

| Object Number One: An Icon Purchased at Auction in Cologne in 1862

Constituting a key part of the oldest collection at the National Museum in Warsaw is a set of works purchased by Justynian Karnicki during a trip to Cologne in the second half of August 1862.¹ Of those objects, the piece assigned the inventory number one has, to date, seen only minor mention in scholarly literature, having first been cited by Jan Białostocki in a 1962 article written in connection with the Museum's centenary, in which the author describes it as missing.² The present analysis concerns the technology used in the artefact's production, its iconography, history, and the circumstances of its arrival in Warsaw, and relies on sources from the time of the object's purchase, press publications from the 1860s, and the NMW's archival records. It aims to answer questions regarding the reason why the icon was purchased by Karnicki for the collection and the decision to give it the number one in the inventory book.

A Description of the Icon and an Attempt at Attribution

The icon, painted on a panel measuring 31.5 × 25.4 cm, within a shallow indentation, shows a half-length view of a saint (**fig. 1**) holding a scroll in his left hand and raising his right in a gesture of benediction. He is dressed in monk's clothing consisting of a dark-ochre robe, a brown riasa and a dark-blue epitrachelion with cinnabar crucifixes, a large symbolic representation of the Crucifixion with a cross inscribed with the letters IC XC HИ KA and the head of Adam below. On his breast, the man wears two *encolpia*, also in the shape of crosses. The saint's habit is girded with a brown belt. His face, elongated and slightly triangular in shape, and with a high forehead, is of a light-brown complexion. He has small brown eyes with pronounced and somewhat bulging lower eyelids, beneath which are pairs of rather deep vertical wrinkles. The light on the man's face is brought out with the use of parallel thin white

¹ See Hanna Benesz's article in this issue of the *Journal*. The icon was the subject of a lecture given by the author of this paper in 2012, as part of a lecture series commemorating the 150th anniversary of the National Museum. The herein article serves as a continuation and elaboration on the hypotheses and conclusions put forth in the lecture.

² Jan Białostocki, "The Weyer Collection and the Beginning of the Warsaw Art Museum (Annex: Catalogue of Pictures Bought by Justynian Karnicki in Cologne in 1862)," *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1962), p. 47, no 1. See also, i.a., Anna Maślowska, *Kronika wystaw Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie 1862–2002*, t. 1, 1862–1662 (Warsaw, 2002), pp. 10–11; Barbara Dąb-Kalinowska, "Ikony maryjne z kolekcji Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie," in *Ikony. Przedstawienia maryjne z kolekcji Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, Aleksandra Sulikowska, ed. (Warsaw, 2004), p. 7.

lines. The exposed parts of the body, the face and hands, are delicate and seem to signal the man's asceticism. His light-brown hair (the same colour as his skin) is cropped short (visible at the top and sides of the head) and his medium-length beard is rounded at the bottom. The bands in the hair and beard are demarcated with white lines. The folds of the saint's clothing are outlined sharply, their three-dimensionality conveyed with pale impasto blots.

The background of the kovcheg and polya is gilded. Originally, these parts of the icon might have been concealed beneath a metal cover, as suggested by the nail holes remaining in the lower field and along the panel's top and bottom edges. The execution of the background can be acknowledged as a later intervention done in a workshop evidently unfamiliar with icon painting techniques. This is indicated by the fact that not only the kovcheg but the icon's entire surface is gilded, and by the absence of inscriptions that would customarily appear in these areas. Fitted onto the reverse of the panel are two opposing, wedge-shaped battens. The panel itself is furnished with largely illegible inscriptions, numerals, and a sticker with the number 13 (in the bottom right corner), while the upper section shows a faintly legible inscription reading *J. Karnicki* [with an illegible word below], and another sticker – the one most interesting to us here – reading: *Museum of the Capital City of Warsaw, Inv. no. 1.*³ Attached to the hook driven into the upper part of the panel (at the level of the upper batten) is also a round metal tag with a paper label with the number one pasted on it.

