

## **6 The Sixth-Century City in the Roman East: Survival or Demise of the Traditional Urban Context?**

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In his oration *Apologia Mimorum*, written presumably sometime before the year AD 542,<sup>1</sup> Choricius of Gaza defends the mimes against attacks by Christian theologians. He stresses their entertainment value, emphasizes their importance to men's moral education and denies any negative effects they might have on the audience. As remarked by Claudia Tiersch, the conflict that Choricius described was not a religious one, he was defending an ancient cultural tradition against monastic and theological attacks.<sup>2</sup> The existence of the School of Gaza and the literary output of its authors suggest that philhellenism and classical culture could still be very strong even amongst Christians around the turn of the fifth and the first half of the sixth century. Scholars like Procopius, Choricius and John of Gaza have been named representatives of a Christian learned culture that painlessly blended classical-Hellenic education (*paideia*) with Christian belief and piety.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, outside of Gaza, the sixth century appears to have been a period in which tensions between Christian religious beliefs and values and classical culture were reaching a climax. Unsurprisingly, the main battleground for such conflicts was the city, where classical culture and pagan traditions had been deeply imbedded in every aspect of daily life, in all institutions, in every ceremony and feast, as well as in all of the architecture and decoration. Such conflicts were not new, on the contrary, they are attested regularly in literary sources already from the end of the fourth century onwards. However, whereas the opinions expressed in sermons and letters by Church fathers initially appear to have had only a limited impact on contemporary society,<sup>4</sup> some 100 years later the effects appear to have been multiplying.

In this article, I will examine how representative the philhellenic opinions of the School of Gaza still were for sixth-century city-dwellers at large by discussing the contemporary urban environment. In particular, I will scrutinize the fate of both the theatre and that of statuary decoration, both aspects of the city that were closely associated with classical Antiquity and Hellenic culture.<sup>5</sup> By the start of the sixth century both the theatre and statuary had known a very long history. However, amongst others because of their recurrent and sometimes strong references to pagan and mythological personae, myths and customs, they were not

particularly appreciated by more extremist Christian factions in society. I will examine archaeological evidence for both theatres and statuary in the Late Roman province of *Palaestina Prima* to which Gaza belonged, but will supplement these data with further evidence from the Roman Near East and Asia Minor. In addition, I will stress the importance of archaeological evidence for estimating the continuity of classical culture. In the case of theatres, we possess quite a lot of literary evidence, both from the side of proponents and opponents, to which material remains can be added, compared and evaluated. In the case of statuary, we are a lot less well informed and it is worthwhile to check if and how archaeology can advance our knowledge and interpretation.

In the last three decades, much has been written about the changes taking place in the city in late antique and Early Byzantine centuries, roughly between the fourth and the seventh century AD.<sup>6</sup> The sixth century in particular has been the focus of an extensive monograph by Helen Saradi, who combines literary, iconographic and archaeological sources to reconstruct what a city would have looked like at that time.<sup>7</sup> Although such studies have greatly contributed to our knowledge, archaeological evidence is either lacking or remains an underused source of information.<sup>8</sup> It is true that pertinent evidence is very diverse and sometimes difficult to trace down or access, making it very difficult to get a general overview. Moreover, there are many methodological difficulties related to the archaeological research on the sixth-century city. Despite the increase of scholarly interest in the period of Late Antiquity, dating individual monuments remains extremely difficult. Moreover, especially in the sixth century, new building largely remained limited to churches, fortifications and streets. Existing monuments such as council halls, baths and theatres were being repaired and renovated, but these interventions were often humble in character. Consequently, they are not always noticed or published and very rarely dated.<sup>9</sup> Finally, many activities, such as day-to-day maintenance of a theatre or passive preservation of statuary left no material traces at all.<sup>10</sup> And yet, as I intend to demonstrate in this article, material evidence can be a significant indicator for (changes in) culture and religion, certainly when it is combined with literary, epigraphic and iconographic evidence. When handled with care, a reconstruction of the urban environment that takes archaeological evidence into account can make an invaluable contribution to the debate on the continuity of classical culture at the end of Antiquity. In contrast to most literary sources, material evidence is not biased or does not have an agenda (although excavators of course might). Most of the sixth-century literary sources that we possess focus on a few cities such as Constantinople, Antioch or Gaza, but

archaeology provides us with information on a large variety of both smaller and larger sites. Consequently, material evidence can at the very least demonstrate how appreciation for theatre buildings or statuary differed from region to region, and even from site to site. If properly analysed, it can therefore add detail to what we know from other sources, it can either support or contradict them. Finally, as we will see, material evidence can also illuminate practices that literary sources have failed to mention entirely.

### *The Theatre*

By the start of Late Antiquity, the Greek tragedies and comedies that we today associate with classical theatre had already been largely replaced by other kinds of shows, the most important being the mimes and pantomimes. Both genres often were still strongly reminiscent of paganism.<sup>11</sup> Mimes were a very old form of farce, performed by troupes of male and female actors, the plots of which were based on daily life or ancient myths. They were explicitly sexual and often offensive to certain subgroups in society.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, pantomimes were a sort of tragic dance or rhythmic movement performed by a single actor or actress who enacted all roles, possibly with diverse masks.<sup>13</sup> Themes were taken from ancient drama and myths. Consequently, late antique spectators would still be watching the adventures of Hercules and Dionysus and be instructed in the love escapades of the ancient gods on a regular basis.

<FIGURE 6.1 HERE>

<FIGURE 6.2 HERE>

We hear about such performances taking place in private houses, on the street or on the market square in Late Antiquity, but most often they were set in a traditional theatre building. A typical theatre in the provinces of the Roman Near East was of the Roman type, meaning that the seating area (*cavea*) was semi-circular and directly connected to the imposing stage area (*proscenium*, Fig. 6.1).<sup>14</sup> The scene building (*scaenae frons*) was articulated by rectangular and/or semi-circular niches and fronted by a columnar architecture over two or three storeys. Both the niches and *aediculae* were filled with statues of local benefactors, emperors, personifications and divinities, whereas the bottom of the *scaenae frons* was decorated with a frieze depicting scenes or stories from classical mythology (Fig. 6.2). Actors performed on the high stage (*pulpitum/logeion*) in front of the scene building. Spectators

could reach their seats through a system of corridors and staircases in the vaulted substructures underneath the seating area. Certain sections were reserved for particular population groups or even individuals, as indicated by place inscriptions.<sup>15</sup>

These theatres were often huge structures. Their cavea could reach a diameter of over 100 m and could seat several thousands of spectators. The North Theatre of Gerasa (D: 59 m) could accommodate between 2,200 and 2,800, the city's larger South Theatre (D: 76 m) 5,000 to 6,300.<sup>16</sup> The theatre of nearby Bosra (D: 88.30 m) had a capacity between 6,600 and 8,300 spectators,<sup>17</sup> that of Philadelphia (D: 102 m) even between 9,100 and 11,400.<sup>18</sup> Performances staged in these theatres could therefore reach a very large number of people. In some cities, more than one theatre was discovered, one often much larger than the other. Without epigraphic evidence, the function of the smaller theatres is difficult to determine. Some of them have been called an odeum or concert hall (e.g., the North Theatre of Gerasa), others a bouleuterion or council hall (e.g., Aphrodisias, D: 45.60 m), others were cult theatres (e.g., Birketein, D: 31 m) or private theatres.<sup>19</sup> Their form and decoration is, however, largely identical. When the presence of a stage can be attested, it can in any case be assumed that a theatre-like building, larger or small, was used for performances, although this does not exclude political gatherings being organised or panegyrics being delivered at other times.<sup>20</sup>

