Tessellated Pictures and Traditional Piety

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ABSTRACT

Tessellated Pictures and Traditional Piety

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Nearly 300 years before the rise of a ‘Christianized,’ Eastern Roman Empire, generations of inhabitants in the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East had witnessed a considerable variety and evolution of religious thought. As a result of the expansion of Christian sects throughout the Near East and Mediterranean, in 325 CE, Emperor Constantine I convened a theological council to unite his vast kingdom in the East under a single religious creed. While revisions to the text of the first ‘Nicene Creed’ and subsequent councils would be organized, many dissenting factions refused to relinquish their long-held beliefs and traditions. Some of these ‘heterodox’ sects resisted the religious arm of the Empire and concealed their practices while continuing to worship in secrecy.

Clues to the subversion of ‘orthodox’ ecclesiastical mandate may still persist in the mosaic programs of extant churches in the Mediterranean and Transjordan. In particular, the general design of mosaics in the Transjordan (e.g., the Petra Church, Petra; the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius, Khirbet al-Mukhayyat; and the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian, Jerash) are somewhat similar, yet divergent from designs found within churches from the Italian Peninsula (e.g., the Theodorean Basilical Complex, Aquileia; the Church of San Vitale, Ravenna; and the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, Classe). The purpose of this thesis is to use the principles of semiotic theory to re-evaluate the use of symbols and icons within sacred mosaic programs, juxtaposed against the historical and ecclesiastical context surrounding their creation.

Keywords: mosaics, Petra, Jerash, Khirbet al-Mukhayyat, Aquileia, Ravenna, Classe, semiotics, symbolism, iconography, Charles Sanders Peirce, Early Christianity, Arianism, Nestorianism, Manichaeism, Nicene Creed, Byzantine Empire
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At Brigham Young University, I first thank my advisors for their help and understanding as I took my first unsteady steps in the realm of academia. To Cynthia Finlayson, I owe particular thanks for her allowance, and nurture, of my interdisciplinary (and sometimes discursive) approach to archaeology. Her advice encouraged me to visit many of the sites discussed here, which afforded me an experience that I hope to repeat in the future. I also thank David Johnson for allowing me the leeway I sometimes needed in my early writing drafts. Both Cynthia and David graciously helped augment my understanding of cultural practices and influences in the Transjordan. To Zach Chase, I am deeply indebted to his guidance and assistance in parsing concepts in the realm of Semiotic theory. I know that I still have much to learn and understand in that field, but his guidance has helped me build and develop my own interpretants related to semiology. I owe a great deal to lectures and conversations where we expounded on divergent thought processes, and how to best express them in my research.

I owe an enormous amount of gratitude and appreciation to John Langdon of the History Department at University of California, Los Angeles. In the final years of my undergraduate studies there, he was a mentor who not only guided the completion of my senior thesis, but constantly praised and encouraged my historical researches. As I began work on my thesis, his corrections and additions to my understanding of historical contexts and timelines proved to be invaluable as was his constant stream of contributions and encouragement. I would also like to thank the librarians and staff who assisted me in locating rare and invaluable resources during my visit to the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library.

In arriving at this point in my academic career, I owe a great deal to my father who not only nurtured my love of history, but also my appreciation for its implications and antecedents. I especially thank my mother who, alongside Dr. Finlayson, has read and re-read virtually every iteration of my thesis chapters in search of errors. I am also grateful to my siblings for their support (and occasional distractions), along with those close family friends who listened to me vent, complain, and theorize without grumbling.
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Introduction

During the ministry of Jesus Christ, many joined his followers as a result of his fame for being able to heal those stricken with illness. Others, more interested in his words and teachings, felt peace as he spoke. We read from the Gospel of St. Matthew that “there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from [the] Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan [i.e., the Transjordan].”¹ In the centuries following the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, his apostles and other disciples sought to continue spreading the news of his life and death and what they believed it meant for all humanity. Many of these disciples, however, held varying views and beliefs amongst themselves about the meaning of the words and actions of this Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, when the Roman (Byzantine) Emperor Constantine I called together the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, many sects professed to be Christian but espoused different doctrines that conflicted with one another, particularly concerning the nature of the Godhead and the Trinity. In an attempt to resolve these conflicts of belief, Constantine hoped that the meeting of an ecclesiastical council would result in the establishment of a single unifying Trinitarian credo that the main Church body could rally behind. From this conference, the Nicene Creed was established, comprising a series of emphatic statements to answer controversial questions of church doctrine definitively.² Several factions of Christians did not

¹ Matthew 4:25, The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989).
² The text of the Nicene Creed, as recorded in 325 CE, states: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being one of substance with the Father; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost. [But those who say: ‘There was a time when he was not;’ and ‘He was not before he was made;’ and ‘He was made out of nothing,’
agree with the final wording of this ecumenical document, and many members of the dissenting blocs refused to relinquish their long-held beliefs and traditions. Some of these groups resisted the religious arm of the Empire, giving rise to the need for additional councils to solve new problems or reaffirm previous decisions, while others concealed their practices from the bishops and other priests sent to watch over them, and continued to practice their versions of Christianity in secrecy.

Regarding doctrinal implementation from Constantinople, however, modern scholars are left wondering to what extent the official creed had penetrated the hearts and minds of individuals in peripheral areas, away from the center of Byzantine political power in Constantinople. I propose that a potential method to evaluate the level of penetration resulting from the Imperial endorsement of the Nicene Creed can be seen by examining the archaeological record with respect to the artistic representations in provincial mosaics (for clues to the subversion of ecclesiastical mandate) in the Transjordan and comparing them with contemporaneous mosaics in Italy – two locations where mosaic programs dating to the Byzantine Era are still extant, as well as regions associated with other doctrinal ‘heresies’ that differed from the assumption of the Nicene Creed imposed by the Emperor in Nicaea, and later reaffirmed in the First Oecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 CE.³

My research will consist of an examination of the mosaic images that have survived in the archaeological record, from several representative churches in the Transjordan. These churches and their mosaics will then be compared with mosaics in similar-sized and

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³ These churches from Byzantine Italy were selected based on the criteria that they had Nicene mosaic decorations added or embellished during the 5th-6th century CE and, unlike many churches in Constantinople, were not altered during the turbulent periods of Byzantine Iconoclasm of the 7th and 8th centuries CE.
contemporary churches in Italy. The methodological approach for this study consists of
describing and interpreting the similarities and differences between selected mosaic images,
exploring their potential socio-religious influences (i.e., the agency used to create the mosaics
and the agency the mosaics, in turn, exert upon the viewer), in order to shed additional light on
this early era of the history of Christianity. Specifically, this thesis will help discern whether or
not divisions in doctrinal beliefs can be seen within mosaic designs of selected churches
belonging to the first sects of Christianity to develop in the Holy Land versus mosaic programs
of Romanized Italy, and to compare these programs with the theological doctrines imposed in
both the Eastern Provinces and the Italian Peninsula via Eastern Roman Imperial edict.

In the Transjordan, I have chosen to assess mosaics in the Petra Church from Petra, the
Church of St. Lot and St. Procopius near Madaba, and the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian
in Jerash (see Figure 1.1). Additionally, selected churches from Italy will be used as a
comparison group, as Christian sects maintained varying degrees of influence across the
Mediterranean Basin and factions who found numerous adherents in one region, might not find
purchase elsewhere. The selected churches and mosaics in Italy, contemporaneous to those in
the selected Trans-Jordanian churches that I shall be analyzing, include the Basilica of
Sant’Apollinare in Classe, the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, and the Theodorean Basilical
Complex in Aquileia (see Figure 1.2). By comparing these two regional sets of churches, I shall
be better able to answer the following questions: 1) Can researchers gain insight into the
religious topography of a region based on the imagery used in mosaics?; 2) In these varied
designs, are there symbols or imagery that would support an unapproved or ‘unorthodox’ view of
Jesus Christ and the Trinity incompatible with the Nicene Creed as imposed by Constantinople?
Broadly, I hypothesize that Late Antique Roman cultural influence spread far enough to satisfy the ecclesiastical and bureaucratic overseers assigned to provincial regions, but that local beliefs and traditions were also expressed in the physical designs of at least some mosaics in both these regions during the 5th and 6th centuries CE. While the cities of Jerash and Madaba were more likely to be influenced by the previous spread of Hellenistic and Roman culture, the architecture of Petra and the Nabataeans display echoes of several different cultures (e.g., Phoenician, Egyptian, Hellenistic Greek, Persian, Roman, etc.), some of which may have had an impact on the eventual selection of the mosaic art and designs used up to and through the Early Byzantine period in Petra. I specifically examine the previously mentioned churches in the Transjordan to look for evidence of expression of ‘heretical’ doctrines or ideas practiced, sub rosa, within the Late Antique Roman Empire. I will inspect surviving floor mosaics from several churches in Jordan, and both floor and wall mosaics in Italy, to examine the possibility of more heterogeneous or pluralistic local religious politics in distant provinces that may have been more liberal regarding the enforcing of ecclesiastical laws, as we see elsewhere in the Empire.

Figure 1.1: A map of Jordan and the surrounding territory, showing the relevant locations for the proposed study
The Historical Contexts – A Short Introduction

It could be said that the most significant proponent of early Christianity, both as a religion and as a movement, was the Late Antique Roman (Byzantine) Empire. Before 312 CE, Christians were just another odd religious sect that originated in the Middle East. Their monotheistic beliefs at the time were relatively novel, considering that many religions in the known world were polytheistic. As a result, Christianity was often poorly understood within well-established pagan cultural contexts. This lack of understanding engendered open Roman Imperial persecution of Christians, who sometimes became easy scapegoats for various disasters and adverse supernatural events. Thus, early Christians were forced to practice their religion in secret. The state-endorsed persecution of Christians ended after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge between Constantine I and Maxentius in 312 CE, both contenders for Roman Imperial power. Earlier, Constantine I had been made a co-ruler of the Western Roman Empire with Licinius (based in the Balkans), while Maxentius had usurped control of part of the Western Roman

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4 Other cults that focused on worshipping a single deity (e.g., Mithras, Isis, and Sol Invictus) tended to be more henotheistic rather than follow strict monotheistic tenets as professed by Christianity.
Empire (mostly in Italy, Sicily, and parts of Northern Africa) and subsequently allied with
Maximinus II Daia who ruled the Levant. The night before a major battle between these two
armies, Constantine (still a pagan) claimed to have seen a vision that promised him victory under
the Christian symbol, giving rise to the popular Latin phrase “in hoc signo vinces,” and it’s
Greek counterpart “ἐν τούτῳ νίκα” (i.e., “by this sign, conquer”).⁵ As the story goes,
Constantine I led his men into battle under a banner bearing either the Cross or the Chi-Rho, “☧”
(a symbol used by early Christians comprising the first two capitalized Greek letters of the name
“Christos”), and emerged victoriously.⁶ After Constantine’s victory, both he and Licinius
declared Christianity a valid religion, extending tolerance and standard legal protection to its
practitioners under the Edict of Milan (313 CE). In reality, this declaration of tolerance was
limited to banning the official endorsement of such persecution, as doctrinal disagreements still
occurred among rival Christian sects.⁷

Later, the Edict of Thessalonica (380 CE) declared Christianity (as defined by the Nicene
Creed issued in 325 CE) to be the official religion of the Eastern Roman Empire, whose capital
was permanently relocated to Constantinople in 330 CE.⁸ The regions controlled by the
‘Eastern’ Roman Empire (including the Transjordan and Asia Minor) would eventually become
known to scholars as the Levant of the Byzantine Empire. The Christian movement did not
originate with the Byzantine Empire, yet Constantinople as the ‘New Rome of the East’ was

⁶ Our two historical sources for this vision are not in complete agreement as to which sign was shown,
though they both describe the ‘chi-rho’ and its prominent placement upon the shields and banners of
⁷ George Ostrogorsky, History of the Byzantine State, tr. Joan Hussey (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 48-49. The alliance between Constantine and Licinius would eventually dissolve as Licinius
began to persecute Christians again, in the hope of suborning the aid of Maximinus’ pagan supporters.
incredibly influential in building up Christianity and in creating a more unified sect out of the varying peoples of this Eastern Empire which had always been more culturally vibrant and religiously diverse than its Western counterpart.

For example, some Gnostic sects, such as the Manichaeans, followed a blend of Christianity mixed with Mesopotamian-based Zoroastrianism and had a separate scriptural gospel that combined the sayings of the Babylonian Sage, Mani, with the teachings of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{9} Other sects, such as those that followed the philosophical views of Arius (a Christian presbyter from Alexandria, Egypt) were taught at formal religious schools, most notably those erected at Antioch. These Arians believed that Jesus Christ was begotten of the Father and, therefore, a separate being from and subordinate to God the Father. Additionally, Christ was also held to be separate from the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost. This perspective was at odds with the Trinitarian doctrine espoused by the Nicene Creed which had been adopted as a Byzantine religious mandate.\textsuperscript{10} Doctrines such as Manicheanism and Arianism went against the canonized ‘Trinity’ as defined in the Creed of the First Council of Constantinople (revised the original Nicene Creed, and is inaccurately called ‘the Nicene Creed’ today) which delineates three distinct but not separate aspects of the unitary True God, thus preserving monotheism in three persons.

From the viewpoint of the Emperor and his political advisors, beliefs conflicting with Nicaean doctrines, such as those previously mentioned, needed to be censored to ensure religious harmony within the Eastern Roman Empire, and this policy was pursued from a political standpoint to increase unity in, and loyalty to, the State. It was hoped that the creation of a

unifying religious climate among the populace would help avoid a political collapse similar to that which was currently occurring in Rome.\textsuperscript{11} The Byzantine emperors of the East also saw the potential of a unified and government-sanctioned religion as a military and political tool, hence the importance of disseminating their religious canon and creed throughout the Eastern Roman Empire. Historians and archaeologists principally view the Byzantine Imperial Court as having used Christianity as an instrument through which the emperors and their advisors wielded political capital.\textsuperscript{12} Looking back at the broad history of the Byzantine Empire, we can see the general results of using religion as a unifying tool, but to what degree was their unity of belief on a provincial or local level? Was this ‘unity’ less of a religious concord, and more along the lines of a practical understanding between opposing factions?

One of the curiosities of the Byzantine Empire surrounds the question of the degree of religious unity and harmony experienced in the various provinces that made up the birthplace of the Early Christian Church. In some of these Levantine provincial regions, segments of the populace had already long been converts to the Christian religion. Many of these believers came from diverse religions and ethnic origins and included Jews, Aramaeans, Greeks, Latins, Arabs, and other assorted polytheists who had converted to Christianity.\textsuperscript{13} As a result of these and other missionary efforts, combined with a general a lack of direct supervision, many early converts established a variety of heterogeneous traditions associated with their beliefs, usually based on stories of miracles, faithful disciples of Christ, or interpretations of scriptures and philosophies that pre-dated the emergence of the Byzantine Empire. When the Roman Emperor Constantine I

\begin{itemize}
  \item The Edict of Thessalonica (380 CE) established the tenets of the Nicene Creed as the official religion of the Byzantine Empire. Though debates continue as to the exact date, it is generally accepted that the Western Roman Empire fell (as an independent political and sovereign entity) around this same period, the late 4\textsuperscript{th}-mid 5\textsuperscript{th} century CE.
  \item Acts 2:9-11 KJV.
\end{itemize}
called together the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, he did so with the intention of establishing a unified line of doctrine that would be accepted and taught as orthodox by the Church at large.\textsuperscript{14} As previously mentioned, many different doctrines existed during the turbulent 3\textsuperscript{rd}-5\textsuperscript{th} centuries CE (e.g., Arianism, Manichaeism, and Nestorianism), and whose adherents persecuted each other and argued amongst themselves over conflicting points of doctrine.\textsuperscript{15} After the Nicene Creed was agreed upon by the assembled ecumenical council at Nicaea, it was sent forth to the populace of the Empire at large via Imperial decree, with the intent of correcting those who did not teach according to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Those who clung to heterodox beliefs and traditions were to be declared ‘heretics’ and were subjected to being labeled as \textit{anathema}, or condemned, by the Eastern Byzantine Church. While this threat of condemnation persuaded many to follow the Eastern Church’s doctrine, there were some who refused to relinquish the beliefs that they held dear.

In this research project, I will explore a selection of the excavated churches and mosaics found in the Transjordan, where converts to Christ had existed since His resurrection, and compare these mosaics with contemporaneous mosaics in the then newly-reconquered Byzantine territory of the Italian peninsula. This comparison is intended to assist archaeologists, anthropologists, and art historians to better understand how provincial cultural ideas and customs (as recorded in the art of religious mosaics) may have been retained in the face of imposed religious doctrines emanating from the political center of the Eastern Roman Empire.

\textsuperscript{14} It should be noted that, while Constantine claimed Christianity as the personal religion of the emperor, it was not made the official state religion until the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 CE.
\textsuperscript{15} Nestorianism was a sect of Christianity also popularly taught at Antioch alongside Arianism. The main tenet Nestorianism offered was the idea that Jesus Christ had two separate and distinct natures: ‘divine’ and ‘human.’ This belief was intended to help bridge the gap between those Christians, like the Psilanthropists who insisted that Christ, born of human (i.e., mortal) parents, could not be divine, and Christians who maintained that he was entirely divine in both body and spirit and thus immune to the frailties of a “human condition” (Ostrogorsky, \textit{History of the Byzantine State}, 49, 60).
Historical Overview – The Early Church in Jordan

I begin this thesis with a brief review of the history of the inhabitants of Nabataea and the region encompassing the Moabite Plain, among whom were some of the earliest converts to Christianity. My research and writing in this section will predominantly focus on the development of Christianity within Jordan and the ensuing interactions with the Roman and Byzantine Empires. By the time the Roman Empire encountered and annexed the province of Arabia Petraea in 106 CE, the Nabataean inhabitants had established an extensive trade network utilizing overland trade routes throughout the Near East, Arabia, Egypt, and sea routes in the Mediterranean and Red Seas. The Nabataeans had previously been invaded by various, more sophisticated Empires, such as the Neo-Babylonians, Achaemenid Persians, Macedonians, Seleucids, Ptolemaic Egyptians, and the Romans. Subsequently, each of these empires left its mark on Nabataean culture. The people of the Transjordan often had to maintain the appearance of strength and security in order to retain their autonomy and contend with the potential threats of invading enemies. Then, in 106 CE, the Romans invaded and annexed the Nabataean Kingdom, ended the existing line of royal succession and turned the once viable Nabataean Kingdom into the Roman Province of Arabia Petraea.

In the New Testament, the Transjordan is mentioned several times, both with relation to the Israelites and their history, and regarding Jesus Christ, but also with regard to the diverse groups of people to whom Christ preached and healed beyond the Jordan River.\(^\text{16}\) As a result of the preaching of Christ and his Apostles, the general province of Greater Arabia, especially the region of the Decapolis, became home to many who professed to be Christian, and eventually

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\(^{16}\) Matthew 4:24-25, 19:1-2 KJV; Mark 3:8-10 KJV; Acts 2:9-11 KJV; 2 Corinthians 11:32 KJV.
became a welcome location for many interested in promulgating their versions (or interpretations) of Christian doctrine.

In the Transjordan, I have selected three different sites for my research. These sites are spread across the Transjordan, and their distance from each other helps to explore the possibility of dissension from the established Nicene Creed during the Early Christian Period. Their distance will also help discern whether or not any given anomaly in a pavement mosaic is repeated elsewhere, possibly evincing a pattern of thematic selection, or if mosaic designs were a more localized display. Most of the mosaics at the selected sites in Jordan are well preserved and are typical examples of Early Christian mosaics with some regional variations. To begin with, I will examine the Petra Church built c. 450 CE in Petra, Jordan (see Figure 1.1). While it initially appears to have been a relatively small church, Petra became a Bishop’s See, and sometime between 500-550 CE, the Petra Church was subjected to a substantial remodeling (likely associated with the arrival of its new Bishop). This remodeling saw the addition of side aisles, an overall expansion of the grounds, and some mosaic work which may have included an alteration from the original program.17

North of Petra, located between the city of Madaba and Mt. Nebo, lies the settlement of Khirbet al-Mukhayyat (see Figure 1.1). Once a notable Moabite settlement, Madaba became a prominent location as the city revitalized itself during the Hellenistic and Roman eras and emerged as a central point of interest for early Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. Madaba served as a sort of ‘welcome center’ for religious travelers due to its proximity to both Mt. Nebo and the site along the Jordan River where Jesus was believed to have been baptized by John the Baptist. The city flourished as a result of its proximity to the pilgrimage trail, and

several of the churches built in Madaba during the 5th-6th centuries CE appear to be larger than similar churches constructed in the same era within the Transjordan, attesting to the significance of the locale. Mt. Nebo, a nearby point of interest, is where, according to tradition, Moses died after commanding that Joshua lead the Israelites over the Jordan River. A shrine was placed atop the mountain to the great prophet of the Exodus, and several churches were built nearby as a result. One of these edifices was the Church of St. Lot and St. Procopius. Constructed in 557 CE, under the reign of Emperor Justinian, the mosaics in the church are structured similarly to the designs found in the Petra Church. Both mosaics share comparable images of local animals, human figures, and other images that may be meant to carry a variety of meanings.

The city of Jerash (see Figure 1.1), also known as ancient Gerasa, was part of a group of ten Hellenistic and Roman-era city-states referred to collectively in the New Testament and other secular accounts as the Decapolis. After being conquered by the Romans in 106 CE, the city received a considerable amount of attention and a substantial number of construction projects, including a triumphal arch built to honor Emperor Hadrian (117-138 CE). As the town grew, several Byzantine churches were built within the city to convert the populace to the Christian religion. The erection of some of these churches, such as the Church of St. Cosmas and St. Damian, date to 529-531 CE during the reign and construction programs of Justinian. Several of the churches in and around Jerash boast of having some spectacular mosaics that were commissioned during a period of accelerated and enhanced church construction. For my research questions, the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian is of particular interest, as the walls

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18 Deuteronomy 31-34 KJV.
and roof were destroyed in an earthquake, and thus its floor mosaics were preserved from the ravages of later iconoclasts by a sealed context created by the building’s collapse.

**Historical Overview – The Byzantine Churches of Italy**

When the Roman Empire split, there began an uneasy peace between the Eastern and Western halves. Ostensibly, the two political entities were united in heritage and acted in the best interests of the Roman Empire as a whole. However, conflicting opinions, encroaching enemies, and questionable command decisions gave rise to increasing tensions between the two imperial powers which culminated in a state of war. As the Eastern Roman Empire emerged victorious, the Western Roman Empire was left to exist as a mere shadow of itself and began to crumble into obscurity. The period of the impoverishment of the Western Roman Empire is often cited as the ‘Fall of Rome’ and lasted from approximately the 3rd to the 5th century CE. This ‘fall,’ however, did not spell the end of Roman political power in the East. Indeed, the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire survived and had periods of expansion and contraction until 1453 CE, when the Ottoman Muslim Turks finally conquered Constantinople. After Christianity achieved primacy in the West in 312 by force of arms and then was legalized through the empire by decree in 313, it took almost a century before Theodosius made Nicene Trinitarian Christianity the sole State Religion of Rome, first at Constantinople in 381 and then by force of arms against two Western usurpers by 394. In so doing, Theodosius reaffirmed his commitment to using Byzantine Imperial and secular power, in his role as *Vicegerent* (or “Chief Bishop of Them All”), to enforce ecclesiastical decrees and decisions.

By the 5th century CE, Italy and the remains of the Western Roman Empire had been conquered by various Gothic kingdoms and neighboring political entities. Meanwhile, in the East, the Emperor Justinian came into power in 527 CE and began several military campaigns
against Byzantium’s rivals. Part of these military campaigns was focused on restoring the glory of the Roman Empire. From 535-540 CE, Justinian’s general, Belisarius, waged war against the Ostrogothic Kingdom of Italy and retook much of the Italian peninsula in the name of the Byzantine Empire. One of the results of this campaign was the re-establishment of Orthodox (Byzantine) Christian churches and religious practice throughout Italy. This portion of the Empire, much like the Transjordan, was not religiously united under a single creed. Rome had been and still was the capital of the Latin (Roman Catholic) Church, an entity that had conflicted (in varying degrees) with the Orthodox (Byzantine) Church. The sects of Christianity previously mentioned received different degrees of acceptance and welcome from the populace of these Italian provinces. This diversity of doctrine may be evident in the mosaic programs of its numerous churches.

The sites I have selected from Italy for comparison include the Theodorean Basilical Complex in Aquileia (see Figure 1.2). After the Edict of Milan was issued in 313 CE (guaranteeing religious freedom by law), the Christian community in Aquileia built twin basilica-style churches as some of the first publicly acknowledged places of Christian worship. Later, one of the basilicas would be rebuilt utilizing Romanesque-Gothic architectural styles, but instead of replacing the original 4th- and 5th-century floor mosaics, the newer pavements were simply laid on top of the originals, thus preserving the magnificent décor from those early dates. Many of these mosaics include geometric shapes and symbols, along with other pictorial figures of both humans and animals with particularly sacred connotations. The mosaics in this church, while arranged before those at Ravenna and Classe, help provide a baseline for Early Christian/Late Roman mosaic styles and designs.
The Basilica of San Vitale, in Ravenna, is one of the most well-known early Christian churches built in Italy. Built during the 6th century CE, San Vitale is located in Ravenna (see Figure 1.2), which had become the ‘final’ capital of the Western Roman Empire in 404 CE and was reconquered by Belisarius in 540 CE. The Basilica of San Vitale was dedicated shortly thereafter in 547 CE. The church still contains many of the original wall mosaics that attest to the piety and wealth of the Empire under Justinian. Some of the floor mosaics have been replaced or covered up, but several areas along the periphery of the church are of original Byzantine construction and design. The remaining mosaics, like the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian, contain both images of symbolic animals, and geometric shapes potentially symbolic in their proportions and number.

The third church I have selected in Italy is the Basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, a smaller suburban area south of Ravenna (see Figure 1.2), this church was also built during the reign of Justinian in the 6th century. Consecrated in 549 CE, the basilica is a large structure that was decorated in the typical style for the era. Much of the original flooring has been covered up and partially destroyed; however, recent excavations have unearthed a simple Byzantine floor mosaic consisting of sacred geometric shapes and patterns.20

**Theoretical Perspectives**

As of now, I am not aware of any studies specifically looking at mosaics in the Transjordan with the purpose of searching for possible symbolic themes that may have diverged from typical Byzantine Christian symbolic programs and decorative mosaic styles. To explore the possible relationship between stated beliefs and what was being visually depicted in church embellishments, I will scrutinize the mosaic pavements for various styles, patterns, colors, and

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20 Khrisat, Hamarneh, and Mjalli, “Mosaic Floor of SS. Cosmas and Damian Church,” 46.
object shapes used in church construction and decoration. There exists the possibility that the artist(s) responsible for the designs and construction of these mosaics may have intended them to have a different indexical meaning based on the understanding of the viewer. If so, these mosaics may have been attempts at changing the world around them, thus imbuing the mosaics with a limited form of agency. My research will primarily focus on the spheres of influence that may have had an effect on the mosaic artist(s) by determining what was and was not within ‘normal’ parameters for mosaic design in the cultural and, more importantly, religious contexts of the Early Christian Period.

In this regard, Semiotic theory will be most helpful in answering these research questions. Semiotics is the linguistic theory behind the logic of sign-making and use, and was explored by various philosophers from the Greco-Roman through the Medieval/Byzantine Periods, however “the two primary traditions in contemporary semiotics stem respectively from the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857– 1913) and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914).”\(^{21}\) According to Saussure, the relationship between a symbol (the “signifier”) and that symbol’s meaning (the “signified”) are ultimately arbitrary, but it is that arbitrariness and allowance for multiple meanings that makes language a sophisticated program.\(^{22}\) Saussure’s semiotic model is described as a “dyadic model,” which means that there is a two-part connection (the “signifier” and the “signified”) to utilize and understand language, whereas Peirce’s theory follows the roles of three foci: the “object” (or the object/symbol being used), the “representamen” (what message the instigator wants to convey), and the “interpretant”

(what the receiver understands from the sign). Through Semiotics, scholars understand that as there is usually no innate connection between a sign and its ascribed meaning, and that multiple signals can be ascribed to a single sign. It is this idea, that by knowing the multivaried uses of a particular sign, an artist/designer/patron could include a symbol that they could feel confident would carry a specific signal to one audience that would interpret it in an orthodox manner. Meanwhile another individual (because of their understanding of an alternate Christian doctrine) might perceive a heterodox interpretant of the same symbol in line with their beliefs. In this way, such heterodox worshippers could practice their beliefs in relative secrecy, without censure from either orthodox clergy or laity.

As my research into the beliefs and ideas proposed by early Christian sects in the Transjordan deepens, and as I compare these examples with similar mosaic programs from Northern Italy, their signs and symbols will become more accessible for identification. From this knowledge, I will be better able to draw connections and intents based on the non-verbal cues that may exist within extant archaeological remains from these provincial regions; particularly from those sites dating to the rise of Byzantine orthodoxy and its attempts to impose Nicene Doctrine on previously established sects of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Introduction and History of Mosaics in the Transjordan

Initially, scholars believed that the lack of sustained cultural development among inhabitants of the Transjordan was likely the result of alternating periods of abandonment and reoccupation.24 Early in the 20th century CE, however, archaeologists studying the region believed that after a period of robust Bronze Age settlement building in the North and Central regions, all sedentary habitation ceased; from which, it was concluded, that between the 23rd – 18th centuries BCE, there was a broad scale reversion from sedentary behaviors to strict nomadism.25 Following this era, an active Bronze Age emerged with the redevelopment of urban settlements and the eventual emergence of powerful kingdoms and city-states. The populations of the Transjordan in the Late Bronze Age (c. 1550-1200 BCE) are often denoted as belonging to the Edomite or the Moabite Kingdoms. These political entities are sometimes referred to as military kingdoms as they constructed border fortresses between the Transjordan (modern-day Jordan) and Cisjordan (modern-day Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon) in order to not only establish protection from neighboring kingdoms but to assert their legitimacy. Wars and skirmishes often broke out between the Moabites, Edomites, and the neighboring Israeliite Kingdom, and are referenced in religious texts including some of the books of the Christian Old Testament and the Jewish Torah.26 Archaeological excavations at Bronze Age sites have

26 Numbers 20:17-21 KJV; Judges 3:12-30 KJV, 11:17 KJV; 1 Samuel 14:47 KJV; 2 Samuel 8:13-14 KJV; 2 Kings 13:20 KJV, 24:2 KJV; Jeremiah 24:3 KJV. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and does not include references in other works and books that have not been considered to be ‘canon.’ It should also be noted that these references are pulled from texts that were written and edited to be poetical, allegorical, and with a distinct religious bias toward the Israelites. The relative strengths, weaknesses,
revealed very little regarding private or religious architectural decoration, and no mosaics have been discovered in the Transjordan that pre-date the conquests of Alexander the Great (the earliest of which dates to c. 104 BCE at the Herodian Palace of Machaerus in the Transjordan).27 In order to understand the evolution of such archaeological remains and their impact on later Byzantine mosaics, we must first understand the origin and evolution of the process of mosaic making, as well as their potential symbolic functions over time.

**Development of Mosaics as an Art Form**

Today, the art of mosaic making is generally regarded as a style of decoration which primarily uses stones or other durable material to create an aesthetic pattern or image. To be more precise, however, mosaic decoration is the multi-media art of inlaying items of assorted colors on a wall, floor, or artifact in order to create a dramatic image. The word *mosaic* is likely based on the Greek μοῦσα (‘muse’), though attempts have been made to etymologically link this term with the Arabic مزَاوَاق (‘decorated’).28 As an art form, mosaic decoration is traceable to the late Neolithic Period. Many consider the Ancient Greeks to be the creators of the mosaic art form. However, the best example of early inlay decoration dates to c. 2600 BCE with the discovery of the Sumerian ‘Standard of Ur’ (see Figure 2.1) from ancient Mesopotamia. The ‘Standard’ depicts images of both warfare and victory, and a more tranquil perspective on domestic life within an ancient Sumerian city. While the exact purpose of this Sumerian artifact is not certain, it remains a beautifully preserved example of mosaic inlay, using a collage of shell, bone, red limestone and lapis lazuli for decoration, and bitumen as a pasting agent.29

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29 Fischer, *Mosaic History and Technique*, 34.
salient point surrounding the “Standard” is that the tesserae (the small, individual building blocks that make up the body of the mosaic) are all cut or worked by hand to fit the mosaic, and are placed in such a way as to present a flush surface. The pasting agent, in this early mosaic form, can be seen between the tesserae, which helped separate the characters from the background. This separation is a significant feature in mosaic art and will eventually evolve into more intricately defined borders around characters. For all the importance that the Standard of Ur is in the development of mosaic art, the practice of utilizing clear-cut tesserae of different media eventually fades.

Archaeological evidence points to Gordion, Greece during the 9th century BCE, as the next major shifting point in mosaic design. Uncovered within several homes and large buildings (e.g., palaces and temples) were curiously elaborate pavement mosaics (see Figure 2.2). These mosaics were constructed using water-worn pebbles of various shades instead of intentionally cut

tesserae of various stones. While the materials may be crude compared to the manufactured fittings of the earlier Sumerian artisans of Mesopotamia, the designs on the pavements show more complexity when compared to previous pebble mosaics from Greece and Anatolia.

Another shift in mosaic decoration takes place during the 5th century BCE. Pebble mosaics found in Olynthos, Greece exhibit fewer geometric shapes than those at Gordion and instead introduce figural imagery and ornamental borders (see Figure 2.3). It is possible that the mosaics at Olynthos are not the first of their type, but they remain among the earliest examples of their kind that can be definitively dated. This shift in subject matter is dramatic,

Figure 2.2: Pebble mosaic from Megaron 2 (Last, Joseph S. Watercolor reconstruction of the pebble mosaic from Megaron 2. 1956. Penn Museum, plan 1956-17, 400833)

but when examined within historical contexts, may have been inspired by frieze designs found on public buildings, such as the Parthenon, and the red-figure and black-figure pottery popular among the political and economic elite of Classical Greece. Upon consideration of this change in style, Pliny the Elder was prompted to record that “pavements are an invention of the Greeks, who also practised (sic) the art of painting them, till they were superseded by mosaics.”

A few centuries later, Pella not only became the capital of Alexander the Great’s Hellenic Empire but is also where archaeologists have found several impressively decorative mosaics that build on previous innovations elsewhere in Greece. Mosaic development in Pella during the 4th-2nd century BCE shows a significant change in artistry and an expansion in the available color palette. Following the trend of modeling mosaic images from images on painted vases, Greek artists began working and cutting tesserae, not only to better create the image they were

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attempting but to also add a sense of perspective and depth. During the fourth century BCE, in addition to using cut tesserae, an innovation was discovered involving the use of lead strips to separate and clearly define figures from the background tesserae. A similar method used by fresco painters during the Italian Renaissance has been observed, but this Greek innovation is the earliest documented evidence of such a practice.\textsuperscript{35} Increasingly small-cut tesserae helped add a level of detail and fidelity to the images seen on mosaics, even when viewed at short-range. One of the best examples of detailed mosaics using fine-cut tesserae comes from one of the only named mosaic artists from antiquity, Sosos of Pergamon, and “The Unswept Floor” mosaic (see Figure 2.4).\textsuperscript{36} While this mosaic has been dated to the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century BCE, the earliest documented example of detailing with small-cut tesserae in Greece dates to around 325 BCE at the Temple of Zeus at Olympia.\textsuperscript{37}

In terms of using worked tesserae, there are two methods of construction that are generally used for different effects. \textit{Opus tesselatum} consists of square or rectangular stones which are set in orderly rows. This type of tesserae is the most common as it makes up the body of the composition, however, using only square-cut tesserae reduces the amount of detail that can be displayed, which is particularly crucial in compositions that will be habitually seen from a short distance, such as pavement and wall mosaics. The second type of tesserae used is referred to as \textit{opus vermiculatum}, or “worm-shaped work,” and consists of tiny tesserae that have been irregularly cut.\textsuperscript{38} These can sometimes be reclaimed from the debitage produced while cutting \textit{opus tesselatum}, but can also be specially made to fit the pattern required by the design of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Photios Petsas, "Ten Years at Pella," \textit{Archaeology} 17, no. 2 (1964): 78-79; Dunbabin, "Technique and Materials of Hellenistic Mosaics," 272; M. Robertson, "Greek Mosaics," 75.
\item Pliny the Elder, \textit{The Natural History}, 36.60.
\item Fischer, \textit{Mosaic History and Technique}, 41.
\item Lucille Alice Roussin, "The Iconography of the Figural Pavements of Early Byzantine Palestine," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1985), 35.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
mosaic. The size of tesserae are not uniform across the centuries, but mosaics can be broadly categorized between earlier or later periods because “it is generally true that later mosaics are made of larger tesserae.”\(^{39}\) The combination of opus tesselatum and vermiculatum is what allowed mosaicists to advance their technical and artistic skills and produce the works admired today.

Correspondingly, artisans during this period began to use an increased variety of colored stone and glass materials in their mosaic construction. Following the pattern of imitating current painting styles and format, mosaicists used naturally occurring color gradients and shading to give added perspective and depth of field to their creations. The “Unswept Floor” mosaic previously mentioned is an excellent example of this. With the added detail and definition gained by innovations involving shading, perspective, and purposefully shaped tesserae, some mosaic images of the Hellenic and Hellenistic Eras attempted to depict action in a manner that appeared to be more evocative than previous iterations of the craft.

![Figure 2.4: Detail of “Unswept Floor” (Musei Vaticani. Detail of Asàrotos ôíkos mosaic. Accessed January 3, 2019. http://www.museivaticani.va)](image)

Modern scholars judge the Hellenistic Period to end c. 31 BCE around the time of the Battle of Actium. Prior to this, Roman elites had grown fond of Greek/Hellenistic culture and art and thus began to borrow and assimilate various aspects of Greek culture into their own. This

\(^{39}\) Roussin, “Iconography of the Figural Pavements,” 35.
assimilation was done both physically (i.e., art and architecture) and psychologically (i.e., poetry and philosophy). The art of mosaic making with cut-tesserae had become vogue among the leading citizens of the Hellenized world, and those who wished to present themselves, or their communities, as having greater wealth and social standing. Subsequent Roman patrons then inherited these trends and would expand on the Hellenized Greek/Macedonian foundation. In order to provide consumers with larger-scale pavement mosaics during the Early Roman Period, the use of multiple colors was reduced to a more unadorned black and white color scheme using basalt and marble (or limestone).40 The monochromatic color scheme, however, did not hinder artists from depicting striking scenes from epic poetry and mythology. It has been argued that, unlike later examples from the Middle Ages, these images of deities were not generally viewed as inherently religious. Unless placed in the context of a temple, or other site considered sacred to one of the gods or goddesses, it is likely that images were selected at the discretion of the patron and were a part of a universal theme that showcased the might and power of the dominant Roman culture rather than for religious effect.41 Nevertheless, without documentation from the patron or artisan defining the purpose and intent of these images, no definite answer can be given on this account, only supposition from contextual clues.

During the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, several references are made to the mosaic school located in Alexandria as producing some of the most technically involved and elaborate mosaics in the ancient world.42 Many copies of these technical Alexandrian mosaics have been found elsewhere in the Mediterranean Basin, but only a few of the 2nd-1st century BCE originals have survived.43 Mosaics from the Hellenistic and Roman Periods exhibit an interest in

40 Fischer, *Mosaic History and Technique*, 53-54.
41 Ibid., 53, 70.
depicting detailed images with a variety of naturally shaded stones. Figures often included representations of Greek and Roman deities, either directly or symbolically, but any religious connotations of these depictions are generally considered circumstantial and dependent on other religious paraphernalia. Popular paintings profoundly influenced these mosaics, and as such, the artists sometimes used landscape scenes to depict various settings or instances of legendary exploits and figural activity.

It remains an archaeological curiosity that evidence of a Nabataean-style of mosaic art form has not yet been discovered via archaeological excavations in the Transjordan, especially given the general Hellenization of the region during the 3rd to late-1st century BCE. Of the pavement mosaics that do appear in Palestine, it is interesting to note that they “show clear signs of the Romanization, as opposed to the Hellenization, of the province.”44 As a significant economic power in the region, and one trading with centers of mosaic production such as Alexandria and Antioch, it is reasonable to suspect that some example of inlay/mosaic art was practiced or imported by the Nabataeans. Incredibly, however, only a few rare examples have been identified and dated between the first century CE and the significant Byzantine construction efforts of the 4th and 5th centuries CE.45 As such, it is also likely that the evidence of ‘Romanization’ we see in the Transjordan may prove to combine Nabataean, Roman, and Hellenistic artistic trends especially at Petra (or even in Bosra, Syria which was a later Nabataean capital city). There remains the hope, however, that with continued excavation in the Middle East, additional evidence of Nabataean-made inlay/mosaic art will be better documented.

The overall shift between Roman-era mosaics and Early Christian/Byzantine mosaics is often considered to be quite sharp, but upon further examination, “the change of direction was evolutionary, rather than revolutionary.” Following in the Greek tradition of mosaic art, Roman figural mosaics aimed at creating lifelike imagery, using all the skills available to the artist to create a series of figures in scenes of action using both modeling and shading.

One of the hallmarks of Early Christian iconography and art was the intent to convey a story with a faith-based message. These images were explicitly calculated to produce a psychological effect or a prompt to any viewers familiar with the doctrine and symbolism of the Christian faith. Under the Byzantine Empire, this program of mosaic making became a powerful propaganda tool, as mosaics were no longer viewed as being merely representative of a particular figure or scene, but now showed idealized versions of a story and the characters. The idealization of characters helped to simplify the depiction of sacred themes by standardizing the symbols attached to notable figures and was meant to remind the viewer of a particular faith-promoting individual (or story) and re-orient their thoughts from the secular to the spiritual. This practice would also become one of the prototypes for later religious icon use. Similar to the use of lead wiring to create a more detailed outline for an image, mosaicists often drew a *sinopia*, or underpainting on the uppermost layer of mortar to act as a guide and outline for the final image. Sometimes these *sinopie* do not match the final product, giving scholars a glimpse into alternate designs and insight into the potential implications of changing a proposed image at the last minute either at the instigation of either the artist or the patron. The discovery of a *sinopia*

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46 Fischer, *Mosaic History and Technique*, 58.
47 Ibid., 70.
could also indicate that a particular mosaic has been refurbished, or replaced, possibly as a result of *iconoclastic* (literally, “image-breaking”) movements or a shift in a preferred doctrinal creed.

**Notes on Pavement Mosaics**

One of the side effects of the Roman modification and industrialization of pavement mosaics was a stark change in style. As previously mentioned, in order to cover larger surface areas more economically, Roman mosaicists shifted from using shading and multiple colors of tesserae to a starker monochromatic scheme in the days of the Early Republic. This shift did not mean the end of polychrome mosaics, but large public areas could be covered at a faster rate if less detail was needed. With this shift in color usage, styles and depictions for mosaics in the Early Republic were eased toward a more straightforward construction through the use of uniform geometric patterns that could be repeated until a sufficient area had been decorated; although smaller, private homes, often retained or copied earlier Hellenistic polychrome mosaic styles. This style of ‘carpeting’ a more substantial area with mosaics would become a mainstay in future Byzantine pavements, as patterns could be recurring until the job was completed; which also meant that artists no longer needed to come up with original ideas for every part of the available floor space.

While carpet patterning could be repeated, artists and patrons still needed areas to display genuinely remarkable and unique talent, so small areas between or in the center of these geometric patterns contained stylized images. These more distinct images, referred to as *emblema*, are often more detailed than the surrounding patterns and were used to alter the perception of flat surface. These more detailed images were created with a metal wire or border surrounding them to define the figure better and were often assembled off-site in a mosaicists’ workshop. By creating an *emblema* in a workshop, an artist could not only work...
more comfortably at a table or bench rather than from the floor, but they also had more convenient access to a broader array of materials and colors (if the *emblema* were part of a polychrome mosaic). Using an *emblema* within a mosaic also had an added benefit to the patron, as once installed in the floors of a house, they could either stay in-situ at the sale of the home (thus adding increased value) or be removed and relocated in a patrons’ new residence.

If the art of mosaic making is the art of inlaying complementary and contrasting colors against each other to depict an image, then this means an artist is not necessarily limited to one type of material. Early Greek mosaics, as we have seen, consisted of naturally worn pebbles which later evolved into worked pebbles, and then into worked square tesserae. Using natural stones from the Mediterranean Region, artists were able to derive a variety of colors: red could be found in reddish limestone or baked ceramics, blue from lapis lazuli imported from Afghanistan, green was a result of copper oxides, shades of white could come from marble or limestone, oranges and yellows came from naturally shaded stones, and shades of black were provided by basalt or black marble.\(^{50}\) Alternately, bitumen could be used to blacken tesserae artificially, a technique that would be mimicked later during the Byzantine Period by the use of gold leafing on background tesserae, and to accentuate sacred symbols.

Towards the end of the Hellenistic Period, *smalti* (or glass tesserae) became increasingly popular and would become a highly valued material in mosaic production. The process of coloring glass involves metal oxides, not organic dyes. Thus, given the technological limitations, the majority of *smalti* found dating to the Late Antique Period tend to be dark blue or green.\(^{51}\) The production of this type of glass involved the combination of sand (silica), limestone (calcium carbonate), and alkalines (soda or potash to lower the melting point), which was then


\(^{51}\) Fischer, *Mosaic History and Technique*, 143.
melted to form a flat glass disk. Similar to methods used to work stone tesserae, the disk of *smalti* would be clipped with a pair of snippers or struck with a hammer while resting on a “Hardie” (a small chisel-like object embedded in a block of wood).52 The resulting stress fracturing of the *smalti* created seemingly random curved lines and edges that, when placed in the mosaic, catch nearby light at different angles providing a more luminous and vivacious scene.53

We are indebted to Pliny the Elder and Vitruvius for providing records detailing not only the means but also the methods of architectural construction during the early days of the Roman Empire.54 One of the most common crafts seen in many public and private buildings throughout the Roman Empire were pavement mosaics; consequently, it comes as no surprise that two of the most well-known Roman authors on architecture devoted some attention to their construction. Pliny’s *Natural History* includes a general ‘tricks of the decorative trade’ that offers advice on a wide variety of subjects; thus he provides readers with a general understanding of the architectural and artistic creative processes involving a variety of media.55 Vitruvius’ *Ten Books on Architecture* entirely focuses on architecture and subjects related to construction processes. Therefore, he records the basic as well as some additional advanced techniques related to pavement construction.56 The following description of pavement construction is illustrated in Figure 2.5, where the first layer is the natural soil, leveled and packed tightly together. Once firmly packed, the second layer, referred to as the *statumen*, and consists of a rough bedding of rubble, stones, and broken pottery “no smaller than can fill the hand.”57 The third strata begins

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53 Ibid., 25.
55 Ibid., 36.62-63.
57 Ibid., 88.
by using a coarse mortar, the *rudus*, consisting of gravel and lime (3:1) for indoor pavements and gravel, lime, and crushed brick (2:2:1) for open-air pavements. The *rudus* is layered and must be allowed to settle and manually compacted until it reaches a thickness of 9-12 inches (thicker if the pavement will be exposed to the elements). The suggested thickness is to help prevent the mortar from expanding and contracting (which would ruin the surface tesserae) as the seasonal weather changes. The fourth layer is known as the *nucleus*, a fine mortar layer consisting of crushed bricks and lime (3:1), and is layered 6 inches on top of the *rudus*. Before the *nucleus* is poured, however, the mosaicist will place lead or copper wiring as an outline for the *emblema*, or medallions, that will be transported from the workshop and placed in their assigned positions. Once the inset wiring is in place, the *nucleus* will be poured, and the *emblema* slotted inside the frame. After this, the mosaicist and his apprentices will begin adding the *nucleus* across the remaining floor, into which the tesserae will be pressed. This process is time-consuming, and only enough mortar is poured to allow for a single day’s work. By layering the *nucleus* in smaller segments, the mosaicist avoids the problem of the mortar drying out before the tesserae can be inserted. After the mosaic surface is completed, additional fine mortar is poured to fill any gaps between the tesserae, and the pavement receives both a rough and a delicate polishing treatment intended to wear away any sharp points.\(^{58}\) Vitruvius also suggests sealing the mosaic surface yearly with olive oil to prevent frost damage.\(^{59}\)

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\(^{58}\) The construction of wall and ceiling mosaics is very similar, albeit the strata are less thick, an additional medium-grit layer of mortar supplements the *rudus* and *nucleus*, and wooden pegs are driven into the brick walls to provide additional support for the *rudus*.

The Nabataeans and the Use of Mosaics in Petra during the Byzantine Period

In order to discuss the first appearances of mosaic floor programs in Petra, Jordan during the Early Byzantine Period, it is essential to understand the origins and history of the Nabataeans of Petra and the cultural and artistic influences that impacted this civilization over time. The origin of the Nabataean people is difficult to trace as, again, no indigenous written records dating to their emergence at Petra have been uncovered. Our only accounts of the Nabataeans come from quotations found in Late Greek and Roman sources.60 Two popular theories center around their descent from an Arabian tribe originating from north of the Transjordan (possibly from as far away as Syria), or they may trace their lineage to tribes that ventured up from the south in Saudi Arabia and around the Persian Gulf.61 The former theory, rather than the latter, has shown to be the most likely explanation; however, the origins of the Nabataeans is still hotly debated among scholars. The heritage and traditions of their desert-dwelling ancestors instilled in the Nabataeans an appreciation and an understanding of the limited resources around them. Through

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ingenious systems of cistern construction and placement, along with other water conservation techniques inherited from earlier civilizations, the Nabataeans “pushed the boundaries of agriculture farther into the desert than any other people in [that] part of the world.”

Not only were the Nabataeans able to farm more productively than previous civilizations through their innovative water conservation methods, but they also constructed cisterns in remote places that tapped into local springs and collected rainwater for future use. The mouths of these remote cisterns and reservoirs were then disguised to blend in with the rest of the surrounding environment. These hidden reserves became an invaluable resource for both defensive and economic purposes. If threatened by an invading army, the Nabataeans could flee further into the desert and sustain their families and livestock through these hidden springs while the lack of available water limited the enemy army’s ability to search or pursue. Later, as the Nabataeans began to establish their monopoly on trade through the deserts of Arabia, these hidden cisterns became oases for merchants who needed to rest their pack animals and refresh their water supplies.

The Nabataeans traded in a wide variety of products, both natively produced goods (such as bitumen from the Dead Sea, incense from Yemen, balsam from Jordan, salt, myrrh, copper from Southern Jordan, olives, dates, and olive wood) and exotic items imported from afar. It has been suggested that Nabataean merchants were able to conduct trade with India and had

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63 Erickson-Gini and Israel, "Excavating the Nabataean Incense Road," 50; Lawlor, *Nabataeans in Historical Perspective*, 79.

64 Erickson-Gini and Israel, "Excavating the Nabataean Incense Road," 24; Lawlor, *Nabataeans in Historical Perspective*, 76.

65 Erickson-Gini and Israel, "Excavating the Nabataean Incense Road," 24-25; Lawlor, *Nabataeans in Historical Perspective*, 73-76.
contacts as far east as China, well before the first century CE.\textsuperscript{66} Virtually every caravan that ventured across the Middle East passed through Nabataean-controlled lands (see Figure 2.6). If the caravan was not Nabataean in origin, tolls and tributes were exacted for the use of way stations and entrances into cities where the merchant could expect protection and opportunity for trade. Domination over overland trade routes and access to international markets made the Nabataeans a relatively wealthy and prosperous civilization, especially considering the harsh desert environment of their home. This wealth also allowed the Nabataeans to build lavish rock-cut tombs, free-standing temples, comfortable homes, and lavish palaces that exhibited Hellenistic Greek influences before their eventual annexation by Rome in 106 CE. However, only a few examples of mosaic floor and other wall decorations (e.g., the Nabataean mansion in Az-Zantur) have been discovered that pre-date the Roman annexation of Petra.\textsuperscript{67} Nabataean wealth inevitably attracted the attention of various political powers who sought to control the economic advantages so jealously guarded by the Nabataeans, themselves. Thus, “it was inevitable that the kingdom controlled from Petra should arouse the cupidit of the Roman Empire. Apart from its importance as a buffer state between the nomadic tribes of the Arabian hinterland and the settled coastal regions, its great wealth was a magnet.”\textsuperscript{68} After the Nabataean Kingdom had become allied with Rome, and in order to improve their political standing, Nabataean merchants, through their intimate knowledge of Arabian trade routes, “might have facilitated Roman penetration of South Arabia.”\textsuperscript{69}


\textsuperscript{67} Kolb et al., “Excavations on Az-Zantur in Petra,” 261-77.


\textsuperscript{69} Steven Sidebotham, "Aelius Gallus and Arabia," \textit{Latomus} 45, no. 3 (1986): 594.
Roman Annexation of the Transjordan

In the first century BCE, Pompey the Great, a member of the First Triumvirate of Rome, and the Roman Senate became concerned with the apparent unrest and constant conflict within the failing Seleucid Empire (in modern Turkey and Armenia) on the eastern border of the steadily expanding Roman Republic.\textsuperscript{70} Civil revolt and conflict had been almost continuous

\textsuperscript{70} Roman policy, with relation to conflicts happening near their borders, was to step forward and offer to mediate a peace settlement or at least a cessation of hostilities. This was done to prevent any conflict from spilling over into the city of Rome or any Roman-held provinces, rather than out of a desire for a genuinely peaceful existence. If the conflict could not be resolved through mediation and diplomacy,
since the death of the Seleucid Emperor Antiochus IV in 164 BCE, which culminated in the
Third Mithrandic War (73-63 BCE). In 66 BCE, towards the conclusion of the war, Pompey
sent a portion of his forces to take possession of Syria, where he traveled after the war to meet
with ambassadors from various political states in the Middle East. Still concerned with unrest in
Syria and the Transjordan, Pompey steadily began to eliminate established and potential threats
to the newly conquered Roman provinces to the north.

It is at this time, 66 BCE, that a Jewish Civil War broke out between two brothers,
Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, of the Hasmonean Dynasty in Judaea, each vying for the right to rule.
Aristobulus eventually succeeded and exiled Hyrcanus. Not willing to give up his potential
kingdom so easily, Hyrcanus traveled to Petra to beg the support of the Nabataean king Aretas
III. Aretas saw the outbreak of another civil war in Judaea as an opportunity to spread his
influence and possibly take control of neighboring Jewish territory, and so pledged his support to
Hyrcanus’ cause. Their combined forces managed to rout Aristobulus’ army and lay siege to
Jerusalem, but not before Aristobulus could send messengers to Pompey, pleading for support.
Anxious to end a conflict that could adversely affect Roman territorial possessions in Anatolia
and the eastern Mediterranean coast (especially Rome’s newly established colony at
Beirut/Beritus), Pompey dispatched his general Scaurus to help negotiate a peaceable solution
between the two factions. After hearing the persuasive arguments (and bribes) from both sides,
Pompey and Scaurus ruled in favor of Aristobulus. Aretas, not wanting to provoke or
challenge the armies of Pompey, broke the siege and chose to retire.

Roman armies were often tasked with enforcing a peace through conquest of the belligerent parties.
Thus, even during the days of the Republic, Rome’s need to expand was based in the desire to keep the
city of Rome, and her territories, safe from potential destruction.

