

Memories of Trajan, memoirs of Hadrien

An international and multidisciplinary conference



The year 2017 will see the nineteen-hundredth anniversary of the death of Emperor Trajan and the accession of his kinsman Hadrian. On that occasion, we will be organizing a conference which will study the contrasted memories of those two Roman emperors. This event will take place on **Thursday 28 and Friday 29 September 2017 at the Université de Lille-SHS Lille 3**. It will continue a series of events and scientific endeavours recently organized in our region: a seminar “Réception de l’Antiquité” of the Lille Humanities Doctoral School (since 2010), an exhibition on “Hadrien, empereur” at the villa Marguerite Yourcenar (2011), another exhibition on “Rome en pays nervien” in Ath and Bavay (2015), or the workshop on “L’empereur Auguste et la mémoire des siècles” organized at the Université d’Artois (March 2015). The conference will be organized by three main research teams: « Histoire, archéologie et littérature des mondes anciens » (HALMA, UMR 8164, CNRS-Université de Lille SHS-Lille 3), « Histoire, langues, littérature et interculturel » (HLLI, EA 4030, Université du Littoral Côte d’Opale, Boulogne-sur-Mer), and « Littératures et représentations de l’Antiquité et du Moyen Âge » (CELIS, EA 1002, Université Blaise-Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand).

At first sight, everything seems to oppose the ways Trajan and Hadrian were remembered. Trajan was seen, already in his lifetime, as “the best of princes”, and later texts present him essentially as a conqueror, eager to expand the boundaries of the Empire. Hadrian’s reputation has been much more contested and contrasted, but it may be said that, generally speaking, his image is often symmetrically opposed to that of Trajan: an aesthete, a friend of the arts and of Hellenic culture, he has been sometimes presented as an effeminate character, and his relationship with Antinous has aroused varied reactions in different times and milieus; historiography has also treated him as the emperor who, unlike Trajan, put an end to territorial expansion and entrenched the Roman Empire behind the *limes*. What is important here is that both emperors seem to have been thought – and thought *together* – in historiography, in the arts and in literature, as diametrically opposed models of princes: virile versus effeminate, conqueror versus prudent, friend of the Senate versus murderer of the “four consulars”, open versus scheming character, but also soldier against aesthete, blunt against clever, and even Roman against Greek. Trajan, defender of the *mos maiorum*, has been seen as a counter model to Hadrian, the “little Greek” (*graeculus*).

Still, many aspects may bring those two characters closer, and their memories could have kept some trace of those common traits. Both descendants of Roman colonists settled in Baetica, they were the first Roman provincials to become emperors. They were kinsmen, and this is no anecdote: in 117, when succession came, the logic of kindred prevailed over the *optimus princeps*

discourse. Both received military training: this fact, that seems evident where Trajan is concerned, was also true of Hadrian, who served three *militiae* and participated in many campaigns.

Those two memories, often thought together, were probably effective right from the first years of the reign of Hadrian, and they have been maintained down to the most recent productions, be they scholarly (historiography), artistic (particularly literary) or more generally cultural (museums, exhibitions). What we want to study, then, is the memories of both emperors over the centuries from 117 to 2017. This means that the conference will be firmly multidisciplinary: we hope to convene literary scholars, historians, art historians and archaeologists. The papers delivered at the conference may dwell on the memory of one emperor in particular, but we will retain first and foremost those which propose a crossed vision of their memories.

Among the topics, moments and phenomena which may be treated in papers, we will mention (this is not a closed list):

