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The St. Bartholomew's Icon of the Virgin Hodegetria: How Context Controls Meaning

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Introduction

In 2000, St. Bartholomew's Church, a historic Episcopal parish located in Midtown Manhattan, acquired a Russian icon of the Virgin Hodegetria (**Fig. 1**) from a store along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem for \$4000.¹ The subsequent placement of this icon, an object with medieval Eastern Christian origins, as the sole devotional aid in the chapel of a Western Christian church is rather unusual. It was placed in the north porch chapel of St. Bartholomew's, a small space that contrasts with the monumental combined space of the nave and sanctuary. The chapel's alternating series of columns and pilasters directs the viewer's gaze to where this alternating series terminates: the east end of the chapel where the icon hangs.² The sequence of columns and pilasters

¹ William Tully, "Your Icon Questions," e-mail message to author, September 23, 2019; Percy Preston Jr., interview by the author, St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, NY, July 2, 2019; Emma Davidson, "Contacting Rev. Bill Tully," e-mail message to the author, July 19, 2019. The Russian inscription along the bottom indicates that the icon is from the Tikhvin Monastery in Tikhvin, Russia.

² Brad Peebles, interview by the author, St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, NY, July 14, 2019.



Figure 1 Icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, 19th century, North Porch Chapel, St.

creates a vanishing point centered on the icon, becoming the natural focal point for the viewer.

In investigating the anomalous revival of the Hodegetria icon in a Western Christian setting, this article considers the icon to be elastic and suggests the importance of assessing the medieval object's relevance in its comparatively modern contexts. The St. Bartholomew's icon saliently illustrates two capabilities in its present setting, one religious and another visual. Interpreting the icon's theological implications, this article

examines the historically catholic practices of the church, beginning with the Oxford Movement's emphasis on apostolic succession and branch theory as well as with the Cambridge Movement's renewal of medieval architecture. The icon continues as an ecumenical and catholic symbol of the commitment of St. Bartholomew's to inclusion and diversity during the last two decades.³ It embodies the historical and present commitment of St. Bartholomew's to catholicity, allowing the icon to evolve from categorization as Eastern Christian and to develop into a broader, still viable symbol of the universal church. At the same time, a formal examination of the icon reveals it as a stage upon which the Romanesque and Art Deco elements of the church are brought together. The St. Bartholomew's icon escapes limited identification as solely Eastern Christian. Instead, it is adapted into a modern vehicle that embodies chronologically-separated elements of ecclesiastical architecture, allowing the church to maintain historical continuity while fulfilling its contemporary interests.

The Romanesque as the Predominant Visual Element

The predominant visual style of St. Bartholomew's is Romanesque revival; even though a number of visible elements suggests eclecticism, the overall aesthetic of St.

³ It is important to make a clear distinction between "catholic" and "Roman Catholic." The former is here intended to refer to an early Christianity that preceded the East-West Schism. The latter term refers properly to Roman Catholicism. This understanding of the distinction essentially follows the usage of the writers of the Oxford Movement. For reference, see John Henry Newman *et al.*, *Tracts for the Times* (New York, NY: Charles Henry, 1839), 1.

Bartholomew's is fundamentally homogenous. The implementation of a Romanesque style was of primary concern to the clerics and patrons, especially under the guidance of Reverend Leighton Parks, rector from 1904 to 1924, who oversaw the 1916-1917 construction of St. Bartholomew's. Parks championed the imperative of preaching for "realizing the kingdom of God in the here and now."⁴ With this in mind, Parks believed that only Romanesque architecture could satisfy his requirements. A Romanesque interior afforded Parks expansive, flat walls that maintained the acoustic integrity of the church, and many of its architectural features also emphasized the spiritual immediacy that Parks valued.⁵ The dome, for instance, represented the immanence of the cosmos and the presence of God and heaven on earth:⁶

Now, the dome is simply the top of the rounded tent, and is the first expression of the spiritual relation between man and God, — the great Shepherd dwells amongst His flock... The dome signifies, not the transcendence but the immanence of God, God dwelling amongst His people.⁷

Parks also viewed the Romanesque semi-circular arch favorably, believing that it symbolized human brotherhood and the acceptance of the present life:⁸

⁴ Christine Smith, *St. Bartholomew's Church in the City of New York* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13, 23.

⁵ Kathleen Curran, "The Romanesque Revival, Mural Painting, and Protestant Patronage in America," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 4 (December 1999): 714, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3051340>.

⁶ Eric Fernie, *Romanesque Architecture: The First Style of the European Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 215; James Snyder, *Art of the Middle Ages* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006), 108; Roger Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 66.

⁷ Leighton Parks, "The Spiritual Significance of the Romanesque" (sermon transcript, St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, NY, May 6, 1923).

⁸ Fernie, *Romanesque Architecture*, 7, 51, 103, 123, 215; Stalley, *Early Medieval*, 218.

But the rounded [semi-circular] arch... typified two thoughts which have often been forgotten: it is the meeting of two great piers or columns; and the key stone insures its permanence. It is an outward and visible sign of human brotherhood. It does not express the escape of the individual from the common conditions of life... it preaches the gospel of brotherhood.⁹

Parks' pragmatic and spiritual needs prompted Bertram Goodhue, the architect who was commissioned to design St. Bartholomew's from 1914 to 1917, to incorporate elements of Romanesque architecture.¹⁰

In their planning of the church's interior, the clergy and patrons never intended that Byzantine decoration would take a prominent role; rather, the Byzantine decoration was seen to complement the overall Romanesque scheme. They advocated for Byzantine ornamentation only because the other plausible decorative styles, Gothic and Classical, were considered infeasible. Leighton Parks was strongly anti-Gothic since he believed that Gothic architecture was overly focused on the afterlife, rather than the present. Furthermore, the potential overuse of statues did not provide a space acoustically conducive to preaching; Parks recognized that a smooth wall reflects more sound than a wall of statues, which absorbs more sound while reflecting less of it.¹¹

⁹ Parks, "The Spiritual Significance."

