The Politics of Perpetuation: Trajan's Column and the Art of Commemoration

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Abstract

The frieze on Trajan's Column has long been criticized for requiring the visitor to circumambulate the column to read it. By considering the Column within the context of Roman funerary monuments, I argue that the frieze's spiraling motion was designed to manipulate the viewer into a reenactment of ancient funerary ritual as it is described in literary sources. Furthermore, the Column functioned as a viewing station; the helical staircase inside its shaft cast the visitor into disorienting darkness, before thrusting him or her at the summit into dazzling sunlight, simultaneously presenting a dramatic vista that promoted Trajan as an accomplished general who restored Rome's self-esteem—and her coffers—through military victory. The Column's full and powerful impact, which extends well beyond the decorative frieze, can only be appreciated by understanding the ancient viewer's experience as he visited Trajan's tomb.

In A.D. 117, partly paralyzed by a stroke and plagued by dropsy, Trajan determined to leave his army in Syria and sail for Italy. Overcome by illness, he broke his journey at Selinus in Cilicia, where he died, probably on 8 August. His body was cremated and his ashes conveyed to Rome by the returning army. Sealed in a golden urn, they were deposited in the base of his sculptured Column in his Forum, where they remained until their theft in the Middle Ages. The Column still stands in the heart of modern Rome (figs. 1–3), and is among the best-known and most-admired monuments of the Roman world. Rarely has it suffered from scholarly neglect, yet, in general, contemporary discourse has focused almost exclusively on the narrative and historical content of the Column's spiraling frieze, and on its original design and intended location in Trajan's Forum. None of these issues is directly confronted here. Instead, this article places Trajan's Column in the context of a genre of imperial funerary monuments including the Mausolea of Augustus and Hadrian. It takes as its starting point two simple questions: How does one explain the unusual—and, for many, unsatisfactory—design of Trajan's Column and its decoration? How could the designer of a funerary monument exploit architectural or sculptural form to promote the memory of the deceased? A single solution to both of these problems, based on a phenomenological reading of mortuary art, may radically alter our perception of one of Rome's best-known landmarks.

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1 Cass. Dio 68.16.3, 68.33.2–333, 69.2.3; Eutropius, Breviarum ab urbe condita 8.52–3; Aur. Vict. Epit. 13.11; S.H.A. Hadr. 6; G. Lugli, "La tomba di Traiano," Omaggio a lui Constan
tin Daicoviciu (Bucharest 1960) 333–38.


PROBLEMS OF THE COLUMN’S DESIGN AND FUNCTION

As its inscription indicates, Trajan’s Column was dedicated in 113 by the Senate and People of Rome.4 It stands in a small court in Trajan’s Forum, defined by the Basilica Ulpia on the south side (with a terrace on the north from which the Column could be viewed), Greek and Latin libraries on east and west (collectively termed the Bibliotheca Ulpia), and the Temple of Divine Trajan on the north (figs. 4–5).5 Soaring 150 Roman ft (44.07 m) high, the Column is sculpted on the base with weapons and trophies and on the shaft with a spiraling narrative frieze. The Tuscan capital supported a pedestal, on which

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4 CIL VI, 960; Fasti Ostienses 48, A. Degrassi, Il 13.1.203.
there was a colossal gilded statue of Trajan standing on a small dome.

Scholars believe that the narrative format of the Column's sculptural frieze was based either upon the continuous illustrated rotulus (even though no example of such a scroll is documented at this date), or upon a painted length of fabric of the kind that was wound around the columns of temples on feast days. Most agree that its content relied to some extent upon Trajan's own account of the Dacian campaigns, known as his Dacica. Since a mere four words survive from this work (which may have resembled Julius Caesar's Commentaries), the Column is one of the few extant sources that document the wars; inevitably this has led to extensive use of the Column as a source for military and topographical information, and to speculation about the account's historicity. The focus here is

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6 Packer 1994 (supra n. 5) 167–68, n. 15, 171. Sixtus V replaced the statue in 1588 with a statue of St. Peter by Giacomo della Porta. Numismatic representations of the Column show a cuirassed male figure holding a spear and an orb.

7 T. Birt, Die Buchrolle in der Kunst (Leipzig 1907). Contra K. Weitzmann, who, finding no antique evidence for a rotulus with continuous narrative illustration, contests its existence before the 10th-century Joshua Roll (The Joshua Roll, Princeton 1948 and Illustrations in Roll and Codex, Princeton 1970). A mosaic from a basilica or synagogue in Mopsuestia strengthens the case for the existence of continuous illustrated rotuli as early as the fifth century. The mosaic shows the Samson cycle from the Old Testament, illustrated in scroll form, with continuous narrative illustration set below verses from the Book of Judg → E. Kitzinger, "Observations on the Samson Floor at Mopsuestia," DOP 27 (1973) 142, writes: "The Mopsuestia mosaic seems to prove to me beyond any reasonable doubt that, whatever the earlier history of this type of illustration, picture rolls similar to the Joshua Roll did exist in Late Antiquity." There is ample evidence to connect Roman mosaics with book illustrations.

8 Settis et al. (supra n. 2) 86–93; Settis (supra n. 2) 231.

9 Prisc. Inst. 6.13 (Keil's Grammatici Latini 2:205); see Lep- per and Frere (supra n. 2) 211–29; Settis et al. (supra n. 2) 7. Cassius Dio's Roman History in 80 books, written under the Severans, covered the reigns of Nerva and Trajan in book 68; what little survives of this comes from Xiphilinus's 11th century Epitome and the Excerpta for the Encyclopedia of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitios (912–59). There must also have been a medical officer's journal from the campaigns, but this too is lost.


Fig. 3. Trajan's Column, section (with restored finial). (From E. Cressy and G.L. Taylor, The Architectural Antiquities of Rome 2 [London 1922] pl. CIII)
on the narrative frieze as an instrument of viewer manipulation.

It has often been charged that the Column’s sculptural frieze, although stylistically of the highest caliber, is, in the final analysis, disappointing. In order to make sense of the narrative’s continuity, scholars argue, the viewer is forced to walk around and around the Column, head inclined sharply and uncomfortably upward. Richard Brilliant summarizes the problem as follows:

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.12

Settis decries “la difficile quasi insormontabile di lettura,”13 which Lehmann-Hartleben passes off as a consequence of the design committee’s disdain for the artist’s wishes,14 and Bianchi Bandinelli as the

13 Settis et al. (supra n. 2) 86–87.
14 K. Lehmann-Hartleben, Die Traianssäule, ein römisches
creation of an artist working only for himself.\textsuperscript{15} Such criticism has led to numerous readings of meaningful sequences on the main vertical axes of the shaft, to prove that the viewer did not have to move around the Column but could, in fact, understand its full message when standing still.\textsuperscript{16} These studies shed valuable light upon the narrative and perceptive strategies of the frieze; yet the problematic encircling motion required of the visitor remains unexplained. How do we reconcile the outstanding quality of workmanship with such a seemingly poor design?

I believe that the solution to this problem lies in the Column's function as an imperial tomb. There is, admittedly, no incontrovertible evidence that Trajan's Column was designed from the outset as his sepulcher. The literary sources state clearly that Trajan's ashes were buried \textit{sub columna}, yet they are equally unclear about when the decision to place them there was taken and by whom.\textsuperscript{17} There is nothing inherent in the Column itself that unambiguously certifies a primary, or even a secondary, funerary function. Furthermore, protocol denied an emperor public burial until the Senate decreed it, and this could not happen until after his death. Burial within the \textit{pomerium} was an extraordinary honor, which Trajan could not have presumed himself to merit with impunity.\textsuperscript{18} Three scenarios are possible: 1) that the Column was built purely as an honorary monument, exalting Trajan after his spectacular victories across the Danube, and only conceived of, unaltered, as a tomb after his death; 2) that it was ini-

\textsuperscript{15} R. Bianchi Bandinelli, "La Colonna Traiana: Documento d'arte e documento politico (o della libertà dell'artista)," in \textit{Dall'ellenismo al medio evo} (Rome 1978) 139.


\textsuperscript{17} Eutropius, \textit{Breviarium ab urbe condita} 8.5.2: [Traianus] \textit{inter divos relatus est solusque omnium intra ubem sepultus est. Ossa consalata in urnam auream in foro, quod adficiavit, sub columna posita sunt.} A. Claridge, "Hadrian's Column of Trajan," \textit{JRA} 6 (1993) 5–22, esp. 11, notes that this need not mean that they were buried in the base itself, and that a cavity under the Column, explored by Boni, could feasibly have contained them.

trially conceived as an honorary monument and redesigned in a separate construction/decoration phase as a tomb; or 3) that it was designed for Trajan's burial.