72 It is speculated that Pompey and Scaurus ruled in favor of Aristobulus in order to maintain a power
struggle between the Judaean and Nabataean Kingdoms, and that it would be much easier to defeat the
In 63 BCE, seeing an opportunity to settle the power struggle between the two kingdoms, Pompey marched his forces south towards Petra. Aristobulus, anxious to deal the Nabataeans a heavy blow offered to provide support and guide Pompey through the desert to Petra. After some time spent with the Roman Army, Aristobulus unexpectedly decided to withdraw his support and returned to Jerusalem. Angered by this sudden betrayal and finding the gates of Jerusalem shut to his generals and emissaries, Pompey rerouted his forces and marched on Jerusalem instead. Thus, Petra and the Nabataeans’ relative autonomy (as they would soon become an allied client kingdom to Rome) was saved for another 160 years until the Roman Emperor Trajan (98-117 CE) formally annexed the region in 106 CE. Seeing a mutual benefit to be gained, a Nabataean king (possibly Aretas III Philhellene) signed a treaty affirming the mutual friendship between the Nabataean Kingdom and the Republic of Rome. This treaty recognized Roman supremacy in the Transjordan but also guaranteed Nabataean territorial possessions and relative autonomy as a vassal, or client kingdom. In so doing, the Nabataeans tied not only their economy but also their foreign policy to the Roman state.

After the Roman conquest of 106 CE, under Emperor Trajan, life for the Nabataeans and other residents of Arabia began to undergo varying degrees of change and alteration. Petra’s architectural development had been previously influenced by Phoenician, Ptolemaic, Egyptian, Nabataean armies (if it came to that) outside of the city walls, rather than besieging Jerusalem and finding it necessary to root out the defenders. For more information, see J.M. Riddle, “Political History of the Nabataeans from the Time of Roman Intervention until Loss of Independence in 106 A.D.” (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1961), p. 41, quoted in Lawlor, Nabataeans in Historical Perspective, 45; Josephus, “Wars of the Jews,” 435.

73 Ibid., 435-36.

74 Exactly which Nabataean king or when this treaty was signed is unclear. Josephus records in his books on the “Wars of the Jews” and “Antiquities of the Jews,” that after Scaurus faced difficulties in reaching Petra, he convinced Aretas III that if he would offer a peace treaty (and a gift of 300 Talents of gold), Scaurus would withdraw his forces from Nabataean holdings (Josephus, “Wars of the Jews,” 437). Sidebotham mentions that between 26-24 BCE, the Nabataeans contributed 1000 soldiers to a Roman military campaign in Southern Arabia (Sidebotham, “Aelius Gallus and Arabia,” 590). This was likely not a generous act of a nearby kingdom, but a request from a dominant political power to a vassal kingdom. It is possible that the peace treaty signed with Scaurus, also stipulated Roman supremacy in the region.
Seleucid, Syrian-Persian, and latent South Arabian styles. Roman reinterpretation of earlier Hellenic and Hellenistic art styles also began to influence Petra’s artistic development, especially after Roman Annexation of Nabataea and Petra. The city, under Roman governorship, received an influx of new construction projects and increased commercial activity. The Roman Emperor projected a powerful persona, but unlike the previous line of Nabataean kings in Petra, this new imperial power demanded deference and even veneration as Roman Emperors were often apotheosized, or deified (sometimes while still living). Not only civil servants, but anyone who claimed to be a good, law-abiding citizen of the Empire were required to pay obeisance to a man whose image was suddenly on display in virtually every public forum as well as venerated in an imperial temple (in major cities). With such a vast empire, however, it was no longer a king or even an emperor who played a regular role in their lives. Instead, the Imperial-appointed provincial governor of the region, along with their chief assistant, a procurator, were the individuals that held a more immediate sway over local lives and property.75 This change must have had a particular effect on long-term Nabataean economic relations, stability, and daily operations, as Imperial governors often did not stay in power in the Eastern Provinces for very long.76 Exceptions from this general rule existed, but the turnover rate was often enough to affect public order, and many areas gained a reputation for being hotbeds of general unrest.

Late Roman Empire and Diocletian’s Division of the Empire

By the 3rd century CE, the Roman Empire had expanded from Hadrian’s Wall in England to the North African coast, and from Spain to the Transjordan. Its’ size, however, was also a significant issue that prolonged and continually caused problems for its rulers and citizens. After concluding that the Empire had grown too large to be effectively administered by a single

emperor even with the assistance of the Senate, Emperor Diocletian (284-305 CE) split the
Roman Empire into two halves (see Figure 2.7). The new system of governing was known as the
Tetrarchy: each half of the Empire would be ruled by a senior emperor and a junior emperor, an
‘Augustus’ and a ‘Caesar.’ Ostensibly, the Roman Empire would remain unified in purpose and
spirit, but by dividing the responsibility among the four members of the tetrarchy, Diocletian
hoped that the various provinces would receive additional stability and support, tax revenues
would increase, and the Empire and its citizens would be better protected against outside
threats.\footnote{One of the stabilizing factors associated with the Tetrarchy was the issue surrounding succession from one emperor to the next. Under the tetrarchy, a new Augustus or Caesar could only be appointed with support from the remaining three rulers. This new candidate was not limited to the offspring of the deceased, but to the most qualified and experienced individual for the position.} The system was somewhat effective until 306 CE, when the ‘Augustus of the West,’ Constantius, died. Constantius’ junior Emperor, Severus, was raised to ‘Augustus’ and Maxentius (seizing an opportunity presented to him by the Praetorian Guard in Rome) usurped the position of ‘Caesar’ after a brief and bloodless coup. Constantius’ son, Constantine, was on a military campaign in Britain when the news of his father’s death arrived and was immediately proclaimed the new ‘Augustus’ by his troops. Not wanting to refuse this opportunity, he returned with all the forces he could muster to help accentuate his claim to the throne through force. Constantine was not alone in making a ploy for power, and what followed through the next half-decade were a series of campaigns and negotiations between each of the six men claiming to be an ‘Augustus,’ for majority control of the Empire.
Byzantine Occupation of the Transjordan

In 312 CE, Emperor Constantine I (306-338 CE) defeated a significant rival, Maxentius, at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, just outside of Rome; a victory Constantine would attribute to the blessing and intervention of the Christian God. In 313 CE, Constantine and the sole remaining co-emperor, Licinius, met in Milan to establish an edict that, for the first time, guaranteed, in writing, religious tolerance for Christians within the Roman Empire. After an uneasy truce with Licinius that led to an eventual outbreak in hostilities, Constantine finally assumed complete control of the Roman Empire in 324 CE. In that same year, and at the insistence of his Christian mother Helena, he began a program of state-sponsored church

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building throughout the Empire. This program had a particular emphasis on the construction of churches at traditional sites sacred to Christians in the provinces of the Holy Land.\textsuperscript{80}

While the extent of Constantine’s sincere devotion to the Christian faith can be debated, his mother Helena was fiercely devoted to her religion. In 326-328 CE, Helena embarked on a pilgrimage to see Jerusalem and several other holy sites. While there, she reportedly discovered several relics, including the “True Cross” upon which Jesus Christ was crucified.\textsuperscript{81} While eventful, two of the most significant results from her expedition were the establishment of several churches in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth (and the sites for future churches and monuments), and the rise of a new wave of pilgrims, encouraged to follow in her footsteps to visit the sacred sites of the Holy Land. Soon, ecclesiastical leaders, writers, and other luminaries were making journeys to visit sacred Christian sites and write about their experiences while in the Holy Land. While most of these luminaries used sacred manuscripts available to them at the time, some of their writings would become future ‘travel guides’ themselves, directing pilgrims to different churches and locations mentioned in scriptural contexts.\textsuperscript{82}

Local bishops, priests, and monks saw it as their duty to help care for these travelers after their long journey, free of charge.\textsuperscript{83} Travel throughout the Roman Empire had been substantially facilitated due to the previously established infrastructure of roads, spanning the length and breadth of the Empire. As a result of this influx of travelers, many members of the clergy (monks especially) rushed to construct additional lodgings and hostels to accommodate and feed the new visitors. It is partially because of these devoted individuals that cities in the Eastern

\textsuperscript{81} Eusebius Pamphilius, “The Life of Constantine,” 444.
\textsuperscript{82} The earliest known text is the Itinerarium Burdigalense, written by an anonymous “Pilgrim of Bordeaux” in the 4th century CE. This itinerary document describes a journey from France, through Italy and Constantinople, to the sacred Christian sites in the Holy Land.
Provinces were able to prosper amidst the constant flow of pilgrims. Additionally, the construction and embellishment of churches over sacred sites fueled the adoption and adaption of pagan mosaic floor programs to Christian contexts in the Holy Land on both sides of the Jordan River.

Of immediate interest and relevance to this study is the reign of the Emperor Justinian I (527-565 CE). While turbulent, Justinian’s reign not only oversaw the expansion of the Byzantine Empire to its most substantial extent since Diocletian had split the Roman Empire in 285 CE (see Figure 2.8), but his reforms and priorities also encouraged a period of artistic and cultural advances throughout the Eastern Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{84} His reign saw one of the most significant and widespread periods of ecclesiastical building construction in the Holy Land.\textsuperscript{85} Magnificent monuments and palaces in Constantinople and elsewhere that have captured the imaginations of countless ancient and modern visitors (such as the Hagia Sophia, the Hagia Eirene, the Church of the Holy Apostles, and the Basilica of San Vitale) were constructed under the orders of Justinian. It is during this period that the churches discussed in this paper were either constructed initially or received additional mosaic decorations, as per the Emperor’s ongoing programs.

\textsuperscript{84} While not directly related to this body of work, it should be noted that the general renaissance in artistic styles and production that flourished under the reign of Justinian I, would later directly influence the ‘Macedonian Renaissance’ (c. 867-1056 CE), and subsequently, the Italian Renaissance of the 14th century CE.

Islamic Expansion

The Early Christian Period, or the Byzantine Period, in the Middle East is typically referred to as lasting from 324-628 CE. The justification for these dates being that 324 CE is when the Eastern Roman Empire begins to become a separate entity from the Western Roman Empire. The closing date of the Early Christian Period is given in 628 CE at the successful conclusion of Emperor Heraclius’ (610-641 CE) Byzantine-Sasanian war because it is during the 7th and 8th centuries that the Eastern Roman Empire finds itself in a period of decline. After periodically fighting Persian forces in the East and Gothic and Hunnic invaders in the West, the Eastern Roman Empire found itself unable to adequately defend its borders against the

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86 While the Roman Empire had been split into two halves before by the Emperor Diocletian in 285 CE, and each half was ruled by an Augustus (Emperor) and a Caesar (a junior co-emperor), the Roman Empire was, ostensibly, still one body that had been divided for bureaucratic and management purposes. At the time, the split in the 4th century CE was regarded in a similar fashion, but some modern scholars begin to distinguish the two as being separate empires from this point onward based on cultural, political, and linguistic divergences that had already begun and would become more pronounced in the future.
encroaching Arab Muslim forces.\textsuperscript{87} While the Byzantine military was no longer able to control and protect the region, this did not mean that Christian worship immediately ended as well. Early Arab Muslim governors and officials exercised tolerance and welcomed the Jewish, Christian Arab, and other Christian ethnic inhabitants of the region to stay and continue practicing their religions, so long as it did not interfere with Muslim worshippers.\textsuperscript{88}

While tolerant, the Umayyad rulers were staunch followers of Islam and took the opportunity of their conquest to convert some of the existent Christian and Jewish sanctuaries and sacred spaces into Islamic mosques. This mass conversion did not apply to all churches and synagogues, and members of non-Islamic religions were generally allowed to practice their religions and decorate their sacred spaces accordingly. Islam, like various sects of other religions, is \textit{iconoclastic}, meaning they abhor the figurative imagery of humans or animals in religious buildings (as a reaction against pagan worship) and made efforts to expunge any such images in their converted mosques. Occasionally, iconoclastic edicts were issued from the Umayyad or later Abbasid Caliphates that, like ecclesiastical edicts from Constantinople, carried the weight of secular law. These often promoted the purging of icons and figurative artwork from all structures under Muslim governance, regardless of religion.\textsuperscript{89} While the Islamic governments that ruled over the Middle East and the Transjordan were generally tolerant of non-Muslims and their beliefs, one period (c. 721-723 CE) under the Umayyad Caliph Yazid II stands out in stark contrast. The Caliph believed a prediction made by astrologers, who proclaimed that if he threw out images of Christ and his Mother, Yazid would be blessed with a

long reign. Thus began an iconoclastic campaign against all religious groups in the Transjordan. Yazid would die later in 724 CE, but his campaign against sacred images had lasting direct and indirect repercussions. Evidence of this iconoclastic fervor can be seen in the archaeological record, such as the two churches attached to the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Jerash, where some mosaics and other wall decorations have been destroyed, altered, or paved over as per the law. However, it should be noted that shortly after Yazid’s iconoclastic edict was rescinded, the Byzantine Emperor Leo III (717-741 CE) also began a campaign of iconoclasm across the Byzantine Empire. Thus, some of the excavated mosaics from this period that bear the scars of an iconoclast’s handiwork could have resulted from either Islamic or Christian perpetrators.

**Role of Religion in the Early Byzantine Empire**

**Early Christian Art and Practices under the ‘Old’ Roman Empire**

One of the subjects that will be treated more fully in a later chapter regards current theories of the use of symbols of Christian iconography and why particular signs may or may not have been included in various mosaics. According to the linguistic theory of semiotics, we can speak and communicate with each other because, as a society, we have agreed on a pattern between the words or actions used and their intended meanings. A group determines the connection between a symbol (e.g., a written word, verbal sound, or visual image) and the concept that a symbol is meant to convey in order to communicate better; but it does not follow that there is an intrinsic connection between the symbol and its established meaning as assigned by the group. As if this social pact did not have enough potential for confusion, sub-cultures

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92 Ibid., 42.
might be able to agree amongst themselves to use specific signs and symbols to represent
corcepts different from what had been previously and widely accepted. In this way, they create
a new language, sub-rosa, that only the initiated can fully understand. This formation process
can be widespread across a region or narrowly used among a select group and is only dependent
on a group of individuals who can come to an understanding regarding what symbols are to be
used to represent specific ideas and meanings.93

The symbolism associated with Early Christian images and what they represented in the
past among differing Christian sects may not be the same as viewers today might expect. This
difference is especially relevant when considering that these images were meant to be viewed
and interpreted by a religious audience that was well-versed (or currently being instructed) in
orthodox, Nicene beliefs (as issued by ecumenical councils after 325 CE); or in the case of some
provincial churches, doctrines that differed from the Nicene Creed. Modern understanding of
these symbols must also take into account the almost 1,400 years of cultural and religious
evolution that has taken place since the original creation of Christian mosaics during the Late
Roman and Byzantine Periods. Not only this, but cultural shifts have occurred as Christianity
spread from its Jewish Near Eastern roots across a polyglot pagan Roman Empire and beyond.

Given the above challenges, the use of portraiture in Byzantine-era mosaics is still a
particularly useful dating mechanism. When examining any religious art, it is common to expect
that some representation of the relevant deity to be the focal point of the composition. Before the
Edict of Milan (313 CE) guaranteed religious tolerance and eliminated sanctioned political
persecution towards minority religions, early Christian adherents had to conduct their rites of
worship in secrecy. As a result, many images, descriptors, and iconography from various pagan

deities were co-opted as part of the new Christian faith and, unless one had been properly
initiated and knew the nuances to these symbols, it would be understandable to pass by without
complete comprehension of the Christian associations that were masked by an older pagan
repertoire. For example, the pagan deity Dionysus/Bacchus was popularly associated with wine
and feasting. However, a youthful representation of Dionysus was also often associated with
resurrection and rebirth. Thus, early depictions of Christ show him as a beardless youth,
sometimes even posed and dressed as similar depictions of Dionysus with similar props and
objects nearby. This practice of the borrowing and the reuse of pagan imagery and iconography
was not a new or unique practice to Christianity, but some aspects of this process were carried
over into later iterations of Christian art. One example of this is the use of portraiture in
Christian floor mosaics. Unlike earlier Greek and Roman floor mosaics that often-incorporated
depictions of pagan deities or characters from classical literature, specific sacred images (such as
depictions of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and other saintly personages) were prohibited from
Christian pavement mosaics after 427 CE. 94 To have the image and name of Christ, or any other
holy individual, on a surface that individuals would walk over was seen as disrespectful and not
permitted under the new ecclesiastical laws of Emperor Theodosius II (402-450 CE). 95 Hence
other symbols and images were used to indirectly lead the viewer's thoughts back to the parables
from the life of Christ or some other connection with the Church’s religious views and stories.

Early Christian Life Under Byzantine Rule

From the ending of his ministry until the creation of an official credo at the Council of
Nicaea, many sects grew up surrounding the worship of Jesus Christ. The fact that so many

94 Codex Justinian I, viii, Edict of Theodosius II (427), in Cyril Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire
312-1453 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 36.
95 Mango, Art of the Byzantine Empire, 36.
arose during that period underscores variety and range of interpretations regarding the proper modes of worship; and no single sectarian authority had been able to persuade the entirety of the Christian world towards a single belief system. The contention among some of the more popular factions prompted action on a larger scale, throughout the Byzantine-Roman State. Between the 4th-6th centuries CE, several ecclesiastical edicts were issued to govern the faithful followers of Christianity and attempt to guide and unite them in their oblations. These often bore the weight of Imperial law, so intertwined would the powers of the Church and the State become. 96 Many authors appear to be divided on the subject of whether or not Constantine was a genuinely devout Christian, but regardless of this, he saw the potential of having a unified doctrine for devout Christians to follow. 97 Thus, in 325 CE Constantine called together a council of the 318 leading Bishops and ecclesiastical leaders in the Roman Empire. Drawing on his experiences as a military and political leader, Constantine (perhaps naively) believed that he could create unity by forcing these men to decide on a single line of doctrine. 98

This assemblage of ecclesiastical leaders would come to be known to history as the First Council of Nicaea. After the opening pleasantries and initial sets of issues had been established and decided upon, the most popular argument of the day reached the floor of the auditorium. The central focus of the council was to determine the true nature of God and the relationship between the members of the Trinity (God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost). One widespread sect, Arianism, believed that Jesus Christ was separate from and subordinate to, God the Father. Others, however, maintained the prevailing theory that God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost were different aspects of the same individual. The matter of the nature of the Trinity

98 Gwatkin, Studies of Arianism, 39.
was, potentially, the most debated question among Early Christian ecclesiarchs, with many
different sects espousing opposing theories, each with varying degrees of support from the
gospels and other sacred texts of the day. Constantine did not particularly care which faction
was correct, only that a decision was made and, consequently, planned to listen to the arguments
and lend his support to whichever side appeared to be in the majority. By the end of the
conference, many issues had been resolved, and the result is known today as the Nicene Creed.

The Council of Nicaea was only the first of many such ecumenical councils that would be
called together to settle the religious questions of the day. As with this Council, future
ecumenical councils and their decisions would ostensibly be religious decrees, but because of the
political backing given by Constantine, the secular government of the Byzantine Empire would
slowly become inexorably intertwined with the religious (Christian) powers to the point that
religious decrees were supported under the force of law. This process continued until the Edict
of Thessalonica (380 CE) when Emperor Theodosius II made Christianity the official religion of
the Empire and formalized the role of the secular government as an enforcer for the Church.99
Part of the need for additional religious councils revolved around the continued survival,
acceptance, and disagreements between various religious sects, particularly in the Eastern
Provinces of the Empire.

**Description and Prevalence of Arianism**

As previously mentioned, Arianism quickly became one of the most well-known and
widespread sects that stood to compete with the established Nicene Creed. About 320 CE, Arius,
an influential priest in Alexandria, began spreading his ideas about the nature of the Trinity. The
basic tenets of his ideas on the correct mode of worship, dubbed Arianism, generally agreed with

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mainstream Christian philosophies of the day; however, Arius believed that if God was a perfect
and divine being, he could not interact with imperfect and fallen humanity, which was why he
had created Jesus Christ. Arius taught that while Jesus is perfect and eternal, it is not in the same
way as God; and because God had created Jesus Christ, he is therefore subordinate and inferior
to God.\textsuperscript{100} This claim was in direct conflict with the definition agreed upon during the Nicene
Council which focused on the ‘\textit{homoousios}’ (i.e., their complete unity, the same in
being/essence; literally translated as ‘of the same substance’ or ‘consubstantial’) of Christ and
God the Father.

In the coming centuries, Arianism would go through periods of general acceptance,
disregard, and outright persecution as it continued to intersect with Orthodox Catholicism.\textsuperscript{101}
Some followers of Arius would be influential enough to garner support from within the
Byzantine Imperial Court, of whom luminaries, priests, and bishops would be rise to become
well-known Early Christian authors and historians; for the most part, however, the sect’s beliefs
and teachings were labeled, in accordance with Imperial pronouncements, as heretical doctrines.
Constantine had never been personally offended or spiritually bothered by Arius or his teachings,
which is likely why he allowed other individuals, such as Eusebius (who was an apologist for
similar Christological doctrines), to hold high ranking positions within the Imperial court.
Through their efforts, Arianism was allowed to survive and to spread through missionary efforts
throughout the early Christian/Byzantine world. This expansion would continue until
Theodosius, a staunch supporter of the Nicene Creed, issued an ironclad edict in 380 CE,
declaring Nicene-Christianity to be the only acceptable, Orthodox interpretation.

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{The Theodosian Code} XVI.5.8, 11, 12, 13.
After 381 CE, when Arianism was ostensibly outlawed in the Roman Mundus/Oecumene, it continued to be accepted among Theodosius’ Gothic Foederati (i.e., client kingdoms), their families, and other barbarian units settled within the Empire, who were allowed to retain their own religion, language, and customs. Theodosius employed these Arian Goths to crush the rebellions of two usurpers in the West (to reunify all of the Empire for the last time) by 394 CE. When he died in 395, the Goths became free agents, pitting the courts of his two sons, who had split the empire, against each other. Eventually, Gothic partisans victimized the Western half of the Empire, sacking Rome in 410 CE – by which time the headquarters of the Western Emperor had been moved to the more secure city of Ravenna. By 476 a heterogeneous mixture of barbarian (Arian) foederati deposed the last Western Emperor at Ravenna, and in 493 CE the Arian Ostro-Goths of Theodoric established a predominantly Arian kingdom in Italy. Despite his preference for Arianism, Theodoric tolerated the presence of the indigenous Orthodox-Catholic community headed by the Bishop of Rome.102 Thus, Arianism was an important cultural force in Italy from 394-552 CE, and particularly in Ravenna from c. 476-540 CE.

While its popularity and general acceptance throughout the Transjordan and particularly in Alexandria, Egypt would wax and wane over time, Arianism enjoyed a particular approval under Gothic rule along the Italian Peninsula, Germania, and Gaul.103 As mentioned previously, few cities were more eager to embrace the Arian doctrine than the Gothic capital of Ravenna, Italy. After Belisarius, one of Byzantium’s most successful military generals, eventually occupied the city during the Gothic Wars (535-540 CE), several new orthodox churches were

102 This Gothic kingdom was eventually overthrown by Justinian’s armies under Belisarius and Narses, 535-552 CE.
constructed. This new wave of construction served not only as part of a program to rebuild the damaged region but also as a subtle way to display the dominance of the Nicene Creed and its close connection with the Imperial throne.

In terms of sectarian iconography, there is some debate as to whether or not Arius and others who propagated his teachings had a formalized lexicon for religious worship.\(^{104}\) In many respects, Arian practices and doctrines were identical to those of the more widespread Orthodox (Nicene) Church, which may have contributed to the longevity of the heterodox sect existing within a strongly orthodox state. The conflict between these denominations was more of a philosophical and didactic nature, and while evidence within the archaeological record is not always apparent, some distinctions can be made in certain conditions.\(^{105}\) The most appealing location to compare iconographic representations between these two denominations is Ravenna, where both Arian and Orthodox baptistries were constructed in the same city. More detailed descriptions of the mosaiced domes can be found elsewhere, but suffice it to say that they both display the same subject matter, and do so in almost identical fashions.\(^{106}\) We see the naked figure of Christ standing in the Jordan River, between the personification of the river and John the Baptist (who is in the act of performing the baptism), and a dove (here representing the Holy Spirit). While an Arian artist could be expected to include a separate depiction of God the Father, to emphasize the separate personages of God and Christ, yet here we see no such display.

While similar, these baptistry mosaics are not so alike as to preclude separate interpretations based on visible details and design choices. It could be argued that as the figure

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\(^{104}\) Bockmann, “The Non-Archaeology of Arianism,” 201-03.


of the Jordan River in the Arian Baptistry is depicted more significantly than its counterpart in the Neonian (Orthodox) Baptistry, and is not explicitly labeled, that this may be a subtle depiction of God’s presence; however, the Jordan could be shown as physically larger and without its label for artistic and space-related reasons. Nevertheless, this is not to say that depictions could not exist in other churches that show God and Christ as separate beings. Still other compositions went farther, perhaps, to show that Christ was just as eternal as God, and thus could not have been created by him.\(^{107}\) While architecture and art were not the primary battlegrounds for the conflict of Arianism, evidence could still be present in the details of subject mosaics. The potential for identifying similar evidences in the archaeological record are the foci of this thesis.

**Description and Prevalence of Nestorianism**

Nestorius was born in 381 CE, educated and trained at the prestigious School of Antioch and would eventually rise through the church to be ordained as the Bishop of Constantinople in 428 CE. While holding this position, he came under condemnation from Cyril of Alexandria (the Patriarch of Alexandria), Pope Celestine in Rome, and Emperor Theodosius II at the Council of Ephesus (431 CE) for his support of the idea of *dyophysitism*.\(^{108}\) *Dyophysitism* is the idea that the person of Jesus Christ consisted of two natures (divine and human) that were unified within him. Many Christians believed that Christ, being part divine and part human, was created with only one nature which was a synthesis of his divine and mortal parentage, or *monophysitism*. To those who supported the opposing idea of *monophysitism* at the School of Alexandria, Nestorius’

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\(^{107}\) Ibid., 273.  
\(^{108}\) During the 5th century CE, there was considerable tension between the Eastern (Greek Orthodox) and Western (Latin Catholic) churches. The Bishops and Patriarchs of these churches would spend considerable time arguing points of doctrine amongst each other but would, on occasion, call upon each other to find support for a point of doctrine, or to condemn another clergy member whom they felt had gone astray. Milton Anastos, "Nestorius Was Orthodox," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962): 120.
beliefs were heretical, and he steadfastly refused to back down from the opposition. The struggle between the Alexandrine school (Cyril) emphasizing the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Antiochene school (Nestorius) emphasizing the humanity of Christ led to the showdown at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, where the former prevailed, leading to the internal exile of Nestorius and the radicalization of his followers, who lapsed into the heresy of ‘Nestorianism,’ which asserted that the two natures of Jesus Christ were more than distinct – totally separate, if uniquely conjoined in the Prosopon of Jesus Christ. Nestorius refused to recant his stated beliefs and was exiled, at which point he took it upon himself to write an account of his trials and thoughts on the nature of Christ in a volume entitled, *The Bazaar of Heracleides.* Nestorius’ impassioned defense of the doctrine that Christ was equal parts God and man, while ultimately declared heretical, found a ready audience among the Christians living in Persia and other regions in the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire and beyond.

The trial for Nestorian artists, to visually convey the idea that a single character has two different natures, appears to be a perplexing challenge. An excellent example of this Christological challenge is the icon of Christ Pantocrator at the St. Catherine Monastery at Sinai. This icon has been dated to the reign of Justinian during the mid-6th century CE and was likely produced in Constantinople. The curious aspect of this icon is that the figure of Christ is asymmetrical. From the observers’ point of view, the figure’s right half of his face appears to

109 Anastos, “Nestorius was Orthodox,” 122-23.
110 Ibid., 123-28. Nestorius felt it necessary to emphasize the humanity within Jesus Christ to prevent it’s being overshadowed by his divine nature. At this time, *Moderate Cyrillianism* (i.e., that Jesus Christ embodied the ‘Hypostatic Union’ of a divine and a human nature) was accepted as Orthodox at Ephesus. So, Nestorius was martyred for defending the integrity of the doctrine of the full humanity of Jesus Christ, while Cyril, concerned that Jesus Christ’s divinity would be deemphasized by the Nestorian position, emerged triumphant. Later, Cyril’s followers would so emphasize the divinity of Jesus Christ as to be condemned at the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) for the heresy of Monophysitism, in that they denied the existence of Christ’s human nature entirely.
have more pronounced cheekbones, giving a slightly sullen overall expression; while the left is more fully formed, and exudes a brighter skin tone because there is a smaller amount of shadowing effect. Not only this but, in reference to Christ’s human nature, the right-hand holds a copy of the Gospels, while the left is raised in an attitude of blessing, possibly referring to the divine nature within Christ.\textsuperscript{112} While this depiction is subtler and more delicate than what might be attempted with the comparatively blocky tesserae, such a portrayal could nevertheless be attempted. Alternately, in lieu of using images to convey the dual natures of Christ, the Nestorian patron or artist might have opted to include an inscription referencing Christ as both the Son of God and the Son of Man.

\textit{Description and Prevalence of Manichaeism}

The Manichaean sect of Christianity is another that found particular popularity in the Eastern Provinces of the Roman Empire, if only for a relatively brief span. Its’ founder, Mani, was born in 216 CE in Persian-occupied Parthia. While a young man, his parents took him away from his home to live among a community that practiced a blend of Judaism and Christianity. Later, he claimed to have received several divine visitations that eventually led him to travel in search of spiritual fulfillment and proselytizing. Manis’ journeys ranged from Parthia to India to North Africa, preaching the basic tenets of Christianity along the way while exploring and seeking to understand the new religions he found as he traveled. While traveling, he encountered many different religious traditions and beliefs, some of which had a profound influence on the development of Manichaean doctrine. Mani faced particular difficulty when proselyting through Roman territories, as he was considered to be a Persian citizen (an enemy of the Roman Empire);

\textsuperscript{112} The significance of the Gospels is perhaps a reference to the appellation ‘God the Logos’ (Gr. \textit{Λογός}, meaning "Word") and a scripture in John 1:14 KJV which reads, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."
thus his religious perspectives, which had begun to incorporate a substantial amount of
Zoroastrian and Buddhist principles, did not gain as large a following in the provinces around the
Mediterranean when compared with similar proselyting efforts throughout Central Asia. Not
only did Mani’s teachings not gather a large following in the Roman-Byzantine world, but
practitioners were considered religious heretics by the Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople,
and violators of public law as declared by Imperial edict.114

It is not the purpose of this paper to examine the intricacies of the Manichaeist doctrine,
but a brief outline will be given to assist in understanding this forgotten sect. While still a young
child Mani was raised in an Elchasaite sect, a community who based their worship of Jesus
Christ on various traditions and written gospels. It is from these gnostic roots that Mani would
eventually write a religious text, called the “Living Gospel,” and would form the framework for
his future religious efforts.115 When 12 years old, he would claim to have had his first vision
which led him to begin questioning the religious world he was being brought up in. Subsequent
visions led him to openly question some of the finer doctrines of the Elchasaites sect, and when he
was 25, Mani broke ties with the Elchasaites and formed a new community of followers.116
According to the so-called “Cologne Mani Codex,” a translation of Mani’s written gospels and
epistles to various communities during the mid-3rd century CE, he began to travel and send out
other messengers to preach as far afield as India, Persia, Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt.117

As a result of his wide-ranging travels, it is sometimes difficult to separate the core
beliefs propounded by Mani with regional variations practiced by his followers, as Mani’s

113 Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, Manichaean Art and Calligraphy (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 1-3.
114 Zsuzsanna Gulácsi, Mani’s Pictures: The Didactic Images of the Manichaeans from the Sasanian
Mesopotamia to Uygur Central Asia and Tang-Ming China (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 25; Klimkeit, Manichaean
Art and Calligraphy, 7; The Theodosian Code, Novel of Valentinian 18.
115 Klimkeit, Manichaean Art and Calligraphy, 2.
116 Ibid., 2-5.
117 Ibid., 5-6.
journeys had a significant impact on the development of his line of doctrine. His beliefs in the dualism of everything seems to weigh closer to Zoroastrian beliefs and themes, and while his teachings mentioned Jesus Christ, it is not in the same all-encompassing, centralized manner of most Christian doctrines. Manichaean missionary efforts appear to have relied on translating texts into the local languages to facilitate communication, and it is in some of these texts that scholars find the mention of “new” doctrines and myths that were being added into the Manichaean repertoire of teachings; unrelated to Christianity, some of these new myths often mirror or in some way relate to myths and traditions of local communities where the texts are discovered. Some of these myths have only vague connections to Mani’s original gospel and appear to be regionally instituted, which makes the Manichaeans appear more like a ‘universalist church’ than one with a clearly and rigidly defined doctrine.

Around 400 CE, St. Augustine of Hippo (himself, a former Manichaeist, before converting to Nicene orthodoxy) wrote a scathing series of rebuttals against Manichaeism in his book *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, in which he points out that Manichaean beliefs regarded Jesus, not as a single person, but as having individual aspects that are worshipped. Not only does Augustine charge them with paganism, but he states that a truly divine person, such as the form of Jesus Christ worshipped by mainstream Christians, could never exist as per Manichaean beliefs. It is curious that Augustine did not go into detail regarding Manichaean art or icons in his polemic writings against the sect, though he does refer to their “boasted manuscripts” and their “ parchments, with their finely ornamented bindings.” It could be understood that St. Augustine’s denouncement of Manichaean beliefs does not touch on every aspect of

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118 Ibid., 5, 7, 9-13.
Manichaeism as modern scholars understand it, because the sect itself was regionally (or culturally) fractured, and not all points of doctrine made the transition across cultural boundaries. If this is the case, we can understand Augustine to be touching on points that were of particular relevance to the people of Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean provinces where Manichaeism held sway.

On the subject of Manichaean art and iconography, it is interesting to note that while Mani is remembered by Persian and Islamic writers as a great painter, we have identified only a few rare examples of Manichaean art in the Eastern Mediterranean.121 This being said, Early Christian scholars, such as Eusebius and Augustine, briefly mention a devotional painting of Mani and the beautiful calligraphy used in non-illuminated (plain) manuscripts.122 Yet, in his writings, Mani claimed to rely heavily on the painting of icons (Gr. εἰκών) to not only set the Manichaeans apart from other Christian sects but to teach his doctrinal beliefs in an easy to understand format.123 It appears that Mani may have preferred illustrating his manuscripts, and as such, painting became the established norm in Manichaean churches. Some ruins in Central Asia have been found with preserved, though fragmented, wall paintings, but mosaic art utilizing stone, glass, or ceramic tesserae is rare. Fragments of wall art and hanging scrolls from Chinese Manichaean sites have led scholars to hypothesize that while based in the same canonical and soteriological roots expressed in Mani’s Book of Pictures, Manichaean theologians and artists in the East begin to emphasize more cosmological subjects and themes.124

121 Gulácsi, Mani’s Pictures, 2-3, 25, 53; Klimkeit, Manichaean Art and Calligraphy, 15.
122 Gulácsi, Mani’s Pictures, 26-28.
123 Ibid., 27.
124 Ibid., 6-7. It should be noted, however, that Manichaeism begins to take root in China circa the 7th century CE, approximately the same time the sect begins to die out in the Roman-Byzantine world. As a result, communication and discourse between adherents from vastly different cultural perspectives was limited.
At the time of this writing of this paper, the work of contextualizing Manichaean art within a myriad of religiously and culturally distinct civilizations is still in its relative nascency; as this is the case, only brief examples of Manichaean iconography and art will be included for the sake of brevity. Much of the language used in Manichaean texts are descriptive beyond what one might expect for a religious text. This would indeed be an asset for any artist looking for material or subject matter to influence their work. Similar to other Gnostic Christian texts, Manichaean works often compare the worth of human souls to pearls or other precious gems that need to be sought out, gathered, and protected from the corrupting influences of the natural world around them. In this light, the missionary aspect of the Manichaean faith is brought to the fore, as members of the community are called upon through moral obligations to spread their beliefs, like an angler in search of fish, or a merchant who must safely convey their precious goods past thieves and brigands to their final destination.

Some Manichaean allusions made between an icon, or other examples of pictorial art, and an aspect of Christianity are incredibly similar if not identical to connections and symbols used in other Christian sects and Creeds. Nevertheless, some images, while familiar to some, may be used to indicate an entirely different concept. One such example is that of the ‘Light Maiden,’ a divine feminine figure in Manichaean mythology, which is often depicted in conjunction with three male angels. Their purpose is to help lead the deceased to exaltation, and while the Maiden greets the deceased, the three angels will appear holding prizes and rewards for the just and the worthy. If one was to take this scene out of its Manichaean context, and insert it into a different Christian setting, it would be forgivable to assume that the image displays a rendition of

126 Ibid., 14-15.
127 Gulácsi, *Mani’s Pictures*, 32-33, 400-05.
the story mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew where Mary the Mother of Jesus and her Son, in the attitude of greeting the Wise Men, or the Magi, who then present gifts to the prophesied Messiah. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, it is in this manner that certain heterodox teachings and practices could be disguised from the prying eyes of potentially hostile authorities.

Summary

To conclude this section with a brief recap, the art of mosaic is, at its heart, a multi-media inlay construction. The earliest example of mosaic inlay dates back to c. 2600 BCE in Sumer. Curiously, examples of mosaics and inlay in the Middle East and the Mediterranean Region are exceptionally rare between 2600-900 BCE, when the artform subsequently reappears and is revitalized by ancient Greek and Macedonian artists. Resulting from the conquests of Alexander the Great, Hellenic culture spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, Transjordan, and Arabian regions, including the techniques used in pebble mosaic construction. Shortly before the Romans subdue Greece, artists begin experimenting with worked tiles to create the images seen today. Roman artisans then expanded on the previous Greek traditions, including the techniques, the variety of materials used (which by now included both glass and stone tesserae), and the subject matter and motifs depicted. Their innovations continued into the Byzantine era when the art of mosaic making took on a supremely religious role in the Christianized Byzantine Empire.

During this time of mosaic development, several Kingdoms existed (partially or entirely) within the Transjordan. The most prominent indigenous political power was the Kingdom of the Nabataeans. Centered around their capital of Petra, the Nabataeans built a substantial trade network across the Arabian Deserts, bridging the lands of India and China with markets in the

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128 Matthew 2:1-11 KJV
Mediterranean Basin. Their wealth, perceived and imagined, made them a target for other, more extensive political powers but also allowed them to construct magnificent structures carved into cliff faces that can still be admired today. Conflicts with their neighbors eventually brought them to the attention of the Roman Republic, and a combination of diplomacy and warfare turned the Nabataean Kingdom first into a client vassal state, and later into an annexed province of Rome (106 CE). The Nabataeans would culturally adapt to Roman/Byzantine control until the Umayyad conquests of the 7th century CE. The mosaic programs discussed later in this thesis, which eventually manifested themselves in the Petra Church derive from this era. Interestingly, given Nabataean trade networks and wealth, only one Nabataean mosaic has been discovered and excavated that predate the Byzantine Christian period.129

After the death of Jesus Christ, Early Christians in the Roman Empire would undergo, sometimes severe and officially sanctioned, persecution but many remained resilient, and despite the trials, Christianity expanded. Then in 313 CE, Emperor Constantine would issue the Edict of Milan, guaranteeing the fair and equal treatment of the Christian religion. From this point on, ecumenical councils would be called to help establish what Christian doctrine was and how it was to be practiced. Various sects, such as the Arians, Manichaeans, Nestorians, and Nicenes, would continue to argue and dispute over the correct mode of worship based on their various interpretations of the nature of the Trinity and other doctrines taught by Christ and the Apostles. These disagreements would be a constant political, cultural, and religious problem within the Byzantine Empire, but the more zealous adherents would never wholly abandon their beliefs. This stubbornness led them to continue expounding their positions and beliefs in various forms,

129 Kolb et al., “Excavations on Az-Zantur in Petra,” 264. A portion of this Nabataean mosaic from Az-Zantur is currently (as of June 2018) on display at the Petra Archaeological Museum in Wadi Musa, Jordan.
potentially including these beliefs in the mosaic artwork of their churches. The possible
archaeological evidence for this subversion and the potential symbolic meanings, with relation to
Christian sects outside the circle of the Nicene Creed, will be the subject of the following
chapters of this paper.
Introduction

The ensuing chapters will focus on mosaic compositions in the Transjordan and Italy, but before examining the mosaics themselves, a brief introduction will be made into the layout of basilica-style churches, prevalent in Early Christianity and the Byzantine Empire. The original basilicas of the Imperial Roman Empire were structures where commercial and legal proceedings could take place, usually built near the main forum (marketplace) or the public official’s home. The floorplan and construction of these basilicas was similar to the later Christian use of the same structural design. In the pre-Christian basilica, the apse (Figure 3.1) would have held a throne or raised seat where the local administrator would be able to sit and arbitrate or pass judgment on the proceedings brought before him. Alternately, this area was also used as a shrine for the imperial cult. After the adoption of Christianity, the throne and shrine were replaced with an altar where the eucharist was prepared and distributed. In some cases, the throne was moved to the back of the apse, as part of a synthronon, where a Bishop or other ecclesiastical leader could sit in symbolic judgment and preside over worship services. Above the apse, mosaics and other paintings were added, centering on the divinity and omnipotence of Jesus Christ and the Trinity.

Directly in front of the apse is an area referred to as the Chancel/Presbytery/Sanctuary. Both the apse and chancel were raised a few steps above the rest of the structure, and in some cases, an additional ‘screen’ or barrier was added to symbolically and physically separate the

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chancel from the audience below.\textsuperscript{131} In the center of the chancel, an altar was added for worship services and held sacred items such as the emblems of the Eucharist, sacred relics, or other holy icons. A lectern was added to the side of the altar for the speakers' convenience but was offset to not distract from the worship services. The open rectangular area on either side of the chancel is known as the \textit{transept}. In typical basilical churches, it was an open walkway to either the chancel or to smaller side apses (called ‘\textit{apsidal chapels},’ often dedicated to a particular saint or holy figure); however, in larger churches, the transept also opened up into larger side chapels (or \textit{parakklesion}) which served the same purpose as apsidal chapels.

Running down the center of the church is the central aisle, called the \textit{nave}. Flanking either side of the nave are two side \textit{aisles}, and while most of the congregation could be gathered within the nave, these aisles could also serve as overflow seating areas.\textsuperscript{132} At the extreme western side of the church, the space just within the exterior walls of the structure is referred to as the \textit{narthex}. The narthex is where the entrance for the main structure of the complex is located, and while it is often little more than an enclosed porch, it at times contained a small baptistry (if not housed in a separate structure) at the end of the central walkway of the nave.\textsuperscript{133} In some larger churches, the narthex was split into an \textit{esonarthex} (inner) and an \textit{exonarthex} (outer). As a porch area outside the exterior walls of the main structure, the exonarthex could also be included with an \textit{atrium} or courtyard immediately in front of the doors to the church.\textsuperscript{134} This atrium is sometimes bounded by the walls of the churchyard complex and may contain pillars and a fountain, representing the Paradisiacal Garden and the Fountain of Life.

\textsuperscript{131} Ward-Perkins, "Constantine and the Christian Basilica," 82.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 78.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 81.
While the exterior construction of churches in the Early Byzantine period is relatively uniform, the interior decoration is more open to local customization.\textsuperscript{135} Whether through paintings or mosaics, the overall spiritual theme was left to the community or the local priests to determine. While modern viewers might prefer a single, uniform composition to fill the entirety of a room, Byzantine worshippers were more accustomed to the changing nature of the depictions. The practice of partially constructing a structure with spoils from previous buildings (e.g., capitals, columns, foundations, ashlar stones, etc.) was commonplace, as seen in the construction of the Petra Church utilizing elements from the nearby Temple of the Winged

\textsuperscript{135} Lucille Alice Roussin, “The Iconography of the Figural Pavements of Early Byzantine Palestine,” (Columbia University, 1985), 21-22.
Lions. In some cases, changes in the subject matter of various panels in pavement mosaics may have correlated with, or even accented, a change or alteration of building materials.\textsuperscript{136} One definite consideration when constructing or decorating churches was the issue of finding the appropriate funding for materials and labor. Thanks to translations of the Edict of Diocletian (301 CE), we know that in an effort to stabilize the sometimes-volatile Roman economy, certain professions were regulated with standardized wages.\textsuperscript{137} For interior decorators, figure painters earned a per diem of 150 denarii plus food, while the more generalized wall painters (a less technically involved position) could expect to earn only 75 denarii each day. Mosaicists were even more affordable workers, as they were to be paid only 50-60 denarii per day.\textsuperscript{138} While not as flashy or as impressive as detailed paintings, mosaics were sturdier, required less upkeep, and could be partially fashioned from raw, potentially locally sourced materials. These practical benefits helped make decoration efforts more affordable as raw materials were more economical and could be processed by the team of mosaicists themselves. Community members were encouraged to donate to the construction and decoration of the church, and those who donated more significant amounts could expect to receive extra consideration for their sacrifices. Such considerations can be seen in extant inscriptions that attest to individuals who paid to have ‘x’ number of feet installed, as seen in the basilical church in Aquileia, Italy.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{136} Roussin, “Iconography of the Figural Pavements,” 33-34.
\textsuperscript{137} Tenney Frank, \textit{An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome Volume V: Rome and Italy of the Empire} (Paterson, New Jersey: Pageant, 1959), 338.
\textsuperscript{139} Annalisa Giovannini et al., \textit{Aquileia: History, Art & Archaeology}, trans. Sarah Tripepi Winteringham and Rebecca Sandrigo (Trieste: Bruno Fachin Editore, 2012), 84.
The Petra Church, Petra

History

It is uncertain when Christianity first made its way to the city of Petra, but records of bishops from Petra (referred to as “an Arabian see”) attending ecumenical councils and conferences are attested as early as the fourth century CE. It has also been theorized that the Apostle Paul may have preached to the Nabataeans sometime following his conversion. Without supporting evidence, scholars cannot be assured on this point; however, if this theory proves to be accurate, it could set the earliest date of Christianity in Petra to c. 33-36 CE.

Eusebius, one of our chief sources for early attestations of Christians in Petra, appears confused as to the exact provincial location of Petra, but it is clear that Christian churches existed and were under the patriarchate of Antioch during the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, before being transferred to the patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The conversion of the city’s populace to Christianity does not appear to have been en masse, as multiple records reference many idol-worshipping pagans still in the area along with the martyrdom of several monks and missionaries. It appears that many of these pagans, however, were converted by around 423 CE due to the missionary efforts of 40 monks. In centuries to come, Petra became an ideal destination for exiled clergy and other church leaders who had been banished for preaching heterodox beliefs and doctrine not in-line with the

141 Ibid., 212.
142 In Galatians 1: 17 KJV, Paul writes that he “went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.” In that day and age, Arabia was the general area that the Nabataean Kingdom had controlled, and Petra, as a major hub of the spice and incense trade, was one of the jewels of the region. If Paul did detour to preach to the Nabataeans, he could have potentially used the major route known as the King’s Highway to travel northward to Damascus. Nevertheless, without explicit attestations, this theory is speculative.
143 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 1.
144 Ibid., 1.
established creed in Byzantium.\textsuperscript{145} As we will explore in a future chapter, this potentially made Petra and the Transjordan a rallying place and a stronghold for several unorthodox sects of Christianity, such as the Nestorians, the Manichaeans, and the Arians.\textsuperscript{146} Thus, the importance of this thesis’ discussion of the churches constructed in Petra by early indigenous Christians and their further patronage (and possible alterations) in the face of the increasing centralization of power in Byzantium during the 3\textsuperscript{rd} through 6\textsuperscript{th} centuries CE.

The ‘Petra Church,’ as it has been referred to, is not the only Christian church of note in the city; nevertheless, it appears to have been the most prominently placed.\textsuperscript{147} The church is a basilica-style structure, measuring approximately 55 m x 25 m on the slopes of a hill near the site of the ancient Nabataean Temple of the Winged Lions. Excavations in the surrounding area of the Petra Church and the Temple of the Winged Lions have uncovered an almost unbroken chain of occupation from the Late Hellenistic period until the 6\textsuperscript{th} century CE.\textsuperscript{148} The church was likely built during the 5\textsuperscript{th} century CE and is part of a more massive architectural complex, which includes the standard features of a basilical-type structure, including a courtyard (exonarthex), a cruciform baptistry, a subterranean cistern, and several additional storage rooms. As is typical with similar construction projects in the ancient world, the builders did not hesitate to reuse preexisting architectural features and materials in their construction.\textsuperscript{149} As such, nearby structures were robbed of building materials or repurposed to function in conjunction with the

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{146} During the Council of Sardica (343 CE), the first known bishop of Petra, the so called “Asterius of Petra of Arabia,” and a compatriot were noted for belonging to the Arian party. During the Council, however, they swapped sides and joined with the Anti-Arians and were afterwards banished to Lybia. When the pagan Emperor Julian recalled all exiled dissident bishops, Asterius returned to assist Athanasius at the anti-Arian Synod of Alexandria (362 CE) (Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 1-2).
\textsuperscript{147} Other examples include the ridge Church and several nearby tombs which were repurposed to serve as places of worship, such as the Urn Tomb and the Ad-Deir Monastery.
\textsuperscript{148} Archaeological evidence suggests that the Temple had been abandoned prior to the construction of the Church, likely in concurrence with a substantial earthquake known to have happened in 343 CE. Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 7.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 7-8, 15-19, 30.
new ecclesiastical complex. The surrounding hillside has not yet been fully excavated, and further research could shed additional light on the purpose of these secondary rooms. Earlier phases have revealed evidence of Nabataean pottery and coinage dating from c. 1st century BCE – early 2nd century CE. From that period until the early Byzantine occupation, it appears that the area where the church sits was likely used for residential purposes. It is possible that destruction caused by an earthquake in 419 CE served as the impetus for a new phase of construction that transformed the site from domiciles to an ecclesiastical complex.

At this juncture, it is fitting to mention two important facts about discoveries made at Petra. The first is that all examples of mosaic art found at Petra “provide a unique opportunity to compare and to reflect on the diffusion of artistic ideas in the region at the peak of its development in the Byzantine period.” Located at a major crossroads connecting trade centers in the Transjordan, Egypt, Arabia, and centers of art production in Madaba, Petra was in a unique position for conveying a multitude of cultural/artistic ideas and economic activity. Not only this, but a side room was discovered at the Petra Church that had been furnished to act as a repository for important business/legal documents. During the late-6th century or early-7th century CE, a fire raged through the church, simultaneously damaging and preserving the scrolls in this room. This hoard became known as the Petra Papyri, and thanks to modern imaging technology, researchers were able to scan and read the scrolls with reasonable accuracy. The latest translated document from this collection dates to 593/594 CE, which is presumably when the fire occurred. It is unknown when the church was officially abandoned, as there is evidence of

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150 Ibid., 12.
151 Ibid., 29-30. The region of the Transjordan is located on a seismically active fault line, and several destructive earthquakes have been recorded by historians from Antiquity. It is sometimes difficult to state exactly which destructive event was the cause for a new phase of construction, but relative dating of the surviving mosaics may provide some clues in this regard.
152 Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 219.
153 Ibid., 148.
continued human activity after the fire. Records of various earthquakes in Petra, also during the late-6th and 7th centuries, suggest that some of the evidence of human occupation is related to the robbing of structural and decorative material from the church itself.
Figure 3.2: Aerial view of the pavement mosaic program from the Petra Church, May 31, 1993 (Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 306)
Figure 3.3: Schematic plan of the mosaics of the Petra Church (Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 218)
Description of Mosaics

**Apse and Chancel**

The exact mode and construction of the earliest form of the Petra Church are challenging to determine, as it appears to have been significantly modified by both massive tremors and later phases of construction. The dating of the central apse has been placed in the mid-5th century CE, and a circular framing in the floor suggests that the area may have once held a more detailed mosaic panel that has since been replaced by more massive *opus sectile* paving stones. Post-holes were also discovered, suggesting that the original area covered by the screen of the sanctuary was much smaller (only extending to the first pair of columns in the nave) than the current raised area of the chancel. Sometime during the 6th century CE, the church entered its final phase as an ecclesiastical structure, and a *synthronon* (or raised tier of seats) with a bishop’s throne was added to the apse. Thus far, no mention has been made of a foundation for the church’s main altar; until the 6th century, it was commonplace for a church to use a decorative, movable altarpiece, and the renovations associated with the *synthronon* may have included a fixed altarpiece that was never installed.

**Nave**

The nave of the Petra Church does not appear to have been tessellated in the same way as the side aisles. This revelation comes as a surprise, given that most other similar-sized basilica

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154 In the Petra Church, there are five remaining tessellated spaces mentioned by Fiema et al. In my following analysis, I will defer to their cataloguing style and description of the depicted figures. As shown in Figure 3.3, by dividing the mosaic panels into columns ‘A, B, and C’ and rows ‘1-28,’ the excavators used these coordinates to refer to specific images. I have since adapted this example to my examination of all pavement mosaics.


157 Ibid., 77-78.

158 Ibid., 78-79.
have mostly decorative naves, while the side aisles may carry little in the way of extensively decorative motifs. However, the nave is the location that would receive a majority of foot traffic through the church, and perhaps it was thought that the lack of an intricately tessellated floor would save money in repair and refurbishment costs in the future; alternatively, perhaps the original phase of the church contained a decorated floor which was replaced at a later time. It appears that when the church was first constructed, red limestone slabs were used as paving stones for the nave.\textsuperscript{159} These are very worn and fragile now, which may be an indication of why small marble pavers covered them during a subsequent construction phase.\textsuperscript{160} Most of the nave pavers were removed sometime after the destruction caused by the fire, but enough remained \textit{in situ} in the NW and SW corners of the nave to indicate how the floor must have looked with these paving stones (see Figure 3.2). These marble and stone pavers are more massive than typical tesserae and were placed in several \textit{opus sectile} patterns, similar to (if less intricate than) the nave mosaic of the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian in Jerash.

\textit{Side Aisles}

The north aisle mosaic (Mosaic I) has been damaged but is mostly intact, with 84 medallions depicting various animal and human representations.\textsuperscript{161} An analysis of these figures suggests a later date than the church’s earlier construction phases.\textsuperscript{162} The presence of giraffes in Row 24 suggests a possible \textit{terminus post quem} in 496 CE, as a few specimens were transported through the region during a journey to Constantinople from Africa at that time.\textsuperscript{163} Scholars have

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 35, 60.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 53, 60.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 36-37. Most of the figures depicted in columns A and C are paired species but are generally not identically modelled, suggesting that some figures may be male-female counterparts. This was perhaps done to attach additional vibrancy to the overall composition, or possibly to symbolize the spiritual relevance to both sexes.
\textsuperscript{162} Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 36-37.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 239.
grown accustomed to aligning the closing dates of structures with cataclysmic events, such as the
great earthquake that rocked Petra in 551 CE. Nevertheless, evidence persists that Bishops were
installed in Petra through the beginning of the 7th century CE, thus the Petra Church and its
mosaic may have been used in some form until this late date.164

Beneath the images of these mosaics are a foundation of flat stone and the typical pattern
of mortar bases for the mosaic. It is impossible to determine whether the construction of the
original structure featured tessellated pavements, and even if the church did include tessellated
pavements, the original floor “must have been completely removed, together with its
foundations, or it rested on the foundation of flat stones. Incidentally, Mosaic I does not exhibit
exaggerated signs of wear and crude repairs, characteristic of the main mosaic floor of the
southern aisle (Mosaic II).”165 As a result, researchers cannot determine the date or the extent of
the earliest architectural decorations by Christians in Petra.

