

*Mirostaw P. Kruk*

UNIVERSITY OF GDAŃSK / THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN CRACOW

## The Icon of the Holy Unmercenaries (Greek: Ἅγιοι Ανάργυροι) Cosmas and Damian, as Bequeathed by Zofia Ruebenbauer,<sup>1</sup> in the Collection of the National Museum in Cracow

The circumstances of the icon's acquisition,  
a description of the icon and a preliminary analysis

Zofia Ruebenbauer died on 15 October 2010 in Ottawa; her last will and testament, revealed on the same day, included a generous bequest to the National Museum in Cracow (hereinafter: NMC), namely an icon of the holy physicians (Greek: Ἅγιοι Ανάργυροι, Agioi Anargyroi, Church Slavonic: Безсребренники, Bezszrebrrenniki) (Figs. 1–2), which proved to be extremely valuable. In January 2011 the executors of the will offered to hand the gift over to the NMC. The certificate issued by the Auction House in Ottawa (Walker's Auctions) identified it as a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian icon.

Zofia Ruebenbauer *née* Kuczyńska (26 July 1913 – 15 October 2010), together with her husband, was a devoted activist of the Polish diaspora in Canada who organised events and actively participated in community work.<sup>2</sup> Born in 1913 in

1 This article was written as part of an academic grant in the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities (hereinafter – NPDH), financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in 2015–2017. The grant, entitled *Katalog ikon XIV–XVI wieku w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie. Opracowanie i publikacja* [The Catalogue of 14<sup>th</sup>- to 16<sup>th</sup>-century Icons in the Collection of the National Museum in Cracow; no. 00627] was led by M. P. Kruk.

2 Based on the obituary published in "Ottawa Citizen" on 19 October – 23 October 2010 and available in digital version at: <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/ottawacitizen/obituary.aspx?n=zofia-ruebenbauer&pid=146105409> [accessed 12 May 2017]. Her contribution included organising exhibitions, Christmas meetings and occasional lectures. The Ruebenbauer Foundation, established in 2003, worked to promote the study of Polish culture and heritage in Canada. One of Zofia's three sisters, Irena Kuczyńska, married Adam Gawlikowski, a graduate of the Lvov Polytechnic who had been a soldier of the Polish Army in France and a delegate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Polish government in exile (in London and,



**Fig. 1.** *The Icon of the Holy Unmercenaries:*  
recto – condition in 2011, NMC,  
inv. No. MNK XVIII-871



**Fig. 2.** *The Icon of the Holy Unmercenaries:*  
verso – condition in 2011. Photo by NMC

Włocławek, she received her academic degree at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. During the Second World War she became a member of the Home Army and fought in the Warsaw Uprising as a liaison officer. She was taken prisoner and was temporarily held at a number of German concentration camps. In 1952 she moved to Canada and worked first in a law firm in Montreal and then as a French teacher in Ottawa.

Jerzy Mariusz Ruebenbauer (1 October 1906 – 13 September 1998) (Fig. 3) was the first commandant of the Lvov District of the National Military Organisation/Home Army, a wartime officer of the Union of Armed Struggle and Home Army, and one of the organisers of the underground National Party (SN) and the National Military Organisation (NOW).<sup>3</sup> He worked as an academic scholar at the Lvov Polytechnic and, after the war, in Brussels; in Canada he became a Polish diaspora activist. He was born in Dąbrowa Tarnowska; his godfather was Jędrzej Moraczewski,

after 1945, in Belgium). From 1956 onwards he worked as an engineer in the United States, where he met his future wife who had emigrated from Poland in the 1950s (she had been working in the Art Objects Production Workshop in Pruszków) in order to join her sister in Canada. Adam and Irena Gawlikowski bequeathed their possessions to sponsor prizes for the best students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw – <http://gawlikowscy.evot.org/index.php?m=1&menu=7&lang=pl> [accessed 24 June 2017].

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.1944.pl/powstancze-biogramy/jerzy-ruebenbauer,38371.html> [accessed 24 June 2017].

the Prime Minister of the first government in independent Poland (1918–1919).<sup>4</sup> He studied in Poznań (at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences) and in Lvov (at the Faculty of Civil Engineering). He worked as a County Engineer in Tarnobrzeg; on 3 October 1938 he married Zofia Strycharska from Lvov (4 May 1913 – 26 June 1941). His wife, who had a degree in law, was arrested by the NKVD on 23 March 1940 and imprisoned in Lvov (in “Brygidki” and “Zamarstynów”) for over a year. She was killed on 26 June 1941 during the so-called “NKVD prison massacres” (between 25 and 28 June the NKVD and NKGB executed several thousand political prisoners).

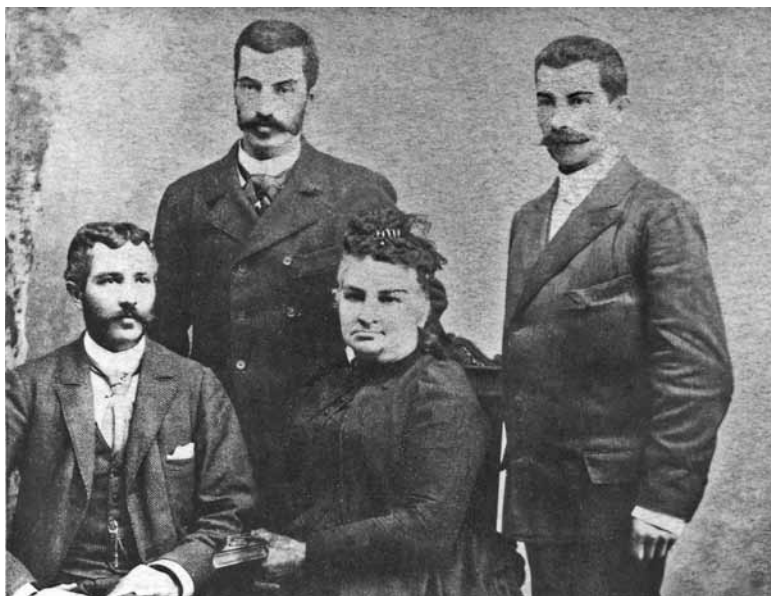


**Fig. 3.** Jerzy Ruebenbauer, Lvov, 30 March 1931. Photo from the archive of Zbigniew Lisiecki

After the Russians entered Lvov in 1939, Zofia Strycharska, Jerzy Ruebenbauer’s first wife, hid the icon behind a tile stove in the family home. Both she and Jerzy feared they would be arrested since they both belonged to structures of the underground movement and Zofia, despite Jerzy’s warnings, distributed underground press. Jerzy, in turn, had been designated by the Russians to become the head of the Laboratory at the Lvov Polytechnic. After his wife’s arrest the NKVD searched their house, most probably in June 1940, and confiscated various valuable objects, including the family documents. When the NKVD came, Jerzy was at the Polytechnic; when he returned home he looked for what remained and found the icon behind the

---

4 Thanks to the kind help of Danuta Tardiff on 23 June 2017, I was able to contact Zbigniew Lisiecki, a relative of Zofia Ruebenbauer’s. By consulting the family archives, photographs and transcripts of genealogical data, Mr. Lisiecki was able to help me solve the problem regarding the origins of the icon and the inscriptions appearing on its verso. The remaining details of this extraordinary story were cleared thanks to a telephone conversation with Mr. Albin Ruebenbauer (88) on 11 July 2017 and with Mr. Łukasz Hoszowski on 2 January 2018; I am very grateful for their help.



**Fig. 4.** Haryklia Mavrocordatos-Serini with her sons Leander, Haryton and Robert. Photo from the archive of Zbigniew Lisiecki



**Fig. 5.** Ludwik Józef Hoszowski and the daughters of Jan Robert Hoszowski and Haryklia: Ewelina (wife of Ludwik Józef Hoszowski), Helena, Virginia and Irena. Photo by J. Henner (the imperial and royal court photographer in Lvov), from Albin Ruebenbauer's archive

stove. He took it and concealed it beneath his coat – this was possible due to the icon's small size. Whether he had any contact with Zofia after her arrest is unknown. Afterwards, fleeing his inevitable arrest, he left Lvov. The icon was the only object he had managed to salvage from the family home. He brought it to Warsaw, where he met Zofia Kuczyńska, who would become his second wife. Like him, she was a member of the Home Army and took part in the Warsaw Uprising. After a period of imprisonment in concentration camps, both Jerzy and Zofia arrived in Belgium and eventually left for Canada.

