



[Florus, Epitome of the Roman History of Titus Livius, Preface](#)

The successive ages of the Roman people.

Name of the author: Florus

Date: 117 CE to 161 CE

Place: Rome

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Literary genre: History

Title of work: Epitome of the Roman History of Titus Livius

Reference: Preface

Commentary:

Florus's work is the focus of many debates. First, its original title is unknown and the manuscripts have transmitted it as being an *Epitome Taken from Titus Livius of All the Wars of 700 Years*. However, Paul Jal has rightly noticed that Florus's project may have not been to offer a compilation of Livy's history of Rome (Jal, "Nature et signification," p. 358-370; Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. xxiii-xxix). Florus knew Livy's work (he quotes passages word-for-word) and he may also have used other summaries of Livy's work. The Livian tradition may thus have been a basis of Florus's narrative (Bessone, "Floro," p. 107-111), but the perspectives, some of the narratives of the historical events as well as the styles of both authors differ. Whereas Livy followed a traditional annalistic tradition, Florus composed his narrative differently: using ages to present Rome's history (see later), dividing it between intern and foreign wars, and choosing not to follow the chronological order to organise his narrative but to organise it through geographical, moral or logical criteria (Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. xviii-xx). A passage in the preface of the work – the text presented here – characterises the nature of Florus's work: "... I intend to do as the people who paint landscapes, and to include a complete representation of my subject as it were in a small picture" (§ 3). The "small picture," *brevis tabella*, is the only element which enables to characterize the work (Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. xxi-xxix).

The identity of the author is also very confused. Apart from the author of the *Epitome*, four Florus are attested: 1/ a Florus who was a friend and poet of Hadrian mentioned in the *Historia Augusta*; 2/ an Annius Florus who wrote letters to Hadrian and is known through Charisius; 3/ a Florus author of poems partially known through the *Latin Anthology*; 4/ a P. Annius Florus, author of a dialogue entitled *Virgil, orator or poet* who was born in Africa and who took part to the Capitoline Games under Domitian, before residing at Tarraco. In front of so many Florus, two opinions exist: these four Florus are a single person who cannot be identified with certainty with the author of the *Epitome* (see Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. cxi-cxvi); on the contrary, all these Florus actually refer to one person (Bessone, "Floro," p. 102-107; for a useful survey of the bibliography, see Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 126, n. 1). Considering chronological matters, the aim of Florus's work is to present the seven hundred years of the history of Rome, from Romulus to Caesar Augustus – the narrative ends with the pacification wars led by Augustus from Actium to Varus's defeat in 9 CE (wars which are not however presented through chronological order). To present the narrative, Florus chose to present the history of the Roman people by dividing it in ages corresponding to ages of life. In the preface, Florus reviews these ages – *infantia*, *adulescentia* and *iuventus* – which will be then presented in his narrative, but the most important point is that he also mentions a fourth age, the *senectus*, which is not developed later in the narrative. The sentence mentioning the *senectus* is interesting from the point of view of the representation of the history of Rome, but it is also important because it is the only element of the work which can be used to guess when Florus composed this work. Because of the passages "From Caesar Augustus down to our own age, there has been not much less than two hundred years" and "under Trajan, they [i.e. the Roman people] again activated their muscles" (§ 8), Trajan's reign has to be considered as the *terminus post quem* for the dating of this work. In addition, considering that there has been "not much less than two hundred years" between Augustus's reign (we ignore however which was the exact starting point of this fourth period, an imprecise range would be 63 BCE, Augustus's birth, and 14 CE, Augustus's death) and Florus's time, one could consider that the last one might be located more or less in the period 138-214 CE, even if the words *haud multo minus* led to put the precision of Florus's count into perspective. Thus, the *communis opinio* is that Florus may have written his *brevis tabella* under the reign of Hadrian (opinion defended in Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. cii-cxi), whereas other scholars have defended the thesis of a redaction, slightly later, under Antonius Pius (Bessone, "Floro," p. 91-102).

Florus's preface is an interesting text because it summarizes the main objectives and themes of his work. We will



focus our presentation on three themes which make Florus's point of view particularly interesting, especially for what concerns the question of the representation of the history of Roman domination.

