3.

CLASSICAL ART IN MEDIEVAL COLLECTIONS
Damnatio and Interpretatio christiana

Whatever the individual collector selects any ‘thing’ is ultimately destined to constitute an unconscious prophylactic device to assist the owner in mastering a feeling of threat and to control a sense of helpless frustration.

Werner Muensterberger

1. Christian versus pagan art, salvage or destruction?

The controvercy of Christian versus pagan art is a relevant side-theme of copying, because it determined the fate of ancient classical artforms. However, the dualism was not always as rigorous as the literary sources, first and foremost the Church fathers, suggest. A lot was derived of Greco-Roman imagery, but also from Classical architecture. Early Christian churches imitated the Roman basilica and often spolia were incorporated, most conspicuously the antique columns. The art forms themselves remained unchanged, for one continued to illustrated manuscripts, carve stone reliefs (sarcophagi and architectural decorations), create mosaics, wall paintings and wood panel-paintings. Ancient gemstones were admired and, occasionally with small alterations, incorporated into liturgical objects. Overall there was a generally accepted structure, which was (subconsciously?) accepted. From this perspective it is not surprising that to medieval man Greco-Roman imagery was regarded as Christian, for it all looked very similar. This symbiosis or coexistence was a general phenomenon and not an exception.

During the medieval period large freestanding Classical sculpture was the subject of a comprehensive controversy. No other genre was more appealing or was discussed with greater intensity. The Bible after all encouraged the destruction of pagan sculpture. Deuteronomy verse 7:25 reads:

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262. Muensterberger 1994, 170. To shed more light on the phenomena of collecting from a psychoanalytical perspective Muensterberger examined the underlying driving factors of collectors, while taking into account the cultural influence on human behaviour.


264. Ramsay MacMullen (1997) refuted the traditional view of a victorious Christendom that prevailed on all fronts as one-sided and false. A distorting factor is the way in which historians dealt with literary sources. One has to keep in mind that the Church fathers did not recoil from manipulating history. An illustration of this is a statement of one of the great church historians of the 4th century, Eusebius of Caesarea, who stated that historiography should be limited to that which was profitable for the spreading of the Christian faith. His successors adopted this attitude, as a result details were bent out of shape or passed over and some events were entirely suppressed (Euseb., Hist.eccl., 8.1 ; quoted by MacMullen 1997, 4). Later historians never questioned these literary sources and regarded them as truthful beyond any doubt. Whereas from early on all the books of pagan writers were considered heretical, were destroyed and disappeared from the libraries and therefore also from history (see: MacMullen 1997, 3.). Additional arguments in this context came from Robin Lane Fox (1986, especially chapt. 13), who made a study of religious life in declining years of the Roman Empire. Lane Fox opposed the persisting theory of Edward Gibbon (1776) and followers who believed that Christianity evolved in a decaying pagan culture. For more recent studies on the Fall of Rome, see: Smith 2005; Ward-Perkins 2005; Heather 2006.
‘The graven images of their [the gentiles] gods shall ye burn with fire (…) for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God’.

Such medieval controversies opposing Classical Antiquity actually functioned as a kind of bridge towards the Renaissance.265

In the intellectual realm the attitude of the Church Fathers toward ancient philosophy - little distinction was made between philosophy and theology - is determined by synthesis on the one side and antithesis on the other. Tertullian (c.160-c.230) regarded pagan philosophy as the foolishness of this world and the philosophers as mere patriarchs of the heretics.266 Clement of Alexandria (c.150-219) sought to develop the systematic presentation of the Christian wisdom in a true, as opposed to a false, gnosis (Greek: insight).267 He believed, like Justin (c.100-c.165) before him, that Plato had borrowed his knowledge from Moses and the prophets.268 In the end the neo-platonic ideas as formulated by Clement and after him Augustine (354-430) prevailed. A Greek philosopher that fitted well in this ideology was Socrates. A passage in the 10th chapter of Justin's Second Apology is eloquent:

(…)’Our doctrine, then, appears to be greater than all human teaching. Those who by human birth were more ancient than Christ, when they attempted to consider and prove things by Logos were brought before the tribunal (…) And Socrates, who was more zealous in this direction than all of them, was accused of the very same crimes as ourselves’.269

Nevertheless, the dogmatic tenets held by the Church rejected pagan idol worship and polytheistic myth. Clement’s Protrepticus or Exhortation to the Gentiles exemplifies this attitude. In line with the tradition of apologetic writing it is entirely directed against image worship of all kinds, from primitive xoana (ancient wooden idol statues) to Serapis and the statues of the emperor.270 He believed that all pagan gods were representatives of demons, in opposition to the one Christian God who created the heavens and all that is in it.271 Marcianus Aristides wrote an Apology (c.140 A.D.) addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius. A good deal of it is devoted to an attack on the pagan deities of Greece and Egypt.272 Hippolytus, a learned presbyter of Rome who lived in the 3rd-century, wrote about the screening of candidates for instruction prior to baptism. He gave these directives among others:

(…)’If a man were a sculptor or a painter, he shall be charged not to make idols. If he does not desist, he must be rejected. (…) A heathen priest or anyone who tends idols must desist or be rejected’.273

266. Tert. De anim., 3.
269. As quoted by Hannestad 1994, 156. The art historian William Heckscher (1939, 205) argued that the idea of a concordance between Paganism and Christianity was quite common and anything but heretical. The archaeologist Glen Bowersock (1990, 13) explained this as the need of rising Christianity for cultural legitimacy: acculturation rather than confrontation would have been the determining factor.
273. Hippol., Apost. Trad. 16. 11. 16.
Attitudes such as these determined the fate of classical sculptures, which were regarded as repulsive idols only good for sending to the limekiln or to the forge. Despite their rejection of any idolatry whatsoever, Tertullian, Origin and Clement of Alexandria never ordered the destruction of pagan works of art.\textsuperscript{274} Neither is there any direct evidence that Christians publicly insulted or destroyed pagan shrines or idols or any specific occasion before the end of the 3\textsuperscript{rd}-century A.D.\textsuperscript{275} The apostle Paul, in his \textit{Letter to the Romans} (mid-first century A.D.), likewise condemned the robbing of pagan temples:

‘Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?’\textsuperscript{276}

Renewed persecution of Christians under Emperor Diocletian in 303 A.D. seems to mark a change in attitude. In his \textit{History of the Martyrs of Palestine} Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, recorded several violent acts of sacrilege committed by Christians under the strains and stresses of persecution in the days of Maximian and Galerius (292-311), although this did not involve the destruction of idols.\textsuperscript{277} The change of attitude was further stimulated by the Edict of Milan where Constantine and his co-emperor in the East, Licinius, agreed on a policy of religious freedom for all, Christians and pagans alike. This meant that Christianity now earned official approval and support throughout the Roman empire. The recently persecuted Church shifted from defence to attack. Eusebius, who wrote a biography of Constantine- had high hopes; he described the emperor as a destroyer of idols and as a suppressor of pagan worship.\textsuperscript{278} Eusebius also stated that Constantine issued a law that prohibited all pagan sacrifices.\textsuperscript{279} Although this statement is highly disputable and this law was certainly not put into motion.\textsuperscript{280} In the same year, Constantine issued, joint by Licinius, a decree proclaiming tolerance for all religions of the empire including Christianity. Yet only one generation later his son Constans decreed in 341 the abrogation of pagan sacrifices in Italy.\textsuperscript{281} This act proved to be premature and had to be modified in the following year 342 on account of powerful pagan opposition from conservative forces in the Senate.\textsuperscript{282}

In 356 Constantius II prohibited all sacrifices and ordered to close all the pagan temples.\textsuperscript{283} But in the following year, when the emperor visited Rome.\textsuperscript{284} Constantius, for all his haughty bearing, was enthralled by the grandure of the city. His very awe was the reason that he had the altar in front of the statue of Victory in the Curia removed, at least while he was present.\textsuperscript{285}

An example of a strong anti-pagan attitude is found with the converted Roman senator Firmicus Maternus who, at about 346 A.D., wrote a vigorous tract in which he appealed to the emperor Constantius II for a root and branch suppression of paganism. He requested the emper-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[274] Gramaccini 1996, 18.
\item[275] Timothy Thornton (1986, 128) argued that in general the early Christians seemed to have followed the existing Jewish tradition of refraining from public insults or acts of sacrilege against pagan idols and shrines and to have respected Roman laws against sacrilege.
\item[276] Bible, \textit{Romans}, 2:22.
\item[277] Thornton 1986, 123.
\item[278] Euseb., \textit{Vit. Const.}, ii. 45; iv. 23,25.
\item[279] Euseb., \textit{Hist.eccl.} 9,8.13-14.
\item[280] Lane Fox 1986, 18, 667.
\item[281] \textit{Cod. Theod.} 16, 10, 2.
\item[282] Especially the pagan party in Rome, see: Alföldi 1937, 31; Bloch 1963, 193.
\item[283] \textit{Cod.Theod.} XVI.X. 4 and 6.
\item[284] Amm.Marc., XVI.X; Symmachus \textit{Relat.}, III ,5-6; Ambrosius \textit{Epp.}, 18-32.
\item[285] Bloch 1963, 194.
\end{footnotes}
ors to destroy all pagan idols and temples emphasising the sacred duty of rulers to eradicate paganism.  

