ON TRAJAN’S COLUMN: READINGS, FUNCTIONS
AND SYMBOLISM ¹

Tom Stevenson

Most art history textbooks treat ‘Trajan’s Column’ by concentrating on
the details of the amazing helical frieze which envelopes the
monument.² In this paper I want initially to support those scholars who argue
that the problems involved in viewing the frieze in detail were probably
insurmountable in ancient times, so that we should re-evaluate our
conventional approach (Part I below). Next, the aim is to reassess the
Column’s functions as one way of approaching the meanings it would have
had for individual viewers (Part II) Finally, I would like to make a few
points about the Column as a symbol of Trajan’s relationship with the Senate
and People of Rome, and as a symbol of Roman power for later generations
(Part III).

It is widely recognized that the Column had a number of functions, though
there remains a slight tendency to treat it as a static monument, the product of
a single phase of creation, and to enquire about the ‘original’ intentions of
figures like Apollodorus of Damascus or Trajan, as though these would
pinpoint the original or primary or definitive function or set of functions.³ It
is quite legitimate to be interested in the views of those responsible for the
Column’s construction, but the effect of such an approach is to counteract,
rather than allow for, change over time. It would be better to accept the
Column as a dynamic, evolving monument, and to contemplate that ancient
viewers, while they may have been concerned with the question of ‘original’
intentions, were more affected by the Column as it featured in their personal
experience. It seems to have had multiple and evolving functions from the
beginning, even if the message of triumphal victory over the Dacians comes
through loud and clear. Consequently, we should perhaps contemplate sets of
meanings rather than a single or definitive, prescribed meaning. There has
been a related tendency to conflate the Column and its frieze into a ‘relief
column’.⁴ Scholars are now mindful of the need to separate as much as to

---

¹ I would like to thank Marcus Wilson for his help with a preliminary draft of this paper
Remaining errors are of course my own
² Examples are the widely used textbooks of Hannestad 1988, 154-67, and Ramage and
Ramage 2000, chap 6
³ Claridge 1993, 5 and 22, refers to our tendency to see the Column as one monument with
three functions - a marker of height, a tomb, and a monument commemorating Trajan’s
victories in Dacia (cf. Lepper and Freer 1988, 19-26). In her view it is two distinct
monuments, one Trajanic and one Hadrianic, separated in time by about 10-15 years.
⁴ Hannestad 1988, 153.
combine them. The processes of construction and appreciation have turned out to be more complicated, ambivalent and dynamic than traditional approaches allow for, and it is preferable to think in terms of multiple functions and meanings evolving over time through various alterations to the Column and/or the buildings around it. There has been a fair amount of debate on the degree to which Hadrian, Trajan’s successor, was responsible for changes to the Column, especially the addition of the relief frieze, and hence for the funerary and other functions that it might have served. Hadrian seems to have converted the Column into a prime symbol of Trajan’s deification, though I am not persuaded that he added the relief frieze to what had been a plain building. Even so, Hadrian’s involvement speaks in favour of the Column as process rather than product and compels us not to overlook the variety of responses which were always possible and which would continue to affect the Column into the future. The Column that we see today is hardly a momentary creation, and at the very least recent scholarship has proved that the period from c.AD 112-128 was one of energetic activity in the northern part of Trajan’s Forum, on and around the Column. Yet a rich stock of functions and meanings continued to develop over time.

I.

The Visibility of the Frieze.

One topic that needs to be given attention early on is the visibility of the frieze, for it is highly unlikely that the Column functioned as a means to spread propaganda through detailed readings of the frieze. Such detailed scrutiny was probably impossible.

The fact that the sculptors went to such lengths to depict detail in the frieze has excited numerous scholars, who have searched hard for realistic treatments of topography, military equipment, historical events and persons, approaching the frieze with varying degrees of caution as an historical record akin to a modern newsreel or film. The consensus now is that forensic

---

5 That Hadrian added the frieze is the thesis of Claridge 1993, 5-22. It has begun to acquire a reasonable following, e.g. Wilson Jones 1993, 23: ‘the relief was probably added by Hadrian after 118’; Elsner 1998, 68 fig 36: ‘The frieze may have been carved after Trajan’s death as part of the Hadrianic programme to honour the deceased emperor.’ Griffin 2000, 98 n 96, and Packer 1994, 163-82, allow the possibility that Hadrian was responsible for the frieze, though Packer feels that he operated according to a master plan of Trajanic date.

6 E.g. Pollen 1874; Stuart Jones 1910; Davies 1917; Davies 1920; Rossi 1971, esp. 14-19; Lepper and Frere 1988, 6, 28-9. Coulston 1990, 293, gives a succinct outline of the dangers. Bennett 1997, 85-103, employs the frieze heavily in his account of the Dacian
realism was not a major aim of the sculptors, who probably did not anticipate close scrutiny along these lines.\footnote{Richmond 1982, 7-42, establishes this point through close comparison with archaeological evidence; cf. Brilliant 1984, 101: 'The Column is the work of 'artists rather than battlefield reporters'; Hannestad 1988, 158: 'the reliefs ... do not provide sculptural photographs of the war'; Coulston 1989; Coulston 1990, 293-4; Claridge 1993, 22.} Beard and Henderson refer to 'the maddening helix of sculpture wound 24 times round the shaft from base to parapet ... [which forms] a sustained narrative just over 200 metres in length, with 2,639 figures (including 59 Trajans!) in over 150 scenes.'\footnote{Beard and Henderson 2001, 180-1; cf. Elsner 1998, 68 fig 36: 'The frieze on the shaft is a helix of 23 whirls, unfolding from bottom to top and containing over 2,500 figures.'} Only 'maddening', it should be said, if you were stubbornly determined to follow every unfolding scene from ground level. Such immense detail could only be appreciated slowly in this case, by someone prepared to circumambulate the Column, confined within the narrow portico which surrounded it (16 x 23 m.), peering ever upwards at an awkward angle, often into strong sunlight. It seems unlikely that this was feasible;\footnote{Brilliant 1984, 90-4: 'Despite the grand scale of the concept and the height of the column, the numerous, small figures were progressively difficult to see clearly, even if the low relief surface was once elaborately painted. Neither could they be easily comprehended from close by, because the proximity of the column to the libraries and to the Basilica Ulpia did not allow the viewer to step back sufficiently to gain a consistent, coherent perspective of the whole. Furthermore, the helical course of the relief band made it practically impossible to follow the path of the relief without losing one's place, especially as the figures became indistinct at the sides of the visual field. And it was and still is very difficult to understand the scenes in the higher elevations of the helix without undergoing the most taxing gyrations, complicated by lapses of memory, which conceal the narrative trail'; Settis 1988, 86-7 ('la difficoltà quasi insormontabile di lettura'), 202-5; Richardson 1992, 177: 'Everything suggests that once the column had been installed in this location the narrative value of the reliefs was considered unimportant'; Packer 1995, 353: '[The peristyle around the Column] allowed clear views of only the monumental base'; Elsner 1998, 158: 'It is the ultimate example of a biographical memorial, tracing - indeed, mythologizing - the heroic battles and deeds of its protagonist in a miniature detail which it is unlikely any viewer could have followed'; Beard and Henderson 2001, 180: 'the maddening helix of sculpture ... most of which fades into an indistinguishable blur from ground level. ... Were ancient viewers supposed to follow the story of Trajan's Dacian Wars round and round the column, in a dizzying helical spin?'} An alternative idea is that a viewer might have been able to remain in one spot, resist the forward momentum of the narrative, and detect formalized compositions in a number of particularly significant scenes and poses that...
can be linked vertically, up and down the Column, across the bands.\textsuperscript{11} It seems that a viewer would have been best advised to attempt this task from the north, either from a projection of the Basilica Ulpia or from the steps of the Temple of Deified Trajan (Divus Traianus).\textsuperscript{12} Then, of course, the two-storey Greek and Latin Libraries on either side of the Column must have afforded opportunities for stationary viewing.\textsuperscript{13} Yet it would only have been a partial view, and even though it is certainly true that imperial relief sculpture favours formalized scenes (of, for example, address, sacrifice, battle, treatment of captives, and acceptance of surrender), and that viewers could therefore be expected to think in terms of them, the 'particularly significant scenes' are by no means objectively determined and repeated poses are perhaps not so much 'significant' as understandable, given the formulaic nature of the art. Moreover, the nagging problem of visibility from anything further than a few metres away persists. Consequently, this alternative approach was fraught with difficulty too, even if paint lent assistance and features like military standards and the emperor's cuirass might have been gilded.\textsuperscript{14}

It certainly must have helped that the relief band grows slightly in width from 0.9 m. at the bottom to 1.25 m. at the top, a fact which indicates that visibility was to some degree a matter of importance. Yet the Column of Marcus Aurelius carries a frieze of the Marcomannic wars of the 170s which is designed in fewer bands (1.24 m. wide) and cut in much deeper relief.\textsuperscript{15} This could be a negative comment on the visibility of its model, the frieze of the

\textsuperscript{11} Brilliant 1984, 90-108; on 104 he says that 'the master of Trajan's Column invented the helical composition as an integrating medium' between the conflicting requirements of continuous narrative and symbolic correspondence; cf. Settis 1988, 182-8, 234, 237-8. For summaries of what is involved, see Coulston 1990, 295-300; Claridge 1998, 167-8; Beard and Henderson 2001, 181 fig 126

\textsuperscript{12} Brilliant 1984, 100; Packer 1994, 177: 'Enclosed within its portico, the Column of Trajan was fully visible only from the north terrace of the Basilica Ulpia or the steps of the Temple'; Claridge 1998, 167: '[The front steps of the temple] probably provided the best view of the shaft.'

\textsuperscript{13} Bennett 1997, 156, thinks that the upper galleries of the Libraries must have incorporated an external ambulatory, 'from where a relatively unimpeded view of the frieze was possible'. The idea seems wishful thinking and is archaeologically unattested. Moreover, says Richardson 1992, 177, 'the advantage would be only slight'.

\textsuperscript{14} Coulston 1990, 304, thinks that such gilding would have meant that 'Trajan's location and role would have caught the viewer's attention, even on the highest spirals'. This appears to conflict somewhat with the implications of his discussion on 295-300; plus, there were 59 Trajans. Most scholars believe that the reliefs were painted and gilded, e.g. Rossi 1971, 18; Brilliant 1984, 106; Coulston 1990, 298, 303-5. Richardson 1992, 177, leaves the matter open.

\textsuperscript{15} Elsner 1998, 69 fig 37. For more detail on the Aurelius Column, see Becatti 1960; Brilliant 1984, 112-15; Kleiner 1992, 295-301 (with bibliography); Claridge 1998, 193-8
Trajan Column, though neither monument is really viewer-friendly. You would choose a different type of frieze if you were serious about detailed scrutiny. In the end, viewing of the frieze in sufficient detail to recapitulate the story, whether from the ground or from some elevated stationary spot, must have presented insuperable difficulties in ancient times. The use of scaffolds to study the frieze, the production of casts, and modern photographic techniques are the crucial developments that have permitted scrutiny in detail.\(^{16}\)

II.