Amanda Claridge has argued that the present Column as an entirety, with sculpted base and shaft, is troublingly busy; in Trajan's time, she proposes, only the base of the Column was sculpted, and the shaft was left plain. The spiral frieze was added in Hadrian's reign, when the Column became Trajan's tomb.19 One might, however, have expected Hadrian to feature more prominently in a frieze that he commissioned. In general, arguments against an initial funerary intention for the Column fail to account for some disquieting problems. First, be it ever so small, there is a chamber in the Column's base (fig. 6), which must have added further complications to an already challenging engineering problem.20 Moreover, in the far north wall of that chamber are traces of a bench or altar that was subsequently hacked away, and marks in the wall above it indicate a bracket, which probably held Trajan's golden urn in place. A rectangular window with an internal splay guided rays of light onto the altar and pavement.21 The chamber may have been a location for propitiary sacrifices or a depository for votive objects (such as the spoils depicted on the exterior) before becoming a burial chamber in 117;22 it may even have housed military standards or the scrolls of Trajan's *Dacica*, as an extension of the Bibliotheca Ulpia.23 Yet its use for any one of these functions between 113 and 117 does not preclude an ulterior motive for its construction. One might compare Marcus Aurelius' Column, designed as a commemorative monument and not a tomb, which has no such chamber.24

Second, there is a formal similarity between the Column base and a widely used type of Roman funerary altar, often with a double door on the front, surmounted by an inscription, and decorated with iconographical features including eagles, victories, and weaponry (fig. 7).25 Columns had been used to mark burials in Greek lands since Archaic times, as

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19 Claridge (supra n. 17). She argues that the entire endeavor was a labor-intensive job and that the Column, complete with sculptural frieze, could scarcely have been finished between ca. 108 and 113. Moreover, the dominant themes in the narrative frieze are oriented toward the later Temple of Divine Trajan, which, she contends, may not have been planned in Trajan's lifetime (see infra n. 95). For the unlikely proposal that the Column initially stood in the eastern hemicycle of Trajan's Forum, see V. Groh, "La Colonna di Traiano," *RendLine* ser. 6.1 (1925) 40–57; L. Richardson, Jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore 1992) 101–107. See also J.C. Anderson, *The Historical Topography of the Imperial Fora* (Brussels 1984) 155–59.


21 G. Boni, "Esplorazione del Forum Ulpium," NSc 1907, 361–427, esp. 368; Lugli (supra n. 1) 337–38; Lepper and Frere (supra n. 2) 21; Claridge (supra n. 17) 5–22.

22 Lugli (supra n. 1) 338; Claridge (supra n. 17) 11–13.


24 Lepper and Frere (supra n. 2) 22.

Elizabeth McGowan has documented, as well as in Italy; a column outside the Porta del Vesuvio in Pompeii, for instance, records the burial of a woman named Septumia, and Numerius Erennius Celso erected a column for his wife Esquilla Polla near the Porta di Nola. Trajan's Column in its entirety therefore represents the superimposition of two traditional funerary elements, the altar and the column.

The prevalent view today on the Column's function is that championed by Zanker in 1970, that Trajan intended his Column to be his final resting place from the outset. By Greek tradition, as a scholiast on Pindar records, a local hero, and especially a foundation hero, might be buried within the walls of his city, often in the marketplace; Alexander the Great, for instance, was buried inside Alexandria. The place of burial then became a form of heroon, which may explain the isolation of the northern part of Trajan's Forum, with tomb and temple. In Republican times, burial within the pomerium was an honor reserved for the summi viri, whose virtues Trajan was intent upon reviving. Perhaps this explains why he set himself apart from the Flavians, who were laid to rest in the Temple of the Flavian Dynasty on the Quirinal, and opted instead to be buried in a style reminiscent of the honors paid to the great soldier-leader of the Late Republic, Julius Caesar. Suetonius describes a monument erected in Caesar's honor: "After the funeral the Roman people] raised a solid, nearly 20-foot-high column of Numidian marble (solidam columnam prope viginti pedum latidis Numidici) in the Forum, and

Fig. 7. Funerary altar of P. Ciartius Actus. Capitoline Museum. (Courtesy Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini)


Zanker (supra n. 25) 539. The libraries may have held some eschatological meaning as well; funerary imagery suggests that intellectualism gradually became a vehicle for apotheosis (see H.I. Marrou, Μοναστήρια της Αρχαίας Ελλάδας. Étude sur les scènes de la vie intellectuelle figurant sur les monuments funéraires romains [Grenoble 1938]; Settis et al. [supra n. 2] 60–74; Maffei [supra n. 2] 358).

35 Seen in, for instance, the naming of the Basilica Ul-pia (using Trajan's family name in the style of the Basilicae Julia and Aemilia) and the Forum's construction ex manubis; it reflected Trajan's determination to settle the conflict between princeps and Senate: Zanker (supra n. 25) 531.

34 Suet. Dom. 1 and 17; Mart. Epigrammata libri 9.16–10, 9.35.8. See K. Scott, The Imperial Cult under the Flavians

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inscribed on it: "To the father of his country. For a long time thereafter they continued to make sacrifices there, and to take vows and decide certain disputes by swearing an oath in Caesar's name."  

Whatever the precedents, the choice of a site within the pomerium was an act of enormous presumption, not dissimilar to one that had contributed to Julius Caesar's assassination. Admittedly, Domitian had redefined the boundaries for self-aggrandizement since the relatively austere times of the Republic, and even though Trajan reaffirmed the emperor's status as princeps rather than deus, he was judged by different rules from those that had governed Caesar. Nevertheless, Zanker argues that Trajan masked his future tomb as a victory monument whose full glory as a sepulchre would be revealed upon his burial there. Sculptural reliefs with distinctly funerary associations located throughout Trajan's Forum support his argument. A frieze of winged tauroctonous Victories decorating candelabra in the Basilica Ulpia refers both to the emperor's victorious power and to his eventual victory over death in apotheosis. A lion-griffin and putto frieze decorated the Forum entrance wall (fig. 8), and a griffin and candelabra frieze decorated the peristyle around the Column. As companion of Nemesis, the griffin was symbolic of military might and the unavoidable necessity for vengeance, ineffugibilis necessitas ultimis. Yet a long tradition also associated it with both Apollo and Dionysos, in the role of watchful guardian (over god, ruler, or the dead) and vehicle of apotheosis or Dionysiac regeneration; as such the griffin was often carved on the side panels of sarcophagi. Putti, moreover, have a well-documented place in funerary iconography. These sculptural themes appear to have been chosen for


Suet. Jul. 85. See also Cass. Dio 44.51; Cic. Att. 14.15, Phil. 1.5; Frischer (supra n. 3) 68–69 and 73; S. Weinstock, Divus Julius (Oxford 1971) 364–67. The evidence on the column is difficult to piece together. Weinstock surmises that Amatius began an altar in Caesar's name, which Dobelba destroyed within two weeks. Subsequently a column (with or without a statue) was erected to mark the unofficial beginnings of the new cult to Divus Julius, probably by Octavian. It may have been replaced by the following year by a consecration altar. For other parallels between Trajan and Julius Caesar, see D. Nardoni, La Colonna Ulpia Traiana (Rome 1986) 125–28.

Cass. Dio 44.3–7.

K.A. Waters, "Traianus Domitiani Continuator," AJP 90 (1969) 385–405. Still, if the Column was designed as a burial monument, it may have been Trajan's presumption that led Hadrian to confirm the interdiction against burial within the pomerium (Dig. 47.12.3.5).

Zanker (supra n. 25).


Ungaro and Millela (supra n. 39) 196–97; Piazzesi (supra n. 39) 196–98, fig. 94; Zanker (supra n. 25) 513 and figs. 22–23.

Mercati di Traiano inv. no. 4000; Ungaro and Millela (supra n. 39) 220–24; Piazzesi (supra n. 39) 134 and fig. 36; A. Bartoli, I monumenti antichi di Roma nei disegni degli Uffizi di Firenze (Rome 1914–1922) 72 and fig. 224; Zanker (supra n. 25) 513 and fig. 21.


