

ANCIENT AUTHORS

Ammianus: Ammianus Marcellinus (c.AD 330–395) was born in Antioch, in Syria. After a career in the Roman army, he came to Rome in the mid-380s. There he completed his history of the Roman Empire, covering the period from the death of Domitian in AD 96 to 378. Of the original thirty-one books, Books 1–13 are lost. The surviving eighteen books are a detailed account of events during Ammianus' own lifetime, AD 353–378. He witnessed many of the events he reported, and also used evidence from eyewitnesses. He wrote in Latin, although his first language was Greek.

Augustus: Augustus (63 BC–AD 14) was born Gaius Octavius and became Gaius Iulius Caesar Octavianus when he was adopted by his great-uncle, Julius Caesar. He was known by the title Augustus after 27 BC when he became Rome's first emperor. The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (*Deeds of the Divine Augustus*) is an account of the career of Augustus written in the first person. Augustus left the document with his will, with instructions to the Senate to set up the text as an inscription. It was engraved on a pair of bronze pillars in front of Augustus' tomb in the Campus Martius. The original has not survived, but copies were carved in stone on monuments and temples all over the Roman Empire, and parts of these have survived. See p. 215 for *Res Gestae*.

Caesar: Gaius Iulius Caesar (100–44 BC), the general, politician, and dictator, belonged to an aristocratic Roman family. He was assassinated on the Ides (15th) of March 44 BC, by a group of senators who feared that he intended to put an end to the Republican system of government and keep supreme power for himself and his family. Caesar wrote an account of his campaigns in Gaul and Britannia (58–52 BC), *De Bello Gallico*. It is written in the third person, as if to give an objective account of events. See pp. 89, 105.

Calpurnius Siculus: Calpurnius Siculus (probably first century AD) was the author of seven *Eclogues* (pastoral poems about the lives of shepherds). Nothing is known about his life. References in the poems suggest that he probably lived in the time of Nero, although some scholars argue for a later date.

Catullus: Gaius Valerius Catullus (c.84–c.54 BC) was born in Verona, in Gallia Cisalpina (now northern Italy), to a wealthy equestrian family. Very little is known about his life. He came to Rome as a young man and spent some time in the province of Bithynia on the staff of the governor. He is best known for his love poems. See p. 14.

Cicero: Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC) was a politician and lawyer, who was a leading figure in events at the end of the Roman Republic. He was born in Arpinum, a town near Rome, and came to Rome to study. Although not born into the senatorial class, he reached the highest office of state, the consulship. He was executed on the orders of Mark Antony during the unrest following the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. His surviving writings include speeches for the law courts, political speeches, philosophical essays, and personal letters to friends and family. See p. 165.

Eutropius: Eutropius (fourth century AD) was probably from Gaul. He wrote a concise survey of Roman history, the *Breviarium*, published in AD 364–378. The ten books covered the period from Romulus to AD 364.

Frontinus: Sextus Iulius Frontinus (c.AD 30–103/4) may have been born in southern Gaul. He had a distinguished military, political, and administrative career. He was consul three times, in AD 72 or 73, 98, and 100, and also served as governor of Britannia and of Asia. He was appointed *cūrātor aquārum* (*superintendent of the aqueducts*) in Rome in 97. He wrote several technical treatises. The most famous is *De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae*, which describes the history, maintenance, and administration of the aqueducts in Rome. It was written for his successors in the post. He also wrote the *Strategemata*, a manual for the use of officers, which discusses techniques of military command.

Historia Augusta (anon.): The *Historia Augusta* is a collection of biographies of Roman emperors (and usurpers) from Hadrian to Numerianus (AD 117–284). The manuscripts present it as a compilation of the works of six individual authors. However, scholars now generally agree that it is the work of a single author writing in the late fourth or early fifth century. Most of the many documents cited in the work are forgeries. As a historical source it must be treated with caution.

Horace: Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65–8 BC) was born in Venusia (modern Venosa), in the south of Italy. He was of humble origins, the son of a freedman who worked as a collector of payments at auctions. His father sent him to Rome and Athens to be educated, and he became one of the most celebrated poets of his day. Maecenas, the friend and adviser of Emperor Augustus, was his patron. His most famous works are the *Odes*, short poems on a variety of subjects, but he also wrote *Epodes*, *Satires*, and *Epistles*. See pp. 89, 199.

Juvenal: Decius Iunius Iuvenalis (late first to early second century AD) was probably born in the Italian town of Aquinum, but lived in Rome. He was the author of sixteen *Satires*, long poems criticizing and attacking the vices of his fellow Romans. The *Satires* have a bitter humour and pessimistic attitude, and there is much exaggeration. Nevertheless, Juvenal sheds light on contemporary Roman society and provides lots of detail about everyday life.

