Temples in Late Antique Egypt: Cultic Heritage between Ideology, Pragmatism, and Artistic Recycling

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Abstract
The landscape of Egypt and the rest of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity was marked by the continued presence of temples. Several papyrological documents, corroborated by archaeological evidence, attest to the abandonment of temples and their recovery by the state, which could rent or sell them to individuals for a wide variety of uses. Christianity, therefore, settled into a desolate cult landscape and was not necessarily imposed by force or through the destruction of temples as was too often suggested by the hagiographic sources. By placing the question of the fate of the temples in a perspective which is not specifically religious and by clarifying it from the angle of the heritage policy of the ancients, this article aims to illustrate the role of temples in the formation of the cultural identity of Late Antique Egypt, thus providing a framework also for contemporary literary and manuscript production.

Keywords:
temples, paganism, Christianisation, literature.

Beginning with the religious and cultural revolution ushered in by the Christianisation of the Empire at the beginning of the fourth century, the fate of the temples is one of the most frequently discussed subjects in Coptic studies. Their demise also forms part of the spatial and cultural context which served as the backdrop to the development of this literature. In light of this, I propose here to address again this important subject.[1] What was the fate of places of pagan worship (whether Egyptian, classical or mixed)[2] when Christianity triumphed, and after Theodosius I ordered the closing of the temples (391)? Did they continue to be sites shared by the whole community and, if so, in what way? Or did they persist as markers of identity – we might think here of their conversion into Christian places of worship –? Or were they, in the end, simply destroyed? Behind these questions looms the frequently repreated view that pagan temples were either destroyed or transformed into churches. The reality, as we have known for a long time, was much more complex and, once again, raises questions concerning our sources and the way we look at them.

The sources for addressing these questions (in particular archaeological reports, and publications of papyri and hagiographic texts), as well as studies of regions outside Egypt, have grown in number. This enrichment of evidence has provided stimulating parallels at the level of the Empire and encouraged scholars to re-examine the question by considering it from a broader perspective. In this paper, I would like to explore the fate of the temples as a problem which is not specifically religious. I would also like to illuminate it from the perspective of "heritage policy" in the ancient world. We will see that the fates of cultic and cultural heritage – above all, literary culture – were often interwoven.

1 Concerning this question, there is a huge bibliography. To cite only the main contributions or those which have comprehensively dealt with the question in Egypt: O'Leary 1938; Habachi 1972; Grossmann 1995; Frankfurter 1998, chap. 7; the articles of Bagnall, Brakke, Frankfurter, Emmel, and Grossmann in Hahn *et al.* 2008; Dijkstra 2011. A shorter version of the current article appeared in French in the proceedings of a conference in Lebanon: Fournet 2018. On paganism and Coptic literature see, for instance, van der Vliet 1993. I warmfully thank Paola Buzi, Peter Shi and Korshi Dosoo for the English translation.

2 On these notions, see the recent publication of Naerebout 2007, 524-529, who provides a list of the Egyptian temples of classical style.

1. *Annihilated heritage: the destruction of temples*

In the minds of the general public, whose imagination is shaped by dramatic stories such as those shown in recent films,[3] pagan temples typically suffered the fate of the Serapeum of Alexandria, in other words, destruction. Although the details of the story are very controversial, it is certain that the Serapeum, the most important monument of the Empire after the Capitolium of Rome according to Ammianus Marcellinus,[4] was the object of violent conflict between pagans and Christians. The incident was regarded as a fateful precedent to the destruction of illustrious temples under the influence of the new religion. The cause of this confrontation is attributed to an edict of Theodosius I addressed to the Augustal Prefect and the Count of Egypt, which prohibited blood sacrifices and ordered the closure of the temples (June 16, 391). The bishop of Alexandria, Theophilus (385-412), exploited the opportunity to attack pagan practices. After an initial provocation, he tried to destroy the most prominent sanctuary in the capital of Egypt, the Serapeum. The high position of the temple made it a naturally strategic site. Consequently, the pagans transformed it into an offensive base under the command of the Neoplatonic philosopher Olympius. The Christians, fanaticised by the bishop and soldiers, brought down the defences and destroyed the Serapeum, which might have already been deserted by the pagans following the amnesty issued by the Emperor.[5] It is unclear to what extent the temple was destroyed. It was likely not ruined entirely, as evidenced by the colonnade of the courtyard which still existed in the twelfth century.[6] But it was enough for the fall of the Serapeum to be a traumatic episode for the pagans and an emblematic victory for the Christians. This triumph is well illustrated in the allegorical vignette of the "Alexandrian World Chronicle" (fifth-sixth cent.) where Theophilus is symbolically depicted as trampling on the Serapeum (the top of a Serapis statue is visible; Fig. 1).[7]

According to literary sources, the destruction of the Serapeum was quickly followed by the dismantling of other temples throughout the Empire in the fifth century. The first few examples are linked to Shenoute, an iconic monastic figure in Upper Egypt. This abbot led the famous White Monastery for a remarkably long period (from 385 to 465)[8] and left many works, in which he exhibited his original personality and vigorous activism.[9] According to his own writings and his *Life*, written by one of his disciples, he burned a temples at Atripe, on the left bank of the Nile, near Sohag, opposite Panopolis and another one at Pneueit.[10] It has been demonstrated recently that the account of the supposed second destruction resulted from a confusion, perhaps originating from a desire on the part of the author of the *Life of Shenoute*, to give his hero a more epic aura.[11]

The fact remains, however, that under his leadership the monastery became a centre of literary production which depicted *holy men* as strong figures decidedly against paganism.[12] This is the case

3 *Agora*, directed by Alejandro Amenábar, released in 2009.

4 Ammianus Marcellinus, XXII 16, 12: *His accedunt altis sufflata fastigiis templa. Inter quae eminet Serapeum, quod licet minuatur exilitate uerborum, atriis tamen columnariis amplissimis et spirantibus signorum figmentis et reliqua operum multitudine ita est exornatum, ut post Capitolium, quo se uenerabilis Roma in aeternum attollit, nihil orbis terrarum ambitiosius cernat*, 'There are besides in the city temples pompous with lofty roofs, conspicous among them the Serapeum, which, though feeble words merely belittle it, yet is so adorned with extensive columned halls, with almost breathing statues, and a great number of other works of art, that next to the Capitolium, with which revered Rome elevates herself to eternity, the whole world beholds nothing more magnificent' (trans. ROLFE 1963, 301-302).

5 On these events, see SCHWARTZ 1966, BALDINI 1985 and, more recently, HAHN 2008b and CHUVIN 2009, 70-74.

6 HAMARNEH 1971, 82-84 (quoted by MCKENZIE - GIBSON - REYES 2004, 108, n. 194; see also 110, n. 209, for the bibliography on its destruction under Saladin). GROSSMANN 1995, 188-189, argues for a complete destruction, an opinion he later modified (GROSSMANN 2008, 300-302). See also MCKENZIE - GIBSON - REYES 2004, 107-108 and HAHN 2008b, 351, n. 50. According to DIJKSTRA 2011, 399, 'It seems likely that the temple was only gradually dismantled for building material after the late 4th c. riots.' In 451, it still played a role in a riot (Priscus, fr. 22, quoted by GASCOU 1998, 34).

7 BAUER - STRZYGOWSKI 1905, pl. VI verso with a commentary, 71-72.

8 EMMEL 2002, 97-98 and EMMEL 2016.

9 On Shenoute and the paganism, see HAHN 2004, 223-269; EMMEL 2008.

10 EMMEL 2008. The case of the temple of Pneueit (or Pnewit) is more complicated: the documents which include the story consists of four texts that have been gathered and brilliantly studied in EMMEL 2017.

11 Stephen Emmel considers the possibility that this is a 'fine example of how an encomiast could fabricate almost ex nihilo a fantastic story glorifying his hero' (EMMEL 2017, 375).

12 BRAKKE 2008, 108-109: 'The White Monastery became a kind of literary headquarters for the production of literary portraits of monks in Shenoute's image'.

for the miraculous destruction of the temple of Kothos (fifth century) initiated by Macarius and Besa (the successor of Shenoute), recounted in chapter 5 of the *Panegyric of Saint Macarius of Tkôw* attributed to Dioscorus, patriarch of Alexandria (444-451):[13] learning that pagans were slaughtering Christian children on the altar of Kothos (a god otherwise unknown), Macarius went to the spot. After several adventures, and on the advice of a heavenly voice, he managed to make the temple catch fire, and it was consumed entirely. Later, around 500, the temple of Apollo and four other temples in Abydos are said to have been destroyed by Moses, another charismatic abbot, according to his *Life,* dating to the sixth-seventh century.[14] However, the sources of these stories are somewhat suspect and their supernatural character undermines their historical credibility.[15] These events are not supported by any archaeological data – unless, in a kind of circular argument, archaeological data are extrapolated purely from the textual evidence[16] – and display anti-pagan rhetoric which makes them hard to exploit at face value.[17]

The destruction of the temple of Kothos is, from this point of view, a textbook example: the eponymous deity of the temple is unknown to us; its destruction was miraculous; and finally, this episode was followed by a conclusion which reveals the genuine meaning of the story: after the temple has been burnt, Macarius, on his way back, met the high priest of this temple. He had the pagan priest arrested and thrown into a fire, where he 'was burned together with the idols that had been found in his house'. This high priest was called Homer (Ὅμηρος), a personal name which was rarely used at that time. This shows us that, behind the fire

Fig. 1. The illustration from the "Alexandrian World Chronicle" (AD V-VI) representing Theophilus trampling the Serapeum, Moscow, Pushkin Museum, Inv. 310/8, verso. (Image from Bauer - Strzygowski 1905, pl. VI verso).

13 Johnson 1980. On the date of this text, see Fournet 2011, 22.

14 Amélineau 1888-1895, II, 686-687; Till 1935-1936, II, 46-81. On this *Life*, see more recently Moussa 1998 and Moussa 2003.

15 Modern research continues to maintain the unreliability of these texts: Hahn - Emmel - Gotter 2008, 1-2; Bagnall 2008, 25-32; Dijkstra 2011, 394-400; etc.