If close viewing of the frieze was not possible, we need to think beyond its details when considering the functions of the Column in the ages of Trajan, Hadrian, and beyond. It was a complex monument with multiple, changing and enigmatic functions. Over time it appears to have acquired a stock of meanings that were selected from, remembered, forgotten, and added to. We should also think in terms of a variety of viewers, differentiated not just by the passage of time but also by age, gender, class, profession, race, and so on.\(^{17}\) The Column and its frieze have been legitimately separated in recent scholarship, but their close association is manifest. They were one entity to me as an undergraduate; the Column was the vehicle for the frieze, and together they formed one amazing display of Roman power. It did not occur that they might have had different functions, different possibilities for interpretation, different origins, and so on. Surely limited understanding of this kind must apply to some of the ‘functions’ distinguished below. Not all viewers would have been aware of them or would have perceived them in exactly the same way. People would have asked questions, and their experience would perhaps have been awe-inspiring, stimulating and frustrating by turns, in proportion to factors such as education and life experience. One fundamental point to make is about the fallacy of conceiving of a generic ‘viewer’. Another is that substantial excavations are sorely needed in the northern part of Trajan’s Forum, where the Temple of Deified Trajan has been identified but little investigated under the foundations of the late 16th Century Palazzo Valentini.


\(^{17}\) Note that Fehr 1985-6 and Settis 1991 attempt such differentiation.
1. A Triumphant (Victory) Monument.

In 1988, Lepper and Frere took their cue from the Column’s inscription (see below) and reflected general perceptions when they discussed the Column’s functions in the following order: a marker of height, a tomb, and a monument commemorating Trajan’s victories in Dacia.\textsuperscript{18} However, it would probably be better to begin with the concept of military victory and contemplate the Column as a monument commemorating triumph over the Dacians. This has the best claim to being its primary function - never the only function, always governed by the perceptions of the individual viewer, and always subject to change. There is a variety of evidence in support of this view, especially the overall form and decoration of Trajan’s Forum, the form and decoration of the Column itself, and the Column’s construction dates, which may be linked with Trajan’s triumphs over the Dacians. The frieze, it should be stressed, fits in well with this thesis.

Victory over the Dacians is the primary message of the sculptural programme of Trajan’s Forum, the primary message (if you like) of Trajanic planning.\textsuperscript{19} The place was jam-packed with triumphant images of Trajan, on foot and on horseback, along with defeated Dacians, Victories and laurels, triumphal chariots, Roman generals and soldiers in stirring pose, and so on (see further under ‘Axis-marker’ below). According to Aulus Gellius (Gell. NA 13.25.1-3),

‘All along the roof of the colonnades of Trajan’s Forum are placed gilded statues of horses and representations of military standards, and underneath is written “from the spoils of war” (EX MANVBIIS).’

The reliefs on the base of the Column exhibit piles of Dacian arms and armour, surmounted by garlands carried in the claws of four eagles;\textsuperscript{20} the torus of the base is carved in the form of a victor’s laurel wreath. The statue atop the Column showed Trajan as a victorious general.

As is well known, the frieze depicts Trajan’s two campaigns in Dacia, which were fought between 101-2 and 105-6.\textsuperscript{21} This indicates at the very least that the frieze was planned after the completion of these two campaigns. If it was planned and carved after Trajan’s death, why were the later Parthian campaigns not included? Trajan was honoured with a posthumous triumph

\textsuperscript{18} Lepper and Frere 1988, 19-26.
\textsuperscript{19} For the entire Forum of Trajan as a victory monument, see Packer 1994, 178-9; Bennett 1997, 158; Davies 1997, 61-2.
\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Wilson Jones 1993, 33: ‘The importance of this motif is underlined by the fact that the eagles are greatly exaggerated on most coin representations.’
\textsuperscript{21} For discussion of these dates, see Lepper and Frere 1988, 242-3.
over the Parthians, and is named Parthicus on inscriptions of Hadrianic date, indicating that his Parthian victories were indeed honoured in that period. Its single-minded concentration upon victory in Dacia should make it more difficult to accept the frieze as a product of the age of Hadrian, especially when the Column’s base perpetuates this specific context of victory too. In these circumstances, we should look first of all at Trajan’s triumphs of 102 and 107 over the Dacians and ask whether the Column makes sense as a monument to mark either of those occasions. Of course, there was a tradition stretching back to the republican period of triumphal column-monuments which bore the statue of a triumphator on top. In very general terms, Trajan’s Column is similar to these republican monuments, but it is also markedly different in size and elaboration, in having a chamber in its base, and in its subsequent use as a tomb. How strongly can a case be made for the Column being a triumphal victory monument at first instance, meant to mark one of the emperor’s triumphs? Claridge links the Column’s decoration with Trajan’s triumph of 102 (when he took the title Dacicus: Dio 68.10.2) and wonders whether, in line with republican tradition, the emperor made a vow to build his Forum ex manubis and decided that votive spoils would be placed in the chamber in the Column’s base in commemoration of this. This thesis tallies well with the decoration of the base; the decoration of the shaft, however, since it represents both Dacian campaigns, tends to imply a decision made in the wake of the triumph of 107. The Column-as-a-building might have been appropriate in the wake of either triumph; the frieze could really only follow the triumph of 107 and there are strong indications of relevant activity around this time.

Even if some construction work in the area of Trajan’s Forum may be attributed to the reign of Domitian (Fig.1), it seems that work was

---

22 The triumph: Birley 2000, 135. For the title Parthicus, see the two identical inscriptions from the Temple of Deified Trajan, which was dedicated under Hadrian: CIL VI, 966 = 31215 = ILS 306; Smallwood 1966, no 141.

23 There is explicit evidence for the triumph of 102, celebrated in the last days of December, at which Trajan took the title Dacicus: Dio 68.10.2; Griffin 2000, 109 n.166, 112. A triumph in 107 can reasonably be inferred from Dio 68.15.1 (magnificent spectacles to mark Trajan’s return in 107). Lepper and Frere 1988, 242-3, and Griffin 2000, 109, show that Trajan’s fifth and sixth salutations as imperator were added between summer 105 and summer 107. The triumph of 118 (Griffin 2000, 135) is also supportive of there having been one in 107.


Fig. 1: Plan of the Imperial Fora

suspended between Domitian's death in 96 and c.107-8, when the spoils of Dacia poured into the imperial treasury and Trajan was in a position to commemorate both his triumph and his decennalia.27 There is a degree of uncertainty here, but the general feeling is that the building program really hit full stride after the Dacian Wars.28 Trajan's Forum in general seems an imperial project, but it is plain from the inscription on its base (see below) that the Column was a gift from the Senate and Roman People. Under the Republic, the Senate was the body which awarded triumphs, permitting the general (imperator) to retain his command (imperium) temporarily within the sacred boundary (pomerium) of the city. It also made decisions about erecting a public monument to the imperator in honour of the occasion, and took care when debating the form of this monument.29 There is no direct evidence for such debate in this instance, but it is generally assumed that the Senate was consulted on the planning and building of Trajan's Forum.30 The Column, then, is a symbol of senatorial participation and honour, and a product of contemplation of the overall triumphal environment. It seems something contributed to original or imperial plans, though it was harmonized with them. This could have happened on the drawing-board, so to speak, if such plans were being discussed in the wake of (say) the triumph of 107. Is there anything else that makes this at all likely?

Trajan's Forum and the Basilica Ulpia were apparently dedicated on 1 January 112. Evidence for the day (the Kalends) comes from a restoration of the Fasti Ostienses:

[K. IANVAR IMP TRAIANVS FORVM SVVM ET [BAS]ILICAM DEDICAVIT

'Emperor Trajan dedicated his Forum and Basilica on the First of January.'

Both restorations here seem reasonable, given that the space to be filled in each instance can only contain three letters.31 A dedication to Trajan set up in

---

27 Plin. Pan. 51 (Trajan's restraint over further building) and Ep. 6.31 (huge stones employed in building a harbour at Centum Cellae/Civitá Vecchia) have been taken to imply the commencement of work in 107-8: Leon 1971, 47-9; Anderson 1984, 141.
28 Griffin 2000, 113-14, is clear that the most imposing buildings of Trajan's reign belong to the period after the Dacian Wars, but she questions the view that the Dacian treasure rescued Rome from financial disaster.
30 Lepper and Frere 1988, 16-19, write of a 'Column Committee', composed of Senators working in conjunction with a master architect, who is commonly (but not certainly) identified as Apollodorus of Damascus. For Apollodorus, see Dio 69.4.1;Procop. Aed. 4.6.13; MacDonald 1965, 129-36; Lepper and Frere 1988, 16-19, 187-93.
31 Vidman 1982, 48, pl. 12; Anderson 1984, 151.
the new Forum in 112 confirms the year (CIL VI, 959). However, Trajan's Column seems to have been dedicated on 12 May 113. The inscription on its base preserves Trajan's tenure of TR POT XVII (10 December 112 to 9 December 113), and the Fasti Ostienses contain the following entry for 12 May:

[AEDEM VE]NERIS IN FORO CAESARIS ET [COLUMNA]M IN FORO SVO DEDICAVIT...

'He dedicated the Temple of Venus in the Forum of Caesar and the Column in his own Forum.'

The restoration [columna]m is obviously questionable, though it has been widely accepted. I see no reason to doubt it and think that we must accept, as things stand presently, that some significant stage in construction of the Column had been reached by 12 May 113. Either the Column-as-a-building (Claridge) or the Column-with-frieze had been completed. This date will have been no accident: it was the festival day of Mars Ultor, who sanctioned all Roman military campaigns in the imperial period and whose temple dominated the nearby Forum of Augustus; it was the day on which the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum of Julius Caesar was dedicated after reconstruction work; and it immediately preceded Trajan's departure from Rome for his campaign against the Parthians ( Dio 68.16.3). The emperor was honouring his divine and deified patrons and models and seeking their help in the upcoming campaign. It is worth noting that Trajan dedicated the Tropaeum Traiani at Adamklissi to Mars Ultor c.107-8, thereby emphasizing Rome's view of the Dacian Wars as revenge for Dacian aggression. Perhaps the frieze seems even more appropriate as a component of the Column on 12 May 113 against this background - as an account of Roman vengeance against the Dacians. Certainly, the act of dedication is commonly taken to imply that Trajan thought of the Column as finished.

32 CIL VI, 960; Degrassi 1937, 202-3, 231-2; Anderson 1984, 151.
33 Vidman 1982, 48, pl. 13; Anderson 1984, 151. The restoration [columna]m was suggested by Calza 1932, 201.
34 Lepper and Frese 1988, 16: 'in the circumstances it would seem rather perverse not to accept Calza's "Columnam"'
36 Anderson 1984, 148, finds no evidence that Trajan contributed: '[The Temple of Venus Genetrix was] a Domitianic structure from podium to cornice, so far as we know.'
37 CIL III, 12467 = ILS 9107; Smallwood 1966, no. 303.
39 Lepper and Frese 1988, 15-16: '[The Column] was almost certainly completed by the summer of AD 113, when it was officially dedicated by the emperor himself ... surely, the builders' scaffolding was down, and down for good, by that great day and the work at last revealed in all its glory.'
Numismatic evidence is crucial for this debate, and in my view the most natural interpretation of the coins is that both the Column and the frieze were completed by May 113. Relevant examples, all minted in Rome, have come to be discussed under two distinct headings: 'statue-coins' and 'owl-coins'. The former refer to reverse designs which show Trajan's gilded-bronze statue atop the Column. This statue was bare-headed, wearing a cuirass, inclining slightly towards its right side, holding a spear in its left hand, with an orb surmounted by a winged Victory in its right hand, its extended right arm partially concealed by a draped cloak, and it stood on a small platform. The first 'statue-coins' are a couple of sestertii dated by COS V in the imperial titulature to the period 103-11. A spiral, rising from left to right (the correct direction for representing the frieze), appears on the shaft of the example (no.579) illustrated in RIC 2; two eagles perch at the corners of the base. The base of the other coin (no.580) is shown with a round-arched doorway that bears little similarity to the real thing; there are no eagles. Hill discusses this type and does not doubt its authenticity. As it antedates the dedication of the Column, and as the eagles are absent from the base, he assumes that it represents an early plan and may refer to the beginning of work on the Forum complex; thus he dates it to 107. In fact, a COS V coin could date as late as 111 (Trajan became COS.V DES.VI around October 111).

