Visualising the enemy

The visual languages of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius and their artistic representation of Rome's barbarian enemies

Master Thesis Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Track Ancient Studies)

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I. Introduction

During the period of economic prosperity and stability that is known as the High Empire (96-192),[1] two outstanding and sumptuous monuments were put up in the aftermath of the victories over two of Rome's long-time barbarian foes. The first of these was Trajan's Column, which was set up in 113 in commemoration of his Dacian Wars (101-106). Likewise, for his triumph over the Germans and Sarmatians in the Marcomannic Wars (166-180), the last 'Good Emperor' Marcus Aurelius received the honour of a monumental victory column. Standing well over 40 meters tall from their bases to the statues on their tops, both monuments loomed over a large number of the many structures in their vicinities and will not have escaped the eye of the ancient passer-by.

Not only do the columns stand out because of their height, but also because of the considerable number of images on their surfaces, which contained numerous figures representing barbarian enemies. In many respects, the columns look very similar. In fact, Marcus Aurelius' Column seems to have been modelled after that of Trajan,[2] which explains their close resemblance. Both monuments are composed of a base supporting a large, hollow column inside which a spiral staircase, lit by small rectangular windows in the column shaft, provides access to a platform at the column's top.[3] This platform originally supported a sumptuous bronze statue of the emperor, which would have increased the height and, hence, the visibility of the monument even further. Apart from their overall structure and design, the subject matter on the main part of the monuments – the column itself – also coincides; the spiral bands enfolding the marble drums that constitute both columns are decorated with sculpted reliefs representing the key events of important military campaigns that took place during the reigns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Closer inspection of the columns, however, reveals a number of significant differences. Apart from the lesser amount of spirals compared to the Column of Trajan,[4] the style in which the figures on Marcus' Column have been executed seems to deviate from its 'model' as well: the figures are carved into a higher relief, standing out

[1] Unless mentioned otherwise, all dates will be referring to events that took place after the beginning of the Common Era.
[2] See for instance Hölscher (2000) 89-91; Dillon (2006) 245; Beckmann (2011) 55f.
[3] On the importance of these staircases, see Beckmann (2002) 353-356.
[4] The column consisted of 21 instead of 23 spirals. See for instance Huet (2000) 108.

further from the background than the figures we find on Trajan's Column. Furthermore, they are portrayed from a frontal perspective more often and have non-classical proportions; the figures are more elongated than those on Trajan's Column and often, their heads appear to be too large for their bodies. Also, the poses and movements of the figures have been executed in a less naturalistic fashion in comparison to Trajan's Column. Each of these aspects sets the frieze covering the surface of the Column of Marcus Aurelius apart from the more traditional and 'classical' reliefs on Trajan's Column.[5]

The difference that has received the most scholarly attention, however, is the way in which the columns portray Rome's barbarian opponents. They have emphasised that the lion's share of the images on the frieze of Trajan's Column allude to the non-violent aspects of war, such as the emperor's addresses to his troops and the construction works of the Roman army. These stand in sharp contrast to the overabundance of violent representations on the Column of Marcus Aurelius; the Germanic and Sarmatian barbarians are shown in states of sheer agony and distress: women are harassed by Roman soldiers and men are butchered. Other scenes even confront the viewer with the image of the decapitation barbarian men. Indeed, scholars have stressed that such cruel representations of the violent 'realities' of war had not appeared on any previous work of monumental Roman art.[6] Hence, despite the similarities in their overall design and general subject matter, and their shared purpose as monuments commemorating two major military successes of the High Empire, the Column of Marcus Aurelius and that of his predecessor Trajan profoundly differ from each other on grounds of their stylistic characteristics and their iconographic contents. What prompted this change in the representation of barbarians in the relatively short period between the constructions of the two columns?

So far a number of different explanations has been proposed. Max Wegner was one of the first to address this issue. He mainly focused on the style of the Aurelianic Column and argued that its style should be perceived as a 'transitional style', initiating the turn to the artistic style of Late Antiquity.[7] While Wegner interpreted the violent character of the monument as an indicator of stylistic transition or *Stilwandel*, a number of alternative interpretations that look beyond the column's stylistic characteristics have been put forward. Ranuccio Bianchi

[5] Wegner (1931); Pirson (1996); Beckmann (2011) 158f.
[6] See for instance Hannestadt (2001); Dillon (2006); Ferris (2009).
[7] Wegner (1931).

Bandinelli argued that the frieze cannot be reconciled with the image of Marcus Aurelius as presented in his *Meditations*. As a mild and humane emperor, he could simply not have commissioned the horrendous and violent images on the column's surface. He therefore concluded that the column must date to the reign of Commodus rather than to that of Marcus Aurelius, as the design of the frieze could only be the product of his violent and cruel.[8] Other scholars have argued that the column was constructed during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and linked the imagery on the column's helical frieze to Marcus Aurelius' 'humanistic' philosophy and his criticism of the way in which Roman soldiers treated their opponents. The Aurelianic Column was the first monument to openly address these ethical apprehensions towards war.[9]

Alternatively, other publications have stressed how the images on the Aurelianic frieze reflected the sentiments of insecurity, distress and anxiety that were felt throughout the instable Roman Empire during the reign of Marcus Aurelius.[10] Another explanation has been sought in the changing conception of the barbarian during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, which may have been the result of the increasing insecurity and anxiety that now prevailed in the Roman Empire. According to Iain Ferris, the violent and gruesome images that covered the surface of his column marked the beginning of a trend he has dubbed the 'dehumanisation of the barbarian': barbarians are no longer regarded and presented as human beings, but simply as objects in the narrative enfolding the Aurelianic Column. They are 'mere humps of flesh and bones' rather than proper characters, which explains and legitimises the increased amount of violence in the scenes in which barbarians appear.[11] Lastly, some scholars adhere to the rather paradoxical view that the violent imagery in fact conveyed a positive message. In the late 1990's Felix Pirson claimed the motivations behind the adoption of the violent imagery on the Aurelianic Column need to be sought in the need to reassure the inhabitants of the Roman Empire of Rome's military superiority and power, which was no longer self-evident in the light of recent Germanic incursions and other socio-economic issues the empire was already facing.[12] Along the same lines, other scholars have stressed how the column's imagery serves to exhibit that Rome's enemies received a suitable punishment for their utterly transgressive behaviour towards the

[8] Bianchi Bandinelli (1978) 136.
[9] See for instance Birley (1993) 215.
[10] See for instance Hannestadt (2001) 151-152.
[11] Ferris (2009) 131-151.
[12] Pirson (1996). Also see Dillon (2006) 244-263.

Romans.[13] In short, the differences between Trajan's Column and that of Marcus Aurelius and the way in which they represent Rome's barbarian enemy have not remained unnoticed, and so far various explanations for this phenomenon have been put forward. Although the subject has, thus, not suffered from a lack of scholarly attention – far from it – it is my aim to readdress it.

In my view, many of the abovementioned explanations for the changes in the artistic representations on the frieze of the Aurelianic Column have been largely shaped by our own contemporary conceptions of violence and warfare. Instead of attempting to reconstruct what these images meant to their contemporary viewers, many of these explanations are simply the result of modern emotional responses the column's violent imagery, stemming from our own condemnation of violence. Therefore, we should first and foremost concern ourselves with the question how the imagery of both Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' column was perceived by their contemporary viewers: those living or visiting Rome in the second century A.D. I believe the key to answering this question lies in communicative purpose of Roman art and the underlying structures that enabled this visual communication. Hence, before moving on to the discussion of the artistic representations of Rome's barbarian enemies on these monuments, the way in which works of Roman art could convey information to its viewers will be discussed firstly.

The semantics of Roman art: images and their visual language

Central to many of the hitherto proposed explanations for the iconographic and stylistic changes on the Column of Marcus Aurelius is the belief that its imagery somehow reflected the contemporary socio-political circumstances of Rome. These had changed because of increasing socio-economic pressures that occurred during the reign of Marcus Aurelius.[14] Apparently, the art of the Roman Empire reacted to these changes. Implicitly, it is thus argued that the images on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius somehow reflected the growing sentiments of distress and insecurity of Roman society. Hence, the idea that ancient images alluded to the interests and concerns of the society in which, and for which, they were created is the *leitmotif* of many of the explanations provided for the changes in iconography and style from Trajan's

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[13] Hölscher (2000); Smith (2002) 78-82; Beckmann (2003) 202-208; Beckmann (2011) 194-198.

[14] For instance, Cassius Dio mentions the costly Parthian campaigns, the outbreak of the Antonine Plague, and the incursions of Germanic tribes into the Roman Empire and Italy as factors that contributed to the increased political instability of the Roman empire during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. See Dio LXXII.3; LXXI.2.

Column to that of Marcus Aurelius. It is this aspect of ancient art as a social construct – extending beyond the conception of art from a solely aesthetic point of view – that has been largely overlooked by scholars writing on both Trajan's Column and its Aurelianic counterpart, and in works on ancient art in general. Yet, taking it into account and exploring its consequences is of vital importance to our understanding and interpretation of the differences between the columns.

Indeed, various scholars have drawn attention to the idea that, contrary to our modern conception of art, ancient art was not created as 'art for art's sake'; the artist did not merely create a work of art to exhibit his creativity or to express his own feelings, but also to express the feelings and world views of his customers and audiences.[15] As such, it can be argued that artworks created in antiquity cannot, and should not, be perceived as isolated from their socio-historical context and, as Bert Smith has argued: 'image-bearing structures and objects … were powerful expressive components of their own time, with distinct agendas, and actively shape our understanding of whole areas of ancient culture in ways that we need to work hard to understand, define and control'.[16]

The idea of ancient art as a mirror of a certain society's contemporary interests and concerns, implies that it was able to convey certain meanings and evoke associations in the minds of its ancient viewers. But how were messages created and communicated? Ultimately, this question touches upon the issue of semantics of Roman art, or its creation and dispersion of meaning. As in daily life, one usually relies on language – either spoken or written – to pass on a message to someone else, so did the ancient artist. Although art was comprised of images rather than words and therefore visual rather than textual, in many ways it, too, depended on language to successfully communicate messages to its audience: a visual language. Even though this aspect is often not considered in publications on ancient artworks and their meaning, various scholars have illustrated how a more structural approach to ancient art from the perspective of its visual language can lead to novel and even paradigm-changing conclusions about ancient art and its role in its contemporary society.[17] Even though their publications are

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[15] Cf. Pirson (1996); Smith (2002) 61-62, 72-73; Hölscher (2004).

[16] Smith (2002) 61-62.

[17] See for instance Elsner (1996); Zanker (1998) esp. 74-75, 83; Heijmans (2000); Smith (2002); Clarke (2003); Hölscher (2004); Steiner (2007).

concerned with very different types of ancient art, they all illustrate how an artwork's visual language enabled its communicative role as a medium to articulate particular contemporary sentiments or beliefs. Hence, the following questions arise: what constituted this visual language and how did it work?

With his *Römische Bildsprache als semantisches System*, translated into *The Language of Images in Roman Art*, Tonio Hölscher has uncovered an important aspect of the visual language of Roman art: its style. In this essay he demonstrates how the alleged 'eclecticism' of Roman art, which was characterised by the co-existence of multiple models or styles drawn from different periods of Greek art, was not dictated by aesthetic principles but was in fact the result of the contents and subject of an artwork. Hölscher illustrates how specific scenes or subjects were executed in a particular style because it was regarded as the most appropriate to convey the underlying values and message of the artwork. Battle scenes, for instance, were virtually always represented following the Hellenistic artistic tradition as this 'style' was believed the most effective means to evoke the emotional engagement or *pathos* of the Roman viewer and emphasise the superiority of Roman victory.[18] Furthermore, Zanker has demonstrated how the 'classical style' that prevailed in the official art under Augustus was embraced by the lower classes of Roman society,[19] which suggests that the style of a work of art was important to contemporary Roman viewers and buyers.

The concept of style as used by Hölscher extends beyond the idea of the mere stylistic features of a work of art, but also encompasses their formal aspects, such as the poses of figures and the technique that was used to carve them. Another important aspect that Hölscher regards as part of an artwork's 'style' is its overall composition: the placement of the individual elements and figures in the space that constituted the work of art. These aspects, too, were dictated by the messages the artwork was to convey. As such, Hölscher's concept of style entails both purely stylistic, and formal and compositional elements of an artwork, which is why he also uses the term 'form' to refer to all of these aspects. Altogether, it was thus this 'form' that can be regarded as an integral part of the visual language of Roman art. Since it was primarily determined by the message a work of art was to broadcast, it was laden with semantic value.

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[18] Hölscher (2004) 29-45.
[19] Zanker (1987) 264-93.s

Style or form, thus, extended beyond matters of contemporary taste, techniques and the qualities of the individual artist. Although these must have also influenced the form of an artwork, it was the message that was its primary determinant. As such, it can be argued that a change in the form of a work of art implies a change in what is or can be communicated; the belief that a certain idea or meaning could be expressed more effectively through the adoption of a particular style by laying an alternative emphasis on specific features of the artwork's composition.[20] Since style has been recognised as one of the aspects that sets the imagery of the Column of Marcus Aurelius so greatly apart from its Trajanic predecessor, it is my contention that this stylistic difference is, in fact, part of a wider difference in the visual language of the column, which entails that the messages of both monuments differed.

The meaning of an artwork, however, is not solely constituted by its style and formal elements. It also conveys its meaning through the individual images that constitute it. Indeed, it is through its imagery that a work of art refers to abstract ideas and beliefs that transcend its direct subject-matter. In other words: images are capable of referring to something beyond themselves. They are symbols that are converted into meaningful concepts in the minds of their viewers.[21] Since the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns also differ in iconography, looking into their images – or symbols – and the ways in which these produced meaning to their ancient viewers is worthwhile. Information theory, which is concerned with the communication of information, provides a useful framework to enhance our understanding of the mechanisms which allowed the contemporary beholders of these monuments to read the many images they were confronted with.

Information theory: entropy, repetition and redundancy

Originally devised by Claude E. Shannon in the late 1940's to theorise the processing of information in the sphere of the computational sciences,[22] information theory can also enhance

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[20] Cf. Smith (2002) 73f, 81-82; Kunze (2015) 547-548.

[21] The conception of the image as a sign derives from semiotic theory. Originally developed to analyse the inner mechanisms of language, semiotics can also be applied to art-historical analyses. See for instance Bal & Bryson (1991). On its value for the study of ancient art and its communicative function see for instance Stansbury-O'Donnell (2011) 72-78; Hölscher (2015). For an example of the applicability of semiotic theory in the analysis of Roman art, see Heijmans (2000).

[22] Shannon (1948). Following Shannon's publication, Weaver has illustrated the value of information theory

our understanding of the ways in which the ancient viewer 'processed' the information that was embedded into an artwork. Ann Steiner has already demonstrated how some of the basic premises of information theory can be applied to ancient art. Although her study concerns archaic Attic vase paintings,[23] applying the same theoretical considerations to the images of barbarians on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius can enhance our understanding of the messages of these works of imperial monumental art in the minds of their contemporary viewers.

According to information theory, a 'system of communication' is constituted by a transmitter, channel, and receiver. The transmitter is the producer of the message that wishes to convey it to the receiver. In order to do this, he has to 'send' this message to this recipient. He does so by sending the message through a 'channel' which adapts the message so that it can be inferred and processed by its receiver.[24] As a medium of mass communication, it can be argued that ancient art worked according to this principle as well. First and foremost, most works of Roman art were commissioned by a patron. In the case of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius the commissioner was the Roman imperial government, which strived to convey a message to the population of the Roman Empire. To do so, the patron or the transmitter chose a medium of communication that would serve as the 'channel' through which information could be sent to and processed by the receiver, such a statue or an image on the reverse of a coin. Subsequently the artist, working on behalf of his patron, was entrusted with the task of ensuring the communication of the intended message through the images he created. The images constituting his artwork, thus, were the carriers of the message that was communicated through the channel to the emperor's subjects: the receivers (see fig. 1).[25] As such, there was an ever-present relationship between the patron of a work of art, the artist, his work, and its audience.

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outside of the computational sciences as a general theory of communication. See Shannon & Weaver (1964)

[23] Steiner (2007).

[24] Shannon & Weaver (1964) 6-8, 33-35.

[25] Cf. Grupe (2013) 11-24.

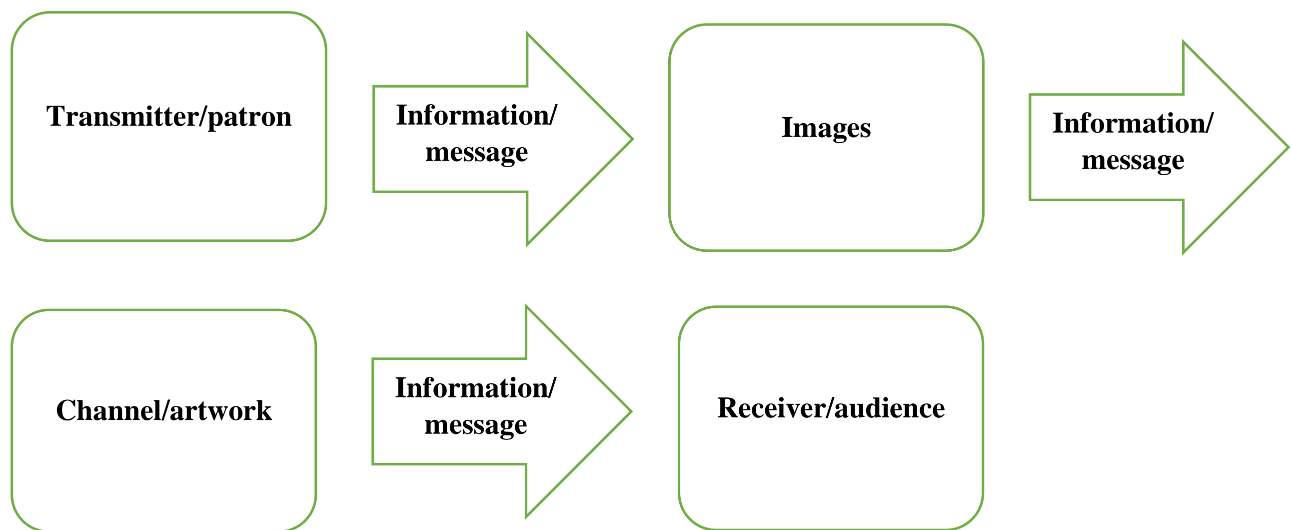


Figure 1 Roman art as a 'system of information'

As a radio signal may sometimes be not clearly audible because of the distortion on its channel and the noise resulting from it, so, too the 'receiver' of an artwork may have trouble with the inference of its information as a result of distortion and the noise, or 'meaningless' and incoherent information, it creates. To assess the extent of this distortion and a system's capacity to transmit meaningful information, information theory uses the concept of 'entropy' or 'disorder'. A high degree of entropy is the result of a high degree of noise and hence entails a low capacity to convey information, while a low degree of entropy results in a high capacity to transmit intelligible and meaningful information (see fig. 2). For instance, imagine having a conversation with a friend in a room which is packed with other people who are talking loudly to each other. It would be difficult understand what he is saying because his voice is drown out by the noise produced by the other conversations in the room, which are irrelevant to you. Now imagine having the same conversation in the same room without the presence of other people. Because of the reduction of the noises created by the conversations of other people you are now able to understand what your friend is saying. In other words, the entropy or the inability to understand this friend has been reduced by diminishing the noise in the room.

Similarly, information theorists have identified various mechanisms that can reduce the

entropy in a system of information and allow the receiver to separate a message from the noise in which it is embedded. One of these mechanisms is the repetition of redundant information. This entails the repetition of the same message over and over again. According to information theory, the continuous transmission of this similar information will eventually be noticed by the receiver. As the transmission continues, the receiver is able to infer more and more of the repeated message. He is now able to clearly infer certain elements through the distortion created by the noise of useless information surrounding the message; the repetition of the message creates a certain recognisability or predictability of these elements. It is this predictability created by repetition that is called redundancy in the sphere of information theory.[26] Hence, the repetition of redundant information, of information that is highly similar and therefore becomes increasingly recognisable, allows the receiver to infer messages from a system of high entropy. For instance, again imagine trying to have a conversation in the same noisy room as in the example mentioned above. At first, you will probably not be able to understand what your friend is trying to say to you, but when he repeats his sentence several times, you will probably be able to decipher what he is trying to tell you. Indeed, as he keeps repeating this sentence, you will be able to understand it gradually. At first, you will probably recognise similar sounds, then several words and in the end probably the entire sentence, or at least get a general idea of what your friend means. Thus, repetition allows you to understand his 'message' despite the constant presence of the noises filling the room.

In a work of art the repetition of redundant information works according to the same principle: the presence of familiar images or symbols helps the viewer to separate information from the entropy of an artwork. The constant reiteration of the same general image allows the receiver to gradually see through the 'useless' information that is created by the noise in the work of art, eventually allowing the receiver to extract a comprehensive message (see fig. 3).[27]

[26] Shannon & Weaver (1964) 12-22, 48-53. For the application of the theoretical considerations of repetition and redundancy on Attic vase painting, see Steiner (2007).
[27] Shannon & Weaver (1964) 22-26, 53-57.

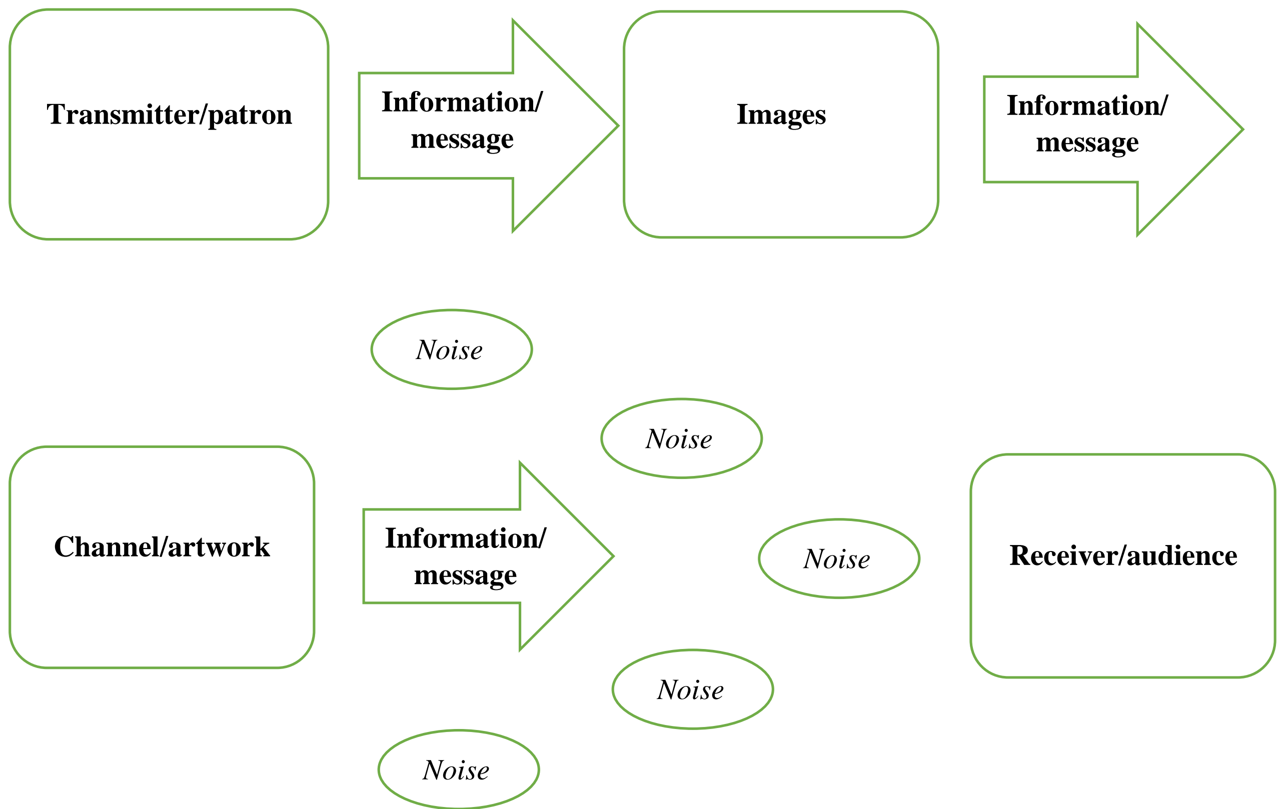
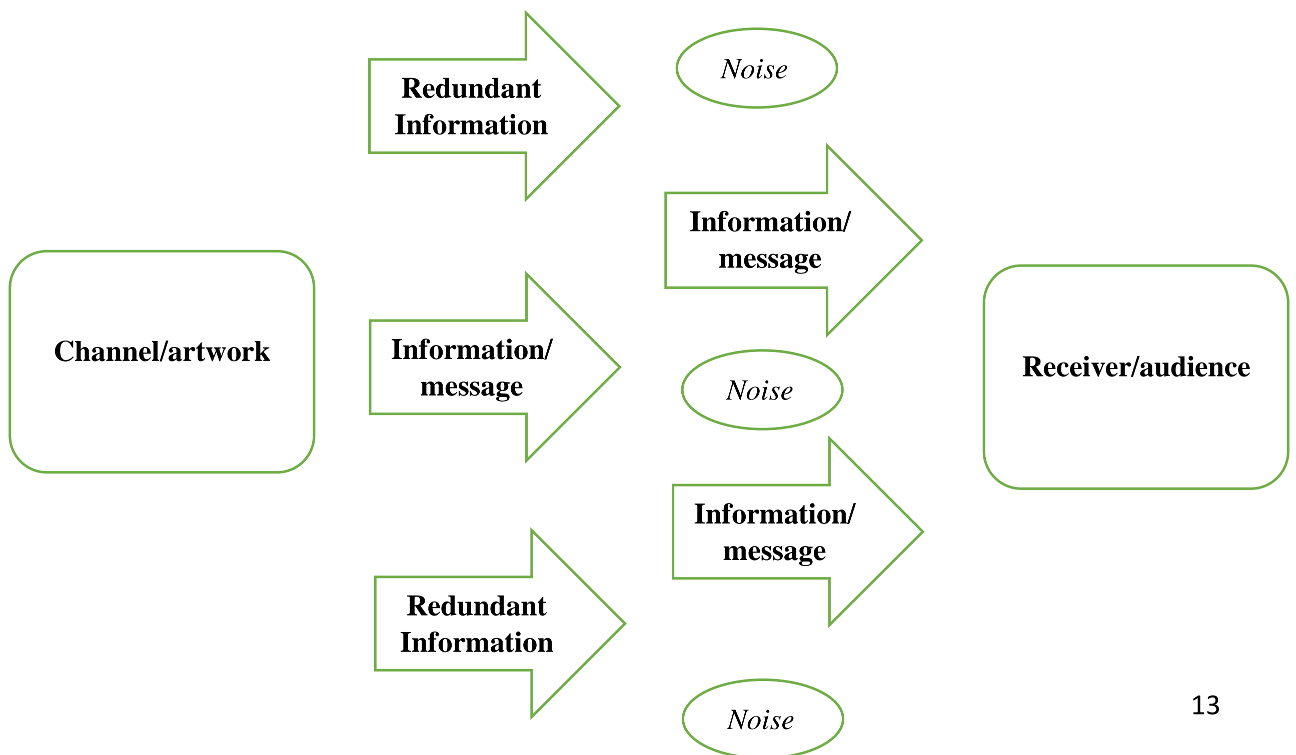


Figure 2 The effect of noise or entropy on the transmission of messages through art

Figure 3 The effect of the repetition of redundant information on the transmission of messages



In the case of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius the mechanisms of repetition and redundancy are of particular importance as both monuments can be characterised as works of imperial art containing a high degree of entropy. Both monuments comprise over 2500 individual figures that appear in scenes with often complex compositions.[28] This large amount of complicated information would undoubtedly have impeded the ancient Roman viewer's ability to extract meaningful information from the scenes on the columns' friezes. What is more, his ability to view and interpret the friezes would have been complicated even further by the design of the monuments: not only did the helical form of their friezes prevent the viewer from seeing the entire frieze without making the effort of walking around the columns, their height also provided a serious limitation to the viewer as the scenes covering the spiral bands near the top of the columns were virtually invisible. The artists, therefore, employed a device that allowed their audiences to extract comprehensive messages from the friezes by reducing the entropy caused by their complex designs and elaborate decorative schemes: the repetition of redundant information.

