# Assimilation or Destruction: The Christianization of Late Antique Statuary

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***Abstract:*** *The recent destruction of Palmyra sent shockwaves across the globe, as the days of religious fanaticism and outbursts of iconoclasm had largely been forgotten by the collective memory. Yet, such acts of destruction have long been a point of discussion (and contention) among scholars. In the centuries following the conversion from paganism to Christianity the fate of the pagan statuary was left in the hands of a newly Christian society, and to the processes of Christianization. Processes which acted either to assimilate the statue into the newly Christian cultural milieu or destroy the statue for its pagan nature. This paper will present an overview of the various attitudes, and responses, towards pagan statuary in late antiquity, and the ways in which recent scholarship has interpreted the processes of Christianization with renewed enthusiasm. Using the Hearst Herakles as a case study for the practice of Christianization, this paper will first examine the processes of Christianization as a means of assimilation, in which the pagan statue was deliberately altered in order to remove its pagan character and make certain of its ability to function in Christian society; then examine the processes of Christianization in which the statue was destroyed for its pagan nature.*

In March of 2016, Syrian armed forces drove members of the Islamic State terrorist group out of Palmyra, after nearly ten months of occupation and destruction. Within hours, images of the UNESCO world-heritage site began to circulate, creating both a sense of relief and sorrow. Many of Palmyra's treasured artifacts, including the famed Arch of Triumph and the Temple of Bel, had been destroyed because they were "pagan temples" (Figure 1a–b).[1] The destruction of Palmyra sent shockwaves across the globe, as the days of religious fanaticism and outbursts of iconoclasm had largely been forgotten by the collective memory. Unfortunately, in the centuries following the conversion from paganism to Christianity the fate of pagan statuary was left to the processes of Christianization, which acted either to assimilate the statue into the new Christian milieu, or destroy the statue for its pagan nature.

It is common knowledge that pagan statuary was still very much a part of the physical and cultural milieu of late antiquity. Literary sources recount the efforts made by several emperors, including Constantine the Great, to move statues across the empire to decorate the new capital of Constantinople.[2] The assimilation of pagan statuary into the cityscape may have been such, that for the most part, their presence went largely unnoticed.[3] However, with the rise of Christianity, the presence of pagan statuary became problematic,[4] even though the statues continued to be appreciated for their artistic value. The intention of this paper is to present an overview of the various attitudes towards pagan statuary, and the ways in which recent scholarship has interpreted the processes of Christianization. I will first discuss the processes of

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[1] Guardian Staff, "Palmyra after Isis: images taken following Syrian recapture offer hope amid ruins," The Guardian, last modified March 27, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/28/palmyra-after-isis-images-taken-following-syrian-recapture-offer-hope-amid-ruins#img-1.

[2] Helen Saradi, "The Use of Ancient Spolia in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 3, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 399.

[3] Ine Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan and Mythological Statuary in Asia Minor," *American Journal of Archaeology* 114, no. 2 (April 2010): 267.

[4] Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 267.

Christianization as means of assimilation, and then turn to the processes in which Christianization became a means of destruction.

## CHRISTIANIZATION AS ASSIMILATION

Evidence for Christianization as a means of assimilation can be found in the active preservation of pagan statuary through the process of acculturation, in which a statue would undergo a set of physical changes in order to remove its pagan character and make certain of its ability to function in Christian society.[5]

### *Adjustments*

For many statues these changes included the cutting of a cross on their forehead or another part (or parts) of the body. Early Christian literary sources mention the cutting of crosses on the forehead and bodies of pagan statues for several reasons: it could be part of a ceremony to exorcise the demons from the statue,[6] it could be a reflection of baptismal rites,[7] or it could be drawn on the forehead as an apotropaic device.[8] However, in the case of extant statues, we have very few examples of pagan gods that have undergone this sort of treatment. Almost all examples of statuary bearing the marks of the cross are those of historical figures, which includes the mortal heroes of myth.[9] In most of these cases, the crosses that were carved were done so very carefully, sometimes, even ornately.[10] This suggests a great deal of time and energy had been spent in making these adjustments. Although these marks are often connected with a process intended to incapacitate the statues prior to their destruction or disposal, on the whole, the application of the crosses does not seem to have been a negative, anti-pagan process; but rather, a positive, Christianizing one.[11]

