

*Donation, Dedication, and  
Damnatio Memoriae:  
The Catholic Reconciliation of  
Ravenna and the Church of  
Sant'Apollinare Nuovo\**

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The seizure and reidentification of the Arian basilica now known as Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna reflects the political, religious, and cultural transformations of Ravenna itself. The “heretical” space of Theoderic’s palace chapel was “converted” into “Catholic” space through a fourfold process that included the legal transfer of ownership, a liturgy of reconsecration, rededication of the basilica under a new name, and the purgation of images that decorated the interior of the basilica. This process was a sort of *damnatio memoriae* by which the Byzantines sought to disparage, rather than to eradicate, the memory of their Ostrogoth rivals in Ravenna.

An unassuming brick-faced basilica stands in the eastern part of the city of Ravenna. Now known as Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, this church is one of the finest examples of early Christian art and architecture and just one of many that adorn this city, once the capital of the western Roman Empire (figure 1). Its structure remains intact, and the brilliant mosaics that fill

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the nave still strike the viewer with a swirl of vibrant color some fifteen centuries after its construction. Not just here, but in the other ancient edifices of Ravenna as well, the conventions and styles of Rome and Byzantium have been woven together and still stand side by side. It is not



Figure 1. Exterior, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

at all surprising, then, that art historians and scholars of early Christianity alike have invested a considerable amount of interest in them.

Yet Sant'Apollinare Nuovo is much more than a museum for early Christian art. Its panels of colored stones and glass and the walls of its nave tell a complex story of transformation. Commissioned as the palace chapel of Theoderic, Ostrogoth king of Italy from 493–526, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo was one of several basilicas that were confiscated, along with other landed property and monies held by the Goths of Ravenna, and transferred by imperial order into the possession of the Catholics of Ravenna after the conquest of Italy by the armies of Constantinople. Much more than a simple matter of legal ownership, the transferal of this “Arian” basilica demanded an elaborate transformation of spatial identity that was realized through a dynamic and multifaceted process, which incorporated political, legal, liturgical, and artistic dimensions. In the political, cultural, and religious contexts of sixth-century Ravenna, the reuse of “heretical space” by Catholics would not have been fully possible without the process of “reconciliation” through which Sant'Apollinare Nuovo became a locus for the defeat of heresy and the triumph of orthodoxy, the redefinition of identity, and the transformation and control of memory. This study aims to examine these aspects of the process of *reconciliatio*, using Sant'Apollinare Nuovo as a case study and microcosm of the developments occurring in Ravenna in the wake of the Byzantine seizure of the city from the hands of the Goths in the sixth century.

### THEODERIC'S PALACE CHAPEL

In 493 Theoderic besieged the city of Ravenna, defeated the forces of Odoacer in Italy, and became the sovereign ruler of the peninsula. Almost immediately upon his assumption of the title *rex*, he embarked on an elaborate and extensive building program meant to restore and embellish his newly conquered territory, especially the capital at Ravenna. The results of his benefaction expressed his profound admiration for classical Rome, and through the work of architects and artists, he exerted claims on its heritage and power, all in the face of similar claims emerging from Constantinople. Within the city of Ravenna proper, Theoderic repaired an aqueduct originally built by Trajan and established a marketplace known as the Basilica of Hercules.<sup>1</sup> The bulk of his building activity took

1. Anonymous Valesianus, *Excerpta Valesiana* 60–61, 67, 71 (ed. Jacques Moreau [Lipsiae: Teubner, 1961], 17, 19–20, 20–21); and Mario Pierpaoli, *Storia di Ravenna: Dalle origini all'anno mille* (Ravenna: Longo, 1986), 128.

place in the eastern part of the city, which may have been a sort of imperial quarter even before Theoderic's time.<sup>2</sup> Adding to the array of imperial structures, Theoderic erected a palace and a magnificent mausoleum for himself, both of which were modeled on previous imperial prototypes.

In fact, much of Theoderic's building program throughout Italy, and especially in Ravenna, can be seen as an aspect of the public image that he promoted. He was a "renovator" whose desire was to "bring back all things to their former state" and to "preserve the monuments of Antiquity."<sup>3</sup> Though Theoderic never assumed the title or insignia of emperor, the king saw himself as "the direct successor of the emperors who had ruled Rome"; and inscriptions, coins, and literature of the time verify this.<sup>4</sup> Procopius wrote that Theoderic "did not want to invest himself either with the title or the insignia of the Roman emperor, and he lived bearing the title of *rex* . . . [but] he invested himself with all the qualities which appropriately belong to one who is by birth an emperor. . . . In fact, he was as truly an emperor as any who have distinguished themselves in this office from the beginning."<sup>5</sup>

Theoderic's building program included a number of ecclesiastical structures for the use of the Christian Goths of Ravenna. This included a cathedral (now known as Spirito Santo) and its adjoining baptistery (the so-called Arian Baptistery) and an episcopal residence for the *episcopus Gothorum*.<sup>6</sup> The adherence to imperial prototypes is evident on several levels, not only in architectural style but also in nominal dedications. The cathedral of the Goths was named the "Anastasis," after the basilica of

2. Mark Johnson, "Towards a History of Theoderic's Building Program," *DOP* 42 (1988): 79.

3. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 3.31, 1.28, 4.51 (CCL 96:119, 35, 179; trans. T. Hodgkin, *The Letters of Cassiodorus* [London: Frowde, 1886], 263). See Johnson, "Theoderic's Building Program," 76, and also n. 37.

4. Johnson, "Theoderic's Building Program," 74–75.

5. Procopius, *De bello gothico* 5.1.26–29 (trans. H. B. Dewing, *History of the Wars*, LCL [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979], 11 [slightly modified]).

6. John Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 95; and Pierpaoli, *Storia di Ravenna*, 135. A papyrus (Jan Olaf Tjäder, *Die Nichtliterarischen Lateinischen Papyri Italiens aus der Zeit 445–700* [Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1955–1982], P.34, ca. 551 C.E.) recording the liquidation and sale of property owned by the Goths of Ravenna names the clergy of the *ecliesie legis Gothorum s(an)c(t)ae Anastasie* (line 108), also called the *basilicae Gothorum* (lines 130–35), as the sellers. This is probably a reference to the church of Spirito Santo. Among the clergy is a certain Ufitahari, who bears the title *papa* (line 88). Another papyrus from Ravenna refers to the *papa et episcopum Gothorum* (Tjäder, *Papyri Italiens*, P.49, line 20).

the same name in Constantinople.<sup>7</sup> Even the plan of Theoderic's imperial complex in Ravenna was modeled on the complex of the Great Palace in Constantinople with its circus, entrance gate (called "Chalke" like the one in Constantinople), *excubitorium*, palace church (Sant'Apollinare Nuovo), and public square.<sup>8</sup> Speculation about the layout of the complex comes mainly from the Palatium mosaic in the church itself and from some minor excavations carried out in the early 1900s.<sup>9</sup> Apart from the church, little is left of the complex as a whole.

It should come as no surprise that the original dedication of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, like the palace chapel in Constantinople, was to the "Lord Jesus Christ." The ninth-century historian Andreas Agnellus,<sup>10</sup> compiler of the *Liber Pontificalis* of the Church of Ravenna, preserves an inscription (still visible to him in the apse) that recorded the original dedication: *Theodericus Rex hanc ecclesiam a fundamentis in nomine domini nostri Ihesu Christi fecit*.<sup>11</sup> In form Theoderic's basilica, probably built in the first quarter of the sixth century, was a three-aisled basilica with a central nave flanked by two aisles. Excavations carried out at the end of the nineteenth century confirmed the presence of an atrium.<sup>12</sup> An earthquake in the early Middle Ages damaged the apse, which was later elongated in the sixteenth century. After damage incurred in World War II, the apse was renovated and restored to its original foundations. Obviously, nothing remains of its original decoration. Apart from these recent restorations,

7. According to Andrea Agnello of Ravenna, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae ravennatae* 23 (*Liber Pontificalis*, ed. C. Nauwerth [New York: Herder, 1996], 1:136), this was also the dedication given to the Catholic cathedral (erected prior to Theoderic's church), also known as the Basilica Ursiana. (Agnello's *Liber pontificalis* is hereafter abbreviated "LP"; and all translations from it are my own.) See Giuseppe Bovini, *Edifici di culto d'età teodoriana e giustiniana a Ravenna* (Bologna: R. Patron, 1970), 2. See also Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Ravenna: Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes*, vol. 2, *Kommentar*, pt. 1 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1974), 245.

8. Johnson, "Theoderic's Building Program," 82–83.

9. Gherardo Ghirardini, "Gli scavi del palazzo di Teoderico a Ravenna," *Monumenti antichi pubblicati per cura della Reale Accademia dei Lincei* 24 (1918): 738–838.

10. The ninth-century historian Andreas Agnellus ought not be confused with the sixth-century Bishop Agnellus of Ravenna, who was responsible for much of the reconciliation of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo. To avoid confusion, in this article I refer to the historian by the Italian version of his name, Andrea Agnello.

11. Agnello LP 86 (Nauwerth 1:344). Deichmann, *Kommentar*, 1:128. See also Johnson, "Theoderic's Building Program," 85 n. 125.

12. G. Gerola, "La facciata di S. Apollinare Nuovo attraverso i secoli," in *Studi e ricerche su S. Apollinare Nuovo*, Felix Ravenna Supplemento 2 (Ravenna: Angelini, 1916), 3–32.

Renaissance-period modifications to the facade, and the addition of side chapels and paintings, the main body of the church remains in its original state, and no major *structural* changes can be documented in late antiquity.

### TRACES OF THE PAST

The most impressive and most discussed feature of the basilica is its decorative program. The walls of the nave are adorned with elaborate cycles of colorful mosaics, which are divided into three vertical sections, each with a thematic and stylistic parallel on the opposite wall (figure 2). The upper zone depicts scenes from the life of Christ: on the north wall are thirteen episodes from the ministry of Christ, including miracles, parables, and other scenes from the gospel accounts. The narrative cycle on the south wall follows the story of Christ's passion, beginning with the Last Supper in the panel closest to the sanctuary and ending with the appearance of the risen Christ to Thomas. In the central zone of each wall, between the clerestory windows, sixteen male figures dressed in philosopher's garb, in typical Roman fashion, stand holding codices or scrolls. Above their heads hover conch shells, crowns dangling from the center. Since the figures are not labeled, their precise identity remains unknown—perhaps prophets, apostles, or fathers of the church.<sup>13</sup> Finally, in the largest and most prominent cycle on the western end of the north wall, ships approach the fortified Civitas Classis, the port of Ravenna. Departing from the glittering walls, a procession of female saints, led by St. Eufemia, strides across a flowered pasture on a gold background, their names inscribed in Latin script above their heads. At the head of the procession, the three Magi in quick stride approach the Virgin Mary, who sits enthroned with the Christ child in her lap and is flanked by four angels of the heavenly court.

