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The Barletta Colossus Revisited: The Methodological Challenges of an Enigmatic Statue

Abstract

The Barletta colossus is the sole large-scale statue in bronze preserved of a late antique emperor; the only comparable image is the even larger, but fragmentary, Constantinian emperor in Rome. According to local tradition, the Barletta colossus depicts the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (610-641). Modern researchers tend to regard this attribution as mere folklore and fiction. But while there is general consensus that the statue does not portray Heraclius, there is no agreement as to whom it may have been intended to portray. About a dozen different emperors have been proposed, suggested dates ranging from the fourth to the eighth century. The present article reviews the evidence and discusses the methodological problems we face when dealing with this enigmatic work.

All over the Italian town of Barletta in Puglia, signposts lead visitors to ‘Eraclio’, a colossal bronze statue of an emperor. Standing 5.11 m tall, it towers above Corso Vittorio Emanuele outside Santo Sepolcro, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.¹ The statue was first set up in 1491 in front of the Sedile del Popolo, but when the Sedile was pulled down in 1923, it was moved a short distance up the Corso to its present location (FIG. 1).

The origin of this enigmatic colossus is totally uncertain. The earliest reference to it is in the Edict of Charles of Anjou from 1309, which notes that it was then lying in Barletta’s harbour as royal property: “ymaginem de metallo existentem in dohana Baroli”. It is further noted in the edict that the legs and arms had been melted down so that the metal could be used for church bells in a neighbouring town.² Later the Jesuit father G.P. Grimaldi recorded that it was brought to Italy by Venetian crusaders as part of the booty from the Sack of Constantinople in 1204. The ship

1. At the time of writing (2015), the statue is in a wood and Plexiglas shelter, as it is undergoing in situ maintenance and conservation, which started in June 2014.

2. Napoli, Archivio di Stato, Registri Angioini, Regesto n. 185, anno 1309 B. Fol. 249; Loffredo 1893, 72; Testini 1973, 129, n. 2.

FIG. 1 – Barletta colossus, Chiesa di Santo Sepolcro, Barletta (photo: B. Kiilerich).

sunk before reaching Venice and the colossus remained destitute in Barletta's harbour, until it was re-erected on 19 May 1491, with the missing limbs restored.³

A late antique emperor

The emperor is depicted as *imperator*, one of the standard *schemata* for imperial portrayal (*statua loricata*). He wears a *tunica*, a muscle cuirass with a *cingulum* and a *paludamentum*; the separately inserted fibula is lost. Technical criteria seem to indicate that the head and torso are contemporary.⁴ This circumstance should rule out the possibility that the head was inserted into an older statue, which might perhaps have accounted for some of the problems of identification. The preserved original parts – the head (the top of which is missing above the diadem) and cui-

3. Grimaldi 1607, 128-129. The year 1491 is now generally accepted as the most likely one, rather than 1469 or the 1440s as recorded in other sources.

4. De Tommasi 1982, 153-154. De Tommasi is also in charge of the current 2014-15 conservation.

FIG. 2 – Barletta colossus, side view (photo: B. Kiilerich).

rassed torso – measure 3.55 m. Since the legs are restored from the knees down, the original height may have differed slightly. In fact, due to the stockiness of the new legs, it is reasonable to assume that the lower extremities were originally somewhat longer, giving an estimated total height of ca 5.30 m. In addition to the legs, the right arm from the elbow down and the left arm from the edge of the *paludamentum* are restored. It is therefore uncertain whether the figure originally held a cross in his right hand and an orb in his left (FIG. 2).⁵ Other possibilities are a cross-staff, labarum or spear, or that his right hand was extended in a powerful gesture. If the attribute in his left hand was a somewhat larger orb, it would plausibly have been surmounted by a figure of Victory.

5. The present cross is actually a very recent replacement. An inscription on the crossbar states that the cross was given “in sostituzione alla croce di legno tolta ad Eraclio la notte 29 Aprile MCMXI del 19 Sett MCMXI.”

FIG. 3 – Barletta colossus, head (photo: B. Kiilerich).

