

## 1 Introduction

Constantinople was a city of statues, from its foundation in 324 to the conquest by the Crusaders at the Fourth Crusade in 1204. Most of these statues were not, however, works of the Byzantine age but objects of ancient art, and therefore represented an older layer of culture in general and a real or imagined local history in particular.<sup>1</sup>

Almost none of these statues have survived to our day. Most of them were destroyed in the course of time, and only a few still exist in Western Europe as spoils of the Crusaders' conquest of Constantinople in 1204, such as the well-known porphyry sculpture of the four Tetrarchs and the four bronze horses now at Saint Mark's in Venice, or the bronze statue of an emperor (probably that of Emperor Leon I (457–74) from his column on the acropolis of Byzantium) which stands today before the cathedral of Barletta in southern Italy. In Istanbul no major ancient bronze object has survived until today except the Serpent column in the Hippodrome,<sup>2</sup> while the few small statues of stone that have been found there, mostly in a fragmentary state, do not belong to those mentioned by the sources.<sup>3</sup>

Pictures from the Byzantine age showing the statues of Constantinople and other places are very rare, and those we have are mostly conventionalised to a degree which makes them worthless for understanding the statues' real appearance. To talk about the statues of Constantinople, therefore, mainly means to analyse the sources where they are mentioned or, in the best case, described. Works of 'serious' high-level literature with statues as their subject are, however, very rare; the most notable of these are the description of the statues in the Zeuxippos bath by Christodoros of Koptos from the sixth century, and in *On the Statues* by Niketas Choniates, in which he describes the artworks destroyed by the Crusaders in 1204.

Most information about the statues of Constantinople is contained in two literary works of a more popular character, the so-called *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* and the *Patria* of Constantinople.

The *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* is a collection of eighty-nine entries of widely varying length about the statues of Constantinople which has come

<sup>1</sup> See Mango, 'Antique statuary'; Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*, pp. 127–59; Bassett, *Urban Image*.

<sup>2</sup> See Section 18 below.

<sup>3</sup> *LSA*-8 (Lenaghan), 375 (Lenaghan), 1033 (Gehn), 1040 (Gehn), 1160 (Gehn), 1167 (Gehn), 1168 (Gehn), 2416–8 (Gehn), in the *Last Statues of Antiquity (LSA)* database, <http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk>; see Gehn and Ward-Perkins, 'Constantinople'. Judging from the places of discovery, *LSA*-1167 and 1168 may have belonged to the decoration of the Chalke, the monumental entrance gate of the Great Palace, and *LSA*-1040 to the Capitol. On the Capitol, see Section 9 below.

down to us in one manuscript, the Paris. gr. 1336 from the eleventh century.<sup>4</sup> Its text is often corrupted and sometimes difficult to understand.<sup>5</sup> The title means ‘short historical remarks’ and actually refers only to the first part of it, not to the whole text.<sup>6</sup> The main part of it was apparently collected by several anonymous authors in the eighth century, beginning shortly after the second reign of Justinian II (705–11).<sup>7</sup> Recently, it has been argued that the *Parastaseis* represent the endeavour of a group of bureaucrats from old Constantinopolitan families who claimed that they alone were able to understand the real meaning of the statues in the city, thus forming a sort of xenophobic opposition to arrivistes in the imperial service.<sup>8</sup>

The *Parastaseis* have a very peculiar view on the city and its monuments. A particular oddity is, for example, its complete indifference towards Emperor Justinian I and his age: neither the Nika Riots in 532, which caused massive destruction in the city centre, nor the following rebuilding receive any mention.

When dealing with the ancient statues of Constantinople, the *Parastaseis* do not aim at a detailed and objective description but try to connect these statues to the local history of Byzantium by identifying them either with historical persons or by reading them as predictions of the future. The statues, which were often larger than life and either dressed in an antiquated way or even nude, are perceived as menacing and demonic. The ancient Greek religion was associated with magic practices, and as a result many statues were regarded as enchanted. It was believed that some of them transported apocalyptic prophecies about the end of Constantinople and the world, that they were animated by sorcery and maliciously took action against the people,<sup>9</sup> or that they were set up by ancient philosophers or magicians as talismans to protect the city from evil.

