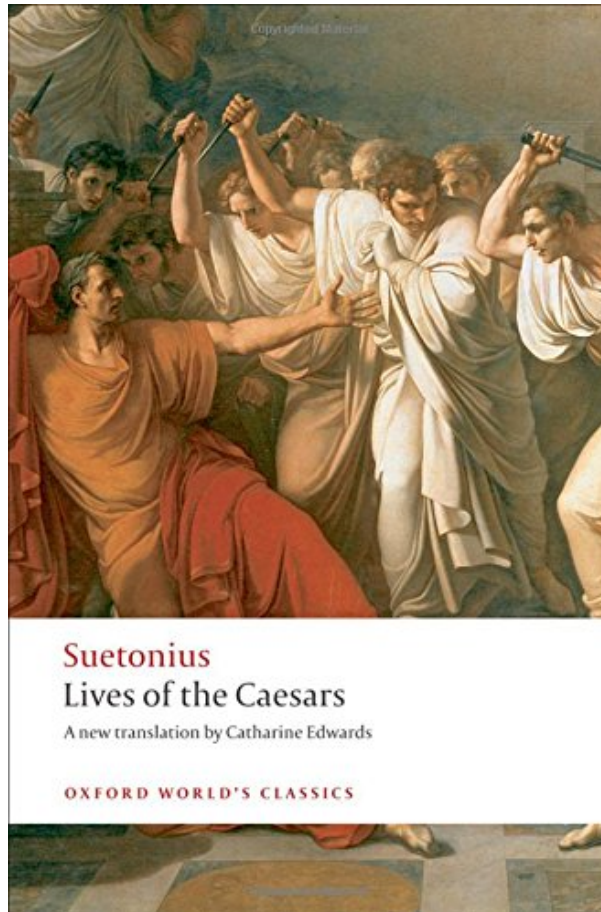
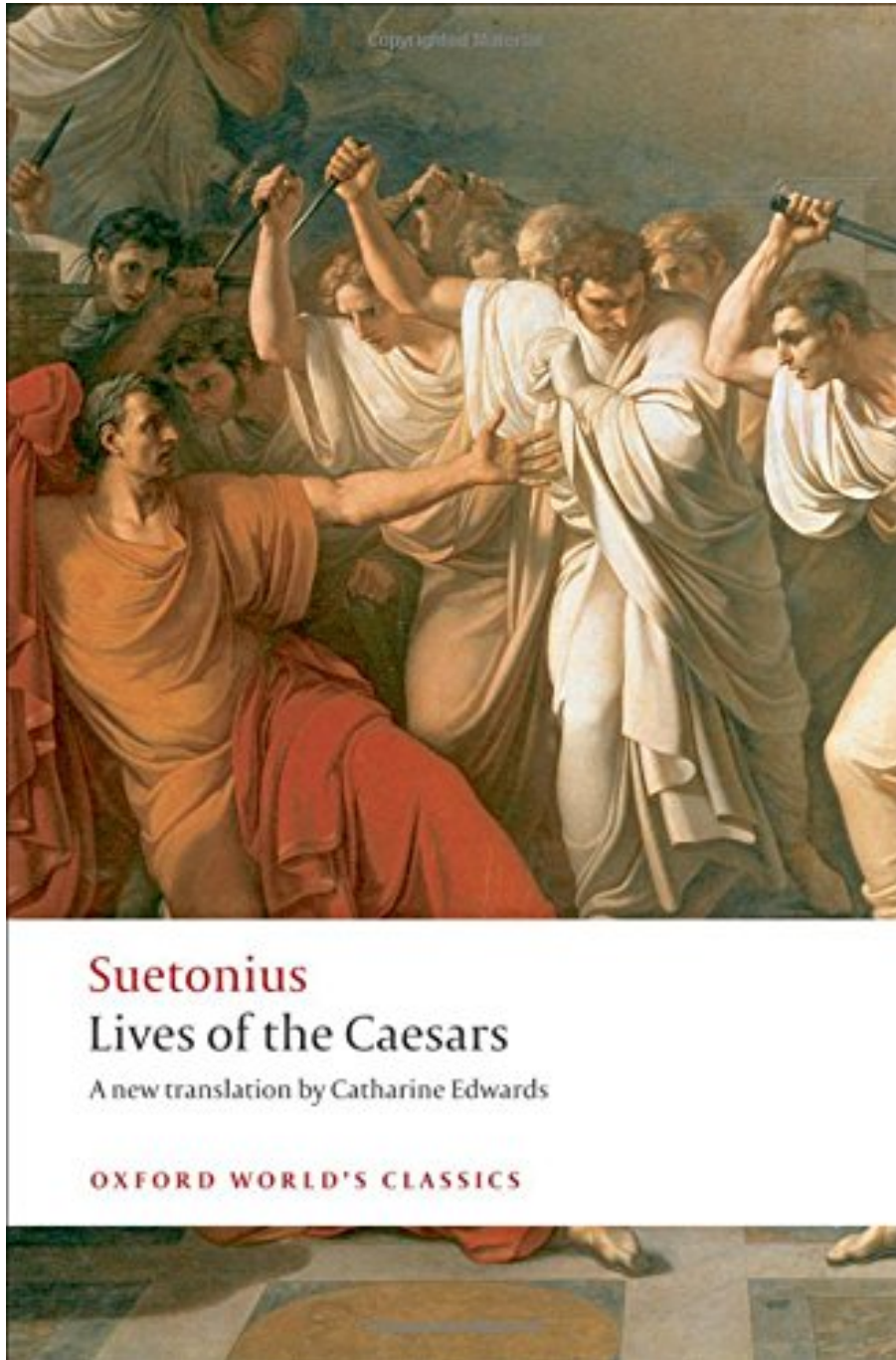


