

Columns of Time: Imagined *Spolia* and Historical Meaning in the *Kaiserchronik*

Abstract

The Middle High German *Kaiserchronik*, written by an anonymous author in the middle of the twelfth century, focuses at strategic moments of its historiographical narrative on columns in the city of Rome. Drawing on critical literature relating to columns and *spolia*, this article presents a reading of the columns in the *Kaiserchronik* as markers of continuity, connected to what Mikhail Bakhtin called chronotopes: mutually semanticising combinations of space and time. In the case of the *Kaiserchronik*, these chronotopes are the pagan Roman past on the one hand – as a sphere of reference valued for its *auctoritas*, and as a source of political prestige and legitimacy – and on the other hand the Christian medieval present of the twelfth century: a sphere of reception, interested in benefitting from this prestige and legitimacy, and retrospectively confirming and constructing it in turn. The article uses the concept of *allelopoiesis* to describe this process as one of reciprocal transformation, and uses Bakhtin's concepts of the chronotope to illustrate the complex relationship between the shifting semantic charges of the Roman Empire. As a result, it becomes apparent how – connected through time by columns as meaningful *spolia* – antiquity and the Middle Ages emerge as two chronotopes: intertwined as mutually semanticising spheres that, for all their differences (above all in religion), can infuse each other with new meaning.

1. Originally published as “Eternidad de la columna” in *La Prensa* on 26 July 1970. Translated by Eco, who called the poem “a collection of exceedingly obvious reflections upon the rhetorical theme of the column, an inventory of banalities with pseudo-poetical intentions” but also “an inventory of the current tradition of thought about the column” and an “astonishing record of an imaginary survey that collects from a sample of everyday users of architecture all the meanings that they associate with the unit ‘column.’”

Around it blow the winds of time. The winds embrace the uplifted, time-defying shaft. Centuries have passed without touching its slim body, and towering among the ruins, the column affirms its timeless destiny. [...] For time is a sharp-keeled ship that leaves in its wake all that is transient. And the column that spans the centuries appears as the mast of this mighty vessel.

Dora Isella Russell, *The Eternity of the Column*¹

This article is concerned with the relationship between time and columns in the twelfth-century Middle High German *Kaiserchronik*. Of particular interest is a set of three atectonic columns (meaning that

they support no other architectonic element). The only thing they carry is meaning: the first column serves as an epitaph of Caesar and a tomb for his mortal remains, the second column is a testament to the justice of Emperor Titus, and the third column (which features in the story of Astrolabe) is connected to a pagan idol of the goddess Venus. The latter's reintegration into a Christian church serves to mark the conclusion of the transition from pagan to Christian Rome under the auspices of Emperor Theodosius.

The columns of the *Kaiserchronik* are of special interest as they relate to time for several reasons. First, two of these columns – the ones associated with Titus and Astrolabe – are fictitious: they neither correspond to any existing monuments, nor are they rooted in the various sources of the *Kaiserchronik*. Not only did the author of the *Kaiserchronik* invent them, then, but he must also have found something in the semantic potential of the columns that prompted him to use them – and not any other urban feature of Rome familiar to the *Kaiserchronik* (for instance the Coliseum). Second, the columns are presented as *spolia*: deliberately transplanted artefacts from the past that, embedded into a new context, help to create new meanings for the present.

In the case of the *Kaiserchronik*, the process of spoliation – *i.e.* of removing an artefact from its (defunct) original context, and inserting it into a new context in order to create new meaning – is temporal and not spatial. This form of spoliation can be observed when, in the context of twelfth-century reception, it is emphasised that the columns are still present, visible, and accessible – despite the times having shifted from one chronotope (that of pagan ancient Rome) into another (that of the Christian medieval present). While the columns remain *in situ*, anchored in the city of Rome, their meaning changes because the time around them changes. In the process, the space is re-semanticised.

As such, the *Kaiserchronik's* columns straddle a temporal gulf, connecting the ancient pagan past with the medieval Christian present. This temporal movement, made visible by the columns' position between two epochs, produces new meaning. To describe this process, in what follows, I shall use the language associated with the concept of *allelpoiesis* (Böhme 8–10; Helmuth 141–51). At the core of this framework, setting it apart from considerations of mere reception, is the analysis of a reciprocal process of transformation, entailing on the one hand the modification of the reception sphere (here the twelfth-century context) and on the other hand the construction of the reference sphere (ancient Rome):

This close connection between modification and construction is an essential characteristic of transformation processes, which can occur both diachronically and synchronically. Such processes therefore lead to something “new” in two senses, namely to mutually dependent, novel configurations in both the reference culture and the reception culture. (Helmrath 141)

Examining these three columns, within their context, through this lens as *spolia*, I will ask how they work as signifiers of time: what do they signify, and how does their function as signifier relate to the chronicle’s conception of history and time in the twelfth century? By following these questions, this article aims to shed light on one of the various narrative strategies the *Kaiserchronik* utilises to negotiate time, one which forms a small but intriguing thread of its greater historiographical tapestry: the insertion of columns as imagined and temporal *spolia*, all situated in the city of Rome, and usually referred to in relation to the unfolding of historical time.

1.1 Time as chronotopos in the *Kaiserchronik*

The Middle High German *Kaiserchronik* is the first German vernacular chronicle, written by an anonymous, well-connected and well-read ecclesiastical author, perhaps in Regensburg but certainly in the southeastern reaches of the Empire, in the middle decades of the twelfth century (Chinca and Young 1). The chronicle’s content is mainly informed by legendary, apocryphal, hagiographical, and mythological sources.²

Starting with the foundation of the Roman Empire, the *Kaiserchronik* quickly establishes an episodic structure, with each episode dedicated to the name and rule of an emperor. Beginning with Caesar, the text traces the history of the Roman Empire from its beginnings all the way through Constantine and Charlemagne, down to Conrad III and the events of the year 1147 (where it stops). The episodes are consistently demarcated by introductory and concluding phrases. This establishes a formal linear axis in which a narration of continuous imperial rule can unfold, in turn maintaining a qualitative equivalence in the content of the episodes. No matter at which place in its linear paradigm a given event is narrated, all events partake in the imperial *romanitas* inscribed in the very form of the chronicle.

But there are two crucial developments, over time, that push against this effect of the episodic framework: the religious shift from ancient Roman paganism to Latin Christianity, and the political shift

2. Identifying these sources and traditions, and discussing their use in the *Kaiserchronik*, is the great achievement of Ernst Friedrich Ohly’s seminal study of myth and legend in the chronicle, which shapes and underpins research on the *Kaiserchronik* even today. More recent studies on the historiography of the *Kaiserchronik* – informed by Ohly – include, but are not limited to, those by Stock, Matthews and Herweg. Among the widening recent research on the *Kaiserchronik*, of particular interest for this article is Mierke’s essay, in which she examines not columns, but rather edifices and building processes. As I will show below, her results run fairly parallel to my observations here.

from a Mediterranean empire centred on the city of Rome and its emperors to a transalpine empire ruled by German kings and princes. I propose to understand these qualitative developments as movements between what Mikhail Bakhtin calls *chronotopes*:

We will give the name chronotope (literally, ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. [...] it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). [...] In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible, likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (Bakhtin 84)

3. The reigns of Diocletian and Maximian (twenty years, six weeks), Severus (six years, six months), Heliuss Pertinax (seven months, five days), Heliuss Adrianus (eleven months), Lucius Accommodus (not specified), Alaric (four years, six months), Achilleus (nine months), Galienus (four years), Constantinus (seventeen years, five months), and Constantine (thirty years, six months) add up to eighty-five years, three months, and two weeks. The final total is obscured by the unspecified duration of Lucius Accommodus’s rule before he is slain and succeeded by Alaric, and complicated by the duration of the rule of Silvester (twenty-four years, six months, five days), where it remains unclear how much overlap has to be assumed with the duration of Constantine’s rule. Adding the entire rule of Silvester brings the final sum to 109 years, nine months, two weeks, and five days (assuming for simplicity’s sake that one month breaks down into four weeks).

