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Pagan iconoclasts? Some case studies from Roman Burgundy during Late Antiquity

Abstract

This paper examines case studies from Roman Burgundy involving suspected symbolic recarving during Late Antiquity. Is it possible that religious desecration took place before the Theodosian Codex, and if so, why? Can we differentiate them from cases of wanton violence? The ambiguous cases found at the “Sources de la Seine” sanctuary (Côte-d’Or) and Entrainens-sur-Nohain (Nièvre) help demonstrate the methodological difficulties involved in understanding the destruction of ancient sculptures. Through an investigation of selected examples from Sainte-Pallaye, Escolives-Saintes-Camille, and Sens (Yonne), we see that while desecration was a reality, the variety of methods employed were linked to the destination of the mutilated sculpture, as well as local customs and legal contexts.

Introduction

The destruction of statues during antiquity, and its motives, actors, and methods, have received increasing attention within the field of Classical studies in recent years and yielded a number of important outcomes. Chief among these outcomes is the acceptance that the partial or total destruction of a statue is as much a part of the “biography” of the object as the “chaîne opératoire” is of its production. This realisation allows for new methodological approaches and the reassessment of ancient finds. This paper will reevaluate both new and older discoveries in north-east Gaul; however before examining our case studies, we must first address certain lexical issues.

1 Kristensen 2009; 2013; Jacobs 2010; Caseau 2011; Cadario 2013; Kristensen, Stirling 2016.
A vocabulary issue

In Rome, Classical literature referring to the voluntary destruction of statues identified two main systems: toppling, also called *demolitio,*\(^2\) and defacing, which was carried out as part of an *abolitio,*\(^3\) often referred to by the modern term *damnatio memoriae.*\(^4\) In truth, the methods used in the destruction or mutilation of statues are numerous, and accidental damage can appear similar to damage caused by intentional acts. Similarly, only a careful analysis of the damaged areas can provide a coherent understanding of the object’s mutilation history. For instance, the beheading of a statue can leave chisel marks at the base of its neck. Equally, if a statue was toppled, as in a *demolitio,* the head was not always the first part of the statue to hit the ground: the chest, limbs or shoulders could all be first, depending on the weight, elevation, and position of the statue. If the head did hit the ground first, it was the nose, ears, and the chin that were particularly exposed, rather than the eyes or the mouth. In cases of political mutilation resulting from *abolitio* or *damnatio memoriae,* the motives are well known, but it is much harder to understand the motives behind the voluntary degradation of tombstones,\(^5\) votive offerings, or images of gods and goddesses, which were quite common in second- and third-century stone sculpture from north-east Gaul. Their occurrence is problematic, and they do not fit neatly within the classical sphere of *demolitio* or *abolitio.* Therefore, a different methodological approach is needed, and in this paper an approach looking at the idea of desecration is explored. The modern word cannot be easily equated to one in Latin, as religious crimes were diverse in antiquity,\(^6\) reflecting the complexity of both the religious and legal systems in Rome. Even its etymology is antithetical as it gives a converse sense to the notion of “making something holy.” Therefore, the word “desecration” has been adopted here in the sense of deliberate damage to a sacred object in order to make it profane or solely to violate it – an important difference that needs to be addressed. The neutral terms of “destruction” or “mutilation” are used here when the sacred nature of the object itself might not be relevant to the damage, as acts of sheer violence or even accidents are not readily distinguishable between sacred and profane objects.

When one writes about the defacement of statues, the word “iconoclasm” almost immediately comes to mind, but it is a polysemic word that can lead to hasty interpretation as it is strongly linked to religious iconoclasm, namely Christian iconoclasm during Late Antiquity, which is part of a much larger and complex religious transition. As of now, our understanding of the dynamics of abandonment and/or the religious shift against pagan cult locations has greatly progressed.\(^7\) This is in part thanks to the development of rescue archaeology. However, the part played by stone sculptures of divinities, of the dead, or of votive offerings remains unclear. While iconoclasm grew stronger after the *Codex Theodosianus,* the large majority of likely cases, such as the engraving of crosses on the faces of statues of pagan gods, are to be found in the eastern part of the empire.\(^8\) When Theodoret of Cyrus generalises the *demolitio* of

