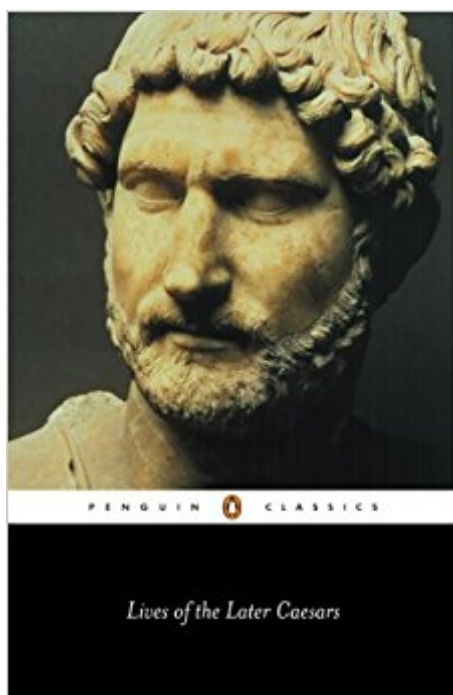


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Lives Of The Later Caesars: The First Part Of The Augustan History, With Newly Compiled Lives Of Nerva & Trajan



Synopsis

One of the most controversial of all works to survive from ancient Rome, the Augustan History is our main source of information about the Roman emperors from 117 to 284 AD. Written in the late fourth century by an anonymous author, it is an enigmatic combination of truth, invention and humour. This volume contains the first half of the History, and includes biographies of every emperor from Hadrian to Heliogabalus - among them the godlike Marcus Antonius and his grotesquely corrupt son Commodus. The History contains many fictitious (but highly entertaining) anecdotes about the depravity of the emperors, as the author blends historical fact and faked documents to present our most complete - albeit unreliable - account of the later Roman Caesars. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, Latin (translation)

Anthony Birley is a renowned translator.

The *Historia Augusta* is not exactly the most scholarly of works from the ancient world--but it ranks as one of the funnest. Taking inspiration from Suetonius, this work examines the men who led the Roman empire at its height. This volume starts with Nerva and ends right with the start of the crisis of the Third Century. While often fun and informative, be warned this is not exactly the most scholarly or balanced of sources. Still, there are some memorable portraits here of the emperors and the usurpers. One caveat for Kindle readers--a third of the book contains notes, indexes, family trees and maps. Some of this material proved hard to manage and is rather awkward (some pages have several large endnotes while others have one short endnote).

The book arrived after being on order for about 10 days and it was adequately packaged in all respects. I've always been fascinated with ancient and medieval history because therein lies the roots of the world in which we live now. This is an integral part of my self-education in my later life.

Got it for my husband as one of his birthday presents. He is very pleased since he is interested in this part of history.

Not the cover pictured (I personally prefer the updated covers), but a great product nonetheless

awfully dry

This book is better known as the *Historia Augusta*, a pseudohistorical work that pretends to great scholarship even though it displays precious little of it. It is basically a continuation of Suetonius composed by a single author at some point in the late 4th Century, although it claims to be written by many authors in the late 3rd and early 4th century. This has been demonstrated conclusively yet the reasons for the deception remain unclear. Given how much fiction is included in the narrative using these Lives as a source requires careful consideration. The translation included here is quite good, being both easy to read and informative. So why give this book only three stars? The first star off is for the source itself. No matter how good a translation this just isn't a very good source to use, even if you have no other choice. After all, this review includes both the work itself and the translation. The translation itself would get five stars. The second star off is for the problems of the book itself. First off this book doesn't include the entire *Historia Augusta*. It cuts off midway at Elagabalus. This leaves out all the lives from Severus Alexander through Carinus. Those are some

of the most interesting ones, particularly Alexander and Aurelian. Secondly, it includes two lives in the beginning that have been made up for this edition. They are designed specifically to make this work feel like a continuation of Suetonius, who left off at Domitian. I consider this a very bad thing for two reasons. First: Someone who doesn't read the introduction carefully enough may mistake these for real lives. Second: These two Lives give readers the impression that this standard of accuracy can be expected throughout the whole book. As mentioned before this source can only be used with great caution. Helping readers misunderstand the accuracy of this work increases the danger it will be misused. For the entire set in a slightly clunkier translation there is always the Loeb series which is available here: [Volume I](#), [Volume II](#), and [Volume III](#).

This book is a collection of biographies of the final Roman emperors, supposedly written by six men, but quite possibly a hoax written in the late fourth century. It includes seventeen portraits, as well as the earlier "Lives" of Nerva and Trajan. About Trajan, they wrote, "It was a fault in him that he was a heavy drinker and also a pederast. But he did not incur censure, for he never committed any wicked deed because of this. He drank all the wine that he wanted and yet remained sober, and in his relations with boys he harmed no one. It is reported that he tempered his wine-bibbing by ordering that his requests for drink should be ignored after long banquets." (Pg. 47) Hadrian "both honoured and made rich all who professed the arts---although he always goaded them by his questioning... He treated with the greatest friendliness Epictetus and Heliodorus and philosophers and... grammarians, rhetoricians, musicians, geometricians, painters and astrologers... Teachers who appeared to be unfit for their profession he enriched and honoured, and them dismissed from their posts." (Pg. 75) They record, "when Marcus was weeping for his fosterer who had died, and was being called on by the court servants to refrain from displaying affection, Antoninus' reply was: 'Let him be human, for neither philosophy nor imperial power takes away feelings.'" (Pg. 105) They state, "Commodus began a life of orgiastic abandonment in the palace, amid banquets and baths: he had three hundred concubines, whom he assembled together for the beauty of their person... equally from the commons and the nobility, by force and by payment." (Pg. 165) Although not the most "trustworthy" as a historical source, this book is very valuable to any collection of ancient Roman history.

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