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«Recubo praesepis ad antrum»: The Cult of Saint Jerome in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome at the End of the 13th Century

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the setting up of the cult of Saint Jerome in Rome at the end of the 13th century in the papal basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. It observes the development of the cult as part of the renovations of the church during the pontificate of Nicholas IV and the patronage of the Colonna family. It argues that it happened during the process of Franciscanization of the church and making the ideological axis between the Roman basilica and new papal basilica in Assisi, stressed also in their pictorial decorations – the mosaics in the apse in Rome, and the Life of Saint Francis in Assisi. It also studies the construction of Jerome’s Roman identity in correlation with the confirmation of Santa Maria Maggiore church as a “second Bethlehem” after the fall of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, reflecting upon the leading proponents of the idea, architectural setting, artistic production and hagiographical texts produced to uphold this idea.

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Il presente saggio analizza la formazione del culto di San Gerolamo a Roma presso la basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore al termine del XIII secolo e indaga lo sviluppo di questo culto in seno ai restauri della chiesa avvenuti durante il pontificato di Nicola IV e il patrocinio della famiglia Colonna. Si mette inoltre in evidenza come tale fenomeno sia avvenuto durante il processo di francescanizzazione della chiesa e la costruzione di un asse ideologico tra la basilica romana e la nuova basilica papale di Assisi, che è evidente anche nelle loro decorazioni pittoriche: i mosaici nell'abside di Roma e la vita di San Francesco ad Assisi. Inoltre, si studia la costruzione dell'identità romana di Girolamo in relazione alla conferma della chiesa di Santa Maria Maggiore come "seconda Betlemme", dopo la caduta del Regno latino di Gerusalemme, riflettendo sui principali sostenitori di questa tesi, dell'architettura, della produzione artistica e di testi agiografici elaborati per sostenere questa idea.

1. *Introduction*

In the hierarchy of the Church, the four Church fathers – Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory I and Jerome – retain a central position because upon their writings and theological discussion, the doctrines of the Western Church were built. Bede the Venerable was among the first to distinguish these four men from among the other doctors. Pope Boniface VIII later confirmed their special position in 1298 with the elevation of their feast days to the rank of the double rite¹. This proclamation is reflected in the decoration of the Upper Church of the Basilica of Assisi, where the four Church Fathers were displayed together for the first time in the four panels of the entrance vault, as a counterpart to the four Evangelists in the crossing vault². Still, the promulgation of the feast day and the fresco decorations should not be seen as the starting point for the veneration of the four Doctors of the Church, but as the pictorial recognition of an already living cult.

Among these early Doctors of the Church Jerome holds a unique place, given that unlike the others we cannot trace a continuous and established cult since Late Antiquity. While the other three had an unbroken living cult throughout the Early Middle Ages, the renewal of appreciation of Jerome's life, accomplishments, and miracles, started only at the end of the 13th century when his relics were translated to the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. From that moment, it is possible to trace the complex progress of Jerome's cult in the Western Church as manifested in *vitae*, liturgical celebrations, and visual portrayals.

¹ Russo 1987, p. 38.

² Brooke 2006, p. 427.

Many scholars have examined the development of Jerome's cult³, but an evident need to review the beginnings of the cult, marked by its translation to Rome, nevertheless remains as earlier research has neglected to observe the context in which such invention took place. This paper will contextualize the political, cultural and theological conceptions behind this construction, and will examine the position of the mendicant orders, above all the Franciscan order, together with the Colonna family and Pope Nicholas IV (1227-1292) as the leading figures who orchestrated the creation of the image of Saint Jerome upon which the cult was established at the end of 13th century.

2. *The first Vitae of Saint Jerome*

Despite the considerable written production Jerome produced during his life, the accounts referring to his life and sanctity are few. The primary source of information come from his own hand, the letters he exchanged with his companions and disciples⁴ and the autobiography he incorporated in his work *De viris illustribus*⁵. However, these texts were lacking the particularly significant element upon which sanctity relies – miraculous deeds. Jerome's intellectual production and the translation of the Bible could be understood as a miraculous work that brought the Bible to the masses, but it was not something that could be used as supernatural material that would appeal to believers. Yet, the very lack of a *vita* from Jerome's days left space for later inventions and constructions. These later works based on his own words, in a more limited and modest manner, accentuated only elements that fit the hagiographical pattern as a means to endorse his sanctity. The two *vitae* of Jerome known in the Middle Ages and attributed to ancient authors were *Hieronymus noster* and *Plerosque Nimirum*, and they formed the base of all later medieval hagiographies of Saint Jerome.

The earliest one of the two was the *Hieronymus noster*, titled after the initial words in the text. The author used a remark from the *Chronicon* of Marcellinus written in the 6th century as the model for the legend, upon which he built up a narrative⁶. Based on this, *Hieronymus noster* could not have been created

³ The fundamental works for understanding the cult of the saint: Vannutelli 1920; Cavallera 1922; Ridderbos 1984; Rice 1985; Russo 1987; Kelly 1998.

⁴ Jerome 1963.

⁵ Jerome 2010.

⁶ Croke 2001. Marcellinus was a count during the reign of Emperor Justinian in Constantinople, where he wrote historical records. His only surviving work is the *Chronicle*, which continues on the chronicle started by Jerome, and relates many important events of the period. Rice 1985, p. 25: «Our Jerome mastered Greek and Latin literature in Rome, and also was ordained a priest there. Later the young man went to Bethlehem, where he decided to remain, like a prudent animal, besides our Lord's crib». As Rice explains, Marcellinus established chronology that all the later writers held

before the time of Marcellinus⁷. By analyzing the text of the *vita*, Vaccari proposes that the legend was written in the Carolingian era, most likely in the 9th century⁸.

Yet, in the formation of Jerome's image, the later *vita*, *Plerosque nimirum* played a more significant role, as apart from the description of Jerome's life, it narrated his first miracle, which would in time grow into one of the primary attributes of the saint – *the Story of the lion*. Two variants of text are known. The first one was attributed to Pseudo-Sebastian, while the second version was an attempt to combine both known *vitae*, *Hieronymus noster*, and *Plerosque nimirum*⁹. Compared to *Hieronymus Noster*, this *Plerosque nimirum* brings new elements to Jerome's cult. The first one is the discussion on virginity, where the author quotes the *Acts of Saint Nereus and Achilleus*¹⁰. The second noteworthy contribution is the story of Jerome befriending a lion during his time staying in a monastery in Bethlehem, by picking a thorn out of lion's paw. With that act, Jerome tamed the lion who remained to reside in the monastery with the monks. The third novelty is that Jerome was elected as a cardinal priest and fled Rome due to the Arian heresy. In *Hieronymus noster*, Jerome left Rome because of its hostile clergy who sought to trap and defame him. Jacobus da Varagine's *Legenda Aurea* gives further details, pointing out it was a women's garment that someone secretly placed in his cell¹¹.

The Story of the lion in *Plerosque nimirum* was not the invention of the hagiographer but rather emerges from Aesop's fables – *The lion and the shepherd* and *Androcles and the lion*¹². However, in Late Antiquity, the story was disseminated in the hagiographical genre, not originally attributed to Jerome, but to Saint Sabbas (439-532) and Saint Gerasimus of Jordan (d. 475)¹³. This was likewise asserted in the *Plerosque Nimirum* where the author instructs us that Jerome's legend was transferred to the West through the pilgrims to the

on to, bringing that Jerome was ordained in Rome, while he himself informs us that happened in Antioch.

⁷ Vaccari 1958, p. 3; Rice 1985, p. 25.

⁸ Vaccari 1958, p. 7.

⁹ Whatley, Thompson, Upchurch 2004, pp. 109-26. The both versions are published in *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*. The first one under the number BHL 3871, and the second one under BHL 3870; Rice 1985, p. 209. See note 2.

¹⁰ Cavallera 1922, p. 140; Rice 1985, p. 209; See note 2.

