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Santo subito? Popes as "New Saints" in the Age of Eleventh-Century Reform

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Abstracts

Although some popes already enjoyed saint-like veneration, papal sanctity significantly increased during the ecclesiastical reform in the eleventh century. After all, it was Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) – one of the main protagonists of the reform – who stated in his *Dictatus papae* that «The Bishop of Rome, if he has been ordained according to canon law, is undoubtedly made a saint through the merits of blessed Peter [...]». These ideas draw attention to general strategies of representation, especially regarding the cult of Early Christian popes (such as Clement I). The increasing worship they enjoyed can be noticed not least in contemporary pictorial programmes. The paper deals with the propagation of early popes as "new saints" and seeks to identify the driving forces behind their dissemination.

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Analysing monumental art such as the *Enthronement* scene in the Lower Church of San Clemente and the (lost) apse decoration of the Oratory of St Nicholas in Lateran Palace, it also reflects upon the intentions behind these specific commissions and the (re-)establishment of papal cults in Rome.

Sebbene alcuni papi godessero già di una venerazione simile a quella di un santo, il riconoscimento della "santità papale" aumentò significativamente nel secolo XI, durante i tempi della riforma ecclesiastica. Papa Gregorio VII (1073-1085), protagonista principale della riforma, affermò infatti nel suo *Dictatus papae* che «Il vescovo di Roma, se è stato ordinato secondo la legge canonica, è senza dubbio di fatto un santo per i meriti del beato Pietro [...]». Queste idee innescano strategie generali di rappresentazione, in particolare per quanto riguarda il culto dei papi paleocristiani (come Clemente I). La venerazione crescente di cui essi sono oggetto può essere notata anche nei programmi pittorici del tempo. L'articolo analizza la diffusione del culto dei papi come "nuovi santi", cercando di identificare anche le forze motrici di questo fenomeno. Analizzando opere d'arte come l'*Intronizzazione di Papa Clemente* nella chiesa inferiore di San Clemente e la decorazione perduta dell'abside dell'oratorio di San Nicola nel Palazzo Laterano, l'autore si interroga anche sulle intenzioni che stanno alla base di queste specifiche commissioni e quindi sulla "ri-fondazione" dei culti papali a Roma.

In 2018, on the occasion of the canonisation of Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Óscar Romero, the *L'Osservatore Romano* published an essay by Giovanni Maria Vian on the holiness of popes¹. Coincidentally or otherwise, the text appeared on the feast day of Pope Gregory VII, 25th May, and emphasised the striking interest of Pope Gregory and his pontificate regarding the sanctity of the Roman pontiffs. Although some popes already enjoyed saint-like veneration, papal sanctity significantly increased at the height of church reform during the papacy of Pope Gregory VII and his successors in the second half of the eleventh century. Analysing monumental art such as the frescoes of the Lower Church of San Clemente as well as the (lost) decoration of the Oratory of St Nicholas in Lateran Palace, this paper will reflect upon the intentions behind these specific commissions and the (re-)establishment of papal cults in Rome. Even though the cult of saintly pontiffs always remained quite limited, especially popes of politically-charged times were considered saints².

1. Saintly Popes

The concept of papal sanctity has been preoccupying canonists and historians for some time³. Although no pope was declared a saint by proper canonisation

¹ Vian 2018, pp. 1 and 12.

² See: Rusconi 2010, p. 21.

³ Ullmann 1959-1961, pp. 229-264; Lindner 1967, pp. 15-26; Fuhrmann 1980, pp. 28-43 (cf.

during the Middle Ages, some Roman bishops were nevertheless considered saintly and accordingly enjoyed veneration by the Roman church⁴. Almost all Early Christian popes suffered martyrdom, whereby their sanctity was beyond any doubts⁵. Due to the end of persecution at the beginning of the fourth century, martyrdom became less frequent. Thus, a new category of saints – the saintly confessors – emerged⁶. Confessors gave testimony of their faith but they not die as martyrs, as was the case with almost all popes from this time on. However, only a few of them enjoyed distinctive veneration by their successors due to their deeds for Christianity. This can be observed by choosing them as patron saints for chapels, oratories, and churches: the basilica at the tomb of St Peter – the first Roman bishop, who died around 65/67 – is probably the most famous case. Moreover, Paschalis I (817-824) nudged the cults of the early pontiffs Urban I and Lucius⁷, while Gregory IV (827-844) dedicated an oratory in Old St Peter to his predecessor Gregory I⁸. Furthermore, some popes were mentioned in liturgical books and the canon of the mass, as well as in early calendars and martyrologies⁹, which was essential for the dissemination of their memoria and consequently their veneration and cult.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the compilers of the *Vitae* of the early pontiffs in the *Liber Pontificalis* rarely made use of terms such as *sanctus* and *beatus* to characterise the popes, whereas these epitheta occur more frequently from the sixth century onwards¹⁰. Shortly thereafter, even superlative forms as *beatissimus* or *sanctissimus* can also be traced¹¹, while the popes of the late eleventh century were addressed as *sancti* with striking frequency by their successors¹². In general, *sanctus* was used in a broader context than we would assume today and was not exclusively limited to actually recognised saints¹³.

