Setting War in Stone: Architectural Depictions on the Column of Marcus Aurelius

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The depictions of architecture on the Column of Marcus Aurelius are an important means of exploring how war along the frontier was presented to the capital. A comprehensive comparison between Antonine architectural depictions and their models on the Column of Trajan demonstrates careful modifications on the part of the Antonine designers to adapt Trajanic models to particular Antonine goals. The architectural depictions of the Antonine column frieze reinforce the larger ideological themes of the monument as a whole, portraying victory not only as the suppression of a barbarian threat but also as independent of expansion of Roman territory, in a dramatic departure from Trajanic precedents. The depicted architecture also reveals that the Antonine frieze should not be read merely as a dialogue between itself and the Column of Trajan but instead as part of a larger conversation among monumental reliefs in Rome, including the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Marcus Aurelius panels. Although traditionally analyzed for information concerning realities of the frontier, the presentation of war on the Antonine column frieze can be better understood as a means of addressing the experiences and concerns of a particular audience—namely, residents in the capital.¹

INTRODUCTION

Transforming ephemeral frontier victories into permanent monuments for public consumption in the Roman capital city was a complex undertaking. On the one hand, a given monument needed to respond to and reflect the contemporary conflict that it commemorated. On the other hand, each monument was erected within a preexisting visual landscape that included other monuments of numerous types to various conflicts. Monumental reliefs from the capital present a distinctive window into this process, since unlike other media, such as coins or paintings, they are large, relatively well preserved, and with a clear overall setting—namely, public architecture in Rome. The Column of Marcus Aurelius in turn offers an unusual opportunity to explore the interplay among such monuments and how this shaped the presentation of war. The column overtly references another monumental relief: many of the column’s constituent elements, from its overall design to the compositions

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of individual scenes, are modeled directly on the Column of Trajan. Yet the artists of the Antonine column did not adopt the Trajanic models wholesale, nor did they rely only on broad changes reflecting the different circumstances of the depicted conflicts. Rather, they made numerous detailed, active choices in order to craft a sophisticated vision of how victory would be defined in the Antonine context, drawing not only on the Column of Trajan but also on other monumental reliefs. This process can be seen particularly clearly in the monument’s architectural depictions. These demonstrate that the numerous choices, both formal and thematic, that shaped the presentation of war on the Antonine column frieze were concerned not so much with the realities of the frontier as with the experiences of the audience in Rome.

PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP AND A NEW APPROACH

The architectural depictions on the Column of Marcus Aurelius consist primarily of generic Roman fortifications and barbarian huts, interwoven throughout a narrative of war that spirals up the height of the column shaft in the form of a sculpted helical frieze. The original setting of the column is unclear, although it obviously stood on the Campus Martius, probably in the vicinity of the Temple of Divine Marcus and Faustina, which is known only from literary sources.2 The general topic of the figural frieze, campaigns waged by Marcus Aurelius (emperor 161–180 C.E.) against barbarians across the Rhine and Danube, is made evident by the adherence of the depicted enemy to standard stereotypes of northern barbarians. The precise topic—that is, which campaigns over which area are concerned primarily with attempts either to decipher the narrative of the frieze and connect it to historical sources or to draw historical significance from the column’s sculptural style.7 Recent decades have seen a productive shift in approach in the study of monumental reliefs, with scholars now emphasizing the artistic, political, and ideological forces that shaped these sculptural monuments.8 This new approach has come somewhat slowly to the Column of Marcus Aurelius but has begun to bear fruit.

In a particularly influential article, Pirson looked past issues of history or style to interpret differences between the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius.

1 I follow the traditional scene divisions and numbering system established by Cichorius (1896, 1900) and Petersen et al. (1896) for the Trajanic and Antonine columns, respectively.

2 This article uses the term “monumental reliefs” to refer to large-scale sculptures in relief, (presumably) set up in publicly accessible space, by groups or individuals acting in the capacity of official positions of authority (Sobociński and Wolfram Thill 2015). Traditionally, such sculptures are referred to as “historical” or “state” reliefs. For methodological critique of these terms, see Hölscher 2015, 37; Sobociński and Wolfram Thill 2015, 276–79. The city of Rome has by far the highest concentration of preserved monumental reliefs.

3 For the setting of the column, see, e.g., Coulston 1988, 18, 390; Hanoune 2000, 207; Beckmann 2003, 1–2, 23; 2011, 37–54; Clarke 2003, 45–7; Coarelli 2008, 12–32.

4 This can be seen from a cursory glance at the column itself but is outlined most clearly in Beckmann 2003, fig. 1.5.

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7 Although not as extensive as that devoted to its Trajanic predecessor, the bibliography on the Column of Marcus Aurelius is still too large to be listed in full here; see, e.g., Petersen et al. 1896; Rodenwaldt 1935; Morris 1952; Becatti 1955; 1960, 47–82; Caprino et al. 1955; Dobias 1962; Jordan-Ruwe 1990; Wolff 1990; Pirson 1996; Huet and Scheid 2000; Beckmann 2003, 2005, 2005–2006, 2011; Claridge 2005; Dillon 2006; Coarelli 2008; Ferris 2009; Kovács 2009; Depeyrot 2010; Griebel 2013.

in light of dissimilar ideologies regarding conquest. He argued that the earlier column stressed control and incorporation through virtues such as labor, in keeping with the glorious victories in the new province of Dacia. The later column, in contrast, focused on motifs of punishment and dominance over an inferior enemy, in keeping with the long slog of the ultimately indecisive Germanic wars. These divergent ideologies helped explain the violence and brutality of the later column, which was meant to reassure the Roman audience that the wars were being won. Similar themes were further explored in a 2000 volume edited by Huet and Scheid. More recently, Beckmann has analyzed sculptural features of the Antonine column to reconstruct the production of the monument and to reveal crucial artistic connections to contemporary sarcophagus workshops; in doing so, he further refines the context of the stylistic and narrative choices made on the column frieze. In the most recent monograph on the column, Griebel focuses on the composition of certain scenes on the frieze to argue for an underlying theme glorifying the emperor. Such scholarship demonstrates how close readings, coupled with an appreciation of patterns for the monument as a whole, can significantly advance our understanding of the column.

Scholarship on the depictions of architecture has mirrored trends for the column frieze in general. Early articles from the early 20th century focused on the structural accuracy and anthropological value of the depicted barbarian huts, with some consideration of the possible artistic source material for the depictions. Over the next 100 years, the depictions were mentioned in passing within the context of larger discussions of the column as a whole. In the 2000 volume edited by Huet and Scheid, a short article dedicated to the architectural depictions pointed out the potential for further study, and a few recent studies have integrated the architecture more purposefully into the thematic analysis of the column frieze. In his larger study of the portrayal of war on the frieze, Ferris briefly but cogently addressed the symbolic importance of the architecture on the Column of Marcus Aurelius in delineating Roman from barbarian and in creating a picture of barbarian culture as ephemeral and inferior. I have explored elsewhere what scenes of the destruction of architecture can reveal about how the Romans conceptualized cultural differences between themselves and the people they fought.

This article continues the approach of such ideologically focused scholarship, analyzing the depictions of architecture on the Column of Marcus Aurelius as potential contributors to the monument’s ideological messages and impact. From a methodological standpoint, revealing the significance for architectural depictions requires three components: (1) attention to all architectural details, rather than an exclusive focus on those related to a depiction’s identification or relevance for historical reconstructions; (2) treating those details as representing conscious choices rather than inevitable byproducts of “faithfully” illustrating a historical building or type; and (3) analyzing each representation and its details within the broader context of the monument as a whole.

The foundation of this article is a comprehensive analysis of all preserved architectural depictions on the column frieze, coupled with a close reading of individual scenes. For each depiction, I catalogued (as far as possible, given varying preservation) specific features related to form (e.g., building type, construction material, architectural details) and narrative (e.g., scene type, cultural associations). I then analyzed particular patterns in the distribution of features throughout the frieze, noting, for instance, the relative numerical frequency of architectural types and their distribution throughout the frieze. I also examined each depiction closely within the context of its given scene.

9 Pirson 1996.
10 Huet and Scheid 2000.
12 Griebel 2013.
13 Mielke 1915; Drexel 1918; Behn 1919a, 1919b.
14 E.g., Pirson 1996; Coarelli 2008; Beckmann 2011.
15 Hanoune 2000.
17 Wolfram Thill 2011.
Critical for my analysis was determination of the basic cultural association of each structure. For the most part, the frieze draws a clear distinction between structures that are associated with the Roman army and those associated with the barbarian enemy. My analysis classifies a structure as associated with Rome, or “Roman,” if it was (1) an architectural type with strong links to Rome (e.g., a monumental arch); (2) part of a collection of structures incorporating such architectural types; or (3) associated by context with the Roman army (e.g., fortifications occupied by legionaries). I associated a structure with barbarian culture if it was (1) a clearly non-Roman architectural type (e.g., a hut); (2) part of a collection of structures incorporating such architectural types; or (3) associated with the barbarian populace through narrative (e.g., structures being burned by Roman legionaries). Roman architecture on the frieze is represented primarily by completed stone fortifications, while nearly all the indigenous architecture is presented as simple reed or wooden huts. Only two barbarian structures are not huts: a wooden siege tower in the so-called Lightning Miracle (Scene 11; fig. 1), and a wood or reed fortification under testudo attack (Scene 54; fig. 2). Any analysis of the choices made in the creation of the column frieze necessarily raises several questions. The most obvious is, Who made those choices? Unfortunately, this question is notoriously difficult to answer. The few extant dedicatory inscriptions for monumental reliefs (including that of the Column of Trajan) record that the monuments were set up, at least nominally, by the senate and people of Rome for the emperor. Recent scholarship has tended to take these inscriptions at their word, interpreting monumental reliefs as a means by which the senate expressed its loyalty and expectations to the imperial regime. This opaque interaction involving the emperor, senate, and reliefs is further complicated for the Column of Marcus Aurelius because it is not clear when the frieze was undertaken and thus who was emperor at the time.

