

THE STUARY COLLECTION HELD AT THE BATHS OF ZEUXIPPUS (*AP* 2) AND THE SEARCH FOR CONSTANTINE'S MUSEOLOGICAL INTENTIONS¹

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RESUMEN

Constantino pretendía enseñar al mundo su Constantinopla como la Nueva (la tercera) Troya, el más acabado retrato de la nueva *paideia* de inspiración griega y romana. Él mismo y su equipo dispusieron de no más que seis años para planear y reconstruir una ciudad entera, la antigua Bizancio; y las artes plásticas, en especial la escultura, ejercieron un rol determinante en todo ese proceso público. Volviendo una vez más la mirada hacia los restos arqueológicos y la descripción literaria de Cristodoro (*Antología Griega*, libro II) de la colección de estatuas de los Balnearios del Zeuxipo, el presente artículo desenvuelve una lectura museológica de estas estatuas, buscando encuadrarlas en el plan arquitectónico global de Constantino para su nueva capital del Imperio.

ABSTRACT

Constantine intended to portrait his very own Constantinople as the new (third) Troy, the most complete portrait of Greek and Roman *paideia*. He and his team had no more than six years to redesign and rebuilt an entire city, the old Byzantium; plastic arts, mainly sculpture, played an important role in the entire public process. Looking once again at the archaeological remains of the statuary collection held at the baths of Zeuxippus, in relation to their literary description by Christodoros (*Greek Anthology* II), the present paper essays a museological reading of these statues as part of the global architectural plan of Constantine for his own new capital of the Imperium.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Zeuxipo, Constantino I, Cristodoro, Antología Griega (Palatina), museología

KEYWORDS

Zeuxippus, Constantine the First, Christodoros, Greek (Palatine) Anthology, museology

¹ This paper was first read at the Conference Constantine and the Grandeur that was Rome, held at Kellogg College of the University of Oxford, in December 11th-13th, 2013. It benefited a lot from the commentaries of the scholars present at the aforementioned Conference.

1. Remodelling and adorning Constantinople

“Dedicatur Constantinopolis omnium paene urbium nuditate”. It was with these words, without mentioning any other political events, that Jerome chose (*Chron.* 324) to refer to the foundation of Constantinople. Scholars have agreed on reading this *nudity* as the look of the cities that, under Constantine’s command, saw their most precious sculptural works of art being taken to the newly found capital of the Empire.² Nevertheless, one must notice that Jerome talks about *nuditate* (the substantive), not simply about *denuding* (any verbal form) the conquered cities. That is why I shall propose the possibility of a different reading: that Jerome had in mind, with such a choice of wording, an intentional ambiguity: certainly he refers to the *act of denuding* other cities to adorn Constantinople, but he also implies to the use of these cities’ own *nudity* (their pagan statues) to *dress up* the new capital, thus giving the latter an overall look of somehow sinful *nudity*, inevitably a characteristic of a whore.

Archaeology and several Christian authors, like Eusebius (*VC* 3.54), have shown – thus giving credit to the view of a truly magnificent Constantinople already portrayed since the Renaissance – that Constantinople, by the time of its official dedication in 330, was everything but a naked city. Furthermore, it was probably not naked even before Constantine’s conquest; *dressed up* enough, at least, for the new Emperor to see in it, in its already existing (and potential) *romanitas*, as Basset (2004: 22) puts it, “a springboard for the implementation of [his own] urban vision”, probably as a result of the changes already made during the previous Severan government.³ Indeed, scholars are now sure of the magnificent buildings and streets of Constantine’s Constantinople, all of these spaces adorned with the most exquisite and rare statuary, in different dimensions and positions, always intriguing the passer-by with both its beauty and its meaning. Such was the city, very close to the one portrayed by Eusebius (*VC* 3.54), a space of architectonical and sculptural *ποικιλία* (*varietas*,⁴ one of the most identifying traces of the new Byzantine taste; a completely different and, as Basset (2004: 17) writes, “newly outfitted urban core of monumental architecture and sculpture”.

In the course of my paper, by the reanalysis of the archaeological, iconographical and literary data, I shall approach what I think is the possible museological reading of the collection of statues held at the Baths of Zeuxippus, following an interpretation already implicit in several scholars, as recently in the book of Yegül (2010: 184) who, talking about the Zeuxippus, called it “a veritable museum of classical art”,⁵ the exact same words already used by Stanley Casson (1929: 14) when publishing the second

² Apud James 1996: 265.

³ On the architectonical development of the city under Septimius Severus see Mango (2003: 593-608). Besides the construction of the original building of the Baths of Zeuxippus, interventions in the Hippodrome and even the erection of some statues are also supported by archaeology.

⁴ Apud Saradi (1997: 396-397).

