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Piety, Power, or Presence? Strategies of Monumental Visualization of Patronage in Late Antique Ravenna †

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Abstract: Between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, lay and cleric alike felt the need to be remembered in the monuments they sponsored. Accordingly, specific elements of the décor were designed as means capable of bearing the patron's memory. The late antique churches of Ravenna offer an extraordinary field to understand how patrons left their mark on decorative programs of ancient buildings. There, portraits, inscriptions, and monograms emerge as the primary instruments used in a complex strategy of visual communication. However, each had its own communicative power and peculiar use. Either separately or in connection, they were able to convey strong messages of patronship to the viewer. By focusing on each of these elements in its context and on the ways they all interacted with the surrounding architecture and church decoration, this paper will highlight their value as visual objects capable to immortalize the piety, power, or presence of the patron. Indeed, the silent dialogue enacted into the architectural space with the beholder will allow us to reconstruct the hidden messages that individuals or groups meant to communicate to posterity.

Keywords: portraits; inscriptions; monograms; patrons; Ravenna

Though many of the communication codes of late antique art and architecture are difficult to discern with modern eyes, Ravenna offers an extraordinary opportunity to evaluate the various means used to remind viewers of the patrons, to understand the meaning of that memory, and to appraise how every trace of the patron in the building was strategically emplaced. Among the most prominent evidence of patronage are inscriptions and the city's figurative mosaics and monograms. Monumental inscriptions here will be treated in a non-philological way, analyzed as part of a complex visual structure designed to convey messages, not separating them from their surroundings, as scholarly studies have done for too long. Portraits will be considered for their value in context and their ability in representing the person portrayed without discussing their accuracy or artistic value. Similarly, monograms will be discussed as "signs" without attempting at deciphering the name of the person encoded within. This paper will center on extant buildings or on buildings for which there is substantial information and visual evidence to allow reflection on the visual strategies of the founder's memory. As most of this analysis focusses on Late Antiquity or as it is recorded by the ninth-century historian Agnellus, whose reliability for the information on extant monuments is often confirmed by material evidence, the timeframe of this inquiry spans from the fifth to the ninth century concentrating on Late Antiquity. As we will see, the locations of patrons' traces within the church buildings were designed to cope with the surrounding elements and to convey messages related to the power, presence, and piety of the patron, adding other layers of meaning to the overall monumental programs.

1. The Creation of a Visual Language

Lost and extant monumental mosaics of the fifth century have provided us with the first evidence for assessing the strategies of monumental visualization of patronage. As attested by the 16th-century description of the apse of San Giovanni Evangelista, written shortly after the mosaic program was destroyed (Rossi 1589, pp. 101–3), the church built by Empress Galla Placidia (425–437) around 430 featured the founder and her imperial relatives portrayed in different ways and locations in the sanctuary.[1] In the lower area of the apse, toward the center, was an image of the Empress's friend and mentor Bishop Peter Chrysologus, who was represented performing the liturgy.[2] Flanking him on either side were portraits of the Eastern imperial house: the Emperor Theodosius II and Eudokia on one side and Arcadius and Eudoxia on the other side, the latter two being either Theodosius's parents or his children, named after his parents, and destined to become future emperors (Brubaker 1997; Carile 2018). The images representing the Eastern emperors, likely in full figure, have often been interpreted as devotional images; however, no reliable source allows us to infer a scene of gift-giving. Thus, we may interpret the portraits as simply commemorating the Eastern house that in 425 defeated the usurper John and restored the Western Empire to the Empress Galla Placidia, who ruled it until her son Valentinian III reached his majority in 437. On the apse conch was an image of Christ in majesty. On or around the triumphal arch were portraits of Galla's entire line of imperial ancestors from Constantine to Theodosius (Amici 2000). A particularly appropriate visual means was adopted for them: their busts were placed into roundels that, by means of their round shape, would have rendered the sacredness of the imperial *basilieia* while simultaneously honoring the deceased with a well-known visual formula associated with fourth-century funerary art (Vermeule 1965; L'Orange 1982; Lechner 1978). The medallions would have provided a suitable decoration particularly for the intrados of the triumphal arch.[3] Galla Placidia and her children were represented in two panels above the apsidal arch, as can be seen in a copy of these images surviving in a 14th-century manuscript[4] in two narrative scenes documenting their rescue by St. John the Evangelist during a storm at sea. The empress dedicated the church to St. John, fulfilling her vow to the saint for seeing them safely returned to Ravenna. Between the narrative scenes, above the triumphal arch, another image portrayed St. John the Evangelist receiving a book from the hands of Christ.

Indeed, the lost mosaic decoration of San Giovanni Evangelista seems to have been a commemoration of Galla Placidia's imperial relatives appearing beside the celebration of Christ and St. John the Evangelist. The portraits of the empress and her heirs, the young Valentinian and Honoria, occupy a marginal place within the mosaic program, as if to show their humility and piety. However, a number of inscriptions located within the sanctuary reminded the viewer of the patronship and related to the figural scenes in such a way as to enhance the role of the empress. As reported by the ninth-century historian Agnellus as well as by Girolamo Rossi in his 16th-century account, an inscription, probably located around the triumphal arch, linked the narrative scenes on the eastern nave wall with the roundels on the triumphal arch, reminding the viewer of the purpose of the church building: Galla Placidia had built the church with its decoration as a vow to St. John the Evangelist,

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[1]　For the basilica of San Giovanni Evangelista, still extant in today Ravenna, see (Russo 2003, pp. 23–41; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, pp. 63–70). On Galla Placidia's building, most recently: (Herrin 2020, pp. 46–60).

[2]　On the basis of her philological reading of Agnellus, Vincenza Zangara suggests that Melchizedek, and not the bishop, was portrayed here (Zangara 2000, pp. 290–92).

[3]　Most probably these portraits decorated the intrados of the triumphal arch as portraits into roundels are located on the intrados of the greatest part of late antique triumphal arches across the Mediterranean; see, for instance, the medallions with female saints in the sixth-century Euphrasian Basilica at Poreć or the portraits of the apostles in the sixth-century churches of San Vitale in Ravenna and of Lythrangomi at Cyprus. Still, as evidenced in 16th-century drawings of S. Sabina at Rome (Ciampini 1690, t. 47), in the fifth century they could have been located around the triumphal arch.

[4]　Ravenna, Biblioteca Classense, Cod. 406, f. 11v, anonymous' *Tractatus hedificationis et constructionis ecclesie Sancti Johannis Evangeliste de Ravena*. For discussion on this manuscript illumination: (Carile 2018, pp. 60–61).

for herself and all her relatives, her children, and her glorious ancestors.[5] At the center of the apse, probably just underneath the conch, the main dedicatory inscription read: "To the holy and most blessed apostle John the Evangelist the Empress Galla Placidia with her son Emperor Placidus Valentinian and her daughter Empress Grata Honoria fulfil their vow for their deliverance from danger at sea."[6] Another inscription, located in the lower area of the apse in proximity to the panels representing the eastern emperors, mentioned Jerusalem and was interpreted by scholars as a sort of caption to a scene of gift-giving[7]—imagining that the emperors were represented donating gifts, similar to the imperial panels found in the sixth-century Church of San Vitale in Ravenna, which show the emperor and empress bringing liturgical offerings—or as referring to other recent imperial gifts: that of the cross erected on Golgotha by Theodosius II (Milner 1996) or Galla Placidia's donation to the Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome (Longhi 1996; Brubaker 1997). The image of St. John the Evangelist receiving the book was commemorated by an inscription celebrating the scene within an apocalyptic context.[8] Furthermore, inscriptions identified the imperial family members in the portrait roundels as well as in the imperial panels.

As I have argued elsewhere, the lost mosaic program of San Giovanni Evangelista provides unique evidence to understand diverse ways of commemorating saintly figures as well as living and dead emperors (Carile 2018). Furthermore, it is the first known instance in Ravenna where the patron is celebrated through her depicted image and two inscriptions, which, by naming her, reiterate both the concept expressed in the figural images (the miraculous rescue during a storm) and her fulfillment of a vow to St. John. The inscription around the triumphal arch functioned as an explanation for the whole mosaic program where the empress, her children, ancestors, and relatives were all commemorated by means of portraits or narrative images. At the same time, the inscription referred directly to the narrative images above showing the western imperial house saved from the storm, which though positioned in a marginal location in respect to the apse, were in close proximity to another scene showing St. John being honored with a book given from Christ's hands. Yet, considering that the apse's furnishings[9] may have partially obscured the view of the apse's lower mosaics, the positioning of the narrative images with the western court above the apse allowed a clear and full view of the imperial portraits and deeds and, therefore, was not as peripheral as it may seem. These mosaics were clearly visible to congregants: above the apse conch, they crowned the apse and faced the faithful gathered in the church who could not miss seeing them. Meanwhile, in the apse itself, the empress' pious donation of the church was clarified again in a long, centralized inscription just below the image of Christ in majesty in the conch of the apse. In other words, although the portrait of the empress and her children was located outside the apse, announcing the narrative of St. John's direct intervention on their behalf, her and her children's inscribed names visually inserted them in the most sacred place of the church.[10] Thus, the inscription

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5   *Galla Placidia Augusta pro se et his omnibus hoc uotum solvit* (Rossi 1589, p. 101; CIL 11.276; ILS 818; RIS 1.2. 568, 570). Translation: "The Empress Galla Placidia fulfilled this vow on behalf of herself and all of these".

