

The Popes of Rome in Post-Byzantine Wall Paintings from Romania

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Abstract: *This study aims to bring forth two iconographic contexts which relate to the issue of the primacy of Rome. The first one dwells upon the evidence taken from Byzantium and the Balkans, while the second follows this line of investigation into the Romanian Post-Byzantine heritage. The cult of Saint Peter was strong enough in Byzantium as to prevent any refutation of his primacy, even during the harshest quarrels with Rome. This could explain the presence of Roman Popes (most frequently of St. Sylvester) in the procession of saintly bishops depicted in Moldavian apses at the end of the 15th c. and in the 16th c., but equally in Wallachian iconographic programs from the 16th and 17th c. This phenomenon might hint at a claim to the plenitude of the apostolic tradition for the local Church, but also at a polemical anti-Latin discourse, which makes use of papal iconic portraits in contexts with strong ecclesiastic imprint.*

Keywords: *Rădăuți Middle Byzantine iconography, Late Byzantine iconography, Post-Byzantine iconography, Popes of Rome, apsidal programs, polemical imagery*

This study¹ aims to bring forth two iconographic contexts which relate to the issue of the primacy of Rome. The first one dwells upon evidence taken from Byzantium and the Balkans, while the second follows this line of investigation into the Romanian Post-Byzantine heritage. I shall aim at arguing that the primacy of Peter among the Apostles and of his heirs on the See of Rome within the Christian *oikumene* were ideas never abandoned by Eastern Christianity, receiving a visual expression in the selection of saintly bishops depicted in the apse and elsewhere within the iconographic programs of the Late and Post-Byzantine pictorial traditions of both Moldavia and Wallachia.

The first argument is prompted by the peculiar redaction of the Communion of the Apostles, in the apse of the basilica of Holy Wisdom in Ohrid (c. 1050), in which Peter is depicted in an emphasized *proskynesis*

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which puts him in sharp contrast with the other stately participants; he bends much lower than Saint Paul, who opens the opposite procession of Apostles. Commenting on this idiosyncrasy, Branislav Cvetković argued that such a firm separation of Peter from the other disciples, reinforced by the detail of his bare outstretching hands, represents a watchful choice made by the donor of the frescoes². Being an adamant polemist against the Latins, the archbishop Leo would have intentionally abandoned all deference towards the founder of the Roman church, and such a mind-set was echoed by the depiction of Peter in a posture of *inclinatio plena*; moreover, Christ gives his benediction to the group of Apostles led by Paul. Cvetković considered that the Communion of Apostles ordered by Leo, with its subtle asymmetries, was conceived as a visual rebuke aimed at those who declared themselves *vicarii Petri* and, by the same token, at those under their spiritual authority³.

Such assertion proves difficult to embrace, for two reasons. First, the cult of Saint Peter preserved its intensity in Byzantium, even throughout the most fervent polemics with the Latins. As Vera von Falkenhausen has proved, an alleged scorning of Peter as founder of the archbishopric of Rome was one of the pretexts invoked by the leaders of the Fourth Crusade in their effort of legitimizing the holy war against the Greeks, but there is a total lack of other documents which would substantiate such accuse⁴. On the contrary, there were several churches dedicated to Saint Peter within the New Rome, and chapels under his patronage existed in the Imperial Palace and in Hagia Sophia⁵. Should one mention a specific feature of the Byzantine cult of the prince of the Apostles, one would point at his permanent association with Saint Paul; this goes as far as to generate in the hagiographic material dedicated to other homonymous saints the existence of parallels established with homologue saints named Paul. The single controversial aspect related to Peter is the fact that he was married (the Gospel clearly speaks of his mother in law), but, surprisingly, this argument was never brought forth by the Byzantines during the dispute concerning the celibacy of the secular clergy⁶. The cult of Peter in Byzantium is validated not only by literary evidence; his chains were venerated in Constantinople as early as the 9th century, when his miraculous escape from prison received a day of commemoration (on the 16th

² Branislav Cvetković, “Intentional asymmetry in Byzantine imagery: The Communion of the Apostles in St. Sophia of Ohrid and later instances”, in *Byzantion*, t. 76 (2006), pp. 74–96 (esp. 75–84).

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 80–84.