⁵ As for the meaning of “classical art” here, see *infra*.

report of the excavations performed on the site. I therefore shall put together the evidence of what must have been a very Constantinian intention – the elaboration of a project, both public and urban, of a great exhibition of statuary, itself formed by several minor collections. More than the “intention of the collectors to display objects of art” (Saradi-Mendelovici 1990: 51), already noticed and studied by scholars, I shall pursue the very steps of the creation of an art collection with political and propagandistic purposes, the means and the ends of what must have been one of Constantinople’s greatest national galleries, even if it held works of art that were in no way national.⁶

By now, first evidence takes us a step closer to the reading we are looking for: the remodelling and the provision with true art galleries of an entire city in just six years, which could not have happened without a detailed, coherent and well-organized plan. Constantine and his collaborators set afoot a wide plan (both architectural and museological) of transformation of a city in which they saw potential enough to become a urban and public museum of Greek, Roman and Hellenistic sculpture; a project that was only possible in a city (the pre-Constantinian Byzantium) that already counted several *art galleries* in itself, spaces that required remodelling –as any room or museum nowadays still does, especially when the exhibition’s importance demands it– in order to accommodate several minor exhibitions that formed the huge National Identity Museum that was Constantinople in its entirety.

If Rome was the huge urban museum that it was, due to centuries of art accumulation, the Severan Byzantium that Constantine finally conquered in 324 was no Rome. The new city’s artistic *spolia* were no longer to be collected during decades, as the result of military victories; they had to be identified, selected, collected, transported and only then exhibited in their new public galleries – and time was limited. Even if different from the primordial *spolia*, at the end of the day they kept their original meaning, as they were still an immediate and meaningful manifestation of imperial power and domination.⁷ Much work was required in only six years. Sozomen (II.3), in the fifth century, actually says that Constantine had to “impose taxes to cover the expenses of building and adorning the city”.⁸ Nevertheless, the Museum was ready to be seen in

⁶ I am therefore completely against James’ opinion and method, when saying that “what Constantine may have ‘meant’ by putting up statues in Constantinople becomes irrelevant: the evidence we have does not describe anything as elusive as his intentions, but rather the reactions of the inhabitants of Constantinople to those statues.” James (1996: 13).

⁷ On the display of war *spolia* in Late-Byzantine Antiquity see Pape (1975), Guberti Bassett (1991: 92 sqq.) and idem 1996. Also important – in spite of focussing in the architectural re-use of *spolia* from the point of view of their Christian appropriation, more than in the importation and held of ancient statuary itself, is the paper of Saradi (1997), when arguing for a political message implied in this practise, namely the appropriation of Roman past.

⁸ According to Bassett (2004), economical support for any public project, as remodelling, construction and even the preparation of art galleries, was to be gathered by the Praetorian Prefecture. It must have included civic taxation and even some private initiative, since – and take only the statuary collections as

May 330, with every single stage of its curacy carefully performed. For the moment, let us make a tour of its major buildings and art collection.

2. The Zeuxippus, a special art gallery

Part of the Emperor's first great architectural plan consisted of remodelling or constructing from the ground up five buildings that soon became the major symbols of his power and urban plan: the Augusteion, the Basilica, the Hippodrome, the Great Palace and the Baths of Zeuxippus. They were all public buildings in the neuralgic centre of the city; all of them well connected by wide streets where circulation was easy, the postcard picture of visitation that Constantine wanted for his city. But they were also the main spaces where, by means of sculptural exhibitions and their very architectural grandeur, a new imperial image of power (of Roman imperial power) should be reflected, a wide-ranging look of *romanitas*.⁹

The Baths of Zeuxippus,¹⁰ along with the Hippodrome and the Great Palace,¹¹ were one of the three sites where such *romanitas* soon became more evident. Nothing more Roman, everyone agrees, than a public bath-gymnasium and a space for athletic competitions (as the Hippodrome was),¹² even if these activities were not the only ones having place in these buildings.¹³ Constantine had already ordered the building of such a complex in Rome, named after himself; but the new capital of the Empire, his major personal achievement, should have its own. From the eight great thermal complexes identified by the *Notitia Vrbis Constantinopolitanae* in the mid-fifth century –apart from the 153 smaller bathing places (*balneae*)– the Zeuxippus was certainly the most important and the one more intimately connected with the will of Constantine

example – besides the cost of purchasing some antiquities, other tasks had to be fulfilled: identification, transportation and gathering of the exhibition itself, among others. On this issue, see Jones (1974), esp. 10, 26 and Liebeschuetz (1972: 110-114).

⁹ On *romanitas* as the main concept for Constantinople's architectural development see MacDonald (1986) and Zanker (2000).