An example of an animated, evil statue can be found in a story of the *Parastaseis* about the Kynegion, an old amphitheatre on the acropolis of Byzantium.<sup>10</sup> A group of intellectuals visits the place and discusses the statues standing there. When one of these statues is addressed wrongly by a certain Himerios, it falls from its height and kills him. The statue is then buried on the

<sup>4</sup> For a scan, see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10722877z>, from fol. 111.

<sup>5</sup> The passages quoted below follow the translation by Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, but are corrected or adapted where necessary.

<sup>6</sup> See Odorico, ‘Du recueil à l’invention du texte’.

<sup>7</sup> Some entries, which are not relevant in our context, show that additions were still being made in the early ninth century or even later; see Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople*, p. 27; and Berger, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 41–8, 674f.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, ‘Classified knowledge’.

<sup>9</sup> James, ‘Pray not to fall into temptation’; Jouette, ‘Divination’; Chatterjee, ‘Viewing the unknown’.

<sup>10</sup> *Parastaseis*, c. 28.

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order of Emperor Philippikos (711–3), and the first-person narrator Theodoros ends his report with these words:

Consider these things truly, Philokalos, and pray not to fall into temptation, and take care when you look at old statues, especially pagan ones.

The idea of ancient statues acting as talismans for the city appears first in the sixth-century Chronicle of Ioannes Malalas, who claims that the well-known philosopher Apollonios of Tyana, who lived in the age of Nero (54–68), installed such talismans in Byzantium:<sup>11</sup>

On entering the town of Byzas, which is now felicitously known as Constantinople, he made many talismans there too at the request of the Byzantines, one for the storks, one for the river Lykos which runs through the middle of the city, one for the tortoise, one for horses, as well as other miraculous things.

Apollonios never, as far as we know, set foot in Byzantium, but some of these statues are, without reference to him as a person, also mentioned by later sources.<sup>12</sup> In Malalas' chronicle, the story of the talismans is just one paragraph; the *Parastaseis*, by contrast, is a whole literary work devoted to the statues of Constantinople and often mentions their magical powers.

Talismans were also sometimes destroyed by bad or ignorant persons, or a person was punished for removing an enchanted statue, such as the eunuch Platon whose deed was, in turn, remembered by a statue near the Church of the Tortoise.<sup>13</sup>

Ancient statues were also occasionally used for practices of sympathetic magic, that is, for magic by which a person is connected to a statue and then suffers whatever is done to this object. This belief does not yet appear in the *Parastaseis*, but in several later texts about the statues of Constantinople.<sup>14</sup>

The Byzantine text commonly known today as *Patria Konstantinoupoleos* was compiled in the late tenth century, mostly of older material from the sixth to ninth centuries. The word *Patria* (neuter plural) means the local history of a place and therefore fits in content only to the first book, but is also used today for the second and third book. Book II, originally titled *About Statues*,

<sup>11</sup> Ioannes Malalas, 10.51; the storks also in Hesychios, c. 25. The portrait bust of marble LSA-375, which was found in Constantinople, could well represent Apollonios. See also Mango, 'Antique statuary'; and Section 17.6 below. On the concept of talismans in general, see Griebeler, 'Serpent Column', pp. 91–4.

<sup>12</sup> For the river god, see under Section 10 below.

<sup>13</sup> *Parastaseis*, c. 26; for the church, see under Section 11 below.

<sup>14</sup> See the stories about the 'Hungarian woman' in 1167, the figure under the hoof of the horse at the Tauros, and the three-headed statue in the Hippodrome, below Sections 6, 8 and 12; cf. Mango, 'Antique statuary', p. 61.

consists of 110 entries, of which more than half are taken from the *Parastaseis* – partly from a tradition that is very close to the surviving manuscript, and partly via an intermediate source, which also exists today as an independent text. In both cases, passages of the text which are difficult to understand have been smoothed and often greatly reduced.

