

NAXOS  
AudioBooks

NON-  
FICTION

BIOGRAPHY

# Suetonius

# Lives of the Twelve Caesars

Read by **Derek Jacobi**



NA633912D

---

<b>1</b>	<b>Julius Caesar (Julius)</b>	5:04
<b>2</b>	While he was aedile...	5:09
<b>3</b>	Having entered upon his consulship...	4:48
<b>4</b>	During this period he lost his mother...	6:35
<b>5</b>	As he thus stood...	4:44
<b>6</b>	In all the civil wars...	5:18
<b>7</b>	His stature is said to have been tall...	5:09
<b>8</b>	In his expeditions, it is doubtful...	5:18
<b>9</b>	The trespasses and delinquencies...	6:11
<b>10</b>	But the act of his which aroused the greatest censure...	6:39
<b>11</b>	In his last will, he named three heirs...	5:49
<b>12</b>	<b>Octavius Caesar Augustus (Augustus)</b>	5:25
<b>13</b>	Having entered into a confederacy...	4:36
<b>14</b>	He conquered, partly in person...	4:45
<b>15</b>	He divided the city into regions and districts...	3:10
<b>16</b>	<b>Augustus continued.</b> He corrected many...	5:17
<b>17</b>	For himself, he resolved to choose...	6:42
<b>18</b>	In number, variety, and magnificence...	5:31
<b>19</b>	He augmented the population of Italy...	5:53
<b>20</b>	How much he was beloved...	5:15
<b>21</b>	By Agrippa and Julia he had three grandsons...	4:21
<b>22</b>	In the prime of his youth...	5:51

---

23	He was by nature a very slight drinker of wine.	4:35
24	Eloquence and other liberal arts...	6:06
25	His death, of which I shall now write...	4:51
26	He died in the same bedroom...	3:04
27	<b>Caius Tiberius Nero Caesar (Tiberius)</b>	5:54
28	His first service in the wars...	5:28
29	In this condition he continued almost two years...	5:12
30	After two years he returned from Germany to Rome...	4:56
31	<b>Tiberius continued.</b> The cause of Tiberius's long demur...	5:28
32	By little and little he showed his princely majesty...	6:28
33	All the while he was Emperor...	6:30
34	His cruel and unpliant nature was apparent...	4:59
35	In person he was heavy-set and powerful...	5:23
36	<b>Caius Caesar Caligula (Caligula)</b>	5:28
37	He accompanied his father...	5:07
38	The Spintriae, those panderers to unnatural lusts...	6:22
39	With all his sisters, he lived incestuously...	5:31
40	He would not permit any to die quickly...	5:30
41	He levied new taxes...	4:55
42	In his march to Rome...	5:20
43	By diligent practice...	6:52
44	<b>Tiberius Claudius Drusus Caesar (Claudius)</b>	5:17

---

45	At length Caius Caligula, his brother's son...	5:31
46	In taking honours upon himself he was sparing...	5:13
47	He was at all times most solicitous...	6:03
48	In his early youth he was twice married...	5:22
49	Being entirely enthralled by these freedmen...	4:55
50	There arose no suspicion too absurd...	3:34
51	In his youth, he attempted to write a history...	4:30
52	<b>Nero Claudius Caesar (Nero)</b>	5:01
53	He made profession that he would govern...	5:08
54	Among the other liberal arts which he was taught...	4:04
55	After this, he appeared at all the public games...	4:46
56	Besides the unnatural abuse of freeborn boys...	3:41
57	He commenced making a pond...	4:49
58	<b>Nero continued.</b> His mother being used...	5:00
59	The twelfth day after the divorcement of Octavia...	5:04
60	When he received word that Galba...	5:22
61	But recovering from this violent mood...	6:59
62	<b>Servius Sulpicius Galba (Galba)</b>	4:40
63	For eight years he governed...	4:57
64	A rumour had been raised before his arrival...	4:55
65	As he was offering sacrifice...	5:50
66	<b>Marcus Salvius Otho (Otho)</b>	4:45

---

67	Upon the day fixed for the enterprise...	4:34
68	My father, Suetonius Lenis...	3:58
69	<b>Aulus Vitellius (Vitellius)</b>	5:21
70	When news came to him...	4:28
71	He was given to excessive feeding...	5:21
72	He advised the senate to send ambassadors...	3:06
73	<b>Tiberius Flavius Vespasianus Augustus (Vespasian)</b>	5:41
74	After the deaths of Nero and Galba...	5:58
75	The city of Rome being much blemished...	5:38
76	To all ranks of men he was most liberal.	6:12
77	<b>Titus Flavius Vespasianus Augustus (Titus)</b>	5:06
78	Besides his cruelty...	6:09
79	<b>Titus Flavius Domitianus (Domitian)</b>	4:24
80	He exhibited naval fights...	5:27
81	But he did not long continue...	4:58
82	Becoming both hated and feared...	4:57
83	He was killed in the forty-fifth year of his age...	4:27

