

Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars

Suetonius (c. 69 - 122 CE) was a Roman historian who wrote a number of biographies, only a few of which survive. The most famous of his writings is *De Vita Caesarum*, or *The Lives of the Caesars*, which details the lives of twelve successive rulers of Rome, beginning with Julius Caesar. He served as secretary to the emperor Hadrian, but was fired for being too casual with the emperor's wife. *The Lives of the Caesars* was an important work in ancient Rome and influenced later authors, notably Einard, the 9th-century biographer of the Frankish emperor Charlemagne.

The Life of Julius Caesar (excerpts)

He is said to have been tall of stature with a fair complexion, shapely limbs, a somewhat full face, and keen black eyes, and in good health, except that towards the end he was subject to sudden fainting fits and to nightmares as well. He was twice attacked by the falling sickness (epilepsy) during his campaigns. He was somewhat overly concerned with the care of his person, being not only carefully trimmed and shaved, but even having superfluous hair plucked out, as some have charged; his baldness was a disfigurement that troubled him greatly, since he found that it was often the subject of jokes among his detractors. Because of it he used to comb forward his scanty locks from the crown of his head, and of all the honors voted him by the senate and people there was none which he received or made use of more gladly than the privilege of wearing a laurel wreath at all times. They say, too, that he was remarkable in his dress; that he wore a senator's tunic with fringed sleeves reaching to the wrist, and always had a girdle (belt) over it . . .

Many have written that he was very fond of elegance and luxury; that having laid the foundations of a country-house on his estate at Nemi and finished it at great cost, he tore it all down because it did not suit him in every particular, although at the time he was still poor and heavily in debt; and that he carried mosaic floors about with him on his campaigns.

He was highly skilled in arms and horsemanship, and had incredible powers of endurance. On the march he headed his army, sometimes on horseback, but oftener on foot, bareheaded both in the heat of the sun and in rain. He covered great distances with incredible speed, making a hundred miles a day in a hired carriage and with little baggage, swimming the rivers which barred his path or crossing them on inflated skins, and very often arriving before the messengers sent to announce his coming.

Yet after all, his other actions and words so turn the scale, that it is thought that he abused his power and was justly killed. For not only did he accept excessive honors, such as an uninterrupted consulship, and the dictatorship for life, as well as the title Imperator, the surname of Father of his Country, and a statue among those of the kings, but he also allowed honors to be bestowed on him which were too great for mortal man: a golden throne in the House and on the judgment seat; a chariot in the procession at the circus; temples, altars, and statues beside those of the gods, and the calling of one of the months by his name. In fact, there were no honors which he did not receive or confer at pleasure.

He died in the fifty-sixth year of his age, and was numbered among the gods, not only by a formal decree, but also in the conviction of the common people. For at the first of the games which his heir Augustus gave in honor of his elevation to divine status, a comet shone for seven successive days, rising about an hour before sunset, and was believed to be the soul of Caesar, who had been taken to heaven; and this is why a star is set upon the crown of his head in his statue.

It was voted that the hall in which he was killed be walled up, that the Ides of March be called the Day of Parricide (parricide = the killing of a parent or close relative), and that a meeting of the senate should never be called on that day.

Hardly any of his assassins survived him for more than three years, or died a natural death. They were all condemned, and they perished in various ways — some by shipwreck, some in battle; some took their own lives with the self-same dagger with which they had impiously slain Caesar.