


Article

From Domestic Devotion to the Church Altar: Venerating Icons in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Adriatic

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Received: 23 May 2019; Accepted: 17 June 2019; Published: 19 June 2019



Abstract: Although traditionally associated with Eastern Christianity, the practice of venerating icons became deeply rooted in the Catholic societies of the broad Adriatic region from the Late Middle Ages onwards and was an indispensable part of everyday popular piety. The evidence lies in the massive amount of icons located today in public and private collections throughout the Italian Peninsula, Croatia, Slovenia, and Montenegro. At a time when Greeks were branded as “schismatics”, and although the Byzantine *maniera greca* had become obsolete in Western European art, icon painting managed to survive at the margins of the Renaissance, and ultimately went through its own renaissance in the sixteenth century. Omnipresent in Catholic households, icons were very often donated to churches as votive offerings and were gradually transformed into the focal points of collective public devotion. Through the combined study of visual evidence, archival records and literary sources, this article will shed light on the socio-political, confessional, and artistic dynamics that allowed for Byzantine or Byzantinizing icons to gain unprecedented popularity throughout the Catholic milieu of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Adriatic, and become integrated into domestic and public devotional practices.

Keywords: icon painting; maniera greca; Byzantine art; Renaissance; Council of Trent; Adriatic Sea; Venice; Dalmatia; Ragusa; Candia

1. Introduction

On 2 March 1506 a miracle was recorded in the Italian village of Longiano, in modern-day Emilia Romagna. A Greek icon of the Madonna and Child (Figure 1a), which decorated the residence of the devout Sebastiano Barberi suddenly started to “sweat” tears (“sudore manavit”). As news of the miracle spread, Barberi’s house was slowly transformed into a site of intense public devotion, swarming with visitors who came to worship the weeping Madonna. It was not long until this new devotion outgrew the domestic confines of Barberi’s household, prompting him to donate the icon to the local community along with his house (Figure 1b), which was subsequently converted into a church to host the wonder-working image, henceforth known as Our Lady of Tears (Madonna delle Lacrime).¹ As extraordinary as it sounds, this episode—one of many encountered in Late Medieval and Early Modern sources—illustrates the prominent place of Orthodox icons in Catholic devotional practices, while highlighting the fluid boundaries between domestic and public worship.

¹ The episode is commemorated in a dedicatory inscription at the ex-church of Our Lady of Tears (Santa Maria delle Lacrime) in Longiano: D.O.M. // BEATISSIMAEQUE VIRGINI // LACRIMARUM // QUAE// ANNO CIOIOVI POSTRID. K. MAR // SUDORE MANAVIT // SEBASTIANUS BARBERIUS // DOMUM IN TEMPLUM D.D.D.S. // QUODQ. VETUSTATE COLLABENS // CONSULES LONZANI // A FUNDAMENTIS IN HANC FORMAM AEDIF. CIOIOCCCLXXII. The inscription is cited and transliterated in (Turchi 1829, pp. 4–5). See also (Pasi 1986, pp. 156–58).



Figure 1. (a) Madre della Consolazione (Madonna delle Lacrime), ca. 1500, © Longiano, Museo d'Arte Sacra; (b) Ex Church of Santa Maria delle Lacrime, now Museo Italiano della Ghisa, Longiano (image in the public domain).

The past twenty years have seen an abundance of scholarship on the material culture of the Early Modern domestic interior and the devotional practices that took place in the Renaissance home.² Drawing heavily on archival sources, previous publications have been geographically limited to the major artistic centers of Central and Northern Italy, notably to Renaissance Florence and Venice, whereas the rest of the Italian Peninsula and the Adriatic region still remain largely uncharted. In addition, extant studies have almost exclusively dealt with art objects of Western style and manufacture, while icons made in the Byzantine tradition are mentioned only briefly as a side-note or listed among items casually encountered in private collections. Departing from the limitations of previous scholarship, this article will explore the place and function of Byzantine and Byzantinizing icons in Catholic households throughout the broad Adriatic region, and at the same time, trace the afterlives of images of domestic devotion in the public space. Through the comparative evaluation of material evidence with archival and literary sources, this study seeks to outline the socio-political, confessional, and artistic dynamics that fostered a favorable setting for the reception of icon painting in the Adriatic. As this article will argue, the intense circulation of artists, artworks and artistic trends in the Eastern Mediterranean from the fifteenth century onwards, as well as the image theories promulgated during the age of confessionalization were the key factors that allowed for the survival of Byzantine artistic forms long after their presumed abandonment by Renaissance Humanism, rendering Orthodox icons the votive objects *par excellence* in the pre- and post-Tridentine societies of both Adriatic coasts. Due to

² (Palumbo Fossati 1984; Lydecker 1987; Grubb 2000; Brown 2004; Palumbo Fossati 2004; Ajmar Wollheim and Dennis 2006; Currie 2006; Ajmar Wollheim et al. 2007; Anderson 2007; Cavallo and Evangelisti 2009; Henry 2011; Morse 2013; Feigenbaum and Freddolini 2014; Walsham 2014; Corry et al. 2017; Brundin et al. 2018; Corry et al. 2018).

the scarcity of sources from the South Adriatic, this study will draw mainly from published records from Venice and its Adriatic possessions, as well as from published and new documents from the archives of Dubrovnik. However, visual evidence in support of the article's main arguments can be found throughout the Adriatic region, including less documented regions, such as Apulia, the Marche, Abruzzo and Molise, and will be presented here selectively.

2. The Introduction, Reception and Appropriation of Icon Painting in the Catholic West

Image worship lay at the heart of Eastern Christian devotional practices since the early centuries of Byzantium, growing increasingly in popularity after the end of iconoclasm in 843. From the mid-eleventh century onwards, painted icons gained added significance, and were promoted as “living paintings” (“ἐμψυχος γραφή”), a concept first introduced in the writings of Michael Psellos. More than mere art objects, for the Byzantines, icons were considered to be the true likenesses and material embodiments of Christ and the saints and were often treated as equivalent to relics. In fact, certain early icons were believed to have been created not by human hands but by divine agency, often credited as the original portraits of saints painted by Saint Luke himself. These *acheiropoietai* icons were often attributed thaumaturgic powers of healing and protection conferred by the sacred figures they represented. In Byzantine theology, the veneration of such images and their copies allowed the devout to communicate directly with the divine, based on the belief that the honor given to an image was transferred directly to its prototype, as expressed by Basil the Great and John of Damascus. Images representing holy figures, crafted in various sizes and a variety of media permeated all aspects of public and private life. In ecclesiastical settings, icons functioned as integral parts of liturgical rituals, decorating church interiors and being carried in public processions, whereas in official civic and military contexts, they were steadily replacing imperial images, acting as divine protectors of armies (*apotropaia*) and defenders of cities (*palladia*), roles particularly diffused during periods of intense warfare. Besides their public functions, icons were also commissioned individually for personal uses; small portable icons, such as diptychs, triptychs and polyptychs were used as visual aids for private devotion in the home, and accompanied their owners to battle or distant travels, providing them with constant protection from harm.³

Although icon worship was an integral part of Orthodox devotional practices from very early on, in Catholic Europe, the veneration of painted panels was a much later introduction.⁴ In the first half of the thirteenth century, during the period of Latin rule, the Archbishop of Ohrid, Demetrios Chomatenos, was writing to Constantine Kavalas, Metropolitan of Durrës: “There are some Latins that do not seem to be completely different from our customs [. . .] Indeed they too revere icons and they exhibit them in their churches.”⁵ While Chomatenos raises a point of convergence between Greek and Latin approaches to images, his statement implies that the practice of venerating sacred images was not always or, at least not universally, adopted by the Catholic Church. In fact, during the Middle Ages, popular piety in the West mainly revolved around the veneration of relics, and even domestic devotion was mainly aided by textual artefacts, such as private psalters and books of hours. It was only after the Crusades and especially, after the Sack of Constantinople in 1204, that Italian and Dalmatian workshops started producing icon-like devotional images, influenced by the reputedly ancient and miraculous icons that came streaming from the East, and possibly by the

³ For the role of icons in Byzantium see (Belting 1994; Carr 2004, pp. 142–52; Vassilaki 2008, pp. 758–69; Drandaki 2013, pp. 109–14).

⁴ For the diffusion of icon worship in the West see (Ringbom 1984, pp. 12–22; Belting 1994; Carr 2004, pp. 142–52; Drandaki 2013, pp. 109–14; Bacci 2018, pp. 272–92).

⁵ “Τινες τῶν Λατίνων εὐρίσκονται μὴ καθόλου διαφερόμενοι πρὸς τὰ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἔθνη [...] τῶν ἁγίων γὰρ εἰκόνων εἰσὶ καὶ οὗτοι προσκυνηταί, καὶ ἐν τοῖς κατ’ αὐτοὺς ναοῖς ἀναστηλοῦσιν αὐτάς.” (Rallis and Potlis 1855, p. 434; Morini 1989, p. 267).

teachings of Byzantine painters migrating to the West.⁶ Images made in the so-called *maniera greca* appropriated the morphological and iconographic features of Byzantine icons, enriched with Crusader innovations and local pictorial elements (Figure 2).⁷ Over the following centuries, Eastern and Western traditions would eventually diverge into largely disparate paths, as Italian—and to a lesser extent Dalmatian—painters gradually adopted a more naturalistic way of representation, abandoning the more abstract Medieval forms.



Figure 2. Berlinghiero Berlinghieri, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1230s, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (image in the public domain).

Rejected as repetitive, distasteful, and unimaginative, the *maniera greca* of the Orthodox East and the Italian *Duecento* ended up becoming synonymous of artistic decline by the fifteenth century, representing everything a Renaissance artist should avoid. Cennino Cennini and Lorenzo Ghiberti both praised Giotto for “changing the profession of painting from Greek back into Latin” (Cennini 1960, p. 2),⁸ “bringing new art and abandoning the roughness of the Greeks” (Ghiberti 1998, p. 84).⁹ Leonardo da Vinci reproached the “followers of the Byzantine manner”, claiming that they “continually imitated each other, and art declined steadily from age to age” (Leonardo 1961, p. 84;

⁶ In his life of Cimabue Giorgio Vasari relates the emergence of Italian panel painting to the presence of “Greek painters”, who had been invited to Florence “for no other purpose than that of introducing there the art of painting, which in Tuscany long had been lost” [“Avenne che in que’ giorni erano venuti di Grecia certi pittori in Fiorenza, chiamati da chi governava quella città non per altro che per introdurvi l’arte della pittura, la quale in Toscana era stata smarrita molto tempo”]. (Vasari 1550, p. 126; cited and translated in Maginnis 1994, p. 147; Concina 2002, pp. 89–96). See also Voulgaropoulou, Margarita. Forthcoming. *Transcending Borders, Transforming Identities: Travelling Icons and Icon Painters in the Adriatic Region* (Voulgaropoulou, Margarita. Forthcoming. *Transcending Borders, Transforming Identities: Travelling Icons and Icon Painters in the Adriatic Region*).

⁷ For the development of Italian panel painting see (Folda 2015, pp. xxii–xxiii, with references).

⁸ “Il quale Giotto rimutò l’arte del dipignere di Greco in Latino e ridusse al moderno”.

⁹ “Arrechò l’arte nuova, lasciò la rozeza de’ Greci”.

Nagel and Wood 2010, pp. 72–73).¹⁰ Renaissance critique of the Byzantine manner culminated in the writings of Giorgio Vasari, who repeatedly dismissed it as “awkward”, “coarse”, “disproportionate” and even “monstrous” (Vasari 1550, pp. 59, 83, 97, 119, 244).¹¹ Within the context of such an increasingly negative discourse, one can only wonder how images made in the Byzantine tradition managed to not only survive in a seemingly unfavorable intellectual setting, but also develop into essential parts of domestic and public devotional practices of Italian and Dalmatian Catholic populations.