The diadem consists of a double row of pearls framing a band of square stones. On the diadem's left side there remain two pearl pendants, while those on the right are lost. The most conspicuous feature is the *Stirnjuwel*. Rather than a large central jewel in pearl framing, the ornament of the Barletta emperor's diadem consists of a rectangular plate subdivided into two rows of three squares surmounted by a disk divided into ten sections.⁶ This unusual design is plausibly meant to indicate precious stones set in a golden mount (FIG. 3). While the *Stirnjuwel* brings to mind the cloisonné technique of Ostrogothic and Longobard metalwork, it has proved difficult to find a good parallel. This, I venture to suggest, may indicate that the atypical ensign is not an original part of the statue but a later addition. The now-missing top of the head could have been removed purposely in order to extract the original ornament that was possibly inset with precious stones, and therefore, like the fibula, worth removing for its material value.

6. Delbrueck 1933, 221 gives a meticulous description: "Das Stirnjuwel besteht aus einer queroblonden Tafel von der ungefähren Breite des Bandes und darüber einer Scheibe, deren unteres Segment von der Tafel abgeschnitten wird. Der obere Rand der Scheibe erscheint unregelmässig verdickt; vermutlich war also noch ein Aufsatz da, etwa ein Dreiblatt. Die Tafel und

die Scheibe des Stirnjuwels haben Randfassungen und werden durch Stege in Felder abgeteilt, die in Wirklichkeit plane Edelsteine enthielten. Bei der Tafel sind es zwei horizontale Reihen von je drei annähernd quadratischen Feldern, bei der Rundscheibe 10 Keile um eine schwach konvexe Rundscheibe in der Mitte."

FIG. 4 – Barletta colossus, *gorgoneia* on cuirass (photo: B. Kiilerich).

When the statue was re-erected in the fifteenth century, the replacement ornament could then have been inserted. In any event, since pearl-lined diadems were in use from the fourth to the seventh century – and plausibly beyond – the diadem is of limited use for close dating.

Similarly, the cuirass furnishes few if any clues with regard to date and identity.⁷ In particular, it lacks narrative decoration that might provide information on this particular emperor. The only figurative features are the *gorgoneia* on the leather lappets; their bland rounded faces – neither scary, nor of the so-called beautiful type – do not indicate any particular timeframe (FIG. 4).

It might be hoped then that the casting technique could give some indication of when the colossus was made. The thickness of the bronze varies from 1 to 5 cm.⁸ In one analysis, the alloy is stated to consist of 64% copper, 8% tin and 24% lead; later specimens tested have rendered 72%, 6% and 22%.⁹ Since the colossus was cast in many pieces, some variation in the alloys is only to be expected.¹⁰ A high content of lead is characteristic of Roman in contrast to Greek bronzes. Imported from Spain or England, tin was expensive; lead was more readily available and accordingly cheaper. Moreover, a high content of lead lowered the melting point of the alloy, improved its fluidity and reinforced its resistance to the infiltration of gasses. It also made the bronze easier to chisel.¹¹ While a high percentage of lead is to be expected in late antiquity, 24% is quite high. Of interest in this context is an analysis of the “Beautiful Door” in the southern vestibule of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, inasmuch as the original and the restored parts differ: in the original parts of the right leaf, the alloy is said to contain 3% lead and 10% tin, whereas the upper part of the left leaf, which post-dates the Justinianic period, contains 20% lead and 6% tin.¹² The chemical composition of the Barletta bronze is compatible – in a general way – with a late date, but it furnishes no specific chronological criteria (FIG. 5).

7. For various types of emperor statues, see Stemmer 1978.

8. De Tommasi 1982, 136.

9. 64% copper: Bearzi 1966; Leoni 1979, 181. 72% copper: De Tommasi 1982, 154.

10. Lahusen & Formigli 2001, cat. No. 2002, 325-331, at 328.

11. Haynes 1992, 83.

12. Leoni 1979, 181.

FIG. 5 – Barletta colossus, detail of leather tunic (photo: B. Kiilerich).