If exorcism was the sole intended purpose for this practice, one would expect to find many more examples of pagan gods thus marked.[12] Furthermore, it would seem unlikely to expend that much time and energy if the statue was to be destroyed immediately following the exorcism.[13] There is evidence to suggest that many of these statues remained on display long after they had undergone the acculturation process. This evidence supports the notion that the application of the cross allowed the statue to remain on display. Thus, the purpose of the cross was not simply to perform an exorcism but was a sort of positive updating and a conscious assimilation of the statue into a Christianized society.[14]

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[5]Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 278.
[6] Helen Saradi, "Late Paganism and Christianisation in Greece," in *The Archaeology of Late Antique "Paganism"*, ed. Luke Lavan and Michael Mulryan (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 7:296.
[7] Constantin A. Marinescu, "Transformations: Classical Objects and Their Re-Use during Late Antiquity," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. Ralph Mathisen and Hagith Sivan (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1996), 290.
[8] Saradi, "The Use of Ancient," 399.
[9]Saradi, "The Use of Ancient," 279.
[10] Marinescu, "Transformations: Classical Objects and Their," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late*, 290.
[11] Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 280.
[12] Marinescu, "Transformations: Classical Objects and Their," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late*, 290.
[13] Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 280.
[14] Richard Rothaus, "Christianization and De-Paganization: The Late Antique Creation of a Conceptual Frontier," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. Ralph Mathisen and Hagith Sivan (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1996), 305.

While exorcism certainly offers a more sensational argument for the appearance of the cross on pagan statuary, it is not the most compelling. Instead, it is the persistent appearance of the cross on the foreheads and bodies of pagan statuary that reinforces the proposed connection to baptism.[15] As Marinescu suggests, the act of cutting a cross onto the forehead of a statue was likely a reflection on the actual practice from the baptismal rites of the Eastern Church.[16] In the fourth-century writings of Saint Ephraem of Edessa, he describes the sign of the cross as applied to various parts of the body during baptism.[17] The Eastern authority on the subject of baptism, however, comes from the fourth-century bishop, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem. In the third of his Catechetical lecture, Saint Cyril discusses the anointing of the body and the granting of the *Sphragis,* or the mark of the cross, as the invocation of Christ's salvation.[18] Furthermore, it has also been suggested that the anointing of the body was perceived as a powerful ceremony of exorcism that ultimately purified the candidates and prepared them to receive the baptism that symbolized their entry into the Christian community (which, among other things, perhaps explains the oft proposed connection between the marking of the cross and the notion of exorcism).[19] According to Marinescu, the early Christian audience in the east must have seen the markings of the cross on pagan statuary as an unmistakable allusion to the baptismal rites, and an indelible sign of conversion into the Christian faith.[20] Thus, with the application of the cross the statue, and its pagan character, had been successfully assimilated into the Christian community.

There are also examples of statues having undergone very specific recutting for the purpose of integrating them into a new social consciousness. According to Jacobs, the statue of Claudia Antonia Tatiana, found at Aphrodisias (Figure 2) may be one such example.[21] Originally, the statue depicted the priestess of Aphrodite accompanied by a small child.[22] It has been suggested that the child represented Eros, though only its feet remain.[23] With the removal of Eros, the statue would have been stripped of all obvious affiliations with the cult. Thus, the statue could remain standing at the entrance of the bouleuterion/odeion, as an honored citizen of Aphrodisias.[24] It is important, however, to note that this suggestion has not yet been confirmed by other scholars.

