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Cross Graffiti as Physical Means to Christianize the Classical City: An Exploration of Their Function, Meaning, Topographical, and Socio-Historical Contexts

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Cross graffiti are omnipresent in the cities of the eastern Mediterranean. They appear on city gates, on the walls and doors of houses and monumental buildings, on the benches of theatres, on columns of agorae and streets, on statues and statuary bases, on church walls and furniture, and so on. Some of them accompany prayers or other texts; others appear in isolation or together with other crosses. In this article I will focus on the last category and especially on cross graffiti applied to pre-Christian components of the cityscape. I will list several aspects of cross graffiti that could shed light on their interpretation and in particular stress the importance of the wider topographical and socio-historical contexts of their appearance, the circumstances surrounding their carving or painting, and the envisioned audience of the crosses. I will argue that graffiti of solitary crosses should largely be interpreted as markers of territory and claims of ownership over certain buildings, walls, columns, statues, and so on in public space. They made it possible to integrate components of this cityscape even when they were of a dubious character (meaning that they were not immediately recognizable or recognized as proper to Christians when viewed independently) into an environment that became perceptibly Christian. At first, crosses may have appeared in the context of competition between real-life religious factions, as physical claim of ownership of space that signalled to adherents of other religions that the cityscape, or at least certain parts of it, were now under the control of Christians. However, the spread and multiplication of cross signs in urban space continued and apparently even accelerated only after the disappearance of physical competitors or at least after they had lost most of their power to intervene in the urban landscape. This can be explained because such signs functioned on a supernatural level as well. I will argue that the proliferation of crosses in cities of the Eastern empire was necessitated by a perceived omnipresence of danger and opponents of a supernatural nature. Cross signs were the means by which Christians expressed to themselves that they were living and moving about in environment that fell under God's authority, where they would be safe from harm.

Instead of compiling a new corpus of evidence, I will revisit, confront, and expand on the material presented in the following publications: the corpus of cross-marked statues

assembled by Troels Kristensen in an article of 2012 (with online additions in 2014), the 2002 discussion of graffiti at Aphrodisias by Angelos Chaniotis, and the crosses identified in the urban landscape of Sagalassos by Luke Lavan.[1] By confronting the methods and interpretations of these three authors, I will try to transcend current boundaries between categories of material evidence, in this case statuary and architecture.[2] These recent studies have focussed on only one material category, an approach not necessarily beneficial for interpretation. As will be demonstrated later on, realizations and interpretations made for one kind of evidence can be extremely informative for others as well. Ideally, in order to understand the meaning of cross graffiti, a combination and confrontation of their appearance on all possible carriers, from monumental walls to objects of everyday use, as well as a comparison with crosses as architectural decoration or ornaments on household objects is required. In addition, it is useful to broaden our scope to graffiti studies in general, as recent developments in this research provide us with an elaborate toolset to look at cross signs as well.

Cross graffiti

Focussing on cross signs as graffiti rather than as architectural ornaments is useful firstly because the former appear on a wider range of surfaces than monumental architecture and secondly because they can reflect actions of all layers of society. However, graffiti have only very recently been considered a worthy subject of research, and there is still much to be explored about the reasons and circumstances of their production.[3] It is useful to consider here some general notions associated with ancient graffiti that will influence the interpretation of the cross signs that will be at the centre of this article.

First of all, the modern definition of graffiti as 'writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place' does not adequately define ancient graffiti at all.[4] Not only did it appear in public space but was also wide spread

[1] Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies'; idem, 'Addenda to T. M. Kristensen'; Chaniotis, 'Zwischen Konfrontation und Interaktion', with useful details and an overview of the evidence in idem, 'The Conversion of the Temple of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias in Context', and idem, 'Graffiti in Aphrodisias' as well; Lavan, 'The Agorai of Sagalassos in Late Antiquity'. Lavan also wrote a methodological section on how to approach graffiti: 'Distinctive Field Methods for Late Antiquity'.

[2] Although the forms of the crosses found on statues have exact matches in the wider cityscape of cities in the East, they are generally not referred to as graffiti, but as 'markings' or 'carvings' or the like.

[3] Langner, *Antike Graffitizeichnungen*, pp. 136–38, included Christian signs as well in his innovative publication on pictorial graffiti.

[4] The definition is from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Its incompatibility with ancient graffiti is discussed in Baird and Taylor, 'Ancient Graffiti in Context', p. 3, and Keenan, 'Graffiti and dipinti as monumenta and verba', pp. 497–98.

in domestic contexts,[5] and, more importantly, graffiti was not always illicit. Labelling the crosses discussed below as vandalism would be a serious mistake. Indeed, the legitimate character of almost all cross graffiti can be assumed, and a significant number of them were probably not only approved of by the city government, but also very likely applied by church authorities in the context of official ceremonies. It is, however, clear that there are many difficulties with defining graffiti in Antiquity.[6] J. A. Baird and Claire Taylor, in their introduction to *Ancient Graffiti in Context,* refrain entirely from providing a definition of ancient graffiti because it is so extremely difficult to pinpoint.[7] The general characteristics of all different forms and varieties seem to be that they were marks added onto an existing surface sometime after this had been created and, in addition, that it is at least difficult to ascertain that a text, sign, or drawing was officially sanctioned, as a monumental inscription was.[8] These are certainly the qualities characterizing the crosses discussed in this paper. Indeed, on the one hand crosses in the form of graffiti can be clearly distinguished from crosses that were part of a building's original architectural decoration for instance. In the latter, a Christian identity was there from the moment the building was constructed. Conversely, applying a cross graffito adds a Christian element at a later moment in the lifespan of a building, statue, or object, thereby altering its identity and interpretation. On the other hand, although I will try to show that some cross graffiti in all likelihood were the result of official ceremonies, there is no evidence to irrefutably prove this.

Baird and Taylor point out that the difference between graffiti and formal inscriptions is very hard to make and probably non-existent in many cases. Charlotte Roueché made such a point about early Byzantine political acclamations added as graffiti to existing architecture at Aphrodisias, capital of the province of Caria.[9] The most famous of these graffiti acclamations are those added on the columns of the east portico of the South Agora. This series of twenty texts, mostly accompanied by crosses, was directed to one of Aphrodisias's most prominent citizens, Albinus, who rebuilt the monument, and in one case to the city

[5] See for example the section *Inschriften in privaten Räumen* in *Öffentlichkeit-Monument-Text*, ed. by Eck and others: Benefield, 'Dialogues of Graffiti in the House of the Four Styles'; and Scheibelreiter-Gail, 'Inscriptions in the Late Antique Private House', pp. 152–54.
[6] Baird and Taylor, 'Ancient Graffiti in Context', pp. 3–7; Baird, 'The Graffiti of Dura-Europos', pp. 49–50; Mairs, 'Blogging Rome', pp. 156–57; and Taylor, 'Graffiti and the Epigraphic Habit', pp. 92–93, all touch upon the difficulties inherent to terminology in discussing their case-studies of graffiti.
[7] Baird and Taylor, 'Ancient Graffiti in Context', pp. 3–7.
[8] Although this is of course also true when a very formal and intricately carved inscription was carved to commemorate, for instance, the renovation of a monument.
[9] Roueché, 'Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire'.

itself.[10] According to Roueché, the graffiti may be a record of acclamations to the person-in-question during the inauguration ceremony of the east portico at some time in the sixth century. Likewise, at sites such as Side, an important city on the south coast of Asia Minor, late antique donors were celebrated with graffiti inscriptions applied to the bits of architecture they had so generously sponsored.[11] The research of Dennis Feissel and Roueché at Ephesus, capital of the diocese of Asia, has revealed the continuity of acclamations on the colonnades, sidewalls, and gates in the Marble Street and the Embolos as late as the early seventh century.[12] Such graffiti acclamations can be interpreted as the late antique equivalent of older, more formal-looking honorific inscriptions of important citizens, governors, other magistrates, the city as a whole, or even emperors. Painted versions of such acclamations have been attested as well — for instance, at the Golden Gate at Constantinople, where they may have commemorated an imperial inauguration ceremony.[13] Likewise, at Hierapolis in Phrygia, laudatory texts were applied in red paint on pilasters on the west side of Frontinus Street in the area of the Northern Byzantine Gate. They have been tentatively dated to 535, when the town was elevated to *metropolis* of the province Phrygia Pacatiana, and it may have been the physical record of an official ceremony, possibly an *adventus*.[14]

Indeed, an aspect of ancient graffiti that must be kept in mind is that mainly the examples that were truly scratched, pecked, or chiselled into stone surfaces are preserved today. But graffiti could also consist of marks, letters, or drawings painted on the wall, inked on a surface, and applied in chalk or charcoal. In other words, the cross graffiti we can recognize today are probably only a fraction of what was present in the past. This is corroborated by some tantalizing attestations of Greek crosses in red paint — for instance, in the central niche of the Antonine Nymphaeum at Sagalassos, a provincial town in Pisidia, or in between figures of divinities on the north side of the lowest frieze in the theatre of Perge, capital of the province of Pamphylia on the South coast of Asia Minor.[15]

Because they remain visible for a longer period, sometimes even to today, we are inclined to investigate how graffiti were perceived by later viewers. And indeed, in order to determine the meaning of graffiti and the intention of the carvers, evaluating the visibility and the intended audience of signs is vital. As Peter Keenan remarked:

[10] Roueché, 'Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire'; idem, 'Looking for Late Antique Ceremonial'; and idem, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*, nos. 83 (acclamation to the city) and 84 (acclamations to Albinus).
[11] Nollé, *Side im Altertum*, nos. 145, 146, 147, 159, and 160.
[12] Feissel, 'Epigraphie administrative et topographie urbaine'; Roueché, 'Looking for Late Antique Ceremonial'.
[13] Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, p. 270.
[14] Miranda, 'Acclamazioni a Giustiniano I'.
[15] İnan and others, 'Vorbericht über die Untersuchungen an der Fassade des Theaters von Perge', pp. 299–300.

