

Head of Trajan

Cast based on an original marble portrait in the British Museum. Marcus Ulpius Traianus (Trajan) was born at Italica in Spain in 53. Trajan was certainly one of the most respected and emulated emperors in Roman history. He attained the rank of consul in 91, and was appointed governor of Upper Germany by the emperor Nerva in 97. Since Nerva's popularity was waning, he adopted Trajan as his son. In 98 Trajan became the emperor of Rome, thus starting his illustrious career in both warfare and social policy.

Like Augustus, an early emperor of Rome, Trajan wished to expand Rome's borders as far as possible. He fought successful campaigns against both the Dacians and the Parthians and also held commands in Spain, Germany, and the Danube. At home in Rome he enacted social legislation, and began several public works projects such as building the Baths of Trajan and the Via Traiana, which attached to the Via Appia, a major thoroughfare in Italy. With the spoils of war from the Dacian campaign, he built the Forum of Trajan, a marvelous complex with a basilica, Greek and Latin libraries, and a vast marketplace. Trajan's good deeds ended when he expired in 117, en route to Rome from the battlefield.

Trajan's portraiture, like that of Augustus, remains static, for he is depicted as an "ageless adult" during his entire career, probably because he didn't become emperor until he was in his mid-forties. There are several styles of Trajanic portraiture but the differences in them are usually quite subtle and have to do with the way Trajan's hair is styled. Usually, "his face is smooth and he is clean shaven, although deep lines etch either side of his mouth to suggest adulthood. His eyes are deeply shadowed beneath prominent brows..." (Kleiner 208). Trajan's hair is combed straight from the crown and separated into locks over the forehead, reminiscent of Augustus' hairstyle some 100 years earlier. This portrait in the Wilcox collection has many of the same aforementioned characteristics. His hair is combed forward and separated into choppy pieces, he has thin lips, and a few lines around his mouth to suggest his age.