\(^2\) Cicero, *Verr.,* 4, 110.
\(^3\) For a recent contribution to the subject, see Galinier 2018.
\(^4\) For a recent contribution to the subject, see Galinier 2018.
\(^5\) The subject is vast, but for a general overview, see Varner 2004; Cadario 2013.
\(^6\) For new perspectives on this topic for Italy, the South of France, and the Rhine, see Carroll 2011.
\(^7\) Scheid 1981.
\(^8\) Van Andringa 2014.
statues of Serapis to the whole empire, we should understand that he writes about the part of the empire he knows, namely the East. In Gaul, Martin of Tours was well known for his iconoclasm. According to Sulpicius Severus, he destroyed idols and burned down pagan temples, and the miraculous destruction of the statue of Berecynthia by Simplicius, bishop of Autun during the early fifth century AD, is well known. In addition to a geographical perspective, we now also have a better understanding of the rhetorical aspect of these episodes of violence and of their limited spread.

Christians and barbarians in Burgundy

The theme at hand will be discussed with the help of selected discoveries from the Aedui and the Senones civitates, two Gallo-Roman peoples whose territories almost match the limits of Burgundy. Nearly 2,000 busts, reliefs, statuettes, and statues are known from the Aedui territory, and discoveries from Senones add a few hundred more. As it stands, and considering only Roman Burgundy, only a few cases relate directly to Christian destruction. First, the cult statue of the “Champagne” sanctuary near Nitry (Yonne), which was destroyed at some point during the second half of the fourth century. The remains of the statue were left on the spot, where it was evidently still worshipped into the early fifth century, when coin offerings continued to be offered. Second, the destruction of statues at Montmarte hill near Vault-de-Lugny (Yonne), which is more obscure and difficult to date, although again here we find a continuation of monetary offerings. Finally, at the Crain sanctuary (Yonne), where cult statues were burned or dumped in a nearby well, either as a single event or as a series of episodes that might have taken place some time after the AD 370s. Even if we took these puzzling cases as exemplars, working on the basis of widespread religious iconoclasm following the issue of the Codex Theodosianus, it would be difficult to ignore the extensive evidence that paganism remained somewhat vivacious in Gaul throughout the fourth century, especially in the countryside where polytheist sanctuaries remained in use and where pagan rites survived up until the early medieval period. That being said, the following case studies from Roman Burgundy all date to at least a hundred years before the Theodosian religious shift. Therefore, we can exclude from the outset the idea of Christian iconoclasm.

Since the focus of this paper is on the third century, we cannot entirely exclude the possibility of destruction having been inflicted by German raiders. Although these were mainly in AD 259 and 260, they also occurred during the following years, when some Germanic tribes caused great distress in Burgundy. Unfortunately this fact has led to some hasty interpreta-

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11 Gregory of Tours, De Glor. Confes., LXVII.
12 Sotinel 2004; Salzman 2006; Saradi 2008. Marcos (2015, 175-177) has shown that Martin of Tours’ destructions should not be overestimated.
13 Lamy 2015.
14 For the argument that this represents a “ritual of closure,” see Kiernan 2016, 211-217.
15 See Hostein et al. 2014, 211-216, for a summary and bibliography related to these cases.
16 Rousselle 1990; Van Andringa 2014.
18 Christol 1997, 180.
tions, with barbarians regularly cited as the cause when fires and/or destruction are brought to light during archaeological investigation. The actuality is that it is still very difficult to assess their role in such destruction, both in Burgundy \(^{19}\) and elsewhere in Gaul. \(^{20}\) Moreover, the *Aeduii civitas* also suffered extortion and abuse caused by political rivalries between emperors, usurpers, and their troops. \(^{21}\) Therefore, if vandals had indeed roamed the region during the third century, their identity must remain unsure if we are to stay clear of any misinterpretation of the facts.

*Ancient and recent cases, new methodology*

The most important thing to note is that the case studies presented here provide an opportunity to separate acts of pragmatic and symbolic recarving. These examples, being distinct from the historical context presented above, require a different methodological approach. For a study of examples showing pragmatic and opportunistic motives for recarving, the current author has already presented the case of the late-antique wall of Sens-Agedincum (Yonne), a fortification whose foundations were made of re-used blocks from local monuments. \(^{22}\) Here it was possible to show that recarving operations were made *in situ* when the blocks were adjusted inside the wall. However, the walls of *Agedincum* will also be a discussed here, where the focus will be on blocks that were likely recarved long before their re-use in the wall. Other case studies from modern Burgundy will also provide further insight into the problem of interpreting purposeful destruction. In each case, the main factors considered will include the presence or absence of toolmarks, the parts of the body targeted, the nature of the sculpted element, and the geographical, chronological, and cultural contexts of the object.

