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FÜR
ANTIKE UND CHRISTENTUM

BEARERS OF MEANING

> One thing that is not clear is the meaning of a column; in itself a column doesn't mean anything; ... a column does not communicate possible functions, it is a neutral element that combines to form more complex morphological chains which do have an architectural meaning[1].

Historians of early Christian architecture are accustomed to think of columns as »bearers of meaning«, in JOHN ONIANS' phrase, but this is not a self-evident proposition. On the contrary, UMBERTO ECO described the resistance to it that he encountered from architects, critics and historians of architecture in a seminar on architectural semiotics that took place in Argentina in 1970. The participants initially refused to agree that the columns of a building could be anything but functional; that is, they did not see that columns could be communicative. Eco found a way out of this impasse by chance, when a local newspaper published an essay entitled »Eternidad de la columna«. »A collection of exceedingly obvious reflections«, »an inventory of banalities with pseudo-poetical intentions«, the essay provided Eco with *endoxa*, received opinions prevalent in the culture[2]. By assigning these embedded cultural assumptions to semiotic categories, Eco was able to show diagrammatically how the column encodes meaning, both on its own, out of context (Fig. 1), and within the context of a building (Fig. 2).

Among historians of early Christian architecture, it is more common to speak of meaning in architecture in terms of »iconography« than of semiotics, even though iconography is a fundamentally pictorial concept and semiotics is medium-neutral. My goal in this essay is to test the utility of a semiotic approach by comparing Eco's schematic analysis of the column with the results of several notable art-historical studies of columns and colonnades in early Christian architecture, including GÜNTER BANDMANN's *Mittelalterliche Architektur als Bedeutungsträger*, recently translated into English as *Early Medieval Architecture as Bearer of Meaning*; JOHN ONIANS' book *Bearers of Meaning*; and the article »Säule und Apostel« by BRUNO REUDENBACH[3].

Published in 1951, BANDMANN's account of meaning in medieval architecture does not translate easily into contemporary English for conceptual as well as literary reasons[4]. Influenced by GOTTFRIED SEMPER, ERNST CASSIRER, and DAGOBERT FREY, BANDMANN posited three categories of meaning in architecture: aesthetic, historical, and symbolic. Symbolic meaning points to »a higher content« (*übergeordneten Inhalt*). »Transcend[ing] the material and formal organization of the work of art«, the symbol is (quoting CASSIRER) an »unmediated reality«; but its religious (or »magical«) »vital essence« drains away with time, leaving the aesthetic as a residue. Aesthetic meaning is secular and grounded in the physical; in antiquity it is represented by Vitruvius, whose treatise locates the meaning of architecture

[1] U. Eco, A Componential Analysis of the Architectural Sign /*Column*/ (Eng. trans. D. OSMOND-SMITH): Semiotica 5 (1972) 106.

[2] Ibid. 108.

[3] G. BANDMANN, Mittelalterliche Architektur als Bedeutungsträger (Berlin 1951); idem, Early Medieval Architecture as Bearer of Meaning (Eng. trans. K. WALLIS) (New York 2005); B. REUDENBACH, Säule und Apostel.

Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Architektur und architekturexegetischer Literatur im Mittelalter: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 14 (1980) 310/51; J. ONIANS, Bearers of Meaning. The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance (Princeton 1988).

[4] K. WALLIS, Bearing Bandmann's Meaning: A Translator's Introduction: in Early Medieval Architecture as Bearer of Meaning 1/13.

(Doric) ●——————— (......)
>......<   (......)

(Ionic) ●——————— (......)
>......<   (......)

(Corinthian) ●—————— (......)
>......<   (......)

(capital)
>holding   (palm) ●——————— (......)
up<   >......<   (......)

(with figures) ●————— (......)
>......<   (......)

(material)
>solid - rigid<

(weight)
>stable<   (smooth)
                                           >......<
(morpheme)   (height)
/column/   >vertical<   (rough)
sememe   (shaft)   >......<
>column< >for leaning
         against<   (diameter)
                    >impenetrable<   (fluted)
                                           >......<
                    (suprasegmental
                    features)   (with figures)
                    >............<   >iconic denotation<

                                           (caryatid)
                                           >......<

(base)   (......)
>resting   ●——— (......)
upon the   (......)
ground<
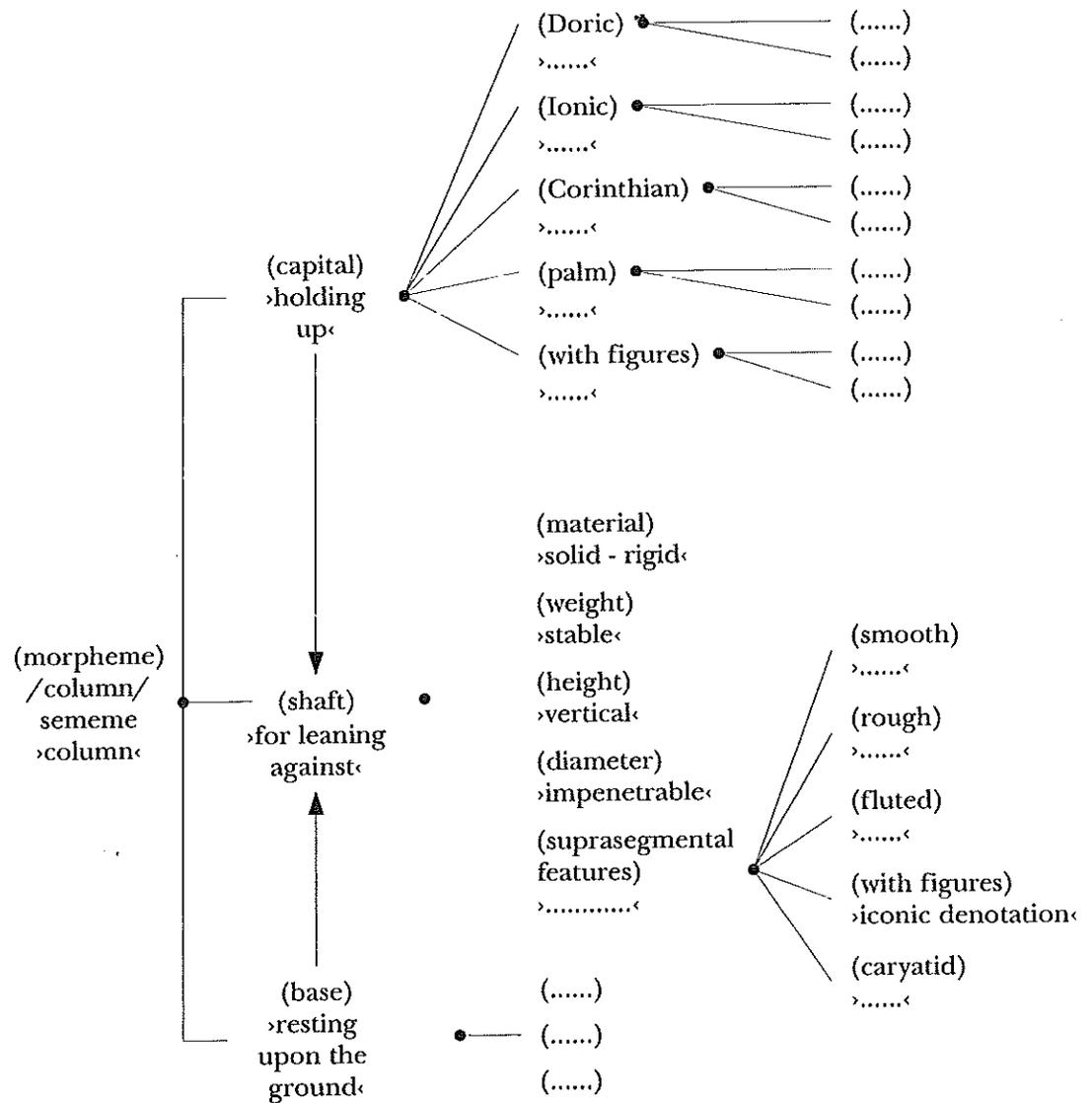
Fig. 1. Componential analysis of the sign >column< out of context
(E. DENGUB, after Eco, A componential analysis, 112 Table II).

