BURIAL AND RESURRECTION: 
THE SCULPTED SARCOPHAGI OF RAVENNA AND 
VISIONS OF PERPETUITY IN AN AGE OF FLUX

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ABSTRACT

ALLISON L. B. FOX: Burial and Resurrection:
The Sculpted Sarcophagi of Ravenna and Visions of Perpetuity in an Age of Flux
(Under the direction of Dorothy H. Verkerk)

The rich artistic remains in the city of Ravenna on Italy’s northeastern coast are invaluable to scholars interested in the dynamic years between antiquity and medievalism. Famous for its mosaics, Ravenna is also home to dozens of late antique / early medieval sculpted tombs. These sarcophagi have received less scholarly attention. This dissertation examines the funerary objects alongside the wealth of additional material at Ravenna, demonstrating that the sarcophagi represent a vital facet of the city’s aesthetic heritage. Further, it explores the sculpture as a means to better understand the contemporary cultural landscape. The imagery reflects a regional pictorial tradition that can be connected to the broader socio-political atmosphere of this urban center, it celebrates the prestige of local, ecclesiastical leaders, and it visually manifests multivalent theological concepts and concerns. The tombs of Ravenna are, therefore, a useful lens by which to view a key urban center at a pivotal crossroads in European history.
To those whose love and support have made this project possible. To my family, particularly my husband, James. And above all to my Great Friend. Thank you.
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

I. Introduction

A nineteenth-century traveler, E. M. De Vogüé, recorded the following remarks upon his arrival in Ravenna:

The train stops, one descends to a deserted piazza. Wrapped in this pall of green pine forests, a small city of rusty tones, empty, silent, emerges as an ancient and unused object, with the air of an old woman of other times who has gone unburied. Submerged . . . by nature and time, the city of the Exarchs is preserved nearly intact, like the cities of the pharaohs in the mud of the Nile. Guardian of famous mausolea, Ravenna is the tomb of tombs.¹

De Vogüé’s “old woman of other times who has gone unburied,” was a reference to the ancient buildings of Ravenna and their brilliant mosaics. These have been, and continue to be, Ravenna’s most popular legacy. Ravenna’s chamber of commerce website announces that Ravenna is the mosaic capital of the world.² A Google search for the keywords “Ravenna” and “Mosaic” brings up over 75,000 hits. The powerful popular connection between the city of Ravenna and late antique mosaic masterpieces is understandable given the preservation of buildings like the so-called “Mausoleum” of Galla Placidia or the

² http://www.turismo.ravenna.it/index.php?lang=2
Orthodox (Neonian) Baptistery. Like enormous geodes, their plain brick exteriors enclose jewel-encrusted interiors. Though Ravenna’s strategic political importance waned over a thousand years ago, the city remains a well-known destination due to its stunning mosaics. In the glitter of such treasures, the carved stone sarcophagi are an easily overlooked repository worthy of study.

The sculpted tombs have not enjoyed the same depth of scholarly attention as have the buildings and mosaics of the city. Though they are as rich, in number and preservation, as any of the other art forms that survive from Ravenna, they have seldom received the kind of interpretive treatment that the mosaic decorations or buildings have, in works like Otto Von Simson’s *Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna.* In brief, the sarcophagi of Ravenna are numerous, well-preserved, and visually compelling, yet they are most often treated as side notes in modern scholarship that addresses the art and architecture of this city. For these principal reasons, I propose to look again at the monuments from this large corpus, in order to demonstrate that the art productions from Ravenna, including the sarcophagi, participated in the creation and sustenance of a specifically “Ravennate” cultural outlook and attitude.

E. M. De Vogüé was more accurate than he imagined when he pronounced Ravenna “the tomb of tombs.” There are more than ninety whole or fragmentary sarcophagi that are either extant in Ravenna or can be traced to that city. Of these, about thirty-seven date from the Christian period, or can be designated “Christian” based on their iconography and symbolism. Several of these are actually pre-Christian tombs that were subsequently re-

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carved during the Christian era. While my primary focus in this introductory chapter (and beyond) will be the Christian tombs of Ravenna, a brief discussion of the pre-Christian sarcophagi is in order by way of preamble.

**A. Pre-Christian Sarcophagi in Ravenna**

There are a number of sarcophagi, or sarcophagi fragments, in or from Ravenna that can be designated “pagan” or “pre-Christian” by virtue of the fact that they do not include Christian imagery, symbolism, or inscriptions and date from the second and third centuries CE.⁴ Ravenna was apparently a site of thriving sarcophagi production during the late Imperial period.⁵ Most of these late imperial sarcophagi from Ravenna are designed as rectangular boxes in which the fronts of the “boxes” are treated as framed spaces for compositions.⁶ Two such sarcophagi attributed to this initial period of production are the sarcophagus of *C. Didius Concordianus* (Fig. 1) in the Museo Arcivescovile at Ravenna and the sarcophagus at S. Maria Maggiore in Ravenna associated with the *Rasponi* family (Fig. 2).⁷ The first sarcophagus is carved with a pair of winged *eros* figures holding a garland and the latter is carved with flying winged figures holding a *tabula* for an inscription. Like the *Concordianus* and *Rasponi* tombs, many of the pagan sarcophagi were carved with formulaic

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⁴ The number in the catalog by Kollwitz and Herdejürgen is 63, although this does not include pieces that were reused but bear no imagery (in other words, there is nothing to indicate whether they were pagan or Christian tombs, and no inscription or imagery by which to date them). It does not, also, include fragments that may possibly, but not undeniably, have belonged to sarcophagi. This number also includes several that are cross-listed in the catalog of Christian tombs by virtue of the fact that they were originally pagan monuments but were reused, and carved with new imagery, at a later date to suit a new, Christian patron. Johannes Kollwitz and Helga Herdejürgen, *Die Sarkophage der Westlichen Gebiete des Imperium Romanum*, Vol. 2, *Die Ravennatischen Sarkophage* (Berlin: Mann, 1979).


⁶ Rebecchi, 255.

⁷ Rebecchi, 257. See: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A5, 21, pl.1.3 (C. Didius Concordianus sarcophagus) and cat. A4, 20, pl. 2.2, 3.1 – 4 (S. Maria Maggiore sarcophagus).
imagery. Especially popular were tabulae for inscriptions, winged eros figures holding garlands or tabulae, and portraits of the deceased. The square ends of the sarcophagi were ornamented with masks, lion heads, winged eros figures, personifications, or images of Roman deities. The lids of the sarcophagi were mostly shaped like pitched roofs of houses. Sometimes, tiers of sculpted “tiles” covered the sloping sides of the lids, and often corner acroteria displayed portraits of the deceased or stylized plant forms.8

Most of the tombs produced in Ravenna during the second and third centuries were constructed of imported marble from the quarries of Proconnesus, an island off the coast of Constantinople in the sea of Marmara.9 Blocks were roughed out in the quarry into the general shapes they would assume in polished form once they reached their destinations. Local craftsmen would refine and decorate the boxes of the sarcophagi and their lids in situ.10 Such tombs were produced en masse, on speculation. Wealthy buyers could have the pieces modified to suit their tastes, and / or carved with an identifying inscription. Semi-worked sarcophagi discovered in Ravenna, such as one found on the grounds of San Vitale and now in the Museo Nazionale, testify to this mode of production (Fig. 3).11 Unfinished sarcophagi might represent pieces that were never sold, or that were sold to buyers who were forced to abandon their commissions due to financial reversals.12

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8 For a complete catalog of the Ravennate sarcophagi, including the “pagan” monuments, see Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 1979.
9 Rebecchi, 253.
10 Rebecchi, 251.
11 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A3, 20, pl. 1.2.
12 Rebecchi, 263.
Near the end of the third century, sarcophagus production slowed in Ravenna as that
city, along with the rest of the empire, experienced an economic downturn. Nevertheless,
Ravennate production of sarcophagi continued in the era of the Tetrarchs and into the
Constantinian era. The so-called *Three-and-Four-Arch (Niche)* sarcophagus (Fig. 4),\(^\text{13}\) for
instance, was probably a pre-Christian tomb that dates to the Tetrarchic age as it is similar in
its main compositional structure to the securely dated *Good Shepherd* sarcophagus (Fig. 5)
from Split.\(^\text{14}\) Another trend that became widespread in the fourth century was the practice of
reusing sarcophagi from the preceding ages (for example the *Three-and-Four-Arch* tomb
would be re-carved to include Christian symbols during the sixth century).

**B. Christian Sarcophagi**

There are about thirty-seven Christian sarcophagi related to Ravenna, plus several
additional sculptural fragments that likely come from sarcophagi. In addition to those pre-
Christian tombs, such as the *Three-and-Four-Arch* sarcophagus mentioned above, that were
subsequently re-carved with Christian symbolism to suit a new Christian patron, there are
also a number of sarcophagi that appear to retain their original imagery; in other words, they
were apparently made new for Christian buyers.

**1. Chronology**

Unfortunately, few Christian sarcophagi have contemporary inscriptions by which to
date them and identify their original patrons. In order to construct any type of chronology for
the Christian monuments, scholars must rely on a handful of original inscriptions from the

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\(^{13}\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A39 / B20, 38 – 40, pl. 17.1 – 3.

\(^{14}\) Rebecchi, 267. For *Good Shepherd* sarcophagus see: Theodor Klauser, “Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte
der christlichen Kunst, V14, Der “Sarkophag des Guten Hirten in Split,”” *Jahrbuch für Antiken und
sixth and eighth centuries on one hand, and stylistic comparison among the group of tombs and also with other contemporary architectural decoration on the other. The first sarcophagus fragment with a reliable inscription comes from the sarcophagus (or sarcophagi) associated with the bishops Ecclesius (522 – 532) and Ursicinus (533 – 536) (Fig. 56).\textsuperscript{15} Ninth-century chronicler Andreas Agnellus\textsuperscript{16} mentions that these men, along with their successor Victor (538 – 545) were buried in the basilica of San Vitale, in a burial chamber or chapel (“monasterium”) dedicated to St. Nazarius, in front of the altar. Agnellus does not mention any sarcophagi associated with this burial.\textsuperscript{17} Observers in the early modern era, however, did mention sarcophagi in association with this burial. An eighteenth-century man named Ginanni wrote that the left and right sides of the sarcophagus of Ecclesius were decorated with a cross in a circle, and that another sarcophagus with an inscription naming “Ursicinus Episcopus” was present and had a lid with a monogram in a circle.\textsuperscript{18} The front box of the tomb of Ecclesius, in his account, was decorated by a central gemmed cross flanked by harts and peacocks. A third tomb was inscribed “Victor Episcopus” and had a lid also decorated with a monogram. On its front box was a Christogram in a circle between two crosses. Soon after the recording of this find, in 1731, the sarcophagi were opened and, inexplicably, destroyed during the process. The bodily remains found inside the boxes were placed in a single sarcophagus that had been adapted as an altar. Today it is on the lawn in front of San

\textsuperscript{15} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B33, 79 – 81, pl. 84. 1 – 3.

\textsuperscript{16} Agnellus was a ninth-century bishop of Ravenna who recorded known information about the lives of his predecessors. His account was based on the Roman Liber Pontificalis which chronicled the history of the bishops of Rome. In his narrative, Agnellus made many references to buildings and surviving mosaics, as well as burials in Ravenna. Thus, his account is invaluable in providing insight into the architectural and artistic landscape of early medieval Ravenna as well as to the locations and methods of ecclesiastical burials.

\textsuperscript{17} Agnelli Ravennatis Liber Pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis, ed. by Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), c. 61, c. 65, and c. 68. All subsequent references to Agnellus refer to this version.

\textsuperscript{18} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 81.
Vitale in a tomb that may be an ancient original, but was modified in Baroque fashion upon its use in the eighteenth century. The three remaining fragments of the old sarcophagi were set into the flooring of the Sancta Sanctorum in San Vitale. They were removed in restorations of 1899 and 1900 and the pieces cemented into a new block altar.19

The largest piece in this group is a rectangular shape, and corresponds to the box of the sarcophagus of Ecclesius as described by Ginanni. It has a border (broken on the top and totally missing at the bottom) of interlocking bands in whose interstices are set small objects such as flower blossoms, starburst patterns, and at least one bird. The composition within this frame consists of a central cross, decorated with carved representations of jewels, flanked by two small harts and, outside of this central image, two large peacocks and palm trees. The relief is shallow and flat, and the details are carved stiffly onto the surface of the objects with many repetitions of line and pattern. The proportions of the animals in and of themselves are passable, but the peacocks are huge relative to the tiny harts under the arms of the cross and the overall effect of the composition is awkward. Also, the palm trees behind the peacocks are not well-integrated into the scene. There is not enough room for them, and their fronds are cut off by the frame at the sides of the composition. The second piece is a fragment of a gemmed monogram in a medallion. The shapes of the “jewels” (rectangles and ovals) and their arrangement is similar to the treatment on the cross of the large fragment. The medallion is carved with chevron-like lines to make the ring look like a laurel wreath, but the carving is, again, shallow and stylized, and the effect is one of pattern rather than organic

19 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 80 – 81. The remaining fragments correspond to the sarcophagi of Ecclesius and Ursicinus (or, it is possible that all three fragments originally belonged to only the sarcophagus of Ecclesius). The whereabouts of the original sarcophagus of Victor are unknown. The tomb today on the lawn with the supposed remains of the bishops (placed there in 1731 after the opening and destruction of the original tombs) may possibly have been the original sarcophagus of Victor.
reality. The third fragment has a simple, unadorned equal-armed cross in a circle. Above this circle are the partial words “[Eccl]esius” and “Episc[opus].”

After these sixth-century examples, the next tomb dateable by inscription does not appear until the eighth-century tomb of Felix (Fig. 10).20 This tomb includes an inscription, apparently contemporary to the original production, which names its patron as Archbishop Felix (709 – 725). The imagery on this tomb is familiar from the Ravennate repertoire, with lambs flanking a central cross against a backdrop of three columned archways or niches. But the style of the carving is quite distinctive. The quality of draftsmanship is low, the spatial proportions are confusing, and there is little modeling of the relief or incised detail within the forms. Two other, later eighth-century tombs dateable by inscription are the Gratiosus (Fig. 11),21 and John (Fig. 12) sarcophagi.22 These tombs represent the burials of Archbishop Gratiosus (d. 789) and John VI (d. 785). They are among the most simply carved examples of the group, with large panels for inscription interrupted by large Latin crosses on the boxes, and more crosses on the lids.

Aside from these inscriptions, scholars rely on comparison of carving style in order to group tombs together and determine their chronological positions. Several sarcophagi exhibit

20 Felix see: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 86.3. The Isaac sarcophagus in San Vitale was inscribed with a tribute to its patron, Exarch Isaac who died in 643. However, the tomb dates much earlier than the seventh century, and thus this is one of the many instances of a reused or spoliated sarcophagus. The inscription, therefore, can communicate information about the date of reuse but not of original production. A similar situation applies to the Theodore sarcophagus, whose inscription names the patron as Archbishop Theodore (d. 691) but whose imagery corresponds closely to the late 5th – early 6th century. Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B16, 67 – 68, pl. 64.3 – 4, 66.1 – 2.


22 Lawrence, 41. Bovini, 1968 – 1969, cat. 60, 58, pl. 60.a – b.
a figure and decoration style that is deliberately conscious of classical trends, and this sculptural style has been associated with the fourth century “Theodosian Renaissance” in Constantinopolitan sculpture. One such example is known as the sarcophagus of Liberius, and is located in the church of San Francesco at Ravenna (Fig. 6). There are two men named “Liberius” to whom this tomb has in the past been related: Bishop Liberius II, and Bishop Liberius III. While the Church of Ravenna assigns the death dates of these men to the years 352 and 378, respectively, there is no evidence in the literature for any secure dates for either of these men. A similar sarcophagus is found in the same location. It is known as the Bensai-dal Corno tomb after the seventeenth-century family who used it (Fig. 7), and likely is close in date to the Liberius sarcophagus. Because of the classicizing style demonstrated in these pieces, certain scholars, such as Freidrich Wilhelm Deichmann, linked both tombs in San Francesco to Constantinople, and situated their dates of production in the second half of the fourth century. Deichmann proposed that either both were imported from Constantinople, or the Liberius sarcophagus alone was imported. In the second case, the sarcophagus known as Bensai-dal Corno would represent a local copy of the Liberius tomb.

Little imperial building activity or large-scale sculptural remains are documented from the

23 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B7, 58 – 60, pl. 34.2, 35.3 – 4, 36. 4 – 6, 37. 3 – 4, 38. 3 – 4, 39. 3 – 4, 40. 4 – 9, 41. 1 – 9.

24 Lawrence, 13ff.

25 The first mention of any bishop of Ravenna comes from the year 343 when Severus is listed as an attendant to the Council of Sardica. The next dated bishop is Ursus, whose tenure likely began shortly after the imperial court moved to Ravenna, at the beginning of the fifth century. So the two bishops known as “Liberius,” would have served between 343 and c. 402 CE. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, Ravenna in Late Antiquity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 38.

26 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen., cat. B6, 57 – 58, pl. 34.1, 35.1 – 2, 36. 1 – 3, 37. 1 – 2, 38. 1 – 2, 39. 1 – 2, 40. 1 – 3.

fourth century at Ravenna.\textsuperscript{28} If, therefore, these tombs date from the fourth century, it is likelier that they represent importations rather than Ravennate productions.\textsuperscript{29} Alternately, one or both pieces may represent early fifth century sarcophagi produced at Ravenna after the arrival of the imperial court.\textsuperscript{30} There are several sarcophagi at Ravenna that utilize a similar compositional format as the \textit{Liberius} and \textit{Bensai dal-Corno} tombs, with decorative architectural features creating archways or niches for figures to inhabit. These tombs may have been inspired by the tombs in San Francesco, and produced for court officials or aristocratic families who inhabited Ravenna in the fifth century. An example of this sort may be the \textit{Ariosti} sarcophagus (Fig. 29).\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{Barbatinus} sarcophagus (Fig. 8)\textsuperscript{32} also exhibits this format, though in this example the figures have odd proportions and are somewhat awkward in relation to their architectural surroundings. This may indicate a later date, or simply a different sculptural workshop or carvers.

The majority of Christian tombs produced in Ravenna probably date from the early fifth century through the early-to-mid sixth century. This was also the period of time during which Ravenna experienced its most significant urban development. The imperial court moved to the city in 402, bringing a class of patrons who would have been able to afford

\textsuperscript{28} Deliyannis, 2010, 36.

\textsuperscript{29} As Kollwitz pointed out in his catalog commentary, the assignation of fourth-century date to the \textit{Liberius} sarcophagus is compromised by the scholarly acceptance of the tradition linking the tomb to a supposed fourth-century bishop named “Liberius.” The establishment of this connection between the tomb and a bishop “Liberius” is convoluted, but was probably not solidified until the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. It should not, therefore, be used in any sense as evidence for the dating of the tomb or tombs. Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 59 – 60. A number of scholars, including Lawrence (1945) and Deichmann (1969) accepted both the secure dating of a bishop named Liberius to set dates in the second half of the fourth century, and the connection of the \textit{Liberius} tomb in San Francesco to one of these men.

\textsuperscript{30} Such is the opinion of Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 59 – 60.

\textsuperscript{31} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B12, 64 – 65, pl. 48.3, 49.2, 50.3 – 4, 52.4 – 5.

\textsuperscript{32} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B10, 63 – 64, pl. 47.1 – 3, 48.2, 50.1 – 2, 51.1 – 4, 52.1 – 3.
luxury burials in large stone tombs. And, it was at this time when builders and stonemasons were employed at Ravenna to enhance and fortify the newly designated imperial capital. There are no sarcophagi that can be positioned by inscription in the fifth century. But there are a number of high-quality tombs with carvings that are carefully modeled, and proportions that are classically appropriate, with quiet, refined details. A number of pieces feature figural decoration that conforms to this “classicizing” style, and utilize a more open compositional format than that employed by the Liberius group mentioned above. Tombs with this elegantly understated aesthetic include the Pignatta sarcophagus (Fig. 38),\(^{33}\) the Traditio Legis sarcophagus (Fig. 48),\(^{34}\) the Isaac sarcophagus (Fig. 30),\(^{35}\) the Rinaldo sarcophagus (Fig. 19),\(^{36}\) the Onesti sarcophagus (Fig. 20)\(^{37}\) and the Twelve Apostles sarcophagus (Fig. 37).\(^{38}\)

Other figural tombs use a similar open format, but display distinctly less skilled

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\(^{34}\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B4, 56 – 57, pl. 31.1 – 3, 32.1 – 3, 33.1 – 4.


\(^{36}\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B14, 65 – 66, pl. 47.4, 53.1, 54.1 – 3, 56.1 – 2, 57.1, 58.1 – 2.

\(^{37}\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B8, 60 – 61, pl. 42.1 – 3, 43.1 – 3, 44.1 – 7.

\(^{38}\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B15, 66 – 67, pl. 53.2, 54.2, 55.1 – 2, 56.3 – 4, 57.2 – 4, 58.3 – 8, 65.1.

Kollwitz noted that the aesthetic and iconographic tone of these tombs, exhibiting large monumental figures and powerfully sparse compositions, represented an entirely new trend in Ravennate sculpture. The sarcophagi broke significantly from the pre-Christian tombs at Ravenna, whose figural imagery was limited to eros figures and representations of the deceased drawn from daily-life imagery. The new series, likely beginning with the Pignatta and Liberius tombs, also utilized new compositional formats. In this Christian series there are no examples of the sort of sarcophagi heretofore popular in northern Italy – either the “chest” style tomb with a central tabula or inscription flanked by figures of the deceased or winged eroti, or the type with three niches or aediculae on the front or back boxes. Instead, the tombs use an architectural format, either one with corner pilasters to frame the compositional space as in the Pignatta sarcophagus, or a series of arcaded niches to shelter figures, as in the Liberius sarcophagus. Kollwitz interpreted this departure from northern Italian craft tradition as significant of the role of the imperial court in Ravenna after the early fifth century. The court was the driving force behind a new era of sarcophagi production, and inspired (and financed) a sophisticated trend in Ravennate funeral sculpture. The new compositional formats, the elegance of the figures and draperies, and the monumental tone can be compared to sculptural sources in the east, particularly in Asia Minor. These forms may have represented exoticism and luxury to the imperial patrons who preferred them. Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 105 – 106.
draftsmanship or design strategy. One such tomb is the *Exuperantius* sarcophagus (Fig. 36)\(^3\) whose imagery mimics closely that of the *Pignatta* tomb, but with figures whose proportions and details are more abstracted. Again, this difference may indicate that the *Exuperantius* tomb ought to be dated later than the *Pignatta* tomb, but other factors such as workshop methods may alternately explain the stylistic diversity.

Alongside these figural tombs are those whose imagery features only nonfigural, or aniconic, forms, yet demonstrates a similar level of attention to careful modeling, proportions, spacious compositions, and refined details. Such tombs are the *Lamb* sarcophagus (Fig. 18),\(^4\) the *Constantius* (Fig. 16)\(^4\) and *Honorius* (Fig. 17)\(^4\) sarcophagi from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, and the *Theodore* sarcophagus (Fig. 31). The style exhibited in these nonfigural examples is markedly different from the sarcophagi fragments of *Ecclesius* and/or *Ursicinus* of the mid-sixth century. Their full modeling of forms, skillful proportions, refined details, and elegantly arranged compositions connect them more closely to the figural tombs mentioned above, and thus these examples likely also date to the fifth and early sixth century. The fragments of *Ecclesius* and *Ursicinus*, in this schema, represent an interruption of the “classicizing” forms after the first quarter or half of the sixth century.

Some tombs from Ravenna have imagery that seems markedly stiffer and flatter than that of their colleagues. These tombs have generally been assumed to represent later additions to the Ravennate corpus, created or modified at a time when highly skilled

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\(^3\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B9, 61 – 62, pl. 45.1 – 3, 46.1 – 4, 48.1.

\(^4\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B19, 70, pl. 65.2, 67.1 – 3, 68.1 – 2, 69.1 – 2.
stonemasons and sculptors were less readily available, and when wealth from an imperial or royal court was more restricted or nonexistent. These tombs include the *Crucifer Lamb* (Fig. 14), 43 *Lamb-and-Rinceau* (Fig. 13), 44 and *Felix* (Fig. 10) 45 sarcophagi. The *Felix* tomb has an inscription, thought to be original, dedicating the sarcophagus to Archbishop Felix (d. 725). Thus, the tombs with less skillfully imagery are likely clustered in the eighth century, around the same time as the *Felix*. Other tombs dated by inscription to the later eighth century include the *Gratiosus* (Fig. 11), 46 and *John* (Fig. 12) 47 sarcophagi.

Architectural decoration within Ravenna’s securely dated buildings can also be used as comparanda to supplement a dating schema based on inter-tomb stylistic comparison. For instance, marble architectural elements found in the church of San Vitale, especially the capitals, can be dated to the era of the consecration of this church under Archbishop Maximian in the year 547. By comparing the imagery and style in these reliefs to the Ravennate sarcophagi, some scholars have of dated the tombs accordingly. For instance, the rinceau border of scrolling vines and leaves with pointed tips found on the border of the box of the *Barbatinus* sarcophagus (Fig. 8) is similar to the vegetal relief filling some of the “basket” type capitals at San Vitale (Fig. 9). 48 Also, the chunky lambs facing a cross on the impost block in the above-cited example can be compared to the lambs on the back of the *Barbatinus* sarcophagus. In particular, their rounded jowls and lumpy throats are much alike.

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43 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 85.4. Lawrence, 39, fig. 69

44 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B32, 79, pl. 87. 1 – 3.

45 Lawrence, 40, fig. 73. Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 86.3.

46 Lawrence, 41, fig. 71. Bovini, 1968 – 1969, cat. 61, 58 – 59, pl. 61.a – c.

47 Lawrence, 41. Bovini, 1968 – 1969, cat. 60, 58, pl. 60.a – b.

On the basis of such observations, this tomb has been dated by some to the mid-sixth century. On the other hand, the forms in the Barbatinus tomb are more roundly modeled, and the details are more deftly included, than are the stiffer, more stylized forms on the Ecclesius and Ursicinus fragments, which probably date to before the mid-sixth century, before the consecration of San Vitale. Such seemingly contradictory evidence may suggest that other factors besides simple chronological change were at work. Different workshops, artisans, or even importation might factor into the visual disparities. And, it is important to resist the impulse to over utilize the style of the architectural decoration to interpret the chronology of the tombs. Many of the examples of architectural sculpture, in particular, at Ravenna were imported in nearly completed states from Constantinople. Therefore, their specific imagery cannot be used to provide precise correspondence to sculptural items produced or modified in Ravenna.

In sum, scholars have only a few reliable inscriptions for the corpus of sarcophagi in the sixth and eighth centuries. Comparison of style and iconography from tomb to tomb helps to position the sarcophagi in order on a chronological timeline. Additionally, comparing the imagery and style of the tombs to architectural decoration can sometimes supplement a hypothetical dating schema, though in many instances the evidence can be interpreted in several contradictory ways. Understandably, there has been little scholarly consensus on the exact chronological arrangement of the Ravennate sarcophagi. The issue of chronology has fueled much scholarly debate, as will be discussed below.

There are, however, some facts about the dating of the sarcophagi that are generally accepted in modern scholarship. The tradition of sarcophagi production (and in some cases

re-production) in Ravenna stretches from the first century CE to the late eighth, or possibly ninth, century CE, and in the case of specifically Christian monuments the majority of the extant examples fall within the range from the fifth century to the eighth century. The first group of tombs likely date from the arrival of the imperial court at Ravenna in the early fifth century, through the era of the Ostrogothic kings and up until the reconquest of Italy by Justinian in the mid-sixth century. After the mid-sixth century there is an apparent lull in sarcophagi production. Tombs from the seventh century, particularly those utilized by bishops of Ravenna, mostly represent earlier monuments that were reused for seventh-century patrons. This may suggest that sarcophagi production had dwindled or ceased in the seventh century. A second moment of sarcophagi production, however, apparently arose in the eighth century. Three tombs dated by inscription hail from this period, and represent newly made monuments for their eight-century patrons. The style of these eighth-century tombs is, nevertheless, much less accomplished than their fifth-and-sixth century predecessors, and figural imagery is totally absent.

The following list offers an approximate timeline of sarcophagi production (or, in the case of some sarcophagi* a first re-carving in the Christian era of a pre-Christian tomb):

**I. early 5th Century:**

- *Liberius* sarcophagus (Fig. 6)
- *Bensai dal-Corno* sarcophagus (Fig. 7)
- *Pignatta* sarcophagus (Fig. 38)
- *Traditio Legis* sarcophagus (Fig. 48)
- *Rinaldo* sarcophagus (Fig. 19)
- *Onesti* sarcophagus (Fig. 20)
- *Isaac* sarcophagus (Fig. 30)
- *Twelve Apostles* sarcophagus (Fig. 37)
- *Ariosti* sarcophagus (Fig. 29)

**II. mid-to-late 5\textsuperscript{th} Century:**

- *Barbatinus* sarcophagus (Fig. 8)
- *Exuperantius* sarcophagus (Fig. 36)
- *Certosa* sarcophagus (Fig. 50)
- *Theodore* sarcophagus (Fig. 31)
- *Lamb* sarcophagus (Fig. 18)
- *Constantius* sarcophagus (Fig. 16)
- *Honorious* sarcophagus (Fig. 17)
- *Fusignano* sarcophagus (Fig. 45)
- *Six-Arch (Niche)* sarcophagus from Sant’Apollinare Classe (Fig. 127)*
- *Six-Arch (Niche)* sarcophagus from Museo Arcivescovile (Fig. 148)*
- *Three-and-Four- Arch (Niche)* sarcophagus (Fig. 4)*
- *Ranchio* sarcophagus (Fig. 54)
- Anonymous sarcophagus n. 1 from San Vitale (Fig. 43)
- Anonymous sarcophagus n. 2 from San Vitale (Fig. 44)
- *Bonifacius* sarcophagus (Fig. 149)
- *Traversari* sarcophagus (Fig. 146)

**IV. early-to-mid 6\textsuperscript{th} century:**

- *S. Gervasio* sarcophagus (Fig. 53)
- Fragments of the sarcophagus(i) of *Bishops Ecclesius and Ursicinus* (Fig. 56)
- *Imola* sarcophagus (Fig. 55)

- *Lamb-and-Rinceau* sarcophagus (Fig. 13)

- *Sale Family* sarcophagus (Fig. 150)*

- Fragment of a sarcophagus dedicated to the *Eunuch Seda* (Fig. 21)*

**V. early 8th century**

- *Felix* sarcophagus (Fig. 10)

- *Crucifer Lamb* sarcophagus (Fig. 14)

- Anonymous sarcophagus from lawn of San Vitale (Fig. 153)

**VI. mid-to-late 8th century**

- Anonymous sarcophagi from Braccioforte Chapel (Fig. 147)

- Anonymous sarcophagi from lawn of San Vitale (Fig. 151)

- *Gratiosus* sarcophagus (Fig. 11)

- *John* sarcophagus (Fig. 12)

**VII. 9th century (?)**

- Anonymous sarcophagus and fragment of the so-called *Vittore* sarcophagus from Museo Nazionale (Fig. 152)

2. **Patrons and Artists**

   The original patrons of the Christian sarcophagi are mostly unknown. No ancient documentation links specific tombs with specific patrons. Few of the tombs have original inscriptions that give a clue as to their contents (major exceptions include those listed above

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* Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A49, 42, pl. 18.4. This is a pre-Christian monument re-carved with an inscription in the year 541 to accommodate a Eunuch named “Seda,” a valet of Ostrogothic King Theodoric. The fragment contains no imagery other than the tabula and flanking archways that are original to its pre-Christian production. Traces of imagery under the archways suggest that these originally had figures, probably of the deceased patrons, whose portraits were removed when the tomb was re-used in the mid-sixth century. The reliable dating of the re-carving gives little information, therefore, about sarcophagi imagery of the Christian era.
– the sarcophagi of Ecclesius and Ursicinus, Felix, Gratiosus, and John). What can be said is that burial in large stone sarcophagi such as these was a luxury, and so the patrons were wealthy, and likely to be politically, and / or ecclesiastically, prominent.\textsuperscript{51} Certainly, bishops or archbishops were one elite group of Ravennate citizens who enjoyed the luxury of lavish burials in the late antique and early medieval periods. Some tombs, such as the Honorious sarcophagus, are associated with individuals (in this case the emperor Honorius) in local lore, but no objective evidence links the monuments to those persons.\textsuperscript{52} The style of the monument in the case of the Honorious sarcophagus seems to be sixth-century, while the emperor in question lived during the early fifth. Many other sarcophagi, such as the Rinaldo (Fig. 19)\textsuperscript{53} and Onesti (Fig. 20)\textsuperscript{54} examples, are named for patrons who reused the ancient monuments in the later middle ages and beyond.

Only one name of a particular sculptor is known – that of a man named Daniel who was active in the first half of the sixth century. This artist came to the attention of the Ostrogothic king Theodoric because of his exceptional skill in carving funerary monuments. He is mentioned by name in a letter as having been given (by Theodoric) exclusive rights to retail of funerary monuments in Ravenna during this era.\textsuperscript{55} The reference to Daniel in


\textsuperscript{52} For an account of how the sarcophagi in the so-called “Mausoleum of Galla Placidia” were first linked with Constantius (the husband of Galla Placidia), Honorious (her brother) and Valentinian (her son), see Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 77 – 78. For a discussion of the unlikelihood of the “Mausoleum” being the real burial place of Galla Placidia, see Deborah Deliyannis, “Bury Me in Ravenna? Appropriating Galla Placidia’s Body in the Middle Ages,” \textit{Studi Medievali} 42 (2000): 289 – 299.

\textsuperscript{53} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B14, 65 – 66, pl. 48. 3, 49. 2, 50. 3 – 4, 52. 4 – 5.

\textsuperscript{54}Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B8, 60 – 61, pl. 42. 1 – 3, 43. 1 – 3, 44. 1 – 7.

\textsuperscript{55} Cassiodorus, \textit{Variae}, 3.19.
Theodoric’s correspondence is also the only piece of literary evidence that there were sculptors active in Ravenna in the Christian era, at least during the sixth century.

3. Form and Imagery

Most of the Christian sarcophagi from Ravenna have rounded, or semi-circular lids (see for example the *Rinaldo* sarcophagus, [Fig. 19]) instead of the pointed, gable lids with *acroteria* that characterize most of the pre-Christian sarcophagi from this region (see *Rasponi* sarcophagus [Fig. 2]).

One of the most striking aspects of the sarcophagi is their limited repertoire of imagery and the difference between the iconography and style of these tombs and sarcophagi from Rome. In terms of style, as a rule, the Ravenna sarcophagi have few figures or symbols in their compositions and, thus, the overall impression is one of simplicity. This quality is in strong contrast to the intricately crowded, contemporary sarcophagi from other centers, for instance the *City Gate* sarcophagus from nearby Milan (Fig. 22). Examples from Rome, like the *Two Brothers* sarcophagus (Fig. 23) or the *Dogmatic* sarcophagus (Fig. 24) divide their compositions into registers, fitting as many figures into these registers as possible. Circular roundels with portraits of the deceased are commonly set in the midst of this abundant imagery. Other versions from Rome use architectural elements like columns and arcades to divide the surface. These examples, such

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56 Certain scholars, such as Rafaella Farioli, contend that the semi-cylindrical lid type was found in the orbit around Constantinople and, therefore, this is a feature of the Ravennate tombs that links them to the eastern portion of the Roman Imperial sphere. Rafaella Farioli, “Osservazioni sulla scultura del V-VI secolo: problemi ravennati,” *Convegno internazionale passaggio dal mondo antico al medio evo da Teodosio a San Gregorio Magno* Rome, 25 – 28 May 1977 (Rome: Accademia Nazionale Dei Lincei, 1980), 193.


as the Unfinished sarcophagus from San Sebastiano (Fig. 25)\textsuperscript{60} or the famous Junius Bassus sarcophagus (Fig. 26),\textsuperscript{61} fill their niches with figures and narratives. Sarcophagi like that in Santa Maria Antiqua (Fig. 27)\textsuperscript{62} use a different approach whereby contiguous narratives and/or figures follow one another without division, a compositional technique that recalls Imperial Roman monuments like the Column of Trajan (Fig 28).\textsuperscript{63} It is apparent that most sarcophagi from Rome are characterized by copious amounts of bustling imagery. Foreground figures are pushed to the edge of the compositional plane, and in the background lower relief figures fill in the interstices between the larger images. Every inch of the surface is busy with detailed visual information.

In comparison, the Ravennate sarcophagi seem almost minimalistic. There are several examples that use the arcaded or arched framework common to the Italian tradition, as in the City-Gate sarcophagi from Milan or those from Rome mentioned above. Nevertheless, there is in general a quieter feeling to the Ravenna examples. Figures stand singly in niches, as in the Ariosti sarcophagus (Fig. 29)\textsuperscript{64} or in the two sarcophagi from San Francesco (Fig. 6 and 7), and backgrounds are often empty leaving open expanses of negative space to play against the elegantly understated figures and symbols. Many of the Ravenna sarcophagi have front and/or back boxes that are framed by architectural elements – columns or pilasters surmounted by a flat entablature – and the imagery fills the rectangular compositional space created by this framework. The prevalent decorative form is a narrow lintel running across

\textsuperscript{60} Giuseppe Wilpert, \textit{I sarcofagi cristiani antichi}, Vol. 3 Supplement (Rome, 1929 – 36), 7, 17, 25, pl. 283.

\textsuperscript{61} Caillet and Loose, 8, 11, 70, and 98, fig. 101.

\textsuperscript{62} Caillet and Loose, 44, fig. 31.

\textsuperscript{63} Filippo Coarelli, \textit{The Column of Trajan} (Rome: Colombo, 2000).

\textsuperscript{64} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B12, 64 – 65, pl. 48. 3, 49. 2, 50. 3 – 4, 52. 4 – 5.
the top supported only at the two ends by either pilasters or spirally fluted columns; see for instance the Rinaldo sarcophagus (Fig. 19). In sharp contrast to the busy quality of the examples from imperial Rome, the forms are large, clear, and substantial. The overall aesthetic of the Ravennate sarcophagi is clean and lucid, a dramatic contrast to the density of other Latin versions.

In the realm of iconography, the Ravennate sarcophagi also contrast strongly with sarcophagi traditions from Rome and from the rest of Italy. Many of the tombs have imagery that includes human figures, but nearly a half to a third of the tombs have no figural imagery whatsoever and instead rely on nonfigural (“aniconic”) symbols. The iconography, both figural and symbolic, is also idiosyncratic in that the repertoire of forms is strictly limited. Certain elements keep recurring. There are, on the whole, few representations of historical or biblical scenes. Among the figured examples, the most popular composition is Christ flanked by two, four, or six of his apostles, an iconography that is sometimes referred to as the College of Apostles, or, when Jesus dispenses a scroll of law, the Traditio Legis. Christ is always beardless and seven times he appears with a monogrammed nimbus (Fig. 19). Other repeated figural compositions are the Presentation of Gifts by the Three Magi, Daniel in the Lions’ Den, and the Raising of Lazarus, all of which can be found on the Isaac sarcophagus (Fig. 30).65 Scenes that are important on sarcophagi from Rome, such as the narrative of Jonah, are strikingly absent. And, in contrast to the variety of different scenes, narratives, and figures on other examples from Rome, the compositions and forms in the Ravenna group, though applied in the individual monuments in different configurations and combinations, are repetitive.

The Christian tombs from Ravenna also diverge from the pre-Christian tombs from Ravenna. Instead of using the “chest” type format in which a sarcophagus box carries a frame or *tabula* for an inscription, the Christian tombs utilize architectural elements, such as corner pilasters and lintels, or a series of arcaded niches, to organize the compositional space. Instead of formulaic eros or angel figures, or portraits of the deceased in colloquial settings, the Christian tombs from Ravenna feature monumental imagery that reflects the most solemn subjects from early Christian art. The frontal representations of Jesus enthroned or standing in a paradisiacal setting flanked formally, and symmetrically, by his followers are more reminiscent of Christian apse mosaics rather than funeral sculpture from pre-Christian Ravenna.

The elegant gravitas of the tombs is supplemented by the inclusion of powerful symbols either alongside or in lieu of figural imagery. Subject matter in the sarcophagus imagery is often abbreviated and abstracted by the introduction of symbols such as peacocks, lambs and the cross. On several examples, these “symbolic” forms replace the human actors entirely, as for example on the *Theodore* sarcophagus (Fig. 31).66 The scene of two “apostle” lambs or peacocks adoring a central cross or monogram is the most popular subject of the symbolic sarcophagi. Acanthus leaves, vines, rosettes, and ivy leaves are part of the abundant vegetal imagery that is frequently carved on the sarcophagi.

The iconography of the Ravennate tombs, considered as a whole, demonstrates the isolation of the group from other Italian sarcophagi, and from pre-Christian monuments from this region. Most scholars have, therefore, assumed that these monuments must have been modeled on eastern (i.e., orbit of Constantinople) ones. Charles Rufus Morey even suggested

66 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B16, 67 – 68, pl. 64.3 – 4, 66.1 – 2.
that the sculptural arts of Constantinople in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries could be
“imperfectly represented” by the imagery of the Ravennate sarcophagi, which he assumed
were complete exports from the eastern capital to Ravenna.67 Some scholars have suggested
that the preference for aniconic symbols, especially arranged in strict symmetry with two
elements flanking a single central one, might also be related to “eastern” (Greek, Byzantine,
Constantinopolitan) tastes. While an eastern origin might be demonstrated for many of the
themes found on the Ravenna sarcophagi based on discrete examples or those drawn from
other artistic media or time periods, it is not easy to localize these stylistic and / or
iconographic connections in any one country or center. Furthermore, though these sarcophagi
differ considerably from their Western counterparts, there are other categories of Latin
imagery in which many close parallels can be found. One example is the correspondence
between the composition of Christ in one of the mosaic lunettes of Sta. Costanza in Rome
(Fig. 32)68 and that found on the Rinaldo sarcophagus (Fig. 19). In both, Christ is flanked by
Peter and Paul and palms of paradise. Streams pour forth from the base of the respective
hillock and throne, and in the mosaic there are attendant lambs, also reminiscent of
Ravennate imagery. Thus, though they do not follow sarcophagi from Rome, the Ravennate
tomb imagery can be reasonably compared to paintings and/ or mosaics in Rome.69

Publishers, 2010), 52 - 69, pl. 1 – 10.
69 The Sta. Costanza lunette features the traditio legis iconography, in which Christ actually hands the scroll
of the law to Peter. This is not the case in the Rinaldo composition, but the traditio iconography is the basis for the
composition of Christ between apostles featured so frequently on Ravenna sarcophagi. In fact, the iconography
of Christ seated or standing, flanked by apostles (often Peter and Paul), and sometimes including paradisiacal
elements such as palm trees, is a common composition in apse mosaics from the Roman sphere. Examples
include the apse of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome, and perhaps even the apse of Old St. Peter’s - if the
fifteenth-century watercolor drawing by Giacomo Grimaldi that preserves its original appearance can be trusted.
None of these compositions presents identical imagery to that found on any Ravennate sarcophagus, but the
elements and the compositional schemes are remarkably similar. Though most, if not all, late antique mosaics
Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the vast majority of the sarcophagus imagery can be directly linked to other Christian art forms from Ravenna. For instance, the examples of birds, urns, or vines as on the Ariosti sarcophagus (Fig. 29) or the Rinaldo sarcophagus (Fig. 19) can be compared to motifs found in the mosaics of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (Fig. 33),\(^{70}\) or the south wall presbytery mosaic at San Vitale (Fig. 34).\(^{71}\) The motif of two lambs flanking a cross, ubiquitous on the sarcophagi, is certainly related to examples including the capital decorations at San Vitale (Fig. 9). In short, the sarcophagi are comfortably situated within the Ravennate artistic milieu of the fifth and sixth century, and the architectural decoration of the city’s buildings provides ample comparanda for these monuments. An in-depth analysis of the imagery of the sarcophagi will be provided in chapter two.

4. Location

Today, most of the Ravennate sarcophagi are located either in churches or in museums in Ravenna, and in nearby cities such as Padua, Ferrara, Fusignano, and Ranchio. Several of the sacred buildings in Ravenna and its (port) suburb, Classe have sarcophagi located inside of them or on their premises. There are tombs in and around the church of San Vitale, the Ravenna Cathedral, the church of San Francesco, Santa Maria in Porto fuori, the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, and the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe. At least seven whole and numerous fragmentary sarcophagi are held in the Museo Nazionale at Ravenna, have been subject to various renovations and restorations, there is enough evidence to suggest that the Ravennate sarcophagi, while indubitably retaining strong aesthetic links to the east, can also be connected to late antique productions from the Roman sphere. For San Paolo fuori le mura, see Poeschke 23, fig. 20; for Old St. Peter’s, see Poeschke, 15 and 42, fig. 41.


and two whole and several fragmentary sarcophagi are in the city’s Museo Arcivescovile. Certain tombs, such as the *Ariosti* sarcophagus, are now in nearby locales (in this case, the church of San Francesco at Ferrara) but their imagery and style (and their physical proximity to the orbit of Ravenna) link them to the Ravenna milieu.

The original locations of the tombs are difficult to pin down. No documentation survives from the contemporary period to assign specific tombs to specific locations, and many of the tombs have been moved several times throughout the centuries. It is known that most of the early burials took place outside the city walls of Ravenna in nearby Classe. In fact, several early Christian burial grounds have been identified in this area. Some of the sarcophagi from Ravenna may have been designed from the start to be above ground. Burial within chapels or mausolea at Ravenna seems to have been a custom for elite burials in the fifth and early sixth century. Agnellus mentions several such burials in what he calls “*monasteria*,” which scholars have mostly interpreted to mean funerary chapels or mausolea. Unfortunately, Agnellus rarely describes the burial method (i.e. whether or not the body was placed in a freestanding stone tomb) within such structures. Other sarcophagi were interred underground in cemeteries such as those at Classe, or in crypts under the floors of basilicas.

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73 One example is the burial of Bishops Ecclesius, Ursicinus, and Victor (Agnellus, c. 59, 65, 68) in the *monasterium* of St. Nazarius which was a chapel adjacent to the apse of San Vitale. As mentioned above, there are surviving sarcophagi fragments associated with this burial. And, while it is unlikely that the “Mausoleum” of Galla Placidia was / is actually her burial place, it does seem likely that this chapel, originally attached to the church of Santa Croce, was designed for burial given the dimensions which shelter so perfectly the marble sarcophagi that are in it today. Also, there is the Mausoleum of Theodoric, a freestanding, two-story structure with an upper and a lower chamber. While in its size and scope this monument is singular, it may represent an elaboration on the type of luxury burial (i.e., above-ground in a specific architectural location) that was common at the time. The literary and physical evidence, therefore, suggests that one burial method that was popular in late antique Ravenna was burial in a large stone tomb within a funerary chapel either attached to a church or freestanding. And the size of the monuments from the fifth and early sixth century also suggests that some, if not all, of the tombs were designed for above-ground internment.
One example of this type of burial was demonstrated during restoration work on the basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe in 1949. The small sarcophagus of a child, inscribed as the tomb of Licinia Valeria (Fig. 35)\textsuperscript{74} was discovered under the floor of the basilica. It may have been part of an early Christian cemetery adjacent to the church, or a burial under the floor of the building.\textsuperscript{75} Agnellus mentioned several burials of bishops, from the sixth century onwards, in the churches in Classe, including St. Probus, St. Agatha, and Sant’Apollinare in Classe. These burials seem to have been beneath the floors of the churches, sometimes near the altars and other times in the narthices. Agnellus often mentioned a slab on the floor to mark the spot of the burial, and sometimes transcribed the epitaph there recorded.\textsuperscript{76} From the late sixth century, the bishops of Ravenna were mainly buried together in the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe. That basilica currently houses eleven stone sarcophagi, and the subject of burial of bishops within this church will be discussed in chapter four.

Much of the information scholars have about the nature of burials in Ravenna and its environs comes from the writings of later authors, in particular Andreas Agnellus. Based on these allusions, it is clear that sarcophagi accommodated burials in a number of different locations and, also, that translation of these tombs after their original interment was common. Many of the burials in sarcophagi are associated with sacred buildings, an association attested to not only in the early medieval writings of Agnellus, but also in the current locations of many of these tombs.\textsuperscript{77}

\textbf{5. Function}

\textsuperscript{74} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A63, 49, pl. 23.6.
\textsuperscript{75} Mazzotti, 31.
\textsuperscript{76} Examples include Agnellus, c. 92, c. 97, c. 103, and c. 114.
\textsuperscript{77} Farioli Campanati, 1986, 166.
On the one hand, the original function of the monuments seems a rather straightforward issue. Tombs were obviously designed to hold the bodies of deceased individuals, or even family groups.78 In the case of marble sarcophagi, these likely functioned as modern-day crypts, and held inside of them wooden coffins.79 The sarcophagi were intended to shelter the earthly remains of Christian persons until the day of resurrection. As such, the sarcophagi had important roles in the spiritual lives of the individuals who utilized them, and also in supporting the shared theological beliefs of the community that created, patronized, and installed them in sacred locations. How the imagery of the sarcophagi functioned in these roles is a question that has not been fully examined in scholarship, but will be discussed in chapter five of this dissertation. A related issue regarding function is a tangent to the notion of the communal existence of the monuments. Ann Marie Yasin considered a group of mosaic grave markers dating from the early Christian period in North Africa.80 Scholars had generally explained the similarity of style and format in these markers by arguing that a single workshop, or at least a limited number of workshops, produced the mosaic markers. But Yasin had a different idea about the reason for the visual similarity. She suggested that the repetitive imagery constructed relations between the buried individuals and the divine as well as with the living Christian audience. The funerary markers, in her analysis, were a means by which a communal, Christian identity was created and sustained. If the Ravennate

78 Agnellus related that Bishop Severus opened the tomb of his wife and laid his recently deceased daughter next to her (he had to ask her to move over first and, though she had been “dead for a long time,” she obligingly acquiesced). Agnellus, c. 15: Defuncta coniunx post plurima tempora.

79 Agnellus, c. 26: “We saw a tomb of precious proconnesian stone, and with difficulty we raised the cover slightly. We found in this sarcophagus a chest of cypress wood, and when we had raised its cover we both saw the holy body . . .” Vidimus sepulchrum ex lapide proconniso precioso, et eleuauimus duriter atque modice cooperculum. Inuenimus infra ipsam archam capsam cypressinam; cumque subleuassemus eius tegument, uidimus nos ambo sanctum corpus . . .

tombs were significant communal participants on account of their important occupants and powerful visual presence, then it would make sense that the similar artistic language employed in the monuments might also play into their function to create and sustain a cohesive Christian community group (or groups) in Ravenna. A study of the history of Ravenna in the fifth through the eighth centuries (undertaken in chapter three) reveals an urban center that became, over the course of the period, the hub of a regional culture with a strong sense of its own self-identity and desire for independence from outside authority. In this context, the art productions from Ravenna, including the sarcophagi, may have participated in the creation and sustenance of a specifically “Ravennate” cultural outlook and attitude. As such, the sarcophagus imagery becomes a vital lens by which scholars can view the historical context of an influential urban hub at the center of an evolving late antique / early medieval Europe.

II. Historiography

The Ravenna sarcophagi have been the subject of several studies over the past century, but most have focused on style, while none have specifically looked at content or context. This is the gap that my study addresses. This section will locate the present study in the larger field of research on this topic. By exploring briefly the approaches adopted by former studies, I hope to sketch out the information that has been accepted and / or debated regarding the monuments, and thus to set the backdrop for a new investigation. Also, this presentation will shed light on the limitations embedded in certain ways of approaching the objects, and will demonstrate the necessity of looking at the monuments afresh, especially in light of modern art historical methods.
The Ravennate sarcophagi pose a number of complicated questions. As Roberta Budriesi pointed out in her 2004 article on Ravennate sculpture, in order even to begin to approach the sculptural objects and fragments extant in Ravenna and its surrounding territories, the scholar must first decide what constitutes “Ravennate sculpture” – whether pieces that were produced in Ravenna and its environs, whether pieces that now survive there, or whether those works that were only finished there. Further difficulties arise when trying to date and place objects that are the result of numerous workshops both local and foreign, itinerate artists, a variety of patrons (royal, imperial, ecclesiastical, and private), material drawn from various quarries, and imagery that can be connected to Roman, Byzantine, and even Lombard sources. There are additional questions arising from problems of reuse, re-carving, dating, and the relationship of sarcophagi imagery with other artistic productions from the same general location and / or time period.

Given these complex and often elusive issues regarding the technical and logistic aspects of the monuments, it is unsurprising that most past scholarship approached them with the intent of clarifying and solving these various issues, particularly those of dating and origination of imagery.

A. Foundational Studies

1. 1850 – 1950

The earliest studies related to the Ravenna sarcophagi were of an antiquarian nature. Such research was often geared towards simply publishing the material, and assigning the tombs to either a “Roman” (meaning, in this case, not simply “from Rome” but emanating from the Roman or Latin cultural sphere) or an “Eastern” origination. The scholarly

understanding of a cultural, artistic connection between Ravenna’s monuments and the Greek east began in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Scholars such as Charles Bayet, in his 1879 publication *Recherches pour server à l’histoire de la peinture et de la sculpture chrétiennes en Orient*, cataloged and described the sarcophagi, pointed out their differences from Roman (Latin) sarcophagi, and suggested an eastern connection.82 Publications by scholars such as Giuseppe Galassi provided more nuanced versions of this narrative. Galassi’s argument, articulated regarding the sculpture of Ravenna in a 1915 article, and regarding the mosaics in a later book, was that the initial influence on Ravenna’s art came from Rome, but by the mid-sixth century the Byzantine pictorial vision had crept in.83 Galassi argued that the more fully sculptural, “classical” forms of the earlier tombs in the corpus (such as the Liberius sarcophagus at San Francesco) should be related to a pan Romano-Hellenistic milieu, before the divergence of Latin / western from Byzantine / eastern. In the mid-sixth century, Galassi saw a particular rupture between the sculptural tradition of the “classical” past which, up to that point, had been dominant in Ravenna, and the emergence of a new, positively Byzantine aesthetic. This aesthetic, associated with the flattening of forms, and greater rigidity and stiffness of figures, was based on Byzantine predilection for pattern, color, crisp lines, and contrast, as opposed to the sculptural, modeled, naturalistic preference of Romano-Hellenistic tradition. Like other scholars in this era, Galassi described these changes with a predominantly pejorative tone.84 Ultimately,


84 Galassi 1915, 55 characterized the imitation of Byzantine models by local “Roman” (i.e., western or Latin) sculptors working at Ravenna in the sixth century as “misery and degeneration.”
Galassi’s analysis filtered Ravennate art through the sieve of Latin or Byzantine tradition. But in recognizing Ravenna as a melting pot where a number of divergent styles and aesthetic preferences mixed, melded, and were variously articulated, he was also acknowledging the separateness of Ravenna’s artistic heritage from that of any one cultural center.

In his great corpus I sarcophagi cristiani antichi of 1929-1936, Giuseppe Wilpert asserted that all artistic influences flowed from the city of Rome, and that deviations in style and iconography from Latin sarcophagi were the result of provincial imitations. Again, like Galassi, Wilpert tacitly acknowledged local Ravennate influence, but this influence was placed firmly in the framework of “provincial” imitation or emulation of a grander, more accomplished tradition. In spite of the diverse interpretations voiced in these first studies, most agreed that one hundred percent of the stylistic verve and iconographic repertoire expressed in the Ravennate sarcophagi flowed directly from either Rome or Constantinople. This early, firmly established presumption had long-lasting implications for scholarship on the subject.

Besides the central question of origination, another principal issue for early scholars was that of chronology. Karl Goldmann’s 1906 publication was the first book devoted entirely to the Ravennate sarcophagi, though it was only fifty-eight pages and nine plates. He followed other early scholars in describing the monuments, and then attempted to sort and date them. Because he accepted the seventh-century inscriptions on the covers of the monuments of Isaac and Theodore as evidence for the boxes, Goldmann dated these inscriptions.

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85 Wilpert, 1929-36.
examples as late as the seventh century.\textsuperscript{87} Hans Dütschke’s 1909 study provided a more careful catalog of the monuments, and in it he also featured the topics of date and stylistic composition. In stark contrast to Goldmann’s chronology, Dütschke dated the earliest of the tombs to the second century and placed nearly all of the figured sarcophagi before the fifth century.\textsuperscript{88} This wide range of opinion on the issue of date was understandable given that the Ravennate monuments offered few securely dated (i.e., by inscription) monuments before the eighth century, and scholars were forced to rely almost entirely on style in order to organize the monuments into a chronological framework. Nevertheless, the deeply divergent opinions over chronology in the earliest scholarship precipitated much attention directed toward this issue in subsequent decades.

In her 1945 study, Marion Lawrence approached the tombs with clarity and neat organization.\textsuperscript{89} Her chronological schema, the basis for the contemporary scholarly consensus regarding the general dating of the monuments, placed the earliest examples in the fourth century and the latest in the eighth century. Lawrence divided the sarcophagi into two main groups – “figurative” and “symbolic” (meaning nonfigural / aniconic) - based on the iconographic and decorative qualities of the tombs. The figured examples, in Lawrence’s opinion, were the oldest, but she allowed for some overlap between the two sets and for a time in the late fifth and sixth century both types were, she asserted, produced concurrently. Among the first group of figurative sarcophagi, she also attempted to assign a subset of monuments to the same workshop by comparing specific decorative devices, including a type

\textsuperscript{87} Goldman, 49, 53, 56.


\textsuperscript{89} Lawrence, 1945.
of “spoon-leaf” capital featured on the *Rinaldo* sarcophagus (Fig. 19). Lawrence’s main concerns were those of establishing chronology, demonstrating iconographic influences, and proposing workshop connections among the monuments. Another important aspect of Lawrence’s work was her insistence on defining the “eastern” influences that in her opinion could be seen in the imagery, and in linking the objects to the Greek sphere, in the tradition of earlier scholars like Bayet.

2. 1950 – 1975

At the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century certain scholars were still approaching the sarcophagi in a highly uncritical, antiquarian mode. A tiny book (eighty-six pages, half of which are plates) prepared by Giuseppe Bovini in 1954 with the provocative subtitle *Tentativo di classificazione cronologica* added little information to that already known and discussed at the time.90 Bovini listed the differences between the Ravennate sarcophagi and Latin sarcophagi but, in fact, unlike many of his predecessors and colleagues, Bovini seemed thoroughly uninterested in the problems of origin. His chronology of the monuments was quite divergent from that of Lawrence. He placed the majority of the monuments in the fifth century, even the two five-arched ones (Fig. 6 and 7) in San Francesco, which other scholars argued were likely dated mid-to-late fourth century. He also placed the *Exuperantius* sarcophagus (Fig. 36)91 in the fifth century, sandwiched chronologically between the *Twelve Apostles* (Fig. 37)92 and *Theodore* (Fig. 31) monuments, in spite of the fact that these latter two demonstrated a figure style and decorative qualities

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92 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B15, 66 – 67, pl. 53.2, 54.2, 55. 1 – 2, 56.3 – 4, 57.2 – 4, 58. 3 – 8, 65.1.
that were entirely different from the *Exuperantius* sarcophagus (which most other scholars placed later than the fifth century). Bovini made no provision for this problem; indeed he did not even address it. Bovini omitted from his *catalogue raisonné* the sarcophagi in nearby locations such as Ferrara and Fusignano that had been linked to the Ravennate group through style and iconography. He also inexplicably passed by several whole sarcophagi in Ravenna, including two in the Museo Nazionale.

Géza de Francovich, in a 1959 article in the journal *Felix Ravenna* sought to use stylistic analysis to craft a chronology for the sarcophagi.\(^93\) De Francovich established a crucial foundation for this chronology by demonstrating that the main altar of the church of San Francesco, Ravenna, was formerly a sarcophagus box, which he argued belonged Bishop to Liberius III.\(^94\) Thus, while de Francovich’s approach towards ordering the tombs chronologically was one in a long tradition of attempted chronologies, his stylistic analysis was also anchored by the examples from San Francesco, one of which (the *Liberius* sarcophagus) he assumed could be securely linked to a Bishop Liberius whose tenure fell in the mid-fourth century. De Francovich, like previous scholars, also found connections between the Ravennate tombs and the eastern orbit of the Roman Empire. He elucidated a significant potential connection between the Ravennate tombs and tombs from Asia Minor by pointing out that the semi-cylindrical form of the lid favored in the Ravennate sarcophagi could be a result of contact with Asia Minor where this type of lid was also popular. He did, however, concur with Hans Gabelmann, whose work will be summarized below, in asserting


\(^94\) de Francovich, 21.
that some of the tombs at Ravenna, such as the *Three-and-Four-Arch* sarcophagus (Fig. 4) might have been derived from northern Italian prototypes.

Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann was the scholar who arguably took the most comprehensive approach to the study of art in Ravenna. Deichmann was responsible for a magisterial, multi-volume compendium of Ravennate art in which all of the artistic mediums of the city, from architecture to mosaic to sculpture, were addressed. Alongside his careful documentation of the monuments of Ravenna, the author provided an invaluable photographic record of Ravennate art, not to mention a bibliography of scholarship on Ravenna up to the contemporary date of publication. The author’s approach, though rarely critical or theoretical, was thorough. In three volumes, published between 1969 and 1976, Deichmann presented Ravenna’s architecture and art in its entirety thus helping the reader envision the whole of Ravenna’s artistic and architectural wealth. He did separate each medium from others, rarely providing scholarly comparisons and contrasts among the media. He also included chapters on the history of Ravenna and its government, its ecclesiastical history, the cultural life of the city, and the city’s economic and commercial life. In 1989, Deichmann followed up his earlier volumes with a final commentary on the history, topography, art and culture. In this volume, he included a section specifically dedicated to the Christian sarcophagi in Ravenna. He discussed the history of scholarship regarding the monuments, and provided a comparative chart with the alternate dates assigned to the tombs by various scholars including Kollwitz, Herdejürgen, Dütschke, Bovini and deFrancovich.

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96 Deichmann, 1989.

Deichmann’s fundamental thesis regarding art in Ravenna was that it was tied inextricably to the Constantinopolitan tradition. Much of his analysis of the pieces he so carefully and comprehensively documented was geared towards explaining the connections between these two artistic traditions. In a 1969 article in Byzantinische Zeitschrift, Deichmann gave evidence of the continuity of the tradition of relief sculpture in the funerary context by comparing the sarcophagus of Liberius (Fig. 6) in the church of San Francesco at Ravenna with fragments found in the Archaeological Museum at Istanbul (Fig. 39). He advanced the hypothesis that such persistence in form, radiating outward from the imperial city of Constantinople, should be understood in relation to the class distinctions of the imperial and / or noble patrons or clients. Since Ravenna was, from the later sixth to the eighth century, the urban base for the eastern Empire in Italy, it made sense, according to Deichmann’s argument, that similar style and imagery would be appropriated from the Constantinopolitan courtly sphere to the one in Ravenna.

An approach towards providing a comprehensive study of sculpture in Ravenna was a three volume publication entitled Corpus della scultura paleocristiana, bizantine ed altomedioevale di Ravenna, edited by Giuseppe Bovini. This work focused on the sculpture from Ravenna, providing a volume on the liturgical sculpture and furnishings, a second on the sarcophagi and sarcophagi fragments from the region, and a third on architectural sculpture (mainly column capitals). The catalog of monuments was not as complete as the Kollwitz and Herdejürgen volume in that it did not cover pre-Christian

99 Deichamnn, 1969, 297 – 298, fig. 2.
sarcophagi, but it did illustrate several anonymous sarcophagi and some sarcophagus fragments passed over in the other studies. It was arranged in a straight-forward fashion (with plates corresponding precisely to catalog entries), making it easy to read and use for reference. The work also allowed the scholar to do in-depth comparisons of sculptural forms across the spectrum of Ravennate sculptural objects.

Hans Gabelmann also dedicated a large portion of his work *Die Werkstattgruppen der oberitalischen Sarkophage*, 101 published in 1973, to the sarcophagi from Ravenna. The author broke with scholarship that linked the sculpted tombs exclusively to the east, and instead proposed that the Ravenna tombs could be better understood as members of a northern Italian school of sculpture. Gabelmann demonstrated that pagan or pre-Christian sarcophagi from northern Italy often were characterized by lids shaped like roofs, with sloping sides and corner *acroteria*. Also, they made frequent use of a decorative arrangement in the compositions on the front and back of the box, known as the “tabernacle” type, in which the composition is divided into three parts through the use of architectural elements such as archways. Some of the tombs at Ravenna have either the sloping roof and / or the compositional arrangement common to the northern Italian tombs. One example is the *Three-and-Four-Arch* sarcophagus (Fig. 4) in the basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe. Whether or not these connections were part of a continuous tradition of local inspiration, or instances of reuse of pre-Christian monuments for Christian burials in Ravenna, became a point of contention. 102


102 For arguments against the northern Italian derivation of Ravennate tombs see: Farioli, 1980.
Johannes Kollwitz provided a tentative catalog of the monuments in his 1956 publication, *Die Sarkophage Ravennas*. Kollwitz’s main objective was to begin a more complete listing of all of the sarcophagi from Ravenna. Like most of his predecessors in the field, Kollwitz traced the stylistic and iconographic roots of the sarcophagi to the Greek East. For instance, he attributed the work of the exceptional *Pignatta* (Fig. 38) sarcophagus to an itinerant sculptor from the courtly sphere of Asia Minor / Constantinople on the basis of its high stylistic quality. He also sought to further clarify the ever-present question of chronology.

Kollwitz’s brief 1956 publication represented work that was not finished at the time of his death, but was later completed and published with the contribution of a co-author, Helga Herdejürgen. The published 1979 monograph on the Ravennate sarcophagi, the second volume in a series devoted to the sarcophagi of the western Roman empire, remains the most complete catalog to date of the monuments. The authors addressed both the pagan and the Christian sarcophagi in the city (or traceable to it), dividing their discussion into two sections, one devoted to the pagan sarcophagi and the other to the Christian. The catalog was also beautifully illustrated with photographic plates, including many of backs and ends of monuments that were not illustrated in Lawrence’s earlier monograph. There were also several plates with detail images of specific figures and ornamentation. In spite of the high quality of the plates, their presentation was potentially confusing. The monuments were listed and discussed in loosely chronological order in the catalog text, but the plates, grouped at the

103 Johannes Kollwitz, *Die Sarkophage Ravennas* (Freiburg: Schulz, 1956).


105 Kollwitz, 7.

106 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 1979.
back of the volume, did not correspond to the catalog listings. The authors instead grouped the plates based on their stylistic qualities, and certain details were placed together for comparison’s sake. For a scholar hoping to do a detailed study of similar imagery this was helpful, but was confusing for the purpose of reading the text and examining the corresponding plates simultaneously. Like many of their early twentieth-century predecessors, the authors were most interested in categorizing and dating the monuments. Their extraordinary contribution to the field was to provide a complete catalog listing and bibliography for a vast majority of the monuments.

In sum, during the third quarter of the twentieth century, scholars were still debating the issues that had formed the core of the earliest scholarship dealing with the Ravennate sarcophagi. Namely, most of the scholarship revolved around the attempt to map a chronology for the monuments based on stylistic analysis anchored by a few securely established dates, and / or determining the origins of the imagery in either the west or, more frequently, the east. Comprehensive catalogs of the monuments such as those prepared by Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, and Bovini, were invaluable in carefully organizing and illustrating the extant pieces, and Marion Lawrence’s monograph opened a dialogue about the possibility of distinguishing individual workshops by examination of details on the tombs.

3. 1975 – present

In spite of the ongoing interest shown to Ravennate sculpture, and more specifically sarcophagi, in the last quarter of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first, there have been few investigations that have ventured outside traditional issues such as origin, dating, and stylistic comparison. Two scholars who have written extensively about the
monuments, often from nuanced angles, in recent decades are Raffaella Farioli and Roberta Budriesi. Both of these scholars have opened dialogue about the possibilities of considering the Ravennate sarcophagi as first and foremost local or regional products rather than bald extensions of other traditions. Also, both, and Budriesi in particular, have introduced themes of meaning and context in their approach to tomb imagery.

a. Raffaella Farioli (Campanati)

Raffaella Farioli (sometimes publishing as Raffaella Campanati or Farioli-Campanati) wrote several articles in the last quarter of the twentieth century in which she pursued ideas that earlier scholarship mostly bypassed. For instance, she was one of the first scholars to insist upon the significance of local production and regional style when approaching the Ravennate sculptural tradition. While it could be said that Farioli’s style of scholarship was “modern” or even “post-modern” in seeking to root out those marginalized and unexplored aspects of Ravennate sculpture, her interests and theses were ultimately indebted to the conclusions of earlier scholars such as Kollwitz and Deichmann. Like those authors, Farioli assumed that a study of Ravennate sculpture could provide insight into the artistic culture of Constantinople, inasmuch as the late antique productions of Ravenna represented, in her mind, either direct importations from the capital and its sphere, or were dependent upon imported metropolitan models for their iconography and style. Where she did acknowledge regional or local contribution, it was in terms of degeneration or decline from a “good” Constantinopolitan (or even Roman) model.

In a 1975 article in *Aquileia Nostra*, Farioli put forth the idea that Ravenna made important creative contributions to its own sculptural tradition. In a 1975 article in *Aquileia Nostra*, Farioli put forth the idea that Ravenna made important creative contributions to its own sculptural tradition.\(^\text{107}\) Following scholars such as

Deichmann, Farioli accepted the highest quality sculptural productions at Ravenna, the most “Hellenizing” in style (like the tomb of Liberius), to be closely connected to the Theodosian school of Constantinople. On the other hand, she argued that in successive Ravennate productions there was evidently a deliberate departure in terms of style (not iconography) from the eastern models. In particular, Farioli examined sarcophagi such as that of Exuperantius (Fig. 36) and demonstrated how they deviated stylistically from models such as the Pignatta sarcophagus (Fig. 38). Although the imagery is similar in these two examples, the Exuperantius sarcophagus, in Farioli’s opinion, has abandoned the principles of correct proportions and three-dimensional modeling, and failed to give the figures a sense of inner life. Instead, the relief is flattened, the figures stiff and frontal, and all elements seem like frozen decorations pinned to the surface of the monument. These tendencies towards abstraction and expressionistic distortion of natural forms were, in Farioli’s analysis, the Ravennate school’s most striking artistic contributions and innovations. These stylistic developments separated the Ravennate school from both its Roman and Constantinopolitan counterparts. She read this rejection of naturalistic form as the development of a new artistic language based on the uncultured, populist strains found in the provincial regions of the deteriorating Roman empire. Her tone in this sense became faintly reminiscent of Bernard Berenson’s in his famous 1954 publication in which he read in the “decline of form” supposedly evident in the Arch of Constantine the destructive effect of “barbarian” culture on the classically pure Roman empire.109


In spite of her sometimes pejorative tone, Farioli did break away from earlier scholarship in proposing that traditionally marginalized monuments deserved serious scholarly attention. In her 1977 article in *Felix Ravenna*, the author brought to light several of the Ravennate sarcophagi decorated simply and sparsely with Christological signs. She proposed that these monuments were overlooked in much of the earliest scholarship, which tended to focus on the more elaborately decorated monuments, particularly those with figural imagery. Farioli hoped that her investigation would serve as an addendum to the “Corpus” of monuments edited by Bovini. On the one hand, Farioli asserted that Ravenna was developing its own distinctive cultural tastes in the late antique period, tastes that were distinct from those of both Rome and Constantinople. On the other, she also affirmed that the iconographic tendencies manifested in the “symbolic” sarcophagi of the fifth and sixth centuries and beyond – tendencies characterized by simple, isolated symbols, abstract decoration, and the repetitive use of Christological signs often in symmetrical or “tripartite” arrangements – owed much to eastern taste.

Farioli, along with scholars like Deichmann, assumed that Ravennate sculpture ought to serve as a mirror for “lost” sculptural productions (destroyed during the iconoclastic period in the Byzantine east) from Constantinople. Though in some instances Farioli championed the artistic individuality of Ravenna’s sarcophagi, she ultimately tended to see the Ravennate contribution in a more or less negative light, as a degeneration of Byzantine form and style.

One of the most striking omissions, in my opinion, in scholarship dealing with the Ravennate sarcophagi has been the lack of inquiry into the function of the monuments in the

context of late antique and early medieval Ravenna. A tentative movement towards approaching the sarcophagi with this question in mind was made by Farioli in a 1986 article in which she used the ninth-century writings of the Ravennate historian Andreas Agnellus to outline the types of burials that were common for the bishops of Ravenna from the fourth through the ninth century.\textsuperscript{111} In spite of this rather fascinating angle, Farioli’s article mostly adhered to elucidation of known data about the tombs and their occupants, particularly in reference to Agnellus’s writings on the subject. She avoided making any statements about the potential significance of the phenomenon of the reuse of tombs for the burial of bishops, or the significance of the sculptural imagery within this particular functional framework.

In another instance of expansion beyond the traditional repertoire of scholarly inquiry, in her 1989 article Farioli moved her discussion of Ravennate sarcophagi out of the late antique period to address the “lives” that some of these monuments lived in subsequent centuries.\textsuperscript{112} Specifically, she looked at two examples from Ferrara which are known, through medieval documentation and through stylistic analysis, to have come originally from Ravenna. The reuse of ancient sarcophagi by medieval patrons, especially elite, aristocratic patrons, is well documented at Ferrara from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The main source for these reused monuments was Ravenna, as Farioli argued, because it was the main center of production in Italy during the late antique/early medieval period and was the only site in Italy that could boast of a strong sculptural tradition during that time. Therefore, not only was it the place with the most available ancient tombs, but it also held certain

\textsuperscript{111} Farioli, 1986.

historical clout as a premier center of sculptural production. One might be tempted to ask whether this admission of the energy and influence of Ravenna’s sculptural tradition runs contrary to the author’s earlier presentation of the imagery as representing a degraded version of a Roman or Constantinopolitan model.

b. Roberta Budriesi

Another scholar who has devoted considerable attention to the issues surrounding Ravennate sculpture is Roberta Budriesi. Like Farioli, Budriesi stressed the importance of recognizing the local contributions, particularly in terms of style, represented in Ravennate sculpture. For example, in her 1984/85 article entitled “Elementi di scultura esarcale,” the author addressed the issues surrounding a fragmentary sarcophagus lid found at Ranchio, a provincial outpost of Italy with close cultural ties to Ravenna.113 Based on stylistic analysis, Budriesi concluded that this piece was produced in Italy, probably in or around Ravenna, and not imported from the East. In it, she read a mixture of iconographic and stylistic traditions that echoed the general “hybrid” nature of Italian sculpture from the period before and during the Byzantine Exarchate. While the practices of importation and reuse of ancient monuments provided continuous links to the artistic currents of the East, local taste and selection, she argued, heavily influenced the monuments as well. Although, along with most other scholars who dealt with this topic, Budriesi acknowledged the significant contribution of Greek style and iconography in Ravennate sculpture of the fifth and sixth centuries, she also pointed out that this production did not take place in a sterile environment. Instead, she characterized Ravenna’s artistic tradition as eclectic, a hybridization mixing foreign and local, as well as ancient and contemporary, forms and imagery.

Similar themes were explored in a 1996 article published in *Epigraphica*.\(^{114}\) Although this article was primarily a review of a book by Croatian scholar Nenad Cambi dealing with the *Sarcophagus of the Good Shepherd* discovered at Thessalonica, Budriesi made several key comments concerning the Ravennate school of sarcophagi production. For instance, she pointed out that in the past few decades a number of examples of Constantinopolitan funerary sculpture have surfaced that demonstrate distinct characteristics from those examples found elsewhere in the late antique world, including Ravenna. Constantinopolitan sarcophagi exhibit themes that are apparently unique among early Christian works, including the preponderance of angels and of female figures, as well as representations of families. They also illustrate narratives from both Old and New Testaments, although often in different ways than these same themes are treated in examples from Rome. Ravennate imagery is much more limited in its repertoire. Few examples of narrative imagery are found at all on the Ravenna tombs. Instead symbolic scenes such as Christ situated between Peter and Paul, or among his disciples, are favored. The iconographic selection is far reduced, and Budriesi proposed that Ravennate patrons and artists focused on doctrine, illustrated through symbolism, rather than on stories related to the life and miracles of Christ, or on typological narratives.

In her most recent article,\(^{115}\) Budriesi encouraged fellow scholars to think outside the traditional, iron-bound categories of “date,” “patron,” “artist,” or even “origin,” and instead to think of Ravennate sculpture as mutable and evolving. As a corollary, rather than speaking about the imagery in terms of its influences or its origination, the author suggested that


\(^{115}\) Budriesi, 2005, 943 – 970.
scholars focus on the imagery in terms of selection. She proposed that much can be gleaned from examining what sorts of imagery were repeated, what sorts were discarded, and what sorts were copied in the successive ages. When approaching Ravennate sculpture, Budriesi stressed the importance of considering that there is seldom one single moment of production, or one single set of artistic hands involved in the production. Any given sarcophagus might have undergone a number of alterations based on the needs and tastes of a succession of patrons.

c. Other recent approaches

Among the most helpful publications on Ravenna in recent years was Deborah Deliyannis’s 2010 book Ravenna in Late Antiquity.¹¹⁶ Deliyannis’s previous books and articles, including her work on Andreas Agnellus’s Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna,¹¹⁷ had clarified essential information and issues related to the study of late antique Ravenna. The 2010 publication travelled further along this road by updating and reframing the fundamental scholarship surrounding Ravenna, its history, and its art and architecture. Beginning with a thorough discussion of the historiography of the scholarship, Deliyannis methodically examined each era of Ravenna’s history, clearly laying out the complex interactions of political, ecclesiastical, and social circumstances and events. She wove discussion of the artistic and architectural achievements into her exploration of each successive era, so that the art and history could be simultaneously considered. In so doing, Deliyannis lucidly brought up-to-date (and into English!) Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann’s Ravenna: Haupstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes. In spite of its general usefulness for any

¹¹⁶ Deliyannis, 2010.

study of Ravenna from the late antique period, Deliyannis’s work offered little new information about the sarcophagi. Most references to the sarcophagi were repetitive of what earlier scholars had concluded (for instance, that the majority of the Christian tombs date from the fifth and sixth centuries) and, on the whole, the tombs were treated as side notes in the history of the city.

In a 2007 article Dorothy Verkerk also explored the idea of sarcophagi re-use and re-contextualization from the time of production to the contemporary moment of museum exhibition. She illustrated numerous examples of sarcophagi and/or funerary markers being re-carved with new inscriptions and/or imagery to suit a new patron, and tombs re-used from the early Christian or pre-Christian eras intact as a means of promoting the humility or piety of a new patron, or, alternately, to suggest his social stature and erudition. By the modern era (eighteenth century forward), such objects had become “cultural artifacts,” ornamenting the veduta scenes of European artists on “Grand Tours” of ancient ruins. In the post-modern era, ancient sarcophagi often live in the cleanly detached world of the museum exhibition space, where they are dissected by art historians and archeologists based on their style and iconography. In order to fully understand the objects, Verkerk argues, one must acknowledge the multiple “lives” they have experienced, and bear in mind that each age understands them differently. While the article does not exclusively relate to the tombs in Ravenna, her approach to sarcophagi in general offers exciting ways to consider questions of the meaning of funerary imagery in evolving contexts.

B. Scope of Past Scholarship

Surveying broadly the scholarship up to 1950, several general trends can be observed. The desire to provide a chronological framework for the sarcophagi motivated many of the earliest inquiries. Despite the fact that much effort was expended to logically place the monuments in the work of early scholars like Goldmann and Dütschke, much of the information necessary to determine sequential chronology with certainty was then, and is today, unavailable. Only a few of the monuments have inscriptions contemporary with the original production or re-carving of the tombs (specifically, those associated with the fragment of the *Seda* sarcophagus, the fragments of the sarcophagus(i) of *Ecclesius* and *Ursicinus*, and the *Felix, Gratosius, and John* sarcophagi). No written documents of commission or sale, or even of importation, exist to connect specific monuments with specific patrons. By the ninth century, when Andreas Agnellus’ wrote his account and mentioned many ecclesiastical burials, the majority of the sarcophagi had already been reused, and thus were linked to new patrons for whom they were not originally destined and were often in locations different from their original placements. In short, despite the drive to collect, organize, and label the monuments by date, the lack of evidence continually thwarted final settlement of these issues and instead simply provided fertile ground for endless debate.119

Another obvious trend in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship was to catalog and organize the imagery of the sarcophagi, to divide the monuments into groups

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119 One example will here suffice: Marion Lawrence grouped the *Rinaldo* sarcophagus with the *Twelve Apostles* and *Theodore* sarcophagi on the basis of the style of the architectonic decoration and the arrangement of the compositional elements. Lawrence, 4 - 5. Based on these factors, she grouped the monuments in the same workshop and the same general period. Galassi, on the other hand, saw the *Twelve Apostles* and *Theodore* sarcophagi as representing a much later phase of production (by about a century) than the *Rinaldo* tomb based on figures which, in his mind, were cruder and less lifelike. Galassi, 1915, 41. Here, then, is an instance in which two scholars, looking at the same carvings, arrived at starkly different conclusions regarding the correct chronology based on their own interpretations of the style of the forms.
based on imagery, style, and even possible workshop connections. Early cataloging attempts such as Goldmann’s 1906 publication were instrumental in gathering the known sculptural monuments and fragments together, and providing a base for other scholars to build upon. More thorough investigations such as Marion Lawrence’s 1945 publication and Bovini’s *Corpus* rendered these earlier attempts more complete and more clearly organized. The most comprehensive effort to date in this category is Kollwitz and Herdejürgen’s 1979 catalog of the Ravennate sarcophagi.

A third major aim of past scholarship – one which characterized articles and books on the topic into the late twentieth-century – was to determine the influences, east or west, which were most important in shaping the imagery. Noting the divergence in iconography and style from contemporary monuments from Rome, most scholars assumed that the Ravenna sarcophagi were not “Roman” / Latin and therefore must be considered “Greek” / eastern / Byzantine. Much of this scholarship, it seems, was itself heavily influenced by the “Orient oder Rom” debate provoked by Josef Strzygowski in the early twentieth century.120 Strzygowski was one of the first scholars to challenge the notion that the creative locus for the development of late antique style was Rome, and instead he suggested that the anticlassical trends in late antique and early Christian art were related to peripheral regions of the Roman empire. He was also one of the first scholars to advocate the importance of Constantinople as a highly influential artistic center, one where the good, “classical” style was preserved while in Rome the arts deteriorated under provincial influences. In this way, Strzygowski framed the discussion of late antique and early Christian art in terms of “eastern” (i.e. Constantinopolitan / Byzantine) versus “western” (i.e. Roman / Latin).

Although Strzygowski’s own anti-Semitism undermined his scholarly prestige considerably, his ideas and framework for approaching this period were still highly influential, a point made by Jas Elsner in a 2002 article. The east / west binary deeply informed late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art historical scholarship, whether by scholars such as Deichmann who affirmed the heavy eastern influence in Ravenna’s art and architecture, or scholars such as Galassi and Wilpert who argued for more western, Roman influence. Over time some scholars questioned this neat division. Authors such as Peter Brown advocated taking into account both the interrelatedness of the imperial Roman spheres (east and west) during the late antique period, while at the same time acknowledging the importance of regional and local cultures.

In the mid-twentieth century, several new developments took place in the study of Ravennate sculpture, and the sarcophagi in particular. Scholars in this field, as in the broader art historical community, began to question earlier conventions and biases that undergirded art historical inquiry. In terms of Ravennate sarcophagi, scholars such as Rafaella Farioli questioned whether the sculptural tradition at Ravenna could be in any part indebted to local or regional style instead of wholly “Roman” or “Constantinopolitan” in character. The interest in artistic traditions that had formerly been passed over as “provincial” off-shoots of Roman or Byzantine schools was one step towards a more complex treatment of the Ravennate sarcophagi. Alongside such interests were new questions about the details of importation or local manufacture, and systems of production and patronage. Roberta Budriesi was one scholar who discussed these issues in her articles on the subject.


Another “peripheral” topic that has received a modest amount of scholarly attention is the “symbolic,” nonfigural or “aniconic” sarcophagi that are common in the Ravennate sphere. While the earliest scholarship passed by these monuments as weak derivatives of the earlier, more sophisticated figured examples, recent scholars have come to recognize that the bias toward the figurative may be a modern prejudice and may not accurately reflect contemporary aesthetic sensibilities. Though certain articles like those cited above written by Farioli\(^{123}\) have sought to emend the “corpus” of recognized monuments to include these symbolic examples, there have been almost no scholarly attempts to answer larger questions about the meaning, purpose, and intention of such monuments.

Few scholars have examined in any depth the function of the monuments and their imagery in specific social and religious settings. And few scholarly studies have been devoted to the significance of the iconography that appears (or does not appear) in the Ravennate sarcophagi. I propose to reexamine the sarcophagi, not with the goal of determining what specific cultural influences (“eastern” or “western”) are at work therein, but rather to understand why this peculiar imagery was consistently chosen, and what message or role it carried that made it preferable in this context. I also think that it is essential to consider the social context of the monuments, to explore their function not only as receptacles for the dead, but how they were perceived by the living, and incorporated into the Christian community in Ravenna and its territories during the early Christian period.

**C. Summary of the Dissertation**

The following chapter, Chapter 2, is an in-depth look at the sarcophagi themselves, and particularly at the sculptural imagery. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the imagery can be compared to that produced in and around the artistic centers of Rome and of

\(^{123}\) Farioli, 1977.
Constantinople. I demonstrate that, while the imagery can be in many ways related to both of these cultural orbits (and most particularly to the eastern sphere), it is also distinctive in important ways from either of these influential centers. These facets of the sarcophagi have been acknowledged by many past scholars, but I give concrete examples in order to provide firm comparisons for these assumptions and arguments. I next look at the ways in which the imagery, both in terms of its iconography / symbolism and its overall stylistic character, makes the sarcophagi from Ravenna a distinct, local body of work. I explore the significant ways in which I see the sarcophagi imagery relating to the other artistic productions of Ravenna, both the other sculpted items as well as the famous mosaics. In so doing, I demonstrate that the sarcophagi are not isolated from the balance of artistic remains from the city of Ravenna, but rather are related to them in salient ways. This approach, considering the imagery across divergent artistic media, has rarely been employed in past scholarship. Nevertheless, it is essential in order to understand how the sarcophagi imagery fits into the broader “composition” of Ravenna’s artistic landscape. The conclusion of this chapter is that, both in their imagery and style, the sarcophagi of Ravenna represent a distinct body of objects closely related to the aesthetic tradition of late antique / early medieval Ravenna.

The third chapter examines the social, political, and ecclesiastical character of Ravenna during this period. This examination reveals aspects of the historical context that made the evolution of a localized aesthetic culture possible. In tracing the history of the city from the time it became one of the residences of the imperial court in the fifth century, through the turbulent end of the Byzantine Exarchate and beyond, I elucidate how this relatively insignificant urban center gradually developed an attitude of dominance in ecclesiastical, political, and artistic spheres. As Ravenna became the hub of an increasingly
cohesive local culture in the early medieval period, its citizenry expressed a sentiment of exceptionism. This attitude was expressed through open defiance of powers, namely the Church of Rome and the Byzantine Empire, that tried to exercise control over Ravenna and its territories. The spirit of independence and autonomy that developed in Ravenna was the product of long-brewing ideas about the specialness of Ravenna, and was bolstered by several centuries of political, ecclesiastical, and cultural ascendance. This created the right environment, I argue, for the development of a unique artistic culture, of which the sarcophagi form a significant part.

In the fourth chapter, I illustrate more specifically the kind of role the sarcophagi played in supporting a cohesive culture at Ravenna through a case study of a discrete group of sarcophagi. These tombs are currently housed in the church of Sant’Apollinare in the Ravennate suburb of Classe, and were used to memorialize several of the powerful bishops of Ravenna. Among the important figures in the history of the rise of Ravenna, the bishops were arguably the most significant. The sarcophagi in Sant’Apollinare in Classe date from the sixth through the ninth centuries, the period in which Ravenna was ascending, achieving, and then losing political and ecclesiastical stature. The imagery on the sarcophagi reveals that these prominent monuments used repetition of familiar symbols, especially those that refer to Christian leadership, to bolster the power of the bishop and to rally the community of Ravenna around him. The subtle visual clues in the sarcophagi imagery are articulated more obviously in the mosaic program in the apse of the basilica. In short, the sarcophagi imagery, along with the mosaic program in Sant’Apollinare in Classe supported an independent community in Ravenna centered around and cemented by the presence of the bishop.
Examining the sarcophagi alongside the mosaics, within this special and specific architectural context, illuminates the meaning of the funerary imagery. The methodology employed in this chapter thus demonstrates the necessity of examining the sarcophagi within their artistic and architectural contexts, a line of investigation rarely explored by scholars deterred by the complexities of dating and categorizing the tombs.

The fifth, final, chapter of the dissertation considers the sarcophagi imagery within the broader context of Christian funerary imagery and its role in articulating fundamental Christian beliefs. I examine ways in which the Ravennate funerary imagery expresses the significance of death ritual, conceptualizations of death, destiny, and afterlife, and also specific theological / doctrinal concerns. The chapter first examines ways in which some of the most distinctive aspects of Christian death ritual were referenced visually on Ravennate sarcophagi. The next section considers ways in which the importance of community – whether temporal or celestial – was expressed in the tomb imagery. Finally, I look at how the most popular images and symbols carved on the monuments can be connected to contemporary theological controversies.

In this chapter, I study the sarcophagi imagery in concert with literary evidence, both broadly from the Christian world, and also more specifically from Ravenna. Among the sources I consider, some of the most important are the sermons of Ravenna’s famous theologian St. Peter Chrysologus, the collection of liturgical orations connected to Ravenna known as the *Rotulus*, and the *Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna* by Andreas Agnellus. These sources, among others, further explicate the significance and relevance of the peculiar imagery found on the Ravennate sarcophagi. Both in its general character, and in its specific nuances, the sarcophagi imagery is deeply connected to the shared beliefs and
values of the community at Ravenna. In fact, my research supports the argument that the imagery of the tombs binds them together as a special group, and also to the particular aesthetic tradition of late antique / early medieval Ravenna. It gives voice to local beliefs, attitudes, and anxieties, but also expresses more general, fundamental conceptualizations of life, death, and afterlife. As such, the imagery can be used as a vital lens by which to view the historical context, not only of this one specific urban center, but also the broader vista of the world beyond during the transitional period between antiquity and medievalism.
CHAPTER 2 ICONOGRAPHY AND SYMBOLISM:  
The Distinct Character of Ravennate Sarcophagi

The imagery carved onto the large stone tombs from Ravenna is in many ways enigmatic, and a number of conundrums revolve around it. The style of the tombs is one puzzle. As outlined in the first chapter, major scholarly debate has been whether the tombs from Ravenna are more closely linked to Rome / the Latin school, or to Constantinople / the Greek school. While there have been tentative moves in recent decades to situate the sarcophagi within a local aesthetic tradition, scholars have generally avoided any attempt to find continuity between the famous mosaic decoration from Ravenna and the tomb carvings. Another ambiguous feature of the sarcophagus imagery is its limited character. Taken as a whole, the tombs are remarkably repetitive, especially in terms of their iconography and symbolism. While none of the imagery is necessarily exceptional in the early Christian context, the consistency of the imagery distinguishes this group from other schools of sarcophagi. Not only is the imagery repetitive, it is also mostly generic, and does not often seem overtly tailored to a specific patron (as, for instance, in other sarcophagi traditions in which portraits of the deceased individuals are regularly included as part of the decorative program). Beyond these issues, there is the question of how the sarcophagus imagery supported the function of the tombs, and what, if any, special significance it had for the original patrons and audiences. This chapter will explore some of these questions, and propose new ways of understanding the imagery in the particular context of late antique and early medieval Ravenna.
I. Style and Iconography: Roman? Byzantine? Ravennate

In scholarship revolving around the Ravennate sarcophagi, the issue of style has been a primary concern. The main question is one of influence – namely, where do the Ravennate sarcophagi come from, stylistically speaking? This issue is not confined to the sarcophagi from Ravenna. It applies to the broader body of sculptural monuments that are situated chronologically between the decline of Rome and the medieval era proper. In the second and third centuries the sculpture produced in Italy was for the most part directly descended from the imperial Roman sculptural tradition. It carried over the illusionistic tendencies from Classical Greek sculpture, but included new trends of realism and narrative specificity. This narrative preference continued on into the Christian era, and is demonstrated by the 3rd century Child’s Sarcophagus from Copenhagen with its scenes of Jonah and the Great Fish (Fig. 40).\(^1\) By the fifth century, sarcophagi in Ravenna, such as the so-called Isaac sarcophagus (Fig. 30),\(^2\) reflect a different character. Instead of narrative in tone, the compositions are mostly static and symbolic. Figures and elements are placed against spacious, blank backgrounds. There is a sensitivity towards symmetrical arrangement of the forms that is absent in imperial Roman sculpture.

A. “Eastern” style in the Ravennate sarcophagi?

I have shown in the previous chapter that the Ravennate monuments are distinct from typical sarcophagi produced in Rome in the early Christian period. Therefore, they cannot be placed with the “Latin” stylistic school. In addition to the formal features already discussed,

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it should be noted that, stylistically, funerary sculpture from Rome also features rather squat figures with garments articulated by a number of incised folds and many minute details that give a sense of specificity to each figure or scene. There is little of the smooth, clean quietness and austerity that so many of the Ravennate tombs exude.

Scholars who noted this trend in Ravenna proposed that it was a result of “eastern” influence. During the late 1920’s, Marion Lawrence prepared several important studies of fourth-century Christian sarcophagi for the *Art Bulletin*. Using the examples gathered by Charles Rufus Morey from Asia Minor, her works demonstrated that Early Christian sculpted sarcophagi in Italy were products of the interaction and integration of two stylistic trends: the native Latin tradition and a second tradition “wholly alien in technique and design” whose roots lay in the Greek East. Lawrence aptly summarized the debate in the opening paragraph of her article on “city-gate” sarcophagi:

If one admits that style in Italy is indigenous and homogeneous in the second and third centuries and if the Syrian and Eastern influence is equally striking in the sixth, as is generally agreed, it becomes especially important to discover what happened in the intervening centuries to bring about this change.

From an historical viewpoint, there were significant changes in the imperial world between the third and sixth centuries. In the fourth century, of course, Constantine moved the capital city of the empire to Byzantium, taking an important source of wealthy patronage with him. The constant harassment by barbarian forces on the Roman frontiers, the

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3 For one example, see Giuseppe Galassi, “Scultura romana e bizantina a ravenna,” *L’Arte* 18 (1915): 29 – 57.


movement of the government of the West out of Rome first to Milan and then to Ravenna, and the eventual sacking of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 changed the role of Rome in the cultural and political landscape of Italy.7

Since Christian sarcophagi from Ravenna are distinct in tone and format from their pre-Christian predecessors, and since they do not appear to have been influenced by examples from Rome, scholars have assumed that the distinctive character of the monuments is a direct result of outside, eastern influence. This influence has been linked to the strong connections that existed between Ravenna and Constantinople in the late antique period. Ravenna’s key position on the Adriatic coast made it an important entry point for trade and communication with the eastern half of the Roman empire. After the reconquest of Italy in the mid-sixth century Ravenna was the seat of the Byzantine administrator in Italy. Direct importation of sarcophagi (some wholly carved, others simply “roughed out” to be completed in situ) from quarries in the Sea of Marmara certainly accounted for a number, probably the majority, of sarcophagi in Ravenna. It is known that other sculptural materials, such as capitals and columns, like those from San Vitale and from the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, were imported,8 and Agnellus in the ninth century made several references to

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7 For summarizations of the history of Rome during this period see: Robert A. Markus, Gregory the Great and His World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Peter Llewellyn, Rome in the Dark Ages (New York: Praeger, 1970).

8 During the Justinianic era in particular a large number of items, including column capitals in the churches of San Vitale, San Michele in Africisco, and Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, as well as marble screens in San Vitale and other liturgical items, were exported from the east to Ravenna and other Italian destinations. These pieces were crafted of Proconnesian marble and chiseled with monograms or quarry marks that demonstrated that they were imported from metropolitan workshops in the east. There is a sarcophagus fragment in the Museo Nazionale at Ravenna that is marked on its back with a Greek sign of the workshop as well. Raffaella Farioli, “Ravenna, Costantinopoli: Considerazioni sulla scultura del VI secolo,” Corso di cultura sull’arte ravennate e bizantina 30 (1983): 205ff and 236. The quarries, under Imperial control, were actively exploited from the 1st century CE to the end of the 6th. Because they were near the sea, it was easy to ship this marble throughout the Mediterranean, and the color, white with bluish-gray veins, was highly prized. Excavated shipwrecks, such as the one at Marzamemi near Sicily, provide additional proof that marble sets, either completely or partially carved, were regularly shipped to Italy. Deborah Deliyannis, Ravenna in Late Antiquity (Cambridge: Cambridge
“Proconnesian” marble as a material used in Ravennate buildings and tombs. Also, the few sarcophagi and sarcophagus fragments that survive from Constantinople or its environs from the period in question display similar qualities with the Ravennate monuments. In particular, the heraldic compositions of many of the “aniconic” sarcophagi from Ravenna (those with no human figures: see for instance the *Constantius* sarcophagus (Fig. 16) or the *Theodore* sarcophagus (Fig. 31)) are similar to eastern sculptural forms. Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann related these nonfigural, heraldic compositions to examples from the Constantinopolitan sphere. One example he provided is the sarcophagus (n. 2731) from the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul which is decorated with a cross framed by vine scrolls springing from a large amphora and flanked on either side by trees and doves (Fig. 41). Johannes Kollwitz suggested that the “confronting animals” motif (in which two animals or birds flank a central object) actually goes back to ancient Asia Minor. Farioli-Campanati proposed in a 1983 article that the theme of large animals found frequently in the Ravennate

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9 For example, in his Life of Peter I (though it must actually have been the tomb of Peter II or Peter III) Agnellus tells how he and a companion discovered the tomb of the bishop: “We saw a tomb of precious proconnesian stone, and with difficulty we raised the cover slightly.” Agnelli Ravennatis Liber Pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis, ed. by Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), c. 26: *Vidimus sepulchrum ex lapide proconniso precioso, et elevauimus duriter atque modice cooperculum.*. See also: Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, “Proconnesian Marble in Ninth-Century Ravenna,” in Deborah M. Deliyannis and Judson J. Emerick, eds., *Archaeology and Architecture: Studies in Honor of C. L. Striker*, 37 – 41 (Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2005).

10 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B29, 78, pl. 80.4, 81. 1 – 3.

11 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B16, 67 – 68, pl. 64.3 – 4, 66.1 – 2.


13 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 140.
monuments is not peculiar to Ravenna but is in fact a Constantinopolitan (i.e. eastern) feature.\textsuperscript{14}

Furthermore, the uncluttered, even austere, aesthetic of the majority of Ravennate sarcophagi (for instance the Isaac [Fig. 30], Pignatta [Fig. 38],\textsuperscript{15} Lamb [Fig. 18],\textsuperscript{16} and Barbatinus [Fig. 8]\textsuperscript{17} monuments) indicates that the imagery was not meant to evoke an illusion of reality or provide a detailed or faithful narrative rendering of an historical event. Rather, the forms seem timeless and symbolic, existing on a spiritual plane that is separate from the earthly sphere. Figures and animals stand singly against blank backgrounds, cleanly detached from one another by faux architectural props, and / or flanked tidily by palm trees or crosses. Compositions are sparingly set with elements, each having its own distinct space and rarely touching any other element in the field. Perhaps this general mood in the sarcophagi, more than any particular iconography, detail of ornament, or stylistic connection, is the factor that has led scholars over and over again to link the monuments to the Byzantine sphere and its distinct vision of spirituality and religious imagery. The two dimensionality of the carvings, the absence of specifying backgrounds, and the repetition of forms are traits that many scholars have associated with the east.\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, several surviving examples of Constantinopolitan funerary art in the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul can be effectively compared to sarcophagi in Ravenna. For instance, the slab numbered 7826 in Istanbul (Fig.

\textsuperscript{14} Farioli, 1983, 219 -220.

\textsuperscript{15} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B1, 54 – 55, pl. 24. 1 – 2, 25.1 – 2, 26.1 – 3, 27.1 – 4.

\textsuperscript{16} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B19, 70, pl. 65.2, 67.1 – 3, 68.1 – 2, 69.1 – 2.

\textsuperscript{17} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B10, 63 – 64, pl. 47.1 – 3, 48.2, 49.1, 50.1 – 2, 51.1 – 4, 52.1 – 3.

\textsuperscript{18} Lawrence, 1927, 34. As has been noted in many modern critical studies of the “orient oder Rom” debate, much pre-modern and early modern scholarship assumed that eastern style was debased relative to good western, or Roman, style. Again, these are also traits that can be connected to mosaic decoration, a potential source for the iconography and style that has not been fully explored in previous scholarship.
42)\(^{19}\) is carved simply with a central Christological medallion tied at the bottom with paired lemniscus vines and flanked by Latin crosses with flared terminals. There are no background details, and the elements are arranged in strict symmetry. Numerous Ravennate examples use the central Christological medallion flanked by symbolic images in a strikingly similar format. For instance, two sarcophagi from the grounds outside the Church of San Vitale (Fig. 43)\(^{20}\) and (Fig. 44),\(^{21}\) as well as an example now in Fusignano (Fig. 45),\(^{22}\) have a central monogram inscribed in a wreath with paired lemniscus vines flanked by lambs.\(^{23}\)

Ultimately, the Byzantine tradition is rooted in the culture of the Greek Classical era with its anonymous, perfectly proportioned and poised figures in timeless postures of suspended motion or lyrically performed, epic conflict. Latin tradition modified the Greek classical style to include more specificity and greater realism in forms. Imperial Roman artists used classical figure styles and techniques but also included details designed to infuse specificity into the imagery. For example, while the procession depicted on the Ionic East

\(^{19}\) Farioli, 1983, 240, fig. 32.

\(^{20}\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B5, 57, pl. 60.1, 61.1, 62.1.

\(^{21}\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B11, 64, pl. 60.2, 61.2, 62.2, 63.1.

\(^{22}\) Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B13, 65, pl. 60.3, 64.1 – 2.

\(^{23}\) The multiple connections between the so-called "symbolic" Ravennate monuments and the surviving examples from Istanbul have been explored by Raffaella Farioli in her 1983 article. Also, a brief survey of the 1955 publication by Nizeh Firatli demonstrates the stylistic and iconographic connections that evidently exist between Constantinopolitan / Eastern sculpture and Ravennate sculpture. A number of the sculptural objects and fragments described by Firatli conform to the heraldic positioning, use of strict symmetry, and / or repetition of forms and symbols that characterize many of the Ravennate tombs. For instance the beautifully preserved *Prince's Sarcophagus*, No. 4508, has a simple composition on the front box with two flying angels flanking a central Christological monogram surrounded by a wreath. The ends of the box are caved with Latin crosses with flared terminals flanked by disciples on either side. While the exact iconography is not found on any extant Ravenna sarcophagus (angels rarely appear on Christian tombs from Ravenna), the sparse compositions with a tripartite arrangement of images – two similar forms flanking a central Christological motif – is familiar from the Ravennate group. Nizeh Firatli, *A Short Guide to the Byzantine Works of Art in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul* (Istanbul: Istanbul Matbaase, 1955), 17, pl. 5, fig. 10.
frieze of the Parthenon contains an ambiguous gathering of model citizens (Fig. 46), the procession on the north side of the Roman *Ara Pacis Augustae* (Fig. 47) contains portraits of the imperial family. It is this representation of reality through individuals and narrated events that gives Roman imperial art a flavor of its own. And it is this idealized particularity that is utterly absent from the Ravennate sarcophagi. Apart from all else, this is the main reason that scholars have been most comfortable relating the monuments and their imagery, ornament, and style, to the east rather than to the west.

Despite the evidence that strongly suggests that the stylistic character of Ravennate sarcophagi is more Eastern / Constantinopolitan than Western / Roman, the argument that the Ravenna examples are unilaterally and absolutely connected to the Byzantine sphere is difficult to fully develop, given the dearth of Byzantine monuments from the late fourth, fifth, and early sixth centuries to use as comparanda.

**B. Characterization of the sarcophagi based on style**

One of the reasons I find it so difficult to base any argument about the character of Ravennate sarcophagi on style is that in spite of some general traits there is actually great diversity in Ravennate sculpture. Even in monuments that use the same iconography or symbolism there is no clear continuity of style within this group of tombs. In the past, scholars generally assumed that diversity of style represented either chronological difference, or difference in artistic hands. Several comparisons of sarcophagi were built on the model-


26 For one articulation of this viewpoint, see: Raffaella Farioli, “I Sarcofagi ravennati con segni cristologici: Contributo per un completamento del corpus II,” *Felix Ravenna* 113 – 114 (1977): 133 – 159, esp. 135.
copy paradigm in which one of the monuments was presumed to be an importation from Constantinople and the other a local copy. For the most part, this use of style was based upon the assumption, whether explicitly stated or merely implied, that one of the monuments was less skillfully executed than the other. The monument that exhibited the most skillful carving style (i.e. naturalistic forms, crisp details, fully modeled relief) was generally supposed to be the older of the two, and / or the imported tomb. The monument that exhibited the less skillful carving style (i.e. less naturalistic forms, clumsy attention to detail, uniform low relief) was considered the later (more medieval as opposed to antique), and / or local example. In some instances, this approach seems valid. Rafaella Farioli convincingly argued that the elegantly carved Pignatta sarcophagus (Fig. 38), with its figures of Christ and Peter and Paul, represents an accomplished version of imagery that is inexpertly echoed in the Exuperantius sarcophagus (Fig. 36). The Pignatta figures are carved in high relief, they are naturalistically proportioned, and their garments sweep gracefully in loose folds around solidly-structured anatomical forms. The Exuperantius figures have oddly rounded heads (like lollipops), hands that are far too large, and bodies that are stiffly affixed to the background in uniform low relief. The difference here is clearly one of disparity in skill level, or at least difference in workshop methods. But what about those monuments in which there is a great difference in style, but the skill level appears equally high?

27 One instance of this sort of comparison is Friedrich Deichmann’s comparison of the Liberius sarcophagus in San Francesco (which he assumed was an imported Constantinopolitan piece) to its companion / imitation known as the Bensai dal-Corno sarcophagus. Deichmann, 1969. See also, Rafaella Farioli, “Osservazioni sulla scultura di Ravenna paleocristiani,” Aquileia Nostra (1974 – 1975): 717 – 740.

One such instance is a comparison between the *Isaac* sarcophagus (Fig. 30) and the so-called *Traditio Legis* sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale of Ravenna (Fig. 48). The ends of these monuments are carved with identical imagery: the Raising of Lazarus on one end, and Daniel in the Lions’ Den on the other. Clearly, both craftsmen were drawing from the same traditional images. In the Lazarus compositions, the tomb of Lazarus is represented as an arched entryway at the top of a stepped wall. Both arches are supported by columns with the “spoon-leaf” capital that Marion Lawrence argued was specific to a particular group of Ravennate carvers. Christ approaches the stairs from the left, and stretches out his hand (in the *Isaac* example this extended arm has fallen off since it was evidently carved nearly in the round). The *Traditio Legis* composition includes a tree with a bird perched in its upper branches behind Christ.

In spite of the similarity of the iconography, the style is dissimilar. The drapery, for one thing, is treated differently in each example. In the *Isaac* composition, the folds of the garments are clean, elegant sweeps. There are a minimum number of folds. The *Traditio* figure of Christ is garbed in a robe and cloak with many folds that crinkle over his upraised arm, around his waist, and over his legs. The *Isaac* Christ (though the face is damaged) has an ovoid head with longer hair and beard, while the *Traditio* Christ has a short hairstyle with curls across the forehead and a monogrammed nimbus. The single surviving eye of the *Traditio* Christ is almond-shaped under a slightly overhanging brow. The facial features are sensitively and realistically rendered. The *Isaac* composition, along with the rest of the

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31 Damage to both compositions from Christ’s hand to the chest of Lazarus leads me to suspect that perhaps both Christs originally held “wands” pointed towards Lazarus.
monument, is carved more deeply and the modeling is soft and fluid. The *Traditio* relief is somewhat shallower with more intricate detailing. In short, even though there are salient stylistic differences between these two examples, it is impossible, in my mind, to decide that one is less skillfully carved than the other. They are different, but not unequal. And despite the fact that both carvers were drawing from the same iconographic pool, neither was attempting to imitate the other’s style.

This example simply demonstrates that the Ravennate sarcophagi cannot be neatly plotted in a linear fashion from more to less skillfully executed. Divergence in style does not mean that one piece is necessarily later chronologically than another, or that one sarcophagus is imported while the other is a local copy. In fact, stylistic disparity can have any number of possible implications. Circumstances of chronology, importation / imitation, competing workshops, various craftsmen, and / or re-carving are some of the permutations to which the imagery may have been subject. Even the most strenuous and objective analyses of style are at the mercy of any number of variables and, therefore, conclusions based on stylistic analysis must include no small measure of speculation.

C. Characterization of the sarcophagi based on iconography

Beyond analysis of style as a means of determining the character of the Ravennate monuments, there is the separate yet related issue of iconography. As mentioned above and in the introductory chapter, a brief survey of the monuments reflects the fact that few are carved with narrative scenes such as those found frequently on Latin sarcophagi. Certain subjects that are popular on Rome’s sarcophagi, such as Jonah and the Great Fish (Fig. 40),
Moses Receiving the Law (upper left beside portrait of deceased), or the Sacrifice of Isaac (upper right beside portrait of deceased) (Fig. 49) are absent from the Ravennate examples.

By far the most frequent figural subject matter that occurs on the Ravennate tombs is Christ, seated or standing, flanked by standing apostles (iconography known as College of the Apostles, or the *Traditio Legis*). This imagery appears on the *Rinaldo* (Fig. 19), *Twelve Apostles* (Fig. 37), *Certosa* (Fig. 50), *Ariosti* (Fig. 29), *Onesti* (Fig. 20), *Liberius* (Fig. 6), *Bensai-dal Corno* (Fig. 7), *Pignatta* (Fig. 38), *Exuperantius* (Fig. 36), and *Barbatinus* (Fig. 8) tombs as well as the *Traditio Legis* sarcophagus from the Museo Nazionale in Ravenna (Fig. 48). In eight out of these eleven instances Christ is seated, rather than standing. In five he hands over the scroll of the law, almost invariably to Paul, though in the *Traditio Legis* example he offers the scroll to Peter.

Other repeated figural subject matter found on the sarcophagi includes the Raising of Lazarus, and Daniel in the Lions’ Den, each found twice on the ends of the *Isaac* (Fig. 30) and *Traditio Legis* (Fig. 48) sarcophagi. There are a few scenes that appear only once on a sarcophagus from the Ravennate sphere. The *Pignatta* sarcophagus (Fig. 38) has two singular

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32 *Sarcophagus of Adelphia* from Syracuse, Dresken-Weiland, cat. 20, 8 – 10, pl. 9.1 – 5, 10.1 – 6.
33 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B14, 65 – 66, pl. 47.4, 53.1 – 3, 56.1 – 2, 57.1, 58.1 – 2.
34 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B15, 66 – 67, pl. 53.2, 54.2, 55.1 – 2, 56.3 – 4, 57.2 – 4, 58.3 – 8, 65.1.
35 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B17, 68 – 69, pl. 53.4, 55. 3 – 4, 59.1 – 5.
36 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B12, 64 – 65, pl. 48.3, 49.2, 50.3 – 4, 52.4 – 5.
37 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat.B9, 61 - 62, pl. 42.1 – 3, 43.1 – 3, 44.1 – 7.
38 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B7, 58 – 60, pl. 34.2, 35.3 – 4, 36.4 – 6, 37.3 – 4, 38.3 – 4, 39.3 – 4, 40.4 – 9, 41.1 – 9.
39 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B6, 57 – 58, pl. 34.1, 35.1 – 2, 36.1 – 3, 37.1 – 2, 38.1 – 2, 39.1 – 2, 40.1 – 3.
compositions on the ends of its box. On the right end is the Annunciation\(^{40}\) and on the left there is an unidentified scene of a man and woman greeting one another.\(^{41}\) There is likewise a lone depiction of the Adoration of the Magi on the Isaac sarcophagus (Fig. 30), the only such scene to be found on a Ravennate sarcophagus, though this imagery does appear several times in other Ravennate works of art.\(^{42}\) In the Traditio Legis sarcophagus (Fig. 48) a man and woman are positioned at the far sides of the main composition, which shows Christ standing on a hillock flanked by two apostles and palm trees. This man and woman have been identified as donors / the deceased. This is the only instance as far as I have been able to ascertain of possible portraits of contemporary individuals included in the imagery of a Christian sarcophagus from Ravenna. Deceased individuals (or donors) appear frequently in the pre-Christian tombs from Ravenna: see for instance the C. Didius Concordianus tomb.

\(^{40}\) According to Marion Lawrence this is only one of two identified Annunciation compositions on an early Christian sarcophagus. The other is found on a lid from a double-frieze sarcophagus in Syracuse. Lawrence, 1945, 26, note 133 and Giuseppe Wilpert, I sarcofagi cristiani antichi, Vol. 1 (Rome, 1929 – 36), pl. 92.2.

\(^{41}\) Marion Lawrence incorrectly identified this as the Visitation iconography. Lawrence, 1945, 18. While the Visitation would be the logical pendant to the Annunciation, upon closer inspection the two figures in the composition are a man and a woman, so this cannot be the greeting of Elizabeth and Mary. Kollwitz identifies this scene only as a “meeting” scene. It possibly represents Mary telling Joseph that she is pregnant, or Joseph accepting Mary as his wife in spite of her pregnancy.

\(^{42}\) There are two known mosaic depictions of the Adoration of the Magi at Ravenna. One is on the south wall of the nave of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, and the other is on the north apse wall of San Vitale, depicted as part of the textile decoration of Empress Theodora’s mantle. In addition, there is a small marble reliquary from the church of S. John Battista (now in the Museo Arcivescovile) that depicts an adoration of the Magi scene similar to the one on the Isaac sarcophagus. Mary is seated on a throne holding the Christ child in her lap while the three Magi hurry towards her holding out their gifts. The spacing of the figures is cramped, and the overall style seems much clumsier than that of the Isaac carving. The ends of this reliquary are carved with Christ between Peter and Paul (again giving the law to Peter, only the second instance of this iconography), and Daniel in the Lions’ Den. In this Daniel composition, unlike the other two, an angel appears at the upper right hand side to close the mouth of the lion. The back of the reliquary has a singular Resurrection scene in which Jesus, in the center of the composition, is pulled up by a Hand of God that reaches down from the upper compositional frame. To the left of Christ are two female figures on their knees, reaching toward him with imploring gestures. To his right is a structure with an open archway and crenellated roof symbolic of the empty tomb. For the front of this reliquary, see: Giuseppe Bovini, ed., “Corpus” della scultura paleocristiana bizantina ed altomedioevale di Ravenna, 3 Vol., (Rome: Istituto di Antichita’ Ravennati e Bizantine dell’Universita’ di Bologna, 1968 – 69), vol. 1, pl. 138 a - d.
(Fig. 1),\textsuperscript{43} or the sarcophagus of \textit{Sosia Juliana and Tertratia Isias} (Fig. 51).\textsuperscript{44} Portraits of the deceased are also found with regularity on pre-Christian and Christian sarcophagi from imperial Rome: see for example the tomb from Syracuse discussed above (Fig. 49). So the absence of this type of representation in Ravenna, save for in the example from the \textit{Traditio Legis} sarcophagus, is conspicuous. There is also a unique scene representing the Doubting of Thomas found on a sarcophagus fragment (Fig. 52)\textsuperscript{45} also at the Museo Nazionale in Ravenna. Thomas extends his hand into the side of the figure of Christ. The figures are tightly flanked by cypress trees, and the square shape of the composition indicates that this large slab was probably from the short end of a sarcophagus.

In sum, other than the ubiquitous composition of Christ flanked by apostles, there are only two instances of iconographic repetition in the figural imagery of the Ravennate sarcophagi: Daniel in the Lions’ Den and the Raising of Lazarus. These scenes are found on the ends of two sarcophagi. The other subjects: the Adoration of the Magi, the Annunciation, the enigmatic Meeting Scene, the Doubting of Thomas, and pendant donor portraits are only found once. There are no other narrative scenes illustrated on extant sarcophagi from the Ravennate sphere. Needless to say the figural repertoire of this group is starkly narrow. The iconography of sarcophagi from Rome, with dense compositions, representations of specific individuals, and narrative, does not appear to have been the primary inspiration for Ravennate artists.

Nonfigural, or aniconic, imagery is just as popular on the Ravennate sarcophagi as is figural imagery, if not more so. As mentioned above, the “symbolic” compositions on the

\textsuperscript{43} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A5, 21 – 22, pl. 1.3, 4.1 – 2, 5.1.

\textsuperscript{44} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A35, 36 – 37, pl. 14.2 – 4, 15.1 – 4, 16.1.

\textsuperscript{45} Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B2, 55, pl. 26.4.
Ravennate sarcophagi have been linked by more than one scholar to examples from Asia Minor or the orbit of Constantinople. The most pervasive symbolic composition involves a central Christological symbol, such as a monogram or cross, flanked by two or more elements, often animals and palm trees. Such compositions can be found on the back of the Pignatta sarcophagus (Fig. 38), the back of the Isaac sarcophagus (Fig. 30), the back of the Onesti sarcophagus (Fig. 20), the back of the Exuperantius sarcophagus (Fig. 36), the back of the Barbatinus sarcophagus (Fig. 8), the back of the Ariosti sarcophagus (Fig. 29), the back of the Rinaldo sarcophagus (Fig. 19), the back of the Twelve Apostles sarcophagus (Fig. 37), the fronts of two sarcophagi from the grounds of San Vitale (Fig. 43) and (Fig. 44), the front of the Fusignano sarcophagus (Fig. 45), the front and back of the Theodore sarcophagus (Fig. 31), the front and back of the Lamb sarcophagus (Fig. 18), the front and back of the Honorius sarcophagus (Fig. 17), the front of the Constantius sarcophagus (Fig. 16), the front of the S. Gervasio sarcophagus at Mondolfo (Fig. 53), the front and back of the Ranchio sarcophagus (Fig. 54), the front of the Imola sarcophagus (Fig. 55), on the fragments of the sarcophagus(i) of Bishops Ecclesius and Ursicinus (Fig. 56), the front of the Crucifer Lamb sarcophagus (Fig. 14), the front of the Felix sarcophagus (Fig. 10), and

46 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B28, 77, pl. 79.1 – 3, 80.1 – 3. Though the back of this tomb is unfinished, the general composition is apparent.

47 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B30, 78, pl. 82.1 – 2; 83.1.

48 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B18, 69, pl. 62.3; 63.2 – 3.

49 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B31, 78 – 79, pl. 83.2 – 4.

50 Bovini, ed., 1968 – 69, cat. 40, 50 – 51, pl. 40a - b.

51 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 85.4.

52 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 86.3.
on the front of the *Lamb and Rinceau* sarcophagus (Fig. 13). This list includes examples of this popular iconography found on fronts or backs of the boxes of sarcophagi, in other words on the prominent rectangular space(s) on the fronts or backs of the tombs. Many other examples of this symbolic arrangement are carved on ends and lids of sarcophagi. In summary, this heraldic imagery is found at least forty-five times in one form or another on the Ravennate sarcophagi, a number that represents about seventy percent of the Christian tombs.

D. “Eastern” Iconography in the Ravennate Sarcophagi?

If this plethora of aniconic symbolism does not come from the Latin tradition, is it the heritage, instead, of the east? Because so many scholars have staked the claim that Ravennate art is, in essence, Byzantine, it is worthwhile to look carefully at the connections that exist, and also to note where leaps across negative information must be made. In the following section, I will consider closely the most prominent, contemporaneous surviving sculpture from the eastern sphere in terms of its relation to the tombs from Ravenna.

As mentioned above, the Byzantine funerary sculptural tradition is more difficult to reconstruct than is the Latin tradition given the dearth of extant monuments compared to the number surviving from the west. Much of what does survive from the Constantinopolitan sphere is today housed in the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul. There are several pieces of funerary sculpture carved with symbols also found on the Ravennate sarcophagi. For example, sarcophagus number 823 (Fig. 57) has a box that is decorated on the front and back

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54 Not only does the heraldic adoration composition appear on “Christian” tombs, but it is also often found on tombs that were originally carved for pagan patrons and were refitted with Christian symbolism for a later Christian burial. See, for example, Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A15 / B21 or A17. The number forty-five includes instances in which the composition is one of two or more on the same sarcophagus.
sides with central monogram crosses and lemniscus vines. The central wreathed monogram also appears in the so-called “Prince’s” sarcophagus (Fig. 58) from Sarıgüzel, number 4508 at the Istanbul museum, and crosses are as ubiquitous in the sculptural collection at Istanbul as they are in Ravenna. Not only do they appear on funerary monuments, but are also found on other sculpted items including lintels, impost capitals, and parapets. Examples include plaques numbered 4135 (Fig. 59) and 4136 (Fig. 60), or the column socle n. 1641 (Fig. 61). Wreathed monograms and scrolling vines are other common symbols found in the sculptural productions from the Istanbul museum that are clearly related to similar symbols and images from the Ravenna sphere. A prime example is found on the front of the “Prince’s” sarcophagus (Fig. 58) mentioned above. Undeniably, there are connections between these sculptural schools, especially in terms of the predilection for aniconic, Christological symbols and a style that favors sparse compositions, a minimum of distracting details, and symmetrical arrangements.

In terms of figural iconography, while there are some direct correlations there are also major discrepancies between Constantinopolitan and Ravennate sculpture. The iconography of Christ seated amongst his apostles that is often repeated in the Ravenna tombs is found on a limestone relief (possibly a sarcophagus fragment), n. 2396 at Istanbul (Fig. 62). In this relief, Christ, seated on a stool, holds an open book in one hand. To his left, Peter stands and

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55 Firatlı, 1955, 14 and Mendel, cat. 1174, 417.

56 Nezih Firatlı, La sculpture byzantine figure au Musée archéologique d’Istanbul (Paris: Librairie d’Amerique et d’Orient Adrien Maisonneuve, Jean Maisonneuve Successeur, 1990), cat. 81, 46 – 47, pl. 30.