*Ambiguous cases*

*The sanctuary of the “Sources de la Seine” (Côte-d’Or)*

Our first case study, the sanctuary of the “Sources de la Seine” (Côte-d’Or), is situated in the small *civitas* of the *Mandubian*, a client people of the *Lingones* and later the *Aedui*, some 20 km away from the site of Alesia. The sanctuary presents interesting examples of methodological and interpretive difficulties. In total, some 450 stone sculptures have been found during the last two centuries from excavations. \(^{23}\) Nearly 400 of these were brought to the sanctuary of the fluvial goddess Sequana as votive offerings. \(^{24}\) Among this group are at least four *ex voto* sculptures that had been re-used in the foundations or the elevation of the most recent temple, which was built around the end of the first century AD (Fig. 1). These included two female busts, one now in the Musée de Semur-en-Auxois and the other in the Musée Ar-

\(^{19}\) Kasprzyk 2011, 65-67.
\(^{20}\) See for instance the case of the Jupiter-Giant column of Ladenburg, discussed in Kiernan 2016, 201-206.
\(^{22}\) Lamy, Ribolet 2020.
\(^{23}\) Baudot 1842-1846; Corot 1927-1932; 1937; 1938; 1940-1941; Martin 1954.
\(^{24}\) Lebel 1937; Bernard, Vassal 1958; Deyts 1966; Deyts 1994.
chéologique de Dijon,\textsuperscript{25} as well as a child holding a dog\textsuperscript{26} and a young boy standing,\textsuperscript{27} both also now in Dijon. These last two statues have clearly been reworked for use as rubble stones.

The Dijon bust, however, shows clear and deliberate mutilation of the nose as well as a beheading. On its own, this could be understood simply as an act of desecration in order to prepare the sculpture for its profane use; however, the bust’s treatment is inconsistent with the Semur-en-Auxois bust, which bears no similar signs of mutilation and is still in a very good state of preservation. The question therefore arises: why go through the process for one bust and not the other? It is possible that the Semur-en-Auxois bust was not destroyed because its dedicator was still alive, or alternatively, because both busts had different meanings. On the other hand, it may have been linked to the position of the re-used sculpture in the new building. Unfortunately, in this case, the findspot was not recorded precisely enough by those who found the bust. As it stands then, none of these hypotheses stand out as a clear explanation.

However, a head found between 1836 and 1842 goes some way to providing an answer.\textsuperscript{28} It was originally a bust of a young man, but only the head now remains. It was pierced in the right ear where it joined the back of the head and again straight into the mouth. It seems too audacious to see these holes as depictions of illnesses.\textsuperscript{29} It is quite possible that this represents the re-use of a broken head as a waterspout. This is especially attractive given the context – a healing sanctuary dedicated to a fluvial goddess which had different basins into which the faithful could plunge. It should also be noted in this case that no other destruction occurred to the face and therefore no desecration was undertaken.

These examples show that desecration was not a mandatory process prior to the re-use of a sculpted offering. It might instead be linked to the periods when the re-use occurred and/or to local habits. However in this case, it is first and foremost a matter of the nature of the site. In sanctuaries, statues were exposed to both weathering and accidents, and even damaged or pieces broken beyond repair could be kept either on site or in a different place, as at the sanctuary of Delos during the Hellenistic period, where an oikos was used as a storehouse for disused offerings.\textsuperscript{30} Indeed, priests were responsible for the offerings made at the sanctuary and as keepers of the gods’ property they could deal with the offerings as they saw fit. They also had to clean display areas and consequently dispose of some ex voto, as can be seen at the nearby settlement of Alesia, at the sanctuary of Apollon-Moritasgus,\textsuperscript{31} and at several other Gallo-Roman sanctuaries, where offerings were stockpiled or used as material for backfills.\textsuperscript{32} Besides votive offerings, useless or broken religious artefacts or even statues and statuettes of divinities were sometimes buried, as can be seen on multiple sites in Gaul. We should be careful not to view the discarding of these objects in a negative way. This began a new ch-

\textsuperscript{25} Museum of Semur-en-Auxois; Espérandieu 1910, no. 2438:1; Deyts 1994, 65, pl. 23.2; Lamy 2015, no. 21.809. Dijon, archaeological museum, inv. no. 994.1.48; Deyts 1994, 65, pl. 23.1.

