Hadrian:
Art, Politics and
Economy
Edited by Thorsten Opper
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Front cover: detail of the interior of the Pantheon, Rome, seen from the entrance to the rotunda. © The Trustees of the British Museum

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The succession

Hadrian succeeded Trajan on 11 August AD 117, acclaimed emperor by the legions in Syria as soon as ‘Trajan’s death was announced.’ In July, his health failing, Trajan had brought his disastrous Parthian War to a hasty conclusion and had left Hadrian in command of the eastern expeditionary forces as he set out for Rome by ship, accompanied by his wife Plotina, niece Matidia and praetorian prefect Attianus. They only got as far as Selinus in Cilicia, where he died on or shortly before 8 August. The body was taken back to Seleucia Pieria, port of Antioch, where Hadrian went to meet it and the funeral was performed, after which Plotina and her party sailed for Rome again with the ashes. Hadrian, then 42 years old, had long been marked out as an eventual successor, having been Trajan’s ward in childhood, married to his niece Sabina in AD 100, given significant roles in the Dacian Wars of AD 101–2 and 105–6, appointed to some major public offices at a young age (governor of Pannonia in AD 106, suffect consul at Rome in 109), followed by major posts in the Parthian campaigns of AD 114–17, and he was consul designate for AD 118.

Trajan’s intention, had he reached Rome, was probably to declare his adoption of Hadrian and the latter’s appointment as Caesar in public in the Forum and on the Capitol, as Nerva had done for him in AD 97 prior to his own succession. As things turned out, he did so only on his deathbed, witnessed solely by family and servants, and the fact of the adoption had to be conveyed by letters, which were signed by Plotina, not Trajan, allowing subsequent doubts that Hadrian was indeed his chosen successor.

Hadrian, who stayed behind to settle matters in the East, reported the fact of his succession to the Senate by letter, in which he apologized for the lack of prior notice but made the usual promises to respect the Senate’s rights and requested divine honours for Trajan. Trajan’s relations with the Senate had been cordial from the start and were still excellent in the year of his death; he had been voted optimus Princeps (best of emperors) in AD 103 and the title was renewed in the summer of AD 114. In late February AD 116 he was awarded the title Parthicus and the right to a triumph for ‘as many nations as he pleased.’ The response in late September AD 117 was favourable, the Senate confirmed Trajan’s consecration as a god and granted him other honours for which Hadrian had not asked; Hadrian himself was offered a Parthian triumph and the title Pater Patriae (he refused both). A congiarium of three gold coins was distributed in Rome to celebrate the adoption and succession, with Trajan’s portrait on the obverse, in military dress accompanied by his titles Optimus, Augustus, Germanicus, Dacicus, and Hadrian’s portrait on the reverse, identical to Trajan’s in profile but with a beard and nude, bearing the name Hadrianus Traianus Caesar.

Relations soured soon after, for Hadrian began to give up almost all of Trajan’s precarious conquests in the East, returning Armenia and Mesopotamia to their client kings, and in the first half of AD 118 he travelled to Dacia to solve a growing crisis on the Danube in the same way, abandoning many of the territories that had been won in Trajan’s Second Dacian War. In the process he made numerous replacements among high-ranking officers, causing anger.
and resentment among the generals most loyal to Trajan, four of whom may have started to conspire, individually or together, to remove Hadrian from office. All four (all ex-consuls) were indicted for treason by the Senate but then summarily put to death without trial, causing additional outrage among senators. Indeed the affair threatened to become national and place the executions were not his idea (placing the blame on Attianus) he made his way swiftly to Italy, entering Rome on 9 July AD 118. A second congiarium of six aurei was distributed by him in person, together with offers of financial support to distressed senatorial families and generous increases to the child-support scheme which Trajan had instituted in Italy, as well as tax remissions of benefit to the empire at large, all of which seem calculated to reassure, and to demonstrate that he would not only not abuse his power but would actually be a great deal more open-handed than his predecessor.

