The Icon of the Madonna Della Clemenza: Patronage, Placement, Purpose

Michael Anton Matos
The Icon of the *Madonna Della Clemenza*: Patronage, Placement, Purpose

By

Michael Anton Matos

A Thesis submitted to the
Department of Art History
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Art

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2005
The members of the Committee approve the thesis of Michael Anton Matos defended on October 28, 2004.

_____________________
Cynthia Hahn
Professor Directing Thesis

_____________________
Paula Gerson
Committee Member

_____________________
Jack Freiberg
Committee Member

Approved:

________________________________________
Paula Gerson, Chairperson, Department of Art History

________________________________________
Sally McRorie, Dean, School of Visual Arts and Dance

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of the thesis could not have been possible without the help and support of many individuals. First and for most I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Cynthia Hahn, for her guidance at all levels of the process. She helped me to make the most out of my topic. Next, I would like to thank my other committee members Dr. Jack Freiberg and Dr. Paula Gerson for keeping me focused on the result. Specifically, I wish to thank Dr. Freiberg for assuming the role of a surrogate thesis director for me while Dr. Hahn was on sabbatical. His advice and leading questions helped to add a level of richness to my analysis I had not considered on my own. I would also like to thank my friends, family and fellow graduate students for their encouragement and support. Specifically, I wish to thank Lana Burgess, Ceil Bare, and Elizabeth A. Chapman.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ................................................................................................................. v
Abstract ............................................................................................................................ vii

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1

1. THE ICON’S STYLE AND PATRONAGE ................................................................. 5

2. THE ORIGINAL LOCATION OF THE *MADONNA DELLA CLEMENZA* ................. 20

3. JOHN VII’s COMMISSIONS AND MARIAN DEVOTION IN ROME ......................... 30

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................... 40

APPENDIX: FIGURES ....................................................................................................... 41

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................... 63

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ................................................................................................. 70
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The icon of the Madonna della Clemenza, Sta. Maria in Trastevere, Rome, 705-707 (© Scala / Art Resource, NY) .................................................. Page 41

Figure 2: Photograph from the 1988 exhibition, De vera effigie Mariae, Rome (© Arte Fotografica, Rome) ................................................................. Page 42

Figure 3: St Matthew, Gospel Book of Ebbo (f 18v), Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 1, Epernay, France, 816-835 (© Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY) .................................................. Page 43

Figure 4: Christ Enthroned, Lectionary of Godescalc (f 3r), Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 1203, Paris, 781-783 (© Bibliothèque Nationale de France) ............................................................................ Page 44

Figure 5: Maria Regina image from Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, c 570 (© ICCD, Rome) .......................................................................................... Page 45

Figure 6: Madonna della Clemenza before restoration (Wilpert, Sancta Maria Antiqua, 1910) .................................................................................. Page 46

Figure 7: Apse mosaic, San Marco, Rome, ninth century (© ICCD, Rome) .... Page 47

Figure 8: Detail of Grimaldi’s drawing of the Oratory of John VII (f 77r), 1619 (© Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana) ............................................................................ Page 48

Figure 9: Saint Anne with Mary, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, 705 (© ICCD, Rome) .......................................................................................... Page 49

Figure 10: Christ Pantocrator between Constantine IX and Empress Zoë, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, eleventh-century mosaic (© Vanni / Art Resource, NY) ............................................................................ Page 50

Figure 11: Maria Regina, mosaic from the Oratory of John VII at Saint Peter’s, Rome (now in the church of San Marco, Florence) (Belting, Likeness and Presence, 1994) ............................................................................ Page 51
Figure 12: Detail of Theodora with Attendants, from the mosaics at the church of San Vitale, Ravenna, mid sixth century (© Scala / Art Resource, NY) ............................................................ Page 52

Figure 13: Maria Regina flanked by donors, church of the Amphitheatre, Duress, Albania, mosaic, mid sixith century (©2002 AlbKristian.com) Page 53

Figure 14: Detail of Saint Agnes, apse mosaic, San Marco, Rome, ninth century (© ICCD, Rome) .................................................................................................................. Page 54

Figure 15: Mosaics above the imperial door of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, ninth century (© Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY) ........................................... Page 55

Figure 16: Justinian II coin depicting Christ and the emperor, Constantinople, c 705 (Belting, Likeness and Presence, 1994) .................................................... Page 56

Figure 17: Drawing of the Triclinium of Leo III from the Lateran Palace, Rome (drawing dates to the seventeenth century and the mosaic to 800).... Page 57

Figure 18: Widow Turtura, fresco, Comodilla Catacomb, Rome, c. 530 (© Foto Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra) ......................... Page 58

Figure 19: Paschal I and the Virgin, apse of Santa Maria in Domnica, Rome, 817 (© Scala / Art Resource, NY) ............................................................ Page 59

Figure 20: Theodotus chapel, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, eighth century (© ICCD, Rome) ................................................................................................. Page 60

Figure 21: Detail of the Adoration of the Magi from the Triumphal Arch in Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, mosaic, sixth century (© Nimatallah / Art Resource, NY) .................................................. Page 61

Figure 22: Detail of a niche showing Greek doctors, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, fresco, seventh century (© ICCD, Rome) ....................... Page 62
ABSTRACT

The medieval Roman icon, known as the *Madonna della Clemenza* (Santa Maria in Trastevere), is unusual for both its large size and its inclusion of a papal portrait. Debate over the age and patron of the icon has centered on the interpretation of two documents thought to refer to the image. In this thesis, the relevance and accuracy of these documents as a means of dating the icon is questioned, in part following the criticisms of Carlo Bertelli. Stylistic arguments put forth by Bertelli and others are also questioned in favor of the importance of iconographic evidence. In the first chapter, Pope John VII (707-707) is supported as the most logical patron of the icon based upon iconographic details. The most significant point concerns the similarity of Mary’s costume to other known commissions by John VII. The iconographic similarity the icon shares with other works is also explored in terms of the icon’s meaning. In a break with past scholarship, this thesis argues that the *Madonna della Clemenza* was commissioned for a papal palace. This idea is supported by a comparison with known palace decoration in Constantinople and Rome that share iconographic similarities with the icon. Finally, the possible meaning of the icon is discussed. Through a close examination of past scholars’ interpretations of a political motive for the icon’s creation, this paper suggests an alternative theory based upon the function of the icon to stimulate devotion. By connecting the icon’s creation to devotional practices in Rome during John’s lifetime, it is argued that the icon conflates Byzantine and Roman practices and is an early example of a new, devotional art.
INTRODUCTION

The image of the Virgin and child flanked by angels known as the *Madonna della Clemenza* (Fig. 1) enshrined in Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, is one of the five surviving medieval Marian icons in Rome. Today, these icons are highly treasured, both as religious images and art objects. The *Madonna della Clemenza*, which has been dated anywhere from the sixth century to ninth century, stands out among the group because, although not the oldest, it is by far the largest, measuring 164 by 116 cm (Fig. 2). In fact, it is larger than the majority of icons created in the medieval period. Furthermore in addition to its extraordinary size, the icon is quite unusual because it includes one of the earliest examples of a donor portrait of a pope. Rather than represented in the more traditional standing pose, the donor is depicted kneeling. Finally, the image of Mary is also unusual in that, by means of her dress, she is depicted as a royal figure. Existing literature has concentrated on disputed issues of style, date and possible patron without ever adequately treating those extraordinary characteristics.

This thesis will argue that pope John VII (705 - 707) was the patron of the icon, that he intended to place the image in his papal palace and that the icon is an early and effective example of devotional art.

The icon’s origin has been discussed by many scholars. The competing theories concerning the place and date of the icon’s creation are based either upon early textual references to the icon or upon stylistic and iconographic comparisons to other dated works. Although a document datable to the seventh century is thought to refer to the *Madonna della Clemenza*, the stylistic evidence suggests a later date. This problem in reconciling the icon’s style with textual evidence has even suggested to some that an exact dating of the icon is impossible. I will argue that the documentary evidence has been over-emphasized. It is too vague to be considered reliable proof of the icon’s age. In contrast, I will emphasize the importance of iconography in addition to style in situating the icon within the reign of Pope John
VII (705-707).

Having reaffirmed John VII as the patron of the Madonna della Clemenza, I will then explain the limitations of past scholarship concerning this pope. This will draw into question scholarship that has focused primarily on the political relationship between the papacy and the Byzantine Emperor during John’s pontificate. While political interpretations will not be completely discounted, I will, instead, emphasize devotional and didactic interpretations to explain why John created the icon. Ultimately, this thesis will show that the Madonna della Clemenza was more than the product of melding of Eastern and Western artistic styles, as has previously been proposed, but that it reflects a conflation of the divergent theories on the usage of images and the devotional trends of Marian images that marked the Eastern and Western Churches.

Thesis Organization

The first chapter of this thesis examines the patronage of the Madonna della Clemenza concluding that Pope John VII commissioned the icon. The possible original location of the icon is discussed in the second chapter. The third and final chapter explores John VII’s motives for creating the image and how it relates both to his view of an ideal relationship between himself and the Virgin Mary, as well as the broader trends in Marian devotion in Rome.

In chapter one, I will first examine the competing theories for the date of origin of the icon purposed by Carlo Bertelli, Dale Kinney, Gerhard Wolf, and Maria Andaloro. By discussing the icon’s iconography, I will then illustrate, as Bertelli has suggested through stylistic analysis, that the icon fits most logically as a commission of John VII. Specifically, I will develop support for Bertelli’s theory by comparing Mary’s costume in the icon to other crowned Madonnas that date from the same time period.

Chapter two explores the idea of the original location of the Madonna della Clemenza. Whereas most scholars think that the icon was made for the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, I will show how their theories are based upon contradictory textual sources. By examining the iconography of the icon, it will become apparent that the image more closely resembles palace decoration than decoration found in an ecclesiastic setting. This hypothesis will be supported by comparing the icon’s composition to a close reading of the inscription that adorned the Chrysotriklinos (throne room) in the imperial palace in Constantinople and with mosaics within
the Lateran palace in Rome. I will suggest that the icon can best be understood as an element of palace decoration developed for John VII’s building program on the Palatine hill.

The third and final chapter will discuss varying interpretations of John VII’s commissions and how they relate to the broader question of his contributions to Marian devotion in Rome. By examining the frescoes in Santa Maria Antiqua and the chapel sponsored by the pope in Old Saint Peter’s and comparing them with the icon, I will demonstrate how current theories on the relationship between the Byzantine Emperor, Pope John VII and the papacy in Rome fail to fully explain John’s motives for commissioning the icon.

In the end, I will prove that although other possible meanings for the icon that have been proposed, ranging from a public declaration of autonomy of the Roman papacy from Byzantium to a visual declaration of the pope’s devotion to Mary, it is more plausible to interpret the icon as a functional devotional object. Specifically, John did not have this icon produced solely to demonstrate his special devotion to Mary, but as an object to be used for personal devotion.
Attempts to date the *Madonna della Clemenza* (Fig. 1) have been the central focus of scholarship on the icon. Scholars have assigned the image to a range of periods and to various patrons. By examining these theories I will argue, using primarily iconographic evidence, that the most plausible hypothesis was one advanced by Carlo Bertelli in 1961 that the *Madonna della Clemenza* was commissioned by Pope John VII. 1

The iconographic similarity between the icon and other John VII commissions was the primary reason that Bertelli attributed the icon to that pope. Others have played down the importance of iconography and in its place have used textual sources and stylistic analysis as the basis for their alternative theories of dating and hence patronage. The theories that rely upon primary sources for dating the creation of the *Madonna della Clemenza* center on two texts that are believed to refer to the icon. The problem with these sources is that they are contradictory.

