Ancestry
&
Suetonius’

De Vita Caesarum

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Doctor of Philosophy (Classics)
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March, 2013
Statement of Originality

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I would like to thank the ‘partner of my labours,’ my supervisor, Hugh Lindsay, for his guidance and generous attention at all times. He has wisely known when to agree to disagree with me, and should not be held responsible for my errors. I also acknowledge the assistance and support of Jane Bellemore and other staff in Classics, Helen Moffatt in the School of Humanities, and the staff in Inter-Library Loans, all at the University of Newcastle.

While I wrote this thesis I received an Australian Postgraduate Award from the Commonwealth Government and the University of Newcastle. I am grateful to have received funding from the Australasian Society for Classical Studies, the University of Newcastle, and the Classical Association (UK) to give papers at several conferences in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

I had help with foreign language sources from Fenja Theden-Ringl, Amanda Carnal, and Oliver O’Sullivan. Janet Hadley Williams, Stacey Francis, and Kristin Heineman all proofread sections of the thesis. Two medical doctors, Dr Silvio Demilio and Dr Mark Davies, did sterling jobs to get me here. Thanks to Kristin Heineman and my family for moral support, and Christopher Thomson for everything else.
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Abstract

Each *Life* of Suetonius’ *De Vita Caesarum* is constructed carefully from the very beginning, leading the reader to a preconceived judgment of the Caesar by employing techniques from epideictic rhetoric, including the comparison of the subject with his ancestors. In nine of the twelve *Lives*, characterisation of the Caesar begins with a detailed family tree of the subject’s ancestors or a short biography of the father. This thesis explores the role of the ancestors in the *Lives* as status symbols and tools of characterisation. Suetonius surpasses other authors, such as Tacitus and Plutarch, in the extent and subtlety of his characterisation through lineage. In Suetonius, the character traits of the ancestors foreshadow similarity or emphatic contrast with the character traits of their descendants. This characterisation works because the audience expects the descendant to resemble the ancestor, and this thesis also investigates the role of nature and nurture in inherited character traits in the *De Vita Caesarum*.

In Chapter One, I explain the role of ancestors as status markers in Roman society, to situate Suetonius’ use of ancestors as status markers in its social and literary context, and in Chapter Two I discuss the use of ancestors as status markers in Suetonius. In Chapter Three, I identify the parallels between the ancestral traits and the traits of the Caesars, and in Chapter Four the unusual features of the *Tiberius*. At the end of Chapter Four I trace the patterns of inheritance and degeneration that arise from Suetonius’ usage of ancestors as tools of characterisation. I argue that the parallels between ancestor and descendant are sufficiently close that Suetonius can be said to have deliberately selected and shaped these ancestral anecdotes to characterise the Caesars themselves. In Chapter Five, I discuss nature and nurture in Suetonius: whether virtues and vices are innate and inherited, the possible mechanisms by which Suetonius’ Caesars resemble their ancestors, and the possible reasons the patterns of inheritance in Suetonius are different from those of the republican and Flavian periods. I conclude that the ancestors are supposed to be read with their descendants in mind, and that Suetonius chose the stories he told about the ancestors with a view to shaping the characterisation of the Caesar. The character traits of the ancestors should be taken into account in future discussions of Suetonius’ characterisation.
Editions and Abbreviations

References follow the style of Antichthon. The abbreviations of ancient sources cited follow that of the Oxford Classical Dictionary (3rd Edition) for both Greek and Latin authors.

References to Suetonius’ De Vita Caesarum are made thus:

- Iul.
- Aug.
- Tib.
- Calig.
- Claud.
- Ner.
- Galb.
- Oth.
- Vit.
- Vesp.
- Tit.
- Dom.

Suetonius’ other Lives are referred to by Gram., Poet., and Rhet. I have given only the title and not the author when the reference is to Suetonius, except to state ‘Suet. Galb.’ where there might be confusion with ‘Plut. Galb.’

References to modern periodicals are abbreviated according to L'Année Philologique.

- OLD Oxford Latin Dictionary
- ILLRP Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae
- ILS Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae
- PIR² Prosopographia Imperii Romani (2nd Edition)
- RE Realencyclopaedie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft (1893-1963)
Stemmata

I  Domitii Ahenobarbi
II  Sulpicii Galbae
III  Flauii
IV  Octauii
V  Saluii Othones
VI  Vitellii
VII  The early Claudii
VIII  Claudii Nerones
IX  Liuii Drusi
X  Iulii Caesares

Stemmata are not always historically accurate; they are provided as guides to Suetonius’ text.
Figure I: The Domitii Ahenobarbi
Figure II: The Sulpicii Galbae
Figure III: The Flauii
Based on those of Nicols (1978) 36 and DNP, s.v. Vespasianus.
Figure IV: The Octauii
This stemma follows Suetonius to connect Augustus’ family with the noble Octauii, but (based on voting tribes and the Velitrae connection) Peter Wiseman follows L.R. Taylor to say that Suetonius errs: the family could not possibly have been related to the Octauii of Cn. Octauius. T.P. Wiseman (1965) 333. For the stemma of the noble Octauii, descendants of Cn. Octauius (pr. 205 BCE), see G.V. Sumner (1973) 115.
Figure V: The Saluii Othones

Father
M. Saluius Otho Praetor

Mother
Q. Terentius Culleo

L. Saluius Otho Titianus

Albia

L. Saluius Otho Terentia

M. Saluius Otho

Saluia

Figure VI: The Vitellii

P. (or A.) Vitellius

A. Vitellius  Q. Vitellius  P. Vitellius  L. Vitellius

Sestilia (or Sextilia)

A. Vitellius  L. Vitellius

xii
Figure VII: The early Claudii
Based on Lindsay (1995) 58.