A catalyzing moment for the reception of Byzantine culture and icon painting in the West, and especially in Venice, was the council for the union of the Greek and Latin Churches held in Ferrara and Florence in 1438–1439.¹² In 1438, the Greek delegation, comprising of seven hundred clerics and laymen, including the Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaiologos (1392–1448) and the patriarch of Constantinople, Joseph II (1360–1439), spent a few weeks in Venice right immediately prior to setting out for Ferrara. The brief Byzantine presence in the city nonetheless left a lasting impression on the Venetians, who developed an almost exotic interest in all things Greek. At the same time, a great many Byzantine icons and luxury items were arriving in Venice, Rome and other Italian cities either by means of trade or as diplomatic gifts, filling up the treasuries of lay and ecclesiastical magnates. Cardinal Bessarion (1403–1472), for instance, donated seven mosaic icons to Saint Peter’s basilica from 1454 to 1466, although an inventory from 1489 suggests that his legacy was much larger, also including numerous painted panels (Müntz 1879, p. 298n3; Müntz and Frothingham 1883, p. 111; Antetomaso 2007, pp. 225–32; Nagel 2011, pp. 21–22; Duits 2013, p. 170). Arguably the largest collection of icons, numbering twenty-three mosaic icons (“de musayco parvissimo”) and thirteen painted and sculpted ones (“ycona graeca”), was amassed by the Venetian cardinal Pietro Barbo, future Pope Paul II (Müntz 1879, pp. 201–5; Cutler 1995, p. 251; Corbo 2004, pp. 31–33; Pedone 2005, p. 102n36; Cherra 2006, pp. 184–85; Duits 2011, pp. 127–41; Nagel 2011, p. 21; Duits 2013, pp. 169–71; Menna 2015, pp. 101–11). When Barbo died in 1471, a part of his collection was acquired by Lorenzo de’ Medici, who already owned numerous icons in the “Greek” style, which were registered in the Medici household inventories as early as 1463 (Furlan 1973, pp. 19–20; Spallanzani et al. 1992, pp. 27, 47–48, 63, 80; Spallanzani 1996, pp. 119, 142–44; Menna 1998, pp. 122–24; Cherra 2006, pp. 185–87; Fusco and Corti 2006, pp. 74–75; Nagel 2011, p. 21; Duits 2013, pp. 157–88). Smaller collections of icons belonged to cardinal Ludovico Trevisan (1401–1465), owner of “antique Greek panels with silver revetments” (Bagemihl 1993, p. 563; Duits 2013, p. 170), and cardinal Francesco Gonzaga (1444–1483), whose will mentions “two old Greek panels, one with the Crucifixion and one with Our Lady” (Chambers 1992; Duits 2013, p. 170). It is not a coincidence that all of these collections were in some way related to Venice: both cardinals Trevisan and Barbo were of Venetian origin, cardinal Bessarion served at the city as a papal legate, and cardinal Gonzaga is known to have acquired art objects from Venice for his Mantua palace.

A new, massive wave of icons and Byzantine artefacts swept through Venice and other Italian centers towards the turn of the sixteenth century, along with an unprecedented influx of Greek migrants and members of the Byzantine intelligentsia that followed the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and the Ottoman expansion into former Byzantine and Venetian lands in the Eastern Mediterranean (Bianca 1999; Menna 1998, pp. 111–58; Cherra 2006, pp. 175–204; Pedone 2005, p. 100; Lamers 2015, p. 4). Carried in the baggage of church prelates and aristocratic refugees, such as cardinal Bessarion and Anna Palaiologina Notaras, these migrating heirlooms eventually entered Italian and Western European private collections; this time, however, they were not only perceived as exotic curiosities and prized relics that appealed to the antiquarian and philological interests of fifteenth-century humanists (Effenberger 2004, p. 212; Cutler 1995, p. 252; Nagel and Wood 2010, p. 105; Duits 2011, p. 135;

¹⁰ “[...] come vedemo in ne’ pittori dopo i Romani, i quali sempre imitarono l’uno dall’altro, e di età in età sempre mandarono detta arte in declinazione”.

¹¹ “la maniera goffa greca”, “rozza maniera Bizantina”, “altre mostruosità di que’ Greci”, “quella maniera greca goffa e sproporzionata”.

¹² For the Council of Ferrara–Florence see (Geanakoplos 1955, pp. 324–46; Nicol 1988, pp. 376–79; Morini 1989, pp. 267–96).

Duits 2013, pp. 159–160n6) but also as the last remnants of the fallen Byzantine Empire and symbols of the battles of allied Christianity against Islam.¹³ According to Alexander Nagel, “the icon enthusiasm of the later fifteenth century led to efforts to revitalize and reauthorize religious images in the West”, leading to the rediscovery of local icons and the formation of legends revolving around miracle-working images (Nagel 2011, p. 22).

The influx of Eastern icons to the West continued throughout the Early Modern Period, only it no longer concerned Byzantine artworks but rather, images created in the flourishing icon-painting centers of the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, the most important being Candia, a Venetian possession from 1211 to 1669. From the sixteenth century onwards, a vibrant trade of icons was established between Venice, Crete and other centers of the Mediterranean and Adriatic Seas, while icons kept streaming to the West, following the mass migrations of Orthodox populations during the Ottoman–Venetian wars. At the same time, numerous Greek Orthodox communities and churches were founded in Venice and other Adriatic cities, encouraging the establishment of icon-painting workshops that produced devotional images for a confessionally diverse clientele (Voulgaropoulou 2014, pp. 132–432). Therefore, it appears that the geopolitical upheavals in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period resulted in an inflow of Byzantine and post-Byzantine icons in Adriatic collections, allowing for the rediscovery of icon painting and the further familiarization of Italian and Dalmatian Catholics with the Byzantine tradition. What remains to be answered, however, is the question of how exactly these icons were introduced in Catholic religious practices and accepted as devotional objects *par excellence* by the Roman Catholic Church, especially in a period of intense theological debates and inter-confessional conflicts.

Respect for Byzantine icons’ spirituality had pervaded Western theology since the Late Middle Ages. As early as 1306, the Dominican preacher Fra Giordano da Rivalto (1260–1311) attributed “the utmost authority to images imported from Greece”, for depicting the holy figures “exactly as they looked” (Giordano 1867, p. 171; Belting 1994, p. 182; Cutler 1994, p. 194; Cutler 2000).¹⁴ Almost a century later, the Blessed Fra Giovanni Dominici (ca. 1355–1419), mentor of Fra Angelico and Archbishop of Ragusa, advised the faithful to revere the “old smoky” humble images of the past (“vecchie affumate”) instead of worshipping the gilded and richly ornamented religious paintings of their time, which he thought distracted them from the essence of prayer (Dominici 1860, p. 133; Nagel and Wood 2010, p. 85; Nagel 2011, pp. 20–21, 290n21; Drandaki 2014, p. 45). Although Dominici’s “old smoky” icons can probably be identified with devotional images of the Italian *Duecento* and *Trecento* (see Figure 2) rather than Byzantine icons, both his and Giordano’s accounts certainly denote a reverence towards Byzantinizing Medieval forms that resonated with more conservative Catholic circles of scholars and theologians.

A marked shift in the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards Greek icons occurred in the wake of the Council of Trent with the implementation of a set of liturgical-artistic reforms that redefined the principles of religious art. The Counter-Reformation defended the veneration of images and promulgated the moral and didactic role of art rather than its aesthetic value.¹⁵ In the post-Tridentine

¹³ The common Ottoman threat created a sense of solidarity between Greek and Latin Christians, especially considering that a large part of the Byzantine refugees had accepted the Union of Florence and converted to Catholicism. Although short-lived, the Union of Florence had cultivated a favorable environment for Orthodox Christianity in the Catholic West, especially in Venice, where there was more tolerance towards doctrinal differences. Quite revealing is a letter of the Camaldolese monks, Paolo Giustiniani and Vincenzo Querini to pope Leo X in 1513, claiming about the Greeks that “they are true Christians; we half-pagan” (“hi Christiani vere sunt, nos semipagani”). (Giustiniani and Quirini 1773, p. 662; Bianchini 1995, p. 75; Prodi 1973, pp. 422–23. See also Nagel 2011, p. 21; Lamers 2015, p. 5).

¹⁴ “sicchè queste dipinture, e specialmente l’antiche, che vennono di Grecia anticamente, sono di troppo grande autoritate; perocchè là entro conversaro molti santi che ritrassero le dette cose e diederne copia al mondo, delle quali si trae autorità grande, siccome si trae di libri”.

¹⁵ This is explicitly decreed in the twenty-fifth and last session of the Council, which took place on 3–4 December, 1563: “[...] picturis vel aliis similitudinibus expressas erudiri et confirmari populum in articulis fidei commemorandis et assidue recolendis; tum vero ex omnibus sacris imaginibus magnum fructum percipi non solum quia admonetur populus beneficiorum et munerum quae a Christo sibi collata sunt sed etiam quia Dei per sanctos miracula et salutaria exempla

era, the artist's primary duty was to serve the triple ciceronian prerequisite "docere, delectare, movere", i.e., to educate, to delight, and to move the audience. One of the first to profess this thesis was the Archbishop of Bologna, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti in his treatise *De imaginibus sacris et profanis* (1594), which epitomizes the focal points of the Tridentine decrees on art (Paleotti 1594, pp. 26, 91). Together with the educational role of art, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards the Holy See promoted an "early Christian revival", especially under the patronage of Pope Gregory XIII (1502–1585) and cardinal Cesare Baronio (1538–1607), aiming to serve Tridentine propaganda by strengthening the ties of the Roman Catholic Church with Early Christianity.¹⁶ This movement entailed the rediscovery of the works of the Church Fathers and early ecclesiastical writers, the conservation of early Christian monuments and the revival of types of Early Christian art and architecture, which instigated a pronounced interest for Christian history and archaeology, and cultivated, as a result, a favorable setting for the reception of earlier pictorial forms, as was Byzantine icon painting.¹⁷

In his monumental treatise, *De Picturis et Imaginibus sacris* (1570), Johannes Molanus (1533–1585) builds on the Tridentine decrees on images, stressing the necessity "to receive in all honor those pictures that are recommended by the venerable Antiquity" (Molanus 1570, p. 19; Molanus 1996, pp. 137–39). For ecclesiastical writers such as Molanus, early icons stemmed directly from the original portraits of holy figures or were considered to be *acheiropoiētoi*, i.e. not made by human hand. Based on the reproduction of original prototypes, Byzantine icon painting was considered to be closer to the Early Christian tradition and, therefore, represented the most authentic art form (Paleotti 1594, 74; Goffen 1975, p. 487; Chatzidakis 1977, pp. 684–85), while its austere otherworldliness allowed for an essential connection with the divine (Chastel 1988, p. 99). In this context, even though Orthodox Greeks were branded as "schismatics" and "heretics"—especially after the refutation of the Union of Florence and during the confessional conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Fedalto 1967, p. 34)—their art seemed to ideally conform to the tridentine doctrines, offering the Catholic Church a useful tool in their battle against Protestant iconoclasm.

The Catholic Church's appreciation of the spirituality of Greek Orthodox iconographic tradition is commonly encountered in the art treatises of the Counter-Reformation era, often paired with the denunciation of the "paganism" and sensuality of Renaissance and Mannerist art. In his 1564 treatise, *Degli errori de' pittori circa l'istorie*, published just a year after the final session of the Council of Trent, Giovanni Andrea Gilio da Fabriano suggests "painting the sacred images honest, and pious, with those signs which were attributed to them by the ancients as the privilege of their sanctity; although it appears to the moderns vile, tasteless, plebeian, old-fashioned, lowly, devoid of genius and art" (Barocchi 1961, p. 111).¹⁸ Likewise, the Archbishop of Bologna and engineer of the tridentine reforms, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, in his *Addenda de picturis*, advises artists to depict the Virgin half-length with

oculis fidelium subiiciuntur ut pro iis Deo gratias agant ad sanctorum que imitationem vitam mores que suos componant excitentur que ad adorandum ac diligendum Deum et ad pietatem colendam [...] Quodsi aliquando historias et narrationes Sacrae Scripturae cum id indoctae plebi expediet exprimi et figurari contigerit: doceatur populus non propterea divinitatem figurari quasi corporeis oculis conspici vel coloribus aut figuris exprimi possit". For the English translation of the excerpt see (Schroeder 2011): "by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith, which ought to be borne in mind and constantly reflected upon; also that great profit is derived from all holy images, not only because the people are thereby reminded of the benefits and gifts bestowed on them by Christ, but also because through the saints the miracles of God and salutary examples are set before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the saints and be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety [...] this is beneficial to the illiterate, that the stories and narratives of the Holy Scriptures are portrayed and exhibited, the people should be instructed that not for that reason is the divinity represented in picture as if it can be seen with bodily eyes or expressed in colors or figures". For the consideration of painting as Poor Man's Bible (*Biblia pauperum*) and live scripture see (Paleotti 1594, p. 288; Barocchi 1961, p. 408; Molanus 1570, pp. 15, 32; Molanus 1996, pp. 125–27).