> Almost all ancient markings were originally located outside or within spaces used or viewed by people other than those responsible for setting them up. This means that the persons writing and drawing on fixed or portable surfaces in these locations intended that others would read messages set up as part of a broader social context. At the very least, they would have been aware of the likelihood of some kind of viewership for their texts or graphic images, and so composed (or, far less likely, commissioned) their markings accordingly.[16]

Conversely, several articles in *Ancient Graffiti in Context* stress the importance of the performative aspects of graffiti as well: the act of inscribing, the identity of the carvers, and the circumstances involving the graffiti creation itself.[17] As we will see, reconstructing the actual moment and circumstances of a sign's creation are equally important parts of the puzzle.

Cross signs and their meanings

If we are to believe John Chrysostom, one of the most important Church Fathers of Late Antiquity, the sign of the cross was already ubiquitous in the cityscape of the later fourth century since 'one can see [the cross] celebrated everywhere, in houses, in marketplaces, in deserts, in streets […]'.[18] It is eventually found on elements of furniture, cutlery, tableware, clothes, jewellery, mosaics, walls, door posts and lintels, capitals, and so on.[19] There have been deploringly few attempts to understand why crosses became so omnipresent. Studies of crosses appearing in the wider cityscape, both as graffiti and as architectural decoration, are still fairly rare and traditionally focus on one particular context or class of materials.[20] The only detailed overview and attempt of interpretation of cross signs in a secular setting has been the study of the architectural decorations found on Kurşunlugerme and a handful of other aqueduct bridges of the water supply system of Constantinople.[21] Otherwise, it has been very common to label crosses as indicators of 'Christianization', without specifying what exactly this process meant or what role cross-carving played in it in the first place.

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[16] Keenan, 'Graffiti and dipinti as monumenta and verba', p. 499.
[17] See especially Taylor, 'Graffiti and the Epigraphic Habit'.
[18] Contra *Iudaeos et Gentiles*, attributed to John Chrysostom, translated in Maguire, Maguire, and Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*, p. 18.
[19] For an overview, see Dinkler and Dinkler-von Schubert, 'Kreuz I'.
[20] Crosses on statuary: Kristensen, 'Miraculous bodies' with references to all the older literature; crosses at pagan sites: Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*, I, passim and esp. p. 245 (Christian signs as part of the deconsecration of temples); Saradi and Eliopoulos, 'Late Paganism and Christianisation in Greece', p. 296; appearance of crosses in Christian pilgrimage sanctuaries: Eck, 'Graffiti nei luoghi di pellegrinaggio dell'impero tardoantico'.
[21] Crow, 'The Christian Symbols and Iconography of the Aqueducts of Thrace'; and idem in this volume.

In principle, each cross ever applied had the potential to convey complicated and conceptual information, but its interpretation of course differed from time to time and from viewer to viewer. Suggested meanings and functions of cross signs include, amongst others, decorative,[22] devotional,[23] votive,[24] and prophylactic or apotropaic.[25] In addition they have been understood as symbols of status and/or identity,[26] evocations of divine or saintly presence,[27] as attracting good fortune,[28] or exorcising evil spirits,[29] and so on. The prophylactic-apotropaic meaning of the cross is especially present in late antique sources. Amongst others, Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century ensured his catechumens of the prophylactic power of the sign of the cross as 'the sign of the faithful and the fear of demons' (*Catecheses ad illuminandos* 13.36).[30] Gregory of Nyssa's (*c.* 335–95) sister Macrina wore an iron cross which is described as a φυλακτήριον (phylactery) (*Life of Saint Macrina*, 30). For the very same reason, Christians made the sign of the cross on their own foreheads (Julian, *Epistulae* 79, l. 12–17)[31] and those of their children (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians* 12.7 (*Patrologia Graeca* 61.106)).[32]

When defining the specific meaning and effectiveness of, and context and reasons for, drawing a cross, the following attributes of both the sign itself and of its context should be taken into consideration:

- The relationship with the surface on which the cross was applied. Was the addition respectful of the already present iconography/context, did it damage it, or replace it altogether?
- The tools used, the quality and the professionalism of its application. Some crosses were scratched in plaster or stone with a sharp implement, whereas others were

[22] From the fifth century onwards, crosses became part of the standard scheme of decoration of everyday items such as oil lamps and dining plates, as well as elements of architectural decoration such as column capitals. In some cases, graffiti and other depictions of crosses may have referred to large cross-monuments, honorific columns of which the original statue had been replaced by a cross. This has, for instance, been suggested for the cross monument depicted in the mosaic at Kastron Mefaa, but also for the graffiti of crosses on top of pedestals in the main street of Perge. Lavan, 'Distinctive Field Methods for Late Antiquity', pp. 59–60, figs 1–2, has convincingly discussed that they mimicked nearby honorific columns carrying crosses.

[23] E.g., large crosses appearing in the apses of church buildings as at St Apollinare in Classe where a jewelled gold cross represents the Transfiguration of Christ (Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, pp. 267–68).

[24] Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, pp. 71–72.

[25] See the discussions in Hjort, 'Augustus Christianus – Livia Christiana', esp. pp. 107–09; Israeli and Mevorah, *Cradle of Christianity*, pp. 127–45; Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, pp. 272–73.

[26] E.g., Bowes, 'Christian Images in the Home'.

[27] Dal Santo, 'Text, Image and the "Visionary Body"'.

[28] Maguire, 'Garments Pleasing to God'.

[29] As suggested in Saint's Lives: e.g., Wiśniewski, 'Pagan Temples, Christians and Demons'.

[30] Cited in Walter, 'IC XC NI KA', p. 214.

[31] Cited and translated in Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies', p. 36.

[32] Discussed in Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity*, pp. 151–52.

applied by means of chisels or other specialist tools that suggest the involvement of a professional.[33]

- The time it took to scratch, carve, or paint it.
- Combinations with other symbols or signs. For instance, when crosses are combined with prophylactic or apotropaic signs such as the Evil Eye, they can be assumed to have been intended primarily to keep away evil spirits.
- The image or sign's exact location on the carrier. For instance, a cross incised in the exact centre of the torso of a statue, a statuary base, or building façade may differ from a cross applied off-centre.
- The cross's overall visibility and, consequently, its potential audience.
- The characterization of its creation as a private or communal decision.
- In addition, when known, it is worthwhile to take the wider context of the cross and its carrier into account. Each architectural environment housed specific activities, and a cross may have been connected or intended to influence them.

Crosses eventually could be accompanied by legends that specified their intended meaning.[34] Christopher Walter divided such crosses with legends in three groups: the first focussing on Christ (as God and son of God, as object of faith, and as source of light and joy), the second on the Cross (as the beginning of faith, singling out its redemptive function, or referring to places in the history of the Cross), and the third referred to the apotropaic power of the cross.[35] Such helpful and very specific legends are almost non-existent for Late Antiquity and also in Byzantine times remain a minority. Consequently, it is feasible that a cross sign could hold multiple meanings at the same time and could send a multifaceted message. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that the meaning, the impact, and importance of a cross sign or any other sign for that matter could change with time and context. Likewise, meaning and importance may have differed between carvers and later viewers and even between different viewers.

Troels Kristensen's corpus of cross-marked statuary comprises fifty-three statues marked with crosses either on the head, mostly on the forehead (twenty-five examples), and on other parts of the body (twenty-eight items).[36] They have been summarized here in Table

[33] Chaniotis, 'Graffiti in Aphrodisias', p. 193.
[34] Walter, 'IC XC NI KA'.
[35] Walter, 'IC XC NI KA', p. 212.
[36] Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies'; Kristensen, 'Addenda to T. M. Kristensen'. Assembling all these statues was no mean feat, considering how dispersed they are and how rarely some of them have turned up in publications.

1. He makes the point that some scholars have focused only on crosses on foreheads of statues, interpreting them as *sphragis* and connected to rites of baptism.[37] This one-sided interpretation is difficult to maintain when we see crosses added elsewhere on the body. Kristensen rightfully stresses the ambiguity of cross signs and points to the importance of the wider context in which the cross was displayed for a correct interpretation. He proposes the following intentions behind cross markings: purification that eliminated the dangerous powers of the statue but also destroyed the appearance of the statue partially or entirely; *interpretatio christiana*, whereby the originally pagan or honorific subject is reinterpreted as Christ, Mary, or a saint; and a more general Christianization, intended to reaffirm the ongoing validity of statues in the new world-view.