In the lower cycle on the opposite wall, a magnificent colonnaded facade, labeled as "Palatium," dominates the western end of the wall. The golden brilliance of its interior can be glimpsed through the curtains of its large central arch, which is flanked by two smaller arches. A portico extends from each side of this central archway, punctuated by still more archways concealed by curtains. The landscape of a walled city extends

13. For a review of various proposals regarding the identity of these figures, see Deichmann, *Kommentar*, 1:152–53.



Figure 2. Interior, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

behind the Palatium. To the right of the Palatium, a gate in the city walls bears an inscription that identifies the city as “Civitas Ravennae,” an idealized portrait of Theoderic’s capital.<sup>14</sup> A procession of male saints, led by St. Martin, files out of the earthly capital. Like the women who approach the Virgin, the men carry offerings of crowns in their hands and advance toward Christ, who is seated, enthroned as ruler of the universe.

This stunning decorative program has raised many questions for scholars. Art historians have long noted the difference in style between the processing saints and the christological scenes. In the upper cycles the figures are of a classical style: static, posed, and situated in “realistic” backgrounds. The figures of saints in the lower cycle, however, are more Byzantine in nature: in motion, they process with distant expressions against an “otherworldly” golden background dotted with a repetition of palm trees and flowers. The clothes of the women saints are very ornate and dazzle in a variety of colors. On the basis of style alone, then, the possibility is raised that the Roman-style christological scenes and the Byzantine-style saints were executed at different times, by different artists, and under different patronage.<sup>15</sup>

But it is not simply stylistic variation that warrants attention. Simple observation suggests that the lowest cycle of mosaic decoration was modified after its original setting. In the Palatium mosaic, for instance, one can see hands and forearms, detached from their bodies, on several of the white columns; and above the curtain rods one can recognize circular patterns in the mosaic work, perhaps the outline of once-depicted heads and/or halos (figure 3). The gold-colored mosaic that fills the pediment above the central arch is not uniform: a darker gold in the center and an uneven arrangement of the mosaic tiles trace the outline of an unknown figure. An examination of the Classis mosaic broadens the mystery. The arrangement of bricks in the upper strata of the mosaic wall is mostly symmetrical, but the courses of brick in the lower portion of the wall are oddly shaped and haphazardly arranged. In these sections of irregular bricks, the nineteenth-century German scholar J. Kurth believed he could see the outline of up to four human figures.<sup>16</sup>

14. Johnson, “Theoderic’s Building Program,” 88.

15. Otto von Simson, *Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 71.

16. J. Kurth, *Die Mosaiken der christlichen Ära*, vol. 1, *Die Wandmosaiken von Ravenna* (Leipzig: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1901), 174. Giuseppe Bovini, “Antichi rifacimenti nei mosaici di S. Apollinare Nuovo di Ravenna,” *Corso di cultura sull’arte ravennate e bizantina* 13 (1966): 80–81.





Figure 3. Palatium mosaic, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna. Notice the “disembodied” limbs, for example, on the first and third columns from the left and the second from the right. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Expert observational and chemical analyses carried out during post-war restorations in the 1950s and 1960s by the scholar Giuseppe Bovini and a group of mosaicists produced valuable data for dating different portions of the mosaic decoration. First, it was noted that the gold background immediately surrounding the saints in procession was of a different color, cut, and type than the gold background just above the inscriptions and immediately below the blue border.<sup>17</sup> Even the tiles comprising the grassy pasture through which the saints process seemed to be more like those used in the upper parts than in the figures themselves.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in the representation of Civitas Classis some of the mosaic bricks are outlined with white enamel and black tiles, while those in the irregular sections are outlined in white marble and blue or purple tiles. The gold tiles that constitute these latter are also of an irregular cut and arrangement.<sup>19</sup>

Chemical analysis of the various layers of underlying mortar yielded interesting results. It was discovered that the composition of the mortar beneath the saints, the Magi, and the pediment segment of the Palatium was identical, but differed from the mortar beneath the Virgin, Christ, and the columns of the Palatium. It also appeared to have been set at a later time, with dramatic sutures indicating where older layers of mortar had been cut out and replaced with new ones (figure 4). Based on this evidence, Bovini concluded that the Palatium representation, the Classis mosaic, the Virgin, Christ enthroned, the male figures standing between the clerestory windows, and the christological cycles all belonged to the original decoration from the age of Theoderic; while the processions of saints (which Bovini believes replaced a series of other figures originally set during the reign of Theoderic<sup>20</sup>) and the “purges” made of figures in

17. Bovini, “Antichi rifacimenti,” 54.

18. *Ibid.*, 56.

19. *Ibid.*, 79. It should be noted that extensive restorations and repairs to the mosaics of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo were carried out under the direction of Felice Kibel in the mid-nineteenth century. While some have questioned the accuracy of some of Kibel’s restorations, these restorations do not affect the reworked segments of the mosaics that are under discussion in this paper. For example, the only portion of the “Civitas Classis” repaired by Kibel was the upper third of the section of wall between the entrance gate and the middle tower, the result being that the heads of the mysterious figures outlined in the sixth-century modifications are no longer visible. For a general review of Kibel’s restorations, see G. Bovini, “Principali restauri 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.

20. Bovini, “Antichi rifacimenti,” 56. C. Ricci, *Monumenti: Tavole storiche dei mosaici di Ravenna* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello stato, 1930–1937), 4:67 and 4:71, held that the original decorative program represented Arian saints, Theoderic,

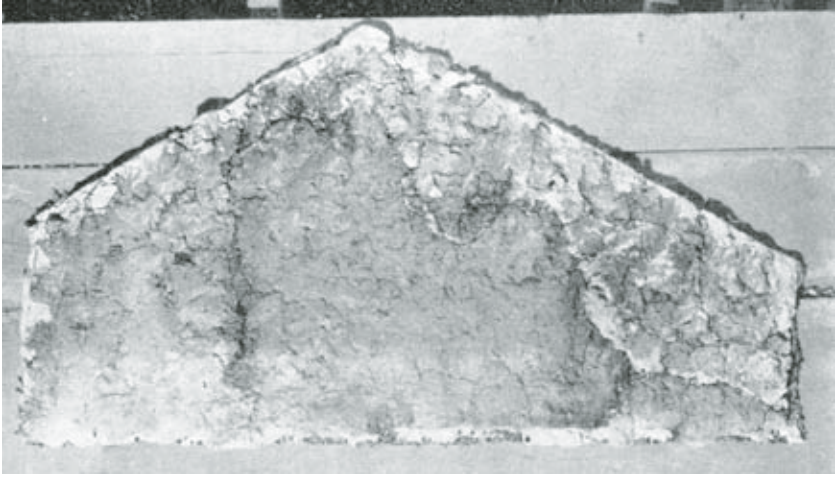


Figure 4. Reverse side of section removed from the pediment of the Palatium mosaic showing two different applications of mortar. Some have suggested that an image of Theoderic appeared in the central area and was later removed. Photo: Giuseppe Bovini.

the Palatium colonnade, in the pediment, and in the walls of Civitas Classis dated to a later period. This corroborated literary evidence provided by Agnello that attributed later work in the basilica to the episcopate of Agnellus, the Catholic bishop of Ravenna (557–570) during the latter part of the reign of Justinian:

He decorated the tribunal and the two walls with mosaic images of martyrs and virgins who go in procession; above [i.e., the ceiling] he applied gilded stucco decoration, and he redecorated the walls with various marbles and composed the floor wonderfully in mosaic. If you look inside at the front of the church, you will find the effigies of the emperor Justinian and of Bishop Agnellus decorated in gilded tiles. No church or house was similar to this church in its ceiling or beams.<sup>21</sup>

Agnello continues:

Nevertheless, on the wall this is what you can see. There, as I said, are representations of two cities. From Ravenna, on the men's side, come the

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the “princes and princesses” of the royal family, and civil and ecclesiastical members of the king's court all processing with offerings toward the images of Christ and the Virgin. See also Deichmann, *Kommentar*, 1:145.

21. Agnello *LP* 86 (Nauerth 1:342–44).

martyrs that go toward Christ; from Classis, the virgins process toward the holy Virgin of virgins. The Magi precede them carrying gifts.<sup>22</sup>

Agnello's description continues with a lengthy theological discourse on the figures of the three Magi, among the bishop's favorites, as he explains, suggesting perhaps that Bishop Agnellus was responsible for these figures as well. Thus, both literary and material evidence suggest that the decorative program of the nave dates to two general periods: the upper two registers and portions of the lower register were part of Theoderic's original plan, while the processions of saints and the Magi and the modifications to the lowest cycle can be dated to the period after Justinian's conquest of Italy, when Byzantine influence strongly swept through Ravenna.

## RECONCILIATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Modifications of this sort naturally pose many questions, particularly when one considers both the nature of Bishop Agnellus' changes (erasures as well as additions) and the historical and political context in which they occurred. First, why did Bishop Agnellus commission the addition of processions of saints to the nave? Was something or someone else depicted there previously, as Bovini believed? Second, was Bishop Agnellus also responsible for "erasing" the mysterious figures whose outlines can be detected in both the Palatium and Classis scenes? Who were they, and why were they erased? Third, what prompted him to execute this alteration program when he did?

Andrea Agnello's *Liber Pontificalis* of Ravenna provides a context: "This most blessed man [Agnellus] reconciled [*reconciliavit*] all of the churches of the Goths, those that had been built at the time of the Goths and king Theoderic, and which had been held by the perfidious Arians and by the doctrine and faith of the heretics."<sup>23</sup> He then provides a list of the other churches that were reconciled: St. Eusebius, priest and martyr, located outside the city proper, built in the twenty-fourth year of Theoderic's reign under Bishop Unimundus;<sup>24</sup> St. George; St. Sergius, located in Classis;

22. *Ibid.*, 88 (Nauerth 1:346).

