

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Early Christian monuments and mosaics of Ravenna
<i>Location</i>	Region of Emilia Romagna
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Italy
<i>Date</i>	23 October 1995

Justification by State Party

The eight properties included in this nomination represent the most outstanding collection of religious buildings of late antiquity and mosaics in the world.

Note The State Party does not make any proposals concerning the criteria under which the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List in the nomination dossier.

Category of property

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the Ravenna nomination represents a *group of buildings*.

History and Description*History*

In the reign of Augustus the port of Classis was established at Ravenna as the imperial base in the northern Adriatic. Following the barbarian invasions of the 5th century Honorius made it his capital after the sack of Rome by Alaric the Goth in AD 410. His sister, Galla Placidia, who was married to Attila's son Ataulf, lived in Ravenna during her widowhood in the first half of the 5th century, and made it a centre of Christian art and culture.

With the deposition of Romulus Augustulus, the last western Emperor, by the Huns in 476, and their subsequent defeat by Theodoric the Ostrogoth, Ravenna entered into a period of prosperity and influence. It was taken by Belisarius in 540 and remained the centre of Byzantine control in Italy until 752.

Its subsequent history was one of decline and stagnation. Changes in the course of the Po seriously damaged its trade. From 1441 to 1509 it was under Venetian rule and then came under Papal control. It remained a backwater for centuries, as a result of which it underwent little rebuilding and preserved testimony to its earlier glory to a remarkable degree.

*Description***- The Mausoleum of Galla Placidia**

This small cruciform brick building was built in the second quarter of the 5th century. It has a plain bare exterior lightened by pilasters that meet in arches and is crowned by a brick dome concealed by a small quadrangular tower. Owing to subsidence it is partly below ground level.

The interior is lavishly decorated. The lower part is clad in panels of yellow marble and the remainder is entirely covered in mosaics. There is a golden Latin cross in the centre of the dome vaulting surrounded by golden stars on a deep blue background. The four beasts of the Apocalypse figure in the pendentives. Four pairs of apostles, their hands raised in benediction, are depicted on the four sides of the drum. The walls are decorated with a variety of scenes, notably the martyrdom of St Lawrence on the wall facing the door. The lunette above the entrance shows the Good Shepherd, seated on a boulder in a meadow with a rocky background.

The building is in the western Roman architectural tradition. It is the earliest and best preserved of all mosaic monuments, and at the same time one of the most artistically perfect. It represents a perfect blend of the Hellenistic-Roman artistic tradition with the iconography of Christianity.

- The Neonian Baptistery

This building, constructed by Bishop Orso in the early 5th century, was decorated with mosaics by his successor, Neone, around 450. It stands to the north of the present cathedral.

The octagonal baptistery is built in brick, relieved by pilasters. Like the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, it is now partly below ground level. The interior consists of four apses, articulated into two orders of arches, rising to the great cupola. The large mosaic medallion at the apex of the dome shows the Baptism of Christ by John the Baptist. Below this comes a band depicting the procession of the twelve Apostles. This surmounts a band of eight architectural scenes, alluding to the Holy City. The upper drum is an imitation gallery, each niche containing the figure of a prophet. Scenes from the Gospels figure in the lower zone.

This is the finest and most complete surviving example of the Early Christian baptistery. It retains the fluidity in representation of the human figure derived from Greco-Roman art. Especially worthy of note is the harmonious relationship between the mosaic decoration and the architectonic structure of the building itself.

- The Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo

This originated as the palatine church of Theodoric, and was built next to his palace in the early years of the 6th century. It was originally dedicated to Christ, later to St Martin, and in the mid 9th century to St Apollinare, first Bishop of Ravenna.

The basilica is noteworthy for its simplicity in design. Built in brick, the facade has a tympanum and is framed by two pilaster strips and pierced by a mullioned window. Inside the interior is divided by twenty-four marble columns into a nave and two aisles, with a rounded apse. Various changes have been made to the interior in the centuries since its original construction.