Appius Claudius (Clausus)  
cos. 495 BCE

Ap. Claudius Crassus Inregillensis Sabinus  
(Regillianus)

Ap. Claudius Crassus Inregillensis Sabinus  
(Regillianus)

cos. 471 BCE, 451 BCE  
Decemvir 451-449 BCE

Ap. Claudius Crassus  
P. Claudius

Ap. Claudius Crassus Inregillensis

C. Claudius Inregillensis

Ap. Claudius Caecus  
Ap. Claudius Caudex

Ap. Claudius Rufus/Russus  
cos. 268 BCE

P. Claudius Pulcher  
cos. 249 BCE

C. Claudius Centho  
cos. 240 BCE

Tib. Claudius Nero  
Claudia
**Figure VIII: The Claudii Nerones**  
The gap after the Consuls of 202 and 207 BCE cannot be reconstructed. Based on a stemma by Lindsay (1995) 64.

![Family Tree Diagram]

Ap. Claudius Caecus  
cos. 307, 296 BCE

Ti. Claudius Nero

Ti. Claudius Nero  
P. Claudius Nero

C. Claudius Nero  
cos. 207 BCE

Ti. Claudius Nero  
cos. 202 BCE

Ap. Claudius Nero

Ti. Claudius Nero

Ti. Claudius Nero  
leg. 67 BCE

Ti. Claudius Nero  
pr. 43 BCE

Liuia Drusilla

Tiberius  
Drusus
Figure IX: The Liuii Drusi
Based on Huntsman (1997) 249-50.
Introduction

Suétónio's *Vidas dos Césares* são distintivos por sua pervasiva rubric system. Cada *Vida* segue, mais ou menos, o mesmo modelo: a primeira seção inclui a genealogia; as circunstâncias do nascimento, muitas vezes incluindo os sinais que cercavam o nascimento; e os eventos e honras da juventude até o acesso. Esta seção é aproximadamente cronológica e é mais longa ou mais curta dependendo de quanto tempo o assunto realmente esteve no poder. O *Julius*, por exemplo, é quase completamente a história de sua vida 'até o acesso,' já que sua assassinação seguiu relativamente em seguida;¹ Nero, por outro lado, sucedeu o Cláudio em uma idade jovem, e assim, mais dessa *Vida* trata de seu reinado.² A segunda seção, geralmente o principal da *Vida*, é um catálogo de vícios e virtudes, demonstrada por anedotas, mas usualmente não em ordem cronológica. Com a terceira seção, a *Vida* retorna à narrativa cronológica, contando os sinais de aproximação da morte, as circunstâncias da morte, e os arranjos fúnebres e deificação (ou falta disso).³

Na seção principal da *Vida*, os aspectos do reinado são listados um por um, muitas vezes marcados por uma palavra de rubric, antes de uma anedota demonstrando cada característica. Os rubrics não aparecem em toda *Vida* ou na mesma ordem, mas há uma progressão sistemática através da lista que é comum a quase todos *Vidas*, incluindo temas como conduta sexual, relacionamentos interpessoais, e gerenciamento de dinheiro, cada um demonstrando uma característica de caráter.³ Os elementos comuns através de *Vidas* criam uma comparação implícita entre Caesars, e a variação na colocação e escolha de rubrics permite ao biógrafo moldar seu material e direcionar seu leitor com a aparência de imparcialidade. O sistema de rubrics tende a frustrar aqueles que estão procurando cronologia, mas a falta de cronologia não teria sido uma preocupação para contemporâneos de Suétônio. O sistema de rubrics também é uma parte essencial do método de Suétônio para construir o caráter. Cada rubric adiciona uma característica de caráter ao retrato, e por um acumulação calculada de rubrics, um caráter completo.

¹ G.B. Townend (1967) 82.
² Os *Vidas* de Galba, Otho, e Vitelio são excepcionais, já que são realmente apenas concernem com os eventos de seus reinados curtos, e não muito de suas vidas antes do acesso.
³ Só o *Cláudio* e *Otho* não prosseguem por virtude e vice.
portrait is drawn. In most Lives the virtues are dealt with first, followed by the vices, which usually overshadow the virtues in the final analysis by both position and degree.

Two questions that concern Suetonian scholars are the effect of the rubric system and the role of each rubric within it. A number of studies approach Suetonius by rubric, taking one subject often addressed over the Lives, such as public shows, omens, or marriages, and investigating what that rubric contributes to Suetonius’ characterisation of the subject. There has so far not been any study of the subject’s ancestry, a major rubric which appears in almost every Life. It is the task of this thesis to identify Suetonius’ purpose and method in these ancestry sections, and to discover whether, and if so, how they affect the way we read the Lives. Sansone examines the ancestors in the Nero, but treats Suetonius’ adherence to his source material rather than the literary qualities of the rubric. Ancestry is treated in several commentaries as it arises, particularly thoroughly by Hurley, but I will be the first to investigate the rubric as a whole across all the Lives for what it can show about Suetonius’ method and purpose.

