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Christian Emperors and the Legacy of Imperial Art

Abstract

In the context of Imperial Art as Christian Art a question of special interest is how Christian emperors handled the imperial legacy of their pagan predecessors. That the tradition of the *saecula aurea* was important at least for the first Christian emperor is shown by the Arch of Constantine. The extensive use of *spolia* became one of the characteristics of the architecture of Constantine and his followers. But this handling of the past is also a sign of its fragmentation and selection, and mirrors in some way the emperors' policy: On the one hand they tried to protect the main temples and their statues as works of art and bearers of the glorious tradition of the empire, on the other hand they took assertive actions against paganism. A critical comparison between imperial decrees, other texts of Late Antiquity and the archaeological evidence shows the different genres of the artistic legacy between destruction as relics of paganism and integration into the Christian empire.

Constantine

In the discussion of Imperial Art as Christian Art, the question arises as to the policy of the Christian emperors in one of the main fields of imperial patronage in the later empire: the planning and financing of public buildings, *opera publica*. Of special interest in this context is the way Christian emperors handled the imperial legacy of their pagan predecessors. That the tradition of the *saecula aurea* was important at least for the first Christian emperors is shown, for instance, by the Arch of Constantine, consecrated in 315 (FIG. 1). Hans Peter L'Orange has scrupulously analysed this monument with its reused reliefs and interpreted it in a way which remains fundamental for all further studies.[1] The starting point of his interpretation is the fact that all imperial portraits in the reused reliefs have been re-cut, most of them with the features of Constantine (FIG. 2). In the Hadrianic *tondi*, though, two heads have been re-carved to show another type (FIG. 3). For L'Orange, this older bearded person was Licinius, and this indicated that "the medallion cycle was absorbed into the pattern of tetrarchic state-representation."[2] On the other hand, Raissa Calza and others have identified the older emperor as Constantius Chlorus, making the programme appear less tetrarchic than personal to Constantine.[3] We are left with the question: Did the builders of the Arch choose reliefs from works by Trajan, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius by chance, or was it a conscious selection to make

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1. L'Orange & von Gerkan 1939, *passim*.
2. L'Orange & von Gerkan 1939, 172.
3. Calza 1959/60; for further literature cf. Kinney

1995, 56-58 and notes 26 and 40; recently Pensabene & Panella 1999.

Fig. 1 – Rome, Arch of Constantine, northern facade (photo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom, neg. 61-2297).

Constantine appear to the Romans "as Novus Trajanus, Novus Hadrianus, Novus Marcus, that is as guarantor of the Saeculum Aureum – deeply desired, and by him brought back?"[4] Most recent authors seem to follow L'Orange on this point. Beat Brenk, for instance, writes, "with this monument, as a whole, Constantine placed himself in the midst of a venerable line of Roman emperors".[5] This statement implicitly answers a question, which L'Orange carefully avoided: that of who was responsible for the programme. According to the dedicatory inscription, the arch is the work of the Senatus Romanus, but its programme is unlikely to have been drawn up without imperial agreement, in particular if we take into consideration the changed patterns of patronage of public buildings in Late Antiquity. If, as Luca Giuliani has recently done,[6] one tries to interpret this monument as a partial break with the imperial tradition of triumphal arches, the personal influence of Constantine becomes even more likely. L'Orange had already noted the absence of the traditional scenes showing the triumphal procession

4. L'Orange & von Gerkan 1939, 191.
5. Brenk 1987, 105; cf. also Alchermes 1994, 170;
    Kinney 1995, 53; Pensabene & Panella 1999, 13.
6. Cf. his inaugural lecture at the Ludwig
    Maximilian University Munich, summer term
    1999.

FIG. 2 – Rome, Arch of Constantine, Hadrianic tondo with scene of bear hunting. The head of the emperor has been recarved to show the features of Constantine (photo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom, neg. 32-53).

FIG. 3 – Rome, Arch of Constantine, Hadrianic tondo with the sacrifice to Apollo. The recarved head of the emperor shows the features of Constantius Chlorus or Licinius (photo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom, neg. 32-54).

and the Capitoline sacrifice, although – as José Ruysschaert has argued with reference to the reliefs now exhibited in the Palazzo dei Conservatori – they existed on the monuments plundered for the Arch of Constantine.[7] Ruysschaert concluded: "Païen par ce qu'il exprime, l'arc de Constantin est chrétien par ce qu'il tait."[8] Nevertheless, the purpose for which this monument was built – the *"Bauaufgabe"* – was neither Christian nor pagan, but genuinely imperial.