The interior must initially have been entirely decorated with mosaics and mural paintings, but much of these disappeared during 16th century reconstruction work. At the present time mosaics cover the two side walls at the foot of the nave, from the ceiling to the tops of the supporting arches, in three decorated fascias. The outer band shows a procession of martyrs and virgins, the centre consists of white-robed male figures (probably prophets), and the innermost is devoted to the miracles and passion of Christ. Those in the upper two fascias are in traditional Roman style whilst those in the third show strong Byzantine influence.

Both the exterior and the interior of the basilica graphically illustrate the fusion between the western and eastern styles characteristic of the late 5th-early 6th century. This is one of the most important buildings from this period of crucial cultural significance in European religious art.

- The Arian Baptistery

Built by Theodoric next to his cathedral, it was reconsecrated with the overthrow of the Arian heresy in 561 and became an oratory dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

It is a small brick building, octagonal in plan with four flat sides and four with protruding apses. Externally it is divided into two by a cornice. The upper part is topped by a brick cupola, with a semi-circular arched window on each side.

The interior walls are now bare brickwork, though excavations have shown that them originally to have been clad in plaster, marble, and mosaics. Only the dome retains its mosaic decoration. The central medallion shows the young Christ in the waters of the river Jordan, with St John the Baptist facing him. The broad band surrounding the central medallion is occupied by the twelve Apostles with crowns in their hands.

The iconography of the mosaics, whose quality is outstanding, is of importance in that it illustrates the Trinity, a somewhat unexpected element in the art of an Arian building, since the Trinity was not accepted in this doctrine.

- The Archiepiscopal Chapel

The private oratory of the Orthodox bishops was built around 500; it was originally dedicated to Christ and later to St Andrew.

The chapel, on the first floor of the present Bishop's Palace, is in the shape of a Greek cross with an apse on the eastern arm; it is covered by a cross-vault and preceded by a rectangular vestibule. The lower part of the walls is covered with marble, with mosaics above (although some of these were replaced by tempera paintings, the work of Luca Longhi, in the 16th century). The lunette over the vestibule door shows a warrior Christ against a gold background. The barrel vault is a grid of white lilies and rosettes, partly in tempera, giving the impression of an airy pergola with birds and animals in the compartments. The apex of the cross-vault is a medallion bearing the Chi-Rho monogram, supported by four angels with raised arms. There are medallions in the four arch intradoses of the vaulting.

The significance of this property is the fact that it is the only Early Christian private oratory that has survived to the present day. Its iconography is also important by virtue of its strongly anti-Arian symbolism.

- The Mausoleum of Theodoric

This building was constructed by Theodoric himself, shortly before his death in 526, outside the city walls in a Gothic burial ground. Its subsequent history was somewhat chequered: Theodoric's body was removed after Justinian's edict condemning Arianism in 561 and it became an oratory, with a square tower surmounting it that served as a lighthouse. It became partly submerged as a result of silting from the nearby river Badareno, and was not drained and excavated until the 19th century.

Unlike the other early buildings of Ravenna, the mausoleum was built of carefully worked stone blocks imported from Istria, constructed without mortar but connected by iron clamps. It is in two storeys, the lower ten-sided with a niche and a small window in each side. The upper storey is smaller, decagonal up to door lintel level and then circular. It is surmounted by a ledge decorated by a "pincer" frieze, a characteristic element of Gothic art.

The significance of the mausoleum lies in its style and decoration, which owe nothing to Roman or Byzantine art, although it makes use of the Roman stone-construction technique of *opus quadratum*, which had been abandoned four centuries before. It is the unique surviving example of a tomb of a barbarian king of this period. The hypothesis has been advanced that its form derives from Syrian influences with which Theodoric may have become familiar during his spell in the service of the Byzantine Emperor Zeno.