The fact that these extraordinary biographies resulted in such an exceptional bequest is no coincidence. It must be emphasised that the gift came from both Zofia and Jerzy Ruebenbauer; museum experts are satisfied to know that the old tradition of exceptional and honourable individuals donating works to national collections has not been entirely forgotten.

The icon that the NMC acquired is striking because of its small size (21.5 x 27 x 2.5 cm) and the fact that the painted surface is visible only through small apertures in a metal cover, revealing the heads and hands of the depicted saints. It was painted on a single wooden panel with a vertical crack running down the middle. The wood used as support is lightweight; the inscription on the verso includes the exact dates and names, which suggest a francophone environment. At the top there is a trace of apertures through which a cord or a leather band could be strewn to hang the icon. Another aperture is visible in the middle of the icon's lower side. The icon was in good condition when handed over to the museum, yet only the faces of the saints were visible; the cover had darkened due to oxidation and its upper right-hand corner was warped. For a time, the icon was kept in the storage room of the Department of Orthodox Art, yet the artistic quality of the faces prompted me to commission restoration and conservation works and to conduct research on it in 2013. Another incentive was provided by the opinion of Professor Eugenia Drakopoulou from Athens (National Hellenic Research Foundation), who confirmed my supposition that the work bequeathed to the museum's collection may in fact be a high-quality Greek icon from the Palaiologan period. Consequently, the icon was cleaned and studied at the Metal and Weapons Conservation Studio of the NMC (hereinafter: MWCS of the NMC) and later at the Laboratory of Analysis and Non-destructive Investigation of Heritage Objects (hereinafter: LANBOZ). The cover of the icon was cleaned in the first of the above-mentioned studios in May 2013; a month later it was studied at the LANBOZ using an XRF spectrometer to determine its exact composition. The icon itself was cleaned and analysed using IR, UV and RTG radiation.<sup>5</sup> Thus both the icon itself and its cover were cleaned and secured. It was decided to use the least invasive method of conservation, which is why the layer of old crystallised varnish was not removed. Since the surface of the icon was covered in dirt, there was no certainty that the painted layer would not

---

5 P. Frączek, *Raport z badań fotograficznych i radiografii cyfrowej ikony „Św. Lekarze” (gr. Anargyroi) z kolekcji Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie* [Report from the photographic examination and digital radiography of the icon of the Holy Healers (Greek: Anargyroi) from the collection of the National Museum in Cracow], prepared at LANBOZ, dated 15 November 2013.

be limited to the faces and hands until the cover was removed. The first look at the revealed surface dispelled these doubts.

The XRF analysis conducted at the LANBOZ by Julio del Hoyo-Meléndez indicated that the metal of the cover was 50% copper, 30% silver and 5% lead.<sup>6</sup> The report from the study states that “an alloy of Cu and Ag was used to craft the metal revetment Pb, As, Zn and Ni commonly appear as contaminants in Cu, yet Au and Pb are usually associated with contaminants in Ag ores”.<sup>7</sup> The cover bore no punch marks and only a Greek inscription referring to the subject of the icon:

H APH ANAPTYP  
(= *Holy Unmercenaries*)

The inscription appears to be a distorted version of the writing which appears (in a correct form) in the paint layer (see below). A more interesting inscription appears in the middle of the lower frame of the cover:

KPNΣPN

This may be a family name of the previous owners of the icon; this is the theory I am willing to accept having consulted experts in different fields, e.g. historians, art historians, philologists and palaeographers.

After the revetment was removed it became apparent that the paint layer covered the entire icon (Figs. 6–7). Clearing away the accumulated dirt revealed extensive fissures in the varnish covering the surface of the saints’ robes. Hypothetically, the damage may have been caused by candles burning in front of the icon and heating the metal cover, which dramatically increased the temperature of the paint layer. The background of the icon is recessed from the frame, forming the so-called *kovcheg*. The frame is marked with a line of bright red with holes for mounting the metal covering placed at regular intervals of several centimetres. The second row of openings on the edge of the *luzga* and the central *polye* is less densely spaced; holes are also visible on the halos of the persons depicted.

Beneath the dirt and above the heads of the saints, an outline of a Greek inscription became visible. A photograph made with an IR spectrometer ultimately revealed the message stating the subject of the icon (Fig. 9):

OI AGIOI ANAPTYPOI  
[= *Agioi Anargyroi; the Holy Unmercenaries*, literally: “taking no silver”  
(for healing)]

For a long time it seemed that the icon bears no inscription identifying the figures by name, as was the custom; furthermore, there is no trace of a connection with the inscription on the icon’s cover, which seems to corroborate the hypothesis that

6 J. del. Hoyo-Meléndez, *Sprawozdanie z analizy składu pierwiastkowego metalowej sukienki*, MNK XVIII-871/2 [Report from the analysis of the element composition of the metal revetment, MNK XVIII-871/2], prepared at LANBOZ, dated 31 May 2013.

7 Ibid., p. 3.





**Fig. 6.** *The Icon of the Holy Unmercenaries: after the cover is removed. Photo by the Painting Conservation Studio of the NMC, 2013*



**Fig. 7.** *The Icon of the Holy Unmercenaries: before cleaning. Photo by P. Frączek, LANBOZ, 2013*



**Fig. 8.** *The Icon of the Holy Unmercenaries: after cleaning. Photo by P. Frączek, LANBOZ, 2013*



**Fig. 9.** *The Icon of the Holy Unmercenaries: after cleaning in IR light. Photo by P. Frączek, LANBOZ, 2013*



**Fig. 10.** *The Icon of the Holy Unmercenaries:* after cleaning in UV light. Photo by P. Frączek, LANBOZ, 2013

the revetment is a later addition to the work. Photographs made in RTG and IR light revealed a number of differences in the visible details and proved that the most original, virtually intact parts of the icon were the faces of the physicians. The face of Christ, in turn, suffered great discolouration. It must have been cleaned with some unfortunate, destructive substance in a liquid form which spilled beneath the cover and reacted with the varnish and the layer of the paint, as is apparent on the UV photography (Fig. 10).<sup>8</sup>

As indicated above, the only elements of the paint layer that were visible through the openings of the cover were the faces, whose dark surface was highlighted by very narrow strands of white. Cleaning the surface of the icon revealed a composition featuring in the centre two holy healers in a three-quarter view and the figure of Christ blessing them with both of his hands. Christ is emerging from a greenish semicircle decorated with golden stars and emitting rays that spread towards the edges of the icon (Fig. 8).<sup>9</sup> The background of the semicircle features the monogram of Christ, yet only its first element is clearly visible, and exclusively under IR light:

IC [XC]

8 Frączek, op. cit., p. 3: "Between the figures of the Holy Unmercenaries there is a stain on which the olifa varnish is much less cracked. The blemish is most probably a trace of a solvent, perhaps the one used to clean the face of Christ. The excess amount of the substance made its way beneath the metal cover, partially dissolved the layer of olifa and flowed vertically down".

9 Ibid, p. 2: "VIS photographs [i.e. taken in white light – M. P. Kruk] made from several angles demonstrate the current state of preservation. Photographs of the icon taken in diffused and raking light, after the silver cover had been removed, show a substantial amount of dirt on the surface (a layer of dust) and a thick layer of cracked and wrinkled olifa varnish".



The face of Christ clearly bears traces of washing, which is why the features are considerably blurred, particularly in the lower section. The head is encircled by a cruciform halo. The Greek inscription appearing in the upper section of the icon provides a general identification of the depicted figures yet does not mention their names. The saints are looking to the side; their faces are oval and slender, with long semicircular beards and drooping moustaches. Remarkable features include long, narrow noses; foreheads and cheeks are highlighted with light paint. The faces are shaded to appear three-dimensional; the sharp chiaroscuro creates an extremely austere impression. The outlines of the halos are accentuated by punched patterns. Above, the surface of the wood is incised with small dotted, equilateral triangles that are visible only under X-ray.