During the reign of the emperor Julian (355-360) Christians had some of their official privileges and advantages taken away from them. This further stimulated the anti-pagan attitude among Christians. There is little doubt that those who were killed by pagans on accounts of acts of sacrilege committed against temples or idols, were regarded by fellow-Christians as martyrs. The same fervent anti-pagan attitude is found with John Chrysostom (c.347-407). This Church Father and patriarch of Constantinople could not believe that the apostle Paul and his companions were averse to committing acts of sacrilege in pagan temples. He was strongly opposed to the account in *Acts* 19:37 where Paul's travelling companions are described as:

‘Neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers’.

By this time it was considered an act of virtue, or even a duty for Christians to destroy pagan idols. Moreover, Chrysostom himself had been instrumental in securing the destruction of certain pagan temples in Phoenicia. Other evidence of this attitude is a plea written in 370 A.D. by Symmachus (the prefect of Rome) to emperor Valentinian I. In it he requested the emperor to protect the decorations of the Curia against the Christian rage of destruction in order to save them for posterity.

Not all government measurements were as draconian as they looked. In 381 the emperor Gratian had the altar in the Curia in Rome removed for good, leaving however the Victory statue. This proved to be a very strategic political act, for it suspended the custom of a pagan sacrifice which had always up till then opened the sessions of the Senate. Moreover it gave the Christian senators the opportunity to treat the Victory statue as an angel. Otherwise he did not interfere with the pagan majority of the Senate.

During the nineties of the 4th-century, Christians decapitated a cult statue from the Serapis temple in Alexandria. It was carried through the city and ceremoniously burnt in the amphitheatre.

The glorification of female nudity was yet another problem. One could say that in the depiction of the Classical nude the energy of the body triumphs, where pathos and eros prevail. Despite the existence of nude figures in early Christian art (Eve, certain saints, e.g. St Thecla) Christian morality degraded the body and associated it with humility and shame (*e.g. Genesis* 3:7). This was a convenient argument for the Church fathers who had a negative attitude towards women anyway.

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286 Firm. Mat., Err. prof. rel., XX. 7; XXIX.
287 For further discussion see Thornton 1986, 125.
289 There are cases where Christians scratched out the eyes of Classical statues, chopped off hands, heads and noses, see: Bredekamp 1975, 72. For other examples see: Gramaccini 1996, 25.
290 Klein 1972, 100.
291 The Victory statue, once brought from Capua, was a symbol of the invincibility of Rome. In having the altar in front of this statue removed, Roman paganism was disconnected from its official association with the State. Also see: Wytzes 1936; Klein 1972.
292 Chadwick 1981, 167. Although it is questionable, because in those days angels were also depicted as men with beards.
293 Bredekamp 1975, 81.
294 A peculiar account in this context comes from Gregory of Tours who tells us that by the end of the 6th century in the cathedral of Narbonne there was a painting of a 'naked Christ upon the Cross, and that Christ appeared to the bishop in a dream and commanded that His body be covered with drapery'
Examples of personal feelings of Church Fathers in regard to anti-pagan violence are rarely documented. One of the few instances is found with Augustine, although his views in this respect are interesting but not necessarily typical.\textsuperscript{297} Despite his strong disapproval of pagan idol worship he was opposed to Christians who took the law into their own hands. He considered violence against pagans or idols as counter productive and recommended Christians to pray for them rather than provoke anger. For when a Christian robs or destroys a pagan's belongings, he may be hindering that pagan's conversion to Christianity.\textsuperscript{298} Idols are best destroyed at the instigation of their owners who have no longer use for them. In all other cases the proper state authorities should carry out destruction.\textsuperscript{299}

Finally, in 391 under Valentinian II and Theodosius I, Christianity was declared the state religion and, enforced by imperial edicts; all the pagan cults were prohibited. Nonetheless this process was far from unambiguous. The laws of the Emperors Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius in 391 and 392 A.D. effectively proscribed paganism but were soon followed by others in 399 that were clearly aimed at protecting ancient temples.\textsuperscript{300} Flavius Stilicho (c. A.D. 365-408) who succeeded Theodosius I in 395 A.D. as the effective ruler of the Western Roman Empire, stated that: 'Just as we prohibit sacrifices, so we wish that the ornaments of public buildings shall be preserved, and those who attempt to destroy such things should not be deluded if any law or rescript is cited'.\textsuperscript{301}

\textbf{2. The evolution of Christian art}

The Church Fathers won the battle and wrote history. But cultural change is always a gradual process. Sculpture was not pagan until Constantine the Great -as has long been the prevailing opinion-, and thenceforth Christian.\textsuperscript{302} Christian art existed already before Constantine and it was not an exception to find pagan and Christian subjects depicted next to each other. Such was the case with an early Christian sarcophagus in Arles from c.380 A.D., depicted on it are Christian subjects (the feeding of the multitude) along with the Classical-mythological story of the Dioscuri.\textsuperscript{303} Its only one of the many examples which prove that ancient classical sculpture continued to play an important role in the late Roman society.

(as quoted by Clark 1976, 223). Another example is a miniature in the Codex Rabulensis which shows Christ upon the Cross as a draped figure.

Tertullian degraded women as 'the devil's gateway' (Tert., \textit{Cultu. fem.} Lib.I, 1 C. 5 V; \textit{Virg. vel.}. 7 V. 11; 17; \textit{Coron.} 14), and blamed her for the death of Christ; Thomas Aquinas saw women as a mistake of nature, a kind of mangled man (\textit{Summa}, I, q. 92, a. 1) As quoted in Deschner 1974, chapt. 18, also for more examples. Furthermore women were barred from worshipping in groups at a saint's martyrium or entering to offer their prayers (they had to use intermediaries); likewise it was prohibited for them to approach the altar or to teach or preach, see: MacMullen 1997, 7, n.17.

\textsuperscript{297} Thornton 1986, 126.
\textsuperscript{298} As reflected by Thornton 1986, 127.
\textsuperscript{299} Ross 1934, 8.
\textsuperscript{300} \textit{Cod.Theod., De paganis, sacrificiis et templis}, (ed.) Th. Mommsen & P.M. Meyer (Berlin, 1895) XVI, 10,15, pp. 901f. For further reading see: Ross 1934, 8-18.
\textsuperscript{301} The division into classical, medieval, and modern periods began in the Italian Renaissance. Lorenzo Ghiberti was the first to adapt it to art history in his \textit{Commentarii} (Fol.8v), written in Florence around 1450. According to Ghiberti, the Classical period ended with the reign of Constantine the Great, when the Christians began to destroy classical monuments. For elaboration see Schlosser 1912, 108.
\textsuperscript{302} Classical themes are christianized. Also see: Benoit 1954, nr.I. For other examples see: Stutzinger 1982, 125 and Elsner 1997. Also see n.312
Despite the fact that the statues of the gods were relegated from the temples to the baths, humilia-
tingly castrated and goddesses even neutered, not all early Christians were opposed to pagan art.
Some commissioned luxury crafts in the pure Classical tradition. The opposition from Christi-
an apologists like Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, came from their discomfort and
displeasure with established fact: Christians made images, even of their God -that is Christ as
incarnated Logos- just like everyone else. One of the stumbling blocks was that the sacred
world of early Christian religion lacked a visual and symbolical language of its own.

The new Christian faith contained a number of teachings, a great story and an enemy (the
pagan gods). But paganism had deep cultural roots based on old traditions and folklore. In
practical reality therefore existed much more a symbiosis. An example of this is that Christians
and non-Christians celebrated each others religious feasts and festivals, no church leader, not
even Augustine, was able to change that. This symbiosis explains the paganisation of the
church (that Augustine fought against) and the persistence of what later disdainfully would be
called superstition.

The lure of Classical sculpture that caused Christians to develop a strategy that on its turn
lead to an aesthetic theory. Like the concept a-cheiro-poieitos (not made by hands) that was
developed in regard to icon-paintings of Saint Luke since the 6th-century A.D. It resulted in a
rather rigid abstract style of icon-painting which had to confirm the absence of the hand of the
artist. This attitude was encouraged by the biblical statement (first century B.C.) found in The
Wisdom of Salomon:

(..)'But the wooden idol made by human hands is accursed, and so is its maker'.