A similar extensive study of cross graffiti on architecture has not been carried out yet. Admittedly, the evidence even for one site is even more difficult to gather than that of statues, having to be gleaned from all the different publications of individual monuments and preliminary excavation reports. Mostly, it simply remains unpublished, even unnoticed, and still has to be gathered painstakingly on-site, where it often is clearly visible only at certain moments in the day, when the sun hits the wall or column or slab in exactly the right angle.[38] Angelos Chaniotis has been surveying graffiti at Aphrodisias since 1995; Luke Lavan did a survey at Sagalassos between 2004 and 2006. They both pointed out how graffiti can inform us about activities carried out in specific locations in the cityscape. Lavan has shown how a careful analysis of their context can help date graffiti, and made a major contribution to the research by drawing attention to the time it took to actually carve a cross sign.[39] His interpretations of the gathered evidence, however, remain limited to the spatial and social context of their creation and barely touch upon the underlying reasons.[40] Chaniotis, on the other hand, has looked for explanations for cross-carving for at least a subcategory of the cross signs recorded at Aphrodisias. Chaniotis discussed the growing rivalry and competition between Christians, Jews, and pagans at Aphrodisias over the course of the fourth century and beyond, pointing to expressions of this in, amongst others, the growing number of religiously

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But, as Kristensen rightly states, without a complete overview of the corpus, interpretation is extremely hazardous.

[37] Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies', pp. 31–34

[38] See also Lavan, 'Distinctive Field Methods for Late Antiquity', p. 66, who has a fairly optimistic view of the easy with which graffiti can be noted.

[39] Lavan, 'Distinctive Field Methods for Late Antiquity', pp. 65–66.

[40] Lavan, 'Distinctive Field Methods for Late Antiquity', p. 65; Lavan, 'The Agorai of Sagalassos in Late Antiquity', pp. 347–48.

inspired names used in inscriptions as well as in religious graffiti.[41] This interpretation has resonance for the study of cross graffiti in general.

Rivalry between human religious factions

Chaniotis remarked that signs of the pagan faith recurrently appeared in the immediate proximity of crosses. He refers to a *labrys* or double axe associated with Zeus positioned next to a large, elegant cross on the pavement below the Tetrapylon at Aphrodisias, the monument which initially gave access to the famous temple of Aphrodite.[42] Furthermore, two double axes on the plastered walls of rooms behind the stage building of the Bouleuterion were found amidst multiple Christian graffiti.[43] Three double axes discovered on a cistern wall near the Hadrianic Baths were located near a late antique personal name accompanied by a cross. Interestingly, one of these three axes had been 'erased' at an unknown moment in time, though the others survive intact. Such (partial) erasures happened to signs of the Jewish religion as well, such as one of the menorahs found in the local Sebasteion.[44] Chaniotis interpreted both the physical proximity of religious signs and the mutilation of some of them as signs of rivalry between diverse factions within the city: one sign was in all likelihood applied in reaction to the other, in a sort of epigraphic 'dialogue'. Dating these symbols and signs is of course difficult. Theoretically, they could even predate the fourth century, but Chaniotis is probably very right to suppose that Christian signs would not be applied so prominently in public space before the religion gained lawful status. In addition, since first names that were religiously tinted apparently became more prominent at Aphrodisias only in the course of the fourth century, it would seem that opposing religious factions and hence the climate for the creation of such signs only appeared then.

It may be true that signs indicating the adherence to a certain religion at least in origin were conscious attempts of opposition against other, very real and very present, religious factions.[45] However, rather than being spontaneous outbursts of religious fervour, they were

[41] Chaniotis, 'Zwischen Konfrontation und Interaktion'; Chaniotis, 'Graffiti in Aphrodisias', pp. 202–04.
[42] See also Chaniotis, 'The Conversion of the Temple of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias in Context', p. 259, fig. 11.
[43] Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*, p. 245; Chaniotis, 'Zwischen Konfrontation und Interaktion', pp. 104–05; Chaniotis, 'The Conversion of the Temple of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias in Context', p. 259.
[44] Chaniotis, 'Zwischen Konfrontation und Interaktion', pp. 95–96, fig. 4.
[45] Mairs, 'Egyptian "Inscriptions"', p. 157, refers to modern studies of 'latrinalia', rivalry graffiti, applied in immediate response to pre-existing short texts, signs, or drawings. Keenan, 'Blogging Rome', discusses clusters of graffiti in Pompeii, many of which consist of texts responding to older graffiti. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*, I, pp. 121–22, mentions a textual example from Deir al-Bahari that is very comparable to the juxtaposed religious signs at Aphrodisias: a pagan votive inscription pleading to the triad Asklepois, Amenothoes, and Hygeia for help was at an unknown moment in time supplemented by three cross graffiti and the inscription, 'There is one God who helps you'.

in all likelihood premeditated.[46] As stated above, appliers of graffiti were aware that their sign would be seen by others. If the creation of the sign would provoke an opposing faction in society, intentionally or not, its location was probably not random. Very visible locations in the city, such as the Tetrapylon at Aphrodisias, were thus not just a coincidental surface, a passive stage on which religious strife was settled, but a valued asset to both parties and thus an important agent in the process of cross-carving. The use of graffiti as markers of territory is a known present day phenomenon.[47] When in Antiquity signs of more than one religion were applied next to each other, they may very well represent subsequent attempts to establish ownership of the space or monument or object in question.[48]

The importance of the location on which menorahs, double axes, and crosses were applied is all the more clear when looking at other contexts in which they appear. Most signs were not found immediately next to others, but, for instance, were applied on the doorposts of singular shops. Cross graffiti, but also graffiti of menorahs, are known from the shops established in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias and from the Shops along the Marble Road at Sardis, capital of the province of Lydia, amongst others.[49] In these cases they did not indicate direct competition with real-life religious rivals, but rather signalled that the owner of the shop adhered to this particular religion and also, as will be argued hereafter, that the space was Christian (or Jewish) territory and watched over by God. This message would have been understood by humans, but could also have been applied with non-human audiences in mind.

Non-human audiences

It cannot be excluded that religious competition between real-life factions continued for a very long time. At Aphrodisias, but also elsewhere, there is solid evidence for the continuity of Jewish and resilient pagan elements in society into the early sixth century.[50] However, there are some indications that the significance of a non-human target audience augmented

[46] See Zadorojnyi, 'Transcripts of Dissent?', p. 113, for the aspect of premeditation when applying provocative graffiti.
[47] See Mairs, 'Egyptian "Inscriptions"', p. 157, for modern examples and literature on graffiti as markings of territory.
[48] On the importance of the environment when applying graffiti, see Mairs, 'Egyptian "Inscriptions"', p. 156.
[49] Aphrodisias: Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias*, pp. 133–34; Chaniotis, 'The Jews of Aphrodisias', pp. 236–37, nos. 6–16; Sardis: Crawford, *The Byzantine Shops at Sardis*, p. 49 and 65, mentions a cross found on the door jamb of Byzantine Shop E3 and two menorahs incised just inside the south door of Shop E7. Such statements are known from other shops as well and regularly accompany *topos* inscriptions.
[50] Chaniotis, 'Zwischen Konfrontation und Interaktion', pp. 100–03. For continuity of pagan cult in general, see Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*.

over time as well.[51] Although the importance of supernatural forces for late antique and Byzantine Christians has been long neglected, it has recently been argued that the belief in demons was highly prevalent and influential.[52] Moreover, the supernatural also included forces such as good or bad luck, envy, and even natural phenomena such as earthquakes.[53]

The significance of the supernatural is apparent with crosses added in locations that would not or would barely have been visible to human eyes. One example is the brick crosses applied to the fortification walls at Nikopolis: the walls were built by separate building crews responsible for individual sections. The locations where two crews met could be recognized by the presence of smaller construction mistakes but also by the addition of brick crosses in the wall fabric.[54] They are hardly noticeable today and were probably almost never seen by passers-by in Antiquity. Their application to the most vulnerable sections of the fortification should rather be interpreted as the builders' attempt to manipulate non-human forces and thus safeguard their work. The aqueduct bridges of the water supply system of Constantinople are a similar example.[55] In 2008, Crow listed all symbols applied to the bridges of the system, Kurşunlugerme possessing by far the largest number. Most of the symbols would have been visible to visitors to the Kurşunlugerme bridge, or at least if they climbed the bridge's staircases and platforms, but it is not clear how many people actually came to this remote monument.[56] There is no major settlement nearby, no major road passing in the vicinity. Hence, the investment of time and energy in carving is remarkable. Many symbols appear on cornice blocks, voussoirs, and keystones, which are the most vital and vulnerable elements of the entire structure.[57] If they were damaged by an earthquake or attacked for whatever reason, the entire structure would fall, and the water supply to Constantinople would be severely disrupted. But there were also signs in other, less structurally vital places, which have been explained as attempts to attract good luck.[58] In both cases, rather than being intended primarily for future human audiences, the crosses can again be considered as messages for supernatural forces.