Methodological problems of identification

Imperial statues were fashioned mainly in gilded bronze or silver. Due to their material value, most were later melted down. Of the few late-antique imperial bronzes to have survived, the most impressive is undoubtedly the fragmentary Constantinian colossus in the Musei Capitolini in Rome.¹³ Because of their colossal size, metallic surface and harsh facial features, the Capitoline and the Barletta heads both have an awe-inspiring demeanour. Except for this, they are ever so different in style.¹⁴ Other surviving fragments, such as the slightly above life size gilded bronze head from Nis (Beograd National Museum), generally identified as Constantine, and fragments from the site of the Ponte Sisto in Rome, which are epigraphically associated with Valens (364-378) or Valentin I (364-375), also fail to compare with the Barletta colossus.¹⁵ Likewise, remains of the cuirass of a colossal bronze imperator (Justinian?) from Caricin Grad, Justiniana Prima in Serbia, are much too fragmentary to throw light on the Barletta statue.¹⁶

No large-scale bronzes are extant in present-day Istanbul, where even imperial marbles are few; a re-carved Constantine and a portrait of a Theodosian emperor from Beyazit are the only early Byzantine portraits found there.¹⁷ The so-called Theodosius II marble head in Paris, although sometimes associated with Constantinople, is unprovenanced and it is equally uncertain whom it portrays.¹⁸ Nevertheless, since a number of imperial portraits in marble are preserved from other sites, one would assume it to be within the reach of modern scholarship to fit in the

13. Ensoli 2000, 71-77 with colourplates 72-75; Parisi Presicce 2005, 152-153; Parisi Presicce 2012, 116-119.

14. Strong 1929, 193, however, found that the Barletta bronze “might have issued from the same workshop” as the Capitoline bronze, a belief few are likely to share today.

15. Vassits 1901, 101; Kiilerich 1993, fig. 104. Tiber: Stichel 1982, 41, pl. 1.

16. Grabar 1948, 57-63; Petkovic 1948, pl. VIII; Stichel 1982, 105, no. 130; Brandl & Vasic 2007, 118, fig. 7.

17. Firatli 1990, cat. 3 and 5.

18. Stichel 1982, 55-56, pl. 23a; Kiilerich 1993, 236, fig. 106.

FIG. 6 – Barletta colossus, face (after Delbrueck 1933, pl. 119).

Barletta emperor and to find a convincing name for it. Still, inasmuch as late antique ruler images were symbolic representations of imperial majesty and desired imperial qualities rather than realistic likenesses, they are notoriously difficult to identify.¹⁹

The Barletta emperor, however, stands out because it departs physiognomically from the conventional concept of the *divinus vultus* as expressed, for instance, in the masklike stylized image of Theodosius on the silver *missorium* from 388.²⁰ Indeed, the colossus' features are surprisingly distinctive, with contracted eyebrows over close-set eyes, short nose, marked naso-labial furrows, a closed, tight-lipped mouth and heavy square chin, covered by a stubbly beard. The hair is neatly combed forward over the forehead in the style introduced by Constantine and still in vogue for subsequent dynasties. The strictly ordered, almost calligraphically rendered hair contrasts markedly with the drawn physiognomy (FIG. 6). Yet in spite of this seeming individualism, it has proved difficult to associate the statue with a particular individual. The colossus projects a powerful image of a warrior emperor of mature age. Still, his precise age is also open to negotiation.

Actual age and represented age could differ considerably in imperial portraits. In general there was no direct correspondence between an emperor's actual and portrayed age: an elderlery per-

19. See, e.g., Kiilerich 1993, 94-95.

20. Kiilerich 2000.

son could be presented as a youth, while a small child could be depicted as an adult. Depending on the qualities to be communicated, the public image could stress agelessness – as in Augustan and early Theodosian emperors – or, in another period, maturity. Disregarding these conventions, Richard Delbrueck ruled out Anastasius who became emperor at the age of around 60 or more, since he estimated the colossus' represented age to be closer to 50.²¹ Franklin Johnson found that the colossus could “hardly represent a man much older than fifty-seven”.²² To other scholars, the features are in keeping with those of a man around 40.²³ Within this age range there are many potential candidates. While the mature facial features may rule out the emperors who died very young, they cannot be used for identification.