in order and internal coherence. Historical meaning is also secular, and is constituted by deliberate acts of emulation: »forms were adopted because ... they had been employed in the past by patrons into whose line of succession certain new patrons now wished to enter ...«[5].

BANDMANN found symbolism in what he considered primal or primitive associations. Thus »at the beginning of its history« the functional column, supporter of the roof of the dwelling, acquired symbolic power. In ancient Egypt this elemental support was conceptualized as a tree supporting the roof of the heavens; this was expressed architecturally as the palm or papyrus column. Afterwards came the Greek Corinthian capital, »the foliage capital *par excellence*«, which was adopted by Rome and thence by the middle ages. Although the

[5] BANDMANN, Mittelalterliche Architektur 10/36 (Early Medieval Architecture 18/38).
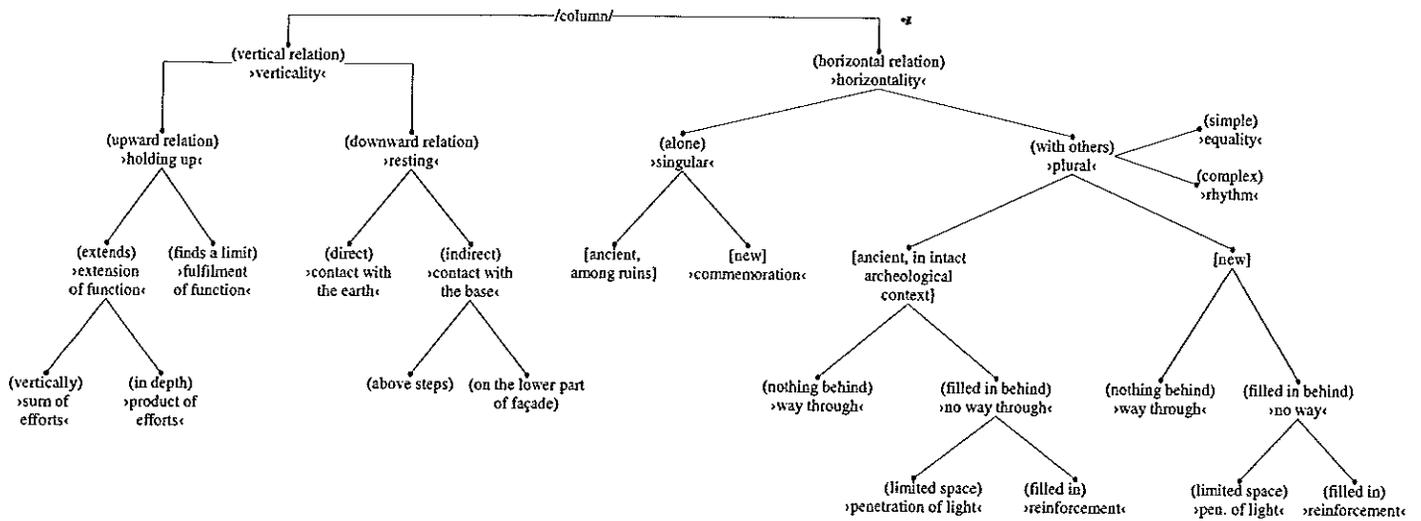
——————/column/——————

(vertical relation) ›verticality‹
(horizontal relation) ›horizontality‹

(upward relation) ›holding up‹
(downward relation) ›resting‹
(alone) ›singular‹
(with others) ›plural‹
(simple) ›equality‹
(complex) ›rhythm‹

(extends) ›extension of function‹
(finds a limit) ›fulfilment of function‹
(direct) ›contact with the earth‹
(indirect) ›contact with the base‹
[ancient, among ruins]
[new] ›commemoration‹
[ancient, in intact archeological context]
[new]

(vertically) ›sum of efforts‹
(in depth) ›product of efforts‹
(above steps)
(on the lower part of façade)
(nothing behind) ›way through‹
(filled in behind) ›no way through‹
(nothing behind) ›way through‹
(filled in behind) ›no way‹

(limited space) ›penetration of light‹
(filled in) ›reinforcement‹
(limited space) ›pen. of light‹
(filled in) ›reinforcement‹

Fig. 2. Componential analysis of the sign ›column‹ in a vertical and horizontal context
(DENGUB, after ECO, A componential analysis, 114 Table III).

shaft of the foliage capital »recalled ancient associations with the tree«, »[its] deeper meanings had long since been forgotten in Antiquity«[6].

BANDMANN distinguished as a different primal structure the freestanding, atectonic column, which he maintained was traceable to the cult object or idol on the one hand, and on the other to the shaft that marked a sacred place. The anthropomorphic column-as-figure is exemplified by menhirs, Greek grave stelai, and funerary columns on Malta; the column-as-marker includes triumphal columns, Indian stambhas, minarets, and obelisks. The two types were fused in honorific columns carrying statues. Some of the »primordial meaning« of these atectonic columns carried over into the architectural columns of medieval churches, according to BANDMANN, and when the column-as-tree had been thoroughly forgotten, the column-as-figure reasserted itself in the column statues on Gothic façades[7].

An equation of columns with human figures was natural for Christians because of scriptural passages like Galatians 2:9 (*Iacobus, et Cephas, et Ioannes, qui videbantur columnae esse*). Applied to real architecture, this metaphor operated within a larger symbolism of the church building as Heavenly City (»the supports of the church personify the apostles and prophets that bear aloft the building, which is the kingdom of God«). The larger symbolism was »generally binding for the middle ages« since the fourth century, when Eusebius expounded it in his sermon on the dedication of the cathedral at Tyre[8].

Historical meaning was more particular. In BANDMANN's view, historical meaning was constituted by deliberate and purposeful acts of reception of forms from the past, and must be distinguished from repetition by habit, which lacked meaning. The Corinthian capital offered an example[9]:

The reception of the Corinthian capital – so closely associated with Antiquity – by Charlemagne, Henry IV, Cluny... is certainly not due to its faded pre-Christian symbolic meaning (the column as

[6] Mittelalterliche Architektur 76f (Early Medieval Architecture 74f).

[7] Mittelalterliche Architektur 78/82 (Early Medieval Architecture 75/81).

[8] Mittelalterliche Architektur 65/7 (Early Medieval Architecture 63/5); Eusebius h. e. 10,4,2/72.

