PATRONS AND VIEWERS IN LATE ANTIQUITY
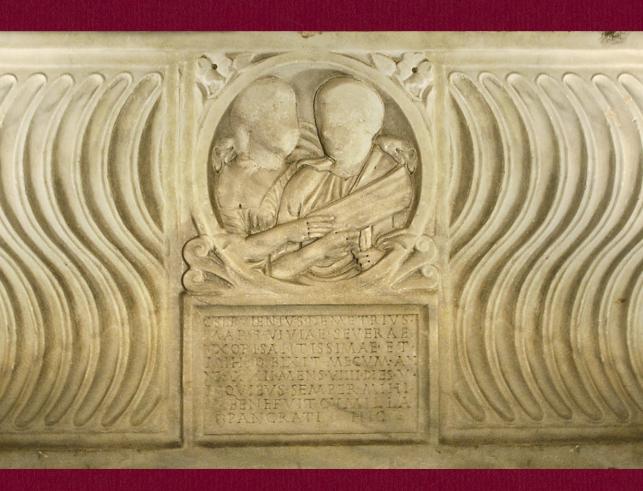
Edited by Stine Birk & Birte Poulsen

Patrons and Viewers
in Late Antiquity

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Introduction

Stine Birk & Birte Poulsen

This volume presents the proceedings of a conference on Patrons and Viewers in Late Antiquity held at Aarhus University in October 2008. The overall purpose of the conference was to discuss the different kinds of patrons and viewers of art and architecture in Late Antiquity, with a special emphasis on the interplay or dialogue between these two agents. One of the aims was to assess if and how the symbolic meaning of monuments changed according to patron, viewer, context, and time, thereby addressing the differences and similarities in the way messages were conveyed and the responses they created in different periods and geographical regions. Late Antiquity is here defined as the period from the 3rd to about the 8th century,[1] in as much as we consider the 3rd century as a period that had an immense impact on the formation of the following centuries, and the end of the 7th century as the period where the Arabic conquests had gained stability in the East and steadily transformed the Roman empire.[2]

Patrons and patronage

To understand a late antique monument and its message, whether it belongs to a profane, religious, funerary, political, public or private sphere, the acknowledgement of the patron and his or her purpose of making the monument is of crucial importance.[3] The patron, who at times can be recognised through inscriptions or a portrait, but who is otherwise often anonymous to us, is in general terms, the one who commissioned the monument, paid for it and provided for its erection.

To approach the patron is like going behind the stage of an already set play and looking at the processes that took place before the premier, that is, to investigate the incentives and the ideals behind the choice of form and decoration. This approach presupposes that the patron wanted to have command of the process in order to control the level of self-representation, which was supposedly the general motivation for donating a public monument, decorating a private house or constructing a religious building. It is obvious that the stimulus for acting as a patron is not only found in the on-going striving for public self-display, but also in contexts where, for example, emotions or religious belief played a central role. Inhabitants of ancient societies were aware that

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1   Unless otherwise stated all centuries and dates are AD in this volume.
2   Bowersock, Brown & Grabar 2000, vii.
3   Patrons are also termed donors and *euergetes* in the contributions.

patronage of monuments was generated by various and differing factors, spanning from power and self-display to bereavement and fear of oblivion.

The degree to which the finished monument can be informative of the patron and his or her influence on the working processes is always a matter of discussion. A few written sources certainly do indicate that at least some patrons took great interest in the design of their private dwellings, not only for their life here and now, but also after their death.[4] Such interest appears for instance in a letter written by the wealthy aristocrat Quintus Aurelius Symmachus in the 4th century. He mentions a new form of mosaic, untried previously, that he wanted to try out for decorating the vaults of his own house.[5]