As for the medallions of Mosaic I, their damaged sections do not appear to have been
intentional, but rather have been sustained as a natural outcome due to intensive use, or possibly
related to human activity post-abandonment.166 As described in the previous chapter, the
detailed figures were likely made in a workshop (possibly a temporary addition to the
construction site), placed in their assigned location (demarked by a border of vines extending
from a vase in 1B) and surrounded by white tesserae to form the background. These
emblema/medallions were enclosed by another background (tan) with offshoots of grape clusters
and leaves protruding from the vines. It appears that grape clusters and vine leaves have been
added in and around the medallions to help fill any empty spaces under the artistic idea of horror

164 Ibid., 243-44.
165 Ibid., 37.
166 Ibid., 219.
vacui. Some of the figures are larger than their medallion-allotted space, giving the impression that they may have been intended for display sans limite, but have been (mostly) scaled to fit in medallions by the workmen. The materials and colors used in this construction are mostly of natural, earthy tones ranging from white, yellow, red, blue, and various shades of brown, and were likely sourced locally from the region surrounding Petra. This sourcing has not been confirmed via petrographic study and analysis, but such practices were standard enough among ancient mosaic producers to make this a likely hypothesis. The composition is enclosed by a guilloche border made up of multiple interlacing bands. This border is familiar enough in Byzantine and earlier Classical period art, and is especially commonplace in Byzantine mosaics found in the Syro-Palestine region.

Beginning from the western end of the aisle, the medallions of Row 1 feature a pair of Peacocks (1A and 1C) flanking a Vase (Figure 3.4). The Peacock in 1C has suffered extensive damage along its body, but the remaining portions reveal that the two birds were not identical, possibly intended as separate sub-species or as a male Peacock (1C) and a Peahen (1A) owing to the differences in the modeling of their tail feathers. Peacocks were traditionally held as symbols of immortality, and it was believed that the flesh of a peacock would not rot or decay. The two birds are depicted in an attitude of walking toward the amphora in 1B, from which the vines that form the medallion borders are proceeding. The imagery of a Vase or Urn with growing grape or acanthus vines is not uncommon in art from the Near East and the Byzantine Empire. Acanthus leaves are readily identified by their ‘spiky’ appearance and were symbolic in

167 Ibid., 222.
168 Ibid., 221.
169 Ibid., 221.
Nabataean and Hellenistic art of fertility and often associated with various deities. Owing to the fact that an acanthus plant will often regrow if sufficiently root cuttings are left in the ground, the plant also took on a later association with resurrection and immortality.171 The Grapevine is a symbol used by early Christians not only because of allusions made by Christ as the “True Vine,” but also from references in the books of the Old Testament and its connotation with the sacramental offerings of the eucharist; it is also seen as a symbol in Jewish and Christian traditions of ‘churches’ or ‘congregations,’ often with particular reference to a “promised land.”172 In this example, the Amphora used appears to be modeled on a more Classical form, and no close parallels in contemporary mosaics from Jordan have been found; however, this style of Amphora can more often be seen in the neighboring regions of Gaza and Judea.173 Thus far, no detailed scholarly work has been dedicated to the identification and typology of vases in either Classical or Early Christian artwork.174 As noted, vases and urns can be seen in the architectural stylings of the Nabataeans of Petra, but attaching symbolic importance to the different types of pottery is challenging and will not be attempted in this work. Row 2 has a depiction of a Lion and Lioness flanking a basket of Grapes (Figure 3.5). Lions were often used as symbols of power and authority by kings (some of the most notable being the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires, along with their use as a symbol of the Hebrew Tribe of Judah), but here

173 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 223. Vases and amphorae are not uncommonly found in mosaics and art from Antiquity, though to this author’s knowledge, no in-depth study has yet been published which connects the various styles and types of vessels with relation to location and timeframe of the depiction.
174 It should be noted that not only do a number of earlier Nabataean rock-cut edifices in Petra have urns adorning their decorative programs (e.g., Al-Khazneh), but the urn and vine motif was also prominently incorporated into early Islamic decoration motifs (e.g., the wall mosaics of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem).
the artist chose to show these Lions hunched forward, almost as if in an attitude of submission.\textsuperscript{175}

The medallion in 2B bears a simple wicker Basket with three bushels of Grapes, the plainness of the basket is in direct contrast to the more ornate amphora directly below in 1B, which is nevertheless full with the bounty of a harvest from the vines outstretched throughout the mosaic.

![Figure 3.4: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 1 (Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 310)](image1)

![Figure 3.5: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 2 (Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 310)](image2)

![Figure 3.6: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 3 (Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 310)](image3)

Geese, not uncommon sights in Early Christian mosaics, are depicted in both 3A and 3C (Figure 3.6). Geese are often depicted with other waterfowl, such as Ducks and the occasional Ibis, in association with paradisiacal scenes (such as one of the intercolumnar panels described later in the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius).\textsuperscript{176} Their presence could be a motif carried over


\textsuperscript{176} Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 224.
and subsumed into Christianity from earlier Egyptian traditions that used Geese in provisioning/hunting scenes, where Geese were also sacred to the creator god Amun. Additionally, Geese were sacred in Greco-Roman mythology as guardians of cities, being ever-watchful and vigilant.\textsuperscript{177} The object in 3B is partially destroyed, and as such, we cannot adequately describe its appearance, save that it is likely a Bowl whose style may mimic a metal original.

4A depicts a partially damaged human male figure, likely a Shepherd (Figure 3.7). As discussed previously, Petra was a significant crossroads location between Gaza, Judea, Arabia, and Madaba, and the Petra Church mosaic contains motifs and imagery endemic to these various locations. The representation of the Shepherd, in this instance, is more likely to be regularly found in Jordanian mosaics than in mosaics from Gaza or Judea.\textsuperscript{178} Pastoral scenes were familiar enough in Hellenistic mosaics and décor, and the representation of a deity (e.g., Hermes, Apollo, or Dionysus) carrying a lamb was a theme that, like so many others, was quickly adapted by Christian artists as a representation of Christ.\textsuperscript{179} The image of a figure carrying a lamb or some other animal is attested to by the second century CE Greek writer, Pausanias. In his \textit{Description of Greece} (9.22.1-2), Pausanias mentions a myth wherein the god Hermes carried a ram on his shoulders around the city of Tanagra to save it from a deadly plague.\textsuperscript{180} This myth is supposed to have started a small cult dedicated to \textit{Hermes Kriophoros} (“ram-bearer”), and

\textsuperscript{177} J.C. Cooper, \textit{An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 75; Murray and Murray, \textit{Companion to Christian Art}, 27.

\textsuperscript{178} Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 225.

\textsuperscript{179} Margaret Finch, “The Cantharus and Pigna at Old St. Peter’s,” \textit{Gesta} 30, no. 1 (1991): 23, https://doi.org/10.2307/767006; Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 225. Similar representations can be found at locations throughout Jordan including the Church of St. Stephen at Umm ar-Rasas and in the Church of Lot and Procopius at Khirbet al-Mukhayyat (examined later).

A depiction of a Dog occupies medallion 4B (Figure 3.7), which is not entirely uncommon for mosaics in the regions surrounding the Transjordan. However, there are some differences in representation and physical dimorphism between depictions of canines in Jordan and Gaza. Jordanian dogs are usually accompanied by a shepherd (who does not appear in many mosaics from the Gaza region), and their ears are generally larger with more robust bodies. Depictions of dogs in Gaza will typically have a more gracile build and are shown in the act of hunting or chasing another animal. The physical proportions of the Dog in the Petra mosaic, along with its context, place it among the former category. The use of canines in mosaic compositions can either be associated with positive or negative connotations. While they are mentioned in the books of the Old Testament as “destroyers,” by Late Antiquity, artists had begun to use them as symbols of fidelity and companionship.

The image in Medallion 4C (Figure 3.7) is the image of an older man with a large Amphora. The Amphora has been identified as a variant typically used for holding wine and

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181 The oldest Greek statue with this type of pose is the Moschophoros, or “Calf-bearer,” found atop the Acropolis in Athens, and roughly dates to 570 BCE. Other depictions of deities carrying an animal draped over their shoulders have been found on Phoenician-made items, possibly predating Archaic Greece [Pausanias, Descriptions of Greece vol 5, trans. J.G. Frazer (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1965), 88-90].
182 Murray and Murray, Companion to Christian Art, 475; Pausanias, Descriptions of Greece vol 5, 90.
183 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 225.
184 Murray and Murray, Companion to Christian Art, 139.
appears to be of a style used during the 1st-7th century CE. \(^{185}\) Few representations of humans are found in mosaics from Gaza and Judea, and older men are not often shown in Transjordanian mosaics, making this character an intriguing study. When considering the uniqueness of their inclusion, these individuals may be unnamed representations of the early missionaries and monks who are traditionally thought to have brought Christianity to the region. The individual in 4A is depicted as a Shepherd, a role that has obvious scriptural references, and the companion in 4C carries a Vessel filled with wine, possibly a reference to the holy sacrament or the ‘water of life.’ 5A and 5C depict Gazelles (Figure 3.8), too large for their medallion, with necks outstretched to drink from a bowl of water in 5B. The depiction of Gazelles (or other animals, usually Deer/Harts) drinking from a water source is well known in early Christian iconography as symbolizing the faithful drinking from the water of life. \(^ {186}\) Gazelles are not uncommonly found in mosaics near the Jordan River; however, most of those depictions appear more vibrant and have a brighter color contrast than those in the Petra Church. \(^ {187}\)

Figure 3.7: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 4 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 310)


\(^ {186}\) Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 226; John 4: 14 KJV; Murray and Murray, *Companion to Christian Art*, 183, 225; Rev. 21: 6 KJV.

\(^ {187}\) Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 226. One example of this will be examined shortly, in the mosaics of the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius at Khirbet al-Mukhayyat.
Medallions 6A and 6C (Figure 3.10) contain depictions of Ostriches, rarely seen in Transjordanian mosaics. Surprisingly, and despite the damage to 6A, these appear to be realistic representations of the birds, which makes identifying them with a particular workshop
complicated, as other examples from the Transjordan are more fanciful in composition.\textsuperscript{188} A wicker basket containing 11 semicircular objects is shown in 6B. The identification of these objects is unknown, but are thought to be representative of eggs, fruit, or other vegetables.\textsuperscript{189} 7A is a depiction of a Horse (Figure 3.11), remarkably well proportioned, sitting on the ground, while the Horse in 7C is standing and (though damaged) also shows a good idea of proper proportions. Between the Horses is a Pomegranate tree in 7B, bearing seven of the iconic fruit. The Pomegranate is one of the most well-attested types of fruit in the books of the Old Testament, symbolic of eternity and fertility (due to its many seeds), and is often seen in Transjordanian mosaics both anciently and today.\textsuperscript{190} 8A hosts a somewhat humorous depiction of a Rabbit in the act of eating some of the Grapes in its medallion (Figure 3.12). This tongue in cheek depiction is not unique to this composition but appears to be one of the most persistent motifs throughout the Transjordan. The Rabbit may also be a partial remnant of Egyptian cultural influence, where Rabbits were closely associated with Osiris (called \textit{Un-Nefer} and alternatively translated as “the beautiful hare”) and various minor deities of the underworld.\textsuperscript{191} Not only this, but representations of rabbits can be seen in Roman and Byzantine art and have been documented in the Transjordan as late as the Islamic Umayyad period.\textsuperscript{192} 8B is a rendering of a Donkey’s Yoke, which is essentially a wooden frame with a wicker basket on either side for carrying goods. Scenes of Donkeys being used as beasts of burden are not uncommon in the Transjordan (such as in Medallions 22A and 22C in this mosaic panel), as it was an everyday

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{188} Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 226-27.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 227.
\textsuperscript{190} Sill, \textit{Symbols in Christian Art}, 56.
\textsuperscript{192} Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 228.
\end{footnotesize}
sight, but what is curious here is that only the yoke is shown without a Donkey. Perhaps this is meant to be a reference to Christ’s admonition in Matthew 11: 28-30 KJV,

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

9A and 9C each contain a pair of Chukars (Figure 3.13), a subspecies of pheasant native to the region. Similar to the Hare in 8A, the Chukars appear to be in search of food and are beginning to peck at the clusters of Grapes in their medallions.9 A 9B contains a caged bird, identified as a Sandgrouse. Cages (with and without captured prey) are recurring motifs in

93 Ibid., 229.
Byzantine inhabited scroll designs, though the style of the cage may change depending on the local region. Native to arid climates, the Sandgrouse has been noted by ancient naturalists (and confirmed by modern researchers) to have a unique survival technique, in that male Sandgrouse will soak their feathers along with their underbellies in water, and return that stored water to their young. Therefore, it is possible that the Sandgrouse was potentially not only chosen for its local presence but also because of the symbolism associated with its nurturing behavior, useful in symbolizing Christian teachings. Medallions 10A and 10C depict Pigs or Boars (Figure 3.14) which, while common enough in Roman and Byzantine diets, are not usually depicted in Transjordanian mosaics outside of a hunting sequence. 10B contains another wicker Basket laden with Fruit, similar to 6B; however, this depiction contains a variety of fruit, including Grapes, Pomegranates, and another unidentified item. A tall, narrow Amphora with a flat base inhabits scroll 11B, and like other examples of pottery, can be identified with other classical antecedents. The model for this depiction was likely metal and was used to pour wine. 11A and 11C are depictions of what could be a Sacred Ibis (Figure 3.15), referring to earlier Egyptian religious traditions regarding the god Thoth and his attribute of wisdom, or a Stork/Heron, more commonly found among Christian hagiography and iconography as symbolic of filial faithfulness and piety.

194 Ibid., 229.
196 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 229.
197 Ibid., 229.
198 Ibid., 230.
Figure 3.13: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 9 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 311)

Figure 3.14: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 10 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 311)

Figure 3.15: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 11 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 311)
Figure 3.16: Detail of Mosaic I, Rows 6-11 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 311)

Two Bears are depicted in 12A and 12C (see Figure 3.17), and like other animals featured in the Petra Church, both are well proportioned and modeled with relation to their size and the space allotted by their medallions. 12B contains an interesting device that breaks from the norm of this composition. The depicted figure is a ‘Knot’ with interlacing bands, encircling geometric shapes that are suspected to be types of fruit. Knots are typical motifs seen in late antique art, with the simplest and most commonly referred to as ‘Solomon’s Knot,’ and can represent binding and restraining, but also the uniting of separate elements.²⁰⁰ Alongside

Crosses, Knots and other similar devices were thought to be *apotropaic*, or protections against evil spirits, and were often placed on or near thresholds to protect the structure from malicious influences.\(^{201}\) While this Knot is not particularly close to a doorway into the basilica, it may have still served a purpose as a ward against evil.\(^{202}\) Row 13 presents something of a mystery in identifying the birds in 13A and 13C (Figure 3.18). They could be classified as Ducks or Geese, both of which are commonly seen in mosaics near the Jordan River, but can be found throughout the Near East. 13B is a large Vase, of which similar styles have been found both in mosaic and physical forms. However, this one is not as intricately decorated or formed as one might expect to find, especially when considering the exact proportions and rendering of other animals found in Mosaic I.\(^{203}\) Row 14 (Figure 3.19) consists of a single scene, crossing all three medallions, of a caravan in miniature (two animal handlers and one Camel). The Camel in 14B is shown in the act of either standing up or sitting down. Highly realistic and proportional, as if the artist was very familiar with camels and their movements, this depiction is considered to be of high artistic value and could itself serve as a model for future constructions.\(^{204}\) The image of a Camel has no contemporary analogies in the region, but the harness is identical with one found in Birket Abu Radi, which could suggest that these men are *xylemporoi*, or merchants from Gaza who

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\(^{201}\) Ernst Kitzinger, “The Threshold of the Holy Shrine: Observations on Floor Mosaics at Antioch and Bethlehem,” in *Kyriakon. Festschrift Johannes Quasten vol II*, eds. Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (Aschendorff: Münster Westfalen, 1970), 642-43; Roussin, “Iconography of the Figural Pavements,” 90. It seems likely to this author that the intertwined *guilloche* border seen in many pavement mosaics may have also served as an *apotropaic* device, but on a larger scale; perhaps similar in purpose to the use of *cartouches* in Egyptian hieroglyphics.

\(^{202}\) It is important to note that “any broad generalization would be dangerous in view of the common – and surely mechanical – use of the knot motif in the decorative arts of late antiquity and on floor mosaics in particular” (Kitzinger, “Threshold of the Holy Shrine,” 643). Such an act would eventually result in misdirecting others into assigning “symbolic interpretations [to otherwise] innocent ornaments” (Kitzinger, “Threshold of the Holy Shrine,” 643).

\(^{203}\) Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 231.

\(^{204}\) Ibid., 232.
specialized in selling wood. Depictions of the two men have been significantly damaged, but the man in 14A appears to be steadying a felled tree trunk, the Camel’s cargo, by holding onto ropes while the animal is changing positions. Meanwhile, the man in 14C is directing the Camel in its state of action.

While the figure in 15A is completely destroyed (Figure 3.20), we can state with some confidence that the pattern of matching pairs of animals from columns A and C is likely to be

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206 Ibid., 232-33.
unbroken. Therefore, the original images were likely to be a pair of Sandgrouse. The Sandgrouse in 15C has a red ribbon tied around its neck, a common motif for both Cis- and Transjordanian mosaics. Medallion 15B is occupied by a red Eagle, in a pose more reminiscent of Hellenistic styles than the more commonly seen Imperial Roman eagle. Eagles are often found as both divine and royal symbols, such as under the Roman emperors, the cult of Baal-Zeus, and were often associated within pagan Petra with deities such as Dushares and Qaws/Qais; but after the rule of Constantine I, “the eagle became a symbol of the victory of Christianity, which assimilated all the imperial symbolism.” The Eagle is also fitted with some sort of device or pendant around its neck; this is not unusual, as “such items were attached by the ancients to precious animals to protect them from the evil eye” and hostile shamans.

Figure 3.20: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 15 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 312)

Medallions 16A and 16C host Leopards (Figure 3.21), one of several species of non-domesticated animals in Byzantine mosaics from the region. The individual in 16A is seated with forepaws outstretched, while 16C is standing with head bowed; both have been given detailed eyes, ears, and even nostrils. While not as commonly depicted as Lions in Byzantine mosaics, these Leopards share similar naturalistic poses with examples found in and around modern-day Gaza, pointing again, to an array of influencing areas impacting the mosaic floor

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207 Ibid., 233.
208 Ibid., 233.
210 Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 233.
embellishments at the Petra Church. Leopards and cheetahs were often kept as pets by political and economic elites of the Greco-Roman world, which may explain why the original artists were able to create such detailed figures. Leopards were also considered sacred to Dionysus, and like many other pagan motifs and traditions (especially those related to Dionysus and Osiris), were subsumed into the Early Christian iconography to be representative of Christ. The center medallion for this row, 16B, contains a still-life depiction of a severed Fish Head on a plate. Currently, this author is uncertain of the relevance of the Fish Head, which could be indicative of a food dish common in the province, but as other mosaics can be found with similarly decapitated Fish, it is possible that this medallion may have also been created and viewed with a different idea in mind. In some cultural traditions, dismemberment was used to symbolize death, rebirth, and even sacrifice, such as in the myth of Orphic Dionysus, who is killed by Titans and chopped into pieces before being boiled and eaten, only to be restored to life once more; thus, this may be a symbol adopted and adapted to the role of Christ. 17A and 17C host a pair of Herons (Figure 3.22), both are standing erect though with different shading on their feathers. Herons of this nature have been found throughout the mosaics of Palestine and Israel, but are less commonly seen in Jordanian sites. The object in 17B is somewhat more difficult to describe, as it appears to be a simple, shallow bowl of water. While partially destroyed and repaired, no figures are shown in the bowl or near the edges. This bowl may be a reference to the Fountain of Life or a representation of a generic baptismal font or possibly a

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211 Ibid., 234.
212 Mike Dixon-Kennedy, Encyclopedia of Greco-Roman Mythology (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 113-16; Cooper, Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols, 52.
213 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 234.
copy of the one at the Petra Church, but without any supporting evidence, this is little more than supposition.\(^{214}\)

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\(^{214}\) Murray and Murray, *Companion to Christian Art*, 183.
The animal figures of Row 18 (Figure 3.24) are a pair of Cattle (possibly a Cow and a Bull in 18A and 18C respectively), both convincingly rendered in both colorations and pose. There are multiple examples of cattle in pavement mosaics found in the Transjordan, but only the ones depicted in Mosaic III of the Church of Saints Lot and Procopius (Figure 3.89) appear to match these figures in both a realistic pose and modeling. The medallion in 18B appears to be another Amphora, less ornate, but similar in shape to the earlier example in 1B (Figure 3.4). Medallion 19A (Figure 3.25) has been partially damaged and repaired, but the figure of a Duck is

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unmistakable, which is complemented by another Duck in 19C. The individual on the right has been modeled with oddly long legs and distinguishable feathers along the curvature of its back. The central figure of this row contains another Basket whose contents have since been removed from the scene. The unique texture of this basket gives it the appearance of possibly being woven, though the oddly decorative base and overall shape more closely resemble other clay vessels, such as 20B. This being the case, the “woven” texture may be a guilloche pattern, similar to the apotropaic border of this panel.\textsuperscript{216} Upon further examination of this figure, pink tesserae can be seen filling the basket in a pattern similar to flowers found in other mosaics of the Transjordan.\textsuperscript{217} 20A and 20C have also suffered damage, but the figures represented are Elephants (Figure 3.26). Elephants have a long history in the Near East, from Alexander the Great’s use of Syrian/Asian Elephants as war mounts, to their association with both the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties, to their inclusion in the circus and triumphal processions in Rome. While not a common motif, elephantine figures can be seen in several mosaic compositions throughout the Eastern Provinces of the Roman and Byzantine empires, and can also be seen nearby in the carved capitals of the so-called Nabataean Great Temple in Petra.\textsuperscript{218} In terms of their symbolic representation, two possibilities seem likely to this author: Elephants are sometimes associated with Alexander the Great, referring to his sweeping conquests and the use of war elephants in his military forces. The Emperor Hadrian admired the life and accomplishments of Alexander the Great, and as the city of Petra was renamed to \textit{Hadriane Petra}, it is possible that the Elephants were intended as a reference to these two men. Alternatively, it is more likely in the mind of this author that as this mosaic was fashioned some

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 235. \textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 235-36. \textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 236.
300 years after the death of Hadrian, the Elephants in this mosaic, like the Giraffes in Row 24 of this panel, are representative of Petra’s trade connections throughout Africa, the Mediterranean, and farther abroad kingdoms in the East.

The Bowl seen in Medallion 20B (Figure 3.26) is somewhat unusual, as it is depicted with a flounced rim and has been shaded on its lower side to imitate ribbing as if it were modeled on an existing metal bowl with similar characteristics.\(^\text{219}\) 21A and 21C (Figure 3.27) arguably contain the most detailed and richly colored animal figures in the entire mosaic, Roosters. While a common sight in rural settings, in Christian art, Roosters represented vigilance and were also

\(^{219}\) Ibid., 236.
associated with Peter’s ‘Denial of Christ.’  

The object in 21B is somewhat challenging to describe, as it appears to contain a Plate or some other serving tray, similar to 16B, but this one has a stand attached to it, and a vertical object that gives the impression of a knife or candle that has been placed in the center of the tray. Separately, these two items can be found in other compositions, but this configuration has no apparent predecessor and remains something of a mystery.  

![Figure 3.27: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 21 (Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 313)](image)

Donkeys are the primary occupants of 22A and 22C (Figure 3.28). While 22A has been severely damaged, both creatures are distinctly modeled and appear to be walking forward.  

With heads bowed in submission, the artist has given them an air of domestication, which is very likely, considering their value as beasts of burden. 22B is designed to represent a Tree with a brown trunk, green spikey leaves, and bearing some species of fruit. Similar to the identification of specific vases, trees are also difficult to identify. While some have tentatively associated this specimen with the tree seen in the chancel mosaic of the Church of Saints Lot and Procopius (Mosaic I, discussed later), this author believes that the clusters of fruit could also be seen as clusters of Dates from a Palm Tree.  

The animals in 23A and 23C are either Crowned Cranes

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220 Murray and Murray, Companion to Christian Art, 58.
221 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 237.
222 Ibid., 237-38.
223 Ibid., 237.
Phoenixes (Figure 3.29), making them the most exotic of any found in the Petra Church.Phoenixes are not often seen in the mosaics of Jordan or the Near East, though there are a few sparse examples. The Phoenix is a mythological bird that is reborn from its ashes and thus came to represent being purified and reborn from a lower state to a higher one. It was previously used in Roman iconography and subsequent Byzantine and Early Christian art as a complex symbol of immortality and resurrection. The Vessel in 23B is commonly referred to as a “crater,” and is another example of a vessel modeled after a metallic counterpart.

Figure 3.28: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 22 (Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 313)

Figure 3.29: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 23 (Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 313)

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224 The possible discrepancy emanates from the “fringe” above the subject’s head. While these could be the feathers of a crane’s plume, phoenixes are also depicted with “rays of light or fire” above their heads; however, in the case of the phoenix, these rays are often accompanied by a nimbus or solar crown symbolic of their sacred nature (Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 238).

225 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 238.

226 Gaskell, Dictionary of Scripture and Myth, 572.


228 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 238.
The figures from 24A and 24C are identified as another exotic creature, the Giraffe (Figure 3.31). The artist had likely never seen a Giraffe before, as the body of the figure resembles that of a camel, complete with a hump on its back, the addition of leopard spots, and a more vertical neck confirms that the animal is intended to be a giraffe. The reasoning for this odd modeling is likely because the Greek word for a giraffe is κάμηλοπάρδαλις, which is a combination of the words κάμηλος – camel and πάρδαλις – leopard.\(^{229}\) Medallion 24B houses what appears to be a woven Basket with a semispherical lid. The definition of this basket is not

\(^{229}\) Ibid., 238-39.
so precise as to determine if it is woven from organic material or if it merely has a plaited design along its body. More birds, possibly Pheasants, are depicted in 25A and 25C (Figure 3.32). Pheasants are popular depictions in the region of the Transjordan, as they are widely used as game birds.

The objects in 25B are five pieces of fruit, spread evenly within the medallion (Figure 3.32). The two on the bottom right are easily identified as Pomegranates, symbolic of eternity and fertility, but also with a royal connotation (owing to the “crown-like” protrusion). On the left is a large spherical fruit, possibly a type of Melon that had begun to circulate in the Mediterranean in Late Antiquity. The top two fruits are a similar shade to the Pomegranates, but their shape is more appropriate to Figs. Figs and Fig Leaves are symbols that can have multiple

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230 Ibid., 239. Cf. However, it is possible that the object in question may instead have been made to resemble an incense burner fashioned from clay strips, rather than a woven basket. This alternate assumption is all the more appropriate if one considers Petra’s link with spice and incense trade routes. Additionally, the animals on either side of the incense burner could be interpreted as resembling Arabian camels, rather than giraffes (Cynthia Finlayson and David Johnson, Personal communication with author, March 25, 2021).

231 Sill, Symbols in Christian Art, 56.
meanings depending on the context and in Early Christian art can either be symbols of lust, or of fruitfulness and good works. Given that the other fruits in this setting can also be perceived as positive symbols of fruitfulness (owing to their high-seed count), it is likely that these Figs are also meant to be identified similarly. 26A and 26C are the final human figures in this panel (Figure 3.33), each bearing offerings (an Amphora and a Plate) possibly referential to the wine and bread of the sacrament. Their oriental style of dress suggests that they may be servants to a wealthy or foreign individual. The object in 26B is intriguing and mysterious, as it appears to be a brown (possibly wooden) hexagonal box with a hinged, conical lid (referred to as a Pyxis), containing six indistinguishable items carefully laid out within. A Pyxis was typically a small vessel used to hold cosmetics, jewelry, or sewing items but were used throughout Early Christianity to hold relics and emblems of the eucharist during worship services.

In Row 27, medallions A and C depict individual birds, likely Doves (Figure 3.34).

There is no perfect comparison for these specific figures elsewhere in the Near East, but similar examples have been found and dated to the 6th century CE in the Byzantine churches of Umm ar-Rasas in Jordan north of Petra. In earlier pagan religions in the Near East, the Dove was sacred to Aphrodite/Atargatis and were protected by law in Greater Syria. The Dove is also an

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232 Ibid., 55.
233 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 240-41.
234 Ibid., 240-41.
235 Ibid., 241.
important symbol in Christianity, as it is seen as an emblem of purity and gentleness. Not only this, but the Dove is also the form taken by the Holy Ghost at the time of Christ’s baptism, as recorded in the Gospels of the New Testament. Medallion 27B depicts a sprouting Stone-Pine cone. These trees are native to the Mediterranean, and while relatively common in nature, their representation in art is rare (one other example being found in the Church of the Priest of Wa’il at Umm ar-Rasas). In Dionysiac myths, the sprouting Pinecone is seen as a phallic, generative, and creative force, and is sometimes used by Dionysus as a weapon. Evergreen trees that bear cones, like the cedar and cypress trees, were symbolically associated throughout Antiquity with both mortuary practices and eternal life (owing to the fact that the tree appears unchanged year-round and continually produces offspring as its cones fall to the ground). The final row of this mosaic panel hosts a Ram in both 28A and 28C (Figure 3.35). Rams and sheep are often seen in Byzantine and Early Christian mosaics, symbolic of virtues and higher qualities (e.g., innocence, penitence, purity, etc.), sacrificial offerings, and at its most profound significance as representative of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. Finally, 28B contains a Vessel with a wide-mouth opening at the top. Shaped more like a bowl than a vase, this may be modeled as another imitation of a metal counterpart with ridges along the underside and handles on opposite ends of the rim. This bowl may also be representative of a kantharos, a twohandled wine cup sometimes associated with ritual use and offerings. Placed as it is, between two Sheep with bowed heads, this row may be a symbolic representation of the Eucharist.

238 Cooper, *Encyclopedia of Traditional Myths*, 42.
Figure 3.34: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 27 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 314)

Figure 3.35: Detail of Mosaic I, Row 28 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 314)

Figure 3.36: Detail of Mosaic I, Rows 24-28 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 314)
The south aisle does not have a single mosaic similar to its counterpart on the north aisle, but rather, is split into two panels. The larger of the two-floor panels (Mosaic II) depicts anthropomorphized representations of the Four Seasons and assorted animals in 51 medallions and has been cautiously dated to c. 450-500 CE.\textsuperscript{242} It is likely that this mosaic was also not laid down during the initial construction phase of the church, but was likely placed sometime before the final phase of construction when the church and complex were expanded to include various smaller structures, and a raised sanctuary or apsidal chapel. East of Mosaic II is the smaller panel of this aisle, Mosaic III. This panel features only six medallions with depictions of animals. However, these portrayals seem to more closely match the stylistic representations of Mosaic I than those of Mosaic II. Stratigraphically, this panel is also associated with the final phase of construction, which is closer to the time frame given for Mosaic I (c. 496-551 CE).\textsuperscript{243}

As noted above, Mosaic II exhibits extensive signs of wear and damage, more so than either Mosaic I or III.\textsuperscript{244} It is commonly accepted that tessellated floors were periodically replaced for several reasons, from repairing general wear and tear damage to remodeling based on changing styles and preferences.\textsuperscript{245} It is possible that Mosaic II was still in an acceptable condition, and did not need to be replaced when Mosaic I was designed; perhaps Mosaic I (and possibly Mosaic III) was also set to replace a previous pavement that was deemed to be inappropriate due to ‘heterodox’ symbols or compositions that referenced doctrines sacrilegious to the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is possible that while the original flooring of Mosaic I had to be wholly replaced, Mosaic II only needed to be altered in a few places to make it more

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid., 244.
\textsuperscript{245} Ibid., 37, 244.
compliant. However, without documentation to explain the alteration and the difference in conditions and styles between the two aisle mosaics, this theory is ultimately speculative.

Similar to Mosaic I, this panel is divided into multiple rows and columns with medallions that display various figures, though knots instead of grapevines form the border of these medallions. The panel’s exterior border is also a Guilloche pattern, like that of Mosaic I. Unlike Mosaic I, however, the center column (B) contains several *emblemata* that fill the space of two rows instead of the customary one. In these medallions, the master craftsman employed a technique known as *opus vermiculatum*, which manipulates tesserae smaller than 4 mm to create an incredibly detailed and shaded image. This practice is different, but complementary, to the more widely employed *opus tessellatum* technique, which uses slightly larger tesserae, generally following a grid or pattern, to form the backgrounds and borders of the mosaic.

Medallions 1A and 1C feature Gazelles (Figure 3.37), not as finely modeled as in Mosaic I, but present nonetheless. As mentioned previously, gazelles are more commonly found in the environs of the Transjordan than other types of deer more endemic to other regions of the Mediterranean; as such, these Gazelle are thought to embody the same symbolism as their western counterparts. Deer and gazelle were seen as symbolic of a gentile convert, and as such, can often be found in a motif where they drink from a fountain, or vessel of water, symbolizing the ‘Waters of Life’ or baptism. Medallion 1B has been obscured due to damage but may have contained a vessel of some sort, possibly filled with water to complete the previously mentioned motif. 2A depicts a Fish beneath a semi-circular design meant to imitate a

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246 Ibid., 245.
247 Cooper, *Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols*, 73.
248 John 7: 37 KJV; Murray and Murray, *Companion to Christian Art*, 225; Revelation 21: 6 KJV.
scalloped sea shell (Figure 3.37). The presentation of a fish is a prevalent sight in Christian iconography. The Greek word for fish, ιχθύς (or ‘ichthys’), was turned into an acronym for “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior,” thus the presence of a fish is usually intended to be a representation of Christ. This image was likely repeated in 2C, though the medallion has been all but destroyed. The figure in 2B has likewise been defaced, possibly intentionally, but its identification is still possible thanks to the Greek inscription, Χιμερινή (Winter). Other personifications of the Seasons can provide clues to the type of figure we might have expected to see, had the medallion not been defaced. The figure was likely a woman with an uncovered head, holding a jug as one of the more common attributes of this character. On the subject of this character, it should be noted that each of the personifications is depicted in a square medallion, not a circular one. According to the principles of symbolic geometry, a square was intended to represent the earth and temporal concerns, not necessarily associated with eternal matters.

Figure 3.37: Detail of Mosaic II, Rows 1-2 (Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 318)

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249 Conch shells are often associated with Poseidon/Neptune and other oceanic deities, and the use in this mosaic is appropriate given the number of aquatic life and the figure of Okeanos (see Figure 3.41) (Cooper, Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, 42).

250 Gaskell, Dictionary of Scripture and Myth, 279.

251 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 247.

252 Sill, Symbols in Christian Art, 137, 262.
The characters in 3A and 3C (Figure 3.38) appear to be another pair of birds, likely associated with waterfowl. The bird on the right has been too damaged, but we can see that the left bird has an elongated neck in an S-curve, and is holding a dark plant in its beak.\(^\text{253}\) This bird is likely intended to be a Stork or Heron, like those mentioned in Mosaic I. Medallion 3-4B is the first example of an extended image in this panel (Figure 3.38); it depicts a Fisherman in a rectangular field with a conch on either of the short sides of the field. The subject is simply dressed and posed similar to other examples of this type, including one at the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius. The presence of this image is both reminiscent of pastoral life in the Transjordan but is also symbolic of scriptural references to disciples of Jesus Christ who have been sent to spread the news of Christianity.\(^\text{254}\) Medallion 4A depicts another Fish with a conch motif, colored differently than 2A, and 4C has been destroyed.

![Figure 3.38: Detail of Mosaic II, Rows 3-4 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 318)](image)

\(^{253}\) Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 247.

\(^{254}\) Gaskell, *Dictionary of Scripture and Myth*, 279; Jeremiah 16: 16 KJV; Mark 1: 17 KJV; Matthew 4: 19 KJV.
In row 5, columns A and C depict Lions (Figure 3.39), which are not as finely modeled as those in Mosaic I but do share the same posture as the Leopards in that panel. These Lions are also depicted with a plant or reed in front of them. Other parts of these medallions are empty, ruling out the necessity of combating *horror vacui*, the presence of these plants may be referring to the paradisiacal reign of Christ spoken of in Isaiah, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.” The square field of 5B has also been defaced, but the inscription Γη (or Earth) is still legible. All that remains to be seen is the top of the central figure’s head and her right arm, along with a putto on her right side. Other representations of the Earth in Byzantine mosaics from Syria and Palestine suggest that she would have been depicted with a wreath on her head (which can almost be seen here despite the damage), and a cloak full of fruit, symbolizing the bounty offered by the Earth. These images are unmistakable remnants of previous pagan art depicting the Four Seasons; such examples are commonly seen in extant Roman-Era mosaics throughout Jordan, Syria, and Asia Minor.

![Figure 3.39: Detail of Mosaic II, Row 5 (Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 318)](image)

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255 Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 248-49.
256 Isaiah 65: 25 KJV.
257 Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 249.
258 Ibid., 249.
Continuing the trend among the even-numbered medallions, 6A and 6C (which is severely damaged) depict fish below the representation of a Conch Shell (Figure 3.41). However, unlike every other fish representation, these two Fish are facing “backwards.”  

While every other surviving representation of marine life is east-facing (toward the chancel), the Fish in row 6 are west-facing. The reason for this is unknown, though it may be related to the figure occupying 6-7B, the Ocean. Labeled as Οκεανός (Okeanos or Ocean), the scene is replete with iconography from the Classical Period depictions of marine deities, such as Neptune.  

Okeanos’ left foot rests upon a small Dolphin, his right-hand holds a Ship aloft while the left

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259 Ibid., 250.
260 Ibid., 250.
grasps an Oar, and his head sports a pair of Lobster claws for good measure. All of these accouterments can be found in similar representations throughout the Roman world.\textsuperscript{261}

![Figure 3.41: Detail of Mosaic II, Rows 6-7 (Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 319)](image)

Medallion 7A (and presumably 7C if it were not damaged beyond recognition) hosts a bird identified as a Guinea Fowl (Figure 3.41).\textsuperscript{262} Guinea Fowls can be similar in appearance to partridges and pheasants, and they likely share the same symbolic meaning as their distant cousins. 8A and 8C (though 8C is partially destroyed) break the trend of displaying a different type of fish and instead hosts a Stingray (Figure 3.42). The side flaps, or ‘wings,’ can be seen along with its slender tail beneath the now-familiar Conch Shell as it faces east, or the ‘top’ of the mosaic. Thus far, this is the only recorded representation of a ray in Byzantine mosaics from the Near East.\textsuperscript{263} The figure in 8B is labeled as \textit{Εαρινή} (or Spring), and is a young woman in a square field, clad in a brown garment with modest jewelry, holding a basket filled with red flowers (Figure 3.42).\textsuperscript{264} Her overall figure has no close comparisons elsewhere in the region,

\textsuperscript{261} Ibid., 250.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid., 250-51.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., 251-52.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid., 251-52.
but her adornment is similar to other portraits found in Transjordan, and her posture is almost identical to a depiction of Aphrodite in Hippolytus Hall in Madaba.265

Figure 3.42: Detail of Mosaic II, Row 8 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 319)

The circular fields 9A and 9C depict Donkeys (Figure 3.43), a common sight as beasts of burden in the region, each with its head bowed and appearing to be in the process of eating a similar plant to those in the Lion medallions from row 5 of this mosaic panel. The next figure that occupies two rows, 9-10B, appears to be a Fowler. His body is weighed down by numerous cages and trapping gear, indicating he is a hunter, with his eyes fixed on the limb of a tree where his quarry lies. In his hands, he holds what is presumably a rod with a sticky lime on it to prevent the birds from taking flight, and leather cords to bind his prey once they are rendered flightless.266 10C has been completely obliterated, but likely is a copy of 10A, which contains a Dolphin and the Conch Shell (Figure 3.43). The Dolphin is a notable symbol in Early Christian art, dating back to its use in catacomb paintings in Rome, and was also a popular feature in Roman mosaic compositions. Like doves, dolphins were associated with the goddess Atargatis, and have been found in a number of locations where Nabataean art has been preserved, including the nearby Temple of the Winged Lions in Petra.267 In Hellenistic-Roman compositions, dolphins often symbolized strength and swiftness, were favored by Dionysus and Poseidon, and

265 Ibid., 252.
266 Ibid., 251-52.
were believed to help ferry souls toward the afterlife, all of which helped symbolize resurrection and salvation in Christian settings. Significantly, within the Dionysus mythologies, Dionysus turned some threatening pirates into dolphins. Thus, in Classical art, they could also symbolize the transformation of the soul. Dolphins were also credited with saving drowning sailors by pushing them ashore, so were also potentially used in later Christian art as symbolic of salvation.

Figure 3.43: Detail of Mosaic II, Rows 9-10 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 319)

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Medallion 11A is thought to depict an Ibis (Figure 3.45), due to the exaggerated curvature of the beak. It is possible that this bird carried a symbolism similar to other waterfowl like the Heron. However, it is also possible that the Ibis carried a special significance, possibly a connotation dating back to the Egyptian god Thoth and his chief attribute, wisdom. The latter is especially likely as the figure in the square field of 11B is labeled Σοφία (or Wisdom). We know that the figure is female, both the word and attribute are feminine in nature, and while her face has been damaged, we can see the remains of a nimbus surrounding her head. Her left-hand

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269 Ibid., 253.
holds a book, which could be any number of codices or tomes, though books depicted in ecclesiastical contexts are often intended to represent the Gospels. This being the case, her attributes, and presence in a square field are likely meant to represent Holy Wisdom or revelation from God upon the Earth. The matching Ibis in 11C has been mostly destroyed, displaying the opus sectile foundation of the mosaic, but part of the neck and head are still visible.

Figure 3.45: Detail of Mosaic II, Row 11 (Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 320)

Another Fish can be seen in the medallion 12A and likely had a matching partner in 12C, which is now destroyed (Figure 3.46). The figure in 12-13B is a Fisherman, though his face and torso are now severely damaged. His presence and style of dress are reminiscent of other figures from Mosaic I, the left hand of the figure holds a recently caught Fish, but the rest of his equipment and attributing features have been lost to us. His proximity in the mosaic, so close to the figure of Wisdom, inspires another symbolism of Fish and Fishermen not yet discussed. In some traditions, Fish can be seen as facts or truths of existence, and the role of a Fisherman is taken on when one learns something new or has an enlightening experience. If this understanding is taken into account, it is possible that this figure is not just representing a local profession or even a religious injunction to spread the Gospel of Christianity, but might represent an individual who has learned some sacred truth essential to their salvation.

270 Ibid., 253-54.
271 Ibid., 254.
272 Ibid., 254-55.
273 Ibid., 254-55.
274 Gaskell, Dictionary of Scripture and Myth, 279.
Medallion 13A depicts a Bull (Figure 3.46) similar to examples seen previously, if not as finely modeled, and shares the same symbolic associations.\(^{275}\) Like other examples from the third column, 13C has been completely obliterated from the composition. The Fish depicted in 14A and partially remaining in 14C almost appears more akin to a Serpent or an Eel (Figure 3.47). Its snakelike body shares similarities with other marine life associated with Okeanos and Thalassa (the Classical female personification of the sea), and as such, may have been included to round out the examples of marine life.\(^{276}\) The figure in the square field of 14B is given the inscription Θερινή (or Summer), and she bears attributes typical to work during that season. She holds a small scythe aloft in her right hand while her left arm cradles a sheaf of wheat, representative of agricultural work and the coming harvest.\(^{277}\) Similar renderings are seen from North Africa to Antioch, but this depiction is unique as only her right breast is exposed. Nudity in Classical art is omnipresent and is seen in later religious compositions, but partial nudity in the Early Christian churches of Late Antiquity is comparatively rare.\(^{278}\) Exposed breasts,

\(^{275}\) Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 255.
\(^{276}\) Ibid., 255-56.
\(^{277}\) Ibid., 255-56.
\(^{278}\) Ibid., 256.
distinctively, are used as symbolic indicators of motherhood, love, nourishment, and abundance.\textsuperscript{279} Such indicators have long been associated with pagan goddesses of protection and nurturing, and so were also associated with the fertility of summer. In later Christian art, the seated Virgin Mary is often depicted with exposed breasts, in the act of nursing the Christ Child, similar to earlier pagan depictions of Isis and Horus.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{mosaic_details1}
\caption{Figure 3.47: Detail of Mosaic II, Row 14 (Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 320)}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{mosaic_details2}
\caption{Figure 3.48: Detail of Mosaic II, Rows 11-14 (Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 320)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{279} Cooper, \textit{Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols}, 25.
Medallions 15A and 15C depict the classic Christian symbols of Doves (Figure 3.49), emblems of purity, aspiration, gentleness, peace, and the Holy Ghost. Medallion 15-16B is the depiction of yet another Eagle, but unlike the example from Mosaic I – Medallion 15B, this example is more similar to the familiar Imperial Eagle of Rome. From the viewpoint of early Christians and their pagan predecessors, eagles were symbolic of the resurrection because it was thought that they were able to rejuvenate themselves by soaring into the heavens and then returning to earth. In this way, they also represented the aspiration of the human soul to soar into the heavens with God. Antelope are depicted in profile view (Figure 3.50) in Medallions 17A and 17C, though there is little of interest about them, except that their eyes are facing the viewer and are striking a simple pose. The final personification of this mosaic is in the square field of 17B and can be identified by the label Φθινοπωρινή (or Autumn). She is simply adorned in both dress and jewelry and holds a basket of freshly harvested fruit, including Grapes and Pomegranates. The display is reminiscent of the personification of Spring in Medallion 8B of this panel (Figure 3.42).

280 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 256; Gaskell, Dictionary of Scripture and Myth, 229-30; Murray and Murray, Companion to Christian Art, 58.
281 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 256.
282 Sill, Symbols is Christian Art, 20.
283 Murray and Murray, Companion to Christian Art, 58.
284 Fiema et al., The Petra Church, 256-57.
285 Ibid., 257.
286 Ibid., 257.
Row 18 of this panel diverges from the trend of featuring marine life in the even number rows and instead depicts Roosters beneath Conch Shells (Figure 3.51). The Rooster was seen as a symbol of vigilance in Christian iconography, both in heralding the approach of the dawn after the darkness of night and in protecting those individuals under its charge.\textsuperscript{287} Medallion 18-19B contains a depiction of two Birds drinking from a Vase of water. This subject is an example of a Greco-Roman motif that was appropriated for use by Early Christians and came to represent followers of Christ seeking to drink from the waters of Eternal Life.\textsuperscript{288} The figures in 19A and C have been mostly obliterated, but traces of the animals, probably Bears, can still be seen along the edges of the destruction.\textsuperscript{289}

\textsuperscript{287} Murray and Murray, \textit{Companion to Christian Art}, 58.
\textsuperscript{288} Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 258.
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., 258.
Figure 3.51: Detail of Mosaic II, Rows 18-19 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 321)

Figure 3.52: Detail of Mosaic II, Rows 15-19 (Fiema et al., *The Petra Church*, 321)
The second mosaic panel found in the South aisle of the Petra Church, Mosaic III, is different from either of the first two mosaic panels in the quality of the workmanship. Where the team working on Mosaic I appear to have focused their efforts on creating realistic, natural depictions of their subjects, and the team from Mosaic II created detailed human personifications, the artisans who worked on Mosaic III (likely constructed during the mid-late 6th century) may not have been as skilled and thus the panel is somewhat less detailed by comparison. The panel consists of only six medallions, laid out in a 3x2 pattern. These medallions are larger than the previous panels, but continues the pattern of paired animals. The border of this mosaic is not a Guilloche pattern like Mosaics I and II, though the medallions are connected by interloped circles comparable to Mosaic II; instead the border is a series of alternating Diamonds and Circles on two sides, and a series of ‘Indented Diamonds’ along the other two (Figure 3.53). This pattern can be found elsewhere in the region but does not appear to have been particularly popular among any specific clique.

Medallions 1A and 1B are a pair of Deer, likely meant to be a variety native to the Near East. As mentioned before, Deer were often symbolic of gentile converts to Christianity, and perhaps this local sub-species of Deer was intended to be symbolic of converts from the region. These figures are surprisingly disproportional, though 1B does display a more natural shading. The birds in this panel are a pair of Ostriches in 2A and 2B. The pose and depiction of these birds have analogous examples from later Islamic Umayyad Palaces. Finally, a pair of Rams are shown in 3A and 3B, commonly presented in the Near East for their importance as food sources, commodities, and symbolic representations of both Christ and sacrificial offerings.

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290 Ibid., 260-61.
291 Ibid., 260.
292 Ibid., 260-61.
Each of these animal pairs, and their correlative examples, help date this mosaic panel to the latter half of the 6th century CE.\textsuperscript{293}

Figure 3.53: Detail of Mosaic III (Fiema et al., \textit{The Petra Church}, 326)

To conclude this section, the images displayed in the Petra Church are primarily made up of animal figures, with some additional human figures, inanimate objects, and anthropomorphized representations. All in all, the variety of figures depicted, along with the modeling used in the depictions, helps support the idea that they were selected for two particular reasons: First, that they can be used to help subtly teach (and remind) individuals about the

\textsuperscript{293} Ibid., 261.
divinity of Jesus Christ; and Second, scholars can infer that the particular styles of figural modeling were selected to showcase the variety of nearby areas that culturally influenced, or potentially had commercial ties with or through, the city of Petra.

The Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian, Jerash

History

The city of Jerash, also known anciently as Gerasa, is one of the best-preserved ancient cities known today. Before it was a Roman possession, Jerash (Gerasa) was a part of the Decapolis, a grouping of the ten wealthiest and most influential cities in the Transjordan that shared a relatively common culture and language. The exact listing of these cities is debated, but prior to the Roman occupation, Gerasa is commonly listed as one of the most popular. Gerasa thrived in the Transjordan due to its proximity to abundant water resources, which helped sustain a solid agricultural base, pagan pilgrimage sites to both Aphrodite and Dionysius, trade routes to the civilizations of the East, and beneficial treaties with the Nabataeans to the south. The success of the cities of the Decapolis at leveraging local resources allowed them to generate a modest regional power base until they attracted the attention of the Roman military and political leaders and were conquered in 106 CE and absorbed, along with Petra and Nabataea, into the Roman Empire by Trajan.

As Crowfoot so aptly states, “We cannot appreciate the work of the Christians on this site until we have first distinguished the pagan buildings which they incorporated in their new

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As mentioned in previous chapters, Early Christian artwork borrowed from the patterns and motifs of previous pagan ideologies, and examples, and the churches at Jerash were no exception. The ‘Great Portico’ near the center of Jerash, where the Christian populace would eventually construct a church, dubbed by archaeologists as the ‘Cathedral Church,’ was once home to a large pagan Roman-Era temple. The original dedication to this temple is currently not extant, but associated historical and archaeological evidence makes it likely that the temple was dedicated to the Infant Dionysus. The similarities associated with Dionysus/Bacchus (who was, among other things, the god of Wine, closely associated with immortality, and rebirth after death) and Jesus Christ are quite significant during the Early Christian Period as numerous pagan converts embraced the new Faith. Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310-403 CE) even mentions Jerash as the scene of an annual miracle where on the Day of the Epiphany (which is coincidentally also the anniversary of the Miracle of Cana) the water of a fountain was turned into wine, and may have also been associated previously with Dionysus. The fountain and the nearby Christian church are situated on the previously mentioned ‘Great Portico,’ which could also have been connected to the Infant Dionysus in Classical Antiquity, potentially giving us another example of adapting and reusing pagan traditions and associations for Christian needs.

Speaking further on the construction and prevalence of mosaics in Jerash, Crowfoot writes that, “It is difficult to dig anywhere at Jerash without finding mosaics… They are of all qualities: some are plain white, others have rudimentary crisscross (sic) patterns…; others have the decorative richness of an Oriental rug.” Most of the materials used in the mosaics of

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297 Crowfoot, Churches at Jerash, 7.
298 Ibid., 2-3, 7.
300 Crowfoot, Churches at Jerash, 39.
Jerash were quarried from local areas, except for a few churches where imported marble and some glass tesserae have been uncovered. The local limestone, however, was not so bland that it could not be provided in varying shades, including pink, red, yellow, brown, creamy white, grey, and black. According to Crowfoot, “the local tints are very beautiful, and it would be hard to surpass the soft and delicate gradations of colour which are brought out when the floors are wetted or polished.”

It is unclear how and when Christianity came to Jerash, but records indicate that a Bishop was sent from Jerash to the Council at Seleucia in 359 CE. A joint British-American archaeological expedition took place at Jerash in the 1920s and 30s, whose efforts uncovered the sites of eleven churches, not including various other chapels and structures. From the archaeological evidence, it was discovered that Jerash underwent a frenzied period of ecclesiastical construction and expansion during the 6th century CE. One discovered archaeological site appeared to be a single structure, but was eventually revealed to be a complex of three separate churches identified as the Church of St. John the Baptist (531 CE), which sat in the middle, flanked by the Church of St. George (529-530 CE) on the south and the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian (529-533 CE) on the north (Figure 3.54). The two flanking churches were built in a typical apsidal basilica style, while the Church of St. John the Baptist was built with a circular floorplan, likely with a large dome above it (a style also popularized in nearby Syria). All three churches shared a courtyard on the western side, and a baptistery was built connecting St. John with SS. Cosmas and Damian. According to later Christian legends, the

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301 Ibid., 39.
302 Ibid., 2; Macdonald, Pilgrimage in Early Christian Jordan, 52-54.
303 Crowfoot, Churches at Jerash, 1-3; Macdonald, Pilgrimage in Early Christian Jordan, 54.
304 Crowfoot, Churches at Jerash, 3.
Saints Cosmas and Damian were brothers who practiced medicine throughout the Middle East, and likely sought medical education and training in Syria. Their fame resulted from their ability to perform miraculous cures through both their religious faith and their professional craft, and their refusal to accept payment for services rendered. The brothers were martyred sometime during the fourth century CE when the persecution of Christians by Diocletian reached the Eastern Provinces. Owing to their constant proselytizing efforts and regional fame, Cosmas and Damian’s Christian faith would have been impossible to remain concealed for long, and so the brothers were soon arrested, tried, and beheaded. Their efforts to further Early Christian teachings won them much posthumous acclaim, and numerous churches have since been dedicated to their honor throughout Gaul, Syria, Palestine, and Greater Arabia.

Figure 3.54: Floorplan of the churches comprising the ‘St. John the Baptist’s group,’ Jerash

307 Butler, Lives of the Fathers, vol. IX.
In 749 CE, a violent earthquake struck the city, and it appears that the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian was one of the hardest-hit edifices. It does not appear from the archaeological evidence that an attempt was made to repair or restore either the church or the mosaics at the time of the event. The absence of significant repair and restoration efforts may have been, in part, a result of the lack of Christian patrons. By this period, the Byzantine military could no longer effectively hold back either Persian Sassanian advances, or Arab Muslim forces, and so Byzantium quietly abandoned the region.

By 614 CE, Persian forces had conquered the Transjordan, which sparked a retaliatory campaign from Constantinople which reconquered the region in 628 CE. This victory was short-lived, and in 635 CE, the region was once again lost to the Byzantine Empire. It is possible that by the time another massive earthquake tore through the city in 749 CE, there were not enough Christian patrons to make the loss of a single church particularly meaningful. While unfortunate at the time, this disaster has granted modern archaeologists a remarkable chance to explore untouched Byzantine mosaic programs from the 6th and 7th centuries. The destruction of the walls and roof of the original church covered up and preserved most of the pavement mosaic from the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian. While the floors of other nearby churches were altered and destroyed by iconoclasts (likely both Christian and Muslim alike), the buried representational images in the floor design of the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian were sheltered from further molestation by the above earthquake event.