The saint on the right holds in his right hand an item that is impossible to identify in visible light. X-ray imaging revealed that it is a slender surgical knife with a pointed tip held vertically between the fingers. The saint's left hand is closed around an oblong object, which probably represents a case for medical tools. One interesting detail of the assumed case is a half-open conical lid with two hoops, of which one is an element of a latch mechanism and the other a part of a hinge. There is also a chain attached to the latter hoop and connecting it with the other end of the case. The upper part of the casing features black dots; both ends are decorated with a pair of parallel lines. The saint wears a two-piece robe; the cloak (*chlamys*) is dark red, while the tunic underneath is light red. The latter garb is additionally decorated with a broad border below the neck, with two parallel lines by the edges and a vertical stripe (*clavus*) associated with ancient Roman robes.

The physician on the left is holding a knife in his right hand. As with the other surgical tool in the icon, the item is barely visible to the naked eye, but easily identifiable in the X-ray. Both of the depicted tools are long and slender, with an element resembling a small hoop with a crossbar at the tip of the handle. A similar crossbar is visible at the base of the blade, which resembles an arrowhead. In his left hand, the saint holds an open chest filled with what, to the naked eye, resembles unidentified spots of colour. Under X-ray, however, the contents of the casket appear to have the form of cuboids. The saint's tunic is greenish in colour, with a very narrow red hem of the wide sleeve. The light red cloak is wrapped around the figure quite tightly; at the neck and left shoulder both the tunic and the *chlamys* are of a similar red hue and are decorated with chrysography. The tunic has another ornament in the form of a narrow band below the neck; a small oval brooch appears to be clasped at its centre, yet it is not visible in any other spectrum.

Another detail visible to the naked eye is the outline of a Greek cross with widening ends, on the chest of the healer on the right. X-ray spectroscopy revealed that the other saint also has a cross on his chest. Three arms have a round plaque at the end; the upper one ends in a large hoop for the chain.

When the paint layer of the icon is compared with its cover, it becomes apparent that the metal revetment (made mostly of silver) copies the general outline of the composition and adds a repoussée decoration in the form of vegetal and geometric motifs to the halos and to the background. The maker of the cover probably did not

notice the tools held by the physicians, since these were not included in the repous-sée details, even though the positions of the fingers were copied. It may be surmised that both of healers are performing a blessing; the one on the right appears to be holding an open book, whereas the one on the left is clutching an item resembling a stole, similar to the ancient *akakia* (gr. *ἀκακία*) – a roll of purple silk containing dust – which was an attribute of emperors in official iconography, serving as a reminder of the mortal nature of man. The sleeve of the physician on the left was interpreted as a rosary hanging loosely from his right hand. These discrepancies clearly indicate that the original attributes were misidentified; nevertheless, the motif of the crosses on the saints' chests was copied faithfully, although in daylight the crosses are nearly invisible to the naked eye. The vegetal decoration appears to corroborate the hypothesis that the cover was made in a later period than the icon itself, as the arrangement of the motifs resembles those on Greek icons from Epirus in modern-day Albania (the border region of Erseka) dated to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

The reverse side and the side panels of the work are covered with inscriptions i.e. names and exact dates. Those on the back are in French, whereas those on the sides are in Polish. The dates suggest that the inscriptions on the reverse side were made earlier (from the top) (Fig. 2):

<i>Mariés</i>	<i>6 Janvier 86</i>	
<i>Leandre</i>	<i>28 Novembre</i>	
<i>Irene</i>	<i>29 9=°</i>	
<i>Robert</i>	<i>24 Juillet</i>	
<i>Harus</i>	<i>21 Juin</i>	
<i>Virginie</i>	<i>28 Juin</i>	
<i>Helene</i>	<i>26 9=°</i>	
<i>Eveline</i>	<i>25 Septembre</i>	
<i>Urania</i>	<i>→→→→ 5/12<sup>11</sup></i>	
<i>Michell(eç)</i>	<i>Novembr. 8/</i>	
<i>Nace (ç) Eveline</i>	<i>25. 19(13ç)<sup>12</sup></i>	<i>Irene 23. 11(ç). 18(99ç)<sup>13</sup></i>
<i>Robert mort le</i>	<i>28 Fevrier 1892</i>	

Yellow UV light reveals traces of erased writing to the right of each line of the text. Unfortunately, the letters are almost entirely illegible, yet it may be surmised that the surviving lines are retraced and thickened versions of the earlier text. The

10 *Christ Pantocrator*, icon, 1635, 109 cm × 75.5 cm × 9 cm, from the monastery of St. Mary in Postenan, Erseka region – *Icons from the Orthodox Communities of Albania. Collection of the National Museum of Medieval Art, Korçë*, ed. by A. Tourta [The catalogue for the exhibition: Thessaloniki, the Museum of Byzantine Culture, 14 March – 12 June 2006], Thessaloniki, cat. no. and Fig. 28; *Christ Pantocrator*, icon, 1651, 93 cm × 63,8 cm × 3,5 cm, from the orthodox church of St. Peter in Bezhan, Erseka region – *ibid.*, cat. no. and Fig. 29; *St. John the Baptist*, icon, mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, 84 cm × 56,6 cm × 3 cm, Erseka region – *ibid.*, cat. no. and Fig. 31.

11 This part is only visible in UV light.

12 Date retraced.

13 Ditto.

final line contains a clue that identifies these inscriptions as mementoes related to significant events in the history of the family that owned the icon. In this case the entry refers to the death of Robert (on 28 February 1892). The dates are from the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century and encompass a period between 6 January 1886 and 23 November 19(13ζ). It must, however, be noted that almost all of the entries in between appear without yearly dates.

The sides of the icon feature the following inscriptions:

The upper side panel:

An inscription with letters(ζ) and numbers, illegible even in UV light.

The left side panel:

... (iζ) *Ludka* (ι) *urodzone* ... 7 8 1893 | *Jaś urodzony* ... 8/7 1900 *Irenka* 26/6 189 (7ι)  
*Janek* 19/8 198

The right side panel:

No traces of inscriptions.

The lower side panel:

Inscriptions invisible; traces of an engraving are discernible on the right-hand side.

The inscriptions on the left side panel are in Polish and refer to the period of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The last inscription, however, could have been added in the 1980s.

The complete list mentions twelve persons on the reverse side and four or five on the left side panel, not counting the illegible inscriptions on the top side panel. The use of diminutive name forms and the entries by some of them suggest that the family was noting down the dates of either the birth or death of its members. The first word in the series of the Polish-language entries is unclear – it should perhaps be understood as the word *wnuki* [grandchildren], or the name of a child. The people to whom these inscriptions refer were identified with the help of the members of the benefactors' family in June 2017.<sup>14</sup>

It is certain that the icon had a connection with Jerzy Ruebenbauer's ancestors: his grandmother Haryklia (Greek: Herakleia) Mavrocordatos-Serini, Sas-Hoszowska (1836 – 20 October 1906), was the last member of the princely house of Mavrocordatos.<sup>15</sup>

---

14 See: footnote 5.

15 The famous Mavrocordatos family were Phanariot Greeks elevated to the title of rulers of Moldavia by the Ottoman Turks. The family was founded by a merchant from Chios; his son Alexander (ca. 1636–1709) became a doctor of philosophy and medicine at the University of Bologna and assumed the post of a translator at the court of the Ottoman Sultan in 1673. He participated in negotiations with Austria and prepared the peace treaty of Karlowitz (1699). He later became a secretary of state and a count of the Holy Roman Empire (*Reichsgraf*). Due to his authority at the court of Mustapha II he was able to improve the situation of the Christians under Ottoman rule. His son Nicholas (1670–1730) held a similar position until 1708, when he was appointed the *hospodar* of Moldavia and then Walachia. He was the first Greek raised

The photograph from Zbigniew Lisiecki's archive shows Haryklia with her sons Leander (the eldest; seated), Haryton and Robert (both standing in the background) (Fig. 4). Haryklia married Jan Robert Hoszowski (1826–28 February 1892), a member of the ancient family of Hoszowski of the Sas coat of arms which originated from Hoszów in Przemyśl Land. The couple had at least seven children: Wirginia Angela, Irena (married Władysław, another member of the Hoszowski family, born in 1858 in Żywisław), Leander, Robert, Haryton, Helena and Ewelina (Fig. 5). Their names appear on the reverse side of the icon with the exact dates of their birth.

