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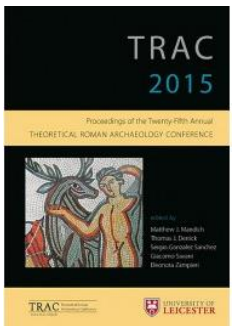

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Author: Maria Kneafsey
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Adventus: Conceptualising Boundary Space in the Art and Text of Early Imperial to Late Antique Rome

Maria Kneafsey

Introduction

The late antique incarnation of the Roman *adventus* is a topic that has attracted much scholarly attention in recent decades, as the focus for discussions of late Roman ceremony, religious practices, and the continuity of the imperial tradition into late antiquity (MacCormack 1972; 1981; Dufraigne 1994; Dey 2011; 2015, amongst others). Its topographical importance has nonetheless been largely overlooked; the *adventus* was an event that was as rooted in place as it was in ceremony, as evidenced by the numerous surviving visual and literary accounts that include detailed references to city boundaries, gates, and walls – the locations of the climax of the ceremony, as the emperor crossed the urban border and entered the city proper. The late antique *adventus* has been, in the past, approached from three distinct interpretative stances: as a ceremony that reinforced the relationship between an emperor and his god (or gods); as a moment of traditional Roman pageantry that was intended to strengthen the relationship between the emperor and his people; and finally as an event that highlighted the emperor's commitment to his city (MacCormack 1981: 40, 43, 50). This paper will develop the third interpretative model: namely that the Roman *adventus*, in all periods of its existence but especially so in its late antique form, reinforced the relationship between the emperor and the city of Rome, and will add that visual accounts of such events not only honed this relationship, but, through the depiction of boundaries, reflected the concept of the city as both a physical place and a symbol.

This is a paper in two parts: the first will comprise an introduction to the Roman *adventus*, setting out its format and examining the ceremony in art of the imperial period to establish the pre-existing visual trends at Rome prior to late antiquity; the second part will contain an examination of late antique material from the city of Rome (with three additional examples from cities of the western empire), in order to discuss the following questions: how was the late antique *adventus* depicted? Can such depictions tell us about the importance of place and boundaries in the ceremony? What can *adventus* scenes tell us about the conceptualisation of space and borders in the wider context of late Roman art? Can an examination of these scenes contribute to the wider discussion of the conceptualisation of boundary space in the city of Rome in late antiquity? This paper does not seek to present conclusive answers, but instead to present a collection of material that suggests that depictions of the *adventus* at Rome between the late third and early fifth centuries A.D. were not only formulaic, but based on three recurrent motifs, one of which – the city boundary – is indicative of a wider conceptualisation of urban space in the late

antique city. Geographically, this research focuses on Rome and its urban periphery, and features a brief comparative discussion of material from three provincial cities in the western empire. It will focus on the *adventus* of an emperor, rather than a bishop or magistrate. Chronologically, the focus is late antiquity, specifically the late third to early fifth centuries A.D., although it forms part of a wider research project on concepts of boundaries between the building of the Aurelian Wall in Rome (A.D. 271) and the end of the sixth century. The methodological approach is primarily material-based and will, through an examination of a selection of sources (literary and archaeological), demonstrate that the city wall or gate motif was not only an integral part of the visual language of the late antique *adventus*, but was representative of the urban space of the city of Rome as a whole – a visual synecdoche designed to symbolise or represent the entire city through the depiction of its base part.

What Was the Roman Adventus*?*

Adventus (meaning 'arrival') was an urban ceremony during which an emperor or magistrate, or, later, bishop, would approach the boundaries of a city. Here he would be formally welcomed by the city's inhabitants; in the case of Rome, during the imperial period (in this instance, before A.D. 271), this took place at the sacred boundary known as the *pomerium,* and in the late antique city (post-A.D. 271), at the gates of the Aurelian Wall (Dyson 2010: 296). The roots of the ceremony lay in the military processions of the Roman Republic, and the ceremony developed as a form of imperial expression during the Principate – part of the pageantry of imperial life – at which time associations with homecoming, victory, and triumph became common (Beard 2007: 323). The *adventus* ceremony was paralleled by the *profectio*, which celebrated departure from a city, usually on military campaigns (MacCormack 1981: 37).