57 Firatlı, 1990, cat. 328, 165, pl. 100.


holds a cross staff. This slab, along with two other limestone reliefs, was found in the Mosque of Imrahor, formerly the Studion Monastery. The related relief numbered 2395 (Fig. 63)\textsuperscript{61} (potentially one of the end pieces of the sarcophagus box based on its square shape) is carved with an image of Christ Entering Jerusalem. This scene does not appear on any of the extant Ravennate tombs. The relief is also framed with a decorative band that includes vine scrolls and figures of birds and beasts. In one section two “quadrupeds” flank a central monogram. Though aspects of this symbolism echo that found on Ravennate sarcophagi there is no direct parallel for this manner of framing.

The beautifully preserved “Prince’s” sarcophagus n. 4508 (Fig. 58) at Istanbul is carved on both sides of the box with flying angels carrying wreathed monograms. Angels are commonly found in Constantinopolitan sculpture, in funerary and non-funerary contexts. Besides the figure of Gabriel that is found in the Annunciation scene on the right end of the Pignatta sarcophagus (Fig. 38), angels appear on no surviving, Christian-era Ravennate tombs. The ends of the Prince’s Sarcophagus have two bearded figures flanking a central cross. The figures are probably meant to represent apostles. Though the representations of flying angels are not found on any known sarcophagus from Ravenna, the compositional arrangement employed on all four sides of this sarcophagus, with its use of three main images in a strictly symmetrical, heraldic configuration is similar to many Ravennate examples. Sarcophagus number 2731 (Fig. 41)\textsuperscript{62} at Istanbul is an imperial sarcophagus of black marble. Its front box is divided into three panels by four pilasters and in the center a cross is framed by vine scrolls springing from a large amphora. To either side are trees and

\textsuperscript{61} Firatli, 1990, cat. 101, 60 – 61, pl. 39.

\textsuperscript{62} Firatli 1990 cat. 87, pl. 33, and Mendel, 1320.
doves. All of these elements, vine scrolls, the *amphora* or *cantharus*, trees, and doves, again are part of the Ravenna repertoire as well.63

Recent excavations have additionally provided a few more examples of Byzantine funerary iconography. In 1988 Turkish archeologists excavating near the Porto Silivri of the Theodosian wall of Constantinople discovered a multiple burial64 consisting of five sarcophagi, whose fragments now reside in the museum at Istanbul. The most prominent of these sarcophagi, which was situated along the back wall of the semi-cylindrical burial space and elevated on a shelf, was worked in Proconnesian marble. It was decorated “in a symbolic manner” with candles and Christological symbols, while the other four tombs were worked in local limestone (Fig. 64).65 Some interesting iconography is found on these limestone tombs. One of them includes a representation of the deceased family (a man and a woman with a small boy) presumably buried within (Fig. 65). The figures stand under pointed arches and

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63 A number of other examples from the Archaeological Museum at Istanbul have imagery that can be compared to imagery found on the Ravenna sarcophagi. Sarcophagus number 2994 is carved simply with crosses in relief. Firatli, 1955, 13. Sarcophagus 823 mentioned above is carved with wreathed monogram crosses on both sides of the box. Firatli, 1955, 14, and Mendel, 1174. The wreaths are tied with lemniscus vines at the terminals of which are ivy leaves supporting crosses. A red limestone child’s sarcophagus, number 4769, is decorated on four sides with framed crosses. Firatli, 1955, 17. There are several other such simply and sparsely decorated sarcophagi at the Museo Archaeologico – including number 2805 carved with wreathed crosses and lemniscus (Firatli, 1955, 20), numbers 4770, 681, 1130, 1131, 4475, 4688, and 4711 with only crosses (Firatli, 1955, 38 – 39). These last seven had some traces of gold in the interiors of the tombs indicating that the corpses had been clad in gold-embroidered raiments – suggesting that these were luxury burials. Also, there are five porphyry sarcophagi that belonged to the Byzantine emperors of the fourth and fifth centuries. Firatli, 1955, 37 – 38 and Aleksandr A. Vasiliev, “Imperial Porphyry Sarcophagi in Constantinople,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 4 (1948): 9 – 26. These examples were carved in the same sparing manner, using only Christological symbols such as the medallion monogram. The fact that luxury and / or imperial sarcophagi were carved in this ascetic manner using only non-figural symbols indicates that the choice to limit the iconographic repertoire and to elevate such imagery to a place of preeminence was consciously done.


65 Matthews, 1994, 314. The author also relates that all of the tombs were composed of pieces of stone put together to form a box – in other words they were not carved from monoliths. This is interesting as the majority of the surviving whole Ravenna sarcophagi are carved from monoliths.
flank a central round arch under which is a representation of a sanctuary with curtains pulled back to reveal a Latin cross and an altar on which there appears to be a central Christological medallion. The use of architectural features to separate the compositional space, as well as the pulled back curtains of the sanctuary and the common symbols of the cross and the monogram are familiar from the Ravennate tombs. For instance, the *Honorius* Sarcophagus (Fig. 17) now in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia uses the compositional device of the pointed and rounded arches to organize the imagery. The use of the pulled back curtain to create a “sanctuary” space is unusual on the Christian Ravennate tombs but was popular in northern Italy in the pre-Christian period of sarcophagi production. A surviving example from Ravenna is the monument known as the *Three-and-Four-Arch (Niche)* sarcophagus (Fig. 4), which is probably a third century original reworked in the mid-late fifth. Unfamiliar from Ravennate tombs is the representation of a family. Thomas Matthews, in fact, suggests that this is the first representation of a family in Byzantine art.⁶⁶ Amongst the Christian tombs from Ravenna representations of the deceased are rare. The limestone sarcophagi from the Theodosian wall tomb also included scenes of Moses Receiving the Law, and the Sacrifice of Isaac (Fig. 65), two other representations that are found on Latin (Roman) sarcophagus examples, but are not found on extant Ravennate tombs.

As for the rarer figurative subjects found on the Ravennate tombs, there are also examples of these subjects in sculptured objects at Istanbul, though they are not necessarily found in a funerary context. There are several instances of relief carvings representing the Raising of Lazarus, including one on a sarcophagus fragment, n. 5769 (Fig. 66),⁶⁷ there is a

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⁶⁶ Matthews, 1994, 314.

⁶⁷ Firatlı, 1990, cat. 98 pl. 38, and Mendel, 675.
parapet slab, n. 6085, representing Daniel in the Lions’ Den (Fig. 67), and there is an ambo (n. 1090) carved with Corinthian columns supporting arches and forming bays in which are represented the Magi seeking the Christ child on one side and presenting gifts to the Virgin on the other (Fig. 68). Scenes represented on the Ravennate sarcophagi that find no correspondence amongst surviving Byzantine sculptural fragments are the Annunciation and “Meeting” scenes from the ends of the Pignatta sarcophagus (Fig. 38), and the Doubting of Thomas from the relief fragment in Ravenna’s Museo Nazionale (Fig. 52). This is not to say that these subjects were unknown to the Constantinopolitan sculptural tradition, but simply that we have at this time no extant example of their appearance.

In short, based on the surviving objects and fragments from the Constantinopolitan sphere, it appears that Constantinopolitan sculptural iconography was less varied than Latin iconography and tended to give preference to static, “symbolic” imagery over narrative imagery. This seems especially true for funerary sculpture. In this regard, Ravennate

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68 Firatli, 1990, cat. 306 pl. 94, and Mendel, 684. In this example, unlike in the Ravennate sarcophagi examples of this subject, Daniel is attended by an angel and the prophet Habakkuk.


70 Thomas Mathews, in his 1994 article detailing the multiple burial found at the Porto Silivri, comments on the Byzantine iconographic “corpus” of funerary sculpture that can be pieced together from the surviving limestone and marble sarcophagi from Constantinople and its orbit. Although, obviously, there are far fewer surviving pieces from the eastern sphere than from the western sphere, Mathews argues that there are enough objects to begin to define Byzantine funerary iconography. Significantly, Mathews finds that this “corpus” of material appears to be distinct both from Roman and Ravennate groups – for instance, angels apparently assume particular importance in Constantinopolitan iconography. Various subjects from the Old Testament were favored such as the Sacrifice of Isaac, Jonah and the Fish, Moses Receiving the Law, Daniel in the Lions’ Den and the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace. None of these themes were novel in the early Christian world but there is a fair amount of originality in the treatment of the imagery, if not in the choice of the imagery. For instance, in the Sacrifice of Isaac scene on one of the Porto Silivri sarcophagi Mathews notes that Abraham and Isaac seem to be smiling. He relates this to the teachings of Amphilochio, the Archbishop of Iconium (373 – 403) who explained that this narrative was a symbol for the coming sacrifice of Christ, and that Abraham understood this and explained it to Isaac so that at the moment of sacrifice Isaac and his father were full of joy. This is one example of several Mathews gives to reiterate the idea that in Constantinopolitan funerary sculpture typological themes trump the narrative sense of the scene. Mathews, 1994, esp. 320 – 332. At any rate, as scholars in the future (hopefully) begin to compile the known examples of Constantinopolitan funerary sculpture and synthesize them into a recognizable catalog it will likely become obvious that there is a distinct character to
iconography is again more closely allied to eastern rather than to western tastes. On the other hand, even within the relatively small number of surviving examples of funerary sculpture from the Constantinopolitan sphere, iconography is present (angels, the representation of a deceased family, Moses Receiving the Law, and the Sacrifice of Isaac) that do not appear on any known Ravennate tomb. And, in sculptural reliefs from non-funerary (or unknown) contexts, there are narrative subjects represented that are common from the Roman tradition (such as the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace from slab number 1233 (Fig. 69), or Jonah and the Fish from fragment number 4517 (Fig. 70), that do not appear in any known sculptural context at Ravenna. If the Constantinopolitan iconographic repertoire seems limited when compared to the Latin tradition, the Ravennate iconographic repertoire is even more severely reduced.

Many scholars, noting this trend in Ravennate funerary sculpture, have assumed that the narrow range in iconography represents, again, the fact that Ravennate productions were imperfect imitations of a greater, more accomplished, more cosmopolitan sculptural tradition. While it is clearly demonstrable that Ravenna’s artisans were inspired by larger sculptural traditions, particularly Constantinopolitan, it might be possible to understand the limitation of

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Constantinopolitan iconography that differentiates it from Roman – but also from Ravennate – funerary iconography.

71 Firatli 1990, cat. 121, pl. 44.
72 Firatli 1990, cat. 106, pl. 40.
73 Ravenna is certainly not the only center whose sculptural school tended to be narrow in its iconographic repertoire. Roberta Budriesi, in her review of Nenad Cambi’s 1994 book on the Good Shepherd Sarcophagus from Salona and its school, remarked that the Salonian school is characterized by an iconographic repertoire that is fairly limited in comparison to the school of Northern Italy, though there are images from that school such as eros figures and portraits of the deceased that are not found in the Ravennate tradition. Nevertheless, it is probable that Ravenna was not entirely unique in its narrow iconographic selectivity. Roberta Budriesi, “Salona, Constantinopoli, Ravenna: Note sui sarcopagi tardo-antichi: riflessioni sull’opera di Nenad Cambi,” Epigraphica 58 (1996): 230 – 237. See also: Nenad Cambi, Sarkofag dobroga pastira iz Salone i njegova grupa, trans. by Maja Cambi (Split: Arheološki Muzej, 1994).
the Ravennate repertoire in a different, more positive light. Among the tombs that have been discovered from the pre-iconoclastic Byzantine sphere, those that represent luxury burials (the so-called “Prince’s” sarcophagus n. 4508 (Fig. 58), five porphyry tombs thought to have belonged to members of the imperial family,74 seven tombs with gold traces on the interiors,75 and the elevated tomb in the multiple burial excavated near the Porto Silivri (Fig. 64) ) are all quite sparing in their use of imagery. Aside from no. 4508, in which angels and apostles appear, all the other tombs are sculpted entirely with nonfigural imagery. Less significant funerary monuments, such as the four limestone sarcophagi at the Porto Silivri burial, have a more highly varied iconographic repertoire including narrative and / or figurative scenes. It would appear that the greater the importance of the deceased, the more symbolic and repetitive the imagery. This conclusion should not be entirely surprising given the Byzantine conception of spiritual reality, which, as scholars have pointed out time and again, often prefers abstract over naturalistic expression. If Byzantine craftsmen were choosing to deliberately limit their repertoire of imagery, and to focus on nonfigural symbols in their funerary monuments, is it surprising that Ravennate craftsmen may have been doing the same thing, for similar reasons? If this is the case, then it follows that the “symbolic” or “nonfigural” imagery on the Ravennate tombs has a greater depth of meaning and purpose than scholars have traditionally assumed, and perhaps merits more serious consideration.

E. The Significance of the Symbolic

Ravennate sarcophagi imagery has traditionally been approached in terms of two distinct groups – those with figural imagery and those whose imagery is primarily nonfigural

74 Vasiliev, and note 71.

75 See note 64.
/ aniconic / symbolic. The most straightforward example of this approach is found in Marion Lawrence’s monograph in which she divided the text neatly into two sections, one labeled “The Figured Sarcophagi,” and the other labeled “The Symbolic Sarcophagi.”76 Even in studies that do not divide the monuments so clearly there remains a distinction between the figural compositions and the symbolic ones.77 As mentioned above, the most common figural subject matter in the sarcophagi is Christ, standing or seated, flanked by disciples. The most common symbolic subject matter found in the sarcophagi imagery is two (or more, always an even number to create clear symmetry) animals or inanimate objects flanking a central symbol (most often the monogram or cross, or some other clear reference to Christ). It seems to me that in drawing a sharp dividing line between “figured” and “symbolic” compositions the possibility that this heraldic imagery might in fact be the same subject matter repeated over and over again, using different but interchangeable elements, has been missed.

Obviously the compositional arrangements with two peacocks, or lambs, or harts standing stiffly to either side of a monogram, cross, cantharus, etc. is a “symbolic” composition in that it is not meant to represent a narrative moment and its elements refer to idea(s) or objects other than themselves. Yet the figured examples in which Christ in human form stands or sits and is flanked by two or more disciples are also symbolic in as much as they, too, refer to a transcendent truth rather than to a specific narrative occurrence. There are three types of figural, compositional arrangements that revolve around Christ and his followers. The first, which is most similar in arrangement to the symbolic scenes of animals flanking a central object, depicts Christ seated or standing flanked by two men (usually Peter

76 Lawrence, 1945.

77 This is also a result of the fact that most scholars have, correctly or incorrectly, assumed that the symbolic sarcophagi are later chronologically than the figured sarcophagi. This is the reason why the Kollwitz and Herdejürgen catalog loosely segregates the groups.

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and Paul) and palm trees. This imagery is applied in the *Pignatta* (Fig. 38), *Traditio Legis* (Fig. 48), *Exuperantius* (Fig. 36), and *Rinaldo* (Fig. 19) tombs. These scenes do not represent narrative moments. They do not tell stories from the life of Christ. They do not illustrate even prophetic future events in heaven. In many of these compositions Christ hands the law to Paul or sometimes to Peter, which is not a future tense event (or even, technically, a narrative moment recorded in scripture), and nowhere in scripture are Peter and Paul situated next to Christ at the Last Judgment, Second Coming, etc. The palm trees may be taken to indicate that the composition is set in heaven, but given the fact that palms are ubiquitous on the sarcophagi it seems more likely that this paradisiacal imagery was basically an ornamental element appropriate for a tomb given that it carried overtones of eternal rest and peace.

The same lack of narrative specificity is demonstrated in the figural compositions in which Christ is flanked by more than two disciples, the palms are omitted, and yet the background remains blank. Such imagery (sometimes called the College of Apostles) is on the *Onesti* (Fig. 20), *Twelve Apostles* (Fig. 37), and *Certosa* (Fig. 50) sarcophagi. Though the number of disciples varies slightly (on the *Onesti* monument there are four disciples on the front box, two to either side of Christ, and on the *Twelve Apostles* and *Certosa* monuments there are six disciples, three to either side of Christ) all three compositions are perfectly symmetrical with Christ as the central element and the same number of flanking disciples on either side of him. The third type of Christocentric figural composition is in essence the same as the examples mentioned above, except for the addition of columns and niches to separate the figures from one another. This compositional arrangement is found in the *Liberius* (Fig. 6), *Bensai-dal Corno* (Fig. 7), *Barbatinus* (Fig. 8), and *Ariosti* (Fig. 29) examples. Again, in spite of the inclusion of decorative architectural features to create a stage setting for the
figures, the basic theme is the same. Christ is the central element, adored on either side by the same number of apostles. The men who flank Christ hail, worship, or acclaim him while hastening toward him in stylized procession. Although in several instances there is the token exchange of the scroll of the law between Christ and one of his apostles (usually Paul), this again is not meant to signify a narrative moment, but rather is a timeless gesture laden with theological overtones, as indicated by the fact that most often the recipient of the scroll hastens toward Christ with reverently covered hands. In fact, in almost all of the figural compositions, the figures of disciples or apostles are depicted in reverential, ritual attitudes of worship. They move toward Christ in the center of the scene often with heads and backs bowed submissively. Hands are often covered by the folds of their garments, raised in gestures of acclaim, or laid against their chests in attitudes of worship or respect. Sometimes the figures carry crosses (especially representations of Peter) or wreathed garlands. Though it may sound simplistic, the iconography in these compositions is basic and timeless in the early Christian world. It represents the transcendent adoration of Christ, who is the central focus of solemn, celestial procession.78

While the forms are different, the meaning is the same in the nonfigural, symbolic arrangements. Most often, in these compositions, the central element is meant to symbolize Christ. Usually this symbolism is blatant, consisting of either the Christological monogram, or the cross, or both. One other common symbol is that of a cantharus either filled with water, or sprouting a grapevine. For instance, in the composition on the Pignatta sarcophagus (Fig. 38), harts drink from a central cantharus with water. This filled cantharus can be seen

78 The device of a procession converging on a representation of Christ is widely utilized in early Christian art and heavily laden with meaning. Thomas Mathews explores this phenomenon, including comments pertaining to the centrality of this imagery in Ravenna, in Chapter Six “Convergence” of The Clash of Gods, esp. 150 – 176.
as a reference to Christ. The imagery comes from Psalm 41 (42): 2 “As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after thee, O God.” More specifically, the soul thirsts after Christ who identifies himself as the fountain of living water in the gospel of John. Grapevines, likewise, refer to Christ as the “vine.” The creatures who move toward the middle to “adore” or partake of the central Christological motif in each of the symbolic compositions are likewise worshippers or devotees, much as are the apostles in the figural examples discussed above. The use of lambs as followers is one of the most common motifs, found seventeen times, or in thirty-eight percent of the total number of these heraldic compositions. Obviously lambs represent disciples of Christ. Scripture makes several references to Christ’s followers as a “flock” or “lambs” or “sheep.” The most significant may be John 21: 15 – 18 in which Peter, the “first pope” is instructed by Christ to “feed my lambs,” and “feed my sheep.”

Considering the figural and non-figural examples with this basic compositional arrangement of Christ adored in an heraldic or symmetrical display, it is immediately obvious that this is by far the most important symbolic iconography in Ravennate sarcophagi imagery. Scholars have never before considered this iconography as a whole because it has in the past always been separated into “figural” and “symbolic” groups. On closer inspection, however, the meaning of the figural and non-figural examples is essentially the same. The fact that often these figural and symbolic compositions are paired, front and back, on the same monument, supports the idea that the two types are reiterations of one another. Pairings of figural and non-figural “adoration” compositions occur on the Pignatta (Fig. 38), Onesti

79 Psalm 41 (42): 2. Douay Rheims translation. All subsequent scripture references taken from this version.
81 “I AM the true vine . . .” John 15:1.
(Fig. 20), *Twelve Apostles* (Fig. 37), *Exuperantius* (Fig. 36), *Barbatinus* (Fig. 8), *Ariosti* (Fig. 29), and *Rinaldo* (Fig. 19) tombs.

Significantly, this tendency to pair a narrative and a symbolic composition, whose underlying meaning may be parallel, on the same tomb is common to neither the Roman nor the Constantinopolitan tradition, and may represent an important way in which Ravenna’s patrons and craftsmen expressed (whether consciously or unconsciously) their artistic autonomy. And, if my argument is valid that these types of composition are in reality reiterations of the same basic symbolism, then it would appear that Ravenna’s iconographic repertoire is even narrower than it ostensibly appears. Considering the diversity in terms of *style* found in the Ravennate sarcophagi corpus (refer to section B. above), this iconographic cohesiveness is even more striking.

It certainly seems that, in spite of the fact that none of the iconography at Ravenna is exactly *original*, taken as a whole the iconographic repertoire does appear to be *distinctive* in its highly selective character, its penchant for symmetrical compositions heraldically arranged (especially ones in which the central element refers to Christ and the flanking elements to his followers), the air of quiet transcendence created by figures that are well-defined and placed coolly against spacious, empty backgrounds, and of course the preference for non-human forms to communicate spiritual truths.

**II. Sarcophagus Imagery and Mosaic Imagery**

Next to the glittering mosaics that are Ravenna’s claim to fame, these monochromatic, repetitive monuments in some ways seem dull and tedious by comparison. Yet, in light of these observations about the nature of the sarcophagus imagery, another look

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82 While there have been no (published) records of any traces of paint discovered on the monuments, there is no reason to assume that the tombs were always as unpolychromed as they are today. It is likely that these tombs were originally painted, in whole or in part, as was the case with most ancient sculpture.
at the mosaic compositions in Ravenna may unveil more similarities than one might immediately suppose. The following section is a brief re-examination of the extant mosaic compositions in the surviving buildings of Ravenna constructed in the fifth and sixth centuries. Due to the lack of chronological specificity in the sarcophagus corpus, it is impossible to link the buildings and the tombs in relationships of direct influence. Nevertheless, the majority of the tombs, as discussed in the previous chapter, date from the early fifth to the early sixth century. This is also the period of time in which most of the surviving buildings in Ravenna were constructed and decorated. In general, the architecture and tombs were, therefore, contemporaries.

This section does not attempt to pinpoint exact visual correspondences between specific mosaic compositions and specific sarcophagus imagery. Rather, I intend to look broadly at the iconographic and stylistic trends in the mosaic imagery in order to demonstrate that while the media might be entirely different, and the imagery diverse and distinct, there are several ways in which the character of the imagery expressed in the sculpted sarcophagi is also reflected in the mosaics.

San Giovanni Evangelista, c. 425 CE.83 The basilica of San Giovanni Evangelista was founded by Galla Placidia, daughter of Emperor Theodosius I, mother of Emperor Valentinian III. It was probably built around 425. Although the mosaic decoration was removed in the sixteenth century, written descriptions84 relate that the wall above the

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84 Written descriptions are found in Agnellus, two sermons from the fourteenth century written on the occasion of the rededication of the church, and in Rossi’s Historiarum Ravennatum. Agnellus, c. 27, 42. Tractatus edificationis et constructionis ecclesie sancti Iohannis evangeliist de Rauenna and Item dedication ecclesie sancti Iohannis evangeliist, preserved in the fifteenth-century Codex Estensis, fol. 44v – 47r, published in Rerum Italicarum Scriptores I.2, 567 – 572. Girolamo Rossi, Historiarum Ravennatum Libri X (Venice, 1572 and 2nd ed., Venice, 1589), 101ff.
triumphal arch leading into the apse featured Christ giving a book to John the Evangelist (to whom the church was dedicated), surrounded by the glassy sea and the seven candlesticks mentioned in the book of the Revelation, all flanked by palm trees. The use of palms as bookends for a symbolic composition is also a common feature of many of the sarcophagus compositions, including those that also date to the early fifth century such as on the front box of the *Rinaldo* sarcophagus (Fig. 19) or on the back box of the *Onesti* sarcophagus (Fig. 20). The apse half-dome was decorated with a large depiction of Christ seated on a throne, holding an open book in his hand that contained a quote from Matthew 5:7: “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” It has been proposed that the main apse image was a figure of Christ surrounded by twelve books representing the apostles. Deborah Deliyannis says that, if such an image was in the apse, this extraordinary substitution of books for figures of the apostles is not known from any other apse image.85 One of the earliest Christian mosaic compositions from Ravenna thus substitutes non-figural symbols for the followers of Christ.

On the wall above the clergy’s bench were shown the eastern rulers Theodosius II and his wife Eudocia, and on the left Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia, thus underscoring the western court’s relationship with the east. In the center of the wall, in the middle of these couples, was an image of Bishop Peter I (Chrysologus) depicted celebrating mass in the presence of an angel.

*Santa Croce*, c. 425 CE.86 Another foundation of Galla Placidia, whose mosaics also no longer survive, is the church of Santa Croce. There is a reference in Agnellus87 to the

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85 Deliyannis, 2010, 68.
mosaic imagery of Santa Croce that describes an apocalyptic image of Christ either seated or standing, treading on a lion and serpent and surrounded by the four symbolic beasts and / or the twenty-four elders with the rivers of paradise at its base. This kind of apocalyptic vision is not uncommon, but sounds similar to the sort of image on the front of the Pignatta Sarcophagus that many scholars consider to be a Constantinopolitan importation. The composition thus features a central figure representing Christ flanked symmetrically by even numbers of adoring elements (beasts, elders, waters of paradise).

“Mausoleum” of Galla Placidia, c. 425 – 426 CE. This tiny chapel has been associated in local tradition since the ninth century with Galla Placidia, though it probably originated as an oratory dedicated to St. Lawrence and attached to the larger, adjacent church of Santa Croce. The building is a small cruciform shape with a central section that rises over the height of the four projecting arms. The exterior of the building is now totally unadorned save for a series of blind arcades that run along the entire lower section of the building. The interior, on the other hand, is covered in marvelous sheets of richly veined marble panels on the lower level, and extraordinary mosaics in the upper level (Fig. 33). Each of the four arms of the building is covered with a shallow barrel vault, and into three of these deep niches sarcophagi have been inserted. The central section of the building is covered with a domical vault carried on four pendentives. In the east and west arms, the barrel vault is covered in a dark blue mosaic background with golden vines that spring out of acanthus

87 Agnellus, c. 41, 148 - 149.


89 Deliyannis, 2010, 74 - 84.

90 The marble panels are modern era replacement based on what was originally thought to have been there.
plants to fill the space. At the center of each side of these barrel vaults stand small gold male
dresses (dalmaticae) and mantles (pallia) and holding scrolls. At the apex of
each barrel vault is a monogram of Christ with the alpha and omega letters surrounded by red
and blue wreaths (Fig. 71). The wreathed monogram is such a common symbol in early
Christian art that it almost seems glib to mention the connection between its use here and its
ubiquity on the sculpted sarcophagi. Nevertheless, it bears mentioning simply because this
Christological symbol is also depicted on many of the Constantinopolitan sculpted objects
that have survived (for example the famous “Prince’s” sarcophagus from the Istanbul
Museum, Fig. 58). When scholars mention the preference for nonfigural, Christological
symbols as a feature of the eastern sculptural tradition, this is probably one of the most
salient such symbols that comes to mind. It is noteworthy, therefore, that this particular
symbol was evidently in use at Ravenna in the era during which the western emperors were
using the city as a base of operations, before direct Byzantine control of Italy was centered in
Ravenna. It may be that the Christological monogram was an important symbol in Ravenna
even before its artistic culture was heavily influenced by the east.

The lunettes in the east and west arms of the “Mausoleum” are filled with acanthus
scrolls in green and gold set against a blue background. In the middle of each lunette is a
small rectangular window, and underneath each window is a pool of water. Two deer, set
amongst the acanthus, flank the pools (Fig. 72). The scene is essentially the same as the
composition on the back of the Pignatta sarcophagus which depicts two deer flanking a
cantharus filled with water (Fig. 38). The imagery is taken from Psalm 41 (42). Again, the
pool is a reference to God (more specifically, Christ), and these compositions are
articulations of the heraldic adoration arrangement that I have argued is the most important iconographic composition of the sarcophagi.

The central tower of the building has four lunettes below the vault, each set with a window. Flanking the windows are male figures wearing white striped tunics and pallia with their right arms held up in gestures of acclamation. The figures on the eastern side are identifiable as Peter and Paul. Beneath each window is a basin of water on which two birds perch (Fig. 73). One of the birds drinks from the basin, another meditation on the theme of the water of life, and Christ as the fountain of living water. The central space of the building, the cupola, is covered with a hypnotic design of concentric rings of golden stars, set against a deep blue background, that converge in the center on golden cross (Fig. 74). At the four corners of the cupola the four apocalyptic beasts float in wisps of golden cloud. The stars pulse against the dark background, drawing the eye up to the pinnacle of the vault and the central symbol of Christian belief. The cross is obviously the most fundamental, most basic, and yet most powerful, symbolic form in all of Christian iconography. And, of course, it is the symbol that is found on almost all of the sarcophagi, in one form or another.

Perhaps the most famous image in the space is found in the lunette of the south arm, directly opposite the entryway into the chapel and, therefore, the first image to be seen by a person entering the building (Fig. 75). This panel represents St. Lawrence (presumably, though there has been debate over his identity91) on the right side of the semicircular space, striding towards the center. In the lower center of the lunette, underneath a small window, is

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a metal grill engulfed in flames, an instrument of martyrdom. And on the far left side is an open cabinet displaying the four Gospel manuscripts.

On the opposite (north) wall, the lunette over the entryway of the chapel depicts Christ as the Good Shepherd seated on a rocky outcrop in a pastoral setting (Fig. 76). Christ is dressed in a golden tunic and draped with a purple mantle. It is one of the first (and few\(^{92}\)) instances in early Christian art in which Christ as the Good Shepherd is not actually dressed as a shepherd, but rather as an imperial figure. Six sheep are clustered around Christ. The arrangement of the composition, in fact, is familiar from the sarcophagi. Christ is in the center of the composition. The six sheep are divided evenly on either side of him, and within each group of three there are two standing sheep and one lying down. Two mounds of rock rise up on either side of Christ, so that his person is situated within a “V” shape in the center of the lunette. This arrangement draws the viewer’s eye to Christ, and provides a symmetrical background so that he is the undisputed focal point of the composition. With his right arm Christ reaches across his body to touch the nose of the sheep standing closest to his left side. With his left arm he grasps a tall staff with short horizontal crossbars on both ends, making it a double-ended cross. Christ is beardless, with long curly hair and he wears a golden halo. He is dressed as an emperor, and therefore the scene is more transcendent than traditional bucolic shepherd scenes, such as the fresco images in the Roman catacombs. Yet the background atmosphere is not the flat gold that characterizes so many Byzantine mosaic compositions. Rather, the location is suggested by strips of brown ground at the lower half of the lunette along with sprinkled green plants, and, in the upper portion, blue sky. The basic iconography and general arrangement of the composition with Christ in the guise of the King of Heaven, seated in the center flanked by symmetrical follower-figures clearly relates this

\(^{92}\) See Verkerk, forthcoming
scene to the most popular imagery on the sarcophagi. Furthermore, the use of lambs again connects the imagery here to that on so many of the carved tombs.

In fact, two of the three tombs that are currently conserved in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia feature lambs as their most prominent element. The so-called Constantius sarcophagus (Fig. 16), set in the east arm of the chapel, is carved on the front of the box with a simple scene depicting a lamb standing in the center of the composition on a raised hillock from which four rivers of paradise flow. The lamb’s monogrammed halo indicates that he is a symbol for Christ. Two lambs stand on either side of the hillock with their bodies turned towards the Christ lamb, and their heads raised to gaze at him. At the far ends of the composition are single palm trees that act as bookends. On the left end of the sarcophagus a single cantharus is set between palm trees. A fountain of water bubbles up from the cantharus, and one of the two birds perched on its raised handles dips its beak into the water. On the lid above this scene is a similar cantharus with a fountain of water, this time without any animals or plants.

This imagery mimics, in non-figural form, the mosaic image of Christ seated in the paradisical, bucolic setting surrounded by sheep on the lunette of the north wall. Though the specific artistic language, including the mediums, the specific images, and even the styles (there is a marked difference between the mosaic sheep, who have slender heads and tapering noses, and the block-like heads of the sculpted sheep), is quite different, the basic iconography and the symbolic meaning are the same. The sarcophagus, thus, reiterates the themes found in the mosaic in non-figural form, not dissimilar from the way in which certain sarcophagi, such as the Rinaldo tomb, repeat the same iconographic theme on the front and back of the box alternately in figural and non-figural languages. Also, the filled cantharoi
and the birds drinking from the vessel on the sides of the sarcophagus echo the harts drinking from the pool in the mosaic lunettes of the east and west arms of the building, and the birds drinking from basins of water in the upper lunettes of the central tower.

The *Honorius* Sarcophagus (Fig. 17), set in the west arm of the chapel, is also ornamented with imagery that is in tune with the mosaic compositions and with the *Constantius* tomb. The compositional space of the front box is articulated with pilasters on either end and divided by a series of three gables. The two outer gables have arches with shell-like niches while the central gable is pointed. Under each of the three gables there is a large Latin cross. Beneath the central gable, standing on a hillock with four rivers in front of the cross, is a lamb. While this lamb is not haloed like its counterpart on the *Constantius* sarcophagus, the fact that it is standing on the paradisical hill directly in front of a large cross strongly suggests that this creature is also a symbol for Christ. Two birds perch on the horizontal cross-beam. Again, in a slightly different format, there is a reiteration of the familiar iconography of Christ in the center of the composition flanked by symmetrically arranged elements. The theme is so basic, so simple that its constant repetition and reiteration, articulated over and over in similar but not exact ways, might easily be overlooked as meaningless. But the persistence of this imagery, its emergence in so many subtly different, yet fundamentally similar ways, indicates that there is meaning in these iconographic reverberations. The back of the sarcophagus is unfinished, but the roughed out design appears almost identical to the imagery on the front of the tomb. On the left side of the box birds drink from a *cantharus*, similar to the decoration on the side of the *Constantius* monument.
The third sarcophagus in the building is rough-hewn with no refined decoration. This sarcophagus was probably originally a pagan monument. Its lid type (gabled with corner acroteria), and the rough-cut design on its box (a tabula ansate for an inscription) are both common to pre-Christian tombs from northern Italy. Although the Constantius and Honorius tombs in the “mausoleum” have imagery that is well-modeled, and details that are refined and elegant, their dates are not certain. I have placed these tombs in the mid-late fifth century because I find the style of their imagery, if not their iconography, closer to elegant examples such as the Rinaldo tomb rather than to the stiff and flat imagery of the sixth century fragments of Ecclesius and Ursicinus. Other scholars, such as Kollwitz for instance, place these sarcophagi in the sixth century. In either case, it seems likely that these tombs were carved at a later date than the mosaic imagery – by as little as a few decades or as much as by a century. It may be a possibility, therefore, that the sarcophagi were specifically chosen for this location based on the pre-existent imagery, or that they were specifically carved to fit the location. Unfortunately, aside from the striking visual correspondences in their imagery, it seems an unanswerable question. Nevertheless, what does seem apparent is that, for the late antique and / or medieval audience(s), the two art forms (mosaic and tomb sculpture) were approached as parts of the same whole.

Orthodox Baptistery, c. 420 – 450 CE.93 The cathedral of Ravenna was likely built in the early years of the fifth century under Bishop Ursus – and for this reason the church, while

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the Anatassios, was called the Ursiana throughout the Middle Ages. The cathedral was destroyed in the eighteenth century in order to make way for a new construction designed by Gian Francesco Buonamici. The fifth-century baptistery attached to the original cathedral, on the other hand, survived. This baptistery is often called the “Orthodox Baptistery” to differentiate it from the similar structure built by the Arian Ostrogoths. The interior of the baptistery is richly decorated in both mosaic, marble, paint and stucco imagery (Fig. 77). The lowest zone of the elevation consists of a series of arched absidioles and flat wall segments decorated with marble revetment. The arches are supported by spoliated columns and mismatched Corinthian capitals. The spandrels of the arcade are filled with mosaic imagery of prophets framed in ovoid shapes and surrounded by curling golden vinescroll, all set against a deep blue background.

A thick cornice separates this lowest zone from a second arcade above it. There are here, as below, eight arches articulating the eight sides of the octagonal baptistery. These arched, shallow niches each have three smaller arches beneath them, thus creating a secondary arcade of twenty-four arches supported on twenty-four spoliated colonnettes. The central of these smaller arches encloses a window, while the outer arches have faux architectural settings with stucco figures of tunic-and-
pallia-clad men holding books or scrolls, set beneath alternating round and pointed pediments (Fig. 15). There are stucco shells beneath each pediment. These men, like their colleagues below, probably represent prophets, and traces of paint indicate that they were originally polychrome. In the awkward spaces between the tops of the pediments and the shallow arcades, there are also stucco

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94 For a brief discussion of the controversy surrounding the dating of the Ursiana, see Deliyannis, 2010, 85 - 86.
compositions. In twelve (half) of these, the imagery is paired animals flanking a central vase or plant, i.e., the heraldic, tripartite arrangement found so frequently on the sarcophagi. The other twelve stucco compositions include Daniel in the Lions’ Den, Christ dressed as a philosopher giving the law to Peter in the presence of Paul, Christ dressed as a warrior trampling the lion and a serpent, and Jonah between two whales. As Deborah Deliyannis points out, these particular scenes had significance for the baptismal ceremonies, as they represent triumph over danger and evil: both Daniel and Jonah are Old Testament types of salvation and of Christ's resurrection, while the other two images present the triumph of Christ over the old law and over evil. According to Ambrose's liturgy for baptism, the catechumens would be facing the northwest wall and looking at these images precisely at the point in the ceremony in which they were renouncing the Devil. Of these narrative scenes, only Jonah does not appear on exant sarcophagus imagery from Ravenna. The parallels discovered between baptismal and funerary imagery should be in no way surprising, given the close association of these two ideas in early Christian thought. It is interesting to note, again, that not only is the heraldic arrangement of the imagery carried through in the “confronting animals” motif, but even in the figural scenes the elements are carefully ordered in the tripartite, symmetrical manner that is so ubiquitous on the sarcophagi.

In the space between the larger eight-part arcade and the inset twenty-four-part arcade, there is mosaic imagery that includes vegetal, vinescroll motifs, as well as peacocks

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96 Deliyannis, 2010, 96.

facing one another, standing on vines that spring from cantharoi with curling vinescrolls and crosses at the upper center of the compositions (Fig. 77).

The next zone of decoration (Fig. 78) consists of a wide ring of mosaic imagery that is set off by a mosaic border from the arcade, below, and the mosaic imagery of the summit of the dome, above. This mosaic imagery is a series of trompe-l’oeil architectural settings that consist of a central recessed niche flanked by square compartments with coffered ceilings and columns. This tripartite arrangement of the architectural setting is repeated eight times, once for every facet of the octagonal core of the building. In four of these arrangements the central niche contains an empty, jeweled throne with a purple and gold garment in the seat, surmounted by a cross in a medallion. The side compartments contain topiary and other garden imagery. In the other four, the central niche contains an altar with an open gospel book on it. The side compartments contain chairs beneath shell-shaped niches. In both of these arrangements, it seems likely that the central element is a symbolic meditation on the person of Christ. The jeweled throne (whether or not it represents the etimasia or “presentation throne” for Christ’s second coming, or some other aspect of his divine sovereignty98) is unequivocally a symbol of Christ’s nature and / or person by virtue of the presence of the cross hovering above it. The gospel books can also be interpreted as references to Christ as well, given the fact that Christ is referred to as the “Word made flesh.”99 The familiar symbolic arrangement of Christ in the center of a composition, adored or flanked by two or more elements, reverberates here. This penchant for symmetrical arrangements, often in tripartite form, with Christ (or a symbol for him or a facet of his

98 Scholars have debated the exact interpretation of this symbol. See: Kostof 1965, 79 – 82; Deichmann 1974, 41 – 43; Wharton 1987, 368 – 375; Annabel Wharton, Refiguring the Post Classical City: Dura Europas, Jerash, Jerusalem and Ravenna (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 126 – 127; Pasquini, 333.

99 John 1:14.
being) at the center flanked by adoration elements, is again carried through in a number of subtly different ways in the baptistery mosaic and stucco imagery.

A red and blue architectural border separates the architectural design from the next concentric circle of mosaic. This circle represents the twelve apostles, marching around the central space of the dome. Each carries a jeweled crown in mantle-covered hands and is named by an inscription. They are differentiated in their physical characteristics, hair color, beards, etc., and Paul and Peter are depicted with the physiognomic types that had come to characterize them in the fifth century. A decorative vegetal motif separates each man from the one next to him. Drapery swags hang above / behind the apostles’ heads, effectively giving each an implied halo. In their striding posture, carrying crowns, these apostles are similar to the apostles on sarcophagi such as the *Rinaldo* (Fig. 19) or *Twelve Apostles* (Fig. 37) sarcophagi.

The central summit of the dome has a medallion depicting the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist. The scene was heavily (and controversially) restored in the 1850's by Felice Kibel, although enough of the original survived to indicate that it did depict the baptism of Christ. A dove descends from the sky directly above Christ as John, leaning on a jeweled cross staff, pours water over the Savior’s head. Christ is bearded and nude; water from the river Jordan (who is personified to Christ’s left) covers him to the waist. The background of the scene is gold. This background, together with the circular cornice with egg-and-dart molding that separates the central medallion from the surrounding mosaic imagery, creates the effect of looking through the dome into a mystical sphere that transcends time and space.

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100 Deliyannis, 2010, 98.
Not only is much of the specific imagery, from birds flanking *cantharoi* to processing apostles bearing crowns, relatable to sarcophagi imagery, but the common tripartite arrangement of elements, suggestive of Christ adored or worshipped, is manifested in several ways in the mosaic and stucco imagery of the Orthodox Baptistery.

*Capella Arcivescovile, early 6th century CE.*\(^{101}\) The Episcopal residence, or *espiscopium*, of Ravenna was enlarged during the bishopric of Peter II (494 – 520). The Archbishop’s chapel was located in the heart of the *espiscopium*, the top floor of a three-story structure, and is therefore assumed to have served as a private chapel for the archbishops. The lower walls of the chapel were originally covered in marble revetment, since restored and / or replaced, but the upper wall level retains its mosaic decoration. The mosaics have been heavily restored, but the restoration was done carefully, and so it is probable that the original design has been faithfully preserved.\(^{102}\)

Over the northwest entryway into the chapel is an image of a beardless Christ dressed as a warrior (Fig. 79). He stands against a gold background on a rocky ground, and tramples a lion and a serpent. He holds a cross staff in his right hand across his shoulders, and his left hand grasps an open book with the inscription “Ego sum via veritas et vita.”\(^{103}\) His head is encircled by a cross nimbus. On the front of the *Pignatta* sarcophagus (Fig. 38) is an image of Christ seated on a throne, trampling the lion and the serpent. Here, once more, there is a simple, tripartite composition carefully balanced with Christ at the center.

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\(^{101}\) Deliyannis, 2010, 100 – 101, 188 - 196.


\(^{103}\) “Jesus saith to him: I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me.” John 14:6.
The shape of the chapel itself is cruciform with short arms covered by barrel vaults. Though the decoration in the lunettes of the arms does not survive, the vault mosaics do (Fig. 80). Each of these barrel vaults has a single row of medallions depicting the heads of various holy persons: apostles on the northeast and southwest arms, male martyrs on the southeast, and female martyrs on the northwest. All of the martyrs depicted were in one way or another famous in the sixth century, but the specific reason for each selection is obscure. Each head is unhaloed, and set in a round medallion with a blue background, circumscribed by three circular bands of mosaic frame. The entire medallion is set against a gold background, and an inscription names each apostle or martyr.

A groin vault covers the central space of the chapel. Slivers of lunettes above the barrel-vaulted arms contain decoration of rinceaux, lambs, and the monogram of Bishop Peter. At the apex of the vault is a golden monogram, or *chrismon*, in a medallion set against a golden background (Fig. 81). It is held by four full-figure angels who tiptoe on green strips of land from the four acute corners of the vault. In between the angels are the apocalyptic symbols of the gospel authors, each winged and floating in a wisp of cloud. They hold jeweled books. Neither figures of angels nor beasts of the apocalypse ever appear on the Ravennate sarcophagi. But the Christological monogram in a medallion is among the most common symbols found on the sarcophagi. Flying angels holding the monogram are also found, as described below, in San Vitale and also on the famous “Prince’s” sarcophagus, from Istanbul (Fig. 58), and, as discussed above, in the “mausoleum” of Galla Placidia.

Though the original apse mosaic did not survive, many gold and blue tesserae were discovered in the area of the apse and, thus, the restorers in the early part of the twentieth
century reconstructed the mosaic as a golden cross in a starry sky against a blue background based on the model from the vault of the mausoleum of Galla Placidia.

*Arian Baptistery*, late 5th – early 6th century CE. The Arian Baptistery is associated with the Arian Cathedral, now called Santo Spirito. The only surviving interior decoration is the dome mosaic (Fig. 82). The imagery of this mosaic is similar to the imagery in the dome of the Orthodox Baptistery, with some important distinctions. The central medallion of the dome depicts the baptism of Christ, as in the Orthodox Baptistery, and an outer band of mosaic imagery depicts the striding apostles dressed in white tunics with *clavi* and mantles. All except Peter and Paul carry crowns; these two carry keys and the scroll of the law, respectively. They are separated from one another by tall, stylized palm trees. While the apostles here are not named, as in the Orthodox composition, they do have haloes, which the Orthodox apostles do not. As in the Orthodox Baptistery there are two “lines” of apostles, one following Peter, and the other Paul. Instead of Peter and Paul facing one another across their decorative vegetal border, at the Arian Baptistery the two pillars of Christ’s church face one another across a large, jeweled throne with a jeweled cross on it. This chair, like those in the third register of imagery at the Orthodox Baptistery, is a symbol, obviously, for Christ. With the apostles lined up on either side of this throne, the composition brings to mind sarcophagus iconography such as that found on the *Ariosti* tomb (Fig. 29) A central image for Christ (or some aspect of his being) is flanked on either side by symmetrical elements, evenly spaced and set against an open background. Though perfectly straightforward, it is yet remarkable to note that the same basic iconographic and symbolic notions are presented repeatedly, over time, in slightly different, and yet fundamentally similar, ways.

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As in the Orthodox Baptistery dome, the center of the dome is separated from the apostles by a decorative mosaic cornice. Christ, again, stands in the center of the composition. He is nude, but the water of the Jordan rises to the level of his waist. The dove of the Holy Spirit again descends directly above Christ’s head. John the Baptist and a personification of the River Jordan flank Christ, as at the Orthodox Baptistery. In this representation, the symmetry is more marked due to the fact that the personification of the Jordan is full-length, is as large as John, and the two are positioned almost directly across from one another. Both bend their bodies inward following the curve of the medallion’s circumference and thus create convex bookends that emphasize the center of the composition, i.e. Christ. In the Arian composition, John the Baptist is on Christ’s left and the Jordan is on his right, opposite from the positioning in the Orthodox Baptistery. As in the Orthodox building, the background of the mosaic is gold, indicating that this scene takes place in a heavenly or transcendent sphere.

Many scholars in the past have combed the imagery of the Arian Baptistery in order to discover allusions to Arian theology or practice. Deborah Deliyannis presents a different interpretation of the imagery, one that is based on the ethnic identification of the designers of the mosaic rather than on their religion. One of the key differences between the imagery here and the imagery at the Orthodox Baptistery is that the apostles are not named by inscriptions. Deliyannis asserts that it is unusual in such a context that the apostles are not provided with their names. Instead, she contends that they are meant to be seen not entirely as apostles, but as generic followers of Christ. Deliyannis goes on to develop her argument that these generic Christ-followers might include Goths based on the “mutton-chop” hairstyle of the apostle

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105 For a brief discussion of some of the arguments, see Deliyannis, 2010, 184 - 187.
directly behind Peter. This strange hairstyle, she contends, might be included to make the man look distinctly Gothic and, thereby, to assert that the Goths were part of the Christian community. Whether or not Deliyannis is correct in her argument about the mutton-chop, I find it fascinating to consider that the intent of the designers may have been to purposefully build ambiguity into the representation in order that the figures might be read multivalently, both as apostles and as Christians of other ages and backgrounds. The ambiguity, and the generally generic, repetitive nature of Ravennate imagery, both in mosaics and sculpture, but particularly in sarcophagus carving, is perhaps designed with the same intent – namely, to suggest a universal or transcendent Christian community, including the living and the dead. This idea will be further developed below and in subsequent chapters.

_Basilica of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo_, early 6th century. The Basilica of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo was originally built by the Ostrogothic ruler of Ravenna, Theodoric, and was dedicated to Christ. The church was situated next to Theodoric’s residence, and can, therefore, be considered the palace church, and an important worship center for the Arian cult. The original mosaic decoration of the apse does not survive, but the nave walls have gorgeous mosaic imagery in three horizontal registers. The lowest of these registers contains, at the east end on the north side, a frontal representation of the Virgin

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seated on a throne holding the Christ child in her lap and flanked by two pairs of angels (Fig. 83). On the opposite, south, side of the nave, on the east end, is a depiction of Christ flanked by pairs of angels (Fig. 84). At the west end of the nave there is a depiction of the city of Classe, on the north side (Fig. 85), and a depiction of Ravenna with its palace (palatium) on the south (Fig. 86). A procession of twenty-six male martyrs leaves the city of Ravenna on the southwestern end of the nave and moves towards Christ. A procession of twenty-three female martyrs leaves the city of Classe on the northwestern end of the nave and moves towards the Virgin.\textsuperscript{109} Between the last of these female martyrs and Mary the Three Magi are also inserted, hurrying towards the Queen of Heaven with their gifts in hand (Fig. 87). There is a slender, stylized palm inserted between each of the male and female martyrs, similar to the processional of apostles in the Orthodox and Arian Baptistery domes.

The second zone of decoration is on the level with the windows of the nave. Between each of the windows is a rectangular framed space with a representation of a male figure (Fig. 88). Each is garbed in a white tunic with clavi, and a white mantle with gammadia. The figures are haloed in silver, against the gold background, and each holds either a scroll or a book. These men represent prophets, evangelists, or patriarchs. In the spandrels above each window are representations of two birds flanking a central cantharus. The third and final zone of decoration is one-third the height of the other two, and contains a series of rectangular frames. The rectangles above the male figures from the second zone have shell-shaped cupolas set against dark blue backgrounds. Each of these faux cupolas has a hanging crown in its center, and a small golden cross above it. The cross is flanked by white birds, which stand on top of each cupola. The other rectangles have scenes from the life and

\textsuperscript{109} The martyrs and virgins in these processions, as well as the Magi at the northeastern end of the nave wall next to the Virgin, are later insertions. They replace unknown original decoration, and probably were substituted during renovations after the re-consecration of the church to orthodoxy in the late sixth century.
ministry of Christ – thirteen scenes of miracles and parables on the north wall (Fig. 89), and thirteen scenes from the Passion and Resurrection on the south (Fig. 90).

The extraordinary richness of the mosaic decoration in the nave at Sant’Apollinare in Classe has provided a surfeit of material for scholars. Most of the imagery was originally installed by the Arian Ostrogoths, but was revised by the Orthodox when the church was rededicated to Orthodoxy after the Byzantine reconquest of 540. Scholars have combed the iconography, including the identity of the male and female martyrs, the obvious deletions of individuals from the palatium at Ravenna, the particular scenes chosen from the ministry of Christ, and the divergent style in the miracle / parable scenes and in the passion / resurrection scenes, in order to discern allusions to Arian and / or Orthodox theology, political structure, courtly ceremony, and liturgy.

There are few direct iconographic connections between the mosaic imagery at Sant’Apollinare and the carved sarcophagi. The seated Christ between angels on the southeast end of the nave wall could, perhaps, be compared to the popular sarcophagi image of Christ seated between apostles as on the Rinaldo (Fig. 19), Twelve Apostles (Fig. 37), or Certosa sarcophagus (Fig. 50), but these tombs likely date earlier than the original mosaics by more than a century. The depiction of Christ seated on a throne is common in early Christian imagery; hence, this is hardly a definitive connection. The mosaic image of the Virgin and Child, receiving the adoration of the Magi, might find a more concrete correspondence with at least one of the Ravennate sarcophagi. One of the few narrative scenes illustrated on a sarcophagus is the unexpected scene of the Adoration of the Magi depicted on the front of the Isaac sarcophagus (Fig. 30). The two representations, one in the Sant’Apollinare mosaic and one on the carved sarcophagus, are similar. Mary is seated on
the *Isaac* sarcophagus, holding the Christ child on her lap as in the mosaic. The main difference in the images is that on the sarcophagus she turns her body towards the approaching Magi, not out towards the viewer in a frontal position. In the mosaic, the image is two-fold. It is an Adoration of the Magi but it is also a separate image of the Virgin Enthroned with Christ, primarily because the Magi were not original to the composition, so they are inserted alongside the Virgin somewhat awkwardly.

The Magi on the tomb, as in the mosaic, are dressed in “Phyrgian costume” with floppy caps and long pants under their short kilts. Both sets of Magi hold bowl-like gifts, although on the sarcophagus the carving is damaged and it is impossible to tell if the gifts were differentiated from one another as they are in the mosaic. There are stars of Bethlehem in both representations. On the sarcophagus the angels are omitted. The *Isaac* sarcophagus has a much earlier date than the mosaic from Sant’Apollinare Nuovo. But it is interesting that this similar representation of the Adoration of the Magi should be found in both of these Ravennate depictions, given the rarity of narrative subjects on the sarcophagi.

While there are no direct correspondences for the processions of martyrs that are found in the Sant’Apollinare mosaic, the theme of procession is carried out in the iconography of the sarcophagi. There are several sarcophagus carvings in which Christ is at the center of the composition, and his followers hasten towards him. Such representations can be found on the *Traditio Legis* sarcophagus at the Museo Nazionale (Fig. 48), the *Onesti* sarcophagus – front and sides (Fig. 20), and the *Ariosti* sarcophagus (Fig. 29), to mention a few. And, of course, the processional of the Magi on the *Isaac* sarcophagus discussed above can also be included in this list. Processional series, in fact, seem to be another dominant iconographic theme in Ravennate art. There are processionals of apostles in the Arian and
Orthodox Baptistery domes, martyrs in Sant’Apollinare Nouvo, Imperial figures in San Vitale, and lambs in Sant’Apollinare in Classe, as well as those on sarcophagi. There may have been imperial processions in the apse of San Giovanni Evangelista as well.

As for the male figures in the second zone of nave wall decoration, the idea of separating figures from one another into neat compartments against a blank background is not unfamiliar in the sarcophagi imagery when one considers monuments like the Liberius (Fig. 6), Bensai-dal Corno (Fig. 7), or Ariosti monuments (Fig. 29). In such sarcophagi, a decorative architectural framework serves to create a separate space for each figure to inhabit, much as the windows and mosaic frames create compartments for the figures in the Sant’Apollinare mosaic. The figures represented on the sarcophagi almost invariably represent apostles in as much as they are arranged around the central figure of Christ, and often number twelve. Also, the familiar visages and coifs of Peter and Paul are almost always discernable in two of the figures (the two closest to Christ on either side), and so their presence clarifies the identities of their colleagues. The mosaic figures’ identities are more obscure. They are not named by inscription, and their facial features do not correspond to known types. Since they hold scrolls they seem to be either prophets, evangelists, and / or apostles. The birds over the windows, flanking cantharoi with water, it goes without saying, echo the heraldically paired animals and birds found so often on the Ravennate sarcophagi.

In the third and uppermost zone of mosaic decoration in the basilica, the confronting birds facing a central cross atop the cupolas can be placed in the same category of imagery as the birds in the spandrels above the windows. In both the mosaic and in the sarcophagi imagery this iconography (heraldically arranged, “confronting” beasts or birds) is often used

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in the marginal spaces of the composition or object. As such, especially in the mosaic, this format becomes a rhythmic pattern of symbol. In the second and third zones of mosaic decoration there is a zig-zag rhythm created by the alteration between the darker colored birds against the gold background above the windows, and the white birds against a blue background on top of the cupolas.

The sarcophagi, also, tend to tuck these conveniently symmetrical compositions into small spaces, such as the ends of the lids. But the sarcophagi also take this type of “marginal” symbolic imagery and use it to decorate the largest compositional spaces on the monuments – the front and back of the boxes as on the Pignatta (Fig. 38) or Isaac (Fig. 30) tombs. In such instances, this rote, “marginalia” imagery thus takes on deeper significance as it is visually and conceptually connected to the iconography of Christ adored or flanked by followers. The heraldic, tripartite imagery type, then, slides between decoration and theological statement. Interestingly, such decorative flourishes in the mosaic imagery are often, likewise, expounded in the most prominent compositional spaces of the buildings. Apse half-domes, or cupola vaults, frequently carry representations of Christ adored or flanked symmetrically. These powerful depictions are in one sense simply massive versions of the symbolic vocabulary echoed throughout the building.

To return to Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, in the rectangular compositions narrating the life and ministry of Christ there is really only one scene, the Raising of Lazarus (Fig. 91) in the center of the north wall series, that has direct connection to any narrative scene on a sarcophagus. This scene is, again, carved on the ends of the Isaac (Fig. 30) and Traditio Legis (Fig. 48) sarcophagi. The basic format of the scene depicts Christ approaching a stepped wall, atop which is an arch representing the tomb. Under the arch stands mummy-
like Lazarus. The composition is the same in the mosaic as on the two sarcophagi boxes. There are a few key differences in the representations. In the mosaic, Christ is accompanied by a companion, perhaps one of his apostles, who stands behind him as he calls Lazarus forth. In the mosaic, Christ stretches out his right arm to Lazarus, but his body is facing frontally. In the sarcophagus scenes, Christ does not turn toward the viewer, but rather his body is shown in three-quarters view, turned towards Lazarus. Also, in the mosaic, Lazarus’s tomb actually looks like a small building with a triangular pediment, instead of a prop-like arch set in empty space. And, in the mosaic, Lazarus actually stands in an open stone sarcophagus, which further gives a sense of narrative setting that is only summarily provided in the sarcophagus scenes. Again, it is difficult to read too much into this iconographic connection, given the broad chronological range between the sarcophagi with Lazarus compositions (early 5th century), and the mosaics (early 6th century), and the widespread popularity of this iconography in Christian art.

While the Raising of Lazarus may be the only direct connection between a sarcophagus image and the scenes in Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, it is interesting to note that several of the scenes on the nave wall do utilize the heraldic, symmetrical, Christ-centered format that almost seems a household formula at Ravenna. Scenes that use the compositional format include the Multiplication of the Bread and Fishes (Fig. 92), the Road to Emmaus (Fig. 93), the Doubting of Thomas (Fig. 94), and Jesus Teaching on the Mount of Olives (Fig. 95).\textsuperscript{111} Christ and the Virgin at the east end of the lowest zone of nave decoration, seated on jeweled thrones and flanked by two sets of angels, also reflect this tripartite,

\textsuperscript{111} The narrative cycle at Sant’Apollinare Nuovo is comparable to other such narrative images from the early Christian world such as the scenes on the wooden doors of Santa Sabina, those of the Brescia Casket, and those illustrated in manuscripts like the Rabbua Gospels. While many scholars have also read Arian theological interpretation in the selection and presentation of these scenes, on a basic level they can be connected to a “Mediterranean-wide visual tradition,” in the terms of Deborah Deliyannis. Deliyannis, 2010, 156.
symmetrical arrangement, as do the birds flanking vases and crosses in the second and third zones of imagery. Another stylistic quality shared between the sarcophagi and the mosaics is the predilection for separating figures from one another, and placing them against blank backgrounds. The male figures in the second zone and the martyrs in the processional of the first zone of the mosaic are treated thusly. In general, the use of gold, flat backgrounds to remove the narrative specificity from the imagery, especially in the first and second zones of mosaic decoration, similarly creates the sense of transcendent timelessness that much of the clean, cool sarcophagi imagery achieves.

San Apollinare in Classe, 532 – 549 CE. The basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe became a burial church for the bishops of Ravenna, and today conserves several marble sarcophagi. As such, the church and its decoration in relation to the sarcophagi will be considered more extensively in the next chapter.

San Michele in Africisco, c. 543 CE. San Michele in Africisco was a small basilica dedicated to the archangel Michael. It was financed by the same man who sponsored the church of San Vitale, Julian the Banker. The building had a nave and single aisles which were separated from the nave by piers instead of columns. The mosaics from this church were removed during the nineteenth century, and taken to Venice. There the mosaic restorer John Moro made a reproduction based on drawings and some original fragments, and in 1904 this restoration was installed in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin, now known as the Bode Museum. Some general comments about the iconography can be made based on this twentieth-century reproduction (Fig. 96). The apse had a central image of a beardless Christ

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with a cross-inscribed halo, dressed in purple, and holding an open book which proclaimed
“He that seeth me seeth the Father also; I and the Father are One” (John 14:9 and 10:30).
Christ was flanked by the archangels Michael and Gabriel (named by inscription), each
holding a staff in the left hand and making a gesture of blessing or acclamation with the right.
The figures stood on a narrow grassy landscape with flowers. The background was flat, solid
gold. A mosaic border of acanthus leaves and doves rimmed the apse. At the center of this
band of decoration was the Lamb of God in a medallion. On the triumphal arch that framed
the apse the Saints Cosmas and Damian were depicted to the left and right, respectively.
Above, there was a central image of Christ seated on a throne holding a book and once more
flanked by two archangels and also three and four angels blowing long trumpets. It appears
that at San Michele the tripartite, heraldic arrangement with Christ at the center was
articulated in at least two separate, yet related ways. Also, some of the symbols that have
become familiar from Ravennate mosaics and sarcophagi (lambs, birds, vinescroll) were
present as well.