¹⁰ Goodhue was primarily a Gothic-revival architect. Indeed, he worked with Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942) to design the Gothic building, St. Thomas Church in New York City (the creation of this church, as well as the architectural philosophy of Cram, will be explained in further detail in the following section, Catholicity, Ecclesiology, and the St. Bartholomew's Icon). Nonetheless, due to the specific requests of Parks, Goodhue used the Romanesque rather than Gothic revival at St. Bartholomew's.

¹¹ Kathleen Curran, *The Romanesque Revival: Religion, Politics, and Transnational Exchange* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 269; Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Glorious Visions* (New York: Abrams Books, 1996), 12.

Gothic art, utilizing stone masonry with detailing, was also expensive, and the church did not have the financial means to fund Gothic decoration following the expensive construction of the church building.¹² Parks also wished to avoid Classicism because of its associations with Late Antiquity and paganism.¹³ Indeed, he described the Neoclassical church as “a pagan temple [that] was adapted to Christian worship.”¹⁴ Therefore, from the early stages of planning, the Romanesque architecture fulfilled a primary role, while the Byzantine decor performed an ancillary one.

A brief examination of the church’s apse mosaic of the Transfiguration (**Fig. 2**) illustrates how even the most aesthetically striking Byzantine furnishing remains visually secondary to the church’s Romanesque elements.¹⁵ The presence of an apse mosaic itself is characteristically Byzantine.¹⁶ The use of gold leaf, and of the iconographic type of the Transfiguration (one implemented as early as the 6th century in the apse mosaic of the basilica of St. Catherine’s Monastery at Mount Sinai), only reinforces the Byzantine associations of the St. Bartholomew’s apse mosaic.¹⁷ The apse mosaic, though, is overshadowed by the monumental dome and semi-circular arches,

¹² Gwen W. Steege, “The ‘Book of Plans’ and the Early Romanesque Revival in the United States: A Study in Architectural Patronage,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 46, no. 3 (September 1987): 221, 225, <https://doi.org/10.2307/990227>; Camille, *Gothic Art*, 33; Smith, *St. Bartholomew’s*, 66, 101.

¹³ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 19, 25; Snyder, *Art of the Middle*, 31.

¹⁴ Parks, “The Spiritual Significance.”

¹⁵ Percy Preston Jr., *Saint Bartholomew’s Church in the City of New York: An Architectural Guide* (New York: St. Bartholomew’s Church, 2018), 41; Peebles, interview by the author.

¹⁶ Snyder, *Art of the Middle*, 61.

¹⁷ Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 50; Kōnstantinos A. Manaphēs, *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1990), 91.

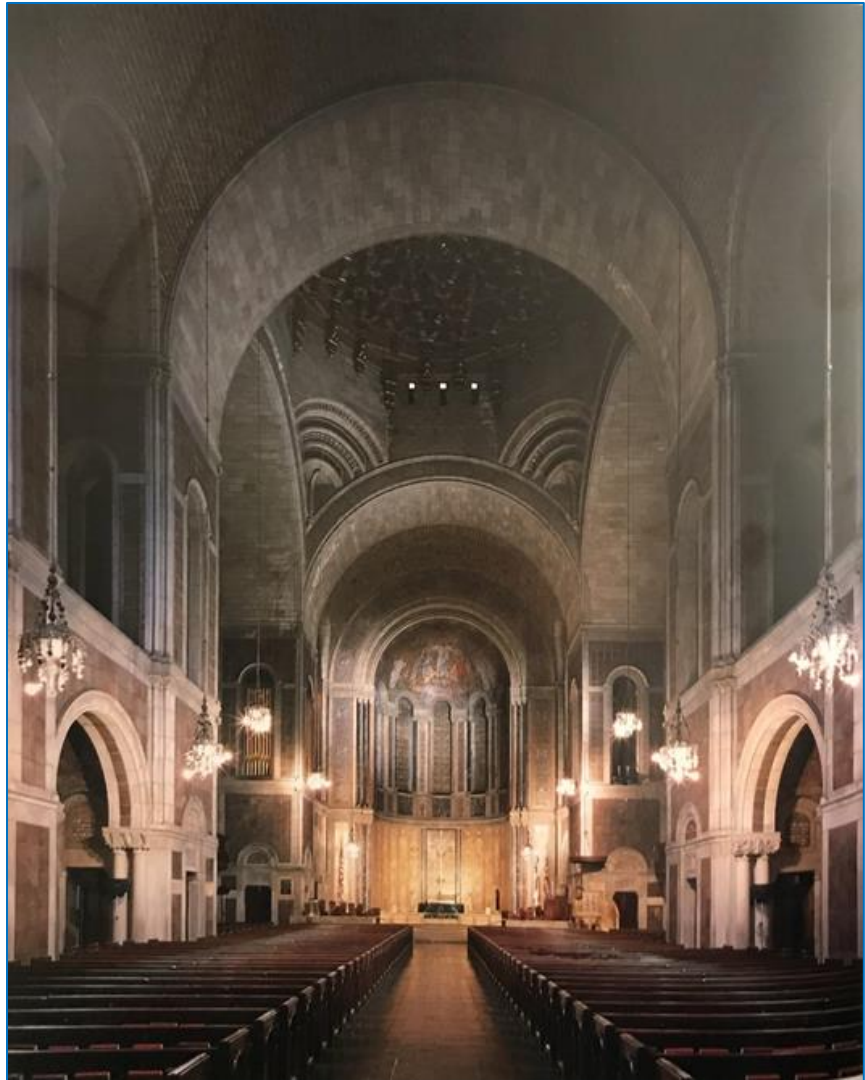


Figure 2 Transfiguration Mosaic, 1929, Apse, St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, New York. Photo: Raffaello Bencini.

characteristic of Romanesque architecture.¹⁸ Indeed, upon immediately exiting the narthex, one notices that the dome and semi-circular arches greatly loom over the crossing area and that the apse mosaic is barely visible at the end of the sanctuary (**Fig. 3**), causing the apse mosaic to lose an aesthetic conspicuousness it would have in the absence of these Romanesque elements.

¹⁸ Fernie, *Romanesque Architecture*, 118, 122.

Figure 3 View of the combined space of the nave and sanctuary, St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, New York. Photo: Raffaello Bencini.