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310 Ibid., 25.
Description of Mosaics

Apse and Chancel

Among the excavated church, archaeologists found that the apse was utterly devoid of any mosaics, seating arrangements, and other architectural fittings, leading archaeologists to believe that if any existed after the destruction cause by the earthquake, they were dismantled and moved into the Church of St. George.\(^{311}\)

Nave

On the east end of the nave, directly below the apse and the chancel, is Mosaic I, which hosts the main inscription of the church. The final line of this inscription somewhat obscurely “ends with a reference to an excellent man ‘whose name thou shalt learn, keeping the name of the Forerunner.’”\(^{312}\) This line is possibly a clue informing us that, even anciently, the complex of three churches may have been referred to as the St. John the Baptist’s Church/Group. Flanking either side of the inscription are images of some notable founders of this particular structure, Theodore and Georgia (Figure 3.55). On the left, Theodore holds a lit censer, presumably on the occasion of the dedication of the church, as portable censers were not used as a part of the standard liturgy during the 6\(^{th}\) century CE.\(^{313}\) Theodore is portrayed wearing a set of clothes that combine both long, close-fitting sleeves, and a voluminous robe, reminiscent of a chasuble or phelonion robe worn by clergy members as they officiated. The other founder, Georgia, is portrayed on the opposite side of the inscription in orant position (i.e., with outstretched arms in an attitude of prayer). She is depicted wearing a tunic or dress with orbiculi

\(^{311}\) Ibid., 23. Some loose glass tesserae were found on the floor of the apse, however, supporting the idea that the apse and ceiling may have once held additional mosaic scenes.


or medallions ornamenting the lower portion with a red cloak and shoes. Upon closer inspection, Georgia is also adorned with large drop-earrings and a necklace, an indicator of status and wealth during Late Antiquity.

Figure 3.55: Detail of nave mosaic from Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian, Jerash [Photo by J. Schweig, SS. Cosmas and Damianus, nave, with inscriptions, 1938, in Carl H. Kraeling, ed., Gerasa: City of the Decapolis (New Haven, CT: ASOR, 1938), 733, plate LXXIII]

Between the depictions of Theodore and Georgia, lies the central inscription of the church mosaic (Figure 3.55). The dedication is surrounded by a decorative motif known as *tabula ansata*. Relatively common during the Roman and Late Antique periods, the *tabula ansata* pattern consists of a simple box of colored tesserae containing an inscription, with a triangle at its shorter (typically northern and southern) ends. The translated inscription reads:

The holy place of Saints Cosmas and Damian has been floored with mosaic,
In the time of… [A.D. 533]
Do homage and reverence to the fair building
Of the martyrs, for they are saints
Having a skill that can cure diseases.

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314 The use of *orbiculi* as ornamentation on clothing is not specifically associated with religious worship, but is a common decorative feature of Late Antiquity [Sylvester Saller and Bellarmino Bagatti, The Town of Nebo (Khirbet El-Mekhayyat) (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1949), 120; Risa Zielinski, “Costume as an Indicator of Status in Late Antique Mosaic Pavements of the Eastern Mediterranean” (MA thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2010), 16].

315 Crowfoot, Churches at Jerash, 25; Zielinski, “Costume as an Indicator,” 12.
Therefore let each one as he makes his offering
Do honor to their art, concealing the sins of his life.
And to all of these Paul, the shepherd, as a wise governor,
Gives his zeal, obeying the wise commands
Of that best of men, whose name you shall learn
Preserving the surname of the Forerunner.316

The rest of the nave is surrounded by alternating geometric patterns (Figure 3.56) in the aptly labeled ‘Diamond and Square’ motif.317 These patterns include the motifs which are labeled as ‘Meander and Square,’ which consists of a cross-shaped meander whose arms tendril outwards and form the edges of a square before flowing to form the next pair of cross-meanders and squares. Within each of these squares are alternating patterns consisting of motifs like ‘Solomon’s Knot’ alongside other patterns of alternatingly colored tesserae (Figures 3.58-64).318

317 All motif labels, unless otherwise specified, are taken from the patterns described in Biebel, Photograph Albums of Mosaics 27, n.p.
318 The ‘Solomon’s Knot’ motif consists of two intertwined ovals, and often comprises two distinctly different colors (e.g., red and blue). This ‘Knot’ motif may be a partial holdover from earlier designs reminiscent of the fabled story of Alexander the Great and the Gordian Knot. Under Christian use, this design motif may have served as an apotropaic symbol; being shown in the shape of χ (the Greek letter chi), ‘Solomon’s Knot’ may have served as a substitute for the depiction of a cross, allowing churches to comply with the letter of Justinian’s Edict of 427 CE which prohibited “the sign of Christ” on pavements (Kiltzinger, “Threshold of the Holy Shrine,” 644-46). It occurs to this author that just as this motif has two primary parts, made up of different colors, that are intertwined into one design, it can be argued that the motif could be used to recognize the ongoing Christological argument that Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine, intertwined within the same being.
Figure 3.56: Nave mosaic of the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian, Jerash (Biebel, “Mosaics,” n.p.)
Figure 3.57: Schematic plan of the mosaics of the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian (Drawing by Matthew Higham, 2020)
Figure 3.58: Example of ‘Meander and Square’ border motif (Biebel, *Photograph Albums of Mosaics* 27, n.p.)

Figure 3.59: Example of ‘Solomon’s Knot’ motif (Biebel, *Photograph Albums of Mosaics* 27, n.p.)

Figure 3.60: Example of ‘Checkerboard’ pattern (Biebel, *Photograph Albums of Mosaics* 27, n.p.)

Figure 3.61: Example type of ‘Diaper’ pattern (Biebel, *Photograph Albums of Mosaics* 27, n.p.)

Figure 3.62: Example type of ‘Indented Diamond’ pattern (Biebel, *Photograph Albums of Mosaics* 27, n.p.)
Bounded within this border, the nave (Mosaic II) is divided into 14 ordered rows and seven columns of the previously mentioned ‘Diamond and Square’ pattern. In this, the main body of the surviving mosaic work, we can see large diamonds alternated by medium-sized squares, with smaller squares and triangles filling the rest of the vacant space. A general overview of the nave will note that the diamonds and alternating squares contain two additional images of humans, an inscription, and a vine in the diamonds of the first row, while the remainder of the diamonds only contain geometric shapes and designs. The medium-sized squares contain images of various animals (three depict vases or pots of various shapes and sizes), though no two animals are exactly repeated or shown in the same pose (Figure 3.56). The smaller squares that help fill the empty spaces of the pavement depict a pattern referred to as a ‘Box in Perspective,’ and the remaining triangles are left with a simple ‘Diaper’ pattern.\footnote{Biebel, \textit{Photograph Albums of Mosaics} 27, n.p.}

The remaining intact nave mosaic sections in Mosaic II (Figure 3.56), begins with the emblema designated in Figure 3.57 as 1A, which is the top left corner of the image directly below the previously mentioned image of Theodore.\footnote{Additional photos will be provided for each row for the convenience of the reader.} Emblema 1A and 1G (Figure 3.65) are
the only two instances, aside from Theodore and Georgia in Mosaic I, of human figures in the excavated church. While the depiction of the seasons was a popular motif in Late Antique and Early Christian compositions, the fact that only two humans are represented instead of four, in addition to their being labeled, makes it likely that these are additional benefactors of the church or mosaicists/architects who participated in its construction. The individual in 1A is identified with a small explanatory inscription as “John, son of Astricius,” and appears to be wearing a short-length tunic with an overflowing basket of grapes; the individual in 1G is likewise identified as “Kalloeonistus” and is depicted similarly, albeit with a smaller basket in his hand and knee-high boots.  

1C contains an inscription from an additional benefactor that reads, “Lord, the God of the holy Cosmas and Damian, Have pity on the Tribune Dagistheus, and receive his offering.” Often, as demonstrated by John and Kalloeonistus, scholars are left wondering as to the civic positions/roles of the mentioned benefactors; this inscription is unique, however, in that it identifies one particular patron as a Tribune (a high-ranking, and presumably wealthy, military officer). 1E depicts a grape-bearing vine springing forth from a vase or pot, possibly representative of the true vine of the Gospel springing forth and bearing fruit.

Interspersed between these larger diamonds, a Peahen, a Peacock, and a Pheasant are depicted in 1B, 1D, and 1F, respectively. Peacocks are one of the more prominent birds depicted in Christian mosaics; according to legend, the flesh of a peacock did not decay after its’ death, and thus the peacock became representative of immortality and eternal life.

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323 Credit for secure identification of the more obscure and damaged figures is found in Biebel, Gerasa: The Mosaic Pavements, 332.
324 Gaskell, Dictionary of Scripture and Myth, 572; Sill, Symbols in Christian Art, 25.
The animals shown in Row 2 (Figure 3.66) are all quadrupeds, including (possibly) a Sheep (2A), a Rabbit (2C), a Gazelle (2E), and a ‘kamelopard’/Giraffe (2G). The remaining emblema contains various decorative patterns, a ‘Scale’ motif in 2B, a ‘Looped Diamond and Interlacing Square’ pattern in 2D, and a pattern with eight interlacing circles in 2F.\textsuperscript{325} Rows 3-14 have suffered severe damage along their North edge, resulting in the loss of designs from the first two columns. The birds in 3B, 3D, and 3F (Figure 3.67) appear to be Ducks, which are common additions in Early Christian art and may stem from the diffusion of neighboring cultural beliefs and practices. The presence of ducks in Egyptian art is often associated with provisioning and harvesting scenes and the goddess Isis, while in Hebrew contexts, ducks symbolize immortality.\textsuperscript{326} The remaining diamonds in Row 3 continue the trend of depicting geometric patterns and motifs: 3C depicts an ‘Acanthus Diaper’ motif, 3E has a type of ‘Multiple Guilloche’ pattern, and 3G displays a repeating grid-like pattern of ovals with floral motifs. The depictions in location 4B and 4D (Figure 3.68) both display a variation on an ‘Interlacing Plait’

\textsuperscript{325} Biebel, \textit{Photograph Albums of Mosaics} 27, n.p.
\textsuperscript{326} Cooper, \textit{Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols}, 57.
and 4F hosts another variation on a ‘Looped Diamond and Interlacing Square.’\textsuperscript{327} The animal figures in row 4 include a Donkey (4C), a Dog/Jackal/Wolf(?) (4E), and a Lioness (4G).

5B and 5F depict Partridges (Figure 3.69), while 5D displays an image of two Doves perched on the rim of a Bowl, symbolizing Christian disciples partaking of the Fountain of Life.\textsuperscript{328} This imagery of doves on a vase is commonly found with varying degrees of detail in Late Antique and Early Christian mosaics. Partridges, or Quails, were used in multiple symbolic connotations; believed to be extremely fertile, they were used to represent the virility of Paradise but were also noted to steal and care for the eggs of other birds. This negative association was turned into a positive overtone when used as an allegory where God tests whether his servants will recognize the call of their Master; thus, partridges came to symbolize the faithful followers of Jesus Christ, who heard the call and instantly flocked to the Church.\textsuperscript{329} 5C has an interesting combination of ‘Solomon’s Knot’ in smaller squares, separated by ‘Meander’ patterns. 5E displays a ‘Plait’ following the outline of an ‘Indented Square,’ and 5G is an orderly grid of dark squares separated by white lines which may have been intended as an imitation of the decoration.

\textsuperscript{327} Biebel, \textit{Photograph Albums of Mosaics} 27, n.p.
\textsuperscript{328} Murray and Murray, \textit{Companion to Christian Art}, 183.
found on chancel screens. 6C, 6E, and 6G (Figure 3.70) appear to depict the more commonly seen domesticated animals: respectively, a male Ox, a Sheep, and a Goat. The large diamond in 6D displays a ‘Looped Diamond and Interlacing Square’ motif, while 6F is an ‘Interlacing Ovals’ pattern. 

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331 Ibid., n.p.
7D (Figure 3.71) depicts the image of a Vase/Urn while 7F is the image of a Rooster, symbolizing vigilance and hopeful expectation of the coming dawn. The geometric patterns in 7C, 7E, and 7G are patterns of ‘Interlacing Hexagons,’ ‘Interlacing Circles,’ and ‘Interlacing Quadrants.’ 8C, 8E, and 8G (Figure 3.72) depict an interesting array of animals including a Lion (probable), an Elephant, and a Bear. 8D and 8F display designs known as ‘Guilloche Circle’ and ‘Interlacing/Intersecting Circles.’ Emblema 9C (Figure 3.73) is partially destroyed but appears to have another Vase, possibly with vegetation (Acanthus vines?) emerging from the top, while 9F depicts another Pheasant. The diamond in 9E has a large floral motif that resembles a Lily, while 9G contains a ‘Solomon’s Knot with Interlacing Square’ pattern. 10C and 10G (Figure 3.74) depict a male and female Lion (respectively), and a Rabbit is shown in 10E. The design of the diamond in 10D is partially demolished but could have been a simple ‘Checkerboard’ design, while 10F boasts a ‘Folded Serpentine Wheel’ pattern. 11B, 11D, and 11F (Figure 3.75) are inhabited by more avian figures, which could be, respectively, an Ibis, a Flamingo, and a Duck. 11C hosts a ‘Quatrafoil and Interlacing Square’ design, 11E has a ‘Figure Eight Loop’ pattern (also referred to as a ‘Seed of Life’), and while 11G is partially destroyed there appears to be an ‘Interlacing Square’ design.

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332 Murray and Murray, *Companion to Christian Art*, 58.
334 Ibid., n.p.
335 Ibid., n.p.
336 Ibid., n.p.
Row 12 (Figure 3.76) contains a series of quadrupedal figures that appear to be similar in shape to a Horse (12A), an Ox (12C), an Ibex (12E), and a Sheep (12G), though the figures are not in the ‘best preserved’ condition. 12B displays a curious ‘Octagon, Diamond and Lozenge’ pattern, and 12D has a design of ‘Indented Hexagons.’ 13B displays a curious ‘Octagon, Diamond and Lozenge’ pattern, and 12D has a design of ‘Indented Hexagons.’ 337  Row 13 (Figure 3.76) is mostly destroyed, but 13B appears to have a bird, possibly a guinea fowl, and 13C displays an ‘Interlacing Triangles’ motif. Row 14 is almost completely destroyed, with only enough of a segment remaining to show that one more row possibly existed in the original design; although, the small corner of a triangle that is still visible could also mark the western border of the frame surrounding Mosaic II.

337 Ibid., n.p.
Side Aisles

The mosaics in the side aisles of the basilica have been completely demolished, likely due to earthquake damage in this seismically active region. The intercolumnar space between the nave and the side aisles on the south side of the nave appears to have survived the destruction, at least in part. No similar segment has survived on the north side of the nave, though from other excavated Byzantine churches, we can presume that it would be designed in a similar nature, if not symmetrical, to the surviving space excavated during the 1928-30 project. The surviving intercolumnar space (Mosaic III) utilized a ‘Net’ motif that can be described as intertwined threads or cords that form several enclosed spaces. These spaces are filled with images of assorted fish and waterfowl, typical of Early Christian iconography (Figure 3.77).
The Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian is not the only Christian church that was built in Jerash, but does contain one of the most complete and well-preserved mosaics in that region. This mosaic, presents some surprising details that set it apart from the other two structures mentioned in this chapter. The most obvious difference that sets this mosaic apart, is the sheer abundance of geometric motifs. While the other two churches discussed in this chapter primarily exhibit human and animal figures, the most prominent decorations in this mosaic are the variety of symmetrical patterns. It is likely that the use of geometric motifs came as a result of earlier Roman artistic influences and a sweeping austerity movement in church decoration during the 4th-5th centuries CE.338

The Church of SS. Lot and Procopius, Khirbet al-Mukhayyat (Mt. Nebo)

History

Near the Acropolis of Mt. Nebo sits one of many Christian churches built during the reign of the Emperor Justinian. According to mosaic panels uncovered in 1913, the church was dedicated in 557 CE to Saint Lot and Saint Procopius.339 The first saint mentioned is generally accepted as the same Lot who is listed in both the Old Testament and the Torah as the nephew of Abraham, the “Father of Nations;” and who traveled with him through Ur, Egypt, and finally into the Land of Canaan.340 He is also the same Lot who lived in the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and was led by angels out of the city before it was destroyed.341 Sometimes Lot is also associated with one of the most well-known examples of incest in the Old Testament, but during the early Christian period, he was honored as a saint (with an almost cultic-level of

339 Piccirillo, Mosaics of Jordan, 164-65; Saller and Bagatti, The Town of Nebo, 5.
340 Genesis 11: 27, 31, 12: 4-5 KJV; Saller and Bagatti, Town of Nebo, 187.
341 Genesis 19: 15-16 KJV.
veneration), as church mosaics, inscriptions, and other liturgical documents found in Jordan indicate. In the New Testament, the Apostle Simon Peter reinforces this veneration by paying brief tribute to the virtuous constancy of St. Lot, reminding his audience that the Lord “delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.”

The St. Procopius mentioned in this inscription is likely the same Procopius of Caesarea who was martyred c. 303 CE. Born in Jerusalem, he eventually rose in the early church to hold such offices as lector and exorcist while at Scythopolis. Procopius was well-known in the area as a scholar and an aesthetic, who was equally learned in both temporal sciences and spiritual doctrine. However, this fame was ultimately his downfall as, when Diocletian’s persecutions reached the East, Procopius had the distinction of being the first to be arrested and taken to Caesarea. There, he was tried and sentenced to death for steadfastly refusing to sacrifice to either the Roman gods or the Emperors.

Concerning the site’s location, the settlement of Khirbet al-Mukhayyat is perched atop a hilly plateau, offering natural defensive benefits, several nearby springs of water, and pasturage for sheep and livestock to graze. Because of the natural abundance of resources, excavations in the area have uncovered, not only the remains of a thriving Byzantine settlement but evidence of use and reuse dating back to the second millennium BCE. The earliest written references to the town of Nebo come from the Book of Numbers and the Mesha Stele; which imply that the

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342 Macdonald, *Pilgrimage in Early Christian Jordan*, 7, 189; Saller and Bagatti, *Town of Nebo*, 192-99. Today, the two most well-known churches dedicated to St. Lot are at Lot’s Cave in Dayr ‘Ayn ‘Abata where, traditionally, Lot and his daughters sought refuge after fleeing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and at the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius in Khirbet al-Mukhayyat, near Mt. Nebo.

343 Saller and Bagatti, *Town of Nebo*, 194; 2 Peter 2: 7 KJV (emphasis added).


345 Ibid., 187.

346 Butler, *Lives of the Fathers*, vol. VII.


town had already been in existence before the Israelites began to establish their Kingdom, and was possibly founded by individuals who either came from or were heavily influenced by Babylonian culture. According to Judeo-Christian beliefs, Mt. Nebo is also the place where the Prophet Moses, who led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, spoke with the Lord and viewed the lands that had been promised to the children of Israel for their inheritance. From the top of this mountain, Moses was told that he would not be permitted to accompany his people into this Promised Land; and so, he blessed them, bade them farewell, and there he died.

Eusebius records in his *Onomasticon* that the nearby town of Nebo was largely abandoned in c. 330 CE, but during the second half of the fourth century CE, a basilica-type church and a monastery were built to commemorate the significance of Moses in the Old Testament. As a result, the village of Khirbet al-Mukhayyat grew, largely resulting from its proximity to Mt. Nebo, as a popular location for pilgrims when traveling through the Holy Land. Sometime during the first half of the 6th century CE, a priest named Barichas contracted a skilled artist and built a smaller church dedicated to Saint Lot, Saint Procopius, and other nameless Martyrs near Mt. Nebo.

Significantly, Mt. Nebo and Khirbet al-Mukhayyat are located near the ancient city of Madaba, extensively noted for numerous Early Christian churches and mosaics installed during the 4th – 6th centuries CE. As a significant trading center near the Decapolis, Madaba’s significance was not only derived from the number of Byzantine Christian churches, but also because of the central location the city held in the region vis-a-vis long-established trade routes.

349 Ibid., 210-13.
350 Deuteronomy 32: 49 – 34: 5 KJV.
353 Saller and Bagatti, *Town of Nebo*, 183-84, 216.
and roadways. Trade and commerce had always been a hallmark and lifeblood of the first civilizations in the Greater Arabian provinces, and Christian religious pilgrimages only added to the wealth and prestige of the cities of the Decapolis. As a result, the citizens in this region expected lavish decorations to adorn their places of worship, perhaps more so than churches in other provinces similarly removed from the center of Byzantine political power.

Owing to its popularity, the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius was remodeled and rededicated in 597 CE, following the newest styles and patterns popularized during the Justinian Renaissance. M. Piccirillo and L. Hunt note that the presence of mosaic portraits came as a direct result of the cultural renaissance that flourished under the rule of Justinian I, and this small church lends credence to the idea of enhanced opulence within the region.354

Figure 3.78: Floorplan of the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius (Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 165)
Figure 3.79: Schematic plan of the mosaics from the Church of Saints Lot and Procopius (Drawing by Matthew Higham, 2020)
Description of Mosaics

Apse and Chancel

As is the case with typical basilica-style churches, the apse, altar, and presbytery are situated at the far eastern end of the church. Most of the tessellated floor on this end is destroyed; however, the foundation of the altar and part of the chancel mosaic (Mosaic I, see Figures 3.78-79) are visible. On the south side of the altar, part of a Palm Tree can be seen with yellow-brown leaves and red fruit; and while the opposite side of the altar is no longer visible, it is surmised that a second palm may have been placed to bookmark the first.\textsuperscript{355} Below this, occupying the majority of the space is a somewhat more straightforward image than those that are displayed elsewhere in the church. The composition is of two Sheep flanking a Pomegranate Tree, encompassed by a ‘Cable’ border of blue, brown, and white (Figure 3.80). Some scholars have pointed out that in Early Christian traditions, the symbolism of sheep or deer nibbling on the leaves of a pomegranate tree was symbolic of the coming “Golden Age,” or the “Messianic Age,” when Christ shall reign personally upon the Earth, and the faithful may “eat the fruit of the tree of life in Paradise.”\textsuperscript{356} The Sheep are of similar size but are not identical, as the one on the left has been modeled with several colors to produce tufts of wool, while the right appears to have a shorter, more uniform coat. Their posture is erect, each has one ear raised and one bent, and their eyes are neither focused on the tree nor each other, but appear to be gazing directly at the viewers’ approach toward the raised floor of the chancel. The Pomegranate Tree has 13 symmetrically placed branches, with six pieces of fruit (evenly placed, if not correctly modeled).

\textsuperscript{355} Saller and Bagatti, \textit{Town of Nebo}, 55.
\textsuperscript{356} Roussin, “Iconography of the Figural Pavements,” 87-88.
The canopy of the Tree sprouts from two large boughs, while the rest of the trunk shows the severed remains of two branches that have been previously pruned.

Figure 3.80: Chancel mosaic (Mosaic I) with altar base, Sheep, and Tree (Saller and Bagatti, *Town of Nebo*, Pl. 14,1)

**Nave**

Below the steps of the chancel, at the head of the nave, sits the dedicatory inscription of the church (Figure 3.81). When translated, it reads thus:

At the time of the most holy and most saintly Bishop John, Your holy place was built and finished by its priest and paramonarius [sacristan], Barichas, in the month of November of the time of the 6th indiction [A.D. 557]. O God of Saint Lot and of Saint Procopius, receive the offering and the present of the brothers Stephen and Elias, the children of Cometisa. O God of the holy martyrs, receive the present of Sergius and Procopius his son. For the welfare of Rabata [the daughter] of Anastasia and for the repose of John [the son] of Anastasius and for those who contributed, the Lord knows their names.357

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357 Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 164; Saller and Bagatti, *Town of Nebo*, 183-84. It should be noted that whereas St. Procopius “received the crown of martyrdom” in c. 303 CE, St. Lot is not given the same honorific. While the text of the inscription later refers to “the holy martyrs,” the context is somewhat more ambiguous, and may simply refer to martyrs in general (Saller and Bagatti, *Town of Nebo*, 141-42, 189).
The inscription itself bears some peculiarities, which are also found throughout other churches, both in Nebo and in Madaba, suggesting that the artisan (or workers) were likely locals based in the Madaba area. The inscription at SS. Lot and Procopius, and other nearby churches in Nebo, bear similarities to others in the surrounding region; such as being decorated in the *tabula ansata* fashion (i.e., an inscription boxed by a simple line border, with two triangles or dovetail handles on either side). Additionally, these inscriptions also bear similar grammatical and spelling abnormalities, and the use of specific terminology (e.g., *paramonarius*), all of which are also found in inscriptions at the SS. Cosmas and Damian in Jerash.358

![Figure 3.81: Dedicatory inscription at the head of the nave mosaic in the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius (Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 160-61)](image)

From here, the remainder of the nave is surrounded by two borders: the first is a ‘Wave-Crest’ pattern (with shades of red and white on a dark blue background) encompassing the entirety of the nave pavement, while the second border is a ‘Diamond, Leaf, and Circle’ motif (with blue, grey, yellow, and white shades laid against a background of red tesserae) that encloses and separates the nave pavement into two panels, Mosaic II and Mosaic III respectively (seen in Figures 3.78, 81, and 82).359 Mosaic II features a series of hunting and pastoral scenes that would likely have been familiar to the local populace, arranged within 20 medallions, or

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358 Which has been generally translated to mean a *sacristan* or a church warden, one who is responsible for the physical upkeep of the structure, however, the Greek usage seems to combine the duties of a *sacristan* with those of the general administration of the church, and so is slightly different from the modern usage (Saller and Bagatti, *Town of Nebo*, 157-58).

volutes, made of Grapevines which extend from four Acanthus bushes in the corners of the panel (Figure 3.82). Mosaic III (Figure 3.89) is much simpler, by comparison, featuring four Fruit-bearing Trees, extending from each corner and meeting in the middle of the panel. Along the sides of the panel, between the fruit trees, are pairs of animals and what appears to be an altar and a secondary inscription.

Figure 3.82: Nave floor mosaic (Mosaic II) in the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius (Piccirillo, Mosaics of Jordan, 153)
The Mosaic II panel is divided evenly into six rows with four columns; four acanthus plants rest in the corners of the panel (1A, 1D, 6A, and 6D), leaving room for 20 circular volutes or medallions, within which are several human and animal figures. As all the medallions occupy an equal space within the overall composition, the depicted figures are not meant to be proportional in size when compared to each other; instead, the figures are resized to fit within or fill up the space allotted. The first row has a pair of Francolins (e.g., Partridges) in 1B and 1C (Figure 3.83), depicted in the humble act of pecking, with additional bunches of Grapes to help fill the given space.

![Figure 3.83: Detail of Mosaic II, Row 1 (Piccirillo, Mosaics of Jordan, 153)](image)

Unfortunately, there is a large discoloration or stain, most likely caused by fire, that covers most of the four medallions in 2B-C and 3B-C. While this dulls the once vibrant colors of the panel, the remaining figures are still discernible. The second row has two human male figures paired with two animals. 2A depicts a Tiger while 2B displays a Shepherd (Figure 3.84). The Tiger is lying down, with its forepaws crossed and mouth agape, perhaps it is meant to be seen as waking from sleep or raising its voice in warning to the approaching Shepherd.\textsuperscript{360} The Shepherd is bearded and, with raised hand, scrutinizes the landscape for potential dangers to either himself or his flock. His short cloak is raised over one shoulder, and he leans on a walking stick/shepherds crook, perhaps implying that he is surprised at seeing this new threat.\textsuperscript{361} 2C-D

\textsuperscript{360} Saller and Bagatti, Town of Nebo, 58.
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid., 58.
show a Hunter locked in combat with a Bear. The Hunter wears a short blue tunic decorated with an orbiculus (i.e., a small round ornament with a cross, typical of commoner fashion during Late-Antiquity), breeches, and is armed with a spear which he thrusts toward the bear. The Bear, meanwhile, charges headlong toward the Hunter, but his eye is directed at the viewer, not his foe.  

The subject of pastoral life is common enough in both other periods of Classical art, and the tradition continues into Late Antiquity. The shepherd pictured with his flock or confronted by fierce animals and hunters pursuing their quarry, are popularly copied models, symbolizing the efforts made to safeguard the physical growth and welfare of one’s livelihood (or in the Christian sense, the converted sons and daughters of God).  

The figure in 3A appears as a Workman carrying a bushel of Grapes (Figure 3.85), presumably freshly harvested from a vineyard. He wears a short blue tunic with two orbiculi, a pair of sandals, and is hunched forward under the moderate-heavy weight of his load.  

3B appears to depict a Fox, a symbol of the Devil, and his cunning minions who are enemies of the Church, who flees at the sight of the oncoming porter.  

3C and 3D both contain Sheep, and while the one on the right is modeled similarly to the Sheep in Mosaic I, the artist has opted to use an odd coloration scheme to the one on the left. It has been suggested that this discoloration

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362 Ibid., 58.
363 Ibid., 93.
364 Ibid., 59.
365 Cooper, Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, 72.
may have been an attempt at showing the methods shepherds and farmers used to identify their sheep from those of a neighbor.366

Figure 3.85: Detail of Mosaic II, Row 3 (Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 153)

Row 4 is an interesting depiction as it contains four male Humans (two of which occupy a single medallion) and a Donkey (Figure 3.86). 4A-B depict a Donkey and his Handler in the act of transporting a bushel (or two) of Grapes. The Donkey does not appear to be anything but docile, though the Handler, wearing a short, light blue tunic with orbiculi, does carry a stick in addition to the lead, should his beast of burden need direction or encouragement.367 4C highlights a pair of Young Men treading Grapes on a simple winepress. They are wearing only loincloths and are grasping each other’s hands for mutual balance while engaged in their work.368 The image in 4D is of a Musician, clad in a short, yellow tunic with dark stripes, playing a single-bodied Flute (similar to a recorder or a clarinet), presumably to entertain or encourage the grape-treaders to stay motivated and keep a consistent rhythm.369 Similar ‘Vintage Scenes’ have been found in other mosaics in locations such as Beisan and Qabr Hiram, though there are subtle differences between the compositions such as the number of treaders or the style of the fluted instrument.370

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367 Ibid., 59-60.
368 Ibid., 60.
369 Ibid., 60.
370 Ibid., 92.
Row 5 depicts a Hunter with his Dog in the act of hunting a Rabbit (Figure 3.87). The Hunter (5A) wears a red tunic with green breeches as he chases after his Dog. The hunting Dog (5B) wears a collar, though the lead attached to the collar appears to have snapped in the Dog’s strained attempt to pursue his prey. Meanwhile, the Rabbit (5C) flees his pursuers with all possible speed.\textsuperscript{371} Like the ‘Vintage Scene’ mentioned previously, other examples of a ‘Hunting Sequence’ are relatively normal, though again, variances within such pastoral scenes are commonplace. The dog having snapped his collar is more common where a chase ensues, while some sequences feature a lion in pursuit of a gazelle.\textsuperscript{372} The figures in this sequence travel in the direction of a Vintager (5D), who inspects clusters of Grapes and selects only the ripest to be sent to the winepress. If read from top-bottom and left-right, one might expect the Vintager to appear previously in the mosaic as his role is, chronologically earlier, a difference that is not shared among other examples of the “Vintage Scene.”\textsuperscript{373}

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{372} Ibid., 92-93.
\textsuperscript{373} Ibid., 60, 92.
The sixth and final row of this panel, again, has two Acanthus plants in the corners (6A and 6D) but also depicts a Hunter engaged in harassing a Lion (Figure 3.88). The Lion Hunter (6B) sports a red tunic, a bow, a quiver of arrows, and a long sword. He is in the act of having just loosed an arrow at his prey (6C) and prepares to grab another arrow before his foe recovers. The Lion, meanwhile, appears to have been shot in the mouth, and endeavors to remove the arrow with his paws before continuing his assault on the Hunter.\footnote{Ibid., 61.} As is often the case, the composition, taken as a whole, has multiple possible interpretations. The mosaic panel could be taken as a pastoral scene, typical of life in the provincial regions of the Empire, or it could be examined as a microcosm of the Church as a whole. While the Church is intended to spread Christian beliefs and to gather the faithful Children of God together (John 15: 1-8 KJV), it must also be vigilant and stand prepared to ward off not only external enemies/threats but also help the faithful members drive out and conquer their own baser desires.\footnote{Cooper, \textit{Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols}, 59, 79-80; John 15: 1-8 KJV; Murray and Murray, \textit{Companion to Christian Art}, 139, 276-77, 416.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig388.jpg}
\caption{Figure 3.88: Detail of Mosaic II, Row 6 (Piccirillo, \textit{Mosaics of Jordan}, 153)}
\end{figure}

In the panel of Mosaic III (Figure 3.89), the artist chose to depict four Trees which extend from each corner and meet in the center of the panel. Each Tree appears to be gnarled with signs of pruning in their earlier life; however, they each bear a different kind of fruit. Similar to the Tree depicted in the chancel mosaic, each Tree features 13 flourishing limbs, arranged symmetrically, but the difference in fruit might indicate grafting from a prudent gardener.\footnote{Saller and Bagatti, \textit{Town of Nebo}, 61-63.} If
so, this could be an echo of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, and his parable on how fruitful branches can be grafted onto a tree with “good roots,” instead of allowing withered branches to sap the strength of the rest of the tree.\footnote{Romans 11: 16-26 KJV.} The parable is intended to reinforce the admonition that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was to go forth to both Jew and Gentile alike, in order for the faithful to flourish under the grace of God.\footnote{Acts 11: 15-18 KJV.}

Beneath the boughs of the Fruit Trees are four pairs of animals, each set in a different activity that would (presumably) have additional meaning and importance. The northern pair (Figure 3.89, left side) of animals are Deer who are craning their necks and extending their bodies (possibly implied as their bodies are modeled to show their strained musculature).\footnote{Saller and Bagatti, \textit{Town of Nebo}, 62.} The western pair of animals have been all but destroyed, but may have been wild Goats, as evinced by their grey hindquarters and a mass that could have been horns.\footnote{Ibid., 63.} The third pair of animals, Rabbits flanking a mound of dirt, are on the southern side of the mosaic. Each of the Rabbits appears to be watching the artist or the audience with an interested eye, ready to leap into action and flee if needed.

As mentioned previously, the third inscription within SS. Lot and Procopius is found on the eastern portion of Mosaic III, beneath the fourth pair of animals in this section, two Bulls or Oxen facing an Altar with a sacrificial fire, similar to a footnote or the caption of a vignette.\footnote{Ibid., 199-202.} The presence of the Oxen is meant to symbolize a reverence for a “higher nature” that leads to willing subservience.\footnote{Gaskell, \textit{Dictionary of Scripture and Myths}, 555.} The inscription below the animals reads, “Then they shall offer calves upon Thy altar. Lord have mercy on the lowly Epiphania.”\footnote{Saller and Bagatti, \textit{Town of Nebo}, 200.} This inscription is unusual for
typical mosaic use, as the benefactor and author chose to combine two common forms of an inscription by using part of a penitential scripture paired with a short, personalized plea for divine mercy. After taking the tone of the inscription into account, the sight of the Oxen approaching the altar of sacrifice with lowered heads appears to be an act of contrition and submission, which is likely the message the original author intended to convey.

![Figure 3.89: Nave floor mosaic (Mosaic III) in the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius (Piccirillo, Mosaics of Jordan, 165)](image)

It has been suggested that similar to the chancel mosaic, this motif is meant to be representative of the Messianic Age, where animal and plant life all glorify and acknowledge the supremacy of their Creator. Occasionally, one animal may be carnivorous while the other is an herbivore, to emphasize the peaceful state of coexistence that will dominate the era. However, the panel used in this church only shows pairs of herbivores. The design of this mosaic panel is not wholly unique, and similar constructions have been found in other locations,

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384 Psalm 51: 19 KJV.
385 Saller and Bagatti, Town of Nebo, 62.
386 Roussin, “Iconography of the Figural Pavements,” 83-87; Saller and Bagatti, Town of Nebo, 88-89.
such as the Church of the Apostles in nearby Madaba, and on a sarcophagus in the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe. The change in design does not appear to be based on religious doctrine or canonical law, and may have been a preference of the architect or a patron.

**Side Aisles and Intercolumnar Spaces**

Lining the nave were six columns and six smaller intercolumnar mosaic scenes. Though the NW intercolumnar section has been destroyed, the remaining five scenes depict various sets of animals (mythical and real) and a pair of human figures seated on either side of a building. Beginning with Mosaic IV, the artist has depicted a pair of mythological aquatic animals, Capricorns, facing a rendition of a Papyrus Plant (see Figure 3.90). Capricorns are half-goat, half-fish creatures popularized as part of the zodiac. They symbolize a higher mental/religious nature arising from a lower nature and are also associated with the earlier pagan god Enki/Ea, who was linked to magic, water, and creation. Being half-goat, it is also possible that they could be a reference to Amalthea, the She-Goat who nursed the infant Zeus. While still a young child, Zeus broke one of her horns, which became the cornucopia, a symbol of creation and plenty. The Papyrus plant is included, in part, as it is a widely found aquatic-based plant in the region and was known for sheltering many different species of animals along the edges of rivers in the Near East and Northern Africa. In earlier Egyptian traditions, this aquatic plant was also associated with the primordial waters of creation and was later deemed symbolic of wisdom and guidance because as it was the source of early paper for written texts.

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388 Gaskell, *Dictionary of Scripture*, 139.
The Mosaic V panel is different from the others in this church, as the focus is not on regional wildlife. Instead, the mosaic segment depicts a Building between two human males (Figure 3.91). As with such depictions relatively common in church mosaics, we can presume that this structure is meant to be a church. This image could either be a depiction of a real building, potentially the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius or another nearby edifice (possibly with a connection to the nearby Jordan River and the baptismal site of Jesus), or an idealized view of a church. On the left of the church is a Man in a Small Boat, sitting on a river or lake, with red fish which visually contrast against the blue water. The Boat is of a similar style to those seen on the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee and appears to be loaded with wooden crates and corked amphorae, representative of the commerce flowing through the region before, and during, the 5th and 6th centuries CE. Other examples of boats in the region are relatively rare and use sails as their primary means of propulsion, not oars. On the right side of the Church is the figure of a seated Fisherman. Examples of fishing are also rare for the Transjordan.

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390 Saller and Bagatti, Town of Nebo, 63-64.
391 Ibid., 65.
392 Ibid., 93-94.
but are more routinely seen near the Sea of Galilee/Lake Tiberias, considering the necessity for a
large body of freshwater to support a population of fish.\(^{393}\) The Fisherman wears a sack on his
back for holding his acquisitions and is mostly naked with the exception of a loincloth and a
mesh hat. He has caught a Fish and reeled it in to shore, but we can see that his rod has been
broken into two pieces, possibly from overuse.\(^{394}\)

![Mosaic V panel with fishermen and church (Piccirillo, Mosaics of Jordan, 160-61)](image)

On the southern side of the Nave, we find a set of three, mostly intact mosaic panels, each
with local animals one might expect to find in the region. While Mosaic VI is partially
destroyed, the artist has gone to some length to show all these characters are part of a Nilotic
(river) sequence and has included aquatic flora as well as fauna (Figure 3.92). This panel is the
most densely packed of any scene in the entire church and, depicting at least eight waterfowl
(e.g., Ducks and Ibises/Flamingoes) and at least five Fish surrounded by Lily Pads. Mosaic VII
depicts two Gazelles grazing on a Fruit-laden Tree (Figure 3.93). This scene is likely another
reference to the Messianic Age when all creatures that have overcome their base natures will
feast upon the fruit of the Tree of Life.\(^{395}\) The final intercolumnar panel, Mosaic VIII, is in the

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\(^{393}\) Ibid., 93.

\(^{394}\) It is possible that the broken rod is intended to reference Luke 5: 4-10 KJV, when Christ’s disciples
lowered their fishing net and it broke under the strain of their haul of fish.

\(^{395}\) Revelation 2: 7 KJV.
SW and depicts two Geese facing a shrub, likely another Papyrus Plant (Figure 3.94). When taken together, Mosaics VI-VIII seem to bear striking resemblances to earlier Egyptian Nilotic motifs, and may have been included as a legacy to the influence from that region, and the similar presence of a nearby life-giving river.

Figure 3.92: Mosaic VI panel with river (Nilotic) scene (Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 162-63)

Figure 3.93: Mosaic VII panel with Gazelles and a Tree with Fruit (Saller and Bagatti, *Town of Nebo*, Pl. 20,3)

Figure 3.94: Mosaic VIII panel with Geese and Papyrus plant (Cynthia Finlayson, Detail of Pavement Mosaic from the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius in Jordan, 2019)
The NW pavements of the Church’s floorplan have received a considerable amount of damage, but the remainder of the North aisle (Mosaic IX) is intact and shows a repeating pattern of black tesserae, contrasted against the off-white background, often seen within other ‘Scale’ motifs (no photo available, but the sketched design can be seen in Figure 3.78). As seen in the above floorplan, there is also a side entrance along the North aisle with an ‘Interlacing Diamond’ pattern placed inside of the doorway. This new pattern interrupts the overall progression of the aisle, and owing to its placement at an entrance to the church, was likely intended as an apotropaic device.

Mosaic X, in the southern aisle, displays a repeating geometric pattern of blue or yellow leaves, separated within a diamond grid of additional ‘Scale’ patterns (no photo available, but the sketched design can be seen in Figure 3.78). At the eastern edge of Mosaic X, excavators found the remnant of a small mosaic scene that appeared to show two Partridges facing a vase and another secondary inscription with tabula ansata decoration, which translates as: “O Saint Lot, receive the prayer of Rome and Porphyria and Mary, your servants.” The location of the inscription and the traditional ‘Birds and Vase’ depiction indicate that this specific corner of the church may have held some special significance. Not only this, but in the original text, a peculiar ligature has been added to the words “the prayer,” which makes the meaning slightly more ambiguous. The new meaning could refer to either a specific prayer or to the place that prayer is offered, such as a chapel. Based on this interpretation, there may have been an apsidal chapel in this corner of the church. However, in so far as this author has been able to determine, there is no archaeological evidence to support the presence of an apsidal chapel in the

396 Biebel, Photograph Albums of Mosaics 27, n.p.
397 Saller and Bagatti, Town of Nebo, 192; Piccirillo, Mosaics of Jordan, 165.
398 Saller and Bagatti, Town of Nebo, 193.
original floor plan of the church. When combined with the fact that apsidal chapels (even in antiquity) were typically constructed in groupings of three, suggests that either this area may have served as a de facto apsidal chapel (leaving little in the way of archaeological remains), or the inscription was an addition made after the initial construction of the church, possibly paid for by one or more donors during the church’s use.

In summary, the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius is the smallest of the three examined churches in the Transjordan, but the mosaic floor is, possibly, the most complete since its abandonment. The pastoral motifs utilized are more similar to those of the Petra Church, but rather than being used to display cultural and trade associations, these images are more akin to describing the idyllic life in the surrounding countryside. Their peaceful nature, however, can also be used to relate or highlight different aspects of Christian doctrine.

Précis

Thus far, this chapter has attempted to describe the mosaics of three Transjordanian churches (dating to the late-fifth to the late-sixth century CE) their motifs, designs, and a brief explanation of the relevance of the included symbols. This last segment will briefly review the above and determine the relevance of each selection in answering the original hypothesis about determining the presence of heterodox Christian sects and their marks on Byzantine ecclesiastical art. To begin with, the examination of mosaic panels in the Petra Church indicates that the selected images, and styles, were chosen not only for their religious significance, but also because many of them have similar counterparts and parallels in churches from the regions surrounding Gaza, Madaba, and even as far away as Antioch. This is not surprising as Petra, being a regional metropolis into the 6th century CE, would have received visitors from each of these places and beyond. Thus, the design of the mosaics was likely intended to pay tribute to
the different styles of these regions, or are reflections of artisans commissioned from these locations to complete the floor in Petra. In short, the images in the Petra mosaic reflect its status as an economic, cultural, and trade/caravan hub. It appears that of the three churches discussed, the designs in the Petra Church underwent more renovation and repair work since its original construction in the mid-fifth century CE. The need for such additional repair work could stem from one of several reasons. Textual evidence indicates that many disgraced and exiled clergy members would eventually make their way to Africa and the Near East, where we also know that many heterodox sects found willing audiences to support their continued practices. Thus, it is possible that some renovation efforts were undertaken to realign ecclesiastical compositions back to accepted orthodox teachings. Alternately, the region has also been home to several catastrophic seismic events that damaged structures and drove a need for additional repairs. The sheer number of repairs and phases of construction that took place at the site of the Petra Church, combined with the lack of documentation regarding the purpose and extent of these reconstruction events, makes it difficult to determine whether there was continuous heterodox worship during the lifespan of the Petra Church, or that the Christian community was responding to frequent seismic events.

The surviving pavement mosaics in the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian appear quite different from the other two churches examined in this chapter, in that it involves a significantly higher number of geometric designs, to a degree unused in any other church examined. The addition of this church is still appropriate, as it provides a unique glimpse into the combined use of geometric motifs and figural designs in Early Christian art. The churches at Jerash have also suffered under the same catastrophic destruction caused by seismic tremors that damaged the Petra Church. However, as the Christian church and community at Jerash appear to have
survived into the 8th century CE, this also suggests that the decorations may have been subject to more intense scrutiny, during both Christian and Islamic iconoclastic phases that took effect in the region. Somewhat ironically, the destruction caused by an earthquake in 749 CE also likely preserved the pavement mosaics to such an extent that the iconoclastic damage appears to be minimal, and thus the remaining pavement presents a beautiful view of a nave mosaic that utilizes both geometric motifs and figural imagery that can be dated to the 6th and 7th centuries CE.

Finally, the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius near Madaba seems to have been largely ignored by the passage of time. Built as a smaller church, more suited to serve a local populace than the larger groups of pilgrims traveling to and visiting both Madaba and Mt. Nebo, scholars only have one reference to the church being remodeled towards the end of the 6th century CE.\textsuperscript{399} This took place during the Justinian Renaissance and updated the decorations of the church to more closely resemble those in use at Constantinople. Unfortunately, no evidence exists of the original mosaic designs, and sometime during the 8th or 9th century CE, the church was abandoned. The redesigned floor was remarkably well preserved until its rediscovery in the modern era, giving us a unique view of pastoral mosaic designs and motifs dating from the 6th century CE in the Transjordan region.

\textsuperscript{399} Ibid., 64.
Introduction

At the beginning of this next chapter, it would be beneficial to review the ongoing Trinitarian and Christological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries CE. Discussing the ‘True Nature’ of Jesus Christ as the prophesied “Saviour of the world” was at the heart of many heterodox beliefs and doctrines. Arius of Alexandria was one presbyter among many who, leaning on scriptural references and other prior religious traditions, articulated a theory on the nature of Jesus Christ that simultaneously amassed a considerable following and with it, both the admiration and ire of Christians across the Byzantine Empire. Arius believed in the Holy Trinity's continued existence but taught that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost were individuals with varying degrees of Glory or power. Today, only a few rare examples of Arius’ writings exist, with the main body of his teachings and beliefs, the Thalia, having been lost to the ages. However, several relatively long quotations from Arius’ Thalia have been preserved within other polemical texts that can be used to reconstruct his original words. Arius taught that only God the Father was infinitely wise, mysterious, and powerful; as he had no beginning, he was eternal and uniquely in his possession of Glory. The Son was then created by the Father and shares in a portion of his Glory and power; thus, the Son not only has a distinct beginning to his existence but is also subordinate to the Father. Jesus Christ, as the Son, can only share in the

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400 John 4:42, 20:31 KJV.
401 Though as with any such historical quotations, these must be taken in the context of being used within a hostile source (David Gwynn, “Archaeology and the ‘Arian Controversy’ in the Fourth Century,” in Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity, eds. David M. Gwynn and Susanne Bangert (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 229-30; R.P.C. Hanson, The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 5-6).
Father’s Glory, and while he should still be worshipped, the Son must be of a different substance than the Father.402

Publicly taking the position that the Trinity was composed of three individuals, distinctly separate yet also unified in purpose and sharing the same source of Grace/Glory, was a radical stance for Early Christians. The majority of the early Fathers of the Church taught that the Holy Trinity members were of the same substance, and thus were different aspects of the same divine being. Eventually, the term homoousios (Gr. ‘consubstantial’ or ‘the same substance’) became a hallmark term to describe the opposing argument to Arianism and other such ‘Trinitarian’ polemics. Applied in ecumenical documents after the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), arguments involving the homoousios of the Holy Trinity became one of the first significant benchmarks for determining the orthodoxy of Christian teachings.

The growing dissension from ‘mainstream trinitarian’ thought inspired other luminaries to engage in a host of related doctrinal debates. Arians argued that, as a mortal human blended with a divine spirit, Jesus Christ was not perfect and was therefore separate from God the Father (as evidenced in the Gospels by his prayers to his Father in Heaven for strength and assistance). The belief in the distinctiveness of Christ, as a separate being from God the Father, was one that was shared by many of the so-called heterodox traditions of the age, such as the ‘Christological’ debates inspired by Nestorianism. Nestorius, the Archbishop of Constantinople (c. 386-450 CE), took a different tack from the ‘trinitarian’ polemics and further taught that within Jesus Christ was a balanced duality of two natures, divine and human.403 While the Councils of Nicaea (325

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402 Athanasius, De Synodis 15, qtd. in Hanson, Christian Doctrine of God, 14-15. Hanson also notes a further nine subdivisions of Arian doctrinal points, but only some of these are treated as relevant in this brief overview (Hanson, Christian Doctrine of God, 19-23).

CE) and Chalcedon (451 CE) supported the belief that Jesus Christ was “begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father” and thus possessed a unified, part-divine/part-human, nature within a mortal frame (monophysitism), other heterodox sects taught that Christ embodied both a mortal and divine nature (dyophysitism).404

Stepping back from this brief review of the trinitarian and Christological discussions and turmoil of the 4th-6th centuries CE, it becomes imperative to consider how these debates spilled over into the realm of artistic representation. While modern scholars apply terms like ‘Arian’ and ‘Nestorian’ to various doctrines and teachings, readers must also understand that at the time, the definition of orthodoxy was nebulous and had yet to be defined until such delineations were made in the 5th and 6th centuries.405 The similarities between these two lines of belief primarily center on the notion that Jesus Christ was fundamentally a different being from God the Father, and as such, they may have been portrayed separately in artistic compositions. As mentioned earlier, a strain of Arianism (if it can be called such) took particular hold among the Visigothic foederati in Italy during the 3rd-5th centuries. This popularity existed to the extent that a separate ‘Arian Baptistery’ was constructed in Ravenna, near the more traditional Baptistery of Neon, or the ‘Orthodox Baptistery.’ The domes of these two structures are similarly decorated, depicting the Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan. While both scenes comprise the same characters (i.e., John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the personification of the River Jordan) and the same action, some have felt that the personification of the River Jordan may have been used in the Arian Baptistery to represent the separate attendance of God the Father.406 Even recognizing that this depiction is accompanied by the typical accoutrements (i.e., lobster claws atop his head, an

405 Ibid., 120; Gwynn, “Archaeology and the ‘Arian Controversy,’” 232, 251, 258-60.
aquatic plant, and a jug of water) of an aquatic-type deity from Greco-Roman antiquity, its presence in a structure so closely associated with Arian doctrines presents enough context to allow this theory some degree of tolerance.

The Early Christian and Byzantine periods were a form of artistic and sectarian ‘trial and error,’ where the ‘adolescent’ religious movement began to develop a concrete identity. In mosaics from the Hellenic through Late Antique periods, one can find various items and depictions related to religious doctrines and teachings. Modern audiences often view these figures as religious and ascribe particular attitudes or histories to the original owners/patrons based on such inferences. Additional research has shown that this is not always the case, as some figural motifs need context to determine their meaning and symbolism. On this subject, it should also be noted that there is a discernable shift between the meaning and creation of pagan and Christian art. “In visual terms, Christianity brought a new relationship between images and their referents, a relationship of dependence in which the image relied on a prior text—a scripture—for its meaning.” Thus, the art from the Early Christian period of the third and fourth century directly impacted the theological debates that raged throughout the fourth and fifth centuries. It would not be until the beginning of the sixth century CE when a canonical iconographic repertoire was generally accepted.

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The Theodorean Basilical Complex, Aquileia

History

The earliest archaeological evidence of settlement in Aquileia's vicinity, located in Northern Italy, extends from the eighth and ninth centuries BCE. Early settlers were enticed by the site’s proximity to a freshwater river, arable land, and access to the Adriatic Sea with its promise of trade throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.410 The urbanization of this idyllic site was interrupted by several catastrophic floods, destroying multiple early settlements until the Romans attempted a concentrated colonization effort. After an invasion of Northern Italy by Transalpine Gallic tribes in 186 BCE, the fledgling Roman Republic and their Latin allies began to expand their sphere of influence and established the Latin colony of Aquileia in 181 BCE.411 The Romans also saw the potential benefits in building a lasting presence at this site, and as the settlement grew, a sizable port was constructed at the head of the nearby river. Not only did Roman strategists use this location to base military campaigns against the nearby Histri and Illyrians in 178-77 BCE, but it was also used sporadically by Julius Caesar as a strategic headquarters location (59-50 BCE) in his campaigns against both Gaul and Illyria.412

In 90 BCE, the settlement was granted a municipium, and the inhabitants were elevated to full Roman citizenship. At some point between the first century BCE and first century CE, Aquileia was made into an “honorary colony,” granting the additional rights and privileges.413 While Aquileia’s importance as a frontier town diminished as the Roman Empire's borders expanded outwards, its relevance to the surrounding provinces continued to grow. At one point,
the fourth-century writer Ausonius recalled that Aquileia was the ninth most-notable city in the Empire, and the fourth in Italy (surpassed only by Rome, Milan, and Capua), and was one of the relatively few cities in the Empire that had a sanctioned mint.414 The city of Aquileia was so prominent that Maximian, the ruling Augustus (i.e., senior emperor) of the western half of the Roman Empire, had a palace built nearby. Around 293 CE, Diocletian named a rising star of the political and military arenas, Constantius, to be Maximian’s Caesar (i.e., a junior emperor). To commemorate the event, Maximian had a painting installed in the Imperial palace at Aquileia, portraying both his and Constantius’ families. This painting is notable, as it contains one of the earliest depictions of the future emperor, Constantine the Great.415

In 313 CE, an Edict of Toleration was signed into effect, legalizing the practice of Christianity and allowing adherents to build formal places of worship. Before this, many early Christians practiced their religion in private homes or domus ecclesia, such as the Dura-Europos house church established sometime in the mid-third century CE, or in remote places, such as the catacombs beneath Rome.416 Excavated evidence from Aquileia, both artistic decorations and carved inscriptions, imply that the city already harbored a robust Christian community during the third century, and the original basilica complex constructed there is considered to be one of the first formal churches built after the proclamation of 313 CE.417 As mentioned previously, the city of Aquileia grew to magnificent heights under Imperial Roman rule, but with this splendor,

the city also became a target for invaders and individuals seeking power and control. Since its original construction, the city and church sites came under attack several times and suffered multiple destructive phases. Despite this, the local Christian community appears to have become so attached to the site that each time one church was destroyed, a new religious structure or complex was built after the rubble was cleared away. The current superstructure was done in Romanesque-Gothic style and dates to the 14th-15th centuries CE.

