

Maria Lidova

Empress, Virgin, *Ecclesia*

The Icon S. Maria in Trastevere in the Early Byzantine Context

An extraordinary icon of the Virgin can be found in Santa Maria in Trastevere, one of the oldest churches in Rome. It was executed in the encaustic technique, which, together with the style characteristics, allowed scholars to date the image from the late 6th to the early 8th century. The icon represents the Virgin as Queen, which is conveyed through her vestments reproducing the dress of a Byzantine Empress. This iconography known as *Maria Regina* was widespread in the Western world but unknown in Byzantine art. This provided grounds to regard the *Maria Regina* as a specific Western variant of Marian imagery.

My research is dedicated to an analysis of the icon in the context of early Byzantine culture. This paper concerns only one of a wide range of issues related to the topic. I shall attempt to analyse the iconographic peculiarities of the icon from a new angle, proving that the Roman context alone cannot explain its origin. As I see it, the icon S. Maria in Trastevere was created under the influence of ideas which were on the one hand pivotal, and on the other shared by the entire Early Byzantine world – ideas that endorsed the perception of the image of the Mother of God in the Roman icon as Empress, Virgin and *Ecclesia*.