

## ‘PAGAN’ STATUES

POLITICAL TALISMANS?  
RESIDUAL 'PAGAN' STATUES  
IN LATE ANTIQUE PUBLIC SPACE

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*Abstract*

This article explores the fate of certain statues of pagan gods and heroes that were displayed not in temples but in streets, squares and public buildings. These images had a functional connection to the civic activities that took place there, especially political activities. An attempt is made to detect to what extent such functional connections were retained or disrupted in Late Antiquity. The fate of images of Victory, Tyche, Minerva, civic heroes and emperors, both living and dead, is examined and compared. Christian attempts to reform their uses can be detected, but these seem to have had limited impact until the mid-6th c. Tentative conclusions are drawn about the significance of the selective preservation of some statues, which may have survived as political talismans in uncertain times.

DISPLAY AND STATUE FUNCTION

The display of pagan statues in urban space underwent a number of transformations from the mid-4th c. onwards. Not only were statues removed from temples, but many were re-installed in baths and private houses, or on public streets and squares. In moving to their new settings, these images were joining a number of already established 'pagan' statues, of gods or heroes, which had been displayed away from major temples, in public space, for hundreds of years. These images could be found in eastern cities, as described by Pausanias on his journeys around Greece, but also in the West.<sup>1</sup> In A.D. 390, the pagan Maximus of Madauros boasted to Augustine that the market-place of his African city was 'occupied by a crowd of beneficent deities', whilst in 384 Ambrose noted that at Rome, 'the baths, colonnades and streets'

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<sup>1</sup> Statues of Greece: Religious statues of *agorai* in Greece: Paus. 1.35.3 (Ajax), 2.13.6 (golden she-goat), 7.22.2 (market Hermes). Ajax was within a temple, though perhaps a small *heroon*.