Trajan’s burial

Quite how long it had taken the imperial party to convey Trajan’s ashes to Rome in AD 117, and what happened to them between then and Hadrian’s advent in July 118, or thereafter, is not recorded. Kierdorf reckoned that the journey took at most a month (end of September AD 117) and that Plotina will have deposited the ashes immediately, as Agrippina had done when Germanicus’ urn was returned to her from Antioch in AD 19. However, Germanicus’ final resting place was the Mausoleum of Augustus, the family tomb, whereas Trajan, uniquely among emperors, was to be honoured with a public burial. Several ancient writers tell us that his ashes, in a golden urn, were deposited beneath the column in his Forum, i.e. Trajan’s Column, the huge monument that had been dedicated by the Senate in Trajan’s honour four years earlier, in AD 113, the year Trajan had set out for his Parthian War. It stood within the pomerium, where burial was normally forbidden, only permitted by special decree of the Senate. The decree could have been passed as soon as Plotina arrived with the ashes (perhaps it was one of the “honours” that the Senate granted which Hadrian had not asked for in the letter that Plotina delivered to them), but it is unlikely that the Column will have been ready to receive them straightaway. Its primary function, traditional in Rome, had been to support a statue, the second of the honorary statues that the SPQR had given to Trajan in exchange for his gift of the Forum Traiani and Basilica Ulpia (Pl. 1). It stood in a small courtyard attached to the rear of the basilica, but it had also been designed as a belvedere, perhaps in an effort to justify and excuse its immense height, which raised the statue to the level of the basilica’s roof or higher; inside the shaft a spiral staircase still leads up from a door in the pedestal to the base of the statue on top of the capital, which once afforded panoramic views over the basilica roof to the imperial fora in one direction and the Campus Martius in the other. The SPQR’s original inscription of AD 113 is still in place over the door to the stair and there is no sign that this aspect of the column was ever altered in any way or that the belvedere function ever ceased. Tucked under the stair, it is true, is a small chamber (Pls 2a–b) which Boni reconstructed in 1906 as “Trajan’s tomb” (Pl. 2c), an idea which has since hardened into fact, but as the tomb of the ‘best of emperors’ it is open to serious question. The room measures only 11 feet (3.3m) long by 6 feet (1.8m) wide and 6 feet (1.8m) high, much of which was once occupied by a bench of solid stone 2½ feet (0.753m) high and 4 feet (1.2m) deep. The space between the top of the bench and the ceiling was only 3½ feet (1.02m), hence the diminutive marble ash-chests in Boni’s drawing. Such chests are hardly the stuff of imperial burials – in the Mausoleum of Augustus, for instance, the urns of even minor members of the family were housed in massive marble containers, some standing up to 2m or more high. Worse still, the walk-in space in front of the bench in ‘Trajan’s tomb’ was just 2 feet (0.6m) wide, with the door at one end, so at the most two people could enter and exit at a time, shuffling sideways. It was also completely undecorated, with little air or light (it had but one small window by the door, and no provision for lamps); in fact, the ‘tomb-chamber’ shares its dimensions, limited light and ventilation and low ceiling with slaves’ cells and brothels – and the stone ‘bench’ was probably a bed,” provided for the porters, not the ashes of Trajan. Surely Trajan’s tomb must have been a separate installation on the outside of the Column, where it could be seen by all, carrying an inscription which duly recorded his status at death and the honour it represented. Its size and shape can only be guessed at, for the evidence is lost; if it could be surmounted by an image of Trajan in a triumphal quadriga (see below), it presumably included a solid square base.

Where did the idea arise that Trajan should be buried at the foot of his column? A large school of thought has taken the ‘tomb chamber’ in the pedestal as definitive proof that the idea was Trajan’s own, but I have just explained how weak that evidence is, and any attempt on his part to pre-empt the honour seems unlikely on principle, since its value lay precisely in the fact that it was a voluntary gift from the state. For the same reason, he would not have made the request in his will, though the family might have brought pressure to bear on the Senate discreetly, letting it be known that such had been Trajan’s deathbed wish. Otherwise, Trajan could have expected to be buried, as his adoptive father Nerva had been, in the Mausoleum of Augustus, though we are told that was now full. Presumably the family had tombs elsewhere in Rome and back home in Italica. Where, for instance, had Trajan buried his own father Traianus, who had probably died before AD 97, and his beloved sister Marciana, who died in AD 112? Given the number of building projects he left unfinished at the time of
his death—and the high hopes he must have had as he set out on campaign again in October AD 113 (the year of the column’s original dedication) that even more building would follow his Parthian conquests—it is possible that had he lived longer he would have built the mausoleum which was later built by Hadrian, but had simply not yet got round to it. Alternatively, the idea could just as well have come from within the Senate at the time Plotina delivered the letters, a genuine desire to pay him some exceptional honour, especially among Trajan’s ex-generals, effectively trumping Hadrian’s pious request for consecration. Still uppermost in their minds will have been the Dacian conquest, the memory of the extraordinary triumphal procession and games that had celebrated it, and the column monument that had commemorated it. The Parthian War, although he put a brave face on it, had been a financial as well as a military disaster; that he would have actually performed his triumph as Parthicus is doubtful, since there seem to have been few spoils.37 It is this which brings us to the unusual event known as Trajan’s ‘Parthian triumph’.

Trajan’s ‘Parthian triumph’
The account of Trajan’s burial in Epit. de Caes. 13.11 begins: ‘The ashes of his burnt body were transferred to Rome and buried in the Forum of Trajan under his column’ and then continues ‘and the image that was put on top [et imago superposita]—just as is done with triumphantes—was carried into the city, the Senate and army leading the procession’ [huius exusti corporis cineres relati Romam humateque Traiano foro sub eius columna, et imago superposita—sic triumphantes solent—in urben invecta (sc. est), senatu praeeunte et exercitu]. The HA Hadrian 6.3 also refers to this procession: ‘When the senate offered him the triumph which was to have been Trajan’s, he [Hadrian] refused it for himself and conveyed the eigy of Trajan in a triumphal chariot, in order that the best of emperors might not lose even after death the honour of a triumph’. Some modern commentators take this to mean that Trajan’s eigy celebrated a real triumph, but both sources carefully avoid saying any such thing. A real triumph was a sacrificial procession, ending at the Capitol, where the sacrifice to Jupiter would be performed by the living triumphator, hence the Senate’s offer of a Parthian triumph to Hadrian instead. No posthumous examples are known. A sacrifice could not be performed by a dead person, or by an eigy, and certainly not by one god to another—in the light of which, Hadrian’s refusal to triumph on Divus Traianus’s behalf was doubly proper.