[51] The shift from human to supernatural opponents can be recognized in the conception and interpretation of the Evil Eye by church fathers as well. They denied its effects on human agents, but they do admit that evil can harm good Christians (Dickie, 'The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye').
[52] See Kalleres, 'Exorcising the Devil to Silence Christ's Enemies', for an overview of the literary sources.
[53] Maguire, Maguire, and Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*; Maguire, 'Garments Pleasing to God'; Dickie, 'The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye'.
[54] Bowden, *Epirus Vetus*, p. 99.
[55] Crow, 'The Christian Symbols and Iconography of the Aqueducts of Thrace'.
[56] Ibid., pp. 162–63.
[57] Ibid., p. 163.
[58] Ibid., pp. 163–64.

Crosses that were (quasi) invisible to human audiences after their creation are known from urban contexts as well.[59] They were either intentionally hidden or were located in dark corners and rooms. Consequently, they would only have been visible during their creation and the inauguration ceremony of the structure.[60] Interestingly, Kristensen mentions three cases of comparable cross graffiti on statues: a colossal statue of Athena from the Athenian Acropolis, a portrait statue of the priestess Nikeso found at Priene next to the propylon of the sanctuary of Demeter, and an over-life-size female portrait statue, possibly of a priestess from Melos.[61] The first was marked with three crosses on her back, the two others both had one. The fact that these crosses were applied to the back of the statues and not to their forehead, chest, or leg, as was much more common, implies that their later visibility to a human audience was not very important to the carvers of the crosses.

Theoretically it is possible that these cross graffiti had been applied by subversive Christians in a time when such practices were not allowed. In this context, it is worthwhile comparing these graffiti to the famous Χ Μ Γ legends found on the back of the head of two late antique portrait statues from Aphrodisias.[62] The exact nature of the acronym is not agreed upon, but it was probably Christian, meaning something like 'Christon Maria Gennai', 'Christ was born to Mary',[63] and was fairly widespread in late antique and early Byzantine centuries, although of course not nearly as pervasive as the sign of the cross. The location of the acronyms would prevent them from being visible after the statues had been erected. All evidence suggests that in these cases, the original sculptors applied the letters when completing the commissioned statues. Their hidden location can probably be explained because the message would not have been approved of by the contemporary community of citizens and maybe not by the honorands in question either. In both cases, the carving was therefore a private initiative that would have remained unknown to others. The same cannot be said for the marking of the statues at Athens, Priene, and Melos. They had been on display for several centuries before the crosses were added to them. The application probably took place in their public setting, it was executed by people that were not the original sculptors, it very likely took some time to complete, and, consequently, probably would not have gone by

[59] Ibid., p. 164, lists some examples from Constantinople. See Avigad, 'A Building Inscription of the Emperor Justinian', for a dedication inscription accompanied by a large cross in a cistern underneath the Nea Church at Jerusalem.
[60] Avigad, 'A Building Inscription of the Emperor Justinian', p. 150.
[61] Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies', cat no. B11; Kristensen, 'Addenda to T. M. Kristensen', Add. 1 and Add. 2.
[62] Smith, 'The Statue Monument of Oecumenius', pp. 150–53. The head kept in the Royal Museum of Arts in Brussels in addition has the words Θ(ε)έ, βοήθη '(God, help (me))!' added onto its back.
[63] Smith, 'The Statue Monument of Oecumenius', p. 150.

unnoticed.[64] It is therefore more likely that the application of crosses on these statues was endorsed by the majority of the population and that there was another reason to apply the crosses in locations where they would not be very visible later on. A possible explanation is that they did not harm the aesthetic appearance of the statue at all, while at the same time offered the guarantee that the statues had safely been incorporated into the Christian world.

It would not be surprising that Christians developed a desire to visibly mark their surroundings with crosses as a means of reassuring their safety. In the cities of the Roman empire, pagan religious life had been deeply imbedded in every aspect of daily life, in institutions, in ceremonies and feasts, and in most buildings and decoration. Christians grew up amongst these traditions and in these physical surroundings that they had inherited. There are multiple indications telling us that Christians experienced a feeling of unease, sometimes menace, because they believed to be surrounded by potentially dangerous forces. According to John Chrysostom, for instance, not a single space or custom was free of religious significance, and danger lurked around every corner.[65] Especially temples, but also other urban spaces such as theatres and bath buildings with their traditional statuary decoration, as well as ancient customs such as civic festivals, were frequently associated with demonic powers. Hagiographical sources of the Eastern Roman empire make it very clear that cities with their constant temptations and roaming demons are to be repudiated.[66] Even after their closure, temples were seen as housing demons, but they also roamed the streets of cities and attacked people on the road.[67] As Robert Wiśniewski phrased it: 'In all these texts we can see a common idea and a need of a fight over space against demons who, when deprived of specific physical dwellings, will disappear from the earth altogether.' That fear of the supernatural also impacted everyday life is apparent in the integration of exorcism in the preparations for baptism,[68] in the characterization of the cross as 'the most powerful of all phylacteries', but also in the omnipresence of magical devices unsanctioned by the church, such as magical gems, amulets, pendants to avert evil, and so on.[69]

[64] In theory, it cannot be excluded that the crosses were applied in secret by Christians in charge of a potential relocation of the statues.
[65] For examples present in the sermons of Chrysostom, see Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, pp. 144–48; Andrade, 'The Processions of John Chrysostom', p. 166.
[66] See Saradi, *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century*, pp. 102–05, on the difficult relation between saints and cities.
[67] See Saradi, 'The Christianization of Pagan Temples', for Greek hagiographical material on demons in temples and elsewhere.
[68] Rousseau, 'Baptism', p. 330. The exorcism took place at regular intervals during Lent.
[69] For an introduction, see Maguire, 'Magic and the Christian Image'; Dickie, 'The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye'; Russell, 'The Archaeological Context of Magic'.

Wiśniewski has convincingly argued that this belief in demons and their omnipresence appears to be limited to the eastern half of the empire, whereas in the West it was not apparent, maybe not even present at all.[70] Whereas temples in the Eastern Roman empire were considered to be the lairs of demons and thus needed to be dismantled or converted into churches, temples in the West were simply abandoned by the end of the fourth century. A belief in demons only appears sporadically by the end of the sixth century, possibly under Eastern influence. In late antique Western stories about temple destruction, the enemies encountered are always of a human or earthly nature. Western monks were not tempted by demons as were their eastern counterparts. Wiśniewski traced the origins of this distinction back to pre-Christian times. In the East, worshippers could have direct contact with deities, notably by means of incubation and oracles, divine epiphanies that were absent in the West. Interestingly cross graffiti have not been attested in the western provinces.[71] If cross signs were intended only for real-life opponents, one would expect to find at least a number of them spread over the cityscape. Their absence in the West and omnipresence in the East, thus, can be linked to the differing beliefs in the existence of demons, or, more broadly the supernatural.

Christians had to find a way to deal with all elements that were in one way or another considered dangerous, obscure, suspect, polluted, and so on. Destroying entire monuments and erasing all elements reminiscent of paganism was obviously not an option. Even temples remain standing unless their building materials were needed for a new construction project.[72] Christians had several means to protect themselves in these dangerous surroundings and extend the reach of God's authority beyond the church.[73] Processions and associated psalm-singing may have been a first useful tool for establishing Christian authority over a city.[74] During such events, the faithful would move in a group through the city, from church to church, singing psalms and carrying wax candles, torches fuelled by papyri and olive oil, as well as large crosses. The streets and monuments where they passed would share in the

[70] Wiśniewski, 'Pagan Temples, Christians and Demons'.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Jacobs, 'A Time for Prayer and a Time for Pleasure', pp. 133–34. Recently, Aude Busine ('From Stones to Myth' and 'The Conquest of the Past') has shown that even literary attestations of temple destruction are most unlikely.
[73] Churches were conceived as safe havens. In the course of the fourth century, inscriptions and literary passages referring to churches as *locus sanctus* become numerous (Markus, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?', pp. 263–64; Sotinel, 'Les lieux de culte chrétiens'; Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean*, pp. 14–26 and 34–44). All three publications provide further references on this complicated matter.
[74] Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship*, pp. 231, 257, and 259–65; Andrade, 'The Processions of John Chrysostom', pp. 162–67. See also the more elaborate discussion in Jacobs, 'A Time for Prayer and a Time for Pleasure', pp. 205–08.

sanctity of the event and became part of the new Christian world order. However, because they are 'embodied practices', the impact of such processions was very likely only temporary.[75] After the faithful had again dispersed, the feeling of power and security was probably perceived to dissolve rapidly. This point was made already by Nathanael Andrade in his examination of the processions organized by John Chrysostom at Constantinople.[76] Especially the funerary oration for John makes it very clear that while John was bishop of the city processions were staged on a regular basis, generating new meanings for all locations where his congregation passed by. After his departure, the prayers stopped, his unified community fell apart, and, consequently, civic spaces again lost their Christianized character.[77]

In staging processions Christians sought to extend the authority of God beyond the church building and map a new Christian interpretation onto the wider cityscape. In order to do this in a more permanent way, however, physical alterations to the urban fabric are unavoidable. Physical alterations or the materialization of a change invariably gives the impression that the change is permanent, can no longer be reversed, or can no longer be questioned or contested.[78] For this reason the cross was applied onto city gates, on street and agora columns, on the walls of public buildings, on statues that were still considered valuable, on game boards, and so on.