It has been suggested that the *Mutatorium Caesaris* on the *via Appia* (near the *Porta Capena* and the Baths of Caracalla) was the location for *adventus* ceremonies that took place in the south of the city; on the Severan marble map this has long been identified as a 'post station' (fragment XI-6; Platner 1929: 355; Dyson 2010: 234). It was near to this location (or another similar pomerial or extra-pomerial space) that the city boundary was crossed, and it was here that another central part of the *adventus* took place: the *mutatio vestis*. The *mutatio vestis* was the ritualistic act of changing from the military cloak of the general, the *paludamentum*, to civilian or civic garb, such as the toga (Sartorio 1996: 335). This was a significant moment in the republican incarnation of the ceremony: it represented the laying down of arms and the temporary power of *imperium* (Marshall 1984: 122). During this act, the extent of the *pomerium* was considered the boundary between two opposing spaces – civic and military. This divisive role, representing the line between two separate zones of activity, was occupied by the *pomerium* in a variety of ways during its existence (civic/military, administrative, funerary), and it was this division that the Aurelian Wall came to represent in late antiquity (Dey 2011). In the early imperial period when Augustus was granted the title *imperator* indefinitely (*c*. 23 B.C.), the moment of republican importance – the crossing of the boundary, the changing dress, and the entry into a different sphere of activity – became redundant: it was henceforth a symbolic gesture, rather than a truly transitional act. Augustus and his successors' power of *imperium* no longer ended at the line of the *pomerium*, and thus their changing from the *paludamentum* to the toga was a conciliatory 'nod' to the traditions of their forebears. Nonetheless, it continued to be part of the pageantry of Roman life, and the successful completion of it (or lack thereof) was something on which an emperor could still be judged (Marshall 1984: 120). Hence, Vitellius'

entry into Rome after his successful bid to become emperor in A.D. 69 was documented by Suetonius (*Vit.* 11.5) and Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.89), and both accounts include lengthy passages about the emperor's botched *mutatio vestis*. Their commentaries tell us two things: that the crossing of the city boundary remained a significant moment even after the realities of power in Rome had changed with the advent of the Principate; and that the changing of the garb, the *mutatio vestis*, remained a value-laden gesture. By late antiquity, the authority of the emperor and his absolute power both inside and outside the city was firmly established, and thus the crossing of the city boundary during the *adventus* was not an act with real implications (such as the loss of *imperium*), as it had been in the Republic, and was more an event similar to those in which his imperial predecessors had participated – a traditional transition between symbolic spheres.

While the details of each individual *adventus* event vary, a general pattern or formula is recognisable, and was observed by Sabine MacCormack in the 1970s (1972: 723). The basic framework for the Roman *adventus* ceremony in both the imperial and late antique periods was as follows: the arrival of the emperor would be announced in the host city in advance, after which the inhabitants would decorate buildings, monumental public buildings, homes, and streets. On the day of the emperor's arrival, a group of citizens, led by the Senate, magistrates, and elite, would proceed to a specific place outside the city's boundaries, where they would gather and wait for the emperor to arrive. The emperor would then arrive with his entourage of soldiers, associates and 'civil servants'. After being welcomed, the entire group would prepare to enter the city proper to continue their celebrations. At this point, some emperors would participate in the *mutatio vestis*, after which they would cross the threshold of the city, and, later in the day, formally meet the Senate who had reconvened inside the city limits. It was then that the city could make requests of the emperor, and during which time he would act as benefactor or patron, planning buildings, monuments, or restoration (MacCormack 1972: 727). Some emperors visited the Capitoline as part of their *adventus*, and it is assumed that during visits to Rome the emperor and his court stayed on the Palatine. The following day, games were held to celebrate the presence of the emperor, at which he would distribute largesse. Though the moment of entry into the city, the crossing of the boundary, was only a small part of the *adventus* process and by no means the end, it was the most dramatic moment, the climax of the ceremony, and the moment often depicted in surviving literary and visual representations.

Visual Evidence

In the imperial period, visual representations of *adventus* ceremonies were most often, though not exclusively, found on coinage. Numismatic evidence for this trend is relatively common roughly until the reign of Severus Alexander (*c.* A.D. 222), after which trends in imperial representation began to change (Manders 2012: 75). Extended literary accounts and other types of artistic representations of *adventus* ceremonies were comparatively less common in the imperial period than they were in late antiquity, although a number of examples from large public buildings have survived (for further information see Koeppel 1969). There are two notable sculptural examples from Rome that will be discussed here.