The ‘triumphal’ procession must, therefore, have been something else. It has been argued that, although his funeral rites per se had already been performed and his body...
cremated in the East, this was his funus imaginarii, the substitute ceremony in such cases, where a wax effigy was carried in parade and burnt on a pyre, giving the general populace an opportunity to participate in the mourning. In the case of Trajan, it has also been argued that staging the funus as a triumph was a necessary preliminary to his consecration as a god. However, the normal destination of a public funeral, and an eventual consecration, was the Campus Martius, having started from the Forum Romanum, whereas the Épit. de Caes. indicates movement in the other direction, into the city (presumably from the Campus), which was led—like a triumph—by the Senate and army. Furthermore it may be doubted that a consecratio was involved, since it had already been decreed by the Senate in AD 117, when Hadrian asked for it: Trajan was already a god.

Although in the funerary context an image might be made of wax, it more generally signifies a portrait statue or bust in bronze or marble. Commemorative portraiture at death was a particular tradition at Rome, especially among the aristocracy. Given that Trajan’s was not to be a normal imperial burial but a special one decreed by the Senate within the city limits, this could be what the procession was for—a real statue of Trajan, an image for his tomb, either a standing figure or more probably a whole triumphal quadriga—the most substantial form of statue-honour for a triumphator—a gift from Hadrian or yet another from the Senate. In AD 116 when offering Trajan his Parthian triumph, the people were also recorded as planning to build him an arch, for which a statue in triumphal quadriga would have been de rigueur. Possibly the statue destined for the arch was diverted to the tomb instead. That would give the Column two public statues, one at the top facing south-east and one at the foot facing north-west. An aureus issued in Rome bearing the legends Divo Traiano Parthicou Aug(usto) Patri and Triumphus Parthicus (A Parthian triumph for the Divine Trajan Parthicus, Augustus, Father) could represent the statue in question: a veiled Trajan standing in a chariot of the tall tower-like ‘triumphal’ type, drawn by four horses, with a sceptre in his left hand and a laurel branch in his right. Hadrian staged the procession like a triumph, with the Senate and army leading the way, starting from the Campus as triumphs did but instead of ending at the Capitolium, it ended at the Column, where it would grace the tomb which, as suggested above, was a new structure installed for the purpose on the north-west side. This would give a straightforward meaning to the term superposita (placed on top) in the Épit. de Caes. which has otherwise been obscure (grammatically it should refer to the ashes, not the column on top of his mortal remains, hence the idea of an effigy burned on a pyre in a funus imaginarii; some have thought of transferring the reference to the top of the column, despite the linguistic objections; but that already bore a statue, see Pl. 1). A note in the epitome of Dio (69.2.3) in connection with the burial tells us that so-called Parthian Games were held for a number of years thereafter, but they were later allowed to lapse. No further details of these survive, but they were presumably funerary, and also Hadrian’s idea, offered by him on behalf of himself and Trajan’s family.

An actual date for either the deposition of the ashes or the ‘triumph’ is elusive. Our sources suggest they were connected and that Hadrian will have wanted to be present, at least for the procession, which the Historia Augusta implies was his idea. Things could have been supervised by Plotina et al. in his absence, the tomb and the statue made, the procession and the games organized, so the summer of AD 118 is possible; but so is any other time until Hadrian’s departure again in AD 121. They might even have been postponed to his second advent in AD 125 (see below), for we have to take into account that Hadrian’s first return will have also seen the planning of Divus Traianus’s temple, an enormous undertaking, to be constructed in the immediate vicinity.

**Trajan’s temple**

Hadrian’s request from Syria that Trajan should be consecrated as a god, for whom he would vow and build a temple, had already been approved by the Senate in AD 117 (see above). The established protocol of imperial successions, such as it was, expected it of him as a demonstration of his pietas towards his predecessor and thus the legitimacy of his succession, but a particularly personal importance is suggested by the Historia Augusta: ‘the temple of his father Trajan was the only one of the innumerable works he built on which he inscribed his own name’.

Although nothing stands above ground, some sort of juxtaposition with the Column is implied by their listing together in the Regionary Catalogues for Region VIII (templum divi Traiani et columna cochlis) and a site immediately to the north of the Column is attested by reports of massive columns and other architectural elements lying under the Palazzo Valentini (currently seat of the Provincia di Roma). Many of the columns belong to a Corinthian order, of colossal dimensions—60 Roman feet (17.76m) high with monolithic shafts in two types of imperial Egyptian granite. These have generally been reconstructed as the porch of an octastyle temple which was placed on axis with the Column and enclosed within a large precinct. A particularly detailed and authoritative version by Italo Gismondi in the 1930s persuaded scholars that the temple must have been planned as part of Trajan’s original Forum project, leaving to Hadrian only the responsibility of carrying it out.

