REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR IN ANCIENT ROME

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CONQUEST AND DESIRE:
ROMAN VICTORIA IN PUBLIC
AND PROVINCIAL SCULPTURE

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Among the most familiar representations of war in imperial Rome are the narrative reliefs from the Column of Marcus Aurelius, set up in the Campus Martius after the emperor’s death in A.D. 180. The reliefs, with their frequently violent subject matter and intense, expressive style, offered a detailed and visually specific account of Marcus’ campaigns on the Danube frontier. They have been extensively studied by scholars as early examples of a “baroque” Late Antique style, as representations of imperial power, and, recently, as a critical primary source for the study of gesture in Roman art.¹

Less attention has, however, been paid to the divine figures interspersed among the narrative reliefs, despite their large scale and prominent placement on the column. An image of Victoria, for example, appeared exactly halfway up the column, separated from the narrative reliefs by two symmetrical, heavily adorned trophies and twice the size of any mortal figure (fig. 64). Standing in an elegant contrapposto pose and supporting an immense shield, she made victory seem as easy as the words – now lost, but originally proclaiming the successful completion of a military campaign – that she wrote upon it. The image was modeled on a Greek statue of Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual love, in a familiar format now known as the Aphrodite of Capua type (fig. 65). Victoria echoed the Greek sculpture in her pose, turning to the left, with the weight on the right, and the left leg bent, and in her drapery, a mantle wrapped about the hips; the style is naturalistic and classicizing. On the column, the goddess offered an image of grace and beauty strikingly at odds with the scenes of slaughter surrounding her. What, then, was this divine figure doing among the column’s historical reliefs, and how did she complement and enhance the representations of war seen throughout the monument?

The goal of this essay is to understand how the seductive Victoria figure on the Column of Marcus Aurelius worked, why it was included – indeed,
highlighted — within the sculptural program of this prominent, imperially sponsored metropolitan monument. For my method of approach, I take as a starting point Tonio Hölscher’s suggestion, in *Victoria Romana*, that images based on the Aphrodite of Capua type were effective in part because they lacked a fixed, specific meaning. Instead, their significance could be altered through context, attributes, and above all inscriptions, which tied the goddess to precise historical occasions. The essay begins with an examination of visual precedents for the seductive Victoria image, to attempt to reconstruct the range of expectations viewers brought to it. One particularly significant model was the Victoria figure from the Column of Trajan, with a complex iconography attesting to the princeps’ military prowess, good fortune,
and constitutional legitimacy. The analogous figure from the Column of Marcus Aurelius can best be understood as a reception and transformation of this earlier image, selectively emphasizing its Aphrodite-like qualities to intimate the desirable aspects of Roman imperialism.
In the second half of the essay, I consider the reception of this canonical imperial image, focusing on a case study of monuments from the Roman province of Germania Superior. While the type had widespread and extensive appeal throughout the empire, it was especially popular in this frontier region, where around thirty versions of the image have been found. Large-scale monuments dedicated by soldiers — for instance, a sculptural group set up near the limes, in a former watchtower converted into a temple — highlighted the type’s military aspect and its connection to Roman state religion. Such works also offered precedents for more modest private commissions, where Victoria was deployed to advertise the patrons’ enjoyment of a cultivated way of life, one of the benefits of Roman conquest. Taken together, these varied sculptures illuminate the range of meanings and connotations possible
for the seductive Victoria image and enhance our understanding of the relationship between metropolitan and provincial art.

The broader purpose of the essay is to investigate, through an especially prominent but characteristic example, the significant role played by the gods within the rich Roman repertory of images dealing with war and victory. Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to narrative reliefs depicting army life, battles, triumphs, and the like. Yet apart from Hölsher’s pioneering *Victoria Romana*, there has been much less interest in divine and mythological figures.\(^4\) Such images, however, appeared frequently in metropolitan imperial art; they were also extensively replicated on provincial monuments. They thus add to our understanding, first, of the Romans’ own conceptions of their imperial project; as public images accessible to a broad popular audience, such works complement the information provided by elite literary texts. In addition, their use by private individuals on the provincial periphery helps us to understand the reception, as well as the promulgation, of Roman ideals regarding their imperial mission.

**LEGITIMACY AND HUMANITAS: VICTORY ON METROPOLITAN PUBLIC MONUMENTS**

On Roman imperial monuments, the seductive figure of Victoria embodied the emperor’s military successes (figs. 64, 66). According to the Roman conception of victory outlined by Jean Gagé in his influential 1933 article, “La Théologie de la Victoire Impériale,” military success was a sign that the emperor enjoyed divine favor and good fortune (*felicitas*) earned by his courage (*virtus*); such success furthermore justified his political power.\(^5\) This conception of victory was rooted in the republican past, when orators such as Cicero used it to legitimize the extraordinary powers given to late republican generals; in the *Pro Lege Manilia* of 65 B.C., for instance, Cicero noted that the Romans apportion major commands not only on account of *virtus* but also the “divinitus adiuncta fortuna” (good fortune linked to the gods) that brings honor, glory, and great achievement (47). A century and a half later, the Younger Pliny’s panegyric of Trajan sounded the same themes: the emperor is courageous, divinely chosen, and successful in peace and war; thus he alone is worthy to wield the supreme authority.\(^6\)

These themes of panegyric were given visual form on monuments such as the Column of Trajan, where they were illustrated through historical incidents on the
narrative reliefs and were also signified via divine and mythological figures. The seductive Victoria image, for instance, combined allusions to Trajan’s *virtus*, *felicitas*, and legitimacy in a succinct and effective manner (fig. 66). Most important, and most recognizable to Roman viewers, were attributes linking the goddess to the emperor’s military prowess. Victoria stood turning toward the left and inscribed an oval shield wreathed with laurel, symbolic of victory and worn by emperors during their triumphs. So, too, her foot rested on a helmet, enhancing her martial appearance, and she was set off from the column’s narrative by two trophies laden with weaponry. The goddess was thus surrounded by familiar and reiterative symbols of military victory, which would have recalled for viewers Trajan’s extraordinary achievements in war, enumerated on the column, throughout the Forum, on coins, and in the emperor’s triumphs and speeches, such as that of the Younger Pliny (fig. 67).\(^7\)