Other questions concerning the level of the patron's impact on the final product are based on issues related to workshop organisation and the production processes.[6] To what degree was the final result of a monument dependent on, for instance, the available raw material? Did customers sometimes have to accept pre-designed products that did not relate to the personal history of the patron, or could he or she influence the entire process, from design to style and the final decorative touch? It seems that the patron's level of influence occasionally went right down to the basis details of the monument, such as the choice of the material,[7] and it has been argued, on the basis of mosaics from Roman North Africa, that the patron had a strong and decisive influence on the design of floor decorations.[8]

It appears that patronage could take various forms, and while some were one-man commissions others were large-scale projects undertaken by a group of people. Plutarch tells of cities who invited artists to compete for contracts for building projects, such as temples.[9] From the late antique period, we know of parallels to this kind of "city patronage", for example in relation to the churches of the Near East where, in one case, various citizens from certain cities sponsored the Church of St Stephen in Umm er-Rasas and its mosaics.[10] Such testimonies are important in understanding the role of

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4   Cicero corresponded with his friend Titus Pomponius Atticus on Greek art for the embellishment of his villa in Tusculum, Cic. *Att.* 1.1.5; 1.6.2; 1.8.2; 1.9.2; 1.10.3, as well as with his friend M. Fabius Gallus, Cic. *Fam.* 7.23.1-3. Lucianus, *Philops.* 18 describes works of art, such as paintings with mythological landscapes related to villa architecture. For the role of architecture and embellishment, see also Amm. Marc. 28.4.12. A similar influence may be observed in the sepulchral sphere. Preserved wills show the extent to which individual patrons took an interest in the design of their own tombs, Carroll 2006, 40-44; Hope 2007, 63-71.

5   Symm. *Ep.* 8.42.10-13 (41).

6   On workshops and organisation, see Kristensen & Poulsen 2012.

7   *E.g.* in the case of Ara Pacis the choice was white marble from Cararra as argued by D. Conlin 1997, 38-42, especially 38.

8   Dunbabin 1978, 24-27.

9   Plut. *Mor.* 489E. Numerous examples of city patronage are known, *e.g.* Halikarnassos was among the towns which applied for permission to dedicate a temple to Tiberius in 26, Tac. *Ann.* 4.55.

10 Dedicated in 756: Piccirillo 1993, 238-239; Piccirillo 1994, 134-164; Baumann 1999, 142-182.

the patron, since we – today's viewers – are usually left with the monument itself and its decoration as the basis for our interpretation.

The viewer

The reception of ancient visual arts is essentially a study of the viewer, and as shown by modern studies of visual culture and mass-media, meaning does not necessarily dwell within the image itself. The meaning and interpretation comes into existence in engagement with the viewer and his or her interpretation.[11] Similar approaches have been applied to Greek and Roman visual culture by scholars such as L. Schneider (1983) and J. Elsner (for example 1995 and 2007), who thereby opened up the discussion of how images and objects were looked at and understood during the period in which they were made. Words such as "Betrachter",[12] "looking",[13] "seeing",[14] "viewing"[15] have thus become terms through which different aspects of Roman society are approached. Thereby monuments are often "read" in terms of understanding social concepts such as gender, social status, rituals, and the relation between different social groups.[16]

The literary sources leave no doubt that the embellishment of both private and public buildings was meant to impress the viewers and to reveal the social status of the patrons. The most famous viewer of Antiquity is certainly Philostratos, and through his descriptions of paintings – real or not – we may be looking at art through the eyes of an ancient viewer.[17]

In a discussion of the viewer, we should be aware that we are not dealing with a homogeneous group of people that relate to art and architecture with similar knowledge. Public art and architecture were usually meant to be seen not only by one individual or a defined group of people, but by a whole range of different viewers belonging to various social, educational and cultural levels. The monuments, therefore, had to respect certain rules and cater to the expectations of the surrounding society, in order to secure their

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11   Sturken & Cartwright 2001. For a review, see Heinrich 2002.

12   Among the first contributions should be mentioned Schneider 1983 and 1990; Wallace-Hadrill 1989. Related issues are discussed, *e.g.* by Schneider *et al.* 1979 and Fehr 2000.

