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AISLE OF SANTA MARIA
ANTIQUA WITHIN THE CONTEXT
OF THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF
THE ICONOCLASTIC ERA.**

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THE DECORATIONS IN THE LEFT AISLE OF SANTA MARIA ANTIQUA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE ICONOCLASTIC ERA.

The topic under consideration is a fresco of the left aisle of the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua in the Roman Forum. It depicts a row of holy men flanking Christ sitting on His Throne dating back to the time of the Pope Paul I (757-767). The author focuses on images of saints on the fresco, their hierarchy, and their garments. It is revealed that the holy men on the right hand of Christ are venerated saints of the Roman Church and those on the left hand are mostly Eastern holy bishops, great theologians and champions of orthodox faith who fought against various kinds of heresies. They have never been really popular in Rome. The author has come to the following conclusion: the saints on the left and the saints on the right represent together the united and undivided Church fighting against the heresy of Iconoclasm. The main weapon of the Western Church being its firmness in the orthodox faith, the main weapon of the Eastern Church was its theological erudition.

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The third quarter of the 8th century saw an open political confrontation between the Holy See and the Empire. The tenuous equilibrium in their relations was disturbed². The frescoes in the left aisle of the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua in the Roman Forum give some evidence from this period, which still has not been properly investigated as a historical source.

By the mid-8th century, contacts between the Empire and the Holy See had already been irregular. In fact, popes had enough power to implement their own policy³. However, two great problems had yet been unsettled: one was the then controversy between iconoclasts and iconodules; secondly, the declining Empire was unable to protect Rome against the Lombards⁴. Pope Stephen resolved to seek assistance from a new political force, that is, the Franks⁵. Pepin and Pope Stephen made an agreement⁶, according to which the Pope was authorized to rule personally over the lands of Rome and Ravenna (previously he had ruled in the name of the emperor). Soon the emperor had to accept an unpleasant status quo: Rome and Ravenna were lost, the Pope was establishing his own state in Central Italy⁷ ('beato Petro sanctaeque Dei ecclesiae, rei publice Romanorum').⁸

It was in about the mid-8th century that popes began to claim both legal and hierarchical supremacy over the whole Church (the Pope's honorary right to be *primus inter pares* among bishops was never contested by Eastern Churches) – an idea alien not only to the early Christianity, but even to the 7th century. That would become a direct route to the following conflict between Pope Nicolas I (856-67) and Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople (857-67), and in the long-term perspective, to the Great Schism⁹.

The personality of Pope Stephen's brother and successor, Paul I (757-67), is yet open to more research. In the history of the papacy, he is, so to speak, barely visible between his great predecessor and elder brother Stephen, and a great successor, Pope Adrian¹⁰.

Anyway, in the final year of Paul's pontificate, the last attempt of the Empire to alienate the Franks from the papacy failed (the Council of Gentilly, 767¹¹). The system of views upon the

² For instance, in 745 Pope Gregory III was a successful mediator in the negotiations between the emperor and Ratchis, the king of Lombards. A treaty of peace was signed, and the Pope was granted some lands in the south of Italy by the emperor (*Von Falkenhausen V. I bizantini in Italia // I Bizantini in Italia / Ed. G. Pugliese Carratelli. Milano, 1982. P. 1-136 (esp. P. 37).* This cooperation was not compromised by the fact that Constantine was a convinced iconoclast, while the Pope not at all.

³ Even Leo III the Isaurian (*Lombard A. L'empereur Constantin V. Paris, 1902. P. 66*) never tried to actually put his iconoclastic edicts into practice either in Central Italy or in Calabria and Sicilia recaptured since 731-32 (*Von Falkenhausen. I bizantini. P. 38-9*).

⁴ *Miller D.H. Byzantine-Papal Relations During the Pontificate of Paul I: Confirmation and Completion of the Roman Revolution of the Eight Century // Byzantinische Zeitschrift. Vol. 68. 1975. P. 47-62 (P. 47).*

⁵ For more details, see *Hallenbeck JT. Pavia and Rome: The Lombard Monarchy and the Papacy in the Eighth Century. Philadelphia, 1982. P. 63-96.*

⁶ See *Vita Stephani II // Liber Pontificalis. Vol I / Ed. Mgr. L. Duchesne. Paris, 1886. P. 447-8.*

⁷ *Lombard. L'empereur. P. 72-73.* In the records of the Papal Chancellery the name of Constantine V appears as an era name until 772, then somewhat before 781 the royal name is replaced by the pontiff's name. On coins, the Pope's name and profile portrait appear since 775, after Constantine V had died (*Von Falkenhausen. I bizantini. P. 40*).