These symbols of military victory were balanced by visual references to Greek sculpture and the goddess Aphrodite, which – for more cultivated viewers – connected Trajan and his monument with the magnificent artistic legacy of the Classical past. Since the Roman goddess Venus was closely associated with the quality of *felicitas*, such references also offered a very appropriate way to connect the emperor to that important virtue.\(^8\) The references were particularly clear in Victoria’s costume and hairstyle. She wore a high-belted tunic with fine delicate folds, whose thin, almost transparent character was highlighted by the contrast with a heavier mantle draped about her hips; the style echoed sculptures of late fifth-century B.C. Athens.\(^9\)
So, too, the manner in which her chiton slipped down her right shoulder recalled that of earlier Greek images of Aphrodite, as did the ornate arrangement of her hair with a topknot and bun in the back.\textsuperscript{10}

In addition, as noted above, the goddess’s pose, drapery, and youthful beauty were modeled on the Classical Aphrodite of Capua type. The lost original on which the image was based probably served as the cult statue for a temple of the goddess that stood on the acropolis of Corinth (fig. 68).\textsuperscript{11} Here a half-nude Aphrodite held out a shield, an object frequently dedicated in temples in celebration of military victories.\textsuperscript{12} Although martial in appearance, the goddess of love was also portrayed as erotically attractive; furthermore, her serene expression and elegant, seemingly spontaneous pose suggested that victory might be achieved with effortless ease and grace (fig. 65). On the Column of Trajan, the visual references to this Corinthian Aphrodite type, together with the others discussed here, helped to convey the attractive qualities of the emperor’s victories, and to evoke the \textit{felicitas} that he possessed and transmitted, through victory, to the empire. Similar references to Greek culture and the attractiveness of victory were seen elsewhere in Trajan’s Forum, for instance in the frieze of Victorias decorating the basilica;\textsuperscript{13} so too the Younger Pliny’s panegyric was replete with laudatory passages on Trajan’s many victories and his \textit{felicitas}, of tremendous benefit to Rome (5, 9, 94, cf. Dio Cass. 68.3.4).

While victory and \textit{felicitas} might, in the rhetoric of imperial panegyric, offer clear evidence for the legitimacy of the emperor’s claim to power, the sculptures of the Column of Trajan also highlighted his political authority and connection to Augustus. This was shown in the Victoria image through the goddess’s juxtaposition with a shield placed on a pillar. The configuration echoes that of the \textit{clipeus virtutis} (the shield of virtues) and Tarentine Victoria statue of the first princes, set up nearby in Rome’s Senate House. The \textit{clipeus} was awarded to Augustus by the Senate in 27 B.C. after his “restoration of the Republic” and enumerated his four cardinal virtues: \textit{virtus, pietas, iustitia, dementia}.\textsuperscript{14} It stood on a pillar near a statue of Victoria honoring Augustus’ victory at Actium.\textsuperscript{15} The Senate also awarded Augustus an oak wreath “\textit{ob cives servatos,}” for saving the lives of citizens by his restoration of the peace. These three symbols – Victoria, the shield, and the oak wreath – were frequently combined on Augustan coins to praise the legitimacy of the princeps through both military and more constitutional channels.\textsuperscript{16} The Augustan Victoria, a Hellenistic sculpture from Tarentum, was likely of a different type from the Venus-inspired version seen on the column; the \textit{clipeus}, too, was a round shield rather than the more oval version inscribed by Victoria.\textsuperscript{17} Nonetheless, coins from the civil wars of A.D. 68, which used the seductive Victoria type, programmatically recalled the Augustan
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monuments via details such as the oak wreath and inscriptions proclaiming "Ob cives servatos" and "SPQR" on the shield.18

Like the contenders of A.D. 68, Trajan had come to power in the aftermath of assassination and civil disruption; as he sought to put the empire on a secure and peaceful footing, he took the first princeps as a model. His portraits, and his ambitious Forum complex, attest to the importance of Augustan precedents for Trajan’s artists; so too did the Victoria on the column. The shield, pillar, and victory goddess would have been familiar to viewers through their juxtaposition in the Curia Iulia. The wreath may also have referred to occasions on which the dīpesus was decorated with laurel; such adornment was appropriate, since military victory created the conditions in which the emperor’s virtues operated.19 And the words the goddess wrote – likely painted on and thus no longer preserved – may have referred to and revised the record of Augustus’ virtues on the dīpesus by substituting a slogan commemorating Trajan’s martial victories, such as "Vici[oria] Dacica."20 The message was one of political legitimacy, guaranteed by the emperor’s respect for constitutional forms as well as his exemplary military achievements. Coins with the same image, released concurrently with the construction of the column and featuring legends such as “SPQR. Optimo Principi,” reinforced this message and broadcast it to a wider audience (fig. 67).21 In this way Trajan’s own victories, and his constitutional powers, were set within a broader historical framework stretching back to the founding of the principate; this theme was central to the emperor’s propaganda.

When Commodus initiated the construction of a monument for his father Marcus Aurelius in the late second century A.D., he too looked back to prestigious earlier
models. Trajan and his column now offered the best precedent for the commemoration of a military emperor. Thus the Column of Marcus Aurelius recalled its predecessor in architectural form, subject matter, and, frequently, in detail; the seductive Victoria figure placed at the column’s halfway mark (fig. 64) was only one of many visual echoes of the earlier monument (fig. 66). At the same time, Marcus’ column did not just imitate its famous model, but adapted it, with a simplified iconography, greater repetition of paradigmatic scenes, and a radically altered, high-voltage dramatic style.22 The Victoria image on the Column of Marcus Aurelius offers an illuminating example of how this process of adaptation worked. Its stylistic alterations have been much commented upon, but the changes in its overall visual effect and meaning deserve further consideration.23 Most notably, while the image’s visual references to military prowess were largely reproduced, the associations with Augustus were more or less eliminated, and its connections to Aphrodite and Greek art increased. Thus the image was selectively altered, and it is worth considering what implications these changes might have for our understanding of the column, and more generally, for our understanding of representations of war in the late second century A.D.

