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DELEGAZIONE FAI DI REGGIO CALABRIA - FONDAZIONE PICCOLO MUSEO SAN PAOLO

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Delegazione
di Reggio Calabria



FONDAZIONE
PICCOLO MUSEO
SAN PAOLO

THE CALABRIAN ICON AT THE PICCOLO MUSEO SAN PAOLO

Among the significant iconographic examples that has reached us, linked to the Tuccio valley, we must mention the icon depicting the Virgin and Saint Gerasimo, kept today at the "Piccolo Museo San Paolo", which evokes a cult spread in the Tuccio valley but maybe produced somewhere else, because the figure of the Saint, for his features, his posture and the inscription that we can read on the roll of paper which he holds in his hands, seems to coincide with that of Saint Gerasimo from Cefalonia.

THE VIRGIN AND SAINT GERASIMO

It is a small-size icon (22x15 cm) depicting the Virgin Nikopeia and Saint Gerasimo, today kept at the "Piccolo Museo San Paolo" where it came after being bought by Monsignor Gangemi from an antique dealer in Messina. The dimensions, rather small, suggest that the icon was produced for domestic and private devotional practices. Its state of preservation is not perfect, in fact it appears quite worm-eaten, probably also because of the poor care with which the wood to be painted was chosen. In the ambit of the Calabrian and "Reggina" Marian iconography, the icon represents an "unicum", for its historical and religious value, since it is a specific example of the cult of Saint Gerasimo of Vallettuccio, archimandrite of Sant'Angelo.

As for the dating of the small icon, Mons. Gangemi dates it back to the XIV-XV century and he proves by documents that it was bought in about 1950 from the antique dealer Paleologo in Messina.

The most recent interpretation of the icon, carried out by Gaetano Passarelli, changes the dating to a later age, precisely the XVIII century. According to Professor Daniele Castrizio, the icon would be a production of a local workshop.

The Virgin, marked by the inscription "MP OY" (God's Mother), is a *Theotòkos Nikopeia*, easily identifiable for its structure. It is a Marian type found in few examples that have reached us from orthodox ancient times, the most famous of which is that of San Marco's Basilica in Venezia.

The *Nikopiios* icon, victory bearer, invincible strategist, was originally kept at the Big Palace of the Emperor in Costantinopoli. It was the city's Palladio, together with the Odigitria icon, and it was symbolically equivalent, according to the historians' interpretations, to the imperial victory.

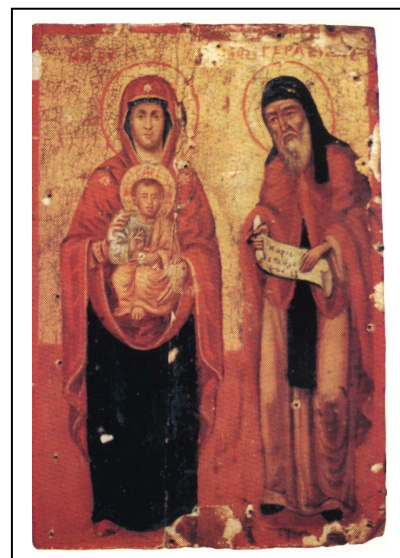
The Virgin was represented from the front with the Baby in front of Her body to state in this way the divine incarnation. The small icon of Saint Gerasimo corresponds perfectly to the typical standards of the Nikopeia: the Virgin is portrayed from the front, full-length, the Baby is in central axis compared to His Mother and He is inscribed in a sort of clipeus formed by a curve of Maria's Maphorion. Also Jesus is depicted full-length and benedictory. The main feature of the Maphorion is its perfect symmetry, that appears in the regular folds around the face, the chest and in those, much wider, that go down from the arms to the bottom, to let us catch a glimpse of the dark blue dress of the Virgin, whose right leg is a bit jugged out in comparison with the left one, slightly bent.

The dark colour of the dress appears compact and it recalls that of the pad, visible around the Virgin's oval face, which lacks the intense spirituality that is usually present in the Marian icons.

The blue and red of the dress and the Maphorion testify the knowledge of the Marian iconographic tradition true to Bisanzio's imperial fashion. Also the presence of the three stars, respectively on Maria's head and shoulders, denotes a good knowledge of the pictorial standards and the Byzantine spirituality. Among the important details there is the Virgin's right hand, an evidently inexperienced reconstruction of the original one, coming out from the sleeve, edged with a slightly decorated border.

The figure of Jesus appears benedictory, because the thumb and the ring finger of His right hand are united as a benediction. In his left hand, he is holding the sins chirograph and he is wearing a white dress and a rosy mantle. The Infant Jesus, proportioned in size, is in a vertical axis with the figure of his Mother and despite being held by her, he appears almost hung in the clipeus. His face reproduces the adulthood of Christ the Saviour and expresses, at the same time, the mystery of His birth and His death, according to the orthodox patterns. The haloes are different: linear and red for Maria, identical to that of Saint Gerasimo; cruciferous and haloed, instead, for Jesus.

Saint Gerasimo occupies the left part of the small icon, his body is slightly curved, bent towards the Virgin and the Infant Jesus, to show respect. His clothes are more complex than that of the Virgin, similar to those of Gerasimo from Cefalonia. His mantle, whose borders are drawn near the chest, is reddish and a dark veil, laid on it, covers his face and goes down to the shoulders; the halo is just delineated. The dress, long to his feet, is clear and in front it seems almost fastened by a belt with falling borders. The folds near the knees highlight the kneeling posture of the Saint and give plasticity to the whole figure that, despite being hieratic, conveys a deep humanity. The gaze of the Saint, contemplating the Virgin Mary and Jesus, contributes to soften the whole composition that, otherwise, would be characterized mainly by the rigidity and a certain heaviness conveyed by the figure of the Virgin. Accepting the theory recently suggested by Professor Daniele Castrizio, the Saint could be identified with Gerasimo from San Lorenzo, who lived in the XII century and probably founded and/or enlarged the Monastery of Sant'Angelo in the Tuccio valley, and whose memory is now remembered by the diocese of Reggio Calabria and Bova on 26th April.



La presente traduzione è stata curata dalle allieve Désirée Quattrone e Maria Teresa Reitano della classe 4AL del Liceo linguistico Tommaso Gullì