

## Ivory Examples of Political Manipulation Under the Theodosians

In the face of continuing political corruption and subversive religious nostalgia, appointed officials and priests were rewarded with luxury gifts for their obedience to the emperor and their display of religious fortitude. At the turn of the fifth century, the pagan resistance seen previously in the uproar over the Altar of Peace and the massacre of thousands of pagans by Theodosius was reflected in four ivory diptychs made in Rome. The boldness of these early diptychs, tied to a rich history of propaganda meant to further careers and solidify influence, waned as Christianity gained a firmer hold. Indeed, just a few short years after the Visigoths entered Italy, the iconography began to shift away from strong pagan symbols toward subtle Christian motifs. These objects gave tangible expression to the cultural shift at an elite level from pagan resistance to Christian victory.

These diptychs, which may have contained consular (and later Christian) lists on their inner wax tablets, demonstrate the increased Late Antique fixation with legitimacy and historical connections (Bowes 2001). At a time when political stability was at a premium, these ivory-bound lists immortalized each man and his family and gave them the legitimacy they needed to wield what power they had more effectively. The Romans went to great pains to edit and re-edit their public personas (Flowers 2003). The recollection of past accomplishments and the convenient forgetting of past defeats is particularly well-suited to an erasable wax tablet. Thus, diptychs were an ideal medium to strengthen allegiances and show respect to curated legacies.

## Bibliography

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