[9] Mittelalterliche Architektur 37 (Early Medieval Architecture 39f).

tree played no role ...) ... Rather, this reception was due to the capital's historical meaning ... that had accumulated around its past applications. The Corinthian capital was tied to the idea of the authentically Roman and imperial.

»Receptions« might be imitations of ancient forms or the real thing – *spolia*, »irreproducible vehicles of a vanished era and its art«. »The plunder of *spolia* should be understood as an inversion of the requirement to situate a building at a holy place; the holy place can just as well be transferred piecemeal (*gleichsam in Teilstücken transferiert*)«[10].

Focused on church architecture from the Carolingian era to the Gothic, BANDMANN's book positions early Christian architecture as the source of forms which acquired Christian meaning in later use. He seems to have viewed early Christian architecture as still antique; thus Constantine's churches »unlocked« a »great treasure house of classical, ›meaningful‹ architecture – the forms of Roman imperial architecture«, and »made [them] available for reception«. The forms adopted for Constantinian churches tended to be associated with the emperor, his palace, and his cult, which imbued them with symbolic meaning[11]. BANDMANN did not attribute any particular significance to the colonnades in these basilicas, although F. W. DEICHMANN had published an important study of them in 1940. He did repeat DEICH-MANN's observation that spoliate shafts or capitals could be used to accentuate more important parts of the basilica, like the triumphal arch[12].

To summarize: in BANDMANN's interpretive system, columns in medieval churches had a universal symbolic meaning that – until the emergence of the sculptured column figure in the twelfth century – had no visible signifier, even if it ultimately derived from the upright stance and bearing function of the shaft. The column-as-apostle or as-prophet displaced a deep primitive meaning in which the column stood for an idol. Late antiquity was a transitional period in which this primitive meaning and its alternative, the column-as-tree, had been forgotten. We might say that in late antiquity the column was a »dead metaphor«, a once vivid figurative statement whose meaning fades and dies in daily use. The historical meaning which patrons like Charlemagne attributed to the column was not yet possible; Constantine's adoption of columns in his churches was not motivated by their association with venerable predecessors.

UMBERTO ECO's »componential analyses« of the column (Figs. 1 and 2) break it into formal (»morphological«) and semantic properties (»markers«). Some of these markers can coexist (e. g., material, weight, height, diameter), and others are mutually exclusive (e. g., smooth, rough, fluted). All of them generate associations (»connotations«), such as those expressed by his journalistic informant. In the analysis of the column in context (Fig. 2), ECO introduced »morpho-historical« features, which embody the factor of time (»ancient«). It is noteworthy that his morphological markers include both intrinsic physical features (weight, height, etc.), which might seem to be universally recognizable, and artificial ones (Doric, Ionic, etc.), which require acculturation to name or even to perceive.

ECO sorted the connotations representing *endoxa* into three categories of signifieds. Two bear the same names as BANDMANN's, historical and aesthetic; the third is »architectural«. Historical connotations include anything having to do with past time, both specific (»com-

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[10] Mittelalterliche Architektur 145[104] (Early Medieval Architecture 147. 288[61]).
[11] Mittelalterliche Architektur 162f. 181 (Early Medieval Architecture 161f. 175).

[12] F. W. DEICHMANN, Säule und Ordnung in der frühchristlichen Architektur: RömMitt 55 (1940) 114/30; BANDMANN, Mittelalterliche Architektur 145 (Early Medieval Architecture 147. 288[63]).

memoration of events, great deeds, heroes«) and non-specific (»venerable«, »patina of millennia«, »last relic of vanished grandeur«). Architectural connotations comprise everything having to do with the column's physical character and its relation to other physical aspects of a building. Some are obvious: tree-like form, solidity/fragility, support function, »irremovable« appearance. Others might seem, especially in relation to BANDMANN's definitions, to be aesthetic: »unity in repetitive variety«, »enriches«, »gives sumptuousness« or »grandeur«, »gives harmony«. Eco's aesthetic connotations are consistently non-architectural, however: »timeless«, »universal«, »pure«, »slender body«, »shapely arm«, »perfectly formed leg«, »obstinate«, »arrogant«, »mounts vertiginously upwards, pointing towards heaven«[13]. »Aesthetic« seems to comprehend any analogy or metaphor that leads away from the function of the column into the realm of human judgement and imagination.

Eco offered no equivalent of BANDMANN's symbolic meaning, although some of its components occur in his architectural (»tree-trunk«) and aesthetic (»pointing towards heaven«) categories. At this level of analysis, no distinction is made between »pointing towards heaven« and other aesthetic connotations like »obstinate«; heaven has no special status as a signified. Eco was mapping the content of communication, as it occurs in culturally embedded codes. If the Argentinian journalist who represented the code associated the column with classical architectural values (unity, harmony), historical figures (great deeds and heroes, vanished grandeur), and religious concepts (heaven), it is because those mental constructs were encoded in her culture. It is striking, but on reflection not surprising, that these constructs resemble those discussed by BANDMANN; the cultures of twentieth-century middle-class Argentina and the Latinate European middle ages were related, after all. The journalist's associations did not include columns-as-apostles, however; nor is it clear where in Eco's schema that association would fit[14].

»Column and Apostle« is the subject of the meticulous study by BRUNO REUDENBACH published in 1980. Unlike BANDMANN, REUDENBACH focused on the hermeneutic methods that produced this symbolism and its origins in biblical exegesis. He distinguished allegorical interpretation (*Sinnträger–Bedeutung*) from neoplatonic »stepped« analogical interpretation (*Urbild-Abbild-Analogien*), and observed that while the second method accounted for the medieval understanding of the church as the heavenly Jerusalem (building–Christian community–heavenly city), the first was used for columns (column–apostle)[15]. Analogical interpretation works by resemblance, whereas the allegory (or what I would call the symbol) and its referent are arbitrarily connected. Allegorical meaning is mediated by features like number and location. REUDENBACH observed that in art history, both analogical and allegorical meanings belong to the »iconography« (or iconology) of architecture, in which textual information and concepts are brought to bear upon the interpretation of real structures. Since medieval written sources rarely address specific buildings, however, it is uncertain what the modern juxtaposition of texts and buildings describes: intentional programs for buildings, interpretations suggested by buildings after the fact, or just coincidence[16].

REUDENBACH argued that both the analogical interpretation of the church building as an image of the heavenly city and the allegorical understanding of columns as apostles were developed in biblical exegesis, in a *Deutungskomplex* of scriptural passages that pertain to the theme of architecture. In the course of the middle ages the two modes of interpretation were

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[13] Eco (above n. 1) 109 Table I.
[14] REUDENBACH (above n. 3) 339.
[15] Ibid. 319f. 342f.
[16] Ibid. 338f.

combined into a unified sign theory, which, as REUDENBACH observed, has much in common with modern semiotics. An integrated interpretive model of the church (*ekklesiologisches Deutungskonzept*) emerged and was extended, via the liturgy, to real buildings[17]. In the early Christian period this development had not yet occurred. Eusebius' discourse on the basilica at Tyre (ca. 315), the first known instance of a neoplatonic »stepped« interpretation of the church building as an image of the heavenly reality, does not cite the allegory of the column-as-apostle. Explicating the analogy of the building and the bishop's congregation, Eusebius associated the columns of the atrium with those who are beginning to learn the Gospels, and the »much greater« columns inside the basilica with those who have been baptized, who can apprehend the »innermost mystic teachings of scripture«. In neither case did he identify columns with people, however, but with the teachings that »support« people: the letter of the Gospel and its inner meaning[18]. And as noted by CHRISTINE SMITH, he did not invoke number symbolism[19].

