Ancestry & Suetonius’ *De Vita Caesarum*

Phoebe Eliza Garrett, BA(Hons)
Doctor of Philosophy (Classics)
The University of Newcastle
March, 2013
Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library**, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

**Unless an Embargo has been approved for a determined period.

Signed…………………………………………………………… Dated……………………………………

ii
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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editions and Abbreviations</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stemmata</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Ancestors as Status Markers</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Status in Suetonius</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Characterisation via Lineage</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: The Trouble with Tiberius</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Nature and Nurture</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philemon Holland’s Supplement to the <em>Julius Caesar</em></td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A
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*.

- *OCD* *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd Edition)
- *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  Iuii Drusi
X  Iulii Caesares

Stemmata are not always historically accurate; they are provided as guides to Suetonius’ text.
Figure I: The Domitii Ahenobarbi

L. Domitius
  ┌───────┐
  │       │
  │ L. Domitius │
  │       │
  │ Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. 192 BCE) │
  │       │
  │ Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. suff. 162 BCE) └───────┘
        ┌───────────┐
        │           │
        │ Cn. Domitius │ L. Domitius
        │ Ahenobarbus (cos. 122 BCE) │ Ahenobarbus (?)
        │           │
        └───────────┘
            ┌───────────────┐
            │               │
            │ Cn. Domitius │ L. Domitius
            │ Ahenobarbus │ Ahenobarbus (cos. 96 BCE)
            │               │ (cos. 94 BCE)
            └───────────────┘
                ┌───────────┐
                │           │
                │ Cn. Domitius │ Cn. Domitius
                │ Ahenobarbus │ Ahenobarbus (d. 82 BCE)
                │           │
                └───────────┘
                    ┌───────────┐
                    │           │
                    │ L. Domitius │ L. Domitius
                    │ Ahenobarbus │ Ahenobarbus (cos. 54 BCE)
                    │           │
                    └───────────┘
                        ┌───────────┐
                        │           │
                        │ Cn. Domitius │ Cn. Domitius
                        │ Ahenobarbus │ Ahenobarbus (cos. 32 BCE)
                        │           │
                        └───────────┘
                            ┌───────────┐
                            │           │
                            │ Antonia Maior │ L. Domitius
                            │           │ Ahenobarbus
                            │           │ (cos. 16 BCE)
                            └───────────┘
                                ┌───────────┐
                                │           │
                                │ Domitia │ Domitia Lepida
                                │           │
                                └───────────┘
                                    ┌───────────┐
                                    │           │
                                    │ Cn. Domitius │ Cn. Domitius
                                    │ Ahenobarbus │ Ahenobarbus (cos. 32 CE)
                                    │           │
                                    └───────────┘
                                        ┌───────────┐
                                        │           │
                                        │ Agrippina Minor │ L. Domitius
                                        │           │ Ahenobarbus
                                        │           │ (cos. 16 BCE)
                                        └───────────┘
                                            ┌───────────┐
                                            │           │
                                            │ L. Domitius │ Nero
                                            │           │
                                            └───────────┘
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 \textit{eques} \quad \text{\textbar\textbar}\quad \text{Mother}

M. Saluius Otho Praetor

L. Saluius Otho

Q. Terentius Culleo \quad \text{Albia}

L. Saluius Otho Titianus \quad M. Saluius \textbf{Otho} \quad \text{Saluia}

Figure VI: The Vitellii

P. (or A.) Vitellius

A. Vitellius \quad Q. Vitellius \quad P. Vitellius \quad L. Vitellius \quad \text{\textbar\textbar\textbar}\quad \text{Sestilia (or Sextilia)}

\text{\textbar\textbar\textbar}\quad \text{\textbar\textbar\textbar}

A. Vitellius \quad L. Vitellius
Figure VII: The early Claudii
Based on Lindsay (1995) 58.

Appius Claudius (Clausus)