The Cancelleria Reliefs

The Cancelleria reliefs were found at the renaissance *Palazzo della Cancelleria* in Rome (the building from which they take their name) in the late 1930s and date from the reign of Domitian

(Varner 2004: 119). The set of large bas-relief fragments (seven pieces in total, comprising two reliefs measuring 606 cm x 206 cm) are likely to have originally been displayed on a large public monument and depict two scenes, the first of which (relief A) depicts Domitian engaging in what is most commonly identified as the *profectio* ceremony, although it has been suggested that the subject of this relief is in fact his *reditus* (Varner 2004: 119). Relief B (Fig. 1) shows the *adventus* of Vespasian in A.D. 70 entering Rome after the civil war and greeting his son Domitian, who had been acting as a *legatus* in Rome during the conflict and in the emperor's absence (Last 1948: 10). Relief A was re-cut during Domitian's posthumous *damnatio memoriae* to show his successor, Nerva, but these alterations do not affect the integrity of the original sculptural content. It is likely that the reliefs were never re-displayed after their alterations as they show little sign of wear, and were found in storage near the tomb of Hirtius (Last 1948: 9; Pollini 2012: 309). The '*profectio*' scene on relief A is a group scene featuring figures such as Mars and Roma, and in which the emperor Domitian is shown in travelling clothes as he makes his way out of the city. In the parallel scene (Fig. 1), Vespasian's *adventus*, the emperor is depicted in his toga, backed by the Senate and the *genius populi Romani*. The latter scene is particularly interesting regarding the location of the *adventus* in the imperial period: in the lower right-hand register of the bas relief, under the foot of the personification of the Roman

Figure 1: Cancelleria Relief B, Museo Gregoriano Profano (photography courtesy of the DAI Rome photo archive).

people, a scalloped-square shape is visible, tilting slightly to the right. It has been suggested by Last that this feature may represent an altar (*arula*) owing to its unusual shape (1948: 10), although this is unlikely given the fairly standardised representation of altars in other relief sculpture from the imperial period, for example the Hadrianic roundels spoliated and reused on the Arch of Constantine, in which sacrifices before the large, upright altars of Diana and Apollo are visible (Claridge 2010: 310). Similarly, there are few examples of statue bases (another suggested identification for the object) in imperial reliefs, and of those that do exist, none share characteristics with the object depicted in the Cancelleria relief B. For comparative materials, see the Marsyas statue bases on the imperial *Anaglypha Traiani*, or painted statue bases on the frescoes of the House of Julia Felix in Pompeii (Torelli 1982: 90; Ewald and Noreña 2010: 55). To my knowledge, no surviving statue bases from Rome take this shape. This leaves only one likely option, suggested by Dufraigne (1994: 46) but never fully explored: the object depicted is a boundary-stone or *cippus* indicating that the scene is taking place at the boundaries of the city. The unusual angle of the *cippus* suggests an old boundary stone relating to a previous pomerial line, one that had since been replaced or superseded. The presence of this object in the scene fits with the traditional location of the *adventus* ceremony at the pomerial line and, given the relatively large amount of space it occupies, may even act as a visual marker, signposting the topographical context of the ceremony to its audience. The shape of the *cippus* in the relief, while not exactly the same as surviving *pomerium cippi*, does match depictions of boundary stones on coinage from the same period.

The sculptural representation of a boundary *cippus* in the *adventus* scene is significant for one main reason: the inclusion of such a motif in public artwork suggests that it would have been a familiar sight to a contemporary audience, who would potentially recognise in the reliefs the boundary stones which marked out the Roman *pomerium* in reality. In this way, the sculpted *cippus* functions as a point of reference, grounding the activities portrayed in the frieze in the urban topography of the ancient city and situating the *adventus* ceremony in a recognisable place.