13   In titles such as *Looking at lovemaking*, Clarke 1998; *Looking at laughter*, Clarke 2007; *Looking at looking*, Sharrock 2002.

14   Examples are: *On seeing and depicting the theatre in classical Athens*, Green 1991; *Seeing women in the Villa of the Mysteries*, Bergmann 2007; *Seeing Statues*, Roueché 2011.

15   *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans. Visual representation and non-elite viewers in Italy,* Clarke 2003; *Greeks on Greekness. Viewing the Greek past under the Roman empire*, Konstan & Saïd 2006; *Viewing Ariadne*, Elsner 2007; *Visibility and Viewing*, Trimble 2007.

16   Rautman 2000 (*Reading the body*); Montserrat 2000 (*Reading gender*); Hurwit 2002 (*Reading the Chigi vase*); Erasmo 2008 (*Reading death*).

17   The paintings were presumably in a stoa in Naples, Philostr. *Imag.* Prooimion 1.4 (Transl. A. Fairbanks, Loeb ed., 1960); Elsner 1995, 23-39. It is also worth noticing how one of the other well-known viewers of ancient architecture and art, the traveler Pausanias, apprehends the many monuments he sees and describes, Elsner 1995, 127-155.

readability. The viewer, basically any inhabitant of ancient society, had agency in defining the final product, since he or she was the real recipient of the message conveyed by the monument. Therefore, the visual codex of a specific time or place must be investigated, in order to approach the way the viewers responded to art and architecture.

Patrons and viewers in Late Antiquity

The contributions to this volume discuss the nature and roles of patrons and viewers in private and sacred contexts in various regions of the late antique world. Overall they contribute to a better understanding of the diverse types of patrons and viewers in Late Antiquity, ranging from group-patronage in the public sphere to individual patronage in private contexts. Furthermore, it is discussed how various viewing positions are taken according to the context in which the monument or image was staged.

Ulrich Gehn, Troels Myrup Kristensen, and Lea Stirling all approach the topic with a focus on sculpture in diverse contexts in late antique society. Gehn investigates the senatorial honorary statues in Rome. Numerous preserved statue bases with inscriptions show that the senatorial honorary statues were still being erected during the 4th century. However, apart from the Forum of Trajan the settings of these statues have shifted from the public sphere to the senatorial *domus*, and the statues were predominantly dedicated by clients and members of the family of the honoured. Kristensen discusses the ways in which the Christian viewer responded to pagan sculpture during the time before Byzantine iconoclasm, with a special focus on pagan statues that have been cross marked. He points to the importance, not of an overall message of Christian triumph, but of individual responses and personal belief. The response of the viewers is also crucial in the contribution by Stirling. Her point of departure concerns statues in public baths and their continued but different use during the 4th and 5th centuries. She observes how pagan sculpture is still being mentioned in inscriptions by the patrons of baths, and how reinstallations of pagan statues, modifications and sometimes mutilations aimed at adapting the sculpture to its new cultural context.

Two contributors focus on funerary monuments, more precisely sarcophagi, and private patronage (Stine Birk and Katherina Meinecke). Meinecke studies the visibility of sarcophagi, or the lack of the same, with the intention of understanding sarcophagi in their original context, that is the tomb. She draws on such cases where the coffins, despite their elaborate decoration, were concealed behind masonry or buried beneath ground. Meinecke points to the fact that the majority of these sarcophagi were only seen very briefly before and during the funeral. There were practical reasons also for the concealment of a sarcophagus, *e.g.* the threat of grave robbery and violation, fears of pollution, or to ensure that the deceased endured an undisturbed *somnus aeternus*. Birk's contribution on sarcophagi also treats the private use of the coffins and considers the patronage of sarcophagi, not primarily as a symbol of status, but as private expressions of grief. She emphasises the importance of showing patronage of sarcophagi, and points to the fact that in Rome, patrons of sarcophagi were found within the family, such as a spouse, daughter/son or a parent. This definition of the patron is, however,

culturally defined since in other parts of the Mediterranean like the Near Eastern city of Tyre, the patron seems often to have been the deceased themselves.