16 Bayliss 2004, 52.

17 See for instance the end of *Apophthegmata Patrum*, systematic collection, XII, 3: 'Abba Bessarion says: "An answer came from the Lord, that the temples would be overturned"... This is what happened; they were overturned'.

of the temple and the death of its priest, it was the end of pagan culture that Macarius (or the author of his *Life*) was advocating.[18]

On the other hand, we must be cautious about these stories, which should not always be understood in a concrete sense. The verb καθαιρεῖν 'destroy', used in Greek hagiography, is susceptible to a metaphorical interpretation. Even in the minds of the authors, it is uncertain whether the 'destruction' of a temple might not be a dramatic and pithy way to refer to the eradication of the cult it hosted or to the temple's actual closure. Thus, when Procopius, in *De bello Persico*, I 19, 36 tells us that Justinian sent Narses to 'destroy' (καθελεῖν) the temple of Philae and the general did it accordingly (καθεῖλε), we can suspect a metaphorical formula– the temple is in fact still standing![19]

The destruction of the temples was not encouraged by imperial policy, despite Constantine's precedents, such as the very symbolic demolition of the temple of Aphrodite on Mount Golgotha, and possibly even earlier destructions in the reign of Diocletian, which were justified by the exceptional situation of the revolts in the Thebaid at the end of the third century.[20] Despite the inadequacies and inconsistencies (owing to the variety of local conditions) in the evidence which make the interpretation tricky, the abundant legislation available on the subject, mainly the *Theodosian Code*, points above all to a preoccupation with the eradicatation of pagan cults housed in the temples. As a result, sacrifices were banned in 341,[21] and temples closed in 346.[22]

It is commonly believed that the situation became severe under Theodosius I (379-395) and Arcadius (383-408). But, in fact, their legislation is more ambiguous than it first seems, and does not support the idea that the emperors encouraged the destruction of the temples: in 392, they forbade entering and approaching a temple[23] and, in 397, Arcadius allowed the materials from demolished temples to be used to maintain streets, bridges, aqueducts and city walls.[24] In 399, Arcadius and Honorius ordered the destruction of the rural temples, but on the condition that it did not cause disorder or commotion.[25] This might well have looked like an upsurge of laws encouraging the demolition of pagan religious buildings if there had not been other laws protecting them at the same time: in 382, the duke of Osrhoene received a decree ordering the temple of Edessa to be kept open for the people so that they could continue to admire the *simulacra* (statues or bas-reliefs);[26] in 399, the vicars of Spain and the Five Provinces, as well as the proconsul of Africa, were ordered to prohibit the destruction of temples, even the empty ones.[27]

In fact, what gave the impression of an anti-temple crusade under Theodosius was less the laws enacted by this emperor than the situation on the ground, which depended more on the personal initiative of local officials or prelates than the imperial orders. Therefore, the Praetorian Prefect of the East, Maternus Cynegius (384-388), enforced the order to close the temples in the Diocese of the East with more

18 FOURNET 2011, 19-24.

19 On the other hand, in the case of the destruction of the temple of Aphrodite on Mount Golgotha ordered by Constantine, described in Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, III 26-29, the author insists that the temple was destroyed and that the site was even excavated to remove all the traces.

20 CARRIÉ 1993, 575-577 and CARRIÉ 2010, 155-156 sees a 'suppression violente de sanctuaires' in the destruction of the sanctuary of Coptos, the installation of a military camp in Luxor, the construction of a *palatium* on the dismantled enclosure of El-Kab and perhaps of a camp in the temple of Khnum in Philae. Those efforts were 'dans le cadre de la répression militaire des deux grands soulèvements de la province dans les années 290', which attempted to smash 'le "nationalisme" provincial en ses lieux d'inspiration' (CARRIÉ 2010, 155). Other than the fact that some of these examples are not, strictly speaking, destruction but re-use (Luxor), these conclusions also result from a reinterpretation of the archaeological data (for instance, P. Grossmann dates the destruction of the temple of Khnum to the end of the third century or to the beginning of the fourth century, but its transformation into a camp to a century later), we can reverse the reasoning by considering these military constructions as re-uses of temples which have fallen into disuse, as Roger S. Bagnall argues (see *infra*, § 3).

21 *CTh.* XVI 10, 2; reiteration of this prohibition, with the death penalty, in 356 (*CTh.* XVI 10, 6 et 10, 4 – on the date of this last, see the discussions summarised in MAGNOU-NORTIER 2002, 370, n. 12).

22 *CTh.* XVI 10, 4 (on the date, see MAGNOU-NORTIER 2002, 370, n. 12).

23 *CTh.* XVI 10, 12.

24 *CTh.* XVI 1, 36.

25 *CTh.* XVI 10, 16, taking the opposite of *CTh* XVI 10, 3 (346) that protects the temple 'located inside the walls'. On rural temples, see CASEAU 2004.

26 *CTh.* XVI 10, 8. See below, n. 108.

27 *CTh.* XVI 10, 15 et 18. See below, n. 109.

zeal than the emperor probably wished, by committing destructions *manu militari*.[28] These events, among others, drove Libanius to write his *Pro templis* (*Or.* XXX), accusing the prefect of disobeying the emperor and deceiving him, since the latter, – as the orator tells us – never ordered the temples to be touched:[29]

> And let none believe that there is an accusation against you, Sire. On our frontier with Persia there lies in ruins a temple that, to judge from the report of all that have seen it, was without peer, so massive was it, built with mighty stones, covering as much as as the city itself.[30] At any rate, in the alarms of war it sufficed the inhabitants that if the enemy captured the city, they would get nothing more, since they would be unable to capture the temple because the strength of its walls defied all the engines of war. Moreover, if they mounted to its roof, they could observe a vast area of enemy country, which is considerable advantage to people at war. I have even heard it argued which temple held the greater marvel, this that is now no more or that of Serapis, which I pray may never suffer the same fate. But this magnificent temple, leaving aside the concealed splendours of its ceiling and all the statues wrought in iron that were hidden in its shadow far from the sunlight, – it is vanished and gone, to the grief of those who had seen it and the confort of those who had not, for in such cases seeing and hearing do not have the same effect. In fact, these who had not seen it experience the twin emotions, of grief at its fall and of confort at not having witnessed it. However, on a careful consideration of the matter, this is none of your doing, but of the person that misled you, a scoundrel hated of the gods, cowardly and avaricious, and a plague to the earth that welcomed him at his birth. He profited by fortune's folly and abused his fortune foully.[31]

The local bishops were also responsible for acts of destruction,[32] such as that of Marcellus against the temple of Zeus in Apamea around 386,[33] Porphyry against the Marneion of Gaza in 402[34] or Theophilus in Alexandria against the Serapeum.[35] Libanius also accuses the monks of being the main instigators of temple destructions – they even allegedly put pressure on Cynegius through his wife –:

> [...] But this black-robed tribe, who eat more than elephants and, by the quantities of drink they consume, weary those that accompany their drinking with the singing of hymns, who hide these excesses under an artificially contrived pallor – these people, Sire, while the law yet remains in force, hasten to attack the temples with sticks and stones and bars of iron, and in some case disdaining these, with hands and feet. Then utter desolation follows, with the stripping of roofs, demolition of walls, the tearing down of statues and overthrow of altars, and the priests must either keep quiet or die. After demolishing one, they scurry to another, and to a third, and trophy is piled on trophy, in contravention of the law. Such outrages occur even in the cities, but they are most common in the countryside. Many are the foes who perpetrate the separate attacks, but after their countless crimes this scattered rabble congre-

28 Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II 26; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VII 5, 11-15; Libanius, *Or.* XXX 44-45; Zosimus, *Historia nova*, IV 37. See Gassowska 1982.

29 See *Or.* XXX 27: εἰ δὲ ταῖς κατασκαφαῖς ἐγίγνοντο τῆς γνώμης αἱ περὶ ταῦτα μεταβολαί, πάλαι ἂν σῇ ψήφῳ τὰ ἱερὰ κατέσκαπτο· πάλαι γὰρ ἂν ἡδέως ταύτην εἶδες τὴν μεταβολήν. ἀλλ' ἤδεις οὐ δυνησόμενος. διὰ τοῦτ' ἀπέσχου τῶν ἱερῶν τούτων. τούτους δ', εἰ καί τι τοιοῦτον προσεδόκων, μετὰ σοῦ προσῆκεν ἐλθεῖν ἐπ' αὐτὸ καὶ μεταδοῦναι τῷ κρατοῦντι τῆς φιλοτιμίας. ἦν δέ, οἶμαι, μηδὲν ἁμαρτάνονταςκατορθοῦν ἅπερ ἤθελον κάλλιον ἢ μετὰ τοῦ πλημμελεῖν, 'If such conversion could be effected simply by the destruction of temples, they would have been long ago destroyed by your decree, for you would long since have been glad to see this conversion. But you knew that you could not, and so you never laid a finger on these shrines. These people, even if they looked forward to such a result, ought to have advanced towards it in step with you and should have let the emperor share their ambition. It would have been better, surely, to succeed in their objective by staying on the right side of the law rather than by abusing it' (trans. Norman 1977, 125).

30 According to Chuvin 2009, 66-68, it is not the temple of Edessa which is targeted here, but perhaps that of Hierapolis (or Carrhae).

31 Libanius, *Or.* XXX 44-46: Καὶ μηδεὶς οἰέσθω σὴν ταῦτ' εἶναι κατηγορίαν, ὦ βασιλεῦ. κεῖται μὲν γὰρ πρὸς τοῖς ὁρίοις Περσῶν νεὼς ᾧ παραπλήσιον οὐδέν, ὡς ἔστιν ἁπάντων τῶν τεθεαμένων ἀκούειν. οὕτω μέγιστος μεγίστοις ἐγεγόνει τοῖς λίθοις, τοσοῦτον ἐπέχων τῆς γῆς ὁπόσον καὶ ἡ πόλις. ἤρκει γοῦν ἐν τοῖς ἐκ τῶν πολέμων φόβοις τοῖς οἰκοῦσι τὴν πόλιν μηδὲν εἶναι πλέον τοῖς ἑλοῦσι τὴν πόλιν οὐκ ἔχουσι κἀκεῖνον προσεξελεῖν τῆς ἰσχύος τοῦ περιβόλου πᾶν ἐλεγχούσης μηχάνημα. ἦνδὲ δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ τέγος ἀναβᾶσι πλεῖστον ὅσον τῆς πολεμίας ὁρᾶν, οὐ μικρὸν πολεμουμένοις πλεονέκτημα ἀνθρώποις. ἤκουσα δὲ καὶ ἐριζόντων τινῶν, ἐν ὁποτέρῳ τὸ θαῦμα μεῖζον ἱερῷ, τῷ μηκέτ' ὄντιτούτῳ ἢ ὃ μήποτε πάθοι ταὐτόν, ἐν ᾧπερ ὁ Σάραπις. ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν τὸ τοιοῦτο καὶ τοσοῦτον ἱερόν, ἵν' ὑπερβῶ τὰ τῆς ὀροφῆς ἀπόρρητα καὶ ὅσα ἀγάλματα σιδήρου πεποιημένα κέκρυπτο τῷ σκότῳ διαφεύγοντα τὸν ἥλιον, οἴχεται καὶ ἀπόλωλε, θρῆνος μὲν τοῖς ἰδοῦσιν, ἡδονὴ δὲ τοῖς οὐχ ἑωρακόσιν, οὐ γὰρ ἴσον ἐντοῖς τοιούτοις ὀφθαλμοί τε καὶ ὦτα, μᾶλλον δὲ τοῖς οὐκ ἰδοῦσιν ἄμφω, καὶ λύπη καὶ ἡδονή, τὸ μὲν ἐκ τοῦ πτώματος, τὸ δ' ὅτιπερ οὐ τεθέανται. ἀλλ' ὅμως εἴ τις ἀκριβῶς σκοπήσειεν, οὐ σὸν τοῦτο, τοῦ δὲ ἠπατηκότος ἀνθρώπου μιαροῦ καὶ θεοῖς ἐχθροῦ καὶ δειλοῦ καὶ φιλοχρημάτου καὶ τῇ τικτόμενον αὐτὸν δεξαμένῃ γῇ δυσμενεστάτου, ἀλογίας μὲν ἀπολελαυκότος τύχης, κακῶς δὲ χρωμένου τῇ τύχῃ δουλεύοντος τῇ γυναικί, πάντα ἐκείνῃ χαριζομένου, πάντα ἐκείνην ἡγουμένου. Trans. Norman 1977, 141-142.