The ancestry rubric occurs at or near the beginning of nine of the twelve Lives. The Lives that do not include it are the acephalous Julius, which almost certainly did include it in the lost section; the Titus, and the Domitian, where an ancestry section would only repeat the information found at the beginning of Vespasian. Of the remaining nine, Caligula and Claudius contain only a potted biography of the father, since their families were already set out elsewhere. The material we are dealing with occurs in the following positions:

- Augustus 1-4 (4 sections out of 101).
- Tiberius 1-4 (4 out of 76)
- Caligula 1-7 (7 out of 60)
- Claudius 1 (1 out of 46).

Examples of such work are the studies of E.C. Evans (1935); (1941); (1969) and J. Couissin (1953) on physical appearance and physiognomy; H. Gugel (1977) 24-103 on omens, erotica, and last words; K.R. Bradley (1981) on spectacles and (1985a) on marriage and sexuality; and J. Goddard (1994) on eating habits.


Nero 1-5 (5 out of 57).
Galba 2-3 (2 out of 23).
Otho 1 (1 out of 12).
Vitellius 1-3.1 (2.5 out of 18).
Vespasian 1 (1 out of 25).

The Caligula and the Nero have the longest ancestry sections, and the Vitellius also has a long one in proportion to the length of the Life. The section of Claudius dealing with his father Drusus is also quite long, although the traditional divisions make it just one section. Only in the Galba and the Vespasian is there a proem before the ancestry section, although there probably was one at the beginning of the Julius. The family tree of Galba is the best model from which to generalise, because it includes almost all the elements of any Suetonian family tree, where in some Lives one or another is often omitted. The basic structure of the ancestry for a Caesar of noble family is: the name of the father’s family, including other branches of the family and the story behind the cognomen, and often including the origo of the family; the first of the family to achieve fame or office, thus ennobling the line; in generational order, the significant moments in the agnate line, and then the name and general importance of the mother’s family. The focus is on the paternal (agnate) line, but the mother is also usually named. The family tree usually proceeds in chronological order, beginning with the first important member of the family, such as the first consul with the same cognomen.

There are exceptions: for instance, the Nero does not mention the mother’s family, which is closely related to the families already catalogued; the Galba does not refer to other lines of the Sulpicii apart from the Sulpicii Galbae; Caligula and Claudius have only the father’s biography. The Tiberius, in particular, exhibits a number of differences in its ancestry section from this template.

For non-noble families, the biographer adopts a slightly different approach. Augustus and other Caesars after Galba are only the first or second in the line to take

\footnote{The proem to Julius probably indicated the general aims of the series. See below, 14, and Appendix.}

\footnote{The ancestry sections are not all the same, but they are consistent enough that Philemon Holland’s translation could include a reconstruction of the lost part of the Julius. P. Holland (1930). The supplementary section is given in the Appendix to this thesis.}

\footnote{The exceptions to the standard structure and the reasons for them will be addressed below, in Chapters Two, Three, and Four.}
office, and those Lives basically follow the pattern, but sometimes give more space to
the mother’s line than the father’s, or make some other exception. The significance of
ancestry to Suetonius’ scheme is demonstrated by the fact that he returns to lineage in
the Vitellius even when there is nothing detailed he can say about it.

The ancestry sections are often considered to be merely introductory, important
neither to the student of the Principate nor to the student of literature. Even critics who
saw literary design in Suetonius’ rubrics often looked past the ancestry sections of the
Lives as irrelevant—Cizek implicitly denies the importance of these sections by not
including ancestral virtues and vices in his list of characterising statements, and Du
Four, who is less interested in structure, explicitly denies the relevance of the ancestry
sections to the Tiberius.11 Tamsyn Barton, exceptionally, argued for the rhetorical nature
of these introductory sections.12 I will investigate the role of these ancestry sections in
the Lives, and postulate some reasons why Suetonius gives more attention to ancestry
than his peers and predecessors in biography. I will show, following Barton, that those
sections on ancestry are deliberately characterising the Caesars. They are part of
Suetonius’ method of steering his reader towards a particular judgment from the very
beginning. I postulate, then, that although ancestry may appear superfluous, it is the first
opportunity for Suetonius to characterise his subject, and he does so through the
character traits of the ancestors.