Another important source for the monuments and statues of Constantinople are the works of Constantine of Rhodes, a well-known poet in the first half of the tenth century who was also probably one of the compilers of the Greek Anthology.<sup>15</sup> Only a part of his poems on Constantinople have survived in their original shape, in the description of the seven wonders of Constantinople, which now serves as the introduction to his *ekphrasis* (description) of the Church of the Apostles.<sup>16</sup> In the late eleventh century, the chronicle of Georgios Kedrenos quotes these poems in a list of monuments of Constantinople that is placed at the end of the reign of Theodosios I (379–95). But these quotations come apparently from a more complete version of the text, and complete or fragmentary verses at many other places indicate that Kedrenos had additional poems by the same author at his disposal, which are now lost.<sup>17</sup>

Before we begin our discussion in more detail, a general remark about the terminology of ‘statues’ is also necessary: the words mostly used by the sources for representations of persons are *agalma* or *stele*. While *agalma* mostly refers to a free-standing statue in the modern sense, *stele* may mean either a statue, a relief or even a mosaic or fresco, and the context often does not allow us to distinguish them clearly.<sup>18</sup> *Andrias* would clearly mean a statue, but is, for example, only once used in the *Parastaseis* and never in the *Patria*.<sup>19</sup> The following example may demonstrate where the problem of terminology lies. The *Parastaseis* state in Chapter 34:

Beyond the Chalke at the Milion to the east are Constantine and Helena above the arch. There, too, a cross of the city <and the Tyche> in the middle of the cross.

The words ‘and the Tyche’ have been erased, but can be restored from the secondary tradition. In *Patria* 2.29 this has become:

<sup>15</sup> Cameron, *Greek Anthology*, pp. 300–7.   <sup>16</sup> Constantine of Rhodes.

<sup>17</sup> Georgios Kedrenos; see, for example, Mango et al., ‘Palace of Lausus’. Mango, *ibid.*, p. 92, listed eleven full and three half verses, to which at least another eight full and eight half verses can be added.

<sup>18</sup> On the terminology of statues in ancient Greece, see Keesling, ‘Greek statue terms’.

<sup>19</sup> The term is applied in the *Parastaseis*, as in many other texts, to the statue of Paneas; the story of the bleeding woman comes originally from Eusebios (see n. 23 below), where the word *andrias* is not used.

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Statues of Constantine and Helena are on the arch of the Milion. They hold a cross that can also be seen there to the east, and the Tyche of the city is in the middle of the cross, a small chain which is locked and enchanted. It ensures that no commodity of any kind is lacking, and brings all victory over the pagans, so that they are unable to approach, to get inside or to come again and again, but stay far away and return home in defeat. The chain's key was buried at the bases of the columns.

The iconography of Constantine and Helena holding the cross between them appears in Byzantium only in the ninth century when the production of free-standing sculptures had long ended. We should assume therefore that this representation, if it existed at all, was a relief, not a monumental group of statues as often shown on popular reconstructions. The Tyche, the semi-pagan town goddess of Constantinople, is usually depicted with a mural crown, a cornucopia and one foot on a ship's bow. If she was actually depicted in the middle of a cross, the picture must have been a relief medallion – but the *Patria* change this to a completely different concept in which the fortune of the city is secured by a magical device.

The foundation of Constantinople in November 324 and its earliest phase before and after the inauguration on the 11th May 330 is only briefly documented by contemporary texts. The earliest remarks about statues in the city can be found in Eusebios' *Life of Constantine* who says:<sup>20</sup>

He displayed the sacred bronze figures, of which the error of the ancients had for a long time been proud, to all the public in all the squares of the Emperor's city, so that in one place the Pythian was displayed as a contemptible spectacle to the viewers, in another the Sminthian, in the Hippodrome itself the tripods from Delphi, and the Muses of Helicon at the palace.