23. *Ibid.*, 86 (Nauerth 1:340).

24. Ecclesius was the Catholic bishop of Ravenna in the twenty-fourth year of Theoderic's reign. There is no Bishop Unimundus included in Agnello's *Liber pontificalis*. Since the name "Unimundus" is of Gothic origin, this is most likely the name of the Gothic ("Arian") bishop of Ravenna. See Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.19 (CCL 96:426).

and the church of St. Zeno in Caesarea.<sup>25</sup> Inside Ravenna itself the cathedral of the Goths (originally called Anastasis, renamed St. Theodore after the reconciliation, and later renamed Spirito Santo) was reconciled,<sup>26</sup> and finally, Theoderic's palace church (originally dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ, renamed St. Martin after the reconciliation, and then renamed Sant'Apollinare Nuovo between the ninth and tenth centuries).

This reconciliation followed the final military defeat of the Goths in 554 by the Byzantine forces led by Narses, after more than ten years of sporadic fighting for control of the Italian peninsula. As the Byzantines took control of territory that had been dominated by a people they considered barbaric in their culture and heretical in their Christianity, the emperor instituted a policy of promoting Byzantine political, cultural, and religious standards. This included removing Goths from positions of power and influence, confiscating their wealth, and directly attacking their religious identity and institutions. The controversial appointment of Maximian as Catholic bishop of Ravenna (546–556) ensured that Justinian's program of "byzantinization" in the city would have a supportive and loyal administrator. This put the rest of the Italian church on the defensive as the see of Ravenna obtained more and more prestige, power, and patronage from Constantinople.<sup>27</sup> Bishop Maximian initiated this course of action with the construction of basilicas (namely, [the completion of] San Vitale, begun under Bishop Ecclesius, and Sant'Apollinare in Classe) and the codification of the Ravennate liturgy.

It was the intention of the imperial seat to build up Ravenna as a "monumental exposition of Byzantine theology" and power, a time to rewrite the history of the city by defaming its previous rulers and praising its new rulers.<sup>28</sup> The history of the Anonymous Valesian, a work of an anonymous Catholic writer, dated by Pierpaoli to sometime in the sixth

25. Cartocci, "Alcune precisazioni sulla intitolazione a S. Agata della 'Ecclesia Gothorum' alla Suburra," in *Teoderico il Grande e i Goti d'Italia. Atti del XIII Congresso internazionale di studi sull'alto medioevo* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1993), 2:614, argues that the dedications used by Agnello are the names assigned to the churches after the reconciliation and do not represent the Gothic dedications. As I will demonstrate below, a change in dedication in the honor of a saint was part of the reconciliation process in both Rome and Ravenna. Cartocci also believes saints such as George, Sergius, and Zeno, all of whom were soldier saints, represented the heavenly armies and "bulwarks of orthodoxy" aiding the earthly armies of Constantinople in their war against heretics.

26. Deichmann, *Kommentar*, 1:243.

27. Pierpaoli, *Storia di Ravenna*, 158–59; and von Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 16–17.

28. Von Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 18.

century,<sup>29</sup> presents Theoderic as the well-intentioned king gone bad. Though an “Arian,” he behaved *si Catholicus* (*Excerpta* 65). He was a great benefactor and restorer of Italy and Ravenna (*Excerpta* 67, 71), but ominous portents forewarned of the Arian ruler’s malicious persecution of Catholics (*Excerpta* 83–85), including his imprisonment of the saintly Pope John (*Excerpta* 93) and his order that Arians “invade” Catholic basilicas (*Excerpta* 94). The “enemy” of God, forgetful of the grace and beneficence shown to him, died before this order could be carried out and passed from this world in the same humiliating way as Arius, the “author of his religion” (*auctoris religionis eius*; *Excerpta* 95). Meanwhile, in Constantinople the stage had been set for the glorious future of the empire with the accession of Justin foretold in a heavenly vision (*Excerpta* 75–76).

The steady erasure of the Gothic hold on Ravenna continued under Maximian’s successor Agnellus. Of the Goths who remained in the city after the takeover, those who did not own property were expelled, reducing their number considerably.<sup>30</sup> Per order of Justinian, Agnellus was charged with the task of “reconciling” the property and possessions that had been confiscated from the Goths:

In his times Justinian, the emperor of the right faith, granted to this church [i.e., the Catholic church of Ravenna] and to the blessed Agnellus all the goods of the Goths, not only in the cities, but also in the estates and villages, and thus even churches and altars, male and female servants, everything that had belonged by right to them and for the use of the pagans. All this he donated to the bishop and confirmed the matter with *privilegia*, and he handed it over materially with a letter.<sup>31</sup>

Agnello continues by citing a letter of Justinian:

The holy mother church of Ravenna is truly mother and truly orthodox, while many other churches for fear of the rulers changed their doctrine. This [church] instead has preserved the true and only holy Catholic faith and never changed it; it has endured the beating of the waves and remained firm, though beaten by the tempest.<sup>32</sup>

29. Pierpaoli, *Storia di Ravenna*, 49 n.18. The work ends with the death of Theoderic. It is unclear whether this work was written immediately after Theoderic’s death, with the accession of Athalaric; or sometime later, perhaps after the defeat of the Goths.

30. Pierpaoli, *Storia di Ravenna*, 161.

31. Agnello *LP* 85 (Nauerth 1:338).

32. *Ibid.*

## LEGAL TRANSFER

A papyrus dated to the reign of Justin II (565–570 C.E.) provides a contemporary glimpse into the legal transfer of the Goths' property to the Roman residents of Ravenna. If Tjäder's reading of the text is correct, it may in fact transcribe the proceedings of the actual legal transfer of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, in the presence of Bishop Agnellus (*praese[nt]e Agnello v[iro] b[eatissimo] archiepisc[opo] . . . s[an]c[t]e Rav[ennatis] eccl[esiae]*; lines 16–17), who is also named as recipient of the newly acquired and allocated (*distributa*) patrimony and “tribute” of *coloniae* and *fundi*. The conclusion of the papyrus reads as follows:

Therefore the holy Catholic church of this city of Ravenna, through the benefits of the most august prince, will possess by its own right all the patrimony that once belonged to the Arians, given that from the custom of the patrician Zacharias we have learned that many funds of the aforementioned patrimony already have been assigned to the defenders of the holy church of Ravenna.<sup>33</sup>

At a basic level, the process of “reconciliation” was executed through legal means. Within this legal framework, rooted both in precedent and imperial sanction, the ownership of the property confiscated (and sometimes coaxed) from the Goths was transferred to the Catholic community.

Yet as far as the churches of the Goths were concerned, legal transfer would not be enough to effect a complete renegotiation and transformation of spatial identity. In the latter years of Theoderic's reign, the relatively good relations that had existed between his administration and the Roman Church rapidly deteriorated in the wake of improving relations between Rome and Constantinople. This political reunion of two “orthodox” entities problematized the previously innocuous religious difference between the Romans and Goths and gave expression to a rising language of theological opposition and accusatory rhetoric of “heresy.” In fact, in light of this religious and political animosity, one might ask whether the confiscated churches, once used for heretical worship and still intended to

33. Tjäder, *Papyri Italiens*, P.2 (my trans.). The first dozen lines or so of this papyrus are very fragmentary. Tjäder reads the first line as “*D(e) m[assa], [...e[.]] ad s(an)c(tu)m Martinum*,” suggesting the connection to the church of St. Martin (i.e., Sant'Apollinare Nuovo). In another papyrus from this collection, dated to the year 553, a Gothic matron named Ranilo, daughter of Aderit and spouse of Felithanc, donates to the church many goods possessed by her in modern-day Tuscany and the Marche. Whether this was part of the reconciliation is unclear, but is possible. See Pierpaoli, *Storia di Ravenna*, 169; and Tjäder, *Papyri Italiens*, P.13.

be used as public sacred spaces, would have been “ready for use” immediately after legal transfer. The answer, of course, is no. Another step in the process of converting Arian space into Catholic space was the purgation of its previous identity through ritual.

#### RITUAL RECONSECRATION: EXORCISM AND RENEWAL OF SPACE

In his discussion of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, Andrea Agnello writes that Bishop Agnellus “consecrated it” (*consecravit*) and then held a public meal in his episcopal residence.<sup>34</sup> In general, liturgies of consecration were performed to inaugurate a new worship space for proper liturgical use; Eusebius, for example, partly describes the consecration of the new basilica in Tyre (*Historia ecclesiastica* 10.3–4). Although not a new basilica strictly speaking, Theoderic’s former palace chapel was reconsecrated by the bishop of Ravenna inasmuch as it was a new space for Catholic worship. Thus, the liturgy of (re)consecration served as a ritual transfer of ownership and identity that both purged the structure of its old identity and conferred a new one on it. This was a crucial part of the transformation process. The bishop, as the officially recognized head of the Catholic and orthodox church of Ravenna, acted as the ritual agent who, by the authority of God and with the consent of the emperor, ritually conquered the Gothic associations of the basilica and claimed it for the triumphant orthodox parties in a public and festive setting.

Unfortunately, neither Agnello nor any other source from Ravenna provides any detailed description of this consecration liturgy. Nevertheless, the writings of Gregory the Great demonstrate that a similar process of appropriating, reconciling, and reconsecrating basilicas that had belonged to the Goths was unfolding some decades later in the city of Rome.<sup>35</sup> Gregory mentions two in particular: the church of St. Severinus and the church now known as Sant’Agata dei Goti, located on the Quirinal in the Subura neighborhood of Rome.<sup>36</sup>

Little is known about the church of St. Severinus. When it was built, its precise location, who commissioned its construction, and how long it was

34. Agnello *LP* 86 (Nauerth 1:342–44).

35. Carlo Cechelli establishes 592 as the date for the reconciling of San Severino and Sant’Agata dei Goti in Rome. See C. Hülsen, C. Cecchelli, et al., *S. Agata dei Goti* (Roma: P. Sansaini, 1924), 39.

