On 8 August AD 117, after a 19-year reign of military glory, Emperor Trajan died at the coastal town of Selinus in western Cilicia (present-day Gazipaşa, about 180 km to the East of Antalya on the southern coast of Turkey). According to Cassius Dio, Trajan fell seriously ill after an unsuccessful siege of the Mesopotamian city of Hatra which led him to abandon his Parthian campaign. Dio gives a good description of Trajan’s symptoms; “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, and he was dropsical all over”. But despite the clear evidence for a stroke or oedema, Trajan was convinced he had been poisoned.

The decision was taken for the emperor to withdraw to Antioch and to return to Rome, leaving the 41-year-old Hadrian in command of the troops stationed in the province of Syria. Trajan set out for Rome by ship, probably from Antioch’s port at Seleucia Pieria, accompanied by his wife Plotina, his beloved niece Matidia (Hadrian’s mother in law) and the praetorian prefect Publius Acilius Attianus.

The imperial party, Trajan, Plotina and Matidia.

The imperial party took the sea route westwards along the coast of Cilicia but Trajan’s condition suddenly worsened. After two or three days at sea, he was put ashore at the nearest harbour of Selinus where Trajan expired. We are not sure of the exact date of Trajan's death, but the official
account places it on or shortly before the 8th of August. The first “provincial” emperor was also the first emperor to have died outside Italy. Trajan lived sixty-three years and eleven months. He reigned for nineteen years and six months.

Plotina, Matidia and Attianus boarded a ship with Trajan’s body and sailed back to the port city of Seleucia Pieria, located on the coast about 25 kilometres southwest of Antioch. The Historia Augusta tells us that Hadrian went out to meet them to “view the remains”. Whether the funeral and cremation of Trajan’s body were performed in Selinus or in Seleucia Pieria is not certain. The emperor’s entourage was put on a ship to be transported to Rome. They carried Trajan’s ashes with them in a golden urn as well as Hadrian’s letter to the Senate asking for divine honours for Trajan. In his letter, according to the HA, Hadrian apologized for depriving the senators of their “right to decide regarding his accession” and explained that “the unseemly haste of the troops in acclaiming him emperor was due to the belief that the state could not be without an emperor”. The response from
the Senate in late September AD 117 was favourable.

Seleucia Pieria (present day Cevlik), also known as Seleucia by the Sea. The city was founded by Seleucus I Nicator (301-281 BC) on the Syrian coast north of the mouth of the river Orontes and on the western slopes of the Mount Casius. The city was the port of Antioch. Mount Casius lies in the background.

Shortly before his death, the childless Trajan was said to have composed or dictated a letter on his deathbed naming Hadrian as his adopted son and successor. Suspicions, however, arose because the letter that reached Rome bore the signature of Trajan’s widow rather than the Emperor’s. The HA claims that there was a widespread belief that Trajan had intended to make Lucius Neratius Priscus his heir to the empire by saying to him “I entrust the provinces to your care in case anything happens to me”. There were other stories claiming that Trajan had wanted to die without naming a successor, in imitation of Alexander the Great (exemplo Alexandri).
Bust of Trajan wearing the Civic Crown with medallion, a sword belt and the
Dio also records that Trajan had once said that Lucius Julius Servianus, Hadrian’s brother-in-law, was the most capable to rule or that Hadrian succeeded Trajan only because he was nearby and controlled a large army. Then Dio adds that Attianus and Plotina helped secure Hadrian’s succession by forging Trajan’s will and that Hadrian had only been adopted posthumously. This story, Dio says, derives from his own father Apronianus who was governor of Cilicia. However, it was most probably a genuine deathbed decision. Trajan had a stroke that left him partly paralyzed and dropsical. He could not write so the documents were signed by Plotina.

Hadrian had to respond to rumours that his adoption was not legitimate. Two silver denarii and an aureus with Trajan and Hadrian clapping hands or holding a globe between them were issued to emphasize the authenticity of the adoption.