⁸ 'To saint Peter and to the Saint God's Church, the State of Romans'. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Codex Carolinus. Epistolae III. Ep. VI // Ed. W. Gundlach. Berlin, 1892. P. 489.*

On the political and cultural making of the pontifical state in 8th-9th centuries, see *Noble T.F.X. The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State. 680-825. Philadelphia, 1984* and *Noble T.F.X. Topography, Celebration, and Power: The Making of a Papal Rome in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries // Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages / Ed. M de Jong, F Theuws. Leiden, 2001. P. 45-91.*

⁹ *Meiendorf I. Very Rev. Rim I Konstantinopol [Rome and Constantinople] // Meiendorf, I, Very Rev. Rim I Konstantinopol / Moscow, 2005. P. 13-43 (P. 26-8).*

¹⁰ *Liber Pontificalis. Vol. I. P. 463-67.* His pontificate lacked notable historical events (besides perhaps the Council of Gentilly), his *Vita* in *Liber Pontificalis* is very short, written records are scarce, and there is none in Greek (cf. *Miller. Byzantine-Papal Relations... P. 47*). *Baumont* construes Paul I as a weak and secondary figure (*Baumont M. Le pontificat de Paul Ier // Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'histoire. Vol. 47. 1930. P. 7-24*), but his reading of the sources is a mere retelling and the attempt at reconstructing the pope's personality is not quite convincing. On the other hand, *Miller* tries to present Paul as a strong, independent and canny politician (*Miller, Byzantine-Papal Relations... P. 47-62*).

¹¹ The Acta of the Council are lost and other evidence is scarce, but there are reasons to believe that in the dispute between Byzantines and Romans the king took the side of the former. See *McCormick M. Textes, images et iconoclasme dans le cadre des relations entre Byzance et l'Occident carolingienne // Testo e immagine nell'alto medioevo: Atti della XLI Settimana di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 15-21 aprile 1993, 1. Spoleto, 1994. P. 95-158 (P. 113-31).*

roles of Rome and Constantinople and the attitudes towards the imperial heritage changed significantly: thereafter Byzantines would be no more seen as 'romei', but as 'graeci', even 'nefandissimi Greci, inimici sanctae Dei ecclesiae et orthodoxae fidei expugnatores'¹² ('the most impious Greeks, enemies of God's Holy Orthodox Church and persecutors of faith'). Now it was Rome that housed the true heirs of the old Roman Empire.¹³

The possible anti-iconoclastic meaning of the 8th-century decoration of Santa Maria Antiqua was broached only once, by Joseph Wilpert¹⁴, who only regarded the apse whose images can be firmly dated from the donator's inscription (K1 1).

I believe that, within this context, the choice and the arrangement of the saints in the paintings of the left aisle was also shaped by the anti-iconoclastic ideas of Pope Paul (the painting in the left aisle cannot be dated precisely, but likely to have been made during his reign or about this period)¹⁵.

The left aisle of Santa Maria Antiqua retains a traditional Roman fresco (C1)¹⁶ with three registers: the upper register shows a narrative sequence from Old Testament¹⁷, the middle – a procession of saints flanking Christ, the lower – a velum¹⁸.

There are other frescoes on the walls of Santa Maria Antiqua, apparently a church of the Greek community in Rome, whose iconography could have polemical meanings, both political and theological – especially two compositions. The first of them is the one with Fathers of the Church, flanking the apse and dating from about the mid-7th century (K1 3, 4)¹⁹. The elaborate decoration of the arch of John VII also might bear a political message (K1 2)²⁰.

¹² Citation from a letter of Paul I (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Codex Carolinus. Epistolae III Ep.30 // Berlin, 1892. P. 536).

¹³J. Osborne in his article concerning a new approach to the contacts between Rome and Constantinople in the 9th century suggests that the cultural exchange became again intense in the mid-9th century after restoration of icon worshipping in Byzance (Osborne J. Rome and Constantinople in the ninth century // Rome across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas, C.500-1400 / Ed. C. Bolgia, R. McKitterick, J. Osborne. Cambridge, 2011. P. 222-36.

¹⁴ Wilpert thought that the reason for the renovation of the apse painting – a monumental figure of Christ flanked by two six-winged hybrids of cherubim and seraphim – during the reign of Paul I was not the poor state of the image of John VII, dating only a half-century earlier. The true reason was Paul's zeal to worship the image of Christ and thus to confirm his own opposition against iconoclasm (Wilpert J. Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchl. Bauten vom IV. Bis XIII. Jahrhundert. 4 vols. Freiburg im Breisgau, 1916. Vol. I. P. 702-03).

¹⁵ Wilpert. Die römischen Mosaiken. Vol. I. P. 702-03. Judging by stratigraphy and style, there is no visible difference between the frescoes of the apse and the left aisle.

¹⁶ The issue of the Roman artistic milieu of the time, its connections and parallels with the fresco of the left aisle is outside consideration in the present article.

¹⁷ For a detailed study of the narrative Old Testament sequence in the left aisle, see Vileisis B. The Genesis Cycle of S.Maria Antiqua. Ph. D. Princeton, 1979.