The very existence of Christian art should therefore not be taken for granted, for the Bible
prohibited any image worship. It took Christianity, an offspring of Judaism, about two centuries
to overcome the Second Commandment (Exodus. 20:4):

‘Thou shall not make unto thee any graven images’. 309

Moreover, due to a strong eschatological belief some thought it completely unnecessary to create
any religious architecture or visual art, since the end of this material world was expected to be near.310

The 3rd- to the 7th-century A.D. constitutes a transitional period during which Classical art
came to an end and Christian art grew from infancy to full bloom. 311 Strong opposition came

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304 Some have explained the existence of pagan sculpture in a Christian context out of practical rea-
sons, from the pure necessity of reusing sculpture because there were no other alternatives at hand.
Hannestad (1994, 152) opposed this view. In his study on the subject he proves that pagan sculpture
did not vanish but remained part of a living tradition that produced amazing works of art.
305 Freedberg 1989, 60.
308 The Wisdom of Salomon, 14:8 (apocryphal, first century B.C.).
309 Or the condemnation found in The Wisdom of Salomon (13:10): 'The really degraded ones are those
whose hopes are set on dead things, who give the name of gods to the work of human hands, to gold
and silver fashioned by art into images of living creatures, or to useless stone carved by a craftsman
long ago'. Painters fell also under the same condemnation (15:4): 'Painters are in love with evil'; Also
see Deut. 7:25, 9:16; Exod. 32:1-33; For discussion on the attitude of the Early Christian Church
towards pagan idols and shrines see: Thornton 1986. This does not imply that Jewish art did not exist.
The wall-paintings in Jewish community-houses in Doura Europos (early third century) are the
evidence of a less strict interpretation of the second commandment.
310 Immerzeel 1998, 56.
from the Iconoclast Council of 754 (since the divine nature is completely indefinable, it cannot be represented by artists in any medium). In the course of time Christians began to use Greco-Roman art forms and developed them into a new pictorial language or style.312

By the end of this transitional period the picture was elevated to the highest status, equal in importance to the Word313 This is confirmed by the words of the last of the Byzantine Church fathers, John of Damascus (c.675-c.749):

‘All these things [history of the Old Testament, events from the life of Christ] really happened and were seen by men and, indeed, written down to remind and instruct us (...) Since, however, not all know letters nor do all have leisure to read, the Fathers deemed it fit that all these events should be depicted as a sort of memorial and terse reminder’.314

This passage was quoted at the second Council of Nicea in 787, where iconoclasm was rejected.

During the early medieval period actual physical force against pagan idol statues or sanctuaries ceased (with incidental exceptions). It seems that one started to rely more on the vengeance of the Christian god himself (ill.2a+b). In the propaganda of the church the destruction of idols was now presented as self-destruction. The appearance of the cross or some other divine sign, even a prayer or a curse of a Christian ascetic would suffice for the destruction of the idol.315 Numerous legends testify of this.316 The basis for this attitude was found in a passage in the Bible, where the Philistines carried off the Ark of the Covenant from the town of Ebenezer to the city of Ashdod. When the ark was placed in the temple of Dagon there, the statue fell on the ground and was broken into pieces (ill.3):

312. Grabar 1980, 31-56. In this chapter titled The Assimilation of Contemporary Imagery, he gives many examples of the adoption of pagan imagery in a Christian context. To name a few: the similarity between the figurations of Christ and the traditional images of sovereign gods of late antiquity - Jupiter, Neptune or Plato (p.34). Or the playful genre of putti well known from pagan art scenes that were adopted for certain scenes of grape gathering in allusion to the 'vine of the Lord' and to communion (p.34). One can also think of the image of the triumphal chariot, very well known by late antiquity. In a Christian context this scene was used for a figuration of Ezekiel's vision of God combined with Christ's ascension (p.35); For pagan motifs on Christian sarcophagi, see: Engelmann 1976, 157ff.; About the Prometheus theme on monuments of Late Antiquity: Kaiser-Minn 1981; For pagan motifs in Coptic art, see: Badawi 1978, esp. p.119: Forerunners of Coptic Sculpture. The same phenomenon is found in Early Islamic art, in the Great Mosque in Damascus, built by the Umayyads in 705 A.D. In contrary to later Islamic rulers the dynasty of the Umayyads were not hostile to realistic pictorial imagery. The decorations in the Great Mosque were very likely made by mosaic makers who were hired out by the Byzantine court. The so-called 'Barada'-mosaic in this Islamic place of worship has strong resemblance with Late Roman wall paintings! For elaboration see: Förtsch 1993, 177ff; Elsner 1996, passim.
314. John of Damascus Orthodox Faith, Book IV On Images, (tr.) Chase 1958, 372. It be noted though that his attitude toward Greek statues was all but tolerant. In his eyes they were representations of demons: Orthodox Faith, Book IV (Chase 1958, 371): (...) 'The Greeks used to sacrifice to the demons, the Jews used to sacrifice, but the Greeks sacrificed to the demons, whereas the Jews sacrificed to God. And the sacrifice of the Greeks was rejected and condemned, while the sacrifice of the just was acceptable to God (...) And thus the statues of the Greeks happen to be rejected and condemned, because they were representations of demons'.
‘When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him’.  

Or in Isaiah 19, 1:

‘Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it’.

But overall the early medieval church denounced the use of violence against idol statues and sanctuaries as a means of to establish dignity within the Christian community.

The way the early Christian church dealt with Classical 'pagan' sculpture was ambivalent, for a severance never occurred. The medieval discussions on aesthetics, form, and ideology is multi facetted. Overall a distinction was made between that what served as idolum on the one hand and the artistic appearance on the other. Did the latter outweigh the first then the artwork could be saved. Fact is that strict prohibitions that were issued in this regard, in most cases, were not observed.

3. Damnation of Classical statues: a means of church propaganda

The demonization of Classical statues during the medieval period, often lead to their destruction. It was a well-known practise in churches and monasteries to immure idol statues with their heads pointing downwards, that is to hell. Such was the case with a statue of the goddess Isis, once venerated in Roman Cologne. It survived the ages being walled up in the Basilica of St.Ursula that was built near, or on top of an Isis sanctuary (ill.4).

This practise actually created a new genre: that of deliberately damaged Classical statues. As deterrence and warning such statues were put on public display and subjected to derision. They were to symbolize the victory of Christianity over antiquity. By itself this practise was nothing new, one could think of the ancient curse called damnatio memoriae that was cast over statues of reprobated emperors.

In 12th-century pilgrims’ guidebooks of Rome such statues are mentioned. An example was found at the courtyard of the Lateran Basilica. Here a colossal bronze head, plus a right hand holding an imperial globe were publicly displayed (ill.5). It is now identified as Constantius II, but then inaccurately assumed to be Sol, Jupiter or Samson. According to Magister Gregorius,

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317 Bible, I Samuel, 5:1-5
318 There are several examples in Late Medieval art where the theme of the Flight to Egypt also depicted the destruction of pagan gods. E.g. a relief of the west portal -right- of the St.Pierre in Moissac, (12th-century). For more examples see Gramaccini 1996, 32.
319 Gramaccini 1996, 28; for examples see Bredekamp 1975, 73. Although in the northern regions of Europe the situation was less tolerant, especially in the regions that still had to be christianised. The Irish missionary Willibrord was still chopping down the sacred oak trees of the Frisian communities in the 7th century.
320 See Gordon Rushforth, A new Description of Rome in the 12th-century (1919), and Nine Miedema, Die 'Mirabilia Romae', Untersuchungen zu ihrer Überlieferung (1996)
Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) personally smashed the statue to pieces, from which debris only the head and right hand remained. It was also this zealous pope, although older pilgrim guides stated it was pope Sylvester, who had the head and hand placed on pillars clearly visible for the faithful.321

In a letter, Cassiodorus (c.490-583) testifies to the vandalizing of ancient statues in Rome during this period. For he appeals to the emperor to have those who commit these acts of vandalism persecuted.322 The act itself was to recall the Old Testament story of the Philistine idol statue of Dagon which was broken to pieces (ill.3). In the same pilgrims’ guide Magister Gregorius gives an account of the heavily damaged Pallas-temple at the Nerva forum where radical Christians piled up many remains of Classical statues. Among these remains was the head, plus an 'admirable' torso of a Pallas statue. It was probably put there as an act of mockery at antiquity now vanquished by the Christian faith. Moreover, it had to impress pilgrims with the omnipotence of the Roman Church.

Another example of such a statue, which reputation was legendary during the medieval period, could be found in Treves (ill.6). Here a heavily vandalised torso of Venus or Diana was attached to one of the walls of the St. Matthew basilica (consecrated 1148 A.D.).323 It served as a warning for Christian pilgrims who were, as an act of defiance, encouraged to throw stones at her. It was accompanied by a stone table on the wall with the three bishops of Treves (Eucharius, Valerius and Maternus) accompanied by an inscription that said (in Latin and in 16th-century German):

‘Wolt Ihr wissen, was ich bin
Ich bin gewessen ein Abgottin
Da S. Eucharius zu Trier kam
Er mich zerbrach, mein Ehr abnam
Ich was geehret als ein Gott
Jetz stehen ich hie der Welt zu Spot’.