The majority of 'statue-coins', marked by COS VI, date from the years 112-16 (before Trajan became PARTHICVS in February 116). They show Trajan's head and titles on the obverse and various versions of the Column on the reverse. It is regular to find a spiral band around the shaft, mostly rising in the correct direction for the frieze, though the spiral is either absent or hard to make out on a minority of examples (wear is a problem with the softer metals). The base is consistently more accurate now, showing eagles

40 E.g. Lepper and Frere 1988, 193–7
42 RIC 2, nos 579 (pl. XL201) [Cohen 1880, no 555; Lepper and Frere 1988, 194, type A1.1] and 580 [BNS 1884, 133; Claridge 1993, 16 fig.8a]
43 Hill 1989, 57-8; cf. Hill 1970, 35: '(this type) needs further explanation.'
44 I have found 17 'statue' examples illustrated in BMC 3, of which 15 date to COS VI (AD 112-17), i.e. nos.449 (pl.16.19), 452 (16.20), 454 (17.1), 455 (17.2), 522 (18.11), 565 (19.11), 566 (19.12), 972 (38.3), 994 (39.4), 995 (39.5), 1003 (40.1), 1004 (40.2), 1016 (40.11), 1024 (41.6) and 1028/C 360 (42.3). The remaining two lack imperial titulature but have been tentatively assigned to the period 115-17: nos.665 (pl.21.15) and 667 (21.16). RIC 2 lists 8 'statue' coins of the period 112-17 which show the Column: nos.238, 239, 292, 293, 307, 313, 356, 683. Cf. Claridge 1993, 16 fig.8; Settis 1988, 60 fig.28.
45 The spiral seems quite consistent on the silver denarii, but is less so on other denominations. Of the 17 'statue' examples illustrated in BMC 3, the spiral is clear on the following denarii: nos 452 (pl.16.20), 454 (17.1), 455 (17.2), 522 (18.11), 565 (19.11), 566 (19.12), 667 (21.16). It is also clear on the following aes: nos.1003 (pl.40.1), 1004 (40.2),
on its upper corners and a square-framed doorway; some examples even indicate the garland between the eagles and the reliefs below.\textsuperscript{46} Most, if not all, of these coins will have been issued after the Column’s dedication in 113, and this seems to explain the greater accuracy, particularly with respect to the base.

Three rare issues, each known in only one example (in Vienna, Paris and London respectively), have come to be known as ‘owl-coins’ because they show an owl atop a column that bears some similarities to images of Trajan’s Column. Some commentators have seen an eagle, but the head in particular is that of an owl, which may, as the bird of Athena/Minerva, be relevant to the adjacent Libraries.\textsuperscript{47} The Vienna coin (BMC 3, 181 n.), marked by COS V and dated c.107-11, shows the owl sitting on a column with a ‘gridded’ base, ‘which is subdivided into six rectangles roughly corresponding to the doorway, the inscribed area above it, and the upper and lower reliefs on either side; eagles are on its top corners; the shaft above has the spiral indicated, but the wrong way round’.\textsuperscript{48} The Paris coin (RIC 2, no.475) is a hybrid, using an obverse die of c.107-11 and a reverse dated to the period 114-16. It also appears to show a (faint) spiral, still the wrong way around for representing the frieze, but the base seems more realistic than that of the Vienna coin: ‘there is a square-framed doorway in the base instead of the grid; an owl (clearly) on the top; eagles on the upper corners of the base.’\textsuperscript{49} The third ‘owl-coin’ (in the British Museum), a sestertius dated 114-16, shows a column set on three steps.\textsuperscript{50} The shaft, which is relatively slender, shows no trace of a spiral. These ‘owl-coins’, then, like the ‘statue-coins’, appear to feature among the coinage both before and after the dedication of Trajan’s Column in 113. The London coin in particular, with its three-stepped base, slender column and huge owl, is far from being an obvious evocation of the Column, but the eagles on the bases of the Vienna and Paris coins, and the spirals on the shafts of the Vienna and Paris coins, do seem to link with the ‘statue-coins’ and point to the Column. Yet the significance of the type remains mysterious. Lepper and Frere are reduced to guessing that a live owl might have actually perched on top of the uncompleted Column, ‘and this sign of divine favour took the public’s fancy and struck the

\textsuperscript{46} BMC 3, nos 449 (pl.16 19), 665 (21.15). It is likewise absent or hard to detect on the following aurei: nos 972 (pl.38 3), 994 (39 4), 995 (39 5), 1016 (40.11), 1024 (41.6).

\textsuperscript{47} Lepper and Frere 1988, 194; Hannestad 1988, 156 (‘the library’s bird’).

\textsuperscript{48} Lepper and Frere 1988, 194.

\textsuperscript{49} Lepper and Frere 1988, 195.

\textsuperscript{50} BMC 3, no.1025 (pl.41 7); cf. Claridge 1993, 15.
Column's creators as most happily appropriate'. Unless these 'owl-coins' relate to an entirely different monument, for which there is no corroborating evidence, or to the building of the Libraries (so that the Column serves merely as a toponym), it would seem from the numismatic evidence that the Column was subject to varying depictions, even if the combination of statue/column-with-spiral/base-with-eagles seems the most publicized image.

Assuming, as is most natural, that all the coins date to Trajan's reign, we should ask whether the coin designers were attempting to reflect successive stages of construction, e.g. planning, completion-as-a-building, completion-with-frieze. The coins, however, do not convey such regular stages. Apart from the fact that there are both statues and owls on top throughout the sequence, spirals are in evidence from the beginning, though at times they seem absent. The bases perhaps look more realistic over time on the dominant 'statue-coins', but this cannot be said of the 'owl-coins'. The London 'owl-coin', for instance, has an odd three-stepped base and it appears to lack a spiral, despite its post-dedication date and the spirals which appear on the Vienna and Paris 'owl-coins' and on contemporary 'statue-coins'. Was the Column erected in commemoration of the triumph of either 102 or 107? Was the frieze added in the wake of the 107 triumph? Did it take until May 113 to finish the frieze? This would explain the spirals on both COS V and COS VI coins. It surely seems, at any rate, that these coins provide strong evidence, in conjunction with the dedication date, for the view that both the Column and its frieze were complete by 12 May 113. Why have scholars questioned this? Are they justified in doing so?

To start with, Claridge argues that the spirals on the coins might refer to the spiral staircase within the Column; the dots around the spirals on a couple of types could be the windows which illuminated the interior of the shaft. The staircase was undoubtedly important (see below), but analysis is complicated both by worn examples and the small scale of the coins, which hardly provides a field suitable for indicating the frieze in any detail whatsoever; the spiral lines appearing on the coins are probably the best representation that could be hoped for, and surely they relate more easily to the (exterior) frieze than to the (interior) staircase.

---

51 Lepper and Frere 1988, 195-6
52 For the Column on Trajanic coinage, see Lepper and Frere 1988, 193-6; Hill 1989, 57-61; Claridge 1993, 15; Eltner 1998, 72 fig 40; Beard and Henderson 2001, 177 fig 124(c) = BMC 3, no 449 (pl 16 19).
53 Anderson 1984, 156-9, thinks that the coins showing columns-with-spirals may belong to Hadrianic commemorative issues which bore Trajan's image and titles
54 BMC 3, nos 454 (pl 17.1) and 455 (17.2); Claridge 1993, 15.
There is also the objection that coin images may be imaginative as well as descriptive. All scholars in this field will have encountered, for instance, the coins showing an octastyle temple which is generally interpreted as an early imagination of (what ultimately became) the Temple of Deified Trajan. This type has been dated 105-8 (COS V), though the temple in question seems to have been built under Hadrian.\(^{55}\) Granted, we should not assume that the designers of coin images were aiming at a photographic record, that their approach would necessarily have been literal, or that the monument would have needed to change for their representations to do so. Yet there are rather a lot of coins showing spirals to explain away as imaginations. It does seem that depictions of the base develop in accuracy on the ‘statue-coins’, and I find it more generally plausible that the spiral lines on the numismatic columns refer to the frieze rather than the staircase, and thus imply its readiness by May 113.

Another set of complications has arisen from Lynne Lancaster’s study of the Forum of Trajan as a building site, which makes it highly likely that construction commenced in the southern part of the complex and proceeded northwards, as dictated by the Forum’s plan and the direction (from the north) from which equipment and supplies were probably transported to the site. The Column, she argues, had to be completed after the Basilica Ulpia because the workmen, materials, ropes, scaffolding and lifting tower associated with it would have blocked free movement south.\(^{56}\) Unfortunately, Lancaster does not hazard a guess at the Column’s construction dates and her sketch of the Column-under-construction shows a partially built Basilica Ulpia in the background.\(^{57}\) Would a period of construction for the Column following completion of the Basilica Ulpia not be more in keeping with her argument, i.e. between January 112 and May 113? This would leave little time for the carving of the frieze before the date of dedication and might support Claridge’s argument that Hadrian commissioned the frieze (c.118) when he presided over Trajan’s burial in the base of the Column and surrounded it with a portico, thereby converting the area into a heroic tomb-precinct.\(^{58}\) Even if, as it seems, Lancaster thinks the Column could have been erected before the Basilica was finished, the amount of time available for the

---

\(^{55}\) For the coins (Trajanic sestertii), see BMC 3, nos 863-6 (pls 32.8-9), 913 (37.8), 958; Boatwright 1987, 78-80, 88-90, fig 16; Packer 1997, append.11. On the date of the temple, see Boatwright 1987, 74-95, esp. 90-1, Lepper and Frere 1988, 197-203; Richardson 1992, 177; Bennett 1997, 157-8.