⁴ Vera von Falkenhausen, “San Pietro nella religiosità bizantina”, in *Bisanzio, Roma e l’Italia nel’Alto Medioevo: Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo 34, 3–9 aprile 1986*, II, Presso la sede del Centro, Spoleto, 1988, pp. 627–674.

⁵ Raymond Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l’Empire Byzantin*, Première partie: *Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat Œcuménique*, III, *Les églises et les monastères*, 2nd ed., Institut français d’études byzantines, Paris, 1969, pp. 397–402.

⁶ Vera von Falkenhausen, “San Pietro nella religiosità bizantina”, pp. 628–638.

of February), while at the same time a canon for the holy chains was composed by Joseph the Hymnographer. Another relic associated with Peter, venerated in his chapel from the Imperial palace, was the knife he used for cutting off Malchus's earlobe⁷. The cult of Peter was intense enough as to prompt many Byzantine pilgrims to visit Rome; but the target of their devotion was not only the tomb of Peter, but also the tomb of Paul, and the two Apostles were so closely connected in the Byzantine devotion that, in several pilgrim books, their tombs were described as located on the same premises⁸. The cult of Saint Peter was however strong enough in Byzantium as to prevent any refutation of his primacy; even during the harshest quarrels with Rome, the Byzantines merely argued that the primacy of Rome was given not by Peter as a founder of the Holy See, but by its status of imperial capital city (a status lost once the New Rome was elected by Constantine)⁹.

Coming back to the church in Ohrid, another aspect that questions an alleged intention of disdaining the Papacy is represented by the selection of bishops represented in its southern pastophorion: six popes of Rome, namely Vigilus, Clemens, Leo, Gregory and Sylvester¹⁰. It is true that the apse is reserved for the saintly bishops of the New Rome, but seeing this as a sign of inferiority assigned to the See of Rome would be inaccurate, as the eastern chapels are not spaces of secondary relevance, being assimilated to the sanctuary and constantly interpreted by the mystagogical texts in close relationship with the apse¹¹.

This aspect opens the second line of inquiry, which I shall follow into the Romanian Post-Byzantine heritage. First, I would like to stress upon the presence of Roman Popes in the procession of saintly bishops depicted in Moldavian apses at the end of the 15th century and in the 16th century¹². Among them, the most popular seems to be St. Sylvester, who is represented alongside the Three Hierarchs (John Chrysostom, Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian) in the central section of the procession at Pătrăuți (**Fig. 1**) and Popăuți (**Fig. 2**). Sylvester appears again at Dobrovăț, but in a different context, as he is followed by two other Roman popes, Gregory the Great and Martin (**Fig. 3**); they occupy the third, fourth and fifth positions to the south, while opposite to them, on the fifth and sixth positions, are

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 638–641.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 641–646.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 651–658.

¹⁰ See, more recently, Branislav Todić, “Représentations de Papes Romains dans l'église Sainte-Sophie d'Ohrid. Contribution à l'idéologie de l'archevêché d'Ohrid”, in *Delton tēs Christianikēs Archaologikēs Hetaireias*, ser. 4, t. 29 (2008), pp. 105–118, with a survey of the academic literature on this topic.

¹¹ B. Todić, “Représentations de Papes Romains”, pp. 116–117.

¹² I commented upon these peculiar iconographic choices in a previous study, “Selectia sfinților ierarhi în absidele moldovenești (secolele XV–XVI)”, in *POLYCHRONION. Profesorului Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca la 70 de ani*, Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 2012, pp. 65–75.

depicted archbishops of Constantinople, Metrophanes and Nicephorus. One should be mindful that, in the same monument, the narthex depicts allegorically the main spiritual centres of the Eastern monasticism through their spiritual fathers (Saint Sabbas for Jerusalem, Athanasius for Athos, and John Climacus for Sinai)¹³, hinting at a similar concern for claiming a filiation with the most revered spiritual centres of the Orthodoxy. The insertion of St. Sylvester in Moldavian programs might be paralleled with Serbian examples; the illustration of Roman popes (most frequently Sylvester, but sometimes also Leo and Martin) represents a peculiar feature of the Serbian medieval wall paintings. In Sopoćani¹⁴, Leo is depicted towards the northern end of the procession, followed by local saints (Sabbas II and Arsenius), while at Lesnovo¹⁵, he accompanies Sylvester at the southern extremity. On the one hand, Sylvester stands alone at Karan¹⁶, Prokuplje¹⁷ and Manasja¹⁸, but one must highlight that he never takes a leading position, as in Pătrăuți and Popăuți. Martin, on the other hand, appears in the northern pastophorion at Matejč¹⁹.