36. Gregory the Great, *epp.* 3.19, 4.19 (*Opere di Gregorio Magno*, ed. D. Norberg and V. Recchia [Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1996], 5.1:406, 5.2:52); Gregory, *Dial.* 3.30 (SC 260:378–85).



in the possession of the Goths all remain unanswered questions. In a letter to Peter, the subdeacon of Campania, Gregory locates the church *iuxta domum Merulanum regione tertia*.<sup>37</sup> Gregory was eager to obtain the saint's relics from Peter and deposit them in this basilica—originally among the “places once deputed to execrating errors” and held by the *superstitio Arriana*—which he would dedicate (*dedicare*) to the “catholic religion.”

The choice of Severinus, the “apostle of Noricum,” was especially significant. Active as a missionary and monk in the Danube region, along the borders of Noricum and Pannonia, this saint is presented in the sixth-century *Vita* by Eugippius as a man of God who had notable success among the “barbarians.” Renowned for his sanctity, Severinus was sought out by the kings of the Alamanni and Rugi, and even by Odoacer himself, for his miraculous foresight, his blessing, and his influence before God. Severinus, in fact, had predicted the barbarian invasions; and as a result of his influence, some cities were rescued from occupation. In those that succumbed, Severinus was a source of comfort and a font of miracles for the Roman populations besieged by barbarian heretics. He died in 482, and between 492 and 496 his relics were transferred to Naples after a long migration of his monastic community, forced to leave their original settlement because of further invasions.<sup>38</sup>

More is known about the church of St. Agatha. An apsidal mosaic inscription, still visible to the author of the sixteenth-century Codex Vaticanus Latinus 5407 (1592 C.E.), indicated that the Goth *magister militum* and patrician Ricimer commissioned the decoration (*adornavit*) of the basilica sometime before the year 470.<sup>39</sup> The Codex also includes a description and sketches of the apse decoration: Christ and the twelve apostles, “six on his right and six on his left.”<sup>40</sup> I agree with those scholars

37. Gregory, *ep.* 3.19 (Norberg and Recchia 5.1:406); Jacques Zeiller, “Les églises ariennes de Rome à l'époque de la domination gothique,” *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 24 (1904): 24.

38. Eugippius, *Vita S. Severini* (PL 72:1167–200). The most recent study is by W. Pohl and M. Diesenberger, *Eugippius und Severin: Der Autor, der Text und der Heilige* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001).

39. The inscription read: “FLA RICIMER VI MAGISTER UTRIVSQUE MIL(itiae) pat)RICIUS ET EX CONS ORD PRO VOTO SUO ARDONAVIT.” Ricimer held the office of consul from 459–470. The apse decoration was lost in 1589 when the vaulting collapsed. See Richard Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1936), 1:2–12.

40. The images of Christ and the apostles, on folios 27/46–40/72 of Cod. Vat. Lat. 5407, appear separately on individual pages: first six apostles, then Christ, then the remaining six apostles. Giovanni Ciampini, *Vetera monumenta in quibus praecipue musiva* (1690), attempted to reconstruct the arrangement as it would have appeared.

who suggest that this is an indication that the church may have originally been dedicated to Christ and the apostles and not to Saint Agatha.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, these images have not survived, but the description of Codex Vaticanus Latinus 5407 and Ciampini's reconstruction both suggest the motif would have been similar to others of the period: Christ, holding an open book, is flanked on one side by Peter, who holds the keys of the kingdom, and on the other by Paul, who takes his place as the twelfth apostle. The two groups of six apostles approach Christ in procession from either side.<sup>42</sup> Along with the mosaic images of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo and the Arian Baptistery in Ravenna, these apostolic portraits were among the very few examples of "Arian art" that survived antiquity.<sup>43</sup> Yet significantly, the author of the Codex notes that even Pope Paul IV (1555–1559) proclaimed them to be "true images of the apostles"—as Gregory the Great had done implicitly before him by allowing them to remain after his rededication of the church.<sup>44</sup> Thus, these "Arian" portraits of Christ and the apostles did not differ significantly from "orthodox" images.

After the defeat of the Ostrogoths in Italy, the basilica remained abandoned and unused until 591 or 592 when Pope Gregory "dedicated the

41. Orazio Marucchi, *Basiliques et églises de Rome* (Paris: Desclée, 1909), 377; Zeiller, "Églises ariennes," 19–21; and Cartocci, "Alcune precisazioni," 611–20, all argue that the original dedication was to the Savior and that the dedication to Sant'Agata was chosen and imposed by Gregory the Great when he rededicated the church (see below). Given that we know the original dedication of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo was to Christ the Savior, it is possible that its apse decoration may have been very similar.

42. The image of the enthroned Christ flanked by apostles also appears frequently on Christian sarcophagi. Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum*, 1:11, suggests that the construction of the church itself is typical of the second half of the fifth century and further intimates that the style of the construction is more Ravennate than Roman. He argues this based on the bolsters over the capitals, the masonry of hollow tiles used in the gables, the arrangement of windows in the apse, and, most significantly, the fact that the nave-to-aisle proportions fit Ravennate rather than Roman measurements.

43. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, *DACL* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1924), 1.2:2820. The category "Arian art" is extremely problematic, as will become evident in the remainder of this paper. There is no convincing evidence that Arian Goths developed a distinctive artistic tradition or employed significantly different symbology or iconography in Italy as an expression of an Arian theology or identity.

44. *Quae picture in musaico antiquior multo est ut existimo ipso S. Gregorio pp. Paulus IV pont. Max. non levibus rationibus permotus solebat dicere pictures has esse versa apostolorum effigies*, quoted in Zeiller, "Églises ariennes," 20; and in *DACL* 1.2:2820.

church of the Goths in the Subura in the name of St. Agatha the martyr.”<sup>45</sup> Gregory himself provides a fascinating description of the liturgy of consecration, complete with details and images that help us understand the logical necessity of the process. His account is worth quoting at length:

An Arian church in the section of the city called Subura had remained closed until two years ago when it was decided to dedicate it to the Catholic faith [*placuit ut in fide catholica . . . dedicari debuisset*]. The relics to repose there were those of St. Sebastian and St. Agatha. We proceeded to the church with an immense throng of people, singing songs of praise to almighty God [*laudes canentes*]. On entering the church for the celebration of Mass [*missarum sollempnia celebrarentur*], the people had to crowd close together because of lack of space. Some of those who stood outside the sanctuary were disturbed by a pig running back and forth through the crowd. . . . During the general commotion that followed, the pig found its way out through the church door. In this way God helped us to realize that the unclean spirit had departed from the building. After Mass we went home. That night, a loud noise was heard coming from the top of the church. . . . The second night, the noise became louder. . . . Then peace and quiet returned. . . . A few days later a cloud appeared out of a serene sky and settled over the altar . . . filling the air with a sweet fragrance. . . . The sacristan had put out the lamps after Mass and had left the church. In a little while he reentered, to find them burning. . . . It was now clear to him that this place had passed from darkness to light.<sup>46</sup>

Gregory’s account enumerates the liturgical elements needed to claim and transform the space to make it suitable for Catholic use. The primary ritual act is a solemn liturgy of dedication, presided over by Gregory himself, with the deposition of the relics of two martyrs, Sebastian and Agatha.<sup>47</sup> These practices, usually associated with the consecration and dedication of *new* churches, serve as a ritual conquest, reidentification,

45. *Liber Pontificalis* 66.1 (trans. R. Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs [Liber Pontificalis]: The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to A.D. 715* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989], 63).

46. Gregory *Dial.* 3.30 (SC 260:378–85; trans. O. Zimmerman, *Gregory I: Dialogues*, FC 39 [New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959], 164–65). In *ep.* 4.19 (Norberg and Recchia 5.2.52) Gregory also refers to the rededication of this church to the acolyte Leo: *ecclesia sanctae Agathae sita in Subura, quae spelunca fuit aliquando pravitatis haereticarum, ad catholicae fidei culturam Deo propitiante reducta est*.

47. The soldier-martyr Sebastian had a very strong cult in the city of Rome. The cult of Agatha, on the other hand, was of Sicilian origin. Cartocci, “Alcune precisazioni,” 616–17, suggests that Gregory chose Agatha as copatroness of this church for a miraculous intervention of hers that resulted in the aid of the Byzantines against the Goths in 535.

and renewal of space stamped by the authority of Gregory as orthodox bishop of Rome. As Gregory describes it, the ritual bears some resemblance to another ritual of rebirth and reidentification: baptism. The tainted edifice is exorcized of its “unclean spirit,” that is, its former identity, under the direction of the bishop as ritual expert and authority.<sup>48</sup> Exorcism, familiar of course from the gospel accounts of Jesus’ miracles and from the baptismal practices of late antiquity, was an act of “sanctification, not only of the body, but also of the spirit.”<sup>49</sup> Likened to regeneration and resurrection, Catholic baptism initiated an individual into a new social network, ritually severing former non-Christian associations, and brought that individual under the power of the bishop who baptized him or her.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, this Arian basilica of Rome was ritually purged and reborn for the orthodox community.

The deposition of relics communicates both Gregory’s own control over the martyrs (as custodian and patron of their cults) and the martyrs’ “divine” support of Gregory. In a letter to his sister, Marcellina, Ambrose of Milan had declared that his discovery of the relics of Protasius and Gervasius and their delivery into his protection proved that the martyrs were supporters of orthodoxy against the Arians.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Gregory marched into conquered territory triumphantly accompanied by the martyrs, soldiers of orthodoxy, claiming the space for the Catholic church of Rome and liberating it from subjugation to demonic possession. The presence of the relics throws the basilica into convulsions, causing it to groan louder and louder. The expulsion of the demonic spirit is verified in the sweet fragrance that fills the church and the lamps that refuse to be extinguished. Ambrose had found confirmation of the martyrs’ approval of his power and authority in the phenomenon of demonic expulsion brought about by their relics. For Gregory, the power and efficacy of the liturgy and of the martyrs whose relics were securely in his care were “signs from God clearly manifesting his condemnation of the Arian heresy.”<sup>52</sup>

The final step in this process of ritual reidentification was the imposi-

48. According to Ambrose of Milan, *De sacramentis* 1.18 (SC 25bis:70), it is the bishop who performs the entire ritual of baptism, including the blessing and exorcism of water, exorcism of the individual, and the actual baptism itself.