\(^{56}\) Lancaster 1999, esp. 439: ‘the Column ... had to be built last so as not to block access to the rest of the site’

\(^{57}\) Lancaster 1999, 431 fig 9

\(^{58}\) Claridge 1993, 5-22. Trajan died at Selinus in Cilicia in 117, before or on 9 August: Dio 68.33.3; Davies 1997, 41; Griffin 2000, 124.
frieze is severely curtailed by her arguments. The sense of progression is rather different to that conveyed by the coins. On the other hand, would work on the Column really have blocked all movement and transport of materials to the south? The Basilica appears to do this more effectively. Could the Column's blocks have been lifted into place before work on the Basilica was even begun? Perhaps, in turn, we should query the generally accepted idea that work on the Column was not possible between 113-118. It does seem unlikely, in my view, that scaffolding could have been erected again immediately after the dedication, but the month of May 113 was suspicious as a time to depart for operations against Parthia. Could Trajan have asked for the Column to be ready as a building by that date, and been prepared to have the frieze completed subsequently? In other words, could the May 113 date have been determined by factors other than the absolute completion of the Column? Literary references in combination with the evidence of brick-stamps, though difficult to interpret, appear to indicate that the Libraries on either side were begun under Trajan and completed under Hadrian, as though construction was constant in the northern part of the Forum as one reign finished and the next one commenced. There is much that is tentative here, but Lancaster has shown that we must form some idea of the sequence of building if we are to date the Column. Furthermore, it seems obvious that the frieze could only have been completed by the date of dedication if work on the Column had begun quite early in the period 107-13. Might it have been the first monument erected in Trajan's Forum or among the first?

2. A Marker of Height.

I have been stressing a message of victory over the Dacians, but it has been strongly pointed out that the Column's inscription appears to indicate a different purpose. Is this really so? And is the frieze incompatible with the purpose indicated by the inscription? The Column's inscription, still visible

---

59 Anderson 1984, 152, thinks it possible that neither the Column nor the Temple of Venus Genetrix were finished in May 113.

60 Dio 68.16 3 credits Trajan with building the Libraries along with the Column, and the Historia Augusta frequently refers to the Bibliotheca Ulpia (SHA, Marcus 17, I.10, 8 1, 24.7; SHA, Tacitus 8 1; SHA, Numerianus 11 3; SHA, Probus 2.1). During excavations of the 1930s, 3 brick-stamps of Trajanic date (CIL XV, 32, 58, 811d) were found in situ in the lowest courses of the walls; 39 others of Trajanic date (apparently dating from c.110) and 55 of Hadrianic date (mostly dating to 124) were found loose in the vicinity: Bloch 1947, 58-9 = 1936-8, 64-6; Lancaster 1999, 420. Anderson 1984, 152-4, and Lepper and Frere 1988, 236-8, discuss the possibilities, which include the use of Trajanic bricks by Hadrianic masons, but they do not believe that construction took place wholly under Hadrian.

61 For detailed discussion of this idea, see Lepper and Frere 1988, 20-1, 52, 203-7.
over the entrance door on the southern side of the base (facing the Basilica Ulpia), says that the Senate and Roman People dedicated this monument to Trajan, whose names and titles are listed, and concludes with a rather enigmatic reason:

SENA TVS POPVI. VSQUE ROMANVS I IMP(ERATORI) CAESARI DIVI NERVAE F(ILIO) NERVAE I TRAiano AVG(VSTO) GERM(ANICO) DAC(ICO) PONTIF(ICI) I MAXIMO TRIB(VNICIA) POT(ESTATE) XVII IMP(ERATORI) VI CO(N)S(VL) VI P(ATRIAE) I AD DECLARANDVM QVANTAE ALTITVDINIS I MONS ET LOCVS TANT[IS OPE]RIBVS\textsuperscript{62} SIT EGESTVS

'The Senate and Roman People (dedicate this) to Emperor Caesar Nerva Trajan, son of Deified Nerva, Augustus, Germanicus, Dacicus, Pontifex Maximus, holder of Tribunician Power 17 times, acclaimed Emperor 6 times, Consul 6 times, Father of the Fatherland, to show how high a mountain - and the site for such great works - had been cleared away.'\textsuperscript{63}

These words have been interpreted to mean that a high ridge once joined the Capitoline and Quirinal Hills and that the whole area was excavated from the height of the Column down to make room for the Forum complex. There appears to be support for this idea in Cassius Dio (68 16.3), who says that Trajan

'...set up in the Forum an enormous column, to serve at once as a memorial for himself and as a memorial of his work in the Forum. For that entire section had been hilly and he had cut it down for a distance equal to the height of the column, thus making the Forum level.'

\textsuperscript{62} The generally accepted restoration, TANT[IS OPE]RIBVS, which is confirmed by the Einsiedeln pilgrim of the 8th Century, is that of Raoss 1968 Stucchi 1989, esp 426, has a different idea. For TANT[IS OPE]RIBVS as a dative rather than an instrumental ablative, see Richardson 1977, 106; Anderson 1984, 154 n 55; Boatwright 1987, 83 n 17; Lepper and Frere 1988, 204-5. Further bibliography: Anderson 1984, 155 n 61.

\textsuperscript{63} CIL VI, 960 = ILS 294 (trans. Claridge 1998, 165). Other translations include: ‘to commemorate how great a hill and place was removed for these works’ (Anderson 1984, 154); ‘to declare how high a hill and area was removed for [or by] such great works’ (Boatwright 1987, 82-3); ‘to show until what height the hill and place was cut away to make room for such a structure’ (Hannestad 1988, 155); ‘in order to show how lofty had been the mountain - and the site for such mighty works was nothing less - which had been cleared away’ (Lepper and Frere 1988, 20); ‘to show how high was the mountain - the site for great works, after all - that was cleared away’ (Davies 1997, 60); ‘this is to show the great height of the hill that has been excavated and the scale of the works required to clear the site’ (Beard and Henderson 2001, 181).
Note first of all that Dio thinks in terms of multiple functions for the Column as both Trajan’s tomb and a kind of excavation marker. The Column has an overall height of about 128 Roman feet (38 metres), of which the Column itself is approximately 100 Roman feet (29.77 metres) high. The 16-foot statue of Trajan would have taken the overall height to roughly 144 Roman feet (the figure mentioned by Eutropius 8.5.3). However, excavations by Boni in 1906 and Ricci in 1934 concluded that there was no hill at the site of the Column. Instead, they revealed traces of a paved road and a portico in front of what may have been a line of shops of the early imperial period. Dio seems to have either misinterpreted the inscription or been misled by a contemporary explanation. Some scholars have wondered whether the inscription really refers to excavations a short distance away at the base of the Quirinal Hill - excavations necessary to level ground for the outer boundary of the Forum and/or to stabilize the hill before Trajan’s Markets could be constructed in the area. This conjecture has been aided both by recognition of the Senate’s input and by the mistaken belief, which has existed for some time, that the Column’s foundations cut through the surrounding pavement; this would be a puzzling thing, for the paving was usually done last. As a result, a view of the Column as an ‘afterthought’ has gained currency. Fortunately, Lancaster has settled the matter by re-examining the evidence and concluding that there is no indication that the Column’s foundations cut through the marble paving of the courtyard in which it stood. In the interim, however, the radical suggestion has been made that Hadrian, wanting to align Trajan’s tomb with the Temple marking his deification, moved the entire Column to its present location. Vladimir Groh thought it might have come from the middle of the Forum Square; Richardson’s idea that it must have been moved from the eastern hemicycle near the Quirinal Hill is more widely known. Plainly, these theories owe much to a particular interpretation of the inscription which holds that the Column served as an excavation marker and that, as such, it would make

64 Boatwright 1987, 83 n 17, is justified in arguing that Dio is reading information into the monument and crediting Trajan himself, whereas the inscription credits the Senate and Roman People.
65 For discussion of the precise measurements, see Wilson Jones 1993, 23-38, esp. 27-31.
67 E.g. Lepper and Frere 1988, 15, 19, 191; Bennett 1997, 156. Claridge 1993, 20, is hesitant, warning that it is easy for excavators to get such things the wrong way around.
68 Lancaster 1999, 421, pointing out that Boni never suggested otherwise.
69 Groh 1925; Richardson 1977, 106; Richardson 1992, 175, 177. Anderson 1984, 157-9, is a partial convert, but he thinks that only the base and inscription were moved. On page 159 he writes that the Column’s inscription was made to face the Basilica Ulpia after Hadrian relocated its base from the east hemicycle because this would make it less conspicuous now that measuring the Quirinal was no longer its primary intent, ‘though not one to be forgotten’.
better sense in a different location, especially over by the Quirinal. Dio’s evidence seems to prove that there were influential people in ancient times who saw the Column as a marker of height too. In reality, however, the idea seems mistaken, and with it should fall the theory that the Column was moved by Hadrian. There is a better interpretation of the inscription to consider.

3. A Stair-tower or Belvedere.

How else might the Column show the height of the hill and the scale of work in Trajan’s Forum? How might it show the locus as well as the mons? A number of scholars emphasize that the Column had an internal spiral staircase that led up to a viewing platform at its top. From this platform, a viewer would have been able to see over the roof of the Basilica Ulpia (its roof tiles shimmering in gilded bronze: Paus. 5.12.6, 10.5.11) and survey the magnificent Forum complex below. Wilson Jones emphasizes the importance of the finely crafted staircase, a virtuoso construction of 185 steps carved from the solid stone, mostly before each of the 19 blocks composing the Column was lifted into place. Illuminated by 43 small window-slits cut at regular intervals, it emerged at the top on the side facing the Quirinal Hill (tallying nicely with the mons in the Column’s inscription). 100 Roman feet seems to have been a key measurement from the outset for both the internal staircase and the exterior height of the Column. This measurement was fundamental to a significant number of monumental Roman buildings, and the Greek term hekatompedon (‘hundred-footer’), used of important temples, implies that it had a certain sacred tradition. When building difficulties arose, the staircase was actually given precedence in the maintenance of this measurement, so that the exterior became 100 feet plus 7 or 8 digits. Wilson Jones thinks of the Column as a conflation of various architectural models: i) the free-standing honorific column, like those in the Forum Romanum; ii) the

---

70 Tummarello 1989; Claridge 1993, 9-10; Wilson Jones 1993, 27: ‘the Column showed off both the height of the Quirinal (or Capitoline?) and the great level expanse of the Forum by providing a magnificent view from the platform at the top’; Davies 1997, 60-5.

71 There has been some question about the height of the Basilica’s roof in relation to the Column. Amici 1982, 17ff., pls III-IV, gives an improbably tall Basilica, but Packer 1992, 160 fig.3, has posited a ridge height for the Basilica of 100 feet and seems to have established the correct relationship between the two elements; cf. Wilson Jones 1993, 27 n.8.