As Barbara Abou-El-Haj stated: «The most dramatic social and artistic expansion of the cult of saints since the fourth century began in the late tenth century and intensified in the eleventh and twelfth» ¹⁴. It is remarkable that despite a general interest for Early Christian saints ¹⁵, papal sanctity was

Fuhrmann 2009, pp. 151-168); Schimmelpfennig 1994, pp. 73-100; Rusconi 2009, pp. 481-490; Rusconi 2010; Rusconi 2012, pp. 11-23.

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<sup>4</sup> Herbers 2002, p. 114.
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⁵ Ivi, p. 115.

⁶ Bartlett 2013, p. 16.

⁷ This is related to the translation of the relics of St Cecilia intra muros (see: Herbers 2002, p. 12). See also the relevant paragraph within the Vita of Paschalis I in the Liber pontificalis: Duchesne 1892, p. 56.

⁸ Ivi, p. 74; cf.: Herbers 2002, p. 122.

⁹ Herbers 2002, p. 114.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 120.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Noreen 2001, p. 47 (footnote 45).

¹³ Cf.: Fuhrmann 2009, p. 159.

¹⁴ Abou-El-Haj 1994, p. 13.

¹⁵ For a brief discussion see: Pace 1993/1994, pp. 541-548.

discussed forcefully at the same time¹⁶. Umberto Longo attests a «notable growth in the varied conceptions of papal sanctity and sainthood»¹⁷, which he links to expanded criteria regarding the creation of saints: «governmental, doctrinal and disciplinary»¹⁸ virtues were considered more often.

2. Gregory VII and the Dictatus papae

Inextricably linked to the question of whether popes are sacred in any way is Pope Gregory VII. Hildebrand of Sovana – born around 1015 in Tuscany – moved to Rome as a youth and received his education at Santa Maria all'Aventino¹⁹ (fig. 1). Elected pope in 1073, he was one of the main protagonists of the medieval church reform at its peak and is assuredly one of the most discussed popes of the Middle Ages. In a document filed in his register under March 1075, Gregory himself²⁰ arranged a numbered list of short statements of powers, reserved exclusively to the Apostolic See. This paper – due to its beginning today known as Dictatus papae - is a compilation of Gregory's conception of the enhanced position of the pope in both ecclesiastical and temporal worlds²¹. Compiled a vear prior to the first excommunication of emperor Henry IV, Gregory claims extensive and exclusive rights for the papacy to strengthen the *libertas ecclesiae* against secular power. As Horst Fuhrmann observed, some of the 27 sentences of the *Dictatus papae* are «characterised by a breathtaking audacity that is by no means always covered by the contemporary canonistic tradition, However, the function and meaning of the document remain a matter of scholarly debate: Especially its intention as well as the dissemination of the *Dictatus papae* are still not entirely clear²³. However, its outstanding singularity and its explicitly articulated claims stand beyond doubt²⁴. In terms of papal sanctity, proposition XXIII of the *Dictatus papae* states:

The Bishop of Rome, if he has been ordained according to canon law, is undoubtedly made a saint through the merits of blessed Peter, according to the testimony of St Ennodius, Bishop of Pavia, to whom many holy fathers agree, as it is handed down in the decrees of blessed Pope Symmachus²⁵.

- ¹⁶ See: Rusconi 2010, p. 30.
- ¹⁷ Longo 2012a, p. 148.
- ¹⁸ Ibidem.
- ¹⁹ Noble 2010, p. 1339 and f.
- ²⁰ Gregory's authorship is no longer in doubt; see: Mordek 1999, pp. 978-981 (esp.: 979).
- ²¹ Butler 2010, p. 501.
- ²² Fuhrmann 2003, p. 182; translated by the author. Even Stefan Weinfurter speaks of «breathtaking audacity» («atemberaubende Kühnheit»); see: Weinfurter 2006, p. 107.
 - ²³ Mordek 1999, p. 979 and f.
 - ²⁴ Cf.: Fuhrmann 1989, p. 148.
 - ²⁵ In Latin: «Quod Romanus pontifex, si canonice fuerit ordinatus, meritis beati Petri

Compared with the other chapters, it is the most detailed one, and it also provides an authoritative source by referring to Bishop Ennodius of Pavia, a writer at the beginning of the sixth century²⁶. Remarkably, Gregory addresses Ennodius as a saintly bishop: more precisely, the quoted paper of Ennodius was written in 502, eleven years before he became Bishop of Pavia and – above all – he never was acclaimed a saint²⁷. Thus, Gregory states that every pope – if he is appointed to the office according to canon law – is automatically a saint due to the achievements of Peter, the first Bishop of Rome. Therefore, what does *sanctus* mean in this context, and why is Peter guaranteeing this sainthood? Several explanations have been offered. The majority of scholars agreed to understand Gregory's claim not as a personal and individual sanctity but rather pointed to a sanctitas ex officio. Of course, it is not sainthood in liturgical terms, legitimised by formal canonisation, with an official cult and the opportunity to be chosen as a patron, as Fuhrmann stated²⁸. At the time of Gregory VII, canonisations of saints were neither a standardised procedure nor yet a privilege to the pope²⁹. Apart from this, any saint-like veneration of somebody during his lifetime was unthinkable at all, as contemporary writers like Burchard of Worms and Ivo of Chartres repeatedly stated³⁰. It is important to emphasise that papal sanctitas is rather meant to be taken as individual sainthood³¹, founded on the virtues of the pope, but based on the merits of the Apostle Peter and thus a sanctity associated with the office passed down from a long line of predecessors³². As Christ granted Peter the power of binding and loosing – documented in Matthew 16:18-19 – all of his future heirs in the office of the Bishop of Rome are also equipped by this authority and have part of his sanctity³³. Thus, papal sainthood is closely linked to the reinforcement of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. In this context, contemporary reflections regarding the outstanding role of the Bishop of Rome must also be considered. In his study on the pope's body, Agostino Paravicini-Bagliani stresses the thoughts of Peter Damian (c. 1007-1072)³⁴, one of the most influential scholars of the eleventh century and

indubitanter efficitur sanctus testante sancto Ennodio Papiensi episcopo ei multis sanctis patribus faventibus, sicut in decretis beati Symachi pape continetur»; see: Caspar 1920, p. 207.

