

This is the first page only. On how to acquire the full article please click this link.

## Hadrian's Column of Trajan

### Amanda Claridge

It has long been customary to attribute three functions to Trajan's Column. The first, indicated in the dedicatory inscription on the Column itself, is that it was in some fashion a mark of height to do with the construction of Trajan's Forum; the second, attested by several ancient writers, is that of Trajan's tomb; the third is that embodied in the shape of the Column and the stupendously detailed sculptural frieze on the outside of the shaft, not mentioned in any ancient source but undoubtedly representing Trajan's Dacian Wars. All three functions have been accounted for in their separate ways, the accounting in each case differing over the years and most markedly in the case of the frieze. Yet, instead of getting easier, it has become increasingly difficult to identify any common motivation for the monument as a whole. One of the latest two monographs on the subject explains the apparent anomalies as the result of decisions made in a senatorial planning committee,<sup>1</sup> while the other ascribes them to a scheme master-minded by Trajan himself, programmed to take full effect only after his death.<sup>2</sup> Neither solution is particularly satisfactory in the circumstances and it is the purpose of this paper to suggest that the problem may lie not with the Column but with our customary approach to it.

In the past ten years we have been given good cause to question traditional views on most of the major ancient monuments in Rome, and Trajan's Column is no exception. Scaffolding erected in the early 1980's for a much-needed and lengthy process of cleaning and conservation brought every inch of the structure within reach, and in so doing brought us back in touch with the Column as it was built. We have rediscovered the pleasure of climbing the internal spiral staircase and the view from the top, for which it was celebrated in the mid-16th c. (fig.1).<sup>3</sup> Thanks largely to Giangiacomo Martines, architect-in-charge of the Column on behalf of the Soprintendenza archeologica di Roma, we have also begun to appreciate the logistical problems involved in the construction and the complexity of the design<sup>4</sup> — the latter in the sense that it was appreciated by the architects who surveyed the Column so attentively in the 17th, 18th and 19th c. (fig.2).<sup>5</sup> For the first time, the spiral frieze itself has been the subject of a detailed technical study, by Peter Rockwell,<sup>6</sup> and now that the last remnants of the scaffolding have been removed, the cleaning can be seen to have made an enormous difference to the outward appearance of the Column, especially the decoration of the pedestal (fig.3).

- 
- 1 F. Lepper and S. Frere, *Trajan's Column* (Gloucester 1988) 16 f., 19-26. For a general review see J. Coulston in *JRA* 3 (1990) 290-309, esp. 291-294.
  - 2 S. Settis (ed.), *La Colonna Traiana* (Torino 1988) 49-56, developing a theory advanced by P. Zanker "Das Trajansforum in Rom" in *AA* 1970, 499-544.
  - 3 Antonio Lafreri, *Speculum romanae magnificentiae* (Roma 1540-86) nos. 94 and 95; Ulisse Aldroandi, *Le antichità della città di Roma ...* (Venice 1562) 106. The Column became a public monument in the late 1530's during the papacy of Paul III, who ordered the demolition of the church of S. Nicola de Columna (which had used it as its bell-tower) and other nearby houses, and appointed a custodian: cf. R. Lanciani, *Storia degli scavi di Roma* (4 vols., Roma 1902-12) II 122 f., 126.
  - 4 G. Martines, "La struttura della Colonna Traiana: un'esercitazione di meccanica alessandrina," *Prospettiva* 32 (1983) 60-71; "Osservazioni sulla Colonna Traiana," in *Per Carla Guglielmi. Scritti da allievi* (Roma 1989) 106-20 "L'ordine architettonico della Colonna Traiana," in *Studi in onore di Renato Bonelli* (forthcoming).
  - 5 E. Cresy and G. L. Taylor, *The architectural antiquities of Rome* vol. II (London 1822) 35 f. pl.CIII. See also, Pietro Santi Bartoli, *Colonna Traiana eretta dal Senato e popolo romano..Nuovamente disegnata...con l'esposizione latina d'Alfonso Ciaccone, compendiata nella vulgare lingua ... da Gio. Pietro Bellori* (Roma n.d. 1673); G. B. Piranesi, *La Colonna Traiana* (Roma 1774); and *Roma Antiqua. "Envois" degli architetti francesi (1788-1924). L'area archaeologica centrale. Roma, Curia — Villa Medici, March-May 1985.* (exhibition catalogue, Roma 1985) 140-51.
  - 6 "Preliminary study of the carving techniques on the Column of Trajan," in P. Pensabene (ed.), *Marmi antichi, SiMisc* 26 (1981-83) (Roma 1985) 101-11; also P. Rockwell, *Lavorare la pietra* (Roma 1989) 249-58.