The first document is a pilgrimage text dated 640, which mentions a miraculous Marian icon in the church in Trastevere that “made itself” (Per se facta est). 2 This same phrase is also

---

1 Bertelli’s choice of John VII as the patron should not come as a surprise. Evidence about John VII’s patronage was well known by the time Bertelli wrote about this icon in 1961. Most notably, Ernst Kitzinger devoted a chapter to John VII in his 1934 dissertation. In that work, Kitzinger examined how artwork of the seventh to the mid-eighth century in Rome was a conflation of Byzantine and late Roman styles. Bertelli's work, then, can be best understood as the placing of the icon within the stylistic context of John VII's patronage as conceived by Kitzinger. John VII, who was Greek, would have been an appealing choice of patron for Bertelli, given that icons were never as popular in the Latin West as in the East. See, Ernst Kitzinger, *Römische Malerei vom Beginn des 7 bis zur Mitte des 8 Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Ludwig Maxmilians Universität, 1934) and Carlo Bertelli, *La Madonna di Santa Maria in Trastevere* (Rome: n.p., 1961).

2 “... Basilica quae app sca maria in trantiberis ibi est scae mariae quae per se facta est (In the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere there is an image of Mary that made itself).” Excerpt from *De locis sanctis martyrum quae sunt foris civitatis Romae* as quoted in Charles Barber, *Figure
found on part of the inscription on the frame of the *Madonna della Clemenza*. Stylistically, the icon shares very little with the art of the mid seventh century. This has lead to disputes over the authenticity of the pilgrimage text and whether that text refers to the *Madonna della Clemenza* or to an earlier icon in Trastevere which the *Madonna della Clemenza* replaced. Doubt over the text referring to the icon is further cast when one considers that a second source claims the icon was created in the ninth century.

This second source is quoted from the life of pope Gregory IV (822 - 844) in the Book of the Popes (*Liber pontificalis*), which states that the icon was a gift given by that pope to Trastevere. Gregory’s papal life was recorded soon after his death and served to catalog all of the good deeds he performed during his pontificate, including the building of Santa Maria in Trastevere. In this text Gregory is said to have created an image of Mary with a donor and placed it above the altar. This reference is universally accepted as referring to the *Madonna della Clemenza*, making it the earliest undisputed reference to the icon; nevertheless, as I will discuss later, most scholars do not accept Gregory IV as the patron.

The conflicting information provided by these two documents explains why most studies...

---

3 According to Bertelli the surviving part of the inscription reads “... DS QYOD IPSE FACTYS EST... +ASTANT STYPENTES ANGELORYM PRINCIPE—GESTARE NATYM... A... (The image made itself... +Even the angels stand in awe that this same god was born from her.).” Carlo Bertelli, *La Madonna*, 34.

4 This position is held by every scholar except Carlo Cecchelli, *S. Maria in Trastevere* (Rome: Danesi Editore, 1968), 52.

5 “Sed et decorem altari addens et Matrem Domini emerito honorans muneribus, fecit ibidem vestem crysoclabam cum blatta bizantea, habentem historia Nativitis et Resurrectionis domini nostri Iesu Christi, et insuper imaginem beatae dei gentricis Mariae refoventem imaginem oblatoris sui.” And, adding beauty to the altar and rightly honoring the Lord’s mother with gifts, he made in the same place a gold striped hanging with Byzantine purple, having the story of the Nativity and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and above an image of God’s mother St Mary cherishing an image of its presenter.”


of the image have focused on evidence provided by style and iconography to date the icon. In order to understand how those theories differ from the one advanced by Bertelli, I will begin by summarizing Bertelli’s argument and then turn to the opinions of other scholars.

Carlo Bertelli, who contended that John VII was the icon’s patron, argued that the literary sources be deemphasized. In their place he relied almost solely on style to formulate his idea. Bertelli pointed out that the 640 pilgrimage text only survives today in later copies, dating to the ninth and the tenth century. His position against accepting the pilgrimage text was informed by a lack of reference to the miraculous Marian icon in two of the three earliest known copies. While accepting the *Liber pontificalis* passage as referring to the icon, he rejects, based upon style considerations, the attribution to Gregory IV as the patron.

Most other scholars have argued for the correctness of one document or the other. For example, Carlo Cecchelli reasoned that the icon be dated to the seventh century based upon a different analysis of style and the pilgrimage text. Maria Andaloro suggested a broad range extending from the sixth to the early eighth-century for the icon’s production. As evidence, Andaloro drew on the textual sources, along with early extant examples of Mary depicted as the Queen of Heaven (*Maria Regina*) in places like the church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome, and even an example from outside Italy, in Albania. The last major scholar to discuss the dating of the icon is Dale Kinney who, in her dissertation on the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, rejected Bertelli’s dating and that of Cecchelli in favor of a later ninth-century date. Her argument, once again, based in part on the primary sources, is quite unusual for she states that both are correct. Kinney believed the icon to be a ninth-century copy commissioned by Gregory IV of an earlier, possibly sixth-century icon, that was located Santa Maria in Trastevere.

In order to reconcile the seemingly conflicting information in these two texts, Kinney offers a complicated narrative in which she argues that Gregory IV purposely commissioned the

---

7 The three copies Bertelli refers to are ms. 1008 from Vienna Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek (formerly referred to as Salzburg 209), ms. theol. 124, fol. 49 from The University of Würzburg, and ms. 795 from Vienna Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek (formerly referred to as Salzburg 140). Kinney, “S. Maria in Trastevere,” 163, disputes Bertelli’s claim that the reference is not in all three of the manuscripts.

8 Kinney “S. Maria in Trastevere,” 69, n. 25, comments that Bertelli claimed that Cecchelli accepted the theory of an eighth-century date for the icon after it was restored in the 1960s.

9 Ibid., 69-72.
icon in a style unlike that of his other commissions.  She proposes that, since the Madonna della Clemenza is a copy of an earlier image, Gregory sought to maintain specific characteristics of the original. The icon’s style, then, is a hybrid, the result of combining the lost sixth-century original and the style of the ninth century. While Kinney’s argument is plausible, the use of visual material to support the theory is, at best, confusing.

Kinney develops her argument for the icon as a conflation of styles from two different time periods by claiming it contains ninth-century stylistic elements that were derived from Carolingian sources. According to her, the style of Mary in the icon mirrors images in the Ada Group of Carolingian manuscripts. Unfortunately, the stylistic comparison that Kinney develops is problematic. For example, the Carolingian image that she compares with the icon is the image of Saint Matthew from the Ebbo Gospels (Fig. 3). She states that the two works share similarities in the manner of painting, that is, the application of paint layers. This may be true, but the finished style of the figure of Matthew is clearly unlike that of any figure from the icon; therefore, this comparison is bewildering. Another manuscript that Kinney uses for comparison, the Godescalc Lectionary, is much more compelling, for the figure of an enthroned Christ (Fig. 4) shares a strong characteristic with the Virgin in the icon---Kinney, however never develops the specifics of this comparison.

Bertelli addresses the style of the icon and its iconography more thoroughly than Kinney and uses comparative material with more subtlety. Although his stylistic analysis is somewhat abstract and difficult to summarize, I will attempt to clarify his ideas. In the case of images

---

10 Ibid., 69.
11 There is some scholarship to support the idea that art in Rome could have been influenced by Carolingian art, but the stylistic connections developed are not specific and require the modern viewer to use considerable imagination. For a discussion of the connections between the Carolingians and Rome see; Hans Belting, “I mosaici dell’Aula Leonina come testimonianza della prima Renovatio nell’arte medievale di Roma,” in Roma e l’età carolingia (Rome: Micrograph 1976),167-82
12 Oddly, Kinney does not give any examples of Ada Group manuscripts to support her theory. She was not the originator of this type of comparison between the art of Northern Europe and Rome; Bertelli had mentioned similarities between the later Ottonian work of the Master of the Registrum Gregorii and the icon. However, for Bertelli, La Madonna, 79, the connection was nothing more than evidence of the possible continuity of technique in the later Middle Ages.
13 This comparison is odd, considering the Ebbo Gospels is not part of the Ada Group.
14 In both the Madonna della Clemenza and folio with the image Christ in the Godescalc, the
depicting *Maria Regina* that pre-date 640, like the one at Santa Maria Antiqua (Fig. 5), Bertelli discerns a lack of complexity and a lack of what he calls a “weighty” style that are unlike the stylistic features of the *Madonna della Clemenza*.\(^\text{15}\) This leads Bertelli to suggest that those who favor a date of 640 or earlier were emphasizing the documentary evidence at the expense of clear and observable stylistic differences.

The reason that stylistic analysis has been disregarded, according to Bertelli, is due to the condition of the icon.\(^\text{16}\) The icon was painted through a process known as encaustic in which wax is infused with pigment. As an artistic medium, encaustic is durable so long as its support remains sturdy. Unfortunately, at some point the wood panel support for the icon buckled along its joints and the encaustic broke off in those areas. The result is that there are extensive losses on the icon. In addition, as it appeared in the early part of the twentieth century, the icon had extensive over-painting in fresco. Bertelli, who was one of the people to work on the icon’s restoration, states that those who have suggested the earlier dating of the icon were probably basing their theories on the appearance of the image before it was cleaned.\(^\text{17}\) The *Madonna della Clemenza* had its over-painting applied sometime in the later Middle Ages (Fig. 6). In Bertelli’s opinion this over-painting did not conform to the icon’s original decoration but may have been conceived with reference to one of the other Marian icons in Rome.\(^\text{18}\) However, in Bertelli’s opinion, with the icon properly cleaned, scholars should rely more upon the style and iconography of the icon than textual evidence for determining dating. It is precisely because of the icon’s style, that Bertelli rejected Gregory IV as the patron.\(^\text{19}\)

On this point he rejects the *Liber pontificalis*’ record and agrees that the icon could not have been the gift of Gregory IV because its style differs too much from that pope’s commission for the conch mosaics at San Marco in Rome (Fig. 7).\(^\text{20}\) Bertelli finds, in general, that ninth-century examples of Marian images lack the strongly byzantizing style found in the icon.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{15}\) For his discussion of the icon’s style, see Bertelli, *La Madonna*, 45-63.

\(^{16}\) Bertelli, *La Madonna*, 28-33.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 82.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 21-22, 85.

\(^{19}\) Bertelli, *La Madonna*, 84.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 83.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 85-88. This position is accepted by most of the other scholars, though Kenny does try to argue for support of the veracity of the *Liber pontificalis*. Kinney, “S. Maria in Trastevere,” 150.
Bertelli, while concentrating primarily on the style of the icon, draws comparisons to John VII’s other, more clearly accepted commissions, to strengthen his argument for John as the patron. He discusses the mosaics in John VII’s chapel in Old Saint Peter’s and John’s frescoes in Santa Maria Antiqua (Figs. 8 and 9), which Bertelli describes has having the same weighty form as the *Madonna della Clemenza*.\(^{22}\) Unfortunately, all of Bertelli’s style comparisons are among objects executed in different media.\(^{23}\) The inherent differences between the medium of mosaic, fresco and encaustic make his style argument seem less plausible. Where Bertelli is able to distinguish his position from others is in the observations of the iconography that he makes while comparing style.\(^{24}\) Nevertheless, Bertelli does not himself emphasize the iconography of *Madonna della Clemenza* or of John VII’s other commissions. This deprives Bertelli’s argument of what I believe to be potentially the strongest evidence for the case that John VII was the icon’s patron.