Leaving aside the monument type, it is true that, in the Arch of Constantine, the appropriation of the past is linked with its fragmentation. This may be part of the "disintegration of classical tradition" which L'Orange noted as a general phenomenon of Late Antiquity and which, in art, went hand in hand with "the emergence of a new form of expression".[9] Yet it is at the same time more specific, for it is not a case of randomly chosen pieces being randomly used. Rather, it is a process of selective assimilation, such as was later to become typical of the perception and interpretation of architecture in the early Middle Ages.[10] But there is yet another aspect bound up with this, which we will also encounter again: that of the criterion of usefulness.[11] People helped themselves to the past and its art above all when – either as a whole or dismembered into its constituent

7. L'Orange & von Gerkan 1939, 77, n. 2; Ruysschaert 1962/63, 96.
8. Ruysschaert 1962/63, 99.
9. L'Orange 1985, 17.
10. Still fundamental: Krautheimer 1942.
11. Cf. Meier, forthcoming.

parts[12] – it could be useful. The use of *spolia* is thus a characteristic of the archi-
tecture of Constantine (and his successors), something which is nowhere more
evident than in the new architectural creation of Constantine's great basilica
churches. The practice of incorporating elements of older buildings went hand
in hand with the increasing use of newly prefabricated architectural elements
and – again as L'Orange, amongst others, has noted – is also evidence of an aes-
thetic change: "The point of the matter is that the clearly defined form and func-
tion of each separate building element is no longer felt."[13] At the same time, the
use of *spolia*, at least in the imperial context, is linked with a conscious harking
back to the "golden age".

Whether this is also true of the numerous imitators of imperial building
practice is another matter. At any rate, as early as May 321, Constantine found
the need to regulate the use of *spolia* by legislation, in response to a request
from the interim Praefectus Praetorius. It was forbidden to remove building
adornments, that is, marbles or columns, from the towns to the country, on pain
of confiscation of the property they were used to embellish. On the other hand,
the transfer of such items from one town to another (provided they remained in
the same ownership) was permitted, "as such things are everywhere a public
adornment".[14] Here the differences from apparently similar older Roman prac-
tices and regulations become clear: when Cicero condemns Verres' *spoliatio* of
the Province of Sicily, he uses the word in its literal sense which Dale Kinney
summarizes in this context "*Spolia* are seized from enemies, not from allies or
friends".[15] Later, in the building legislation of the early and middle imperial
period, what was at issue was the question of regulating what had probably
always been the common practice of recycling architectural materials for pri-
vate house building. But if we take, for example, the *senatusconsultum
Hosidianum* from the year 44, this applied equally to villas and thus to town *and
country* alike, and was primarily directed against speculation and the concomi-
tant ruination of individual buildings; again the differences from the laws of
Late Antiquity are clear. And even where – as in the *senatusconsultum
Acilianum* from the year 122 – there was an undeniable intention to legislate in
principle to protect aesthetically valuable buildings, private property was nev-
ertheless to be restricted as little as possible;[16] and here again a clear difference
from the concepts of state and ownership in late antiquity is evident. In
Constantine's decree, which places hardly any reliance any longer on well-func-
tioning, largely self-regulating municipalities, protection is no longer afforded
primarily to individual buildings or even architectural elements, the principle of
whose free availability is no longer in question. What are protected are the
towns as a whole, with their "public adornments", which in the context of
increasing urban depopulation were under threat of plunder. Similar regula-
tions were later passed by Constantius, Valens and Valentinian as well as by

12. See also Choay 1992, 33-34.
13. L'Orange 1985, 43.
14. *Cod. Iust.* 8. 10,6.

15. Kinney 1995, 53; cf. below note 47.
16. Murga 1976; Rainer 1987, 284-293; Geyer 1994,
    66-67.

Arcadius and Honorius, to protect the architectural adornments of the towns.[17] To quote again Dale Kinney: "In any case their target is neither *spolia* nor the practice of reuse, but the process of denudement by which reusable elements could be procured."[18]

