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Embedding Byzantine Icons in Post-Tridentine and Baroque Splendour: Reception and Celebration of Eastern Cult Images in the Republic of Genoa, 16th-18th Century

This paper will address the status of miracle-working and acheropita images in western Europe by presenting three interesting cases of Byzantine icons brought in different moments to the Republic of Genoa's territory (the celebrated "Mandylion", identified with the acheropita image from Edessa, and the lesser known "Madonna di Pera" in Genoa; the late medieval "Dormitio Virginis" in Rapallo, a small sea town), focusing on their reception from the 16th to the 18th century. These images - though widely different as far as their history and their degree of fame are concerned - all enjoyed a cult status which caused the creation of new art objects to celebrate them. Rather than the icons themselves, the works of art commissioned to express the local people's devotion toward these miracle-working images, as well as the church's recognition of their significance, are the main object of this analysis.

In the late 16th century, the Mandylion was inserted in a theca and then embedded, inside a marble tabernacle, in a grandiose embracing structure by Marcello Sparzo, comprising many stucco statues representing allegories and prophets; at the same time, Giovanni Battista Paggi painted the first canvas depicting the story of the "Holy Face" for the Church San Bartolomeo degli Armeni. By the end of the 17th century, no less than fifteen canvases illustrating the Mandylion's legend and some of its miracles adorned the church, which had become a veritable *theatrum sacrum* focused on the icon. The *Madonna di Pera* - which takes its name from the Genoese colony in Constantinople that was its place of origin, and was attributed to Saint Luke, as so many other images of (real or alleged) Eastern provenance did - was inset in the late 17th century in a celebrative altarpiece, on which the Genoese painter Giovanni Andrea Carlone represented Saint Nicholas of Mira and female saints, a typical instance of a "picture within a picture" celebrative solution; while the *Dormitio Virginis* in Rapallo was the focus of two magnificent 18th-century "apparati", a permanent grand silver frame in the shape of a rich flowered drapery with cherubs, inside the marble Baroque altar in which it is normally displayed, and a sumptuous processional casket, bearing large silver statues depicting the scene of the icon's miraculous apparition in Rapallo, into which the small image is in-set and carried around on its festive day, even today, thus marking an itinerary which is in fact a projection and an enlargement of the image's sacred space, as well as confirming the strength of its links with the local community.

The complexity of the diverse factors here at play - including the tension caused by divergent eastern and western iconographic traditions and the assemblage of different works of art - contributes to the interest of this case study in the perception of icons in modern Western Europe: a case whose specific characters are closely linked to the history of Genoa, to its ties to the eastern Mediterranean area and to its fight against the Muslim enemy, whose perceived impiety and iconoclastic fury the Madonna from Pera and the Rapallo icon had escaped by coming west.