An exhaustive examination of the complicated problem of the column’s date, and thus possible patrons, is beyond the scope of this article. Some brief observations nevertheless are relevant. The dedicatory inscription is not extant, and the column’s sculpted base is preserved only in 16th-century drawings, which are too vague to support firm identifications of any figures. Only one scene on the frieze has been unambiguously linked to a definitive historical event: the Rain Miracle (Scene 16), which a combination of textual references and coins most likely dates to 174 C.E. This establishes only a terminus post quem for the lower spirals of the frieze. The absence on the frieze of any undisputed representation of Commodus has suggested to scholars that the depicted events predate his arrival at the front in 175 C.E. As a basis for dating, however, this not only assumes a great deal of historical fidelity and precision in the depictions but also would speak only to the date of the depicted events, not the date of commission or execution. One possible explanation for Commodus’ absence—rarely discussed—is that at least part of the frieze, particularly the upper spirals, was completed after his damnatio memoriae.


For conflicting identifications of Commodus on the pedestal reliefs, see, e.g., Clarke 2003, 45; Beckmann 2011, 202–6.

For the most convincing arguments for this date, see Wolff 1990; Beckmann 2011, 26; cf. Kovács 2009. For a summary of the debate of the miracle’s date, see Birley 2010, 39–40. The most common dates proposed range from 171 to 174 C.E., a distinction not important for the purposes of this article.

For the problem of identifying Commodus on the frieze, see Löhr 2009, 124, 128–30; Beckmann 2011, 29–36.

Coarelli (2008, 34, 36), who has evoked the damnatio memoriae as an explanation for Commodus’ absence from the frieze but seems to envisage a scenario in which preexisting portraits were removed; as Löhr (2009, 128) points out, there is no evidence for such erasure. Commodus’ damnatio did not last long, from his death in 192 C.E. to his renovatio memoriae and divination in 195 C.E. under Septimius Severus (Hekster 2012, 242–44). Commodus nevertheless remained unpopular with the senate (Hekster 2012, 243), the nominal sponsor of monumental reliefs, and his rehabilitation need not have extended to inserting him back into the column frieze, especially if plans were already underway to leave him out.
Although the visual elements of the frieze are broadly consistent, there are sufficient differences in the lower and upper spirals, in everything from planning to the distribution of different types of scenes, to indicate that the frieze was possibly executed over an extended period. The famous inscription CIL 6 1585b is often cited as establishing a terminus ante quem of 193 C.E. for the column’s completion;\textsuperscript{27} it records that Adrastus, a procurator columnae divi Marci, was granted permission in 193 C.E. to build a house in the column’s vicinity. As Moore has argued, however, it is not clear what Adrastus’ exact role was regarding the column, and the inscription preamble dates to 197–211 C.E.\textsuperscript{28} The inscription’s role in establishing a terminus ante quem for the frieze is thus tenuous. Given these uncertainties, it seems prudent to adopt only a broad date of post-174 C.E. for the column.

If the elite forces involved in the column’s commission are unclear, there is more evidence for those working closer to the stone. Beckmann’s close studies of technique and composition have demonstrated that the sculptors of the frieze were given somewhat wide latitude in executing the carving. They appear to have worked in discrete teams and to have relied on sculptural techniques developed in carving sarcophagi.

\textsuperscript{27}E.g., Coarelli 2008, 34; Löhr 2009, 128; Beckmann 2005, 310; 2011, 19–22; 2012, 253.
\textsuperscript{28}Moore 2012.
Between commission and execution, however, there is the rather large expanse of murky middle ground concerning the design of the frieze. Certain important scenes were laid out along vertical axes, and there are discernible patterns and themes that run throughout the length of the frieze, suggesting some degree of planning and supervision. Who planned and supervised what, however, is impossible to say. Our uncertainty in assigning authority thus extends from the monument’s conception to the execution of individual scenes. In this article, therefore, I use the term “the production team” as a purposely neutral catchall referring to anyone and everyone involved in the design of the column’s frieze.

Turning from patronage to the related question of audience, we can find firmer, if hardly very specific, evidence. Issues of how to tease out what monumental reliefs meant to different audiences are too complex to be explored in detail here. Nevertheless, we can make the simple but crucial observation that, as stationary objects, monumental reliefs, particularly the columns, are different from other media such as coins in that their broad audience is clear: the population of Rome. As architectural features on imperial building projects, the reliefs generally were intended to be seen by the public at large and often stood in high-traffic areas (e.g., forums, roads). The architectural depictions on the Column of Marcus Aurelius thus can help us better understand how war and victory were conceptualized, particularly in the capital city.

Complicating the exploration of audience are the questions raised by visibility. Scholars have long been under the impression that, as stationary objects, monumental reliefs, particularly the columns, are different from other media such as coins in that their broad audience is clear: the population of Rome. As architectural features on imperial building projects, the reliefs generally were intended to be seen by the public at large and often stood in high-traffic areas (e.g., forums, roads). The architectural depictions on the Column of Marcus Aurelius thus can help us better understand how war and victory were conceptualized, particularly in the capital city.

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Complicating the exploration of audience are the questions raised by visibility. Scholars have long been puzzled by the apparent incongruity between the wealth of detail present on both the Trajanic and Antonine friezes and the great height, and thus restricted visibility, of those details. Some scholars have argued that the Antonine production team reacted to the visibility problems of the Trajanic frieze by making adjustments in the Antonine monument: the height of the spirals is taller; the scene layouts are often more open; the depth of carving is greater; and the compositions are regularly arranged to draw more attention to the emperor. As Beckmann has recently pointed out, while it is true that the combined effect of these changes is somewhat clearer visibility, it is not apparent that visibility was their main, or even an intended, purpose. Carving depth, for example, was likewise increasing in contemporary sarcophagi, where there were not equivalent concerns about visibility. An overall decrease in the number of scenes on the Antonine frieze compared with its Trajanic predecessor (116 vs. 154) may have been the result of fewer episodes chosen for illustration. If the Antonine production team wanted to privilege visibility, furthermore, they made some very odd choices. Most notably, they increased the height of the pedestal from 6.2 to 10.2 m. They also made frequent use of complex compositions with multiple layers and rows of figures, occasionally overlapping scene types within a single composition (e.g., Scene 30, which combines a sacrifice in the upper register with a river crossing below).

In the Antonine column, as previously in the Trajanic column, there are no apparent adjustments in the way details are handled at different heights from the ground. Some scenes or sequences seem to have been purposefully positioned low on the shaft so as to be seen more easily. But it does not follow that we should discount the details of higher scenes as less important. Indeed, to do so would require arbitrarily deciding where and which details lose their significance, given that patterns
of representation tend to be consistent throughout the friezes. Although confusing to modern sensibilities, all current evidence suggests that visibility (or the lack thereof) rarely seems to have affected the care given to sculptural details, and accordingly this article treats all details as potentially significant regardless of the height at which they are located.

A final question regarding the choices made in the production of monumental reliefs concerns the sources for various visual motifs. Unusually for monumental reliefs, an immediate source of inspiration is apparent for the Column of Marcus Aurelius—namely, the Column of Trajan. The former borrows several distinctive large-scale features from the latter: the two monuments are both 100 Roman feet high, with an internal helical staircase leading to a crowning platform, and an external helical frieze that gives the impression of a war narrative. Given that the two columns are the only examples of their kind extant in Rome or listed in third- and fourth-century regionary catalogues, and that the Trajanic column had stood only 800 m to the south of the Antonine column for some 75 years, there has been a long-standing scholarly consensus that the Antonine production team designed their monument to directly evoke the Column of Trajan.

More contentious is discussion of the extent to which the Antonine production team drew on specific elements of the Trajanic frieze in designing their own compositions. The Antonine production team certainly was looking at the Trajanic frieze in detail, since the friezes share specific design features such as the alignment of important scenes along vertical axes and the use of a Victory with shield at the approximate halfway point of each frieze. Notable scenes are also adopted and adapted, such as the siege of a barbarian fortification by testudo formation (see figs. 2, 3) and the opening sequence of frontier settlements (figs. 4, 5). As will be seen, further compositional elements from various Trajanic scenes are found throughout the Antonine frieze, although in many cases it is not apparent why certain elements were borrowed or why they appear where they do. Beckmann has demonstrated that many imitated scenes were selected primarily according to their position on the shaft of the Column of Trajan: either along the lower spirals, near the central Victory, or at a height corresponding to the roofline of the surrounding buildings.

It may be posited that these shared compositional elements on the friezes reflect not a close, direct relationship but instead reliance on common, now lost, models, such as triumphal paintings. This is unlikely taken from the Column of Trajan. A previously singular monument was chosen as a pattern and, despite all its transformations, can be identified as the model through some conspicuous details.) See also Hölscher 2000, esp. 89, 91; Beckmann 2011, 58, 89–106; Boschung 2012a, 307–8.

41 Victory: Trajanic Scenes 78–79; Antonine Scenes 55–56. See supra n. 29

42 Opening sequence: Trajanic Scenes 1–3; Antonine Scenes 1–3. Testudo siege: Trajanic Scene 76; Antonine Scene 54.


44 Triumphal paintings have long been assumed to have been an influential source for monumental reliefs, particularly for architectural depictions; Lusnia (2006) has even gone so far as to argue that the panels of the Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome are direct reproductions in stone of triumphal paintings. Yet, since not a single painting survives, it is difficult to assess their specific appearance or influence. For the connections among architectural depictions, triumphal painting, and monumental reliefs, see Zinserling 1959–1960; Torelli 1982, 119–25; Settis 1988, 94–6; 2005, 75–7; Hölscher 1991, 293–94; 2006, 37, 39; Holli day 1997, 130–31, 134–37; La Rocca 2000, 63. Particularly relevant in this context is a contemporary reference in a letter from Verus to Fronto, where the former offers to send picturas from the Parthian front as source material for the latter’s history (Fronto, ad Verum imperatorem Aurelium Caesarem epistulae 2.3). But exactly what form these picturas took is unknown.