Dale Kinney raised several important questions about Bertelli’s attribution. For her, Bertelli’s comparison of the crown in the icon to the crown in John VII’s mosaics from Old Saint Peter’s is unconvincing. She suggested that the icon's crown, being far more elaborate, is similar to that worn by the Empress Zoë in an image dated to 1042-55 in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Fig. 10). She also disagreed with Bertelli comparison between the frescoes of Santa Maria Antiqua and the icon. The frescoes, according to Kinney, are “bold and splashy,” whereas the angels in the icon are carefully “controlled and precisely defined.”\(^{25}\)

On the problem of the possible identity of the icon’s kneeling figure, Kinney proposes that it represents Pope Callistus I, honored by Gregory IV because Callistus was traditionally identified as the founder of Santa Maria in Trastevere.\(^{26}\) In contrast, Bertelli proposed that the

---

\(^{22}\) Bertelli, *La Madonna*, 84-85

\(^{23}\) While a comparison between fresco and encaustic is not difficult follow, Bertelli spends more time on the mosaic in Old Saint Peter’s, which is not as easily comparable to the icon.

\(^{24}\) Bertelli, *La Madonna*, 58, notes the similarity in the way the folds of the Virgin’s dress in the icon matches those of the Marian image commissioned for Old Saint Peter’s. He also explains how the crown of both Virgins share the same tripartite elaboration, though that of the icon is more intricate.


\(^{26}\) Kinney was not the first to suggest that the kneeling figure represented Callistus I. In 1906, Giuseppe Wilpert traced the identification of the kneeling figure as Callistus I back to the twelfth century; as cited by Kinney, “S. Maria in Trastevere,” 163.
kneeling figure was John VII. Bertelli connects John VII’s interest in being represented in the icon, as in other works, with the Pope’s personal devotion to Mary and to the church in Trastevere, which is thought to be the oldest Marian church in Rome. One problem with Bertelli’s argument for John VII as the patron is that it depends upon the pope commissioning works for Trastevere and there is no creditable evidence to connect John VII with Trastevere.

While I agree with Bertelli that the image depicts John VII, I find there are other more compelling grounds, quite apart from the icon’s placement within Santa Maria in Trastevere, in order to identify the kneeling figure. Indeed, the identification of the figure of the donor as either Callistus I or John VII in previous scholarship has been entirely dependant on the supposition that the icon was made for Santa Maria in Trastevere, a supposition that I will question in chapter two.

In earlier scholarship, Bertelli and Kinney represented the most popular theories concerning the icon’s origin. This uneasy and bifurcated consensus has shifted recently with the work of scholars such as Ann van Dijk, Robert Deshman, and Erik Thunø, who have distanced themselves from what they see as a problematic attribution either to John VII or Gregory IV. These scholars, while writing on other commissions of John VII, have relegated their discussion of the icon to one or two footnotes in which they confess a lack of confidence in any attribution. This has created a void in research; whereas studies on John VII have continued and progressed, problems concerning the icon’s patron have been labeled as unsolvable.

I believe that the means to provide a more convincing argument for John VII as the patron of the Madonna della Clemenza lies in an analysis of Mary’s costume. All of the examples of Maria Regina found in Rome from the sixth to the ninth century wear not only crowns, but full imperial regalia. Although the type of dress depicted in each example could be dated to a wide range of dates between the sixth to ninth centuries, there is a recognizable

---

27 Bertelli, La Madonna, 18-21.
28 The only document that associates John VII with the church is from the eighteenth century; Kinney, “S. Maria in Trastevere,” 150.
30 Bertelli does identify the garments worn by Mary, but he does not elaborate upon their
repetitious pattern of design in Mary’s costume in John VII’s commission, that reappears in the
*Madonna della Clemenza*.

Although the *Madonna della Clemenza* has no stylistic twin, it does share several visual
similarities to works drawn from the 300 years discussed as the era of its creation. Ultimately,
while the icon shares some characteristics with images from each of these centuries, John VII’s
commissions provide the closest stylistic comparisons. Specifically, the face, garments and
crown of the figures in the icon resemble John VII’s commissions in Rome at Santa Maria
Antiqua and Old Saint Peter's and, of those two, the icon is a closer match to the Marian image
in Old Saint Peter's (Fig. 8) because both depicted Mary according to the iconography of *Maria
Regina*.

One of the earliest representations of a crowned Madonna is found inside Santa Maria
Antiqua (Fig. 5). Depicted on the palimpsest layer of fresco, dated to 580, a seated *Maria
Regina* with Christ child is flanked by two angel attendants. This image is part of the oldest
fresco layer in the church and would have been covered over by at least one later layer during
John VII’s time. As a result it could not have been known to him.31

A close inspection of this image shows how it differs from the *Madonna della Clemenza*.
For example, the crown on the figure of Mary in the icon is more elaborate than the one in Santa
Maria Antiqua. The Madonna's crown has three jeweled floral forms atop the crown, two on the
sides and a larger one in the middle. It also has round and angular components making up the
base and top, whereas the fresco uses only angular forms to create the entire crown. The end
result is that the *Madonna della Clemenza*'s crown appears lighter and more delicate than the
crown from Santa Maria Antiqua. Unfortunately, the extensive losses of fresco in the wall
painting make it impossible to compare the *pendulia*, or hanging strands of gems attached to the
crown, but a small portion of the crown remains visible to the left of Mary’s right eye. Here we
can see a difference in how the crown rests upon the head. The crown in the icon sits squarely
atop the head. That in the fresco is more helmet-like, resting low and curving to fit the forehead

---

31 The fresco layer is so old that it has been speculated that it may date to before the conversion
of the space from a Byzantine guardhouse into a church during the late sixth century. Richard
Krautheimer, Wolfgang Franckl, and Spencer Corbett, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum
and resting just above the ears.  

The depiction of Theodora's crown at San Vitale in Ravenna (c. 548) has been suggested as a comparable contemporary example to that of the Santa Maria Antiqua Virgin (Fig. 12).  

While Theodora’s crown is more complex than the crown depicted on the image of Mary in Santa Maria Antiqua, it also lacks specific similarities to the *Madonna della Clemenza*. Instead, Theodora's crown has more pearl patterns and rectangular gemstone patterns in its design. Also, on Theodora's crown there is a very pronounced central point and two almost unnoticeable side points. In the icon Mary’s crown is structured around three points, but it differs from the mosaic in the relative proportion of those same points. Finally, Theodora's crown sits differently on her head than the crown worn by the Virgin in the icon. Like the crown in Santa Maria Antiqua, Theodora's crown is depicted resting on her head, not in a straight line, but in an arch-like shape. Specifically, the sides of the crown extend to a level just above the ears. The lack of specific comparative examples for the icon’s crown is also found when we consider Mary’s garments in the icon.

The image at Santa Maria Antiqua also differs from the icon in the treatment of the tunic. Both images are similar in the garment's neckline; however, as with the crown, the tunic in the icon is much more elaborate. In addition, there is a major difference in the specific garment in which the Madonna is depicted. In the fresco, a diagonal strip of gems and pearls is shown forming a “V” on Mary’s tunic just behind Christ's head. The fabric is then swagged to form a crescent shape at Christ's feet and then a third jeweled band falls straight down the middle of the Virgin's garment. This is most like a representation of the *loros*, an imperial vestment, worn by the emperor and empress, which consisted of a leather strap seven-meters long, which was encrusted with gold and gems. The *loros* was worn over the shoulders and crossed at the chest. One part of the leather strap was allowed to hang straight down while the other draped over an arm. Significantly, the *Madonna della Clemenza* does not depict Mary wearing a *loros*.

---

32 Imperial crowns often sat above the eye line in the eighth century and after according to Jennifer Ball, “Byzantine Dress” (Ph. D. diss., New York University, 2001), 19. 
35 There are no examples of a seated empress figure wearing a *loros*, with the exception of Mary in the sixth-century wall fresco inside Santa Maria Antiqua. Examples of figures wearing a *loros*
Instead she is shown wearing a *dalmatic*, which is a type of imperial tunic worn by empresses and princesses that is belted high beneath the breasts.\textsuperscript{36} The choice of depicting Mary in a *dalmatic* instead of the *loros* distinguishes John VII Marian image from all of the other comparative examples.

Another example of *Maria Regina* is found in a sixth-century mosaic at the church of the Amphitheatre in Duress, Albania (Fig. 13). At first, the mosaic appears to be very similar to the Roman icon. Both images have kneeling figures depicted beside an image of Mary as a queen, flanked by angels. However, on closer inspection, the Marian images are somewhat different. As with the Santa Maria Antiqua image, here, too, Mary is depicted wearing a *loros*. Also, the kneeling figures are not members of the clergy, but the emperor and empress. The image, therefore, lacks specific similarities to the icon of the *Madonna della Clemenza*. We must look later than the sixth century to find comparable examples.

A similar iconography of dress was employed in the eighth and ninth centuries in other depictions of female saints and Mary. Figures were often depicted wearing a *dalmatic* without the *loros*. In contrast to earlier Roman examples, which provided little to compare with the icon, in the eighth-century examples commissioned by John VII several similarities are apparent. In the pope's oratory in Old Saint Peter's, there was a central image of an orant *Maria Regina*, a seventeenth-century drawing (Fig. 8) is the only record of how the oratory was decorated. The drawing also shows that Mary was flanked by an image of the pope offering a model of the church to her.\textsuperscript{37} A fragment from the oratory mosaics survives, depicting only the image of Mary, having been moved the church of San Marco, Florence (Fig. 11).\textsuperscript{38} The mosaic bears a can be found in the sixth-century apse mosaic at the Church of Sant’Agnese fuori le Mura. The artists who created the fresco and the mosaic both understood the importance of this vestment and how it should be depicted.

\textsuperscript{36} The garment that Mary wears in the icon is a specific type of early Byzantine imperial attire. One of the earliest examples of an imperial woman wearing a *dalmatic* is in an illustration from *The Book of Job* (Naples I.B. 18) commissioned by Heraklios (circa 615-40). The women wearing the *dalmatic* are the Empress Martina, her sister Epiphania and daughter Eudoxia. See Ball, “Byzantine Dress,” 32.

\textsuperscript{37} The seventeenth-century drawings were made by Giacomo Grimaldi, which record fairly precisely the appearance and layout of the mosaics that decorated the structure; R. Niggl ed., *Descrizione della basilica antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano: Codice Barberini Latino 2733* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1972), 123.

\textsuperscript{38} The mosaic image matches the drawing made of it before the oratory was destroyed. Thus, we
strong resemblance to the *Madonna della Clemenza* icon.\(^{39}\) The figure’s garment has the same alternating round and rectangular patterning in the jeweled neckline of the tunic, as well as the repetition of pearl-like pendants along the neckline. There is also the inclusion of a high-waisted belt in both images. Roundel patterns appear on the shoulders which, though simplified on the mosaic, still have the basic decorative design of circular patterns surrounded by a pearl-like border. The cuffs of both garments share the same alternating pattern found around the neck. The icon’s drapery pattern is the same as the mosaic’s, even though the icon represents Mary as enthroned while in the mosaic she is standing. Although profound losses of encaustic at the bottom of the icon make it impossible to completely understand how the drapery was depicted in that area, there is enough to show that the tunic in the icon and that in the mosaic have the same diagonal swag of fabric draped over another end piece that hangs straight down.