According to an apocryphal story bishop Eucharius (sent from Rome to Treves in the second half of the third century) threw the statue down from its place on the market square and erected a cross there. Gramaccini categorized these damaged statues as examples of didactic propaganda of the church.324

Charlemagne imitated the early papal propaganda during the reign of Pope Gregory and Sylvester in Rome. It was he who regarded himself as the new emperor of the Roman Empire, which explains his interest in antiquity. In his Palatine Chapel in Aix-la-Chapelle (ill.7), building material and bronze statues from Classical Rome and Ravenna, plus newly cast bronzes that imitated ancient originals were incorporated in the building. It was intended to be an evocation of the most famous monuments at the time in Rome: the atrium (also called paradisus) of the Lateran and the atrium of the old St.Peter (ill.8+9). This explains why at the atrium of the chapel, a bronze pine-cone (a contemporary medieval cast), a bronze bear (antique) (ill.10+11), an equestrian statue of Theodoric (a now lost original which came from Ravenna), plus two massive bronze doors, could be found there. Such spolia lost their individual meaning and were assimilated in the history of salvation as perceived by the Church.325

323. Though others, like Rademacher (1905) believed the statue to be on a pedestal in he direct vicinity of the church.
325. Also see: Bosman 2004
Church ideology looked for more ways to claim the inheritance of Antiquity. To accomplish this real history was to be incorporated in what the church perceived as the history of salvation. It even became the common view—which lasted through the Middle Ages—that the city of Rome, its very stones, palaces and statues were part of a sacred salvation plan and as such worthy of reverence.326

In the intellectual realm this attitude was reflected in the so-called Interpretatio christiana. This concept, which prevailed since the early 12th-century, incited scholars to give a new Christian interpretation of ancient art, especially in respect to mythological matters. It involved both practical and theoretical concepts. An example of an extreme notion as far as attitudes towards antiquity are concerned, is found with Heraclius (12th-century A.D.). He believed that it was possible to equal the artistic achievements of the ancients through knowledge of their recipes for technical art processes and products.327

The Interpretatio christiana was applied to ancient gemstones and sculpture, poetical theory, theology and philosophy.328 Many ancient artworks were transformed to representations of biblical events. Classical statues were regarded as essentially good and deep down of Christian origin. It is also the reason why the Church permitted that an exemplary function of external beauty was attributed to them.329 The development of such concepts was possible because scholars were now able to construct a summa of the Christian and pagan tradition.330

Since the 4th century spolia or spoils appear in churches.331 The small ones were incorporated in objects used in the church liturgy.332 For example an antique lapis-lazuli head, now identified as Livia, was incorporated in an 11th-century crucifix from Cologne as the head of Christ (ill.12a+b). Or a 14th-century gilded statuette of King David in Basle, where the head was

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326. This attitude is already found with Cassiodorus (c.490-583 A.D.) who much revered Classical culture. He believed it should not only be preserved for its own sake, but also for the hidden nuclei of the sacred history of salvation that it embodied, see: Cassiodorus De institutione divinarum litterarum (as quoted by Gramaccini 1996, 51). This concept prevailed during the Middle Ages and is also expressed by Dante Alighieri in his Convivio (the Banquet), written between the years 1304-1308. The chapter on Rome (Book IV, chapt.5) ends: ‘Consequently we need seek no further proof in order to see that this holy city had a special birth and a special evolution, conceived and ordained by God. I am most certainly of the firm opinion that the stones lodged in her walls are worthy of reverence and that the soil on which she rests is more worthy than is commonly proclaimed or established’ (tr. R.H.Lansing). This signifies the sanctification of the material and metaphysical make up of the city; for elaboration see: Heckscher 1936, 17ff; Greenhalgh 1989, 86-247.

327. Heraclius in his work De coloribus et artibus Romanorum, see: Gramaccini 1996, 55.

328. Gramaccini (1996, 54ff): A late example which was very influential is a book by Phillipp de Vitry (early 14th century) called Ovide moralisé. In it new Christian meaning is given to mythological figures. E.g. Diana became a symbol of the Holy Trinity, Actaeon a predecessor of Christ, Phaeton an other Lucifer and Proserpina represents the Church seeking the souls of the faithful; In the same context Heckscher (1938, 216, n.2) mentions late Roman jugs that were called ‘Vases of Canaan', or ancient jewellery known as Opera Salomonis. Holt (1967, 44ff) also gives several examples of faulty interpretations of Classical artworks to which a new Christian meaning was attributed.


331. Spolia is a modern art-historical term used to describe the re-use of earlier building material or decorative sculpture on new monuments. For elaboration see several publications on the subject by Kinney (1997, 2001) and Bosman (2004).

332. During the eighties of the 4th-century A.D. Libanios (a non-Christian Greek orator) pleaded with emperor Theodosius for the preservation of pagan temples. He complains about Christians who demolished temples that were still in use. Although the temple raiders stated that they destroyed the temples for religious reasons, Libanios was of the opinion that it was done only for financial gain.
made of an antique sardonyx, which originally represented the head of Medusa. Inserted under the figurine of the Virgin with Child that David holds in his hands, is an antique intaglio which depicts a lion (ill.13a+b). A 10th-century cross that belonged to the emperor Lothair was incrustated with an antique cameo of Augustus (ill.14a+b).

The Interpretatio christiana and the use of spolia played part in the ideology of the church. But besides ideological, there were also practical reasons. When there were no building materials or sculptor’s available spolia offered a good alternative. The use of spolia in medieval churches was very widespread and examples are numerous. A favourite re-use of antique capitals as baptismal fonts can be found in many churches, for example the cathedral in Aquileia (ill.15) or in the S. Eufemia in Grado. Early examples of re-used antique columns in Rome exist in the S. Maria in Cosmedin, S. Lorenzo fuori le Mura, S. Maria in Trastevere or S. Sabina (ill.16).

The use of spolia in connection with church ideology first became common in Italy, but soon spread to neighbouring countries. The English, French and German bishops also wanted spolia, including Classical statues, for decorative and ideological purposes. An example of this is the Lotharingian abbot Gerhard von Broque, who in A.D. 940 had several carloads of porphyry taken from Rome that was utilized to build the altar in his monastery-church. This was done to increase the status of his church. Or the abbey church of St. Remy in Reims (A.D. 1005-1049) where the statues of the patron saints Peter and Remigius are placed on spolia-columns. In the 12th century abbot Suger wanted spolia-columns from Rome to build the church of St. Denis, in which he failed to succeed. The use of spolia was only allowed after the pope granted permission, for he was regarded as the custodian of antiquity.

Antique sarcophagi were very much sought after as burial tombs. The popes who regarded themselves as the successors of the Roman emperors saw the imitatio imperii as a personal privilege. There are examples of early Christian burial tombs which imitated antique sarcophagi that fitted well in this concept. It is known that Pope Damasus II (d. A.D. 1048) had himself buried in an early Christian sarcophagus with putti that he probably held for antique. It was placed in the narthex of S. Lorenzo fuori le Mura in Rome. Pope Victor II (d. A.D. 1057) had himself buried in the mausoleum of Theodoric in Ravenna. This custom developed into a status symbol for nobles and high clergymen, as well as high-ranking civil servants. Charlemagne (d. A.D. 814) was buried in a Proserpina sarcophagus that was placed in the Palatine Chapel in Aix-la-Chapelle (ill.17). Other examples are the tomb of Louis the Pius (d. A.D. 840) in the S.Arnulf in Metz, which was decorated with the ‘Passage of the Red Sea’, or the tomb of Otto II (d. A.D. 1271) in Old Saint Peter’s in Rome.

5. Medieval treasuries: relics

The taste for collecting and historical awareness go hand in hand. Medieval man was rather restricted in this respect, for the notion of time was rather primitive, and a clear-cut idea of

333 I point here to an interesting study carried out by Petry (1984) on the use of spolia in North-West-European Churches, with several examples. Also see: Esch (1969).
334 Gramacinni 1996, 73. Porphyry was a very popular material for the interior decoration of churches. In the 4th century under emperor Constantine porphyry was used to decorate the baptisterium chapel of the Lateran. In Rome the emperors had a kind of monopoly over porphyry, the popes adopted this tradition. The use of this material was always associated with papal commissions. In the medieval period it became the favourite material to increase the status of a church. see: De Blauuw 1991.
335 See: Suger, De consecracione, II, 20.
Antiquity as a historical period that preceded their own did not exist. The general conception of time was cyclic, which is reflected in several ways. Like for the agricultural population it was the cycle of the seasons and for the ecclesiastical world the liturgical year. In the political realm most scholars were convinced that they themselves were still citizens of the empire which had been founded by Augustus. The conventional religious outlook was that history began with the Christian era, preceded by a prehistory constituted by the world of the Bible. All which was not of that order was submerged in darkness, and considered as a world that was governed by evil forces.