¹⁶ For the so-called "early Christian revival" of the end of the sixteenth century see (Zuccari 1984, pp. 49–52, 64, 80, 94; Bianchi 2008, vol. 11, pp. 84–85; Tosini 2009).

¹⁷ "usum a primaevis christianae religionis temporibus". [following the sacred writings and the ancient tradition of the Fathers]. Sessio XXV 3–4 dec. 1563. Cf. the treatises of Molanus and Gabriele Paleotti.

¹⁸ "Dipingere le sacre imagini oneste e devote, con que' segni che gli sono stati dati dagli antichi per privilegio de la santità, il che è paruto a' moderni vile, goffo, plebeo, antico, umile, senza ingegno et arte".

the Infant Jesus “as occurred in the past and can be seen today in Greek icons” (“et così nelle figure grece” [sic]); otherwise, the holy figures might not be recognized by the faithful (Bianchi 2008, p. 171).

Paleotti’s image theory shaped the aesthetics of Catholic devotion and popular piety, and was further developed in the writings of contemporary and future scholars. Johannes Molanus, quoting the Bishop of Meaux, William Durant the Elder (ca. 1220–1296), condemned the use of nudity by his contemporary artists, pointing out that “the Greeks use images, painting them as it is said only from the navel above, and not lower, so that there is no opportunity for brute thoughts to suggest themselves” (Molanus 1570, p. 69; Freedberg 1971, pp. 229–45).¹⁹ The Archbishop of Milan, Federico Borromeo (1564–1631) shared similar opinions. In his treatise, *De Pictura Sacra* (1624), Borromeo echoes Paleotti’s views that art should educate the public, and praises the “Christian Greeks” (“i Greci cristiani”) for respectfully depicting only the upper part of the saints’ bodies and veiling the lower part with a cloth, “as we can still see in many pictures” (Borromeo 1932, p. 65; Jones 1997, pp. 32, 96). Almost a century later, the bishop of Bisceglie, Pompeo Sarnelli (1649–1724) was making specific recommendations to the painter Angelo Solimena, from whom he had commissioned four religious images for personal use. In a lengthy letter, the bishop provided Solimena detailed instructions on “how the sacred images should be painted” (“come si debban dipingere le sacre imagini”), and stressed that he would prefer his icons to be “half-length, according to the old Christian custom, which has been preserved by the Greeks”. Like Gilio and Molanus, Sarnelli pointed out in his letter how old Christian masters painted religious images that “inspired devotion and superhuman majesty, even though they did not conform to the rules of art”, contrary to “the painters of our age, who have profaned with their style the sacred pictures to the point where, not only is it impossible to worship them, but it is also impossible to look at them with pure eyes for they have introduced nudity even into the altars” (Sarnelli 1686, pp. 273–74; Basile Bonsante 2002, pp. 110–11).²⁰

Despite Sarnelli’s expressed recognition of the spiritual merits of Greek icon painting, the iconic images he commissioned from Solimena were ultimately executed in the late Baroque style, which was fashionable during his time. In Counter-Reformation Italy, appreciation for the spirituality of Eastern Orthodox icon painting did not necessarily entail a return to Byzantine pictorial forms; instead, at the basis of Post-Tridentine image theory lay the combination of the devotional qualities of Byzantine icons with the aesthetic principles and the naturalistic vocabulary of Italian or Flemish Baroque art, a precept that even regulated the production of iconic copies. In 1597, when Federico Borromeo wanted to include the “original portraits” of Orthodox saints and Church fathers in his *Ambrosiana*, he entrusted his commissions to several Italian artists instead of hiring one of the numerous Greek icon-painters working in Northern Italy. However, he went to great lengths to ensure that the copies would be modeled after authentic prototypes, ideally originating from the East.²¹ Much more important for him was the adherence of the copies to specific iconographic prototypes, rather than the painter’s origin or the faithful emulation of the original’s technique. After all, for Borromeo, any direct or indirect copy

¹⁹ “His adde, quod Gulielmus Durandus Mimatensis Episcopus scribit de quibusdam Graecanicis Ecclesiis in Rationali divinorum officiorum, Graeci, ait, utuntur imaginibus, pingentes illas ut dicitur, solum ab umbilico supra & non inferius, ut omnis stultae cogitationis occasio tollatur”.

²⁰ “Per prima io le desidero a mezzo busto. Così fù l’antico uso de’ Christiani ritenuto da greci per degni rispetti [...] tanto che spirano divozione e maestà sopraumana; ancorche l’opera non appaja secondo le regole dell’arte [...] Pittori de nostro secolo, che hanno profanato in maniera le sacre pitture, che non solamente non si ponno adorare, ma nè men rimirare con occhio puro, havendo introdotta la nudità infin sopra gli Altari”.

²¹ In 1597, Borromeo assigned the German artist Hans Rottenhammer and the Spanish Dominican Alphonsus Ciacconius with the task of locating the “original portraits” of Doctors of the Eastern Church in Venice and Rome, respectively, cities with strong Byzantine associations. Rottenhammer’s inquiry proved fruitless, so he proposed to have the portraits commissioned from a Greek artist residing in Venice, whom he, however, dismissed as a less skillful painter (“non è troppo maestro”). On the other hand, Ciacconius informed Borromeo that he had discovered certain portraits of Orthodox saints, which had been “carried off from Constantinople”. See (Jones 1997, pp. 190–92, 205n94). Although most portraits have been attributed to Giuseppe Franchi, the close resemblance of certain ones among them with popular iconographic models or types associated with Greek icon-painting workshops (for example the one of Ioannes Permeniates in Venice), suggests the possibility that the images could have been modelled after original Greek designs or executed with the assistance of a Greek-speaking icon painter.

of a miraculous icon channeled part of the qualities of the original, regardless of style or authorship (Noreen 2005, pp. 665–66; Merriam 2009, p. 204).

By sharing the powers of authentic images, reproductions of wonder-working icons became popular in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe and were used by the Catholic Church as propagandistic tools in their battle against Protestant iconoclasm. Federico Borromeo's famous cousin, Cardinal Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584), owned, in his private collection, several reproductions of miraculous icons and symbols of Roman popular piety. In 1569, at the initiative of Cardinal Francesco Borgia, who wanted a “true and living portrait” of the Virgin, Carlo Borromeo received the permission of pope Pius V (1566–1572) to issue reproductions of the miraculous icon venerated at the church of Santa Maria Maggiore under the title of *Salus Populi Romani* (Noreen 2005, pp. 662–72). Most copies of the miraculous icon were distributed throughout Europe to Jesuit missionaries and state leaders fighting Protestantism. One of them, however, Borromeo kept for himself and had it placed in his private chambers, as we can see in a painting from the Duomo of Milan depicting the cardinal on his deathbed. The same copy or a similar one ended up later in the property of his cousin, Federico, and is featured in another painting portraying Federico Borromeo in his study (Noreen 2005, p. 665) (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Giulio Cesare Procaccini, *Cardinal Federico Borromeo*, Milan, Museo Diocesano (image in the public domain).

In addition to the Borromeo family, a multitude of wealthy cardinals and cardinal-nephews (*nipoti*) owned copies of popular miraculous images or icons in the “Greek” style in their collections, usually objects of private devotion and of inferior economic or aesthetic value (Cappelletti 2014, p. 79). Cardinal Paleotti, for example, owned two small icons painted *alla greca* in his private residence (“un quadro con una Madonna alla greca, con sua coperta di tavola picciola [...] e un altro dipinto di piccolo formato sempre alla greca”) (Bianchi 2008, p. 171). A “Madonna alla greca” was listed in 1609 in cardinal Ludovico de Torres’ estate in Rome (Abbate 2009, p. 283), while devotional images and copies of thaumaturgic icons were in the possession of cardinals Benedetto Giustiniani and Francesco Maria Del Monte (Jones 2004, p. 88). The domestic veneration of Greek icons was especially popular

with the house of Barberini, as evidenced by the property inventories and wills of cardinals Francesco Barberini, his brother Taddeo, prince Maffeo, Cardinal Antonio and Don Francesco (Aronberg Lavini 1975, pp. 83, 97, 216, 231, 234, 268, 284, 313, 315–16, 343–44, 386, 392, 424).

While in Rome, higher intellectual and artistic circles often promoted the creation of iconic images in the Italian fashion, the diffusion of the cults of miraculous Byzantine icons resulted in their wider popularization and integration through means of copies in domestic settings. Contrary to pre-Tridentine times, when Byzantine icons were mainly collected as rare and precious items of prestige, in the age of confessionalization icons, *alla greca*, were primarily acquired for their spiritual properties, and functioned mainly as objects of devotion and piety. The spread of icons in Early Modern domestic interiors becomes even more conspicuous in the multiethnic and multiconfessional societies of Venice and the Adriatic region, where the persistence of Byzantine artistic traditions and the presence of vibrant Greek communities and artistic workshops allowed for the intense veneration of Byzantine and post-Byzantine icons in both private and public contexts.

3. The Veneration of Greek Icons in the Italian and Dalmatian Household

3.1. The Archival Evidence

As previously mentioned, during the course of the Middle Ages, Catholic domestic worship was mainly associated with manuscripts, although the presence of isolated religious images for private use is suggested in sporadic sources. In any event, in the fourteenth century, a new kind of image-centered spirituality emerged across Europe, aiming to engage the emotional involvement of the viewer, and emphasizing the importance of private piety (Ringbom 1984, pp. 12–14, 30–39). Since that time, religious images have consistently constituted the primary *foci* of domestic religious practices, representing, by far, the most common type of material culture encountered in Late Medieval and Early Modern Catholic households. It is estimated that ninety percent of all inventoried households in Venice possessed at least one devotional icon (Palumbo Fossati 1984, p. 131; Kasl 2004, p. 63; Morse 2007, pp. 163–66; Brundin et al. 2018, p. 139). Among these items, Byzantine and Byzantinizing icons, commonly referred to as *alla greca* to emphasize their Eastern origin, are encountered in sources as early as the fifteenth century, although mainly in the collections of wealthier and highly educated patrons. Nevertheless, by the early sixteenth century, their popularity increased to such a degree that they became almost ubiquitous in a vast range of households.

The prominent role of Byzantinizing icons in the Italian household is colorfully illustrated by the sixteenth-century historian, Giambattista Armenini, in his treatise titled *De veri precetti della pittura* (1587). During his travels through Northern Italy, Armenini reveals that he visited many mansions and palaces, all “admirably decorated, except for the paintings of holy images, which, for the most part, consisted of little panels of certain figures *alla greca*, very coarse, unpleasing, and entirely sootblackened” (Armenini 1587, p. 214; Armenini 1977, p. 256; Ringbom 1984, pp. 34–35).²² These icons were usually found in “the rooms where we rest and spend most of our lives”, a custom which Armenini emphatically dismissed as shameful (“un gran vergogna”). But regardless of Armenini’s personal sentiments, his narration reflects the proliferation of icon-worship in Catholic households, which is further confirmed by the dozens of icons located today in Italian and Croatian museums and private collections, as well as by a multitude of archival sources dating from the fifteenth, right through to the eighteenth century. Household inventories, family memoirs, wills and testaments, and other documents drawn up in the occasion of inheritances or dowaries testify to the presence of at least one or more “Greek” icons in

²² “per molti palagi e case, e fino nelle camere secrete [...] e tutte ho veduto essere con mirabil arte fornite, eccetto di pitture delle sacre imagini, le quali erano la maggior parte quadretti di certe figure fatte alla greca, goffissime, dispiacevoli e tutte affumicate”.

Catholic residences, and offer a vivid impression of the domestic uses of devotional images in the Italian Peninsula and the East coast of the Adriatic.²³

In Venice, the hub of the Adriatic culture, the domestic cults of icons remained vital from the Late Middle Ages and throughout the entirety of the Early Modern period, long after the *maniera greca* had been abandoned from official artistic production. The vibrant commerce between Venice and its Mediterranean possessions, especially Candia, supplied the city with an abundance of devotional icons, while, from the sixteenth century onwards, the increasing local demand was supplemented by the production of Greek painters, commonly named *Madonneri*, who either travelled to the metropolis or settled their workshops in the city. According to Isabella Cecchini's estimates, Greek icons made up for 18% of the total art objects inventoried in Venetian collections during the years 1511–1513, faring considerably better than paintings of other foreign workshops, such as Flemish or German (Cecchini 2008a, p. 187; Corazza 2017, p. 202).

