

The Life of Aelius Lampridius, Biographer

By Pneumaticus

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This is a work in progress . . .

I. In the series of lives of those who have written the lives of Roman emperors of the past, next comes the famous Aelius Lampridius. It is pleasing to recount for your royal ear, O great Romulus Augustus, beloved of God and men, the most notable events, circumstances, and achievements of an humble life in the field of letters, for the discovery of merit even among his most obscure subjects will always tend to exalt the sovereign, whose greatness so far surpasses their own, by law both human and divine. If, on the other hand, his subjects display only the sins and vices of mankind, with no admixture of virtue, the sovereign is exalted by the great chasm separating him from the common lot, preserving his virtue and dignity inviolate even in the most unfortunate times. There is no subject greater than an Emperor of Rome, and for this reason I am pleased to embark upon the life of a literary man who, in the prosecution of his life's work, disdained the ass, the atom, and all such foolishness, offering to his sovereign, the great Constantine, the only matter worthy of his consideration.

II. The life of Lampridius emerges from obscurity on short notice, and, like a meteor, it burns brightly in our remembrance, though in actual fact the sacred fire is extinguished not long after it dazzles the eye. That is, the appearance is sudden and unexpected, the splendor is short-lived. But most men never emerge from obscurity at all; they live basely and die ingloriously. In his timeless *Lives*, the most excellent portion of the mortal Lampridius will never die, that portion which the world most desires to retain, and which gives perpetually without taking or asking any succor or sustenance.

The *Lives* of Lampridius we know well; the life of Lampridius the man is obscure, and some writers of the present age insist (brazenly, though not without reason of a kind) that Aelius Lampridius is a literary phantom, without substance or shadow. Such arrogance should be generously, but firmly, imputed to their ignorance, not to their malice or envy. Sallust, I think, very nearly put his finger on this issue, when he wrote that men are most eager to deny the greatness of others. While he seemed thereby to insinuate that men are naturally envious and malicious, what he really was saying is that men rarely discover superior merit among their brethren, and therefore the common opinion holds that great men exist only as authors' inventions, in books, poems and song, or in the theater.

But the example of the Apostles is sufficient to refute this common opinion. Consorting with the greatest man Who ever lived, a vile band of Judeans recognized the eternal King of the Universe in His specious garb of humility and mortality, delivered themselves unto His care and discipline, and under His tutelage transformed their own lives, becoming great themselves by propagating tales and examples of His greatness throughout the world. Do we doubt their claims to authorship, or their veracity? Do we deny their greatness, when we affirm that they were not perfect?