- ²⁶ For a detailed discussion of this source, see: Ullmann 1959-1961.
- ²⁷ Fuhrmann 2009, p. 158.
- ²⁸ Fuhrmann 1980, p. 183.
- ²⁹ This was to emerge only in the following centuries, culminating in the compilation of the Liber extra in 1234 under Pope Gregory IX; see: Sieger 1995, pp. 62-78.
- ³⁰ Fuhrmann 2009, p. 155 and f.; cf.: Burchard of Worms, Decretorum liber decimus nonus, cap. 68 (Burchard of Worms 1853, col. 999); Ivo of Chartres, Decreti pars decima quinta, cap. 82 (Ivo of Chartres 1855, col. 881).
- ³¹ Thus, although Gregory VII was convinced that he became a better human due to his elevation to the papacy; see: Fuhrmann 2009, p. 157.
 - ³² Ivi, p. 156 and f.
 - ³³ For a detailed study, see: Ullmann 1959-1961.
- ³⁴ For his biography, see: Reindel 2001, p. 229 and f.; for Damian as a «hagiographer» recently: Longo 2012b.

a driving force behind the reform movement. In a treatise addressed to Pope Alexander II (1061-1073), Damian argued for the striking brevity of a pope's life and – parenthetically – introduced a number of new and audacious titles to express the pope's supremacy³⁵.

According to Fuhrmann, Gregory VII – «like hardly any other pope before» ³⁶ – took care of the liturgical *memoria* of his predecessors, especially of his immediate forerunners Nicholas II (1058-1061) and Alexander II, whom he addressed as a *«gloriosus confessor»* ³⁷. Furthermore, two contemporary documents provide evidence of an intensified liturgical commemoration of popes in the eleventh century. First, the protocol of the Roman Synod of fall 1078 reports a decree titled *De festivitatibus pontificum Romanorum celebrandis* ³⁸. Admittedly, we do not know its content, since the very document is not handed down. Nevertheless, we can assume that the paper sought to regulate the liturgical commemoration of popes. Second, the Benedictine monk Bernold of Constance notifies an order – most likely issued by Gregory himself – to celebrate a full Office on all feast days of the Roman martyr-popes ³⁹. Although this is still reported in a German chronicle even two centenaries later, we cannot determine the extent to which this was actually operated ⁴⁰.

Let us now turn our attention back to Pope Gregory VII: to clarify his view of ecclesiastical supremacy over secular power, he states in a letter to Hermann of Metz – dated March 1081 – that only a few monarchs were considered sacred while almost one hundred Roman bishops are listed among the saints⁴¹. Of course, this is an exaggeration that involves a variety of interpretative issues, which I shall not address in any detail. Suffice it say, it refers to the high position of his preceding office-bearers, whose *memoria* Gregory VII wanted to firmly secure. Looking at the calendar of the Lateran basilica, in fact, we can observe a noticeable increase in papal feast days: whereas the late eighth-century *Sacramentarium Gregorianum Hadrianum* contains twelve popes⁴², the calendar of the twelfth century already lists 40⁴³. This is a remarkable increase in number by 28 popes (24 martyrs, four confessors)⁴⁴. Furthermore, this is interesting because one of the oldest pieces of evidence of this phenomenon is

³⁵ Paravicini-Bagliani 1997, in particular: p. 25. Further (summarised): Paravicini-Bagliani 2012, pp. 723-742, here: pp. 723-727.

³⁶ Fuhrmann 2009, p. 157.

³⁷ *Ibidem*; see also: Schimmelpfennig 1994, p. 87.

³⁸ «On the liturgical celebration for Roman bishops»; for the protocol of the Concilium Romanum V, see: Migne 1853, col. 799; cf.: Gresser 2006, p. 182; Fuhrmann 2009, p. 157.

³⁹ Bernold of Constance, Micrologus de ecclesiasticis observationibus, cap. ⁴³ (Bernold of Constance 1881, col. 1010). See also: Fuhrmann 2009, p. 157; Bartlett 2013, p. 123 and f.

⁴⁰ Bartlett 2013, p. 124.

⁴¹ Schimmelpfennig 1994, p. 90.

⁴² Auf der Mauer 1994, pp. 136-143, p. 147.

⁴³ Jounel 1977, p. 180 and f.

⁴⁴ Gresser 2006, p. 182. Rusconi mentions just 25, see: Rusconi 2010, p. 29. See also: Auf der Mauer 1994, p. 147.

the calendar of Santa Maria all'Aventino, the monastery where Gregory used to live as a monk⁴⁵. While Gregory was probably not the founder of this intensified care for saintly popes – similar tendencies can also be contemporaneously observed in France and on German territory – he is nevertheless considered a potent and authoritative supporter of the veneration of his predecessors⁴⁶. Practices and ideas that had been circulating for a long time were finally concluded by providing canonistic proof and guidelines⁴⁷. Undoubtedly, this served to underpin a gapless line of succession and strengthen the prestige and power of the papacy.