First, however, one must draw attention to what did not change: the celebration of the emperor’s virtus. On the Column of Marcus Aurelius, as on that of Trajan, Victoria was flanked by large, impressive trophies – the unequivocal signs of battlefield victory – and was depicted inscribing a shield. The latter had indeed become enormous, presumably to make its written inscription, commemorating the emperor’s victories, more legible and visually striking. As on the column’s narrative reliefs, with their frequent depictions of brave, invincible Roman soldiers and cowering defeated barbarians, so here too Rome’s military success was represented in clear and comprehensive terms; contemporary state reliefs, coins, and inscriptions bore the same propagandistic message, an appropriate one for imperially sponsored monuments.24 This message was factually incorrect; Commodus had in fact abandoned the frontiers created by his father’s campaigns and was largely unsuccessful in his own military endeavors. But the column nonetheless represented imperial victory as both laudable and assured; for Commodus as for Trajan, military success – or at any rate its appearance – was indispensable.

It is true that on the Column of Marcus Aurelius one further military attribute, the helmet under Victoria’s foot, has been eliminated; this change might be interpreted as minimizing the decisiveness of subjugation seen in the image. But one must take into account the many other signs of military success (trophies, shield, even the imploring barbarian whose leg overlaps the right trophy), as well as the topographical
context, function, and patronage of the monument. Given these considerations, I would argue that the helmet was eliminated not to create a more ambiguous image of victory but to heighten the attractive, pacific qualities of Victoria herself, as will be examined in greater detail below.

While the Victoria image on Marcus' Column followed Trajan's precedent in the celebration of the emperor's victories, it departed from the model in another significant aspect; the pillar and laurel wreath were eliminated. The sculptor was then able to increase the size of the shield, as already noted, and to rest it on one of the column's windows, a practical innovation. These alterations can be seen purely in practical terms; as with other changes on the column, they made the image simpler and thus presumably easier for viewers to grasp. But given that the pillar and laurel wreath helped to connect the image with the clipeus virtutis and the memory of Augustus, the changes in visual form may also have reflected alterations in the image's programmatic message. Unlike Trajan, Commodus succeeded to the throne in a peaceful and unquestioned manner, as did his father. For them, the example of Augustus, the first princeps, was less significant as a precedent; perhaps, too, they did not expect viewers so readily familiar with the clipeus and the Curia, now rarely seen on coins. Such references could be left out; the focus was elsewhere.

The focus of the Victoria image on the Column of Marcus Aurelius was now, emphatically, the voluptuous half-nude body of Victoria herself. The goddess no longer wore the high-belted tunic seen on the Column of Trajan; her low-slung mantle slipped down to reveal her pubic area in front and her wide, sensuously rounded right hip. Her wings curved toward her body, seeming almost to caress it, and their soft irregular feathers offered an effective contrast with her smooth flesh; her gently curling hair added further textural interest as it streamed down from its topknot onto her neck. The overall effect of these changes, and of the elimination of the helmet beneath her foot, was to make the goddess look more seductive, and less martial, than her Trajanic prototype. The same tendency toward a heightened erotic character may be observed in other versions of the Aphrodite of Capua type from the Antonine period, particularly statue groups commemorating mortal couples, with the wife as Venus and the husband as Mars. There the type was deployed to praise the wife's beauty, desirability, and love for her husband, and to exalt both through the evocation of Greek myth and Classical art. On the Column of Marcus Aurelius, the Victoria image had a different ideological role. While the column's narrative reliefs depicted the laborious and often brutal process of Roman conquest, the erotic, Greek-inspired figure offered an attractive image of imperial victory. As such, the sculpture fit well with ideals of Roman imperialism popular in
the Antonine era, and articulated in the panegyric literature of the period as well as its art.

According to Roman panegyrist of the imperial period, conquest was a benevolent undertaking that would transmit *humanitas* (civilization) throughout the empire. This idealized view of Roman imperialism appeared, for instance, in the Elder Pliny:

Nec ignoro ingrati ac segnis animi existimari posse merito si obiter atque in trans cursu ad hunc modum dicatur terra omnium terrarum alnuma eadem et parens, numine deum electa quae caelum ipsum clarius faceret, sparsa congregaret imperia ritusque molliet et tot populorum discordes ferasque linguas sermonis commercio contraheret ad colloquia et humanitatem homini daret, breviterque una cunctarum gentium in toto orbe patria fieret.

I am not unaware that I may rightly be considered of ungrateful or dilatory spirit, if in my survey in this way I speak of the land [Italy] which is the nurse and parent of all lands, chosen by the authority of the gods, which will make the sky itself brighter, collect scattered empires, and make gentle traditional customs, and bring together into conversation the discordant and wild languages of so many peoples through communication of speech, and give civilization to men, and in brief become the one homeland of all the races in the whole world.

(HN 3.39)

So, too, the Greek rhetorician Aelius Aristides touched upon these themes in his panegyric on Rome in the mid-second century A.D., stressing the peaceful and harmonious government of Rome, its unification of the whole world, and its advancement of the forms of civilized life, both in the Greek world and beyond it.

This idealized view of Rome's civilizing mission, enunciated in literary texts for elite readers, was also promulgated on Roman state monuments for a broader metropolitan audience. Marcus Aurelius, for example, was represented on his column with a civilized, cultivated appearance, including elegantly styled curly hair, a philosopher's beard, and a commanding but self-restrained demeanor; in this way, he furnished the greatest possible contrast to the unkempt, disordered, and overly emotive barbarian leaders. Similar contrasts are visible on the Aurelian panels now incorporated into the Arch of Constantine, and on Antonine coins depicting the emperor calmly galloping over the wretched body of his defeated enemy. The Victoria figure on the Column of Marcus Aurelius — based on a Greek prototype, effortless and serene in her visual effect — should be understood within this broader context as an image of *humanitas*; at the same time, her erotic appearance intimated that Roman victory, and the civilization it brought, were attractive to both
the conquerors and the conquered. In this way she was an effective symbol of what Greg Woolf has termed "the seductions of civilization." Since the same image was adapted on private works of art from the Latin West, a careful contextual examination of such monuments can shed further light on the image by showing how it was received and understood by provincials.