- The Church of San Vitale

This building was commissioned by Bishop Ecclesius after his return from Constantinople in 525, and it was completed around 547. It is built on the site of a 5th century church commemorating the martyr St Vitale, which was incorporated into the new structure. It was fronted by a large quadroportico, which was converted into a cloister when the church became part of a Benedictine monastery.

The church is octagonal and constructed using the large flat bricks typical of all the buildings erected by Justinian. There are two storeys, the upper one encircling the dome. The apse, which is semi-circular on the interior and polygonal on the outside, is flanked by two small rectangular rooms terminating in niches and two semi-circular sacristies.

Inside the architecture is one of impressive space and light. The centre is surrounded by eight massive pillars sheathed in Greek marble which reach up to the drum of the dome. The cupola itself, 16 m in diameter, is made up of a number of concentric rings of twin terracotta pipes, whose lightness obviated the need for massive side walls; they are less than 1 m thick. It is decorated with baroque frescoes executed in 1778-82, and in stark contrast to the architectonic purity of the structure.

Of especial interest are the columns and capitals of the triforia, which are tall and slim, probably imported from the east. The impost capitals are in the form of lotus leaves, creating an elegant transition from the circular section of the columns to the rectangular vaulting. The closest parallels for these are to be found in Constantinople.

Six of the eight sections of flooring are in marble and date from the Renaissance. The remaining two are from the 6th century and consist of a *cantharos* out of which come fronds that fill the space with their convolutions, with among them small birds and bunches of grapes. Stucco decoration from the 6th century also survives on the intradoses of the arches of the presbytery. This form of floral decoration is predominant in the presbytery itself: the mosaic figures of the four Evangelists and the Old Testament scenes are juxtaposed with a profusion of plant, animal, and human motifs.

In the vault of the apse is to be found the Redeemer, flanked by two archangels, Bishop Ecclesius, and St Vitale. At the foot of the side walls of the apse are the famous panels depicting Justinian and Theodora, each with a splendid appareled retinue, offering gifts of sacred vessels to the new church.

San Vitale is one of the most important examples of Byzantine art in Europe because of the clarity with which it expresses the ideology and religious fervour of the age of Justinian and at the same time the use of architecture as a means of asserting Imperial dominance. It is also noteworthy for its subtle and skilful incorporation of certain elements of western art.

- The Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe

The basilica is situated some 8 km from the centre of Ravenna, but it forms an integral part of the artistic heritage of that city. It was built in the first half of the 6th century, commissioned by Bishop Ursicinus. Substantial restoration and extension work was carried out in later centuries.

It is an imposing building, 56 m long by 30 m wide, once again in brick. The narthex is incorporated in the central body of the facade, framed by two pilasters. Only one of the two flanking rectangular rooms, originally surmounted by towers, survives. Also disappeared is the quadriportico that originally stood in front of the narthex. It was built on an earlier (2nd-3rd century) cemetery, where Apollinare, the first bishop, was buried.

The interior, divided into three equal aisles by two rows of twelve Greek marble columns, gives an impression of great spaciousness. The original floor was a mosaic of geometric motifs, only fragments of which survive. The side walls were once faced with fine marble, removed in the early 15th century for reuse in Rimini. The basilica ends in a semi-circular apse, flanked by two small rooms.

The apse and triumphal arch are decorated in mosaic, the former dating from the mid 6th century and the latter from different periods between the 6th and 12th centuries. The apse depicts two scenes: the first shows the hand of God issuing from stylized clouds, whilst below the half-figures of Moses and Elijah are also seen partly covered by clouds. They flank a great medallion with a jewelled cross in the centre of which is the image of Christ in a representation of the Transfiguration. The central medallion of the decoration on the arch shows the bust of Christ, with twelve sheep, symbolizing the Apostles, coming out of the doors of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Below are the figures of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

Sant'Apollinare in Classe is an outstanding example of the Early Christian basilica in the purity and simplicity of its design and use of space and in the sumptuous nature of its decoration.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Of the properties included in this nomination, the Arian Baptistery, the Mausoleum of Theodoric, and the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe are state property and the remainder are owned by the Roman Catholic Church (Opera di Religione della Diocesi di Ravenna). All are protected under the provisions of Article 4 of Italian Law No 1089/39; the three in state ownership are additionally covered by Article 822 of the Civil Code. These legal instruments establish the principle of the *vincolo*, by means of which all works affecting the monuments are subject to prior authorization by the appropriate state agency, in this case the Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici di Ravenna.