Cross graffiti on statuary and reliefs

For the remainder of this paper, I will explore some of the ways to interpret the significance of cross graffiti. In this section, I will first summarize on which statues cross graffiti have been found (Table 1). Thereafter, I will stress that a cross marking altered their identity to such a degree that they could remain in place in the urban landscape. Finally, I will try to demonstrate how important it is to reconstruct the physical context of display of these statues. In the following sections, I will touch upon the circumstances of cross marking, the perceived effectiveness of cross signs, and the difficult question of dating.

First, let us return to the Tetrapylon at Aphrodisias. As mentioned above, it was one of the monuments beneath which graffiti of both a double axe and a large, elegant cross were

[75] For the theoretical framework on 'embodied' and 'inscribed' practices, see Hodder and Hutson, *Reading the Past*, pp. 66–67 with further references.
[76] Andrade, 'The Processions of John Chrysostom'.
[77] *Oratio Funebris* 97.7–16. See Andrade, 'The Processions of John Chrysostom', pp. 178–83, for an elaborate discussion.
[78] Demarrais and others 'Ideology, Materialization and Power Strategies'; Hodder and Hutson, *Reading the Past*, pp. 66–67.

carved, suggesting that the monument was considered valuable enough for two different groups in society to claim it as their own. Although it technically belonged to the sanctuary of Aphrodite, it is not unexpected that also Christians would want to preserve this monument, as it is both aesthetically very pleasing and located on a major street in the city centre. They eventually succeeded in making it their own when the bust of Aphrodite that had originally decorated the monument was carved away and replaced by another large and elegant cross (Fig. 1). This replacement made it possible to give the larger monument a new Christian identity.

With the majority of cross-marked statues, intentions appear to have been very similar. Admittedly, there are a few (two of pagan deities, a table leg in the shape of a ram bearer and an honorific portrait)[79] where the application of the cross or crosses to the head either destroyed the features of the subject completely or took the form of mutilations to the sensory organs. This targeting of the face or its distinctive features was a familiar feature of *damnatio memoriae*, intended to erase the subject from memory or to indicate that he or she was not worthy of being remembered.[80] Even in such cases, it is not unlikely that the statues were shown afterwards.[81] However, much more often the addition of the cross changed little to the original subject and respected all its distinguishing features, enabling the statue to stay on display largely unaltered. The remaining collection includes six other statues of deities, mythological figures such as Herakles and a satyr, as well as a naked kouros statue, various figurative table legs, and herms.[82] In addition, twenty-seven of the fifty-three cross-marked statues depicted real-life persons, among which there were two and maybe up to three priestesses,[83] one heroic nude and two funerary depictions, but also thirteen portraits of statues of citizens or benefactors and eight imperial statues.

Admittedly, there are a few examples of honorific portraits that were both carefully marked with a cross and 'mutilated' in another manner. Examples include the faces of the figures on a funerary stele at the Archaeological Museum at Istanbul and the basalt bust of

[79] Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies', A11, A18, A20 (possibly smashed only in the seventh or eighth century), and A17.
[80] In the Imperial age, emperors as well as some individuals are known to have suffered *damnatio* (Varner, *From Caligula to Constantine*; Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation*).
[81] Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation*, p. 3.
[82] Their interpretation is especially problematic because their particular shape made them suitable for reuse as building blocks. It is probably for this reason that so many of them were found headless, with crosses added to the shaft, or, in one example (B13), completely reworked in the shape of a Christian templon post.
[83] B2, Add. 1 and possibly Add. 2. Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies', p. 50, identified both B1 and B2 as 'Branchid', members of Didyma's priestly family. However, as argued by Tuchelt, *Die archäischen Skulpturen von Didyma*, pp. 215–19, the label of *Branchidae* goes back to 1863, but is not based on solid evidence. Tuchelt argues instead that all seated votive statues depict benefactors, who, in the case of the female statues, could have been priestesses as well. Consequently, B1 is in Table 1 labelled as a benefactor, B2 as priestess statue.

Germanicus in the British Museum[84] (Fig. 2) In the case of the stele, the execution of the crosses was extremely careful and skilful (cf. infra). The bust of Germanicus had a cross carved neatly on his forehead, but his throat also bears marks, probably as a reference to decapitation, his nose was cut away, and his right ear lobe was cut off, again suggesting that he suffered *damnatio*.[85] I have suggested already elsewhere that the cross carving and the other marks do not have to belong to the same time period.[86] All carvings took quite some effort, especially due to the hardness of the stone. Consequently, the cross-carving in first instance might have been sufficient to preserve the statue, while in a later period *damnatio* was considered necessary. It is unlikely that one would mark a statue as Christian and condemn its memory at the same time. Admittedly, at Ephesus, portraits of Augustus and Livia were found in small fragments underneath a sixth-century pavement in the city's former basilica[87] (Fig. 3) The smaller Augustus portrait may have originally been housed in the *temenos* of the nearby temple of Caesar and Dea Roma. The original setting of the colossal statues inside the *chalcidicum* at the eastern end of the basilica implies that they once possessed a cult-function. As such, it is not impossible they were targeted by zealous Christians. However, since the basilica itself was destroyed around 500, the portraits were in all likelihood only smashed at this time and their remains used as building material in the construction of the later peristyle.[88] Rothaus suggests that a discolouration of the crosses on the foreheads of Augustus and Livia found at Ephesus were created by rubbing, indicating they remained active for quite some time before their burial.[89]

The use of the statues after the cross addition is overall difficult to establish because so many of them lack a find context or were found outside their last context of display. However, the few lucky exceptions that we do possess suggest that reinstating statues after the creation of a cross was fairly common practice. The discovery of two cross-marked female portraits recovered from amidst the collapse of the so-called 'Strassenbrunnen' to the southeast of the city centre of Ephesus confirms that they had stayed in place until the architecture around them collapsed. Likewise, a cross-marked headless satyr was discovered in the ruins of the famous nymphaeum of Miletus, a city on the west coast of Asia Minor in ancient Caria (Fig. 4). An archaic lion found in situ in the frigidarium of the Faustina Baths had a cross added to

[84] Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies', cat. nos. B5 and A10.
[85] See Kristensen, 'Embodied Images', pp. 229–32, for an extensive discussion. Kristensen implicitly assumes that all secondary carvings were contemporaneous.
[86] Jacobs, 'From Production to Destruction?', p. 280, note 82.
[87] Alzinger, 'Das Regierungsviertel', p. 262; Langmann, 'Eine Kaisertaufe (?) in Ephesos', pp. 65–69; Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies', pp. 45–47.
[88] Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity*, p. 82.
[89] Rothaus, *Corinth: the First City of Greece*, pp. 112–14.

its back. Two cross-marked statues were recovered from where they were still standing alongside the Sacred Way connecting Miletus with Didyma. Finally, also the nude statue of a young man from Thubursicum Numidarium, a smaller city in the North African province of Numidia Cirtensis, was found in the niche of a Nymphaeum.

In the last case, Kristensen suggested that the re-display of the statue could have been a Christian context.[90] A continued display in a standard urban nymphaeum would, however, seem the most likely option. On the whole, the evidence for crosses added to statuary in nymphaea is substantial: three out of the five examples of statues found in context. Secondly, it can be argued that quite a few of the cross-marked statues found outside a context once belonged to a display façade, either a fountain façade or, less likely, a theatre facade. For this, it is necessary to take a closer look at the exact locations of the crosses. Kristensen already remarked that in some cases, the cross was scratched or chiselled neatly in the centre of the statues.[91] This is of course the case for most of the crosses on foreheads, but it was also apparent with the nude statue from Thubursicum Numidarium, the kouros from Didyma, a trapezophoron with Ganymedes from Athens, a cuirassed statue of Marcus Aurelius in Alexandria, a Herakles statuette from Tralles, a clypeus portrait of Marcus Aurelius from Eleusis, a Serapis from Puteoli, a Dionysos statuette found by the river Don, and even the lion in the Faustina Baths at Miletus. A centrally located cross graffito suggests that considerable care and premeditation went into the carving, but it does not necessarily indicate possibilities for Christian reinterpretation, as surmised by Kristensen. It was in all probability first and foremost connected to the display position of these statues. The particular nature of these statues makes it very likely that they were intended to be seen from the front. They were either free standing or placed centrally in a larger ensemble. Other examples whereby the cross is added a-centrally must have belonged to the right or left ends of the façade setting. This is clear both for the Artemis found at Corinth that had the cross added on the left thigh and was clearly intended to be placed in the right wing of a façade with her face and body directed towards the centre. Conversely, the satyr discovered in the fountain façade of Miletus must have belonged to the left wing, which would explain the appearance of a second cross on his right side.