"THE SEDUCTIONS OF CIVILIZATION": VICTORIA IN GERMANIA SUPERIOR

In studies of Roman art, provincial sculptures such as the German reliefs examined here tend to be excluded from consideration. They have frequently been described as crude and as derivative of imperial models in form and meaning, despite their very different contexts, functions, and audiences. Alternatively, these monuments have been seen as local products, expressive of indigenous tastes and traditions, notwithstanding their Roman iconography and sculptural technique, and their Latin inscriptions. Neither approach offers an entirely satisfactory method for investigating these modest but often intriguing works of art. Here instead I will examine the reliefs as a series of partial and selective receptions of imperial prototypes; in Germany, as in Rome, the works both responded to and adapted earlier models. For a discussion of Roman representations of war, they repay close analysis because they complement the information derived from metropolitan monuments and offer critical insights into the manner in which imperial conquest was depicted on the frontier, where the major campaigns took place.

A votive column from Mainz, likely dating to the Trajanic period, serves as an early example of the Roman representation of war in provincial Germany (fig. 69). The column is in fragmentary condition, much weathered and with only the base preserved, but it is nonetheless informative due to its three sculpted figures in relief and lengthy inscription. It was likely erected in the civic center of Mainz, the capital of the newly created province of Germania Superior and site of a major legionary base along the Rhine. On the monument, Victoria held out a shield that she inscribed with the legend "V[ictoria] Aug[usta]," she was half nude and placed her left foot on a globe, a symbol of universal rule. In her overall visual format, she closely resembled images of the victory goddess seen on contemporary coins, for instance in her erect frontal pose, her half-nudity, her right arm crooked across her body, and the jaunty outthrust of her right hip (fig. 67). Thus it seems reasonable to posit that the artist of the Mainz sculpture took direct inspiration
from a metropolitan model for the figure of Victoria (and also, with further adaptations, for the image of Apollo from the same monument); a similar use of coin models has been posited for other provincial German sculptures, for instance a portrait head of Gordian III. At the same time, the Mainz sculptor adapted his model, eliminating the palm tree supporting Victoria’s shield (perhaps because it was unfamiliar to his German audience) and substituting a globe beneath her foot for the more usual helmet. Nor did he reproduce the classicizing style of the coin, but instead he carved the limestone relief in a more abstract manner, accentuating the linear patterns of the drapery while leaving the flesh flat and the musculature undifferentiated.

In evaluating the Victoria figure on the Mainz column and its reception of metropolitan prototypes, it is useful to consider not only the work’s iconography and style but also its broader visual context, its patrons, and its function. Victoria appeared here together on the four-sided base of a sizable votive dedication, which combined architectural elements (column shaft, base, and capital), with sculptures of Roman-style divinities. Such votive columns were frequently erected in provincial Germany and tended to follow a well-established format; they might however vary in the selection of gods represented, presumably following the dictates of the patrons. Here we have preserved Apollo holding a lyre and Juno sacrificing as well as Victoria; the most likely restoration of the entire monument would include a socle with the gods of the week, and a crowning statue group of Jupiter on horseback, victorious over a snaky-legged giant (cf. fig. 72). Relative to the previously considered metropolitan columns, the Mainz votive was smaller and less elaborate in its sculptural program, and was comprised of static images of divinities rather than predominantly narrative scenes; these features again connect it more closely to coin prototypes.

In terms of patronage, the Mainz monument differed from both metropolitan coins and columns in that it was commissioned not by the emperor but by a group of local benefactors. We are fortunate in that the inscription has preserved the names of the column’s commissioners, a cross section of the provincial elite of Mainz. Although most had the traditional tria nomina of Roman citizens, some, with names such as Julius and Valerius, were likely local clientela of republican and imperial generals. Among them was L. Valerius Fronto, whose name led the list and who was commemorated on his tombstone as a former centurion of the Legio I Adiutrix. As a high-ranking soldier and, upon his retirement, a person of consequence in Mainz, Fronto belonged to two worlds – that of the immense and heterogeneous Roman Empire and that of his local frontier community – and mediated between them. The list of patrons, then, illustrates both how the Mainz Column differed
from imperial public monuments in its commissioners and how it was nonetheless connected to Rome by men like Fronto, who had served, and benefited from, the imperial system.

The mention of Fronto on the Mainz Column also aids in specifying its date and perhaps the occasion of its commissioning. The Legio I Adiutrix was in Mainz only from A.D. 70–86, so the column should date to the late first or early second century A.D.\textsuperscript{40} Given its similarities to the Trajanic coin series discussed above, a date early in that emperor’s reign seems most likely.\textsuperscript{41} The occasion for the monument cannot
of course be reconstructed with certainty, but the inscription "Vic[toria] Aug[usta]" suggests that the column commemorates an imperial victory. Recent archaeological investigations have led scholars to posit that – although Domitian's battles in the area are well known – the frontier was in fact pushed forward from the Rhine only under Trajan.42 The column might then function as a thanks-offering for a victory won at this time of personal relevance to the inhabitants of Mainz, since their city was no longer directly on the border but well behind it, and consequently better protected.43 And the column's dedication to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Juno Regina, the highest gods of the Roman state, would signal the gratitude felt by the inhabitants of Mainz to Rome. If the column was, indeed, a thanks-offering to the gods for Roman imperial conquests, then the image of Victoria was highly appropriate. One might furthermore see the figures of Juno and Apollo, with their significant attributes of patera and lyre, as alluding to the religious rituals and cultivated life that victory would bring to the city. As on the columns and coins considered earlier, Victoria was an image of Roman military success, but the implications of victory were somewhat altered. While in Rome, greater emphasis was placed on foreign conquest justifying the emperor's political power, here the focus was on the benefits of victory, as it created the conditions for a new, more civilized way of life.

