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SUETONIUS AS *AB EPISTULIS* TO HADRIAN AND THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE IMPERIAL CORRESPONDENCE

The post of *ab epistulis* had its origins in Republican times when generals in the field entrusted the care of military correspondence to a particular officer. The classic example here is the father of Pompeius Trogus who served under Julius Caesar and not only dealt with letters, but also organised embassies, and was entrusted with his official seal.¹ These are functions very similar to those later in the hands of the *ab epistulis*. Other advisers, sometimes knowledgeable acquaintances, sometimes Greek notables, were also favoured in instances where they could prove useful, although they may have held no specific post within the command structure.² One who did was Theophanes of Mytilene, who became Pompey's *praefectus fabrum* before Pharsalus.³ The title of *ab epistulis* did not emerge until later.

The advent of the imperial system brought about changes in scale as well as new roles for courtiers. Initially the number of advisers employed by the emperor may have been small, and we hear of influential Greeks at court often employed in much the same way as men of like status had been used by the

- 1 Justin *Epit. Pompei Trogi Philippicarum* 43.5.11–12: *patrem [Trogi] quoque sub C. Caesare militasse epistularumque et legationum, simul et anuli curam habuisse*; see F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, London 1977, 213ff., who discusses the nature of imperial correspondence in detail, and its link with the Hellenistic traditions. Augustus initially used a sphinx to seal his correspondence, later a head of Alexander the Great, and finally his own. See Suet. *Aug.* 50. Presumably this was entrusted to the *ab epistulis* at some stage. The sphinx ring is said to have existed in duplicate so that Maecenas and Agrippa could act in Augustus' name during his absences abroad. See Dio 51.3.4; Plin. *NH* 37.10. For fuller discussion see H. Instinsky, *Die Siegel des Kaisers Augustus*, Baden-Baden 1962.
- 2 A good non-Greek example here is Balbus from Gades, who first became useful to Pompey in Spain in the 70s. His first reward was Roman citizenship (apparently no office as such), but later Caesar made him *praefectus fabrum* in Lusitania in 61–0. See Münzer, *RE* IV 1 (1900) 1260–1268, s.v. Cornelius no. 69. The *praefectus fabrum* often had very vaguely designated duties. See J. Suolahti, *The Junior Officers of the Roman Army in the Republican Period*, Helsinki 1955, 200–1; B. Dobson, 'The *praefectus fabrum* in the early principate', in *Britain and Rome: Studies in Honour of E. Birley* (ed. B. Dobson & M.G. Jarrett), Kendal 1966, 61–83. Trogus came from a rather similar background to that of Balbus. His grandfather was a Vocontian from Narbonensis, who had been enfranchised by Pompey. In his case it took an extra generation to reach similar status.
- 3 Plut. *Cic.* 38.4, as discussed by Millar, *op.cit.* (n. 1) 84.

Republican generals.⁴ Eventually correspondence was to fall into the hands of freedmen. Augustus had been assisted in writing his will by his freedmen Hilario and Polybius, perhaps already holding office as *ab epistulis*.⁵ Polybius actually read the emperor's will in the senate, which may be significant.⁶ This development continued in the age of Tiberius, although the evidence is still insubstantial.⁷ Their utility was considerable, not merely in the bureau of the *ab epistulis*, since their position was directly dependent on the emperor's patronage, and they were expendable. In the early stages they did not suffer from the divided loyalties of the equestrian and senatorial orders, but they gradually became embedded in the court structure, and came to exert real political influence.⁸ To give but two examples from the many, Callistus is said to have been involved in the plot to assassinate Caligula,⁹ and Epaphroditus under Nero was sufficiently in the know to be instrumental in exposing the Pisonian conspiracy to the emperor in AD 65.¹⁰ Freedmen were slowly replaced with equestrians in the aftermath of the fall of Nero. Claudius and Nero had created an atmosphere in which the continued dominance of the freedmen had become unacceptable to the Senatorial order, but the new dynasty did not immediately dilute their impact. It was to be the emperor Domitian who would institute change in response to political problems of his own.

Relatively little is known of the contribution of the freedmen secretaries, who in general do not figure largely in the literary sources.¹¹ A few further details can be gleaned from inscriptional evidence. The best known freedmen secretaries were Narcissus under Claudius and Abascantus under Domitian. Narcissus was highly honoured by Claudius, and there is no doubt that his post as *ab epistulis* represented the highest level within that bureau.¹² He will not have held one of the junior posts going under the same name that are attested

4 See G.W. Dowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World*, Oxford 1965, Ch. 3, discussing the careers of Athenodorus of Tarsus and Pompeius Macer.

5 Suet. *Aug.* 101.1; cf. *CIL* XIV 3539: *C. Iulius Polybi diu[i] Augusti liberti l. Anthus*.

6 Dio 56.32.1. See L. Friedländer, *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms*, Leipzig 1920–22, IV 36.

7 The new palatine library in the *templum Diui Augusti* (perhaps the same as the *bibliotheca domus Tiberianae*) was probably run by *liberti* despite Tac. *Ann.* 4.6.7. See G. Boulvert, *Esclaves et affranchis impériaux*, Naples 1970, 74ff. A freedman assistant to the *ab epistulis* is already attested at this period. See *CIL* VI 4249: *Ti. Iulius [Aug. lib.] Agat(h)opos stator a epis(tulis)*.

8 On some of the problems associated with access in a court society see N. Elias, *The Court Society*, Oxford 1983, 86ff.