In 381 CE, an ecumenical council was organized, this time by St. Ambrose, and convened in Aquileia. Ambrose had grown concerned over the rising popularity of Arianism and intended to use the synod as a platform with which to repudiate Arian theological teachings. Apprehensive of high-ranking clergy and government officials in the Eastern Provinces who might be sympathetic to Arian doctrines, if not Arians themselves, Ambrose petitioned the Western Emperor Gratian to call a council of Bishops from the Western churches to be convened in Aquileia. At this council, two Arian Bishops from Dacia were called upon to defend their doctrines against Ambrose’s support for the teachings of Orthodox Christianity and were subsequently deposed from their ecclesiastical offices.

In the early 20th century CE, renovation work on the church's interior revealed that approximately a meter below the current ground level, mosaics from the earliest constructions of the fourth century CE were mostly intact, having survived the destruction of the exterior of the church. Excavations of the church reveal that the original site was likely established, not as a single structure, but as a more massive complex of four buildings. The two that are of interest

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418 A council with similar goals was convened earlier in 381 CE at Constantinople, but did not include representatives from the Western churches in the Byzantine Empire.
to this paper are the two basilicas, referred to as the Northern and Southern Theodorean Halls. The present superstructure is the remains of an 11th-century church dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the Saints Hermagora and Fortunatus; but the original complex was named for the Bishop of Aquileia, Theodore, who first inspired and propelled construction efforts during the initial period of religious tolerance in the 4th-century CE. The mosaics in the Theodorean Halls are beautiful examples of paleochristian decorative work done in the Late Antique style. In a time when no standard for the mode or style of Christian artwork had been established, the mosaicists commissioned for the decoration of the basilicas must have been left to their own devices with minor direction for the specific motifs and scenes already in use by Early Christian artists.420

When examining the mosaic floors, many differences in the modeling and color shading suggest that the compositions were not installed by a single team of artists. It is more likely that the mosaics’ carpet-like presentation is the result of simultaneous efforts by multiple workshops under the supervision of different ‘Master Mosaicists.’421

Description of Mosaics (North Theodorean Hall)

Apse and Chancel

The North Theodorean Hall appears to have been built as an oratory but was demolished only a few decades after its original construction. A second basilica, the Basilica of Fortunatus, was then built on the same location (c. 345 CE).422 Curiously, neither iterations of the North Theodorean Hall (later referred to as the ‘Crypt of Excavations’ and the “Hall of Cyriacus”) appear to have been built with an apse in mind.423 Excavations conducted in 1962 revealed

421 Ibid., 171; Giovannini et al., Aquileia: History, Art, & Archaeology, 81.
422 Ibid., 93.
portions of both figural and geometric pavement décor. However, foundations for a permanent
altar were not found among the structure's excavated portions (potentially supporting the idea
that the structure was abandoned sometime before the end of the fourth century CE).424

During the latter half of the 4th century CE, the North Hall was demolished and replaced
by several later structures. As seen in the schematic floorplans (Figures 4.1, 4.3), parts of
Mosaics III, IV, and V were damaged by the foundations for a post-Theodorean basilica which
was itself demolished during the fifth century, and again with the construction of an 11th-century
bell tower, or *campanile*.425 The tessellated pavements that have been uncovered, however,
provide additional insight into the stylistic composition of Christian art immediately following
the Edict of Milan.

424 Ibid., 172.
Figure 4.1: Schematic floorplan of Theodorean Basilical Complex in Aquileia (Dorigo, “Roman and Christian Painting,” 170)
Figure 4.2: Reconstruction of North Theodorean Hall pavements (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 30-31)
Based on the division of the uncovered pavement mosaics from this structure, there does not appear to be a division of panels separating the body of the nave from the side aisles in this structure. Instead, the floor space can be divided into six segments with varying degrees of completeness. The lowest portion of the North Hall contains two separate segments: Mosaic I (Figures 4.4-5) depicts a repeating but widely spaced ‘Meander’ pattern forming a series of undecorated rectangles and squares. This area is placed directly in front of one of the uncovered entrances to the structure and may have served as an abbreviated esonarthex.426 Mosaic II is also situated in a similar space at the westernmost end of the basilica, though it has been decorated differently, using an ‘Octagon, Hexagon, and Square’ pattern (Figures 4.6-7), and does not

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426 Author’s Note: Unlike later basilica-type churches, the entrances to the North Theodorean Hall were located along the south wall, near Mosaics I and III. This helps explain the curious orientation of the various emblema within the church, as the subjects in Mosaics II and III were oriented for a west-facing viewer, yet the figures in Mosaics IV-VI are oriented for an east-facing audience. Curiously, both the ‘Felix’ and ‘Januarius’ inscriptions are also oriented for an east-facing viewer.
appear to be situated near an entryway. Like the squares in the neighboring panel, the hexagons, rectangles, and squares are plainly colored, though the latter display a small ‘Floret Diamond’ in the center. Most of the visible octagons are depicted as featuring a bird perched upon a fruit-bearing branch. Both the birds and branches differ in shape and coloration, indicating their different species. This displayed variety could have been added both as a complement to the craftsmen's skill and for its spiritual significance. The shape of an octagon (the combination of a square and a circle) was considered symbolic of the union of heaven and earth, and the inclusion of birds (denizens of the sky) and trees (firmly anchored in the ground) may have helped to secure this interpretation.⁴²⁷ Along the left side of Mosaic II, several baskets are seen bearing different types of fruit still attached to their branches, and along one row, the octagons include a partial inscription that reads: “FELIX HIC CREVISTI HIC FELIX.” Without the beginning of the text, it is difficult to translate the inscription accurately, but it appears to be addressing an individual named ‘Felix’ in praise of his fortunate increase.⁴²⁸ It is possible that the inscription was paid for by this Felix, who credited his wealth to divine benevolence. Both of these mosaics are bounded by a pattern of ‘Interlacing Circles’ with a trio of leaves existing within bisected circles. While these leaves do not resemble either an Acanthus or Grape Vine and considering the importance of the local port and the freshwater river, it is possible they were instead representative of some locally recognized, aquatic-based plant.

⁴²⁸ Alternatively, it has been proposed that the missing beginning to this inscription was the phrase “O THEODORE,” thus altering the translation to be a statement honoring Bishop Theodore by reading “O Blessed Theodore, here you grew up, here you are truly happy” [Cf. Renato Jacumin, *La Basilica di Aquileia* (Udine, Italy: Chiandetti Editore, 1990), 2:25-26].
Figure 4.4: Detailed overview (reconstruction) of Mosaics I and II, North Basilical Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 30)

Figure 4.5: Photograph of Mosaic I, North Hall [Matthew Higham, author. “North Hall, Mosaic 1 (facing West).” Photograph. (Taken January 20, 2019)]
As might be expected, the decoration of multiple buildings in a single complex would likely be turned over to multiple master artisans rather than a single individual. This
differentiation can be inferred in several places throughout the Theodorean complex, one of which is visible in the North Hall's vibrant coloration, particularly in the following panels.\textsuperscript{429} Mosaic III is designed similar to Mosaic II, though it has been modified to portray an ‘Octagon, Hexagon, and Cross’ pattern, wherein the crosses include a ‘Guilloche’ braid, and the hexagons depict flowering plants or ‘Peltae’ (Figures 4.9, 4.12). While a sizable portion of this panel was obliterated due to the 11th-century campanile's foundations, 27 octagonal emblema survived with varying degrees of preservation. Of these survivors, 15 share a similar motif involving a pair of birds perched on a thorny Acanthus scroll, with a small basket of fruit or Pinecones in the center; nine depict various quadrupeds, including Rabbits, Sheep, Goats, Oxen, and even a Fox.

The remaining three emblema from Mosaic III are unique and deserve some special attention. Two emblema of particular interest depicts a basket of Snails (Figure 4.10) and a bowl of Mushrooms (Figure 4.11). When considering that harvesting both snails and mushrooms as a dietary supplement were widespread occurrences in Roman Italy, their presence in a fourth-century CE church is not surprising. As these subjects are rarely depicted in Byzantine/Early Christian art, their inclusion may have had some other occult or heterodox symbolism attached.\textsuperscript{430} The last emblema to be mentioned is an inscription that has been partially destroyed by the northwest corner of the campanile’s foundation. The partial inscription reads:

“IANUARIU- DE DEI DONO V- P. DCCCLXXX” (Figure 4.12), and can be read as:

“Januarius with God’s gifts made a donation of 880 feet.”\textsuperscript{431} This marker, likely added at the

\textsuperscript{429} Dorigo, “Roman and Christian Painting,” 172. However, the particular vibrancy of the tesserae used in the North Hall may be partially related to their being preserved and protected from regular use for longer than the panels in the South Hall.

\textsuperscript{430} As to the identification of the specific type of mushroom depicted, certain inferences can be made between the use of mind-altering substances in Hellenic and Roman pagan rituals and their possible use in Early Christian worship (Fabbro, “Mushrooms and Snails,” 71-76).

\textsuperscript{431} Ibid., 71.
patron’s request, served as a reminder that this wealthy individual was directly responsible for funding the installation of 26 m² of tessellated flooring.

Figure 4.9: Detailed overview (reconstruction) of Mosaic III, North Basilical Hall (Marini, I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia, 30)

Figure 4.10: Photograph of Emblema with Snails, Mosaic III, North Hall [Matthew Higham, author. “North Hall, Mosaic 3 (facing West), Snails.” Photograph. (Taken January 20, 2019)]
Figure 4.11: Photograph of Emblema with Mushrooms, Mosaic III, North Hall [Matthew Higham, author. “North Hall, Mosaic 3 (facing West), Mushrooms.” Photograph. (Taken January 20, 2019)]

Figure 4.12: Detail photograph of ‘Januarius inscription,’ Mosaic III, North Hall [Matthew Higham, author. “North Hall, Mosaic 3 (facing East).” Photograph. (Taken January 20, 2019)]
The campanile foundation has all but wholly obliterated mosaic IV, but enough remains to provide a partial description and general idea of the overarching design. Mosaic IV appears to have been part of a ‘Wheel and Oval Diaper’ (Figure 4.14), and considering the similar compositions of Mosaics III (Figure 4.49) and IX (Figure 4.50) in the South Theodorean Hall, was likely intended as a part of a paradisiacal setting.\(^{432}\) The ovals and half of the visible circles are filled with flowering ‘Rosettes,’ while the remaining circles are depicted with a ‘Solomon’s Knot.’ The spaces bounded by the framework of circles and ovals contain alternating images of perched birds and active quadrupeds. The figures involving avians share a similar format between themselves, depicting a pair of birds (i.e., Ravens, Quail, Pheasants, Doves, and Peacocks) standing upon Acanthus vines, flanking various types of baskets and urns bearing a variety of fruit-laden bushes. The quadrupedal depictions are also similar in modeling, as each of the five visible examples appears to be in the act of rearing back on their hind legs; these individuals include common terrestrial animals, such as a Donkey and a Goat, alongside the depiction of a mythical, winged animal (Figure 4.13).\(^{433}\) This mythical creature's rear legs appear to have hooves, but without the front half of the depiction, it is impossible to determine what the artist intended in this space. The figure may have been modeled from an earlier pagan composition such as a winged horse (e.g., Pegasus), or a character from the Zodiac (e.g., Taurus); however, it may have also been a Winged Bull, the symbol of St. Luke as one of the Four Evangelists.

\(^{432}\) Other theories have suggested that the damaged portions of the mosaics in question may have been filled with characters from the Zodiac (Jacumin, *La Basilica di Aquileia*, 1:29-35).

\(^{433}\) Somewhat unusually, however, the Goat is depicted wearing a harness as if it were prepared to carry goods or pull a small cart.
Figure 4.13: Detailed overview (reconstruction) of Mosaic IV, North Basilical Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 31)

Figure 4.14: Example of ‘Wheel and Oval Diaper’ motif (Biebel, *Photograph Albums of Mosaics* 27, n.p.)

Figure 4.15: Detail of Ravens and Pomegranates in Mosaic IV, North Basilical Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 116)
Figure 4.16: Detail of Peahens and Peaches in Mosaic IV, North Basilical Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 116)

Figure 4.17: Detail of Donkey in Mosaic IV, North Basilical Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 158-59)

Figure 4.18: Detail of Pheasants and Figs in Mosaic IV, North Basilical Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 116)

Figure 4.19: Detail of Goat in Harness in Mosaic IV, North Basilical Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 112)
The foundation of the campanile has also largely destroyed Mosaic V, but the remaining figures and patterns are unique and should also be mentioned. The overarching design pattern is distinctive in that it does not appear to be often used in Early Christian mosaics but can be described as ‘Circles and Rounded Diamonds’ (Figure 4.21). The smaller circles are decorated with geometric designs (likely intended as *apotropaic* devices) resembling ‘Intersecting Circles,’ ‘Cruciform Rosettes,’ and ‘Firey Suns,’ while the interstitial spaces depict various birds with fruited branches. Within the four surviving ‘Rounded Diamond’ emblema are four scenes that appear to have intensely Christ-centered connotations. The spaces are roughly shaped like a Greek Cross (i.e., a cross with four equal-length arms) and depict a tree with various animals sitting in the boughs as they branch out. Being shaped in such a manner, it has been suggested
that the tree itself is representative of the *arbor Crucis* or ‘tree of the Cross,’ thus it can be assumed that each of the figures atop a tree held some particular relevance toward Jesus Christ.\(^434\) The bottom emblema depicts a single Goat, placidly resting among the branches of the tree. When taken under the previous supposition then, the Goat is likely intended as a sacrificial animal. The next emblema depicts a nest of Quail (two adults and five young) huddled together (Figure 4.22); perhaps drawing on the belief that a Quail will always heed the call of its parent in reference to the devotion Christ showed to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the Cross at Golgotha.

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One medallion from this panel stands out in particular contrast to its neighbors, that of the ‘Lobster and Skate’ (Figure 4.23). The whole scene depicts a Lobster sitting among Palm tree branches, with a Skate (a cousin to the Stingray) hovering overhead. As a crustacean, the Lobster was considered unclean and inedible according to Judaic laws and is not often depicted in Early Christian contexts. However, it has been suggested that the Lobster's hybrid aesthetic (appearing as a crustacean, with a fish’s tail) may have been intended as a reference to the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ (i.e., the christological discussion over the combination of human and divine aspects of Christ’s nature).\textsuperscript{435} While many shunned and failed to recognize

\textsuperscript{435} Ibid., 39.
Christ as the long-awaited Messiah because he appeared as a man (i.e., the crustacean), he was nevertheless possessed of a divine nature (i.e., the Fish’s tail). Again, the tree itself could represent the *arbor Crucis*, and while Skate was a popular dish in Antiquity, their ‘winged’ appearance may have been applied as a depiction of the Holy Ghost in this context.

![Lobster and Skate emblema from Mosaic V, North Basilical Hall](image)

The last visible emblema from Mosaic V depicts a goat seated atop a tree with a basket of 12 scrolls or loaves of bread (Figure 4.24). While the depiction of a basket of scrolls is a relatively common sight in Christian mosaics, the rest of the composition may provide clues as to the intended contents. The shape of the complete figure is, again, in the form of a cross, and when combined with a sacrificial animal figure, suggests that the contents of the Basket could be intended as eucharistic bread.

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436 This allusion relies on the use of the Greek word *ἰχθύς* (i.e., *ichthys* or fish) as an acronym referring to Jesus Christ.
437 Upon closer inspection, there appears to be an inscription beneath the rim of the basket, but the characters may be too far degraded to create an accurate transcription. While there are indications that this may have been an intentional act, it is difficult to understand why the letters would not have been removed entirely, rather than simply defaced (Cf. Jacumin, *La Basilica di Aquileia*, 1:13-14).
The final panel from the North Hall is Mosaic VI and is presumably where the apse and altar would have been located; however, no evidence of these features has been uncovered. However, the center of the panel does feature a series of disjointed rhombi, giving the appearance that the center of the mosaic was adjusted to accommodate liturgical practices (e.g., such as a standing platform for a portable altar table or lectern). No remains of the original decoration have been found in the *sinopie* beneath this carpeting (e.g., a preparatory outline drawn on the plaster before the tesserae are set in place), making further speculation on the original decoration inadmissible. The panel itself is modest when compared to the other segments of the North Hall but contains three images of particular note. The panel is decorated using an ‘Octagon and Square’ motif (Figure 4.26), and while the smaller squares depict several *apotropaic* designs, similar to those seen in Mosaic V, the majority of the octagonal mosaics are decorated with ‘Pelta’ (Figure 4.27) and ‘Acanthus’ motifs. Three surviving emblema vary from...
this pattern and instead depict various animals. Closer to the southern end of the panel is a depiction of a Rabbit in the attitude of crouching or lying down, while the other two depictions are on the opposite side of the panel. One of these latter depictions is a Ram with an accompanying dedication (Figure 4.25, 4.28). The inscription reads, “CYRIACE VIBAS” and translates as “May you, Cyriacus, live in eternity.” It is interesting to note that a Ram was used in a dedication regarding eternal life, particularly when considering the similar threads of creation, rejuvenation, and sacrifice in Egyptian (e.g., Amun-Ra), Hellenistic (e.g., Dionysus), and Judeo-Christian traditions (e.g., Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and Jesus Christ).

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Among the emblema and depictions found in Mosaic VI is a depiction of a Rooster engaged in battle with a Tortoise (Figure 4.29). This type of depiction in a Christian context is interesting for several reasons, not the least of which is its rarity. As noted previously, Aquileia's port was heavily engaged with trade throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and was a likely sphere where Eastern cultural and religious influences could spread and interact with new audiences. Religious movements like Zoroastrianism and Hinduism have been seen to share some features in common with the nascent Christian movement, and, with that commonality, a natural convergence of iconographic representation naturally followed suit.\textsuperscript{440} One proposed example of this merging of artistic practices is depicting two diametrically opposed forces: the Rooster, a symbol of resurrection and vigilance, battling against a Tortoise, a creature believed to lead an existence characterized by darkness.\textsuperscript{441} Behind the two combatants is a pillar, upon which rests the victor’s prize, a \textit{Unguentarium} (i.e., a small vessel containing sweet-smelling

\textsuperscript{440} Fabbro, "Mushrooms and Snails," 77-79.

\textsuperscript{441} Jacumin, \textit{La Basilica di Aquileia}, 1:115-18.
incense or oils). Another possible explanation of the scene could be a representation of the conflict that a young man (symbolized by the Rooster) must win against the Devil (the Tortoise) before he can receive his prize, chrismation/confirmation in the Church (represented by the Unguentarium).

Figure 4.29: Detail of ‘Rooster Battling Tortoise,’ Mosaic VI, North Basilical Hall (Marini, I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia, 36)

Description of Mosaics (South Theodorean Hall)

Nave

The South Hall's mosaic panels have been remarkably well preserved from the time of their creation until their rediscovery in the 20th century (Figures 4.30-32). The presence of so many symbols intimately associated with Christ (e.g., ‘Victory of the Eucharist’ and the ‘Good Shepherd’) located on the pavement surface does not seem to have bothered Early Christians, and it would not be until 427 CE when an edict of Theodosius II prohibited the inclusion of

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442 Marini, I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia, 36.
crosses or Christograms on floor surfaces. The South Hall's pavement mosaics were possibly covered up by this point, though it is also possible that some of these depictions endured as a result of a perceived loophole in the edict’s wording. Interestingly, some of these panels' orientation is not what one might expect when compared against other Christian basilicas, as they do not all face the same direction. Unlike later basilicas, the main entrance to this structure was located along the north wall and omitted a delineated esonarthex. When considering this point, the portraits' orientation appears more logical, as they (generally) face the viewer’s anticipated pathway from the entrance in the north wall, through the nave, and terminating at the foot of the presbytery. Thus, the entering parishioner would be greeted by the portraits of benefactors and patrons, nameless to modern scholars but likely familiar to the early members of the Aquileian congregation.

Figure 4.30: Schematic floorplan of South Theodorean Hall, Aquileia (Drawing by Matthew Higham, 2020)

Mosaic I  Mosaic II  Mosaic III  
Mosaic IV  Mosaic V  Mosaic VI  
Mosaic VII  Mosaic VIII  Mosaic IX

443 Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 36.
Figure 4.31: Reconstruction of South Theodorean Hall pavements, west half (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 29)
Mosaic I of the South Theodorean Hall shares a similar ‘Octagon, Hexagon, and Cross’ decorative motif as Mosaic III from the North Hall, where the hexagons still depict flowering plants, similar in shape to a Lily, and while approximately half of the interstitial crosses depict cruciform-shaped ‘Guilloche’ ribbons, the remaining spaces depict ‘Peltae’ designs. The design
consists of 20 octagons, four of which depict ‘Solomon’s Knot and Square’ motifs (Figure 4.33),
four portraits of donors, four host aquatic life (three with Dolphins and one with a pair of
Octopi), three scenes of birds upon branches, two depictions of empty vases, and two emblema
with damaged or missing subjects. Along with several panels in the South Hall, Mosaic I
appears to have once depicted a large, central emblema, though the depiction has since been
disturbed by the later inclusion of a rectangular baptismal font. The four donor portraits in this
panel (Figure 4.35) are nameless; however, their creator seems to have emphasized the modeling
and shading of the subjects’ faces rather than giving way to artistic license or caricature.
Mosaic II appears as one of the more multifaceted panels in the South Hall; the base design involved the previously seen ‘Octagon, Hexagon, and Cross’ motif, though with 12 additional square emblema (Figure 4.36). The octagons are occupied by variants of the ‘Solomon’s Knot,’ ‘Rosette,’ and ‘Multiple Guilloche’ motifs, while the cruciform spaces are filled with similar *apotropaic* designs. The square emblema was likely added to include the portraits of individuals who donated large sums to help build and decorate the church. Only five
of the emblema in this panel depict such portraiture, and the remainder of the squared frames were filled with the now-familiar image of birds and fruitful branches (except for one with a ‘Multiple Guilloche’ design). The individuals in these portraits (four men and one woman) are shown in formal attire, two of whom appear to be wearing liturgical clothing and are perhaps lay clergy members (Figure 4.37).446 As mentioned previously, the two entrances into this basilica were found along the north wall, just where Mosaics I and II are located; which means that upon entering the South Hall, one of the first things a visitor would be greeted with, was the portraits of these notable community members, whose faces are turned towards the entrances to the basilica.

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446 It has been suggested that the portraits in this panel may be a family grouping of a wealthy mother with her four younger sons (Jacumin, *La Basilica di Aquileia*, 2:59). If so, it is possible that the missing emblema contained a final member of the family party, though one might expect that final portrait to continue the pattern of being attached to a bird and fruit branch in a neighboring the portrait.
Skipping over Mosaic III, for the time being, the motif found in Mosaic IV (Figure 4.38) can be characterized by its ‘Square, Circle, and Semi-Circle’ pattern, similar to the ‘Circles and Rounded Diamonds’ from Mosaic V in the North Theodorean Hall (Figure 4.21). While a few squares along the edge can be seen with ‘Checkerboard’ and ‘Crenellation’ patterns, most squares utilize ‘Solomon’s Knot’ and ‘Multiple Guilloche’ motifs. The circles, on the other hand, depict additional ‘Solomon’s Knot’ patterns along with a few ‘Quatrefoil’ designs. However, the semi-circles uniformly depict ‘Peltae’ (which have also been described as referencing similar mushrooms to those found in the North Hall).\textsuperscript{447} The panel center is an emblema that features another Rooster battling a Tortoise (Figure 4.39). While much of the symbolism (presumably) remains consistent, the tower in the background appears to be completely different, along with the victors’ prize. This tower appears more like a rounded

\textsuperscript{447} Fabbro, “Mushrooms and Snails,” 73-76.
watchtower, and the *Unguentarium* has been exchanged for a pouch of money. Not only this, but a closer examination of the purse reveals an added label reading, “∞ CCC.” These characters are likely intended as an allusion to eternal life with the members of the Trinity (i.e., God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost), though it could have also been included as a statement (either promoting or rejecting) regarding the so-called ‘Arian heresy’ which was still spreading throughout Northern Italy and the Balkans.\(^\text{449}\)

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\(^\text{448}\) In Christian sacred numerology, ‘10’ was a perfect number as it was a union of ‘3’ (Trinity) and ‘7’ (Man). Following this thought, ‘100’ (the result of ‘10 x 10’) indicates perfection stacked upon itself which can only be found in Heaven. At times, one hundred was also a generic number used to describe a long period of time (Sill, *Symbols in Christian Art*, 138).

The unique design presented in Mosaic V can be described as ‘Scalloped Medallions,’ where each medallion is surrounded by four sets of curvilinear shapes (Figure 4.40). Like Mosaics IV, VI, and X, this panel has been partially damaged by the foundations of a later basilicas’ pillars, but enough remains to get a clear view of the original design. Initially, 18 medallions were included, though four of which have been considerably damaged or destroyed. Of the remaining medallions, seven depict aquatic life (six with Fish of various hues, one with an Octopus, and some Scallops/Oysters), and eight contain half-portraits of humans (four donors and personifications of the Four Seasons). The four patrons (three women and one man) are dressed very formally in their portraits, suggesting that they may have donated higher sums of money to the Church’s construction. This supposition is potentially corroborated by examining
the extent of the shading and detail given over to their serene faces and clothing (Figure 4.41). As discussed in the preceding chapter, the Christianization of popular artistic motifs from Antiquity was not uncommon, including the personifications of other supernatural beings or forces. Representations of two of the Four Seasons, ‘Autumn’ and ‘Summer,’ can be clearly seen, and a third, ‘Spring,’ has been partially reconstructed (Figure 4.42). While the medallion depicting ‘Winter’ is missing, its inclusion is a near certainty, particularly as the Four Seasons were often used to convey the idea of eternal life and spiritual renewal through Jesus Christ.

Figure 4.40: Detailed overview of Mosaic V, South Theodorean Hall (Jacumin, *La Basilica di Aquileia*, 2:69)

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450 It is also interesting to note that most of the portraits of patrons in the South Theodorean Hall are of feminine subjects, suggesting that Aquileia may have also been home to an above average number of women with the means and the freedom to invest their capital at will.
Figure 4.41: Detail of Portraits in Mosaic V, South Theodorean Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 77)

Figure 4.42: Detail (and reconstruction) of the Four Seasons from Mosaic V, South Theodorean Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 73)
The Mosaic VI panel is prominently featured in the nave center, closest to Mosaic X and the presbytery. The panel is decorated with an ‘Octagon and Rectangle’ motif, where the rectangles and smaller octagons are filled with ‘Guilloche’ ribbons, ‘Solomon’s Knot,’ and ‘Solomon’s Knot and Square’ motifs. However, at the center of this panel, one particular scene stands out in both size and distinction, the ‘Christian Victory’ emblematia (Figure 4.43-44). Here, the artists repurposed an image of Nike, the goddess of Victory, to resemble an angel who holds a laurel crown over the presentation of the Eucharist, symbolized by a paten of bread and chalice of wine (partially damaged). The octagons surrounding the image of ‘Christian Victory’ contain two types of figures: Birds (of varying types) perched upon fruit-laden branches (i.e., Pomegranates, Peaches, Pears, etc.) and individuals working to prepare eucharistic offerings. Both men and women perform these tasks, and while they are not as finely dressed as some of the other subjects in the South Hall, they are much more formally attired than is necessary for the average farmer or husbander.

Figure 4.43: Detail of Portrait emblema from Mosaic VI, South Theodorean Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 48-49)
Mosaic VII is also laid out using an ‘Octagon and Square’ pattern, though the borders separating each shape are simple black ribbons against a white background. Each square displays a simple ‘Floret Diamond,’ while the octagons are decorated with a considerable variety of patterns and designs (Figure 4.45). The panel consists of some 21 motifs, ranging from simple figures like the ‘Checkerboard’ and ‘Rosette’ to more complex designs like the ‘Pelta’ and ‘Quatrefoil.’ Most of these 21 adornments are repeated throughout the composition, some with slight variations in coloring, though not with any discernable pattern or uniform interval.
Near the center of the panel, one emblema stands out in stark contrast as it appears to depict the silhouette profile of a face (Figure 4.46). The Silhouette is seen facing west and appears to have something (possibly spit) protruding from its mouth. It has been suggested that this curious addition, set amongst so many other apotropaic devices, likely served a similar purpose, possibly linked to the renunciation of Satan and his evil works in a pre-baptismal rite.  

Figure 4.45: Detailed overview (reconstruction) of Mosaic VII, South Theodorean Hall (Marini, I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia, 29)

Figure 4.46: Detail of ‘Silhouette’ emblema, Mosaic VII (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 42-43)

The Mosaic VIII panel depicts a familiar pastoral setting with the ‘Good Shepherd’ (Figure 4.47). The panel is divided into an ‘Octagon and Square’ pattern and is separated by a ‘Guilloche’ border. The bottom and top rows include three half-octagons and one quarter-octagon, while the middle row hosts three full-octagons and one half-octagon; the sizing of the center row gives the impression that the original design was made with grander dimensions in mind. However, the size difference also helps direct the viewers' attention to the central figure of the ‘Good Shepherd.’ The emblemata on the bottom row (from left to right) depicts a pair of Doves amongst some Flowers (or possibly a type of Mushroom) that are being gathered into a basket, an underwater scene with two Fish (generic) and a longer marine animal (possibly a Swordfish), another pair of birds (possibly Quail) perched upon branches bearing Pomegranates and another type of fruit (possibly Citrons), and lastly, a pair of Ducks resting in the shallows of a stream. The next row up depicts three small, interstitial squares, each with a bird resting upon various types of branches. The birds vary in shape and color, likely representing local species
familiar to the viewer, and the branches appear to be from several fruit-bearing varieties. Upon closer inspection, the types of fruit depicted may have been selected for symbolic reasons similar to the inclusion of the Four Seasons. The depicted assortments of fruit are typically harvested during different seasons: Citrons (spring harvest), Peaches (late summer), Pomegranates (autumn harvest), Cherries (autumn harvest), and Figs (late autumn/early winter harvest). Not only does the range of harvest times roughly correlate to each of the Four Seasons, but they are also traditionally associated with themes like love, paradise, and resurrection; thus, when taken together, these images could also symbolize eternity and the constancy of the teachings of Jesus Christ throughout time.452 If this supposition regarding the changing seasons is correct, then the birds shown with each branch may be identified from among species commonly found during that season.

Figure 4.47: Detail photograph of Mosaic VIII (Marini, I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia, 58-59)

452 Cooper, Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols, 34, 38, 66, 96, 127, 134.
The center row of Mosaic VIII hosts the panel's most prominent figures, which include an Antelope/Gazelle, a Shepherd, a Stag, and a final depiction of a Horse and a Goat drinking from a river. Near the center of the panel, the figure of Christ is depicted as a young Shepherd (Figure 4.47). The figure appears as if it was modeled directly from a preexisting image of a kriophoros from Antiquity, complete with a Lamb draped over his shoulders and holding a pan flute in his right hand (a feature typically associated with Dionysus). The depiction is an odd mixture of abstract and artistic elements, a descriptor that would become more commonplace for Early Christian/Byzantine art in the coming centuries. While the artist used careful shading to mimic the folds of the Shepherd’s clothing (an undecorated, short tunic with knee-high leggings) and the musculature of two Sheep depicted with him, the rest of the model is somewhat abstractly rendered; as the Shepherd is seemingly hovering above the ground, and the larger of the two Sheep seems oddly proportioned.

The final two rows of Mosaic VIII mimic the first two, in that the row of squares also depicts a variety of birds perched on branches, bearing Figs, Peaches, and Cherries in their emblema. Finally, the top row of octagons features a pair of dark-colored birds standing on a Peach and a Pomegranate branch, two Herons/Storks fighting/hunting a Snake and a Turtle (representations of darkness and evil influences hunted by heralds of light), a Pheasant with two baskets of collected fruit (likely Peaches), and finally, a depiction of two Dolphins playfully existing in their emblema.

The diversity of animals and plants in Mosaic VIII could be symbolic of the variety, and breadth of human cultures and nations gathered together in the Paradisiacal or Messianic Age after the awaited return of Jesus Christ. This analogy can also be carried into an examination of Mosaics III and IX. Like their counterpart from the North Hall, these panels were fashioned
using a ‘Wheel and Oval Diaper’ pattern with similar *apotropaic* designs within the circles and ovals. Unlike the North Hall panel, the animals depicted in these South Hall panels are much more serene, instead of being caught up in a state of agitation. Mosaic III (Figure 4.48-49) depicts eight animals, including Goats, Sheep, Deer, and a Donkey, all of which are calmly standing, lying down, or grazing. Some of the figures are ill-proportioned, but the rigidity of their stance helps convey a sense of contentment and peace. Mosaic IX (Figure 4.50) follows the same theme and a similar cast of individuals, though one of the figural spaces depicts two Rabbits (drawing on a pre-Christian connotation of rejuvenation and rebirth that was associated with the Egyptian god, Osiris). These panels give the impression of a type of scene called *Ovilia Dei* or ‘the sheepfold of God,’ which is only strengthened when combined with the ‘Good Shepherd’ from the nearby Mosaic VIII.

![Figure 4.48: Partial photo of ‘Ovilia Dei’ in Mosaic III (Dorigo, “Roman and Christian Painting,” Plate 140)](image)

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The final pavement mosaic in the South Theodorean Hall is an aquatic composition that pays homage to Aquileia’s most important feature, its harbor. The depiction hosts a variety of sea life and fishermen plying their trade alongside a three-part allegorical representation of the story of the Old Testament prophet, Jonah (Figure 4.51-52). Like so many others, this panel has been partially destroyed, but the surviving figures include Fish (x90 individuals), Dolphins (x6), Skate (x4), Cephalopods (x13), Scallops/Cockles (x11), Ducks/Gulls (x4), and some Winged Putti as Fishermen (x11). While most Christian art involving aquatic life is limited to simple

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453 These numbers are excluding the three vignettes of the Story of Jonah, which will be examined separately.
Fish or Dolphins, portrayals of Octopus and other marine animals can be found in ancient compositions ranging from Pompeii to Palestrina.\(^{454}\)

The panel's marine residents do not appear to be engaged in any particular activity outside of their ordinary existence. Two of the Dolphins are seen in the act of devouring the remains of a meal, while the Ducks/Gulls resting on the surface of the water are situated near the fishing boats (perhaps waiting for an easy meal to escape the yawning nets). Three of the Fishermen are balanced on solid ground, or outcroppings, while the remaining eight are spread out among four boats, using both fishing rods and nets to haul in their catch. In the center of the composition is an inscribed medallion (Figure 4.53) which translates as, “Blessed are you, Theodore, who with the help of God and the flock entrusted to you from on high, have completed all this work and consecrated it to the glory of Almighty God.”\(^{455}\) This mosaic provides a *terminus post quem* for the mosaics, as Bishop Theodore ministered to Aquileia's community from 308-315 CE and was followed by Bishop Agapito (315-328 CE); thus, construction likely began c. 313-314 CE and was probably completed before Theodore’s death.


Figure 4.52: Detail photograph of Mosaic X (partial), South Theodorean Hall (Jacumin, *La Basilica di Aquileia*, 2:31)

Figure 4.53: Detail photograph of Medallion, Mosaic X, South Theodorean Hall (Marini, *I Mosaici della Basilica di Aquileia*, 97)
Turning to the three vignettes of Jonah, the characters are ignored by the other panel residents. Briefly stated, Jonah's story starts with a calling from God to preach in the wicked city of Nineveh. Jonah boards a boat and attempts to flee from God’s command but is caught in a storm. In attempting to save the rest of the crew, Jonah is thrown overboard while the crew prays that the storm will be calmed. The first scene on the left (Figure 4.54) depicts a boat carrying four humans: one holding onto the tiller, as if he is trying to steady the vessel’s motion, one is shown with upraised hands in prayer, and the third is throwing Jonah, the fourth human, overboard where a sea monster devours him. After praying for forgiveness, Jonah is vomited back up three days later. This short scene is shown plainly in the second vignette (Figure 4.55) with Jonah emerging headfirst from the sea monster. After being freed from captivity, Jonah then travels to Nineveh, where he preaches to great effect and finds rest under the shade of a Gourd vine afterwards (Figure 4.56).

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456 Jonah 1:1-17 KJV.
457 Jonah 2:1-10 KJV.
458 Jonah 3:1-4:6 KJV.
The significance of Jonah’s story, however, was viewed as more than a reflection of the consequences of disobeying the commands of God. The story was also seen as an allegory
representing the final days and the divine mission of Jesus Christ. In this allegorical connotation, the death of Jesus is symbolized by Jonah being eaten by the sea monster, the resurrection is symbolized by Jonah’s reemergence from the creature that had ‘killed’ him, and the final scene of Jonah resting beneath the cool shade of a vine is symbolic of Christ’s ascension into the paradisiacal realm of heaven. This multi-layered, allegorical display is a far-reaching feature in the basilica décor, where, not only do most of the previous mosaic panels allude to the importance of Jesus Christ but this scene, in particular, was placed directly in front of the presbytery where the Eucharist would be prepared and presented to the congregation.

The Church of San Vitale, Ravenna

History

The city of Ravenna, known colloquially as the “City of Mosaics,” has cherished a long history of occupation and importance not only within the region but throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. The earliest period of occupation dates to the Etruscans, when a settlement was established on the shores of the Aegean Sea. This settlement grew and expanded due to its strategic location on the coast and gained some measure of importance by the reign of Emperor Augustus as both a reliable harbor and shipyard for commercial and Imperial military forces stationed in the Eastern Mediterranean. Throughout the 1st-3rd centuries CE, Ravenna steadily grew into a city, largely due to its access to maritime trade with the Eastern Mediterranean and again rose to the forefront of political affairs under Emperor Honorius (395-423 CE) when the central seat of the Western Roman Empire and the Imperial See were moved from Milan to

460 The posture Jonah takes in Figure 4.56 (i.e., reclining on his back with one arm raised over his head) is often seen in depictions of Dionysus, and is called a dormition pose (denoting sleep or rest).
461 Verhoeven, Early Christian Monuments, 13.
462 Deborah Deliyannis, Ravenna in Late Antiquity (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 21-26, 31-35; Verhoeven, Early Christian Monuments, 13.
Ravenna in 402 CE. The relocation of the capital was done, in part, because of Ravenna’s geographic location in Italy and its’ more favorable access to the rest of the Byzantine world.\textsuperscript{463} This move would make Ravenna a critical factor in future Byzantine political schemes in the west and cemented it as a focal point for Christian worship and decoration.

The presence of Gothic tribes in Northern Italy dates to the third century CE when several Germanic tribes, fleeing the impending threat posed by nomadic tribes from the steppes of Central Asia, migrated south toward Italy and the Balkans. This resettlement effort led to the Goths’ increased contact with Christianity, via raiding and acquiring prisoners, and directly led to the creation of a Gothic Alphabet and a new translation of the collected Gospels.\textsuperscript{464} In 376 CE, Emperor Valens permitted these Gothic tribes to settle further south as they fled the approaching Hunnic hordes. The Christianization of these tribes was conducted through the Arian Ulfilas, who had been consecrated and assigned by other influential Arians like Eusebius of Nicomedia, Patriarch of Constantinople (339-341 CE).\textsuperscript{465} As a result, the Gothic tribes were predisposed to accept Arian-Trinitarian arguments while still practicing tolerance to their Nicene Christian brothers.

Unable to completely prevent the Germanic migration into Byzantine territory, these tribes were converted into client states under the Byzantine Emperor, and given a degree of autonomy so long as they recognized Byzantine supremacy. This arrangement met with mixed results, as minor rebellions among Gothic forces happened with surprising frequency.\textsuperscript{466} In 476 CE, the Germanic ruler Odoacer overthrew the remains of the Western Roman Empire along

\textsuperscript{463} Deliyannis, \textit{Ravenna in Late Antiquity}, 46-48; Verhoeven, \textit{Early Christian Monuments}, 13, 55.
\textsuperscript{466} Ostrogorsky, \textit{History of the Byzantine State}, 52-53, 60-63.
with several Gothic rivals. Then in 493 CE, Theodoric, the son of a Germanic chieftain, deposed Odoacer as ruler of Italy and the fragmented remains of the Western Roman Empire. Seeking to preserve some measure of political power in the west, Emperor Anastasios reached an agreement that officially recognized Theodoric as the leader over the new Ostrogothic Kingdom. In his youth, Theodoric had been a political hostage in Constantinople and thus became familiar with the workings of the Imperial government. While in Constantinople, his political status notwithstanding, Theodoric received an excellent education and was even adopted into the Imperial House by Emperor Zeno, who later commissioned him to conquer Italy. After making Ravenna his capital, Theodoric’s 30-year reign would breathe new cultural life and new Byzantine-inspired projects into the city.

After Theodoric died in 526 CE, Emperor Justinian sent his most successful general, Belisarius, to reconquer territories in North Africa and Italy lost to the Vandals and Ostrogothic kingdoms, who had long since renounced their status as clients to the Byzantine Emperor. Both Ravenna and Classe were occupied by Belisarius in 540 CE, sparking a renewed wave of ecclesiastical and civic construction projects in the region. By the middle of the sixth century, Ravenna’s role as a center of artistic and cultural influence reached its climax, and in 584 CE, the city became the seat of the Byzantine Exarch, a political role that served as the Byzantine Emperor’s representative in all military and civic affairs in Italy. This high status also affected the relationship between the Eastern and Western Churches and, by 666 CE, the Pope in Rome was forced to grant a state of autocephaly upon the Ravennate church. This act made the Ravennate church (and by extension, the Byzantine Emperor’s largest supporter in the west)

467 Ibid., 63.
468 Ibid., 108-10.
469 Ibid., 69-71.
470 Deliyannis, Ravenna in Late Antiquity, 208; Ostrogorsky, History of the Byzantine State, 80.
independent of the Pope in Rome.\textsuperscript{471} This brief period of autonomy ended in 681 CE with the reconciliation of the Pope at the Third Council of Constantinople.\textsuperscript{472} The Exarchate of Ravenna would still exert a degree of political influence in the region until their capitulation to the invading Langobard’s in 751 CE.\textsuperscript{473}

The city of Ravenna was also known as the location where St. Vitalis of Milan was purportedly martyred and buried. Vitalis was a citizen of Milan who was present at the execution of a condemned Christian named Ursicinus. At the execution, when it appeared that Ursicinus was about to falter and renounce his faith, Vitalis shouted words of encouragement to the man to not be tempted by sin. Buoyed up, Ursicinus died as a martyr and was carried off and laid to rest by Vitalis. When word of this reached the judge who had condemned Ursicinus, he ordered Vitalis’ arrest, torture, and execution.\textsuperscript{474} Before the end of the fifth century CE, the martyrdom and subsequent burial of Vitalis was associated with Bologna, until a popularized account came into circulation where St. Ambrose allegedly discovered some relics associated with SS. Gervasius and Protasius alongside a record that cited Vitalis’ martyrdom taking place in Ravenna.\textsuperscript{475} A small chapel was erected on the site of Vitalis’ martyrdom but was leveled c. 530 CE by Bishop Ecclesius of Ravenna, who sought to commemorate the martyr’s life and example with a grander shrine.\textsuperscript{476} This new church was to become Ravenna’s largest and most imposing

\textsuperscript{471} Verhoeven, \textit{Early Christian Monuments}, 131-32.
\textsuperscript{472} It is around this time that the Ravennate church began to seek more favor with Roman ecumenical factions than with those at Constantinople (Verhoeven, \textit{Early Christian Monuments}, 132-33).
\textsuperscript{473} Ostrogorsky, \textit{History of the Byzantine State}, 119, 170.
\textsuperscript{475} Verhoeven, \textit{Early Christian Monuments}, 73.
\textsuperscript{476} Mark Johnson, \textit{San Vitale in Ravenna and Octagonal Churches in Late Antiquity} (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2018), 129; Deliyannis, \textit{Ravenna in Late Antiquity}, 224; Verhoeven, \textit{Early Christian Monuments}, 74-75.
religious edifice, though construction would not be completed until 547 CE due to the Gothic War and the Byzantine conquest of Italy.

The architecture of surviving structures in Ravenna from the fifth century CE onwards shows an interesting blend of elements from Northern Italy and the Byzantine Empire. The Church of San Vitale is one such example: built on an octagonal plan, a less common design in Late Antique Italy than in the more Eastern provinces, its design adds to the unique place San Vitale occupies in the Early Christian world (Figure 4.57). Octagonal churches were often part of the martyrium tradition in marking significant locations for notable saints. Like rectangular basilicas, the apse of San Vitale faces a generally eastward direction, though the narthex and the atrium are curiously aligned along a different axis. Concerning the unusual orientation of the architecture, one theory is that the atrium and narthex were positioned for structural and aesthetic reasons, possibly related to urban planning issues and preexisting streets. However, an alternate theory focuses on the notion that these additions were engineered to accommodate an anticipated high foot traffic flow. The narthex is positioned in such a way as to create two main entrances. The north entrance was likely used as the primary portal for liturgical purposes; meanwhile, the south entrance was located near the ‘Pit of Vitalis,’ which marked the location of Vitalis’ martyrdom/tomb. Like most martyria, the first chapel built on this site was positioned such that the altar was directly over Vitalis’ tomb. The newer church was now arranged such that pilgrims had continual access to the tomb, while other attendees and clergy members would not be hindered in their passage.

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477 Ibid., 119-22.
478 Johnson, San Vitale in Ravenna, 149, 158.
479 Author’s Note: In reviewing several publications for this paper, I have noticed that the compass depicted with the schematic plans of the church’s layout is not properly aligned with current satellite imagery. As a result, I have taken the liberty of correcting this error in the text and images used in this thesis.
480 Deliyannis, Ravenna in Late Antiquity, 224; Johnson, San Vitale in Ravenna, 133-34.
By the 14th century, many of Ravenna's once-great ecclesiastical buildings had fallen into such a state of decay that they were slowly being dismantled by Venetian Doges and other nobles for their marble building materials and statuary. San Vitale and Sant’Apollinare in Classe were two such churches to suffer the indignity of being raided for other projects and had been despoiled of entire marble blocks, columns, capitals, and even statues of their patron saints.\footnote{Corrado Ricci, \textit{Il Tempio Malatestiano} (Rimini: Bruno Ghigi, 1974), 210-12; Verhoeven, \textit{Early Christian Monuments}, 161-64.}

The period between 1476-94 CE, however, marked the first significant campaign aimed towards the restoration and repair of these Ravennate churches, along with the reformation of the

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Figure 4.57: Schematic Plan of the Church of San Vitale, with numbered bays [Patrizia A. Martinelli, ed., \textit{The Basilica of San Vitale} (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1997), 122]
monastic orders charged with the care of these churches, though this would not be the last time such a campaign would be needed.482

In 1509 CE, Ravenna was ostensibly restored to Papal control, though it would not be until 1512 CE when the city could be wrested from Venetian control following a decisive loss to Papal armies.483 Following the capture of Ravenna by Papal forces, the city was sacked and suffered catastrophic property damage and loss. After the destruction, several building campaigns would be undertaken to repair critical issues related to the Sacco of Ravenna and the longstanding neglect endured by many churches. One such issue was related to flooding within San Vitale. A study conducted in 1983 into the foundation of San Vitale revealed that, much like the rest of Ravenna, the ground beneath the church is a mixture of sand and silty clay accompanied by a high-water table.484 The study also revealed that the original constructors pounded down a layer 3m deep of oak poles (or pallafitti) with a further 3m of limestone rubble on top to serve as a relatively stable foundation for the superstructure. Nevertheless, the ground's underlying weakness had already caused cracks to appear by the Middle Ages, and the walls and central dome needed to be repaired and reinforced by flying buttresses.485

Between 1538-1549 CE, the pavement of the central octagon was raised c. 80cm, and six of the eight wedges were replaced.486 Thus, it should not be surprising to learn that the pavement mosaics in San Vitale have not wholly survived intact since the 6th century CE.487 Andreas Agnellus, a historian from the 9th century, also reported the existence of various

482 Ibid., 163-65.
483 Ibid., 171-72.
484 Deliyannis, Ravenna in Late Antiquity, 13-14.
485 Johnson, San Vitale in Ravenna, 134-35; Verhoeven, Early Christian Monuments, 175-76.
486 Ibid., 176, 276ff.
487 It should be noted that while the pavements of the octagon and ambulatory were covered up as recently as during the 18th century, restoration efforts from the early 20th century removed these later surfaces, revealing the original mosaic panels that were left untouched (Verhoeven, Early Christian Monuments, 285).
inscriptions within San Vitale that are no longer extant.\textsuperscript{488} In contrast, other records from as late as the 16th century recall additional Byzantine-era images and decorations that have since been destroyed or removed.\textsuperscript{489}

\textbf{Description of Mosaics}

\textit{Apse}

The pavement mosaic motif from the apsidal portion of San Vitale is referred to as an ‘Inhabited Acanthus Scroll.’ The central figure is that of an acanthus bush, though unlike other depictions of Acanthus bushes, this one sprouts directly from the bottom of the composition rather than from an urn or basket (Figure 4.58). As the vine tendrils outward, they form several medallions inhabited either by birds or a ripening fruit piece. At the base of the composition, the artist included a recognizable Peacock, which adds to the symbolism of immortality and eternal life, while some of the other depicted birds from this scene are more nondescript in appearance. While Acanthus bushes do not produce fruit, the depicted specimens at the end of the vines could represent Pomegranates (also symbolic of the resurrection) or Figs (symbolic of fruitfulness and good works).\textsuperscript{490} The panel is encircled by a floral pattern of Lilies (symbolic of purity and innocence).\textsuperscript{491}

\textsuperscript{489} Johnson, \textit{San Vitale in Ravenna}, 142.
\textsuperscript{491} Cooper, \textit{Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols}, 97-98.
Relevant to the discussion of mosaics in San Vitale and Sant’Apollinare in Classe, the following description and analysis must also touch on the composition of the surviving wall and apse mosaics. Given the much-needed comparisons of Early Christian mosaics from the Transjordan with those in Italy, the absence of apse mosaics, and other wall mosaics in general, is more particularly lamentable. While multiple authors compiled accounts and crafted descriptions of heavenly visitations, artisans and craftsmen were left to the task of depicting or artistically representing such an event. The apsidal and presbytery spaces became natural focal points for this, as they were directly above the altar where the Eucharist was prepared and administered. These apsidal spaces are often depicted as a direct extension of heavenly realms, most often with a theophanic scene (i.e., a visible manifestation of God to humankind).

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492 Brooke Shilling, “The Other Door to the Sanctuary,” in Sacred Thresholds: The Door to the Sanctuary in Late Antiquity, ed. Emilie M. Van Opstall (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 341-42.
493 Shilling, “The Other Door to the Sanctuary,” 342. After the Edict of Theodosius (427 CE) outlawed the placement of images of Christ on pavement decor, craftsmen resorted to using figural imagery to support the motifs and scenes now found only on wall panels and ceiling spaces.
The sacred significance of the apse and accompanying *theophany* was such that it became a visual focal point for the entire worship service and was considered a protected ‘doorway’ between heaven and earth: a place where God could hear an individual’s prayers.\(^{494}\)

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\(^{494}\) Kitzinger, “Threshold of the Holy Shrine,” 640; Shilling, “Other Door to the Sanctuary,” 343-44.
While the original pavement mosaics in both the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe and San Vitale have been altered to varying degrees, the surviving wall compositions are still excellent examples of the progression of religious art in the centuries before the Justinianic era.\footnote{Ernst Kitzinger, \textit{The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies}, ed. W. Eugene Kleinbauer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 72-74.} The apse in San Vitale hosts two of the most recognizable Byzantine mosaic panels and depicts the Imperial retinues of Emperor Justinian I and Empress Theodora in procession at the consecration of the church.\footnote{Author’s Note: I have elected to include the “Imperial Panels” among the apse mosaics, as opposed to the more popular approach which lists them among the mosaics of the presbytery. My reasoning is simply that if the architectural division of the apse from the chancel is drawn along the arch of the curving semidome, then these two panels physically reside within the apse (even if they are not thematically in-line with the main apsidal mosaic composition).} The apse's left wall, Panel 2, depicts Emperor Justinian joined by
an Imperial retinue, and Archbishop Maximian flanked by additional clergymen (Figure 4.61). Justinian is depicted wearing richly decorated Imperial robes and is holding a highly decorated bowl representing a *diskos* (i.e., the plate that holds the eucharistic bread). Maximian is seen wearing the stole and *pallium* of an archbishop and holds a decorative cross. The attending retinue is not explicitly identified, though the two clergymen to the right of Maximian carry a copy of the Gospels and a censer. Simultaneously, the Imperial party on the left includes two advisors and a contingent of bodyguards (i.e., the *Scholae Palatinae* or the *Excubitors*).

![Figure 4.61: Detail of Panel 2 – Justinian (Martinelli, Basilica of San Vitale, 220-21)](image)

The opposite apse wall, Panel 3, features Empress Theodora and a party of feminine retainers (Figure 4.62). The depicted scene refers to a purported story where, upon entering the church, Empress Theodora was approached by two young men intending to sprinkle her with

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497 Some researchers have claimed that the two individuals portrayed to the right of Justinian were altered to replace the original subjects sometime after the original panel was installed (Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 239-40; Verhoeven, *Early Christian Monuments*, 125). This is indicated by a slight change in the layout of the background tesserae surrounding these two individuals’ heads from the rest of the background, and is supported by references to Maximian’s need to both assert his authority and ingratiate himself with the Imperial Court at Constantinople.
purifying water. However, before their eyes, a white dove flew into the fountain and performed the act itself. Like her husband, Theodora’s costume was also intricately embellished, from her elaborate diadem to the life-like shading along the folds of her robes. Additionally, the bottom border of Theodora’s cloak has been decorated to depict the visitation of the three magi to the Christ child. This supplemental ornamentation was likely to symbolically relate the magi’s gifts with the gifts of eucharistic serving trays by Theodora and Justinian. While these panels were expertly and exquisitely executed, Justinian never personally visited Ravenna. This pair of ‘Imperial Panels’ was likely included as a reminder that the victorious Byzantine Emperor now controlled the region and as a way for the new Archbishop to pay homage and curry favor with the Imperial Court.

Figure 4.62: Detail of Panel 3 – Theodora (Martinelli, *Basilica of San Vitale, 230-31*)

In the apse’s semidome, Panel 4, rests the *theophany* scene depicting Christ enthroned in heaven and flanked by a pair of angels and supplicants (Figure 4.63). The figure of Christ is

seated on a blue sphere, representing heaven, and holds a scroll with seven seals, referring to a vision recorded by John the Beloved in the book of Revelation. The winged angels are present to serve as intermediaries who introduce their petitioners to the enthroned Christ. On the left side of the scene, Christ extends a ‘Crown of Martyrdom’ to St. Vitalis, the patron saint of the church, who is identified by an inscription and a nimbus (i.e., a halo which marks one’s status as a saint). Meanwhile, the angel on the right side of the scene introduces Bishop Ecclesius, the church's original founder, who presents a model of the completed structure to Christ for approval. St. Vitalis is represented wearing a decorative suit of clothing befitting his position in life, while Bishop Ecclesius is depicted, anachronistically, wearing an archbishop’s pallium. At the bottom of the panel is a depiction of paradisiacal earth. In the center, beneath Christ and the orb of heaven, are four rivulets of water, representing the four rivers that flowed from the Garden of Eden. The surrounding landscape is dotted with depictions of Lilies, other small bushes, and a Peacock and a Dove in the panel's corners.