*Further Adjustments: Nudity*

For many statues, the application of the cross completed the process of acculturation, and the statue was effectively assimilated. For other statues, the process of acculturation was a bit more aggressive which brings us to some of the most notable adjustments made to pagan statuary, namely the de-genitalizing of nude statuary.

Statues with sexual connotations were often regarded as offensive to Christian sensibilities.[25] As RRR Smith states, "[t]he naked body, so purposefully displayed in ancient culture and art, was a particular locus of the early church's anxiety and discontent…[p]ublic

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[15] Marinescu, "Transformations: Classical Objects and Their," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late*, 290.
[16] Ibid., 291.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Thomas Scannell, "Confirmation," Catholic Encyclopedia, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04215b.htm.
[19] Marinescu, "Transformations: Classical Objects and Their," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late*, 291.
[20] Ibid., 291-92.
[21] Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 280.
[22] Ibid., 281.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 278.

nudity came to need attention, independent of cult and theology."[26] Most often, this meant that the "offending parts" of the statues were damaged or removed. In the case of men, the genitals were removed either by careful use of a small hammer or with the action of a well-placed chisel; both methods were carried out so as to avoid unnecessary damage to the surrounding marble surface.[27] For women, the pudenda were either scratched[28] or hit sharply with a small hammer or chisel, causing a rough, shallow gouge in the marble surface.[29] Nude female breasts were also damaged, either by chiseling off the nipples (which only managed to bring more attention to the naked breast), or the breasts were hit with a hammer.[30]

One of the most extensive examples of systematic damage and/or removal of genitalia was found in the excavations of the Sebasteion complex at Aphrodisias. The Sebasteion was a grandiose complex dedicated to Aphrodite and the Julio-Claudian emperors in the mid-first century by two prominent local families.[31] The upper two stories of the North and South buildings were faced by columnar orders that framed more than 200 marble reliefs.[32] The reliefs displayed a wealth of mythological, allegorical, and imperial/historical subjects that reflected the city's local, Greek, and Roman cultural heritage. [33]

The complex, which remained largely intact until the seventh century, became a retail and craft center in the fourth-fifth centuries. During this time, Jews, Christians, and others conducted business and interacted with each other on a daily basis.[34] As a repository of local memory, the reliefs remained on display; yet at the same time, the reliefs also contained elements that were felt by some to be offensive and therefore changes needed to be made.[35] A solution was chosen that left as much as possible intact but removed the offensive parts in a highly selective, targeted manner.[36] On the two-hundred surviving reliefs, *all* visibly exposed male genitalia were removed.[37] Similarly, the few fully nude female figures depicted among the surviving reliefs also had their pubic regions abraded, and their breasts damaged.[38] Perhaps one of the most notable reliefs from the complex is that of Achilles and Penthesilea (Figure 3), which perfectly demonstrates just how sensitive and systematic the people of Aphrodisias were in removing all "offending parts" from the complex.

The Sebasteion, however, was not the only public complex to have employed such a solution. Bathhouses were another public arena that employed the systematic damage or removal of genitalia. Although the public bathhouse was a preferred location for the display of pagan statuary, from the Christian perspective, the bathhouse was a potentially dangerous place.[39] Thus,

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[26] R.R.R. Smith, "Defacing the Gods at Aphrodisias," in *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World*, ed. Beate Dignas and R.R.R Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 306.
[27] Smith, "Defacing the Gods at Aphrodisias," in *Historical and Religious Memory*, 307-8.
[28] Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 278.
[29] Smith, "Defacing the Gods at Aphrodisias," in *Historical and Religious Memory*, 308.
[30] Ibid., 308.
[31] Ibid., 284-85.
[32] Ibid., 285.
[33] Ibid.
[34]Ibid., 287.
[35]Smith, "Defacing the Gods at Aphrodisias," in *Historical and Religious Memory*, 284.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 308.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 310.

in order to make use of, and enjoy these facilities, it was a general practice to de-genital the nude statues that adorned the space.[40]

