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Three new books on Trajan's Column

J. C. N. Coulston

LA COLONNA TRAIANA E GLI ARTISTI FRANCESI DA LUIGI XIV A NAPOLEONE I (Carte Segrete, Roma 1988). Pp. 310, 5 col. pls., and 200 black-and-white pls. and figs. Lit 45,000.

F. LEPPER AND S. FRERE, *TRAJAN'S COLUMN. A NEW EDITION OF THE CICHORIUS PLATES. INTRODUCTION, COMMENTARY AND NOTES* (Alan Sutton, Gloucester 1988). Pp. xviii + 331, 113 black-and-white pls., 8 figs., 3 maps. ISBN 0-86299-467-5. £25.00

S.SETTIS (ed.), A. LA REGINA, G. AGOSTI AND V. FARINELLA, *LA COLONNA TRAIANA* (Giulio Einaudi, Turin 1988). Pp. XIX plus 597, col. pls. 291 (by E. Monti), figs. 90. ISBN 88-06-59889-9. Lit 120.000.

It may be true to say that Trajan's Column has generated more scholarly literature than any other single Roman monument or work of art. The reasons for such intense interest are not hard to appreciate. Trajan was lauded by his contemporaries as the best of emperors, a judgement which has adhered to his name ever since. It is natural that his most impressive and best-preserved monument should be studied with a view to learning more about the man and his times. Moreover, many of the most respected Latin authors were part of the Trajanic social scene and they too have directly or indirectly drawn attention to the emperor and his actions. Trajan's reign may have witnessed the high-water mark of the Roman empire, but the written sources for the period are scarce and mutilated, so the column's spiral frieze has been assiduously examined and interpreted by those scholars who value it as a pictorial historical document. Students of the Roman army and its frontier installations have traditionally pressed the frieze to provide details of military equipment and architecture. Artists have made full use of the reliefs as a direct inspiration for their own products, and art historians have given it a central place in studies of Roman art and of narrative representation in general. Thus, Trajan's Column permeates most fields of Roman studies, be they concerned with history, military affairs, architecture, ethnography or art. Yet, despite the great outpouring of articles and monographs devoted to the column, there are still gaps in the literature and more than enough room for the three substantial and complementary books reviewed here. The latter are examined in an order which best allows antiquarian and archaeological matters to be dealt with first, before questions of the legibility, layout and deterioration of the spiral frieze are discussed.

The French connection (Medici Catalogue)

The first of the three works is the catalogue for an exhibition, held in the Villa Medici, Rome (April-June, 1988), which examined French involvement with Trajan's Column in the 17th, 18th and early 19th c. It is divided into 3 parts. The first deals with the influence of the frieze in particular upon artists. The second is concerned with the part played in French architectural thinking by the concept of an honorific column, with or without a spiral frieze. These two parts make up the catalogue proper which consists of cartoons, drawings, paintings and plans produced by French artists and architects of the period. The third part is a very valuable series of essays dwelling principally upon the legibility of the reliefs, on the casts made of them at various times, and on the survival of the original sculpture in the face of atmospheric pollution (see 'Painting' below).

The influence of the column upon the French resident in Rome and on artists of all nationalities is evident, especially during the 15th and 16th c. Countless 'historical' compositions and works depicting The Passion borrowed figures, scenes and military details from the frieze, particularly and unsurprisingly from the most visible bottom 6 spirals. Scenes XI-XX provided interesting toiling figures, whilst scene XXIV served with its vigorous warriors locked in combat.¹ The first overall illustrations of the frieze

¹ Scene numbers follow divisions of the frieze made in the text of Cichorius 1896, 1900.