Ungaro and Millela (supra n. 39) 220; Packer 1994 (supra n. 5) 171. Its association with Apollo dates to the sixth century, and develops more fully from the fourth century B.C., particularly with the burgeoning popularity of Pythagoreanism and Orphism and a concomitant belief in the transmigration of the soul. The griffin is mostly associated with Dionysos as Sabazios, master of plants and animals, god of rebirth, who, like Apollo, guaranteed immortality to his adherents. Simon (supra n. 42) remarks "ist der bacheische Charakter des Frieses unverkennbar," and notes the added Dionysiac touch of a silenus and maenads depicted on the volute krater shown in the frieze. See also R. Turcan, Les sarcophages romains à représentations Dionysiaques: Essai de chronologie et d'histoire religieuse (Paris 1966) 368–77, who documents a "réveil du Dionysisme roman sous Trajan," which manifested itself particularly strongly in funerary art: "Dans le cas précis des frises de ce Forum, nous ne pensons pas que le griffon 'solaire' du Levant nous réfère précisément à la politique orientale de Trajan: c'est un symbole de puissance valable pour toute espèce d'imperialisme roman. Comme tel aussi et comme tous les motifs de la symbolique triomphale, il pourra représenter la victoire sur la mort de l'âme, qu'il arrache aux miasmes du monde et qu'il vénérera au-dessus de la matière jusqu'aux splendeurs étherées" (371–72, n. 7).

Putti accompany the griffin in both Dionysiac and Apolline iconography: see R. Stuveras, Le putto dans l'art roman (Brussels 1969) 33–63. Frequently represented in its own right in a funerary context, the putto often holds a downward-facing torch to symbolize the extinction of life, and is often characterized as the guide of the dead, or psy-
the Forum according to a program of purposeful ambiguity. In another frieze, representing candelabra and sphinxes and probably to be located inside the colonnades, the ambiguity vanishes: the sphinx, as Marina Millela puts it, has no other significance than decorative and apotropaic, "quest'ultimo concesso con la sua funzione di guardiana della tomba."45

PROBLEMS OF TOMB DESIGN: ESTABLISHING A CONTEXT

For the Romans, as countless ancient authors attest, remembrance by the living after death was no small concern.46 In man's memory lay a form of immortality, even if the deceased did not participate in it actively. For a society whose beliefs about an afterlife were pessimistic if admittedly uncertain, this form of immortality may have offered greater permanence than any gilded promise of a hereafter, and for many the most obvious way to construct a living memory was through a funerary monument. Thus in Petronius's Satyricon, the arriviste Trimalchio casts around for lighthearted dinner conversation and decides upon the design of his tomb, which he discusses with his friend and monument mason, Habinnas. He concludes: "And, thanks to you, I'll be able to live on after my death."47 Yet how exactly did the tomb function to promote the perpetuation of memory?

A tomb may be monumental and unusual, but it has meaning only through those who look at it; it may speak, but it is always dependent on the passerby to read it aloud,48 and in the glance or the voice of the living lies perpetuation through memory. Disinterest or neglect means a true "death" for the deceased, for he or she no longer lives on in the minds of the living. Well aware of this, the Romans

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45 Ungaro and Millela (supra n. 39) 222; Packer 1994 (supra n. 5) 171.
47 Petron. Sat. 71.11. See also Cic. Leg. 2.22.55-57, on the tomb's crucial role in rendering the burial spot sacred.
often sought highly frequented locations for sepulchers—such as the plot of land chosen by Eurysaces in the fork between two main arteries into Rome, the Via Labicana and the Via Praenestina (fig. 9), or the spot selected by Cicero for his daughter’s tomb—to ensure companionship and remembrance for the dead. Rites at the tomb, as well as its upkeep, were the oldest and most important ways of perpetuating memory, and the Romans often made provisions to ensure that both were maintained. Sometimes the tomb complex would include a garden, partly to encourage visitors to take their leisure nearby, and often to grow grapes for offerings of wine or fruit to raise money for the tomb’s upkeep. Frequently, moreover, the will would name the heir responsible for maintaining the tomb, and allocate funds for the observance of rituals. Keith Hopkins draws attention, for instance, to the small-town ragman who left enough money for 12 fellow guild members to dine once a year at his tomb: another man left a sum of money to a college of naval engineers so that they could celebrate annual festivals at his tomb. As a rule, rites took place at a funerary monument on personal anniversaries and during the dies Parentales (or Ferales), also termed the Parentalia (13–21 February), when family and friends would visit the tomb with offerings of grain, salt, wine-soaked bread, and violets, and dine by the grave; but how much better if the deceased could somehow be assured of daily attention from passersby. This issue, it seems, was one with which tomb designers knowingly grappled; as I argue below, they labored to exploit sculptural and architectural form to reach out to those who had not come specifically to visit, but were merely passing by.

In pursuit of memory perpetuation, many Romans endeavored to engage the passerby through their tomb’s design. Pleas for attention from the living exist, for instance, in epigraphy. Like an example from Ostia (“Be aware, traveler, that your voice is really mine”), epitaphs could be designed to be read aloud and, in quasi-magical fashion, to perpetuate the deceased through the spoken words of the living. Besides encouraging speech, however, the tomb’s design might effectively secure the visitor’s

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50 Cic. Att. 12.12, 12.18; see also Lavagne (supra n. 48) 61; H. von Hesberg, Römische Grabbauten (Darmstadt 1992) 5–6.
52 CIL XI, 5047; K. Hopkins, Death and Renewal (Cambridge 1983) 233. See also the documents collected by M. Amelotti, Il testamento romano attraverso la prassi documentale (Florence 1966).
53 ILS 7258; see also ILS 8370, 8373.
54 Ov. Fast. 2.533–42. On the closing of temples, banning of marriage, and other measures in force during the Parentalia, see Fast. 2.557–71; Plut. Mor. Quaest. Rom. 34. See also A. Bouche-Leclercq, Manuel des institutions romaines (Paris 1886) 466; J.M.C. Toynbee, Death and Burial in the Roman World (London 1971) 63–64; R. Schilling, “Roman Festivals and Their Significance,” Acta Classica 7 (1964) 44–56; Hopkins (supra n. 52) 233; von Hesberg (supra n. 50) 16–17.
55 CIL XIV, 356; translation from S. Walker, Memorials to the Roman Dead (London 1985) 62. The very utterance of a name could have special magical significance: see J. Ankequin, Recherches sur l’action magique et ses représentations (IVe et VIlme siècles après J.-C.) (Paris 1973) 28–29. See also Prop. 4.7.79–86.
attention by requiring his or her interaction with the monument, on either a cognitive-affective or a physical level. Intricate sculptural decoration of any kind, be it vegetal or figural, could provoke interest in the beholder, engaging his attention as it forced his eye to roam over cuts in the stone and experience lively movements of light and shadow, especially during nocturnal rites by the light of flickering lamps. Figural decoration reliably piqued the viewer’s curiosity, so some, like Euryaces the baker or the Haterii, provided a visual res gestae, or record of things achieved, for the viewer’s entertainment, thus perpetuating interest in their lives. For others like, again, Euryaces, or a Roman wine merchant from Neumagen, Germany, whose tomb is surmounted by a stone model of Moselle riverboats laden with casks of wine (fig. 10), the monument might itself be a huge sculpture denoting an aspect of their lives. This made it curious to behold, an invitation for interest. Freed persons of the Late Republican and Augustan periods used sculpture to address the passerby more directly still; groups of shoulder-length truncated busts, surrounded by a long rectangular frame mounted window-like on a roadside monument, peered out at the passerby, engaging him eye-to-eye with their frontal gaze, eerily reversing the usual hierarchy between viewer and viewed, living and dead, and forcing interest in their lives.

On a grander scale, however, an architect might choose to control the visitor’s physical movement through a monument’s architectonic design, thus bringing “life” to the sepulcher and promoting active memory perpetuation. An example of this is the exedra monument (fig. 11), such as those of Cerninius Restitutus, Aulus Veius, and Mamia on the Street of the Tombs outside the Herculanean Gate at Pompeii. This monument type consisted of a bench or vaulted niche lined with seats, providing a resting place for the weary traveler to or from the

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57 On the former, a frieze detailing bread-making (see Ciancio Rossetto, supra n. 49), and on the latter, a relief perhaps referring to Haterius’s career as a building contractor (see W. Jensen, The Sculptures from the Tomb of the Haterii, Diss., Univ. of Michigan 1978).
59 D.E.E. Kleiner, Roman Group Portraiture. The Funerary

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city—on the unspoken condition that the visitor read the name of the deceased, featured prominently in the design. Like the philosophers for whom such exedrae might be a meeting place, they might then contemplate man’s fate and the life of the deceased. Accommodating for funerary banquets in honor of the dead, these monuments would entice banqueters to linger in the company of the deceased.

In the following pages, I argue that the architects of the imperial funerary monuments also appreciated the power of dynamics in architecture and sculpture, and learned to exploit its potential with increasing success, not only to engage the viewer but to draw him into a perpetual reenactment of funerary rituals as well.