¹¹ Rice 1985, p. 28; Da Varazze 1998. In the development of Franciscan thought and positioning Jerome within the Franciscan Order, Jerome can be seen as a predecessor of Saint Francis. In the development of Franciscan thought and positioning Jerome within the Franciscan Order, Jerome can be seen as a predecessor of Saint Francis. In 1452, Benozzo Gozzoli (1420-1497) painted the frescoes in the chapel of Saint Jerome in the church of San Francesco in Montefalco, among which is the scene Jerome leaves for Antioch. Here, Jerome's renunciation of the material goods and clerical privileges, followed by his voluntary exile in the Syrian desert and choosing the solitude instead of Papal Rome, could be seen as the prefiguration of the acts and the image of Saint Francis.

¹² Rice 1985, p. 39.

¹³ Butler 1845, p. 76; Vaccari 1958, p. 12.

Holy Land and that it was comparable to the lives of the ancient fathers¹⁴. In both lives, that of Gerasimus and of Sabbas, the monks then living as hermits in Palestine, encountered injured lions and helped them, and as a sign of gratitude, the lion remained to live as a faithful servant and loving disciple in the case of Saint Gerasimus¹⁵.

However, the adaptation of Aesop's narrative to the hagiographical genre offered a different meaning and theological connotations to the lion story. The act of taming the lion became a metaphor for suppressing the bestial in man, and it is not surprising that this element is present in the *vita* of the hermit monks, including Jerome, whose life in the desert was intended to promote the suppression of physical desires and bodily temptations which could lead to sin against God¹⁶.

It is still unclear when the story passed from Sabbas or Gerasimus to Jerome. Vaccari suggested that the adoption of the *Story of the Lion* took place in Rome in the 7th century in the monastery of Saint Sabbas to which Giovanni Mosco left behind a copy of his work *Prato Spirituale*, which among others contains a legend of Saint Gerasimus. Presumably, because of the resemblance in the names, and because of the common component of the hermit lifestyle, Gerasimus' attribute was given to Jerome¹⁷. If we agree with Vaccari's explanation, this adoption of Gerasimus' account to Jerome's life would have taken place at the beginning of the 7th century. A formal analysis of the text points to a Roman author, together with the mentioning of a "cardinal-priest" and quotes from the *Acts of Saint Nereus and Achilleus*. With all this Vaccari reinforces his argument that this transformation occurred in Rome.

Following this, the author most likely came from the environs of Rome. Based on the style and the composition, Vaccari proposed the dating of *Plerosque Nimirum* to the Carolingian age, same as the *Hieronymus Noster*, but placing it after the former in the chronology¹⁸. The argument for the emergence of both *vitae* in the Carolingian age is further reinforced by the pictorial cycles of Jerome's life (fig. 1), that are to be found in two manuscripts from the 9th century: *The First Bible of Charles the Bald* (known also as *Vivian Bible*), copied at the monastery of San Martin of Tours around 845, and the *Bible of San Paolo fuori le Mura*, presumably composed in Reims around 868¹⁹.

¹⁴ Rice 1985, p. 43.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 40.

¹⁶ Rice 1985, p. 40. Rice explains that the removal of the thorn is the metaphor of baptism and the washing away of original sin. This interpretation is supported by the *Gesta Romanorum*, compiled at the end of the 13th century, which brings the story of the lion as a moralizing tale, where the character of the saint is replaced with the character of the knight. As the moral of the story, the author compares the lion with the whole of humanity that limps because of the sins of Adam and Eve.

¹⁷ Vaccari 1958, p. 12.

¹⁸ Vaccari 1958, p. 14.

¹⁹ Rice 1985, p. 26.

On the other hand, Cavallera does not agree with this explanation, since he points out that there are analogies between Jerome's and Gerasimus' *vitae*, but the evident discrepancies demonstrate that both legends simply adhered to the same earlier source²⁰. He suggests that such a transfer could have happened because the pilgrims may simply have misunderstood the subject, mistaking Gerasimus for Hieronymus, and adhered the story to Jerome who had higher importance in the Western church.

3. *Translation of the Body of Saint Jerome to Rome*

In his masterful book on the cult of Saint Jerome in the Renaissance, Eugene Rice has argued that the development of the cult in Rome had two stages. The first one, connected with the translation of Jerome's relics to the church of Santa Maria Maggiore at the end of the 13th century, and the second related to the dissemination of new hagiographical material in the first half of the 14th century which broadened the knowledge on Jerome's life and death, and enlarged the list of his miraculous powers.

Because of the complexity of the subject, this work will reassess particularly the initial phase – the translation of the relics in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. While Rice focuses on the most important points of this, he does not go in-depth name the main protagonists or the promoters of the cult, and the dynamics of the diffusion of the cult. One of the goals of this research is to present the invention and the development of the cult of Saint Jerome as the expression of the power of the Colonna family and their alliance with Pope Nicholas IV, promoting the Franciscan spirituality through the renovations of Santa Maria Maggiore.

The beginning of the saint's worship in the West is associated with the translation of his bodily remains to the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. The tradition connected with the church dates this event to 1283, while the earliest documented reference of *translatio* is from the year 1314, and in the *Chronicon* by Dominican Francesco Pipino²¹. Even with this inconsistency in the written sources, there is other evidence of a lively cult of Saint Jerome in the mentioned church, already at the end of the 13th century, which will be examined in

²⁰ Cavallera 1922, p. 142. The story of Gerasimus misses the elements of the donkey and the merchants. For Cavallera it is evidence that the story of Gerasimus was not directly attributed to Jerome.

²¹ Biasiotti 1920, p. 237; Russo 1985, p. 40; Saxer 2001, p. 356. Even though all the researchers repeat 1283 as the year of the translation, Victor Saxer brings the information that Guillaume Durand, a famous liturgist from the end of the 13th century, brings 1286 as the year when the translation happened, on May 9th.

this text. Following the well-established medieval hagiographical tradition²², the event was reported in the written record dated to the 1290s, where the discovery of the relics is ascribed to a miraculous dream of a monk who lived in the East and to whom Jerome appeared and expressed a wish for his body to be unearthed and moved to Rome. The place of the re-interment is defined by Jerome's special devotion to the Virgin²³. The explicit indication of the place of reburial in the document reveals that the text of the translation, together with the act, was orchestrated to serve the religious and political purposes which will be discussed below.

The choice of Santa Maria Maggiore was not accidental because the church already had the relic of Jesus's crib in the Chapel of Nativity, regarded as a wholesome relic of the *Cave of the Nativity* in Bethlehem which it resembled²⁴. Knowing that Jerome's original burial place was near the *Cave of Nativity*, it is not surprising that the leading creators of Jerome's revival chose Santa Maria Maggiore as the church in which the cult would be established. Eugene Rice argued that the translation of relics handed over a certain power to the church of Santa Maria Maggiore and «had made plain God's approval of the Roman see, the people of Rome, and the clergy of S. Maria Maggiore» while the relics provided «Jerome's own powers of protection, exorcism, healing, and intercession» to its guardians²⁵. Even though Rice's conclusion is not far from the conclusions of this paper, the development of the cult should be observed beyond the simple wish of church canons for more ecclesiastical power.

4. Jerome between the Colonna Family and Nicholas IV

The second half of the 13th century in Rome was heavily marked by a struggle for power between the city's noble houses, predominantly between the families Orsini and Colonna, and disseminated through their appointees, Popes Nicholas III (1277-1280) and Nicholas IV (1288-1294), the first Franciscan pope.

The development of Jerome's cult strongly tied to the Colonna family is of higher importance. The family's power started to rise at the beginning of the

²² Geary 1990. The *furta sacra* (the *holy theft*) was a medieval religious practice of acquiring the relics of the saints, usually by stealing the relics from one shrine to another. It is followed by the specific hagiographic genre, a detailed written narrative in which the saint's willingness to be moved is explained. The saint's participation in such activities was an argument that defended the stealing of the holy relics.