\textsuperscript{26} Dijon, archaeological museum, inv. no. 4043; Deyts 1994, 23, pl. 2.4; Lamy 2015, no. 21.972.

\textsuperscript{27} Dijon, archaeological museum, inv. no. 4160; Deyts 1994, 26, pl. 5.3; Lamy 2015, no. 21.981.

\textsuperscript{28} Dijon, archaeological museum, inv. no. Arb. 794; Espérandieu 1910, no. 2433; Deyts 1994, 52, pl. 17.1; Lamy 2015, no. 21.747.

\textsuperscript{29} Bernard, Vassal 1958, 332, pl. 105-106.

\textsuperscript{30} Prêtre 2014, 39-40.

\textsuperscript{31} De Cazanove et al. 2012, 112-119, fig. 18.

\textsuperscript{32} Pechoux 2008, 138-140.
ter in the object’s “biography,” even if they were re-used as building material. We therefore should not simply view these aspects with a modern eye to what is useful and what is broken and useless. When re-used in foundations a statue was out of sight, but it was still a part of the sanctuary. In such cases, there might, therefore, have been no need to desecrate an offering that remained on consecrated grounds, because even though its function radically changed – or ceased – it still belonged to the divinity. To go any further in our investigations, then, we need detailed studies which include not only a consideration of the state of preservation but also the documentation of potential toolmarks on the stone offerings found in Gallo-Roman sanctuaries; unfortunately, this approach to the study of stone material from such sites has yet to find favour.

Recently excavated houses in Entrains-Intaranum (Nièvre)

The city of Entrains-sur-Nohain (Nièvre), Intaranum in the Gallo-Roman period, provides further ambiguous cases of destruction. Situated 116 km west from Alesia, the site has provided regional museums, since the nineteenth century, with roughly 140 stone sculptures carved from local limestones. However, here we are concerned only with the find of nine new statuettes from an excavation carried out by Inrap in 2014-2015 in Entrains-sur-Nohain on a residential area in the northern part of the ancient city. Some of the statuettes remained in a surprisingly good state of preservation. They depict 30- to 60-cm tall gods and goddesses, shown mostly seated and holding attributes related to earthly wealth and prosperity: cornucopia, cakes, fruits or bread, and full purses. The statuettes appear to have been abandoned somewhere around the end of the third century AD, the majority coming from backfills.

While the abandonment and demolition of the area seems surprisingly consistent, judging from the similarity of material in the fill, the statuettes were abandoned in different ways. At least four statuettes simply seem to have been thrown down, or perhaps fell down, either accidentally or purposefully. Unfortunately, their presence in the backfill is of no use in resolving this issue. More interesting are the other statuettes which were found in two cellars, close to where they had originally been set up, presumably in a secondary context (Figs. 2 and 3). This is surely the case for the two gods found on top of each other in basement 2 (which had been used as a dumping pit) (Fig. 2a), where they seem to have been discarded. Their state of preservation indicates that they had not been thrown down from the ground-level, situated 2 metres, above but rather they had fallen from a lower height. Indeed, each statue could have been set atop either the nearby column with capital or on the small pillar, which was perhaps an altar. One of the statuettes had lost its head (Fig. 2b), which was found a few metres away. The god’s face had received several blows, and the broken surface of the bust confirms that the head was detached with a blow struck to the face. These observations support the idea of wilful mutilation, perhaps even carried out after the fall of the statuette. One gets the impression that the gods were overturned from their original display context,

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33 Croxford 2003, 82-83.
34 Devauges 1988, 33-111, no. 1-117. For an updated inventory, see Lamy 2015, no. 58.52 to 58.171.
35 Lamy, Venault forthcoming.
36 These underground rooms, used for storage, were seemingly under the protection of domestic deities and could be quite decorated (i.e. with painted walls). They are quite common in northern Gaul, especially in Burgundy, in Alésia and Entrains. See Lamy and Venault forthcoming, for a summary of the functions of these basements.
with the statuettes set up at no more than a man’s height. Then, one of the statuettes received several blows causing the damage to the head before it finally broke off; it may be no coincidence that this statuette was placed facing upwards and not laid face-down on the ground (Fig. 2a). It should also be noted that another small statuette of a headless god on a base was found in another corner of the same basement, standing strangely square.

