THE URBAN IMAGE OF LATE ANTIQUE CONSTANTINOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

ROM ITS FOUNDATION IN THE FOURTH CENTURY BY CONSTANTINE THE GREAT
to its sack by the army of the Fourth Crusade in the thirteenth, the city of
Constantinople boasted a collection of ancient statuary unrivaled by any of the
great medieval cities east or west. The self-conscious creation of the emperor and
his advisors, this collection, composed largely of antiquities of pre-fourth-century
manufacture, was created by transporting the sculptured riches of the cities and
sanctuaries of the Roman Empire to the newly founded capital.[1] There, in a series
of discrete yet interrelated gatherings spread throughout the city's public spaces,
the sculptured patrimony of antiquity was marshaled to create a civic identity for
the city, describing its history and in so doing explaining its unique right to urban
preeminence.

What was initiated by Constantine was continued by his successors in the later
fourth, the fifth, and the sixth centuries. Constantine's son, Constantius, appears to
have completed a good deal of the initial work set in motion by his father, and over
the course of the next two hundred years, additions continued to be made to extant
gatherings around the city. With the expansion of the city limits and the concomitant
development of new urban spaces under the aegis of the Theodosian house, new
ensembles also were formed in the latter decades of the fourth and in the early fifth
centuries. It was only in the sixth century, during the reign of Justinian, that the habit
of reuse finally died out, by which time hundreds of ancient monuments graced the
city's streets and public gathering places.

Although individual pieces inevitably were destroyed, felled by such natural and
man-made disasters as fires and earthquakes or the occasional economic exigency that
prompted the sacrifice of statuary for coin, the monuments that had been gathered
for display in late antiquity stood largely undisturbed throughout the early middle
ages.[2] Eventually, however, piecemeal attrition gave way to systematic, wholesale

destruction as war replaced accident and imperial cupidity as the force behind the collection's demise. Two cataclysmic events shattered the city and with it the collection of antiquities: the 1204 sack of Constantinople by the army of the Fourth Crusade and the capital's fall to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

In April 1204 the army of the Fourth Crusade, after having laid siege to and captured Constantinople, spent three days pillaging the city. Churches, palaces, and public buildings were raided, their sacred relics and riches scavenged. Public monuments also were assaulted: statues ancient and Byzantine were toppled, some to be destroyed, others to be carried away. There is no question but that the better part of the Constantinopolitan collection was destroyed at this time. Indeed, the wealth of Byzantine artifacts that first appeared in western Europe in the thirteenth century, among them not only relics and reliquaries but also the Horses of San Marco in Venice, confirm the extent of looting and destruction.[3]

What the Crusaders did not destroy was probably ransacked in May 1453, when the city fell to the Ottoman Turks. As in 1204, the conquering army was granted three full days of looting and slaughter. At the end of this period the central areas of the city are said to have been little more than rubble, a sight reported to have caused the conqueror, Sultan Mehmet II, to weep.[4]

The havoc wrought by these great sacks means that a gathering of antiquities that once numbered in the hundreds can now be counted on the fingers of one hand. In Istanbul only three monuments survive in situ: the Serpent Column of the Platean Tripod (cat. no. 141), the Theodosian Obelisk (cat. no. 138), and the porphyry Column of Constantine (cat. no. 109). Archaeological excavation, limited because of centuries of continuous habitation and the growth of the city in modern times, has expanded upon this picture only slightly. Excavations carried out in and around the city have yielded only a handful of antiquities associated with the collection: four statue bases (cat. nos. 31, 47, 75, 144), a sphinx (cat. no. 104), a dolphin (cat. no. 110), a portrait of Tiberius (cat. no. 116), a bronze goose (cat. no. 132), and the colossal head of a goddess (cat. no. 57).[5]

Although its destruction was virtually complete by the end of the fifteenth century, the Constantinopolitan collection has been the source of speculation and commentary from as early as the sixteenth, when it first began to pique the imagination of renaissance humanists. A general awareness of both the collection and the project for its development emerged as early as 1550 in two separate contexts: the intellectual world of Medicean Florence and the court of François I Valois. Although the Italian and the French interests developed simultaneously, their approaches to the gathering and the contexts in which they discussed it could not have been more different,

with the Italians viewing the gathering as an artistic phenomenon and the French considering it under the rubric of philology.

