



## Denarius depicting the head of Trajan and the personification of Arabia (103-111 CE)

### Denarius depicting the head of Trajan and the personification of Arabia making an act of submission (103-111 CE)



[1]

**Denomination:**

Denarius

**Date:** 103 CE to 111 CE

**Material:**

Silver

**Mint:**

Rome

**Name of Ruler:**

Trajan

**Obverse (Image and Inscription):**

Image: Laureate bust of Trajan, draped on his left shoulder, looking right

Inscription: IMP TRAIANO AVG GER DAC P M TR P COS VI PP

**Reverse (Image and Inscription):**

Image: Personification of Arabia standing front, draped, head left, holding branch in right hand, bunch of sticks in left hand, with camel at her feet

Inscription: SPQR OPTIMO PRINCIPI – ARAB ADQ

**Commentary:**

(RIC II, Trajan no. 245, p. 261)

This denarius was likely minted in 111 CE (the RIC lists it under the group minted between 103 and 111 CE) (see Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 83). It depicts on the obverse the head of Trajan wearing a laureate crown, which symbolised honour and victory, and on the reverse the female personification of Arabia holding a branch in an act of submission with a camel at her feet. The inscription on the obverse refers to Trajan as IMP(ERATORI) TRAIANO AVG(VSTO) GER(MANICO) DAC(ICO) P(ONTIFICI) M(AXIMO) TR(IBVNICIA) P(OTESTAS) COS VI P(ATRI) P(ATRIAE), or “to Trajan, emperor, Augustus, Germanicus, Dacicus, *pontifex maximus* (high priest), holder of the tribunician power, consul for the sixth time, and father of the fatherland (*pater patriae*). The inscription on the reverse, OPTIMO PRINCIPI, refers to Trajan as *optimus princeps*, or “best ruler” of the SPQR (*Senatus Populusque Romanus*, the senate and people of Rome), and ends with the words ARAB(IA) ADQ(VISITA), or “Arabia acquired/gained.” The word *adquisita*, which describes in essence the acquisition of something, is less suggestive of a bloody campaign than numismatic issues which used the terms *capta* (captured) or *devicta* (subdued, conquered) (see the examples listed below), minted by various emperors.

The circumstances under which Arabia came under Roman power began with the death of the last Nabatean ruler, Rabbel II, in 106 CE (Bowersock argues that the delay in announcing the annexation of Arabia on coinage and



inscriptions—the present coin probably best dated to 111 CE—might have been a deliberate attempt to wait until Trajan's work in the Near East was completed; *Roman Arabia*, p. 84). After Rabbell II's death, Trajan decided to annex the land of the Nabataeans, incorporating it into the Roman Empire, with Aulus Cornelius Palma Frontonianus, the governor of Syria, commanding the military operations carried out by the Legio VI Ferrata. The new province was named Arabia Petraea, and Trajan transferred the capital to Bostra, although he bestowed the title of metropolis to Petra, the former capital. It seems that, at least at the beginning, the Nabataeans put up some resistance to Rome's annexation, and so the notion of Arabia as a *provincia adquisita*, which indicates the annexation of a province by peaceful means, is probably not entirely accurate (on the events surrounding the transformation of Arabia into a Roman province see Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 76-84). Still, Miriam Griffin suggests that perhaps the celebration of acquisition, rather than all out conquest, and the fact that Trajan did not take the epithet Arabicus was because there was no *major* bloody war (rather, a smaller-scale military intervention). Indeed, she notes that in 106 CE, when Rabbell II died and the status of the Nabatean Arab territory changed from client kingdom (which it had been since Augustus's time) to imperial province, Trajan was still engaged in fighting the Dacians ("Nerva to Hadrian," p. 123).