Demonstrating the Byzantine decor's subordinate role compared to the Romanesque architecture of the church is a crucial step in recognizing that the placement of the icon in the north porch chapel is anomalous. As mentioned earlier, the icon is not simply an extension of the church's eclecticism, but rather a continuing reflection of the builder's wish to accommodate the Romanesque-style architecture over any decoration. The icon is the only element with Byzantine origins given aesthetic

distinction in the church, and it is given such aesthetic prominence that an analysis of the icon's religious and visual implications is worthwhile.

Catholicity, Ecclesiology, and the St. Bartholomew's Icon

The first wave of interior decoration led by Reverend Robert Norwood, rector from 1925 to 1931, reflects the church's early endorsement of a church catholic.¹⁹ A mosaic completed in 1930 under his supervision reflects this diversity. Inside the altar rails of the sanctuary are three marble inlays. From left to right, these inlays depict Hagia Sophia, the historical seat of the Eastern Orthodox Church; Canterbury Cathedral, the seat of Anglicanism; and St. Peter's Basilica, the seat of Roman Catholicism. The same iconography—Hagia Sophia, Canterbury Cathedral, and St. Peter's Basilica—is represented in the lower panels of the north transept windows, which Scottish artist John Gordon also completed in 1930.²⁰ The floor mosaic and windows suggest an emphasis on the early Christian past prior to the Schism of 1054, as the symbolic depictions of the three main branches of universal Christianity are visibly joined together on the mosaic and windows. Such a focus on early Christianity reflects the then-popular attitudes toward apostolic succession and branch theory that emerged

¹⁹ As a reiterated point of clarification, the term "catholic" refers to the universal Christianity that existed prior to the East-West Schism and the Reformation.

²⁰ Peebles, interview by the author; Preston, *Saint Bartholomew's*, 42.

in the 19th-century Oxford Movement.²¹ Furthermore, the emphasis on medieval Christianity can equally be traced to the Cambridge Movement and its impulses for historical gravitas.²²

The 20th-century installation of the mosaic and stained glass illustrates the lingering effects of both the Oxford and Cambridge Movements on American ecclesiastical architecture. The Oxford and Cambridge Movements accelerated a wave of high churchmanship and ritualism throughout the late 19th - early 20th century, including the United States and particularly New York. More specifically, Benjamin T. Onderdonk, the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York from 1830 through 1861, strongly embraced the theological insights of the Oxford Movement as well as the high church practices of the Cambridge Movement.²³ Therefore, ornate, medieval Christian architecture, whether it was the Gothic or Romanesque revival, became widely

²¹ That is, prior to 1054, Christianity had remained intact as an essentially universal religion. However, according to the Oxford Movement, following the East-West Schism (1054) and the Reformation (1517-1648), universal Christianity became split into three main branches: Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Anglicanism. Also, according to Oxford scholars, all of these branches were considered authentic due to their traceable origins to the Twelve Apostles. Therefore, a unified display of these three branches in the floor mosaic and windows of St. Bartholomew's communicates the parish's emphasis on an early, undivided Christianity, which can also be called the church catholic.

²² The Cambridge Movement specifically encompasses the activities of the Cambridge Camden Society (from 1839 to 1846) and the Ecclesiological Society, which evolved from the society and continued well into the 1860s. For the purposes of this article, the actions of the Cambridge Camden and Ecclesiological Societies are grouped under the broader label of the "Cambridge Movement," as the doctrinal consistency of the two organizations currently makes such a distinction unnecessary. For reference, see Raymond Chapman, ed., *Firmly I Believe* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006), 150-151.

²³ Warren C. Platt, "The Rise of Advanced Ritualism in New York City: The Rev. Thomas McKee Brown and the Founding of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 85, no. 3 (September 2016): 332 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43973340>.

popularized under the theological environment of Onderdonk, who sought to communicate his teachings “in tangible and sensual forms [in this case, the Gothic or Romanesque] appealing to the Episcopal communicant.”²⁴ In the mid-19th century, the General Theological Seminary in New York City preached Tractarian doctrines and Cambridge-inspired high churchmanship to new generations of the Episcopal ministry.²⁵ It followed that Gothic and Romanesque revival styles, which reflected the medieval affinity of the Movements, were soon in high-demand within Episcopal parishes in New York City.

The Episcopal Church of St. Mary the Virgin in New York City, for instance, featured a Gothic style, marble altar, and rood screen as well as lavishly ritualistic and frequent daily services.²⁶ The high-church practices of the church prompted *The New York Herald* to dub the church as a “New Ritualistic Chapel” on December 9, 1870, following the opening on the previous day.²⁷ Another Episcopal parish in New York City, St. Thomas Church, completed in 1933, is also distinctively Gothic.²⁸

²⁴ Platt, “The Rise,” 332.

²⁵ Edwin Ryan, “The Oxford Movement in the United States,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 19, no. 1 (April 1933): 36-38, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25013122>.

²⁶ Platt, “The Rise,” 349.

²⁷ Newbury Frost Read, ed., *The Story of St. Mary's: The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York City, 1868-1931* (New York: Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 1931), 26-27.

²⁸ The creation of the Gothic St. Thomas Church illustrates a continuity of the high church orientation of New York City established during the mid-19th century by Right Reverend Onderdonk and the General Theological Seminary.

Ralph Adams Cram, one of the lead architects of St. Thomas Church who completed his design of the church in 1914, was a vigorous Anglo-Catholic who believed in a thoroughly holistic revival of Gothic elements, unsurprising given Anglo-Catholicism's adoption of the ceremonialism espoused by the Cambridge Movement.²⁹ Cram advocated for a complete and uncompromising Gothic scheme that permitted "no meaningless battlements, no windows painted to imitate stained glass, no concealed steel beams, nothing covered over to look like stone that was not."³⁰ In other words, Cram wanted Gothic revival in the most authentic medieval sense and without the modern techniques that, in his belief, were unable to adequately emulate the Gothic. In their demonstrated adherence to the Gothic revival aesthetic, the architecture and practices of St. Mary the Virgin and St. Thomas illustrate the sustained impact of the Movements as late as the early 20th century.