6   *Sancto ac beatissimo apostolo Iohanni euangelistae, Galla Placidia augusta cum filio suo Placido Valentiniano augusto et filia sua Iusta Grata Honoria augusta liberationis periculum maris uotum soluent* (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 42; Rossi 1589, p. 101; CIL 11.276; ILS 818; ILCV 20). Translation: (Malmberg 2014, p. 174). For discussion on the inscriptions, see (Longhi 1996; Amici 2000, p. 32; Zangara 2000, pp. 281–82; Malmberg 2014, pp. 174–75).

7   *Confirma hoc, Deus, quod operatus es in nobis; a templo tuo in Ierusalem tibi offerent reges munera* (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 42; Rossi 1589, p. 102). Translation: "Confirm, o God, that which you have wrought for us; from your temple (in) Jerusalem kings shall offer you gifts" (Malmberg 2014, p. 174). For discussion, see (Amici 2000, p. 32; Longhi 1996, pp. 54–55; Carile 2018, p. 62).

8   *Amore Christi nobilis et filius tonitrui Sanctus Iohannes arcana vidit* (CIL 11.276b; ILS 818,2; ILCV 20b). Translation: "Noble for (his) love in Christ and the son of thunder, St. John saw the secrets." Discussion in (Deichmann 1974, p. 109; Longhi 1996; Zangara 2000, p. 282).

9   The furnishing would have included a marble enclosure, perhaps an iconostasis and a canopy, which according to written sources was largely used in Ravenna. For a complete catalogue of the canopies with discussion of written sources: (Lavers 1971). Most recently fragments of another late antique canopy were discovered in the excavation of the basilica of Sant'Agnese: (Beghelli 2018). For the canopy in church architecture and liturgy, see (Bogdanović 2017).

10   The fact Galla Placidia, Valentinian, and Honoria were mentioned in the central part of the inscription suggests that their names would have been visible in the exact center of the space. On the comprehension of inscriptions by the late antique beholder, see most recently (Leatherbury 2020, pp. 14–18).

commemorated the patrons in a very effective way, communicating with words—that became written images in the overall décor—the centrality of Galla Placidia and her heirs in the church building.

The mosaic program of San Giovanni Evangelista was exemplary for the arts of Ravenna, as it established iconographies that were subsequently used in other churches. For instance, the idea of representing the ruling bishop in the middle of the apse just above the choir while performing the liturgy was probably adopted in the basilica of Sant'Agata by Bishop John Angeloptes (477–494).[11] There, according to Agnellus, Bishop John Angeloptes was represented just above the benches in the apse (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 44), in the same location where Bishop Peter Chrysologus was depicted at San Giovanni Evangelista. According to a legend, during the mass, he had the miraculous vision of an angel who performed the eucharistic rite with him in the place of a deacon. John Angeloptes' memory was thus attached to the church of Sant'Agata by this legend, the bishop's portrait on the lower area of the apse, and his tomb just behind the altar (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 44). Agnellus recorded this information in the ninth century, and it is not clear if the image above the benches was commissioned by John Angeloptes himself or by his successors. In any case, the location of the bishop's portrait in the lower area of the apse became a constant as it is repeated in the sixth-century basilicas of San Vitale, where Archbishop Maximian (546–556) appears beside the emperor, and of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, where the founder Ursicinus (533–536) is shown in a full figure depiction beside his predecessors and a seventh-century mosaic celebrates other bishops and emperors, likely Bishop Reparatus (671–677) and Constantine IV (668–685) (Brown 1979; Cosentino 2014b; Ortenberg West-Harling 2016). Thus, in episcopal churches, the bishop founder or the bishop whose memory was attached to the building was honored with a portrait located in the apse, which possessed strong visual power and a certain meaning as it preserved his memory in the most sacred place of the church, below the apse conch, manifesting a direct relationship between the higher representative of the Church of Ravenna and the divinity represented in various iconographies in the apse.

Just as Galla Placidia's church of San Giovanni Evangelista, the Arian basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, the palace church of Theoderic (493–526), featured the founder's name inscribed in a central position inside the apse (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 86).[12] Although nothing is known of the original decoration of the apse, it may be inferred that it showed an image celebrating the Savior (Ward-Perkins 2010, p. 279), similar to two other churches of Rome dedicated to the Arian cult, which had been built a few years earlier in the second half of the fifth century. At Rome, both Sant'Agata dei Goti, possibly the Arian Cathedral, and the church of Sant'Andrea in Catabarbara showed an image of Christ in the middle of the apostles, which we know from archival drawings (Andaloro and Romano 2002, p. 99)[13] (Figure 1).

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[11] By tradition, the church built in the second half of the fifth century and probably restored in the sixth century (Deichmann 1976, pp. 283–97; Russo 2003, pp. 127–30) is associated with Bishop John Angeloptes; however, no source clearly attests that its foundation should be attributed to him.

[12] *Theodoricus rex hanc ecclesiam a fundamentis in nomine Domini nostri Iesu Christi fecit.* Translation: "King Theoderic made this church from its foundations in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2004, p. 200). For this church, see (Deichmann 1974, p. 128; Johnson 1988, pp. 85–86; Urbano 2005, pp. 75–76).

[13] The apse mosaic of Sant'Andrea in Catabarbara, a fourth-century building transformed into Arian church in the second half of the fifth century, can be seen in Antonio Eclissi's drawings (c. 1630), now held in the Dal Pozzo Collection of the Windsor Castle in London (WRL 9033) (Osborne and Claridge 1996, pp. 78–81). For the apse of Sant'Agata dei Goti fundamental are Alfonso Ciacconio's 16th-century reproductions, see (Vatican City, Ms. Vat. lat. 5407) (Hülsen 1924, pp. 25–26, 192).
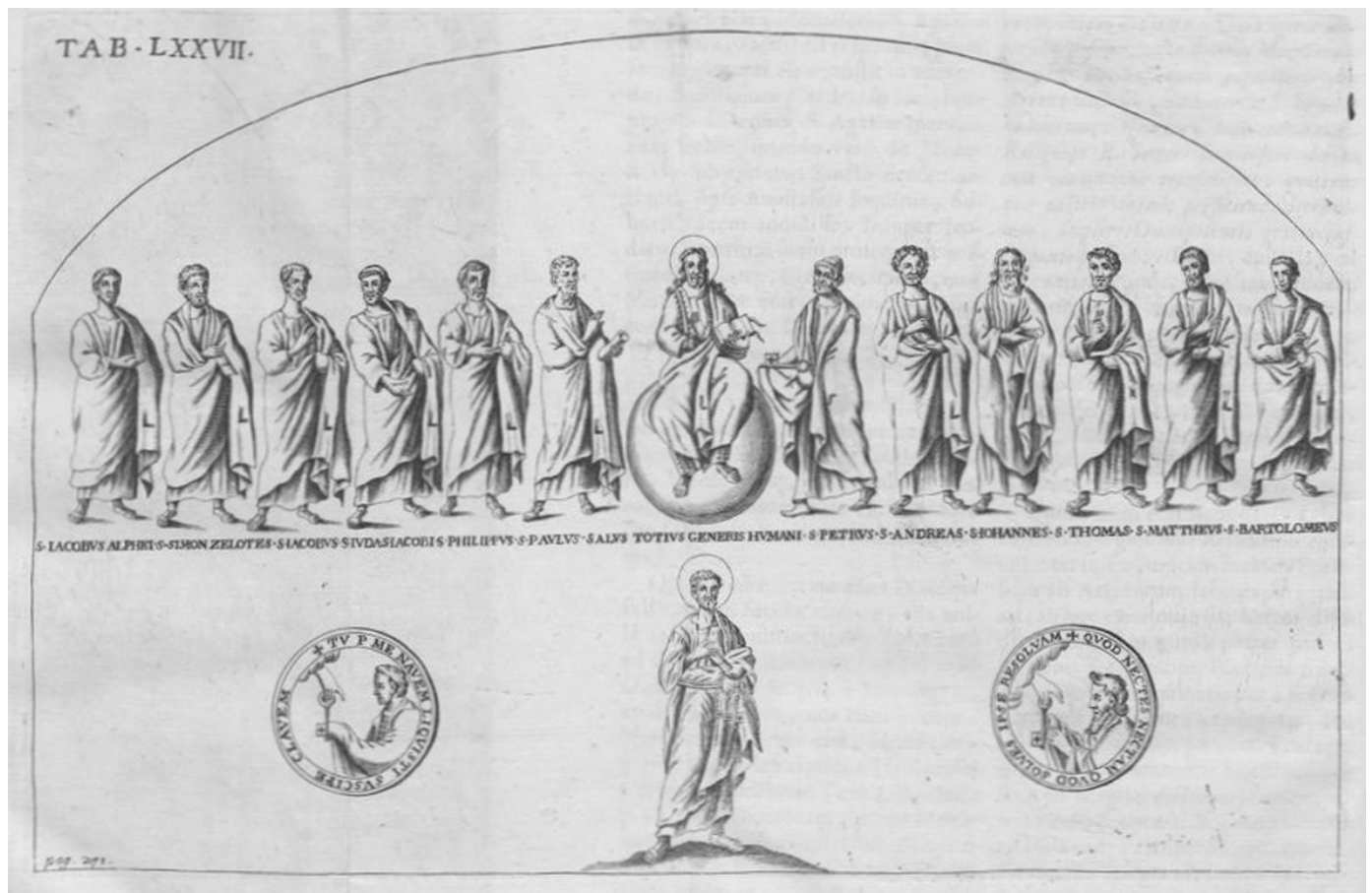
Figure 1. Drawing of the lost decoration of the apse of the basilica of Sant'Agata dei Goti at Rome (after Ciampini 1690, t. 77).