Fig. 1 Pătrăuți. Apse, Sts. John Chrysostom, Sylvester, Athanasius, and Spyridon

¹³ André Grabar, “Un cycle des *capitales* chrétiennes dans l’art moldave du XVI^e siècle”, in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, t. 21 (1972), pp. 125–130.

¹⁴ Nikolaj Okunev, “Les peintures murales à l’église de Sopoćani”, in *Byzantinoslavica*, t. 1 (1929), p. 120 *sqq.* Gabriel Millet and Anatole Frolov, *La peinture du moyen âge en Yougoslavie*, II, de Boccard, Paris, 1957, pl. 1 (3–4), 2–3, 4 (4), 98 (1), Vojislav J. Đurić, *Sopoćani*, Prosveta, Belgrade, 1963, pp. 54, 112, ill. I–II, B. Todić, “L’Apôtre André et les Archevêques Serbes sur les fresques de Sopoćani”, in *Byzantion*, t. 72 (2002), pp. 465–474, ill. 2–3.

¹⁵ Smiljka Gabelić, *Manastir Lesnovo. Istorija i slikarstvo*, Stubovi kulture, Belgrade, 1998, pp. 69, 273, pl. 18–23.

¹⁶ Milan Kašanin, “Bela crkva Karanska”, in *Starinar*, ser. 3, t. 4 (1926–1927), pp. 187 *sqq.*, pl. 11, 39, 40.

¹⁷ Dušan Tasić, “Les peintures de l’église médiévale de Prokuplje”, in *Zbornik za Likovne Umetnosti Matice Srpski*, t. 3 (1967), pp. 129 *sqq.*, pl. 2–3.

¹⁸ B. Todić, *Manastir Resava*, Agencija “Draganić”, Belgrade, 1995, pp. 57–61, 149, 153, pl. 32, 56–59, 61, 101, 107.

¹⁹ Elizabeta Dimitrova, *Manastir Matejče*, Kalamus, Skopje, 2002, pp. 107 *sqq.*, 278, 285, 301, 315, pl. 18–21.



Fig. 2 Popăuți. Apse, Sts. Basil, Sylvester, and Cyril



Fig. 3 Dobrovăț Monastery. Apse, Sts. Sylvester, Gregory, and Martin

The presence of Roman Popes in the economy of apsidal programmes raises serious issues, in the light of an observation made by Christopher Walter who pointed out synthetically that these iconographies avoid all secondary or problematic aspects²⁰. For instance, the role played by the emperors in the salvific plan, alongside other themes related to the

²⁰ Christopher Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church*, Variorum Publications, London, 1982, p. 221.

oikumene, is usually relegated to the narthex²¹. A similar situation is met with the themes connected with confessional controversies, though the most outstanding authors of mystagogical writings, Nicholas of Andida and Nicholas Cabasilas, were at the same time very active in the polemic against the Latins. Given this tendency of the Byzantine iconography, the Roman Popes were not a popular choice, a fact that singles out even more the case of the southern pastophorion from Ohrid. Walter quotes alongside this example the appearances of Sylvester in Saint Sofia from Kiev, Hosios Loukas, Daphni, Saint Nicholas Orphanos from Salonic, Bela Crkva, Staro Nagorično and Dečani²². In the last two monuments, he is accompanied by Leo. One must add to this corpus the iconography of the Northern pastophorion in the church of St. Nicholas from Curtea de Argeș (**Fig. 4**), where saint Sylvester is depicted alongside Peter of Alexandria, Spyridon of Trimythous, John the Almoner of Constantinople and a fourth unidentified bishop²³. From a statistic point of view, nonetheless, Walter was right to consider that the Popes of Rome did not represent a popular iconographic choice throughout the middle and late Byzantine periods²⁴.



