



Lives of the Caesars, Volume I: Julius/Augustus/Tiberius/Gaius Caligula

Suetonius , John Carew Rolfe (Editor) , K.R. Bradley (Revised by)

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Suetonius (C. Suetonius Tranquillus, born ca. 70 CE), son of a military tribune, was at first an advocate and a teacher of rhetoric, but later became the emperor Hadrian's private secretary, 119-121. He dedicated to C. Septicius Clarus, prefect of the praetorian guard, his "Lives of the Caesars." After the dismissal of both men for some breach of court etiquette, Suetonius apparently retired and probably continued his writing. His other works, many known by title, are now lost except for part of the "Lives of Illustrious Men" (of letters).

Friend of Pliny the Younger, Suetonius was a studious and careful collector of facts, so that the extant lives of the emperors (including Julius Caesar the dictator) to Domitian are invaluable. His plan in "Lives of the Caesars" is: the emperor's family and early years; public and private life; death. We find many anecdotes, much gossip of the imperial court, and various details of character and personal appearance. Suetonius's account of Nero's death is justly famous.

The Loeb Classical Library edition of Suetonius is in two volumes. Both volumes were revised throughout in 1997-98, and a new Introduction added.

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From Reader Review Lives of the Caesars, Volume I: Julius/Augustus/Tiberius/Gaius Caligula for online ebook

Bettie? says

Translated by Robert Graves

On the Life of the Caesars, in Latin *De vita Caesarum*, or as it is often known in English, *The Twelve Caesars*, is a set of twelve biographies of Julius Caesar and the first 11 emperors of the Roman Empire. *On the Life of the Caesars*, which was written in 121 during the reign of the emperor Hadrian, was the most popular work of Hadrian's personal secretary, Suetonius, and is the largest among his surviving writings. It was dedicated to a friend, the Praetorian prefect Gaius Septicius Clarus, in 119. *On the Life of the Caesars* was considered very significant in antiquity and remains a main source on Roman history. The book discusses the significant and critical period of the Principate from the end of the Republic to the reign of Domitian; comparisons are often made with Tacitus whose surviving works document a similar period.

Craig Garen says

Suetonius is of course the classic source of so much Roman historical fiction, it was nice indeed to reread the original lately.

Michelle says

Too dry.

Sam Vanderplas says

Fascinating accounts of Julius and Augustus. Horrific accounts of Tiberius and Caligula. A testament to man's ability for unimaginable evil when his power is unchecked. Makes one thankful for our American checks on power. Sections on the cruelties of Tiberius and Caligula should be required reading in school.

jon says

What can I say, it's all about the content and Suetonius was in a position to give us information on the Caesars that is as reputable as it comes. You can't get much closer to the emperors of Rome in a digest, and

an eloquent one at that, than Suetonius affords and it's always valuable to read primary sources--they never go out of style.

Alicia says

Absolutely fascinating read. I have always loved history and this book details the lives of some amazing people. I enjoyed how detailed and unbiased Suetonius is in his assessment of their lives. I truly felt like it was a learning experience and not a bash of Caligula or Julius. I highly recommend this book for those wanting to learn more about these rulers and how they got to where they were and why we still speak of them today. Some people might not find it riveting so I would definitely only suggest this to a history buff or military leader/war reader.

John Isles says

I've read Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars* in Robert Graves's translation twice at least, but now I'm celebrating having read the first five lives in Latin, and also having translated them into English, in company with a group of fellow Latinists in the Latin Study email list. The Loeb Classical Library contains almost all the great authors of Greece and Rome, with the Greek or Latin text facing an English translation. (I didn't look at the latter, of course, until I'd worked out my own translation.) The first of the two volumes devoted to Suetonius was originally published in 1913, but revised in 1951 and 1998 to take account of more recent scholarship, and to provide a more accurate and straightforward translation than the earliest version.

Suetonius is not a historian, but a gossip monger. He will not let a good anecdote go unused even if it can't be believed. Most of his emperors come across as monsters, and some modern scholars have attempted to restore their reputations. No doubt they each had their supporters and their opponents, just as modern politicians do, and it all depends on who is telling the story. The Roman senators such as Tacitus and knights such as Suetonius who wrote about past emperors who they thought had usurped the power that once had rested in their own classes were accordingly inclined to do a hatchet job. You have to take it all with a pinch of salt, but it makes for a wonderful saga. Now on to Volume 2!

Lucas says

from the chapter on Emperor Tiberius, who lived on the island of Capri after he went insane:

A few days after his arrival at Capri, a fisherman coming up to him unexpectedly, when he was desirous of privacy, and presenting him with a large mullet, he ordered the man's face to be scrubbed with the fish; being terrified at the thought of his having been able to creep upon him from the back of the island, over such rugged and steep rocks.

The man, while undergoing the punishment, expressing his joy that he had not likewise offered him a large crab which he had also taken, he ordered his face to be farther lacerated with its claws. He put to death one of the pretorian guards, for having stolen a peacock out of his orchard.

In one of his journeys, his litter being obstructed by some bushes, he ordered the officer whose duty it was to

ride on and examine the road, a centurion of the first cohorts, to be laid on his face upon the ground, and scourged almost to death.