The propaganda which celebrated Trajan's German and Dacian triumphs, including coins bearing the legends *Germania capta* and *Dacia capta* (see [Denarius depicting the head of Trajan and the personification of Dacia mourning \(107-111 CE\)](#) [2]) and the emperor's taking of the epithets Germanicus and Dacicus (as is evidenced in the inscription on the present coin) is somewhat different to that associated with the Arabian annexation. Trajan did not take the name Arabicus, and in addition to the different wording on the coinage, the images on reverse types documenting this event show Arabia standing upright, not mourning or subdued, and accompanied by items symbolising the new region to join Rome's empire. This is precisely what we find on the present Denarius, where we see depicted a camel and a bundle of sticks, which are probably cinnamon (Herodotus, *History* III.111, speaks of cinnamon growing in Arabia). Nonetheless, despite the different wording and imagery suggesting a more diplomatic campaign, this coin joins numerous other coin types from the period 69-235 CE whose reverses celebrated Rome's power over foreigners (see Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 192). Other reverse types in this category, minted under several emperors, frequently depicted one or more of the following: the personification of a particular place in a submissive, mournful pose, captives, trophies, and broken weaponry (see, for example, [Sestertius depicting the head of Domitian and a trophy with German captives \(85 CE\)](#) [3]; [Aureus depicting the head of Domitian and the personification of Germania mourning \(88-89 CE\)](#) [4]). Famous among this type of coin are the *Iudea Capta* series, struck to commemorate the Roman victory over the Jewish rebels in Judea by Vespasian and Titus, and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 66-70 CE (e.g. [Sestertius depicting Vespasian and a couple of Jews mourning under a palm tree \(71 CE\)](#) [5]).

The depiction of Arabia on the reverse of this coin is by no means one of complete subjugation and defeat. The personified Arabia stands, accompanied by symbols of the new Roman province, and while her holding of the palm branch (which among other things was a symbol of peace) indicates an act of supplication to Rome, the overall picture is much more diplomatic than those on other types which emphasise brutal military victory on the part of the Roman army.

Keywords in the original language:

- [imperator](#) [6]
- [optimus princeps](#) [7]
- [Senatus Populusque Romanus](#) [8]
- [Augustus](#) [9]
- [Germanicus](#) [10]
- [Dacicus](#) [11]
- [pontifex maximus](#) [12]
- [tribunicia potestas](#) [13]
- [consul](#) [14]
- [pater patriae](#) [15]
- [Arabia](#) [16]

Thematic keywords:



- [Trajan](#) [17]
- [military expedition](#) [18]
- [victory](#) [19]
- [Arabia](#) [20]
- [camel](#) [21]
- [submission](#) [22]
- [Roman power](#) [23]
- [Roman province](#) [24]
- [Roman army](#) [25]
- [Nabateans](#) [26]
- [cinnamon](#) [27]
- [palm branch](#) [28]
- [supplication](#) [29]

#### **Bibliographical references:**

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Bennett, Julianbook *Trajan: Optimus Princeps* Roman Imperial Biographies London Routledge 2000

### [Roman Arabia](#) [31]

Bowersock, Glen W. book *Roman Arabia* Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press 1983

### [Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power](#) [32]

Noreña, Carlos F. book *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power* Cambridge Cambridge University Press 2011

### [Nerva to Hadrian](#) [33]

Griffin, Miriam article-in-a-book *The Cambridge Ancient History, Second Edition, Volume XI: The High Empire A.D. 70–192* Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, Dominic Rathbone 84-131 Nerva to Hadrian Cambridge Cambridge University Press 2000

**Other sources connected with this document:** Numismatic item

### [Sestertius depicting Vespasian and a couple of Jews mourning under a palm tree \(71 CE\)](#) [34]

- [Read more about Sestertius depicting Vespasian and a couple of Jews mourning under a palm tree \(71 CE\)](#) [34]

Numismatic item

### [Sestertius depicting the head of Domitian and a trophy with German captives \(85 CE\)](#) [35]

- [Read more about Sestertius depicting the head of Domitian and a trophy with German captives \(85 CE\)](#) [35]

Numismatic item



## [Aureus depicting the head of Domitian and the personification of Germania mourning \(88-89 CE\) \[36\]](#)

- [Read more about Aureus depicting the head of Domitian and the personification of Germania mourning \(88-89 CE\) \[36\]](#)

Numismatic item

## [Denarius depicting the head of Trajan and the personification of Dacia mourning \(103-111 CE\) \[37\]](#)

- [Read more about Denarius depicting the head of Trajan and the personification of Dacia mourning \(103-111 CE\) \[37\]](#)

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[Kimberley Fowler \[38\]](#)



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- [2] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/denarius-depicting-head-trajan-and-personification-dacia-mourning-103-111-ce>
- [3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/sestertius-depicting-head-domitian-and-trophy-german-captives-85-ce>
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- [5] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/sestertius-depicting-vespasian-and-couple-jews-mourning-under-palm-tree-71-ce>
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/imperator>
- [7] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/optimus-princeps>



- [8] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/senatus-populusque-romanus>
- [9] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/augustus>
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