Icons of Greek provenance were almost omnipresent in the households of the Venetian nobility, with their popularity peaking towards the mid-sixteenth century. For instance, a Greek painting of the Virgin ("uno quadro de la Madonna greco") hung in one of the rooms at the residence of the nobleman and member of the Council of Ten, Domenico Cappello, and was inventoried on 22 June 1532 (Kasl 2004, p. 63; Hochmann 2005, p. 129). On 10 December 1533, a gilded icon of the Virgin ("un quadro de Nostra Donna grando dorado alla grecha") was registered among the possessions of noblewoman Elena, widow of Alvise Vitturi and, according to an inventory from 20 September 1529, a "Greek Christ" belonged to another noblewoman, Magdalena, widow of Girolamo Dedo (Hochmann 2005, pp. 121n70, 130). Likewise, a gilded icon of the Virgin ("una Nostra Donna greca dorada") was registered in the residence of Andrea Grimani on 7 June 1553 (Hochmann 2005, p. 130).

Among the wealthiest households, it was not uncommon to find more than one icon in the "Greek" style, sometimes even forming small collections. We know, for example, from a 1594 document, that Zuan Jacomo de' Agostini owned three Virgins *alla greca* in his impressive, for the time, collection of sixty-seven paintings (Jestaz 2001, p. 188). Three Greek icons in canvas ("doi quadri in tolla alla greca", "una madona greca in tolla con soaza dorata piccola") also belonged to the property of Doge Francesco Molin, and was inventoried on 30 November 1655 (Levi 1900, p. 15). The nobleman Alessandro da Mosto, on the other hand, kept six Greek icons of different subjects and styles ("sie quadri senza soaze greci de più sorte"), listed *en masse* in an inventory from November 27, 1538 (Hochmann 2005, p. 121). Similar to this was the case of the nobleman Priamo Malipiero, who had assembled a collection of various types of icons *alla greca*, including a triptych with "portelle" (Palumbo Fossati 2004, p. 481).

Icons *alla greca* also regularly appeared in the property of non-aristocratic Venetian professionals (*cittadini*), including lawyers, notaries, doctors, civil servants, and international merchants. Affluent, educated and socially ambitious, the *cittadini* had risen to a status of "second nobility", and their residences often rivalled those of the patricians (Schmitter 1997, p. 6; Jestaz 2001, pp. 186–87; Hochmann 2005, p. 120). In addition, wealthy citizens who did not share the connoisseurship of cultured aristocratic patrons often chose to decorate their dwellings with devotional icons of lower cost and quality (Cavazzini 2014, p. 89). To mention just a few, "due figure alla greca" were listed in the house of Giovanni Balarmi, "civis muriani" [sic] on 1 January 1513, and a "Madona grecha" was found in the residence of Bernardino Redaldi, duchal secretary, on 5 April 1526 (Hochmann 2005, p. 129).

It is noteworthy that, in Venice, as well as in the rest of the Adriatic, icons were not only restricted to upper-class palaces but were also commonly found in modest dwellings. In fact, one of the major innovations witnessed in sixteenth-century Venetian society was that art ownership gradually spread across all social and economic strata, and painting entered in the households of the lower classes, the *popolo*, as evidenced by property inventories (Henry 2011, p. 256; Corazza 2017, p. 193). According to

²³ The display and uses of icons in Italian and Dalmatian households bear striking similarities with relevant practices documented in Venetian Candia. See (Constantoudaki 1975, pp. 36–74).

Isabella Cecchini's calculations, while the percentage of art-owning patricians and citizens remained virtually stable and always at high levels during the years 1511–1615, that of craftsmen witnessed a 20% increase, whereas that of labourers was almost doubled, rising from 41% to 81% (Cecchini 2008b, Table 2). Indeed, inventory data demonstrates that 75% of *popolani* households contained at least one art object, mostly paintings of smaller dimensions, and of devotional rather than decorative function (Corazza 2017, p. 193). Mass-produced Byzantinizing icons perfectly fit this description. For example, a small icon of Saint Christopher ("uno S. Cristofalo alla greca piccolo depento") belonged to the grocer (*aromatario*) Francesco de Scoperti, as was registered in an inventory from 1528 (Molmenti 1928, p. 480). In another contemporary residence, that of Zaccaria Franchini, second-hand clothes dealer (*strazzarol*), there was a panel of the Madonna "alla greca indorado cum le sue arme suso" (Cecchini 2008a, p. 182). Lastly, from the inventory of the valuables of the apothecary (*spezzer*) Giovanni Ambrosio Perlasca, compiled in 1587, we learn that a "madoneta alla greca" decorated the walls of the house's *portego* among other works of art (Corazza 2017, p. 194).

The presence of Greek icons in Venetian households is documented well into the seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries. To name a few examples: from an inventory drawn on 21 August 1613, we learn that a Greek icon of the Madonna ("un quadro de nostra donna soazado d'oro alla grecha") hangs on the walls of a corridor at Alvise da Ponte's mansion (Carlton 2015, p. 152n52). In addition, a Greek icon of the Virgin, which the notary assessed as "old" ("un quadro della Beata Vergine alla greca vecchio"), was found in the residence of nobleman *cavalier* Marin da Pesaro on 20 July 1671 (Bellavitis 1975, p. 260). Two more icons ("una Madonina greca con soaza nera d'ebano", "un quadro della Madona, pittura greca con soaze antiche dorate") were part of the collection of Andrea Morosini in 1674 (Levi 1900, p. 57). Moreover, in 1701, a Greek Madonna on canvas ("un quadro di Madonna in tolla alla Greca") decorated the house of Francesco Caffi (Cecchini 2005, p. 163). Several Greek icons of the Virgin were documented during the course of the century in the residences of Francesco Querini ("Madona Greca in tavola"), Domenico Cottoni ("effigie di una Madonna, pittura alla greca", "un quadretto con l'effigie della Madonna alla greca con soaza negra e rotta"), and Antonio Giustinian ("Madona alla Greca in tavola") (Levi 1900, pp. 154, 184, 192).

However, despite this documented continuity of paintings *alla greca* in Venetian households, their records in the notarial sources grew progressively fewer as the centuries advanced. Going back to Isabella Cecchini's studies, it appears that the percentage of Greek icons in Venetian households dropped from 18% at the beginning of the sixteenth century to just 4% in the years 1560–1562, and 1% in the period 1600–1615 (Cecchini 2008a, p. 187, Tab. 10; Corazza 2017, p. 202). One can only presume that these numbers kept decreasing in the following decades. While this data should be interpreted with caution, there are several reasons that would explain such a remarkable drop. Towards the late sixteenth century, the already outdated *maniera greca*, fell gradually out of fashion in favor of more naturalistic pictorial styles, and Greek icon painters started to incorporate increasingly more Western elements in their works, often creating mass-produced icons in the style of the Venetian mannerists (Figure 4). Although these works definitely found their ways into the Venetian households, they no longer bore the features that would allow notaries to detect their Eastern origin and identify them as *alla greca*. Another important factor that needs to be considered is the outbreak of the Cretan war in 1645, and the fall of the centers of Chania (1645), Rethymno (1646) and ultimately, Candia (1669), to the Ottomans, which put a halt in the number of imports of Cretan icons to the Venetian markets.

Apart from the metropolis of Venice, Greek icons became widely popular throughout the whole Adriatic region, especially in the peripheral territories of the *Stato da Màr*, but also in regions that developed under the Venetian sphere of influence. In the Veneto and the Venetian *terraferma*, Greek icons were regularly encountered in household inventories. The residence of nobleman Alvise Biasio Speron in Padova offers an illuminating example, boasting of a considerable number of icons of various styles and subjects, as evidenced by an inventory compiled on 19 May 1683: an icon of the Virgin ("un'immagine della B. Vergine dorata alla greca") decorated the mezzanine room (*mezzato*) of the house, another gilded canvas with the Madonna and Child with Saints Augustin and Jerome ("quadro greco

in tela dorato con B. Vergine Bambino s. Agustino e s. Gerolemo”) hung above the door of one of the chambers, whereas two more icons were located in another chamber, an “old” icon depicting the Madonna and Child with Saint Lucy (“quadro alla greca B. Vergine Nostro Signore e s. Lucia, vecchio dorato”) and a smaller one with the Coronation of the Virgin (“altro poco più piccolo Incoronation della B. Vergine”) (Sartori 1989, p. 166).



Figure 4. The Deposition (Pietà) with Saints Francis of Assisi and Carlo Borromeo, ca. 1620–1630, © Koper, Pokrajinski Muzej.

A similar picture is painted in the east coast of the Adriatic, although most published archival sources from the region date from before the late fourteenth century, when the practice of owning and bequeathing icons was still not as widely diffused as in the Early Modern period. Zoran Ladić and Valentina Živković have demonstrated the growing popularity of the veneration and bequest of artworks in Late Medieval Zadar, Trogir and Kotor; however, the cases they presented make no specific reference to icons *alla greca*, thus not permitting us to draw concrete conclusions (Karbić and Ladić 2001, pp. 180, 217; Ladić 2003, pp. 22–24; Živković 2016, pp. 221–30). More specific stylistic descriptions survive from later periods: for instance, in the property inventory of nobleman and doctor of law, Giovanni Casio (Ivan Kašić) from Nin, compiled after his death on 31 January 1699, there is mention of a small Greek icon (“un imagine della Beata Vergine alla grecha piccola”), located in one of the rooms of his house (Katušić and Majnarić 2011, p. 240). Likewise, on 2 August 1722, a small icon of the Virgin with Christ (“un detto piccolo con pitura alla grecha con l’Image della Beata Vergine con un Christo in mano”) was listed among the artworks included in the dowry of Marietta, daughter of Antonio and Lucietta Garbellotto from Zadar (Goja 2014, pp. 136, 142). The widespread popularity of Greek icons in Dalmatia is further highlighted by Alena Fazinić, who claims that on the island of Korčula, there was no household that did not possess at least one Greek icon (Fazinić 2009, pp. 127, 133). Indeed, in her publications of the Boschi family archives, Fazinić mentions numerous icons in the Greek style and

iconography, such as a small painting of Saint Spyridon (“un quadretto di s. Spiridion”), an icon of the Madonna and Child with a silver crown (“un quadro antico rappresentante Madona col bambino pittura greca su legno con una piccola corona con lami d’argento sopraposta alla testa della Madonna con cornice di faggio lucida in nero”), as well as a small oval panel with Saint Simeon (“un quadretto ovale in legno pittura greca rappresenta S. Simeona”) (Fazinić 1980, pp. 587, 596–97; Fazinić 2009, 116n28, 119n40, 124n47).

It is important to note that the veneration of icons was not only diffused in the Venetian possessions of the Adriatic, where there was plenty of interaction with Greek- and Slavic-speaking Orthodox populations; icons were equally popular in the Republic of Ragusa, where the Eastern rite was strictly prohibited until the eighteenth century. In the State Archives of Dubrovnik, there are numerous records of Greek icons in probate and dotal inventories, spanning all social and economic classes, as was the case in Venice. An icon of the Virgin in the Greek style (“una figura de Nostra Dona greca in clausura piccola”), for example, decorated the house of the Ragusan Hieronymo Marini de Dimitrio, according to an inventory drawn on July 28, 1510 (Kovač 1917, p. 86; Tadić 1952, vol. 2, p. 97). Another Greek icon (“una figura alla grecha”) was located in the residence of Petar Antulinović, which was inventoried after his death on 26 April 1518 (DAD, Diversa Cancellariae 108, f. 1r; Tadić 1952, vol. 2, p. 99). Likewise, an icon made “more greco” was found inside a painted *cassone* in the house of the leather-worker (*cimator*) Andrea Benchi (Benković), as registered in an inventory from 22 May 1518 (DAD, Diversa Cancellariae 108, f. 3r; Tadić 1952, vol. 2, p. 99). According to the inventory of the estate of Mirussa, wife of Natale Dobrić that was compiled on 11 May 1519, a small icon “alla greca” was found inside a big chest (*cophano*), while another Greek icon of the Virgin (“una inchona di nostra dona indorata alla greca”) hung in one of the house’s rooms (DAD, Diversa Cancellariae 108, ff. 15r, 16r; Fisković 1959, pp. 85–86n18). A mention of a small Greek icon (“una incona pizola indorata greghescha”) is also found in an inventory from 23 January 1520 (Fisković 1959, pp. 85–86n18). Lastly, on 5 May 1528, a “Madonna de pittura greca” was listed in the property of Nicoletta, daughter of Antonio Bolegnini (Tadić 1952, vol. 2, p. 143).