#### The Fourth to Early Sixth Century

There can be no doubt that the theatre initially remained highly popular in large areas of the late antique East.<sup>21</sup> Laws of the end of the fourth century confirm that the imperial government encouraged the continuance of spectacles and festivals.<sup>22</sup> They could be assimilated in the new, Christianised society by removal of sacrifice, superstition and offensive depictions<sup>23</sup> and continue on in a secular form. However, such compromising solutions were not sufficient for more ascetic church leaders.<sup>24</sup> Augustine and Chrysostom were only the most famous amongst many Christian orators who preached for the abolition of the institution of the theatre all together. Their fierce critiques revolve around three key issues. First and foremost, the staged performances remained reminiscent of pagan gods and even sacrifice.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, some Christian leaders were opposed to the theatre based on moral grounds. Theatre performances, and mimes in particular, included dancing performances, sexual themes, erotically charged music, and obscene songs that afterwards echoed in the streets.<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, the competitive donations for entertainment and other civic causes were judged by Christian preachers as vanity and ambition. They would rather see the

large sums of money invested in Christian causes.<sup>27</sup> In addition, theatre shows and horse races were direct competitors for the Church.<sup>28</sup> As apparent in some of John Chrysostom's complaints, members of his congregation preferred these forms of entertainment over his sermons.<sup>29</sup>

In such complaints about public spectacles and festivities, a more general concern about society is apparent. Church fathers on the whole were deeply worried about the authenticity of the conversion and salvation of their flock, who, though baptised, clung to traditions and customs that were not compatible with a true Christian way of life, at least in their opinion. Their protests, however, appear to have very little effect. As will be discussed below, there is plentiful evidence for theatre repair and renovation in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, whereas the only concession from the side of the central administration was an edict forbidding festivals and performances on Sunday the day of the Lord, as well as other important Christian festive days.<sup>30</sup>

By the early sixth century, seemingly not that much had changed.<sup>31</sup> Mimes and pantomimes were obviously still staged, their inspiration source remained the same, they were still sponsored by high magistrates and wealthy individuals,<sup>32</sup> the visitor numbers were high<sup>33</sup> and, consequently, the complaints remained numerous.<sup>34</sup> In the early sixth century, Jacob of Serugh, bishop of Batnae in North Syria, still protested that: '[the actor] mimes the stories of the gods, and burns perfumes in the plays, in order that he may do great honour to tales which are true for him. If this is not so, why then does he burn incense at that time to the Fortune of anything? All this pertains to paganism'.<sup>35</sup> Both Jacob of Serugh and Severus of Antioch, patriarch of the region, as well as other contemporary authors still raise moral objections, whereas the feeling of direct competition lingered as well.<sup>36</sup> The only argument that has largely disappeared is that of a vain waste of money.

If we look at the archaeological evidence for theatre buildings in the Roman Near East, a similar, but more detailed picture emerges. First of all, it is clear that some theatres were already abandoned by the later fourth century, possibly after an earthquake in 363. Other theatres survived much longer though, into the sixth century. Quite a few of these long-lasting monuments, such as that at Shuni near Caesarea Maritima,<sup>37</sup> Hammat-Gader near Gadara and Birketein near Gerasa (Fig. 6.3), were in fact relatively small cult theatres with associated pools. At Birketein, an inscription dated to the year 535 referred to the *Maioumas*

festival, a late antique aquatic festival, associated with several of the ancient pagan deities including Dionysus and Aphrodite.<sup>38</sup> Despite various attempts to prohibit it, it remained highly popular and was still celebrated in a bath at Constantinople as late as 778.<sup>39</sup> Birketein was obviously still in use in the middle of the sixth century, and so was Shuni, as Choricus in his *Apologia mimorum* (§ 95–96) gave an account of a festival held there, in the presence of the mayor and community notables, in which all the stage members and rhetoricians in the city appeared.<sup>40</sup> Although there were no doubt still many pagans around in this period,<sup>41</sup> there is little doubt that these festivals were enthusiastically attended by Christians as well.

<FIGURE 6.3 HERE>

The larger urban theatre of Caesarea Maritima (D: c. 100 m), capital of the province *Palaestina Prima*, to which Gaza belonged, was located to the south of the city centre and may very well still have been in use in the early sixth century. Eventually, it would be incorporated into a new intramural fortress, the date of which is not entirely certain, but which is nowadays placed in the later sixth or early seventh century.<sup>42</sup> What happened to the monument between its final phase of renovation in the later fourth century and the later sixth or early seventh century remains unclear. The theatre of Neapolis, a city in the same province, which was even bigger than that of Caesarea Maritima, still underwent changes in the ‘Byzantine period’.<sup>43</sup> The theatre of Skythopolis, capital of *Palaestina Secunda*, may still have existed in the early sixth century, though in a rather poor state.<sup>44</sup> Other theatres that probably continued in use in the fifth and sixth century include those of Bosra (capital of *Arabia*), Daphne (the rich suburb of Antioch capital of *Syria Prima*), and Petra (capital of *Palaestina Tertia*).<sup>45</sup> Most evidence for the survival and continued appreciation of urban theatres therefore comes from provincial capitals, but the archaeological and iconographic evidence pertaining to Neapolis, the literary and iconographic evidence for Gaza, as well as the sermon on the theatre by Jacob of Serugh<sup>46</sup> suggest that elsewhere as well the building was still in use.

Detailed archaeological evidence pertaining to the condition of these buildings and their decoration is, however, scanty and it is useful to broaden our scope to the region of Asia Minor.<sup>47</sup> In this region as well, some theatres were abandoned long before our period, especially in smaller towns.<sup>48</sup> At Hierapolis, capital of *Phrygia Secunda*, part of the scene building collapsed in the course of the fifth, or maybe the early sixth century and was not

rebuilt thereafter.<sup>49</sup> Provincial capitals, however, again often had functional theatres far into the sixth century.<sup>50</sup> Evidence for continuity in this region includes inscriptions and structural changes, but also graffiti, updates of statuary in the theatre façade, and Christian interventions to the structure. For example, graffiti in the theatre of Ephesus, capital of the diocese of *Asiana*, attest to its use in the sixth century, whereas even its statuary decoration was still updated in the Justinianic period (527–565).<sup>51</sup> At Aphrodisias, capital of the province *Caria*, a statuary base mentions the name of Vitianus, governor of Caria between the late fifth and the mid-sixth century.<sup>52</sup> Texts and graffiti mentioning the Blues and the Greens, two opposing factions in society, inscribed in the seats of the theatre in any case indicate activities until and possibly after the mid-sixth century.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, for the theatre of Perge, capital of *Pamphylia*, it has even been suggested that it was restored under the reign of Justinian. The monument still awaits full publication though.<sup>54</sup> At Side, the second largest city of *Pamphylia* and ecclesiastical capital of the church province *Pamphylia Prima*, fifth- or sixth-century repairs to the pillars and vaults of the theatre were executed under Phronton and Theodoros, both of them important magistrates or Fathers of the City (*pater tès poleos*).<sup>55</sup> Such inscriptions commemorating late antique repairs to theatres clearly testify that members of the higher elite were still willing to invest in these traditional monuments. These donations suggest that the theatre was still considered a medium valid for elite self-representation into the sixth century.<sup>56</sup>

Although the staging of theatre plays therefore continued at least in the bigger cities of the Roman East, the material remains of these monuments suggest localised efforts to remove elements most strongly linked with the pagan past for the benefit of Christian spectators. Both the late fourth or early fifth-century renovations at the theatre of Caesarea Maritima and that of Petra encompassed architectural changes to the scene buildings that curtailed all further display of statuary. The niches were filled with rubble and blocked by walls faced with marble revetment.<sup>57</sup> There were no structural reasons for these changes, making a religious motivation – such as the desire to remove the visual representations of the pagan gods – a likely possibility. In Asia Minor, where the statuary programmes of theatres are often preserved,<sup>58</sup> more selective changes to theatre decoration can be distinguished. A good example is that of the scene building of the theatre at Aphrodisias where a depiction of Aphrodite, the tutelary goddess of the city, was chipped away in a marble relief, although many other statues and reliefs of gods, goddesses, muses, and Nikes remained in place.<sup>59</sup> The goddess suffered a similar fate elsewhere in the city as well. Her statues have been found

broken up, her depictions on the reliefs of the Sebasteion were defaced (Fig. 6.4), her bust was removed from the Tetrapylon and from the nymphaeum near ‘Gaudin’s Gymnasium’,<sup>60</sup> honorific portraits of renowned citizens were recarved in Late Antiquity to remove associations to the cult of Aphrodite.<sup>61</sup> The name of the goddess and even that of the city eventually became intolerable, leading to their erasure in inscriptions. Examples include those integrated into the so-called archive wall in the theatre<sup>62</sup> and the replacement of Aphrodisias by Stauropolis (City of the Cross) on the North-East Gate of the city wall, probably during or after the late sixth century.<sup>63</sup> Because Aphrodisias had been the City of Aphrodite and the largest centre for her cult in the Roman Empire,<sup>64</sup> the cultic associations of Aphrodite were here apparently so strong that she could not be removed from the profane sphere, so she had to be physically destroyed. It is important to note that this was primarily the case at Aphrodisias. In a city such as Ephesus, for example, Aphrodite had not played a particular part. Among other gods, also a statue of Aphrodite remained present in the city’s theatre.<sup>65</sup> What was regarded as acceptable decoration thus differed from location to location.