Concern for the traditional town with a simultaneous ruthlessness towards individual buildings seems to have been a maxim of Constantine's architectural policy in general. On the one hand he left the centre of Rome untouched, built new baths on the edge of the inner city as his predecessors had done, and in the centre itself he finished the work of his rival with the completion of the Basilica of Maxentius or of Constantine.[19] On the other hand, on the periphery of the city, he had the barracks of the defeated Guard razed to the ground to make way for building the Lateran, while for St Peter's in the Vatican he demolished not only Nero's circus but also a neighbouring necropolis, setting aside as *Pontifex Maximus* – the central law protecting graves in order to do so.[20] (The funerary monuments, however, were not completely destroyed, but damaged only in so far as was strictly necessary for the foundations of the basilica). The only church foundation for which Constantine, or his mother, took over and extensively reused an existing building, without any preparatory clearing of the site, was Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. However, most of these measures did not actually affect *opera publica*, but buildings and localities in the private ownership of the Emperor; even the Vatican gardens had belonged to the *res privata* since the days of Nero.[21]

Jerusalem was the only place where a central and imperial monument was removed. The radical demolition of the temple of the "licentious demon Aphrodite" was a very specific and unique reprisal. According to the Christian apologist Eusebius, Hadrian had built this temple in order to obliterate the tomb and memory of Christ: "Moreover, with a great deal of hard work, they (i.e. the Hadrianic pagans) brought in earth from some place outside and covered up the whole area; thereafter raising the level and paving it over with stone. They concealed the sacred cave somewhere below with a great quantity of fill."[22] But by incorporating the building of the sepulchre church into Hadrian's plan of the forum and the *Via Porticata*, Constantine attempted both to retain the imperial urban layout of the middle period of the empire and to utilise it as part of the triumphal approach to Christ's grave. According to the excavations of Virgilio Corbo, the south-east corner of Hadrian's Temenos Walls and their continuation along the *Via Porticata* were taken over for the eastern atrium of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (FIG. 4).[23] Thus the new church, occupying the site of what had been the chief pagan shrine, yet again took over its dominating role in the town plan.

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17. *Cod. Theod.* 15.1,1 (a. 357); 15.1,14 (a. 365); 15.1,19 (a. 376); 15.1,37 (a. 398); 15.1,43 (a. 405); Pharr 1952, 423-428.
18. Kinney 1995, 54.
19. Krautheimer 1993, 545-546.
20. Another necropolis had been razed in Constantinopolis to build the Forum of Constantine;

Bauer 1996, 168.
21. Krautheimer 1993, 531.
22. Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3, 26: Migne, *PG* 20, 1085-1088; *GCS* 7, 89-90; Taylor 1993, 114.
23. Corbo 1982, 34-35, pl. 1 and 68; Avi-Yonah 1976, 614; cf. yet Deichmann 1939, 120.
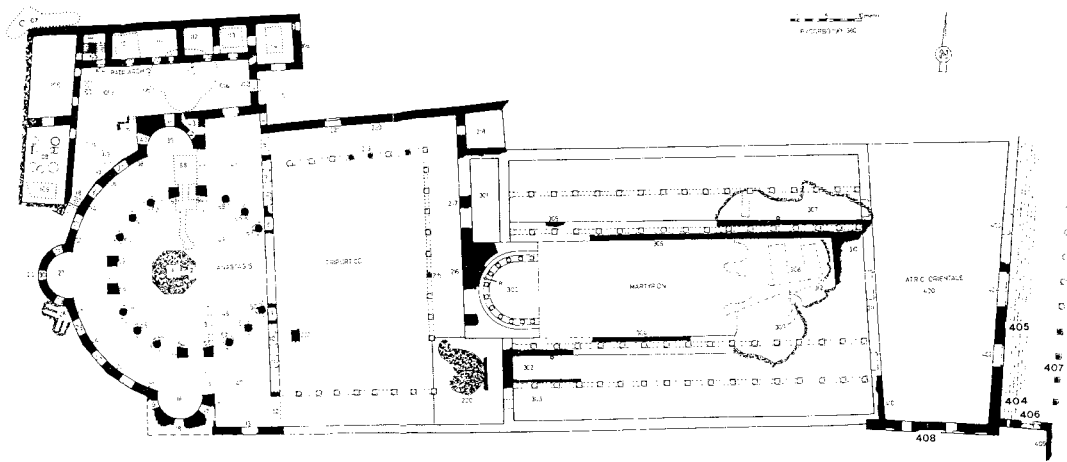
FIG. 4 – Jerusalem, Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Groundplan after Corbo 1982, pl. 1. The walls of the eastern atrium (nos. 404-408 in bold type) were taken over from the Hadrianic temple.