The Author

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus was born around 69 CE. His father, Suetonius Laetus, was
an equestrian, who fought for Otho in the civil wars of 69. Suetonius lived through the
Flavian era, and became secretary ab epistulis and a bibliothecis to the emperors Trajan
and Hadrian. A good deal of what we know about him comes from the Lives themselves
or letters from his friend, Pliny the Younger.13 The crucial dates of his life are relatively
well rehearsed.14 The beginning of the twentieth century saw a new interest in

11 E. Cizek (1977); M.J. Du Four (1941 [1979]) 5.
12 T. Barton (1994).
13 Important passages are Calig. 19.3; Ner. 57.2; Oth. 10.1; Dom. 12.2; Gram. 4; Plin. Ep. 1.18; 1.24;
5.10; 3.8; 10.94.
14 See for instance OCD, s.v. Suetonius, which places his birth c. 70 CE and his death c. 130. Estimates of
his birth date range from 61-72, but it is usually put in 69-70. The date of Suetonius’ death is uncertain,
Suétone, with Macé’s *Essai sur Suétone* in 1900, concerned mainly with the historical figure of C. Suetonius Tranquillus and the chronology of his work and career,\(^{15}\) Leo’s *Die griechisch-romische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form* in 1901, Dalmasso’s *La grammatica di C. Svetonio Tranquillo* of 1906, and, in 1907, Ihm’s edition of Suetonius’ text, still the standard.\(^{16}\)

In the 1950s, following the publication of a new inscription from Hippo Regius (in modern Algeria) that cast new light on Suetonius the historical figure, confirming that he held the posts of *a studiis, a bibliothecis, and ab epistulis*, as well as being priest of Vulcan,\(^{17}\) there was a flurry of research about Suetonius’ significant dates, his relationship with Hippo Regius, his position in the imperial court and his controversial dismissal from that position.\(^{18}\)

As an equestrian who mixed in senatorial and imperial circles, Suetonius was in a unique position to conduct his research on the Caesars. He also would have been acutely aware of the minute distinctions of status within the upper echelons.

The *De Vita Caesarum* is the most famous of many works from a cornucopia of subjects, many of which are known to us only as titles in the Byzantine encyclopaedia, the *Suda*.\(^{19}\) According to the *Suda*, the previous efforts of the polygraph had been spent on subjects as varied as Greek insults, physical defects, public games, and the *Lives* of famous courtesans. Attesting the author’s abiding interest in stemmata, the *Suda* records the title of a work by Suetonius on ‘Family Trees of Distinguished Romans.’ Of this bibliography, only *De Vita Caesarum* survives almost completely. It is missing its first sections, including the title and a dedication, which was known to Johannes Lydus in the sixth century.\(^{20}\) Part of a collection *De Viris Illustribus* also survives, and some fragments of other works, which already show the use of rubrics.\(^{21}\) *De Vita Caesarum* not helped by the uncertainty of the date of the events of SHA *Hadr.* 11.3, in which Suetonius makes his last appearance.

\(^{15}\) Macé focussed on his date of birth (which he placed in 69 CE, refuting Mommsen’s date): A. Macé (1900) 35.

\(^{16}\) Macé (1900); F. Leo (1901); L. Dalmasso (1906); M. Ihm (1907).

\(^{17}\) E. Marec & H.-G. Pflaum (1952).


\(^{19}\) Suda, s.v. Trankullus.

\(^{20}\) Johannes Lydus (De Mag. 2.6) reports that the dedication of (some if not all of) *De Vita Caesarum* was to Septicius Clarus. Suetonius’ fall from grace is linked with Septicius’ by SHA *Hadr.* 11.3.

\(^{21}\) The standard edition of the *De Viris Illustribus* is R.A. Kaster (1995).
was probably the latest addition, published in the 120s, most likely after Tacitus’ *Annals* and Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives.*

Sueto[n]ius’ *De Vita Caesarum* (‘On the life of the Caesars,’ also known as the *Caesares* or the *Twelve Caesars*) is a collection of twelve biographies of the first Caesars, from Julius Caesar to Domitian. By biography, I mean what the ancients called a *Life* (*uita* or *bios*), which is an historiographical genre but which is distinguished from history, because of its preoccupation with one person rather than the narration of events.

Today, we lack extant precursors of Suetonius’ genre. Jerome named Santra, Nepos, Varro, and Hyginus as Suetonius’ predecessors in biography, but only Nepos’ efforts survive in more than fragmentary form. Nepos was also, like Suetonius, a polygraph, whose *Lives* made up just part of a large number of works on various subjects. Enough of Nepos’ *De Viris Illustribus* survives to show his biographies were more similar to Greek biographies, such as Isocrates’ *Evagoras* and Xenophon’s *Agesilaus*, than to Suetonius’ *De Vita Caesarum*. Between Nepos and Suetonius, the biographical genre evolved through experimentation. The first century CE saw the flourishing of *exitus* literature, descriptions of the deaths of famous men, which share certain characteristics with biography, and the Gospels of Christ—variations on Greco-Roman biography—also belong to this period. In the late first century, Tacitus’ *Agricola*, a laudatory biography of his father-in-law, is a rare, extant example of a precursor to Suetonius’ biographies. As I will argue in Chapter Three, Suetonius’ *De

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22 121 is the date preferred by Macé (1900) 199-200, but he had no knowledge of the Hippo inscription; Lindsay (1993) 5 prefers a date as late as 128, to allow for Suetonius’ dismissal after Hadrian’s trip to Africa; this was disputed by Wardle (2002). The publication after Tacitus’ *Annals* is based on a few passages in which Suetonius appears to be correcting Tacitus, proposed by J. Beaujeu (1960). Plutarch’s death around 120 means Suetonius’ work must post-date Plutarch’s, T.E. Duff (1999) 2. On the composition and publication dates of the *De Vita Caesarum*, a thorny subject, see Townend (1959); Bowersock (1969) 124; contra Bowersock’s proposal, Bradley (1973); Syme (1980) and (1981).