*A Case Study*

One of the best examples of a pagan statue that has undergone the processes of acculturation can be found in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. The statue, known as the Hearst Herakles (Figure 4a), depicts a nude Herakles at rest. His club is tucked underneath his left arm, and covered in the pelt of the Nemean Lion. In his right hand, he holds three apples from the garden of the Hesperides, which he keeps hidden from view behind his back. The sculptor went to great lengths to ensure Herakles was the epitome of masculinity, and he took care to minimize the appearance of any tool marks on the front of the statue. Conversely, the backside of the statue was not given the same attention to detail, as made apparent by the rough surface of the unpolished marble. The treatment of the marble suggests that the statue probably stood in a niche, where the backside would not have been easily seen. Given that the statue has been dated to the second-century CE, and was said to have been found in Tralles (western Turkey),[41] it probably stood in one of public bathhouses in the area, and may explain why the statue had undergone the processes of acculturation.

A closer inspection of the statue reveals that a cross has been carved into each pectoral muscle, and another has been cut into the lower abdominal muscles just above the pubic area (Figure 4b). The nude Herakles has also been de-genitaled, which, as mentioned earlier, would have been a common practice for nude statuary displayed in a public bathhouse. Unfortunately, the statue is missing its head, so we are unable to determine if a cross had been carved into its forehead as well. However, given that the drawing of the cross on the forehead of pagan statuary appears to have been a common practice, it is very likely that this statue would have also been marked in this manner.[42] Thus, assuming the statue’s missing head was intentionally removed from its body, and not due to natural causes, the decapitation would have come at a later time, perhaps during a second round of iconoclasm.

It is also worth mentioning that every one of the public bathhouses in which large quantities of sculpture have survived, remained in use well into the Christian period.[43] This suggests that the removal of the offending parts from nude statuary, as well as the application of the cross, when necessary, was sufficient enough to allow for the continued display of these statues. Furthermore, the very nature of the bathhouse draws strong correlations to the baptismal rites of the Eastern Church, further reinforcing the proposed connection to baptism, which again, may help to explain why we have found so many extant pagan statues, including the Hearst Herakles, in the excavation of bathhouses. However, not all statues were as lucky as the Hearst Herakles.

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[40] Ibid.

[41] "Statue of Herakles," Phoebe A Hearst Museum of Anthropology, http://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/.

[42] Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 54.

[43] Miranda Marvin, "Freestanding Sculptures from the Baths of Caracalla," *American Journal of Archaeology* 87, no. 3 (July 1983): 379.

*Defacing*

Lastly, in some instances, the line between updating and outright mutilation, has become too blurred to say with any certainty the category it should fall into, with the exact designation dependent upon the perspective of the viewer. For instance, only nine of the eighty surviving reliefs along the South Building in the Sebasteion had been fully defaced with a rough quarry pick sometime during the late antique period.[44] Similar to the process of de-genitalization that was described earlier, the process of defacing was highly selective, and only carried out where absolutely necessary. Consequently, the only images to be defaced featured divine figures represented in such a way that the Christian community could feel threatened by their presence.[45] Several of the defaced reliefs displayed a single Olympian god. As the god was not engaged in any activity, nor accompanied by any other figures, these gods could be taken as real, present daimones, who could be activated by prayer.[46] Thus, a group of three reliefs depicting an enthroned Zeus, flanked by the standing goddesses Athena, and Hera, were thoroughly defaced.[47] Similarly, in a relief depicting a statue of Aphrodite (Figure 5) standing frontally on a round base, in the process of being crowned by a goddess, who is most certainly Aphrodite as a real and present figure, was again, thoroughly defaced.[48]

It is important to emphasize that these reliefs were carefully defaced, damaging only the offensive figures, while leaving the outline of the figures visible, and the background and surrounding panels totally unharmed.[49] According to RRR Smith, this was done not so much to preserve the façade of the panels, but to demonstrate that the still recognizable daemonic figures had been incapacitated.[50] The defacing of the gods at Aphrodisias had demonstrated in a concrete, and permanent manner, that the pagans and their gods, had successfully been conquered by the new Christian faith.[51]