In the 1990s, however, a fuller investigation of the archival record and explorations in the basements of Palazzo Valentini failed to confirm the axial position, and the temple has since been officially wiped off the map, its porch turned into a monumental propylon facing the other way (Pl. 4). I am not alone in finding that solution highly
improbable and in 2007 proposed that we should allow instead for the possibility that the temple was not quite as large as that of Mars Ultor (on which it has usually been modelled), that it was hexastyle rather than octastyle and, most significantly, that it was not on axis (north-west), rather, it was placed due north, facing the Column at an angle (Pl. 5). The Palazzo Valentinii’s main courtyard (which lies 2 metres higher than the surrounding streets) could correspond fairly closely with the position of the temple cella, while the despoiled ruins of the pronaos and its collapsed columns could account for the irregularities of the southern wing and smaller yard, and their downward slope towards the Column. Excavations in the cellars all around the main courtyard have found a sequence of wealthy houses which, if the temple was there, encroached from the east in the course of the mid 2nd to early 6th centuries AD, but everything found so far can be reconciled with its continued existence in their midst.

Not to follow the existing alignment of Trajan’s Forum and the Column when placing the temple might seem a perverse decision to us, but could have its own particular rationale in antiquity. Public building was a very competitive business, among emperors as much as others. While axial symmetry is a distinguishing feature of high status Roman architecture, it was generally limited to the internal organization of space within a given building or set of buildings; it was rarely carried over externally from one emperor’s project into the next. Where the ground was flat and space allowed, successive projects might develop according to a common orthogonal grid, but each project within that grid took its own distinctive shape and its own orientation, turned at 90, 180 or 270 degrees to the buildings around it. Which is to say, Hadrian could have chosen to position his temple for Trajan at an angle precisely because it was his own project, which he wished to make clear, and not just by inscribing his name on it. If, against the odds, Trajan’s temple does turn out to be on axis with Trajan’s Forum after all, then this would not necessarily mean that Trajan had planned it, only that Hadrian intentionally subordinated his project to Trajan’s in filial deference, which the inscription of his name on the temple then emphasized. If on the other hand it lies due north, this could have its own more positive values. It would mean it shared its orientation with the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitol, for instance, while the roofline will have directed a line of sight from the top of the Column of Trajan to the top of the Mausoleum of Augustus, also capped with a statue, at the far end of the Campus Martius.
the paving extended, supported on foundations that have now also proved to date from AD 123 and 125.\textsuperscript{55} The discovery of a major Hadrianic building programme around and to the north-west of the Column in AD 122–5 increases the probability that the temple was under construction at the same time, notwithstanding current doubts as to its exact position. The plans could have been put in hand, and the site inaugurated, before Hadrian left Rome in AD 121. Its basic fabric, including its massive columns (probably diverted on Hadrian’s orders from the Pantheon project) could have been in place by AD 122–3, at which point it was possible to start work also on the surrounding buildings. Hadrian returned in the summer of AD 125, which will have enabled him to oversee the final phases of the project. AD 126 was his \textit{decennalia}, the tenth anniversary of his accession and of Trajan’s death and consecration. What better year to dedicate his temple? Pertinent could be an entry in the \textit{Fasti Ostienses} for AD 126, unfortunately not more closely dated, which records Hadrian’s dedication of a \textit{templum Divoru[m]} accompanied by a \textit{munus} of 1,825 pairs of gladiators held \textit{in ciro} (presumably \textit{Maximo}).\textsuperscript{56} The text is fragmentary and \textit{Divoru[m]} has been thought to refer to \textit{Divus Vespasianus} and \textit{Divus Titus};\textsuperscript{57} but it may be questioned why Hadrian should be dedicating a temple to the Flavian \textit{divi} at this juncture, especially with such an extravagant \textit{munus} (a show for the people) staged not in the Flavian amphitheatre but in the Circus Maximus, which was one of Trajan’s great benefactions to the people.\textsuperscript{58} There were numerous Ulpian \textit{divi} who might have shared Trajan’s temple by AD 126—his sister \textit{Diva Marciana} deified in AD 112,\textsuperscript{59} his real father \textit{Divus Traianus Pater} deified shortly after,\textsuperscript{60} Marciana’s daughter (Hadrian’s mother-in-law) \textit{Diva Matidia}, who died and was deified in December AD 119,\textsuperscript{61} Trajan’s wife—Hadrian’s adoptive mother—\textit{Diva Plotina}, who died and was deified sometime in AD 122–3, though in her case Hadrian is reported as having given her a temple of her own.\textsuperscript{62} Matidia had her own temple on the Campus Martius, with a basilica on either side, one named for her, the other for Marciana.\textsuperscript{63} Trajan’s adoptive father \textit{Divus Nerva} is also a candidate, since there is some doubt that the temple vowed for him by Trajan upon his own succession had been built.\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Divus Traianus Parthicus} and one or more other fragmentary \textit{divi} are named in two monumental inscriptions of a closely related form recorded from the area north of the Column, both dedications by Hadrian ‘\textit{parentibus suis}’ (‘to his parents’).\textsuperscript{65} Although commonly attributed to the temple, their letter size (only 140 mm), their format (on four lines) and their duplication might better suit two sides of an arch or two smaller monuments, perhaps large statue bases. \textit{Diva Plotina} is the normal restoration on the understanding that ‘parents’ were intended in the strict sense of Hadrian’s (adoptive) mother and father, but since \textit{parentes} can also be used of grandfathers and other relations, \textit{Divus Nerva} and \textit{Divus Traianus Pater} should not be ruled out.\textsuperscript{66} If a coin of c. AD 125–8 (\textbf{Pl. 7}) represents Hadrian acknowledging an acclamation of the Roman people from a rostra in front of the temple of \textit{Divus Traianus}, as I have suggested,\textsuperscript{67} then the rostra on which he stands and the rearing horses which appear in the background to either side were presumably also part of the project. The rostra may have been traced in the cellars of Palazzo Valentini, lying on axis with the column.\textsuperscript{68} The three horses to the right could represent the \textit{quadriga} for his Parthian triumph, set on his tomb (see above). Alternatively they and the other horse beyond the temple could represent a pair of triumphal \textit{quadrigae} which flanked the temple, commemorating
Trajan’s other two triumphs (as Germanicus, which he shared with Dicianus, Nerva, and as Dacicus). Or, alternatively again, they honoured respectively Nerva Germanicus and Traianus Pater – who won the ornamenta triumphalia during service in Parthia in AD 74–75° – in which case their placement beside the temple reinforces the possibility that it housed them too. The statuary faintly indicated in the temple pediment seems to be a quadruped with a short head with a figure or figures above – perhaps a hunt, real or mythological, a theme which Hadrian may have considered eminently appropriate to Trajan’s apotheosis.20