The case of basement 1 is something else entirely. The statuette found here represents two divinities, one male and one female - iconography typical of the Aeduii and Mandubiani civitates. It was found during the excavation at the north-west corner of the basement, however, this time the statuette was evidently not in a fallen position but standing straight on its base (Fig. 3). Moreover, the upper and lower deposits show no significant differences, and therefore the deposit appears to be part of the same stratigraphic context. Additionally, some organic materials found underneath the statuette could point to the presence of a wooden structure, such as a wooden aedicula. Surprisingly, the statuette was not found directly on top of these remains but several inches above them. This position remains difficult to explain, appearing as if the piece had been carefully placed at some point during the filling of the basement, on the same axis as this structure. At first glance, the statuette appears rather well preserved, but in fact an arched-edged tool such as a gouge had been used to behead the male god and to strike the god’s attributes and hands. These symbolic parts of the body were critical to the god’s active, divine power. But, if this represents an act of desecration, why behead only the god and not the goddess? Why mutilate the statuette and then restore it to its previous location? Is this also what happened to the headless but “restored” statuette from basement 2?

Taking the finds from the site as a whole, it is clear that there was no consistent modus operandi in terms of destruction or discard processes. In fact, the acts carried out seem contradictory. Relentless blows to one of the gods’ faces and the incomplete mutilation of others could equally be understood as desecration or blind violence, while the finds from both basements indicate that some divinities were restored to their proper place. Further investigations in the area could provide more answers, but as it stands, it appears that an episode of vandalism was followed at some point by symbolic restoration, after which the site was permanently abandoned and the now-damaged gods were buried.

Evidence of desecration

The cases discussed in the following section present evidence much closer to acts of desecration. Among these, two categories stand out: those carried out before re-use and those done prior to abandonment or destruction. While the previously mentioned statues from Entrains might belong to the latter, it is important to note that acts of desecration prior to discard pre-date the Roman period. This has been suggested, for example, for the statues of the so-called “heroes” of Hirschlanden and Glauberg, which were carefully buried within the area of the tumulus they used to cap before their definitive abandonment. Nonetheless, the more one studies the phenomenon of desecration, the more it seems that multiple strands of evidence

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37 Boguszewski et al. 2011, 313. The authors provide two other cases, although less secure, of desecration of La Tène steles.
point toward desecration before re-use as the norm, rather than desecration before abandonment.

_Disfiguring the gods_

While there are multiple examples of desecration before re-use in the _Aedui_ civitas, I will focus on just two persuasive examples. The first one is a head from Sainte-Pallaye (Yonne) that shows evidence of multiple and deliberate mutilations to the face. The use of the drill for the hair suggests an original date around the second half of the second century AD. It was found in 1868, presumably in the foundations of a temple. The general shape and treatment of the hair do not suggest a portrait but rather a young god such as Apollo. If the head had been a portrait, one could think in terms of a mutilation following a _damnatio memoriae_. Equally, Christian iconoclasm can also not be asserted in this case, since the head was re-used, maybe as building material, in the substructure of a pagan temple. What is striking, is that the face has been entirely chiselled off, removing even elements that would not have hindered its new function as building material. However, the hair was left untouched and remains surprisingly well preserved. The contrast between the face and the hair are striking, and this invites us to identify it definitively as a case of deliberate desecration, and more specifically, desecration carried out before re-use. The situation is reminiscent of the re-used and mutilated head from the sanctuary of the “Source de la Seine,” but here the oddity of the head of Sainte-Pallaye needs to be stressed. This could be another isolated case, or alternatively, it might be understood in two different ways. First, it is possible that the mutilation may have been related to a local custom. However, it is more likely that the distinction here between the votive offering and a god’s face might relate to the re-use process, with the latter requiring a thorough removal and a few strikes sufficing in the case of the former. However, the head from Sainte-Pallaye may not have been an isolated case at all.