4. Decius died in 251 CE, and Theodosius came into power in 379 CE. As the Theodosius of the *Kaiserchronik* seems to be an amalgamation of the historical Theodosius I and II, the time would increase to 151 years, as Theodosius II came to power in 402 CE.

The Empire as a spatial structure changes over time, and this temporal change in turn renders its spatial dimension unrecognisable. If, according to Bakhtin, time is to be understood as the fourth dimension of the three-dimensional coordinate system of the Empire’s situation in space, the Empire has now been inexorably altered by the qualitative, temporal change in its religious composition: the shift over time from paganism to Christianity. The territory occupied by the Empire is now no longer semanticised by its spatial permanence, but has been ‘charged’ by the altered time. With the temporal dimension now charged differently, the spatial dimensions alone (which remain semantically stable) seem no longer able to hold the charge: as the following example will show, space responds to the temporal change by rendering itself unrecognisable.

An example for the functioning of the two chronotopes of the *Kaiserchronik* is the striking conception of time and space in the Seven Sleepers passage, which concludes the Theodosius episode. In it, seven Christian princes from Ephesus go into hiding to escape Emperor Decius’s persecution of the Christians (*Kaiserchronik* 6421–42), only to be found again under the reign of the exemplary Christian Emperor Theodosius (*Kaiserchronik* 13 496–503). At that point, they have slept through not only 248 years but also through several thousand lines of narrative. The 248 years the author claims they have been sleeping (*Kaiserchronik* 6425–27) does not correspond to the *Kaiserchronik*’s own reckoning of time passed between Decius and Theodosius (around 110 years),³ or the actual historical distance between the two (128 years).⁴ When Serapion, the first of the sleepers to

awake, realises that he – after going to sleep to evade persecution by the pagan Roman authorities – is now surrounded by Christians, his confusion is registered not in temporal but in spatial terms (*Kaiserchronik* 13 550–51). Serapion has just come down from the mountain – where he believes he has spent only four days – to get food, and now expects to be martyred for it (*Kaiserchronik* 13 508–20). The spatial environment of Ephesus and Mount Celeon, which should be immediately familiar to him, loses all meaning when he realises that times have changed and he has come back to a Christian world (*Kaiserchronik* 13 552–57). His confusion about historical change over time is expressed as a total loss of spatial orientation. He no longer knows where he is, what the country he is in is called, or how he got there (*Kaiserchronik* 13 564–65). He does remember Ephesus and the mountain to which he and his companions fled, but with the times having changed so dramatically, he is no longer capable of reconciling the topography he remembers with the spatially unchanged but religiously differently semanticised topography he finds now: he has to ask whether the mountain to which he fled is anywhere nearby, and whether anyone knows the way there (*Kaiserchronik* 13 566–68).

Extrapolating from this example, within the overall structure of the chronicle, produces two chronotopes: the ancient pagan cisalpine chronotope in the narrative past of the chronicle, and the medieval Christian transalpine chronotope in the present day (of the chronicle's composition). Using these terms, the *Kaiserchronik's* core mission can be described as narrating the transformation of a political entity – the Roman Empire – over time, as it moves from the first chronotope to the second. In order to discuss these changes as a process of reception and transformation between antiquity and the Middle Ages, the two chronotopes will be synchronised with the two spheres of the allelopoetic model presented above: the ancient pagan chronotope serves as the sphere of reference, and the medieval Christian chronotope serves as the sphere of reception.

As the *Kaiserchronik* moves through its episodes, the passage of time is mainly registered quantitatively, but there are instances where these two chronotopes clash, or where the qualitative discrepancies become all too apparent. In such cases, the chronicle can deploy a range of strategies to mitigate the clashes, and to negotiate the anticipated irritation of its audience. One of them is the use of columns as *spolia* that connect the two chronotopes and allow the mutual creation of meaning in both directions along their axis. In this, they begin to function like *spolia*.

I.2 Spoliation and citation

5. A helpful overview of the research on *spolia* up to 2000 can be found in Kinney, “Concept” 239–49.

6. Esch’s five motivations are (1) Convenience and availability; (2) Profanation and exorcism of demonic forces; (3) *Interpretatio Christiana*; (4) Retro-dating or political legitimization; (5) Aesthetic wonderment or admiration. Here I am following Kinney’s paraphrase of Esch for an English translation (Kinney, “Concept” 244). In the original German, Esch call his motives for spoliation: “materielle Verwertbarkeit [...], Profanierung und Exorzismus [...], *interpretatio Christiana* [...], politische Legitimation [...], ästhetische Wertschätzung” (Esch 1).

7. “[...] die Spolie lag eben herum, sie war einigermaßen ansehnlich, sie hatte gerade Kanten, also verwendete man sie eben” (Esch 42–43).

8. Michael Greenhalgh, in particular, emphasises that many analyses of *spolia* are marred by “baggage and prejudices,” connecting them all too easily to ideas of “memory, power, prestige, self-image, civic pride [...] and other generalized, over-inflated and frequently nebulous claims which the subject generates” (Greenhalgh 76–78). As with Esch, he focusses on the practical and economical motivations for using *spolia*.

9. For a collection of examples of this tendency, see the contributions in Poeschke.

The study of *spolia* was, originally, mostly bound up with discussions of the medieval reception of classical antiquity.⁵ This changed when the historian Arnold Esch recognised *spolia* as a “distinctive cultural practice” and brought together five crucial motors behind spoliation and *spolia* (Kinney, “Concept” 244), to be analysed and understood independently from processes of reception and classical survival (Esch 1–64).⁶ Only the first motive is concerned with practical issues, while the others are concerned with the semantics of *spolia* – their capacity to imbue, to transpose, and to carry meaning from place to place or from object to place, or, as Hansen puts it, to “turn time into a theme” (Hansen 245). But Esch gives the practical motive priority over the others, arguing that the vast majority of *spolia* were probably used for pragmatic reasons.⁷ These reuses are “ecological,” meaning the process of spoliation feeds the material back into the life cycle of a building. The price for this new or extended lease of life is the loss of their memory, their semantic charge; “[t]he condition for their reincarnation, their second life, is a forgetting of the first life” (Nagel and Wood 180). Because of this, Kinney and Greenhalgh have argued for caution when interpreting physical *spolia*.⁸ Owing to this caution, art historians and archaeologists are often more concerned with materiality and physicality: the process of spoliation; the scarcity and irreproducibility of *spolia*; the logistics of transportation and reuse in a new location; the formal and aesthetic fit in their new surroundings; the new semantic dimensions derived from the synergies with their new architectural surroundings; and the way in which *spolia* relate to the (empty or shaped) space surrounding them.⁹

If we accept that the main factor in spoliation is a limitation of technology and resources (Kinney, “Concept” 233), the question arises as to how useful the *spolia*/spoliation terminology is for *spolia* featuring in literature, in the absence of any material, physical, or practical restrictions. Writers composing texts are not limited by these factors. What Nagel and Wood call “[t]otal meaningfulness” (Nagel and Wood 178) can certainly also be applied to literature. The idea of total meaningfulness refers to the fact that when analysing paintings – as opposed to architecture – it can be assumed that every element has been purposefully composed to carry meaning, without any necessary practical considerations. In literature, too, it can be reasonably assumed that everything has been put in place with some deliberation and, whether consciously or not, serves as a carrier of meaning.

10. What kind of meaning was intended by the author is of course a different question altogether, but of no importance for this article.

11. Dale Kinney has provided a very helpful overview of different semiotic approaches to reading columns as signifiers. See Kinney, “Bearers.”

12. In contrast to the column-as-tree type, prevalent through most of antiquity but no longer understood as such during the Middle Ages (Bandmann 74–75).