Suggested identifications

According to the signposts and the prevailing local tradition, the statue represents the Byzantine emperor Heraclius.²⁴ It has also been known locally by variant names such as Are, Aracco, Eracco and Arichis, the latter being a Longobard duke. Scholars have supplemented these names with a range of hypothetical attributions. A chronological list of fourth- to eighth-century emperors who have been launched as candidates, either in passing or more thoroughly argued in articles and books, includes the following names (there may have been others as well):

- Valentinian I (364-375)²⁵
- Theodosius I (379-395)²⁶
- Arcadius (383-408)²⁷
- Honorius (393-423)²⁸
- Theodosius II (401-450)²⁹
- Marcian (450-457)³⁰
- Leo I (457-474)³¹
- Zeno (474-491)³²
- Justinian (527-565)³³
- Heraclius (610-641)³⁴
- Carolingian ruler, no specific name offered.³⁵

As this long list proves, we are desperately in need of secure criteria that would enable us to establish a date and an identity for the bronze statue. The emperors listed are mainly well-known, long-reigning rulers. But lesser known emperors who reigned for only a short time would also

21. Delbrueck 1933, 219-226.

22. Johnson 1925, 23.

23. Purpura 1993.

24. Alberti 1550: “proprio nel mezzo della piazza di questo nobilissimo Castello vi è una grande statua di metallo dieci piedi alta, che rappresentan un Re armato, quale è secondo i Barolitani l'effigie di Heraclio Imperadore”, cited in Purpura 1993, n. 17. It may be noted that the height stated by Alberti is merely ten feet.

25. Koch 1912-13; Strong 1929, 193.

26. Marulli 1816; Riegl 1901, 209.

27. Gurlitt 1909, n.1; also Machiarelli 2006, 162.

28. Testini 1973; Demougeot 1982.

29. Purpura 1993.

30. Delbrueck 1933, 219-226; Kollwitz 1941, 109-111; Breckenridge 1979, 29-30; cf. Bassett 2014, 79: ‘is thought to represent Marcian’.

31. Peschlow 1986; Meischner 1991; Bauer 1996; Mundell Mango 1994, 112.

32. Stichel 1982, 61-62.

33. Picozzi 1971; Picozzi 1975.

34. Johnson 1925; Beckwith 1961, 29.

35. Haseloff 1909, 461; cited by Kollwitz 1941, 94.

have been recorded in effigy, meaning that the number of potential candidates is even larger. In order to give an idea of the problems of finding convincing criteria for identification, the main alternative positions and arguments shall be presented here, without, however, going into a detailed discussion of each and every point that has been put forward over the years.

An early attempt to identify the statue was made in 1816 by the count Trojano Marulli, who published a book-length treatise – indeed almost 200 pages – where he dismissed the popular Heraclius identification. Instead, he associated the colossus with a statue of Theodosius I that once stood in nearby Canosa.³⁶ Although a monument honouring Theodosius is epigraphically attested there, it is unlikely to be identical with the colossus since it appears to have been an equestrian monument. It is worth noting that the Theodosius interpretation was accepted, without hesitation, by Alois Riegl in his formal analysis of late Roman art.

Turning to a slightly earlier emperor, Herbert Koch in 1912 argued for Valentinian I. This identification gained a general following, along with the main alternative, Marcian, which was proposed by Richard Delbrueck in 1933.³⁷ In both instances, the dating and identification were based on a combination of stylistic analysis and antiquarian and iconographic criteria.

Among more recent efforts to solve the problem, Pasquale Testini, although with some reservation, and Emilienne Demougeot both favour Theodosius' son Honorius. On the Probus diptych of 405, the young emperor appears in much the same cuirassed guise as the colossus, albeit on a miniature scale.³⁸ In addition to the diptych, both authors support their argumentation primarily with numismatic evidence. In support of a date around 400, Demougeot suggests that the colossus' *Stirnjuwel* could be identical in design to one represented quite indistinctly on a coin of Aelia Flacilla. Still, the profile-view image hardly allows for such comparison.