The first interesting point is the predominance of the Roman people in Florus's narrative. As the title of the work might have indicated, Florus's aim was to write some kind of panegyric of the Roman people which is actually the central character and the hero of his narrative. A reference to the Roman people opens the preface (§ 1), and, as Paul Jal rightly recalls, the Roman people is mentioned about fifty times in the whole work. The repartition of the references to the *populus romanus* is logically unequal as most of the occurrences are in the first book – which starts from Rome's royal origins to the period of the Gracchi –, and only a few of them are in the second book which is highly focused on the augmentation of inner conflicts during the last century of the Republic and on the pacification policy led by Augustus, who appears both as the representative and the authority acting instead of the Roman people. Thus, the decrease of the references to the Roman people goes along with the narrative as the settlement of the Empire led actually to a clear decline in the political role of the Roman people. It is thus logical that this picture of the history of the Roman people ends at this time (Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. xxxix-xli). Considering our text, there is no less than three references to the Roman people (§ 1, 3, 4). The most interesting passage is when Florus presents the Roman people as the *princeps populus*, an expression repeated three times in the whole work (I.1[3].2; I.2.5; I.17[25].5), and two other times through a slightly different form of "the first people among nations," *princeps gentium populus* (II.7.1; II.13.1). The Roman people is also named through more complex expressions, as he is called "the Roman people victorious over Italy/the Italian peoples," *victor Italiae (gentium) populus Romanus* (I.18[2].1; I.44.3); "the people arbiter of the kings and nations," *cum regum et gentium arbiter populus* (II.6.7); "the people who had been victorious over the nations and possessed the whole world," *populus gentium victor orbisque possessor* (II.1.2; II.2.3); "the Roman people victorious over the nations," *victorem gentium populum Romanum* (II.34.61) (for these references, see Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. xl). Considering all these expressions, the evolution of the Roman people as the leader of Italian peoples to the arbiter or the master of the nations of the whole world reflects the evolution of the narrative of the evolution of Rome's territorial domination. By using in his preface the expression *princeps populus*, Florus may have echoed Cicero who also refers to the Roman people as "the first people, master and victor over all the nations," *princeps populus et omnium gentium dominus atque victor* (Cicero, *Pro Plancio* 11), but also Livy's preface when he speaks about "the first people of the world," *princeps terrarum populus* (Livy, *Books From the Foundation of the city*, Preface § 3). Florus's expression *princeps populus* can thus also be translated, following the Ciceronian or Livian traditions, as "the first people," however Paul Jal or Myles Lavan respectively translates it by "people-king" or "people-emperor" (§ 3; Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. 6; Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 147, n. 81). For them, Florus may have wanted to present the Roman people not only as predominant, but as taking part directly in the ruling of Rome's affairs. Even if, in the second book of Florus's work – dealing with the increase of the *imperatores* and the establishment of the Principate – the references to the Roman people are far less numerous, the use of the expression of *princeps populus* in the Preface has to be understood as the consequence of the fact that Florus may have wanted to present the Roman people under the Republican period as some kind of superior collective entity which played a major role in the ruling of the empire that he conquered by arms and then unified. The Roman people is thus presented by Florus as the unquestioned leader of Rome's Empire before Augustus became its new representative and completed the divine plan which had destined the Roman people for the universal domination (Christol, "Rome et le peuple romain," p. 213).

Yet in his preface, Florus puts forward the nature of his work which is nothing else than a "conquering epic of the Roman people," an epic that he organizes according to ages of life – see later – and which is presented as an irregular alternation of periods of success, but also sometimes of crisis which were however always overcome (for the expression see Christol, "Rome et le peuple romain," p. 213). Florus explicitly connects Rome's territorial expansion with two things.

The first one is the destiny and the actions of the Roman people: "They have extended their arms throughout the world so widely, that those who read their achievements are learning the history not of one people only, but that of all mankind (*non unius populi, sed generis humani*)" (§ 2). Through such a sentence, Florus uses a common representation of the Roman people appearing as a collective entity fit for conquests, which finally succeeded to unify the whole world. Such a representation of the Roman people clearly reminds the first representations of the *Genius populi romani* associated with symbols of domination, that could be spatial – the globe – or political – the sceptre –, representations which appear on Republican coins minted by the Lentuli ([Denarius minted by P. Cornelius Lentulus Spinther, representing the Genius populi Romani seated in a curule chair and crowned by Victory](#); on the link between the Genius of the Roman people and Florus's representation of the Roman people master of the world, see Christol, "Rome et le peuple romain," p. 213-219). In § 2 of his preface, Florus is directly asserting the fact that the Roman people, thanks to the conquest they led, made the Roman empire universal. Such a theme is repeated in the preface – in the rest of the sentence when the achievements of the Roman people are said to concern all mankind, or when Florus writes that until Augustus they "brought the whole world into a