**IMPERIAL MAUSOLEA AND CIRCUMAMBULATION**

Augustus’s mausoleum complex offers a ready example of cognitive manipulation through monument design. The Mausoleum (ca. 28–23 B.C.) did not stand in isolation on the Campus Martius; rather, as Buchner has suggested, it was but one component of a tripartite complex consisting also of the Ara Pacis Augustae, an altar built in 13–9 B.C. to celebrate Augustus’s safe return from Spain and Gaul, and the Solarium Augusti, a giant sundial designed by Facundus Novius ca. 10 B.C., with an Egyptian obelisk as its gnomon and bronze letters set into the pavement alongside it as a grid (fig. 12).61 Since the area around these monuments was desolate, the monuments were visibly united by their topographical proximity to one another and isolation from other buildings, even if they were not joined by the movement of the needle’s shadow as Buchner supposed.62 They also shared commonalities in symbolic themes, such as references to the Actian victory. All, we might suppose, were part of Augustus’s commemorative scheme.63 The huge Horologium functioned on a

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63 For the isolation of the monuments from other buildings, see D. Favro, “Reading the Augustan City,” in P.J. Hol-

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Fig. 11. Exedra of Mamia, Pompeii. (Courtesy Stephen Petersen)
multitude of levels, but served, on the simplest, to draw the visitor into a daily dialogue with the complex. Petronius articulates just how it worked: the macabre Trimalchio asks Habinnas, “Are you building my monument in the way that I told you? . . . A clock (horologium) in the middle, so that anyone who looks at the time, whether he likes it or not, reads my name.” By offering the service of telling the time, Trimalchio’s sundial cast the visitor as unwitting conspirator in Trimalchio’s struggle for immortality in the minds of the living. In the same way, the incorporation of a sundial into Augustus’s funerary complex ensured that well after his death, each time anyone consulted the sundial he would, advertently or not, be reminded of its builder, and in that mental process lay Augustus’s immortality. That immortality is itself alluded to in the very incorporation of the dimension of time into the tomb’s design: the sundial stands as an icon for the passage of time, through which Augustus’s memory will survive.

Architectural design also provoked the viewer’s physical interaction with imperial funerary monuments, as can be seen in the Mausolea of Augustus and Hadrian, where the architect manipulated the visitor’s movement in prescribed directions. Writing soon after its construction, Strabo described the Mausoleum of Augustus as “a large mound set upon a tall socle by the river, planted with evergreen trees up to the top. Above stands the bronze statue of the emperor Augustus.” Inside, five concentric walls surrounded a central travertine pillar (figs. 13–14).66

Piercing the three outer walls, a vaulted vestibule led to an annular corridor between third and fourth walls; two openings in this corridor granted access to a second annular corridor between the fourth and fifth walls. From this inner corridor one entered the burial chamber proper. Hadrian’s Mausoleum on the ager Vaticanus, built after Trajan’s Column between ca. 123 and 140, consisted of a square base, tied by radial walls to two circular drums that supported a tempietto or a quadriga. A bronze door in the Mausoleum’s south facade opened into a vestibule,

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65 Strab. 5.3.9.

66 On the Mausoleum of Augustus, see most recently H. von Hesberg and S. Panciera, Das Mausoleum des Augustus. Der Bau und seine Inschriften (Munich 1994).

leading to a square atrium, on the east side of which an annular corridor begins its counterclockwise ascent through the tomb’s interior (fig. 15). Turning a full 360°, the ramp culminated immediately above the vestibule, and there a second, radial corridor led to the main burial chamber.68

In short, both imperial mausolea are circular in plan, and both incorporate annular corridors into their interior design, even though those corridors were not necessary for construction purposes.69 For the visitors entering either mausoleum, the approach to the burial chamber is not a straight line from the entranceway; instead, they must move first through the ring corridors around the cells, in effect circumscribing the burial in the center of the tomb with their winding path. What was the purpose of such circumambulation? An answer to this question appears to reside in the magical properties that the Romans, like many other peoples, ascribed both to the circle and to the act of circumscribing an object or person (even if the encircling action did not inscribe a perfect circle).70 The circle’s special quality could be harnessed for a variety of purposes. Often, it served to concentrate attention and power on its center, as is the case, presumably, in fertility rites ascribed by Pliny to the Phrygians and Lycaonians, who believed that the egg of a partridge or other bird passed around (circumducas) a woman’s breasts three times would prevent them from sagging.71 In his analysis of dreams, Artemidorus interprets the circle as a restrictive boundary, and indeed in the Satyricon, one of Trimalchio’s fellow-freedmen threatens to use it for just such a purpose: he curses the young Ascylos for laughing, and insists that if he urinated in a circle around him (circumminxit) he would prevent the boy from escap-


69 On the circular corridors, see J.C. Reeder, “Typology and Ideology in the Mausoleum of Augustus,” CRI 11:2 (1992) 265–304; Boatwright (supra n. 67) 161–63; Angeletti (supra n. 67). For Roman circular tombs, see Eiser (supra n. 60) passim. Examples with rectilinear corridors indicate that circular corridors were not simply due to construction technique; moreover, circular walls required for construction need not house accessible corridors.

70 For evidence of belief in special properties inherent in the circle, an almost universal phenomenon, see L. Hau-

71 Pliny HN 30.131. See also Claud. De Vi cons. Hon. 324–27; Pliny HN 28.23; Petron. Sat. 62; and Annequin (supra n. 55) 136–40.
ing. Yet Artemidorus also sees it as a defensive device. The boundary established through circular motion both defined the area it enclosed and protected it; thus, according to Varro, circular movement took place during the creation of a town boundary, and in the annual festivals of amburbium (the expiatory procession around Rome), and ambarvalia (circumambulation of the fields). The sanctity of this circular boundary was such that, according to legend, those who disrespected it might suffer deadly consequences; such was the fate of Remus, who leaped over the foundation trench of Romulus's emeralds. 

Fig. 15. Mausoleum of Hadrian: A) reconstruction by M. Borgatti (1931); B) reconstruction by S. Rowland Pierce (1925); and C) plan. (From H. Colvin, Architecture and the After-Life [New Haven 1991] fig. 40)

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72 Petron. Sat. 57. See also Hom. Od. 11.26–28, where Odysseus makes a sacrifice of three libations around a sacred pit as he prepares to invoke the dead, and thus, as F. Robert puts it, delimits the terrain that will be soiled by infernal contact, and prevents the soiling from spreading beyond the bothros: Thymelé. Recherches sur la signification et la destination des monuments circulaires dans l'architecture religieuse de la Grèce (Paris 1939) 321.

73 Artem. 2.24.

74 Varro Ling. 5.143; Eitrem (supra n. 70) 17–18, 20, 28; H. Winfeld-Hansen, "Les couloirs annulaires dans l'architecture funéraire antique." Acta Instituti romani Norvegicæ 2 (1962) 33–63, esp. 59; Rykwert (supra n. 30) passim, who suggests that the templum, or piece of land designated as sacred for augury or for state and religious functions, was carefully defined by a circular boundary (45–49); Varro Ling. 77; Gell. NA 14.7. Contra J. Linderski, "The Inaugural Law," ANRW II.16.3 (1968) 2,146. On the relationship between Roman magic and religion, see Anneoquin (supra n. 55) 140.

75 S.H.A. Aurel. 20.3: lustrata urbs, cantata carmina, amburbium celebratum, ambarvalia promissa; Paulus Fest. 17M.

76 Macrob. Sat. 3.5.7: Ambarvalis hostia est, ut ait Pompeius Festus, quae rei divinae causa circum arva ducitur ab his qui pro frugibus faciunt. Paul. Fest. 5; Serv. G. 1.345. See Serv. Aen. 1.283 on the ambilustrum; Polyb. 4.21.8 on how the Manthineans enacted a "solemn purification of their city" by offering piacular sacrifices and carrying them round their city in a circle and all their territory" (trans. W.R. Paton); Cato Agr. 141: Agrum lustrare sic oportet. Impera suovetaurilia circumagam: "Cum divos volentibus quoque bene eveniat, mando ibi, Mani, uti illace suovetaurilia fundum agrum terramque meano quae ex parte sive circumagam sive circumferenda censeas, uti cures lustrare"; Luc. 1.592.
city wall in order to ridicule it. In the amburgh and ambarvalia, circular movement also appears to have been conceived to effect a catharsis upon the area it enclosed, just as it did upon sacrificial victims when they circumambulated the altar before slaughter.