While St. Mary the Virgin and St. Thomas adhered strictly to the high church architecture favored by the Oxford and Cambridge Movements, St. Bartholomew's pursued an architectural form more focused on the Romanesque, though still espousing

²⁹ Curtis Brad Faught, *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and Their Times* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2003), 44. Before St. Thomas Church, Cram had already designed All Saints Church in Ashmont, Massachusetts, as well as Calvary Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Both of these churches display a revival of Gothic architecture, as Cram had always believed that Gothic architecture was the most "sublime manifestation of religious faith." Indeed, Cram believed that the "sublime" Gothic had been discontinued during the reign of King Henry VIII (1491-1547) and thus thought that it was dutifully necessary to revive the Gothic through his work. For reference, see John Robert Wright, *Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 128-129.

³⁰ Wright, *Saint Thomas*, 129, 131.

key tenets of Tractarianism and Cambridge Ecclesiology. The sanctuary floor mosaic and north transept stained glass—which unify Hagia Sophia (symbolic of Orthodoxy), Canterbury Cathedral (symbolic of Anglicanism), and St. Peter’s Basilica (symbolic of Roman Catholicism) in shared spaces—specifically indicate that some vestiges of the Oxford Movement prevailed in St. Bartholomew’s: the catholic doctrines of apostolic succession and branch theory. The Tractarians promoted apostolic succession as a means to legitimize the order and authority of the Anglican Church, especially to combat the strong currents of rationalism and utilitarianism of 19th-century England.³¹ As apostolic succession connected Anglicanism to the era of the apostles and the early universal church, Anglican High Churchmen authenticated the authority of the Church of England, and thus the Episcopal Church.³² Branch theory incorporates apostolic succession and maintains that, from an ancient and undivided church, there emerged different Christian sects, or branches.³³ The claim of a Christian branch to be a part of

³¹ Owen Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2; David A. Valone, “Hugh James Rose’s Anglican Critique of Cambridge: Science, Antirationalism, and Coleridgean Idealism in Late Georgian England,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 33, no. 2 (2001): 225, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4053371>. As mentioned previously, both the Oxford and Cambridge Movements idealized a medieval past of more robust religiosity. Therefore, rationalism and utilitarianism, which are both strongly anti-religious, posed a threat to the Anglican Church.

³² Peter Benedict Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 25-26. As a point of clarification, though the Gothic and Romanesque styles date later than the universal Christian period, their ornateness and high church ceremonialism led Anglican High Churchmen to believe that the Gothic and Romanesque could evoke the same spiritual quality as during universal Christianity. For reference, see James F. White, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 29.

³³ Chadwick, *The Spirit*, 49.

the church universal depended on the preservation of apostolic order through succession. The branches that followed apostolicity did not depend on one another; rather, they were thought to coexist equally.³⁴ The three broad branches of the church, the Anglican, the Greek (Eastern Orthodox), and the Latin (Roman Catholic), contain only parts of the truth, thereby encouraging continuance in their “fragmented state[s].”³⁵

By directing the construction of the sanctuary floor mosaic and north transept stained glass, Norwood effectively recognized the validity of apostolic succession (the Tractarians accepted Anglicanism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism as Christian branches with a sound line of apostolic succession) and branch theory (the Movement regarded the three aforementioned Christian branches as those comprising the universal church). The church’s sanctuary floor mosaic and north transept stained glass—which visually link Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and Roman Catholicism—also illustrate that Cambridge shared Oxford’s emphasis on catholicity.³⁶ Ecclesiologists influenced by the Cambridge Movement perceived the Middle Ages (a period in which Christianity had long remained undivided by schismatic forces) to be “more spiritually-

³⁴ Nockles, *The Oxford*, 153-154.

³⁵ Nockles, *The Oxford*, 160; Paul Evdokimov, *Orthodoxy* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011), 342.

³⁶ Many, though not all, Tractarians openly embraced the ecclesiological movement of Cambridge. Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882), for instance, openly endorsed the ornateness of revived medieval ritualism. For reference, see Faught, *The Oxford*, 30.

minded and less worldly-minded” than in the 19th century.³⁷ John Mason Neale (1818-1866), who helped to set the Cambridge Movement in motion, once even nostalgically remarked, “Oh the good old times of England! Here, in her evil day, From their Holy Faith and their ancient rites her people fell away.”³⁸ The medieval period clearly awed the Cambridge men, who believed that the past held a spirituality that could be achieved by reviving medieval ritualism and architecture.³⁹ Therefore, the floor mosaic and glass of St. Bartholomew’s reflect the church as one that, since the early 20th century, valued the ideal of an early, pre-schism church.

In the context of the historical acceptance of St. Bartholomew’s of the universal church, the Virgin Hodegetria icon now symbolizes not just a tradition from the Eastern Orthodox church, but an ecumenical symbol that affirms the catholicity promoted by the Oxford and Cambridge Movements and continued through the choice of its acquisition and display by the modern clergy.⁴⁰ Over the course of its development

³⁷ Cambridge Camden Society, *Report of the Cambridge Camden Society for MDCCCXLII* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Camden Society, 1842), 16.

³⁸ John Mason Neale, *Hierologus: or, The Church Tourists* (London, UK: James Burns, 1843), 90.

³⁹ As mentioned previously, Right Reverend Onderdonk, who was the bishop of the Episcopal diocese of New York (1830-1861), as well as the General Theological Seminary strongly endorsed the Oxford and Cambridge Movements by virtue of their continuity with the Anglican Communion. Thus, in line with the doctrines established by Onderdonk and the Seminary, the patrons and rector of St. Bartholomew’s proceeded with a Romanesque design in keeping with medieval visual culture. For reference, see David J. Langum, “Frederic Sandeman De Mattos: Gentle Rogue and Talented Priest: Part One: Ritualist Controversy,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 77, no. 2 (2008): 163, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42613158>.