Thirdly, although most statues discovered were not marked by crosses at all, their immediate surroundings often were. Thus we find crosses added, for instance, in between the reliefs of theatres, surrounding statues in bath houses, and, unsurprisingly, on the façades of

[90] Kristensen, ‘Miraculous Bodies’, pp. 40–41.
[91] Ibid., pp. 40–42.

fountains, in between and in front of the statuary ensembles. The Hadrianic Nymphaeum at Sagalassos was still in possession of part of its statuary decoration when it finally collapsed, including a colossal statue of a seated Apollo Kitharodos, a colossal head of Demeter, a statue of Poseidon, a statue of a satyr, a headless statue of a half-nude Aphrodite *pudica*, and a statue of the so-called Large-Herculaneum type.[92] The statues themselves do not seem to be marked with crosses, although the possibility of painted or chalked crosses cannot be excluded. However, on the lowest steps of the monument in front of the basin a large cross graffito with open flared ends had been added (Fig. 5).[93] Its execution may not have been particularly professional, but it was done with care. Likewise, the Antonine Nymphaeum on the Upper Agora of Sagalassos preserved images of pagan gods until it collapsed in the early seventh century. In its final phase, there was room for a total of ten statues, eight of which have been retrieved in various states of preservation. Both corner *aediculae* harboured a life-size group of Dionysios and a satyr; there is evidence for a torso of a naked youth, a Nemesis, a statue of Koronis, a lower arm with a snake coiled around it belonging to a statue of Hygeia, an Askleipios, and a plinth bearing the feet of a male statue, which may be identified as Apollo. Again, none of the statues themselves were marked by crosses, but the Christian inhabitants of the town claimed the monument as their own by writing a Christian inscription in red paint on the archivolt of the central niche and inserting into its decoration small slabs adorned with well-carved crosses in diamond-shaped frames and quadrangular andesite blocks with crosses inside circles.[94] Traces of mortar on these blocks fuelled the hypothesis that they were used to seal off the corner *aediculae* housing Dionysios, perhaps because the god was perceived as a dangerous opponent by the Christians, who did not allow him to meet the public gaze.[95] However, the care with which these blocks were carved and the fact that they recall the coffer blocks from the primary decoration phase suggest they were intended as a decorative way to Christianize the ensemble.[96] Variants of such adjustments are present in other cities as well. For instance at Stratonikeia in the province of Caria in Western Asia Minor, a large cross

[92] Mägele, Richard, and Waelkens, 'A Late-Hadrianic Nymphaeum'.
[93] Lavan, 'The Agorai of Sagalassos in Late Antiquity', p. 343.
[94] Waelkens and others 'The 1994 and 1995 Excavation Seasons at Sagalassos', pp. 161–62. Whether the slabs with crosses were reconstructed as parapets in the *aediculae* themselves or were instead late replacements for the cassette blocks remains to be determined.
[95] Waelkens and others' The 1994 and 1995 Excavation Seasons at Sagalassos', p. 151, 162, and repeated in Talloen, 'From Pagan to Christian', pp. 582–84.
[96] According to Marc Waelkens, the statues of the last ensemble had been decapitated and smashed to pieces before the nymphaeum itself collapsed. This, in his opinion, would account for their state of preservation with only the Nemesis completely preserved. By contrast, I believe that the statues were still entirely or largely intact when they toppled over during the early seventh century, after which the fragments that were not buried underneath building debris were removed to be burnt to lime. See discussion in Jacobs, 'From Production to Destruction?', p. 277.

inside a double circle was added to one of the columns of the Severan Gate Nymphaeum (Fig. 6). The statuary decoration of this nymphaeum was again largely recovered from amidst the architectural debris.[97]

Like the Tetrapylon at Aphrodisias, with which I started this section, civic nymphaea overall were highly valued monuments. They were the most prominent show façades of their community, located in highly conspicuous locations on nodal points in the traffic network or on civic agorae. The cooling effect of flowing water caused them to have an extremely pleasing effect on the hot and crowded cities of the eastern Mediterranean. Like theatre façades, they possessed luxurious columnar architecture and offered room for multiple statues.[98] Unlike theatre façades, however, their status and visibility was not dependent on the continuation of games or events. Although late changes to the statuary compositions of some nymphaea are known, most of them survived with at least part of their statuary decoration intact until the end of Antiquity. The addition of cross signs to the statues or to the architecture itself may have been one of the factors enabling preservation of such classical architecture and pagan-mythological subjects to take place. Of course, in order to confirm this hypothesis a much more extensive survey of the graffiti on fountain structures is necessary, and, as said, we may never recover evidence for crosses that were not carved but painted or chalked.

There is nonetheless much to learn from the examples of carved and painted crosses that we do possess. Their exact location and appearance can at least offer some indications of the circumstances surrounding their creation. First of all, it is meaningful that the painted cross attested at the Antonine Nymphaeum at Sagalassos was placed in the central niche, or that the pecked cross at the Hadrianic Nymphaeum appeared on the steps in the very centre of the building. Another, much more modest example, is a smaller cross on the upper moulding of an honorific statue base, again exactly in the centre.[99] As was the case with statues and their central markings, the careful positioning of such crosses indicates planning and care.

The same care is apparent in the execution of these central crosses. As mentioned above, Lavan, in cooperation with a sculptor, has estimated the creation time of several crosses in the cityscape of Sagalassos. Scratching a cross into a stone surface with a sharp object would not have taken very long; most small crosses known from all over the eastern

[97] Özgan, *Die Skulpturen von Stratonikeia*; Mert, 'Die Tor- und Nymphaeumanlage von Stratonikeia'; Jacobs, 'Old Habits Die Hard'.
[98] See Jacobs and Richard, 'We Surpass the Beautiful Waters of Other Cities', esp. pp. 41–43, for the continued appreciation for the statuary ensembles of urban fountains.
[99] Lavan, 'The Agorai of Sagalassos in Late Antiquity', p. 319, fig. 10a, top right.

Mediterranean could have been carved in ten to twenty minutes. They sometimes appear alone but often accompany prayers, place inscriptions, and other inscribed texts. Similar graffiti crosses are found on coins and domestic items such as table wares and oil lamps as well. In short, these crosses are most likely to represent the actions of an individual.

Quite a few of the cross graffiti on statues, like for instance those found on the portraits of Augustus and Livia at Ephesus, are also this simple. They were applied with care, but were not necessarily skilful or labour- and time-intensive. Other crosses would have taken much longer to create. Thus the three crosses with flaring arms on the Herakles statuette from Tralles were not scratched, but pecked. When compared to some of the examples from Sagalassos analysed by Lavan, it can be hypothesized that the pecking of one cross would have taken up to an hour.[100] The pecking of the cross on the steps of the Hadrianic Nymphaeum (7 by 15 cm) likewise must have taken over an hour. The chiselled crosses applied to the armour of the statue of Marcus Aurelius or to the tetrapylon at Aphrodisias may have taken five or more hours to finish and required the involvement of a professional sculptor.[101] A professional also must have been responsible for the carving of the cross on the Gate-Nymphaeum at Stratonikeia or the three crosses on a funerary stela kept in the Archaeological Museum at Istanbul.[102] All of these were chiseled with great care, but the largest cross, placed on the clothing on the central male figure, in its size, technique, and elaboration resembles new architectural decoration. In all these cases, both because of the time investment and often the central placement, it can be hypothesized that in the minds of contemporaries there was little or no distinction between crosses as architectural decoration and these graffiti. As said in the beginning of this article, graffiti are a very indistinctive category of markings, their main characteristic being that they were added at a later moment in the lifespan of the building or statue, altering the identity and interpretation of the surface to which they were applied.

The differences in techniques and time of applying do not necessarily indicate a different purpose, but may point to different social circumstances. When a remarkable investment of time and energy can be noticed, and especially when these characteristics are combined with a central location, it is hardly likely that we are dealing with individual

[100] My hypothesis, based on a comparison of all examples in Lavan, 'The Agorai of Sagalassos in Late Antiquity'.
[101] My hypothesis, based on a comparison of all examples in Lavan, 'The Agorai of Sagalassos in Late Antiquity'.
[102] Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies', cat. no. B15 with further references. A professional no doubt was also responsible for the strangest example in Kristensen's collection: the female statue head from Rhodes that was completely recurved in the form of a cross with legend.

actions. On the contrary, in such cases, it can be surmised that the drawing of the cross was part of a large ceremony. As mentioned above, for political graffiti acclamations, a connection has been made between actual ceremonies accompanied by shouted acclamations and their physical remnants, the graffiti texts. Therefore, these graffiti were not random carvings or 'simple, conventional formulae',[103] but reflections of actual events. The events could be inauguration ceremonies of buildings, but also include the reception of imperial portraits, the visit of a high official, or even repetitive ceremonies in front of an imperial statues.[104] Furthermore, Roueché has suggested that there also might be a connection between public ceremonies and inscribed circles on street pavements.[105] I would like to propose here that some crosses at least were directly connected to Christian ceremonies that probably set out from one of the churches of the city in a formal ecclesiastical procession with the clear goal of incorporating a valued monument into the Christian city.[106] There are two reasons to connect the more elaborate graffiti crosses not only to Christian ceremonies, but specifically to processions like the ones mentioned above. Firstly, they appear frequently along major streets, on their columns and walls, as well as on some columns of major urban squares, where there is not much other reason to apply them. Fig. 7 shows an example of the colonnaded street at Sagalassos, 19 cm high, Fig. 8 a combination of such crosses on the smooth wall surface of an arch integrated in the north wall of a major street in the northeast corner of the Upper Agora. Secondly, some of the cross graffiti have the specific shape of a processional cross. A large, professionally cut cross (25 by 20 cm) on one of the columns of the Lower Agora at Sagalassos had a spike or handle at the bottom.[107] But also the well-executed cross on the grave stela in the Archaeological Museum at Istanbul displayed a similar spike. Ideally, the locations and appearance of all these crosses are compared — especially a comparison between the quantity and quality of crosses in major colonnaded streets with those in residential alleys would be useful — but the archaeological record is at the moment not extensive enough to settle the matter.