The frieze on Trajan’s Column

For most people, the monument to Trajan is the frieze on the shaft of his Column. Two hundred metres long, wound 23 times round the shaft, it tells the story of his two Dacian Wars (AD 102–6) in some 155 scenes, and is carved in extraordinary detail. The army sets out, builds bridges, enters enemy territory, forages for food, builds camps, engages in ferocious battles, builds more bridges, achieves victory and creates the new province of Dacia; then has to do it all over again because of the perfidy of the Dacian king Decebalus, but eventually prevails and the barbarians are brought to final defeat. Trajan is prominent throughout (up to band 21 at any rate), appearing over 50 times, in a range of situations which were evidently calculated to illustrate his virtues: his piety towards the gods (offering sacrifice at the start of each campaign), his concern for the welfare and morale of his troops, his skill in dealing with the barbarians, receiving their embassies, showing clemency. In return he is blessed by the gods (not just Victory, but Jupiter Tonans and Night both intervene to help the Romans) and is rewarded by the loyalty and companionship of all his subordinate officers, who are also portrayed as recognizable individuals, often standing, sitting or riding beside him. Although he rides to the rescue in band 15 scene xcvii, he is never shown charging into battle in the Alexandrian manner of the so-called Great Trajanic Frieze, which is thought to have decorated some part of Trajan’s Forum.21 In the 19th century the frieze was seen primarily as a form of historical document – a pictorial narrative of all the appearances of Trajan (Pl. 8) and the gist of the professionalism as well as that of the Roman army. That the frieze was most probably a Hadrianic addition to the Column I have already argued elsewhere on a number of other grounds,22 here by way of conclusion, I would draw attention to a couple more.

First, there is the question of the relationship between the layout of the frieze and the temple. Some connection has always been suspected, because Victory, the single most prominent figure, who marks the division between the two wars, is centred on the Column’s north-west side, which presumed to face the temple, not on the south-east side, which is that shown in the coins. Not just Victory but an episode known as the ‘omen of victory’ and its outcome, the suicide of Decebalus appear on this north-west axis, one of the ‘vertical correspondences’ which could have allowed the frieze to be read synoptically from one particular direction, instead of trying to follow its continuous narrative around the shaft.23 The correspondence on the ‘Victory axis’ has been taken as evidence that the temple and the frieze must have been designed at the same time, though as part of a Trajanic project.24 If the temple turns out to be positioned at an angle, as I have proposed, then the correspondence is no longer there. Or is it?

The latest study of the frieze, by Martin Galinier, analyses both continuous and intermittent vertical readings in equal measure. He is a firm believer in its Trajanic date, but most helpfully for my case, he has mapped the incidence of all the appearances of Trajan (Pl. 8) and the gist of the
‘vertical correspondences’ from eight directions: on the four main axes and the four diagonals, the latter as defined by the corners of the pedestal (Pl. 9). Although he was not disposed to make much of it,® both his exercises reveal the same singular imbalance: Trajan appears twice as frequently, and with a far greater preponderance of other notably more significant messages, not on the north-west axis, or any of the Column’s other orthogonal axes, but between the north-east and north-west, that is on the diagonal axis which faces due north (Pl. roa), where I would place the temple. The very first figure in the frieze, an auxiliary on guard duty, is positioned on this axis (Pl. 10b) and directly in line upwards from his head, scene after scene was evidently calculated to coincide with the same point, where the longer scenes often divide around a particularly eye-catching component:

