

BYZANTINE ICONS BEYOND BYZANTINE BORDERS

Images in Medieval Rome

JOHN LANSDOWNE (ART & ARCHAEOLOGY)

Icons are the quintessential Byzantine work of art. Their veneration was a primary means of Christian worship in the Greek East and, thereby, a distinctive element of Byzantine culture. Some of the most long-held loca for the Cult of Images, however, lay well outside the purview of the *basileos* (whose temporal authority most closely delineated the medieval “borders” of Byzantium *per se*)—Sinai, Syria, Palestine, Italy. Furthermore, it was in these more-or-less isolated former outposts that the majority of pre-Iconoclasm icons have survived. In this paper, I will discuss icon veneration as it manifested itself in the West, specifically, the city of Rome, from the fourth to fifteenth centuries.

I begin with of the tradition of image veneration—from its murky beginnings in the extra-mural catacombs to its eventual incorporation at S. Maria Antiqua in the city center. The term ‘icon’, derived from the Greek *εἰκών* (‘image’), corresponds to any picture that functioned as a tool for devotion, formally (as in the liturgy) or informally (as in private prayer). That said, as Annmarie Weyl Carr has observed, the portable painted wooden panel is the primary means by which the icon met with historical change. Thus, in the latter half of my presentation, I will discuss Rome’s exceptional collection of sixth- and seventh-century panel icons (i.e. five icons of the Virgin and the famous Lateran icon of Christ). In so doing, I track the “lives” of the icons in the papal city—their promotion, evolving means of authentication, copies, and vicissitudes in popularity. All of these icons were probably made in Rome. However they eventually became attached with legendary back-stories that placed their origins in the East. I therefore conclude with some discussion of the miniature mosaic icon of the Imago Pietatis at S. Croce in Gerusalemme. Gifted to Rome ca. 1390, the mosaic Imago was a conspicuously Greek object that—opposite of Rome’s other icons—was given a legendary origin in the city itself.