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Still Life in Stone: the pedestal reliefs of Trajan's Column

Partly due to the fact that historians and archaeologists have obsessed over the helical frieze on the shaft of Trajan's Column, the richly carved sides of the monument's pedestal have been largely ignored. The exception is the inscription over the door in the south-east face, generally accounted the finest surviving manifestation of Latin epigraphic art. The pedestal reliefs presented more than 600 items of barbarian *spolia* in exquisite detail. Only Piranesi and Percier in the 18th century addressed these sculptures in detail. Yet they contribute directly to the triumphal function of the Column as monument, and are closely linked to the frieze above by the details of the trophies dividing the two Dacian wars (Cichorius scene LXXVIII).

This paper will briefly examine the structure and decoration of the pedestal before employing the archaeological evidence for Danubian military artefacts to analyse what the reliefs actually depict. The items represent genuine barbarian *militaria*, specifically Dacian, with some practical misunderstandings, but their decoration is suspiciously Hellenising. This study reveals a great deal about the processes of barbarian defeat and spoliation. It also aids location of the reliefs within Roman triumphal iconography. The paper concludes by placing the monument in its original architectural setting and by exploring the implications of the pedestal reliefs for Roman triumphal celebration.