In short, a myriad of ancient statues exhibit the distinctive marks of having been altered to suit Christian sensibilities. Though, this process often affected much more than the explicitly pagan nature of some of these statues. Instead of being motivated by anti-pagan sentiments, the de-genitalizing of nude statues was often motivated by modesty, and the carving of the crosses on the statue was seen as a form of assimilation into Christian society.[52] Unfortunately, not all pagan statuary survived the process of Christianization, as I will discuss below.

## CHRISTIANIZATION AS DESTRUCTION

With the limitations of archaeological evidence, our knowledge of the violence toward pagan statuary has relied heavily on the use of literary sources. However, one must use caution when using literary sources, as much of it is hardly more than Christian propaganda. For instance, much of what we know about the destruction of pagan statuary comes from the *Lives of the Saints*,[53] and the writings of Eusebius and Augustine.[54] In *Homilies on the Statues* by Saint

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[44] Smith, "Defacing the Gods at Aphrodisias," in *Historical and Religious Memory*, 292.
[45]Smith, "Defacing the Gods at Aphrodisias," in *Historical and Religious Memory*, 294.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 298.
[49] Ibid., 302.
[50] Ibid.
[51]Ibid., 303.
[52] Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 282.
[53] Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 55-6.

John Chrysostom and the writings of Libanius, we learn of statues being pulled from their bases, decapitated, melted down, or dragged through the streets.[55] The Greek poet, Palladas, humorously describes the destruction of a bronze statue of Eros as being melted down and turned into a frying pan, "because it too burns."[56] Another oft cited tale comes from Bishop Porphyry in 402 CE, when he and a group of Christians bearing crosses approached a nude statue of Aphrodite in Gaza, at which time the bishop states, "the demon who inhabited the statue, being unable to contemplate the terrible sign, departed from the marble with great tumult, and, as he did so, he threw the statue down and broke it into many pieces."[57] While, it is reasonable to assume that not all of these stories are true, there can be little doubt that the purposeful and malicious destruction of pagan statuary did occur throughout the Roman Empire.[58] As Rachel Kousser suggests, the outright violence towards pagan statuary can be understood as falling under the rubric of iconoclasm regardless of the motivations of the iconoclasts.[59]

*Damnatio Memoriae*

Perhaps the most common form of destruction carried out on pagan statuary was the practice of *damnatio memoriae*, which translates to "condemnation of memory."[60] The intention of *damnatio memoriae* was to erase the subject from memory by removing the distinctive features of the statue.[61] These attacks were far more drastic than the examples provided for the processes of acculturation, and often reflected the corporal punishments cited in the literary sources such as, the picking out of the eyes, the removal of the nose or ears, and in extreme cases, decapitation of the statue.[62] All of which were carried out with the aim of truly defacing or "killing" the statue.[63]

This type of destructive behavior is most often found to have been carried out on statues associated with the imperial cult, particularly to the small busts representing deities, emperors, or other members of the imperial family that decorated the "bust-crowns" worn by these statues.[64] Instances of deliberate destruction may be more frequent than originally thought, but such occurrences have not always been recognized as such.[65] Previously, it was assumed that the heads on these bust-crowns had suffered the sort of damage one would expect to see as the result of a natural disaster, or from the collapse of a neglected structure in which the statue had been housed.[66] However, upon closer examination of many of these sacred crowns, the damage appears to be rather uniform. Not at all what one would expect to find if the statue had fallen or it

