

The rise and fall of trajan

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



There was once a time that if a digital designer wanted to illustrate a story that was comparably epic to that of Homer's "Iliad and the Odyssey", to tell a tale of historic grandeur that feels as if it were translated from ancient Roman literature itself. Trajan is the perfect example of a classically styled typeface. Trajan is a serif typeface whose design is directly influenced by Imperial letterforms that were chiseled into stone from as early as 43 B. C. American designer Carol Twombly worked as a professional type designer at the age of twenty-nine and created or helped create many fonts and typefaces we still see today. She had graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design where she earned a Masters Degree in Typographic Design. With this, she was soon hired by Adobe in 1988 and was immediately tasked with creating new and appealing typefaces for digital design software that was growing more popular with corporate media buyers. In her work, Carol Twombly studied ancient historical literature to inspire her illustrations for digital fonts and typography. She accomplished in transcribing early inscriptions from one of Roman Emperor Trajan's stone columns, from which her first widely known font takes its name.

Trajan uses an all-capitals typeface because the Romans didn't have a lower-case letter system of writing in place at the time, but this was remedied by Adobe's release of "Trajan Pro 3" which featured a lower-case of small capitals. Twombly's digitization by adding more uniformity and balance to its original counterpart very well maintained its readability and handmade calligraphic beauty. Professional Typographers typically use Trajan for its elegant look, its combination of distinct proportion and geometry. It had successfully placed itself as a "Modern Ancient" design choice, but its stoic

appearance gave way as a visual cliché as more and more productions used it in later media advertisements and illustrations. With the advancement and demand of printing and design technologies that led Trajan to 1989-1990 Adobe Systems, which coincidentally was part of the software that also of designers were starting to use to make branding projects particularly for corporate and apparel logos, magazines, movie posters, DVD covers and more. It was boasted as being the next new big thing. James Mosley, a renowned historian whose work specialized in the history of letter design once said, “ Trajan is the new Helvetica”.

Although its popularity never exceeded that of Helvetica, its insurgent use started to grow exponentially after it had appeared on three movie posters that showed box office hits that debuted in 1993, a few years after its digital inception. Since then, it went from a typeface that beautifully captured the essence of Roman history and literature then gradually strayed far from that concept into an almost standard for movie branding that appeared everywhere hitting its peak in 2007. If you happened to be a digital designer in the mid-late 90’s and were commissioned with creating several posters within deadlines, you could almost guarantee most would default to Trajan for its distinct readability and familiarity. Furthermore, as this typefaces popularity took off, bigger movie productions eventually minimized its use to help distinguish their films from the many that still implemented it at the time. The rise and fall of Trajan can give a proper perspective on the downsides of a digital typeface.