SMITH's brilliant analysis of Eusebius' sermon reveals its complex multicultural genealogy, which includes, in addition to the neoplatonic exegetical tradition of Jewish Alexandria already adduced by REUDENBACH, secular speeches in praise of buildings by Greek authors of the Second Sophistic, Longinus' rhetorical treatise *On the Sublime*, and the psalms. SMITH characterized the Tyre sermon as a »kinesthetic description«, a rhetorical type of the Second Sophistic in which the building is described in the order in which a spectator might actually walk in and around it, as opposed to the more abstract »hierarchical« type that became standard in later Christian ekphrasis. Despite its kinesthetic order, however, the sermon is not grounded in the architecture of the basilica; on the contrary, the allegory departs from the »innermost« meanings of Bible passages and proceeds from there to the building, which is not even the endpoint:

> Eusebius first determines the allegorical significances of the references to architecture in the Bible; then he determines the various spiritual realities signified by the church at Tyre. Collating these two lists of abstract meanings, he selects those points on which they agree as the substance of his oration. The discourse itself seems to collate texts and building, but in reality it illustrates the concordance of meanings extrapolated from both[20].

In terms of Eco's semiotic categories, Eusebius' allegory of the column makes use of just one architectural connotation: »supports«. The richness of the sermon's interpretation derives from its rhetorical virtuosity, rather than from properties of the columns themselves or their culturally embedded associations. Conversely, the sermon tells us nothing about what columns meant in the culture outside the scriptural *Deutungskomplex* mediated by erudite bishops.

Columns are treated differently in Eusebius' description of the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, written about twenty years later. The symbolism is straightforward: »… the chief point of the whole was the hemisphere attached to the highest part of the royal house, ringed with twelve columns to match the number of the Apostles …«. The »tops« of these columns

[17] Ibid. 319f. 334/6.

[18] Eusebius h. e. 10,4,63f (DINDORF 4, 469f; Eng. trans. OULTON: LCL 2, 439). For a different translation, in which the people are »under-props« to the »pillars« of the atrium and the nave, see The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine, Eng. trans. G. A. WILLIAMSON (Baltimore 1965) 399, followed by M. FABRI-

CIUS HANSEN, The Eloquence of Appropriation. Prolegomena to an Understanding of Spolia in Early Christian Rome (Rome 2003) 268.

[19] C. SMITH, Christian Rhetoric in Eusebius' Panegyric at Tyre: VigChr 43 (1989) 242.

[20] Ibid. 236.

were »decorated with great bowls made of silver, which the Emperor himself had presented to his God as a superb offering«. Other columns contributed to the basilica's magnificence (»twin ranges of double colonnades, in upper and lower storeys, their tops ... decorated with gold«), and there were »superb columns« around the tomb of Christ. The description is kinesthetic and relatively uncomplicated, representing »Eusebius the historian«, according to SMITH[21]. It is also architecturally imprecise, especially with respect to capitals, to the extent that it is not clear whether the silver bowls on the columns in the hemicycle stood on top of capitals, or in place of them[22]. This does not necessarily mean that Eusebius did not recognize or notice capitals, of course, only that the genre in which he was writing did not require him to do so.

Attentiveness to capitals is a *sine qua non* of JOHN ONIANS' account of how columns bore meaning in late antiquity and the middle ages, in a book that tracks the classical orders from their invention in Greece through the sixteenth century. Bracketing Vitruvius as an attempt to theorize architecture that reflected rhetoric and philosophy rather than practice, ONIANS inferred the communicative content of the orders from observation of their distribution in real buildings. He found that in the Hellenistic period the mixing of orders within a single building reveals a hierarchy of types, with Doric used for the least important areas and Corinthian for the most important. Under the Romans a new capital type was created, later called »Composite«, which synthesized elements of all three Greek types: the Doric echinus, Corinthian acanthus basket, and Ionic volutes. An »arrogantly imaginative fusion of elements which the Greeks had regarded as biologically separate«, the Composite capital was self-consciously Roman, according to ONIANS, a »national capital« that symbolized Roman superiority[23].

After the first century nearly all Roman columns bore Composite or Corinthian capitals, so differentiation of spaces was achieved by other means; »shaft variation ... became a more significant index of status«[24]. This development was accompanied by an increase in the variety and sources of materials used for column shafts, including Egyptian granites and colored marbles from Greece, Asia Minor and North Africa. The distribution of shafts in the Pantheon shows that

> the colour and finish of column shafts play an important part in the organization of the building. They describe and control axes of movement and vision. A Roman visitor to the Pantheon must have been much more alert to such modulations than his modern equivalent, who will probably only be left with a generalized impression of opulence ... For the second-century Roman finding his way through a city which was becoming increasingly like a labyrinth of colonnades, every significant change in the shafts which he passed must have helped to bring order to his experience[25].

Thus ONIANS posited a »new visual alertness to columns as a means of communication«, a »new interest in ostentatious display«, and a »new concern for visual effect« in the second century, which were accompanied in the later second and third centuries by the increasing diversification of colonnades. »The traditional colonnade with columns of virtually identical

[21] Eusebius, vit. Const. 3,34,37f (WINKELMANN 100; Eng. trans. A. CAMERON and S. G. HALL, Eusebius. Life of Constantine [Oxford 1999] 135f); cf. SMITH (above n. 19) 239f.

[22] The basilica was destroyed in 1009 and the columns have disappeared. On the description of the hemicycle columns see A. PIGANIOL, L'Hémisphairion et l'omphalos des lieux saints: CahArch 1 (1945) 7/14; J. G.

DAVIES, Eusebius' Description of the Martyrium at Jerusalem: AmJournArch 61 (1957) 171/3. It is not clear why GIBSON and TAYLOR call them »colonnettes«; S. GIBSON and J. E. TAYLOR, Beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Jerusalem (London 1994) 74.

[23] ONIANS (above n. 3) 24f. 33/40. 44.

[24] Ibid. 47. 51.

[25] Ibid. 53.

size, material and order was ... broken up to provide an emphasis sometimes on the ends and sometimes on the centre«. Such emphases and punctuations produced a visual order, which permitted the eye to scan and comprehend a surface just as the differentiation of columns in space guided movement[26].

Early Christian churches inherited the communication system of late Roman colonnades, according to ONIANS, but the message and the experience of receiving it were altered by the Christian religion. The triumph of Rome signified by the Composite capital became the victory over death, as in St. Peter's basilica, where Composite capitals decorate the transept, that is, the space of the apostle's tomb. »Columns were used with a new dramatic expressiveness« in Christian churches, because these buildings were sites of psycho-dynamic rituals; colonnades became »liturgical commentaries«[27]. ONIANS ascribed the Christian »fascination« with columns to the same scriptural passages identified by REUDENBACH as the *Deutungskomplex* of architecturally-focused exegesis (Galatians 2:9, Ephesians 2:20 [*superaedificati super fundamentum apostolorum, et prophetarum*], Revelation 21:14 [*et murus civitatis habens fundamenta duodecim, et in ipsis duodecim nomina duodecim apostolorum Agni*]). Unlike REUDENBACH, however, ONIANS claimed that these texts directly determined the dispositions of columns in real buildings; that they inspired Constantine, for example, to erect groups of twelve columns over Christ's tomb in Jerusalem, around the tomb of St. Peter in Rome, and around his own tomb in the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople[28].