The death of Trajan at the coastal city of Selinus in Rough Cilicia later prompted the temporary renaming of the city as Trajanopolis. It also received the status of ius Italicum, transforming the
provincial *solum* (land) into Italian *solum*, a rare privilege for a non-Italian community. A tetrastyle temple inscribed with the name TΡAIANO appeared thereafter on the city’s coins during the late 2nd and 3rd centuries.

The ancient city of Selinus was established on the River Kestros (today called Hacımusa) in 628 BC, probably by Phoenicians, and was incorporated into the kingdom of Cilicia. In 197 BC the area passed into the hands of the Romans. At its height, Selinus occupied an area of over 40 hectares and was the largest city in western Rough Cilicia. Selinus later became part of the Byzantine Empire alongside the rest of Cilicia before falling into the hands of the Turks in 1225. The city stood on the slopes and at the foot of a steep hill with a perpendicular cliff on the seaward side, and was surrounded by massive fortifications.

The remains visible today date to the Roman and medieval periods. The most interesting and best-preserved monument in Selinus is a large rectangular building locally known as Şekerhane Köşkü. It is located in a flat area at the foot of the hill, between the agora, bathhouse, and odeon on its western side and the necropolis to the east. The monument has long been thought to have been built as a
cenotaph for Trajan.

The building was first noted in 1812 by Captain Francis Beaufort and Charles Robert Cockerell in their voyage along the south coast of Turkey. They found the ruins of the so-called Şekerhane Köşkü which they described as a low, massive structure situated in a large square surrounded by porticoes. Beaufort conjectured that the building served as a mausoleum (but more accurately, a cenotaph) for Trajan, although the existence of such a monument was not mentioned either in ancient sources or on inscriptions.
From 2005 to 2007, the German Archaeological Institute and the Alanya Archaeological Museum conducted research on the architectural remains of Şekerhane Köşkü in a cooperative project. A geoarchaeological survey was also completed in 2009 around the building. The work has shown that the Şekerhane Köşkü was indeed a cenotaph for the deceased emperor Trajan, although its current appearance is Seljuk.

The Imperial monument consisted of a central tetrastyle prostyle building (with four columns in front and two on the sides) of the Corinthian order with a cella and pronaos, on a high podium enclosed in a large temenos surrounded on all four sides by porticoes. However, the building was remodelled by the Seljuks in the early 13th century using the ancient building materials which altered the monument in a structural way. The name Şekerhane Köşkü refers to the use of the building in Seljuk time as a hunting lodge.
The building we see today is about 5 meters high and its interior consists of two successive barrel-vaulted rooms. The exterior walls date to the Seljuk period while the internal structure of the Roman podium is completely preserved, apart from the big hole created by the Seljuk entrance. The vaulted rooms of the podium served as substructures for the temple-like upper floor.
The cenotaph of Trajan.

More than 400 architectural elements and fragments made of marble were found scattered around the building. They were collected and moved to the storerooms of the nearby Alanya Museum.
Near Trajan’s cenotaph are the remains of an odeon dating back to the Hellenistic era which was built into the natural slope of the hill, as well as baths from the Roman period. An aqueduct crosses the marsh near the mouth of the neighbouring stream.
The remains of the Hellenistic odeon at Selinus.
The remains of the nymphaeum, part of the Large Bath Complex.
The aqueduct of Selinus that used to carry a steady supply of water to the bath from its presumed origin only 1.5 kilometres away and over the river.

Eventually, Trajan’s ashes were deposited in the pedestal of his column in Rome while the official ceremony of deification took place soon after Hadrian’s arrival in Rome in July AD 118. Trajan was forever remembered as Optimus Princeps, the best of emperors.
8 August AD 117 – Trajan dies at Selinus (#Hadrian1900)

The Column of Trajan and the remains of the Basilica Ulpia in the Forum of Trajan in Rome.

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Me paying my respects to the deified Trajan (16th July 2017).