A funerary stele from Obernburg, the site of a second- to third-century fort along the German frontier, illustrates a further adaptation of the Roman imagery of military success; in this case the Victoria image was deployed to perpetuate the memory of local private patrons (fig. 70).44 The work's composition, style, and inscription suggest that it was set up in the Antonine period and was contemporaneous with the rebuilding, in stone, of the auxiliary fort.45 It thus dated a half-century or so later than the Mainz Column and documented a different phase in the development of the province. Germania Superior was now more urbanized, and a greater number of its inhabitants were familiar with Roman culture than before; at the same time, as Roman habits spread to the indigenous population, locals evolved a hybrid culture, taking elements from both Roman and native traditions.46 This is well illustrated by the stele itself, in which Roman artistic forms and a Latin inscription were combined with an antinaturalistic style to commemorate a husband and wife who adopted Roman dress and habits but lacked the tria nomina.

On the front of the stele, the deceased couple Girisonius and Bibulla were shown dining together with a young girl, likely their daughter; their clothes, furniture, and food – carefully depicted in an abstract yet detailed manner – attested to the high degree of material culture that they enjoyed. On the stele's sides, the war gods Victoria and Mars stood in niches framed by columns, both holding shields...

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emblazoned with parts of the inscription; Victoria inscribed hers “Mem[oriam] Pietat[e].” The lower half of the stele’s front was likewise covered with an inscription, in tipsy capitals, giving the name of the patron, Gibais, perhaps the daughter shown on the front of the stele, and commending Girisonius and Bibulla to the Di Manes, the Roman gods of the dead.\(^{47}\)

This small, schematically carved sandstone stele from Obernburg transformed its Roman models in an extensive and thoroughgoing manner. To consider the front of the monument first, the scene of dining, familiar from Greek and Etruscan kline monuments, was taken up by the Romans and appeared frequently on tombstones of provincial Germany.\(^{48}\) The Obernburg stele’s artist used this familiar format to draw attention to the deceased’s adoption of Roman material culture, highlighting such details as Girisonius’ couch, Bibulla’s chair, the small table, and the jug of wine beside it, not to mention Girisonius’ Roman toga. As literary and archaeological sources attest, such objects were among the most visible signs of Roman conquest; they were furthermore thought by the Romans to show the civilized nature of those who used them.\(^{49}\) Provincials who wished to achieve the appearance of civilization (with its concomitant advantages in a society dominated by Romans) were thus encouraged to adopt these tangible manifestations of Roman life. The artist of the Obernburg stele thus adapted a conventional image of Roman dining to advertise the cultivated way of life of the couple, a sign of their status within their frontier town.
With the divine figures on the stele’s sides also, the artist adapted Roman models in terms of style, iconography, and meaning. Likely inspired by earlier provincial monuments such as the nearby Mainz Column, the artist enhanced the antinaturalistic qualities seen in those works. For the Victoria figure, the artist focused attention on creating a clear, highly legible silhouette of the goddess in profile, and on carving certain features in detail, for instance her complex hairstyle and the diagonal folds of her lower drapery. Above all, he used the goddess’s hands, gaze, and forward lunge to highlight the importance of the shield and its written inscription. It was indeed a very significant detail for this funerary stele. While the shields on both the metropolitan columns and the Mainz votive proclaimed the victory of the emperor, here the shield celebrated instead the memory of the deceased and the piety of the patron. On the Oberburg stele, Victoria likely retained her identity as a goddess of military success; she was after all juxtaposed with the war god grasping a spear. Yet judging from her inscribed shield, and from the broader context of the grave monument, she also served to commemorate a different kind of victory – that of memory – as Girisonius and Bibulla lived on in the recollections of the stele’s viewers.

The sculptures from Mainz and Oberburg furnish examples of how viewers on the second-century limes might make sense of the Roman imperial iconography representing war and conquest in terms of their own cultural background. The sensuality and appearance of effortless victory, critical to both the Greek statue of Aphrodite and the Roman imperial Victoria, have been eschewed here; for instance, on the Oberburg stele Victoria was no longer half-nude but rather fully draped. Iconographic details evoking the clipeus virtutis, which suggested the legitimacy of the princeps and were thus critical to the Trajanic metropolitan type, have likewise been dropped. And the style is no longer classicizing but highly abstract, with linear patterns decorating the surface and few attempts at modeling. The emphasis is on the creation of a clearly delineated and recognizable goddess, and on the elucidation of her significance through the written word. More broadly, the appropriation of this imperial image testifies to the patrons’ knowledge of Roman material culture. Such knowledge, and such self-promotion, would serve to enhance the patrons’ status in the competitive world of the provincial elite, as locals vied to demonstrate their cultivation and their ties to Rome. The figure of Victoria was created in the metropolitan center in order to present attractively the benefits of Roman imperialism; it was then adopted on the frontiers precisely as a sign of provincials’ integration into the imperial system created by Roman conquest.
In conclusion, it is useful to consider two monuments of the late second to early third century A.D., the period of the most extensive Romanization of the Rhineland. As these works of art demonstrate, the artistic culture of Germania Superior was drawing ever closer to that of metropolitan Rome; for instance, the sculptures have a more naturalistic and classicizing style than their provincial predecessors. Nonetheless, these seemingly Romanized works still differed from their models in the details of their iconography, their broader visual context, their function, and above all in their meaning; they represented imperial victory as their frontier audience understood it, as superlatively important, indeed the necessary condition for the continuance of their way of life.

