

# P. Annius Florus

**Publius Annius Florus (c.70? - c.140?):** Roman author, published a brief work on the history of the Roman empire during the reign of the emperor Hadrian (117-138).

Roman official, first quarter of the second century

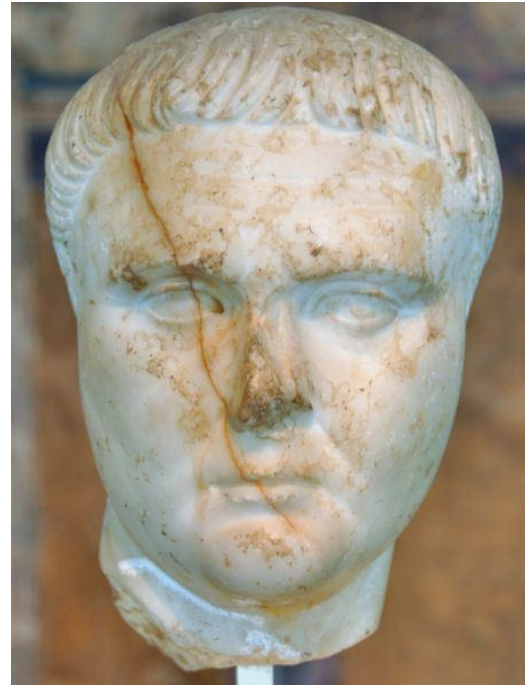
Publius Annius Florus is known under several names: his first name is rendered as Publius and Lucius; his family name as Annius and Anneus; only the element "Florus" is always the same. Although we cannot exclude that there were several authors with almost identical names, most scholars agree that there was only one, Publius Annius Florus. He is credited with four works:

A short, witty poem dedicated to the emperor Hadrian, who replied with a parody. Both poems are quoted in the *Historia Augusta*. The author is called Florus.

Letters and poems by Annius Florus.

The preface of a dialogue on the question whether Virgil was an orator or a poet, written by Publius Annius Florus.

An Epitome of the Histories of Titus Livy, by Lucius Anneus Florus.



## Life

### **Domitian**

According to a source from late Antiquity, the grammarian Virgilius Maro, Florus was born in Africa and came to Rome during the reign of Domitian. When this emperor organized a poetical contest (the *Ludi Capitolini*, held in 86, 90 and 94), the young man took part and although his entry was acclaimed by the audience, he failed to win a prize. Florus now embarked upon a career as a traveling sophist or "show speaker". During the days of the Second Sophistic, a literary movement founded by Nicetes of Smyrna in the second half of the first century, people came to the theater or odeon to listen to the performances of virtuoso orators, who delivered improvised declamations on subjects suggested by the audience. Florus is said to have made a tour through the Greek-speaking part of the Roman world and visited Sicily, Crete, the Cyclades, Rhodes, and Egypt.

He returned to Rome and continued across the Alps to Gaul, which means that he had been unable to find a patron at the imperial court of the new emperor Nerva. For some time, Florus settled in Tarraco, the capital of Hispania Tarraconensis, where he founded a school and taught literature. He

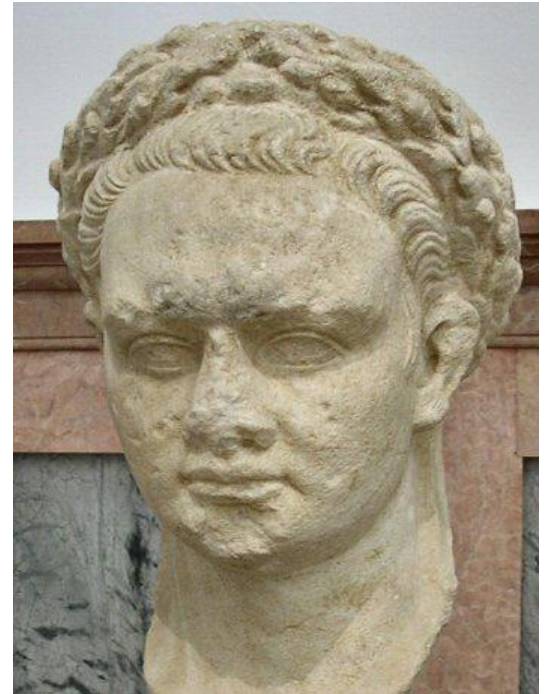
liked the town, where people were honest and the climate was nice. When he wrote his Dialogue on Virgil, he had been a teacher for four years. During the first years of the emperor Trajan, he returned to Rome, where everybody knew his poetry.

Florus was still staying in Rome during the second half of the reign of Hadrian. He was befriended with the emperor, and it is interesting that during his reign, the Annii Veri family played an important role in the Roman government. Perhaps as an Annii, the teacher gained access to the emperor. In Rome, he wrote the following short poem, in which he expressed his admiration for Hadrian's traveling habits, which had brought him to the unpleasant countries on the edges of the earth:

*I don't want to be Caesar, please,  
to tramp round the Britons, weak at the knees,  
[one line lost]  
in the Scythian frosts to freeze.*

Hadrian replied to his friend:

*I don't want to be Florus, please,  
to tramp round pubs, into bars to squeeze,  
to lurk about eating pies and peas,  
to get myself infested with fleas.*



Hadrian, bust from Italica

## Epitome

Florus is best known for the Epitome of the Histories of Titus Livy, a brief and laudatory history of Rome in two books, strongly focused on warfare. It presents the history of the Roman empire as a growing organism: the reign of the kings is Rome's infancy, the conquest of Italy its youth, and as a Mediterranean power, Rome is grown-up. The inevitable conclusion that Rome as a monarchy is growing old and weak did occur to Florus. He speaks about the inertia Caesarum, meaning that the expansion of the empire had come to a standstill.

Perhaps, he wrote the two books in two installments. He first wrote the part on the Roman wars in Latium, Italy, and the Mediterranean, which were based on Livy's History of Rome from its foundation; later, he decided to continue his tale to his own day. This last part was not based on Livy but on other sources, and the title Epitome of the Histories of Titus Livy is simply incorrect for these chapters. We do not know which sources were used, but one of them must have been a history of (among others?) the Germanic Wars, which was completed during the reign of Tiberius or Caligula, because Florus states that of the three military standards lost in the battle in the Teutoburg Forest, one

was still missing. It was, however, recovered in 41 by Aulus Gabinius Secundus Chaucius, the governor of Germania Inferior.

The Epitome is not the greatest achievement by a Roman historian. Yet, it is a useful text, because it gives us an idea of the lost portions of Livy's History of Rome from its foundation. For similar reasons, Florus' Epitome became very popular in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: it offered a useful compendium of Roman history for those who were unable to read the collected works of Livy. It was still used as a schoolbook in the nineteenth century, which is a tribute to Florus' qualities as a narrator.

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