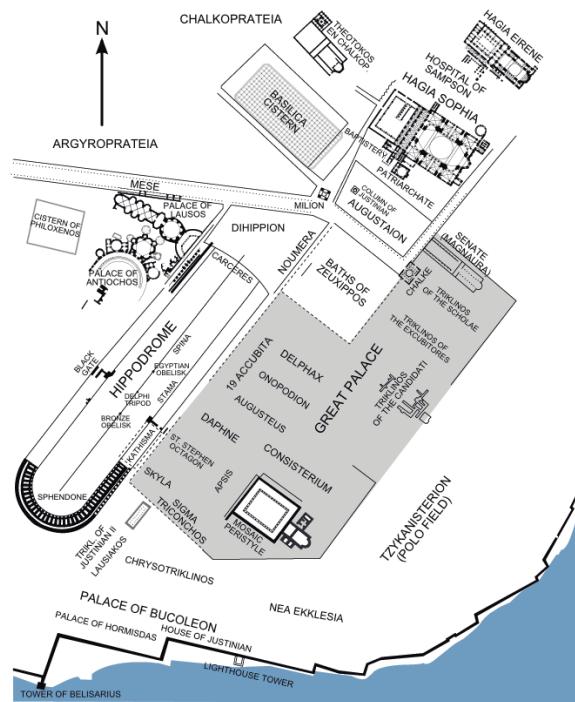
¹⁰ Etymologically, “Zeuxippos” means “the one who yokes horses”, and it is therefore plausible that the Baths were built in the site of a previous temple of a god with such epithet was worshiped. The most probable identification of such god is the son of Apolo and the nymph Syllis (or Hyllis, daughter of Hyllus and Iole), as in Ibycus (fr. 282a *PMG*, line 41). Nevertheless, sources prove that it also corresponds to a personal name, being thus possible that the Baths had been named, for instance, after their architect's name.

¹¹ On the Hippodrome, its statuary and Constantine's remodelling project for it see Guberti Bassett (1991) and Bassett (2004: 58-67, 212-232).

¹² In such typology (the bath-gymnasium type) is the Zeuxippus included by Yegül (2010: 171 sqq). The two main characteristics of this model of building are the reduction of the importance of the *palaestra* and the equal smaller *frigidarium*.

¹³ Socrates Ecclesiasticus (*Hist. Eccles.* 2.9), for instance, mentions an official meeting between the Prefect of Constantinople and Paul the Patriarch, under the pretext of a public debate to which Paul was to be invited, as having took place in the Zeuxippus already in the mid-fourth century. Even if such a meeting never happened, the testimony alone reveals how frequent such events should be in the Baths.

himself. In spite of its achievements, archaeological excavations held in place between 1927-1929 were not able to provide a very detailed plan of the inside organization of the building.¹⁴ Nevertheless, later excavations *in situ* unveiled other buildings of the same complex, among which there was a cistern, and provided more data for a better understanding of the building and its functions.



Picture 1: Constantinople center around the Great Palace, the Hippodrome and Saint Sophia [Adapted from Müller-Wiener and Mango].

The Zeuxippus, Constantinople's major bathing complex, stood in the center of the city, between the northeastern corner of the Hippodrome, the Great Palace and the public forum known as the Augsteion (see Picture 1). Traditionally, literary sources ascribe its construction to Septimius Severus, in the last years of the second century. Even if we are not aware of Constantine and his team's level of intervention on the

¹⁴ For the archaeological plan of the site, see Casson *et alii* (1929).

existing building –in fact, when telling the rush of building activity leading up to the dedication of Constantinople, the sixth century historian Malalas only says that the emperor “completed” or “filled in” (ἀνεπλήρωσε) the building¹⁵; it seems to admit that it was largely remodeled and amplified, besides being provided with a more direct connection to the Great Palace and the Hippodrome, via the Augsteion. Far beyond the installation of the gallery of statues, the project must have included a series of new rooms and halls, some of them meant to host the collection of statues. Constantine, in the Zeuxippus as in many other sites of the so-long called Byzantium, was preparing the galleries that were to receive the most impressive works of classical sculpture.

As said before, archaeological remains of the Zeuxippus are few when it comes to reconstructing its inner architectural organization. Nevertheless, Scholars like F. Yegül seem to be correct when seeing in the remains resemblances to the Baths of Faustina in Miletus, which archaeology was able to uncover in a more efficient way than in the case of the Zeuxippus.¹⁶ The Baths of Faustina are also meaningful on the subject of statuary displaying, since, besides the statues naturally displayed in this kind of building, excavations identified a square hall with a broad apse and niches in the walls that could have functioned as a lecture hall, a *museion* or a room for the display of statuary (*apud* Yegül 2010: 169).¹⁷

This is the kind of physical gallery that we must have in mind from now on. Although it is possible that there were rooms exclusively meant to host the works of art –and one may think especially of the case of sculptural portraits, usually smaller and more easy to accommodate in a closed room–, the better known examples of bath-gymnasia we have mentioned, as well as others, show very clearly that the main works of art, those precious sculptures brought from abroad, both in bronze and marble, were to be displayed all-along the building, inside and outside of it. Therefore, one may already distinguish two policies for display, both traditional and part of Constantine’s project: one more monumental and public, meant to be a part of the user’s routine –which somehow took the outer communitarian space into the inner spaces of the Baths–, alongside another one, more concentrated and possible to organise thematically, chronologically or even artistically, probably meant for more exclusive visitors; this might occupy several smaller rooms.