On account of its small dimensions, the object appears to be a domestic icon intended most likely for a so-called holy corner (a home iconostasis). The depicted saint is difficult to identify due to the lack of identifying inscriptions, which would originally have been placed on the kovcheg or in the upper field but are presumably now concealed beneath the later re-gilding. This fact stands in the way of a certain identification of the saint and to a considerable extent impedes the icon's dating and determination of its place of production. The nature of the composition is likewise of little help with regard to attribution. What we are dealing with here is an icon produced in line with the traditional formula of Old Orthodox art, one of a decidedly archaic nature, with the depicted figure of the saintly monk devoid of individual features, which makes it impossible to pinpoint the workshop where it was made within the general Eastern Slavic world.

The work belongs to a category of portrait icons showing a saintly Ruthenian monk, as indicated by the man's clothing. Any attempt at a more precise identification would have to be based on the saint's physiognomic features.⁴ Among the saints portrayed in a similar manner are Anthony of Siya (**fig. 2**) and Alexander Svirsky,⁵ the latter being depicted in one other icon in the NMW collection, titled *The Revelation of the Old Testament Holy Trinity to St Alexander Svirsky* (**fig. 3**),⁶ as well as two of the most popular saints venerated in Eastern

³ The sticker indicates that the inventory was taken after 1916, but before 1918, when the museum operated under the name National Museum of the Capital City of Warsaw, see Stanisław Lorentz, "Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie. Zarys dziejów," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, Ann. 1 (1938), p. 29.

⁴ *Podlinnik" ikonopisnyj*, pub. Sergej T. Bolshakov, Aleksandr I. Uspenskij, ed. (Moskva, 1903), pp. 213, 625.

⁵ Natalja N. Chugreeva, "Gruppa pomorskih ikon v sobranii Muzeja imeni Andreja Rubleva," in *Mir staroobriadchestva. IV. Zhivye tradicii: rezul'taty i perspektivy kompleksnyh issledovanij russkogo staroobriadchestva. Materialy mezhdunarodnoj nauchnoj konferencii sostojavshejsja 21–24 nojabrja 1995 g. v Starom Aktovom zale MGU im. M. V. Lomonosova. Sbornik nauchnyh trudov*, Irina V. Pozdeeva, ed. (Moskva, 1998), p. 393, cat. no. 7; *Svjatye zemli Russkoj*, Evgenija Pivovarova, ed. (Sankt Peterburg, 2010), p. 272, cat. 236, p. 282, cat. no. 248.

⁶ The National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. IK 65 MNW.

Slavic lands, namely Sergius of Radonezh⁷ and Cyril of Beloozero.⁸ Considering the geographic range of these saints' veneration, perhaps it is most probable that the saint shown in our icon is Sergius of Radonezh.

In addition to iconographic details like the position of the monk's fingers in the benediction gesture and the inscriptions on the epitachelion (their form and painting method), the work's formal characteristics, and its archaicism in particular, support a hypothesis that the piece might originate from northern Russia, likely from priestless Pomorian Old Believer circles.⁹ The icon's stylistics suggests an approximate creation date of the turn of the 18th century to the mid-18th century.

The Circumstances of the Icon's Acquisition

Knowledge on the object's history offers little help in determining the identity of the person depicted. We know that the icon was acquired by Karnicki at an auction taking place on 25–30 August 1862 in Cologne, at the gallery of the architect Johann Peter Weyer. At the auction, Karnicki purchased 36 paintings (having also bought several others from the Cologne art dealer Antoine Brausser) (figs. 4, 5).¹⁰ Karnicki served as the first Honorary Director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw, which several months prior (on 20 May 1862) had been established by way of an ordinance on public education in Congress Poland.¹¹ As the 3 September 1862 issue of *Dziennik Powszechny* daily reports, Karnicki was dispatched to Cologne “to buy for the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw all that he deemed worthy of acquiring, deferring in this regard to his diligence and knowledge” (fig. 6).¹² The Karnicki-drafted “Register of Paintings and Works of Art Acquired in Cologne at Public Auction in the Weyer Gallery for the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw,” dated 9 October 1863, contains 44 items and opens with an object described in the following words: “Byzantine school. Blessing priest – in half-length against a gilt background, on wood measuring 13 cm [crossed out, with 9 written in] in height and 10½ [crossed out, with 8 written in] in width.” The artefact's value is stated to have been 11 roubles.¹³

The “Inventory of the Museum of Fine Arts” was produced on the basis of the collection's state in 1863 and was concluded on 21 July 1864 by the museum's first curator, Jacenty

⁷ 1000-letie russkoj hudožestvennoj kul'tury / 1000 Jahre russische Kunst, Moskva (Moskva, 1988), fig. 93, 140; *Svätые zemli Russkoj*, p. 136, cat. no. 115.