Gianfranco Purpura, a historian of jurisprudence, argues for Honorius' nephew Theodosius II. He suggests that when Licinia Eudoxia was proclaimed *augusta* at Ravenna in 439, a statue could have been erected there of the then 39-year-old emperor.³⁹ While this is a possible scenario, actual evidence for a statue in Ravenna of the eastern emperor Theodosius the younger is lacking. Nevertheless, the capital city Ravenna should not be disregarded as a plausible provenance. It has in fact been proposed that the statue was brought from Ravenna to Puglia by Emperor Frederick II in 1231, as part of his *renovatio* program.⁴⁰

Many scholars tend towards a date in the second half of the fifth century, that is, in the reigns of Marcian, Leo and Zeno.⁴¹ Believing that the colossus originated in Constantinople, some have endeavoured to associate it with a specific Constantinopolitan monument. Following the reasoning of Delbrueck, the most popular identification is probably that it is the statue of Marcian (450-457), which was mounted on his still standing column in Constantinople. To bolster the claim, the drapery style of the *paludamentum* is said to match that of the Victories on Marcian's base, a stylistic impression that may be open to discussion (FIG. 7-9).⁴² In a variant interpretation, Urs Peschlow reconstructs the statue as Leo I (457-474) atop a much higher, no-longer-standing col-

36. Marulli 1816.

37. Koch 1912-13; Delbrueck 1933.

38. Testini 1973; Testini 1974; Demougeot 1980-81; Demougeot 1982. Probus diptych: Kiilerich 1993, 65-67, fig. 37. Marulli 1816; Riegl 1901, 209.

39. Purpura 1993.

40. Purpura 1993.

41. Many refrain from naming, e.g., Sande 1975, 75-76; Kiilerich 1993, 236 with n. 789; Elsner 1998, 75, 77; La Rocca 2000, 30-31; Lahusen & Formigli 2001, 331.

42. Delbrueck 1933; Kollwitz 1941, 109-111; Breckenridge 1979.

FIG. 7 – Column base of Marcian, Victoria, Istanbul (photo: B. Kiilerich).

FIG. 8 – Barletta colossus, cuirass and paludamentum (photo: B. Kiilerich).

FIG. 9 – Barletta colossus, detail of paludamentum, backside view (photo: B. Kiilerich).

umn in the Pittakia. This identification has been followed by other German scholars.⁴³ While the Leo and the Marcian proposals are both attractive, the assignment to one of these monuments ignores the fact that it was quite common for Byzantine emperors to have their images raised on columns, for example, Theodosius II, Valentinian III and Anastasius all had columnar monuments in the capital city.⁴⁴

43. Peschlow 1986; Meischner 1991; Bauer 1996, 216, 341, 342.

44. Stichel 1982, no. 98, 106 and 124.

FIG. 10 – Barletta colossus, diadem with pendulia (photo: B. Kiilerich).

Moreover, the two proposals are based on the assumption that the colossus was originally erected in Constantinople. Although Constantinople is probably the most likely provenance, other eastern or western origins are also possible.

While Testini and Demougeot demonstrate that the double-row pearl diadem is not incompatible with a date around 400, the numismatist Vittorio Picozzi points to an important antiquarian detail. He holds that pendulia (*kataseistà*) do not appear in imperial iconography before Justinian; accordingly the statue represents either Justinian or one of his successors.⁴⁵ The important point here is to spot the visual difference between pendulia that hang down from the diadem just behind the ears, as in the Barletta statue (FIG. 10), and the tied strings of the diadem at the back of the neck. If Picozzi is right, then the dangling pearls seen on Honorius' diadem on the Probus diptych and other fourth- to fifth-century imperial images are the tied ends of the banded diadem. Later on, when the diadem became more crown-like, these were replaced by the *kataseistà*, which by then had merely an ornamental function. While it is often difficult, especially on tiny numismatic

45. Picozzi 1971; Picozzi 1975.

representation to tell what the image-makers intended, the visual evidence suggests that pendulia were especially prevalent from around 500.⁴⁶ The pendulum now swings towards the sixth century.

A small minority of scholars stretch the chronology as far as the seventh century. In 1925 Franklin Johnson argued that the colossus was indeed Heraclius as local tradition had it.⁴⁷ His criteria were mainly the style of the diadem and the portrayed age – the very same criteria that earlier and later scholars have used in support of fourth-, fifth- and sixth-century emperors. The Heraclius interpretation was later accepted by John Beckwith, who found that “stylistically a date in the second half of the sixth or in the early seventh century seems more acceptable, and it is possible that the identification as Heraclius ... is the correct one”.⁴⁸ Neither the iconographic criteria presented by Johnson, nor the stylistic criteria championed by Beckwith prove that the colossus represents Heraclius. However, before dismissing this interpretation out of hand, it is worth exploring some factors of significance for associating the Barletta colossus with this illustrious emperor.