<FIGURE 6.4 HERE>

A growing Christian influence in theatres was furthermore recognisable in further modifications to the statuary record. At the theatre of Ephesus, for instance, both a male seated statue of Demos (the people) and an Eros figure on the frieze of the stage wall had their genitals carved away.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, it would seem that the accommodation of the theatre in Christian society was facilitated by applying cross signs both on the outside and inside of the monuments. At the theatre of Perge, Christians left their mark in the form of at least one red Greek cross painted amidst the relief figures on the *scaenae frons*.<sup>67</sup> Some of the renovation inscriptions at the theatre of Side were accompanied by crosses, many of the place inscriptions were preceded by crosses,<sup>68</sup> and the arches of the theatre were decorated with crosses inside medallions at some point in the course of the fifth or the sixth century. At the theatre of Aphrodisias, prayers were carved both on the front wall of the scene building and on the theatre seats.<sup>69</sup> In addition, at Aphrodisias, we can witness a true overlap between a continued secular use of the theatre and a sacred Christian function. At the beginning of the sixth century, and thus long before stage shows were halted, the two rooms flanking the scene building were redecorated. The room to the north probably then served as an oratory, both private and public, as its frescoes depicted the archangels Michael and possibly Gabriel (Fig. 6.5). Contemporary epigrams confirm that such depictions supported the notion that the

archangel(s) would be ‘present’ for the viewers, thus encouraging prayer.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, at the theatre of Side two small chapels had been established in the eastern and western corners of the cavea. They have been connected to the martyrdom of the nine saints of Side, who were fed to the beasts during the reign of Diocletian. Whether or not this association is valid, they were again constructed before the theatre shows were halted and suggest a Christian supervision over activities taking place in the theatre.

<FIGURE 6.5 HERE>

#### The Justinianic and Post-Justinianic Period

If we are to believe literary sources, the second quarter of the sixth century was a decisive period for spectacles as imperial back-up was becoming highly volatile.<sup>71</sup> According to John Malalas, riots in 522/3 caused the emperor Justin I to take severe measure and eventually prohibit all spectacles and banish all dancers.<sup>72</sup> How serious we have to take this comment or how long-lasting the measures were is not clear, since already in 501/2 Joshua the Stylite (§ 46) claimed that the emperor Anastasius on the occasion of the Maioumas festival forbade all dancing in every city of the Empire. Moreover, in 530 Justinian had the theatre of Antioch repaired with imperial funds, even though he had it (temporarily) closed the year before.<sup>73</sup> As seen above, the festival and its associated dancing obviously endured much longer. Procopius of Caesarea as well places the end of all public spectacles in the early Justinianic period and blames it to financial difficulties,<sup>74</sup> thereby implicitly indicating that theatres, hippodromes and circuses were at the time still being staged with local funds and were popular venues of entertainment, an impression already gleaned from Choricius.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, later law texts of Justinian and his successor Justin II refer to funds for the staging of plays and spectacles.<sup>76</sup>

<FIGURE 6.6 HERE>

The continued appreciation for the theatre building itself is perhaps indicated most strongly by the integration of the theatres of Gaza and Neapolis on the Madaba map (Fig. 6.6). This famous mosaic, dated to after 542,<sup>77</sup> is located in the nave of the Church of the Map at Madaba in Jordan.<sup>78</sup> It depicts settlements of Christian Palestine and northern Egypt, most of them identified by inscriptions, and their surrounding physical geography. The representation of a city through such iconographic media induced simplification or selection and compression of certain elements in order to produce a silhouette that would be immediately

comprehensible.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, the vignettes of smaller sites consist of one or a few buildings, often a city gate or a church. The representations of larger cities can be very detailed and include their city walls, colonnaded streets and the city's most significant churches inside. Unsurprisingly, much attention has been devoted to Jerusalem, which with its churches, but also its colonnaded street and honorific column on the square in front of the North Gate of Jerusalem, suggests that the mosaic layers were genuinely concerned to represent the city in an authentic manner.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, the integration of the theatre in the depictions of Gaza and Neapolis, next to the colonnaded streets and just inside the city wall, suggests they were at the time still considered valuable monuments.<sup>81</sup>

Archaeology confirms that at least some theatres were still being repaired or at least used in the Justinianic period. However, the overall picture is as puzzling as that gleaned from literary sources. It is often not clear what happened after the latest changes. Indeed, certainly after the Justinianic period the archaeological record grows silent, meaning that the buildings could have gone out of use just a few years after the latest interventions, or, conversely, could have survived for several decades longer. In some cases, material evidence points towards abandonment or conversion. Thus the orchestra of the extra-urban theatre of Shuni was encroached by an oil press in the later part of the sixth century;<sup>82</sup> theatres such as that of Caesarea Maritima itself and that of Aphrodisias were turned into a fortresses in respectively the later sixth and seventh century;<sup>83</sup> that of Skythopolis was encroached by a pottery workshop, but only in the later seventh century<sup>84</sup> and so on. Even though there obviously is much work to be done here, the sudden paucity of evidence after the Justinianic period does suggest that activity had been drastically diminished.<sup>85</sup>

### *Statuary*

As mentioned above, the statuary decoration of theatres underwent changes in Late Antiquity, which points to changed sensibilities but also a desire to preserve both the theatre building and its decoration. In the second section of this paper I will review how appreciation for statuary in general changed in the sixth century. Literary sources pertaining to the subject are largely limited to law edicts from the late fourth and early fifth century and episodes in sixth-century and later Christian hagiography that overall give a very negative image of the medium. In this case, archaeology can add invaluable detail to our view on how statuary was used and seen throughout the centuries.

Statuary was a highly popular medium of expression in Classical Antiquity. It was first and foremost a public art form with a social function, which could serve various uses and functions, and even possess several meanings at the same time.<sup>86</sup> Statuary inside a city can be roughly divided into two categories: honorific statues and reliefs and so-called 'idealised' statuary. The first included state reliefs recording the triumphs and great deeds of emperors and generals, imperial statues embodying the authority of the distant ruler,<sup>87</sup> and portraits of local citizens representing recognition and gratitude for benefactions or public services. 'Idealised' statuary included cult statues that potentially incorporated the divine *numen*,<sup>88</sup> votive statues given to the deity in thanks of a fulfilled request, but also the reliefs featuring on temple gables and temple friezes, statuary and reliefs on the outside and inside of public buildings such as theatres, monumental fountains, baths, gymnasia, and so on. Especially in these monuments, pagan gods were combined with other 'idealised' figures from Greek-Roman mythology such as Hercules, Ganymede, Nike, Tyche, tritons, gorgons, satyrs and nymphs, personifications of the winds, the seasons and the city and so on. In the Late Roman period, smaller mythological statues and shield portraits of philosophers were an ostentatious display of refined taste and association with classical education or *paideia*. Though a statue by itself was, therefore, not in the first place intended to be art, this does not mean it could not be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities or that it could not be used as decoration. Moreover, we can state that the total collection of statuary in the city was aesthetic in the sense that it was an essential and integral part of the cityscape, which, deprived of its statuary adornment, would have been sensed as incomplete.<sup>89</sup>