This leads to another point: the papacy, in general, is an interesting case in respect to lineage and ancestry. Although dynastic sequence does not come into play, «Genealogies of Office» (*Amtsgenealogien*) – as Ursula Nilgen formulated⁴⁸ – were an essential strategy of representation. Although very little was known in detail about the lives and deeds of most of the Early Christian popes, lists and records of the Bishops of Rome are preserved since the third century⁴⁹. Series of papal portraits documented for the basilicas of San Pietro in Vaticano and San Paolo fuori le mura date back to the fifth century and served to stress the linear and pure succession of the papal office⁵⁰. Beginning with Peter, they were updated at certain times and roughly covered the Early Christian and Early Medieval popes⁵¹. As shown before, during the eleventh century the interest in saintly predecessors and the popularity of Early Christian popes significantly increased⁵². Thus, the visualisation of papal sanctity became an important issue. A particularly striking example is Clement I, who enjoyed veneration as one of the first successors of Peter to the bishopric of Rome.

3. Picturing Papal Enthronement at San Clemente al Laterano

In the city of Rome itself, Clement's cult was almost concentrated to the church of San Clemente al Laterano, documented at least since the end of the fourth century⁵³. Most likely between 385 and 417, a three-nave basilica was constructed over existing architectural structures, which had previously served as a Mithraeum (an underground sanctuary for the ancient cult of Mithras) as

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<sup>45</sup> Gresser 2006, p. 182.
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⁴⁶ Auf der Mauer 1994, p. 148.

⁴⁷ Longo 2012a, p. 149.

⁴⁸ Nilgen 1985, pp. 217-234.

⁴⁹ Ziegler 2007, pp. 5-38.

⁵⁰ Hobelleitner 2020.

⁵¹ Even nowadays, the portrait series of San Paolo fuori le mura – restored in mosaic after the great fire in 1823 – is still kept up to date.

⁵² Auf der Mauer 1994, p. 254; Rusconi 2010, p. 30.

⁵³ Jounel 1977, p. 314.

well as a warehouse⁵⁴. Shortly after 1100, the church was abandoned and wholly backfilled with soil to provide a foundation for the present edifice, erected and completed in the first two decades of the twelfth century⁵⁵. When precisely the building was abandoned remains somewhat uncertain, although at least the election of Rainerius of Bleda as pope Paschalis II (1099-1118) - which took place at San Clemente in August 1099⁵⁶ – sets a terminus post quem. However, at some point in the late eleventh century a major campaign of decoration was still completed in the ancient basilica (now often referred to as the Lower Church of San Clemente) (fig. 2, fig. 3). The paintings – commissioned by Beno de Rapiza and his wife Maria, a lay couple⁵⁷ – testify to a vivid presence of Clement in the contemporary Roman canon of saints⁵⁸. As the various inscriptions show, the pious veneration of God, as well as Saint Clement and the request for redemption of their souls, were reasons of Beno and Maria for the sponsorship⁵⁹. As Kirstin Noreen summarised, during the eleventh century some families increasingly achieved financial prosperity through trade and properties and thus established themselves as donors and sponsors of monastic communities⁶⁰. Above all, this happened due to a changed perspective on the afterlife and the end of the time: every earthly sin will be followed by punishment of God, whereby those who do not repent in this world will have to do so in the hereafter⁶¹. Therefore, the remission of sins became an important factor in Christian life. Individualised prayers spoken by monastic communities were propagated for sustainable personal salvation⁶². In particular, earthly frailty and the possibility of a sudden death fuelled the upraising care for one's own redemption. In exchange for material gifts⁶³, the sponsors of churches, pictorial programmes or liturgical equipment sought to secure their own *memoria* through perpetual intercessional prayer. With the various portraits of the family within the frescoes, Beno and Maria also strengthened their visual commemoration.

In addition to miracle episodes of the dedicatee of the church, Clement's introduction to the office of the Bishop of Rome as well as the translation of

⁵⁴ Zchomelidse 2007, p. 142, p. 144. For the Early Christian basilica, see: Barclay-Lloyd 1986, pp. 197-199.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ Yawn 2012, p. 177.

⁵⁷ Beno de Rapiza and Maria (Macellaria) are mentioned several times among the frescoes. In her study on the San Clemente decoration, Patrizia Carmassi discussed the little information and sources about the family's environment: Carmassi 2001, pp. 38-65.

⁵⁸ Jounel 1977, p. 314.

⁵⁹ See fig. 2: «Égo Beno de Rapiza cum Maria uxor mea p(ro) amore De(i) et beati Clementi / p(in)/g(e)/r(e) / f[eci]». See also the inscription of the narthex paintings (left): «Ego Maria Macellaria p(er) timore Dei et remedio anime mee hec p(in)g(e)r(e) f(e)c(i)»; inscriptions discussed by Stefano Riccioni in: Romano 2006, pp. 131-140.

⁶⁰ Noreen 2001, p. 52.

⁶¹ Angenendt 1984, p. 199.

⁶² Cowdrey 1970, p. 125 and f.