**Total time: 7:13:35**

---

## Suetonius

# Lives of the Twelve Caesars

**CAIUS SUETONIUS TRANQUILLUS** was born around 69AD (the year of the four emperors). With Tacitus, he is one of the two main sources for the early Roman empire. But where Tacitus (writing *Annals* and *Histories*) was an out-and-out historian, Suetonius' instincts are those of the gossip columnist. *Lives of the Caesars* is tabloid journalism 2000 years ahead of its time.

Suetonius was well placed to pick up gossip. His father commanded a legion for Otho in 69AD, and he himself entered the imperial civil service, which gave him access to imperial libraries and archives. He was dismissed by Hadrian for some indiscretion involving Hadrian's wife Sabina, which is probably why he quotes documents verbatim for Julius and Augustus, but not for the later emperors.

He is not interested in political or social history, giving us instead a series of intimate memoirs – indelible portraits drawn with the skill of the cartoonist who differentiates individuals by stressing their most prominent characteristics. The banqueting hall and the bedchamber figure more

largely in his narrative than the forum or the camp. We do not get a complete picture of Roman society. Instead we see the homely, the ludicrous, the horrendous: Julius Caesar trying to disguise his baldness; Augustus adopting platform soles so as to appear taller; the luxuries provided (and consulship planned) by Caius for his horse Incitatus; and the failure of the collapsible boat constructed by Nero for the murder of his mother.

But Suetonius offers us more than entertainment. He is objective and non-judgmental where Tacitus is biased and censorious. And he reminds us, usefully and unfashionably, that individuals in history do make a difference. It is hard to read the lives of Julius and Augustus, and believe the Mediterranean world would have turned out exactly the same with two different individuals in charge.

### The Emperors

Despite Suetonius, it is arguable that Julius and Augustus were not really emperors, though they did call themselves 'imperator'

---

(meaning 'commander'). Julius was consul for life and dictator for life, and Augustus always called himself 'princeps'. By the time of Tiberius the word 'imperator' had come to mean 'emperor', so the other ten rulers certainly were emperors.

**JULIUS** (born 100BC; dictator 46–44BC)

The life and the death of Julius Caesar make sense if we remember three things about him. He was intensely ambitious. He was clear-sighted enough to see that political arrangements which worked for an Italian city-state were inadequate for governing an empire covering half the Mediterranean. And he was not prepared to pretend that the autocracy he established was anything other than an autocracy. He was too honest, too impatient, and too proud to make a pretence of consulting the senate about things they had proved themselves incompetent to deal with over the previous 60 years. This is why he was murdered. Augustus was to establish the same autocracy, but disguise it as the republic restored. As an individual, Julius has been described as a 'cool-headed man of genius with an erratic vein of sexual exuberance', and this is certainly the picture of him presented by Suetonius.

**AUGUSTUS**

(born 63BC; princeps 31BC–14AD)

Augustus was born Caius Octavius, taking the name Caesar Octavianus when he was adopted by his great-uncle Julius, and the title 'Augustus' from the senate after bringing peace and prosperity to the Greco-Roman world. Cold, ruthless and perhaps unlovable, he was also patient, efficient and energetic. Possessing, as Julius had not, a very strong instinct for self-preservation, he did not claim dictatorial powers. He asked only for the power of a tribune (to veto any unpalatable legislation) and proconsular (i.e. military) authority over those provinces with sizeable armies in them. With these powers, he ruled the Mediterranean world for forty years. His dynastic plans were thwarted by the deaths of his chosen candidates, and he would no doubt have been appalled to know he was founding a dynasty which would include Caligula, Claudius and Nero.

**TIBERIUS** (born 42BC; emperor 14–37AD)

Under Augustus, Tiberius showed military and administrative ability of the highest order, his campaigns in Germany bringing to the Rhine frontier a peace which lasted for 150 years. He also showed himself loyal and dutiful, retiring from public life to make the

---

way clear for Augustus' chosen successors, only to be summoned back when those successors died. As emperor he was no less capable, at least until the closing years of his life, and he left the Roman Empire, at his death, prosperous and stable. He is said to have vetoed a proposal to name a month after him, asking drily 'And what will you do if you have thirteen emperors?' His chief fault was the severity he showed to senators suspected of disloyalty, and this has led to his being harshly treated by history – notably by Tacitus, whose judgment Suetonius follows.