9 See Suet. *Cal.* 56.1; Jos. *AJ* 19.64–9; Dio 59.29.1. On the politics of the accession of Claudius see H. Jung, 'Die Thronerhebung des Claudius', *Chiron* 2 (1972) 367–86.

10 Tac. *Ann.* 15.55.

11 For a list of those who definitely held office as *ab epistulis* see Appendix 1.

12 On Narcissus as *ab epistulis* see Suet. *Claud.* 28; Dio 60.34; Victor *epit.* 4.9; *CIL* XV 7500.

contemporaneously in the hands of both freedmen and slaves.¹³ In some instances the age at death of these subordinates helps to illustrate their lowly status.¹⁴ Although a puzzling aspect of the office, it would seem that initially all those associated with the bureau described their office as *ab epistulis*, and it was only later that a true hierarchy developed. In later inscriptions the lowest grade is designated *adiutor*, rising to *tabularius*, with the chief of the bureau holding procuratorial status.¹⁵

Abascantus under Domitian is an interesting case, partly through the celebration of his importance in Statius' lament over the death of his wife Priscilla, partly because he was to be the last freedman procurator to have this status before the total transfer of the office into equestrian hands.¹⁶ Statius *Siluae* V.1 gives us the most complete literary account of the role of the *ab epistulis*.¹⁷ He outlines the main functions of Abascantus as *ab epistulis* as including the sending out of *mandata* to provincial governors and in general the handling of military correspondence.¹⁸ Another function was to keep the emperor informed about those suitable for equestrian posts,¹⁹ as well as gathering intelligence about the physical state of the empire.²⁰ It is important to keep in mind that these are areas being entrusted to a freedman, and in such a hierarchical society it is not surprising that the arrangement caused resentment in élite circles.²¹ After the equestrian Titinius Capito was appointed to the job by Domitian in about AD 95 there was no return to freedmen procurators, but there is plenty of evidence to show their continued importance in the junior ranks of the bureau.²²

13 See Appendix 2.

14 *CIL* VI 8596, 8597; Gordon, *Album of Dated Latin Inscriptions*, Berkeley & Los Angeles 1958–65, I no. 122. The topic is discussed by P.R.C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris*, Cambridge 1972, 259–66.

15 See P.R.C. Weaver, *op.cit.* (n. 14) 238, 262–3.

16 On his career see *PIR* (2nd ed.) F 194; he may be identical to T. Flavius Abascantus who was a *cognitionibus* at this period (*CIL* VI 8628). This was denied by Weaver, *op.cit.* (n. 14) 261 n. 5, but has been reaffirmed by A. Hardie, *Statius and the Siluae*, Liverpool 1983, 185; B.W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, London 1992, 65; G.W. Houston, *Roman Imperial Administrative Personnel during the Principates of Vespasian and Titus*, Dissertation University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill 1971, 598.

17 For some of the problems with this evidence see B.W. Jones, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 63; for a more detailed analysis of *Siluae* 5.1 see A. Hardie, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 183–7.

18 Statius *Siluae* 5.1.83–100.

19 5.1.94ff.

20 5.1.99ff. For the measures taken by Augustus in this regard see Suet. *Aug.* 49. Intelligence may have been brought back to the *ab epistulis* by the *speculatores*. Some sources seem to imply that their reports were brought directly to the emperor (e.g. Suet. *Cal.* 44.2; Tac. *Hist.* 2.73), but in most instances it is more likely that the *ab epistulis* acted as intermediary. See M. Gichon, 'Military intelligence in the Roman army', in *Labor Omnibus Unus, Historia Einzelschriften* 60 (1989) 154–70, esp. 166–8.

21 The precise status of Abascantus' wife Priscilla eludes detection. She could be equestrian. See Weaver, *op.cit.* (n. 14) 171.

22 For the date of the transfer from Abascantus to Titinius Capito see B.W. Jones, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 64–5.

It may be that Abascantus himself was demoted and retained rather than removed.²³

During the Civil War of AD 69 the process of transition to equestrian hands began, and we hear of the orator Secundus accompanying Otho on campaign, and acting as his *ab epistulis*.²⁴ Although undoubtedly an emergency measure, this has obvious affinities with late Republican practice of entrusting these posts to intellectuals. The actual status of Julius Secundus is not certain, although he seems to have been a senator by the end of his career. He may still have been equestrian in AD 69, as is commonly assumed.²⁵ Tacitus comments that Otho's successor Vitellius also employed equestrians for these jobs which had hitherto been in the hands of freedmen.²⁶ This represents some sort of exaggeration, since secretarial posts of a sort had been in equestrian hands since at least the time of Claudius, as Millar has shown.²⁷ Only one example of the phenomenon attested by Tacitus is known in the shape of the career of Sextus Caesius Propertianus. He in fact never became *ab epistulis*, although he did have a meteoric rise through senior equestrian posts as a result of his presence on the Rhine at the moment of Vitellius' proclamation as emperor. He started off in early AD 69 as a tribune of the fourth legion at Mainz, and rapidly rose to be procurator of the *patrimonium* and inheritances, as well as a *libellis*. His career is recorded in his Umbrian home at Mevania, where he held office and became *patronus* of the community.²⁸ After the civil war we have no record of the *ab epistulis* under Vespasian, and there is a similar gap for the reign of Titus. Freedmen appear to have continued to be appointed, but the continuity of tenure from one reign to the next which we find under the Julio-Claudians may not have suited Domitian. He nevertheless did continue to employ freedmen of his own choosing for most of his reign, of whom Abascantus is a conspicuous example.²⁹ Domitian was the first emperor who in peacetime adopted the expedient of introducing equestrians into what had hitherto been the domain of