39 There are obviously numerous other questions that could be addressed in a study of the column: the degree to which individual scenes reflect specific historical events along the frontier; the nature and extent of information about the frontier available to the production team and the audience in Rome; other influences, both visual and nonvisual, official and unofficial, that could have had an effect on the production team and audience; and the reaction to the column by various specific audiences. A thorough exploration of or engagement with these questions is beyond the scope of this article, which focuses on the interrelationships between the column and other monumental reliefs in the capital. It is my hope that this article can contribute to some of the above debates in the future.


41 For discussion of the columns within the particular context of the regionary catalogues, see Beckmann 2002.

42 See, e.g., Lühr 2009, 126 (translation by the author): “Deren Vorbildwirkung ist evident, das Schema des narrativen Reliefbandes, das eine überdimensionale Ehrensäule umweibt, ist nur an der Trajanssäule vorgebildet. Ein bis dahin singuläres Denkmal wurde also zum Muster gewählt und bei aller Umformung doch bis in manche auffällige Details nachgestaltet.” (It is evident that the paradigm for the narrative relief band, which surrounds an oversized honorary column, can only be

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in the particular case of these two monuments, however. In the first place, the unusual shared structural and design features of the columns themselves establish a close unambiguous relationship between the two. Second, some of the borrowed elements, such as the opening frontier sequence, are designed to fit the particular compositional needs of a helical sculpted frieze (see figs. 4, 5). Third, much of the shared imagery, like the testudo siege, is rare or is extant only on the friezes. Fourth, if the various elements are reliant on a shared lost model, it is unclear why these elements would cluster in particular areas of the Trajanic frieze, as Beckmann has shown. Finally, even if these shared elements are ultimately derivative of a common lost model, the sheer existence of the Column of Trajan, nearby and on such a colossal scale, would mean that the Antonine column could not help but evoke its Trajanic doppelganger. Therefore, in this article I work from the theory that the Antonine production team was actively engaging with the Trajanic frieze as a source of reference and inspiration for their own work.

The first part of this article consists of a general survey of the architectural depictions on the Column of Marcus Aurelius and a broad comparison with their Trajanic counterparts. I then present a detailed analysis of each of the three main categories of architecture on the frieze: buildings associated with (1) civilians aligned with Rome, (2) the Roman military, and (3) barbarian populations. Finally, I contextualize the depictions of architecture on the Column of Marcus Aurelius within the specific visual setting of Rome and explore what this can tell us about the presentation of war in the capital.

DEPICTED ARCHITECTURE ON THE COLUMN OF MARCUS AURELIUS

The heavy damage suffered by the Antonine column makes exact quantification of any feature difficult. Nevertheless, some general figures and trends can be discerned for the architectural depictions. I have

46 Beckmann 2011, 97–8.

47 In my analysis, I drew on Coarelli’s (2008) edition of photographs of the frieze, supplemented by photographs of the monument from ground level taken by E.C. Robinson and me. By architectural depictions, I mean the representation of any built structure. This does not include tents, which are set up, rather than constructed, and can be disassembled easily and relocated; cf. Hanoune (2000, 206), who includes tents in his list of Roman architectural types on the frieze.
fig. 4. Column of Trajan, Scene 1. Frontier settlement in lowest spiral.

fig. 5. Column of Marcus Aurelius, Scene 1. Frontier settlement in lowest spiral. From left to right: Buildings A, B, C, D, and a wood pile.
distinguished 51 separate depictions of built structures on the Column of Marcus Aurelius frieze. All other structures were too poorly preserved to be enumerated. These depictions were distributed throughout the length of the frieze in 38 probable assemblages of built structures.\textsuperscript{48} Seven additional scenes feature conspicuous Roman tents, 18 in total, in three cases paired with what appears to represent a surrounding defensive trench.\textsuperscript{49} One final scene (Scene 115) shows a boat bridge without any architectural parapet. There are thus eight additional assemblages that do not feature built architecture but do indicate Roman presence through ephemeral structures.

Architecture makes up a considerable proportion of the Trajanic elements adapted for the Antonine frieze. A systematic analysis of these elements and the adjustments made by the later production team demonstrate important patterns that reveal what the Antonine production team found useful, and what they did not, in the Trajanic prototypes.

The broad differences in the depicted architecture of the two columns are easily identifiable. Architectural elements are significantly more numerous on the Trajanic column than on its Antonine counterpart.\textsuperscript{50} The frieze of the former includes 326 architectural structures, while on the latter there probably were not more than 75 independent structures, to give a high estimate.\textsuperscript{51} Architecture is also more varied on the earlier monument: the Trajanic frieze features 25 independent architectural types (with seven additional types consisting of particular variant forms of a broader type), while the Antonine frieze features only nine different architectural types, with four (fortifications; boat bridges; \\textit{suggestus}, or speakers’ platforms; and huts) clearly dominant. But there are also more specific differences in the handling of architecture that relate to the detailed shaping of important ideological themes crucial to the overall presentation of war on the Antonine frieze.

Civilian Architecture: No Longer in Kansas

The Column of Trajan puts great emphasis on prosperous, loyal civilian settlements, particularly in Scenes 79–100, where the emperor undertakes a long journey through a series of provincial towns on his way to hostile barbarian territory.\textsuperscript{52} These civilian settlements are shown in considerable detail and take the form of prosperous Roman towns; two include amphitheaters (Scenes 33, 101), and one has an elaborate Roman theater (Scene 86). Citizens in mixed Roman and provincial dress greet Trajan in the settlements and sacrifice with him. As a group, the civilian settlements demonstrate the benefits of Roman rule and preview the expansion of Roman rule that Trajan’s victories will bring to Dacian territory. They also extend and blur the transition between Roman and barbarian territory, culminating in the mixed settlement in Scene 101, where a wooden amphitheater is paired with friendly provincials in non-Roman dress.

This theme of peaceful interaction with provincial settlements is absent from the Column of Marcus Aurelius.\textsuperscript{53} The Antonine column features at most three peaceful civilian settlements; one of these is clearly copied from the Column of Trajan (Scenes 1–3; see below), and the other two (Scenes 40, 113) are heavily restored and unlikely to reflect anything ancient.\textsuperscript{54} It is even debatable to what extent the settlement in Scenes 1–3 is to be understood as civilian, as opposed to military, in nature; certainly the watchtowers and signal piles indicate it is part of a large-scale, organized defense. Otherwise no peaceful civilian architecture is shown on the frieze, with all remaining architectural depictions clearly related to either the Roman military or the barbarian enemy. No peaceful civilian citizens, furthermore, make an appearance on the Antonine frieze.

Historical fidelity cannot explain this phenomenon, given that Marcus Aurelius, like Trajan, must have passed through peaceful towns on his way to the front, if only in Italy. Instead, a conscious decision must have

\textsuperscript{48} Likely assemblages of built structures: Scenes 1–3, 6, 7, 11, 18, 20, 29, 37, 43, 46, 49 (2 separate assemblages), 50, 54, 55, 71, 75, 78, 80, 82, 84, 86, 88, 89, 94, 95, 98, 100–2, 104, 105–7, 109/110, 111. For the possible assemblages of Scenes 40 and 113, see main text and infra n. 54.

\textsuperscript{49} Scenes 8 (trench), 15, 19, 21, 31 (trench), 39 (trench), 60; see also Hanoune 2000, 210.

\textsuperscript{50} Coulston 1988, 383; Pirson 1996, 140, 149; Holscher 2000, 96; Grunow 2002, 134; Beckmann 2003, 197.

\textsuperscript{51} All numbers, percentages, typologies, and classifications for the Trajanic column are derived from a comprehensive catalogue of architectural depictions published in abbreviated form (Wolfram Thill 2010b).

\textsuperscript{52} For civilian settlements on the Trajanic frieze, see Turcan-Déléani 1958; Coulston 1990, 48–9; Wolfram Thill 2010a, 35–6.

\textsuperscript{53} Holscher 2000, 96–7.

\textsuperscript{54} Given that the imagery for both Scenes 40 and 113 is unparalleled on either frieze, it is unlikely that the restored imagery reflects the ancient sculpture in any real way; see also Wolfram Thill 2011, 299 n. 41.
been made to depart from Trajanic precedent and set the entire narrative of the Antonine frieze beyond the borders of the empire, in specifically nonurban enemy territory, without any buildings (such as theaters or porticoes) signaling peaceful Roman occupation. This would have had multiple effects. First, it would avoid the idea of establishing settlements in new territory, a theme I will elaborate on in the discussion of military architecture. More importantly, the lack of civilian settlements increases the conceptual distance between the viewer in Rome and the action of the frieze. There is no gentle transition or blurring of boundaries as on the Column of Trajan: after the army leaves the friendly settlement of Scenes 1–3 on the Antonine frieze, they operate exclusively in hostile territory.

The importance of this last effect, and the great lengths taken to achieve it, can be seen by comparing the representations of the frontier in the opening sequences of both columns. The friezes of both monuments famously begin with a scene of the frontier (see figs. 4, 5): a collection of small buildings, followed by haystacks and wood piles (for signal fires), taller watchtowers, and finally a river settlement, where soldiers march out over pontoon bridges under the watchful gaze of a river god. These depictions are so similar that scholars have suggested that the bottom scenes of the Column of Marcus Aurelius are based on a direct sketch of their Trajanic counterparts.55 If so, this sketch was only a first stage, since the production team of the later column made several important adjustments.

The first structures on the Trajanic frieze are two small generic stone buildings set far apart and surrounded by wooden palisades (Scene 1; see fig. 4). Both buildings are two stories, with a window above an open door on the facade. The windows and doors lack frames.56 The buildings’ construction material is clearly marked as stone by the uniform courses of ashlar masonry; diagonal lines on the pitched roofs suggest wooden planks. The palisades are made of upright posts with triangular tips, arranged with wide entrances.

