



HONESTIORES OG HUMILIORES
KUNST OG SOCIAL IDENTITET I SENANTIKKEN

GÆSTEFORLÆSNING

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” INTERPRETATIONS OF RUIN AND ENTROPY
IN LATE ANTIQUITY: A CHAPTER IN THE CULTURAL
HISTORY OF DESTRUCTION”

Edward Gibbon famously claimed that he was roused to compose his history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire whilst listening to vespers amongst the ruins of Rome’s Capitoline temple, converted to function as a Christian church. His image may well be a poeticism, but since then it has become almost a superficial quintessence of late antique culture: a period of transformation from pagan into Christian, when the material and cultural vestiges of the former are reborn as the nucleus of the latter. Yet this traditional approach to late antique society continues to neglect the pivot upon which this image turns: the ruin itself, as a monument in the past, both in its material reality, and its cultural construction. Entropy and ruination are universal natural processes, but their cultural values and the social meanings attached to them are always culturally contingent and historically specific: different societies have different ideas about, and images of, the role of ruins in their *imago mundi*. This paper will examine some interpretations of both ruins themselves, and the processes of destruction that created them, in the late antique world, and explore some of the implications of this for understanding the role that the concept of ruination played in late antique cultural rhetoric.

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