The headgear in both the icon and the mosaic are similar in their design. They both have a three-pointed crown, but here, again, as with the decorative patterns on the garments, the mosaic’s crown is simplified. This simplification might be due either to limitations in the mosaic medium or the participation of different artists. Regardless of the reason, the differences in complexity between these two works are not as pronounced as those that emerge when comparing these objects with other artworks discussed in this chapter. Ultimately, Mary’s crown as depicted in the oratory of John VII is much closer in its artistic rendering to that of the icon’s crown than are examples put forth by other authors.\(^{40}\) Thus, John VII’s mosaics provide the best example of a garment and crown to match those depicted in the icon.

The style of ninth-century images are far too different to be considered similar to the icon and thus cannot reasonably be considered as contemporary with the *Madonna della Clemenza*. For example, the mosaic from the apse of San Marco in Rome, which was commissioned by Gregory IV, has little in common with the icon (Fig. 7). In that work, all of the figures have long can gather that the mosaic has not been significantly changed from the time that it was in Old Saint Peter’s.

\(^{39}\) The icon does have a diagonal decorative pattern by the right arm. It is unclear if that pattern was also repeated on the left side. This pattern is not repeated in any other representation of saints, empresses or Mary that I have come across. The closest comparison is with some of the ninth-century images like the figure of Saint Agnes in the ninth-century apse mosaic in San Marco, Rome, where the garment has a decorative line down the middle.

\(^{40}\) Kinney, “S. Maria in Trastevere,” 153. She states that the crown of Theodora in San Vitale is closer in design to the crown in the icon than to the mosaic in Old Saint Peter’s.
thin faces and the female figures wear crowns that look more like small tiaras than the substantial crowns from the earlier examples. Furthermore, there are no surviving examples of major commissions in Rome during the ninth century depicting Maria Regina with which to make a direct comparison. However, there are examples of female saints wearing garments in the imperial style. In the image of Saint Agnes from San Marco, one sees an odd piece of fabric that hangs down under the diagonal fold of the tunic (Fig. 14). Covering the saint’s hands is another piece of fabric with the same pattern, on which is supported a crown. The placement of the same type of fabric over the arm and down the front, does relate to the manner in which the loros would have been worn, but a rendering in this way does not follow the standard artistic conventions for depicting this garment. In the correct way, the loros would be depicted on top of the robes rather than underneath. There is a conceptual understanding of how this vestment is supposed to be depicted, yet what the mosaic lacks is a clear understanding of how the garment appears when worn.

Ultimately, for many reasons, the patron of Madonna della Clemenza was most logically John VII. While textual sources suggest a different patron and date for the icon, those sources are contradictory. Furthermore, the visual evidence of the icon does not match representative artistic examples dated to the same time as the literary sources were written. Although past stylistic analysis has not been able to identify the patron with certainty, the iconographic analysis I have presented here does provide a support for the idea that John VII commissioned the work.

41 This garment design can be found also in the sixth-century mosaic depicting the procession of the Virgins in the Church of Saint Apollinare Nuovo. Where shows several figures are dressed like the image from San Marco. However, no one has yet drawn a connection between sixth-century costume and eighth or ninth-century examples. In this author’s opinion, it would seem plausible that the invocation of this earlier iconography might be connected to the papacy’s desire to no longer be under Byzantine control, but this would require additional research outside the scope of this paper.
CHAPTER 2
THE ORIGINAL LOCATION OF THE MADONNA DELLA CLEMENZA

Scholars have been in agreement that the Madonna della Clemenza probably has been located in Santa Maria in Trastevere since its creation. The reference in the De locis sanctis of a Marian image at the church in Trastevere is the prime reason that scholars consider the Madonna della Clemenza as having been made for the church. There is, however, no evidence to connect John VII to this church, nor is there any indication before the mid-ninth century that the icon was placed there. Therefore, there is a gap of over a hundred years from the icon's creation to Gregory IV's use of it in the rededication of the main altar in 828-844 AD.

As we shall see, examples of the Madonna della Clemenza's composition and iconography can be found in palaces, as well as religious structures. Whereas parallels between the icon and other religious artworks have been discussed, the context of that discussion centers on the icon as if commissioned for a church. In contrast, I believe that there is sufficient evidence for us to consider that the Madonna della Clemenza was created for display in a palace. That is not to say that similarities between the icon and palace decoration have been completely ignored. Hans Belting, for instance, compared the icon’s composition with images found in a description of the imperial throne room in Constantinople, called the Chrysotriklinos. While Belting’s analysis was fascinating, here again, he never considered that the Roman icon might have been intended for a palace. However, there is strong evidence that the Madonna della Clemenza was being created for a palace, supported by records of John VII’s patronage and from compositional and iconographic similarities the icon shares with other known palace decorations.

The Liber Ponticalis records that John VII built, or at least was in the process of

---

42 Bertelli, La Madonna, 56, uses an eighteenth-century source to link John VII with the church; Carlo Bartolomeo Piazza, Eorterologio overo le sacre stazioni romane, e feste mobili (Rome, 1702), as cited by Kinney, “S. Maria in Trastevere,” 150.
building before his death, a palace (*Episcopium*) above the church of Santa Maria Antiqua.\(^{43}\)

This church has a complex history, created within an area of the imperial residence constructed on the Palatine hill by the emperor Tiberius. The area that was later transformed into the church originally served as a guardhouse for the stairs that linked the Forum to the Palatine residence.\(^{44}\)

The guardhouse had been utilized as a church for some time during John VII’s life, but the other parts of the palace had long been abandoned.

As Richard Krautheimer argued, the area of the city where Santa Maria Antiqua is located became a gathering point of the Greek community. From the time of Gregory the Great (590 -604) to John VII, Greeks living in this area enjoyed a certain level of autonomy. The pope, who acted as the mayor of the city did not have control over this zone of the city.\(^{45}\)

Thus, the rebuilding of the palace, along with redecorations at Santa Maria Antiqua, attests to John’s desire to maintain a papal presence within this Greek community in Rome. Furthermore, John’s choice to create an icon that represented the pope in *proskynesis*, a pose that would have been familiar to Greeks, might relate to the fact that the palace was in the predominantly Greek section of Rome.\(^{46}\)

Given the popularity of icons in the East at this time, it is reasonable to propose that John VII commissioned the icon for his new palace to express his authority as pope in a distinctively Greek manner.

---

\(^{43}\) “*Basilicam itaque sanctae Dei genetricis qui Antiqua vocatur picture decoravit, illicque ambonem noviter fecit et super eadem ecclesiam episcopium quantum ad se contruere maluit, illicque pontificati sui tempus vitam finivit.*”

“In the Basilica of Santa Maria Antiqua [John] adorned the church with new paintings, at the same time new ambo and above this same church he built great papal palace unsuccessfully, there his life and pontificate came to an end.”

Latin quoted from Duchesne, *Liber pontificalis*, vol. I, 384. Interestingly, the term *Episcopium* is used in the lives of Popes Severinus, Theodore, Saint Martin I, John V, Conon and Sergius I to refer specifically to the palace at the Lateran basilica, whereas the term is used to refer to the palace beside Santa Maria Antiqua in John VII’s life. The term is only used to refer to a palace other than the Lateran in John’s life and might point to his reluctance to remain at the Lateran and instead making his primary residence in the Greek community around the Palatine hill. Raymond Davis, trans., *The Book of Pontiffs, Translated Texts for Historians*, Latin Series V, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 88.


As mentioned earlier, Belting suggested that the icon’s overall composition was derivative of the decoration in the imperial throne room in Constantinople, called the *Chrysotriklinos.*\(^{47}\) Unfortunately, that space was destroyed first during Iconoclasm and then again by the Turks in the fifteenth century, and the only record of the room is a source that records the room’s dedicatory inscription from c. 860.\(^{48}\) According to that text, the room contained an image of Christ above the imperial throne, along with depictions of the then current Emperor Michael III and the Patriarch Photios. Although the images date to the ninth-century, the document does state that the decoration was a restoration of images that existed earlier.\(^{49}\) There is no mention in the source of how the images of the Emperor or Patriarch were posed. Although the palace does not survive, it has been argued that the extant mosaic above the imperial door of Hagia Sophia was based upon the *Chrysotriklinos* decoration (Fig. 15). In that image, the emperor, believed to be Leo IV, is depicted kneeling in *proskynesis*, in a similar manner to the pope in the *Madonna della Clemenza*.

---

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 343.

\(^{47}\) One problem with this theory is that John VII, as far as we know, did not travel to Constantinople, although, as Nordhagen argues, John VII was well connected to individuals who did. Thus, it is possible that John VII would have been aware of the throne room imagery and sought to copy it. Per Jonas Nordhagen, “Constantinople on the Tiber: The Byzantines in Rome and the Iconography of Their Images,” in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald Bullough*, ed. Julia M. H. Smith (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2000), 133-34.


The ray of Truth has shone forth again and has dimmed the eyes of the imposters [the iconoclasts]. Piety has grown, error has fallen, faith blooms and Grace spreads out. For behold, once again the image of Christ shines above the imperial throne and confounds the murky heresies; while above the entrance is represented the Virgin as divine gate and guardian. The Emperor [Michael III] and the Bishop [Photios] are depicted close by along with their collaborators inasmuch as they have driven away error, and all round the building, like guards, [stand], apostles, martyrs, priests. Hence well “the new Chrysotriklinos” that which aforetime had been given a golden name [Chrysotriklinos], since it contains the throne of Christ, our Lord, the forms of Christ’s Mother and Christ’s heralds, and the image of [Emperor] Michael whose deeds are filled with wisdom.

\(^{49}\) This might mean that the decoration was a restoration of images in general, for example, after the end to Iconoclasm, or that this is the recreation of the decorative program as it existed before Iconoclasm.
There are some problems with the idea that the Roman icon was based upon the *Chrysotriklinos* decoration. First, it is unlikely that John VII ever saw the throne room in person. Also, the mosaic at Hagia Sophia, believed to have been commissioned by the Patriarch of Constantinople, has been interpreted by some scholars as conveying an admonition toward the emperor depicted.\(^{50}\) As a result, the icon might not be an accurate representation of the palace decoration. Furthermore, in the imperial palace, the emperor is not depicted alone with holy figures, but with the patriarch. However, the closing line of the inscription mentions that the imagery includes Christ, Mary, angels and the emperor, a similar cast of characters depicted on the icon.\(^{51}\)

Most scholars who have examined John VII’s commissions have determined that their style and iconography was an amalgam of Eastern and Western artistic traditions. Nordhagen suggested that John VII, being from an influential Greek family in Rome, would have known, through friends and people associated with the family, of the contemporary iconographic developments in Constantinople. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that John would have known something of the iconography of a famous room he had never seen.

The act of praying in a *proskynesis* position does not, of course, always have a negative connotation. There are numerous examples of emperors being depicted in this manner, without conveying anti-imperial meaning. Furthermore, the arguments for an anti-imperial interpretation of the Hagia Sophia mosaic are developed more through biography than through iconography.\(^{52}\) That is, the arguments center more on who commissioned the work, rather than the way that it appears. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that the icon is indeed a conceptual copy of the imperial throne room. Thus, the Trastevere icon may have been created to convey a similar relationship for John VII and Mary that the Byzantine emperor had created between himself and Christ.