Livy: Titus Livius (59 BC–AD 17) was born at Patavium (modern Padua) in northeast Italy. Little is known about his life, but he probably came to Rome as an adult. He wrote a history of Rome, *Ab Urbe Condita*, starting with its foundation and going up to his own lifetime. Originally there were 142 books, of which about twenty-five have survived.

Lucretius: Titus Lucretius Carus (c.94–c.55 BC) was the author of *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), a long poem about Epicureanism. Very little is known about his life.

Martial: Marcus Valerius Martialis (c.AD 40–c.104) was born at Bilbilis in Hispania and came to live in Rome in about AD 64. He is best known for his short poems, the *Epigrams*, which often criticize and mock the faults and vices of his fellow Romans. His *De Spectaculis* (*On the Spectacles*) is a collection of epigrams written to celebrate the opening of the Colosseum in AD 80, in the reign of Emperor Titus.

Minucius Felix: Marcus Minucius Felix (late first to mid-second century AD) was a Christian writer. Virtually nothing is known about his life, although he may have lived in Rome. He is the author of *Octavius*, a debate about Christianity in the form of a dialogue between Octavius Ianuarius, a Christian, and Caecilius Natalis, an educated supporter of traditional Roman religion.

Ovid: Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BC–AD 17) was born in Sulmo, near Rome, and educated in the city. He abandoned a public career to become a poet. Emperor Augustus banished him to Tomis on the Black Sea (in modern Romania). According to Ovid, there were two reasons for his exile: **carmen** (a poem) and **error** (a mistake). The poem was probably *Ars Amatoria* (*The Art of Love*), which fell foul of laws introduced by Augustus to improve the morals of contemporary society. The mistake was probably connected to the love affairs of Augustus' granddaughter, Julia. Among Ovid's other works are love poems such as the *Amores* (*Loves*), poems written in exile such as *Tristia*, and a long epic poem, the *Metamorphoses*, which is a collection of stories from mythology bound together by the theme of transformation. See p. 85.

Perpetua: Vibia Perpetua (c. AD 182–203) lived in the North African city of Carthage. She was a well-educated noblewoman, who was executed, along with an enslaved woman named Felicitas, for her Christian beliefs. While she was in prison awaiting trial and execution, she wrote a daily account of her suffering. This was published after her death and is known as *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (*The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*). It is a very rare example of writing by a Roman woman and is one of the earliest by a female martyr. The two martyred women have since earliest times had their own feast day, March 7th. See p. 136.

Petronius: Petronius Arbiter was the author of the *Satyricon*, a novel about the adventures of three young men travelling in southern Italy. The main episode is the *Cēna Trimalchiōnis* (*Trimalchio's Dinner Party*). Trimalchio is a wealthy freedman to whose dinner party the three main characters are invited. Petronius mocks and grotesquely exaggerates the vulgar extravagance and bad taste of Trimalchio, and his ostentatious display of wealth. He has sometimes been identified with the politician Petronius who was Emperor Nero's **arbiter elegantiae** (*arbiter of taste*); this meant he advised Nero on what was tasteful or elegant. The politician Petronius was falsely accused of being involved in a plot to kill Nero and took his own life in AD 66.

Phaedrus: Gaius Iulius Phaedrus (c. 15 BC–c. AD 50) was born in Thrace. He was enslaved and brought to Rome, where, after gaining his freedom, he was a freedman in the imperial household. His collection of about 100 fables, written in verse (the metre is the iambic senarius), was published in five books. Many of the stories are based on the fables of Aesop, which were written in Greek. Phaedrus' aim was to both entertain and to instruct.

Plautus: Titus Maccius Plautus (c. 250–c. 184 BC) was born in Sarsina, in Umbria (in central Italy). His comedies are the earliest Latin works of literature to have survived complete. The twenty surviving plays include *Amphitruo*, *Mercator*, and *Aulularia* (*The Pot of Gold*). They are adapted from Greek comedy of the fourth and third centuries BC. The settings are Greek, but include some Roman elements, to create a fantasy world; *Amphitruo* is the only play based on a myth. There are stock characters such as the outspoken slave, the clever slave who outwits the master of the household, and the boastful soldier. The plays were written in verse (the metre is the iambic senarius), and featured music and song.

Pliny the Elder: Gaius Plinius Secundus (AD 23/24–79) was born at Comum (modern Como) in northern Italy. He is known as Pliny the Elder to distinguish him from his nephew, known as Pliny the Younger. He had a career in military and government service, serving as procurator in several provinces before his final post as commander of the fleet at Misenum in Italy. He dedicated his spare time to research and writing, and among his many learned works is his *Naturalis Historia*, an encyclopaedic collection of facts and stories about a huge variety of subjects. It is a very useful source of information on many aspects of Roman life. In *Suburani* 'Pliny' refers to Pliny the Younger. See p. 59.