As we will see, the friezes of the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns both consisted of a limited number of scene types that were repeated as the friezes spiralled upwards. Even more importantly, however, the scenes in which the barbarian enemy was represented can be characterised by the repetition of specific figural compositions. It is my contention that these repetitions ultimately allowed the viewers of both columns to make sense of the many scenes and images they saw, as the recurring presence of these familiar images throughout the columns' surfaces would allow the viewer to focus on the images that the transmitter deemed most important; they were the primary carriers of meaning on the columns and their repetition subsequently ensured they would not be overshadowed by the columns' entropy, but rather stand out to the ancient viewer.

Altogether, it is the idea of Roman art as a system of forms that was not so much concerned with realistic representations of reality, but with the communication of coherent and intelligible messages that will serve as the basis of my enquiry into the friezes of the Trajanic and Aurelianic Columns and their representations of Rome´s defeated foreign enemies. Imagery and form, the two aspects that constituted the language of this communicative art, will provide

[28] Lepper & Frere (1988) 32.

the starting point of my discussion of the friezes and their depictions of Rome's barbarian opponents. It is this visual language that allows us to enhance our understanding of the meaning and significance of these depictions to their contemporary beholders, rather than simply approaching them with our own modern set of values and beliefs and interpreting them through this framework. Even though it is impossible to fully separate oneself from these, focussing on the visual languages of the friezes of the Trajanic and Aurelianic Columns will reduce the degree of subjectivity and modern bias, as the visual language of an artwork is always the product of the society in which it is employed and alludes to the beliefs and concerns of those within this society. Therefore, the external circumstances, ideas and mentalities surrounding the commission of both monuments will also be central to my argumentation; it is in these socio-historical circumstances, as well as the different audiences of the monuments that we need to seek the reasons behind the change in visual language from the Column of Trajan to the Column of Marcus Aurelius.

Aims and structure of the subsequent chapters

To shed more light on the images of barbarian opponents on the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns, we should first and foremost concern ourselves with the larger context in which they appear: the columns themselves. This chapter does not only encompass the spatial and historical contexts of the columns, but also discusses topics like the purpose of the monuments, their audiences and the circumstances regarding their design and construction, which have received only very minimal scholarly attention so far. Ancient written sources on the reigns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, as well as accounts of other ancient authors that can elucidate on the social context in which art was produced in ancient Rome will serve as the starting point of this enquiry. Furthermore, I will revisit the debates on the visibility and historicity of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Here, the friezes of both monuments as well as contributions by other scholars will be my primary point of reference.

After having explored the broader contexts in which the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius were conceived and set up, it is time to turn to their representation of the barbarian enemy: the Dacians on the Trajanic Column and Marcus Aurelius' Germanic and Sarmatian foes. Central in the analysis of these representations will be the two 'pillars' that together constituted the visual language of Roman art: their iconography, and their stylistic and formal

aspects. My discussion of the visual languages of the monuments will revolve around the scenes that portray Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' barbarian adversaries. Apart from focussing on the appearance of these barbarian figures and the stylistic and compositional characteristics of the scenes in which they appear, the repetition of specific and generic barbarian figures in these scenes will receive particular emphasis. To assess the significance of these figures, I will make use of information theory and its concepts of entropy, repetition and redundancy. Approaching the columns and their images of barbarians from this theoretical perspective will allow us to enhance our understanding of the role of these images in the visual languages of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius and their significance to the ancient viewer.

In the third and final chapter I will first attempt to establish what elements constituted the difference between the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns and their representation of Rome´s barbarian enemies, by building onto my findings of the previous chapter. After having pinpointed these differences, I will turn towards an explanation of them. Through the use of various ancient written sources on the reigns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, I will attempt to reconstruct the socio-political circumstances in which the columns were produced. Finally, I will demonstrate that these socio-political circumstances, as well as the different audiences for which the columns were produced, provide the key to answer the question regarding the differences in the visual languages of the Column of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius and their representation of their defeated foreign enemy.

II. Putting the columns in context

The images of Rome´s foreign enemies on the friezes encircling the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius did not appear as isolated sculptures, but were part of a large frieze on an even larger monument that was incorporated into Rome's civic space, which in turn was packed with other monuments, statues and buildings. Finding out what the images of barbarians on the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns meant to the contemporary Roman viewer requires us to take into account their surroundings as well. Yet, other aspects such as the purpose of the columns are of importance as well. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to scrutinise the contexts of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius in the broadest sense of the word. It will discuss the aspects that would have been relevant to the ancient viewer and his perception of the images on the columns. Not only are the dates, locations and purposes of the monuments vital to our understanding of the images they bear, they can also elucidate another crucial contextual question: who exactly viewed the columns? Likewise, the way in which the viewer would see the columns and their images should be taken into account as well. Therefore, the visibility and historical accuracy of the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius will also be discussed in this chapter. First and foremost however, I will briefly reflect on the practical context in which the images of Rome's foreign foes on the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns emerged: who commissioned them and what role did the individual artists play in their conception?

Reflections on the processes and practicalities of design and construction

To enhance our understanding of how the ancient beholders saw and interpreted the images of barbarians on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius we should first and foremost try to establish *how* and *by whom* these works of art were created.[29] Although providing an answer to such question is greatly hampered by the lack of sources informing us about the practicalities surrounding the production of works of Roman art, the social context in which these artworks were produced remains nonetheless of vital importance. In what follows an attempt is made to gain a better understanding of the circumstances and priorities surrounding the creation of the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns.

As has been discussed, the artist was always dictated by the wishes of the patron, or the commissioner of a work of art. Yet at the same time, the artwork he created would always be

[29] Cf. Clarke (2003) 10-12.

dependent on his own skills and ingenuity on the one hand, and the sentiments and the framework of reference of the public on the other. We should, therefore, not consider a work of art and its form and subject-matter as the result of the wishes of the patron, but as the result of the triangular relationship between buyer, artist and public.[30] What does this tell us about the creation of the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius?

In the Roman Empire, many works of imperial art were not commissioned by the emperor himself, but often by the Senate, or 'the Senate and the people of Rome', as is for instance specified in the inscription on the base of Trajan's Column.[31] In reality, however, the Senate was so closely operating with the emperor that the monument was in fact as closely connected to the Senate as it was to the emperor.[32] We can thus assume that the constitution of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius began with an official decision by their patrons: the Roman Senate. Next, a senatorial decree would have been issued to confirm and announce this decision. An example of such a decree specifying the construction of an arch in honour of Germanicus has been preserved in the *Tabula Siarensis*. It illustrates the many details such a document could contain: the decree specifies the type of the monument, its material, its location and the subject matter of the statues and reliefs that were to be decorating the arch.[33]

After the decree had been issued, a supervisor would have been appointed. His task was to oversee the construction of the monument and to decide upon aspects that were not specified in the senatorial decree. Lepper and Frere have suggested that in the case of Trajan's Column, there was a specially assigned 'column committee' that was entrusted with this task. The members of this senatorial committee, of which the emperor is likely to have been a member as well, could give their opinions about the construction of the column and the details that should be incorporated into it throughout the entire building process.[34] The same scenario can be devised for the construction of the Column of Marcus Aurelius: after the issuing of a decree

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[30] Cf. Smith (2002) 65-72.
[31] See CIL XIII 5708. Also see Stewart (2008) 34.
[32] On the one hand, the relevance of the Senate as the official commissioner of a monument lies in the 'propagandistic' character of such monuments. If a monument is not the creation of the emperor himself, but a gift of the Senate in honour of a specific act or victory, this would enhance the quality and grandeur of these achievements even further. Hence, through their praise of the emperor, monuments and sculptures emphasised specific values that the senate wished the public to share. On the other hand, setting up a monument for the emperor and his achievements could also make the emperor more benevolent towards the Senate and thus be beneficial to the members of the Senate themselves as well. Cf. Stewart (2008) 113-114.
[33] See CIL VI 40348. On the decree, see Stewart (2008) 34; Beckmann (2011) 68-69.
[34] Lepper & Frere (1988) 16-19.

specifying the design and subject-matter of the monument, a 'Column committee' that oversaw the construction of the column was appointed.

But who built the columns and who was responsible for the carving of their highly detailed reliefs? The ancient evidence on these matters is very limited indeed. Cassius Dio mentions that the famous architect Apollodorus of Damascus was responsible for the construction of the structures on the Forum of Trajan.[35] He is therefore regarded as the 'master' of Trajan's Column.[36] Dio also mentions how both Trajan and Hadrian personally consulted the architect about the buildings they wanted to construct. Hadrian, for instance, sent a plan of the Temple of Venus and Roma to him to ask for his opinion on the design.[37] It, thus, seems not unlikely that the design of the monument was the result of close collaboration between the column's patron and its artist. Yet, it is highly inconceivable that Apollodorus constructed and carved the column on his own, as this process would have taken up a considerable amount of time. Instead, a large number of workmen would have been hired from workshops in Rome to complete these tasks of lifting the marble drums in place and carving the frieze on the column's exterior.[38]

Contrastingly, Beckmann has argued that the Aurelianic Column did not have a single 'master' like Apollodorus, but rather 'multiple creative actors of varied skill.'[39] Apart from the fact that his argument is based on mere speculation and lacks any supportive argumentation, whether the column had one or multiple 'masters' is not of primary importance here. The key question regards all individual sculptors who worked on the columns' friezes: to what extent could they determine the contents and compositions of the scenes on the columns? As we have seen, the senatorial decree on the arch in honour of Germanicus already laid out many of the monument's details, including the subjects of its decorations. The will of a nobleman from Gaul, that is known as the 'Testament of the Lingon' also suggests that patrons could make very specific demands. The document gives a very detailed description of how the man's tomb

[35] Dio LXIX.4.1. Cf. Lepper & Frere (1988) 18.
[36] See for instance Lepper & Frere (1988) 18; Beckmann (2011) 70.
[37] See Dio LXIX.4.2.
[38] Beckmann has demonstrated that the frieze was only carved after the drums had been put into place. Only the bands between the individual drums as well as the interior staircase would have been carved on the ground to save weight during the assembly of the column. See Bekcmann (2011) 78, 114-115. On workshops and the sculptors of Trajan's Column, see for instance Stewart (2008) 29-32.
[39] Beckmann (2011) 70.

should be designed and decorated.[40] A passage from Petronius' *Satyricon* also suggests patrons could give very detailed instructions to the artists they hired. Here, Trimalchio describes the details that should be incorporated into his own tomb, including its lavish decorations.[41]

Therefore, we can assume that the patron of an artwork could exert a considerable amount of influence on the details of the work of art he commissioned; especially in the case of the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius which were highly unusual and, above all, expensive monuments. Lepper and Frere have suggested the sculptors working on the frieze of Trajan's Column had a fully worked out model at their disposal.[42] Although this model is likely to have been the result of the close collaboration between the column's chief architect – or perhaps architects – and the column committee, the individual artist who would ultimately be carving the frieze merely followed the design that was already laid out for him. Nonetheless, the result would still depend on his skill and technical expertise. Ultimately, the images on the friezes of the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius were thus the result of the ideas and designs of the patron seeking to convey a specific message on the one hand, and the skill and artistic techniques of the artists who carved them on the other.

Date, location, audience and purpose

As its inscription tells us, Trajan's Column was dedicated in 113 by the Senate and the People of Rome.[43] The monument was placed in a small courtyard on the Forum of Trajan where it was flanked by Trajan's Greek and Latin libraries, while facing the Temple of Trajan on the north and the Basilica Ulpia on the south (see fig. 4).[44] The construction of the forum began in 106-107 and was finished by 112-113, when the area was dedicated. The forum and its monumental buildings and statues were all financed by the spoils of the recently concluded Dacian Wars between 101 and 102, and 105 and 106. This was made especially clear by inscriptions in the attic of the colonnades of the Basilica Ulpia, where images of horses and military standards were accompanied by the formula *ex manubiis*.[45]

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[40] See CIL XIII 5708. Also see Stewart (2008) 34.
[41] Petr. LXXI.
[42] Lepper & Frere (1988) 29-31.
[43] See ILS 294 (=CIL VI 960). Cf. Lepper & Frere (1988) 203-204.
[44] Packer (2001) 70-85. On the forum of Trajan see for instance, Settis et. al. (1988) 36-44; Kleiner (1992) 212-214; Packer (1997) Packer (2001); Zanker (1970).
[45] Although no archaeological evidence of these inscriptions has survived, they are mentioned by Aulus Gellius, when he describes how Favorinus, after seeing the inscriptions on the colonnades of the Forum of Trajan, asked

References to Trajan's campaigns at the edge of the Roman Empire were omnipresent on the Forum, which served to commemorate and glorify the emperor and his military victories in Dacia through its richly decorated monumental buildings, statues, inscriptions and other embellishments.[46] Hence, John Clarke aptly summarised how 'Everyone from elite citizen to foreigner, saw a very basic message encoded throughout all the spaces in a recurring tripartite formula: Trajan, the Dacians and the army.'[47] References to the recently conquered Dacian enemy could be found on many locations on the forum. For instance, the attic of the central triumphal arch that served as the entrance of the forum complex contained large statues of Dacian Atlantes, dividing it into five bays. The two colonnades flanking the forum complex and the façade of the Basilica Ulpia, too, were decorated with larger-than-life sized statues of Dacians that served to support the structures on top of them.[48] The Great Trajanic Frieze, which was once part of the façade of the Basilica Ulpia, also reminded the visitor of the forum to Trajan's military successes in Dacia. Although only four panels of this highly decorative sculpted frieze are known to us, they allude to the Dacian War and Trajan's grand victory over his Dacian opponents.[49]

Apart from these more explicit references to the Dacian successes of Trajan and the Roman army, the various monuments constituting the Forum, as well as the adjacent Markets of Trajan may have also reminded their visitors of Rome's successful endeavours in Dacia. Built for the public and used for various civic purposes like trading and law courts, these grand and lavishly decorated buildings reflected the benefits of the wars to the inhabitants of Rome, who had not directly participated in the Dacian Wars that were waged in distant lands that were both geographically and culturally miles away from Rome. The construction of the Trajanic forum with its grand sculptural programme and the commercial centre housed in Trajan's Markets reflected how all inhabitants Rome could have a share in Roman military victory as they could benefit from the public works that were set up by the spoils of war.[50] This way, the

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about the meaning of the word *manubiae*. See Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* XXIII.25.1.

[46] Packer (1997) 5.

[47] Clarke (2003) 31.

[48] See Packer (1997) 88-99; 220; Packer (2001) 61, 65.

[49] The panels of the Great Trajanic Frieze are known to us through their partial reuse on the Arch of Constantine as *spolia*. On the Great Trajanic Frieze, see Leander-Touati (1987), Ferris (2003), esp. 58-59, Tuck (2015) 229-231.

[50] The markets were used for retail sales in the small *tavernae*, but the complex was also used as a state-

forum served as a legitimation of Trajan's Dacian Wars, as well as for any future military campaigns.[51]

Not only did the Forum of Trajan contain references to the Dacian Wars, it also referred to the already existing imperial fora in its vicinity. In fact, the layout and orientation of the structures on the Trajanic forum were based on the designs of two of these earlier fora. The Temple of Peace, for instance, provided the north-south axis of the Forum of Trajan and the Temple of Trajan was oriented in the same way as this Vespasianic temple (see fig. 4).[52] Individual elements reminiscent of the Forum of Augustus could also be found in the Trajanic Forum complex. The hemicycles that have been incorporated in to the plan of Trajan's Forum provide a telling example as they can be regarded as duplicates of those in the Forum of Augustus. This forum, however, only contained two of these *exedrae*, while Trajan's Forum counted four of them (see fig. 4). Furthermore, the statues of Dacian Atlantes in the forum's colonnades echoed the caryatids that could be found on the attics of the colonnades in the Augustan Forum. Lastly, the plan of the Basilica Ulpia was probably modelled after that of the

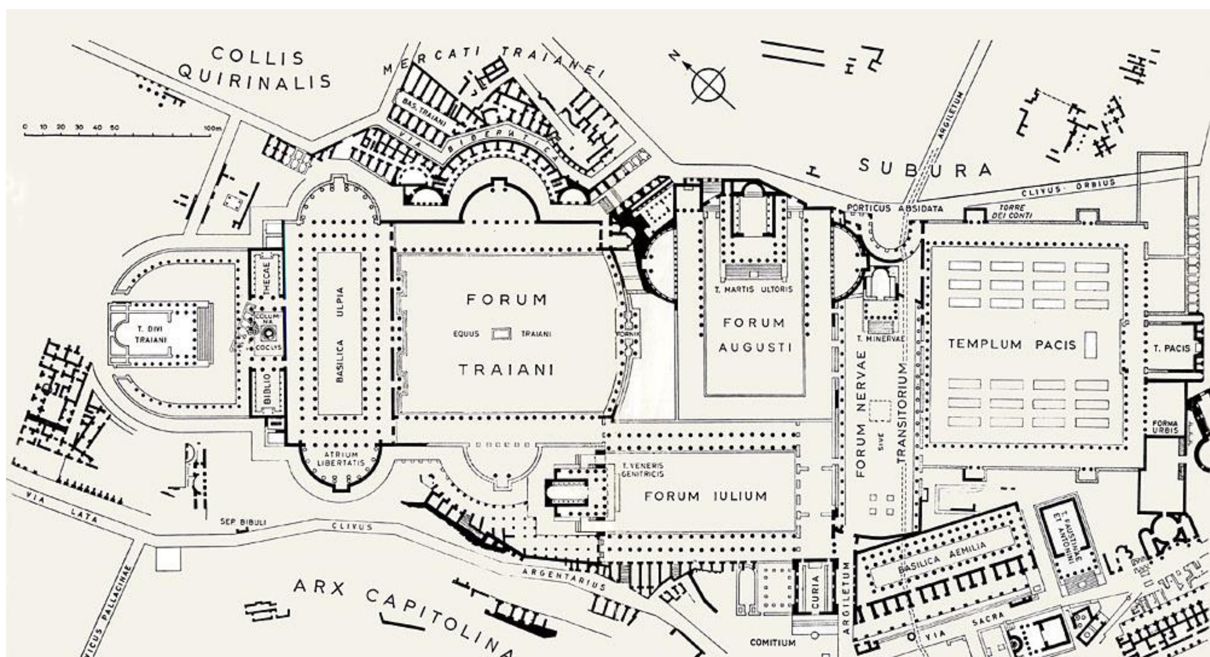

Figure 4 The Roman Forum area. Packer (1997).

controlled staple market for food supplies, especially grain. See Coarelli (2014) 124.

[51] On the Forum of Trajan and its legitimising function, see Zanker (1970); Settis et. al. (1988) 38-40; Packer (2001) 187f.; Davies (1997) 61-63, Davies (2000) 131, Ferris (2013) 53.

[52] Packer (1997) 261-262.

Basilica Aemilia on the Forum Romanum.[53]

While not all of these architectural similarities would have been apparent to the ancient Roman visitor of the Forum of Trajan, some of them, such as the duplicates of the *exedrae* of the Forum of Augustus, must have stood out to the majority of the ancient visitors. Hence, the Forum of Trajan created various visual connections with the forums of past emperors. Through these connections, the Forum of Trajan reminded its visitors of these fora and the achievements of the emperors who built them, thus adding Trajan and his victories in Dacia to this 'catalogue' of imperial achievements, presenting himself as the rightful successor of Augustus and the Flavian emperors. At the same time, however, these visual connections also served to illustrate how Trajan's Forum surpassed those of his predecessors. The doubling of the hemicycles of the Augustan Forum has already been put forward as an example, but more can be given. The Basilica Ulpia, for instance, also surpassed its existing 'models' because of its size: it was the largest covered space standing in Rome.[54] Lastly, while the Forum of Augustus contained a 'gallery of heroes' from Rome's (mythical) past, the Forum of Trajan was primarily used for dedications to contemporary figures, such as important generals who fought in the Dacian Wars, Trajan himself and the enemies he defeated.[55] Hence altogether, the Forum of Trajan reflected how Trajan and his splendid military victories in Dacia sustained the grandeur of Rome that had been established by his predecessors, while also surpassing them and bringing further prosperity and glory to the inhabitants of Rome. Secondly, the forum's numerous references to his military victories in Dacia served to remind its visitors that the entire complex was brought about because of Rome's successes in the Dacian Wars.

