

Graduate Seminar Fall 2004
History 801
Professor Marc Kleijwegt

Roman Biographies

5 Lives by Plutarch: Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Caesar, Antony.

6 Imperial Biographies by Suetonius: Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero.

Required reading:

Texts:

Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, vol. 1: Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, ed. J. C. Rolfe, with introduction and notes by Keith Bradley, Loeb Classical Library: Harvard University Press; Revised edition (May 1998), ISBN: 0-674-99570-8; vol. 2: Claudius, Nero, Galba, Viltellius, Otho, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, ISBN 0-674-99565-1.

Plutarch: Roman Lives, with a new translation by Robin Waterfield, introduction and notes by Philp Stadter, OUP: Oxford World's Classics. 1999. Pb. ISBN 0-19-282502-x.

Secondary Literature:

Tim Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: exploring virtue and vice*, Oxford 2002. Pb. ISBN 0199252742.

D. A. Russell, *Plutarch*, London: Duckworth 2003. Pb. ISBN 1853996203.

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: the scholar and his Caesars*, London 1983, reprinted Bristol/London 1995. Pb. ISBN 1853994510.

Why was it that the Romans found Pompey's habit of scratching his head with one finger despicable? How did the dictator Sulla meet his fifth wife, and why was he criticized for falling in love with her? Why did Augustus organize a banquet at which he and his companions were dressed up as gods of the Roman pantheon?

The biographies of Plutarch and Suetonius offer a body of titillating evidence on the public and private lives of famous Romans, the majority of which is absent from the writings of serious historians. The traditional viewpoint is that, barring some factual evidence which can be extracted from their works, their accounts are to be rejected as an inferior type of history-writing filled with gossip and at best half-truths. This attitude is slowly changing and today the biographies of Plutarch and Suetonius are studied as valuable sources of information in their own right. The material presented by Plutarch and Suetonius can be used to open up a window on the moral and cultural world of Rome.

Plutarch (ca. AD 50-120) wrote a series of parallel lives in which he compared a famous Greek and a famous Roman. Suetonius (ca. AD 70-122?) wrote lives of the Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Domitian. The differences between these two writers could not be greater. Plutarch was a Greek from Chaeroneia in Boeotia whose output in philosophical writings was enormous. His surviving works fill 16 volumes in the Loeb Classical Library. He was proud of his Greek cultural heritage and he held numerous offices and priesthoods in his home-town. His frame of reference is always Greek even though he was in the possession of the Roman citizenship. Suetonius was the son of an equestrian but his own equestrian career was short-lived. Ca. 101-103 Suetonius secured through the agency of Pliny the Younger a military tribunate in Britain but decided not to take it up. He subsequently embarked on a career in advocacy but did not progress very far. He eventually started a career in the imperial administration under Trajan and held the posts of cultural and literary adviser to the emperor (*a studiis*), director of the imperial libraries (*a bibliothecis*) and supervisor of the imperial correspondence (*ab epistulis*). According to later sources, Suetonius was dismissed from the latter post ca. 122 for an indiscretion involving Sabina, the wife of the emperor Hadrian. We have no further information on him after this date. Thus, we have on the one hand a Greek writer known for his strict morality who had a strong attachment to the Greek cultural past and a failed military officer and advocate who found his destiny as an imperial servant. Their writings are as different as their personalities. Suetonius has a popular reputation as the reporter of saucy details on the private lives of the Roman emperors, while Plutarch was acknowledged by Christian writers as someone who shared their ethical and moral ideals.

Many ancient historians still entertain the fanciful notion that Suetonius and Plutarch wrote history (whatever that means; it could be a number of different things, depending on the perception of the modern scholar), and that they should be studied for the accuracy with which they report events. As a perfect example of what I mean, read the following quote from the introduction to the commentary on Suetonius: *Divus Julius* written by H. E. Butler and M. Cary (two big names in ancient history; the textbook by Cary and Scullard is the most widely used textbook in ancient history courses):

“In this life as elsewhere, Suetonius emerges as a conscientious, sensible and accurate reporter of the sources at his disposal, even if he fails to set out the full range of alternative versions as a modern historian might, and even if he realized the very limited claims to authenticity of some of these sources. He may not be strong on historical insights of his own; but the chance of a reliable version of the literary tradition available to him is evidently greater with Suetonius than with a more creative and imaginative historian such as Tacitus.”

Think whatever you will of this quote, but I find it one of the most puzzling statements on any Roman writer. The gist of it is: Suetonius is not a good historian (he is actually a bad historian), because he fails to observe that his sources were either hostile or in error. Nevertheless, he is a good source, more or less by accident, because of his lack of creativity and imagination. In other words, he is also a bad writer. Thus, the chances are that he reliably copied a valuable contemporary source, and that makes him worthwhile to study.