Individual and anonymous patronage is further discussed by Veronika Scheibelreiter-Gail and Birte Poulsen. Self-representations of patrons in private houses and the response of the viewer to the constructed self-image are approached from the perspective of inscriptions on various kinds of media by Scheibelreiter-Gail. She examines the various functions of the inscriptions in wall-paintings and mosaics and shows how inscriptions as a general phenomenon point to the financial power of the house-owner. The role of the viewer is furthermore approached through images or inscriptions without a patron, as is the case with graffiti. If a patron is one that sets up and pays for the erection of a monument, inscription or image, graffiti, then, cannot be said to have patrons. Scheibelreiter-Gail argues that art without patrons (i.e. graffiti) can still convey meaning and messages of social standing. Both within the private and public sphere, the patron had monuments erected and commissioned images for the purpose of self-representation and visibility. This issue is approached through mosaics by Birte Poulsen, who shows that self-representation and visibility could find expression in portraits of the patrons or the donors in the mosaic floors of both private and public sacral buildings. In line with the material presented by Scheibelreiter-Gail, attention is drawn to the sometimes very elaborate inscriptions in the mosaics that often address the viewer directly.

Sarah Scott examines patronage in regard to romanised villa owners and their aim to position themselves in society, a kind of patronage that says little about the patron's individual life history but which aims instead at appropriating the patron's local and regional political standing. She suggests that as Christianity gradually gained popularity in the Coln Valley, Gloucestershire, temples located near private villas became less attractive for performing patronage.

Patronage of religious buildings is discussed by three authors, Arja Karivieri, Gitte Lønstrup Dal Santo, and Mette Low Sørensen. Karivieri is discussing a selection of floor decorations in late Roman houses and villas, as well as in early Christian churches in Greece. She compares the imagery in these two categories of buildings in order to investigate if the patrons chose to present different kinds of motifs and iconography to the viewers in profane and religious contexts. At least in a few cases conflicts between a local patron, the donor, and the church authorities seem to have arisen due to disagreement on the decorative program suited for a church. It is still a matter of discussion how strictly the local patrons followed the recommendations of the church authorities and whether the view of the patron, or the effect that the decoration had on the viewers of different social and cultural backgrounds, was considered the most important. Dal Santo continues this thought about patronage of religious buildings and studies the church of Sts Peter and Paul in Constantinople, in the context of the vision of "the new Rome". Dal Santo puts emphasis on the patronage of cults. Contrary to prevailing assumption, she argues that a church to Sts Peter and Paul existed in Constantinople before Justinian. The viewer's response is approached through the eyes of the believers. Besides considering Sts Peter and Paul in the context of the public

sphere, Dal Santo also discusses the use of their iconography on sarcophagi, *i.e.* in the private sphere. Low Sørensen focuses on religious imagery in the Christian and Jewish communities. On the basis of mosaic pavements in religious buildings in Jordan and Palestine, she addresses the question of messages conveyed by the iconography and inscriptions in churches and synagogues respectively. She argues that the iconography was adopted and reinterpreted with a new connotation, either in accordance with Christianity or Judaism. There was a direct interaction between the structure and the iconography and together they formed a sacred environment which was an essential part of the maintenance process of the religious identity of the local Jewish and Christian communities.

