

## Abstract

### **Panel 2. *Impacts of Images in the Late Middle Ages***

Although the influence of Byzantine models on early Netherlandish iconography is generally acknowledged (e. g. the Vera Icon or certain prototypes of the Virgin and Child) , few studies have attempted to investigate the precise circumstances in which these processes of assimilation, dissemination and the inherent transmission of values occurred. Well-known examples of Italo-Byzantine icons in the Low Countries are the *Notre-Dame de Grâce* (Cambrai Madonna), *Notre-Dame de Saint Luc* in the Cathedral of Saint Lambert, Liège or *Our Lady of Miracles* in the Sint-Rombouts Cathedral in Mechelen. Frequently, miraculous powers were attributed to these images since they were either regarded as an *acheiropoiëton* (“not made by hand”, either of heavenly origin or produced by mechanical impression during the lifetime of the model) , or believed to be made by Saint Luke himself. They were the subject of fervent devotion and their cult status was increased through the offering of indulgences. Moreover, the popularity of these icons was further enhanced by the spread of numerous copies; often commissioned by dignitaries and the top layer of society in the Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands. Patrons who ordered such copies were not always driven by personal religious motives; in some cases underlying political, military or social agendas were at stake. It is clear that these powerful cult images were important vehicles for the transmission of religious, political, social and cultural ideas. This paper will focus on the *Mother God of Tenderness* or *Eleousa* , one of the most popular iconographic types relating to (Italo-)Byzantine prototypes in the Netherlands and characterized by the affectionate relationship between Mother and Son. More specific, I will elaborate on the context in which this process of assimilation, dissemination and the immanent transmission of values took place.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on my master thesis: *The Mother God of Tenderness and the Influence of Byzantine Icons on Early Netherlandish Painting*, Free University of Brussels, 2006 (supervisor: Prof. A. Balis).

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*The Mother God of Tenderness: The Dissemination of an Iconic Image in Early Netherlandish Art*