⁴⁰ The Virgin Hodegetria is an iconographic type that was originally painted by Luke the Evangelist, according to Christian tradition. The icon typically features the Virgin holding the Christ Child on her left arm, with both of their gazes frontally directed at the viewer. For reference, see James Hall, *A History of Ideas and Images in Italian Art* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1983), 91.

through the Early Byzantine period and the first half of the Middle Byzantine period, the icon was a religious symbol of Christianity as a whole. Moreover, relics created a strong devotional attachment vis-à-vis the Virgin, culminating in the categorization of her images as *apotropaia* and the proliferation of her icons following the Triumph of Orthodoxy.⁴¹ Icons, though, were not restricted to Eastern Orthodox practice prior to the Schism of 1054. For example, Byzantine members of the Order of Basil fled the iconoclasts, settling in southern Italy during the 10th century and executing wall paintings in a purely Byzantine style, thus expediting the transfer of Eastern iconographic types to the West.⁴² Following the Norman conquest of the Byzantine-held southern Italy in 1045, icons created in the conquered regions featured greater combinations of Byzantine and Western motifs.⁴³ Icons then belonged to Christianity as a whole, rather than one geographic region. An anonymous parishioner who facilitated the purchase of the Virgin Hodegetria icon at St. Bartholomew's mentions that it has its merits in "speak[ing] to a much older part of the Christian tradition," and this parishioner's attitude comfortably echoes the sentiments of both Tractarians and

⁴¹ Annemarie Weyl Carr, "The Mother of God in Public," in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vasilakē (Milan: Skira, 2000), 328; Euthymios Tsigaridas, "The Mother of God in Wall-Paintings," in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vasilakē (Milan: Skira, 2000), 126.

⁴² William D. Wixom, "Byzantine Art and the Latin West," in *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, ed. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 436.

⁴³ Helen C. Evans, "Christian Neighbors," in *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, ed. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 278.

Cambridge Ecclesiologists.⁴⁴ For Oxford Movement men, the icon was a symbol of the cult of medieval ritualism that reflected an ancient period of purer faith.⁴⁵ At Cambridge too, the icon would manifest itself with “an aura of sanctity to the architecture of the Middle Ages.”⁴⁶ Reverend William Tully, the rector from 1994 to 2012, found value in the icon consistent with the Movements and their emphasis on the richer spirituality of the medieval period: “the icon brings focus to that small space [of the north porch chapel]... it’s important for personal prayer and meditation.”⁴⁷ Cambridge Ecclesiologists also promoted attitudes inclusive of foreign art and eclecticism, making an icon, like that of the Russian St. Bartholomew’s icon, an even more appealing medieval object.⁴⁸ Following this line of reasoning, the icon celebrates the early, undivided church—as also glorified by the Oxford and Cambridge Movements—and recalls a time when the icon was an ancient symbol of Christian unity.

Yet the icon departs from the Tractarian ideals of apostolic succession and branch theory as well as the Cambridge Ecclesiological approval of medieval visual culture. Reflecting the parish’s 21st-century evangelical imperative of the “radical welcome,” the icon sustains commitment to religious diversity and inclusion, preserving the notion of a church catholic. While Parks believed that the most

⁴⁴ Emma Davidson, “Contacting Rev.,” e-mail message to author.

⁴⁵ Newman *et al.*, *Tracts for the Times*, 1:156.

⁴⁶ White, *The Cambridge*, 165.

⁴⁷ William Tully, “Your Icon,” e-mail message to author.

⁴⁸ White, *The Cambridge*, 31.

important part of his ministry was the “province of preaching,” Tully attested that “it is not just having a suitable preacher in the pulpit every week, but an evangelical mindset.”⁴⁹ Vicar Lynn C. Sanders, in declaring that the “act and art of preaching ‘the Word of God’ is central in St. Bart’s worship and life,” and Rector Dean E. Wolfe, in affirming that the church is committed to “spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the heart of New York City,” both ensure that Tully’s evangelical attitude persists even after his departure in 2012.⁵⁰ In addition to emphasizing evangelism as a central mission of the church, Tully also developed the doctrine of the “radical welcome”: “no matter who you are, or what you wear, or what you’ve done or not done, you are welcome here in this place and around this table.”⁵¹ For example, this policy has led the church to embrace the gay and lesbian community before the turn of the 21st century.⁵² Tully’s acceptance of homosexual individuals faced significant pushback from many parishioners.⁵³ Even when popular opinions pressured him to do otherwise, Tully staunchly endorsed the “radical welcome.” Tully explained to Dr. Robert Carle that

⁴⁹ James B. Simpson, “Mission, Evangelism and Hospitality,” *The Living Church*, August 4, 1996, 12.

⁵⁰ Lynn C. Sanders, “We are here.” (sermon transcript, St. Bartholomew’s Church, New York, NY, August 28, 2011); Dean E. Wolfe, “Mission Statement,” foreword to *Saint Bartholomew’s Church in the City of New York: An Architectural Guide*, by Percy Preston Jr. (New York: St. Bartholomew’s Church, 2018), 4.

⁵¹ Robin Finn, “The Last Sermon of Mr. Fix-It,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), January 21, 2012, New York, <https://nyti.ms/2kHnYE1>; Lynn C. Sanders, “Welcome, embrace, share” (speech transcript, St. Bartholomew’s Church, New York, NY, September 5, 2010).

⁵² Robert Carle, “Continuity and Change in Episcopal Congregations in New York City,” in *Religion, Race, and Ethnicity*, ed. Tony Carnes and Anna Karpathakis, vol. 4, *New York Glory: Religions in the City* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 49.

⁵³ Finn, “The Last,” New York.

“We are working on the heart. We’ll deal with the head later.”⁵⁴ In short, St.

Bartholomew’s is a parish committed to religious and spiritual open-mindedness, not a limited notion of “theological coherence.”⁵⁵ The icon can thus be seen as an external manifestation of the commitment of St. Bartholomew’s to evangelism and religious heterogeneity. Just as the church aims to spread the Word to all people, instead of a select audience, through a “radical welcome,” the pre-schism icon expresses a belief in the universal church, thereby fulfilling the church’s commitment to religious diversity. In its present situation, as in its Tractarian and Cambridge Ecclesiological context, the icon evokes a period when it was a symbol of catholicity, instead of a symbol of Orthodoxy.

The icon’s current use by the parish reaffirms the devotional image’s embodiment of religious universality, but the parish is more concerned about the icon’s contemporary function than its Eastern Christian history.⁵⁶ The church’s tour guide and archivist highlight the icon’s present import as a devotional aid. The anonymous parishioner involved in the acquisition of the icon largely agrees with the importance of

⁵⁴ Carle, “Continuity and Change” 50.