⁶³ See: Schmid 1985, pp. 51-73, in particular: p. 6; further: Oexle 1985, pp. 74-107.

his relics to the city can be seen. The extant programme – arranged in several registers – was rediscovered during excavation works in the nineteenth century⁶⁴. The murals were painted on supporting walls that had been newly erected in the narthex of the church, flanking the portal, and on two sheathed columns in the southern nave, close to the presbytery. Since the narthex of San Clemente was used as a burial site, it is reasonable to assume that the donation of the frescoes might be read in a funeral context⁶⁵. They are keyworks of their time, celebrating the titular saint of the church. Furthermore, they provide a convincing example of how papal authority could be interpreted and propagated visually in the last quarter of the eleventh century. Due to a lack of written sources, the problem of real dating has not yet been resolved. While the frescoes have repeatedly been affiliated with the last two decades of the century⁶⁶, Serena Romano recently argued for a slightly earlier dating between 1078 and 1084, based on stylistic but chiefly historical considerations⁶⁷.

In any case, the legends of Clement's life report that he was first banned to Chersonesus in the Crimea region by emperor Trajan and afterwards executed by being tied to an anchor and drowned in the Black Sea⁶⁸. His tomb was allegedly discovered in the late ninth century by Cyril and Methodius, and subsequently, the relics were translated to Rome, where the liturgical memory of the papal martyr increased⁶⁹. In this context, the writings of the Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia - Leo Marsicanus (1046-1115) - hold particular interest: Arranged obviously after the execution of the frescoes between 1109 and 1115, they are dedicated to the Early Christian pope and unequivocally seek to establish a cult of St Clement⁷⁰. This is noteworthy since the main frescoes focus on three significant events of his Vita: the dies natalis, the translatio of his relics and the cathedra of St Clement. Thus, as Filippini has highlighted, the frescoes present the various commemoration days of the dedicatee of the church⁷¹. Furthermore, Leo's texts offer an exact date as well as a (fragmented) sermo for a feast day of Clement's enthronement, although its celebration at San Clemente is unfortunately not handed down⁷².

Although no direct connections to Gregory VII can be traced, many art historians have pointed to specific reformist content of the San Clemente decoration and repeatedly described the murals as a keywork of "reform

⁶⁴ Zchomelidse 2007, p. 144.

⁶⁵ Filippini 2002, p. 112.

⁶⁶ For a brief discussion of the dating hypothesis, see: Filippini 1999, p. 21 (footnote 57).

⁶⁷ Romano 2006, p. 129.

⁶⁸ Ramseger 1994, pp. 319-323.

⁶⁹ See: Jounel 1977, p. 314; Ziegler 2007, p. 93.

⁷⁰ Filippini 2004, p. 127. Still the most relevant editing: Meyvaert, Devos 1955, pp. 375-461; Meyvaert, Devos 1956, pp. 189-240. For a summary see: Filippini 2004, p. 126 and f. (footnote 11).

⁷¹ Filippini 2004, p. 124. ⁷² Ivi, p. 132.

art"⁷³. Especially one of these frescoes holds stronger importance in terms of visualising papal authority: it is located at the right pillar of the central nave and shows in its upper register St Clement enthroned, surrounded by eight men, mostly clerics (fig. 4). Although its top section is lost due to the construction of the present church, the composition can be read by its inscriptions⁷⁴: Clement – in the centre of the painting, sitting on a richly elaborated throne – is accompanied by Peter to his right, as well as Cletus and Linus, and some more undefined men. Based on their garments, at least two are laymen. Dressed like guards (with a shorter tunic that reaches above the knees, held with a belt), they are flanking the group to the right and left⁷⁵.

Clement is shown in pontifical robes: he is wearing a lavishly-ornamented yellow vestment, a red chasuble with floral decoration, the pallium as well as red dotted shoes. To his right, Peter is dressed in a greyish tunic, matched with a red mantle, probably depicted in the act of consecrating his successor⁷⁶. Even Cletus and Linus, as well as three other men, are depicted in a rich episcopal or ecclesiastical garment, whereby traces of the lower parts of crosiers can be seen in front of their bodies. In general, the San Clemente paintings «place great emphasis on the pontifical throne and vestments, which were vital demonstrations of a pope's genuine claim to the office»⁷⁷, as Lila Yawn highlighted. This is also evident in Gregory's statement in his *Dictatus papae*: the proper ordination of the pontiff – according to canon law – is authoritative to the sanctity of a pope⁷⁸.

Although Clement was not usually regarded as the immediate successor of Peter, as either the third or the fourth Bishop of Rome (following Cletus and Linus)⁷⁹, his legendary introduction to the papal office by Peter himself was strongly emphasised in later life descriptions⁸⁰. However, the enthronement

⁷³ Toubert 1976, pp. 1-33; Toubert 1990, pp. 193-238; Zchomelidse 1995, pp. 7-26, (esp. p. 25 and f.); Zchomelidse 1996; Osborne 1997, pp. 155-172; Carmassi 2001, pp. 1-66; Romano 2009, pp. 53-88; Romano 2006, pp. 129-150; Rusconi 2010, pp. 40-50 (esp. 47-48).

⁷⁴ I make use of the inscriptions provided by Stefano Riccioni; see: Romano 2006, p. 138.

⁷⁵ This echoes elements of Late Antique imperial iconography, as can be seen – for example – in the Missorium of Theodosius I (388); see: Beyeler 2011, pp. 316-319; Effenberger 2001, pp. 97-108.

