

Another ancient image of St. Paul discovered in catacomb

VATICAN CITY - The Vatican announced what it called the “sensational discovery” of an early image of St. Paul on the frescoed wall of a catacomb in Naples.

The fresco, dated to the early sixth century, is one of the most “intense and priestly” images of St. Paul from the period, with an unusually expressive face and the facial features of a philosopher, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi wrote in the Vatican newspaper June 29.

Cardinal Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, said the image shows St. Paul turned in acclamation toward a dead woman. It was found in the catacombs of St. Januarius, the most extensive series of underground burial chambers in southern Italy.

According to tradition, St. Paul preached in Naples during his last missionary voyage. Cardinal Ravasi said the city was at that time a multiethnic crossroads of the Jewish, Roman and Greek cultures, making it the ideal place for St. Paul to conduct his style of evangelization. St. Paul is believed to have been martyred in Rome in 68 A.D.

In 2009, just as the Year of St. Paul was ending, Vatican archaeologists discovered the oldest existing image of St. Paul in a Rome catacomb during restoration work.