

Life before becoming Emperor

It is thought that Trajan’s paternal family came from Tuder on the border of Ancient Umbria (now known as Todi). Trajan’s formal name being Marcus Ulpius Traianus, makes it clear why he was later given the moniker Trajan, Marcus being an incredibly common praenomen (personal name) in the Roman world, this meant that his cognomen Traianus becoming used more as a method of distinguishing him from an family members with the same name. Trajan’s family had settled at Italica in southern Spain around the time of his birth. The exact date of Trajan’s marriage to Pompeia Plotina is unknown, though she remained with Trajan until his death in 117 AD. He served as a military tribune and was in the Syrian army while his father was governor of the province. After Trajan gained praetorship he gained command of the legion VII Germania . In 91 AD Trajan gained consulship .

While Nerva was Emperor, Trajan was made governor of upper Germany and was eventually adopted by Nerva himself as his son.

Within Trajan’s life before becoming Emperor there is little to suggest that he would become a dictator in the negative connotation, his life could be however the reason why he became known as a ‘good emperor’, he knew what is was likes to serve in the military and be one of the people.

Politics

After the death of Nerva, it was clear to many that Trajan was to succeed him, this is because Trajan had seized control of the imperial power in Germany. After Trajan become emperor he didn’t proceed straight to Rome, he took a route through the more urban areas, while on his route to Rome Trajan made the decision to conduct himself as a private citizen, he travelled by foot, a bold statement for a newly appointed Emperor, perhaps to say that he was not above the private citizen despite being an emperor or at least an attempt to appear so whether it worked or not. During Trajan’s reign as Emperor he became very close friends with Licinius Sura, Trajan gave him his third consulship and used Sura to compose his speeches. Trajan even went so far in his devotion to his friend that despite many being suspicious and untrusting of Sura, Trajan never himself felt anything of the sort. Trajan was known as a very attentive friend, taking time to call upon them especially if they were sick, perhaps he used this as a clever way to ensure loyalty and devotion?

Domestic work

Trajan made a number of changes to the laws:

- Trajan changed the law surrounding the mistreatment of a son by their father – the father was obligated to emancipate the son and the son lost the rights to their inheritance, meaning it would go to the state. This law could be seen as a deterrent for maltreatment, no man would consciously want his estate to go to the state if he had sons.
- Trajan also made the law that any freeborn children who had been exposed and then raised by those who find the child, may claim their freedom and not have to pay compensation for the care given.

These are just some examples of the changes that Trajan made to family law during his reign, all of which seem to at least try to improve the quality of life for Roman children.

Trajan was also very active in the actual practicing of the law, this meant that unlike some other in power he had direct contact to how his country was being led by those in power.

Trajan: A good Emperor?



Architecture

- ⇒ Trajan spent large amounts of money repairing roads, harbours and public buildings
- ⇒ Trajan’s column – perhaps the most famous of his additions to the city of Rome – built within the *forum Traiani* - the column “consists of a 29.8 m tall column standing on a 6.2 m high pedestal” (Hornblower, et al., 2012)
- ⇒ While Trajan was Emperor the river Tiber flooded, causing damage to some of the surrounding buildings. This lead to Trajan aiding the restoration of said buildings and also made a rule that no building should built over 60 feet (Birley, 1976)
- ⇒ Trajan built a number of new harbours at Ostia, Centumellae and Ancona
- ⇒ Brand new baths were built in Rome on the Oppian Hill, along with a new aqueduct

Trajan fell ill in 117 AD whilst in Cilicia and died on August the 9th.