The first building on the Antonine frieze (fig. 6, Building A, at far left) shares the general form of the Trajanic examples. It, too, is made of stone, indicated by broadly spaced, deeply cut ashlar patterning. One framed window is over the door, and another is on the flank. The structure features a tile roof, complete with carefully delineated pan and cover tiles. Most interesting is the doorway, which is framed by columns and an inverted trapezoidal molding for a lintel (fig. 7). The details of apparent ashlar stone construction, tile roof, and decorative doorway combine to make this building seem expensive, permanent, and secure. Building A lacks its own palisade.

The second building (Building B) also is made of ashlar masonry (fig. 8), although the blocks are smaller and the joints shallower than in Building A. Building B also has a framed window over the door and a tile roof with pan and cover tiles. The structure is surrounded by a wooden palisade, very similar to those of the Trajanic buildings. The entrance to Building B, however, is marked by a rectangular frame and a partially open door; the door has a sturdy lintel and jambs and a heavy central boss (fig. 9). While Building B is the closest to the Trajanic model, the Antonine production team added numerous careful details to create a more sophisticated structure.

At this point, the Antonine column begins to deviate significantly from its prototype. The third building (Building C) repeats the same general form as the previous two, with windows over the door and on the flank (fig. 10). This building also has a palisade, but with an arched entrance surrounded by a banded (?) frame and an open door. The building’s roof, and its palisade are all patterned with closely placed, parallel half cylinders. The half cylinders on the building and roof run vertically and close together, and they are set in staggered tiers, three on the building and two on the roof. The half cylinders in the palisade are wider, run horizontally, and are interrupted by thick posts. Building C and its palisade thus appear to be made of logs or wattle and daub.

The fourth building in the sequence (Building D) is almost entirely obliterated, but one can still see some rectangular patterning, a tile roof, and windows above the door (now lost) and on the flank (fig. 11). The ashlar patterning seems to be more similar to Building A than Building B. A wooden fence around the building can just be discerned. The rest of the scene to the right is too poorly preserved for detailed analysis, but it

55 Coulston 1988, 384; Beckmann 2003, 30; 2011, 89–98; 2012, 256. Beckmann (2011, 96) argues that the changes in construction material from Trajanic to Antonine representations for Scenes 1 and 2 can be attributed to the buildings’ walls being left blank in the initial sketch, although this does not explain why the particular changes that were made were selected. For further discussion of the opening sequence on the Antonine frieze, see Ferris 2009, 155; Beckmann 2011, 89–91; Wolfram Thill 2011, 301, 304.

56 My thanks to the AJA Editor-in-Chief for pointing out the differences in the handling of the windows between the two friezes.
Fig. 6. Column of Marcus Aurelius, Scene 1 (detail). First building (Building A) of frontier settlement; note tile roof, ashlar masonry, and decorative doorframe (cast in LIMESEUM und Römerpark Ruffenhofen, Wittelshofen).

Fig. 7. Column of Marcus Aurelius, Scene 1 (detail). Doorway of first building (Building A) of frontier settlement; note framing columns and channeled masonry (cast in LIMESEUM und Römerpark Ruffenhofen, Wittelshofen).

Fig. 8. Column of Marcus Aurelius, Scene 1 (detail). Second building (Building B) of frontier settlement (cast in LIMESEUM und Römerpark Ruffenhofen, Wittelshofen).

Fig. 9. Column of Marcus Aurelius, Scene 1 (detail). Doorway of second building (Building B) of frontier settlement (cast in LIMESEUM und Römerpark Ruffenhofen, Wittelshofen).
appears to adhere closely to the equivalent scenes on the Column of Trajan, which show signal towers, log piles, and a port town. A large wooden palisade runs behind Buildings A–D (see figs. 5, 6, 8, 10, 11).

To summarize, the Antonine production team made several important changes to the opening sequence of the Column of Trajan. They added more buildings and reduced the space between them, linking them further by a common backdrop of a high palisade. This gives a greater sense of a settlement, as opposed to the disconnected, open outposts of the Trajanic scene. The production team also made three of the buildings more elaborate, particularly Building A, through the addition of tile roofs, framed and decorated doors, and wide ashlar patterning indicative of sophisticated masonry. This elaboration, paired with the greater crowding of buildings, creates a picture of a stable, prosperous settlement, the last bulwark of civilization worth defending through a costly and bloody war.

At the same time, great care has been taken to include a building, Building C, that, while it shares its form and context with Roman buildings and is therefore presumably "Roman," has construction materials evocative of barbarian buildings. Details of the perishable construction materials are carefully rendered, such as the posts in the palisade and the tiers of the walls and roof. This suggests that the organic construction was intentional, not an afterthought or an ad hoc addition. The motif of an open, arched entrance is found elsewhere on the column on all barbarian huts except one, further linking the building with barbarian architecture.57 Some of the huts are clearly visible in Scene 18, in the third spiral above and in almost direct vertical alignment to Scene 1.

The addition of Building C has the effect of creating conceptual distance between the settlement of Scene 1 and the audience in Rome. It makes the settlement seem stranger, more closely connected to the distant world of the frontier, where barbarian and Roman elements meet in unfamiliar combinations. This distancing effect may have been desirable in light of the historical circumstances of Marcus Aurelius’ wars. For the first time in centuries, barbarian tribes had been able to penetrate the Italian peninsula. Setting the scene of the army’s departure, and thus the brutal action of the rest of the frieze, as far away as possible from Rome would be a reassuring message that the concerns of war were far from the capital. This adds nuance to the traditional interpretation that extreme violence on the Column of Marcus Aurelius frieze was intended to display for the Roman viewer that Romans were winning the war. Rather, the frieze reassured the viewer in Rome that the brutal violence necessary to win such a war was confined to lands far from their home.

What is particularly strange about the choice of the construction material for Building C, however, is that elsewhere on the frieze most of the barbarian buildings made of similar material are shown subject to violent destruction by fire.58 This occurs as soon as Scene 7 (fig. 12) and may have been intended to create a positive

57 Only one hut on the frieze is shown specifically with a closed door (Scene 20), while Roman fortifications often specifically feature massive closed doors (e.g., Scenes 49–50).

58 Wolfram Thill 2011.
contrast: perishable Roman buildings are secure, while perishable barbarian buildings are burned to the ground. Romans, in other words, can defend their own. But such a comparison works only through the acknowledgement of potential danger to all perishable buildings. The same can be said for the inclusion of the large palisade wall behind the settlement. A protective wall presupposes, and thus acknowledges, danger on the other side, even as it keeps that danger at bay. This danger, now neutralized, provides the justification for the war and the extreme violence that follows throughout the rest of the column. A wall also creates another side, a differentiated space into which the emperor moves with his troops. On the Antonine column the entire narrative specifically takes place in enemy territory. The wall in Scene 1 makes this setting clear.59

59 Sommer (2012a, esp. 163–64; 2012b) has suggested recently that the large palisade depicted in Scene 1 may commemorate the establishment of major wooden palisades along the Raetian Limes under Marcus Aurelius (for a similar suggestion, see Beckmann 2012, 256). This raises the interesting question of who in Rome would know—or care—about specific fortification measures along the frontier. Even with a historical impetus, the depiction of a palisade was a choice made by the production team that would have affected the scene’s impact.

Scene 1 on the Column of Marcus Aurelius presents an illustration of the frontier that is very similar to the description of the edges of Roman territory at the beginning of the Bellum Gallicum.60 Like Marcus Aurelius, Julius Caesar faced a situation in which barbarian invasions of Roman-allied regions spurred extensive military expeditions into northern barbarian territory.

60 The academic analysis of Roman literary sources concerning the frontiers is its own discipline, and a full exploration is beyond the scope of this article. In the current context, it should be noted that scholars have long hypothesized a particularly close relationship between the visual narrative of the Column of Trajan and Trajan’s lost commentaries, known in modern times as the Dacica (see, e.g., Lepper and Frere 1988). However, only a single sentence of the Dacica survives. It was preserved by a fifth-century grammarian (Prisc., Int. 6.13) and reports only the movement of Roman troops from one location to another. Not much of substance, therefore, can be confirmed concerning the relationship between the Dacica and the reliefs. In this article, I use the Bellum Gallicum as an example of the potential relationships between text and relief because this text is well preserved, well known, and shares striking similarities with the Antonine frieze.
In the beginning of the *Bellum Gallicum* (1.7, 1.10), Caesar specifically states that fear of raids in a rich province was his impetus for traveling to Gaul. He reiterates several times in the first book the concept of danger to the province, not only through his own words but also through the pleas of the allied Aedui and Allobroges, who spell out in considerable detail the dangers faced by territories exposed to raids (1.11). Caesar, of course, is describing (some might say creating) a problem that in the context of his narrative only he can solve and one that, by the time of the book’s publication, he has already solved. Caesar’s response to these threats of barbarian violence is to build a wall (1.8), then a bridge over a river, and march out into enemy territory (1.13); the opening sequence of the Antonine frieze echoes this strategy, or perhaps trope, but without any explicit construction (see below).

Scene 1 of the Column of Marcus Aurelius thus engages not only with the immediate tradition of the Column of Trajan but also with an older tradition of portraying the northern borders of the empire as an area needing swift, decisive action to maintain security. This portrayal is accomplished by the careful addition and manipulation of details to depictions that seem at first glance to be copies of generic structures. The transformation of the more general Trajanic forms into the specific mix of elaborate (Buildings A, B, and D) and strangely exotic (Building C) presents a frontier that is worth protecting but also distant from the capital. Meanwhile, the addition of a tall palisade clearly separates the peaceful settlement on view from the violence to come. This palisade also makes the individual palisades of three of the buildings (B, C, and D) redundant, resulting in an overabundance of evidence for defense (and perhaps danger). The scene is set eloquently, both geographically and thematically, for the narrative that follows. Beckmann has attributed the extra structures to a horror vacui on the part of Antonine artists, but I think the problem was conceptual rather than compositional: the sort of frontier presented on the Trajanic column (basically open, as befits territory that will cease to be a border once new territory is incorporated) was not the sort of frontier that the Antonine production team wanted to represent.