⁷⁶ Due to the loss of the upper section, this remains an open question. Wilpert provides a possible reconstruction of the scene with Clement in the gesture of an orans and Peter blessing him by touching his head; behind the people of the front row he proposed a crowd by adding more figures; see: Wilpert 1916, pp. 538-540 (fig. 179); cf.: Filippini 1999, p. 34 and f.

⁷⁷ Yawn 2012, p. 195.

⁷⁸ As quoted above; see also: Fuhrmann 2009, p. 160.

⁷⁹ In his recent study, Ziegler underlines that Clement – alongside (Ana-)Cletus and Linus – were members of a board of three ecclesiastical leaders; see: Ziegler 2007, p. 90 and f.

⁸⁰ Chapter II of the Epistle of Clement to James – part of the Early Christian Clementine literature and attributed to Clement himself – is the principal source for the installation of Clement by Peter; see: Rehm 1965, p. 376. For a detailed discussion of the handed down tradition, see: Filippini 1999, pp. 27-32; a short summary can be found in: Ziegler 2007, pp. 90-92. In general, popes often relied on writings of Early Christian popes – especially texts ascribed to their namesakes – to give

scene shows Clement as the immediate successor of the principal apostle, elected by Peter himself and receiving his pontifical power directly from him⁸¹. Linus and Cletus – as seen in the fresco – were serving as *coadjutores* (a kind of assistants in the administration) to Peter, while Clement was appointed to follow him in the bishopric of Rome⁸². This marks a pure Petrine-line of handing over authority and power, first transferred from Christ to Peter, and passed on to Clement, and thus to all his future heirs of the bishopric of Rome.

According to Cristiana Filippini, the scene mirrors imperial coronation iconography and as such, it is a rare and perhaps unique example in medieval Roman art⁸³. It also reflects two fundamental reformist claims: the absolute authority of the pontiff over the church and the supremacy of sacerdotium over regnum⁸⁴. Nevertheless, Valentino Pace has put forward an alluring but controversial reading of this image: he suggested that it may also be a programme invented by the anti-reform party, who were in support of Clement III – the opponent pope – not least on the grounds of this obvious choice of name⁸⁵. Wibert - Archbishop of Ravenna and elected pope by the Synod of Brixen in 1080 to replace Gregory VII – always had an active and supportive group during the twenty years of his "pontificate", not only, but chiefly in Rome⁸⁶. Nonetheless, after his death in September 1100, Paschalis II had to deal with «lingering opposition in the city» 87. Moreover, rumours of miracles at Clement's tomb in Civita Castellana - for example, twinkling lights and thaumaturgical healings – started to circulate⁸⁸. This led Paschalis II to exhume his remains and finally throw them into the Tiber to stop an already-sprouting saint-like worship⁸⁹.

4. From Wibert to Clement: Popes and their Chosen Names

An interesting aspect regarding the veneration of the early popes is the – at this time quite recently instigated – custom of choosing a papal name as popes took office. Wibert of Ravenna called himself Clement III, as already shown. It was not until the end of the tenth century that the change of a pope's

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authority to their concerns; cf.: Noreen 2001, p. 47.
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⁸¹ Filippini 1999, p. 29.

⁸² Filippini 2004, p. 126. This is the explanation Rufinus offered in his letter to Bishop Gaudentius, together with his translation of the Recognitions; see: Rehm 1965, pp. 3-5.

⁸³ Filippini 1999, pp. 35-43.

⁸⁴ Yawn 2012, p. 184.

⁸⁵ Pace 2007, p. 56 and f.

⁸⁶ Ziese 1982, passim; see also: Yawn 2012, p. 177 and f.

⁸⁷ Yawn 2012, p. 178.

⁸⁸ Rusconi 2010, pp. 41-43.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*; see also: Longo 2012a, p. 150.

name became common due to papal elections⁹⁰. Suidger – Bishop of Bamberg – chose Clement II as his further name after his election to the papacy in 1046⁹¹. By doing so, Suidger thus triggered a wave: almost all popes of the following century called themselves after early predecessors and entered papal history as the second of their name⁹². The name Clement became quite popular among popes (as well as papal opponents) in the following decades and centuries⁹³. According to Umberto Longo, «the highly significant choices of papal names»⁹⁴ indicate a specific orientation of the popes; however, their motives must naturally be considered in individual cases⁹⁵.

Thus, it is quite conceivable that some of Wibert's supporters tried to strengthen their position to legitimise Clement III's pontificate by choosing the complex and embellished programme. Remarkably, both factions mostly referred to the same strategies to underline even «diametrically opposed positions» ⁹⁶. Since there is a lack of sources, we are unable to decide to which of those parties – if we can speak of parties at all – the mastermind of the programme belonged. Nevertheless, the life of the Early Christian pope Clement was "updated" to communicate not least contemporary ecclesiastical and political issues. Thus, in this case, Clement served to underpin the legitimacy of the papacy, which is interestingly conceivable for either one or another faction.