3.2. “Alla Greca” in the West, “Alla Latina” in the East: The Many Styles of Greek Icons

In Late Medieval and Early Modern archival sources, devotional images are usually described by a wide range of generic terms, including *ic(h)ona* (and the alternative spellings *anc(h)ona*, *ycona*, *cona*), denoting any kind of portable devotional panel or altarpiece; *quadro*, a term used to describe a broad range of artworks of various subject matter; *tavola*, which stands for a wooden panel; and, after the seventeenth century, *tela* or *teller*, signifying a painting on canvas, usually made in the Western style. Since all of these obscure terms may refer to any kind of religious painting without specification of its style and provenance, more precise terminology was required to discern Byzantinizing icons from their Western counterparts. In all the previously cited cases, the Eastern origin and Byzantine technique of the inventoried icons was explicitly noted through the use of terms highlighting their “Greekness”, such as *alla greca*, *more greco*, *greghescha* or *pittura greca*. Some few documents even make more specific assessments: for example, a “quadro candioto piccolo” was listed in Bernardino Redaldi’s inventory in 1526, and a “quadro a la candiota” was mentioned in another Venetian inventory from 1541 (Hochmann 2005, pp. 118n21, 129). Though, undeniably, the best part of the icons that reached the Adriatic markets was imported from the workshops of Candia, it might be safer to assume that classifications such as *alla candiota* or *alla greca* rather implied the style and technique of the icons and not necessarily their actual provenance.

But what does the term *alla greca* precisely refer to? On an initial level, one might easily assume that an icon painted in the “Greek” style was one conforming to the rules of the Byzantine pictorial tradition, as it was preserved in the iconographic centers of the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. More specifically, in order to be classified as “Greek” even by an Early Modern notary inexperienced in matters of art, an icon should observe certain stylistic and iconographic conventions, such as the use of egg tempera on a gold-ground panel, the adherence to an austere two-dimensionality, the stylized

modelling of the faces and the linear articulation of the draperies. Based on such criteria, the author of the 1498 inventory of Paolo Morosini was able to distinguish between an old “Greek” icon and a painting “a la moderna” (Kasl 2004, p. 63).

That being said, in the culturally diverse milieu of the Venice and the Eastern Mediterranean, aesthetic definitions were not always clear or straightforward. In particular, in territories that remained long under Latin rule, as were Rhodes, Cyprus, the Ionian Islands, and especially, Venetian Crete, icon painters had grown highly familiar with Western art, and had adapted their painting style and techniques to better respond to the demands of their Catholic clientele.²⁴ An extraordinary case study from Venetian Candia might help shed some light on this stylistic bilingualism of Cretan artists: on 4 July 1499, the dealers Giorgio Basejo from Venice and Petro Varsamà from Morea signed a series of contracts with three icon painters, named Michael Fokas (Migiel Fuca), Nikolaos Gripiotis (Nicolò Gripioti) and Georgios Miçoconstantin, commissioning them to deliver seven hundred icons of the Virgin within a period of forty-five days (Cattapan 1972, pp. 211–15; Lymberopoulou 2007, pp. 188–89). The painters were provided specific instructions on the preferred style of the commissioned icons, out of which two hundred were to be executed in the “Greek” manner (“in forma greca”), while the remaining five hundred would be painted in the Italian fashion (“tuto in forma a la latina”). Therefore, in this case, the distinction between the Eastern Orthodox and Western painting techniques is clearly noted: the term “in forma greca” corresponded to the strict Byzantinizing tradition (Figure 5a), while the definition “alla latina” indicated that the icons would be executed in a hybrid Italianate style (Figures 5b, 6 and 7), based on the combination of Byzantine elements with Late Gothic or Renaissance influences.



Figure 5. (a) *The Virgin Hodegetria*, 16th century, Venice, Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini (image in the public domain); (b) Nikolaos Tzafores, *Madre della Consolazione with Saint Francis of Assisi*, Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum (image in the public domain).

²⁴ For the presence of Italian artists in Venetian Candia see (Constantoudaki 2018, pp. 30–58).



Figure 6. Circle of Nikolaos Tzafores, *Madre della Consolazione*, Hvar, Biskupski Muzej (provenance: Church of the Annunciation of the Virgin) © Živko Bačić.



Figure 7. Ioannes Permeniates (attr.), *Madonna and Child*, San Marino, Museo di Stato (photograph by the author).

From the above, it appears that the identification of the different styles of icon painting depended heavily on the cultural background of the viewers and their levels of familiarity with the Byzantine tradition. What would classify as “Latin” for a Greek Orthodox viewer might be easily seen as “Greek” by an Italian or Dalmatian, who was used to viewing paintings in the naturalistic style of

the Renaissance and Baroque. Therefore, we can presume that a good part of all these icons *alla greca* mentioned in the archival sources were actually painted in the Westernizing style that was then becoming popular in Latin-ruled Greek lands. After all, the bulk of the icons ordered in the aforementioned massive commission were intended to be “a la latina”, and were probably destined for Western markets, a hypothesis which is also confirmed by the plethora of Italianate icons in museums and private collections throughout the Adriatic (Figures 6, 7, 9a, 17, 19, 20).

On the other hand, it is possible to assume that, due to their stylistic ambiguity, these hybrid icons of Greek manufacture were not always successfully identified in the sources, and were easily mistaken for works of the Italian *trecento* or *quattrocento* (Figure 8). While notaries were seemingly up to date on the aesthetic tendencies of their time, and able to distinguish between different painting styles, such as Italian, Greek or Flemish. However, their assessments should still be read with caution. After all, even in modern-day museum or auction catalogues, Greek icons are often mistaken for works of Italian or Dalmatian provenance, especially if they feature pronounced Western influences. Although it is difficult to know for sure, it seems highly likely that some of the ancient gilded Madonnas (*all’antica*, *indorata*) that are so often cited in the inventories might as well have been of Greek provenance.



Figure 8. Permeniates (attr.), *Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John and Saints Sebastian and Roch*, private collection (image in the public domain).

The identification of Greek icons becomes even harder, as icon painters were not only adopting Western stylistic elements but also replicating Western iconographic themes. The practice of reproducing popular iconographic prototypes lay at the core of icon painting, and Greek workshops systematically copied works of famous Italian masters, thus popularizing them for a mass public. Widely popular among Greek painters were the works of Giovanni Bellini and his circle: in its most concise compositional variation, Bellini’s *Madonna and Child with Saints* from the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, a type already proliferated within the master’s workshop (Heinemann 1963, pp. 239, 277, 279; Golden 2004, pp. 91–127), served as a model for an icon at the Franciscan Monastery of Hvar (Voulgaropoulou 2014, p. 758) (Figure 9a–c); even more popular was Bellini’s *Pietà*, now at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (Heinemann 1963, p. 116, Fig. 85, n. 168; Belting 1985, p. 71, Fig. 32; Bock and Grosshans 1996, n. 1781), replicated

in numerous copies in Rijeka, San Marino, Saint Petersburg, Berlin, Athens, Geneva, and in private collections (Ricci 1901, p. 131; Gamulin 1984, pp. 147–50; Piatnitsky 1993, p. 89; Pasini 2000, pp. 132–34; Kakavas 2003, p. 305; Frigerio Zeniou and Lazović 2006, Tab. 44–45; Voulgaropoulou 2007, pp. 216–19; Voulgaropoulou 2014, pp. 633, 667) (Figure 10a,b).

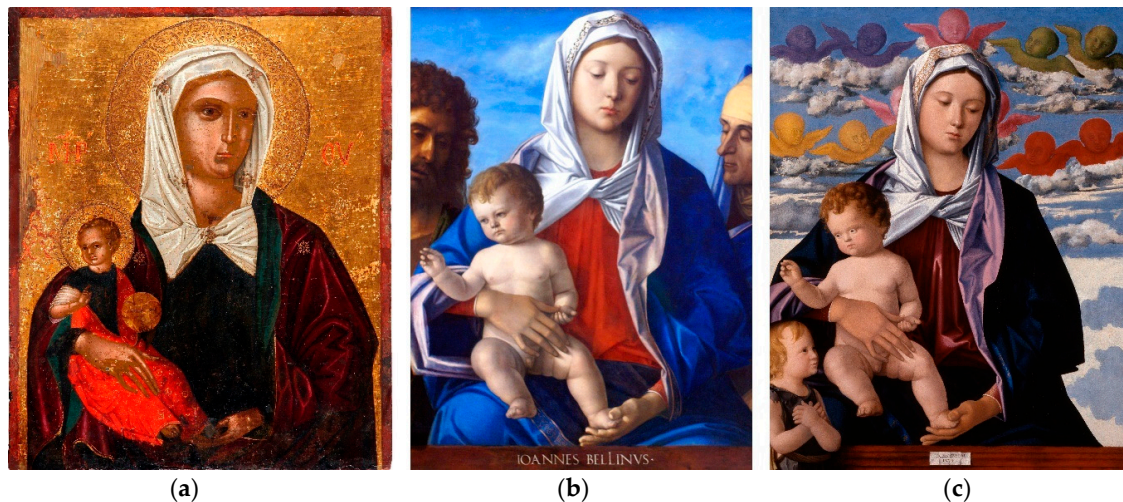


Figure 9. (a) *Madonna and Child* after Giovanni Bellini, Hvar, Franciscan Monastery of Our Lady of Mercy (Zbirka Umjetnina Franjevačkog Samostana Gospe od Milosti) © Živko Bačić; (b) Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child with Saints John and Anne*, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie (image in the public domain); (c) Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John*, Indianapolis, Indianapolis Museum of Art (image in the public domain).



Figure 10. (a) *Pietà* after Giovanni Bellini, San Marino, Museo di Stato (taken from Pasini 2000, Fig. 57); (b) Giovanni Bellini, *Pietà*, ca. 1495, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie (image in the public domain).

In his inventory of the paintings preserved at the convent of Saint Nicholas in Zadar, the Venetian painter, Giovanni Battista Pitteri, identified several icons *alla greca* that were modelled after Italian prototypes, among which were an *Ecce Homo* and an icon of the Virgin (Brunelli 1913, p. 393). It should be noted that while the Greek icons from Pitteri's list were obviously cheaper than their Italian originals, still they were considered more valuable than other devotional images of Italian manufacture contained in the same inventory. In particular, the icons marked "alla greca" were estimated from 50 to 120 *lire*, whereas those "all'italiana" were only priced from 16 to 30 *lire*. What is more, when the painter Agustin Crivellari was asked to evaluate the paintings included in the dowry of Marieta Garbelloto, he appraised the only Greek icon on the list for 44 *lire*, a price much higher than all the other Italian images in the collection (Goja 2014, p. 142). Likewise, in the inventory of Pietro Gritti, compiled in 1557,

a Greek Madonna was estimated at 6 ducats, second only to a painting of the Judgement of Solomon that cost 15, when all the other artworks in the collection had significantly lower prices (Brown 2004, p. 86; Hochmann 2005, p. 118). The same value of 6 ducats was also ascribed to another Greek Madonna in the 1553 inventory of Andrea Grimani, making it the most expensive artwork among his possessions (Hochmann 2005, p. 118).

As prices of paintings in Candia and other Mediterranean centers were substantially lower than those in Venice (Panagiotakes 2009, vol. 7, pp. 31–32; Corazza 2017, p. 163), Greek icons offered an affordable solution to collectors with a wide range of budgets, while retaining a relatively high level of quality in comparison to mass-produced images of Italian or Dalmatian workshops. When the painters Fokas, Gripiotis and Miçoconstantin were commissioned to manufacture seven hundred icons, they were asked to design them in three different sizes, which corresponded to three different prices. A month earlier, the same painter, Fokas, had employed the woodcarver Giorgio Sclavo to cut for him a thousand wooden panels, again in three different sizes and prices (Cattapan 1972, pp. 211–15). It was precisely the varying cost of Greek icons, combined with their mass manufacture, that contributed the most to their wide popularity, making them affordable even to modest households, as opposed to only to the upper and educated classes. The prices of Greek icons were the most likely to increase with time, given their actual or claimed antiquity, or their asserted miraculous and spiritual properties.