23 The *locus classicus* for the history-biography distinction is Plut. *Alex.* 1.2.

24 A. Reifferscheid (1860) fr. 1.

25 N. Horsfall (1889) xvii. On Nepos and his work, see E.M. Jenkinson (1967) and (1973); J. Geiger (1985); and Lindsay (1998).


Vita Caesarum owes as much to Ciceronian invective as it does to the primarily eulogistic biographies which preceded it. A more important antecedent to the De Vita Caesarum was a series of Lives from Augustus to Vitellius by Plutarch.\footnote{Of Flavian date, according to C.P. Jones (1971) 27.} Unfortunately only Galba and Otho are extant, but they show more integration with each other and a more chronological, narrative approach than Suetonius’ versions. A comparison of Plutarch’s Julius Caesar (part of the Parallel Lives) with Suetonius’ Julius also demonstrates that the two authors had different biographical interests.\footnote{For a comparison of Suetonius and Plutarch, see A. Wardman (1974) 144ff; in relation to the Galba and Otho, see B. Baldwin (1983) 526-46; in relation to the Julius Caesar, see C. Pelling (2009).}

‘Suetonius,’ it is said, ‘has never lacked readers.’\footnote{A. Wallace-Hadrill (1995) vii.} In the later Roman period, he was widely read, and imitated by, amongst others, Marius Maximus\footnote{Townend (1967) 96-7; Syme (1968) 496.} and the author(s) of the Scriptores Historiae Augustae,\footnote{D. Magie (1921) xv-xvii; H.W. Bird (1971).} and later, in the post-Roman period, Einhard, in his ninth-century Life of Charlemagne.\footnote{A story told by S.J. Tibbetts (1983).} After a precarious passage through the Middle Ages,\footnote{Lounsbury (1987) 161.} between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries some two hundred editions of De Vita Caesarum were produced, a testament to its popularity.\footnote{J. Geel (1828); Reifferscheid (1860); G. Becker (1862); Shuckburgh (1896).} The nineteenth century has left us textual criticism in the form of Reifferscheid’s edition, Becker’s notes on the text, Geel’s edition of Ruhnken’s commentary on the Lives, and Shuckburgh’s commentary on Augustus.\footnote{Wallace-Hadrill (1983); B. Baldwin (1983).}

The twentieth-century revival of Suetonian studies, which has already been described, had not produced a monograph on Suetonius in English, until in 1983 two were published: Andrew Wallace-Hadrill’s Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars, and Barry Baldwin’s Suetonius.\footnote{Bradley (1985b) 255.}

Baldwin’s work, as Bradley commented, deals with the ‘traditional problems of Suetonian scholarship.’\footnote{Baldwin (1983) 51.} He begins with chapters on the life and career of Suetonius, covering the dates of Suetonius’ birth (which he places in 61/2 CE),\footnote{Baldwin (1983) 27.} publication of the Caesars (by 117),\footnote{Baldwin (1983) 51.} and his dismissal from court (in 122).\footnote{Baldwin (1983) 51.} In ‘Suetonius and the
Caesars’ he discusses each of the *Lives*, never in great detail, excluding *Galba* and *Otho*, which he saves for an appendix. That section deals with the themes of Suetonius’ *Galba* and *Otho* in comparison with Plutarch’s *Lives* of the same men.\textsuperscript{43}

Wallace-Hadrill’s *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars*\textsuperscript{44} is concerned to place Suetonius in the appropriate historical/cultural context, and as such he steers clear of the question of dates, except where he is in a good position to improve on Macé because of archaeological findings since 1900, in particular the Hippo inscription. The first part of the book deals with Suetonius the man, setting him in his historical context amongst other courtiers and biographers. The second part, more relevant to my theme, proceeds rubric by rubric, discussing the themes that Suetonius uses and their significance. Several pages in the chapter ‘Emperors and Society’ concern the subject’s family background as an illustration of status, in which (Wallace-Hadrill argues) Suetonius is interested for its own sake.\textsuperscript{45} He does not profess interest in Suetonius’ literary style (other than putting Suetonius’ work in context of scholarship and biography) but he does consider Suetonius not a collator of previous works but a deliberate and careful author, actively characterising his subjects.

Not long after Baldwin and Wallace-Hadrill’s books appeared, Jacques Gascou’s *Suétone Historien*\textsuperscript{46} reminded us that Suetonius’ *Lives* are usually used by historians, and even the commentaries are written for historians, with little interest in style or language. Indeed, the 1990s was a productive decade for commentaries in English on individual *Lives*, written from a mostly historical point of view, such as Hugh Lindsay’s commentaries on *Caligula* and *Tiberius*; on *Caligula* David Wardle and Donna Hurley, on *Claudius* Donna Hurley and Jean Mottershead; and, on the Flavian *Lives*, Charles Murison, Brian Jones, and Brian Jones with Robert Milns.\textsuperscript{47} These commentaries joined two earlier commentaries on the *Nero* by B.H. Warmington and Keith Bradley, a commentary on the *Augustus* by Carter, and a partial commentary on *Tiberius* by Mary

\textsuperscript{42} Baldwin (1983) 45. 
\textsuperscript{43} Baldwin (1983) 526-46. 
\textsuperscript{46} J. Gascou (1984). 
\textsuperscript{47} J. Mottershead (1986); C.L. Murison (1992) and (1993); Lindsay (1993); D.W. Hurley (1993); Wardle (1994); Lindsay (1995); Hurley (2001); Jones (2000) and (1996); Jones & Milns (2002).
Du Four. Amongst this revival, two bibliographies were published by P. Galand-Hallyn and D.T. Benediktson.