Nevertheless, there are important differences between the *Chrysotriklinos* and the icon,

---

\(^{50}\) One of the most popular arguments concerning why the mosaic was created states that Patriarch Photios created the image after Emperor Leo IV was excommunicated for marrying four times. Nicholas Oikonomidès, “Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of Saint Sophia,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 30 (1976): 151-172.

\(^{51}\) An important question to consider is whether the Chrysotriklinos decoration depicted an adult Christ.

\(^{52}\) Oikonomidès’ theory was based solely on textual sources relating to Leo VI and the Patriarch
which center on the positions held by the men who commissioned the works and their personal
goals. The image from the throne room establishes the relationship between the emperor and the
Church and also the emperor and God. From the imperial perspective, the emperor is equal to the
patriarch and together both serve Christ. In contrast, the icon does not include a representation
of a secular leader. For a pope in Rome, there would be no need to represent a secular ruler
because, again, the pope served that role in Rome. Also, through the writing of Pope Gelasius I
(492 - 496), the papacy argued that secular rulers were of a lesser significance to the church
because it was the church, not secular kings, who held the keys to salvation. Therefore, the
differences between who was depicted in the two works should be understood as relating to the
different power structures that existed for the patrons who commissioned those works.

Even if the subject of the Chrysotriklinos imagery, recorded in that ninth-century
inscription, did not exist during John VII's lifetime, the pope would have been aware of the
political and theological connections the emperors were seeking to make through another
medium. That medium was coinage, which by its nature, enjoyed wide circulation. The
Byzantine emperor who was in power during John VII's reign was Justinian II (669 - 711), the
first emperor to have Christ's image depicted on a coin. Justinian II's coin had an image of
Christ on one side and his own portrait on the other (Fig. 16). Thus, in these coins a comparison
is made between the emperor and Christ, the same political claim made by the Chrysotriklinos

Photios, Ibid., 151-172.

53 This idea was expressed in a famous letter of Pope Gelasius I to the Emperor Anastasius in
which he wrote:

There are two powers by which the world is chiefly governed, the sacred authority
of the priesthood and royal power. Of these, the responsibility of the priests is
weighty in so far as they will answer for the kings of men themselves at the divine
judgment. You know, most clement son [Anastasius], that, although you take
precedence over all mankind in dignity, nevertheless you piously bow the neck to
those who have charge of divine affairs and seek from them the means of your
salvation and hence you realize that, in the order of religion, in matters concerning
the reception and right administration of the heavenly sacraments, you ought to
submit yourself rather than rule, and that in these matters you should depend on their
judgment rather than seek to bend them to your will.

Gelasius I, Epistulae 12, in A. Thiel, ed., Epistulae Romanorum Pontificum (Brunsberg, 1868) as
quoted in Jeffrey Richards, *The Popes and the Papacy in the Early Middle Ages 476-752*

54 For background on Justinian II see Constance Head, *Justinian II of Byzantium* (Madison, WI:
University of Wisconsin Press, 1972).
and a claim comparable in certain ways to that made by the icon about John VII’s relationship to Mary. More than casting himself in audience with Christ, Justinian II depicted himself as Christ-like. The emperor’s currency circulated throughout the Empire, including Rome, during John VII’s lifetime.\footnote{Krautheimer comments that during the excavation of Santa Maria Antiqua one of Justinian II’s coins was found. Krautheimer, \textit{Rome}, 343, n. 98.} Therefore, John VII was aware of the type of visual connections being made in Constantinople between the emperor and Christ. It is not unreasonable to suggest that John VII appropriated this compositional framework for the \textit{Madonna della Clemenza} if the icon was to be placed within a palace. The icon is then a conflation of royal and religious artistic traditions of representation. An example of how the icon might have influenced later palace decoration can be found at Saint John in the Lateran.

In Rome, a ninth-century image from the papal palace of Saint John in the Lateran closely resembled the \textit{Madonna della Clemenza}. There in the \textit{Triclinium}, or banquet hall, of Leo III (795–816) a mosaic depicted an enthroned Saint Peter flanked by Pope Leo III and Charlemagne kneeling in much the same manner as John VII kneels before Mary (Fig. 17).\footnote{Herbert L. Kessler, \textit{Rome 1300: On the Path of the Pilgrim} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 34-35.} The mosaic provides us with evidence that the same compositional format used by John was used by later popes. The fact that Leo III commissioned his mosaic for the Lateran palace further strengthens my suggestion that the \textit{Madonna della Clemenza} could have been created for a similar palace space. The icon might have even been the inspiration for Leo III’s \textit{Triclinium} mosaics.

The political message of the \textit{Triclinium} mosaic is that the authority of the pope is derived from Petrine Supremacy, i.e., the office of pope can be traced back to Saint Peter whom Christ entrusted as his successor. This concept is visually represented by Leo III being handed the \textit{pallium}, a ceremonial band of wool, by Saint Peter as a symbol of the pope’s spiritual authority.\footnote{Ibid.} Unlike the \textit{Madonna della Clemenza}, however, the secular ruler is included. Charlemagne is shown being handed a standard, the vexillum, as symbol of his temporal authority by Christ himself.

Although I draw attention to the similarities the \textit{Madonna della Clemenza} has with the
Lateran mosaic, it neither depicts the ceding of temporal authority to another individual nor does it even show a holy figure ceding spiritual authority to John VII. This difference between the mosaic and the icon, I believe, is emblematic of the different goals the patrons sought for their commissions. In much the same way that the Chrysotriklinos differs from the icon, the Lateran mosaic was created to express in visual terms political alliance between the papacy and Charlemagne. In contrast, the icon was created for devotional purposes, which I will discuss further below. Nevertheless, it is an example, albeit a hundred years later, of a Roman palace wall mosaic that shares compositional similarities to the image of the Madonna della Clemenza, in the interaction between holy and living figures.

When the icon is compared to religious images from chapels and other sites, dating both before and after its presumed date at the beginning of the eighth century, those works lack the compositional similarities found in the palace examples. For example, an early work with similar iconography from a religious site can be found in the widow Turtura fresco dating to circa 530 in the Comodilla catacombs in Rome (Fig. 18). In this image, a wealthy woman, with two saints acting as intercessors, kneels before the enthroned Madonna and Child. There is an inscription below that attests to the widow’s thirty years of celibacy after her husband’s death. It has been argued that what is represented in this fresco is a visual comparison between the Virgin and the chaste widow.\textsuperscript{58} Although this image is similar to the icon, it lacks the icon’s more direct interaction of the donor with Mary. Turtura is depicted with a saint as her intercessor, unlike the icon in which John VII is alone. However, the inscription compares Turtura’s actions to the Virgin’s and they both share the same type of dress. This indicates that before John’s time artistic conventions existed for comparing individuals to the holy figure of Mary.

Another example from the East, the sixth-century mosaic in the church of the Amphitheatre in Durres in Albania, shows a donor and his wife kneeling beside an image of Maria Regina in a very similar manner to the way in which John VII is shown in the Madonna della Clemenza (Fig. 13). The mosaic is part of the overall decoration for the patron’s burial chapel. It is doubtful that the pope would have been aware of this image, but it does point to early Byzantine traditions of representing Mary as queen with donors being depicted at her feet.

\textsuperscript{58} Charles Barber, “Early Representations of the Mother of God,” in Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira Editore, 2000),
Other examples, slightly later than the icon, are telling. A kneeling image of a donor occurs both in the Theodotus chapel in Santa Maria Antiqua, dated to 741-752, and in the mosaics commissioned by Pope Paschal I for Santa Maria in Domnica dated to 817-820 (Fig. 19). In the image from the Theodotus chapel, the donor, Theodotus, is depicted holding two candles in his hands as he kneels before an image of *Maria Regina* (Fig. 20). In the conch mosaic from the Roman church of Santa Maria in Domnica, Pope Paschal I is depicted as a supplicant, kneeling in front of Mary and holding her foot in his hands. This image was meant to show the Virgin’s support for Paschal I and, like the *Madonna della Clemenza*, depicts a living Pope devoted to Mary.

Each of these religious images share partial similarities to the *Madonna della Clemenza*, but only the ninth-century examples have similar complex compositions of depicting a living person in proximity to holy individuals. Earlier examples include saints acting as intercessors for the individual represented. Also, the religious images that pre-date the icon, with the one exception from the church at Durres in Albania, do not attempt to draw out comparisons between the patron and someone of imperial authority. Conversely, examples of palace decoration make a more impressive comparison to the icon and show that the icon’s compositional arrangement creating a relationship between Mary and John VII was also being made between emperors and Christ or later popes and Saint Peter.

These examples demonstrate that the icon’s composition was not limited to individuals from a specific social position or region of the Mediterranean, nor was its composition original. The icon appears to derive its iconography from both church and palace examples. Even though I argue that the image was most likely meant for a palace, the compositional similarities it shares with church decoration leads one to believe that the meaning of the icon cannot be understood as purely political. The host of possible additional meanings will be addressed in the final chapter.

253-260.

59 Bertelli, *La Madonna*, 80-89. These works were discussed by Bertelli as having the *Madonna Della Clemenza* as their antecedent.
CHAPTER 3

JOHN VII’S COMMISSIONS AND MARIAN DEVOTION IN ROME

Pope John VII’s reign, though lasting less than three years, is thought by many to be a high point in the commissioning of artwork relating to the cult of Mary. There were, however, examples of Marian devotion in Rome that preceded John VII’s life by at least a hundred years. Whether John, as pope, was adopting the Roman tradition of highlighting a special position for Mary, or if he himself was a devoted follower of Rome’s existing Marian cult, is difficult to know. But it is certain that all of John VII’s commissions relate directly to Mary, and he included an image of himself in all those commissions.

By examining John VII’s contributions to Marian devotion in Rome, I will show that the icon of the Madonna della Clemenza and John’s other commissions served to illustrate an ideal relationship between the pope and the Church. John was conscious of his audience when contracting these commissions and, therefore, looked to Greek iconographic traditions for objects symbolically meaningful to the Greek community. At the same time, however, he also used iconography recognizable to the Latin community in his commissions. Ultimately, John VII sought to create artwork that would unify an isolated Greek community with a distrustful

---

60 For a broader discussion of John VII and his contribution to Marian imagery see the following. On the issues of style see Ernst Kitzinger, Römische Malerei vom Beginn des 7 bis zur Mitte des 8 Jahrhunderts (Munich: Ludwig Maximilians Universität, 1934). For iconology, see Bertelli, La Madonna. For political and iconographic analysis see Nordhagen, “Constantinople on the Tiber,” and Ursula Nilgen, "Maria Regina-Ein politischer Kultbildtypus?,” Römisches Jarbuch für Kunstgeschichte 19 (1981): 1-33.

61 For information on the Cult of the Virgin in Rome see Hans Belting, Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of
Latin one through the utilization of the common affinity that both groups had towards Marian devotion and imagery. John VII’s ultimate goal was to create artwork that highlighted specific liturgical and devotional aspects of his position on the cult of Mary. While I intend to advance the idea that the icon was created for devotional purposes, past scholarship has focused almost completely on political theories to explain its meaning.