The earliest published reference to Constantine's collecting activity appeared in the 1550 edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*:

> Thus, for this and many other reasons, one sees just how low sculpture and with it the other arts had fallen by the time of Constantine. And if anything else were necessary to bring about their final destruction, it was the departure of Constantine from Rome to establish the seat of his Empire at Byzantium by which act he brought to Greece not only all of the best sculptors and artisans of the age, whoever they might have been, but also an infinity of statues and other examples of the most beautiful sculpture.[6]

As the passage makes clear, Vasari used the fact of Constantine's collecting not as a gateway to any larger discussion of Constantinople and its newly massed gathering of statuary, but rather as evidence in a larger argument about the inexorable decline of Rome as an artistic center. Unsurprisingly Vasari viewed the removal of sculpture from Rome to Byzantium as the ultimate proof that Rome as an artistic center was dead, and with it, the artistic standards of the ancients. With the best artisans having been taken east, there was no one left in the city to produce art, and with the best art taken away, there was nothing left to appreciate. Rome had been denuded. Vasari went on to argue that this step was the last in a process of decline that had manifested itself first in a move away from the imitation of nature toward abstraction, and then in the pathetic reuse of ancient materials in building. As such, it was a definable moment that confirmed not only the death of an ancient artistic tradition, but also Vasari's own belief that the arts, like human beings, are born, grow old, and die.[7]

This negative tendency must have been nourished by the chauvinistic attitudes that underpinned his own literary efforts. As is well known, one of Vasari's own aims in the *Lives* was to establish the primacy of a reborn Italian art, and within that broader framework the seminal role of Florentine traditions in the development, promotion, and sustenance of that rebirth.[8] Thus, however lamentable the decay of ancient tradition Vasari documented, the Roman fall from grace was in a perverse sense felicitous as it paved the way for the Florentine reinvention and recovery of antiquity. As the signal event in that process of decline, Constantine's removal of statuary to Constantinople was key in this interpretation of history.

From the point of view of art-historical tradition, Vasari's interest in the Constantinopolitan collection was a dead end. No other art-historical author mentions the collection, and interest in the gathering passes into the realm of historical and

philological study from the sixteenth century on. In fact most modern study of the collection is an outgrowth of the interest in Greek philology that occurred in humanist circles across Europe during the Renaissance. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the arrival of Byzantine scholars in the West in the build up to and wake of the Ottoman conquest accommodated this interest.[9] The presence of such great Byzantine intellects as Manuel Chrysoloras, John Argyropolos, and John Bessarion introduced western Europe not only to the language of classical antiquity, but also to the Byzantine literary traditions that had preserved and commented on the traditions of classical Greece. It was the study of these later texts that opened the door to an awareness of the Constantinopolitan collection, for it was here, in descriptions of the events of Byzantine history and the marvels of the Byzantine capital, that the gathering lived on.

The scholarly interest in Byzantium and its traditions that developed out of the initial philological interests of the humanists was also fueled by contemporary religious and political concerns. The ecclesiastical disputes of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation made for an interest in the Orthodox church on the part of both religious groups, with Protestants lining up in support of the antipapist Orthodox clergy and Catholics calling for union with the eastern church in a bid to strengthen their ranks in the face of growing religious dissent.[10]

Equally important for the study of the Constantinopolitan antiquities were the alliances that grew out of western Europe's political infighting. The long-standing rivalry between François I Valois (r. 1515–47) and Charles V Hapsburg (r. 1519–58) led the French king to strike a military alliance with the Turkish Sultan, Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–66), which in turn led to a series of diplomatic agreements that allowed the French open access to Constantinople and its environs. François took advantage of the alliance, not only in military terms, but also in cultural ones, sponsoring a series of studies on the seats of classical antiquity that included an overview of Constantinople and its history.[11] The man entrusted with this task was the French humanist Pierre Gilles (1490–1555), who, in accordance with his humanist roots, styled himself Petrus Gyllius for purposes of publication.