This leads us to another essential question: who were these visitors? Although military references were omnipresent on the forum because of the many allusions to Trajan's Dacian Wars, Trajan's Forum should first and foremost be regarded as a civic area. The various structures on the forum complex were primarily used for civic purposes: the open spaces of the colonnades and their *exedrae* as well as the forum's central piazza were used for commercial activities, as well as occasional tribunals and courts.[56] Like the Greek and Latin libraries, they

[53] On the 'architectural quotations' of the Trajanic Forum see Packer (1997) 272-273.
[54] Packer (1997) 220; Clarke (2003) 31.
[55] Cf. Anderson (1984) 161.
[56] Anderson (1984) 160. Packer (1997) 91.

were also used for reading and education.[57] The Basilica Ulpia primarily served as a court building as various law courts, such as the Consular Courts, and the ceremonial manumission of slaves were held in this building.[58] Anderson has argued that from the reign of Hadrian onwards the Praetorian court was housed at Trajan's Forum as well. In fact, all imperial fora were built with the intention of housing specific institutions of the Roman imperial government.[59] Hence, apart from its connotations with military activities and the celebration of Trajan's Dacian victories, his forum also provided the setting for various Roman offices that were concerned with the administration of justice. The Forum would thus draw a broad spectrum of visitors; from senators to slaves running errands for their masters. Nonetheless, its function allows us to conclude that the complex would primarily be frequented by visitors belonging to the civic population of Rome. Hence, Hölscher's conclusion that the Forum of Trajan and his column were primarily intended for a military audience cannot be maintained.[60]

It was in this civic context of Trajan's Forum, with its celebration and legitimation of the Dacian Wars that his column was set up. Although victory columns had been erected from the republican period onwards, for example the Minucian and the Maenian columns that had already been constructed in the late fifth century B.C.,[61] Trajan's Column distinguished itself from its predecessors not only through its size, but principally through its elaborate decorative scheme. Rising a mere 150 Roman feet (including its base and statue),[62] the column's helical narrative frieze depicted various episodes of Trajan's two Dacian campaigns in extraordinarily high detail. Although the majority of the over 2500 individual figures on his column can be identified as Roman soldiers, images of Dacians also occupy many of its 155 scenes, explaining

[57] Coarelli (2014) 120.
[58] Anderson (1984) 163; Clarke (2003) 172-173; Coarelli (2014) 118.
[59] Anderson (1984) 163.
[60] Cf. Hölscher (1984).
[61] See Plin. *NH*, XXXIV.20-21. Furthermore, the Roman republican poet Ennius mentions the habit of setting up a column to commemorate a general's outstanding achievements in war when he discusses the appropriate way to honour Scipio Africanus: Quantam statuam faciet populus Romanusquantam columnam quae res tuas gestas loquatur? "How great a statue, how great a column, will the Roman people make, such as will tell of your great deeds?" Edition: Ennius, *Scipio*, 10-11. Translation: Warmington, E.H., *Ennius. Scipio* (Cambridge, MA 1935) LCL 294. This passage suggests that the victory column had become a common medium to celebrate military victory. On the victory column in the republican period and the early empire, see Lepper & Frere (1988) 202; Huet (2000) 124-127; Beckmann (2011) 55-56.
[62] Packer (1997) 261.

how the image of the Dacian became the 'defining symbol of Trajan's reign'.[63]

Apart from the highly detailed frieze alluding to Trajan's victories in Dacia, his column also fulfilled the function of his tomb, since an urn with his ashes and those of his wife Plotina were placed in one of the chambers in the column´s base.[64] Cassius Dio wrote that Trajan set up the monument to serve as a funerary monument for himself and as a memorial for his work in the Forum.[65] Some scholars therefore adhere to the view that Trajan´s Column primarily fulfilled a funerary function.[66] Writing in the later second century, however, Dio had only known the Column of Trajan as the monument that bore Trajan's remains, which would explain his description of the monument. What is more, given the explicit military theme of the Forum of Trajan with its emphasis on the defeat of the Dacians and the benefits of this victory for the inhabitants of Rome, a monument celebrating the emperor's military achievements would be more appropriate. This is also suggested by the column's imagery: apart from the narrative alluding to the activities of Trajan and his troops during the Dacian Wars on the column shaft, its base was decorated with representations of winged victories and military trophies laden with Dacian weapons and armour.[67] The entire decorative programme of the column, thus, served to celebrate Trajan's military victories. As such, it is my contention that its primary purpose was honorific rather than funerary: it served as a victory monument celebrating and alluding to one of Trajan's most important military achievements.

This does not exclude the possibility that Trajan's Column did fulfil a funerary function; his remains were indeed stored in the column pedestal after his death and the presence of Trajan's ashes would have further added to the celebration of his honourable status and achievements, which was the purpose of the monument's exterior. Nonetheless, the column's funerary aspect was only supplementary to its honorific purpose as a victory monument; it was first and foremost intended to remind the ancient Roman visitor of Trajan's Forum of the military victories of the emperor and the Roman army against their barbarian enemies in Dacia.

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[63] Ferris (2003) 65. The division of the column's frieze into separate scenes was devised by the German historian and philologist Conrad Cichorius and is still used by present scholarship to refer to particular sections of the frieze. See Chichorius (1896-1900); Lepper & Frere (1988) 1-2.
[64] Dio LXIX.2.3.
[65] Dio LXVIII.16.3.
[66] See for instance Davies (1997); Coarelli (2014) 119.
[67] On the decoration of the pedestal, see for instance Lepper & Frere (1988) 31-32.

About seven decades after the Column of Trajan had been completed, yet another monumental and highly decorative victory column was set up in Rome: the Column of Marcus Aurelius. The monument is considered to have been based on the design of Trajan's Column, with a large square base providing access to the column's interior and a spiral staircase leading to its very top, on which once stood a luminous bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius.[68] Like its Trajanic predecessor, the column's shaft, too, was covered by large sculpted helical frieze with depictions of episodes from yet another important series of wars waged on the northern edges of the Roman Empire: his Germanic or Marcomannic Wars, named after the most famous of the Germanic tribes that had invaded the Roman Empire during this series of military campaigns.

As a result of increasing pressure from the migrations of other, more remote barbarian peoples, various Germanic and Sarmatian tribes had invaded the Roman province of Pannonia in 166-167.[69] While a peace treaty had been conducted, new invasions occurred during the subsequent year. Hence, in 168 Marcus Aurelius and his co-emperor Lucius Verus embarked on a campaign to suppress a number of Germanic and Sarmatian barbarians invading the Roman Empire. During this campaign, the Marcomanni and their Germanic allies successfully invaded northern Italy; the first 'barbarian' invasion into Italy since the Roman republic.[70] The various Germanic tribes raiding and invading the empire's Northern provinces provided a very imminent threat to the order and stability of the already unstable socio-economic situation in the empire.[71] In 177 the emperor had to march north again to crush another large-scale invasion of rebellious Germanic barbarians. He died during this campaign in 180, after which his son Commodus brought the Marcomannic wars to an end by concluding a peace treaty with the Marcomanni as well as a number of other northern barbarian tribes.[72]

The Aurelianic Column was set up in commemoration of the positive outcome of the

[68] The statue has been replaced for a statue of St. Paul by pope Sixtus V in the sixteenth century. See for instance Beckmann (2011) 16.
[69] SHA, *Marc.* XIV.1. Cf. Birley (2012) 221-222.
[70] SHA *Marc.*, XIV.1-2, XXIX.29.6; Dio LXXII.3. Cf. Birley (2012) 224-225.
[71] The war against Parthia (161-166) had put the empire's resources under an immense amount of stress. What is more, an infectious disease was brought to Rome by the troops returning from the war, causing a large-scale epidemic known as the Antonine Plague, to which Lucius Verus also fell victim in 169. See for instance SHA, *Marc.* XVII.2; Dio LXXI.2. Cf. Birley (2012) 222-224.
[72] Dio LXXII.33, LXXIII.2; Birley (2012) 229-230.

series of campaigns and repression of the barbarian rebellions between 166 and 180 that have been dubbed the Marcomannic Wars. It served to honour the military achievements of Marcus Aurelius and those of the Roman troops fighting under his *aegis*. Unlike Trajan's Column, this monument was not located on an imperial forum, but on the Campus Martius, or the Field of Mars, which was packed with imperial honorary monuments and located north of the Capitoline Hill. Here, the column stood in a small precinct that was facing the Via Flaminia on the east and the Via Recta on the south. Standing exactly one hundred Roman feet tall, while being supported by a forty-foot pedestal and topped by a grand statue of the emperor, the total height of the column added up to a mere 175,5 Roman feet.[73]

Unlike Trajan's Column, the base of the Aurelanic Column no longer bears a dedicatory inscription from which a date can be deduced. An inscription referring to the house of the column's caretaker that can be dated to 193 provides a *terminus ante quem*.[74] Hence, it suggests the column should be dated between 176 – the year in which Marcus Aurelius celebrated his triumph for his victories against the Germans and Sarmatians – and 193. While various scholars have argued the construction of the Column only began after Marcus Aurelius' death in 180, and was thus built during Commodus' reign,[75] arguments in favour of an earlier date can be put forward as well. One of the main arguments in favour of a relatively early date is the absence of Commodus from the column's frieze. If the monument was indeed commissioned during Commodus' reign, we would expect the column to contain images of the campaigns between 177 and 180, in which Commodus was directly involved. Beckmann has already emphasised Commodus absence in many of the Panel Reliefs of Marcus Aurelius, which portrayed scenes from the Marcomannic Wars up to 175 as well as of his triumph in 176. In fact, Commodus only appears on panels showing triumphal festivities in Rome and not on those portraying scenes of the actual war. In this light Commodus' absence from the column's helical frieze can be explained by a similarly early date of 176.[76]

Eugen Petersen has suggested that one of the figures on the pedestal relief of the Aurelianic Column did represent Commodus, which would still support the dating of the

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[73] Beckmann (2011) 5.
[74] ILS 5920 (=CIL VI 1585).
[75] See for instance Bianchi Bandinelli (1978) 134-136; Davies (2000) 46-48; Huet (2000) 110; Clarke (2003) 46-53; Griebel (2013) 26.
[76] Beckmann (2011) 29-31.

column to the reign of Commodus.[77] Yet, the fact that public images of Commodus were removed because of the *damnatio memoriae* that was declared after his death, casts Petersen's identification into serious doubt; especially since the representations of Commodus in the Panel Reliefs of Marcus Aurelius were erased completely, rather than simply replacing his head.[78] The figure on the column base should, thus, not be identified as Commodus, since the figure would have been removed from the monument if it did indeed represent Commodus. Altogether, the absence of Commodus from both the frieze and the pedestal does suggest the column's design, including that of its frieze, had been completed when Marcus Aurelius was still alive.

In my view, the overall decoration of the column further enhances the plausibility of a relatively early date around 176, while it also implies the column was set up as an honorific rather than a funerary monument. Indeed, like Trajan's Column, the Aurelianic Column is also primarily concerned with the celebration of military victory: its helical frieze, as well as the reliefs on its pedestal are all concerned with the representation of the military activities of Marcus Aurelius and his troops, and the defeat and subjection of their German and Sarmatian enemies, which would be relevant in the context of Marcus Aurelius triumphal procession in 176. Furthermore, if the column had been erected as funerary monument to Marcus Aurelius we would expect another type of decoration that is more similar to the images of apotheosis that can be found on the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius, which had been set up by Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in honour of their deceased adoptive father after his death.[79] While the imagery on the base of this monument represented to Antoninus Pius' funeral and subsequent apotheosis, the subject of the images on the base of the Aurelianic Column is markedly different. Like the pedestal of Trajan's Column, it contains representations of winged Victories and military trophies. What is more, its eastern side contains a scene representing the submission of two barbarians to the emperor and his entourage.[80]

Viewed in this light, it can be argued that the imagery we find on the Aurelianic Column is more appropriate for an honorific monument celebrating the emperor's military victories than

[77] Petersen (1896) 8. Also see Clarke (2003) 46-47.
[78] See Beckmann (2011) 32-34.
[79] Kleiner (1992) 285-287; Davies (2000) 40-42; Tuck (2015) 253-256.
[80] On the base of the Aurelianic Column, see for instance Beckmann (2011) 98-99.

a funerary monument honouring a deceased and deified emperor. Like Trajan's Column, the Column of Marcus Aurelius should therefore be first and foremost regarded as a victory monument.

The conception of the Column of Marcus Aurelius as a funerary monument celebrating the defied emperor after his death may partially stem from the character of the monuments that stood in its direct vicinity, which brings us to another important contextual aspect of the Aurelianic Column: its location. It was located on the Campus Martius, on its northern plain to be more precise. Here, it flanked the Via Flaminia to its east, while various other Antonine monuments stood to the column's north-west. The northern plain of the Campus Martius also housed several famous Augustan monuments: the Ara Pacis, the Horologium and the Mausoleum of Augustus (see fig. 5). Yet, it is the rather high concentration of funerary monuments in the vicinity of the Aurelianic Column, primarily the Column of Antoninus Pius and the pair of altars that can be identified as the alters of Faustina I and Faustina II,[81] that has prompted many scholars to associate the area in which the Aurelianic Column was located with imperial apotheosis, especially since deceased emperors were cremated on the Campus Martius.[82] Consequently, they have interpreted the Column of Marcus Aurelius as part of this 'apotheosis landscape'.[83]

The column's imagery, alluding to the exploits of the Roman army during the Marcomannic Wars, however, is more reminiscent of the Campus Martius' military associations, than of imperial apotheosis. Although the Campus Martius had only fulfilled a military function during the Roman republic, when its primary purpose was the gathering of military troops outside the city,[84] it had not lost its military connotations during the Roman Imperial period. On the contrary, the northern Field of Mars was also a rather common location for imperial victory monuments, especially of those celebrating military victories in the northern parts of the Roman Empire. Apart from the Ara Pacis and the Temple of Fortuna Redux, the arch of Claudius provides another example of such monuments. Celebrating Claudius´ military victories in Britannia, the arch was incorporated into the Aqua Virgo and

[81] On the identification of these two funerary altars, see Beckmann (2011) 46-47.
[82] Davies (2000) 168-170; Ferris (2009) 42; Griebel (2013) 23-25; Jacobs & Conlin (2014) 158-159.
[83] On the term apotheosis landscape, see Zanker (2004), esp. pp. 56.
[84] Jacobs & Conlin (2014) 5.

built across the Via Flaminia, where it marked the beginning of the Rome's *pomerium*.[85] Likewise, an honorific arch celebrating Domitian's victories in Germania was set up in the same part of the Campus Martius.[86]

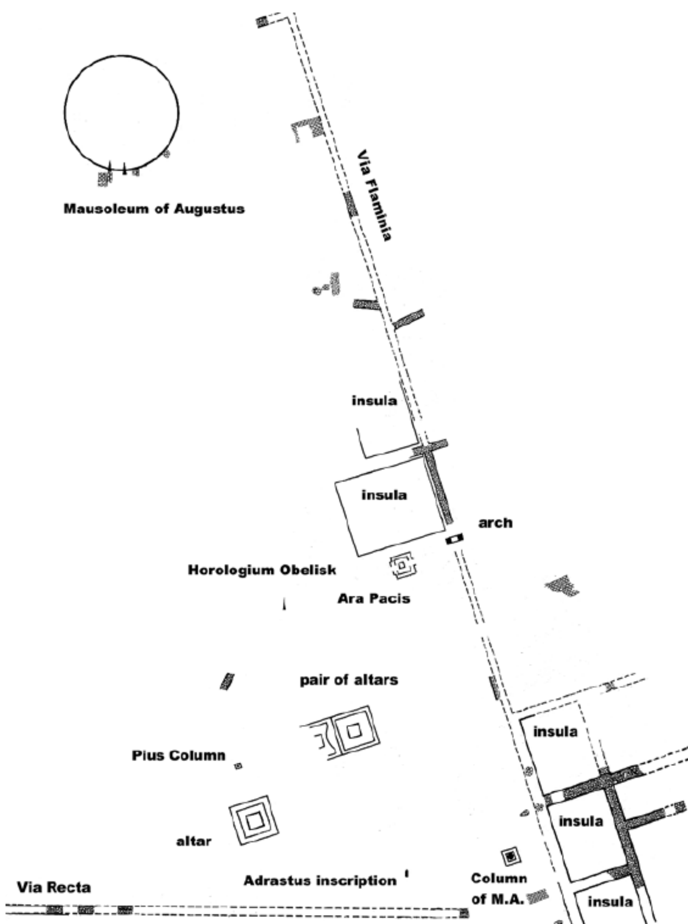

Figure 5 Map of the northern Campus Martius during the reign of Sepitmius Severus. Beckmann (2011) 43.

The location of these honorific arches was not chosen randomly. On the contrary, while the Campus Martius no longer fulfilled any martial purposes, its connotations with activities of war remained important throughout the Roman Empire.[87] Even more important, however, was the presence of the Via Flaminia that ran adjacent to the northern plain of the Field of Mars. This consular road was one of the main arteries of the Roman Empire. It connected Rome to northern Italy, where it lead to the Adriatic coast. Here it joined the Via Aemilia that ran to the northwest. As such, those travelling from and to the north would enter and leave Rome through the Via Flaminia, and would thus pass by the Aurelianic Column on their journey.[88] Apart from merchants, foreign embassies and others visiting the city, the road was also used by soldiers marching off to the northern and western fronts and returning to the empire's capital to participate in triumphal processions after their victories.[89] Both the

[85] Dio 60.22.1.
[86] The arch is mentioned by Martial: Mart. 8.65. The monument is likely to have been incorporated into the background of the Profectio scene on the Panel Reliefs of Marcus Aurelius. See Beckmann (2011) 53.
[87] Jacobs & Conlin (2014) 4-5.
[88] Coarelli (2014) 262.
[89] See for instance Dio 53.22.1-2. In this passage, Dio describes how Augustus took care of the restoration of the Via Flaminia himself, 'since he was 'going to lead an army out by that route'. τῆς δὲ δὴ Φλαμινίας[3] αὐτός, ἐπειδήπερ ἐκστρατεύσειν δι᾽ αὐτῆς ἤμελλεν. Edition: Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana*. Translation: Cary, E. Foster, H., *Dio Cassius. Roman History, Volume VI: Books 51-55* (Cambridge, MA 1917). On the importance of the Via Flaminia to the Roman army, see for instance Beckmann (2011) 52-54; Jacobs & Conlin (2014) 10.

Campus Martius and especially its northern plain which faced the Via Flaminia bore strong connections with military activities and the return of triumphant generals. Like the previous victory monuments set up on this location, the Column of Marcus Aurelius was also oriented towards the Via Flaminia. Indeed, Martin Beckmann has argued that the column was primarily meant to be viewed and approached from this important roadway; the column's base, and the doorway providing access to the column's interior, faced this important road. Since the column's base extended about two and a half to three meters above the surface of the Via Flaminia, the monument would have been clearly visible from this road, thus inviting the ancient passer-by to enter the precinct to inspect the column more closely and perhaps even climb the spiral staircase leading to its very top. Furthermore, the most important scenes on the column – such as the Rain Miracle and the scene on which Victoria inscribes a shield that is used to mark the transition to the scenes alluding to the second campaign – are aligned vertically and oriented towards the east. Hence, they would be visible from the Via Flaminia.[90]

The location of the Column of Marcus Aurelius also reveals much about its viewers; the audience to which the monument was intended to broadcast its messages. The role of the Via Flaminia is of vital importance to this question: it was the main roadway for those travelling from and to the capital of the Roman empire, including the Roman military troops travelling to the northern fronts or returning to the capital to celebrate their military triumphs. The location of the Column of Marcus Aurelius suggests the monument was not primarily intended for the civic population of Rome itself, but rather for those travelling from or to Rome, and especially the soldiers serving in the Roman army. It was through its strategic location and orientation, to both one of the main arteries connecting Rome to the northern parts of the Roman Empire and among many important imperial monuments in its vicinity, that the Column of Marcus Aurelius would have been viewed and approached by those using the Via Flaminia to leave or enter Rome.

Hence, unlike Trajan's Column, the Aurelianic Column was not located in an area that primarily referred to one of Marcus Aurelius' important military campaigns and the benefits it provided to the inhabitants of ancient Rome. Instead, the monument placed more emphasis on the place of Marcus Aurelius among the 'great' emperors from past times, such as Augustus,

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[90] Beckmann (2011) 48-49.

Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, under whose reigns the inhabitants of the Roman Empire experienced peace and great prosperity,[91] while also alluding to the connotations with military activities and the celebration of military victories of the Campus Martius, and especially the northern part of this field.

Altogether, exploring the historical and topographical contexts of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius has revealed three important conclusions about these two conspicuous monuments from the High Empire. First and foremost, we have seen that the purpose of the columns was primarily honorific: they were built as victory monuments celebrating important military victories of each emperor's reign. Secondly, the locations of both monuments have received particular attention and can reveal much about their primary audiences. Trajan's Column was located in Trajan's Forum among numerous references to his victories against the Dacians and the benefits these had brought to the inhabitants of Rome. Fulfilling commercial and judicial functions, the forum area can be regarded as a primarily civic location. I have therefore argued that the intended audience of Trajan's Column should be sought in the civic population of Rome. Alternatively, the Column of Marcus Aurelius did not focus on the civic population of Rome, but rather to those travelling to and from Rome via the Via Flaminia, and especially to those fighting in the Roman army. The column was located outside of the city's centre: in the Campus Martius. Here it stood among the monuments and funerary altars of past emperors and other members of imperial families. Nonetheless, both the presence of other monuments celebrating military victories against Northern barbarian enemies and especially column's orientation to the Via Flaminia served to further strengthen its military connotations.

'Reading' the columns: the issues of visibility and historicity

Since we are primarily concerned with the imagery and visual languages of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, and that of their barbarian enemies in particular, we should first and foremost ask ourselves how the columns and its friezes were regarded by their contemporary beholders. Therefore, it is worthwhile to focus on the columns from the perspective of the ancient viewer, who was not aided by detailed photographs or plaster casts of each individual scene.[92] Indeed, many publications on both Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius'

[91] Cf. Davies (2000) 166-171.
[92] Four of such plaster casts have been made between 1861 and 1862 and are now on display in four European

columns have addressed the difficulty of reading the narrative friezes that are so characteristic of the monuments; to see the friezes in their entirety, the viewer had to encircle the Trajanic Column at least twenty-three times, while the fewer number of spirals on the Aurelianic Column limited this number to twenty.[93] Secondly, as the narrative enfolded the columns, the distance between the viewer and the figures on the friezes increased, rendering many of the sculptural details on the scenes virtually invisible from the ground.[94] Even though the libraries and the Basilica Ulpia on Trajan's forum would have provided suitable viewing-platforms to inspect the upper spirals of Trajan's Column in closer detail,[95] it remained virtually impossible for the ancient viewer to see the frieze in its entirety or to inspect the column in the detailed way the modern viewer is able to because of the availability of photographs and reconstructions.

Those viewing the Column of Marcus Aurelius did not have the opportunity to behold the monument from such viewing platforms. The form of the frieze itself, however, did enhance the visibility of the frieze and the individual scenes and figures on it; not only did the frieze of the Aurelianic Column have fewer spirals, the height of the relief bands was also larger than those on Trajan's Column: about 1.5 metres, while the height of relief bands on Trajan's Column varied between 1.45 and 0.77 metres.[96] This also resulted in a reduction of the number of scenes compared to Trajan's Column: while the frieze of this monument has been divided into 155 individual scenes, the shaft of Aurelianic Column was covered by only 116 scenes.[97] Additionally, some of its stylistic novelties will also have contributed to the frieze's visibility. The figures on the frieze were carved in deeper relief and therefore extended further from the column's surface, which would have enhanced the visibility of each individual figure on the Column of Marcus Aurelius.[98]

Various scholars have also stressed the fact that the friezes of both columns were

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museums. See Settis et. al. (1988) 590-595; Koeppel (1991) 136.

[93] Beckmann (2011) 84-85.

[94] On the problem of visibility see for instance Settis et. al. (1988) 86-87; Hölscher (1991); Davies (1997) 126-128; Hölscher (2000) 90-91; Ferris (2013) 54.

[95] Lepper & Frere (1988) 197.

[96] Beckmann (2011) 84-86.

[97] The division of the frieze of Trajan's Column into separate scenes has been devised by the German historian and philologist Conrad Cichorius. Peterson is responsible for the division of the frieze of the Aurelianic Colum. Both divisions are still the primary means to refer to particular sections of the frieze. See Chichorius (1896-1900); Petersen, Domazsewski and Calderini (1896).

[98] Kleiner (1992) 195; Davies (2000) 165; Ferris (2009) 62.

originally painted. In the case of Trajan's Column bronze, iron and wooden elements were added to some figures and their attributes.[99] Undeniably, these embellishments would have aided the viewer to distinguish individual figures and scenes more clearly, but viewed from the ground the sculpted figures in the uppermost parts of the column would nonetheless remain mere indistinct and abstracted shapes. Despite the additions to the design of the Aurelianic Column, many of its scenes would still not have been clearly visible from the ground. The fact that the column's ground level was significantly lower in ancient times, would have enhanced the distance between the viewer and the monument even further.[100] Hence, it can be argued that viewing the friezes of both monuments in their entirety was simply impossible.

Why then would the 'Senate and the People of Rome' commission victory monuments with narrative friezes that were so difficult to comprehend because of their shape? Why did it not commission friezes that were sculpted on a less complex construction, such as the Great Trajanic Frieze or the Relief Panels of Marcus Aurelius? First and foremost, it should be noted that the subject of the friezes was not entirely novel, as it is likely to have been drawn from the Roman tradition of battle painting: paintings that were carried in triumphal processions and depicted various episodes of a military campaigns.[101] Trajan´s Column was the first to incorporate this tradition into a victory column, which resulted in a hitherto unprecedented large-scale helical frieze alluding to, and celebrating his outstanding military achievements in Dacia. Apart from drawing from the same tradition of battle painting, the frieze of the Aurelianic Column had the Trajanic Column as an important model to which it is much indebted.

The artists of both columns must have been aware of the fact that the monuments' overall design and the helical shape of their friezes would have greatly impaired the ancient viewer´s ability to view the narrative enfolding on them. When designing the helical friezes on the columns' surfaces, their patrons must have been well aware of the fact that their future audiences would not be able to view the sculpted reliefs in their entirety. Arguing that they did

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[99] This is mentioned by Philostratus the Elder: Phil. *Imag*. II, 5.1. Also see Lepper& Frere (1988) 32; Ferris (2013) 54.

