



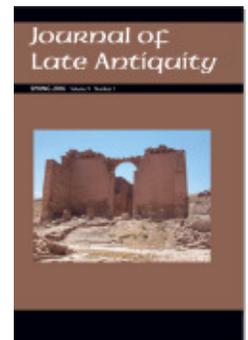
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The Art of Empire: Christian Art in Its Imperial Context ed.
by Robin M. Jensen and Lee M. Jefferson (review)

Daniel C. Cochran

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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

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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

ascension. Jensen critiques both the traditional assumption that the Christian motifs simply adopted imperial iconography and Mathews's argument that Christians looked to secular motifs such as the gentleman's homecoming. Drawing on the writings of Tertullian and Leo the Great, Jensen argues instead that Christians presented Jesus as a foil to the emperor; they appropriated but subverted the iconography of imperial power, proclaiming that the reign of Jesus was "different from that of any secular ruler" (33).

Jefferson also explores the subversive possibilities of early Christian art, arguing that the *traditio legis* motif popular in the fourth century was a proclamation of ecclesiastical authority and *not*, as sometimes argued, an attempt to present Christ as an emperor. Jefferson argues that the motif highlights Peter more than Christ, emphasizing the apostle's role as a new Moses and leader of the universal church. While Jefferson draws on a wide range of material, he does not allow for variant interpretations. This reader wonders, for example, if the *traditio legis* on the sarcophagi of aristocratic converts really had the same connotations of ecclesiastical authority as images commissioned for basilicas and viewed within the context of the liturgy.

Boin's essay likewise focuses on Peter, suggesting that memories of Peter were used in the fourth century to excuse the integration of Christians into Roman society and, conversely, to argue for their rigid separation. Boin contends that the integration of Christian and mythological scenes in such mausolea as Rome's Tor de'Schiavi reveals that the more flexible approach to religious identity persisted well into the fourth century, much to the consternation of bishops. Boin's essay deals less with Christian art than the other contributions

but his conclusion adds further nuance to the study of Christian identities in Late Antiquity.

Harley-McGowan's essay defends Grabar against Mathews's harsh critique, arguing that Grabar's approach emphasizes the creativity of artisans who appropriated and transformed imperial motifs to fit Christian theological contexts. She demonstrates, for example, that early depictions of Christ's victory over death relied upon the subtle alteration of imperial images of victory. Early Christian texts (as well as sermons and liturgical formulations) helped viewers understand that these familiar motifs were being used in new ways, conveying Christian rather than imperial notions of triumph. Freeman's essay returns to the anti-imperial connotations in Christian art, suggesting that the Good Shepherd was not nearly as humble and peaceful as scholars tend to assume. For both Jewish and Gentile Christians, she argues, this ancient motif was associated with divinity, kingship, judgment, and power. When used to depict Jesus, she concludes, the Good Shepherd produced a politically charged motif not so different from the post-Constantinian images of Christ enthroned.

Latham explores how "influence" may have worked the other way, suggesting that a shifting political landscape and a growing Christian population precipitated a change in the civic processions that marked the opening of public games. Christian opposition to the games' connection to pagan deities may have contributed to a shift in focus toward the emperor or presiding consul. This shift, he argues, is evident in the representations on Roman coins and further attests to a complex and "tangled web of enduring visual traditions" (224) that should

caution scholars against over simplifying discussions of influence. Peppard's essay considers why early Christians adopted many aspects of imperial art with the exception of statuary. He suggests Christians strove to adhere to the Mosaic Law's prohibition on "false idols" while also distinguishing themselves from their pagan neighbors. Without statues Christians rendered the divine present through other visual mediums, holy objects, and the liturgy. While he presents a compelling exploration of how Christians navigated the various visual traditions of the fourth century, his conclusion that mosaics became the medium of choice because their fractured nature "negates . . . the presumption of idolatry" seems simplistic, overlooking how mosaics were, like statues, used in a wide variety of religious, public, and private contexts.

Marsengill takes the reader to Constantinople and argues that the emperor's new city promoted imperial sovereignty over any religious tradition; imperial propaganda dominated the city's public spaces while Christianity was confined within the walls of the churches. Echoing Boin's conclusion above, Marsengill argues that the vast majority of citizens ignored the warnings of bishops and easily navigated between these spaces; they existed "along a spectrum . . . and defied being categorized as pagan or Christian" (280). The final chapter of the volume whisks the reader to Roman Britain to investigate the famous Hinton St. Mary mosaic. Levine does a masterful job exploring the multitude of possible interpretations of this mysterious mosaic portrait; he is not concerned with offering a definitive interpretation but rather with demonstrating how such ambiguous images could have been interpreted in a variety of ways. He pays particular

attention to the architectural context of the mosaic within an aristocratic villa, suggesting that wealthy and educated visitors would have strung together the various Christian, mythological, and imperial motifs to arrive at a range of conclusions concerning the patron's social status.

These nine essays offer the reader a wide array of case studies and perspectives while the volume as a whole succeeds in making a significant contribution to our understanding of the complex relationship between imperial and Christian art. Such a volume deserves an equally compelling platform, but unfortunately its present formatting leaves much to be desired. The book was released in paperback and produced using Pressbooks, resulting in awkward text spacing throughout the volume: what often appears to be the end of a chapter is merely a void, with the essay continuing on the following page. The black and white images are often blurry, making it difficult to appreciate the nuances of arguments. While these issues are, unfortunately, quite distracting, the volume is a must-read for students and scholars of late antique art, religion, and theology.

*Le Légendier de Turin:
MS. D.V.3 de la Bibliothèque
Nationale Universitaire*

MONIQUE GOULLET

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Pp. xv + 891. ISBN 978-88-8450-516-3.
With DVD.

Reviewed by Roger Wright
(University of Liverpool)

The *Légendier de Turin* is a manuscript collection of saints' lives compiled at the end of the eighth century in Northern France, probably at Soissons. It is known as the Turin Legendary because that is