Single cross graffiti and graffiti clusters

[103] Roueché, 'Looking for Late Antique Ceremonial', p. 162.
[104] Roueché, 'The Image of Victory'.
[105] Roueche, 'Late Roman and Byzantine Game Boards at Aphrodisias', pp. 100–05; Lavan, 'Distinctive Field Methods for Late Antiquity', pp. 64–65.
[106] Lavan, 'Distinctive Field Methods for Late Antiquity', p. 65; idem, 'The Agorai of Sagalassos in Late Antiquity', pp. 347–48 for a similar notion.
[107] Lavan, 'The Agorai of Sagalassos in Late Antiquity', p. 339. It was estimated that it took five hours to carve this cross.

The cross with spike was, however, not the only cross on the stela. There were two more. This was the case for a few of the cross-marked statues. On the Herakles statue from Tralles three crosses were carved, on the satyr from Miletus there were two, the colossal statue of Athena discovered at the Acropolis had three crosses added on its back, and so on. Some of these crosses may have been applied simultaneously. For instance, the two symmetrical crosses with flared ends on the pectorals of the mentioned Herakles statuette are identical in appearance and in size, plus the carving on both pectorals kept the image 'in balance'. The third cross, on the statue's abdomen just above the genitalia, is different as its arms are wider and do not possess flared ends. Consequently, it seems to have been applied either before or after the two others. In other cases as well, because the crosses are very different in form, size, and/or quality, or because they overlap, it is pretty clear that between two or more cross additions time had elapsed. Some of the reasons for reapplying maybe were practical. In the case of the satyr in Miletus it can for instance be conjectured that he was moved from elsewhere to his final location of display in the left half of the city's Nymphaeum so that the original central cross would not have been sufficiently visible anymore, necessitating the pecking of a new one on his right side.[108] In the case of the Herakles, changing ideas towards nudity may have created the need for a third cross.[109] The appearance of more than one cross on a statue was not frequent though and seems to be very dependent on local circumstances, which can only be guessed at.

The phenomenon of concentrations of cross graffiti is much more recurrent in Christian pilgrimage centres and in the secular cityscape. Street colonnades and the walls of monuments often have more than one cross, as do temple doors, church entrances, and city gates. The Severan Gate at Stratonikeia is a very nice example of a city entrance that was completely covered in cross graffiti (Fig. 9).[110] Unlike the large and professional carved cross in the Nymphaeum just next to the gate, the crosses on the walls of the gate itself could all have been carved relatively quickly and by unskilled individuals. There is little reason to link these graffiti to an official event. They rather appear as repetitive individual actions. Does this mean that one cross was not considered powerful enough? Does a multiplication of cross

[108] This is, of course, purely hypothetical, but statuary relocations are certainly not uncommon in Late Antiquity (Jacobs, 'From Production to Destruction?', p. 271–77).
[109] Nude statues, regardless of their subject or function, were deemed offensive and were adapted to suit Christian notions of nudity and, more generally, the human body. Cross signs may have been one solution. The mutilation or complete removal of genitalia was another (Jacobs, 'From Production to Destruction?', p. 288.).
[110] Clusters of symbols of other religions are known as well. See, for instance, Chaniotis, 'Zwischen Konfrontation und Interaktion', pp. 104–05 for labrys.

signs offer a better guarantee for safety and protection?[111] In such cases, the performative aspects of carving can again help further our understanding. Parallel studies on other clusters of graffiti in entirely different contexts suggest that the process of carving itself was very important to the carver as it served as a confirmation of the carver's power, as well as of his (or her) place within the community.[112] We can surmise that multiple individuals wanted to establish a more personal relation with the one God, possibly on special occasions in their life such as at the start of a long journey. However, this does not have to be the only meaning of all these crosses. A cross concentration at a city gate would be the perfect shield against forces wishing evil upon the city and its inhabitants, for example. Remarkably, despite their high number, the crosses on the Gate of Stratonikeia do not encroach upon another, indicating a desire to keep all crosses active and powerful at the same time. This contrasts for instance with the crosses on the doorposts of the Temple-Church at Aphrodisias (Fig. 10). Here, very different but all labour-intensive crosses were cut and overlap. Are we in this case dealing with a consistent renewal of the power of the cross? In truth, we have no idea of how long the beneficial influence of a cross graffito was perceived to last. As stated above, as a cross graffito was a material change to the statue or monument, it was certainly more long lasting than any ceremony or procession, but this does not mean that it was also a permanent guarantee. If we consider the process of application and the ensuing feeling of safety generated, it is certainly conceivable that a regular reapplication was required. In addition to recarvings, this may have taken the form of regular repaintings as is known for some political acclamations,[113] as well as regular rubbing of the cross as has been suggested for the Augustus and Livia portraits at Ephesus. Some of the mutilated statues mentioned above suggest that even a cross sign was not always an infallible safeguard. The meaning and impact of a cross was not stable, and it may well be that later inhabitants looked at crosses applied long ago in an entirely different manner.

Dating cross graffiti

In the pages above, I have largely avoided the dating question because it is extremely difficult to date a cross graffito.[114] In the past, very divergent dates for graffiti have been proposed, but most of them are just wild guesses based on edicts of the Theodosian Code at best. In optimal

[111] I would like to thank the other speakers at the 'Early Medieval Graphic Signs of Authority' Conference for encouraging me to think about this question and for a stimulating discussion.
[112] Taylor, 'Graffiti and the Epigraphic Habit', p. 95. Taylor discusses the clusters of names in classical rural Attica, and Mairs, 'Egyptian "Inscriptions"', those in El Kanais in the Egyptian dessert.
[113] Roueché, 'Looking for Late Antique Ceremonial', p. 162.
[114] On the difficulties of dating graffiti in general, see Langner, *Antike Graffitizeichnungen*, p. 15.

scenarios a *terminus post* or *ante quem* can be established. For the cross-marked statues of Augustus and Livia at Ephesus, a *terminus ante quem* of around the year 500, when the remains of the portraits were sealed underneath a new floor, is certain. Kristensen and Lea Stirling have suggested that the practice of inscribing crosses indeed belongs to the fifth and sixth century since many of the cross-marked statues were found in bath buildings in the East, where bathing continued through the sixth century. The phenomenon was fairly rare in the western provinces, where public bathing often ended before the fifth century. In addition, of the five examples of cross-marked statues from the West, four came from areas that were reconquered under Justinian, suggesting that such 'updating' was an eastern practice, as was already argued above, and that it was still a feasible procedure at that time of Justinian.

For architecture as well, it is sometimes possible to establish either a *terminus post* or *ante quem*. Lavan has convincingly argued that the crosses on the wall facing the Northeast entrance of the Upper Agora at Sagalassos can be dated to during or after the early sixth century, when this wall was built. They are chiselled at eye height and one of them has an elongated vertical shaft pointing down to the ground, making it improbable that the cross graffiti predated the wall construction.[115] Conversely, the statuary base mentioned above, on which a small cross graffiti was applied, was integrated into a water basin in the second half of the sixth century,[116] which serves as *terminus ante quem* since the location of the cross on the carrier indicates that it was inscribed on the monument when it was still *in situ* on the agora. In addition, the last painting of the crosses on the Nymphaeum at Sagalassos and the theatre at Perge must date to the full sixth century, as the first was restored in the second quarter of the sixth century and the last only during the reign of Justinian.[117]

We do see crosses integrated into masonry and used as elements and motifs on architectural decoration quite regularly already from the later fourth century onwards. Interestingly, although they are finely worked, they are not very eye-catching in the beginning. At the Theodosian Golden Gate, the chi-rho symbol in a medallion was applied above the central passage, but on the interior face. At Hierapolis, a cross-like symbol was present on the relieving arch, and chrismons featured on the two marble brackets that support the architrave. They were, however, combined with reliefs of a gorgon, of heads of lions and panthers, all again quite common apotropaic symbols, which were much more visible.[118] As at Aphrodisias, we here find Christian signs next to symbols of non-Christian origin, but they