state of peace" (*totum orbem pacavit*, § 7) –, but it is also omnipresent in the whole work (for references to this theme in Florus's work and in Latin sources, Facchini, *Il proemio*, p. 45). By invoking "mankind," Florus made the conquering epic of the Roman people some kind of transcending story, as the settlement of their domination over the world led also to the gathering of all the peoples concerned by their conquests and to the unification of this great ensemble (Christol, "Rome et le peuple romain," p. 215).

The second thing that Florus connects in his preface with Rome's territorial expansion is the influence of *Fortuna* and *Virtus*: "They have been confronted with so many efforts and dangers that to establish their Empire (*imperium*), Bravery (*Virtus*) and Fortune (*Fortuna*) seem to have competed" (§ 2). Florus refers here to the couple *Virtus* and *Fortuna* which is traditionally presented as gathering two essential factors to contribute to victory: *Virtus* refers to the conscious energy – and logically the bravery – inspiring the behaviour of the Roman people; *Fortuna*, on the contrary, was an external and divine power which could intervene (or not) in favour of the Roman people, and the Roman people could not have any hold on it. As Luigi Bessone rightly remarks, Florus's entire work is structured through a combination of the alternate influence of *Virtus* and *Fortuna* during the various ages of the history of the Roman people, an alternate influence which finally led to the establishment of Rome's hegemony. Thus, *Fortuna* is said to have had a determining role during the monarchic period – corresponding to the *infantia* of the Roman people – when the *virtus* of the Roman people could not express itself completely. Then, the *virtus* of the Roman people manifested itself during their *adulescentia*, when Rome conquered Italy. Then, the third age of the Roman people, their *iuventus*, is an age which ended with Augustus's reign, which is presented as the embodiment of the best which could be produced by the alternate influence of *Fortuna* and *Virtus*. The creation of a universal empire and the settlement of the *pax romana* under Augustus is thus presented by Florus as the moment when the balance between *Virtus* and *Fortuna* was optimal (Bessone, "Floro," p. 115-117).

The third interesting point in this preface is the part in which Florus presents how he has organized his narrative of the history of the Roman people through a biological scheme and a division of this history in 4 ages (§ 4-8). First, it is important to remind that Florus's dating of the various ages of Rome are voluntarily imprecise, and that many of the numbers expressing the length of the various ages have been corrupted throughout the manuscript transmission. Paul Jal has proposed some revisions of these numbers and thus distinguishes (Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. lxix-lxx):

1/ The first age of the Roman people, that of their *infantia*, is the monarchical period of Rome. For Florus, it may have lasted for around 250 years, as it goes from 754 to 510 BCE (§ 5).

2/ The second age, that of their *adulescentia*, is the period when the Roman people conquered Italy. For Florus, it may have lasted for around 250 years, as it goes from 510 to 264 BCE (§ 6).

3/ The third age, that of their *iuventus*, is the period of expansion of the Roman empire throughout the world. For Florus, it may have lasted for around 200 years, as it goes from 264 to 43 BCE as, according to Paul Jal, it is supposed to stop at the beginning of Octavian's accession to power (scholars debate this second dating a lot, as it could be 29 BCE, see Bessone, "Floro," p. 94-95, or 29-25 BCE, see Facchini Tosi, *Il proemio*, p. 30-31). However, the narrative includes military campaigns of the Augustan period which are mentioned because they put an end to wars and conflicts started during the third age (§ 7).

4/ The fourth age, that of the *senectus*, is the period when the Roman people grew old because of the "inactivity" of previous emperors, even if they found a new energy under Trajan's reign. This fourth age is not developed in Florus's narrative, but it is probably the passage of the preface which has been the most commented upon, because it is the major element in the debate related to the dating of the work, and for the understanding of the reference to the *senectus* of the Empire (§ 8).