cos. 495 BCE

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.

```
Ap. Claudius Caecus
cos. 307, 296 BCE

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ti. Claudius Nero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ti. Claudius Nero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C. Claudius Nero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cos. 207 BCE               | cos. 202 BCE

Ap. Claudius Nero

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ti. Claudius Nero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ti. Claudius Nero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ti. Claudius Nero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

leg. 67 BCE

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ti. Claudius Nero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

pr. 43 BCE

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liuia Drusilla</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tiberius

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

[Liuus] Drusus
mag. eq. 324 BCE

M. Liuus Denter
cos. 302 BCE

M. Liuus Drusus
pr. c. 282 BCE

M. Liuus Salinator
xvir sacr. 216 BCE

M. Liuus Salinator
cos. 219, 207
cens. 204

M. Liuus Æemilianus

C. Liuus Drusus
cos. 147 BCE

M. Liuus Drusus
cos. 112 BCE
tr. pl. 122 BCE

M. Liuus Drusus Claudianus

Mam. Lepidus Liuianus
M. Liuus Drusus
cos. 77
tr. pl. 91

Liuia Drusilla
Figure X: The Iulii Caesares

L. (Iulius) Caesar
trib. mil. c. 250 BCE

Sex. Iulius Caesar
pr. sic. 208 BCE

L. Iulius Caesar
pr. urb. 166 BCE

C. Iulius Caesar
pr. 93 BCE
procos. 91 BCE

C. Iulius Caesar
pr. 93 BCE

C. Iulius Caesar
cos. 59 BCE
Dictator

C. Octavius

C. Octavius

C. Octavius

L. Aurelius Cotta
cos. 119 BCE

Q. Marcius Rex
pr. 144 BCE

L. Aurelia

C. Iulius Caesar

Iulia

Iulia

Marcia

Aurelia

Iulia

Iulia

Atia

Atia

Octavia Minor

Augustus
Suetonius’ *Lives of the Caesars* are distinctive for their pervasive rubric system. Every *Life* follows, more or less, the same structure: the first section includes ancestry; the circumstances of birth, often including the omens surrounding the birth; and the events and honours of youth up to accession. This section is roughly chronological, and is shorter or longer depending on how long the subject was actually in power. The *Julius*, for instance, is almost completely the story of his life ‘up to accession,’ since his assassination followed fairly soon afterwards;¹ Nero, on the other hand, succeeded Claudius at quite a young age, and so more of that *Life* concerns his actual reign.² The second section, usually the main part of the *Life*, is a catalogue of vices and virtues, demonstrated by anecdotes, but usually not in chronological order. With the third section, the *Life* returns to chronological narrative, recounting the omens of approaching death, the circumstances of death, and the funeral arrangements and deification (or lack thereof).

In the main section of the *Life*, aspects of the reign are listed one by one, often marked by an introductory heading word, that is a rubric, before an anecdote demonstrating each characteristic. The rubrics do not all appear in every *Life* or in the same order, but there is a systematic progression through the list that is common to most of the *Lives*, including topics such as sexual conduct, interpersonal relationships, and money management, each demonstrating a character trait.³ The common elements across the *Lives* create an implicit comparison between Caesars, and variation in the placement and choice of rubrics allows the biographer to shape his material and direct his reader to a particular judgment with the appearance of impartiality. The rubric system tends to frustrate those looking for chronology, but the lack of chronology would not have concerned Suetonius’ contemporaries. The rubric system is also an essential part of Suetonius’ method of building a character. Each rubric adds a character trait to the portrait, and by a calculated accumulation of rubrics, a complete character

1 G.B. Townend (1967) 82.
2 The *Lives* of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius are exceptional, as they are really only concerned with the events of their short reigns, and not much of their lives before accession.
3 Only the *Claudius* and *Otho* do not proceed by virtue and 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).

---

4 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.

5 D. Sansone (1986).


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

---

3 The proem to Julius probably indicated the general aims of the series. See below, 14, and Appendix.
9 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.
10 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.\(^1\) Tamsyn Barton, exceptionally, argued for the rhetorical nature
of these introductory sections.\(^2\) 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.\(^3\) The crucial dates of his life are relatively
well rehearsed.\(^4\) 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,
Suetonius, 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*

---

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).
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 Septicus’ by SHA *Hadr.* 11.3.
was probably the latest addition, published in the 120s, most likely after Tacitus’ *Annals* and Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*.  

Suettionius’ *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 Suettionius’ genre. Jerome named Santra, Nepos, Varro, and Hyginus as Suettionius’ predecessors in biography, but only Nepos’ efforts survive in more than fragmentary form. Nepos was also, like Suettionius, 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 Suettionius’ *De Vita Caesarum*. Between Nepos and Suettionius, 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 Suettionius’ biographies. As I will argue in Chapter Three, Suettionius’ *De

---

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 Suettionius’ 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 Suettionius appears to be correcting Tacitus, proposed by J. Beaujeu (1960). Plutarch’s death around 120 means Suettionius’ 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.


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.\textsuperscript{29} 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.\textsuperscript{30}

‘Suetonius,’ it is said, ‘has never lacked readers.’\textsuperscript{31} In the later Roman period, he was widely read, and imitated by, amongst others, Marius Maximus\textsuperscript{32} and the author(s) of the Scriptores Historiae Augustae,\textsuperscript{33} and later, in the post-Roman period, Einhard, in his ninth-century Life of Charlemagne.\textsuperscript{34} After a precarious passage through the Middle Ages,\textsuperscript{35} between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries some two hundred editions of De Vita Caesarum were produced, a testament to its popularity.\textsuperscript{36} 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.\textsuperscript{37}

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.\textsuperscript{38}