⁸ *Svätые zemli Russkoj*, p. 165, cat. no. 140; p. 166, cat. no. 141; p. 169, cat. no. 143.

⁹ Chugreeva, op. cit., pp. 391–96; see also Grażyna Kobrzeniecka-Sikorska, *Ikony staroobrzędowców w zbiorach Muzeum Warmii i Mazur* (Olsztyn, 1993), pp. 128–129, cat. no. 41.

¹⁰ Lorentz, op. cit., pp. 3–4; Horst Vey, “Johann Peter Weyer, seine Gemäldesammlung und seine Kunstliebe,” *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, vol. 28 (1966), p. 172.

¹¹ Dorota Folga-Januszewska, “Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych i Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie 1862–2004,” in *Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie*, Dorota Folga-Januszewska, ed. (Warsaw, 2005), p. 10.

¹² *Dziennik Powszechny*, 3 September 1862, no. 198, p. 827.

¹³ NMW Collection of Iconography and Photography, inv. no. Rkps [MS] 1945 MNW, Wykaz obrazów i dzieł sztuki nabytych w Kolonii na publicznej licytacji w Galerii Weyera dla Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie [List of paintings and works of art acquired in Cologne at public auction at the Weyer Gallery for the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw], 1863. The document's first page and part of the last page were published in: Maślowska, op. cit., p. 64. A draught copy of the list is kept in the NMW Archives, ref. no. 1b (No. 32), Records of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw concerning the museum's holdings. The draught copy contains information that the estimated cost of all of the purchases made in Cologne amounts to 8669 roubles (the sum was crossed-out with pencil and does not appear in the final list).

Sachowicz, and signed by Karnicki. Noted therein is an entire group of objects described as “Paintings and a marble sarcophagus acquired in Cologne at public auction at the Weyer Gallery in 1862.”¹⁴ Listed under position 651, but bearing the inventory number one, is an object described in the same way as in the 1863 register: “Unknown artist of the Byzantine School, of a blessing priest, on wood”.¹⁵ Meanwhile, in the National Museum’s first inventory ledger spanning items 1 through 6000, the annotation for item number one reads: “14th century. Painting on wood. Byzantine. Artist unknown. Blessing priest.”¹⁶ The descriptions cited here say little about the work’s history prior to its arrival at the museum, and they contain incorrect information, providing an inaccurate date and place of creation. This is probably why Białostocki, presuming the veracity of the first inventory’s categorisation of the piece as a work of the “Byzantine school” showing a “father of the Church,” described it as a wartime loss in his aforementioned article on the Weyer collection.¹⁷ It ought to be kept in mind, however, that errors in dating and attribution were a very frequent occurrence at the time of the first inventory’s drafting. The initial suppositions about the work persisted until 1982, when, finally, the museum’s inventory of its Foreign Painting Collection described it as: “Icon. Saint Sergius of Radonezh. 17th century.” In 1997, the icon was reassigned to the NMW’s then recently-designated Eastern Christian Art Collection and listed in that collection’s inventory under the number IK 100 MNW. Today, it belongs to the Collection of Icons and Byzantine Handicrafts, which is part of the Collection of Eastern Christian Art.