An unusually large and well-executed statue group, likely dedicated by Roman soldiers near the *limes*, adapted the by now familiar Victoria type to serve as the focus of religious worship within a temple (fig. 71).\textsuperscript{31} Here the iconography of the associated figures, as well as the group’s patronage and context, brought out the image’s military resonances. Dominating the group was a cuirassed male figure, twice the height of the other sculptures and standing in a dynamic pose with his right arm raised; originally it was supported by the spear he grasped. His costume and
other attributes were similarly martial: an elaborate muscle cuirass, a paludamentum draped across his shoulders, and military sandals. In terms of weapons, he wore a sword belt slung across his right shoulder, with the long sword by his left side, while his left hand rested on a fragmentarily preserved shield. The visual format echoed a familiar image of Mars, seen most prominently as the cult statue of the Temple of Mars Ultor from the Forum of Augustus and spread throughout the empire on coins and gems; the type was also used, with a portrait head, in statues of the emperor and other military leaders. It was most familiar in provincial Germany as one of the divine images seen on votive columns and should thus probably be identified as Mars here; nonetheless, we must allow for the possibility that the figure represented the emperor and decorated a temple devoted to the imperial cult.

The two associated female figures were clearly divinities, although both were closely connected to the emperor also. One leaned on a pillar to her left, with her weight on the right and her left foot crossed in front of her. She wore only a mantle draped about her hips, while a snake curled about her left arm. This type of figure appeared on imperial coins of the late first to mid-third centuries A.D., where it was identified by inscription as “Salus Augusta,” the good health of the emperor and, by extension, of the empire; the figure should thus likely be identified as Salus here. The third figure was likewise half-nude, in the Aphrodite of Capua pose with her left foot on a globe and her left hand grasping a tall oval shield placed on a pillar. In a departure from the usual iconography, she poured an offering from a patera onto a small altar with her right hand; her shield was inscribed “Vicipotustria Augustae,” and she is generally identified as Victoria. Certainly she was a warlike goddess as well as a pious one.

The context of the statue group also contributed to its strongly martial and victorious character. The group was set up within a former military installation, a stone watchtower dated by brick stamps to the reign of Antoninus Pius. The chronology of the site is disputed, but it seems clear that the tower was altered, through the addition of a small adjoining room, and served in this later phase as a shrine. The three figures were placed within an arched niche in the central room of the tower; fragments of red, green, and yellow paint show that the interior was decorated with wall paintings also. Nearby stood another stone tower, while an earlier wooden one had by this period gone out of use. The buildings were situated along the line of the early second-century limes, and resembled contemporary fortifications. By the time the statue group was dedicated, the border had been pushed forward so that the site was no longer in the front line of defense. Nonetheless, the military architectural setting of the group would have enhanced its warlike connotations.
FIGURE 72: Votive column with Victoria, Nida, restored in A.D. 240. Frankfurt, Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte X 8384. Photo courtesy Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Frankfurt.
for viewers. So, too, would the circumstances of its dedication. As on the Mainz Column, the shield inscription, "Vi[ctoria] Au[gusta]" should have commemorated a particular military success, in gratitude for which the statue group was set up. Given that the group likely dated to the early third century, victory in a skirmish with attackers from across the border seems to have been the most likely occasion. Such victories took on added importance at this time, as attacks grew both more common and more serious; by circa A.D. 260 they led the Romans to draw back the frontier and effectively abandon their settlements east of the Rhine.

A votive column of the same period offers an analogous, but more extensive and explicit, representation of the connections between military victory, the gods of Rome, and the empire they made possible (fig. 72). The column was set up in Nida, a civitas capital in Germania Superior, and was restored and rededicated on March 13, 240 A.D., by the decurions of the town and their families. Its findspot – a Roman well near the Forum – suggests that this votive monument was set up in the civic center. The gods depicted on the column offered a selection of deities concerned either with war (Minerva, Mars, and Victoria), or with the benefits of peace. These latter included Fortuna, Ceres, and a Genius, holding attributes such as cornucopias, baskets of fruit, and sheaves of wheat to suggest prosperity and fecundity; even Hercules rested from his labors, cradling the apples of the Hesperides in his hand. The series of gods chosen thus presented an attractive picture of the material advantages resulting from Roman rule, while also acknowledging – through Jupiter on top, attacking a giant, as well as the gods of war shown in the column's reliefs – its foundation in military force.

The column's history suggests that both Romans and their enemies across the border could understand the monument as a symbol of the imperial system. As previously noted, the inscription states that the patrons restored it (restituerunt) on March 13, 240 A.D. The precise date may be significant; it was the dies imperii of Alexander Severus and thus the occasion of an important imperial festival. The fact that there were a number of similar inscriptions commemorating restorations of such votive columns at this time has led scholars to connect them with the cross-border raids of the Alamanni; the raids began in 233 and were repelled by the Roman armies only after causing considerable destruction to the towns near the frontier. One might go further and hypothesize that the attacks on the columns – of no particular strategic value but conspicuous signs of Roman rule – were meant as visible challenges to the imperial system. And the reconstruction and rededication of the columns by civic officials, in the aftermath of the raids, can be understood as symbolic of the reestablishment of Roman power in the region.
CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, I have argued in this chapter that divine and mythological images - for example the seductive Victoria type analyzed here - constituted a critical yet rarely examined aspect of the Roman representation of war. On metropolitan monuments such as the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, they complemented the programmatic message of the narrative battle scenes by suggesting, through the metaphor of a beautiful woman's body, the desirability of Roman conquest and the benefits of victory. In this way they served to convey an idealized view of Roman imperialism as a civilizing mission. They did so in a highly effective manner, and one different from that of the narrative images more commonly studied. So these Greek-inspired divine images had an important role to play in Roman art; they embodied the Romans' highest aspirations for their imperial project.

Images of gods, such as the seductive Victoria figure, were also frequently adapted for provincial monuments. In Germany they might be deployed, as in Rome, to celebrate imperial victory; yet they took on new meanings because the implications of victory were very different here. These German images of Victoria appeared on early votive and funerary monuments as signs of the conquest that had made possible a cultivated way of life. Such symbolic images of military success and its benefits became ever more important within the visual culture of Roman Germany as the Romans lost control of the frontier zone in the third century A.D.

NOTES

1. On the Column of Marcus Aurelius and the origins of Late Antique style see, e.g., Wegner 1931; on the reliefs and imperial power see Bianchi Bandinelli 1970, 324; Brilliant 1984, 114-15; and on gesture see Scheid and Huet 2000. See also Dillon, chap. 8 in this volume.