49. Ambrose, *Explanatio symboli* 1 (SC 25bis:46): *per exorcismum non solum corporis, sed etiam animae quaesita et adhibita est sanctificatio* (my trans.).

50. Ambrose, *Sacr.* 3.1–2 (SC 25bis:90): *itaque secundum interpretationem apostoli sicut illa resurrectio regeneratio fuit, ita et ista resurrectio de fonte regeneratio est.*

51. Ambrose, *ep.* 22.

52. Gregory, *Dial.* 3.30.1–2 (SC 260:378; Zimmerman, FC 39, 164).

tion of a new name on the basilica. Though its former dedication to Christ and the apostles was innocuous enough, Gregory chose to invoke the name, support, and authority of the martyr Agatha, possibly for the saint's intervention in favor of the Byzantines in a battle against the Goths in 535. To this day, the church is still known as Sant'Agata dei Goti.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps not all the vestiges of its previous owners were erased.

Though the evidence in Ravenna is much more vague, there are several indications that Bishop Agnellus of Ravenna effected a reidentification of the space of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in a similar way. As Andrea Agnello describes it (albeit very briefly), it would seem that the bishop of Ravenna formally rededicated the church with a public liturgical consecration that was followed by a celebratory dinner in his episcopal palace. He also renamed the basilica, exchanging Theoderic's original dedication of the basilica to "our Lord Jesus Christ" for a dedication to St. Martin of Tours, the *malleus haereticorum* and legendary champion of orthodoxy (the dedication "Sant'Apollinare Nuovo" would not occur until the ninth century).<sup>54</sup> Thus, we see again how the renaming of reconciled churches in Ravenna and Rome had a political and theological significance that utilized the cult of saints as a defense of orthodoxy.

There is no evidence, literary or otherwise, that Bishop Agnellus transferred the relics of St. Martin into the basilica as part of the Ravennate reconciliation. Nevertheless, on the south wall of the basilica the saint makes an appearance as leader of the procession of mosaic saints, departing from the gates of Ravenna and marching toward the Pantocrator. He is singled out from his companions by the scarlet cloak he wears and by his positioning in the foreground in respect to the others. The other male and female saints in procession are drawn mainly from the catalogues of the saints of Ravenna, Rome, and Milan (with very few eastern saints depicted<sup>55</sup>) and represent a sort of expression of unity, even an alliance, of

53. Zeiller, "Églises ariennes," 20–21; see also Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum*, vol. 1.

54. Throughout his *Liber pontificalis*, Andrea Agnello (writing in the middle of the ninth century) refers to Sant'Apollinare Nuovo as "St. Martin." A cult of St. Martin in Ravenna is known from a sixth-century *Life of St. Martin* written by Venantius Fortunatus, who mentions a holy image of the saint in the basilica of SS. Giovanni e Paolo. See Pierpaoli, *Storia di Ravenna*, 162. A crypt below Sant'Apollinare Nuovo has been dated to the ninth century when the relics of Sant'Apollinare were translated from the basilica in Classe to this church. It was at this time that the name of the basilica was changed once again, from S. Martino to Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, to distinguish it from Sant'Apollinare in Classe. See Bovini, *Edifici di culto*, 64–67.

55. It is noteworthy that an eastern saint, St. Euphemia, patroness of Chalcedon, leads the procession of virgins. This choice may have been a further visual expression

the Catholic churches of Italy against Gothic hegemony—an alliance under the patronage, protection, and approbation of saints who are claimed as ancestors and forerunners in orthodoxy, who march as triumphant defenders of orthodoxy from the gates of Ravenna and Classis into the presence of Christ and the Mother of God.<sup>56</sup>

#### CHANGE, “NONCHANGE,” AND THE CONTROL OF MEMORY

Thus far, we have seen that the transfer of church buildings from Arian Goths to Catholic Romans necessitated a number of changes that rendered the transfer effective and final. Through the confiscation, liquidation, and buying of property once held by Goths, the new leaders of Ravenna defined the ownership of property for economic and legal purposes. Liturgical consecration and rededication of churches expressed this transfer of property ritually by expelling the demons of the former possessors and affirming a new holy and orthodox possession under the auspices of the emperor and his bishops. Name changes evoked the authority of these powers to define the new identity of the space and invoked the legions of heaven as support. The final element of change in the case of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo was the modification and purgation of images.

It seems to be a task required of anyone who conducts a study of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo to speculate about the identity of the figures that were purged under the order of Bishop Agnellus. My own contribution to this unsolvable mystery will not offer any novel identifications of the figures who once stood amid the columns of the Palatium or before the walls of Classis; but building upon previous suggestions, I will attempt to approach the question within the context of the full process of reconciliation.

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of anti-Arianism. But on the problem of Gothic “Arianism,” especially as it has been used by modern scholars to interpret the christological images of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, see below.

56. The saints depicted in the mosaics are perhaps illustrations of diptychs and litanies used in the liturgies of sixth-century Ravenna. See von Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 84. They include saints venerated in the churches of Rome and Milan. Starting from the image of the Pantocrator, the male saints are labeled in the following order: Martinus, Clemens, Systus, Laurentius, Hypolitus, Cornelius, Cassianus, Iohannes, Paulus, Vitalis, Gervasius, Protasius, Ursicinus, Nabor, Felix, Apollinaris, Sebastianus, Demiter, Policarpus, Vicentius, Pancratius, Crisogonus, Protus, Iacinctus, Sabinus. The female saints follow the magi in the following order: Eufimia, Pelagia, Agatha, Agnes, Eulalia, Cecilia, Lucia, Crispina, Valeria, Vicentia, Perpetua, Felicitas, Justina, Anastasia, Daria, Emerentiana, Paulina, Victoria, Anatolia, Cristina, Sabina, Eugenia.

I agree with those scholars who conjecture that representations of Theoderic himself, of members of his court and possibly his family, and perhaps of ecclesiastical leaders of the Goths once adorned the walls of the king's palace chapel.<sup>57</sup> Some have suggested that the purged section of the palatial pediment once enshrined an image of the Ostrogoth king.<sup>58</sup> Though highly speculative, the claim is not made without basis. In his *Liber Pontificalis* Andrea Agnello describes an image of Theoderic that he saw in the king's palace complex at Pavia:

I saw [Theoderic's] image on horseback in the beautiful mosaic in the vault. A similar image was here, in this palace [in Ravenna], which he built, in the tribunal of the *triclinium* called "Ad Mare," above the gate, and also on the facade of the royal palace of this city called "Ad Calchis," where the main entrance of the palace was. . . . At the top of this place there was the image of Theoderic, splendidly decorated in mosaic. Dressed in war gear, he held a lance in his right hand and a shield in his left. On the side of the shield stood Rome represented in mosaic, with a spear and helmet; on the side of the lance was a mosaic representation of Ravenna, that had the right foot on the sea and the left on the land, approaching the king.<sup>59</sup>

While the precise interpretation of the Palatium mosaic is still disputed among art historians,<sup>60</sup> it would seem from Agnello's testimony that Theoderic was wont to display mosaic images of himself in imperial style. In fact, in a church in Ravenna portraits of the royal family and court would not have been unusual at all. The original mosaic decoration (now lost) of the apsidal arch in San Giovanni Evangelista, commissioned by Galla Placidia in the first third of the fifth century, depicted the episode of the empress's ship being saved from tempestuous seas by the intervention of St. John, the event which according to the dedicatory inscription warranted the construction of the basilica. Decorating the arch itself were portrait medallions of ten Christian emperors, including Constantine and Theodosius—a sort of imperial dynasty of orthodoxy that Galla claimed to perpetuate.<sup>61</sup> On the lower wall of the tribunal itself the imperial portraits of Eudoxia and Arcadius (on the left) and Theodosius II and Eudocia (on the right), each bearing offerings, flanked a central image of

57. Von Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 81; Bovini, *Edifici di culto*, 121; and Johnson, "Theoderic's Building Program," 91, and n. 172.

58. Bovini, "Antichi rifacimenti," 74; and Johnson, "Theoderic's Building Program," 92.

59. Agnello *LP* 94 (Nauerth 2:356).

60. Johnson, "Theoderic's Building Program," 88–90.

61. Piero Piccinini, *La regalità sacra da Bisanzio all'Occidente ostrogoto* (Bologna: Lo Scarabeo 1991), 64.

Bishop Peter Chrysologus in the midst of a liturgical celebration.<sup>62</sup> Later examples include the famous portraits of Justinian and Theodora, accompanied by their retinues and ecclesiastical leaders, on the apsidal walls of San Vitale, and a similar portrait in the apse of Sant'Apollinare in Classe of the court of Constantine IV (668–685) handing over the decree of imperial *privilegia*. This abundance of imperial portraiture in the churches of Ravenna seems appropriate for a city that sat on the threshold between East and West, sporadically served as the seat of Italian rulers, and was so often caught in a tug-of-war between Rome and Constantinople. Such images served as effective means for communicating both patronage and power. Von Simson has suggested that images of Theoderic and his court in procession toward Christ once adorned the walls of the nave of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo where we now see the processions of saints. He further suggests that these images may have served as model and counterpoint for the San Vitale portraits.<sup>63</sup> Hypothetical, but thought provoking nonetheless.

Elsewhere in this period, in Rome for example, one is hard pressed to find examples of imperial or royal portraiture in churches. Much more common are the representations of episcopal patrons, whether in image (e.g., Felix IV depicted with Christ and saints in the apse of Sts. Cosmas and Damian from the sixth century) or in name (e.g., the name of Xystus III displayed prominently in Santa Maria Maggiore from the fifth century). Episcopal portraits were also common in Ravenna, both before and after the reign of Theoderic—for example, S. Giovanni Evangelista, S. Vitale, S. Apollinare in Classe; and so it would not be surprising if representations of bishops of the Goths had also appeared in the Palatium or in the original nave or apse decoration of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo.