My interest in Suetonius is only tangentially in his value as an historian, but really in his practice as a writer, and it is traditional in Suetonian studies that in order to make a point about Suetonius’ writing one must first establish that Suetonius was, in fact, in control of his material. For most of his peers, this could be assumed, but there was a time when Suetonius could be uncontroversially dismissed as a passive, artless compiler of material, without a political or philosophical opinion on his subject. Such a view was propounded by Eduard Norden, who, in a two-volume work on Roman prose, consigned Suetonius to a single footnote; Schanz-Hosius said Suetonius worked ‘not with his head but with his hands.’ Neither Stuart nor Garraty, both writing about biography, saw any creativity in Suetonius. Friedrich Leo compared Suetonius to other Greek and Roman biographers and found him wanting. He was dismissive of Suetonius’ literary qualities, considering him an antiquarian collector of facts rather than an autonomous or creative writer, and criticising his dissimilarity to other Greco-Roman biographies. To his credit, Leo identified the rubric system, which is now widely accepted as the distinctively Suetonian structure and the basis of many modern studies.

If not quite passively, then Suetonius was otherwise supposed to have written with a sober rationalism. The ‘rationalism’ attributed to Suetonius by Madvig and Teuffel provoked this response from J.D. Duff:

[i]f they have failed to perceive his art, the reason may be that he has had the art to conceal it.

Duff was ahead of his time when he championed Suetonius’ involvement in his work. A few decades later, Wolf Steidle also did Suetonius a service when he argued that he was a deliberate writer, beginning with a preconceived idea of his characters and building up a characterisation, chiefly through the rubric system, which had previously

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50 ‘Sueton schreibt farblos’ (Suetonius wrote colourlessly), according to E. Norden (1898 [1958]) 1.371, n. 1; ‘Er arbeitete nicht mit dem Geiste, sondern wesentlich mit den Händen,’ (he worked not with his head, but only with his hands) according to M. Schanz, C. Hosius, & G. Krüger. (1922 [1959]) 3.51. See also D.R. Stuart (1928) 230; J.A. Garraty (1985) 49.
51 Leo (1901); M. Hadas (1952).
53 J.D. Duff (1914) 165.
54 W. Steidle (1951 [1963]).
been thought a symptom of an unsophisticated, mechanical compiler. David Wardle, in his commentary on *Caligula*, paraphrased Steidle’s opinion:

Suetonius (pre-)determines the characterisation of his subject and then manipulates his material to that end. This accounts best for Suetonius’ practice and is a tendency basic to ancient biography, whether or not there are apparent pretensions to literary merit.55

This approach is the correct one: that is, Suetonius begins his biographies with a firm view of his subject, and he deliberately leads his audience around to his view by certain methods of characterisation. The primary structure of characterisation is the rubric, a trademark of Suetonius’ method.

Steidle showed that Suetonius’ work is ‘not only intelligently conceived and artistically executed, but even that Suetonius’ style has merits which have been overlooked.’56 He argued that Suetonius has a uniquely Roman interest that Leo did not appreciate.57 However, as his test case was the *Julius*, Steidle’s analysis did not treat the rubric of ancestry in detail.58 Giovanni D’Anna’s monograph, *Le idee letterarie di Suetonio*, was also interested in the literary aspects of Suetonius, particularly the influence of Flavian authors including Quintilian, but D’Anna gave the credit for any of Suetonius’ literary ‘colour’ to his sources rather than to the biographer himself.59 In the same year, Michael Grant gave Suetonius too little credit when he said:

[n]evertheless, here at last is a ‘historical’ writer who makes no effort to present a rhetorically or morally preconceived version.60

It is now generally accepted that Suetonius wrote deliberately, as Steidle argued, but there is still a question of whether or not he is more than deliberate—that is to say, whether he shows artistic merit.

In the 1960s and 70s, Suetonius’ ‘art’ received attention, especially from francophone critics such as Cizek, Sage, and Croisille. Eugen Cizek identified in Suetonius’ *Lives* certain structures that suggested the author had not only opinions but

56 Steidle (1951 [1963]); Hadas (1952) 183.
57 W. den Boer (1953).
58 Some of Steidle’s comments on family are to be found at (1963) 69, 91. At 111 he plainly says that the family sections are often characterising the Caesars: ‘Familie und Vater, vielfach geradezu als Voraussetzung der Charakteristik des jeweiligen Kaisers gestaltet.’
59 G. D’Anna (1954); W.K. Smith (1956) 73.
60 M. Grant (1954) 119.
even ideology. Cizek’s method of counting off vices and virtues to assess Suetonius’ opinions has been thought superficial.\textsuperscript{61} Certainly the statistical approach appears to be flawed, in no small part because it takes no account of the introductory sections, and does not assess the general air of an individual \textit{Life}, but that does not nullify the general idea of Cizek’s book, that Suetonius has opinions and that they can be read from the structure of his work. However, as recently as 1980, Ektor could still object that Suetonius was an impassive and objective writer, who had no interest in the emotions of his readers, and made no attempt at literature or art.\textsuperscript{62}