**CAIUS** (born 12AD; emperor 37–41AD)

Better known as Caligula (Little Boot), the nickname given him by the soldiers of his father Germanicus. The deaths of his father, mother, and two elder brothers (for which Tiberius was, probably wrongly, blamed) left Caius as Tiberius' heir. He made a good start as emperor, but was then severely ill seven months after his accession; after which he embarked on a career of cruelty and caprice. His plan to make his horse Incitatus a consul may have been insanity – or a wry comment on the by now debased value of the consulship. He also built a three-and-a-half-mile bridge of ships from

Baiae to Puteoli, either to rival the bridge built by Xerxes 500 years earlier, or perhaps in response to a prediction of the astrologer Thrasyllus, who said that Caius 'would no more be emperor than he would ride on horseback across the gulf of Baiae'.

**CLAUDIUS**

(born 10BC; emperor 41–54AD)

Claudius in his youth suffered from ill health, clumsiness of manner, and coarseness of taste. Augustus wrote of him (to Livia): 'if he be right in his intellects, why should we hesitate to promote him by the same steps and degrees as we did his brother? But if we find him deficient in body and mind, we must beware of giving occasion for him and ourselves to be laughed at by the world, which is ready enough to make such matters the subject of mirth and derision.' The decision was to exclude him from public life, and he became something of a domestic buffoon. When Caius was murdered, the Praetorian Guards found Claudius hiding behind a curtain. He was dragged out expecting to be murdered, but was made emperor. He had the last laugh on everybody by making a very good job of it.



---

**NERO** (born 37AD; emperor 54–68AD)

The star of Nero's life is his mother Agrippina. Sister to Caligula and wife to Claudius (whom she is believed to have poisoned), she was ambitious, ruthless, and determined that her son should be emperor. Had she known her own murder, on his orders, would be the result, that probably would not have stopped her. Nero inherited her cruelty, but little else, his ambitions being restricted to competing in musical and dramatic contests. Weak, shallow and vain, he demonstrates how badly the hereditary principle can work when applied to an autocracy as absolute as the Roman empire. What is surprising is how long it took for somebody to decide to get rid of him. The story that he set fire to Rome, and sang of the destruction of Troy as he watched it burn, may not be true, but is certainly in character.

**GALBA** (born c.3BC; emperor 68–69AD)

When Gaul rose in revolt against Nero, the rebels appealed to Galba (governor of part of Spain) to head the rebellion. Galba agreed, gained the empire with ease, and then as easily lost it. He executed the praetorian prefect responsible for his accession. His rewards to the Gallic states

alienated the Lower Rhine army, which proclaimed Vitellius emperor. Galba also refused to pay the praetorian guard a reward for having deserted Nero. Finally, he adopted Lucius Piso as his successor instead of Otho, the former governor of Lusitania. Otho won the support of the Praetorians, who then killed both Galba and Piso in the Forum. It is impossible not to agree with Tacitus' famous verdict on Galba: 'everybody's choice of emperor – too bad he became one'.

**OTHO** (born 32AD; emperor 69AD)

Otho joined Galba's rebellion against Nero, in the hope of becoming Galba's successor. When Galba adopted Piso instead, Otho prepared to seize power himself. The praetorian guard rebelled, Galba and Piso were murdered, and Otho was acclaimed emperor. But the legions in Germany had declared for Vitellius, whose troops were already moving toward Italy. Otho summoned the Danube legions, and marched out to meet them. The Vitellian forces were stronger, but poorly supplied. Otho should have waited. Instead he insisted on action, apparently from a horror of civil war and a determination to bring it to an end as quickly as possible. After

---

a clear-cut but not overwhelming defeat, with reinforcements on their way, Otho committed suicide to avoid further bloodshed.

**VITELLIUS** (born 14AD; emperor 69AD)

Aulus Vitellius has few claims to fame apart from his gluttony. According to Suetonius, he was a favourite of three emperors: of Tiberius, for his good looks as a boy; of Caius, for his skill as a charioteer; and of Claudius for his skill at dice. He presided over games held in Nero's honour, in which his chief function was to persuade a far from reluctant emperor to take part himself. After Nero's death, Galba appointed Vitellius governor of Lower Germany, believing him to be too indolent to pose any threat. When Galba in turn was murdered, Vitellius was elevated to the position of emperor by the ambition of the troops under his command more than any ambition of his own. Out of his depth as emperor, he offered no serious resistance to the challenge of Vespasian.

