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*The Restoration of the Roman Forum in Late Antiquity:  
Transforming Public Space* by Gregor Kalas (review)

Margaret M. Andrews

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## Book Reviews

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### ***The Restoration of the Roman Forum in Late Antiquity: Transforming Public Space.***

GREGOR KALAS.

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. Pp. xviii + 228. ISBN 978-0-292-76078-3

Reviewed by Margaret M. Andrews  
(Brown University)

Gregor Kalas' monograph on the physical and ideological transformations of the Forum Romanum in Rome during Late Antiquity (focusing on the late third through mid-fifth centuries CE) is a welcome addition to a growing bibliography on aspects of Rome during this critical period of transition. While the city's physical transformation has very much been a part of this recent scholarship, most publications on the topic are limited in length and/or theme, or they often constitute only part—usually the final one—of a longer diachronic overview of a site or area. Kalas' extended focus on one space during Late Antiquity *per se* is therefore distinct at the moment, but hopefully the start of a trend. Kalas's central argument is that imperial and senatorial acts of building construction and preservation, as well as the addition and manipulation of statuary, within the Forum during this time evoked and revived the city's

past to convey power and stability during the late antique present, a time that was recognized already in antiquity as one of dramatic change.

The first two chapters focus largely on architectural changes during the Tetrarchy and the Constantinian period. In Chapter 1, Kalas argues that through his reconfiguration of the Forum and its *rostrae*, Diocletian attempted to convey a permanence of imperial rule. New imperial optics signalled a shift away from the cult of imperial personality towards a more abstract concept of joint rule and a regular and stable calendar of imperial succession mediated and sanctioned by the gods, thus bypassing the Senate. Chapter 2 focuses on Maxentius' continuation, as Kalas sees it, of the Tetrarchy's attitudes towards the Senate and Constantine's subsequent "liberation" of the city from them and return to a pre-Tetrarchic past. As is well-known, Constantine focused on altering ("editing," according to Kalas) Maxentius' building projects along the upper Via Sacra in order to establish a contrast between himself and his rival and to convey his role as a restorer of proper political, religious, and judicial order. While Kalas's assessment of Constantine's building and renovation program is hardly novel, it is probably more certain and one-sided than either the archaeological or textual evidence permits. His portrayal of Constantine in such sharp contrast to Maxentius, particularly with respect to Christianity, could be more nuanced, as it closely follows the polemics of Constantine's apologists.

In Chapters 3 and 4, the focus largely shifts from architectural and archaeological evidence to art historical evidence to examine how senators negotiated increasingly restricted outlets of euergetism in

their efforts to gain political and social prestige. Kalas's approach remains nonetheless spatial, as both chapters draw on a long-standing project that Kalas has directed to document and reconstruct the position, appearance, and history of the statuary—much of it imperial portraiture—and extant inscribed statue bases in the Late Antique forum (*Visualizing Statues in the Late Antique Forum of Rome*, <http://inscriptions.etc.ucla.edu>). In Chapter 3, Kalas demonstrates that the most visible and important areas of the Forum were restricted to statuary depicting imperial subjects. Since, however, these were almost all senatorial dedications, they reflect a mutually beneficial relationship between senators and the emperor. The accrual of these images conveyed not only the emperors' constant connection to and improvement on the city's past, but also the active role that senators (still) had in curating it.

More interesting is the argument of Chapter 4, where Kalas shows that senators created spaces of leisure within the porticos of the Basilicas Julia and Aemilia by transferring famous artwork there from other parts of the city on their own initiative. They thus operated a program of cultural benefaction to gain social and civic prestige at the purely local level, apart from the political benefaction that the statuary in the central part of the forum reflected and the reward at the imperial level that it brought them. The distinction of two different realms of senatorial benefaction and reward is an important contribution to understanding how Rome managed its declining importance during Late Antiquity, showing that local interest and investment in the city's cultural assets did not flag in the face of reduced imperial interest. Kalas goes on to argue that the investment of the