Fig. 4 Curtea de Argeș, Sts. Sylvester and Peter of Alexandria

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 221–222.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 222 and n. 307, commenting also the situation of Pope Leo (scarcely represented) and Martin, Agatho or Gregory Dialogus, almost absent from monumental programs.

²³ Daniel Barbu, *Pictura murală din Țara Românească în secolul al XIV-lea [The Wall Painting from Țara Românească in the 14th century]*, “Meridiane” Publishing House, Bucharest, 1986, p. 53, iconographic inventory under numbers 62–66. The author does not speculate on this peculiar choice. On the scroll of Pope Sylvester: “Lord, our God, Whose dominion is incomparable and glory incomprehensible; Whose mercy is immeasurable, and love for mankind [ineffable]” (secret prayer of the first antiphon).

²⁴ See, more recently, Chara Konstantinidi, *Ho Melismos: hoi sylleitourgountes hierarches kai hoi aggelloi-diakonoι mprosta stēn Hagia Trapeza me ta timia dōra ē ton eucharistiako Christo*, Thessaloniki, Kentro Byzantinōn Ereunōn, 2008.

However, the Moldavian examples quoted earlier, as well as the situation in Curtea de Argeș, have nonetheless been extended during the 16th and 17th centuries in Wallachia through the practice of including a series of iconic portraits of Roman Popes at the base of the drum. Their placement between the iconography of the drum and the four evangelists from the pendentives brings forth a vigorous ecclesiological inference, pointing at the role played by the successors of Peter in the accomplishment of the divine providence. Thus, in the funerary parekklesion of Cozia²⁵, this row is composed by saints Sylvester, Vigilius (inscribed as ‘Vergilius’), Gregory, Celestine and Agatho (**Fig. 5**). The first two popes hold open books (that of Sylvester miraculously floating above his trunk, as the bishop blesses with both his hands). Its text is worn out, but one can still read the book held by the other pope: “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God.” The popes from Cozia, led by Sylvester and Vigilius, recite the Nicene Creed²⁶. One must notice that the popes’ headgears are tiaras or royal crowns, the latter choice reminding the Moldavian practice, as the instances from Dobrovăț, from Voroneț or from the ecumenical councils represented at Arbore show this peculiar royal feature. A similar iconography is displayed in the catholicon from Snagov monastery²⁷, doubled nonetheless by a most spectacular selection of Roman Popes for the prothesis chapel (**Fig. 6**), echoing the situation met earlier at St. Nicholas from Curtea de Argeș. At Snagov, the centre of the small apse is occupied by an altar table surmounted by the dove of the Holy Spirit encircled by an eight-rayed glory; this theophany is flanked by the officiating bishops: Anthimus of Nicomedia, Pope Leo, Pope Sylvester, Pope Agatho²⁸, Hierotheos, Dionysius Areopagitus, and Timotheos. The prayers inscribed on the scrolls held by

²⁵ Carmen Laura Dumitrescu, *Pictura murală din Țara Românească în veacul al XVI-lea [The Wall Painting in Țara Românească in the 16th century]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978, pl. 9–11; Ioana Iancovescu, “Picturile de la bolnița mănăstirii Cozia” [The Paintings from the Hospital of Cozia monastery], in *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei [Studies and Research in Art History]*, new ser., t. 2 (2012), pp. 161–214.

²⁶ I. Iancovescu, “Picturile” [“Paintings”], p. 164, 167 (iconographic inventory, under “Naos”, no. 5) and fig. 21 on p. 181.

²⁷ See more recently Atanasia Văetiși, “Ansamblul pictural al bisericii Mănăstirii Snagov” [“The Pictural Ensemble of the Church of Snagov Monastery”], in *Mănăstirea Snagov: istorie și artă [Snagov Monastery: History and Art]*, “Cuvântul vieții” Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, p. 95. Conf. C. L. Dumitrescu, “Deux églises valaques décorées au XVI^e siècle: Snagov et Tismana” [Two Wallachian Churches Decorated during the 16th century: Snagov and Tismana], in *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire de l’Art*, t. 10 (1973), no. 1–2.

²⁸ All standing iconic portraits preserve, alongside the painted tituli, the sgraffiti incised by the painters; the portrait of Agatho has lost the painted inscription, but its sgraffito is still legible.

popes Sylvester and Agatho display the secret prayers for incensing²⁹ and for the completion of the prothesis rite³⁰.