ONIANS' ideas about the communicative function of colonnades in early Christian churches are indebted to F. W. DEICHMANN, who pioneered this mode of thinking in 1940 in an article on »Columns and Order in early Christian Architecture«. DEICHMANN asked what sort of order existed in the church colonnades composed of *spolia*, in which classical consistency and symmetry were not possible. He observed that in the absence of canonical combinations of base, shaft, capital and entablature, capitals became bearers of meaning; in semiotic terms, the syntagm of the classical order had been destroyed, and only the capital retained semantic value. When church colonnades of the fourth through sixth centuries contained one or more types of capital, they were distributed in pairs, and pair relationships either unified or differentiated the space of the church. »Ornament is given new architectonic relationships: it marks, underscores, and further delimits the space; it is expressive in a spatial sense«. In DEICHMANN's view, this use of ornament eliminated the physically integral (*bau-körperliche*) and aesthetically determining role that ornament played in classical architecture. Its new role was »superficial«; »reduced almost exclusively to a single member, it is detachable (*lösbar*) and has no intrinsic value«[29].

DEICHMANN's thesis can be easily mapped onto Eco's componential analysis of the column in context (the right side of Fig. 2): column capitals in horizontal relationships »with others« of different types are »complex« formations connoting »rhythm«; as *spolia* they are morpho-historical (»ancient«); if in colonnades they connote a »way through« to a »limited space«. Signification is based on difference (»rhythm«), as in DE SAUSSURE's model of language[30]. Although he might not have used or even liked the term, DEICHMANN's model of meaning is fundamentally semiotic. ONIANS' adaptation of it, by contrast, is iconographic, as it replaces the non-specific cultural code of connoted differences with a symbolic code of

[26] Ibid. 53/8.
[27] Ibid. 59. 69f.
[28] Ibid. 70.
[29] DEICHMANN (above n. 12) 130.

[30] F. DE SAUSSURE, Course in General Linguistics, ed. C. BALLY and A. SECHEHAYE with A. RIEDLINGER, Eng. trans. W. BASKIN (New York 1959 [1966]) 120/2.
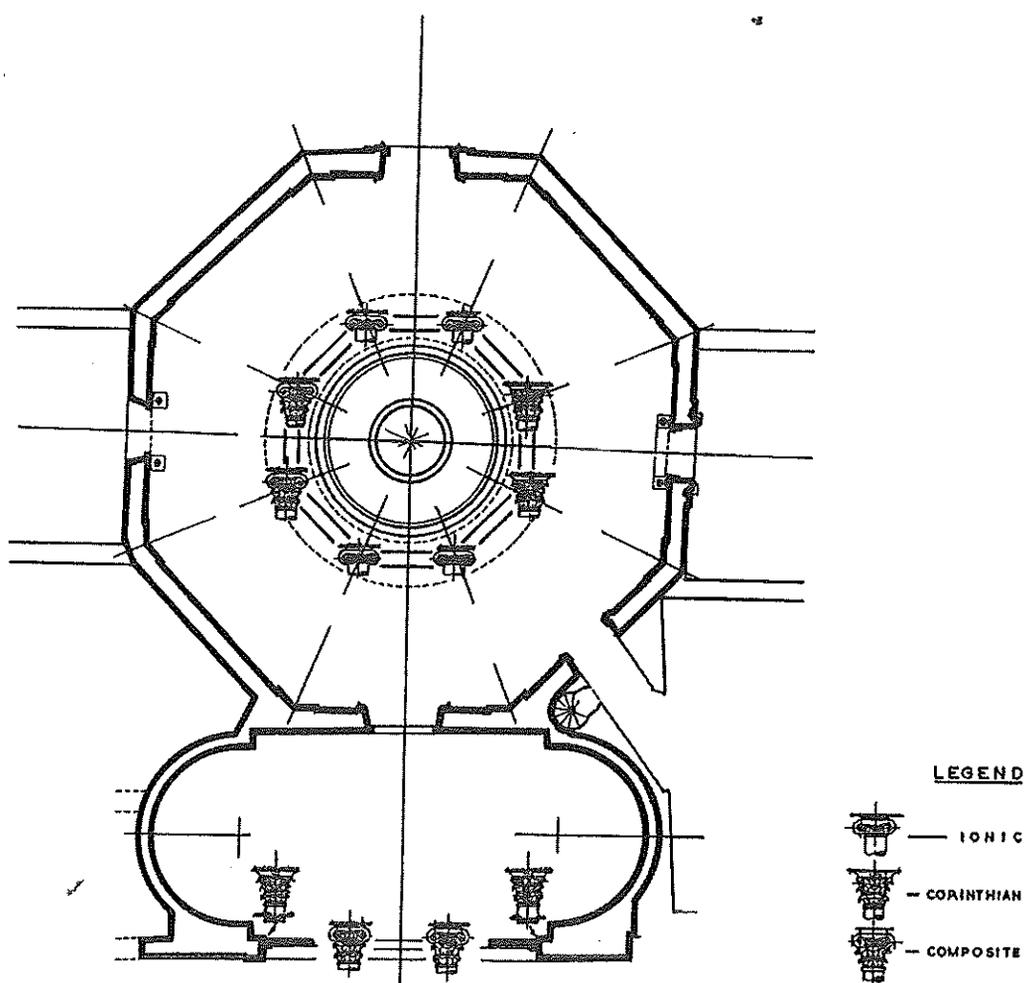
Fig. 3. Disposition of capitals in the Lateran Baptistery (ONIANS, Bearers of Meaning 63 Fig. 38).

precise denotations. Whereas DEICHMANN argued that architectural ornament in early Christian churches operated *like language*, ONIANS claimed that ornament – specifically column shafts and capitals – constituted *a particular language*, which was spoken by the builders and users of churches throughout the middle ages.