After the specific exception of the opening settlement, the aversion of the Antonine production team to anything that could be construed as an urban setting extends beyond avoiding depictions of specifically urban buildings to avoiding the depiction of any concentrated inhabitation at all. Unlike on the Trajanic frieze, buildings on the Antonine frieze rarely appear densely grouped. Those that do almost always are barbarian huts, which even then are grouped in limited numbers. It is striking that the tight cluster of five (possibly six) buildings in Scene 7, clearly discernable from ground level as barbarian huts subject to destruction, is one of the two largest collections of buildings on the frieze (see fig. 12). In general, the frieze emphasizes single buildings rather than settlements. This absence of architectural clusters underlines the uncivilized, undesirable character of the region.

To summarize, the handling of civilian architecture on the Antonine frieze establishes a clear boundary between Roman territory, which must be defended, and the space in which the violent action of the war takes place. This space is largely devoid of significant architecture, a blank canvas in which the army can work freely to suppress irredeemable barbarians, without concern for establishing future occupation in the area.

**Roman Military Architecture: Managing Expectations**

The civilian architecture and its paucity on the Column of Marcus Aurelius created a conceptual distance between the viewer in the capital and the foreign setting for the campaigns. The depictions of military architecture, however, shaped expectations for the future of that foreign setting. On the one hand, the visual correspondence between the Antonine and Trajanic columns could be expected to evoke memories of the prosperous expansion of new Roman territory that the Trajanic monument commemorated. On the other hand, the Antonine production team seems to have gone out of its way to diminish expectations of contemporary expansion into barbarian territory.

On the Trajanic frieze, scenes of the army constructing stone architecture are a crucial means of delivering that monument’s message of the Roman army creating a new and permanent presence in barbarian territory (fig. 13). The Trajanic army is shown at work on new

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61 Rome’s interaction with the northern frontier continued to be fraught long after Julius Caesar’s time. Events such as the Teutoburg Forest disaster and the invasions under Domitian and Trajan could have contributed to the sense that the frontier was dangerous and required firm defensive action. I thank an anonymous *AJA* reviewer for pointing this out.

62 Beckmann 2011, 97.

63 For the importance of construction scenes on the Column of Trajan, see, e.g., Richmond 1982; Coulston 1990; Wolfram Thill 2010a, 2011.
constructions in 16 often extended scenes, building wooden bridges or, more commonly, stone encampments. In stark contrast, there are only two construction scenes on the Column of Marcus Aurelius (Scenes 82, 94; figs. 14, 15). Both are relatively abbreviated and placed high along the column. In addition, the Antonine frieze features only one completed stone camp (Scene 80; fig. 16).

It is possible that the lack of construction scenes on the Antonine column has some historical basis, since the Germanic frontiers, unlike the Dacian territories, had been well fortified before the campaigns immortalized on the columns, and thus new fortifications would not have been required. If we follow strict logic, however, the fortifications under construction on the Trajane frieze, despite their depicted masonry construction, should be temporary marching camps, a critical component of any campaign in hostile territory. Yet it is the Antonine frieze that refers more directly to this process of establishing temporary occupation in the greater prominence given to large tents, especially the three examples surrounded by apparent defensive ditches. Actual defensive ditches around temporary fortified camps required considerable construction efforts in and of themselves, and, had the Antonine production team wished to include historically accurate construction scenes, the digging of these three ditches and the temporary fortifications they imply would provide an obvious chance to do so.

There are two possible explanations for the lack of Antonine construction scenes, one technical and one thematic. The technical explanation is that construction scenes were far outside the repertoire of the
Antonine production team, especially if, as Beckmann has argued, the sculptors were drawn primarily from sarcophagus workshops.68 This would explain why such scenes are absent in most of the frieze and why, when they were included, they were heavily reliant, as we will see, on Trajanic models. A more thematic explanation is that the message conveyed by the Trajanic scenes—the establishment of a permanent presence in hostile territory—was specifically undesirable in an Antonine context. A careful examination of the relationships between the Trajanic and Antonine construction scenes suggests that the latter explanation is more likely.

Scholars have disagreed on the extent to which the Antonine construction scenes draw directly on Trajanic models.69 Lehmann-Hartleben effectively

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68 Supra n. 11. There has not been a comparable investigation exploring the technical backgrounds of the sculptors of the Trajanic frieze, although in his preliminary study of carving techniques, Rockwell (1985) concludes that these sculptors were not well versed in imperial portraiture and probably worked in teams specializing in figures or backgrounds.

69 Coarelli (2008, 302) simply calls the Antonine construction “another textual quote from Trajan’s Column.” Coulston (1988, 384) sees particular figures in the Antonine construction scenes as copied from Trajanic examples. In contrast, Beckmann (2011, 162; see also Beckmann 2012, 256) has rejected these examples as quoted scenes, citing the lack of coherent inter-

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demonstrated the reliance of the Trajanic construction scenes on stock figures and poses.\textsuperscript{70} But there are particular details that strongly suggest that the Antonine construction scenes are based directly on Trajanic models rather than drawing independently on earlier stock material. Specifically, the Antonine production team seems to have relied on a narrow three-scene sequence on the Trajanic frieze (Scenes 60–62).

The first element from this Trajanic sequence to appear on the Antonine frieze is the aforementioned completed camp (Scene 80; see fig. 16), which derives its composition from a camp in Scene 61 of Trajan’s column (see fig. 13). The composition is simple but specific: a completed camp wall with an open gateway and prominent tent(s) inside forms the backdrop to the emperor flanked by companions. The two versions of the composition are by no means identical; the narrative contexts are not the same, and the Antonine example repositions several secondary figures. The similarities are nonetheless striking. The Trajanic tent, furthermore, is unusual for its frieze in its size and prominence, yet a very similar tent appears in Antonine Scene 21. This latter tent is the only Antonine tent to feature rectangular paneling on its sides, and, like its Trajanic predecessor, it is the backdrop to a scene of the emperor, flanked by companions, receiving a barbarian while soldiers encircle the group from the right. The Trajanic Scene 61 thus may have influenced multiple Antonine scenes.

The camp on the Column of Marcus Aurelius (Scene 80; see fig. 16) is followed almost immediately by that frieze’s first construction scene (Scene 82; see fig. 14). In both Antonine scenes (see figs. 14, 15), all the soldiers wear segmented armor but do not wear helmets, a marked—and illogical—feature of construction scenes on the Column of Trajan (see fig. 13).\textsuperscript{71} All the Antonine soldiers engaged in construction have short beards or no beards at all, which is unusual on their column but the standard on the Column of Trajan. The extent of direct overlap in soldiers’ poses is also remarkable. The two soldiers in the upper left corner of Antonine Scene 82 (see fig. 14) are near copies of two figure types in Trajanic Scene 60 (see fig. 13). Type 1, represented by the Trajanic soldier in the center of the incomplete camp and the Antonine soldier in his scene’s far upper left, wears segmented armor and short hair and beard, and he moves to the side with his arms bent at a 90° angle. Type 2, represented by the Trajanic soldier at the juncture of the two camps and the Antonine soldier adjacent to the Type 1 soldier, has short, curly hair, faces left, and is posed to hold a pole with his right arm raised and left arm held in front of his chest;\textsuperscript{72} a second variant of this type appears in the Trajanic scene below the Type 1 soldier. In both the Trajanic and Antonine scenes the two types appear clustered together: the most likely explanation is that the Antonine scene borrowed the types as a loose unit from the Trajanic scene rather than arriving at the same combination independently.\textsuperscript{73}

Also telling are the five helmeted soldiers who enter at the right of the second Antonine construction scene (Scene 94; see fig. 15). These seem to combine elements from two different groups of soldiers in Trajanic construction scenes. The two topmost soldiers, who peer at a construction scene from behind a stretch of rocky ground, grouped so tightly that they appear as “floating heads,” recall the three similarly positioned, helmeted soldiers who view the construction from the top of Trajanic Scene 60 (see fig. 13). The motif of a group of soldiers entering the scene from behind rocky ground on the right can be found two scenes later on the Trajanic frieze (Scene 62). The two Trajanic scenes are connected by Scene 61 (see fig. 13), which includes not only the completed camp and tent discussed above but also a sequence of wagons and draft animals (oxen and donkeys in the lower register, with a team of oxen above) that is found in modified form in Antonine Scene 93, the scene immediately preceding the construction scene with the curious group of soldiers (Scene 94; see fig. 15).\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{70}Lehmann-Hartleben 1926, 12; see also Coulston 1988, 29, 145; 1990, 42.

\textsuperscript{71}Beckmann 2011, 162. All but three of the Column of Trajan soldiers involved in construction wear segmented armor, despite the fact that heavy armor is an unlikely costume for such activity (Coulston 1988, 68).

\textsuperscript{72}The pole in the Trajanic example was originally a metal insert and is now missing.

\textsuperscript{73}For what it is worth, neither of these types appears in the admittedly fragmentary construction scenes of the painted Esquiline frieze or the Basilica Aemilia reliefs.

\textsuperscript{74}The carts and their loads are markedly different in the Trajanic and Antonine examples, and the front cart is doubled in the latter; I thank an anonymous A\textit{J}A reviewer for pointing this out. The particular arrangement of identical animals into similar tiers nevertheless seems notable. Furthermore, a two-wheeled cart loaded with at least one barrel and pulled by donkeys, as seen in Trajanic Scene 61, is found in Antonine Scene 25.
We thus have a collection of elements (the composition of a particular completed camp, the general handling of the soldiers, a combination of soldier types, unusual compositions of soldiers, and a wagon train) from a narrow range of Trajanic scenes (Scenes 60–62; see fig. 13) loosely incorporated within the two Antonine construction scenes and their surrounding scenes. This is significant because it allows us to identify what the Antonine production team chose not to include—namely, the Trajanic emphasis on stone architecture. The architecture under construction on the Column of Marcus Aurelius notably lacks the ashlar patterning and coherent form of its Trajanic forebears. In fact, the Antonine architecture is barely visible at all. By downplaying the stone architecture so important to the Column of Trajan, both in the smaller number of construction scenes and the relative unimportance of architecture within those scenes, the Antonine production team chose not to repeat the overt signs of the Roman army establishing a permanent new presence in the region.