Fig. 5 Cozia, funerary parekklesion. Pope Vegilius



Fig. 6 Snagov Monastery, prothesis chapel

²⁹ On the scroll of Pope Sylvester: “We offer You incense, O Christ our God, for a perfume of [spiritual] fragrance; receive it [upon Your heavenly Altar and send down upon us in return the grace of Your all-Holy Spirit]”.

³⁰ On the scroll of Pope Agatho: “O God, our God, who didst send forth the heavenly Bread, the food of the whole world, our Lord [and God Jesus] Christ”.

A renewed interest in the portrayal of Roman Popes is registered in the Wallachian wall paintings from the 17th century, beginning with the reign of Matei Basarab. Thus, at Topolnița³¹, Sylvester holds the second to last position in the southern half of the apsidal procession, while at Scăueni³² he appears alongside Gregory, and in Crețulești³³, he is figured alongside Cyril of Alexandria; one must also notice that in the row of medallions above the procession, in the corresponding position to Sylvester is represented Ambrose of Mediolanum. In the same interval, at Arnota, six popes (all labelled as *papareski*, a shortened version for the traditional epithet *papa rymski*, present in the wall paintings of the 16th century) occupy the arch between the apse and the dome³⁴: Pegasios³⁵ (?), Sylvester, Bucolus³⁶, Vigilius, Martin, and Agatho (**Fig. 7**). Exceptionally enough, in this monument, the Roman Popes are figured a second time in the narthex, on the transversal arch (**Fig. 8**), which displays the busts of Bucolus, Leo, Andrew³⁷, Celestine, Adrian, Martin, and Dionysius³⁸.



Fig 7 Arnota Monastery. Naos, Eastern arch

³¹ Cornelia Pillat, *Pictura murală în Țara Românească în epoca lui Matei Basarab* [*Mural Painting in Țara Românească during the time of Matei Basarab*], “Meridiane” Publishing House, Bucharest, 1980, p. 24, iconographic inventory under no. 32.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 32, iconographic inventory, under no. 5.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 34, iconographic inventory, under no. 40.

³⁴ Conf. *ibidem*, p. 19, iconographic inventory, under nos. 19–22: Agatho, Vucu (sic), Eravest (sic), Pegasius.

³⁵ The inscription is disfigured by the clumsy restoration, so the lecture of Cornelia Pillat could be trusted. However, there is no pope listed with this name; Pegasius was one of the priests martyred in Isfahan by the Persian king Sapor II (alongside Acindynus, Aphthonius, Elpidephorus, and Anempodistus). An alternate reading could nonetheless indicate Pope Damasus.

³⁶ There is no pope listed under this name, St. Bucolus, disciple of Apostle John, was bishop of Smyrna.

³⁷ Despite the clear inscription, there is no evidence for a pope bearing this name, leaving aside the fictional “Jewish Pope”.

³⁸ Conf. Pillat, *Pictura murală* [*Wall Painting*], p. 19, iconographic inventory, under nos. 108–115: portraits of patriarchs.



Fig. 8 Arnota Monastery. Narthex, transversal arch

The most significant moment for this peculiar selection of saintly bishops is registered during the reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu; in the perimeter of Vâlcea district only³⁹, at this time, several monuments display the familiar row of medallions at the base of the drum, including a large number of Roman Popes (in the following lists, footnotes will indicate the plausible identifications for saints who were surely not titulars of this see). At Mamu⁴⁰, this selection includes saints Clemens, Martin, Julius, Juvenal⁴¹, Constantine, Simeon⁴², Euty chius⁴³, Leo, Gregory, Eleutherius, Theodotus⁴⁴,

³⁹ Corina Popa, Ioana Iancovescu, Vlad Bedros, Elisabeta Negrău, *Repertoriul picturii murale brâncovenești. I [The Repertory of Wall Painting having a Brâncovenesc style]*, Vâlcea Department, The Publishing House of the National University of Arts, Bucharest, 2008.

⁴⁰ *Repertoriul [The Repertory]*, p. 172, II.5.

⁴¹ Bishops with this name are listed for the dioceses of Jerusalem and Narni; Juvenal of Jerusalem was the first bishop to receive the patriarchal dignity, after the Council of Chalcedon.

