

Head of Roman emperor Publius Aelius Hadrianus ("Hadrian")

Cast based on head of Hadrian in the Vatican Museums, Rome. The reign of Publius Aelius Hadrianus, Hadrian (born 76, ruled 117-138 CE), was fairly peaceful, mainly because he withdrew troops from eastern and northern provinces. To ensure the peace, he traveled to nearly every province. He is well known for his Hellenism, his affair with the youth Antinoös, and the Pantheon in Rome and villa at Tivoli. He forbade circumcision by the Jews which led to the Bar Kochba revolt (132-35), which he ruthlessly suppressed; his Roman colony, Aelia Capitolina, in Jerusalem and his fortification of the Temple Mount made Hadrian a pariah amongst Jews.

Hadrian's time as emperor of Rome was quite different from his predecessor Trajan, in that he had no intentions of expanding Rome's borders and was more interested in Greek philosophy than military pursuits. His love for all things Greek began in his teenage years, around the time his father died and he became the ward of the emperor Trajan. Trajan formally adopted him, thus marking his entrance into the political arena. Hadrian served as quaestor in 101, consul in 108, and was also at one time the imperial speechwriter. He was the governor of Syria in 117 and consul for the second time in 118 and again in 119.

Hadrian's time was consumed by his many talents which included: writing poetry, engaging in debates with sophists, singing, mathematics, rhetoric, playing the harp, painting and sculpting. Another of his pursuits was a certain Bithynian youth named Antinous; the two were very close. Hadrian was therefore grief-stricken when Antinous drowned in the Nile River after a grand excursion to Egypt. He then deified Antinous and named a new city, located on the Nile, Antinoopolis.

The portraiture of Hadrian is significant because, like Trajan, Hadrian assumed the role of emperor when he was in his forties and all of his busts depict him as a never-aging adult. His skin is always smooth and without wrinkles or any signs of age. Hadrian is also interesting because he is the first emperor to sport a full beard, undoubtedly a manifestation of his Hellenistic tendencies. His beard was important with regards to the study of sculpture because it provided a new texture for sculptors to work with. Another important advancement in portraiture was the drilling of the pupil of the eye, which was painted in earlier portraits. Hadrian's physical attributes include: "a full head of curly hair brushed in thick waves from the crown of his head,...a neat moustache and a full but short beard. His face is broad and smooth, he has almond-shaped eyes, eyebrows delineated with individual hairs, a straight nose, and full lips," (Kleiner 238). The bust at the Wilcox collection depicts Hadrian at about forty years old with a thick mass of hair and his head is slightly turned, gazing to the left.