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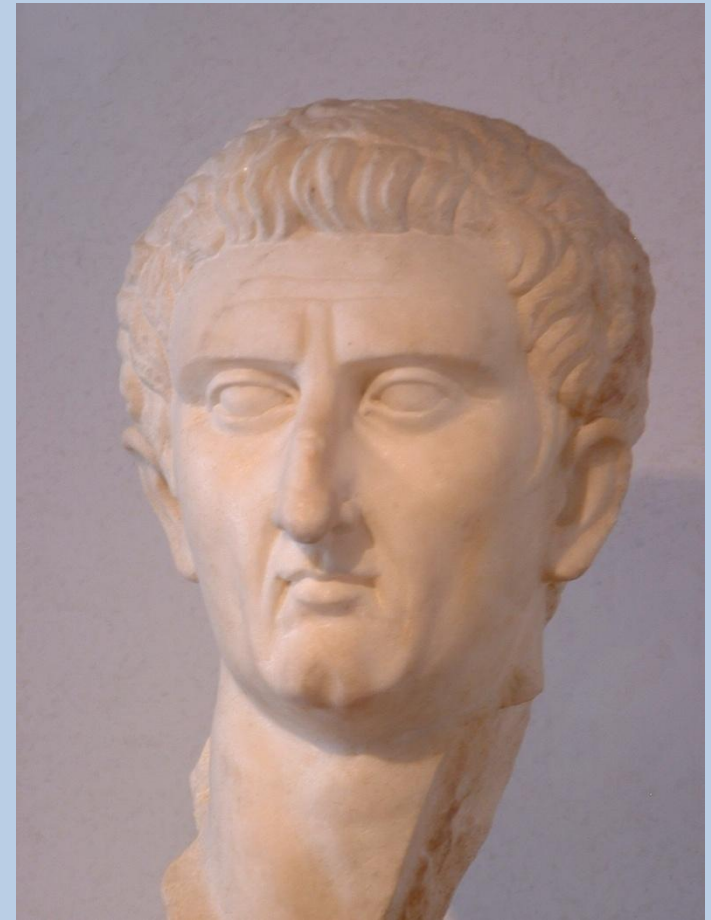
**From Village to Empire: An
Introduction to the History of Rome**

**Nerva (AD 96-98)
and Trajan (AD 98-117)**

Matthew Cobb

Nerva

- Marcus Cocceius Nerva.
- Born AD 30.
- Possibly part of Nero's literary circle.
- Praetor designate in AD 65 – awarded *ornamenta triumphalia* on the suppression of the Pisonian conspiracy.
- Consul in AD 71 with Vespasian.
- Temporary exile under Domitian?
- Reigns from 18th of September AD 96 to 27/28th of January AD 98.



Reaction to the Death of Domitian

“[Domitian’s death]... deeply affected the troops, who at once began to speak of him as *Divus* – they would have avenged him had someone given them a lead...” – **Suetonius**
Domitian 23.

“Now at last our spirit is returning. And yet, though at the dawn of a most happy age Nerva Caesar blended things once irreconcilable, sovereignty and freedom...” – **Tacitus**
Agricola 3.

Abolition of *Maiestas* Charges



Nerva Denarius. IMP NERVA CAES AVG P M TR P COS II PP, laureate head right / LIBERTAS PVBLICA, Liberty standing left with pileus & sceptre - **RIC 7, RSC 106.**

“Nerva also released all who were on trial for *maiestas* and restored the exiles; moreover, he put to death all the slaves and the freedmen who had conspired against their masters and allowed that class of persons to lodge no complaint whatever against their masters; and no persons were permitted to accuse anybody of *maiestas* or of adopting the Jewish mode of life. Many of those who had been informed were condemned to death, among others Seras, the philosopher.” – **Dio Cassius 68.1.2.**

Shoring up Support

“He also forbade the making of gold or silver statues in his honour. To those who had been deprived of their property without cause under Domitian he gave back all that was still to be found in the imperial treasury. To the very poor Romans he granted allotments of land worth 60,000,000 sesterces, putting some senators in charge of their purchase and distribution... In the senate he took oath that he would not slay any of the senators, and he kept his pledge in spite of plots against himself. Moreover, he did nothing without the advice of the foremost men. Among his various laws were those prohibiting the castration of any man, and the marriage by any man of his own niece. When consul he did not hesitate to take as his colleague Virginius Rufus, though this man had often been saluted as emperor.” – **Dio Cassius 68.2.**

Praetorians

- Demanded the execution of Domitian's assassins in AD 97.