32 See, in general, Fowden 1978.

33 Theodoretus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V 21, says the bishop received help from the military to prevent any resistance among the population and insists that this is the first destruction of a sanctuary by a bishop in this city. See Chuvin 2009, 65.

34 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 47-50; 63-70. See Chuvin 2009, 82-84.

35 Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VII 16, 1, tells that Theophilus asked the emperor for a rescript to destroy the Serapeum.

> gates and calls for a tally of their activities, and they are in disgrace unless they have committed the foulest outrage. So they sweep across the countryside like rivers in spate, and by ravaging the temples, they ravage the estates, for wherever they tear out a temple from an estate, that estate is blinded and lies murdered. Temples, Sire, are the soul of the countryside: they mark the beginning of its settlement, and have been down through many generations to the men of today.[36]

These local initiatives were far rarer than literary sources would like us to believe. The literary accounts often tend to exaggerate the degree of destruction. Cases proven by archaeology are rather rare,[37] not to mention that the complete destruction of a stone temple is no trivial task. The description (spiced with some fantasy) of Theodoret of Cyrrhus on the destruction of the temple of Apamea undertaken by Marcellus with the help of Cynegius gives a good idea of the magnitude of the mission:

> An attempt was made to destroy the vast and magnificent shrine of Jupiter, but the building was so firm and solid that to break up its closely compacted stones seemed beyond the power of man; for they were huge and well and truly laid, and moreover clamped fast with iron and lead. When the divine Marcellus saw that the prefect was afraid to begin the attack, he sent him on to the rest of the towns; while he himself prayed to God to aid him in the work of destruction. Next morning there came uninvited to the bishop a man who was no builder, or mason, or artificer of any kind, but only a labourer who carried stones and timber on his back. Give me, said he, two workmen's pay; and I promise you I will easily destroy the temple. The holy bishop did as he was asked, and the following was the fellow's contrivance. Round the four sides of the temple went a portico united to it, and on which its upper story rested. The columns were of great bulk, commensurate with the temple, each being sixteen cubits in circumference. The quality of the stone was exceptionally hard, and offering great resistance to the masons' tools. In each of these the man made an opening all round, propping up the superstructure with olive timber before he went on to another. After he had hollowed out three of the columns, he set fire to the timbers. But a black demon appeared and would not suffer the wood to be consumed, as it naturally would be, by the fire, and stayed the force of the flame. After the attempt had been made several times, and the plan was proved ineffectual, news of the failure was brought to the bishop, who was taking his noontide sleep. Marcellus immediately hurried to the church, ordered water to be poured into a pail, and placed the water upon the divine altar. Then, bending his head to the ground, he besought the loving Lord in no way to give in to the usurped power of the demon, but to lay bare its weakness and exhibit His own strength, lest unbelievers should henceforth find excuse for greater wrong. With these and other like words he made the sign of the cross over the water, and ordered Equitius, one of his deacons, who was armed with faith and enthusiasm, to take the water and sprinkle it in faith, and then apply the flame. His orders were obeyed, and the demon, unable to endure the approach of the water, fled. Then the fire, affected by its foe the water as though it had been oil, caught the wood, and consumed it in an instant. When their support had vanished the columns themselves fell down, and dragged other twelve with them. The side of the temple which was connected with the columns was dragged down by the violence of their fall, and carried away with them. The crash, which was tremendous, was heard throughout the town, and all ran to see the sight.[38]

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36 Libanius, *Or.* XXX 8-9: οἱ δὲ μελανειμονοῦντες οὗτοι καὶ πλείω μὲν τῶν ἐλεφάντων ἐσθίοντες, πόνον δὲ παρέχοντες τῷ πλήθει τῶν ἐκπωμάτων τοῖς δι' ᾀσμάτων αὐτοῖς παραπέμπουσι τὸ ποτόν, συγκρύπτοντες δὲ ταῦτα ὠχρότητι τῇ διὰ τέχνης αὐτοῖς πεπορισμένῃ μένοντος, ὦ βασιλεῦ, καὶ κρατοῦντος τοῦ νόμου θέουσιν ἐφ' ἱερὰ ξύλα φέροντες καὶ λίθους καὶ σίδηρον, οἱ δὲ καὶ ἄνευ τούτων χεῖρας καὶ πόδας. ἔπειτα Μυσῶν λεία καθαιρουμένων ὀροφῶν, κατασκαπτομένων τοίχων, κατασπωμένων ἀγαλμάτων, ἀνασπώμενον βωμῶν, τοὺς ἱερεῖς δὲ ἢ σιγᾶν ἢ τεθνάναι δεῖ· τῶν πρώτων δὲ κειμένων δρόμος ἐπὶ τὰ δεύτερα καὶ τρίτα, καὶ τρόπαια τροπαίοις ἐναντία τῷ νόμῳ συνείρεται. τολμᾶται μὲν οὖν κἀν ταῖς πόλεσι, τὸ πολὺ δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἀγροῖς. καὶ πολλοὶ μὲν οἱ καθ' ἕκαστον πολέμιοι, ἐπὶ δὲ μυρίοις κακοῖς τὸ διεσπαρμένον τοῦτ' ἀθροίζεται καὶ λόγον ἀλλήλους ἀπαιτοῦσι τῶν εἰργασμένων καὶ αἰσχύνη τὸ μὴ μέγιστα ἠδικηκέναι. χωροῦσι τοίνυν διὰ τῶν ἀγρῶν ὥσπερ χείμαρροι κατασύροντες διὰ τῶν ἱερῶν τοὺς ἀγρούς. ὅτου γὰρ ἂν ἱερὸν ἐκκόψωσιν ἀγροῦ, οὗτος τετύφλωταί τε καὶ κεῖται καὶ τέθνηκε. ψυχὴ γάρ, ὦ βασιλεῦ, τοῖς ἀγροῖς τὰ ἱερὰ προοίμια τῆς ἐν τοῖς ἀγροῖς κτίσεως γεγενημένα καὶ διὰ πολλῶν γενεῶν εἰς τοὺς νῦν ὄντας ἀφιγμένα. Trans. NORMAN 1977, 107-108.

37 GROSSMANN 1995, 185 tells about 'Sonderfälle'. See, in general, BAYLISS 2004, 16-25 (with bibliography).

38 Theodoretus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V 22, 3-10: τὸ δὲ τοῦ Διὸς τέμενος, μέγιστόν τε ὂν καὶ πολλῷ κόσμῳ πεποικιλμένον καταλῦσαι μὲν ἐπειράθη, στεγανὴν δὲ ἄγαν καὶ στερεμνίαν τὴν οἰκοδομίαν ἰδών, ἀδύνατον ἀνθρώποις ὑπέλαβε διαλῦσαι τῶν λίθων τὴν ἁρμονίαν· μέγιστοί τε γὰρ ἦσαν καὶ ἀλλήλοις ἄγαν συνηρμοσμένοι καὶ μέντοι καὶ σιδήρῳ καὶ μολίβδῳ προσδεδεμένοι. ταύτην τοῦ ὑπάρχου τὴν δειλίαν ὁ θεῖος Μάρκελλος ἰδών, ἐκεῖνον μὲν εἰς τὰς ἄλλας προὔπεμψε πόλεις, αὐτὸς δὲ τὸν θεὸν ἠντιβόλει πόρον δοῦναι τῇ λύσει. Ἧκεν οὖν τις αὐτόματος ἔωθεν, οὔτε οἰκοδόμος, οὔτε λιθοτόμος, οὔτ' ἄλλην τινὰ ἐπιστάμενος τέχνην, ἀλλὰ λίθους φέρειν ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων καὶ ξύλα εἰθισμένος. οὗτος προσελθὼν ὑπέσχετο ῥᾷστα τὸν νεὼν καταλύσειν, δυοῖν δὲ τεχνίταιν ἀπήτει μισθόν. ἐπειδὴ δὲ τοῦτον ὑπέσχετο δώσειν ὁ θεῖος ἀρχιερεύς, τοιόνδε τι ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐκεῖνος ἐμηχανήσατο. στοὰν ἐκ τῶν τεττάρων πλευρῶν ὁ νεὼς εἶχεν ἐφ' ὕψους κείμενος αὐτῷ συνηρμοσμένην· οἱ δὲ κίονες μέγιστοί τε ἦσαν καὶ ἰσόμετροι τῷ νεῷ, ἑκάστου δὲ ὁ κύκλος ἑξκαίδεκα πήχεων ἦν. ἡ δὲ τοῦ λίθου φύσις στερροτάτη τις ἦν καὶ οὐ ῥᾳδίως τοῖς τῶν λιθοτόμων ὀργάνοις ὑπείκουσα. τούτων ἕκαστον ἐν κύκλῳ διορύττων ἐκεῖνος καὶ ξύλοις ἐλαΐνοις ὑπερείδων τὰ ὑπερκείμενα, ἐφ' ἕτερον αὖθις μετέβαινεν. οὕτω δὲ τρεῖς τῶν κιόνων ὀρύξας τὴν φλόγα τοῖς ξύλοις προσήνεγκεν. ἀλλ' οὐκ εἴα κατὰ φύσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς τὰ ξύλα δαπανᾶσθαι δαίμων τις μέλας φαινόμενος καὶ κωλύων τῆς φλογὸς τὴν ἐνέργειαν. ἐπειδὴ δὲ πολλάκις τοῦτο δράσαντες ἀνόνητον ἑώρων τὴν μηχανήν, ἐμήνυσαν τοῦτο τῷ ποιμένι μετὰ τὴν μεσημβρίαν καθεύδοντι. Ὁ δὲ παραυτίκα εἰς τὸν θεῖον δραμὼν νεὼν καὶ εἰς ἄγγος ὕδωρ κομισθῆναι προστάξας, ἔθηκε μὲν τὸ ὕδωρ ὑπὸ τὸ θεῖον θυσιαστήριον, αὐτὸς δὲ εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος τὸ μέτωπον θεὶς τὸν φιλάνθρωπον ἠντιβόλει δεσπότην μὴ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐνδοῦναι τῇ τυραννίδι τοῦ δαίμονος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἀσθένειαν τὴν ἐκείνου γυμνῶσαι καὶ τὴν οἰκείαν δύναμιν ἐπιδεῖξαι, ἵνα μὴ πρόφασις ἐντεῦθεν

Fig. 2. Isis with her body entirely chipped away in the temple of Philae (© Esther Garel).

Fig. 3. Isis with her head intentionaly mutilated in the temple of Philae (© Esther Garel).