Gilles[12] was a contemporary of such noted French humanists as François Rabelais and Guillaume Budé, men who were themselves students of Erasmus and the Italian Humanists. The details of his education are unknown, but it is clear that like his contemporaries, he was not only a crack philologist, but also, by dint of his familiarity with authors such as Aristotle, Aelian, and Pliny, an important scientific observer. In the 1520s and 1530s Gilles wrote several books on natural history, dedicating at least one, a study of Adriatic marine life, to François I.[13] In addition to his scientific

publications, he translated, edited, and commented on a variety of Greek texts and produced a Greek–Latin lexicon.[14] His interest in and command of Greek, coupled with his proven ability as a researcher in the natural sciences, must have made him an ideal candidate for a fact-finding mission to the eastern Mediterranean mounted by François I in 1544.

Gilles appears to have been in Constantinople between 1544 and 1547, and again in 1550.[15] Two important studies resulted from these visits: *De Bosporo Thracio libri tres* (Lyon, 1561; Leiden, 1632 and 1635) and *De topographia Constantinopoleos et de illius antiquitatibus libri quatuor* (Lyon, 1561; Leiden, 1661). The latter is Gilles' best-known and most important work. The text describes the city of Constantinople in four books. It is organized by city ward and proceeds from east to west, moving from the tip of the peninsula to the city's defensive land walls in the west. A general account of Constantinople and its setting introduces the project, followed by Book I, an outline of the mythological and historical background of the city that describes the city's mythical foundation under Byzas and its early growth in the late Roman and Byzantine period before ending with a survey of its contemporary layout. Gilles then examines Constantinople district by district and monument by monument, giving an overview of the city in his own day. Book II goes over the same territory in the same order, but with the aim of reconstructing lost monuments, especially those in the ancient city's monumental core. Books III and IV concentrate on the rest of the city, always with the intent of reconstructing the lost monuments of Constantinople. A survey of contemporary Ottoman monuments completes the book.

Gilles' work is interesting, not only because it is the first scholarly account of Constantinople, but also because of his working method. As the first person to map the city and describe it, he applied the lessons of the Greek sources to an interpretation of modern Constantinopolitan topography. His basic source was the fifth-century regionary catalogue the *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolis*,[16] which mapped out the city district by district. Following the scheme of the *Notitia* he observed the architectural and sculptural remains of Constantinople as they survived in the various regions. As befit his humanist bent, his intent was to recover the city's lost antiquities, an aim that set him apart from previous urban commentators, crusaders, and clerics for the most part, whose main interest was in the city's religious sites and their relics.[17]

De topographia is not only the first topographical study of Constantinople, it is also the first modern text to include references to the collection of ancient statuary. Naturally, Gilles observed the surviving monuments such as the Serpent Column

and the Theodosian Obelisk. More importantly, he also used Byzantine texts to reconstruct destroyed buildings and sculpture. He did so, however, not as an end in itself, but rather as one piece in the larger topographical discussion. Thus, descriptive reporting identifies monuments and their location but offers no interpretation or analysis of either individual statues or the collection as a whole.

