

On this day (July, 10) in AD 138, Hadrian died following a heart failure at Baiae on the Bay of Naples.

He lived 62 years, 5 months, 17 days. He reigned for
20 years, 11 months. *HA 25.11*



Bust of Hadrian, from Hadrian's Mausoleum. Possibly created following the emperor's death in AD 138 (Vatican Museums).

According to Cassius Dio, Hadrian became ill in AD 136 when he was 60 years old. The nosebleeds, from which he had long suffered, intensified, and he began to despair of his life.

“He now began to be sick; for he had been subject even before this to a flow of blood from the nostrils, and at this time it became distinctly more copious. He therefore despaired of his life [...].” *Dio 69.17.1*

In AD 138, Hadrian's clinical condition had worsened and he often desired to kill himself.

“ [...] he was constantly growing worse and might be said to be dying day by day, he began to long for death; and often he would ask for poison or a sword, but no one would give them to him.” *Dio 69.22.1*

Cassius Dio reported that the cause of Hadrian's death was a heart failure. This diagnosis is supported by the bilateral diagonal ear creases on Hadrian's portraiture. Sculpted portraits of Hadrian show a remarkably naturalistic detail; a deep, bilateral diagonal crease in both earlobes. Many scientists believe that earlobe creases are linked to coronary artery diseases. The creases are caused by the collapse of blood vessels in the earlobe, one of the symptoms of the disease.



Hadrian's earlobe showing a deep diagonal crease (Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Rome).

Hadrian spent the last moments of his life dictating verses addressed to his soul. According to the [Historia Augusta](#), Hadrian composed the following poem shortly before his death:

Animula, vagula, blandula
Hospes comesque corporis
Quae nunc abibis in loca
Pallidula, rigida, nudula,
Nec, ut soles, dabis iocos.

Little soul, you charming little wanderer, my body's guest
and partner,
Where are you off to now?
Somewhere without colour, savage and bare;
Never again to share a joke.

These five lines have defied translation. There have been many translations from the best English-speaking poets. Anthony R. Birley writes: "Few short poems can have generated so many verse translations and such copious academic debate as these five lines—a mere nineteen words—of the dying Hadrian, quoted in the *Historia Augusta*." Among all the attempts, here is my favourite translation:

Oh, loving Soul, my own so tenderly,

My life's companion and my body's guest,
To what new realms, poor flutterer, wilt thou fly?
Cheerless, disrobed, and cold in thy lone quest,
Hushed thy sweet fancies, mute thy wonted jest.

—D. Johnston

But it is Marguerite Yourcenar's version that I find the most moving:

Little soul, gentle and drifting, guest and companion of my
body, now you will dwell below in pallid places, stark and
bare; there you will abandon your play of yore. But one
moment still, let us gaze together on these familiar shores,
on these objects which doubtless we shall not see again...
Let us try, if we can, to enter into death with open eyes...

—*Marguerite Yourcenar "Memoirs of Hadrian", English
translation from French by Grace Frick*



Statue of Marguerite Yourcenar, Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli.

Tributes to Hadrian continue to this day. [Ian Venables](#), a British composer whose specialist genre is 'Song' set *Anima Vagula Blandula* for voice, clarinet and piano as part of a song cycle called 'On the Wings of love'. The translation used in the art song is from Antinous' biographer Royston Lambert (*Beloved and God: The Story of Hadrian*).

Hadrian was initially buried at *Puteoli* near Baiae, on an estate which had once belonged to Cicero. After the cremation and upon completion of the Tomb of Hadrian in Rome in AD 139 by his successor Antoninus Pius, Hadrian's ashes were placed beside his wife, Vibia Sabina, and his adopted son Lucius Aelius.



Mausoleum of Hadrian (Castel S. Angelo), Rome



Mausoleum of Hadrian (Castel S. Angelo), Rome

Hadrian died an unpopular man with the Senate and it was only with the intervention of Antonius, who was later given the title "Pius", that Hadrian was deified in AD 139. A [great temple](#) in the Campus Martius was built to his memory in the early 140s.



The Temple of the deified Hadrian (Hadrianeum) in Rome.

Much was said against him after his death, and by many persons. The senate wished to annul his acts, and would have refrained from naming him “the Deified” had not Antoninus requested it. Antoninus, moreover, finally built a temple for him at Puteoli to take the place of a tomb, and he also established a quinquennial contest and flamens and sodales and many other institutions which appertain

to the honour of one regarded as a god. It is for this reason, as has been said before, that many think that Antoninus received the surname Pius. *HA 27.1-2*

A noble and highly cultured figure who was strong and austere, Hadrian was a brilliant soldier but also an astute politician with a predilection for art, music, philosophy and literature.

For almost 21 years Hadrian had ruled over one of the greatest empires the world had ever seen and the legacy of his reign is still with us today.



Modern statue of Hadrian in the gardens of Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome.

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