¹⁸ The dating of the left aisle needs some comment. Rushforth, the first publisher of the monument, among other valuable points, attributed the narrative scenes of the left aisle to the date not before the middle of the 8th century (Rushforth G. The Church of Santa Maria Antiqua // Papers of the British School at Rome. Vol. I. 1902. P. 1-123 (P. 28) suggesting that the row of saints belong to the same layer of mortar. De Grueneisen's dating – the third quarter of the 9th century – does not appear to be correct (De Grueneisen W. Sainte Marie Antique. Rome, 1911. P. 106).

Dating from the second half of the 8th century was assumed, for example, by P.Toesca (Toesca P. Storia dell'arte italiana. 2 vols. Torino, 1927. Vol. I. P. 236. Note 86) and E.Tea (Tea E. La basilica di Santa Maria Antiqua. Milano, 1937. P. 271). Nordhagen thought it was contemporary with the apse (Romanelli P. Nordhagen P.J. S.Maria Antiqua. Roma, 1964. P. 62; for a more detailed analysis, see (Nordhagen P.J. Italo-Byzantine Wall Painting of the Early Middle Ages: an 80-Year Old Enigma in Scholarship // Nordhagen P.J. Studies in Byzantine and Early Medieval Painting. London, 1990. P. 444-76 (P. 465); Matthiae shared the opinion of Grueneisen's that the frescoes belonged to a local 9th-century school (Matthiae G. Pittura romana del medioevo. Secoli IV-X. 2 vols. Roma, 1987. Vol. I. P. 190). Maria Andaloro, commenting on Matthiae, believes that the frescoes of the left aisle are rather typical of the general linear trend in the 8th-century Roman art (Matthiae. Vol. I. P. 283).

There are not yet any studies on the iconography and meaning of the middle register of the fresco in the left aisle.

¹⁹ About the Lateran Council and its connections with the frescoes of Santa Maria Antiqua, see in particular Beat Brenk (Brenk B. Papal patronage in a Greek Church in Rome // Santa Maria Antiqua al Foro Romano cento anni dopo. Atti del colloquio internazionale, Roma 5-6 maggio 2000 / Ed. J. Osborne, G. Morganti. Roma, 2004. P. 67-82).

²⁰ On the image, see Nordhagen P.J. The Frescoes of John VII (A.D. 705-707) in S.Maria Antiqua in Rome. Roma, 1968. P. 39-54. On its possible political meaning, see Nordhagen P.J. Constantinople on the Tiber: the Byzantines in Rome and the Iconography of their Images // Early Medieval Rome and Christian West. Essays in Honor of D.A.Bullough / Ed. J.M. Smith. Leiden, 2000. P. 113-34 (P. 130).

In the Middle Ages political and theological controversies were often inseparable. The row of saints in the left aisle may be another example of an image representing a certain political and/ or theological programme.

The row of saints in the left aisle

The second register shows Christ on a throne decorated with gems, his right hand raised in a blessing gesture, his left hand holding a codex. He is flanked on both sides by saints: prelates, martyrs, priest-martyrs and venerables - twenty-two in total, thirteen at the right hand and nine at the left.

The arrangement of saints around Christ:

1. At the right hand: St. Clement, St. Sylvester, St. Leo, St. Alexander, St. Valentine, St. Abondios, St. Euthymios, St. Sabbas, St. Sergius, St. Gregory, St. Bacchos, an unidentified saint, St. Mammias (?).
2. At the left hand: St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Basil the Great, St. Peter of Alexandria, St. Cyril of Alexandria, Saint Epiphanius of Salamis, St. Athanasius of Alexandria, St. Nicolas of Myra, St. Erasmus.

Saints at the right hand of Christ ²¹.

1. St. Clement, Pope (88(90)?-97(99)?)²². Inscription: O AΓIOC KACIMENTIOC
Represented as an elderly short-bearded man with a tonsure in his curly grey hair²³, wearing traditional vestments of classical antiquity: white tunic with broad purple stripes (*tunica manicata laticlava*²⁴), a cloak, a pallium²⁵ and sandals; his left hand covered with the cloak and holding a codex, his right hand holding an anchor, the symbol of his martyrdom.
2. St. Sylvestre, Pope (b. 314 - † 35)²⁶. Inscription: O AΓIOC CEABECTPIOC
A middle-aged man, with tonsured grey hair, a moustache and a small beard²⁷; wearing a white tunic, a dalmatic with clavii and a dark-red paenula with pallium and *campagi* (half-open shoes with lacing), his left hand holding a codex, his right hand touching the book with the tips of the fingers in a blessing gesture.
3. St. Leo the Great, Pope (b. 440 - † 51)²⁸. Inscription: O AΓ(IOC) ΛΕΓΩ

²¹ A survey of vestments of the saints of the left aisle see in *De Grueneisen*. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 179-85.

²² St. Clement has been worshipped in Rome since the 4th century, when the San Clemente basilica was built (*De Grueneisen*. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 517-18).