First, it has to be recalled that explaining the history of Rome through ages and a biological scheme is not something singular in Roman historiography. Before Florus, Cicero had talked about the various ages of Rome in his treaty *De Republica*, to prove that the Rome of his time had reached adulthood (Cicero, *De Republica* II.1.3). However, the most obvious parallel with Florus's biological scheme is that which may have been used by Seneca (the Elder or the Philosopher, his identity has been debated), if we believe Lactantius when he attributes this text to Seneca (Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* VII.15.14-16). Actually, Seneca-Lactantius may have also compared the ages of Rome to that of a man, however various differences exist with Florus's perspective, because Seneca adds another age (the *pueritia*), and does not follow the same chronological division as Florus. For instance, for Seneca-Lactantius the *senectus* starts with the civil wars, whereas for Florus the civil wars are part of the third age and are presented as the expression of an "exuberant maturity" (for the expression, see Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. lxxiv; on the text of Seneca p. lxxii-lxxv). Thus, Florus may have known Seneca's division of the ages of Rome, even if the biological scheme of the historical evolution of the Roman people that he presents appears as a personal version of that division (Bessone, *La Storia Epitomata*, p. 31-41).

The second important element which can be analysed in this enumeration of the ages of Rome is the reference to the *senectus*, that is Rome's growing old: "From Caesar Augustus down to our own age, there has been not much



less than two-hundred years, during which, owing to the inactivity of the emperors, they [i.e. the Roman people], as it were, grew old and shrivelled up, excluding the fact that under Trajan they again activated their muscles; and, contrary to general expectation, the old empire regained its strength as if youth had been given back to it" (§ 8). The idea of ageing of cities, peoples or empires is an idea which was part of the rhetoric and philosophical background (on this idea that cities as empires could see their *fortuna* prosper, decline or disappear, see Velleius Paterculus, *The Roman History* II.11.3; Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. lxx). The originality of Florus's presentation of this age is that, after the beginning of its *senectus*, the Roman people experienced an improvement, which shows that Florus's conception of the biological evolution of Rome was more influenced by a "resigned" or "moderate pessimism" than by a uniform, declinist point of view (for a later representation of the *senectus* of Rome see [Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae XIV.6.4](#); Jal, *Florus, Oeuvres*, p. lxxvi-lxxviii). Therefore, Florus's definition of the notion of *senectus* is closer to the Ciceronian acceptance of the term – which can be for Cicero a symbol of perfection, stability and permanence – than to the acceptance of decadence. He may have meant that Rome would not die of old age, but rather would stay in this state of *senectus* – even after the period of improvement under Trajan –, alternating ups and downs which would not however signify its disappearance (Bessone, "Floro," p. 91 and n. 50). Florus's representation of Rome's *senectus* is thus totally different from Lactantius-Seneca, who defends a cyclic vision of the evolution of Rome – the loss of the Republican *libertas* means for him the regression to *infantia* (Facchini Tosi, *Il proemio*, p. 36-37). Finally, the criticism of Florus against the *inertia Caesarum*, which we can identify with the Julio-Claudian (probably with the exception of Augustus) and the Flavian emperors, clearly recalls some statements of Tacitus or of Pliny the Younger, who also criticized previous emperors for their *inertia* (see for instance Tacitus and Suetonius criticizing Tiberius for his military inactivity, Tacitus, *Annals* IV.32.2; Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius* 41; see also Pliny the Younger when he criticizes the *iners* emperor Domitian, *Panegyric of Trajan* 14.5; the *inertia* of the previous times 18.1; or when he exhorts Trajan to teach the future emperors to get out of *inertia* 59.2; for a global survey of these references, see Jal, "Nature et signification," p. 372-373).