Circumambulation played an important role in funerary rituals, where magic was omnipresent. Plutarch reports Varro's statement that when the living visited ancestral tombs, they would "turn around" (περιστρέφονται) the graves, as did the shrines of the gods. Moreover, at a funeral, participants would circumambulate the pyre; Statius describes how seven squadrons of knights encircled the pyre of Opheltes to the left, and several sources indicate that this type of ceremony was enacted with extravagant display at imperial funerals. Cassius Dio, for instance, recounts the procedure that took place during Augustus's funeral: "When the bier had been placed on the pyre in the Campus Martius, all the priests marched around it first, then came the knights, not only those who were to be senators but the others as well, and then the infantry of the Praetorian Guard circled it at a run and threw onto it all the triumphal decorations which any of them had ever received from the emperor for an act of valor." Herodian describes a similar ritual during Pertinax's funeral nearly two centuries later: "When an enormous pile of these aromatic spices has been accumulated and the entire place has been filled, there is a cavalry procession around the pyre in which the whole equestrian order rides in a circle round and round in a fixed formation, following the movement and rhythm of the Pyrrhic dance. Chariots, too, circle round in the same formation, with their drivers dressed in purple-bordered togas." It is this decursio, scholars believe, that is illustrated on the east and west sides of the base of Antoninus Pius's Column (fig. 16), now in the Vatican Museums, a monument erected in 161 to celebrate Antoninus's and Faustina's apotheosis. Moreover, Suetonius records that, after Drusus's death, the army erected a monument in his honor around which the soldiers made an annual ceremonial run; in subsequent years, in other words, the ritual decursio was repeated in a perpetual reenactment of the funerary ritual.

It is in rituals of circumambulation of the kind described above that Windfeld-Hansen convincingly finds an explanation for the annular corridors in the imperial tombs, which accommodated encirclement of the central burial chamber by visitors before and after ingress. Presumably the mausolea were closed except at times of ritual activity, when officiating priests, family members, and those con-

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77 Plut. Vit. Rom. 10; Apollodorus (1.18) describes how Oeneus, the Calydonian god of wine, killed his own son Toxeus for leaping across the ditch surrounding his vineyard, and according to Plutarch (QG 37) Poimander tried to kill Polycritos for jumping over the walls of his new fortress; see Rykvert (supra n. 30) 27–28.

78 See Serv. Aen. 4.62: Spatatur ad aras matronae enim sacrificantur circa aras faculas tenuentes ferebantur cum quodam gestu . . . quidam genus sacrificii appellant quo vetere, cum aras circumirent et rursus cum revertereantur et deinde consisterent, dieciant minusculum sacrum, an hoc ad impatientiam amoris referendum est, quo iactata Dido loco stare non poterat, iuxta illud; Porph. Abst. 2.54 (a human sacrificial victim was compelled to run three times around the altar); Valerius Flaccus 245–46. See also Schol. Ar. Pax 957 (when Trygeus sacrifices to Peace, he orders his slave to encircle the altar with a vessel and lustral water); for other Greek examples, see Robert (supra n. 72) 319–20 (who notes that, in mockery of this practice, Hector is chased three times around the walls of Troy before being killed, and then dragged three times around the pyre [Il. 22.165; 24.16, 417]; Eitrem (supra n. 70) 25–26.


84 Suet. Claud. I: Celerum exercitus honorarium et tumulum excitavit, circa quem deinceps statio die quotannis miles decurritur Galliarmique civitates publice supplicaret.

85 Windfeld-Hansen (supra n. 74) 58; G. Welter, "Zwei vörromische Grabbauten in Nordafrika," RM 42 (1927) 113–15; Eitrem (supra n. 70) 6; B. Götte, Ein Rundgrab in
nected to the imperial house entered to pay their respects. Judging by the non-funerary examples cited above, the rituals of circumambulation that they enacted on these occasions may have been intended to protect or confine the dead inside the tomb. They may alternatively (or additionally) have been cathartic, since upon entering the tomb the visitors found themselves moving dangerously be-

tween the realms of the living and the dead. Indeed, Statius describes the encircling action of the soldiers at Opheltes' pyre as a lustration, lustrantique ex more sinistro orbe rogum. Perhaps, too, this rite of passage mirrored the soul's circuitous journey, as it moved not directly from life to death, but instead through a tripartite change of state, from life to near-death and finally to death. Needless to say, many

86 There is little evidence on this subject. According to Suetonius (Vesp. 23), however, Vespasian dreamed that Augustus's Mausoleum opened, which he took as a presage of another's death: nam cum inter cetera prodigia mausoleum de reprehendi pataisset et stella crinita in caelo apparisset, alterum ad Iuniam Calvinam et gente Augusti pertinentem, alterum ad Parthorum regem qui capellatus esset. Judging by this anecdote, we may assume that it was usually closed.

87 Eitrem (supra n. 70) 61.

88 Theb. 6.215–16.

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Falerni, Baugeschichte des römischen Adels und Kaisergrabes (Stuttgart 1939) 11; R. Fellmann, Das Grab des Lucius Munatius Plancus bei Gaeta (Basel 1957) 87. A. Fleming, “Vision and Design: Approaches to Ceremonial Monument Typology,” Man 7 (1972) 57–73, argues that the circle is a preferable form for monuments that accommodate ceremonies, since it affords maximum visibility to all participants.

TRAJAN’S COLUMN AND THE ART OF COMMEMORATION 57

Fig. 16. Column base of Antoninus Pius, decursia. Rome, Vatican Museums, Cortile delle Corazze. (Photo P.J.E. Davies)
an archaic ritual custom based upon principles of magic persisted long after its meaning had been lost or reinterpreted.90 The ceremonial spectacle that took place at an imperial funeral, presumably in origin a response to and/or an expression of a concept of liminality,91 nevertheless took on a further dimension: the cavalry's circular movement defined a central point or navel for its action and, in this way, focused attention on the pyre and the deceased leader; the decursio was therefore an honorific process. Inside the imperial mausolea, the visitor's circumambulation was certainly a ritualistic precaution, but probably also a perpetual reenactment of a gesture of piety and honor, of precisely the kind that Suetonius records at Drusus's funerary monument.

Through both sculpture and architecture the designer of a funerary monument could manipulate the visitor, encouraging his participation in a dialogue with the monument, in order to maintain interest in its subject (and thereby perpetuate memory) as well as, in some cases, to perpetuate certain magical and honorific rituals. In the case of Trajan's Column, to which I now return, sculptural and architectural form come together most successfully in the service of viewer manipulation, conspiring to perpetuate Trajan's memory and to enforce reenactment of honorific rituals; at the same time, the visitor's experience of the Column was designed to culminate in a grand revelation regarding Trajan's illustrious career.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS: PERPETUATION

At the beginning of this article, I outlined the main problem that scholars have traditionally perceived in the design of the Column of Trajan, which is the viewer's discomfort in pursuing the helical narrative decorating the shaft. Now, clearly, the encircling motion required of the viewer by the spiraling narrative cannot have taken the designer by surprise: it was a totally predictable effect, which could have been abandoned at the drawing board in favor of, for instance, a tiered sculptural arrangement as seen on Nero's Column of Jupiter in Mainz (fig. 17).92 Moreover, if the ancients judged the Column's spiral to be disappointing, why then was it so carefully emulated in the Column of Marcus Aurelius?

91 Verg. Aen. 5.545–88.
The answer must be that it was not so judged, and that its effect, far from being a failure, was the desired one that its designer purposely accentuated, for not only did the narrative's formal structure itself require the viewer to encircle the Column, but because the Column stood within a closed courtyard and because its sculpture was executed in relatively shallow relief, he was forced to do so in close proximity to the Column. Might it be that our perception of the design is incorrect: perhaps the idea was not, first, to illustrate the Dacian Wars and then to find a way to fit them onto the Column, but instead to create a spiral around the Column (as illustrated on denarii minted between 112 and 117) and then to decorate it in such a way as to force the viewer to pursue it? Like the sculptor of Eurysaces' tomb, Trajan's master-sculptor turned to a visual representation to engage the viewer, encouraging his mental interaction as he read the narrative, thereby forcing him to perpetuate Trajan's memory. Yet perhaps he also made use of decorative sculpture to promote movement in a certain direction, just as processional sculpture on monuments such as the Ara Pacis guided the viewer on a prescribed path, that is, he hoped that by enticing the viewer to follow the narrative's trail, he could force him to walk around the Column. When the Column is placed in its context with other imperial tombs, the reason for a manipulative frieze of this kind is readily apparent: like the annular corridors in the circular mausolea, the frieze encouraged the visitor to circumambulate the sacred burial spot, in order to commit the deceased to his resting place, and to reenact and perpetuate rituals performed at the emperor's burial. Aply, this respectful action took place before the Temple of the Divine Trajan, seat of the deceased emperor's cult. Given the Column's prominent location in one of Rome's most frequented areas, visitors would be constant, drawn from a wide cross-section of Roman society, for it was in the Forum Traiani that senators deposited their valuables, and that lawyers tried their cases and (at least in Late Antiquity) learned of new laws; it was there also that large groups gathered for the emperor's congiaria, or distribution of largess, and ex-slaves took their first steps of freedom. Shoppers and merchants crossed the Forum on their way to the markets, and Rome's literati consulted books in the Bibliotheca Ulpia. If the Column's design could engage them to follow the spiraling narrative, then at one and the same time their motion would perpetually honor and protect the ruler's mortal remains, after the example of Alexander the Great, who, with his companions, ran naked around Achilles' tomb near Troy before laying a crown upon the stele.