Mark the Deacon, in his *Life of Porphyry*, also left us one of the most striking tales of temple destruction, that of the Marneion in Gaza. The task was only accomplished thanks to a prescription revealed by God to a child ('Burn [the temple] in the following way: bring liquid pitch, sulfur and pork fat, mix the three things, coat the bronze doors with it, set them on fire, and so the whole temple will burn: because otherwise, it is not possible').[39] And yet, in spite of this divine counsel, the fire, with the collapse of a burning beam, did not fail to take a victim and it took several days for the temple to burn down completely. Under such conditions, the destruction was often partial or symbolic. Christians were satisfied just to remove and break the statues (idols, inhabited by demons),[40] to paint over the frescoes[41] or to smash the bas-reliefs, as amply testified by examples in Egypt, especially in Philae.[42] (Figs. 2 and 3).

One might think that everything changed in 435 with the law enacted by Theodosius II and Valentinian III. The emperors ordered the destruction and purification of the temples – a decision which comes as the perfect ending for the chapter on pagans, sacrifices and temples in book XVI 10 of the *Theodosian Code*.[43] It

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τοῖς ἀπίστοις μείζονος γένηται βλάβης. ταῦτα εἰπὼν καὶ ὅσα τούτοις παρόμοια καὶ ἐπιθεὶς τοῦ σταυροῦ τὸν τύπον τῷ ὕδατι, Ἐκοίτιόν τινα διακονίας ἠξιωμένον, πίστει καὶ ζήλῳ πεφραγμένον, λαβεῖν τε τὸ ὕδωρ ἐκέλευσε καὶ διὰ τάχους δραμεῖν καὶ μετὰ πίστεως διαρρᾶναι καὶ τὴν φλόγα προσενεγκεῖν. οὕτω τούτου γενομένου, ἀπέδρα μὲν ὁ δαίμων οὐκ ἐνεγκὼν τὴν τοῦ ὕδατος προσβολήν, τὸ δὲ πῦρ, ὡς ἐλαίῳ τῷ ἀντιπάλῳ χρησάμενον ὕδατι, ἐπελάβετό τε τῶν ξύλων καὶ ταῦτα ἐν ἀκαρεῖ κατανάλωσεν. οἱ δὲ κίονες, φρούδου τοῦ ἐρείδοντος γενομένου, αὐτοί τε κατέπεσον καὶ ἄλλους εἵλκυσαν δυοκαίδεκα. καὶ τοῦ νεὼ δὲ τὸ τοῖς κίοσι συνημμένον κατηνέχθη πλευρὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκείνων βίας συνελκυσθέν. ὁ δὲ κτύπος εἰς ἅπαν τὸ ἄστυ διαδραμὼν, πολὺς γὰρ ἦν, πάντας εἰς θέαν συνήγειρεν. Trans. B. Jackson.

39 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 68-70. The quotation is from § 68: Καύσατε τὸν ναὸν τὸν ἔνδον ἕως ἐδάφους· πολλὰ γὰρ δεινὰ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ, μάλιστα αἱ ἀνθρώπων θυσίαι. Τοιούτῳ δὲ τρόπῳ καύσατε αὐτόν. Ἀγάγετε ὑγρὰν πίσσαν καὶ θεῖον καὶ στέαρ χοίρειον καὶ μίξατε τὰ τρία καὶ χρίσατε τὰς χαλκᾶς θύρας καὶ ἐπ' αὐτὰς <τὸ> πῦρ ἐπιβάλετε, καὶ οὕτως <πᾶς> ὁ ναὸς καίεται· ἄλλως γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν δυνατὸν γενέσθαι.

40 *Leitmotiv* of the destruction of temples, relayed by the hagiographic tradition of the destruction of the 70 idols (see recently Kouremenos 2016). On this topic, see Stewart 1999; Caseau 2001, 117-121; Dijkstra 2015.

41 Among many examples, see the temple of Domitian in Ephesus (Foss 1979, 30).

42 Nautin 1967, 26-27.

43 *CTh*. XVI 10, 25 : *Omnibus sceleratae mentis paganae exsecrandis hostiarum immolationibus damnandisque sacrificiis ceterisque antiquiorum sanctionum auctoritate prohibitis interdicimus cunctaque eorum fana templa delubra, si qua etiam nunc restant integra, praecepto magistratuum destrui collocationeque venerandae christianae religionis signi expiari praecipimus, scientibus universis, si quem huic legi aput competentem iudicem idoneis probationibus illusisse constiterit, eum morte esse multandum,* 'We interdict all persons of criminal pagan mind from the accursed immolation of victims, from damnable sacrifices, and from all other such practices that are prohibited by the authority of the more ancient sanctions. We command that all their fanes, temples, and shrines, if even now any remain entire, shall be destroyed by the command of the magistrates and shall be purified by the erection of the sign of the venerable Christian religion. All men shall know that if it should appear, by suitable proof before a competent judge, that any person has mocked this law, he shall be punished with death' (trans. Pharr 1952, 476).

is considered as the *coup de grâce* to the temples which still existed. But Richard Bayliss[44] has rightly shown that this law must be interpreted as a reaffirmation of that of 399 (*CTh.* XVI 10, 18), which prohibited the still active cults (while ordering that empty temples should not be disturbed[45]). The very text of the law of 435, by its language, insists on the fact that the temples where there were still sacrifices (considered as the essence of pagan cults) had to be destroyed[46] and not just any temples.

If we still insist on interpreting the aforementioned regulation in an ambiguous sense, the law enacted by Majorian and Leo I in 458, directed to the *praefectus Urbis,* has the merit of clarity: they completely prohibit the destruction of temples, reviving the previous protective laws which I have already mentioned and others that I will discuss in a moment. [47]

The policy against vandalism targeting temples (whether religious or for other purposes) has left at least one trace in Egypt: Shenoute, in a short autobiography, admits that, in their crusade of destroying pagan temples, some of his henchmen had trouble with the law. [48]

In short, to quote Richard Bayliss, temples must have suffered more often from 'aggressive deconsacrations rather than actual demolitions or destructions.'[49] In fact, as we will see later, Christian vandalism was far from being the temples' worst enemy.

2. *Converted heritage: 'from temple to church'*

The other *opinio communis* concerning the fate of the temples is that they underwent widespread conversion into churches, either after total destruction, or by accommodating new Christian constructions within their still existing walls. [50] This view is summarised by the famous expression 'from temple to church' which the great early Byzantine art historian Friedrich Deichmann used in one of his many studies on the question.[51] Recently, it also became the title of a collective volume on the destruction and renewal of the cult topography in Late Antiquity.[52] Despite its success, the teleological meaning of the concept is nonetheless questionable, since it seems to endorse the idea that the Christian reclamation of pagan cult sites was a common fact. It also reflects a historical trend and is based on the presupposition that a sacred place would remain so forever despite religious changes.[53] The 'continuism' which it implies has been strongly criticised in recent decades.[54] Nevertheless, it deserves to be challenged once more.

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44 BAYLISS 2004, 18.

45 Not even their 'idols' which are still worshipped: they must be placed under official control ([...] *depositis sub officio idolis disceptatione habita, quibus etiam nunc patuerit cultum vanae superstitionis impendi*).

46 We will note the decisive role of the *eorum* in the expression *cunctaque eorum fana templa*, referring to the pagans still active, to which the text refers at the very beginning (*omnibus sceleratae mentis paganae*, which I understand as a dative depending on *interdicimus* while *exsecrandis hostiarum immolationibus*, etc, is the complement to the ablative expressing the object of the ban). Only temples where sacrifices are still practised are therefore expressly concerned.

47 *Nov. Maj.* 4 : [...] 1. *Idcirco generali lege sancimus cuncta aedificia quaeve in templis aliisque monumentis a veteribus condita propter usum vel amoenitatem publicam subrexerunt, ita a nullo destrui atque contingi, ut iudex, qui hoc fieri statuerit, quinquaginta librarum auri inlatione feriatur ; adparitores vero atque numerarios, qui iubenti obtemperaverint et sua neutiquam suggestione restiterint, fustuario supplicio subditos manuum quoque amissione truncandos, per quas servanda veterum monumenta temerantur* [...], 'This is why, by this general law, we decide that all the buildings which were founded by the ancients, like the temples and other monuments, and which were built for the use or the pleasure of the people cannot be destroyed or touched by whoever, so that a judge who gives an order to the contrary would be charged with a penalty of fifty pounds of gold and the *adparitores* and *numerarii* who would have obeyed his orders and who would not have opposed them in any way by a report would incur the punishment of caning and would also see their hands amputated, the very ones by which the monuments of the elders are desecrated while they should have been preserved'.

48 I quote the text (corresponding to LEIPOLDT 1906-1913, III, 91, 19-92, 3) and the translation by EMMEL 2017, 314: ⲙⲡⲓⲣⲗⲁⲁⲩ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲉⲛⲟⲩⲱⲧⲟⲣⲧⲣ ⁶ⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙⲡⲥⲟⲡ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲛⲣⲱⲕ ⲙⲡⲉⲣⲡⲉ ⲛⲣⲉⲫⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲓⲇⲱⲗⲟⲛ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲛⲁⲧⲣⲓⲡⲉ ⁷ⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲉⲙⲡⲥ[ⲟ]ⲡ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲛⲃⲱⲕ ⲙⲛⲛⲉⲭⲣⲓⲥⲧⲓⲁⲛⲟⲥ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲭⲓⲧⲟⲩ ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲩ ⲙⲡⲇⲓⲕⲁⲥⲧⲏⲥ ⲛⲑⲏⲟⲩⲛ ⲙⲛⲁⲛⲧⲓⲛⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲛⲟⲩⲛⲏⲃ ⲕⲁⲑⲏⲅⲟⲣⲉⲓ ⲙⲏⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲃⲉⲡⲕⲉⲣⲡⲉ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲧⲁⲕⲟⲩ ⲉⲑⲟⲩ ⲟⲛ ⲉⲙⲡⲉⲩⲧⲏⲉ 'For I have done nothing in a disorderly fashion: neither the time we burned the pagan temple that is in Atripe; nor the [time] we went with the Christians who were taken before the judge in Hermopolis and Antinoopolis, whom the priests accused because of the other temple, which they for their part too had destroyed in their village'. See also EMMEL 2008, 162-164.

49 BAYLISS 2004, 18.

50 As a result, Pierre Nautin begins his classic study on the conversion of the temple of Philae into a church with the sentence: 'La liste est longue des temples païens transformés en églises' (NAUTIN 1967, 1).

51 DEICHMANN 1964. On the same topic, DEICHMANN 1939 and his article in *RLAC* II, 1228-1241.

52 HAHN - EMMEL - GOTTER 2008.

53 BAGNALL 2008, 33.

54 For Egypt, see above all the contributions in HAHN - EMMEL - GOTTER 2008, and DIJKSTRA 2011.

As with the phenomenon of destruction, the idea of converting temples into churches has known a precedent which served as a paradigm, from the period of the first Christian emperor, Constantine: according to Eusebius, he had a church constructed on the site of the temple of Aphrodite built by Hadrian on Mount Golgotha, after having it completely razed to the ground and removed.[55] The Egyptian examples are far from presenting such an ideal and linear pattern in the reclamation of the cult sites.