The French interest in Byzantium continued into the seventeenth century at the courts of Louis XIII (r. 1610–43) and Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715).[18] As in the sixteenth century, the interest has its origins in philological study. The systematic editing of Byzantine texts was the primary undertaking, and it is in the context of this enterprise that the real founder of Byzantine historical studies emerged, Charles Du Fresne Du Cange. Du Cange was a prodigious editor of and commentator on Byzantine historical texts. He also undertook research and writing on such related subjects as Byzantine history, genealogy, topography, and numismatics, and he is probably best known for his medieval Greek and Latin dictionaries;[19] however, his great work, the *Historia byzantina duplici commentario illustrata* (Paris, 1680), is an important marker in Constantinopolitan studies. The book is written in two parts: *Constantinopolis Christiana* and *De familiis byzantinis*. The former, a topographical study, deals with the city's structure and monuments, while the latter, a genealogical survey of Byzantine aristocratic families, is more purely historical.

Like Gilles, the foundation for Du Cange's interest was philological and historical; however, unlike his predecessor, Du Cange had no thirst for on-site investigation and study. In fact, *Constantinopolis Christiana* is the work of an armchair historian: Du Cange never once visited Constantinople and relied completely on Gilles and the Byzantine sources for his topographical information. Nevertheless the book is not simply a repetition of previous labors. Although largely similar in structure and content, Du Cange does offer new information gleaned from his study and observation of texts. As with Gilles, the interest in antiquities is part of the larger project of reconstructing Constantinopolitan topography and with it the stage set for Byzantine history. The material included is reported on the basis of textual references, and as with his predecessor the aim is descriptive and informational rather than analytical.

Gilles and Du Cange made the observation of antiquities an integral part of the discussion of Constantinopolitan history and topography, and in so doing, they established a precedent for all future topographers and historians.[20] For all their awareness of the material, however, discussion remained largely superficial, as observations regarding ancient monuments were always subsumed into the larger topographical project.

The first person to focus on the collection itself was the German classical scholar Christian Gottfried Heyne. In an article published in 1792, Heyne offered a hand-list of the city's ancient monuments.[21] Like Gilles and Du Cange before him, Heyne mined the Byzantine sources for information regarding antiquities. Unlike his predecessors, who consistently subordinated an interest in ancient statuary to the overall aims of history and topography, Heyne focused exclusively on sculpture. The result was a two-part census of monuments. Part I offered a list of male figures organized first by subject matter (gods, heroes, men of letters) and then by location. Using the same structure, Part II presented the evidence for female figures before concluding with a survey of nonrepresentational monuments such as tripods, obelisks, and columns, which he published together with a list of animals and mythical creatures. This project offered the most systematic and detailed study of the Constantinopolitan antiquities to date; however, for all its focus on the statuary, the work was in some senses identical to that of Gilles and Du Cange in that it remained essentially informational. Heyne expressed no awareness of or interest in the gathering as an actual collection or any desire to consider the motivation behind its conception.

It was only in the nineteenth century that interpretive studies of Constantinopolitan antiquities became of interest. With the development of classical archaeology as a discipline and the concomitant urge to establish a corpus of classical statuary based on recognizable sculptural typologies, scholars began to be interested less in the collection as a list and more in the details of its individual components. The claims made by Byzantine authors for the presence of such famous works of ancient art as the Olympian Zeus (cat. no. 157) or the Aphrodite of Knidos (cat. no. 151) led German scholars such as Otto Jahn and Wilhelm Gurlitt to search for other famous classical statues in the Constantinopolitan corpus with the result that a cottage industry associating individual statues with some of classical antiquity's most renowned works of art sprang up as scholars vied to identify the city's treasures.[22]

A second strand of interpretive study developed in the early twentieth century in the context of anthropology. In a paper presented to the British Folklore Society in the spring of 1924, R. M. Dawkins took up the problem of reception.[23] What interested Dawkins was the afterlife of classical statuary in the postclassical world, and his paper considered the attitudes that medieval observers brought to bear on the remains of antiquity, that is, anything of pre-seventh-century manufacture. On the basis of the textual evidence Dawkins noted a desire on the part of post-seventh-century viewers to interpret sculpture in terms of local, nonclassical history, to attribute to it mystical powers, and to interact physically with statuary, either to

prevent wrong-doing on the part of an image or to punish a statue for crimes already committed. Drawing from these observations he concluded that one unifying idea characterized the approach to statuary in the postclassical world, a sense of the power, the knowledge, and the magical skill of the ancients.