72 Davies 1997, 65

73 Apart from the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius and the Basilica Ulpia, one can add the Solarium Augusti, the monumental sun-dial constructed by Augustus in the Campus Martius (Buchner 1982, 14ff., abb 1), and the Tropæum Traiani at Adamklissi, Romania (Elsner 1998, 125).
stair-tower or belvedere, like the Lighthouse of Alexandria; and iii) the obelisk, which in Egypt was placed hard up against important buildings. However, he notes that the Column of Marcus Aurelius copies the spiral staircase most closely of all the elements of Trajan’s Column, and the fact that the dimensions of the staircase took precedence as they did rather serves to underline the Column’s function as a belvedere tower.\textsuperscript{74}

Not everyone could have experienced the staircase. It was too narrow and perhaps too sacred for unregulated use by the general public. The viewing platform at the top, surrounded by a metal fence, could hold c.12-15 people.\textsuperscript{75} In its function as a belvedere, therefore, the Column was for the élite;\textsuperscript{76} but if the viewer was fortunate enough to be a member of the élite and invited to climb the inner staircase, the Column would provide an unparalleled view of the \textit{mons et locus} (better than from any other location in the entire complex or from the adjacent Markets). It would serve as the prime viewing vantage point rather than a marker of height, and one need not think of the inscription as being incompatible with its present location. Some idea of the impression that could be made is given by Ammianus Marcellinus, who describes the reaction of Constantius II upon entering Rome for the first time during his ceremonial entrance or \textit{adventus} of AD 357:

‘When he had come to the Rostra, the most renowned Forum of ancient dominion, he stood amazed; and on every side on which his eyes rested he was dazzled by the array of marvellous sights … [among which were] the exalted columns which rise with platforms to which one may mount, and bear the likenesses of former emperors [i.e. the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius] … But when he came to the Forum of Trajan, a construction unique under the heavens, as we believe, and admirable even in the unanimous opinion of all the gods, he stood fast in amazement, turning his attention to the gigantic complex about him, begging description and never again to be imitated by mortal men.’\textsuperscript{77}

There is good reason, then, to think that the inscription is especially interested in the Column as a belvedere. Does it imply that the Column was dedicated upon completion of the staircase and observation platform? These would have been finished well before the frieze, given that the staircase was mostly carved before the blocks were lifted into place. But this is probably to read the inscription too literally, too exclusively. Nor does it help, in my view, to dwell too long on the question of whether the inscription preserves

\textsuperscript{74} Wilson Jones 1993, esp. 23, 27, 37.
\textsuperscript{75} Lepper and Frere 1988, 20; Claridge 1998, 165; cf. Claridge 1993, 10 (‘12-16 people’).
\textsuperscript{76} Davies 1997, 60, is not so firm on this as she might be, given ancient social attitudes.
some words from a hastily contrived senatorial decree of (say) 107. This is quite possible - the site would at that time have been more locus than opera - but it continues to imply that the inscription is somehow inconsistent with the fundamental triumphal message of the rest of Trajan’s Forum. We need only contemplate what would have been ‘shown’ from the viewing platform: Trajan could move mountains and create an awe-inspiring space for monuments to his triumph over the Dacians. None of these other monuments, for instance the Basilica, is any less triumphal for having other functions. The idea of a belvedere should not be seen as incompatible with the Column’s triumphal associations, for it shows a Forum which bears the marks of victory over the Dacians at every point. A view from the observation platform would make this unsurpassably clear.

Of course, most people were not members of the élite and so would not have experienced the Column from the viewing platform. As a belvedere it would not have figured in their experience. Many probably remained unaware of the possibilities, as do the vast majority of modern tourists.


James Packer, the American scholar who has done more than anyone else to reconstruct Trajan’s Forum, has drawn attention to the Column’s function as an axis-marker. The statue of Trajan atop the Column, for instance, faced south in the direction of the main entrance to the Forum and served as a marker of its longitudinal axis for any visitor entering the complex through this entrance (which took the form of a triumphal triple archway). From here, the flanking colonnades and rows of trees in the open piazza guided the visitor’s eye to Trajan’s statue above the roof of the Basilica Ulpia, directly over the triumphal quadriga led by Victories which was placed above the Basilica’s main entrance. A straight line ran from i) the statue, to ii) the chariot over the main entrance to the Basilica, to iii) the equestrian statue of Trajan in the centre of the Forum, to iv) the point where the visitor was standing. Beyond the Basilica on this axis, though masked by it, was (in all probability) the entrance to the Temple of Deified Trajan. The sculptured friezes in the main nave of the Basilica Ulpia, plus those on its north façade

---

79 Packer 1994, 163-82.
80 For the principal entrance to the Basilica, see BMC 3, nos 492 (pl.17 15), 982 (38 8), 983; Packer 1981; Packer 1992, 160 fig. 3; Packer 1997, frontispiece
81 Amm. Marc. 16 10.15; BMC 3, nos 445-8 (pl 16 18); Packer 1994, 168 n.17; Packer 1995, 351 fig 175.
(on the attic of which Packer would place the 'Great Trajanic Frieze' that was later reused on the Arch of Constantine\textsuperscript{83}), in the peristyle around the Column, and on the shaft of the Column itself were closely harmonized in subject matter. All celebrated (victory and Trajan's prominent role in) the Dacian wars. This does not easily suggest later 'retro-fitting' or an 'essentially opportunistic' frieze on the Column.\textsuperscript{84} Furthermore, the Temple of Deified Trajan probably stands on the same north-south axis as the Flavian Temple of Peace, and in effect amplifies, extends and provides a mirror-image of it. In other words, the Forum of Trajan 'completed' the earlier imperial fora (\textbf{Fig.1}) Packer allows the possibility that the Column, its frieze, the Temple, and its temenos or forecourt may have been completed under Hadrian, but he affirms in conclusion that they were integral parts of an original plan.\textsuperscript{85}

The Column may have served as an 'axis-marker' from the beginning, but it would have applied especially to those who entered through the Forum's main entrance. There were other entrances to the Forum,\textsuperscript{86} other functions for the Column, and even if it was an 'original' function, it probably made little difference to many visitors to the Forum over the years, who may not have known this or may not have cared or may have failed to notice or may have found other functions more significant, and so on.

It certainly seems that the Column featured in the original or master plan in its present location, even if it might be argued that Hadrian would have tried to maintain harmony with existing structures and features as much as possible. The statue's appearance above the Basilica Ulpia, for instance, is hard to imagine as a fortuitous result of relocation. I am less certain with respect to the Temple of Deified Trajan, whose remains seem to lie, largely unexcavated, under the foundations of the late 16th Century Palazzo Valentini. There is a serious possibility that the Temple did not feature in original planning. It is slightly worrying that the Temple of Peace is approximately half a kilometre from Trajan's Temple and masked by boundary walls and other structures in-between. More disconcerting,

\textsuperscript{83} Packer 1994, 169 n 29; Packer 1995, 353; contra Leander Touati 1987, 90, who places it inside the attic of the east colonnade.

\textsuperscript{84} Packer 1994, 168-71, answering Claridge explicitly.

\textsuperscript{85} Packer 1994, 171-82; Packer 1995, 348; Packer 1997, chap 8 n 11, app XI C. For the view that the structures north of the Basilica form a second complex perhaps wholly a creation of Hadrian, see Anderson 1984, 147; Richardson 1992, 175.

\textsuperscript{86} Richardson 1977, 103, and Richardson 1992, 175, refer to secondary entrances to the Forum at either extremity of the front (southern) wall. These provided access to the Forum's flanking colonnades from the Forum Iulium and Trajan's Markets respectively. Anderson 1984, 167-8, would like to see further excavation to confirm their existence.
however, is the plan of the Forum of Trajan itself. The innovative transversal placement of the Basilica Ulpia prevents a view of the Temple from the Forum courtyard and defines two spaces instead of one. Movement between these areas was severely curtailed: two inconspicuous, non-axial doors led from the Basilica to the Column court. The main area becomes a square rather than a rectangle like the other fora. Rodenwaldt argued long ago that Apollodorus based the Forum’s unusual layout, especially the transversally-placed basilica with its (nearly) square forecourt, on the ground plan of a military camp such as the Praetorium of Vetera. The Libraries and Column-court took the place, respectively, of the tabularii (archive rooms) and aedes or sacellum (shrine for the army’s standards) of a military principia (command building). A temple is not suggested by this model. Trajan’s statue atop the Column faced south and the Column’s inscription is on the southern side of the base, facing the Basilica Ulpia; this might be taken to imply visitors from that direction or integration with the Forum complex in that direction. On the other hand, there are points to make in support of the Temple’s existence in original planning. Firstly, all the imperial fora incorporate an axial, impressive temple, and the combination of open piazza, flanking colonnades that mask hemicycles, and statues of summi viri (distinguished men) is based on the plan of the Forum Augustum. Surviving fragments of the Corinthian columns from the porch of the Temple of Deified Trajan indicate that it might have been modelled on the Temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum Augustum. Innovation and tradition seem equally

87 Richardson 1977, 104; Lepper and Frere 1988, 11; Richardson 1992, 176; Davies 1997, 64. Lepper and Frere 1988, 11-12, interpret this as a deliberate device which signalled that one area was for business (south) and the other was for silent reflection and study (north).
88 I am not quite convinced by Packer’s arguments (1994, 177-8) that this is a product of the architect’s desire, within the context of a traditional design, to surprise and delight the viewer through the employment of features like columnar screens, shifting vistas, and contrasts of light and shadow. Traditional designs employed one space rather than two and did not hide the temple behind a similarly imposing building.
90 Contra Anderson 1984, 159. Claridge 1993, 10 n.13, stresses the Column’s ideal location for looking down into the Forum.
91 Temple of Venus Genetrix (Forum of Julius Caesar), Temple of Mars Ultor (Forum of Augustus), Temple of Peace (Forum of Peace), Temple of Minerva (Forum of Nerva). Bennett 1997, 154, points out that the templum-in-foro plan applied throughout Italy and most of the empire, though he thinks that Apollodorus may have abandoned it before Hadrian restored it.
92 Anderson 1984, 160-1, 172. Packer 1994, 172-7, finds references to all the earlier imperial fora, but especially that of Augustus.
apparent. The possibility that the Temple of Deified Trajan was conceived and built under Hadrian and 'tacked on' to the rest of the complex cannot be dismissed on present evidence. Excavation is sorely needed.

5. Trajan's Tomb.

Even before Trajan's death, it is probable that the Column was capable of making a profound impression of the type that we would today call 'religious'. The gods of ancient Rome were involved in all human undertakings, and the emperor's power made him a godlike figure. A monument as intimately connected with that power as Trajan's Column assumed a sacred aura from the start. A number of features imply it. In the shrine of a military camp, for example, in a position analogous to that occupied by the Column in Trajan's Forum, the emperor was worshipped in conjunction with the legionario standards. The staircase might have implied a sacred ascent. The Elder Pliny wrote that Romans placed statues of famous men on columns to elevate them above all other mortals (HN 34.12.27). These things in turn affect what contemporary Romans thought about the emperor's qualities and achievements. The western world of today is in some respects distinctly different to the world of imperial Rome. The latter had a more entrenched idea of social hierarchy, little respect for ideas of egalitarianism, and a greater level of conviction that some were born better than others or became so through their achievements. The border between human and divine was not so defined or policed. There had been emperors in existence for well over a century by the reign of Trajan. Citizens looked (personally) to the emperor rather than (impersonally) to the government or a government agency for direction. They were accustomed to their emperor featuring heavily in cult ceremonies and having a pronounced religious role. He and the state were in many respects indivisible, so that his success was their own. Their attitudes towards him would have been both formed and modified by a monument such as Trajan's Column, and it is important to consider reactions that might not seem entirely rational to modern scholars. The obsessive responses of some fans to modern pop, movie or sports stars, or indeed to some religious figures, serve as an illustration of the degree to which individual pre-eminence can be accepted and actively supported by the initiated.