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[54] Rachel Kousser, "A Sacred Landscape: The Creation, Maintenance, and Destruction of Religious Monuments in Roman Germany," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 57/58 (2010): 129.
[55] Peter Stewart, "The Destruction of Statues in Late Antiquity," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. Richard Miles (London: Routledge, 1999), 159-62.
[56] Saradi, "Late Paganism and Christianisation," in *The Archaeology of Late*, 7:294.
[57] Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine," 55-6.
[58] Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 282.
[59] Kousser, "A Sacred Landscape: The Creation," 122.
[60] Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 283.
[61] Ibid, 283.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] John Pollini, "Gods and Emperors in the East: Images of Power and the Power of Intolerance," in *The Sculptural Environment of the Roman near East: Reflections on Culture, Ideology, and Power*, ed. Yaron Z. Eliav, Elise A. Friedland, and Sharon Herbert (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 169.
[65] Saradi, "Late Paganism and Christianisation," in *The Archaeology of Late*, 7:295.
[66] Pollini, "Gods and Emperors in the East," in *The Sculptural Environment of the Roman*, 171.

had been hit by a piece of architecture that had fallen.[67] Take for instance, the third-century statue of Lucius Antonius Claudius Dometinos Diogenes (Figure 6), one of the most prominent citizens and priests of the imperial cult in Aphrodisias, which originally stood in a portico behind the city's bouleuterion/odeion.[68] The statue's reattached head is rather well preserved, showing only minor signs of damage with the exception of its broken nose. The rest of the statue is in exceptional condition. Conversely, every one of the eleven heads of the small busts that encircle Diogenes's sacred crown has been carefully and systematically destroyed, leaving the rest of the crown unharmed.[69]

*Damnatio Memoriae: Divine*

Although the term *damnatio memoriae* is most often associated with the destruction of imperial portraits, we also find this type of behavior directed towards those statues of divine personages. For instance, the central vegetal figure of Aphrodite was erased from the west pediment decoration of the tetrapylon at Aphrodisias and replaced by a prominent cross.[70] Two large marble statues of the city's goddess were removed and disposed of; one statue was found built into a wall, the other was found broken into small pieces near a late antique house.[71] The name of the goddess was carefully and visibly erased from many of the public inscriptions around the city.[72] While the inscriptions of city's name, Aphrodisias, were replaced by Stauroplis (City of the Cross) in most places.[73]

*Abolitio Memoriae*

Lastly, it is the category of *abolitio memoriae* which has dominated the popular opinion as to the fate of pagan statuary in late antiquity, and that is, the total annihilation of a statue so as to leave no trace of it behind.[74] Though, it would seem that this type of behavior is seen more in the Western empire. While the attacks made against pagan statuary in the Eastern Empire – such as those found in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias – have garnered more attention, the attacks in the West were perhaps more pervasive.[75] One explanation for this difference may be due to the lack of imperial presence in the Western provinces, where bishops, monks and fanatics were able to attack pagan monuments without official legislation or support of the government.[76] This seems to be particularly true in the Germanic frontier zones, where wells often served as convenient dumping grounds for smashed sculpture.[77] In Bad Wimpfen, a statue of the goddess Minerva was found smashed into six pieces andburned.[78] Her head was never found.[79] In Walheim, there appears to have been a highly-organized operation to destroy all pagan monuments and dispose

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[67] Ibid., 171.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Smith, "Defacing the Gods at Aphrodisias," in *Historical and Religious Memory*, 319.
[71] Ibid., 320.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan," 287.
[74] Pollini, "Gods and Emperors in the East," in *The Sculptural Environment of the Roman*, 179.
[75] Kousser, "A Sacred Landscape: The Creation," 129.
[76] Kousser, "A Sacred Landscape: The Creation," 129.
[77] Eberhard W. Sauer, *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred: In the Roman and Early Medieval World* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2003), 57.
[78] Sauer, *The Archaeology of Religious*, 57.
[79] Ibid., 57.

of them in the nearest well, all of which were found filled with the debris of numerous votive sculptures and inscriptions.[80]

There can be little doubt that secular violence and religiously motivated iconoclasm toward pagan statuary occurred during the transition from paganism to Christianity. Nevertheless, we are challenged by the limitations of the archaeological evidence; and, as suggested above, we cannot assume the accuracy of a literary source. Though, from the archaeological evidence we do have, there seems to be a clear distinction between the process of Christianization as a means of assimilation and the acts of Christianization that manifested through destruction.