5. Representing Saintly Popes in the Lateran Palace

Just a short walk away, in the medieval Lateran Palace, another elaborated programme was commissioned merely a few decades after the San Clemente frescoes: the apse decoration of the Oratory of St Nicholas (fig. 5). In general, the Lateran basilica and palace – *mater et caput* of the Christian community and *sedes* of the Roman bishop – held strong symbolic significance, especially when it comes to papal ceremonies. A small edifice built under Calixtus II (1119-1124) housed the Oratory dedicated to St Nicholas of Myra, which was situated next to the *camera pro secretis consiliis* as well as the so-called *cubiculum*, both of them rooms for papal audiences and meetings⁹⁷. The programme of the oratory apse dates back to the pontificate of Anacletus II (1130-1138) but

⁹⁰ Krämer emphasises the connection between papal name changes and the eleventh-century church reform; see: Krämer 1956, pp. 148-188 (esp. 163).

⁹¹ Gresser 2006, p. 65.

⁹² Ivi, p. 66 and f.; for a list see also *ibidem* (footnote 236).

⁹³ Above all, Krämer has already stated that there are no precise statements regarding the reasons for the individual name changes; see: Krämer 1956, p. 153.

⁹⁴ Longo 2012a, p. 146.

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the case of Urban II, see: Rusconi 2010, p. 44 and f.

⁹⁶ Yawn 2012, p. 186.

⁹⁷ Moretti 2008, p. 213.

is completely lost due to the final demolition of the old Lateran Palace in the eighteenth century. Fortunately, replicas of the sixth- and seventeenth-century document its former appearance⁹⁸. The apse shows two registers: the upper part depicts enthroned Mary with Jesus, accompanied by torch-bearing angels behind the throne, and two contemporary popes to Mary's feet: the founder of the oratory, Calixtus II as well as (antipope) Anacletus II, who commissioned its pictorial decoration. Notably, at some point, both inscriptions referring to Anacletus were changed to Anastasius to erase the (anti-)popes memory, which might have taken place shortly after the death of Anacletus II in 1138, or at a later time during restoration works⁹⁹.

Both Calixtus II and Anacletus II are wearing a chasuble and the pallium and shown with squared nimbi¹⁰⁰. The setting of Mary surrounded by angels refers to the (still-preserved) *Madonna della Clemenza* icon of Santa Maria in Trastevere from the time of John VII (705-707), as Giacomo Grimaldi already noted in the early seventeenth century¹⁰¹. Two standing popes in episcopal dresses – again with the pallium – are flanking the central group: Silvester I (314-335), anachronistically with a frigium on the left, as well as one of the first Roman bishops, Anacletus I, bareheaded. Both can be identified by added labels, which also testify their sanctity.

In terms of papal sanctity, the lower zone of the apse decoration holds stronger significance: the patron of the oratory – St Nicholas – can be seen in a painted niche. The veneration of St Nicholas of Myra enjoyed a striking increase during the time of the reform papacy¹⁰². Just a few decades before, his relics were transferred from Myra to the South-Italian port city of Bari¹⁰³. The veneration of St Nicholas in Rome and beyond swiftly increased¹⁰⁴. Accompanied by eight popes of different times, he is located between Leo I and Gregory I, two influential, early theorists of the papal primacy and liturgically already-venerated popes¹⁰⁵. Each of them is followed by three Roman bishops, more or less involved in the recent investiture controversy: on the right-side Alexander II, Gregory VII and Victor III, and on the left Urban II, Paschalis II, and Gelasius II. The chronological order runs on both flanks from inside to outside. All of the popes are endowed with the abbreviated inscription SCS – sanctus – in capital letters and crowned by a halo, which shows the afterlife of Gregory's claims, stated in his *Dictatus papae* and finally implemented by

⁹⁸ Ivi, pp. 213-216.

⁹⁹ Herklotz 1989, p. 213; Moretti 2008, p. 213; see also: Duchesne 1889, pp. 355-362.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion regarding the interpretation of squared haloes, see: Osborne 1979, pp. 58-65 (esp. 64).

¹⁰¹ Anacletus II served as titular cardinal at Santa Maria in Trastevere prior to his election to papacy in 1130; see: Herklotz 1989, p. 213.

¹⁰² Jounel 1977, p. 110 and f., p. 320 and f.; Jones 1978, pp. 167-172.

¹⁰³ Jones 1978, pp. 172-202.

Thus, not least due to the special efforts of Urban II; see: Jones 1978, pp. 209-217.

¹⁰⁵ For the veneration of Gregory I, see: Rusconi 2010, p. 21.

one of his reform-line successors. As Ingo Herklotz noted, the peculiarity of the representation manifests itself in the «iconographic equating of church representatives, who have already been liturgically venerated for centuries, with the recently deceased popes, who had not been canonised at this time» 106, and were never to be canonised at all. There is no markable difference in their appearance: all are dressed in pontifical robes, shown with a gesture of benediction and equipped the same with a book in a quite uniform way. Thus, the mural is a clear visualisation of the papacy's sanctity as well as a forceful demonstration of the strengthened position of the victorious reform papacy.

The decoration of the adjacent halls – especially the programme of the *camera pro secretis consiliis* – underlines this reading. Handed down in a series of ink sketches, the scenes show four triumphantly popes of the pro-Gregorian line with their opponents cowering at their feed, completed by Henry V holding the scroll of the Concordat of Worms¹⁰⁷. Both, the Oratory of St Nicholas and the *camera*, formed a powerful – not to say an explosive – visual statement that could not have been realised in any other place but the ceremonial centre of papal power itself.