Whose idea was it to bury Trajan beneath his Column? I feel that Hadrian stands out as the best qualified candidate, though once more it is impossible to hold this view with absolute conviction.
It was well known in ancient times that the Column served as Trajan’s tomb. A golden urn containing his ashes was deposited ‘beneath his Column’ (sub columnā) in 118, after the Senate had voted in favour of the exceedingly rare honour of burial within the pomerium, the sacred boundary of the city. This was burial with heroic overtones, evocative of the treatment of founders in Greek cities. Although its enormity and grandeur make it justifiable to think of the Column as an innovation of Trajan’s reign, there was a republican precedent for the erection of a column as a funerary monument within the pomerium. Following the murder of Julius Caesar in March 44 BC, Cicero writes that an altar and a column were set up by the plebs on the site where Caesar’s body was cremated in the Roman Forum. Civil conflict made these activities controversial and the consul Dolabella suppressed them at the end of April and destroyed whatever building had been done. Suetonius (Iul. 85) describes how, after Caesar’s death,

‘the plebs set up in the Forum a solid column of Numidian marble almost 20 feet high, and inscribed PARENTI PATRIAЕ (To the Parent/Father of the Fatherland) upon it. At the foot of this they continued for a long time to sacrifice, make vows, and settle some of their disputes by an oath in the name of Caesar.’

It is hard to envisage structures of much substance being erected in the few weeks between Caesar’s death and the end of April, so that the column referred to by Suetonius could be a replacement for a rough version destroyed by Dolabella. Weinstock thinks the replacement column (no statue is mentioned) may have been erected by Octavian to mark the unofficial beginnings of the cult to Divus Julius. He also believes that it might have been replaced in turn the following year by a consecration altar, as the cult to Divus Julius became formalized. There can be no certainty, and this reconstruction sits uneasily with Suetoniussen’s assertion that the column for

94 Dio 68 16.3, 68 33.2-3, 69.23; Enn. Brev. 8.5.2-3 (sub columna); Aur. Vict. Epit. 13.11; SHA, Hadr. 6; Jerome, Chron. Euseb., Olymp. 222, AD 116. Claridge (n.11), 11, notes the absence of explicit evidence that Trajan’s ashes were entombed in the base itself, and feels that a cavity under the Column, explored by Boni, could feasibly have contained them
95 Cic. Leg. 2.23.58; SHA, Pius 12.3; Paul. Sent. 1.21.2-3; Dig. 47.12.5. Cf. Plut. Quaest. Rom. 79, Publ. 23.1-3.
96 E.g. Hennestad (n.18), 157: ‘Trajan’s Column was undoubtedly an original work of art’; Elsner (n.14), 65: ‘the column broke every precedent’; Beard and Henderson (n.19), 177: ‘At the moment of its creation, the Column was an extraordinary innovation, a more-or-less unprecedented reach for the sky.’
97 Cic. Phil. 1.5 (bustum in foro facerent); 1.30 (cum expiate foro); 2.107 (bustum in foro evertit); Att. 14.15.1 (columnam tollere); 14.16.2 (Mibi quidem videtur Brutus noster iam vel coronam auream per forum ferre posse); Fam. 9.14.1 (contentus eram, mi Dolabella, tua gloria); 12.11 ( Sed ita sedito compersa est); cf. Dio 44.51 (the consuls, i.e. Antony and Dolabella, overthrew the altar); Lact. Div. Inst. 1.15 30
Caesar remained in use ‘for a long time’ (longo tempore). Yet it is hardly likely that Caesar’s column, which was solid and one-fifth the height of the Trajan Column, was much of an inspiration, even if by some remote chance it still existed. More relevant in all likelihood is the fact that there were other prominent burials within city walls during the second century AD. The practice seems to have been revived in the Greek world. These burials included the former consul Gaius Julius Celsus Polemaenus (PIR I, 260), who was buried beneath the Library of Celsus at Ephesus in about 120, and Herodes Atticus (c.101-77), sophist, tutor in Greek letters to the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, consul in 143, and famous benefactor of Athens, who was buried by his stadium in Athens. The emperor Constantine was similarly buried within the city walls of Constantinople. Whether or not Trajan’s burial was the inspiration for this revival, it seems plain that a highly hellenized mindset was behind the decision to bury Trajan beneath the Column.

Claridge does not believe that the Column’s funerary function could have been planned from the start because Trajan posed throughout his reign as a civilis princeps, a citizen-like emperor who was merely primus inter pares, first among equals. Thus, the decision must have been taken at his death by either the Senate or Hadrian. It was followed by carving of the frieze and building of the Temple of Deified Trajan, both of which she would date to the years 118-128. In my view, the argument that the funerary function of the Column was something secondary seems to make sense. Claridge may well be underestimating both the degree of hellenization and the presumptiveness of Trajan, but his burial certainly represents a dramatic

---

99 S. Maffei, ‘Forum Traiani, Columna’, in E.M. Steinby (ed.), Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae, vol II (Rome, 1995), 358 (Celsus); Davies (n.11), 47 n.31 (Celsus); Elsner (n.14), 121-2 (Celsus and Herodes Atticus), 164 (Constantine).
100 Claridge 1993, 11-13. For Trajan’s modest pose, see Bennett 1997, 50-7, 104-6, 108 (‘Trajan’s amazing civility to the Senate’). Lepper and Frere 1988, 21-2, leave open the question of whether Trajan intended to use the Column as his tomb.
101 Claridge 1993, 21, noting that SHA, Hadr. 6.1-3, says that Hadrian’s requests for divine honours for Trajan were voted unanimously by the Senate, ‘together with others which Hadrian had not requested’.
102 Claridge 1993, 21; cf. 22, where she uses Dio 69.4.1-6 to posit antipathy between Hadrian and Apollodorus of Damascus, so that Hadrian would not have been reticent to add a frieze that ‘wrecked the architectural character of the original building’. This probably overstates both the antipathy and the effect of the frieze. Boatwright 1987, 88-94, and Amici 1982, 76, argue that Hadrian conceived, built and dedicated the Temple to Deified Trajan.
103 Waters 1969 demonstrates interesting continuities between the attitudes of Domitian and Trajan. Griffin 2000, 96-108, describes the contradictions in Trajan’s image. In light of these (cf. 99, 128-31, esp. 128 n.273), she feels that a wish to be buried within the pomerium in imitation of Julius Caesar is not so implausible
and bold departure from tradition. The ashes of previous emperors had been interred in either the Mausoleum of Augustus in the Campus Martius or in the Temple of the Flavian Dynasty on the Quirinal.\(^{104}\) Emperors from Hadrian to the Severi would be interred in the Mausoleum built by Hadrian in the ager Vaticanus across the Tiber from the Campus Martius, also outside the sacred boundary of the ancient city.\(^{105}\) Trajan’s ashes, therefore, received unique treatment, and it is hard to believe that he intended it so during the planning stages of his Forum. For a start, the Column was a contribution from the Senate and Roman People, and the sensibilities which sustained the dominant mausoleum tradition - sensibilities to do with Roman tradition and the elevation of a fellow Roman above his peers - were constant and strong, and they are associated above all with the Senators. It is hard to imagine the Senate suggesting that the Column might serve as Trajan’s tomb c.107, and it is equally hard to imagine Trajan asking for the privilege. It would even have been a good chance to display his civilitas by refusing such a suggestion. Trajan perhaps decided early on that his ashes would be placed in the Mausoleum of Augustus, as those of his adoptive father Nerva had been.\(^{106}\) Burial beneath the Column was probably the result of negotiation and consensus between the Senate and the new princeps in the wake of Trajan’s death. It thus demonstrates both a significant concession on the part of the Senate and an act of conspicuous pietas by Hadrian, who probably underlined his pietas a few years later in the decision to build his own mausoleum. Trajan, in other words, was the hero-founder; Hadrian did not claim a similar honour, just as he did not claim the credit due to others (cf. SHA, Hadr. 19.9). Hadrian’s hellenized mindset and capacity for innovation are trademarks; his was undoubtedly the crucial opinion at the time of Trajan’s death. Perhaps space was becoming a problem in the Mausoleum of Augustus. This would further justify the decision to put Trajan beneath his Column and the subsequent construction of a new imperial mausoleum.

This question, of course, forms part of a much larger debate about the extent of Hadrian’s programme for deifying Trajan. As mentioned above, Claridge would include the frieze in this programme. She finds it difficult to reconcile the frieze with the Column’s inscription, argues that the coins do not necessarily show the existence of the frieze under Trajan, and is in no doubt that the frieze was carved after the Column was erected, given the way that sizeable elements of the sculpture cross joins between one drum and the

---

105 For Hadrian’s Mausoleum, built c.123-140, see Boatwright 1987, 161-3; Davies 1997, 53.
next. Yet if the frieze does not seem to us necessary for the kind of monument indicated by the inscription, it nonetheless fits very well into the lavish sculptural programme of the Forum of Trajan as a whole, which emphasizes the conquest of Dacia at every turn. The coins, as discussed above, might indeed indicate the helical frieze under Trajan, and carving of the frieze after construction of the Column - and to proceed otherwise would surely have caused damage during the complicated process whereby each of the drums was lifted into place - is not necessarily evidence that takes us beyond the reign of Trajan.

Clatridge goes on to emphasize the extraordinarily minute surface detail of the frieze. The detail is so intricate, she believes, that there must have been a period of carving of 6-8 years, arguing from conjectures about the time it would have taken to carve contemporary sarcophagi. There is, however, no way to decide for sure, and Claridge is possibly estimating a touch high. She is also assuming both a lack of time before May 113 and that work on the Column must have been suspended between 113-118. Moreover, the very low relief of the frieze, which means less stone to remove, problematizes comparisons with sarcophagi. The Arch at Ancona is depicted in Scene LXXIX of the frieze. Inscriptions on the real arch date to 115. If it was not indeed carved around or after this date, perhaps Scene LXXIX has an imaginative element to it, something like numismatic representations of temples before they were dedicated. Finally, Claridge argues that while the frieze begins on the south side, the figure of Victory (Scene LXXVIII) and other significant elements suggest that principal viewing took place from the north (or at least that a relationship was being created with the north, i.e. in the direction of Trajan's Temple, which Hadrian dedicated). Yet at a couple of points Claridge herself supports the view that most of the frieze could never have been seen.

---

107 Claridge 1993, 13-17.
108 Most scholars agree that the frieze was carved after the Column was erected, e.g. Anderson 1984, 157; Coulston 1990, 300-2; Claridge 1993, 17. Those against it include Lepper and Frere 1988, 30-1, 234; Richardson 1992, 177.
109 Claridge 1993, 15: 'a puzzling aspect of the frieze, since most could never have been seen.'
110 Claridge 1993, 19; Lepper and Frere 1988, 16, 29, estimate 4-7 years.
112 Boatwright 1987, 92 n.46; Simpson 1977, 91-4. Lepper and Frere 1988, 127-32, discuss this scene in terms of imaginative reconstruction employing conventional elements.
113 Claridge 1993, 20.
114 Claridge 1993, 15, cf. 22: 'the sculptors are the only people likely to have seen the minutiæ they were given the time and took the trouble to carve.'
Hadrian devoted himself heavily to the area around Trajan’s Column. He completed the Libraries, built the portico around the Column and the colonnade around the forecourt of the Temple of Deified Trajan,\textsuperscript{115} and he is heavily implicated in construction of the Temple itself.\textsuperscript{116} Two identical inscriptions relating to the Temple, now in the Galeria Lapidaria of the Vatican, were found northwest of Trajan’s Forum. They set a \textit{terminus ante quem} for dedication of 128, when Hadrian became COS IV and PP:\textsuperscript{117}

\begin{verbatim}
E[X] S C DIVI[S TR]Aiano parthico et [plotinae i m]p caes[ar
divi]vi Traiani parthici [f] divi n[ervae nepos Traia]nius
hadrianus aug. pont m[ax trib pot - ] cos iii [p]arentibus
sui[s]
\end{verbatim}

‘In accordance with a decree of the Senate, Emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus, son of Deified Trajan Parthicus, grandson of Deified Nerva, Pontifex Maximus, holder of Tribunician Power 7 times, Consul three times, (dedicated this temple) to his parents, Deified Trajan Parthicus and Deified Plotina.’