²³ The earliest preserved image is in San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, in one of the medallions with the portraits of the popes (see *Ladner G.B.* Die Papstbildnisse des Altertums und des Mittelalters. Vol.1.Vatican, 1941. Fig. 29, of the time of Leo the Great (440-61). The next is in Sant Apollinare Nuovo on the south wall of the nave (6th cent.).

²⁴ See *De Grueneisen*. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 181.

²⁵ A long, rather narrow band of white cloth decorated at the end with crosses and a fringe. Bishops of the early Church wore it draped on the chest and thrown over the left shoulder (for more details and evolution see *Braun J.* Die liturgische Gewandung in Occident und Orient, Verdersche Verlagshandlung, Freiburg im Breisgau, 190. P. 642-51. For a picture, see P. 649. B. 297).

²⁶ In the Church tradition St. Sylvester is seen as a notable person, the opponent of Constantine the Great (see, for instance, *Krauthheimer R.* Profile of a city. Princeton, 1980. P. 114). But most probably, the *Donatio Constantini* had not yet been written at the time of Paul I. Medieval Rome had at least seven churches and oratoria dedicated to St. Sylvester (*De Grueneisen*. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 552-54). Among them was the monastery Santi Sylvestro e Stefano founded by Pope Paul in his own family estate (*Liber Pontificalis*. Vol. I. P. 464-65. and *Falla Castelfranchi M.* I monasteri greci a Roma // Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città Cristiana / Ed. S. *Ensolì. E. La Rocca*. Roma, 2002. P. 221-26 (P. 225).

²⁷ The earliest representations are: a mosaic from 509-14 in the Roman church of Santi Silvestro e Martino ai Monti (*Wilpert*. Die römischen Mosaiken. Vol. III. Tf. 96) and S. Sylvestre from the left aisle (*Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*. Freiburg im Breisgau, 1968-76 (V. 8. P. 353-58); in the medaillon on the south wall of San Paolo fuori le Mura (*Andaloro M.* La Pittura Medievale a Roma 312-1431. Corpus. Vol. I. Roma, 2006. P. 390. Fig. 34).

²⁸ A notable fighter against monophysitism; his writings were important for the consolidation of the orthodox communities during the Council of Chalcedon in 431. He was venerated on the West as well as on the East of the Christianity. In Santa Maria

A rather young man with chestnut hair, fine moustache and a short beard;²⁹ wearing a white tunic, a dalmatic, a white paenula with a pallium, and a pair of *campagi*.

4. St. Alexandre - most probably, Pope Alexandre (b. 105(107) - † 15(18)³⁰. Inscription: O ΑΓΙΟC ΑΛΕ (...) ΔΡΟC

A young beardless man with a clerical tonsure in chestnut hair³¹, barefooted, wearing a classical costume of Antiquity: a blue tunic with broad purple stripes (*tunica manicata laticlava*) with a white cloak, pallium and sandals; his left hand holding a codex, his right hand making some (perhaps oratorical) gesture.

5. St. Valentine.³² Inscription: O ΑΓΙΟC ΒΑΛ(ΕΝ)ΤΙΝΟC

An elderly, white-haired cleric, bearded and moustached; wearing a white tunic, a crimson paenula and *campagi*; holding a codex³³. The face is poorly preserved, the upper part is almost lost.

6. St. Abundius³⁴. Inscription: O ΑΓΙΟC ΑΒΟΥΝΔΙΟC.

A dark-haired cleric, bearded and moustached; wearing a white tunic and a yellow paenula, holding a codex³⁵.

It is an unique and valuable piece of evidence of his cult in the then Rome³⁶.

7. St. Euthymios the Great (b. 377- † 473)³⁷. Inscription: ΑΓΙΟ(С) ΕΥΘΥΜΙΟC

A narrow-faced old man with a high wrinkled forehead and a long beard, wearing classical vestments of Antiquity: a purple tunic and a blue cloak, sandals; holding a codex³⁸. The face is badly damaged.

Antiqua he appears also on the left of the apse among other Fathers of the Church from the mid-7th century. There were two churches of St. Leo in Rome (*De Grueneisen. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 537-38*).

²⁹ The earliest image is the one on the southern wall of San Paolo fuori le Mura (see *Andaloro. Corpus. P. 395. Fig. 47*). Moreover, there is another image of Leo in the altar, on the left of the apse, as one of the Church Fathers condemning monothelitism.

³⁰ Rushforth suggests that Pope Alexander was included there due to a well-known (since the 6th century) confusion between him and a martyr of the same name whose tomb and basilica on the Via Nomentana were very popular (*Rushforth. The Church. P. 32*). In the 8th century this merging was taken for granted, so the Pope is shown with a martyr's cross in his hand (*De Grueneisen. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 507*).

³¹ On the earlier image from San Paolo fuori le Mura (5th century, see *Andaloro. Corpus. P. 381. Fig. 7*), he is beardless and tonsured, wearing a tunic and a pallium; another surviving image is in the left aisle of Santa Maria Antiqua.