Wirginia (1865–1936, buried at the Lvov cemetery), the daughter of Haryklia, married Col. Karol Teodor Ruebenbauer (1869–1917) on 26 October 1901. Her husband was an engineer constructing railway lines in Galicia. Karol and Wirginia had three sons: the above-mentioned Jerzy (1 October 1906–14 August 1998); Zbigniew (1905–1992), who was a minister in the Polish Government in London; and Janek, who died in infancy in 1902 (mentioned on the left side of icon as born on 8 July 1900). Leander married Miss Dwernicka; Haryton – a lady named Adelajda; Irena married a man named Władysław; Helena died young; and Ewelina married Józef Hoszowski and later Karol Kalinowski.

## The analysis of the icon conducted within the NPDH grant in 2015–2017

A more extensive and thorough study of the icon became possible thanks to the scientific grant of the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities titled *Katalog ikon XIV-XVI wieku w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie. Opracowanie i publikacja* [The Catalogue of 14<sup>th</sup>- to 16<sup>th</sup>-century Icons in the Collection of the National Museum in Cracow. Study and publication]. The study has been under way at the National Museum of Cracow since September 2015; when completed it shall result in an academic catalogue scheduled to be published in 2017. Fifty of the earliest icons in the Museum's collection were chosen for the project. Most of them can be seen on permanent exhibition in the Gallery of Orthodox Art of the Old Polish Republic situated in the Bishop Erazm Ciołek Palace (a subdivision of the National Museum in Cracow; hereinafter BECP NMC) at 17 Kanonicza Street in Cracow.

The initial selection consisted of icons dated to between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries based on the iconographic and stylistic analysis. As well as being the earliest items in the collection, they display a number of features that categorise them into a distinct group, differing from later icons from the early-modern period. In general

---

by the Porte to the position of ruler of the Danubian principalities. Famous descendants of the Phanariots also include Alexander Mavrocordato (1791–1865), who actively participated in the struggle for Greek independence (1821–1832) and the formation of a Greek government. He presided over the first national assembly meeting at Epidaurus. In 1833 he was appointed Prime Minister by King Otto – [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mavrocordatos\\_family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mavrocordatos_family) [accessed 23 June 2017]; *Mavrocordato*, in: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 17<sup>th</sup> Edition, Cambridge 1911, p. 917.

terms, they are more faithful to the earlier Byzantine tradition of icon painting, regardless of their place of origin – which could be Greece, the regions of Ruthenia (Rus' within the borders of the Polish Republic), northern Rus' (the Novgorod region, the Pskov region), or central Rus' (the Moscow region). The research project also encompasses an interdisciplinary analysis involving historians of art, conservators, philologists, physicists, chemists, geologists and experts in other fields.

Since analytic light examination had already been performed, the study of the icon of the Holy Unmercenaries could proceed to the next stage, i.e. the identification of the wood used as support. It was performed by Wojciech Ptak of the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts, on the basis of a sample taken by Dominika Tarsińska-Petruk, a restorer from the Painting and Sculpture Conservation Studio at the BECP NMC.<sup>16</sup> The conclusion of his report was as follows: “the identified structural features indicate that the analysed sample of the icon inv. no. MNK XVIII-871 was of chestnut wood (*Castanea*). The only species of chestnut naturally appearing in Europe is the sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa* MILL.); it must be assumed that the icon was painted on the wood of this species of tree”.<sup>17</sup> Such wood cannot be analysed dendrochronologically, which is why it was disregarded in the next stage of research pertaining to supports of coniferous wood, conducted by Prof. Marek Krąpiec of the AGH University of Science and Technology in Cracow.

The principal phase of the icons' analysis was conducted between January and September 2016 at the Faculty of Conservation and Restoration of Works of Art of the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. The chosen method was X-ray fluorescence (XRF) performed using a stationary spectrometer with the function of mapping the distribution of chemical elements on the painted surfaces. The analysis was completed by dr. Małgorzata Walczak and her team. For maximum effectiveness, traditional analysis of the cross-section was also performed on samples taken by Dominika Tarsińska-Petruk. Photographs of the cross-sections were made at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts using an electron microscope.

Non-invasive spectrometer analysis revealed that the paint layer of the icon contains gold and silver (used most often in the halos and background), calcium (which was always present in the priming coats and earth pigments), chromium (appearing in the greens, oranges and yellows), copper (frequently found in azurite, malachite and green pigments), iron (appearing in the earth pigments, iron pigments and iron black), mercury (found in vermilion, manganese, earth pigments and manganese black), lead (lead white), titanium (titanium white) and zinc (present in barite white).<sup>18</sup> A cursory look at the photographs and results is sufficient to realise that the painter had to make do with a relatively limited palette, as was

---

16 W. Ptak, *MNK XVIII-871: Identyfikacja rodzaju drewna podobrazia* [MNK XVIII-871: Identification of the type of wood used as support], a report made as a part of the NPDH grant *Katalog ikon XIV–XVI wieku...*, dated 22 December 2015.

17 Ibid.

18 M. Walczak, *MNK XVIII-871: Wyniki wielkoformatowego skanowania spektrometrem fluorescencji rentgenowskiej XRF* [MNK XVIII-871: Results of the large-format scan with X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometer], a report made at the Chair of Chemistry and Physics in Art Conservation



the case with works of art of this kind. The nuances of shades were achieved by choosing different kinds of pigment, e.g. iron red for the robes and vermillion for the border around the icon. The analysis of samples taken from three different sections indicated that the icon was painted on a gypsum primer, in each case overlaid with a layer of lead white, with the background covered with gold foil containing a small amount of silver.<sup>19</sup>

Thanks to the photographs made with a spectrometer, with the use of a gold filter, one can finally discern the names of Unmercenary Healers, inscribed vertically in the background: *Holy Cosmas* and *Holy Damian* – no longer visible in daylight:

ΟΙ ἍΓΙΟΙ		ΑΝΑΓΓΥΡΟΙ	
с	K	с	Δ
O	O	O	A
A	C	A	M
Γ	M	Γ	A
O	A	O	N
C	C	C	O
			C

The geological features of the priming coats on the icons were analysed in the latter half of 2016. It is known that works made in the South were usually painted on wood that was different from that from the North (e.g. chestnut, walnut, cypress) and covered with a primer that included a more pliable type of gypsum. Since the majority of the icons under analysis contained chalk, it was to be expected that microscope analysis would reveal remnants of ancient micro-organisms that had petrified and formed deposits of chalk. The analysis was conducted by Prof. Mariusz Kędzierski from the Institute of Geology of the Jagiellonian University. The available samples allowed him to identify more than eleven thousand species of micro-organisms; the results of the study were presented in the form of charts and relevant analyses of clusters of affinity between the identified fossil species.<sup>20</sup>

As expected, the icon under analysis did not contain a representative amount of nanofossils characteristic of chalk primers.<sup>21</sup> The report of the chemical analysis states that: “the acquired information, examined using the PDF-4+ database of the

---

of the Faculty of Conservation and Restoration of Works of Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow as a part of the NPDH grant *Katalog ikon XIV-XVI wieku...*, dated 30 September 2016.

19 M. Walczak, *MNK XVIII-871: Interpretacja wyników analizy SEM EDX* [MNK XVIII-871: Interpretation of the results of SEM EDX analysis], a report made at the Chair of Chemistry and Physics in Art Conservation of the Faculty of Conservation and Restoration of Works of Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow as a part of the NPDH grant *Katalog ikon XIV-XVI wieku...*, dated 30 September 2016.