[100] Beckmann (2011) 189.

[101] Settis et. al. (1988) 93-98; Koeppel (2002) 428-249; Ostenberg (2009) 189-199.
Beckmann (2011) 131-132, 168.

simply not care about this aspect, in my view, unconvincing. As was discussed in the introduction, there was an ever-present triangular relationship between the individual or institution that commissioned an artwork, the object itself, and its audience.[102] Furthermore, various scholars have established a number of meaningful vertical sequences on the shafts of both columns. Salvatore Settis, for instance, has drawn attention to the alignment of three scenes that have been interpreted as an omen of Roman victory, Victoria inscribing a shield, and the suicide of the Dacian king Decebalus.[103] As was mentioned in the previous section, a similar vertical sequence can be found on the Aurelianic Column, on which eastern side three of its most significant scenes have been aligned: scenes representing Marcus Aurelius' crossing of the Danube, the famous Rain Miracle and Victoria as she inscribes a shield.[104] These vertical sequences suggest that the choice of the columns designs and images were conscious and premeditated ones.

Secondly, there is the important notion that ancient art did not necessarily reflect reality, but first and foremost alluded to the interests and concerns of its audience and, as such, conveyed messages to this audience. Indeed, as was discussed in the introduction, ancient images should not be perceived as art created by artists 'for art´s sake', but as expressions of their customer´s and audience's world views. Therefore, arguing that the column's scenes should be read as a factual narrative of the Dacian Wars would be an outright simplification that does not take into regard the role of art in ancient society. In short, it is my contention that the impossibility of a 'consecutive, chronological reading' of the friezes on Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' columns – scene after scene, from bottom to top – was not problematic because the columns should not be read as a literal narrative of the various episodes of the Dacian and Marcomannic campaigns. Providing such a narrative was simply not their primary purpose. Instead, both monuments were primarily concerned with the communication of (ideological) messages. The continuous recurrence of a limited number of specific types of scenes would have aided the ancient viewer to grasp the overall meaning of the friezes even though he was not able to view them from bottom to top.

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[102] Cf. Settis et. al. (1988) 131; Smith (2002) 65.

[103] Settis (1997) 196-197. On vertical sequences on the Column of Trajan, also see Settis et. al. 182-188, 202-20; Gauer (1977) 45f.; Koeppel (1992) 63; Hölscher (1991) 287-295.

[104] See Beckmann (2011) 48.

The idea that one should read the scenes encircling the columns as consecutive narratives on the Dacian and Marcomannic Wars may partially stem from the poor state of the literary evidence on both campaigns. Apart from the brief passages in Cassius Dio's *Roman History* and a number of very sporadic fragments there are no literary accounts of Trajan's reign and his endeavours in Dacia.[105] The *Historia Augusta* only cover the history of the Roman Empire from the reign of Hadrian onwards, and Tacitus does not discuss Trajan's reign, even though he mentioned this task in the beginning of his *histories*.[106] Although Trajan is known to have written an account of his campaigns in the style of Caesar's commentaries on his Gallic Wars – the *Dacia* – this document has not been handed down to us; neither have the works of Titus Statilius Critio, Trajan's physician who also accompanied him during his campaigns in Dacia and kept a journal in which he described their daily developments.[107]

Marcus Aurelius' Marcomannic campaigns have been documented slightly better, yet no exhaustive literary account on the actual course of the wars has been handed down to us. Although Marcus Aurelius is known to have written at least the first book of his philosophical diary – known as his Meditations – during one of his campaigns,[108] the stoic emperor remains silent about the war which he was waging at that very moment. Cassius Dio and the authors of the *Historia Augusta*, however, provide us with some information on the wars against the invading Germanic and Sarmatian peoples. Both discuss the events leading to the campaigns

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[105] Dio LXVIII. We know from one of Pliny's letters (Plin. Ep., VIII.4) that his friend Caninius was preparing an epic poem on the Dacian campaigns, including the infamous suicide of the Dacian king Decebalus. Furthermore, there is a brief fragment in Procopius (Procopius, *Buildings* IV.6.11-14) on the construction of a bridge over the Danube during the Dacian Wars. Lastly, in his *De Magistratibus* the 6th century Byzantine administrator and writer John the Lydian wrote about the Dacian wars and especially focussed on the landscapes and its ethnographic make-up of the region (Johannes Lydus, *De magistratibus populi romani*, II.28). It should be noted that all of these sources postdate Trajans reign and his Dacian Wars and thus cannot be regarded as first-hand information.

[106] Tac. *Hist* I.1: *Quod si vita suppeditet, principatum divi Nervae et imperium Traiani, uberiorem securioremque materiam, senectuti seposui, rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet*. "I have reserved for my old age the history of the deified Nerva's reign and of Trajan's rule, a richer and less perilous subject, because of the rare good fortune of an age in which we may feel what we wish and may say what we feel." Edition: Tacitus, *Histories: Books 1-3*. Translation: Moore, C.H. (Cambridge, MA 1925) LCL 111.

[107] Cf. Settis et. al. (1988) 7-8.

[108] The book ends with the clause: Τὰ ἐν Κουάδοις πρὸς τῷ Γρανούᾳ ('written among the Quadi, on the River Gran'). M. Aur. *Med.*, I.8. Edition: Haines, C., *Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA 1916) LCL 58.

and a number of defining and unusual episodes, such as the famous Rain Miracle,[109] but these accounts are insufficient to fill the entire lacuna in our knowledge of the Marcomannic campaigns.

What is more, as is the case for any text from the hand of an ancient author, we should be cautious with the information provided by these sources. While the *Historia Augusta* were only written roughly two centuries after the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and thus do not provide first-hand information on this period, the collection of imperial biographies is also known for its questionable reliability.[110] Secondly, Cassius Dio was born during the reign of Antoninus Pius and, thus, had to base his account of the Dacian campaigns on secondary sources, hearsay and probably his own imagination. Even though he had been alive during the Marcomannic Wars, his account on Marcus' campaigns is also problematic; a large part of his work (including the books covering the reigns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius) has only been preserved through fragments in the epitome of the 11th century Byzantine monk Xiphilinus. He also added parts from his own hand to his summary of Dio's work, which are sometimes hard to distinguish from Dio's own writing.[111]

Partly stemming from the limited and problematic nature of the documentary evidence on the Dacian and Marcomannic Wars, some scholars have regarded the friezes encircling the shafts of the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns as important sources on the Dacian Wars and the Marcomannic Wars.[112] Although the friezes may indeed provide information on Roman military tactics and equipment, ethnography or infamous and specific events during the war, such as Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' crossing of the Danube, Decebalus' suicide or the Rain Miracle, we should be cautious to regard them as factual and realistic narratives on the two

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[109] Dio LXXII.8.1-3, LXXII.10.1-5.

[110] See for instance Birley (2002) 228-30; Beckmann (2011) 128.

[111] On the epitome of Xiphilinus and Dio's *Roman Histories*, see Cary's introduction to the Loeb edition of the *Historia Romana*, esp. xvii-xix and Lepper & Frere (1988) 211f.

[112] For Trajan's Column, see for instance Chichorius (1896-1900); Rossi (1971) and Lepper and Frere (1988). Settis regards it as a visual equivalent of the accounts of the Dacian Wars stored in the libraries adjacent to the column; as a large-scale illustration and tool for those reading the accounts in the libraries. See Settis et. al. (1988) 88. For the Column of Marcus Aurelius, see Petersen, Doazeski and Calderini (1896) esp. 46, where they write their primary objective is to distinguish the ethnic characteristics of the various Germanic peoples appearing on the column, since they were regarded as the 'ancestors' of the modern Germans. Zwikker also regarded the frieze of the Aurelianic Column as a visual historical narrative that presented various events of the wars in a chronological and historically accurate fashion. See Zwikker (1941).

emperors' campaigns.[113] The veracious portrayal of events that took place during their campaigns did simply not provide the primary incentive for the construction of the columns and its richly decorated friezes. Indeed, as victory monuments, their primary function was to commemorate Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' – and hence the Roman army's – achievements and military successes in the Northern provinces; an ostentatious example of the transformation of an ephemeral military victory into a more permanent kind of political power through art.[114]

In order to achieve this transformation the scenes constituting the column's frieze all alluded to various qualities and virtues of the emperor and to the achievements of the Roman army in general. Already in the beginning of the 20th century the German scholar Lehmann-Hartleben concluded the main part of the frieze on Trajan's Column was in fact constituted by a limited number scenes that depicted different aspects of warfare: *adlocutio*, or the emperor's address to his troops; *lustratio* or purification; building and construction; envoys and captives; marching and *profectio*, or the ceremony in which the army marched out of Rome; and lastly battle itself.[115] Building on to this classification, Gauer has made an important contribution to our understanding of Trajan's Column by demonstrating how these stock scenes occurred in a more or less fixed order of marching, construction, sacrifice, *adlocutio*, battle and finally scenes portraying captives and submission. This sequence was subsequently repeated multiple times on the column's shaft.[116] More recent publications have emphasised how each of the scene types on Trajan's Column alluded to a specific imperial virtue or benefit; to military qualities such as *virtus* in the *profectio* scenes, *pietas* and *providentia* in the *lustratio* scenes, *concordia* and *fides exercitus* in scenes depicting *adlocutio*, while the construction scenes allude to the technical expertise and toil or labour enabling Roman success. Lastly, the battle scenes illustrate the success and power of the Roman army, which also enabled Roman victory.[117] In short, each type alluded to an important imperial quality that would contribute to the image of Trajan as a *bonus princeps*; good ruler. Furthermore, many publications on Trajan's Column have stressed

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[113] Niels Hannestadt aptly summarises this interpretation when he states that 'They [the scenes] relate to history, but are not historical in the strict sense.' See Hannestadt (2001) 149.
[114] Cf. Hölscher (2006).
[115] Lehmann-Hartleben (1926): *adlocutio* 11-24; *lustratio* 24-39; construction 39-50; envoys and captives 51-63; marching/travelling 63-88; battle 88-108.
[116] Gauer (1977). Also see Settis et. al. (1988) 156-181.
[117] See for instance Settis et. al. (1988); Koeppel (1992) 62. On *adlocutio* Baumer (1991) 278-287; on profectio, construction, *lustratio* and battle: Hölscher (1991) 287-295.

its manifold references to the positive aspects of warfare. Through the many scenes depicting travelling, sacrifice and building the frieze also alluded to the organisation and constructive force of the army under the *auspices* of Trajan. Hence, like the Trajanic Forum itself, its most conspicuous monument also aimed at emphasising the various benefits the Dacian Wars had brought to the inhabitants of Rome and to counter the predominantly negative attitudes towards warfare and the Roman imperial army.[118]

The debate on the historicity of the Column of Trajan in the final two decades of the previous century provided an impetus for renewed scholarly interest in the Column of Marcus Aurelius. Inspired by the publications of Settis, Lepper and Frere, and Hölscher, scholars now began to cast into doubt the historical character of its frieze as well. From the second half of the 1990's onwards, scholars began to stress that the frieze, too, was not so much concerned with the veracious portrayal of historical events; the images on the frieze alluded to actual historical events, but were simply not literal translations of them.[119] Like Trajan's Column, the frieze served as a means to provide a permanent visual memory to an ephemeral, yet important military victory and to create meaningful connections between Rome's military successes on the one hand, and imperial power on the other.[120] Hölscher has illustrated how the Aurelianic Column's frieze, like that of the Trajanic Column, consists of the same narrative structure of standardised scenes alluding to specific imperial virtues. It is constituted by the same 'scene types' of *profectio*, *adlocutio*, *lustratio*, construction, envoys and captives, and battle. The stock scenes on the Aurelianic Column do not seem to be ordered in the same orderly fashion as those on the Trajanic Column; in more or less fixed sequences. Therefore, Hölscher has argued that this lack of sequencing illustrates the overall disorder on the Aurelianic Column if we compare it to its Trajanic model. Its complex and structural composition had been reduced to a minimum, or 'decomposed'; we no longer encounter the more or less fixed sequence of *profectio*, *lustratio*, construction and *adlocutio* prior to the battle scene. These stock scenes only appear if they fit in the column's ideological structure.[121]

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[118] See for instance Settis et. al. (1988) 6, 10-11; Davies (1997) 63 ff; Davies (2000) 132-33; Ferris (2013) 55.
[119] This interpretation of the Aurelian Column was introduced by Pirson (1996) and has served as the basis of many subsequent publications, such as Scheid and Huet (2000); Dillon (2006); Ferris (2009); Beckmann (2011) and Griebel (2013).
[120] Cf. Hölscher (2006).
[121] Hölscher (2000) 93 ff.

Nonetheless, the repetition of the same limited number of stock scenes on the column shaft is significant in my view. It is my contention that the reiteration of the same scene types throughout the friezes of both the Column of Trajan and that of Marcus Aurelius – served as a tool to the ancient viewer that was provided by the artist to comprehend the overall narrative and messages of the friezes despite their problematic visibility. Viewing the scenes in the lowest portions of the columns would allow the ancient beholders to clearly view and interpret the scenes they saw. The ensuing repetition of similar scenes as the frieze spiralled towards the top of the monuments ensured the viewers would still be able to make sense of what they saw despite the friezes' diminishing visibility. Indeed, since the column friezes consisted of a fixed number of scenes, each representing the same theme every time they appeared on the friezes, they could simply fill in the contents of a scene of which the details were less clearly visible. Similarly, they could expect that the scenes which were completely 'invisible' represented the same subject-matter as the remainder of the friezes scenes. In this way, the columns created an ´equilibrium´ between what could be seen and what could not be seen, without losing the communicative capacity of the images on their surfaces and ensuring the effective communication of their messages to the ancient beholder.[122] To the ancient beholder of the Trajanic or Aurelianic Column, casting his glance upwards as he watched the many images on its surface, the idea that the countless images were simply there was confirmed by the scenes he could clearly see, and their quality and high level of detail.[123]

As I will argue in the next chapter, the scenes in which Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' barbarian enemies appear worked according to the same mechanism of repetition; barbarians appear in a limited number of fixed and generic scenes to ensure the effective communication of the columns overall messages.

[122] Cf. Settis (1997) 191.
[123] Zanker (2010) 100-101.

III. The columns and their representations of the barbarian enemy

The aim of this chapter is to explore the visual language through which the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius portrayed Rome's foreign enemies. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the monuments look very much alike because of their similar designs and subject-matter: the military victory of the emperor and his troops against their barbarian opponents. Furthermore, the friezes of both monuments are made up of a limited number of stock scenes that represent various aspects of the wars, such as the scenes depicting construction activities, battle and the emperor's addressing of his troops. The repetition of these select number of scene types on the friezes of both columns ensured their viewers could grasp the overall meaning of the friezes, even though they were unable to discern all of their numerous details.

Yet, a closer examination of the columns also reveals a number of important differences. The first of these can be found in their designs. The lesser amount of spirals, the increased height of the relief bands, the smaller number of scenes, and the higher relief of the figures on the Aurelianic Column have already been mentioned in the previous chapter. A second and important difference is provided by the imagery of the monuments. Many of the scenes on Trajan's Column allude the non-violent events of his Dacian campaigns and their positive effects through the many scenes depicting activities such as travelling, sacrifice and building. Each of these scenes emphasised the constructive force of the army under the *auspices* of Trajan. Hence, like the Trajanic Forum itself, its most conspicuous monument also aimed at emphasising the various benefits the Dacian Wars had brought to the inhabitants of Rome and to counter the predominantly negative attitudes towards warfare and the Roman imperial army.[124] The relatively 'peaceful' and positive character of the images on Trajan's Column is also reflected in the frequency with which scenes representing battle appear on its frieze: only 19 out of the 155 scenes on the frieze (roughly 12,3%) present armed confrontations between Roman troops and their Dacian opponents.[125]

This share provides a sharp contrast with the amount of battle scenes that have been identified on the Column of Marcus Aurelius. Beckmann noted that at least thirty of the

[124] See for instance Lehmann-Hatleben (1926) 88; Settis et. al. (1988) 6, 10-11; Davies (1997) 63 ff; Davies (2000) 132-33; Ferris (2013) 55.
[125] Cf. Pirson (1996) 140.

column's 116 scenes (roughly 26%) can be identified as battle scenes.[126] As their number is not outweighed by any of the other scene types on the frieze, representations of battle dominate the frieze of the Aurelianic Column. Additionally, the violent character of the imagery on Marcus Aurelius´ Column is emphasised even further through the adoption of specific images and compositions that directly confront the viewer with the violent realities and consequences of warfare. The depictions of lifeless decapitated bodies, Germanic villages that are being set on fire by Roman troops, and Germanic women who are being assaulted by Roman soldiers are just a few examples of the manifold representations of violence appearing on the Aurelianic Column. Moreover, the 'expressionistic', or baroque style of its frieze,[127] too, served to emphasise the horrors of the Marcomannic Wars. Not only through the highly emotional facial expressions of the barbarians that appear on the column's frieze, but also through the heightened abstraction of and simplified compositions of the scenes.[128] Altogether, the Aurelianic Column thus differed from its predecessor on two levels: that of its style or form on the one hand, and that of its imagery on the other. As such, it can be argued that the visual language of the frieze on the Aurelianic Column had changed. In what follows, I will try to establish *how* exactly this visual language and that of the Trajanic Column were expressed by looking at the scenes in which Rome's barbarian enemies were portrayed.

Practices of barbarian representation in Early Imperial Rome

Not only was Trajan's Column a novel monument because of its conspicuous design, but also because of the large number of barbarian figures that appeared on its surface. Until the construction of this monument, images of barbarians were virtually absent from Rome. Images of enchained and submissive barbarians had appeared on the reverses of Roman republican and imperial coins,[129] as well as on monuments in the provinces of the Roman Empire, such as the imperial victory monuments and arches in the province of Gallia Narbonnensis during the

[126] Pirson (1996) states the column contained 36 battle scenes, but Beckmann rightly emphasises the questionable character of 6 of these scenes; four scenes are sixteenth-century reconstructions (34, 40, 47 and 76). Hence, the originality of their content should be questioned. Another battle scene has been extended over two scenes: scenes 72 and 73. They should therefore be not be counted as two individual battle scenes, as was done by Pirson. See Beckmann (2011) 167.
[127] See Wegner (1931).
[128] Cf. Wegner (1931); Kleiner (1992) 195; Davies (2000) 165.
[129] On these coin issues, see Cody (2003).

reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, or on the Julio-Claudian sculptures of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias.[130] In Rome, images of captive and submissive barbarians were less common. Augustus' Parthian arch with statues of Parthian enemies presenting standards on the arch's attic, and various Augustan statues of standing and kneeling Parthians in coloured marble should be regarded as exceptions.[131] Two other monuments that can be dated to the Early Imperial period also bear representations of barbarians: the battle scenes on the frieze of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus and a section of the Mantua Relief depict historical battles between Roman soldiers and their barbarian opponents.[132] Apart from these reliefs no other scenes alluding to historical battles have survived from Early Imperial Rome. Altogether it seems that representations of barbarians and battles against them were uncommon subjects to the artist working during this period, although the triumphal arch of Titus does bear depictions of Judean 'barbarians' as part of a triumphal procession.[133]

While images of barbarians and historical battles were virtually absent in the monumental art of Early Imperial Rome, they were displayed rather prominently during triumphal processions in Rome in this period. Josephus' description of the battle paintings that were carried in the procession celebrating Vespasian's and Titus' victories in Judea are illustrative of the contents of such paintings:

> *"The war was shown by numerous representations, in separate sections, affording a very vivid picture of its episodes. Here was to be seen a prosperous country devastated, there whole battalions of the enemy slaughtered; here a party in flight, there others led into captivity; walls of surpassing compass demolished by engines,*

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[130] On the arches and victory monuments in Gallia Narbonnensis see for instance Charles-Picard (1957): Silberbeg-Peirce (1986) and Walter (1993). On the sculptures of the Sebasteion, see Smith (2013).

[131] Augustus' Parthian arch has not withstood the test of time, but it has been reconstructed through fragments as well as numismatic representations on the reverses of coins of Lucius Vinicius (17-15 B.C.). See Silberberg-Peirce (1986) 308; Kleiner (1992) 86-88. On the statues of Parthians in coloured marble see Schneider (2008) 290ff. The motif of the kneeling Parthian was also adopted on Augustan coinage, see for instance RIC I Augustus 304 (19 B.C.).

[132] The temple of Apollo Sosianus was probably commissioned by Gaius Sosius and dedicated to Apollo around 20 B.C. One of the fragments of its frieze depicts a battle scene between Romans and Gauls. See Kleiner (1992) 84-86; Pollini (2012) 183-184. The Mantua Relief is believed to have been part to the decoration of the Temple of Castor and Pollux. The relief has been dated to late Augustan times, although some scholars have proposed a later date in the Claudian period. This relief portrays the Romans in combat with northern barbarians. See Kleiner (1992) 86-87.

[133] See for instance Kleiner (1992) 187-189.

strong fortresses overpowered, cities with well-manned defences completely mastered and an army pouring within the ramparts, an area all deluged with blood, the hands of those incapable of resistance raised in supplication…' (Josephus, *Jewish Wars* VII.139-148).[134]

Josephus here describes how the paintings carried in the procession contained very vivid images of the battles fought against Rome´s barbarian enemies, as well as of groups of captive and submissive barbarians.

Although the image of the barbarian was, thus, not a complete novelty by the time of the construction of Trajan´s Forum and his column, it can be argued that the numerous images of barbarians on this monument, as well as the statues of Dacians that could be found elsewhere on the form complex, provided a clear break with previous practices of barbarian representation in Rome. In fact, Trajan's Column can be regarded as one of the first monuments in the empire's capital that bore representations of the empire's foreign enemies. Contrary to the battle paintings carried during triumphal processions, these provided a more permanent memory to the defeat of Rome´s barbarian adversaries. Furthermore, the column's frieze can be put forward as one of the first examples of Roman monumental art that portrayed historical armed confrontations between the Roman troops and their foreign enemies.[135] The fact that these images of barbarian Dacians appeared in such large quantities must also have been conspicuous to the ancient viewer, adding to the already idiosyncratic character of the monument. Nonetheless, I will argue that, despite its novel character, it was the use of highly standardised images of barbarians, or barbarian types, that provides the key to the understanding of the monument in the mind of the contemporary viewer. What is more, the same standardising figure types can be found on the friezes of the Column of Marcus Aurelius, suggesting these images formed an integral part of the visual languages of both monuments.

The importance of repetition: previous scholarship on the columns' images of barbarians

Already in the 1920's, the German scholar Lehmann-Hartleben observed that many of the scenes on Trajan's Column can be characterised by a number of recurring standard

[134] Translation: Thackeray, J., *Josephus. The Jewish War, Volume III: Books 5-7* (Cambridge, MA 1928) LCL 210.

[135] Settis et. al. (1988) 120; Pollini (2012) 184; Ferris (2013) 58; Tuck (2015) 226.

iconographic compositions; of figures making use of the same gestures and appearing in similar poses. The concentration of such figures was especially high in construction scenes, in which the majority of the figures could be identified as a standard 'figure type' for Roman soldiers.[136] Lehmann-Hartleben demonstrated that the battle scenes on the column also contained a large concentration of such standardised iconographic compositions or figure types. Images of kneeling barbarians in the midst of battle, defeated sitting barbarians turning their heads desolately to the ground, and barbarian figures that are lying dead or dying on the ground of the battlefield appear in virtually every of the column's battle scenes in highly similar compositions. In fact, they look virtually interchangeable. Lehmann-Hartleben emphasised that each of these standardised figural compositions could be traced back to figures appearing in battle scenes and sculptures from the Greek and Hellenistic periods, especially to Pergamene sculptures such as that of the Dying Gaul.[137]

Similarly, for scenes portraying 'captives and envoys', he noticed that compositions of kneeling barbarian figures with their arms extended in gestures of submission also recurred in the majority of the column's submission scenes.[138] Following the observations made by Lehmann-Harbleben, Settis regarded these generic images appearing in the battle scenes on Trajan's Column as the *leitmotif* of these scene types.[139] The occurrence of standardised iconographic compositions, or visual formulas is an aspect that has not been taken into regard in publications on Trajan's Column after that of Settis. Pirson, however, has made an important further contribution to our understanding of the significance of this phenomenon. Inspired by the pioneering publications on Trajan's Column by Lehmann-Hartleben and especially Settis, he was the first to recognise the importance of the repetition of various stock images on the frieze of the Aurelianic Column. He was the first scholar to quantify the frequency with which these figural compositions appeared on the Aurelianic Column. Confining himself to the monument's battle scenes, he identified various types that recurred in a considerable number of scenes depicting armed confrontations between Roman troops and their barbarian opponents. Through his analysis of the column's battle scenes Pirson concluded that about three-quarters

[136] See Lehmann-Hartleben (1926) 39-50, esp. 44-46.
[137] Ibidem, 88-101.
[138] Ibidem, 58-60.
[139] Settis et. al. (1988) 120-131.

of the barbarian figures appearing in these contexts was depicted as either fallen and dead or dying (34%), panicking and fleeing (25%) or clearly losing the fight with their opponents (15%).[140] These figure types stood in sharp contrast to the figure types that were used to portray Roman soldiers. Almost 50% of these figures appears while fighting, while those figures representing non-fighting soldiers all appeared standing upright and fully armed, emphasising the 'powerful Roman strength by means of their mere presence.'[141] He therefore concluded that the Aurelianic Column placed a considerable emphasis on the 'complete defeat' of the Germans and Sarmatians.[142]

Despite the important contributions made by Lehmann-Hartleben, Settis and Pirson, the occurrence of standardised figural compositions on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius is an aspect that has been largely overlooked in more recent publications on these monuments. Yet, it is through the repetition of these standardised iconographic formulas on both the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns that these barbarian types formed an integral part of the visual language of both monuments, as they were employed as a tool to facilitate the communication or transmission of comprehensive messages. Approaching the repetition of these images of barbarians from the viewpoint of information theory will enhance our understanding of the mechanisms through which these barbarian types could transmit comprehensive messages to their receivers.