San Vitale, c. 532 – 547 CE.114 Perhaps the most famous mosaic imagery in the city
of Ravenna is found at the church of San Vitale. The design of San Vitale is a double-shelled
octagon. Its domed core is surrounded by an ambulatory on the lower level and gallery on the
upper. The eighth, east, side of the octagon opens into a presbytery and vault. Though,
regrettably, all mosaics from the nave ambulatory, gallery, and dome are lost, the surviving
mosaics of the presbytery and apse survive in glorious splendor. This mosaic collection
epitomizes some of the highest achievements of Ravenna’s artistic culture.

114 Deichmann, 1976, 34 – 205; Patrizia Angiolini Martinelli, ed. La basilica di San Vitale a Ravenna, 2 Vol.
The central image of the mosaic program in the presbytery of San Vitale is in the half-dome of the apse (Fig. 34). Christ is seated on a blue orb of the world, dressed in purple with a cross-inscribed nimbus. He is youthful and beardless. In his right hand he holds out a crown to the titular Saint Vitalis, and in his left he grasps a scroll of the law. Two angels flank him. On the outer edges of the composition are depictions of St. Vitalis and Bishop Ecclesius. Vitalis holds out mantle-draped hands to receive the crown from Christ, and Ecclesius proffers a small model of the church of San Vitale. The upper background of the scene is gold, with red and blue wisps of cloud floating over Christ’s head, but the ground below is depicted as a swath of green set with flowering plants. Four rivers of paradise flow from the ground beneath Christ’s orb. Essentially, this is the penultimate heraldic arrangement. A monumental Christ figure, seated as the definitive Sovereign of the universe, distributes gifts to his followers and hosts who are gathered in neat, symmetrical arrangement on either side of him. It is the basic iconography of the Rinaldo sarcophagus (Fig. 19) (or any number of others) writ large. Of course, there are clear dissimilarities. Angels, as mentioned several times above, appear rarely on the extant Christian sarcophagi from Ravenna. And the inclusion of specific individuals such as Vitalis and Ecclesius is not a feature of the sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{115} On the tombs, figures tend to be more generic, save for the popular presence of Peter and Paul. But in spite of the salient differences, I do think it is significant that this basic iconography of Christ enthroned between followers that is clearly the most common figural imagery and, as I have argued, symbolic non-figural imagery, on the Ravennate sarcophagus from the Museo Nazionale, (Fig. 48).

\textsuperscript{115} The one major exception being the deceased individuals present in the composition of the Traditio Legis sarcophagus from the Museo Nazionale, (Fig. 48).
sarcophagi, is also the most important piece of the sumptuous mosaic program at San Vitale.  

The half-dome is bordered by a broad arch, decorated with a pattern of intersecting cornucopia, with a gemmed Chi-Rho monogram in a medallion upheld by eagles at the apex. The monogram is one of the most fundamental symbols for Christ that is articulated repeatedly on the sarcophagi. Often, it serves as the central, Christological symbol in the heraldic, non-figural “adoration” compositions like the one on the back box of the Rinaldo sarcophagus. The monogram is also a popular symbol at San Vitale.

On the apse wall below the dome are two panels of mosaic imagery that have been widely explored. These panels depict processions of imperial figures: Emperor Justinian

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116 This monumental iconography in the apse at San Vitale was, of course, also employed in many other churches both in Rome and in Constantinople (example: Sta. Pudenziana). What is striking is that the tombs seem to stretch to achieve the same monumentality in their imagery as the greatest apse programs in Ravenna (or elsewhere, for that matter).

117 The bibliography on the imperial panels at San Vitale is extensive. Among the questions that have been raised: Why do they depict an emperor and empress who never came to Ravenna, or set foot in San Vitale? What ritual ceremony could bring the Emperor and Empress into this sacred part of the building? Who are all the people with them? Why is Theodora set against a different background than Justinian? What is the meaning of these panels in the overall mosaic program of the church? A range of arguments and approaches have attended each of these questions, as well as others. A small sampling of the bibliography includes Otto Von Simson, *Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna* (reprint, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) in which he argued that the inclusion of the panels, and Maximian alongside Justinian, was motivated by the urge to assert the authority of Byzantine orthodoxy in a city on the border between “Orient and Occident.” Djordje Strišević (“Sur le problème de l’iconographie des mosaïques impériales de Saint-Vital,” *Felix Ravenna* 85 (1962): 80 – 100) argued that the panels represented a specific liturgical moment, being representations of the “Grand Entrance” of the Byzantine liturgy, but that the imperial couple were meant to be not actually in the sanctuary, but rather just arrived at the sanctuary. André Grabar took the position (“Quel est le sens de l’offrande de Justinien et de Théodora sur les mosaïques de Saint-Vital,” *Felix Ravenna* 81 (1960): 63 – 77) that the panels depict the Emperor and Empress offering gifts to the church in the form of liturgical objects (paten and chalice). In Sabine MacCormack’s publication *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) the author interpreted the company and environment surrounding the royal pair as highlighting the complex network of concepts which made the status of the emperor elected and crowned by God, yet also chosen by the people. MacCormack also suggested that the difference of the backgrounds between Justinian and Theodora was indicative of the fact that, when these panels were executed, Theodora had died. Charles Barber (“The Imperial Panels at San Vitale: A Reconsideration,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 14 (1990): 19 – 42) suggested that the representation of Theodora presented the Empress in the ambivalent and transgressive role performed by empresses in Byzantine society. Henry Maguire (*Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987)) counted twelve people in Justinian’s panel and therefore suggested that the emperor was positioning himself as Christ among the apostles. Ernst Kitzinger (*Byzantine Art in the*
and his retinue on the north (left) side (Fig. 97), and Empress Theodora and her retinue on
the south (right) side (Fig. 98). Positioned, as they are, lower down and on either side of the
main apse, the processional lines of Theodora and Justinian become part of the group of
followers, including the angles, martyr, and bishop, surrounding the seated Christ in the
dome above. In addition, each of the royal figures becomes the center of the world in his / her
own composition. Justinian is the true center of his panel. He is flanked on the left and right
by groups of adherents, both ecclesiastical and military.\footnote{Depending on whether or not
the viewer counts the heads or the pairs of feet in this panel, there are either
eleven or twelve men accompanying Justinian – thus either makingJustinian the central (Christlike)
figure with
dOLLOWERS, OR INCLUDING JUSTINIAN IN THE NUMBER TWELVE AS IF PART OF THE GROUP OF FOLLOWERS. THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF HEADS AND FEET IN THIS MOSAIC IS DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE HEADS OF MAXIMIAN AND THE MAN BETWEEN HIM AND JUSTINIAN WERE INSERTED INTO THE MOSAIC AFTER THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION. DIELYANNIS, 239.} He holds a large golden paten,
which ostensibly places him in the role of supplicant or dedicator (like the figures in the apse
above making offerings to Christ), but his upright stance (he does not bend forward
deferentially), jeweled crown, and frontal position in relation to the viewer, suggest
otherwise. He may be carrying the paten in a superficial reference to humility, but in his own
little world he himself is the Christ-like symbol of ultimate power. This empero-centric
vision is completed by the flat gold background and lack of setting-specific detail that gives
the composition a transcendent quality typical of religious or mystical scenes.

University Press, 1977)) noticed that Maximian was the only person titled with an inscription, and therefore
read the panel as propaganda for the authority of the archbishop and, by extension, the Church hierarchy. Irina
and Warren Treadgold published an article in 1997 (“Procopius and the Imperial Panels of S. Vitale,” \textit{The Art
Bulletin} 79 (1997): 708 – 723) in which new archaeological evidence was presented. This data demonstrated
that the panels were modified during Maximian’s era, and therefore were completed in two distinct moments of
construction. Based on the new timelines for the date of the panels (by which some theories, such as
MacCormack’s contention that Theodora was deceased at the time of the mosaic execution, were discarded by
the Treadgolds), the authors proposed a number of identifications for specific figures represented in the panels
alongside Justinian and Theodora. The Treadgolds generally interpreted the panels as having a more immediate,
practical, and political purpose rather than a mystical one. In Anne McClanan’s 2002 chapter on the “The
Visual Representation of Empress Theodora” (in \textit{Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and
Empire} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)), the author reflected that the mystical, or incorporeal treatment
of the bodies in the panel signified an ideal of kingship descending from God that lent a sense of fundamental
order to the world.

\footnote{Depending on whether or not the viewer counts the heads or the pairs of feet in this panel, there are either
eleven or twelve men accompanying Justinian – thus either making Justinian the central (Christlike) figure with
twelve followers, or including Justinian in the number twelve as if part of the group of followers. The
discrepancy between the number of heads and feet in this mosaic is due to the fact that the heads of Maximian
and the man between him and Justinian were inserted into the mosaic after the original production. DIELYANNIS,
239.}
Empress Theodora is not as clearly the center of her universe in the opposite panel; she is set just to the right-of-center in the composition. Nevertheless, other factors in the illustration correct for this. For instance, she is situated under a shell-shaped cupola that accentuates her large round halo and emphasizes her person, and she is flanked on either side by two pairs of attendants. On the right side of the composition a group of five other attendants line up, and on the left side a large open doorway and fountain provide balance to the scene. Therefore, while Theodora is not precisely the center of the composition, the surrounding figures and elements in the scene conspire to give her person a centripetal quality that suggests her supreme importance, like that of her husband across the way. Her frontal stance and stare also belie the humble gesture of carrying the chalice in uncovered hands. The purple chlamys Theodora wears is embroidered on its hem with an image of the Three Magi similar to those found in Sant’Apollinare Nuovo’s nave mosaic, and carved on the Isaac sarcophagus.

The presbytery vault of San Vitale rises above the level of the half-dome of the apse, but not as high as the central dome of the church. An arched opening leads from the central space of the church into the presbytery. Triple-arcaded openings lead into the ambulatory on the ground level, and the galleries on the upper level. There are lunettes over each of these triple-arcades. A lower arch topped by a tympanum connects the presbytery and the apse itself. All of the surfaces above the level of the columns are sheathed with glittering mosaic. The lunettes of the north and south walls leading into the ambulatory depict Old Testament scenes. On the north side are two narratives from the life of Abraham: the feeding of the three strangers at Mambre (Gen. 18:1-15), and the Sacrifice of Isaac Gen. 22:1-13) (Fig. 99). The two scenes are not given equal space in the lunette. The three strangers (an allusion to
the Trinity) are in the center of the lunette. At the left side of the composition, Abraham walks out of his home, bearing a platter with a tiny calf, while his wife Sarah waits behind him in the doorway. Each of the three strangers has a round loaf of bread set before him with a cross marked on it. The three are haloed, and their facial features and garments are not significantly different from one another’s. To the right side of the composition, Abraham lifts a sword to slay his son Isaac who is bound on the altar. The hand of God reaches down from wisps of cloud to stop Abraham, while a goat at his feet alludes to the substitutionary sacrifice that will be provided.

Above the lunette, in the spandrels, are images of the Prophet Jeremiah, on the left, and of Moses Receiving the Law on the right. The children of Israel wait below Moses. In the center, a pair of flying angels hold between them a cross with pendant alpha and omega symbols in a medallion. This imagery is reminiscent of Constantinopolitan sarcophagi compositions like that of the “Prince’s” sarcophagus (Fig. 58).

The lunette of the south wall also depicts two scenes from the Old Testament (Fig. 100). These scenes, the Sacrifice of Abel and that of Melchizedek, are conflated by the presence of a central altar toward which both turn. The altar is covered with a white cloth over a purple undercloth, and a purple, eight-sided appliqué is stitched onto the front. The altar is set with a large two-handled chalice, which greatly resembles the cantharus-type vessel, found on many of the sarcophagi (and elsewhere). Two round loaves of bread flank the cantharus. Above the altar, the Hand of God stretches down from the sky through wisps of cloud. A semicircular outline creates a wide arc around the hand, and subtly separates it from the rest of the composition. Abel (labeled – his story can be found in Genesis Ch. 4), on the left, steps out from his hut and holds a lamb out and up, towards the Hand. Melchizedek
(Gen. 14:18 – 20) moves toward the altar and holds up a round loaf of bread. Even in this Old Testament imagery, which scholars have considered more narrative and dynamic in tone than the New Testament imagery in the vault and apse, the narrative scenes become formulaic through the use of the tripartite, heraldic arrangement of the imagery. And this is not only true for the figures – Abel and Melchizedek centered around the altar set with the Eucharist (symbolic of Christ) – but also for the marginal and decorative touches. Below the lunette, for instance, there are small scenes set into the spandrels depicting birds flanking baskets of fruit. Below these, in the impost blocks of the columns, are lambs flanking crosses. Similar “marginalia” imagery is found on the small spandrels and impost blocks of the north side. And, as on the north side, in the large spandrel above the lunette there are two flying angels holding between them a cross in a medallion. Once more there is a repetition and reiteration of this symmetrical format both in the main imagery as well as in the marginal imagery.

In addition to the flying angels, there are also other Old Testament figures in the large spandrel above the lunette as on the north side. On the left is an image of Moses tending his sheep on the bottom, and above taking his shoes off before the burning bush. On the right is the prophet Isaiah. Clearly, in spite of the Old Testament origination of these scenes, the infusion of Christological symbols and references to Christ throughout is meant to suggest to the viewer that the Old Testament stories can only be properly understood in the light of Christ as the final revelation.

This supremacy of the New Testament and, obviously, of Christ is affirmed by the fact that on the second level, next to the openings into the gallery, are depictions of the four evangelists. Matthew and Mark are on the south side (Fig. 100), and John and Luke on the
north (Fig. 99). Matthew and John hold their books in their laps and have writing desks beside them. Mark and Luke hold their open books outward. Each of the evangelists is seated in a rocky, mountainous setting and each is accompanied by his symbol. Above these images, in the arched space over the arcade, are urns from which curling vines issue. Both clusters of grapes, as well as blossoms, are set within the spiral sections of the vine, and birds also inhabit the space. Each urn has two birds standing on the ground on either side of it, and one bird perched on the top rim. Two other birds are set in the middle of the vinescroll. At the apex of each arched section is a small Greek cross in a medallion.

On the soffit of the arch that leads from the presbytery into the center of the church there is a procession of medallion busts of the apostles (Fig. 101). Christ is at the center, in the summit of the arch. The image of Christ, as Deborah Deliyannis points out, is correctly seen when the viewer is facing east, standing beneath the dome. From this vantage point it can be perceived as aligned with the lamb in the apex of the vault and with Christ in the apse, creating a three-part visual set of representations of Christ.119

On the eastern tympanum above the apse arch there are representations of the cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem above palm trees (Fig. 102). The cities are presented as jewel-encrusted, symbols for the continuing cities of the Kingdom of God more than realistic representations of actual places. Between the cities there is a pair of winged angels flying and holding a medallion that contains an eight-armed, rayed cross. This pair complements the pairs of angels on the north and south walls beneath the openings to the gallery. The triple-arched windows themselves are surrounded by grapevines and acanthus vines that spring from baskets and cantharoi or chalices. All of this organic ornament is set against a dark blue background.

The presbytery vault itself is a breathtaking testament to the Ravennate acuity for simultaneously communicating spiritual ideas and crafting dazzling visual displays through the use of non-figural symbols, pattern, rhythm, and repetition (Fig. 103). At the zenith of the vault is a circle with a white, haloed lamb in the center, set against a blue background spangled with golden and silver stars. This creature is obviously a symbol for Christ. The circle is surrounded by a thick border of mosaic imagery with leaves and fruit. The square space of the vault is divided by four strips of mosaic that stretch from each of the four corners of the vault to the central medallion. Each mosaic band is decorated with peacocks at the lower end, next to the corner of the vault, and fruit, flowers, and leaves along its length. The four sections created by this structure alternate in their background colors between green and blue. Against these backgrounds are golden acanthus scrolls. Birds inhabit the scrolls against the blue backgrounds, and animals against the green ones. In each field a full-figure angel stands on a blue orb in the center of the field, and reaches out to grasp the outer edge of the central lamb medallion. The vision is an apocalyptic one, coming from the fifth chapter of the Revelation: “And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them: I heard all saying: ‘To him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction, and honor, and glory, and power for ever and ever.’” It seems superfluous to point out that many of these symbols and images (the peacocks, birds, beasts, vines, the lamb itself) are found over and over in Ravennate imagery, including on the sarcophagi where they glorify, ornament, and exalt Christ.

In this lengthy (though by no means comprehensive) exploration of the mosaic imagery of Ravenna, I have tried to demonstrate that, despite their obvious differences, the sarcophagi and the mosaics at Ravenna share many iconographic and stylistic qualities. On a

120 Revelation 5:13
very basic level, the “words” and “phrases” of the artistic language are essentially the same. The most common iconography in the Ravennate mosaic compositions involve Christ, seated or standing, flanked or approached by worshipping followers. Such compositions are found in prominent spaces at San Vitale, Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Sant’Apollinare in Classe, and San Michele in Africisco. Smaller and/or symbolic arrangements of a similar nature are found in almost all of the Ravennate buildings, especially as marginal imagery. For instance, the small stucco compositions in the Orthodox Baptistery include images such as Christ between Peter and Paul. And it is not hyperbolic to assert that the tripartite, heraldic arrangement in which a central, non-figural symbol for Christ, a monogram, cross, pool or cantharus with water, vine, etc., is flanked by animals or birds or angels is found everywhere in Ravenna mosaics. These familiar compositions are essentially the same as those found tucked on so many lids, sides, and boxes of Ravennate sarcophagi. While the mosaics certainly include imagery that the sarcophagi do not (for example, representations of angels, and narratives such as the Old Testament scenes at San Vitale), taken as a whole much of the visual vocabulary found in Ravenna mosaics and in Ravenna sarcophagi is communal among these two different mediums.

Aside from the specific iconography and symbolism, the preference for symmetrical arrangements of imagery, especially in three-part harmonies, is a feature of the sarcophagus reliefs that is also found over and over again in the mosaics. Also, the use of architectural or vegetal “props” to separate figures from one another is commonly used in Ravenna mosaics such as the processions in the Orthodox and Arian Baptistery domes, and in the nave wall of Sant’Apollinare in Classe. This preference for static, isolated figures set against blank
backgrounds is a popular feature on the Ravennate sarcophagi like the *Barbatinus* tomb (Fig. 8).

One reason that these two art forms appear at first glance to share few qualities is that the brilliant, polychromatic nature of the mosaics seems utterly distinct from the unpainted marble of the sarcophagi. But this distinction may not have been as apparent to the ancient and medieval audiences. It is likely that many, if not all, of the stone sarcophagi were initially painted in bright colors. While there is no surviving evidence of paint on the surface of any sarcophagus, this educated guess as to the original appearance of the tombs is based on the penchant for painting stone carvings known from the Greek and Roman classical periods, and also on the fact that some of the architectural sculpture in buildings at Ravenna was originally painted. The capitals and impost blocks at San Vitale, for instance, were painted. Restored examples can be found in the presbytery.\(^{121}\) And, as mentioned above, traces of paint on the stucco imagery from the Orthodox Baptistery indicate that these reliefs were also originally polychromatic.

**III. Architectural and Liturgical Sculpture and Sarcophagi**

It should be no surprise that there are also a number of visual connections between Ravennate sarcophagi carving and the architectural and liturgical sculpture. A brief survey of some of the surviving sculpture at Ravenna will demonstrate, again, that the carved sarcophagi fit comfortably into the artistic language of this community.

The nave colonnade at Sant’Apollinare Nuovo consists of twelve columns with bases, capitals, and impost blocks all in Proconnesian marble (Fig. 104). The supports must have been made and exported as a set, and they represent the earliest example of this method of

\(^{121}\) Deliyannis, 232, pl. Vlb.
exportation at Ravenna. The columns and capitals are inscribed with Greek letters that refer to the workshops in which they were made, and the same marks are found on marble in churches in Constantinople and Ephesus,122 providing clear evidence that these pieces were importations from the east. The Corinthian capitals have flat acanthus leaves. The impost blocks are plain except for Latin crosses with flared terminals on the sides facing the nave.

The raised apse of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo was accessed from the nave by a step, and marble *transennae* (openwork screen panels) enclosed a space in the nave west of the apse to the third columns of the nave arcade. An ambo was placed even further west. The ambo, as well as three *transennae* panels and one *pluteum* (solid flat panel) from the chancel screen, survive today. These liturgical furnishings were also made of Proconnesian marble.123

The ambo (Fig. 105)124 is designed as a three-part structure, similar to other ambos of eastern origination such as the one in the garden of Hagia Sophia at Istanbul,125 or the one found in the shipwreck at Marzamemi.126 Only the center section of the ambo at Sant’Apollinare survives today. The center of the panel is slightly concave, and is carved with a series of rhombuses, inscribed in a square frame. Two subtle bars, one horizontal and one vertical, unite the corners of the superimposed rhombus shapes, thus creating a Greek cross in the background of the design. On either side of this concave central section are thin rectangular panels carved with Latin crosses with flared terminals, resting on orbs. Several

123 Vernia, 363 – 389.
125 Vernia, 379, fig. 5.
rows of decorative molding at the bottom of the ambo provide a base. This base rests on four slender colonnettes. Scholars such as Rafaella Farioli have argued that this ambo is the work of a Constantinopolitan craftsmen based on the high quality of the carving. Whether or not this is the case, there are certainly clear connections between the imagery and style of this pulpit and the clean, sparsely decorated sculptural pieces conserved at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum discussed above. Of course, the same coolness of tone, careful symmetry, and preference for aniconic symbols characterizes Ravennate sarcophagi as well.

A similar ambo from the church of Santo Spirito at Ravenna (Fig. 106) also has a central concave section flanked by two thin rectangles with elongated Latin crosses atop orbs. The central section, however, has three gables. The central gable is pointed, and the outer two are arched with shell-niches underneath their arches. The supports for this triple gable structure are spiral columns with Corinthian capitals. Underneath the central gable is a series of vegetal flourishes. Beneath the two outer arches are two-handled *cantharoi* which sprout grapevines.

On the presbyterial balustrade at the eastern end of the nave of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo there are several carved pieces that relate even more closely to Ravennate sarcophagus imagery. At the far left a *pluteum* (Fig. 107) has on one side a relief with a large, central *cantharus* from which a curling grapevine grows. The vine grows to the left and right of the vessel, supporting on each large curling section a peacock, facing inwards toward the center of the composition. A Latin cross with flared terminals and a Rho loop is

set between the peacocks, atop the curling vines. These elements (the peacocks, curving grapevines, and cross) are popular features on sarcophagi such as the *Theodore* (Fig. 31), and *Rinaldo* (Fig. 19) tombs. The opposite side of the *pluteum* has a representation of Daniel in the Lions’ Den. Like the Daniel compositions on the ends of the *Isaac* (Fig. 30) and *Traditio Legis* (Fig. 48) sarcophagi, Daniel stands in the center of the composition and is flanked by two lions. He is, likewise, dressed in Phrygian costume and stands in an *orants* pose. Unlike the sarcophagus compositions, Daniel stands on a “podium” created by a stylized acanthus leaf, and is surrounded by a *mandorla*. Curling vines with leaves and rosettes fill the space to the left and right of the composition, and the lions actually perch on sections of this vine. Also, a small bird is depicted to the left of Daniel, apparently holding a ring in its beak to slip on Daniel’s upraised right hand. While the iconography is clearly divergent, there are many familiar elements – not only the vines, lions, and frontal, *orans* Daniel, but in general the tripartite, symmetrical arrangement that is the basis for the compositions on both the front and back of this *pluteum*. And, as on tombs like the *Pignatta* (Fig. 38), *Isaac* (Fig. 30), and *Exuperantius* (Fig. 36) examples, there is in the *pluteum* a pairing of two such symmetrically arranged compositions, one figural and one non-figural, on opposite sides of the same monument.

There are three marble *transennae* on the presbyterial balustrade at Sant’Apollinare Nuovo as well. The first one (Fig. 108) has a central Latin cross carved with squares and rhombuses meant to represent jewels. Above the horizontal crossbar, on either side of the vertical crossbar, are two Greek crosses inscribed in medallions. Beneath the horizontal

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130 A similar composition is found on slab no. 6085 at the Istanbul Museum, mentioned above (Fig. 67).

crossbar on either side of the vertical upright are two crosses created by twisted strands of interlocking line. Around this central cross arrangement are geometric designs resembling swastikas and rhombuses. There is a double cornice around the entire composition, the outer part of which has a grapevine. The second transenna (Fig. 109)\textsuperscript{132} is similarly framed. In its center, again, is the jeweled cross, this time inscribed in a rectangle and flanked by peacocks. Outside of the framing rectangle are curling vines with grapes and leaves which ultimately spring from a cantharus at the bottom of the composition, below the cross. The third transenna (Fig. 110)\textsuperscript{133} again has a central cross, this time much smaller. Surrounding the cross are vegetal ornaments and four quatrefoil shapes that enclose prickly flower blooms and leaves.

There are other transennae at Ravenna with similar qualities. For instance, a transenna from the church of San Michele in Africisco (Fig. 111)\textsuperscript{134} has a small Latin cross and is surrounded by quatrefoils and circles, all inset with the spiky leaves and blossoms similar to those in the third transenna from Sant’Apollinare Nuovo.\textsuperscript{135} Two small peacocks perch on either side of the small, central cross.

Among the most famous surviving sculptural objects from Ravenna is a large pulpit given to Ravenna’s Cathedral by Archbishop Agnellus\textsuperscript{136} (r. 557 – 570) (Fig. 112). The design of the ambo is similar to those discussed above at Sant’Apollinare Nuovo and Santo


\textsuperscript{133} Bovini, ed., 1968 – 69, vol. 1, cat. 131, 75, pl. 131.

\textsuperscript{134} Bovini, ed., 1968 – 69, vol. 1, cat. 126, 74, pl. 126. This piece is now in the Museo Nazionale at Ravenna.

\textsuperscript{135} The design of the San Michele transenna is more consistently symmetrical than the Sant’Apollinare transenna, and the ornament is more cleanly drilled out. For these reasons, Farioli Campanati and Deichmann determined that the transennae at Sant’Apollinare were created by local Ravennate workshops following the imported Constantinopolitan models like the one from San Michele. See: Farioli Campanati, 2005, 25 and Deichmann, 1969, 71.

Spirito: a central concave section is flanked by two thin rectangular sections. The surface of the marble is divided into a series of square compartments, framed by borders filled with rinceau vines and rosettes. Inside each compartment is a single creature. Fish inhabit the bottom row of boxes, birds the second and third rows from the bottom, deer the fourth row, peacocks the fifth, and lambs the sixth, uppermost row. The creatures are in profile, facing inward toward the center of the pulpit. They are carved in uniform low relief. All in all, they closely resemble the types of striding, profile animals and birds found not only on many of the Ravennate sarcophagi, but also those on other sculptural productions from Ravenna such as the *pluteum* from Sant’Apollinare Nuovo discussed above.\(^{137}\)

The use of symmetry and rhythm to reiterate timeless beliefs undergirds the visual repertoire of Ravennate sarcophagi. These themes are echoed not only in liturgical sculptural from Ravenna, but in architectural sculpture as well. The imported capitals and impost blocks at the church of San Vitale (Fig. 113) provide beautiful examples of Constantinopolitan craftsmanship. Yet these pieces clearly reflect Ravennate taste for communicating fundamental ideas through symmetrical, non-figural compositions using an economy of symbolic language. The first and second story ambulatories at San Vitale are supported by beautiful monolithic\(^{138}\) columns of Proconnesian marble with decorative capitals and impost blocks. These materials were imported from the imperial quarries, and

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\(^{137}\) A similar ambo from the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Ravenna is now conserved in the Museo Arcivescovile. The quality of craftsmanship is less high than in the Ambo of Agnellus; the animals and birds have awkward proportions and the decorative framework is clumsy and less ornate. See: Farioli Campanati, 2005, 28 and 43.

\(^{138}\) There are two exceptions in the gallery, which were apparently broken in transport and reassembled at the time of construction.
carved in the latest Constantinopolitan styles. 139 Many of the capitals are carved with vegetal or floral ornament that recalls the *transennae* at Sant’Apollinare Nuovo (Figs. 109 and 110). Several of the impost blocks feature peacocks or lambs facing a central Christological symbol, such as a cross or *cantharus*.

One extremely interesting sculptural importation from Constantinople is the throne of the archbishops of Ravenna, 140 which bears the monogram of Maximian (Fig. 114). This episcopal chair had a curved back and straight arms, and was outfitted with thirty-nine panels of carved ivory attached to its wooden frame. The style of carving bears resemblance to that of ivories from Constantinople and the eastern Mediterranean, and so scholars have generally determined that this chair was either made in Constantinople, or was made in Ravenna by craftsmen from the east. 141 The ivory insets were carved with scenes and figures from both Old and New Testaments. Twelve panels are now missing, but some of their iconography is known from earlier drawings.

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139 Columns, capitals, and bases have masons' marks inscribed on them in Greek letters, indicating that they were quarried and shaped in Proconnesus. There has been debate as to whether the capitals were made in Constantinople, or carved in Ravenna (as this delicate sort of carving would have been prone to damage during transport). Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Ravenna Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1976), 108 and 111 – 112; William E. Betsch, The History, Production and Distribution of the Latin Antique Capital in Constantinople (Philadelphia: PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1977), 149 – 150; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Ravenna Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1989), 273 – 276; Deliyannis, 2010, 232 – 233.


The panels themselves are framed on all sides by borders of vinescroll. Nestled into the curling vegetation are peacocks, birds, deer, lion: in other words, the symbols and creatures that are familiar from so many other Ravennate contexts. But there are also some interesting additions to the menagerie, including cows, rabbits, and dogs, not common in other Ravennate contexts. On the bottom border on the front of the throne there is a central *cantharus* that sprouts a vine which grows outward toward either side of the vessel. Perched on its curling section are heraldically paired lions. A pair of deer flank the lions, and a pair of rabbits flank the deer in a series of symmetrically arranged animal “parentheses.” On the border at the top of the seat, on the front, there is the monogram of Maximian. Two peacocks flank this central monogram, striding towards it in profile view, recalling compositions like that of the *Rinaldo* sarcophagus (Fig. 19). Like the lions below, they, too, are flanked by two pairs of animals. So the decorative borders, which at first glance appear to be slightly chaotic with a profusion of organic, animal and plant decoration, are in reality carefully arranged and structured. The symmetrical, heraldic positioning of creatures around a central symbol, consistently a prominent feature of Ravennate imagery, is also the organizing agent at work in the chair.

On the front of the chair between these borders are a series of five figures standing beneath shell niches. John the Baptist is in the center, the four evangelists are on either side holding codices. The other panels have a more narrative tone. There is a cycle from the Nativity of Christ including a representation of the Three Magi (which is one of the more frequent narrative compositions from Ravenna, appearing on the *Isaac* sarcophagus, mosaic in Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, at San Vitale on the hem of Theodora’s robe, and on the marble reliquary conserved at the Museo Arcivescovile), and a scene of the Annunciation. There are
a number of panels that depict episodes from the life of Joseph, and there are several scenes from the ministry of Christ. The narratives from the life and ministry of Christ, though they have few correspondences with sarcophagi imagery, are conventional for sixth-century Christian art. The examples from the church of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo attest to this popular imagery at Ravenna.

The prominence of the Joseph narrative is somewhat unexpected, though juxtaposition of Old and New Testament elements is one of the hallmarks of post-Theodorican art in Ravenna (a prime example is in the presbytery mosaics at San Vitale). The story of Joseph may have been chosen for this particular context because Joseph was understood to be a model of good stewardship. Ambrose of Milan, in his writings on the roles of priest and bishop, praised Joseph for his chastity, charity, and generosity, and held him up as an ideal counselor to a secular ruler. Joseph thus was a model for the good bishop, who was to both shepherd his flock and also serve as an intermediary between divine and earthly rule by serving as an advisor to the secular ruler.142

Taken as a whole, some of the same aesthetic qualities that the carved sarcophagi share with Ravennate mosaics are also those common to liturgical and architectural sculpture from Ravenna. In particular, the use of non-figural symbols (especially repetitive ones such as peacocks, grapevines, lambs, the cross, the Christological monogram, etc.) and the preference for non-figural forms and decoration, particularly in the “marginal” areas, is a universal trait. The proclivity for symmetrical arrangements of imagery, especially in tripartite designs, is also apparent in the architectural and liturgical sculpture of Ravenna.

Certainly, the symbolic tripartite arrangement in which a central symbol for Christ is flanked by “followers” is manifested in such objects as the marble *pluteum* from Sant’Apollinare Nuovo (Fig. 107), or the impost blocks from San Vitale (Fig. 113). While many of these liturgical and architectural carvings represent direct importations from the Constantinopolitan sphere, their presence in Ravenna fits tidily into the aesthetic flavor of the city, regardless of whether they were produced in this city or chosen for it.

**IV. Ravennate Sarcophagi Imagery as a Communal, Civic Expression**

The artistic productions in and from Ravenna are broadly diverse. From mosaic to stucco, marble to ivory, (and probably manuscripts at one time too, though none survive), there are a number of mediums and types of materials at work. Chronologically, the era of artistic flourishing in Ravenna stretches from the early fifth to the late eighth century and beyond, though in all artistic media the majority of objects, and the highest quality productions, are clustered in the period from the early fifth through the early to mid-sixth century. Scholars have identified objects that were certainly imported from metropolitan centers in the east, but other objects are evidently local productions. Artists and workshops were likely made up of indigenous and itinerant craftsmen. The political and economic vicissitudes weathered by Ravenna in this turbulent era meant that there was a continual shifting of patronage and market forces. Given these facts, it is logical that Ravenna’s artistic productions should be widely varied, which they certainly are. Yet in spite of the clear variations, there are also a number of shared themes, common visual tropes, and repeated stylistic preferences that constantly crop up in Ravenna’s artistic language.

In my brief survey of Ravenna’s carved stone sarcophagi, surviving mosaic programs, and selections of architectural and liturgical sculpture, I have tried to draw out the qualities of
imagery that seem to be shared among the productions, and particularly those symbols and arrangements that are repeated over and over again either in similar formats, or in more subtle reverberations. Specifically, I have been struck by the recurrence of Christocentric compositions with flanking followers, some of which are figural and many of which are non-figural or symbolic. A related type of repeated image is the heraldic, symmetrical composition often in three parts. These tripartite designs often feature a central symbol for Christ. The symbolic language of Ravenna has many repetitive elements; especially popular are the Christological monogram, the cross, birds, beasts, cantharoi, vinescrolls, and lambs.

Another familiar quality in Ravenna’s artistic productions is the preference for isolation of forms. This quality is evident in the predilection for presenting figures and symbols singly, in spacious settings, against open backgrounds. Figures are commonly separated from one another using architectural or vegetal props. Finally, the theme of procession is popular especially in the mosaic and sarcophagus imagery.

One feature that distinguishes the carved sarcophagi in Ravenna is the strictly limited repertoire of figural and narrative iconography on the tombs. The mosaics feature more numerous and varied figural representations from both the Old and New Testaments, depictions of martyrs and saints, and types such as the “Good Shepherd” from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia or the Triumphant Christ from the Cappella Arcivescovile. The narrative scenes on the sarcophagi are reserved to a small handful including the Visit of the Three Magi (Fig. 30), Daniel in the Lions’ Den, the Raising of Lazarus (Figs. 30 and 48), the Annunciation and a strange “Meeting” or “Visitation” scene (Fig. 38), and a single Doubting Thomas (Fig. 52). There are rarely references to specific biblical or contemporary individuals on the sarcophagi, except for Peter and Paul who are discernible by their iconographic types.
The anonymity of the sarcophagus figures, however, may fit well with the anonymous groups in fifth and early sixth century mosaic programs at the Orthodox Baptistery, the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, and even Sant’Apollinare Nuovo. While there is a fundamental reservation across the board at Ravenna, compared to other mediums the sarcophagi are even more repetitive, and seem to be purposefully generic in tone.

It is important to remember that the iconography of the Ravennate sarcophagi was chosen by the patrons and / or the artists.143 Whether the imagery was a local production or a cosmopolitan importation, whether it was conceived by a Ravennate patron or artist or a “foreigner,” this imagery appears because for some reason it was desirable. The repetition of the same imagery over and over again supports this idea.144 The sculpted marble sarcophagi had a crucial function. They were meant as resting places for the immortal souls’ mortal remains until the day of resurrection. In this context, it is inconceivable that the chosen iconography did not have deep meaning.

In spite of my conviction that this is so, it would be wise to acknowledge that one of the leading factors in the choice of the repetitive, generic imagery in the Ravennate tombs was probably because it was popular, conventional, and convenient. The imagery itself was flexible, especially non-figural imagery. The symbolic forms, such as the *cantharus*, were multivalent, and could be interpreted in a number of ways depending upon what the viewer

143 Roberta Budriesi has remarked on the limited nature of Ravenna sarcophagus iconography that distances it from both the Rome and Constantinople schools. She points out that the near total absence of narratives from the New and Old Testaments on the sarcophagi is indicative of the fact that the Ravennate patrons selected imagery that emphasized doctrine, through symbolism, over narrative stories. Budriesi, 1996, 236.

144 This notion of “choice” is true even if some of the iconography represents stock, generic imagery that exporters used to satisfy a speculative market – in other words, even in the cases in which the tombs were not made for specific patrons but were shipped out of the quarry or workshop to be peddled on the other side of the Adriatic. Market forces, indeed, seemed to ensure that these popular symbolic compositions would find buyers. The large collection of sculpted funerary monuments with repetitive imagery demonstrates that this iconography was sought-after in Ravenna either from local craftsmen or from purveyors of foreign sarcophagi.
wanted to see in it. The tripartite grouping of imagery, that I have noted is one of the most
popular compositional arrangements in the sarcophagi, may very well carry subtle Trinitarian
overtones.\textsuperscript{145} But it is also a fairly simple composition that fits easily into lots of places. It
can be expanded to fill a large compositional field (as on the backs of sarcophagi like the
\textit{Rinaldo} tomb), or it can be abbreviated and squeezed into the small space of an impost block,
spandrel, or end of a sarcophagus

Though it is common and convenient, however, the repeated symbols and
compositions on Ravenna’s sarcophagi do create a series of monuments, closely related to
other artistic objects in Ravenna, which can be perceived as a group. In the heraldic, tripartite
compositions that I have argued are the most significant iconography on the sarcophagi, the
central figure is most often Christ. The elements flanking the Christ figure or Christ symbol
are “followers.” These followers might be men, or peacocks, or lambs, or birds, but
nevertheless they are Disciples of Christ. As Deborah Deliyannis argued in her approach to
the apostles in the dome of the Arian Baptistery, the point of the group representation was to
emphasize that there was a community of Christ-followers in Ravenna who transcended time,
space and, in this particular instance, ethnicity. I would propose that a similar sentiment may
underlie the recurring, nonspecific imagery on the Ravennate sarcophagi. Instead of
emphasizing the individuality of the patron of the monument, the imagery instead
emphasizes his (or her) identity as part of a group. This group (Christ followers universally,
and Ravenna’s community of Christ-followers locally) existed simultaneously eternally and

\textsuperscript{145} Any tripartite grouping of elements in a Christian context is likely to pique ideas about Trinitarian doctrine.
In the context of Ravenna, especially, in which during the period from 476 to 540 when the Arian Goths ruled
Italy from their capital city at Ravenna, scholars have been quick to point out possible instances of anti-Arian
symbolism, including references to the Trinity, in Ravenna’s monuments. The proposition that Christ was a
creation of God the Father, and hence a subordinate being, is attributed to Arius, a priest of Alexandria (d. 336).
Arianism was condemned as a heresy at the ecumenical council of Nicaea in 325. The Ostrogoths do not appear
as a distinct group until the 450’s; it is said that they had converted to Arian Christianity by the time they
entered Pannonia in 455. More depth on this topic is explored in Chapter 5.
contemporaneously, and its members included both the living and the dead. In particular, the patrons of the expensive Ravennate tombs might have been keen to emphasize their special position in this group, especially in the context of late antique / early medieval Ravenna. As I will expound in the following chapter, Ravenna during this period of time was an urban center on the rise, the hub of an increasingly cohesive regional culture, a city in which a burgeoning spirit of independence and autonomy evolved over the course of several centuries at the end of the imperial age.
CHAPTER 3 THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF LATE ANTIQUE RAVENNA

In Chapter 2, I argued that the late antique and early medieval sarcophagi from Ravenna are a distinctive group of monuments characterized by repetitive imagery, unique combinations of symbolic and figural elements, and a general, stylistic trend towards open, spacious compositions uncluttered by unnecessary details or elements. These qualities mark a sharp contrast with the sarcophagi of Rome and, though they have been endlessly characterized as Byzantine as a result of this differentiation from the Roman template, actually represent a somewhat insular off-shoot from the more prominent Latin and Greek artistic traditions. If, as I contend, the sarcophagi represent a localized body of work connected to the broader, particularized artistic culture of Ravenna, what in the historical context of the urban region made Ravenna amenable to the development of such a culture? In this chapter, I will examine the history of Ravenna in order to shed further light on the peculiar position of the city in this era. This position, I will argue, gave rise to an aspirational posture in Ravenna, and illuminates the cohesive artistic culture, and, more specifically, the idiosyncratic group of marble sarcophagi associated with it. In one particular example, the antagonism of Ravenna’s archbishops toward papal authority may be related to the preference given to Paul over Peter in the sarcophagus iconography.

I. Ravenna to the Fifth Century: Sources for Political, Ecclesiastical, and Cultural Aspirations
During the Augustan period the port city of Classe, to the south of Ravenna, became a docking port for the imperial fleet. At the end of the third century, as a result of the political and military instability created by epidemic disease and barbarian invasions, Rome’s navy suffered great losses, and Classe (and, in turn, Ravenna) faded in significance. The size and importance of the fleet stationed at Classe, and thus Ravenna’s role in government, seem to have been sharply reduced by the early fourth century. Though Andreas Agnellus provided a list of the bishops of Ravenna descending from the supposed apostolic founder of the see, Apollinaris, up to the ninth century, there is no written evidence for any bishop or other personality of the church of Ravenna before the fourth century.

Ravenna’s second rise to prominence among the cities of northern Italy began when the imperial court, in 402, moved to Ravenna after the initial incursion of the Goths under Alaric into Italy. The city’s unique location, situated on the Adriatic coast with a nearby

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2 References to Ravenna disappear from both texts and inscriptions at the end of the third century. Deliyannis, 2010, 46.

3 *Agnelli Ravennatis Liber Pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*, ed. by Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006). All further references to Agnellus refer to this translation.


5 Milan was the *sedes imperialis* prior to Ravenna’s ascension. Diocletian had actually designated several urban sites as seats of the imperial government, and constructed in them facilities, including palaces, hippodromes, fora, baths, etc., to accommodate imperial ceremonial and administrative activities. Nevertheless, the term *caput* was only used to refer to Rome and Constantinople. The notion of Ravenna as a “capital” of the western Roman empire arose with the ninth-century observation of Agnellus, who recorded that Valentinian III (425 – 455) “ordered and decreed that Ravenna should be the head of Italy in place of Rome.” Agnellus, c. 40: *Et iussit atque decreuit ut absque Roma rauenna esset caput Italiae*. Evidence demonstrates, however, that the western emperors moved back and forth between Rome and Ravenna, and that Rome continued to be considered, in political and cultural terms, the imperial city. Andrew Gillet, “Rome, Ravenna, and the Last Western Emperors,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 69 (2001): 131 – 167. Obviously, the pro-Ravenna stance
port, and surrounded by marshes, made it attractive due to its defensibility, its strategic coastal position, and its naval connections to the eastern Mediterranean. Certain rights were awarded to the Church of Ravenna by the papacy during the tenure of Sixtus III (432 – 440) in response to the elevated status Ravenna assumed once it became one of the seats of the imperial court. The bishop of Ravenna was granted authority over several other churches in the region. This grant limited the power of Milan and Aquileia, Ravenna’s main rival sees in northern Italy. When precisely Ravenna’s bishops were actually bestowed with metropolitan authority (i.e., authority over other bishops in the area) is debatable. Agnellus asserted that Ravenna received this right as early as the reign of Valentinian III (425 – 455), but his assumption was based on a counterfeit document known as the “Diploma of Valentinian III.” This document supposedly gave Ravenna’s bishop the ceremonial pallium garment and metropolitan jurisdiction, with fourteen subordinate bishops. As it turns out, the “Diploma” was later proved to be a forgery of the late sixth or early seventh century. The first evidence of a bishop of Ravenna actually wielding metropolitan authority by consecrating other bishops comes from the sermons delivered by Bishop Peter I (known as Peter Chrysologus, c. 40).

adopted by Agnellus places Ravenna’s elevation in a more glorified light than was actually the case in the fifth century, and instead reflects his ninth-century perspective.


8 The pallium was a band of white wool adorned with six black crosses that was originally issued by the Roman emperor to high dignitaries in both the ecclesiastical and civil spheres, but evolved over time to signify spiritual and / or ecclesiastical authority.

9 Agnellus, c. 40.
431 – 450).\(^{10}\) Regardless of the particulars, the fact remains that bishops became more powerful figures in Ravenna beginning in the fifth century. As the imperial administration became weaker and less effectual, the bishop emerged as one of the major authority figures in Ravenna.

Artistically, the city was enriched with building projects and artistic commissions in the fifth century as a result of its new status as a *sedes imperialis*. New circuit walls were built, a mint was established, and an imperial residence was constructed. Archaeological evidence supports the conclusion that there were also several prominent churches constructed during the fifth century at Ravenna. St. Lawrence was an extramural church built on top of an existing cemetery. It was a martyrial basilica used for funerary purposes, and as such functioned similarly to the basilica of St. Lawrence outside Rome.\(^{11}\) Because it was demolished in the mid-sixteenth century, little is known about the church’s exact location or appearance.

Under the leadership of Galla Placidia\(^ {12}\) the churches of Santa Croce and San Giovanni Evangelista were constructed, as well as a chapel dedicated to St. Zacharias. Galla

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\(^{12}\) Half-sister to emperor Honorius (395 – 423), and regent to her son Valentinian beginning in 425. She was captured and taken as a hostage in 410 by the Visigoths, and later married to the barbarian leader Athaulf in 411. After his death, she returned to Rome and was married to the general Constantius. Her son Valentinian became emperor after the death of Honorius. As he was only five years old at the time, his mother served as regent. She was active in the court at Ravenna, and according to the written sources was involved in a number of intrigues. Though these were often characterized by male historians as related to feminine impulsivity, in reality they were likely shrewdly handled political maneuverings geared towards keeping the western empire intact. For a discussion of Galla Placidia’s subtle exercise of diplomatic power, within the confines of the social
Placidia is perhaps most famously associated with the small chapel that was once originally attached to the church of Sta. Croce.\textsuperscript{13} Though in all likelihood not meant to be used by Galla Placidia for her own burial chamber,\textsuperscript{14} there is strong evidence to suggest that this small chapel was designed for someone’s burial (see discussion of this monument in the previous chapter). The example of the “mausoleum” of Galla Placidia indicates that in the fifth century in Ravenna, elite members of society were constructing elaborate shrines and mausolea as were the affluent in other major urban centers.\textsuperscript{15}

The construction of the cathedral of Ravenna, known as the Ursiana,\textsuperscript{16} because it was begun during the episcopate of Bishop Ursus (c. 405 – 431),\textsuperscript{17} and its baptistery are associated with this period of Ravenna’s history as well. The Ursiana was a large, double-aisled basilica similar in scale to those of Milan and other, major urban centers. The cathedral was located at the hub of a group of buildings that were directly controlled by the bishop, and political constrictions placed on women, see Audrey Becker-Piriou, “De Galla Placidia à Amalasonthe, des femmes dans la diplomatie romano-barbare en Occident?” \textit{Revue Historique} 3 / 647 (2008): 507 – 543.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} This small building may have been dedicated to St. Lawrence, based on interpretation of a scene depicted in mosaic in one of the interior lunettes. See Chapter 2, 78, n. 91.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Galla Placidia died in Rome in 450 and was likely buried in the imperial mausoleum at St. Peter’s. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, “Bury Me in Ravenna? Appropriating Galla Placidia’s Body in the Middle Ages,” \textit{Studi Medievali} 42 (2000): 289 – 299.
\item \textsuperscript{16} The cathedral was actually dedicated to the Anastasis. Agnellus, c. 23. See also: Paola Novara, \textit{La cattedrale di Ravenna. Storia e archeologia} (Ravenna: Danilo Montanari Editore, 1997), 49.
\item \textsuperscript{17} The dates of Ursus’s reign are disputed. Some scholars believe that Ursus’s episcopacy should be placed at the end of the fourth century, c. 370 – 396. Deborah Deliyannis, based on her interpretation of Agnellus, favors the early fifth century date. Deliyannis, 2010, 85 – 86.
\end{itemize}
including the *episcopium*, or Episcopal palace. The *episcopium* supplied space for the bishop to give public audiences, judge legal cases against clerics, hold assemblies of clergy, and entertain guests. Agnellus noted that the *episcopium* of Ravenna was continually refurbished and added on to by different bishops, thus its architectural fabric embodied a history of the episcopal see.¹⁸ The episcopal complex was located on the western side of the city, directly opposite the imperial *palatium* on the eastern side, a situation that was, perhaps, not coincidental (Fig. 115).¹⁹ The Orthodox Baptistery of Ravenna is a centrally planned, octagonal structure. Interestingly, Milan and Aquileia also built octagonal baptisteries around this same time, perhaps indicating an architectural rivalry parallel to the episcopal and political rivalries that these cities also shared. Deborah Deliyannis also pointed out that during the 430’s, Pope Sixtus III redecorated the Lateran Baptistery, and twenty years later, in the 450’s, Bishop Neon redecorated Ravenna’s baptistery.²⁰ This remodeling duel may also signify underlying currents of latent competition between Ravenna and Rome as early as the fifth century.²¹

A large basilica was founded in Classe during the first half of the fifth century by Bishop Peter I (Chrysologus, c. 431 – 450).²² In Ravenna, a church identified by Agnellus as

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¹⁹ Maureen C. Miller, *The Bishop’s Palace. Architecture and Authority in Medieval Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 119 – 120 mentions that the earliest communal palace in Ravenna faced the archbishop’s residence across the space known today as the Piazza Arcivescovado. Miller interprets this as evidence that the power of the bishop in the precommunal era, and his relations with the commune, were so well-established that the communal palace was sited with this “preexisting topography of power” in mind.

²⁰ Deliyanhis, 2010, 89.

²¹ Or, as the saying goes: “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.”

²² Agnellus, c. 24.
the Church of the Apostles (*Basilica Apostolorum*)\(^{23}\) was constructed at this time, and a subdeacon named Gemellus was also responsible for the construction of a church dedicated to St. Agnes during the reign of Bishop Exuperantius (473 – 477).\(^{24}\) Other buildings recorded by Agnellus as being constructed during the fifth century are mostly associated with bishops, and include a large percentage of burial structures. All in all, enough archaeological evidence remains to support many of Agnellus’s observations, and certainly enough to demonstrate that Ravenna during the fifth century experienced a building boom. Significantly, while in the beginning of the century the constructions were mostly associated with imperial patrons, by the end of the fifth century bishops had eclipsed the empire in terms of monumentalizing the city.\(^{25}\)

Many, if not all, of the buildings constructed at this time were richly encrusted with mosaic decoration. Perhaps the most resplendent of these mosaic encrustations is found in the “Mausoleum” of Galla Placidia, where the brilliant colors and stunning compositions are considered some of the finest surviving examples from anywhere in the world. Sculptural productions during this period were also of the highest quality. The so-called *Isaac* sarcophagus, for instance, with its cool, symmetrical composition and carefully modeled reliefs likely dates to the early fifth century (Fig. 30), as do a number of the highest quality sarcophagi from Ravenna, as discussed in the previous chapter.

II. Ravenna in the Ostrogothic Period: Capital of the King

\(^{23}\) Agnellus, c. 21, c. 29, c. 30, c. 56, c. 117, c. 121.

\(^{24}\) Agnellus, c. 31.

\(^{25}\) Deliyannis, 2010, 104. Andrew Gillet argues that between the years of 450 – 476 the weight of the evidence points to Rome, not Ravenna, as the main imperial residence. This might explain why there is little imperial patronage of buildings in the later fifth century, and instead bishops assumed the role at this time as the greatest patrons of the arts in Ravenna. Gillet, 162.
At the end of the fifth century, the general Odoacer deposed the last emperor of the western empire and assumed the title “King of Italy,” establishing his capital city at Ravenna. And, in 493, it was at Ravenna that the Ostrogothic ruler Theodoric murdered Odoacer and assumed the title of king in his stead. For the next fifty years, the Ostrogoths ruled Italy. At first they enjoyed the tacit consent of the emperor in Constantinople. Ravenna served as both the symbolic and functional power-base of the Amal dynasty until the year 540, when Theodoric’s granddaughter Matasuntha, the last of the Amal rulers, was captured at Ravenna by Byzantine forces, and taken to Constantinople.

While during the fifth century, under the reign of the last western emperors, Ravenna was considered a sedes imperialii, under Theodoric it truly became the undisputed capital city, the center of political power in Italy. Theodoric’s decision to establish himself at

26 Theodoric had been captured and taken hostage to Constantinople when he was a child, in 461. He lived for almost ten years in the capital city before being returned to his people around 470-471. Upon the death of his father, he became the leader of his people in 474. By 484 he had become the consul for the eastern empire, and in 488 he led his Ostrogothic forces into Italy. It is unclear whether Theodoric was operating under the command of Emperor Zeno, or whether he took his own initiative in the Italian invasion. What is clear is that the Byzantine emperors did not oppose Theodoric’s move, and that Theodoric himself never attempted to usurp the title of “Emperor,” reserving that for the ruler in Constantinople. The literary sources for Ostrogothic Italy mostly come from Roman authors who supported and worked with Theodoric. Ennodius, bishop of Pavia, wrote letters, poems, and a panegyric to Theodoric in 507. Ennodius, Magni Felicis Ennodii Opera Omnia, edited by Wilhelm August Ritter von Hartel, Corpus scriptorium ecclesiasticorum latinorum 6 (Vindobonae: Apvd. C. Geroldi filium, 1882). Cassiodorus Senator worked in the Ostrogothic government throughout the first half of the sixth century and served as consul in 514. He published a set of letters in 537, known as the Variae, that were written by him on behalf of the various Ostrogothic rulers he served. Cassiodorus Senator, The variae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator, translated with notes and an introduction by Sam J. Barnish, Translated Texts for Historians 12 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992). Cassiodorus also wrote a chronicle, the Chronica, and a history of the Goths that is now lost but is thought to have been the source for the later Getica, a history of the Goths written in the 550’s by Jordanes. Cassiodorus Senator, Chronica minora, edited by Theodore Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi 11 (Berlin: n.p., 1894). Jordanes, The Origin and Deeds of the Goths (Getica), translated by Charles C. Mierow, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1908). An anonymous author wrote a history of Theodoric’s reign today as the Anonymous Valesianus pars posterior. Anonymous Valesianus, edited by Theodore Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi 9 (Berlin: n.p., 1892), 306 - 329. Finally, Procopius of Caesarea, a staff officer in Justinian’s army at the time of the reconquest of Italy, wrote a history of the war between the Goths and Byzantines. Procopius, History of the Wars, Secret History, and Buildings, translated, edited, abridged and with an introduction by Averil Cameron ( New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967). See also: Deliyannis, 2010, 106 - 107.
Ravenna instead of Rome was likely a practical one, as well as a calculated political maneuver. On the one hand, Ravenna had the attractions of defensibility and ease of communication that had appealed to Honorius in the early part of the fifth century. On the other hand, Theodoric was cognizant of his position as an ethnic “outsider” and took specific measures neither to provoke the Italian people, nor the emperor at Constantinople. He did not assume the title of “emperor,” but rather ruled, at least ostensibly, as a proxy for the emperor. In Italy, he reached out to the Senate and to the pope, and in the year 500 he formally visited Rome and was welcomed by the Senate and pope, and officially recognized by them as the ruler of Italy. Theodoric respectfully left the Roman Senate intact and unmolested at Rome. As a result of his deferential treatment, the Senate was disinclined to do anything other than support Theodoric, who remained at Ravenna, wielding all actual political control. During his reign, the epithet *Felix Ravenna*, invoking the position of the city as the seat of government, first appeared on a series of bronze coins issued by the mint of Ravenna (Fig. 119).

In fact, Ravenna’s defensibility cannot be better illustrated than by the example provided by the contest between Odoacer and Theodoric. Theodoric had conquered most of the Italian peninsula by the year 490. He besieged Ravenna for two years, and, finally, assembled a fleet of ships to create a blockade. In early 493, Bishop John brokered a peace agreement between Odoacer and Theodoric whereby the two were to share joint rule. Ten days after Theodoric entered Ravenna, he assassinated Odoacer and then assumed sole rule. This episode, therefore, may demonstrate that even a military commander such as Theodoric was unable to take the city by force. It should be noted that Andrew Gillet rejects this notion of Ravenna’s attractiveness to Theodoric because of its defensibility, arguing that Theodoric’s success in the siege was due to the fact that he reduced Odoacer to famine, and that it would have, therefore, been ridiculous for Theodoric himself to set himself up at Ravenna because of its isolated position. Gillet, 156.

28 Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy 489 – 554*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought Fourth Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8. Theodoric’s visit to Rome in 500 was an extended one, lasting about five months. Gillet, 156.

29 Gillet, 155 – 156.
Theodoric sponsored several building campaigns in Ravenna in order to enhance his chosen capital. Three letters from the *Variae*, written by Cassiodorus Senator on behalf of Theodoric, order individuals or groups to send building materials to Ravenna. In *Variae* I.6, for instance, Theodoric writes to Agapitus, the Praetorian Prefect of Rome, requesting that he send marble-workers and mosaicists from Rome for the construction of a *basilica Herculis*. Under Theodoric, building materials and probably even workmen were imported from the east as well. The nave colonnade of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, constructed under Theodoric, consisted of twelve columns with matching bases, capitals, and impost blocks made of Proconnesian marble, all dating to the early sixth century (Fig. 104). These pieces were presumably made and exported as a set, the first of such examples from Ravenna. Liturgical furnishings, including several of the marble *transennae* and *plutea* discussed in Chapter 2, are also crafted of Proconnesian marble, again demonstrating the importation of building materials from the east during Theodoric’s tenure. Some of the sarcophagi likely date to the early sixth century, suggesting that there were local workshops active either creating monuments from scratch, modifying pre-existing pagan tombs from the region, and / or refining roughed-out sarcophagi imported from the east. A letter in the *Variae* from Theodoric to a marble-worker named Daniel gives the sculptor a monopoly on the furnishing of sarcophagi to the inhabitants of Ravenna, but remonstrates with him not to overcharge

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31 The columns and capitals are incised with Greek letters referencing the workshops in which they were made. Identical marks have been noted on marble in churches in Constantinople and Ephesus. See Chapter 2, 109 - 110 and 115, n. 139.

32 Chapter 2, 110 - 113.
bereft families for his work. This snippet supports the assumption that during Theodoric’s reign there were both active workshop(s?) and a vibrant market for luxury sculpture in Ravenna. The ambo and capitals found in the Arian cathedral, constructed under Theodoric, were sculpted from stone quarried in nearby Istria, another clue that there was at least one sculptural workshop community in Ravenna at this time.

The *Anonymous Valesianus* recorded that Theodoric built a palace at Ravenna, and a site to the south and east of the church of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, which Agnellus claimed to have been built by Theodoric, has been identified as the “palace of Theodoric.” Archaeological excavations at the site show evidence of domestic foundations dating to the imperial period (2nd cen. BCE – 1st cen. CE), succeeded by additions and modifications in the fourth century, and extensive renovations and additions in the fifth and early sixth. This evidence seems to suggest, then, that Theodoric may have expanded and built his *palatium* on the foundations of an older structure, whether for practical or symbolic reasons. Clearly, the *palatium*, for Theodoric, was an important symbol of his reign, since it is prominently included in the representation of the city of Ravenna in the mosaics of the southwestern nave wall in Sant’Apollinare Nuovo (Fig. 86).

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35 *Anonymous Valesianus*, 2.71.

36 Agnellus c. 39, c. 94, c. 119, c. 122, c. 132, c. 152.

Sant’Apollinare Nuovo was originally dedicated to Christ, according to Agnellus, when it was first constructed under Theodoric.\(^{38}\) It was redecorated at the time of its conversion to Orthodoxy\(^{39}\) under Bishop Agnellus, and so it is assumed that the mosaic decoration at the church represents at least two distinct phases of production. The compositions on the nave walls are two processions, one of virgins and one of martyrs (Fig. 85 and Fig. 86). On the north wall, a procession of virgins leaves from a representation of Classe, at the western end of the nave, and moves towards an image of the Virgin, seated with the Christ child on her lap, at the eastern end. On the south wall, a procession of martyrs leaves from a representation of Ravenna, at the western end of the nave, and moves towards an image of Christ enthroned at the eastern end. Several past scholars assumed that originally the processions would not have been virgins and martyrs, but rather a royal procession featuring Theodoric and his court. If this was, in fact, the case, this political procession would have been related to the imagery of political processions in the churches of San Giovanni Evangelista and San Vitale.\(^{40}\) There is also a surviving mosaic fragment of the head

\(^{38}\) Agnellus, in fact, asserts that there was an inscription written above the windows in the apse that read “King Theodoric made this church from its foundations in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Agnellus, c. 86: *Theodoricus rex hanc ecclesiam a fundamentis in nomine Domini nostril Jesu Christi fecit.*

\(^{39}\) The Ostrogoths were Arian Christians - that is they accepted the teachings of the early fourth century priest of Alexandria, Arius, who taught that God the Father created Christ and, thus, Christ was a subordinate being to God the Father. This teaching was condemned at the Ecumenical council of Nicaea in 325. The people who accepted the teachings of Arius were lumped under the term “Arian,” even though their beliefs varied as to the exact nature of the Father and Son. For the most part, Theodoric was recorded to have been tolerant of Orthodox Christians during his reign; in fact, several Orthodox buildings were constructed at this time in Ravenna.