This procedure, where an inherited pre-Christian layout was used as the basis for erecting a splendid new church complex, was to be emulated on numerous occasions elsewhere. The so-called Cathedral in Gerasa/Jerash (FIG. 5), built in the first half of the fifth century, and somewhat later the church of S. Giusto on the Capitol Hill in Trieste, are but two examples, in which the Christian architects reused the entrance of the pagan forerunner-building for their new church.[24] Constantine and subsequent building patrons tried in this way to incorporate the new religion into the traditional conception of the city. The same attempt was made in Constantinople as in Jerusalem, but on a wholly different scale. In Rome, however, there were no efforts of this sort on the part of the emperors; the late and gradual christianisation of the centre there was the work of the bishops.

Constantius and his successors
In spite of the astonishing concurrence of themes, the laws which Constantine's son passed in the years 340 and 349 against the desecration of graves and in 342 (or 346) for the preservation of temples – "although all superstitions must be completely eradicated"[25] – cannot be seen as a reaction against the policies of his father. At least, there is no direct correlation between Constantine's demolitions and the protective regulations of Constantius II. Just as the instances of destruction – whether those of Constantine or the later triumphant demolitions effected by Ambrosius and other Christian zealots – have a concrete historical location and context, so also have the protective edicts. The real and apparent contradictions, that make a straightforward account of the events under discussion here impossible, derive from this fact, and from the divergent aims of the contemporary chroniclers.

Constantius' edict for the protection of temples relates to pagan buildings outside the walls of Rome. It was precisely the Roman periphery which had become

24. Jäggi, Meier & Brenk 1998, 427-429; Mirabella   25. *Cod. Theod.* 9.17,1; 9.17,2; 9.17,4; 9.16.10,3: Pharr
    Roberti 1975, 420-430; Meier forthcoming.   1952, 239, 472.
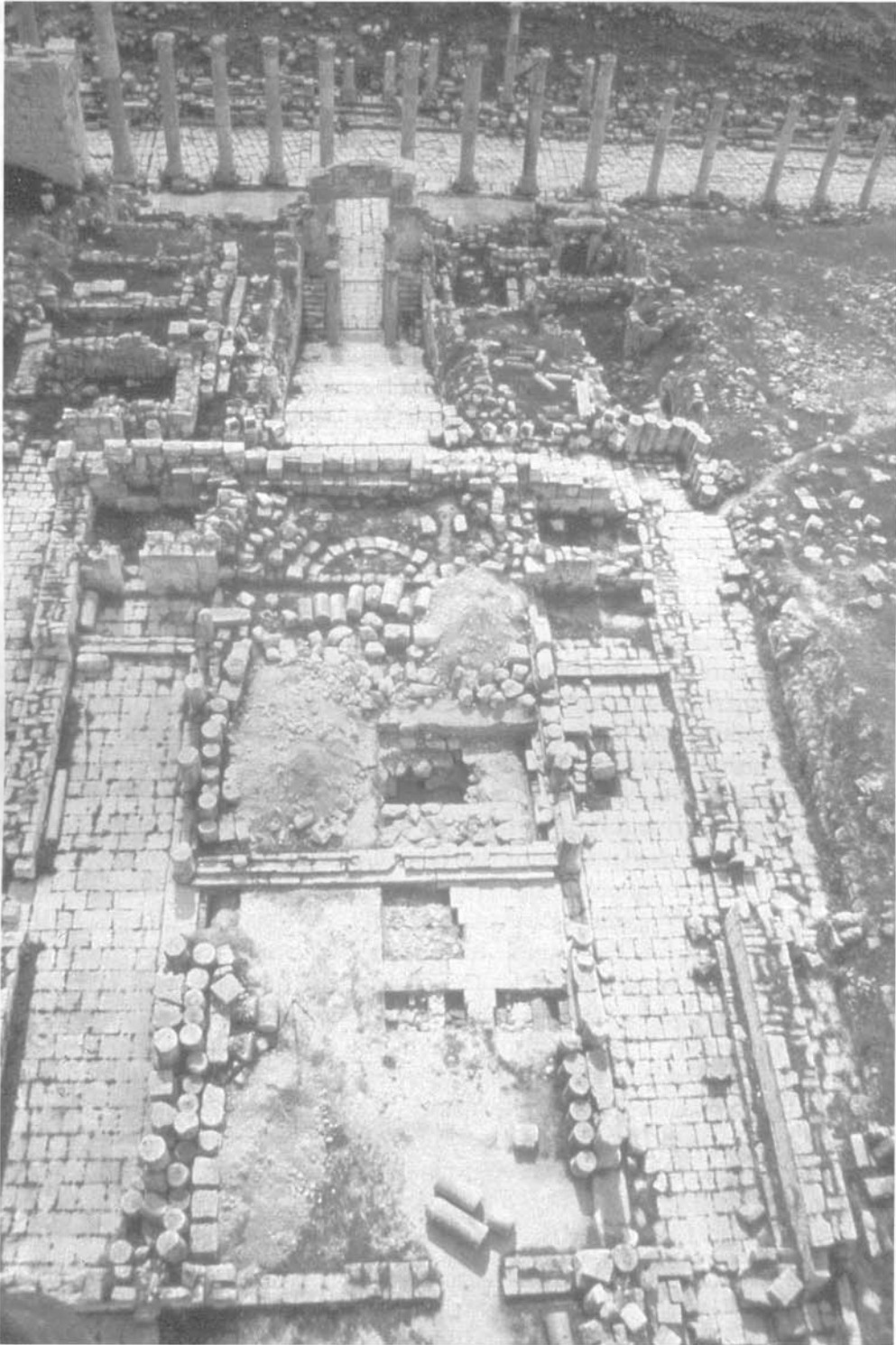
FIG. 5 – Jerash/Gerasa, Cathedral; view of the eastern part of the church with the reused gate from the colonnade-street (photo: Jerash Cathedral Project, Kunsthistorisches Seminar, University of Basel).