Indeed, the vertical orientation and helical design of the friezes presented a considerable restriction to a viewer's ability to assess these scenes covering the surfaces of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Viewing them required some effort from the part of the viewer, as he had to encircle the monuments to 'read' the decorative bands of relief sculptures. The increasing invisibility of the scenes and figures as the friezes spiralled upwards, however, provided an even greater challenge to the viewer; despite the application of colour, and various technical modifications in the case of the Aurelianic Colum, viewing the columns' friezes in their entirety was simply beyond the bounds of possibility. Furthermore, I have already emphasised that the friezes encircling the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius each contained over 2500 individual figures. The presence of this large number of figures in

[140] Pirson (1996) 158-164.
[141] Ibidem, 160.
[142] Ibidem, 164, 173-177.

combination with the often detailed and complex compositions of the scenes in which they appeared further impeded the viewer's ability to 'read' and interpret the scenes he encountered. The overabundance of figures and details presented the viewer with an excessive amount of information, making it difficult to assess what exactly was going on in the scene; what did it depict?

From the perspective of information theory, both columns can be regarded as systems of high entropy; the invisibility of the scenes that were located towards their tops and the densely packed and complex scenes ensured their friezes contained a high degree of 'noise', or incomprehensible information. The artists of the columns, thus, had to employ a mechanism to reduce this general prevalence of entropy in order to effectively transmit comprehensible information to their audiences. It is my contention that the reiteration of highly standardised images of barbarians was one of these mechanisms: the recurring appearance of these barbarian types provided an effective means for the ancient viewer to immediately identify the overall subject of a scene, as well as its primary message.

For instance, when viewing a composition such as that of scene 119 on Trajan's Column (see fig. 6) the viewer would be confronted with a central group of four men, of which three are standing. The rightmost and fourth figure is kneeling while outstretching his arms towards the second of the three standing figures. Through his costume and especially his facial features, the standing figure can be identified as Trajan.[143] The kneeling figure to his right is dressed in a typically barbarian costume, as he wears trousers and a long-sleeved tunic covered by a cloak. The scene, thus, seems to represent some sort of interaction between the emperor and this barbarian figure. The exact nature of this interaction is entirely encoded in the pose and gestures of the kneeling barbarian figure, which is typical for an act of submission.[144] This barbarian type, thus served as the primary carrier of the scene's subject and meaning: the submission of the barbarian, whose fate is now fully dependant on Trajan's clemency. Furthermore, the appearance of similar kneeling figures in many of the column's other scenes representing barbarian submission would ensure a quick recognition and interpretation of these scenes as well.

As the reiteration of generic images of barbarians has especially been scrutinised in the

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[143] He is wearing a cuirass and a *paladumentum*; the costume of a high military official.
[144] See for instance Brilliant (1963) 16-18, 63, 122-124.

context of the battle scenes on Trajan´s and Marcus Aurelius' column, the extent to which such types were employed beyond this context has not been explored systematically. In what follows we will therefore also look into the compositions of other scenes in which Rome´s barbarian enemies appear. The starting point of this enquiry will be two scene types discerned by Lehmann-Hartleben: the battle scene and scenes showing interaction between the emperor and barbarians as envoys or captives. The presence of barbarians on both columns is largely limited to these scene types. Hence, in what follows I will explore both of these scenes and the role of the various barbarian types they contain. Apart from these two scene types, I will also focus on another important aspect of barbarian representation on the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns: the appearance of barbarian women on their friezes.

Figure 6 Scene 119 of Trajan's Column showing a pleading Dacian. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=578#PhotoSwipe1503325207747

Battle scenes

On both the Trajanic and Aurelianic column the largest number of barbarian figures can be found are the scenes in which they are engaged in combat with either Roman legionary soldiers or the auxiliary troops of the Roman army: the battle scenes. As we have seen, 19 of the 155 scenes on Trajan´s Column can be classified as such,[145] while at least 30 of the 116 scenes on the Column of Marcus Aurelius allude to battle.[146] From this follows that 12,3% of the scenes

[145] Scenes 24, 29, 32, 37, 38, 40, 64, 66, 70-71, 72, 93, 94, 112, 113, 115, 133-134, 144, 145 and lastly 151.

[146] My analysis will include 30 of the 36 battle scenes that have been identified by Pirson: scenes 8, 12, 15, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29-30, 35, 39, 43, 48, 50, 52, 57, 63, 70, 72, 73, 77, 79, 89, 92-93, 97, 99, 105 and 109. While scenes 34, 40, 76 and 77 can also be classified as battle scenes, they are the result of extensive sixteenth

on Trajan´s Column and 26% of the scenes on the Column of Marcus Aurelius depict confrontations between Roman troops and their barbarian opponents. Battle scenes can thus provide meaningful insight in the artistic representation of the barbarian enemies appearing on the friezes of these monuments. As was mentioned in the previous section, Lehmann-Hartleben and Pirson already observed how various 'types' or figural compositions reoccurred in many of the battle scenes of both column. In this section we will look into their battle scenes and the role of standardised barbarian types in the visual language of their friezes.

We will begin our examination of the battle scenes with those of Trajan´s Column. Its first battle appears in scene 24, which is part of the column´s third spiral and would, thus, be clearly visible from the ground, hence allowing the viewer to discern the individual figures and the details constituting the scene. For this reason, scene 24 will serve as the starting point of our enquiry into the various barbarian types appearing in the battle scenes on Trajan´s Column. On the in the leftmost side of the scene, we see Trajan in military costume; wearing a tunic, a cuirass and a *paladumentum* fastened on his right shoulder. Two soldiers approaching from the right present him the severed heads of two Dacians. The emperor is looking towards his troops as they approach the battlefield in the centre of the scene. All soldiers, two of them on horseback, raise their right arms as they wield their weapons to strike their Dacian opponents (see fig. 7). Both Lehmann-Hartleben and Settis have emphasised how this uniform pose and the spatial arrangement of the Roman troops in neatly arranged lines is one of the characteristic compositional elements of the Trajanic Column.[147]

The central part of the first battle scene of the Trajanic Column is constituted by a heated clash between the Roman forces and a group of armed Dacians (see fig. 7). It is here, in the turbulent and chaotic midst of the battle, that we find various instances of the visual formulas or generic barbarian 'types', providing structure to this seemingly incoherent lump of fighting figures and thereby allowing the viewer to make sense of what he or she saw. The first of these types, or visual formulas, can be found slightly to the left of the 'centre' of this battle scene.

century restorations and can thus not be regarded as original. Cf. Beckmann (2011) 167.

[147] Lehmann-Hartleben (1996) 88-108; Settis et. al. (1988) 122-123, 126. Ferris (2013) argued the 'orderly' arrangement of the Roman troops provides a contrast with the lack of order among the Dacian troops and, as such, is used to set the Dacians apart from the Roma figures on the frieze. See Ferris (2003) 55-56; Ferris (2013) 55. Scenes 24, 70 and provide clear examples of such an ordered battle formation set against the chaos prevailing on the side of the Dacians

Here we encounter a bearded man, wearing trousers or *baracae* and a long-sleeved tunic covered by a *sagum*, or military cloak: a costume typically used for the representation of northern barbarians in Roman art.[148] He is lying on the ground, on his left side, while his head rests on his left arm, which is extended and rests on the body of another fallen Dacian (see fig. 7). It is the figure of this lifeless Dacian, lying on the ground that is one of the compositions that appears in a considerable number of the battle scenes depicted on the helical frieze that encircles the surface of Trajan's Column and can thus be regarded as one of its iconographic formula that was used to portray barbarians.[149]

The kneeling barbarian figure to the right of this first barbarian type provides another example of a recurring generic image that is characteristic of the column's battle scenes. Again, the figure is bearded, long-haired and dressed in 'barbarian' costume as he wears trousers and a long-sleeved tunic (see fig. 7). He is engaged in a battle with a Germanic auxiliary soldier,[150] a fight he is apparently losing as the figure is kneeling, while resting on his left knee with his right leg outstretched, and looking upwards to his opponent, who is about to strike him with his weapon. The image of the kneeling Dacian, looking up towards his opponent as he tries to ward off his attack is another recurring motif on the Trajanic Column.[151]

Perhaps the most telling barbarian type that appears in scene 24 can be found at the centre of the scene. In the empty space between two fighting Dacians, aligned with the figure of Jupiter Tonans who appears in the upper margin of the scene,[152] we see a sitting barbarian. He is supporting himself with his left arm, while his right arm rests on his knee. He is looking towards the ground as if he has given up and is now lamenting his defeat and the fate of his fellow Dacians (see fig.7). Like the figures of the fallen Dacian and the kneeling Dacian, the image of the defeated sitting Dacian also appears in a large part of the column's battle scenes.[153]

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[148] Cf. Koeppel (1991) 154-155.

[149] The image of the barbarian lying on his side appears in scenes 24, 29, 37, 40, 41, 70 (2 times), 71, 72 and 139; hence in roughly 47% of the battle scenes.

[150] This figure can be identified as a Germanic auxiliary soldier by virtue of his dress: he is wearing baggy trousers, while his upper body is uncovered. This 'costume' was used by Roman artist to portray Germanic warriors or soldiers. See for instance Speidel (2004) 7-10, 60-66, 168. The other soldiers fighting in this battle scene, as well as those on the other battle scenes can also be identified as auxiliary soldiers through their distinct dress, especially their trousers and auxiliary mail coats (*lorica squamata*). See Speidel (2004) 4-5; Koeppel (1992) 62; Coulstson (1998) 170.

[151] It appears in scenes 24, 29, 38, 40, 95, 96, 112 and 151; hence in roughly 42% of the column's battle scenes.

[152] See for instance Koeppel (1991) 155.

[153] We encounter images of defeated sitting Dacians in scenes 24, 32, 37, 40, 41, 64, 66 and 94; hence, in

Furthermore, Lehmann-Hartleben already observed these figures look very similar to the famous Attalid sculpture of the Dying Gaul.[154] Like the other two barbarian types, this Dacian can also be recognised by virtue of his beard and long hair. The garments covering his upper body have apparently been torn off during the battle. What remains of them now desolately hangs on his left arm, further enhancing the sorrowful and dejected outlook of the figure.

Figure 7 Central part of scene 24 of Trajan´s Column. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=107#PhotoSwipe1503326105793

For another figure that characterises many of the battle scenes on the Trajanic Column, we move to the second battle scene on the frieze: scene 29. Apart from the familiar compositions of the fallen Dacian lying on his side and that of the kneeling and fighting Dacian, in this scene the viewer is introduced to another lifeless figure. This Dacian is lying flat on his back. His right arm lies motionless above his head, while his knees are slightly drawn upwards (see fig. 8). The image of this fallen Dacian is the last of the four types identified by Lehmann-Hartleben and also appears in more than half of the battle scenes on Trajan's Column.[155] In fact, taken

roughly 42% of the battle scenes.

[154] Lehmann-Hartleben (1926) 100.

[155] In scenes 29, 38, 40, 64, 71, 95, 114, 134, 144 and 145; hence in roughly 53% of the battle scenes.

together each battle scene contains at least one, but often more than one of these four barbarian types or iconographic formulas.

Figure 8 Scene 29 of Trajan´s Column. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=107#PhotoSwipe1503326301145

Lastly, some reservations with regard to the Dacian figures that appear while still standing and actively fighting their opponents should be made. While Lehmann-Hartleben and Settis have both emphasised the orderly character of the Roman troops appearing on the column through the similarity of their poses and gestures, the Dacian figures in the column's battle scenes appear in two basic fighting positions that are similar to those of the fighting Roman soldiers: leaning forward and raising one arm to wield their weapon and putting forward their shield with their other arm, such as the Dacian appearing in the last line of fighting Dacians in scene 24 (see fig. 7).[156] A variation on this composition is provided by the Dacian figure who is fighting a Roman soldier holding the severed head of a Dacian with his teeth. His left leg is

[156] The figural composition also occurs in scenes 40, 66, 72, 94, 115, 134 and 151; hence in 42% of the battle scenes.

also slightly bent and he is raising his right arm to strike his enemy, while defending himself with his shield. This Dacian, however, is leaning backwards, as if backing away from his opponent. While the soldiers in the battle scenes of Trajan's Column virtually exclusively appear leaning forward, the image of the receding Dacian occurs with considerable frequency in the battle scenes of the Trajanic Column.[157] However, according to Philostratus the Elder, the ancient viewer focussed especially on fallen and dying figures, rather than on those fighting the actual battle.[158] Hence, we can regard the visual formulas of fallen and dying Dacians as the most important components of the battle scenes on Trajan's Column.

Although the figural compositions of defeated and fallen Dacians we encountered in scenes 24 and 29 were employed in many of the column's other battle scenes, they could be employed with a certain degree of variation. Scenes 140 and 145 aptly illustrate how the artist could slightly alter a visual formula without reducing its semantic value. Here, the artist has employed the familiar visual formula of the kneeling barbarian losing the fight against his adversary to depict a Dacian taking his own life; the only thing that will save him from the humiliation of his defeat. Not only does the frontal orientation of the figure enhance the dramatic and emotional character of the scene, as it allows the viewer to perceive the tragic movement of the dagger towards the Dacian´s body, the viewer's familiarity with the overall figural composition that recurred in a large part of the column's battle scenes would have ensured a connotation with defeat. In scenes 140 and 145 the suicides of the two Dacian figures are presented as the ultimate exhibition of their defeat and that of their entire people. This holds especially true for scene 145 that depicts the suicide of a figure that has been identified as the Dacian king Decebalus because of his large size. Rather than attempting to fight his enemies, as the kneeling barbarian figure in scene 24, Decebalus is bringing the weapon in his left hand towards his throat, preferring suicide over begin taken captive by the approaching auxiliary horsemen (see fig. 9). Decebalus' pose, resting on his left knee while his right leg is extended,

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[157] In scenes 24, 40, 64, 70, 72, 94 and 112.

[158] Phil. *Imag*. II, 5.1. 'Καὶ τὸ αἷμα πρὸς τῷ χαλκῷ καὶ ταῖς φοινικίσι προσβάλλει τι ἄνθος τῷ στρατοπέδῳ, καὶ χαρίεν τῆς γραφῆς οἱ ἄλλος ἄλλως πεπτωκότες ἵπποι τε ἀτακτοῦντες μετ' ἐκπλήξεως …'. 'The blood and also the bronze weapons and the purple garments lend a certain glamour to the battle-scene, and a pleasing feature of the painting is the men who have fallen in different postures, and horses running wildly in terror …' Edition: Fairbanks, A., *Philostratus the Elder. Imagines. Philostratus the Younger Imagines. Callistratus, Descriptions*. LCL 256 (Cambridge, MA 1931).

can be regarded as a variation on the kneeling figure type we encountered in scene 24 and also appears in other battle scenes.

Figure 9 Scene 145 of Trajan´s Column: Decebalus' suicide. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=578#PhotoSwipe1503326852386.

It is this association with defeat that is shared by each of the above mentioned types and the variations on these visual formulas that were employed by the artist of the column's frieze; the images of kneeling Dacians attempting to defend themselves from their opponents, the figural compositions of Dacians lying motionless on the ground and those of the dejected barbarian sitting on the soil of the battle field. Similar figures can be found on the battle scenes of the Aurelianic Column. However, its battle scenes also contain barbarian types that were not part of the fixed repertoire of iconographic formulas that was used by the artist of the Trajanic Column. Indeed, while stock images of sitting barbarians and foreign enemies who have fallen on their backs also appear with considerable frequency on the Aurelianic Column, the motifs of the kneeling and fighting barbarian and that of the fallen barbarian lying on his side do not seem to predominate the Aurelian frieze.[159] Instead, two other figural compositions dominate the battle scenes on the Aurelianic Column: that of a fallen barbarian sitting on hands and knees

[159] These motifs do appear on the column´s battle scenes, but given their relatively low frequency they should not be regarded as proper types. The motif of the kneeling barbarian appears in scenes 40 63, and 68, while that of the barbarian lying on his side appears in scenes 19, 50, 99 and 109.

with a hunched back – the cowered barbarian – and that of the falling barbarian. Altogether, these two barbarian types as well as those of the defeated sitting barbarian and the barbarian lying on his back with his legs pulled upwards can be regarded as the figural compositions that predominated the column's battle scenes and as such, were the mechanisms through which the artist could convey comprehensive messages despite the entropy resulting from the many figures and the 'chaotic' composition of these scenes.

Scene 50, for example, illustrates how the figural compositions of the cowered barbarian and the falling barbarian were employed in the column´s battle scenes. It portrays a combat between five barbarians and a group of Roman soldiers; the majority of them is mounted, but several foot soldiers appear in the scene as well. Those fighting on the side of the Romans can be identified as either Praetorians or auxiliaries because of their military costumes.[160] They have clearly overruled their barbarian enemies as only one of them is still actively fighting. The other four barbarian figures have all fallen and are depicted according to three standardised figural compositions. The first of these appears in the lower section of the scene; directly on the lower border of the relief band. The figure is portrayed in the typical posture of the cowering barbarian; it is depicted from the side and kneeling on both legs and arms, while bending his back. The figure lying immediately to the right of this hunched barbarian is depicted in the typical pose of the fallen barbarian lying on his side. Lastly, two barbarian figures seem to be 'floating' in awkward, yet lifeless poses, among the horsemen depicted in the centre of the scene (see fig. 10). These figures can be regarded as representations of falling barbarians, which most often appear on the Aurelianic Column while falling from their horse.[161] Both figures of falling barbarians as well as representations of cowering barbarians occur in many of the battle scenes on the Aurelianic Column. They should therefore be regarded as iconographic formulas employed by the column´s artist.[162]

[160] See Griebel (2013) 312.
[161] Cf. Beckmann (2003) 224-25.
[162] Images of falling barbarians appear in scenes 23, 24, 35, 40, 50, 72, 79, 89, 92 and 105; hence in roughly 34% of the column's battle scenes. Images of cowering barbarians appear in scenes 19, 20, 27, 28, 29-30, 40, 50, 89, 105 and 109; hence in roughly 34% of the column's battle scenes.

Figure 10 Scene 50 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius; central and left sections. Griebel (2013) 317.

Scene 89 clearly illustrates two of the other predominant figural compositions that reoccur in a substantial number of battle scenes on the Aurelianic Column. This scene portrays the slaughter of three barbarians by four Roman horsemen. The three barbarian figures did not withstand the attack of their enemies and appear on three different ground levels as if they have been piled up. Two of these figures also appeared in many of the battle scenes of Trajan's Column. The first of these is seated barbarian figure appearing on top of this vertical compositional line, which can be identified as another recurring motif in the battle scenes on the Aurelianic Column.[163] The same can be argued with regard to the figure appearing on the

[163] Images of the sitting dejected barbarian appear in scenes 18, 19, 23, 28, 29-30, 48, 68, 70, 77, 89, 97 and 99; hence in roughly 41% of the column's battle scenes. Images of the barbarian lying on his back appear in scenes 9, 18, 52, 68, 79, 89, 92-93, 97, 99, 105 and 109; hence in roughly 38% of the column's battle scenes.

lower border of the relief band. This barbarian is lying on his back while his knees are slightly drawn upwards from the ground. Lastly, between these two fallen barbarian figures, we again encounter the image of a cowering barbarian (see fig. 11).

Figure 11 Scene 89 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius; detail. Griebel (2013) 384.

Each of the four figural compositions of the barbarian who is falling, seated, cowering and lying flat on his back with his legs pulled upwards recurs in a considerable number of the column's battle scenes.[164] As such, they can be regarded as visual formulas that allowed the viewer to recognise the often irregularly arranged and chaotic battle scenes and to extract the information the column's artist wished to transmit through them. We have already seen how

[164] Images of falling barbarians appear in scenes 23, 24, 35, 40, 50, 72, 79, 89, 92 and 105; hence in roughly 34% of the column's battle scenes. Images of cowering barbarians appear in scenes 19, 20, 27, 28, 29-30, 40, 50, 89, 105 and 109; hence in roughly 34% of the column's battle scenes. Images of the barbarian lying on his back appear in scenes 9, 18, 52, 68, 79, 89, 92-93, 97, 99, 105 and 109; hence in roughly 38% of the column's battle scenes. Lastly, images of the sitting barbarian appear in scenes 18, 19, 23, 28, 29-30, 48, 68, 70, 77, 89, 97 and 99; hence in roughly 41% of the column's battle scenes.

these figural types were employed with minor alterations in some scenes on Trajan's Column. The artist of the Aurelianic Column also made very subtle adaptations to various familiar iconographic formulas. Scene 61 provides a very explicit example. Often regarded as one of the column's most gruesome and cruel scenes,[165] it presents the decapitation of a large group of barbarian men by their compatriots. The execution is witnessed by various mounted Roman soldiers depicted in the scene's upper relief border. In its centre we encounter two barbarians in the typical northern barbarian costume of trousers and long-sleeved tunics who are about to be beheaded by two of their compatriots. Two barbarians who have already faced this unfortunate and gruesome fate now lie motionless on the ground in familiar poses: on the left we encounter a figure in the familiar position of the cowered barbarian, while the figure to his left is portrayed on its back. They differ from the figural compositions of the battle scenes in one important respect: their heads are not attached to their bodies, but instead lie next to them; leaving no doubt about the fate of the barbarians that are about to be executed (see fig. 12). As such, the artist employed two familiar barbarian types to emphasise the defeated and annihilated status of these barbarian figures and the fate awaiting the rest of their people.

Another recurring motif in the battle scenes: the fleeing barbarian

Apart from images of defeated and fallen Dacians, a second category of recurring figural types can be discerned in the battle scenes of both the Trajanic and the Aurelianic Column. This is constituted by images of barbarians fleeing the battlefield. Such images appear in 16 battle scenes of the Aurelianic Column,[166] while on Trajan's Column most fleeing Dacian figures appear prior to or immediately after a battle scene.[167] On both columns these 'fleeing types' can be characterised by their gesticulating movements. For Trajan's Column, scene 93 is illustrative of the appearance and importance of these compositions. This scene depicts a large group of

[165] See for instance Hölscher (2000) 98; Ferris (2009); 136-138; Griebel (2013) 331.
[166] In scenes 19, 23, 40, 47, 49, 50, 43, 49, 50, 52, 63, 72, 79, 92-93, 97 and 109; hence in roughly 53% of the column's battle scenes.
[167] I.e. scenes 41, 59, 93, 116, 121-22 136, 140, 144, 146. In scenes 29, 37, 64, 70-71 and 111-12 figures representing fleeing Dacians have been incorporated into the battle scene itself. Altogether, fleeing figures appear in roughly 10% of the scenes on Trajan's Column.