Past political interpretations of John VII’s commissions were developed through iconographic analysis. Each of these political theories is based upon a single event recorded in John’s official papal life, that is, the Byzantine emperor Justinian II’s insistence that the Pope sign the canons of the Quinisext Council of 692. The issue of signing the canons had been a point of contention since the pontificate of pope Sergius I (687-701) and, with the exception of John VII, the popes are recorded in the Liber pontificalis as having strongly condemned the council. Although John did not sign the canons, his biographer records that he wrote to Justinian II stating, “that he [John] could find nothing wrong with the canon, but forgot to sign them.”

John’s conciliatory actions towards the canons, so different from earlier pontiffs, has led scholars to use this to determine the pope’s overall position on the relationship between Byzantium and Rome.

As mentioned in chapter one, scholars have noted that John’s commissions are a melding of Eastern and Western iconographic choices. Iconographic details characteristic of each region

---


63 The Emperor sought Rome’s approval of the decrees of the Quinisext Council of 692. The synod was comprised of only Eastern clergy who sought, among other things, to limit artistic representations of Christ to human forms, to nullify the restriction on marriage for deacons and canons established by Rome, and to reaffirm the primacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople over all other bishops. When the document was sent to then Pope Sergius I (687-701), he refused to sign it. Sergius’s refusal to sign the decrees of the synod resulted in Emperor Justinian II sending a military officer to Rome to bring Sergius to Constantinople, which failed only because of a popular uprising in the streets against the arrest of the Pope. Pressure from Justinian II ceased after he was deposed in 695. But, that same Emperor regained power in 705, a few months after the beginning of John VII’s pontificate, and he once again sought the Pope’s signature on the synod’s decrees. John is recorded in the Liber pontificalis as sending them back unsigned but stating that he could not find anything wrong with them.

64 Davis trans., Book of Pontiffs, 98.
employed in these commissions have been compared in the hope that it would provide evidence of John’s possible position on the role of the Roman Church in the Byzantine Empire. It has been argued through these analyses that John VII sought to commission images that were either pro-Rome or alternately conciliatory towards the East. For example, there have been conflicting interpretations over the supposed politically charged iconography in John’s decoration for the apse of the church of Santa Maria Antiqua. In that work, Pope Martin I, who was martyred by the Byzantines in 655, is depicted, as is an image of the Lamb of God, an iconographic type condemned by the Eastern Church. The inclusion of these images has been seen as evidence for the idea that John VII was loyal to Rome, as opposed to having any allegiance to Byzantium. However, other scholars have pointed out that the most prominent image in the apse is a crucifixion, which is done in what has been called an “Asiatic” style, and its central placement has been said to heighten its importance in comparison to the image of the Lamb of God. In addition, Breckinridge argued that the image of Christ in the apse was based upon the coinage of Justinian II where a similar image appears. Finally, during John’s reign the diaconicon, or chapel to the right of the central apse of Santa Maria Antiqua was decorated with images of the Greek Doctors, which further implies an Eastern proclivity. Ultimately, the reliance on the occurrences of specific regional iconography as the basis for arguments of John VII’s attitude towards the East or West fail.

Political arguments based upon iconography have also come into play in the discussion of the Madonna della Clemenza. The representation of Byzantine imperial garb on the Virgin in the icon has led some scholars, Hans Belting among them, to argue that John VII sought to

---

65 For a general discussion of the problem with attributing a specific viewpoint to John VII’s commissions see Nordhagen, “Constantinople on the Tiber,” 446.
68 Ibid., 369-71.
visually declare Rome's independence from the Byzantine Empire. The problem with Belting's idea is that the pope is depicted in a pose of extreme humility. If the pope sought to declare his independence from Justinian II, why would John have chosen to be depicted in this manner? While there is, without a doubt, some political significance to the icon, given the manner in which John chose to have himself depicted, I believe that there are more interesting motives for his patronage.

In contrast to these contradictory and dubious political interpretations, perhaps the best summation of the iconographical evidence of John's commissions was put forth by Nordhagen. He argued that John VII was well aware of the contemporary artistic trends in Constantinople and used them along with local Roman styles. For Nordhagen, John's commissions were a deliberate mixture of Eastern and Western styles, and if the intention was to advance a particular political stance, it is purposely left vague.

All of these arguments rely upon the idea that John VII would have had intimate knowledge of both Italian and Byzantine iconography. There is evidence that he would have had the means to be aware of contemporary art in Constantinople. John VII was a member of a high ranking Greek noble family in Rome. His father, Plato, was the *curator palatii*, or governor of the Imperial palaces, on the Palatine. Therefore, John VII’s family had strong associations, not only with the Greek community in Rome, but also with Constantinople.

Since the political interpretations previously advanced are based upon John’s selection of iconography and are contradictory, perhaps John’s melding of different iconography does not represent a political agenda, or at least not one that involves the Byzantine emperor. I would suggest instead that John commissioned the icon with the intention of improving relations between the Latins and Greeks in Rome. John lived in Rome during a transitional period for the Greek community. As Richard Krautheimer has pointed out, the role of the pope in early medieval Rome was quite the same as a ruler in other parts of Europe. Beyond liturgical

---

70 See for example, Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 126-127.
71 Nordhagen “*Constantinople on the Tiber,*” 130-34; points out that Kitzinger was the first to suggest that John VII was adapting Eastern and Western styles. Kitzinger went so far as to suggest, though not prove, that art in Rome from the eighth century could be viewed as representative of what was produced before Iconoclasm in Constantinople.
72 Krautheimer, *Rome*, 100.
73 Ibid., 106.
demands, the pope was the city's leader in charge of its upkeep and in the dispensing of justice. Krautheimer further explained that, during the sixth century, the pope's sphere of influence did not extend to the Palatine palaces, and it was precisely in these palaces that the Greek community settled and John VII's father was later employed.\(^74\) As Krautheimer explains, the Greek community's hegemony over this portion of the city was waning during John VII’s life, but still existed. Consequently, before becoming pope, John VII lived in Rome, but outside the influence of the Western popes. Therefore, he might have been viewed as a foreigner to the Latin Church. This might explain why his official papal life, as recorded in the Liber pontificalis, has a negative tone.\(^75\) One might suggest, then, that John may have created the icon, along with other commissions, not to challenge the authority of the emperor, but as a conciliatory gesture to the Latin community to prove that Greeks in Rome, himself included, considered themselves Romans. The conflation of iconography as seen in the icon might have been meant as a symbolic joining of these two communities in the papal city.

Here, again, the question of whether the imagery is politically charged must be addressed. This issue can be resolved if we reexamine the Virgin’s costume. Once again, Mary is depicted in the icon wearing a dalmatic, which unlike the loros, was specific to women. Mary’s garment is, however, in no way less imperial: the use and meaning of the loros was akin in the Byzantine state to the use of the crown jewels in England. Infrequently worn by the emperor and empress, lori were nevertheless often depicted in ‘official images,’ such as coinage. The lack of inclusion of this garment in the icon might seem odd if the pope was attempting to claim independence from the emperor. Instead the icon depicts John kneeling before a queen in Byzantine dress, but one who is not wearing the official garments of state. Specifically, Mary is depicted as a queen, but not as the empress in the garments that are the embodiment of the Byzantine state.

This consideration suggests that if John VII sought to create images to declare independence from the emperor as Belting has proposed, he would have had the Virgin wear a loros.\(^76\) The lack of that garment in the icon makes Mary, though still imperial, less

\(^74\) Ibid., 71-72.
\(^75\) Davis trans., Book of Pontiffs, 88.
\(^76\) According to the Book of Ceremonies, the emperor would wear the garment on other days if that emperor felt it was appropriate. Constantine Porphyrogenitus writes specifically about
representative of the Byzantine state and characterizes her as specifically feminine. Without the
inclusion of the *loros*, the icon lacks the emphatic level of imperial meaning that would have
been known to John VII. Furthermore, by depicting Mary in a garment worn only by women,
the icon cannot, as some have suggested, be thought of as a political declaration by John against
Justinian II. Instead, the choice of depicting Mary in a *dalmatic*, I believe, can be best
understood in terms of the icon’s devotional purposes.

Recently there has been ample discussion placing John VII’s commissions in a
devotional or liturgical context. The majority of these contributions center on the meaning that
lies behind the depiction of John with the Virgin identified as Queen of Heaven, Maria Regina.
The *Madonna della Clemenza*, because of questions surrounding its origin, for the most part has
not been included in this more recent scholarship, as was pointed out in chapter one. For
scholars, the depiction of John with Mary was emblematic of a relationship based upon the
humility of the pope as a servant of the Mother of God.

This can also be seen in John VII’s oratory in Old Saint Peter’s, where a large mosaic
image of John standing and praying in an orant gesture is depicted beside a larger image of the
Virgin, who is depicted as Maria Regina (Fig. 8). Below that mosaic is an inscription that states
that John is the “Unworthy Servant of Mary.” The mosaic image, along with the icon, are
extraordinary for they are some of the earliest known examples of a living pope depicted with
holy figures. Robert Deshman, discussing the meaning of the mosaic’s inscription, was able to
wearing the *loros* for the Pentecost. See Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Le Livre Des Cérémonies*,
that the period sources on Byzantine dress do not mention the *loros* in connection with Pentecost
and, for her, point to the garment being optional. Ball also gives the example of Basil I, who on
May 1, 880, wore the *loros* for the dedication of the Nea Ekklesia as an example of the garment
being worn when an emperor chose to distribute largess. Basil did give away a sizable portion of
his wealth in honor of the new church’s dedication. Ball suggests that the secular act of
distributing wealth superceded the connection of the *loros* to Easter. Ball, “Byzantine Dress,”
27.

“For the loroi wrapped around the magistri and patricii on the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ
our God recall His burial, while they recall, in the splendor of their gilding, the Resurrection... In
their wrappings being after the fashion of Christ’s burial wrappings.”

78 For a brief discussion of this early papal portraiture see van Dijk, “The Oratory of Pope John
VII.” Van Dijk points out that the icon is not the earliest example of a papal portrait. Popes
John IV, Pelagius (536 - 561) and Honorius (625 - 638) each had donor portraits produced in
relate the tone of the inscription to an established literary tradition that defined the proper relationship between a living person and Mary.  

Deshman developed an argument along devotional lines concerning why John’s commission in Old Saint Peter’s has an inscription on it that includes the phrase “John the unworthy servant of Mary.” He pointed out that the inscription referred to the ideal relationship of a person to Mary. This concept was being developed in theological writing during the seventh century and might have been part of the inspiration for John VII’s commissions. Deshman also examined, though in a limited fashion, how John’s image in Old Saint Peter’s related to liturgical function in the space. While he does develop the John VII material in an interesting direction, Deshman does not incorporate the Madonna della Clemenza in that discussion beyond a mere mention. Furthermore, he explains John’s motive for creating the mosaics as an anti-imperial message against Justinian II, arguing that John VII perceived the emperor as too proud. Unlike earlier scholars who based their political theories on the inclusion of Western or Eastern artistic forms, Deshman presents us with a political message that is conveyed through devotional themes. For Deshman, the stress on humility in the inscription at Old Saint Peter’s served the dual purpose of condemning a prideful emperor while simultaneously referring to contemporary trends in Marian devotion.