Management

Management of the properties is the responsibility of the Opera di Religione and the Soprintendenza respectively. Under the terms of Article 21 of Law No 1089/39 there are prescribed areas contiguous with the protected sites where authorization is required when the integrity and setting of the properties may be affected by proposed works. These constitute effective buffer zones when taken into consideration with the Town Development General Plan for the City of Ravenna, which specifies substantial restrictions on construction and development within the historic city.

There is special provision in this Plan for the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe. This takes the form of urban renewal and redevelopment in the whole area and the incorporation of the Basilica into an archaeological park, along with the remains of the Roman port of Classe and other archaeological sites in the area.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

There is a long history of restoration and conservation work on the monuments in Ravenna that constitute this nomination. Whilst some of the earlier work was to a standard that would not be acceptable at the present time,

current practice is impeccable, and in some cases the opportunity has been taken to remedy mistakes of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The main causes of further potential decay have been identified and are the subject of active research programmes. They are identified as being attributable to four causes. *Subsidence* is endemic, owing to the nature of the subsoil. This is being countered by continuous drainage, particularly where floor levels in monuments are below the water-table. *Decohesion of mortar* is one of the results of the water problems, and this is being tackled both in a preventive way and by restoration work. *Condensation* resulting from large visitor numbers, coupled with water-table problems, is the subject of current intensive research. *Pollution* resulting from the industrialization of the Ravenna area is one of the subjects being taken into account in the overall Town Development General Plan.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the eight properties that make up this nomination is high. All have undergone various modifications in the centuries since they were originally built, but these modifications have their own intrinsic historical value and as such do not affect the authenticity adversely.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the town in February 1996. ICOMOS also consulted European experts in the field of Early Christian art and architecture in the Mediterranean region.

Qualities

The Early Christian buildings of Ravenna are without parallel in the information that they provide about artistic contacts and developments in this highly significant period in the cultural development of Europe. They constitute an epitome of religious and funerary art and architecture during the 6th century. The mosaics are among the highest expressions of this form of art surviving anywhere in Europe, and have added importance because of the blending of western and eastern motifs and techniques.