quickly and decisively Christian, so that isolated pagan shrines in this region, already difficult to control, might have appeared as extraneous elements offering both over-zealous Christians and thieves of building materials wide scope for their destructive activities. Indirectly, Constantius' edict was thus a consequence of his father's policies. In other places (particularly in the West) this problem had hardly (yet) raised its head, as it was usually within the towns that Christians formed socially relevant groups. The odd Christian building on the periphery of, or outside the town had to coexist with pagan sanctuaries, at least until the end of the fourth century.

Even if the buildings addressed and protected by Constantius were hardly related to imperial cults and deities, official interest in preserving them was not only a question of keeping the internal peace.[26] As the arguments cited in justification of the legislation show, it was also, and most importantly, a matter of maintaining traditions and rituals, which created a sense of community and were central to the Roman state. For many of the games, circus events and contests, the time-honoured amusements of the Roman people, would have had their origins in these temples.[27] Admittedly, this appeal to the *mos maiorum* did not stop Constantius from having the *Victoria* statue removed from the Curia on the occasion of his visit to Rome in the year 357. Here it was his father who had been more conscious of tradition, and Symmachus and Libanius were thus able to invoke Constantine in their speeches in defence of this and other statues of the gods.[28] It was also this awareness of tradition as a force by which the state was cemented, which prompted Constantine to take some strangely contradictory measures. After the Colosseum had been struck by lightning, Constantine ordered that, "if it should appear that any part of Our palace or any other public work has been struck by lightning, the observance of the ancient custom (*more veteris observantiae*) shall be retained, and inquiry shall be made of the soothsayers as to the portent thereof".[29] This was in spite of the fact that only a short time before he had passed several severe measures to regulate the activities of the *haruspices*.[30] According to Zosimus, Constantine even erected or repaired temples in the new imperial capital which – here again his care to maintain tradition is apparent – were supplied with statues of *Rhea*, the mother of the gods, or a *Fortuna* from Rome. The former, however, "was mutilated by Constantine in his frivolous attitude towards the deity"[31] – something to which we will return later. As for the latter, it was not a symbol of paganism, but the representation of one of those abstract cults (Concordia, Pax etc.), which remained essential for the idea and ideology of the Roman Empire. I agree with Gudrun Bühl in interpreting the erection of these two statues not as a religious act, but as a political programme.[32]