⁴² The only pope with this name held the see of Alexandria.

⁴³ Patriarch of Constantinople.

⁴⁴ Bishop of Laodicea.

Meletius⁴⁵, Capiton⁴⁶, Parthenius⁴⁷, Hippolytus, Peter⁴⁸, Innocent, Boniface, and Sylvester. At Polovragi⁴⁹, the saints selected for this register are Clemens (**Fig. 9**), Sylvester, Eleutherius, Charalampos⁵⁰, Aicepsimus, Aeithalas⁵¹, Meletius⁵², Stephen, Agapetus, Eusebius, Martin, Euty chius⁵³, Dionysus, Nicander⁵⁴, and Joannicius⁵⁵. In the church of Surpatele Monastery⁵⁶, the saints depicted at the base of the drum are Jacob⁵⁷, Liberius, Apollonius⁵⁸, Agapetus, Stephen, Flavius⁵⁹, Sixtus, Gregory, Alexander, Boniface, Innocent, Celestine, Martin, Agapetus (**Fig. 10**), Agatho, Adrian, Stephen, Clemens, and Sylvester. The church from Fedeleşoiu⁶⁰ displays the following saints in this area: Gregory, Sylvester, John, Germanus, Proclus, Metrophanes⁶¹, Cyril⁶², Methodius⁶³, Sophronius⁶⁴, Athanasius⁶⁵, Nicephorus, Euty chius⁶⁶, John⁶⁷, Stephen, and Basil⁶⁸. In the catholicon of Govora⁶⁹ the papal selection (preserved inscriptions include the title ‘pope’) comprises Leo, Agapetus, Liberius, Clemens, Nicholas⁷⁰, Gregory, Boniface, Zosimus, Thomas⁷¹, Celestine, Adrian, and Agatho. At Ocele Mari⁷², the medallions depict ‘popes’ (same epigraphic peculiarity as earlier at Govora) Sylvester, Gregory, Alexander, John⁷³, Peter, Adrian, Flavius⁷⁴, Jacob⁷⁵, and

⁴⁵ Bishop of Antioch.

⁴⁶ One of the seven priests martyred in Kherson.

⁴⁷ Bishop of Lampsacus.

⁴⁸ Perhaps St. Peter of Alexandria.

⁴⁹ *Repertoriul [The Repertory]*, pp. 242–243, II.6.

⁵⁰ Bishop of Magnesia.

⁵¹ Bishop in Persia.

⁵² See note 45.

⁵³ See n. 43.

⁵⁴ Bishop of Myra.

⁵⁵ The only bishop with this name could be presumably identified as Joanikije II, the first Patriarch of Serbia.

⁵⁶ *Repertoriul*, p. 303, II.6.

⁵⁷ Perhaps Jacob “the Lord’s Brother”, first bishop of Jerusalem.

⁵⁸ Bishop of Ephesus.

⁵⁹ Either Flavius of Nicomedia or Flavianus of Constantinople.

⁶⁰ *Repertoriul*, p. 327, II.5.

⁶¹ John, Germanus, Proclus, and Metrophanes belong to the list of the Constantinopolitan see.

⁶² Pope of Alexandria.

⁶³ Patriarch of Constantinople.

⁶⁴ Bishop of Jerusalem.

⁶⁵ Pope of Alexandria.

⁶⁶ Nicephorus and Euty chius belong to the list of the Constantinopolitan see.

⁶⁷ It is difficult to assess an identity for this doubled name.

⁶⁸ Basil the Great of Caesarea.

⁶⁹ *Repertoriul*, p. 358, II.6.

⁷⁰ The only pope with this name from the interval prior to the 1054 Schism is Nicholas I, main figure, however, in the Photian Schism.

⁷¹ It is impossible to assess an identity for this name.

⁷² *Repertoriul*, p. 392, II.5.

⁷³ See notes 61 and 67.

Germanus⁷⁶. Eventually, the church of Sărăcinești Monastery⁷⁷ includes in this iconographic register ‘popes’ Sylvester, Nicephorus, Paul, Methodius⁷⁸, Alexander, Leontius⁷⁹, Euty chius⁸⁰, Meletius⁸¹, Paul, Leo, Metrophanes, and Germanus⁸². The possible survival of this practice in post-Brâncovan ensembles could be proved by further examinations.