The discussion of miracles during the medieval period clearly reveals the acceptance of the miraculous as a basic dimension of life. Despite the dismissal by the young Christian church of paganism, common believers were reluctant to put their faith in elusive blessings. They needed something more palpable; relics, which offered supernatural assurance, suited this need. A major problem was the large-scale distribution of spurious relics, for they were copied and forged. That ecclesiastical leaders were aware of this issue becomes clear from a -moderate-statement of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216). He said that it was better to leave the problem to the wisdom of God than to judge rashly.

Relics venerated in the West during this period can be categorised in three groups: 1) the relics of saints related to the Bible and the early church; 2) The relics of the true cross and the bones of the apostles; 3) The relics of the early Christian martyrs.

In religious texts dated around the 4th-century A.D., the concepts of praesentia (presence) and potentia (force) were assigned to the physical remnants of saints and martyrs. This in fact meant the reintroduction of a pagan custom from pre-Christian times. Praesentia was considered an actual physical presence; it was the most sacred and greatest blessing that a Christian in late antiquity could enjoy. Wherever Christianity went in the early Middle Ages, it brought with it the 'presence' of the saints. Moreover a relic of a saint was considered to have potentia, a 'clean power', which was present around the tombs of the saints.

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337 Jacques Le Goff (1989, chpt.6: The Framework of Time and Space -p.174-) emphasised that the medieval attitude, especially during the 10th-until 13th-centuries, towards time was characterised by a vast indifference.

338 For instance before 1200 every day, in summer or winter, had twelve hours that varied in length. The religious symbolic value was the essence and not as much the exact duration of time. The mechanical clock was not invented until the 14th-century and the eyeglass a century or so earlier.

339 An early example of this is Augustine's reply to Faustus the Manichaean who accused him of idol worship. Augustine: 'As to our paying honour to the memory of the martyrs, and the accusation of Faustus, that we worship them instead of idols. (...) It is true that Christians pay religious honour to the memory of the martyrs. (...) But we build altars not to any martyr, but to the God of martyrs (...) The offering is made to God, who gave the crown of martyrdom, while it is in memory of those thus crowne' August., Serm., XX, 21.

340 As quoted by McCulloch 1932, 142. In 14th-century the tendency towards the bizarre is also found with other objects that were part of collections that were set up from a humanistic perspective. In regard to relic veneration the psychoanalyst Muensterberger (1994, 64) concluded that 'few subjects lend themselves better to the study of delusional conviction and possessiveness then the collecting of relics. The experiential force attached to these remnants is like a love affair- unreasoned, wishful, and occasionally manic'.

341 This categorisation is by Ward 1982, 33.

342 Brown 1981, 7, 86ff. This is confirmed by remarks of Julian the Apostate (339E) when he mentions the cult of saints, as a novelty for which there was no warrant in the gospels. He turned against the repugnance expressed by the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 65:4) for those who 'lodge among tombs and in caves for the sake of dream visions'.

343 For a post-patristic author on the concept of potentia, see: Gregory of Tours, Glory.mart., 45 <c>; For elaboration see: Brown 1981, 106ff.
of relics in Rome can be traced back till the 3rd- and 4th-century and in the Alps region till the 4th-century.344

All this stimulated the desire to own relics as a reservoir of divine patronage.345 The veneration of something that belonged to a saint or, for that matter to Jesus Christ Himself, underscores the need for a bond with the saint, which offers an illusory attempt at self-preservation. Psychologically this attitude is related to the dread of being without protection in this life and the phobia of being exposed to the horrors of purgatory.346

Along with other remnants of the Christian past, relics had to be preserved at all costs. In the early medieval period the resting places of the saints, their sanctuaries, were the main centres of ecclesiastical organisation and of spiritual life.347 The usual place of worship was there where the body of a saint was put to rest. In an earlier stage of development there was a strong feeling that the place of worship should be where the saint had died. Since the 8th-and 9th-centuries the northern peoples also wanted a share in the sacred remains. In effect this ended the taboo of the uprooting of the saints from their original resting places, which resulted in the scattering of their dismembered bodies throughout Europe.348 Between the 9th- and 11th-century every church of importance amassed a large collection of relics.349 (ill.18+19) It was not for pious reason alone that churches and monasteries engaged themselves in this activity. There was also a distinct economic appeal: by attracting worshippers hard needed revenues were brought in. Moreover relics also had a role to play in legal documents which required an oath: the res sacra was taken on the relic, the cross or a manuscript of the Gospel.350

Since the 7th-and 8th-centuries, relics were usually located in a crypt under the altar of a church, but also in treasuries, usually small annexes in churches or monasteries. It is important to realise that they were not exhibition rooms, as is the case nowadays. One of the oldest examples is the treasury of the Cathedral of Monza, Italy, which was founded in the 7th-and 8th-centuries.351 Treasuries appear in both a secular (the Holy Roman Empire) and in an ecclesiastic context.

Manuscripts reveal that from very early on royal treasures contained objects from classical antiquity, like gemstones, chalices and ceremonial swords.352 A clear example is the treasury of Charlemagne which, among others, contained three antique caskets and many gemstones and cameos.353 In most cases the ecclesiastical and the secular realm blended together because the royal insignia were kept in conjunction with the relics. Most probably this was done for purely practical reasons: a treasury was usually the best place for safekeeping valuable objects.

344 Schramm 1981.
345 Muensterberger 1994, 62.
346 Muensterberger 1994, 65; E.g. Gregory of Tours describes how at the entry of King Chilperich in Paris (d. A.D. 584) he had relics carried in front of him to ensure himself of the protection of the Saints, see: Schramm 1981, I, 24.
348 Southern 1970, 247; Legislation of the first Christian emperors - in line with the old Roman legislation - strictly forbade the disturbance of graves. But in practise it seems that this prohibition only applied to Christian graves, see: Zappert 1850, 766.
349 For elaboration of relics in France see: Allard 1965; in Germany see: Legner 1985, both abundantly illustrated exhibitioncatalogues.
352 E.g. the treasure of the Visigoth king Ataulph (reigned between 410-415) contained objects that were booty of war from the Roman provinces, see: Zappert 1850, 754. The same was the case with the Avar kings during the 8th century, see: Zappert 1850, 754.
Insignia or simply called signa were symbols of rulership; they could be a throne, crowns, staffs, sceptres, arm rings, and since the beginning of the 11th-century the imperial globe (ill.20+21). In this context relics had an added value namely as a guarantee of the divine mission of the ruler.354 An early example of this type of royal treasury is the crown of the Longobard Queen Theolinde (died 624) that was kept in the treasury of Monza.355 Likewise was the situation in Charlemagne’s treasury at the Palatine chapel in Aix-la-Chapelle. Other examples are the church of St. Louis in Paris which had a small structure where the relics of the Sainte-Chapelle and the crown jewels were stored next to each other. Insignia were also found in the treasury at Saint Denis in Paris and at the Cathedral of Reims.356 The same situation existed in the treasuries of the Cathedral of S. Vitus in Prague and Westminster Abbey in London.

Other, more religious, objects that could be found in treasuries were retabiles, portable altars, liturgical objects -chalices, ciboria and eucharistic doves-, manuscripts -mainly the gospels-, reliquaries and tapestries.357 Pieces of cloth that had been in touch with the bodies of saints were also considered relics. It became a common practise to exhume the corpses of martyrs, which were often dismembered and transported to churches in many different places or even to individual collectors.

Consecrated bodies, or body parts, were usually preserved in gold or silver reliquaries. These boxes or shrines were often richly decorated with antique cameos and semi-precious stones. If they contained complete bodies they had the shape of a casket, but later also that of a church. When only fragments had been preserved the reliquary repeated its form, which could be a hand, arm, leg, foot, head or rib.

The Praeputium Christi (Christ's foreskin) was given to Charlemagne as an engagement present by Empress Irene. In the 12th century, several churches owned this particular relic. It evolved into a complete cult, which lead to the foundation in 1427 of a 'brotherhood of the foreskin'.358 When St. Elisabeth of Hungary was lying in her bed of state in 1231 the mourners cut off her hair, her nails and even her nipples!359

Stealing relics was even considered a pious act. Such was the case with the monks of the abbey of Abingdon in England. Without any embarrassment they declared that certain remains in their shrines had been taken from Glastonbury,360 under the pretence that they as their new guardians could take better care of them.361 An example of to what extremes an overzealous relic hunter was prepared to go is St. Hugh of Lincoln (c.1140-1200), a Carthusian monk who later became bishop. His biographer tells us how:

‘He had a hollow ring made which he intended to use as a repository for relics. This receptacle was about the width of four fingers, and in it he had collected thirty relics of the saints. (..) When he was at the celebrated monastery of Fécamp, he extracted by biting two small fragments of the bone of the arm of the most blessed lover of Christ, Mary of

357 Relics were the treasures of the church, literally, as savings, because in times of hardship the jewels and ancient gemstones that decorated the reliquaries were sold off. They were very much sought after by the rich as well as churches who collected them.
358 Hartmann 1929, 111.
359 Müller (1907), wrote a book on the cult of the praeputium, with a compilation of the dogma's that were developed throughout the centuries; McCulloch 1932, 137ff: Beside the praeputium there were other relics, like the horns of Moses, hairs of Noah's beard, soot from the furnace of the Three Children, manna, St.Joseph's breath, feathers from St.Michael's wings, our Lords tears, sweat etc.
Magdalen. This bone had never been seen divested of its wrappings by the abbot or any
of the monks who were present on that occasion, for it was sewn very tightly into three
cloths, two silk and one of ordinary linen. 362

6. Unimpaired survivors: gems and cameos

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire many works of art and architecture deteriorated, but
the engraved stones, especially the ones of high quality, survived time unscathed. Objects of gold
or bronze could, and were in most cases, melted down to be re-used for other purposes. An
exception to this are the ancient gems and cameos which could not easily be recarved. 363
However there are some cases where ancient gems were altered in accordance with the Inter-
pretatio christiana.