“And when Domitian's murderers were being called to execution, he was so dismayed that he was unable to keep from vomiting or from outbursts of the bowels, but nevertheless he vehemently objected, saying that it was more fitting to die than to pollute the authority of *imperium* as a result of the authors of the power that he was to acquire having been betrayed. But the soldiers, ignored the *princeps* and slaughtered those they sought, Petronius with a single blow, but Parthenius after his genitals had been torn out and shoved into his mouth, with Casperius bought off by means of huge payoffs, who, more insolent than the savage crime, compelled Nerva to give thanks among the people to the soldiers, since they had killed the most base and wicked of all mortals.” – **Aurelius Victor 12.7-9.**

Conspiracy

“Calpurnius Crassus, who was tempting the minds of the troops with grand promises, having been discovered and having confessed, he removed, along with his wife, to Tarentum, while the senate chided his leniency.” – **Aurelius Victor 12.6.**

Adoption

- Need for successor – Nerva in his mid-60s when he becomes emperor – no suitable close relatives for the succession.
 - Nerva adopts Trajan in September AD 97.
- “Nerva, therefore, finding himself held in such contempt by reason of his old age, ascended the Capitol and said in a loud voice: ‘May good success attend the Roman senate and people and myself. I hereby adopt Marcus Ulpius Nerva Trajan.’” – **Dio Cassius 68.3.4.**
- “He admitted Trajan to the position of son and to a share of *imperium*; with him he lived three months.” – **Aurelius Victor 12.9.**

Death of Nerva

“Nerva ruled so well that he once remarked: ‘I have done nothing that would prevent my laying down the imperial office and returning to private life in safety.’”
– **Dio Cassius 68.3.1.**

“...[Nerva] was seized by a sweat. When it abated, the excessive shivering of his body revealed the beginnings of a fever, nor much later did he end his life in his sixty-third year of age [contra Dio 68.4]. His body, as formerly that of Augustus, was conveyed with honour by the senate and buried in the tomb of Augustus. On the day on which he died, there was an eclipse of the sun.” – **Aurelius Victor 12.10-11.**

Deification of Nerva



Divus Nerva AE25 of Phoenicia, Berytus. Struck by **Trajan**, **98-117 AD**. DIVVS NERVA, laureate draped bust right / COL BER, Neptune standing left, foot on prow – **BMC 81**.