Scholars agree that the basilica of Sant'Agata dei Goti, built between 462 and 470 by the Goth Ricimer and dedicated to St. Agatha at the time of Gregory the Great (590–604), originally was devoted to the Savior (Cartocci 1993; Mathisen 2009), as was Theoderic's church in Ravenna. Indeed, an image of Christ and the apostles would have suited the apse of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (Urbano 2005, pp. 87–88). In this case, the inscription naming the founder, originally located just above the apse windows (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 86) and thus quite visible to the faithful attending the service, would have reminded the viewer of the patron's piety and faith and of his submission to Christ and the apostles, possibly located hierarchically in the apse conch. Likely, King Theoderic was represented elsewhere in the church; according to scholarship, the mosaics in the nave, which at the time of Archbishop Agnellus (556–569) were replaced by two rows of male and female saints, may have represented the Arian court, including the king (Simson 1948; Frugoni 1983, pp. 41–44, 55–57).[14] Another portrait, interpreted as representing King Theoderic (Priess 1927; Lorentz 1935; Fuchs 1943), was found on the western wall of the church where it is now set onto a panel. Unfortunately, it was heavily restored in the 19th century and only a small number of the original tesserae survive: the accompanying inscription *Iustinian*(us), as well as the majority of the mosaic except for the portrait and parts of the *chlamys*, are all later additions (Figure 2). An analysis of the underlayers confirmed that the original areas of the mosaic can be attributed to the time of Theoderic (Bovini 1956). However, it is difficult to explain why Archbishop Agnellus would have kept the portrait of Theoderic but had the lower nave mosaic redone once he converted the church to the Catholic cult.

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14   For a summary of scholarly hypotheses on the lost mosaics, see (Carile 2012, pp. 129–56).

Furthermore, according to the *Liber Pontificalis,* in the ninth century, the western wall of the nave featured the portraits of Justinian and Archbishop Agnellus (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 86). This has raised a lively debate: scholars tend to identify the male figure either with Theoderic (Deichmann 1974, pp. 151–52; Penni Iacco 2004, pp. 63–65, 79–80), Justinian (Baldini Lippolis 2000), or with an emperor, possibly Anastasius I or Justin, whose effigy was reused to represent Justinian at the time of Archbishop Agnellus' restorations (Bovini 1956). Justinian died in 565, and his physiognomy should have been known in Ravenna for his monumental portrait in San Vitale and because written sources attest the wide circulation of imperial portraits within the boundaries of the empire (Carile 2016a). This suggests the possibility that the portrait was meant to represent the ruling emperor. Yet, since the mosaic has been corrupted by too many heavy restorations and its original subject is now lost, this portrait cannot be considered as another example of patronship within the decorative program of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo. We can assert with certainty only that the apse inscription functioned as to commemorate the founder and that, as in the basilica of San Giovanni Evangelista, it centrally positioned the founder in the most sacred space of the church performing a clear and immediate commemorative function.
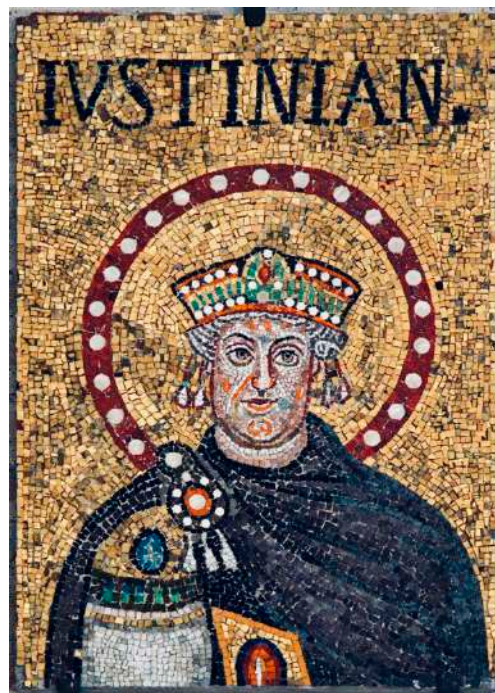

Figure 2. Mosaic panel representing an emperor, Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna (photo: Ввласенко, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, cropped).

2. Visual Innovations

In the second half of the fifth century, a new method of commemorating a founder's memory made its first appearance in Ravenna. In the lower mosaic area of the Baptistery of the Cathedral, the name of Bishop Neon (451–c. 468), who restored the building and refurbished it with a new internal decoration, appears as a block monogram above the northeastern niche. (Figure 3a) Although monograms were used since antiquity (Gardthausen 1966, pp. 1–72; Garipzanov 2018, pp. 109–12), between the fourth and the fifth century, they spread across a wide range of media, from personal objects and rings (Spier 2010) to imperial coins dated to the 440s (Grierson and Mays 1992, p. 80). In the fourth century, they were rarely used in monumental contexts, found in a few instances in

private villas.[15] Apart from an example at Rome,[16] in public monumental buildings, the practice of inserting monograms into the decorative programs is attested only from the second half of the fifth century onward and, possibly, from the time of Neon of Ravenna.[17] Although the mosaics of the Baptistery of the Cathedral were heavily restored during the 19th century, Giovanni G. Ciampini's drawings attest that in 1690 the niches featured similar though fragmentary monograms at their center (Ciampini 1690, pp. 236–37 t. 69) (Figure 3b). The interpretation of the monograms has raised lively scholarly debate, as the one on the southwestern niche was attributed to Bishop Peter II (494–519), and that on the northwestern niche was attributed to Maximian, suggesting a sixth-century intervention to the mosaics (Kostof 1965, pp. 18–19; Bovini 1974). However, Peter II's monogram does not appear in Ciampini's drawing, who mistakenly repeated the monogram identified as Maximian's twice. Furthermore, all the monograms of Maximian at Ravenna present a regular squared pattern with slight variations and include the characters for the word *episcopus* (Bovini 1974, p. 119).[18] Indeed, Maximian's monogram in the baptistery does not even seem to be a monogram but rather the horizontal sequence of three characters: the group M and V, which interlace, followed by a lonely S.[19] Although 19th-century restorations remade most of the mosaics in the lower area of the baptistery, the building shows no trace of a sixth-century phase (Ricci 1931, p. 9), excluding the possibility that the so-called monogram is Archbishop Maximian's. Possibly, this was the result of an intervention that happened before 1690, when the lower area of the building received several major changes due to the rise of waters (Iannucci 1984; Muscolino 2011).

(**a**)

(**b**)

Figure 3. Monograms on the arches of the Baptistery of the Cathedral, Ravenna: (**a**) northeastern arch and niche (photo author); (**b**) drawing of extant monograms in 1690 (after Ciampini 1690, t. 69).

As the monograms appear also on Ciampini's drawing and on subsequent illustrations of the mosaic prior to 19th-century restorations (Bovini 1974, pp. 101–5), we cannot rule out that originally the inscriptions featured monograms at their center, and at least there is a possibility that the northeastern arch indeed featured Neon's.[20] If this was the case, then the bishop responsible for the renewal of the baptistery, as well as a number of other monumental works in Ravenna and Classe (Carile 2019; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2016),

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15 In the mansion of the rich Philippianus at Gerace in Southern Italy, roof tiles, bricks, and floor mosaics bear the owner's monogram (Wilson 2020). They are also found in the mosaics of the villa at Cuevas de Soria in Spain (Blázquez and Ortego 1983).

16 The monogram found on a threshold in the basilica of San Sebastiano at Rome was interpreted as Constantine's or one's of his sons (Ferrua 1961), but it may have not belonged to the original structure (Jastrzebowska 2002, p. 1151 n. 21). In the late fifth and sixth centuries, episcopal, aristocratic, or imperial monograms often decorated the floor tiles of monumental buildings in Apulia and Albania (Volpe 2002; Omari 2014).

17 According to Ildar Garipzanov's extensive analysis, the first monograms in monumental settings should be attributed to Theoderic. However, he does not exclude that, in the East, monograms were already used in monumental architecture (Garipzanov 2018, pp. 166–67).

18 Such monograms are found on Maximian's ivory chair and on an impost block now at the Museo Arcivescovile (Bovini 1974, pp. 116–20; Olivieri Farioli 1969, p. 86 no. 183).