The German kingdoms that emerged after the fall of the Roman Empire favoured and
admired antique valuables, which were carefully passed on in families from one generation to
another. The conquerors of the Romans were often former primitive people but they admired the
Roman taste and style, they even went as far as to imitate the Roman style of dress. 364 Ostrogoth-
and Visigoth, Vandal and Frankish kings dressed in ceremonial robes that were sumptuously
decorated with precious stones including gemstones. It is no surprise therefore that during the
medieval period a substantial trade in gemstones existed. The Jews were renowned for their
knowledge and insight regarding these matters. 365

Ancient monuments and art-objects of the past were met with superstition. Prehistoric
tumuli were seen as the dwelling place of fairies and guarded by dragons. Great earthworks or
extraordinary structures were the work of demons. When barrows were opened that contained
funeral deposits and treasures of ancient origin, benedictions were pronounced to exorcise them.
One of these prayers call on the Almighty to 'deign so to cleanse these vases made in the art of
the Gentiles, that they may be used by the believers in peace and tranquillity'. 366 Any ancient ves-
sel needed consecration before any Christian would dare to use it.

Such was also the case with ancient gems and cameos. Already in antiquity they were
collected for their alleged magical and healing powers and this was all the more reason that the
Church found it necessary to exorcise the evil forces residing in them. 367 Nevertheless they are
the most striking examples of a symbiosis of orthodox Christianity and pagan Antiquity. For al-
though the subject matter of the stones was mainly pagan, the themes were derived from Classi-
cal mythology, they were used by medieval goldsmiths for the decoration of covers of prayer
books, crosses, relic shrines and often ecclesiastical objects. An early example dates from 603,

362 Adam of Eynsham Mag. Vit. Hug., V.XIV.
363 The terminology can sometimes be confusing, therefore a short elucidation. The word camaeus or
camaïeu is high medieval, providing a special term for a reliefcarving that utilises two or three
different coloured layers of stone. Antiquity only employed the general term gemma or imago ectypa
which referred not only to intaglios (carved stones) but to all precious stones. In modern usage the
word gem explicitly refers to a carved stone, precious or semi-precious in deep relief, it is the opposite
of a cameo where the image lays as it were on top of the stone. See: Meiss 1969, 52; Zazoff 1983, 275.
364 Zappert 1850, 756; Cassiodorus (6th century AD.) urged the vanquished peoples and tribes, like the
Goths and Byzantines to be true Romans, to wear togas and renounce barbarism, see: Gramaccini
365 Zappert 1850, 757.
366 As quoted by: Wright 1844, 439ff.
367 Heckscher 1937, 215 n.3: here he quotes a benedictio which was used for the exorcism of pagan
gems. Although Wright (1844, 448) stated that Christians who found them wanted to preserve and
take advantage of, rather than to dispel, the charm. For other prayer formulas to Christianise ancient
vessels, see: Zappert 1850, 764-765.
when Pope Gregory the Great gave a golden book-cover with semi-precious stones and antique cameos to Theolinde Queen of the Longobards at the occasion of the baptism of her son Adaloald (ill.22). It was this pope who allegedly set fire to pagan statues. But it seems that he was not offended to the antique cameos on the book-cover. Another striking example is the reliquary of the Three Magi in Cologne which is set with no fewer than two hundred antique stones (ill.23a+b).

Abbot Suger (1081-1151) of St. Denis, searched as far as Sicily to obtain ancient cameos and sardonyx carvings. He even wanted to bring home columns from the Baths of Diocletian in Rome to use them for the construction of his abbey Church. Henry, the bishop of Winchester, travelled to Rome in 1151 for church affairs and also to receive absolution for his sins. Before his departure from the eternal city he procured some ancient statues. It prompted a grammarian who saw him buying the statues, which were of pagan origin, to mock him by quoting Horace: 'Damasippus is a madman for purchasing antique statues.'

Ancient gems were used as personal seals King Pepin the Short (751-768) used an antique gem, without inscription, that depicted a head of Bacchus with sideburns and vines engraved in his hair. Pippin's second son, King Carloman I (768-771) used as his personal seal an ancient gem with a profile bust of a Bacchante, also without inscription. Charlemagne himself continued the tradition of his father. His seal was an ancient gem which represented a bearded head of Commodus, Anthony Pius or a philosopher; the exact identity has not been decided yet. (ill.24a). The seal had an added new element; a border-inscription, which read **Christe protege Carolum, regem Francorum**. The court of Charlemagne used its own seal: also an ancient classical gem, without inscription. On it was depicted a head of Jupiter Serapis, the bearded Roman-Egyptian fertility god with a corn basket on his head. Louis the German (843-876) used as his seal a gem that depicted Hadrian. (ill.24c) In a charter of circa 904 Louis the Child, the last of the East Frankish Carolingian kings, used a seal that portrayed the Roman emperor Hadrian. Even the highest dignitaries of the church wore signet rings or had personal seals that were made of ancient gemstones. An ecclesiastical seal attached to a chart dated 1189 shows Leda with the swan. The inscription indicates that this was the personal seal of the archdeacon. Leda with the swan might well have been interpreted as a scene foreshadowing the union of the Virgin with the Holy Ghost. Roger, the archbishop of York (1154-1181) and advisor of King Henry II of England, had a seal with a three-headed chimera. From very early on there was an awareness of a duality here, which becomes clear in the admonitions of some Jewish and Christian leaders who tried to discourage the faithful to wear signet-rings with images of idols, naked women, weapons, drinking vessels etcetera. In addition to this the 7th

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368 Bazin 1967, 30; Erwin Panofsky (1955a, 122) compared him with a modern museum collector. Suger was the first who appointed curators and restorers.
369 Ross 1934, 135.
370 Ross 1934, 164. For elaboration see: chapt. V to X.
371 Schramm in Braunfels 1965, 15ff; Heckscher (1937, 215) points out that this tied in with the idea of **Imperial Succession** that prevailed throughout the Middle Ages and after. From Byzantium it came down to the Carolingian rulers. The ancient gem became the credential which both signified and secured the **regalis potestas**.
372 Zappert 1850, 757, n.46.
373 The inscription reads: **+SIGNORE MAGIST ANDREE ARCHID SUESSION**.
374 Heckscher 1938, 218.
375 Zappert 1850, 757, n.46.
376 Clem. Al., *Peadag.* XI,118 / XI,57-60. Here Clement mentions Christian symbols, like a dove, fish, anchor, or a sailing ship or a harp as suitable subjects to be depicted on signet rings. Clement, (**Exhort.* IV, 60.) strongly opposed the use of signet rings with pagan images such as Leda and the swan. In his opinion, it was worn by those who encouraged licentiousness as piety; For Post-Nicene Fathers on
century Synod of Milan launched an interdict against figurative decorations of Episcopal finger-rings. But this did not prevent the gems of being incorporated in Christian settings.

Suger describes how he was overwhelmed into an almost trancelike state when he meditated near the precious stones that glowed on the main altar and in its relics:

‘When, because of my delight in the beauty of the house of God, the loveliness of the many-coloured stones has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; in that, by the Grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner’.

Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274) defined beauty as related primarily to integrity or perfection: things impaired were considered ugly for that very reason. In his Summa he stated:

(…) ‘Beauty must include three qualities: integrity or completeness, since things that lack something are thereby ugly; right proportion or harmony; and brightness, we call things bright in colour beautiful’.

In the medieval concept the universe is conceived as a static order in which each thing is well established and ranked, according to the divine plan. Such a system rejects anything that has forsaken the form or origin assigned to it. A palace, to the medieval mind is beautiful as a palace; as a ruin it ceases to be so. What was mainly looked for in the remains of the past was, contrary to modern romanticism, the permanent form, quite the opposite of the ruin.

