

Davide Longhi

**The Cosmic Cross as *Logos*' Theophany
First Version of Sant'Apollinare in Classe's Apsidal Mosaic and
Jerusalem's Staurophany of AD 351**

The apsidal mosaic of Sant'Apollinare in Classe near Ravenna is not, as it seems, a single iconographic program, but was made in three distinct phases. In the first version, attested by sinopias, St Apollinaris didn't appear, but there were just two crosses, the former crowned, in the middle of the apsidal vault, the latter drawn at the base, in the centre of a frieze with peacocks and other birds. Such composition, perhaps considered less understandable, was replaced by a symbolic *Transfiguration*, constituted by a crowned cross as image of the transfigured Christ and by three lambs as the symbols of Peter, James and John. Both inscriptions IXΘΥΣ and SALUS MUNDI, but particularly the landscape, characterised by tall olive tree making the background of the crowned cross, are all elements present in the famous Letter of Cyril to Constantine II, in which the bishop tells the Emperor about a staurophany which occurred over Jerusalem in AD 351 between *Golgotha* and the Mount of Olives. The impression is that building's original dedication was not to St Apollinaris, but rather to the Cross, or better to the Staurophany of 351: the saint's sarcophagus was brought inside the church, many years after its foundation, by Bishop Maximianus, who perhaps rededicated the basilica on that occasion to Apollinaris and introduced the figure of the first bishop of Ravenna in the apsidal mosaic between the twelve lambs. The reason of the original dedication is evident by the quoted letter, in which Cyril admonishes Constantine II to believe in the consubstantiality of Christ/*Logos* with the Father, and to fight heretics using as standard the victorious sign of the Cross: this is the slogan of Justinian, who legitimates his war against the Goths in the name of the fight against Arian heresy.