

ANTIQUÉ WRITINGS CONCERNING TRAJAN

Although the name of the architect who designed Trajan's Forum is known — Apollodorus of Damascus — surviving mentions of him are sparse, and all of them occur in the context of the career of Trajan. Therefore I have considered the true "author" of the monument to be Trajan himself. The principal selection is the biography of Trajan by Dio Cassius, where the Emperor's building projects are mentioned along with his other accomplishments; it is supplemented by a brief passage from the following chapter of Dio Cassius, where the end of Apollodorus is described. The other selections are self-explanatory.

- (1) The dedicatory inscription on the base of Trajan's Column:

SENATVS POPVLVSQVE ROMANVS
IMP. CAESARI DIVI NERVAE F. NERVAE
TRAIANO AVG. GERM. DACICO PONTIF.
MAXIMO TRIB. POT. XVII IMP. VI COS. VI P. P.
AD DECLARANDVM QVANTAE ALTITVDINIS
MONS ET LOGVS TANT (is oper) IBVS SIT EGESTVS

The Senate and the people of Rome to the Emperor Caesar, son of the divine Nerva, Nerva Trajan Augustus Germanicus Dacicus, pontifex maximus, at the time of his seventeenth tribunician power, of his sixth imperial salutation, and of his sixth consulship, the Father of the Country, to declare how high a hill and place have been excavated for these works.

- (2) From Pausanius, Description of Greece, V, xii, 6:

There are also statues of emperors, one of Hadrian in Parian marble set up by the cities which form the Achaean confederacy, and one of Trajan, set up by all the Greeks. This latter emperor was victorious over the Getae who live north of Thrace and waged war against Osoes, the descendant of Arsaces, and the Parthians. Of the public buildings which were constructed during his reign, the most worthy of note are the baths, which are named after him, the great theatre which is completely circular, the building for horse races which stretches out to a length of two stades, and the forum which he built for the Romans; the last is worth seeing on account of its ornamentation and that sort of thing, particularly its roof which is made of bronze.

- (3) From Dio Cassius, Historia romana, LXVIII (attached copies) and LXIX, 4, 1-5 (as follows):

Hadrian first drove into exile and then put to death the architect Apollodorus who had carried out several of Trajan's building projects — his forum, the odeum, and the gymnasium. The pretext given for Hadrian's action was that Apollodorus had been guilty of some serious offense, but the truth is that when Trajan was at one time consulting with Apollodorus about

a certain problem connected with his buildings, the architect said to Hadrian, who had interrupted them with some advice, "Go away and draw your pumpkins. You know nothing about these problems." For it so happened that Hadrian was at that time priding himself on some sort of drawing. When he became emperor he remembered this insult and refused to put up with Apollodorus' outspokenness. He sent him the plan for the temple of Venus and Rome, in order to demonstrate that it was possible for a great work to be conceived without his (Apollodorus') help, and asked him if he thought the building was well designed. Apollodorus sent a reply saying that, as far as the temple was concerned, it should have been placed in a higher position and that the area beneath it should have been dug out, both so that the temple would have had a more imposing effect on the Via Sacra by being raised above it and so that the hollow space beneath the temple could have received the machines. (There they could be put together out of sight and brought into the theatre without anyone knowing about it beforehand.) With regard to the cult images he said that they were made on a scale which was too great for the height of the cella. "For if the goddesses should wish to stand up and leave the temple," he said, "they would be unable to do so." When he wrote all this so bluntly, Hadrian was both irritated and deeply pained because he had fallen into an error which could not be rectified; nor did he attempt to restrain his anger or hide his pain; on the contrary, he had the man slain.

(4) Ammianus Marcellinus, Rerum Gestarum Libri, XVI, 10, 15-16:

But when he came to the Forum of Trajan, a structure which, in my opinion, is unique under the heavens, and a marvel which even wins the acceptance of the divine powers, he stopped in his tracks, astonished, while his mind tried to grasp the gigantic complex, which cannot be described by words and could never again be attempted by mortal men. He abandoned all hope of ever constructing anything of this sort but said that he only wanted to copy, and was able to do so, Trajan's horse which was situated in the middle of the open court of the forum, and which carried the emperor himself. Ormisda, the (Persian) royal pretender, happened to be standing by ... and responded with a studied remark characteristic of his people: "Before you do that, O Emperor, you should give the command, if you are able, to have a stable built just like this one. For the horse which you intend to make would thus have as much room to move around as this horse which we see here."

(5) From Cassiodorus, Variae, VII, 6, 1:

The Forum of Trajan is a wonder to look upon, even after continual viewing.

NOTES

- (1) The sense of the last part of the inscription is that the height of the column (125 feet including the base) is meant to indicate the depth of the earth removed in order to provide a level place to build the forum. The date corresponds to 113 A.D.
- (2) For Pausanias see note (9) of the "Antique Writings Concerning Polykleitos" distributed for the previous unit. Pausanias is here discussing statues in the temple of Zeus at Olympia, but digresses on Trajan's building program in general.
- (3) Cassius Dio Cocceianus, Roman historian and administrator (c. 155-235?). His father, the distinguished Greek orator and philosopher Dio Chrysostom, had been banished by the emperor Diocletian, and restored to favor under Nerva and Trajan. Dio Cassius wrote, in Greek, a history of Rome from the earliest times to his own day, most of which (including our selections) survives only in an eleventh-century epitome (summary) by a Byzantine monk. The peculiar remark in the shorter selection about drawing pumpkins is usually taken to refer to Hadrian's liking for domes in architecture.
- (4) Ammianus Marcellinus (c. 330-c. 400), the last Roman historian of any note. Himself a pagan though not unsympathetic to Christianity, he was a successful general under the emperor Julian the Apostate. Around 390, he retired and wrote a history of the Roman emperors from Nerva to his own time (in Latin, although he was of Greek birth). All of this history is lost except the part covering the years 353 to 378. During this period the division of the Empire into East and West was becoming definitive. This passage is indicative of the decline of the wealth and power of Rome, but also of the tremendous prestige of her old monuments. The moment described is the visit of the emperor Constantius to Trajan's forum in the year 357.
- (5) Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator (c. 485-c. 585), Roman statesman and author under the Christian Gothic rulers of Italy. From this short mention it appears that Trajan's forum was still essentially intact, and admired, as late as the sixth century.