The public image(s) of Heraclius

Heraclius (610-641) became emperor at the age of 35 and reigned until he died of natural causes at about 66.⁴⁹ As emperors before him and emperors to come, he was launched as *novus Constantinus*.⁵⁰ He named his eldest son Constantine and gave his wife the traditional imperial name Eudocia. One could imagine that as a new Constantine, Heraclius' image adopted traits from the Constantinian *divinus vultus*. Unfortunately, his official image is far from clear-cut. Identified portrayals are furnished by coins, but the numismatic material varies considerably. While some coin images are rendered in the tradition of Constantinian through Theodosian emperors, others are radically different, close to those of his predecessor Phocas (602-610). Moreover, the coins minted at Constantinople, Ravenna and Carthage show iconographic variety. Heraclius is variously depicted with a short beard, a very long beard, and at times beardless; his hair can be straight or wavy.⁵¹ A minting from Ravenna presents him in the classical tradition with a pearl diadem and symmetrically arranged hair combed forward over his forehead, and with a short beard – incidentally somewhat like the Barletta emperor.⁵²

If we consider the possibility that the colossus was from the very beginning intended to portray Heraclius, a fundamental question remains: even though the high lead content in the alloy may point to a late date, is it likely that a statue of this colossal size would have been fashioned in bronze as late as the early seventh century? As attested by literary and epigraphic evidence, the erection of bronze statues did not cease in Constantinople and elsewhere after 600. Among the recorded images are those of Emperor Maurikios (582-602) with his wife and children on the Chalke gate.⁵³ A statue of Maurikios was erected in the palace hall, the Magnaura, in the year

46. Neither Koenen 1996, who focuses mainly on the crowning elements, nor Baldini Lippolis 1999, 52-65, discusses pendulia in detail.

47. Johnson 1925.

48. Beckwith 1961, 27-29; citation p. 29.

49. Sear 1981, 50.

50. Shahid 1972, 309-310, n. 65; Whitby 1994, 93-94; Torp 2006, 598, n. 119.

51. Grierson 1959 and 1968 points to a development from clean-shaven to cropped beard, with a very long beard after the Persian wars, ca 629 onwards.

52. Panvini Rosati 1982, 660, figs. 558 (Catania), fig. 562 (Ravenna).

53. *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* ch. 5b, Stichel 1982 no. 141; Cameron & Herrin 1984, 62-63, 174-175.

596.⁵⁴ A gilded bronze statue of his successor Phokas was set up on a masonry column by the Arsenal behind the Magnaura in 609.⁵⁵ In Rome, another gilded imperial image was placed on a column in the Forum Romanum. The column of Phokas, however, had been erected centuries earlier, probably by Diocletian.⁵⁶ Of particular interest in our connection is the circumstance that Heraclius' cousin, the general Niketas was awarded an equestrian bronze statue in Constantinople shortly after 614 (Anth.Plan. 46-47). In view of Niketas' monument, it seems reasonable to assume that a monument was similarly raised in honour of the emperor himself. In his narrative of the emperor's exploits, the poet George of Pisidia actually refers to an *eikon* of Heraclius: "the city decreed ... a portrait (*eikona*) of you" (Heraclius II, 62-65); this portrait could have been either two- or three-dimensional.⁵⁷ Still, a crucial question is whether these various monuments were newly made, or whether old statues were refashioned, renamed and reused.

The art of appropriation

It was not uncommon for Roman and Byzantine emperors to appropriate their predecessors' images.⁵⁸ Consequently, over the years an imperial likeness could take on several identities. Even in the first century, Pliny the Elder complained that "statuarum capita permutantur", indicating that the heads of statues were subject to replacement (NH 35.4). An example was an equestrian statue of Alexander the Great in the Forum Iulium which according to Pliny had been turned into Caesar. Later the church father Jerome explained that when a "tyrant" was cut down, so were his images, and by removing the head and changing the face, the victor's portrait could be inserted into the statue's body (In Abacus 2.3.14).⁵⁹ The colossal marble head of Constantine in the cortile of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome was re-carved, perhaps from a portrait of Hadrian, or rather from Constantine's ex-co-emperor, the purported tyrant Maxentius.⁶⁰ As the back view proves, the imperial head in Istanbul labelled Constantine is definitely a second rendition.⁶¹ Even at Aphrodisias, the main centre for the manufacture of marble sculpture in late antiquity, there is evidence of material reuse, since a portrait of a Constantinian prince was fashioned from an older head.⁶²