\(^{40}\) Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 168 claims that the original, processional imagery represented the Arians’ claim to control the urban environment. Deborah Deliyannis questions the assumption, since it would have made Sant’Apollinare the only known basilica to have had a political procession on the nave wall (instead of in the apse as at San Giovanni and San Vitale). Deliyannis, 2010, 171 - 172.
of a figure labeled “Justinian,” and it may have originally been a portrait of Theodoric that was relabeled “Justinian” after the Orthodox modifications (Fig. 117). Another possibility is that the original processions included specifically Arian saints and martyrs, and were changed to Orthodox figures during the renovation. Whether or not the original processions involved royalty or Arian saints and martyrs, the modifications wrought during the later sixth century make it nearly impossible to do anything but speculate as to the original iconography. Nevertheless, it is clear from the images of Classe and Ravenna that were left intact at the western end of the nave that Theodoric wanted to include his particular capital city as a prominent part of the mosaic program at Sant’Apollinare Nuovo.

Under Theodoric, a large basilica was also built as the cathedral for the Arian bishop of Ravenna, and dedicated to St. Theodore. After the return of the Orthodox to power, this church was rededicated to the Holy Spirit, and is known today as Santo Spirito. A freestanding baptistry accompanied the Arian cathedral (parallel to the Ursiana and Orthodox Baptistry of the previous century).41 Theodoric also built a large, freestanding mausoleum for himself at Ravenna.42

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41 As discussed in the previous chapter, the apostle who walks behind Peter in the dome mosaic at the Arian baptistery is depicted with a “mutton chop” style mustache, but no beard. Deliyannis suggests that this distinct hairstyle may have been meant to demarcate the man as a Goth, since the Goths wore their hair differently than did the Romans. This figure, an apostle ostensibly but also, by default, a generic “Christ follower” because of his lack of definite identification, may have been purposefully depicted as Gothic in order to assert that the Goths were part of the Christian community of Ravenna alongside Latin peoples. I think this suggestion is particularly interesting when one considers the context of the decoration. The baptistry was the place in which the ritual of baptism occurred exclusively. Baptism was the rite that initiated a person into the Christian faith, and solidified his or her position in the Christian community, a community that transcended time, place, ethnicity, even life itself. If Deliyannis’s interpretation is correct, it signifies that Theodoric and the Ostrogoths were building this idea of community at Ravenna through the artistic productions they sponsored. While in one sense the “community” represented in the procession was meant to represent a transcendent Christian community, it was also particularly Ravennate. Where else would it be more appropriate to see Roman and Gothic-looking figures side-by-side, in ritual procession, revolving around the central figure of Christ? See Chapter 2, 91, n. 106.
Theodoric was by no means intolerant of Orthodox Christianity in Italy. During the Ostrogothic period, the Orthodox bishops of Ravenna — John I (477 – 94), Peter II (494 – 520), Aurelian (521), Ecclesius (522 – 32), Ursicinus (533 – 36), and Victor (538 – 45) — sponsored a number of important constructions. Though they were forced to share power with Arian bishops appointed by Theodoric, they continued to wield significant ecclesiastical and temporal authority. The episcopium of Ravenna was expanded and enriched during this period, as was a large basilica known as the Petriana with its own baptistry. Bishop Ecclesius began construction of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore and San Vitale sometime between 526 and 532; both of these projects were sponsored by the banker Julian. Julian was also a major financial participant in the construction of the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, begun under Ecclesius’ successor Ursicinus.

While Theodoric was able to mediate between several competing factions in Ostrogothic Italy — Romans, Goths, Arians, Orthodox, external forces — and, thus, maintain control of a highly diversified kingdom, his successors were not as fortunate. After his death in 526, his eight-year-old grandson Athalaric was proclaimed king under the regency of his mother Amalasuntha. When Athalaric died at the age of sixteen in 534, his mother assumed the title of queen. Unfortunately for her, she fell out of favor with the Gothic nobility and was imprisoned and murdered by her cousin Theodahad in 535. Because Amalasuntha before her death had appealed to Emperor Justinian for aid, Amalasuntha’s murder gave the eastern emperor an excuse to intervene in Ostrogothic affairs. Justinian instituted his quest to reconquer the western half of the erstwhile Roman empire.

III. Byzantine Ravenna: City of Exarchs and Archbishops


43 Agnellus, c. 26, c. 50, c. 67, c. 91.
Once Justinian decided that the time was ripe to reintegrate the western portions of the empire into his fold, in 535 he launched an aggressive military campaign to recapture the Italian peninsula. During the course of this drawn-out engagement, plague broke out in Italy in 542, and cities in Italy such as Milan and Rome suffered debilitating effects during the mid-sixth century.\textsuperscript{44} In spite of these troubles, Ravenna emerged from the Gothic Wars relatively unscathed. Ravenna was captured by the Byzantines in the year 540, and Matasuntha, the last of the Ostrogothic, Amal dynasty, was captured by Justinian’s forces and sent to Constantinople. The Byzantines set up an administration in Italy to govern their western holdings, and they chose to use Ravenna as their administrative capital in the west, installing there an “Exarch” who was meant to rule Italy on behalf of the emperor in Constantinople.\textsuperscript{45} Like their Roman and Ostrogothic predecessors, the Byzantines chose Ravenna for logistical reasons (particularly the ease of transport to Constantinople), for security reasons, and for the fact that the bureaucratic institutions that survived in Italy were largely, by this time, found at Ravenna. Rome of course continued to be an important city since it was the seat of the pope, who increasingly held political and practical, as well as ecclesiastical and spiritual, power in his sphere. But Ravenna retained the army and the civil

\textsuperscript{44} Milan was sacked in 539. Rome witnessed dramatic depopulation and the dissolution of the Senate, and changed hands four times during the course of the Gothic Wars. Peter Llewellyn, \textit{Rome in the Dark Ages} (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1993), especially Ch. 2 “The Gothic Wars,” 52 – 77.

\textsuperscript{45} This period of time in Ravenna’s history is less well attested by literary sources than is the preceding Gothic age. Most of the textual information about the period comes from papal letters and the writings of Pope Gregory I (the Great). Gregory is also an important source for the picture of desolation in Italy (particularly, from his perspective, in Rome) during the sixth century as a result of numerous crises. Pope Gregory I (the Great), \textit{The Letters of Gregory the Great}, translated with an introduction and notes by John R.C. Martyn, 3 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2004). Pope Gregory I (the Great), \textit{Pastoral Care (Regula Pastoralis)}, translated by Henry Davis, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation 11 (New York: Newman Press, 1978). Paul the Deacon, a monk of Lombard descent, wrote a history of the Lombards (also known as the Langobards) in the 780’s and 790’s. Paul the Deacon, \textit{History of the Langobards}, translated by William Dudley Fouke (Philadelphia: Department of History, University of Pennsylvania, 1907). The term \textit{exarchus} first appears in Italy around 584; the office seems to have developed sometime after Justinian’s “Pragmatic Sanction” of 554. Deliyannis, 2010, 208.
administration, and because of its history as the home of rulers it had an ideological prestige associated with it as well. The building campaigns of the late imperial Roman and Ostrogothic periods also provided an infrastructure that was necessary for an administrative capital.

After the reconquest, sometime before 553, Justinian gave the bishop of Ravenna, Maximian, the title of “Archbishop.” From this time a series of monumental additions were made to the episcopium, making it highly visible as an opposite pole of authority in the city. In 554, Justinian issued an edict known as the “Pragmatic Sanction,” in which a number of political changes were put into place. The right to elect provincial governors and to take responsibility for military requisitions was granted to bishops as well as local magnates. This shift signified that the bishop was becoming a figure of ever greater political importance in late-sixth-century Italy. As archbishop of the capital city of the Byzantine administration, Ravenna’s head cleric was a decidedly prominent figure.

Ecclesiastically, Ravenna continued to exercise jurisdiction over the territories granted to the see’s care in the mid-fifth century. In addition to these, Pope Gregory I (the Great) in 592 also assigned to Ravenna’s oversight a number of sees in northern Italy that were by then in Lombard-controlled territories. At this time, the archbishop of Ravenna was

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46 Some scholars have seen Justinian’s elevation of Maximian, and his provision of funds for the building of churches in Ravenna, as an establishment of a “state-church” system in Ravenna, or a desire on the part of the emperor to exalt Ravenna to a quasi-patriarchal status as a kind of second Constantinople. But, rather than an attempt to elevate the see to apostolic authority, Justinian’s policy seems to have been more limited and self-interested. The emperor also conferred superior metropolitan rank on politically favored cities such as Carthage and Justiniana Prima. Robert A. Markus, “Carthage – Prima Justiniana – Ravenna: An Aspect of Justinian’s Kirchenpolitik,” Byzantion 49 (1979): 277 – 306. Justinian apparently held a strict conception of ordered hierarchies, and this meant that that ecclesiastical standing of a city should match its civil status. In so doing, Justinian also confirmed Ravenna’s importance as a provincial capital. Brown, 1979, 8.

47 Brown, 1979, 2 and Thomas Brown, Gentlemen and Officers. Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy A.D. 554 – 800 (Hertford, UK: Stephen Austin and Sons, Ltd., 1984), 176 - 177.
still being chosen by either the Byzantine ruler or the pope, and the archbishop had to be confirmed by the pope in Rome, regardless of whose choice he was. Exactly when the bishops of Ravenna began wearing the ceremonial *pallium* is unclear. Andreas Agnellus linked the wearing of the *pallium* to the grant of metropolitan authority that was given (or so he thought) in the fifth century. In his text he always referred to the *pallium* as a symbol of authorization given to a newly appointed or confirmed bishop by the pope or emperor.\(^{48}\) After Maximian was elevated to the rank of archbishop by the emperor, he and his successors began to use the *pallium* more extensively, so much so that Pope Gregory reprimanded the archbishops of Ravenna for their intemperate use of the symbolic vestment.\(^{49}\) Gregory wrote to both Archbishop John II and to Archbishop Marinian to admonish them against wearing the *pallium* more often than custom required, and he accused John II, in particular, of being corrupted by secular influence in this regard.\(^{50}\) It seems obvious that the archbishops of Ravenna were taking full advantage of the concessions that they had received both from the popes and from the emperor to increase their visibility and their status in Ravenna, and perhaps beyond.\(^{51}\)

\(^{48}\) Agnellus, c. 40, c. 70.

\(^{49}\) During the time of Gregory, since the records of previous grants and practices were in dispute, the archbishop was permitted to use the *pallium* outside of Mass during four specified litanies, and perhaps during the translation of relics. Pope Gregory the Great, *Letters*, vol. 1, 78 – 79.

\(^{50}\) Pope Gregory the Great, *Letters*, vol. 1, 3.54 and 3.54a, and vol. 2, 5.61.

\(^{51}\) Gregory also reprimanded the bishop of Milan for mentioning John of Ravenna’s name during the mass, as would be done for a patriarch. Pope Gregory the Great, *Letters*, vol. 1, 4.37. John was a Roman by origin, and a friend of Gregory’s. Gregory’s *Regula Pastoralis* was dedicated to a “John,” who may have been this archbishop. Marinian was also a friend of Gregory’s, and was brought up in Gregory’s monastic establishment on the Coelian Hill. Robert Markus has pointed out that it is striking that, in spite of these two archbishops’ close ties to Rome, they became entangled in local interests at Ravenna, into circles in which there was strong opposition to Roman authority. He says “the readiness with which two ‘outsider’ archbishops were sucked into the whirlpool of local aspirations is perhaps the most significant indication of the emergence of a powerful
The power of the archbishop of Ravenna was augmented by the weakness of the Byzantine administration. Though the Byzantines were successful in ousting the Ostrogoths from Ravenna in 540, and in claiming a large amount of Italian real estate as the province of the Byzantine “Exarchate,” their hold on Italy was tenuous at best. The exarch’s role as a representative of an absent emperor put him in the position of being an outsider and a proxy in a land wearied by war, constant threats of barbarian invasion, plague, depopulation, economic decline, and environmental disasters (severe drought resulted in famine in Italy in the year 604). The Lombards (or Langobards) moved into northern Italy starting in 568 and began to conquer and inhabit large amounts of land. By the year 575, the only areas of the peninsula that remained in Byzantine control were Naples, Calabria, Sicily, the coast north of Genoa, Ravenna and its surrounding territories (known as the Pentapolis after the five cities of Rimini, Pesaro, Fano, Senigallia, and Ancona), Rome, and a narrow piece of territory stretching from Ravenna to Rome along the Via Flaminia.\(^{52}\) In the late sixth century the Lombardic Duchy of Spoleto was created, effectively blocking communications between northern and southern Italy. Geographically, the region of the Exarchate of Ravenna and the Pentapolis, the core of the Byzantine administrative entity, was bounded by the peaks of the Apennines to the north (separating it from Liguria and the Tuscan Lombards) and the perpendicular spurs of these mountains (separating it from the Duchies of Rome and Spoleto) (Fig. 118).\(^{53}\) The geography of the region lent itself to an internal cohesion, and even a sense of ecclesiastical, administrative, and aristocratic groups in local society.” Robert A. Markus, “Ravenna and Rome, 554 – 604,” *Byzantion* 51 (1981): 578.

\(^{52}\) Deliyannis, 2010, 237.

of isolationism. In 592, Pope Gregory delegated temporary powers over the sees in the Pentapolis to Ravenna because of “the enemy presence between us.”

In addition, a schism known as the “Three Chapters Controversy” broke out in the sixth century and pitted the Byzantine emperor against several sees in northern Italy. The schism arose over the decision of the Council of Constantinople in 553 to condemn the writings of three theologians, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa, which had been accepted by the earlier Council of Chalcedon. These theologians were accused of the heresy of nestorianism, or the belief that Christ had two separate natures, one human and one divine, instead of two natures merged into one. The Byzantine administration supported the Council’s decision. Several northern Italian bishoprics, including Milan and Aquileia, refused to recognize the condemnation, because, they argued, doing so would mean rejecting the decisions of Chalcedon. The pope and archbishop of Ravenna supported the emperor’s viewpoint. But the authority of the exarch remained threatened in northern Italy, as Ravenna was the only see not in schism. Rome was reluctant to curb Ravenna’s ecclesiastical aspirations because it did not want to alienate itself from the sole Orthodox see in northern Italy. Both emperor and pope needed Ravenna as a counter to the schismatics in Milan and Aquileia. During this period, Ravenna was given jurisdiction over Istria and Liguria as well as Emilia, and in all three provinces the consecration of non-schismatic bishops was carried out by the archbishop of Ravenna. The archbishop’s name

54 Gregory the Great, Letters, vol. 1, 2.25. The “enemy” refers to the Lombards.

55 For a recent treatment of this controversy, see Catherine Cubitt and Celia Chazelle, eds., The Crisis of the Oikumene: The Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth Century Mediterranean (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2007).

56 Brown, 1979, 9.
was also inserted in the canons of the Ambrosian mass after that of the pope.\textsuperscript{57} Thus, the Church of Ravenna became an agent of imperial policy in both religious and political realms. By the year 600, Ravenna’s archbishops had risen to the top of the episcopal hierarchy in Italy, second only to the popes.\textsuperscript{58}

Given the relative positions of the exarch and the archbishop in Ravenna, it is perhaps unsurprising to note that there is no “exarchal” iconography that developed in the artistic productions of Ravenna during this period.\textsuperscript{59} Instead, it is the bishop who developed an iconographic identity to coincide with his developing political and ecclesiastical stature. All told, there were six major churches and several smaller ones built or consecrated in the region of Ravenna and Classe between the years of 540 and 600. Agnellus gave no credit to any exarchs or prefects for architectural patronage during this period, though he listed many major foundations by archbishops. Under Maximian, a number of the constructions begun by his predecessors were decorated or completed. San Vitale, Sant’Apollinare in Classe, San Michele in Africisco, St. Andrew, St. Probus, and St. Euphemia were completed, decorated, or consecrated during his tenure. Additionally, he founded a church dedicated to St. Stephen, and the Domus Tricollis in the \textit{episcopium}. There were a number of large, richly decorated basilicas built in and around Classe to honor Ravenna’s earliest bishops. San Severo was built inside Classe’s walls, but other churches were constructed outside the suburb atop former Roman cemeteries.\textsuperscript{60} Visitors coming to Ravenna would have passed by these

\textsuperscript{57} Brown, 1979, 9.

\textsuperscript{58} For a summary of the relations between Ravenna and Rome in the second half of the sixth century, see Markus, 1981.

\textsuperscript{59} Deliyannis, 2010, 209.

\textsuperscript{60} Deliyannis, 2010, 258. These churches included St. Probus, St. Eleuchadius, and St. Euphemia \textit{ad mare}. 

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constructions on their way into the city on the Via Popilia and, therefore, their first impression of the city would have been the antiquity and prestige of its Episcopal see.

In the decorative programs inside churches, recurrent themes are the glorification of the person and office of the bishop, and the subtle promotion of Ravenna and her Church to the high rank of courtly city and ecclesiastical powerhouse. For example, the mosaics in the presbytery of San Vitale have mosaics illustrating scenes of sacrifice, including the sacrifices of Abel and Melchizedek, the Sacrifice of Isaac (Figs. 99 and 100), Saint Vitalis offering his body and Bishop Ecclesius offering a model of San Vitale to Christ in the apse (Fig. 34), the Lamb of God in the presbytery vault (Fig. 103), and the famous mosaic panels on the north and south apse walls representing the donations of Emperor Justinian ([Fig. 97] prominently attended by Bishop Maximian) and Empress Theodora (Fig. 98). The program communicates both theological and political themes, blended together in a liturgical meditation on the Eucharist. These images of sacrificial giving are fittingly clustered in the area of the church in which the officiant would regularly offer up the wafer and cup of communion. But they also, by default, continually reference the person of the cleric, the worthy intercessor who performs the ritual of sacrifice (Abel, Melchizedek, Abraham, Bishop Ecclesius, and, obviously, Archbishop Maximian). This program subtly, yet persistently, points to the head of the Church of Ravenna as the natural successor in a long line of faithful shepherds, beginning with Abel and progressing through the ages to the contemporary moment. The historical and spiritual legitimacy of the Archbishopric was thereby implied. And many scholars have noted that Maximian’s insertion of himself into the Justinianic panel beside the emperor was intended to be a blatant allusion to his imperial connections. Above him, in the apse, Christ himself blessed the gift offered by Ecclesius, an important founding member of
the Ravennate Church. Maximian’s authority symbolically radiated from his predecessor; in a very literal, and pragmatic way he also reminded the viewer that his power in Ravenna was sanctioned by the Byzantine emperor. The crowning achievement of the iconography of the bishop and bishop-glorification is found in the apse mosaics of the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, which is discussed in the following chapter.

Importations of marble and sculptural productions continued to flow into Ravenna under Maximian’s patronage. A set of liturgical furnishings made of Proconnesian marble were imported for the refurbishment of the Ursiana cathedral, and a large ambo, also in Proconnesian marble, was provided for the cathedral by Bishop Agnellus, the successor of Maximian (Fig. 112). The church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe was outfitted with a set of beautiful Proconnesian marble columns and capitals (Fig. 128). The large ivory *cathedra*, or throne of the archbishops of Ravenna, also dates from this period (Fig. 114), with a style of the carving that has been compared to ivories from Constantinople and the eastern Mediterranean. While these sculptural productions clearly indicate a strong relationship with the east (in the realms of transport, commerce, and aesthetic values), it is important to bear in mind that this practice of importation from the east was not new during the sixth century. Rather, it represented a continuation, albeit an acceleration, of the sort of luxury trading that was popular during previous centuries, under both imperial Roman and

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62 Stylistic comparisons with Constantinopolitan ivories have led scholars to believe that the *cathedra* is either a direct importation from the eastern capital, or a product of a Ravennate workshop with itinerant, eastern artists. See Chapter 2, 115 - 117.
Ostrogothic leaders.63 Shipwrecks discovered on the bottom of the sea of Marmara carrying sculptural cargo reveal that materials were sometimes exported from Proconnesus in complete sets, and other times were exported as roughed out pieces.64 This indicates that there were active local workshops in and around the region of Ravenna that would have routinely finished materials that were sent in primitive stages of design from the east.65 Additionally, the finely detailed marble capitals of Sant’Apollinare in Classe show no signs of damage related to transport, which also points to the likelihood that these pieces were carved (or, at least refined) in situ. In her catalog of the large surviving body of sculpture

63 From the second century on, marble sculptural items, prominently including columns, capitals, and sarcophagi, were regularly shaped and carved at the imperial quarries in the eastern Mediterranean, particularly at Proconnesus. These items were shipped in unfinished states and refined in situ either by local stonemasons or by stonemasons dispatched with the marble to finish the pieces and / or instruct local craftsmen. Sometimes, complete sets of these materials, especially architecturally structural items such as columns and capitals, were sent together, as a sort of prefabricated, basilica set. Marble from Proconnesus had been used in the apse of San Giovanni Evangelista, the basilica apostolorum, Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, and the capella arcivescovile. Deliyannis, 2010, 219. For the marble trade in late antiquity / middle ages, see: John Bryan Ward-Perkins, “Il commercio dei sarcofagi in marmo fra Grecia e Italia settentrionale,” Atti del I Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia dell’Italia Settentrionale, 119 -124 (Torino, 1963); John Bryan Ward-Perkins, “Quarrying in Antiquity: Technology, Tradition and Social Change,” ProcPrAc 57 (1971): 137 – 158; Nusin Asgari, “Roman and Early Byzantine Marble Quarries of Proconnesus,” Xth International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Papers, Ankara – Izmir, 479 – 480 (Ankara, 1978); Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, “Proconnesian Marble in Ninth-Century Ravenna,” in Deborah M. Deliyannis and Judson J. Emerick, eds., Archaeology and Architecture: Studies in Honor of C. L. Striker, 37 – 41 (Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2005); Cosimo D’Angela, “Produzione e commercio di sarcofagi tra le due sponde adriatiche nel VI secolo,” in La cristianizzazione dell’adriatico, ed. Giuseppe Cuscito, 539 - 552 (Trieste: Editreg, 2008).

64 The wreck included a complete set of Proconnesian marble architectural sculpture and furnishings for a basilica. It was likely heading to a Justinianic church in Northern Africa when it sank off the coast of Sicily, near Syracuse. This find provided evidence to support the conclusions of scholars such as Ward-Perkins. See Gerhard Kapitän, “Elementi architettonici per una basilica dal relitto navale del VI secolo di Marzamemi (Syracuse),” Corso sull’arte Ravennate e Bizantina 26 (1980): 71 – 136; Gerhard Kapitän, “The Church Wreck off Marzamemi,” Archaeology 22 (1969): 122 – 133.

65 The presence of local workshops is also indicated by the multitude of pre-Christian pieces (particularly sarcophagi) that were recarved in Ravenna during the late antique and early medieval periods for use by Christian patrons. Rafaella Farioli-Campanati, “Ravenna e i suoi rapporti con Costantinopoli: la scultura (secoli V-VI),” in Venezia e Bisanzio. Aspetti della cultura artistica bizantina da Ravenna a Venezia (V – XIV secolo) ed. Clementina Rizzardi (Venice: Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2005), 18.
from the Cathedral of Eufrasius at Poreč, Ann Terry suggested that Ravenna may have functioned as an intermediary hub for sculptural items between Constantinople and the more isolated areas of the upper Adriatic. She argued that the sculptural group from Poreč is too highly varied, in terms of style, type, and quality, to represent the sort of mass-produced, pre-fabricated “set” of furnishings like that discovered in the Marzamemi wreck. Instead, Terry proposed that the mixed assortment of materials probably was acquired in more than one way. The close iconographic parallels between items at Poreč and Ravenna (including, for instance, the “animal-grid” ambos that appear at Ravenna but are not known widely from elsewhere in the Mediterranean) suggests that some of the Poreč pieces came from the workshop(s) in Ravenna.66 As discussed in the previous chapter, the tombs from Ravenna represent monuments that were imported from the east, those crafted locally, and hybrid examples that were probably roughed out in quarries in the east, and then finished in Ravenna.

Objects and styles gleaned from Constantinople exuded exoticism and luxury, and importation of these materials reached its apex in the sixth century. Nevertheless, it is an overstatement to extrapolate from their popularity the notion that Ravenna was from this point onwards a city powerfully under the influence of Constantinople. Ravenna’s history was one of cosmopolitanism, though this complexity and sophistication blossomed as a result of the political connections to the eastern capital in the second half of the sixth century. Both André Guillou,67 and Thomas Brown68 have challenged the notion that Ravenna’s culture

66 “It would seem . . . that the existence of recognizably ‘Ravennate’ types of furnishings, such as altars and ambos, might argue that in addition to importing sculpture from Constantinople, Ravenna itself possessed active workshops that turned out quality sculpture.” Ann Terry, “The Sculpture at the Cathedral of Eufrasius,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988): 56ff.

could be characterized as “Greek” or “eastern” after the year 540. There was certainly an influx of eastern peoples to the region in the post-reconquest era as a result of mercenaries and soldiers brought over by Belisaurus, Narses, and other Byzantine generals settling in the newly reconquered territories after their military careers were complete. A purposeful transplant of eastern peoples may also have been part of the Byzantine program to shore up support for the Exarchate in Italy. Plus, dramatic depopulation in the Gothic-War-era necessitated new laborers to reinvigorate the flagging economy.

Most Greeks who migrated to Italy in the seventh century could probably read and speak Latin, if not write it, evidenced by the fact that notes at the bottom of legal documents continued to be Latin formulas, though sometimes these were also translated into Greek.69 The tomb of exarch Isaac (d. 643) is inscribed with two inscriptions designating Isaac as the occupant – the one on the front of the lid is in Greek, the one on the back is in Latin (Fig. 30). The teaching of letters, the law, and medicine was conducted in Latin. There is no Greek literary production associated with Ravenna that survives, nor any Greek manuscripts preserved from Ravenna during this period.70 Knowledge of the Ravennate liturgy is scanty, though there is a surviving document that dates to the seventh century known as the Rotulus.71 This series of orations was written in Latin as a meditation on the mystery of the

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69 Guillou, 1969, 84.

70 Brown, 1988, 141.

Incarnation of Christ for the liturgy of Advent, and in verse and sentiment it demonstrates traditional Latin culture.\textsuperscript{72} Liturgical cloths found in sarcophagi have invocations and prayers in Latin on them, and most of the inscriptions on sarcophagi are in Latin, though there are a few Greek exceptions (including that of the exarch Isaac mentioned above). All of the notarial acts emanating from the Church of Ravenna, or from high level Byzantine officials for that matter, are drawn up in Latin.\textsuperscript{73} Though clearly the population of Ravenna during the late-sixth and seventh century was heterogenous and diverse, strong cultural ties remained with the west. Eastern influences in all spheres, including artistic, were intermixed freely to lend an air of luxury, exoticism, and refinement. In its very heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism, though, Ravenna was in many ways an exceptional city in Italy culturally, as well as politically.

\textbf{IV. Ravenna in the Seventh Century and beyond: \textit{Régionalisme}}

At the dawn of the seventh century, Ravenna was the hub of an increasingly cohesive culture made up of indigenous Latin peoples, as well as Gothic and eastern immigrants who had settled into the Byzantine Exarchate and the Pentapolis.\textsuperscript{74} Ravenna was by this time the traditional political center in Italy, a major hub of communication and commerce, and an administrative link to the empire in Constantinople. As mentioned above, though the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{72} Guillou, 1969, 114. Brown, 1988, 149.
  \item \textsuperscript{74} Originally most of the military units, called \textit{numeri}, in the Exarchate were made up of foreign mercenaries and / or soldiers from the east. But Byzantine commanders also recruited local units attached to major metropolitan centers (there were \textit{numeri}, for instance, attached to Milan, Ravenna, and Verona). Eventually the units from the east were integrated into the local \textit{numeri} of Italy. Many of the soldiers from the east, after completing their military careers, ended up settling in the Exarchate instead of returning to their countries of origin. Guillou, 1969, 160.
\end{itemize}
population of Ravenna was diverse, there seems to have been a high level, relatively speaking, of assimilation between the groups, and a general acceptance of a common tongue (at least for legal or formal matters) in Latin. The main military strength of the Exarchate was based at Ravenna, and the army became a powerful social group in and of itself in the seventh century.

The late sixth and seventh centuries were difficult for Italian cities. The Gothic Wars had resulted in huge casualties and destruction of urban infrastructure. Plague struck intermittently, beginning in 542, then again in 600 – 601, famine in 604, and a number of harsh winters resulted in widespread food shortages in the early part of the seventh century.75 After the year 600, Ravenna began to experience the cumulative effects of the economic downturn and the political events that had rocked the Italian peninsula in the second half of the sixth century.76 Depopulation was a devastating consequence of the famine, illness, and war that had swept through Italy in the sixth century. Not only did these crises cause a demographic deficit in Italy, but also a large number of upper class citizens, including senators, landowners, and nobles, left the country to immigrate to the court at Constantinople.77 The harbor at Classe began to silt up in the seventh century, which reduced the level of commerce with the east. The direct influx of water from the Po ceased by the

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75 Brown, 1984.

76 There is little literary evidence from Ravenna during this period of time. The episcopal archive was destroyed by a fire in the year 700, so scholars must rely on a few documents (about 31) that date to the later eighth century for data about the period. Several of these documents are preserved because they were copied in the late tenth century into a register of deeds known as the Codex Bavarus or the Breviarium ecclesiae Ravennatis. Deliyannis, 2010, 278. Giuseppe Rabotti and Currado Curradi, Breviarium ecclesiae Ravennatis (codice bravaro) secoli VII – X, Fonti per la storia d’Italia pubblicate dall’Istituto storico italiano per Medio Evo 110 (Rome: Nella sede dell’Istituto, 1985). For a summary of events from the Roman perspective, see Llewellyn, 1993.

77 For a summary of this period, see Deliyannis, 2010, 204 - 206.
early eighth century; after this the harbor at Classe completely dried up. Because, by the late seventh century, the Lombards controlled much of northern Italy, the sphere of the Byzantine Exarchate had shrunk considerably. With the imperial court in Constantinople itself experiencing significant problems as a result of its aggressive Slavic and Arabic neighbors, there were increasingly fewer resources – financial or military – to spare for the Exarchate in Italy as it declined in power and prominence.

During this time, when turmoil and uncertainty characterized the political establishment in Italy, the power of the archbishops of Ravenna achieved its apogee. The exarch was the chief general responsible for conducting war, chief administrator in charge of financial operations, he judged crimes considered worthy of death or exile, he conducted diplomacy, and he confirmed the election of the pope in Rome. In spite of these sweeping responsibilities, the exarch was ultimately accountable to the imperial government in Constantinople. The sea voyage from Constantinople required fifty days of travel. Exarchs were transferred (or murdered) after three to seven years, on average, though some such as Isaac and Euthychios lasted up to two decades. In general, however, the frequent turnover of the exarchs destabilized the office, and prevented these men from putting roots into the local culture or becoming true authorities in the socio-political landscape. The exarchs relied heavily on the prelates of Ravenna in their governance of Italy, because the bishops were part of the indigenous, social fabric of the region. Of the seventh-century archbishops, only two, Marinian and John V, were not serving as clerics at Ravenna before their election to the bishopric. The archbishops in general had tenures that were much longer than the average

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78 Venice eventually assumed Ravenna’s role as entry point for eastern goods. Brown, 1988, 155.
79 Guillou, 1969, 165.
exarch’s, and so most of them saw several foreign administrators come and go during the course of their reigns. Also, their political power had increased over the years as had their ecclesiastical power. Since the fifth century, the Church in Ravenna had exercised a voice in the nomination of local administrators, in the interest of their flock.  

During the period of the Exarchate, bishops played a part in the selection of local governors. They were also expected to publish imperial legislation. In the year 629, ecclesiastic tribunals were given expanded authority to judge both civic and criminal suits of clerics and monks, and they were empowered not only to enact episcopal justice but also to carry out corporal punishment. The archbishop’s powers in the Exarchate were second only to that of the exarch himself.

The Church of Ravenna was also a large landowner. Many of its territories had been donated to the Church by the faithful for the salvation of their souls. For instance, a man from Naples, Stephan, gave the Church at the beginning of the seventh century his possessions in the town of Gubbio that included two houses, and multiple vineyards. Based on the papyri which record instances of such gifts, not only does it seem the Church of Ravenna was attracting large donations, but also that it was a common phenomenon in the seventh century for military men who had inherited or bought small pieces of land in the post-conquest period to join the church as neophytes, or as newly inducted members of monastic houses. During this time of anxiety and instability, becoming a dependent of the Church rather than a landowner may have seemed a more secure option. Additionally, the

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81 Guillou, 1969, 164.
82 Brown, 1979, 2.
83 Guillou, 1969, 164.
84 Tjäder, no. 18 / 19, 340. Guillou, 1969, 184.
Church also stepped in and took over many dilapidated estates that had been abandoned by the aristocracy who had either perished or fled the country. The significant number of new monastic members, the neophytes mentioned above, were probably used as a labor force by the Church to support these lands, and to return them to productivity. Much of the land that had once been the property of the imperial government was also ceded to the Church, because it was more profitable for the government in Constantinople to grant out the property in exchange for tax revenue than to provide for its production. Consequently, the revenues generated from the rent and taxes obtained from Churches like Ravenna became essential to the imperial government, cementing the symbiotic relationship that had developed between the church and state. The Church of Ravenna, therefore, had become one of the wealthiest entities, and one of the largest classes of landowners in Italy by the end of the century. And, due to the devastation wrought throughout Italy and the increasing inaccessibility of foreign importations of goods, a new society emerged during the seventh century which was dependent upon locally produced and locally consumed goods. At the center of this emerging, regionalized economy and culture was the bishop.

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85 Brown, 1979, 6. Agnellus remarks that the state conferred property confiscated from the Arian Church on Archbishop Agnellus (557 – 570), and this is confirmed by a papyrus document of the early years of Justin II. Agnellus, c. 85, and Tjäder, no. 2.

86 Agnellus records an instance in which Archbishop Sergius (744 – 769) was imprisoned by Pope Stephen at Rome. When Stephen asked Sergius what he would be willing to give in exchange for his freedom, Sergius told Stephen that he could go to Ravenna and inspect the treasures of his church, taking what he would of the precious vases, gold, and silver there. Stephen accepted the bribe, but before he got to Ravenna the clergy hid the majority of the loot. Nevertheless, Agnellus related, Stephen came away with relics, nine measures of gold, a large number of silver vases, and other objects in gold and silver. Agnellus, c. 157 – 158. This episode, whether or not embellished by Agnellus, indicates that the church of Ravenna was extremely wealthy at the time, and gives insight as to the amount of material that must have been plundered from Ravenna in the medieval period by the Franks and others.

Under Archbishop Maurus (644 – 673), the Church of Ravenna stretched its power and influence to its furthest reach. The *Passio* of Apollinaris, the document in which the patron saint of Ravenna was traced to Antioch and said to be a disciple of Peter (therefore demonstrating the apostolic origins of the see), likely dates to the era of the reign of Maurus, as does the false diploma of Valentinian (supposedly written in the fifth century) that conferred metropolitan status on the bishopric of Ravenna, placing fourteen towns in its jurisdiction, and bestowing on the bishop the privilege of the *pallium*. Evidently, as discussed above, many of these privileges had been practiced by the church of Ravenna long before the actual creation of this document, and its false, early dating seeks to lend legitimacy to these activities. The creation of the *Passio* and the diploma in the seventh century suggests that Ravenna’s ecclesiastical officials were actively hoping to promote their see by establishing its ancient authority and privilege. Maurus’ aims were ultimately centered in emancipating the Church of Ravenna from dependence on the popes in Rome. It was Byzantine, imperial policy to elevate the episcopal seat of a city correspondent to its political position. Therefore, when the cleric Reparatus went to Emperor Constans II at the behest of

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88 *Vita beati Apollinaris martyr is archiepiscopi Ravennatis ecclesiae*, ed. by Lodovico A. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores ab anno aere christanae 500 – 1500*, 1.2 (Milan, 1725), 529 – 533. See also *De invention corporis beati Apollinaris martyris, Rerum italicarum Scriptores* 1.2, 538 – 546. *Agnelli,* 2006, 39 – 41, 40 n. 72. Since the details given by the *Passio* differ from those commemorated by Maximian in other contexts, scholars speculate that this work of hagiographic literature was not completed until after the sixth century – possibly it was written during the autocephaly debate to boost Ravenna’s ambitions by underlining the “facts” that its founding bishop was both from the apostolic era and a martyr. Nevertheless, by the time Agnellus was writing his account in the ninth-century it was accepted that Apollinaris was an apostolic-era martyr. Deliyannis, 2010, 260.

89 The right of emancipation was an application by the Byzantine government of the principle affirmed by the 17th canon of the Council of Chalcedon which dictated that ecclesiastical organization should follow political organization, and under which Justinian had operated when granting the archbishopric to Maximian. J.D. Mansi and N. Coleti, *Sacrorum conciliorum nota et amplissima collication*, vol. 7 (Florence, 1762), col. 365. See also: *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, translated and with introduction and notes by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, Translated Texts for Historians 45 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), vol. 3, 100. Deliyannis, 2010, 284 - 284. There is no evidence to suggest that the Byzantine administration was attempting
Archbishop Maurus with a request for independence from Roman jurisdiction, he went with the full support of Exarch George. On March 1 of the year 666, Constans issued a *jussio* that confirmed the rights and titles Ravenna had previously been granted as a metropolitan (those rights were, again, based on the forged document attributed to Valentinian III), but went further to include the grant of “autocephaly,” meaning that Ravenna was no longer considered under the patriarchy of Rome. This privilege stated that the Archbishop of Ravenna could be consecrated by three of his suffragen bishops, instead of by the pope, and that he would not be subject to orders from the pope.\(^90\) A mosaic panel on the lower apse wall of the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Fig. 132) probably commemorated this grant of autocephaly, and will be discussed in the following chapter. In response to this outrage, Pope Vitalian excommunicated Maurus, and forbade him from singing the Mass. The interdiction extended to all those who took communion from him. Maurus, according to Agnellus, in turn excommunicated the pope and removed his name from the liturgy in Ravenna.\(^91\) He likewise forbade the pope from giving Mass. Unfortunately for the ambitious clerics of Ravenna, their independence was short-lived. The Roman *Liber Pontificalis* states that the church of Ravenna was reconciled with Pope Donus under Archbishop Maurus’s successor, Reparatus.\(^92\) Agnellus, however, gave a different version of the events. He related

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\(^90\) Deliyannis, 2010, 283.

\(^91\) Agnellus, c. 112.

\(^92\) *Liber Pontificalis, pars prior* Vol. 1, edited by Theodore Momsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Munich: Berolini, 1982), 80.2. The entry relates, rather maliciously, that as soon as Reparatus subjugated his see back to that of Rome, it pleased God to immediately kill him.
that Reparatus’s successor Theodore was the party guilty of resubmitting Ravenna to Pope Agatho in the year 680, and Agnellus excoriated him for this perfidy. At any rate, by the year 682 Emperor Constantine IV issued a decree formally revoking Ravennate autocephaly. The bishop of Ravenna was once again required to be consecrated at Rome, and the anniversary of the death of Maurus was not to be celebrated at Ravenna.

In spite of their limited success in obtaining independence from Rome, the spirit of rebellion and autonomy expressed in the autocephaly interlude was not easily quenched, even after its revocation. Several of the eighth-century bishops of Ravenna, including Felix and Sergius, continued, unsuccessfully, to attempt to regain autocephaly. When he was consecrated at Rome in 708, Felix refused to sign a document stating that he would not disturb the unity of the church. The pope appealed to Emperor Justinian, who dispatched the patrician Theodore, general of the army of Sicily, to capture Ravenna, arrest “that presumptuous archbishop [Felix],” and put all the rebels into shackles, seize their properties, and send them to Constantinople. The Book of the Pontiffs of Rome states that the

93 Agnellus, c. 124.
94 Deliyannis, 2010, 284.
95 Liber Pontificalis, 82.4.
96 Liber Pontificalis, 90.2: praefatum archiepiscopum arrogantem. While the Book of Pontiffs of Rome attributed Theodore’s punitive mission to Italy entirely as a result of the Felix incident, there was another incident that occurred close in time that may also have inspired Justinian’s harsh reaction. In 710 the newly appointed Exarch John Rizokopos was murdered in Ravenna. It is unclear what the motivations were for his assassination, but André Guillou suggests that perhaps this insurgency was another reason for Justinian’s actions. Guillou, 1969, 216 – 217. Agnellus also suggested that the Ravennate citizens participated in the amputation (of the nose and tongue) of Justinian II in 695 before his exile at Cherson. Agnellus, c. 137. Perhaps, upon his return to power, Justinian harbored a smoldering grudge against the urban populace for this reason as well. Thomas Brown takes a radically different view of this punitive mission. He reads the emperor’s dispatch of Theodore as retribution for the snub to papal authority rather than vengeance for Ravennate opposition to the emperor in 693 or 695. Thomas Brown, “Byzantine Italy, c. 680 – c. 876,” in The New Cambridge Medieval History II, c. 700 – 900, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 323n.
“citizens of Ravenna were punished for their haughtiness with the vengeance they deserved.”\textsuperscript{97} Those who “had disobeyed the apostolic see died a bitter death,”\textsuperscript{98} and Felix was blinded and sent into exile. The points of contention between the pope and Felix seem to have been in regard to the \textit{promissio fidei}, the dogmatic and jurisdictional commitment of the Bishop and his Church to the see of Rome, and the oath of loyalty to the unity of the faith and the leadership of the state. The first and second oaths referred to the submission to Rome in the areas of doctrine and practice, the third oath referred to the limits of pontifical power to the empire. The schism between Rome and Ravenna in this case therefore invoked imperial action against Ravenna, because, implicitly, the recalcitrance of the Church of Ravenna to Rome also involved the non-submission of Ravenna to the authority of the emperor.\textsuperscript{99} The pugnacious Ravennate spirit was not only directed against the pope. It occasionally emerged in bellicosity toward the emperor. Agnellus wrote that after his decapitation by his successor Philippicus, Justinian II’s head made a tour of Italy where it was received with great rejoicing by the people of Ravenna.\textsuperscript{100}

Agnellus also related the harrowing adventures of Archbishop Sergius (744 – 769), who was imprisoned in Rome by Pope Stephen II for his refusal to subjugate the church of Ravenna to Rome. Agnellus explained that Sergius’s bold actions were related to his conviction that he “had jurisdiction over the whole Pentapolis, from the borders of Persiceto

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Liber Pontificalis}, 90.2: \textit{Nam Ravennantium cives elati superbia dignam ultionis poenam multati sunt.}

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Liber Pontificalis}, 90.2: \textit{qui inoboedientes fuerunt apostolicae sedis amara morte perempti sunt.}

\textsuperscript{99} Guillou, 1969, 214. Agnellus also suggested that the Ravennate citizens participated in the amputation (of the nose and tongue) of Justinian II; see note 96.

\textsuperscript{100} Agnellus, c. 142.
up to Tuscany and the river Volano.” These instances indicate that the accord with Rome wrought by Theodore three decades earlier had done little to diminish the resentment felt by the Ravennate citizenry and ecclesiastical establishment. Even after the fall of the Exarchate to the Lombards, the archbishop of Ravenna officially assumed the responsibilities of power in a part of Byzantine Italy. The continuation of the fight for independence shows that this spirit of separatism was not born out of thin air, but was rather the product of long-brewing sentiments in Ravenna and its Church about their indispensable position in the world.

There are several significant incidents that occurred during the seventh century that seem to indicate a flourishing spirit of independence and autonomy in Ravenna. These incidents were not confined to ecclesiastical ambitions, though the Church in Ravenna certainly exerted itself against Rome, as discussed above. Other instances represent mutinies against the power of the exarch and / or the empire on the part of the populace of Ravenna or the army of the exarch centralized at Ravenna. These insolences were often supported by the Church. In fact, a rebellious attitude, and a drive for some level of independence from centralized authority, seems to have been deeply enmeshed in the social fabric of Ravenna in the seventh century. One example that illustrates this underlying sentiment is in the rebellion of the local population of Ravenna against Exarch Eleutherios. In the year 616, the Exarch John I of Ravenna was the victim of an uprising led by a man named John of Compsa (or Conza) who revolted against Byzantine authority and murdered Exarch John along with his imperial functionaries. In response to this uprising, Emperor Heraclius appointed a successor for John, Eleutherios. Eleutherios came to Italy and exacted harsh retribution against the rebels. He began his purge in Rome, then moved on to Naples (which had been taken by John

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101 Agnellus, c. 159: *Igitur iudicauit iste a finibus Persiceti totum Pentapolim et usque ad Tusciam et usque ad amnem Walani.*
of Compsa’s forces), and finally reached his capital city, Ravenna. Here he also pacified the leaders of the rebellion, who were troops of the exarch but were probably mostly local recruits. Shortly after he quashed the rebellion, Eleutherios was on his way to Rome on the Via Flaminia when he was killed by a group of soldiers. He was decapitated, and his head sent to Constantinople, presumably as a warning to Heraclius not to meddle too deeply in local affairs. Eleutherios was sent not to defend against foreign invaders, but rather to quell a local rebellion. And it is apparent that a powerful sector of the local population took offense to his presumptions and / or methods. This act of violence came from the army of the exarch, and may have enjoyed the tacit agreement of the archbishop of Ravenna.102

Another uprising occurred nearly a century later in 701 against the newly appointed Exarch Theophylaktos. On this occasion, when the exarch, upon his arrival to Italy, stopped at Rome on his way to Ravenna, troops from the Exarchate and the Pentapolis marched to meet him in an attempt to assassinate him. This time the rebellion was apparently motivated by economic concerns. A portion of the populace blamed the imperial government for the destitution to which it had been reduced. In this case the priests of Rome were sent out to pacify the revolting army, and eventually the instigators of the uprising were punished and Theophylaktos was installed at his post.103 Both of these incidents demonstrate that there were serious objections at times to the centralized authority of the empire among the local population of the Exarchate. Such an attitude could only be possible at a time when the region of the Exarchate and the Pentapolis had become isolated from the wider world.

Thomas Brown characterizes the events of the early eighth century as marking a “turning

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102 Liber Pontificalis, 71.2. Guillou, 1969, 204 – 205.

point” in Ravenna’s relationship with the empire. The late seventh century was generally characterized by complacent allegiance to the empire, which controlled the Exarchate with a more-or-less laissez-faire attitude. More strident antipathy to centralized authority is openly apparent in the eighth century.104

The rifts between the Church of Rome and that of Ravenna were most obvious in the seventh and eighth centuries, but were long-smoldering, fed by at least two previous centuries of ambition on the part of the Ravennate clerics. André Guillou’s assessment of these various “uprisings” in which the populace of Ravenna participated in is that in them one can discern a history of the growth of a provincial culture that came to form a collective consciousness. The ethnic and cultural differences that made up this diverse populace were gradually subsumed into a regional independence, often coalescing around the person of the bishop.105 In my estimation, however, the development of a regional identity in Ravenna and its territories in the seventh century cannot be entirely separated from its history of ascension, which began during the fifth century when Ravenna became a sedes imperialis.

104 Brown, 2005, 323. See also: Thomas Brown, “Urban violence in early medieval Italy: the cases of Rome and Ravenna,” in Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West, ed. Guy Halsall: 76 – 89 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1998). Brown 1998, 83 rightly reminds modern scholars that Agnellus is the main source for most of the information about this period of time, and his partisanship ought not to be overlooked when interpreting these events. While clearly there was unrest, particularly as communities struggled to cope with the loss of legitimate imperial authority, Agnellus’s narrative invariably assigned pure, “good” motives to his city while characterizing outsiders as treacherous. Agnellus also gave a bizarre account from the late seventh or early eighth century of the customary brawling between neighborhood factions within Ravenna. On one occasion, a smoldering vendetta led one faction to slaughter the other. Agnellus, c. 126 – 128, 248 - 250, and Brown, 1998, 84. Whether or not this account is completely accurate, it may suggest that the unrest and aggression expressed by the citizenry and army towards outsiders was also, occasionally, experienced internally. In narrating the episode, Agnellus highlighted the key role of the Archbishop in restoring order and harmony to the city. This suggests that the Church at times exploited such chaotic and violent situations in order to reinforce its own, local, authority.

In the year 751, the Lombard army conquered Ravenna, effectively ending Byzantine rule in northern Italy entirely. But by this time, Byzantine rule had become odious to the Italians in any case.\textsuperscript{106} Ravenna’s days as a shining capital and center of political and ecclesiastical power were essentially ended. This does not mean, however, that the city of Ravenna ceded its quest for sacred and secular power. In the wake of Byzantine withdrawal from northern Italy, a power vacuum was created that several entities vied to fill, one of which was the Church of Ravenna. The quickness with which the Lombards were able to take Ravenna may be explained by the presence of a pro-Lombard party among the Ravennate citizens who were opposed to the only viable alternative to Lombard control, i.e., papal control. This group may have included Archbishop Sergius, who Agnellus admitted wanted to rule the Exarchate and the Pentapolis “like the exarch.”\textsuperscript{107} In 755 the Lombard King Aistulf made an agreement with Pope Stephen II at Pavia in which he handed over the Exarchate and the Pentapolis to papal authority. When Stephen II visited Ravenna later that year to make the necessary administrative adjustments, he was refused admission into the city by the local lay and clerical aristocracy, presumably with the support of Archbishop Sergius.\textsuperscript{108} When the Lombard kingdom was conquered by Charlemagne in 774, Ravenna was caught between Charlemagne’s kingdom in Italy and the emerging entity that came to be known as the Papal States (or The Republic of St. Peter).\textsuperscript{109} During this period of time,

\textsuperscript{106} In the year 717, Emperor Leo III had imposed heavy taxes on the Italians in order to fund defensive military campaigns in Constantinople against the Arabs. He also promoted iconoclasm beginning in 726-27, a move which alienated most of the western Church including Rome and Ravenna. Deliyannis, 2010, 282.

\textsuperscript{107} Agnellus, c. 159: \textit{ueluti exarchus}. Brown, 2005, 327.

\textsuperscript{108} Brown, 2005, 333.

Ravenna’s leaders maintained a policy of defiance in relation to the authority of the pope. Letters from Pope Hadrian to Charlemagne include complaints against Archbishop Leo of Ravenna, who apparently sent an embassy to Francia to discuss Ravenna’s autonomy. Leo even traveled to Francia himself; afterwards he refused to acknowledge papal authority.\textsuperscript{110}

It seems that a distinctive urban consciousness also characterized the later eighth and ninth centuries in Ravenna as well. In the eighth century an anonymous author from Ravenna wrote the \textit{Cosmography}, a catalogue of world geography.\textsuperscript{111} In this treatise on the regions, bodies of water, and major cities of the known world, the Cosmographer praised his home city of Ravenna: he called it \textit{nobilissima}, a title reserved for Constantinople, Rome, and Ravenna alone.\textsuperscript{112} The \textit{Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna} was written during the ninth century, and several scholars including Deborah Deliyannis and Joaquín Pizarro have demonstrated that Andreas Agnellus’s writing carries heavy overtones of local pride and civic consciousness.\textsuperscript{113} These episodes and texts reveal that Ravenna’s sentiment of independence and sense of its own significance were deeply embedded in the culture of Ravenna not only during the seventh century, but both before and after this pivotal moment.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] Noble, 169 - 171.
\item[112] Deliyannis, 2010, 290.
\end{footnotes}
The decline in the arts and in architecture is striking in the seventh century and beyond in Ravenna. The only major building constructed during the early medieval period for which there is surviving archaeological evidence is a large basilica dedicated to the Savior that was situated south of the entrance to the palace.\footnote{Deliyannis, 2010, 292.} This cultural downturn was due to several factors. The demographic crisis of the sixth century resulted in fewer skilled laborers during the seventh. It is likely that many highly skilled artisans either died, were forced into other, more practical or lucrative professions, or immigrated out of Italy at this time. The dearth of workmen capable of creating fine objects went hand-in-hand with a lack of fine materials with which to work. Importations of marble were sharply reduced in the seventh century due to the gradual decline in production from the Proconnesian mines, which were no longer producing marble for long-range export by the year 600.\footnote{See: Deliyannis, 2005.} When the Exarch Isaac died (c. 643) his family chose to reuse a sarcophagus from the fifth century instead of commissioning a new one for him (Fig. 30). This example suggests a scarcity of high quality materials and skilled craftsmen available in the mid-seventh century. In spite of this evident depression in the artistic market, the fact remains that several sarcophagi were sculpted in the eighth, and possibly some in the ninth centuries in Ravenna. The surviving examples from this time period, such as the sarcophagi of Felix (Fig. 10) and Gratiosus (Fig. 11), are notably less refined and more formulaic than their fifth and sixth century predecessors. And the material is often humbler, local (Istrian) limestone rather than Proconnesian marble, or second-hand early Christian or pre-Christian monuments. Nevertheless the iconography, symbolism, and compositional arrangements follow closely their more refined ancestors. Even though the quality is lower, the very existence of a decent number of surviving sarcophagi suggests a continued demand for this form of art.
examples from the eighth (and ninth?) centuries indicates, in my opinion, a continuation, at
least in a nostalgic sense, of the grand cultural traditions of this city.

V. Conclusion: Collective Culture and Sculpted Sarcophagi

Admittedly, the spirit of independence, even rebellion, that characterized the later
phases of Ravenna’s history was not predominant, or even visible, in the early stages of the
city’s rise to prominence. In the fifth century it was the seat of western emperors, in the sixth
the capital city of Ostrogoths who were originally loyal to the imperial court at
Constantinople. It was not until the final flourishing of Ravennate culture during the
Exarchate that the powerful regional sentiment of Ravenna and the surrounding territories
became obvious in the form of rebellions against centralized imperial and papal authority.
For this reason, some scholars have argued that Ravenna is exemplary of the fragmented
cultural and political fabric that characterized early medieval Europe.\footnote{Brown, 1988, 127 – 160. Guillou, 1969.} Nevertheless, the
seeds of particularism did not sprout into fully grown \textit{régionalisme} overnight. They were
nurtured by centuries of increasing political authority centered at Ravenna, the meteoric rise
of the powerful Church of Ravenna, and an architectural and artistic culture that accrued
between the fifth and seventh centuries as the city morphed from \textit{sedes imperialis} to royal
capital to base of the Exarchate. In this respect, perhaps, Ravenna was more singular even
than other regional centers in Europe as the medieval age dawned.

The sarcophagi represent a group of objects that were created or modified in Ravenna
over the full span of this road to prominence and particularity. Interestingly, the iconography
and style of the earliest monuments seems to be repeated consistently, more or less, in the
later examples. While products of the later phase, such as the \textit{Lamb-and-Rinceau}
sarcophagus (Fig. 13), are clearly different from their more elegant fifth- and early sixth-
century predecessors such as the Constantius sarcophagus (Fig. 16), the main symbols and compositional formats are applied repeatedly, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. As a result, the sarcophagi, through several centuries at Ravenna, are relatively coherent in terms of their imagery and general compositional choices. Over the course of the period in question, they developed into a distinct group of monuments with strong local flavor. The aesthetic verve of Ravenna is part of the broader tapestry of its existence as a vital urban center, and the visually distinctive corpus of sarcophagi are a fundamental part of that picture.

This view of the sarcophagus imagery within the broader Ravennate aesthetic tradition is a generic way in which to understand the sculptural productions within the historical context. But there are also more specific possibilities for interpreting some peculiarities of the imagery in light of the times. For example, one compositional form that is regularly carved on the sarcophagi is Christ Enthroned between Peter and Paul. This imagery is often associated with the traditio legis iconography from other early Christian sources (mosaic compositions, etc.). In the traditio legis scene, Christ is enthroned (presumably in heaven), and hands a scroll to one of two apostles standing on either side of him. Frequently, the two apostles on either side of Christ are Peter and Paul. On sarcophagi from Rome, it is most often Peter who receives the scroll (Fig. 119). On Ravennate sarcophagi, however, Paul more frequently has this honor. The iconographic

117 For a list of the monuments on which this iconography is found, see Chapter 2, 57.

118 By this time, Peter and Paul had both developed distinctive physiognomic types in visual representations. Peter usually had a full head of curly hair and a short, curly beard. Paul was depicted as bald with a large, round head and a longer, sometimes pointed, beard.

favoritism shown to Paul at Peter’s expense may have been inspired by Ravenna’s history of contention with Rome for ecclesiastical authority.¹²⁰

Not only is the person of Paul prominent on the sarcophagi, but scenes involving Peter are conspicuously absent, especially when the Ravennate sarcophagi are compared to sarcophagi from the Roman sphere. On those sarcophagi, the apostle Peter is the most frequently and obviously cited New Testament figure, besides for Christ himself. In several Roman examples, rather obscure passages from the book of Acts are depicted. These narratives – such as the raising of Tabatha, taken from Acts 9:36 – 42 (Fig. 120),¹²¹ and the Arrest of Peter from Acts 12:3 - 19 (Fig. 121)¹²² – are examples of experimentation with the theme of the glorification of Peter. Other types of imagery that can be connected to this theme include the images of the *cathedra* of Peter (Fig. 122)¹²³ and the symbolic imagery of Christ handing the keys of the church to Peter (Fig. 154).¹²⁴ Additionally, in Roman sarcophagi Peter is often awarded a privileged position in compositions depicting events from the life of Christ. For instance, one vignette on a sarcophagus now in Arles depicts an episode from the Last Supper in which Christ washes the feet of the disciples (particularly, here, Peter) (Fig. 123).¹²⁵ In their catalog of early Christian sarcophagi imagery, Jean-Pierre

¹²⁰ Peter was considered the “first pope” since the mid-fourth century, at least.

¹²¹ *Saint Sidoine* sarcophagus, church of Sainte-Madeleine, Roman workshop, last quarter of the 4th century, Caillet and Loose 86, fig. 72.

¹²² Sarcophagus found in the 19th century in the reserves of the Vatican museum, Vatican, Musée Pio Cristiano, Roman workshop, first quarter of the 4th century, Caillet and Loose 87, fig. 74.

¹²³ “Chair of Saint Peter” sarcophagus, Arles, Musée de l’Arles Antique, Roman workshop, second quarter of the 4th century, Caillet and Loose 88, fig. 75.

¹²⁴ *Saint Maximin* sarcophagus, church of Sainte-Madeleine, Roman workshop, last quarter of the 4th century, Caillet and Loose 89, fig. 76.

¹²⁵ “Christ Doctor” sarcophagus, Caillet and Loose, 80 fig. 65.
Caillet and Helmuth Nils Loose assert that these representations are an expression of the fact that the bishops of Rome saw their authority drawn in a direct line from Christ, through Peter.\textsuperscript{126} Unsurprisingly, none of these scenes makes its way into the restrictive repertoire of Ravennate sarcophagus imagery.

While in Rome the iconography of the \textit{traditio legis} most often included the group of twelve apostles (sometimes referred to as the College of the Apostles) arranged on either side of Christ (Fig. 124),\textsuperscript{127} an abbreviated version of the image was adopted in areas outside of the Roman sphere, most completely at Ravenna. Although there are Ravennate examples in which the entire College appears (as on the \textit{Twelve Apostles} sarcophagus [Fig. 37]), the trend in Ravenna was toward an abbreviated scene in which the figures were reduced to three: Christ flanked by Peter and Paul as on the \textit{Traditio Legis} sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale (Fig. 48). On several monuments in the series, the figures are often further reduced to symbolic or animal elements (as in the \textit{Constantius} sarcophagus [Fig. 16]). Any narrative tone in the imagery is, thereby, lost, and is replaced with a static, courtly scene of homage or worship. Peter and Paul, in this visual schema, are presented as the two highest-ranking members of Christ’s celestial court and, as such, are positioned as the highest authority figures in the Christian kingdom, second only to Christ. They are also presented as equals of one another in authority and honor.

Though the Roman church claimed both Peter and Paul as Roman martyrs,\textsuperscript{128} it was Peter who was most strongly associated with the bishops of Rome. By positioning Paul thus,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{126} Caillet and Loose, 69.
\item \textsuperscript{127} \textit{Traditio Legis} sarcophagus, Chruch of Saint Ambrose, Milan, Roman workshop, c. 390 CE, Caillet and Loose, 102, fig. 92.
\item \textsuperscript{128} It should be noted that Roman sarcophagi do not avoid the figure of Paul. In fact, it is in Roman objects that Paul acquired his characteristic physical features. Scenes of the passion of Paul were also included in Roman
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the authority of the Roman bishop may have been subtly balanced, if not outright undermined. Given the Ravennate church’s ongoing struggle with Roman authority, such a motivation is within the realm of possibility, particularly for monuments associated so often with high-ranking members of Ravenna’s Church. In fact, whether or not the person of Paul (and the relative inconspicuousness of Peter) on the tombs can be regarded in this interpretive framework, the treatment of the relics of Saint Apollinaris and the inhumation of the bodies of the bishops and archbishops of Ravenna in large marble sarcophagi may in and of itself point to the Ravennate church’s desire to compete with Rome, even in the period before open struggle for power. In fact, it is important to keep in mind that the Ravennate figural sarcophagi on which the *traditio legis* iconography appears date to the fifth (and, at the very latest, early sixth) century, in the period before there was visible contention between the popes and bishops of Ravenna. Nevertheless, these sarcophagi continued to be *selected* for use by subsequent (often ecclesiastical) patrons long after the date of original production.