A similar phenomenon can be seen in the handling of another important type of military construction: *suggestus*, or speakers’ platforms. On the Trajanic frieze, all of the *suggestus* are shown with the ashlar patterning of stone construction, adding to the sense of architectural permanence associated with the Roman army (fig. 17). While the Column of Marcus Aurelius repeats several elements of the Trajanic *adlocutio* motifs, the Antonine *suggestus* under the emperor’s feet either have pegs or are left blank (fig. 18). The sort of temporary construction seen on the Antonine column is more realistic for active campaigning, but the switch in construction material also indicates that the connotations of permanence and supremacy that the stone construction of the Trajanic platforms bring to their scenes were no longer prioritized.

This is not to say that stone architecture in a military context is entirely absent from the Antonine column. With few exceptions, such stone architecture takes the form of fortifications. These fortifications serve a limited number of purposes, mostly related to narrative or scene type. Clustered at the end of the narrative when the wars are wrapping up, the fortifications emphasize Roman defense, serving as a secure base for military operations (Scenes 50, 105), as protection from barbarian siege (Scene 11; see fig. 1), or as a deliberate contrast in scenes of Romans destroying or pillaging barbarian resources (Scenes 11, 102, 105, 110). In several instances, this theme of defense is reinforced by massive closed doors (Scenes 11, 50, 110; see fig. 1), which stand in obvious contrast to the numerous open doors of barbarian huts. None of these

75 This series of scenes would loosely fit the pattern Beckmann has identified for which Trajanic scenes were copied based on their position on the column (supra n. 44), although they appear two spirals higher than the examples cited by Beckmann.

76 Wolfram Thill 2012, 70–2.

77 Pegged platforms: Scenes 55, 76, 100. Blank platforms: Scenes 37, 49, 96. Blank platforms may also have once had pegs that have not survived.

78 Completed stone fortifications: Scenes 5 (heavily damaged), 11, 29, 50, 101, 105, 109. Completed stone camp: Scene 80. Completed stone building: Scene 49. In addition, there are numerous freestanding arches that logically imply construction in stone or concrete but do not include quadratic courses that would make such construction explicit: Scenes 3, 78, 86, 94.


fortifications clearly represents a settlement; none has built structures within or without the walls.

Beyond the fortifications, military stone architecture is limited to a single structure in Scene 49. In this unique scene for the frieze, the emperor interacts with barbarians in distinctive foreign costumes. He stands on a blank suggestus and is framed by a large building with ashlar masonry and a pitched roof, the only structure of its kind on the frieze (see fig. 18). The presence of this building can be best understood through its narrative context, which may be the welcoming of barbarian allies into the Roman world (see below). The building thus illustrates and represents the world to which the allies pledge their allegiance.

On the column, stone constructions are limited in number, and nearly without exception they are completed structures. This is in keeping with a theme of preexisting security established by the introductory frontier sequence (Scenes 1–2), without explicit representations of expansion. It is a complicated task for modern scholars to reconstruct official Roman policy toward the territory north of the Rhine in any given period, and the Romans themselves could not have known the ultimate result of their (mis)adventures in

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81 The exact narrative of the scene is not clear. Many scholars have seen it as a representation of the emperor receiving eastern subjects (e.g., Caprino et al. 1955, 98; Coarelli 2008, 209; Löhr 2009, 128). The long sleeves worn pulled over their hands by the barbarians seem distinctive; they are certainly unique on the frieze. Taylor (2014) has drawn interesting parallels with literary descriptions of Persian customs and with similar imagery on a Late Antique mosaic in Neo Paphos and Magi mosaics in Ravenna. The particularizing, unique details of the scene suggest that a historical event is being referenced, although it is difficult to say more, given the general tendency in Roman art to be imprecise with “ethnic” details for non-Roman peoples.

82 Hölscher (2000, 99) draws parallels with the position of the emperor in front of the building and the position of emperors in front of temples in sacrifice scenes.

83 There is little consensus, in either ancient or modern sources, regarding Marcus’ original intentions for the region, particularly regarding annexation. For discussion of the issue, complete with bibliography divided into pro and contra annexation camps, see Birley 2010, 41–3. For archaeological evidence of the wars, see Fischer 2012; Kovács 2012.
Barbarian Architecture: Superiority Rather Than Incorporation

There are considerable differences in the handling of barbarian architecture on the two columns. The Column of Trajan carefully develops an elaborate architectural typology of complex building types for its Dacian architecture.\(^{84}\) Most striking are the massive stone fortifications that anchor a series of sieges waged by the Romans against the barbarians. This architectural typology presents the Dacians as a unique, challenging, yet still inferior enemy. In contrast, the Column of Marcus Aurelius reduces barbarian architecture to a series of nondescript huts. Scene 7 presents a typical collection of indigenous architecture on the Antonine frieze (see fig. 12). Here the slaughter of barbarians is set next to the destruction of a cluster of five (possibly six) huts.\(^{85}\) All the huts are marked by rounded roofs and parallel vertical elements, interrupted at intervals by horizontal braids. Three huts have open arched entrances. Barbarian architecture is simple and ephemeral, exposed to easy potential destruction.

At first blush there is some historical basis for this divergence. The area that became Dacia did in fact have a considerable local architectural tradition in stone at the time of the Roman invasion, and sieges against mountain strongholds do seem to have been a major factor in those wars.\(^{86}\) This was not the case for Germania. Yet while partly grounded in history, the Dacian architecture on the frieze is often fanciful (such as the stone building on stilts with a door to nowhere in Scene 25) and clearly contrived, directed more toward casting the enemy as a noble yet foreign opponent than representing how Dacians actually built their buildings.\(^{87}\) A different choice was made on the Great Trajanic Frieze, where the Dacians are portrayed as living in simple huts (see below). This demonstrates once again that monumental reliefs were not bound strictly by historical reality. The choice to depict only simple huts for the enemy on the Column of Marcus Aurelius represents just that, a choice on the part of the Antonine production team, even if that choice was to reflect, however accurately, the actual Germanic frontiers.

This choice may have been driven by the fact that the simple barbarian huts, often subject to violent and clearly visible destruction (e.g., Scenes 7, 20; see fig. 12),\(^{88}\) fit neatly within and contribute to the larger themes of the Antonine frieze, where the Roman army is victorious less because of Trajanic labor than because of obvious superiority over a patently inferior enemy.\(^{89}\) The lack of any permanent, impressive enemy settlements underscores that the Romans are a punishing, rather than an occupying, force in the area: there is nothing worth keeping there.

The handling of siege technology on the Antonine frieze demonstrates that the production team relied on more than ephemeral Germanic huts in their portrayal of barbarian architecture. A single barbarian fortification is shown (Scene 54; see fig. 2), under siege by Roman testudo.\(^{90}\) Here clear efforts have been made to depict the fortification specifically as made of perishable material. This can be seen by comparing the Antonine example with its Trajanic inspiration (Scene 76; see fig. 3). The Trajanic fortification wall is left blank except for a line of roundels.\(^{91}\) The Antonine wall, in contrast, features an intricate combination of parallel...
diagonal hatching and horizontal braids, clearly indicating something more like wood or reed construction. This emphasis on simple perishable material recalls descriptions in the *Bellum Gallicum* of brush impediments that barbarians constructed to hinder Roman movements, impediments specifically described as wall-like. The flammable material also creates an aura of vulnerability for the barbarian fortification, heightened by the flaming torches and boiling cauldrons flung down on the Roman attackers. The torches would recall those that Roman soldiers use elsewhere on the frieze to burn barbarian huts (see fig. 12), raising the possibility that the fortification walls themselves could catch on fire. The perishable barbarian fortification in Scene 54 (see fig. 2), furthermore, stands in stark contrast to the secure Roman fortifications in the spiral below, which feature high stone walls, merlons, and an arched gateway with massive closed doors (Scenes 49–50). The addition of hatching in exchange for the subtler roundels of the model strengthens the emphasis on the barbarians’ vulnerability and desperation.

An obvious point of comparison for the Antonine siege of the barbarian fortification in Scene 54 (see fig. 2) is the earlier siege of a Roman fortification in Scene 11 of the Antonine column (see fig. 1). In this Lightning Miracle, a wooden barbarian siege tower, having been struck by lightning, is engulfed in flames outside the Romans’ impregnable stone fortification. Whatever the historical background of the miracle, the combination of fire, a siege context, and the destruction of a barbarian structure would amplify the idea that the barbarian fortification in Scene 54 was subject to fire. The added details of the perishable construction method for the fortification tie the scenes together and encourage comparisons between Roman and barbarian architecture and engineering expertise.

The burning barbarian siege tower of Scene 11 (see fig. 1) also recalls an incident in the *Bellum Gallicum* (5.43) in which Roman soldiers set fire to a Gallic siege tower. Both the visual and written scenes could easily have a basis in historical events, but their similarities suggest a common trope regarding barbarians and warfare. Scene 11 and the *Bellum Gallicum* are quite unusual in showing the barbarians as possessors of the sort of siege technology usually reserved for their Roman adversaries. Indeed, Caesar (*BGall.* 5.42) is careful to state that his barbarian opponents learned siege technology from Roman prisoners. Both the Gallic and the Germanic siege towers end disastrously in flames (as opposed to being undermined by tunnels). Both the literary and the visual scenes thus present the same contrast between secure Roman architecture and perishable barbarian structures, a contrast carried throughout both larger works.

**BEYOND THE COLUMN OF TRAJAN: MONUMENTAL RELIEFS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF WAR**

The exceptionally close relationship between the Column of Trajan and the Column of Marcus Aurelius, between model and interpretation, presents a unique chance to highlight how the Antonine production team made conscious choices in their use of depicted architecture to further numerous ideological goals of their monument. Their vision of war differed significantly from that portrayed on the Column of Trajan. The Antonine production team specifically set the entire narrative of the frieze outside the Roman world, in a land where architecture was limited in both scale and quantity. At the same time, they were careful to avoid indications of future expansion of Roman urbanity into the territory. In short, they crafted a particular vision of war as cultural erasure rather than expansion.