Literary evidence records that the Temple of his father Trajan was the only one of Hadrian’s many building projects in the city to which he attached his own name (Gell. \textit{NA} 11 17.1; SHA, \textit{Hadr.} 19.9). Hadrian’s temple to Plotina, mentioned by Dio (69.10.3), is probably the very same Temple. Plotina, the wife of Trajan and a sponsor of Hadrian, seems to have died early in 123.\textsuperscript{118} Hadrian was away from Rome between 121 and the summer of 125, and his next travels started in the spring of 128. Since his presence at the ceremony can be taken for granted, the Temple must have been dedicated \textit{suis parentibus}, ‘to his parents’, sometime between 125-128.\textsuperscript{119} The Column presumably received Plotina’s ashes alongside those of Trajan.

Understandably, scholars have wondered whether the Temple was planned or even built under Trajan. It has been pointed out, for instance, that the fragments of columns normally associated with it were once part of 50-foot Egyptian monolithic columns of grey granite, and that the Column of Antoninus Pius (erected 161), a 50-foot Egyptian monolithic column of red granite, was originally cut, according to an inscription on its base, in

\textsuperscript{115} SHA, \textit{Hadr.} 19.9; Anderson 1984, 146
\textsuperscript{117} CIL VI, 966 = 31215 = ILS 306; Smallwood 1966, no 141.
\textsuperscript{118} SHA, \textit{Hadr.} 12.2; Dio 69 10.3; OCD\textsuperscript{3} 1214.
\textsuperscript{119} Gell. \textit{NA} 11.17.1; Claridge 1993, 21 n 65; Claridge 1998, 167; Lancaster 1999, 420.
Perhaps the latter was a spare, left over when work on the Temple was completed, Trajanic sestertii, dated c.105-108 (COS V) and lacking a legend, show an octastyle temple that has been linked with the Temple, in the absence of a better alternative. On the other hand, papyrus evidence exists for the cutting and transport of a 50-foot monolithic column, probably of grey granite from Mons Claudianus in Egypt, during the latter part of 118. This could have been intended for the Temple, unless it was meant for the Pantheon, which recent scholarship has found was intended at first to have a porch containing 16 x 50-foot column shafts. Lancaster’s study, suggesting that construction in the northern part of the site occurred last, tends to support a Hadrianic date for the Temple. Possibilities abound. An educated guess might surmise construction north of the Basilica beginning under Trajan but being substantially unfinished at his death, at which point Hadrian gladly undertook responsibility for what must have been a magnificent complex, including the portico around the Column, the Libraries, a colonnade marking the forecourt of the Temple, and the Temple itself.

The Column functions remarkably well in support of Trajan’s deification, though of course this may mean that it was adaptable rather than built for this exclusive purpose. The frieze records the kinds of achievements which justified Trajan’s deification, visibility problems notwithstanding. The colossal, gilded-bronze statue of the emperor which stood atop the Column, some 40 metres above the ground, is literally lifted to the heavens in a kind of perpetual re-enactment of Trajan’s apotheosis. How the bright sunlight of a Mediterranean summer added to the impression of apotheosis, especially for viewers on the ground, can be imagined. It must have produced considerable

120 Amici 1982, 76-7; Boatwright 1987, 75 n.2; Pena 1989, 130; Packer 1997, chap.4 n.36
122 BMC 3, nos.863-6 (pls 32.8-9), 913 (37.8), 958; Boatwright 1987, 78-80, 88-90, fig.16; Packer 1997, append 11. Packer 1994, 177 n.57, writes of an unpublished account of an 1866 excavation which cleared enough of the Temple’s façade to confirm that it was indeed octastyle.
123 P. Giss 69; Pena 1989, 126-32.
124 Eventually, 40-foot monolithic shafts were settled upon: Davies, Hemsoll and Wilson Jones 1987.
125 Lancaster 1999, esp. 439.
126 On the date of the Temple, see Amici 1982, 76; Boatwright 1987, 74-95 (esp 90-1); Lepper and Frere 1988, 197-203; Pena 1989, 132; Richardson 1992, 177; Bennett 1997, 157-8
127 Cf. Claridge 1993, 22: ‘The very fact that the sculptors are the only people likely to have seen the minutiae they were given the time and took the trouble to carve suggests a religious act; their labours may be interpreted as a match for the pious nature of the commission itself. For the sculptors, for Hadrian, and the public at large, it could have been enough to know it was there.’
glare off the gilded statue and Luna marble, even if paint would have altered
the effect that emanates from the white stone today. A number of theories
have sought to explain the shape of the helical frieze. One notion is that it
represents an unfurled papyrus scroll narrating in pictorial form what Trajan
wrote in his lost account of the Dacian Wars, his Dacica; 128 another is that it
is based upon a painted length of fabric of the kind that was wound around
the columns of temples on feast days. 129 Doubt persists, 130 but if we ask
about effect rather than inspiration, we can see that the helical frieze helps to
direct the viewer’s attention upwards, thereby commencing a sort of process
of propulsion.

A number of writers minimize Hadrian’s input, arguing that the Column’s
function as a tomb was intended from the beginning. Packer, for example,
thinks that the frieze was designed to commemorate Trajan’s achievements
eternally, justifying Trajan’s deification, 131 ‘although tradition dictated that
Trajan could hardly have revealed this purpose publicly when he dedicated
the Column’. 132 Similarly, the earliest publicity for the Forum ‘would not
have named the as yet living Trajan as the ultimate dedicatee of the
Temple’. 133 However, it is difficult to accept that subterfuge would have been
attempted or successful, and it is not the sort of behaviour that one associates
with the emperor whose modest style led to the Senate naming him optimus
princeps, ‘the best (or perfect) emperor’. Perhaps a lot comes down to your
assessment of Trajan’s character and relationship with the Senate.

Penelope Davies has revived an old view of Paul Zanker, based upon
funerary architecture and iconography, arguing that Trajan gave careful
thought to the Column as his tomb and fully intended the frieze from the
start. 134 She notes that the Column has a chamber in its base, that Marcus
Aurelius’ Column, designed as a commemorative monument rather than a
tomb, lacks a similar chamber, that the Column’s base bears a formal

128 Birt 1907, 269-315; Rossi 1971, 14; Hannestad 1988, 156: ‘as a scroll in stone, the column
with its band is undoubtedly meant to appear.’
129 Settis 1988, 86-93
130 E.g. Richardson 1992, 177: ‘[The idea of a book scroll] ignores the excellence of the
overall design, in which patterns are worked out vertically, as well as in sequence. And
such continuous narrative is at least as old as the Odyssey Landscapes from the Esquiline,
which seem hardly likely to have been derived from a book roll’; cf. Davies 1997, 43 n 7.
131 Packer 1994, 168, 182
133 Packer 1994, 172
134 Zanker 1970; Settis 1988, 53-6; Davies 1997, 41-65. For a Roman notable insisting upon
personal involvement in the design of his funerary monument, see (with caution) the
evidence of Pet. Sat. 71, where Trimalchio asks his tomb-builder Habinna: ‘Are you
building my monument in the way that I told you?’
similarity to a widely used type of Roman funerary altar, and that columns had been used to mark burials in Greek lands since archaic times. Trajan’s Column, she thinks, represents the superimposition of a funerary column on a funerary altar. In addition, griffins and other creatures familiar from funerary contexts appear throughout the sculptural programme of Trajan’s Forum. Yet again, however, the reader must think about the evidence for Trajan’s character and political pose. Furthermore, the Column’s inscription squares poorly with a funerary monument, the chamber’s use is uncertain, columns were not so regular in funerary contexts in Italy, griffins do not appear exclusively in funerary contexts, and the Column’s uniqueness among its imperial successors in having a funerary function can be used against the idea, viz. other columns of this type have no funerary associations. If Trajan did intend his tomb to be in the base, his model was not followed, apparently because his successors bowed to the strong sensitivities in existence. Why should Trajan have been less affected by these?

Davies has further, original points to make. Firstly, she feels that Hadrian would have featured more prominently in a frieze that he commissioned. This is not really so troubling, for it was not, with the single exception of the Temple of Deified Trajan, his normal practice to impose himself on the monuments refurbished or constructed during his reign (note the Pantheon’s façade: M. AGrippa COS. III FECT). More worrying is the fact that the Parthian campaign does not feature. Another idea relates specifically to the frieze’s spiralling motion and low relief, which Davies believes were designed to draw viewers close and manipulate them into circumambulating the monument in a way that re-enacts ancient funerary ritual. In other words, each viewer of Trajan’s Column who appreciated the frieze by walking around it would be honouring Trajan by perpetuating ritualistic, funerary behaviour. This is an intriguing idea, and it certainly appears that it was common in ancient funerary rites for individuals and groups to make magic circles around the deceased. The design of imperial mausolea, specifically those of Augustus and Hadrian, forces circumambulation before reaching the inner chambers, and there are several accounts of imperial funerals which describe groups running, riding or processing around the body of the dead.

---

136 Claridge 1993, 21 n 62. For a discussion of relevant examples, see Settis 1988, 90-3; Davies 1997, 47.
137 Even Davies recognises ‘purposeful ambiguity’: 1997, 49.
138 Davies 1997, 46.
139 Davies 1997, 52-60.
140 Davies 1997 53 fig.13 (plan of the Mausoleum of Augustus), 55 fig.15C (plan of the Mausoleum of Hadrian after Colvin 1991, fig.40).
emperor. In addition, there is the well known relief from the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius, which shows horsemen riding around a group of Praetorian infantry at the emperor's funeral.

On the other hand, Davies is clear that magic circles were used in other types of situations, for instance to do with fertility and protection, and the visibility problems surrounding the frieze make it unlikely that many people circumambulated the monument with much determination. Could it be, then, that the sculpted figures themselves are circumambulating the monument - perpetually, positively, in everlasting commemoration of Trajan's achievements? They might function, to some degree, like figures on a votive monument.