19 This would be in contrast with the widespread use of block-monograms in the sixth century (Seibt 2016; Fink 1981).

20 Nevertheless, Deichmann excludes the possibility that the monograms were original (Deichmann 1974, p. 16).

certainly would have left his mark on the lower decoration using a sign inserted into the lower arches. The use of monograms within monumental programs increases their value: by mixing characters, monograms lose their original function as "compressed signatures" and transform names into art to adorn buildings. They evoke the patron, yet they also permit the rest of the decoration to create new meanings as constituents of the decorative program. In the case of the baptistery, the bishop's monogram at the apex of the arch marks the niche's central axis and separates the two sides of an inscription quoting John's Gospel (*Jn* 13: 4–5). (Figure 3a). At San Giovanni Evangelista and Sant'Agata, the bishop's image adorned the lower area of the apse and was located along the same axis as a throne; in fact, in both the churches the apse conch featured images of Christ in majesty, seated onto a throne (Rossi 1589, p. 101; Ciampini 1690, p. 184).[21] Similarly, inside the baptistery, the bishop's monogram was located underneath the empty thrones of the lower register of the dome. In this way, the bishop's submission to Christ and God, whose presence is implied by the empty throne covered by a cross and by the baptism scene above, where God manifests himself through the Holy Spirit (Ivanovici 2016, pp. 57–66; Carile 2019), was made visible and became another message included in the mosaic program. Even by exchanging a full-figure portrait with a much simpler yet still evocative image, the episcopal founder associates himself with the throne, declaring his role as the leader of the powerful Church of Ravenna and his submission to God, who by means of his son Christ was represented in the apse of the basilicas and is still visible at the center of the baptistery's dome. Unfortunately, it is not clear where the inscription clearly associating Neon's name to the renewal of the baptistery was set (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 28).[22] But while the inscription commemorated the accomplishment of the bishop to posterity, the monogram inserted into the mosaic program visually declared the bishop's role within the Christian hierarchy.

It was during the reign of Theoderic (493–526) that the practice to immortalize the memory of the founder through his or her monogram spread, both in church buildings and probably also in other monumental structures. In fact, four of the capitals now reused in the colonnades of Piazza del Popolo in Ravenna feature Thedoeric's monogram inside a laurel wreath on the abacus, similarly to other capitals now held at the Museo Nazionale (Olivieri Farioli 1969, p. 31 n. 40) (Figure 4). It is not clear whether these and the columns associated with them in the major square were originally set in the church of Sant'Andrea dei Goti, located in the so-called Gothic district in the northeastern area of the city and demolished in 1457 (Ricci 1905, p. 27), or in the *Basilica Herculis*, a civic building whose exact function is still unknown (Savini 1914, pp. 22–26). In any case, the capitals with Theoderic's monogram demonstrate the patron's need to insert his mark into the decorative program of a monumental building, a practice that during the reign of Justinian (527–565) would have spread in Constantinople and in the East, becoming a feature of monumental architecture.[23]

However, in order to understand the meaning of monograms, it is perhaps worth analyzing their uses in different media. Three extant typologies of the diptychs of Areobindus, consul of the East in 506, clearly show how monograms at the time of Theoderic could substitute for the patron's portrait, acquiring its value. The ivory plaques of the Musée de Cluny, the Louvre, and the Museo Diocesano at Lucca (Delbrueck 1929, no. 11, 13, 15; Volbach 1976, no. 10, 12, 14; Olovsdotter 2005, pp. 38–44), which serve as examples for the three typologies of Areobindus' dyptich, are centered, each one, on a full-figure image of

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[21] According to a close-up analysis of the mosaic fragments, at Sant'Agata, the apse mosaic belonged to the sixth-century phase of the building under Archbishop Agnellus (Russo 1989, pp. 2323–24). However, in the fifth century, the apse could feature a similar scene with Christ at the centre of the apse, an iconography quite common at that time (Spieser 2015, pp. 317–97).

[22] *Cede, uetus nomen, nouitati cede uetustas! / Pulchrius ecce nitet renouati gloria Fontis. / Magnanimus hunc namque Neon summus que sacerdos / Excoluit, pulchro componens omnia cultu.* Translation: "Yield, old name, yield, age, to newness! Behold the glory of the renewed font shines more beautifully. For generous Neon, highest priest, has adorned it, arranging all things in beautiful refinement" (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2004, p. 125).

[23] On the monograms of Justinian's churches at Constantinople, see Fabian Stroth's much awaited monograph (Stroth 2021). Later in the sixth century, the use of monograms on monumental architecture spread in buildings promoted by emperors and bishops alike, as testified at San Clemente at Rome and the churches of Northern Adriatic (Barsanti and Guidobaldi 1992, pp. 154–55; Garipzanov 2018, pp. 186–95, with references).

the consul with his insignia watching a circus spectacle, the consul's portrait inserted into a clypeus, and his monogram framed by cornucopiae (Figure 5a–c). Monograms appear only on the second and third plaque. However, the second ivory lacks a full inscription, and the monogram does not seem to be a label for the image. The monogram appears twice, above and below the clypeus, and therefore, although including the letters of Areobindus's name, its function is not solely for providing a label for the portrait but becomes a kind of decoration, filling the empty spaces around the image. On the diptych now at Lucca, the monogram replaces the consul's portrait as the image of the consul, while his full name, title, and office are showed at length in the inscription in the *tabula ansata* above (Figure 5c). Therefore, already at the beginning of the sixth century, the monogram worked as a personal mark, which could reinforce the meaning of a portrait, strengthening and validating the image, just as seals legitimated a document,[24] or substitute for the patron's image and function as such, thus conveying his/her presence to the beholder. In a monumental context, depending on the location of the monogram, it may have had a similar role, proving the patron's responsibility for that monument or conveying his/her memory, power, and social position, just as portraits did.

Figure 4. Capital with Theoderic's monogram on the abacus, Piazza del Popolo, Ravenna (photo: M. Benfatti).

Over the years, the Orthodox bishops of Ravenna continued such a practice in the private chapel of their palace. The small oratory dedicated to St. Andrew features Peter II's monogram in privileged locations of the mosaic. Although the building underwent changes and major restorations across the centuries, certainly in 1708, Peter's monogram was still set on the wall underneath the vault of the chapel, just above the roundel with Christ's portrait on the western arch (Ricci 1934, pp. 33–34) (Figure 6). A symmetrical monogram above the eastern arch and another one on the wall above the apse were reconstructed during major restorations undertaken at the beginning of the 20th century (Ricci 1934, pp. 33–35).[25] Indeed, in the private chapel of the episcopal palace, Peter II would have

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24 On the value of seals as legitimating a document and providing the mark of the responsible for that document even by means of a monogram (Fink and Seibt 1981; Spier 2010, pp. 15–16).

25 These monograms are the result of 19th-century interventions (Ricci 1934, t. 41–42), therefore they cannot be considered in this inquiry.

declared his patronship, placing his symbol along the main axis of the room, facing the apse, in a visible location for those who exited the chapel from the main access on the western wall.

(**a**)

Figure 5. *Cont.*

(**b**)

Figure 5. *Cont.*

(**c**)

Figure 5. Diverse typologies of Areobindus' diptychs: (**a**) placque at the Musée de Cluny, Paris, inv. no. CL13135 (photo: Françoise Foliot, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0); (**b**) diptych at the Musée du Louvre, inv. no. OA9525 (photo: © Marie-Lan Nguyen, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.5); (**c**) diptych at the Museo della Cattedrale, Lucca (photo: courtesy of Opera del Duomo di Lucca).

Figure 6. Mosaic vault, Archiepiscopal Chapel, Ravenna (photo: GFreihalter, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, cropped).

While according to a passage of Agnellus' *Liber Pontificalis* (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 50),[26] the bishop portrait was believed to dominate the lunette above the door of the central space, Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis asserts that the saint's portrait was represented above the door and not the bishop's, following a model already used in the so-called Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, pp. 189–90). Although the greatest part of scholarship conjectures that the chapel was dedicated to St. Andrew during Maximian's reign or even later (Deichmann 1974, p. 199),[27] the dedication of a major Arian church to St. Andrew at the time of Theoderic (Sant'Andrea dei Goti) attests that at the time of Peter II, the cult of St. Andrew was already active in Ravenna and the effigies of several eastern martyrs (Euphemia, Eugenia, Cosmas, Damian, Polycarpus) in the Archiepiscopal Chapel are testimony to their cult in Ravenna. However, the repetition of the saint's effigy both on the eastern arch and on the lunette above the entrance is very unlikely. Furthermore, the saint is not mentioned in the long dedication inscription on the vestibule of the chapel, which celebrates Peter the Bishop mentioning him twice: the first recognizing the gleaming stones of the chapel as Peter's gifts, and the second comparing the bishop with the apostle Peter, the latter being the foundation of the Church (*fundamen*) and the former the founder (*fundator*) of the oratory (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 50) (Leatherbury 2020, p. 54). Placing the bishop's portrait on the lunette above the door breaks with the practice of commemorating the bishop inside the apse. However, the private chapel of the episcopal palace was attended only by the bishop and his closest clergymen. Thus, it should have celebrated its founder and recalled his memory for future bishops. In this case, Peter's intention to leave an enduring trace of his pontificate in the episcopal chapel was achieved through the inscription in the vestibule, asserting itself on those who entered the chapel from the main access, as well as by the bishop's effigy and his monogram above the door of the chapel, clearly visible upon exiting the oratory. The repetition of the bishop's monogram alone, just underneath the vault, would have already declared his role in the building of the chapel and exalted him as the founder, but the inscription, portrait, and monogram all cooperate to stress his role.