Due to its material value, the reuse of bronze must have been even more prevalent than the reuse of marble. Malalas notes that the magistrate John the Paphlagonian around 500 melted down some of the bronzes collected by Constantine in order to make a statue of "extraordinary size" of the emperor Anastasius. The statue in question was set up on Theodosius' triumphal column,

54. Stichel 1982, no. 142.

55. Preger, *Scriptores* II 1907, 34; Mango 1972, 129. According to one tradition, Maurikios set up the statue. Another tradition ascribes it to Phokas (ibid. n. 27), or it could be a matter of two separate monuments; cf. Stichel 1982, cat. 142-143.

56. Stichel 1982, 115, no. 145 (CIL VI 1200); Giuliani & Verduchi 1987, 174-177.

57. Pertusi 1960, 272 takes this as a statue. Other passages by George of Pisidia refer to paintings of the emperor, and the *Patria* notes that the emperor's name was inscribed on the walls of the palace of the Sophiae, Torp 2006, 583.

58. See, e.g., Kiilerich 2005; Prusac 2011; Ambrogi 2013; Kiilerich 2014.

59. "Si quando tyrannus obtruncatur, imagines quoque eius deponuntur et statuae, et vultu tantummodo commutato, ablatoque capite, eius qui vicerit facies superponitur, ut manente corpore, capitibusque praecisis caput aliud commutetur", cited after Parisi Presicce 2005, 154, n. 8.

60. Maxentius: Jucker 1983, 51-57; Hadrian: Evers 1991.

61. Firatli 1990, no. 3.

62. Kiilerich 1998, 108, fig. 51; La Rocca 2000, 28, fig. 30.

which had stood vacant since the first emperor's image had been thrown down in an earthquake in 480.⁶³ By appropriating Theodosius' column, Anastasius also appropriated the former emperor's triumphal bravura depicted on the column's helical relief.

Just as the numismatic imagery of one emperor could be adopted unchanged by another, it is reasonable to assume that statues were at times taken over without even adjusting their faces. When imperial images topped columns, it would at any rate have been difficult to get a detailed view of facial features. A portrait of a former ruler could therefore be appropriated simply by providing it with a new name. The equestrian statue of Theodosius (II) on a column in front of Hagia Sophia was reused for Justinian, probably without changing its face.⁶⁴ This monument may later have come to be known as Heraclius, although the evidence for this is feeble.⁶⁵ At Ravenna an equestrian statue of Zeno was renamed Theoderic; in 801 it was brought to Aachen where it gained fame as a monument to Charlemagne.⁶⁶ If this image had been preserved but the written record of its origin lost, we would probably not have been able to trace it back to Zeno.

Like the multiple-identity representations of Zeno/Theoderic/Charlemagne and Theodosius II/Justinian/(Heraclius), the Barletta colossus is likely to have had several successive identities. Unfortunately we cannot establish at what point in time it was turned into Heraclius. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, many ancient works were subject to fanciful interpretations, for instance, the equestrian bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius in Rome was reinterpreted as Constantine.⁶⁷ Thus the most likely explanation is perhaps that the colossus did not take on its identity as Heraclius until arriving at Barletta, an identity subsequently strengthened by its being situated next to the Santo Sepolcro basilica.

On the other hand – but this is pure speculation – it could have been interpreted as Heraclius already in the seventh century. If the colossus was part of the crusaders' loot from Constantinople in 1204, the reason why it was spared from being melted down for military purposes could have been that an inscription identified it as Heraclius. As the restorer in 628 of the True Cross, which had been removed from Jerusalem by Chosroes in 614, Heraclius obviously was of special significance to the crusaders.⁶⁸

