



Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire

Mary T. Boatwright

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Cities throughout the Roman Empire flourished during the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117-138), a phenomenon that not only strengthened and legitimized Roman dominion over its possessions but also revealed Hadrian as a masterful negotiator of power relationships. In this comprehensive investigation into the vibrant urban life that existed under Hadrian's rule, Mary T. Boatwright focuses on the emperor's direct interactions with Rome's cities, exploring the many benefactions for which he was celebrated on coins and in literary works and inscriptions. Although such evidence is often as imprecise as it is laudatory, its collective analysis, undertaken for the first time together with all other related material, reveals that over 130 cities received at least one benefaction directly from Hadrian. The benefactions, mediated by members of the empire's municipal elite, touched all aspects of urban life; they included imperial patronage of temples and hero tombs, engineering projects, promotion of athletic and cultural competitions, settlement of boundary disputes, and remission of taxes.

Even as he manifested imperial benevolence, Hadrian reaffirmed the self-sufficiency and traditions of cities from Spain to Syria, the major exception being his harsh treatment of Jerusalem, which sparked the Third Jewish Revolt. Overall, the assembled evidence points to Hadrian's recognition of imperial munificence to cities as essential to the peace and prosperity of the empire. Boatwright's treatment of Hadrian and Rome's cities is unique in that it encompasses events throughout the empire, drawing insights from archaeology and art history as well as literature, economy, and religion.

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