Mausoleum of Theodoric, Ravenna

CONTEXT

This is a building constructed just outside the walls of the Roman city of Ravenna for the burial of the barbarian ruler of Italy and king of the Ostrogoths, Theodoric (493-526).

THE MAUSOLEUM

A circle of pillars surrounding the mausoleum and a balustrade protecting the balcony around it has disappeared, as has the original staircase leading to it. But in other respects it is much as Theodoric had it built (see image below).
There are two interior spaces, one at ground-floor level, one at first-floor level. The latter contains an enormous bath-tub made of the purple marble, porphyry, and often thought to have been used as Theodoric’s coffin.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

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a. **The wealth and power of King Theodoric**

This mausoleum is constructed in really fine limestone (you can see the blocks on the image) whereas most Roman buildings in Ravenna were more cheaply built in brick. Moreover, the dome is amazingly of an enormous, single piece of stone. How this was raised into position is still debated.

b. **The extent that as a barbarian king Theodoric was really like a Roman emperor**

- The basic form of the mausoleum is not dissimilar to the Roman mausolea, especially that of the emperor Hadrian in Rome, which in the middle ages converted into the Castel Sant-Angelo.
- Each of the brackets around the roof is inscribed with the name of a Christian apostle, showing that Theodoric wished to demonstrate his Christianity, even if that Christianity was the Arian rather than the orthodox form.
- Nevertheless, the detailed shape of the mausoleum is not paralleled in Roman architecture and has been interpreted as barbarian in inspiration.