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499 Revelation 4-9 KJV. It should also be noted that while six of the seals are visible, the final one is partially occluded by Christ's hand, perhaps referring to its future occurrence.
The final decorative feature which needs to be discussed in the apse is the soffit, or underside, of the arch leading to the presbytery (Figures 4.63-67). At the top of this arch is an encircled Christogram (e.g., one early version of the Chi-Rho “☧” is the IX Monogram “†,” comprised of the first initials of Christ’s name in Greek: “Ἰησοῦς Χριστός”), flanked on either side by seven pairs of Cornucopias with various birds and flowers, which seem to conflate Imperial and Divine triumphal connotations. The flowers and birds between each set of Cornucopias are also matched with a pair on the arch's opposite side. The flowering plants generally appear nondescript but are attached to examples of fruit (e.g., Figs and Pomegranates).

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On the other hand, the birds can be identified as Eagles, Doves, Quail, and Partridge (Figures 4.64-67).

Figure 4.64: Detail of Eagle in the soffit of the apsidal arch (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 260)

Figure 4.65: Detail of Quail in the soffit of the apsidal arch (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 260)

Figure 4.66: Detail of Dove in the soffit of the apsidal arch (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 260)

Figure 4.67: Detail of Pheasant in the soffit of the apsidal arch (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 260)
Presbytery/Chancel

If the apse of the church was intended to be a visual focal point for the viewers in the audience, the decoration of the presbytery was in no way less carefully crafted and laid out. Like the apse mosaics, those in the presbytery have remained mostly intact since their creation. In 1781 CE, an earthquake damaged the mosaics adorning the presbytery of San Vitale, though the damage was repaired the following year using painted tesserae.\textsuperscript{501} The mosaics of the apse can be divided into five areas: the chancel arch, the left and right walls, the apsidal arch, and the vault. The soffit of the chancel arch is decorated with 15 medallions, each with a pair of dolphins at the base (Figure 4.68). While 14 of the medallions are identical in size, the medallion at the apex of the arch is slightly larger and features an image of Jesus Christ, who not only has a golden nimbus but whose background is also suffused with golden tesserae. On either side of him are portraits of the 12 Apostles, also with golden nimbi, against a blue background. Finally, at the base of either side of the arch are depictions of Saints Gervasius and Protasius, the twin sons of Saints Vitalis and Valeria. Unlike other depictions of Saints and Apostles, these portraits do not include any other symbols or devices associated with the depicted individual and are identified only by a named inscription. This lack of adornment is likely related to both the small space allotted for each figure and the idea that few individuals would have an opportunity to inspect the portraits closely.

\textsuperscript{501} Verhoeven, Early Christian Monuments, 282.
The presbytery's left and right walls are highly decorated with images of prophets, stories from the Bible, and portraits of the Four Evangelists. The wall décor begins near the top of the first floor and extends to the ceiling; the space below this point may have once held other mosaics, but the remaining walls are decorated by marble slabs.\textsuperscript{502} Beginning with the left wall (Figures 4.69-70), Panel 1 depicts two scenes from the Old Testament involving the prophet Abraham. The panel's left side depicts the story where Abraham and his wife Sarah fed three angels, disguised as men, and were promised that they would bear a son.\textsuperscript{503} While the right side of the panel provides a follow-up story, wherein Abraham was initially commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac, but was stopped via divine intervention.\textsuperscript{504} On the left side, Abraham is shown wearing a short tunic, ideal for manual labor, and offers food to his visitors in a pose that suggests meekness and contrition. The three angels are seated at a table beneath the shade of a tree and are depicted with nimbi and attired in formal, white robes. The third angel has his hand raised in a gesture of blessing, referring to the promise that Sarah would bear a son.


\textsuperscript{503} Genesis 18:1-15 KJV.

\textsuperscript{504} Genesis 22:1-18 KJV.
Meanwhile, Sarah remains in the doorway, with her hand raised to her mouth to hide laughter at the absurd sounding pronouncement. The second scene in this panel shows Abraham again, now attired in priestly robes, holding Isaac’s hair in one hand while the other hand wields a raised sword. Abraham’s gaze, however, is directed upwards at the Hand of God protruding from heaven, represented by red and blue clouds, stopping him before he completes his action. At Abraham’s feet stands a compliant ram, provided as a sacrifice, in place of Isaac.

Panel 2 also depicts multiple scenes; however, these are not part of a united story like Abraham in Panel 1. The left scene (i.e., the side closest to the nave) depicts the biblical Prophet Jeremiah, denoted by a named inscription, a nimbus, and holding a long scroll, as Jeremiah was noted for his long prophecies regarding Christ and the 12 Tribes of Israel. In the middle, two angels are shown holding a medallion that bears a cross with two anchors attached to the cross arms, a popular icon among early Christians. The right side of the panel depicts the Prophet Moses, standing upon Mt. Sinai, wearing a nimbus, long robes, and receiving a scroll (presumably containing the Ten Commandments) from heaven while looking fondly on the people to whom he will deliver this gift. Below, a crowd of Israelites is gathered, who appear to be disgruntled and talking amongst themselves, rather than expectantly awaiting Moses’ return.

Panels 3 and 4 depict two of the Four Evangelists of the Gospels. Panel 3 presents St. John the Beloved, sitting on a mountainside while holding his written Gospel. In front of him is a small desk with writing utensils, while an Eagle sits at the top of the composition, both of which are in reference to his authorship of the book of Revelation and prophecies regarding the Second Coming of Christ. At the bottom of the panel rest two Ducks, possibly included as a reference to Christ’s statement that one of his disciples would “not taste of death, till they see the
Son of man coming in his kingdom.”\textsuperscript{505} Panel 4 presents St. Luke, also seated on a mountainside holding his written Gospel. He is depicted with a \textit{capsa}, a leather basket or satchel of scrolls, symbolizing his authorship of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, while an Ox stands at the top of the composition, representing Luke’s recurring themes of sacrifice. At the foot of the panel is a Stork or Ibis, often used in Christian art to represent piety and a destroyer of reptiles (evil).\textsuperscript{506}

Panels 5 and 6 are identical on both the left and right walls of the presbytery. A ‘Pinwheel’ design with 23 protruding rays occupies the arch of Panel 5, and space above the capitals is occupied by a florid vine, with rosettes to occupy any vacant spaces. Panel 6 is the remainder of the archway beneath the vaulted ceiling. On either side of the arch is a Vase with Grapevines extending outwards. The vines themselves are flush with ripening Grapes and broad leaves, while five white Doves are perched on and around the vines themselves.

\begin{figure}[h!]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{mosaic_diagram.png}
\caption{Schematic of presbytery left wall mosaics (Drawing by Matthew Higham, 2020)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{505} Matthew 16:28 KJV; Mark 9:1 KJV; Luke 9:27 KJV. Ducks were likely used here in specific reference to John’s immortality as they carried an earlier Hebrew association with immortality, and with the goddess Isis in Egyptian religious motifs (Cooper, \textit{Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols}, 57).

\textsuperscript{506} Cooper, \textit{Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols}, 86; Sill, \textit{Symbols in Christian Art}, 26.
Figure 4.70: The left wall of the presbytery, as seen from the gallery (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 262)
The right wall of the presbytery (Figures 4.71-72) is formatted very similarly to the left wall and has also been divided into six panels. 507 Panel 1 depicts two unquestionably righteous individuals, Abel and Melchizedek, offering a sacrifice to God. Abel, and his brother Cain, were the first two recorded children of the original Adam and Eve. When it came time to offer sacrifices before God, Abel offered the “firstlings of his flock” and was judged to be the more righteous of the two. 508 Melchizedek is recorded as the “king of Salem…. the priest of the most high God” and was so highly revered that even Abraham paid tithes to him. 509 Behind the two men are representations of their appropriate settings, a simple hut behind Abel, and a grand temple by Melchizedek. Between the figures is an altar decorated with a white cloth bearing an eight-pointed star. Upon the altar and cloth is a chalice and pair of diskoi, representing the Eucharist, all of which are blessed and accepted by the Hand of God protruding from heaven.

Panel 2, like the counterpart upon the facing wall, also depicts three scenes within the same panel. On the right side (i.e., the side closest to the nave) is depicted the biblical prophet Isaiah, whose written works are filled with prophecies regarding the coming of Christ. Again, the middle sequence depicts two flying Angels supporting a medallion that bears a cross with two smaller anchors on either side. The left side of this panel depicts another two scenes from the life of the prophet Moses. At the bottom of this portion, the artists illustrated Moses as a shepherd, tending to the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law. The upper illustration is of Moses on the slopes of Mt. Sinai, standing before a representation of the ‘burning bush.’ He is seen

507 Author’s Note: Only the first four panels differ from the panels on the left wall of the presbytery, thus only the last two panels will not be described a second time.
508 Genesis 4:1-5 KJV.
509 Genesis 14:18-20 KJV.
untying his sandals, for he stands on holy ground, as commanded by God (again, depicted by a disembodied hand extending from the heavens).\textsuperscript{510}

Panels 3 and 4 rounds out the Four Evangelists' illustration by depicting St. Matthew and St. Mark. Panel 3 depicts St. Matthew holding his own Gospel book, seated near a writing desk with a \textit{capsa}. This could be intended to represent Matthew’s recording of the genealogy of Joseph, Jesus Christ’s earthly father, establishing Christ as an heir to the Jewish line of Kings. Above the composition is the figure of an Angel, the established symbol of St. Matthew amongst the Four Evangelists. Panel 4 depicts St. Mark, also seated before a writing desk, holding a copy of his Gospel account. Above him is the figure of a Lion, associated with St. Mark, but also representing power, strength, and the other ‘kingly’ attributes of Jesus Christ.

Figure 4.71: Schematic of presbytery right wall mosaics (Drawing by Matthew Higham, 2020)

\textsuperscript{510} Exodus 3:1-6 KJV.
Figure 4.72: Right wall of the presbytery, as seen from the gallery (Martinelli, The Basilica of San Vitale, 276)
The wall space above the apsidal arch was also richly decorated (Figure 4.73), though it has only two panels, which begin at the level of the 2nd-floor gallery. The lower panel depicts two cities on either side of the composition: Jerusalem (left) and Bethlehem (right). Some artists from the Late Antique and Early Christian periods went to extreme lengths to inject realism into their representations, making certain cities identifiable based on their relative size or even the types of structures displayed within (e.g., the so-called ‘Madaba Mosaic Map’ from the Church of St. George in Madaba, Jordan and the mosaics from the Church of St. Stephen in Umm ar-Rasas, Jordan are two excellent examples). Most examples, however, simply depict various types of structures (with no regard for perspective), usually surrounded by a high city wall. The depictions in San Vitale fall under the latter category; both cities are the same size, though with differently modeled structures, behind an impossibly high and decorative wall. The lavish decoration on both sets of walls are identical to each other and could represent their royal heritage and association with the birth and death of Jesus Christ. However, it is also possible that these same patterns could also mimic a chancel screen's decoration. Between these two cities are a pair of angels supporting a blue and white medallion with red and white rays emanating from the center. At the center of this medallion is a single, luminous Greek “Α” (i.e., Alpha), referring to Christ as the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.” The upper panel is similar to Panel 6 from the left and right walls of the presbytery, in that it also depicts two baskets (woven this time), with fruiting grapevines and various perched birds. The top panel also depicts two metal urns that host blossoming acanthus vines on either side of a mandorla that features a simple cross, wreathed in flame.

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511 Similar decorative patterns can be seen on Panels 2 and 3, the ‘Imperial Panels’ (Figures 4.61-62), in the apse of this church.
512 Revelation 1:8 KJV.
The final tessellated surface in the presbytery yet to be mentioned is the vaulted ceiling. The ceiling is divided into four triangular areas through the use of bushes, extending inwards from the four corners of the panel (Figure 4.75). In the wedge-shaped division, at the base of each corner, is an almost identically modeled Peacock, behind which is a series of flowering bushes. Each bush plays host to a varying set of leaves, blossoms, and fruit marking them as individual permutations, instead of larger conglomerates, of flora such as Lilies, Grapevines,
Pomegranates, and Figs. Two of the triangular divisions of the vault are decorated with green backgrounds, while the other two have gold tesserae, likely representing the realms of Earth and Heaven respectively. Supporting this idea is the artists’ use of terrestrial animals to help decorate the green portions, while the gold sections only feature birds and pieces of fruit (representative of worthy souls that have ascended to heaven). Owing to the complexity of the presbytery ceiling mosaic, the succeeding descriptions will be separated between the four triangular sections and accompanied by schematics identifying the various figures amongst the ‘Inhabited Acanthus Scroll’ patterns.

Figure 4.74: Numbered schematic of presbytery ceiling mosaic, Section 1 (adapted from Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 285)

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Beginning with the triangular section closest to the apse, Section 1 (Figure 4.74), Roundels 1.1-2 depict Pomegranates (Figure 4.76), which, if the star-shaped ‘crown’ was not a distinct enough identifier, are missing ¼ of their peel, revealing the multitudinous seeds within. Pomegranates are typically used in Christian iconography as symbols of eternity, fertility, and
royalty (owing to the ‘crown-like’ protrusion at one end, but if the inner seeds are visible, then the fruit becomes a graphic symbol of the Resurrection of Christ, and life after death.\textsuperscript{514} Roundel 1.3 displays a green bird (nonspecific, but possibly a type of Dove), gazing after a white Dove that sits outside the Acanthus vine's roundels (Figure 4.77). Roundel 1.4 and 1.6 host mirror opposite models of green birds, generally accepted as types of Doves, while position 1.5 is filled by the main Acanthus plant giving form to the section (Figure 4.78). Roundel 1.7 depicts an Ibis devouring a snake, Roundel 1.8 hosts another Pheasant/Partridge, and between these two roundels stands the figure of a Raven (Figure 4.79). While not often seen in Christian art, as they are typically viewed as ill-omens, Ravens are also associated with the story of carrying food to the biblical prophet Elijah.\textsuperscript{515} The final image in the bottom row of this section is a white Dove; however, this specimen has been depicted with its wings extended, as if it is mid-flight (Figure 4.80). This figure may represent the Holy Ghost, the third member of the Holy Trinity, who appeared at the Baptism of Christ in the form of a Dove.

\textsuperscript{514} Sill, \textit{Symbols in Christian Art}, 56.
\textsuperscript{515} Murray and Murray, \textit{Companion to Christian Art}, 58; 1 Kings 17:6 KJV.
Roundel 1.10 (Figure 4.81) presents a departure from the pattern of highlighting birds in the Acanthus scroll and instead displays an unidentified type of flowering plant, while a small Dove sits just outside the Acanthus border. Roundels 1.11-13 (Figure 4.82) return to the depiction of birds and feature an additional two Doves (or Pigeons) and a Pheasant. Above Roundels 1.13-14 and 1.15-16 is the figure of an Owl, often associated with wisdom and divine guidance. Roundels 1.14 and 1.15 are seen flanking the top of the main Acanthus plant (Figure 4.78) and are mirror images of Quail, though 1.14 is also depicted with two pieces of fruit (possibly a Fig and either an Apple or a Cherry). Roundels 1.16-18 feature no animals of

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516 Murray and Murray, *Companion to Christian Art*, 58.
any kind, and instead are filled by a display of leafy fronds (Figure 4.83). Roundel 1.16 and 1.18 feature two different kinds of Palm fronds that one might expect to find in the Holy Land, and 1.17 hosts a circular fruit, likely a Pomegranate.
Roundel 1.19 hosts a spherical design with red and white coloration, likely intended to be a flower of some variety, while 1.20 hosts another green-colored Dove with a ribbon tied around its neck (Figure 4.84). Roundel 1.21 features a similar Dove with ribbon (Figure 4.85), which does not seem to have a unique significance attached to it, despite being a common depiction in Early Christian art. Meanwhile, Roundel 1.22 features another budding Pomegranate, 1.23 hosts a Palm frond, and 1.25 returns to the Pomegranate fruit (Figure 4.85). Roundels 1.24, 27, and 29 are decorated with a typical ‘Rosette’ design, while Roundel 1.26 and 1.28 depict birds (a Duck and a Rooster, respectively) and are flanking the figure of an Angel holding its arms in the orant pose (Figures 4.84-85).

Section 2 of the ceiling faces the right wall of the presbytery, and whereas Sections 1 and 3 have a gold-colored background, Sections 2 and 4 are surrounded by green-colored tesserae. Roundel 2.1 and 2.9 (Figures 4.87, 4.91) feature a black-and-white colored bird, possibly a Dove or another similarly colored avian. Thus far, the figures on the ceiling have been limited to types of birds or fruit. Roundels 2.2-3 (Figure 4.88), however, depict a variety of canines (possibly a Wolf or domesticated Dog) and feline (possibly a Leopard, judging by the spots) animal. While both share a similar color scheme, the individual in Roundel 2.3 appears to have a differently modeled head. Not only this, but the individual in Roundel 2.2 appears to be chasing Roundel 2.3, going so far as to be leaping beyond the Acanthus boundary, while Roundels 2.4-6 host a pair of Quails flanking the main Acanthus plant (Figure 4.89). In Roundel 2.7 (Figure 4.90), the artists included a well-modeled figure of an Antelope/Gazelle/Deer in the process of leaping away from a pursuing Leopard in Roundel 2.8 (Figure 4.91).
Figure 4.86: Numbered schematic of presbytery ceiling mosaic, Section 2 (edited from Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 285)

Figure 4.87: Detail of Roundel 2.1 (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 300)

Figure 4.88: Detail of Roundels 2.2-3 (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 288)
The next cluster of figures, Roundels 2.10-12 and 2.14, depict Pomegranate fruits surrounding a Fish in Roundel 2.13 (Figure 4.92), with a grey Dove standing on one of the Acanthus tendrils. The fruit is colored in multiple hues, potentially indicating varying stages of ripeness or differentiating between different species of fruits. Roundels 2.15-16 (Figure 4.89) host a pair of Oxen, one white and one black, while Roundels 2.17-18 (Figure 4.93) feature a Fig and a Pomegranate, respectively. The final two clusters of Roundels in this section are curiously unique additions, compared to the other figures depicted on the tessellated ceiling. Roundels 2.20 (Figure 4.94) and 2.23 (Figure 4.95) are relatively straightforward, depicting a green fruit (possibly a Pomegranate or a Fig) and a small, grey bird (possibly a Dove) respectively.
Roundels 2.19, 2.21, and 2.22, however, only depict half animals. Roundel 2.19 (Figure 4.94) depicts the front half of a white Ram, which appears to be emerging from a circular portal, or wreath of red and yellow flame. Likewise, Roundel 2.21 (Figure 4.95) appears to depict the head and forelegs of a Donkey, while 2.22 (Figure 4.95) hosts the front half of an Ox, each emerging from a similar portal. At this point, it is unclear what these portals or wreaths of flame could signify, though it should be noted that only one other instance of this phenomenon exists in the ceiling of San Vitale (see below, in Section 4).
While Sections 1, 2, and 4 of the tessellated ceiling depict an even variety of flora and fauna, Section 3 is different as the majority of the roundels depict fruit; only ten depictions of birds are shown in this Section, both within and without the framing of the Acanthus vines. Roundels 3.1, 3.19, 3.21, and 3.31 depict Doves (or some other bird species) with lighter bodies and grey wings (Figures 4.97, 4.100). It should also be noted that the bird in Roundel 3.1 has been partially defaced and is missing its head. It is not likely that this occurred due to any malicious intent, but rather, came about during one of the restoration campaigns to repair structural or aesthetic damage. Between Roundels 3.14 and 3.15, an artist included a Pheasant, while an Owl can be seen between 3.10 and 3.16 (Figure 4.98). The main Acanthus plant is found at the base of this section, while two Quails are seated above it (Figure 4.98). At the plant's base, two Peacocks (Figure 4.98) can be seen pecking at some of the fallen fruit. The remaining roundels play host to different fruit types, likely intended to resemble Pomegranates and Figs (Figure 4.99).
Figure 4.96: Numbered schematic of presbytery ceiling mosaic, Section 3 (edited from Martinelli, The Basilica of San Vitale, 285)

Figure 4.97: Detail of Roundels 3.1-2 (Martinelli, The Basilica of San Vitale, 302)

Figure 4.98: Detail of Roundels 3.4-10 (Martinelli, The Basilica of San Vitale, 303)
The décor of Section 4 of the ceiling mosaic mimics that of Section 2 and includes fruit, birds, and mammals. The roundels in the base corners of these sections, Roundels 4.1 and 4.12 (Figures 4.102, 4.107), feature white Doves in the attitude of flapping their wings for take-off or landing. Roundel 4.2 also depicts a Dove, though this one is patiently watching the figure in Roundel 4.3, a grey colored Leopard (Figure 4.104). At the center of this bottom row is the main Acanthus plant, surrounded by four roundels featuring a fruit (likely Figs) springing from the Vine (Figure 4.105). On the opposite side of the Acanthus are two additional Leopard figures, Roundels 4.9 and 4.11, modeled in the same fashion as their predecessor, and another Dove with its head turned, Roundel 4.10, watching for approaching threats (Figure 4.106).
Figure 4.101: Numbered schematic of presbytery ceiling mosaic, Section 4 (edited from Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 285)

Figure 4.102: Detail of Roundel 4.1 (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 304)

Figure 4.103: Detail of Roundel 4.2 (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 304)
Roundel 4.13 depicts a Pomegranate, attached to the tip of the vine, while both 4.14 and 4.19 depict mirror images of a Rabbit, mid-leap, possibly attempting to evade the pursuing Leopard (Figure 4.107). Roundel 4.15 hosts another Fig-like fruit, while 4.16 hosts a placidly sitting Dove (Figure 4.109). Roundel 4.17 depicts another Leopard, though this one has a black-colored pelt, and 4.18 features another black-winged Dove (Figure 4.110).
In the final clusters of roundels, Roundel 4.20 holds another circular fruit, and in 4.21, a smaller grey bird can be seen. The figures in Roundels 4.22-24 appear to be quadrupeds in the act of leaping or running from the angel in the center of the section (Figures 4.111, 4.113). Roundel 4.22 is possibly a Donkey, though considering that 4.23 and 4.24 feature Rams (or Ibex), it is also possible that this figure is intended to be a Ram as well. It should also be noted that the fleeing Goat in 4.24 has been depicted in front of a pole with a ribbon tied to it (Figure 4.113), though its significance is uncertain. Another interesting variation is found in Roundel 4.25 (Figure 4.113), which features a circular object with black lines (possibly a ‘Rosette’ motif, or a representation of eucharistic bread stamped with a cross emblem) that appears to be
protruding from another ‘firey portal’ like those in Section 2 of this mosaic. This section's final roundels depict a Stork in 4.26 (Figure 4.114) and a smaller fruit in 4.27.

The final images portrayed on the vaulted ceiling are four angels standing upon blue spheres (representative of Heaven), depicted in the orant position, holding up a central medallion (Figure 4.115). The presence of these angels, along with those mentioned previously on the
presbytery walls, is reminiscent of the reuse of Nike as a symbol of ‘Christian Victory.’ The center medallion features a white lamb on a blue field with stars. This figure and medallion depict the Agnus Dei (or ‘Lamb of God’) and were placed in the presbytery's apex to refer to its sacred nature as a place where a divine visitation was possible.

Figure 4.115: Detail of Agnus Dei with supporting angels (Martinelli, Basilica of San Vitale, 288)

Nave/Octagon

As should be expected, the octagon's original tessellated pavements have not entirely survived since the church's founding in the sixth century CE. Only three of the exedra pavement mosaics (facing the first, second, and seventh bays) and two wedges of the core (facing the fourth and fifth bays) have retained their original designs after the restoration efforts of the 12th century which replaced the original mosaics with marbled, Cosmati-style pavements (Figure
The wedge facing the fourth bay depicts an Amphora, similar in design to those seen in the previously described Transjordanian mosaics, with Acanthus vines protruding outwards (Figure 4.117). These vines curve as they extend from the Vase and form small medallions, both with and without subjects. In the two medallions directly above the Vase, the artisan included two standing birds (likely Doves), while other roundels contain fruits or budding flowers of various colors. The wedge facing the fifth bay follows a similar, though more ornately decorated pattern. A decorative Chalice is found at the wedge's broad end, with a vine growing out from the top (Figure 4.118). While not as realistically modeled as those in the Transjordan, this Grapevine also forms several medallions that feature additional birds (again, likely Doves, though an argument could be made that some represent Pheasants or even Peacocks). Protruding from the ends of the vine are some Grape clusters, along with flowering buds. This design is somewhat more artistic than the other similar motifs in the church as it also depicts several birds outside of the medallions, almost as if they had just landed on an open branch or had wandered from their original placement.

The use of marble (Proconnesian, or otherwise) was known to carry with it a certain symbolic significance related to water. Just as 'Wave' motifs were used in certain decorative panels, any wavy line could be interpreted as representing water or a marine sequence; coupled with scriptural interpretations that God added water below and above the firmament (i.e., 'heaven'), and that the water was "a sea of glass like to a Crystal," the glossy, wavy lines found in 'book-matched' marble panels was used to represent these watery boundaries (Revelation 4:6 KJV, quoted in Barry, "Walking on Water," 632-36).
Figure 4.116: Aerial view of octagon pavement mosaics (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 329-30)
Figure 4.117: Detail view of octagon pavement, Wedge IV [Matthew Higham, author. “Wedge IV, Octagon, San Vitale.” Photograph. (Taken January 22, 2019)]

Figure 4.118: Detail view of octagon pavement, Wedge V [Matthew Higham, author. “Wedge V, Octagon, San Vitale.” Photograph. (Taken January 22, 2019)]
Of the three *exedra* pavements that remain, the first and seventh appear with simple designs, loosely resembling a pinwheel, while the third remains largely destroyed (Figure 4.116). The seventh bay lunette has an ‘Interlaced Circle and Square’ border and a scalloped design with 20 radial wedges, alternating in red and white colors, while the first bay lunette has a white and green border that resembles leaves or Papyrus fronds and a scalloped design with 27 radial wedges, alternating in red and blueish-grey shades. The lunette facing the second bay is fragmentary, but evidence can still be seen of scattered figures ranging from a small bird to what could be a table or some other household item.

One final note on the central octagon relates to a peculiar combination of ‘old and new’ mosaic pieces. As work progressed on the restoration efforts of the 12th century, or possibly later, some of the pavement mosaics were, in effect, cannibalized to fit within the new Cosmati-style designs. These reused decorations can be seen in the wedges facing the second and third bays, where some small segments of *opus tessellatum* and *opus vermiculatum* were moved from their original location to fit within the new design (Figures 4.116, 4.119-20). Some segments are intact enough to show the remains of inscriptions and other detailed designs, while other scattered tesserae can be seen in the borders between marble slabs.

Figure 4.119: Detailed view of octagon pavement, Wedge II, an amalgamation of segments from earlier mosaics (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 333)
Ambulatory

As mentioned previously, the central octagon and ambulatory mosaics were paved over sometime during the 16th and 18th centuries to combat flooding within the structure via the raising of the floor level. Thankfully, many of the original mosaics were left intact and subsequently rediscovered in the 20th century. Of the surviving panels, some of the motifs are familiar to this paper, like the ‘Inhabited Acanthus Scroll,’ ‘Solomon’s Knot,’ and ‘Interlacing Circle and Square’ patterns, while other motifs are unique to the Church of San Vitale. The ambulatory mosaics have been divided according to the seven bays they occupy and have been
subdivided into different panels with reference to the motifs used (Figure 4.121). Bay I is located on the right of the apse and consists of five unique panels, all surrounded by an Acanthus border. Panel 1 is a triangular wedge that depicts an ‘Inhabited Acanthus Scroll’ protruding from a now-familiar Urn, with four birds (non-specific, but possibly ducks) and four pieces of orangish fruit (possibly Pomegranates or Peaches) inhabiting the medallions of the vine (Figure 4.122).

Figure 4.121: Schematic view of the ambulatory pavement, with labeled Bays and Panels (edited photo from Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 324)
Panel 2 is a grid of circles, squares, and rectangles, where each circle hosts a single geometric motif (Figure 4.123). From the top of the photograph, these patterns can be labeled as: ‘Rosette,’ ‘Solomon’s Knot,’ ‘Guilloche Knot,’ ‘Squared Solomon’s Knot,’ ‘Rosette (variant),’ ‘Interlacing Circle,’ ‘Diaper,’ ‘Chalice,’ and ‘Sun.’ Bay I, Panel 3 has been partially occluded by the addition of modern stairs to facilitate access to the church. The panel consists of four rows of ‘Interlaced Circles and Squares.’ From the orientation of the photographer (Figure 4.124), the top row is not visible, but the following rows consist of two Rosettes and a Duck; a Pheasant, ‘Rosette,’ and ‘Squared Solomon’s Knot;’ and the final row depicts two Doves drinking from an Amphora, an ‘Intertwined Circle and Square,’ and a final Rosette. Bay I, Panel 4, hosts a new design, the ‘Pelta,’ named for the classic Greek shield (Figure 4.125). Like some other panels to follow, this portion was likely intended to be an apotropaic barrier and may have imitated the chancel screen's decoration. Finally, Panel 5 (Figure 4.126) is another triangular
wedge with an ‘Inhabited Acanthus Scroll,’ with six nonspecific birds and two orangish fruit, albeit with a Wicker Basket instead of an Urn.

Figure 4.123: Detail view of the ambulatory pavement, Bay I, Panel 2 (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 325)

Figure 4.124: Detail view of the ambulatory pavement, Bay I, Panel 3 (partially occluded by modern stairs) (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 325)
Bay II, Panels 1 and 3 are almost mirror images of each other, in that they are triangular wedges and feature several shapes in repeating rows (Figures 4.127-28). There are three types of shapes in each wedge: ‘oval,’ ‘tapered oblong,’ and ‘crescent.’ While the number of shapes is not entirely consistent between these panels, their order is presented unvaried. Beginning with the wedge's broad end, the first, third, fifth, and seventh rows contain the ‘tapered oblongs.’ The second and fourth rows contain ‘ovals’ (three and two, respectively), and the sixth row features two thin ‘crescent’ shapes. The ‘tapered oblongs’ could resemble Figs (symbolic of

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518 It is the opinion of this author that these shapes are representative of various types of fruit found in the region and mentioned in the scriptures.
fruitfulness and good works). The ‘ovals’ could be a variety of Melon (owing to its general shape and size) or possibly enlarged Grapes (due to their similar shape and reference to the eucharistic wine). The ‘crescents’ are somewhat more curious but could be depictions of Gourds, an attribute of Jonah (as mentioned in the Theodorean Basilica mosaics) and symbolic of resurrection.

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519 Sill, Symbols in Christian Art, 55.
520 It is also possible that the ‘crescent’ could be a different type of fruit, and that the ‘tapered oblongs’ are instead representative of Gourds.
Bay II, Panel 2 is another dense accumulation of geometric motifs, though it becomes simpler upon closer inspection (Figure 4.129). The overall pattern is one of ‘Squares and Fig Leaves,’ each main square is inhabited by either a ‘Solomon’s Knot’ or ‘Diaper’ pattern while the intervening spaces contain smaller squares and depictions of Fig Leaves. The design in each square alternate between the two motifs mentioned above; however, this alternating pattern is not consistent, and several places can be seen where one pattern is identical to its neighbor. Whether this was part of the original design or if it manifested as an error during reconstruction efforts is unclear.

Figure 4.129: Detail view of the ambulatory pavement, Bay II, Panel 2 (composition of multiple photographs from Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 326)
The mosaic flooring is noticeably interrupted at this point in the ambulatory, as only one panel in Bay III has been partially restored. Bay III, Panel 1 (Figure 4.130) appears to have been another Acanthus vine growing from a Wicker Basket/Urn. The remainder of the panels from Bays III and IV were not recoverable by restoration efforts, which, given their location, is not to be unexpected. Referring back to the schematic of the church (Figure 4.121), Bays III and IV are situated directly in front of the two entrances that lead to the narthex of the octagon. Naturally, these would have been high-traffic areas during the structure’s active life, especially considering that the so-called ‘Pit of Vitalis’ lay directly in front of the Bay III entrance.

Like previous ambulatory bays, the Bay V, Panels 1 and 3 wedge mosaics are very similar (Figures 4.131-32). Both panels depict an ‘Inhabited Acanthus Scroll’ protruding from a Wicker Basket, with several birds and fruit in each created medallion. In both panels, six birds
and two fruit pieces appear, though unlike previous panels, these birds are more distinctly identifiable as Ducks and Quail. The central motif of Panel 2 is a ‘Pelta, Square, and Quatrefoil,’ and within each square is an identical ‘Rosette’ (Figure 4.133). As is the case with many of the larger motifs displayed in San Vitale, this is also likely an imitation of the decoration on a chancel screen.
In Bay VI, Panels 1 and 3 (Figures 4.134-35), the artists appear to have borrowed the motif from the wedges of Bay II. The design of these panels also involves a repetition of three shapes: ‘diamond,’ ‘oval,’ and ‘crescent.’ In comparing the Bay VI panels with their Bay II counterparts, not only have the ‘tapered oblongs’ have been replaced by small ‘diamond’ shapes, but the panels also differ in the number of rows. Bay VI, Panel 1 has seven rows: with ‘diamonds’ on the first and third row, ‘ovals’ on the second, fourth, and seventh rows, and ‘crescents’ on the fifth and sixth row (Figure 4.134). Whereas Panel 3 has eight rows: with ‘diamonds’ on the first, third, and fifth rows, ‘ovals’ on the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth rows, and ‘crescents’ in the seventh row only (Figure 4.135). The presence of diamond-shaped figures on the field stymies the previous supposition that the figures represent types of fruit.
unless they were intended as a more abstract sign than depictions in previous panels. The overall
design of Panel 2 is that of an ‘Interlaced Square and Octagon,’ where the ribbons bordering
each square extend to the diagonally adjacent square, which connection gives shape to the
octagons in this composition (Figure 4.136). Each square is fitted with an ‘Indented Diamond’
motif, while the octagonal spaces are filled with Fig Leaves (extending from the sides of the
adjacent squares) with an orange circle, possibly intended as a Fig, in the middle.
The final mosaic panels of the ambulatory terminate in Bay VII where, following the established pattern, Panels 1 and 3 feature ‘Acanthus Scroll’ motifs. Bay VII, Panel 1 is a thinner wedge, and while the depicted Acanthus is growing from another Wicker Basket, the artist chose to forego any other examples of flora or fauna (Figure 4.137). On the other hand, Panel 3 featured a much wider space, and the tendrils of the Acanthus vine host an additional four birds and four pieces of fruit (Figure 4.138), similar if not identical to previous examples in this church. Bay VII, Panel 2 (Figure 4.139) consists of a rather hypnotic pattern of ‘Intersecting Circles’ (Figure 4.140), whose interior squares contain smaller ‘Floret Diamonds’ (Figure 4.8) and ‘Indented Diamonds’ (Figure 3.62) for additional decorative flair.
Figure 4.137: Detail view of the ambulatory pavement, Bay VII, Panel 1 (Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 328)

Figure 4.138: Detail view of the ambulatory pavement, Bay VII, Panel 3 (the composition of two images from Martinelli, *The Basilica of San Vitale*, 328)
Briefly, the central themes depicted in the mosaic scenes of San Vitale are focused around reinforcing the idea of sacrifice leading to a paradisiacal rest, mingled with some mid-6th century political references. While the original pavement mosaics of the nave and presbytery have been all but destroyed, the motifs from the ambulatory have remained mostly intact. These ambulatory designs, while non-figural, appear to be *apotropaic* and represented an intangible barrier to sanctify the enclosed space. The walls of the presbytery and the *theophany* in the apse,
then, seem to project the impression of sacrifice on behalf of Jesus Christ and the salvation
offered by his grace, which would ultimately lead to the supplicant’s admission into the
heavenly, paradisiacal realms above.

The Basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, Classe

History

The town of Classe is mostly known as a small port near the larger city of Ravenna, and
most of the ecclesiastical history between the two locales is intertwined. The most notable
church built near Classe's harbor had the distinction of being named for St. Apollinaris, the first
Bishop (and martyr) of the Christian church in Ravenna. St. Peter purportedly ordained
Apollinaris as Bishop of Ravenna, who was recorded as having “frequently spilt portions of his
blood for the faith, and ardently desired to lay down his life for Christ.” Apollinaris was
canonized, somewhat unusually, not because he died in the act of testifying of Jesus Christ, but
because his actions exemplified how disciples of Christ should live their lives while enduring
torments.

The current basilica had initially been ordered by Bishop Ursicinus (533-536 CE), though
it is likely that construction did not begin in earnest until after the Byzantine capture of the
region in 540 CE. The church was finished and consecrated in 549 CE by Archbishop
Maximian, who also likely authorized the decorative programs seen today, although some of
these panels have not survived the passage of time intact. In 584 CE, the Byzantine-controlled
regions of Italy (excluding Sicily) were formed into a separate administrative unit called an
‘Exarchate.’ The new Exarchate of Ravenna became the center of Byzantine military, civic, and

521 Butler, *Lives of the Fathers*, vol. VII.
(later) ecclesiastical power in the West.\textsuperscript{524} Due to the growing tensions between the Bishop of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Emperor Constans II decided to take specific steps to help fortify Byzantine control in the region.\textsuperscript{525} After this point, however, the Exarchs and Archbishops of Ravenna found their task of enforcing Byzantine rule increasingly problematic, which came to a head during the iconoclastic and Christological reforms of the 7\textsuperscript{th}-8\textsuperscript{th} centuries CE.\textsuperscript{526} Thus in 666 CE, the Ravennate Church was granted the status of \textit{autocephaly} (i.e., the Bishop of Ravenna was made independent of any higher Bishop), a move intended to help separate Ravenna from the governing powers at Rome in both ecclesiastical and civic terms.\textsuperscript{527} Unfortunately, the Orthodox Patriarch at Constantinople and the Imperial court's attention became directed towards the encroaching Persian ambitions along the eastern provinces, thus lessening Ravenna's priority status. In 680 CE, unable to receive needed support from Constantinople, the Ravennate Archbishop Theodore agreed to renounce any claim to \textit{autocephaly} in exchange for the support of the Roman Catholic Papacy.\textsuperscript{528} The Exarchs of Ravenna continued to function on behalf of the Byzantine Emperor, but their authority and territorial control slowly eroded. In 751 CE, the Exarchate was finally dissolved after an invasion by the Lombards.

During the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries, many accounts recall the spoiling and sale of construction materials and marble from Ravennate churches.\textsuperscript{529} Among these looted churches

\textsuperscript{524} Ostrogorsky, \textit{History of the Byzantine State}, 80, 96, 119.
\textsuperscript{527} Cosentino, “Ravenna's Autocephaly and the Panel of the Privileges,” 157-58, 167-69.
\textsuperscript{528} West-Harling, “The Church of Ravenna,” 208-09.
\textsuperscript{529} Ricci, \textit{Il Tempio Malatestiano}, 210-17, 239-42, 368, 586.
was the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, where parts of the pavement mosaics and walls were damaged following the events of the Sacco of 1512 CE. Later, in 1730 CE, the pavements were ordered to be covered and raised by c. 15 cm, as part of a long-overdue reconstruction and stabilization of Sant’Apollinare. Then, in 1941, this reconstructed layer was scheduled to be removed and replaced with more durable ceramic tiles when a fragment of the original mosaic was discovered in the north aisle. Then, during a later reconstruction phase in 1953-56, as the pavement of the nave was being lowered to its original level, fragments of the original tessellated floor surface were also discovered.

530 Verhoeven, Early Christian Monuments, 290.
531 Mario Mazzotti, La Basilica di Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Rome: Citta del Vaticano, 1954), 120.
532 Mazzotti, La Basilica di Sant’Apollinare in Classe, 123; Verhoeven, Early Christian Monuments, 293.
Description of Mosaics

Apse and Chancel

Figure 4.141: Schematic plan of apsidal mosaics (Drawing by Matthew Higham, 2020)
The apse wall mosaics are a combination of original art and subsequent additions from later centuries. Depicted in Panel 1 (Figure 4.143) of the ‘window zone’ of the apse is the so-called ‘Autocephaly’ or ‘Privilegia’ scene. This panel depicts Emperor Constans II granting the
privilege of *autocephaly* to Archbishop Maurus and Deacon Reparatus. To the left of the Emperor are three Imperial figures, his sons Constantine IV, Heraclius, and Tiberius, and to the right of Reparatus are three additional Ravennate clergymen.\(^ {533} \) We know from the history recorded by Agnellus that Maurus traveled to Constantinople several times to plead the case for Ravenna’s semi-independence and that Reparatus, his successor, carried on the same efforts.\(^ {534} \) However, this panel must have been installed after 666 CE, and only scant traces of the original Justinianic mosaic can be seen in the current composition.\(^ {535} \)

\(^{533}\) The possibility exists that the figure could instead depict Constantine IV. Several accounts recording the creation of the Exarchate of Ravenna and granting the Autocephalous status of the Ravennate church are somewhat contradictory as to the exact dates and individuals involved (Cosentino, “Ravenna's Autocephaly and the Panel of the Privileges,” 159-63; Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 272-73). However, it is the opinion of this author that the depicted Emperor is Constans II. This is supported by the presence of three additional Imperial figures (likely intended as his three sons) as part of the Imperial retinue. This is further supported by Constans II having taken up residence at his Sicilian estate during the time of the ‘privileged.’

\(^{534}\) Agnellus, *Pontiffs of Ravenna*, 227ff; Cosentino, “Ravenna's Autocephaly and the Panel of the Privileges,” 159-60; Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 283-84.

\(^{535}\) Cosentino, "Ravenna's Autocephaly and the Panel of the Privileges," 163-64; Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 271-73.
Opposite the ‘Privilegia’ scene is Panel 6, referred to as the ‘Sacrifice’ panel (Figure 4.144).\textsuperscript{536} This scene depicts the biblical figures, Abel, with a white lamb, and Abraham, with his son Isaac, offering their respective sacrifices to God while Melchizedek officiates as High Priest. Above Melchizedek, the Hand of God is seen reaching out from Heaven to bless the

\textsuperscript{536} It is unknown if this panel is part of the original construction of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, or if it was also composed at the same time as the ‘Privilegia’ panel; though the use of Melchizedek as both King and High Priest also fits in the political and ecclesiastical debates during the 7\textsuperscript{th} century (Cosentino, “Ravenna's Autocephaly and the Panel of the Privileges,” 165; Deliyannis, Ravenna in Late Antiquity, 273).
represented figures for their faithfulness. The depictions of Abel, Melchizedek, and the altar are reminiscent of the similar lunette scene in the Church of San Vitale (Figure 4.72).


Between these two scenes, Panels 2-5 depict four of the most notable predecessor-Bishops to Maximian: Bishop Ecclesius (Figure 4.145), Bishop Severus (Figure 4.146), Bishop Ursicinus (Figure 4.147), and Bishop Ursus (Figure 4.148). The four Bishops are seen as full figures, standing beneath white curtains, a chandelier, and a seashell-styled lunette. Each portrait is identically modeled (albeit with individual hairstyles and slightly different colored robes), presenting their right hand in a ‘benedictory gesture,’ while their left reverently holds a book of
the Gospels.  

Somewhat anachronistically, they are all depicted wearing the *pallium*, a liturgical cloak reserved for Popes and Archbishops. Though each of these men died before the privilege of donning this garment was granted to the office they held, the unpopular Archbishop Maximian likely included it in their portrait’s design to add a sense of legitimacy and honor to the line of authority he now shared with them.  

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537 In Orthodox traditions, the ‘benediction’ pose “is performed with the forefinger entirely open, the middle finger slight bent, the thumb crossed upon the third finger, and the little finger bent;” while Latin traditions were depicted slightly differently with “the third and little fingers close, the thumb and other two fingers remaining open and straight” [Clara E.C. Waters, *A Handbook of Christian Symbols and Stories of the Saints as Illustrated in Art* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1886), 9-10]. Unfortunately, no examples have been definitively shown to support a distinction between Nestorian- or Arian-type benedictions against existing Orthodox traditions.

538 Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 210-12.


Above the panels of the ‘window zone’ sits the apse's large semidome, depicting a largely pastoral scene with the founding Bishop of the Ravennate church, St. Apollinaris (Figure 4.149). Like the other depicted Bishops beneath him, Apollinaris is shown wearing a *pallium* and holds his arms upraised in an attitude of prayer. In the foreground, flanking Apollinaris, are 12 symmetrically placed sheep with flowering Lily plants between them, while behind him is a background of assorted trees (leafy, yet fruitless), rocks, and other small plants/shrubbery. Perched among the greenery are several avians, likely Doves alongside other small, unspecified birds. The centerpiece of the apsidal mosaic is a representation of the event known as the ‘Transfiguration’ mentioned in the New Testament and is focused around seven figures, with the large medallion being the focal point.\textsuperscript{539} According to Mark and Luke's Gospels, three apostles, Peter, James, and John (represented here as Sheep), went with Jesus Christ to pray on a mountainside. While there, they bore witness to the visitation of Moses and Elias (depicted as half-figured angels with named inscriptions, emerging from the clouds) who came in fulfillment of prophecy and to emphasize the importance of Christ’s divine mission. The medallion itself encompasses a golden, jeweled cross on a blue field, surrounded by 99 stars, with a miniature portrait of Jesus Christ included at the cross’ center. On either end of the cross’ short arms is an alpha “Α” and omega “Ω,” referring to Christ as the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.”\textsuperscript{540} Along the top of the cross are the letters “ΙΧΘΥς,” which is an acronym for the Greek phrase, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior;” meanwhile the bottom inscription reads “SALUS MUNDI,” or “the salvation of the world.”\textsuperscript{541} The final character depicted in this scene

\textsuperscript{539} Mark 9:2-10 KJV; Luke 9:28-36 KJV; 2 Peter 1:16-18 KJV.
\textsuperscript{540} Revelation 1:8, 11 KJV.
\textsuperscript{541} Mazzotti, *La Basilica di Sant’Apollinare in Classe*, 174.
is a disembodied hand, seen at the apex of the apse, representing the declaration of divine approval from God the Father.

Unfortunately, the church structure received some damage due to seismic tremors, natural decay, and collateral damage caused by the destruction of World War II, where part of the apse mosaic was damaged.\textsuperscript{542} In 1970-76, efforts were undertaken to detach, then restore portions of the apse mosaics in Sant’Apollinare in Classe, which led to the discovery of a unique ‘cartoon’ or \textit{sinopia} beneath the tesserae.\textsuperscript{543} These piecemeal restoration efforts provided new insights

\textsuperscript{542} Ibid., 121-22.
\textsuperscript{543} Verhoeven, \textit{Early Christian Monuments}, 293.
into the use of sinopia and the mosaic panels' installation process.\textsuperscript{544} As conservationists peeled back the outermost layer of tesserae and uncovered the plaster layer that helped anchor the cubes in place (Figure 4.150), they uncovered this sinopia, a crude drawing in paint or clay which was used to guide the workmen and artisans in their decoration. Beneath this initial layer, however, restoration efforts revealed an unexpected, earlier layer of plaster that had been decorated with an altogether different motif. The older plaster layer depicted alternating pairs of Peacocks and Pheasants with fruit-bearing trees between each pair (Figure 4.151). While the original preparatory drawing involving birds is dated to the church's original construction (532-49 CE), it is unknown if this version of the decorative program was ever utilized, as the later sinopia also dates to the late 6\textsuperscript{th}-century CE.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{sinopia_sheep.png}
\caption{Sinopie drawing of a Sheep from Sant’Apollinare in Classe [Photographed by Matthew Higham, author. “Sinopie from the Basilica of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, National Museum of Ravenna.” Photograph. (Taken January 22, 2019)]}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{original_sinopia_birds_trees.png}
\caption{Original sinopie drawing of birds and trees from the apse [Photographed by Matthew Higham, author. “Original Sinopie drawing from Sant’Apollinare in Classe, National Museum of Ravenna.” Photograph. (Taken January 22, 2019)]}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
The discovery and identification of the earlier *sinopia* found along the base of the apse decoration presents the possibility that other aspects of the current decorative scheme may have been substituted for the original decorative program. One such supposition is that the figure of Saint Apollinaris was substituted for an image of the ‘Lamb of God’ by Archbishop Maximian. While unlikely, considering the reverence directed to the saint responsible for founding the local Ravennate church, it is nevertheless possible given the apparent overarching theme of depicting lines of succession between earlier Bishops.\(^\text{545}\)

On the wall outside the apse, Panels 8 and 9 depict a pair of portraits, one full- and one half-sized. Panel 8 depicts the Archangel Michael (Figure 4.152) holding a *labarum*, or standard, that repeats the word “ΑΓΙΟΣ” (i.e., “Holy”) three times, and below is a half-portrait bust depicting a portrait of St. Matthew, identified by an inscription. Panel 9 (Figure 4.153) similarly depicts the Archangel Gabriel, in an identical pose and *labarum*, standing over a bust of St. Luke. However, the portraits in these panels were added sometime during the 12th century as part of an earlier reconstruction effort and may not resemble the original panel décor. Panels 10 and 11 depict simple Palm trees bearing Dates (Figure 4.149) and fill most of the awkward space along the sides of the apsidal arch.

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\(^{545}\) Mazzotti, *La Basilica di Sant'Apollinare in Classe*, 172-75.


At the top of the arch are the two final lintel mosaic panels in the apse (Figure 4.154).

Panel 12 depicts two cities on either side of the panel with six sheep marching out and ascending a mountain to be closer to Christ. While the two cities are unnamed, they have been constructed in like fashion and are probably intended to represent Bethlehem and Jerusalem, as they are also
similarly decorated and positioned as the two cities seen in the lintel above the apse in San Vitale (Figure 4.73). On the subject of the sheep in the apse (6th century) and on the lintel space (7th century), it is probable that they were intended to represent faithful Christians, as opposed to the Apostles, as can be typically interpreted from 12 identical objects. This is in reference to an antiphon or repeated phrase in the ancient Ravennate liturgy.

Finally, Panel 13 depicts five figures set against a dark blue background with the red and light blue clouds, which usually represent heaven (Figure 4.154). Four of the figures represent the Four Evangelists, an Eagle (i.e., St. John the Revelator), an Angel (i.e., St. Matthew), a Winged Lion (i.e., St. Mark), and a Winged Ox (i.e., St. Luke), each holding a copy of their Gospel writings. They are seen flanking a medallion that bears Jesus Christ, with a cruciform nimbus, hand raised in benediction, holding a Gospel text.


Nave

As mentioned previously, the pavements of Sant’Apollinare were raised to remedy the ongoing issue of slumping due to the high-water table and poor foundational support underneath.

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546 Ibid., 175-77.
547 Ibid., 175.
the church. This repair occurred during the 18th century and, again, in the 1940s, when the flooring was covered with a layer of ceramic tiles. Excavations beneath this flooring uncovered a portion of the original tessellated floor, along with a partial inscription (Figure 4.156). The pavement's outermost borders appear to have been designed using a type of 'Interlaced Guilloche Circle' and a neighboring 'Guilloche' border. An examination of the inscription itself reveals only fragmentary letters and words and cannot be understood in its degraded condition.

The nave mosaic's main panel has been decorated with a type of ‘Octagon, Hexagon, and Square’ motif. Each square appears to have been uniformly decorated with alternating patterns of a single ‘Intersected Circle’ or ‘Indented Diamond.’ The surviving color scheme consists of pale blues, reds, browns, and off-white/tan, although the original designers may have intentionally used muted colors for the pavement. Adjacent panels of the pavement were either removed during previous restoration work or were so far degraded that they could not be accurately reconstituted.

Figure 4.155: Schematic of the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, with highlighted pavement mosaic locations [Original from Mario Mazzotti, _La Basilica di Sant’Apollinare in Classe_ (Rome: Citta del Vaticano, 1954), Plate 1]
Figure 4.156: Detail view of north aisle pavement fragment, facing West [Matthew Higham, author. “Nave pavement fragment.” Photograph. (Taken January 21, 2019)]

Figure 4.157: Example of ‘Interlaced Guilloche Circle’ motif (Biebel, Photograph Albums of Mosaics 27, n.p.)

**Side Aisles**

As excavation and restoration efforts continued in parts of the church, a section of the North aisle flooring was cleared away, which revealed a small geometric design of ‘Interlacing
Circles, Diamonds, and Squares’ (Figure 4.158). This mosaic segment was dated to the 6\textsuperscript{th}-century CE construction of the basilica, and the design motif is known to have been widespread at that time. Somewhat curiously, this section is relatively plain in its decoration, utilizing only ‘Floret Diamond,’ ‘Solomon’s Knot,’ and simplified ‘Guilloche Knot’ motifs; whereas in other examples from the 6\textsuperscript{th}-century CE, the roundels formed by the interlacing bands usually host a variety of images (either geometric or figural). This relative lack of décor could result from earlier restoration programs or possibly the result of an intentional erasure of unwanted or heterodoxical symbols.

Interestingly, the remaining mosaics in the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe seem to follow a different theme than those seen elsewhere in this study. Many of the remaining panels
depict previous Church Fathers who left a lasting legacy on the region. While this could be construed as displaying a certain reverence for the work of those who have gone before, it could also be argued that their depiction serves to shrewdly create a line of authority from revered predecessors to the less popular individuals installed by the Byzantine Emperor. While the apsidal space still portrays Jesus Christ as the main focal point, some of the other panels seem to display a message of the ecclesiastical authority vested in various individuals, which is then passed on to a new individual who is deserving of the same respect; making these panels seem more political than strictly reverential.

**Précis**

This penultimate chapter has primarily focused on the construction and decoration of three notable Early Christian churches from Northeastern Italy. While separated by both time and distance, they house themes and depictions, both unique and uniform, that were affected mainly by issues surrounding their spheres of influence. The Theodorean Basilicas, built shortly after the passage of the Edict of Milan, displayed a distinct artistic similarity with older, pagan Roman art. While in line with the artistic development of the Late Antique period, it also helped set a precedent for using and associating pagan motifs for newer, Christian purposes. For example, the ultimate central figure of the mosaics in the North and South Theodorean Halls was the representation or symbolism linked to Jesus Christ as the ‘Savior of Mankind.’ This can be seen in the continual depiction of sacrificial animals, the ‘Good Shepherd’ motif, and the nuanced understanding behind the ‘Allegory of Jonah.’

The city of Ravenna hosted two of the churches examined in this chapter, and while they were built around the same time, they also display very different themes and meanings behind their depictions. While retaining many of the artistic penchants of the Theodorean Basilica (e.g.,
reusing earlier symbolic animals with a newer ‘Christianized’ interpretation), the Church of San
Vitale’s décor no longer focused primarily on Jesus Christ as the ‘Savior’ (at least, not in the
same way that was depicted in Aquileia). The presbytery wall panels seem to introduce a theme
of ‘Sacrifice,’ though it appears to be focused more on identifying the sacrifice/obedience of lay
church members in following the example set by Jesus Christ. Here again, the focus is no longer
on the sacrifice made by Christ but on the necessary sacrifices made by individuals, which will
eventually lead them to salvation and paradisiacal bliss. Still different from the Church of San
Vitale, the mosaics in the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe were apparently designed to focus
on the transference of ecclesiastical power and the respect attached to the office. While this may
be viewed as a cynical interpretation, a more flattering analysis of the mosaics at hand could be
the veneration of respected Church Fathers and individuals who helped the local community
progress to its then-current apogee.