#### The Fourth to Early Sixth Century

By the start of Late Antiquity, such statues and reliefs were present in every thinkable building and space.<sup>90</sup> New honorific statues had become much rarer than in classical Antiquity, and were partially replaced by two-dimensional representations on wood and mosaic, but there are still examples of newly carved or re-carved portraits into the sixth century.<sup>91</sup> We hear of an early sixth-century statue at Gaza, in Procopius' panegyric to Anastasius, which mentions the dedication of the emperor's statue in a public space as an expression of gratitude of the entire city.<sup>92</sup> In Asia Minor, sixth-century honorific portraits are known from Ephesus, Aphrodisias and, of course, Constantinople.<sup>93</sup> Conversely, with exception of a few smaller statuettes mainly intended for private display, pagan and mythological statues were no longer being newly produced in Late Antiquity. Moreover, the

existing record was being thinned out throughout the centuries. On the one hand, statues were lost because of accidents or earthquakes. On the other hand, selective adjustments were already made in the late fourth century, when pagan statuary became a pressing concern of the imperial government.<sup>94</sup> For example, a decree of the year 399 stressed that the status of every individual statue needed to be investigated and ‘idols’ taken down.<sup>95</sup> This is likely to have affected primarily statues in a temple context, especially cult statues, which without exception had received sacrifice and had been worshipped in the past.<sup>96</sup> In addition, statues that received worship had to be removed from the baths and ‘the favourite haunts of the public’ in order to prevent further veneration.<sup>97</sup> At Gaza, we hear of one such statue in the hagiographic *Life of Porphyry*, who was bishop of the city between 395 and 420.<sup>98</sup> The *Life* tells of a naked statue of Aphrodite standing on an important crossroads in the city, which is being worshiped by the female population of the city. The demon dwelling inside it supposedly cannot stand the sight of the cross and causes the statue to fall down, killing a worshipper in the process and injuring a second.<sup>99</sup> Although it is highly unlikely that this event took place exactly as it was described, and although the story probably reflects the mentality of the sixth century rather than the early fifth, the writer of the *Life* confirms that such a statue was conceived of as offensive by Christians, both because it was an idol and because it had ‘all her shame uncovered’.

Naked statues indeed were more problematic than dressed ones and would remain so throughout Antiquity.<sup>100</sup> This taps into a wider discussion on bodily impropriety in early Christian times. Thus, early Christian authors were opposed to mixed bathing, and propagated sexual shame and avoidance of temptation in general.<sup>101</sup> But, opposed to what we read in literary sources, nude statues were not all destroyed. They could also be re-carved to adjust them to Christian notions of nudity and the human body. We have already seen how naked depictions in the theatre of Ephesus at an unknown moment in time were ‘updated’ to fit Christian standards. Examples of such modified statues have been found in multiple bath buildings in Asia Minor and Cyprus.<sup>102</sup> In the East Baths of Skythopolis as well, a naked statue of Aphrodite with vandalized breast and pudenda was found, as well as a Dionysus of which the face had been hammered and the genitals hammered away.<sup>103</sup> Although such statues are especially numerous in bath buildings, they turn up in fountain, theatres, bouleuteria and other public buildings as well.

Consequently, although a lot had changed already, at the start of the sixth century there was probably still a sizeable collection of older traditional statuary left in the cityscape. Appreciation for such statues was changing though. The updated statues of Skythopolis were taken down before 515/6, when the East Baths were overbuilt by a new structure.<sup>104</sup> The Aphrodite was left in the hypocaust of the caldarium together with a semi-nude nymph, both of them headless at the time of their deposition. The Dionysus was found in the eastern portico of the baths. In the building's cold water bath, another group of broken statues, among them a statue of Heracles, Apollo or Hermes and Leda and the Swan, were found in a pit in one of the supporting vaults. Their deposition led Yoram Tsafrir to conclude that 'the great majority of freestanding sculptures were discarded around 515/6'.<sup>105</sup> There is not much other dated evidence to support this conclusion firstly because the number of statues recovered from archaeological sites in the Roman Near East is very small. Although this may be connected to strong iconoclastic feelings already in late antique and Early Byzantine times, it is much more likely that it is a result of the fact that these cities remained inhabited also after Antiquity and that monuments with statuary were exposed uninterruptedly.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, in 720/21, Caliph Yazid II issued an edict that representations of living creatures should be destroyed.<sup>107</sup> Secondly, the statues that have been discovered were published without a detailed stratigraphical analysis,<sup>108</sup> making it very difficult to discern what has happened to them. Consequently, when it is reported that a Hermes statue was found in pieces near the scene building of the theatre at Skythopolis and that it has 'suffered iconoclastic defacement', there is no way to say when or why this happened and who was responsible.<sup>109</sup>

Whether or not statuary survived also in the Roman East in larger numbers than is generally suspected today, traditional iconography was without any doubt still thriving in the region, but mainly in two-dimensional media, in mosaics and paintings that were still newly laid in the first half of the sixth century.<sup>110</sup> Examples at Skythopolis entail a famous mosaic with Tyche, the city's personification, from one of the rooms of the Sigma plaza along Palladius street, created c. 506/7.<sup>111</sup> Personifications of cities were found in the corner of the Hippolytus mosaic at Madaba (Fig. 6.7).<sup>112</sup> There are several fifth- and sixth-century mosaics from the Near East depicting the adventures of ancient heroes and demi-gods, Dionysus and his enthusiast entourage (*thiasos*), or scenes from myths such as that of Aphrodite and Adonis or Phaedra and Hippolytus.<sup>113</sup> According to Procopius of Gaza, a public building at Gaza was decorated with a cycle of paintings based on this story of Hippolytus as well as with scenes

from Homer's *Iliad*.<sup>114</sup> Interestingly, the patron of the painting is said to be both a generous benefactor, responsible amongst others for organizing races in the circus, and a pious Christian.<sup>115</sup> Procopius furthermore described a mechanical clock with the twelve labours of Herakles and Helios figures was on display in the city centre,<sup>116</sup> whereas John of Gaza described the series of allegorical paintings applied inside the winter baths of the city in 536.<sup>117</sup>

<FIGURE 6.7 HERE>

### The Justinianic and Post-Justinianic Period

Despite a continuity in two-dimensional media and in spite of all the uncertainties surrounding statuary in the Roman Near East, the discard of the statues at Skythopolis does seem to reflect a more general change in mentality that became apparent by the start of the sixth century and was fully reflected by the Justinianic period. Statuary was disappearing from public monuments elsewhere in the East as well. For instance, imperial portraits on display in the basilica of Ephesus ended up in foundations around 500.<sup>118</sup> Privately owned collections, including portraits and mythological statuettes, although previously displayed in the relative safety of private villas, found their way into walls or foundations or were thrown into pits or wells. This happened to several statues and reliefs in Athens around 530,<sup>119</sup> as well as to the philosophers' portraits at Aphrodisias, that were around this time discarded in an alley behind the house in which they had been originally on display.<sup>120</sup> Even the magnificent collections built up during the fourth and early fifth century at Constantinople began falling apart under Justinian.<sup>121</sup> It was also the period (529) that Justinian had the philosophical school at Athens closed.<sup>122</sup> Justinian would send out John of Ephesus to convert pagans still present in the hinterland of western Asia Minor in 542 and launch two more conversion campaigns in 545/6 and 562.<sup>123</sup> In the course of the sixth century Christian iconography supplanted traditional and until then highly popular themes such as Dionysiac imagery and Nike/Victory in media such as mosaics and pottery as well.<sup>124</sup> However, it must be mentioned again that many theatres, fountains and bath houses were found with an elaborate statue collection.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, a change in sensibilities and tastes did not immediately elicit violent destruction, but rather caused statues to no longer be repaired when they were damaged nor re-erected when they fell down or when their surroundings experienced a new building phase.<sup>126</sup> In practice, when the baths at Skythopolis were closed, no one felt the need to redistribute its statues over other locations in the city.