The Weyer collection catalogue published in Cologne in 1862 mentions 587 objects; mainly paintings, works of Old Masters, with four works of Byzantine painting.¹⁸ Listed under the number two, the icon was identified as a Byzantine artefact and described as a “bust of a saintly Church father”¹⁹ (figs. 4, 5). Three other icons are listed in the catalogue. In a copy of the catalogue originally residing in the Library of the John G. Johnson Collection in Philadelphia, the present-day Philadelphia Museum of Art,²⁰ item number two is an icon annotated with the name *Karnicki* and the number 8 (thalers?) (fig. 4). Like the other three icons listed therein, it is described as a “Byzantine” artefact. Appearing under the number one is a description of an icon showing Saint George, perhaps of Greek origin, dated to circa 1300 AD, which was purchased in 1862 likely by Moreau, a Parisian art dealer.²¹ Numbers 3 and 4 pertain to icons

¹⁴ In the case of the entire group, this was provided as the “date and rescript number of the Government Commission on Religious Faiths and Public Education or other evidence serving as the basis for entry into the Inventory of the property of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw: d. 16/28 Maja 1983 r. N. 8229./13.690.”

¹⁵ NMW Archives, ref. no. 4, pp. 61–62, Inwentarz Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie za rok 1863 [Inventory of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw for 1863].

¹⁶ These ledgers are kept at the NMW Inventory Department.

¹⁷ Białostocki, “Annex,” op. cit., p. 47, no. 1.

¹⁸ See *Illustrierter Katalog der reichen Gemälde-Galerie des Herrn J.P. Weyer / Catalogue illustré de la riche et nombreuse collection de tableaux composant la galerie de Mr. J.P. Weyer* (Köln, 1862).

¹⁹ “2. Byzantiner. Aus Holz und Goldgrund, 12 Zoll hoch, 10 Zoll breit. Bustbild eines heiligen Kirchenvaters / Byzantin. Sur bois à fond doré, 12 p. de haut, 10 p. de large. Buste d’un Saint père de l’église”. Ibid., pp. 2–3.

²⁰ Published on archive.org, at: <<https://archive.org/details/illustrierteroojmhe/page/n25/mode/2up>>, [retrieved: 11 January 2022].

²¹ Ibid., p. 200, cat. no. 2. The icon appears in the 1862 catalogue under number one. The copy at the Philadelphia Museum of Art contains a handwritten, poorly legible annotation reading “Moreau” (*Illustrierter Katalog...*, op. cit., no. 1; see n. 19). In a paper on Weyer’s collection published in 1863 in Bruges, the same (most likely) icon is described as a work of the “Old Russian school” purchased by a different art dealer, M. Schmitz, for 65 thalers (see William Henry James Weale, *Notice sur la collection de tableaux anciens, faisant partie de la galerie de Mr J.P.*

showing “clerical and lay rulers under the protection of Saint Mary” and “the Child Christ in Mary’s arms.”²² We also know that Weyer’s collection also included one other artefact of this kind – a Cretan triptych with the likenesses of the Deesis with saints, not listed in the 1862 catalogue as it was transferred to the Dahlem Museum in Berlin in 1859.²³

The icon of the saintly monk from the NMW was classified as a Byzantine work despite its production technique and artistic form unequivocally pointing to the territory of Russia as its place of origin. The triptych with the Deesis and the Saint George icon from Weyer’s collection likely come from southern Europe. Other pieces in Weyer’s holdings, today scattered throughout multiple collections, are mainly paintings from Western Europe. Thus, the presence of Ruthenian or Russian icons among them seems odd. It must be noted that for nearly the whole of the 19th century, icons were not considered to be works of art. It thus seems rather unlikely that Karnicki’s purchase of an object of this type stemmed from a recognition of the icon’s artistic quality. Even if we take into account the individual flashes of interest in Orthodox painting in Russia, such as those appearing in, for example, the prose of Nikolai Leskov – particularly in his 1873 novella *The Sealed Angel*,²⁴ it was only in the 1880s and 1890s that Orthodox painting really began to be appreciated in East-Central Europe. As regards the territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, it must be noted that the first icons made their way into the collection of the National Museum in Krakow in 1879,²⁵ and that the first exhibition of Orthodox art was held in Lviv in 1885.²⁶ True interest in icons only came with the turn of the 20th century.²⁷ Only in 1916 did Eugeniusz Trubiecki write the well-known statement “The discovery of the icon was made in front of our eyes.”²⁸

The presence of an Eastern Christian painting in Weyer’s collection might be connected with the emergence of interest in Byzantine art, first in German-speaking lands²⁹ and later in France,³⁰ which gave rise to occurrences like the 1845 publication of Adolph Didron’s *Manual of Greek and Latin Christian Iconography*, a work that opened the door to scholarly study on the subject and stimulated the further popularity of art from this domain.³¹ Still, until the end

Weyer [Bruges, 1863], pp. 1–2). The same sum appears in the 1863 catalogue next to the artefact under number 1 (*Illustrierter Katalog...*, op. cit., no. 1; see n. 19).