These charges of objectivity, and Wallace-Hadrill’s claim that Suetonius has ‘no persuasion,’ are claims I will show cannot be supported.\textsuperscript{63} With a view to rehabilitation, Richard Lounsbury contributed an essay which tried to correct the view of Suetonius as a mere compiler, by a close study of some notable passages in the \textit{Lives}, bringing out the more rhetorical elements of Suetonius’ composition.\textsuperscript{64} The rhetorical nature of Suetonius’ work was further defended by R.G. Lewis, who argued for rhetorical antecedents to Suetonius in 1991, by Tamsyn Barton in 1994, and, in 2008, by Tristan Power’s \textit{Suetonius: The Hidden Persuader}, which argued that Suetonius was not only deliberate but also sophisticated in his use of literary and rhetorical devices.\textsuperscript{65} In this vein, building on the theses of Steidle, Lewis, Lounsbury, Barton, and Power, I will argue that Suetonius was indeed influenced by rhetoric and uses rhetorical devices in the course of persuading his readers of a predetermined portrait.

That predetermined portrait is also prejudged. Suetonius is rarely interested in asking why the subject behaved in a certain way, but that is not to say he does not have an opinion on his subjects. His choice of virtues and vices, the order in which they appear, and what actions count as virtuous or vicious, contribute to this judgment and determine whether each Caesar is good or bad.\textsuperscript{66} Suetonius’ list of the qualities of a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} For example D. Knecht (1979) 319.
\item \textsuperscript{62} E. Cizek (1961) (1977); P. Sage (1979a) (1979b); J.-M. Croisille (1969-70); contra Cizek, in particular, J. Ektor (1980).
\item \textsuperscript{63} Wallace-Hadrill (1995) 19.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Lounsbury (1987); see also Lounsbury (1991).
\item \textsuperscript{66} Keith Bradley (1998) 13 thought that Suetonius’ arrangement of material was one of the aspects that marked the author’s ‘independence of mind,’ but later in the same introduction he expressed the judgment that the opinion came from the rubrics, rather than the rubrics from the author’s opinions: ‘his opinions are the independent result of the way the deeds and characters of his biographical subjects are presented through the topical framework that is such a special feature of the collection as a whole.’ Bradley (1998)
\end{itemize}
good (or, conversely, bad) ruler is comparable with the qualities praised in Augustus’ *Res Gestae* and Pliny’s *Panegyric*. In the formulation of Christopher Gill, Suetonius is coming to his subjects from a ‘character viewpoint,’ judging them as good or bad, rather than trying to understand them (which would be a ‘personality viewpoint’). However, a character viewpoint should be associated with a sense of moral agency, and in Suetonius, as we will see in Chapter Five, almost every action is attributed to character rather than choice.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the parts of the *Lives* which concern ancestry, to discover what their role is in the *Lives*, and what is Suetonius’ method for achieving his purpose through the ancestors. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill recognised that Suetonius was interested to pinpoint the ‘precise degree of nobility’ in the *De Vita Caesarum*, and this is an important role of the ancestry sections, which deserves further exploration.

Nobility is not the only contribution ancestry can make to the *Life*. It appears Suetonius uses ancestry for two purposes—to demonstrate status, and for characterisation. There is often some overlap between these two roles of ancestry, with the result that one anecdote might perform both tasks at once.

The first purpose of the family trees in the *Lives* is to demonstrate the social status of the Caesars, so I look to other Roman sources for comparable usage of ancestors as indicators of social status. In Chapter One, I use ancient texts such as Cicero, Polybius, and some of the extant *laudationes* to demonstrate the role of ancestors in life and politics in the Republic. Harriet Flower argues that ancestors, specifically as they were represented by masks (*imagines*), were important and meaningful status markers amongst the nobility of the Republic and early Principate. Flower noted the important role of the *imagines* in everyday life as well as at public ceremonies.

16. I would prefer to see the rubrics as the deliberate expression of an opinion already formulated from the sources.
71 H.I. Flower (1996). Work on the ancestor masks has often concerned the artistic aspects of ancestral portraiture, and the relationship of ancestor masks with death masks, such as that of A.N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta (1932); D. Jackson (1987); G.M.A. Richter (1955).
I also draw on Gary Farney’s *Aristocratic Family Identity in the Roman Republic* to explain the origins of many elements of Suetonius’ family trees. Farney has established that the practice of family advertisement in Rome was entrenched long before Augustus and the Julio-Claudians. Advertisement of ‘family’ character traits presumes a Roman belief in the inheritance of character traits from one’s parents, but Farney does not quite say as much in his study of family identity. I discuss some of the parallels between the family trees we find in Suetonius and direct applications of ancestry in Roman life such as funeral orations, representation on coinage, and the proliferation of legendary genealogies. The ancestors are shown to contribute to legal, financial, and social status, and it is especially in social status that we are interested. I collect the various markers of status that might be indicated by ancestors, such as membership of the nobility and the patriciate. Non-Roman *origo* is also a signpost of social status. In Chapter One, I also look to Suetonius’ peers and predecessors in biography, Cornelius Nepos, Tacitus, and Plutarch, to show that ancestors were a standard part of a Roman biography, and that Suetonius’ audience would be quite prepared for him to adduce ancestors as markers of his subjects’ social position.