Band 1: i Auxiliaries stand guard on the Roman side of the Danube
Band 2: viii Trajan performs a suovetaurilia sacrifice at the outset of his campaign
Band 3: xii Trajan inspecting fort-building and xvi Trajan interrogating Dacian prisoners
Band 4: xiii Battle of Tapae, intervention of Jupiter

Tonans
Band 5: xixi Attack on a Dacian stronghold
Band 6: xxxiii Night battle against the Dacians
Band 7: xlix Trajan addresses the troops
Band 8: lii Trajan receives Dacian embassy and lii’ Trajan suovetaurilia sacrifice
Band 9: lii’ Trajan receives surrender of Dacian nobleman and liii’ Trajan suovetaurilia sacrifice

Such a concentration of imagery is not likely to be fortuitous – if there was ever an attempt to provide a synopsis of the whole story on one face of the Column this would seem to be it, and if the temple turns out to be positioned at the same angle we would have even more reason to connect the two in a specifically Hadrianic context.

Before one gets too carried away, however, it must be noted that our habit of cutting up the frieze into equal sections for reproduction in books has tended to obscure the fact that its 150 or so scenes are of greatly differing lengths, those on the diagonal axes of the Column (N, W, S, E) being generally longer and more complex than those on its orthogonal axes (NW, SW, SE, NE). This must be because the orthogonal axes are interrupted at intervals by the windows which light the internal staircase, whereas the diagonal axes invariably offer a clear space 3 metres wide. In places the windows allowed for a clear field across the orthogonal axes, too, and the sculptors took advantage of all such opportunities, but more often they made those axes coincide with divisions between two smaller scenes, especially where there was a window to be negotiated. The difficulty was not only how to incorporate the window’s black rectangle into any given composition (often no effort was made to do so), rather that the wide embrasure inside the window meant the stone around the slot was comparatively thin – it will have been quite risky to do much carving close to it. Carving on the diagonal axes was also compromised, but to a much lesser extent, at the junction between one drum and the next, by small filler-holes through which lead had been fed into the lower end of the four large metal dowels pinning one block to the next (hence the large cavities that frequently mar the centres of the reliefs on the diagonal axes, where scavengers have spotted the holes and chiselled into the depths of the blocks to extract the dowels). Such considerations, certainly until the position of the temple is confirmed one way or the other, suggest to
me that the preponderance of scenes on the north face rather than the north-west could have been prompted by its artistic advantages as much as the desire to put the frieze in dialogue with the temple. The west face (that towards the curving portico and its suite of curia-like halls) also has a good quota of very eloquent scenes, whose arrangement in the vertical sense would surely repay further study. The relative visibility of one side of the column compared to another should also be taken into account if we really want to understand ancient viewpoints and the viewer experience. It is not just a question of distance and angle; it is also light. One reason why the sequence on the north face has not been recognized before is that, nowadays, it is extremely difficult to see except very early in the morning and is disfigured by long black streaks which run down the shaft at precisely this angle, for the Basilica Ulpia no longer gives the Column any protection from the weather, nor our eyes a guard against the sun. We may seriously doubt that anyone was expected to read the detail, except the deified Trajan in his temple, but it was surely intended to be readable in some degree, and instead of reconstructing the surrounding buildings to provide spectator terraces, or applying paint (for which there is no evidence whatsoever) it might be more instructive to reconstruct a series of different roof heights and model the column and its reliefs in raking light as the sun moves round the sky.

Finally, if the frieze is Hadrianic, and it was meant to be read, where’s Hadrian? He accompanied Trajan as a comes in the First Dacian War, was given command of Legio I Minervia in the Second, and was apparently commended for his exploits, receiving dona militaria from Trajan for both wars, so we should expect him to appear in the frieze, whenever it was carved. Some modern commentators have been willing to recognize him here and there yet no figure has been definitely identified as his, and in so far as the matter has been given much consideration at all, his relative obscurity has been taken to endorse a Trajanic rather than Hadrianic date. Unfortunately, no particulars of Hadrian’s exploits are given, so we do not know what we might be looking for in the way of action, nor is it certain how he will have been portrayed, in the event that the frieze was carved before his accession, possibly in the ‘youthful’ Hadrian type, with long sideburns, which appears on coins issued for his decennalia, but seems to have resurrected a type minted at Alexandria just after his accession. An added complication is that even the portraits of Trajan on the Column are extremely variable, some look nothing like him; we can pick him out only by his actions and gestures, or by the fact that he is usually slightly taller than the rest of his officers and usually the centre of attention from surrounding figures.