¹⁵ ἀνεπλήρωσε καὶ τὸ λεγόμενον Ζεύξιππον δημόσιον λουτρόν (Malalas 321B).

¹⁶ The Baths of Faustina were built around the middle of the second century in honour of the empress Faustina, the wife of Marcus Aurelius, who visited Ephesus (though not Miletus) in 164. The complex was rebuilt approximately during the 3rd century. On this complex see Yegül (2010:168-170).

¹⁷ For a concise description of them, among the many bibliography available, see Marvin 1983 (freestanding statuary) and Yegül (2010: 110-118). Also the famous Baths of Caracalla, built in Rome between 212 and 216 during the government of the emperor they were named after, can be looked at as a similar building.

The reputation of the Zeuxippus is due mainly to the poetic description of some of its statues, a poem in 416 hexametres by Christodoros that was transmitted to us as book 2 of the *Greek Anthology*. Presenting in all manuscripts of the *Anthology* the epigraph Ἐκφρασις τῶν ἀγαλμάτων τῶν εἰς τὸ δημόσιον γυμνάσιον τοῦ ἐπικαλουμένου Ζευξίππου, the poem describes eighty statues or statue-groups,¹⁸ from the much larger collection that was possible to see in the Baths. Scholars have been divided on their approaches to the relations between the poem and the statues themselves, giving more or less credit to the truth of their description and to the words of Christodoros. Indeed, it is datable in the first years of the sixth century,¹⁹ under the government (and probable commission) of Anastasius, mentioned in lines 403-404.²⁰ Archaeology has shown that Christodoros worked upon a real collection of sculptures,²¹ even if we are forced to believe that it was no longer the same collection prepared by Constantine, at least 170 years before. Among other remains, excavations unveiled three base-statues, two of which had inscribed the names of Hecuba (Base B) and Aeschynes (Base C), characters whose statues are described in the *Ekphrasis*, respectively in lines 175-178 and 14-17.²²

The very re-appreciation of these bases will soon provide us new arguments on the reading we are following. First, the bases must be placed somewhere in the fifth century. Therefore, they are posterior to Constantine, i.e., they were very probably not part of the original exhibition in 330, “when Roman square bases were more common” (Casson 1929: 20); on the other hand, being previous to the time of Christodoros, it is highly possible that he saw them when composing his poem.²³ This hints at the constant remodelling of the exhibitions inside the Zeuxippus, something that receives further confirmation in the holes found in Bases A and B, enough to prove that each base must have supported at least two different statues and allowing the possibility of the existence of temporary exhibitions.²⁴ We must accept the idea of an open gallery, even several open and multipurpose galleries, being constantly reformed. And this is different

¹⁸ Only Bassett 1996 considers the description of “no less than 81 pieces”, although we found no explanation for it in the mentioned paper.

¹⁹ Waltz (1929, repr. 2002: 54, n. 4) suggested that the poem was composed after the destruction of the Baths in the great fire of 532, as a way to remember and immortalise the majesty of its statuary. In order to sustain his theory, the author mentions several past verbal forms (e.g. ἴστατο ‘it used to stand’; ἔπρεπε ‘it shined’), which we do not consider a strong argument.

²⁰ It is known the important role played by Christodoros in the highest levels of the Constantinopan society. On the poet’s life and activity for Anastasius see Croke (2008).

²¹ For archaeological reports, see Casson (1928, 1929, 1930).

²² For the reproduction of these bases see Casson *et alii* (1929) and Bassett (1996).

²³ Already Casson (1929: 19) noticed that Christodoros uses the word βοημός, when referring to the bases, instead of the more usual βάσις. This fact, nevertheless, may be nothing else than a poetical liberty, not related to the material reality of the gallery.

²⁴ See Casson *et alii* (1929: 16-21) for the archaeological report; Bassett (1996: 497-498). Marvin (1983: 381) suggested that the bases might have been used for the stockpiling of sculpture.

from the simple accumulation of statues, as the result of military *spolia*, for instance; the archaeological data we now have support that idea that, in the Zeuxippus, statues were moved and frequently added to the collection also as a response to museological or artistic concerns.