23 See B.W. Jones, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 63.

24 Plutarch *Otho* 9.

25 See discussion in C.P. Jones, 'Julius Naso and Julius Secundus', *HSCPh* 72 (1967) 279–88, esp. 283–4.

26 Tac. *Hist.* 1.58.1.

27 *Op.cit.* (n. 1) 85–6. His discussion focuses on the careers of Stertinius Xenophon and T. Claudius Balbillus, neither of whom was actually *ab epistulis*. The former was in charge of *apokrimata* in Greek (*Syll.* 3rd ed., 804), the latter had responsibility for embassies and possibly rescripts (H.-G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres*, Paris 1960, no. 15 – henceforth cited as Pflaum). The post of *ab epistulis* may already have been in existence at this time, however, as suggested above. That would in any case be an obvious inference from the existence of Claudian freedmen with the title *ab epistulis*. For the career of Stertinius see R. Herzog, 'Nikias und Xenophon von Kos', *HZ* 125 (1922) 189–247.

28 *ILS* 1447. See Pflaum no. 37. Discussed by Millar, *op.cit.* (n. 1) 89.

29 For evidence that he dismissed the staff of Titus see Dio 67.2.1–3 and Jones, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 65.

the freedmen.³⁰ It seems that his motives were related to a general deterioration of his relationship with his senior freedmen.³¹ It was in AD 95 that Epaphroditus was finally executed, possibly for involvement in treasonous activities.³² Domitian appears to have been justifiably suspicious of his freedmen, since they were involved in his assassination about two years later.³³

Even after equestrians came to control management of the whole department of correspondence, freedmen continued to be employed in a subordinate capacity, perhaps even as heads of the individual bureaus. There is some inscriptional evidence that this was the case.³⁴ It causes some confusion and overlap with the later situation when two positions of equestrian rank were established, each to manage correspondence in a single language. Debate over the precise date of this eventuality has been considerable, with Townend providing good reasons for placing the permanent establishment of the *ab epistulis Latinis* and the *ab epistulis Graecis* considerably later than the age of Hadrian.³⁵ Nevertheless, one Hadrianic incumbent of the post *ab ep. Graec.* is known in the form of Eudaemon.³⁶ This is assumed to be a response to the peculiar circumstances of Hadrian's reign when he was based in the East for a considerable period after AD 128.³⁷ If Auidius Heliodorus was also *ab ep. Graec.*, this could be explained on the same basis.³⁸ The existence for a short time under Hadrian of what virtually amounted to an Eastern court may have resulted in an increase in the volume of Greek correspondence, necessitating the changes placed by Townend in about AD 166.³⁹ From what we know of those who held office as *ab epistulis* between the reigns of Domitian and Hadrian, there must have been a preference for *literati* of some status. Political factors may also have been at work.⁴⁰ The same trends continued until the third

30 Suet. *Dom.* 7.2: *quaedam ex maximis officiis inter libertinos equitesque R. communicavit.* See Jones, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 64 n. 91

31 See Suet. *Dom.* 14–15, and Jones, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 65.

32 Suet. *Dom.* 14.4; Dio 67.14.4.

33 Suet. *Dom.* 17.1f.; Dio 67.15.1. See Hardie, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 185.

34 *Ab epistulis Latinis*: CIL VI 8609; 8610; 8611; XI 1434. *Ab epistulis Graecis*: CIL VI 8606; 8607.

35 G.B. Townend, 'The post of *ab epistulis* in the second century', *Historia* 10 (1961) 375–81. G.W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1969, 50 is cautious over this point.

36 CIL III 431; BCH 3 (1889) 257–9.

37 Until AD 132: Townend, *op.cit.* (n. 35) 379. For Hadrian's movements in the East see R. Syme, 'Journeys of Hadrian', *ZPE* 73 (1988) 162ff. A succinct account of Hadrian's travels by W. Weber is to be found in CAH XI 318–9.

38 Note that he came from Cyrrhus in Syria (Dio 71.22.2). Pflaum no. 106 lists him as *ab ep. Graec.*, as does Millar, *op.cit.* (n. 1) 88.

39 Townend, *op.cit.* (n. 35) 379.

40 See N. Lewis, 'Literati in the service of Roman emperors: Politics before culture', in *Coins, Culture and History in the Ancient World. Numismatic and other Studies in Honor of B.L. Trell* (ed. L. Casson & M. Price), Detroit 1981, 149–66; cf. Bowersock, *op.cit.* (n. 35) 50–1.

century, although the level of distinction of individual incumbents varied considerably.

Suetonius as *ab epistulis*

It is Suetonius who first alerts us to the pressures on the emperor of dealing with correspondence, when he talks of a post offered to the poet Horace, a man of equestrian rank.⁴¹ He reports a letter of Augustus to Maecenas in which Augustus requested the services of the poet to assist with his private correspondence. Although the post of *ab epistulis* came to deal with the public correspondence of the emperor this is no impediment to seeing the job offered to Horace as a forerunner of the later post. Clearly a major factor in Suetonius' own interest in this offer to Horace is the fact that he himself had become *ab epistulis* to Hadrian. I would suggest that he must already have attained this rank at the time of writing of the *De Viris Illustribus* in order to account for the reference, since his discussion shows that Horace never took up office.⁴² Why give so much space to a post never held by the poet, unless the subject has a special interest for Suetonius?