²³ The text is usually named *Translatio corporis S. Hieronymi Romam* or *Translatio corporis beati Hieronymi* (BHL 3878).

²⁴ Rice 1985, p. 56.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 63.

13th century, when Giovanni Colonna the Elder (d. 1245) declared his loyalty to the emperor Frederick II (1194-1250), marking the family as Ghibellines. Despite the considerable influence which the family acquired in the second half of the 13th century – two of the family members were appointed to the College of cardinals – they failed to get one of their family members elected as pope. Instead, they managed the next best thing and got appointed their favored candidate for the papacy, Girolamo Masci who took the name Nicholas IV and during his papacy favored the family²⁶.

Nicholas IV, a Franciscan friar known also as Jerome of Ascoli, interrupted the practice of appointing the popes from the Roman aristocratic families²⁷. As this paper argues, it is not accidental that the re-appreciation of Saint Jerome happened during the pontificate of the pope who was his namesake. Since his election was heavily associated with the Roman Colonna family, their fidelity was mutual; the pope granted a cardinal title to Pietro Colonna, and the Colonna family took an obligation of the pope's tomb and a chapel dedicated to him in Santa Maria Maggiore, after his death²⁸. The rapid rise and immense power of the Colonna family gained them many political opponents, including Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) from the Caetani family, historic rivals of the Colonna, who announced a Holy War against the family, which led to their downfall in 1297²⁹. Still, the most important period of the family's influence

²⁶ Romano 2006, p. 295. Before becoming Pope Nicholas IV, Jerome Ascoli was the bishop of Palestrina, Colonna's feud, cf. Binski 2011, p. 281. Pope Nicholas IV named Pietro Colonna a cardinal in 1288, and Giovanni Colonna a senator in 1290, cf. Saxer 2001, p. 16.

²⁷ Gardner 1973a, p. 1; Franchi, p. 1990; Menesto 1991. For the influence of pope Nicholas IV on the Franciscan art see: Cooper, Robson 2013. Even though his papacy did not last long, during his pontificate many important things were done in Rome. One of them was issuing the papal bull which gave more power and the share of the Church's revenues to the College of Cardinals. He was personally engaged in the dispute between the James of Aragon and House of Anjou overruling rights in Sicily. Despite attempts to start a new crusade to recover the lost Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem after 1292, his efforts remained unrealized. Still, his papacy is remembered for the start of the remodeling and decoration of the church of Saint Francis in Assisi, and the refurbishment of some Roman churches as will be discussed later in the text.

²⁸ Gardner 1973a, p. 1. Cf. De Angelis 1621, p. 55: «in Capella Sancte memoriae quondam Sanctissimi Patris Domini Nicolai Papae Quarti, quam dictus Dominus Cardinalis aedificari fecit obreverentiam, et memoriam praedicti Sanctissimi Patris Domini Papae». The pope's tomb was on the left end of transept. De Angelis counts his chapel among the four others that the Colonna family built «in quatuor Basilicae angulis». However, he does not mention when they were built they looked like. According to him, the pope's tomb was on the end of transept where usually the side portal was, De Angelis informs «in hoc loco non erat porta, sed sacellum Dominorum Colonnensium, sicut est in aliis tribus angulis Basilicae».

²⁹ Romano 2006; Binski 2011, p. 284; Burke, Bury 2017, p. 135. There were several reasons which lead to the fall of the family. One of them was the internal family's feud triggered by cardinal Jacopo Colonna, who deserted his brothers, who pleaded for help from pope Boniface VIII. After refusing to return the lands to his brothers on the papal request, Jacopo was removed from the College of Cardinals and excommunicated. In return, Jacopo accepted Celestine V as the rightful pope, which resulted in the destruction of his property by Boniface VIII. Another reason which stirred up papal anger was the hijacking of papal gold by Stefano Colonna in May of 1297.

was between the years 1288 and 1297 which has been in detail discussed by Serena Romano³⁰.

Despite coming from different political parties and families, the papacies of Nicholas III and Nicholas IV shared some common elements, such as their efforts to mark their place in the history of Rome by reconstructing and restoring many sacral places hold a special place, as noted by Gardner³¹. During the pontificate of Nicholas III (1277-1280), several substantial construction interventions were begun including a new papal residence in the Vatican and a covered passageway to Castel Sant'Angelo³². Among the other important renovations was Saint Peter's, together with the renovation of the *Sancta Sanctorum* chapel in San Giovanni in Laterano³³.

The renovated chapel itself was not the celebration of the papacy as an institution, as might be expected of the private papal chapel, but as Triff explains, «the decoration of the Sancta Sanctorum emphasized the quasi-Imperial *romanitas*, or Roman lineage and authority, of Nicholas himself, marking a new emphasis upon personal and familial aggrandizement that prefigured trends in later papal patronage»³⁴. The glorification of his aristocratic lineage and provided eternal memory and glory to the family by raising new, or in this case, renovating the old apostolic churches, had as its purpose to distinguish the family among the other Roman aristocratic families, but as well confirm their place in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This *modus operandi* was not specific only to the Orsini family, furthermore, it was a common thing among the Roman aristocracy.

The renovations of the most important Roman churches were continued during the pontificate of Nicholas IV (1288-1294), who followed the same ideological patterns, gaining the glory and memory himself and the Colonna family whose interests were firmly connected with his papacy. Both popes worked for the benefit of their own party, and it is best demonstrated in the restorations of the churches that they commissioned, and the gifts and privileges awarded to them.

Pope Nicholas III spent his pontificate in the Vatican where he enlarged the papal palace, thereby reinforcing papal legitimacy and emphasizing the origins of the papacy in the figure of Saint Peter. Though, this positioning is connected with the internal Roman struggles for power among the aristocracy and the control of the territory. The bridge over the Tiber near Castel Sant' Angelo was one of the crucial connection points in the access of the Vatican through which many pilgrims were passing every day on their way to see the relics of

³⁰ Romano 2006.

³¹ Gardner 1973a, p. 1. The article by Gardner discusses in detail the renovations in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, focusing on the pictorial decorations.

³² Keyvanian 2015, p. 127; Brooke 2006.

³³ Frothingham 1888, pp. 326-328.

³⁴ Triff 2009, p. 71; See also: Gardner 1973b.

Saint Peter in Rome. As much as Nicholas III's move to the Vatican from the Lateran palace can be viewed as an act of defense from the other prominent families, like the Annibaldi who controlled the area near the Lateran³⁵, it was also a smart economic move as the pope could have clear control over the contributions to Saint Peter given by pilgrims whose number was only growing during the 13th century, especially after the Fall of the Latin Kingdom, with the culmination in the *Grand Jubilee* in 1300.

In the same manner, the renovation during the pontificate of Nicholas IV can be observed, where practically nothing was done on the churches that "belonged" to the Orsini family – Saint Peter and San Paolo fuori le Mura. While the Orsini family controlled the Tiber bank and Vatican area, the Colonna family established themselves in the zone close to Santa Maria Maggiore, near the Lateran not far from the Vatican. When their *protégé*, Jerome of Ascoli, formerly a Bishop of Palestrina, one of the Colonna's strongholds, was appointed as the new Pope Nicholas IV, the family started to employ his papal influence for their own interests. It is not surprising that the Colonna family and Pope Nicholas IV started the propaganda in the favor of the family, with the renovation of San Giovanni in Laterano and Santa Maria Maggiore³⁶. Nevertheless, as Serena Romano pointed out, in the second half of the 13th century, there was no other aristocratic family in Rome which seized power so quickly and imposed it so vigorously, memorializing their place in Roman history primary by commissioning numerous artistic works and renovating the church of Santa Maria Maggiore as the private *capella palatina* of the family³⁷. The parallels between Nicholas III's renovation of *Sancta Sanctorum* and Nicholas IV's restoration of Santa Maria Maggiore could be drawn.