3.3. A World of Homely Madonnas and More: The Subjects of Greek Icons

From the examples presented in the previous sections, it becomes evident that icons intended for private use demonstrate a very limited range of subject matter. By far the most popular subjects of domestic devotional imagery were depictions of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child. Every art-owning household contained at least one image of “Nostra Donna”, and even in the humblest dwellings, where there was only one recorded painting, it would most probably be an icon of the Virgin. Although inventory entries do not offer specific iconographic descriptions, we can get a sense of the most popular types that were venerated in Italian and Dalmatian houses by looking into the icons preserved today in museums and private collections around the Adriatic. In the surviving samples, the Virgin is portrayed in a variety of iconographic types established in the Greek-Orthodox tradition, such as the *Hodegetria* (Figure 5a), the *Galaktotrophousa* (Figure 15), the *Eleousa* or *Glykophilousa* (Figure 16b), the *Madonna of Passion* (Figure 18), and the *Virgin Threnousa*.²⁵ More popular among the Catholics, however, was the composite type of the so-called *Madre della Consolazione* (Virgin of Consolation), which was invented in fifteenth-century Crete in order to respond to the aesthetic preferences of the local Catholic and Latin-oriented clientele (Figures 5b, 6, 7, 17, 19). By emulating Venetian models of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, while retaining the morphological features of a Byzantine icon, this hybrid type appealed more to the taste of a Western audience than icons of an austere, purely Byzantine style, and was largely diffused in the Adriatic markets. We can safely assume that the five hundred icons “in forma a la latina”, that were commissioned in the above-mentioned 1499 contracts, belonged to this hybrid iconographic type.

It appears, therefore, that the increasing demand for religious icons in the West had a profound impact on the art of icon painting itself, which was required, in turn, to adapt to the needs of its Latin clientele in terms of both form and content. Apart from images of the *Madre della Consolazione*, highly diffused in domestic interiors were hybrid iconographic subjects relating to the Passion of Christ, such as the Man of Sorrows, the *Pietà* or Christ carrying the Cross, themes once again borrowed from the Western iconographic tradition (Figures 10 and 11). From the mid-fifteenth century onwards, when the artistic exchanges with the West became more intensive, the iconographic repertoire of Greek icon painters was further enriched with a long list of saints worshipped in the Catholic Church. Devotional icons often featured saints that were invoked for particular purposes, bearing various attributes and

²⁵ For icons in the collections of the broad Adriatic region see (Voulgaropoulou 2014).

powers, and depicted either alone or accompanying the Madonna and Child, often in portable triptychs and polyptychs. For instance, very common in devotional imagery were representations of Saints Sebastian and Roch, healing saints and protectors from the plague and other contagious diseases that regularly infested the Adriatic ports (Figure 8). Icons depicting the Doctors of the Catholic Church, usually Saints Augustin and Jerome, were also popular, presumably among learned scholars and theologians. Female saints were also frequently represented in Greek devotional icons, with the most popular among them being Saint Catherine, followed by Saint Lucy, Agnes and Magdalen. Among the saints of the Orthodox Church that appeared in Catholic households, the most popular were Saints Nicholas and Spyridon, whose cults were widely diffused in the maritime societies of the Adriatic.



Figure 11. Donatos Bitzamanos, *Triptych with Scenes of the Passion of Christ (recto and verso)*, painted in Otranto, San Marino, Museo di Stato (taken from [Pasini 2000](#), Fig. 58).

3.4. The Display and Functions of Icons in the Domestic Space

The preference for such subject matter is directly linked to the function of devotional images in the domestic space, which was mainly to serve the needs of everyday individual piety. Most of these portable objects have been long removed from their original domestic contexts, posing critical obstacles to our understanding of their devotional roles and their place in the religious experiences of devout Catholics. Once again, information drawn from archival records, combined with insights from literary sources, in addition to painted illustrations, help us reconstruct a fairly accurate picture of the varied uses of Greek icons and their display within the Catholic household.

The devotional roles ascribed to paintings for private devotion were crystallized during the Late Middle Ages, and remained essentially unchanged through the Early Modern period, when they found their ideal representation in icons of Eastern provenance. Icons of saints were placed around the household in order to offer divine protection from harm and sickness, assistance to everyday challenges, while also serving as instruments of catechism and paradigms of virtue. More precisely, icons of the Virgin were invoked to provide fertility for the married couple, assistance to women in

childbed, as well as comfort to the ill and dying. In his diaries (*ricordi*), the fifteenth-century Florentine merchant, Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli, describes how his dying son Alberto found consolation by praying before a *tavola* of the Madonna on his deathbed (Trexler 1980, p. 173; Gavitt 1990, p. 294; Romano 1993, p. 720n331). Young mothers were expected to model their behavior after the Virgin Mary, whereas children were encouraged to imitate the Infant Saint John the Baptist or virgin Saints.²⁶ On the other hand, images of the Passion were designed to inspire penance, prayer, meditation, and compassion (*compassio*). By depicting the holy figures half-length (*a mezza figura*), icons accentuated the most expressive features of the human body, i.e., the face and the hands, thus achieving the emotional engagement of the believer, and enhancing their experience of worship. Further in his narration, the above-mentioned Giovanni Morelli colorfully illustrates how he used to pray before the painted image of the Crucifix, privately in his chamber, kneeling barefoot in his nightgown; at the end of this ritual, he would kiss the three figures of the Crucified Christ, the Virgin Mary and Saint John, and make the sign of the cross (Trexler 1980, pp. 159–86; Webb 2005, p. 35).

In Morelli's account, this "domestic ceremonialization", to borrow Richard Trexler's terminology, took place within the most private and secluded space of the home, the bedchamber, where the devout would retire in solitude to pray. Indeed, since the Middle Ages, the veneration of icons had usually taken place in the bedchamber (*camera*), making it the principal locus for informal religious practices. As early as the thirteenth century, Tommaso da Celano (1200–1265) noted the presence of small rooms (*camerulae* or *secreta cubicula*) in the residences of the Roman nobility, where the devout would pray before a devotional panel (*icona* or *imago*) (Schmidt 2005, p. 93). Likewise, in thirteenth-century Florence, the Blessed Umiliana de Cerchi (1219–1246) had converted her bedchamber into a cell, so that she could pray before a portable icon of the Virgin (Maginnis 2001, pp. 13–20; Webb 2005, pp. 32–34; Schmidt 2005, p. 95). These early accounts match later testimonies, such as the one of Giambattista Armenini, who came across Greek icons in "secret rooms" ("*camere secrete*") at the palaces he visited, underscoring the connection of icons with private domestic spaces, and thus illustrating the continuity of devotional practices from the Late Medieval through the Early Modern period.

Notarial acts, memoirs and inventories, such as the ones discussed in the previous sections, confirm the preponderance of Greek icons in private rooms and bedchambers of Catholic households.²⁷ To cite yet another example, from the property inventory of the silk-spinner (*filatore*) Mafeo de Calvis, drawn up in Venetian-ruled Bergamo on 14 September 1540, we learn that a panel of a "Madonna alla Greca" was kept in the owner's master bedroom (*camera grande*) (Roncalli 1945, p. 335). The same picture is observed even in the houses of cultured and entirely conscious collectors of icons: the majority of the Byzantine icons in Lorenzo de' Medici's palace, for instance, were found in his private study (*scrittoio*) and in his bedchamber (*camera*), while one of the least costly ones was kept in the chamber of Piero de' Medici for private use (Fusco and Corti 2006, p. 110; Duits 2013, pp. 175–77).

Paintings containing illustrations of Medieval and Early Modern interiors offer an additional representation of the uses of devotional images as visual supports for prayer in the domestic space: particularly valuable in our research are Altichiero da Zevio's *Dream Of King Ramirez*, the scene of *The Prayer of Saint Henry of Hungary* from the *predella* of an altarpiece in the church of San Martino a Mensola, the *predella* of Francesco Francia's *Coronation of the Virgin* in the church of San Frediano in Lucca, and especially, the episodes of the *Return of the Ambassadors* and the *Saint's Dream* from by Vittore Carpaccio's *Legend of Saint Ursula* (Figure 12), to name some examples (Goffen 1975, p. 512; Romano 1993, p. 720; Belting 1994, p. 42; Kasl 2004, pp. 66–68; Schmidt 2005, pp. 93–94, Fig. 52;

²⁶ In his *Regola Del Governo Di Cura Familiare*, Giovanni Dominici went as far as to encourage children to worship icons in private, sometimes even by engaging in ritualistic practices that involved dressing up like priests, and playing Mass around toy altars in imitation of what occurred publicly at church. (Dominici 1860, pp. 132–33). For Giovanni Dominici's pedagogical views see also (Battista 2002, pp. 126–38; Webb 2005, pp. 34–35; Morse 2006, pp. 170, 307, 313–14n135; Kolpacoff Deane 2013, p. 69; Drandaki 2014, pp. 45–46).

²⁷ It is far from surprising that icons were also found in private chambers in the households of Greek migrants in Venice. (Vlassi 2008, pp. 96–97).

[Corry et al. 2017](#)). These paintings reveal how the religious icon hung above the bed or was placed on a domestic altar, often covered by a curtain (*cortina*), lit by a candle (*candelier*) or lamp (*cesendello*), and accompanied by other devotional accessories, such as Crucifixes, rosaries, incense burners and holy water stoups (*situla*).



Figure 12. Vittore Carpaccio, *The Dream of Saint Ursula*, ca. 1495, Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia (image in the public domain).

Archival evidence confirms the accuracy of these artistic impressions. In 1533, for instance, the Venetian Nicolò Zorzi kept a Greek icon of the Virgin in his private chamber, behind a protective curtain (“quadro uno greco de Nostra Dona d’oro con fornimento d’oro con ferro e cortina”) ([Hochmann 2005](#), p. 129). In 1538, an icon of the Virgin with its gilded candleholder (“uno quadro de Nostra Donna alla greca con suo candelier dorado”) was recorded in one of the bedchambers at the residence of the Venetian noblewoman and former courtesan, Elisabetta Condulmer, accompanied by an image of the Shroud ([Hochmann 2005](#), p. 130; [Schmitter 2011](#), p. 729n120). Similarly, from the 1535 inventory of the artworks preserved at the palace of the Venetian nobleman Nicolò Salomon, we learn that an icon “alla greca”, together with three more paintings of the Virgin and a small image of the Dead Christ were all placed next to a small metal basin for holy water and a bronze bell ([Morse 2007](#), p. 166). At the residence of the Da Lezze family, always in Venice, an icon of the Virgin “alla greca” was located in the

master bedroom, while in the adjacent study, there was a small altar with a wooden Crucifix and a painting of the Three Magi (Brown 2004, p. 79).

It is, therefore, evident that the domestic space was often appropriately customized in order to host the devotional icon, which stood at the center of domestic worship, emulating, in all aspects, the public setting of the church (Webb 2005, p. 32; Morse 2007, pp. 165–66). A remarkable case illustrating this merging of private and public devotion was that of the Venetian nobleman, Daniele Dolfin, who had a small chapel (*giesiola*) built in his palace to house a Greek icon of the Virgin (“una madonna maniera Greca”), as evidenced from a 1681 inventory (Levi 1900, p. 71). As may be expected, such domestic altars and chapels were not consecrated for public celebrations but were only used for private devotion; however, this still required special permission from the Venetian Church (Cecchini 2000, p. 42; Kasl 2004, pp. 68–70; Mattox 2006, pp. 658–73; Corry et al. 2017, p. 11).

The placement of icons in the private apartments of a household clearly reflects the emphasis placed upon their spiritual and devotional function, as well as their appreciation as rare and valuable objects. That being said, we need to keep in mind that, contrary to Florence, in Venice and its colonies, the bedchamber was not an exclusively private space, and often functioned as a semi-private reception hall or sitting room. Moreover, while in Florence or other Italian artistic centers, devotional images were almost exclusively restricted to private domestic spaces, in Venice and the rest of the Adriatic, they were quite omnipresent throughout the household and were even displayed in the most public shared areas of the house. For example, an “old” Greek icon of the Last Supper (“una cena del nostro Signor, in tolla pittura greca antica”) decorated the staff dining room (*tinello*) at the residence of the Venetian Angelo Bozza, as mentioned in a document from 27 May 1680 (Levi 1900, p. 65). Plenty of icons *alla greca* were also documented in the main reception areas of Adriatic houses, mainly in the *portego*, the central entry and entertainment hall of upper-class palaces, which was usually decorated with diverse objects, maps, secular portraits or large paintings of historical, allegorical or mythological themes in the Italian or Flemish fashion (Morse 2013, pp. 91, 95–96; Carlton 2015, p. 152).²⁸

Indeed, Greek icons were among the most common types of religious paintings decorating the walls of Venetian *porteghi* and were often paired with other works of a religious or profane subject matter, sometimes even with erotic paintings and nudes. A large gilded icon of the Madonna and Child with a candlestick, pictured in Giovanni Mansueti’s *Miraculous Healing of the Daughter of Benvegnudo of San Polo* (Figure 13), offers a visual representation of the display of icons in Venetian interiors, in support of what is inferred from the archival sources. A 1545 inventory reveals that a Greek *Maestà* hung on the walls of the *portego* at the residence of Hieronimo Zono in Venice, together with a Last Supper and a Flemish painting with bathing nudes (Hochmann 2005, p. 119). Another inventory, documenting the valuables of the miniaturist Gasparo Segizzi (or Segezi) after his death in 1576, reports that “an ancient Greek Madonna” was displayed in one of the reception areas of his estate together with a female nude, portraits of Roman emperors and an image of an old map; two other old Madonnas, possibly also of Greek origin, hung in the adjacent *portego* near the owner’s portrait (Palumbo Fossati 1984, pp. 144–49; Kasl 2004, p. 64; Carlton 2015, pp. 152–53). In a period that saw the rise of collectionism, it is not surprising that certain icons of higher artistic quality were also valued as works of art, as is manifested by the inclusion of icons painted *alla greca* in the first private collections established in Venice during the seventeenth century (Savini Branca 1964, pp. 120, 149, 160).