Comparative analysis

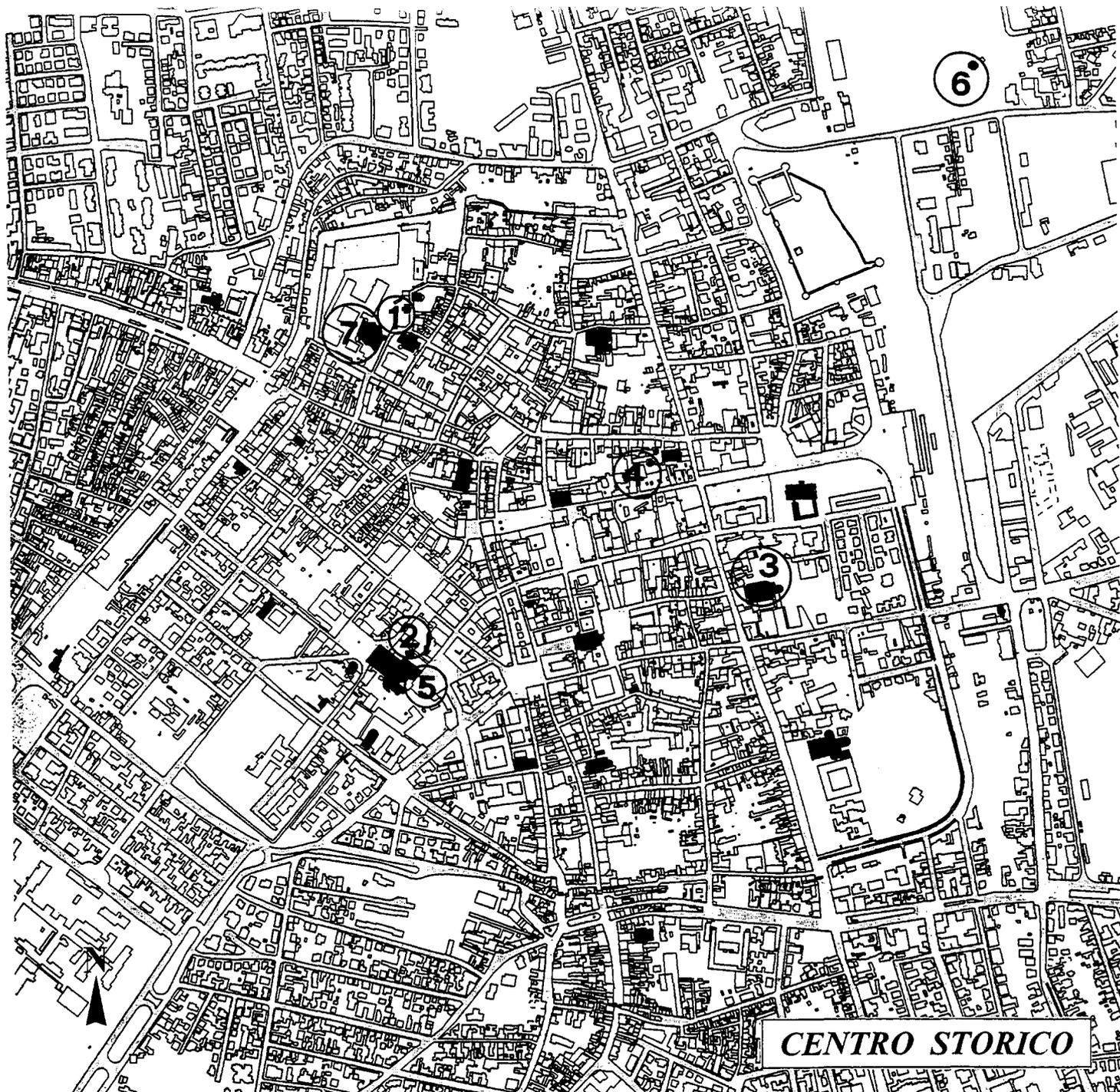
It is difficult to compare the Ravenna group of monuments with any others. Monuments such as the Church of Agia Sophia in Constantinople or the monastery of Daphni are masterpieces of architecture and art, but in a sense they stand alone. The importance of the Ravenna properties is their group value.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, iii, and iv*.

The complex of Early Christian religious monuments in Ravenna are of outstanding significance by virtue of the supreme artistry of the mosaic art that they contain, and also because of the crucial evidence that they provide of artistic and religious relationships and contacts at an important period of European cultural history.