³² Most likely the popular Roman saint, Valentine the priest, martyred under Claudius in 269. There were at least four churches of St. Valentine, including the famous San Valentino in Via Flaminia built over his sepulchre in the 4th century (*De Grueneisen. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 554-56*). He became even more popular after the restoration of the basilica by Pope Theodore (642-49 rr.) (*Rushforth. The Church. P. 32*).

³³ The earliest images are: (possibly) a 7th-century fresco from the Roman coemeterium Valentini, where the saint is shown wearing a tunic, with a crown and a book (*Garucci R. Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa. Prato, 1872-1880. Vol. II (1873). P. 93. Tf. 84*); the one in the left aisle of SMA and a mosaic medaillon in the San Zeno Chapel in Santa Prassede.

³⁴ A local saint priest martyred, according to *Acta Sanctorum*, under Diocletian, together with his deacon Abondantius and other Christians (*De Grueneisen. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 503*). There are no other traces of his cult in Rome of the time; it was only in the 11th century that his relics were transferred from the original burial site (*Rushforth. The Church. P. 32*)

³⁵ This is his only extant image (*Lexicon. Vol. 5. P. 15*).

³⁶ The extant Medieval church of Santi Abondio e Abondanzio at Rignano Flaminio is known to have been built on the site of an ancient church, but when exactly it was founded and who was its original venerated saint, is unclear (see *Trimarchi M. Sulla chiesa di santi Abondio e Abondanzio a Rignano Flaminio // Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire. Vol. 92. 1980. P. 205-36*).

³⁷ A holy hermit, miracle-worker and founder of the famous monastery in Palestine; contributed notably to the victory of the Orthodoxy on the Monothelitism (*Rushforth. The Church. P. 31; De Grueneisen. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 530*).

³⁸ Early images are in the monastery of St. Jeremiah in Saccara (5th-6th centuries, see *Wessel K. Koptische Kunst. Recklinghausen, 1963. Tf. 10*), in the monastery of St. Apollo (5th – 6th centuries, see *Clédat J. Le monastère et la nécropole de Baouit. Caïre, 1904. Ill. 51, 57*), in the Laura of St. Euthymius at Chirbet-el-Mard (7th century, see *Mader A.E. Ein Bilderzyklus in der Gräberhöhle der St.Euthymios-Laura auf Mardes (Chirbet El-Mard) in der Wüste Juda // Oriens Christianus. Vol. 34. 1937. P. 27-58. T. II*) (*Lexicon. Vol. 6. P. 201-03*). On the façade of the Oratory of Forty Martyrs near Santa Maria Antiqua there is a medaillon with his portrait dating from 705-7 (*Nordhagen. The Frescoes. Pl. CIV, CV*). There could have been another

8. St. Sabbas. Inscription: O ΑΓΙΟC CA(BBAC)

The figure is almost lost, but the character is likely to have been barefooted and wearing a classical costume like St. Euthymios. He has short grey hair and a beard³⁹. Mostly probably, he is St. Sabbas (b. 439 - † 532)⁴⁰. A monastery dedicated to St. Sabbas was founded on Aventine Hill, most likely in the 7th century by the monks who came from the Christian East⁴¹.

9. A saint with a short beard, wearing a formal Byzantine costume (a white tunic and a chlamys with a blue tablion), holding a cross and a martyr's crown. Inscription: O (A)ΓΙΟ(C) CΕΡΓ(ΙΟC)

The preserved letters of the inscription and juxtaposition with the next nearest figure wearing the same type of costume allow to identify him as St. Sergius, companion of St. Bacchus⁴² (# 11) - with a *torques aurea*⁴³, a golden neck-ring typical of the images of Sergius and Bacchus⁴⁴.

10. St. Gregory. Inscription: O ΑΓΙΟC (Γ)ΠΙΓΟΠΙΟC

Most likely, Gregory the Great, Pope (b. 590 - † 604)⁴⁵. The preserved facial details indicate a middle-aged man with a round face, a moustache and a short beard, wearing a yellowish tunic, a dalmatic, a dark blue paenula with a fringed pallium (*fimbriatum*⁴⁶) and a pair of campagi⁴⁷.

11. A saint looking like No. 9, most likely St. Bacchus (most of the inscription is lost). The face is lost, the vestments rather well-preserved.

12. An unidentifiable saint.

Only a fragment of the halo and the letters O ΑΓ on the left of it are preserved.

13. A laic saint with thick curly hair, a short beard and fine moustache; the figure below the neck is not preserved. Inscription: O ΑΓΙΟC MA(MM)AC(?)

picture of St. Euthymius in the apse of the lower church of St. Sabbas, late 8th – early 9th century (see *Styger P.* Die Malereien in der Basilika des Hl. Sabas auf dem kl. Aventin in Rom // *Römische Quartalschrift*. Vol. 28. 1914. P. 49-96 (esp. P. 79).