²⁸ For the Venetian *quadro da portego* see (Schmitter 2011, pp. 693–751).



Figure 13. Giovanni Mansueti, *The Miraculous Healing of the Daughter of Benvegnudo of San Polo*, ca. 1505, Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia (image in the public domain).

A quite different arrangement to those of the ones mentioned above was encountered at the palace of Girolamo Foscari. There, Greek icons of the Virgin were paired with a paper illustration of the Siege of Candia with the coats of arms of the Foscari family ("Madonne dipinte alla greca ed un quadro col disegno in carta dell'assedio di Candia da parte dei turchi coll'arma Foscari"), and other items referring to the war of Crete (Levi 1900, LXVIII). Given that the residence was inventoried in 1679, only ten years after the fall of Candia to the Ottomans, the association of Greek icons, presumably from Candia, with other objects relating to the Cretan war was surely intended to allude to the military accomplishments of the Foscari family, and especially, to pay tribute to the owner's namesake, Girolamo Foscari, who had served as *Provveditore Generale* in Dalmatia and *Capitano Generale da Mâr* during the Siege of Candia. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that apart from their devotional and aesthetic roles, Greek icons, especially those stemming from Venetian territories contested by the Ottomans, were also valued in the domestic space as historical tokens or miraculous guardians during periods of geopolitical unrest. Indeed, the practice of commissioning Greek icons was particularly

popular with Venetian or Dalmatian noblemen that had participated in the Ottoman–Venetian wars, and it was intended that the images as protective talismans in the battlefield or tokens of gratitude for their survival and success, customs that were widely diffused in the Eastern Orthodox world.²⁹ Such icons were privately venerated in domestic settings, as was the case with the Foscari Madonnas or similar works kept in private collections; however, a large proportion of them was commonly donated to churches and monasteries, thus becoming part of public devotion.

3.5. From the House Tabernacle to the Church Altar: Icons of Domestic Devotion in the Public Space

The veneration of religious icons often exceeded the boundaries of domestic life and entered the sphere of public collective piety (Figures 14–20). As we have already seen, a large number of the sources documenting the presence of icons in Catholic households were actually probate inventories, dowries and last wills, recording the donation of icons to private individuals or public institutions. During the course of the Early Modern period, the practice of bequeathing devotional icons on the deathbed became increasingly common in the Catholic milieu of both Adriatic coasts (Romano 1993, pp. 713, 718–20; Belting 1994, pp. 230–33; Janeković 1996, pp. 25–34; Cecchini 2000, p. 86; Sivrić 2002, pp. 73–77, 107; Vlasić 2008, pp. 83–117; Ladić 2012, p. 306; Živković 2016, pp. 221–30). Although rarely mentioned before the mid-fourteenth century, paintings started to be included in the wills of Italian and Dalmatian testators from the late fifteenth century onwards, together with monetary legacies, bequests of land, garments, food, and liturgical objects (Ladić 2003, pp. 22–23; Ladić 2012, pp. 304–06).



Figure 14. Icons from private collections and churches of the Boka Kotorska, Kotor, Cathedral of Saint Tryphon (Katedrala Svetog Tripuna) (photograph by the author).

Icons were usually bequeathed to close relatives, friends, as well as to faithful servants, young unmarried girls or the poor, with the request that they pray and mediate for the souls of the deceased. For instance, in 1525, Nicola de Saracha from Dubrovnik left to his cousin, Frana, the icons of the Virgin and Saint Ephrem “out of love” (“per amore”), as he explicitly mentioned in his will (Tadić 1952, vol. 2, pp. 142–43). In a similar vein, the Venetian ambassador to England, Girolamo Lando left in

²⁹ See (Voulgaropoulou 2014, pp. 123–25, 647).

his 1656 will, three Greek icons to his sons, Antonio and Giovanni (“una madona alla greca”, “un quadro de Madonna in tolla alla greca dorado”, “un quadro alla greca nominato la pietà”) (Levi 1900, p. 24). Likewise, in a will that was drawn up on the Dalmatian island of Korčula in 1779, the nobleman Angelo Boschi left, to his brother Gasparo, an icon of the Virgin “di pittura greca”, which was, in turn, bequeathed to him by his grandmother, Brigita Albertini (Fazinić 1980, p. 587).

Apart from bequeathing icons on a personal level, a common practice among Catholics was to donate or bequeath religious paintings to churches and other ecclesiastical institutions, often located in the places of their origin. As in the case of bequests to private individuals, icons were donated to churches with the request that the donor’s name be commemorated in Mass, thereby ensuring the eternal salvation of their soul and the souls of their ancestors (*pro remedio animae*). Because of their spiritual properties, icons *alla greca* were particularly suited for pious acts compared with other art objects in the possession of Catholic families. Quite revealing is the case of Vittoria, widow of Pavao Grgurov, a Bosnian merchant living in Venice, who specifically requested in her will that all the paintings in her property be sold with the sole exception of a “Madonna Greca”, which would be donated instead to the church of San Giobbe (Čoralić 2002, pp. 50, 55n65).

In the public archives of various Adriatic countries, one occasionally comes across similar records of donations and bequests of Greek icons to churches and monasteries, signed by testators from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. In 1507, for example, the milliner (*baretarius*) Juraj (Georgius) Gojković drafted his last will and testament, bequeathing a Greek icon of the Virgin (“una figura mia alla greca, la imagine de sancta Maria”) to the church of Saint Luke in Dubrovnik, seat of the confraternity of the oil merchants (*oleari*) (Tadić 1952, vol. 2, p. 33). In a similar fashion, towards the end of the seventeenth century, the bishop of Makarska, Nikola Bijanković, donated his rich collection of icons to the town cathedral and to other nearby churches (Demori Staničić 2012, p. 171; Voulgaropoulou 2014, pp. 130, 506–8, 776; Demori Staničić 2017, pp. 319–20). In this group of icons, there was a Virgin *Galaktotrophousa* (Figure 15), which was given to Bijanković in 1707 by Meletios Typaldos, Greek Metropolitan of Philadelphia in Venice (Farlati 1769, p. 202; Tomasović 2013, p. 31; Voulgaropoulou 2014, p. 508). Among the most renowned donors of Greek icons, we can also mention the Venetian painter Gentile Bellini, who, in 1506, bequeathed a mosaic icon—probably acquired during his visit to Constantinople—to the Scuola di San Marco (Duits 2013, p. 170).

The practice of bequeathing and donating icons to churches was particularly diffused among noblemen or wealthy commoners who wished to leave their mark on the public space in order to enhance their prestige within the local communities, and at the same time, obtain spiritual benefits. In Venice alone, Alberto Rizzi counted ninety-two Greek icons throughout the city churches, many of which came directly from donations of prominent patrician families, such as the Corner, Foscolo, Pisani, Morosini, Venier, Barbaro, Pizamano and Meseri (Rizzi 1972, pp. 250–72, 253n9). Icons originating from bequests and individual donations retained much of their private devotional character in the public space, and were often placed on their owners’ tombs or in churches, chapels and altars over which their donors possessed rights of patronage (*jus patronato*) or which they helped establish. These religious edifices usually had a purely devotional and secular rather than liturgical function, serving as an extension of the domestic space.

According to a dedicatory inscription in the Franciscan monastery of Saint Euphemia on the island of Rab, the Venetian merchant and printer Andrea Cimalarca bequeathed an icon of the Virgin *Glykophilousa* (Figure 16) to his sister Maria with the order to have it installed on the altar of his funerary chapel that he built in 1506 in the monastery church of Saint Bernardine (Domijan 2007, pp. 221–23; Voulgaropoulou 2014, pp. 490–91, 665). Objects of private and, at the same time, public devotion were also an icon of the Madre della Consolazione, work of the Cretan painter Emmanuel Tzanes, which decorated the chapel of the Duboković-Šprung family in the town of Jelsa on the Dalmatian island of Hvar (Demori Staničić 1990, pp. 139–40; Demori Staničić 2012, vol. 2, pp. 264–65; Voulgaropoulou 2014, pp. 522, 766; Demori Staničić 2017, pp. 359–60), as well as an eighteenth-century icon of the Madonna *Hodegetria* that was venerated in the chapel of the Butafogo family of merchants (crkva Svete

Marije al Prato dei Butafogo) on the island of Cres (Fillini and Tomaz 1988; Demori Staničić 2012, vol. 2, p. 281; Voulgaropoulou 2014, pp. 492–93, 653; Demori Staničić 2017, p. 367).



Figure 15. *The Virgin Galaktotrophousa (Madonna of the Rosary), Makarska, Co-Cathedral of Saint Mark (Konkatedrala Svetog Marka) (taken from Tomasović 2013, p. 31).*



(a)



(b)

Figure 16. (a,b) *The icon of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa in the funerary chapel of Andrea Cimalarca, Rab, Monastery of Saint Euphemia, Church of Saint Bernardine (Franjevački Samostan Svete Eufemije u Kamporu, Crkva Svetog Bernardina) (taken from Domijan 2007, pp. 221–22).*

The bequest and donation of icons to funerary and family chapels or other types of private and semi-public places of worship was largely linked to their spiritual protective properties, guaranteed not only in the domestic space but also in the afterlife, and often manifested in the form of miracles. In fact, a large number of icons publicly venerated in chapels and churches made their way into the public domain after manifesting miraculous healing powers. According to Susan Merriam, “miracle-working icons proved especially useful to the Church in the aftermath of the Reformation, as they offered divine proof in support of the cult of images” (Merriam 2009, p. 204). At the beginning of this study, we mentioned the case of “Our Lady of Tears” from Longiano, an icon of domestic devotion, which became the center of a popular public cult after allegedly exhibiting miraculous properties. As striking as it sounds, the case of Longiano was hardly an isolated occurrence, as legends of wonder-working icons were extremely widespread in the entire Adriatic region, often triggering the initiation of public cults and even the establishment of religious institutions.

A similar example to that of Longiano comes from Venice, and revolves around a “devout image of old Greek art” (“una divota imagine di greca antica pittura”) kept at the house of a certain Agostino around the year 1497 (Corner 1749, pp. 369–78; Corner 1761, p. 515; Concina 1998, p. 529; Walberg 2004, pp. 261–69). According to Flaminio Corner, Agostino had long undervalued the icon in question, which hung neglected in a dark corner of his house. Then, suddenly, one day, Agostino heard a “miraculous voice” reproaching him for his lack of respect towards the icon and ordering him to place it somewhere where it would receive its due veneration. Obeying the celestial command, the devout Agostino took the icon from his house, and in a solemn procession, transported it to the nearby Oratorio di San Vincenzo, which was subsequently dedicated to the Virgin in honor of the miraculous icon. News of the miracle-working icon soon reached another pious Venetian, the nobleman Alvise Malipiero, who decided to finance the construction of a new church in place of the old oratory and have it dedicated to Santa Maria Maggiore.³⁰

Another illustrative case, ideally manifesting the blending of private and public religiosity, was that of a streetside icon of the Virgin, which belonged to the Venetian family of merchants, the Amadi, and was affixed on the external wall of their residence or of the nearby Ca’ Dolce, facing a public street (Corner 1749, pp. 218–23; Corner 1761, pp. 89–92; Apollonio 1880, pp. 7–23; Boni 1887, p. 249n1; Tassini 1915, p. 234; Rizzi 1972, p. 279). Lore has it that the icon, a work of inferior artistic quality, suddenly started to perform miracles and became the object of public veneration. Acknowledging the importance of the icon for public piety, the Amadi relocated it on a small wooden altar near the ponte della Fava, but soon requested that a more suitable place be built for its veneration. Only three months later, on 10 November 1480, after verifying the miracles attributed to the image, the Venetian Patriarch, Maffeo Gerardo, granted the Amadi family and other patricians the permission to build an oratory to honor and protect the prodigious icon. The oratory was dedicated to Santa Maria della Consolazione, after the iconographic type of the icon, but was commonly referred to as Santa Maria della Fava from the nearby eponymous bridge.³¹ Amadi and his descendants were assigned as lifetime custodians of the church, an honor otherwise restricted to noblemen.³² It is noteworthy that, in the same year, the Amadi family was involved in yet another legend regarding a different miraculous icon in their property—this time an image in the Late Gothic style, work of a certain maestro Nicolò—whose

³⁰ The same story with slightly differering details is reproduced by Helen Deborah Walberg. (Walberg 2004, pp. 261–69).