ICOMOS, October 1996



1 - MAUSOLEO DI GALLA PLACIDIA

2 - BATTISTERO NEONIANO

3 - BASILICA DI S. APOLLINARE NUOVO

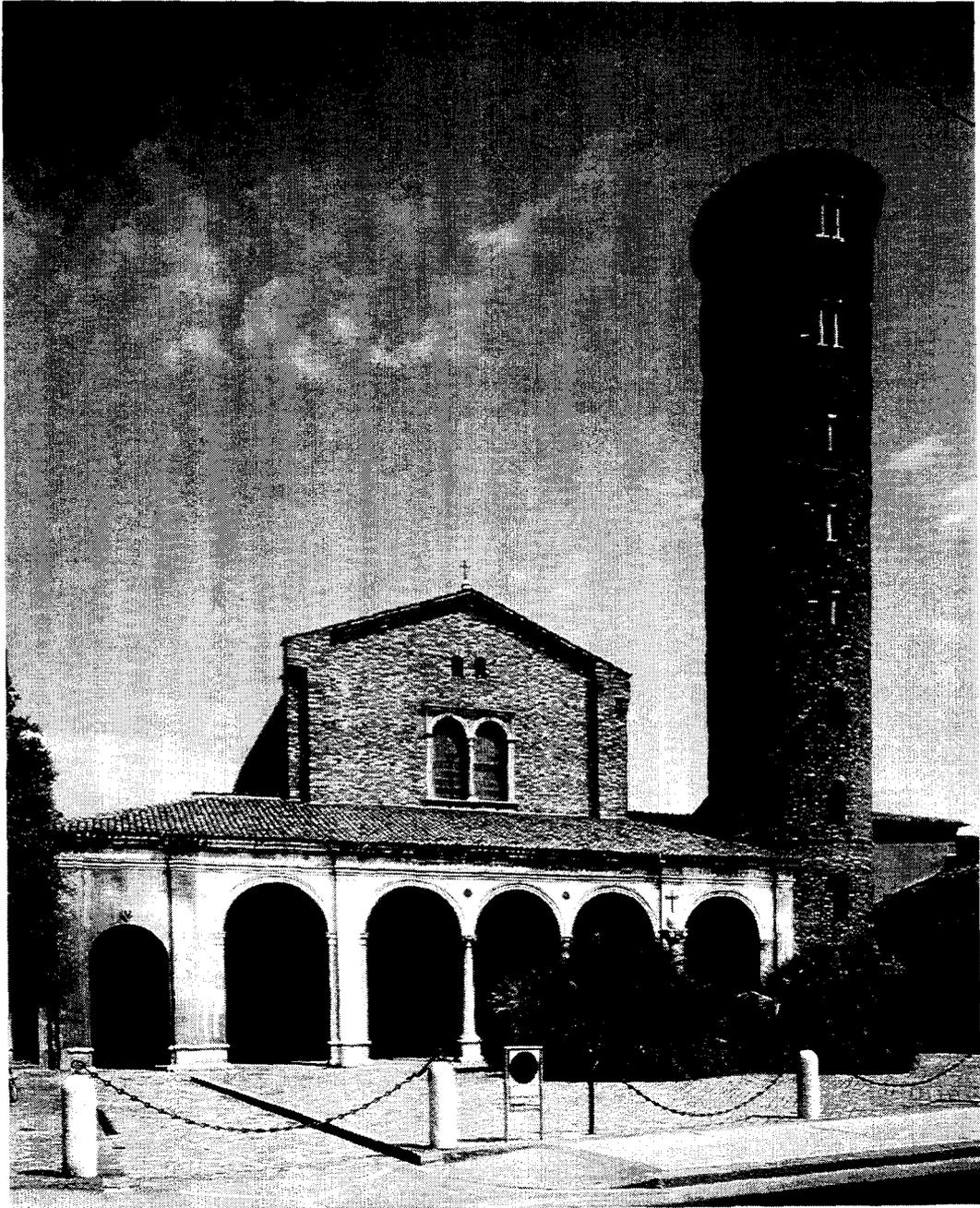
4 - BATTISTERO DEGLI ARIANI

5 - ORATORIO DI S. ANDREA CAPPELLA ARCIVESCOVILE