senators in local culture on the periphery of the Forum was a tacit critique of their effective exclusion from the central area of the Forum by imperial imagery there, but this argument seems somewhat overwrought, and it only undermines his important earlier point.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Kalas returns to an architectural focus and examines how the pagan past of the Forum was negotiated after the prohibition of pagan rituals and the increasing involvement of the Roman episcopacy in the city's physical structures and spaces. Chapter 5 continues the theme of senatorial cultural investment with an analysis of temple repairs carried out after restrictions on pagan rites. He argues that temples could still serve as aesthetically appreciated backdrops for civic ceremonies and that restoration efforts on the part of senators, particularly their use of *spolia*, allowed them to remain connected to the traditions of the past. Kalas believes that even the papacy could be seen as an inheritor and protector of Rome's pagan temples and their symbolic significance by the turn of the fifth century, though the evidence for his argument consists of only a single hagiographic text, the *Actus Silvestri*.

Kalas focuses on the senatorial complex of the Curia, Atrium Libertatis, and Secretarium Senatus in Chapter 6. He makes the point that the removal of the altar, but not the statue, of Victory from the Curia in the 380s acknowledged the traditions of the past without preserving the offensive pagan cult practice, though even more recent arguments have suggested that the textual evidence for this debate reflects inter-Christian conflict more than Christian-pagan conflict. The analysis of the cross-generational epigraphic associations in the conversion of the Secretarium to a church dedicated eventually, to S. Martina, is insightful, but perhaps too neat, as the

circumstances and date of the foundation of the church of S. Martina are more complicated than Kalas acknowledges. Interesting, however, is Kalas' final argument that the famous knee prints made by St. Peter on a stone from the Via Sacra during his encounter with Simon Magus, were a "negative" or "absent" monument that undermined the materiality of the earlier imperial and senatorial statues and buildings, which by contrast conveyed authority through concrete presence. Kalas's chosen end point, 476 CE, is traditional, but, for the subject of the book, somewhat arbitrary, as the physical space and ideological significance of Rome's Forum continued to be manipulated by Theodoric and the Ostrogoths in concert with the Senate for the next half-century.

Technically, the book is well-illustrated with clear line drawings and mostly clear photographs, as well as numerous three-dimensional reconstructions of the Forum and its statuary generated by Kalas's own project. The author's argumentation is clear, even if occasionally, in my opinion, overreaching. As a whole, Kalas's study of the Late Antique Forum is a valuable presentation and analysis of its rich material, visual, and literary evidence. We hope its appearance will mark the start of more focused and extended studies of Rome's late antique buildings and spaces.

*The Art of Empire: Christian Art in Its Imperial Context*

ROBIN M. JENSEN AND LEE M. JEFFERSON,  
EDS.

Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2015.  
Pp. xi + 356. ISBN 978-1-4514-8766-4

Reviewed by Daniel C. Cochran  
(University of Wisconsin-Madison)

*The Art of Empire* brings together nine scholars to reconsider the relationship

between Roman imperial and Christian art during the fourth and fifth centuries. Grabar and Kitzinger once argued that in the wake of Constantine's conversion Christians abandoned the popular funerary representations of Jesus as a peaceful miracle worker and humble shepherd in favor of images that rendered Jesus as a powerful king. No longer dressed in plain robes and carrying a simple wand or scraggly sheep, this post-Constantinian Christ donned royal purple and golden garments and sat confidently upon a jewel-encrusted throne. With the imperial adoption of Christianity, these scholars argue, came Christianity's adoption of imperial art, language, and ritual. Mathews was among the first to critique this widely accepted narrative. In his provocative study, *The Clash of Gods* (1993), Mathews argued against what he refers to as the "Emperor Mystique," that is, the thesis that post-Constantinian Christian art adopted wholesale the style and iconography of Roman imperial art. He proposed instead that Christians sought to depict Jesus as superior to the most powerful pagan gods. While Mathews's central thesis remains controversial, his work succeeded in sparking debate about the nature of imperial influence on Christian art.

The essays in *The Art of Empire* build upon Mathews's work, offering critiques of his thesis while also seeking to extend his efforts to nuance our understanding of late antique Christian art within the context of the Roman Empire. After a brief introduction that situates the volume in relation to this past scholarship, Jensen's opening chapter explores the relationship between imperial images of tribute, *adventus*, and apotheosis and Christian representations of the adoration of the magi, the entry into Jerusalem, and the