The final chapter of this study will examine the similarities and differences between the
depictions found in the Byzantine mosaics of the Transjordan with those in Italy; and how their
meanings and thematic changes altered based on their location and nearby influences. One point
that will be singularly addressed is the Christological and heterodoxical discussions and
arguments that impacted the Early Christian period. While it could be argued that the Christians
in the Near East had scores of varied cultural and religious influences on all sides, the Early
Christians in Greece, the Balkans, and Italy may have had fewer competing ideas, but the
heterodoxical doctrines that were espoused were more heavily inculcated. The dissension and
discussions between monophysite and dyophysite theologians played a large role in how certain
doctrines were received or rejected, which may have impacted the decoration of those places of
worship.
Introduction

In the final chapter of this thesis, I will attempt to combine archaeological and linguistic theories related to semiotics with historical contexts to better understand the iconographical data collected in the preceding chapters. To reiterate the premise of this study, I intended to examine the icons and symbols used in Early Christian mosaics in the hopes of identifying and, if possible, quantifying the level of penetration of the Nicene Creed in areas of the Byzantine Empire that were most likely to support other heterodox Christian traditions. It is hoped that by identifying patterns and unique artistic motifs, this analysis will provide additional insight into the multivariate nature of Christian worship in the early-Byzantine Empire; specifically, with reference to visualizations in complex mosaic compositions, which represent one of the most significant remaining archaeological evidences of Early Christian belief systems.

My analysis into the polysemous nature of symbols begins with the highly influential oeuvre of Ferdinand de Saussure, a 19th-century Swiss linguist who identified a general framework regarding how a common language is developed, understood, and used. Many theorists from the 19th-century onward argue from one of two positions: that either a system of social/cultural norms precedes and determines the proper use of linguistic features (structural determinism), or that the active use of linguistic features creates an arrangement of loose guidelines that evolve into an organized system of application (social determinism). The

following discussion will explore the development of Semiotic theory in greater depth as regarding its relevance in analyzing select Early Christian mosaic programs.

**Anthropological/Linguistic Theories**

**Semiotic Theory**

**Saussurean Model**

Saussure presented a *dyadic*, or two-part, model about how signs are used and how they are read and understood by the human mind. He called these two parts the *signifier* (the form that a sign takes) and the *signified* (the underlying concept). To explain, when one sees the word ‘tree,’ the reader knows the kind of ‘object’ referred to by the text/spoken word. However, there is nothing inherently ‘tree-ish’ about this signifier; indeed, except in the case of onomatopoeia, the connection between any signifier and the concept or thing it signifies is entirely socially conventional. This arbitrariness means that an object, like a tree, could have just as easily been referred to as ‘shell’ or ‘cloud,’ yet somewhere in the development of a common language, speakers agreed to use the word ‘tree’ to refer to this one type of object. This shared convention is how individuals within language groups can communicate and understand one another.

Given the vast potentialities of a shared understanding of language, it is common for a single sign to have multiple interpretations. For example, a ‘tree’ *signifier* can refer to a plant or a genealogical display of one’s heritage as its *signified* concept. In this instance, there is a stark difference between these two connotated definitions, and the intended denotation then becomes apparent when taken within a specific setting. However, if a recipient is unaware of additional connotations that the original *signifier* may be attached to, they may be perplexed by the

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apparent lack of logic in a statement/proposition/expression. Thus, the value of the signification (the signifier-signified relationship) is developed within specific socio-cultural contexts, and varies according to the interpreter’s degree of cultural understanding. A given sign’s connoted value must be continuously explored and evaluated based on the presence and influence of external factors.\textsuperscript{551} Thus, knowing the full extent of a given cultural context is required in attempting an accurate interpretation of a Sign.


\textit{Peircean Model}

Around the time Saussure was developing his theory of sign making and usage, an American logician named Charles Sanders Peirce was formulating a similar theory of semiology or semiotics. Advancing beyond Saussure’s linguistics, Peirce’s use of semiotics is structured around a \textit{Representamen}, an \textit{Object}, and an \textit{Interpretant}.\textsuperscript{552} The \textit{Representamen} (e.g., Saussure’s signifier) is the form that a sign takes to refer to an \textit{Object} (e.g., Saussure’s signified).\textsuperscript{553} However, when the \textit{Representamen} is viewed, it creates an \textit{Interpretant} in the mind of the viewer. The \textit{Interpretant} differs from Saussure’s signified as it is not intended to be a direct interpretation of the initial \textit{Representamen} (i.e., signifier); instead, it is another sign (created by the viewer’s mind), which carries a specialized meaning to the viewer based on their level of contextual understanding.\textsuperscript{554} For Peirce, the \textit{Interpretant} is a necessary component as the ‘net result/effect’ that a symbol may convey, based on the polysemous associations of the sign and the contextual understanding of the viewer.

\textsuperscript{551} Saussure, \textit{General Linguistics}, 88-90.
\textsuperscript{554} Ibid., 2.228.
Both the Saussurean and the Peircean models of semiosis allow for potentially infinite interpretations of a particular sign. Each individual’s interpretation can be a variation from their neighbor’s, depending on their background, education, and understanding of context and culturally recognized norms.\textsuperscript{555} Semiotic communication is possible owing to contextual clues and shared connotations between the ‘signifier-signified’ and ‘representamen-object-interpretant’ relationships. According to Peirce, “[a Sign] cannot furnish acquaintance with or recognition of that Object; ….it presupposes an acquaintance in order to convey some further information concerning it.”\textsuperscript{556} If an individual is an excellent communicator, they will typically recognize when their audience cannot make the intended ‘representamen-interpretant-object’ connection and find appropriate substitutes to direct the audience to a similar conclusion instead. This ability is possible if a speaker possesses a wide-ranging knowledge of \textit{Representamen} symbols that their audience may recognize. In other words, the intended audience and speaker/author/artist must share a similar cultural context from which to interpret the meaning of a sign; ergo, understanding a symbol’s value as a form of knowledge stems from an appreciation for the nuances effecting the author and their reactions to those forces.

\textbf{Division of Signs}

For Peirce, a sign operates as an \textit{Icon}, an \textit{Index}, or a \textit{Symbol}.\textsuperscript{557} An \textit{Icon} is a sign that refers to an object by physical semblance with the object’s form or characteristics, and maintains the connection only so long as it remains used for that purpose. For example, an individual's portrait (such as the appropriately named ‘icons’ of Christian saints) can be recognized as such only as long as the image is perceived to resemble the original model. An \textit{Index} is a sign that

\textsuperscript{555} Ibid., 2.303-08.
\textsuperscript{556} Ibid., 2.231.
\textsuperscript{557} Ibid., 2.247-49. These are not three ‘equal’ types of signs, but are hierarchically nested: indexes permit icons, which permit symbols.
refers to some connecting quality binding it to an object, almost as if an aspect of the object has been copied or torn from the original. Examples of an ‘indexical’ relationship can include an arrow indicating a specific direction or a halo/nimbus adorning one of the previously referenced ‘saintly icons.’ A Symbol is a sign that refers to an object via a structural law or general/cultural idea that inherently associates the one with the other. Thus, ‘symbolic’ relationships are arbitrary connections in the abstract, such as the association of a fish with the name/person of Jesus Christ, or the modern-day Morse code (which connects a series of dots and dashes to specific letters). While icons are more likely to be recognizable by any viewer, the arbitrary nature of symbols means that they may only be relevant if found within an appropriate context. Even if used within a context that gives special meaning to a symbol, that value is unnoticed unless interpreted by an appropriately informed viewer. The remainder of my paper focuses on exploring the possibility of polysemous symbolic relationships within archaeological contexts.

Polysemous Symbolism in Early Christianity

Late Antiquity in the Mediterranean saw many alterations to established customs and zones of political control. Just as language and grammatical structures evolve and change with use, artistic representations also evolve and change alongside their meanings. The 3rd and 4th centuries CE saw Christianity rise from an obscure branch of Judaism to become one of the fastest-growing religious (and political) movements in the Mediterranean world. This feat was aided by the religion’s focus on proselytizing to anyone who would hear the message and evangelizing through any medium possible. As converts from varying cultures and backgrounds

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558 Ibid., 2.230.
grew, worship slowly became more formalized with written records and defined iconographic representations.  

Owing to the progressive yet uncompromising doctrines and attitudes espoused by Jesus Christ, early converts to this new religious sect faced cultural opposition within their communities and political oppression from established governing powers.  

Until the Edict of Milan’s passage in 313 CE, the harassment and persecution of Christians was not only legal but, at times actively pursued in Rome and throughout the Roman Empire (especially in the Eastern Mediterranean). Consequently, many resorted to worshipping in secret, which also meant that their artwork was either removed from public/semi-public places or camouflaged among more distinctly ‘orthodox’ artwork. In addition, prior to the 6th century, there was no apparent attempt to develop a new, standardized, or ‘uniquely Christian’ iconography, with the result that artists and patrons reached back to their pagan heritage for inspiration and artistic direction. Two seemingly oppositional forces influenced this phenomenon: 1) Christianity’s roots in Judaism with its biblical interpretations and limitations in figural artistic expression; and 2) the need for Christianity to communicate visually with large audiences who were often illiterate and required visual aids to understand and remember new religious doctrines. Thus, the first of two significant challenges for modern scholars in identifying and defining signs during this period of

560 E.g., the persecution of Christians under Decius (249-251 CE), Diocletian and Galerius (c. 303 CE), etc.
561 Deuteronomy 4:16-18 KJV. This second point is especially daunting, considering the multinational, polyglot nature of cultures in the Mediterranean.
emergent Christian imagery is to combine interpretative speculation (based on trends and influences from that era) with later ‘apologies’ provided by epigraphic sources.562

The use and integration of pagan myths and stories in Christian art was a point of contention among many of the early Fathers of the Church. In Late Antiquity, a thorough knowledge of classical literature and philosophy was commonly acknowledged as a marker of intelligence and education. For some Christian converts, such as St. Jerome and St. Augustine, being too attached to previous cultural knowledge and pagan heritage was perceived as being in direct opposition to their newfound Christian beliefs and a threat to their personal salvation.563 Understandably, some of the more erudite converts were loath to dismiss the totality of their classical learning and education as naught; and instead chose to use their knowledge and understanding to prove the rationality of Christian doctrine against pagan beliefs. These so-called ‘apologists’ sought to make the story of Christ more relatable to the masses by connecting the stories and actions of Jesus Christ to the sagas and attributes of the mythical gods and demigods. In doing so, some even encouraged both Christian and pagan art to be produced side-by-side.564 However, not all Christian authors believed that combining Christian tenets with pagan myths was appropriate. Some writers, such as Lactantius and Eusebius, saw pagan myths and their characters as absurd and immorally opposed to the Christian doctrine of a transcendent, perfect god.565

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563 In some of the more educated pagan circles of Late Antiquity, there existed the belief of Mousikos aner, or that an individual could obtain a degree of immortality in the afterlife if they were sufficiently committed to the Muses and all forms of cultural knowledge [Claude Lepelley, “The Use of Secularised Latin Pagan Culture by Christians,” in Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity, eds. David Gwynn, Susanne Bangert, and Luke Lavan (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 477-79].
The second major obstacle in attempting to link indices and symbols with specific and uniform meanings in Early Christian art relates to the debates surrounding iconoclasm and the proper use and role of representational imagery (i.e., portraits, personifications, and icons) within sacred contexts. The debate had been a simmering dispute among some early Christian converts but reached its climax during the late-7th-9th century CE. The crux of the crisis surrounded whether or not intercessory prayers uttered before images of saints and other holy figures could be construed as a form of idol worship. The belief that specific images could be inherently connected with ‘supernatural,’ ‘sacred,’ or ‘holy’ power is attested in a 427 CE Imperial edict, which forbade the placement of any image or sign of Jesus Christ on pavement flooring. To carry the thought further, if the belief that an iconic or indexical sign of Christ carried a connection to the Divine person, then the image of a similar (if less important) holy figure must also be connected to their person. Thus, if prayers were uttered before such an image, would that not qualify as an act of idolatry?

Thus, the iconoclastic movement aimed to destroy as many icons of holy personages as possible to prevent their worship (accidental or intentional) as idols. Many richly decorated church mosaics, such as those in urban areas like Constantinople, became targets for partial refurbishment because of their use of icons and representative figures. As such, many compositions were intentionally destroyed or replaced as part of targeted iconoclastic programs. In spite of these iconoclastic movements, some ‘offending’ panels of figural

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representations were spared from these purges. In some cases, this was the result of their accidental destruction/preservation by natural disasters, while others were simply covered by ‘less offensive’ depictions or were shielded by sympathetic clergy.  

While there exist some difficulties in making a thorough examination of Early Christian art in archaeological contexts, the underlying proposal still bears merit. Although the entire corpus of Early Christian art is not available for study, similar challenges have not prevented archaeologists and other scholars from developing insights based on surviving examples. The essential idea behind Semiotic theory is that a single sign may have multiple meanings and referents, some of which may only be understood by those aware of the sign’s contextual significance. Keeping these principles in mind, I began to explore the multivariate process of signification and sign-making/reading within Early Christian, devotional art.

**Figural Interpretation and Semiotics**

**Arian Iconography**

Arianism’s longevity and sustained success within Roman and Constantinopolitan spheres of influence are surprising, given the intermittent efforts to outlaw and eradicate similar heterodoxic sects.  

Studies into the nature and existence of a ‘purely’ Arian iconographic program have proven difficult for two significant reasons: iconoclasm and the relatively slight philosophical deviance of Arian beliefs from the more popular ‘trinitarian’ views. To begin with the latter point, our understanding of the position occupied by Arian theologians is taken almost entirely from highly polemic sources. Without the full text of Arius’ seminal work, the *Thalia,*

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569 As described in the previous two chapters, the remaining figural representations can only be analyzed according to their current composition and may lack some of the vibrancy and artistic direction they were initially imbued with prior to the iconoclastic movements of the 8th and 9th centuries CE.

570 Beginning with Constantine I (c. 325 CE) and extending through later emperors such as Theodosius II (c. 430-50 CE), Justinian I (c. 527-65 CE), and beyond.
scholars must rely on quotations provided from the surviving oeuvre of Arius’ detractors.571

While surviving quotations from the Thalia may be skewed or taken out of context, an examination provides a basis for describing the Arian position as essentially ‘non-trinitarian.’

Aside from their philosophical departures, other practices and rituals between Arian and Orthodox/Catholic Christians appear to have been held in common with only slight divergences. While separate baptistries were built in Ravenna (5th–6th century CE) expressly for the use of Arians and their Orthodox counterparts, the archaeological and textual evidence surrounding these structures does not indicate a marked difference in their liturgical rites or worship exercises.572 So, if Arian liturgical practices were largely the same as (or similar to) ‘Orthodox’ groups, we should not expect to find polysemous differences in such texts. However, it is possible that Arian and Orthodox artists utilized the same (or very similar) imagery and only attached different connotations to the same iconographic representations. If there were no deviation in the images used then, when the structures were transferred to Orthodox control, no physical changes would need to have been made; and if images existed that were not deemed appropriate, per Orthodox sensibilities, they could be ‘fixed’ without needing to trigger a larger-scale redecoration effort.

Scholars acknowledge the use of art as a semiotic mode of transmission of cultural ideals or religious doctrine, but the danger involved in this application is the temptation to view such interpretations as synchronic and isolated applications. As Gwynn notes, the evolution of ‘Christian art’ developed a more vital need for doctrinal definition than earlier Greco-Roman ‘pagan art,’ generating a need for unity and standardization that did not exist in the nascent

572 Gwynn, “Archaeology and the ‘Arian Controversy,’” 251. It is possible that other cities and regions had sect-specific structures, but Ravenna is the best attested example of this.
stages of Christian development. The development of a more purposeful ‘Christian art’ helped define religious doctrines as it reflected the attitudes of the polemical world surrounding it. However, one need only read into artistic interpretations to see that the ‘representamen-object-interpretant’ relationship between the art and the viewer is always in a state of flux, due to the polysemous character of signs.

Statements from 4th- and 5th-century luminaries show that no small amount of debate existed surrounding the formation and use of art in distinctly sacred settings. Individuals like St. Nilus of Sinai were concerned over the use of images in sacred spaces that were not overtly related to Jesus Christ and the scriptures. In a 5th-century letter to Prefect Olympiodorus of Thebes, St. Nilus suggests that “it would be… the mark of a firm and manly mind to represent a single cross in the sanctuary… and to fill the holy church on both sides with pictures from the Old and the New Testaments,” rather than depicting scenes of animal hunts and fishermen. While such hunting/fishing/pastoral scenes were popular motifs in Late Antique art, it is clear that certain high-ranking individuals disapproved of their use in a sacred space, declaring them “childish and infantile… [trivialities]” and would only serve to “distract the eyes of the faithful.” This is not to say that such images were subsequently erased from existing churches [e.g., the Theodorean Basilical complex (Figures 4.2, 4.31-32), the Petra Church (Figure 3.2), the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius (Figure 3.82), etc.], nevertheless, it shows that such inclusions were eventually assigned meanings and interpretations that were standardized and approved within the growing Church hierarchy in an attempt to raise their secular nature to fit the sacred space they now inhabited.

573 Ibid., 234-35.
574 St. Nilus of Sinai, Letter to Prefect Olympiodorus, qtd in Mango, Art of the Byzantine Empire, 32-33.
575 Ibid., 32-33.
576 Ibid., 33.
Gwynn asserts that the idea that artistic depictions in the archaeological record are filled with ‘anti-Arian’ connotations and propaganda is commonly propagated among modern scholars.\footnote{Gwynn, “Archaeology and the ‘Arian Controversy,’” 238-40, 243.} While this theory cannot be dismissed, it is unfair to paint all such mosaics with so broad a brushstroke. While the passage of discriminatory legal measures (post-381 CE) and condemnation by ecclesiastical leaders lend credence to the idea that few Arian or ‘non-trinitarian’ allusions may be found in the archaeological record, Ward-Perkins points out that Arian and Orthodox art and architecture differed only marginally (as seen among the numerous churches excavated from Gothic-occupied Northern Africa and Italy).\footnote{Brian Ward-Perkins, “Where is the Archaeology and Iconography of Germanic Arianism?,” in Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity, eds. David M. Gwynn and Susanne Bangert (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 266-73; Gwynn, “Archaeology and the ‘Arian Controversy,’” 250-53.} Poignant examples from important urban centers (e.g., the separate Orthodox and Arian Baptistries of Ravenna) display near-identical artwork and iconography. Such examples notwithstanding, specific regional art differences from 5th–6th century Northern Italy could suggest a codified difference between Arian and anti-Arian art, though, admittedly, such narrow scrutiny also presents the risk of reading too much into messages that may not have been unintended.\footnote{Ward-Perkins, “Archaeology and Iconography of Germanic Arianism,” 273.}

Ward-Perkins presents an example of a possibly misleading interpretation that can be found among the Church of San Vitale’s mosaics.\footnote{Ibid., 273-75.} Along the presbytery’s left wall, the lower lunette depicts the story of Abraham and Sarah feeding three disguised, angelic visitors (Figure 4.70). These disguised angels are depicted identically and were used by past Orthodox/Catholic theologians as symbols of the Trinity’s homoousios.\footnote{Ibid., 275.} However, an alternate interpretation, which does not touch on the trinitarian debate, pairs the Abraham lunette with its counterpart on the opposite wall, depicting Abel and Melchizedek offering their sacrifices to God (Figure 4.72).
The explicit theme suggested by these scenes is that of the faithful offering requisite sacrifices to God, without, it would seem, any underlying, implicit anti-Arian aspect. However, the polysemous nature of signs means that these depictions could – and likely did – simultaneously represent the stories and themes most obviously depicted, while also signifying the authority of the orthodox Church hierarchy, and thus also their anti-Arian stance.

Another instance of potential anti-Arian iconography is found in the apsidal mosaic of the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Ravenna’s port of Classe. The center of the panel displays a enormous jeweled cross with a miniature portrait of Jesus Christ and is accompanied by the inscriptions “ΙΧΘΥς” and “SALUS MUNDI” along the top and bottom of the figure (Figure 4.149). On either side of the cross’s shorter arms, two additional letters can be seen: an alpha “Α” and an omega “Ω,” referring to Christ as the ‘Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.’ Ward-Perkins theorizes that these two letters were included alongside other Christograms found in the region as part of a reaction against Arian suggestions that Christ was subordinate to God.582 By including these three sets of inscriptions within a symbolic representation of the Transfiguration, it seems that the decoration of the apse may have been installed to reaffirm Christ’s position as an equal part of the Trinity and divine status while on Earth. The suggestion that Christ was not divine was never part of an Arian doctrine, but the addition of these titular inscriptions does appear to evoke the image of a more eternal (e.g., “Α and Ω” – ‘Beginning and Ending’), omnipotent being (e.g., “SALUS MUNDI” – ‘Savior of the World’) who is the literal Son of God (e.g., “ΙΧΘΥς” – ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior’).583

582 Ward-Perkins suggests that the inclusion of these symbols may have been “in reaction to alleged Arian denigrations of Christ; and… were used to stress that He was no mere creation by the Father, but an equal being who had existed from before all time” (Ibid., 271-73).
Abstract designs may have also been employed to help support both Arian and anti-Arian doctrines in a variety of sites. The ‘Solomon’s Knot’ motif appears as infinitely intertwined strands, separate and without an apparent beginning or end [as seen in the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian (Figures 3.56, 69, and 73), the Church of San Vitale (Figure 4.123-24, and 129), both halls of the Theodorean Basilical complex (Figures 4.13, 33, 36, 38, and 44), and the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Figure 4.158)]. Usually, these strands will display a distinct coloration (e.g., red and blue), which can symbolize the harmonious conjoining of two discrete elements, such as Heaven and Earth during the Messianic Age. Some more detailed representations were colored using a three-part gradient within each band, which could represent the unity of the three personages in the Trinity. As with previous examples, however, the perceived interpretation could vary, where two individuals can walk away with wildly different understandings of the same image. For example, the two strands of the ‘Solomon’s Knot’ could be interpreted as a symbolic reminder of the Messianic Age, or another type of ‘mystical knot’ design with apotropaic referents, or even as an Arian reference to the separate (yet unified) persons of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

As one of the most well-known heterodox Christian sects in the 3rd-6th centuries CE, support for Arians fluctuated between uneasy acceptance and severe ecclesiastic/legal sanctions. As a result, references to their particular strain of doctrine were often anathematized and destroyed (e.g., Arius’ missing Thalia). Since then, many scholars have pointed to particular symbols and inclusions decorating sacred spaces as ‘anti-Arian’ in nature, but I would contend

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585 Another possible example of this may be seen in the dome medallions of the previously mentioned Arian and Orthodox Baptistry in Ravenna. Both medallions depict the Baptism of Christ, though with minute differences in decoration which may or may not have held a unique significance to the viewers.
that some ‘pro-Arian’ (e.g., ‘non-trinitarian’) examples may still exist. While a similar argument may be a reasonable approach for Arianism, Nestorianism, and many other Christian sects, the Manichaeist sect of Christianity presents a different set of complications for modern investigators.

**Manichaean Iconography**

From the variety of heterodox ‘heresies’ that Early Christians contended with, few were as vehemently despised as the Manichaeists. Born into an Elchasaitic community (a splinter group of Judeo-Christians) in modern-day Iraq, Mani was raised in an environment where he learned to embrace certain Gnostic-Christian beliefs. After claiming to receive visions from heavenly messengers, Mani left the community and traveled to India, where he began to formalize a different set of views on Christian doctrine and cosmology (c. 241/42 CE).\(^{586}\) Mani’s new dogma featured a blending of Christianity with cosmological themes and beliefs from Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and other Mesopotamian religions.\(^{587}\) Today, his merging of beliefs and traditions from multiple regions could be described as an early attempt at ‘Christian universalism.’

Part of Mani’s religious zealotry focused on missionary work, and thus both he and his followers endeavored to make their beliefs as broadly accessible as possible: texts were copied and translated into local languages and were often accompanied by illustrations.\(^{588}\) Mani’s proficiency and interest in painting were well-known in Mesopotamia (earning him the moniker of “Mani the Painter” in Persian sources) and inspired him to encourage in his followers to

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\(^{588}\) Ibid., 2.
develop their own artistic talents.\(^{589}\) Manichaean proselytization throughout the Sassanian Persian Empire and into the Transjordan and Egypt met with some success, though increasing resistance from Western sources drove his followers back East. Unfortunately, no examples of ‘Coptic-Manichaean’ art survive, likely due to the overwhelming tide of anti-Manichaean propaganda and legal decrees from the Roman and Byzantine world.\(^{590}\) Scattered examples of Manichaean art from the 7th century onwards have been discovered in Central Asia; however, these depictions appear to have been more heavily influenced by Buddhist and Zoroastrian cosmology and artistic styles than one might expect to have existed in the Transjordan or Africa.\(^{591}\)

Considering that Manichaean art and texts were composed and adapted locally to aid in missionary efforts, we may presume that iterations created in the Transjordan and Northern Africa likely resembled the Late Antique artistic motifs of the 3rd-4th centuries.\(^{592}\) Not only this, and given Mani’s fondness for Mesopotamian religions, Manichaean art in the Eastern Mediterranean may have also featured exotic animals from farther East and scenes related to his unique cosmology.\(^{593}\) With these suppositions in mind, an examination of the mosaics found in the Petra Church and the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian could suggest a mild Manichaean influence. Mosaic I in the Petra Church features a series of roundels that display various plants, animals, and a few examples of vases and baskets. Some of these representations are unique to

\(^{589}\) Ibid., 3, 15-20.
\(^{590}\) Ibid., 6-7.
\(^{591}\) Ibid., 2.
\(^{593}\) It is curious to note that while many such ‘exotic’ animals were known in the heart of the ‘old’ Roman Empire (even if only in stories and legends), no such examples were included in these examples of devotional art from the Italian Peninsula. This apparent exclusion could have been a choice by artists/patrons who did not view their inclusion as particularly ‘Christian;’ however, it is also possible that ‘exotic’ animals were deliberately excluded (or expunged) due to their association with Manichaeism and other ‘foreign’ influences.
the Petra Church or are only rarely depicted within sacred spaces. The presence of ‘exotic’
animals [i.e., Giraffes (Figure 3.31), Elephants (Figure 3.26), and Phoenices (Figure 3.29)] can
be reasonably explained as representations of Petra’s mercantile heritage and cultural/regional
importance; even so, an alternate hypothesis could suggest that they may have been installed by a
mosaicist who was familiar with Manichaean styles and artistic inclusions. Petra and the
Transjordan became popular destinations for rebellious clergymen who had been exiled from
some of the more cosmopolitan regions of the Byzantine Empire; thus, it is not unreasonable to
suppose that a heterodox sect, like Manichaeism, would have a greater concentration and
influence in the province.  

However, as Mosaics II and III in the Petra Church (which are
roughly contemporaneous with Mosaic I) do not include additional examples of ‘exotic’
imagery, the supposed ‘Manichaean connection’ is not as strong as it might be.

As for the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian, only two ‘exotic’ animals, a Giraffe
(Figure 3.66) and an Elephant (Figure 3.72), can be found adorning the pavement. However,
approximately half of this church's floor space is covered with geometric patterns and designs
(Figure 3.56). Many of these designs can be seen in other Christian contexts and were employed
for their apotropaic referents, such as the ‘Solomon’s Knot’ and ‘Guilloche Circle’ designs.
However, as future analyses may show, some of these motifs may have antecedents among other
Mesopotamian religions (e.g., Zoroastrianism), thus presenting new interpretations based on

595 While we know that Bishop Asterius (c. 343-362 CE) was an anti-Arian, and his successor Bishop
Gemanus was pro-Arian, my research has not revealed any unique information about the positions and
standings of Petra’s later Bishops. While it is unlikely that they would turn a blind eye to the Manichaeist
heresy, given the strength of the condemnation against Manichaeism, it is nevertheless possible that the
Bishops may have been ignorant of possible Manichaean connections within the newly installed art (c.
450-550 CE) of the Petra Church.
The inclusion of cosmological concepts and imagery from Zoroastrian doctrines was not unusual in Manichaean contexts. One such example of Manichaean emulation is the presence of “Ban the Builder,” a Zoroastrian deity who was charged with helping to build a paradisiacal world, or “New Earth.”

Another indicator of Manichaean influence, if not an explicit doctrinal inclusion, may be found in the presence of female depictions within sacred spaces. Generally speaking, depictions of women in ‘orthodox’ artwork were limited to St. Mary and the occasional inclusion of other female saints; conversely, Manichaeist art included frequent depictions of women as deities, angels, and even as sacerdotal members. Among the churches examined here, women are prominently featured in the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian (Figure 3.55), the Church of SS. Lot and Procopius (inscriptions only, Figures 3.78 and 81), and the South Hall of the Theodorean Basilical Complex (Figures 4.33, 35-37, 40-41, and 43-44). Each of these locations in the Transjordan and Italy was also located along highly-trafficked trade routes that likely served as a conduit for cultural transmission. Not only this, but the Petra Church’s feminine depiction of Sophia, or ‘Wisdom,’ is portrayed holding a book and wreathed by a halo (Figure 3.45).

While this portrait may have been included as a representation of a godly virtue, as mentioned in Chapter 3, Manichaean artists also used the imagery of a book to represent the transmission of...
possession of doctrinal authority; when combined with the presence of a female figure, this may suggest Manichaean influences on the design of this mosaic panel.602

If my researches into the possibility of finding Manichaean references in the artwork of the examined churches was partially ineffectual, due to the absence of Coptic-Manichaean art, it was not altogether fruitless. The lack of such innovative illustrations from the Eastern Mediterranean and Transjordan is unfortunate, as it would be an interesting study to compare such works with later examples of Manichaean artistry from Syria and Central Asia. While such ‘Eastern’ examples of Manichaean art date to a later period than the churches examined in this thesis, the next section will explore some commonalities that could present a connection between the dyophysite beliefs of the Manicheans, the Nestorians, and the artwork from the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe.

Nestorian Iconography

In 428 CE, Nestorius was elected the Patriarch of Constantinople, a fact which was resented by the numerous enemies he had contended with in his earlier career. As Patriarch, Nestorius first took issue with the terminology used to describe St. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who had risen to become an object of reverence among many devout Christians and was given the title, “Theotokos” (i.e., “she who bore God” or “Mother of God”).603 Seeking to clarify an apparent misunderstanding of terminology and nomenclature, Nestorius suggested that the title should be replaced with “Christokos” (i.e., “Mother of Christ”); believing that it would have been impious (at best) or heretical (at worst) to suggest that a mortal woman could be the mother

602 Guláczi, Mani’s Pictures, 69-70. Books are often included in depictions of the Four Evangelists [e.g., the Church of San Vitale (Figures 4.70 and 72) and the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Figure 4.154)], possibly indicating an adopted portrayal between Manichaean and other Christian artists.
603 Milton Anastos, "Nestorius Was Orthodox," Dumbarton Oaks Papers 16 (1962): 121. It should also be noted that Mary is traditionally believed to have died at Ephesus, which was also the location of the famed Temple of Artemis; thus, it is possible that her rise in importance may have been partially based as a replacement for another well-known female, pagan deity.
of a divine god. This suggestion sparked an unexpectedly outsized backlash against Nestorius and drew attention to an ongoing Christological debate regarding the nature of Jesus Christ.

The basis of the Christological argument lies in identifying, with exactness, the divine and the non-eternal (mortal) nature of Christ. The argument revolves around whether Christ possessed a mortal nature, a divine nature, or some combination thereof; or, conversely, if it was possible for a God-being to be in any part corruptible. As Christ was born the “Son of God,” most Christians accepted that he was not possessed of a wholly mortal nature because of his divine parentage. However, to say that he had a fully divine nature and yet was still able to interact with and live among mortal humans (without their undergoing a constant, intermediary transfigurative process) was not in line with established doctrines. As a result, many believed that Christ was possessed of a nature that blended the Son's divinity with the mortality of the man (referred to as a “hypostatic union,” or a ‘union of essences’). Nestorius proposed that a blending was not only impossible, but that such a supposition degraded the unsullied divinity of God the Father (who was acknowledged to be ‘of the same substance’ as his Son). As a result, Nestorius’ followers argued that Jesus Christ was fully possessed of both divine and mortal natures that were not combined or blended in any way but coexisted within the “prosopon” (i.e., body) of Christ. In a reading of the arguments presented by Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria, his chief antagonist, it is clear that some of their misunderstandings of each other’s doctrinal position were based on different uses of terminology. Such misattributions include Cyril’s supposition that Nestorius’ Christological formula introduced a fourth member (i.e., the

604 Anastos, "Nestorius Was Orthodox," 121-22.
606 Ibid., 120.
607 Ibid., 125-28.
608 It is important to note that Nestorius never proposes this exact view, which was propagated by some of his more radical followers and detractors (Ibid., 126-28).
mortal nature of Christ) into the Trinity, and Nestorius’ interpretation of Cyril’s defense of the ‘incarnō/incarnate’ (i.e., ‘wrapped in flesh’) state of Christ.\textsuperscript{609}

During the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th} centuries, several notable Bishops wrote letters and sermons supporting Nestorius’ views on Mary’s title and the nature of Christ. The most outspoken works of these Bishops, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa, sparked a movement known today as the ‘Three Chapter Controversy.’ As this front began to grow, Emperor Justinian I was prompted to issue an edict (543/44 CE), anathematizing these individuals’ writings, accusing them of following heretical Nestorian doctrines.\textsuperscript{610} While popular among Syrian and Persian Christians in the East, Nestorianism retained a substantial following along the Italian peninsula, including in Aquileia, whose Bishop refused to condemn the ‘Three Chapters.’\textsuperscript{611}

If, as Anastos argues, Nestorius and his followers viewed themselves as ‘Orthodox Christians,’ then their artistic décor should be similar in most respects to other sectarian art.\textsuperscript{612} Given Nestorius’ views on Mary, one could expect to find an absence of the \textit{Theotokos} inscription or depiction in Nestorian decorative motifs; however, given the relative ease of removing or covering up mosaic scenes, this is not a valid reference point in determining the presence or absence of Nestorian worshippers.\textsuperscript{613} The difficulty in identifying a distinctive Nestorian art style lies in their \textit{dyophysite} belief in a Christ with two natures, such that the question becomes: how does one depict a subject who is both mortal and divine?

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{609} Ibid., 125. \\
\textsuperscript{610} Harry Magoulias, \textit{Byzantine Christianity: Emperor, Church, and the West} (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1970), 35-36. \\
\textsuperscript{611} Magoulias, \textit{Byzantine Christianity}, 36. \\
\textsuperscript{612} Anastos, “Nestorius Was Orthodox,” 123. \\
\textsuperscript{613} E.g., the mosaics of the Theodorean Basilical complex do not refer to Mary (either by inscription or portraiture), nevertheless this could be the result of a myriad of reasons ranging from the desire to avoid depicting a sacred individual on the pavement, to the preference of an influential patron/clergyman.
\end{flushleft}
In depicting Jesus Christ in works of art, there is little that can be described as uniquely ‘Nestorian’ without also describing the merging of his two natures into a ‘hypostatic union,’ instead of the separateness of the Nestorian ‘prosopic union.’ The artist must find a way to “represent the divine, to circumscribe what is uncircumscribable, or, if it limits itself to representing the bare man, it must divide the inseparable, the human from the divine nature of Christ.”614 An example of such an attempt to depict Christ’s dual natures could be seen in one of the more common poses he is given in Byzantine/Early Christian art. Often described as the Pantocrator pose, Christ is seen holding a Gospel book in one hand (usually his left hand, representing his mortality and human nature), while the other hand is held in a benedictory gesture (usually his right hand, representing his divine aspect as the Son or ‘God the Logos’).

Abstract designs and motifs could also have been used to promote or signify Nestorian contexts. For example, the ‘Solomon’s Knot’ design (referenced above) with its two interwoven bands could also be used to represent the dual natures of Christ. These bands are often depicted with different colors and could be interpreted as representing the differences between Christ’s mortal and divine natures. While intertwined, the bands do not merge into a single ribbon but are simultaneously separate, distinct, and form a united design.

Another potentially Nestorian (or at least a dyophysite) design motif may be seen in the stylization of a cruciform shape. In a Manichaean temple uncovered near Gaochang, China, a painting on a silk flag or banner was found to have been influenced by Buddhist artistic motifs during the 8th-9th century.615 While partially degraded, the scene's central figures are a young boy kneeling before another individual (presumably Jesus) seated upon a lotus flower (Figure 616).

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615 Klimkeit, Manichaean Art and Calligraphy, 43.
5.1) Above the seated Jesus is a cross that was likely affixed to a long pole and is described by Klimkeit as a “Nestorian Cross.” The cross appears to have arms that widen at their extremities and are capped by three orb-like decorations. This depiction is similar to a bronze cruciform artifact uncovered in Ak Beshim, Kyrgyzstan, in 1996. The site dates to the 10th-11th century and the artifact itself can be described as having arms that flare out at the extremities and narrow as they approach the center (Figure 5.2). The distal ends of the arms are also capped with pearl-like protuberances, though this design is only decorated with two per arm instead of three. Not only this, but the cross also appears to be decorated with poorly preserved characters that are said to “look Sogdian.” While the style of the cross is peculiar, it cannot be securely identified as being a ‘Nestorian Cross,’ as no design of that nature is explicitly described in Late Antique and Early Medieval literature, though it is suspected to have been analogous to the Maltese or Johannine crosses. Interestingly, both the silk banner and the inscribed artifact just described resemble the central cross seen in the apse of Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Figure 5.3).

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616 Klimkeit refers to this example as a “Nestorian Cross,” though his reasons for labeling it as such are not stated (Ibid., 43). This term may be a misnomer as will be explained shortly.


Figure 5.1: "Temple Flag with Two Saviour Figures" (Klimkeit, *Manichaean Art and Calligraphy*, Plate XXII)

Figure 5.2: Photograph of Inscribed Cross (Klein and Reck, "A Cross with Sogdian Inscription," 149)
Of the three crosses shown above, two have tentatively been described as a ‘Nestorian cross,’ but with little apparent reason beyond the tapered arms and pearl-like spheres. I suggest that the spheres on the so-called ‘Nestorian cross’ may be better described as attributes of a ‘dyophysite cross.’ The spheres may have been meant to signify the separated divine and human natures co-existing within the person (i.e., the ‘prosopic union’) of Jesus Christ. Similarly, given the recurring theme of ‘dualism’ in Manichaean doctrines, the sphere-like pearls or globes may have been associated with the separate divine, pure, and eternal natures of God the Father and Jesus Christ as discrete entities. If this is the case, then the cross from the

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621 Gulácsi, Mani’s Pictures, 424. However, this is where the similarities between Manichaean and Nestorian dyophysite doctrines end. Manichaean doctrines were considerably more docetic; believing, instead, that Jesus’ body, suffering, and death on the cross were illusory and had metaphorical
Manichaean banner (Figure 5.1) is the most curious as it depicts a trio of pearl-like orbs on each arm, whereas the other examples only display two. This divergence in style only adds to the proposed interpretation, as Manichaean texts also taught that the divine and human aspects of Jesus were independent of each other. Moreover, translations from Manichaean texts also distinguish three different ‘manifestations’ of Jesus. Thus, the trio of spheres on the cross is appropriate, given its location within a Manichaean temple.

While the inscribed artifact dates to the 10th-11th centuries, the painting is recorded as existing in the 8th-9th centuries, and the apse mosaic was installed in the 6th-7th centuries; the fact that Christological arguments were present in all three locations poses the possibility that the mosaic may have been an early prototype for these later artistic creations. Additionally, given that the Bishop of Aquileia refused to condemn the Three Chapters in 543-44 CE, it is plausible that the style of the ‘Nestorian (dyophysite) Cross’ with its unusual pairs of sphere additions was included in the apse of Sant’Apollinare in Classe as a subtle display of solidarity and support for the threatened dyophysite position. As mentioned previously, this particular apse also included several inscriptions, believed to be anti-Arian/pro-Trinitarian in nature; which, even should that interpretation prove to be correct, would not necessarily conflict with my proposed dyophysite (i.e., Christological) interpretation.

Conclusions

While my research began by simply searching for ‘hidden’ or ‘unorthodox’ symbolic messages included in Byzantine and Early Christian art, it has concluded in a more philosophical manner. In seeking to understand how individuals and groups interact with (and react to)

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623 Ibid., 11-12, 43.
unspoken, codified messages, I have gained a new appreciation for the nuances expressed by the
polysemy of symbols and what they signify. In learning this, I have attempted to show how the
use of representational art in Byzantine décor grew substantially in metaphorical value and
import from its Hellenistic and Roman antecedents. Demus, in describing this dramatic change
in significance, observes that:

“In Byzantium, the beholder was not kept at a distance from the image; he entered within its aura
of sanctity, and the image, in turn, partook of the space in which he moved. He was not so much a
‘beholder’ as a ‘participant.’ While it does not aim at illusion, Byzantine religious art abolishes all
clear distinction between the world of reality and the world of appearance.”

As representational art grew to hold such an honored place in the decoration of sacred spaces, it
also served as a tool (perhaps unintentionally, at first) to bring about unity and order among the
various sects with their diverse doctrinal beliefs and traditions. Such a transition, from one
tightly held doctrine to another, was not always accepted, and both ecclesiastical and imperial
rulers occasionally approved more direct responses to bring about their envisaged concord
among Christians.

While some individuals felt that their belief system needed no correction and openly
contended with their opponents, others believed that such disputation would ultimately be futile.
Many of these divergent adherents chose to continue in their worship practices while drawing as
little attention to themselves as possible. In some cases, this practice met with mixed results, and
many either converted to the ‘orthodox’ position or emigrated to regions where they were
allowed to worship in their preferred manner. However, some may have chosen to remain and

624 Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (London:
Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 4. Demus’ reflection on the significance of devotional art as a
‘participatory’ experience dovetails nicely with aspects of Semiotics and Peirce’s conception of the
*interpretant*. The *interpretant* is intended as a separate sign that exists only in the mind of the viewer
which allows them to understand, or to connect with, the signified *object*. Through manipulating the
*interpretant*, individuals can connect and participate with the sign’s polysemous references/meanings.
University Press, 2016), 125-27.
find ways to continue practicing their beliefs sub rosa. To this end, such individuals may have turned to artistic decoration to help stylistically represent a doctrine without needing to overtly explain its meaning and subtext. Semiotics explains the multiple uses and meanings of signs depending on the changing contexts in which they are expressed. One such principle is the concept of polysemy, or the fact that signs and symbols encompass multiple meanings; however, because social convention is the arbiter of correspondence between signifier and signified, the full import of these alternate meanings can only be comprehended by those who have been properly initiated.

While the list of possible sects and doctrines that were deemed ‘unorthodox’ (at best) or ‘heretical’ (at worst) is extensive, I confined my research to three sects that were popularly received in a variety of areas: the Arians, the Manichaens, and the Nestorians. The major differences between Arian and Nestorian beliefs and those following the ‘orthodoxy’ of the ecumenical councils are mostly philosophical in nature. The Arian position was, in essence, a non-trinitarian belief (that while Jesus Christ was the Son of God, he was created with only a portion of God’s ‘grace’ or ‘divine essence’). Therefore, Arians believed that Jesus Christ was distinct from and subordinate to God the Father. Nestorian differences with mainstream orthodoxy were also mostly philosophical, and centered on identifying the ‘true nature’ of Jesus Christ. Nestorius and his followers argued that Jesus Christ was possessed of two natures, one divine and one mortal, which coexisted within his person yet were independent and separate from one another.

On the other end of the spectrum, Mani's followers incorporated various ‘pagan’ doctrines into their Gnostic-Christian dogma and were intensely reviled and persecuted within the Roman and Byzantine ecumenical spheres of influence. Manichaean texts describe the
significant incorporation of external influences into their dogmatic views, such as Buddhist and Zoroastrian cosmological interpretations and deities. These Eastern additions to Judeo-Christian traditions made Manichaean art unique throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and, subsequently, relatively simple for orthodox iconoclasts to identify and remove. Meanwhile, the philosophical differences held by Arian and Nestorian adherents made divergent artistic depictions much more challenging to identify. A significant component of this subtle complexity was related to perceived constraints around portraying the divinity or the ousia of a subject, namely that of Jesus Christ.\(^{626}\)

Challenges notwithstanding, 3\(^{rd}\)-6\(^{th}\)-century artists still chose to depict Christ's personage in various contexts and found ways to include additional clues denoting his divine nature. On this subject, Marini points out that the indexical/symbolic value of such additions varies, as “it might be wiser to assume that a more detailed determination of the allegorical value was entirely up to the different reading capacities of believers and their ministers.”\(^{627}\) Not only would the value of these signs vary according to their viewer, but their use may have been commonplace enough to have been manipulated by any number of heterodox splinter groups.\(^{628}\) Despite these challenges, I have successfully identified a few previously unspecified symbols appearing in mosaics recovered and now part of the archaeological record. These symbols, when combined with contextual evidence, point to their potential use as conveyors or vehicles of heterodox teachings in the Arian, Nestorian, and Manichaean heterodox sects. Thus, this study provides a foundation for further explorations into the diverse visual expressions of heterodox Christian


sects that existed during the Byzantine Era, some of which persisted in the face of numerous attempts to enforce the adoption of a harmonizing Christian doctrine throughout the world of Late Roman Antiquity.

Among the examples of figural representations identified in this study, some have proven to be fairly ubiquitous in their appearance within Christian art (e.g., Doves, Ducks, Peacocks, Pheasants, Oxen, Sheep, etc.; see Appendix A for a more complete accounting). Many of these representations appear to have been borrowed from earlier religious contexts and likely carried the same (or similar) symbolic connotations from their original contexts. For example, the Petra Church displays the highest concentration of figural depictions seen in this study. My research suggests that this is likely related to Petra’s distance from the center of the Byzantine orthodox ecumenical world and its proximity to several other religious and cultural spheres of influence (e.g., the Sassanian Empire, the cultural nexus of Egypt, and the Hellenistic influences from the 3rd century BCE-1st century CE). Supporting the theory that artistic representations drew upon contextual associations, the Theodorean Basilical Complex's mosaics also feature multiple pastoral and aquatic figures, likely because Aquileia was closely associated with its naval port.

Similar to figural representations being influenced by nearby cultural sources, certain figural and geometric illustrations, which may have originated from earlier mythical and cultural sources, likely developed additional significance within their new religio-cultural contexts. Prime examples of these altered geometric motifs include ‘wave crest’ or water-type patterns, which became associated with the ‘water of everlasting life,’ the waters of baptism, and the bodies of water that separated Heaven and Earth.629 Similarly, variations of ‘Knot’ and

‘Guilloche’ patterns appear in each of the examined churches and also underwent a change in symbolic meaning.

While used as an *apotropaic* device (as discussed in Chapter 3), the interlacing bands of the ‘Knot’ motif grew to hold symbolic significance beyond that suggested by cursory examination. A study of various ‘Solomon’s Knot’ motifs evokes a symbiotic linking of separate elements (portrayed via the cords’ two distinct hues) into a single product. In these designs, the bands, or elements, do not appear to have a beginning or end point, but are eternally intertwined. These two bands are often portrayed in shades of red and blue, which colors are also used in clouds to symbolize Heaven and Earth. My study has led me to suggest that not only was this coloration intended to represent the unity of Heaven and Earth during the future ‘Messianic Age,’ but was also likely used to promote the Christological (*dyophysite*) belief in the ‘prosopic union’ of Jesus Christ’s two discrete natures.

Furthermore, in my on-site researches, I found that some of the strands in the ‘Solomon’s Knot’ motif were comprised of *three* different shades rather than one solid color. While this could have been simple artistic choice showcasing the composer's skill, the trio of hues could also have been intended to represent the Trinity's unity and omnipresence in all things. This Trinitarian argument does not seem to be at odds with the Christological interpretation, which may have played a factor in the widespread use of this particular motif.

While ‘Solomon’s Knot’ is one of the most common ‘Knot’ motifs used in Early Christian art, variants (e.g., ‘Solomon’s Knot and Square’) and analogous motifs (e.g., the ‘Guilloche’ braid) can also be found in similar settings with comparable connotations. As an *apotropaic* design, ‘Guilloche’ motifs were often used as border decorations but can also be found styled into cruciform shapes within the mosaic itself (Figures 4.9-12, 33, 38, 123). While
most of the braids found in this study only display two strands, other variants, such as the border of Mosaic IV in the South Theodorean Hall (Figure 4.38), have been recorded using three intertwining strands to form the braid. Given my research, I suggest the use of three strands was possibly intended as a statement on the nature of the Trinity. Considering that each of the three strands is separate and distinct, yet are unified with the other two, and the fact that this example specifically appears in Aquileia (a region known for its pro-Arian proclivities), I submit that this specific variant was intended as a subtle portrayal of Arian dogmatic beliefs.

In a similar fashion, the stylization of the apsidal cross in the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe could also represent more than Jesus Christ at the Transfiguration. While scholars do not yet have a specific description of a so-called ‘Nestorian Cross,’ my research suggests the possibility that the configuration of the example from Classe could convey *dyophysite* Christological arguments. My theory is based on three points, namely that: 1) analogous cruciform depictions and artifacts have been found within Manichaean contexts in Central Asia, 2) correlation between some quasi-comparable interpretations of Christ’s nature amongst the Manichaeans and Nestorians, and 3) the fact that the Bishop of nearby Aquileia initially refused to condemn the Three Chapters and Nestorianism, suggesting the presence of a sizable Nestorian community. The combination of these three points seems to indicate the continued existence of a heterodox community and its influence on the decoration of a nearby church.

In summary, while it is plausible that hidden messages were expressed through the medium of church mosaics and other sacred art, most of the examples explored in this paper have proven to be inconclusive. This is due mainly to the nature of the aforementioned heterodox doctrines, compared against mainstream (i.e., ‘Nicene’ or ‘orthodox’) Christianity, but

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whose salient differences centered around doctrinal disputes that did not lend themselves to being readily displayed through artistic mediums. Additionally, many examples of Early Christian art (e.g., mosaics, icons, paintings, etc.) were destroyed or altered after the Islamic conquests of the Transjordan (7th-8th century CE) as well as during the iconoclastic Byzantine periods of the 8th and 9th century CE. As a result, many depictions related to these heterodox sects have been lost or otherwise compromised. Thus, without further textual evidence to support some of these proposed interpretations, the semiotic ambiguity that remains is such that clear distinctions cannot be made without reference to contemporaneous events and groups operating in the region. However, as also noted throughout the text, these results also conform to the polysemous character of signs and symbols which supports the possibility of multiple interpretations existing simultaneously.