ONIANS' confidence that capitals encoded a hierarchy of Christian ascent led him to interpretations like that of the Lateran Baptistery (Fig. 3). Observing that spoliate capitals are disposed in four pairs over the eight columns surrounding the font – two pairs of Ionic capitals on the north and south sides, Composites on the west and Corinthians on the east – ONIANS translated this pattern into a description of the baptismal choreography: »[on entering the baptistery] the catechumen found himself on the minor Ionic axis; then in the course of the baptismal rite he is likely to have turned first to the east [toward the intermediate Corinthian capitals] and then to the west [toward the top-ranked Composites]«[31]. SIBLE DE

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[31] ONIANS (above n. 3) 62f. B. BRENK, Spolien und ihre Wirkung auf die Ästhetik der *varietas*. Zum Problem alternierender Kapitelltypen: J. POESCHKE (ed.), Antike Spolien in der Architektur des Mittelalters und der Renaissance (München 1996) 62 notes that the Ionic capitals are seventeenth-century replacements.
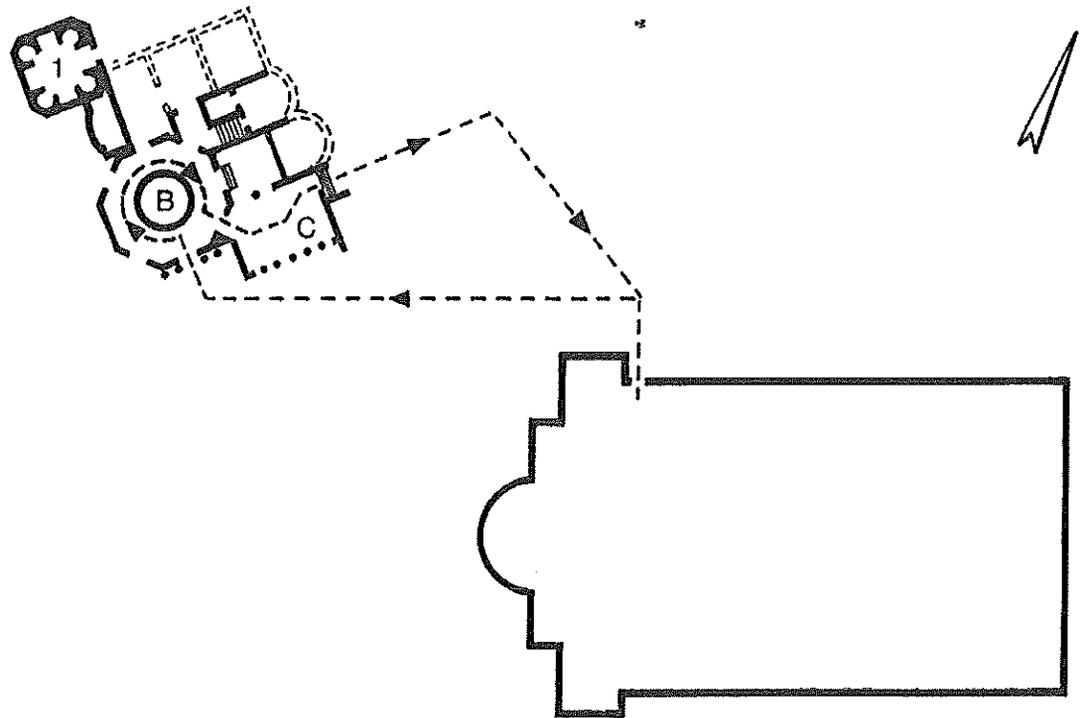
Fig. 4. Course of the Holy Saturday liturgy in the Lateran Cathedral, 4th century
(DE BLAAUW, Cultus et decor 2, Fig. 6).

Blaauw's better-documented reconstruction of the same ritual (Fig. 4) moves in just the op-
posite direction, however: from the southern entrance left into the western part of the am-
bulatory, where catechumens disrobed and were anointed with oil; then west to east across
the *piscina* (B), where the bishop immersed them three times in water flowing from the mouth
of a lamb made of gold; and then out of the pool into the eastern section of the ambulatory,
where they donned their white robes and passed into the *consignatorium* – probably the room
that later became the chapel of San Venanzio (C) – to receive the chrism[32].

Specific instances aside, it is questionable whether any visual symbolic language could be
sustained for decades, much less centuries, without the aid of written codification such as
REUDENBACH found for the column-as-apostle. Yet fourth- and fifth-century written sources
rarely mention capitals, and when they do – as in Gregory of Nyssa's request for stone car-
vers who knew how to make »sculptured capitals of the Corinthian type« – they do not
suggest symbolic meaning[33]. Builders and viewers doubtless were aware of capital types, but
capitals do not feature as significant elements in architectural descriptions, even though
columns are mentioned frequently. Writers tend to remark columns' size, number, and the

[32] S. DE BLAAUW, Cultus et decor. Liturgia e architettura
nella Roma tardoantica e medievale (Vatican City 1994)
1, 151/5; 2, Fig. 6.
[33] Gregory of Nyssa, ep. 25,13 (MARAVAL 296). Jerome
disparaged Christians who spent their money on buil-

dings, »deck[ing] the unconscious capitals with gold
and precious ornaments«; ep. 130,14,7 (HILBERG 194;
Eng. trans. FREEMANTLE et al., in C. DAVIS-WEYER,
Early Medieval Art 300–1150. Sources and Documents
[Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1971] 40).

material of their shafts[34]. The importance of material is illustrated by the well-known letter from Constantine to the bishop of Jerusalem, quoted in Eusebius' description of the Holy Sepulchre basilica, which instructs the bishop to request columns and marble revetment for the basilica directly from him, »so that whatever quantity and kind of materials ... [are] needful may be competently supplied from all sources«[35]. »From all sources« implies stones of all kinds and colors: greens from Greece, yellow from North Africa, blue-veined from Asia Minor, purple from Egypt. Such diversity – even if assembled second-hand, with *spolia* – connoted luxury, expense, political and technological dominion; in short, it connoted empire, and by metonymy the emperor[36].

According to WILLIAM MACDONALD, »column displays« were a »cardinal theme« of Roman architecture from the founding of the empire in the first century. They were »the essential stuff of empire imagery«; »by the second century, the theme of a nimiety of columns compacted in elaborate symmetrical compositions« was ubiquitous in Roman cities and signified their imperial status[37]. JUDSON EMERICK extended this argument to the »focused Corinthian column screens« of Constantinian church basilicas, claiming that the variegated colonnades of these basilicas were a direct continuation of the secular displays identified by MACDONALD. Disputing ONIANS' emphasis on the capital, EMERICK avers that the meaningful unit in both secular and Christian contexts was the column composition as a whole, the »scenic (or ›festive‹) Corinthian order«:

> ... Any scenic confection with entablatures featuring modillion cornices and Corinthian capitals (or variants thereon) that *also* incorporated other capital types ... the Ionic, or even plain Doric, ought still to be considered Corinthian[38].

In this view, distinctions among columns have little to no significance. EMERICK interprets the well-documented diversity of shafts and capitals in the colonnades of St. Peter's (Fig. 5) as a purely formal device, a means of »[breaking] up the long colonnades into distinct units« and »creat[ing] a series of scenic accents that helped to frame the triumphal arch and focus attention on the splendid columnar screen of the Peter Shrine« in the transept[39].

In Eco's schema (Fig. 1), the column comprises several morphological markers – more precisely, morpho-historical markers – that generate connotations, which might include gendered associations like those codified by Vitruvius: Doric = *virilis*, Ionic = *muliebris*, Corinthian = *virginalis*[40]. Associations could also include »Roman triumph«, *per* ONIANS, »empire«, *per* MACDONALD, and »festive«, *per* EMERICK, and all of them and more could coexist in one culture and even in the mind of a single observer. Connotations are not necessarily exclusive, and even contradictory ones can operate simultaneously. A spoliate colonnade can connote

[34] Hist. Aug. vit. Gordiani 32,1f (HOHL 54); vit. Tacit. 10,5 (PASCHOUD 241); Sidonius Apollinaris, ep. 2,2,8; 2,10,16/21 (LOYEN 48. 70). Marcus diaconus, vit. Porph. 84 (GRÉGOIRE/KUGENER 66). Greg. Tur. hist. Franc. 2,14; 2,16 (KRUSCH/LEVISON, MGH Scr. rer. Mer. 1, 63f). T. WEIGEL, Spolien und Buntmarmor im Urteil mittelalterlicher Autoren: POESCHKE, Antike Spolien (above n. 31) 117/53.