Although there are peculiarities in the imagery, such as the preference for Paul over Peter, that stand out in contrast to other artistic traditions, the general repertoire of forms on the sarcophagi is narrow and, for the most part, ostensibly innocuous. The frequency with which “normal” Christian symbols, such as the cross, the Christological monogram, lambs, doves, vines, etc., are referenced on the sarcophagi, combined with the repetition of basic compositional arrangements and the limited visual repertoire, suggest a lack of creativity on the part of the designers of the tombs. But, then, creativity or uniqueness does not seem to have been the point. Instead, it appears that sameness, consistency, and symbolic unity were

carvings, sometimes alongside images of the passion of Peter, and sometimes separately. This type of imagery reiterated the idea that both Peter and Paul were Roman martyrs, and that as the heads of the Jewish (Peter) and Gentile (Paul) churches, the two together represented the universality of the church. Caillet and Loose, 72ff.
more highly valued. The prominent departed of each successive age were enshrined within monuments carved with similar and formulaic compositions and imagery, covered with familiar, time-honored symbols. Held up against the history of Ravenna’s development of a localized, regional identity, the tombs that enshrined the city’s dead possibly helped to craft a cultural sense of self-awareness, or historicized self-awareness. In spite of the changing styles and levels of quality demonstrated over the course of sarcophagus production, this shared pool of imagery suggests an attempt on the part of the patrons, designers, and / or craftsmen to preserve a cultural character among the dead as other artistic and architectural monuments did among the living.

The mosaics and sculptural productions, as well as the architectural constructions, all contributed to and sustained the growth and development of régionalisme. But the tombs represent a special category of monuments, in-as-much as they played specific roles both for their patrons, and also for their community. In the next chapter, I take as a case study one particular group of sarcophagi, those located in the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, which were used to entomb the bishops of Ravenna. I will explore some of the ways these tombs helped to reinforce the sentiment of local, civic solidarity that developed in Ravenna at the end of antiquity and dawn of the early medieval age.
CHAPTER 4 THE POWER OF BISHOPS AND THE TESTIMONY OF THEIR TOMBS:
Sarcophagi and Mosaics of Sant’Apollinare in Classe

The sarcophagi of Ravenna, in spite of their clear variations and distinctions, repeat certain forms, symbols, and compositional arrangements. These aspects bind them together visually, as does their close relationship to the other artistic productions found at Ravenna. Chapter 3 traced the development in Ravenna of a spirit of regional cohesiveness over the course of the period in question. This régionalisme¹ created the appropriate environment for the growth of a localized artistic culture. The sarcophagi of Ravenna, I have argued, with their repetitive qualities and limited iconographic repertoire, are best understood as reflective of the Ravennate context in which they were created and utilized, rather than solely as amoebic extensions of either Latin or Constantinopolitan art. This chapter examines a particular subset of sarcophagi in order to explore potential ways in which the tombs and their imagery may have fully participated in and contributed to the localized cohesion of late antique / early medieval Ravenna.

The tombs in this group are located in physical proximity to one another, in the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Ravenna’s suburb of Classe. Today they line the aisles north and south of the nave. Their presence in the church reflects the fact that from the late sixth century through the ninth century, Sant’Apollinare in Classe was the church in which

¹ Term used by André Guillou in Régionalisme et indépendance dans l’empire byzantine au VII siècle. L’Exemple de l’exarchat et de la pentapole d’Italie (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1969).
many of the bishops of Ravenna after the year 594/5 were interred. As described in Chapter 3, the bishops played a primary role in Ravenna’s ascension to prominence in Italy. They were arguably the most significant public figures in terms of rallying the civic consciousness of the Ravennate citizenry.

Saint Apollinaris, a native of Antioch, was the legendary first bishop of Ravenna. Peter Chrysologus in the mid-fifth century dedicated a sermon to Apollinaris, in which he said that the saintly bishop was not a martyr, but deserved to be considered as one. Much of what is known about him comes from the account of his life, called the *Passio* of Apollinaris, which was probably written in the late sixth or seventh century. According to the *Passio*, Apollinaris was exiled from Ravenna during either the persecutions of Vespasian or Nero. On his way out of the city he was supposedly recognized, tortured, and martyred. In 532 Bishop Ursicinus (532 – 36) established the church of Sant’Apollinare in the suburb of Classe. The site was outside the city walls of Classe, adjacent to a preexisting Christian cemetery. Architecturally, the straight-forward Roman design of the longitudinal basilica

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5 In the sixth century, Apollinaris was honored as the first bishop of Ravenna, but not as a martyr. It was not until the ninth century that Apollinaris was officially designated a “martyr,” and this interpretation was probably based on the account given by the *Passio*. Deborah Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 260.

6 The original location of Apollinaris’s tomb before its translation to the basilica upon its consecration in 549 is not entirely clear. Because the basilica was constructed alongside a preexisting Christian cemetery, it seems logical that this was the location of the saint’s interment. Mario Mazzotti, in his 1954 publication argued that the body of the saint was actually buried in a sarcophagus set in a box-like niche or “loculus” that was excavated alongside an external wall of Sant’Apollinare. He even goes so far as to suggest that this idea of
with its two side aisles separated by arcades relates the church to the simplest early Christian prototypes in Rome and Ravenna\(^7\) (Fig. 125). The church was completed and consecrated in 549 under Bishop Maximian, who compiled the first known list of the bishops of Ravenna, and, accordingly, elevated the cult of Sant’Apollinaris as the patriarch of Ravenna’s ecclesiastical establishment.

Eleven sarcophagi reside today in the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe. Of these, two were brought to the church in the modern era.\(^8\) The other nine sarcophagi (Figs. 4, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 37, 127) appear to have been part of the collection at Sant’Apollinare from the medieval period or earlier. The medieval and Renaissance sources, including Agnellus,\(^9\)

\(\text{\^{\text{\textregistered}}\text{\textregistered}}}\) including the burial of an eminent person into the fabric of a building by constructing a wall along one of its sides was customary in Ravenna, and he suggests that Saint Severus and Archbishop Florentius possibly received the same type of honor. According to this argument, there was, therefore, not so much a real “translation” of the relics from one location to another, but rather a simple movement from the outside of the church to the interior. In the late seventh century, Archbishop Maurus moved the body of Apollinaris from its original location in the narthex to the center of the church, as related by Agnellus c. 114, 115. Today there is a plaque on the south nave wall to mark the supposed original burial location of Apollinaris. A metal grill covers the opening in the wall, allowing visitors to peek into the space. In the middle of the nave there is a raised marble platform and altar with an inscription to mark the underground crypt of Apollinaris. The relics were supposedly moved from Classe in the late ninth century and translated into the newly re-dedicated church of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo. In the twelfth century a dispute arose between the monks of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo and those of Sant’Apollinare in Classe as to who actually had the relics of Apollinaris. Both groups claimed to have excavated his remains from their respective crypts. Mario Mazzotti, *La basilica di Sant’Apollinare in Classe*, Studi di Antichita Cristiana Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana 21 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologica Cristiana, 1954), 39 – 42, 224 – 226. In the sixteenth century the basilica was plundered after the Battle of Ravenna (1512), and the monastic community that had been present throughout the late middle ages abandoned the church, taking with them the relics of Apollinaris (or those remains claimed to be the relics). These were returned to the church in 1654.

\(\text{\^{\text{\textregistered}}\text{\textregistered}}}\) The design of this church can be compared, for instance, to the fifth century church of San Giovanni Evangelista.

\(\text{\^{\text{\textregistered}}\text{\textregistered}}}\) The small sarcophagus of a child named by inscription “Licinia Valeria” was discovered under the floor of the church during a 1990 excavation. The tomb was found in a layer of earth that predates the foundations of the church. For this reason, scholars have concluded that this sarcophagus, which probably dates to the fourth century, was a member of the burial ground adjacent to Sant’Apollinare. Mazzotti, 29. The *Theodore* sarcophagus was added to the collection in the church in 1721, even though Agnellus does say that Archbishop Theodore was buried in Sant’Apollinare.

\(\text{\^{\text{\textregistered}}\text{\textregistered}}}\) *Agnelli Ravennatis Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, ed. by Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006). All further references to Agnellus refer to this version.

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\(^{9}\) *Agnelli Ravennatis Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, ed. by Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006). All further references to Agnellus refer to this version.
Rossi,\textsuperscript{10} and l’Acquedotti,\textsuperscript{11} list a number of archbishops interred at Sant’Apollinare in Classe. These are: John II (578 – 595),\textsuperscript{12} Marinian (595 – 606),\textsuperscript{13} John III (606 – 625),\textsuperscript{14} John IV (625 – 631),\textsuperscript{15} Bonus (631 - 642),\textsuperscript{16} Maurus (642 – 671),\textsuperscript{17} Reparatus ( 671 - 677),\textsuperscript{18} Theodore (677 – 691),\textsuperscript{19} Damian (692 - 708),\textsuperscript{20} Felix (709 - 725),\textsuperscript{21} John V (726 - 744),\textsuperscript{22} Sergius (744 - 769),\textsuperscript{23} Leo (c. 770 - 778),\textsuperscript{24} John VI (c. 778 - 785),\textsuperscript{25} Gratiosus (c. 786 - 789),\textsuperscript{26} Valerius (c. 788 - 810),\textsuperscript{27} Petronace (c. 817 - 837),\textsuperscript{28} and Giorgio (c. 837 - 846).\textsuperscript{29} The

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{10} Girolamo Rossi (Hieronymus Rubeus),\textit{ Historiarium Ravennatum – Libri Decem} (Venice: Paulus Manutius, 1572), (2\textsuperscript{nd} edition, Venice, 1959).
\item\textsuperscript{11} Vitalis Aquaeductus (l’Acquedotti),\textit{ Liber de Aedificatione et Mirabilibus Aedis Divi Apostolici Apollinaris in Civitate olim Classensi}, MS. Mob. 3. I. Q. 2. This manuscript is a description of the basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe composed in 1511 and now conserved in the Biblioteca Classense of Ravenna. Transcribed in Mazzotti, 1954, 239 – 272.
\item\textsuperscript{12} Agnellus, c. 98.
\item\textsuperscript{13} Agnellus, c. 103.
\item\textsuperscript{14} Agnellus, c. 104.
\item\textsuperscript{15} Agnellus, c. 107.
\item\textsuperscript{16} Agnellus, c. 109.
\item\textsuperscript{17} Agnellus, c. 114.
\item\textsuperscript{18} Agnellus, c. 116.
\item\textsuperscript{19} Agnellus, c. 124.
\item\textsuperscript{20} Agnellus, c. 134.
\item\textsuperscript{21} Agnellus, c. 149.
\item\textsuperscript{22} Agnellus, c. 153.
\item\textsuperscript{23} The end of this \textit{vita} is missing from Agnellus; see Vitalis Aquaeductus, 27. Mazzotti, 260.
\item\textsuperscript{24} The end of this \textit{vita} is missing from Agnellus; see Vitalis Aquaeductus, 27. Mazzotti, 260.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Agnellus, c. 163.
\item\textsuperscript{26} Agnellus, c. 166.
\item\textsuperscript{27} This \textit{vita} is missing from Agnellus; see Vitalis Aquaeductus, 28. Mazzotti, 261.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
only bishop left off of this list, of those known from the *Liber Pontificalis Ravennatis*, is Martin (c. 810 – 818) and the end of his life is missing from Agnellus. Otherwise, this list includes almost all of the bishops after John II and ends where Agnellus’s text, and his list, ends.

According to Agnellus, John II was buried in the church of Sant’Apollinare outside the walls of Classe in the *monasterium* of S.S. Mark, Marcellus, and Felicula. This *monasterium* was probably a chapel flanking the narthex. Agnellus also wrote that Felix was buried not far from this *monasterium*, which also likely meant in the narthex. Agnellus definitely related that a number of burials of bishops from the seventh century were found in the narthex of the basilica, including those of Marinian (595 – 606), John IV (625 – 631), Maurus (642 – 671), and Theodore (677 – 691). The only one of these burials Agnellus describes is that of Maurus. He mentions a long poetic inscription placed on the wall above the tomb, and a shorter inscription in mosaic on the floor “in front of this sarcophagus on the pavement.”

The inscription honored Archbishop Maurus for liberating the church from Roman servitude. As Agnellus didn’t specifically mention the other burials in the narthex it is not certain whether these burials were underground or consisted of above-ground sarcophagi interments. Nevertheless, there are no extant sarcophagi in the front of the church today; the original narthex was destroyed and the current one was completely reconstructed.

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28 This *vita* is missing from Agnellus; see Vitalis Aquaeductus, 28. Mazzotti, 261.

29 Rossi, 240.

30 Agnellus, c. 114: *ante ipsam arcam inuenies in pavimento tessellis exaratum*.

31 Agnellus, c. 113. This referred to the conferring of "autocephaly" by Byzantine Emperor Constans II in the year 666, during the tenure of Archbishop Maurus.
in 1908 – 1909,³² and it is assumed that some (or all) of the sarcophagi that are today in the
nave of the church were moved from their original locations in the narthex.³³ Three
sarcophagi can be securely linked to three archbishops because of inscriptions on the tombs
that state explicitly their contents: the sarcophagus of Felix (d. 725), the sarcophagus of John
VI (d. 785), and the sarcophagus of Gratiosus (d. 789). Though it may never be possible to
securely link each of the remaining six sarcophagi to specific clerics supposedly buried in the
church, it is obvious that each sarcophagus at Sant’Apollinare was the tomb for a distinct
type of person – namely, an archbishop of Ravenna.

Though these nine tombs are a disparate group in terms of style, iconography, and
date, they share a momentous function: to serve as lasting memorials to the “very special
dead.” As such, I propose to examine these monuments to determine whether they relate to
one another in terms of their imagery and symbolism, and, further, how these visual
connections might serve to facilitate their function as receptacles for the most important
members of Ravenna’s clergy. Not only do I hope to demonstrate that visual links bind the
monuments and help them accomplish their purpose, I also intend to examine the monuments
in the context of the church of Sant’Apollinare itself. All together, the nine ancient tombs, the
sacred space that enshrines the relics of the first bishop of Ravenna, and the architectural
decoration in the presbytery of the basilica work in concert to glorify the office of bishop,
and to celebrate the special members of this highest tier of spiritual leadership.

I. The Sarcophagi

A brief introduction to the monuments found inside Sant’Apollinare in Classe will demonstrate their points of symbolic and iconographic cohesion. (Fig. 126)

1. **Twelve Apostles** sarcophagus\(^{34}\) - south aisle, position 3; marble; original date early 5\(^{th}\) century; reused in Sant’Apollinare 7\(^{th}\) or 8\(^{th}\) century

This sarcophagus (Fig. 37) is of the “frieze” type; in other words, the decorative space on the front of the monument is treated as a continuous frieze and is framed by architectural elements, in this case flanking columns and a decorated entablature. On the front of the sarcophagus Christ is seated on a throne in the middle of the composition, his mantle wrapped around his waist. The extra fabric drapes over his left hand, which holds an open book. With his right hand, he holds out a scroll to the draped arms of Paul. Christ is flanked by Peter on his left and Paul on his right. Paul hurries toward Christ to receive the proffered scroll of the law, his cloak fluttering behind him, and his arms stretched out in front of him, covered with the end of his mantle. On the other side of Christ, Peter advances in a similar striding pose. He also holds his arms out before him with a piece of draped fabric covering them. Peter carries a cross over his left shoulder, and grasps a key in his left hand as well. In addition to the three central figures, there are four additional figures, two on each side behind Peter and Paul. The men directly behind Peter and Paul hold up their hands in signs of either blessing or acknowledgement, and the figures on the far ends carry wreaths or crowns of victory in veiled hands. The four additional figures are bearded and mustached, but otherwise no specific facial features distinguish them as individuals. There are no details in the background to indicate place.

On the back of the sarcophagus, the box appears unfinished. Though the framing elements are in place the pilasters are not fluted, and the entablature has no leaf pattern carved onto it. On the lid, the horizontal border has been roughed out (or cut away), but it has not been dressed or carved. Though the framing device around the back composition appears unfinished, the imagery within the compositional field appears finished, excepting perhaps the cross in a medallion placed in the center of the composition. This Latin cross has no decorative detailing at all. It also does not have a rho loop on its topmost bar. A sphere inscribes the cross, and it too is plain, with no decoration. This central medallion is flanked by two peacocks in profile. Behind the peacocks are two curling grape vines. Though not exactly symmetrical, the vines are carved to closely resemble one another. The preference for heraldic positioning of imagery, with one side of the composition providing a mirror image for the other, is thus carried through on the back of the sarcophagus as on its front.

The ends of the sarcophagus box are also carved, each end with three figures; hence the name Twelves Apostles, as there are six on the front flanking Christ, three on the right end, and three on the left. On the lid of the right end, carved in the arched space within the decorative border, is a Latin cross with two rosettes set on either side of its upper crossbeam. On either side of the horizontal bar of the cross are two birds in profile who touch the upper end of the bar with their beaks. They stand on curling vines that spring up from the base of the cross. Once more, the shapes of the curling vines and their leaves are carefully arranged to achieve symmetry. The lid in front and in back is decorated with three equally spaced crosses in the monogram shape of an equal armed cross intersected by an “X” shaped chi.
2. *Lamb* sarcophagus\(^{35}\) – left (north) of the main entryway; marble; original date mid-to-late 5\(^{t}h\) century; reused in Sant’Apollinare 7\(^{t}h\) or 8\(^{t}h\) century

The front box of this sarcophagus (Fig. 18) is simply framed by two tall, thin, unfluted columns. The composition inside the decorative framework consists of a large central, Latin cross flanked by two lambs, which face the cross in profile and touch their noses to the ends of the horizontal crossbar. Behind each lamb is a palm tree. *Alpha* and *omega* ornaments hang on chains from the arms of the cross. The cross spans the height of the box from top to bottom. The carving on this sarcophagus is much stiffer and flatter than that of the *Twelve Apostles* sarcophagus. The hooves of the lambs are clearly articulated, and the fur is conceived as a pattern of rounded scales that cover the bodies from the neck to the tops of the legs. The trunks of the palm trees are articulated by a firmly drawn, abstracted pattern of oblong shapes. The lid above is carved with a central wreath inscribing a Latin cross, similar in form to the cross on the box below, with the *rho* loop and *alpha* and *omega* symbols hanging from the arms. The wreath is tied at the bottom center with a double loop of ribbon (known as a *lemniscus*), the ends of which scroll outward and terminate in heart-shaped leaves. Peacocks perch on the ends of the *lemniscus*, facing the laurel wreath. The back of this sarcophagus is carved with a *chi* monogram with *alpha* and *omega* symbols embossed in low relief on a plain medallion. A tree with two roses flanks this on either side.

The right end of the sarcophagus is carved with a lamb similar in form to the ones on the front, turning its head back over its right shoulder to touch its nose to the horizontal bar of a cross behind it. A bird perches on the opposite horizontal, its wings extended behind it as if in flight. The scene on the left end of the sarcophagus is singular, although all of the

\(^{35}\) Marion Lawrence, *The Sarcophagi of Ravenna* (New York: The College Art Association of America in conjunction with the *Art Bulletin*, 1945), fig. 35.
elements have appeared before in one form or another. In the center of the composition, a cross is perched on a lily plant which grows up from the bottom of the composition on a single stalk. Two peacocks flank the cross, their feet planted on a bumpy ridge of roughly carved marble meant to represent ground. Below each peacock, on either side of the lily, hover two elongated streams. The rounded tops of the streams appear out of the earthly outcrop, and taper down towards the bottom right and left, respectively, of the composition. The lid is also carved on either end. On the left end there is a Latin cross flanked by two birds, and on the right there is a chalice, or *cantharus*, at the lower center of the composition. Out of this *cantharus* sprout two large vines which, in turn, sprout several curling sections that produce bunches of grapes.

3. *Three-and-Four-Arch (Niche)* sarcophagus\(^{36}\) – right (south) of the main entryway; marble; original date 3rd century; recarved late 5th – early 6th century; reused in Sant’Apollinare 7th or 8th century

On the front box of this sarcophagus (Fig. 4), an architectonic border of two fluted pilasters and a plain lintel resting on top of them forms a decorative border. The name of the sarcophagus is derived from the fact that, in the space within the border, the composition is composed of four arched niches, with scallop-shell, or conchiliagated, *exedrae*. Under each of these is either a cross or a palm tree. Birds perch on the bars connecting the arches to one another. The back of the sarcophagus is carved with a central *aedicula* covered by a gable, under which a shallow arch has been inserted. A curtain is suspended on a rod under the arch, and is tied back to reveal a cross. Two flanking arches to the right and left of the central *aedicula* likewise shelter crosses with pendant *alpha* and *omega* symbols. This compositional arrangement has been linked to pre-Christian sarcophagi from northern Italy, and is

\(^{36}\)Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A 39 / B 20, 38 – 39, and 70 – 72, pl. 17. 1 - 3. Lawrence, fig. 64.
sometimes referred to as a “tabernacle” format. Based on its affinity with other examples, it seems likely that this tomb was originally a pre-Christian tomb re-carved with Christian symbols for use by a new patron.

Both ends are framed by pilasters and lintels, within which framework there are pseudo-archways. The arches rest on unfinished, block-like capitals but these have no supporting columns. The left end has an isolated scallop shell like those on the front, resting above a fluted *cantharus* which is flanked by birds perched on slight sticks or columns. The right end features a lamb on top of a hillock, from which flow the four rivers of paradise. The lamb is nimbed with a cross-inscribed halo, and so probably represents Christ.

4. *Six-Arch (Niche)* sarcophagus – south aisle, position 1; marble; original date late 5th – early 6th century; reused in Sant’Apollinare 7th or 8th century

The *Six-Arch (Niche)* sarcophagus (Fig. 127) has a front box framed by a series of six arches (hence the moniker), each surmounted by scallop-shell niches. The two central arches are not supported on both sides by columns. Their outer ends are supported by columns, but their inward ends instead rest illogically on the heads of two peacocks that stand on square pillars facing one another across a central *cantharus*. The vessel sprouts a mound of flowing water from which both birds drink. Under the other arches are palm trees, under the far left and right, and crosses under the middle arches. The rounded lid is framed along its lower border by a pattern of ovoid jewels in sequence; there has evidently been a loss at the far left end of the lid, since the border is broken and the patch left uncarved. The space of the lid

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37 Raffaela Farioli, “Osservazioni sulla scultura del V-VI secolo: Problema ravennati” in *Convegno internazionale passaggio dal mondo antico al medio evo da Teodosio a San Gregorio Magno* Rome, 25 – 28 May 1977 (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1980), 147 – 194. It was on the basis of this compositional arrangement that is sometimes found at Ravenna that Hans Gabelmann and Géza de Francovich argued that the Christian sarcophagi at Ravenna were descendants of a northern Italian tradition. See: Chapter 1, 26 – 27, 30.

itself is decorated with a pattern of overlapping, round scales meant to represent roof tiles. The back box of this sarcophagus follows the same format as the front, with the exception that the peacocks flanking the cantharus are replaced by lambs flanking a palm. Under each niche is a cross. On the lid there is a wreathed monogram, flanked on either side by birds in profile. The left end is identical to the right, with two niches surmounting crosses. On the lid is an isolated scallop shell.

5. Lamb-and-Rinceau sarcophagus\(^{39}\) – north aisle, position 2; marble; original date early-to-mid 6th century; reused in Sant’Apollinare 7th or 8th century

The first impression of this sarcophagus (Fig. 13) is that it is much less skillfully crafted than some of its colleagues. In general there is a greater use of pattern and stylization in the elements. The forms are hesitant and awkward, the carving is stilted, and the relief is uniform. The forms seem more closely related to those of the fragments of the sarcophagus(i) of Bishops Ecclesius and Ursicinus (Fig. 56) than to those of the Theodore (Fig. 31) or Lamb sarcophagi. For this reason, I have assigned it a later date, in the early-to-mid sixth century rather than to the fifth. It is, in fact, similar to other examples at Sant’Apollinare in Classe in iconographical terms. The composition of the front box of the sarcophagus is a single panel between pseudo-pilasters. Instead of the compositional field being framed by these architectural elements as on the sarcophagi described above, the compositional space is itself set off by a double frame and the “pilasters” stand outside this frame at the vertical ends of the box. These pilasters are, nevertheless, decorated with the same kind of vine (though more abstractly rendered) as is found frequently in other Ravennate sarcophagi, particularly on the ends of the Twelve Apostles and Theodore sarcophagi (Figs. 37 and 31). Within this

border, the composition is symmetrically arranged. A central Latin cross is inscribed in a wreath tied with lemnisci. Two lambs flank the central wreath, and a palm tree stands behind each lamb. In spite of the salient stylistic dissimilarities of the forms (the lambs here have oddly “feathered” coats, teardrop-shaped eyes, pointed ears and muzzles; the palm trees look like overgrown shrubs, and the proportions of the cross and wreath are dumpy and thick) the repertoire and compositional arrangement of imagery is the same as on other sarcophagi in the basilica. The back box of this sarcophagus is not carved. On the rounded lid of the tomb, three equally spaced monograms, inscribed in wreaths, hover against a blank background. The elements can be closely compared to those found on the Twelve Apostles and Thedore sarcophagi lids. The marble of the lid is slightly different in color from the marble of the box, and therefore may not be original to the monument.

The ends of the sarcophagus are decorated similarly, with two horseshoe shaped arches supported on pilasters that are decorated only with crudely cut, round bosses. Underneath these arches are two stacked pinwheel shapes, a whorl with four grooved spokes. This element appears on at least two other sculptural fragments from Ravenna both in the Museo Nazionale. Comparisons for this motif can also be found on transenna panels and church furniture from the eighth century in Bobbio, Bologna, and Rome.

6. Crucifer Lamb sarcophagus – north aisle, position 3; marble; early 8th century (possibly represents a recarving of an earlier marble sarcophagus of unknown date)

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40 Lawrence, 39.


42 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 85.4.
If the *Lamb-and-Rinceau* sarcophagus seems crude or simplified in style, the *Crucifer Lamb* sarcophagus (Fig. 14) is more basic, even to the point of appearing unfinished. The front has an unornamented border on all four sides, without any attempt to create the sort of architectural, decorative framework that has so far characterized all of the other examples (though as mentioned above the *Lamb-and-Rinceau* example is much reduced in this regard). The plain, rectangular space of the box is carved with a central star-shaped monogram inscribed in an undecorated circular medallion. This motif is flanked on either side by two rudely carved lambs, each of which carries a cross over its shoulder. The lambs themselves are poorly drafted, with too-short legs, awkward, inorganic bodies, and heads with chunky jowls that cause them to resemble dogs or donkeys more than lambs. Their mouths are indicated with short, lightly incised lines, and the lamb on the right has a tiny outline for an eye. The lamb on the left has no eye. Neither of the lambs has any carving to indicate fleece. They float freely on either side of the monogram, with no hint of a groundline or any sort of background setting. The carving is blocklike, and the relief is uniformly low. The total lack of detail on the monogram, lambs, and border suggests that this sarcophagus was left unfinished.

The lid of the sarcophagus is rounded, as in the other examples, but it is a much shallower arc than the high domed lids on the other monuments. The lid in front is carved with two peacocks approaching a central *cantharus*, a motif echoing that of the box below. As with the lambs, details are scarce, and the surface of the marble seems roughly cut, once more likely indicating an unfinished product. On most of the other sarcophagi from Ravenna,

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43 Raffaella Farioli has suggested that Ravennate sculptors who reused sarcophagus lids shaped like pitched roofs (pointed with corner acroteria) often carved them down to a semi-circular shape to match the domed lids popular in eastern sarcophagi. This may explain the shallow arc of this lid as well as others. Farioli, 1980, 193.
lid carvings are comparatively smaller, and act like decorative accents to the more prominent box carving. Here, the lid and box are given nearly equal sculptural attention. The ends of the sarcophagus have only a carved frame, and the back of the sarcophagus is blank. In spite of its basic simplicity, it must be acknowledged that the symbols employed, including lambs, peacocks, *cantharus*, crosses, and medallion monogram, are entirely familiar, as is the symmetrical arrangement of these elements within the compositional space.

7. *Felix* sarcophagus⁴⁴ - north aisle, position 1; marble; early 8th century c. 724 (represents a recarving of an earlier marble sarcophagus of unknown date)

The *Felix* sarcophagus (Fig. 10) recycles many of the nonfigural symbols and images that are found elsewhere in this group (and in other sarcophagi from Ravenna). The box is a frieze type, and the compositional space has been blocked out in a rough manner, similar to the treatment of the *Crucifer Lamb* monument. But, like the *Lamb-and-Rinceau* tomb, it also includes flanking architectural elements (columns) that reference the architecturally-framed boxes of examples such as the *Twelve Apostles* or *Theodore* sarcophagi. The column on the left of the box is rounded and unfluted, while the right column is a shallow pilaster carved with flutes. This disparity likely indicates two (at least) phases of carving. The roughness of the marble beneath the box composition, with no lower border as appears on other examples like the *Lamb-and-Rinceau*, may indicate either an unfinished sarcophagus or evidence of re-carving of this marble box.

The composition of the front consists of a central Latin cross, with *alpha* and *omega* pendants and a *rho* loop, situated beneath a gabled arch supported on columns. This central feature is flanked by two lambs surmounted by floating crosses. On either end, flanking the lambs, are round arches supported on similar columns. A lamp or crown hangs from the

⁴⁴ Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 86.3.
center of each arch. The perspective for each lamp is tilted up, so that it is perceived as a round oval with three hanging pendants. Tall candlesticks at the extreme right and left of the composition flank the archways.

The elements, though conventional, are not consistently well-crafted. The columns that support the arches and gable are each a bit different from one another. Their proportions are slightly disfigured, and one of the columns lacks any sort of necking, but rather merges senselessly into its capital. The lambs are curious creatures. They stand alert in profile, and all four of their legs are visible. The joints of their limbs and of their neck, chest, and jawbones are depicted as knobby lumps. Like the lambs of the *Crucifer Lamb* sarcophagus, the features of their faces are reduced to a single incised line for a mouth, and an ovoid eye.

The lid of the sarcophagus is rounded, but it is a much shallower form than the high, cylindrical domed lids from earlier monuments. Carved on the top of the lid are familiar symbols, a large Latin cross flanked by two smaller Latin crosses with *alpha* and *omega* pendants. Both these crosses are inscribed in wreaths. The ends and back box of this sarcophagus are uncarved.

This tomb is a reused pre-Christian sarcophagus. The antique inscription was removed only in the eighteenth century. An added inscription on the lid alerts the audience that this tomb bears the blessed remains of archbishop Felix, who served from 708 to 724. The re-carving of the monument can be securely dated to the first part of the eighth century based on the date of the archbishop’s death. There is no way to know whether or not Felix ordered the preparation of this tomb, but the impression of haste given by the lower quality

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45 Farioli, 1980, 188ff.

46 Mazzotti, 208.
of workmanship in the sculptural style, and the lingering pre-Christian inscription, suggests that the tomb was not prepared in advance of Felix’s demise. Agnellus relates that this sarcophagus was once positioned “near the monasterium of St. Felicula” which was probably either a chapel off of the nave or off of the narthex. There may also have been an epithet on the wall above the sarcophagus.

8. Gratiosus sarcophagus – south aisle position 2; marble; late 8th century (possibly represents a recarving of an earlier marble sarcophagus of unknown date)

Of the tombs in Sant’Apollinare in Classe surveyed thus far, the iconography of the Gratiosus sarcophagus (Fig. 11) is most divergent from any of the others. Its scope of imagery is reduced to a series of Latin crosses, whose arms terminate in volute scrolls at the ends. The front of the sarcophagus box is framed by only a contour box in which are three equally-spaced rectangular frames. Each of these has one cross. The crosses are carved in low relief and are roughly similar to one another in size and proportion. In between the three crosses is an inscription, broken into two sections, letting the viewer know that here lies the body of the blessed archbishop, Gratiosus, archbishop of Ravenna from 785 to 788.

The lid of this tomb is carved with three crosses, but unlike their counterparts on the box they are not of equal size, nor are they equally spaced. The center cross is larger than the outside crosses, and it is spaced much nearer to the left end. There seems to have been a flaw in the design to give the decoration of the lid such an obvious lack of the balance and symmetry characteristic of the other sarcophagi. The lid also is separated visually from the box by a braided pattern of cords. The left end of the sarcophagus has another cross carved in

47 Agnellus, c. 150: non longe a monasterio sanctae Feliculae.

48 Mazzotti, 207. Agnellus, c. 150.

49 Bovini, ed., 1968, cat. 61, 58 - 59, pl. 61 a. – c.
shallow relief. The terminals have trumpet-like flared ends, and there is an additional, trapezoidal shape at the bottom of the vertical crossbeam which serves as a sort of miniature pedestal. The surface of this end, including both the cross and the negative space around it, is covered with striated chisel-marks, indicating that the composition was in a rudimentary state of production and, perhaps, that older imagery had been removed in preparation for a new design. The right end is blank. The back of the sarcophagus has three more crosses, whose forms are similar to the cross on the left end. Like that cross, the ones on the back are plain, except that instead of being sculpted in relief, they are actually incised into the surface of the monument. The central cross is surrounded by a circle and has two lily flowers set atop the horizontal crossbeam, one on either side of the vertical crossbeam. The difference in the appearance of the crosses on the front and on the back of the tomb, and the disparity in the sculptural methods (relief on the front and incision on the back) suggests that the back decoration was added separately. The lid in the back has a single cross, whose terminals have the volute scrolls like the crosses on the front of the monument. The surface of the lid in the back reveals rough chisel marks like the ones noted on the ends.

This tomb is obviously a reworked monument. The singularly shallow curve of the rounded lid may have resulted from carving away an originally sloping lid with corner acroteria, perhaps with pagan imagery.\textsuperscript{50} In addition, the asymmetrical arrangement of the crosses on the lid is a strange, seemingly \textit{ad hoc} arrangement of imagery, perhaps designed to cover an area that had been previously chipped away. The obvious chiseling on the ends and back provide further evidence in support of this hypothesis.

\textsuperscript{50} As suggested by Mazzotti, 201 as well as Farioli, 1980, 188.
9. John VI sarcophagus\textsuperscript{51} – north aisle position 4; marble; late 8\textsuperscript{th} century (possibly represents a recarving of an earlier marble sarcophagus of unknown date)

The sarcophagus of John (Fig. 12) is quite similar to the sarcophagus of Gratiosus, the only difference being that the lid of the sarcophagus is plain instead of decorated with crosses. Like that of Gratiosus, the tomb of John is also probably a re-worked pre-Christian sarcophagus. The right end is carved with a cross; the left end and back are uncarved. Based on the inscription attributing this tomb to John VI it can be dated to the last quarter of the eighth century.

The Gratiosus and John sarcophagi are the most obviously different from the other monuments in that they lack any of the iconography or symbols, besides crosses, found elsewhere. Also, their prominent inscriptions on the front of the boxes are unlike anything found on the other Christian monuments from Ravenna.\textsuperscript{52} In fact, the only similarities in their imagery are the repetition of forms in symmetrical arrangements (even if this symmetry is occasionally botched, as on the Gratiosus lid), and the use of nonfigural rather than figural imagery.

Stylistically, the monuments at Sant’Apollinare vary greatly in terms of chronology and style. Several of the sarcophagi were carved in the fifth or early sixth centuries during the heyday of Christian sarcophagi production in Ravenna. These monuments, including the Twelve Apostles sarcophagus (Fig. 37) and the Lamb sarcophagus (Fig. 18) exhibit naturalistic, idealized forms, skillfully varied relief, and careful attention to decoration and

\textsuperscript{51} Bovini, ed., 1968, cat. 60, 58, pl. 60 a. – b.

\textsuperscript{52} In the pagan monuments from Ravenna it was common for a large portion of the compositional space on the front of the sarcophagus box to be reserved for an inscription (usually carved onto a tabula ansata or frame sometimes flanked by figures such as eroti or representations of the deceased). For examples see Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A1, A3, A4. If these tombs are renovated pre-Christian tombs, the odd format may be related to preexistent compositional formats.
detail. These sarcophagi were selected for reuse in the seventh or eighth (or ninth) centuries for burial of an archbishop in the basilica of Sant’Apollinare. Other sarcophagi likely were carved in the eighth century (that is to say, most likely marble boxes from an earlier period were recarved in the eighth century) for the same purpose. These sarcophagi exhibit a markedly different style. The *Crucifer Lamb* (Fig. 14) and *Felix* (Fig. 10) monuments, for example, exhibit rather poor draftsmanship, flat shallow relief, and few details. Despite disparities in chronology and style, the sarcophagi demonstrate some strong iconographic connections. The *Twelve Apostles* sarcophagus is the only one of the group to use figural imagery. All the other tombs draw on a strictly limited repertoire of nonfigural symbols. The *Lamb* sarcophagus (Fig. 18), *Lamb-and-Rinceau* sarcophagus (Fig. 13), *Crucifer Lamb* sarcophagus (Fig. 14), and *Felix* sarcophagus (Fig. 10) are differentiated from one another in terms of style and level of artistic skill, but their primary compositional formats are strikingly similar. The *Three-and-Four-Arch* sarcophagus (Fig. 4) and *Six-Arch* sarcophagus (Fig. 127) both feature architectonic compositions supplemented by symbols such as lambs, peacocks, crosses, palm trees and other conventional symbols found elsewhere among this group of tombs. The latest tombs in the set, the *Gratiosus* (Fig. 11) and *John* (Fig. 12) tombs are nearly identical.

Repeated symbolic forms include peacocks (found on six monuments), the Christological monogram (found on seven), grapevines and / or rosettes (four), lambs (six), chalices or *cantharoi* (five), laurel wreaths or crowns (seven), and the cross (found on all of the tombs). These consistent symbols and images are employed not only on the fronts of the monuments, but also on the backs, ends, and lids. Many of the sarcophagi feature similar symmetrically arranged compositions, and the arrangement of three elements, with one
central element flanked on either side by two identical ones, is found at least once on all of
the sarcophagi. Many of the idiosyncratic qualities that bind this group, including the
repetition of familiar symbols, symmetrical and / or tripartite arrangements, reduction of
elements to create compositions that are simple, uncluttered, and clean, also mark the
majority of the sarcophagi from Ravenna, as noted in Chapter 2. The sarcophagi in
Sant’Apollinare cohere as a group around these qualities, but they simultaneously commune
with a number of other tombs at Ravenna.

It is also important to note that the majority, and probably all, of these sarcophagi
were reused tombs, either from the pre-Christian era as the *Three-and-Four-Arch*
sarcophagus, or from the Christian era, as the *Twelve Apostles* and *Lamb* sarcophagi. One
practical reason that the most important clerics from the see of Ravenna may have chosen to
reuse monuments, instead of commissioning new ones, must have been the cost involved.
The burials in the church date from the late sixth through the ninth century. Funds were
obviously limited at certain points during that span, as demonstrated by the unfinished nature
of several of the tombs such as the *Felix* and *Crucifer Lamb* examples. Another possible
reason for the reuse may have been the prestige associated with certain spoliated items. The
*Twelve Apostles* sarcophagus, in particular, demonstrates a high degree of artistic skill and its
classically-garbed figures recall examples found on other Ravenna examples such as the
*Rinaldo* sarcophagus54 (Fig. 19) in Ravenna Cathedral and the *Isaac* sarcophagus55 (Fig. 30)

53 On the *Three-and-Four-Arch* sarcophagus this arrangement is lost on the front of the box due to the even
number of niches, but it is carried through on the back of the box.

54 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B14, 65 - 66, pl. 47.4, 53.1 – 3, 56. 1 – 2, 57.1, 58. 1 - 2.

55 Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B3, 55 - 57, pl. 28. 1 – 3, 29. 1 – 3, 30. 1 - 4. Of course, the *Isaac* sarcophagus
was itself reused in 643 at the time of the death of Exarch Isaac. So it would seem that reusing fifth and early
sixth century tombs was a practice not only engaged in by the clerics in Sant’Apollinare in Classe, but by other
important Ravennate citizens of the seventh century as well.
in San Vitale. Therefore, this tomb might have been consciously selected to inspire comparisons with other, admirable monuments.

Whether the motivations were economic or sentimental, the very fact that they were reused implies choice, selection. These tombs may not have been specifically commissioned, but they were chosen by their patrons and, in several cases, recarved with new imagery. The similarities among the tombs must be considered in light of this point of view. Would the patrons who picked the monuments have made their selections with the thought of place in mind? In other words, is it mere coincidence that the tombs are almost all nonfigural or “symbolic?” Or that the same types of symbols, particularly lambs, and crosses in medallions, recur over and over again? I will return to these ideas after first considering the visual context of the basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe.

II. Mosaic Decoration in Sant’Apollinare

The visual context of these sarcophagi illuminates the significance of their imagery. Unfortunately little of the original mosaic decoration or marble revetment that once ornamented the nave of Sant’Apollinare survives today. The nave arcade does have its original set of twenty-four beautiful columns that were quarried from Proconnesus specifically for the church, and matching capitals in the “butterfly” or “leaves blown by the wind” style (Fig. 128). But by far the most striking part of the interior decoration of the basilica is found in the presbytery and apse mosaics. The imagery here deserves special attention. As discussed above, the church of Sant’Apollinare served as a designated memorial site for the leaders of the Church of Ravenna. The iconography of the mosaics in the presbytery of the church celebrates these leaders and their role in Ravenna.
The half-dome above the apse (Fig. 129) of the basilica has become an iconic example of Ravennate mosaic work, and is included in most survey texts on the history of Western art. The iconography is that of the Transfiguration, the account in the gospels of Matthew,\textsuperscript{56} Mark,\textsuperscript{57} and Luke\textsuperscript{58} in which Jesus Christ ascended Mt. Tabor with three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John. While on the mountain Christ’s divinity was revealed (his body and clothing glowed with light). He was miraculously joined by Old Testament figures Moses and Elijah, and the voice of God proclaimed Jesus to be His Son. In the Classe mosaic Christ is represented as a large cross in a blue, star-spangled medallion. He is flanked on the left and right by the Old Testament patriarch and prophet whose torsos emerge from stylized clouds. The disciples of Christ are represented as three lambs on the ground below the cross. Beneath the cross medallion is a large representation of Saint Apollinaris. He is flanked by six lambs on each side, processing toward him from either side of the apse. The stunning visual impact of the mosaic is achieved through the use of simple, yet powerful, symbols and luscious gold, green, and blue colors. Though the imagery and symbols employed are familiar, they carry deep significance in the overall mosaic program, and in the greater purpose of the church.

The cross is meant to symbolize Christ, as is clearly indicated by the small face of Jesus set in a circle of pearls at the center of the jeweled cross. If that isn’t enough for a positive identification there are also two inscriptions, one above the cross in Greek (ΙΧΘΥΣ - the acrostic for “Jesus Christ Son of God Savior”) and another below it in Latin (“Salus Mundi” – “Salvation of the World”). A peculiar aspect of this representation of the

\textsuperscript{56} Matthew 17: 1 – 9

\textsuperscript{57} Mark 9: 2- 8

\textsuperscript{58} Luke 9: 28 - 36
Transfiguration is that it uses this symbol of the cross-in-medallion instead of a physical representation of Jesus Christ. The cross itself is a common type, with arms that flare out slightly at the terminals. There are also α and ω symbols flanking the horizontal crossbar. This type of cross is often found on the sarcophagi from Sant’Apollinare (as in other places). For instance, on the Lamb sarcophagus (Fig. 18) this type of cross appears on the front and ends as well as on the rounded lid. As mentioned above, a cross appears at least once, and usually several times, on all nine of the tombs under consideration. The cross with α and ω symbols occurs three times, and the cross in a medallion occurs seven times. This large, prominent cross with its flared ends, α and ω symbols, and surrounding medallion thus echoes the similar forms carved onto many of the large stone sarcophagi.

In addition to the nonfigural symbol for Christ that is the focal point of the Transfiguration mosaic, other symbols in the mosaic are also referenced in the sarcophagi imagery. In particular, the lambs that populate the apse are echoed on several of the tombs. Not only are the three disciples from the Transfiguration narrative represented as lambs, but there are also two flocks of twelve lambs in the mosaic program. One flock is arranged on either side of the titular saint at the bottom of the apse, and a second ascends the triumphal mosaic preceding the apse. The use of lambs to stand in for physical representations of

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59 The apse image at Classe is often compared to similar iconography in the apse of the church of the Monastery of St. Catharine at Mount Sinai. The Sinai mosaic, roughly contemporaneous with the Classe mosaic, features full figures of Christ, the Old Testament prophets, and the three disciples. Jesus Christ is presented in a static, frontal pose, inscribed in a blue mandorla, and the background is pure gold with little indication of setting or landscape. In spite of these abstracting tendencies, it is curious that this fully Byzantine version of the iconography yet eschews a symbolic presentation of Jesus Christ himself in favor of a figural representation. The comparison, in my opinion, makes the Classe imagery more surprising in its blend of naturalistic features (especially landscape details and the figure of St. Apollinaris) with the nonfigural symbols used for Jesus and his followers. For mosaic at Sinai, see: Henry Luttikhuizen and Dorothy Verkerk, *Synder’s Medieval Art*, 2nd edition, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006), 69, fig. 4.22.
Christian disciples or followers is in no way unprecedented, and appears in both mosaic and sculpted images from elsewhere in Ravenna. Again, however, the repetitive use of this formulaic symbolism creates strands of continuity between the tombs in the church and the architectural decoration.

In the apse the fact that the three disciples present at the Transfiguration – Peter, James, and John – are represented as lambs, and that Apollinaris’s followers are represented as lambs is interesting. By depicting Peter, James, and John as lambs instead of distinct individuals the designer removed some of the specificity of the narrative moment, and of the participants. In one sense, this generalization echoes the larger symbolic sentiment of the Transfiguration iconography in that it further presents it as a transcendent moment, apart from chronological time or fixed historical import. But, also, by representing both the disciples and Saint Apollinaris’ flock as lambs, the designer created a correspondence between the two groups. Though the three lamb disciples are obviously privileged by being set above the anonymous flock, they are nevertheless not set apart by physical features nor by inscriptions (as are their Old Testament colleagues floating alongside the cross medallion).

The choice to represent Peter, James, and John as lambs may have been, in part, a way of synthesizing this original group of Christian disciples with the later members of Saint Apollinaris’s flock of Christian disciples.\(^{60}\) The fact that the “anonymous” flock numbers

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\(^{60}\) The conceptualization of the bishop as a type of “shepherd” has a rich literary and visual tradition in early Christian culture. While the popular iconography of Jesus Christ in the guise of a shepherd (the “Good Shepherd”) phased out of artistic representations by the fifth century, the imagery of the bishop as a sort of shepherd, responsible for tending the “flock” of the Christian community remained popular for much longer. Dorothy Verkerk has documented the use of such pastoral imagery to emphasize the role of the bishop on Irish high crosses, and situates this visual imagery within a broader context. Such imagery also appears, she points out, in early Christian sarcophagi carving. And, from a literary perspective, it is prominent in both the biblical texts in which God and/or Christ is compared to a shepherd, as well as in the writings of early Church leaders such as Aphraates, Gregory the Great, and St. Patrick, all of whom equated the responsibilities of the bishop within his diocese to that of a shepherd with his flock. Dorothy Verkerk, “Feed My Sheep: Pastoral Imagery and
twelve is of course an allusion to the group of disciples associated with Christ during his lifetime, but also to the symbolic church as a whole, or more specifically to the Church of Ravenna. In Peter Chrysologus’s sermon on Apollinaris he referred to the saint as a good shepherd who stands in the middle of his flock, a verbal picture that seems to be represented in the apse mosaic.\(^61\)

Thus, the nonfigural, symbolic forms serve not only to create chronological transcendence (a moment whose significance supersedes the bounds of time or history), but additionally communal transcendence (disciples of Christ are One no matter the historical moment they inhabit). It is also possible to extend the implication of the symbols beyond the mosaic to the funerary monuments where they appear. Lambs are depicted on six of the nine sarcophagi in Sant’Apollinare. Possibly the patrons of these tombs wanted to associate themselves with the original disciples of Christ, and the primary, Ravennate disciples of Saint Apollinaris. In addition to the particular images, the style of the Transfiguration mosaic with its sparing use of strong symbols, and its symmetrical compositional arrangement is strongly reminiscent of many of the sarcophagus compositions.

The apse mosaic at Classe is the first extant example of an apse program that uses a subject other than Christ in Majesty, but its peculiar representation of the Transfiguration may not have been entirely unprecedented. A now-lost apse mosaic from the church of San Felix in Nola (Fig. 130) is also thought to have carried a similar image.\(^62\) In the Nola mosaic, however, below the cross medallion was a large lamb standing on a hillock from which the

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62 Lawrence, fig. 77.
four rivers of paradise flowed. This lamb was another obvious representation of Jesus Christ. The same position in the Classe composition is occupied by the figure of Saint Apollinaris. In the apse at Classe, Apollinaris is the only full figure, and, in fact, the only human figure represented apart from the torsos of Moses and Elijah. While these men float in disembodied form against the golden sky of the upper mosaic, the figure of Apollinaris is set off against the green ground of the lower portion of the mosaic. He stands in an hieratic, orans pose, along the central axis of the design directly below the large cross medallion which is the center of the composition. Aligned thus, symbolically, to Christ the form of this first bishop of Ravenna is clearly the second most significant image in the apse. Such a glorification of the bishop is unprecedented in early Christian mosaic imagery.⁶³ It is evident that the

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⁶³ Some scholars hypothesize that the figure of Apollinaris was not originally intended for the apse when Ursicinus founded the church in 532 and was instead substituted when the relics of Apollinaris were translated to the church under Maximian (who consecrated it in 549). Restoration work on the mosaics in 1949 – 1950 and 1970 – 72 revealed the presence of sinopie or underdrawings on the plaster around the cross as well as a wooden peg in the center of the drawing that marked the place where a string would have been tied to mark the drawing of a medallion around the cross. This discovery demonstrated that the center of the composition was predetermined from its inception. On the lower wall, sketches revealed the presence of another cross flanked by peacocks, birds and vases, and plants – the sort of motifs found commonly in other mosaic and sculpted images from Ravenna. It is unclear whether or not this sketched imagery was ever actually worked out in mosaic. The similarity of the tesserae around the cross and Saint Apollinaris suggest that he was part of the original mosaic work, but he may have originally played a less prominent role by being accompanied by other figures such as Ursicinus, and / or angels. In short, by the time the church was consecrated under Maximian, it seems the design had been changed to give much more prominence to the basilica’s titular saint. See: Mazzotti, 171, Giuseppe Bovini, “Qualche nota sulle sinopie recentemente rinvenute sotto il mosaico absidale di S. Apollinare in Classe di Ravenna,” in Atti dell accademia delle scienze dell ‘istituto di Bologna – Classe di scienze morali 62/2 (1974), 100 – 106, Luise Abramowski, “Die Mosaiken von S. Vitale und S. Apollinare in Classe und die Kirchenpolitik Kaiser Justinians,” Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum 5 (2001), 304 – 305, Deliyannis, 2010, 268. Because the restoration work at Sant’Apollinare has been nearly continuous since its construction, it is prudent to be wary of drawing too many conclusions based on the iconography and / or design. Nevertheless, the evidences of the original imagery, including the sinopie (underdrawings), the wooden peg, surviving tesserae, and the similarity between the motifs and iconographical details found elsewhere in Ravenna’s other fifth – and sixth-century mosaics and sculpture, allow scholars to, circumspectly, draw generalizations from the extant composition. For summaries of the restoration work at Classe see Mazzotti, 1954, Giuseppe Bovini, “Principali restuari compiuti nel secolo scorso da Felice Kibel nei mosaici di S. Apollinare Nuovo di Ravenna,” Corso di cultura sull’arte ravennate e bizantina 13 (1966): 83 - 104, and Anna Maria Iannucci, “I vescovi Ecclesius, Severus, Ursus, Ursicinus, le scene dei privilege e dei sacrifice in S. Apollinare in Classe – Idagine sistematica,” Corso di cultura sull’arte ravennate e bizantina 33 (1986): 165 – 193.
designers (or remodelers) of the mosaics were invested in honoring the prototypical bishop of Ravenna in this basilica.

While a number of interpretations can be (and have been) applied to the Transfiguration mosaic, the evident desire to glorify Apollinaris in the mosaic program is natural given the impetus for the construction of the church to honor him the first bishop of Ravenna’s see, and the subsequent promotion of Apollinaris’s significance as later church leaders (Maximian, and his successors) sought to elevate the see’s status. In fact, Apollinaris is not the only clerical leader honored in the presbytery of his basilica. Set between the five windows of the lower apse wall are representations of four subsequent bishops of Ravenna (Fig. 131). They are, from left to right, Ecclesius the twenty-fourth bishop (522–532), Severus, the twelfth (c. 308–348), Ursus the seventeenth (c. 405–431), and Ursicinus the twenty-fifth (533–536). Each is named by an inscription, as is Saint Apollinaris above them. Severus and Ursus have the title “Sanctus” before their names as well, but none are nimbed. Each of the clerics stands in a niche beneath a pair of curtains pulled back to either side of his head. A crown hung on a chain is suspended above each bishop, and each holds a jeweled gospel book in a covered left hand while raising the right in a sign of benediction. All wear the ceremonial, ecclesiastical garment known as the pallium. The imagery in these representations of the archbishops is nothing if not familiar. Figures set under niches, holding jeweled gospel books with draped hands are abundant in mosaic imagery and in sculptural imagery from Ravenna as from elsewhere in the early Christian world. Like the repetitive

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64 For a summary, see Angelika Michael, *Das Apsismosaik von S. Apollinare in Classe: Seine Deutung im Kontext der Liturgie* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2005), 13–22. As in so many cases, a variety of meanings were surely operative simultaneously.

65 None of these men are inhumed at Sant’Apollinare in Classe.

66 See, for instance, the representation of Christ’s disciples on the Twelve Apostles sarcophagus (Fig. 37).
imagery found on the sarcophagi, the readily recognizable symbols and conventional costumes, postures, and props serve to reinforce the continuity between these men and the broader tradition of clerical authority. These four bishops serve as an abbreviated history of the see of Ravenna to this point in time by featuring several of its prominent clerics. Severus was present at the Council of Sardica, Ursus founded the cathedral basilica of Ravenna, Ecclesius was renowned because of his mission from Pope John I to Constantinople, and Ursicinus commissioned the building of this church. Each of these men was pivotal in elevating the see of Ravenna, and / or expanding its authority and autonomy.

While the mosaics found in the half-dome of the apse date to the consecration of the church in 549 under Maximian, two panels along the lower apse wall were added later, probably in the seventh century. On the left (Fig. 132) is an image of a Byzantine emperor (wearing a purple chlamys with a gold tablion on top of a white tunic) handing privileges to a man dressed as an archbishop. Between the emperor and the recipient bishop is another archbishop who (like the emperor) is nimbed. The meaning of the image is contested, but probably commemorates the awarding of “autocephaly,” or the privilege of choosing its own bishops, to the see of Ravenna, under Archbishop Maurus in the year 666. The emperor

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67 Mazzotti, 176.

68 On the debate over the dating of these mosaics, see Ianucci, 1986.

69 Mazzotti, esp. Ch. 8, “I Musaici,” 162 – 188.

70 Although Constantine IV is named in the mosaic inscription (Constantinus maior imperator, Eraclii et Tiberii imperator), the award of autocephaly actually took place under Emperor Constans II. Some scholars, therefore, believe that the “privilegia” represented here is not the autocephaly grant, but instead represents the granting of privileges by Emperor Constantine IV, and his brothers Heraclius and Tiberius, to Bishop Reparatus (the inscription below reads: “This Reparatus, that he might be a comrade to the saints, made new decorations for this hall, to blaze through the ages” Is igitur socius meritis Reparatus ut esset, Aula nouos habitus fecit, flagrare per aeuum). This was the explanation given by Agnellus in his description of the program. Agnellus, c. 115; see also Deliyannis’s translation of Agnellus, 234 n.4. Other scholars, however, such as Deichmann, argue that Agnellus was mistaken as to the iconography, and that the mosaic does, actually, depict the grant of autocephaly. In this case, the bishop shown between the emperor and Reparatus is Maurus, while the other three
hands a rolled scroll, inscribed with the word “privilegia” to an unnimbed man dressed as a monk. This figure is Reparatus, a delegate of Archbishop Maurus who later himself became archbishop of Ravenna. Between the emperor and Reparatus, behind the scroll, stands a tonsured man in bishops’ costume. An inscription beside his nimbed head identifies him as “archbishop.” If this vignette represents the autocephaly award, this figure likely represents Maurus who, though not physically present at the historical moment, was pivotal in winning these privileges for his see, as his watchful presence indicates. Agnellus, as mentioned above, remarked that Maurus, along with two other bishops, was buried in the narthex in Sant’Apollinare, and he related that a mosaic inscription near the burial honored Maurus for his work in wrestling autocephaly for Ravenna. Maurus is honored in the church as a faithful steward of the bishopric and for his particular service in gaining for it greater authority and recognition.

On the right wall of the apse, opposite the representation of Maurus’ triumph, (Fig. 133) is a panel representing three Old Testament figures depicted as faithful “priests.” These men are Abel, Melchizedek, and Abraham. Melchizedek, standing in the center of the

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71 It was also, incidentally, during the reign of Maurus that the hagiographical life of Saint Apollinaris was likely composed. If the apostolic origins of the see of Ravenna were not already established by the time of the consecration of the basilica to Apollinaris in the mid-sixth century, the composition of the Passio in the seventh was meant to shore up and solidify those apostolic origins. In any case, the veneration of Apollinaris clearly predated the composition of the Passio, as demonstrated not only by the dedication of the basilica at Classe, but also to Peter Chrysologus’s mid-sixth century sermon devoted to him.

72 Mazzotti, esp. Ch. 8 “I Musaici,” 162 – 188. This mosaic panel has been heavily restored, and only portions of it are original. Ianucci, 1986, 182. There are many similarities that can be drawn between this panel and ones found in the presbytery of San Vitale.
composition, behind a linen draped table, is depicted with long flowing silver hair and beard. He is dressed in a white robe with a purple cloak thrown around his shoulders. To his right, Abel turns toward the table holding out a lamb. To his left, the Patriarch Abraham offers his young son. The table before the three men is tilted up at an angle to reveal two silver patens and the central wine vessel, instruments of the Eucharist.

The composition of this panel has been traditionally interpreted as referring to the Eucharist. Its position to the side of the main altar of the church makes such an interpretation not only plausible but, I would submit, obvious. In light of the concurrent theme of “bishop veneration” in the overall mosaic program (and, furthermore, the broader idea of the church as a shrine for the bishops of Ravenna), there may be a secondary interpretation that is equally valid. The three figures epitomize ideal spiritual leaders. The imagery not only represents the sacrifices offered, but also the officiants who preside over these faithful sacrifices. Especially when taken in conjunction with the grandiose presence of Saint Apollinaris in the upper apse, the four faithful bishops along the apse wall, and the opposite panel honoring the bishop(s) who won privileges for the see of Ravenna, it seems impossible that this additional meaning could have been unintentional. And, of course, the connection between these two panels and those similarly placed in San Vitale, with their own obvious Eucharistic and political themes, provides additional support for such an interpretation.

The apse program at Sant’Apollinare celebrates the power and prestige of the bishopric of Ravenna. As such, it may also be possible to find another layer of meaning in the main apse mosaic. While the Transfiguration is indisputably the primary iconography, a secondary subject matter is Saint Apollinaris performing a transcendent mass. The bishop stands beneath the orb of the transfigured Christ with his arms raised as an orans. This type
of figure harkens back to the earliest Christian and Jewish (and pagan) postures of prayer, but, in this position, with his arms raised, in the sanctuary of the church, Apollinaris also looks like a priest singing the mass. His arms are raised as if at the moment of the elevation of the Host. Indeed, the round medallion of Christ hovers above his raised arms like a mega-Host, while the congregation in the guise of lambs stream toward the priest to receive from him the wafer. It is a timeless celebration of the mass as performed by the first bishop, the first officiant, of the see of Ravenna. Positioned as he is directly above the altar space of the church, the gathered congregation watching mass take place in the basilica could not have failed to make the visual connection between the priest below and the saint above. It may not be coincidental that subsequent to the completion of the mosaic in the half-dome of the apse a mosaic panel was placed on the lower right wall of the apse celebrating the Eucharist by gathering together three foundational “priests” from the Old Testament presenting their sacred offerings on the same table. As mentioned above, it is a tableau that glorifies the act of sacrifice as well as the priestly persons and their sacred roles.\textsuperscript{73}

One clear indication that contemporary audiences understood the dual meaning of the mosaic imagery in the apse, and the broader memorial significance of the church itself, comes from Agnellus’s account of the Life of Theodore. Bishop Theodore was despised by his priests in Ravenna because, among other things, he “submitted himself and his church to the control of the Roman bishop.”\textsuperscript{74} In protest against Theodore, several of the priests of the

\textsuperscript{73} Several scholars have also noted that Apollinaris appears to performing mass in this composition. See: D. John Montanari, “L’abside di S. Apollinare in Classe di Ravenna: Mistero centrale, anamnesis ed eucharista,” in Miscellanea di studi artistici e letterari in onore di John Fallani in occasione del XXV di president, ed. Dante Balboni, 99 – 127, (Naples: A. de Dominicius, 1982), and Michael, 2005. Agnellus mentioned that there was a mosaic portrayal of Peter I (Chrysologus) performing the mass on the lower apse wall of the church of San John Evangelista. If Agnellus’s observation is factual, then the reference to Apollinaris performing the mass in Sant’Apollinare in Classe would not be without precedent in Ravenna. Agnellus, c. 27.