26. For *otium civile* and *domestica quies* as aims of government cf. the references quoted by Noethlichs 1971, 27.
27. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10,3; Pharr 1952, 472.
28. Klein 1971, 92-99.
29. *Cod. Theod.* 16. 10, 1; Pharr 1952, 472.
30. Noethlichs 1971, 20-24.
31. Zos., *Hist. Nea* 2, 31; Mango 1963, 57; Bühl 1995,

30-34; Bauer 1996, 166, 219.
32. Bühl 1995, 33. Cf. also *CIL* 11, 5265, where we learn that Constantine permitted the residents of Hispellum in Umbria to dedicate a temple and games to him, but "provided that the temple dedicated to our name not be tainted by deceits of any contagious superstition"; Alchermes 1994, 172.

The same reasons as those given by Constantius for protecting the *suburban* temples were also adduced in justification of later edicts, where it was primarily a question of preserving *urban* monuments. For the accusation that he had robbed "every... town of its embellishments and adornments" and "no longer cared about official buildings" was still one of the main reproaches – regardless of its truth – levelled by Procopius against Justinian in his *Anecdota*.[33] The concern of a ruler for the town and its *opera publica* remained a criterion for judging his worth. After all, Theodoric, for example, was even praised in eastern sources for his care of the buildings of Rome.[34]

Towards the end of the fourth century, in the effort to hold the balance between the demands for the preservation of the town and its *opera publica* and those of the Christian "pressure groups", the argument of artistic worth came into play, alongside that of tradition and remembrance of the past. In 382, for example, Theodosius justified his directive to Palladius, the Duke of Osrhoene, to leave the main temple – probably of Edessa – open, not only by the fact "that (it) was formerly dedicated to the assemblage of throngs of people and now also is for the common use of the people", but also that the "images... must be measured by the value of their art rather than by their divinity (*artis pretio quam divinitate metienda*)".[35] In attempting to separate the former temple and its furnishings from their ancestral function and elevate them to the status of works of art – thus endowing them with different connotations – Theodosius was following a strategy which was to find application in similar situations far beyond the end of the Roman empire. For this reason alone, regardless of its effect and significance as part of imperial policy, the effort deserves recognition.[36] Theodosius also anticipated a later development by differentiating between the architecture and the furnishings: while the latter were to be promoted as art, freed of their dependence on religion, the architecture was more inseparably related to its function and demanded a new use, which Theodosius tried to give by prescribing that the temple be used as a place for public assembly: "In order that this temple may be seen by the assemblages of the city and by frequent crowds, Your Experience shall preserve all celebrations of festivities, and by the authority of Our divine imperial response, you shall permit the temple to be open, but" – he impressed upon his official – "in such a way that the performance of sacrifices forbidden therein may not be supposed to be permitted under the pretext of such access to the temple."[37] The imperial strategy, however, was to be largely abortive and even as an assembly hall the temple was scarcely to be rescued from the sharpening conflict. For, as early as the year 388, even the *Praefectus Praetorio Orientis*, Cynegius, whom Theodosius sent to Egypt and Asia Minor in order to "place bolts on the temples",[38] disregarded his master's attempts at differentiation and was personally active in the destruction of key urban temples – as Theodoret reported from Apamea.[39] That this was not a task

33. Procop., *Anecdota* 26.
34. von Falkenhausen 1984, 307.
35. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10,3; Pharr 1952, 473.
36. Meier 1996, 371-374.
37. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10,3; Pharr 1952, 473; cf. also

Noethlichs 1971, 168.
38. Zos., *Hist. Nea* 4,37.
39. Theodoret, *Hist. Eccles.* 5,21 (*GCS* 44, 318-319; Migne, *PG* 82, 1243-1244).

