

# From equality to asymmetry: honorific statues, imperial power, and senatorial identity in late-antique Rome

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Late-antique Rome was not only home to human inhabitants.\* It also housed, according to the 6th-c. senator Cassiodorus, another population, made of stone: 'a large populace of statues and many herds of equestrian monuments'.<sup>1</sup> The ecclesiastical historian Zacharias of Mytilene, a younger contemporary of Cassiodorus, counted 3,845 honorific monuments for high-ranking office-holders and emperors in late-antique Rome.<sup>2</sup> Such punctilious accuracy was no doubt spurious, but the public spaces and aristocratic residences of late-antique Rome were crammed with statuary. Unfortunately, precious few traces have survived from Cassiodorus' 'other population of Rome'. Of all the statues for aristocrats and emperors put up in late-antique Rome, only a handful has survived completely.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, all that remains is hundreds of fragments of the bases on which the statues were displayed. Sometimes the fragments are so small that we are lucky if it is even possible to reconstruct the name of the honorands.

Yet despite their fragmentary nature, the scattered remains of Rome's statuary landscape are a precious source for the social historian of the Late Roman aristocracy. Not only are bases extant in much greater quantity than the statues they once served; the fact that they were much less exposed to relocation, re-use and destruction means that bases permit one to reconstruct the spatial context in which statues were displayed.<sup>4</sup> But the bases do not only help to understand how monuments interacted with the locale in which they were exhibited; the texts carved on them are also important sources in their own right. It is significant that Roman honorific monuments were almost always inscribed. As G. D. Woolf points out, the use of writing permitted commissioners to describe the matrix of social relations embodied by a monument with much greater precision than would otherwise have

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\* Frequent abbreviations:

Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal* = F. A. Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike: Untersuchungen zur Ausstattung des öffentlichen Raums in den spätantiken Städten Rom, Konstantinopel und Ephesos* (Mainz 1996)

Chastagnol, *Fastes* = A. Chastagnol, *Les fastes de la préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (Paris 1962)

Niquet, *Monumenta* = H. Niquet, *Monumenta virtutum titulique: senatorische Selbstdarstellung im spätantiken Rom im Spiegel der epigraphischen Denkmäler* (Stuttgart 2000).

1 *Var.* 7.13: *populus copiosissimus statuarum, greges etiam abundantissimi equorum*, with V. Fauvinet-Ranson, *Decor civitatis, decor Italiae: monuments, travaux publics et spectacles au VIe siècle d'après les Variae de Cassiodore* (Bari 2006).

2 Ps. Zach., *Chron.* 10.16, with the notes by G. Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: church and war in late antiquity* (Liverpool 2011) 422.

3 For extant imperial and aristocratic portraiture from late-antique Rome, see the collection by K. Fittschen and P. Zanker, *Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen und anderen kommunalen Sammlungen der Stadt Rom* (Mainz 1983-2011) nos. 1.118-27, 2.176-81 and 3.177-88.

4 Ironically, the one statue of a Late Roman aristocrat discovered *in situ*, the monument for C. Caelius Saturninus Dogmatius set up in his private house, is itself re-used from an Early Imperial monument of unknown provenience: H. R. Goette, *Studien zu römischen Togadarstellungen* (Mainz 1990) 134, Bb 83.