In Chapter Two, I apply the lessons learnt in Chapter One to a close examination of Suetonius’ use of ancestry as status markers. I ask why Suetonius uses the ancestors more comprehensively and consistently than his predecessors and peers. I discuss the relative roles of paternal and maternal ancestry, the significance of legendary ancestries, and I wonder why the family tree appears even when it is uncertain. At the end of the chapter, I identify the different approaches to the family trees of noble and non-noble Caesars, and show that Suetonius is much more careful to emphasise the respectability of those Caesars whose family background is less than perfect, because their honour must be unimpeachable, no matter what their character. The demonstration of social status is shown to be one of the two purposes of the ancestry rubric in Suetonius.

In Chapter Three, ‘Characterisation via Lineage,’ I look beyond the role of the ancestors as status markers to the use Suetonius makes of them as bearers of character traits. This is the central section of the thesis. I begin by asking whether Suetonius’ antecedents were not just biography but also the rhetorical genre of epideictic oratory, of which Cicero was a famous proponent, and I find that some of the features of

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73 Below, 18-20.
Suetonius’ ancestry sections are clearly parallel to, and contain stock elements of, praise and blame oratory. In fact, the comparison of subject with his ancestor, whether to his credit or his discredit, is a key prescription of the rhetorical manuals. On the basis of these similarities between Suetonius and the orators, I ask whether it is not fair to call Suetonius rhetorical and to find him shaping his characterisation with rhetorical devices, just as Cicero emphasised and downplayed certain aspects of his clients’ characters to suit his purpose.

It is likely that we would have a better understanding of the role of the ancestors in Suetonian biography if we had the opening section of the *Julius*. That section almost certainly described the background of the Iulii, and perhaps the author there explained his intentions, or at least his plan. Given that we have not that tantalising text, I look to *Nero* 1.2 for a programmatic statement on the role of the ancestors, and then more broadly across the *Lives* to see how the biographer’s practice matches his plan.

For each family tree, I give some historical background on the ancestors Suetonius uses in his *Lives*, to compare the picture Suetonius draws of the families with what we know of them from other sources, where possible, and determine how much liberty Suetonius has taken with these historical figures. By identifying the parallels between episodes in the *Lives* and the stories Suetonius tells about the ancestors, I demonstrate that the biographer selects anecdotes from his subjects’ ancestries specifically to create either foils or paradigms for his subject, according to the material available to him.

Many of the parallels between the ancestors and their descendants have been acknowledged in commentaries as relevant, particularly in notes on *Tiberius* and *Nero*. My contribution will be to demonstrate that the method of characterisation via lineage is in fact found across the board in Suetonius’ *De Vita Caesarum* and that it allows the biographer to begin his characterisation from the very beginning of the *Life*. I will demonstrate that the parallels between the ancestors and the Caesars are one of the subtle ways in which Suetonius leads his readers around to his own opinion. The

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75 From authorities such as Broughton’s *Magistrates of the Roman Republic* and *Der neue Pauly (DNP)*.
Tiberius has an ancestry section that diverges from the usual pattern in at least five ways, and this is the subject of Chapter Four. In that Chapter, I propose to account for the differences between the Tiberius and the family trees of other Lives by some noticeable differences between Tiberius’ character traits and those of the other Caesars. The ancestry of Tiberius demonstrates that the family tree was not just compiled from sources, but was in fact built to suit the character traits of Tiberius. At the end of Chapter Four, I outline the general patterns that appear out of these studies: virtue degenerates, vices are inherited, and noble families tend to degenerate over time.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I enquire as to the mechanism of the resemblance between ancestors and descendants: is it nature or nurture? A modern ‘nature’ view would find all the sources of character traits in genes, and so all the traits of our Caesars (for example, saeuitia, cupiditas, lenitas) would be present at birth, and therefore probably inherited from parents. A ‘nurture’ view would see those same traits not inherited but formed in response to external influences, such as teachers and parents, and possibly changing over their lifetimes. A mixture of nature and nurture might be possible, and is in fact the view of modern psychology. Looking for nature and nurture in Suetonius, I first look to the period of Suetonius’ sources, in the late-republican era through to the Flavian era, with a view to finding out the prevailing view of nature/nurture in those periods.

There appear to be different attitudes to nature and nurture in different periods: authors of the Ciceronian era express different ideas on inherited merit from Flavian authors, which are different again from the view we find in Suetonius. Since nature/nurture views have been known to change with social changes in the modern period, I argue that the nature/nurture model Suetonius uses might reflect society, and the difference between Suetonius’ model and those of the Ciceronian and Flavian periods might be explained by changes in socio-political structures over that period.

This close reading of the ancestry sections will prove that Suetonius is peddling a particular impression of each Caesar from the very beginning, and that he is more sophisticated than his predecessors in biography in his use of ancestry as a rhetorical tool. This research will recontextualise the role of ancestry as devices of Suetonian characterisation, and reveal the rhetoric in his presentation of historical material.