Very shortly after his election in 1288, Pope Nicholas IV started to collect funds for the renovation of the church, most of the support came from the Colonna family who finished the renovation project after the death of the Pope, in 1292. With the demolition of the old apse, a space for the installation of the transept opened. With it, the church received the Latin cross shape, characteristic for the late antique churches like Saint Peter's Basilica. A similar cross plan was adopted for the mendicant churches, such as the most important Franciscan church – the Upper Church of the Basilica of Assisi. This type of plan can be seen in Rome in the Dominican church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva begun in 1280 or in the Franciscan church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli reconstructed from 1250³⁸.

³⁵ Triff 2009, p. 73.

³⁶ Gardner 1973a, p. 1. De Angelis 1621, p. 32: «Iacobus Columna Cardinalis [...] Hic anterioris templi partis et absidis auctor fuit»; p. 54: «Iacobus et Petrus de Columnis Cardinales primam ecclesiae extructionem experimentes, multaque sacella, ac alia ornamenta piè extruxerunt».

³⁷ Romano 2006, p. 296.

³⁸ Keyvanian 2015, p. 277; Gardner 1973a, p. 3.

While the impulse for this remodeling might have been driven by the wish to position the church of Santa Maria Maggiore also the apostolic basilicas with the same plan, Saint Peter and Saint Paul, the influence could have come from the different source and that of the Upper Church of the Basilica of Assisi whose transept was decorated by Cimabue and his workshop around the 1280s.

The addition, a new transept and apse in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore freed space for new pictorial decorations, mosaics in the apse and on the main façade, together with frescoes in the transept. The new *Chapel of Nativity* was also a part of the renovation program, together with its sculpted scene of the Nativity³⁹. The representation of Pope Nicholas IV, members of the Colonna family, and the Franciscan saints in the apse witness to the meticulous planning of the implementation of a certain ideological stamp input in the new decoration scheme which had as its purpose the glorification not only of the Colonna family, under whose authority the church was but also the Franciscan order and their saints.

5. Colonna's Artistic Patronage: Mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore

The execution of the new mosaic in the apse was commissioned from Jacopo Torriti, himself a Franciscan friar, who had already been commissioned to do other works for the Colonna, notably in Lateran whose mosaics he finished around 1291. Although the pope died during the execution of mosaics, the Colonna family faithfully pursued his projects, which is fully shown in the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore. The Colonna family was also in charge of the completion of the fresco decoration in the Upper Church of the Basilica of Assisi after the death of Nicholas IV in 1292.

The dominating scenes in the apse focused on the Virgin Mary, with the central scene of the *Coronation of the Virgin*, followed with scenes of the life of the Virgin in the lower zone (fig. 2). The presence of the patrons of the restoration, identified by the inscriptions, Nicholas IV on the left and Cardinal Giacomo Colonna on the right, witness clearly the effort these two put into the restoration of the church and their ideological contribution to the iconographic scheme depicted there⁴⁰. Both sides, the patrons are followed by saints. On the left, Saint Francis (fig. 3), Peter and Paul are depicted, while on the right stand Saint John the Baptist, Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Anthony of Padua⁴¹. Unfortunately, the whole opus completed by Torriti is no longer visible today due to the restorations of the 17th century when vaults were added and

³⁹ On the sculptures in the chapel see: Pomarici 2006.

⁴⁰ Keyvanian 2015, p. 279.

⁴¹ See: Gardner 1973a, p. 21; Brooke 2006, pp. 450-453.

covered the upper parts of the scenes in the transept, while some scenes were heavily restored in the 20th century, especially the depictions of Saint Jerome and Saint Matthias. For our discussion, of particular interest are the mosaics on the outer curve of the apse, in the transept, where on one side the scene of *Saint Jerome with Paula and Eustochium* was depicted, while on the other side was the depiction of *Saint Matthias Preaching*⁴² (fig. 4). The representation of the saints is associated with their relics preserved in the church – Jerome in the *Chapel of Nativity* and Matthias under the main altar. The reliquary of Saint Matthias was given to the church by Jacopo Colonna in 1289⁴³.

Despite being heavily restored today, a description of the scene is found in a number of written and pictorial sources. One of the sources where the scene is reproduced is a plate in a book made by Paolo de Angelis in 1621, where the main apse is depicted⁴⁴ (fig. 4). Another source that depicts the scene in greater detail is a watercolor from the codex *Vat. Latino 5074*⁴⁵ (fig. 5). However, the author omitted the figures of Paula and Eustochium and copied only the figure of Jerome, dressed in a cardinal robe, sitting in the throne chair, with the written description: «*S. Hieronimus ex abside operis musivi sive vermiculati quod Nicolaus 4 (sic) PP. suo tempore fecit cardinalis habitu cum hac inscriptione: S. Hieronymus ad Paula(m) et Eustochium sermonem facit et ante ipsum stant matronar habitu*»⁴⁶. Jerome is not represented in his usual iconography as the cardinal in a red robe with the lion next to his feet, as this type developed only at the beginning of the 14th century⁴⁷.

Representations of Jerome can be found on another mosaic in the church, the one on the façade, commissioned by the Colonna family and executed by Filippo Rusuti (1255-1325), Torriti's follower. It is still debatable whether the mosaics were completed before or after the fall of the Colonna. Regardless, they once again witness the power which the family held until the end of the century. The mosaic on the façade depicts *Christ in Majesty*, surrounded by four saints on each side. Among the depicted figures are the namesakes of the members of the Colonna family, Saint Peter and Saint Jacob, as well as the saints whose relics the church possessed: Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Jerome together with Saint Matthias, paired in the same way as they were on the western wall of the transept⁴⁸.

Below the scene on the façade, the Colonna family coat of arms is depicted – a column set on a plain field, is not the only reference on the commissioners of these mosaics. The representations of two cardinals, Giacomo (Jacopo) and

⁴² Gardner 1973a, p. 6.

⁴³ Wollesen 1998, p. 110.

⁴⁴ De Angelis 1621, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Biasiotti 1920, p. 238.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Russo 1987, p. 67.

⁴⁸ McCahill 2013, p. 43.

Pietro, kneeling in front of Christ's *mandorla*, indicates the ideologists of the program⁴⁹. Omitting pope Nicholas IV from this representation clearly shows that the Colonna family desired to take all the credit for the renovation of the church. This omission also gives us a clue of a possible dating for the façade mosaics to right after 1292 when Pope Nicholas IV died, and before the fall of the Colonna family in 1297⁵⁰.

6. *The Franciscan Connection*

The strong connection between the pope, who we must recall was a Franciscan, and the Colonna family lies also in the family's strong support of the Franciscan order. The Franciscan chronicler, Salimbene di Adam (1221-1290) names Jacopo Colonna «totaliter... amicus ordinis Fratrum Minorum»⁵¹. The Colonnas' favor towards the Franciscan order goes beyond supporting Nicholas IV as the new Pope. Their connection with the Franciscan order manifested in many ways – from artistic patronage in Franciscan churches to the promotion of Margherita Colonna (c. 1255-1280) as a model of Franciscan female lay piety⁵².

A legend even existed within the Colonna family confirming their direct connections to Saint Francis. According to family lore, Giovanni the Elder (d. 1245), the cardinal-priest of the church of Santa Prassede in Rome, who is known in the historical records as a papal legate in Constantinople. From there he returned with a very precious relic, the column near which Christ had suffered⁵³. Bearing in mind that the symbol of the family was a column (*colonna*, it.) due to their last name, it is not surprising that the family was keen to acquire such a relic. Giovanni's affiliation with Saint Francis is shown in the legend which the family nurtured in order to establish a close relationship with the founder of the order. As a papal legate, Giovanni took part in the *Fifth*

⁴⁹ Gardner 1973a, p. 22. Even though the mosaics are altered today, the drawing kept at the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh reveals the original design and the depictions of the figures. The drawing clearly shows two cardinals with their mitres on the ground in front of them, one on each side of the seated Christ.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 28.