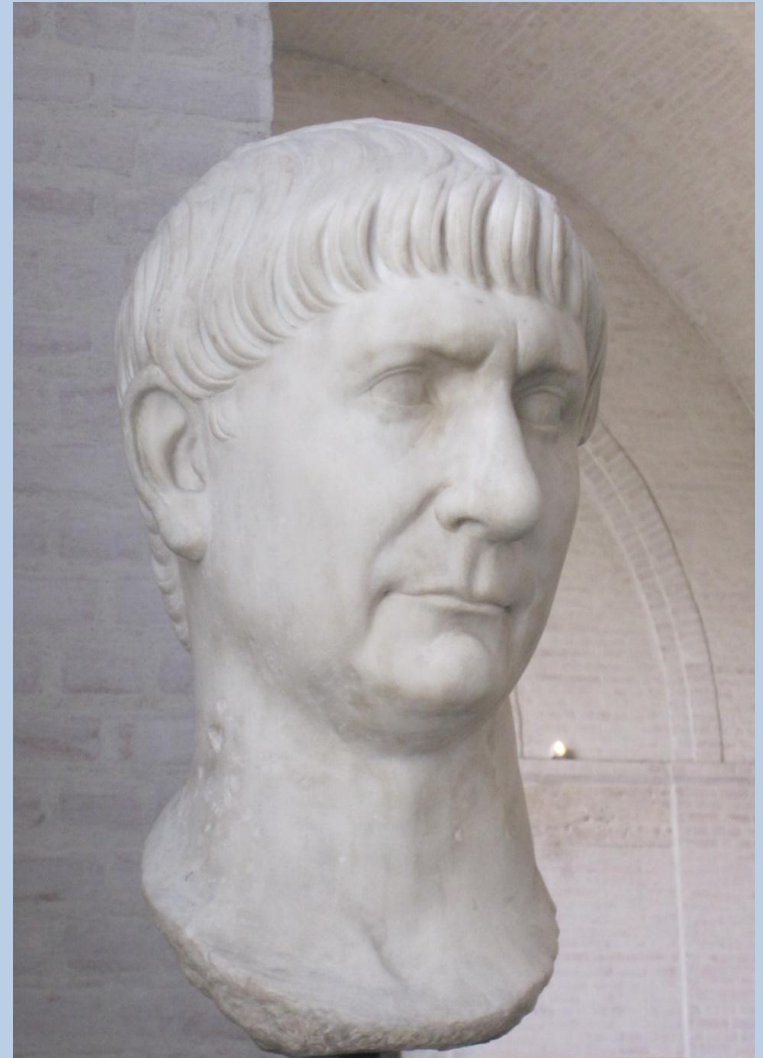


Nerva Commemorative AR Antoninianus, struck under **Trajan Decius (c. AD 249-51)**. DIVO NERVAE, radiate head right / CONSECRATIO, Eagle standing right, head left & up. Mediolanum mint - **RSC 152**.

Trajan (AD 98-117)

Trajan

- Marcus Ulpius Traianus.
- Born in Italica in Baetica in AD 53.
- Spends ten years as a military tribune.
- Quaestor in AD 86 and consul in AD 91.
- Governor of Germania Superior in AD 97 (same years as his adoption).
- Reigns from 28th AD 98 to 9th of August AD 117.
- First non-Italian emperor.



Early Years

- Continues to inspect Rhine and Danubian frontiers - Does not come to Rome until AD 99/100.

“He accepted *imperium* at Agrippina, the noble colony in Gallia, possessing diligence in military matters, mildness in civil, and largess in supporting citizens.” – **Aurelius Victor 13.3.**

- Issues *congaria* in AD 99 and 102.

- “When he became emperor, he sent a letter to the senate, written with his own hand, in which he declared, among other things, that he would not slay nor disfranchise any good man; and he confirmed this by oaths not only at the time but also later. He sent for Aelianus and the Praetorians who had mutinied against Nerva, pretending that he was going to employ them for some purpose, and then put them out of the way.” – **Dio Cassius 68.5.**

“Nowhere should we flatter him as a divinity and a god; we are talking of a fellow-citizen, not a tyrant, one who is our father, not our over-lord. He is one of us – and his special virtue lies in his thinking so, as also in his never forgetting that he is a man himself while a ruler of men.” – **Pliny the Younger** *Panegyricus* 2.

Dacian Wars

- Trajan decides to set aside peace treaty with Decebalus.
- First campaign - AD 101-102, captures Decebalus, dismantles some of his fortresses, Roman garrisons left in Dacia.
- Second campaign AD 105-106, Roman garrisons killed. Trajan attacks with force of c.120,000.
- Creation of the Province of Dacia.

“Decebalus, when his capital and all his territory had been occupied and he was himself in danger of being captured, committed suicide; and his head was brought to Rome.” – **Cassius Dio 68.14.3.**

“After spending some time in Rome he made a campaign against the Dacians; for he took into account their past deeds and was grieved at the amount of money they were receiving annually, and he also observed that their power and their pride were increasing. Decebalus, learning of his advance, became frightened, since he well knew that on the former occasion it was not the Romans that he had conquered, but Domitian, whereas now he would be fighting against both Romans and Trajan, the emperor.” – **Dio Cassius 68.6.1-2.**