While it is clear that images of human figures were purged from the original decoration of Theoderic's palace chapel, any precise identifica-

62. The apsidal arch depicted an image of Christ enthroned in the center handing a scroll or book to John the Evangelist, with seven candelabra and "other apocalyptic images." This would have been flanked by two marine scenes of the rescue of the royal family by St. John. In the apse itself was another Christ enthroned, holding a book in his hand and flanked by books that represented the evangelists. The dedicatory inscription ran below. Though destroyed in 1568, the images can be reconstructed based on descriptions given by Agnello *LP* 42 (Nauerth 1:212–17); a thirteenth-century sermon (found in *Rerum italicarum scriptores* 1.2 [Florentia: ex typographia Petri Cajetani, 1748–1770], 1-B); and Gerolamo Rossi (*Historiarum Ravennatum* [1572]). See also, Ricci, *Tavole storiche*, vol. 8, plate 1; Scevola, "La basilica di S. Giovanni Evangelista," *Felix Ravenna*, 3rd ser., 36 (1963); Deichmann, *Kommentar*, 1:94–124; and Piccinini, *Regalità sacra*, 60–64.

63. Von Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 81.



tion can only be left to informed speculation. We can move away from the question of *who* was purged to the question of *why*, as part of the larger context of the transformation of spatial identity. In this regard, the destruction of images acted as a sort of purge of memory, a *damnatio memoriae* as it were, that reflected the political and religious upheavals in Ravenna.<sup>64</sup>

A recent book by Charles W. Hedrick, Jr., considers the practice of *damnatio memoriae* in the late Roman world not as an annihilation of memory but as a dishonoring and paradoxical confirmation of memory and dictation and pronouncement of history.<sup>65</sup> Not a clearly defined nor technical juridical concept in antiquity, *damnatio memoriae* is instead a modern term used to refer to a set of penalizing practices—such as the destruction of visual images, the erasure of names, and a ban on funeral and mourning rites—that were intended to condemn and abolish the memory of persons deemed unworthy to be remembered by the ruling powers.<sup>66</sup> More often than not, the property of one condemned to *damnatio memoriae* was confiscated.<sup>67</sup> The traces of this practice can still be seen today among the monuments of ancient Rome.<sup>68</sup>

Condemnation of memory itself does not necessarily mean “destruction” of memory, since this is not what generally happens. A name excised from an inscription, or an image scratched out from a stone relief, may be physically destroyed; but as long as the inscription or relief is allowed to remain standing in public, the memory of the name or image persists. *Damnatio memoriae*, therefore, is dissimulatory. On the surface, the practice purports to destroy, eradicate, and forget; but in fact it represses rather than destroys, erases rather than eradicates, and silences

64. Deichmann, *Kommentar*, 1:127, also 3:75.

65. Charles Hedrick, *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), xii.

66. *Ibid.*, 93.

67. *Ibid.*, 110.

68. Perhaps the most notable examples are those related to the *damnatio memoriae* of Geta, son of Septimius Severus and brother of Caracalla. In the city of Rome, Geta's name was removed from the inscription on the Arch of Septimius Severus and replaced by a praise of Caracalla (*CIL* 6:1033). Meanwhile, on the Arch of the Silversmiths, also in Rome, in addition to the removal of his name from the inscription (*CIL* 6:1035), a relief image of Geta was “scratched out” from a scene showing Septimius Severus and Julia Domna sacrificing. Also, in a family portrait kept in the Berlin Antikenmuseum, the face of Geta has been violently obliterated, but not in a way that completely erases traces of his portrait. Particularly in the latter two examples, the erasure is not so much an annihilation as it is a maiming, as the “absence” of the image calls attention to its former presence.

rather than forgets.<sup>69</sup> In short, the practices associated with the *damnatio memoriae* encouraged the audience to “remember to forget,” as Hedrick puts it.

Seen in this light, the modifications made to the space of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo can be considered an act of *damnatio memoriae* executed by a Byzantine administration that was eager to plant its hold in the West. Property was confiscated, images were destroyed, and the memory of Theoderic and his associates and successors was condemned. As such, the multifaceted reconciliation of Theoderic’s palace chapel was a microcosm of the general political, religious, and cultural changes affecting this region of the western empire and part of a larger process in which the new political order of the Byzantines assumed the authority to write history and shape memory.<sup>70</sup> Let us not forget the *Excerpta Valesiana*, written before the Byzantine conquest but already after the political relationship between Ravenna and Constantinople had begun to sour. Its aim is not to eradicate the memory of Theoderic but to allow it to linger in disgrace.

While a concerted effort was made to erase and transform aspects of the memory associated with Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, it is equally important to take note of what remained unchanged, as positive changes are merely one part of the process. In order to confront more fully the question of spatial identity in relation to the politics of memory waged against the Goths, it is also necessary to examine the element of “non-change,” or those aspects of the original character of the space that were either intentionally or unconsciously left unchanged. Given the limitation of space in this article, I wish to consider just two examples, giving more attention to the second, since it is an issue taken on by a long line of scholars: (1) the interior liturgical space; and (2) the mosaic images that went untouched, particularly the christological scenes in the upper registers.

After its confiscation, Sant’Apollinare Nuovo was not destroyed but allowed to stand. Though “inimical space,” it was deemed functional. As a three-aisled basilica, it conformed to the architectural trends of the fourth and fifth centuries and resembled other orthodox basilicas of Ravenna and Rome. There was nothing typically heretical or Arian about its construction or layout. That there is no evidence that the structure of the church was modified in any way after its confiscation and reconciliation in the sixth century indicates that, as it stood, the Catholics considered the space reusable for their own liturgical use. In fact, there is no reason to think that the Gothic and Catholic liturgies diverged fundamen-

69. Hedrick, *History and Silence*, 120.

70. *Ibid.*, 218.

tally in their use of space or types of rituals used. While we cannot speak of a “standard” liturgy at this early stage, even among Catholic/orthodox communities, it is quite unlikely that the Gothic liturgy developed in significantly different ways than the types of liturgies characteristic of the West. Meslin has pointed out a number of parallels between the liturgical theology and practices of Ambrose and the Arian Maximinus, both of whom drew heavily on eastern practice.<sup>71</sup> In terms of ritual space, then, the church of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo was suited for both communities, and thus required no alterations when it was seized and reconciled. Thus, the lack of modification to the arrangement of the space speaks to both the utility of the space for the new owners and their physical occupation of it as a demonstration of power and authority.

Curiously, in both Rome and Ravenna the dedicatory inscriptions crediting construction or renovations to Gothic leaders remained in place. Andrea Agnello testifies to the presence of Theoderic’s dedication in Sant’Apollinare Nuovo in the ninth century. The description of the apse decoration of Sant’Agata dei Goti in Codex Vaticanus Latinus 5407 includes the inscription that credits the decoration to Ricimer.<sup>72</sup> Because these inscriptions are no longer in situ, we have to rely on (sometimes conflicting) descriptions that transcribe their content but are not precise about their positioning and visibility. For example, Andrea Agnello’s description implies that the inscription was difficult to read. “If you search carefully,” he writes, “you will find [it] written over the windows.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, the significance of this “nonchange” depends on the visibility.

Finally, we should consider the images that remained untouched, those that were spared the reconciliation purge. Indeed, this can add to our

71. Michel Meslin, *Les Ariens d’occident, 335–430* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 407. In the *Opus imperfectum*, Maximinus (an Arian) complains that the sacramental practices of the Milanese Catholics were invalid imitations of the true liturgy: “They are deceivers, these false prophets, because in their churches, their clerics appear to give the same baptism, the same sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, and because they likewise honor the Apostles and Martyrs” (*Opus imperfectum* 905, cited in Meslin, *Ariens d’occident*, 381). Even Maximinus’ festal calendar, which itself ranks as one of the oldest Christian calendars, shares feasts and saints’ days with contemporary and later “orthodox” calendars of eastern and western churches. See Meslin, “Rites et Cultes,” ch. 5 in *Ariens d’occident*.

72. This mosaic inscription was visible until 1589 when the vaulting of the apse collapsed. Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum*, 1:3.

73. Agnello LP 86 (Nauerth 1:344): *In tribunali vero, si diligentier inquisieritis, super fenestras inveniatis ex lapideis litteritis exaratum*. There has been discussion about whether Agnello’s phrase *lapideis litteritis* refers to a marble or mosaic inscription. See Deichmann, *Kommentar*, 1:127.

understanding of the entire process of spatial transformation, as well as force us to rethink some previous theories concerning the decorative program commissioned during the reign of Theoderic, when the church was still in the hands of the Goths. It is important to ask why particular images were purged as part of a process of *damnatio memoriae* and spatial transformation, while others were deemed acceptable and allowed to remain.

In the lower register the representations of Ravenna and Classis dominate the portion of the nave closest to the entrance, while the figures of Christ and the Virgin command the area before the sanctuary. All can be dated to the reign of Theoderic and were not modified by Bishop Agnellus. This is completely comprehensible. The two cities do not have any particular associations with a specific party or leader but represent the territory under dispute, the prize of the battle. The images of the Virgin and the Pantocrator are not unique to this basilica, nor do they represent characteristically Gothic or Arian conceptions, but instead reflect the iconographic trends developing in both East and West. The unidentified male figures dressed in tunic and pallium in the central cycle, innocuous enough by virtue of their anonymity, are also malleable in their identity: they can be any wise man of the Christian tradition—a prophet, evangelist, or any great teacher of the early church. Given that these images did not conjure any specific association with the Goths or Theoderic, the Catholic owners judged them to be iconographically sound.

In the context of the practices associated with *damnatio memoriae*, the erasure and banishment of images of a conquered and condemned people are comprehensible, while images with less specific association would not have presented a problem. We speculated above that images of Theoderic, his court, his family, and/or other figures tied to his administration may have appeared at one time in the lower cycle and were subsequently erased. Interestingly enough, this can be deduced not only by an elaborate analysis of the arrangement of the mosaic tiles or the chemical composition of the mortar (studies that confirm the hypothesis), but from simple observation. Anyone standing in the nave of the basilica can see the hands “cut off” from their bodies on the columns of the Palatium. Given the extent of the modifications executed under Bishop Agnellus, it would appear that these hands, which could have easily been replaced with white tiles, were left *intentionally*, a subtle reminder of the purgation and charge to “remember to forget.”

## THE ARIAN FACES OF CHRIST?

What has been most puzzling for scholars, however, is that the upper christological cycles remained intact, untouched by the Catholics. In order to assess this aspect of “nonchange” within the context of the current discussion, it will be useful to reflect on the roots of this scholarly puzzlement and the assumptions feeding it, while contextualizing the cycles within the political, theological, and art historical contexts that spanned the period from their original commission under Theoderic to the purgations ordered by Agnellus.