The first case of conversion is that of the Mithraeum in Alexandria. It was transformed into an oratory by the bishop George of Cappadocia (357-361).[56] But Socrates informs us that the temple had long been disused and abandoned. For this reason, Constantius II gave it to the Church of Alexandria.[57] Therefore, we can see that there was a rupture in cultic continuity which prevents us from attributing this transformation of architecture to ideological motivations: the construction of a church was not intended to replace a pagan place of worship and to affirm the victory of Christianity over paganism, but can be explained, more pragmatically, as the re-use of a deserted building.

We find the same pattern in the story of the Serapeum. The sources contradict each other. After its destruction, according to Rufinus, a martyrium dedicated to John the Baptist was built on one side of the temple and a church on the other.[58] According to Sozomen, shortly after its fall, this temple was transformed into an eponymous church of Arcadius.[59] However, John of Nikiu tells us that Theodosius I converted the Serapeum into a church, named it after his younger son Honorius, but dedicated it to the martyrs Cosmas and Damian.[60] Moreover, it should be noted that, in spite of the wording used by Sozomen and John of Nikiu, the Christian buildings seem rather to be peripheral additions and, therefore, did not result from a conversion of the temple itself – its layout and size (the internal space was only 9 metres wide) did not suit reuse as a church.[61] Archaeological investigations have not uncovered any foundations of Christian buildings in the sanctuary area.[62] The Christian constructions (dating from the end of the fourth or to the fifth century) have instead been found to the west of the temple, which could confirm Rufinus' account. Nevertheless, Jean Gascou has deployed weighty arguments to dispute the idea that the martyrium of Saint John the Baptist could have been on the side of the Serapeum. According to the *History of the Church of Alexandria*, it was located in a garden south of the city (in the district of Hermes) and belonged to Athanasius, who then bequeathed it to the Church.[63]

55 See above, n.19.

56 Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica*, III 2. During the construction of the oratory, human skulls were found. Christians interpreted these as the remains of human sacrifices. They were allegedly exhibited in procession by the bishop to shame the pagans. The disturbances caused by such an action eventually resulted in the assassination of George by the pagans. See Gascou 1998, 31-32. As this scholar rightly thinks (*ibid.*, 31), it is probable that the transformation of the temple of Dionysus of which Sozomen speaks, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VII 15, 2 (ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον ὁ Ἀλεξανδρέων ἐπίσκοπος τὸ παρ' αὐτοῖς Διονύσου ἱερὸν εἰς ἐκκλησίαν μετεσκεύαζεν) results from a confusion with that of the Mithraeum.

57 Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica,* III 2, 2-3: Τόπος τις ἦν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐκ παλαιῶν τῶν χρόνων ἔρημος καὶ ἠμελημένος συρφετοῦ τε γέμων πολλοῦ, ἐν ᾧ οἱ Ἕλληνες τὸ παλαιὸν τῷ Μίθρᾳ τελετὰς ποιοῦντες ἀνθρώπους κατέθυον. Τοῦτον Κωνστάντιος ἤδη πρότερον ὡς σχολαῖον τῇ Ἀλεξανδρέων ἐκκλησίᾳ προσκεκυρώκει, 'There was a place in that city which had long been abandoned to neglect and filth, wherein the pagans had formerly celebrated their mysteries, and sacrified human beings to Mithra. This being empty and otherwise useless, Constantius had granted to the church of the Alexandrians'.

58 Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica,* II (XI) 27 (ed. Mommsen, GSC IX 2, 1033): *Flagitiorum tabernae ac ueternosa busta delecta sunt, et ueri dei templa ecclesiae celsae constructae. Nam in Serapis sepulchro, profanis aedibus conplanatis, ex uno latere martyrium, ex altero consurgit ecclesia*, 'The lairs of vices and lethargic tombs were brought down and high churches, temples of the true God, were built. And in fact, on one side rises a Martyrium and on the other a church'. Rufinus later explains that the martyrium collected the relics of John the Baptist from his tomb at Sebaste, following his desecration. On this text, see Thélamon 1981, 264-266.

59 Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VII 15, 10: τὸ μὲν δὴ Σεραπεῖον ὧδε ἥλω καὶ μετ' οὐ πολὺ εἰς ἐκκλησίαν μετεσκευάσθη Ἀρκαδίου τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπώνυμον, 'It was thus that the Serapion was taken, and, a little while after, converted into a church; it received the name of the Emperor Arcadius'.

60 John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, 83: 'And there was a temple of Serapis in the city, and he converted it into a church and named it after the name of his (Theodosius') younger son Honorius. But this church was also named after the names of the martyrs Cosmas and Damian. It faced the church of St Peter the patriarch and last of the martyrs' (trans. Charles 1916).

61 McKenzie - Gibson - Reyes 2004, 108 and 109 (on the case of Philae that they cite as an example of conversion into a church, see below).

62 McKenzie - Gibson - Reyes 2004, 108: 'No traces of church wall foundations were found in the area excavated inside the main collonnaded court'.

63 See Gascou 1998, 33-35, based, among other things, on the text edited by Orlandi 1968-1970, I, 66-67; II, 61-62.

Fig. 4. The Greek inscription engraved on the eastern pillar of the *naos* gate by Bishop Theodorus commemorating his installation of the oratory of Saint Stephen in the temple Philae: 'This work was done under our father, the most God-beloved bishop Apa Theodorus' (© Julien Auber de Lapierre).

Let us leave Alexandria[64] and jump forward almost a century and a half later for the third example, the temple of Philae. The transformation of this temple is considered as the best-documented case of conversion from temple to church in Egypt. Located on the island of the same name, the Temple of Philae was the last active sanctuary to be closed due to an old diplomatic agreement concluded between Diocletian and the Nubian populations bordering Egypt (Blemmyes and Nobades). In this agreement, Nubians could frequent the temple of Philae, perform their rites there, and take the statue of Isis annually in exchange for peace on the *limes*. Justinian could not tolerate this hotbed of paganism (on an island which had otherwise been Christian since the fourth century).[65] He, therefore, sent the Persarmenian general Narses to put an end to this unacceptable anomaly and to close the temple of Isis between 535 and 537.[66] This closure has long been associated with the establishment, in the temple itself, of a votive cult to Saint Stephen (the first Christian martyr) by Bishop Theodorus, as was commemorated in five inscriptions (Fig. 4).[67] Some scholars believed in the association so strongly that they argue the church was built immediately after the destruction of the temple and was probably commissioned by the emperor.[68]

But again, the concatenation of the two events, though it fits well in the pattern of religious 'continuism', is far from certain. First of all, it is not certain that the closure of the temple effectively ended the cult activities: the last inscriptions attesting the existence of a pagan cult date back to 456/457. It is also quite possible that, despite Procopius' claims, the temple was no longer in operation when Justinian closed it.[69] The closure would, therefore, have been purely symbolic. Furthermore, it is not known when Theodorus established the worship of Saint Stephen. But, given the longevity of his episcopate (from approximately 525 to at least 577),[70] this may have taken place a few decades after the temple was closed by Justinian. Finally, we should not believe, as once thought, that the oratory of Saint Stephen was symbolically installed in the *naos* of the temple, where a cross would have replaced the statue of Isis before being moved to *pronao*s (Fig. 5). The work of Peter Grossmann has shown that it was not in the *naos*, but in the *pronaos* where the oratory was installed from the beginning, using the original columns.[71] The inscriptions and the hammered crosses on the pillars of the *naos* were part of a deconsecration process, without implying the re-use of the temple.[72]

64 There are two other very suspicious cases of conversions from temples to churches in Alexandria: that of the temple of Kronos transformed into Saint Michael's church (MARTIN 1984 and MARTIN 1996, 149-151; GASCOU 1998, 3; the latter will deal in more detail with this case in a work in press entitled *Églises et chapelles d'Alexandrie byzantine: recherches de topographie cultuelle*, *s. n.* « Kaisareion » and « Michel (archange) »), and of the Caesareum, partly transformed into a church under the Arian bishop Gregory (339-345) (cf. MARTIN 1996, 148-149; GASCOU 1998, 32-33).

65 The *Life of Aron* narrates the conversion of the pagans of Philae by Bishop Macedonius in the fourth century (BUDGE 1915, 445-456): cf. DIJKSTRA 2007 and DIJKSTRA 2015.

66 Procopius, *Pers.* I 19, 31-37. See HAHN 2008a.

67 *I.Philae*, II, nos. 200-204 (ed. BERNAND 1969) and NAUTIN 1967.

68 Cf. NAUTIN 1967, 7: 'Justinien jugea plus expédient de les (sc. les édifices du sanctuaire) faire remettre à l'évêque du lieu pour les transformer en église'.

69 DIJKSTRA 2011, 425-426.

70 Cf. DIJKSTRA 2008, 299-335 and 360 (appendix 4).

71 GROSSMANN 1984.

72 On other churches built on the island of Philae, some of which much after Theodorus, see DIJKSTRA 2011, 425, n. 125 and 429.

Some temples were also transformed into monasteries, but in these cases we see again discontinuities.[73]

As we have seen, the few examples which are not suspect do not attest to direct or linear conversions, which would forcefully confirm the victory of Christianity over paganism by materialising, in a sense, the famous formula Ὁ Σταῦρος ἐνίκησεν 'the Cross has won'. Indirect transformations took place after the premises had been abandoned for a certain period. Christian authors, then, took advantage of the conversions to speak of the symbolic value of the events. The majority of the examples belong to a later period (after the middle of the fifth century and especially from the sixth century).[74] In most cases, this break in continuity is accompanied by a partial dismantling of the old place of worship and/or a spatial dissociation (often downplayed in literary sources): the church or monastery was built in another place or in an outlying part of the sanctuary – at least not in the *naos*, which was totally unsuitable –[75] with materials (*spolia*) from the temples.[76] There are many examples of these re-uses.[77] Let us mention just a few: the grand church of Shenoute's White Monastery, built with the stones of the nearby temple of Triphis;[78] the three-conch church of Dendera constructed in the second half of the sixth century next to the *mammisi* (temple of birth), recycling the stones of the temple;[79] the Basilica of Hermopolis (late fifth-sixth century) built with re-used materials from the temple of Ptolemy III and with columns from an unidentified Roman temple.[80]

Fig. 5. The altar and niche of Saint Stephen's oratory in the *pronaos* of the temple of Philae (© Julien Auber de Lapierre).

However, indirect conversion did not prevent the occasional symbolic interpretations of such re-uses, which were, in fact, driven primarily by purely practical reasons.[81] Among the examples, the most revealing is a passage on the construction of a church on the site of the Marneion in Gaza from Mark the Deacon's *Life of Porphyry*:

> When, therefore, the ashes were carried away and all the abominations were destroyed, the rubbish that remained of the marble work of the Marneion, which they said was sacred, and in a place not to be entered, especially by women, this did the holy bishop resolve to lay down for a pavement before the temple outside in the street, that it

73 See, for example, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, 5: 'The temples and capitols of the city (of Oxyrhynchus) were also full of monks'. See, in general, Brakke 2008.

