

PRIMARY SOURCES: TRAJAN



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Cassius Dio (155 AD- 229 AD), was a noted Roman historian and public servant. Dio wrote a history of Rome in 80 volumes, beginning with the legendary arrival of Aeneas in Italy through the subsequent founding of Rome and then to 229 AD; a period of about 1,400 years. Of the 80 books, written over 22 years, many survive into the modern age intact or as fragments, providing modern scholars with a detailed perspective on Roman history. Below are some of the things Cassius Dio wrote about the Emperor Trajan (53 AD-117 AD).

How Trajan Became Emperor

“Nerva had chosen Trajan to be the next emperor. Thus Trajan became emperor, although there were relatives of Nerva living. But Nerva did not think family relationship above the safety of Rome, nor was he was going to pass up Trajan because the latter was a Spaniard instead of an Italian, even though no foreigner had previously held the Roman emperor’s role; for he believed in looking at a man’s ability rather than at his nationality.”

On How the Enemy Saw Trajan

“After spending some time in Rome Trajan made a campaign against the Dacians; for he took into account their past deeds and was upset at the amount of money they were receiving annually from the Romans, and he also observed that their power and their pride were increasing. Decebalus, their king, learning of Trajan’s 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 mightiest of emperors.”

On His Character and Personality

“Trajan was most known among Romans for his justice, for his bravery, and for the simplicity of his habits. He was strong in body, being in his forty-fourth year when he began to rule, so that in every enterprise he worked as much as the others; and his mental powers were at their highest, so that he had neither the recklessness of youth nor the sluggishness of old age. He expended vast sums on wars and vast sums on works of peace; and while making very many urgently needed repairs to roads and harbors and public buildings, he drained no one’s blood or harmed anyone for any of these undertakings. He was so high-minded and generous that, after enlarging and embellishing the Circus Maximus, which had crumbled away in places, he merely inscribed on it a statement that he had made it “adequate” for the Roman people.”

On His Death

“Trajan himself suspected that his sickness was due to poison that had been administered to him; but that is wrong, for it was because the blood, which descends every year into the lower parts of the body, was in his case checked in its flow. He had also suffered a stroke, so that a portion of his body was paralyzed. On coming to Selinus in Cilicia, which we also call Trajanopolis, he suddenly expired, after reigning nineteen years, six months and fifteen days.”