Fig. 9 Polovragi Monastery. Pope Clemens

⁷⁴ See note 59

⁷⁵ See note 57

⁷⁶ Patriarch of Constantinople.

⁷⁷ *Repertoriul [The Repertory]*, p. 414, II.6.

⁷⁸ Nicephorus, Paul and Methodius belong to the list of the Constantinopolitan see.

⁷⁹ Bishop of Caesarea.

⁸⁰ See note 43.

⁸¹ See note 45.

⁸² See notes 61 and 76.



Fig.10 Surpatele Monastery. Popes Martin and Agapetus

As one would expect, these programmes are informed by the tradition set by the ensemble of Hurezi; indeed, in the catholicon, the parallel between the Old and the New Rome is expressed by the mirroring of two rows of archbishops, depicted on the two halves of the circumference, at the base of the drum⁸³ (Constantinople and other major eastern centres of Patristic age: John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Athanasius, Cyril⁸⁴, Germanus, Proclus, Methodius, Nicephorus, Metrophanus; Rome: Sylvester, Martin, Leo, Alexander, Agapetus, Liberius, Clemens, Adrian, Agatho, Celestine, Stephen, Hippolytus, Gregory; Constantinople again: Paul the Confessor, Eutychius, Gregory the Theologian). This program is reinstated in the hermitage of Saint Stephen⁸⁵ (Basil, Gregory, Martin, Therapon⁸⁶,

⁸³ *Repertoriul [The Repertory]*, p. 63, IV.8.

⁸⁴ Basil the Great held the See of Caesarea, while Athanasius and Cyril belong to the See of Alexandria.

⁸⁵ *Repertoriul*, p. 217, II.6.

⁸⁶ Bishop in Cyprus.

Clemens, Patricius⁸⁷, Sylvester, Nicephorus, and Athanasius⁸⁸), but not necessarily in the hermitage of the Holy Apostles⁸⁹, where the series of popes and patriarchs is displayed on the upper parts of the Northern and Southern walls (Sylvester, Nectarius⁹⁰, Modestus⁹¹, Athanasius, Cyril⁹², Nicephorus⁹³, Gregory and Spyridon Trimythous).

To sum up this issue, one must be mindful of two aspects implied in the popularity of the Roman Popes in the post-Byzantine iconography within the Romanian territory: on the one hand, the leading figure, as in Byzantium, seems to be Pope Sylvester, and on the other, there is also a narrative component for the devotion addressed to this saint, expressed by episodes from his life that become entangled with the hagiographic material concerning saint Constantine the Great. Two of these episodes are even illustrated in local iconographies, one in Moldavia and the other one in Wallachia. At Bălinești, the narthex includes a large cycle of the miracles worked by the Archangels, and, among them, the baptism of Constantine by St. Sylvester⁹⁴ (**Fig. 11**); this episode appears in the Late Byzantine redactions of the life of Constantine, which were received in Moldavia through the Slavonic version compiled by Patriarch Euthymius of Târnovo⁹⁵. The second instance is represented by the illustration of the dispute between St. Sylvester and Rabbi Zamvri in the cycle of Saint Constantine from the narthex of Hurezi Catholicon (**Fig. 12**). There is no evidence that this episode from the life of Sylvester was ever integrated into the life of Constantine⁹⁶.

⁸⁷ Bishop of Prusa.

⁸⁸ See note 84.

⁸⁹ *Repertoriul*, pp. 198–199, II.10.

⁹⁰ Patriarch of Constantinople.

⁹¹ Bishop of Jerusalem.

⁹² See note 84.

⁹³ See note 66.

⁹⁴ The cycle was first signalled by Sorin Ulea, “La peinture extérieure moldave: où, quand et comment est-elle apparue” [«Moldavian External Painting: where, when and how it appeared »], in *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire*, t. 23 (1984), no. 4, p. 286, note 12.

