
DAILY COIN RELIEF!

A BLOG FOR ANCIENT COINS ON THE PAS
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Trajan and Dacia



Marcus Ulpius Traianus
(AD 98-117)
(PUBLIC-6A513E)

Often coins recorded through the PAS hint at or provide direct links to the wider Roman world. This can be anything from depictions of the Emperors, through to places, key events, battles, and even architecture. Good examples of this are seen in the coinage of Trajan (AD 98-117), particularly in relation to his two military campaigns in Dacia – the landscape of modern-day Romania and Moldova, notably around the Carpathian Mountains (Transylvania) – in AD 101-102 and AD 105-106. Dacia, with her king Decebalus, was considered a potential threat to Rome as well as a source of great natural wealth, particularly gold. Trajan's victorious Dacian Wars resulted in the southern half of Dacia being annexed as the Roman province of *Dacia Traiana* in AD 106, rejuvenated the Roman economy, and brought Trajan glory. His triumph instigated 123 days of celebrations with Roman games that involved 10,000 gladiators and even more wild animals!

Coins of Trajan are not uncommon.¹ The PAS has over 3,200 examples (<https://finds.org.uk/database/search/result/s/ruler/256/objecttype/COIN/broadperiod/ROMAN>) for Trajan alone, as well as much rarer examples of coins struck for his wife Plotina (2 examples), sister Marciana (5 examples), and niece Matidia (1 example).



¹ The standard reference is RIC II. However, this has been superseded by the work of Bernhard Woytek, the leading expert on Trajanic coinage, in his *Die Reichsprägung des Kaisers Traianus (98-117)* (MIR 14, Vienna, 2010). See also for Dacia and Trajan: <https://tinyurl.com/s37b2ya>

Trajan's Bridge

During the 2nd Dacian campaign, Trajan instructed the Syrian-Greek architect Apollodorus of Damascus to construct a bridge over the Danube to enable the movement of Roman legions into the region. His segmental arch bridge was constructed between AD 103-105 and formed of twenty stone piers connected by wooden arches. It was the first to span the Lower Danube and at a length of 1,135m was the largest bridge of its kind for more than a millennium. Roman historian Cassius Dio (LXVII, 13) regarded the bridge as Trajan's greatest achievement. A series of *sestertii* struck by Trajan between AD 103-111 depict a large, single-span bridge, which has often been regarded as Apollodorus' bridge over the Danube, although this isn't entirely certain. There are three identified examples on the PAS, one of which is a contemporary copy. In addition, *denarii* depicting the Danube personified (4 PAS examples) are also issued and likely represent Trajan's crossing of the river.



LANCUM-9C8D5D

Copper-alloy *sestertius*, mint of Rome, dating to c.AD 103-111 (Reece Period 5)

Obv.: IMP CAES NERVAE TRAIANO AVG GER DAC P M TR P COS V P P, Laureate and draped bust right.

Rev.: S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI, S C, Single span bridge with tower at each end.

RIC II, p. 284, no. 569.



SUR-A9D5C3 and IOW-2C6A13 (contemporary copy)²



LIN-DFA1F2

denarius, Rome, c.AD 103-111

Obv.: IMP TRAIANO AVG GER DAC P M TR P, Laureate and draped bust right

Rev.: COS V P P S P Q R OPTIMO PRINC, DANVVIVS, Danuvius (The Danube), naked to waist, cloak floating out behind, reclining left on rocks, head right, placing right hand on prow of ship, left elbow resting on rock

RIC II, p.251, no. 100

² B. Woytek has identified several groups of Trajan *sestertii* which are contemporary copies that appear to be British products. See Woytek, B. 'More Imitative Trajan Sestertii from Britain: Additional Evidence for the 'Modius Group' and Other Finds', *Numismatic Chronicle* 174, 2014: 119-124

Campaigns and Victory

Multiple coin types were struck commemorating Trajan's successful campaigns, typically depicting defeated Dacian captives, the Emperor, Victory, and similar motifs. These for the majority date to his 5th consulship of c.AD 103-111, with legends containing COS V and references in the obverse legends to his role as conqueror of Dacia – DAC. There is enormous variety, but here are a few PAS examples:

First Dacian campaign, AD 101-102 – COS IIII reverse types



LON-5EAC62 – *denarius*, AD 101-102
Obv.: IMP CAES NERVA TRAIAN AVG
GERM, Laureate bust right
Rev.: P M TR P COS IIII P P, Victory
standing right, inscribing shield
Rome, **RIC II**, p.248, no. 65



BM-66EB98 – *denarius*, AD 101-102
Obv.: IMP CAES NERVA TRAIAN AVG
GERM, Laureate bust right
Rev.: [DACICVS] COS IIII P P, Victory
advancing left
Rome, **RIC II**, p.247, no. 47

Second Dacian campaign, AD 105-106 – COS V reverse types, AD 103-111



NCL-0911E3

Sestertius, mint of Rome, c.AD 103-111 (Reece Period 5).

Obv.: IMP CAES NERV[AE TRAIAN]O AVG GER
DAC [P M] TR P COS V P P, Laureate head right
Rev.: S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI, S C, Trajan on
horseback right, spearing Dacian

RIC II, p.282, no. 534

LIN-F8B578

Sestertius, mint of Rome, c.AD 103-111
(Reece Period 5).

Obv.: IMP CAES NERVAE TRAIANO
AVG GER DAC P M TR P COS V P P,
Laureate and draped bust right.
Rev.: S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI, S C,
Dacian seated left on shields in
mourning, trophy on left with arms at
base

RIC II, p.284, no. 564



COS V P P S P Q R OPTIMO PRINC, DAC CAP reverse types, AD 103-111



WILT-317DB7

Dacian, his hands bound behind him, seated right on a pile of shields and arms

RIC II, p.250, no. 96



WILT-10BFD6

Dacian seated left on a pile of arms mourning, arms around him

RIC II, p.251, no. 98



SWYOR-7A4E6D

Dacian, standing left, with hands bound in front, various arms around

RIC II, p.251, no. 99

COS V P P S P Q R OPTIMO PRINC and S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI reverse types, AD 103-111



BERK-6AECA4

Victory standing right inscribing DA/CI/CA on shield attached to palm-tree

RIC II, p.253, no. 130



PUBLIC-88B2DC

Trophy of arms, shields, spears and swords at base

RIC II, p.254, no. 147



HAMP-F6A13B

Pax seated left holding branch and transverse sceptre, in front of her kneels a Dacian

RIC II, p.256, no. 187



LEIC-99D086

Dacian mourning, seated right on shield, sword below

RIC II, p. 258, no. 218



DENO-C3D1E3

Dupondius, Rome, AD 103-111

Obv.: IMP CAES NERVAE TRAIANO [AVG GER DAC] P M TR P COS V P P, Radiate head right

Rev.: S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI, S C, Pax left holding branch and cornucopiae foot on Dacian captive

RIC II, p.280, no. 505.

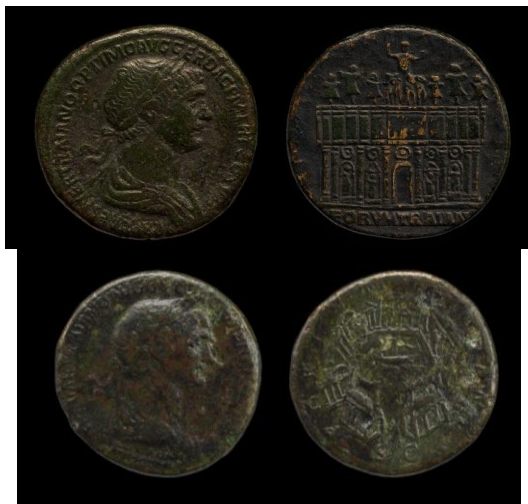


Forum Traiana – Trajan’s Forum³



Trajan’s Dacian Wars allowed him to embark on a series of vast building campaigns, the most important of which were in Rome, based on the *manubiae* (proceeds) of the War. The *Forum Traiana*, Trajan’s Forum, became the largest forum in Rome. It was designed by Apollodorus and inaugurated in AD 112, Gellius remarking that “*All along the roof of the colonnades of the forum of Trajan gilded statues of horses and representations of military standards are placed, and underneath is written Ex manubiis [from the spoils of war] ...*” (Attic Nights 13.25.1). At its centre stood an equestrian statue of Trajan, the *Equus Traiana*. Ammianus Marcellinus, describing Constantius II’s visit to Rome in AD 357, regarded Trajan’s Forum as “*a creation which in my view has no like under the cope of heaven and which even the gods themselves must agree to admire*” (Amm. Marc. XVI.10.15)! Other structures included Trajan’s markets next to the forum, the Baths of Trajan, the Aqua Traiana, and a new harbour at Portus near Ostia.