³⁹ The earliest image is in the left aisle; there used to be possibly another one in the apse of the old St. Sabbas Church (see *Styger.* Die Malereien, p.79).

⁴⁰ One of the latest disciples of St. Euthymius, also a prominent opponent of monophysitism.

⁴¹ See, for instance, *Falla Castelfranchi*. I monastery. P. 222, 224. Connection with the Laura of St. Sabbas in Palestine is possible, but the monastery on the Aventine Hill could have already existed in the time of Gregory the Great (*Gandolfo F.* Gli affreschi di San Saba // *Fragmenta picta. Affreschi e mosaici del Medioevo romano* / Ed. A. Ghidoli. Rome, 1995. P. 183-88 (P. 183).

⁴² Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, high-ranking officers martyred under Diocletian, were very popular in Rome. There were at least four ancient churches dedicated to them (*De Grueneisen.* Sainte Marie Antique. P. 550-51).

⁴³ The grammar form given by Wilpert (*Wilpert.* Die römischen Mosaiken. Vol. II. P. 709), explanation see below.

⁴⁴ See the icon of Sergius and Bacchus from the Kiev Art Museum of Bogdan and Varvara Khanenko (*Lazarev V.* Istorija Vizantijskoj jivopisi [History of Byzantine Paintng]. 2 vols. Moscow, 1986. Vol. II. Fig. 76

Represented invariably as young warriors in formal Byzantine dress, sometimes with golden torques. Grueneisen suggests that the episode in their Vita, where the saints are dragged by the chains on their necks, may come from misunderstanding the torques in the images (*De Grueneisen.* Sainte Marie Antique. P. 550-51).

Other early images are: the above mentioned icon from Kiev, a 6th-century silver cup from the British Museum (*Beckwith J.B.* The Art of Constantinople. London, 1961. Abb. 69). The torques are mentioned in (*Lexicon.* Vol. 8. P. 329-30).

⁴⁵ His cult has been known in Rome since the reign of the Pope Gregory III (*Rushforth.* The Church. P. 30. Note 1). There were three churches dedicated to him (*De Grueneisen.* Sainte Marie Antique. P. 530-31). Wilpert suggests that St. Gregory was placed between Sergius and Bacchus because a church dedicated to Sts. Sergius and Bacchus was built on the Forum by the Pope of the same name, Gregory III (731-41) (*Wilpert.* Die römischen Mosaiken. Vol. II. P. 709).

⁴⁶ See *De Grueneisen.* Sainte Marie Antique. P. 181.

⁴⁷ The earliest image once existed in the St. Andrew monastery in Rome; only an inaccurate copy from the late 16th century survives (see *Ladner G.B.* The So-Called Square Nimbus // *Ladner G. B.* Images and Ideas in the Middle Ages. Roma, 1983. P. 115-66 (P. 123. Esp. note 35); another one is on the reverse side of the Boetius dyptich (circa 487; between 602 and 770 a scene of the Resurrection of Lazarus and images of Sts. Gregory, Jerome and Augustine were added (see *Matthiae.* Pittura. P.254; for the picture see *Wilpert.* Die römischen Mosaiken. Vol. IV. Taf. 297); since the 8th century his portraits have been abundant in illuminated manuscripts (see *Lexicon.* V.6. P. 434); the image in the ancient St. Sabbas church may also portray him (see *Styger.* Die Malereien. P.79).

Apparently, this used to be an image of St. Mammas, a saint from Cappadocia⁴⁸.

Saints at the left hand of Christ

1. St. John Chryzostome. Inscription: Ο ΑΓΙΟC (ΙΟΑ)ΝΝΗC ΧΡΙ(CΟ)CΤΟΜ(ΟC)

A middle-aged man with a round face, a short beard, wearing a white tunic, a dark-coloured paenula with an omophor (ὠμοφόριον)⁴⁹ thrown over his shoulder, and *campagi*; his right hand holding a codex, his left hand raised in a blessing gesture⁵⁰.

2. St. Gregory of Nazianzus . Inscription: (C) (ΓΡ)ΙΓΟΠΙΟC

A white-haired elder, wearing a white tunic, a yellow paenula with an omophor thrown over the shoulder, and *campagi*; holding a codex⁵¹.

There is no surviving evidence of any Roman churches dedicated to Sts. John Chryzostome and Gregory of Nazianzus.

3. St. Basil the Great⁵². Inscription: (Ο) ΑΓΙΟC ΒΑCΙΑΙΟC

A man of the same facial type as St. Gregory's, but middle-aged and dark-haired⁵³; wearing a tunic, a blue dalmatic, a dark-coloured paenula, and *campagi*; with an omophor.

4. St. Peter of Alexandria⁵⁴. Inscription: Ο ΑΓΙΟC ΠΕΤΡΟC ...ΕΞΑΝΔΡΙΝΟC

A white-haired but middle-aged man with a short beard and a wrinkled forehead, wearing a white tunic, a crimson paenula with an omophor, and *campagi*⁵⁵.