\textsuperscript{74} Agnellus, c. 124: \textit{subiugavit se suamque ecclesiam sub Romano pontifice}.  

see decided to rally together at the basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe instead of ministering in Ravenna cathedral with Bishop Theodore. When the legates of the bishop went to find the missing priests, the priests declared to them: “Turn back, since we do not have a shepherd, but a killer. When he entered this sheepfold, he promised not to do as he has done.” They continued by calling upon the corpse of Apollinaris to rise from his grave to their defense: “Rise, S. Apollinaris, celebrate with us the mass of the day of the nativity of the Lord. Holy Peter gave you to us as a shepherd. Therefore we are your sheep. We gather around you, save us.”75 The priests in this anecdote understood the implications of the mosaic image, calling on the saint to perform his holy duty and say mass in their presence, and to fulfill his role as guardian shepherd as they gathered around his tomb just as the lambs in the mosaic gathered around the figure of Apollinaris. They also drew upon the powerful physical presence of the saint’s body in the underground crypt. The priests were surrounded and supported, in this church, by a “great crowd of witnesses”76 in the form of past faithful bishops, those depicted in the mosaics of the apse walls, and those physically present in the tombs sheltered by the church. Although Apollinaris remained that day in his grave, as a result of this resounding vote of no confidence, Bishop Theodore was shamed into relenting on the policies that had made him so loathed by his clergy.

In his transcendent performance of the basic rite of the Christian church, Apollinaris is honored as the epitome of the “good shepherd” below, of course, Christ. Not only does the mosaic, thus, celebrate the Eucharist and all its spiritual implications, but it also celebrates the office of the priest, who is in this case the bishop. The shades of meaning – the

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75 Agnellus, c. 122: Recedit, quia non habemus pastorem, sed interfectorem. Quando in hoc ingressus est ouile, non talem ut facit, dedit pormissa. Surge, sancte Apolinaris, celebra nobis missam die nativitatis Domini. Ten obis dedit sanctus Petrus pastorem. Ideo tui sumus oues. Ad te concurrimus, salua nos.

76 Hebrews 12:1.
Transfiguration of Christ, Christ as the Good Shepherd, Apollinaris as a good shepherd in the likeness of Christ, the moment of mysterious transubstantiation at the height of the mass, the archetypical bishop performing the fundamental rite of the Christian church, the glorification of the office of bishop – all blend together in a harmonious balance. The symbolism filters down from the half-dome of the apse, is reiterated in the mosaics of lower apse walls, and echoes in the carved stone sarcophagi that house the earthly remains of Apollinaris’s successors. The tombs, with their repetitive, nonspecific imagery communicate this idea in a more subtle, but no less significant way.

The theme, glorification of the ecclesiastical institution, expressed so clearly in the mosaic program of the church, seems to have grown and expanded over time. The foundation of the church in 532 was a period of ascension on the part of Ravenna and its see. Already a seat of the Western Roman Empire since the early fifth century, the mid-sixth century was the period in which Ravenna as a political center began its rise to the apogee of its power and influence. As a result of the decision to base the Byzantine administration in Italy at Ravenna, Emperor Justinian also elevated the status of Ravenna’s clergy, granting the bishopric super-metropolitan status during the time of Bishop Maximian. Maximian was the bishop, subsequently, who oversaw the translation of the relics of Saint Apollinaris into the basilica and consecrated it in 549. It was at this time that the mosaics of the apse’s half-dome and some of the images on the triumphal arch leading into the apse were completed. The mosaics of the lower walls of the apse, including the bishops between the windows and

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77 For a discussion of the rise of the ecclesiastical power of Ravenna during the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, see Chapter 3.

78 Mazzotti, 41.
the two panels on the right\textsuperscript{79} and left walls flanking the main altar, were completed more than a century after the dome mosaic, during the period in which the church of Ravenna was openly contending with Rome for greater autonomy. In the year 666 that autonomy came in the form of new privileges granted to the see of Ravenna by the Byzantine Emperor. The mosaic panel on the lower left wall of the apse likely represents Maurus’s wresting this right of autocephaly for his bishopric. Agnellus mentions the burial of Maurus in the narthex of the church, though the mosaic panel and its inscription as he records them no longer survive. At any rate, the oldest of the extant sarcophagi in the church (the \textit{Twelve Apostles} and \textit{Lamb} tombs) can be dated to the sixth century based on comparisons with other monuments and architectural decoration.\textsuperscript{80} Clearly, some bishops began to be interred in the church shortly after its consecration, by the late sixth century. The majority of the extant tombs date from the late-seventh through the late-eighth centuries, during the season when Ravenna’s see was fighting for, winning, and then swiftly losing her independence from Rome.

In sum, the mosaic program of the presbytery and the choice of the church as a burial place for several of the bishops of Ravenna seems directly correlated to the see’s ongoing struggle for authority and independence. By including the deceased members of Ravenna’s bishopric alongside the images of the first bishop and his illustrious colleagues, in sarcophagi decorated with symbols familiar from the mosaic program, the patrons, and audiences,

\textsuperscript{79} There is some debate as to whether the mosaic of the south wall of the apse, with Melchizedek, Abraham, and Abel represents a panel that was installed contemporaneous with the panel opposite, showing the granting of “privileges;” or whether it is earlier – perhaps dating to the original construction. Similarities between this panel and mosaics in San Vitale suggests a sixth-century date. For this point of view, see Otto Demus, “Zu den Apsismosaiken von sant'Apollinare in Classe,” \textit{Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik} 18 (1969): 229 – 238. The fact that the composition focuses on the priestly figures in their roles as officiants seems related to the sentiment of the facing panel, perhaps indicating a seventh-century date. For this point of view, see Deichmann, 1976, 246. Given the acceleration of the ambitions of the Ravennate church in the seventh century, and the unfolding of the broad theme of bishop-veneration in the basilica, I think a seventh-century date for the mosaic seems more plausible.

\textsuperscript{80} For a discussion of this process of dating based on comparative analysis, see Chapter 1.
original and future, must have understood the implication: that the Christian community in Ravenna was a glorious one, and a transcendent one. It stretched from heaven to earth, from the resplendent glory of the celestial space, where the forerunner, Christ, hovered in disembodied symbol against the golden sky of heaven, to the figure of Apollinaris standing against the green earth, to the solidly material stone tombs that held the very near bodies of those deceased bishops. It spanned time and eternity, from Christ’s eternal omnipresence, to the ancient reign of Apollinaris, to the more recently expired bishops. Though Ravenna’s ecclesiastical autonomy was rescinded less than a century after it was awarded, the fierce sense of self-importance and desire for independence continued to ignite the citizenry of Ravenna for centuries. It is a sentiment echoed in the unabashedly biased words of Agnellus, who wrote of Bishop Maurus:

in the hour of [Maurus’s] death he called all his priests, weeping before them . . . and he said to them ‘I am entering the path of death, I call to witness and warn you, do not place yourselves under the Roman yoke. Choose a pastor from yourselves, and let him be consecrated by his bishops. Seek the pallium from the emperor. For on whatever day you are subjugated to Rome, you will not be whole.’ And with these words he died; and he was buried in the narthex of the blessed Apollinaris, in a wonderful tomb.81

81 Agnellus, c. 113: In hora autem mortis suae uocauit omnes sacerdotes suos, plorans coram eis . . . et dixit ad eos: “Ego ingredior uiam mortis, contestor et moneo uos, non uos tradatis sub Romanorum iugo. Eligite ex uobis pastorem, et consecetur a suis episcopis. Pallium ab imperatore petite. Quacumque enim die Romae subiugati fueritis, non eritis integri.” Et his dictis obiit; sepultusque est in ardica beati Apollinaris, mire sepulture.
CHAPTER 5 SARCOPHAGUS IMAGERY:

Meaning and Multivalence

In the preceding chapters of this dissertation, I have argued that the imagery of the sarcophagi of Ravenna is neither coincidental nor haphazard. That it represents influences from major cultural centers, including but not limited to Constantinople and Rome, is unsurprising given the cosmopolitan nature of Ravenna in the late antique and early medieval eras. But it does not follow that because the imagery is not original, it is insignificant. In the second chapter, I argued that, along with the other artistic productions from Ravenna, the sarcophagus imagery represents distinctly local aesthetic impulses. Whether the imagery was crafted or modified in a local workshop, or whether selected by a local patron,¹ the idiosyncrasies of the imagery as well as the frequent connections to nearby architectural decoration strongly suggest that the peculiarities of the imagery can be, at least in part, attributed to its situation in the historical and artistic context of Ravenna. In the third chapter, I summarized the situation of Ravenna as an urban center during this period of time, and sketched an image of a city with a developing sense of both self-importance and isolation in a

¹ For the majority of the sarcophagi conserved at Ravenna the original patron or patrons remain unknown. Only in the cases of the fragments associated with the sarcophagus or sarcophagi of Bishops Ecclesius (d. 532), Ursinus (d. 536), and Victor (d. 544) conserved in the church of San Vitale, is there any certainty of connection between the monument(s) and an early superior of the local clergy. See: Roberta Badrissi, “La scultura ravennate,” in Ravenna da capitale imperiale a capitale esarcale, Atti del XVII congresso internazionale di studio sull’alto medioevo, Ravenna, 6 – 12 giugno 2004: 943 – 970 (Spoleto: Fondazione centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 2005), 963. In most all other cases, the inscriptions that record the names of the deceased were included later during a subsequent use. In spite, therefore, of the evident significance of bishops in the cultural landscape of Ravenna and the fact that a group of tombs are associated with them at Sant’Apollinare in Classe, it appears that the majority of the conserved tombs cannot be definitively linked to clergy. Some inevitably were, others became associated with bishops at a later date. Some may have originally been commissioned by political or military elite. That elite members of society often utilized marble sarcophagi is attested by the inscription on the Isaac sarcophagus connecting this fifth century sarcophagus to a mid-seventh century political patron (Exarch Isaac).
fracturing political environment. In the fourth chapter, I considered a specific group of tombs within a particular architectural context and described some possible ways that the sarcophagus imagery reflected, and bolstered, the sentiment expressed in the architecture and its decoration. In so doing, I explored ways in which the tombs may have represented views of an elite segment of Ravennate society, in this case the bishops. I have argued that the sculptural tradition extant in Ravenna ought to be understood as a local and regional phenomenon as much as (or rather than) a transplantation of a more sophisticated, outside tradition. In this, my conclusions agree with those articulated by scholars such as Roberta Budriesi and Raffaella Farioli. If the sculptural imagery of the sarcophagi is particular to late antique / early medieval Ravenna, it is relevant to explore its possible significations in this specific cultural context. What did the imagery mean to its patrons and audiences? What connections existed between the imagery and the social, political, or theological climate?

Unlike architectural sculpture, which was almost uniformly imported in a completed or semi-completed state and installed in one location, the sarcophagi were often used multiple times and frequently moved. Ancient imperial sarcophagi, from pre-Christian and Christian eras, were commonly selected and reworked with the addition of symbols that were prized in the local repertoire (peacocks, lambs, the Christological monogram, and so forth). This system of reuse and refurbishment represented selection and choice of imagery in a more direct manner than did outright importation. Even for tombs that were imported directly from eastern quarries (in semi-completed or completed states), clearly the sellers of such monuments designed tombs that would please the intended market base.

Speculation trade might explain, to an extent, the often generic quality of the imagery on the tombs inasmuch as the producers or exporters of the monuments would have wanted
them to appeal broadly. In the first section of this chapter, I consider some of the ways in which Christian funerary practice in a general, or ecumenical, sense may have inspired some of the sarcophagus imagery at Ravenna. At the same time, strong visual connections exist across the corpus of Ravennate sarcophagi and distinguish them from any other sculptural school. In the second section, I consider ways in which a sense of community may have been crafted through the repetitive funerary forms. Finally, in the third and fourth sections of the chapter, I will explore some of the various ways in which the subtly eccentric, almost obsessively formulaic, sarcophagus iconography may be specifically related to theological and doctrinal concerns relevant in late antique and early medieval Ravenna.

I. Sarcophagus Imagery: Part 1, Ritual

A foundational belief in Christian faith was the eventuality of bodily resurrection, followed by divine judgment and either eternal glorification or damnation.\(^2\) It is unsurprising that this concept gave rise to new meanings in burial rituals among Christians. The oldest liturgical books date no earlier than the seventh century, so prior practices must be painstakingly reconstructed by comparative analysis of later texts. In addition to these later liturgical texts, inferences to care for the dead can be found in several patristic writings, including Cyprian’s *De Mortalitate*,\(^3\) and Augustine’s *De Cura Gerenda Pro Mortuis.*\(^4\) Based on these early Christian authors and liturgical sources, a vision of early Christian, and

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\(^2\) A sample of the numerous Biblical allusions to the issue of death and afterlife include: John 5:25, 28 – 29 in which Jesus remarks that “the hour cometh . . when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live . . . And they that have done good things, shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment;” 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 18 in which Paul talks about those that “sleep” being raised by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God on the last day; 1 Corinthians 15: 52 in which Paul relates that “at the last trumpet . . . the dead shall rise again.”


\(^4\) Bishop Augustine of Hippo, *De Cura Gerenda pro Mortuis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), also *How to Help the Dead (De cura gerenda pro mortuis)*, trans. Mary H. Allies (New York: Benziger Bros, 1914).
early medieval, death and burial ritual can be somewhat reconstructed.\textsuperscript{5} Interestingly, some of the most distinctive aspects of this “Christianized” death ritual are referenced visually on Ravennate sarcophagi.

A. References to Eucharist / \textit{viaticum}

The earliest Latin ritual for death and burial is known as the old Roman \textit{Ordo defunctorum}.\textsuperscript{6} This is an eleventh-century text, but its character seems consistent with what is known about the attitudes and traditions of the late antique Roman church concerning death and burial rituals.\textsuperscript{7} Thus, the nature and structure of the Roman rite, as practiced in the fourth and fifth centuries can be generally reconstructed from this text. The ritual was based on a coherent set of actions: \textit{viaticum} given for the dying, the chanting of psalms, triumphal procession to mark the transition from life to death and from home to crypt, and celebration of the mass or Eucharist as a way of memorializing the deceased and consoling the bereaved. The general attitude of the participants throughout these activities was one of optimism concerning the salvation of the Christian soul and the certainty of eventual bodily resurrection. It is this ritual process and general positive outlook on death that seems to accord most closely with the visual references on the sarcophagi, particularly the earlier sarcophagi in the corpus.


\textsuperscript{7} Paxton, 37 – 39. While the actual death / burial rituals practiced in Ravenna at the time are unknown, it is plausible to assume that, for the most part, the Ravennate rituals were influenced by Latin tradition given that the general liturgical tone of Ravennate ritual seems to have been closely related to Latin / Roman forms. For a more in-depth discussion of the church at Ravenna’s liturgical character, see Chapter 3, 146 - 147 and below, 241 - 244.
The first and most important part of the early Christian ritual involved the giving of communion to the dying person. The *ordo* instructed clerics as to the moment and purpose for the administration of the Eucharist, known in this specific context as *viaticum*. The priests were to give the communion when they saw the dying person approaching death, and it would serve as defender and advocate for him / her.8 In the *Life of St. Melania*, there is a statement that it was customary among the Romans for the dying person to have the Communion of the Lord in the mouth when the soul departed out of life.9 This may have been a substitution for the ancient pagan practice of putting a coin in the mouth or coins over the eyes of the dead as payment to the ferryman (Charon) who transported the soul across the gulf between the land of the living and the realm of the dead (Hades). The word *viaticum* itself refers to money or supplies for a journey. Though the meaning had certainly shifted, the idea of fortifying the dead for a journey, providing protection, was maintained from pre-Christian tradition. As with other aspects of Christian life, the form of the practice was adopted, but the meaning of it changed. For Christians, the *viaticum* was not a vague parting gift for the deceased, but was considered the greatest possible safeguard for the soul. The Body and Blood of Christ was the departed’s pledge of immortality.10

The Eucharistic wafer or loaf, a circular piece of bread, inscribed with the sign of the cross, may have looked quite similar to the cross-inscribed medallion or monogram that is

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10 Rush, 98.
one of the most ubiquitous symbols on Ravennate sarcophagi. For instance, on the back of the Onesti sarcophagus (Fig. 20) palm trees flank two birds flying toward a large medallion in the middle of the trough. The undecorated, round medallion has a small, shallowly carved Latin cross in its center. While the rough-hewn quality of the trough on this particular example may indicate an unfinished monument, other examples of this simple device are more polished and appear finished. For instance, the back of the Isaac sarcophagus (Fig. 30) has a similar composition, though the medallion here encircles a much larger and more carefully carved monogram. Simply inscribed crosses or monograms are carved onto many sarcophagi, including on the back of the Exuperantius sarcophagus (Fig. 36), the back of the Twelve Apostles sarcophagus (Fig. 37), and on the back and sides of the Barbatinus sarcophagus (Fig. 8) to name only a few examples. Even in instances in which the monogram or cross-in-medallion is more complex, as on the ends of the Rinaldo (Fig. 19) or Three-and-Four-Arch (Niche) (Fig. 4) sarcophagi where the monograms are wreathed in laurel crowns with trailing lemniscus vines, the central symbol is a circular device with a cross or monogram in its center. The most famous cross-in-medallion in Ravennate imagery is, of course, the huge mosaic version representing Jesus in the apse at Sant’Apollinare in Classe. As noted in the previous chapter, this visual presentation probably also alluded to the Eucharist and its offering by the priest, Apollinaris, below. The symbol is, of course, also echoed on the sarcophagi in the church. The visual links to the Eucharist in these examples are alternately overt or subtle, yet the connection is unavoidable.

In addition to the allusion to the Eucharist that may have been intended by the inclusion of such medallions, there are also many examples of birds or animals drinking from

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11 An approximation of the appearance of such loaves or wafers may be assumed based on representations of them on altar tables in the mosaic scenes in San Vitale (Fig. 100) and Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Fig. 133).
cantharoi filled with water, as on the Six-Arch (Niche) sarcophagus (Fig. 127). While the primary interpretation for this symbol is probably a more direct reference to Christ as the source of living water, an alternate or additional meaning may have been the wine of the Eucharist. Not only was the Eucharist administered to a dying person before death, it was also the central symbol in the collective remembrance of the deceased in the celebration of Mass. Masses were said for the deceased on the day of burial, and sometimes on the third, ninth, and fortieth days after death. Additionally, the early liturgy seems to have included remembrance of the names of the faithful departed during every Mass celebration. In this way, the living continually reaffirmed the presence of the dead as an eternal, yet invisible, part of the community.

The visual symbols for Christ’s body and blood, in the form of cross-inscribed roundels or in allusions to wine / water vessels, would have had particular poignancy in funerary sculpture. Not only were they intimately associated with death and commemoration rituals, viaticum and the Eucharist, but they also were visual reminders of the defense which the deceased had claimed for his or her eternal salvation. Like a brand or mark to signify

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12 In John’s gospel, Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at the well: “Whosoever drinketh of this water, shall thirst again; but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst for ever: But the water that I will give him, shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting.” John 4:13 – 14.


14 By the seventh century in the west special diptych tablets recording the names of the departed were placed on the altar during the Mass. Prior to this it is uncertain how such remembrance would have been accomplished. There are references to removing peoples’ names from the liturgy from before the time in which diptych tablets are definitely known; what this means exactly is unclear. Kotila, 43.

15 St. Augustine remarked that the kingdom of Christ incorporated the departed and the living. The unity of the church could not be broken by death, and the best expression of this unity was the commemoration of the departed in connection with celebrating the Eucharist. In the Eucharistic community, the living and dead alike had admission to the grace brought about by Christ. Augustine, *Sermones*, Patrologiae cursus completes, Series Latina, 38 , edited by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1865), 172.2. See also: Kotila, 104 – 105.
ownership, the deceased, by having these culturally-imbedded references inscribed on his tomb, was affirming his right to belong to the community of the saved by way of Christ’s propitiatory redemption. The symbol of the Eucharist refers to two of the most important, and fundamentally intertwined, concerns regarding Christian existence, namely assurance of the soul’s salvation and destination after death, and the continuity of the communities of living and dead through unity in the Body of Christ. Allusions to this “medicine of immortality”\textsuperscript{16} in funeral sculpture are entirely appropriate, as the Ravennate sarcophagi attest.

**B. Psalmody**

A second fundamental component of the early Christian death ritual was the chanting of selections from the poetic compositions known as the Psalms. Psalmody accompanied the transitional moments when the soul actually left the body and began its heavenward ascent, when the body was moved in funerary procession from the home to the church, and when, sometime later (usually after three days\textsuperscript{17}), the corpse was placed in the crypt or sepulcher. The Psalms included in the old Roman \textit{ordo defunctorum} include Psalm 113 (114), 114 (115), 22 (23), 32 (33), 92 (93), 41 (42), and 117 (118). There are also allusions in the patristic sources to the use of Psalms 100 (101) and 31 (32).\textsuperscript{18} Imagery in these poems is comforting and hopeful, reiterating themes of God’s mercy and justice. References to God enthroned in heaven, the refreshment of God’s presence, and the bliss awaiting the righteous

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\textsuperscript{17} Rush, 160 – 162.
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\textsuperscript{18} Paxton, 37 - 39.
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encouraged the living to focus on the peaceful state of the deceased soul, which had made a successful transition from this world to celestial paradise. The tone of optimism created by these psalms in the funerary context is one of the fundamental differences introduced by Christian faith into traditional death rituals. Instead of the mourning and wailing that normally accompanied pagan funeral services, Christians rejoiced inasmuch as they looked upon death not as the end of life, but as the birth to true life. St. John Chrysostom, in his sermon on the epistle to the Hebrews, remarked

> what is the reason for the hymns? Is it not that we praise God and thank Him that He has crowned the departed and freed him from suffering, and that God has the deceased, now freed from fear, with Himself? Is this not the reason for the singing of hymns and psalms? All this is a sign of joy, for it is said ‘Is anyone cheerful, let him sing.’

Much of the confident, comforting imagery of the Psalmody can be found in the visual language of the Ravennate sarcophagi. For instance, the famous Psalm 22 (23) depicts God as a “shepherd” who leads the author (in the role of the lamb or sheep) “into green pastures beside still waters.” While the actual image of Christ in his guise as the “Good Shepherd” per se does not appear on any of the Ravennate tombs, certainly the theme of the Christ-follower as a lamb is a common image that, as argued in Chapter 4, had great currency in the sarcophagus repertoire (Fig. 16). Additionally, there are many visual depictions on the tombs of streams of water, and the waters of paradise (Fig. 18). The opening lines of Psalm 41 (42) declare: “As the deer panteth for the water, so my soul longs after you, O God.” These lines are one inspiration for imagery of deer drinking from cantharoi filled with water as on the back of the Pignatta sarcophagus (Fig. 38), and may also relate to imagery of birds

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drinking, as on the *Six-Arch* sarcophagus (Fig. 127). These literary and visual images transmit a thirst or longing which only God’s presence can satisfy. This refreshing intimacy with God is, according to scripture, the essence of post-terrestrial paradise. Finally, the psalms associated with the funerary rituals contain references to God enthroned in heaven. For instance, Psalm 92 (93): 4 “The Lord sits enthroned in majesty,” or Psalm 32 (33): 13 “The Lord watches from heaven.” The image of Christ enthroned in paradise is undoubtedly the most common figural iconography of the Ravennate sarcophagi, appearing on the *Liberius* (Fig. 6), *Pignatta* (Fig. 38), and *Rinaldo* (Fig. 19) sarcophagi, among others.

References to such intimacy on the sarcophagi may have been intended to inspire mourners to focus on the fate of the saved soul, finally satiated in the presence of God in paradise. The same sentiment inspired the choice of Psalms selected for this transitional moment. To the dead, they were a sacred greeting and welcome. To the living, they were an incentive to strive to attain this same consummation. This sentiment could be applied equally, I would argue, to the sarcophagus imagery. Though the tomb imagery may or may not have been *directly* inspired by the psalmody included in death rituals, certainly the

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20 In John’s vision of paradise recorded in Revelation chapter 21 he relates that the quintessential, defining quality of heaven is the proximity of God with man: “And I heard a great voice from the throne, saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people; and God himself with them shall be their God” (v. 3). A few lines later, this intimacy is poetically described when God himself proclaims “to him that thirsteth, I will give of the fountain of the water of life, freely. He that shall overcome shall possess these things, and I will be his God; and he shall be my son” (v. 6 - 7). Thus, the imagery of refreshment with water and / or springs is related to the concept of ultimate satiation of all earthly desires, and ultimate fulfillment of intimacy, in the presence of the Almighty.

21 Intimacy of relationship with God is not only expressed in the imagery of drinking animals or birds, but also in the compositions in which a figure or symbol for Christ is surrounded by followers in a celestial setting. This composition is the most common one carved onto sarcophagi from Ravenna. Its essence is the expectation of proximity to God in the afterlife on the same level as that enjoyed / experienced by the saints who had gone before.

22 Rush, 174.
reverently buoyant sentiment encapsulated by the sculptural imagery is analogous to the hopeful tone of the poetic verses repeatedly uttered during the funeral services.

C. Procession

In addition to the reception of Christ’s body in the viaticum, and the chanting of psalms, a third fundamental aspect of Christian death ritual was procession. In a practical sense, procession was movement from one place to the next: movement of the corpse from the home to the church, and then movement from the church to the tomb. In the old Roman ordo burial was attended by the antiphon “Open to me the gates of justice and let me enter, for I will confess to the Lord. The Lord’s just ones will enter by this gate.”23 Having been prepared for the final judgment by the body and blood of Christ, the Christian died in assurance of entry into the community of saints. The rite was organized as a passage. The deceased was conducted systematically and symbolically from earth to heaven, accompanied by psalms (using the first person) of victory and assurance.24 Thus, the funeral cortege became a triumphal procession. Such a procession is demonstrated in the account of the nighttime burial of St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage. His body was carried from the church, where it had lain in “wake” for several days, to the burial ground of Macrobius Candidianus, accompanied by mourners carrying tapers and torches.25 Gregory of Nyssa gives an account of the funerary procession of St. Macrina, in which the participating mourners (divided by sex) marched behind deacons and servants holding wax tapers, singing psalms.26

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24 Paxton, 43.


In addition to the references to the psalm imagery on sarcophagi, references which can be applied equally to the funerary services and to the funerary procession, there are also many visual representations of processions on the Ravennate tombs. For instance, several representations of Christ’s apostles on the sarcophagi depict the figures as hurrying toward Christ holding offerings, or making gestures of acclamation. The composition on the front of the *Rinaldo* sarcophagus (Fig. 19), for example, depicts Peter and Paul hurrying toward Christ in a reverent, almost ritualistic manner with their hands covered, holding crowns, in stylized postures that suggest swift, purposeful movement. Their left legs advance with bent knees, and their right legs are stretched behind them indicating long strides, with the right heels leaving the ground and right feet flexed. Their cloaks billow out behind them with identical backward-sweeping flourishes. It is movement, but highly streamlined, as if in practiced ceremony. A more corporate sense of ritual progression is communicated on the *Twelve Apostles* sarcophagus (Fig. 37). Here, six disciples on the front of the sarcophagus (and three more on each side) form part of the processional group. The figures at the far end of the front trough hurry forward in much the same guise as Peter and Paul on the *Rinaldo* monument, carrying crowns. The figures nearest Christ (here Paul stage left and Peter right) also move toward the enthroned Christ at the center of the composition. This time Peter carries a cross over one shoulder, and Paul receives from Christ, in fabric-covered hands, the scroll of the law (the iconography traditionally known as the *traditio legis*). Christ looks directly out at the viewer, and does not turn toward Paul or acknowledge him as he hands over the scroll. Again, the tone is carefully ritualized, rather than active or spontaneous. The disciples between Peter / Paul and their colleagues to the far left and right do not move forward as deliberately as the others, but rather turn their bodies toward the center with
gestures of acclamation. The figures on the end turn and gesture among themselves, but do not seem to entirely connect with the processional tone of the figures on the front of the trough. While this representation certainly does not constitute an active procession in the vein of the triumphal Roman soldiers on the Arch of Titus (Fig. 145), the figures do seem to move toward the figure of Christ with purposeful intent, particularly those on the front of the sarcophagus. They are in different stages of progression. Some are hurrying, others pausing reflectively (not unlike, perhaps, the variation in processional speed in the Ionic frieze of the Parthenon).

Processional imagery is a vital component of not only Ravennate sarcophagus imagery, but in mosaic representations from Ravenna as well. Examples are abundant, but two of the most prominent are those of the processions of saints and martyrs on the nave walls of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo (Figs. 85 and 86) and the imperial processions of Justinian and Theodora on the side walls of the apse at San Vitale (Figs. 97 and 98). The theme of ceremonial procession, the ostentatious, elaborate pageantry used as a tool of self-aggrandizement by the Roman imperial machine, was likely connected to Ravenna’s political ambitions, and desire for elevation among the powers of a post-Roman Mediterranean. Illustration of this sort of spectacle, particularly the one at San Vitale in which the Byzantine Emperor and Empress themselves appear to grace Ravenna with their participation as grand marshals, provided visual reminders of the significance of Ravenna as a royal and imperial city. Some of this desire for self-promotion may have inspired the visual allusions to procession on the tombs as well. But in the funerary context, I think there is an alternate interpretation that can be applied, either in addition to, or in lieu of, sheer self-promotion or

institutional propaganda. The iconography of “processional” compositions on the sarcophagi reflects the idea of movement, a rhythmic and stately progression, but at the end of the parade is always, clearly, Jesus Christ. This was the hope of the Christian soul after death, to move seamlessly, accompanied by practiced and perfected ritual, from this life on earth to eternal life with Christ in paradise. Both the triumphal processions included in funerary ritual, and representations of triumphal processions enacted by the saints in heaven, tended toward the same goal – to encourage and assure the community of the happy and secure outcome of this transition.

D. Baptism

While subtle connections or allusions to funerary ritual are imbedded within the sarcophagus imagery, there may also be other significant ritual elements that are represented on the tombs. Specifically, the numerous images of water, water vessels, and fountains, seem to invite the concept of baptism into the sculptural repertoire. For instance, there are the images of birds, deer, or lambs drinking from *cantharoi* as on the *Six-Arch* (Fig. 127), and

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28 In her work on the literary and artistic representations of imperial ceremonial, Sabine MacCormack remarks that these political rituals were employed during times of transition or upheaval that required explanation, and that the fundamental questions of late antique life (one of the most persistent being the status of the relationship between humanity the divine) were recurrent in such ceremonials. In the Christian period, images of imperial ceremonial were gradually transformed into, and then replaced by, representations of Christ and the saints in elevated situations or ritual activities. Christ in a paradisiacal setting seated on throne surrounded by supplicating saints or martyrs as on the *Liberius* sarcophagus, for instance, represents a transposition of images such as Constantine receiving largesse on the Arch of Constantine in Rome, or the imperial presence represented on the base of the obelisk of Theodosius in Constantinople. The sarcophagus images reflect such syncretisms frequently. This is, in my opinion, fairly logical given that the purpose of the funerary imagery was to affirm the stability of the relationship between the deceased and the divine, and to reiterate the transcendent and timeless sovereignty of Christ. In so doing, the images validate all of the fundamental hopes for continuity between the realms of the living and the dead that were thereby secured. Sabine MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), esp. 12 – 14, 50 – 55.

29 Thomas Mathews, in fact, has argued that procession is the most important organizational theme in early Christian church decoration, and carries a deeply meaningful signification. The target of convergence in these compositions (which he documents in every imaginable form, from catacomb fresco, to tomb sculpture, to mosaic program) is Christ, as the omega point of human existence. The repeated images on the Ravennate sarcophagi are abbreviated examples of this ubiquitous ordering principle and are, thus, essentially succinct expressions of basic, Christian existential philosophy. Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of early Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 150 – 173.
Pignatta (Fig. 38) sarcophagi. There are fountains of water streaming down hillsides as on the Constantius (Fig. 16) and Rinaldo (Fig. 19) sarcophagi. And there are water-storage vessels which sometime spring into vines or sprout Christian symbols as on the end of the Theodore (Fig. 31) sarcophagus or Rinaldo sarcophagus (Fig. 19). These images have been much discussed in other sections of this dissertation, and they also have variant meanings (for instance, as discussed above, the image of “living waters” enjoyed by deer is closely connected to the verses in Psalm 41 referencing the soul thirsting for God as the deer thirsts for water, and may also have Eucharistic overtones). Nevertheless, the persistence of “water” imagery in the funerary context of the sculpted sarcophagi undoubtedly evoked associations with baptism, particularly given the powerful connections between baptism and death in Christian philosophy.

Immersion into the water of the baptismal font, and emergence from it, was a reenactment of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. The baptizand was fundamentally identifying him / herself with the death and burial of the old, earthly or material life, and “rebirth” into resurrected, eternal, spiritual life in the same way that Christ’s death and burial “put to death . . . the flesh” and his resurrection brought life “in the spirit.” Baptism, in this sense, was the Christian’s only true death, because from the moment of salvation forward the Christian believer was considered to have eternal life. Death of the physical body was simply the final sloughing off of the flesh to achieve the inheritance of eternal, celestial life which had been his or her destiny from the moment of salvation. This is reflected in the practice

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30 In Peter’s first letter he explains the connection between Christ’s death and resurrection and baptism: “Because Christ also died once for our sins, the just for the unjust: that he might offer us to God, being put to death indeed in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit. . . Whereunto baptism being of the like form, now saveth you also: not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the examination of a good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” I Peter 3: 18, 21.
adopted by Christians of an annual commemoration of a loved one on the anniversary of his / her death with celebration of a Mass. This day came to be called the ‘natalitia’ or ‘dies natalis’ which refers to the birth of the departed into a new, heavenly life.\textsuperscript{31} Death and rebirth, then, were articulated through the initiation ceremony of baptism, and then again in funeral practice. Baptism was ritual enactment of death and rebirth, a down-payment on eternal life. Physical death was the fulfillment of the transaction. It seems quite fitting, therefore, that baptismal imagery would be closely related to funerary forms.\textsuperscript{32}

Baptism was also deeply intertwined with the importance of community in Christian tradition. Baptism initiated a person into life as a Christ-follower, into the community of Christian faithful. It was this inclusion in the faith-community that inspired optimism that the dead in Christ were included among the saints in heaven. Baptismal symbols on funerary monuments encouraged and articulated this confidence by serving to remind those left behind of the reason the deceased could hope for true life to begin beyond the grave. Like viaticum, the reception of Christ’s body and blood, baptism was an outward expression that a person had chosen to identify himself with Jesus and his redemptive process. It was this identification that would “resuscitate” him or her from death and save the soul from hell.

Paul articulated this doctrine throughout his letters, but perhaps most powerfully in I Corinthians 15: 20 – 27a:

\begin{quote}
But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.
\end{quote}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{31} Kotila, 53. Saints also came to be commemorated on the day of the year in which they died, not their day of birth.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{32} The close connections between funerary and baptismal forms and architecture have been much studied. For a recent study on this phenomena with bibliography, see: Dorothy Hoogland Verkerk, “The font is a kind of grave: remembrance in the Via Latina catacombs,” in Memory and the Medieval Tomb, ed. By Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo with Carol Stamatis Pendergast, 157 - 181 (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 2000).}
Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.”

The key issue, according to Paul was “belonging to Christ,” and the two most powerful symbols of this “belonging” were the ritual actions that incorporated a person into the community of faithful through baptism, and ensured his or her final passage from this life to the next, especially the reception of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. It is logical that visual references to these ritual actions would feature commonly on funerary monuments. In the case of the Ravennate sarcophagi, they clearly do.

II. Sarcophagus Imagery: Part 2, Community

Inclusion within a community of faith, into the church corporate, would have, in this period, been a matter of heaven or hell. Beyond baptismal allusions on the sarcophagi, there are also a number of visual cues revolving around the idea of “community” in the Ravennate sarcophagus carvings. The repetition and anonymity of forms, the unique shape of Ravenna’s monuments, and the preference for apocalyptic “adoration” imagery may represent some of the ways in which the importance of community, whether temporal or celestial, was expressed in the tombs.

A. Repetition and Anonymity

One of the striking qualities of Ravenna’s sarcophagi imagery is the extreme limitation of the visual repertoire, as discussed in Chapter 2 and elsewhere. The same images and symbols are used over and over with slight variations. Despite the comparatively large number of surviving pieces, the iconographic and symbolic themes are far fewer than can be found sarcophagi from Rome. Even the scant number of surviving Byzantine sarcophagi from the fifth and sixth centuries depict scenes and figures, such as angels, the Sacrifice of
Isaac, etc., that appear on no extant Ravennate tombs. A related feature of the tombs is their anonymity. Unlike Roman and Constantinopolitan monuments, there are almost no images of deceased individuals on the (Christian era)\textsuperscript{33} tombs.\textsuperscript{34} While images of the deceased in \textit{orans} poses, or set in \textit{imago clipea} were popular from the earliest Christian period in catacomb frescoes (Fig. 141) and were a common feature on sarcophagi from Rome and Byzantium (Figs. 23 and 65), the Ravennate tombs are usually limited to non-specifying Christian imagery. In part this preference for familiar Christian iconography may have been related to the urge toward humility, expressions of unequivocal orthodoxy, and / or the modes of production and commerce. Yet, this anonymity in the imagery, paired with the high level of repetition in the forms, may have been inspired by the desire for uniformity in the funerary landscape.

Not only do Ravennate sarcophagi demonstrate an almost total lack of specificity in terms of representations of the deceased, few of them have inscriptions to identify the person(s) buried within. Notable exceptions exist, particularly the tombs in Sant’Apollinare in Classe, and there are, of course, some tombs (one example is the \textit{Constantius} sarcophagus [Fig. 16]) that came to be associated in later local lore with an ancient individual. For most of the tombs in which there is an identifying inscription (such as the \textit{Rinaldo} sarcophagus [Fig. 19]), the patron mentioned in the inscription is from the medieval era or later. This namelessness, alongside the repetitive quality of the imagery, suggests that the producers and patrons of the tombs were either consciously or subconsciously following in the grand

\textsuperscript{33} Several of the pre-Christian sarcophagi from Ravenna include representations of deceased individuals.

\textsuperscript{34} The one exception to this seems to be the sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale of Ravenna (sometimes called the \textit{Traditio Legis} sarcophagus) in which a male and female figure appear on the front of the trough flanking the main composition of Jesus approached by Peter and Paul. These figures, who do not otherwise seem to be part of the main composition, likely represent the deceased and / or donors.
historical tradition of binding a community through collectivism in burial. On the other hand, it is important to note that while contemporary inscriptions carved onto the sarcophagi are rare, it may be safely assumed that many original inscriptions were removed upon the reuse of the sarcophagi. One intriguing possibility about the anonymity of ancient tombs is proposed by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill in his article on Roman tombs. He suggests that some burials that today appear anonymous may have originally had labels in evanescent materials (carbon or red pigment on terracotta, plaster, or wood for instance). The use of incised marble for the inscription may have marked a more highly privileged burial. 35 Also, there are frequent allusions in Agnellus to epitaphs placed above or near sarcophagi as in the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe.

Tedium in funerary imagery is a trend almost as old as death itself. Anthropologists and historians alike have observed that repeated images and symbols, particularly when applied without personalizing details, characterize many communal burial situations. This is especially true for cultures in which the group identity was paramount to the individual identity. One example is the mosaic tomb markers in early Christian basilicas in North Africa. These markers were studied by Ann Marie Yasin, who argued that while there are variations among the markers, especially from building to building, within one church the repertoire of forms and inscriptions is remarkably narrow.36 Although one major impetus for these burials, within the fabric of the church, must have been ad sanctos inhumation, Yasin points out that one cannot ignore the visibility of these markers to the congregations of living


who gathered to worship in the basilicas on a regular basis. The deceased were associated with one another as the community of Christian dead, but their collective markers would also have greeted the community of Christian living en masse each time there was a congregational assembly. The repetitive sameness of the grave markers enabled the dead to speak as a group. In other words, this visual similarity may have been a deliberate choice on the part of the patrons to reinforce the idea of unity and community that the markers suggest. Although the tomb monuments from Ravenna are more variegated in terms of imagery, and more spread out in terms of their locations, they do represent a clear group of monuments with idiosyncratic visual qualities. And, they are all associated with this particular urban center (and many are clustered together in sacred buildings or on exterior grounds associated with sacred buildings). Is it possible, then, that death in late antique / early medieval Ravenna became an occasion for the affirmation of broader communal values through the rhythm and repetition of forms?37

B. Tomb as Temple

One fact that supports this contention that the tomb imagery does deliberately appeal to communal unity is that many of the tombs at Ravenna may have been designed for above-ground display, rather than underground interment. The imagery on the Ravennate tombs most often covers four sides of the monument, with the “back” of the monument carved as well as the front and ends. This marks a distinction from earlier and contemporary Roman sarcophagi, which were originally designed to fit into the individual loculi in catacombs, and whose backs were rarely carved. Ends of these Roman sarcophagi were sometimes left blank, and sometimes sketched in low relief. The rectangular shape of the Roman sarcophagi, with a

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37 For elaboration on this theme, see: Jill Dubisch, “Death and Social Change in Greece,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 62/4 (October, 1989), 189 - 200.
flat lid often carved with decorative bands of relief on the front, also accommodated this usage. In Ravenna, by contrast, not only were all sides of the monuments generally carved, but most of the sarcophagus lids were carved to resemble the roofs of houses, either pointed with corner acroteria (Fig. 16), or rounded and carved with faux roof tiles (Fig. 17). These large, complex shapes would have been ill-suited for catacomb-like underground burials, and the panoramic decoration further suggests that the tombs were meant to be viewed from all sides. The current locations give little information as to the original situations of the sarcophagi, since most have been moved (usually multiple times). However, by the sixth century it can be assumed that at least some of the tombs were being actively displayed in congregational locations, such as in the narthex of the basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe.

The house design of Ravennate sarcophagi links them to pre-Christian examples from northern Italy (the pointed, gabled style), and from Asia Minor (the rounded style). The shapes demonstrate, again, that influences from other cultural centers played a powerful role in the formation of the Ravennate school, but also mark the tombs as distinctive from neighboring traditions in funerary monuments, and create once again an impression of continuity in the community of tombs. By designing the sarcophagus to resemble a “house,” furthermore, there is a connection to the pre-Christian, Greco-Roman idea that the tomb is a home for the deceased. This ancient understanding is reiterated in cases in which architectural features are used to frame the compositional space. For instance, in tombs such as the Lamb sarcophagus (Fig. 18), columns at each of the four corners of the trough carry a decorated “lintel” around all four sides of the tomb (on the back of the trough, the lintel has moldings but no carved design as it does on the front and ends). Thus, the effect is of looking into a building or portico to view the imagery within. In other examples, such as the
Barbatinus sarcophagus (Fig. 8), the effect of an arcade is created with columns and scallop-shell niches. The figures and symbols are positioned between the columns, under the niches. Though not all of the Ravennate sarcophagi are treated in this architectonic manner, the majority are.

In Christian belief, of course, the tomb was not considered the habitation place for the deceased in eternity. Rather, it was simply a holding location for the body until the day of resurrection when the soul would return to be reunited with the body. Therefore, the house-symbolism in this Christian context would have had a different meaning than it would have had in the pre-Christian or pagan context. Rather than providing a home on earth for the deceased, the symbolic form of a house or home would have alluded to the everlasting home that the righteous enjoyed in heaven.

Combined with the paradisiacal imagery that is frequently featured on the tombs (palm trees, rivers of paradise, celestial wisps of cloud, birds, vines, blossoms, and, of course, the presence of Jesus and the saints) the viewer is put in mind of the heavenly “dwellings” to which Jesus referred in the Gospel of John: “In my Father’s house there are many mansions.”38 There are multiple references in the book of the Revelation to the Tabernacle of God as a dwelling place of the righteous in heaven.39 Methodius of Olympus also interpreted the tabernacle as a symbol of a Christian’s risen body during the Millenium.40 Bodies are also compared to tabernacles in various places in scripture, such as in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: “your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you

38 John 14:2.


have from God.”41 Jesus himself referred to his own death and resurrection metaphorically when he told the crowd in the temple at Jerusalem: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”42 This statement was used against Jesus at one of his trials as evidence of his blasphemy,43 but, as John explains “[Jesus] spoke of the temple of his body.”44

To summarize, the association between the architectural temple or dwelling, and the body and soul of a believer were well established in Christian scripture, and in pagan and early Christian literary and cultural tradition. On one level, the shapes of the Ravennate sarcophagi, resembling houses or tabernacles, provide another visual cue that these monuments are part of the same pan-Mediterranean tradition. Further, the symbolism of the house / temple / tabernacle refers to the larger, celestial community into which the deceased may be presumed to have passed. No longer dwelling on earth, the Christian dead are dwelling in paradise with Christ and the saints, until resurrection day when, collectively, the “temples” of their bodies would be raised up together with all the dead in Christ, and then joined with their still-living brothers and sisters “into the air.”45 Thus, the proclivity for tomb-profiles that refer to “houses” or “temples” was another way for the patrons of these tombs to associate themselves with the group of their fellow Christians in Ravenna, and with the church as a whole.

41 I Corinthians 6:19.
42 John 2:19.
43 Matthew 26: 61.
44 John 2:21.
45 “For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again; even so them who have slept through Jesus, will God bring with him. For this we say unto you in the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them who have slept. For the Lord himself shall come down from heaven with commandment, and with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead who are in Christ, shall rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ, into the air, and so shall we be always with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort ye one another with these words. ” I Thessalonians 4: 13 – 17.
C. Apocalyptic / “Adoration” Imagery

The general tendency toward repetition and anonymity in the imagery may be indicative of the value placed on community by the patrons of the tombs. The distinctive “house” shapes of the tombs, as well as the allusion to “temples” or “tabernacles” created by these shapes, may be another trend in that philosophical direction. Finally, I would like to look at a specific iconography that I believe emphasizes this idea of the importance of Christian unity / community. The image to which I refer is the “adoration” imagery in which two or more figures (or symbols) flank a central image of (or symbol for) Jesus Christ. In certain cases, this adoration composition reflects the popular traditio legis iconography in which Christ hands the scroll of the law to one of his apostles (Paul or Peter), but other times the followers simply reverently approach Jesus, with no exchange of a scroll. Sometimes, the figures do not move toward Christ at all, but simply flank him in static, frontal poses like an honor guard (Fig. 36). These figures assume postures and gestures that suggest worship. Their hands are sometimes covered with fabric, they often bear gifts (particularly crowns), when shown as moving their backs are bent forward in postures of deference and / or humility, and sometimes they hurry toward Christ with undignified haste (robes or cloaks fluttering behind them) as if in a fervor to come to his side. This iconography is the most frequently occurring figural iconography in the Ravennate funerary repertoire. One example is on the front of the Rinaldo sarcophagus (Fig. 19). In most instances in which this iconography is employed, other elements in the composition point to the fact that the scenes of worship are not taking place on earth. They are not, for instance, scenes in which the apostles receive a visit from the resurrected Christ, as in a composition representing the Doubting of Thomas (Fig. 52).
Several clues within the imagery suggest that this adoration is taking place in heaven. For one thing, the two most frequent figures included in the scenes are Peter and Paul. Obviously, this pair were never simultaneously in the presence of Jesus Christ during His time on earth.\textsuperscript{46} Further, Christ is generally represented as either seated on a chair or throne with a small pedestal, or standing on a hillock from which flow the four rivers of paradise. In both cases, the reference is to Christ enthroned in his glorified, post-terrestrial state. In many of the compositions, there are also included paradisiacal elements (palm trees, wisps of clouds, birds / peacocks, lush foliage and / or blooms, etc.). Additionally, the stark solemnity of the scenes, with few distracting details or additional compositional elements that might hint at a narrative moment, reinforces the sense that the worship or adoration depicted is not taking place on an earthly plain, or in chronological time, and, rather, represents the eternal worship of Jesus Christ in heaven. This imagery is drawn directly from the apocalyptic vision of St. John recorded in the final, prophetic book of the New Testament known as the book of the Revelation, or the Apocalypse.

In his vision, John glimpses the corporate, eternal worship of heaven, the destiny of every Christian individual. Much of the language of John’s account provides direct inspiration for the forms carved onto Ravenna’s sarcophagi. For example, in the first chapter John hears a voice that proclaims, twice, “I am Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”\textsuperscript{47} Christological monograms and crosses with pendant Greek letters “A” and “O” are some of the most frequently used symbols to appear on the sarcophagi, especially in symbolic compositions, like the one on the back of the Rinaldo sarcophagus (Fig. 19) which

\textsuperscript{46} In fact, Paul was never in the presence of Christ on earth, it was only after Christ’s ascension to heaven that he appeared in glorified form to Paul on the road to Damascus.

\textsuperscript{47} Revelation 1: 8 and 1:11.
repeat in nonfigural form the figural adoration image on the opposite side of the trough. In chapter 4, John saw “a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne one sitting.”

Around the throne were twenty-four elders, who “fell down before him who sitteth on the throne and adored him . . . and cast their crowns before the throne.”

Later, near the end of his visionary account, John wrote of “a river of water of life, clear as crystal proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb . . . and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life bearing twelve fruits.”

Obviously, all of these elements – saints carrying crowns, rivers of water, the enthroned Christ, fruit-bearing trees of life - are found not only in the popular adoration scenes, but also as part of “symbolic” adoration scenes on the sarcophagi.

Furthermore, lambs are one of the most frequently employed symbols on the sarcophagi. In part, their popularity stems from the multiple scriptural metaphors in which lambs signify either the righteous person, or Christ in the role of the sacrificial Lamb of God. But this imagery is particularly prevalent in the Book of the Revelation, in which the literary trope of the glorified Lamb is the single most significant image used to describe Jesus in his post-earthly state.

Lambs are found on the Ravennate sarcophagi both as representations of Christ-followers (as on the Lamb sarcophagus in which two lambs approach a central symbol for Christ [Fig. 18]), and as representations of Jesus himself (as on the end of the Three-and-Four-Arch sarcophagus in which the lamb is nimbed with a cross-inscribed halo, and stands

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48 Revelation 4: 2.

49 Revelation 4:10.

50 Revelation 22:1, 2.

51 “And I saw: and behold in the midst of the throne . . . a Lamb standing as it were slain . . . the four living creatures and the four and twenty ancients fell down before the Lamb . . . I heard the voice of many angels round the throne, and the living creatures, and the ancients; . . . saying with a loud voice: ‘The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and benediction!’” Revelation 5: 6, 8, 11 - 12.
on a hillock from which gush the rivers of paradise [Fig. 4]). In at least one example, the
Constantius sarcophagus in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (Fig. 16), both the image of
Jesus Christ and the worshippers are translated into lambs.

The imagery found most commonly on the Ravennate sarcophagi is, in short, deeply
indebted to the apocalyptic imagery from the book of the Revelation. In particular, the
 corporate Christian worship of Christ as described by John seems to be one of the most
significant themes represented on the sarcophagi. The setting for this worship is the
“continuing city,”52 the “New Jerusalem,”53 the final rest for those “who are written in the
Lamb’s Book of Life,”54 i.e., the saved. The essence of this celestial city is the presence of
God with the righteous: “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the
tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people; and
God himself with them shall be their God.”55 There is no more potent image of Christian
community than this vision of the eternal, continuing concert of the saints around the
centerpiece of the faith, Jesus Christ. It is this community worship to which the Ravennate
iconography alludes.

The visual references to communal, eternal worship in heaven must have had broad
appeal for the patrons of the Ravennate sarcophagi. They surely wanted to advertise to the
community of the living their incorporation and acceptance into the continuing community of
Christ-followers among those who had passed on to the next world. This powerful
iconography, together with the universal repetition of a few common forms, and the “house”

52 “For we have not here (on earth) a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come. Hebrews 13:14.
53 “And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” Revelation 21:2.
54 “There shall not enter into it anything defiled, or that worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they that are
55 Revelation 21:3.
or “temple” shapes of the sarcophagi, all seem to indicate that the patrons of the tombs were interested in stressing their inclusion into the community of faithful. The visible reminders of this continual, celestial community would also have inspired the still-living who may have seen them on a regular basis, often in groups as at Sant’Apollinare in Classe. The tombs thus would not only have memorialized the dead, but united the living in a shared sense of destiny.

III. Sarcophagus Imagery: Part 3, Theology

In the preceding sections, I considered the personal, practical, and philosophical aspects of death and burial and suggested ways in which these rather universal Christian ideas and concerns may have been visually articulated on Ravenna’s sarcophagi. In this section, I will turn to several of the theological and doctrinal concerns that were relevant in the context of late antique / early medieval Ravenna and propose possibilities for how such abstractions may have been expressed in the visual choices employed on the carved sarcophagi.

While individual patrons of most of the tombs are unknown, high-ranking clergy likely commissioned or utilized a number of them. Bishops and archbishops of Ravenna would have been wealthy enough to afford the expense of a luxury burial, and they would have had a stake in promoting themselves and soliciting continued prayers posthumously from the flock they had shepherded in life. Their position as high-ranking clergy would have earned them a right to burial ad sanctos, and their tombs would have likely been enshrined within sacred buildings where they could be venerated by posterity. Among secular leaders from the late antique period, there are only a few who are known to have been buried at Ravenna. The last western emperors, in the fifth century, continued to be buried in Rome.
The most prominent of the Ostrogothic rulers, Theodoric, had his own personal freestanding mausoleum, and likely an antique, spoliated porphyry sarcophagus within it. Most of the exarchs were recalled to Constantinople once their tenure was over (unless they were murdered), so few of their graves are known at Ravenna, the sarcophagus of Exarch Isaac being a prominent exception. Many of the sarcophagi are, of course, anonymous, and could possibly have belonged to wealthy, but politically insignificant individuals for whom there is no literary or historical evidence. But there are several hints in Agnellus that bishops were buried in stone tombs, and of course there are the sixth-century fragments of Ecclesius, Ursicinus, and Victor, as well as the group of sarcophagi at Sant’Apollinare in Classe. There are carved marble sarcophagi associated with bishops Exuperantius and one “Liberius” as well, though these two associations cannot have been original. However, they may suggest that connections between bishops and sarcophagi were common enough to engender traditions in local lore. The weight of the evidence, therefore, is that a significant percentage of the original patrons / occupants of the sarcophagi were high-ranking members of the clergy, the sort of patrons who would have been active in, or at least conversant with, the theological debates of the day. It seems relevant, therefore, to hold the tomb imagery against the contemporary intellectual and theological background in order to glean further understanding of its meaning in this context.

A. Theological Context

56 There were various military leaders known to have been commemorated at Ravenna, though to my knowledge none have specific sarcophagi associated with them. For instance, Paul the Deacon in History of the Lombards, 3.19, quotes the epitaph of a certain military leader named “Droctulf” whom he says was buried in San Vitale in the late sixth century.

57 For discussions of how these sarcophagi came to be associated with these bishops, see Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, 61 – 62 (Exuperantius) and 58 – 60 (Liberius).
It is difficult to examine the Ravennate sarcophagi in even the most cursory way without noticing the preponderance of references, figural or symbolic, to the person of Jesus Christ. This statement may seem simplistic; after all, as discussed at length above, these are Christian monuments commissioned for Christian patrons, and their imagery naturally revolves around the primary figure of the faith. But the Ravennate tombs are distinguished among the other groups of early Christian sarcophagi by a determined reiteration of Christ-symbols, particularly as the central focus of any given composition. Unlike sarcophagi from Rome, which traditionally preferred several narrative or, at least, figural sequences positioned side-by-side in one or two crowded sculptural registers, the Ravennate tombs feature a few, spare images positioned against spacious backgrounds, usually in quiet, symmetrical arrangements. Almost invariably, a figure or symbol for Christ is the central image, the one toward which all other images in the composition are oriented.\textsuperscript{58}\ One intriguing variation is the preference for pairing figural and nonfigural forms of Christ on the same monument, often as pendant sets.\textsuperscript{59}\ In later tombs, such as several preserved at the Braccioforte chapel (Fig. 147),\textsuperscript{60}\ the sparse Ravennate imagery is further reduced to lone, conventional crosses - the most common and recognizable symbols for Christ and Christian faith. Sometimes, there are several such crosses etched onto the same monument, in a manner that feels almost desperate.

\textsuperscript{58}\ Examples are the \textit{Constantius} sarcophagus (Fig. 16) from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, the \textit{Pignatta} sarcophagus (Fig. 38) from the Braccioforte chapel, and the \textit{Lamb} sarcophagus (Fig. 18) from the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe. This preference for a Christ-centered composition is found not only on the long rectangular compositional spaces on the fronts and backs of the troughs, but also on the ends and lids as well.

\textsuperscript{59}\ There are at least eight extant examples in which a figural composition including Christ on the front of the trough is echoed by a symbolic composition including a symbol for Christ on the back of the trough. The \textit{Rinaldo} sarcophagus (Fig. 19) is one example. Even in cases in which the back of the trough is not dedicated to a nonfigural reiteration of figural imagery, the heraldic “adoration” image with two “follower / disciple” symbols flanking and / or worshipping a central “Christ” symbol is a common decorative trope tucked on ends, lids, etc. See Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{60}\ Bovini, ed., 1968 – 69, vol. 2, figs. 53, 48, 55.
The dominance of symbolism revolving around Jesus Christ is logical in this context. Christian patrons of the tombs would have been eager to associate themselves with Christ and His church, particularly at the juncture between this world and the next, when salvation was a crucial concern. Yet perhaps this preoccupation with Christo-centric imagery may be related to the particular theological climate. Specifically, I propose that this predilection may be related to the struggle to define the nature of Jesus Christ.

The most important theological controversies of the early Christian era revolved around the nature of Christ. In the fourth century a presbyter in the Alexandrian church, Arius, began to teach that Jesus Christ was begotten by God the Father. As such, Jesus was not, therefore, co-equal with God in dignity or in substance. The church doctor who was most instrumental in forcibly refuting this “Arian heresy,” as it came to be known, was Athanasius of Alexandria. Athanasius, a young deacon in the Alexandrian church and secretary to Bishop Alexander at the time that Arius began promulgating his viewpoint, wrote a reply to Arius in which he affirmed that the “begetting” of the Son by the Father was a description of the eternal relationship within the Godhead, not a temporal event. Arius was condemned by the bishops of Egypt and fled to Nicomedia. From there, he continued to send out writings espousing his position. The dispute over the nature of Christ persisted, therefore, and ultimately inspired Emperor Constantine to call an ecumenical council to meet at Nicaea in 325. Athanasius not only attended the council, but became the chief apologist for the position that Christ was fully divine, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. It was his argument that was affirmed in the resultant Nicene Creed, which affirms belief “in . . . one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the
Athanasius went on to have an illustrious career in the church, and in fact earned within his lifetime the title “Father of Orthodoxy.” Unsurprisingly, the Biblical miracle Athanasius was the greatest apologist for was the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Correct interpretation of this event was fundamental to a position that affirmed Christ’s divinity because it was the devolution point for the mystery of God in human flesh. The Councils of Nicaea and of Constantinople officially denounced Arianism as a heresy.

In the middle of the fifth century, two other church councils were convened, first at Ephesus, then at Chalcedon. Both these councils were concerned, as was the Nicene council of the previous century, with defining more clearly, in the face of controversial objections, the nature of Jesus Christ. At Ephesus, the philosophy of Nestorianism was rejected. Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, taught that the Virgin Mary had given birth to a man, Jesus, not God the Logos. Rather, the Logos inhabited the man Jesus Christ as a temple. Christ was, therefore, not himself to be considered God but instead Theophoros or “God-Bearer,” and Mary ought to be known as the Christotokos, or “Mother of Christ,” rather than Theotokos, “Mother of God.” The council decided that this position was unsupportable, and decreed that Jesus Christ was one person, not two separate beings, and that he was thus complete God and complete man – the two natures were united in such a way that one did not disturb or usurp the other (a concept termed “hypostatic union”). Mary was, consequently, secured in her title as Theotokos.

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61 Et in unum Dominum Iesum Christum, Filium Dei unigenitum, ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula. Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero, genitum non factum, consubstantialem Patri.