If this controversial interpretation is accepted it has important implications for Suetonius' own tenure as *ab epistulis*. We know that at least some of the *De Vita Caesarum* was dedicated to Septicius Clarus as praetorian prefect.⁴³ Both Suetonius and Septicius Clarus are said by the *Historia Augusta* to have been dismissed from their official posts in AD 122.⁴⁴ The *De Vita Caesarum* would then have appeared at least in part between AD 119–22, the ostensible dates of Septicius' prefecture.⁴⁵ This would mean that Suetonius produced his two major works within a very short time-scale. This is not impossible, but it has prompted me to review the other incumbents of the post *ab epistulis* in the Hadrianic age, and to reconsider Crook's suggestion that the dismissal has been misplaced in the narrative of the *Historia Augusta*, and may have occurred in Africa in AD 128.⁴⁶

41 Suet. *Life of Horace*, p. 45 Reifferscheid. On Horace's equestrian status see D. Armstrong, 'Horace *Eques et Scriba: Satires* 1.6 and 2.7', *TAPhA* 116 (1986) 255–88.

42 A. Macé, *Essai sur Suétone*, Paris 1900, 68–75, places the *De Viris Illustribus* in AD 113, but there is no firm evidence. Suetonius is described as *in edendo haesitator* by Pliny in AD 105 (*Ep.* 5.10), but it is very doubtful whether the *De Viris Illustribus* could be referred to. See A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars*, London 1983, 59. Wallace-Hadrill thought that Suetonius' promotion to *ab epistulis* by Hadrian might be a result of recent publication of the work (op.cit. 8).

43 Lydus *De Mag.* 2.6.

44 *HA Hadr.* 11.3.

45 R. Syme, 'Guard prefects of Trajan and Hadrian', *JRS* 70 (1980) 64–80.

46 See J. Crook, 'Suetonius *Ab epistulis*', *PCPhS* n.s. 4 (1956–7) 18–22.

Two types of attack have been mounted against the credibility of the passage in the *HA*. The first has followed Crook in questioning the position of the passage within the the narrative, while another view has seen the entire incident as the fabrication of an inventive biographer.⁴⁷ The latter is an extreme position, and not worthy of detailed consideration.

In support of Crook's view we can note the inconsistency not only of the present passage but others in the *Historia Augusta*. Chronological problems are a particular weakness. Just after handling the sacking of Suetonius and his colleagues is placed the news of the rediscovery of the Apis bull in Egypt. This item should belong in AD 118.⁴⁸ The dismissal passage is located after a description of Hadrian's reform of the army during AD 121. The purpose of this reform is said to have been to allow Hadrian the freedom to correct abuses while in Britain. Before the author treats Hadrian's return to Gaul from Britain, we find this controversial passage about the dismissal on grounds of excessive familiarity with the empress, and some general remarks about the emperor's sexual mores. Many authorities now assume that this flouting of court protocol occurred in Britain. But stories about Hadrian's relationship with Sabina are notoriously suspect, and this does much to diminish the value of the passage.⁴⁹ Another problem is the value of anecdotal material about Hadrian's treatment of his friends.⁵⁰ Even Marcius Turbo, his long-time praetorian prefect, is said to have been attacked, if only verbally.⁵¹ There are other acknowledged insertions within the life,⁵² and various investigations may assist in confirming the misplacement of the story.⁵³

47 See B. Baldwin, 'Suetonius: Birth, disgrace and death', *Acta Classica* 18 (1975) 61–70.

48 See H.W. Benario, *A Commentary on the Vita Hadriani in the Historia Augusta*, Chico 1980, 90.

49 Notice especially the posthumous deification of Sabina, as against the attitude of the *HA*. See A. Carandini, *Vibia Sabina*, Florence 1969, 98–101; W. Eck, *RE Suppl.* 15 (1978) 914.

50 Observe the story that he reduced Eudaemon to penury (*HA Hadr.* 15.3), and his alleged attacks against another *ab epistulis*, Auidius Heliodorus (*HA Hadr.* 15.5). On the value of stories of this type see R.P. Saller, 'Anecdotes as historical evidence for the principate', *Greece and Rome* 27 (1980) 69–83.

51 *HA Hadr.* 15.7.

52 H.W. Benario in his edition of the *Vita Hadriani* allows this, but does not believe that the present passage is one of them. See Benario, *op.cit.* (n. 48) 12, 89.

53 There seems no doubt that the author of the *Life of Hadrian* intended to present his material in its present order. See G. Alföldy, 'Marcius Turbo, Septicius Clarus, Sueton und die *Historia Augusta*', *ZPE* 36 (1979) 233–253, especially 250ff. My contention is that the author of the *HA* himself made an error of chronology as he combined his sources.

The guard prefects of Hadrian

Is it a necessary postulate of our other evidence that Septicius Clarus was sacked in AD 122? A review of Hadrian's guard prefects may assist.

On the death of Trajan in August 117 the praetorian prefects were Acilius Attianus and Sulpicius Similis. The former, who came from Italica, and had been guardian of Hadrian, was on hand with Plotina and Matidia at Trajan's demise, which occurred at Selinus in Cilicia as he tried to return to Italy.⁵⁴ There is no evidence as to who accompanied Trajan as *ab epistulis* at this time. The ashes of the deceased emperor were conveyed to Rome by the imperial women and the praetorian prefect, and a triumph was celebrated on Trajan's behalf. It was put about that Trajan had adopted Hadrian.⁵⁵

Hadrian did not return to the city until 9th July of AD 118,⁵⁶ but the praetorian prefect Attianus is said immediately to have become embroiled in bloody politics. Not only was there the hasty and unexplained execution of the four consulars,⁵⁷ but Attianus is blamed for seeking leave to charge Baebius Macer, the City Prefect, and to take action against two exiles, Laberius Maximus and Calpurnius Crassus, who had previously been banished to islands by Trajan.⁵⁸ Nothing is known of his colleague Similis at this time.

