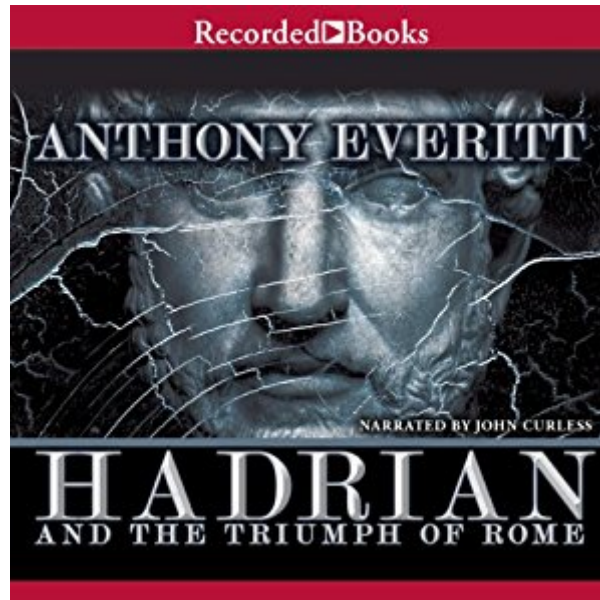




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Hadrian And The Triumph Of Rome



Synopsis

Acclaimed British historian Anthony Everitt delivers a compelling account of the former orphan who became Roman emperor in A.D. 117 after the death of his guardian Trajan. Hadrian strengthened Rome by ending territorial expansion and fortifying existing borders. And - except for the uprising he triggered in Judea - his strength-based diplomacy brought peace to the realm after a century of warfare.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a very well documented biography of the Emperor Hadrian based on historical writings of his contemporaries and later historians. The author is careful not to make too many assumptions about Hadrian's personality, private life and habits and focuses primarily on his reign as emperor and military exploits. Everitt does have a chapter on his relationship with Antinous, the young Bithynian whom Hadrian was so enamored with that he made him into a god after his mysterious death. He explores his relationship with his contemporaries, his soldiers, and his officers more in depth than he does Hadrian's family, assuming this is because of lack of written historical documentation. Everitt also gives an excellent timeline of his travels across the Roman Empire, as well as his methodology for keeping the pax romana rather than using up resources for further expansion. Overall, an excellent book.

I enjoyed reading Anthony Everitt's book on Hadrian. Like many other comments here, I too felt he spent too much time describing the political world unto which Hadrian emerges. Frankly, the first

half of the book where he does this was on the boring side, and I almost set it aside. Thankfully, the second half where Everitt focuses on Hadrian is much more interesting, particularly the themes of Hadrian's (homo)sexuality and Antinous and how that was thought of in ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and today, as well as Hadrian's love and support of Greek culture and his "Grand Tour" of the Roman empire. I appreciated his introduction and afterwards where he explained particular problems regarding the reliability of ancient sources on Hadrian. I also liked that Everitt integrated the sources into the text, without the use of footnotes. (Is ANYTHING more annoying than to constantly have to flip back and forth??) One concern I had was that the narrative almost seemed too smooth, especially given what Everitt's says about the quality of the sources. He does occasionally go through variations of what happened in particular instances based on the different primary sources, it's just that I wondered about the validity of the rest. Additionally, I would have appreciated much much more perspective on how Hadrian is perceived today and in subsequent years, or how Hadrian affected the course of Rome. The final chapter does this but it was way way too short. I'd like to give the book a 5 because Everitt is such a smooth and polished writer and historian, but, given the above, a 4 fits better.

Another excellent product from Anthony Everitt, although I do have one caveat on this book. There was a seeming paucity of documented information on Hadrian, especially his pre-Emperor years, versus what Mr. Everitt relayed about Augustus and Cicero. This leads to a lot of suppositions which detract only slightly from the overall work. I could honestly say one of the "extras" I gleaned from the book due to the lack of documentation of Hadrian's early life is learning much more about Trajan and his life and times as Emperor. In addition, I did feel that more detail was given in this book to the actual specifics of governing Rome and Roman lifestyle and habits than the readers ever received with the other two biographies. Mr. Everitt has a great way of putting things and I find myself chuckling often through his books. One is very much drawn in and feels like the character in the book has been known for years. I can actually envision some of the things happening. As always, I remain a fan of Mr. Everitt's work. I am willing to purchase any of his writings if on a topic of interest to me.

All in all, this is a pretty good book. The author, however, covered more than just Hadrian. The first half discusses the preceding Roman emperors. The Emperor Trajan is covered in some detail as this was also the period when Hadrian was moving up the political ranks. The second half is much more focused on Hadrian. There is, however, a fair amount of speculation on certain events. This is

likely due to a lack of source material. The author is quick to point out what is known and what is unknown. For example, Hadrian is believed to have taken a young boy named Antinous as a lover and companion. The boy subsequently drowned in Egypt but the available sources are in conflict over the circumstances of his death. Antinous may have died in an accident or he may have been deliberately sacrificed in a ritual designed to prolong Hadrian's life. The author does an excellent job of documenting his research. The book is 327 pages long, not counting sources, notes, and an index. It has a detailed chronology and several photographs of statues and monuments. It also contains two maps, one of the Roman Empire and one of Greece. These maps are helpful in orienting the reader to various cities and sites that are referenced in the narrative. Bottom line: this book is an easy read that moves quickly. Of note, however, is that a little more than half the text is focused on Hadrian. The author spends an equal amount of time on preceding emperors and Roman life in the 2nd century. Given the lack of primary sources, the author did a pretty good job of covering this emperor who is mostly known for building a wall in Britain.

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