The portraiture of Christ in the narrative cycles of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo has generated a considerable amount of discussion. Two types are evident: in the scenes of Christ's ministry on the north wall a youthful, beardless Christ, somewhat distant and expressionless; and in the passion and resurrection cycle on the south wall an older, bearded Christ (figures 5 & 6).<sup>74</sup> Two modes of analysis have driven scholarly discussion of these images: an art historical analysis that seeks to place the images within the context of Christian and non-Christian artistic conventions of the period, and a theological analysis that attempts to locate the images within the theological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries. It is often argued that the primary function of the christological scenes was to express a particular theological agenda promoted by Theoderic and the church of the Goths in Ravenna. More often than not, this theology is a sloppily construed scholarly construction of a quasi Arian-Nestorian christology that, I would argue (as others have argued<sup>75</sup>), is appropriate neither to the climate of fifth- and sixth-century Ravenna nor to Germanic Christianity. I believe this confusion derives from faulty assumptions about the nature of Gothic Arianism, which, to be fair, have been informed by ancient orthodox polemic and heresiology.

The general argument runs as follows: the iconographic representation of two Christ types (one bearded, the other unbearded) expresses a sharp theological separation between the two natures of Christ (the human and

74. See in particular the classic study by von Simson in *Sacred Fortress*, 73–75; and most recently Robin Jensen, “The Two Faces of Jesus: How the Early Church Pictured the Divine,” *Bible Review* 18.5 (Oct 2002): 42–50, for discussion of the portraiture of Jesus in the art of Ravenna. Regrettably, I was unable to include in this study Jensen's recently published book *Face to Face: The Portrait of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004) on the portraiture of Jesus and the question of the visual image of God.

75. See, for example, Jensen, “Two Faces,” 47: “[W]e cannot define the two portrait styles in terms of Arian theology.”

Figure 5. A  
beardless Christ  
calls Peter and  
Andrew,  
Sant' Apollinare  
Nuovo,  
Ravenna. Photo:  
Scala/Art  
Resource, NY.



Figure 6. A  
bearded Christ  
takes up  
the cross,  
Sant'Apollinare  
Nuovo,  
Ravenna. Photo:  
Scala/Art  
Resource, NY.



the divine) that would have been typical of Arian theology. In an 1879 study of the sarcophagi of Arles, Le Blant noted that the beardless Christ was used in scenes depicting the human life of Jesus Christ (performing miracles, washing the feet of Peter, on trial before Pilate), while the bearded Christ was used to express his divinity (*traditio legis*).<sup>76</sup> Barbier de Montault agreed and applied Le Blant's hypothesis to Sant'Apollinare Nuovo.<sup>77</sup> Three decades later, in a review of a study on the church of Sant'Agata dei Goti, Messini argued that no distinctive characteristics of "Arian art" could be found in the decoration of this Roman church, "come nei quadretti di S. Apollinare Nuovo." Reversing the conclusion of Montault, he states that in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo the "ideal type" of Christ (that is, the beardless Christ) expresses divinity in miracles and preaching and the "real human type" (the bearded Christ) better represents his human nature, the subject that suffers.<sup>78</sup> Cecchelli agreed, calling Messini's the "best" explanation of the two types as they appear in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo.<sup>79</sup>

The bearded/beardless typology was more fully developed by Otto von Simson. In his very influential work on the art and architecture of ancient Ravenna, von Simson saw a very clear theological agenda operating behind the christological scenes of Theoderic's palace chapel. He argued that the beardless and bearded Christs represented a sort of theology in image, an artistic expression of the dual natures of Christ. In sum, in von Simson's estimation the images express the idea that each of Christ's natures acted according to what was proper to it. The youthful, beardless Christ that is depicted performing miracles and teaching represents the divine nature of Christ, while the bearded Christ who suffers and dies represents the human nature of the Son of God.<sup>80</sup> Such a use and display of the two types, he argues, would have been "indistinguishable from Nestorianism" to "Byzantine eyes."<sup>81</sup>

76. E. F. Le Blant, *Étude sur les sarcophages d'Arles* (Paris: Imprimerie Natioanle, 1878), 19: "Dans les actes de sa vie humaine, le Seigneur est imberbe; il est barbu lorsqu'il revêt son caractère divin." Cf. *Ibid.*, 29.

77. Barbier de Montault, *Les mosaïques des églises de Ravenne* (Desclée, de Brouwen, 1897), 70.

78. Messini, "Rassegna Bibliografica," *Felix Ravenna* 32 (1927): 70–73.

79. Cecchelli, "Mostra dei mosaici cristologici di S. Apollinare Nuovo," *Felix Ravenna*, 3rd ser., 23 (1957): 74.

80. Von Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 73. Von Simson also suggests a geographical typology: the beardless Christ deriving from the West, and the bearded Christ being a Syrian type (*Ibid.*, 74).

81. *Ibid.*, 74.



Thus, while labeling Theoderic and the Goths “Arians,” von Simson attributes a Nestorian/Diophysite theology to them. But one wonders if this is appropriate, especially in light of the fact that “Gothic theological writings of that epoch point to a spirit of rapprochement between the Arian and the Catholic doctrines.”<sup>82</sup> Von Simson seems to begin from the assumption that the two types represent two natures, then attributes this to Theoderic’s heretical “Arian” beliefs, and finally interprets the theological significance in light of the Council of Chalcedon. He can assign the views of Nestorius to Theoderic by appealing to “the strength of Syrian influence in Ravenna” in art, liturgy, and theology.<sup>83</sup> I am not convinced. One wants to ask why only the *Goths* in Ravenna were influenced by a Syrian christology.

Von Simson’s interpretation has persisted. Most recently, MacGregor and Langmuir amplify it with the observation that “of the many heresies . . . the most widely disseminated, the longest lived, and the one that most affected visual art was Arianism.”<sup>84</sup> Like von Simson, these scholars hold the view that the christological cycles of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo were vehicles for expressing an Arian theology that distinguished “the two (for the Arians) separable natures of Jesus Christ, human and divine,” a sort of visual Arian christology that depicted each nature performing actions appropriate to it.<sup>85</sup> But if as von Simson argued the christological scenes “must have made the most profound impression upon the Christian of the sixth century”<sup>86</sup> and “reflect a theology conflicting with that of Byzantium”<sup>87</sup> in terms of its Arian and Nestorian inspired images, then why would the Byzantine purgers of the basilica have left them untouched? In their fight against the Gothic religion, how could they fail to remove such a blatant visual expression of heresy?

I believe this Arian-Nestorian interpretation of the images is faulty on several accounts, and unnecessarily causes confusion. Once this particular theological interpretation is put aside, the decision of the Catholic leadership of Ravenna to preserve them becomes clearer. First, the neat

82. *Ibid.*, 72.

83. *Ibid.*, 75.

84. Neil MacGregor and Erika Langmuir, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 80.

85. *Ibid.*, 80. The authors seem to follow von Simson’s argument that the beardless Christ is a representation of his divine nature in its performing miracles and teaching, while the bearded Christ represents the human nature that suffers and dies on the cross.

86. Von Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 73.

87. *Ibid.*, 82.

categorization of beardless/divine and bearded/human does not hold up. We have already seen how the reverse was suggested for the sarcophagi at Arles. Moreover, in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo the panels representing the resurrection appearances in the "passion" cycle do not depict a suffering Christ but rather a (bearded) glorified Christ appearing to his followers. Why is the beardless Christ who calls Peter and Andrew to come follow him necessarily an expression of his divine nature? Also, the Christ figure in the scene of Peter's denial strangely does not seem to have a beard. Moving the dichotomy to another representation of Christ from the time of Theoderic, we must ask why the Pantocrator of the lowest cycle displays a bearded Christ. This is certainly not an image of a human, suffering Christ, but quite the opposite.

Second, the argument that a beard serves as an iconographical indication of humanity as *opposed* to divinity is itself problematic and unconvincing. As both Thomas Mathews and Robin Jensen have pointed out, both types are used in Greco-Roman art to depict divinities.<sup>88</sup> "Senior" gods such as Zeus and Serapis most often have beards, while "junior" gods such as Apollo and Dionysus usually go beardless.

Third, and perhaps most telling, it appears that this interpretation is applied to these images not simply on the basis of iconography but on the assumption that art produced by and for Arians must express an Arian theology, that is, that "heretical art" must explicitly exhibit their theological differences from orthodoxy.<sup>89</sup> Notice that the question does not arise in orthodox contexts. For example, the artistic program of the church of San Vitale (also in Ravenna), completed shortly after Justinian's conquest, also contains the two Christ types: in the apse a beardless, youthful Christ sits enthroned upon the globe of the earth and a medallion of a bearded Christ looks down from the top of the arch leading into the sanctuary. Indeed, no one has argued that this is a visual expression of Nestorian theology on the part of Maximian or Justinian! Similarly, if we

88. Jensen, "Two Faces," 45–46; and Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

89. In his chapter on the apse mosaic of Sant'Agata dei Goti (in Huelsen, Cecchelli, et al., *S. Agata dei Goti*, 13–94), Cecchelli notes that the depiction of Christ had "no Arian characteristics." On the other hand, he notes that Sant'Apollinare Nuovo is the only example of an Arian "special use" of the two types, adopted from Catholic art and suited to an Arian theology. The lack of parallels and the "uniqueness" attributed to Sant'Apollinare Nuovo make the Arian theological interpretation even more suspect.

are to see a particular theology behind the image of the beardless Christ in the Arian Baptistery,<sup>90</sup> simply because he is beardless and because the building has been labeled “Arian,” then why do we not apply the same interpretation to beardless images of Christ in the *Catholic* archepiscopal chapel?<sup>91</sup>

Other explanations for the presence of the two types in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo have been put forth and (some) are worth revisiting. There is the theory of “two masters” or two workshops, each responsible for one cycle. Another hypothesis to which von Simson alluded was regional derivation: the short-haired, beardless Christ is a Roman type and the bearded Christ is a Syrian (Strzygowski) or Palestinian (Grabar) type. Still another suggests that the long-haired youth is a type of the “wonder-worker” (Kollwitz).<sup>92</sup> All of these start from stylistic and art historical observations, rather than theological assumptions; and I think this is the road to follow.

