

Recycling and Reuse of Sculpture in Roman and Late Antique Times – An Introduction

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Recycling and reuse of sculpture was a common practice in the ancient world, which took a variety of forms in different periods and places.

The research on this topic had a strong increase in the last years, in which the phenomenon of reusing sculpture was analysed from different points of view, but usually focusing only on Late Antiquity. One of the most interesting research of the last years on reuse of sculpture is for example the work of T. M. Kristensen and L. Stirling, which studies the practice used in late antique times from different aspects and regional perspectives.¹ The project “The Last Statues of Antiquity”, directed by R. R. R. Smith and B. Ward-Perkins, in which reuse is one of the main topics, shows the same strong focus on Late Antiquity.²

The two volumes published by Topoi are also focused on the analyses of reuse processes and transport of material during late and post-antique times³. Moreover, the relation between antique sculptures and Christianity represents a further aspect linked to the late antique times, often taken into account by studies on the topic discussed on this panel.⁴

Among the multiple points of view, through which the subject can be discussed, two main aspects seem to be of particular importance. On the one hand sculptures and their parts were reused as building material. One example is the case of Athens, where several funerary reliefs and parts of statues were reused for the construction not only of buildings but also of the fortification walls already in the classical period.⁵

On the other hand sculptures could be reused maintaining their original function or as works of art. In the first case it happens in the original context, for example through the new dedication of the statue, the practice of re-inscribing the monument or of remaking parts of the sculpture – normally the portraits. One of the most interesting examples of this is the Acropolis of Athens, where the project “Die Akropolis von Athen im Hellenismus und in der römischen Kaiserzeit” has pointed out how rich and various this phenomenon⁶ could be. It aimed not only at avoiding the costs of producing new statues, but also at honouring Romans with Greek monuments from the Classical and Hellenistic periods. The iconography and the quality of old statues took an important role in the decision to reuse them. Furthermore, in some cases the reuse involved modification of sculptures, contributing to the flourishing of Athenian workshops.⁷

Not only in Greece, but also in Italy ancient statues were highly esteemed and reused in the decoration of public and private spaces, like prestigious *domus*. Many sculptures have traces of continuous use, as is shown not only by the deterioration of their surfaces but also by the presence of repairs and restoration.⁸ A special regard for ancient statues

in public and private spaces is documented in the late antique times also in literary sources.⁹

In the second case the statues were moved in a new context, that often implies also an alteration of the objects in function and meaning. It is for example the case of Ostia, where a lot of funerary material was reused to redecorate private *domus* and public buildings in Late Antiquity.¹⁰ During this process, there has been a selection of old statues from buildings with another function and their use in this new context gives to the sculptures a different meaning.

The practice of recycling and reusing sculptures implies a number of consequences in relationship with socio-economical aspects. The economical factor plays an important role in recycling and is an integral part of this concept that is why it must always be taken into account discussing the chosen case studies. The difficulty to purchase new sculptures in the late antique times should be considered, which was probably due to the scarcity of material and the deterioration of the transportation infrastructures in the Mediterranean area. However, at the same time we know that statues were still made during Late Antiquity,¹¹ therefore the economical factor cannot be the only reason for reusing and recycling, but there were some socio-cultural reasons as well.¹² As demonstrated in many papers of the panel, reuse and recycling are complex processes that cannot be traced back to just one cause and only to the late antique times.

The reuse of statues as building material may as well in some cases have an aesthetic value and a recall to the antiquity, which got nothing to do with any economical reason.

Panel's Overview

The panel presented at the conference stresses the two main aspects in relationship with this practice that are already discussed here: the reuse as building material and the reuse with maintenance of original function or as works of art. The panel focuses not only on the late antique period but also on the roman one, aiming to show the continuity and the complexity of the phenomenon. Geographically the focus is on the Mediterranean area, analysing the reuse of statues in different contexts and regions.

Through the discussion and the comparison of different case studies of recycling and reusing sculptures in many contexts the papers of the panel highlight common features and local singularities of this practice.

Starting from the study of a set of statues' heads reused as building material for the Athenian walls and through their comparison with other similar cases in Athens and in other Greek cities, Caterina Parigi discusses the possibility of a conscious reuse based on aesthetic and ideological criteria.

Ralf Krumeich's paper focuses on the various facets of the reuse of pre-existing bases (including huge pillar monuments) and the re-inscription of Greek sculptures as honorific statues of Romans on the Athenian Acropolis in the late Hellenistic and Roman Im-

perial periods as well as on the economical, political and social aspects associated with this practice.

In his study Simon Barker examines a selection of sculptures, especially portraits that were transformed into new objects through the practice of re-carving, while considering aspects such as the sources of stone for re-carving projects and the sculpting techniques employed in recycling and adapting existing works to new objects.

By discussing several public and private buildings from Italy and the western provinces, the paper of Cristina Murer assesses how far funerary sculpture became an integral part of the late antique décor of Roman houses, villas, churches and public buildings.

The reuse of sculpture as building material in Ostia is the topic of Roberta Ruotolo's paper, that through the discussion of three case studies, demonstrates not only the continuity of the practice of reuse from the Roman times, but also its increase in the 3rd century AD and its value as social indicator.

In her study Eva Christof presents some examples of reused statue bases from Italy and discuss the social, legal and financial conditions, which allow that former grave monuments from a necropolis could assume a completely new function in the middle of the city, as bases for statues.

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Notes

¹ Kristensen – Stirling 2016.

² <<http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/>> (20/02/2019); Smith – Ward Perkins 2016.

³ Altekamp et al. 2013; Altekamp et al. 2017.

⁴ See for example Sauer 2003; Kristensen 2013 and the works of John Pollini on different aspects of the subject Pollini 2007; Pollini 2013.

⁵ Th. 1, 90, 3; 1, 93, 1–2. Theocharaki 2011, 104–112; Greco 2014, 1271 no. 10.17 (M. C. Monaco); Theocharaki 2015, 37–39. 183–192.

⁶ Krumeich – Witschel 2010. On the project see also <<https://www.ai.uni-bonn.de/lehre-und-forschung/akropolis-projekt-1/akropolis-projekt>> and <www.poliskultur.de> (20/02/2019) and here the paper of R. Krumeich.

⁷ Krumeich 2010.

⁸ Examples of repair include a statue of Diana from the House of the Fortuna Annonaria in Ostia: Ostia, Museo Ostiense Inv. no. 64 Stirling 2016, 283. For this and other examples see also Vorster 2012/2013, 473–477.

⁹ See Bassett 2004, 143–259 which collects the literary sources.

¹⁰ Murer 2016.

¹¹ See for example the case of Aphrodisias: Smith 2016a, 145 f.

¹² See for example Smith 2016b, 4. 20.

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