²² *Illustrierter Katalog...*, op. cit., pp. 2–3.

²³ Vey, “Johann Peter Weyer...,” op. cit., p. 177 and p. 200, cat. no. 1.

²⁴ Nikolay Leskov, “The Sealed Angel” in id., *The Sealed Angel and Other Stories*, tr., ed. K.A. Lantz (Knoxville, 1984), pp. 5–69.

²⁵ Mirosław P. Kruk, “Dzieła sztuki cerkiewnej w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie – historia kolekcji, jej eksponowania i opracowania / Works of Orthodox Art at the National Museum in Krakow – History of the Collection Exhibitions and Study,” in id., *Ikony XIV–XVI wieku w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie*, vol. 1, *Katalog / Icons from the 14th–16th Centuries in the National Museum in Krakow*, vol. 1: *Catalogue* (Krakow, 2019), p. 21.

²⁶ See Ludwik Wierzbicki, Marian Sokołowski, *Wystawa archeologiczna polsko-ruska urządzona we Lwowie w roku 1885 / Vystava archeologična pol'sko-russka ustroena vo L'vově v' roku 1885 / Polnisch-ruthenische archeologische Ausstellung in Lemberg 1885 / Exposition archéologique des objets polonais et rutheniens à Lemberg 1885*, Lemberg 1885.

²⁷ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, tr. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago–London, 1994), pp. 19–20.

²⁸ Evgenij Trubeckoj, “Dva mira v drevnerusskoj ikonopisi (1916)” in *Filosofija russkogo religioznogo iskusstva XVI–XX vv. Antologija*, Nikolaj K. Gavryushin, ed. (Moskva, 1993), p. 220.

²⁹ J.B. Bullen, *Byzantium Rediscovered* (New York, 2006), pp. 15–53.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–105.

³¹ See Adolphe Didron, *Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne grecque et latine, traduit du manuscrit byzantine. Le guide de la peinture*, par Paul Durand (Paris, 1845). A German translation was published in 1865.

of the 19th century, Eastern art, and especially Byzantine works, remained little known in the West,³² while Byzantium itself, as Gibbon saw it, was synonymous with the fall of the ancient social order and of the ancients' cultural and artistic tradition.³³

If we accept the Old Believers origin of the NMW likeness as probable, it is worthwhile to consider that Old Ritualists emigrating from the Russian Empire always took their icons with them, a fact that Nikolai Leskov wrote quite colourfully about.³⁴ In this manner, objects in their possession made their way to Western Europe, which nevertheless does not mean that they became objects of antiquities trading. Their owners – Old Believers who treated their icons and books as belonging to the realm of the sacred – did not part with them easily.³⁵ The gilding in the background of the NMW painting was likely executed by someone unfamiliar with the icon painting canon, and therefore almost certainly someone from the West. Rather unlikely is the possibility of its having been done in Warsaw, as the inventory from 9 October 1963 mentions the presence of a “gilt background”.³⁶