⁵¹ Romano 2006, p. 295.

⁵² Knox 2008; Knox, Field 2017. Margherita Colonna was a sister of Giovanni Colonna, the Roman senator, who wrote her vita around 1280, and of cardinal Giacomo Colonna. She chose a life of prayer and penance on the family's estate in Palestrina, where she formed a community of devotees, who, after her death accepted the Franciscan rule – *sorores minores inclusae*. The researchers have argued that she followed a more traditional form of piety, different from Franciscan female mystical piety, and identified herself as Franciscan only to please her family. The intentions of the family to canonize Margherita, which for Giovanni wrote the vita, were obstructed by the political interferences that are discussed in this paper.

⁵³ Osborne 2012, p. 29.

crusade where he was eventually captured and imprisoned by the sultan. His life was then saved in Egypt due to the personal mediation of Saint Francis. However, this legend is not recorded outside the Colonna circles⁵⁴. Still, this story, true or not, can be taken as the starting point of the special relationship between the family and the Franciscan order.

The research of Rosalind Brooke has shown further that the Colonna family was engaged in the planning of the fresco cycle *Legend of Saint Francis* in the Upper Church of the Basilica of Assisi. The concluding scene of the nave murals illustrates the *Miracle of Saint Francis*, which included Jacopo Antonio Colonna, the bishop of Tivoli (from c. 1209), during the papacy of Gregory IX (fig. 6). This scene is not to be found in the earlier narrative scenes of Francis' life⁵⁵. One of the miracles added to the *Legenda Maior* by Nicholas IV mentions a bishop, but not by his name⁵⁶. However, Rosalind Brooke managed to confirm that it could be no one other than Jacopo. The inclusion of the column in the depiction undoubtedly draws associations with the family, and it also confirms the family's involvement in the completion of the Assisi fresco cycle after the death of Pope Nicholas IV.

Paul Binski offered an even clearer interpretation of the fresco, claiming the family's involvement in the whole fresco cycle of the *Legend of Saint Francis*, which is also seen in the engagement of Jacopo Torriti, practically the family's personal painter who worked in Santa Maria Maggiore as well⁵⁷. Taking into consideration the previously discussed competition between the Orsini and the Colonna family, I would agree with Binski's interpretation that one of the goals of the patrons of the cycle was to overshadow the work commissioned by the Orsini family in Assisi, primarily the frescoes by Cimabue in the transept⁵⁸.

The connection between the family and the Franciscans is visible in several other examples, such as the above-mentioned frescoes in the main apse of Santa Maria Maggiore and San Giovanni in the Lateran depicting Saint Francis and Anthony of Padua. Another example of the family's devotion to Saint Francis and the Franciscan order is the family's personal chapel in the Franciscan church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, which had a mosaic panel depicting the senator Giovanni Colonna kneeling in front of Saint Francis and Saint John the Evangelist⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*. The legend only appears in the sources connected with the family, and it is not possible to verify it from the independent sources.

⁵⁵ Brooke 2006, pp. 442-443; Binski 2011, p. 283.

⁵⁶ Binski 2009, p. 663.

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 665.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*. The frescoes by Cimabue in the Upper Church were executed in 1278/1280. The frescoes in the cross-vault bear the Orsini coat of arms.

⁵⁹ Osborne 2012, p. 30. Today, the mosaic is in the private collection of the family.

7. *The Connection between Santa Maria Maggiore and Church in the Upper Church in Assisi*

While the connections between the two churches in the terms of the patronage, iconography and creative executions have been discussed, one other connection deserves a more profound analysis: the cult of the nativity elaborately celebrated in both churches. This possible connection between the church of Santa Maria Maggiore and the order was examined in an article by Janet Robson where she concentrated on the famous scene *Miracle of the Crib in Greccio* (fig. 7), represented in the cycle *Life of Saint Francis* in the Upper Church of the Basilica of Assisi. The scene depicts the establishment of the annual liturgy of the celebration of the birth of Christ, but in art-historical terms, it is valuable because of the representation on the transversal choir screen – *tramezzo*⁶⁰. The author points out the peculiarity of the inscription which does not mention Greccio or any other church explicitly, and the unusual shape of the ciborium in the choir rather resembles the ciboria found in Roman papal basilicas.

The depiction of the ciborium resembling those typically found in Roman basilicas could have been one way to indicate the relation between Rome and Assisi as the basilica in Assisi is the only papal basilica to be found outside of Rome. Further, it emphasized the equality of Saint Francis with the apostolic saints⁶¹. Among the few churches which had a special nocturnal liturgy on Christmas Eve, there was Santa Maria Maggiore, which had already from the 11th century an established processional liturgy which culminated in the *Chapel of Nativity*⁶². Art-historians are still disputing where the depicted scene occurred since the legend under the depiction doesn't mention Greccio *per se*. Another interpretation puts the scene in the Lower Church of the Basilica of Assisi, above the tomb of Saint Francis, inside the choir closed with the marble *tramezzo* screen as seen on the fresco. However, there is an intriguing element on the fresco: the ciborium, which never existed in the Lower Church. Moreover, it resembles the Roman ciboria from the papal basilicas, precisely the one prepared by Arnolfo di Cambio in 1285 for S. Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome, due to its form and the porphyry columns. The church of Santa Maria Maggiore also had a ciborium with porphyry columns, but not above the main altar.

In the middle of the 13th century, a new *tabernaculum* ciborium was installed above the altar, that housed the relics, among them the relic of the crib of Christ⁶³. While Janet Robson proposes that this scene depicts Assisi and not

⁶⁰ Robson 2011, pp. 145-155; Hall 1974.

⁶¹ Robson 2011, p. 151.

⁶² Ivi, p. 152.

⁶³ Ivi, p. 155; Gardner 1970.

Greccio, she also proposes that the fresco has an allusion to the liturgy held in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore on Christmas Eve. The first reference is in the papal ciborium depicted in the fresco which emphasized a new status that basilica received during the papacy of Nicholas IV. The reasons for the representation of this scene should be sought for in several places. One of them is the undoubtedly newly established axis between the two churches archived through the patronage of Pope Nicholas IV, but also through the connections with the Colonna family, who would have had a greater influence on the iconography of the cycle after the death of Pope Nicholas IV as discussed before⁶⁴.

Janet Robson also noticed the mutual metamorphoses of the churches – while the frescos in Assisi represented the process of *Romanisation* of the church, the introduction of the Franciscan elements, among them Jerome, represented the process of the *Franciscanisation* of the Roman papal basilica. The presence of Saint Francis in the Roman church of Santa Maria Maggiore demonstrates that his position is equal to the papal saints, Peter and Paul, but it also emphasizes him as the inventor of the liturgy and the veneration of the crib of Jesus. In contrast, the Franciscan friars in Assisi received papal protection over their church⁶⁵.

Still, it might seem questionable how Jerome fits in this story of an exchange between Rome and Assisi. The restoration of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore involved the construction of the *Chapel of Nativity* where the relics of the crib were kept, in the newly constructed transept, executed by Arnolfo di Cambio. The decision to represent the nativity here should also be seen through the Franciscan connection and Pope Nicholas IV who promoted the cult of the nativity as one of the teachings of Saint Francis⁶⁶. Arnolfo's sculptural group of the Nativity is the earliest representation of it in art history, finished before the famous depiction in Assisi. Due to the connection of Jerome's burial place to the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, his relics were placed in the new chapel when it was finished. The invention of the story must have happened before 1292, as Pope Nicholas IV expressed his wish to be buried next to Jerome in the church⁶⁷. Not only that he wanted to be buried next to his namesake saint, but he chose the most prestigious place next to, not only Jerome's relics but also other precious relics that church possessed, namely the crib relics, stored in the new Chapel of Nativity. The fact that the pope was Jerome's namesake played a crucial part in the construction of Jerome's cult, and the idea of reviving the cult might have come from the pope himself.