⁵⁵ Carle, “Continuity and Change” 50.

⁵⁶ A.A. Titov, “Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God,” Tikhvin Assumption Monastery, <http://tihvinskii-monastyr.ru/about/shrines/tikhvin-theotokos/>; Tikhvin Assumption Monastery, “Foundation of the Tikhvin Monastery,” Tikhvin Assumption Monastery, <http://tihvinskii-monastyr.ru/about/foundation/>; Presidential Library, “The History of the Tikhvin Icon of the Holy Mother of God among the Presidential Library’s Rarities,” Presidential Library, last modified June 29, 2016, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/news/659399>; John Matusiak, “The Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God,” Orthodox Church in America, <https://oca.org/saints/lives/2019/06/26/101821-appearance-of-the-tikhvin-icon-of-the-mother-of-god>.

the icon's devotional use, stating that the icon was installed "to facilitate private prayer, so its location in the north porch chapel would seem to make perfect sense as a space for quiet contemplation a little apart from the main sanctuary."⁵⁷ Given the north porch chapel's location above the Memorial Chapel and the columbarium that stores the cremated remains of parishioners, individuals frequently pray in front of the icon to honor a deceased loved one.⁵⁸ The icon provides an immediate and present link between the earthly and the heavenly.

The main body of the church is monumental, unifying the vast spaces of the nave and the sanctuary. Given the visual and spatial dominance of the church's main body, the small-scale north porch chapel, in terms of size, appears to be an afterthought. The chapel seems to be reduced to its pragmatic function as a handicapped-accessible entrance, through which one must first pass to enter into the grand main space. However, as those who acquired the work intended, the icon gives the plain-walled chapel considerable prominence. It transforms the north chapel from a mere passageway into an intimate space of prayer and private devotion. In this way, the small size of the chapel becomes a strength rather than a weakness. The contrast between the chapel's modest scale and the main body's monumentality amplifies the intimacy of the chapel.⁵⁹ The parish, though Episcopal, finds it consistent with its larger

⁵⁷ Emma Davidson, "Contacting Rev.," e-mail message to author.

⁵⁸ Peebles, interview by the author; Preston, interview by the author.

⁵⁹ Peebles, interview by the author.

goals to direct its prayer toward an object usually associated with Eastern Christianity. In this way, the parish embraces the icon more for its present-ness than its history. The traditional visual vocabulary of the Byzantine iconography and the disciplined adherence to ancient forms evoke the same spiritual quality that the icon had in the Christian past. This mystic aura, which John Deno Geneakoplos characterizes as Hesychastic, transcends time.⁶⁰ Promoting spirituality, the icon encourages the parishioner in the present to reach a union with the divine—a sentiment reminiscent of the Oxford and Cambridge Movements' emphasis on powerful medieval religiosity.⁶¹ In sum then, the promotion of the icon at St. Bartholomew's as a universal devotional aid, instead of a symbol of Orthodoxy, reinforces the church's own leaning toward catholicity as reflected in the Movements.

In the context of Oxford and Cambridge High Churchmanship and Tully's theological program as well as the parish's treatment of the icon, the church reveals itself as one receptive to the universal church, with the icon tangibly expressing sustained commitment to such catholicity. The icon sheds its status as Eastern Christian and assumes looser categorization as universal. It is no surprise, then, that the parishioners regard the icon as an important devotional tool. The parishioners

⁶⁰ Geanakoplos defines Hesychasm, at least in its relevance to icons, as a mystical union with God through contemplation and prayer. For reference, see Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the "Sibling,"* 19-20.

⁶¹ Many Cambridge Ecclesiologists termed this complex medieval spirituality as a "Catholic feeling," a term John Mason Neale used frequently in his 1843 book, *Hierologus: or, The Church Tourists*. For reference, see White, *The Cambridge*, 34 as well as Neale, *Hierologus: or, The Church*, 44, 174.

recognize the Tractarian ideals of apostolic succession and branch theory and accept the Cambridge appeal to medieval ecclesiology, as they implicitly accept the authentic catholic roots of Eastern Orthodoxy. Simultaneously, they celebrate the diversity of Christianity, as first championed by Tully, by embracing the icon as a desirable and legitimate object of worship. Rather than considering the icon as a medieval object limited to Orthodox Christianity, the parishioners treat the object as a modern one that adapts to the spiritual needs of an Episcopal parish.

Iconological Elements of the Romanesque and Art Deco

Beyond the theological, the icon has aesthetic implications that convey its flexibility and modernity, for it visually embodies the Romanesque elements of the church. Having undergone some modifications from the traditional medieval iconographic type, the St. Bartholomew's icon features figural and non-figural elements that conform to the American Romanesque Revival decoration of St. Bartholomew's.

The complementary effect of the figural and non-figural in the icon is one that fits within the American Romanesque Revival decoration of the church. The Romanesque Revival within the United States largely derived its decorative scheme from the *Rundbogenstil* style, a German architectural movement that adopted the rounded arch as its leitmotif and embraced the Romanesque along with Neoclassicism

and Renaissance Revival.⁶² Within this style, two different approaches to mural decoration emerged, influencing the interior ornamentation of St. Bartholomew's and this article's understanding of the icon. Painter Peter von Corenlius (1783-1867) advocated for the painting of Christian epics of vivid biblical scenes. Corenlius' perspective is reasonable, considering that he aligned himself with the Nazarene movement, where German Romantic painters sought to revive the spirituality of Christian art and the moral lessons that biblical histories could impart to society and to the individual.⁶³ Architect Friedrich von Gärtner (1791-1847), on the contrary, advocated for a "characteristic" mural decoration that incorporated flat ornamentation, which he derived from medieval elements, such as diamonds, squares, quatrefoils, crosses, and arabesques.⁶⁴ These motifs were then implemented on walls or in bands to articulate certain structural elements, like arcades and vaults.⁶⁵

With the large influx of German immigrant painters during the mid-1840s, many designers of American Romanesque churches became cognizant of the *Rundbogenstil* decorative styles and subsequently combined both figural biblical history paintings and non-figural "characteristic" ornamentation. Boston's Trinity Church is one such example. It contains a short nave that allows for one panel on each side: John La Farge's

⁶² William H. Pierson, "Richard Upjohn and the American Rundbogenstil," *Winterthur Portfolio* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1986): 229, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1181051>.