The Museum as a School of Art History

The selection of works purchased by Justynian Karnicki can be interpreted as an attempt to build a collection of a strictly defined chronology, evidence of which appears in the 18 August letter dispatching Karnicki, with a sum of 5000 roubles, to the auction in Cologne. The museum's director was to “purchase those works which, being representative of painting school types, could serve to enrich the painting gallery existing at the School of Fine Arts.”³⁷ Pointing to a similar objective for Karnicki's journey are also some mentions in the press from that period: according to *Dziennik Powszechny* daily, Karnicki was tasked not only with the purchase of objects in Cologne but also with “surveying fitting examples of museums of this kind and examining the various systems of their arrangement with the aim of designing one to most accurately present the historical development of art.”³⁸ Several days later, on 12 September 1862, the same paper reported that “As per Mr Karnicki's latest relation, the sale was concluded on the 30th day of the previous month, with Karnicki succeeding in purchasing 42 of the most appropriate objects, the bulk of them paintings. In their acquisition, Mr Karnicki's main concern was to see to it that our gallery is endowed from its inception with monuments of every painting school so that it may represent not only local works of artistic beauty but also those attesting to art's historical evolution. Of the paintings acquired for our museum, 7 are

³² Belting, op. cit., p. 19.

³³ Averil Cameron, *The Byzantines* (Oxford, 2010), p. IX; ead., *Byzantine Matters* (Princeton, 2014), p. 22.

³⁴ In his aforementioned story *The Sealed Angel*, we find a highly believable description of the Old Believers' attitudes to the icons in their possession: “We travelled about from job to job [...] just as the Hebrews of old wandered in the wilderness with Moses, and we even had our own tabernacle with us and we were never parted from it” – cited after Leskov, op. cit., p. 8.

³⁵ Making its way into Charles Butler's collection in similarly secretive circumstances was the early-19th-century Old Believers *Komentowana Apokalipsa*, which today resides in the collection of the National Library in Warsaw. See Aleksandra Sulikowska, “Znaki Antychrysta. Miniatury starowerskiej Komentowanej Apokalipsy z kolekcji Biblioteki Narodowej,” *Rocznik Biblioteki Narodowej*, no. 45 (2014), p. 81.

³⁶ See *Wykaz obrazów...*, op. cit., inv. no. Rkps [MS] 1945 MNW.

³⁷ NMW Archives, ref. no. 1b (No. 1), Records of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw concerning the museum's holdings.

³⁸ *Dziennik Powszechny*, no. 198 (3 September 1862), p. 827.

of the Italian school (here, next to Antonio of Ferrara we encounter names such as Gentile Bellini and Guido Reni); 4 Franconian (including Holbein); 5 Brabantian (including one attributed to Quentin Messis); 11 Antwerpian and Dutch (including Jordans and Teniers); 2 French, 1 Spanish, and 4 older works of a value more historic than artistic. This bodes of a beautiful beginning to a collection which, in conjunction with a collection deposited by Fioretti for the use of the school of fine arts and forming a distinct whole as regarded in the last will and testament of the benefactor, will make it possible for young people devoting themselves to painting to learn from the examples of masters who had dedicated their lives to perfecting themselves in art, and, by observing parallel monuments, to assume a picture of the progress and directions art has borne over the ages.”³⁹

Indicating a similar objective was a mention in *Kurier Warszawski* on 25 October 1862, which reports, in turn, on the previous day’s opening of an exhibition of the paintings purchased in Cologne: “The fine arts, invariably rousing curiosity, yesterday found many an admirer in those visiting the exhibition and marvelling at the masterful works meant to serve as a template for our young generation of people devoting themselves to the fine arts.”⁴⁰

It is also worth noting the manner in which the paintings were ordered in the list of works purchased in Cologne, drafted on 9 October 1863 and observing a specific chronology – listed first is our painting from the “Byzantine school”, followed by a painting of the “Tuscan school” attributed to Angelo Gaddi (1327–80), paintings of the “Giotto school” (“14th c.”), and a work by Antonio da Ferrara (d. 1384).⁴¹ Ordered similarly is the Inventory of the Museum of Fine Arts produced in July 1964, which lists the “Byzantine” icon, two paintings by Angelo Gaddi, a painting of the “Giotto school,” etc., in that sequence.⁴² This order seems compliant with the Vasarian picture of art history, or to put it more succinctly, with how art history was understood in the 19th century, when the evolution of painting was unanimously presumed to have progressed from *maniera greca* to *maniera moderna*.⁴³ In his story on Cimabue, Vasari writes about the painter having been sent for training to Greek artists, who “giving no thought to making any advance, had made those works in that fashion wherein they are seen to-day – that is, not in the good ancient manner of the Greeks but in that rude modern manner of those times.” Cimabue, meanwhile, “although he imitated these Greeks, [...] added much perfection to the art, relieving it of a great part of their rude manner,” and thus surpassed his teachers.⁴⁴ Cimabue’s student, in turn, “banished completely that rude Greek manner and revived the modern and good art of painting, introducing the portraying well from nature of living people.”⁴⁵ It is worth noting that the “Vasarian order” reflected in the inventory of the Warsaw Museum of Fine Arts was also consistent with the premises governing the organisation of Weyer’s catalogue representing European painting schools of various periods.⁴⁶