93 The court measured 25.0 x 20.2 m, of which the Column took up 6.19 x 6.19 m: see Packer 1995 (supra n. 5) 353: Packer, in Archeo (supra n. 5) 73. The designer chose to begin the narrative at the bottom and spiral upward: if the illustrated rotulus was the inspiration for the narrative, the opposite arrangement would have been closer to the model. By beginning at the bottom, he better engages the viewer, again asking him to encircle the Column. Upward movement better fits the Column's design: "The classical column is broadest at the bottom and thereby establishes a weight center, from which it tapers toward the top. This shape creates a strong connection with the ground and favors the upward thrust of rising toward a relatively free end" (R. Arnheim, The Dynamics of Architectural Form [Berkeley 1977] 50).


95 Scholars are divided on whether the temple formed part of the Forum's original design, since Trajan could hardly have openly planned a temple to himself as a divinity. It was not completed until Hadrian's reign, and some scholars contend that it was entirely a Hadrianic building (see, for instance, Richardson [supra n. 19] 175). It is more likely that the temple was part of the plan, as Settis [supra n. 2] 75–82 argues: either the Forum complex was purposely left unfinished, so that his successor could finish it and dedicate the temple to the divinized Trajan, or Trajan planned to dedicate it to his real father, Divus Traianus Pater, whom he had divinized.

96 Schol. Juv. 163–64; Gall. NA 13.25.2 (Quaerobat Favorinus, cum in area fori [Traiani] ambularet et amicum suum consulem opprimentur causas pro tribunali cognoscent); Cod. Theod. 14.2.1; Novell. Valent. 19.4, 21.1.7, 21.2.6, 23.9, 27.8, 31.7M; S.H.A. Comm. 2.1 (adhis in praetesta fueriis congiiarii dedit atque ipse in Basilica Traiani praeedit); Sid. Apoll. Carm. 2.544–45 (nam modo nos iam festa vocant, et ad Ulpia poscunt /te fora, donabis quis libertate, Quirites). See Packer 1995 (supra n. 5) 349.


98 Plut. Vit. Alex. 15; Robert (supra n. 72) 320. The visitor to Pelopó's tomb at Olympia also encircled the tomb as a form of honor to the hero, as did the mounted ephebes on their visit to Neoptolemus's grave at Delphi, before sacrificing victims: Schol. Pind. Od. 1.93.
When it is understood in the context of funerary monument design, the spiraling narrative is revealed to be anything but a conceptual miscalculation; rather, it was actively chosen and emphasized with the express purpose of manipulating the viewer. This dynamic quality has, for the most part, been obscured both by the Column’s physical isolation from the modern viewer and by the different emphases of modern scholarship; yet recognition of this quality is of enormous consequence. When the Column is considered only as an object to be viewed, it demands nothing more from the beholder than the respect due to high-quality engineering and sculpture. When, on the other hand, it is considered as a dynamic force, the Column becomes an active work of architecture, encouraging and requiring the visitor’s participation.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS: PERSONAL AND POLITICAL PROMOTION

The exterior design of the Column functioned, I have argued, to perpetuate ritualistic and honorific behavior on the visitor’s part. In the remainder of this paper, I suggest that only through a similar experiential reading of the Column’s interior design and its relation to surrounding buildings can we fully appreciate its intended purpose.

The most satisfactory reading of the Column’s inscription indicates that its primary role was “to show how high was the mountain—the site for great works, after all—that was cleared away.” Just how the Column fulfilled this function has been the subject of no small debate. Until the early years of this century, scholars believed that Trajan’s engineer, Apollodorus of Damascus, had removed part of the Quirinal Hill in order to erect the Column in its present location, and that the Column’s height indicated the depth of earth removed. In 1906, however, Boni’s excavations beneath the Column revealed Republican and Early Imperial strata where the supposed hillside would have been. It is now thought that the

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99 CIL VI 960: AD DECLARANDUM QUANTAE ALTITUDINIS MONS ET LOCUS TAJNTIS OPERIBUS SIT EGESTUS. For this paraphrasing of Mau’s interpretation, and for bibliography on the problematic inscription, see Lepper and Frere (supra n. 2) 52.


102 Claridge (supra n. 17). While I do not agree with her suggestion that the Column was initially designed without a spiral frieze, her argument stresses the novelty of the spiral staircase and forces us to reconsider the priorities in the Column’s design. See also Lepper and Frere (supra n. 2) 20; Wilson Jones (supra n. 20); Stucchi (supra n. 29) 237–91.


104 Lepper and Frere (supra n. 2) 13.
refers to the sculpted columns when he describes "the elevated heights that rise up, with platforms to which one can climb."\footnote{105} When, by the early fifth century, Cassiodorus commented, "The Forum of Trajan is a marvel to look upon, even after continual viewing."\footnote{106} perhaps he meant from the Column.

This adaptation of the tomb monument, from monument to be viewed to monument from which also to view, suggests that the architect was keenly aware of the potential failings of tomb architecture to engage the viewer, and equally of the power of kinetic design to overcome this problem. As we shall see, however, the solution he presents in Trajan's Column shows his ability not only to entice the privileged viewer into a dialogue but also to invest that dialogue with a powerful propagandistic content.

By the Trajanic period, Rome had its share of tall buildings; if one could gain access to their roofs, one might look out from them over the growing city. The seven hills of Rome, too, provided high points from which to survey lower ground. It seems, however, that Trajan's Column was the first belvedere designed specifically as a viewing station. What precisely was it that the visitor was supposed to see upon emerging from the Column, and why might it be important enough to merit a belvedere?

Two reasons might be suggested for the construction of a belvedere. The first, the more self-evident, was commemorative. In planning his tomb, Trajan hoped to be remembered as one of Rome's great benefactors, through the magnificent forum-market complex he constructed. Architectural embellishment of a city was not an unusual means of securing a reputation, particularly in this period,\footnote{107} and memorials in the form of architectural gifts to the city had the added advantage of being assured maintenance regardless of monies set aside by the benefactor. The Column would provide a place for the viewer to survey all that Trajan had built and, perhaps, have a reaction similar to Constantius's as it is described by Ammianus: "Indeed when he came to the Forum of Trajan, a structure that is unique beneath all of heaven, in my opinion, which even the divine gods agree is extraordinary, he stopped, astonished, while his mind took in the gigantic complex, which cannot be described by words and could never again be imitated by mortal men. Abandoning all hope of attempting anything like it, he said that he wanted—and was able—to copy only Trajan's horse, which was situated in the middle of the atrium and carried the emperor himself."\footnote{108}

It was not enough, though, that Trajan should be remembered only for an architectural feat. Studies of late first- and second-century fora throughout the empire reveal that in the Flavian period, and especially in Britain, the traditional Italic forum design, a rectangular piazza with the Capitolium on a short end marking the long axis, began to give way to a square piazza with a basilica on one side.\footnote{109} These new developments appear to have influenced the design of Trajan's Forum. Yet, at the same time, as Rodenwaldt has convincingly argued, Apollodorus based its unusual layout upon the ground plan of a military camp such as the Praetorium of Vetera, in which the Column took the place of the army's standards.\footnote{110} The Romans were renowned for their swiftly constructed standardized camps, to which, Polybius implies, one might in part attribute their military success.\footnote{111} In designing the Forum as a military camp, Apollodorus intended the viewer not only to look down upon Trajan's munificence, but also to recognize his role as an accomplished general, the role that bespoke his virtue and upon which his authority, and ultimately his apotheosis, were predicated. Throughout the Forum, architecture and sculpture spoke of triumph; for instance, the gate through which the visitor entered resembled a triumphal arch surmounted by a stauaery group of a Victory crowning Trajan in a seingis, and images of spoils and symbols of victory abound in the architectural sculpture. Thus the whole Forum was characterized as a victory monument,\footnote{112} a visual form

\footnote{105} Amm. Marc. 16.10.14: datosque vertes qui scanllii sug·gestu consurgunt, priorum principum imitamenta poriantes. The text is ambiguous and could refer to another monument type altogether.

