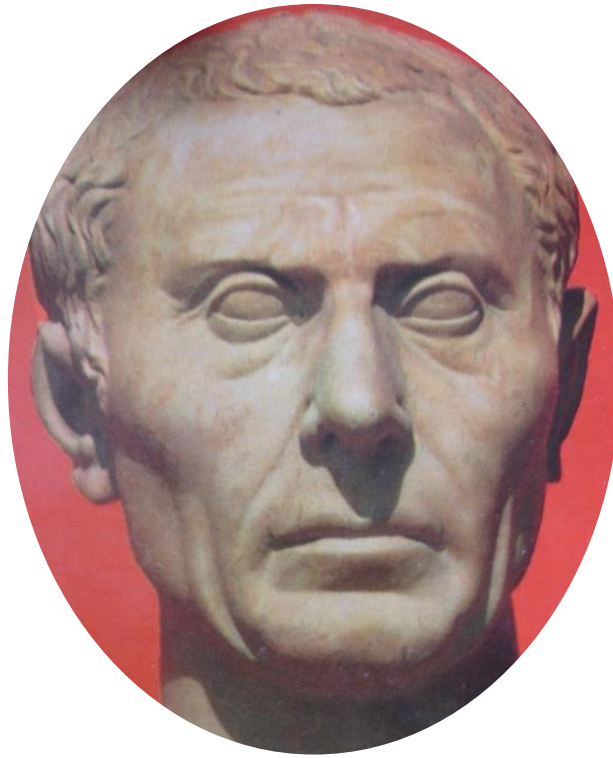


BELLARIA (IX)



Suetonius AD 69-after AD 122

'Bellaria' means 'sweets, dainties', and in these hard times Classics for All will try to lighten the mood and put a spring in the step by posting delicious extracts from ancient literature, the original text followed by a translation or translations, and very occasionally with explanatory notes.

Tom Holland is currently translating Suetonius' de vita Caesarum for Penguin Classics. Like Suetonius, he is thoroughly in favour of Classics for All, and would be delighted if CfA were to run the rule over his first draft (he is currently up to Vespasian). So the next five Bellaria will feature scenes from Suetonius in Tom's translation. One of his stated aims is to keep as close as possible to Suetonius' word-order.

Suetonius makes it clear that one important criterion of the 'good emperor' was the care he lavished on the city and people Rome, and another the moderation he exemplified in his own personal life. Augustus came out top in both...

SCENES FROM SUETONIUS (4)



Nero, emperor AD 54-68
Cesares de Roma project

Good and bad emperors (i): Augustus (27 BC-AD 14)

‘As for Rome, which lacked the adornments appropriate to the majesty of its empire, and was vulnerable to flooding and fire, he so improved the city that he could justifiably boast of having found it made of brick and leaving it made of marble; also, to the degree that human planning can ever make provision for the future, he boosted its defences against natural disasters.’

Tom Holland (first draft, 2020)

urbem neque pro maiestate imperii ornatam et inundationibus incendiisque obnoxiam excoluit adeo, ut iure sit gloriatus marmoream se relinquere, quam latericiam accepisset. tutam uero, quantum prouideri humana ratione potuit, etiam in posterum praestitit.

Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 28

‘In other aspects of his life, however, there is a general consensus that he behaved with great moderation—so much so that he was never even suspected of failings’.

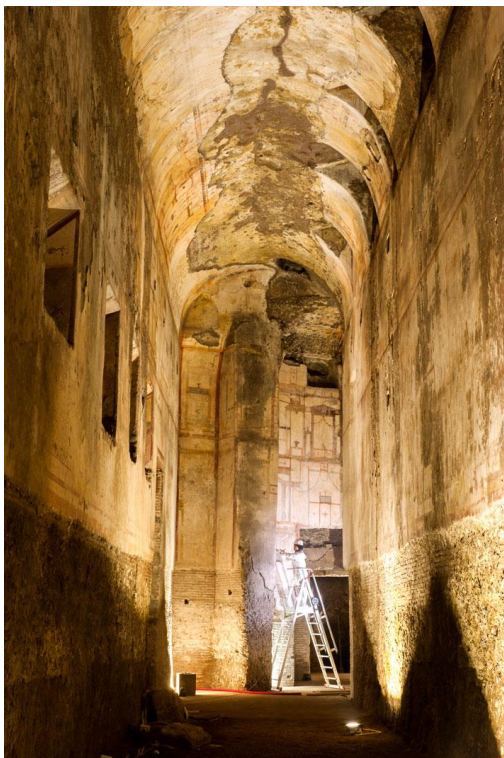
Tom Holland (first draft, 2020)

in ceteris partibus uitae continentissimum constat ac sine suspitione ullius uitii.

Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 72

Good and bad emperors (ii): Nero (emperor AD 54-68)

Grandiose projects enhancing the image of Rome were 'good', and there is no doubt that Nero's vast Golden House, a 300-room palace (no bedrooms: it was for entertainment) fitted that bill precisely. Built on the ruins of Rome's fire of AD 64 and located within a carefully designed 'natural' landscape covering anything up to possibly 300 acres, it was a ground-breaking architectural, artistic and engineering masterpiece. The problem was that it seemed to have been built not for Rome's glory but Nero's personal pleasure.