Attianus gained senatorial rank, and was superseded as praetorian prefect in 119,⁵⁹ along with his colleague Similis, who is said to have been anxious for retirement.⁶⁰ Hadrian's idea seems to have been to promote younger men of his own choosing into these jobs.

He chose Q. Marcius Turbo, a general who had been active on the Danubian frontier, and C. Septicius Clarus, whose previous employment is not known.⁶¹ It was to the latter that both Pliny and Suetonius dedicated at least segments of their work.⁶² Might he not have been *ab epistulis* to Trajan, surely a worthy successor to Titinius Capito?⁶³

54 Dio 68.33.2–3. For Hadrian's links with Italica see R. Syme, 'Hadrian and Italica', *JRS* 54 (1964) 142–9.

55 R. Syme, *Tacitus*, Oxford 1958, I 240; H. Temporini, *Die Frauen am Hofe Trajans*, Berlin–New York 1978, 120ff., 149.

56 As attested by the *acta* of the Arval brothers (*CIL* VI 32374).

57 *HA Hadr.* 7.2. Inconsistencies emerge in the *HA* over Hadrian's attitude to Attianus. See *HA Hadr.* 8.7 and compare 9.3, discussed by R. Syme, 'Guard prefects of Trajan and Hadrian', *JRS* 70 (1980) 67–8.

58 *HA Hadr.* 5.5.

59 The date is based on that of the next item in the *HA*, Hadrian's visit to Campania (*Hadr.* 9.6).

60 *HA Hadr.* 9.4; Dio 69.19.1–2.

61 *HA Hadr.* 9.5.

62 See Pliny *Ep.* 1.1; Lydus *De Mag.* 2.6; J.D. Morgan, *CQ* 36 (1986) 544–5.

63 Syme suggests him as *praefectus uigilum*, on a parallel with Titinius Capito (*ILS* 1448), or *praefectus annonae* in view of the gap after the tenure of M. Rutilius Lupus (*AE* 1940, 38; c. AD 103–11). See Syme, *op.cit.* (n. 57) 68.

Turbo's tenure as praetorian prefect was undoubtedly lengthy. The early part of his career is attested on an inscription discovered at Cyrrhus in northern Syria,⁶⁴ and culminated with his tenure as prefect of the fleet at Misenum, already attested on a diploma from AD 114.⁶⁵ In this capacity he went to Syria during Trajan's Parthian war, and later settled revolts in Egypt and Cyrenaica.⁶⁶ Immediately on Hadrian's accession he was sent to Mauretania, again with a military task.⁶⁷ Soon after the death of Trajan disturbances had broken out on the Dacian frontier, and the new emperor summoned Turbo, who was left in charge when Hadrian returned to Rome.⁶⁸ When Turbo left to take up the praetorian prefecture, the first legate of Dacia Superior was appointed, and this can be dated to summer AD 120.⁶⁹

Thus Turbo's tenure as praetorian prefect began in AD 119, and not later as had been suspected on the basis of a diploma which was initially thought to show that Turbo was still ensconced in his Dacian command as late as August AD 123.⁷⁰ He apparently became sole praetorian prefect after the sacking of Septicius Clarus, whenever that happened. At the other extreme of his career no new prefect of the guard is attested until a year after the death of Hadrian on 10th July AD 138. On 1st March AD 139 the incumbents are M. Petronius Mamertinus and M. Gavius Maximus. The former is still prefect of Egypt on 26th May AD 137, although he had been superceded by Auidius Heliodorus by September.⁷¹ A specious anecdote about Hadrian's final days refers to the presence of two prefects.⁷² In itself of little value, it is nonetheless customary to place the end of Turbo's stint in AD 135, by which time he had been in office for some 15 years.⁷³

The absence of any other known prefects at least between the sacking of Septicius and the last year of Hadrian's reign clears the way for placing the dismissal in AD 128. It is surely an attractive argument, since it is hard to imagine Hadrian allowing a single prefect to consolidate his position for over a decade. The later date still gives him seven years sole control, during which no extant evidence shows the existence of a colleague.

64 *AE* 1955, 225.

65 *CIL* XIV 4243.

66 Eusebius *HE* 4.2.4. See Syme, *op.cit.* (n. 57) 70 n. 58.

67 *HA Hadr.* 5.8.

68 Syme suggests that he was already being groomed for the job of praetorian prefect at this stage, since Hadrian lacked a prefect after the departure of Acilius Attianus for Rome (*op.cit.* [n. 57] 70).

69 *CIL* XVI 68. For this entire summary of Turbo's career see Syme, *op.cit.* (n. 57) 70, on which it is based.

70 *AE* 1973, 459, discussed by M.M. Roxan, *Roman Military Diplomas 1954–1977*, London 1978, 21. Full discussion in G. Alföldy, *ZPE* 36 (1979) 233–53.

71 *ILS* 2182.