The third important element in Florus's enumeration of the ages of Rome is that he continuously stresses the constitutive manliness and strength of the Roman people, which thus appear as the main factors of their expansion and successes. In the first part of the preface, Florus emphasizes the martial dimension of their history: "They have extended their arms throughout the world so widely..." (§ 2); their *virtus* explains why they established their Empire in spite of dangers (§ 3). Then, in his enumeration of the ages of the Roman people, it is interesting to see that each age – with the exception of the first – are all defined according to the question of their degree of bravery and virility. He presents their *adulescentia* as being "the most vigorous period (*tempus incitatissimum*) for what concern men and arms" (§ 6). Then, even if he presents the third age, the *iuventus*, as an age of "pacification of the world," he also highlights the fact that it is the age of the "robust maturity" (*robusta maturitas*) of the Empire (§ 7). Also in the fourth age, that of the *senectus*, which firstly signified the weakening of the Roman people, Florus highlights Trajan's reign as being the time of some martial and virile recovery, through the image of the activation of the muscles, a period which enabled the Roman people to *revirescere*, "recover their strength" (§ 8). Florus's representation of Trajan's reign as being a warlike period fits in with the traditional representations of this reign as being the acme of Rome's expansionist policy (see the [Column of Trajan](#)). A comparison with the panegyric of Trajan of Pliny the Younger appears thus as a prerequisite. Luigi Bessone has noticed that some echoes appear between the two works, even if the perspectives of both authors are, at the end, slightly different. For instance, Pliny the Younger defends the idea that, under Trajan, security inside the Empire was actually ensured, an idea which can echo Florus's development about the *pax romana*. However, in his panegyric, Pliny does not present Trajan only as a tremendous warlord whose reign could be characterized strictly through his military operations; his presentation of Trajan's military campaigns is limited to a part of the panegyric, so that he can also praise the numerous other qualities of the *princeps* (see Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric of Trajan* 12-19 upon the 94 chapters of the panegyric). In addition, the fact that Pliny specifies, about the bellicosity of Trajan, that: *Non times bella nec provocas*; "You do not fear war, but you do not have any desire to cause one" (Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric of Trajan* 16.2), fits in with this impression that Pliny may have wanted to present a more complex picture of Trajan as war leader than Florus. Conversely, Florus chose to present Trajan's reign mainly through a martial perspective which clearly contrasts with the representation of his predecessor, who actively worked for the preservation of the integrity of the Roman Empire, namely Augustus; Augustus who is essentially staged as the pacificator of the Empire (Bessone, "Floro," p. 113, n. 139).

In conclusion, the understanding of the goals which may have been those of Florus when he wrote this preface enumerating the various ages of Rome and when he inserted a reference to the warmongering policy of Trajan – goals which are understood by scholars in diametrically opposed ways, as the work has been seen both as a justification and as a critique of Hadrian's decision to abandon Trajan's policy of conquests (on the bibliography, see Lavan, "Florus and Dio," p. 129, n. 12) – depends upon the dating that one chooses to attribute to the composition of the work. Whatever the dating and the interpretation chosen, Florus's representation of the Roman people is interesting for two reasons. First, the fact that the Roman people is the central element of his narrative



and is thus staged as the main actor and leader in a process which is constitutive of Rome's history, namely the establishment of Rome's universal empire. The theory of the succession of the ages was thus an interesting literary tool that Florus could use in order to reflect the idea that the establishment of this Empire had been a progressive, but also an integrative process: the personified Roman people is staged as being always renewed and enriched after that more and more peoples came under its control. The second interesting point is that the biological metaphor enables Florus to emphasize an essential dimension of the power of the Roman people, namely their virility and their conquering strength which are presented as their main quality explaining their successes. Florus could have chosen to present the history of the Roman people and more particularly the establishment of Rome's domination on earth by insisting upon the idea of the spread of Rome's culture, language or citizenship, but he deliberately chose to present the history of the Roman people through this expansionist and martial perspective.

Keywords in the original language:

- [adulescentia](#)
- [aetas](#)
- [arma](#)
- [Augustus](#)
- [bellum](#)
- [Caesar](#)
- [fortuna](#)
- [genus humanum](#)
- [homo](#)
- [imperium](#)
- [incitatus](#)
- [inertia](#)
- [infantia](#)
- [iuventus](#)
- [magnitudo](#)
- [maturitas](#)
- [orbis terrarum](#)
- [paco](#)
- [pax](#)
- [populus romanus](#)
- [princeps populus](#)
- [processus](#)
- [quattuor gradus](#)
- [reviresco](#)
- [rex](#)
- [saeculum](#)
- [senectus](#)
- [vir](#)
- [virtus](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [ages of Rome](#)
- [people-emperor](#)
- [Roman conquests](#)
- [Roman decline](#)
- [Roman domination](#)
- [Roman peace](#)
- [Roman people](#)
- [Roman power](#)
- [Trajan](#)



- [universal domination](#)
- [virility](#)
- [warrior](#)

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