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Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: Latin

About the Author

Translator Catharine Edwards is in the Department of Classics at the University of Bristol.

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The Lives of the Caesars include the biographies of Julius Caesar and the eleven subsequent emperors: Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian. Suetonius composed his material from a variety of sources, without much concern for their reliability. His biographies consist of the ancestry and career of each emperor in turn; however, his interest is not so much analytical or historical, but anecdotal and salacious which gives rise to a lively and provocative succession of portraits. For example, the account of Julius Caesar does not simply mention his crossing of the Rubicon and his assassination, but draws attention to his dark piercing eyes and attempts to conceal his baldness. The life of Caligula presents a vivid picture of the emperor's grotesque appearance, his waywardness, and his insane cruelties.

The format and style of Suetonius' Lives of the Caesars was to set the tone for biography throughout western literature--his work remains thoroughly readable and full of interest. Indeed, it was Robert Graves's primary reference source when he was writing I, Claudius, and those who have read his book will enjoy the original accounts as set down here.

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About the Author

Translator Catharine Edwards is in the Department of Classics at the University of Bristol.

Most helpful customer reviews

28 of 29 people found the following review helpful.

On Ancient Gossip

By Rob

When you need a break from memorizing the dates of the Punic Wars, are bored speculating over what kind of salt the Romans used to sow Carthaginian fields, have given up on finding Philippi on any modern map, and can't quite recall the names of the dramatis personae during the year of the three emperors, this book will re-stimulate your interest in history by gratifying the natural human desire to learn more about crime in high places.

Imagine, all the gravitas reeking Romans were up to treason, homicide, intrigue, incest, bestiality, gifting poison mushrooms and assorted produce, adultery, simple theft, complex theft, tax cheating, forgery, perjury, matricide, patricide, fratricide, suicide, sistercide, and murdering or marrying their nieces, and all sorts of stuff not normal entertainment at church family picnics nor encouraged at the office.

A question does arise - was Suetonius accurate or fair? I think not; he is a delightful scandalmonger who makes no pretense at being fair and his sources undoubtedly included talk show hosts from the Forum's late night hour. Tiberius is for example portrayed as a monster; but he seemed to be a talented administrator himself or had the sense to hire those who were. Claudius while making very poor choices in wives and prone to some silly enthusiasms was very prudent in his foreign policy, by-and-large avoiding killing foreign folks who didn't enlist for suicide.

Overall a great book; just take it with a pinch of Roman salt.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

A splendid read that kept my attention throughout

By Nick

Books published as part of the Oxford World's Classics are unlikely to disappoint, and some even delight. This translation of Suetonius' Lives of the Caesars is lively, easy to read, and interesting throughout.

I've recently read a number of works by Seneca, including his biting satire upon the deification of Claudius. Much of Suetonius' work covers the Julio-Claudian emperors and offers readers much background on the reigns and the city of these first Roman Emperors. It is a different perspective than Plutarch's and adds much to the knowledge of Imperial Rome. Lives of the Caesars adds a perspective (generally iconoclastic) that helps students of Roman letters, theater and history have a broader understanding of the place and the era.

I also found the extensive end notes very valuable. In addition to a valuable translation, these notes make this volume a worthy edition to any library or shelf dedicated to the world of ancient Rome.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

The ancient writer captivates the reader!

By Dimitrios

I have read many biographies of famous historical figures, written by modern scholars, but none had the immediacy, the thrilling emphasis to minor details and the power of words that Suetonius' work features. The Roman historian proves that he was a true child of the classical world, having the gift of telling his stories in a few but full of meaning sentences. I think that after reading Suetonius one has a powerful image of every emperor as a human being first and as a ruler second. Hats off to the ancient writers who are the top specialists to explain the inner secrets of their society and epoch!

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