13. All Latin Bible quotes are from the Vulgate; all English translations are from the King James Bible. For a more comprehensive look at relevant passages from the Bible see Kinney, “Spolia.”

This means that the recourse to *spolia*, and to columns in particular, must be a deliberate strategy through which the authors were hoping to create additional meaning.¹⁰ By understanding the use of columns in the *Kaiserchronik* as spoliation, we can get to the core of this meaning-making process. A seam between *spolium* (or citation) and new context, the contained and the container, the artefact and the shrine, becomes visible in conceptual relief. This enables a comparison between old and new, then and now, here and there, and thus establishes “figural or typological relationship[s]” between the two (Nagel and Wood 179, 181).

1.3 Columns as bearers of historical meaning

Among *spolia*, columns are the most prolific. There have been several attempts to define theoretically the way in which columns operate as signifiers, Eco’s componential analysis being one of the first and most influential. Eco showed “that certain architectural objects, either out of context or in context [...] can be the bearers of meaning, and are thus considered as the pertinent units of an architectural semantics – the sememes that culture recognizes and organizes in a structured system” (Eco 117). Most of these theories are concerned with physical and atectonic columns, and it will have to be discussed to what extent these also apply to columns depicted in literature.¹¹ Given the great quantity of literature on the possible semantics of columns, I will focus on one concept from this wider framework which is particularly relevant for the columns of the *Kaiserchronik*: Bandmann’s column-as-figure-type. The free-standing, atectonic columns of the *Kaiserchronik*, standing “in isolation, rather than as a meaningless component in a tectonic assemblage” (Bandmann 75), correspond to what Bandmann in his influential study on meaning in early Christian architecture calls the column-as-figure type of columnar morphology and semiotics.¹²

The notion of columns as figures comes easily to Christians because Scripture itself makes this connection: [...] *Jacobus, et Cephas, et Joannes, qui videbantur columnæ esse* [...] (“James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars,” Galatians 2:9), and *Et murus civitatis habens fundamenta duodecim, et in ipsis duodecim nomina duodecim apostolorum Agni* (“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb,” Revelation 21:14).¹³ This sense was expounded in the early fourth century by Eusebius – church historian, scholar, biographer and pan-

egyrist of Emperor Constantine and Bishop of Caesarea – who, in his oration for the dedication of the cathedral of Tyre, which he included in chapter 10 of his *Ecclesiastical History*, compares the members of the Christian Church to architectural elements such as columns, which in combination form a metaphorical edifice (Eusebius 10.4.63–64). The most prominent medieval articulation of the idea of columns-as-figures was written by Suger, abbot of St Denis, burial church of the French kings, in his *De Consecratione* (a decade or two before the *Kaiserchronik*). In his description of the architecture and programme of the new abbey church, whose reconstruction he oversaw as patron, he likens the columns holding aloft the midst of the edifice to the twelve apostles, and sets Christ above them as the chief keystone.¹⁴ Other medieval writers such as Hrabanus Maurus and Sicard of Cremona interpreted columns as the doctors of the Church in apostolic succession, or as bishops in general (Bandmann 75). While these are all tectonic columns, and while they indeed derive much of their semantic potential from their capacity as bearers of something, the symbolism can also be transferred onto atectonic columns. As Kinney states, “[t]he signified of the verbal signifier ‘column’ was not fixed, although the range of possibilities was restricted by the consistent overriding idea” (Kinney, “Signifiers” 162). The author of the *Kaiserchronik* would certainly have been familiar with this exegetical tradition and, as the following will show, was very adept in using it as a rich quarry for his own invention.

14. “Medium quippe duodecim Apostolorum exponentes numerum, secundario vero totidem alarum columnae Prophetarum numerum significantes, altum repente subrigebant aedificium, juxta Apostolum, spiritualiter aedificantem: Jam non estis, inquit, hospites et advenae; sed estis cives sanctorum et domestici Dei, superaeificati [sic] super fundamentum Apostolorum et Prophetarum, ipso summo angulari lapide Christo Jesu, qui utrumque conjugit parietem, in quo omnis aedificatio, sive spiritualis, sive materialis, crescit in templum sanctum in Domino.” Suger 104–05.

Bandmann also devises an important modification of this type, relevant for the columns in the *Kaiserchronik*: a combination of the column-as-figure type with the column-as-marker type, to form a memorial “not endowed with anthropomorphic ideas but [to] indicate the place where the divinity or the dead one dwells,” best embodied in “the fully developed cult image or later in the honorific column carrying a statue of the person being honored” (Bandmann 77). All three columns of the *Kaiserchronik*’s account fall neatly into this category. The column (or obelisk, or pyramid) with Caesar’s remains on top of it indicates the “place where the divinity of the dead one dwells;” the column of Titus clearly works as a “honorific column carrying a statue of the person being honored;” and the column from the Astrolabe episode figures in a many-layered state of tension with the idol of Venus, which co-inhabits its space as a “fully developed cult image” (Bandmann 77).

15. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of the *Kaiserchronik* are taken from the unpublished translation by Mark Chinca and Christopher Young.

16. At the time, however, situated to the south of Old St Peter's Basilica as the only standing remnant of the so-called Circus of Nero. The obelisk was moved from there in 1586 by Pope Sixtus V, who had it erected in its present location to mark the centre of the newly created oval St Peter's square. For a short overview of the history and meaning of the obelisk see Alföldy 15–17. He later discusses how many present assumptions about the obelisk are far from certain and how many intriguing puzzles still remain, and offers insightful thoughts on how to approach these puzzles (Alföldy 82–94).

17. Translation is my own. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

18. Valentini and Zucchetti 44 (in the following: *Mirabilia*). This poem is also used by William of Malmesbury for the beginning of his rendition of the epitaph inscription for Heinrich III (William of Malmesbury, Cap. 194.2.346). In the *Poetae* series of the MGH the text is recorded as a *planctus* – a song of lamentation – but for Lothar I; see Strecker 1072–75. It has – of course! – been a major point of discussion between late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians whether the poem refers to the ninth-century Carolingian or to the eleventh-century Salian ruler. Ludwig Traube and Feodor Schneider argued for Lothar, contending, based mostly on formal points of genre and meter, that the text could not be younger than the ninth century. Building on Ernst Dümmler's first rejection of this identification, Bernhard Bischoff showed, more convincingly referring to the manuscript transmission and the content of the text, that the poem must indeed refer to Heinrich III. Bischoff's approach also has the advantage that we can take William of Malmesbury at his word. Only later in the twelfth century were the first lines of the poem then combined with the Caesar tradition, where they resonated long after the impact of the death of Heinrich III had faded. See Schneider 169, and especially Bischoff 247–53.

19. Probably directly via the *Mirabilia*. The first to make this connection was Massmann in his early edition of the text, 424–30; 433–60. Also see Miedema 468 and Mierke 46, who sees

II. The columns in context

The usual lexeme used for columns in Middle High German is *siule* (sometimes phonetically shifted to *sûl*). In the *Kaiserchronik* some of them are further qualified as *irmensûl*, which indicates a particularly grand column (BMZ, “irmensûl” 726a). This is the case with the first column presented here, the one associated with the mortal remains of Julius Caesar.