to be achieved *en passant*, but represented a technically demanding building operation becomes clear from Theodoret's exceedingly vivid description. Several attempts failed before finally, Bishop Marcellus having driven out a demon protecting the temple of Jupiter, it became possible to topple the columns and set the temple ablaze. In view of such infringements it looks as though Theodosius was anticipating events, though in fact he was probably reacting to similar events elsewhere, when as early as 386 he decreed that for the *Archierosyne*, "the office of chief civil priest" – in other words, for the supervision of temples and festivals – "shall be considered preferable (that person) who has performed the most services for his municipality, and who has not, however, withdrawn from the cult of the temples by his observance of Christianity."[40] For rather than concern for the soul of any Christian who might be entrusted with this duty, the edict betrays misgivings that such a Christian might not attach sufficient importance to the desired protection of the buildings. Apart from the sacrifices, the buildings and festivals were to continue as before; indeed in 392 it was still a question of *templis fanisve publicis*,[41] and in 399 of *voluptates secundum veterem consuetudinem*.[42] Or, as Arcadius and Honorius decreed in the same year: *sicut sacrificia prohibemus, ita volumus publicorum operum ornamenta servari*.[43]

Art and Idols

As far as the artistic furnishings of the temples were concerned, or, to be more precise, their statues,[44] in his attempt to remove them from the field of conflict by elevating them to works of art, Theodosius was not only following arguments already employed by Julianus or Libanios; he was also supported by a few Christians, such as Prudentius. In his work, *Contra Symmachum*, Prudentius called on Romans to give up their childish festivals, ridiculous rites and shrines, which were unworthy of so noble an empire and to cleanse the marble statues of blood.[45] The statues, made by great artists, should, he argued, become the most beautiful adornments of their local cities and, as works of art, be delivered from the service of evil. It must be doubted, however, whether the distinctions drawn by Prudentius were able to save many images of the gods. As John Curran remarked, we cannot assume "that statuary survived because connoisseurs saved 'works of art' for men like themselves from a dreadful fate at the hands of vulgar religiosity."[46]

For Theodosius (and the emperors in general) it must have been less a question of connoisseurship than of preserving the *ornamenta urbis*, of which statuary

40. *Cod. Theod.* 12.1,112; Pharr 1952, 358.
41. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10,12,3.
42. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10,17.
43. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10,15.
44. Treasures with objects of gold and silver, which were hoarded preferably in temples, were confiscated when the temples were closed. According to Amm. Marc. *Hist. Rom.* 22.4 these *templorum spoliis* were used to fatten the pockets of courtiers and sycophants. Bredekamp 1975, 75 considers the fiscal interests of the imperial court a main reason for the antipagan policy in the fourth century.

45. Prud., *C. Symm.* Lib. 1. 499-505 (Loeb, 388): "deponas iam festa velim puerilia, ritus / ridiculos tantoque indigna sacraria regno. / marmora tabenti respergine tincta lavate, / o proceres: liceat statuas consistere puras, / artificum magnorum opera: haec pulcherrima nostrae / ornamenta fiant patriae, nec dolor usus / in vitium versae monumenta coinquinet artis"; cf. also Alchermes 1994, 171. For the comparison of this poem with the 17th letter of Ambrosius, see Klein 1971, 122-160.
46. Curran 1994, 55.

formed a quite essential part. This is confirmed by Cicero's indictment against Verres,[47] already quoted, and equally, half a millennium later, by Sozomenos, when he commented as follows on Constantine's treatment of temple statues and the way he embellished his new imperial capital with statuary: "All the images of the gods which were made of precious metals or which seemed otherwise to be useful, were melted down and used to make official coins. But anything artistically cast in bronze was brought from wherever it stood to the city named after the emperor and used for its adornment, and now stands on public view on the streets and in the hippodrome and the emperor's palace. Thus the *Pythia* from the oracle of Apollo, the *Muses* from Helikon, the tripod from Delphi, and the famous *Pan* which Pausanias, the Lacedaemonian, and the Greek cities consecrated after the war against the Medes."[48] It may be true, as Hugo Brandenburg has concluded from his study of the inscriptions on the bases of statues,[49] that for the majority of Romans the actual presence of the statues themselves was far more important than what they represented. With Christian apologists, however, the attempt to release this traditional art from what were – as far as Christians were concerned – its pagan connotations, and elevate it to the realm of "pure art", thus making it, if not exactly Christian art, then at least the art of the Christian empire, met with perhaps even more resistance in the area of sculpture than in architecture. For if even stones and mortar were possessed by demons, as was the case not only in the temple of Jupiter in Apamea, but even as late as Benedict's day, in the temple of Apollo which he removed to found his monastery at Montecassino[50] – how much more must this have been true of the "idols" themselves. Against such a viewpoint, the argument for art from Theodosius's time seems to have been just as unsuccessful as the Constantinian argument for tradition. Constantine's biographer, Eusebius, at any rate, will have none of it, when he describes the decking out of the new imperial capital with statuary as if the purpose were to expose the statues to ridicule: "The venerable statues of brass, of which the superstition of antiquity had boasted for a long series of years, were exposed to view in all the public places of the imperial city: so that here a Pythian, there a Sminthian Apollo excited the contempt of the beholder: while the Delphic tripods were deposited in the hippodrome and the Muses of Helicon in the palace itself. In short, the city which bore his name was everywhere filled with brazen statues of the most exquisite workmanship, which had been dedicated in every province, and which the deluded victims of superstition had long vainly honoured as gods with numberless victims and burnt sacrifices, though now at length they learnt to renounce their error, when the emperor held up the very objects of their worship to be the ridicule and sport of all beholders."[51]