The “Champ des Tombeaux” site in Escolives-Sainte-Camille (Yonne), excavated during the 1960s, has revealed, among other monuments, a late-antique thermal bath complex. Its foundation consisted in part of re-used blocks, most notably a 1.52 metre-high relief depicting a standing goddess holding a cornucopia. The related inscription records that it was offered as an _ex voto_ to the goddess Rosmerta, probably during the second century AD. The stone was clearly sawn in half to facilitate its transport and re-use. However above all, the goddess’s face received multiple small strikes, which were confined to the forehead, the nose, and the cheeks. Notably, the eyes were not entirely obliterated, as one might have expected. Once again, the rest of the relief remains in a reasonably good state of preservation. The inscription and even the toolmarks remain perfectly visible. The relief of Escolives-Sainte-Camille stresses once again the peculiarity of mutilation prior to the re-use process in the case of depictions of divinities. It is hard to compare these last two examples to the damage described above from Entrains-sur-Nohain, since the goals were different: on the one hand, here

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38 Auxerre, musée-abbaye-Saint-Germain d’Auxerre, without inv. no.; Espérandieu 1911, no. 2910.2; Lamy 2015, no. 89.92.
39 Leblanc-Davau 1871, 98, no. 4.
40 Kapps 1974.
41 Escolives-Sainte-Camille, site deposit; Kapps 1967; Lamy 2015, no. 89.55.
42 _AE_ 1968, no. 306.
we have a new function as building material, and on the other, at Entrains-sur-Nohain, the complete and utter end of function.

Mutilating statues of divinities before re-use might be linked to religious scruples. After all, was not the god supposed to reside inside the statue? Caius Lucilius makes a joke of this by ridiculing those who indulged in such superstitio.\(^43\) Yet in Egypt, after paganism was banned, people had to be shown through speech and gesture that the idols were now powerless.\(^44\) We hear that, for instance, an exorcism was needed for a statue of Sarapis in the Serapeum of Alexandria.\(^45\) Similarly, the less-famous statue of Aphrodite was destroyed by Porphyry of Gaza,\(^46\) after which Diaconus reports that rats and a demon’s spirit escaped from the broken statue. These literary references are not cited here to suggest Christian iconoclasm as the motivation for the head from Sainte-Pallaye and the relief from Escolives-Sainte-Camille, as the dating in both cases do not correspond. However, what they do illustrate is a possible connection between the disfiguration of a statue and its ability to render the divinity powerless. This would have turned the depiction back to its original state – lifeless stone. As attractive as that theory is, we must acknowledge that the disfiguration was carried out differently in the case of our two examples, and the fact that the depiction of the goddess Rosmerta still was left with her eyes almost intact could be highly meaningful.

Defacing the dead

More significant for this paper is the case of blocks re-used in the fortification of Sens-Agedincum (Yonne), which can be dated to the last quarter of the third century AD. Most of the recycled blocks came from funerary monuments. They depict the dead, always in full length and either alone, as a pair, or in groups of three or even four – typically parents with children or two couples. The earliest monuments probably date from the end of the first century AD, but most can be dated from the late Antonine period to the Severan dynasty.\(^47\) Almost a third of these monuments show targeted mutilation to the hands, the attributes, and/or the face – especially the nose and chin – even though the latter parts were not the most protruding elements.\(^48\) In such cases the defaced parts often show traces of erosion unlike the other areas where the recarving was linked to re-use in the fortification. Moreover, nineteenth-century paintings of the fortifications in the “Album Thiollet”\(^49\) show that these mutilations predate the discovery of the blocks in modern times. Altogether, this confirms that the funerary monuments were recarved during antiquity and then stockpiled later somewhere outdoors before being adjusted and re-used in the late Roman walls. While the mutilated areas are mostly symbolic (hands, faces, etc.), it must still be pointed out that no strict modus operandi can be detected, since the majority of the monuments are either broken or highly

44 Frankfurter 2008.
45 Theodoret, Hist. Relig., V, 22.
47 Lamy, Ribolet 2020.
48 This is seen on 14 reliefs out of 45; however, at least 100 reliefs remain to be studied in the reserves of the museum of Sens.
damaged. In other cases, the human figures were entirely chiselled off. Nonetheless, these few examples still look like cases of desecration.

The variety of methods do not hide the fact that the face and the figures’ attributes were critical areas in such activities. Furthermore, the variety of methods show that there was no written law or official procedure from the municipal or the provincial government, but rather local customs and traditions. Following this idea, we might therefore assume that the difference in methods was linked to the different periods at which these monuments were dismantled and stockpiled – all told more than a hundred years separate the earliest and latest funerary monuments that were re-used in the late third-century walls. Mutilation customs or practices may well have changed over the course of this time. What is more certain is that the desecration took place a long time before re-use in the wall, meaning that in Sens desecration was not an immediate step preceding the next function or use. Thus, it is possible that no specific re-use had been planned for these objects, and therefore, the desecration acted more as some sort of “death sentence” that ended the current life of the object, regardless of what would happen to the monuments afterwards.