Another of Peter II's monograms is engraved on an impost block later reused in the colonnades of the basilica of Sant'Agata (Olivieri Farioli 1969, p. 84 n. 176). Unfortunately, there is no indication of its provenience and it may be just considered as evidence for the

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[26] *Fecit que non longe ab eadem domo monasterium sancti Andreae apostoli; sua que effigies super ualuas eiusdem monasterii est inferius tessellis depicta.* Translation: "And not far from that house he built the *monasterium* of St. Andrew the apostle, and his image is depicted in mosaic inside this *monasterium*, over the doors" (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2004, p. 162).

[27] This opinion is perhaps influenced by the major importance attributed by Agnellus to Maximian's translation of St. Andrew's relics from Constantinople to Ravenna (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 76).

spread of the monograms on architectural decoration at the time of Peter II. A different and rather concealed value had Peter II's monogram appeared on two capitals at the Museo Arcivescovile. These are two-zone pilaster capitals decorated with windblown acanthus, Evangelists' symbols, and (probably) cornucopiae[28] (Figure 7). Originally, these architectural elements were set somewhere in the Cathedral and reused in the Archiepiscopal Chapel in the 16th century (Ricci 1934, pp. 9–10). On their abaci, an inscription naming the bishop celebrates his deeds, referring to a building of which he was the patron and that he erected from its foundation[29] (Figure 7b,c). Evidently, both capitals were set close enough to each other to constitute a continuous inscription. On the left side of the capital from which the inscription starts, at the height of the Evangelists, a *Chrismon* towers above Peter's monogram: both symbols inserted into clypea are outlined in black paint, so as to make them visible although they are marginally located on one undecorated side of the capital (Figure 7a). In this case, through his monogram, Peter II declares his submission to Christ by placing his mark underneath the *Chrismon*. Furthermore, the bishop's name is also inscribed in full letters a few centimeters beside Christ's monogram. Yet, the presence of monograms in such an unusual and concealed location may also point to a hidden message, as if the monograms were sealing the capital, adding additional Christian and episcopal value to it. While the inscription on the capitals' front commemorates the bishop and his deeds with straightforward immediacy, the monogram here performs a diverse function: it seals the capital with a mark of the patron and, more importantly, suggests to the viewer the hierarchical submission of the bishop, and by extension of the Church of Ravenna, to Christ himself. As the bishop's monogram could be difficult to decipher but anyone could understand the *Chrismon* as a symbol for Christ, such a message shall be interpreted as a personal statement from the part of the bishop, a statement which completed the significance of the inscription. The memory of the founder, Peter II, is attested by both his full name and the monogram, two diverse forms of communication, both certifying in a peculiar way the authenticity of the architectural element, the bishop's dependence on Christ, and his responsibility for the space in which the capitals were inserted.
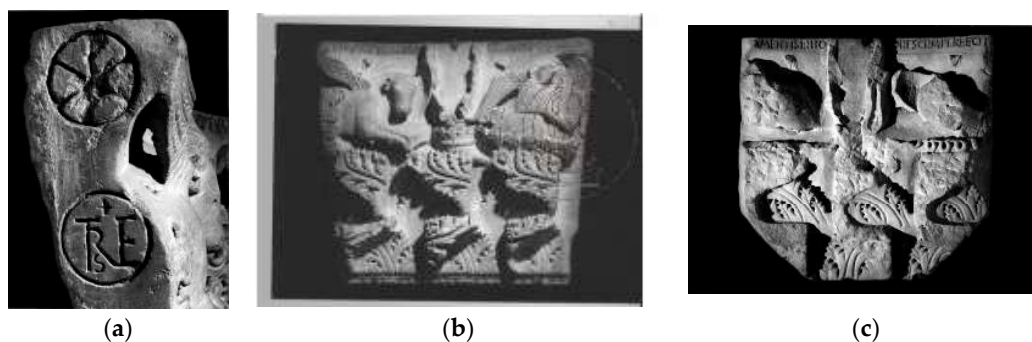

(**a**)　　　　　　　　　　　　　(**b**)　　　　　　　　　　　　　(**c**)

Figure 7. Two zone acanthus leaves capitals, Museo Arcivescovile, Ravenna: (**a**) side of the first capital; (**b**) first capital; (**c**) second capital (photos: courtesy of Istituzione Biblioteca Classense, Ravenna, Fondo Mazzotti).

3. The Establishment of a Visual Language

Sixth-century churches made wide use of portraits, inscriptions, and monograms as means of imprinting the founders' memories upon church buildings. In the great basilicas inaugurated by Bishop Maximian, the celebration of the episcopal patrons is found at different locations inside the buildings. At San Vitale, Bishop Ecclesius (522–532), who founded the church around 528, is portrayed at the center of the iconographic program, beside Christ inside the apse. Thus, the church's founder achieved a major place and

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[28]　The capitals are now held at the Museo Arcivescovile (inv. no. 69–70) (Gardini and Novara 2011).

[29]　On one capital are inscribed the words "PETRUS EPISC(opus) S(an)CTE(=ae) RAVEN(natis) ECCL(esiae) COEPTUM OPUS" and on the other "(a) (fund)AMENTIS IN HONORE S(an)C(to)R(u)M PEREECIT (=perfecit)", translation "Peter, Bishop of the holy Church of Ravenna, completed this work started from its foundation in honor of the saints."

became part of a very effective scene, following a powerful iconographic model that was possibly inaugurated by Constantine himself in the basilica of San Pietro at Rome (Liverani 2006, 2007) and which became more and more frequent after the sixth century[30] (Figure 8). Within the image, Ecclesius is admitted in front of Christ himself as the bishop personally bequeaths Him a model of the church. This strong iconography declares the bishop's devotion, although by the time the mosaic was set, he was already deceased. It henceforth became a commemorative image of Ecclesius left by his successors on Ravenna's episcopal throne and, at the same time, a major celebration of the Church of Ravenna due to the positioning of the bishop in the apse beside Christ.

Figure 8. Apse mosaic, basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna (photo: Petar Milošević, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0).

By the time the church was completed in 547–548, three other bishops had already succeeded Ecclesius: Ursicinus (533–536), Victor (538–545), and Maximian (546–556). As demonstrated by a careful analysis of the mosaic (Andreescu Treadgold 1992a, 1992b, 2007), Victor was probably represented beside Justinian in the imperial panel, but his portrait was later replaced by Maximian's, during whose rule the basilica was consecrated. The location of the bishop's portrait beside the emperor with – according to the primitive ways of rendering perspective – his feet on the foreground, communicates the primacy of the Church of Ravenna, while also honoring the *basileus* with an image of him and his court. However, neither Justinian, Maximian, or even Theodora on the opposite panel, are easily viewable at San Vitale. Indeed, the portraits at the sides of the apse can only be seen if standing inside the sanctuary, where no one but the clergy was admitted (Carile 2018). Due to the depth of the sanctuary and the dazzling effect of light reflecting upon the mosaic surface, the imperial panels can never be clearly and simultaneously seen from the naos. Only the image of Ecclesius is clearly visible, but we should also infer that in an episcopal church, the bishop officiating the liturgy inside the sanctuary screen would have been visible at least during certain moments of the ceremony. Thus, aside from Ecclesius in the apse, the current bishop of Ravenna, whose throne was located along the same axis as Christ and placed directly beneath His image, would have performed the ceremony and thereby become a living manifestation of the centrality of the Church of Ravenna for the ecclesiastical building, for the hierarchy of the earthly order, and for the Church itself.

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[30] The iconography of the church founder with the model in his hands spread in the Middle Ages across boundaries and cultures (for the Balkans: Marinković 2007, 2013; Stachowiak 2018; for the west: Klinkenberg 2009; more generally for models: Kratzke and Albrecht 2008; Ćurčić and Hadjitriphonos 2010).

Ecclesius was commemorated in his portrait in the apse as well as by a mosaic inscription located in the atrium at the front of the church (*in atrio ipsius frontis aulae*) (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 61)[31] and by the consecration inscription in the narthex (*in ardica*) (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 77),[32] while Victor was memorialized by his portrait beside the Emperor in the apse and by his monogram as *Victor Episcopus*, on the impost blocks of the matroneum northern windows and of the naos (Figure 9). These were indeed locations of particular prestige: the former was a symbolic place, at a higher position, close to the vault with a representation of the Lamb in the middle of a paradisiacal garden, and the latter encircled the naos. All the columns of the naos support impost blocks decorated with Victor's monogram on both sides, so that the faithful standing in the naos and those in the ambulatory could see his monogram, which functioned as the boundary of the church's central area under the dome. However, the location of the other monograms, quite high within the sanctuary, and their small size compared to the rest of the decorative program would have concealed the monograms from view inside the church. They are a mark of Victor's work, power, presence, and symbolic of the deeds of the bishop whose untimely death preceded the completion of the construction and dedication of the church. Maximian replaced Victor's portrait beside the Emperor in the apse with his own image, and he also added an inscription with his name just above the portrait, just to make clear his identity. Thus, not only did he have his name placed into the consecration inscription in the narthex (Agnellus 2006, *LP*,77),[33] but his memory and leading role as the head of the Church of Ravenna is found in a powerful image that also attests to his ties with the court, where he was admitted several times before 546 (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 70, 74, discussed in Mazzotti 1950, 1956; Bovini 1957; Montanari 1991). Through this image, he was immortalized and is still today remembered as a man of particular prestige.