74 See Bayliss 2004, 56-57 for an overview not limited to Egypt. According to Bayliss 2004, 51, direct conversions could have been encouraged by the law of Majorian and Leo I (*Nov. Maj.* 4) which, in 458 prohibited the destruction of temples (see n. 47).

75 The worship of the pagan deities was done in the inner or the most secluded part of the temples, which excluded the presence of the public. However, churches were configured so that people could participate without going through any intermediation. Pagan temples, as a result, were not generally suitable for conversion into churches.

76 Despite the protective laws we talked about. On how conversions or re-uses took place, see Bayliss 2004, 32-49; on the re-use of materials from temples, see Grossmann 2008, 309-312.

77 Grossmann 1995, 190-191 and Grossmann 2008, 309-312 ; see also Dijkstra 2011, 406-408.

78 McKenzie 2007, 272-279. Grossmann 1995, 190; Grossmann 2002, 528-536; Grossmann 2008a, 310; but according to Grossmann 2008b, 37, n. 6 and 53, no. 89, the blocks were not taken from the temple of Triphis.

79 See Grossmann 1995, 192; Grossmann 2002, 443-46; McKenzie 2007, 282-283; Grossmann 2008a, 310.

80 See Grossmann 1995, 189-190; Grossmann 2002, 441-443; McKenzie 2007, 284-286; Grossmann 2008a, 306.

81 Even artistic: see Saradi-Mendelovici 1990, 53. See below.

> might be trodden under foot not only of men, but also of women and dogs and swine and beasts. And this grieved the idolaters more than the burning of the temple. Wherefore the more part of them, especially the women, walk not upon the marbles even unto this day.[82]

The re-use could, therefore, have the value of anti-pagan propaganda. But, in the case of temples abandoned for decades, sometimes even for centuries, as those in Egypt, such considerations were no longer relevant.[83]

The conclusions from the cases of conversions in Egypt also tally well with evidence from the rest of the Empire. For example, in Greece, the construction of churches in or on sites of the destroyed temples was a late phenomenon and was devoid of any purpose of anti-paganism .[84]

3. *Abandoned heritage: the desertion of the temples*

The two patterns that we have just examined (destruction and conversion) have certain limitations: they owe far too much to anti-pagan propaganda and to a certain type of literature which constantly reported it. The fate which the temples suffered was less dramatic than they report; the reality is duller and less spectacular. The temples were less the victims of the ravages of man and religious fanaticism than of their own decay. They succumbed not to the blows of Christianity but to their own demise. Many of them were in fact already abandoned before the fourth century, or at least in bad shape. The counterexamples offered by the Serapeum or the Temple of Philae – each representing a unique case - should not mislead us into generalising about the numerous small sanctuaries, urban or village, which were no longer able to maintain themselves long before the institutionalisation of Christianity.

Temples were financed by the state and offerings from the public, or else funded themselves using their own resources. However, state subsidies diminished considerably in the third century, as Roger S. Bagnall has lucidly demonstrated, which caused an irreversible decline for the temples.[85] But the Crisis of the Third Century only exacerbated trends which already existed: as early as the first century AD, the emperors had put a brake on the material support which the ruler was supposed to provide for construction, renovation, decoration and maintenance of cult sites in Egypt (according to the precedent set by the Ptolemaic kings). The decreased endowment under Augustus gave way to a strong reduction after Antoninus Pius (138-161), and then a total disappearance by the middle of the third century. The large shrines were withering away, the small ones disappeared. Christianity, therefore, arrived in a landscape desolate of cults.

Hagiography did not fail to highlight this situation through the depictions of holy men who retired to abandoned pagan temples and monuments. There, the protagonists could better assert their moral strength and faith, as they fought with steadfastness and success against the demons still haunting these places.[86] The example of Saint Antony, who retreated to a tomb and had to resist the attacks of demons, served as a model of this *topos*,[87] which spread throughout hagiographic literature far beyond the borders of Egypt: Saint Hilarion († 371), in Cyprus, retired to a ruined temple where he was besieged day and night by evil spirits; Saint Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis († 403), managed to neutralise the evil force emanating from a temple, which was apparently no longer in use.[88] Abandoned temples, therefore, become a space where the saints could manifest their charisma and perform miracles. The temples were, above all, places of asceticism where they could test the vigour of their faith.

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82 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 76 : Ἐκχοϊσθείσης οὖν τῆς τέφρας καὶ πάντων τῶν βδελυγμάτων περιαιρεθέντων, τὰ ὑπολειφθέντα σκύβαλα τῆς μαρμαρώσεως τοῦ Μαρνείου, ἅπερ ἔλεγον ἱερὰ εἶναι καὶ ἐν τόπῳ ἀβάτῳ τυγχάνειν, μάλιστα γυναιξίν, ταῦτα οὖν ἐκέλευσεν ὁ ὅσιος ἐπίσκοπος πρὸ τοῦ ναοῦ, ἔξω εἰς τὴν πλατεῖαν πλακωθῆναι, ἵνα καταπατῶνται οὐ μόνον ὑπὸ ἀνδρῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γυναικῶν καὶ κυνῶν καὶ χοίρων καὶ κνωδάλων. Τοῦτο δὲ πλέον ἐλύπησεν τοὺς εἰδωλολάτρας τῆς καύσεως τοῦ ναοῦ. Ὅθεν οἱ πλείους αὐτῶν, μάλιστα αἱ γυναῖκες, οὐκ ἐπιβαίνουσι τοῖς μαρμάροις ἐκείνοις ἕως τοῦ νῦν. Trans. HILL 1913, 87.

83 DIJKSTRA 2011, 407, concerning the re-uses, concludes that for the majority of the temples 'these can show that practical rather than ideological considerations were equally at play here'.

84 SPIESER 1976; FOSCHIA 2000. See also BAYLISS 2004 for Cilicia.

85 BAGNALL 1988, proposed again in BAGNALL 2008.

86 See MANGO 1992; BRAKKE 2008; FRANKFURTER 2018, chap. 3.

87 Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 8-9.

88 These two examples are mentioned in SARADI 2008, 115-116.

Far from being merely a commonplace in Christian literature, the abandonment of temples is a phenomenon well attested in archaeology and written documentary sources. These sources, unlike their literary counterparts, are less redolent of ideological prejudices or motives and, therefore, have the advantage of greater objectivity. Several papyrological documents demonstrate the abandonment of temples and their confiscation by the state, which could then rent or sell them to individuals in a tightly regulated manner:[89]

- *P.Sakaon* 93 (Theadelphia, 314-323) is a petition in which the petitioner explains that, due to the desertification of his village, he lives alone with his wife in a temple (*hieron*), for which he is responsible;[90]
- *SB* VI 9598 (Hermopolis, 427/428 or 442/443)[91] is the validation of a rental request for a deserted sanctuary (τόπον ἔρημον ἱερατικόν);
- *SPP* XX 143 (Hermopolis, *c.* 435)[92] is a rent receipt for a disused Amon shrine (ἱε[ρ]ίου [ἐ]ρήμου καλουμένου Ἄμμωνος);
- *PSI* III 175 (Oxyrhynchus, 462) is a lease for a room (*symposion*) of a house located in the temple of Thoeris.[93]

The second and third texts, which have the same provenance and close dates, allow us to understand how these vacant religious properties were managed. Belonging to the state,[94] they relied on the imperial Private Purse (*res privata*), which was locally represented by the military governors. 'Ils étaient concédés à des particuliers, mais sous le régime du bail emphytéotique (bail perpétuel), ce qui montre que les autorités souhaitaient conserver la propriété éminente de ces édifices.'[95] The contractors were in these cases important figures, who could guarantee regular payment of the rents.

We might think that the pagan poet Palladas was exaggerating in one of his epigrams when he said that the Tychaion of Alexandria had become a tavern (κάπηλος): 'once honoured with a temple, you (= Tyche, "Fortune") run a cabaret in your old age!'[96] But the papyri cited above show that such conversions were not at all impossible.

In a certain number of cases, the temples were allocated for public use. For example, in the temple of Triphis, near Panopolis, a 'palace' (*palation*) was built to house the emperor Diocletian and his cortege during his visit to Egypt in 298.[97] The temple of Hadrian (Hadrianon) in Oxyrhynchus was transformed into a prison and a courtroom in the fourth century,[98] while, contemporarily in the same city, the temple of Kore also served as a court.[99]

The best archaeological example of this conversion of ancient temples into state buildings is the temple of Amon at Luxor which was turned into a military camp in 301/302. [100] The row of pylons, halls, and hypostyle courtyards of the temple were, as a result, surrounded with mud bricks punctuated by doors

89 The two texts which follow were presented with corrections (which I follow here) and commented on by Jean Gascou at the session of the Association of Greek Studies of January 7, 2008 (summary in Gascou 2008). He also quoted an unpublished text of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (P.Acad. inv. 69, Lycopolis, 420) mentioning 'the former temple of Pouenbnēu' (τοῦ ποτε ἱεροῦ Πουενβνηυ).

90 L. 5-7 :]. . . . ου . . [.]. μετὰ τῆς συμβίου κ[α]ταλειπόντες ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦτο φυλάττιν [- - -]φανῶς μόνος ἐκεῖσαι οἰκῶν, οὔτε δημοσίων οὔτ' αὖ ἀρχεφόδων συνφυλατ[τόντων - - -]. αι ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων παρ' ἕκαστα ἀφέλκουσίν με ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ ἐπι[- - -], κτλ.

91 *BL* X, 201.

92 *BL* II/2, 165 (end of the fourth-beginning of the fifth century) and VI, 196 (*c.* 435).

93 L. 11-15: ἀπὸ οἰκίας οὔσης ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ πόλει ἐπ' ἀμφόδου ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ Θοήριδος ὁλόκληρον συμπόσιον, κτλ.

94 Libanius, *Or.* XXX 43: οὐκοῦν τῶν μὲν βασιλέων οἱ νεὼ κτήματα, καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα, 'Temples are the property of emperors like other monuments'. See Delmaire 1989, 641-645.

95 Gascou 2008.

96 *AP* IX 180-183. The quotation is borrowed from the epigram 183, verse 3 (ἣ πρὶν νηὸν ἔχουσα καπηλεύεις μετὰ γῆρας). On this group of texts see Cameron 2016, 103-105. See also Hahn 2008b 353, n. 59 and above all Gibson 2009 who offers 'evidence to corroborate C.M. Bowra's theory that the Alexandrian Tychaion was converted into a tavern in c. 391 CE' (p. 608). For a metaphorical interpretation of Palladas' epigrams, see McKenzie 2007, 245-246.

97 *P.Panop.Beatty* 1, 260 : εἰς ἔκστρωσιν παλατίου τοῦ ἐν τῷ Τρι[φ]είῳ πρὸς τὴν ἐ[υτυχῶς] ἐσομένην ἐπιδημίαν τοῦ δεσπότου ἡμῶν αὐτοκρ̣άτ̣ορες Διοκλητιανοῦ. On the term *palation*, cf. *P.Oxy.* LV 3788, 4n.