But what can be said about the monuments that received no such defacement? It is possible that this was related to legal issues caused by the absence of heirs that might have allowed for the dismantling and profanation of the monument, much like the case with modern cemetery plots. However, in antiquity a funerary plot – a sepulcrum – was a locus religiosus and therefore in theory intended to be permanent; moreover, from the second century AD onwards, the monumentum was inseparable from the sepulcrum and thus inalienable. As a result, only the municipal authorities could have sanctioned the re-use of abandoned funerary monuments; in certain circumstances they may even have requisitioned such monuments. In this scenario, the authorities might have made the defacement mandatory – in the truest from of a desecration – since the monumentum was still associated with the bodies of the dead, which were central to the definition of the sepulcrum. In the case of Sens, where most of the monuments were at least a century old, we might consider how well preserved the bodies were. Could it be that some were utterly disintegrated by this time? If this was the case, as seems likely, the monument might not have held the status of a sepulcrum anymore and thus the defacement may have been considered useless and therefore was not carried out. Granted, this hypothesis is still tenuous, but I strongly suggest that the choice to deface a monument or not was a legal matter, be it state law, municipal law, or both.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of the survey of symbolic recarving in Roman Burgundy, I believe I have presented case studies that reflect the complexity of the matter. The problems of interpretation are for the most part due to the lack of precise data regarding the context of discovery. Here, the need for detailed studies of individual objects and their archaeological surroundings is stressed; toolmarks, stratigraphic context, position in the new building in cases of re-use, and association with other artefacts.

50 A famous example was given by Sidonius Apollinarius regarding his grandfather’s tomb: Sid. Apoll., Epis., 3.12.
51 Laubry 2016, 79-87; the author cites among others Iulius Paulus who considered any defacement of the monument a violation of the sepulcrum (Sent. Paul., 1, 21, 8).
Three main contexts have been considered: sanctuaries, houses, and a castrum. By combining data on the intended destination of the recarved sculptures – re-use or discard – we have seen that such contextual evidence is critical in identifying desecration per se. In the case of the abandoned statuettes at the third-century houses in Entrains-sur-Nohain, vandalism was suspected; in the Sources de la Seine and in Escolives-Sainte-Camille, we have seen partial defacing; in Sainte-Pallaye and in Sens, I believe there is a stronger case for desecration, but for two different purposes. Overall, it is clear that generations before the Christianisation of Roman Burgundy there were already multiple reasons behind the mutilation of statues, based on the object’s new function, local customs or laws, and religious scruples. However, there were also acts of sheer violence that are hard to fathom in the present and are almost unintelligible in the past.

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Fig. 1 – Votive offerings from the Sources de la Seine sanctuary, found re-used in the late first-century temple foundations. From left to right, top to bottom: Dijon, archaeological museum, inv. no. 994.1.48 and inv. no. 4160; Museum of Semur-en-Auxois, without inv. no.; Dijon, inv. no. 4049; Photo: P.-A. Lamy (bottom left); P. Bert (top and bottom right).
Fig. 2 – Entrain-sur-Nohain (Nievre), 2014-2015 INRAP excavation, route d’Eiais. Large basement with two seated gods. Photo: INRAP; P.-A. Lamy (bottom left).
Fig. 3 – Entrains-sur-Nohain (Nievre), 2014-2015 INRAP excavation, route d’Etais. Small basement with an “Aeduan Pair.” Photo: INRAP (left); P.-A. Lamy (right).

Fig. 4 – Head from Sainte-Pallaye (Yonne). Musee-Abbaye Saint-Germain-d’Auxerre, without inv. no. Photo: P.-A. Lamy.
FIG. 5 – Escolives-Sainte-Camille (Yonne), Rosmerta relief re-used in the late-antique baths. Escolives, site deposit. Photo: O. & F. Harl, Ubi Erat Lupa.
Fig. 6 – Sens (Yonne), funerary monuments re-used in the late-antique city wall. Musée de Sens, inv. (from left to right, to bottom) J112-113-114, J84, J139. Photo: P.-A. Lamy.