Among the spolia brought to Italy from Constantinople by the crusaders were the bronze Horses of San Marco.⁶⁹ Today they are firmly associated with Venice and perceived as a symbol of that city. But before adorning the Venetian church façade, they stood in Constantinople, perhaps over the hippodrome starting gates. Before that again they belonged in a different setting and had a totally different meaning. According to the eighth-century *Parastaseis*, the horses were brought from Chios to Constantinople by Theodosius II. While this may be the case, secure evidence is lacking.⁷⁰ Analysis of the bronze alloy has not helped to determine whether the high-quality gilded horses, dated variously from the Hellenistic to the Severan period, are of Greek or Roman manufacture. Whatever their origin, before they came to Venice, they had already been re-

63. Malalas (ed. Dinsdorf, Bonn 1831), 400-401; Mango 1972, 46; Stichel 1982, cat. 124.

64. Stichel 1982, 105-112, cat. 132; Sande 1987.

65. Vickers 1976, 281.

66. Thürlemann 1977; Stichel 1982, no. 120, p. 102.

67. Barkan 1999, 119-136; Kinney 2002.

68. For the importance of Heraclius in Western iconography, see Torp 2006.

69. AA.VV. 1979; for their appropriation: Nelson 1996; for spoliation at San Marco, Barry 2010.

70. *Parastaseis*, ch. 84; Cameron & Herrin 1984, 160-161, 273-274.

FIG. 11 – Are Rock Festival 2007, Barletta (photo: B. Kiilerich).

interpreted in Constantinople.⁷¹ Their uncertain past notwithstanding, the horses have gained cultural importance in their current tertiary setting: through appropriation they have become the Horses of San Marco.

Like the Horses of San Marco, the first (and second?) functions of the Barletta colossus cannot be established. Regardless of whether it came from Constantinople, Ravenna or somewhere else, along with new legs, new arms and new attributes the statue gained new life in Barletta. To some extent it was refashioned into a wholly new image that was later included in the area's coat of arms. Today Barletta features a Bed & Breakfast Eraclio, a Pizzeria Eraclio and a Caffetteria Eraclio, while a pub brandishes the colossus' face. The statue has even advertised the annual Are Rock Festival – in one instance it was playing the electric guitar (FIG. 11). In October 2011, the colossus was the theme of a Barletta symposium: "Il ritorno del Gigante. Giornata di studio sul Colosso di Barletta".⁷² To celebrate its alleged birthday on 19 May 2013, the prizewinning pastry-baker Antonio Daloiso created a nearly 4 m high sugar-coated colossus. This confection was exhibited next to the bronze before being eaten by the Barlettani. The statue is a focal point for tourists, a meeting point for the locals and a play area for children who hide between its gigantic legs (FIG. 12). In other words, through being a subject of scientific inquiry as well as of general public interest, the colossus has established itself as a trademark for, and a strong symbol of, the city it inhabits.

71. As Robert Nelson 1996, 126, puts it: "Venice appropriated Constantinople's appropriation".

72. As far as I am aware, the proceedings have not been published.

FIG. 12 – People gathering around the colossus in 2007 (photo: B. Kiilerich).

Conclusion

In spite of new findings and new research, it must be concluded that we today are no closer to solving the problems of the Barletta colossus than were scholars a century ago. With the present state of knowledge, it seems almost impossible to reconstruct the colossus' original function and setting, still less to identify the emperor originally portrayed. Certain iconographic traits are not incompatible with a fourth- or fifth-century date, while other features point to the sixth. A seventh century date is less likely, but due to a dearth of material evidence, it cannot be ruled out entirely. The methodological problems we face are illustrated by the fact that the very same criteria – diadem and hairstyle – have been used to support an early as well as a late date, and that the represented age of the colossus has been estimated to be that of a man from around 40 to around 60 years of age.

But no matter whom the impressive statue originally portrayed, it was quite common for Roman and Byzantine emperors to appropriate their predecessors' images. Some monuments were refashioned, others were simply renamed. In this way a statue could come to serve as a visual manifestation for more than a single emperor. The Barletta colossus is a spolium, and as is the case with most spolia, whether free-standing or built into architecture, their original contexts are often unknown or uncertain. Still, when discussing spolia, we usually do not focus most of our attention on their origin, but on their meaning in the secondary or tertiary context. Thus although the statue's original identity is unknown, it is as Heraclius that the colossus has become famous, and for the last half millennium, been an important cultural symbol that has given a name and a face to Barletta.

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