## CONCLUSION

In this brief overview, I have attempted to demonstrate the various attitudes, and responses, towards pagan statuary in late antiquity, and the ways in which recent scholarship has interpreted the processes of Christianization with renewed enthusiasm. Some scholars have suggested that the Christianization of pagan statuary was a way in which to assimilate the statue into Christian society and allow for its continued display. While other scholars have taken a hard stance towards the process of Christianization and consider the practice to be destructive, whether or not it allowed for the statue's continued display. The interpretation of these processes, and thus, how they are classified, is further complicated by the limitations of the archaeological record. Therefore, the exact designation of Christianization as a process of assimilation or Christianization as a process of destruction is dependent upon the perspective of the reader. Though, when compared to the recent events at Palmyra, the processes of Christianization were far less destructive. Perhaps, we should be thankful the early Christians did not have access to dynamite.

[80] Ibid.

***Figure 1a***. *2010. The Temple of Bel in Palmyra prior to ISIS occupation. Photo credit: Reuters/Sandra Auger.*

***Figure 1b***. *August 26, 2015. Islamic State destroys the Temple of Bel with explosives.*

***Figure 2***. *Statue of Claudia Antonia Tatiana at Aphrodisias. Photo credit: Google images.*

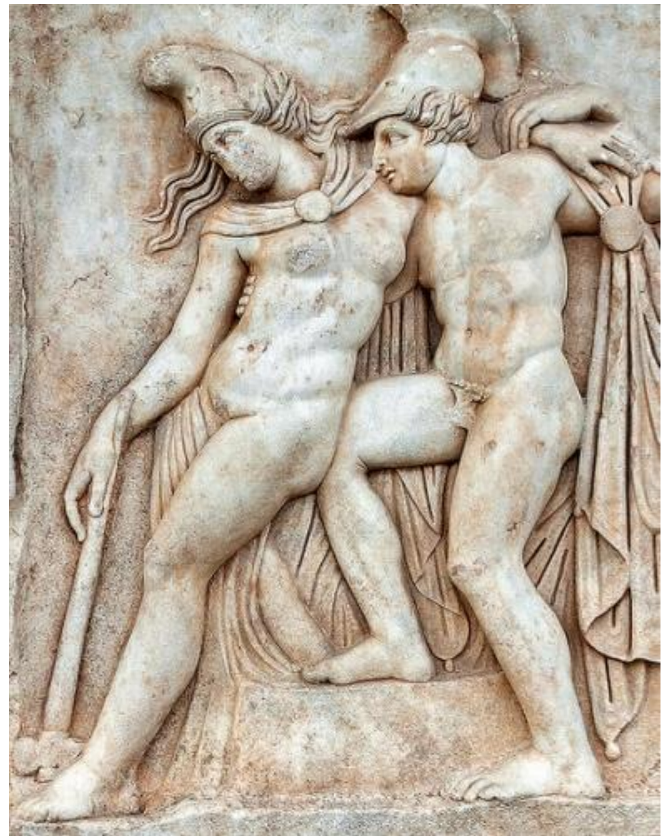

***Figure 3***. *Achilles and Penthesilea, with genital-defacing of both figures. Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. Photo credit: Google images.*

***Figure 4a***. *Hearst Herakles with crosses carved into his chest and abdomen, and genital-defacing. Photo credit: Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. University of California, Berkeley.*

***Figure 4b.*** *Hearst Herakles, detail. Photo credit: Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. University of California, Berkeley.*

***Figure 5***. *Aphrodite with cult statue. Defaced relief from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. Photo credit: Google images.*

***Figure 6.****Statue of Lucius Antonius Claudius Dometinos Diogenes with defaced bust-crown at Aphrodisias. Photo credit: Artstor Digital Library.*

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