

ABSTRACT.

Architectural motifs such as arches, portals, aedicules and *fastigia* constitute some of the most frequent and visually prominent features of Late Roman and Early Byzantine art. Forming part of Roman commemorative tradition from the earliest times, they chiefly appear in works celebrating events of a transitional or cyclic character in the lives of individuals and of the state, such as betrothals, deaths, victories, official and imperial accessions, and anniversaries. Along with a range of transcendence symbols with which they are regularly combined, the architectural motifs become systematically employed as tools for dignifying, immortalising and ‘apotheosising’ subjectmatter in the figural arts of the late antique period. Structural analyses of their thematic correlations, application patterns, intercontextual migrations and Christian adaptations may reveal the mechanisms and purposes – historical, religious, social – behind their intensified use, and behind the symbolisation of art in general, in this transformative last phase of the Roman empire.