After his treacherous murder by the Romans, Caesar's mortal remains are buried *ûf ain irmensûl* (“on top of a great column,” *Kaiserchronik* 602).¹⁵ This *sûl* is deeply rooted in the dense tapestry of Roman legends, many connected to the urban features of Roman antiquity, which would have been available to the author of the *Kaiserchronik* in the middle of the twelfth century. The idea that Caesar's mortal remains were buried atop a monument is tied to the Egyptian obelisk that is now situated in front of St Peter's Basilica,¹⁶ probably due to a misinterpretation of an inscription on the monolith's base:

DIVO . CAESARI . DIVI . IVLII . F . AVGVSTO | TI .
CAESARI . DIVI . AVGVSTI . F . AVGVSTO | SACRVM
(Bormann and Henzen 156)

(Dedicated to the divine Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Julius, [and] to Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus)¹⁷

The anonymous author of the twelfth-century *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* seems to have been the first to set down in writing the popular identification of this obelisk as Caesar's tomb. According to the *Mirabilia*, this fact is documented by an inscription on the obelisk, which reads: *Caesar tantus eras quantus et orbis, Sed nunc in modico clauderis antro* (“Caesar, you were as great as the orb of the world, but now you lie enclosed in a small cavity”).¹⁸ The monument itself is described as a *memoria* for Caesar (*Mirabilia*, Cap. 19, 43–44) or as a *agulia*, which is a Middle Latin version of the classical Latin *acus*, meaning needle (Ziltener 147). After the *Mirabilia*, this tradition found its way not only into the *Kaiserchronik*,¹⁹ but also into the early thirteenth-century *Narracio de Mirabilibus Urbis Romae*, written by the otherwise unknown Magister Gregorius, who was probably an ecclesiastic from England on diplomatic mission in Rome (*Narracio*, Cap. 29, 28–29).

There are two more monuments identified as *irmensûl* in the *Kai-*

serchronik. At the beginning of the chronicle – where it embarks on a survey of the seven days of the pagan week, the pagan deities to whom these days are dedicated, and the festivals and ceremonies attached to them (*Kaiserchronik* 63–208) – it is stated that the Romans *worhten* [...] *abgot sibeniu* (“created seven idols,” *Kaiserchronik* 63–65). One of these *abgot* is placed on the top of an *irmensiule* (“great column,” *Kaiserchronik* 129). Later in the Nero episode, Peter and Paul face off with Simon Magus, and the heretic sorcerer climbs up an *irmensûl* (*Kaiserchronik* 4213) to demonstrate his ability to fly. He falls to his death, and Peter and Paul are subsequently martyred by Nero. The two ‘lesser’ *irmensûlen* mentioned in the chronicle are not discussed here, but will become important again in the final part of this study.

A second remarkable tale of a column can be found in the Titus episode (*Kaiserchronik* 5365–556). It centres on a fictitious column situated in the city of Rome, which was imagined still to be visible to the *Kaiserchronik*’s twelfth-century contemporaries. Unlike the Caesar column, this monument is not connected to any source material. It is described as a memorial, but is framed like an aetiology: it sets out to explain, to a present-day audience, a monument that remains *in situ*. It uses the trans-temporal structure of aetiological narratives to intertwine the example of the column with a moral and didactic example: after Emperor Titus has thwarted a plot against his life through personal cunning, in a display of great civic justice, he has the twelve conspirators executed (*Kaiserchronik* 5377–530). In order to memorialise this event, the emperor orders a *sûl êrîn* (“iron column,” *Kaiserchronik* 5533) to be cast in commemoration of his just verdict (*Kaiserchronik* 5531–46).

The text claims that this column would be visible (*anscîn*) in the Rome of today (*hiute*, *Kaiserchronik* 5534) – although it corresponds to no actual topographical landmark in the city and is not part of a broader legendary tradition connected to Titus. Instead, its introduction is owed to the *Kaiserchronik*’s author. It cannot, however, be ascertained if he thought of the column as a real monument, or if he intentionally fabricated it.

In either case, within the *Kaiserchronik*, the monument’s purpose is decidedly public and civic: the statue on top of the column shows Titus as a just ruler and judge, with the sword as the sign of his *impe-rium*, conferring the judicial authority to condemn perpetrators to death. Not only is the column which memorialises Titus’ verdict still present in temporal terms, but it is also visible over a wide spatial distance, as it *scînet verre in di lant* (“shines widely into the land,” *Kaiser-*

chronik 5542). Indeed, it is assumed still to be visible, as the present tense of *scinet* suggests. The column is imagined, then, as permanent in time and space – and still accessible, at least theoretically, for the audience of the text to verify the *Kaiserchronik*'s claim.

A third example of a column, a *sûle* – this one also introduced by the author of the *Kaiserchronik*, and not part of a broader source tradition – can be found at the end of the Astrolabe legend, which is one of the three main parts of the episode centred on the rule of Emperor Theodosius (*Kaiserchronik* 13 086–376). Like Titus's column, this *sûle* is also connected to the present by the word *hiute* ("today," *Kaiserchronik* 13 364).

At the beginning of the Theodosius episode, the youth Astrolabe is introduced as an obdurate pagan in an increasingly majority-Christian world under the rule of the pious emperor. In an abandoned pagan temple, he happens upon an idol of the goddess Venus, which casts a spell on him – causing him to fall hopelessly in love with it and, consequently, his condition to deteriorate. With the help of the wily priest Eusebius, the spell of the idol is finally lifted from the boy. As a result, Emperor Theodosius decrees the erection of *in der gottes minne | ain ander hûs* ("in the love of God | a different house," *Kaiserchronik* 13 351–52) at the site of the abandoned pagan temple and its idol. The legend up to this point is linked to a parallel tradition, also transmitted in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*, which predates the *Kaiserchronik*'s version by a couple of decades and shares key elements with it – such as the obdurate pagan youth, the ring, the betrothal to a pagan statue, and the priest adept in the dark arts as a helper (William of Malmesbury Cap. 205, 380–84).²⁰ Moreover, the basic constellation – an idol of a female goddess of such beauty that men fall for her – seems to have held sufficient force that even Master Gregorius, the author of the thirteenth-century *Narracio* and an observant visitor of Rome, feels compelled to profess his love for a particularly beautiful example in that city:

Hec autem imago ex Pario marmore tam miro et inexplicabili perfecta est artificio, ut magis viva creatura videatur quam statua: erubescenti etenim nuditatem suam similis, faciem purpureo colore perfusam gerit. [...] Hanc autem propter mirandam speciem et nescio quam magicam persuasionem ter coactus sum revisere, cum ab hospicio meo duobus stadiis distaret. (*Narracio*, Cap. 12. 20)

20. For a comparison of the probably unrelated accounts of the *Kaiserchronik* and of the *Gesta*, see Ohly 204–09.

21. Parian marble is quarried on the Aegean island of Paros. It is white in colour, close-grained, and peculiarly suitable for sculpture (Darvill 161).

22. Translation after Osborne, *Marvels*, Cap. 12. 20.

(This image is made from Parian marble²¹ which such wonderful and intricate skill, that she seems more like a living creature than a statue, indeed she seems to blush in her nakedness, a reddish tinge colouring her face [...] Because of this wonderful image and perhaps some magic spell I'm unaware of, I was drawn back three times to look at it despite the fact that it was two stades distant from my inn.)²²

Towards the end of the episode, shortly before the curse is lifted, a heretofore unmentioned *sûl* appears (*Kaiserchronik* 13 354), which seems to be connected to the idol. Theodosius decrees that it is to be moved only one foot, presumably to allow the demonic presence to escape from under it. This leads to the prompt restoration and subsequent conversion of the youth Astrolabe (*Kaiserchronik* 13 356–58). The emperor then orders that a new church, which is intended to replace the abandoned temple and idol, should be built around the column, which is re-dedicated to St Michael. The chronicle expands that the new church *ubertriffet ze Rôme alle di stat, | also man hiute wol kiesen mach* (“surpasses in Rome all the rest of the city | as one can certainly decide for oneself today,” *Kaiserchronik* 13 363–64).

The text remains vague as to what exactly the *sûl* is supposed to be. The idol had previously been introduced as a *pilde lussam* (“majestic idol,” *Kaiserchronik* 13 109) and has since usually been referred to as *pilde* (“image/idol” *Kaiserchronik* 13 116, 13 122, 13 123, 13 128, 13 152, 13 344) or as *statua* [...] (*Kaiserchronik* 13 336). It is sometimes further qualified as *in honore Veneris* (“in honour of Venus,” *Kaiserchronik* 13 124, 13 337). It is, however, never described as a *sûl*. Perhaps the text assumes some sort of column on which the *pilde* stood and which is now, after the idol's removal, being repurposed. But this also could be considered a representation of the medieval concept of the column-as-figure, meaning that the column is not just a base on which the image rests, but rather that the column is one with the image (Bandmann 74–75). I will proceed to explore this possibility in the final section of this article.