This analysis was only made possible by: 1) identifying which mosaic programs in Jordan and Italy were still extant for study from this era and recording and unraveling their mosaic programs; 2) researching the archaeological viability of original mosaic programs versus possible later restorations and/or alterations; 3) researching each church’s historical context, with regards to notable personalities, doctrines existing in the geographical region, and the relationship of each church’s location to its potential exposure to trade and cultural exchange; 4) researching the uses and types of Christian symbols existing and evolving during the Early Byzantine period (3rd-6th century CE); 5) studying divergent Christian sects with regard to their various philosophies and potential visual works; and 6) applying semiotic theory to the above data. In conclusion, my research has shown that interdisciplinary approaches to unravelling the polysemous nature of symbols allow researchers to better conceptualize the significations of those symbols. While not every aspect of a symbolic association may be understood, our
understanding can only be improved by increasing the catalog of datapoints, and associating those examples with their appropriate contexts, be it historical, religious, cultural, etc. While this work is only partially complete, I hope that it will be seen as a starting point for future interdisciplinary studies exploring the use of signs and symbolism in Early Christian contexts.
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## Appendix A – Table of Symbols, Locations, and Meanings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>The Petra Church</th>
<th>Symbol also appears in…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aquatic Animals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolphin</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of resurrection and salvation; Associated with Dionysus, Atargatis, Isis, and Allat</td>
<td>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eel</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Common food in Mediterranean, possible inclusion to add variety of Aquatic life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish (various)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>M I: c. 525-550 CE, M II: c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Associated with Jesus Christ (e.g., ἵχθυς as an acronym, miracles performed, etc.); common food source in Mediterranean; Symbolic of experiencing life, and gaining knowledge, ideas, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shell (e.g., scallop, conch, etc.)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Birth, regeneration/resurrection, Creation; associated with Isis and Aphrodite</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stingray</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Commonly found in the Mediterranean, venom was used in Antiquity for medicinal properties</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Symbol also appears in...</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Avians</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</strong></td>
<td><strong>Church of SS. Lot and Procopius</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds (Nonspecific)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Typically used as representations of worthy souls who have ascended into Heaven</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken (incl. Rooster)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>M I: c. 525-550 CE M II: c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Nurturing instincts; Rooster: Symbolic of Vigilance, also assoc. w/ Peter’s denial of Christ</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dove</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>M I: c. 525-550 CE M II: c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Purity, Aspiration, Gentleness, Peace; Associated with Aphrodite/Atargatis; Symbol attached to the Holy Ghost</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Assoc. w/ Isis in Egyptian mythos; Symbolic of Immortality in Hebrew mythos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Symbol also appears in…</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Eagle  | Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II) | M I: c. 525-550 CE  
M II: c. 450-500 CE | Symbolic of Resurrection; used as divine and royal symbols (e.g., Jesus Christ, Baal, Zeus, Dushares, etc.); Christian Victory (after Constantine I); Symbol attached to St. John | Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian  
Theodorean Basilica  
Church of San Vitale  
Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe |
| Goose  | Side Aisle (Mosaic I)   | c. 525-550 CE | Symbol of Vigilance, Providence; also associated with Egyptian god Amun, Harpocrates        | X  
X |
| Ibis   | Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II) | M I: c. 525-550 CE  
M II: c. 450-500 CE | In Egyptian mythos, symbolic of Soul, Aspiration, Wisdom, Sacred to Thoth, Destroyer of Reptiles; local to Transjordan and Africa | X  
X  
X |
| Ostrich| Side Aisle (Mosaic I and III) | c. 525-550 CE | Exotic bird found in North Africa and Arabia; no apparent sacred significance               | X  
X  
X  
X |
| Peacock| Side Aisle (Mosaic I)   | c. 525-550 CE | Immortality, Purity, and Incorruption                                                       | X  
X  
X  
X  
X |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</th>
<th>Church of SS. Lot and Procopius</th>
<th>Theodorean Basilica</th>
<th>Church of San Vitale</th>
<th>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pheasant (incl. Quail)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>M I: c. 525-550 CE M II: c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Commonly hunted game birds; Symbolic of ‘Manna in the Wilderness’ (and Eucharist), Fertility; alternately represents the return of ‘True Followers of Christ’</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandgrouse</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Nurturing instincts; local to Transjordan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stork/Heron</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>M I: c. 525-550 CE M II: c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Faithfulness and Piety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Immortality, Resurrection, Advancing from a lower state to a higher one</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>M I: c. 525-550 CE M II: c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Resurrection (after winter hibernation); New Life after conversion; also symbolic of Devil, Greed, Cruelty, Carnal Appetite</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camel</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Beast of Burden, commonly seen in Transjordan; associated with Dushares</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### The Petra Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
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<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Symbol also appears in…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Cattle (incl. Bull, Calf, etc.)** | Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II) | M I: c. 525-550 CE  
M II: c. 450-500 CE | Symbolic of Reverence and Obedience to Higher powers; common Beast of Burden and food source; Symbol attached to St. Luke | Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian  
Church of SS. Lot and Procopius  
Theodorean Basilica  
Church of San Vitale  
Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe |
| **Deer (incl. Gazelle, Antelope, etc.)** | Side Aisle (Mosaic I, II, and III) | M I & III: c. 525-550 CE  
M II: c. 450-500 CE | Symbolic of Gentile converts, often seen drinking from ‘waters of life;’ soul fleeing earthly passions | Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian  
Church of SS. Lot and Procopius  
Theodorean Basilica  
Church of San Vitale  
Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe |
| **Dog**                | Side Aisle (Mosaic I)   | c. 525-550 CE        | Used in Old Testament as symbols of Destruction, but used in Late Antiquity as symbols of Fidelity; also common additions in hunting scenes | Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian  
Church of SS. Lot and Procopius  
Theodorean Basilica  
Church of San Vitale  
Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe |
| **Donkey**             | Side Aisle (Mosaic I)   | c. 525-550 CE        | Commonly used Beasts of Burden; subservience to a Higher power | Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian  
Church of SS. Lot and Procopius  
Theodorean Basilica  
Church of San Vitale  
Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe |
| **Elephant**           | Side Aisle (Mosaic I)   | c. 525-550 CE        | Often assoc. w/ Alexander the Great and, later, Hadrian; exotic animal native to Africa | Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian  
Church of SS. Lot and Procopius  
Theodorean Basilica  
Church of San Vitale  
Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe |
| **Giraffe**            | Side Aisle (Mosaic I)   | c. 525-550 CE        | Exotic animal native to Africa; poss. symbolic of wealth and trade connections | Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian  
Church of SS. Lot and Procopius  
Theodorean Basilica  
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Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Not commonly found in the religious art of Late Antiquity; likely included as part of pastoral scenery and sign of personal wealth</td>
<td>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian X Church of SS. Lot and Procopius X Theodorean Basilica X Church of San Vitale X Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leopard</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Treacherous and Devouring Beast (Devil), manifestation of Evil, unrepentant sinner; assoc. w/ Dionysus (thus possibly used as representation of Christ)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>M I: c. 525-550 CE M II: c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Power, Strength, Authority; can be used to represent either Good or Evil; Symbol attached to St. Mark, Dushares</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig/Boar</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Staple food in Roman/Byzantine diets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian symbol of Rebirth, Renewal, and Fertility; symbol of Egyptian god Osiris</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Petra Church

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I  and III)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Symbolically associated with Innocence, Penitence, Purity; Sacrificial Offering (i.e. Jesus Christ)</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Depictions of Flora**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruits</th>
<th>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</th>
<th>c. 525-550 CE</th>
<th>Symbolic of Lust (Genesis 3:7 KJV), but also Fertility, Fruitfulness, and Good Works</th>
<th>X X X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grapes</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Eucharist and “True Vine”; when combined with Cherubs, can be used as Symbols of Dionysus and Dushares</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melons</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Semi-exotic fruit that had begun to circulate in the Mediterranean in Antiquity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomegranates</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Eternity, Fertility, Royalty (crown-like top); if open with seeds visible, reference to Resurrection and open tomb, blood-red juice is life from death</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinecone</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Assoc. w/ Dionysus; Fecundity, seen as a great generative and Creative force; also assoc. w/ evergreen trees and mourning</td>
<td>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree (w/ Fruit)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>‘Tree of Life’; resulting blessings from good deeds</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree (w/o Fruit)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Palm Tree used as substitute for ‘Tree of Life’; palm fronds are also symbolic of immortality (i.e. evergreen trees) and victory over sin</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vine (Grape)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>“True Vine” (Jesus Christ); Reference to the Church and Promised Land; previously associated with Dionysus and Dushares (Nabataean deity)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representations of ‘Natural’ Figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fisherman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fowler</td>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Representative of commerce and trade of exotic goods in region</td>
<td>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porter/Servant</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Representative of commerce; amphora of wine poss. Symbolic of Eucharist or ‘water of life’</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepherd (incl. Kriophoros)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 525-550 CE</td>
<td>Jesus Christ (originally borrowed from Hermes or Dionysus); sometimes only intended as an addition for pastoral scenes</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Representations of ‘Supernatural’ Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aquatic Deity</th>
<th>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</th>
<th>c. 450-500 CE</th>
<th>Ωκεανός (Ocean), has similar iconography to other Classical Period marine deities; part of temporum felicitas/‘Golden Age’ motif</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autumn (Season)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Φθινοπωρινή (Autumn); part of temporum felicitas/‘Golden Age’ motif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Γη (Earth); part of temporum felicitas/‘Golden Age’ motif</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Petra Church

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<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring (Season)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Εαρινή (Spring); part of temporum felicitas/‘Golden Age’ motif</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer (Season)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Θερινή (Summer), nurturing nature; part of temporum felicitas/‘Golden Age’ motif</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter (Season)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Χιμερινή (Winter); part of temporum felicitas/‘Golden Age’ motif</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Σοφία (Wisdom), attribute considered to be sacred, often seen holding a scroll or book representing the Gospels</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Misc</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilloche Braid</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>M I: c. 525-550 CE M II: c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlaced Circle and Square</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Likely apotropaic, similar to the ‘sacred rope’ around the Egyptian cartouche</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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The Petra Church

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vessels (i.e., ceramic pots, metal urns, kraters, baskets, Pyxis, etc.)</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>M I: c. 525-550 CE M II: c. 450-500 CE</td>
<td>Unknown if the design has significance, but likely linked closely to the contents of the vessel (e.g., Water = Waters of Life, baptism; Wine = Eucharist; etc.); certain shapes and types of vessels can be associated with different types of held goods or deities (e.g., Harpocrates, etc.)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aquatic Animals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fish (various)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Associated with Jesus Christ (e.g., ιχθύς as an acronym, miracles performed, etc.); common food source in Mediterranean; Symbolic of experiencing life, and gaining knowledge, ideas, etc.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avians</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken (incl. Rooster)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Nurturing instincts; Rooster: Symbolic of Vigilance, also assoc. w/ Peter’s denial of Christ</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dove</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Purity, Aspiration, Gentleness, Peace; Associated with Aphrodite/Atargatis; Symbol attached to the Holy Ghost</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II and III)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>In Egyptian mythos, assoc. w/ Isis; In Hebrew mythos, Symbolic of immortality</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flamingo</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Unknown meaning, possibly another Ibis</td>
<td>X?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibis</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>In Egyptian mythos, symbolic of Soul, Aspiration, Wisdom, Sacred to Thoth, Destroyer of Reptiles; local to Transjordan and Africa</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacock</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Immortality, Purity, and Incorruption</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pheasant (incl. Quail)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Commonly hunted game birds; Symbolic of ‘Manna in the Wilderness’ (and Eucharist), Fertility; alternately represents the return of ‘True Followers of Christ’</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Resurrection (after winter hibernation); New Life after conversion; also symbolic of Devil, Greed, Cruelty, Carnal Appetite</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle (incl. Bull, Calf, Oxen, etc.)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Reverence and Obedience to Higher powers; common Beast of Burden and food source; Symbol attached to St. Luke</td>
<td>X</td>
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### The Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian

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<tr>
<td>Deer (incl. Gazelle)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Gentile converts, often seen drinking from ‘waters of life;’ soul fleeing earthly passions</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Used in Old Testament as symbols of Destruction, but used in Late Antiquity as symbols of Fidelity and Companionship; also common additions in hunting scenes</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Commonly used Beasts of Burden; subservience to a Higher power</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elephant</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Often assoc. w/ Alexander the Great and, later, Hadrian; exotic animal native to Africa</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giraffe</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Exotic animal native to Africa; poss. symbolic of wealth and trade connections</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Common herd animal in region; sometimes symbolic of lower qualities and virtues, as opposed to the representation of a sheep</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
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<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Not commonly found in the religious art of Late Antiquity; likely included as part of pastoral scenery and sign of personal wealth</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Power, Strength, Authority; can be used to represent either Good or Evil; Symbol attached to St. Mark, Dushares</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian symbol of Rebirth, Renewal, and Fertility; symbol of Egyptian god Osiris</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep (incl. Ibex, Lamb, Ram, etc.)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Symbolically associated with Innocence, Penitence, Purity; Sacrificial Offering (i.e. Jesus Christ)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily (Flower)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Symbol of Purity and fertility (in Nilotic scenes); associated with St. Mary and Annunciation</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vine (Grape)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>“True Vine” (Jesus Christ); Reference to the spreading of the Gospel; previously associated with Dionysus</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Depictions of Humans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representations of ‘Natural’ Figures</th>
<th>Mosaic I</th>
<th>Mosaic II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patron/Patroness</td>
<td>Nave</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priest/Clergy</td>
<td>Nave</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Mosaic I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Geometric Motifs

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The Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian

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<tr>
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<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acanthus Diaper</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Likely based on Chancel Screen decoration, associated with significance of Acanthus bushes/vines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box in Perspective</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Likely used as a reference to Jesus Christ as a personification of the ‘Sun’/‘Son of God’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checkerboard</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Relatively simple pattern, likely based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crenellated Swastika</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Various uses of swastika originated in Hindu traditions, but became relatively common throughout the Mediterranean and Europe, typically associated with ‘good fortune,’ ‘eternity,’ and ‘the sun’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamond and Square motif</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Significance unknown; number ‘4’ and used to symbolize the Earth and terrestrial spaces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaper pattern</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Simple pattern to reproduce, possibly based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Figure Eight Loop’ or ‘Seed of Life’ pattern</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Protective device comprising six interlacing circles, symbolic of divine creation (representative of the six days of creation in the Old Testament)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian

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<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
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<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Petra Church</th>
<th>Church of SS. Lot and Procopius</th>
<th>Theodorean Basilica</th>
<th>Church of San Vitale</th>
<th>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Folded Serpentine Wheel</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, though the mesmerizing design could be made to resemble rays of light from the Sun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilloche Circle</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indented Diamond pattern</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Simple pattern to reproduce, possibly based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indented Hexagons</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Similar design to the ‘Indented Diamonds,’ possibly based on Chancel Screen decoration; hexagons and the number ‘6’ often associated with Creation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indented Square</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Simple pattern to reproduce, possibly based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlacing Circles</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Likely <em>apotropaic</em>, similar to the ‘sacred rope’ around the Egyptian cartouche</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlacing Hexagons</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references and creation</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlacing Ovals</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references and heaven; similar to ‘Interlacing Circles’ pattern</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interlacing Plait</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
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<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Symbol also appears in…</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlacing Quadrants</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references; Given the division into 4 quadrants and an interlaced circle, also probably associated with the unity of Heaven and Earth</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlacing Square</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td>Church of SS. Lot and Procopius Theodorean Basilica Church of San Vitale Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlacing Triangles</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Design resembles a star, possibly the ‘Star of Bethlehem;’ Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looped Diamond and Interlacing Square</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meander and Square border</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Various uses of swastika originated in Hindu traditions, but became relatively common throughout the Mediterranean and Europe, typically associated with ‘good fortune’ and ‘eternity’</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Guilloche</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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## The Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian

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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Net’ motif</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references; possibly also used to indicate fishing (either in a literal sense or as a metaphor for proselytizing, depending on context)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octagon, Diamond, and Lozenge</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Design is made up of several shapes and designs but, when taken together, suggests an emphasis on eternal unification of heaven and earth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quatrefoil and Interlacing Square</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references; possibly a unification between heaven and earth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale motif</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Inclusion in other example of artwork suggests that this pattern was based on Chancel Screen decorative patterns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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## The Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solomon’s Knot</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Apotropaic connotations, possibly similar to Hellenistic representations of Alexander’s ‘Gordian Knot’; symbolic of Solomon’s wisdom and eternity (i.e., no starting or ending points) Two materials (different colors) unified into one – <em>dyophysite</em> connotation (e.g., ‘hypostatic union,’ ‘prosopic union,’ etc.); each band can contain a tricolor shading – possibly suggestive of trinitarian doctrine Usually depicted with shades of Red (Earth) and Blue (Heaven)</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon’s Knot and Square</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Similar to the basic ‘Solomon’s Knot’ design, an apotropaic knot intertwined with a ribbon forming a square</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessels (i.e., ceramic pots, metal urns, kraters, baskets, etc.)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>529-533 CE</td>
<td>Unknown if the design has significance, but likely linked closely to the contents of the vessel (e.g., Water = Waters of Life, baptism; Wine = Eucharist; etc.); certain shapes and types of vessels can be associated with different types of held goods or deities (e.g., Harpocrates, etc.)</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Church of SS. Lot and Procopius

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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Theodorean Basilica</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish (various)</td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic V and VI)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Associated with Jesus Christ (e.g., ψηθύς as an acronym, miracles performed, etc.); Common food source in Mediterranean; Symbolic of experiencing life, and gaining knowledge, ideas, etc.</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic IV and VI)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>In Egyptian mythos, assoc. w/ Isis; In Hebrew mythos, symbolic of Immortality</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goose</td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic VIII)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Symbol of Vigilance, Providence; also associated with Egyptian god Amun, Harpocrates</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibis</td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic VI)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>In Egyptian mythos, symbolic of Soul, Aspiration, Wisdom, Sacred to Thoth, Destroyer of Reptiles; local to Transjordan and Africa</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Aquatic Animals

- **Fish (various)**
  - Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic V and VI)
  - Date: c. 557-597 CE
  - Possible Symbolic Meaning: Associated with Jesus Christ (e.g., ψηθύς as an acronym, miracles performed, etc.); Common food source in Mediterranean; Symbolic of experiencing life, and gaining knowledge, ideas, etc.

#### Avians

- **Duck**
  - Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic IV and VI)
  - Date: c. 557-597 CE
  - Possible Symbolic Meaning: In Egyptian mythos, assoc. w/ Isis; In Hebrew mythos, symbolic of Immortality

- **Goose**
  - Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic VIII)
  - Date: c. 557-597 CE
  - Possible Symbolic Meaning: Symbol of Vigilance, Providence; also associated with Egyptian god Amun, Harpocrates

- **Ibis**
  - Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic VI)
  - Date: c. 557-597 CE
  - Possible Symbolic Meaning: In Egyptian mythos, symbolic of Soul, Aspiration, Wisdom, Sacred to Thoth, Destroyer of Reptiles; local to Transjordan and Africa
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pheasant (incl. Quail, Partridge)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II and X)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Commonly hunted game birds; Symbolic of ‘Manna in the Wilderness’ (and Eucharist), Fertility; alternately represents the return of ‘True Followers of Christ’</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capricorn</td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Half-Goat, Half-Fish; used in Zodiac to symbolize higher nature/spiritual state rising from a lower state; Connections with Amalthea and Cornucopia (i.e. creation and perpetual abundance); Possible connection to Jesus Christ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrestrial Animals</td>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Resurrection (after winter hibernation); New Life after conversion; if hunted, symbolic of the Devil, Greed, Cruelty, Carnal Appetite</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle (incl. Bull, Calf, etc.)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Reverence and Obedience to Higher powers; common Beast of Burden and food source; Symbol attached to St. Luke</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deer (incl. Gazelle)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III and VII)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Gentile converts, often seen drinking from ‘waters of life;’ soul fleeing earthly passions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Used in Old Testament as symbols of Destruction, but used in Late Antiquity as symbols of Fidelity and Companionship; common additions in hunting scenes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Commonly used Beasts of Burden; subservience to a Higher power; common sight in pastoral scenes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Symbol of Devil, Cunning, Guile, Fraud; alternately, a relatively common sight in rural areas, and may be present to round out pastoral scenery</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Power, Strength, Authority; can be used to represent either Good or Evil; Symbol attached to St. Mark, Dushares</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II and III)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian symbol of Rebirth, Renewal, and Fertility; prey animal in hunting scenes; symbol of Egyptian god Osiris</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep (incl. Ibex, Lamb, Ram, etc.)</td>
<td>Chancel (Mosaic I) Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Symbolically associated with Innocence, Penitence, Purity; Sacrificial Offering (i.e. Jesus Christ) Chancel, M I: Depicted facing a representation of the ‘Tree of Life’</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Power, Strength; exotic animal from the East, usually used in Christian art to represent Evil</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Fruits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depictions of Fruits</th>
<th>Symbol also appears in…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citron</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figs</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapes</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The Church of SS. Lot and Procopius

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pears</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian association with Isis; Often appears in Christian contexts as symbolic of Christ’s love</td>
<td>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</td>
</tr>
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<td>Theodorean Basilica</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chancel (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Eternity, Fertility, Royalty (crown-like top); if open with seeds visible, reference to Resurrection and open tomb, blood-red juice is life from death</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic VI)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Symbol of Purity and fertility (in Nilotic scenes); associated with St. Mary and Annunciation</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic IV and VIII)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Wisdom and Knowledge; Referred to as ‘Grass of Guidance’ or ‘Vegetable of Knowledge’ in Ancient Near Eastern religions, used in Egyptian myths to symbolize a vehicle for ‘Divine Wisdom’</td>
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# The Church of SS. Lot and Procopius

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<th>Symbol</th>
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<th>Petra Church</th>
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<th>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tree (w/ Fruit)</td>
<td>Chancel (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>‘Tree of Life,’ Symbolic of the coming ‘Messianic Age;’ resulting blessings from good deeds</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Mosaic VII)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vine (Acanthus)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Heaven, resurrection, eternity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vine (Grape)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>“True Vine” (Jesus Christ); Reference to the Church and Promised Land; previously associated with Dionysus</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

<p>| Representations of ‘Natural’ Figures | | | | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boatman</td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Relevance based on context; Seen here rowing small boat laden with goods, likely representative of abundant trade and commerce in area</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Field Worker</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Relevance based on context; Seen here working around grapes, possibly a reference to ‘Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard’ (i.e. building the ‘Kingdom of God’)</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fisherman</td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Possibly included as relevant to pastoral scenes near water sources; Possible reference to Disciples of Christ as ‘Fishers of Men’</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Common addition for pastoral/daily life scenes; potentially symbolic of defending Church/Christians from external evils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depictions of Humans</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepherd (incl. Kriophoros)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Jesus Christ (originally borrowed from Hermes or Dionysus); sometimes only intended as an addition for pastoral scenes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patron/Patroness</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaics II and III) Side Aisle (Mosaic X)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>M II: Stephen and Elias – (inscription only) brothers listed as donors and as the “children of Cometisa” Sergius and Procopius – (inscription only) father and son donors Rabata – (inscription only) “[daughter] of Anastasia,” asking for welfare (possibly alive or dead) John, son of Anastasius – (inscription only) prayer for ‘repose’ (likely deceased and is prayer/donation made on behalf of his soul) M III: Epiphania – (inscription only) prayer for mercy M X: Rome, Porphyria, and Mary – (inscription only) mentioned as servants in prayer to St. Lot</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
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## The Church of SS. Lot and Procopius

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misc.</td>
<td>Altar</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic III)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Fire atop altar suggests sacrifice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Geometric Motifs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Diamond, Leaf, and Circle’ motif</td>
<td>Nave – Border (Mosaic II and III)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, possibly used to provide a ‘jeweled’ decorative effect to the composition; possibly intended to signify Heaven (circle), Earth (square/diamond), and the Garden of Eden/Paradise of the ‘Messianic Age’ (leaf)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interlacing Diamond</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic IX)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Likely intended as an apotropaic device, considering its position at an entrance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scale motif</td>
<td>Side Aisle (Mosaic IX and X)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Inclusion in other example of artwork suggests that this pattern was based on Chancel Screen decorative patterns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Wave-Crest’ pattern</td>
<td>Nave – Border (Mosaic II and III)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Common decorative motif in Greco-Roman art, possibly used to signify the waters of Baptism or to represent the waters created above and below the firmament (Revelation 4:6 KJV)</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structures</td>
<td>Intercolumnar Panel (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Possibly a church (maybe a visualization of SS. Lot and Procopius)</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Vessels (i.e., ceramic pots, metal urns, kraters, baskets, etc.)</td>
<td>Nave (Mosaic II) Side Aisle (Mosaic X)</td>
<td>c. 557-597 CE</td>
<td>Unknown if the design has significance, but likely linked closely to the contents of the vessel (e.g., Water = Waters of Life, baptism; Wine = Eucharist; etc.); certain shapes and types of vessels can be associated with different types of held goods or deities (e.g., Harpocrates, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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## The Theodorean Basilical Complex

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<tr>
<td><strong>Aquatic Animals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dolphin</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics I, VIII, and X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of resurrection and salvation; Associated with Dionysus, Atargatis, Isis, and Allat</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish (various)</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics V, VIII, and X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Associated with Jesus Christ (e.g., ιχθύς as an acronym, miracles performed, etc.); common food source in Mediterranean; Symbolic of experiencing life, and gaining knowledge, ideas, etc.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobster</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, possibly used as a <em>miaphysite/dyophysite</em> symbol of the ‘hypostatic’ or ‘prosopic union’ within Jesus Christ</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Octopus</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics I, V, and X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, may have been included to emphasize maritime connections with the surrounding region</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shell (e.g., scallop, conch, etc.)</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics V and X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Birth, regeneration/resurrection, Creation; associated with Isis and Aphrodite</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stingray (Skate)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic V) S Hall (Mosaic X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>A common foodstuff in Italy; possibly representative of the Holy Ghost</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avians</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds (Nonspecific)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaics II and III) S Hall (Mosaics I, II, V, VI, VIII, and IX)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Usually depicted as perched upon a branch with some variety of fruit (Note: identification of the birds may be possible if correlated between the fruit’s harvest season and the birds’ migratory habits) Typically used as representations of worthy souls who have ascended into Heaven</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken (incl. Rooster)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic VI) S Hall (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Nurturing instincts; Rooster: Symbolic of Vigilance, also assoc. w/ Peter’s denial of Christ Possibly used here to represent the coming of the dawn and a ‘Warrior of Light’</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depictions of Fauna</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dove</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic IV) S Hall (Mosaic VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Purity, Aspiration, Gentleness, Peace; Associated with Aphrodite/Atargatis; Symbol attached to the Holy Ghost</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics VIII and X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Assoc. w/ Isis in Egyptian mythos; Symbolic of Immortality in Hebrew mythos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacock</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Immortality, Purity, and Incorruption</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pheasant (incl. Quail)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaics IV-V, and VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Commonly hunted game birds; Symbolic of ‘Manna in the Wilderness’ (and Eucharist), Fertility; alternately represents the return of ‘True Followers of Christ’</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raven</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Sometimes perceived as an ill-omen, but also associated with bringing food to Elijah and other ‘hermit’ saints</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stork/Heron</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Faithfulness and Piety</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depictions of Fauna</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mythical Creatures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leviathan</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Depicted in reference to the story of Jonah who was swallowed by a “great fish” (Jonah 1:15-17 KJV)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified “Winged quadruped”</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Uncertain significance, possibly symbolic of St. Mark (Four Evangelists) or a member of the Zodiac</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrestrial Animals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle (incl. Bull, Calf, etc.)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic III)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Reverence and Obedience to Higher powers; common Beast of Burden and food source; Symbol attached to St. Luke</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deer (incl. Gazelle)</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics III and VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Gentile converts, often seen drinking from ‘waters of life;’ soul fleeing earthly passions</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Commonly used Beasts of Burden; subservience to a Higher power</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic III)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The Theodorean Basilical Complex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Symbol also appears in…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fox</strong></td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic III)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbol of Devil, Cunning, Guile, Fraud; alternately, a relatively common sight in rural areas, and may be present to round out pastoral scenery</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goat</strong></td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaics III-V), S Hall (Mosaics III, VIII, and IX)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Common herd animal in region; sometimes symbolic of lower qualities and virtues, as opposed to the representation of a sheep. Likely depicted here as a sacrificial offering</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horse</strong></td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Not commonly found in the religious art of Late Antiquity; likely included as part of pastoral scenery and sign of personal wealth</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rabbit</strong></td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic III), S Hall (Mosaic IX)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian symbol of Rebirth, Renewal, and Fertility; symbol of Egyptian god Osiris</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Theodorean Basilical Complex

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serpent</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Particular representation of Satan, Darkness, and Evil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep (incl. Ibex, Lamb, Ram, etc.)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic III and VI) S Hall (Mosaic III, VIII, and IX)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolically associated with Innocence, Penitence, Purity; Sacrificial Offering (i.e. Jesus Christ)</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snails</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic III)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Common foodstuff in Italy; Christian symbol of Sinners and the ‘Natural Man’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tortoise</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic VI) S Hall (Mosaics IV and VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Representation of Darkness and Evil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fruits*
### The Theodorean Basilical Complex

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<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Symbol also appears in…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cherries</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Called the ‘Fruit of Paradise’ because of red color and sweetness, symbolic reward for good deeds</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Church of SS, Cosmas and Damian</td>
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<td>Church of SS, Lot and Procopius</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Church of San Vitale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citron</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of a loving nature, also associated with Mary (similar to Lemons)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figs</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Lust (Genesis 3:7 KJV), but also Fertility, Fruitfulness, and Good Works</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VIII)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gourds</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Usually associated with Jonah, also symbolic of Resurrection</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaches</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaics IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Charity and Salvation</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics VI and VIII)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pears</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VI)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian association with Isis; Often appears in Christian contexts as symbolic of Christ’s love</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomegranates</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic IV) S Hall (Mosaics VI and VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Eternity, Fertility, Royalty (crown-like top); if open with seeds visible, reference to Resurrection and open tomb, blood-red juice is life from death</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic III)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>While regularly eaten in Italy, exact identification and symbolism of this inclusion is unknown; rarely seen in Christian art – possibly used as part of an Early Christian rite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree (w/o Fruit)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Palm Tree used as substitute for ‘Tree of Life;’ palm fronds are also symbolic of immortality (i.e. evergreen trees) and victory over sin Seen here in form of the Arbor Crucis (‘Tree of the Cross’)</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vine (Acanthus)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaics II/III–border, IV, and VI)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of heaven, resurrection, eternity</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Representations of ‘Natural’ Figures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depictions of Humans</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Petra Church</th>
<th>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</th>
<th>Church of SS. Lot and Procopius</th>
<th>Church of San Vitale</th>
<th>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boatman</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Depicted in connection with the story of Jonah</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Workers</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VI)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Relevance based on context; Seen here working around grapes, possibly a reference to ‘Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard’ (i.e. building the ‘Kingdom of God’)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
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391
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
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<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Petra Church</th>
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<th>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals from the Old Testament</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>M X: Jonah – Missionary prophet who sinned, repented, and was blessed; story is often used as an allegory for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patron/Patroness</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic III and VI)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>M IV: Januarius – (inscription only) noted for donating “880 feet” M VI: Cyriacus – inscription declares “May you, Cyriacus, live in eternity,” and is accompanied by a Ram</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patron/Patroness (Unnamed)</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics I, II, and V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>M I: 4 Women M II: 4 Men and 1 Woman M V: 3 Women and 1 Man</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priest/Clergy</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unnamed, possibly lay clergy or patrons</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepherd (incl. Kriophoros)</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Jesus Christ (originally borrowed from Hermes or Dionysus); sometimes only intended as an addition for pastoral scenes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Representation of ‘Supernatural’ Figures**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Symbol also appears in…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VI)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Christian Victory (modeled similar to Nike), stands offering victory laurels over symbols of the Eucharist</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn (Season)</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unnamed, but likely depicted as part of <em>temporum felicitas</em>/<em>Golden Age</em> motif</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silhouette</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Likely included as an apotropaic device, possibly associated with early baptismal rites</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring (Season)</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unnamed, but likely depicted as part of <em>temporum felicitas</em>/<em>Golden Age</em> motif</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer (Season)</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unnamed, but likely depicted as part of <em>temporum felicitas</em>/<em>Golden Age</em> motif</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winged Putti</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic X)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Depicted in the act of fishing, likely in reference to missionaries as “fishers of men” (Jeremiah 16:16 KJV; Mark 1:17 KJV; Matthew 4:19 KJV)</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Theodorean Basilical Complex

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geometric Motifs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter (Season)</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unnamed, but likely depicted as part of <em>temporum felicitas</em>/'Golden Age' motif</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checkerboard</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics IV and VII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Relatively simple pattern, likely based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circles and Rounded Diamonds</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Loosely resembles silhouette of the ‘Looped Diamond’ pattern which conveniently places the depicted figures at the center of a cruciform shape</td>
<td>X?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crenellation</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Relatively simple pattern, likely based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Miscellaneous</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosette (various iterations)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Relatively simple pattern, likely based on elements of Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Firey Suns’</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic V) S Hall (Mosaic VII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unknown significance, possibly apotropaic or a solar symbol referencing Jesus Christ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilloche braid (various iterations)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic III) S Hall (Mosaics I, II, IV, and VI-VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlacing Circles</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic II/III border)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Likely <em>apotropaic</em>, similar to the ‘sacred rope’ around an Egyptian cartouche</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersecting Circles</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic V) S Hall (Mosaic VII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian decorative motif, perhaps used to symbolize the interconnected nature of heaven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meander</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic I)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Various uses of swastika originated in Hindu traditions, but became relatively common throughout the Mediterranean and Europe, typically associated with ‘good fortune’ and ‘eternity,’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octagon, Hexagon, and Cross</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic III) S Hall (Mosaic I and II)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, likely similar to the ‘Octagon, Hexagon, and Square’ motif</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octagon, Hexagon, and Square</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic II)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, possible significance in the type of shapes used to signify a transition/union between Heaven and Earth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octagon and Rectangle</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic VI)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, likely similar to the ‘Octagon, Hexagon, and Square’ motif</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octagon and Square</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic VI) S Hall (Mosaics VII and VIII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, likely similar to the ‘Octagon, Hexagon, and Square’ motif</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Theodorean Basilical Complex

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<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
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<th>Petra Church</th>
<th>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</th>
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<th>Church of Sant’Apollinaire in Classe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pelta</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic VI) S Hall (Mosaics I, IV, and VII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>A design named for the crescent-shaped Greek shield of the same name, possibly apotropaic based on that connection; possibly also used to stylistically represent a mushroom (given their inclusion elsewhere in the complex)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quatrefoil</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaics IV and VII)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, but can be seen as a detail of the ‘Quatrefoil and Interlacing Square’ or ‘Intersecting Circle’ motifs, and may have similar connotations; also, possibly intended as a stylized representation of a flower</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scalloped Medallions</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic V)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Unknown significance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon’s Knot</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Apotropaic connotations, possibly similar to Hellenistic representations of Alexander’s ‘Gordian Knot’; symbolic of Solomon’s wisdom and eternity (i.e., no starting or ending points); Two materials (different colors) unified into one – <em>dyophysite</em> connotation (e.g., ‘hypostatic union,’ ‘prosopic union,’ etc.); each band can contain a tricolor shading – possibly suggestive of trinitarian doctrine; Usually depicted with shades of Red (Earth) and Blue (Heaven)</td>
<td>X  X  X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon’s Knot and Square</td>
<td>S Hall (Mosaic I and VI)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Similar to the basic ‘Solomon’s Knot’ design, an apotropaic knot intertwined with a ribbon forming a square</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheel and Oval Diaper</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaic IV)</td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td>Pattern resembling the ‘Looped Diamond’ motif; Likely based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td>X?</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown if the designs have significance, but likely linked closely to the contents of the vessel (e.g., Water = Waters of Life, baptism; Wine = Eucharist; etc.; certain shapes and types of vessels can be associated with different types of held goods or deities (e.g., Harpocrates, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. 314 CE</td>
<td></td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Vessels (i.e., ceramic pots, metal urns, kraters, baskets, etc.)</td>
<td>N Hall (Mosaics II-VI) S Hall (Mosaics I, VI, and VIII-X)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Church of San Vitale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Petra Church</td>
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<td>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</td>
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<td>Church of SS. Lot and Procopius</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Theodorean Basilica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aquatic Animals</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dolphin</strong></td>
<td>Presbytery (Soffit Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of resurrection and salvation; Associated with Dionysus, Atargatis, Isis, and Allat</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avians</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birds (Nonspecific)</strong></td>
<td>Presbytery (Lintel Panel; Vault Panel) Octagon (Wedges IV-V)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Typically used as representations of worthy souls who have ascended into Heaven</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chicken (incl. Rooster)</strong></td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Nurturing instincts; Rooster: Symbolic of Vigilance, also assoc. w/ Peter’s denial of Christ</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Fauna</td>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dove</td>
<td>Apse</td>
<td>(Panels 4-5) Presbytery (Soffit Panel; Left/Right – Panel 6; Lintel Panel; Vault Panel) Octagon (Wedge IV) Ambulatory (Bay I)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Purity, Aspiration, Gentleness, Peace; Associated with Aphrodite/Atargatis; Symbol attached to the Holy Ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left – Panel 3; Vault Panel) Ambulatory (Bay V)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Assoc. w/ Isis in Egyptian mythos; Symbolic of Immortality in Hebrew mythos</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 5)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Resurrection; used as divine and royal symbols (e.g., Jesus Christ, Baal, Zeus, Dushares, etc.); Christian Victory (after Constantine I); Symbol attached to St. John</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presbytery (Left – Panel 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goose</td>
<td>Presbytery (Right – Panel 4)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbol of Vigilance, Providence; also associated with Egyptian god Amun, Harpocrates</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Panel 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ibis</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>In Egyptian mythos, symbolic of Soul, Aspiration, Wisdom, Sacred to Thoth, Destroyer of Reptiles; local to Transjordan and Africa</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Vault Panel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owl</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Sometimes associated with night/darkness and evil, but more often a symbol of Wisdom and Guidance</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Vault Panel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacock</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 1 and 4)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolically associated with Immortality, Purity, and Incorruption</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Church of San Vitale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Symbol also appears in…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pheasant (incl. Quail, Partridge)</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 5) Presbytery (Vault Panel) Octagon (Wedge V) Ambulatory (Bays I and V)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Commonly hunted game birds; Symbolic of ‘Manna in the Wilderness’ (and Eucharist), Fertility; alternately represents the return of ‘True Followers of Christ’</td>
<td>X X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raven</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Sometimes perceived as an ill-omen, but also associated with bringing food to Elijah and other ‘hermit’ saints</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stork/Heron</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left – Panel 4; Right – Panel 3; Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Representative of Faithfulness and Piety</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrestrial Animals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle (incl. Bull, Calf, etc.)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left – Panel 4; Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Reverence and Obedience to Higher powers; common Beast of Burden and food source; Symbol attached to St. Luke</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The Church of San Vitale

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deer (incl. Gazelle)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Gentile converts, often seen drinking from ‘waters of life;’ soul fleeing earthly passions</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Used in Old Testament as symbols of Destruction, but used in Late Antiquity as symbols of Fidelity; commonly found in hunting sequences</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Commonly used Beasts of Burden; subservience to a Higher power</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Common herd animal in region; sometimes symbolic of lower qualities and virtues, as opposed to the representation of a sheep</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leopard</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Treacherous and Devouring Beast (Devil), manifestation of Evil, unrepentant sinner; assoc. w/ Dionysus (thus possibly used as representation of Christ)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion</td>
<td>Presbytery (Right – Panel 4)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Power, Strength, Authority; can be used to represent either Good or Evil; Symbol attributed to St. Mark, Dushares</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian symbol of Rebirth, Renewal, and Fertility; symbol of Egyptian god Osiris</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serpent</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Particular representation of Satan, Darkness, and Evil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep (incl. Ibex, Lamb, Ram, etc.)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left – Panel 1; Right – Panels 1-2; Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolically associated with Innocence, Penitence, Purity; Sacrificial Offering (i.e. Jesus Christ)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Cherries</td>
<td>Presbytery (Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Called the ‘Fruit of Paradise’ because of red color and sweetness, symbolic reward for good deeds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Church of San Vitale

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Presbytery (Lintel Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Popular food in the Transjordan and associated with the ‘Tree of Life,’ Fertility, and Abundance</td>
<td>Petra Church: X, Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian: X, Church of SS. Lot and Procopius: X, Theodorean Basilica: X, Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe: X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figs</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 1 and 5) Presbytery (Lintel Panel; Vault Panel) Ambulatory (Bay VI)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Lust (Genesis 3:7 KJV), but also Fertility, Fruitfulness, and Good Works</td>
<td>Petra Church: X, Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian: X, Church of SS. Lot and Procopius: X, Theodorean Basilica: X, Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe: X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Flora</td>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomegranates</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 1 and 5)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Lintel Panel; Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Eternity, Fertility, Royalty (crown-like top); if open with seeds visible, reference to Resurrection and open tomb, blood-red juice is life from death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily (Flower)</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 1 and 4)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left - Panel 1; Vault Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbol of Purity and fertility (in Nilotic scenes); associated with St. Mary and Annunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree (w/ Fruit)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Lintel Panel)</td>
<td></td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>‘Tree of Life,’ Symbolic of the coming ‘Messianic Age,’ resulting blessings from good deeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree (w/o Fruit)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left – Panels 1, 2, and 4; Lintel Panel)</td>
<td></td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Palm Tree used as substitute for ‘Tree of Life’; palm fronds, cypress, cedar, and evergreen trees are also symbolic of immortality and victory over sin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Church of San Vitale

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vine (Grape)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left – Panel 6; Right – Panel 6; Lintel Panel; Vault Panel) Octagon (Wedge V)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>“True Vine” (Jesus Christ); Reference to the Church and Promised Land; previously associated with Dionysus</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vine (Acanthus)</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 1) Presbytery (Lintel Panel; Vault Panel) Octagon (Wedge IV) Ambulatory (Bays I, III, and VII)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of heaven, resurrection, eternity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
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<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
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<td>Symbol also appears in…</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Church of SS. Lot and Procopius</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Theodorean Basilica</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Representations of ‘Natural’ Figures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depictions of Humans</th>
<th>Apse (Panels 2-3)</th>
<th>c. 547 CE</th>
<th>Apse, P2: Emperor Justinian I presents a diskos as an offering, flanked by three unidentified retainers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperial Retinue</td>
<td>Apse</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Apse, P3: Empress Theodora carries a chalice as an offering for the dedication of the church and leads a party of seven female retainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Humans</td>
<td>Individuals from the New Testament</td>
<td>Presbytery (Soffit Panel; Left/Right – Panels 3-4)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presb., Soffit: Portraits and names of the 12 Apostles (St. Simon the Canaanite, St. James Alphæus, St. Thomas, St. Philip, St. James, St. Paul, St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. John, St. Bartholomew, St. Matthew, and St. Thaddæus)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presb., Left P3: St. John – One of the ‘Four Evangelists,’ shown holding his portion of the Gospels, a writing desk, and an Eagle (symbolic representation of himself)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presb., Left P4: St. Luke – One of the ‘Four Evangelists,’ shown with a portion of the Gospels, a basket of scrolls, and an Ox (symbolic representation of himself)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presb., Right P3: St. Matthew – One of the ‘Four Evangelists,’ shown holding his portion of the Gospels, a basket of scrolls, a writing desk, and an Angel (symbolic representation of himself)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presb., Right P4: St. Mark – One of the ‘Four Evangelists,’ shown holding his portion of the Gospels, and a Lion (symbolic representation of himself)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Humans</td>
<td>Individuals from the Old Testament</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left/Right – Panels 1-2)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depi</td>
<td>Porter/Servant</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 2)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### The Church of San Vitale

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<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priest/Clergy</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 2 and 4) Presbytery (Soffit Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Apse, P2: 3 clergymen seen holding either a censer, Gospel book, or jeweled crucifix; the latter is wearing an Archbishop’s <em>pallium</em> and identified as Maximian. Apse, P4: St. Vitalis – Martyred saint to whom the church is dedicated Bishop Ecclesius – Bishop of Ravenna who arranged the initial construction of the church; depicted as presenting a model of the completed church to Christ. Presb., Soffit: Portraits of SS. Gervasius and Protasius (twin sons of St. Valeria and St. Vitalis), likely included here because of their father’s significance to the church.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepherd (incl. <em>Kriophoros</em>)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Right – Panel 2)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Usually representative of Jesus Christ (originally borrowed from Hermes or Dionysus), but seen here as a depiction of Moses.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldiers</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 2)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Bodyguards from the <em>Scholae Palatinae</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **Angels** | Apse (Panel 4) Presbytery (Left – Panels 1-2; Right – Panels 2-3; Lintel Panel; Vault Panel) | c. 547 CE | Apse, P4: Seen flanking Christ Pantokrator  
Presb., Left P1: Seated before Abraham and Sarah, receiving food and imparting a blessing in return  
Presb., Left/Right P2: A pair of angels seen flying, holding a medallion depicting a cross with anchors  
Presb., Right P3: Flying, symbolic representation of St. Matthew  
Presb., Lintel: Flying, holding a medallion with a luminous A  
Presb., Vault: 4 Angels standing on blue spheres, holding up a central medallion featuring a Lamb | X X |
<p>| <strong>Hand of God</strong> | Presbytery (Left – Panels 1-2; Right – Panels 1-2) | c. 547 CE | Any depiction of God the Father would have been considered heretical by the majority of the Christian world, yet depicting one hand to denote his presence was considered acceptable | X |</p>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Humans</td>
<td>Jesus Christ</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 4) Presbytery (Soffit Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Apse, P4: Depicted as Pantokrator; enthroned upon a globe, holding a scroll, and presenting a ‘Crown of Martyrdom’ to St. Vitalis Presb., Soffit: Portrait of Christ with nimbus, against a gold background, holding a scroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Altar</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left/Right – Panel 1)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Presence indicates an act of sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christogram</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 5)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>First initials of Christ’s name in Greek: IHS – “Ιησους Χριστος”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cornucopia</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 5)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian symbol of Creation and Abundance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cruciform Shape</strong></td>
<td>Apse (Panel 2) Presbytery (Soffit Panel; Left – Panels 2 and 6; Right – Panels 2 and 6; Lintel Panel)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Apse, P2: Jeweled cross held by Archbishop Maximian Presb., Soffit: Two Jeweled Crosses (at the bottom of either side of the arch), 'Latin-variant' with flaring arms at the ends Presb., Left/Right P2: Medallion with Jeweled cross and Anchors Presb., Left/Right P6: Medallion with Greek Cross Presb., Lintel: A simple Latin Cross in a mandorla, wreathed in flame</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geometric Motifs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaper</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bay I)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Likely based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floret Diamond</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bay VII)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Inclusion in other example of artwork suggests that this pattern was based on Chancel Screen decorative patterns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilloche Knot</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bay I)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Considering it's 'knot-like' appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indented Diamond</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bays VI and VII)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Simple pattern to reproduce, possibly based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhabited Acanthus Scroll</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 1) Presbytery (Vault Panel) Octagon (Wedges IV-V) Ambulatory (Bays I, V, and VII)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>The Acanthus vine maintains its earlier connotations and the tendrils wrap around to form separate medallions for additional depictions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bays I, V, and VII)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Likely <em>apotropaic</em>, similar to the ‘sacred rope’ around the Egyptian cartouche</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlaced Circle and Square</td>
<td>Octagon (Exedra VII) Ambulatory (Bay I)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Apotropaic design that unifies and shows the progression from an earthly state (square) to a higher, paradisiacal state (octagon)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlaced Square and Octagon</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bay VI)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Church of San Vitale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Petra Church</th>
<th>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</th>
<th>Church of SS. Lot and Procopius</th>
<th>Theodorean Basilica</th>
<th>Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intersecting Circles</td>
<td>Octagon (Exedra I) Ambulatory (Bays I and VII)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian decorative motif, perhaps used to symbolize the interconnected nature of heaven</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oval, Tapered Oblong, and Crescent</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bays II and VI)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>These shapes are reminiscent of various fruits in the Mediterranean and elsewhere (Oval=Melon, Tapered Oblong=Fig, and Crescent=Gourd), though this is not a definite interpretation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelta</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bays I and V)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>The example seen here was likely made to resemble the decoration of the chancel screen in the apse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinwheel design</td>
<td>Presbytery (Left – Panel 5; Right – Panel 5) Octagon (Exedra I and VII)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Possibly representative of rays of light extending from a single point (i.e., Jesus Christ), or representative of a scalloped shell and its connotated meanings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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## The Church of San Vitale

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quatrefoil</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bay V)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, but can be seen as a detail of the ‘Quatrefoil and Interlacing Square’ or ‘Intersecting Circle’ motifs, and may have similar connotations; also, possibly intended as a stylized representation of a flower</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosette (various iterations)</td>
<td>Presbytery (Soffit Panel; Vault Panel) Ambulatory (Bays I, II, and V)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Relatively simple pattern, likely based on elements of Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian; Church of SS. Lot and Procopius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon’s Knot (incl. ‘Squared’ variant)</td>
<td>Ambulatory (Bays I-II)</td>
<td>c. 547 CE</td>
<td>Apotropaic connotations, possibly similar to Hellenistic representations of Alexander’s ‘Gordian Knot’; symbolic of Solomon’s wisdom and eternity (i.e., no starting or ending points) Two materials (different colors) unified into one – <em>dyophysite</em> connotation (e.g., ‘hypostatic union,’ ‘prosopic union,’ etc.); each band can contain a tricolor shading – possibly suggestive of trinitarian doctrine Usually depicted in Red and Blue hues</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Star   | Presbytery (Right – Panel 1; Vault Panel) | c. 547 CE | Presb., R P1: Eight-pointed star (“Star of David”) depicted on altar cloth  
Presb., Vault: Six-pointed stars (reminiscent of ‘IX’ Christogram) in background of Lamb medallion | x | x | x | x | x |
| Structures | Presbytery (Lintel Panel) | c. 547 CE | Two walled cities: Jerusalem and Bethlehem, with identically decorated walls (though Jerusalem is modeled with more interior structures than its counterpart) | x | x |
| Miscellaneous | Apse (Panels 2 and 3)  
Presbytery (Left – Panels 4 and 6; Right – Panels 1, 3, and 6; Lintel Panel)  
Octagon (Wedges IV-V)  
Ambulatory (Bays I, III, and VII) | c. 547 CE | Unknown if the design has significance, but likely linked closely to the contents of the vessel (e.g., Water = Waters of Life, baptism; Wine = Eucharist; etc.); certain shapes and types of vessels can be associated with different types of held goods or deities (e.g., Harpocrates, etc.) | x | x | x | x | x |
### The Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depictions of Fauna</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
<th>Symbol also appears in…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avians</strong></td>
<td>Birds (Nonspecific)</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 7; Soffit Panel)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Typically used as representations of worthy souls who have ascended into Heaven</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dove</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 1, 6, and 7)</td>
<td>P 1: c. 666 CE P 6-7: c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Purity, Aspiration, Gentleness, Peace; Associated with Aphrodite/Atargatis; Symbol attached to the Holy Ghost</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 7)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Assoc. w/ Isis in Egyptian mythos; Symbolic of Immortality in Hebrew mythos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 1, 6, and 13)</td>
<td>P 1: c. 666 CE P 6: c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Resurrection, used as divine and royal symbols (e.g., Jesus Christ, Baal, Zeus, Dushares, etc.); Christian Victory (after Constantine I) Apse, P 13: Haloed Eagle carrying Gospel Book – Symbolic representation of St. John (Four Evangelists)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacock</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 7)</td>
<td>c. 6th century CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of Immortality, Purity, and Incorruption Note: only found on underlying <em>sinopia</em>, not actually depicted in final rendering</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Terrestrial Animals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Cattle (incl. Bull, Calf, etc.)                                                                                                                                       | Apse  
| Lion                                                               | Apse  
(Panel 13)  | c. 549 CE | Winged Lion carrying Gospel Book – Symbolic representation of St. Mark (Four Evangelists), Dushares (Nabataean deity)                                                                                                  | X  X  X  X  X  |
| Sheep (incl. Ibex, Lamb, Ram, etc.)                                                                                                                                    | Apse  
(Panels 6, 7, and 12) | c. 6th-7th century CE | Symbolically associated with Innocence, Penitence, Purity; Sacrificial Offering (i.e. Jesus Christ)                                                                                                                   | X  X  X  X  X  X |

Apse, P 7: The three sheep that are separated from Apollinaris’ flock are shown gazing at the central Medallion and Cross. These three are symbolic of SS. Peter, James, and John at the *Transfiguration*.
### The Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fruit</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 10 and 11)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Popular food in the Transjordan and associated with the ‘Tree of Life,’ Fertility, and Abundance</td>
<td>Church of SS, Cosmas and Damian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily (Flower)</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 1, 6, and 7)</td>
<td>P 1: c. 666 CE P 6: c. 549 CE P 7: c. 6th–7th century CE</td>
<td>Symbol of Purity and fertility (in Nilotic scenes); associated with St. Mary and Annunciation</td>
<td>Church of SS, Lot and Procopius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree (w/ Fruit)</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 10 and 11)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>‘Tree of Life,’ Symbolic of the coming ‘Messianic Age;’ resulting blessings from good deeds</td>
<td>Theodorean Basilica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree (w/o Fruit)</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 7)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Palm Tree used as substitute for ‘Tree of Life;’ palm fronds, cypress, cedar, and evergreen trees are also symbolic of immortality and victory over sin</td>
<td>Church of San Vitale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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## The Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Location within Church</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vine (Acanthus)</td>
<td>Apse (Soffit Panel)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Symbolic of heaven, resurrection, and eternity</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Depictions of ‘Natural’ Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representations of ‘Natural’ Figures</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperial Retinue</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 1)</td>
<td>c. 666 CE</td>
<td>Emperor Constans II granting the privilege of <em>autocephaly</em> to Archbishop Maurus of Ravenna, seen with his sons: Constantine IV, Heraclius, and Tiberius</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Possible Symbolic Meaning</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals from the Old Testament</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 6 and 7)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Apse, P 6: Abel – Faithful son of Abraham, presenting a Lamb offering before Melchizedek and the Hand of God Melchizedek – Israelite King and High Priest, receiving offerings before the Hand of God Abraham and Isaac – Grandfather of the Israelite tribes, offering son (Isaac) to Melchizedek and God Apse, P 7: Moses – Hebrew prophet chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of bondage, shown in connection with the <em>Transfiguration</em> scene Elias – Hebrew prophet who (according to prophecy) would appear to announce the coming of the Messiah, shown in connection with the <em>Transfiguration</em> scene</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Humans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Priest/Clergy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Apse (Panels 1-5 and 7)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Panel 1:</strong> c. 666 CE <strong>Panels 2-5 and 7:</strong> c. 549 CE</td>
<td><strong>Apse, P 1:</strong> Maurus – Archbishop of Ravenna (c. 644-71 CE), lobbied with Reparatus for Autocephaly Reparatus – Archbishop of Ravenna (c. 671-77 CE), lobbied with Maurus for Autocephaly 3 unidentified attending clergymen <strong>Apse, P 2:</strong> Ecclesius – Bishop of Ravenna (c. 522-32 CE) who ordered construction of the Church of San Vitale, depicted wearing an Archbishop’s <em>pallium</em> <strong>Apse, P 3:</strong> Severus – Bishop of Ravenna (c. 308-48 CE) who is noted for attending the of Council of Sardicia (344 CE), depicted wearing an Archbishop’s <em>pallium</em> <strong>Apse, P 4:</strong> Ursicinus – Bishop of Ravenna (c. 533-36 CE) who ordered construction of the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe, depicted wearing an Archbishop’s <em>pallium</em> <strong>Apse, P 5:</strong> Ursus – Bishop of Ravenna (c. 399-426 CE) who ordered construction of basilica that became the Cathedral of Ravenna, depicted wearing an Archbishop’s <em>pallium</em> <strong>Apse, P 7:</strong> Apollinaris – First Bishop of Ravenna (c. 1st century CE), shown in attitude of prayer and wearing an Archbishop’s <em>pallium</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Representation of ‘Supernatural’ Figures</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Angel</strong></td>
<td><strong>Apse (Panels 8, 9, and 13)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|  | X | X | X |
### The Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
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<th>Date</th>
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<th>Petra Church</th>
<th>Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian</th>
<th>Church of SS. Lot and Procopius</th>
<th>Theodorean Basilica</th>
<th>Church of San Vitale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand of God</td>
<td>Apse (Panels 6-7)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Any depiction of God the Father would have been considered heretical by the majority of the Christian world, yet depicting one hand to denote his presence was considered acceptable</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Jesus Christ | Apse (Panels 7 and 13) | c. 549 CE | Apse, P 7: Small portrait featured at the center of a large Jeweled Cross  
Apse, P 9: Medallion with portrait of Christ, holding a Book of Scripture in one hand, while the other forms a benedictory gesture                                                                                   | X            |                                 |                                 |                     |                     |
| Altar     | Apse (Panel 6)        | c. 549 CE | Presence indicates an act of sacrifice                                                                                                                                                                                  | X            | X                               |                                 |                     |                     |
| Cruciform Shape | Apse (Panel 7)     | c. 549 CE | Medallion with large Jeweled Cross (Latin-variant), containing a small portrait of Christ at the center, surrounded by stars and text in Greek and Latin; Note: possible example of a “Nestorian (or dyophysite) Cross” | X            |                                 |                                 |                     |                     |
## The Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe

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<td></td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Church of SS., Cosmas and Damian</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Church of San Vitale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geometric Motifs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floret Diamond</td>
<td>Side Aisle</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Inclusion in other example of artwork suggests that this pattern was based on Chancel Screen decorative patterns</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilloche border</td>
<td>Nave</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilloche Knot</td>
<td>Side Aisle</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indented Diamond</td>
<td>Nave</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Simple pattern to reproduce, possibly based on Chancel Screen decoration</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlaced Guilloche Circle</td>
<td>Nave</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Considering it’s ‘knot-like’ appearance, likely associated with apotropaic references</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Location within Church</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Petra Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlacing Circles, Diamonds, and Squares</td>
<td>Side Aisle</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Likely <em>apotropaic</em>, similar to the ‘sacred rope’ around the Egyptian cartouche</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersecting Circle</td>
<td>Nave</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Pre-Christian decorative motif, perhaps used to symbolize the interconnected nature of heaven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscella</td>
<td>Octagon, Hexagon, and Square</td>
<td>Nave</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Unknown, possible significance in the type of shapes used to signify a transition/union between Heaven and Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
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<td>Possible Symbolic Meaning</td>
<td>Symbol also appears in…</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</table>
| Solomon’s Knot | Side Aisle             | c. 549 CE | Apotropaic connotations, possibly similar to Hellenistic representations of Alexander’s ‘Gordian Knot’; symbolic of Solomon’s wisdom and eternity (i.e., no starting or ending points) Two materials (different colors) unified into one – dyophysite connotation (e.g., ‘hypostatic union,’ ‘prosopon union,’ etc.); each band can contain a triclor shading – possibly suggestive of trinitarian doctrine Usually depicted with shades of Red (Earth) and Blue (Heaven) | Petra Church  
Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian  
Church of SS. Lot and Procopius  
Theodorean Basilica  
Church of San Vitale |
| Star           | Apse (Panels 6 and 7)  | c. 549 CE | Apse, P 6: Eight-pointed star (“Star of David”) depicted on altar cloth Apse, P 7: 99 Six-pointed stars (reminiscent of ‘IX’ Christogram) in background of central Cross medallion                                                |                                          |
### The Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe

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<th>Theodorean Basilica</th>
<th>Church of San Vitale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structures</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 12)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Two walled cities, probably intended as representations of Jerusalem and Bethlehem (similar to Lintel Panel in Church of San Vitale)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Vessels (i.e., ceramic pots, metal urns, kraters, baskets, etc.)</td>
<td>Apse (Panel 6)</td>
<td>c. 549 CE</td>
<td>Unknown if the design has significance, but likely linked closely to the contents of the vessel (e.g., Water = Waters of Life, baptism; Wine = Eucharist; etc.); certain shapes and types of vessels can be associated with different types of held goods or deities (e.g., Harpocrates, etc.)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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