³⁹ *Dziennik Powszechny*, no. 204 (12 September 1862), p. 851.

⁴⁰ *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 245 (13 (25) October 1862), p. 1405.

⁴¹ NMW Archives, ref. no. 1b (No. 32), Records of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw concerning the museum’s holdings. See also Białostocki, op. cit., p. 39; Masłowska, op. cit., p. 64.

⁴² NMW Archives, ref. no. 4, Inventory of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw for 1863, pp. 61–62.

⁴³ Arpad Szakolczai, *Sociology, Religion and Grace. A Quest for the Renaissance* (New York, 2007), pp. 88–89.

⁴⁴ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters Sculptors and Architects*, vol. 1: *Cimabue to Agnolo Gaddi*, tr. Gaston du C. de Vere (London, 1912), p. 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴⁶ See *Illustrierter Katalog...*, op. cit.

The icon of the saintly monk was also shown in an exhibition opening on 22 June 1865 in the building of the School of Fine Arts.⁴⁷ Open to the public on Sundays and Thursdays, with free admission,⁴⁸ the exhibition of 170 works, including those acquired via auction from Weyer, generated great interest among Varsovians. The show was prepared by the curator Jan Sachowicz and was soon thereafter to be supplemented with a catalogue.⁴⁹

The glowing review of the exhibition likely authored by Adam Wiślicki in the 7 January 1866 edition of *Przegląd Tygodniowy* discussed the main concept of the exhibition in the building that the article called the “Kazimiriowski Palace”: “The years and centuries pass, and we gradually advance from the first steps of infancy to bold bouts with difficulty, to immortal works of art’s triumph, in which it has reached its aims and captured on canvas the *highest ideal of beauty*. We hasten through the schools nuanced by proper *characters* and delve into works great in idea and execution, and in their juxtaposition, in comparing them with each other we *obtain* and *perfect* our knowledge of art. Thus, the gallery of paintings becomes the most meaningful school of painting and aesthetics, in which taste and sensitivity at large are most fully developed.”⁵⁰ Here, the museum is described as a place of education, of broadening general knowledge on art history, but also as a place of shaping a sense of aesthetics. Much space in the article is afforded to Old Christian art, and to one work that was to be representative of it: “Christian art was begot by love and faith and its shelter were catacombs... There, over the grave of a Christian martyr, the brother and master whose hand was to die tomorrow, carved reliefs in stone or used a brush to render an allegorical sign. He imbued his ideas into the readymade form of ancient art, whose highest trait was harmony and tranquillity... Later, when art left the quietude of tombs and entered the dark basilicas of the Christian world, it long retained, for nearly ten centuries, its original nature. This is the Byzantine school, full of pious awe, inner solemnity, and calmness. Figures gaze forth with eyes beaming with inner pensiveness, some passionless asceticism, an eternal existence. We see these traits in a diminutive picture (no. 651) showing a priest whose blessing hand rises with solemnity over our heads. Let us not forget that this painting is more than eight-hundred years old! Let us not search in it for the forms of external art – those which had not been the gifts of the era – but let us look into the spiritual depth of a lonesome, simple figure. This individual attempt, perhaps taken from a Greek church, is enough to characterise the school because a strict typicality looms so strongly therein, its fantasy so constrained in the shackles of tradition, from which it strays not even a hair, that each picture contains within itself the complete whole and can vary from another only in subject and size.”⁵¹ These words are surely the first in the Polish language to attempt, and quite successfully at that, to characterise Byzantine art. Later on in the article, the author writes that “the Byzantine style would long weigh on the art which due to political events moved from the East to the West...”⁵² Surely, the exhibition needed to stress the development of European art from the Byzantine period, and our icon played an important role in that as something of a symbol of that development’s beginning.

