158–70.

[7] Jean-René Bouchet, "L'icône, une oubliée du concile Vatican II," in *Nicée II, 787–1987. Douze siècles d'images religieuses*, eds. François Bœspflug and Nicholas Lossky (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 397–402.

[8] Vladimir Lossky and Leonid Ouspensky, *Der Sinn der Ikonen* (Berne: Urs Graf Verlag, 1952). This work underwent several developments. An English version was published in 1969 in Boston, and then in 1982 and 1999 by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press in Crestwood (New York).

[9] Paul Evdokimov, *L'Art de l'icône, théologie de la beauté* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1972); L. Ouspensky, *Essai sur la théologie de l'icône dans l'Église Orthodoxe* (Paris: Éditions de l'Exarchat patriarcal russe en Europe occidentale, 1960); Léonide Ouspensky, *La Théologie de l'icône dans l'Église Orthodoxe* (Paris: Cerf, 1980, 2003); Egon Sendler, *L'icône, image de l'Invisible. Élements de théologie, esthétique et technique* (Paris: DDB, 1981). We have made an inventory of these two works in *La Vie Spirituelle* (hereafter cited as *VS*) 640–41 (1980): 895–907 (Ouspensky) and 653 (1983): 128-30 (Sendler).

[10] Christoph von Schönborn, *L'Icône du Christ. Fondements théologiques élaborés entre le Ier et le IIe Concile de Nicée (325–787)* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions universitaires, 1976); this book was republished in Paris by Éditions du Cerf in 1986.

[11] François Bœsplug and Emanuela Fogliadini, *Dieu entre Orient et Occident : Le conflit des images, mythes et réalités* (Paris: Bayard, 2017).

[12] Jean-Claude Larchet, *L'Iconographe et l'artiste* (Paris: Cerf, 2008).

[13] Vladimir Ivanov, *Le grand livre des icônes russes* (Paris: Desclée, 1988); cf. our analysis of this book in *VS* 684 (1989): 331–5.

[14] The icon collection at the Musée du Petit-Palais in Paris provides a good idea of these regional diversities; it recently received a larger, renovated space. See the catalogue established by the curator, Raphaëlle Ziadé, *Icônes. Les arts chrétiens d'Orient au Petit Palais* (Paris: Musées, 2017).

[15] *Moderne Ikonen: theologische Bilder von Anton Wollenek*, with explanatory notes by Ernst C. Suttner (Vienna: Herold Verlag, 1979); Anton Wollenek, *Moderne Ikonen* (Graz, Vienna, Cologne: Styria, 2001).

[16] M. Porebski, "The Eschatological Realism of Jerzy Nowosielski," in *J. Nowosielski* (Cracow: Gallery Starmach, 1990), 171–214.

[17] Three booklets about his work have been published: *Irdische Gedichten mit himmlischer Bedeutung. Gleichnisse Jesu in Bildern von Nikola Sarić* (2015); Nikola Sarić, *Zeugen*, with poems by Nikola Dolovic (2016); Nikola Sarić and Sytze de Vries, *Cyclus van het leven* (Hannover: LindenCraft Detlef Reuleke, 2018).

[18] http://juliastankova.com/home.html.

[19] Julia Stankova, "A word about the Word," http://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=1021&lang=en&action=show.

[20] Her writings appear mostly in *Literaturen forum* (The Literary Forum), *EK*, *Literaturni Balkani* (Literary Balkans), and the electronic literary magazine *Liternet* (http://liternet.bg).

[21] Julia Stankova, *Painting* (Sofia: Astry Gallery, 2008); this publication contains ninety-seven "paintings" or "icons chronologically classified," the earliest from 2000 and the newest portraits all from 2008.

[22] Julia Stankova, *Healing* (Sofia: n.p., 2011).

[23] Julia Stankova, *Mortal Angels. Painting in Wood* (Oxford: n.p., 2013).

[24] Julia Stankova, *Exhibition Catalogue: Easter 2015* (London: Sacred Space Gallery, 2015).

[25] Julia Stankova, *Aquarelna bibliia* [Watercolor Bible] (Sofia: n.p., 2016).