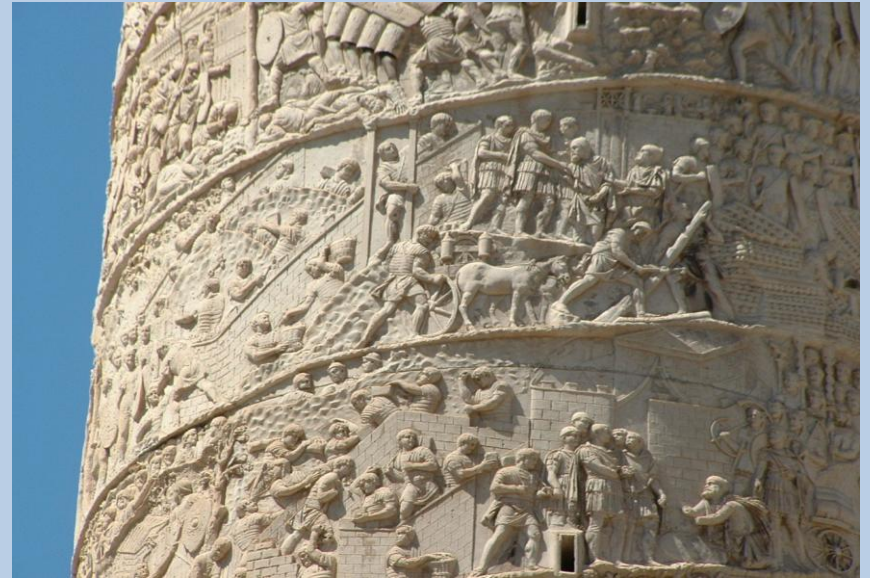
Capture of Decebalus

“Tiberius Claudius |
Maximus a veteran | saw
to the construction of
(this monument) while
still living... the same
emperor [Trajan]
promoted him | to
cavalry officer in the
same ala [II *Pannonian*]
because | he captured
Decebalus and || brought
his head back to him at
Ranisstor|rum.”



Stele of Ti. Claudius Maximus – Philippi.

Celebrating Victory



“The Senate and the People of Rome [dedicate this column] to the emperor Caesar Nerva **Trajan** Augustus Germanicus Dacicus... to show the height and location of the hill removed for such great structures.” – *ILS 294* = *CIL 6.960*.



- The column 100 Roman feet (29.78 m) in height.
- Diameter of the column is 3.83 m at the base and 3.66 m at the summit.
- Composed of 17 drums of luna marble.
- In a continuous sequence it shows the campaigns of Trajan in Dacia.
- Trajan appears frequently on the column, portrayed larger than those around him.
- Narrative reasonably accurate.

“(Dedicated) to Mars
the Avenger | by
Imperator [Cae]sar,
deified | Nerva’s
[son]...father of his
country, [the
Dacian] army | [of
King Decebalus]
having been
de | | feated...”



Reconstruction of Trajan's trophy at Adamklissi –
Moesia Inferior (original built AD 108-09).

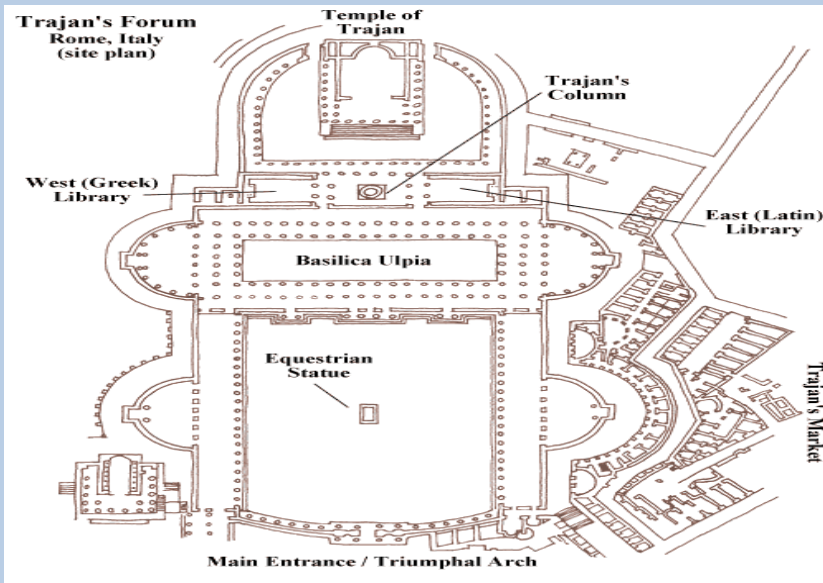
Flood of Wealth

- Capture of half a million Roman pounds of gold and a million of silver = c. 700,000,000 denarii (2.8 billion sesterces).