Trajan’s Column



Pompeia Plotina



Military and Empire expansion

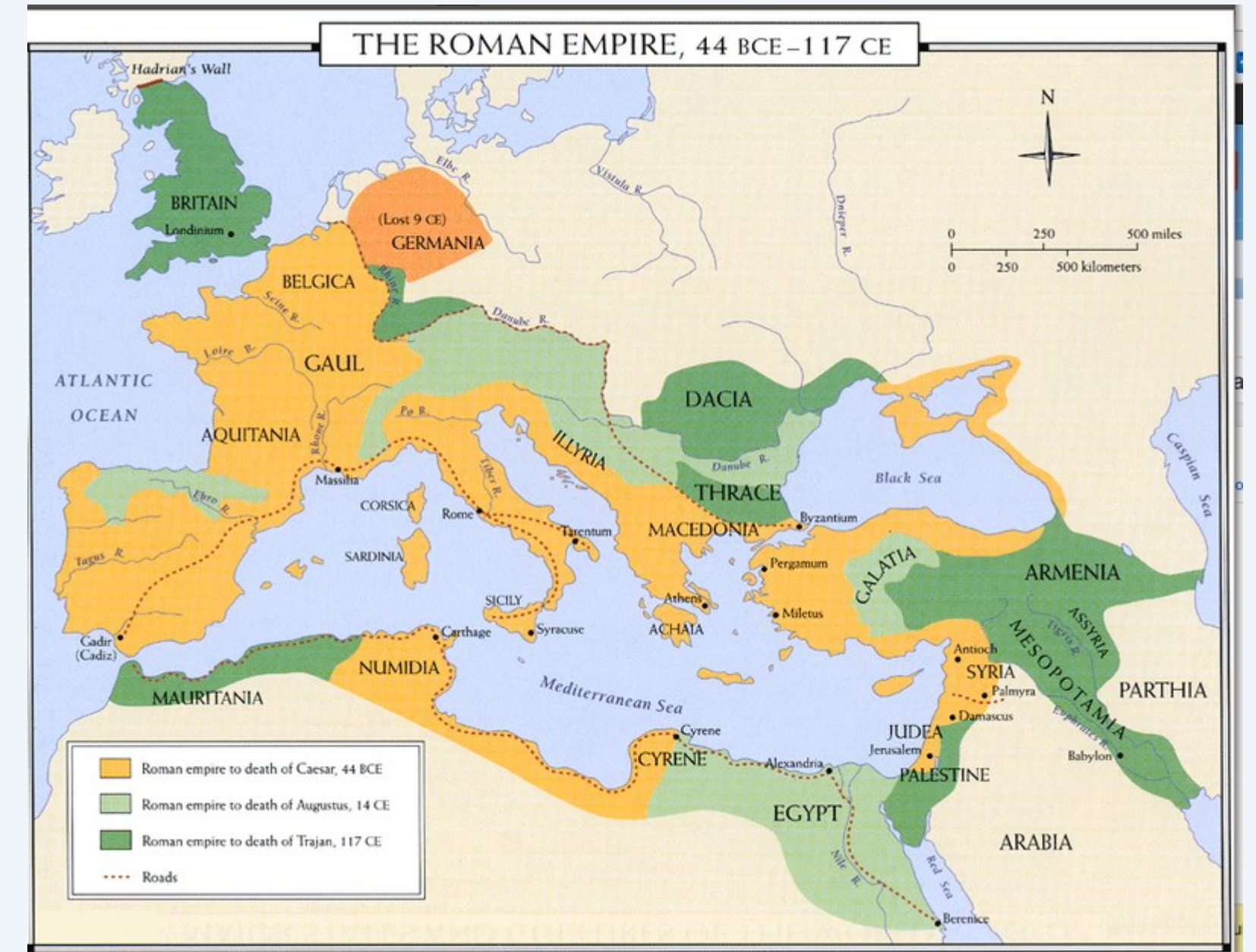
There are a number of changes that Trajan made to the regulations of the army, for example he changed the attitudes towards what happens after death, before a will of a soldier was just ignored but Trajan made it that the last wishes of the soldier were honoured. He also changed the law so that public holidays did not affect the military.

Trajan also added a law that meant that any fathers “who mutilated their sons in an attempt to prevent them from being conscripted into the army” (Birley, 1976, p. 46) would face punishment. This aided Trajan in his expansion of the army. Trajan managed to raise 2 new legions in his reign.

Although for the most part Trajan’s reign as Emperor was ‘peaceful’ or at least that was his aim, he did go on some expeditions.

One of the military escapades that Trajan took part in was the wars against Dacia. The Dacian king Decebalus attacked a Roman territory in 101 AD, by the end of the next year he was defeated. Decebalus was then forced under treaty making him a subject of Rome. But by 105 AD Decebalus broke the treaty, this ultimately ended with Decebalus committing suicide and Dacia becoming a province.

Arabia became a province in 106 AD, a process that had begun under Vespasian. Trajan also began an invasion of what is now known as Iraq in 113 AD.



It is clear to see why Trajan is considered to be one of the so called ‘good Emperors’. His advances in family law made life for Roman children and adults less risky. His expansion of the army made for Empirical expansions easier. He provided new bath houses in Rome, along with various other new public works developments such as the work on the roads. Trajan is an Emperor that will be remembered even if it is only because of the archaeological remains of the column that he built and other such monuments he erected. His life and time as Emperor served as an example for those who succeeded him, especially Hadrian.

Bibliography

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