[26] Mario Wirz, Uwe Seidel et al., eds., *Einen Engel schick ich dir. Himmlische Grüsse und Gedanken* (Eschbach: sVerlag am Eschbach, 2012); *Alongside Stanzas*, poems from Aleksandra Ivojlova and Aleksandar Dabnishki, with tableaus from Julia Stankova (Sofia: Farrago, 2016).

[27] Julia Stankova, *Gentle Touch Among the Crowd (Talks with Mark)* (Sofia: n.p., 2018). As she explains in her introduction, this icon series derives in large part from the invitation she received for seven years straight to participate in an exhibition in the Cathedral of Vienne (in France, along the Rhône) dedicated to the healing miracles related in the Gospel of Mark.

[28] François Bœspflug, "Sur les fonctions des images peintes dans l'évangélisation," *Diaconat aujourd'hui*, no. 191 (December 2017): 12–13 (about Julia Stankova's icon of the healing of the Blind-Mute).

[29] One might wish that Julia Stankova would someday treat other Markan miracles, such as the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29–31), the demoniacs (Mark 1:32), the paralytic in Capernaum (Mark 2:1–12), etc.

[30] http://juliastankova.com/galleries/2017.html

[31] François Bœspflug, "Pierre sauvé de la noyade," *Enseignement catholique actualités*, no. 377 (February-March 2017): 44–45.

[32] "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins" (Mark 2:22). If the new wine is our feelings and ideas sprung from reading the Bible, then the new wineskins are the new artistic language these feelings and ideas need in order to be expressed.

[33] François Bœspflug, "Art et liturgie: l'art chrétien du XXIᵉ siècle à la lumière de *Sacrosanctum concilium*," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* no. 78.2 (2004): 161-81; François Bœspflug, "L'arte cristiana alla luce della constituzione 'Sacrosanctum concilium'," in *Nobile Semplicità. Liturgia, arte e archiettura del Vaticano II* (Comunità di Bose, Edizioni di Bose, 2014), 179–198.

[34] Stankova, in "A word about the Word" states: "The determination of the icon as an absolute phenomenon on an equal level to the Holy text is wrong, as the nature of iconography is similar to that of art in general. It is just one of the human languages invented until now."

[35] Ibid.

[36] This is what we have tried to establish in an incontestable way by using the Crucifixion as example in Bœspflug and Fogliadini, *La Crucifixion dans l'art*, chapter 13.

[37] François Bœspflug, "Autour de l'Hospitalité d'Abraham dans la Bible et le Coran, et de son écho dans l'art juif et l'art chrétien du Moyen Âge (xiiie-xvie siècle). Essai d'iconographie comparée," in François Bœspflug and Françoise Dunand, eds., *Le comparatisme et l'histoire des religions* (Paris: Cerf, 1997), 315–43; text reprinted and expanded in François Bœspflug, *Les Théophanies bibliques dans l'art médiéval d'Occident et d'Orient* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012), 21–67; François Bœspflug, "Une approche des religions par textes fondateurs et images d'art. L'exemple de l'Hospitalité d'Abraham (judaïsme, christianisme, islam)," in *S'initier aux religions. Une expérience de formation continue dans l'enseignement public (1995-1999)* eds. François Bœspflug and Évelyne Martini (Paris: Cerf, 1999), 199–222; "L'Hospitalité d'Abraham dans l'art religieux occidental du Siècle des Lumières," in Isabella Balestreri and Laura Facchin, *Arte e cultura fra classicismo e lumi. Omaggio a Winckelmann* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2018), 301–16.

[38] Readers can readily access the works discussed below using this link (click on the desired year): http://juliastankova.com/galleries/2017.html

[39] François Bœspflug, *Le Dieu des peintres et des sculpteurs. L'Invisible incarné* (Paris: Hazan, Musée du Louvre, 2010), 125; François Bœspflug, *Dieu et ses images. Une histoire de l'Éternel dans l'art* (Paris: Bayard, 2017), 160, 164, 170.

[40] They are both explicitly declared to be old in the book of Genesis, which Sarah herself recognizes, to the point of laughing when they announce to her that she's going to bear a child (Gen. 18:12–13). But Julia Stankova persists in depicting them in the way many have for a long time depicted Joseph and Mary his spouse, namely with contrasting ages in favor of a very young Mary.

[41] In Western art we have to wait for a precursor such as Giotto, and then pass through two more centuries before seeing characters such as Sarah, Isaac's mother, or Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, commonly painted as old women.