<FIGURE 6.8 HERE>

And yet, as with theatres, this development was not univocal. There are some tantalising examples of enthusiastic reuse of statuary even in the full sixth century, suggesting that statuary was not entirely superfluous. Firstly, at Aphrodisias a water basin reaching a length of c. 50 m in front of the East Gate of the South Agora was decorated with reliefs depicting scenes from an Amazonomachy, Centauromachy and Gigantomachy. The reliefs, which were not reassembled in the correct order, were separated by pillars with Eros figures.<sup>127</sup> A careful analysis of the entire South Agora has now made it possible to re-date the huge water basin from the middle of the fifth century to c. 518.<sup>128</sup> Secondly, at Sagalassos (a town in *Pisidia*) a collection of small-scale statues, including a statue of Apollo, at least two and maybe even four statues of Hygeia, the Three Graces, as well as an Aphrodite,<sup>129</sup> were put on display on top of statue brackets in the main colonnaded street of Sagalassos in the second quarter of the sixth century (Fig. 6.8). They may not have been in perfect condition anymore when they were moved here and the end result looked very unclassical, but it was still very reminiscent of the statue brackets in the grandiose Roman colonnaded streets of Syria and Cilicia.<sup>130</sup> Thirdly, although statuary seems to have lost some of its appeal at Constantinople, literary evidence suggests that Justinian at least still valued the medium and used it to enhance the appearance of the city, re-distributing the statues that once stood on the Augusteion at Constantinople to other locations in the city, applying effigies of philosophers and gorgoneia to the Chalke Gate of the imperial palace, and adorning a colonnaded court at the Baths of Arcadius with ancient statues.<sup>131</sup> Fourthly, at Caesarea Maritima, the statue of Caesarea's Tyche was placed on top of a high sandstone base in a courtyard of an unidentified public building.<sup>132</sup> Finally, the most discussed example of sixth-century statuary reuse is that of the two colossal seated statues found on the so-called Byzantine Esplanade of Caesarea Maritima, which probably functioned as a kind of shopping centre. They were moved here sometime between 546 and 606 by the Father of the City (*pater tēs poleos*) Flavius Strategius (Fig. 6.9).<sup>133</sup> To the east of the entrance to the esplanade, the famous red porphyry figure of the Emperor Hadrian, probably the cult statue from the city's temple of Hadrian, had been re-erected. To the west another emperor or god, in white marble, had been placed.<sup>134</sup> The statue of Hadrian did not fit the granite throne he was seated on, and, moreover, makeshift bases and odd bits of stone were used to prop the statues up where parts of the original sculpture were missing. The manner in which they were installed can be considered typical for the sixth

century, when statues still in existence had already been damaged, matching elements could no longer be found, and, consequently, classical aesthetics was broadening.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, as mentioned, the late display at Sagalassos was rather unusual as well and the reliefs at Aphrodisias were no longer positioned in their correct position.<sup>136</sup>

<FIGURE 6.9 HERE>

Although archaeological examples of such active usage of statuary are limited to only three cities, it is probably no coincidence that in every case they were connected to more sizeable infrastructure works undertaken in this period. In other words, had the larger interventions not been dated to the sixth century, we probably would not have realised that something had happened to these statues at such a late moment in time, since their reuse and relocation was not commemorated in inscriptions.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, as I have mentioned in the introduction, there are still grave difficulties where dating is concerned and it is very likely that there existed many more other, comparable interventions that we just do not (yet) recognise.

Why these examples of statuary reuse took place so late in time remains unknown. The examples of Caesarea Maritima have been discussed on multiple occasions and have mostly been interpreted negatively, mainly because they were all missing their heads when they were found.<sup>138</sup> It has generally been assumed that they already were headless or were decapitated when they were put on display in the sixth century, so that they were incomplete, could be shown to be entirely harmless and could maybe even be derided by the now Christian population.<sup>139</sup> However, when exactly decapitation took place is entirely uncertain and it could equally have happened much later in time. Moreover, the Tyche was found in three pieces that could not be fitted together, indicating that fragments of the statue were indeed taken away after it had toppled over. As Kenneth Holum has remarked, the statues at the Byzantine Esplanade lack a specific iconography or identifying inscriptions, so there is little reason for the sixth-century population to be reminded of pagan gods and take offense.<sup>140</sup> Suffice here to say that the possibility that they were merely intended as embellishment therefore remains very plausible. Conversely, the statue of Tyche was still clearly recognisable, with or without the head. Sixth-century city-dwellers, even Christians, had no reason to deride the personification of their city. On the contrary, these personifications remained popular in the Byzantine Near East, at least in two-dimensional form, and testify to a continuing urban identity and pride.<sup>141</sup> Since another marble Caesarea Tyche as well as

other statues were reused in a late sixth or early seventh-century defensive structure, it can be safely assumed that such statues had been part of the cityscape of Caesarea until that time and not just to be derided by Christians.

A more positive interpretation has also been given to the examples from Asia Minor. Pascale Linant de Bellefonds has proposed that the scenes of the Amazonomachy, Centauromachy and Gigantomachy reused at Aphrodisias possessed a political meaning in their original context and were intended to glorify imperial victories. It is not unlikely that this meaning was still understood as late as the sixth century and that the reliefs were still considered useful means to celebrate imperial power. Finally, the statuettes at Sagalassos were gathered on what was the main approach to the city centre. Since they would have been one of the first things to be seen by visitors, the collection of mythological statuary is best interpreted as a sign post for the city.

All examples mentioned above can indeed be interpreted as enjoyable items still useful for self-display, for enhancing the prestige of a location, and, in general, as indicators of the city's rich cultural heritage.<sup>142</sup> They may even still have had a part to play in the ongoing competition amongst cities, which, as we hear from several literary sources pertinent to Gaza as well, was still very much alive in the sixth century.<sup>143</sup>

### *Discussion*

Even though the evidence is nowhere as detailed as at Gaza, it can safely be said that in the first decades of the sixth century at least in certain cities theatres and theatre plays had not lost their allure. Likewise, even though the attractiveness of ancient statuary was undoubtedly dwindling in the sixth century, we can now tell from the archaeological record that this evolution was not univocal and that statuary decoration could still be used to express local pride and traditions, or to celebrate imperial power. The subject matter of these statues and reliefs could be found in mosaics and paintings as well, where their popularity seems to have been even more long-lived. Clearly, the themes and stories from the pagan past still held value. It is very likely that they answered to desires and needs for which the alternatives offered by the Christian Church were not sufficient, not quite as attractive or entirely absent.<sup>144</sup> This is another discussion altogether.<sup>145</sup> Suffice here to say that a recurrent element is the joy that these ancient media gave the viewer. Beautification is one of the main reasons

given to justify the reuse of statuary in literary and epigraphic sources of the fourth and fifth century;<sup>146</sup> Choricus considers mimes valuable amongst others because of their entertainment value.<sup>147</sup> The Christian benefactor of horse races and the mythological paintings described in Procopius' ekphrasis must have had similar motivations.<sup>148</sup> Finally, the most blatant statement is the inscription added to the mythological scenes in the fifth or early sixth-century mosaic at Sheikh Zuweid: 'Friend, observe here with pleasure the charming things which art has placed in the mosaic cubes... You are one who is proud of enjoyable art.'<sup>149</sup>

In order to be interpreted as such and to be acceptable to Christians, ancient depictions and traditions did require some alterations. Firstly, in newly created depictions with Hellenic inspiration, references to cult remained absent. Instead, most depictions were decorative and narrative, with a lot of attention for the adventures of the ancient gods and heroes, showing them in actions such as hunting – a popular contemporaneous elite activity –, or other mundane activities. Secondly, ancient Olympic gods had been reinterpreted as symbols for well-being, for the idyllic, bucolic or culture life. Dionysus is a good case in point. Dionysus and Dionysiac imagery were highly popular from the fourth into the sixth century on mosaics, pottery, silverware, clothing and so on.<sup>150</sup> Among the many depictions found, not a single one refers to cult practices or the biography of the god: Dionysus himself and other members of his ecstatic party such as Pan, maenads and satyrs are often depicted dancing, feasting and vine harvesting. Dionysus was no longer the god of wine and ecstasy, but since long had become a symbol for conviviality and joy, or, alternatively, fertility. Thirdly, in order to clarify the assimilation and subjection of ancient divinities to Christianity (or Judaism), signs of the new religion could be added. For instance, the personifications of city goddesses in the sixth-century mosaic at the Hall of Hippolytus at Madaba all held cruciform sceptres, emphasizing the Christian aspect (Fig. 6.7).<sup>151</sup> Crosses were incised or chiselled into the foreheads and bodies of statues in Late Antiquity.<sup>152</sup> Interestingly, to the paintings in the winter bath at Gaza a cross apparently had been added, standing out amidst the traditional iconography.<sup>153</sup> The description of this cross is very reminiscent of that added to the *scaenae frons* of theatre at Perge. Finally, as discussed, a reconciliation between Christian sensibilities and the theatre and statuary had required other physical changes to take place as well, including the removal of genitalia of naked statues.