Pliny the Younger: Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (AD 61/2–c. 112) was the nephew of Pliny the Elder. He was born at Comum (modern Como) in northern Italy. He had a successful career as a lawyer, politician, and administrator, and his final post was as governor of Bithynia and Pontus. His letters to friends, family, and colleagues include an exchange with Emperor Trajan when he was governor. The letters offer a glimpse into the lives, attitudes, and politics of the society of his time. At regular intervals during his lifetime, Pliny published collections of his

letters, probably polished and edited for publication. Although they are personal letters, many of them resemble short essays on various themes. In *Suburani* 'Pliny' refers to Pliny the Younger. See pp. 59, 89.

Sallust: Gaius Sallustius Crispus (probably 86–35 BC) was born in Amiternum, about 40 miles from Rome. He was a soldier and politician and served as governor of Numidia. After retiring from public life, he devoted himself to writing history: the *Bellum Catilinae* (an account of the Catilinarian conspiracy) and *Bellum Iugurthinum* (*The Jugurthine War*) have survived.

Sappho: Sappho (born in the late seventh century BC) was a Greek poet from the island of Lesbos. Her lyric poems were greatly admired in antiquity. However, only one complete poem survives; her work is known from quotations by other writers or from papyrus fragments found in the Egyptian desert. In many of her poems Sappho writes about love between women.

Seneca (the Younger): Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BC–AD 65) is sometimes known as Seneca the Younger to distinguish him from his father of the same name, who was also a writer. He was born in Corduba (modern Cordoba) in Hispania and came to Rome to be educated. He was Nero's tutor and, after Nero became emperor, his political adviser. In AD 65, after he had retired from public life, he was implicated in a conspiracy to overthrow Nero and was forced to commit suicide. Seneca was a philosopher, politician, and dramatist. Among his many writings are several works of moral philosophy which contain interesting details about life in Rome in the first century AD. Some of these are in the form of letters to friends and family. In *Suburani* 'Seneca' refers to Seneca the Younger. See p. 133.

Suetonius: Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (c. AD 70–c. 130) was a secretary at the imperial palace. He wrote biographies of Julius Caesar and the first eleven emperors, *Lives of the Caesars*. Although his position gave him access to the state archives, he is not very reliable in his use of sources, and his work relies heavily on uncritical reporting of gossip and anecdote.

Sulpicia: Sulpicia (late first century BC) belonged to an upper-class Roman family. Her father was probably the consul Servius Sulpicius Rufus; after his death, she may have been brought up by her uncle, Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus, a consul and patron of literature. Sulpicia is the only Roman woman from her time whose writing has survived in more than fragments. Six short poems have been preserved, some addressed to her lover Cerinthus. The name Cerinthus is Greek: it could be a pseudonym or possibly the love affair was a fiction. See p. 26.

Tacitus: Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 56–after 117) may have been born in Gaul. He had a successful political career in Rome and wrote two major works of history: *Annales* covered the period AD 14–68, from the death of Augustus to the death of Nero; and *Historiae* covered the years AD 69–96. Only parts of these works survive. He also wrote *Agricola*, a biography of his father-in-law. Tacitus used as his sources the writings of earlier historians, official records, and his own experience. He was a supporter of the earlier Republican system of government and a harsh critic of the emperors and the Imperial system. He claims to write without prejudice, but his bias is often evident. See p. 221.

Varro: Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BC) was born in Reate, about 50 miles from Rome. He wrote more than 600 books on a wide variety of subjects, but only the *De Re Rustica* (*On Farming*) survives complete, as well as parts of *De Lingua Latina* (*On the Latin Language*).

Velleius Paterculus: Gaius Velleius Paterculus (c. 19 BC–after AD 30) had a career as a soldier and senator. He wrote a concise history of Rome from earliest times to AD 29, in two volumes; most of the first volume has been lost.

Vergil: Publius Vergilius Maro (70–19 BC) was born near Mantua in Gallia Cisalpina and educated at Cremona, Mediolanum (modern Milan), and Rome. Maecenas, the friend and adviser of Emperor Augustus, was his patron, and he became the most celebrated poet of his day. His greatest work is the *Aeneid*, an epic poem which tells the story of the founding of the Roman race by the Trojan hero Aeneas. The poem is a celebration of the origin and growth of the Roman Empire and of the achievements of Augustus. Vergil also wrote the *Eclogues* (pastoral poems about the lives of shepherds) and the *Georgics* (a didactic poem about farming). See p. 140.



This wall painting from Pompeii shows Terentius Neo, the owner of a bakery, and his wife. She holds a stylus and a writing tablet, and he holds a scroll.