⁶³ Cordula Grewe, "Historicism and the Symbolic Imagination in Nazarene Art," *The Art Bulletin* 89, no. 1 (March 2007): 88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25067302>.

⁶⁴ Curran, "The Romanesque," 699.

⁶⁵ Curran, "The Romanesque," 699.

Visit of Christ to Nicodemus and his *Christ and the Woman of Samaria*.⁶⁶ In addition to these realistic scenes drawn from the New Testament, the church displays a medley of arabesques, vegetals, medallions, crosses, and diamonds. The designers of Trinity Church, though, sporadically situated the figural and non-figural, instead of reconciling the two. By contrast, the designers of the Bowdoin College Chapel attempted to synthesize the figural and non-figural in a manner more sophisticated than Trinity Church. The elongated nave walls allowed for a series of biblical history paintings derived from the Old and New Testament.⁶⁷ The paintings are rendered in a naturalistic manner and display a legible narrative. The realistic effects aside, each painting is placed within a repeated “characteristic” frame, comprised of diamonds, Greek crosses, and arabesques. The juxtaposition of the representational paintings and the flat ornamentation magnifies the depth of the biblical scene and the flatness of the frame so much so that it seems as if the nave walls cave inward toward the painting.

St. Bartholomew’s can be viewed as one of the many Romanesque Revival churches, along with Trinity Church and the Bowdoin Chapel, to harmoniously combine the figural and non-figural. The north transept, for instance, contains Francis Lathrop’s enormous painting, *The Light of the World* (1898) (**Fig. 4**), which depicts the

⁶⁶ Curran, *The Romanesque*, 289.

⁶⁷ Bowdoin College, *The History, Art, and Architecture of the Bowdoin College Chapel* (Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College, 2010), 5-6.



Figure 4 *The Light of the World*, 1893, North Transept, St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, New York. Photo: Raffaello Bencini.

biblical passage of Mark XIII: 26-27.⁶⁸ Lathrop's work, though having faded into near illegibility, has certain identifiable features. Christ is in the center, and the edges of the

⁶⁸ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, NY: J. T. White Company, 1909), 11:292; Herbert Baxter Adams, *The Church and Popular Education* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1900), 25.

painting contain an earthly entourage of figures who kneel and fold their hands in prayer as well as a heavenly host of angels who gaze adoringly at Christ. The edges—noticeably darker than the center—emphasize the centrality of the light-imbued Christ. The garments of Christ’s followers and the wings of the angels also reveal a generous use of light and dark, grounding the painting in realism. It is perhaps unsurprising that Lathrop produced such a work, as he played a central role in the interior decoration of Trinity Church and painted many of the biblical history scenes of the Bowdoin Chapel.⁶⁹ As at Bowdoin, a decorative band frames *The Light of the World*. This tiled band is composed of an alternating series of boxes: one box is characterized by a centralized ringed cross with adorned borders of repeating diamonds and the other is composed of a variety of both long and short diagonal lines out of which emerges a saltire cross at the center. Even with Lathrop’s work faded beyond easy visibility, *The Light of the World* and its surrounding “characteristic” frame create a visual effect analogous to the St. Bartholomew’s icon and the Bowdoin Chapel. The realistic Biblical scene is illusionistic and full of depth while the geometric ornamentation is frontal and flat, and the contrast between the two emphasizes each other. The scene seems to expand backward into the wall while the geometric ornamentation affirms the wall’s flatness, providing a rigid

⁶⁹ Helene Barbara Weinberg, *The Decorative Work of John La Farge* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 99; Bowdoin College, *The History*, 5-6.

frame around this illusionistic painting. The figural and non-figural are thus effectively complementary.

One of the most visible qualities of the St. Bartholomew's icon is the sharply pronounced three-quarters tilt in the Virgin's head toward Christ instead of the viewer, a position that allows more depth and emphasizes the figural that is characteristic of American Romanesque Revival decoration.⁷⁰ Because they are less frontal and thereby less simplified, the facial features are more articulated. The St. Bartholomew's icon, unlike many other icons of the Virgin Hodegetria, does not merely feature an oval with curved lines for brows and almond shapes for eyes. One can make out the prominent high cheekbones of the Virgin as well as her chin and nose that noticeably jut forward. The light from the top left-hand corner, paired with the three-quarters facial position, creates passages of highlight and shadow that enable the artist to present a face that is individual with distinctive features. The face does not appear as a flat mask with neat outlines that define and generalize facial features. The garment of Christ is another realistic component of the icon, especially in the regions that drape his left arm and thigh. The creases of the fabric, in addition to matching the natural curvature of the human form, vary. There is not a random, agitated pattern of linear zigzags but an ultimately more realistic handling of the garment's relationship to the body of Christ.

⁷⁰ Léonide Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 85.

The artist also subtly blends the highlights and shadows to model Christ's dull orange garment. The left arm and left thigh of Christ are given volume, weight, and "an autonomous inner force."⁷¹ With the inclusion of the Virgin's face as well as Christ's left arm and left thigh, the icon contains a certain degree of realism in the human form that is fundamentally figural.

The icon also displays non-naturalistic, or more abstract, components, such as the bronze red lining of the Virgin's veil. Though the artist uses highlights and shadows in the main folded regions of the veil, the unfolded areas, which comprise the vast majority of the cloth, are simply thick lines filled in with color. The folds are drawn rather than modelled. Instead of gracefully flowing down the Virgin's head and exhibiting an organic pattern of waves, the hard lines of the veil render it flat. This lack of depth is also visible in the yellow-tinted, burnt umber garment of the Virgin. It drapes diagonally across her body, from her right shoulder to her left waist. The use of light near her right shoulder and the use of shadow toward the center of her chest create an illusion of corporeality for the Virgin. The created curvature of the body, though, is rather simplified, and the body of the Virgin becomes one large mass instead of the differentiated parts of the shoulders, chest, and abdomen. The repetitive series of diagonal lines that represents the folds in the garment overwhelms the rudimentary

⁷¹ Ernst Kitzinger, "The Byzantine Contribution to Western Art of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1291241>.

sense of illusion, and the rigidity of the lines ultimately depicts the body as flat. The poor blending of the lighter and darker regions of the cloth also makes the diagonal line pattern more easily discernible, creating highlights that are artificial. The diagonal lines of the Virgin's garment appear less as rich, voluminous folds and more as schematic patterns, making the garment seem depthless and stiff. The sharp lines, which render the Virgin's veil and garment as flat, implying a non-figural feature to the icon, along with the figural features.