[35] Eusebius, vit. Const. 3,31,3 (WINKELMANN 98; Eng. trans. CAMERON/HALL 135).

[36] Pliny n. h. 36,7,48/36,13,63 (ANDRÉ 65/71). Paulus Silent. descr. S. Sophiae 376/80 (FRIEDLÄNDER 237); R. GNOLI, Marmora Romana (Rome 1971 [1988]) 122/83;

D. KINNEY, Roman Architectural Spolia: Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 145 (2001) 140/5; FABRICIUS HANSEN (above n. 18) 235.

[37] W. L. MACDONALD, The Architecture of the Roman Empire 2. An Urban Appraisal (New Haven 1986) 183. 197.

[38] J. J. EMERICK, The Tempietto del Clitunno near Spoleto (University Park, PA 1998) 1, 218.

[39] Ibid. 217f. On the colonnades of St. Peter's see L. BOSMAN, The Power of Tradition. Spolia in the Architecture of St. Peter's in the Vatican (Hilversum 2004) 29/56.
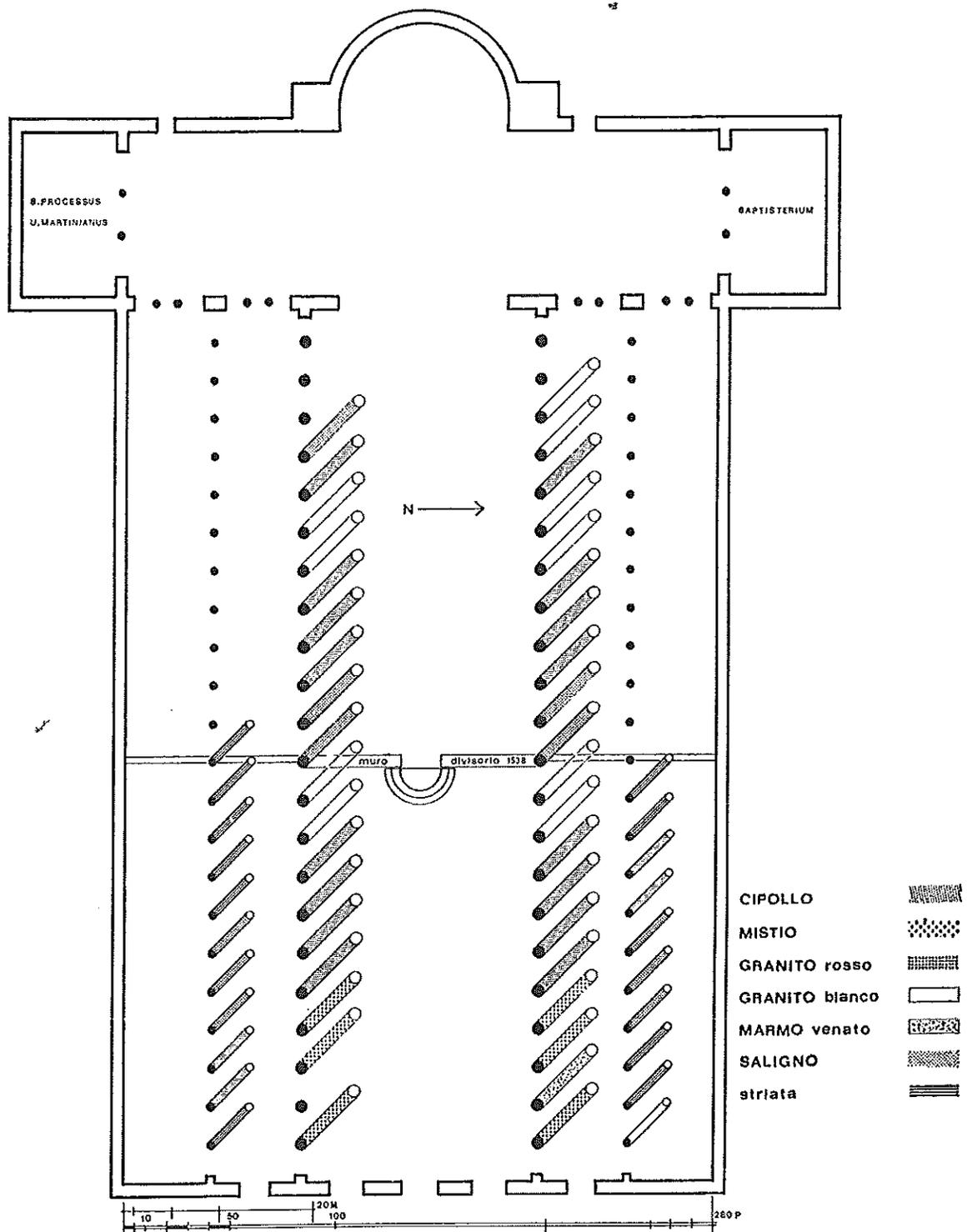
[40] Vitruvius, de arch. 4,1,6/8, GROS 5/7.

Fig. 5. Disposition of column shafts in St. Peter's
(J. CHRISTERN, Der Aufriß von Alt-St. Peter: RömQS 62 [1967] 173 Fig. 16).

penury because its parts are reused and also magnificence, if the components are gorgeous. Connotations are not fixed or static; they can fade and die. New connotations do not immediately supplant earlier ones, but they can inflect or »skew« them, as EMERICK argues was the case when »Corinthian« colonnades were appropriated from the realm of empire by the church[41].

In stressing the continuity from Roman imperial column displays to the »Corinthian« colonnades of early churches, EMERICK implicitly rejected BEAT BRENK's position that the fourth-century colonnades constituted »a new, hitherto unknown taste« made possible by the use of *spolia*[42]. BRENK argued that the colonnades of Constantinian basilicas, with their »alternating« types of capital, created an aesthetic effect that was »unexpected, novel, even shocking«, and that this effect was attendant upon the use of *spolia*, by means of which »the whole tradition of Roman architectural sculpture became available«[43].

> The use of *spolia* for the decoration of emblematic (*repräsentativer*) major buildings by Constantine's architects confronted people with an entirely new manner of seeing, as venerable rules of architecture were disempowered and replaced by new ones[44].

This was the beginning of a new aesthetic, which BRENK – admitting that no contemporary recorded or named it – dubbed the »aesthetic of *varietas*«. Borrowed from rhetoric, *varietas* entails a range of connotations or perhaps more precisely, sensations: *sublimitas, splendor, nitor, magnificentia, auctoritas*[45].

BRENK proposed *varietas* as an alternative to »cultural-political« or »ideological« intentions, as if they were mutually exclusive. The semiotic model, although it does not deal with intention, suggests that even at that level (that is, in the mind of the maker) the opposition is unnecessary; colonnades could have had both aesthetic and ideological connotations. On the level of effect, the semiotic model allows even EMERICK's and BRENK's positions to be reconciled. To the viewer who took in only a »generalized impression of opulence« (in ONIANS' words), the variety of early Christian colonnades could have connoted the familiar values of imperial might and grandeur, while the very same colonnades could have connoted refuse and abandonment to viewers who noticed mismatchings and marks of reuse.