The Column of Trajan, however, was hardly the only predecessor on which the Column of Marcus Aurelius could draw. There are numerous other contemporary monumental reliefs that further contextualize how the latter presented war to the public in Rome. Architectural depictions can serve as a focal point for a brief exploration of the relationship between the Column of Marcus Aurelius and other sculpted portrayals of war.

The so-called Great Trajanic Frieze, now partially preserved as spolia in the Arch of Constantine in Rome, serves as an intriguing conceptual bridge between the

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92 “Effecerant ut instar muri hae saepes munimentum praeberent, quo non modo non intrari sed ne perspicui quidem posset” (They contrived that these wall-like hedges should serve them as fortifications which not only could not be penetrated, but not even seen through) (Caes., *BGall.* 2.17; translation by Edwards 1917; see also *BGall.* 5.9, 5.18, 7.22, 7.46).

93 Ferris 2009, 155–56.

94 For a detailed discussion of this scene’s narrative and significance, see Kovács 2009, 137–68; see also Morris 1952, 39; Hülscher 2000, 99–100; Clarke 2003, 47; Dillon 2006, 262; Coarelli 2008, 50–1; Ferris 2009, 156; Beckmann 2011, 133–34.

95 None of the Column of Trajan’s three scenes where barbarians besiege a Roman fortification (Scenes 32, 94, 135) includes siege architecture, although in Scene 32 two barbarians do hold a pathetically small and ineffectual battering ram.
Trajanic and Antonine columns. Like the Column of Trajan, the Great Trajanic Frieze illustrates and celebrates wars against the Dacians, with numerous parallels in the handling of figures on the two monuments. The tone of the frieze, however, shares more in common with the Column of Marcus Aurelius: the message of the Great Trajanic Frieze is one of total and almost effortless dominance of the Roman army over a desperate enemy.

Interestingly, the handling of barbarian architecture on the reliefs seems to follow tone rather than historical content. On the section from the Great Trajan Frieze now on the west attic of the Arch of Constantine, barbarian architecture is represented by two simple huts (figs. 19, 20). These huts share numerous compositional features with their counterparts on the Antonine column (see fig. 12), including braided, horizontal ropes that subdivide the roofs into multiple tiers and probably suggest efforts to hold the organic material of the roofs in place. In both monuments, the huts serve as the backdrop for acts of violence against barbarians, an arrangement generally avoided on the Column of Trajan. In both the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Column of Marcus Aurelius, the huts can be seen as underlining the characterization of the enemy as primitive, exposed, and inferior to their Roman enemies. The production teams of these two monuments chose a different means of depicting architecture and war than is seen on the Column of Trajan, opting to emphasize untempered Roman superiority rather than the challenge of a complex enemy.

Do the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Antonine column simply represent the same general approach to visualizing war, or is there a more direct relationship between the two? Once again, depicted architecture may hold a partial clue. In Scene 103 of the Antonine frieze, a soldier and his rearing horse ride over a raised ridge of rocky terrain (fig. 21), in an arrangement similar to the one seen at the far right of the extant portion of the Great Trajanic Frieze (see fig. 19). Notably, the hut that appears behind the Antonine soldier (Scene 104; see fig. 21) is particularly close to the examples on the Great Trajanic Frieze. It is broader than other Antonine huts and, uniquely for the Antonine frieze, includes sickle-shaped sprouting elements also seen on the Trajanic huts; these sickle-shaped elements, which can be found in the largest tier of both Trajanic huts (see figs. 19, 20) and directly above the door of the Antonine hut, probably represent stray reeds or leaves and underline the huts' simple construction material. Although hardly definitive, these similarities nonetheless suggest that the Antonine production team selected and adapted various components of several visual monuments to the Trajanic wars in composing their own representation of ethnic conflict.

Just as the Column of Trajan and the Great Trajanic Frieze were two separate monuments representing the same conflicts, the Column of Marcus Aurelius was not the only depiction of the campaigns it commemorated. We have 11 extant panels from an arch (or arches) commemorating Marcus’ wars in the north. Besides

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96 The primary study of the Great Trajanic Frieze remains Leander Touati 1987; see also Pallottino 1938; Koeppe 1969; Gauer 1973; Philipp 1991; Hölscher 2002. The exact date of the frieze is unclear, given that it is no longer in situ and its imperial portraits have been recut to Constantine. Nevertheless, current consensus remains that the frieze is Trajanic. The most extensive argument is that of Leander Touati 1987, 91–5; see also Toynbee 1948, 163; Holloway 1985, 265; Gergel 1989, 483; Brilliant 1990, 240; Philipp 1991, 12; Hannestad 1992, 113.


98 On the Column of Trajan, violence directed toward Dacians takes place only once, in the context of a village, at the very end of the frieze (Scene 151); see Wolfram Thill 2011, 305.

99 Gauer (1973, 340; see also a passing remark in Petersen 1906, 522) argued that the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Antonine column both depict barbarian architecture as huts because both monuments represent wars against the Sarmatians, in contrast to the Trajanic column, which depicts wars against the Dacians. Even if one problematically assumes a concern for ethnographic specificity on the various reliefs, Gauer’s Sarma-
obvious differences in execution between the column frieze and the arch panels, there are also differences in how they use architecture to present war and its relationship to the city of Rome.

Given the Roman fondness for symmetry and the odd number of remaining panels, it is almost certain that the 11 panels do not form a complete set. It is tempting to guess—and it would be only a guess—that there was originally a total of 12 that belonged to a single arch. As on the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum, the preserved Antonine panels can be divided into a group of six dealing with territory outside the capital (adlocutio, lustratio, prisoners, rex datus, riders, and supplication) and perhaps an originally equal number (of which five are extant) dealing with the capital (adventus, donation, prefectio, sacrifice, and triumph). One must be careful in drawing conclusions from negative evidence, but some broad patterns nevertheless can be discussed.

None of the Antonine panels includes any indication of specifically military architecture. Only one of the six extant panels that depict activity along the frontier includes any architecture beyond a suggestus.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ The idea that the lost Antonine arch was arranged, like the Trajanic arch at Beneventum, with urban vs. nonurban sides is introduced briefly in both Stuart Jones (1906, 262–63) and Grunow (2002, 133 n. 104), and it deserves further exploration. In the context of this article it is interesting to note that this may represent another instance of Antonine designers cribbing from a Trajanic monument.

¹⁰² Frontier panels: adlocutio (suggestus), lustratio (damaged but possible), prisoners (suggestus), rex datus (suggestus and
The four suggestus of the exurban military panels (and the one in the donation panel, which takes place in Rome) feature the temporary pegged construction favored by the Antonine column frieze, rather than the ashlar masonry patterning of Trajanic examples. This suggests, but obviously does not prove, that the approach to Roman military architecture on the panels’ monuments was more akin to that of the Column of Marcus Aurelius than to that of the Column of Trajan, with permanent military architecture deemphasized.

The rex datus panel, in which Marcus Aurelius appoints a client king, is the only extant military scene with significant architecture (fig. 22). The backdrop is a large building with two arched entranceways, ashlar masonry, numerous windows, and a tile roof. The elaborate form and high level of detail for the building connect it to architectural depictions in the five extant panels representing scenes in Rome, all of which feature an upper register of ornate buildings. The compositional role of the architecture is particularly close between the rex datus and donation panels; these are the only two panels where a single building forms a continuous backdrop, and both show the emperor giving a gift to a crowd of people. The impressive building of the rex datus panel thus ties the action of the scene to Rome and represents the Roman world that the barbarian king is joining.

The rex datus panel points to a more specific connection between the lost arch and the column frieze. As previously discussed, Scene 49 on the Column of Marcus Aurelius also shows a scene of interaction between the emperor and friendly barbarians, played out in front of a large, elaborate building unique for its monument (see fig. 18). The compositional similarities go beyond the architecture. In both scenes the emperor, joined on a blank suggestus by a single companion, faces right and gestures with both hands toward a barbarian who wears a distinctive foreign costume. The emperor is faced by a crowd of soldiers in mixed dress. In the panel, the barbarian king stands below the emperor with his back to the suggestus. Facing the king directly

building), riders, supplication (suggestus). The lastratio panel would be particularly interesting in this respect, since on the Column of Trajan lastrations are performed only around camp walls. Unfortunately, the upper half of the Antonine panel is destroyed, making it impossible to say for sure whether it included architecture. What can be said is that there is no preserved indication of masonry courses for a stone wall.

103 Rome panels: adventus (temple and arch), donation (colonnade and suggestus), profectio (arch), sacrifice (temple and colonnaded wall?), triumph (temple and arch).
and raising his hand in greeting is the central figure of the crowd, who is set apart by his prominent position, height, lack of overlap by other figures, and framing standard bearers behind him. This distinction, coupled with his unusual enveloping cloak that echoes the cloak of the barbarian king, suggests he is a non-Roman ally; if so, he and the Roman soldier to his left, who likewise stands in the foreground with little overlap but in more traditional field dress, would neatly display the alliance of non-Roman and Roman in Marcus’ army.104 The central figure’s cloak notably wraps tightly around his foregrounded left arm, forming a long sleeve that hangs down to the level of his mid calf. This may be a variation on the long sleeves that cover the barbarians’ hands in Scene 49. In both scenes, the long-sleeved figure’s costume draws a contrast with that of a prominent Roman soldier who stands adjacent (above in Scene 49, to his left in the panel) and wears a much shorter cloak gathered at the right shoulder.

The rex datus panel and Scene 49 are similar enough to suggest that, even if one does not copy the other, they probably share a common source of visual inspiration; a triumphal painting of an imperial interaction with a foreign power would be an obvious, if purely hypothetical, candidate.105 Certainly the two scenes can serve as a reminder that both monuments, column and arch, were operating within a rich and complex visual tradition, only pieces of which are still preserved for our analysis.

