

## **Spirally-fluted columns: origins, context and 'architectural fantasy'**

*Hannah Snell (MPhil University of Oxford)*

*Independent Researcher*

Spirally-fluted columns are a little-studied aspect of Roman architecture, and are often dismissed in excavation reports and architectural studies as simply another type of column shaft. However, their possible origins can be seen in ancient Greece and Mycenae and, according to the archaeological record, these columns were more frequently used in Roman architecture than written reports might permit scholars to believe. Current scholarship highlights their presence during the second and third centuries AD in particular as well as their prevalence in the East. Here I argue that there is more significance to the spirally-fluted column than is otherwise credited: their unusual form makes them a visual focal point in an architectural setting, and the use of a range of materials (stucco, limestone and marble) and colours makes them both 'functional' and 'decorative' architecture. I also consider how these columns were designed, and show that particular aspects of their design, proportions and decoration mean that they can be grouped together. I also consider the building types in which they were used and whether context and form can lead to functional associated imagery. The range of examples that I consider, including from the West of the Empire and other periods, shows that these unusual column shafts should be given greater importance in archaeological recordings and considerations as to what their presence may signify.