20 M. Kędzierski, *Analiza zespołów nanoplanktonu wapiennego z podkładów malarskich ikon znajdujących się w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie* [Analysis of calcareous nanoplankton accretions from the paint bases of icons held in the National Museum in Cracow collections], a report made at the Institute of Geology of the Jagiellonian University as a part of the NPDH grant *Katalog ikon XIV-XVI wieku...*, dated 13 September 2016.

21 Kędzierski, op. cit., p. 4.

diffraction data centre, clearly points to gypsum as the main crystalline component in the studied sample of the priming coat”.<sup>22</sup> The material is remarkably “pure”; samples taken from other icons usually contained various additives in the gypsum. These elements might allow researchers to identify the deposits from which the mineral originated.

Thus, the materials research unambiguously suggests that the icon came from the south of Europe, thus confirming conclusions drawn from the iconographic and stylistic analysis; this is evident both from the species of wood used as support (sweet chestnut) and the gypsum priming coat. The array of pigments that was used was fairly standard, yet the presence of gold and silver increased the value of the icon, particularly since the amount of gold was greater than that of silver. This indicates that no expense was spared in the process of the icon’s manufacture. As regards the green hue of the semi-circular mandorla from which Christ is emerging, it should be mentioned that copper – the main component of the pigment used to paint it – is frequently known to oxidise, yet the analysis provided no evidence to assume that the currently visible colour was due to this process. Proof of oxidation was found during analyses of other icons, as noted by Dominika Tarsińska-Petruk, who summarised and presented the results of the materials study in the form of a chart.<sup>23</sup> The analysis suggested, for example, that the icon was not backed with canvas and that the preliminary drawing, visible in infra-red photographs, was made with a fine and medium-sized brush with broad, sketchy strokes. The changes in composition were very slight, but the amber protective layer covering the entire surface of the icon effectively hinders the observation of specific elements of composition and the original colours, namely greens, blues and gold.<sup>24</sup> These conclusions correspond to earlier inferences that were made on the basis of analytic photography: “As demonstrated by the analysis of photographs, the processing of the paint layer is original and clearly apparent, conforming with the principles of painting icons and not disturbed by the presence of any other layers of paint. There is no trace of earlier artistic compositions or later modifications. The aesthetic properties of the work are significantly affected by the state of preservation of the olifa

---

22 A. Rafalska-Łasocha, M. Grzesiak-Nowak, W. Łasocha, *Raport z badań za pomocą dyfrakcji promieniowania rentgenowskiego (XRPD) próbek zapraw pobranych z ikon należących do kolekcji Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie (Pałac Biskupa Erazma Ciołka)* [Report from the X-ray powder diffraction (XRPD) examination of primer samples taken from icons in the National Museum of Cracow collection (Bishop Ciołek Palace)], a report made at the Faculty of Chemistry of the Jagiellonian University as a part of the NPDH grant *Katalog ikon XIV–XVI wieku...*, dated 6 November 2016, unpaginated, chart 20.

23 D. Tarsińska-Petruk, *Zestawienie zbiorcze warstw technologicznych ikon z „Katalogu ikon XIV–XVI wieku w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie”, projekt 00672* [Collected record of technological layers in icons from the “Catalogue of 14<sup>th</sup>- to 16<sup>th</sup>-century icons in the National Museum of Cracow collection”, project no. 00672], a report made at the Painting and Sculpture Conservation Studio of the BECP NMC as a part of the NPDH grant *Katalog ikon XIV–XVI wieku...*, dated 3 November 2016, item 46.

24 A more detailed report will be published in the forthcoming catalogue of icons.

varnish. It had become greatly discoloured, turning brown and chipped, with traces of damage inflicted by high temperature and solvents, which has a significant adverse effect on the perception of the composition and the colour palette".<sup>25</sup>

## The iconography of the painting

The cult of the holy physicians was well-established already in the early Byzantine period. Many of its features suggest that it constituted a continuation of the ancient cult of Asclepius. The central figures were the two most renowned healers – Saints Cosmas and Damian – yet other doctors were also venerated in Byzantium. The two saints, born ca. 300 AD, became famous for not taking any remuneration for their work as physicians, hence the title *Ἀνάργυροι*, *Anargyroi* (rendered in the Church Slavonic language as *Безсребренники*, *Bezsrebrnniki* = *taking no silver*). Kosmidion, a church in their name, was built outside the walls of Constantinople as early as in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century; it was founded by Paulinus, advisor to Emperor Theodosius II. The gravely ill travelled there seeking a miraculous recovery, which was expected to occur during sleep – a belief that had originated in Antiquity.<sup>26</sup> One of the earliest portrayals of both saints also comes from that period; it may be found among the mosaics in the Saint George Rotunda in Thessaloniki. The saints are depicted in the orant pose, wearing white robes and presented against a background of architectural elements. A description of thirty-nine miracles performed by Saints Cosmas and Damian was penned in the 6<sup>th</sup> century; thirty of these events took place in infirmaries (Greek: *Ξεῶν, xenon*).<sup>27</sup> One of the stories includes the motif of an afflicted person praying before the icon of the Holy Mary with Christ and the Saints Cosmas and Damian, hung in the courtyard of the temple. Having returned to his bed in the church, the patient was healed in his sleep, since the Holy Mary had requested this of the two saints. The vision of healing mentions Saint Cosmas using a surgical knife, the same tool with which the two saints are portrayed in the icon under analysis here.<sup>28</sup>

Although until recently the saints were seemingly not identified by their names in the icon, they were recognisable as Saints Cosmas and Damian on the basis of many other examples from the Orthodox iconography.<sup>29</sup> The lack of direct identification is, in fact, peculiar. The inscription on the cover (appearing in a rather distorted form: "H APH / ANAPTYP") refers to healers but lacks the suffix "OI", which

25 Frączek, op. cit., p. 4.

26 The custom of incubation was practised in the temples of Asclepius – T. S. Miller, *Hospital Dreams in Byzantium*, in: *Dreams, Healing, and Medicine in Greece. From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. S. M. Oberhelman, Farnham – Burlington 2013, p. 201.

27 *Cosmas und Damianos*, Greek text and commentary by L. Deubner, Leipzig–Berlin 1907, pp. 97–197.

28 Miller, op. cit., p. 202.

29 Iconography: Father M. Janocha, *Ikony w Polsce. Od średniowiecza do współczesności* [Icons in Poland. From the Middle Ages to the present day], Warsaw 2010, p. 334.

would turn the word into its plural form. The meaning of the word “ΚΡΝΣΡΝ” = “KRIZRI” that appears at the bottom of the cover remains unclear. It may be the name of the family who commissioned the cover.<sup>30</sup>

The motif of a semicircle decorated with golden stars, visibly separated from the earthly realm, is known from ancient works of art.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the gesture of extending both arms in a blessing, as depicted in the figure of Christ, resembles early Christian models, e.g. the 6<sup>th</sup>-century mosaic in the domed roof of the apse in the northern chapel of the Euphrasian Basilica in Parenzo (present-day Poreč). The pose also invokes ancient symbols, since the Saints Cosmas and Damian are being rewarded laurel wreaths held by Christ in the above-mentioned example.

The semicircle of the sky is filled with multicoloured clouds. This motif is common in Roman mosaics dated to the first millennium, e.g. those in the apse of the Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian. It is sometimes interpreted as apocalyptic aurorae portending the *Parousia*, or the second coming of the Messiah during the Last Judgement, when all martyrs and saints are to receive the wreaths of eternal life and all sinners the punishment of eternal damnation. In later iconography this scene was modified to emphasise the role of the saints as healers; e.g. in the miniature found in the late 11<sup>th</sup>-century *Lectionary* from the library of the Dionisiou Monastery on Mount Athos (Fig. 11) Christ is emerging from a semicircle of the sky to present the saints with items resembling scrolls, which probably ought to be interpreted as cases containing medical tools.<sup>32</sup> Both saints are depicted as wearing dark cloaks draped over their hands. This was a sign of respect, as is apparent also from depictions of angels receiving, for example, the instruments of the Passion of Christ. A miniature found in the *Menologion of Basil II* portrays a scene with a *Manus*

30 Consultations on the subject held, for example, with experts in various disciplines and philologists specialising in different fields, brought no definitive conclusion. The inscription was examined by Prof. Eugenia Drakopoulou, Prof. Maciej Salamon, Jan Stradomski PhD (habil.) and Bojan Popovic PhD. I would like to express my profound gratitude to Anna Zachwieja MA for granting me access to the visual materials which she had collected for her forthcoming doctoral dissertation on the Holy Unmercenaries. The images proved very helpful in specifying the dating of the icon under analysis.