Figure 9. Matroneum northern windows, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna (photo: courtesy of Istituzione Biblioteca Classense, Ravenna, Fondo Ricci).

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[31]   Dedication inscription: *Ardua consurgunt uenerando culmine templa / Nomine Vitalis sanctificata Deo./Geruasius que tenet simul hanc Protasius arcem, / Quos genus atque fides templa que consociant. / His genitor natis fugiens contagia mundi/Exemplum fidei martirii que fuit./Tradidit hanc primus Iuliano Ecclesius arcem, / Qui sibi commissum mire peregit opus./Hoc quoque perpetua mandauit lege tenendum,/His nulli liceat condere membra locis. / Sed quod pontificum constant monumenta priorum,/Fas ibi sit tantum ponere seu simile* (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 61). Translation: "The lofty temples rise to the venerable rooftop, sanctified to God in the name of Vitalis. And Gervase and Protase also hold this stronghold, whom family and faith and church join together. The father fleeing the contagions of the world was to these sons an example of faith and martyrdom. Ecclesius first gave this stronghold to Julian, who wonderfully completed the work commissioned to him. He also ordered it to be maintained by perpetual law that in these places no one's body is permitted to be placed. But because tombs of earlier bishops are established here, it is allowed to place this one, or one like it" (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2004, p. 177).

[32]   Consecration inscription: *Beati martiris Vitalis basilicam, mandante Ecclesio uiro beatissimo episcopo, a fundamentis Iulianus argentarius aedificauit, ornauit atque dedicauit, consecrante uiro reuerendissimo Maximiano episcopo, sub die .xiii. [kal. Maiarum, indictione .x.,] sexies p. c. Basilii iunioris* (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 77). Translation: "Julian the Banker built the basilica of the blessed martyr Vitalis from the foundations, authorized by the *vir beatissimus* Bishop Ecclesius, and decorated and dedicated it, with the *vir reuerendissimus* Bishop Maximian, consecrating it on April 19, in the tenth indiction, the sixth year after the consulship of Basilius" (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2004, p. 192).

[33]   According to Agnellus, a similar inscription was placed in the narthexes of San Vitale and Sant'Apollinare in Classe that Maximian consecrated in 549. For the text and translation, see above n. 32.

Maximian used the same means in other churches to visualize his role. Around 550, in the church of St. Stephen, the bishop placed his image in the mosaic decorating the vault of the apse,[34] put his name in the consecration inscription and in the dedication inscription on the triumphal arch,[35] and carved his name above all the capitals of the columns (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 72), likely using monograms. Indeed, his church was replete with marks identifying him, and in his hubris, he went so far as to represent himself in the apsidal conch, if the mosaic mentioned by Agnellus in the ninth century was sponsored by Maximian himself. Furthermore, Agnellus reports that the barracks of the regiment called *Bandus Primus* showed the archbishop's name stamped on the tiles: "Maximian Bishop of Ravenna" (*Maximianus Episcopus Rauennae*) (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 77).[36] Thus the bishop adopted the habit of memorializing his episcopal authority, possibly through his image in the apse, through inscriptions, and through monograms that we may imagine like that on the impost block from his church of St. Andrew now at the Museo Arcivescovile (Figure 10).[37] His portrait in the apse clarified his power in the Christian hierarchy and, probably, his piety; inscriptions communicated with immediacy his role as the church builder to anyone who could read them, while monograms performed a more complex function. From the point of view of the patron and of the church designer or architect, they marked the architectural elements with the bishop's imprint as to attest to his widespread presence and responsibility for the church building. From the point of view of the beholder who could not decipher them, they were decorative elements and, perhaps, an ambiguous reference to a person who, in life, was so powerful and influent to have built that church. Significantly, Maximian did not limit his building activities to churches and works at the Episcopal palace (Cirelli 2008, pp. 72–78) but extended his support to military structures. The latter is a rare instance conveying the power of the bishop of Ravenna over the city itself.

Apart from his remains, which for a long time laid in the southern chapel beside the apse, almost no trace of Bishop Ursicinus is left at San Vitale.[38] He is however prominently featured at Sant'Apollinare in Classe, where his portrait appears in the apse (Figure 11b). Just as in fifth-century basilicas, at Sant'Apollinare in Classe, the bishop's portrait occupies the lower area of the apse. In this case, it is located between the apse windows and is one of a series of portraits that also includes the full-figure images of Bishops Ecclesius, Severus, and Ursus, which are depicted as if set within precious niches adorned with jewels (Figure 11a). They hold jeweled books and are identified by inscriptions, which make their recognition immediate and transform their portraits into icons (Marsengill 2013, pp. 117–19). At the center are the images of two bishops that by the sixth century were already venerated as saints: Severus and Ursus. The former was the first recognized bishop of the city, known for participating in the council of Serdica in 343 (Lucchesi 1968; Caroli 2005); the latter was the founder of the cathedral at Ravenna at the turn of the fifth century, when the city became the Western imperial seat (Lucchesi 1967). Both are identified by

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[34] [..] *et in cameris tribunae sua effigies tessellis uariis infixa est* (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 72). Translation: "in the vaults of the apse his image is fixed in multicolored mosaic" (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2004, p. 187) (Mazzotti 1950, 1956; Bovini 1957; Montanari 1991). Possibly this was a full figure portrait, such as Ecclesius's at San Vitale.

[35] Consecration inscription: *In honore sancti ac beatissimi primi martiris Stephani seruus Christi Maximianus episcopus hanc basilicam, ipso adiuuante, a fundamentis construxit et dedicauit die tertio Idus Decemb., indictione .xiiii., nouies p. c. Basilii iunioris* (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 72). Translation: "In honor of the holy and most blessed first martyr Stephen, Bishop Maximian, servant of Christ, by God's grace built this church from the foundations and dedicated it on December 11 in the fourteenth indiction, in the ninth year after the consulship of Basilius the younger" (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2004, p. 187). Dedication inscription on the triumphal arch: *Templa micant Stephani meritis et nomine sacra,/Qui prius eximium martiris egit opus./Omnibus una datur sacro pro sanguine palma, / Plus tamen hic fruitur, tempore quo prior est./Ipse fidem uotum que tuum nunc, magne sacerdos / Maximiane, iuuans, hoc opus explicuit. / Nam talem subito fundatis molibus aulam/Sola manus hominum non poterat facere. / Vndecimum fulgens renouat dum luna recursum / Excepta et pulchro condita fine nitet* (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 72). Translation: "The temple of Stephen shines, holy in relics and in name, he who first performed the exceptional act of martyrdom. The same palm is given to all for holy blood; however he benefits from it more who was earlier in time. He himself now assisting your faith and your vow, great priest Maximian has completed this work. For the hand of man alone could not so soon have made such a hall from its foundation walls. When the gleaming moon was new for the eleventh time, the church which had been begun shines established in beautiful completion" (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2004, p. 188).

[36] For the barracks of the *Bandus Primus*, see (Deichmann 1989, p. 40).

[37] See above footnote n. 18.

[38] (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 59).

the word *sanctus* inscribed before their names and were thus already the recipients of veneration in the sixth century, proved by the dedication of a great basilica of Classe to St. Severus in the second half of the sixth century (Augenti et al. 2017), which later became a principal monastery (Augenti and Cirelli 2016). In the church of Sant'Apollinare, their images are flanked at each side by two iconic portraits with great communicative power: those of the sixth-century bishops Ecclesius and Ursicinus, the latter of whom was the church founder (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 63 and 77) and the former his predecessor. They were intended to be remembered as the heirs of the bishops-saints, champions of the Church of Ravenna. However, both Ecclesius and Ursicinus were already dead by the time the basilica was completed. Therefore, as Katherine Marsengill has wonderfully stated, the inclusion of the bishops' portraits in the apse of Sant'Apollinare in Classe actually demonstrated the legacy that the ruling bishop wielded at that time. As it was Maximian who inaugurated the church in 549, the portraits performed as a statement of power for him (Marsengill 2013, p. 117).
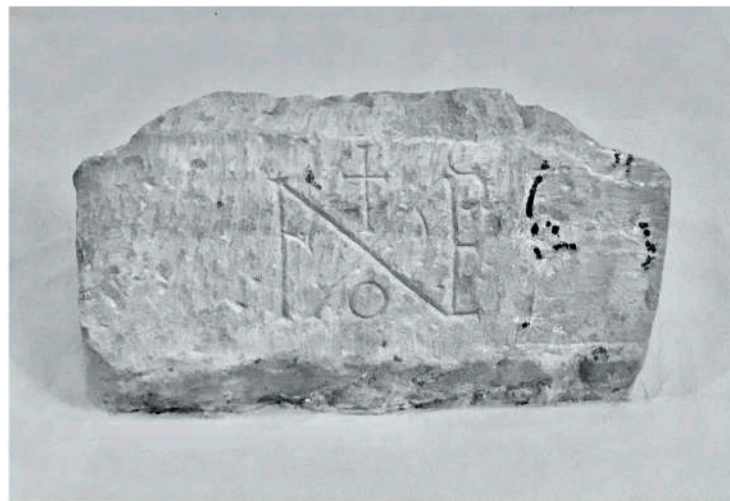

Figure 10. Impost block with Maximian's monogram, Museo Arcivescovile, Ravenna (photo: author).

| (a) | (b) |

Figure 11. Apse mosaic, basilica of Sant'Apollinare, Classe: (**a**) the bishops (photo: author); (**b**) Bishop Ursicinus (photo: W. Borghini).