Dawkins's use of statuary to explore medieval ideas and attitudes toward antiquity set the stage for Cyril Mango's influential study of classical sculpture in Constantinople.[24] Like Dawkins before him, Mango was interested in the problems of afterlife and reception, and like Dawkins, Mango observed the Byzantine propensity for reinterpretation in ways that had little or nothing to do with classical ways of seeing and thinking. At the same time, however, Mango went beyond Dawkins to observe what he felt were two different ways of seeing: one that preserved classical modes of seeing and thinking, and another defined by the folkloristic reinterpretation of images. It is this interest in perception and afterlife that has informed most recent studies of the Constantinopolitan collection.[25]

For all the awareness of and interest in the Constantinopolitan collection, there has been little desire to study the gathering during the initial period of its formation or to understand it as a consciously developed ensemble. Following the lead of Dawkins, most modern interest has centered on the questions of reception and afterlife. Publication of a series of articles on individual collections within the city has shifted the focus of this discussion somewhat, bringing the contextual and thematic questions associated with the reuse of ancient statuary to the fore.[26] This book is an attempt to continue that discussion by examining the collection in the initial period of its formation, the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. Its aim is threefold: to reconstruct its contents from the combined evidence of literary, graphic, and archaeological sources; to identify, describe, and analyze individual displays of statuary in terms of chronological development and topographical distribution; and to examine the collection as a whole, not in the warm glow of the afterlife, but in full light of the late antique ideals and assumptions that informed it. In so doing it also hopes to contribute to a growing body of literature on questions of collecting, reuse, and appropriation.[27] To this end, the book is arranged in two parts. Part I is an overview of the collection's chronological development from its formation in the fourth century under Constantine through the sixth-century reign of Justinian. Part II, a census of works known to have been in Constantinople, provides the documentation for the discussion undertaken in Part I. Arranged alphabetically by location and within each locus by subject matter, the census presents the monuments known to have been in the city together with the pertinent literary, graphic, and archaeological testimonia.

A word on the documentation for the collection is in order. Of the available testimonia, literary sources have proved most valuable in the creation of the census. Surviving monuments are the exception, and archaeological materials virtually nonexistent, with the result that almost all knowledge of the city's antiquities derives from texts. The nature of these sources is varied. For the most part Greek, the texts range in date from the fourth century through the fourteenth and include, in addition to histories, such diverse genres as chronography, panegyric, and ekphrasis. Non-Byzantine sources supplement these texts. Foreign visitors to the capital occasionally left records of the Constantinopolitan marvels, and scattered sources in ancient authors add historical and descriptive dimension to monuments attested by Byzantine writers.

Native or foreign, contemporary or ancient, these accounts are invaluable as the basic documentation for the collection: they have allowed identification of the greater number of antiquities, provided information about their topographical distribution, and offered details about the history and appearance of individual monuments. At the same time, however, the sources are not without their difficulties. Consistency in reporting is unheard of. Some authors make description their primary aim, while others mention antiquities only in passing. In both instances the kinds of observations made are entirely unpredictable. More often than not, ancient and medieval ideas of what constitutes description bear no resemblance to the modern conception of the exercise with the result that observations about the physical properties of a given monument that would form the backbone of any modern account are often only haphazardly observed, if at all. Thus, issues of size, medium, pose, and provenance, details that are useful to the modern observer wishing to reconstruct the actual contents of the collection, often go unremarked, with the result that the identification of individual statues must rely more often than not on the occasional bit of evidence casually observed, a remark about pose, an iconographic aside.