Nebesnaia golubizna angel'skikh odezhd. Sud'ba proizvedenii drevnerusskoi zhivopisi. 1920–1930-e gody.

Elena Osokina
(Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2018), 664 pp., illus.

Nebesnaia golubizna angel'skikh odezhd. Sud'ba proizvedenii drevnerusskoi zhivopisi. 1920–1930-e gody.

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From 1918 to 1938, the Soviet Union exported artworks, antiques, tapestries, furniture, libraries, icons, liturgical objects, and jewelry by the ton. Outside the USSR, this disputed export caused much publicity: It received wide media coverage, was repeatedly litigated in courts, and the legitimacy of whether to participate in the sales was debated by Western governmental institutions. In a satirical comedy on Bolshevik Russia, even Hollywood dealt with the theme (Ninotchka). With the outbreak of World War II, however, the sales completely faded from public memory.

In the 1980s, interest was revived by American research, selectively at first. With the demise of Communism, the subject reached Eastern Europe. In post-Soviet Russia, the first revelations unleashed strong patrimonial emotions; in particular, the early publications during glasnost aroused widespread public outrage and disbelief over the scope and quality of the unprecedented loss.

Since then, scholars have unearthed a flood of sources and data previously not accessible, resulting in a steady stream of conference proceedings, of archival editions, of films, of memoir and article publications which has enriched our

understanding greatly. The bulk of the tedious, continuous task lay with the institutions that suffered the greatest losses—primarily with the Hermitage, the palace museums, the nationalized collections of the high nobility in and around St. Petersburg, and the Kremlin Museums in Moscow.

As for the globally dispersed public and private collections that had acquired the exported art, American museums and libraries took the lead and—unlike their European counterparts—published their records and findings, often in cooperation with their Russian colleagues. Among them are the New York Public Library, Hillwood Estate, Museum, and Gardens, and the National Gallery of Art, the latter two both in Washington, D.C.

The most recent publication on the topic, *Nebesnaia golubizna angel'skikh odezhd* (The Heavenly Blue of Angels' Robes) is devoted to the fate of nationalized icons under Stalin. The Russian historian Elena A. Osokina, a specialist on socio-economic and institutional-administrative history of the interwar period, has done extensive archival research on the export and industrialization policy under Stalin in Russia and abroad. Her previous study on the Soviet Torgsin stores that allowed trade with foreigners—Gold for Industrialization: Torgsin (2009)—serves as a solid basis which allows her to cover the sales within a broad chronological framework.

The results of her painstaking research have been released in Russian with the Moscow-based publisher NLO. Advertized as an "intellectual thriller," both in style and structure the work addresses a larger educated Russian audience; the rich, detailed scholarly apparatus, bibliography, and—not least —the comprehensive appendix of source material (pp. 513–643), however, attend to the needs of specialists and museum professionals.

In line with the publisher's "thriller" advertisement, the book starts out with the legendary scandal of the George R. Hann collection, auctioned off at Christie's in five separate sections in 1980. The Pittsburgh philanthropist Hann had purchased icons, ecclesiastical works of art, embroidery, and silver of Soviet provenance in the interwar years. An émigré Russian restorer, Vladimir Teteriatnikov, an engineer and chemist by training, criticized the sale; his book *Icons and Fakes* (1981) branded as forgeries almost all the icons offered. Despite a lawsuit filed by Christie's, despite rebuttals, and the consternation of experts, the publication long challenged the authenticity of the renowned collection and generally impacted icon auctions, even museums in the years to come.