62 One of Athanasius’s earliest writings, written just prior to the outbreak of the Arian controversy, was a treatise entitled “On the Incarnation,” in which the central assertion is that the Word was with God and was the agent of creation in the beginning. St. Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation, trans. by John Behr (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011).
Scarcely had Nestorianism been rejected than a new Christological challenge sprang up to replace it. While Nestorius had divided Christ’s nature into two parts, human and divine, his opponents fled in the opposite direction, insisting on the unity of Christ’s human and divine natures to the extreme extent that the human was swallowed up in the divine. This doctrine, most famously espoused by Eutyches of Constantinople, was called Monophysitism. The fourth ecumenical council of Chalcedon met in 451 to address Monophysitism, and again affirmed the nature of Christ as one person, both fully divine and fully human simultaneously.\(^63\) In spite of these ecumenical councils, the controversy over the precise nature of Christ continued to churn in the Christian world, particularly in the eastern half of the erstwhile Roman empire. Arianism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism persisted, as did the Orthodox apologists who argued against them.

The ongoing debate as to the nature of Jesus Christ was particularly poignant in the orbit of early Christian Ravenna. Bishop Peter Chrysologus (c. 431 – 450), the most famous Ravennate theologian from this period, focused many of his sermons on the nature of Christ and refutation of heresies, especially Arianism, which denied the coequality of Christ with God the Father.\(^64\) Another famous text from Ravenna, a collection of liturgical orations known as the Rotulus, demonstrated a pointed interest in the theological doctrine of the Incarnation and the debate surrounding the nature of Christ. While the Rotulus was not compiled until the late sixth or seventh century, some of its content is closely connected to Peter Chrysologus, and may represent a compilation of earlier, fifth century material.


\(^64\) See: Ruggero Benericetti, *Il Cristo nei Sermoni di S. Pier Crisologo* (Cesena: Centro Studi e Ricerche sulla Antica Provincia Ecclesiastica Ravennate, 1995).
Furthermore, the Ostrogothic administration of Ravenna in the late fifth and early sixth centuries held to Arianism, considered a Christological heresy since Council of Nicaea in 325. In sum, there were a number of streams in Ravenna that fed the tide of interest in the nature of Christ in the fifth and sixth (and into the seventh) centuries.

St. Peter Chrysologus served as Bishop of Ravenna from about 431 – 450. He is best-known for his collection of homilies that was first edited by Bishop Felix of Ravenna in the early eighth century. For the most part, his sermons were concise and concerned with explanations of key Biblical texts. Among the issues that he most passionately discussed was the nature of Christ, hardly surprising given the contemporary, theological context. Chrysologus dealt with the event of the Annunciation in one set of sermons, and discussed the Incarnation in detail in others. He also clarified the corresponding scripture in the Gospel of Luke in a series of six sermons. Specific refutation of Arian theology, and the attendant denial of the coequity in Christ of divine and human natures, was made in at least nine sermons.  

For instance, in his exposition on the event of the Annunciation, Peter went out of his way to reiterate the reality and significance of the Incarnation. Alongside his defense of the Virgin conception (i.e. “let the heretic now profess that God is born of the Virgin’s flesh, and no longer reduce a heavenly mystery, namely, the birth from virginity, to the world’s manner of conceiving”), he continually turned to the related issue of the nature of Jesus: “Who can approach the mystery of God . . . the partnership between divinity and flesh, and

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66 Sancti Petri Chrysologi, 60.7: haereticus iam deum natum uirginea confiteatur ex carne, neque amplius caeleste mysterium, uirginitatis partum, trahat ad conceptum mundi.
the mystery that man and God are one God?" Chrysologus continually returned to ideas about the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ, and provided several explications of the theological concept of the Trinity: “Christian faith knows the Father, it knows the Son, it knows the Holy Spirit . . . Divinity is threefold in persons, but there is one divinity in the Trinity.” Correct understandings of the Incarnation, the nature of Christ, and the ideology of the Triune God, were core goals of Chrysologus’s sermons. These closely linked concepts were applied to not only instructing the faithful, but also to forcibly refuting the arguments of heretics, particularly Arian and Eutychian heretics who, by virtue of their distinguishing beliefs, distorted, in Chrysologus’s mind, truth in all three of these related theological areas.

Another glimpse into the practical application of these ideas in Ravenna comes from a document known as the Rotulus. The Rotulus is a roll of parchment containing a series of liturgical prayers that was discovered in 1884 in the archives of Prince Antoine Pio of Savoy. On its backside are copies of eight letters dealing with the affairs of the church of Ravenna, and for this reason the prayers have been connected to the liturgical practice of Ravenna. The prayers do not all fit together as a coherent group, but instead represent a collection of several separate units that relate to one another. The prayers were likely composed at different times, and by different authors. While they were not compiled in their present form

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67 Sancti Petri Chrysologi, 143.1: Quis adtingit archanum dei . . . commercium divinitatis et carnis, hominem deumque unum deum?

68 Sancti Petri Chrysologi, 60. 3: Christiana fides scit patrem, scit filium, scit spiritum sanctum . . . Divinitas personis trina est, sed una est in trinitate divinitas.

69 The Rotulus can also be linked to Ravenna based on paleographical, liturgical, historical, and text-critical terms. See: P. Suitbert Benz, Der Rotulus von Ravenna: Nach Seiner Herkunft und Seiner Bedeutung Für die Liturgiegeschichte Kritisch Untersucht (Münster: Westfalen, 1967).
until the seventh century, the content of some, perhaps most, can be dated much earlier.\textsuperscript{70} Many of them, based on comparisons with other literary and liturgical sources can be dated to the fifth century.\textsuperscript{71} P. Suitbert Benz, who made a complete comparative study of the prayers in the Rotulus with liturgical texts from other traditions, found that none of them can be closely related to Roman liturgical sources.\textsuperscript{72} Instead, a blend of influences seems apparent, and some appear to have originated in Ravenna itself. Benz argued that the author of several of the orations was likely Peter Chrysologus, based on comparisons with the linguistic idiosyncrasies, as well as the overarching themes, found in Chrysologus’s known writings.\textsuperscript{73} Above all, the most popular theme in the orations was that of the Incarnation, and preparation for the celebration of Advent. Thus, the Rotulus represented a compilation of prayers brought together around the pre-Christmas celebration of Advent. The dating of the orations can be determined not only by literary analysis, which Benz meticulously explored in his work on the Rotulus, but also based on their theological content.

It is the content of the prayers, focused on the Incarnation and, consequently, the nature of Jesus Christ as the God-Man, that makes a date in the mid-to-late fifth century probable for the majority of the prayers. Near both councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, and

\textsuperscript{70} Benz, 106. It has been suggested that Archbishop Maurus was the party responsible for bringing the prayers together, possibly in an attempt to formulate a liturgy for Ravenna during the autocephaly controversy. Benz, 340.

\textsuperscript{71} Benz, 332.

\textsuperscript{72} Benz, 335.

\textsuperscript{73} Benz argued that the content of many of the orations in the Rotulus aligned with the content of Chrysologus’s sermons and he also identified certain phrases that Chrysologus used in his sermons that also appeared in some of the prayers. For instance, the words \textit{deitas}, \textit{elementa}, \textit{cunabula}, and \textit{geminus} as well as the phrases \textit{subiacent-iacere} and \textit{laudes-conlaudare} are uncommon in other liturgical texts of the time, but were commonly used by Chrysologus in his sermons. Based, therefore, on both linguistic and content parallels, Benz argued that Peter Chrysologus was likely the author of several of the prayers. Their place of origin in Ravenna, and date in the fifth century agrees with this argument. Benz, 332 – 333.
closely related to the themes addressed in Peter Chrysologus’s sermons, the prayers were appropriate and timely. And, though some of the orations appear neutral, several of them contain outspoken anti-Arian sentiment. For instance, No. 18 addressed Christ as the Son of the Eternal God (*domine aeternae dei filius*) and as God and Lord of Angels (*deus et dominus angelorum*), which were obvious rejections of Arian teachings. Oration No. 24 referred to Christ as the Son of the eternal, omnipotent God born in flesh from the womb of a virgin. Again, these directly theological prayer structures reflected a desire to staunchly stake an orthodox position in the midst of an era of Christological chaos.

Not only did the prayers of the *Rotulus* reflect the theological climate of the Christian world as a whole, they more particularly applied to a local, Ravennate theology. The celebration of the Advent, which these prayers served, was not introduced into the liturgy in the west until the sixth century, after most of the prayers contained in the *Rotulus* were composed. None of the prayers have an obviously Roman origin and, in fact, many of them

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74 A few may even represent Arian prayers modeled on Orthodox ones. For example, there are two prayers, Nos. 26 and 36 that are almost identical in their language save for a subtle, but important distinction. No. 26 is a pre-Advent oration that was likely written for an Annunciation feast. It is anti-Arian and anti-Eutychos in tone in as much as it is an appeal to Christ, the omnipotent Son of the Father who came to earth in human flesh and substance to guide believers to heaven. No. 36, on the other hand, is addressed only to God the Father, not to Christ. It is likely an Arian pre-Christmas, Advent oration. Benz, 209 – 218. This sort of editing characterizes the *Rotulus* prayers that have a pro-Arian tone. In other words, they seem to represent revisions of the anti-Arian prayers, which constitute the majority of the orations.

75 Benz, 199 – 204.

76 Benz, 204 – 209.

77 Benz demonstrated convincingly that certain prayers pointedly referenced the dogmatic decrees of the councils in their language. No. 30 is one of the *Rotulus*’s most undeniably theological texts. It explicitly declared the divinity of Christ and stressed the virginity of Mary as a proof of the Godliness that had entered into her, the divinity she carried, and the reality of her child as both God and man. Not only was Mary the instrument of the incarnation in this prayer, but she was also personally filled with the light of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, worthy of the title “Mother of God.” In sum, the prayer was tailored to the orthodox decisions at Ephesus and Chalcedon. Benz, 218 – 243. Another set of orations (or possibly one oration mistakenly broken into two parts), No. 40/41 explained the miracle of the birth by a virgin in theological language: *humanae naturae deitas sociata genimina in Christo fulgit substantia* – in Christ the Godhead and humanity came together, he is Lord of both heaven and earth, but also a man. Again, this emphatic reference to orthodox teaching related the prayer directly to the ecumenical councils of the time. Benz, 300 – 313.
probably originated in Ravenna. Ravenna, therefore, was evidently an important location for
the history of the development of the liturgy of the Advent. The Rotulus is one of the oldest
collections of texts revolving around a pre-Christmas celebration of the Incarnation in the
Latin world. Given the potent influence of St. Peter Chrysologus and his theological
interests, the Rotulus is a convincing pendant to the theory that these concerns were of utmost
importance in early medieval Ravenna.

Such concerns were not solely philosophical, they had a practical, political raison d’être as well. Arianism was not a distant belief system, but was a very real and vital
presence in the region during the time period. Most obviously, the Ostrogothic kings who
ruled from Ravenna in the late fifth and early sixth century were Arian Christians. Arianism
may have pre-dated the Ostrogoths in northern Italy, however. Patrick Amory has argued that
Arianism as a sect did not disappear in Italy after its official condemnation by the Council of
Constantinople in 381. He supplies some evidence for the presence of Latin Arianism
continuing into the pre-Ostrogothic fifth century in Italy, particularly in the region
surrounding Ravenna. While the extent of Arianism in the pre-Ostrogothic, northern Italian
landscape is not entirely clear, the presence of this heterodox religion may help to explain
Peter Chrysologus’s preoccupation with it. Of course, the advent of the Ostrogothic

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78 Benz, 343. Benz even suggested that the Rotulus does not appear to have been originally intended for
liturgical use, it was simply a collection of prayers surrounding the theme of the preparation for Christ.

79 Patrick Amory, People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489 – 554, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and

80 For more on this see: Roberta Budriesi, “Ortodossi e Ariani: Questioni ravennati,” Corso di cultura sull’arte
eravennate e bizantina 37 (1990): 109 – 120; Thomas S. Brown, “The Role of Arianism in Ostrogothic Italy: The
Evidence from Ravenna,” in Sam J. Barnish and Federico Marazzi, eds., The Ostrogoths from the Migration
Period to the Sixth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective, Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology series 7
(Woodbridge, Suffolk UK: The Boydell Press, 2007), 417 – 441; Amory, 246.
administration (whose leaders, if not the entire “Gothic” population,\textsuperscript{81} held to Arianism) exponentially accelerated the prestige and prominence of the Arian church, particularly in Ravenna.

In the beginning of their rule, the Ostrogoths were by most accounts extremely tolerant of Orthodox Christianity (the Orthodox Bishops maintained a separate episcopate in the city as well as a separate cathedral from the Arian bishops),\textsuperscript{82} but toward the end of the reign of Theodoric (c. 520 – 526) tensions were on the rise. One incident, recorded in the \textit{Anonymous Valesianus},\textsuperscript{83} cast Theodoric’s heir Eutharic as an evil villain who was connected with pro-Arian reprisals against Catholics at Ravenna. Whether or not this later source correctly reveals the state of affairs in the early sixth century, it is clear that, by the end of Theodoric’s reign, relations between Arians and Catholics had become sensitive. Theodoric apparently abandoned his earlier policy of \textit{civilitas}, and attempted to close all Catholic churches. He sent Pope John I (against his will, according to the \textit{Liber pontificalis}) to Constantinople to intercede for eastern Arian churches which were being persecuted by Justin I. John died shortly after his return to Italy, making him a sort of martyr to Theodoric’s late-life tyranny.

Even before Theodoric’s descent into intolerance, there is some evidence that theological conflicts and missionary rivalry characterized relations between Arians and

\textsuperscript{81} Amory, 236ff.

\textsuperscript{82} In fact, the great Ostrogothic king Theodoric propagated a program of \textit{civilitas}: the idea of two nations (Goths / soldiers and Romans / civilians) living together in peace but performing different functions. This constructed ideology was Theodoric’s solution for maintaining rule over a territory of which he was not native. Part of this reconciliatory policy was toleration and respect for a diversity of religious dogmas. As a result, Theodoric and the Orthodox church, particularly the Roman bishops, maintained a working truce through much of Theodoric’s early reign. See: Brown, 2007, 419 – 420; Amory, 43 – 50.

Catholics, at least in Ravenna. Gregory of Tours, in his late sixth-century *Liber in Gloria martyrum* records a debate between a Catholic and an Arian which culminated in a deacon of Ravenna surviving an ordeal of boiling water. Correspondence between the Roman deacon John and the Ravenna bureaucrat Senarius about baptism implies that proselytizing was common. The Catholic Church found it difficult to maintain a building program for most of Theodoric’s reign. During the period in the late fifth and early sixth century when numerous Arian churches were built, the Catholics were only able to complete a small archiepiscopal chapel dedicated to St. Andrew and to start work on the episcopal palace known as “Tricoli,” which was not completed until four decades later. It does not seem surprising that tensions would be higher between Arians and Catholics at Ravenna than elsewhere in Italy. Though this small minority sect, for the first part of the Ostrogothic period at least, did not threaten the Catholic church in Rome, at Ravenna the Arian and Orthodox churches were vying for ecclesiastical power and resources. Plus, there was the lingering theological presence of Ravenna’s most celebrated bishop, Peter Chrysologus, whose powerful anti-Arian messages may still have resonated when Archbishop Felix compiled them in the early eighth century.

**B. Imagery**

It was in the midst of this atmosphere that the Ravennate sarcophagi came into being. Whether they were wholly carved or simply modified, imported or reused, the patrons of the tombs chose the images that would hold secure their earthly remains until the day of resurrection and would, in the meantime, promote them to posterity. Images and symbols of

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84 Gregorii Turonensis, *Opera*, vol 2: *Miracula et opera minora*. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 1, ed. by B. Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1885), c. 80.


Jesus, particularly the type utilized most frequently on the monuments, would have carried deep significance for the patrons and audiences of the tombs. One striking thing about representations of Jesus Christ on the Ravennate tombs is the emphasis placed on his divinity. Most of the compositions that present him in figural form show him seated on a throne or standing in an elevated position in a paradisiacal atmosphere. (Fig. 36) His disciples or followers approach him heraldically from either side in supplicating or worshipping attitudes. The only miracle scene involving Jesus on the sarcophagi represents the Raising of Lazarus. It is found on the ends of two sarcophagi, one in the Museo Nazionale of Ravenna (Fig. 48) and the *Isaac* sarcophagus in San Vitale (Fig. 30).

Otherwise, there are no other narrative representations including Jesus. This marks quite a distinction from Roman sarcophagi, in which narrative and miracle scenes were popular. The static, timeless, transcendent depictions of Jesus enthroned in paradise, the most popular type of image to appear on the fifth and sixth century sarcophagi, may represent subtle allusions to Jesus’s divine nature. This affirmation would have been important for those who wished to proclaim Orthodox, anti-Arian belief.

Another way that the producers or patrons of the tombs may have tried to emphasize the divine, otherworldly nature of Jesus involves the use of non-figural, abstract symbols.

Overwhelmingly, symbols referring to Jesus Christ are the most common images on the

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87 Thomas Mathews has argued that early Christian representations of Jesus did not strive to make him appear like an emperor so much as they did a deity. He points out that images of Christ enthroned omit important imperial *insignia* such as diadem, imperial cloak (*chlamys*), and scepter, and instead feature symbols associated with pagan deities, such as golden garments, haloes, and thrones. These “divine” features are ever-present in the representations of Christ enthroned on the sarcophagi. Mathews, 1993, 101 – 109.

88 This account in John 11: 1 – 44 is arguably Jesus’s most famous and powerful miracle, as it demonstrated his ability to conquer death before his own crucifixion and resurrection.

Ravennate sarcophagi. Sometimes, this substitution of a symbol for the person of Christ is explicit. One example is the composition on the *Constantius* sarcophagus (Fig. 16) in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in which a lamb, nimbed with a cruciform halo, stands on a gushing hillock between two other lambs. This is clearly a transposition of the Christ Enthroned iconography into animal terms. Even in the earliest dated tombs from Ravenna, there is a total absence of the sort of narrative imagery that characterizes sarcophagi from Rome. Christ is presented as static, frontal, and formulaic. In other words, abstract. There is very little action or dynamism in the scenes to disturb the solemn regality of the representation. The shift from the figural to the nonfigural representations that characterizes the later tombs (those dating from the late sixth through the eighth centuries) seems not so much one of change in tone or type, as of change in particular form. This hypothesis is supported by the instances I cited above in which a figural composition on one side of the trough of a sarcophagus is repeated with nonfigural symbols, in exactly the same configuration with the same number of elements, on the backside of the same sarcophagus trough.

While large-scale compositions with nonfigural symbols for Christ are certainly common on the rectangular backs of sarcophagi troughs, the most frequent insertions of Christ-symbols are more casual or haphazard, occurring as decorative motifs or ornamental “riffs” on the main theme. Returning to the *Constantius* sarcophagus mentioned above, tiny monograms, the right one with *alpha* and *omega* pendants, occupy the corner *acroteriae* on the edges of the lid. Crosses, monograms, *cantharoi* filled with water or vines, and lambs all refer to the person of Jesus. These symbolic images are used far more often than are figural representations of Jesus. Later sarcophagi in the series, from the sixth century onward, rarely
ever use figural imagery. Instead, they are peppered with formulaic, abstract symbols for Christ until the latest tombs from Ravenna are devoid of any imagery at all save for repeated, simple Latin crosses (Figs. 147 and 151). Most scholars would argue that the progressive proclivity for this symbolic language is a result of the decline of the sculptor’s craft as the arts, and culture in general, waned in Ravenna (and the entire Latin West) at the end of antiquity and commencement of the “dark ages.” While changing modes and methods of production must certainly have been a factor in this shift, it is important to note that the propensity for nonfigural symbols didn’t occur in Ravenna after the figural tradition had run its course, but rather developed alongside it. This is proven not only by the examples such as the Onesti sarcophagus (Fig. 20) in which a figural composition on one side is repeated in nonfigural symbol on the other, but even in the myriad of ways in which nonfigural symbols for Christ were included as “marginalia” in otherwise figured examples. The symbolic formulas and the dignified tone of abstraction appear to be ultimately connected to, not distinct from, the figural representations of Christ with which they were, at an early date, associated. Whether or not the later symbolic language carries the same potential theological implications (subtle assertions of the divine quality of Christ) is less certain. By the time that the latest examples (such as the Felix and Crucifer Lamb monuments) were being modified in the eighth century, the Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries were past.

As a final note, though the repertoire of narrative iconography on the Ravennate tombs is, as I have repeatedly stressed, extremely narrow, it is worth mentioning that among the narrative scenes that do appear there are several related to the Incarnation. Perhaps the best preserved example is found on the Isaac sarcophagus, (Fig. 30) in which the front of the

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trough is occupied with a scene of the Visitation by the Three Magi. There are also scenes on
the ends of the Pignatta sarcophagus (Fig. 38) which represent the Annunciation, and, some
scholars assert, the Mary’s Visitation of Elizabeth (though, as I have remarked elsewhere,
this scene does not appear to me to be two women, but rather one man and one woman). It is
difficult, given so few examples, to draw any conclusions from these instances, yet it is
interesting that, among a group of monuments with so few narrative representations, scenes
of the Nativity and Epiphany - the scriptural events which involved the Incarnation, and
played such a prominent role in debates over the precise nature of Jesus Christ, and were
repeatedly explored in the orations of the Rotulus and in the sermons of Peter Chrysologus –
appear more than once.

C. Compositional Arrangements

Another visual feature of the Ravennate sarcophagi which may be connected to the
contemporary theological climate is the proclivity for tripartite arrangements of imagery.
This propensity was discussed at length in Chapter 2, so a detailed explanation is not
necessary here. One example ought to suffice. In the sarcophagus of Archbishop Theodore
(Fig. 31),91 in all of the sculpted compositions (on the front, back, ends, and lid of the
monument) the forms are arranged in sets of three, usually with a Christ-figure or symbol
occupying the center position. Again, as stated in the previous chapter, such tripartite
arrangement of forms is not unique to the Ravennate sarcophagi. It is a satisfactory and
practical layout that provides balance and symmetry, and was widely used in a number of
cultural and artistic contexts. In Christian art, on the other hand, number symbolism is often
an imbedded device involving great significance.

91 This sarcophagus, as discussed in the previous chapter, is inscribed with the name of Theodore (677 – 691),
but it was probably carved originally in the mid-late fifth century.
The theological concept of the trinity, the most obvious spiritual truth communicated by the symbolism of “three” in the Christian context, was obviously poignant in Ravenna inasmuch as Arianism rejected this doctrine. Since Christ’s divinity was not accepted by Arians, neither could they accept the idea that God was a single being with multiple, co-equal persons. Affirmation of the Trinity was an Orthodox position, and one that was vociferously supported by the defenders of Orthodoxy in Ravenna like Peter Chrysologus. Like representations of Jesus Christ, or Christ-symbols, tripartite compositions that implicitly reference the Trinity are highly conventional in Christian art. What makes them noteworthy on the Ravennate sarcophagi is first, their insistent repetition in a medium with limited formal variety, and, second, the historical context of theological controversy revolving around the nature of Christ and, consequently, the nature of God. Thomas Mathews has commented,

there is something reassuring about images composed in matching parts with figures reflecting one another left and right. Because the human body is symmetrical, matching members naturally symbolize wholeness. There is balance in the Christian world. It is a world of order under the universal control of the Son of God at the center.

92 References to the Trinity were numerous in Chrysologus’s sermons. One example can be found in Sermon 144 on the Annunciation. Chrysologus criticized Arians for assuming that because Christ accepted indignity and death from humans, and later glory from the Father, this meant he was subordinate in some way. He argued that if the heretics (read: Arians) could understand such things they would not fall into their misapprehensions: “you would inflict no indignity on the Son, and would introduce no disparity into the Trinity.” Here, Chrysologus is clearly linking the coequality of Christ with God the Father and the reality of the Triune nature of God. In the sermons, Trinitarian philosophy and the nature of Christ are inseparable concepts, both of which are undermined by Arian heresy. See: Sancti Petri Chrysologi, 144.7: *tu nullam filio inrogabis iniuriam, nullam tu facies in trinitate distantiam.*

93 There are many instances of tripartite arrangements in the mosaics of Ravenna, as discussed in previous chapters. These triplicate representations have been often noted as bearing potential Trinitarian overtones. For instance, in his description of the image of the three Magi in Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, Agnellus mentioned that the number of Magi was an allusion to the Trinity. Agnellus, c. 88. See also: Deliyannis, 2010, 169 – 170; Deliyannis, 2004, 36 – 45 and 201 – 202, notes.

94 Mathews, 96 – 97.
In no other artistic context would representations of such balance and order been so highly desirable as on monuments designed to receive those facing the dark mystery of death.

**D. Summary**

The qualities of the sarcophagus carvings dealt with in this section, including the insistent and methodical application of Christocentric imagery, the preference for presentations of Christ in glorified, exalted, and celestially abstract modes, the visual ruminations on the Trinity in compositional arrangements, are compelling when viewed alongside the most important theological concerns of this particular time and place. The connections between imagery and thought are not, however, monolithic. There are a number of possible explanations. For example, because there does seem strong evidence that some of the tombs were imported from the east either in wholly carved or semi-carved states, it is reasonable to propose that to some extent they reflect eastern thought-patterns rather than specifically Ravennate ones. While there is a high concentration of imagery emphasizing Christ’s divinity, there is very little that deals with his humanity, besides for physical representations of him (i.e. there are few narrative sequences presenting him in action, among other people, grounded in historical time or place). I have tended to see in this predilection a refutation of the Arian heresy that Christ was somehow subordinate to or lesser than the Father, not subject to the same level of glory. This hypothesis is supported by the climate of late antique / early medieval Ravenna, the presence of Peter Chrysologus’s ideas, the prayers of the *Rotulus*, and the power struggle between the Arian and Catholic churches. On the other hand, these visual qualities might be alternately read as pointing to a monophysite position. Monophysitism, the view that the human and divine were so merged in Christ’s being that
they were one nature, not the “hypostatic union” of the Orthodox position, was a broader ranging and powerful heresy, particularly in the eastern Christian world, than was Arianism. Several imperial administrations held to Monophysitism, making it a much more dangerous doctrine, particularly in the eyes of the leaders of the western church in Rome.\textsuperscript{95} It is possible that this view of Jesus Christ influenced the tomb imagery as much as the more localized, Ravennate concerns with Arianism.

Another possibility is that the imagery appears generic because it was designed for a speculative market. This might especially be the case for examples imported in completed or semi-completed states. Not knowing the precise buyers, importers and exporters may have preferred tombs whose imagery was rather vague, and could be read according to the subjective allegiances of any number of buyers. After all, few “Christians” – whether Arian, Orthodox, Monophysite or any shade between – would find objection to symbols such as the cross, the monogram, or standard \textit{traditio legis} iconography with Christ seated in glory. In this light, the comments in the earlier sections of this chapter, on the relation of the imagery to universal Christian understandings regarding death, salvation, resurrection, afterlife, and community may prove more useful in interpreting the imagery than attention to theological hair-splitting among particular factions. In short, precise meanings of the tomb imagery remain elusive, but when the sculpture is viewed as one facet in the mosaic of the cultural context of Ravenna, it broadens perspective of the entire composition. Perhaps, in this sense, the tomb imagery ought to be used not as a telescope to hone in on particularities, but rather

\textsuperscript{95} For instance, in the view of Pope Gelasius I (492 – 496), there was a “hierarchy of heresies” of which Monophysitism was more pernicious than Arianism. The Ostrogothic king stood outside the community of belief but, unlike an emperor, he did not interfere with dogma. Gelasius could ignore Theodoric’s religion because he was not the emperor, in spite of any pretensions on Theodoric’s part. Gelasius was much more deeply concerned about imperial monophysitism, as his letters reveal, because it threatened encroachment on papal authority. Walter Ullmann, \textit{Gelasius I (492 – 496): Das Papsttum an der Wende der Spätantike zum Mittelalter}, Päpste und Papsttum 18 (Stuttgart, 1981), 217 – 218. Amory, 187 – 198.
as a kaleidoscope in which the view shifts and the possibilities for interpretation broaden with each turn of the wheel.

**IV. A Wider Perspective: The Journey from Antiquity to Medievalism**

One of the reasons that the Ravennate sarcophagi represent such an important body of work is that their production spanned an era of fundamental transition in western Europe. The earliest tombs were produced in the fifth and sixth centuries, during the tumultuous era when the Roman imperial government disintegrated and was replaced by Ostrogothic administrators, then Byzantine exarchs. Over the course of the next two centuries, any pretense of Roman antiquity definitively unraveled, and the medieval age was gradually, but firmly, established. The latest carved sarcophagi from Ravenna can be dated to the late eighth – early ninth century. Thus, the timeline of production spans the gap between the Late Antique and the Early Medieval periods.

While I have gone to great lengths to suggest the commonalities, and peculiarities, of the Ravennate funerary repertoire, I in no way mean to imply that the imagery itself was static. There were important shifts in style, and in iconography, that occurred over the course of production. In this final section, I will examine one of the most obvious and important of these changes in light of the broader cultural changes that were contemporaneously occurring, in Ravenna and beyond. In so doing, I aim to suggest some of the ways in which the metamorphoses of Ravenna’s funerary imagery may reflect the deeper alterations in the cultural landscape.

**A. Iconic to Aniconic**

One of the most significant changes in the sarcophagus iconography over the course of production was the shift from figural to nonfigural, or aniconic, imagery. While the
difficulties with creating an exact timeline for production or re-production have been discussed in other parts of this dissertation, the basic trend is evidently away from figural forms (examples are those carved onto the earlier tombs of the corpus such as the Liberius [Fig. 6], Isaac [Fig. 30], and Rinaldo [Fig. 19] sarcophagi) towards more static compositions that are comprised entirely of nonfigural symbols and forms. It is important to note that the simple absence of figures does not, in and of itself, indicate that a sarcophagus must be dated at the latest end of the production timeline. There are some tombs carved entirely with nonfigural imagery that represent a higher degree of artistic expertise than others. For instance, the Lamb sarcophagus (Fig. 18) in Sant’Apollinare in Classe, or the Constantius sarcophagus (Fig. 16) in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, have forms that seem to be carefully modeled and well-drafted. It is for this reason that I have considered these sarcophagi to be, if not contemporaneous with, only slightly later than, finely crafted figural tombs, such as the Rinaldo sarcophagus. In other words, the style of some nonfigural tombs is comparable with figural tombs, probably indicating that they were carved around the same time. Although there is certainly a trend toward aniconism (almost no human or animal figures appear on the latest sarcophagi) this tendency to use animal and symbolic forms to “stand in” for human figures was expressed in the earlier tombs as well. The predilection for symbolic / nonfigural forms, therefore, was not a new phenomenon to emerge, but rather was present from the beginning of Ravennate sarcophagi production, and became, over time, the preferred visual format.

Clearly, the sarcophagi near the end of the series, however, display starkly lower sculptural and artistic qualities, and reduce the symbolic forms to basic formulas. Examples such as the Crucifer Lamb sarcophagus (Fig. 14) represent this development. By the end of
the era of production examples such as the *John* (Fig. 12) and *Gratiosus* (Fig. 11) tombs have a visual repertoire that is reduced to only the form of the cross. Examples of this type, bearing only Latin crosses, are numerous.96

Various scholars have suggested reasons for this progression to aniconism in the Ravennate sarcophagi. Some suggest that it is a result of the fact that, in the seventh century and beyond, there were fewer skilled artisans available (as a result of the Gothic wars, the famine and economic devastation experienced in the late sixth and seventh centuries, and the increasingly frayed ties with the court at Constantinople), and thus the imagery reflects a lack of artistic skill in representing the human form.97 Though in most sculptural productions from Ravenna, it is true that, from the sixth century onwards, human figures rarely appear, there are some examples in liturgical items.98 While the level of abstraction in these instances is indubitably higher, the artisans still clearly undertook the attempt to represent human forms alongside animal and ornamental imagery. Regardless, the total absence of human forms after the late fifth or early sixth century is a striking feature of the early medieval tombs in Ravenna.

While the changing nature of the art production business and the availability of skilled artisans may have had some role to play in the transition from primarily figured to

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96 For instance, there are several examples of this type of tomb in the Braccioforte chapel (Fig. 147) and on the lawn of San Vitale (Fig. 151).

97 For instance, Jean-Pierre Caillet and Helmuth Nils Loose suggest that nonfigural imagery is a hallmark of sarcophagi crafted for a less wealthy or lower status patron in *La vie d’éternité. La sculpture funéraire dans l’antiquité chrétienne* (Paris: Édition du Tricorne, 1990), 10.

98 There are a few examples of the inclusion of human forms in later sixth – seventh century liturgical pieces or fragments including a portion of an ambo with a framed quadrant bearing an image of a veiled and haloed female figure. See: Bovini, ed., 1968 – 1969, vol. 1, cat. 22. Also, an ambo (dated to the late sixth century) in the Museo Nazionale of Ravenna features two *orants* figures in framed quadrants at the topmost left and right zones of the ambo. The men are named by inscriptions as St. John and St. Paul. See: Bovini, ed., 1968 – 1969, vol.1, cat. 26. There are even two limestone fragments with simplified human figures set into the campanile of S. Apollinare Nuovo that have been dated to the ninth century. See: Bovini, ed., 1968 – 1969, vol. 1, cat. 151.
primarily nonfigured examples in funerary sculpture, other scholars have assumed that this
trend toward the “symbolic” is indicative of the “eastern” (i.e. Byzantine) character of the
tombs. Certain scholars⁹⁹ have argued that the more abstract, or “mystical,” spiritual mindset
evined by static symbols relates the sarcophagi, along with most other artistic productions at
Ravenna, to the Byzantine sphere. This mystical aesthetic is, in this view, contrasted with the
more didactic, narrative tone supposedly characteristic of Latin, or western, sculpture. For
reasons that I have discussed at length in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I find this
characterization of the imagery untenable. In fact, the imagery from Ravenna, figural and
nonfigural, demonstrates influences from both the east and the west but, additionally, it
represents local tastes and visual choices. Furthermore, the characterization of Byzantine
imagery as preoccupied with abstractions over narrative or figural imagery is belied by more
recent finds such as the one documented by Thomas Matthews in excavations along the
Theodosian Wall.¹⁰⁰ Matthews demonstrated that sculpted sarcophagi discovered in 1988
were carved with narrative scenes that were hitherto unknown in any surviving example of
pre-iconoclastic, Byzantine art.

I would like to propose an alternate explanation for this shift in the imagery. Peter
Brown has noted a fundamental change that occurred in the imaginative structures of the
Christian worldview between the fifth and seventh centuries.¹⁰¹ Early Christians held an
“ancient” conceptualization of the other world and the afterlife (inherited from Greek and

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⁹⁹ See Ch. 2, 50, 61 - 66.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Matthews, “I sarcofagi di Costantinopoli come fonte iconografica,” Corsi di cultura sull’arte

¹⁰¹ Peter Brown, “The End of the Ancient Other World: Death and Afterlife between Late Antiquity and the
Early Middle Ages,” The Tanner Lectures on Human Values delivered at Yale University October 23 – 24, 1996.
Roman philosophies) in which the celestial realm was conceptualized as being close at hand, just beyond the stars. The gulf between the earthly and the heavenly spheres was bridged on a regular basis by angels, as well as demons. All in all, religious sensibility was shaped by a “haunting awareness of the immanent presence of the other world in this world.”¹⁰² Likewise, early Christian funerary ritual, as far as it can be constructed, was organized around an optimistic vision of death as sure and immediate entrance into the presence of the Lord.¹⁰³ Funerary rites in this period, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, incorporated white robes, fragrance, songs of praise, and processing candles. These ritual elements recreated, on earth, the solemn adventus of the soul into Paradise. Imagery painted on the walls of catacombs from the early Christian period also represented this triumphal journey.¹⁰⁴ These scenes of deliverance expressed a confidence that death, for the baptized Christian, involved the end of exile, and immediate entrance into paradise. A confident attitude towards death and the status of the Christian soul in the next life is certainly well-represented on the early Ravennate sarcophagi, particularly those carved with figural imagery. The iconography of Christ glorified, surrounded by his faithful flock, expressed the sense of triumphal homecoming that was so much a part of the early Christians’ conceptualization of what awaited them on the other side of the grave.

Brown’s thesis is that a shift occurred in this mindset around the mid-seventh century. The journey to the afterlife, instead of being viewed as instantaneous and effortless, came to be seen as fraught with peril, agony, and uncertainty. Hagiographical accounts, such as the

¹⁰³ Paxton, 37 -39.
¹⁰⁴ One example being the imagery of the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, as in the Via Latina Catacomb. See: Verkerk, 2000.
Life of Fursey composed around 656/7 in Northern Gaul, recounted harrowing journeys to the afterlife and back.\textsuperscript{105} The account of the life of Irish St. Ciarán recorded that this holy man looked up to the sky and remarked “that is a hard haul up.”\textsuperscript{106} This new attitude did not spring up overnight. Glimpses of it occur in the sixth-century writings of Pope Gregory the Great. In his Dialogues, Gregory described death bed scenes as particularly poignant moments, often when some dramatic sign occurred to bear witness to the character of the person deceased, or, more correctly, his fate in the next life. For instance, Gregory told a story of a priest whose sexual sin with his god-daughter was not revealed until after his death, when a flame shot up from his tomb, destroying the body.\textsuperscript{107} A group of three new prayers for the dead, preserved in the Bobbio Missal, represent an elaboration of the response to death over those preserved in the Old Roman ordo. Two of these prayers petitioned God to receive the soul in transit and allow it to evade the fires of hell.\textsuperscript{108} This fascination with the state of the deceased’s soul in the afterlife undermined the optimistic confidence that had shaped early Christian conceptualizations about death, and injected a new anxiety and ambiguity into the journey from earth to heaven and the likelihood of its successful conclusion.

In the Latin west, Brown attributed this shift in part to the development of the cult of the saints. Not only did dramatic testimony accuse the guilty, such as the licentious priest described in Gregory’s Dialogues, but these sort of supernatural phenomena more

\textsuperscript{105} Brown, 1996, 33.


\textsuperscript{108} Bobbio, nos. 536 and 537. See: Sicard, Liturgie, 280 – 285.
importantly ratified the purity and greatness of the great, i.e. saints. Many instances are recorded in literary accounts of miraculous healings taking place at funerals and/or tomb sites of the holy dead, and often the resting places of these saints were accompanied by fragrant smells, echoes of heavenly music, and evidence of incorrupt bodies. These signs were evidences of the efficacy of the intersession of the saints, the newly minted class of “patrons” who came to be viewed as powerful protectors, advocates at the court of God.

On the flip side, this belief in the “super-holiness” of an elite set of Christian “patrons” was accompanied by the rational conclusion that not all Christian souls could attain so easily to God’s amnesty; in other words, that not all souls were worthy to fully enjoy God’s presence upon their demises, but, rather, some sort of posthumous purgation ought to occur to cleanse them and make them whole. This opposite and opposing suspicion developed into the doctrine of purgatory. In short, after the seventh century, the face of Christian death changed. The “exuberant vision of Paradise that was close at hand,” gave way to a preoccupation with issues of merit and sin. In the early medieval spiritual hierarchy there were clear distinctions drawn between the few “saints” and the many “sinners.”

Can it be coincidental that, as this new understanding of death and afterlife gradually congealed in the early medieval mindset, the figural imagery that had once been most popular on Ravennate funerary monuments fell out of favor, and a new repertoire of nonfigural forms, in many ways just as limited in terms of variety and scope, replaced it?

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109 One example is from the Life of St. Eustodiola of Bourges in which the saint granted healing to various illnesses, thus showing herself to be still present at her tomb. See: Brown, 1996, 43. Vita Eustadiolae 8, Acta Sanctorum 2 (June), 133A. Translated in Sainted Women of the Dark Ages, trans. and ed. by Jo Ann McNamara, John E. Halborg, E. Gorden Whatley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 110.


111 Brown, 1996, 84.
Several aspects of the symbolic language of the later Ravennate tombs suggest that this newly “medieval” understanding of Christian death inspired the popularization of the forms. In the first place, the repetition of the most common symbolic compositions, including a preponderance of Eucharistic imagery, especially cantharoi, crosses, and visual references to the wafer, may represent appeals for divine favor or grace. Additionally, the overwhelming popularity of the form of the cross, found on every single example and, often, several times on the same monument, took on an almost apotropaic quality, guarding the tomb and its occupant from the powers of evil that might have tried to impede the soul on its progression to paradise.

A second aspect of the figural imagery that suggests a level of anxiety regarding the passage to the next life is the frequency of visual references to the Eucharist. Images of birds or beasts drinking from overflowing cantharoi, or eating grapes off the vine, and symbols of the cross or Christological monogram inscribed in medallions directly inspire connections to the body and blood of Christ mystically consumed during the Mass. In the first section of this chapter I discussed these allusions to viaticum as one aspect of the sarcophagus imagery that reflects contemporary funerary ritual. The giving of viaticum to the dying was a practice that was established fairly early in the evolution of Christian death ritual. However, there was, over time, an increasing anxiety about the giving of viaticum, not simply as a comfort to the dying, but as a necessity to ensure salvation. It was this anxiety that eventually gave way to the popular belief that one had to die with the wafer in the mouth. While references to the Eucharist can be found on the earliest tombs from Ravenna, the visual cues become more

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112 The council of Nicaea in 325 formed the conclusion that a dying person was not to be deprived of communion. See: Rush, 98, and also Paxton, 37 – 39. The first part of the Roman death ritual, as recorded in the Old Roman Ordo defunctorum, instructed priests to offer communion to the dying person as he approached death. See: Sicard, 1988, 2 – 33 and chart at the end of the book giving the rubrics and psalmody of seven manuscripts containing versions of the ordo.
numerous and more direct in the later tombs of the series, particularly those whose imagery trends towards the nonfigural and / or symbolic. Sarcophagi from the mid-sixth century, such as the fragments of the sarcophagus(i) of *Ecclesius and Ursicinus* (Fig 56), and the similar *S. Gervasio* sarcophagus (Fig. 53) make obvious and repeated use of the cross-inscribed medallion or monogram, which is powerfully visually reminiscent of the bread of communion. The *Lamb-and-Rinceau* sarcophagus from Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Fig. 13), includes not only lambs approaching a center, cross-inscribed garland on the front of the trough, but three, large medallion monograms on the lid and a *cantharus* on one end of the lid. It is hard to say whether the increase in these visual clues is significant, or purely the result of an exponential decrease in the variety of forms (i.e., figures) found on the sarcophagi from the sixth century and later. But one possible explanation for the rising popularity of these references to the wafer and / or cup is the increasing awareness of the need for *viaticum* as a safeguard, as confidence in the fate of the soul after death wavered.

Perhaps a more obvious example of an apotropaic usage of symbol on the latest Ravennate sarcophagi is in the sign of the cross. It goes without saying that the cross is a form that is found on almost every one of the sarcophagi, from the earliest examples onward. And it is unnecessary to reiterate the importance of this symbol in the broader field of Christian art. As a sign for Christ, Christian faith, and salvation, the symbol of the cross is ubiquitous. But, as mentioned above, the later sarcophagi in the Ravennate series oftentimes bear no other decorative device whatsoever, and several of the tombs repeat the cross neurotically on the troughs and lids. Examples, to name only a few, include the *Sale Family* sarcophagus from the Basilica of San Francesco (Fig. 150),113 two anonymous sarcophagi

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from San Vitale (Fig. 151 and 153), several anonymous (and apparently unfinished) sarcophagi from the Braccioforte chapel (Fig. 147), the John and Gratiosus sarcophagi from Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Figs. 12 and 11), and two fragmentary sarcophagi from the Museo Nazionale (Fig. 152). Of course the easiest explanation for these late examples may be that the form of the cross was the technically simplest one that a workshop of low-skilled artisans could provide. But when dealing with the single most fundamental image in the entire repertoire of Christian visual forms, I think it unwise to wholly discount a deeper, more meaningful reason for the persistence of this powerful symbol.

The form of the cross was not common until after the Constantinian era, but once it came into vogue in the fourth century it was used as a symbol of triumph and victory over death and evil. The symbol was used as a standard by bishops. One of the earliest manifestations of crucifixion iconography, in which two soldier figures hunker on either side of a cross, may have evolved out of the symbolism of barbarian captives submitting beneath Roman insignia. Other direct connections between the idea of victory or triumph and the cross include the iconography of Christ as a victorious commander, trampling evil (often in the forms of a lion and a serpent), bearing a cross as his standard. One example of this imagery is found in mosaic form at the archiepiscopal residence in Ravenna (Fig. 79), and Laura Pasquini argued in a 2005 article that the symbolism of the cross as an item of victory and power is reiterated in a number of ways, some subtle, and some more obvious, throughout Ravennate iconography. Though Pasquini focused primarily on the mosaics

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115 Though this iconography is clearly taken from the gospel narrative accounts of the crucifixion, it is visually connected to images from Roman triumphal monuments.

116 Laura Pasquini, “L’immagine della croce come simbolo di potere in Ravenna capitale,” in Ravenna da capitale imperiale a capitale esarcale, Atti del XVII congresso internazionale di studio sull’alto medioevo,
from Ravenna, I have clearly documented evidence that the form of the cross is a major factor in the sarcophagus iconography, and is arguably the most significant symbolic image in the corpus.

It is also important to note that a number of tombs at Ravenna represent monuments that were repurposed from pagan burials, and that the inclusion of a cross or crosses were the means by which the sarcophagi were re-consecrated for Christian usage. Examples include the Sale Family sarcophagus (Fig. 150), the Three-and-Four-Arch sarcophagus from Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Fig. 4), and an incomplete sarcophagus from San Vitale (Fig. 153).117 In each case, the cross symbol was nestled into the pre-existent compositional format, presumably after other imagery was chipped away. The use of the cross in these instances was a means to exorcise former spiritual allegiances, and ratify that the occupant of the tomb was covered under the insignia of Christ.118

The symbol of the cross was, therefore, not simply a universal symbol of Christian victory, but a personal one as well. As such, the sign of the cross as a seal of salvation was employed in a number of important Christian ritual contexts as well. For instance, the sign of the cross made on the forehead was used in baptismal rites at an early date. At the end of the second century, in fact, the Abercius inscription speaks of the people who “bear the glorious

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117 Bovini, ed., 1968 – 69, vol. 2, cat. 27, 45, fig. 27.

118 The use of a cross symbol to designate a new Christian interpretation for spoliated architectural and / or sculptural items from pagan antiquity was widespread in the early Christian era. Constantin Marinescu provides several examples of ancient sculptures marked with crosses to signify new Christian usage. See: Constantin A. Marinescu, “Transformations: Classical Objects and Their Re-Use during Late Antiquity,” in Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity, edited by Ralph W. Mathisen and Hagith S. Sivan: 285 - 295 (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1996).
seal” – the word “seal” meaning the cross traced on the forehead after baptism. St. John Chrysostom wrote that “wherever we are the Cross is a great good, the armor of salvation, a shield which cannot be beaten down, a weapon against the devil.” It was also common custom to mark the forehead after death with the sign of the cross, known as the sphragis, in order to scatter wicked spirits: “As sheep without a shepherd are the ready prey of wild beasts, so the soul that has not the sphragis is at the mercy of the devil’s snares.” In the early medieval age, uncertainty about the soul after death, and the possibility that the journey to heaven would be difficult and fraught with invisible conflict, were pressing concerns. It seems natural that, at this juncture, patrons would have been more eager to cover themselves, and their tombs, with this potent and protective symbol. The sign of the cross signified that the souls whose bodies deteriorated within the stone boxes were “signed and sealed,” and wholly “delivered” to Christ in paradise.

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have applied my conviction that art exists in symbiotic relationship to its culture of origin to the Ravennate sarcophagus imagery. Seeking to understand better some of the peculiarities of the iconography, symbolism, and compositional style of this group of tombs, I have held these imaged oddities up to the climate of late antique and early medieval Ravenna, particularly in the realms of doctrine, cultural philosophy, theology, and the spiritual imagination as it subtly shifted over the course of the period in question.

119 Daniélou, 136.


Concrete connections between these cultural phenomena and the imagery itself have not been established, and probably (given the dearth of contemporary documents pertaining to the tombs) cannot be established. What I have proposed, therefore, is not hard and fast evidence that certain aspects of the imagery were directly inspired by specific beliefs or historical events, but, rather, that the tombs were produced, modified, and utilized within a rich and diverse intellectual and social climate. This climate was distinctive to this particular time and region, and the sarcophagi themselves represent a distinctive body of objects that are separated from other groups of tombs by sculptural imagery as much as by time or geography. Therefore, it seems legitimate to hold up these objects against the backdrop of the cultural flows of the region during the turbulent and dynamic timeframe of late antique and early medieval Ravenna, in the hopes that the objects and the history may mutually illuminate one another.

There are a number of potential interpretations that could be given to the various symbols, iconography, and stylistic qualities and compositional arrangements favored in this group of tombs. Furthermore, the images do not necessarily have only one “true” meaning. They were likely multivalent, having different meanings and significations for different audiences at different times, perhaps even meaning different things to the various patrons who used, or reused, them. As the times changed, it is likely that the imagery - generic, symbolic, and mysterious in many ways - shifted with the cultural tides. Trying to form definitive interpretations is not only dangerous, but a fool’s errand. Therefore, whether or not any of my propositions concerning the meanings and messages of this imagery are accurate, I hope at least that the questions are provocative. Today in Ravenna, the tombs stand quietly in the aisles of impressive basilicas, whose glittering, polychromatic mosaics divert the eyes
of modern day audiences. Or, they moulder silently in chips and fragments in churchyards, or in the solemn historic sanctuaries of the city’s museums. Their imagery, so conventional and bland, evokes little interpretive interest. Yet these powerful symbols, and simple statements of faith, are the final word that the patrons who commissioned, purchased, or selected the tombs spoke as they faced the transition from the tangible, material world to the dark beyond. They are the last messages communicated by people whose bones, along with those of generations of their successors, have long since turned to dust inside the marble boxes that held them. The tombs and their imagery bear the traces of the culture and the people that produced them, but also the deeper, pan-human issues of life and death, mortality and immortality. Their hopes and fears were theirs, but they are also ours.
Fig. 1 C. Didius Concordianus sarcophagus, Museo Arcivescovile Ravenna, 2nd – 3rd cen. CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 1.3
Fig. 2 *Rasponi family* sarcophagus, S. Maria Maggiore Ravenna, 3rd cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 3 Unfinished sarcophagus, San Vitale Ravenna, 3rd cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 4 *Three-and-Four-Arch (Niche)* sarcophagus, Sant’Apollinare in Classe, original box 3rd century, recarved mid-late 5th century CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 5 *Manastirine, or Good Shepherd*, sarcophagus, Arheološki Muzej Split, late 3rd – early 4th cen. CE

Source: Cambi, fig. 4
Fig. 6 Liberius sarcophagus, San Francesco Ravenna, early 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 7 Bensai-dal Corno sarcophagus, San Francesco Ravenna, early 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 8 *Barbatinus* sarcophagus, Ravenna Cathedral, mid-to-late 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph, Lawrence fig. 40
Fig. 9 Column capitals from presbytery of San Vitale
Ravenna, c. 549 CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 10 *Felix* sarcophagus, Sant’Apollinare Classe, c. 725 CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 11 *Gratiosus* sarcophagus, Sant'Apollinare Classe, c. 788 CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 12 John (VI) sarcophagus, Sant’Apollinare Classe, last quarter of the 8th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 13 *Lamb-and-Rinceau* sarcophagus, Sant’Apollinare Classe, early-to-mid 6th cen. CE, reused late 7th – 8th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 14 *Crucifer Lamb* sarcophagus, Sant’Apollinare Classe, early 8th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 15  Stucco reliefs from the Orthodox (Neonian) Baptistery, c. 450 – 460 CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 16 Constantius sarcophagus, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, mid-to-late 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph, Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 81.1, 81.2
Fig. 17 Honorius sarcophagus, Mausoleum of Galla Placida Ravenna, mid-to-late 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 18 Lamb sarcophagus, Sant’Apollinare Classe, mid-to-late 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 19 *Rinaldo* sarcophagus, Ravenna Cathedral, early-5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph, Lawrence figs. 4, 7, and 8
Fig. 20 *Onesti* sarcophagus, S. Maria in Porto fuori Ravenna, early 5th cen. CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen pl. 42.1, 42.2, 42.3, 44.1
Fig. 21 Fragment of sarcophagus of dedicated to the *Eunuch Seda*, Museo Arcivescovile Ravenna, 3rd cen. CE recarved c. 541 CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. A49, pl. 19.1
Fig. 22 *City Gate* sarcophagus, Sant’ Ambrogio Milan, c. 380 – 400 CE

Source: Lawrence, 1925 – 26, fig. 2 – 3
Fig. 23 *Two Brothers* sarcophagus, Museo Pio-Cristiano Vatican City, 4th cen. CE

Source: Bovini, 1949, fig. 56
Fig. 24 “*Dogmatic*” sarcophagus, Museo Pio Cristiano Vatican City, early 4th cen. CE

Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 7
Fig. 25 Unfinished sarcophagus, San Sebastiano Rome, 4th cen. CE

Source: Wilpert, 1929 – 36, pl. 283
Fig. 26 Sarcophagus of *Junius Bassus*, Grottoes of Saint Peter Vatican City, c. 359 CE

Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 101
Fig. 27 Sarcophagus of *Santa Maria Antiqua*, Santa Maria Antiqua Rome, 3rd cen. CE

Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 31
Fig. 28 *Column of Trajan*, Rome, 113 – 116 or after 117 CE

Source: Stokstad 2008, fig. 6.51
Fig 29. *Ariosti* sarcophagus, San Francesco Ferrara, early 5th cen. CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 49.2
Fig. 30 Isaac sarcophagus, San Vitale, Ravenna, early 5th cen. CE (reused with added inscription c. 643)

Source: author photograph
Fig. 31 *Theodore* sarcophagus, Sant’Apollinare Classe, mid –to- late 5th cen. CE (reused with added inscription 7th cen.)

Source: author photograph
Fig. 32 Apse Mosaic (reconstruction) from the church of Santa Costanza, Rome, 5th or 7th cen. CE

Source: ArtStor image database
Fig. 33 Interior of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia Ravenna, c. 425 – 426 CE

Source: ArtStor image database
Fig. 34 Interior of the Church of San Vitale Ravenna, c. 549 CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 35 *Licinia Valeria* sarcophagus, Sant’ Apollinare Classe, c. 4th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 36 Exuperantius sarcophagus, Ravenna Cathedral, mid – to – late 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph; Kollwitz and Herdejürgen pl. 45.1 - 2
Fig. 37 Twelve Apostles sarcophagus, Sant’Apollinare Classe, early 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 38 *Pignatta* sarcophagus, San Francesco Ravenna, early 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph; Kollwitz and Herdejürgen pl. 24.2, 25.1 - 2
Fig. 39 Sarcophagi fragments from the Archaeological Museum at Istanbul, 4th cen. CE

Source: de Francovich, fig. 9 – 10, 24 - 25
Fig. 40  *Child’s Sarcophagus* with scenes of Jonah and the Great Fish, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Copenhagen, 3rd cen. CE

Source: Dresken-Weiland, pl. 3.1
Fig. 41 Sarcophagus fragment n. 2731, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, 5th – 6th cen. CE

Source: Deichmann, 1969, fig. 2
Fig. 42 Slab n. 7826, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, 5th cen. CE (?)  

Source: Farioli, 1983, fig. 32
Fig. 43 Anonymous sarcophagus n. 1 from the garden outside San Vitale Ravenna, mid-to- late 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph, Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 60.1
Fig. 44 Anonymous sarcophagus n. 2 from the garden outside San Vitale Ravenna, mid-to - late 5th – early 6th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 45 *Fusignano* sarcophagus, Church of S. Savino Fusignano, mid-to- late 5th cen. CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl 60.3, 64. 1 - 2
Fig. 46 Procession from the East Ionic Frieze of the Parthenon, Athens, c. 447 – 432 BCE

Source: Stokstad, 2008, fig. 5.38
Fig. 47 Imperial Procession from the North Side of the *Ara Pacis Augustae* Rome, 13 – 9 BCE

Source: Stokstad, 2008, 6.22
Fig. 48 *Traditio Legis* sarcophagus, Museo Nazionale Ravenna, early 5th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 49 *Adelphia* sarcophagus, Syracuse, 4th cen. CE

Source: Dresken-Weiland, pl. 9.1 - 3
Fig. 50 *Certosa* sarcophagus, Ferrara Cathedral, mid – to – late 5th cen. CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, cat. B17
Fig. 51 *Sosia Juliana and Tertratia Isias* sarcophagus, Museo Nazionale Ravenna, 3rd cen. CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 52 Sarcophagus fragment with Doubting of Thomas, Museo Nazionale Ravenna, early 5th cen. CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 26.4
Fig. 53  *S. Gervasio* sarcophagus, Church of S. Gervasio Mondolfo, early-to-mid 6th cen. CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 81.1 -2, 83.1
Fig. 54 Ranchio sarcophagus, Parish Church Ranchio, mid-to- late 5th cen. CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 62.3, 63.2
Fig. 55 *Imola* sarcophagus, Bishops’ Palace Imola, early – to – mid 6th cen. CE

Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 83.2 – 4
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Source: Kollwitz and Herdejürgen, pl. 84. 1- 2, Bovini, 1968 - 69, pl. 40.a - b
Fig. 57 Sarcophagus n. 823, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, 4th – 5th cen. CE

Source: Mendel, cat. 1174
Fig. 58 “Prince’s” sarcophagus n. 4508, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, late 4th – early 5th cen. CE

Source: Firatli, 1990, pl. 30
Fig. 59 Plaque n. 4135, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, 5th cen. CE (?)  
Source: Firatli, 1990, pl. 100

Fig. 60 Plaque n. 4136, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, 5th – 6th cen. CE  
Source: Firatli, 1990, pl. 101
Fig. 61 Socle n. 1641, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, 6\textsuperscript{th} cen. CE (?)

Source: Firatli, 1990, pl. 60

Fig. 62 Fragment (from a sarcophagus?) n. 2396, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, 5\textsuperscript{th} - 6\textsuperscript{th} cen. CE (?)

Source: Firatli, 1990, pl. 38
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Source: Fıratlı, 1990, pl. 39
Fig. 64 Excavated tomb from the Porto Silivri of the Theodosian Wall, Constantinople, 4th – 5th cen. CE

Exterior (top left), view of interior to north (top right), and view of interior to south (bottom)

Source: Mathews, 1994, fig. 1 - 3
Fig. 65 Sarcophagi fragments from the Porto Silivri tomb with family portrait (top), the Sacrifice of Isaac (bottom left), and Moses Receiving the Law (bottom right)

Source: Mathews, 1993, fig. 19, Mathews, 1994, fig. 8 and 6
Fig. 66 Sarcophagus n. 5769, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, 5th cen. CE (?)  
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Source: Firatli, 1990, pl. 94
Fig. 68 Ambo n. 1090, Archaeological Museum Istanbul, 4th – 5th cen. CE

Source: Firatli, 1990, pl. 178.a – d
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Source: Firatli, 1990, pl. 44
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Source: Firatli, 1990, pl. 40
Fig. 71 Barrel vault with Christological monogram, Mausoleum of Galla Placida, c. 425 - 426 CE

Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
Fig. 73 Prophets and Birds, mosaic detail from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, c. 425 – 426 CE
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Source: author photograph

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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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Source: ArtStor image database
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Source: www.mosaicocidm.it
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Source: www.mosaicocidm.it
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 85 Classe and Procession of Virgins, Northwest nave wall mosaic, Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, early 6th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
Fig. 88 Second and third zones of mosaic decoration on upper nave wall, Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, early 6th cen.

Source: author photograph
Fig. 89 Jesus Among His Disciples, Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, early 6th cen.

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Source: Bovini, 1969, 91.
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Source: author photograph
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Fig. 96 Reconstruction of apse mosaic, Church of San Michele in Africisco, 6th cen. CE

Source:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apsismosaik_Museum_Byzantinische_Kunst_001.JPG
Fig. 97 Emperor Justinian and His Retinue, south wall of apse, San Vitale, c. 549 CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 98 Empress Theodora and Her Retinue, north wall of apse, San Vitale, c. 549 CE

Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
Fig. 100 South wall of presbytery, San Vitale, c. 549 CE

Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph

Fig. 103 Presbytery vault mosaic, San Vitale, c. 549 CE

Source: author photograph
Fig. 104 Capitals and impost blocks, Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, early 6th cen. CE

Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
Fig. 106 Ambo, Santo Spirito (Arian Cathedral), first half of the 6th cen. CE

Source: Bovini, 1968 – 1969, pl. 18
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Source: author photograph, Bovini, 1968 – 69, Vol. 1, cat. 77. a - b
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Source: Bovini 1968 – 69, pl. 133
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Source: author photograph
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Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 77
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Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 74
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Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 75
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Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 65
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Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 92
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Source: author photograph
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Source: Deliyannis, 2010, 262 with author notes
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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Source: Lawrence, fig. 77
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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Source: ArtStor image database

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Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 4
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Source: Caillet and Loose fig. 56

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Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 35
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Source: Luttikhuizen and Verkerk, figs. 1.17 and 1.14
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Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 18
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Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 8
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Source: ArtStor image database
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Source: Bovini 1968 – 69, vol. 2, pl. 26
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph
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Source: author photograph, Bovini, vol. 2, pl. 49b. – c.
Fig. 152 Anonymous sarcophagus (top) and fragment of the so-called S. Vittore sarcophagus (bottom), Museo Nazionale, 9th cen. CE (?)  
Source: Bovini, 1968 – 69, vol. 2, pl. 66 and 65
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Source: author photograph
Fig. 154 Christ Handing Keys to St. Peter from the *Saint Maximin* sarcophagus, Church of Sainte-Madeleine, c. 375 – 400 CE

Source: Caillet and Loose, fig. 76
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