⁶⁴ Binski 2011, Brooke 2006, pp. 392, 441-443.

⁶⁵ Robson 2011, p. 155.

⁶⁶ Moore 2017, p. 113.

⁶⁷ Rice 1985, p. 64, footnote 17: In the writing of Francesco Pipino, from the early 14th century, it is noted that Pope Nicholas IV was buried «in Ecclesia Sanctae Mariae Majoris juxta sepulcrum Beati Hieronymi» (*Chronicon* IV, 23, cf. Muratori 1978, 728A).

The reasons for choosing Saint Jerome and Saint Matthias as the “new” saints venerated in the church can also be seen in the circles of Franciscan theologians, surrounding Pope Nicholas IV and the Colonna family. Although at first sight, their connection is not obvious, these two saints express the Franciscan postulates at large⁶⁸.

The second half of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century was a period of extensive debates inside the Franciscan order, and the church in general, on the question of the apostolic poverty. The proponents and the defenders of the idea of absolute poverty built their arguments on the theological texts and debates, where Jerome appears as the perfect model because of his ascetic lifestyle and pious life. In the same way, Jerome’s renunciation of material goods, preferring the desert instead of papal Rome, could be seen as the prefiguration of the acts and image of Saint Francis, and vice-versa⁶⁹. The use of Saint Jerome as an authority in the debate on poverty is noticeable in Saint Bonaventure’s *Apologia pauperum*, the theological treatise composed in order to defend and promote the existence and the actions of the Franciscan order⁷⁰. His work can be seen as the direct answer to the Gerard of Abbeville’s attack against the existence of mendicant orders⁷¹. Even though he is reflecting upon the words of other church fathers, like Augustine and John Chrysostom, he quotes extensively Jerome’s words on poverty, along with his letters to Paula and her daughter Eustochium⁷².

Given this theological background, the image of Jerome and his female students was included in the mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore, where Jerome’s role as a teacher and a preacher, is emphasized. Similar iconographic types can be found in earlier Carolingian manuscripts: the *Vivian Bible* (fig. 1) and the *Bible from San Paolo fuori le Mura*⁷³. However, in the Late Middle Ages, this type of presentation became extremely rare. The two female saints were instead incorporated into the typical *sacra conversazione* representation. It is not known whether one of the Bibles served as the direct model for this image but taking into consideration the portrayed characters and their body postures,

⁶⁸ Russo 1987, pp. 30-31. Russo argues that Jerome was often portrayed in pair with evangelist Matthew because Matthew differs from the other evangelists as he is without an animal attribute. As one of the examples, he lists the mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore. However, he made an innocent mistake in the translation where he identified Saint Matthias with Saint Matthew, while the mosaic depicts Saint Matthias, the apostle who according to the *Acts of Apostles* replaced Judas and was known for his preaching in Cappadocia and on the coast of Caspian Sea. This error, however, means that Russo’s interpretation should not be taken into consideration.

⁶⁹ In the Late Middle Ages, the pairing of two saints will become very popular due to the penitent elements in their lives. See: Russo 1987, pp. 238-444.

⁷⁰ Skubiszewski, Skubiszewski 1986, p. 270.

⁷¹ See more: Mäkinen 2001, pp. 34-56.

⁷² Bonaventure 2010, p. 13; Skubiszewski, Skubiszewski 1986, p. 279.

⁷³ Skubiszewski, Skubiszewski 1986, p. 282.

it is presumable that the inspiration was drawn from the introductory page of the Bible in San Paolo fuori le Mura.

The legend associated with the church has dated the *translatio* of the relics of Saint Matthias to the church of Santa Maria Maggiore to the time of Saint Helena (246-330). It is not sure when this legend was invented⁷⁴, but the earliest sources mention that Saint Mathias was venerated in Rome already in the 11th century, while his relics in Santa Maria Maggiore are earliest documented in the 12th century⁷⁵.

Two earlier depictions of the saint were known in Rome. One in the apse of San Paolo fuori le Mura, made during the papacy of Honorius III, and one earlier in the frescos in the crypt (actually 5th-century church) of San Chrysogonus in Rome⁷⁶. However, it is clear that Matthias' cult started to gain importance in the period of the restoration of the church when the new reliquary was donated to the church by the Colonna family. Still, the devotion to Saint Matthias could be also observed from the Franciscan perspective, which explains the iconography of this depiction.

In the timeline of Francis' conversion and activities, the feast of Saint Matthias played an important role. As Thomas of Celano informs us, the moment in which Saint Francis received the divine call happened on the mass on the feast of Saint Matthias⁷⁷. The passage from the Gospel of Mathew, read that on that night in the church proclaimed,

And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support⁷⁸.

This short biblical passage illustrates the Franciscan postulates, and further underscored Francis' devotion to the continuation of the Matthias' ministry

⁷⁴ De Voragine 2012, p. 170. The earliest versions of his life are in the *Acts of Apostles*, as well in the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacopo da Voragine. He informs us that Matthias's body was buried under a porphyry slab in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore and that his head was shown to the people there. Additionally, he mentions another legend that can be found in Trier, where it is described that Matthias was born in Bethlehem, and his remains were first translated to Rome to the church of Santa Maria Maggiore by Saint Helen, and later translated to Trier. Matthias' birthplace, Bethlehem, certainly contributed to his temporary re-interment in this Roman church. Giordano 1649, pp. 171-172. In his chronicle, Giordano also discussed the question of the body of Saint Matthias being in Rome or Trier. He describes the main altar in the church where the relics were kept, and which could be accessed through *fenestella*. Additionally, he mentions that on his feast day the silver reliquary was brought to the people, who could see the apostle's head through the crystal parts of it. However, he doesn't mention the exact year of translation of the body to the church.

⁷⁵ Saxer 2001, pp. 317, 339-342.

⁷⁶ Murray, Murray 1998, p. 316.

⁷⁷ Brooke 2004, p. 56.

⁷⁸ Matthew 10, 8-10.

of preaching⁷⁹. The particularity of the representation of the saint, and the emphasis on the element of preaching, as well as the importance of his feast day as a milestone in the life of Saint Francis, forces the conclusion that the representation was not only referring to the relics preserved in the church but that two saints thus contributed to the *Franciscanisation* of one of the major Roman churches. The saints depicted here could be seen as the predecessors of Saint Francis as their lives and actions could be seen as emblematic examples of apostolic poverty, devoted life and the exemplary devotion to preaching the words of Christ promoted by Saint Francis.

However, research has shown that Jerome's cult enjoyed much greater recognition and importance than Matthias', which is not surprising if we keep in mind Jerome's position in *communio sanctorum*. It is visible that the invention of Jerome's cult in Rome was not the only innovation that came from the closed circle of the canons in the Santa Maria Maggiore, but it was supported by the higher instances of the Church, the pope himself. Besides the inclusion in the mosaics in the church, the cult was promoted with the indulgence given by Pope Boniface VIII in 1295, which granted forgiveness for all those who visited on the feast day of the translation of the relics – 9th of May⁸⁰. The given indulgence was a good way of promotion of the cult of the saint and the newly acquired relics, but also a way to collect the financial resources for completing the renovation⁸¹. In 1298, the same Pope also promoted the feast days of the four church doctors, apostles, and evangelists on the double rite *sub honores festis duplis*⁸².

Additionally, it seems that Jerome's cult had already become popular among the elite of the Catholic church, especially among the cardinals, whose patron saint he became during the Avignon papacy⁸³. The tomb of the cardinal Consalvo Rodriguez, a bishop of Alba Longa, who died and was buried in Rome, is in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. His funerary monument, executed by Giovanni Cosmati in 1299, has a mosaic decoration of bit later production in the upper part, representing *Virgin Mary with Saint Matthias and Jerome* (fig. 6). The obvious reference to the titular of the church and the most precious relics housed in the church is also backed with the inscriptions on the mosaics. Saint Matthias holds a scroll with the inscription *Me tenet ara prior*, alluding to the place of his relics in the main altar. Similarly, Jerome points out the place of his relics with the inscription *Recubo praesepis ad antrum*. Interestingly, Jerome is depicted dressed in a monastic habit, resembling the

⁷⁹ Robson 2006, p. 91.