Examined alongside one another, the three columns of the *Kaiserchronik* share certain features that will point the way for further enquiry. Some similarities are obvious, but nevertheless significant: all three columns are free-standing and not part of a greater architectural context — meaning that they do not serve to carry weight or (re-)direct forces to the ground, but are rather atectonic. Instead of being part of a greater edifice, they serve only as the carrier for a statue, or for any other receptacles placed on top of them, that can be

charged with meaning (e.g. the container with the mortal remains of Julius Caesar, the statue and inscriptions memorialising the just verdict of Titus, or the pagan idol of Venus that is later removed). In particular, the two columns associated with Titus and with Astrolabe/Theodosius share certain intriguing features: both are said to still be present in Rome, towering over the rest of the city – as anyone who goes there today is supposed to be able to see for themselves. Both columns are primarily memorial in purpose, and both introduce a topographical element that ensures the visual commemoration of an apparently important event from the past to the present.

The Caesar column stands apart due to its fairly cursory consideration in the text, and because it is firmly anchored in the literary tradition of the twelfth century. But it still shares, with the other two columns, a connection to the memorialisation of imperial authority: the first column is a tomb and epitaph of Caesar, the second column is a testament to the justice of Titus, and the third column is a marker that, under the rule of Emperor Theodosius, the transition from pagan to Christian Rome is now complete. All three columns, therefore, straddle a temporal gulf – connecting a past sphere, to which they make reference, to a present sphere, and thereby producing some form of meaning. In the sphere of reception of the twelfth century, it is underscored that the columns (and particularly the two fictitious columns) remain present, visible, and accessible. The truth of their existence, the chronicle contends, can easily be verified by going to Rome and seeing for oneself.

It is this peculiar position in the text that turns the columns into *spolia*. They are all imagined as physical remnants of the past, still present *in situ* to project their meaning into the present day. Unlike conventional *spolia*, they are not moved out of their original (ruined) context and re-used in a new one. Rather, spoliation happens by the progress of time around them: altering their environment to such an extent that it appears as though the columns have in fact been moved. This is most obvious with the column from the Astrolabe episode, which only really appears once the idol of Venus (on which the episode has focussed thus far) is rendered powerless and subsequently removed. Afterwards, it is reintegrated into the new church which Theodosius orders to be built at the site – albeit, as the text stresses, without moving the column. With the Caesar column, it is mainly the extradiegetic context that suggests consideration as a *spolium*. The column is, in fact, an Egyptian obelisk – the Latin parallel tradition characterises it not as a column, but rather as a pyramid – and

the *Kaiserchronik*, too, seems to attempt to mark it as different, or as more than the other columns, by calling it not just *sûl*, but *irmensûl*.

III. Reading the columns

As shown above, the process of spoliation in the *Kaiserchronik* happens through the movement of time, and not through the physical movement of the *spolium*. The columns remain stable, but the chronotope around them is sufficiently recoded to make them stand out as *spolia*. While unchanged in location, they are entirely refigured in time, and therefore still meaningful to the present.

In the case of the Caesar column, the initial spoliation occurs mostly through citation from the legendary tradition surrounding Caesar's tomb (as elucidated above). Reference to this tradition stands out visibly in the *Kaiserchronik*, as something that is only present because of its recourse to an external source. As such, it jars with the rest of the episode – which makes little effort to smoothen its abrupt insertion, or to connect it to what came before or what will come after. This tendency highlights once again the parallel between citation and *spolium*. The Italian art historian Salvatore Settis views the use of *spolia*, in both material culture and text, as the leitmotif of the Middle Ages as “the period of continuity” (Kinney, “Concept” 244). Settis draws a continuous line from the perception of the ancient raw material to the selection of choice fragments, and thence to their re-insertion in new contexts (Settis 398). For him, crucially, it does not matter if these raw materials are physical remains or classical texts. Spoliation, the drawing from the physical remains of antiquity, and citation, the drawing from the classical texts of antiquity, work similarly: excerpted from their original context, both *spolia* and citation assume and transport the authority of their original whole, which is now defunct or dismembered. As Settis expresses it:

The ancient fragment, enclosed within a new system of values, immediately tends to occupy the center; but its imperfect, mutilated state invites you [...] to complete it, beginning an exegetical process [...] of conjecture. It is an almost empty center, and to fill it is not enough to squeeze from that single fragment all of the norms that it contains; it lets you make out that there are other [norms], and challenges you to find them.²³

23. Using Dale Kinney's translation: Kinney, “Concept” 244–45. For the original Italian see Settis 421–22.

Importantly, there is a production of new meaning through this process. The use of fragments, and the implied reference to a whole – both the original whole from which the *spolia* stem, and the new whole which is to be created around the *spolia* by the recipient – lead to the reassembly of what Settis calls *auctoritas*. This *auctoritas* comes with a richness and nobility unrivalled in its time, and it effectively underpins the new meanings that *spolia* take on, enriched by their new environment (Settis 385–86). In the specific case of the column as *spolium*, this *auctoritas* is that of the city of Rome, as the capital both of imperial majesty and of Christianity. This is the authority of antiquity which medieval authors were seeking when they turned to the classical texts “in caccia di spolia” (“hunting for *spolia*,” Settis 385) – much like the author of the *Kaiserchronik* when he decided to include the columns in his chronicle.

The *Kaiserchronik* thus shows itself as a parallel case, which through literary means recreates – or creates – *spolia* to bring the authority and prestige of ancient Rome, here that of Julius Caesar, forward to the present of the twelfth century. In so doing, it not only confirms the authority of the Roman *spolia*, but in fact creates it in the first place. What Bandmann and others have referred to as “historical meaning” (Bandmann 36–38)²⁴ becomes apparent here as the main interest of the *Kaiserchronik*’s framing of these columns as *spolia* – when the author of the text treats antiquity, embodied in the ruins of Rome, as “Magazzini di spolia, di frammentate ma efficaci citazioni, di topoi [...]” (“depositories of *spolia*, of fragmented but effective citations, of topoi,” Settis 385).

Situating Caesar’s mortal remains on top of a column – a *spolium* suffused by its absent original context with the *auctoritas* of the Roman past, to mark the dwelling place of the “divinity of the dead” (Bandmann 77) – highlights the conceptual seam between citation and context. This highlighting of the seam triggers Settis’s “exegetical process,” in which citation or *spolium* begin to infuse their new context with the semantic remnants of their original charge. Through the figure of Caesar, the presence of the column imparts the authority of Rome to the Germans, who have featured prominently as Caesar’s allies in the text until just before his death. The aim is not just to memorialise Caesar’s life and his deeds as exemplary elements of the reference sphere, but to reify them, to perpetuate them in stone, and to conserve them for the present-day reception sphere. The column thus functions like a bridge between the two clashing chronotopes, so that meaning generated in the ancient pagan chronotope can be

24. The “purposeful and deliberate act of reception of forms from the past,” which has to be “distinguished from repetition by habit, which lacked meaning” (Kinney, “Bearers” 141).

25. On the complex and many-layered role of Caesar, his valorisation as heroic founding figure, and his general relationship to the Germans and Germanness in the *Kaiserchronik*, see: Ohly 42–51; Thomas; Fiebig; Goerlitz, “(Un-)Wahrheit.”