In spite of the (few) spatial indications provided by Christodoros and the intricate attempts of reconstructing the order of the statues by some scholars,²⁵ we are actually unable to reconstruct the look of the sculptural exhibitions in the Zeuxippus. Nevertheless, it seems that Christodoros follows a somewhat linear order, and that is why we give credit to the opinion of Bassett (1996: 500), when arguing for the *Ekphrasis* as a description of the statues exhibited in the *frigidarium*, which was, indeed, “the showpiece of any Imperial establishment”. There, statues could stand at ground level –and that was Stupperich’s biggest mistake, to assume that every sculpture was displayed this way–, but also in open spaces (like halls and corridors) or niches and *aediculae*, in the best architectural tradition of similar buildings found everywhere throughout the Roman Empire. The room on which Christodoros focused, and with it the entire complex, would have such a *poikiliakos* aspect, as *poikiliakos* was the poem that describes it with such creative versification.²⁶ Once again, the three bases, contemporary as they are, can afford some confirmation. Base C (the “Aeschynes’ base) is smaller (height 1,35m; shaft 58cm) than Bases A and B (height 1,40m; diameter 1,08m; shaft 83cm), but its inscription presents the same lettering than Base B, which suggests that they were part of a same gallery purpose. With all this evidence, Bassett (1996: 498) seems to be correct when arguing that “a concerted effort was made to provide a homogenous display” and that “presumably all of the bases in the collection were round”. If so, even if the inner structures of the building were also used to exhibit (its niches, its corners, its halls), one may accept the idea that the very conception of these bases was part of a museological plan.

Yet another question requires an answer as we *revisit* the Zeuxippus sculpture gallery: the medium in which these works were sculpted. Christodoros, in the fifth century, persistently mentions bronze (with χάλκον and derivative forms), and archaeologists actually detected remains of such material in the uncovered bases of the statues (Casson 1929: 19); in the sixth century, Malalas (321B) says that Constantine adorned the Zeuxippus “with variegated marbles and statues of bronze” (κοσμήσας κίοσι καὶ μαρμάροις ποικίλοις καὶ χαλκουργήμασιν), and colourful marble seem to be mentioned not as medium of the sculptures but as covering the walls and floor of the building. On the other hand, in the twelfth century, Cedrenus provides another description of the complex, mentioning, “many painted marvels and well-made splendours of marble, stone and mosaic, as well as bronze images that were the work of ancient men” (ποικίλη τις ἦν

²⁵ E.g. Stupperich (1982); contra Bassett (1996: 500-501).

²⁶ On ποικιλία as one of the main characteristics of the *Ekphrasis* see Bär (2012).

θεωρία καὶ λαμπρότης τεχνῶν, τῶν τε μαρμάρων καὶ λίθων καὶ ψηφίδων καὶ εἰκόνων διὰ χαλκοῦ πεποιημένων τῶν ἀπ' αἰῶνος ἀνδρῶν ἔργα), but also this author is unclear on the media of the statues. Nevertheless, nothing undeniably supports Christodoros' exclusive references to bronze as the medium of the collection. Once again, we face the limits of the reading of the *Ekphrasis*. Is Christodoros working upon a single gallery, probably the one at the *frigidarium*? Or is he arbitrarily focusing on some statues he sees when walking through the Baths? Once more, archaeology provides a possible answer.

The main artefact recovered in the site of the Baths that can directly be connected with the museological plan of Constantine is a fragment of the face of a colossal female statue or bust,²⁷ which is nowadays lost but we are told was found “among the debris at the very bottom level” (Casson *et alii* 1929: 41). Because of that, the report of the second excavation already stated that the marble fragment “derived from a statue which once stood in the baths, quite probably one of the early Greek statues looted from Athens by one of the first Emperors of the fourth or fifth century A.D.” Even if a direct relation to Constantine is unsafe, we obtain confirmation for another characteristic of the exhibitions in the Zeuxippus: there were, in the same space, statues of marble and bronze, from the very beginnings of the building as a public bath and an art museum.²⁸

3. Masterpieces at the Zeuxippus (the possible guided tour)

The fragment of a colossal head we are looking at is also the best proof available to confirm the practice of importing sculpture to Constantinople from the very first years of its foundation. As mentioned before, Constantine's use of sculptural *spolia* is to be understood differently, since it was part of a detailed plan to provide the city with some of the greatest masterpieces of both Greek and Roman culture. From now on we shall look at some examples of sculptures we know, mostly from Christodoros' account, to have been displayed at the Zeuxippus. Samples of true antique sculpture,²⁹ that at least is how the inhabitants would have looked at them - brought from several parts of the Empire. One must also keep in mind the common use, at the time, of copies, some of them ordered for a specific building, a practice that, besides not being a sign of bad taste,³⁰ must have had its own market.

Archaeological interventions at the site of the Zeuxippus, apart from the

²⁷ See the picture at Casson *et alii* (1929: 40).