- The posthumous fortune of the designation *optimus*, granted to Trajan, which may be contrasted with the rather poor reputation Hadrian suffered for a long time. It may be interesting to observe when historiography began to see Hadrian as a “good emperor” and fully integrated him into the positive discourse on the “Age of the Antonines”.
- How Trajan’s memory was maintained by Hadrian, and how both emperors’ memory (and also, to a lesser degree, the memory of their wives and kindred) were maintained by their successors, who sometimes claimed their heritage: through epigraphy, coinage or the imperial cult, through the resumption of elements of their names and titles.
- The question of the rulers’ personalities, especially through gendered approaches of their depiction in historiography and the arts, the episode of Antinous being central to such considerations. The question of homosexuality and its (non-)treatment in the following centuries (especially the twentieth century) is of interest, because it concerns both princes and, with very different portrayals. Even their hair is interesting! The “manly” Trajan was (as all emperors before him) clean-shaven, whereas Hadrian was (as most emperors after him) bearded. All periods are here concerned, and this question can also be drawn together with that of their appreciation of art: Antinous has to do with art, and Trajan was also interested in art, as his support to Apollodorus of Damascus shows. In the vicinity of their relation to art, we may also consider their relation with humanism, *Romanitas* and Hellenism. Here also, hair may be called in!
- The succession of 117. This problematic moment has been depicted in very different ways: as an occasion to praise Hadrian’s political cleverness, or conversely to present him as a ruthless schemer. François Fontaine’s novel *Mourir à Sélinonte* (1984), as well as his pastiche *Douze autres Césars* (1985), are interesting examples of such a treatment, but there may be many more.
- The fourth-century *Historia Augusta*, which contains the first biography of Hadrian that has been passed on to us, and begins precisely with the death of Trajan.
- The appearance, in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, of a Christian memory of Trajan and, to a much lesser degree, of Hadrian, particularly in martyrial hagiography and the memory of persecutions. This is a complex memory, Trajan being often recognized (down to modern historiography) as a “mild persecutor” of Christians. Maybe that was in contrast with his later namesake Trajan Decius, the persecutor *par excellence*. This curious phrase needs of course to be questioned. And is Hadrian as ignored as it seems by early and medieval Christian authors? And if so, why?
- The appearance and transformations of a second Christian memory of Trajan, very different from the first. In several texts, Trajan is presented as having reached salvation and paradise thanks to Pope Gregory the Great’s tears, to the extent that Dante made

him one of the only two pagans in his paradise. The theological and literary fortune of this motif is huge.

- The existence of a Jewish memory of both emperors, who both suppressed Jewish revolts. But it is mainly Hadrian who remained in the memory of Jewish communities: he seems to be one of the only Roman emperors to be mentioned by name in the Talmud.
- The conservation through the early Middle Ages of important (even fundamental) aspects of both rulers' memories. As Jean Stengers reminds us (*Vertige de l'historien*, Brussels, 1998), works as important as Pliny's correspondence and *Panegyricus Traiani*, or John Xiphilinus' *epitome* of Dio Cassius are known only through unique manuscripts.
- Both were military leaders, but one of them has been associated with wars of expansion, the other with *pax Romana* and the *limes*. The question of their respective strategies in historiography is an interesting topic. Have their strategies always been contrasted, and when did that begin? Was this idea challenged?
- The memories of Trajan and Hadrian as builders, as it is reflected through monuments which remained visible during whole or part of the last nineteen centuries. Three monuments are particularly important: Trajan's Column on the one hand, Hadrian's Wall and the *Villa Hadriana* in Tivoli on the other. For example we may note that, for many centuries, the British wall was attributed to Septimius Severus: there was an eighteenth-century rediscovery of one forgotten memory of Hadrian, which only a short passage in the *Historia Augusta* had kept. To those three monuments, we may add a fourth: the Pantheon, which symbolises both continuity and breach between the two: contemplated by Trajan, achieved by Hadrian, it was criticized by Apollodorus of Damascus. For each of those monuments, it would be interesting to study the many drawings, paintings and engravings that represented them through centuries.
- Figurative representations of the two rulers, in statues and paintings. How was the prince's figure represented in art, from Antiquity to the present day?
- The work of Marguerite Yourcenar. Trajan's description in *Memoirs of Hadrian* is rather less flattering than the one which had been drawn by most previous authors; conversely, Hadrian finds himself rehabilitated in a way through the novel. Is such an "intersection of popularity curves", if we may use the phrase, a phenomenon which began before Yourcenar, or was it an aspect of the reception of her novel?
- Trajan and Hadrian on screen, in comic books and in all popular forms of artistic expression. Curiously enough, despite of two reigns rich in events, our two emperors did not really inspire Hollywood. John Boorman has been working for many years on an adaptation of *Memoirs of Hadrian*, but the film has not been produced. Neither was Europe much concerned with those emperors: two scenes in the film by Xavier Beauvois, *Souviens-toi que tu vas mourir*, evoke the Pantheon, the Tivoli villa and the memory of Hadrian. It could be interesting to study documentaries and films for television, which seem to have focused on Hadrian rather than on Trajan. Comic books include the series *Le Bouclier de Mars*, by Gilles Chaillet. As an anecdote, one may note that "Trajan" is also used in typography as the name of a font, often used in film posters and credits!

Papers will be delivered during the conference in Lille. They will consist in presentations of about 30 minutes, including a time for discussion.

To propose a paper, please send the following elements to Alban Gautier (alban.gautier@univ-littoral.fr):

- title of the paper;
- brief abstract (no more than half a page);
- brief CV (affiliation, main publications, e-mail address, web site).

Thank you for sending all propositions **before 31 October 2015**.

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