Many of these architectural elements are represented on Trajan’s coinage:



Sestertius, Rome, AD 103-111
 Rev.: S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI, S C, AQVA TRAIANA, River god reclining left on rocks under arched grotto
RIC II, p.278, no. 463

BM R.12049

Sestertius, Rome, AD 112-114
 Rev.: S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI, S C, FORVM TRAIANI, Trajan’s Forum
RIC II, p.288, no. 630
NOTE –no PAS examples yet!

BM 1867,0101.2043

Sestertius, Rome, AD 103-111
 Rev.: PORTVM TRAIANI, S C, Trajan’s harbour at Portus
RIC II, p.278, no. 471



WAW-768AA5

Denarius, Rome, AD 112-114
 Rev.: S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI, Trajan on horseback left holding spear and sword
RIC II, p.264, no. 291

³ For a good overview see: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/ancient-mediterranean-ap-ancient-rome/a/forum-and-market-of-trajan>

The Basilica Ulpia

At the north western end of the Forum stood the massive Basilica Ulpia. Completed in AD 112 and measuring 169m in length, it stood as the largest public building of its kind in Rome and the architectural blueprint for future public law courts and buildings. A large central nave was lined with columns, the façade decorated with trophies and the spoils of Trajan's Dacian campaigns. Remains of the incomplete Basilica survive today, but importantly *sestertii* issued by Trajan to commemorate its completion preserve some of those elements that no-longer survive, notably the columns, pediments, and sculpture.



BERK-FE5596

Sestertius, Rome, AD 112-114

Obv.: IMP CAES NERVAE TRAIANO AVG GER DAC P M TR P COS VI P P, Laureate bust right with aegis on left shoulder

Rev.: SPQR OPTIMO PRINCIPI, BASILICA VLPIA, S C, The entrance to the Basilica Ulpia

RIC II, p.287, no. 618



Basilica Ulpia, Rome

Trajan's Column⁴

Behind the Basilica Ulpia stood Trajan's Column, a stone column almost 100ft high formed of 20 huge marble blocks. This was dedicated by the Senate and commemorates Trajan's Dacian Wars. It served two other key purposes. The exterior of the column itself has a spiralling frieze that tells the story of the Dacian campaigns, Trajan's own account now lost to history. Trajan features prominently and a statue of him would have originally stood on the top, but this was lost and replaced in the 16th century by one of St. Peter. It became a prototype for other similar columns, like that of Marcus Aurelius also in Rome. The interior of the column is hollow with a spiral staircase to its summit, while at the base are a number of small rooms. One of these may have held Trajan and his wife Plotina's ashes, or more likely these were interred in a nearby funerary monument. Not only does the column provide the narrative for Trajan's Dacian campaigns and commemorate his victory, but it may have also served as his funerary monument. It appears too on Trajan's coinage in various forms and issues, with more than 20 examples in bronze and silver recorded through the PAS.



WILT-D11324

Denarius, mint of Rome, c. AD 112-114 (Reece Period 5)

Obv.: IMP TRAIANO AVG GER DAC P M TR P COS VI P P, Laureate and draped bust right

Rev.: S P Q R OPTIMO PRINCIPI, Trajan's Column, two eagles at base

RIC II, p. 264, no. 293



DEV-C7F221 (*dupondius*, AD 114-117, RIC II, p. 292, no. 679) and LEIC-7E2FF2 (*denarius*, AD 114-117, RIC II, p. 265, no. 307)

Anerley, 24 March 2020

⁴See C. Gazdac, 'Trajan's Column versus numismatic programme. Prototypes in the Trajanic Imperial ideology' https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316336690_TRAJAN'S_COLUMN_VERSUS_NUMISMATIC_PROGRAMME_PROTOTYPES_IN_THE_TRAJANIC_IMPERIAL_IDEOLOGY for a good overview of the numismatic data for Trajan's Column