Judging by these alterations, the period from the fourth to the middle of the sixth century is characterized by attempts to reconcile the two traditions of Hellenism and Christianity. Although most of the research on the transmission of ancient culture so far has focused on the elite layers of society, their education and their luxurious dwellings, the public nature of theatre plays as well as the continuous public display of statuary, the presence of mythological paintings in baths and so on ensured that city populations at large stayed in contact with ancient myths, stories, heroes and divinities in various ways.

The exact reception of classical antiquity, however, differed from site to site. As seen above, in some cities theatres were abandoned already in the fourth or fifth century and there was no evidence for late statuary displays, whereas in others continuity is much more apparent. Part of the explanation may have been the position of the site in the wider administrative structure of the Empire. From the fourth century onwards, the wealth of provincial capitals was considerably higher than that of other cities in their province, which may have influenced the upkeep of huge monuments such as theatres.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, a city with a preeminent status, commercial importance and a rhetorical school with international reputation such as Gaza presumably attracted more elite members and more money. Gaza moreover financially profited from the attention of Stephanos, governor of *Palaestina Prima*, who was a native of Gaza.<sup>155</sup> The most notable archaeological parallel for this situation is the city of Side in *Pamphylia*. Like Gaza, it was not the capital of the province, but a major harbour city with a strong Christian presence and a self-conscious elite that invested in theatre repairs into the sixth century. Even though active preservation and reuse of statuary in the sixth century has not been recognised here, statues from classical Antiquity were discovered amidst the rubble of the theatre, the city's fountains and elsewhere on the site,<sup>156</sup> reminding city-dwellers of the rich cultural past until the very end of Antiquity.

Although finances may have allowed or hindered the renovation of huge monuments such as theatres, they cannot explain why in some places statues were destroyed, mutilated or cross-marked and in others not. There are other factors at play here that we have no knowledge of whatsoever. Particular circumstances and even individuals may have played important roles in the further unfolding of a city's history.<sup>157</sup> In the case of Gaza, the mere presence of the rhetorical school probably contributed to a general philhellenic atmosphere, as its students later held high positions in civic and Christian life.<sup>158</sup> In addition, we are fortunate enough to be able to have descriptions of at least some individuals living in the city. The most

remarkable figure is probably bishop Marcian (518/9–c. 540).<sup>159</sup> Not only did he have strong family connections and cultural ties to the secular elite, he had enjoyed a classical education himself and, according to Choricus, even managed the School after the death of Procopius.<sup>160</sup> Under the supervision of a bishop like Marcian, mimes and festivals can be expected to have continued, probably in a theatre with updated statuary collection and crosses carved on the seats. Likewise, mythological statuary was undoubtedly still visible in urban space, assumingly with some adjustments.

If the picture before and during the reign of Justinian is still quite diverse, after Justinian's reign our sources largely grow silent. In Asia Minor, this coincides with a general decline of the monumental city and possibly of the general standard of life.<sup>161</sup> The first half of the sixth century in the Roman Near East certainly is very prosperous, with flourishing cities amidst a populated and thriving countryside, and construction of fortifications, colonnaded streets and churches taking place everywhere. The data are somewhat less clear for the second half of the sixth century though. There is plentiful evidence for continued occupation, commercial and industrial activities, but public donations and civic construction become very rare, the only exception being Caesarea Maritima.<sup>162</sup> Consequently, although the growing influence of Christianity throughout the centuries of Late Antiquity undoubtedly transformed and weakened philhellenism, it may not have been responsible for its final demise.<sup>163</sup> It rather seems that the entire city was changing, that city life was becoming more and more pragmatic, and that all interest in non-essential interventions or decoration – with the exception of church decoration – was lost.

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- 1 The text was analysed in considerable detail in Malineau (2005). See also Tiersch (2008, 82–83).
  - 2 Tiersch (2008, 82–83).
  - 3 Tiersch (2008, 68–69, 87, 91), Drbal (2011, 119–122). Ashkenazi (2004) for a more general co-habitation of classical heritage and Christian piety at Gaza.
  - 4 For a more elaborate discussion and further references, see Jacobs (2014).
  - 5 Tiersch (2008, 75–90) on the opinions held on classical culture in sixth-century Gaza.
  - 6 Grig (2013) is a very useful starting point. For Palestine see e.g., Sivan (2008) and Avni (2014).
  - 7 Saradi (2006). In addition, some excellent studies have contributed to the reconstruction of the sixth-century cityscape of Gaza: Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky (2004) on Christian Gaza, Saliou (2005a) gathering all information from the writing of Choricius, Tiersch (2008).
  - 8 With the notable exception of Avni (2014) who discusses archaeological evidence for sixth- to eleventh-century Palestine.
  - 9 Because of the nature of the transformations, later interventions to buildings can seldom be connected to stratigraphic deposition of sediments and can often only be dated relatively, sometimes stylistically, or not at all. This is particularly true for large monuments such as theatres, see also Puk (2014, 10).
  - 10 In the past, an absence of clearly visible and datable interventions was often interpreted as decay or decline. Alternatively, one can take the opposite approach and rely on the absence of evidence for destruction or collapse to argue for a continued lifespan of a theatre or the continued display of a statue. For example, if the last renovation campaign of a theatre can be dated to the third century and it was encroached by small houses in the seventh, it has to be taken into account that it could have been used for public gatherings until the seventh century. Although this may at times prove to be incorrect as well, the theoretical exercise leaves room for more continuity than generally is assumed.
  - 11 Other sources of inspiration were possible as well, as argued by Roueché (2009), but not as frequent as the traditional themes.
  - 12 Webb (2008, 2, 95–115), Puk (2014, 291–294), Weiss (2014, 120–128) for the history and reception of the mimes in Palestine.
  - 13 Webb (2008, 2–4, 58–71), Dvorjetskij (2012, 95), Puk (2014, 294–296), Weiss (2014, 128–135).
  - 14 Sear (2006, 1–10) for an extensive description of the Roman theatre building.
  - 15 Sear (2006, 4) for examples from Roman Antiquity. Cf. *infra* for late antique examples.
  - 16 Sear (2006, 311–312).
  - 17 Sear (2006, 308).
  - 18 Sears (2006, 314).
  - 19 Sears (2006, 37–42).
  - 20 Sear (2006, 39). Political gatherings took place in larger theatres as well, already from the fourth century BC (Sear 2006, 41–42) into the sixth century AD (Saradi 2006, 315).
  - 21 The functioning, status and reception of the theatre in Late Antiquity is discussed elaborately in Leyerle (2001, 13–74), with a focus on the testimonies of John Chrysostom, Puk (2014) for spectacles in general.
  - 22 Puk (2014, 38–39, 53–84) for an extensive discussion on imperial reactions to games and festivals from the fourth to the seventh century.
  - 23 Cod. Theod. 16.10.17 (399), Emperors Arcadius and Honorius to Apollodorus, Proconsul of Africa. ‘Just as We have already abolished profane rites by a salutary law, so We do not allow the festal assemblies of citizens and the common pleasure of all to be abolished. Hence We decree that, according to ancient custom, amusements shall be furnished to the people, but without any sacrifice or any accursed superstition, and they shall be allowed to attend festal banquets, whenever public desires so demand.’ See also Cod. Theod. 16.10.3 (AD 341) in which Constantius already expressed a similar point of view.
  - 24 For a general discussion, see Lim (2009, 500–501), Lugaresi (2007), Jacobs (2014).
  - 25 Leyerle (2001, 23–24), Saradi (2006, 312), Puk (2014, 23–24).
  - 26 Saradi (2006, 311–312), Webb (2008, 203–205), Andrade (2010, 176), Puk (2014, 24–27).
  - 27 Sandwell (2007, 145), Webb (2008, 201), Puk (2014, 27–28).
  - 28 Webb (2008, 202), Puk (2014, 28–29).
  - 29 Ioh. Chrys. *Hom.* 29.3 *in Act. Apost.* (PG 40.218), *Hom. in illud: Si esurierit inimicus* 3 (PG 52.177). For the lack of enthusiasm for church visits among his congregation see *Hom. in Matt.* 37.6 (PG 57.426); *De Anna* 4.1 (PG 54.660).
  - 30 Cod. Theod. 15.5.5 (425). Theodosius Augustus and Valentinian Caesar to Asclepiodotus, Praetorian Prefect ‘On the following occasions all amusements of the theatres and the circuses shall be denied throughout all cities