26. The rich and complicated tradition around the figure of Simon Magus cannot be discussed here in greater detail. It will suffice to say that after its beginnings in the *Acts of the Apostles* (8:5–24), the figure of the Simon the arch-heretic became a prominent feature of early Christian apologetics and historiography. Among others, he featured in Irenaeus’s *Adversum Haereses*, and he plays a crucial role in the apocryphal *Acta Petri* – originally written in Greek in the late second century, but widely circulating in Latin translations throughout the Middle Ages. See Waitz. Most importantly, Simon Magus became a key character in the so-called *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions*, probably written in Syria in the third century and translated into Latin by Rufinus c. 150 years later. They were identified as the most probable source of the *Kaiserchronik* by Ohly (Ohly 74–81).

gleaned by the *Kaiserchronik*’s German medieval audience.

This is all the more important as the Caesar of the *Kaiserchronik* is not only the first emperor of the Roman Empire, but is also closely associated with the Germans, who play a crucial part in his ascension to imperial power.²⁵ By burying their key figure, Caesar, on top of an *irmensûl*, the German-speaking audience of the *Kaiserchronik* could generate political legitimacy and retro-date their own historical role and relevance within the Empire. By supplementing the reduced ancient nucleus of Caesar with elements of their own Germanness, they not only modify their estimation of their political role, prestige, and authority in the present; they also construct the Roman past as one closely associated with Germans.

This close association of the *irmensûl* with *auctoritas*, as shown above, is underpinned by the other instances in which the text uses this term. Towards the very beginning of the chronicle, when its author surveys the pagan weekdays, the text proclaims: *ûf ainer irmensiuule | stuont ain abgot ungehiure* (“on a great column | stood a monstrous idol,” *Kaiserchronik* 129–30). The *irmensûl* as a literal carrier of divine meaning is thus firmly established. When Caesar is later placed on top of one, the move from pagan idol to the mortal remains of the person whom the chronicle considers the first emperor of the Roman Empire functions as a signal. It signals a translation of the divinity associated with Roman authority from pagan deity to imperial ruler. Later still in the *Kaiserchronik*, a third *irmensûl* features: *Symon der gaukelære kom ouh dar; | ûf ain irmensûl er staich* (“Simon the magician came there too | he climbed on top of a great column,” *Kaiserchronik* 4212–13). In this case, no Roman authority is placed on top of a column, but rather it is Simon Magus – a heretic and, as such, an adversarial figure to the early paragons of Rome’s Christianisation, Peter and Paul (*Kaiserchronik* 4155–253) – who climbs on top of the column.²⁶ He is not placed there by the Romans, as the idol and later Caesar were. Rather, it is a hubristic attempt at self-empowerment by a heretic; Simon will then plunge to his death from this column when trying to demonstrate his powers of flight (*Kaiserchronik* 4243–48). This scene is placed at the very beginning of the process of Christianising the Roman Empire, which forms the backbone of the first half of the *Kaiserchronik*. Following the transformation from a figure of pagan authority to one of imperial Roman authority, this rejection of a claimant to the column – one who embodies, like no other, the pagan antagonism early Christians had to face – signposts two things: firstly, the rejection of paganism and the ultimate triumph of

Christianity – not despite, but *because* of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul at Nero’s command, directly after Simon’s death; and secondly, the unbroken association of the column with ancient Roman authority – which will continue into Christian times not despite, but because of its rejection of paganism and heresy.

In contrast with the Caesar column, the other two columns examined here – the Titus column and the Astrolabe column – are not only literary *spolia*, but are exclusively literary *spolia*: they do not depict any structures that actually exist or existed. The passages where they feature are not descriptions or textual representations of existing physical monuments, but rather stand for themselves and for whatever meaning they can transport, written as literary artifice. The Titus column seems to be entirely without precedent in the source material; and if the author of the *Kaiserchronik*, as Ohly claims (Ohly 208), really took the conversion of the Venus idol into an image of St Michael from Cassiodorus’s *Historia ecclesiastica tripartita*, he would not have found a column there *expressis verbis* either.²⁷ Instead, both columns seem to have been deliberately introduced by the author of the *Kaiserchronik*, who must have found something useful in the imagery of the ancient column. They reverberate, of course, in the rich environment of actual Roman columns, both in Rome and beyond the city, where they were exported as *spolia*, and they benefit from a deeply-rooted cultural association of columns with Romanness (Kinney, “Signifiers” 158–62; Kinney, “Discourse” 182–99).²⁸ And of course, they also benefit from the availability of a rich tradition of legends associated with Roman columns.²⁹ As Dale Kinney points out: “To treat the discourse on columns is therefore to confront, *in nuce*, the medieval discourse of *romanitas* and the problem of determining when notions of ‘Romanness’ point to the ancient capital on the Tiber and when they range farther afield: materially throughout the Roman centres of Europe and Britain or in the realm of mytho-historical imagination” (Kinney, “Discourse” 183). Settis terms this process of productive reception the “two-fold narration” of Rome after its fall: one narration of Rome itself, its destruction and loss, and a different one of its redeployment and relocation in new and varied contexts (Settis 386).

After columns had ceased to be produced in the Carolingian era, Rome was perceived to be the only possible point of origin of all columns. Their connection to foreign geographies, which had made their erection in Rome a veritable map of the Empire, had been all but forgotten (Kinney, “Discourse” 192–93, 198–99). Through their connection to Romanness, *spolia* become vehicles for what Bandmann

27. See Cassiodorus, Cap. 19:

“Insignis itaque locus ex illo tempore claruit peregrinis et urbicis, ubi olim quidem Vesta colebatur, postea vero ecclesia facta est. Qui locus nunc Michahelium nuncupatur in dextra positus parte navigantium a Ponto ad Constantinopolim, distans ab ea navigio quidem stadiis fere triginta et quinque, per terram vero circueuntibus omnem sinum usque ad septuaginta et amplius tenditur.”

28. As Kinney puts it: “Twelfth-century Rome must have been full of columns ‘standing alone’, without capital, supporting nothing, or not standing at all, lying prone or propped up by debris. These columns were themselves morphological markers of the ruinscape, diachronic signifiers of buildings that once had been [...]” (Kinney, “Signifiers” 161).

29. See the examples from the *Mirabilia* and the *Narracio* above, but obviously the *Kaiserchronik* itself too is a rich trove of Roman legends.

calls “historical meaning” (Bandmann 36–38). Historical meaning is underpinned by the “phenomenon of building forms being received over vast spatial and temporal distances, even occasionally from completely alien cultures” (Bandmann 36–37) – though not for aesthetic reasons, but rather “because of the way they had been employed in the past by patrons into whose line of succession certain new patrons now wished to enter by taking up those forms and employing them in new contexts” (Bandmann 37). Moreover, historical meaning is

primarily bound up with the official architecture of those people and groups in society that wish to be considered the heirs of earlier communities. It could not appear in human history until the moment when the consciousness of transience awoke and with that the necessity to overcome it. (Bandmann 38)

A parallel case from architectural history, where physical *spolia* are used to secure the desired historical meaning of the past for the present, can illustrate the strategy used here in the *Kaiserchronik*. Wolfgang Götz explains the re-use of ancient porphyry columns in the choir of the cathedral of Magdeburg (during its reconstruction in the thirteenth century) not as a puzzling interruption of the Gothic elevations of the choir, but rather as “embodiments of the authority of their place of origin.” In the understanding of the time, the re-use of the columns connected the present building and its patron back to both the first cathedral – built in the tenth century by Emperor Otto I – and, moreover, to imperial Rome, from where Otto had first imported the columns (Götz 97–120). The possibility of embedding his medieval chronicle in this sense of Roman continuity is exactly what prompts the author of the *Kaiserchronik* to include these columns, in the same way the architects of the Magdeburg Cathedral did in their building.