Part of the Golden House

Suetonius described—and judged—it thus:

[31] 'Nothing, however, proved a more ruinous waste of money than his construction of a house that stretched from the Palatine to the Esquiline: initially he called this the "Passageway House", but then, when it was rebuilt after burning down in the fire, he renamed it the "Golden House". The following details should be sufficient to convey a sense of its scale and splendour. It had an entrance hall so high that it was able to enclose a colossal statue of the emperor himself, a hundred and twenty feet tall, and so long that its triple colonnade stretched for a mile; it also had a lake like a sea, together with structures built to convey a sense of cities along its shore, and a park which featured a range of fields and vineyards, pastureland and woods, and large numbers of every kind of animal, both domestic and wild.

[2] In the rest of the house everything was overlaid with gold and decorated with jewels and mother-of-pearl; the banqueting halls had coffered ceilings with panels made of ivory that could be made to rotate and drop flowers, and spray guests with

perfume from pipes; the main banqueting hall had a dome which revolved continuously day and night, like the cosmos itself; the baths were supplied with running water both from the sea and a sulphur spring. Once the entire house had been brought to completion in this style, and he had dedicated it, his only expression of approval was to declare: "Now at last I have begun to live like a human being."

Tom Holland (first draft, 2020)

[31] *non in alia re tamen damnosior quam in aedificando domum a Palatio Esquillas usque fecit, quam primo transitoriam, mox incendio absumptam restitutamque auream nominavit. de cuius spatio atque cultu suffecerit haec rettulisse. uestibulum eius fuit, in quo colossus CXX pedum staret ipsius effigie; tanta laxitas, ut porticus triplices miliarias haberet; item stagnum maris instar, circumsaeptum aedificiis ad urbium speciem; rura insuper aruis atque uinetis et pascuis silisque uaria, cum multitudine omnis generis pecudum ac ferarum.*

[2] *in ceteris partibus cuncta auro lita, distincta gemmis unionumque conchis erant; cenationes laqueatae tabulis eburneis uersatilibus, ut flores, fistulatis, ut unguenta desuper spargerentur; praecipua cenationum rotunda, quae perpetuo diebus ac noctibus uice mundi circumageretur; balineae marinis et albulis fluentes aquis. eius modi domum cum absolutam dedicaret, hactenus comprobauit, ut se diceret quasi hominem tandem habitare coepisse.*

Suetonius, *Life of Nero* 31

Good and bad emperors (iii): Vespasian (AD 69-79) and Titus (AD 79-81)

The poet Martial celebrated the fact that later emperors undid all Nero's work, and whereas once 'there was only one house in the whole of Rome', now 'Rome has been restored to herself and under your rule, Caesar (= Titus), the delights that belonged to the overlord (=Nero) now belong to the people.'

*reddita Roma sibi est et sunt, te praeside, Caesar,
deliciae populi, quae fuerant domini.*

Martial, *de spectaculis* 2.10-11



Titus

Vespasian drained Nero's lake and began building the Colosseum on it. His son Titus finished it, and showed 'the devotion of a father' to his people during fire, plague, and eruption, as Suetonius explained. This was what being an emperor should be all about:

[8] Some appalling disasters took place during his principate: among them the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Campania, a fire in Rome which lasted for three days and nights, and a plague of a severity rarely witnessed before. In the face of calamities on such a terrible scale he showed not only the concern proper to a princeps but the devotion that a father uniquely can provide: now furnishing consolation by means of his edicts, and now straining his resources to their absolute limits so as to provide aid. He appointed officials chosen by lot from among former consuls to lead the reconstruction of Campania, and allocated the property of those who had lost their lives in the Vesuvius disaster and had no surviving heirs to the reconstruction of the damaged cities. He made no public pronouncement on the fire at Rome, beyond declaring that the loss was all his own: in proof of which he set aside the ornaments from his country estates to assist with the public monuments and temples, and put a number of men from the equestrian order in charge of the work to ensure that it would be completed faster. As for the plague, he spared no resource, either divine or human, in his attempt to counter its impact and to nurse people back to health: every kind of sacrifice, every kind of medicine was tried.

Tom Holland (first draft, 2020)

[8] *quaedam sub eo fortuita ac tristia acciderunt, ut conflagratio Vesuuii montis in Campania, et incendium Romae per triduum totidemque noctes, item pestilentia quanta non temere alias. in iis tot aduersis ac talibus non modo principis sollicitudinem sed et parentis affectum unicum praestitit, nunc consolando per edicta, nunc opitulando quatenus suppeteret facultas. curatores restituendae Campaniae consularium numero sorte duxit; bona oppressorum in Vesuuio, quorum heredes non exstabant, restitutioni afflictarum ciuitatum attribuit. urbis incendio nihil publice nisi perisse testatus, cuncta praetorium suorum ornamenta operibus ac templis destinavit praeposuitque complures ex equestri ordine, quo quaeque maturius paragerentur. medendae ualitudini leniendisque morbis nullam diuinam humanamque opem non adhibuit, inquisito omni sacrificiorum remediorumque genere.*

Suetonius, *Life of Titus* 8



This is an extract selected for you as part of Classics for All's 'Bellaria' series to cheer us up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full series of weekly instalments may be found on our website classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/