

 theday.co.uk/the-roman-emperor-who-was-a-trans-woman-4



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Bitter end: Elagabalus was murdered by his own soldiers and replaced with his cousin.

Is the past a foreign country? For hundreds of years, Roman emperor Elagabalus has been known as a man. But now some say he was actually a transgender woman.

What's happening?

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, or "Elagabalus", was not **ancient Rome's** most famous **emperor**.

He became leader aged 14 and was killed just four years later.

But now, 1,800 years later, his name is being spoken again. A museum in England has announced it believes Elagabalus was a **transgender** woman.

Find out more

Elagabalus is said to have worn make-up and wigs and asked to be called a lady rather than a lord.

But historians cannot know how much of this true. There is little information about his time in power.

Many historians believe some stories about Elagabalus might have been made up by his enemies. The claim that he wanted to be treated as a woman, they argue, might have been made up by people who wanted to spread the idea he was unmanly.

The Romans, they say, did not think about the idea of people being transgender — so it is not really right to talk about a "transgender emperor".²

But others argue that the Romans may have had different ideas about gender to our own. Roman stories are full of people who changed their **gender**.

So, they say, we should recognise the truth of **LP Hartley's** famous saying: "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there."

Is the past a foreign country?

Some say

Yes! We cannot put our own ideas onto the past. Things were very different in the past, including ideas about gender.

Others think

No! We know that ancient Rome was a place that often valued men over women. We cannot forget that transgender people may have faced danger there.

Some people say

"History is a set of lies agreed upon."

**Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 – 1821),
French emperor**

What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? -

From what you've read, do you think it is right for us to say that Elagabalus was a transgender woman?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: Does history matter for us in the present?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure from this story.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - If you were in charge of the museum, would you have made the same decision?

5. Express

What do others believe? - What do you think life as a Roman emperor would have been like? Discuss as a class.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Write a diary entry pretending you are Elagabalus.

Glossary

Ancient Rome - One of the largest empires in the ancient world.

emperor - Ruler of an empire.

Transgender - Someone whose gender identity (what they feel inside) does not match the gender identity they were assigned at birth (based on their biology).

Gender - A person's gender identity (whether they feel like a man, woman or something else) is not the same as their biological sex (which is determined by genitals, hormones or chromosomes).

LP Hartley - A British novelist, born in 1895.