72 *HA Hadr.* 24.9

73 Pflaum (1960) 205; Syme, *Bonn. Hist. Aug. Coll.* 1968/69, Bonn 1970, 196.

The travels of Hadrian and the purpose of the Hippo inscription

Hadrian was a great traveller throughout his reign, and his first journey started with the death of Trajan in Cilicia.⁷⁴ He returned to Rome in July AD 118, possibly after wintering at Nicomedia,⁷⁵ and stayed there until at least April AD 121 before setting out for Gaul, where it is to be imagined that he wintered at Lugdunum.⁷⁶ The following year saw Hadrian cross from Germany to Britain but he was soon back at Nemausus where a basilica was commanded in honour of Plotina, who had recently died. One question is the point at which Suetonius acceded to the position of *ab epistulis*: perhaps not until Hadrian returned to Rome in AD 118.⁷⁷ Another is whether he was dragged around the empire to meet his dismissal in Britain.⁷⁸ This must be the conclusion if we accept the passage in the *HA* as chronologically exact. Even on my interpretation with Suetonius still in office until at least AD 128 it is to be presumed that he was present with the emperor and the praetorian prefect throughout the extensive perambulations. After wintering in Tarraco in 122/3 Hadrian was off to the Eastern frontier only to return to Rome in the summer of AD 125.⁷⁹

A major obstacle in the way of accepting the earlier date for the sacking of Suetonius is to provide a plausible explanation for the erection of a Hadrianic inscription in Suetonius' honour at Hippo Regius.⁸⁰ One approach has been to suggest an African origin for the biographer.⁸¹ But most scholars now agree that an Italian origin is more plausible.⁸² It would seem that both Suetonius' father

74 Investigated by W. Weber, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Kaisers Hadrianus*, Berlin 1907; H. Halfmann, *Itinera Principum*, Stuttgart 1986, reviewed by R. Syme, 'Journeys of Hadrian', *ZPE* 73 (1988) 159–70.

75 Syme, *op.cit.* (n. 74) 160.

76 On 21st April 121 he inaugurated the temple of Venus and Rome in the Roman forum. See D. Kienast, 'Zur Baupolitik Hadrians in Rom', *Chiron* 10 (1980) 391–412; M.T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the City of Rome*, Princeton 1987, 122–3.

77 Even then Hadrian was soon off to Campania, where he bolstered his control by *beneficia* and acts of *amicitia*. See *HA Hadr.* 9.6; M.T. Boatwright, 'Hadrian and the Italian Cities', *Chiron* 19 (1989) 235–71, esp. 241.

78 As argued by R. Syme, 'The travels of Suetonius Tranquillus', *Hermes* 109 (1981) 105–17.

79 Details in R. Syme, 'Journeys of Hadrian', *ZPE* 73 (1988) 160–1.

80 *AE* 1953.73: *C. Suetoni[o] Tran[quillo]lami[ni] adlecto] int[er] selectos a Di]uo Trai]ano Parthico] Pont. Volc[na]l]i [a] studiis a bybliothecis ab e]pistulis [Imp. Caes. Trai]ani Hadriani [Hipponenses Re]gi DDPP*. Useful summaries of debate on this well known inscription include G.B. Townend, 'The Hippo inscription and the career of Suetonius', *Historia* 10 (1961) 99–109; C. Baurain, 'Suétone et l'inscription d'Hippone', *LEC* 44 (1976) 124–44.

81 As argued most strongly by A.R. Birley, *JRS* 74 (1984) 245–51. However, other Suetonii in Africa appear to be Italians. See M.G. Jarrett, *Historia* 12 (1963) 210. There is one military man from Theveste, Suetonius Ianuarius, whom Syme believed might have been African-born (*CIL* VIII 17589).

82 Lanuuium was the *patria* of his *propinquus* Caesennius Siluanus (Plin. *Ep.* 3.8.1; *ILS* 7212). Syme favoured Pisaurum. See *Tacitus*, Oxford 1958, II 780.

and his grandfather had based their careers in Rome.⁸³ If this is the case another explanation for the inscription at Hippo has to be sought. That it was an honorific inscription is clear enough from its face, and it is important to compare it with a similar inscription in honour of Marcius Turbo erected at Utica.⁸⁴ Both inscriptions should be associated with Hadrian's visit to Africa in AD 128, when Suetonius would have been in his company as *ab epistulis*.⁸⁵ The presence of Marcius Turbo on the tour in his role as praetorian prefect suggests that Septicius Clarus on this occasion was left behind at Rome. This means that if we accept any of the anecdote about the sacking, as I believe we should, it should be placed in Rome after the African tour.⁸⁶

The date of the *De Viris Illustribus* and the *De Vita Caesarum*

The above discussion shows that a case can be made for placing both Suetonius' major works after he had attained high office under Hadrian. His lengthy publication list as known from the Suda shows that he was by no means a nonentity before they appeared.⁸⁷ I assume that the *De Viris Illustribus* is the earlier work, although this should not be taken as indisputable. The main arguments in favour of an earlier date for the *DVI* relate to the scale of biographical treatment, which may have been influenced by factors such as the number of identities discussed. Nevertheless, the *Caesares* seem to me to represent a more confident and developed sense of biographical technique.⁸⁸

83 Suet. *Otho* 10: Suetonius Laetus supported Otho's attempt on the purple as an equestrian officer; *Cal.* 19.3. Birley doubted whether Suetonius' grandfather need have heard court gossip about the Baiae bridge at Rome, but it is surely the most likely hypothesis.

84 See *ILAf.*, 421: *Q. M[a]rcio Turbon[i] praefecto praetorii DDPP*. The comparison was first made by J. Gascou, *Latomus* 37 (1978) 441–2.