When considering its different, and somewhat contradictory, visual elements, the icon may seem inharmonious, as both figural and non-figural forms are present. When taken as a whole, however, the figural and the non-figural, that is, the realistic and the non-naturalistic, complement each other—a practice evolved from the Byzantine tradition, which primarily focuses on the non-figural, and one consistent with the American Romanesque Revival. For example, the contrast between the face of the Virgin, which resembles a human face, and her veil, which is flat, allows both the face and the veil to become more pronounced. Since the veil is immersed in the picture plane, the face with its modeled features thrusts forward. In addition, the contrast can be seen in the garments of Christ and the Virgin. Christ's garment is represented as having weight and volume, while the Virgin's garment lacks depth. By placing these garments side-by-side, the Christ child jumps out of the picture plane while the Virgin

virtually dissolves into it, stepping back from her son. The greater size of the Virgin thus no longer overwhelms the smaller Christ.

By embodying a synthesis of the figural and non-figural that was prevalent during the American Romanesque Revival, the Hodegetria icon evolves beyond a static record of an ancient artistic tradition and reveals itself as an object adaptable to contemporary needs. More importantly, this analysis reveals that the icon has the capacity to embody the reconciliation of the historical Romanesque style and a 20th-century one, Art Deco.

The presence of Art Deco elements in the church is hardly surprising. The period of Norwood's ambitious decorative plan in the late 1920s and early 1930s overlapped with the height of the Art Deco movement, which was grounded in symmetry, repetition, and geometric forms.⁷² The work of Art Deco architectural sculptor Lee Lawrie (1877-1963), whose most notable work is the *Atlas* in Rockefeller Center, is most clearly visible in the altar.⁷³ His lectern (**Fig. 5**) features a symmetrical eagle (except for its head, which turns right) with outstretched wings. Lawrie stylized the feathers of the eagle's body such that the bold, repeating diamond patterns make it seem as if the eagle is wearing stiff metal armor. The wings of the eagle, comprised of a few long rectangles,

⁷² Carla Breeze, *American Art Deco: Architecture and Regionalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 16, 109; Anthony W. Robins, *New York Art Deco: A Guide to Gotham's Jazz Age Architecture* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2017), 16, 60, 111, 125.

⁷³ Dorothy J. Glancy, "Preserving Rockefeller Center," *The Urban Lawyer* 24, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 474, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27894770>.



Figure 5 Lectern, 1923,
Sanctuary, St.
Bartholomew's Church,
New York, New York.
Photo: Raffaello Bencini.

appear more rigid and solid than graceful and nimble. The strongly articulated geometric parts provide the eagle a certain artificial quality ubiquitous in much Art Deco sculpture. Art Deco stylization also manifests itself in the geometric motifs of Lawrie's communion rail (**Fig. 6**). The rail displays repeating Greek crosses that are surrounded by tightly-fitted squares. The arms of the Greek crosses also extend past



Figure 6 Communion Rail, 1920s-1935, Sanctuary, St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, New York. Photo: Raffaello Bencini.

their square borders, creating additional miniature squares, with each square containing a diamond.

When examining the garment of the Virgin, particularly the section that drapes her chest, one may view Lawrie's use of hard outlines in his eagle sculpture as a technique that strikingly mimics the use of rigid lines that renders the Virgin's body depthless. Indeed, both representations appear rather stiff, inorganic, and flat. Of

course, Lawrie's work far predates the icon, but the aesthetics of the icon mesh well with the Art-Deco style, as seen in the repetitive diagonal lines that start from the Virgin's right shoulder and end at her left hip. Like the motifs of Lawrie's communion rail, the icon features repeated lines. Furthermore, the two largest creases on the Virgin's garment are essentially repeated patterns. Both start as triangles on the Virgin's right shoulder. As they head inward, a rectangle emerges from a corner and edge of each triangle. The duplicated design of the large fold therefore reinforces the icon's ability to embrace and adapt to modern art movements like Art Deco.

By embodying Romanesque and Art Deco visual elements, St. Bartholomew's icon of the Virgin Hodegetria effectively presents itself as a malleable aesthetic object. The icon then escapes narrow categorization as medieval Eastern Christian. It has a present and active history as an image that dually embodies chronologically discrete forms of ecclesiastical decoration, consistent with both the church's historical ties to the Oxford and Cambridge Movements and its contemporary concerns for an inclusive universality.

Conclusion

By widely held consensus, the sustained development of the icon, at least in the West, halted following the disintegration of the Byzantine Empire. Though adopting many stylistic and iconographic features, Western artists did not preserve Byzantine art

in its pure form as their Eastern neighbors had in the past.⁷⁴ By focusing on the St. Bartholomew's icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, this article attempts to show that the understanding of the icon is still evolving. Within its present context, the icon already resists interpretation as a static object relegated to the confines of a certain historical period. The St. Bartholomew's icon demonstrates that the icon can go both *backward* and *forward* in time. The icon moves *backward* by resonating with the church's historical and present religious values for catholicity, recalling an ancient, undivided church—as espoused by both the Oxford and Cambridge Movements. The icon moves *forward* by linking the Romanesque Revival and Art Deco features of the church, demonstrating the capacity for the icon to embrace art movements that came many centuries after its emergence. This case study of the St. Bartholomew's icon suggests that narrowly labeling icons as Eastern Christian severely limits the interpretation of their art historical and religious significance, therefore underlining the necessity of viewing icons in more contemporary contexts in order to expand the frame of their iconological analysis. 🙏

⁷⁴ Wixom, "Byzantine Art and the Latin," 445; Kitzinger, "The Byzantine," 46; Manaphēs, *Sinai: Treasures*, 125.