The implicit transmission of historical meaning between clashing chronotopes, as we have seen in the Caesar column, is yet more overt in the Titus column, where the word *ienoch*, in the sense of “still” (and not “anyway,” as it is sometimes used), explicitly signals continuity (Lexner, “ie-noch” 1415–16):

er hiez die aitgenôzze vâhen
unt alle di an dem râte mit in wâren,
er hiez si vuoren ûf den hof –
daz urkunde ist ze Rôme ienoh –,
mit rehter urtaile

Rômære algemaine

hiez er in diu houbet abslahen. (*Kaiserchronik* 5521–27)

(He had the conspirators arrested
and all who had been in on the plot.
He had them brought to court –
the record is still in Rome –
[and] by the just verdict
of all the Romans,
had them beheaded.)

The bridge between the medieval Christian chronotope of the present and the ancient pagan chronotope of the past, marked by *ienoch*, is *urkunde* – a word spanning a broad semantic field from “sign,” “record,” or “proof,” via “argument” to “testimony” and even “testament” (Lexer, “ur-künde, -kunde” 2006). Thus the combined column-as-figure and column-as-marker configuration of the Titus column unfolds its full semantic potential. This testimony is drawn from the past justice of the pagan Titus, but the historical meaning, which is built on this source of *auctoritas*, is directed at the present-day German and Christian audience of the *Kaiserchronik*. The key point, conveyed by the testimony from the past to the present, is the way Titus punishes his assailants *mit rechter urtaile* (by just verdict, *Kaiserchronik* 5525).

The fact that the column is an imagined *spolium*, which does not actually exist in the sphere of reference, does not diminish its capacity to affect the sphere of reception. Rather, it allows the exemplarity of the pagan emperor to be more readily appropriated. The chronicle’s author, as agent of *allelopoiesis*, and the audience of the *Kaiserchronik* might well have thought it to be an actual Roman site. However, it becomes clear that the launching-point for this particular enquiry into the Roman past is not puzzlement at the present physical monument – “What kind of column is this?” – but something else. The text constructs it not with an interest in explaining a phenomenon of the chronotopical past, but rather to imbue a historical example with the *auctoritas* of that past, for the benefit of the present. The Roman past as a chronotopical reference sphere is constructed as a repository for templates of *auctoritas*. The differently-coded chronotopical medieval present is modified by the innovation of the agent who inserts an imagined *spolium* for the benefit of the present-day audience. The author or compiler of the *Kaiserchronik* aims to appropriate the enduring historical exemplarity of the event memorialised by the monument: the justice of Titus. As such, it shines through the

centuries not as an actual monument, but as a textual anchor of the absoluteness of Titus's exemplarity. It becomes unchangeable in its validity and formative for both chronotopes:

daz wart umbe daz getân –
 sô wir das buoch hôren sagen –
 swer das zaichen iemer dâ ersæhe,
 daz er bilde der bî næme. (*Kaiserchronik* 5543–46)

(This was done,
 as we hear the book tell,
 so that whoever sees the sign
 will always take it as an example.)

Now the *Kaiserchronik* switches into explanatory mode – not, however, looking back from the present, but as part of a reciprocal movement the other way round: looking forward from the diegetic past towards the present of the author and the audience. Everyone in the future – *wir* (“we”) – should *iemer* (“always”) benefit from the *zaichen* (“sign”) of Titus's justice, from which they might *bilde nemen* (“take an example”). The present finds meaning in the past, and the past derives meaning from the present.

Finally, in order to grasp the curious column appearing at the end of the Astrolabe passage within the Theodosius episode, we must consider the wider context of the passage and the passage's situation within the chronicle as a whole. At the beginning of the episode, Astrolabe was introduced as one of two obdurately pagan brothers who have little regard for their own salvation, actively strive to honour the pagan gods, and are deaf to the emperor's personal pleas to renounce their erroneous faith (*Kaiserchronik* 13 086–100). Now that – thanks to the cunning of the priest Eusebius, who is also well-versed in the dark arts (*Kaiserchronik* 13 218) – Astrolabe has been saved from the devil's entrapment by the idol and its ring (*Kaiserchronik* 13 125–30), the youth becomes Christian, together with all the other pagans who are present (*Kaiserchronik* 13 365–68).

The passage marks a clear shift in the make-up of the world of the *Kaiserchronik*. Over several episodes, the text signposts the transition of the Roman pagan empire into a Christian empire. This happens through a string of escalating encounters between pagan Roman emperors like Tiberius, Faustianus, or Decius and missionary Christian figures such as Veronica, St Peter, and Emperor Philip (*Kaiserchronik* 671–1114, 1219–4082, 6097–450). Pivotal in this regard is the Con-

stantine episode (*Kaiserchronik* 7806–10 633), which marks the Christianisation of Emperor Constantine through his encounter with Pope Silvester, followed by a great public disputation between Silvester and twelve pagan wise men. Silvester obviously wins this disputation and thousands of pagans, including the emperor's mother Helena, accept Christianity as their new creed. In an act of coequal legislation, which stretches over seven days and is deliberately modelled to mirror the seven days of the pagan week from the beginning of the *Kaiserchronik*, pope and emperor recode and re-semanticise the religious and political makeup of the Roman Empire. From this point onwards, the Romans – as a political collective – are implied and assumed to be Christians. The religious default of the Roman world has switched to a Christian one, and the lexemes 'Romans' and 'Christians' are now used interchangeably.

By the time of Theodosius (*Kaiserchronik* 13 067–650), several emperor episodes later, only a minority of Romans within the Empire remain pagan. The qualitative shift from a pagan chronotope of the Empire to a Christian chronotope makes for an interesting clash between the chronicle's form and its content: as argued above, while the episodic form of the *Kaiserchronik* allows for temporal distance, it does not account for the qualitative changes that separate the chronicle's present from its narrated time. These happen on the level of content, and have to be overtly signposted to counteract the equalising and quantifying tendencies of the episode framework. The inclusion of columns by the *Kaiserchronik*'s author, in both the Astrolabe and Titus narratives, fulfils this purpose.

To better understand this claim, it is necessary to undertake a closer examination of the circumstances of Astrolabe's salvation through the magical intervention of the priest Eusebius. In order to save Astrolabe from his predicament, Eusebius conjures a devil and follows him into a distant hellscape (*Kaiserchronik* 13 303: *in aines tiefen moses grunt* ["to the bottom of a deep sea"]) where other devils guard Astrolabe's ring. The curse that ravages Astrolabe is tied to the devils' control over this ring, which Astrolabe had given to the statue of Venus in a form of a mock-engagement to seal his unflinching love to the pagan idol. In this distant hellscape, Eusebius extorts from the devils the release of the ring, and of information crucial to redeem Astrolabe (*Kaiserchronik* 13 225–346).

To Eusebius's question *von welhen dingen | daz aller êrist kôme, | daz dem jungelinge missescæhe* ("to reveal who was responsible | for the youth's misfortune | and whether he had s anything to do with

it,” *Kaiserchronik* 13 332–34), the distraught devil – much to his chagrin – has little choice but to answer, as Eusebius is commanding him *in verbo domini* (*Kaiserchronik* 13 314). As the devil admits, Astrolabe’s initial enthrallment was not due to the statue itself having any kind of divine or magical powers, but was solely due to a miraculous root buried beneath it: *di wile di wurze dar under ligent. | swer daz pilde oben an sihet, | der muoz iemer minnen* (“no one who sees the statue above | can avoid loving it forever, | as long as the herbs are underneath it,” *Kaiserchronik* 13 343–45). Everything that later transpired was devised by the devils using Astrolabe’s cursed ring. This admission on the devil’s part reimagines, in a radical euhemeristic reduction, the entire religious service of the pagans as the effect of a root’s bewitching qualities. The text gives no further indication as to whether they are natural or magical, but the result remains the same: paganism is exposed as a fraud, never related to any true gods to begin with. The cosmological forces in the background have always been the same and remain unchanged: God and the devils. In Astrolabe’s case, those devils deployed one of the pagan illusions he was so drawn to in order to corrupt his soul. The clash of the ancient pagan chronotope with the Christian medieval chronotope is thus resolved: the content of the chronicle becomes much more easily reconcilable with the pattern suggested by its form and structure. Everything remains the same: the cosmological powers driving the world in both chronotopes, and moving it along from the first chronotope to the second, have always been the same; only a continuum of countable years separates the present from the past, and no qualitative change actually happens. What has always been true is now only being asserted for the first time, through Christianity; and it is therefore possible to semanticise the emerging new chronotope as explicitly Christian.