²⁸ Other materials, like gold, silver or ivory are also to be taken as possibilities. Even if the archaeological remains do not support its existence, comparison with other baths in the Empire or even with other buildings in Constantinople is strong enough to be an argument. The better and closer example is perhaps the chryselephantine statue of Zeus by Pheidias, which we know to have been displayed in Constantinople. See *infra* and n. 28.

²⁹ As Mango (1963: 55), “by ‘antique statue’ I mean any statue, whether Greek or Roman, manufactured before the fourth century AD.”

³⁰ See Bassett (1996: 499-500).

aforementioned fragment of a colossal head, have not been able to uncover any complete or even partial statue that might have been displayed in the Baths. Nevertheless, the better-known history of other famous sculptures and their presence in the galleries of Constantinople allow us to imagine that no less important works of art must have stood in the rooms of the Zeuxippus, at first as the result of Constantine's museological plan. One single example would be enough: the eleventh century historian Kedrenos (322C) records a tradition according to which the fifth-century chryselephantine statue of Zeus, the work of Pheidias first exhibited in the Temple of Zeus in Olympia, was carried off to Constantinople,³¹ most probably in the years of the preparation of the city for the official dedication, where it was displayed at the Palace of Lausus, another building renowned for the vast and rich collection of statues housed within its walls.³²

As for the Zeuxippus collection, the most recent and complete essay on listing the sculptures displayed is the one by Bassett 2004 (esp. pp. 160-185). When working on the Zeuxippus, Bassett does it probably in the only way possible, i.e. from the list of statues and sculptural groups given in the *Ekphrasis*. But the poem, in spite of the aforementioned persistent indication of bronze and other indirect information, says nothing on the statues' provenance, antiquity or authorship. In face of such a lack of information, both literary and archaeological, the only way to forward is the way of moderate imagination and comparison with known sculptural models of each character, when such a work is possible. And some interesting identifications have been made or suggested. I give here two examples, and dare to make a suggestion. Richter 1965, for instance, thought that the statue of Sappho described between lines 69-71 of the *Ekphrasis* could be an original brought from Lesbos, not necessarily from the classical period, since Christodoros mentions the poetess as a seated female figure, an image frequent in coins found at Mytilene, from the second century AD. In another example, all the three descriptions of statues of Aphrodite (lines 78-81, 99-101, 288-290) fit the model of a series of half-draped fourth century BC representations of the goddess, as the so-called Aphrodite (or Venus) d'Arles,³³ a first-century BC marble sculpture now at the Louvre that is thought to be a copy of the Aphrodite of Thespiae of Praxiteles, a work from his early career in the 360s BC that could also resemble the model of the so-called *Cnidia Beldevere*, nowadays in the Vatican Museum (Nº inv. 4260).³⁴ Scholars have for long noticed this resemblance,³⁵ but I suggest what seems to me a strong

³¹ See Guberti Bassett (2000: 9), Bassett (2004: 238-239).

³² On the topography and importance of the Palace of Lausus, see Bardill (1997).

³³ Also the well-known examples of the Venus de Milo or the Arles Aphrodite were pointed out as possible models. See Guberti Bassett (1996: 494).

³⁴ Furtwängler (1893) advanced the attribution to Praxiteles. The Praxitelean style may be detected in the head's resemblance to that of the Cnidian Aphrodite, a mature work of Praxiteles known through copies as the aforementioned *Cnidia Beldevere*, assumed to belong to the same type of sculpture by Corso 2007: 20.

³⁵ E.g. Guberti Bassett (1996), Bassett (2004: 165).

possibility, that the statue standing at the Zeuxippus may have been the original forth century BC sculpture by Praxiteles. Besides Pausanias' (second century AD) mention of having viewed the statue at Thespiae in Boeotia, as part of a group made up of Cupid, Phryne and Aphrodite, nothing else is known about its destination. Therefore, if we only remember that in the latter years of the fourth century Theodosius II brought the Aphrodite of Cnidos of the same Praxiteles to his court in Lausus,³⁶ it is not hard at all to suspect that Constantine himself or any other emperor after him might have brought to the city this other Praxitelean work.

4. A thematic gallery on national identity?

Such was the Zeuxippus in terms of statuary. As for Christodorus' poem –which in selecting its characters seems to obey above all artistic, poetic and commissioning interests– it mentions and describes figures from the following main categories.³⁷ mythical characters that participated in the Trojan War (25), mythical characters not part of the Trojan conflict (6), mythical prophets or seers (8), male and female divinities (11), poets and other writers (16), philosophers (7), political men and other public characters (7) and athletes (3). If the collection prepared by Constantine might not have had the very same statues, as said before, Christodorus' account is still useful for providing a sample of a collection with an intention akin to those of Constantine. Indeed, it makes sense that some of the ideological purposes were the same.