“The treasures of Decebalus were also discovered, though hidden beneath the river Sargetia, which ran past his palace. With the help of some captives Decebalus had diverted the course of the river, made an excavation in its bed, and into the cavity had thrown a large amount of silver and gold and other objects of great value that could stand a certain amount of moisture; then he had heaped stones over them and piled on earth, afterwards bringing the river back into his course. He also had caused the same captives to deposit his robes and other articles of a like nature in caves, and after accomplishing this had made away with them to prevent them from disclosing anything. But Bicilis, a companion of his who knew what had been done, was seized and gave information about these things.” – **Dio Cassius 68.14.4-5.**

Building Programme

Forum of Trajan



- Initially begun under Domitian, completed by AD 113 (though temple to Trajan added by under Hadrian).
- Consists of vast square flanked by colonnades, with hemicycles, with Basilica Ulpia.
- Inner complex with Trajan's column, flanked by libraries and Temple of Divus Trajan.

“All around the Forum of Trajan
on the roof of the colonnades
there are gilded statues of
horses and military standards
and below them is written
‘From the sale of booty in
war.’” – **Gellius *Attic Nights***
13.25.1.

Trajan in the East

Annexation of Nabataea

- Nabataean Arabia a client-kingdom of the Romans.
- Important role in overland incense trade.
- Made into a Roman province by Trajan in AD 106.



War Against Armenia and Parthia

- Parthian nobles put Choseroes on the throne (Parthamasiris, son of Pacorus, seizes Armenia).
- Resistance from Axidares.
- Trajan deposes Parthamasiris and declares Armenia a Roman province – AD 114.
- Trajan continues his advance into Parthian territory, capturing Nisibis and making Mesopotamia a Roman province.
- Parallel march of Roman forces down the two rivers for joint attack upon Ctesiphon (AD 116).

“Next he made a campaign against the Armenians and Parthians on the pretext that the Armenian king had obtained his diadem, not at his hands, but from the Parthian king, though his real reason was a desire to win renown.” – **Dio Cassius 68.17.1.**



Revolt

- Roman province of Assyria revolts – AD 116/117.
- Trajan crowns Parthamaspates (son of Chosroes) king, retreats with Roman forces.
- Trajan arrives back in Antioch in early AD 117.

“Trajan was preparing to make a fresh expedition into Mesopotamia, but, as his malady began to afflict him sorely, he set out, intending to sail to Italy, leaving Publius Aelius Hadrian with the army in Syria.” – **Dio Cassius 68.33.1.**

Kitos War – AD 115-117

“Meanwhile the Jews in the region of Cyrene had put a certain Andreas at their head, and were destroying both the Romans and the Greeks. They would eat the flesh of their victims, make belts for themselves of their entrails, anoint themselves with their blood and wear their skins for clothing... In all two hundred and twenty thousand persons perished. In Egypt, too, they perpetrated many similar outrages, and in Cyprus, under the leadership of a certain Artemion. There, also, two hundred and forty thousand perished...” – **Dio Cassius 68.31.**

- Messianic beliefs continuing from the Rabbinical school that survived from First Jewish Revolt (AD 66-73).
- Weakening of the garrison in Judaea.
- Connections between Babylonian Jews and those living in Judaea?
- Termination of Parthian War in AD 116/117 left Trajan free to suppress the insurgents.
- No subsequent rebellions in the Diaspora communities.

Death of Trajan

Death and Apotheosis

- Dies on 9th of Augustus AD 117.

“The ashes of his cremated body were borne back to Rome and interred in the Forum of Trajan under his column, and an image was placed above it, just as triumphators are accustomed to do, entering the city, with the senate preceding and the army.” – **Aurelius Victor 13.11.**

Useful Reading

- Potter, D. (2009) *Rome in the Ancient World* (London: Thames & Hudson) pages 204-210.
- Goodman, M. (2012) *The Roman World: 44 BC-AD 180* (London: Routledge). – chapters 25 and 26.
- Rossi, L. revised and translated by Toynbee, J. M. C. (1971) *Trajan's Column and The Dacian Wars* (London: Thames and Hudson). – chapter 5.