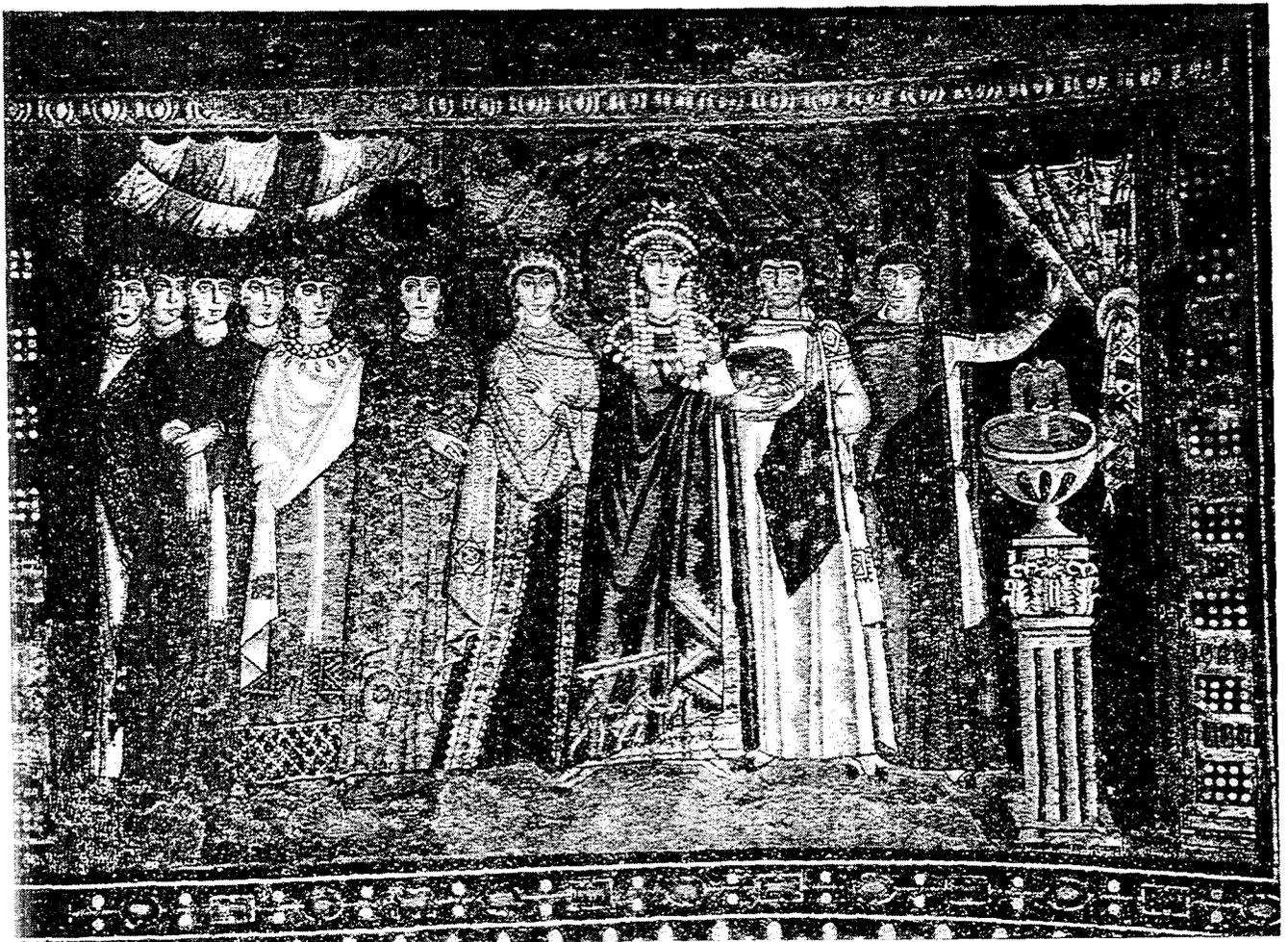
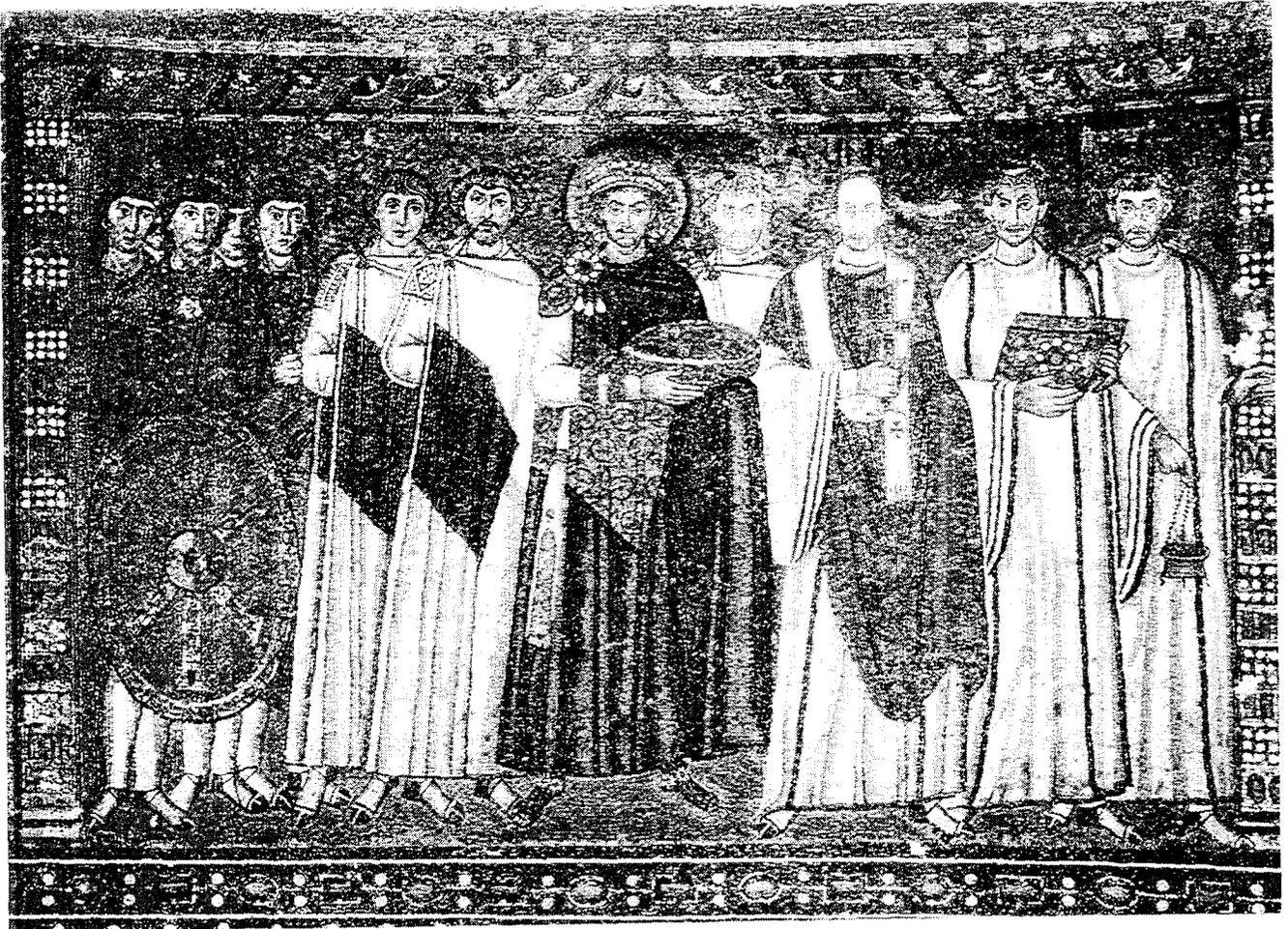
6 - MAUSOLEO DI TEODORICO

7 - CHIESA DI SAN VITALE

Ravenna : plan de localisation des monuments proposés pour inscription
Ravenna : location map of the nominated monuments



Ravenne : Sant'Apollinare Nuovo
Ravenna : Sant'Apollinare Nuovo



Ravenna : mosaïque de Justinien et Théodora, San Vitale
Ravenna : mosaic of Justinian and Theodora, San Vitale