This is the case, for example, with a fifth-century description of one of the major thermal foundations in Constantinople, an ekphrasis on the statuary in the Baths of Zeuxippos by Christodoros of Koptos.[28] As it survives, the ekphrasis describes eighty-one statues or statue groups in the late fifth-century complex. Although some descriptions offer detailed accounts of pose that allow identification with known classical statue types, this kind of observation is rare. Instead, the notion of what constitutes description is defined less by the desire to record physical appearance than by the need to document the perceived sensations of emotion and intellect experienced by the individual figures displayed. The result is that individual passages are often long on interpretation and short on documentation. Consider, for example,

the description of the orator Demosthenes (cat. no. 53). In the florid language admired by the age, Christodoros identifies and describes his subject with only passing reference to physical appearance. Instead, the author concentrates on re-creating the orator's mental state by alluding to past historical events. This technique allows Christodoros to infer a state of mind from which the orator's thoughts are duly extrapolated. Far more interpretive than factual, this verse is conceived less as an exercise in physical documentation than as the stirring evocation of a moment. Indeed, the real subject of Christodoros's poetry is not so much observed physical reality as the ephemera of thought and feeling.

Although fascinating in its own right and perfectly consistent with the aims of late antique ekphrasitic writing as a genre, this type of description provides only small pieces of the larger puzzle for most statues. In the case of the Demosthenes, for example, the opening verse describes the figure as standing, and the last suggests in a reference to "brazen silence" that the statue was bronze. These comments are not much to go on, and fuller reconstruction must by necessity depend on outside evidence when available. In this instance, surviving portraits of Demosthenes offer possible examples. In other instances, however, no such comparanda exist and the absence of viable comparative material means that the picture of individual statues will be incomplete.

Texts including detailed physical descriptions can be equally problematic, albeit in different ways. This is the case with Niketas Choniates's thirteenth-century description of a statue of Athena in the Forum of Constantine that was felled during a riot in 1202 (cat. no. 107). In terms of physical observation, Niketas's description is as precise as Christodoros's is vague.[29] From it we understand that a standing bronze figure of Athena stood in the Forum of Constantine. Her right arm was outstretched, and the goddess wore a plumed helmet and long gown girdled with the aegis. Apart from outlining a general iconography, the description also suggests style and date of manufacture. Specifically, reference to the deep folds of drapery and the figure's dilated veins suggests a comparison with fifth-century B.C. classical styles. On the face of it, this is a treasure trove of information, and scholars have responded to it by identifying the figure with any one of a number of fifth-century B.C. statues by the Athenian sculptor Pheidias. It is, however, a clear-cut case of a little knowledge being a dangerous thing, for Niketas observes properties that are generally those of any classical or postclassical representation of Athena with the result that it is impossible to identify this statue with any particular image.

Although problematic in terms of descriptive detail, the texts by Christodoros and Choniates are valuable in terms of clear iconographic definition. Other texts

are not so forthcoming. Reinterpretation of classical statuary over the course of the middle ages often resulted in the loss of original identities and the creation of new ones. Thus a statue group of Herakles and the Hesperides sisters (cat. no. 134) in the Hippodrome became a statue of Adam and Eve with the personifications of Famine and Plenty, while a Hekate (cat. no. 159) at the Milion metamorphosed into a representation of Constantine and his two sons, and a statue of Askleipios (cat. no. 16) became a bishop. Recapturing the classical identities of these statues depends almost exclusively on the inclusion of iconographic observation. In the case of the Askleipios statue, for example, identification hinges on a remark that the statue was equipped with one of the characteristic Askleipian attributes, a snake-entwined staff.

The difficulties in working with these texts are hardly insurmountable, but until recently they have been enough to force the question of reliability. Faced with non-modern descriptions and strange identifications, scholars have wondered whether the accounts of the city's antiquities were nothing if not invented.[30] There are, however, various reasons to accept the texts at face value. Now and again external evidence will redeem a text condemned as fiction. This was the case with the Zeux-ippos ekphrasis: only when excavation at the site recovered two bases (cat. nos. 31, 75) inscribed with the names of statues mentioned by Christodoros was the poem accepted as an actual description.