85 Hadrian probably only visited Africa once, as argued by R.H. Chowen, 'The problem of Hadrian's visits to North Africa', *CJ* 65 (1969–70) 323–4.

86 Notice that after coming back from Africa, Hadrian immediately set out for Athens (*HA Hadr.* 13.6). But he did have a brief sojourn in Rome.

87 Suda s.v. Τραγκύλλος.

88 As I have argued in 'Suetonius on the character of Horace', forthcoming.

Appendix 1⁸⁹The *ab epistulis* in the early empire to the death of Hadrian

<i>Date</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Main testimonia</i>
44–54	Narcissus	<i>CIL</i> XV 7500; Suet. <i>Claud.</i> 28; Dio 60.34.
c. 60	Beryllus ⁹⁰	Jos. <i>AJ</i> 20.183–4, <i>ab ep. Graec.</i>
c. 65?	Dionysius of Alexandria ⁹¹ (Pflaum no. 46)	Suda (Δ 1173 Adler), <i>ab epistulis, ad legationes, ad responsa</i>
69	Iulius Secundus	Plut. <i>Otho</i> 9.3
c.85–95	Abascantus	Statius <i>Siluae</i> 5.1; <i>CIL</i> VI 8598; 8599; ⁹² 8628 ⁹³
c.95–105	Cn. Titinius Capito (Pflaum no. 60)	<i>CIL</i> VI 798= <i>ILS</i> 1448; <i>AE</i> 1934, 154; Plin. <i>Ep.</i> 1.17; 8.12
118–128	C. Suetonius Tranquillus (Pflaum no. 96)	<i>AE</i> 1953, 73; <i>HA Hadr.</i> 11.3, <i>a studiis, a bibliothecis, ab ep. to Hadrian.</i>
128	C. Auidius Heliodorus (Pflaum no. 106)	Dio 69.3.5; <i>HA Hadr.</i> 15.5; 16.10, <i>ab ep. to Hadrian, praef. Aeg.</i> 137–42.
130	Valerius Eudaemon (Pflaum no. 110)	<i>CIL</i> III 431= <i>ILS</i> 1449; <i>HA Hadr.</i> 15.3, <i>praef. Aeg.</i> 142–3.
135	L. Iulius Vestinus (Pflaum no. 105)	<i>CIG</i> 5900= <i>IG</i> XIV 1085, <i>a bibliothecis Lat. et Gr., a studiis, ab ep.</i>
137	Caninius Celer ⁹⁴	Philostr. <i>VS</i> 1.22.3, <i>ab epistulis to Hadrian</i> ; cf. Arist. <i>Or.</i> 50 Keil, 57; teacher of M. Antoninus and L. Verus (<i>HA M. Ant.</i> 2.4; <i>Ver.</i> 2.5)

89 Earlier lists include those of Friedländer, *op.cit.* (n. 6) IV 35–44; Townend, *op.cit.* (n. 35) 380–1; Lewis, *op.cit.* (n. 40) 150–2.

90 Josephus describes this man as *ab epistulis Graecis* under Nero. He is the only example of a divided bureau before Hadrian. It is possible that he was a subordinate to the procurator.

91 As argued by Lewis, *op.cit.* (n. 40) 159. This career has affinities with that of Balbillus, which is one reason for giving it a relatively early date. Cf. Millar, *op.cit.* (n. 1) 85–7.

92 These inscriptions appear to record freedmen of Abascantus. See Friedländer, *op.cit.* (n. 6) IV 38

93 Apparently recording a wife subsequent to Priscilla, Flauia Hesperis. See Jones, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 65.

94 His career is fully discussed by Bowersock, *op.cit.* (n. 35) 53.

137 L. Domitius Rogatus *CIL* VI 1607=*ILS* 1450, *ab ep.* to
 (Pflaum no. 140) L. Aelius Caesar

It can be observed that there is no known predecessor to Suetonius after the tenure of Titinius Capito, who was promoted to *praefectus uigilum* in about AD 105. Likewise none of his successors under Hadrian can be fixed indisputably into the allocated slots.

Auidius is said to have been attacked by Hadrian in a slanderous pamphlet, and Eudaemon to have been reduced to poverty. Both stories arise in the same section of the *HA*,⁹⁵ and are probably untrustworthy.⁹⁶ Calumnies about Hadrian's handling of his dealings with the élite seem to be a feature of the *HA*. Auidius became prefect of Egypt in the last year of Hadrian and was retained on the accession of Pius, and it is clear that his career was not seriously affected.⁹⁷ Eudaemon also appears to have flourished under Hadrian; it would appear that the long list of procuratorships recorded on his honorary inscription from Ephesus should span a lengthy part of his reign.⁹⁸ Unfortunately they cannot be dated. He went on to be prefect of Egypt in 142–3.⁹⁹

Auidius is assumed to be *ab epistulis Graecis* by Millar,¹⁰⁰ but Townend had a different view, and imagined him holding both bureaus. If Dio Cassius is to be believed his tenure in Egypt should be seen as a reward for his prestige in the field of rhetoric.¹⁰¹ But it is also recorded that he attracted the envy of a sophist named Dionysius, who did not hold his oratorical skills in the same esteem.¹⁰²

The career of L. Julius Vestinus is better known. He had held senior posts in Alexandria, including control of the Museum before a career at Rome involving the same offices as Suetonius, whose career probably helped to provide a precedent, culminating in him becoming *ab epistulis* to Hadrian.¹⁰³

The date at which Caninius Celer became *ab epistulis* to Hadrian is of necessity conjectural since our only testimonia are Philostratus and Aristides.¹⁰⁴ He is said to have been a writer on rhetoric, like Auidius, and Philostratus

95 *HA Hadr.* 15.3. See n. 50 above.