⁴⁷ Lorentz, op. cit., p. 6; Małowska, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴⁸ *Dziennik Warszawski*, Ann. 2, no. 134 (6 (18) June 1865) (Sunday), p. 1366.

⁴⁹ *Gazeta Warszawska*, no. 140, (23 June 1865) (Friday).

⁵⁰ “Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie,” *Przegląd Tygodniowy Życia Społecznego, Literatury i Sztuk Pięknych*, Ann. 1, no. 1 (1866), p. 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*

The next exhibition, held many years later, in 1902, in a building on Wierzbowa street, was conceived quite differently. Its catalogue was structured in an entirely different manner and perhaps this left insufficient space for the icon,⁵³ which was part of group of works referenced a few years later by the museum's director Pius Weloński, when he stated to the press that "three-hundred other paintings, mainly monastic pieces, remain in storage, packed up in a dry place, under our care and supervision."⁵⁴

There is no doubt that Justynian Karnicki's purchase of the icon at Weyer's auction in August 1862 was deliberate, spurred by an intention to not only include it in the collection but also present it at the Warsaw museum's exhibition tracing the evolution of European art. On the basis of documents and records, as well as the inventory ledgers from 1863–64, we can arrive at the conclusion that the icon was to serve as something of a historical context marker for the other paintings (treated as later artefacts!) in the Warsaw collection. Is it possible that the people of Warsaw, a city that prior to the January Uprising was home to nine Orthodox churches and chapels full of icons,⁵⁵ failed to notice the artefact's Ruthenian or Russian character? What was understood, or what was hoped to be understood, in 1862 and 1863 by the "Byzantine" designation repeatedly assigned to the icon? These questions remain unanswered. Without a doubt, however, the presence of the work in the Museum of Fine Arts collection invites reflection on the specificities of the culture of Warsaw – a city in the centre of the Russian authorities' interest in the 1860s – and on the museum management's need to adjust to the existing social and political circumstances. The new institution could not function, or even have come to life, without the approval of the Russian authorities. Could the icon in the museum's collection have been beneficial to gaining their favour? It is known that the first exhibition of the paintings purchased by Karnicki in Cologne was visited by the viceroy of Congress Poland, Konstantin Nikolayevich, before its official opening on 19 October 1862. The following day, *Dziennik Powszechny* daily reported: "Yesterday, His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke and Viceroy graced with his presence the exhibition of paintings purchased at the behest of the education authorities for the museum of fine arts from the famed gallery of Mr Weyer in Cologne. On the occasion, the acting Chief Director of the museum introduced to His Imperial Highness the Honorary Director Justynian Karnicki, the high-ranking officials of the Religious Faiths and Education Commission, the professors of the school of fine arts and a number of notable artists."⁵⁶ There are no accounts indicating whether or not the Grand Duke took note of our icon when viewing the exhibition.

Translated by Szymon Włoch

⁵³ It is not included in the publication *Katalog obrazów warszawskiego Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych, znajdujących się w czasowym lokalu tegoż muzeum przy ulicy Wierzbowej No 11 / Katalog "kartin" Varshavskago muzeja izjashnyh" iskusstv", nahodjashhijsja vo vremennom pomeshhenii togo-zhe muzeja po Verbovoj ulicze No 11* (Warsaw, 1902).

⁵⁴ Demil, "Muzeum Sztuki w Warszawie," *Świat*, Ann. 4, no. 47 (20 November 1909), pp. 12–13.

⁵⁵ Piotr Paszkiewicz, *Pod berłem Romanowów. Sztuka rosyjska w Warszawie 1815–1915* (Warsaw, 1991), pp. 40–77.

⁵⁶ In the section "Część urzędowa." See *Dziennik Powszechny*, no. 236 (20 October 1862). See also *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 241 (21 October 1862), p. 1387.