Textual autopsy can also legitimate the sources. One of the common complaints about many of the references is that they postdate the actual existence of sculpture by centuries and therefore cannot accurately account for the city's monuments. Increasingly, however, understanding of the ways in which Byzantine authors drew upon and recycled sources demonstrates the extent to which later texts incorporate the observations of earlier authors, thereby legitimating the claims of later writers. This is the case with the Lausos collection, a gathering of statuary destroyed in 476 and documented only by the tenth-century historian Georgios Kedrenos. Analysis of Kedrenos's text traced his sources to late antique authors contemporary with the installation of the collection, thereby lending his commentary a new legitimacy.[31]

Also crucial in the evaluation of the texts is the question of balance. Although it is increasingly clear that textual evidence should be relied on in the reconstruction of the collection, it is also important to bear in mind that the extant sources are likely to be selective in their reporting. As such they offer only a partial view of the gathering. That said, it should also be borne in mind that that view, lacunary though it may well be, is probably a good reflection of general trends of selection and display as well as ways of thinking about antiquities.

Finally, changes in the scholarly environment of the past half-century have contributed greatly to the ability to mine these sources profitably. Developing understanding of the problems of shifting mentalities from age to age has allowed an appreciation of materials once dismissed as debased on their own terms, and this new consideration in its turn has facilitated an approach to the understanding of the great monuments of Constantinople. Analyses of texts such as the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*, the *Patria Konstantinopoleos*, and Niketas Choniates' *De Signis* have allowed a two-tiered understanding of these documents that at once recognizes their documentary value in terms of the recording of antiquities and respects the idiosyncratic aspects of period interpretation that once condemned these writings to the dust bin.[32]

The documentary materials that are the backbone of the census intersect with a wide range of broader, contextual subjects. As always, topography remains a key issue in the discussion of Constantinopolitan antiquities.[33] The collection was formed in the urban context for purposes of civic definition. Thus issues of location are important to an understanding of the gathering's development and aims. At the same time, however, Constantinopolitan topography is a notoriously difficult study. Because most of the evidence for the city has long since been destroyed, and the surviving texts remain open to interpretation, the city, although reconstructable in broad outline, resists secure description on any detailed level, with the result that some of the discussion will, by necessity, be speculative.

Urbanism also plays a role in the discussion.[34] Enough information is available to envision the city's monumental components and their placement, an exercise that in turn allows an understanding of the design principles at work in the creation of the capital. As in other urban centers in the late classical Mediterranean world, cities such as Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria, an established architectural image formed out of the components of the classical orders shaped the city and in so doing infused it with meaning. The articulation of space in terms of grand public forums and wide, colonnaded boulevards created a generic urban image of power that expressed the city's participation in the ongoing enterprise of empire. At the same time, individual institutions and the buildings that housed them specified the nature of that power. As in all major cities, the major reference point was Rome. Inclusion of such requisite institutions as a Capitolium made that point explicit in Constantinople as it did in any late Roman city with pretensions to urban status. At the same time, the Constantinopolitan approximation to Rome was far more intense than in any other city, a point driven home by the continued and consistent imitation of Roman models in the fourth and fifth centuries.

This evocative setting formed the backdrop for the city's great sculptured display, and, indeed, the deployment of statuary was an aspect of that urbanism. In the Greco-Roman world, sculpture carried a weight and significance that largely has been lost in modern times. All manner of statuary was displayed in public places, and these images were closely associated with a given city's identity and self-image. For example, in the fourth century B.C., the south Italian city of Tarentum commissioned a colossal bronze image of its patron god Herakles from the renowned Greek sculptor Lysippos (cat. no. 21). This statue was displayed on the city's acropolis, and images of it were reproduced on Tarentine coin issues. In a way that is difficult for the modern viewer to appreciate, this statue was the focus of city pride, an emblem of civic virtue. Thus, when Tarentum fell to Rome in the second century B.C., the great prize of conquest was the colossal bronze Herakles that was taken off to the Roman Capitol where it was displayed as booty, an emblem of conquest and Roman might.