98 Cf. *P.Oxy.*XVII 2154, 14-15. Already in 316, it appears in a list of buildings in need of restoration (*P.Oxy.* LXIV 4441, VI, 12). For the history of the *Hadrianon*, cf. *P.Oxy.* LXXI 4827, 3n.

99 *P.Oxy.* LIV 3739, 1 (325).

100 Mohamed El-Saghir *et al.* 1986.

and horseshoe-shaped towers and enclosed at the corners with rectangular towers. The central hall of the temple of Amenophis II was converted into a chapel for imperial cult: the walls were covered with paintings depicting the tetrarchs. This is an ancient case of re-use: the temple seems to have declined rather early (the last inscription left by a visitor to the temple of Amon seems to date from the second century), and its re-use predated the advent of state Christianity. This indicates that the recovery of the religious buildings was not motivated by the anti-pagan controversy.[101]

The archaeological and papyrological evidence from Egypt is in perfect agreement with the policy implemented by the emperors regarding the rehabilitation of the abandoned temples. As public buildings, temples are expressly designated in legislation for public use.[102] Several laws, as we have seen, prohibited their demolition and improper appropriations. When they were in ruins, their materials had to be used for public works.[103] It is often through secularisation in a public framework that these temples were able to be saved. The pagan Libanius understood this well and proposes himself that temples should be transformed into tax offices:

> As for his predecessor, once he had made up his mind to spurn the gods, even though he would have done better to spare the temples and property of the enemy, I would have expected him to demolish, overthrow and burn the temples of the enemy, but to be a proper champion of our own shrines that have been erected with so much toil and time, labour and expense. If we must protect our cities everywhere, if our cities owe their fame to the temples in particular, and if these temples are, after the glories of the palace, their chief pride, we must surely give them some consideration and be zealous for their maintenance as part of the fabric of the cities. They are at least buildings, even though not used as temples. Taxation, presumably, requires offices of collection: so let the temple stand and be the collecting office, and keep it from demolition'.[104]

It is, therefore, understandable that the state opposed the demolition of temples. Once the pagan cults disappeared, the interest of the state lay above all in saving and re-using these potentially useful buildings for public services or as sources of income in the case of long-term rental. 'The fate of the temples in late antique Egypt was more a question of recycling than of religious violence'.[105]

4. *Protected and shared heritage: temples defended for their heritage value*

It should not be believed, however, that the survival of the pagan cultural heritage is a question which concerns only economic and pragmatic matters. The profound religious transformation in progress brought about changes in cultural paradigms and sensibility. It could only increase the distance between Christians and the architectural monuments which were made in another time by people in a world ruled by a different mentality. Nevertheless, considerations of a more cultural and even artistic nature also played a part in preserving the temples and led to a policy of heritage protection in a modern sense.[106]

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101 See also above, n. 20, the questionable hypothesis of J.-M. Carrié, who sees in some of the conversions of temples the effects of a policy of repression by Diocletian.

102 *CTh.* XVI 10, 19 (407), addressed to Curtius, Praetorian prefect (from the *Const. Sirm.* 12): *Aedificia ipsa templorum, quae in civitatibus vel oppidis vel extra oppida sunt, ad usum publicum vindicentur. Arae locis omnibus destruantur omniaque templa in possessionibus nostris ad usus adcommodos transferantur*, 'The buildings themselves of the temples which are situated in cities or towns or outside the towns shall be vindicated to public use. Altars shall be destroyed in all places, and all temples situated on Our landholdings shall be transferred to suitable uses' (trans. PHARR 1952, 475).

103 *CTh.* XV 1, 36 (397) addressed to Asterius, *comes Orientis*: *Quoniam vias pontes, per quos itinera celebrantur, adque aquaeductus, muros quin etiam iuvari provisis sumptibus oportere signasti, cunctam materiam, quae ordinata dicitur ex demolitione templorum, memoratis necessitatibus deputari censemus, quo ad perfectionem cuncta perveniant*, 'Since you have signified that roads and bridges over which journeys are regularly taken and that aqueducts as well as walls ought to be aided by properly provided expenditures, We direct that all material which is said to be "put in order" (= stored for later use and placed under the control of the administration) following the demolition of temples shall be assigned to the aforesaid needs, whereby all such constructions may be brought to completion' (I would like to thank Jean-Marc Mandosio for helping me to identify the meaning of *ordinata* here).

104 Libanius, *Or.* XXX 42: Ἐγὼ δὲ ἠξίουν τὸν πρὸ τοῦδε τὰ μὲν τῶν ἐναντίων καθαιρεῖν καὶ κατασκάπτειν καὶ κατακάειν, ἐπειδήπερ ἐγνώκει τῶν θεῶν καταφρονεῖν, εἰ καὶ ἱερῶν γε καὶ ὁ τῶν ὄντων τοῖς πολεμίοις φειδόμενος ἀμείνων, οἰκείων μέντοι ναῶν πόνῳ καὶ χρόνῳ καὶ πολυχειρίᾳ καὶ πολλοῖς ταλάντοις κατεσκευασμένων καὶ προκινδυνεύειν ἄξιον. εἰ γὰρ πανταχόθεν μὲν σωστέον τὰς πόλεις, λάμπουσι δὲ τούτοις μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς ἄλλοις αἱ πόλεις καὶ οὗτοι τῶν ἐν αὐταῖς μετά γε τὰ κάλλη τῶν βασιλείων κεφάλαιον, πῶς οὐ καὶ τούτοις μεταδοτέον προνοίας καὶ ὅπως ἐν τῷ σώματι τῶν πόλεων εἶεν σπουδαστέον; πάντως δέ εἰσιν οἰκοδομήματα κἂν εἰ μὴ νεῴ γε. δεῖ δέ, οἶμαι, τῷ φόρῳ τῶν δεξομένων. δεχέσθω τοίνυν ἑστώς, ἀλλὰ μὴ καταφερέσθω . Trans. ROLFE 1963, 139.

105 DIJKSTRA 2011, 409.

106 KUNDEREWICZ 1971; LEPELLEY 1994; MEIER 1996.

I have already mentioned certain measures taken by the emperors to obstruct or prohibit the demolition of the temples. Imperial legislation sometimes provided motives which were beyond purely economic reasons or, at least, justified them with the social and artistic roles assumed by the temples. As early as 342, when Constans I prohibited anyone from damaging the temples outside the walls of Rome, he justified his decision with the usefulness of temples for the regular organisation of games and other public celebrations, thereby highlighting the social functions of the temples which was still current in the fourth century.[107] In 382, Theodosius I ordered that the the temple of Edessa not be closed. Again, the reason was to allow large public gatherings, and also because 'there are *simulacra* (statues or bas-reliefs) which must be judged more for their artistic value than for the divinity they represent':[108] here, for the first time, we see the inclusion of reasons related to the aesthetic aspects of the works which decorated the ancient temples in addition to social and political concerns This legislation was echoed in the law of Honorius of 399. This edict protected the *ornamenta* of public buildings, of which temples were a part, and prohibited their appropriation, an attempt to put an end to the illicit traffic of antique objects, to which I will return.[109] This series of protective laws culminated in the aforementioned Edict of Majorian in 458,[110] which endeavoured to save the buildings constructed by the ancients for the 'splendour of cities' (*ad splendorem urbium*). Any *judex* who authorised their destruction would be subjected to very heavy fine (50 pounds of gold), while officials of his office who did not oppose his decisions would be beaten and have their hands cut off!

Behind the aesthetic argument, we can see that, besides the search for economic profitability, there was, above all, 'la volonté têtue [...] d'entretenir ou de restaurer le cadre urbain traditionnel des cités'[111] and to preserve in the increasingly pluralistic Empire 'un idéal urbain, [...] facteur de sa cohésion sociale'.[112]

The Church itself was, *a priori*, less ready to forget the obstacles that the temples and their furnishings could constitute *vis-à-vis* the eradication of religious practices which were now prohibited. It was, however, not insensitive to the status of ancient temples as heritage. Without taking into account the exceptional – and very ambiguous – case of Pegasius, bishop of Ilion, admirer of pagan art who invited the future Emperor Julian to join a real antiquarian journey,[113] we should recall that canon 58 of the fifth Council of Carthage (401)[114] advocated the destruction of rural temples, and those distant from cities, on

107 *CTh.* XVI 10, 3 addressed to Catullinus, *praefectus Urbis*: *Quamquam omnis superstitio penitus eruenda sit, tamen volumus, ut aedes templorum, quae extra muros sunt positae, intactae incorruptaeque consistant. Nam cum ex nonnullis vel ludorum vel circensium vel agonum origo fuerit exorta, non convenit ea convelli, ex quibus populo Romano praebeatur priscarum sollemnitas voluptatum*, 'Although all superstitions must be completely eradicated, nevertheless, it is Our will that the buildings of the temples situated outside the walls shall remain untouched and uninjured. For since certain plays or spectacles of the circus or contests derive their origin from some of these temples, such structures shall not be torn down, since from them is provided the regular performance of long established amusements for the Roman people' (trans. Pharr 1952, 472).

108 *CTh.* XVI 10, 8 addressed to Palladius, duke of Osrhoene: *Aedem olim frequentiae dedicatam coetui et iam populo quoque communem, in qua simulacra feruntur posita artis pretio quam divinitate metienda iugiter patere publici consilii auctoritate decernimus neque huic rei obreptivum officere sinimus oraculum*. The location of this temple is not expressly given, but modern scholars, by comparing this law addressed to the duke of Osrhoene with Libanius, *Or.* XXX 44, concluded that it must have been the temple of Edessa (see however the dissenting opinion of P. Chuvin, n. 30).

109 *CTh.* XVI 10, 15 addressed to Macrobius, *vicarius* of Spain, and to Proclianus, *vicarius* of the Five Provinces: *Sicut sacrificia prohibemus, ita volumus publicorum operum ornamenta servari. Ac ne sibi aliqua auctoritate blandiantur, qui ea conantur evertere, si quod rescriptum, si qua lex forte praetenditur. Erutae huiusmodi chartae ex eorum manibus ad nostram scientiam referantur, si illicitis evectiones aut suo aut alieno nomine potuerint demonstrare, quas oblatas ad nos mitti decernimus. Qui vero talibus cursum praebuerint, binas auri libras inferre cogantur*, 'Just as We forbid sacrifices, so it is Our will that the ornaments of public works shall be preserved. If any person should attempt to destroy such works, he shall not have the right to flatter himself as relying on any authority, if perchance he should produce any rescript or any law as his defense. Such documents shall be torn from his hands and referred to Our Wisdom. If any person should be able to show illicit post warrants, either in his own name or that of another, We decree that such post warrants shall be delivered and sent to Us. Those persons who have granted the right to the public post to such persons shall be forced to pay two pounds of gold each' (trans. Pharr 1952, 474).

110 See n. 47.

111 Lepelley 1992, 369

112 Rémondon 1964, 322.

113 Julian, *Ep.* 79. The fact that Pegasius himself was accused of being a crypto-pagan and that his case is told to us by Julian, ardent renovator of paganism, removes much of its value from what could be a testimony to the prelates' craze for pagan art.