31 The motif of a blue sky filled with bright stars was present in Byzantine art, in 13<sup>th</sup>-century Italian painting as well as in the art of the Romanesque and Gothic periods – S. Stawicki, “Techniczne i technologiczne problemy ściennych malowideł bizantyńsko-ruskich w kościele zamkowym w Lublinie” [Technical and technological problems posed by the Russo-Byzantine wall paintings in the castle church in Lublin], in: *Kaplica Trójcy Świętej na Zamku Lubelskim. Historia, teologia, sztuka, konserwacja. Materiały z sesji zorganizowanej w Muzeum Lubelskim 24 – 26 kwietnia 1997 roku* [The chapel of the Holy Trinity at Lublin Castle. History, theology, art, conservation. Materials from the session organised at the Lublin Museum 24 – 26 April 1997], eds. B. Paprocka, J. Sil, Lublin 1999, p. 118, footnote 8. The use of green colour for the sky is therefore unusual.

32 *Cod. 587 (Lectionary)*, late 11<sup>th</sup> century, fol. 159v, Athos, Monaster Dionisiou – *Οι θησαυροί του Αγίου Ορους: σειρά Α; εικονογραφημένα χειρόγραφα, παραστάσεις – επίτιλα – αρχικά γράμματα. Πρωτότον, Μ. Διονυσίου, Μ. Κουτλουμουσιού, Μ. Ξηροποτάμου, Μ. Γρηγορίου*, eds. Σ. Μ. Πελεκανίδες, Π. Κ. Χρήστος, Χ. Μαυροπούλος-Τσιούμη, Σ. Ν. Καδά, Αθήνα 1973, p. 214, Fig. 269.

*Dei* emerging from a starry semicircle holding a medical bag. The motif of Christ holding laurel wreaths above the heads of the saints also appears on frescoes in the church in Ohrid (*Mali Sveti Vrači*), dated to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. A gesture of Christ blessing the two saints, similar to the one depicted on the icon from Cracow, may be seen on a 16<sup>th</sup>-century icon originating from Mount Athos, now in the collection of the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow (hereinafter: TG). The arrangement of the hands and the attributes of both physicians is the same in both icons, albeit in the TG icon the saints are presenting open cases containing medical tools. Tool cases should therefore be considered as one of the typical attributes of the two physicians; they appear already on a Christian fresco from Egypt (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century, Wadi Sarga, moved to the British Museum). A similar depiction of the figure of Christ as a source of light (emphasised by the rays) emerging from a semicircle of the sky with both hands extended in a blessing appears on a 14<sup>th</sup>-century icon of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste from the gallery of icons in the crypt of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia.



**Fig. 11.** *The Holy Unmercenaries*, a late 11<sup>th</sup>-century lectionary from the library of the Dionisiou Monastery on Mount Athos



Another important detail is the tool case in a shape that resembles a scroll. Such items frequently appear, for example, in the hands of prophets. Interestingly, in the icon in question the case is open and features a conical cover connected to the main body with a hinge. Saints Cosmas and Damian were depicted with open cases in the shape of a scroll in 12<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes in the narthex of the Panagia Asinou Church in Cyprus. The faces of the saints in the frescoes are youthful and beardless, while their robes feature rich appliqué with imitations of precious stones and pearls. The tools they are holding in their hands are very similar to those depicted in the icon under analysis. The gesture of one of the holy healers depicted in paintings in the early 14<sup>th</sup>-century Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Veria<sup>33</sup> hints at the function of the cases, as he appears to be putting a medical tool back into the container (Fig. 12). A unique version of the open case appears in the depiction of Saint Damian in a 14<sup>th</sup>-century painted decoration at the Church of Saint John Chrysostom (Greek: *Άγιος Ιωάννης Χρυσόστομος*) in Geraki on the Peloponnese Peninsula.<sup>34</sup> The case contains three long tools; the fourth tool is held by the saint (Fig. 13). Saint Pantaleon, shown in the neighbouring medallion, is also holding a tool, yet the case in his left hand is closed. The conical cover of the case, depicted as ajar, is decorated with a row of tiny pearls. The paintings in Geraki are also exceptional because they include the entire group of Unmercenary Healers, even those depicted much less frequently, such as Saint Hermolaus or Saints Cyrus and John the Wonderworker (Gr. *ο Θαυματουργός*, *Thaumaturgos*) (Fig. 14).<sup>35</sup> The first of the above-mentioned healers is holding a vessel, in the shape of a convex body that is decorated with geometric patterns, and a stopper to which he is pointing with his right hand. Saint John, in turn, appears to be pointing a sharp surgical tool towards a case with a conical cover that is depicted as ajar and is very similar to the one in the icon under analysis here. The above-mentioned type of case/container also appears in the hand of Saint Euplius, depicted in the fragment of a painting in the Orthodox Church of Saint Nicholas in Melnik and currently on display at the gallery of icons in the crypt of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sophia. The painting is dated to the late 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The 12<sup>th</sup>-century chapel of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Nomitsi on the Mani Peninsula features frescoes from the 14<sup>th</sup> century in which the two physicians appear with attributes similar to those as in the analysed icon, yet their relative position is inverted (Fig. 15). Saint Damian, here on the left, is holding a closed tool case with both hands, whereas Cosmas is raising his hand over a casket. The lid of the box is slightly open, revealing the outlines of three quadrilateral elements. A detail that proves interesting in the context of the icon under analysis is the presence of a cross

33 Georges Kallergies, a painter active in Thessaloniki, *Saints Cosmas and Damian*, the Orthodox Church of the Resurrection of Christ, lower panel of the western wall – G. Gounaris, *The Church of Christ in Veria*, Thessaloniki 1991, p. 45.

34 N. K. Μουτσόπουλος, Γ. Δημητροκάλλης, *Γεράκι. Οι εκκλησίες του οικισμού*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1981, Fig. 39.

35 Ibid., Figs. 34–37.



**Fig. 12.** *The Holy Unmercenaries*, fresco, early 14<sup>th</sup> century, Veria, Church of the Resurrection of Christ, photo by A. Zachwieja, 1999



**Fig. 13.** *The Holy Unmercenaries*, fresco, c. 1300, Geraki, Church of John Chrysostom, photo by A. Zachwieja, 1999



**Fig. 14.** *The Holy Unmercenaries*, fresco, c. 1300, Geraki, Church of John Chrysostom, photo by A. Zachwieja, 1999



**Fig. 15.** *The Holy Unmercenaries*, fresco, 14<sup>th</sup> century, Nomitsi, Orthodox Church of the Holy Unmercenaries, photo by A. Zachwieja 1999



on Saint Damian's neck and – as may be suspected – a similar one on the chest of Saint Cosmas. The cross is slightly different, featuring a diamond-shaped element at the intersection of the arms. A tool case resembling the one in the Cracow icon was depicted in the hand of Saint Cosmas in the lower row of the saints on the western nave wall in the Žiča monastery (Serb. Жича, Žiča). The saint is standing alongside Saints Pantaleon and Damian.<sup>36</sup> As in the case of the analysed icon, the case in Saint Cosmas's hand is decorated with a double line. The outline of tiny dark pierced dots and a chain may also be inferred.