⁹⁵ Gheorghe Mihăilă, “Tradiția literară constantiniană de la Eusebiu al Cezareei la Nichifor Calist Xanthopoulos, Eftimie al Tîrnovei și domnii țărilor române” [«Literary tradition during the time of Constantin from Eusebiu of Caesarea to Nichifor Calist Xanthopoulos, Eftimie of Tîrnova and the rulers of Romanian countries», in *Cultură și literatură română veche în context european: studii și texte [Culture and Old Romanian Literature in the European Context: studies and texts]*, The Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1979, pp. 217–380.

⁹⁶ Ioana Iancovescu, “Biserica Sf. Împărați: pictura” [“The Church of the Saint Emperors: Painting”], in *Repertoriul [The Repertory]*, pp. 50–51.



Fig.11 Bălinești. Narthex, Baptism of St. Constantine



Fig.12 Hurezi Monastery. Narthex, Dispute of St. Sylvester with Zamvri

These iconographic contexts invite to an evaluation of the parallelism between the two protagonists, the emperor and the pontiff, as model for the ideal balance between the secular and spiritual authorities. In my opinion, the popularity of Sylvester and, alongside him, of several or many other Roman Popes, might be seen as a visual expression of the fidelity manifested towards the Byzantine heritage of *symphoneia* but also as a claim to the plenitude of the apostolic tradition for the local church, which expressed its “pedigree” through this inclusion of archbishops from each of the prestigious sees of the Pentarchy – among which Rome never lost its leading role.

However, the appropriation of the Roman Popes as a crucial part of the selection of saintly bishops participating in the iconographic programs of Late and Post-Byzantine pictorial practice should be equally interpreted in the light of the fervent polemic against the “Latin Church”, entering therefore within the broader ‘polemical quotations’ recently conceptualized by Ágnes Kriza⁹⁷. As I showed, the local Post-Byzantine iconographies seldom display Popes of Rome commemorated in the Byzantine ritual as sources of legitimation within the Orthodox *oikoumene*. More strikingly, in the 17th century (when the title of ‘pope’ was arguably pointing first of all to the Roman pontiff rather than to the memory of the Alexandrian Popes), this epithet is sometimes bestowed upon saintly bishops who obviously belong to the other sees of the Pentarchy (the ‘New Rome’, Antioch, Jerusalem) or to crucial spiritual centres of Early Christianity. The most conspicuous turn in this iconography belongs to the 16th century, when the Popes are placed at the base of the drums to recite the Nicene Creed (thus hinting at the *Filioque* dispute) or take part in the rite of prothesis, as witnesses of the descend of the Holy Spirit upon the altar table (alluding henceforth both to the Liturgical dispute regarding the offertory, and equally to the theological polemic concerning the eucharistic transubstantiation).

Such practices echo indeed the ‘polemical quotations’ described by Kriza:

What we see here, however, is a visual counterpart to written religious polemic: this is visual polemic, a pictorial use of the rules of rhetoric. In order to challenge an idea, the polemicist, that is, the painter, quotes his opponent: he takes an iconographic element or motif from the representation he wants to challenge, in order to make the target of the polemic recognisable. [...] The Orthodox painters quoted the Western pictorial elements, but they also modified them and put them into a new, transformative context, thus juxtaposing their own position and counterclaim⁹⁸.

⁹⁷ Ágnes Kriza, “The Russian *Gnadenstuhl*”, in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, t. 79 (2016), pp. 79–130, esp. 122–128.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 122–123.

List of illustrations:

- Fig. 1** Pătrăuți. Apse, Sts. John Chrysostom, Sylvester, Athanasius, and Spyridon
Fig. 2 Popăuți. Apse, Sts. Basil, Sylvester, and Cyril
Fig. 3 Dobrovăț Monastery. Apse, Sts. Sylvester, Gregory, and Martin
Fig. 4 Curtea de Argeș, Sts. Sylvester and Peter of Alexandria
Fig. 5 Cozia, funerary parekklesion. Pope Vegilius
Fig. 6 Snagov Monastery, prothesis chapel
Fig. 7 Arnota Monastery. Naos, Eastern arch
Fig. 8 Arnota Monastery. Narthex, transversal arch
Fig. 9 Polovragi Monastery. Pope Clemens
Fig. 10 Surpatele Monastery. Popes Martin and Agapetus
Fig. 11 Bălinești. Narthex, Baptism of St. Constantine
Fig. 12 Hurezi Monastery. Narthex, Dispute of St. Sylvester with Zamvri

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