Yet, the great sixth-century churches of San Vitale and Sant'Apollinare in Classe do not only celebrate the memory of these bishops; they also celebrate that of another man named *Julianus*, apparently an *argentarius* (banker) who supported the construction of

several basilicas in Ravenna.[39] Ecclesius assigned the commission of the church of San Vitale to Julian,[40] as did Ursicinus at Sant'Apollinare in Classe.[41] Julian was a banker (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 57, 59, 63, 77); thus, Ecclesius's and Ursicinus's commission to Julian must be interpreted as the task to support the expenses for their churches. Apparently, he was a very rich and pious man, close to the Church of Ravenna, and eager to support the great church buildings promoted by sixth-century bishops. At San Vitale, Julian's memory and devotion were preserved in the dedicatory inscription set in the atrium of the basilica, the consecration inscription of the church, as well as an inscription found on a reliquary[42] (Figure 12a). Indeed, it is quite rare that a patron is given the great honor of a devotional inscription on a reliquary.[43] The latter is a highly symbolic but rather concealed sign of Julian's great role in the foundation of the church and, according to the form and style of the writing, it must be considered as a private dedicatory inscription (Deichmann 1976, pp. 32–33). Similarly at Classe, Julian was mentioned in the consecration inscription in the narthex as well as on a marble inscription on the tomb of St. Apollinaris.[44] Apart from having his name recorded in monumental inscriptions and on the reliquary, he was also allowed a particularly prestigious position within the decorative program of San Vitale: in fact, his name appears in the form of a monogram in the sanctuary, upon the impost blocks of the matroneum southern windows, just in front of Victor's monograms on the opposite side, and on the marble inlaid work of the sanctuary[45] (Figures 12b and 13). Therefore, through his monogram, his memory was placed close to the vault with a zoomorphic image of Christ, at the same height as the Evangelists, and close to the altar and the clergy in the sanctuary. His monograms were much simpler and more schematic than Victor's and appear both in Greek and in Latin, proving, according to Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann and Salvatore Cosentino, that he was a Greek or Greek-speaking man living in Ravenna (Deichmann 1951; Deichmann 1976, pp. 4–11, 22–27; Barnish 1985; Cosentino 2006, 2014a; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2010, p. 200).[46] Little is known of his life and scholarly speculations abound, but even the scant material evidence may give us some clue on his role.

For many years now, San Vitale's monograms have been studied with the scope of deciphering the names inscribed within or as a proof of a possible manufacture in situ (Deichmann 1976, pp. 103, 111; Russo 1991, pp. 36, 49).[47] Most recently, they have been considered as "graphic signs of authority," as labels upon an artifact intended to indicate the name of the possessor and attest to his influence (Garipzanov 2018, pp. 131–60). If we compare Victor's and Julian's monograms on the imposts blocks in the presbytery of

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[39] Namely, the greatest sixth-century churches of San Vitale and Sant'Apollinare in Classe, and the basilica of San Michele in Africisco; Agnellus' attribution of the church Santa Maria Maggiore to Julianus' munificence is dubious (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 57, 59, 61, 63, 77). For discussion: (Deichmann 1951; Deichmann 1976, pp. 3–33; Barnish 1985; Caillet 2003; Cosentino 2006, 2014a, 2020).

[40] See the dedicatory inscription set in silver tesserae in the atrium of San Vitale at footnote 31, the consecration inscription in the narthex of the same church at footnote 32.

[41] Consecration inscription in the narthex of the basilica: *Beati Apolenaris sacerdotis basilicam, mandante uiro beatissimo Vrsicino episcopo, a fundamentis Iulianus argentarius aedificauit, ornauit atque dedicauit, consecrante uiro beato Maximiano episcopo, die .vii. id. Maiarum, indictione .xii., octies p. c. Basilii* (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 77). Translation: "Julian the Banker built the basilica of the blessed priest Apollinaris from the foundations, authorized by the *vir beatissimus* bishop Ursicinus, and decorated it and dedicated it, with the *vir beatus* bishop Maximian consecrating it on May 9, in the twelfth indiction of the eight year after the consulship of Basilius" (Mauskopf Deliyannis 2004, pp. 191–92). For discussion on the inscriptions, see expecially: (Deichmann 1976, pp. 4–11; Caillet 2003).

[42] For the dedication inscription in the atrium and the consecration inscription in the narthex of the church (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 61, 77) see above footnote 31 and 32. The inscription on the reliquary now held at the Museo Nazionale in Ravenna is the following: *Iulianus argent(arius) servus vest(er) praecib(us) vest(ris) basi(licam) a funda(mentis) perfec(it)*. Translation: "Julian the Banker, your servant took to completion this basilica from its foundations, with prayers to you."

[43] Another instance is found on a reliquary from El Bassah (Syria) and today at the Louvre, where the deacon Elias had his dedication carved on the lid (Michon 1905, p. 576).

[44] See above footnote 41. For the inscription on Apollinaris's tomb (*CIL* XI.1 n. 295): (Deichmann 1951, p. 8; 1976, pp. 4–5).

[45] The *opus sectile* in the sanctuary of the church was reconstructed at the beginning of the 20th century on the basis of a surviving panel, showing Julian's monograms at the sides of a porphyry circle, and archive documents; however the reconstruction raised a lively debate at that time (Ricci 1902; Deichmann 1976, pp. 134–35).

[46] On the impost blocks, Julian's monograms are in Greek, while in the marble slabs of the choir in Latin.

[47] On the inutility of deciphering monograms: (Deichmann 1976; Fink and Seibt 1981; Caillet 2003) with discussion.

San Vitale, Victor's bear all the characters of his name and of his role as bishop (*Victor Episcopus*), while Julian's shows solely those of his name ('Ιουλιανοῦ) ([Deichmann 1976](#), p. 4) (Figures [9](#) and [13](#)). Clearly, the bishop's is more detailed and demonstrates a higher degree of skill; meanwhile, Julian's Greek monogram is simply engraved inside an irregular round clypeus. Julian's monogram displays a clumsy hand, perhaps a local artisan who was unable to achieve the same degree of accuracy that we see in Victor's monogram.[48] Therefore, if the monograms are "signs of authority" as claimed by Ildar Garipzanov, here they function as such only for the bishop. In Julian's monogram, neither his function nor his title are included—only his Greek name in the genitive as it was customary in the Greek speaking East. Furthermore, it seems that his monogram was not planned since the beginning, but inserted later and thus carved by another artisan. More significant is the location of the element higher within the sanctuary, close to the vault, just opposite Victor's. Thus, we may infer that Julian the Banker was so close to the Church of Ravenna and so involved in the construction of the basilica that his monogram was allowed such an important location. Indeed, the positioning of Julian's monogram, just opposite the mark of one of the bishops responsible for the completion of the church, visually declares the primary role of Julian the Banker in the construction and the high esteem in which the Church of Ravenna held this man—if not the debt felt towards him. This is corroborated by the fact that he is mentioned in all the monumental inscriptions of the church that, likely following a processional path, the beholder encountered before his/her eyes walking through the church from the atrium to the narthex. This path culminated in the sanctuary where Julian's memory was more concealed though nonetheless present in his monograms; while the memory of Bishop Ecclesius, mentioned in all the inscriptions, climaxed with his portrait in the apse conch.[49] In the choir, Julian's Latin monogram appears as a decorative element, as part of the overall *opus sectile*, almost an ornament featured on the sides of the slabs. Still, its presence in such a highly symbolic location beside the clergy, who was supposed to sit on the *subsellium* and the bishop on the marble chair at the center of the apse, visually conveyed once again the close ties of Julian with the Church of Ravenna and therefore his social position and power. In short, at San Vitale inscriptions overtly commemorated the patrons and Julian to anyone who could read them; portraits, with the immediate visual language of narrative scenes, celebrated the patrons reaching all kinds of beholders; while monograms bore the memory, influence, and piety of Julian or Victor to the contemporaries who could decipher them, but mostly they became elements of the overall church décor.
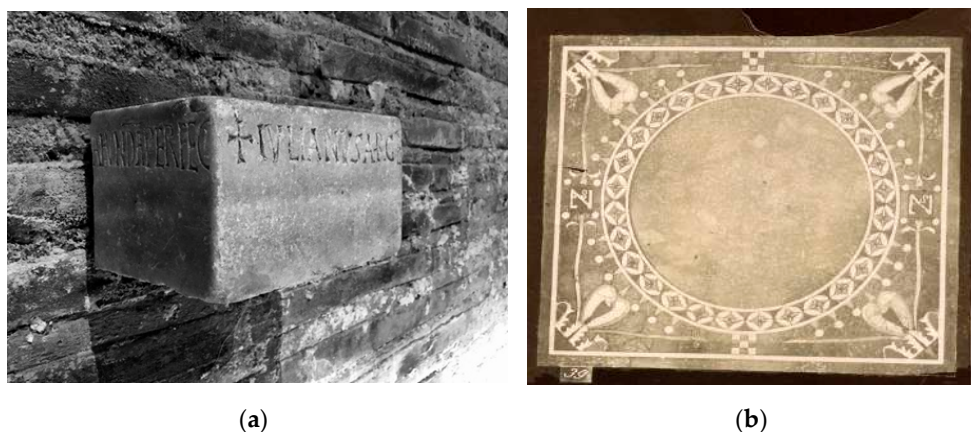

(**a**)   (**b**)

Figure 12. Inscriptions and monograms of Julian Argentarius: (**a**) reliquary (photo: G. Gardini); (**b**) original marble inlaid panel (photo: under concession of Fondazione Federico Zeri, Bologna, inv. 3431, copyrights cleared).