Another example of a similar case is found in the hand of Saint Damian in the painting on the northern side of the south-western pillar in the nave of the *katholikon* of Saint Varlaam in Meteora, dated to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 16). Saint Damian is looking to the side and is wearing a cloak, yet in general terms he is more similar to the depiction of Cosmas in the Cracow icon (with a casket). In his hand he is holding a similar surgical knife with a cross-shaped point. An identical knife can be seen in the hand of Saint Cosmas painted on the southern side of the north-western pillar. It is he who is holding an open, rectangular box whose interior is divided into six parts. The saint's robe is exceptionally decorative, featuring floral motifs as well as appliques of pearls and precious stones. Saint Pantaleon from the Church of Taxiarchis in Kastoria is also holding a box of medical supplies filled with three cuboid elements, just as the one in the icon under analysis here.<sup>37</sup>



**Fig. 16.** *The Holy Unmercenarys*, fresco, mid. 16<sup>th</sup> century, Meteora, Orthodox Church of Saint Varlaam, photo by A. Zachwieja, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> М. Кашанин, Ђ. Бошковић, П. Мијовић, Жича, *Историја, архитектура, сликарство*, Београд, 1969, Fig. on p. 169. The most recent monograph on the paintings: М. Чанак-Медић, Д. Поповић, Д. Воводић, *Манастир Жича*, Београд 2014.

<sup>37</sup> S. Pelekanides, M. Chadzidakis, *Kastoria*, Athens 1985, Fig. 1306.

A capsule with a semi-spherical stopper may be seen in the miniature depicting the two saints included in Codex 412 from the collection of the Koutloumous monastery on Mount Athos. The illustrations in this work were clearly modelled after earlier *menologia*.<sup>38</sup> A very similar semi-spherical cover is visible on the tube-shaped case in the left hand of Saint Damian from the Church of Saint Paraskevi in Geraki (*Αγία Παρασκευή, Agia Paraskevi*). The depiction, dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, also features Saint Cosmas holding a vessel (Fig. 17). This form of container for medical tools appears to have been widespread in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as evidenced by the presence of such an element in the hand of a holy healer from the frescoes in the Peribleptos monastery in Mystras.



**Fig. 17.** *The Holy Unmercenaries*, fresco, 14<sup>th</sup> century, Geraki, Orthodox Church of Saint Paraskevi, photo by A. Zachwieja, 1999

The above-mentioned examples delineate the artistic circle from which the icon under analysis might have originated. As far as its style is concerned, one should note the exceptional quality of the saints' faces; together with the *Glykophilousa*-type icon from the monastery of the Order of Saint Claire in Cracow, the icon represents a unique example of the art of the late Paleologian period in Polish collections.<sup>39</sup> The nature of the linear highlights (smudges of light) on the saints' faces

<sup>38</sup> *Cod. 412*, fol. 38a – *Οι Θεσσαυροί του Αγίου Ορους*, 1, 1973, Fig. 318.

<sup>39</sup> M. P. Kruk, *Ikony-obrazy w świątyniach rzymsko-katolickich dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* [Icon as paintings in the Roman Catholic churches of the old Commonwealth], Cracow 2011, cat. no. 4.



calls to mind the late 14<sup>th</sup>-century works of Theophanus the Greek. Other examples of similar Greek icons painted in this style include magnificent depictions of Christ Pantocrator – one from ca. 1363, currently in the collection of the Hermitage in Petersburg,<sup>40</sup> the other dated to the 1370s, held at the Byzantine Museum in Mytilene.<sup>41</sup> Yet another may be found in the Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos, which is a fragmentarily preserved icon of Saint Theodore Tiro.<sup>42</sup> The surviving elements include the edge of a mandorla with the hand of Christ extended in a blessing, similar to the gesture apparent on the icon from the NMC collection.

All the above-mentioned works fall into the category of Byzantine painting of the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Their common features include the tendency to depict faces as almost triangular, narrowing pronouncedly towards the chin. The contrast between the dark tone of the skin and the white highlights on the forehead and cheeks is clearly visible in many of them. In the case of the NMC icon, the skin tone is clearly dominant, with no larger areas of white; the only highlights appear below the eyes, on the nose and lips, and they take the form of sharp lines. The mouths of both physicians are turned downwards, giving their faces a particularly austere, “monastic” demeanour.

The physiognomy of the saints’ faces and the rendering of their attire bears some similarity to the icon of Saints Cosmas and Damian kept at the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria. This latter work, dated generally to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, features an even sharper contrast between the highlights and the shadows. It is unique in terms of iconography, as it includes a half-figure of a holy woman (Saint Paraskevi?) depicted between the two physicians. The woman is holding a scroll in her right hand; her left arm is raised in a gesture of acclamation. The icon is also lined with red, but here the painted frame covers the sides of the board entirely and not only half of it, as is the case in the Cracow icon. Significantly, the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria has ca. seven icons with Cosmas and Damian depicted in the same conventional manner, i.e. frontally and together, with surgical tools in their hands. The works are dated to between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. The apparent popularity of the two Holy Unmercenaries in Kastoria finds corroboration in the painted decoration of

40 *Christ Pantocrator with donors*, icon, ca. 1363, tempera on wood, 106 cm × 79 cm × 2.8 cm, from the Pantocrator Monastery on Mount Athos, now in the Hermitage in Petersburg, inv. No. I-515 – *Sinai. Byzantium. Russia. Orthodox Art. From the Sixth to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Y. Piatnitsky, O. Baddeley, E. Brunner, M. M. Mango, St. Petersburg 2000, cat. no. B125 (ed. Y. Piatnitsky).

41 *Christ Pantocrator / Saint John the Evangelist*, double-sided icon, ca. 1370–80, tempera on wood, 107 cm × 69.5 cm, Mytilene, The Museum of Orthodox and Byzantine Art – *Byzantium 330–1453*, eds. R. Cormack, M. Vassilaki [exhibition catalogue: the Royal Academy of Art in London, 25 October 2008 – 22 March 2009], London 2008, cat. nos. 240–241 (ed. M. Vassilaki). According to M. Vassilaki, the icon originated from the workshops of either Constantinople or Thessaloniki; the dating was based on the above-mentioned analogous work from the Hermitage collection.

42 D. Vojvodić, *Serbian art from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century till the fall of the Nemanjić state*, in: *Sacral Art of the Serbian Lands in the Middle Ages*, eds. D. Vojvodić, D. Popović, Belgrade 2016, Fig. 234.

the local churches, of which more than seventy have survived to this day. Similarly to the icons, the unique complex of architecture and visual arts in Kastoria is yet to be described in a fully comprehensive monograph. It may be surmised that the icon makers from the Ruthenia had many connections with the region of Kastoria, as evidenced by the icon of the Holy Unmercenaries from Jablonica Ruska.

Another formal analogy for the icon under analysis may be found in the paintings of Saints Cosmas and Damian from the church of John the Baptist in Axos in Crete, dated to the second quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>43</sup> The faces of the two saints are slightly more expressive, yet the arrangement of their hands and the shape of the tool held by Saint Cosmas is very similar to the one seen in the icon under analysis here.

The motif of a faintly outlined fringe on the forehead of the physician holding a tool case also appears in the depiction of Saint Damian in the Orthodox Church of Saint George (*Црква Светог Ђорђа*) in Staro Nagoričane (presently in Macedonia),<sup>44</sup> which was renovated by the Serbian king Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1253–1321), who around the year 1318 commissioned the artists Michael Astrapas and Eutychios to paint the interior. The decoration of the church now belongs to the best surviving examples of late-Byzantine painting in the Paleologian style. The faces of the physicians in the icon under analysis here represent the type of physiognomy that was favoured in Greek painting in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as exemplified by the depiction of Saint Cosmas in another interior decoration linked with patronage of Stefan Uroš II Milutin, namely in the Orthodox Church of Saint Nicholas Orphanos in Thessaloniki, dated to 1310–1320 (Fig. 18).<sup>45</sup> The rectangular neckline of the saint's robes is also similar. Yet another analogy for the facial features of the physicians in the Cracow icon may be found in the painting of Saint Damian from the Serbian church in Psača, dated to 1366.<sup>46</sup> The edifice was used as the monastic church of Saint Nicholas. The physiognomic features of the saints as well as the arrangement of their hands and the folds in their robes are analogous to the depictions of Saints Cosmas and Damian from the former Orthodox church in Constantinople that is now the Atik Mustapha Pasha Mosque. The edifice has traditionally been identified with the church of Saints Peter and Mark, yet more recent sources associate it with Saint Thekla of the Palace of Blachernae.<sup>47</sup> Regrettably, the surviving frescoes have not yet undergone a systematic study.