Decades after this uproar, Osokina chronicles the fate of the icons from the

Hann collection, tracing their origins back to their respective private and institutional owners in late imperial Russia and the early USSR, thus refuting Teteriatnikov's untenable claims. In the process, the study covers a wide range of aspects pertaining to Stalin's sale of icons abroad. From the artistic appreciation of icons, which for centuries were revered for their religious character, and their transformation into collector's items in late imperial Russia, the focus then shifts to the massive nationalization in the wake of the revolution, carried out in the name of Socialist ideals and the creation of a new, proletarian culture; art collections once belonging to the court, the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the church were confiscated and added to the state museum funds. The "loot" was categorized, researched, and then redistributed—to the art institutions established in the Tsarist era, to the short-lived 'proletarian' museums, and to the newly founded Soviet art museums. The first post-revolutionary decade, despite much destruction and loss and thanks to the efforts by the intelligentsia, witnessed a rise in professional restoration, research, collecting, and public display of icons. With the late 1920s, the Kremlin—allegedly in need of financing the country's industrialization program—began to sell cultural patrimony abroad, both at public auctions and through middlemen, in some cases in great secrecy. Icons, deprived of their protected artistic status, were downgraded to commodities and transferred from the museum to the export fund; hundreds of icons chosen for sale were popularized through travelling icon exhibitions held in Europe and the USA. The study ends with an overview of Russian icons entering international museums.

In a final assessment, the sheer scope of the volume is the focus of any review. This major opus presents a variety of interdisciplinary summaries of much of the available literature and sources in Russian and, to a much lesser degree, in English. It constitutes a reference work, facilitating further research—albeit impaired by lengthy, rambling, reiterating text passages. The author presents a detailed documentation of the respective provenances pertaining to the Hann collection as well as other foreign icon funds formed as a result of the Soviet icon sales, based on rare archival material specifically compiled and published as an appendix for the first time. This source material (e. g. from the State Museum Fund, the Moscow History Museum, and the State Tretyakov Gallery) allows for authentication both of former private, nationalized, state museum funds and of later purchases by a foreign clientele.

Among the desiderata, the author's disregard of European research figures prominently; theoretical approaches as elaborated in the field of enlarged museum studies, notably regarding the assessment of forced translocations of cultural patrimony in the global context, are ignored. Contextualizing the extensive data

and archival section within an appropriate methodological comparative framework would have strengthened the study, contributing to greater balance. Given its overall relevance, the publication would also have benefitted from academic content editing and proofreading (e.g. numerous foreign sources and names are misspelled).

Beyond its scholarly impact, the merit of this timely publication lies in its political value. After years of academic research and intense public debate, on the centenary of the revolution Russia is in need of changing cultural narratives: Reconciliation assumes high priority, as Russia's leaders restore continuity with a past that their Bolshevik predecessors attempted to eradicate. In an attempt to bridge the gap between tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, a selective approach to its blurred past is pursued. Russia today seems in a state of forgetfulness of its own revolutionary origins, in a process of negation. Against this background, the need to arrive at a final, transparent assessment of the interwar art sales is no longer felt. Institutional silence is preferred at home. The art sales, deeply regretted since perestroika, thus remain an emotionally charged, multi-layered issue for post-Soviet Russia.

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The History of the Discovery and Study of Russian Medieval Painting

Gerol'd I. Vzdornov, Valerii G. Dereviagin, trans., and
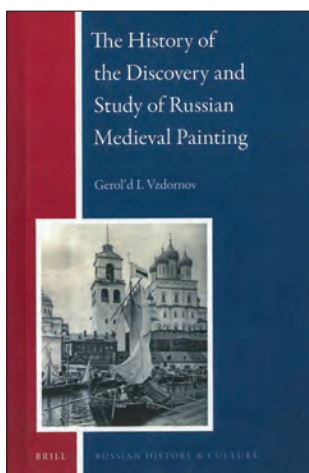Marybeth Sollins, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 426 pp., illus.

The History of the Discovery and Study of Russian Medieval Painting

Gerol'd I. Vzdornov, Valerii G. Dereviagin, trans., and Marybeth Sollins, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 426 pp., illus.

The Dutch publisher Brill is to be congratulated for publishing a superb English translation of Gerold I. Vzdornov's 1986 seminal study of the nineteenth century's discovery and study of Russian medieval icons and frescoes within imperial Russia that was commissioned by the Bronze Horseman Literary Agency in New York. Well known to art historians and historians of medieval and early modern Russia and Ukraine, Vzdornov's prolific work is less familiar to historians and students of the modern era. The welcome English version of one of his encyclopedic and beautifully illustrated monographs – involving an initial translation by Valery G. Dereviagin, which was then checked by Yury Pamfilov and edited by Marybeth Sollins – should become a staple of every university library and essential reading for scholars and students interested in the history and culture of imperial Russia. Chief researcher at the Russian State Institute of Restoration, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and an Honorary Member of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts, Vzdornov has authored approximately 300 works. His erudition is breathtaking.

