

# Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus

## Family and Early Life:

- Born around 69 CE
- Birthplace unknown, possibly Rome or Hippo Regius
- Equestrian Status
- Grandfather had ties to Caligula's Court
- His father, Suetonius Laetus, served as military tribune for Otho.
- Well educated
- Likely grew up in Rome

## Career and Professional Life:

- Practicing law by around 97 CE
- Flamen Vulcanalis
- Probably *Procurator Bibliothecarum Ulpianarum* around 112/113 CE
- *A studiis* around 114/115 CE
- *A bibliothecis* around 116/117 CE
- *Ab epistulis* around 119-122 CE
- Credited with writing sixteen books

## Dismissal and Later Life:

- Septicio Claro praefecto praetorii et Suetonio Tranquillo epistularum magistro multisque aliis, quod apud Sabinam uxorem iniussu eius familiaris se tunc egerant, quam reverentia domus aulicae postulabat, successores dedit, uxorem etiam ut morosam et asperam dimissurus, ut ipse dicebat, si privatus fuisset. (Life of Hadrian, 11.3)
- Holds no offices after dismissal
- Probably died around 141 CE at the latest

## Suetonius and Septicius Clarus:

- Career tied to Septicius Clarus'
- Clarus may have been his patron
- *De Vita Caesarum* said to have been dedicated to Clarus
- Clarus also a friend of Pliny the Younger

## **Suetonius and Pliny:**

- Four of Pliny's letters are to Suetonius, and two others are about him
- Helped Suetonius with trials, purchasing land, and encouraged him to publish
- Secured a military tribuneship for Suetonius around 101-103 CE
- Suetonius likely accompanied Pliny to Bithynia
- Pliny acquired the *ius trium liberorum* for Suetonius
- Pliny clearly occupied the higher position
- Suetonius likely friends with Tacitus, too

## **De Viris Illustribus:**

- Originally had over 100 lives of poets, philosophers, historians, orators, and teachers
- Most lost, but nearly all of one book, *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus*, survives
- Provides overview of development of formal study of grammar and rhetoric in Rome, then has lives of 20 grammatici and 16 rhetores
- No known precedent for writing lives of teachers
- Very well researched, with relatively frequent source citations
- Publication date generally thought to be roughly 107-118 CE
- Used as a model by St. Jerome, and likely used as a source by Aulus Gellius

## **De Vita Caesarum:**

- Biographies, not histories, of Julius Caesar and the first eleven emperors
- First known Latin imperial biography
- Uses a variety of different sources, including obscure ones
- Earlier lives likely published 119-122 CE
- Focuses more on personality than historical narrative
- Key source for understanding daily administration of empire
- Avoids stylistic flourishes
- Later lives are shorter

## **Further Reading:**

- Townend, G. B. 1961. "The Hippo Inscription and the Career of Suetonius." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 10.1: 99-109
- Baldwin, B. 1997. "Hadrian's Dismissal of Suetonius: A Reasoned Response." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 46.2: 254-256