\footnote{106} Var. 76.1, trans. J.J. Pollitt. By medieval times, the pilgrim was directed toward the two columnae cochilides to witness the wonders of Rome. The author of the Mirabilia tells the visitor what to expect: "Trajan's winding pillar is 138 feet high, with 185 steps and 45 windows," details that one would experience on the interior of the shaft; elsewhere he adds, "Here is a pillar of marvelous height and beauty, carved with the stories of [Trajan and Hadrian] like the pillar of Antoninus at his palace" (trans. F.M. Nichols, The Marvels of Rome\footnote{106} [New York 1986] 39).

\footnote{107} See Schmitt-Pantel (supra n. 51).

\footnote{108} Amm. Marc. 16.10.15–16.


\footnote{110} Rodenwaldt (supra n. 23) 338–39. See also Fehr (supra n. 97) 44 \textsuperscript{→} Contra.J.B. Ward-Perkins, "Severan Art and Architecture at Lepcis Magna," JRS 38 (1948) 62.

\footnote{111} Polyb. 6.27–34 and 42.

\footnote{112} See Packer 1994 (supra n. 5) 178–79.
of res gestae; the disguise with which he masked his tomb, within that Forum, was a celebration of the achievement of which he was proudest, and which would assure him immortality.

Second, Trajan had an urgent message to impart during his lifetime. The empire he had inherited from Nerva and the Flavians was fraught with financial difficulties, partly as a result of Domitian’s “rapacious devices,” partly following Nero’s debasement of the currency in 64. Trajan, the soldier-emperor, sought to remedy the situation through war, just as Augustus had a century before. Many, though, perceived war differently from Trajan: military activity was not a source of wealth but an enormously costly undertaking, in terms of both manpower and money. Domitian’s recent wars against the Dacians, for instance, his most important foreign policy, had not seen felicitous results, and must have lodged a less than optimistic conception of war in the Roman citizen’s mind.

Anxious to impress potential critics and, in particular, to appease the Senate, which met nearby, Trajan needed to justify the wars he had already waged and any others he might plan by demonstrating to civilian Rome the competence of the men who worked for him, to confirm Rome’s superiority in the world and to fend off accusations of a needless and irresponsible waste of resources. What better way to do this than to employ Apollodorus, his military engineer, to undertake an apparently impossible task (“could never again be imitated by mortal men”) in the heart of Rome: to cut away the very ground upon which the city dwellers trod and erect in its place a new urban center for the Romans? And, near the end of the Forum, what better than to have him (or another designer) create a powerful image of dominance, a 150-ft column with a spiral staircase carved out of the very marble that held it up, from which the viewer could survey the Forum, designed as a symbol of army organization? He also needed to display as aggressively as possible the enormous quantities of booty he had won through war, sufficient to build the whole Forum ex manubiiis, the first forum to be born of war and starkly opposed to the Flavian Templum Pacis on the other side of the Forum Transitorium. Captive Dacians in the attic of the portico recalled the influx of slave labor following the campaigns, and a riches of colored marbles spoke of great new wealth from foreign sources. The Column towered above the Forum, a vantage point from which to experience the whole magnificent effect.

The importance of this message cannot be overestimated, for in 113, soon after dedicating the Column, Trajan was to initiate another campaign, this time against the Parthians. In later years, Cassius Dio was to suggest that the Parthian Wars were fought for glory, not necessity: the Parthians, he would claim, had been willing to negotiate concerning Armenian sovereignty, and were not a serious threat to Rome’s eastern frontier; the wars actually entailed the endurance of formidable toils and danger, the massacre of countless garrisons, and the loss of recent acquisitions in the East, all for little gain.

\begin{footnotesize}
114 D.M. Robathan, “Domitian’s Midas-Touch,” TAPA 73 (1942) 130–44; Settis et al. (supra n. 2) 10–11.
115 Cass. Dio 67.6; Settis et al. (supra n. 2) 6; Campbell (supra n. 113) 398–400; BW. Jones, The Emperor Domitian (London 1992) 126–59.
116 Cass. Dio 69.5.1; Cass. Dio 69.5.1 praises Hadrian for refraining from stirring up new wars and for terminating those that were in progress.
117 Cass. Dio 70.6; Campbell (supra n. 113) 398 writes: “An emperor would… have to bear in mind that military competence, real or imagined, could be a useful weapon of political propaganda against him.” Trajan could look back upon the hostile senatorial tradition that held up to ridicule the military achievements of Tiberius, Claudius, and Domitian.
118 Just as Trajan surveyed the construction of such camps in the frieze, e.g., scene XXXIX (Settis et al. [supra n. 2] pl. 56).
119 See Settis (supra n. 2) 10–11; Campbell (supra n. 113) 164–74: emergencies such as military activity always created financial problems, because the empire lacked systematic budgeting. According to Campbell, in the first century A.D., yearly expenditure on the army consumed at least 40%, possibly 50%, of the state’s available revenue. Cass. Dio (69.5.1) praises Hadrian for refraining from stirring up new wars and for terminating those that were in progress.
120 Cass. Dio 68.7.1; Campbell (supra n. 113) 391. On the reasons for the Parthian War, see J. Guey, Essai sur la guerre parthique de Trajan (114–117) (Bucharest 1997); F.A. Lepper, Trajan’s Parthian War (Oxford 1948) and review by M.I. Henderson in JRS 39 (1949) 21.
121 Just as Trajan surveyed the construction of such camps in the frieze, e.g., scene XXXIX (Settis et al. [supra n. 2] pl. 56).
122 See Cass. Dio 68.29.4–33.1 on the toils and hardships endured in war, and 68.29.1 on Trajan’s inability to retain the land that he had already won. Pliny, in his Panegyric, praises Trajan for his moderation in not opening hostilities unnecessarily, but this speech was delivered in 100
\end{footnotesize}
likelihood, while he was planning and embellishing the Forum, Trajan was also nurturing the thought of a new campaign as a means to acquire further military renown. Cassius Dio’s criticisms were precisely those he must have anticipated and tried to preempt in the messages of his Forum, as he contrived to boost public support and troop morale.\(^{123}\)

The subject matter of the Column’s frieze played its part in expressing the required message. A comparison of the Trajanic Column with the later Antonine imitation puts into relief an important characteristic of the earlier narrative: though it purports to illustrate Trajan’s Dacian Wars, it contains very few actual battle scenes. Downplaying the gruesome realities of war, the Trajanic relief is made up, rather, of more peaceful themes, notably scenes of travel, construction, \textit{adlocutio, submissio}, and sacrifice.\(^{124}\) This can hardly be accidental. As suggested above, Trajan was anxious to prove the competence of his soldiers to dispel the city dweller’s resentment of the financial drain caused by war, and to display the wealth brought to Rome from foreign wars, perhaps with a view to promoting his planned Parthian campaign. Non-aggressive, constructive themes were opportunistically chosen to represent his men in complete control rather than constantly pitting their strength against the Dacians.

Compositional means were similarly exploited to this end: Roman soldiers struggle almost exclusively in the direction of the spiral, so the viewer inadvertently adds his movement—strength—to theirs. Meanwhile, Roman calm is constantly opposed to Dacian panic,\(^{125}\) and damage perpetrated against Rome is purposely minimized.\(^{126}\) Sacrifice scenes periodically pepper the narrative to affirm that the campaigns were undertaken with the implied consent of the gods and with all due piety; Jupiter himself confirms this message by a sudden epiphany in scene XXIV, hurling his thunderbolt in support of the Romans, mirroring their gesture in an act of visual comradeship.\(^{127}\) Scenes depicting Dacians dismantling their fortresses form an alternative means to slaughter or Dacian suicide to symbolize Roman supremacy.\(^{128}\) and yet by contrasting their barbarity with the “civilization” of the Romans,\(^{129}\) the designer justifies the need to tame the Dacian monster that lurks threateningly at the frontier. Moreover, none but the staunchest literalist can deny the metaphorical connection between the construction scenes on the Column (and especially the remarkable bridge over the Danube shown in scenes XCIX–C)\(^{130}\) and the recently completed construction of the Forum, a connection that suggests a causal relationship between the campaigns and resources resulting from them. The message: through the burden of war, this magnificence was made possible.

This, then, was Trajan’s urgent message. Yet why did he insist on a Column as belvedere? What made it so effective for his purpose? After all, he might have been content with allowing the visitor to view his works from the top of another great engineering feat, the Market complex that now lined the Quirinal. The Markets, even today, reach more or less to the height of the Column, and offer a spectacular view over the Forum area.