Many Romans in the frieze sport short beards of Hadrian’s type including several officers, some of whom look to be of suitable age (26–30). Two appear in the first band (scenes iv–v), leading their troops over the Danube on pontoon bridges, wearing the cuirass and paludamentum diagnostic of generals, but in the second case the legate has a companion in front, not wearing a cuirass, who might be Hadrian (Pl. 11). The figure is centred on the south-east axis, over the door. Alternatively, there is a very tall cuirassed figure at the far end of scene v who is defaced (Pl. 12). Given his size he is generally identified as Trajan himself, but the masonry behind him and the gesture of his hand indicates that he actually belongs to the adjacent scene vi in which Trajan is already seated on a high dais in company with two of his generals. Trajan would not be shown twice in the same setting, and the tall figure is standing on the ground, not raised on the dais, so despite his size is evidently a subordinate, albeit an important one.
Trajan’s death in AD 117 was marked in the city of Rome by two important monuments – his public burial within the pomerium, at the foot of the column that the Senate had dedicated in his honour in AD 113, and a temple which housed him as the god Divus Traianus. Only the Column still stands, and the exact location of the temple is currently in doubt, but both monuments were evidently closely connected with one another. Modern scholarship is in the habit of crediting their juxtaposition to a plan drawn up by Trajan, well before his death, when designing his Forum in 106. This paper has pursued the alternative view, that Trajan will not have attempted to deprive the Senate and his successor of the honour of honouring him, and that it was Hadrian who brought the tomb and temple together, to underscore the legitimacy of his succession and consolidate his somewhat shaky imperial position at the end of his first year of power. The tomb was a gift from the Senate, not hidden inside the column pedestal but a new installation located in full view on the outside, identified by an inscription and probably crowned with a statue of Trajan which the Senate may have originally commissioned for an arch to commemorate his final Parthian triumph. Hadrian
had the statue conveyed to the tomb in a procession led by the Senate and the army, as the triumph would have been, and no doubt participated himself — not as triumphator, which he had refused, but as Trajan’s son. The temple was a gift from Hadrian, put in hand when he was in Rome in AD 118–21 and dedicated when he returned for his decennalia in AD 126. It may have housed both Divus Traianus and other family divi – such as Trajan’s fathers Divus Nerva and Divi Traiani Pater – and, as the latest archaeological discoveries have shown, it was erected in conjunction with a suite of libraries or schools at the same time as alterations were made to the Column, its courtyard and the buildings to either side. Hadrian’s change to Trajan’s Column was to add the frieze on the shaft, which effectively turned the column on its axis to face in the same direction as the tomb at its foot, and developed the story of Trajan’s Dacian triumph into a permanent eulogy in stone. Trajan did have plans to develop the area around his Column and the hillside beyond, plans which were in progress at the time of his death and may have included porticus and libraries but that project was stopped and Hadrian instituted his grander one, which united Trajan’s tomb and temple together with libraries, schools and a public rostra in a new vision of shared senatorial, and ‘Ulpian’, ideological values.

Notes
1 Birley 1997, 77.
2 Bennett 1997, 20f.
3 HA Hadrian 5.9–10.
5 Pliny Pan. 6.3, 8.1–3, 5.10.1 and 6, 47.5; Dio 68.2.3 and 3.3–4; Eutropius 8.1.1–2; Epit. de Caes. 12.9; cf. Bennett 1997, 41, 47–50.
7 HA Hadrian 6.1–2.
8 Dio 68.25.1.
9 Dio 68.29.2. The date is confirmed by the Fasti Ostiensis: Bargagli and Grosso 1997, p. 40f. Kb, 14–16.
10 HA Hadrian 6.3–4.
11 Birley 1997, 8f. BMC III, p. 124; another BMC III, Hadrian no. 8, in Hadrian’s name as emperor with ‘Trajan’s titles and the two of them clapping hands on the reverse with a subscript ‘Adoptio’.
13 Birley 1997, 93.