96 But Auidius was father of the rebel Auidius Cassius, and the story may not be completely without foundation. See Bowersock, *op.cit.* (n. 35) 50.

97 For the dates of his prefecture see G. Bastianini, 'Lista dei prefetti d'Egitto dal 30a al 299p', *ZPE* 17 (1975) 263–328 at 288; 'Lista dei prefetti d'Egitto dal 30a al 299p: Aggiunte e correzioni', *ZPE* 38 (1980) 75–89 at 81.

98 *ILS* 1449=*CIL* III 431.

99 See Bastianini, *ZPE* 17 (1975) 289; *ZPE* 38 (1980) 81.

100 *Op.cit.* (n. 35) 88.

101 Dio 71.22.2.

102 Dio 69.3.5. On his career see also *PIR* (2nd ed.) A 1405. This Dionysius was Dionysius of Miletus, who is also said to have quarrelled with Caninius Celer. See Philostratus *VS* 1.22.

103 *CIG* 5900=*IG* XIV 1085=*IGR* I 136=*OGIS* 679. Discussed by Millar, *op.cit.* (n. 1) 88.

104 Philostr. *VS* 1.22; Aristides *Or.* 50 Keil, 57. See *PIR* (2nd ed.) C 388.

assigns to him a work entitled *Araspes the Lover of Panthea*, which some attributed to Dionysius, the rival of Auidius.¹⁰⁵ Townend wanted to place him in the 120s, but this was based on the assumption that Suetonius had been sacked in 122. He can easily be accommodated in the last years of Hadrian, perhaps actually in 137. That same year saw the appointment of Rogatus under Hadrian's successor.¹⁰⁶

Appendix 2¹⁰⁷

Junior grades in the office of the *ab epistulis* up to the age of Hadrian

*Slaves*¹⁰⁸

Ianuarius Caesaris Aug. <i>ab epistulis</i>	CIL VI 8596
Aphnius Caesar. Aug. <i>ab epistulis</i>	Gordon, <i>Album of Dated Latin Inscriptions</i> I, no. 122

Freedmen

Ti. Iulius [Aug. lib.] Agat(h)opos <i>stator ab epistulis</i>	CIL VI 4249
Claudius Eudaemon	CIL VI 8600
Claudius [Phil]ologus	CIL VI 8601
Claudius Primio	CIL VI 8603
Flavius Epictetus	CIL XIV 2840
Flavius Fortunatus	CIL VI 1887
Flavius Epaphroditus	
Flavius Protogenes	CIL XI 3886

Ab epistulis Latinis

Acindynos	CIL VI 8609
Flavius Alexander	CIL VI 8610
T. Flavius Thallus	CIL VI 8611
M. Ulpius Aug. lib. <i>uerna</i>	CIL XI 1434

¹⁰⁵ Philostratus *VS* 1.22.

¹⁰⁶ *ILS* 1450.

¹⁰⁷ Many of these were mistakenly included as chiefs of the bureau in the works of O. Hirschfeld, *Die kaiserlichen Verwaltungsbeamten bis auf Diocletian* (2nd ed.), Berlin 1905, 319ff.; L. Friedländer, *op.cit.* (n. 6) IV 35–44. Best modern discussion by Weaver, *op.cit.* (n. 14) 259–66.

¹⁰⁸ I have followed Weaver, *op.cit.* (n. 14) 259, in excluding *CIL* VI 8597: *Libanus Caesaris uern. ab epistulis*. *Vernae* are rare before the time of Hadrian. See Weaver, *op.cit.* 51.

*Ab epistulis Graecis*¹⁰⁹

M. Aurelius Alexander

CIL VI 8606

M. Ulpius Eros

CIL VI 8607

Doubtful date

Clem[ens]

CIL VI 37747

Faustus Aug. lib. *adiutor ab ep.*¹¹⁰

CIL VI 8613

Glyptus¹¹¹

CIL XIV 3909

Ionus¹¹²

CIL XV 7837a

Pistus

CIL VI 8605

*Doubtful status*¹¹³

T. Flavius Euschemon

CIL VI 8604

University of Newcastle, N.S.W., Australia

Hugh Lindsay

109 Both incumbents seem to be later than the age of Hadrian but it is worth noting their lowly status, especially VI 8607, who has slave brothers. See Weaver, *op.cit.* (n. 14) 261. This shows that even at this late date there was no problem about junior staff adopting the style *ab epistulis Graecis*. Can we be sure that even the title *ab epistulis* was reserved for the chief of the bureau?

110 Weaver thought that no freedman of the rank of *adiutor* could be proved to be earlier than Hadrian (*op.cit.* [n. 14] 262).

111 Cf. CIL VI 37763b, with Weaver, *op.cit.* (n. 14) 260 n.11. He appears to be Trajanic.

112 This is perhaps Claudian. See CIL XV 7837b.

113 Euschemon was not only *ab epistulis* but also *procurator ad capitularia Iudaeorum* (cf. Jos. BJ 1.7.6; Suet. Dom. 12; Dio 66.7). If the inscription follows chronological order then he was probably of junior rank. But otherwise he might be chief of the bureau. See Weaver, *op.cit.* (n. 14) 261.