Consequently, much of the research that has been done on Suetonius and Plutarch concerns the original sources which they used and the checking of different versions of anecdotes they report in order to test their reliability. Excuse my language, but I find this utterly boring.

An alternative approach to both Plutarch and Suetonius has been developing for some time now. Scholars who work in this mold no longer accept that biography is equivalent to historiography (and they have some very strong views about how ancient historiography differs from modern history writing). By dropping this notion, the study of Plutarch and Suetonius becomes a much more exciting prospect. By acknowledging that ancient biography is mainly concerned with setting examples, positive or negative, and with the morality of behavior, we need to inquire how these writings are constructed. Rather than tracking the original sources, it is much more proper to examine how Plutarch and Suetonius have organized the material that was available to them. A second option which has opened itself in recent times is the possible influence of other literary genres, such as the novel, rhetoric, and mime on the composition of these biographies. Altogether, I believe very strongly that Roman biography is a work of art, a literary composition. This is much better illustrated by Plutarch than by Suetonius, but even the latter has not simply assembled facts and evidence and organized these into chapters. There is a master plan behind their writings, and it is up to us to determine what it is and what it may have meant to an ancient audience.

Therefore, in studying Roman biography you will be asked above all to think about the following questions:

How is the biography organized?

What is the main impression that the life imparts to us? Good or bad?

What are significant episodes in the hero's life?

What is the point of a particular anecdote?

Can we detect any significant literary influences?

In order to facilitate the discussion I have decided to let you work in two groups of three and one group of four. This will start from week 4 (Plutarch's Life of Marius). The purpose is to start the discussion already in your group, so that the final discussion on Mondays will be better informed, sharper, and more advanced.

Group 1: Matthew Amati; Ashli Baker; Alice Astarita.

Group 2: Mattia Begali; William Bruce; Benjamin Newton; Mike Nerdahl.

Group 3: Brian Lush; Martin Pickens; Shawn Parmley.

As you will notice, for Plutarch I have allocated an article or a chapter in a book to each group. I have not done this for Suetonius, for the simple reason that it was impossible to find three articles/chapters of the same weight for each group. But there are didactic considerations as well. I want you to apply the experience that you have gained from dealing with Plutarch to the study of Suetonius. In other words, there are no written scripts; you have to rely on your own skills. Evidently, the outcome of these exercises in research is dependent on your preparedness to think long and hard about certain aspects of Suetonius' work. The bibliography and the books on reserve should be able to give you some useful directions.

Course Minutiae

Meetings will take place every Monday between 2 September and 15 December in the Greek and Latin Reading Room on the fourth floor of the Memorial Library (1:20-3:20).

Requirements:

1. Weekly readings: these consist of:
 - a. The general reading material for weeks 2, 3, and 9.
 - b. One ancient biography per week, except for week 2, 3, and 9.
 - c. The material allocated for your group. This should be analyzed, discussed, and commented upon to raise issues for the discussion on Monday.

2. A paper of between 15 and 20 pages on a topic of your choice on the subject of Roman biography. The paper **MUST** be submitted before Friday 17 December, 4:00 pm. Late papers will not be accepted.

3. A presentation of the results of your research at a symposium, to be organized by the instructor at a date convenient to all participants.

Grading

Attendance and participation in the discussion: 20%.

Paper: 60%.

Presentation: 20%.

Teaching Program

Week 1: Monday 9/6: Labor Day: No Meeting

Week 2: Monday 9/13:

Plutarch: the man and his writings

Readings:

D. A. Russell, *Plutarch*, London 2003, 1-18; 42-63; 84-100.

Focus Points:

- Background and milieu.
- Work ethic.
- The force of Plutarch's morality.

What was Plutarch's philosophy of history? How informed was Plutarch about his subject material?

Week 3: Monday 9/20:

Plutarch's Lives and the Roman Lives

Readings:

Tim Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*, Oxford 2002, 13-98.

C. B. R. Pelling, 'Plutarch's Method of Work in the Roman Lives', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 99 (1979), 74-96 (downloadable via JSTOR).

D. A. Russell, *Plutarch*, London 2003, 100-17.

Focus Points:

- Plutarch's moralism.
- The contours of the Plutarchan hero.
- Plutarch's methodology.

What was Plutarch's objective in writing the Parallel Lives? What was his methodology in the Roman Lives?