Both Siri Sande and Hendrik Dey investigate questions related to public architectural monuments built from *spolia*. Sande discusses the reuse of the sculptural embellishment and the re-carving of the portraits on the Arch of Constantine. Did Constantine order the re-carving of the portraits of the original emperors because he wanted to identify himself with them (Trajan, Hadrian etc.) thereby manifesting a positive view of those emperors, or, rather, should the altering of the facial features be understood as an insult to the same emperors, a kind of *damnatio memoriae*? A crucial question is whether the viewers of the Arch of Constantine realised that older historical reliefs were re-used. The patron of the arch was the senate, but who were the viewers? Whoever planned the Arch of Constantine evidently had in mind this ancient splendour, inserting the monument into a setting which was meant to evoke the great past to the viewer. Sande concludes that even if the "wish to employ usable materials lies at the bottom of all use of *spolia*, it does not preclude that their use may have had different meanings, which varied from one type of monument to another". This also holds good for the contribution by Dey who, offering reflections on the experience of the patron and the viewer, takes what he calls a 'positive' approach to *spolia*, in looking at late antique city walls and their reuse of older material. Because of the visibility of milestones along the vital roads of the Roman provinces, he considers patronage of milestones to be a powerful statement of political authority and at the same time investigates their destiny once their patron lost power. Although Dey does not apply the theory of 'positive spoliation' uncritically to the material, he presents examples of intended and well considered reuse of monuments, and points to the interesting fact that the reputation of the first patron played a role in how the monument was later reused.

Acknowledgements

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Ehrenstatuen in spätantiken Häusern Roms

Ulrich Gehn

Einleitung

Öffentliche Statuenehrungen sind bereits seit republikanischer Zeit ein wichtiger Aspekt der römischen Stadtkultur. Bis in severische Zeit wurden die öffentlichen Plätze auch provinzialer Städte dicht mit Ehrenstatuen bestückt, womit, dem Beispiel der Kaiser und der Angehörigen des *ordo senatorius* folgend, auch die lokalen Honoratioren der Provinzstädte bedacht wurden. In spät- und nachseverischer Zeit hingegen ist ein drastischer Rückgang der Zahl nichtkaiserlicher Ehrenstatuen zu konstatieren.[1]

Der weitgehende Ausschluss von der Verwaltung der Provinzen seit dem 3. Viertel des 3. Jahrhunderts zog das Desinteresse des *ordo senatorius* an statuarischen Ehrungen im munizipalen und kolonialen Bereich nach sich. Durch den Ausfall der senatorischen Monumente "musste das ganze System der statuarischen Ehrenzuweisungen in Gefahr geraten".[2]

Während diese Sicht reichsweit gesehen sicherlich Gültigkeit beanspruchen kann, überrascht beim Blick auf Rom die hohe Anzahl senatorischer Ehrenstatuen insbesondere im 4. Jahrhundert.[3]

Unter den Zeugnissen für spätantiken Porträtstatuen in Rom erfreuten sich bislang in erster Linie die 'offiziell', d. h. mit kaiserlicher Zustimmung, auf dem Trajansforum

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1 Wrede 2001, 111; Alföldy 1979, 185 mit Anm. 25, 234; Alföldy 1984, 73. Empirisch gestützt wird das zunächst durch die genannten Untersuchungen G. Alföldys. Die Auflistung bei Goette 1990, 145 nennt nur noch 11 Belege aus der Spätantike. Zum Rückgang der Statuenproduktion, vgl. auch Diebner 1979; Zanker 1983; Smith 1985, 215-221.

2 Wrede 2001, 111.

3 Im alten *CIL* VI sind von 150 Inschriften nachdiokletianischer Magistrate bzw. Senatoren 78 sicher auf Statuenbasen zu beziehen, welche Ehrenstatuen für 54 verschiedene Persönlichkeiten trugen. Von diesen sind aus den erhaltenen Inschriftentexten 50 namentlich bekannt. Der Löwenanteil fällt ins 4. und frühe 5. Jahrhundert. Dem stehen grob überschlagen ca. 250 entsprechende Zeugnisse aus der Kaiserzeit gegenüber. Ca. 20 der römischen Inschriften sind großen öffentlichen Plätzen zuzurechnen und mit kaiserlicher Genehmigung dort aufgestellt worden.