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"Pliny the Younger and Suetonius: A Study in the Language of Roman Friendship"

Friendship in ancient Rome was complex and multi-faceted. It functioned at the confluence not only of personal affections but also of Roman political factions, party politics, and the Roman client/patronage system. Culturally, friendship was not restricted to either the public or the private sphere; rather its range "covered every degree of genuinely or overtly amicable relation." Nor was friendship a necessarily egalitarian venture amongst the ancient Romans. Not only was Roman society intensely stratified, but an embedded awareness of individual social position formed the glue that held those strata together. Moreover there was an accepted and expected protocol inherent in the Roman idea of friendship, regardless of whether that friendship referred to a personal bond of affection or an overt political tie. Roman friendship was based on mutual reciprocity.

One area that often blurred the lines between patronage and friendship was the relationships within the literary circles of imperial Rome. An example of this may be found in the relationship between Pliny the younger and the man who later became *ab epistolis* to Hadrian: Suetonius. Pliny both writes to Suetonius and refers to him several times within his letters to others, including one letter to the Emperor Trajan. In each case, the language used in reference to Suetonius was that of affection and friendship, however at the same time, it is clear that Pliny mentored the younger Suetonius and several of the letters are concerned with gaining specific favors for his young protégé. As this paper will seek to show, the language with which Pliny refers to the younger Suetonius provides a useful lens through which to glimpse the working nature of upper class literary friendship in first century Rome, most especially the ways in which its many functions overlapped.