The large amount of statues portraying mythical heroes from the Trojan war, 25 (29 in other authors' account),³⁸ led Stupperich 1982 to develop his very polemic theory that the *Ekphrasis* was mostly a bronze *Ilioupersis* –indeed, the most part of the characters are described as being in a miserable situation, close to or as result of the fall of the city; and that the Emperor himself had wanted to present Constantinople as the new Troy, the third, after Rome.³⁹ Furthermore, Stupperich's paper actually reads the Trojan iconography at the Zeuxippus as Constantine's intention, arguing, among other things, from three literary testimonies that mention Constantine's first thought of founding his new capital in Troy (or at a nearby location in Troad).⁴⁰

In general, even if it remains impossible to determine how far the mythical (Trojan

³⁶ On the Aphrodite of Cnidos in Constantinople see Mango (1963: 58); Guberti Bassett (2000: 8-9, 13-14); Bassett (2004: 232-233).

³⁷ Apud Bär (2012: 452-453).

³⁸ E.g. Stupperich (1982); Guberti Bassett (1996); Bassett (2004:53).

³⁹ Both Kaldellis (2007: 375-377) and Bär (2012) read this Trojan presence among the statues as a Christodorus' purpose, who wanted to present himself like the new Homer (whose statue is largely described between lines 311-350, and called "father" in line 320), the third, new Empire's official poet.

⁴⁰ Sozomen 2.3.1-3 (fifth century); Sosimus 2.30.1 (sixth century); Zonaras 13.3.1-3 (tenth century). Stupperich's theory was widely criticized by Bassett 1996, who later reviewed her position and came to realize "the wisdom of his initial proposal that the Trojan theme is one related to civic identity": Bassett (2004: 259).

and non-Trojan) statues described by Christodoros in the late-fifth or early-sixth century were part of Constantine's inaugural collection, I think it might be assumed that this original collection was composed mostly with mythical characters, models of virtue, happiness and even learning from pain, all of them derived from the very best characters of ancient Greek-roman culture. On the other hand, it is also easy to understand that the portraits and freestanding statues of political and more contemporary figures were later added to the collection, as the result of successive individual or group dedications. Yet, when thinking about its origins, the exhibition had to reflect, as well said by Bassett (1996: 505-56), the "desire to detach Constantinopolitan identity from the confining agenda of local history and link it with the universal cultural traditions of Greece and Rome". Myth, music, poetry, rhetoric, politics and even sports, those were the bases that Constantine wanted as the new Christian Empire's *paideia*.⁴¹ Constantine needed to provide his people with a plastic sample of this *paideia* within the walls of the Zeuxippus and other Constantinian public places. And so these places became museums of art, but also museums of (yet unspoken) very meaningful words (*apud* Bär 2012), where pagan gods and seers were meant to transmit a message, not to be the object of any kind of cult. In 382, merely 50 years after the official inauguration of Constantinople, an imperial decree (*CTh XVI.10.8*) from Teodosius I, referring to a certain temple at Osrhoene in Mesopotamia, commands the local authorities to keep it open so that the inhabitants may enjoy its precious gallery of statues. The text of the decree is clear on saying that the statues were brought to the temple more "artis pretio quam divinitate", a phrase unequivocal in relation to the purely artistic importance ascribed to these collections of statuary.⁴²

The urban project prepared for the new capital, in spite of the Christian tradition surrounding the foundation that gained voice after it took place,⁴³ insisting on seeing it as the *naked luxuriant whore* possibly implied by Jerome; it was not permeable to (or at least not defined by) the ideological demands of the new official religion of the Empire. Far from being intimidated by the popular beliefs of the pagan statues as containing evil demons,⁴⁴ one may actually think that even that must have created an aura of

⁴¹ On the traditional but correct interpretation of the gallery of Zeuxippus as a means of Hellenistic *paideia* see, among many others, Guberti Bassett (1996); Bassett (2004).

⁴² See Saradi-Mendelovici (1990: esp. p. 51).

⁴³ See Euseb. *VC* 2.48, who claims, shortly after the foundation, that the city had been dedicated "to the god of all martyrs" and possessed many temples and shrines to the god of the Christians. On the other hand, some Christian authors focussed on the pagan make-up of the city and complained about it, as Malalas (311) and the *Chron. Pasch.* (277), when portraying a dedication to the Greek-roman divinity Tyche/ Anthousa. Again Eusebius (*VC* 2.54), after describing some of the statues held in the city by Constantine (he mentions a Pythian and a Sminthian Apollo and the Muses, among others), sustains that "the emperor held up these very playthings to be the ridicule and the sport of all beholders". On the Christian interpretation of the foundation of Constantinople see especially Frowlow (1944).