114 Concil. Carth. 16 June 401 (*Reg. Eccl. Carth. Excerpt.* 58, ed. Munier 1974, 196 = Mansi, III, col. 766) : *Instant etiam aliae necessitates religiosis imperatoribus postulandae, ut reliquias idolorum per omnem Africam jubeant penitus amputari : nam plerisque in locis maritimis, atque possessionibus diversis, adhuc erroris istius iniquitas viget : ut praecipiantur et ipsas deleri, et templa eorum, quae in agris, vel in locis abditis constituta nullo ornamento sunt, jubeantur omnimodo destrui*, 'There are also other compelling reasons for asking our pious emperors to order that the remains of idols across Africa be completely removed: indeed, in most

the condition that they did not have *ornamenta*; it is a recognition, expressed negatively, of the heritage value of certain temples.

Many Christian authors have made no secret of their admiration for the beauty of the ancient temples. Leaving aside the conventional praise conditioned by encomiastic rhetoric,[115] some show genuine attention, even sensitivity, towards pagan art. Thus, Prudence († 405-410) did not hesitate to dissociate the artistic beauty of a pagan monument from its religious use, stained by the impure blood of the sacrifices:

> *marmora tabenti respergine tincta lavate,*
> *o proceres: liceat statuas consistere puras,*
> *artificum magnorum opera: haec pulcherrima nostrae*
> *ornamenta fuant patriae, nec decolor usus*
> *in vitium versae monumenta coinquinet artis.*
> 'Wash ye the marbles that are bespattered and stained with putrid blood, ye nobles. Let your statues, the works of great artists, be allowed to rest clean; be these our country's fairest ornaments, and let no debased usage pollute the monuments of art and turn it into sin'.[116]

Art transcends religious function. And it is at the cost of this shift in values, this change of outlook, that the 'idol' becomes lawful. Once desecrated, devoid of its religious function, an 'idol' becomes an object of decoration, a work of art, which can be sought and collected without risk.[117] Constantine set an example by starting to adorn Constantinople with statues from ancient sanctuaries, launching a trend that turned big cities into veritable museums.[118] Certainly, some ancient authors felt obliged to justify the display of 'idols'. They either claimed that those who initiated the display had anti-pagan intentions or found excuses which cleared them of any suspicion of involvement with paganism;[119] some even ended up forgetting the pagan origin of these idols and saw in them biblical or historical figures.[120] But this taste for the statues and bas-reliefs in temples and pre-Christian culture – which produced them and permeated the Greco-Roman literary heritage – preserved the Christians, or at least the cultivated elite, from any temptation to see any threats to the new faith in the monuments of paganism. Such a cultural interest enabled this cultic heritage – just like the literary heritage inherited from the pre-Christian era – to continue to be shared beyond religious boundaries and to remain in the collective memory. However, it also resulted in the destruction of architectural heritage due to the incitement of temple lootings, which explains, to a large extent, the measures emperors had to take to protect temples and old public buildings. In sum, even if it was not preserved in its entirety, this cultural heritage was at least accepted, understood and integrated into the new society.

Egypt did not escape this frenzy, and surrendered its share to the greed of collectors, although the information provided in written sources and archaeology are scarce and difficult to interpret. We have some examples of the recovery of pagan statues. The most impressive is the cachette dating from the fifth century, discovered in the villa of Sidi Bishr in the outskirts of Alexandria, which contained intact statues of Aphrodite, Eros, Harpocrates, Dionysius, Hygia, Ares, the Nile (Fig. 6).[121] The burial of these statues has been interpreted as proof that their owner was a pagan who wanted to hide works that were overly compromising. But the examination of other known *cachettes* also raises the possibility that the owner was a Christian lover of antiquities, who, therefore, wanted to shelter himself from the accusation of paganism or that he was, at some point, forced to protect his collections.[122] The cultural profile of our anonymous Alexandrian collector would not be so different from that of Lausos, from Constantinople, who collected ancient statues during the same time (amongst which are the Athena Lindia by Scyllis and Dipoinos, the Aphrodite Cnidia by Praxite-

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coastal regions and in various estates, the iniquitous paganism is still alive. May they order that these be destroyed and that their temples which, built in rural areas or in hidden places, are devoid of ornaments be completely demolished'.

115 See, for example, what is said about the Serapeum by Theodoretus (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, V 22: μέγιστός τε οὗτος καὶ κάλλιστος) or Socrates (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, VII 15 : ναὸς δὲ οὗτος ἦν κάλλει καὶ μέγεθει ἐμφανέστατοι).

116 Prudentius, *Against Symmachus*, I, 501-505 (trans. THOMSON 1969, 389).

117 MANGO 1994; LEPELLEY 1994; HANNESTAD 1999; CASEAU 2011, 110-112.

118 For Constantinople, see DAGRON 1984, 128-136.

119 DAGRON 1984, 132-133.

120 DAGRON 1984, 135.

121 KISS 2007, 195-196

122 CASEAU 2001, 112-116.

Fig. 6. The statue of Aphrodite and Eros from the villa of Sidi Bishr (© Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria).

Fig. 7. A statue of Marcus Aurelius with the breastplate engraved with a cross (© Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria).

les, or the Hera Samia by Lysippus and Boupalos).[123] This phenomenon also finds its counterpart in the field of literature with, for example, the *Ekphrasis*, in verse, by Christodorus of Coptos (*AP* II). Writing under the reign of Anastasius, the poet described the statues which decorated the baths of Zeuxippus in Constantinople, where Constantine and his successors had established a large gallery of ancient statues collected across Greece, Asia and Italy: the great deities of the Greek pantheon (Apollo, Aphrodite, Artemis, Poseidon, etc.) were accompanied by legendary heroes (above all the characters of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*), historical heroes (Caesar, Pompey, etc.), and the great authors of literature (Homer, Menander, Thucydides, etc.).

Some ancient statues could be preserved with minimal transformations, such as the engraving of a cross.[124] This is the case of the statue of Marcus Aurelius, preserved in the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria (inv. 22186), the decoration of the lower part of the breastplate of which was engraved with a cross (Fig. 7). It was not a cult statue, but such procedures were used to desecrate certain temple effigies and make them acceptable by giving them a second life.[125] Was this also the case with the statues of Olympian gods in Alexandria about which Palladas tells us in one of his epigrams?

123 Cedrenos, *Compendium historiarum*, ed. I. Bekker, CSHB, Bonn 1838, I, 564, 5-19 : Ὅτι ἐν τοῖς Λαύσου ἦσαν οἰκήματα παμποίκιλα καὶ ξενοδοχεῖά τινα, ὅπου ἡ φιλόξενος ἐχορήγει τὸ ὕδωρ, ἔνθα ἔσχε τὴν κλῆσιν. ἵστατο δὲ καὶ τὸ ἄγαλμα τῆς Λινδίας Ἀθηνᾶς τετράπηχυ ἐκ λίθου σμαράγδου, ἔργον Σκύλλιδος καὶ Διποίνου τῶν ἀγαλματουργῶν, ὅπερ ποτὲ δῶρον ἔπεμψε Σέσωστρις Αἰγύπτου τύραννος Κλεοβούλῳ τῷ Λινδίῳ τυράννῳ. καὶ ἡ Κνιδία Ἀφροδίτη ἐκ λίθου λευκῆς, γυμνή, μόνην τὴν αἰδῶ τῇ χειρὶ περιστέλλουσα, ἔργον τοῦ Κνιδίου Πραξιτέλους. καὶ ἡ Σαμία Ἥρα, ἔργον Λυσίππου καὶ Βουπάλου τοῦ Χίου. καὶ Ἔρως τόξον ἔχων, πτερωτός, Μυνδόθεν ἀφικόμενος. καὶ ὁ Φειδίου ἐλεφάντινος Ζεύς, ὃν Περικλῆς ἀνέθηκεν εἰς νεὼν Ὀλυμπίων. καὶ τὸ τὸν χρόνον μιμούμενον ἄγαλμα, ἔργον Λυσίππου, ὄπισθεν μὲν φαλακρόν, ἔμπροσθεν δὲ κομῶν. καὶ μονοκέρωτες καὶ τίγριδες καὶ γῦπες καὶ καμηλοπαρδάλεις ταυρελέφας τε καὶ Κένταυροι καὶ Πᾶνες.

124 Marinescu 1996; Myrup Kristensen 2009, 167.

125 Marinescu 1996, 289, describes the heads of two goddesses (found in Sparta and Athens) on the forehead of which has been engraved a cross. We may make a parallel with the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius of the Capitolium, who, reinterpreted as Constantine, may have thus escaped being recast.

> Become Christian, the gods with the Olympian residences live here safe from insults; and the crucible that produces the nourishing little change will not set them on fire.[126]

Even Justinian (527-565) – who cannot be accused of sympathy for paganism! – asked general Narses to send the statues from the Temple of Philae to Constantinople, once his order of its closure was carried out.[127]

The survival of Egyptian cultic heritage clearly shows two phases. The first, which covered mainly the fourth century, but also part of the fifth century, is marked by direct opposition between paganism and Christianity. This may have caused Christians, who were now in the position of power, to destroy and mutilate the symbols of the ancient pagan religions, namely the temples and their statues, which had become idols. But these reactions were less common than literary sources suggest. They were often driven by apologetic or polemical motives, which were inclined to transform modest ascetics into crusaders of the new faith in a dramatic epic manner. In any case, Christians did not wish to re-appropriate these places for religious purposes. Most of the time, when the temples were already or about to be abandoned, the state, which was the owner, sought to profit from them: it secularised and assigned them to the most prestigious or most suitable public offices and rented the more modest ones to private individuals. For this purpose, the state implemented a policy to protect this heritage, recognising in it a social, cultural and artistic role. These protections, however, did not prevent the lust of certain antique collectors. In any case, far from being the target of mistrust and prejudices of Christians who would have liked to get rid of them, the temples were seen as a source of income and an object of interest.

From the second half of the fifth century and during the sixth century, tastes changed: the art forms in which paganism was expressed (the full relief statues) faded to make room for other art forms such as mosaics. At the same time, public space was undergoing a metamorphosis. Gradually, large buildings (theatres, hippodromes) stopped being maintained and were abandoned. Temples were then re-used as quarries or were partially recycled by churches and monasteries. These Christian occupations did not bear much symbolic value. It was no longer fashionable to assert the victory of Christianity over paganism by means of religious topography. Paganism was no longer a dangerous enemy to fight, whereas its former places of worship offered spaces to invest at a lower cost. This did not lead to exciting narratives. As a result, the hagiographers and historians – often both at the same time – quickly erased the ruptures of continuity with aetiology and symbols and adorned the vapid facts with more glamour and meaning.

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126 *AP* IX 528 : Χριστιανοὶ γεγαῶτες Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες
ἐνθάδε ναιετάουσιν ἀπήμονες· οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτοὺς
χώνη φόλλιν ἄγουσα φερέσβιον ἐν πυρὶ θήσει.
On this epigram, see the bibliography quoted by HAHN 2008, 354, n. 61.

127 Procopius, *Pers.* I, 19, 37 : τὰ δὲ ἀγάλματα ἐς Βυζάντιον ἔπεμψεν.

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