

After the death of Trajan on 8th August 117, Hadrian drafted from Syria a 'carefully worded' letter to the Senate in Rome in which he reported his accession and requested divine honours for his adoptive father. He also apologised for having assumed the imperial title only on the acclamation of the army, on the ground that the empire could not be without an emperor.

The response Hadrian received by late September while still in Antioch was favourable. The Senate approved the deification (*divanos honores*) of the *optimus princeps* and granted other honours that went beyond Hadrian's request.

This request he obtained by a unanimous vote; indeed, the senate voluntarily voted Trajan many more honours than Hadrian had requested. *HA Had. 6.1*



Posthumous statue of Trajan shown in ceremonial armor, standing or stepping forward as if in the act of addressing his troops.

The statue was carved in the months or years immediately after the emperor's death, when monuments such as the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum were completed to honor the military and civic acts of the ruler who brought the Roman Empire to its greatest heights.

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The new emperor was offered a Triumph (*cum triumphum*) to mark Trajan's victories in the East but declined the offer. Instead, Hadrian authorised one for his deceased adoptive father who would be represented as an effigy carried in a triumphal chariot.

When the senate offered him the triumph which was to have been Trajan's, he [Hadrian] refused it for himself, and caused the effigy of the dead Emperor to be carried in a triumphal chariot, in order that the best of emperors might not lose even after death the honour of a triumph.

HA Had. 6.3

Trajan's triumph and the official ceremony of his apotheosis would have to wait until after the return of Hadrian to the capital (9 July AD 118). Yet Trajan was already a god. As referred on a papyrus dated to shortly after September AD 117 (*P.Giss. 3*) and previously mentioned [here](#), the consecration of the deceased Emperor was already celebrated at Heptakomia in Egypt. The papyrus seems to be an official draft for the celebration of Hadrian's accession and contains part of a dramatic performance between Apollo and the responding voice of the people. The god Apollo praises Trajan who has just become divine and declares (translation of J.P. Alexander, 1938): «Having just mounted aloft with Trajan's in my chariot of white horses, I come to you, oh people, I, Phoebus [Apollo] by no means an unknown god, to proclaim the new ruler Hadrian, who all things serve on account of his virtue and the genius of his divine father». The recording of Trajan's deification would later appear on a reverse

aureus of Hadrian with the legend *Divo Traiano*.



RIC 24b. Gold coin. Rome mint. 117-118 AD.
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The Senate also immediately offered Hadrian the title of *Pater Patriae* (father of the fatherland) which he refused. Like many of his predecessors, Hadrian waited a decent interval before accepting the title in AD 128.

Also he refused for the present the title of Father of his Country, offered to him at the time of his accession and again later on, giving as his reason the fact that Augustus had not won it until late in life. *HA Had. 6.4*

Meanwhile, Plotina (Trajan's widow) was carrying her husband's ashes from Seleucia Pieria to Rome in

a golden urn. If the journey took at most a month, as reckoned by W. Kierdorf, Plotina would have arrived in Rome by the time Hadrian received the Senate's reply to his letter. Did Plotina immediately deposit the ashes inside the pedestal of Trajan's column?

Several ancient sources tell us that Trajan's ashes were interred under the column in his Forum. It has therefore long been believed that Trajan's Column was Trajan's final resting place.