⁴⁴ On the Byzantine Christian attitudes –both the popular and the intellectual one– see Mango (1963: esp.

mysticism favourable to the existence and keeping of the statues themselves. In other words, as recently concluded by Elsner (2010: 265-266), “the very re-appropriation and redeployment into private collections of these objects, many with pagan themes, helped to neutralize their religious value to a sort of antiquarian chic which was hardly in opposition to the new Christianising tendency.” On the other hand, as postulated by James (1996: 13), pagan statues were the medium of a paradox that is no more than apparent: they are intentionally used by Constantine (and by the emperors after him) as a means to unify an officially Christian empire. And such a fact proves how far the inhabitants accepted these works of art as part of their daily-life, their collective and more immediate culture.

A last plausible interrogation, in relation to Constantine’s artistic agenda, may come from a literary and performative enquiry on the *Ekphrasis*. The poem, with regard to its context of production, commission and much-probable performance – and if it was not for its literary value – could fit in the same group of texts such as the so-called Παραστάσεις σύντομοι χρονικοί... («Brief Historical Expositions»), a confusing little book from the eighth or ninth century that consists of a series of comments on Constantinopan topography and monuments, mainly its statues and their mystic relation to the inhabitants.⁴⁵ More than revealing the Byzantines’ distrust of classical statues, this book (and others like it) is to be interpreted, if not as “a kind of tourist’s guidebook to the curiosities of Constantinople” (Mango 1963: 60), at least as having been compiled also from such guidebooks, among the several and very distinct sources most certainly implied in its composition.⁴⁶ As James (1996: 15) writes, “statues were perceived on both the intellectual and popular level as animated, dangerous and talismanic”, which suggests an official intention to promote no more than the artistic valour of the sculptures.

When reading the full text of the *Ekphrasis*, we sometimes receive the impression of being in front of a text to be performed; several marks of colloquialism, space indications (scenic indications indeed) and other aspects of Christodoros’ verses make it easy to imagine an actor (or the poet himself) at least reading his text aloud to an audience, around and in dialogue with the statues themselves. We can think, for instance, of a guided tour of some of the masterpieces of the Zeuxippus,⁴⁷ or even a poetical and dramatic performance prepared for one of the several dedications of statues we know to

55-60), Saradi-Mendolovici (1990) and James (1996).

⁴⁵ On this issue see especially James (1996). As stated by the author (p. 12), this work “seems to represent an early stage in the type of Works collected in the *Patria* of Constantinople”. For the text of the *Parastaseis* see Cameron-Herrin (1984).

⁴⁶ See Cameron-Herrin (1984: 29-31). We actually think that the very same arguments here used by the editors can be used to prove the opposite, I mean, at least the influence of guidebooks in the composing of the *Parastaseis*, as the work can be read in the confuse Par. Gr. 1336.

⁴⁷ This possibility is developed by Kaldellis (2007: 368-371).

have taken place in the Baths.⁴⁸ More than a simple speculation, this chance becomes a real possibility if we think of parallel poems that we know to have been performed for an audience.⁴⁹ Such is the case of the *Ekphrasis* of Hagia Sophia that Paul Silentarius wrote in the late-sixth century, after the rebuilding of the temple, to be performed in the day of its dedication, in 563.⁵⁰ The only manuscript that transmits the text clearly shows marginal annotations and other scenic indications destined for the actors. That Christodoros' poem could have been written for a similar ceremony and performative end is a very plausible possibility. Maybe we only lack the manuscript to prove it.

The arguments provided so far seem to unveil a little more of Constantine's artistic convictions and careful plans for his own city of Constantinople. Archaeology, literary sources and the comparison with contemporary or neighbouring examples show how the case of the Zeuxippus, as for its functioning as an art-gallery, is indeed special. It was not the result of years of sculptural integration in a public building, rather the best-known (and documented) case of the construction of a national gallery of antique sculpture, with very clear political and artistic purposes. But the Zeuxippus, with its statuary, was also a space of memories. It was the space where art was meant to forge the nonexistent memories of an entire people, the Byzantine people. A people to whom past-references were not part of its own history; a people who needed, more than any other and in a very crucial moment, to fulfil its lack of *paideia*. And plastic art was an important part of the imperial plan to do so.

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⁴⁸ The *Chron. Pasch* 495 mentions, in 467, a dedication of unspecified statues, but there were probably many more dedications at other occasions (ἐφίλει γὰρ αὐτὸς ὁ Λέων αὐτὸν τὸν ψυχριστὸν καὶ πᾶσα ἡ σύγκλητος καὶ ἡ πόλις, ὡς ἄριστον ιατρὸν καὶ φιλόσοφον, ὃτινι οἱ συγκλητικοὶ καὶ εἰκόνας αὐτὸν ἔστησαν ἐν τῷ Ζευξίππῳ). Bassett (2004: 52) suggests the possibility that the *Ekphrasis* was written on this occasion. Nevertheless, the relatively safe *data* we have on Christodoros' life and career do not seem to fit such an early date for the poem.

⁴⁹ See Bär (2012: 459-460).

⁵⁰ On this example, see Cameron (2004: 327, 354; esp. 347).

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