³¹ The idea to place the icon in a church was first revealed by divine inspiration to the wife of Francesco, head of the Amadi household, as evidenced in the copy of an annotation in the Annali Guarnieri-Bocchi, which reads: L’anno 1480 Per rivelazione / dalla moglie di un Francesco / Amadi fu edificato l’oratorio de[lla] / Madona della fava deta anche / di consolazione il quale prima / era un cappitello depinto con una / immagine di Maria operando / miracoli si edifico il luogo. Si crearono 6 procuratori Tre / nobili tre cittadini includendo / in questo numero gli Amadi. (Pastega 2015, p. 276). See also (Apollonio 1880, pp. 11–12).

³² Giuseppe Tassini offers an alternative account, according to which the icon hung on the walls of Ca’ Dolce and not Ca’ Amadi, and that in the year 1496 the parish priest of San Lio, Natale Colonna, Giacomo Gussoni, and other patricians bought out the two houses of the Dolce family to build a small church and move the icon to a more dignified place. (Tassini 1891, pp. 436–37; Tassini 1915, p. 234).

ownership was contested at court by the neighboring Barozzi family, and whose public veneration led to the construction of the church and convent of Santa Maria dei Miracoli (Corner 1761, pp. 52–56; Apollonio 1880, p. 6; Boni 1887, pp. 236–74; Crouzet Pavan 1992, pp. 617–68; Grubb 2000, pp. 130–31; Grubb 2004, pp. 272–73; Kasl 2004, p. 60; Morse 2007, pp. 182–83).

The involvement of the Amadi family in at least two cases of miracle-working icons in the same year, and with the foundation of important religious institutions throughout the city, significantly boosted their reputation within the Venetian society and allowed them to elevate their social status, obtaining privileges usually reserved for the nobility. Indeed, owners of icons were eager to proclaim them as miraculous, and then donate them to churches, thus enhancing their social prestige, as well as the value of their bequest. In numerous acts of bequest, it is explicitly mentioned whether the image donated was famed for exhibiting miraculous properties. To name one example, an “old miraculous Greek icon of the Virgin” (“immagine miracolosa della B. Vergine, e di Pittura Greca, antica”) was donated on 13 February 1671, to the church of the Redentore in Venice by the novice capuchin Fra Mariano da Venezia, born Giorgio Corner (Da Portogruaro 1930, p. 206; Rizzi 1972, pp. 254–55n14, 262). A quite different example is that of the so-called “Madonna of the Miracle” (Gospa od Čuda), an image of the *Madre della Consolazione*, venerated at the church of Saint Andrew at the Benedictine convent in Rab (Figure 17). The icon belonged to Lucchina de Dominis, a nun of noble birth who lived at the convent in the years 1530–1545. According to the written tradition, the nun, who had been bedridden for nine years, prayed before the icon that hung over her bed and was miraculously cured on the feast day of the Nativity of the Virgin. The miraculous recovery of the ailing nun initiated the public cult of the icon, which was immediately removed from the nun’s cell, and placed on a special altar in the monastery church (Barić 2007, p. 147; Domijan 2007, p. 130; Demori Staničić 2012, vol. 2, pp. 207–8; Voulgaropoulou 2014, pp. 491–92, 666; Demori Staničić 2017, pp. 333–34).



Figure 17. “Our Lady of the Miracle” (Gospa od Čuda), Rab, Benedictine Convent of Saint Andrew (Samostan Benediktinki Svetog Andrije) (taken from Domijan 2007, p. 126).

In the period of the Counter-Reformation, legends revolving around miracle-working icons were received with more suspicion and often attracted the attention of the Inquisition. Particularly revealing is the trial of two Venetian citizens, which started because of an icon: around 1668, a Greek triptych of the Virgin was donated to the church of Santa Ternita in Venice by a poor woman named Cecilia, widow of a certain Pietro Bevilacqua, after divine revelation (Schutte 1999, pp. 153–55; Schutte 2001; Black 2004, p. 170). At first, the rector of the church, Francesco Vincenzi, kept the icon at the sacristy, but soon, a local woman named Antonia Pesenti, daughter of a local artisan, informed him “that this image would perform miracles, and at Antonia’s persuasion he [Vincenzi] hung it in the church at the altar near the sacristy”. The prodigious image shortly started attracting flocks of believers, who expected to be healed from various illnesses. Worshippers of the image were distributed sanctified oil from a lamp that hung in front of the icon and carnations from a vase placed on its altar, whereas reproductions of the icon were sold in the square right outside of the church, along with “relics” from Pesenti herself, now promoted as a living saint. It was not long until the events revolving around the icon of Santa Ternita reached the Inquisitor Agapito Ugoni, who persecuted Vincenzi and Pesenti with the charges of pretense of holiness; in 1669, they were both convicted of heresy. As for the miracle-working icon, it was immediately removed from the church and placed for safekeeping in the patriarchal residence.



Figure 18. *The Madonna of Passion, Ferrara, Church of Santa Maria in Vado (photograph by the author).*



Figure 19. Icon of the Madre della Consolazione encased in an altarpiece by Giovanni Battista Agostino Pitteri, Trogir, Cathedral of Saint Lawrence (Katedrala Svetog Lovre) (photograph by the author).



Figure 20. *Madonna and Child Enthroned (Madonna di Costantinopoli)*, Bisceglie, Church of Saint Matthew (Chiesa di San Matteo) (photograph by the author).

The dedication of votive offerings was another channel through which icons of domestic devotion ended up in public collections. Apart from a few icons that gained popularity and became the *foci* of public cults, church and monastic collections throughout the Adriatic abound with Greek devotional paintings that were donated to religious institutions as petitionary and votive offerings. In the treasury of the convent of Saint Nicholas in Zadar, for example, inventoried by the Venetian painter Giovanni

Battista Pitteri after the monastery's fusion with that of Saint Mary in 1798, there were nine icons that the artist assessed as "Greek", in all probability deriving from individual legacies:

"B. V. sopra tavola, fatta alla greca e presa dall'italiano di Sassoferrato, con cornice d'intaglio dorata lire 80; Decollazione di s. Giovan Batt. opera greca, sopra tavola, con cornice id. lire 120; S. Niccolò alla greca sopra tavola con cornice dorata lire 90; S. Stefano martire alla greca sopra tavola, con cornice antica dorata lire 50; S. Giorgio a cavallo alla greca id con cornice id lire 50; Sacra Famiglia alla greca id con cornice id. lire 80; Ecce-Homo alla greca id preso dall'italiano con cornice id. lire 80; B. V. col bambino, maniera greca sopra tavola con cornice id. lire 80; S. Spiridione maniera greca id, con cornice dorata d'intaglio lire 110. (Brunelli 1913, p. 393)

In view of the above, there is enough evidence to suggest that the majority of the Greek icons that are now located in Catholic churches and monasteries of both Adriatic coasts originated from bequests and votive offerings and were, initially, in private use. Jacob Burckhardt was the first to suggest that the Madonnas seen in Venetian churches and *scuole* originated from private houses, and were transferred to the public sphere due to space limitations or in the absence of heirs (Burckhardt 1898, pp. 298–99; cited in Ringbom 1984, p. 36). Apart from archival sources and inscriptions documenting private donations to ecclesiastical institutions, the domestic provenance of icons in churches is implied by their small, sometimes minute dimensions, as well as their subjects, mostly half-length images of the Madonna and Child or other themes commonly associated with private devotion (Figures 18–20). In addition to their size and iconography, the often low cost and inferior artistic quality of icons of public devotion further indicate that they were donated not because of their value and magnificence, but mainly, because of their spiritual properties that were presumably intrinsic to Byzantine and Byzantinizing icons regardless of their aesthetic qualities.

4. Conclusions

Serving as devotional accessories, spiritual mediators or measures of social prestige, icons *alla greca* were omnipresent in Italian and Dalmatian households, regardless of class or confessional orientation. At the same time, with the seal of antique authenticity and claims of possessing miraculous properties, icons of Eastern provenance often became the center of legends and popular cults that extended their veneration from the uttermost privacy of the domestic space to the heart of civic worship. The large variety of icons venerated in Catholic households and churches, ranging from paintings of high artistic value to works of mass production, reveals that their artistic quality had little impact on their consideration as holy and miraculous, and their integration into private and public devotional practices. In his discussion of the reputedly miraculous Madonna of Santa Maria della Fava, Ferdinando Apollonio not only stresses that the icon was made "without study of art and colors", but that all of the images venerated as miraculous in Venice were "artistically speaking, rough pieces of wood cut with an axe [. . .], smears rather than paintings". As harsh as his assessment reads, for Apollonio, it was exactly this lack of artistic sophistication that added to the spiritual qualities of these images, and inspired the public's devotion: "the cruder they are, the greater the waves of people that surround them" (Apollonio 1880, pp. 7–8).

Perhaps more telling is the story of Franceschina, mother of the Venetian priest Andrea Ingegneri. In 1435, a merchant from Constantinople brought Franceschina a fragment of Saint Theodosia's shroud, and advised her to make an offering to the saint in order to cure an illness that had almost left her blind. Franceschina followed the man's advice, and thereby made a swift and remarkable recovery. Three years later, the devout woman received from Constantinople a painted icon of Saint Theodosia ("ex byzantio ymago sancte Theodosie depicta aportaretur"); however, her husband refused to accept it, because he believed it to be unsophisticated and overpriced. Instead, he chose to commission another, more beautiful painting, this time from a Venetian artist. The outcome of this decision was that Franceschina's health deteriorated immediately, and did not improve until after the family purchased

the rejected Byzantine icon for double the initial price (Corner 1749, vol. 2, p. 334; Bacci 2018, p. 282; Giani 2018, p. 70).

The case of Franceschina Ingegneri demonstrates precisely the fundamental difference between religious images painted in the Western style and icons made in the Byzantine tradition, a difference that ultimately explains the survival and popularity of icon painting in the Catholic milieu of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Adriatic. Orthodox icons were never meant to rival contemporary works of Renaissance or Baroque art, but on the contrary, they were intended to cover a completely different set of market needs. As compared to the more naturalistic art of the West, Byzantinizing icons were not destined for the decoration and embellishment of lay households but were rather meant to inspire devotion and piety, responding almost exclusively to the spiritual needs of the faithful. In other words, icon painting, in spite of its humility, but also thanks to it, was able to get through to the common people, sometimes even more than the “high” art of the Renaissance and the Baroque, and thus constituted an enduring and indispensable part of everyday religious practices. Thus, even though the *maniera greca* was banished from the official artistic production, the cult of icons managed to survive at the margins of the Renaissance, and ultimately went through its own renaissance in the Early Modern period.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: I owe many thanks to Raffaella Bassi, director of the Fondazione Neri, Museo Italiano della Ghisa, and Giorgio Buda, responsible of the Museo d’Arte Sacra of Longiano for kindly supplying me with a reproduction of the icon of the “Madonna delle Lacrime”, as well as with bibliographical documentation on the icon. I also wish to thank Luka Juri, director, and Edvilijo Gardina, chief curator of the Pokrajinski Muzej Koper, who provided me with reproductions of artworks from their collections. Many thanks are due to Živko Bačić and Vivian Grisogono for authorizing me to use photographic material from the icon collections of Hvar. Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Salvador Ryan, editor of the special issue “Domestic Devotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe” for his kind invitation to contribute to this volume, as well as to the external reviewers and the editorial team of the journal *Religions*, for their careful reading of the manuscript, and especially for their insightful, valuable and encouraging feedback.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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