But this resolution – exposing the cosmological continuities tying the two chronotopes together – is only half of the passage’s deft narrative negotiation of the apparent clash between the two. The other half is the sudden appearance of the *sûl*, directly after the spell of the idol of Venus is broken. The chronicle cannot allow for a vacuum to appear where the pagan idol used to be, so it introduces a by now well-established and enduring symbol, suffused with ancient Roman *auctoritas*, but also apt for Christian re-signification: a column, which, as a type of figure, still carries the overlapping connotations of the idol placed atop a column at the beginning of the chronicle, of the numinous presence of the ashes of Julius Caesar, and of the trans-temporal exemplarity of Emperor Titus. Here the *Kaiserchro-*

nik uses the *spolium* as a “remedy for discontinuity” (Nagel and Wood 183), as it relies on its capacity to signal two seemingly contradictory circumstances at the same time.

By once more highlighting the seam between *spolium* and new context, the text acknowledges that the Empire as a temporal entity had been unstable in its religious makeup, but has now been fixed and stands stable in its Roman identity, despite its religious re-coding (Nagel and Wood 183). To achieve this, the chronicle resorts for the first time to a semantic potential created by the productive overlap of the column-as-figure and the column as *spolium*, which it has thus far – quite deliberately – avoided: the signification of triumphalist supersession. The many-layered semantic charge of the column, accumulated throughout the chronicle up to this point, is now explicitly extended by dedicating it to St Michael:

Do rewarf der briester Eusèbius,
daz der bâbes Ignâtius
wihete die sùl ze èren
dem guoten sante Michahèle. (*Kaiserchronik* 13 359–62)

(Then the priest Eusebius got
Pope Ignatius
to consecrate the pillar in honour of
good Saint Michael.)

Consequently, the continuous and enduring presence, visibility, and magnificence of the column have to be underscored: *si ubertriffet ze Rôme alle di stat | als man hiute wol kiesen mah* (“It towers over the whole city of Rome, | and can still be clearly seen today,” *Kaiserchronik* 13 363–64).

This leads to the second circumstance signalled by the column as *spolium*: by replacing the idol not with a vacuum, but with a *spolium* – which is then re-dedicated and re-semanticised as a religious artefact – the column again reaches back through time as a bridge, establishing an “effective reverential relationship to much older buildings” (Nagel and Wood 183). It allows Roman prestige, and the *auctoritas* tied to those physical structures, to cross the bridge between the two chronotopes, while at the same time neutralising their pagan connotations. This process is expanded by the encasing of the column within a new church building (*Kaiserchronik* 13 351–52). The column becomes the enshrined relic, and the seam between *spolium* and new environment is again foregrounded to start the process of exegesis. Importantly, its encasement in the new ecclesiastical build-

ing not only serves as the enshrinement for a precious artefact with desirable connotations like *auctoritas*, *romanitas*, and political pedigree, but also serves as an effective containment for its less desirable connotations, like paganism, idolatry, and polytheism.

These findings are supported by the results of Mierke's 2019 study. Mierke examines edifices and buildings in the *Kaiserchronik* and – from a different perspective and with a very different toolkit – comes to similar conclusions. Her focus is on the relationship of architecture and power in the text, and she demonstrates quite convincingly that here, too, the processes of translation and renovation are so configured as to enable the present to benefit from the “alte Herrschaftsgewalt” (“old power of rulership,” Mierke 61) of the past, and to continue the existence of the Roman Empire:

Rom wird nicht abgelöst, sondern unter christlicher Prämisse erneuert. Dies ist an die Idee der Etablierung einer neuen Ordnung gebunden, die ihre Geltung durch die Bindung an die Vergangenheit behauptet. [...] Die magischen Steine und sprechenden Säulen müssen quasi als überwunden abqualifiziert werden, um aus ihrer Substanz etwas Neues zu begründen, das länger anhält. (Mierke 61–62)

(Rome is not replaced, but renewed under Christian conditions. This is tied to the establishment of a new order, which claims its validity through its connection to the past. [...] The magic stones and speaking columns must be dismissed as surmounted, in order to create something new from their material, which will last longer.)

The columns examined here work to the same purpose, but do so in a different way. Because of their *in nuce romanitas*, where the chronicle uses columns, it ultimately emphasises continuity far more strongly than Mierke's examples, which work equally with “Überwindung” (“overcoming”). Only where the association of the columns with ancient paganism becomes too noticeable does a similar strategy of overcoming or surmounting need to be pursued – as is apparent in the Astrolabe example.

Replacing a pagan idol with a column that is subsequently Christianised and encased in a Christian building therefore achieves two things. First, it marks the final and ultimate Christianisation of the Empire, which is now all but concluded within the *Kaiserchronik* and the rule of Emperor Theodosius. Second, it also claims the semantic

potential, and the historical meaning and *auctoritas* of the column, for the new Christian parameters. These parameters organise the very present of the reception sphere of the text, again building a semantic bridge between the two chronotopes of the *Kaiserchronik*. By using the column as a meaningful *spolium*, the *Kaiserchronik* can signify the religious inversion of the Empire, while still maintaining its claim to the imperial *auctoritas* of ancient Rome.

IV. Conclusion

The column provides the author of the *Kaiserchronik* with a potent symbol. It carries the *auctoritas* of both the imperial Rome of antiquity and of the Christian Rome of the martyrs. The author of the *Kaiserchronik* utilises columns like *spolia* to access this *auctoritas*, in order to connect the two sometimes clashing chronotopes of his text: pagan antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages. Within the text, the process of spoliation is not one of physical removal or recovery, followed by transport and re-use or re-insertion, but is rather a process of citation. Much as a citation can be prised from its original text and inserted into a new context to generate new meaning, so the column can be moved through a process of textual spoliation from a chronotopical ancient reference sphere to a chronotopical medieval reception sphere. With this movement between chronotopes, the despoiled column transforms both spheres: by suggesting the faded or defunct symbolism which used to be connected to it – such as *romannitas*, imperial authority, or political legitimacy – the ancient column, reinserted into a medieval context, imbues this symbolism onto the new elements which the *Kaiserchronik* now adds – such as Germanness, imperial continuity, or political prestige. This in turn reinforces and perpetuates the *auctoritas* of the *spolia*, which made them so attractive to the author to begin with. The artistry and innovation of the *Kaiserchronik*'s author is shown in the fact that the most interesting of these columns are not actual citations from a pre-existing tradition, but rather original inventions – used as imagined *spolia* akin to literary citations, benefitting from the same mechanics, drawing from the same pool of semiotic potential, and included at strategic positions within the text. The *Kaiserchronik*'s episodic paradigm, which projects an idea of continuous and unchanging Romanness, capitalises on this special meaning of columns to fortify and assert itself. On the one hand, passages such as the Astrolabe story, which foregrounds

the shift from pagan polytheism to Christianity, actualise the historical qualitative difference between its two chronotopes. On the other hand, passages like the Titus episode explicitly make the historical exemplarity of a pagan Roman available for the twelfth-century Christian present.

Through the adept use of the column as a carrier of meaning from one chronotope into the next, the author of the *Kaiserchronik* builds a rich and coherent image of the ancient Roman past, whilst at the same time providing a vivid and productive space for deliberation about his German audience's twelfth-century present. Connected through time by columns as meaningful *spolia*, antiquity and the Middle Ages emerge intertwined as mutually semanticising chronotopes, which – for all their differences, particularly in religious make-up – can still infuse each other with new meaning.³⁰

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