⁸⁰ Rice 1985, p. 64. The same indulgence was confirmed by Pope Pius II on 21 January 1459 and again on 1 June 1464.

⁸¹ The renovation of the church was not finished as planned, mostly due to the fall of the Colonna in 1297.

⁸² Lanzoni 1920, p. 36.

⁸³ Russo 1987, pp. 51-60.

Franciscan monastic clothes, which should have been influenced by the already discussed Franciscan circle around the church⁸⁴.

8. *Santa Maria Maggiore as Second Bethlehem*

As previously mentioned, the 13th century in Rome was a period of increasing pilgrimages to the places of the martyrdoms and burials of the first apostles⁸⁵. The renovations of the Late Antique churches can be and should be seen as emphasizing the *romanitas* and the establishment of papal power in Rome. They should also be seen in the context of the rising pilgrimage and the significant financial influx coming from the pilgrims, not only in the votive gifts to the churches and monasteries but also to the economy of the city in general. Before examining the role of pilgrimage connected with the renovations of certain churches, it is necessary to define the metaphorical position which the church of Santa Maria Maggiore had in the formation of the sacred topography of the Holy Land in Rome, principally after the siege of Acre (1289-1291) and the fall of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem.

The translation of the sanctity of the Holy Land to Rome is not an invention of the 13th century was an idea that had been present for a long-time. It was initiated in the Late Antiquity when allegedly Helen, mother of Constantine, transported the earth from the Golgotha to Rome. Upon that place, the church Santa Croce in Gerusalemme was built⁸⁶. Despite the church holding a relic of the cross, the major fragment was stored in Lateran in the *Oratory of the True Cross* erected by Pope Hilarius in the 5th century⁸⁷. Yet, by the 8th century, the importance of the relic in the Lateran surpassed the one in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme progressively taking over the role of Jerusalem in the sacred landscape of Rome.

In the complex process of the construction of the image of Rome as the new Holy Land, the church of Santa Maria Maggiore also had its function. In the 7th century, after the Holy Land was conquered by the Arabs, the church received one of the earliest relics of Christ – his manger. In the light of the new political situation, the church of Santa Maria Maggiore became a protector of this precious relic. Moreover, it received the role of Bethlehem succeeding in the Church of Nativity which was inaccessible to all those who wished to visit it. Corresponding to the new role, the church started to be called *ad praesepe*,

⁸⁴ We should keep in mind that Pope Nicholas IV was a Franciscan, same as Jacopo Torriti the author of the mosaics in the apse.

⁸⁵ Birch 1998.

⁸⁶ Moore 2017, p. 31; De Blaauw 2014, p. 159. Despite the legend that connects the foundation to Saint Helen, the earliest written source about it is from the 15th century by Flavio Biondo.

⁸⁷ Johnson 1995.

clearly pointing out the most precious relic the church owns. This denomination did not happen accidentally, but as De Blaauw points out, it was related to the appointment of Pope Theodore who was born in Jerusalem⁸⁸.

Another aspect that many scholars who have dealt with the development of the cult of Saint Jerome have overlooked is the role of pilgrimage. The 13th century in Rome was a period of revival for Rome as pilgrims' target destination⁸⁹. The greatest contribution to this came from Pope Innocent III and was continued by his successors. The above-mentioned effort to restore the main churches of Rome by Nicholas III and Nicholas IV should be observed in the light of the growing number of the pilgrims streaming to Rome. The goal was to make Rome and its treasures splendid and thus worth visiting. The seven-century pattern of the growing popularity of Rome as a pilgrimage site after the Holy Land fell into the Arab hands, was reflected in the 13th-century political situation as well. The rising number of pilgrims to Rome in the second half of the 13th century was the direct consequence of the loss of the main pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land due to the Muslim conquest, most importantly of Jerusalem in 1244. Rome thus became not only a target destination for pilgrims due to the graves and shrines of the first apostles and martyrs, but because it now became a substitute for the Holy Land by having the relics connected with Christ himself.

The establishment of the sacred topography in Rome which resembled the Holy Land was reinforced by the "miniature pilgrimage", a procession which was part of the *ordo* for the coronation of Holy Roman Emperor, that ran from Santa Maria Maggiore to San Giovanni in Laterano⁹⁰. For the pilgrims who visited Rome, the processional route from Santa Maria Maggiore to Lateran had a symbolic meaning of passing from Bethlehem to Jerusalem⁹¹.

In this context, the restoration of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore should be observed as well. Besides the crib of Christ, the pilgrims were coming to see the most precious relic that church housed *Salus Populi Romani* – a miraculous image of the Virgin Mary believed to have been made by Saint Luke. Despite the legend which traced the painting to the time of its foundation and Empress Helen, the earliest documented reference of the painting in the church is from the 13th century⁹², so it is to suppose that it was made in the early 13th century.

As presented before, the end of the 13th century is pivotal for the transformation of Santa Maria Maggiore into the *Second Bethlehem*, and

⁸⁸ De Blaauw 2014, p. 146.

⁸⁹ Birch 1998, pp. 187-202.

⁹⁰ De Blaauw 2014, p. 147. See note 47: «*coronatus vadit de ecclesia Bethleem ad ecclesiam Yerusalem*». *Ordo Coronationis Imperatoris* 13, 7, cf. Elze 1960, p. 35. This ritual is not referred to again in the later *ordines*.

⁹¹ Moore 2017, p. 110.

⁹² Maniura 2004, p. 63. It is mentioned in Jacopo da Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* and *Rationale divinorum officiorum* by Guillaume Durand.

the innovation of Jerome's cult whose relics only strengthened this position enhancing the church as a destination of pilgrimage. Even though the legend associated with the church dates the translation to the 1280s, and with that the invention of the whole narrative, it is more plausible that the translation of Jerome's body is related to the restoration of the church in the 1290s, and the efforts of Pope Nicholas IV and the Colonna family, supported by the canons of the church. The renovations that were made in the church were in the function of the promotion of the newly established cult and newly acquired relics of the saint. The incorporation of Saint Jerome in the mosaic decorations in the transept, as well as on the façade of the church, clearly witness the propaganda of the new cult.

9. *Further Construction of Jerome's Sanctity*

From the above-discussed argument, several conclusions should be drawn. In the first place, Jerome's cult emerges in the period when the Franciscans were trying to establish their place in the Roman topography, where their presence in the city evolved differently than in the other urban centers of the Italian peninsula in which they became the main authority in town very fast. The reason for it is obvious, Rome was the heart of the Church, and in the atmosphere where the place for dominance was already overcrowded by the Roman families and their papal appointees, the necessity of the support for the Franciscans by some local family is evident. The papacy of Nicholas IV and the support of the Colonna family made it possible. It is not evident only in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, but also in several others that went through some type of refurbishments during the last decade of the 13th century, such as Santa Maria in Aracoeli⁹³.

Even though Franciscans had the support of Pope of Nicholas III, he did not undertake the mission of promoting Francis's image in Rome in the way Nicholas IV did, unsurprising given that he himself was a member of the order. The Roman Franciscan iconography could have been established only under a Franciscan pope, and it is visible in the above-mentioned cycles in Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore. In the Lateran, the presence of the modern saints in the new apse, and especially of Saint Francis, is connected with the dream of Innocent III and the restoration of the Lateran basilica, which was undertaken after the pope saw Francis holding the church and saving it from collapse. If we see Francis as the reformer of the church whose postulates were based on absolute poverty and preaching, it is not surprising that Nicholas IV chose to promote his original namesake saint in Rome – Saint Jerome.