Conclusion

The papal claim to primacy at its summit of power in the thirteenth century has justly been described as connected to a «politica della santità» (Rusconi)¹⁰⁸. This term – as I would like to suggest – can also be applied to the time of Gregory VII and his environment. Visualising papal sanctity and saintly popes - especially during the eleventh-century reforms and the following decades - is linked to major political events in a fascinating but not always easily traceable way. While in the case of the St Nicholas Oratory in the old Lateran Palace, its belonging to a triumphant Gregorian-line papacy is beyond debate, the murals of San Clemente still raise several questions, which are especially pressing for historians of art due to the pre-eminent importance of those frescoes. The dating of the paintings by scholars is closely linked to historical considerations, although the only thing we know for certain is that laypeople donated them. The very connection between lay sponsorship and the religious renewal movement is a repeatedly-mentioned issue but the precise circumstances still remain – and probably always will remain - an open question. However, it is noteworthy that laypeople were responsible for the eleventh-century decorations of San

¹⁰⁶ Translated by the author; see: Herklotz 1989, p. 214.

¹⁰⁷ Moretti 2008, p. 213, p. 215 and f.

¹⁰⁸ Rusconi 2010, p. 10.

Gabriele sull'Appia as well as Sant'Urbano alla Caffarella¹⁰⁹. This leads to the assumption that the aims of the reform movement were noticed quite early and in a much broader context by secular circles than previously expected.

Even within the Roman church administration, the veneration of St Clement was of course not exclusively reserved to the Gregorians: even the Wibertin faction have had good reasons to occupy the early successor of the Apostle Peter for their argumentation¹¹⁰. As long as we cannot be certain about the dating of the San Clemente frescoes, we are unable to specify those considerations. Nevertheless, whatever direction we choose, we can spot the attempt to accomplish claims of power and authority towards an opposition: reform-line popes vs pro-imperial popes, and vice versa.

Looking at the careful and thorough renewal of the interior decoration of San Paolo fuori le mura initiated by Nicholas III (1277-1280), the alreadymentioned Early Christian series of papal portraits was duplicated by a second one. Strikingly, the surviving portraits of the thirteenth century clearly show the popes with nimbi, underlining their recently-established *sanctitas*¹¹¹.

Nonetheless, it is remarkable that cults of popes seemed never to disseminate significantly beyond the walls of Rome itself. Indeed, even within Rome, the contemporary miraculous pope and figurehead of the reforms – Leo IX (1049-1054) – apparently did not enjoy much popularity. Despite being buried in a distinguished site close to the tomb of Gregory the Great in the Vatican basilica, his cult did not truly flourish in the papal city, apart from a single mention of his name in the calendar of Santa Maria all'Aventino¹¹². Bishop of Toul prior to his elevation to the papacy, Leo IX was primarily venerated in France with ties to his former bishopric, as well as in Segni and the Benevento, *per viam cultus*¹¹³. It is also striking that he has not been mentioned among the saintly popes of the St Nicholas Oratory in the Lateran Palace, although he was the only medieval pope who enjoyed cultic veneration on a noticeable level¹¹⁴. However, for Gregory VII, it was not until the late sixteenth century (and on the initiative of one of his namesakes) that his canonisation was promoted and he was finally formally raised to the altars and declared a saint in 1609¹¹⁵.

¹⁰⁹ See therefore: Bernacchio 2014, pp. 17-29; Noreen 2001.

¹¹⁰ Yawn 2012, p. 184.

¹¹¹ See the reconstruction of the former setting: Bordi 2008, pp. 97-124.

¹¹² Jounel 1977, p. 137. Rusconi mentions an official confirmation of the cult by Pope Victor III; see: Rusconi 2010, p. 35.

¹¹³ Schimmelpfennig 1994, p. 86 and f.

¹¹⁴ Goez 1998, p. 167.

¹¹⁵ Thus, by a bull of Paul V, but first limited to Salerno; expansion to the entire Christendom only in the eighteenth century, albeit not without disputation; see: Blumenthal 2001, pp. 331-338.

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Appendix



Fig. 1. Antonio Ecclisi, *Pope Gregory VII* (detail), Windsor, RL 9214; after: Osborne J., Claridge A. (1996), *Early Christian and Medieval Antiquities*. *Mosaics and Wallpainting in Roman Churches*, London: Harvey Miller, p. 115 (fig. 24)



Fig. 2. Mass of St Clement, Enthronement of St Clement, Central Nave (right pillar), Lower Church of San Clemente, Rome; after: Della Porta I. (2000), Das unterirdische Rom. Katakomben, Bäder, Tempel, Köln: Könemann, p. 188



Fig. 3. Mass of St Clement, Enthronement of St Clement, Replica by Joseph Wilpert and Carlo Tabanelli, Central Nave (right pillar), Lower Church of San Clemente, Rome; after: Wilpert J. (1916), Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV.-XIII. Jahrhundert, 4, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, p. 240



Fig. 4 Enthronement of St Clement (detail), Replica by Joseph Wilpert and Carlo Tabanelli, Central Nave (right pillar), Lower Church of San Clemente, Rome; after: Wilpert J. (1916), Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV.-XIII. Jahrhundert, 4, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, p. 240



Fig. 5. Oratory of St Nicholas, lost apse decoration, Old Lateran Palace, engraving around 1638, from: Caetani, Vita Gelasio II (between pp. 128 and 129); after: Ladner G.B. (1941), Die Papstbildnisse des Altertums und des Mittelalters, Città del Vaticano: Pontifico Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, fig. XX

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