The Antonine Panel from the Arch of Constantine

The second sculptural example of the imperial *adventus* to be discussed is currently in situ on the Arch of Constantine in Rome, reused as *spolia* in the construction of the fourth-century triumphal arch, but originally carved for a large public monument celebrating Marcus Aurelius' *adventus* of A.D. 176. The panel (approx. 210 cm × 350 cm) is located on the attic storey of the triumphal arch, and, on the right hand side of the scene, we see the so-called Arch of Domitian through which the emperor entered the city of Rome during his homecoming (MacCormack 1981: 31). In a similar fashion to the *cippus* in the Cancelleria relief, the carved panel includes a depiction of a monument, located at the boundaries of the city, which the emperor had to pass on entering the urban space. Such motifs root the *adventus* in the actual topography of the city of Rome.

In both these sculptural examples, there is clear interest in depicting the space of the *adventus* – the physical location – either as the sacred boundary of Rome or as the architecture through which the emperor had to pass on entry. This ensured that viewers of such scenes in figurative art were aware of the relationship between the image, the event, and their city. After the third century, this moment became heightened as the boundaries themselves were monumentalised: marked by large, imposing circuits of walls and gates, the city boundary was an architectural space through which the emperor moved, rather than a line, such as the *pomerium*, that he crossed (Dey 2010: 23).

The Late Antique Adventus

The importance of the physical city, and in particular of its boundaries, in late antique *adventus* scenes is evidenced by the consistent featuring of walls and gates in art and literature of the late third to early fifth century (Dey 2010: 23). It would be simple to conclude that boundaries were explicitly featured in *adventus* scenes because they were the location for the crucial part of the ceremony, but the consistency of their prominent inclusion on such scenes, coupled with the particular types of depictions that occur, suggests that the boundaries were not background images, but integral parts of the visual language of the *adventus*. Walls were large public monuments, often the focus of civic and urban pride as evidenced by the remarkable circuit at Le Mans (Dey 2010: 11), a provincial city in the Gallic interior, whose wall dates to the late third century and which provides us with an excellent example of a monumental city boundary in the western empire. Dey has noted that this late antique wall was decorated with alternating brick and contrasting stone polychrome designs on its entire outer face (1,300 m), suggesting that this was an attempt to make the exterior space of the city a more impressive and suitable setting for boundary ceremonies such as the *adventus*, which became increasingly popular in late antiquity and which occurred throughout the empire, not just at Rome (2010: 11).

The prominent place awarded to the fortifications of late Roman cities is evident in a variety of media that demonstrate the trend. The panegyric for the occasion of Constantine's arrival at Autun in A.D. 311 uses figurative language to imbue the walls with human characteristics, actively welcoming the emperor into the city and not just existing as a passive backdrop:

> 'Immortal Gods, what a day shone upon us […] when you entered the gates of this city […] and when the gates, curved inwards and flanked by twin towers, seemed to receive you in a kind of embrace' (*Pan. Lat.* 5 (8).7, 6).

Similar imagery is evident on the Arras medallion, struck in A.D. 310 and depicting the *adventus* of Constantine in London after the defeat of the usurper Allectus in A.D. 297. The personification of London can be seen kneeling before the approaching emperor, with the gates and walls of the city on the far right. Again, in the absence of the crowd, the city itself welcomes the emperor (Rees 2004: 48–49). Other notable examples of this trend from provincial cities include the Arch of Galerius at Salonica (Fig. 2), dated to approximately A.D. 303. The *adventus* scene on this monument depicts the emperor (possibly Diocletian) and his entourage on the left approaching a city (possibly Nisibis); this time, he is welcomed by a crowd (Dufraigne 1994: 69). On the upper right of the scene is the city's gate and, inside, a temple is visible. The frieze depicts urban space towards which the emperor is moving as part of his *adventus*: it is the culmination of his journey.

These are just a few examples from a long list of late antique *adventus* scenes and descriptions in which gates and walls are given a prominent position (see MacCormack 1981; Dufraigne 1994; and Dey 2011 for additional examples). They suggest that there is a strong link between the ceremony of *adventus* and the conceptualisation of 'the city' as represented by its boundaries. Representations of the late antique incarnation of *adventus* can be tentatively broken down into three recurrent parts: the emperor figure, the welcoming crowd, and the city boundary. Each part is integral to the overall comprehension of the composition; each motif provides key information about the type of activity being portrayed, who is participating, and where such an event takes place. Though there are undoubtedly examples of *adventus* scenes that deviate from this pattern (for example, the rare scenes appearing on late antique coinage), there is an overwhelming degree