Week 4: Monday 9/27:

Plutarch's Life of Marius

Readings:

Group 1: T. F. Carney, 'Plutarch's Style in the Marius', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 80 (1960), 24-31 (downloadable via JSTOR).

Group 2: T. F. Carney, 'The Flight and Exile of Marius', *Greece & Rome* 8 (1961), 98-121 (downloadable via JSTOR).

Group 3: Tim Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: exploring virtue and vice*, Oxford 2002, 101-31.

Week 5: Monday 10/4:

Plutarch's Life of Sulla

Readings:

Group 1: J. M. Candau Morón, 'Plutarch's Lysander and Sulla: integrated characters in Roman historical perspective,' *American Journal of Philology* 121 (2000), 453-78 (downloadable via JSTOR).

Group 2: Tim Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*, Oxford 2002, 161-205.

Group 3: P. A. Stadter, 'Paradoxical Paradigms: Plutarch's Lysander and Sulla', in P. A. Stadter (ed.), *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*, London/New York 1992, 41-55 (Xerox).

Week 6: Monday 10/11:

Plutarch's Life of Pompey

Readings:

Group 1: Thomas P. Hillman, 'Authorial Statements, Narrative, and Character in Plutarch's Agesilaus-Pompeius', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 35 (1994), 255-80 (Xerox).

Group 2: B. X. de Wet, 'Aspects of Plutarch's portrayal of Pompey', *Acta Classica* 24 (1981), 119-132 (Xerox).

Group 3: S. P. Haley, 'The Five Wives of Pompey the Great', *Greece & Rome* 32 (1985), 49-59 (downloadable via JSTOR).

Week 7: Monday 10/18:

Plutarch's Life of Julius Caesar

Readings:

Group 1: J. Beneker, 'No Time for Love: Plutarch's Chaste Caesar,' *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 43 (2002/3), 13-29 (downloadable via ProQuest).

Group 2: Christopher Pelling, 'Plutarch's Caesar: A Caesar for the Caesars?', P. A. Stadter and L. van der Stockt (eds.), *Sage and Emperor: Plutarch, Greek Intellectuals, and Roman Power in the Time of Trajan (98-117 A.D.)*, Leuven 2002, 213-227 (Xerox).

Group 3: Christopher Pelling, 'Plutarch on Caesar's fall', in Judith Mossman (ed.), *Plutarch and His Intellectual World: Essays on Plutarch*, London 1997, 215-234 (Xerox).

Week 8: Monday 10/25:

Plutarch's Life of Antony

Readings:

Group 1: Frederick E. Brenk, 'Antony-Osiris, Cleopatra-Isis', P. A. Stadter (ed.), *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*, London/New York 1992, 159-82; also published in Frederick E. Brenk, *Relighting the Souls*, Stuttgart 1998, 128-52 (Xerox).

Group 2: Simon Swain, 'Novel and Pantomime in Plutarch's *Antony*', *Hermes* 120 (1992), 76-82 (Xerox).

Group 3: Brigitte Ford Russell, 'The Emasculation of Antony: The Construction of Gender in Plutarch's *Life of Antony*', *Helios* 25 (1998), 121-138 (Xerox).

Week 9: Monday 11/1:

Suetonius' methodology

Readings:

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: the scholar and his Caesars*, Bristol/London 1995, 1-25; 50-73; 99-198.

Focus Points:

- Suetonius' methodology.
- The Roman Emperor in Historiography.
- Virtues and vices.

Week 10: Monday 11/8:

Suetonius' Life of Julius Caesar

Week 11: Monday 11/15:

Suetonius' Life of the Deified Augustus

Week 12: Monday 11/22:

Suetonius' Life of Tiberius

Week 13: Monday 11/29:

Suetonius' Life of Caligula

Week 14: Monday 12/6:

Suetonius' Life of the Deified Claudius

Week 15: Monday 12/13:

Suetonius' Life of Nero

Bibliography

Biography

Barry Baldwin, 'Biography at Rome' C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, vol. 1, Brussels 1979, 100-18.

T. A. Dorey (ed.), *Latin Biography*, London 1967.

M. J. Edwards/Simon Swain (eds.), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1997.

B. Gentili/G. Cerri, *History and Biography in Ancient Thought*, Amsterdam 1988.

Thomas Hägg/Philip Rousseau (eds), *Greek biography and panegyric in late antiquity*, Berkeley/London 2000.

Thomas Hägg, 'Recent Work on Ancient Biography. I. Review Article', *Symbolae Osloenses* 76 (2001), 191-200.