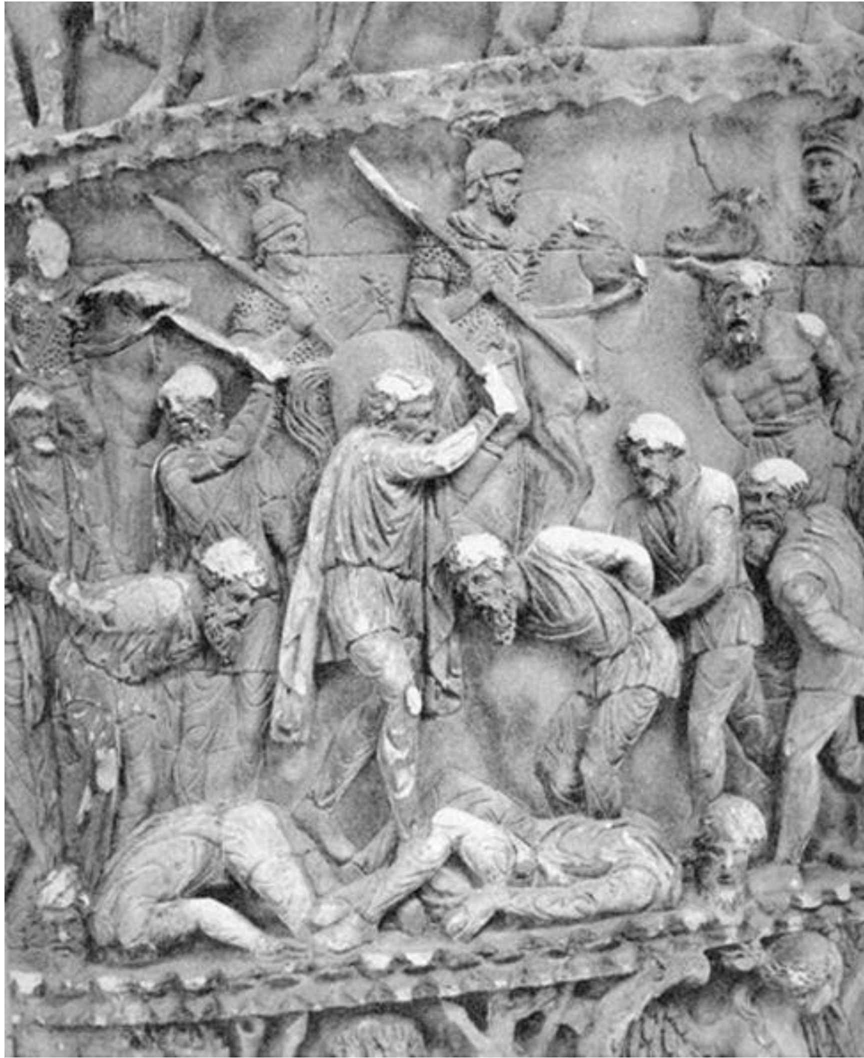

Figure 12 Scene 61 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius; central section. Griebel (2013) 338.

Dacians retreating into a fortification or town (see fig. 13).[168] About five figures stand out in the mobs of fleeing Dacians as they hastily approach the enclosure from both the left and right margins of the scene. The first of these figures appears is depicted in its foreground. He appears at the left side of the fortification and is about to enter its gate. The figure is putting his left leg forward, while his right leg is depicted slightly behind him; a pose suggesting motion.[169] He is turning his head back towards the line of fellow-Dacians behind him and extending his right arm, while pointing towards the fortification with his hand, as if beckoning those running behind him. The same gesticulating figures appear at the left side of the fortification. Two

[168] Cf. Lepper & Frere (1988) 143-145; Settis et. al. (1988) 424-426; Koeppel (1992) 75.
[169] Koeppel (1992) 75.

figures that are depicted in a mountain ridge near the upper border of the relief band, extend their arms towards the enclosure, pointing out the right direction their fellow fleeing Dacians. A third figure, depicted in the middle of this group also seems to raise his hand. His gesture is rather reminiscent of the Dacian figure that can be found below the mountain ridge in the scene's foreground. His left leg is raised from the ground, and his arm is extended into the air, in what appears to be another gesticulating movement (see fig. 13). It is this beckoning movement that is a recurring element in virtually every scene representing groups of fleeing or retreating Dacians.[170] Because of the presence of multiple gesticulating Dacian figures, especially in the scene's upper border, these gestures would have stood out to those viewing the scene. Hence, they ensured the viewer would be able to interpret the subject and meaning of the scene: the retreat of a large group of Dacians, which not only alluded to their defeat but also to their cowardice.

While on the Trajanic Column, the fleeing barbarian was mainly depicted while moving on foot, the typical image of the fleeing barbarian on the Aurelianic Column is that of a mounted German or Sarmatian. These mounted barbarian figures often appear in the frieze's battle scenes and are virtually always set in the scene's top segment, as can be seen in battle scene 63. In the upper left corner of this scene, we encounter a bearded barbarian sitting on horseback. Here, we find the image of a mounted barbarian, who is riding towards the right while turning his body to the left. He is extending his arm in the same direction (see fig. 14). Figural compositions of the fleeing barbarian on horseback reoccur in a significant number of the column's scenes that depict fleeing barbarians and can therefore be regarded as yet another visual formula that was employed by the artist to portray Marcus Aurelius' Germanic and Sarmatian foes.[171] Unlike on Trajan's Column however, the number of gesticulating barbarians in each scene is limited to one or two figures. This may stem from the fact that contrary to those on Trajan's Column, the fleeing barbarian figures on the Aurelianic Column were incorporated into battle scenes rather than in distinct scenes depicting their flight from the battlefield.

[170] Images of one, but often multiple gesticulating and fleeing Dacians appear in scenes 41, 59, 64, 72, 93, 111-112, 116, 120-121, 139, 144 and 146; hence in 80% of the scenes that depict fleeing or retreating Dacians.
[171] I.e. in scenes 40, 47, 49, 50, 63, 79, 92-93, 97, 102, 107, and 109; hence in roughly 69% of the scenes depicting fleeing barbarians.

Figure 13 Scene 93 of Trajan's Column. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=578#PhotoSwipe1503390209210

Figure 14 Scene 63 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius, detail. Griebel (2013) 339.

Some preliminary conclusions

Before moving on to the occurrences of barbarian types in scenes that did not represent battles, it is worthwhile to discuss some general observations with regard to the appearance of the types in the scenes we have encountered so far. First and foremost, some conclusions about the style and composition of the battle scenes on both columns can be made. A comparison between scene 24 of Trajan's Column and scene 50 of the Aurelianic Column illustrates the higher relief in which the figures on the frieze of the latter were executed, as well as the deeply carved or drilled details of each individual figure (see figs. 10 and 11, above). This allowed the artist to fully employ shadows in his reliefs, which further enhanced the three-dimensional character of the figures on the frieze's foreground, which would also have enhanced their visibility. Through the more explicit modelling of folds in the figures' clothing, hair and beards the artist also enhanced the sense of 'motion' or liveliness of the figures.[172] Furthermore, the decapitation scene on the column of Marcus Aurelius is illustrative of its enhanced 'emotional character' through the depiction of more explicit facial expressions. The expression of Germanic figure which upper body is exposed clearly captures his fear and abhorrence as he witnesses the execution of his compatriots (see fig. 12, above). Contrastingly, the faces of the fleeing barbarians appearing in scene 93 of Trajan's Column do not reveal any fear or dismay; they are expressionless and almost serene (see fig. 13, above). Lastly, the gesticulating barbarian on horseback we encountered in scene 63 of Marcus Aurelius' Column illustrates the 'non-classical' proportions of some of the figures on the column.[173] Not only does the figure appear to be too large for his horse, the way he turns his body and extends his arm also appear as not naturalistic.

Apart from these stylistic and formal differences, a number of compositional differences can be discerned as well. To begin with, the battle scenes on Trajan's Column all present clashes between two more or less ordered battle formations and also a considerable number of fighting Dacians. On the Aurelianic Column on the other hand, the number of barbarians that are portrayed while actually fighting is considerably lower. Indeed, Pirson already observed that only 13% of the barbarian figures appearing in the column's battle scene appear as 'properly

[172] Wegner (1931); Beckmann (2011) 159; Griebel (2013) 35.

[173] Cf. Hölscher (2000) 101; Griebel (2013) 33-34.

fighting', while about 5% of the figures is represented as fighting, but leaning backwards as if stumbling, which suggests they were overpowered by their enemies,[174] such as the fighting figure in scene 50 (see fig. 10, above). Furthermore, the lion's share of the battle scenes on the Column of Marcus Aurelius is not constituted by two large opposing groups in clear and solid battle formations, as we saw in scene 24 (see fig. 7, above) for instance. Instead, most battles scenes are formed by various more or less isolated fighting pairs or small groups that are not part of a larger battle formation (see fig. 15).[175]

Figure 15 Drawing of battle scene 24 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius. Beckmann (2011) 171.

A second and important compositional difference between the columns can be found in their conceptions of space. Indeed, many of the battle scenes on the Aurelianic Column are made up of different ground lines, dividing the scene in two or three distinct horizontal sections (see for instance figs. 11, 14 and 15). On the Trajanic Column on the other hand, scenes were not divided into distinct sections, but were simply confined to a single space.[176] Lastly, it should

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[174] Pirson (1996) 158-161.
[175] Wegner (1931) 141 argued the battle scenes consisted solely of fighting pairs (*zweikämpfe*), yet Beckmann has demonstrated that the battle scenes on Marcus Aurelius' column were more varied and did not solely consist of such *zweikämpfe*. Nonetheless, the absence of neatly ordered battle formations constitutes an important difference with the battle scenes on Trajan's Column. See Beckmann (2003) 47f. and Beckmann (2011) 169-173.
[176] Cf. Griebel (2013) 33-34.

be noted that the artist of the Aurelianic Column paid much less attention to the backgrounds on which the events alluding to the Marcomannic Wars appeared. Indeed, while on Trajan's Column scenes are often set against a rather detailed background, such as the fortification in scene 93 (see fig. 13, above), the scenes on the Aurelianic Column appear on virtually empty, ´screen-like' backgrounds.[177]

Apart from these considerations with regard to these formal aspects, some conclusions on the way in which the barbarian types were represented by the artists of the columns can be drawn as well. Looking at Trajan's Column, we can conclude that virtually every Dacian appears bearded and many of them are long-haired, which allows us to identify them as *comati*, or common Dacians who were not members of the elite. Some of the Dacian figures are depicted wearing a specific type of headgear. This conical cap identifies these figures as *pileati* or members of the Dacian aristocracy.[178] The clothing of the Dacian figures also helps the viewer to distinguish them from the Roman figures in the frieze's compositions; they wear baggy trousers in combination with a long-sleeved tunic, which were regarded as a typically barbarian garments. In fact, this costume and physiognomy were used as the typical artistic model for the 'northern' barbarian in Roman art.[179]

While the Dacian's on Trajan's Column all appeared in the same costume – some of them also wearing the typical Dacian cap, the barbarians appearing on the Column of Marcus Aurelius appear in two distinct costumes. Hence, we can discern two groups of barbarians, which should both be regarded as stereotypical northern barbarian types. The first of these is very reminiscent of the Dacian figures on Trajan's Column; this group of barbarian figures is dressed in the same baggy trousers, long-sleeved and sometimes fringed tunics, covered by a *sagum*. The second type is constituted by the bare-chested figures wearing baggy trousers. The majority of the barbarians appearing on the surface of the Aurelianic Column appears bearded and long-haired, although a small number of barbarian figures modelled after the second, bare-chested type, however, also appear shaven and short-haired. These can be identified as youths. Contrary to Trajan's Column, there is no distinction between barbarians of the upper and lower

[177] Pirson (1996) 152, 168. On the treatment of the backgrounds of the column's frieze also see Hölscher (2000); Griebel (2013) 33.
[178] Koeppel (1991) 155.
[179] Cf Koeppel (1992) 171; Speidel (2004) 5-6; Griebel (2013) 442-443.

classes. Also, Johannes Griebel has emphasised that the use of each of these types was confined to the representation of either Germanic barbarians or Sarmatians; such a distinction can simply not be made. Instead, the appearance of these two groups of barbarians simply coincides with the stereotypical images of northern barbarians that existed in the Roman Empire.[180]

Indeed, in his publication on the clothing habits of the north-western provinces of the Roman Empire, Wild has emphasised how garments like trousers were no longer part of the 'native' dress of the various peoples inhabiting these areas. Nonetheless, they were still used in artistic representations of these peoples to denote their 'foreign' and non-Roman character.[181] Hence, the appearance of Dacians on the one hand, and Germans and Sarmatians on the other was not necessarily realistic, but first and foremost an artistic stereotype and served to facilitate the identification of these figures as the non-Roman, barbarian enemy by clearly distinguishing them from the Roman Praetorians, legionary soldiers and auxiliary soldiers on the Column's surface.

The lack of body-armour of the barbarian figures on both columns further confirms their representation was primarily based on stereotypical and generic artistic conceptions rather than reality. For Trajan's Column, Lepper and Frere have emphasised that images of Dacian helmets and mail shirts figure prominently on the column's base.[182] Furthermore, Dacian arms and armour also appear on the military trophy depicted in scene 78.[183] A similar scene portraying military trophies decorated with the weaponry and body armour of Marcus Aureliuis' Germanic and Sarmatian enemies can be found on scene 55 of his column.[184] The barbarians represented on the friezes, thus, may not have existed in reality, but only in works of art and through them in the minds of their beholders.[185] As such, the outward appearance of Dacians, Germans and Sarmatian enemies on the columns is largely stereotypical and conforms to the idea of what constituted the 'typical' barbarian in the minds of many Romans, hence making the images easy to 'read' as they allowed the Roman viewer to immediately identify figures in this appearance

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[180] Cf. Griebel (2013) 444. On the two barbarian types, and their costumes and physiognomy, see Griebel (2013) 442-449.
[181] See Wild (1985).
[182] Cf. Lepper & Frere 31-32. Speidel also stresses the lack of historical accuracy with regard to the appearance of the Dacians. See Speidel (2004) 6.
[183] See for instance Lepper & Frere (1988) 121-122, pl. LVII.
[184] See for instance Beckmann (2011) 98-99.
[185] Cf. Zanker (1998) 61-73; Zanker (2004) 84-86.

as non-Roman and, thus, different from their opponents.

Interacting with the emperor: submission and captives

For both the Trajanic and the Aurelianic columns, scenes portraying 'envoys and captives' also contained a considerable number of barbarian figures.[186] This section will therefore explore the role of barbarian types or iconographic formulas in these scenes. To begin with, scenes showing embassies of Dacians interacting with the Roman emperor appear thirteen times on the frieze of Trajan's Column.[187] Lehmann-Hartleben rightly observed that kneeling Dacian figures recurred in many of these scenes.[188] In fact, it can be argued, again, that the majority of the Dacians appearing in these scenes were generic and stereotypical figure types, or visual formulas, that served to aid the viewer in his understanding of the frieze despite the 'entropy' created by the dense and intricate compositions of the scenes. The gestures of these barbarian types are of central importance; they are very telling of the character of the scene and the artist's intention of these compositions.

Gestures formed an important element of the communication between the emperor and his subjects. For instance, the emperor frequently made use of gestures in is public speeches. Their importance is aptly illustrated by Pliny the Younger in his panegyric on Trajan; his *Panegyricus Traiani*. In this eulogy, he praises the emperor on multiple occasions for the effective use of gestures during his speeches; according to Pliny, his gestures perfectly complement the words he addresses to the people of Rome.[189] Furthermore, Aldrete has emphasised how gestures enabled emperors to convey messages to large gatherings of people without making use of words.[190] In short, gestures could create an interactive dialogue between the emperor and those subjected to his rule. They were laden with semantic value, and were therefore frequently employed by ancient artist to indicate status, sentiments or ideas; to emphasise the meaning or message of their work.[191] As such, focussing on the gestures of the barbarian envoys and suppliants depicted on the friezes of Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius'

[186] As was mentioned in the previous chapter, this scene type has been established by Lehmann-Hartleben. See Lehmann-Hartleben (1926) 51-63.

[187] I.e scenes 46, 50, 52-53, 61, 66, 75, 89-90, 100, 119, 123, 130, 131, and 141.

[188] Lehmann-Hartleben (1926) 42-63.

[189] Plin. *Pan.* 67.1, 71.6.

[190] Aldrete (1999) 90-92; 102-127.

[191] Brilliant (1963); Aldrete (1999) 92-97.

columns will help us to gain a better understanding of the ideas and associations that their patrons wished to convey.

Both the employment of such stock images of barbarians, as well as the importance of gesture are especially well illustrated by scene 75, which is known as the 'great surrender-scene'.[192] Here, we encounter a large group of Dacians approaching the emperor, who is seated on a throne on an elevated platform. As in scene 24, he is dressed in the costume of a high military official, as he wears a cuirass and the *paludamentum*. The emperor is accompanied by several of his high officers, who are dressed in the same costume, as well as some auxiliary soldiers and Praetorian standard-bearers.[193] They all look towards Trajan, which further emphasises his central and elevated position. The emperor is facing a large line of Dacians alternating between kneeling and standing groups. The image of a suppliant and kneeling Dacian grabbing the seated emperor's knee in the scene's foreground reveals the dramatic character of this scene of mass submission (see fig. 16).

However, the two Dacian figures appearing in front of the emperor, to whom he is directing his gaze, can be regarded as the first examples of a visual formula on the Trajanic Column. Both figures are bearded *pileati* and are dressed in the generic Dacian costume that was also worn by the Dacian figures appearing in the column's battle scenes. The figures are kneeling with their oval shields lying next to them on the ground. Both Dacians have turned their heads up towards Trajan and extend their arms towards him with the palms of their hands turned upwards (see fig. 16). It is this kneeling pose, and the extension of their arms that can be regarded as typical for submissive figures; they have discarded their weapons and now openly address the emperor in an act of *deditio* or sumbission.[194] The emperor, in turn, extends his right hand with opened palm towards the two kneeling Dacians, suggesting he accepts their submission.

Their poses and gestures are repeated by the next group of kneeling Dacians, who are separated from the two kneeling *pileati* by a group of five standing Dacians, two of whom appear to have their hands tied behind their backs. This group of kneeling Dacians is made up of twelve figures, both representing *pileati* and *comati*. Again, some of them have thrown their

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[192] See Lepper & Frere (1988) 116-120; Settis et. al. (1988) 126, 385-389; Koeppel (1991) 192-194.
[193] Lepper & Frere (1988) 117; Settis (1988) 285; Koeppel (1991) 194.
[194] Brilliant (1963) 122-124.

shields on the ground to indicate their submission. Furthermore their gestures, too, illustrate their subjection. Three of these kneeling figures extend their arms towards the enthroned emperor. Again, their palms are upturned (see fig. 16).

The standing figures in the last group of pleading Dacians in scene 75 are gesticulating towards the emperor in the same way. The figures depicted in the foreground of this group also extend both arms towards Trajan, while showing the palms of their hands. Like the kneeling Dacians, they have also discarded their oval shields (see fig. 17). The standing figure depicted behind this group of standing suppliants stands out because of his conspicuously large size and can be identified as a Dacian nobleman because of his headgear. This figure has therefore been identified as the Dacian leader Decebalus. The Dacian king is, thus, also depicted as a submissive figure in this scene.[195]

The gestures of the Dacians kneeling and standing in front of the emperor are of primary importance to the overall character of scene 75. Many of these figures raise their arms towards the emperor with the palm of their hand turned outward; a gesture that was both typical in representations of *deditio,* or submission, in Greco-Roman art and was associated with servitude as well.[196] Hence, through these gestures the submissive and inferior status of the suppliant Dacians is emphasised. The kneeling poses of the two barbarian groups further enhance this notion of subjection. Lastly, the position of the emperor himself also emphasises the submissive character of the Dacian figures appearing in scene 75; seated on an elevated platform, he looks down to the two kneeling Dacian figures in front of him, while he extends his right hand with an upturned palm in what can be interpreted as an gesture of clemency; he accepts the submission of the pleading Dacians in front of him.[197]

Looking at the overall composition of the scene, its largest part is constituted by repetitious Dacian figures and especially their submissive gestures. The large group of suppliant Dacians therefore immediately catches the eye. Settis referred to this effect as an ´anafora del gesto´, emphasising how the repetition of these gestures enhanced the scale and impact of this particular scene to convey the notion of a mass subjection of the entire Dacian people to the

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[195] Settis et. al. (1988) 214, 390; Koeppel (1991) 194.
[196] See Brilliant (1963) 16-18, 63. On the submission scenes of the Trajanic Column, see pp. 122-124.
[197] Cf. Brilliant 124.

Figure 16 Scene 75 of Trajan's Column: the 'Great Submission'. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=107#PhotoSwipe1503394454854

Figure 17 Rightmost section of scene 75 of Trajan´s Column with final group of submissive Dacians and Decebalus. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=107#PhotoSwipe1503394454854

column´s viewer.[198] The fact that the Dacian leader Decebalus is also depicted according to the visual formula of the submissive barbarian further adds to this notion of mass subjection; his submission provides the ultimate proof of the demise of the entire Dacian populace.

Altogether, the majority of the Dacian figures appearing in scene 75 are depicted as submissive suppliants who are either kneeling or standing. Especially their gestures can be interpreted as signifiers of their submissive status; their extended arms and upturned palm are typical gestures of submission and therefore serve to signify their status as suppliants to the emperor. The impact of these composition was strengthened even further by the fact that composition was not only repeated in scene 75 but in virtually every other scene depicting the interaction between the emperor and groups of Dacian envoys.[199] They can therefore be rightly regarded as another category of visual formulas.

Likewise, on the Aurelianic Column many of the scenes depicting interaction between barbarians and the emperor are also typified by the repeated appearance of barbarian figures in highly similar poses of *deditio*; either standing or kneeling in front of the emperor, while extending the right or both hands with upturned palms. The importance of these two figural compositions is also illustrated by the column's base, which once bore the image of a genuflecting submissive barbarian on its eastern side and would thus have struck the eye of the column's visitor as he approached the monument from the Via Flaminia; the direction to which it was orientated (see fig. 18).[200]

Figure 18 Sixteenth-century drawing of the eastern side of the base of the Aurelianic Column by Laferi. Griebel (2013) 20.

Altogether, compositions of barbarians presenting themselves to the emperor in

[198] Settis et. al. (1988) 127-130.
[199] Images of kneeling suppliant Dacians appear in scenes 46, 61, 75, 117, 123, 130, and 141; hence in roughly 54% of the scenes depicting interaction between Dacians and the emperor. Images of standing suppliant Dacians appear in scenes 46, 52-53, 66, 75, 89-90 100, 123, 130 and 141; hence in roughly 70% of scenes representing the interactions between Trajan and his Dacian enemies.
[200] On the column's base, which has only survived through sixteenth-century sketches, see Beckmann (2011) 204-206; Griebel (2013) 19-21.

submission appear on 20 of the column's 116 scenes. These scenes are also characterised by various stock figural compositions of the submissive barbarian presenting himself to the emperor by making use of gestures of *deditio*.[201] Scene 40, for example, depicts two suppliant Germans standing and extending their hands towards the emperor who is seated on an elevated platform and looks away from the submissive barbarian towards the battle taking place below him. Both suppliant figures have long beards and are dressed in the typical costume of the northern barbarian: trousers, a fringed tunic and a fringed cloak. Their gestures are similar to those of the submissive barbarians we encountered on Trajan's Column (see figure 19).

While on the Trajanic Column images of kneeling suppliants appeared in over 50% of the scenes presenting submissive Dacians, the predominant figural compositions of barbarians appearing in the same settings on the Aurelianic Column is that of the standing suppliant.[202] Furthermore, scene 49 illustrates a variation on the standing submission type that also appears in several of the column's scenes of subjection. It portrays the submission of a group of barbarians that are approaching the emperor from the right. As in scene 40 Marcus Aurelius has been set in the scene's centre and is elevated from the ground by a platform. Unlike scene 40, however, the emperor's gaze is directed towards the two figures leading the barbarian embassy, as he extends his right hand towards them in a gesture of *clementia*. The two barbarian figures are turning their heads up towards the elevated emperor and bend their upper bodies slightly forward, thus clearly indicating their inferior and submissive status. The arms of these barbarian figures are extended, but they are covered by their cloaks. Covering one's hands and arms in this way was regarded as a ritual gesture of respect and was often employed in religious contexts. As such, it enhanced the exalted character of the emperor to whom the barbarians subdued themselves.[203] Again, the artist has thus slightly altered a familiar figural composition to strengthen the message of a particular scene on the column's frieze (see fig. 20).

[201] In his contribution on gestures in Scheid and Huet (2000), Robert also refers to scenes representing submission, but his discussion is confined to only one paragraph. See Robert (2000) 181. Scenes 8, 17, 21, 22, 31, 38-39, 41, 40, 41, 45, 49, 51, 53, 56, 60, 62, 91 112 will be incorporated into my analysis. Scenes 6 and 114 have also been identified as scenes representing submissions but their damage is too severe to identify any of its figures.

[202] Images of standing suppliant barbarians employing the typical gesture of *deditio* appear in scenes 17, 22, 38-39, 40, 49, 51, 53, 56, 62 and 112; hence in 53% of the scenes representing contacts between the emperor and his barbarian enemies. Contrastingly, figural compositions of kneeling suppliant barbarians only appear in two of the column's scenes: i.e. in scenes 17 and 53.

[203] Cf. Brilliant (1963); Griebel (2013) 308.

Altogether we can conclude that standard figural compositions are also a defining aspect of the scenes representing various episodes of interaction between Trajan and his Dacian enemies, as well as those depicting the same theme on the Column of Marcus Aurelius. Here, too, the artist has employed a limited number of barbarian types to represent barbarians in acts of *submission*. As such, through their poses and submissive gestures, these barbarian types represent another outcome of their defeat: they had to succumb to the force of their vanquisher and now submit themselves to the emperor, hence acknowledging their defeat and subjection.

Figure 19 Detail of scene 40 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius. Griebel (2013) 297.