Intaglios from Classical antiquity were preserved in a setting which left them completely in tact. With others its form or its function, or both, was changed and a new Christian interpretation (Interpretatio christiana) was attributed. An example of how this affected the attitude towards ancient glyptography is an ancient cameo with the pagan figures of Poseidon and Athena that was altered and subsequently interpreted as Adam and Eve.
original appearance was like becomes apparent by a comparison with an ancient cameo with a similar theme now in Napels (ill.26). Or an antique cameo of Germanicus in the treasury of Sainte-Chapelle that was venerated as representing the triumph of Joseph at the court of Pharaoh.382

A genre that was categorised as 'juxtaposition' is the so-called 'Second Mathilda Cross' of the Cathedral of Essen (ill.27a,b,c). Here antique gems are inserted next to contemporary decorations: a gem depicting a nude figure of a youth next to an enamel figure of the Sun and a gem with a portrait of a woman next to an enamel figure of the moon.383 In other cases small alterations were made, like a gem of Hera that was inserted in a cross (now in Prague, Domschatz, Reliquienkreuz 1354) which was given a halo, and added inscriptions.384 (ill.28) A gem of the Roman emperor Caracalla was re-christened by an inscription and the symbol of the cross that transformed him into St. Peter.385 (ill.29)

An example of a Christian interpretation of classical mythological figures is found in a Roman agate cameo from the first century A.D. Depicted is Jupiter, laurel-crowned, holding the thunderbolt and leaning upon a lance, while the eagle is at his feet.386 Charles V donated it in 1367 to the cathedral of Chartres. Long before this date the image of Jupiter was taken for that of St. John the Evangelist, whom Christ had sumamed 'the son of thunder' (Gospel of St. Mark 3:17). With added inscriptions it became an amulet that was supposed to offer protection against demons and lightning.387 The popularity of gemstones is also evident in Carolingian miniature painting where they were reproduced as decoration of highly stylised architecture.388 (ill.30+31)

Ancient gems and cameos were a major source of inspiration for contemporary artists, which explains for example the flourishing of stone carving during the period of the Hohenstaufen (1138-1254).389 In France the inventory lists describing the royal collections of Philip the Fair (1285-1314) and Charles the Victorious (1422-1461) mention several carved stones that were supposed to be of ancient origin.

7. Christianity and humanism: traditions in late medieval collections

In the 14th century, under the influence of authors like Dante and Petrarch, a shift took place from medieval ecclesiastical thinking to the enthusiastic exploration of the material world. This also involved learning about the past which resulted in a tendency to idealise classical antiquity. The

the leaves, bird types and lions, furthermore the inscription on the border is in Hebrew which is highly uncommon during the Renaissance (see: p.57).

382 Bazin 1967, 32.
383 Heckscher 1937, 217; Kästner 1929, ill. 41-43.
384 Pazaurek 1932, Abb. 34.
385 Babelon 1887, 138.
386 This cameo is now preserved in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris, see: Babelon 1897, No.I.
387 Heckscher 1937, 215; Most of the inscribed medieval finger-rings functioned as amuletic charms. E.g. the names of the Magi, or Three Kings: Jasper, Melchior and Baltasar. They were supposed to be especially efficient against epilepsy. Another inscription is (sic) IN NOIMNE DOIMNI (the phrase In Nomine Patris et Spiritus Sancti, is frequent in books of magic), it may well have an exorcist connotation, see: Dalton 1912, 135 Amulet-Rings, esp. p.140, nr.885, with added bibliography regarding medieval examples of amulet-rings; For a catalogue raisonné of incorporated gems in medieval settings see: Snijder 1932.
388 Heckscher 1937, 217, ill. 30c. The miniature can be found in the MS. from St. Maximin in Treves, beginning of the 9th century, Treves, Stadt Bibliothek, No.22, also depicted in: Swarzenski, Vorgotische Miniaturen, 1927, No.9. The other in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.
change in social conditions gave rise to a new bourgeoisie that enjoyed a new prosperity that was earned with trade and commerce. This is reflected in the pleasure they took in the gathering of worldly goods.

Great collections with valuable art-objects were found at the courts of the French kings. A royal collection was regarded as a reflection of the wisdom of the Rex Christianissimus. With this concept collecting became a royal enterprise that increased the prestige of the monarch and at the same time justified his pretensions.

The collections of the French king Charles V and his brother Jean de Berry illustrate this. Such a collection was kept in the Estude (study chamber) only for private use by the king. These study chambers existed in each of the castles where he resided, Jean de Berry (1340-1416), was one of the greatest collectors of his time. He owned a library with hundreds of exquisitely illustrated books, miniature paintings, and a clock, a collection of medals, precious stones such as cameos, seals, and gems. Curious is that the precious stones were also collected for their alleged magical and healing properties. Jean’s enthusiasm was not confined to one single area, this is apparent in the variety of objects that could be found in his collection, he even maintained some kind of private zoo. His collection can therefore be described as a predecessor of the Wunderkammer, the place where the cabinet collectors of two centuries later kept their curiosities.

This brings to mind the question of what motivated someone like Jean de Berry to become such a passionate collector. For this we have to take a closer look at the backgrounds of the time era that he lived in and how this affected his life.

Jean de Berry was the third son of the future king of France, Jean Le Bon. He came from a poor family background; his mother, Bonne de Luxembourg, had to borrow money to feed and dress her nine children. The queen, Jeanne de Bourgogne helped out a lot and seems to have had a special affection for her grandson Jean. But both mother and grandmother fell victim of the Black Death and Jean became motherless at the age of nine. All these events must have had a strong impact on Jean's personal life, most likely with traumatic consequences. Judging by the things that are known of him, he seems to have been a lonely man. It has been suggested that he cared more for animals than for men. The lifestyle at the time for a man of his status made that he was restless on the move from one castle to another -he owned ten or twelve of them-. On each occasion went with the Duke all the tapestries, plates, jewels and other possessions to furnish his residence; it is for this reason he has been described as 'a wealthy nomad'. Jean came from an enlightened background. His parents owned many magnificently illuminated manuscripts and they liked the company of cultivated men. The renowned poet and musician

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390 Since Constantine the Great emperorship and Christianity were inseparable, also see: Scheicher, E. in: Bergvelt 1993, 18ff.
391 Liebenwein 1977, 80; It has been pointed out (Muensterberger 1994, 171) the disillusionment with the Church as one consequence of the plague may have put some in search of other sources of inspiration. Jean de Berry's collection could be interpreted as such. It also was a transitional period; Humanism was gaining influence and began to replace the medieval worldview.
392 Liebenwein 1977, 36ff.
393 Alcouffe 1973, 131.
394 Lehoux 1966, 12ff.
395 If it is true what the psychoanalyst Muensterberger says, namely that the objects in collections help the owner to master a feeling of threat, and control a sense of helpless frustration, the circumstances of the 14th century set the perfect conditions to become an ardent collector.
396 Meiss 1969, 32; it was not uncommon for a nobleman in the 14th-century to maintain a small menagerie. The records show that the Duke de Berry owned bears, some fifty swans, a monkey, a wolf, a camel, an ostrich and a large number of hunting dogs, each was provided with a private guardian. What is perhaps illustrative for Jean's attitude toward others is his alleged remark in a debate on love: [about women] 'the more the merrier, and never tell the truth', see: Meiss 1969, 32.
Guillaume de Machaut lived at their court and also Petrarch was once on their guest list.\[^{397}\] It is an undeniable fact that Jean and his brother became the most remarkable fraternal group of collectors in history. Beside personal motives for setting up a collection there were also economical reasons. Precious stones and golden objects served as a prime repository of wealth, readily convertible at all times for ready money.\[^{398}\]

Collections of the 14th- and 15th-century, reflect a wide interest and a thirst for knowledge. Empirical knowledge would provide a reliable basis for understanding natural phenomena.\[^{399}\] This attitude was enhanced by the overall change of life that took place, not only regarding general values and ideals, but also socio-economically. As has been mentioned before, this change in mentality meant that the authority of the Church was decreasing, which opened the way for a new interest in the past, and especially for antiquity.

8. A revival of Classical art and culture: Rome in the 12\(^{th}\) century

The interest in the visual qualities of Classical art was never completely lost. A great stimulus came from the revival of Antiquity under Charlemagne and his followers. But since the 12th-century an exemplary role was attributed to Latin culture. The use of *spolia* played an important role in this process. One can think of the *spolia* in the treasury of St. Denis or work of the Cosmati School.

The German Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250), considered himself to be the successor of Caesar and Augustus. He had copies of antique statues made at Capua and Castel del Monte.\[^{400}\] Under Frederick’s influence a more classical language in sculpture evolved that represented nature more convincingly and suited his aspirations. He is known to employ not just Italian, but also French and German artists. Examples of this ‘classical language’ are echoed in the works of the Italian sculptor Niccolo, and later his son Giovanni Pisano.