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[48] Julian's monogram on the matroneum windows was sculpted in Ravenna according to [Deichmann](#) ([1976](#), pp. 103, 111), as if local artisans could not achieve the perfection of artisans from Constantinople and as if artisans from Constantinople were all highly skilled. Indeed, this kind of opinion reflects an idealized vision that does not allow the growth of local proficiency in the provinces and regards art history as a continuous process of improvement.

[49] Maximian was mentioned only in the inscription in the narthex and not in the one in the atrium, but he was immortalized by being depicted beside the emperor in the apse.

Capitello bizantino della tribuna

Figure 13. Impost block with Julian's monogram, San Vitale, Ravenna (photo: courtesy of Istituzione Biblioteca Classense, Ravenna, Fondo Mazzotti).

The monogram, a shortened version of a name, transforms the letters into a sign with an apparent artistic value that implied its use as a decoration or as a component of the overall church *decor*. This is evident for instance in the repletion of monograms on the sculpted architectural décor of the church of Hagios Polyeuktos built before 527, and possibly between 519 and 522 (Bardill 2004, v. I pp. 62–63, 111–16), at Constantinople. There, the monograms are plentiful, likely belonging to different people but impossible to decipher[50] and positioned at different locations to become decorative elements of the architectural sculpture (Mango and Ševčenko 1961; Harrison 1989; Eastmond 2016, pp. 226–30). As recent research highlights, monograms were intended to be viewed rather than read; they were symbols to be recognized and interpreted in a visual way (Eastmond 2016, pp. 227–30). As after a few generations monograms might have been difficult to decipher even by contemporaries (Leclercq 1934, cc. 2371–72)—just as they are for us—they seal the element upon which they were inserted with a defined mark, but they lose their original function of compressed versions of his/her name, changing into signs of that person.[51] As signs, they were elements of a visual language and were meant to express messages. Yet, when monograms were used as part of the decorative program, they lost the role of mere "markers of possession" (*signes de propriété*) (Duval 1994, p. 313), or "graphic signs of authority," as in Ildar Garipzanov's recent analysis (Garipzanov 2018).[52] Rather, they

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[50] For their apparent indecipherability, Garipzanov hypothesizes that they could bear hidden messages directed to a few people who could read them (Garipzanov 2018, p. 163). However, this would be the only instance where monograms include entire messages and not just personal names and titles.

[51] It is worth noting that in ancient sources, the monogram is not considered a word but a *signum* (Fink 1984, pp. 85–86) and that several monograms of different form belonged to the same person (e.g., Maximian's monograms on his chair and on the capital described above or Areobindus's monogram on his diptychs).

[52] For they do not always include the title or office of the person, nor were they established by civil power; rather they hold a private character.

worked as markers of presence, maintaining the memory of that person for eternity.[53] Simply, they commemorated a person in a certain place, preserving his/her personal memory on a permanent basis, and added further meaning to the overall decorative program. The value of the written name in the ancient world as an element that possesses all the features of the person it signifies—a quasi-magical element—was not only retained in monograms, but was best expressed by them.[54] To a certain extent, they were intended to function as a portrait or a fully inscribed name. However, they did it in a more concealed, hidden way (Leatherbury 2020, p. 18). As they soon became undecipherable, then they solely maintained the function to indicate a forgotten presence, the distant memory of someone whose identity and deeds or piety were preserved by inscriptions or portraits with their overtly communicative role. As Avitus, Bishop of Vienne, expressed at the beginning of the sixth century, concerning a signet ring commissioned by his brother, Apollinaris Bishop of Valence, one's monogram acted one's behalf (Avitus 2016, Ep. 87), imprinting his/her presence on the element sealed with it.[55]

Unfortunately, an analysis of the tools of visual communication for the patron in the monumental buildings of Ravenna between the late sixth and the ninth century cannot be carried out, as the material evidence and written sources are too limited to indicate exact architectural settings. Portraits with accompanying inscriptions were still considered an appropriate and effective means to celebrate patrons and their deeds. This is evidenced in the mosaic panel at the northern side of the apse at Sant'Apollinare in Classe, where Archbishop Reparatus receives the privilege of tax exemption from Emperor Constantine IV and the embrace of a saint, possibly the same Apollinaris or his predecessor Maurus (Carile 2016b) (Figure 14). Although the mosaic received major restorations, which visibly altered the portraits (Iannucci 1986), this panel was modelled on the imperial panels at San Vitale, demonstrating that the Church of Ravenna did not use any new instrument of visual communication to express its power and presence in context in the Middle Ages. As for the fresco where Archbishop Martinus (810–818) is represented beside St. Peter and Apollinaris showing his piety and close connections with the Church of Rome,[56] it was detached from the southern chapel at the side of the apse at San Vitale. It is known that the chapel housed the tombs of Ecclesius, Ursicinus, and Vitalis (Agnellus 2006, *LP*, 59, 65, 68), but the loss of information on its ninth-century setting prevents any speculation on this evidence. The use of monograms seems to disappear by this time,[57] replaced by inscriptions of the patrons' full names. In the seventh century, the lead sheets covering the new roof of the Cathedral did not show the monogram of Archbishop Theodorus (677–691) but his full name, as did the cathedra of Archbishop Damian (692–708) at Sant'Apollinare in Classe (Angiolini Martinelli 1968, p. 83 n. 143). Contemporary evidence attests that monograms were still in use on seals and jewelry. Yet perhaps the easier communication allowed by a full name moved the bishop to adopt full inscriptions instead of monograms. Still, a decrease in the use of monograms in monumental decoration is evidenced in the whole Mediterranean for that period.

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[53]　Anthony Eastmond defines monograms as "images that mark the presence of a donor or patron, who therefore becomes more as an abstract concept" (Eastmond 2016, p. 227).

[54]　In this sense, sixth-century monograms in monumental contexts may have also had the function to avoid *phthonos* (the Evil Eye) and magic (Roueché and Feissel 2007).

[55]　On the role of seals as a kind of "signature card": (Volkoff 2019, p. 225). On the value of monograms in Roman antiquity, see also: (Symmachus 2002), *Ep*.II.12 (c. 385).

[56]　At the beginning on the 20th century the fresco was taken to the Museo Nazionale where it is still today.

[57]　A cross monogram of difficult reading was later reused in the belltower of the church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (Romanelli 2011, pp. 120–21).

Figure 14. Mosaic panels with privileges, apse mosaics, Sant'Apollinare, Classe (photo: W. Borghini).

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, in the monumental architecture of late antique Ravenna, portraits, inscriptions, and monograms were all means to pass on the memory of patrons and immortalize them to posterity. They were testimony to the patrons' deeds, social positions, and devotion in church buildings. Depending on their location in monumental programs and their relationship with the other elements of the décor, they were able to communicate the piety or the influence of the person to whom they referred. Moreover, they always conveyed the person's presence in context. Lay and cleric alike used the same tools which, however, had each their own specific and unique communicative power. Portraits expressed the idea of the person they represented with extraordinary immediacy, often reproducing the facial features of that person with accuracy (Marsengill 2013, pp. 47–66), or being inserted into highly explicative narrative scenes. With the accompanying inscriptions they succeeded in capturing the memory of that person with astonishing efficacy. Through their narrative and highly communicative character, monumental inscriptions celebrated the deeds of the patron and, as they often carried the name of that person in a central position, visually worked to center his/her name, succeeding not only through written but also visual communication, the level of literacy of the beholder notwithstanding. Monograms used written characters to produce symbols of the patron; thus, they were given a more concealed role: they referred to that person becoming elements of the overall décor, inextricably linking the person to the setting without necessarily being a primary subject. These three tools were all designed to bear the patrons' memories and marked the architectural spaces with their presence. Conversely, as part of overall decorative programs, their meaning and the way they referred to the person represented changed depending on their location within the building and their relationship with the rest of the architectural décor.

As this paper is intended to show, Ravenna is a privileged observatory to understand how inscriptions, iconographic evidence, and monograms—a peculiar form of ornament indeed, where text mixes with art—all were meant to cope with the surrounding images and convey messages to the viewer. More importantly, they were meant to preserve the memory of their patrons, indicating their presence, reminding the viewer of their piety or power, and pass on to posterity. Regrettably, due to the loss of visual communication codes, the ability to disentangle the characters joined together into monograms, and the loss of complete architectural and decorative settings where inscriptions and portraits were

inserted, apart from Ravenna, in most cases we are today generally unable to decipher the several layers of meanings "sealed" within that evidence.

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