We are left with a situation in which some scholars credit Hadrian with a great deal, while others minimize his input. My feeling is that the Column and the Temple were originally planned for other purposes but were later appropriated as expressions of Hadrianic pietas after Trajan's death. Perhaps the Temple was at first intended for Nerva, Trajan's predecessor. Trajan's birth father, whom the emperor deified as Divus Traianus Pater, has also been seen (less convincingly) as a contender. As for the date of the Column's frieze, I am inclined to believe that it was executed and completed under Trajan, and thus that it did not relate at first instance to, though it subsequently harmonized beautifully with, Trajan's deification and entombment beneath the Column. In subsequent periods, people's minds would naturally be focused upon Divus Trajan when they viewed the Column or experienced the exciting novelty of its staircase, ascending to the heavens as Trajan himself did after his death. Hadrian would have known and

---

141 Praetorian Guardsmen ran around the bier at Augustus' funeral (Dio 56.42). There was an annual ceremonial run of soldiers around a monument marking the death of Drusus (Suet. Claud. 1). According to Cassius Dio (75.5.5), who was present at the funeral of Pertinax arranged by Septimius Severus, 'the magistrates and equestrian order, arrayed in a manner befitting their station, and likewise the cavalry and the infantry, passed in and out around the pyre performing intricate evolutions, both those of peace and those of war' (Loeb translation); cf Hdn 4.2.9. For discussion, see Price 1987, 59-61. On imperial apotheosis, see MacCormack 1981, 93-168.


143 Davies 1997, 54-6.


145 Settis 1988, 75-82; Davies 1997, 59 n 95. The coins often associated with the Temple seem to show a seated male cult statue, but Bennett 1997, 157-8, proposes Victoria, and Boatwright 1987, 88-9, mentions that Marciana, Trajan's sister, was also deified. For the possibility of rededication, see SHA, Pius 13, where Marcus Aurelius added the name of Antoninus Pius to that of Faustina on her temple in 161.
accepted this if he was involved as heavily (and anonymously) as some scholars now think. It did not matter that the monument would probably be called ‘Trajan’s Column’.

III

The Negotiation of Power.

Praise and restraint always go together, for the terms in which someone is praised mark the boundaries of their relationship with those who are praising them. The negotiation of power is intrinsic to the process. The Column, therefore, may be looked upon as a symbol of Trajan’s relationship with the Senate and People of Rome and a product of the negotiation of power in contemporary Roman society.

There were some among the citizens of Rome who were not entirely reconciled to the fact of Trajan being emperor. Trajan had the support of the army - that was the underlying reason why he was the princeps. He knew it, and he knew that some of the Senators in particular were prepared to accept him only because he had more power than they did. It made for a tense situation because these Senators, in their turn, knew that an insecure emperor might wish to see them executed for their ambition and prominence. There was relief when Trajan eventually returned to the city after his accession, in the latter part of 99, and adopted a pose of modesty and reconciliation.¹⁴⁶ He preferred to be merciful rather than to execute, hoping to build a reservoir of trust between himself and those who might be disaffected or inclined in some way to oppose the first emperor born in the provinces.¹⁴⁷ His Forum, together with its Column, can be looked upon as part of the process of negotiating his power, part of a dialogue or discourse going on between the emperor, his advisers, and the various interest groups who composed the citizens of Rome.

Some Senators were concerned for their personal security, others were worried about the empire’s economic condition after the excesses of Nero and the expensive and unprofitable campaigns of Domitian.¹⁴⁸ Still others thought that expansionist policies could be ruinously expensive and lead to further wars that would jeopardise the security of the entire empire. It was

¹⁴⁶  Bennett 1997, 53
¹⁴⁷  On the difficult political circumstances at the commencement of Trajan’s reign, see Bennett 1997, 40-57, 75-7.
time for consolidation of the imperial borders. Hadrian, of course, adopted this very policy at Trajan’s death. However, Trajan and his circle of advisers seem to have judged that booty could help to ease the empire’s financial problems (EX MANVBIIS on the attic of the colonnades makes this point in telling fashion: Gell NA 13.25.1-3). Thus, the Column justifies war and the army to civilian Rome and presents the emperor’s glory in association with these. It might equally be said that the Column (being an honour from the Senate and People) shows civilian Rome’s acceptance of these points. The public support and troop morale that it demonstrates would be needed for the upcoming Parthian campaign.  

How might visitors of Trajan’s reign have reacted to the martial images of the emperor, the statues of captured Dacians which acted as caryatids in the attic of the colonnades, and the other representations of arms and conquest which featured so heavily in Trajan’s Forum? Roman citizens probably felt pride and gratitude, Dacian slaves humiliation and resentment, foreign visitors might have had mixed emotions, men might have been stirred more than women, Roman soldiers more than civilians, and one could go on with such conjectures. One of the features of the sculptural programme that should not be taken for granted is its portrayal of Roman soldiers doing battle with ‘barbarians’. The Roman army was no longer a citizen militia which was called into existence for a particular campaign, after which the soldiers returned to tend their farms. The civilians and the military had been separated since the professional standing army came into existence under Augustus. As a result, the civilian population of the city were by now quite distinct from the military, and while foreign enemies were fearsome they had learned through experience that there was reason to be wary of their own soldiers too. Some older folk would have remembered the civil wars which resulted in Flavian power. Visitors to the Forum complex would have understood that they were entering a civic space with a profoundly military character. The emperor and his army were what stood between the citizens and the barbarian forces ‘out there’, beyond the provinces Part of the Forum’s message, therefore, is about the role being played by the army in giving protection and security to the citizens of the capital.  

This meaning could be apprehended almost at a glance. Less obviously, but available upon contemplation, is the idea that this army is the emperor’s ultimate weapon against internal dissent too.

149 Dio 68.17.1 describes this as a war for glory; cf. Bennett 1997, 183-204, on the Parthian campaign

150 Hannestad 1988, 153, notes that inscriptions in the Forum relate to all the units of the Roman army, not just those that fought in Dacia, and that officers were honoured with portrait medallions.
Future emperors would continue to derive benefit from the ubiquitous images of imperial victory, the power of the army, and the emperor’s mediation between Rome and her enemies and between the soldiers and the civilians. A viewer of Hadrian’s reign would perhaps contemplate the merits of expansionism versus pacifism.

**A Bell-tower and a Symbol of Roman Power: The Column in Later Ages.**

A *monumentum* (monument) for the ages was created when the Forum complex was opened in 112. Romans were much given to the creation of lasting personal monuments.¹⁵¹ Trajan’s Column was meant to stand permanently in an important civic space and was thus meant to be appreciated by future generations. Mary Beard and John Henderson emphasize the spectacle:

> ‘we are encouraged to think of titanic labours, mountains moved, empires built - the same godlike power of Rome and its emperor as bridged the Danube and conquered the steppes of Dacia. Close reading of the sculpture’s intricate narrative is confounded by the very scale of the gargantuan project. The sheer spectacle of all this precision stonework (264 m²) soaring beyond the reach of any human eye is surely the essence of this archetypal *folie de grandeur*.’¹⁵²

As a symbol of power its ultimate success can be measured by its influence down through the ages, which has been profound. Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius received columns after their deaths. In Constantinople, Theodosius I erected a column (perhaps dedicated in 383 or 384) and Arcadius commemorated his victory over the Goths with a column (in 402, but only dedicated in 421). Though now lost, sketches of the latter made in the 16th and 17th Centuries leave no doubt about its debt to Trajan’s Column.¹⁵³ Already by the early 4th Century, sculpture from the Column court (the ‘Great Trajanic Frieze’) was removed for reuse on the Arch of Constantine. The Forum was still admired in the 8th Century, but its destruction was virtually complete by the early 9th Century, when the great earthquake of 801 struck. Ravages to the Forum meant that the Column gradually lost its coherence with surrounding structures. Nevertheless, in

---

¹⁵¹ See Livy, *Praef.* 6, for the description of his work as a *monumentum* for future generations. Mary Beard and John Henderson 2001, 177, say that ‘Trajan’s Column was originally designed as a tour de force to top off the mammoth Forum of Trajan, the largest in the series of imperial fora, which were all laid out in a row as one ruler after another sought to outdo his predecessors. Trajan meant to have the last word in imperial megalomania.’

¹⁵² Beard and Henderson 2001, 181

¹⁵³ Elsner 1998, 69 fig. 38.
subsequent periods the impression of respect and influence is remarkably maintained. The Column’s hollow construction and sacred aura saw it used as a bell-tower for the tiny Medieval church of S. Nicola de Columna, which grew up at its base (attested first between 1029-1032). Its funerary function was maintained by the parishioners, who excavated a (pre-existing?) cavity below the base to make room for a succession of burials. It was considered a tourist attraction in the Middle Ages, while the buildings around it were ceaselessly plundered for stone and decoration for Rome’s churches and palaces. A law of 1162 stipulated that death would be the penalty for anyone damaging it. The Column played an important part in guide-books of Rome, which described features like the number of steps in great detail. It was the first monument treated as an archaeological treasure by Renaissance Rome, in the 1530s during the papacy of Paul III, who ordered the demolition of S. Nicola’s church and appointed a custodian. The outline of a roof over the door to the Column’s interior is a legacy of S. Nicola’s demolition; it has slightly defaced the reliefs. A drawing by Étienne Du Pérac, dated to 1575, shows the Column isolated in a low trench; late Medieval (?) structures surround it. In 1588 Pope Sixtus V placed a specially commissioned statue of St. Peter by Leonardo Sormano and Tommaso della Porta on top; the statue of Trajan had long since disappeared in antiquity. In the following year the Pope placed a statue of St. Paul atop the Column of Marcus Aurelius. Many artists have painted it and many architects have been inspired by it. The French were particularly impressed, conducting excavations around the Column in 1812-1814. Napoleon stood atop a column in the Place Vendôme; it was torn down in 1871 but a replacement was soon installed. In Trafalgar Square, Lord Nelson towers around 50 metres above everything but pigeons on the wing. A much-reproduced image under the Fascist régime, the Column survived the post-Fascist backlash. Interest, scholarly and otherwise, at the time of writing seems never to have been greater.\footnote{On the later history of the Column, see Nibby 1839; Lanciani 1902-12; Cecchielli 1938; La Colonna Traiana 1988; Richardson 1992, 177-8; Claridge 1993, 5; Packer 1997, chap.1; Claridge 1998, 168-9; Elsner 1998, 65-9; Beard and Henderson 2001, 177-82.}

Trajan’s Column, therefore, has served quite consistently as an inspirational symbol of power, a wonder of ancient Rome. This indeed is how it tends to reside in the modern imagination - aloof, proud, a wonder of power, a powerful wonder. The various functions distinguished above often seem to elide into one another - understandably, for the emperor’s power radiated into most areas of life in a way not readily comprehensible to those of us living in a compartmentalized modern world. A monument so clearly related to Trajan’s power could not fail but radiate similarly in its display. There was never a single function or meaning. As time passed, a large stock of
meanings accumulated to the benefit of Trajan, his successors and his people. The Column encourages questions but rarely permits a definitive settlement. We are often guessing when we contemplate evocations and responses in studying Roman art, partly because the best works of Roman art remain evocative in a variety of changing circumstances. This is not to say that all viewers of Trajan's Column sought messages beneath the celebration of victory and imperial virtue. Many did not need to, so positive and strong was their commitment. Any who did, however, must have found many reasons to support the emperor, imperial government, and the Column itself.

Bibliography

BNS: Bollettino di Numismatica e Sfragistica.
Calza, G. (1932) 'Un nuovo frammento di fasti Annali (anni 108-113)' NSc 8 201.
Cecchelli, C (1938) ‘Le chiese della Colonna Traiana e la leggenda di Traiano’ Studi e documentazione sulla Roma sacra 1 Rome.
Pollan, J.H. (1874) A Description of the Trajan Column London.


Scott, K. (1936) The Imperial Cult under the Flavians Stuttgart.