Classical statues in the medieval period were often reused and incorporated in monuments that have to be interpreted in the context of contemporary ideology. It is significant, from an iconological point of view, that just at the height of the medieval period (13th- and 14th-centuries) Classical motifs were not used for the representation of Classical themes while; conversely, Classical themes were not expressed by classical motifs.\[^{401}\] The art historian Erwin Panofsky wrote a book that contributed a lot of insight into this matter. The focal point in his *Renaissance and Renascences* (1960) is the endurance of Classical antiquity during the Middle Ages. It was his aim to analyse the issue of disintegration of form and content that evolved in art during the medieval period. It is Panofsky's assertion that it was only until the Italian Renaissance that the original integration was achieved.\[^{402}\]

In the 12th-century Cardinal Giordano Orsini had created a cabinet of antiquities in the eternal city that he turned into a public museum for souvenirs of ancient Rome.\[^{403}\] During this period we also see the first attempts toward conservation of the ancient monuments in Rome. There was a growing awareness that the ancient monuments just as well embodied the fame of

\[^{397}\] Meiss 1969, 31.
\[^{398}\] On many occasions Jean melted down golden objects like reliquaries in order to strike coins for financing the wars that he was involved in.
\[^{399}\] Although Jean de Berry was also susceptible to superstition, he continued to collect holy relics and believed the legends attached to them. He also collected gems and cameos for their alleged healing and magical properties (under the influence of Jewish kabbalistic theories).
\[^{400}\] These models were not exact copies or casts.
\[^{401}\] Panofsky 1955b, 41. He illustrates this matter with several examples.
\[^{403}\] According to the assertion of a 16\(^{th}\)-century panegyrist of the Orsini family, see: Bazin 1967, 41.
the city as the popular places of pilgrimage. In 1119 A.D. a column of Marcus Aurelius, which
belonged to a monastery, was preserved. In 1162 the Roman Senate issued the death penalty for
anyone who would damage the Column of Trajan.404

Although by the 12th century Rome's ancient sites, monuments and statues were in a
dilapidated state and deprived of their former decorations405, some believed that Antiquity was
still present with them. Around 1143 an attempt for political renovation was to restore Antiquity,
it was then that a new government in Rome overthrew the old aristocratic regime of the city. The
new leadership adopted the title Sacer Senatus Populi Romani, in honour of the ancient Roman
tradition.

In line with these developments the first antiquarian catalogue of Ancient Rome was
written. This famous pamphlet with the title Mirabilia urbis Romae (The Wonders of Rome)406
was copied with many variations and additions for several countries. In later years it became a
popular pilgrims' guide to Rome. Despite the large number of misconceptions and errors it did
provide a new topographical review of the city's ancient monuments. Beside the pagan monu-
ments it also mentions cemeteries and places that were renowned because of stories related to
martyrs, but also describes churches that were build on the ancient ruins. Despite the renewed
interest it did not result in a restoration of the ruins of the ancient buildings.407 This would also
not have been possible, because of the lack of skill or craftsmanship, but also of sufficient means.

The Mirabilia also functioned as an indoctrination tool of the church. In Rome all the
ancient statues were considered property of the Church because of a former donation by the
emperor Constantine. These statues were used as trophies in the propaganda of the church. If
possible a new meaning was attributed to them. In the Graphia Aurea Urbis (another pilgrims’
guide for Rome dating from c.1150), for example, the two horsemen of the Dioscuri group were
interpreted as philosophers that were proclaiming the truth. In the Mirabilia they were regarded
as visionaries that recognized the salvation of the Roman church.408

Hildebert of Lavardin (c. A.D. 1055-1133), archbishop of Tours, visited Rome three
times during his lifetime.409 In his verses on the city, which are in fact a nostalgic eulogy about
the city's former glory, the opening lines read:

‘Rome, thy grand ruins, still beyond compare,
Thy former greatness mournfully declare,
Though time thy stately palaces around
Hath strewed, and cast thy temples to the
Ground’.410

404 Schramm 1929, Teil II, 50.
405 In some cases the decay of Rome's Classical artworks was a result of deliberate policies of the
Popes. Gramaccini (1996, 161) emphasises that the decay of the Capitol Hill, once the 'golden head'
and centre of the world was used as a propaganda tool by the Popes. The antique statues would have
been competition of the nearby Lateran hill that symbolized the Popes legitimate heritage of Antiquity.
406 It was supposed to be written around 1143 by Benedict; who was a canon of St.Peters. This
pamphlet is associated with the genre of Laudes or descriptio urbium (panagyrics of cities). The
combination of fantastic and real toponyms creates an aura of authenticity that is appropriate to that
genre but does not mirror what the author really saw. For elaboration see: Ross 1934, 172ff, Miedema
1996.
408 For elaboration of the Interpretatio christiana applied to the Dioscuri in Rome see: Gramaccini
409 He was an expert and admirer of ancient civilisation, see his Versus de Roma meliores quam sit
aroma (Zürich Stadtbibl. C.58/275). The full text plus translation in German is to be found in
Schramm 1929, Teil I, 300ff.
410 William of Malmesbury (transl.& edit., J. Stevenson), London 1853-56.
Implicitly he admits the inability of his time to rescue the ancient monuments and restore them to their original form. His nostalgia was incited by the vision of the original shape of the ruins. It is important to note that he does not admire, but laments the fragmentary state the monuments are in. He also expresses his admiration for Classical antique statues:

‘Here gods themselves their sculptured forms admire,  
And only to reflect those forms aspire;  
Nature unable such like gods to form,  
Left them to man's creative genius warm;  
Life breathes within them, and suppliant falls,  
Not to the god, but statues in the walls.  
City thrice bless'd! were tyrants but away,  
Or shame compelled them justice to obey.’

Francesco Petrarca (1304-74) was one of the first who regarded Antiquity as a 'lost paradise' whose ruins and remains were venerable (and therefore untouchable) relics of a past which was irrevocably detached from his own epoch. Already as a young man he admired Virgil and Cicero. In 1337 he visited Rome for the first time. He spent long days strolling about the city accompanied by his friend Giovanni Colonna, a Dominican friar. By comparing the landscape of Rome with the texts of her poets and historians, Petrarch had revived a city that had long lain neglected. He also gave this forgotten city a name: ancient Rome. It was necessary to define the adjective:’Let us call ‘ancient’ whatever preceded the celebration and veneration of Christ's name in Rome, ‘modern’ everything from then to our own time’. While fantasy played an important role in classical studies, the most vital element of antiquarian practice was scholarly diligence. Every antiquarian worthy of the name had a mastery of classical Latin and, after an uneasy start, Greek, and had read widely in the history, rhetoric, philosophy, and poetry of both languages. These textual sources provided a framework within which the other, material, remnants of antiquity could be integrated. However it was only until the Renaissance period that the ruins of Antiquity became admired on account of their intrinsic beauty.

9. Decorative use of stucco in medieval churches

Stucco (Stuc de gypse) was used for ornamental decorations in medieval churches. Stucco is for the larger part made up of lime and sand, but it is a very suitable material to model decorations. Such applications were, as we have already seen, very common in the ancient world. But there is also evidence of such use during the medieval period. Research suggests did not suggest the utilisation of any kind of moulds; the decorations were incised directly into the stucco with modelling tools.

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411. See: Heckscher 1937, 208. What Hildebert has to say about the city of Rome stems from his own experience.
413. ‘The Use of Antiquity for life’ An exhibition held in the Rare Book Room of the Canaday Library, Bryn Mawr College, 20 September - 17 December 2004, Benjamin Anderson, Exhibition Curator (internet).
During excavations that were carried out between 1958 and 1960 in the crypt of the Romanesque cathedral of Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne in France, some 180 stucco fragments were recovered. From these fragments it was possible to reconstruct a small canopy from the Carolingian period.\(^{415}\) (ill.33) It became clear that it was made completely out of stucco that was supported by a wooden frame. In addition to this other fragments were found that belonged to statues. The discovery of a medieval brick that was made with a mould in a channel near the French city of Tours is evidence that moulds existed and that they were utilized (ill.34). Michael Greenhalgh (1989) mentions the stucco work at the basilica G.Salvatore in Brescia, Rome and elsewhere. They represent a revival of classical techniques.\(^{416}\)

In some cases, stucco was also used as a material to make statues. In the abbey church of Saint-Jean in Müstair, Switzerland (1490), at the left side of the apse there is a niche with a baldachin in the Gothic style, made of local stone. In it is a stucco statue of Charlemagne (ill.35). It is peculiar that the feet are made from stone, of the same material as the niche, but the rest is completely made out of stucco. The statue was painted over many times, its exact age has not yet been determined, but it is thought to date somewhere between the 9\(^{th}\) and 12\(^{th}\) centuries.\(^{417}\)

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\(^{415}\) Sapin 1995, 67 ff.
\(^{417}\) Sapin (etc.) 2005, 217. This catalogue gives an extensive survey of the decorative use of stucco during the medieval period.