⁹³ Brooke 2006, p. 446.

Besides being used in the Franciscanisation of the church, Jerome was also used in the ideological transformation of the position of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore as the *Second Bethlehem*. It should not be forgotten that the 13th century, in general, was a period of rising pilgrimages to Rome, as the consequence of the loss of the Holy Land, but also because after the Crusades Rome started to receive the relics connected with the Christ himself, such as *Column of Flagellation* in Santa Prassede. In an atmosphere where the funds brought by pilgrims represented an important part of the income for Roman churches, it is easy to understand the renovations undertaken by the Colonna family and Pope Nicholas IV in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. The renovations should thus be understood as monuments that gave a representative expression of the Colonna's power, but also as the formation of the scenography appropriate for the veneration of the precious relics of the crib of Jesus. The insertion of the new transept opened a place in the new chapel of the Nativity, in a more representative place, at the northern end of the transept. Taking into consideration all the circumstances, it is evident that the invention of Jerome's cult was part of an integrated plan of active promotion that also included Saint Matthias. However, the cult of latter one did not root as strongly as Jerome's whose saintly status was higher. For these reasons, the translation of Jerome's body and the invention of the cult should be placed within the period of the papacy of Nicholas IV (1288-1292). The dating of the text of the translation to the 1290s further supports this theory as it seems less likely that the text of the translation was written almost 10 years after the event. Further evidence is given by the pictorial representations of the saint in the church on the mosaics, which certainly served as the promotional material for the newly established cult. The depiction of the mosaic above cardinal Consalvo's tomb is a clear example of it, with the written mention of the place of Jerome's relics.

While the first phase of the development of the cult in Rome is connected to the translation of the relics and the creation of a decent shrine not only for Jerome's relics but also for Saint Matthias and other saints venerated in the church, at the end of the 13th century. The second phase, at the beginning of the 14th century, marked a new and important step in the further development of the cult and its dissemination throughout Western Christianity. Jerome's limited hagiography was no longer suitable for a man of such importance. While his *vita* was known for a miraculous deed, it seemed hardly possible that it would attract pilgrims to his new burial place. Additionally, very little was known about his last days and death. So, for that reason, at the beginning of the 14th-century new hagiographic material appeared, giving new details on Jerome's life and death, and introducing new miracles.

Thus, at the beginning of the 14th century, a set of letters, apparently written by Eusebius of Cremona, Cyril of Jerusalem and Augustine, were "discovered" and started to circulate around Europe, giving more details on Jerome's miracles and death. With time they became foundational texts of Jerome's cult which

reached its peak in the 15th century. Today, scholars agree that they were forged, but do not agree about the date of the forgery. However, the arguments given by scholars regarding the similarity between the text of the translation and some parts of the letters, indicate that the forgery happened in Rome, in the circle of Santa Maria Maggiore, not only to promote the cult but also to use Jerome as an authority in the discussion on the ongoing *visio beatifica* debates. However, this question deserves more attention and time than this paper allows.

For this argument, the establishment of the cult of Saint Jerome should be seen in the context of the Franciscan circles, the impact of his body on the pilgrimage to church to Santa Maria Maggiore, together with the formation of Jerome's cardinal image during the papacy of Avignon and the role that the members of the Colonna family had in it.

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Appendix

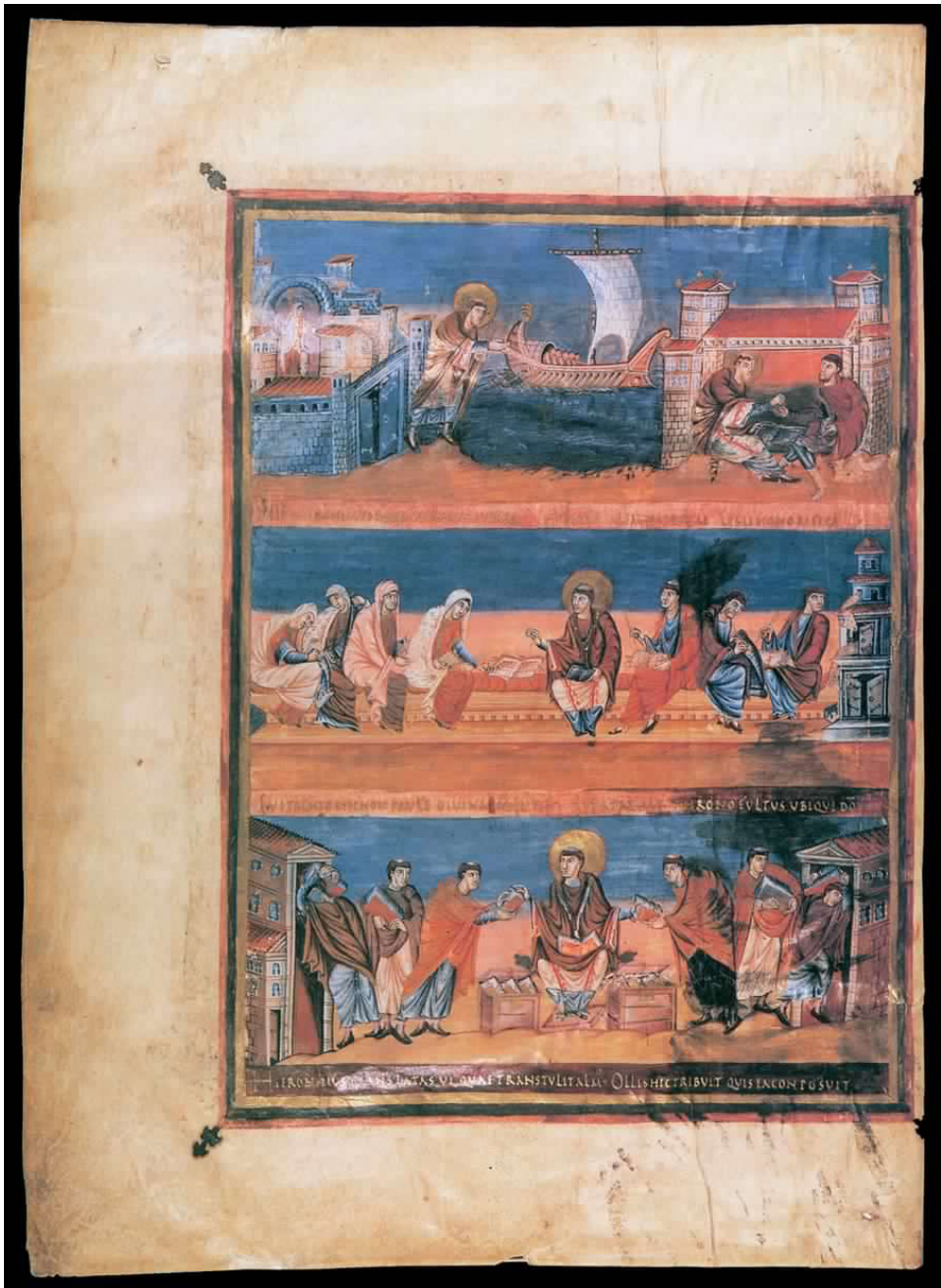


Fig. 1. *Scenes from the life of St. Jerome*, Vivian Bible, Tours, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS. lat. 1, fol. 3v. c. 845



Fig. 2. Jacopo Torriti, *Apse mosaic*, 1296, Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore



Fig. 3. Jacopo Torriti, *Apse mosaic, Saint Francis* (detail), 1269, Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore



Fig. 4. Paolo de Angelis, *Interior of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome*, 1621



Fig. 5. Reproduction of the apsidal mosaic representing Saint Jerome, 1295, Codex Vaticano Latino 5074



Fig. 6. Giovanni Cosmati, *The tomb of cardinal Consalvo Rodriguez*, after 1299, Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore

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