[115] Lavan, 'The Agorai of Sagalassos in Late Antiquity', p. 335.
[116] Ibid., p. 320. For the dating of the basin, see Jacobs and Waelkens, 'The West Portico of the Upper Agora'.
[117] İnan and others, 'Vorbericht über die Untersuchungen an der Fassade des Theaters von Perge', pp. 321–22.
[118] Jacobs, *Aesthetic Maintenance*, pp. 82–83.

are in no ways competing with each other. On the contrary, they join forces to fight common enemies that would want to harm the inhabitants of the settlement in question. Such ensembles therefore confirm that although Christianity had become the predominant religion, the rich traditional heritage of a city was not yet regarded as problematic by the majority of the population. Civic minded Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries, including the imperial, provincial, and municipal authorities, apparently did not experience much anxiety when moving about in the secular world when attending theatre plays or civic feasts. For them, the end of sacrifice, the halting of worship on temple sites, the destruction of idols, and probably the calculated application of a cross here and there were sufficient to Christianize the world that they lived in.[119]

On the whole, it would seem that we have to wait until the later fifth or even the sixth century for a more forceful form of Christian urban signs to crystallize. Chaniotis argued for the erasure of non-Christian signs or texts only in the sixth century, when it can be recognized in Christian inscriptions that they had become truly aggressive.[120] Statues that had until then survived apparently without alterations were often no longer tolerated and were thrown out with the rubbish, ending up in foundations or floor fills.[121] In other media as well, such as pottery and even silverware, Christian iconography began to supplant more traditional themes.[122] Tolerance of everything not explicitly Christian dwindled fast.[123] Interestingly, although one example of a fountain parapet decorated with crosses has been dated to the late fourth or early fifth century, the majority have been dated stylistically to the sixth.[124] In such a climate, the marking of the ancient city and its components with multiple signs of Christian authority would not be a luxury.

Conclusion

There is still much we do not understand about cross graffiti. Why was one statue marked with a cross but not others? Why did for instance only two of the many seated statues found along the Sacred Way in Didyma receive a cross? Why were crosses in some cities like Sagalassos applied to the surrounding architecture and in other cities to some selected (?) statues themselves? Why did some locations attract multiple cross signs? There are at the

[119] For destruction of idols as opposed to all other statues that had not received worship, see Jacobs, 'From Production to Destruction?', p. 286.
[120] Chaniotis, 'Zwischen Konfrontation und Interaktion', p. 103.
[121] Jacobs, 'From Production to Destruction?', p. 288; Jacobs, 'The Sixth Century City in the Roman East'.
[122] For an overview, see Jacobs, 'Old Habits Die Hard'. See also Christoph Eger's essay in this volume.
[123] The standard publication on this change in mentality is still Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*.
[124] Jacobs, *Aesthetic Maintenance*, pp. 257–58.

moment no definite answers, and there maybe never will be. By discussing some examples of cross graffiti I hope to have offered at least some new perspectives and ways forward. In particular, I have stressed the usefulness of comparing multiple examples, reconstructing the physical context of the cross and its carrier, and examining the wide socio-historical circumstances in which the cross was created. The most basic requirement for a better understanding of cross graffiti and their functioning in Antiquity remains, however, a much more elaborate mapping and investigation of the contexts in which they all appear.

One thing we can be certain of: that cross signs were a means to fit a Christian reinterpretation in the classical cityscape. Their initial appearance in the fourth century may very well have been situated in a context of direct rivalry with other religious factions. When confronted with pagan or Jewish opposition, Christians marked their ground with physical signs. However, the fear that Christian rights over a space, building, or object would be contested or at least the need to assert them over and over again, on an ever more diverse collection of objects and spaces, seems to have gained momentum only in the fifth and especially the sixth century, after physical contestants of the Christian faith had already been conquered. The proliferation of cross graffiti may very well have been grounded in an atmosphere of increasing fear for the supernatural, a phenomenon that probably was typical for the Eastern Roman empire, linked to particular eastern belief in the unseen world. It was fuelled by the more extremist factions within Christianity who labelled all aspects of life that were not immediately relevant to the Christian faith and all spaces of the urban environment outside churches as dangerous and even demonic. Cross graffiti allowed contemporary Christians to alter the identity of already existing elements in their surroundings. Whether their exact intent was deterring demons, purifying, or attracting good luck, crosses were the means that enabled Christian citizens to claim their rights over the surroundings that they had inherited from their predecessors and continue to use them.

Table 1. Overview of the cross-marked statues collected by Kristensen, 'Miraculous Bodies'

A – Examples of crosses located on the head of statuary;
B – Examples of crosses on statuary located on other parts of the body than the head);
Add. – Kristensen, 'Addenda to T. M. Kristensen'.

No	ID	Find Location	Emperor	Honorific	Priestess	Herm	Divinity	Mythological	Other
A1	tetrarch	Afyon, unknown	1						
A2	Life size portrait head of Augustus	Ephesus, Basilica	1						
A3	Colossal portrait statue of Livia	Ephesus, Basilica	1						
A4	Colossal portrait statue of Augustus	Ephesus, Basilica	1						
A5	Portrait of unknown woman	Ephesus, 'Strassenbrunnen'		1					
A6	Portrait of unknown woman	Ephesus, 'Strassenbrunnen'		1					
A7	Porphyry female portrait	Abu Mina, no further details		1					
A8	Portrait of unknown woman	Alexandria, unknown		1					
A9	Portrait of unknown man	Alexandria, unknown		1					
A10	Basalt bust of Germanicus	Egypt, unknown	1						
A11	Colossal head of goddess	Athens, near the Tower of the Winds on the Roman Agora					1		
A12	Portrait head of a young boy (Julio-Claudian prince?)	Athens, Kolokunthous district, next to the Estauromenos Church. Maybe part of funerary monument		1					
A13	Head of herm	Vicinity of Athens				1			
A14	Portrait head of bearded man	Corinth, Peribolos of Apollo, northeast of the east entrance to the Fountain of Peirene		1					
A15	Grave relief of a bearded warrior from Eleusis	Eleusis, no further details		1					
A16	Portrait of a bearded man	Philippi, close to Basilica B		1					
A17	Portrait head of unknown woman	Rhodes, no context		1					
A18	Colossal head of goddess	Xerokambi, on the southern part of the Spartan plain					1		
A19	Herm formerly in Palazzo Castellani	Unknown				1			
A20	Trapezophoron of ram bearer	Unknown							1
A21	Portrait herm of Karneades	Caesarea Maritima, found during excavations in a disturbed layer				1			
A22	Head of divinity	Unknown					1		
A23	Head of young boy	Unknown		1					
A24	Head of Apollo	Unknown					1		
B1	Branchid	Didyma, Sacred Way		1					
B2	Branchid	Didyma, Sacred Way			1				
B3	Kouros from Didyma	Didyma, 'Tempelgebiet', built into a Turkish wall							1
B4	Relief of phallus	Ephesus, maybe Nymphaeum							1

B5	Funerary stela with three figures	Istanbul, Gedikpaşa		1					
B6	Representation of herm with the head of a child on column drum	Constantinople, Forum of Constantine				1			
B7	Headless torso of satyr	Miletus, Nymphaeum						1	
B8	Lion from the Baths of Faustina	Miletus, frigidarium of the Baths of Faustina							1
B9	Hercules from Tralles	Unknown						1	
B10	Cuirassed portrait of Marcus Aurelius	Alexandria, found in excavations together with other statues	1						
B11	Colossal statue of Athena	Athens, Acropolis, near the Propylaea					1		
B12	Fragment of relief with horse and rider	Athens, Agora excavations							1
B13	Headless herm	Athens, Roman Agora, reused				1			
B14	Herm shaft	Athens, Akropolis South Slope				1			
B15	Trapezophoron with Ganymede	Athens, no context							1
B16	Herm-shaped trapezophoron	Athens, no context							1
B17	Herm shaft	Attica, Koropi, reused				1			
B18	Herm	Corinth, excavations				1			
B19	Fragment of togatus	Corinth, excavations, reused in wall		1					
B20	Life-size statue of Artemis	Corinth, Agora Excavations					1		
B21	Herm shaft	Unknown				1			
B22	Clipeus portrait of Marcus Aurelius	Eleusis, Great Propylaia	1						
B23	Statue of sitting Sarapis from Puteoli	Puteoli, Macellum of Serapaeum					1		
B24	Heroically nude statue of a young man	Thubursicum Numidarium, Nymphaeum		1					
B25	Bronze statuette of Dionysos	Found by the River Don in 1867					1		
B26	Statue of Marcus Aurelius or private citizen being velatus	Italica	1						
Add. 1	Portrait statue of the priestess Nikeso	Priene, next to the propylon of the sanctuary of Demeter			1				
Add. 2	Headless, female portrait statue (of priestess of Isis?)	Melos, 'Three Churches' site, re-used in a wall		1					
Add. 3	Marble head of a boy, antiquities market	Unknown		1					
			8	**17**	**2**	**9**	**8**	**2**	**7**

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