14 HA Hadrian 7; Birley 1997, 94–6.
15 Kierdorf 1986, 152.
16 Dio 69.2.3; HA Hadrian 6, 1–2; Eutropius 8.5.2–3; Epit. de Caes. 13.31.
17 The other being the equus Traiani, also commemorated on the coinage, a colossal portrait of him on horseback (Bergemann 1990, 166 L32, pl. 92h), whose base has now been identified in the forum square, set towards the southern end: Menghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2007, 86f.
18 CIL VI 1660; Lepper and Frese 1988, 20, 205–7.
19 Amm. Marc. 16.10.14; elatosque vertices qui sensissi suggesta consurgant, priorum principum imitatae remansisse porticus [columns] which bear platforms to which one may mount, and the images of former emperors’ were among the wonders that greeted Constantius IV in his visit to Rome in AD 357. As far as we know, the plural can only refer to the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius (Antoninus Pius) was not hollow. The steps in Trajan’s Column are not as worn as those of Marcus, but that might only mean it was less frequented in later ages, not in antiquity.
21 Hesberg and Panciera 1994, 88–147, e.g. Octavia’s (94 no. II, pl. 13a) measures 1.04m; Aigrippina the Elder’s (157 no. XVI, pl. 13 c–d) measures 1.14m; an anonymous (162f. no. XXVIII, pl. 13b) is 1.34m high, all are missing their lids and plinths.
22 Compare 50 cells with stone beds for slaves in the basement of a late Republican house on the Via Sacra: Carandini 1986, 264f. fig. 1 and similar basement cells in Lugli 1947, 147–9 fig. 45 (there identified as a brothel); for the cells in the lapanare at Pompeii (VII, 12, 18–20), which contain little more than a masonry bed, see Lugli 1947, 157f. fig. 46 (plan); Varone 2003, 204 tav. II (plan); McGinn 2004, 232f. and fig. 6.
23 That Trajan’s tomb would not be inscribed with his name and titles, and that the legality of the burial would not be publicly declared, would go against all norms of Roman funerary practice (Keppie 1991, 106f.). The very fact that so many different commentators in late antiquity knew that Trajan’s Column was his tomb and that the knowledge survived well into the Middle Ages suggests there was a public inscription in addition to that which survives.
24 Unfortunately, all the marble paving of the courtyard around the Column has been stripped and even the travertine capping of the Column foundation is missing along most of the north-west side, where a large hole was cut into the Column foundation in the early Middle Ages (for plan and section see here Pl. 2a–b). It is possible that the medieval hole (filled with burials) enlarged an existing one on the same spot. The footings of a tomb superstructure made of solid marble, as one should expect Trajan’s to be, might only have been let into the marble paving of the court, not set deeper into the ground (the concrete foundations of the paving are anyway a metre thick), thus leaving no trace.
25 Nerva’s burial in the Mausoleum of Augustus had been at Trajan’s request: Epit. de Caes. 12.12. For the base of a portrait statue which accompanied Nerva’s burial, perhaps set up outside the tomb, see Hesberg and Panciera 1994, 144–6 no. XX, pl. 12c.
26 Bennett 1997, 19; death of Traianus Pater before ad 100 implied by Pliny Pan. 89.2, and before AD 97 by his adoption by Nerva; death and apotheosis of Marciana Fasti Ostiensis, I 40–44; Bargagli and Grosso 1997, 36–8.
29 Beard 2007, 42, 88–9, 91.
31 Richard 1966, 258.
32 On which further, see den Boer 1975.
34 Flower 1996 passim; the letters of Pliny the Younger provide a sample of what might go on in the early 2nd century; Ep. IV, 2 and 7 (on the senator M. Aquilius Regulus’ exaggerated behaviour on the death of his son).
35 Well documented in the case of L. Volusius Saturninus cos ad 56,
who was given three: Eck 1972, 46ff., though as Fejér 2008, 44ff. points out, those were likely to be a pedestrian statue in triumphal costume, not an equestrian figure or the full-blown quadriga chariot.

36 Dio 68.29.3.

37 Strack II 22; BMC III, 472. Broadly datable to 17–18. Similar types were issued for imperial rituals, e.g. aurei of Domitian of AD 88–9 (Triumph Romanae 2008, 131 no. 1.2.12), perhaps also representing a statue rather than the event itself.

38 Kierdorf (1986, 150) reasoned that it would have to be a standing figure, placed on top of the burial itself, but does not enter into the details of where that was. If we entertain the possibility that the original statue of AD 113 was removed and replaced by a new one to mark the greater honour, it could have been turned round to suit the tomb (unfortunately, although the footprints were reportedly still visible when the statue of St Peter was installed in 1381, no one noted the direction they faced).

39 Kierdorf 1986, 153–4, on the basis of his chronology for the relevant coinage, prefers a date in the autumn of AD 117, arguing that such a change 'caused to be carried' could only order figures given in adventus, but not all would agree, see Birley 1997, 99, and 388 n. 20.

40 Kraglund 1998, 16ff.

41 Hadrian 19.9.

42 Cochils (shaped like a snail-shell) refers to the internal spiral staircase, on which see Wilson Jones 2000, 105–9.

43 One section of shaft in Altare Claudia granite brought to the surface in 1856 and a Corinthian capital of matching scale are in white marble in the Forum, are displayed beside Trajan's Column. Shafts of granite bianco e nero (from Wadi Barud) are also recorded in the verbal reports. For the detailed history of discoveries on the site, see Claridge 2007, 59–70.

44 See Packer 1997, 87–121 for a series of examples by French and Italian architects in the 18th and 19th centuries. The plan in Lepper and Frese 1968, 8 ff. is very much in that tradition.


46 First proposed in Meneghini 1993 and reconstructed in Meneghini 1998, all the latest reconstruction plans of the imperial forums now present the propylon as fact.


49 The main question mark hangs over the last house in the series, a nobleman whose remains disappear under the foundations of the modern Palazzo Valentini (shaped like a snail-shell) refers to the internal spiral staircase, on which see Wilson Jones 2000, 105–9.

50 First proposed in Meneghini 1993 and reconstructed in Meneghini 1998, all the latest reconstruction plans of the imperial forums now present the propylon as fact.

51 Claudio Ricci for several opportunities to see their excavations in progress and their kindness in sharing their findings with me in advance of publication.

52 Claridge 2007, 76–82; La Rocca 2009, 396. It seems plausible that the complex subsequently became the venue for the Athenaeum, intellectual games instituted by Hadrian in AD 135 (Aur.Vict. Cae. 14), though we should probably not apply the term to the buildings themselves (Egidi 2010, 114–16).

53 Egidi 2010, 11ff.

It does not even start until 7.8m above ground and then rises up to 17m.


Opper 2008: 59f. igs 38; for the Alexandrian coin: Bergmann 1997, 52, 64; Galimberti 2007, 17.

On which see Opper 2008, 59.

Gauer 1977, 63, igs 19a–20a.

It is quite rare in the 2nd century ad, but also appears on the Arch of Trajan at Benevento.

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