5. St. Cyril of Alexandria⁵⁶. Inscription: Ο ΑΓΙΟC ΚΥΡΙΑΙΟC

Wearing a blue tunic, a yellow paenula with an omophor, and *campagi*; holding a codex⁵⁷.

⁴⁸ A martyr from Caesarea in Cappadocia, persecuted under Aurelian; venerated on the East as a holy healer (*De Grueneisen. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 540*). The image in question is the earliest, the others not predating the 10th century (Lexicon. V. 7. P. 483-85).

⁴⁹ A long narrow band of fabric, which differs from a Roman Catholic pallium, basically, by having Greek crosses all along and the edge decorated, but without fringe (for details, see *Braun. Die liturgische. P. 664-74*, for a picture, P. 665, Bild 300; P. 669 refers to the recently (at that point) discovered images of bishops with omophors from Santa Maria Antiqua.

⁵⁰ The earliest surviving images are: another one from Santa Maria Antiqua, among the Church Fathers on the right of the apse; the one in the Laura of St. Euthymius (Mader, Ein Bilderzyklus, taf. II); the one from the second half of the 9th century that was among frescoes of Faras (*Michalowski K. Faras: Die Kathedrale aus dem Wüstensand. Zürich, Köln, 1967. Ill. 39*); that of Santa Passera (cm. *Andaloro. Atlante. P. 125*); a mosaic image in the nave of Aghia Sophia (see *Walter C. Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church. London, 1982. P. 172-73*).

⁵¹ The earliest images are on the palimpsest wall of the Santa Maria Antiqua, 705-07, on the right of the sanctuary (*Nordhagen. The frescoes. Pl. XLV*) and in the left aisle. He is also portrayed in Santa Passera (see *Andaloro. Atlante. P. 125*) and in a lost mosaic from the nave of the Aghia Sophia (867-86) (*Lazarev. Vol. II. Fig. 125*).

⁵² In the medieval Rome, there were at least two churches dedicated to St. Basil (but maybe later than the 8th century) (*De Grueneisen. Sainte Marie Antique. P.513*).

⁵³ The image on the right of the apse (about 649 r.) may be the earliest. Other examples are: the one in the Laura of St. Euthymius in Chirbet-el-Mard (7th cent.) (*Mader. Ein Bilderzyklus. Taf. II*); in Santa Passera (see *Andaloro. Atlante. P.125*); perhaps a figure among the saints in the passage of the west wall of the atrium of Santa Maria Antiqua, presumably from the 10th or 11th century (see *Osborne J. The Atrium of S.Maria Antiqua, Rome: A History in Art // Papers of the British School at Rome. Vol. 55. 1987. P.186-223 (P. 216-19)*); the now lost mosaic in Aghia Sophia (see *Walter. Art. P. 172-73*).

⁵⁴ A Patriarch of Alexandria martyred under Diocletian. Among legends about him, there is one according to which he had a dream of Arius having torn Christ's seamless garment and anathemized him (*De Grueneisen. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 545*).

⁵⁵ This is the earliest preserved image; the next oldest ones are in Tokali Kilise, 10th century (Lexicon. V. 8. P. 175-76) and in San Sabas (7th - 8th) (see *Stryger. Die Malereien. P. 54-60*).

⁵⁶ Patriarch of Alexandria (b. 412 - † 44), an inspirer of the Council of Ephesos of 431 which established the veneration of the Virgin (*Theotokos*) (*De Grueneisen. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 521*). He was called «a new Athanasius» (in the Greek Church, his feast day coincides with that of St. Athanasius).

6. St. Epiphanius of Cyprus⁵⁸. Inscription: Ο ΑΓΙΟC ΕΠΙC(Ι)(Φ)ΑΝΙΟC

Another narrow-faced bearded old man, wearing a classical costume of Antiquity: a blue tunic with broad purple stripes (*tunica manicata laticlava*), a white cloak with an omophor loosely hanging down over the chest, and sandals⁵⁹.

7. St. Athanasius of Alexandria⁶⁰. Inscription: Ο ΑΓΙΟC (Α)ΘΑΝΑCΙΟC

A grey-haired old man, wearing a white tunic, white dalmatic, yellow paenula with an omophor, and *campagi*; the lower part of the face and most of the figure are lost⁶¹.

8. St. Nicolas⁶². Inscription: (Ο) (Α)ΓΙΟC ΝΙΚ(Ο)(Λ)ΑΟC.

Most of facial features are lost, but the man is apparently round-faced and short-bearded; wearing a white tunic, a blue dalmatic, a crimson paenula with an omophor, and *campagi*⁶³.

9. St. Erasmus⁶⁴. Inscription: Ο ΑΓΙΟC ΕΡΑCΜΟC.

A round-faced, dark-haired, tonsured, beardless cleric⁶⁵; wearing a white tunic, a blue dalmatic, a blue paenula, with an omophor, and *campagi*.