The example of the Tarentine Herakles is particularly germane to the experience of Constantinople. Not only was the statue eventually brought to the city, but its own particular history of reuse also throws the questions pertinent to that issue into sharp relief. As with any discussion of statuary, issues of meaning stand at the fore. The case of the Herakles, or any reused monument, poses the question on two levels: the primary meaning vested in the initial creation and installation of a monument, and the secondary meaning accorded it through the history and experience of transport and reinstallation. These questions in turn engage the problem of appropriation, its role in the creation of new meaning and with it a collective civic identity that expresses a larger cultural interest. In the case of Constantinople the gathering of monuments from the cities and sanctuaries of the Roman world stood at the end of a long line of ancient acts of appropriation. As the example of the Tarentine Herakles makes clear, the Roman habit of reuse had a long and distinguished pedigree.[35] Nor was this tradition unique to the Romans. In the Hellenistic age, the Ptolomies adorned their capital at Alexandria with treasures brought from the sacred sites of pharaonic Egypt,[36] and well before these interventions, Xerxes, himself heir to a long tradition of reuse in the territories of Mesopotamia, wrestled statues from the Greeks.[37] In each of these instances, the plunder and subsequent display of statuary in a new setting was a way to express a hierarchical relationship between one population and another. Thus, as in the case of the Tarentine Herakles, Xerxes' removal of statuary from Athens was a visible expression of Persian triumph. In a similar but slightly different vein, the Ptolomaic display of Egyptian antiquities at Alexandria expressed not simply Greek control of Egypt, but also the successors' desire to claim continuity with the legitimating thread of pharaonic tradition.

The display of statuary in Constantinople was also an act of collecting. Thus, although there was a kind of inevitability to the fact of the gathering's existence that derived from and depended on time-honored beliefs about what constituted fit urban decor, the circumstances of the city's foundation and the speed with which it was built made the manner of its decoration unique. Unlike Rome, the city against which Constantinople measured itself and a place where sculpture had been massed for centuries to vivid urban effect, Constantinople saw the initial formation of its public displays in the short span of six years. Further, it is clear that the individual gatherings around the city that took shape in this period were created with an eye not only to internal coherence appropriate to a discrete civic space, but also with a sense of the larger, global project of urban self-definition. Thus, across the city individual collections of sculpture were conceived as parts in a larger whole that would work together to create a larger identity.[38]

Although this panurban impetus was particularly Constantinian and had as its basis the desire to create an urban history through the display of statuary, an urge to maintain continuity with the overall structure of the collection continued into the later phases of the gathering's development. Thus, although the collection of antiquities was more important for Constantine and the foundation of the city, it remained an aspect of urban activity throughout the Theodosian and Justinianic periods. Even though the aims and aspirations that drove the acquisition of monuments were sometimes different for these later emperors than those of Constantine were, there remained throughout the history of the collection's development an awareness of and reference to the initial Constantinian construct. As a result, the Constantinopolitan gathering, unique among the cities of the later Roman world, should be considered a collection in the true sense of the word.

Also important to the understanding of the Constantinopolitan collection are the question of imperial power and the definition of authority current in the late Roman social context.[39] Again and again the sculptural installations of Constantine and Theodosios appeal both implicitly and explicitly to the traditions of the paideia that were so much a part of the Roman élite's habit of self-definition. In so doing they created an image of power that was designed to legitimate the emperor's personal claims and those of his capital city.

Awareness of the religious culture of the later Roman world also is important for an understanding of the collection. With the legalization of Christianity and its embrace as the religion of choice by Constantine, scholars have puzzled over the emperor's apparently contradictory decision to deploy ancient statuary in the decoration of the capital, but the Constantinian decision to reuse monuments from the cities and