3. Votive reliefs: Bad Homburg, Saalburgmuseum Inv.no. St. 158; Bad Kreuznach, Römerrhalle Inv.nos. 3, 56; Birkenfeld, Museum des Vereins für Heimatkunde in Landkreis Birkenfeld, no Inv.no. (see Espérandieu 1907-81, vol. 6, 309-10, no. 5127); Frankfurt, Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte Inv.no. X 8384; Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum Inv.nos. 4869-71, C 12, C 3499, C 6814; Mainz, Landesmuseum Inv.no. S 994; Mannheim, Städtisches Reiss-Museum Inv.nos. Baumann 62, 622, Haug 17, Haug 77, Haug 87, no Inv.no. (see Espérandieu 1907-81, vol. 15, 467, no. 752); Obernburg, Römermuseum R 1954.17; Pforzheim, Heimatmuseum Inv.no. FSt.3.1894.116; no Inv.no. (see Kortüm 1995, 126, no. 421); Speyer, Museum der Pfalz Inv.nos. A 62, A 74, B 135, 13.VII.1912, 1927.42; Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum Inv.nos. RL 208, RL 68/160:1-10, no Inv.no. (see Espérandieu 1907-81, vol. 15, 332, no. 517).

Funerary: Obernburg, Römermuseum R 1889, 7.
4. On Victoria, see Hölscher 1967. Hölscher has also discussed the type as exemplified in a provincial public monument, the Victoria of Brescia, and its connections to the imperial art of Rome (Hölscher 1970, and 1994, 138-73).

5. Gagé 1933, 3. Gagé’s analysis has been recently reaffirmed by Fears 1981a. See also Kostrubian and Dillon, chapters 6 and 8 in this volume.

6. Praise of Trajan’s courage (13); Trajan chosen by the gods (1, 3); the emperor successful in peace and war (4, 12-16); worthy of his office (4, 13).

7. On the Column and its broader Forum setting see especially Settis 1988; Ungaro and Milella 1995; on Trajanic coins, see Mattingly 1956; and for Pliny’s praise of Trajan’s martial prowess see Pan.12-15, 17-20.

8. On Venus and felicitas see Schilling 1988, especially 159-61 (Hadrian’s temple of Venus Felix and Roma Aeterna); Schilling 1982, especially 379; Simon 1990, 228.

9. The rendering of the chiton and mantle is similar to that of Nikai from the Nike Temple Parapet, and to that of an image of Aphrodite found in the Athenian Agora (Stewart 1990, plate 419, 21, 25).

10. The chiton slipping off the left shoulder looks back to fifth-century b.c. renderings of Aphrodite, such as that of Figure M on the Parthenon East Pediment (Stewart 1990, plate 350-1). The hairstyle is that of the Capitoline Aphrodite type, probably a Hellenistic creation but also popular in the Roman imperial period (Smith 1991, plate 99).

11. Hellenistic terracottas from Corinth, dating as early as the late fourth and early third centuries b.c., suggest that such a statue was known and available for copying and adaptation by then (Bronner 1930, fig. 45:1). I thank Gloria Merker for sharing with me material from her upcoming monograph on the Tile Works also at Corinth. Whether the statue of Aphrodite survived Mummius’ infamous sack of Corinth in 146 B.C. is not clear, but Roman coins, lamps, statuettes, and a wall painting from Corinth show that by the Roman period it was again a well-known sculpture in the Corinthian acropolis temple. For coins, see Edwards (1933, nos. 101, 75, 208, 16-18); for lamps see Bronner 1930, 98-9, 192; for statuettes see Soles 1976, 43-58; for the wall painting see Gadbery 1993, 61-4.

12. On shield dedications see Hölscher 1967, 98, and for ancient sources, Herodotus (1.92.1), Pausanias (10.8.7).


16. Zanker 1988, fig. 80.


18. A very rare anonymous denarius from Gaul juxtaposes the seductive Victoria type and the inscription “Salus Generis Humani” on the obverse with an oak wreath and the inscription “SPQR” on the reverse (RIC I, Nr. 175; BMC I, 296). Denarii and sestertii of Galba show Victoria inscribing “PR” and “SPQR” on a shield resting on a column (RIC I nos. 99-101, 133, plate 25; BMC I, 353, nos. 232, 233, plate 54.26). Finally, sestertii of Vitellius and Vespasian show Victoria inscribing “Ob Cives Servatos” on a shield resting on a palm tree; these combine references to military victory with those to the end of civil war (RIC I nos. 123, 124, 142, 143, 169; RIC II nos. 464, 466, 467; BMC I, 379, nos. 61-4, plates 63.6, 64.2; BMC II, 181, nos. 577-85, 785-4, plates 22.11, 22.12, 31.6, 35.7).


20. Trajanic coins with the same seductive Victoria image, earlier than and contemporary with the column, bear this legend (RIC II nos. 522, 528-9, 531; BMC III nos. 812-6, plate 30.1); others are inscribed “Dacica” instead (RIC II nos. 130, 234, 286; BMC III nos. 322, 411, 439, 449, plates 14.16, 16.2, 16.14).


22. On the Column of Marcus Aurelius and its relation to Trajan’s Column, see especially...

23. On changes in style see Wegner 1931, 64–72.

24. On military imagery and its importance in late Antonine art, see Stemmer 1988, x–xiii (historical overview), 78–107 ("Politik und Propaganda"). See also Dillon, chap. 8 in this volume.


28. Oration XXVI. The government of Rome (29); Rome unifying the world (63); Rome making possible civilized life (62–100).

29. For exemplary images, see Scheid and Huet 2000, fig. 39; Stemmer 1988, 115. See also Dillon, chap. 8 in this volume.


32. For a thoughtful recent overview and critique of earlier approaches to provincial art, with abundant bibliography, see Kampen 2003, 377–8.

33. Bauchhens and Noelke 1981, 17–20 (Bauchhens); cf., however, the opinion of Noelke, 395; for a discussion of the problems posed by these two models, see Woolf 2001.