Thus, the saints at the right hand of Christ are venerated by the Roman Church and those at the left hand are mostly Eastern holy bishops, notable theologians and advocates of orthodox faith who opposed various kinds of heresies. The first group (Clement, Sylvester, Leo, Valentine, Alexander, Abundius, Sabbas, Euthymius, Sergius, Gregory the Great, Bacchus, Mammias) is comprised by popes of Rome, local saints and saints from Christian East who could equally belong in the second group, but are put in the first due to their popularity in Rome⁶⁶. Most persons from the right-hand group are at least partly legendary. At the same time, the saints of the left-hand group are mostly historical and many of them have never been much popular in Rome⁶⁷.

Yet, taken together, both groups of saints seemingly stand for the Church one and indivisible, opposing some formidable adversary. Who or what could be that adversary then? For the third quarter of the 8th century, the answer is obvious – they all stand against the heresy of Iconoclasm spread from Constantinople. Presumably, the main armour of the Western Church was its firmness in the orthodox faith, while the main weapon of the Eastern Church was its theological erudition.

⁵⁷ The earliest images are the one in the Rotunda of St. George in Thessalonica, 5th century (Lexicon. V.6. P. 19-21) and the now lost mosaic from Aghia Sophia (see *Walter*. Art. P. 172-73).

⁵⁸ A monk from Palestine, Bishop of Salamis, one of the most fervent participants of the dispute on Origen's doctrine; respected very much by St. Jerome (*De Grueneisen*. Sainte Marie Antique, P.527).

⁵⁹ The earliest images are the ones in the left aisle of SMA and in Santa Passera (see *Andaloro*. Atlante. P.125).

⁶⁰ A Patriarch of Alexandria (b. 296 - † 373), one of the prominent opponents of Arianism. There was a church of his name in Rome, however, as late as the 16th century (*De Grueneisen*. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 510).

⁶¹ Besides the image from the left aisle, the oldest one is from Chirbet-el-Mard (*Mader*. Ein Bilderzyklus. Taf. II. Lexicon. Vol.5. P. 268-69). There could have been one more in the apse of the old San Sabas (см. *Styger*. Die Malereien. P. 79); and there was another lost mosaic of Aghia Sophia (see *Walter*. Art. P.172-73).

⁶² There have been about ten Roman churches and oratoria dedicated to St. Nicolas, but some of them may postdate the 8th century (see *De Grueneisen*. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 543 - 44).

⁶³ Another image is in Santa Passera (см. *Andaloro*. Atlante. P. 125); also a now lost mosaic from Aghia Sophia (see *Walter*. Art. P. 172-73).

⁶⁴ One of the most venerated martyrs in South Italia. There were several Roman churches of St. Erasmus, some of them being indeed ancient (*De Grueneisen*. Sainte Marie Antique. P. 528).

⁶⁵ Usually represented as beardless and tonsured, in a bishop's mitre and with a crosier; besides the image in question and the fresco sequence from Santa Maria n Via Lata, there are later images dating from the 12th century (Lexicon. Vol.6. P. 156-58).

⁶⁶ Rushforth was the first to notice that the distribution of saints in the row obeyed some rules (*Rushforth*. The Church. P.34). He suggests that at the right hand there are the favourite saints of the Roman Church and the first eight of them are ranged by their position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy (four popes, two presbyters, two eastern monks). A similar point of view was expressed independently by Dmitry E. Afinogenov, who also suggested that the saints on the right hand are chosen as representing different ranks of holiness: five saint bishops, two priests-martyrs, two holy monks and two martyrs.

⁶⁷ Interestingly, St. Erasmos, a legendary Italian saint, stands at the left hand and is wearing an Eastern omophor.

Emile Mâle wrote: «In these frescos, whose creation was authorized by the Pope, Rome put together her own saints and those from the East, equally lovingly. She was intentionally respectful towards those whose images were destroyed in Constantinople, confirming that both Churches are the whole»⁶⁸.

Thus, we have analysed the frescoes in the left nave of Santa Maria Antiqua in the context of the Iconoclasm period and both political and theological polemics between emperors and popes. We have considered which exactly saints are present in the procession, whether they belong to the Western or Eastern Church, what type of vestments they are wearing, what the stories of their lives are about and how popular they could have been in Rome. These considerations bring us to the conclusion that the left-nave composition was polemical by its message, both politically and theologically. The group of saints comprises various types: those venerated in Western and in Eastern Church, popular in Rome and basically unknown there; some were glorified through martyrdom, some through prayer and ascetic life, some through their anti-heretical theology. The totality of the information allows us to suggest that the composition showing two groups of saints venerated both in Western and Eastern Church was meant to represent the unity of the Church struggling against the heresy of Iconoclasm imposed by Constantinople.

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⁶⁸ Mâle E. Rome et ses vieilles églises. Rome, 1992. P. 113.