Part of the reason must have been that from the top of the Markets the viewer would not have seen the Markets themselves so well; part also, that the

\(^{123}\) Especially in supplication scenes, e.g., LXXV–LXXVI; Settis et al. (supra n. 2) 127 and pls. 128–30.

\(^{124}\) Fehr (supra n. 97) suggests that the frieze was intended to allay civilian fear of the army, by breaking down the barrier between military and civilian life. This long-standing fear manifested itself in the prohibition against military exercise within the pomerium. Literary sources reveal distrust for the army verging on antagonism on the part of the rest of the population. Emperors tried to minimize contact between army and civilians, perhaps for fear that city life would soften the soldiers. Thus the army had developed its own societal system apart from the rest of the population. He suggests that the Column’s designers played down the violent acts of the soldiers to avoid aggravating this deep-seated fear in city dwellers.


\(^{126}\) The dead shown in battle scenes, in a variety of distorted poses, are Dacian, not Roman. There is only one scene on the whole frieze showing medical aid being given to Roman soldiers (XL), which may be more out of homage to army doctors than to show Roman vulnerability; Settis et al. (supra n. 2) 121 and pl. 58.

\(^{127}\) Settis et al. (supra n. 2) 129 and pl. 30.

\(^{128}\) E.g., scenes LXXV–LXXVI.

\(^{129}\) Dacians are shown in woods and mountains, while Romans are shown in cities and while Dacian men fight Roman soldiers, Dacian women torture them (XLIV–XLVI); Settis et al. (supra n. 2) 134 and pls. 67–68, 100–101. On the torture scene, see R. Vulpe, “Prigionieri romani s pulpizzati da donne dacie sul rilievo della Colonna Traiana,” \textit{RivStorAnt} 3 (1973) 109–25.

\(^{130}\) Settis et al. (supra n. 2) pls. 179–83. See also E.S. Kleiner, “The Trophy on the Bridge and the Roman Triumph over Nature,” \textit{AntCl} 60 (1991) 182–92.
Column's role as belvedere encouraged visitors to mill around Trajan's tomb and temple area; but more importantly, the felicitous combination of Column and staircase was an exciting novelty, which would enable Trajan to manipulate the visitor, to control and heighten the dramatic effect of his visual experience.  

From the moment the visitor stepped into Trajan's Forum through the triple archway on its southern side, he or she could see the Column, raising Trajan's gilded statue high above and behind the Basilica Ulpia. Indeed, his focus was directed there, since, along with the equestrian statue of Trajan and the Basilica's main southern entrance, it marked the longitudinal axis of the open piazza, and the colonnades and rows of trees guided his attention to it. J.E. Packer surmises that as he moved through the Forum the ancient viewer was "constantly surprised" by its columnar screens and hemicycles, offering shifting vistas enveloped in contrasts of light and shadow. He could only reach the Column by passing into the Basilica, where "the hemicycles and the orderly rows of columns . . . produced remote, mysterious vistas which receded into darkened interiors accented by daylight introduced from artfully concealed sources," and exiting it through the two small doors in its north wall. There, the porticoes of the Basilica, the Libraries, and the Temple enclosed him, and framed the Column as their focus. Even despite his foreknowledge of the Column's position and height, and even despite the Basilica's huge dimensions, the Column must have leapt up before him suddenly, its extreme verticality accentuated by the restricted courtyard.

Entering the Column through the door in its base, to the visitor's left was a passage to the chamber, sealed after 117. To the right rose the helical staircase, a novelty in Trajan's time. Once inside the shaft, he labored steeply upward, mindful, perhaps, of how his motion mirrored Trajan's ascent from mortal to god. He climbed in a darkness alleviated only here and there by small slit windows in the thick encircling walls. Kevin Lynch notes that, in a city, the traveler's experience is heightened if the path tantalizingly reveals glimpses of other city elements, "hints and symbols of what is being passed by." The Column's windows will have had a similar effect: through the windows small snatches of sky and cityscape were revealed, enticing to the eye, yet more disorienting in their disjointedness than useful to locate the visitor in his turning ascent.

The spiral staircase served, in effect, as a long, upward corridor leading to the outside platform. As Arnheim illustrates, a corridor (like this one, or those in the Mausolea of Augustus and Hadrian) creates a stalling effect that he terms "temporary retardation" in the face of an ultimate goal. "Temporary retardation is known in the arts as a strong incentive toward forward movement. It is also a standard device of traditional drama, and is constantly used in music to dam the melodic flow before a new surge of power. Suspense derives from the temporary suspension of action." Added to this effect, and to the general disorientation induced by circling, is the power of the spiral staircase to render the climber unable to judge either how far he or she has ascended or how many stairs lie ahead; this engenders a sense of spatial disorientation and, at the same time, anticipation. Moreover, an especially restrictive corridor like the Column's staircase (which

131 As precedents for this novel combination, Settis suggests fortification towers containing staircases, or light-houses; in both cases, the outside walls served to enclose a spiraling staircase rather than rooms for habitation or use (supra n. 2, 232).

132 Packer and Sarring 1992 (supra n. 5) 73. Packer 1994 (supra n. 5) 167 estimates the height of the statue at at least 4 m.


134 Packer 1994 (supra n. 5) 177-78.

135 The Basilica measured 600 x 200 Roman ft (176.28 x 58.76 m) and 100 ft (29.38 m) in height. It had only two stories (not three as originally supposed). See Packer 1995 (supra n. 5) 353; and Packer and Sarring 1992 (supra n. 5) 73.


137 On the psychological sense of change induced by the staircase, see MacDonald (supra n. 60) 71: "They are purveyors of changes not only of locale but of meaning—from the street to the temple forecourt, for example, or from the street to the interior of the baths" (Here, the staircase reflects a change of state, from mortal to immortal.) See also Templer (supra n. 136) 7: "Stairs serve many roles in addition to their prosthetic function. These roles may modify or even dominate completely the mundane purposes of safe, comfortable and convenient ascent and descent.


139 The turning, in itself, could be disorienting: Luhrmann describes the use of circular motion in contemporary rituals to induce disorientation (supra n. 70) 227.

140 Arnheim (supra n. 93) 158.
was only 0.74 m wide at the base of the shaft and approximately 2 m in height) contributes to the impact caused when the restriction is removed: "A temporary narrowing of the path can also act dynamically, by generating the tension of constriction, resolved into new expansion. There is furthermore the stimulating effect of the sudden surprise: the opening up of an unforeseen space."\(^{141}\) In Trajan's Column, the "sudden surprise" is the visitor's abrupt emergence from the narrow, dark staircase into the dazzling sunlight, where he stood, blinded for a moment, surrounded on all sides by open air, released from total restriction to utter freedom.

This was the moment of revelation that the Column's designer planned as the extraordinary culmination of the viewer's experience. Harnessing all the force of that climactic moment, he engineered a chosen vista as the visitor's first sight on emerging into the light; in order to do so, he eschewed the expected, and typically classical, harmony of placing the door in relation to the lower entrance, either directly above it, due south and overlooking Basilica and Forum, or on the opposite side, due north, confronting the temple. Nor did he place it on the west side, to face respectfully to the Capitoline, with the Basilica Argentaria in the foreground. Instead, he located it on the east, facing out over the Quirinal.\(^{142}\) There, the viewer's first sight when he emerged from the shaft was Apollodorus's remarkable and costly building feat lodged against the Quirinal where once there was hillside, a sight that epitomized Trajan's message to Rome, a message of competence, superiority, and enormous newfound wealth.

When the Column is appreciated on an experiential level, the dramatic potential of the novel combination of Column and staircase is revealed: it allowed the architect to manipulate the viewer as few other architectural forms could, creating disoriented suspense as he climbed the shaft in order, then, to create a surprising, and propagandistically loaded, climax when he emerged.

**CONCLUSION**

When we place Trajan's Column in a genre of imperial funerary monuments, the problem of its spiraling frieze is solved. The narrative can be understood as an instrument of manipulation that forced the viewer to reenact ritual and honorific procedures. Moreover, with its internal staircase and upper platform, the Column was designed to deliver a striking and calculated statement concerning Trajan's accomplishments in the military field, with a view, perhaps, to promoting further campaigns. The Column can be recognized as a fully dynamic monument, intended to draw the visitor into a dialogue to ensure the perpetuation of memory as sculpture and architecture conspire to present a dramatic propagandistic message concerning Trajan's life and afterlife. This exploitation of the dynamic powers of sculpture and architecture is not entirely new, but draws with unprecedented success upon a developing tradition in earlier imperial funerary architecture.

\(^{141}\) Arnheim (supra n. 93) 157. For measurements, see Wilson Jones (supra n. 20).

\(^{142}\) Stucchi (supra n. 23) 253.