The Pythian and Sminthian Apollo mentioned here cannot be identified with statues which existed later in the city. The Muses were a group of nine statues which had been brought from the famous sanctuary on Mount Helikon – several rhetorical texts from the fourth century allude to their presence by calling Constantinople 'the new seat of the Muses'. But these statues were destroyed in 403 when the first Hagia Sophia and the nearby building of the Senate, where they had stood, burned down. Zosimos, the last pagan historian, who wrote about eighty years later, insists that two other ancient statues, a Zeus from Dodone and an Athena from Lindos, survived the fire miraculously.<sup>21</sup> But let us go on with Eusebios' report:

<sup>20</sup> Eusebios, *Life of Constantine*, ch. 3.54.2–3; on which see Bassett, 'Curious art', pp. 246–7.

<sup>21</sup> Zosimos, 5.24.3–8.

The city named after the Emperor was filled throughout with objects of skilled artwork in bronze dedicated in various provinces. To these under the name of gods those sick with error had for long ages vainly offered innumerable hecatombs and whole burnt sacrifices, but now they at last learnt sense, as the Emperor used these very toys for the laughter and amusement of the spectators.

Constantine the Great is depicted as a purely Christian emperor whose aim was to destroy all remnants of paganism – but, as we shall see presently, this was definitely not the case, and many ancient statues brought to Constantinople in his era were intended for a pagan or semi-pagan religious context, beginning with the main monument of the new city: the emperor's own statue on the column of his new forum.

Following a similar ideological representation, Eusebios speaks also some chapters before about 'Daniel with his lions shaped in bronze and glinting with gold leaf'.<sup>22</sup> It is highly improbable, however, that such a Christian group of statues ever existed; we should rather assume that this was a reinterpreted ancient work of art, like the group of Christ and the bleeding woman of Paneas in Palestine which is also mentioned in Eusebios' work.<sup>23</sup>

Only about fifty years after the foundation of Constantinople, Jerome mentions the transport of many ancient statues to Constantinople in his chronicle *Constantinopolis dedicatur omnium paene urbium nuditate*. This is usually translated as 'Constantinople was dedicated by denuding almost all cities', but may also mean 'by the nudities of almost all cities'.<sup>24</sup>

Later texts of the post-iconoclastic time show a strong tendency to date all buildings and objects in the city, which were obviously from the early Byzantine period, back to Constantine, its founder and first Christian emperor, or in the best case even to the time before him. In reality it took a long time to build the city and to bring it into an inhabitable shape: by 330, it seems, only the walls and some important public buildings were actually completed; for example, the Forum of Constantine immediately outside the old walls of Byzantium and the Capitol further to the west. For most of the area now incorporated into the city, only plans had been made, and it was over the course of some decades that it became filled with streets and squares, houses and public buildings. The aqueduct, which was indispensable for the water supply of the growing population, was put into service only in 373, and the Fora of Theodosios and Arkadios on the main east–west avenue, the so-called Mese, were completed and inaugurated only in 393 and in 421 respectively.

<sup>22</sup> Eusebios, *Life of Constantine*, ch. 3.48.    <sup>23</sup> Eusebios, *Church History*, 7.18.

<sup>24</sup> Martins de Jesus, 'Nude Constantinople', p. 1.

All this suggests that the ancient statues which decorated Constantinople were not all brought to the city at the same time, or let's say the six years between 324 and 330, but in the course of several decades. A part of them, however, was apparently set up with a clear political agenda – namely, that of the semi-pagan imperial cult of Constantine himself. And, as it seems, a number of statues were actually transferred to Constantinople as a kind of basic equipment for this purpose before the city had even been inaugurated.

The complete Christianisation of the empire and its heavy political decline during the seventh century interrupted the traditions of ancient culture and religion almost completely, especially among the uneducated population. The real significance of Constantinople's ancient statues was no longer understood, and new identifications were proposed for the historical and mythological persons depicted by them, as well as for the pagan deities. Statues of ancient kings and other rulers were sometimes identified with emperors of Constantinople's Byzantine past, while the iconography of ancient gods and goddesses precluded, in most cases, their interpretation as biblical or Christian persons. The commonest reinterpretation of ancient statues is, therefore, that of the *Parastaseis*: as magical figures set up by ancient philosophers or sorcerers, with the intention either to do harm to the city, or to keep harm away from it.