The tradition to paint in this stylistic manner continued throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Similar depictions of saints, i.e. slightly turned towards what was probably a figure of Christ in a semicircle (this part of the paint layer is missing), appear in

---

43 I. Spatharakis, *Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete, 2: Mylopotamos Province*, Leiden 2009, Fig. 469.

44 Б. Тодић, *Старо Нагоричино*, Београд 1993, Fig. 20.

45 Gounaris, op. cit., table 97.

46 G. Millet, *La peinture du Moyen Age en Yougoslavie*, Paris 1969, Fig. 132.

47 T. F. Mathews, E. J. Hawkins, "Notes on the Atik Mustafa Pasa Camii in Istanbul and Its Frescoes", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 1985, no. 39, Figs. 21–22.



**Fig. 18.** *Saint Cosmas*, fresco, 1310–1320, Thessaloniki, Orthodox Church of Saint Nicholas Orphanos, photo by A. Zachwieja, 1999.

the icon from the collection of the Museum in Pskov. The work is dated to the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is close in size to the icon from Cracow.<sup>48</sup> A similar rendition of the eyes, with deep convex shadows near the nose, may be observed in the icon painted by Andreas Ritzos (ca. 1421–1492) that is being kept at the Monastery of Saint John the Evangelist in Patmos.<sup>49</sup> However, the shadows in the Cracow icon are not applied with such strong lines and the highlights on the brow are placed differently, i.e. not in the form of vertical lines but as long horizontal ones, as in another early 15<sup>th</sup>-century icon in this circle depicting Saint Nicholas.<sup>50</sup> When describing this work of art, Manolis Chatzidakis noted the “impressionist” manner of rendering the features that is reminiscent of the best examples of Paleologian paintings from the Kariye Djami which were imitated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>51</sup> Another remarkable feature that the icon of Saint Nicholas shares with the one in

48 *St. Cosmas and Damian*, icon, early 15<sup>th</sup> century, tempera on wood, 22 cm × 15 cm, inv. ПГОИАХМ 25350 (5) – *Иконы Пскова*, (= *Древнерусская живопись в музеях России*), ed. А.С. Преображенский, 1–2, Москва 2012, cat. no. and Fig. 9.

49 Andreas Ritzos, *St. John the Evangelist*, icon, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, tempera on wood, 165 cm × 91 cm, Patmos, the Monastery of Saint John the Evangelist – M. Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos. Questions of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Painting*, Athens 1985, cat. no. 9, Tables 13, 15.

50 *Saint Nicholas*, icon, tempera on wood, early 15<sup>th</sup> century, 100 cm × 52 cm, Patmos, the Monastery of Saint John the Evangelist – *ibidem*, cat. no. 8, Table 10–11.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

the Cracow collection are the schematically rendered folds of the robes, with deep lines accentuated with broad strokes of dark paint and highlights.

The icon is decorated with a fine punched decoration that is also known from Italian art. Ornaments that were incised and punched with ready-made tools or stamped using a template were typical of Italian painting as early as in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A similar set of dots and tiny circles (ca. 0.5–1.5 mm in diameter) filled with stars appears in one work by Meo di Guido da Siena (active 1319 – died before 1334, Perugia).<sup>52</sup> The outline of the halo surrounding the head of Saint Andrew features a motif of three points forming triangles filled with evenly-spaced pinholes. Such a decoration was popular in the Cretan school and also used in the icon of the holy healers. It also originated from Italian art, as evidenced, for example, by the ornaments on the halo around Saint Agnes in a triptych by Andrea Vanni (ca. 1332–1414).<sup>53</sup> By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of outlining haloes with triangles composed of three punctures became popular in the southern schools of icon painting, particularly in the so-called Cretan school. Ornaments composed of incised circles filled with rosettes, in turn, may be seen on some icons produced before the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century.

## Notes on the attribution

The stylistic features of the icon in the collection of the NMC point to the late-mediaeval Greek circle. Possible places of origin include northern Greece, with its significant centres of icon making from Kastoria and Veria, through Mt. Athos and Thessalonike to Constantinople. The above-mentioned features also set the time of the icon's manufacture in the 14<sup>th</sup> century; a more precise time period is difficult to achieve due to the uncertain dating of the existing analogies, e.g. the wall paintings in Geraki. It should be noted that many of the identified analogies are found among works of art commissioned by the Serbian king Stefan Uroš II Milutin, who employed Greek painters. In terms of style, the work under analysis appears to bear more resemblance to icons of the later Paleologian period than to the early 14<sup>th</sup>-century ones.

To recapitulate, it may be assumed that, due to its small size, the icon of the Holy Unmercenaries from the NMC collection functioned as a private object of cult. Throughout its history the icon had been venerated by a narrow circle of people. It is likely to have been made by Greek artists in the third quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and owned by people following the Greek tradition. It seemed that silver cover (without the punch marks) could be added around the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Macedonia, perhaps in Kastoria. The icon was painted in tempera on

---

52 Meo di Guido da Siena, *Christ Enthroned with the Twelve Apostles*, Frankfurt, Städel–Gaertringer 2004, table 14; Fig. 42, see p. 101.

53 Andrea di Vanni (D'Andrea Salvani), *Saints Anna, Ursula and Agnes*, Frankfurt, Städel–Gaertringer 2004, Fig. 75.

a wooden support (sweet chestnut), with a substantial amount of lead white and some gold and silver.

Since the mystery of the inscriptions on the back of the icon has been solved, it is now known that in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the icon was in the hands of the Lvov branch of the famous Greek family of the Mavrocordatos. After the outbreak of the Second World War, the work of art found its way, in dramatic circumstances, to occupied Poland and later to Canada; it was taken there by Jerzy Ruebenbauer. The numerous names listed on the icon's verso and the side panels indicate that throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century the icon was regarded as a precious family heirloom. It became a part of the NMC collection in 2011, and since 2014 it has been displayed in Room VII of the BECP as a part of "The Orthodox Art of the Old Polish Republic" permanent exhibition. It constitutes another rare and excellent example of late-Byzantine panel painting in Polish collections.

*Translated by Julita Mastalerz*

## Abstract

In 2011 the National Museum in Cracow received a bequest that had been specified in the last will and testament of Zofia Ruebenbauer from Ottawa. The gift was described as a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian icon. Comparative stylistic analysis complemented by restoration work and a material study revealed an exquisite paint layer, for which analogies may be found in the mid-14<sup>th</sup>-century Greek art of the Paleologian period. The icon was probably painted in the third quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in one of the centres in northern Greece including Kastoria, Veria, Mt. Athos, Thessalonike and Constantinople itself. The collection of the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria includes many icons of the holy physicians depicted in a similar pose. Iconographical details such as the surgical knives in the hands of the physicians and in the open tool case find close analogies in the 14<sup>th</sup>-century wall paintings in Peloponnese, e.g. in the Church of Saint Paraskevi (*Αγία Παρασκευή*, *Agia Paraskevi*) and Saint John Chrysostom (*Άγιος Ιωάννης Χρυσόστομος*, *Agios Ioannes Chrisostomos*) in Geraki, as well as in the Orthodox Church of the Holy Unmercenaries (*Άγιοι Ανάργυροι*, *Agioi Anargyroi*) in Nomitsi. The conclusions of the analysis regarding the icon's provenance find indirect corroboration in the recently discovered fact that in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the work of art was owned by Haryklia Mavrocordatos-Serini, Sas-Hoszowska (1836–1906), a member of the Lvov line of the Greek princely family of Mavrocordatos. The names of her children with the exact dates of their birth appear on the reverse side of the icon. The work of art was passed down to Jerzy Ruebenbauer, who carried it away from Lvov during the Second World War, taking it first to Warsaw, where he met his future wife Zofia, and after the war to Canada via Belgium.