Deshman’s theory rests upon the notion that John VII’s reference to himself as various churches. All of those images were altered during later restorations. There is also a record in the Life of Gregory the Great, written by John the Deacon, of a self-portrait painted by Gregory for the monastery of Saint Andrew on the Caelian hill. John the Deacon, S. Gregorii Magni Vita 4:84 (Pat. Lat. 75: 230f.) as quoted by van Dijk, “The Oratory of Pope John VII,” 138.

79 See Deshman, "Servants of the Mother of God,” 33-70, and Barré, “La royauté de Marie,” 303-34.
81 This site was meant to be John’s funerary chapel. Deshman briefly discusses how the inscription might have related to prayers that would be offered on John’s behalf after his death. Deshman, “Servants of the Mother of God,” 37-38.
82 The basis of the problematic relationship between the Pope and the Emperor centered on the change of allegiance of the Emperor from supporting the Roman church’s primacy over theological matters in favor of Eastern bishops. The result of this shift was the Trullo controversy. For discussion of the council of Trullo and its effect on the East and West, see Jorj Ji Netunnatta and Jeffrey Featherstone, The Council in Trullo: Revisited (Rome : Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1995).
83 Deshman, “Servants of the Mother of God,” 36-42.
“unworthy” in the inscription on the mosaic and posed in a kneeling posture in the icon were extraordinary for his time. However, the opposite is the case. The *topos* of humility was extremely common during the early medieval period. For example, Gregory of Tours in the *History of the Franks* refers to himself as the “unworthy Gregory” in his list of the Bishops of Tours. Gregory of Tours also tells how pope Gregory the Great attempted to hide, rather than assume the office of pope. This same pope Gregory was known to refer to himself as the *Servus servorum Dei* (Servant of the Servants of God). Finally, in Einhard’s *Life of Charlemagne*, the author recorded that the King would not have gone to Saint Peter’s if he knew in advance that Pope Leo III intended to crown him Holy Roman Emperor. Therefore, John VII’s inscription, which expresses humility for the act of giving the chapel, should be understood as based upon the tradition of humility expressed by donors, especially those who were attaining high office, or receiving gifts or offices.

A more recent study by Ann van Dijk concerning the meaning of John VII’s chapel in Saint Peter’s has almost completely downplayed the political interpretation surrounding John VII’s commission. Van Dijk argued that the chapel’s iconography was determined primarily by liturgical needs. Building upon Deshman’s theory, she points out that the space was John’s

84 Ibid.
85 *History of the Franks*, Book X:31: “The nineteenth was I, unworthy Gregory, who found the church of Tours, in which the blessed Martin and the other bishops of the Lord were consecrated in the pontifical office, shattered and ruined by fire.” All of the quotes of Gregory of Tours were translated to English by the author from Grégoire de Tours, *Histoire des Francs*, trans. Robert Latouche (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996), 323.
86 *History of the Franks*, Book X:1: “And when Gregory was making ready to go to a hiding place he was seized and brought by force to the church of the blessed apostle Peter and there he was consecrated to the duties of bishop and made pope of the city.” Grégoire de Tours, *Histoire des Francs*, 259-260.
88 “He would not have entered the church that day if he had known in advance the plan of the Pope.” Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni. The Life of Charlemagne*, trans. Evelyn Scherabon Firchow and Edwin H. Zeydel (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1965), 99-100.
89 If I am correct in my analysis, it is interesting that the place where John’s temporal power was to be most evident, the palace, is where he chose to depict himself in the most humble manner.
funerary chapel and that the imagery referred to services held at the chapel to help his soul. In this reading, the chapel was meant to be a focal point of prayers for John’s salvation in the afterlife. The author points out that John’s tomb was, then, the most elaborate ever created for a pope who was not yet canonized.

My discussion of how John might have chosen to represent himself in relation to Mary is not meant to counter Deshman’s suggestion, only to stress that there are other reasons for John’s humility. However, in order to understand what might have been the reasons for commissioning the icon as a devotional object, the following questions will need to be addressed. First, how was the cult of Mary manifested in the West and the East and what, if any, was John VII’s original contribution to that cult? Who was the intended audience for the icon? Finally, what can we understand from the iconography and composition of the icon, specifically, John being depicted kneeling and presenting Mary as a royal figure.

Creating an icon in the context of Marian devotion was the most logical way for John to create devotional imagery that would have broad appeal. The cult of Mary existed throughout the Mediterranean with both Rome and Constantinople having well established ritual celebrations occurring on significant days in Mary’s life. Although the cults in both regions had wide appeal, during the seventh and eighth centuries it was in Rome that the Marian cult took full advantage of artistic expression. By the time John became pope, there were Marian icons in several of the titular churches of Rome. These images were the basis of important devotional practices for the city. One major ritual, dating to John VII’s time, occurred on the Feast of the Assumption, when an icon of Christ was processed together with an icon of Mary through the city’s major churches. If we accepted that the Madonna della Clemenza was located at the Marian Church at Trastevere, then John’s icon would fit nicely into the contemporary model of icon usage in churches in Rome. But, as I argued in chapter two, John may have commissioned this image for a palace. If the image was created for a palace, how does its placement within the

---

91 It has been suggested that the Madonna Della Clemenza might have been the Marian image processed, but I, like many other scholars, reject this idea in favor of the Santa Maria Maggiore icon. See for example, William Tronzo, “Apse Decoration, the Liturgy and Perception of Art in Medieval Rome: S. Maria in Trastevere and S. Maria Maggoire,” Italian Church Decoration of the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: Functions, Forms and Regional Traditions: Ten Contributions to a Colloquium held at the Villa Spelmen, Florence, William Tronzo, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 174.
palace affect the icon’s meaning? More specifically, can the icon be thought of as a devotional object in a palace context? I believe it can and will explain how by examining the significance of *Maria Regina*.

The earliest example of *Maria Regina* iconography is found on the so-called triumphal arch in Santa Maria Maggiore, dated to the fifth century and a product of the patronage of Sixtus III (432 - 440). Depicted there are a series of narrative scenes in which Mary is shown wearing a crown and gold toga (Fig. 22). Although this image is the earliest example, it is not often thought of as a prototype for later depictions of Mary as royalty, mostly because, other than the crown, the later Marian images share nothing with the Sixtus image. This viewpoint is based not only on details such as the fact that Mary is depicted in a gold toga, an iconography not repeated in later examples, but also on the lack of a political context for the image’s creation.

The image of Mary in Santa Maria Antiqua has been more readily compared to the icon (Fig. 5). Here again, a problem with this comparison stems from a lack of knowledge of the context of its creation. It has even been suggested that the Santa Maria Antiqua image might predate the conversion of the structure into a church. The reluctance to attribute great significance to these Marian images might also arise because the next examples of *Maria Regina* imagery in Rome were commissioned by John VII, almost 300 years later, while other, now lost images might also have existed. After John VII’s time, there are several examples of Mary depicted as royalty, dating as soon after his pontificate as 756, which suggests acceptance of this type of iconography by John’s successors.\(^92\)

Ursula Nilgen, in her discussion of the political significances of *Maria Regina* throughout the medieval period, singled out John VII’s patronage as evidence that *Maria Regina* imagery was political. Nilgen relied on Wilpert’s political argument of John’s commissions for her own theory of the significances of *Maria Regina*.\(^93\) She makes reference to a number of extant examples from the mid-eighth through the ninth century that could be tied to the Church’s attempt to break away from Byzantine influence. This interpretation fails, however, to address the broader issue of crowned images of Mary that are found in the East. Given that John VII was Greek, it is important that we also consider the possible Byzantine significance of *Maria Regina*.

---

\(^{92}\) Marion Lawrence, "*Maria Regina,*** Art Bulletin 7 (1925): 150-61.

\(^{93}\) Giuseppe Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis*
Although the image at the church in Duress, Albania is the only known crowned image of Mary in the East dating before Iconoclasm, there are extensive literary references to Mary as a royal figure. John L. Osborne, while writing on the Marian imagery at San Clemente in Rome, cites two early authors who make just such a comparison. Writing in the West, Venantius Fortunatus (530 - 609) provided some of the earliest examples comparing Mary to royalty. His writings refer to Mary as a *Maria Regina* and are contemporary with the early crowned images of Mary at Santa Maria Antiqua (567-578), though there is no direct connection made by the author to any Marian images. At about the same time in the East, Corippus Flavius (sixth to seventh century) in his *Lauds of Mary* referred to her as the queen of the church, *Ecclesia Regina*. Corippus, who was a member of the court of Justinian, chose not to refer to Mary as just a queen, but as the queen of the church.

Gerhard Wolf’s discussion of *Maria Regina* claimed that the Eastern and Western distinctions are meaningless; there is no differentiation between *Ecclesia Regina* and *Maria Regina* in literature or iconography. There is a subtle difference, however, in being referred to as the queen of the church, as opposed to merely a queen. With John VII being Greek, it is possible that the icon and the chapel at Old Saint Peter’s represent Mary as the queen of the church, instead of just a queen. This idea is furthered by the fact that the earliest example of artwork in Rome that is identified as *Maria Regina*, through an inscription on the work, dates to the middle of the eighth century. It would then stand to reason that the image commissioned by

---


94 John L. Osborne, "Early Medieval Painting in San Clemente, Rome: the Madonna and Child in the Niche," *Gesta* 20, no. 2 (1981), 302-304. Osborne was concerned primarily with the iconography of San Clemente and did not explain the significance of the differing Marian texts in his article.

95 Osborne, "San Clemente,” 299-310.

96 The dating of the Marian image in Santa Maria Antiqua is meant to correspond to just before the structure was converted from a guardhouse to a church; Krautheimer, *Rome*, 343, n.98.


John VII might have only retroactively been read as a *Maria Regina*.\(^9^9\)

Although Mary is often compared to the Church and is sometimes referred to as the Church, I believe that there is a distinction between the linguistic status of the two terms. In terms of semiotics, *Maria Regina* refers to Mary by name, whereas *Ecclesia Regina* makes a reference through metaphor. Wolf's own analysis of the meaning of *Maria Regina* and *Ecclesia Regina* depends mostly on the *Madonna della Clemenza* and other later examples.\(^1^0^0\) Since it is reasonable to suggest that John VII created an icon with Mary as *Ecclesia Regina*, then the political meaning read into his commission probably relates more to later medieval Roman reaction to the work than to John’s own intent.

Furthermore, if we think back to the earlier point that Mary’s garments are more expressive of her femininity than of her as a symbol of the Byzantine state, then perhaps we should consider that the inclusion of the *dalmatic* was meant to invoke the tradition of *Ecclesia Regina*. Unfortunately, there are no extant examples of *Ecclesia Regina* to compare with the icon. Robert Deshman made a political argument based upon literary texts describing the ideal relationship between the pope and Mary. I believe an argument can be made from other texts to suggest that John VII sought to represent Mary as the queen of the church and himself as her devoted follower.

In this view, both the icon and the mosaic would then depict John VII as devoted to the Church. Within the context of Old Saint Peter’s and John’s papal palace, this connotation seems reasonable. The two images, the icon and the mosaic, are both significant because one may have been situated within John’s palace in the Greek community, and the other was located in a church where the relics of the saint on which Rome’s claim to primacy over other theological centers are preserved. These images would have had different levels of interpretation, and John VII’s choice to use royal imagery would have meant one thing to the Greek community and something else to the Latin, even though the two images are compositionally similar. I believe, however, that these images represent a melding of the literary tradition of the East with Western visual traditions.