35. The head closely resembles coin portraits in profile, but its front view is distinctively different from metropolitan sculptural models (Cüppers 1990, 186).

36. The major study of these votive columns remains that of Bauchhens and Noelke 1981; for a recent reconsideration of the columns, see Woolf 2001.

37. CIL 13.6723. | [ovis] O[ptima] M[axima] e[t]/Iunoni Regin[ae]/Vici salutaris... To Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Juno Regina, the inhabitants of the Vicus Salutaris... (a long list of names follows; no verb is preserved).


39. The tombstone inscription is CIL 13.6793.

40. Bauchhens 1984, 32.

41. Earlier coins, for instance Domitian's, show a different composition, with Victoria seen in profile, still in the process of inscribing the shield (see e.g., BMC II plates 70.10, 72.7, 73.5).

42. Sommer 1999, 177–83.

43. Bauchhens and Noelke 1981, 45; Bauchhens argues for a Domitianic date, but a Trajanic one seems more probable now due to the similarities to Trajan's coins, as well as the new evidence for Trajan's extension of the limes (see previous n. 31).

44. Obernburg, Römermuseum R. 1889, 7. The Obernburg castellum was likely established during the extension of the German frontier under Domitian or Trajan; it was destroyed in 162 and rebuilt, before being abandoned after the invasion of the Alamanni in the mid-third century. It was guarded by the Cohors III Aquitanorum equitata civium Romanorum, and a number of both military and civilian tombstones are preserved. For further information, see Bartz 1993, 178–99; von Elbe 1975, 297–301.

45. The artist's flat, abstract style and lack of familiarity with Classical prototypes is comparable to other works from the second century A.D. in Obernburg, for instance the grave stele of Atius Genialis of ca. 170 A.D. (Obernburg, Römermuseum). The frontal presentation of the small girl, the seated female figure, and the accurate rendering of the table in front of Girisonius' couch are all characteristic attributes of Antonine "Totenmal" scenes (Noelke 1974, 555–6). The mention of Otriyadas the Lacedaemonian, a quasi-mythological figure associated with battles with almost no survivors, perhaps connects the
deaths of Girisonius and Bibulla with the attack that destroyed the legionary fort. ca. A.D. 162. On Otrihyadas see Anth. Pal. VII, 430–1, and for the attack by the Chatti on the Obernburg fort, see von Elbe 1975, 298–9.

46. On Germania Superior in the second century a.d., and on its hybrid culture, see Künzl 1982; Sommer 1999.

47. CIL 13.6626. The meaning of the inscription is disputed, but should probably be reconstructed as follows. Left side: Otrihyadas M[anibus]. Girisonius Cabi /filio, et Bibullae Vere/cund[i] filiae co/nuigibus Gibai/. Right side: Mem[oriam]/ pietate posuit. To Otrihyadas the Lacedaemonian. To the gods of the dead. Gibai (the patron, perhaps the daughter shown on the front) [set it up] for Girisonius, son of Cabi, and Bibulla, daughter of Venezandus, spouses, as a memorial on account of piety. On the translation of the inscription, see Koepp 1926, 36–7. I thank Dr. Leo Hefner of the Obernburg Römermuseum for sharing with me his views on the translation of the epitaph.


50. Millett 1900, 38–9.


52. On the cult of Mars Ultor in the Forum Augustum, see Zanker 1988, 198–200, fig. 152a; on the type in general see LIMC 2 s.v. “Ares/Mars” for coins in this period, see BMC V nos. 482, 497–502, 547–8, plate 41.16.

53. For example, Kleiner 1992, fig. 173 (Trajan); Zanker 1994, fig. 58 (M. Holconius Rufus). For an extensive overview of cuirassed portrait statues, see Stember 1978. I thank Natalie Karpfen for suggesting this possibility to me.

54. LIMC 7 s.v. “Salus,” 659.

55. However, this identification is complicated by the fact that the figure has no wings; the stone breaks off near the shoulders, but the finished surface of the side further down shows that this was not far from its original extent, while the back of the figure has no traces of wings but was instead carved to resemble a tree. It appears to me possible that the figure should be understood as Venus, seen in her role as Victrix and, with Mars, as joint ancestor of the Roman people. Other warlike images of the love goddess in the Aphrodite of Capua type include, of course, the Greek original, as well as an over lifesize bronze from Brescia, a statuette, now in Oxford, showing Venus with captive barbarians, and a votive column from Germany, so such an identification would not be unprecedented (Brescia, Museo S. Giulia Mr. 969; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum [see Stirling 1994, 115–18]; Speyer, Museum der Pfalz A 62).


57. The walls of the adjoining room are not bound to those of the central tower, and the floor levels are different (Wagner 1911, 420).


59. For a description of the site, see Baatz 1993, 196–7, and Wagner 1911, 420–2.

60. Stoll 1992, 528.

61. Details of Mars’ cuirass, sword, and sword belt suggest that the statue dates to the early third century; the style of the group, with elongated figures rendered in an adept, somewhat mannered technique, supports such a date. Stoll 1992, 523–4.


63. Frankfurt, Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte Inv.no. X 8384. On the column, see Bauchhans and Noeke 1981, 124–5, no. 45–46.

Filis./In suo restituerunt/ III Idus Mart[ias]
Sabino II et Venusto Co[nsulibus]. To Jupiter
Optimus Maximus and Juno Regina. C. Sedatius
Stephanus, decurion of the Civitas of the Taunusenses,
and his [wife] Caturgia Crescentia with Stephanus
Maximus, decurion of the Civitas mentioned
above, and Festa, Maximinus, Maximina, [and]
Honorata, children, restored [this] by themselves
on the third Ides of March, when Sabinus II and
Venustus were consuls. A second inscription is
visible in places beneath the first; of this only
the last two lines are legible: In suo ex [v]or[or]
[r]e[novavit (? repaired in accordance with a
vow by himself). On Nida, see Drinkwater
1975, 128; PECS s.v. “Nida.”
65. Fischer 1971, fig. 1, Schleiermacher
1965, fig. 1.