Just as the panels and column frieze both downplay military architecture, what little can be said about the depiction of the barbarian context aligns the Marcus Aurelius panels more closely with their contemporary frieze than with the Column of Trajan. No barbarian architecture is shown on any of the preserved panels; instead, numerous trees emphasize the wilderness aspect of barbarian territory. This can be seen most clearly in the riders panel, where two helpless barbarians plead with the emperor in front of a background of twisting trees. This lack of architecture and emphasis on the natural world contrasts sharply with the elaborate architecture seen in the panels set in Rome.106 On the Marcus Aurelius panels as a whole, then, architecture, particularly sophisticated architecture, stands in for the Roman way of life, specifically in contrast to the architecturally deficient barbarian world. The Marcus Aurelius panels and the Antonine column frieze thus share similar attitudes toward architecture and its role in defining barbarian and Roman cultures.

At the same time, the Marcus Aurelius panels demonstrate that the choice made on the Antonine column to eschew any representation of impressive peaceful Roman architecture was not a necessary or inevitable one. At least five panels, probably originally half of a full 12, depict a total of nine prominent, luxurious, highly detailed and decorated structures. Eight of these represent building types particularly associated with the Roman urban tradition—namely, honorary arches (3), colonnades (2), and pedimental temples (3), including a rendition of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus replete with sumptuous pedimental sculpture. If all these panels were in fact grouped together on the same side of an arch, as at Beneventum, then that facade would present the viewer with an unbroken tableau of the architectural magnificence of Roman civilization.107 This would heighten the contrast with the lack of permanent architecture on the side of the arch devoted to the barbarian frontier.

The Marcus Aurelius panels show that another Antonine monument emphasized the sort of architectural contrasts between Roman and barbarian that were such an important part of Trajanic reliefs. Yet the production team of the Column of Marcus Aurelius chose to highlight not the architectural magnificence of Roman culture but instead the bleakness of barbarian life. The approaches to architecture taken on the two monuments should be seen as broadly similar but hardly identical.

Without clear chronological or spatial information about the Marcus Aurelius panels, one can only speculate as to the reasons behind these differences. One

104 For a similar phenomenon on the Column of Trajan, see Hölscher 1999. Ryberg (1967, 43–50) sees all seven figures facing the emperor in the panel as undifferentiated Roman soldiers in camp dress.

105 For triumphal paintings, see supra n. 45. Coins are another possible source of inspiration: Lucius Verus issued rex datus coins (e.g., BMCRE 4, 426, nos. 300–2; RIC 3, 255, nos. 511–13) that feature the emperor seated on a suggestus with prominent pegs. These coins are clearly based on an earlier Trajanic type (Woytek 2010, 480–81, no. 594) and notably do not feature any architectural background. For the complicated, and to a great degree unknowable, interplay between coins, reliefs, and painting, see, e.g., Wolfram Thill 2014, esp. 126–27 (with further bibliography).

106 A similar phenomenon can be seen on the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum, where three of the panels on the northeast provincial side include trees to indicate a setting along the empire’s borders.

107 For the role of architectural depictions in underlining the contrast between Rome and the provinces on the arch at Beneventum, see Wolfram Thill 2012, 53–66.
possibility is that the arch stood outside the city, perhaps along a major road, similar to the setting of the arch at Beneventum.\textsuperscript{108} If this was the case, then the arch’s production team perhaps was interested in illustrating and underlining the architectural glory of the capital, which would not have been on direct view as it would have been for the column. More importantly, the arch would have addressed a different primary audience than the column—namely, travelers to the capital. The urban, particularly Roman, buildings on display on the arch could represent a shared architectural culture found throughout other cities of the empire, perhaps the hometowns or recent destinations of travelers making their way to Rome. This theme of integration, reinforced by the \textit{rex datus} panel, would be appropriate for a monument associated with movement toward the capital. All of this is of course unprovable, but it is important to consider that the numerous discrepancies between the arch and column may be related not just to chronology but also to factors such as audience.

**Conclusion**

The architectural depictions on the Column of Marcus Aurelius played an important role in the carefully considered presentation of war and victory crafted for that monument. The initial sequence of frontier buildings eloquently and succinctly defined both the setting and the stakes of the conflict. The choice to forego any further depiction of peaceful, prosperous settlements and to limit evidence of military construction positioned the conflict’s territory far from Rome and sought to avoid the suggestion of a permanent Roman presence in the territory. The representation of barbarians as architecturally primeval further discouraged ideas of expansion by casting barbarian territory as an undesirable wasteland.

Monumental reliefs were only one approach to commemorating a conflict: written sources, rituals such as triumphal processions, and other visual media such as coins and painting were just a few of the numerous other means by which the public perception of war could be manipulated, at various scales and social levels.\textsuperscript{109} Nevertheless, the medium of monumental reliefs was a distinctive means of communication. Large-scale and strikingly three-dimensional, permanent and public, reliefs were closely associated with the very architectural fabric of the capital. They were part of the city itself. The message of monumental reliefs is thus firmly connected and attuned to Rome.

This connection between setting and medium must be taken into consideration, and indeed further insight can be gleaned by comparing the architectural depictions of the Antonine column with those of the Column of Trajan, the Great Trajanic Frieze, and the Marcus Aurelius panels. On the other hand, similarities in the compositions of certain scenes suggest a familiarity of the production team of the Antonine column with the broad monumental habit of the city (and perhaps the city’s surrounding area) rather than a strict reliance on a single model. On the other hand, the handling of architectural depictions on the four monuments demonstrates that, even within the specific medium of monumental reliefs, there were competing approaches to visualizing military conflict and war and that these approaches were not necessarily contingent solely on what was actually occurring along the frontier. The Column of Trajan used architecture to cast enemy territory as worthy of conquest and to emphasize the benefits of peaceful integration. The Great Trajanic Frieze also employed architecture to delineate Roman from barbarian space but characterized the same enemy as pathetically inferior. The Column of Marcus Aurelius eschewed messages of peaceful integration and used architecture to emphasize the remoteness of the depicted conflict. Finally, the Marcus Aurelius panels sharpened the disparity between barbarian vs. Roman to a total lack of architecture standing in contrast to the emphasized architectural glory of the capital itself. To understand any given relief monument, then, requires contextualizing it within the monumental habit of the city as a whole.

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\textsuperscript{108} The process of spoliation, whereby eight Marcus Aurelius panels were inserted into the fourth-century Arch of Constantine and three were immersed in a nearby church, is still poorly understood and beyond the scope of this article; see Liverani 2011 (with bibliography). For the purposes of the current discussion, it is noted that the panels are sufficiently heavy that they probably originated from a monument close to Rome, but not so heavy (like the column) that the arch necessarily stood within the boundaries of the city. If the arch in fact stood outside the city on a major road, this would coordinate well with the panels’ interest in the emperor coming and going from Rome (\textit{profectio, adventus}, and triumph panels).

\textsuperscript{109} For the public presentation of Marcus Aurelius and his wars in general, and literary presentation in particular, see Birley 1999, 2010; van Ackeren 2012; Rossignol 2014. For the material presentation, see the papers in the “Material Forms of Self-Representation” section in van Ackeren 2012, including coins (Börner 2012), ideal sculpture (Stewart 2012), and portraits (Boschung 2012b). For the architectural evidence in the capital, see Boatwright 2010.
If the handling of the depictions of architecture, with all its ideological consequences, was a choice, what were its goals? The Antonine conceptualization of barbarian territory as worthless was critical, because it helped justify why Germania was not part of Rome. Punishment against invading tribes was an accomplishment to be acclaimed, but it was not intrinsically opposed to expanding the borders, which was logically the best way to secure Roman interests in the region. Indeed, the conceptualization of victory presented on the Column of Marcus Aurelius ran counter to much discourse that tied victory to territorial expansion. Even in the much later *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, the idea lingered that Marcus originally intended to bring the territories under Roman jurisdiction."110 But if the territory was, like the people on it, not desirable, then leaving it outside the borders could be acceptable. The architecture thus augmented and refined the same message sent by other aspects of the frieze, such as the brutal, overwhelming violence in battle, the executions of prisoners, and the assaults on women and children. The architectural poverty provided an appropriate context for this message and these scenes: perpetually barbarian territory far from the capital.

Going further, the characterization of the setting of the campaigns as bleak and worthless also provided some justification for why Marcus’ wars had not resulted in the sort of loot and subsequent building expansion in the capital that Trajan’s northern wars had produced."111 The choice to emulate the Column of Trajan must have recalled that column’s setting, the magnificent Forum of Trajan. Whatever the surroundings of the Antonine column, they clearly were not as splendid, or at least not as worthy of mention or preservation. In its design, the Antonine column laid claim to the sort of glory earned by Trajan’s northern campaigns, but at the same time the details of the frieze clarified that the fiscal circumstances of the two emperors’ wars were not the same.

Finally, a clear message of establishing security through a definitive border between Roman and insignificant barbarian territory also justified a firm end to extended yet inconclusive wars. Rossignol points out that the senate apparently asked Commodus to conclude the wars and that an emphasis on military achievements far from Rome could have been destabilizing within that institution."112 Since the senate was the nominal dedicator of monumental reliefs, it would not be surprising if the frieze reflected senatorial interests in this respect.

One must consider a monument within the context of its particular audience. Looking back on the Marcomannic Wars from the privileged viewpoint of history and with an eye to the empire as a whole, it can be difficult to remember what was deemed worthy of celebration about campaigns that were so drawn out and whose results ultimately presaged greater invasions to come. Yet the extensive modeling of the Antonine column on earlier Trajanic monuments must have been intended to encourage favorable comparison between the campaigns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, despite their different outcomes."113 The Antonine column frieze itself makes clear that to a large extent Marcus’ accomplishments were framed not around what he achieved on the frontiers but what he achieved for Rome. His wars were commendable for keeping the barbarian hordes at a distance from the capital and for maintaining the borders, both physical and conceptual, between Roman and barbarian. What mattered in Rome was how matters affected Rome, and in this respect Marcus Aurelius had been a smashing success.

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