Jürgen Malitz, 'Autobiographie und Biographie römischer Kaiser im I. Jhdt. n. Chr', Gregor Weber/Martin Zimmermann (eds.), *Propaganda - Selbstdarstellung - Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreich des 1. Jhs. n. Chr.*, Stuttgart 2003, 227-42.

Holger Sonnabend, *Geschichte der antiken Biographie. Von Isokrates bis zur Historia Augusta*, Stuttgart 2002.

W. W. Ehlers (ed.), *La biographie antique*, Entretiens sur l' Antiquité classique, 44, Vandoeuvres and Geneva 1998.

Plutarch:

General:

Books:

- C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome*, Oxford 1971.
Judith Mossman (ed.), *Plutarch and His Intellectual World*, London 1997.
C. B. R. Pelling, *Plutarch and History: eighteen studies*, Swansea 2002.
Barbara Scardigli (ed.), *Essays on Plutarch's Lives*, Oxford 1995.
P. A. Stadter and L. van der Stockt (eds.), *Sage and Emperor: Plutarch, Greek Intellectuals, and Roman Power in the Time of Trajan (98-117 A.D.)*, Leuven 2002.
Luc van der Stockt (ed.), *Plutarchea Lovaniensia: a miscellany of essays on Plutarch*, Leuven 1996.

Articles:

- L. de Blois, 'The Perception of Politics in Plutarch's Roman Lives', *ANRW II* 33, 6, Berlin 1992, 4568-4615.
David C. Braund, 'Dionysiac tragedy in Plutarch, *Crassus*', *Classical Quarterly* 43 (1993), 468-74.
Frederick E. Brenk, 'The Dreams of Plutarch's Lives', *Latomus* 34 (1975), 336-349.
J. Buckler, 'Plutarch and Autopsy', *ANRW II* 33, 6, Berlin 1992, 4788-4830.
J. Geiger, 'Plutarch's Parallel Lives: The Choice of Heroes', *Hermes* 109 (1981), 85-104; reprinted in Scardigli 1995, 165-191.
T. W. Hillard, 'Plutarch's Late-Republican Lives: Between the Lines', *Antichthon* 21 (1987), 19-48.
C. P. Jones, 'Towards a Chronology of Plutarch's Works', *Journal of Roman Studies* 56 (1966), 61-74.
Ph. de Lacy, 'Biography and Tragedy in Plutarch', *American Journal of Philology* 73 (1952), 159-71.
J. M. Mossman, 'Plutarch's use of statues', M. A. Flower/M. Toher (eds.), *Georgica. Greek Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell*, *BICS Supplement* 58, London 1991, 98-119.
C. B. R. Pelling, 'Plutarch's Method of Work in the Roman Lives', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 99 (1979), 74-96.
C. B. R. Pelling, 'Plutarch and Roman Politics', I. S. Moxon/J. D. Smart/A. J. Woodman (eds.), *Past perspective: Studies in Greek and Roman Historical Writing*, Cambridge 1986, 159-87.
C. B. R. Pelling, 'Truth and Fiction in Plutarch's Lives', D. A. Russell (ed.), *Antonine Literature*, Oxford 1990, 19-52.
C. B. R. Pelling, 'Is Death the End? Closure in Plutarch's Lives,' Deborah H. Roberts, Francis M. Dunn, and Don Fowler (eds.), *Classical Closure. Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*, Princeton 1997, 228-250.

- Tony Reekmans, 'Verbal humour in Plutarch and Suetonius' Lives', *Ancient Society* 23 (1992), 189-232.
- Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, 'Beginnings in Plutarch's Lives', *Yale Classical Studies* 29 (1992), 205-30.
- D. A. Russell, 'On Reading Plutarch's Lives', *Greece & Rome* 16 (1966), 139-54; reprinted in Scardigli 1995.
- R. E. Smith, 'Plutarch's Biographical Sources in the Roman Lives', *Classical Quarterly* 34 (1940), 1-10.
- P. A. Stadter, 'Plutarch's Lives and their Roman Readers', E. N. Ostenfeld (ed.), *Greek Romans and Roman Greeks*, Aarhus University Press, 2002, 123-35.
- Frances B. Titchener, 'Critical Trends in Plutarch's Roman Lives, 1975-1990', *ANRW II* 33, 6, Berlin etc. 1992, 4128-53.
- Ben X. de Wet, 'Plutarch's Use of the Poets', *Acta Classica* 31 (1988), 13-25.
- A. V. Zadorojniy, 'Tragedy and Epic in Plutarch's *Crassus*', *Hermes* 125 (1997), 169-82.