More recent research unanimously interprets Eusebius's contention, that simply moving them from one place to another brought ridicule on the formerly sacred images, as wishful thinking.[52] On the other hand, it is equally undeniable –

47. Cic., *Verr*. 1.11,3; 2.4,133; 2.4,93; see Brandenburg 1989, 242.
48. Sozom., *Hist. eccl.* 2,5.
49. Brandenburg 1989, 245.

50. Gregor, *Dialogi* 2,8-10.
51. Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3,54.
52. Curran 1994, 53; Bauer 1996, 313; Gramaccini 1996, 21.

as we know at least since Marcel Duchamp's "Ready-mades" – that an altered context did place works of art in a new light; the purpose of the precious collection of statuary was to compensate for Constantinople's lack of tradition and "to assure for the new town on the Bosphorus, as the *nova Roma*, the sovereign title of the first Rome."[53] But, as with the Arch of Constantine, it is clear that "tradition" meant imperial, not pagan tradition, because the statues of deities which already belonged locally were submitted not only to a change of context, but also of form and function to make them fit for the new Christian capital. Whereas on the Arch of Constantine it was the heads that were changed, in the case of the above-mentioned statue of *Rhea* it was the hands. Criticising the "mutilation", Zosimus describes the altered statue: "For whereas before they appeared to be restraining lions, now they have been placed in the posture of a supplicant, who casts her eyes over the city and protects it."[54] Recently Norberto Gramaccini has presented numerous other examples of *interpretationes christianae*,[55] each of which represents a concrete solution to the problem of how to transform traditional art of the Empire from an area which was problematic, often because of its pagan connotations, into Christian art, or at least art which was compatible with Christianity. Gramaccini rightly emphasizes that such procedures and attitudes in the long run had a decisive influence on the history of the artistic genre in the Middle Ages. But it should also be emphasized that the genre of free-standing sculpture remained problematic for over a thousand years. In the West, where antique statues – with certain well-known exceptions – largely disappeared from the scene over the course of the early Middle Ages, a hesitant renaissance of free-standing sculpture was experienced from the eleventh and twelfth centuries on, albeit accompanied by polemics against idolatry. In Byzantium, on the other hand, whose capital was adorned with Constantine's antiquities until 1204, this genre significantly never experienced a new blossoming.[56] As *opera publica* these statues were obviously sacrosanct; as works of art, however, they could be dangerous. This is shown by the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, an eighth century chronicle, the gist of which runs as follows: "As you investigate these matters truthfully, pray not to fall into temptation, and be on your guard when you contemplate ancient statues, especially pagan ones."[57] Even though Christianisation may have been successful in isolated cases, and even if in the western High Middle Ages there is here and there evidence of these statues being valued as works of art, in this genre as a whole, imperial art – or better: traditional art of the Empire – never became Christian art.

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53. Gramaccini 1996, 21.
54. Zos., *Hist. Nea* 2.31; Bredekamp 1975, 80; Gramaccini 1996, 22; more critical Bühl 1995, 31.
55. Gramaccini 1996, 22-24; Mango 1963, 63-64.
56. For early Byzantine sculpture and the decline of this genre, see Kiilerich 1993, 94-97.
57. Mango 1963, 61; James 1996, 12.

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