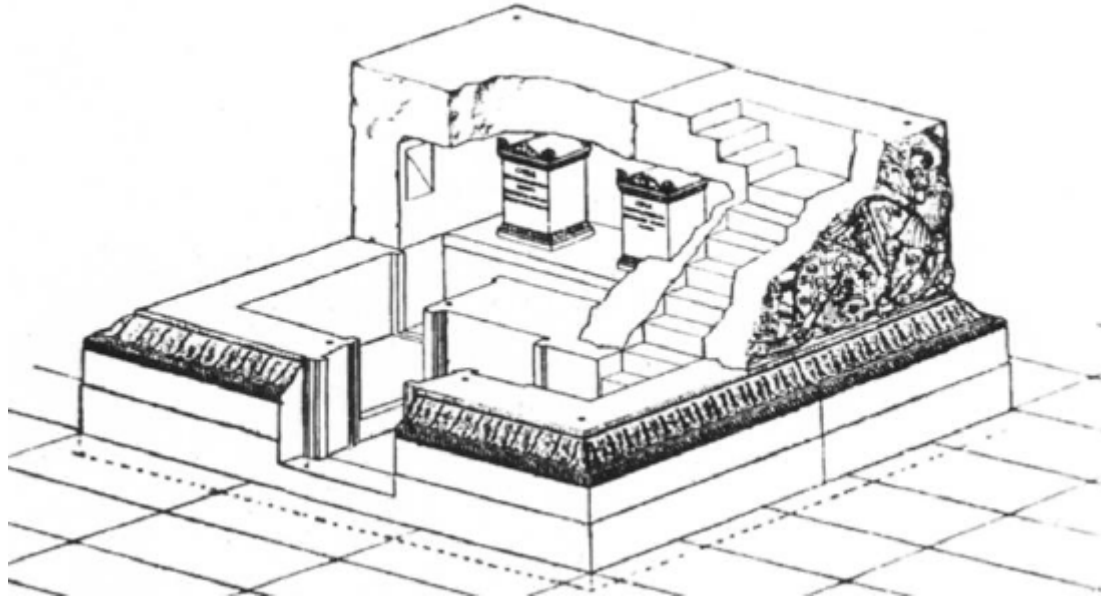
The bones of Trajan were deposited in his Column, and the Parthian Games, as they were called, continued for a number of years. *Dio 69.2.3*



Pedestal of Trajan's Column which served as a 'tomb chamber'.

The ashes of his burnt body were transferred to Rome and buried in the Forum of Trajan under his Column, and an effigy that was put on top, was carried into the city on a chariot, just as is done with triumphators ; the senate and the army opened the procession. *Epitome de Caesaribus* 13.11

The burial of Trajan's remains inside his Column was a very unusual choice and contrary to Roman practice since the Column stood within the *pomerium* (the boundary of the city proper), where burial was normally forbidden. Trajan had not made arrangements for his funeral at the time of his death so perhaps the Senate permitted it by special decree, a distinction which none of his predecessors had had. Or perhaps, as proposed by Amanda Claridge, it was one of the additional honours the Senate granted which Hadrian had not asked for in his letter. The fact that Trajan was buried underneath his column has been a matter of scholarly debate. Amanda Claridge has argued that the chamber of Trajan's column was too small to be an imperial burial. She believes that "Trajan's tomb must have been a separate installation located in full view on the outside of the Column".



Reconstruction of the burial chamber. (From G. Boni, NSc 1907, fig. 13)

As for Trajan's triumph and his funeral procession, when did they actually take place? Did they happen at the same time or were they two separate ceremonies? A posthumous triumph had no precedent in Rome. Modern scholarship seems to defer on many grounds. W. Kierdorf believes the ceremony of the consecration was combined with the posthumous triumph which took place in autumn AD 117, before Hadrian's return to Rome. W. den Boer, however, argues that triumph and consecration were separated both for political and religious reasons and that the ceremonies had to wait after Hadrian's return in the Summer of 118. Amanda Claridge raises the possibility that Trajan's posthumous triumph was in fact "something else" since an effigy could not perform the ceremonial duties which included a sacrifice to Jupiter performed by the living *triumphator*.

In any case, the posthumous triumph was commemorated on a very rare aureus bearing on the obverse the head of Trajan with the legend *Divo Traiano Parth(ico) Aug(usto) Patri* and on the reverse a four-horse chariot driven by the deceased Emperor who holds a laurel-branch and a sceptre, with the legend *Triumphus Parthicus*.



Aureus of AD 117-18. The triumph of the Parthian victory which Trajan did not live to celebrate in Rome is accorded posthumous record.

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