The evidence and conclusions of this monograph should shatter once and for all various preconceived notions that the destruction of Russian religious art

began with the Bolshevik regime, that restoration work always involved modern understandings of the word "restoration," and that Russian medieval painting was revered throughout the ages. When I agreed to review this work as a non-art historian, I naively expected from the table of contents that I would be reading about the systematic uncovering of unblemished artistic works of the medieval period through the renovation of ancient churches, beginning with the 1840s work on the late eleventh-century frescoes of the Dormition Church in Kiev's Monastery of the Caves, the first monastic institution established in the Kievan Rus state. Instead, Vzdornov catalogues the disastrous ways in which early Rus paintings and frescoes were occasionally renewed over time through obliteration via whitewashing and overpainting according to the fashions of individual periods. Renovations became fairly regular only in the eighteenth century when the ancient panels of iconostases were replaced with new ones and either deposited in less important churches or were left to mold in sheds. In 1849 many twelfth-century murals in the Church of St. George in Staraia Ladoga were, in Vzdornov's words, "knocked off the walls, its walls plastered anew, and the remaining fragments whitewashed."(14) By the 1880s, frequent whitewashing and overpainting in the major Kremlin cathedrals had, according to Vzdornov, reduced old frescoes to "the work of an ordinary nineteenth-century house painter[!]"(215) When renovation and scientific method combined in the mid-nineteenth century to remove the original glazes or darkened drying oil on frescoes, more destruction of ancient artifacts ensued. Later technologies could not easily distinguish any new painting done in the aftermath of the cleaning from the original frescoes as the renovators had paradoxically applied their new appreciation for the old art by painting in the style of the original rather than conforming to contemporary tastes. In the late nineteenth century even the well-intentioned attempts of Vladimir Vasilevich Suslov to preserve twelfth-century frescoes in Pereslavl-Zalessky by removing them and storing them in special mortar that fit snuggly in fifty wooden crates were for naught because he was unable to convince a museum or scientific academy to house them. The storage of all but two crates in a barn guaranteed such rapid deterioration that in summer 1895 the containers and their contents "were disposed of in Lake Pleshcheevo."(228) The only saving grace in these calamities of renovation and others like them lay in the occasional presence of mind on the part of restorers to have sketches made of the original murals.

At the same time that destructive renovations of medieval Russian and Ukrainian churches were being carried out, a variety of factors, according to Vzdornov, had paradoxically come together to champion a growing modern appreciation for medieval icons and frescoes, if not yet an appreciation of such works as being aesthetically pleasing. These factors included Romanticism's admiration

for antiquities, Nicholas I's protectionist attitudes toward traditional Russian art, and the growing number of collectors of pre-Petrine artifacts from among wealthy Old Believers and Orthodox churchmen and laypersons. Eventually, some of that collecting would include antique icons from Byzantium, Mount Athos, and Egypt. At first the appreciation for medieval Russian art was limited to specialized restorers and private collectors, but by the late nineteenth century it was broadcast to a larger audience by way of the development of modern museums and public exhibits (through donations, bequests, and eventually systematic acquisitions), publications by enthusiasts and academic specialists, and works of fiction. By examining leading renovators and their projects as well as the endeavors of individuals, learned societies, and public institutions in nineteenth-century imperial Russia, Vzdornov provides a collective biography of persons both in the capital cities and the provinces who were part of an ever-growing civil society. They discovered Russian medieval art as an entity of its own separate from but inspired by Byzantine art. Finally, Vzdornov critically analyzes the historiographical contributions of the early scholars on the subject.

Through the lens of art history Vzdornov delivers nothing less than a reinterpretation of late imperial Russian history and a chronicling of the destruction of much of ancient medieval Russian and Ukrainian art up through the turn of the twentieth century. It is little wonder that medievalists and early modernists often have to rely on surviving embroideries and manuscript illustrations to reconstruct the art and symbolism of their eras. Hopefully, Brill or another publisher will also publish translations of Vzdornov's work on the careful scholarly restoration projects of medieval and early modern Russian art works that occurred in the last decade of the imperial period as well as in the Soviet era by specialists who understood their aesthetic value.

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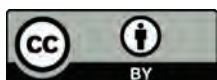
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