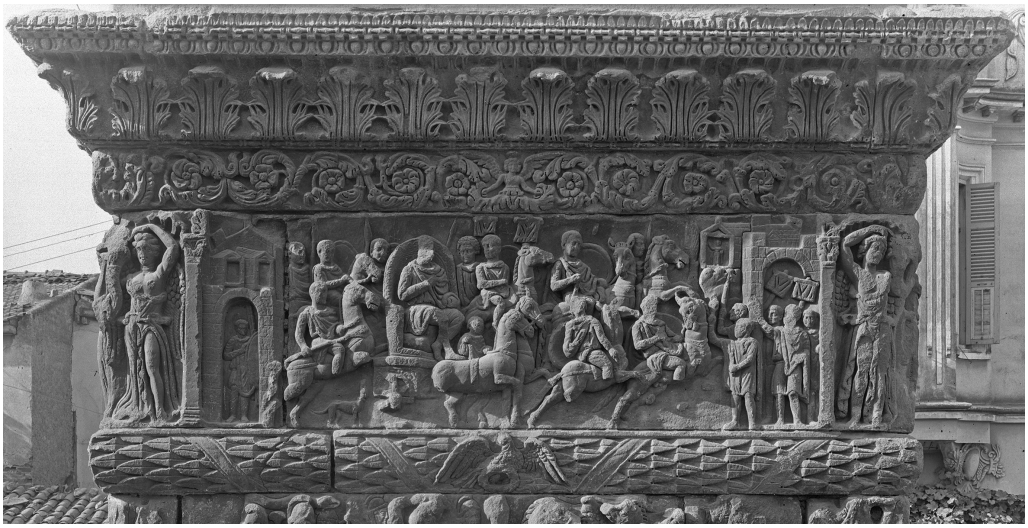

Figure 2: The Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki (Hermann Wagner 1935, photo courtesy of the DAI Athens photograph archive).

of conformity to the 'type' in late antique art. The boundary marker (gate, wall) in such scenes is not to be taken at face-value: it is a visual device designed not only to locate the event at the familiar edge of the urban space, but to evoke the city as a whole through the depiction of its most recognisable part – the monumental city wall.

Thus far, the examples discussed have not been from Rome, and this has been deliberate. It has been suggested that while city walls 'loom large' on provincial art (as we have seen), the same trend is not visible in Rome in the fourth century (Dey 2010: 35). There is, however, a wealth of evidence to suggest the contrary: the same trends visible in provincial art and literature may also be traced in the visual and literary representation of *adventus* at Rome between the late third and early fifth centuries. It should be remembered that the examples already discussed, and the additional ones that Dey chose to focus his argument on, are from a wide geographical area and chronological span, and often exist as the only example of such art or literature in the region. There is a great deal more evidence from Rome which sees the Aurelian Wall as an integral part of the visual language used to portray the late antique *adventus*.

Evidence from Late Antique Rome

The examination of evidence for city gates and walls as significant parts of surviving *adventus* scenes from Rome will begin with two literary examples, before focussing on two material examples. The first example is from Ammianus Marcellinus' famous account of Constantius II's *adventus* into Rome in A.D. 357 (16.10.10):

> 'For he [Constantius] stooped when passing through lofty gates (although he was very short)…'

In this short section of a larger passage describing the emperor's *adventus*, we are informed that Constantius, moving as though he were a work of art himself, crossed the threshold of

the city of Rome by passing through the 'lofty gates' of the Aurelian Wall. The architecture of the boundary in this passage is a key element in the framework of Ammianus' account – there can be no entry, no arrival without a boundary to cross. Constantius' passage through the gate signifies his entry into the city proper and the completion of his 'arrival' in Rome, even though the periphery of the city was home to an array of active sites in this period – domestic buildings, *horti* and agricultural land in particular – and the wall was by no means located at the edge of the city's sprawl (Dey 2011: 169).

The second literary example comes from Claudian's panegyric of A.D. 403-4, 'On the Sixth Consulship of Honorius' (531–536):

> 'Still fairer than of old the city seemed by reason of those new walls that the rumour of the Getae's approach had just caused to be built […] For fear it was that caused the sudden upspringing of all those towers and renewed the youth of Rome's seven hills by enclosing them all within one long wall.'