The following pages will not try to give a list of the many statues of emperors and dignitaries which stood in public buildings or on the streets of Constantinople. Instead, I will present the important pieces of which we know, with a special focus on their arrangement in groups and their popular reception. After a look on the imperial statues on triumphal columns, I will first follow the main street, the *Mese*, from the city centre to the west. Then, returning to the centre, I will visit the collections of statues on the Augoustaion square, in the Zeuxippos baths, in the Lausos Palace, and, above all, in the Hippodrome.

## 2 'Shining like the Sun upon the Citizens': Constantine's Statue on the Forum

The first monument of Constantinople was a triumphal column with the statue of Constantine the Great on top. It stood in the centre of his newly built circular forum, immediately outside the main gate of old Byzantium, and was inaugurated together with the city on the 11th May 330.

Until the early seventh century, at least another six triumphal columns were built in Constantinople, all crowned by the statue of an emperor. But only the column of Constantine and another smaller column have survived to our day, and most statues, that of Constantine included, were lost in the Byzantine age.

The statue of Emperor Justinian was the last to go, still standing on its column near Hagia Sophia when Constantinople was taken by the Ottomans in 1453, and another statue, the so-called Colossus of Barletta, has survived outside the city.<sup>25</sup>

The column of Constantine with its height of almost 40 metres and the gilded, brightly shining statue on top was certainly the most impressive monument of the new city in its first decades. In the so-called *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a Roman road map from the fourth century which survives in a late medieval copy, a picture of it symbolises Constantinople, together with the enthroned city goddess. This representation is small and not very detailed, but the only one which was drawn while the statue still existed.

No source before the mid-sixth century mentions the statue as such or describes it in any detail, and only the *Parastaseis* tell us, more than four hundred years after the event, how it was installed on the column in 330: it was placed on a carriage, escorted to the new forum, and lifted to the top of the column in the presence of the whole population, and revered as embodying the Tyche of the city. The first descriptions of the statue can be found in the works of Hesychios of Miletus and of John Malalas, which were both written in the mid-sixth century – more than two hundred years after Constantine. Hesychios speaks of ‘the notable porphyry column, on which Constantine is set, whom we see shining like the sun upon the citizens’,<sup>26</sup> while Malalas states that he ‘put a statue of himself on top of this same column, which had seven rays on its head. He brought this work of bronze which had stood in Ilion, a town of Phrygia’.<sup>27</sup>

The claim that the statue was a reused piece of ancient Greek art can only be explained if the statue did not show the emperor in the usual military costume, but in a way which suggested identification as a pagan god. The most plausible assumption is that the statue was, in fact, reused, that it was naked, as the picture in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* suggests, and that it wore a crown with seven solar rays emanating from its head in an angle.<sup>28</sup>

The depiction of a Roman emperor in this form is not without precedent, the most prominent example being the monumental Colossus of Nero in Rome which was naked, had such a radiate crown and was rededicated after his death to the Sun. In the case of Constantine, the iconography can be explained by his association with the cult of Sol Invictus, the invincible sun god, which lasted from 310 to 325. In this period, Sol appeared regularly on the emperor’s coins. Sol was also propagated as his supporter in the victory over Maxentius in 312 and figures prominently on the Arch of Constantine, which was built in Rome to commemorate this event.

<sup>25</sup> See Section 3 below.    <sup>26</sup> Hesychios, c. 45.    <sup>27</sup> Ioannes Malalas, 13.7.

<sup>28</sup> Bardill, *Constantine*, pp. 27–34.





**Figure 1** The column of Constantine in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*.

Credit: Vienna, Austrian National Library, Cod. 324.