Stylistically, the christological scenes draw on the conventions of Greco-Roman art; and as von Simson rightly points out, much of the iconography mirrors motifs found in early Christian art, especially in the funerary art of the Roman catacombs and Christian sarcophagi.<sup>93</sup> If we consider

90. There is speculation that the image of Christ in the dome of the Orthodox Baptistery may have originally been beardless and was altered during nineteenth-century restorations. This can be supported by the fact that the Arian Baptistery seems to be an imitation of the Orthodox Baptistery in form and decoration, and there Christ is beardless.

91. G. Galassi, *Roma o Bisanzio*, vol. 1, *I mosaici di Ravenna e le origini dell'arte italiana* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1953), 79–81, proposed that the same workshop both produced the christological cycles in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo and executed the decoration in the archepiscopal chapel. He calls attention to the similarity in types, faces, style, and execution of the portraits. L. Ottolenghi, “La cappella arcivescovile in Ravenna,” *Felix Ravenna*, 3rd ser., 22 (1957): 28–29, notes that the type of construction used for the chapel is identical to that of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo and that it was probably built in the same period (ca. 494–520). He also remarks on the similarities between the portraiture of St. Felicitas in the chapel and that of the Virgin in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo. Also, in my opinion the beardless Christ in the clipeus of the chapel bears a striking resemblance to the beardless Christ in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo. Certainly, one or more workshops of mosaicists were employed to decorate both Gothic and Catholic churches.

92. For a summary of the different views, see Deichmann, *Kommentar*, 1:160–61, and 1:188–89.

93. Von Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 71. For example, the panel depicting the raising of Lazarus is almost iconographically identical to early Christian frescoes and sarcophagi that depict the same scene. Christ stands before the tomb, depicted as a temple *in antis* with four steps leading to a two-columned facade, with his hand

Theoderic's admiration for the classical Roman heritage, the cordial relationship he maintained with the church of Rome, and the self-image he presented as protector and preserver of the classical Roman and ancient Christian traditions, it should not come as a surprise that Theoderic looked also to the art and architecture of Rome as the model for his capital city.<sup>94</sup> In fact, he even brought artisans, marble workers, and mosaicists from Rome to work on his building projects in Ravenna.<sup>95</sup> His palace complex, his mausoleum, the restoration of imperial monuments all attest to his desire to imitate the productions of the great imperial patrons of the past and to present his own patronage as a reflection and continuation of theirs and a rivalry toward others. Why should we not look at his ecclesiastical monuments in the same way—not simply as expressions of Arian theology but as imitations and reproductions of the classical Roman artistic tradition commissioned by a ruler who saw himself not as an Arian theologian but as the protector and transmitter of the Roman political, cultural, and religious traditions?

To be clear, I am not arguing that the christological cycles of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo do not convey any theological significance nor am I denying that artwork is a vehicle for visualizing certain theological ideas; rather, I am challenging the *specific* interpretation that ascribes to these images a clear *Arian* theology. In addition to the methodological, historical, and art historical reasons just given, I would add that in the context of a process whose purpose was to transform the identity of a particular space and which involved the modification of images, it seems extremely odd that the Catholics would have *intentionally overlooked* images that evoked the very heretical beliefs that had tainted the edifice in the first place. If we put aside the Arian interpretation, the situation becomes clearer: the christological images were spared because the eyes of the Catholic leader-

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outstretched beckoning Lazarus to come forward. Lazarus emerges at the entrance of the tomb, still bound except for his face, standing upright in his coffin, and eager to come out from the tomb. Similarly, the scene of the Last Supper contains elements that are very similar to the frescoes of meals of the dead found in both the Christian and non-Christian catacombs of Rome—participants reclining at a semi-circular table, the loaves and fish on the table, even the striped cushions. One can also see the similarities with the Last Supper of the Rossano Gospels. M. Mesnard, "L'influence de l'iconographie romaine sur les mosaïques de Ravenne," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 5 (1928): 316–18, pointed out the similarities in execution of biblical scenes produced in Rome and Ravenna, particularly in sarcophagi, and argued for a strong connection between Roman and Ravennate iconography.

94. *DACL* 1.2:2830–32; and Johnson, "Theoderic's Building Program," 74–78.

95. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.6 (CCL 96:17).

ship of Ravenna did not perceive them to be problematic, that is, they were not the blatant expressions of heresy that modern historians have made them out to be. Instead, the artwork commissioned by Theoderic reflected the styles and types of western Christian art that could also be found in the orthodox churches of Ravenna and Rome. Whatever the theological agenda that motivated Theoderic's artistic program, it probably had more in common with sixth-century Roman Christianity than it did with fourth-century eastern Arianism or fifth-century Nestorianism.

Strangely enough, the attempts of ancient and modern writers to interpret the reconciliation of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo primarily in terms of a conflict between Arianism and orthodoxy are thrown into question both by the character of the changes and the nonchanges of the space and also by the notion of Gothic "Arianism" as a whole. The Goths of Italy were not the Arians of the fourth-century Greek world, and Gothic Christianity did not have its birth directly within the context of the fierce theological debates and political struggles of the fourth century. Rather, the concept of Gothic "Arianism" seems to have been born out of the polemics and politics of the sixth century, and its connection to fourth-century Arianism has been questioned.<sup>96</sup> That is to say, it seems that the political and military defeat of the Goths was translated into a religious one as well, as the story of Gothic religiosity (*as told by their opponents*) emphasized the

96. See Patrick Geary, "Barbarians and Ethnicity," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown, and O. Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 116; and Maurice Wiles, "Attitudes to Arius in the Arian Controversy," in *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, ed. M. Barnes and D. Williams (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 40–41. Catholic writers after the defeat of the Goths root the origins of Gothic Christianity in fourth-century Arianism. For example, Jordanes, *De origine actibusque getarum* 25.132 (ed. F. Giunta and A. Grillone [Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medico Evo, 1991], 58), blamed the emperor Valens for making the Visigoths "Arians rather than Christians" (*Ariani potius quam Christiani*) by sending Arian missionaries among them to infect them with falsehood. The story of Ulphilas' mission to the Goths, after his ordination by Eusebius of Nicomedia, is recounted in Photius' ninth-century epitome of Philostorgius' *Ecclesiastical History* 2.5 (*Kirchengeschichte*, ed. J. Bidez [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913], 17–18). Photius is loud in his condemnation of Ulphilas, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and the Goths for their "heretical opinions" (i.e., "Arianism"); Philostorgius, on the other hand, writing *before* Justinian's conquest, is loud in his "praises" of Ulphilas and his work among the Goths and does not label them as "Arians." The *Excerpta Valesiana*, also accusatory against Theoderic and the Goths, characterizes them as "Arians," derived from Arius himself (*Excerpta Valesiana* 95 [Moreau 27]).

arch-heretics of their own story. The Goths, then, were Christians on whom the name “Arian” had been wrongly imposed.

Gothic religiosity was founded in national identity rather than in theological ideology.<sup>97</sup> It was “neither a proselytizing faith nor a persecuting one,” but rather functioned to “found a common identity.” Being a Christian Goth demanded loyalty to the king, his family, and their political allies.<sup>98</sup> Ethnicity and allegiance, rather than theology, seem to have been the defining elements of Gothic religious identity. Thus, it appears that the use of the label “Arian” to describe the Gothic rulers of Italy was more an attempt to discredit them on theological grounds in order to foster relations between the orthodox communities of Constantinople and the West than it was a description of Gothic theology. This all came to pass as the Goths’ political power and influence over Italy was severely weakened. It is in this period that the dishonoring, disparaging, and damning of the memory of the Goths in Italy, in particular Theoderic, was being developed and mythologized. This is the context, I believe, in which the transformation of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo ought to be read.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps we will never know whose portraits decorated the walls of Theoderic’s palace chapel, but it is clear that purging of images and the redefinition of space reflected the larger political, religious, and cultural transformations affecting Ravenna in the sixth century. The entire fourfold process by which Sant’Apollinare Nuovo was transformed into Catholic space was a form of *damnatio memoriae*, which the Byzantines used to disparage and marginalize (but not completely erase) the memory of their Ostrogoth rivals. Just as an inscription whose name has been expunged in *damnatio memoriae* cannot be fully understood apart from its larger political and social context, so, I would argue, the refashioning of the mosaics of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo was one part of a larger fourfold process that also included the legal transfer of ownership, a liturgy of reconsecration, and rededication of the basilica under a new name. Perhaps the ultimate example of this process may be found in a mosaic portrait of Justinian (figure 7) located at the entrance of Sant’Apollinare

97. See Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*, 94, who also writes, “It is very difficult to see any trace of religious controversy in the mosaics produced during Theoderic’s life at Ravenna.”

98. Geary, “Barbarians and Ethnicity,” 121.



Figure 7. Portrait of Justinian located at the entrance of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna. Preiss, von Lorentz, and Fuchs believed this was originally a portrait of Theoderic. The lettering identifying it as Justinian is from a later restoration. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Nuovo. Some have suggested that the portrait resembles the facial features of Theoderic rather than Justinian and that perhaps it was manipulated after Justinian's conquest to resemble the portrait of the Byzantine emperor.<sup>99</sup> If this is the case, it is a true mosaic of the political and religious transformation of Ravenna.

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99. I. Preiss, *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 77 (1927): 91–93, was the first scholar to suggest that a portrait of Theoderic hung by the entrance of the basilica was changed into a portrait of Justinian. F. von Lorentz (“Theoderich—nicht Justinian,” *Römische Mitteilungen* 50 [1935]) and S. Fuchs (“Bildnisse und Denkmaler aus dem Ostgotenzeit,” *Die Antike* 19 [1943]: 109–53) have since agreed. The problems are many, especially given the number of modern restorations to the portrait. For recent discussion, see Johnson, “Theoderic’s Building Program,” 86; and, especially, Baldini Lippolis, “Il ritratto musivo nella facciata interna di S. Apollinare Nuovo a Ravenna,” *Atti del VI colloquio dell’Associazione italiana per lo studio e la conservazione del mosaico*, ed. Guidobaldi and Paribeni (Ravenna: Girasole, 2000), 647–58.