Claudian's mention of Honorius and Arcadius' recent renewal of the Aurelian Wall ('those new walls') takes place almost immediately before his account of Honorius' *adventus* of A.D. 403, and thus sets the architectural backdrop for the scenes that follow, once more rooting the *adventus* in the real physical space of the city of Rome. In this instance, *adventus*, the emperor, and the city are interdependent, and the value of Honorius' *adventus* lies in the significance of its location at Rome, which, even though the city could no longer claim the permanent residence of the emperor, remained the symbolic heart of the empire (MacCormack 1981: 54). We, the audience, know that this scene is located in Rome because the defining monumental circuit of the city has been described.

The emphasis on the walls and gates of Rome is also visible in the art produced there in and around the fourth century. The eastern side of the Arch of Constantine is decorated with a panel of contemporary narrative frieze (A.D. 315) that commemorates the titular emperor's *adventus* after the victory over Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in A.D. 312 (Fig. 3). The emperor is shown entering not as a victor in military garb and in a triumphal chariot, but as a citizen, seated in a chariot drawn by four horses, with Victory at his feet. Most interestingly, the scene is bordered on the left-hand side by architecture that appears as an arch with brick detail. This cannot be a framing device as similar features do not appear in the other portions of the frieze, but rather it is specific to this scene and this position. Sabine MacCormack has identified this as the *Porta Flaminia* (1981: 36). This is a convincing interpretation, particularly when considering that parts of the frieze would have been painted, and this fine brickwork detail was a likely candidate for colour, which may have made the motif stand out in the scene. Once again, the boundaries of the city are an integral part of the *adventus* story. We know that this is Constantine's entry into Rome, his *adventus*, because we, the viewers, see him passing through the archway of a gate building, which can only mean he has entered the city proper.

Other media demonstrate the same trend. For example, the small, private funerary complex known as the 'Hypogeum of the Aurelii', located inside the Aurelian Wall and in use from the third century A.D into the Christian period (Bisconti 2004: 15), includes a fresco (Fig. 4) that appears to depict an imperial-style *adventus* – the man on horseback is approaching a gathered crowd who are waiting to receive him and, in the background, there is a gateway (the city boundary) and a walled city. This wall painting, composed before the construction of the Aurelian Wall but bridging the gap between the depiction of architectural boundary markers (the arches and *cippi* discussed above) and the later inclusion of walls and gates, contains the three

Figure 3: The Arch of Constantine, Rome (photo courtesy of the DAI Rome photograph archive).

Figure 4: The Hypogeum of the Aurelii, Rome (Bendinelli 1922: pl. 10b).

key elements of the imperial and late antique *adventus* scene: emperor style figure, welcoming crowd, and city boundary.

The exact character of this fresco is unclear, however the use of *adventus* style imagery is striking, and demonstrates that the depiction of Rome's boundaries in art was indeed present in *adventus* scenes in Rome, and not just on large-scale public monuments but had spread into the private (or semi-private) funerary sphere.

Conclusions

This paper has discussed several examples of the diverse range of media from Rome that engaged with the artistic formula of the imperial and late antique *adventus*, and, in particular, the representation of the city's boundaries. Late antique *adventus* scenes are formulaic: often they contain a combination of three key elements (emperor, crowd, and city); the directionality of the scene is most commonly left-to-right, with the approaching figure depicted on the left and the destination (the city or the gate) on the right; and the scenes appear with relative ubiquity throughout the period.

The late antique *adventus* had many meanings: it was a display of triumph, a display of imperial benefaction, a religious ceremony, and a homecoming. This paper has demonstrated that the recurring motif of city walls and gate buildings in late antique *adventus* scenes is not an exclusively provincial phenomenon, but one that can also be traced in the art that was produced at Rome between the late third century and the early fifth century, in both the public and private spheres. Not only that, but the use of such images represented the artistic conceptualisation of the space of the late antique *adventus* at Rome. The entire urban space was evoked in these scenes through the employment of a single image, the city boundary. In late antique art and literature, circuits of walls and gate buildings and arches became symbols, acting as visual synecdoche in which a gate or wall referred to the entire urban space within, the space that was only hinted at by the motif itself. In this way, Rome's Aurelian Wall had transcended its physical form to become a symbol of the urban identity of late antique Rome as a whole.

Department of Classics and Ancient History, University of Exeter

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