Since it is improbable that a statue of this size or shape was newly made for the column of Constantine's city, we should assume that a colossal statue of a Hellenistic king or a god was actually reused here. But there is no reason to believe Malalas that it came from Ilium, the Roman successor settlement of Troy, for this claim is simply an allusion to the legend that Constantine transferred the legitimate title to world rule, that of the Trojans, from Rome back to the East.<sup>29</sup> The statue may rather have been, as suggested by Jonathan Bardill, that of the Greek sun god Helios, which stood in older times, according to Malalas, on a public square of Byzantium and was later transferred to a new temple of Helios on the acropolis.<sup>30</sup> The attribution of this temple to Septimius Severus (193–211) is, however, certainly wrong, for Severus destroyed the walls of Byzantium and deprived the city of its rights, but did not rebuild it – as the later legend claimed.<sup>31</sup>

The central monument of Constantinople was, therefore, clearly and visibly pagan in character. After Constantine's death in 337, the city soon

<sup>29</sup> Bardill, *Constantine*, p. 34, with note 19. <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; Ioannes Malalas, 12.20.

<sup>31</sup> See Section 4 below; and Mango, 'Septime Severe'.

became Christian, and Constantine himself was perceived as the first Christian emperor, and later even venerated as a saint. But the naked statue in the shape of the sun god still stood on its column, and the longer it stood there, the more it became incomprehensible to its beholders. The forum was experienced as a pagan place – also on account of the other ancient statues which stood there – a fact which began to cause troubles for the regular ecclesiastical processions which passed through it. We hear that the globe fell down in 477 and was repaired, and the same happened to the spear in 557.<sup>32</sup> When the globe fell for the second time at the earthquake of 869, it was put in its place again, but at the same occasion a chapel of the Mother of God was built at the foot of the column. In this way, the forum was Christianised, and the processions visited the chapel on several occasions, now probably without even taking a look at the statue.<sup>33</sup>

Hesychios' remark 'whom we see shining like the sun upon the citizens' indicates that the statue was originally gilded. In later sources, such as the tenth-century Chronicle of the Logothete, this phrase is turned into an inscription in verse, 'To Constantine who shines upon the citizens like the sun' – which cannot have, however, stood on the socle, since in Constantine's age it would have been in Latin and in hexameters, while this inscription is in Byzantine dodecasyllables, a meter which was used in Byzantine epigrammatic poetry only from the seventh century onwards.<sup>34</sup>

The *Patria*, in the late tenth century, are the first to call the statue *Anelios*, that is, 'Un-Sun'.<sup>35</sup> This is probably a pun on the old designation as *Anthelios* or 'Anti-Sun',<sup>36</sup> in the sense of 'second sun' or 'competing sun', thus indicating that the gilding was now lost. In 1079, the *Anelios* and parts of the column were damaged by lightning, as Michael Attaleiates reports.<sup>37</sup> Finally, on the 5th April 1106, the statue fell down during a thunderstorm killing several people, and was later replaced by a cross.<sup>38</sup> In her report on this event, the historian Anna Komnene writes that the statue had looked to the east with a sceptre in the right hand and a globe in the left. The statue, she says, was one of Apollo which Constantine had renamed after himself, and was called *Anelios* by the inhabitants of Constantinople. The fact that Anna speaks about a sceptre may indicate that the original spear had been replaced

<sup>32</sup> Theophanes, p. 126.2, 222.25–30.

<sup>33</sup> Symeon Logothetes, c. 101.8; see Mango, 'Constantine's porphyry column'.

<sup>34</sup> Κωνσταντίνῳ λάμποντι ἡλίου δίκην: Symeon Logothetes, c. 88.7. The same applies for the Christian inscription quoted by Constantine of Rhodes, v. 67–74, and repeated in Georgios Kedrenos, c. 344.8.

<sup>35</sup> *Patria*, 2.49. <sup>36</sup> Mentioned by Anna Komnene, see n. 38 below.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Attaleiates, p. 309; also Michael Glykas, p. 617.

<sup>38</sup> Anna Komnene, 12.4.5; Ioannes Zonaras, vol. 3, p. 755.6–14.