This essay is concerned with how columns conveyed meaning in early Christian contexts, not with determining what those meanings were. Nevertheless, a summary of substantive agreements and differences may be in order. All of the authors reviewed so far concur that in the fourth and fifth centuries, the column did not have the conventional symbolic meaning (column-apostle) that was codified by exegetes later in the middle ages, although the idea was contained in scripture and may have been reflected in some buildings, notably in foundations of Constantine. The more recent studies implicitly contest BANDMANN's view that in this period the column was essentially meaningless, and his theory of latent primal meanings (column-as-tree, column-as-figure) is simply ignored. ONIANS, EMERICK, and BRENK argue that the early Christian column bore meaning not in itself but in relation to other columns, in a colonnade or »column display«; and they agree that the columns' messages pertained to

[41] EMERICK (above n. 38) 230f.

[42] B. BRENK, Spolia from Constantine to Charlemagne: Aesthetics versus Ideology: DumbOPap 41 (1987) 103/6. EMERICK does explicitly refer to DEICHMANN (above n. 12), whose argument is the foundation of BRENK's; ibid. 219₁₁₄. 229₁₄₉.

[43] BRENK (above n. 31) 50. 63.

[44] Ibid. 75.

[45] Ibid. 76. On rhetorical parallels for *spolia* see also B. L. WOHL, Constantine's Use of Spolia: J. FLEISCHER / N. HANNESTAD / J. LUND / M. NIELSEN (ed.), Late Antiquity – Art in Context (Copenhagen 2001) 100/3.

the space in which they stood (»look here«, »celebrate here«, »pray here«). These scholars differ over whether communication occurred by means of distinctions within the colonnades (capital or shaft types) or through the effect of the whole. They agree that columns and colonnades were signifiers of the architectural glories of imperial Rome, but disagree whether they connoted continuity or rupture, with BRENK positing rupture, EMERICK suggesting continuity, and ONIANS proposing change through overlay or accretion.

There is significant divergence as well over the role assigned to *spolia* in the generation of meaning, ranging from seminal (BRENK) to occasional (ONIANS) to negligible (EMERICK). Taking BRENK's arguments many steps forward, MARIA FABRICIUS HANSEN has recently made large claims for *spolia*, associating them not only with a »general breakthrough« in the realm of architectural aesthetics, but also with an effort to »develop a different, irrational and figurative architecture«, a »stylistic language [that] ... corresponded with the general sensibility of the time«, »a break with the qualities of rationality and coherence ... that seems to inform all cultural phenomena of early Christianity«, and even »a first expression of a historical consciousness that developed gradually... through two millennia«[46]. She calls these meanings »deeper iconographic content« in a seeming allusion to PANOFSKY's famous tripartite analysis of iconography, which concludes with »iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense«. The object of this level of interpretation is »intrinsic meaning«, in which one finds »the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion – unconsciously ... condensed into one work«[47].

Intrinsic meaning, like Eco's *endoxa*, is analogical and expansive. It depends on iconography »in the narrower sense«, however, which is denotative and restrictive. A preliminary »iconography of the column« would describe a very limited field of meaning, because columns, like most architecture, are self-referential. On the primary (pre-iconographic) level, as defined by PANOFSKY, the combination base + vertical cylinder + capital denotes a column, a load-bearing entity that is different from a post, pillar or pier. On the secondary or conventional level, certain configurations of these components denote Doric, Ionic, or other kinds of columns; this is iconography in the narrower sense, which requires the recognition of types[48]. It is in the nature of columns to be typical. They can denote particular prototypes, however, as when medieval columns were made to represent Iachin and Booz. All of this is still in the realm of iconography »in the narrower sense«, and all of it holds true whether the column is newly made or a *spolium*.

The meaning of *spolia qua spolia* is indexical, as BANDMANN saw; hence the frequent comparison of *spolia* to relics. Indexical signifiers point by means of a material or causal connection to a signified that may be transcendent or lost (ashes–saint). The indexicality of *spolia* is always historical, but it can be more or less specific: reference to a particular building (if the source of the *spolia* is known), reference to an era or culture (if the style is datable or localizable), reference to the process by which the *spolia* became available (demolition or ruin). Iconography »in a deeper sense« includes all such indexical meanings, but as yet there have not been many studies that show how meaning was produced and perceived in practice. The

[46] FABRICIUS HANSEN (above n. 18) 135. 181. 195. 202. 292.
[47] E. PANOFSKY, Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance ([1939] New York 1972) 7. 14f. FABRICIUS HANSEN 291: »deeper iconographic content (transgressing the consciously intended) ...«.
[48] PANOFSKY 6f. 14f.

current debate about the Arch of Constantine demonstrates how complex and difficult reconstructing these meanings can be[49].

FABRICIUS HANSEN persuasively described a cultural context in which the manifold possible connotations of *spolia* – »rhythym and polyphony«, *vetustas*, recollection, triumph, renovation, rupture, continuity, prefiguration, replacement – have a constitutive role. Only a year later, LEX BOSMAN published his study of St. Peter's, which demonstrates that the elements in its variegated colonnades probably were not *spolia*, but pieces taken from stockpiles and used for the first time in the fourth-century basilica[50]. He argues the same for the colonnades in the Lateran basilica, and some archaeologists believe that even the reliefs on the Arch of Constantine were remnants of unrealized or dismantled projects rather than *spolia*. A different set of connotations is suggested, and future attempts to define the »deeper content« of these monuments will have to consider them.

PANOFSKY's tripartite analysis of iconography maps so easily onto Eco's componential analysis of the column, and vice versa, that it is easy to think there are only terminological differences between them. But iconography, as the study of products of human intention – works of art or culture, like PANOFSKY's example of a man representing a greeting by tipping his hat – seeks and produces intentional interpretations. Semiotics identifies the entire range of meanings generated by cultural objects and events, intended or not, including unforeseen and contradictory ones. Iconography posits univocality and transparency; semiotics reveals multiplicity and ambiguity.

It is an honor, albeit a daunting one, to present these ruminations to JOSEF ENGEMANN, the acknowledged Grand Master of early Christian iconography, whose understanding of meaning and how it is borne by man-made things is unsurpassed.

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE   DALE KINNEY

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[49] For a sample of recent work on the Arch of Constantine: J. ELSNER, From the Culture of *spolia* to the Cult of Relics. The Arch of Constantine and the genesis of late antique forms: PapBritSchoolRome 68 (2000) 149/84; P. LIVERANI, Reimpiego senza ideologia. La lettura degli spolia dall'arco di Costantino all'età carolingia: Röm-Mitt 111 (2004) 383/434; E. MARLOWE, Framing the Sun. The Arch of Constantine and the Roman Cityscape: ArtBull 88 (2006) 223/42.

[50] BOSMAN (above n. 39) 39/52; see also R. COATES-STEPHENS, Attitudes toward *Spolia* in Some Late Antique Texts: (L. LAVAN and W. BOWDEN (ed.), Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology (Leiden 2003) 341/4.