to the people thereof, and the minds of Christians and of the faithful shall be wholly occupied in the worship of God: namely on the Lord's day, which is the first day of the whole week, on the Natal Day and Epiphany of Christ, and on the east of Easter and of Pentecost, as long as the vestments that imitate the light of the celestial font attest to the new light of holy baptism; at the time also when the commemoration of the Apostolic Passion, the teacher of all Christianity, is duly celebrated by everyone...'. A similar law forbidding musical performances, probably related to pantomime, was issued by the emperor Leo in 459 (Malalas *Chronographia* 293, ed. Thurn). For a detailed discussion of official concessions and their effects, see Puk (2014, 62–66).

31 An extensive overview of literary sources on the content and reception of theatre plays in the sixth century can be found in Malineau (2005) and Saradi (2006, 310–319). Helen Saradi in addition discusses the financing of theatres and theatrical performances.

32 The spectacles at Gaza were supported financially by the provincial governor Stephanos, who resided at Caesarea Maritima, but was from Gaza and therefore may have favoured his native town. Saliou (2005b, 177–180) argues that the use of the word *skènè* refers not to the stone theatre of Gaza, but to another building, non-permanent, established on the agora.

33 Two edicts dated to the first half of the reign of Justinian (527–565) suggest that some clerics as well could not withstand the draw of the theatre: Cod. Iust. 1.4.34 (534) and Nov. 123.10 (546).

34 Puk (2014, 316–317) for an overview of literary sources pertinent to the Roman Near East.

35 Jac. Ser. *hom. de spect.*, transl. Moss (1935, 106).

36 Discussed in more detail in Saradi (2006, 312–313).

37 Shenhav (1993, 383).

38 Welles (1938, 470–471), no. 279. Dvorjetskj (2012, 96–101) for the characteristics of the Maioumas festival. Other festivals attested in the region until the reign of Justinian are the *Brumalia*, in honour of the emperor, and the *Rosalia*, festivities connected to Aphrodite and Adonis (Tiersch 2008, 80).

39 Dvorjetskj (2012, 101–103) for imperial attempts to constrain the Maioumas as well as Christian opposition.

40 Malineau (2005, 160), Saradi (2006, 317), and Dvorjetskj (2012, 110).

41 Dauphin (1999).

42 Holum (2003, 155) with footnote 14 presenting a summary of the dating evidence. Retzleff (2003, 127) wrongly dates the abandonment of the theatre to the period from the mid-fifth to early sixth century. Saradi (2006, 320) still claims that the theatre was abandoned in the course of the fourth century, which actually is the date of its last grand renovation phase. Malineau (2005, 160) cautiously assigns the fortification to the Justinianic period.

43 Magen (1993, 1356–1357).

44 Weiss (2014, 239, 241), Mazor and Atrash (forthcoming).

45 Retzleff (2003, 122–123, 127–130), with further references.

46 Puk (2014, 316).

47 A summary overview can be view in Puk (2014, 313–315).

48 For instance, the theatre of Aizanoi (in *Phrygia Secunda*) may have been abandoned already before the middle of the fourth century (Rheidt 2003, 243), that of Priene was spoliated in the fifth (von Gerkan 1921, 25).

49 D'Andria (2003, 181).

50 Jacobs (2014, 197–198, 211–212).

51 Roueché (2002, 257), Auinger and Aurenhammer (2010, 675, 688).

52 Ala2004 65.

53 Roueché (1991, 107), Cormack (1991, 120), Ala2004, 171–181 see also 184–186.

54 İnan *et al.* (2000, 321–322).

55 Nollé (1993, no. 149 and 152). Originally, there must have been four renovation inscriptions applied to the theatre walls. Further late antique restorations to the theatre are commemorated in inscriptions as well. See Nollé (1993, nos. 145–148).

56 See Lim (1999, 271–275) for the various reasons behind the organizing of games by both pagan and Christian members of the senatorial elite in Rome.

57 Retzleff (2003, 125–127 for Caesarea and 129 for Petra).

58 For an overview, see Jacobs (2010, 296).

59 Brody (2007) cat. no. 13.

60 Smith (1996, 11, 25), Brody (2007, 24).

61 Originally, the statue of Claudia Antonia Tatiana, one of the many honorific statues excavated at Aphrodisias, emphasized her role as priestess of Aphrodite, an identity that was made clear by her clothing and, especially, by the presence of a young child, most likely Eros. The figure was most likely intentionally eliminated, so that the statue could remain standing without these cultic associations (Erim 1967, fig. 7, Smith 1998, 66–67, Jacobs 2010, 280–281).