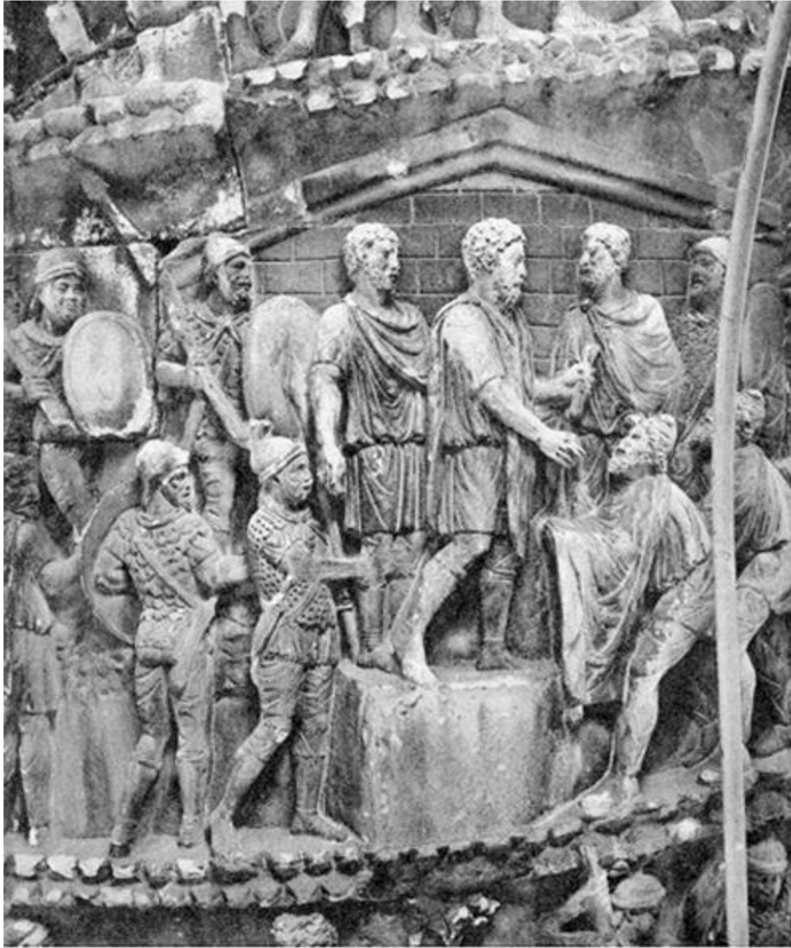

Figure 20 Detail of scene 49 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius. Griebel (2013) 311.

Representing an enemy in the guise of a captive can be regarded as another means to allude to his defeat and subjection; hence the appearance of several standing Dacian men with their hands tied behind their backs in scene 75. Images of Dacian captives, however, also appeared in scenes that did not portray submissive barbarians, but bore the representation of a captive that is brought forward to the emperor.[204] Again, similar figural compositions occur in these scenes, such as the standing captive brought forward to the emperor by an auxiliary soldier in scenes 18, 40, 68 and 148 (see fig. 21), and the image of a seated or kneeling captive gazing up towards his captor in scenes 40, 45, and 146.[205] Yet, only 7 of the column's 155 scenes

[204] I.e. scenes 18, 40, 45, 68, 146, 148, 149-150; hence they cover roughly 0.5% of the column's surface.
[205] Various scholars have identified the naked captive figures in scene 45 as Roman soldiers, who are being tortured by Dacian women. Smith, however, has proposed an alternative interpretation of this scene. According to him, the scene represents the torture of Dacian captives by Moesian women. Smith primarily based his argument on the Dacian physiognomy of the captive figures and concluded that the scene is a representation of revenge. See Smith (2002) 79. However, it can also be argued that the nudity of the figures in this scene should

portray Dacians. This limited number diminishes the significance, and hence the impact of these captive types on the column's viewers.

Figure 21 Scene 18 of Trajan's Column showing a Dacian captive brought forward to Trajan. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=107#PhotoSwipe1503395152016

Contrastingly, 14 of the Aurelianic Column's 116 scenes bear images of Germanic or Sarmatian barbarians as captives or prisoners of war,[206] suggesting the image of the barbarian captive had become more prominent on this monument. In general, we can distinguish between two basic settings in which the image of the barbarian captive has been employed by the column's artist. The first of these is that of the barbarian brought forward to the emperor. Also appearing on the

not be interpreted as an example of heroic nudity, but served to emphasise the humiliation and barbarity of the Dacian males, whose imprisonment and torture by women can already be interpreted as utterly shameful.

[206] I.e. scenes 25, 61, 64, 66, 69, 73, 77, 85, 88, 98, 102, 104, 112, 115-116; hence they cover roughly 12% of the column's frieze.

Trajanic Column, in these settings the barbarian is depicted standing with his hands tied behind his back while he is escorted by a Roman soldier who is forcing him to move forward. This particular composition is aptly illustrated by scene 25. As the first scene in which Marcus' foreign enemies appear as captives, it presents two bound captives brought forward to the emperor standing on the scene's left side. Holding a spear in his left hand, the emperor extends his right hand towards the approaching captives (see fig. 22). As this composition was repeated by the column's artist in a considerable number of other scenes,[207] it can be regarded as another visual formula that aided the viewer interpret the column's frieze.

Figure 22 Scene 25 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius. Griebel (2013) 276.

The representation of barbarian women on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius

Apart from the familiar motif of the standing captive in front of the emperor, the frieze of the

[207] I.e. in scenes 25, 61, 64, 66, 77, and 88; hence in roughly 42% of the captive scenes.

Aurelianic Column also presented Germanic and Sarmatian barbarians in a slightly different context: being deported by Roman soldiers.[208] Scene 69 for instance, shows two rows of barbarians being forced to move forward by a Roman soldier. The line of barbarians in the scene's lower segment are all male and are all modelled according to the typical model of the northern barbarian dressed in trousers and long-sleeved tunics (see fig. 23). Their hands are not fastened by chains, although in some scenes barbarian men appear to be bound.[209]

While the four barbarian men in this scene seem anxious, which is clearly illustrated by the third figure turning his head towards the Roman soldier urging them to move forward, it is in the upper line of captives that we encounter two figural compositions that also appear in other scenes. These barbarian captives are female and can be identified by their long and untied hair, long loose-fitting garments, as well as by the children accompanying them.[210] Two of the female captives have placed their hands on the shoulder of a child walking next to them; as if protecting them and pushing them forward. The pose of the second barbarian mother is especially illustrative of the women's distress; protecting her child with her left arm, the figure has raised her right hand as she looks backwards in a gesture that is typical for panicking barbarian figures appearing on the Aurelianic Column (see fig. 23).[211] The female figure walking in front of the two mothers is resting her chin in her right hand; a gesture that was used to portray mourning (see fig. 23).[212] These images of distressed women, making use of panicking gestures or in the attitude of mourning, can be marked as another group of recurring figural compositions on the surface of the Aurelianic Column. Women appear in 10 of the columns 116 scenes (roughly 9%), especially in scenes that represent the deportation of barbarian prisoners of war.[213] These two standardised female barbarian types, especially the first type, appear in the vast majority of these 10 scenes.[214]

Various authors have emphasised the considerable degree of violence that is often used

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[208] Scenes 69, 73, 85, 88, 97, 102, 104, and 115-116.
[209] See for instance scene 85 and 102.
[210] Dillon (2006) 248; Griebel (2013) 447.
[211] Robert (2000) 179-189; Dillon (2006) 257.
[212] On this gesture see for instance Robert (2000) 189-190; Dillon (2006) 257.
[213] I.e. in scenes 20, 40, 61, 69, 73, 85, 92, 102, 104 and 115-116.
[214] We find the barbarian type of the panicking woman in scenes 20, 40, 69, 85, 92 and 104 (2 times); hence, the type appears in 60% of the scenes in which women appear. The mourning type can be found in scenes 61, 68 and 115-116 and hence appears in 30% of the scenes in which barbarian women appear.

by the soldiers accompanying these captive women.[215] The composition of a panicking women accompanied by a child, as represented in scene 20 is illustrative of the violent treatment of women on the Aurelianic Column (see fig. 24). Furthermore, the woman's exposed breast in combination with the soldier grabbing her by the hair may allude to rape, signifying a woman's sexual conquest.[216]

Figure 23 Scene 69 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius; detail. Griebel (2013) 352.

[215] See for instance Zanker (2000); Dillon (2006) and Ferris (2009) 111-130.
[216] Cf. Dillon 258.

Figure 24 Scene 20 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius.. Griebel (2013) 261.

This violent behaviour towards women provides a sharp contrast with the appearance of women on Trajan's Column. Not only is the presence of female barbarian figures on the column limited to only six of the columns 155 scenes (less than 4%),[217] but the violence towards women we encountered in the scenes on the Aurelianic Column is completely absent from the imagery we find on Trajan's. Furthermore, the two female barbarian types that recurred on the frieze of the Column of Marcus Aurelius are absent from the scenes on Trajan's Column. Scene

[217] I.e. scenes 29-30, 39, 45, 76, 86 and 91.

20 provides an exception, as it shows the familiar figural composition of a panicking woman turning her back towards the viewer. However, this figure does not seem in danger of being harassed or violated. Instead, she is being escorted on a boat by the emperor himself, who makes a reassuring gesture towards the distressed woman (see figure 25).[218] Altogether, the limited number of scenes in which women appeared, as well as the absence of recurring figural compositions representing Dacian women on Trajan's Column, suggests the female figures on its frieze had little semantic importance. The marginal role of female Dacians on the column, thus, marks an important difference with the imagery we find on the Aurelianic Column.

Figure 25 Sceene 20 of Trajan's Column; detail. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=107#PhotoSwipe1502397013320

[218] Cf. Dillon (2006) 255-257.

Barbarians on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius: the redundancy of barbarian types

The preceding sections have illustrated how the representations of Trajan's Dacian and Marcus Aurelius' Germanic and Sarmatian enemies were largely confined to the repetition of various stock figural compositions or barbarian types, especially in scenes depicting battle and barbarian submission. Hence, the following question arises: how can these various stock figural compositions or visual formulas enhance our understanding of the columns? While both Lehman-Hartleben and Pirson have drawn attention to the existence of such recurring images on both columns. It was Settis who first reflected on the importance of this phenomenon with regard to the battle scenes on Trajan's Column. In his extensive publication on this monument, Settis contended that the recurrence of the same barbarian types in the column's battle scenes provides the key to understanding these scenes. According to Settis, they served a dual purpose; the fact that the lion's share of the scenes contained highly similar images allowed the viewer to immediately identify these scenes as representations of combat, while every individual scene also contributed to the 'general' image of combat on the Trajanic Column. Secondly, the barbarian types fulfilled a narrative function; according to Settis they should be interpreted as representatives of larger groups of people. The single Dacian figure thus served as a *pars pro toto* or metaphor for a larger group of defeated Dacians.[219]

How exactly did this process of interpretation work? Information theory and the concepts of entropy, repetition and redundancy can help us to further explain the importance of the various iconographic formulas appearing on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. As has already been emphasised, because of their design as well as the complex composition of their friezes both monuments can be characterised by their high entropy. The repetition of a limited number of scene types, combined with the repetition of highly similar barbarian figures would help the viewer to interpret the scenes in which barbarians appeared by reducing the degree of entropy that was inherent to both monuments. In short, the various barbarian types discussed in the previous sections can be regarded as the primary carriers of meaning in the scenes in which they were employed. For instance, the images of fallen barbarians in battle scenes signified the defeat of the barbarian enemies and hence the outcome of the battle for the

[219] Settis et. al. (1988) 120-131.

Roman army, while images of standing and kneeling submissive barbarians allowed the viewer to establish that the defeated barbarians now had subjected themselves to the Roman Emperor. The fact that these types occurred in the vast majority of the scenes that depicted Rome's foreign enemies would create a certain familiarity with these images in the minds of their beholders; their repetition ensured a certain predictability or 'redundancy' from the part of the viewer, which in turn allowed him to extract comprehensive messages from the columns.

Apart from the repeated occurrences of stereotypical and highly similar figural compositions on the columns themselves, the ancient viewer could also encounter the same barbarian types on various other monumental works of art in Rome. While the number of images of barbarians from the pre-Trajanic period was very limited, the battle scenes presented on the Temple of Apollo Sosianus and the Mantua Relief would have provided various visual analogies with the columns' battle scenes, especially to the contemporary viewers of the Trajanic Column. For instance, on the Mantua Relief we see the familiar barbarian types of the sitting barbarian, as well as the barbarian lying flat on his back with his legs pulled upwards (see fig. 26).[220]

Figure 26 Fragment of the Mantua Relief. Kleiner (1992) 87, fig. 66.

[220] See for instance Kleiner (1992) 86-87.

The images of barbarians that were carried through the streets of Rome on the battle paintings during triumphal processions may have also provided visual antecedents for the viewers of both Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' columns. Although we do not know if they also contained stock images of fallen, fleeing, submissive and captive barbarians, we do know that the events they portrayed coincided with the scenes of battle and interaction with the emperor we encountered on the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns.

To the ancient viewer of Trajan's Column, the Forum of Trajan would have provided the primary point of reference. Apart from the various large-sized sculptures of Dacian men, which the viewer would encounter as he entered the forum complex through its monumental arch, the Great Trajanic Frieze would have provided the closest visual analogy to the scenes of the Trajanic Column and the barbarian types that characterised them. Originally part of the Basilica Ulpia, the frieze was displayed in the vicinity of the column. Seven of its eight surviving slabs contain images of Rome's defeated Dacian enemies. Slab II for instance, bears the familiar image of a Dacian lying lifelessly on the ground, which characterised the battle scenes of both Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' columns. The wound inflicted by his victorious opponent is clearly visible in his chest. The slab shows an image of another familiar figural composition of a kneeling Dacian, who is pierced by the lance of a mounted soldier (see fig. 27).[221]

Slabs V and VI present various other figural compositions that also appear on the Trajanic Column. The first of these is the image of a kneeling *pileatus*, whose arms are no longer part of the frieze, but were originally raised in a pleading and submissive gesture.[222] The figure's gaze is directed to the mounted emperor, who is trampling another Dacian figure as he advances towards the kneeling Dacian. The pose of this Dacian is very reminiscent of a figure type appearing in many of the battle scenes on the Aurelianic Column: that of the cowering barbarian. Lastly, a fleeing *pileatus* is making use of the gesture that characterised the numerous compositions of groups of fleeing or retreating barbarians on both the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns (see fig. 28).[223]

Another medium through which the viewer of Trajan's Column could have familiarised

[221] Cf. Leander-Toati (1987) 17.
[222] Ibidem, 22.
[223] Ibidem, 22-24.

himself with the figure types appearing on the monument's frieze was Trajan's imperial coinage. Various reverse types of coins issued in celebration of his Dacian victories depict images that can be regarded as visual equivalents to the iconographic formulas used to portray barbarians on his column. For instance, the motif of the kneeling Dacian also appears on the reverse of Trajanic *aes* coin types minted between 103 and 111. It depicts Trajan on horseback, trusting his spear at a female Dacian figure (see fig. 29) whose pose is very reminiscent of that of the Dacian king Decebalus taking his own life (see fig. 9, above).[224] A similar coin type also presents Trajan on horseback while spearing a Dacian, who is kneeling underneath rather than in front of the horse's feet.[225] Various coin reverses also depict images of kneeling and submissive Dacians, such as an *aureus* minted between 104 and 111, which shows how Trajan presents a kneeling Dacian to a personification of the Roman Senate. The kneeling figure is depicted in the same pose, and makes use of the same gestures as the kneeling suppliant Dacians on the Trajanic Column.[226]

Figure 27 The Great Trajanic Frieze slabs I-II. Leander-Toati (1987) pl. 1.

[224] RIC II Trajan 534-542, p. 282.
[225] RIC II Trajan 543-546, p. 282.
[226] RIC II Trajan 187.

Figure 28 The Great Trajanic Frieze slabs V-VI. Leander-Touati (1988) pl. 3.

Figure 29 Denarius minted by Trajan with an image of Trajan spearing a Dacian on its reverse. http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/trajan/RIC_0534.1.jpg

Figure 31 Denarius minted by Trajan with a reverse image of Pax seated on a throne with a kneeling submissive Dacian in front of her. http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/trajan/RIC_0187.1.jpg

To those viewing the scenes and figures on the Aurelianic Column, Trajan's Column must have served as an important visual antecedent. As I have demonstrated, many of the barbarian figure types appearing on the frieze of the Aurelianic Column were also employed on 'the model' of this monument. As was stated in the above, some of the visual formulas presented on the Great Trajanic Frieze, such as the depiction of a cowering barbarian, could also have familiarised the contemporary viewers of the Aurelianic column with some of the recurring figural compositions on its frieze. Apart from these Trajanic visual counterparts through which the ancient viewer could perceive the same visual formulas that characterised the representation of barbarians on the Aurelianic Column, there were also various contemporary equivalents that could serve the same purpose. For instance, a standardised representation of a submissive barbarian can be found on one of the Panel Reliefs of Marcus Aurlius (see fig. 31), which also celebrated Marcus' victory over his German and Sarmatian enemies. They were originally part of one or two lost arches of Marcus Aurelius and set up in Rome between 176 and 180.[227] Secondly, Beckmann has illustrated that generic images of fallen, captive barbarians and distressed female barbarians also appeared on many of the roughly contemporary Antonine battle sarcophagi which represented mythological battles or historical battles with Rome's northern barbarian enemies.[228] An example is provided by the Portonaccio Sarcophagus, which

[227] Its exact location is unknown. On the relief, see for instance Kleiner (1992) 288-292; Tuck (2015) 256.

[228] Beckmann (2003) 123-155; Beckmann (2011) 173-176. On battle sarcophagi, also see Kleiner (1992) 301-305.

is also roughly contemporary to the Aurelianic Column as it is dated between 180 and 190. It may well have been the sarcophagus of one of the leading generals fighting in Marcus Aurelius' Marcomannic Wars.[229] The extremely densely packed battle scene on this lavish sarcophagus contain several of the barbarian figure types discussed in the above, such as that of the cowering and falling barbarian, as well as representations of fleeing barbarians in the upper regiment of the battle scene (see fig. 32).

Figure 31 One of the Panel Reliefs of Marcus Aurelius showing two submissive barbarian figures. Kleiner (1992) 292.

[229]On the Portonaccio Sarcophagus, see Kleiner (1992); Tuck (2015) 265-268.

Figure 31 The battle scene on the Portonaccio Sarcophagus. Tuck (2015) 267.

Altogether, the presence of the same figural compositions of barbarians that predominate the columns of Trajan and Marcus on other contemporary works of art illustrates how the 'redundancy' of these barbarian types was in fact created on two levels. On the columns themselves, this redundancy resulted from their constant reiteration of a limited number of fixed iconographic formulas in each scene type. As such, I have argued that we should regard these recurring figural compositions of barbarians as integral parts of the visual languages of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Secondly, the employment of the same visual formulas in contemporary works of art, such as the Great Trajanic Frieze and Roman battle sarcophagi, implies that the ancient viewer could also encounter the barbarian types that characterise the scenes on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius elsewhere. Hence, it can be argued that the repetition of the same iconographic formulas on the columns as well as other contemporary monuments created a 'double' redundancy.

IV. Explaining difference: the meaning of the artistic representations of Rome's barbarian enemies

The previous two chapters have illustrated how the representation of barbarian enemies on the friezes of the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns was characterised by the recurrence of a limited number of and scene types in which highly standardised and stereotypical barbarian figures prevailed. I have demonstrated how these figures defined the two scene types in which barbarian figures were portrayed: scenes portraying battle and scenes representing interactions between the emperor and his barbarian enemies. Here, they were represented as the defeated or fleeing adversaries of the Roman army, as submissive envoys or as captives. As we have seen, each of these contexts can be regarded as allusions to the various outcomes of the defeat of Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' barbarian enemies. While the repetition of these standardised barbarian figures, or barbarian types, should be regarded as one of the defining aspects of the visual languages of both monuments, various differences in their visual languages can be discerned as well. In this final and conclusive chapter, I will look into the similarities and differences of the visual languages through which the columns represented the barbarian enemies of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Since an artwork's visual language is actually constituted by two aspects: its overall stylistic and formal appearance on the one hand, and its imagery on the other, both of these elements will be taken into account in the analysis that will be made in this chapter.

The columns and their imagery

Beginning with the images of barbarians on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, various conclusions can be drawn. First and foremost, they can be characterised by their highly stereotypical traits, such as their long-haired and bearded appearances and their costumes. These were not historically accurate representations. Instead, the barbarian figures appearing on the columns should first and foremost be regarded as generic stereotypes, which were based on the prevailing stereotypical conceptions of northern barbarians in Rome.[230] Furthermore, the same generic and a-historical representation would allow the ancient viewer to clearly distinguish between figures representing Roman or auxiliary soldiers from their barbarian adversaries, which in turn would also facilitate their interpretation of the scenes in which such

[230] See for instance Tac., *Germ.* XVII, on the clothing habits of Germanic barbarians.

figures appeared. Secondly, the previous chapter has demonstrated the importance of the recurring iconographic formulas in the representation of barbarians on the columns, which served as the primary carriers of semantic value of the scenes in which they were employed. Because of their repetition on the column frieze as well as on other contemporary works of art, these figures can be regarded as redundant images that ensured the beholders of both monuments could extract comprehensive messages from their friezes, despite their overall entropy.

Yet, differences between the visual languages of the Trajanic and Aurelianic Columns can be discerned as well. First and foremost, although some barbarian types, such as that of the defeated sitting barbarian and the standing submissive barbarian, appear in scenes on both Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' Column, not all types do so; falling and cowering barbarians are virtually absent from Trajan's Column, while the importance of captive figures also seems to have increased on the Aurelianic Column. The same can be argued with regard to the figure types that were used to represent barbarian women, which are almost entirely absent from the scenes on Trajan's Column. Apart from the variations in the iconographic formulas employed on the columns, another important difference between the two monuments is constituted by the increased incorporation of violence on the Aurelianic Column. Many scholars have emphasised that its imagery reflects an increased willingness to depict the cruelties inherent to ancient warfare, such as the execution of large groups of enemies and the harassment and rape of women, especially in the light of the absence of such scenes on the Trajanic Column.[231]

Indeed, the scene portraying the peaceful shipment of a female barbarian figure supervised by Trajan stands in sharp contrast to the images of women we find on the Aurelianic Column. Similarly, the more violent scenes on Trajan's Column, such as those portraying the suicide of Dacians, like scenes 140 and 145, are also telling. Apparently, these Dacians preferred taking their own lives over being enslaved or killed by Roman soldiers when they realised their defeat was imminent; a deed that was deemed highly respectable in Roman eyes.[232] The 'worthy' death of these Dacians provides a contrast to the execution of the

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[231] See for instance Pirson (1990) 173 ff; Kleiner (1992) 298-300; Hölscher (2000); Hannestadt (2001); Smith (2002) 78-82; Dillon (2006); Ferris (2009); Beckmann (2011) 194-195.

[232] A telling example is presented by Plutarch's description of the suicide of Cato the Younger, who preferred killing himself after Caesar's victory of Battle of Thapsus. See Plut., *Cat. Min.* LXX.6.

Germanic barbarians on the Aurelianic Column, especially since they are executed by their compatriots. Further evidence of the representation of the Dacians as respectable enemies is provided by the fact that in each battle scene, they are presented as fiercely attempting to defend themselves from their Roman opponents. By contrast, the reduction of the number of properly fighting figures on the Aurelianic Column did not convey the notion of brave, yet futile barbarian resistance, but instead was illustrative of the overruling force of the Roman army and the inevitability of their defeat. Hence, although the mechanisms through which messages were communicated by the complex scenes on the columns were the same, some important differences in the emphases of their iconographic can be discerned as well.

The columns and their styles

Other differences between the visual languages of the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius can be found in their stylistic forms. Generally speaking, these were formed by the contrast between the 'Classical' and detailed execution of the figures on the Column of Trajan on the one hand, and the expressionistic, Baroque style and heightened abstraction that characterise the figures on the Aurelianic Column. As I have argued, this expressionism and abstraction are the result of the absence of details in the backgrounds of the column's scenes, the proportions of its figures, and the composition of its scenes in two or three distinct horizontal sections. Furthermore, the higher relief in which the figures on its frieze have been carved, as well as the deep carving and drilling of details on each individual figure also comprise an important stylistic deviation. The addition of such details was made possible by a new sculptural technique that entailed the carving of details with a drill, which became common in the Antonine Age. Hence, it can be argued that the presence of such detailed figures extending further from the column's background should be merely attributed to this artistic innovation.