**VESPASIAN** (born 9AD; emperor 69–79AD)

Vespasian was not an aristocrat, and his wife was not even a Roman citizen. He was appointed to military command by Nero because he was competent and because Nero (almost certainly rightly) did not think someone of such low birth could have ambitions to become emperor. However, Nero had no descendants, the year of the four emperors removed several leading contenders for the throne, and once Vespasian had been acclaimed as emperor by part of the army, he became a contender, and had no choice but to pursue his claim with vigour. Vespasian was a man of great energy, humility and common sense, the best emperor Rome had had since Augustus. Under him, the peoples of the Roman world enjoyed political stability and economic security. Had his son Titus not died young, he might have founded a remarkable dynasty.

**TITUS** (born 41AD; emperor 79–81AD)

Titus was the older son of Vespasian. In 70AD, while Vespasian was busy consolidating his position as emperor, Titus completed the four-year war against the Jewish Zealots, who had rebelled against

---

Roman rapacity and the demand for emperor-worship. Titus captured Jerusalem, in the face of fanatical and heroic resistance, and destroyed its temple. He then became Vespasian's colleague and co-ruler, and on Vespasian's death in 79AD, emperor. After only two years, however, he died unexpectedly of a fever. Suetonius does not accuse Domitian of poisoning him, and this is in itself surprising in an age when unexpected deaths were routinely (and perhaps often rightly) attributed to poisoning. Titus was not hugely popular during his lifetime, but his reputation rose steadily during the ensuing tyranny of his brother Domitian.

## **DOMITIAN**

(born 51AD; emperor 81–96AD)

Domitian was the younger, less favoured, son of Vespasian, and became emperor on the death of his brother Titus. He is known chiefly for his lust, gratuitous cruelty (one of his leisure pursuits was sticking pins in flies), and the reign of terror which he directed first against the Senate, but then widened to embrace all classes in society. When even his close friends and household servants no longer felt safe, they conspired to murder him, and so ushered in the golden age of

the Roman empire (the period from Hadrian to Marcus Aurelius). Suetonius tells a story of Domitian's father once laughing at him for refusing to eat some mushrooms, saying that if he knew his fate, he would be afraid of the sword instead. The story, if true, is further evidence of Vespasian's good sense.

**Notes by Tom Griffith**

---

## The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

<b>SCHUMANN</b> OVERTURES Julius Caesar Op. 128 Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra / Johannes Wildner	8.550608
<b>SCHUMANN</b> OVERTURES Faust Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra / Johannes Wildner	8.550608
<b>SCHUMANN</b> OVERTURES Bride of Messina Op. 100 Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra / Johannes Wildner	8.550608
<b>SCHUMANN</b> OVERTURES Manfred Op. 115 Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra / Johannes Wildner	8.550608
<b>FRANCK</b> SYMPHONY IN D MINOR Royal Flanders Philharmonic / Günter Neuhold	8.550155
<b>BEETHOVEN</b> OVERTURES Egmont Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra / Stephen Gunzenhauser	8.550072
<b>BEETHOVEN</b> OVERTURES Consecration of the House Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra / Stephen Gunzenhauser	8.550072

Suetonius

# Lives of the Twelve Caesars

Read by **Derek Jacobi**

Suetonius wrote his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* in the reign of Vespasian around 70AD. He chronicled the extraordinary careers of Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian and Domitian and the rest in technicolour terms. They presented some high and low times at the heart of the Roman Empire. The accounts provide us with perspicacious insights into the men as much as their reigns – and it was from Suetonius that subsequent writers such as Robert Graves drew so much of their material.



**Derek Jacobi** is one of Britain's leading actors, having made his mark on stage, film and television – and notably on audiobook. He is particularly known for the roles of *I Claudius* and *Brother Cadfael*, both of which he has recorded for audiobook. His extensive theatrical credits, from London's West End to Broadway, include numerous roles encompassing the whole range of theatre. He also reads *The History of Theatre* and *The History of English Literature* for Naxos AudioBooks.

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-339-5

View our catalogue online at

[www.naxosaudiobooks.com](http://www.naxosaudiobooks.com)



Abridged by Tom Griffith  
Produced by Nicolas Soames  
Recorded by Ross Burman at RNIB Talking Book Studios,  
London  
Edited by Sarah Butcher

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE,  
BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THESE COMPACT DISCS PROHIBITED.  
© 2005 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd. © 2005 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd.  
Made in Germany.

Total time  
7:13:35