62 Reynolds (1982, xv–xvii), docs. 3, 4, 8, 9, 11–13, 20, Brody (2007, 24).

63 Roueché (1989) no. 42.

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- 64 Brody (2007).
- 65 The statues found in the theatre are described in Aurenhammer (1990) no. 5, 12, 15, 32, 34, 53, 79, 98, Özren (1996, 126–127).
- 66 Auinger and Aurenhammer (2010, 688). Cf. *infra* for a discussion on the perception of nudity.
- 67 İnan *et al.* (2000, 299–300).
- 68 Nollé (1993, 460–463), no.143.
- 69 Roueché (1989), nos. 137–138, (1993) 46.D.13, 46.D.16, 46.E.2, 46.E.26, 46.G.8, 46.X.15.
- 70 Cormack (1991, 121–122) referring to an epigram of Agathias, Anth. Gr. 1.34.
- 71 Saradi (2006, 318).
- 72 Malalas, *Chronographia* 343–344, ed. Thurn.
- 73 Malalas, *Chronographia* 376, 390–391, 393, ed. Thurn.
- 74 Procop. Arc. 26.6–8; Puk (2014, 106).
- 75 At Gaza, governor Stephanos still financed the theatre, see the discussion in Tiersch (2008, 81).
- 76 Nov. 63.1 (538), Nov. 149.2 (569).
- 77 On the vignette of Jerusalem, the Nea Church, which was only constructed after 542, is visible.
- 78 Donner (1992), Piccirillo and Alliata (1999), Donceel-Voûte (1988).
- 79 Duval (2003).
- 80 Pullan (1999).
- 81 Depicted are the scene building, with either the staircases or a porticus on top of the cavea (Weiss 2004, 24–26).
- 82 Dvorjetskj (2012, 108).
- 83 See note 42.
- 84 Mazor and Atrash (forthcoming).
- 85 Puk (2014, 315) suggests the theatre building at Ephesus was still functional in the early seventh century, because inscriptions referring to the Blues and Greens were still being applied at the time. They were, however, found outside the theatre and cannot be linked to the building itself.
- 86 Witschel (1995, 333), Smith (1998, 81). For the social functions of statues, see Zanker (1987). Bauer and Witschel (2007, 1–8) for an overview of diverse statues and their function in the late antique city.
- 87 Price (1984, 200–201), Kleiner (1992, 6).
- 88 Belting (1994, 49–50).
- 89 Stewart (2003, 142–143, 147–148, 154–156) for this feeling in the Roman period. For the Late Roman period, Sarah Bassett (2004, 46) phrased it as follows: ‘a larger set of late antique assumptions about the nature of cities and their appearance that saw sculpture, ancient or modern, as an essential element in the urban design.’ At Constantinople statuary remained an essential element of the city’s appearance up to the sack of 1204, see Vryonis (1991, 33–34).
- 90 On the omnipresence of statuary in the Roman world, see Beard and Henderson (2001, 83).
- 91 Liverani (2016).
- 92 Procopius of Gaza, *Panegyricus in imperatorem Anastasium*, c. 1 (p. 4).
- 93 Killerich (1993). There are no such surviving late antique portraits from the Roman Near East (Tsafrir 2008, 124–128).
- 94 Discussed in more detail in Jacobs (2010, 292).
- 95 Cod. Theod. 16.10.18 (399). Nearly all of the laws assembled in book 16.10 of the Theodosian Code react against sacrifice, but were not primarily directed towards statues or temples.
- 96 See also Cod. Theod. 16.10.19. (408) = Const. Sirmond. 12 (407) which state that images in temples and shrines that received worship had to be ‘torn from their foundations’.
- 97 Cod. Theod. 16.10.20.3 (415).
- 98 There are many problems with this text, for a recent discussion see Busine (2013, 330–332).
- 99 *Vita Porphyrii* 59–62, transl. Hill: ‘But when we came into the city, in the place that is called the Four Ways, there was a statue of marble which they said was a statue of Aphrodite; and it was upon a base of stone, and the form of the statue was of a woman, naked, and having all her shame uncovered. And all they of the city did honour to the statue, especially the women, kindling lamps and burning incense’. See the discussion in Lavan (2011, 443).
- 100 Jacobs (2010, 288), Kristensen (2013, 222–224 with reference to antique authors, 228).
- 101 Brown (1988), esp. 315–321 and Markus (1990, 59–61, 81–82) deal with thoughts on the human body between the first and the early fifth century.
- 102 Hannestad (2001), Jacobs (2010, 278–279), Kristensen (2013, 225–229).
- 103 Kristensen (2013, 222–225).
- 104 Tsafrir (2008, 134), Kristensen (2013, 223–225).
- 105 Tsafrir (2008, 138).
- 106 The effects of continued exposure of statues has been discussed in Jacobs (2010, 291).

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- 107 Vasiliev (1956).
- 108 Tsafirir (2008, 130).
- 109 Applebaum (1978, 85).
- 110 Talgam (2004) and Bowersock (2006) are good introductions to the abundant mythological figures in mosaics of the Roman Near East. Bowersock (2006, 55–62) points out that the themes in these late mosaics are the same as those in the contemporary mimes.
- 111 Tsafirir and Foerster (1997) fig. 42, Tsafirir (2008, 138).
- 112 Talgam (2004, 225), Poulsen (2004, 214).
- 113 Talgam (2004, 220–233).
- 114 Procopius of Gaza, *Ekphrasis Eikonos*, Friedländer (1939); discussed in Talgam (2004).
- 115 Talgam (2004, 216).
- 116 Short description in Tiersch (2008, 84–85), with further references.
- 117 John of Gaza, *Ekphrasis*, discussed in Tiersch (2008, 84–86).
- 118 Alzinger (1972–1975, 260–263).
- 119 Frantz (1988, 41, 87).
- 120 Smith (1990, 153–155).
- 121 Bassett (2004, 128–129).
- 122 Cod. Iust. 1.11.9–10. Watts (2004) places the closing of the school at Athens into its political and social context.
- 123 Tiersch (2008, 76–77) with extensive references.
- 124 Dionysiac imagery on mosaics of the first half of the sixth century, see Talgam (2004, 220–223); on African Red Slip Ware: Hayes (1972, 261–263), Lund (2001, 205), on Sagalassos Red Slip Ware: Talloen and Poblome (2005, 70), Jacobs and Waelkens (forthcoming), Nike: Roueché (2002, 543).
- 125 Jacobs (2010, 282) and appendices.
- 126 Bassett (2004) for Constantinople.
- 127 Linant de Bellefonds (1996), *Ala*2004 38, 39, 40. In their new location, the reliefs were placed next to each other without any obvious iconographic relation.
- 128 *Ala*2004 38, 39, 40. Personal communication Bert Smith and Andrew Wilson.
- 129 Jacobs and Waelkens (2014), Jacobs and Stirling (2017).
- 130 Jacobs (2016), Jacobs and Stirling (2017).
- 131 Bassett (2004, 124–128) for a discussion of Justinian’s interventions.
- 132 Holum (2008, 558) suggested the building was a lecture hall, but there is not much evidence to support this hypothesis. The statue is discussed on pp. 555–558.
- 133 They are discussed in full in Holum (2008). See also Avi-Yonah (1970), Holum (2003, 158). Kristensen (2010) discusses these statues as well as their re-display in detail. In the same city, another relocation of the statue of Tyche could also be assigned to the later sixth or even early seventh century, see Gersht (1984), Wenning (1986), Holum *et al.* (1988, 10–12), Kristensen (2010, 276–277).
- 134 For the intolerance towards cult statues of Roman emperors, see Jacobs (2010, 288).
- 135 On the shifts in aesthetic taste in the sixth century and the reasons for this phenomenon, see Jacobs (2016).
- 136 Bassett (2004, 130) for a diminished supply of statuary at Constantinople; Jacobs (2016) for a broadening of classical aesthetics out of pure necessity.
- 137 Jacobs (2016) on difficulties of dating.
- 138 The leg support of the Tyche as well, which was probably the personification of the harbour of the city, was discovered headless.
- 139 Tsafirir (2008, 132), Kristensen (2010, 280), (2013, 235–243), all with references to older literature.
- 140 Holum (2008, 549–551).
- 141 Talgam (2004, 225–226), Poulsen (2014, 209, 213–216) for examples from the Near East.
- 142 For references and discussions of ancient texts and edicts referring to these values, see Lepelley (1994), Salzman (1999, 131–132), Stewart (2003, 154–155), Schmidt (2003, 215), Saradi-Mendelovici (1990), Saradi (1997). Bassett (2004, 130) for an example of Justinianic Constantinople.
- 143 Saradi (2006, 62), Tiersch (2008, 86–87).
- 144 For instance in private contexts, knowledge of ancient myths and literature expressed in mythological statuary and mosaics was a statement of the owner’s classical education, hence his status in society, wealth and prestige, Uytterhoeven (2009), also Leader-Newby (2005).
- 145 Bowes (2011, 190) likewise explains the continuity of mythological scenes by pointing at the absence of Christian equivalents.
- 146 Jacobs (2010, 289–291).
- 147 Cf. note 1.
- 148 Cf. note 114.
- 149 Ovadiah (1977, 442).

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150 Bowersock (1990, 41–53) explains the popularity of Dionysos in Late Antiquity. Parrish (1995), esp. 332, (2004) and Stirling (2005, 87) discuss Dionysiac images in private houses. Talgam (2008, 220–223, 226–227) focuses on Dionysos in late antique mosaics. Jacobs (2010) 287 for an overview of reinterpretations of other gods.

151 Talgam (2008, 225, 234).

152 Kristensen (2012).

153 John of Gaza, *Ekphrasis* 1.29–44; Tiersch (2008, 87–88).

154 Jacobs (2013, 671–673).

155 Tiersch (2008, 81).

156 Mansel (1963) *passim*, Jacobs (2010) cat. no. 27, 28, 33.

157 Jacobs (2010, 291) on the role of individuals in statuary destruction.

158 Ashkenazi (2004, 199).

159 Ashkenazi (2004), Tiersch (2008, 70).

160 Ashkenazi (2004, 200).

161 Jacobs (2013, 652–655).

162 Avni (2014, 60–61, 98–99).

163 Weiss (2014, 250) considers the influence of Christianity the sole cause of the end of spectacles in Palestine.