However, the fact that the more or less contemporary relief panels of Marcus Aurelius are not executed in this style, but are more reminiscent of the 'classical' tradition,[233] suggests the choice for the style in which the reliefs on the Aurelianic Column were executed was a conscious one and was not merely the result of the artistic conventions of the Antonine period. Indeed, as has been argued, during the Roman Empire the commissioner of a work of art could exert a considerable influence on the work of the artist. This holds especially true for the

[233] Cf. Beckmann (2011) 176-177.

columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, the design and construction of which were carefully monitored by a 'column committee'. Hence, the following question arises: what were the reasons behind this stylistic choice? Hölscher has already demonstrated how the overall 'form' of a work of Roman art – which encompassed its style, as well as its formal and compositional characteristics – were primarily dictated by their contents and the messages they were intended to convey. Hence, various differences between the form of the Column of Trajan and that of Marcus Aurelius, suggests the monuments were produced with the intention of conveying different messages. Apparently, the abstract and expressionist style of the Aurelianic Column was deemed more appropriate for the dispersal of its message than the more traditional style of Trajan's Column. This brings us to yet another important question: what messages did the columns broadcast to their ancient beholders?

Explaining difference

Many of the hitherto proposed interpretations of the frieze of the Aurelianic Column and its representation of Marcus Aurelius' barbarian adversaries have revolved around the prevalence of violence on the monument, such as the idea that the images on the column were commissioned by Commodus, who was known for his cruel character,[234] reflected the sentiments of insecurity and anxiety because of the economic and political troubles during the reign of Marcus Aurelius,[235] or served to ensure the viewer that the Germans and Sarmatians had received appropriate punishments.[236] In my opinion, however, the idea of a drastic shift towards more violence in the representation of barbarians is partially misguided. In fact, it is my contention that the iconographic change occurring on Marcus Aurelius' Column is not as profound as has hitherto been taken for granted if we place the work in the longer tradition of barbarian representations: we can already discern an increased willingness to include violence in the images on Trajan's column.

Not only was the Trajanic Column one of the first monuments within the city of Rome that portrayed barbarians and their battles with Roman soldiers in considerable numbers, the

[234] Bianchi Bandinelli (1978) 136.
[235] Hannestadt (2001) 151-152. Ferris argued that under these circumstances the ancient Roman conception of the barbarian changed; they were no longer regarded as human beings, hence the violence towards them as depicted on the Aurelianic Column could be justified. See Ferris (2009) 131-151.
[236] Hölscher (2000); Smith (2002) 78-82; Beckmann (2003) 202-209; Beckmann (2011) 194-198.

scale and shape of the monument itself also added to its novel and conspicuous character. What is more, the column contains various explicit references to wartime violence. Apart from the various scenes depicting Dacian suicides, the appearance of severed heads in several of the column's scenes is also telling. Although the artist has only employed this motif in 6 of the columns 155 scenes, the gruesome images of severed Dacian heads seem to contradict the frieze's emphasis on the positive and non-violent aspects of the Dacian Wars, for instance by scenes depicting construction and sacrifice.[237] Furthermore, given the fact that the motif of the severed Dacian head appears twice in scene 24, which was set in the column's third spiral and was therefore clearly visible from the ground, suggests the artist did not attempt to prevent his viewers from noticing these cruel details.

The motif of the severed head appears in three variations on the column's surface and each of these variations are present in scene 24 (see fig. 7, above). Its leftmost section contains a composition of two auxiliary soldiers who each present the severed head of a Dacian to the emperor. This motif appears again in scenes 71 and 146. One of the heads in the latter scene is believed to represent that of the Dacian king Decebalus, whose suicide is depicted in scene 145. According to Dio, after his suicide his head was severed from his corpse and subsequently and dis played as a trophy during Trajan's triumphal procession in Rome.[238] Secondly, the middle section of scene 24 contains the image of a fighting auxiliary soldier who is clenching the hair of another severed Dacian head between his teeth (see fig. 7, above). A similar composition can be found in scene 113, where a fighting Roman auxiliary soldier holds the severed head of a Dacian in his hand.[239] Lastly, the rightmost section of scene 24 presents the gruesome image of six Dacian heads that have been impaled on stakes, which have subsequently been displayed on the walls of a Dacian fortification (see fig. 33). A similar composition of impaled Dacian heads can be found in scene 56. Moreover, the motif of the severed head also appeared on the Great Trajanic Frieze in Rome. One of the slabs of this frieze also confronts the viewer with images of severed Dacian heads. Two *equites singulares* – recognisable through their crested

[237] See for instance Settis et. al. (1988) 6, 10-11; Kleiner (1992) 216-217; Davies (1997) 63 ff; Davies (2000) 132-33; Ferris (2013) 55. Furthermore, Stadter has emphasised the importance of *humanitas* in the imperial representation of Trajan. See Stadter (2002) 229 ff.

[238] Dio. LXVIII.15.3.

[239] Cf. Settis et. al. (1988) 468; Koeppel (1992) 93.

helmets – approach the emperor from the background. Each of them carries the severed head of their defeated Dacian opponents (see fig. 27, above). Another foot soldier depicted towards the centre of the slab holds a fleeing Dacian by the hair, while leaning forward and raising his right arm to deliver a fatal blow to his opponent's neck.

On the Aurelianic Column, on the other hand, images of severed heads were less prominent. In fact, severed heads appear only in scene 61, the infamous decapitation scene. Why then was this motif figure displayed so prominently on Trajan's Column? Nick Fields has emphasised that various archaeological and textual sources confirm that some auxiliary units did decapitate their defeated enemies and used their severed heads as trophies.[240] While Fields contends this suggests that the auxiliary soldiers depicted with the severed heads of their enemies on these monuments should therefore be identified as Celtic, in my view it is more likely that the artist was not so much concerned with the employment of this motif to clearly demarcate the ethnic origins of particular auxiliary soldiers, but primarily with the connotations of victory this motif evoked. Not only did severed head serve as a potent image signifying victory over a barbarian enemy by virtue of its status as the ultimate military trophy,[241] but the severed head can also be interpreted as a metaphor. Indeed, these decapitations of defeated barbarians can be regarded as symbolic references to decapitation of their entire people and their autonomy. While in Roman literature, it was not uncommon to use the human body as a

Figure 33 Scene 24-25 of Trajan's Column showing six Dacian heads impaled on a stake. http://www.trajans-column.org/?page_id=107#PhotoSwipe1503588560321

[240] Fields (2005) 57-63. The same interpretation has been put forward in: Chichorius (1896) 224; Lehmann-Hartleben (1926) 106; Rossi (1971) 191-192.
[241] Cf. Voisin (1984) 279-280; Zanker (1998) 54-55.

metaphor for the Roman state,[242] the same underlying connection was made by the artists of the three monuments commemorating the Dacian Wars: the decapitation of the Dacian was adopted as a metaphor for the 'decapitation' of Dacia itself, which had been defeated by the unyielding Roman army once and for all. As such it provided yet another illusion to the primary messages of the various barbarian types employed by the column's artist.

Notwithstanding, I want to emphasise that I am not arguing against the idea that the ancient beholder of the Aurelianic Column would be confronted with a fair share of violent images; this cannot be denied. In the light of the previous patterns of barbarian representation in Roman imperial monumental art however, the novel character of the Column of Trajan itself, as well as that of its imagery has simply received too little emphasis by previous scholarship, which has mainly focussed on the violent images that can be found on the Aurelianic Column.

In my view the main difference between the two columns lies in the frequency with which barbarians appear on their friezes. Indeed, on Trajan´s Column scenes portraying Dacians engaged in battle or while interacting with the emperor in acts of submission or as captives appear in only 45 of the column´s 155 scenes,[243] thus covering about 29% of its frieze. Contrastingly, these scenes cover at least 64 of the 116 scenes that constitute the frieze of the Column of Marcus Aurelius, which means they cover a little over 55% of its frieze.[244] As we have seen, virtually each of these scenes were characterised by the repeated occurrence of highly similar types that served as the primary carriers of meaning and alluded to the various effects of the defeat of these barbarian figures, such as their submission to the emperor or their death in the battlefield. The relatively limited share of scenes portraying barbarian figures on Trajan's Column in comparison to that of Marcus Aurelius does indeed illustrate how Trajan's monument emphasised the more 'peaceful' of warfare through scenes presenting the emperor making sacrifices, the marching Roman army or the construction of fortifications and military encampments. These all served to allude to the effective organisation and constructive force of the army under the *auspices* of Trajan.[245]

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[242] See for instance Voisin (1984) 283-285; Varner (2005); Marks (2008).
[243] I.e. 19 battle scenes and 26 scenes representing interactions between Marcus Aurelius and his barbarian enemies, see above.
[244] The column contained at least 30 battle scenes and 34 scenes representing interactions between Dacians and the emperor, see above.
[245] See for instance Settis et. al. (1988) 6, 10-11; Davies (1997) 63 ff; Davies (2000) 132-33; Ferris (2013) 55.

Contrastingly, the Aurelianic Column places a stronger emphasis on the encounters between Roman figures and their barbarian adversaries, hence underlining the importance of the defeat of the enemy rather than the activities that revolved around the active conduct of war that prevail on Trajan's Column. Furthermore, women, who are often accompanied by a barbarian child, are also active subjects in many of the scenes on the Aurelianic Column. Their presence served to further emphasise the defeated status of the Germanic and Sarmatian barbarians since they signified the defeat of these peoples in their entirety; not only the barbarian men, but also their women and children are now all equally subjected to the mercy of the emperor and his soldiers.[246]

How can these observations enhance our understanding of the messages which the Trajanic and Aurelianic Columns aimed to broadcast? While the date of the Column of Marcus Aurelius suggests its construction already started during the reign of Marcus Aurelius – most likely around 176 – we can dismiss the idea that the design of its frieze had been devised by Commodus. Likewise, the ideas that the column's images were to evoke a particularly emotional response or to emphasise the punishment of the Germans and Sarmatians are also unlikely, simply because of the fact that to the people of imperial Rome, such violence was not particularly abhorring or condemnable. In fact, the Roman viewer would be confronted with similar images of extreme violence public space more often; for instance when he attended gladiatorial games in the arena.[247] As we have seen, rather explicit images of war time violence would also be displayed during triumphal processions in Rome. Josephus, for instance, mentions the brutal slaughter of enemies, the destruction of their villages and the sheer numbers of fleeing, captive and submissive barbarians on the paintings that were displayed during Vespasian's and Titus' victories in Judea.[248] What is more, Philostratus the Elder describes how people looked with fascination, rather than with abhorrence to such images, calling the images of fallen men a 'pleasing' feature, rather than a gruesome depiction.[249]

Hence, the idea that the violent imagery of the Aurelianic Column served to trigger emotional responses from the part of its viewers, stems from the modern abhorrence and

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[246] Cf. Dillon (2006) 258ff.; Ferris (2013) 32-35.

[247] According to Zanker, these provided a form of institutionalised violence to temper aggressive energy and tensions in urban societies, like that of Rome. See Zanker (1998); Zanker (2004) 87.

[248] J. *BJ*. VII.139-148. Also see p. 44, above.

[249] Philostrates describes them as χαρίεν, see Phil. *Imag*. II, 5.1.

condemnation of explicit images of violence. To the ancient Roman viewer, however, such images did not evoke the same sentiments. Instead, an alternative and more convincing interpretation can be made. As we have seen, the Aurelianic Column placed a stronger emphasis on the defeat of the barbarian enemy, whilst Trajan's primary focus was on images showing the orderly conduct of secondary wartime activities. This difference in emphasis can help us to gain a better understanding of the different messages the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius conveyed to their audiences. Furthermore, the locations and intended audiences of the monuments provide another important starting point.

As we have seen, Trajan's Column was located on the Forum of Trajan, where it stood among buildings and monuments that all served to commemorate the successful outcome of the Dacian Wars and the benefits these had brought to the civic population of Rome that would be visiting the forum:[250] the entire complex had been constructed because of the revenue of these wars and could now be used by the inhabitants of Rome. As a victory monument containing a narrative frieze alluding to the very same wars, Trajan's Column shared this commemorative purpose with the rest of the forum's structures. Its emphasis on scenes that did not depict direct confrontations between Romans and Dacians, but rather on those alluding to more peaceful activities of the campaigning emperor and his army can be interpreted as allusions to the same beneficial character of the Dacian Wars. The defeat and submission of the enemy was not of primary importance here, since the Dacian Wars were not fought out of necessity. Although the exact impetus for Trajan's decisions to attack the Dacians are not entirely clear, his pursuit of personal glory, the need for revenues, or the wish to improve the security of the Roman frontier seem the most likely motivations.[251] It was thus Romans themselves who initiated the war by invading Dacia. The civic population of Rome, and especially that part of them that visited Trajan's Forum, thus had to be convinced of the advantages brought about by the costly military campaigns that had been initiated in a period of peace, while the empire's resources had been largely depleted by Domitian's costly campaigns against the very same Dacian enemies.[252] The numerous allusions to the constructive force of the army and its skilful organisation under the

[250] Cf. Zanker (1970); Settis et. al. (1988) 38-40; Packer (2001) 187f.; Davies (19997) 61-63; Davies (2000) 131; Ferris (2013) 53.
[251] See Lepper & Frere (1988) 277–89 on these and other possible motivations for the Dacian Wars.
[252] See Dio LXVII.6

supervision of Trajan served this specific purpose.

Contrastingly, the pretext for the beginning of the Marcomannic Wars was wholly different. These were fought out of necessity; to call the barbarian invasions into the Roman Empire to a halt. Especially the Marcomannic invasion of Italy and their siege of Aquileia revealed the magnitude of the threat of these barbarian incursions to the peace and stability of the Roman Empire, which was already troubled because of the considerable restraints the Parthian Wars of 161-166 had put on the empire's resources and the large-scale outbreak of the Antonine Plague.[253] Moreover, the Germanic invasion of Italy also triggered other invasions elsewhere in the Roman Empire, such as that of the Costoboci into the Balkans and Greece, where they destroyed the shrine of the Mysteries at Eleusis. Likewise, in southern Spain, there were invasions of Moors who had crossed the Strait of Gibraltar. The news of the barbarian invasion of Italy had also reached the eastern provinces, where a rebellion in the Nile Delta occurred. The Roman client-king of Armenia was also shortly deposed as the result of a large-scale revolt.[254] What is more in 175 the Empire was shaken by another rebellion: that of Avidius Cassius, the governor of Syria who had himself proclaimed emperor.[255] Although each of these rebellions was eventually crushed, they clearly illustrate that the political order and stability of the Roman Empire were no longer self-evident.

In this context, the column's focus on the defeat of all Germanic and Sarmatian barbarians, including their women and children would be a very relevant message. The need of the defeat of the entire nations of these rebellious barbarians is also illustrated by Cassius Dio, who describes that Marcus Aurelius 'wished to annihilate' all of the Germanic Quadi 'utterly'.[256] Both Pirson and Dillon have argued that through this 'total defeat' the column illustrated the Roman army had not lost its military power and superiority.[257] However, they do not specify for whom exactly this message was intended. The spatial context of the Aurelianic Column may provide an answer to this final question. As I have argued, the column's orientation to the Via Flaminia as well as the close connotations between the northern plain of the Campus Martius and the Roman army suggests the monument was primarily aimed at a

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[253] See for instance SHA, *Marc.* XVII.2; Dio LXXI.2 Cf. Birley (2012) 222-224.
[254] Dio. LXXI.3.1, LXXII.4.1-2, 71.3.1; SHA *Marc.* XXI.2. Cf. Birley (2012) 225-226.
[255] SHA, *Avid.* VII; Dio LXXII.22. Cf. Birley (2012) 227.
[256] 'ἐπίπαν ἐξελεῖν ἠθέλησεν'. See Dio LXII.13.1-2.
[257] Cf. Pirson (1996) 168f.; Dillon (2006) 244-263.

military audience. Hence, its message was primarily intended for the Roman soldiers marching from Rome or returning to the empire's capital from their campaigns in the northern Roman Empire. Notwithstanding, the column would also have spoken to other passers-by as it provided a strong confirmation of Roman military strength and resilience; it had withstood the pressure of invading and rebellious barbarians and would continue to do so in the future.

V. Conclusion

In the above, I have attempted to shed more light on a historical question that has not remained unnoticed by (art)historians: the changes in the artistic representation of barbarians from Trajan's Column to that of Marcus Aurelius, and especially the increased inclusion of violent imagery on the latter. So far, various divergent explanations for this phenomenon have been put forward, ranging from the belief that the images on the Aurelianic Column were the product of the cruel and maniacal mind of Marcus Aurelius' son Commodus to the argument that the more explicit portrayal of violence towards barbarian enemies served to affirm they had received an appropriate punishment for their transgressive behaviour. However, rather than explaining the meaning of this change from the perspective of the contemporary ancient Roman viewer, these interpretations reveal more about our own contemporary rejection and condemnation of violence than they do about the ancient Roman viewer's interpretation of such imagery. My aim has therefore been to revisit the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius and the way in which they represent Rome's barbarian enemies from the perspective of their contemporary Roman viewers.

I have argued that in the Roman empire, art served as an important medium of mass communication. Hence, to shed more light on the specific message that was conveyed to the viewers of the Trajanic and Aurelianic columns, I have firstly reflected on the way in which artworks were able to broadcast messages to their beholders: through their visual languages. In short, I have demonstrated that this visual language, or the underlying structure that enabled the communicative function of ancient art, was in fact constituted by two 'pillars': the overall appearance, or form, of an artwork on the one hand, and its images on the other. While the former aspect encompassed the stylistic, as well as formal and compositional characteristics of a work of art, which Hölscher has integrated in the concept of 'form', the latter concerns the individual images that constitute the artwork itself and their function as symbols referring to concepts and beliefs beyond themselves.

Before moving on to the visual languages of the columns and the differences between them, the first chapter focussed on various important contextual aspects that are of crucial importance to shed more light on the way the columns would be viewed and interpreted by their contemporary Roman beholders. After having established that the columns and the many images on their surfaces were ultimately the result of the planning and design provided by their

patrons, the Roman Senate and the emperor himself, and the skill and technique of the individual artists who sculpted them, the historical circumstances under which the monuments were put up and their geographical locations were discussed. I have argued that both monuments were put up as victory monuments, and primarily served to celebrate the successful outcome of two major military campaigns of the High Empire: Trajan's Dacian Wars and Marcus Aurelius' Marcomannic Wars. While both monuments were put up in the capital of the Roman empire, their locations already constitute an important difference. Indeed, while Trajan's Column stood in the very centre of Rome on Trajan's forum complex which was entirely devoted to the emperor and his military victories in Dacia, the Column of Marcus Aurelius stood in an area that was not reserved for the celebration of his own achievements, but to those of other emperors and members of the imperial family as well. His column was located on the northern plain of the Campus Martius, an area that was known for the abundance of imperial honorary monuments and imperial apotheosis. Yet, I have argued that the Campus Martius, and especially its northern plain, was also a location that was associated with military victory: having fulfilled a military function in republican times, it was now the location of imperial victory monuments celebrating Roman military successes against Northern barbarian tribes. Furthermore, the Via Flaminia, which served as the primary roadway that connected Rome to the northern parts of the Empire, flanked the northern plain of the Campus Martius. Apart from being used by merchants and travellers, the Via Flaminia was also important to the Roman army: the road was used by Roman soldiers marching off to defend the glory of the Roman Empire in its northern provinces, or returning to the city to participate in military triumphs after their northern victories. Given its location on the northern plain of the Campus Martius, and especially through its orientation to the Via Flaminia, the Column of Marcus Aurelius should, therefore, be viewed from the same military perspective.

The difference in the location of the columns also entails they were intended for different audiences. I have demonstrated that, despite its explicit and omnipresent references to Trajan's military victories, the Forum of Trajan should first and foremost be regarded as a civic area. The buildings on the forum complex were primarily used for judicial and commercial activities. Therefore, it is my contention that the majority of the viewers of Trajan's Column would be part of Rome's civic population. Contrastingly, the fact that the Column of Marcus Aurelius was orientated to the Via Flaminia implies that it was not intended for such a civic

audience, but rather aimed at those travelling to or away from Rome. The further military connotations of the area in which the column was put up suggests it was primarily targeting the Roman soldiers who passed the monument when they marched along the Via Flaminia.

Next, I addressed the question of *how* these specific audiences would view the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius and the many images of barbarian enemies on their surfaces. The helical design of the friezes encircling the columns would have provided a considerable restraint to the ancient viewer trying to 'read' the narratives they contained. Apart from the fact that the viewer would have had to keep walking around the columns to do so, the height of the columns also prevented the viewer from seeing all of its scenes; as the friezes spiralled towards the top of the columns, their images became increasingly less visible. Even the application of colour to the friezes, the availability of viewing platforms or technical improvements did not alter the fact that reading the friezes and their narratives from bottom was simply impossible. However, I have argued that this was not problematic because the columns were not intended to serve as chronological narratives on the Dacian and Marcomannic campaigns. Instead, they were more concerned with the communication of ideological messages. These were primarily conveyed through the various scene types on the friezes: marching and *profectio*, *adlocutio*, *lustratio*, building activities, battles, and the emperor's interaction with barbarian envoys and captives. The fact that these various scene types were repeated throughout the columns' surfaces allowed the viewer to be able to interpret their entire friezes, even though they could not view each individual scene. Indeed, since he could clearly view and interpret the scenes in the lowest portions of the columns, and viewed them again as they were repeated as the friezes spiralled upwards, he could fill in the contents of a scene which details he could no longer distinguish.

In the next chapter, I have scrutinised the scene types in which Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' barbarian foes appear. These were highly standardised and structured because of the presence of almost identical figures: barbarian types, or iconographic formulas. In short, the battle scenes and the scenes portraying barbarian envoys or captives can be characterised by the recurrence of a limited number of generic and highly stereotypical barbarian figures who appear in the same poses and often make use of the same gestures.

It is my contention that these barbarian types formed an integral part of the visual languages of both the Trajanic and Aurelianic column and that they would have been essential to the interpretation of the monuments and their friezes by the ancient viewer. Approaching this

phenomenon from the perspective of information theory has shed more light on the importance of these figure types. I have argued that the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius should both be regarded as systems of high entropy. The many individual figures on their friezes, the complex compositions of the scenes in which these appeared, and the limited visibility of the frieze would have provided a considerable challenge to the ancient viewer trying to interpret the friezes and extract the messages that were embedded into them. The barbarian types facilitated this process by reducing the 'noise', or incomprehensible information, of the friezes. In short, each of these types served as the primary means through which the ancient viewer could identify the subject of a scene, as well as its message. These lay encoded in the poses and gestures of these types. For instance, the images of fallen barbarians in the battle scenes signified their defeat and hence the victory of the Roman army in battle, which was the primary message of these scenes. Alternatively, images of pleading barbarians specified to the viewer that the barbarians standing or kneeling in front of the emperor had subjected themselves to his mercy.

The presence of one, but often multiple, of such types in virtually every scene representing barbarians, would create a certain recognisability in the minds of their beholders; through their constant reiteration on the column's surface, they would stand out to the ancient viewer as familiar images or characteristics of the scenes portraying Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius' barbarian enemies: they had become redundant. Apart from the repetition of a limited number of types on the column itself, this redundancy was also created by the presence of the same barbarian types on other, contemporary works of art that provided visual antecedents of the iconographic formulas on the Trajanic and Aurelianic Columns. The viewer could, thus, already have familiarised himself with the barbarian types through other media. Hence altogether, the 'double redundancy' of the iconographic formulas characterising the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius would ensure the viewer was able to extract comprehensive messages from their friezes.

The visual languages of both the Trajanic and the Aurelianic column were, thus, both characterised by the repetition of a limited number of standardised and highly stereotypical barbarian types. Yet, their visual languages differed on a number of fundamental aspects as well. These have been discussed in the final chapter. On the level of the columns and their imagery, the representation of the Dacian barbarian as a respectable enemy on Trajan's Column

contrasted sharply with the emphasis on the overruling force of the Roman army and the inevitability of barbarian defeat on the Aurelianic Column. The presence of barbarian types representing female barbarians and the increased importance of the iconographic formula of the captive barbarian on its frieze also serve to strengthen this notion of the 'total' defeat of the barbarian. The different stylistic, formal and compositional characteristics of the columns also revealed a number of important differences between the columns. As I have argued, the heightened expressionism and abstraction on the Aurelianic Column were employed consciously and therefore suggest the column was intended to broadcast a message that was different from Trajan's Column, a message that focussed on the more explicit portrayal of the defeat of the barbarian enemy than its Trajanic 'model'.

Indeed, I have argued that the difference between the column of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius and the way in which they portray Rome's barbarian foes, should not be sought in the increased willingness to portray violence, but rather in the frequency with which barbarians appear on the columns. While barbarians appear in about 29% of the scenes covering the Column of Trajan, they appear in over 55% of the scenes on the Column of Marcus Aurelius. This difference can be explained by the fact that Trajan's Column served to convince the visitors of the Forum of Trajan of the advantages of the costly Dacian campaigns. It did so by focussing on the peaceful and constructive activities of Trajan's campaigns in Dacia; the defeat and submission of the enemy were simply not of primary importance to his audience. Contrastingly, in the context of the primarily military audience of the Aurelianic Column as well as the challenges to the political order and stability in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the total defeat of the barbarian enemy would have been a very relevant and reassuring message. Hence altogether, the different ways in which the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius portray the barbarian enemies of the Roman empire can be explained by the different contexts and the different audiences in which and for which these conspicuous victory monuments were put up.

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