Beyond the symbolic meanings of *Maria Regina*, there is the question of why John chose

\(^1^0^0\) Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani*, 120-21.
to create this icon. Icons were created throughout the Mediterranean during John’s life, but the Madonna della Clemenza is unusual because of its size and the inclusion of the patron. It was suggested by Carlo Bertelli and Per Jonas Nordhagen that John’s inclusion in the icon is related to his own personal devotion to Mary, a devotion that is manifested in all of John’s art commissions.\textsuperscript{101} For example, in Santa Maria Antiqua, Nordhagen explained how, when John VII’s new fresco layer was applied, specific portions of the older fresco layer were allowed to remain visible (Fig. 23).\textsuperscript{102} These older fresco images were all of Mary, and the new layer was built up around each image to create, what Nordhagen proposed, was a frame.\textsuperscript{103} The devotional nature of John’s commissions has been discussed in a limited manner relating specifically to his piety. No one has addressed the possibility that John sought to create a new devotional art for all of Rome.

Although icons are often seen as synonymous with devotional practices, it was not until the post-Iconoclastic period that they were referred to as devotional objects by the Orthodox Church. The role that icons played in pre-Iconoclastic Byzantium was first outlined by Ernst Kitzinger. According to Kitzinger, these roles were magical and apotropaic, as well as devotional.\textsuperscript{104} The magical role was recorded through literary sources, which referred to the manner in which icons would bleed or repair themselves if damaged; how some of them appeared miraculously; or how they had the ability to heal the sick.\textsuperscript{105} The apotropaic aspects of Eastern icons were recorded in texts which discussed how icons of holy figures, most often Mary, were tied to ships or paraded around a city during a crisis.\textsuperscript{106} Kitzinger’s discussion of the devotional aspects of these early icons centers on desire.\textsuperscript{107} Simply put, Kitzinger sees the mass production of icons and the people’s insatiable desire to possess them as evidence for devotion. Kitzinger’s definition of icon devotion is not persuasive, because he does not address the social construction that instructs and condones the act of devotion.

A more useful definition for devotion was developed by Richard Kieckhefer in his

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{101}{See Bertelli, La Madonna, 56-59; and Nordhagen, “Constantinople on the Tiber,” 133-134.}
\footnote{102}{Nordhagen, The Frescoes of John VII, 64.}
\footnote{103}{Ibid., 64.}
\footnote{105}{Ibid., 109-110.}
\footnote{106}{Ibid., 109-110.}
\end{footnotes}
article, “Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion.” He states, “devotional practices lay between the common experiences of the strict liturgical exercises of the church and the unstructured thoughts and expressions of personal piety.” This definition was derived from Gothic devotional practices occurring in a time period during which there is no debate about the existence of devotional art. Kieckhefer’s definition calls into question the possibility of early medieval devotion because of the lack of a uniform institutional doctrine on the acceptability of devotional objects.

Although the pre-iconoclastic Byzantine icon cannot be seen as devotional, Kieckhefer’s model does lend support for the Madonna Della Clemenza as a work of devotional art. Not only was the work commissioned by John, but it even includes a papal portrait in which devotion is expressed in the clearest possible way. The portrait is rendered with the pope in the act of prayer. The problem of the usage and acceptance of images, which theologians had been debating since the beginning of Christianity, seems to be settled for us, the viewer, by papal decree in visual form by John VII.

John depicted himself kneeling before Mary or Ecclesia Regina perhaps to show both his position as the head of the church and as a devoted follower of Mary. John’s kneeling pose, coupled with his direct gaze, alters the traditional relationship between the donor and holy figures. Unlike John’s mosaics for the chapel at Old Saint Peter’s, which follow iconic donor portrait conventions, the Madonna della Clemenza seems to be almost narrative. We, as the viewer, are looking into a space in which John kneels in adoration before Mary and the Christ child. If we accept the idea that the icon might represent a narrative, then John becomes a sort of “actor” whose exact role is defined by the viewer. I believe that the icon was created in this manner to be didactic. John represented a model of devotion for the viewer. The model of devotion is similar to the idea that Deshman discussed, but different, in that its intent was not to be a geopolitical statement, but a local Roman declaration of the acceptability of venerating images.

This argument of the icon’s intent and function relies upon the image being seen by

---

107 Ibid., 110.
109 Ibid., 76.
others. While it is possible that John could have created this image for a private area of his palace, I believe it is more reasonable to assume that the icon was created for a public space within the palace, such as a throne room. This supposition is reinforced by the large size of the icon and the fact that all of the comparative examples are themselves found in public spaces. While I do define the space in which the icon was located as public, access probably would have been restricted to members of the church or visiting dignitaries.

John’s icon followed the ideas that were expressed by earlier popes, like Gregory the Great (590 - 604). Gregory was one of the first to put into words his support for religious art. In his letters to Serenus of Marseilles, Gregory explained that images could have roles in helping those who were illiterate understand Christianity.\textsuperscript{110} He thought people would be able to read a picture with almost as much clarity as one reads scripture. For Gregory this reading of images was meant to be more than just didactic, it was meant to fill the viewer with compunction.\textsuperscript{111} For the viewers able to see the \textit{Madonna della Clemenza}, the sight of the pope in such a pose of extreme humility must have led them to feel as though they themselves were called upon to emulate John.

To return to Kieckhefer’s idea, devotional art exists between the strict liturgical rituals of the church and the unstructured, contemplative piety of an individual.\textsuperscript{112} When this is coupled with Gregory the Great’s idea of didactic images guiding a viewer to a state of compunction, what we are presented with is a basic pattern of devotional art. Having said this, we should understand that for this application of Gregory’s idea, I have made two minor assumptions that augment the meaning of the text. One is that art is not limited to those who are illiterate, and the second is that the didactic elements of a work do not take a person from complete ignorance to enlightenment. Rather, the art invokes commonly known conventions so that the viewer is able to recognize that it is an image of a holy person and veneration of that image is sanctioned by the Church. Through this connection, the image engages its viewers in a sort of dialog, which might lead them to a state of compunction. In this view, the \textit{Madonna della Clemenza} can be

\textsuperscript{111} Cynthia Hahn, \textit{Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century} (Los Angles: University of California Press, 2001), 48-49.
understood as an early example of devotional art.

Finally, the icon’s likely location in a palace served the purpose of connecting John’s corporeal office as pope with the spiritual devotion to Mary already existing in Rome. Creating this connection allowed John to visually articulate his position on the acceptability of the veneration of images and to show himself as a model of devotion. In this way, he also sought to bring the Greek and Latin communities together through his new iconographic mode.

112 Kieckhefer, “Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion,” 76.
CONCLUSION

In summation, it has been argued here that the Madonna della Clemenza was created by John VII for a palace being built on the Palatine Hill and connected to Santa Maria Antiqua. John’s early death resulted in the palace never being completed and the icon, at some later point, being moved to Santa Maria in Trastevere. It was at the church in Trastevere that the image gained its fame as one of the holy Marian images in Rome, when Pope Gregory IV prominently placed the icon above a new altar he commissioned for the church. In the past, scholars have discussed the Madonna della Clemenza in terms of its physical location within a church. It has been the purpose of this study, however, to reassess the Madonna Della Clemenza through a reexamination of the object’s patron, its origin and placement, and its meaning as a symbol of Pope John VII’s connection to the trends in Marian devotion in Rome.

Supporting Carlo Bertelli’s theory of John VII as the icon’s patron, chapter one was dedicated to looking at the comparative examples which help date the icon to the eighth century. In chapter two, I departed from a critique of textual sources in order to give consideration to the object’s iconography. Through a comparison between images in churches and palaces, I conclude that the particular iconography of the Madonna della Clemenza can more comfortably be understood in terms of a palace location. In chapter three, I reviewed and discussed the varying interpretations of John VII’s Marian commissions. Furthermore, I elucidated the problems that exist in current scholarship with regard to the relationship between the Byzantine Emperor and Pope John VII. Finally, I assessed past theories concerning John VII’s contributions to Marian devotion in Rome. In these ways, I have not only strengthened the attribution to John VII as the patron of the icon, but I have demonstrated that the object, itself, conveyed a public declaration of devotion to Mary by an individual who, as pope, provided the model for a perception of art in Rome as devotional and identified himself as pious.
Figure 1 The icon of the Madonna della Clemenza, Sta. Maria in Trastevere, Rome, 705-707 (© Scala / Art Resource, NY)
Figure 2 Photograph from the 1988 exhibition, *De vera effigie Mariae*, Rome
(© Arte Fotografica, Rome)
Figure 3 St Matthew, Gospel Book of Ebbo (f 18v), Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 1, Epernay, France, 816-835 (© Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY)
Figure 4 Christ Enthroned, Lectionary of Godescalc (f 3r), Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 1203, Paris, 781-783 (© Bibliothèque Nationale de France)
Figure 5 Maria Regina image from Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, c 570 (© ICCD, Rome)
Figure 6 *Madonna della Clemenza* before restoration. (Wilpert, S. Maria Antiqua, 1910)
Figure 7 Apse mosaic, San Marco, Rome, ninth century (© ICCD, Rome)
Figure 8 Detail of Grimaldi’s drawing of the Oratory of John VII (f 77r), 1619
(© Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)
Figure 9 *Saint Anne with Mary*, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, 705 (© ICCD, Rome)
Figure 10 Christ Pantocrator between Constantine IX and Empress Zoë, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, eleventh-century mosaic (© Vanni / Art Resource, NY)
Figure 11 Maria Regina, mosaic from the Oratory of John VII at Saint Peter’s, Rome (now in the church of San Marco, Florence) (Belting, Likeness and Presence, 1994)
Figure 12  Detail of Theodora with Attendants, from the mosaics at the church of San Vitale, Ravenna, mid sixth century (© Scala / Art Resource, NY)
Figure 13 Maria Regina flanked by donors, church of the Amphitheatre, Duress, Albania, mosaic, mid sixth century (©2002 AlbKristian.com)
Figure 14 Detail of Saint Agnes, apse mosaic, San Marco, Rome, ninth century (© ICCD, Rome)
Figure 15 Mosaics above the imperial door of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, ninth century (© Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY)
Figure 16 Justinian II coin depicting Christ and the emperor, Constantinople, c 705
(Belting, Likeness and Presence, 1994)
Figure 17 Drawing of the Triclinium of Leo III from the Lateran Palace, Rome (drawing dates to the seventeenth century and the mosaic to 800)
Figure 18 Widow Turtura, fresco, Comodilla Catacomb, Rome, c. 530 (© Foto Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra)
Figure 19 Paschal I and the Virgin, apse of Santa Maria in Domnica, Rome, 817 (© Scala / Art Resource, NY)
Figure 20 Theodotus chapel, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, eighth century
(© ICCD, Rome)
Figure 21  Detail of the Adoration of the Magi from the Triumphal Arch in Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, mosaic, sixth century (© Nimatallah / Art Resource, NY)
Figure 22 Detail of a niche showing Greek doctors, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, fresco, seventh century (© ICCD, Rome)
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


64


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Michael Matos was born in Silver Spring, Maryland. He earned his bachelor’s degree in art history from the University of Maryland at College Park, in 2001. As both an undergraduate and graduate student, Michael has been interested in issues surrounding devotion and medieval art. He presented a paper that became the core of this thesis at the Southeastern Medieval Association in 2002. He is currently pursuing a master’s degree in library science and plans to enter museum profession.