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Afterword

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Afterword

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The two five-part ivory panels adorned with enamel additions in the treasury of the Milan duomo are among the most frequently cited works of Early Christian art, and also among the least studied. With an astute mind, Zuzana Frantová examines the vast bibliography to show how little is really known about the extraordinary objects and how the hypotheses set out in a relatively few texts have been accepted uncritically and perpetuated as fact in the others. Foremost among the unsubstantiated assertions is the oft-repeated claim that the two panels were originally covers of a Gospel book or Evangeliary.

With an eye as keen as her mind, Frantová then applies herself to the objects themselves, subjecting every assertion about them to her acute intelligence. On the question of localization, this leads her to accept one of the previous theories, namely, that the Diptych was produced in Ravenna; but she bases her argument not only on a comparison with other ivories but also, and most important, on the enamel supplements that have been largely ignored until now. Drawing on new research in the history of metalworking, she shows that the beautiful cross and lamb point to a special nexus of conditions of manufacture and reception in the Adriatic city. She does the same in dating the panels. Although an origin in the fifth century has long been accepted, Frantová offers new arguments that allow a more precise dating to the turn of the 460s. These complicated matters settled persuasively, she turns to the social and cultural contexts in which the Diptych was produced and functioned.

What purpose, Frantová asks, did the elaborate enamel and ivory panels serve? Having set aside the convenient but unsupported claim that they were book covers, she seeks alternatives by comparison with the other five-part diptychs, including the "secular" ones and to information about their function; and she ingeniously studies the reuse of such works during the course of the Middle Ages. This lead her to conclude that the Milan panels served as specific liturgical function, that is, the recitation of the names of saints being venerated during the Mass. Her claims are convincing and important, as are her arguments about the special nature of the materials and forms themselves, which opens up a new way of understanding both the cultural origins and and intellectual connotations of the physical objects.

Frantová then harvests the fruit of her scientific examination by offering a religious and political context for the imagery and astounding luxury of the Diptych.

Maintaining rightly that any attempt to read the iconography in a strictly programmatic way fails to acknowledge the fundamentally open method of Christian exegesis, she nonetheless makes a forceful case that the themes depicted are to be understood in the context of contemporary disputes over the two natures of Christ caused by the spreading Monophysite heresy and in the delicate relationship between Ravenna and Rome. Like light focused through a magnifying lens, the arguments about date, place, function, and meaning direct a beam onto Neon, bishop of Ravenna (450–ca. 473), and his relationship to Pope Leo the Great (440–461). The two men had both used art to express theological and political positions; and her heuristic hypothesis enables Frantová to account for other connections between Neon's patronage and Roman works, and between the Milan Diptych and ivories that seem likely to have been produced in the papal city. Careful not to succumb to the kind of unsupported speculation that she criticizes in the previous literature, Frantová sets forth these conclusions with a balance of conviction and scholarly delicacy.

Clearing away more than a century's entangled hypothesizing, Zuzana Frantová's *Heresy and Loyalty* in all these ways provides a precise account of the elegant ivory and enamel Diptych in Milan that equals its subject in richness, complexity, and inspiration.