Individual Lives:

Marius

Books:

- T. F. Carney, *A Biography of Gaius Marius*, Chicago 1970.
Richard J. Evans, *Gaius Marius: a political biography*, Pretoria 1994.
Volker Werner, *Quantum bello optimus, tantum pace pessimus. Studien zum Mariusbild in der antiken Geschichtsschreibung*, Stuttgart 1995.

Articles:

- E. Badian, 'Marius' Villas: The Testimony of the Slave and the Knave', *Journal of Roman Studies* 63 (1973), 121-32.
Stefan Borszak, 'Marius Alexandros. Zum Marius-Porträt des Sallustius', *Hommages à Carl Deroux*, vol. 2, Brussels 2002, 57-63.
P. F. Cagniat, 'L. Cornelius Sulla's Quarrel with C. Marius at the Time of the Germanic Invasions (104-100 BC)', *Athenaeum* 67 (1989), 139-49.
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Gary D. Farney, 'The Fall of the Priest C. Sulpicius Galba and the First Consulship of Marius', *Memoirs of the American Academy at Rome* 42 (1997), 23-37.
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T. J. Luce, 'Marius and the Mithridatic Command', *Historia* 19 (1970), 161-94.
Luis Ballesteros Pastor, 'Marius' Words to Mithridates Eupator (Plut. *Mar.* 31, 3)', *Historia* 48 (1999), 506-8.
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Lee A. Reams, 'Censorinus, Sulla, and Marius', *Rheinisches Museum* 136 (1993), 281-8.
Jean-Claude Richard, 'Kalendis Ianuariis. Sur deux épisodes de la carrière de C. Marius', *Museum Helveticum* 51 (1994), 73-87.
R. J. Rowland, 'Marius' Bridges', *Historia* 25 (1976), 252.
Barbara Scardigli, 'Marius und Sulla im Opusculum des Exuperantius', *Ziva Antika* 45 (1995), 303-312.
Marta Sordi, 'La fuga di Mario nell'88 e gli Etruschi d'Africa', *Klio* 73 (1991), 408-12.

Sulla

Books:

G. P. Baker, *Sulla the Fortunate: Roman General and Dictator*, New York 2001.

Karl Christ, *Sulla: eine römische Karriere*, Munich 2002.

Arthur Keaveney, *Sulla: the last republican*, London 1982.

Articles:

E. Badian, 'Lucius Sulla: The Deadly Reformer', in A. J. Dunston (ed.), *Essays on Roman Culture: The Todd Memorial Lectures*, Sarasota, Fla. 1976, 35-74.

T. C. Brennan, 'Sulla's Career in the 90's: Some Reconsiderations', *Chiron* 22 (1992), 103-58.

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Volker Fadinger, 'Sulla als Imperator Felix und "Epaphroditos" (= "Liebling der Aphrodite")', Norbert Ehrhardt/Linda-Marie Günther (eds.), *Widerstand – Anpassung – Integration. Die griechische Staatenwelt und Rom. Festschrift für Jürgen Deininger zum 65. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart 2002, 155-88.

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Alan B. Jenkins, 'Sulla's Retirement', C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, vol. 7, Brussels 1994, 132-42.

Arthur Keaveney, 'Studies in the *Dominatio Sullae*', *Klio* 65 (1983), 185-208.

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R. G. Lewis, 'Sulla's Autobiography', *Athenaeum* 79 (1991), 509-19.

Christopher S. Mackay, 'Sulla and the Monuments: Studies in His Public Persona', *Historia* 49 (2000), 161-210.

Llewelyn Morgan, 'Levi quidem de re....Julius Caesar as tyrant and pedant', *Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997), 23-40.

Edwin S. Ramage, 'Sulla's Propaganda', *Klio* 73 (1991), 93-121.

Lee A. Reams, 'Sulla's Alleged Early Poverty and Roman Rent', *American Journal of Ancient History* 9 (1984), 158-74.

- Ronald T. Ridley, 'The Dictator's Mistake: Caesar's Escape from Sulla', *Historia* 49 (2000), 211-29.
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- Peter Scholz, 'Sullas commentarii – eine literarische Rechtfertigung. Zu Wesen und Funktion der autobiographischen Schriften in der späten Republik', Ulrich Eigler/Ulrich Gotter/Nino Luraghi/Uwe Walter (eds.), *Formen römischer Geschichtsschreibung von den Anfängen bis Livius*, Darmstadt 2003, 172-95.
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- P. Wyetzner, 'Sulla's law on prices and the Roman definition of luxury', Jean-Jacques Aubert/Boudewijn Sirks (eds.), *Speculum Iuris. Roman law as a reflection of social and economic life in Antiquity*, Ann Arbor 2002, 15-33.

Pompey

Books:

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