Baldwin’s work, as Bradley commented, deals with the ‘traditional problems of Suetonian scholarship.’\textsuperscript{39} He begins with chapters on the life and career of Suetonius, covering the dates of Suetonius’ birth (which he places in 61/2 CE),\textsuperscript{40} publication of the Caesars (by 117),\textsuperscript{41} and his dismissal from court (in 122).\textsuperscript{42} In ‘Suetonius and the

\textsuperscript{29} Of Flavian date, according to C.P. Jones (1971) 27.
\textsuperscript{30} 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).
\textsuperscript{32} Townend (1967) 96-7; Syme (1968) 496.
\textsuperscript{33} D. Magie (1921) xv-xvii; H.W. Bird (1971).
\textsuperscript{34} Townend (1967) 98-106.
\textsuperscript{35} A story told by S.J. Tibbetts (1983).
\textsuperscript{36} Lounsbury (1987) 161.
\textsuperscript{37} J. Geel (1828); Reifferscheid (1860); G. Becker (1862); Shuckburgh (1896).
\textsuperscript{38} Wallace-Hadrill (1983); B. Baldwin (1983).
\textsuperscript{39} Bradley (1985b) 255.
\textsuperscript{40} Baldwin (1983) 27.
\textsuperscript{41} Baldwin (1983) 51.
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 \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{Nero} by B.H. Warmington and Keith Bradley, a commentary on the \textit{Augustus} by Carter, and a partial commentary on \textit{Tiberius} by Mary

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Baldwin (1983) 45.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Baldwin (1983) 526-46.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Wallace-Hadrill (1983 [1995]). Reprinted as \textit{Suetonius} in 1995.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Wallace-Hadrill (1995) 108.
\item \textsuperscript{46} J. Gascou (1984).
\item \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).
\end{itemize}
Du Four. Amidst 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

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{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{61} For example D. Knecht (1979) 319.
\textsuperscript{64} Lounsbury (1987); see also Lounsbury (1991).
\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{flushleft}
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

---

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

---

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, saevitia, 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.
I Ancestors as Status Markers

At the beginning of the *Vitellius*, one of the shorter *Lives* in Suetonius’ series, occurs a long discussion of the possible origins of the Vitellii:

If the origin of the Vitellii different and widely varying accounts are given, some saying that the family was ancient and noble, others that it was new and obscure, if not of mean extraction. I should believe that these came respectively from the flatterers and detractors of the emperor, were it not for a difference of opinion about the standing of the family at a considerably earlier date. We have a book of Quintus Elogius addressed to Quintus Vitellius, quaestor of the Deified Augustus, in which it is written that the Vitellii were sprung from Faunus, king of the Aborigines, and Vitellia, who was worshipped as a goddess in many places; and that they ruled in all Latium. That the surviving members of the family moved from the Sabine district to Rome and were enrolled among the patricians. That traces of this stock endured long afterwards in the Vitellian Road, running from the Janiculum all the way to the sea, as well as in a colony of the same name, which in ancient days the family had asked the privilege of defending against the Aequicoli with troops raised from their own line. That when afterwards a force was sent into Apulia at the time of the Samnite war, some of the Vitellii settled at Nuceria, and that after a long time their descendants returned to the city and resumed their place in the senatorial order.

On the other hand several have written that the founder of the family was a freedman, while Cassius Severus and others as well say further that he was a cobbler, and that his son, after making a considerable fortune from the sale of confiscated estates and the profession of informer, fathered a child by a common woman, the daughter of one Antiochus who kept a bakery, and this son became a Roman knight. But this difference of opinion may be left unsettled.  

---

Suetonius does not promise definitive answers about the Vitellii—quite the contrary. In the very opening sentence, he astutely acknowledges the problems with the evidence, and in the end refuses to decide the matter: *sed quod discrepat, sit in medio*. This uncharacteristic shrug of the shoulders is not a strong opening to a *Life*, giving no answer to the question of whether the Vitellii were very important or very unimportant. We know the Vitellii were not an old republican family, but nothing more until two generations from Vitellius. In no other *Life* has Suetonius had so little foundation for a family tree, yet the rubric remains. Such an equivocal statement is perhaps a curious choice for an opening. In fact, this opening, despite the ambiguity of the family history, is very revealing of the importance of the family tree to a Suetonian *Life*. The topic of the Vitellii receives extended treatment even though it proves little about Vitellius’ pedigree.

This intriguing opening prompts the reader to wonder what Suetonius sees as the role of this ancestry section. Is it very important that the Caesars all be descended from nobility? Does a noble ancestry recommend the character of a Caesar? Is it the ancestry itself that is important, and would it be preferable that all the Caesars were in some way related to Augustus and Julius, if not to each other? Or is the ancestry a vehicle for characterisation, and does this indecisive introduction reflect some indecision about the character of Vitellius?

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill postulated that Suetonius was interested in the ‘precise degree of nobility’ of his Caesars, and indeed he was, but can nobility or non-nobility account for this interesting family tree of Vitellius? In this chapter I will provide the historical context for Suetonius’ interest in status, by adducing parallels and contradictions in other texts from the late Republic to the early second century. I will lay out the kinds of status that could be established by lineage, and in particular the many ways in which ancestry contributed to social status. By so doing, I will explore why Suetonius was interested in pedigree so long after the fall of the Republic, and I will show that Suetonius’ audience was quite accustomed to the use of ancestry for status (in life as in literature) and would expect to find it in biography. In the following chapter, I will investigate the importance of status to Suetonius and the role ancestors play in his demonstration of his subjects’ status.

---

78 Vit. 2.1.
Unfortunately we do not have reams of biographies preceding Suetonius—certainly not the desiderata of Plutarch’s *Lives of the Caesars* or even the whole of Cornelius Nepos’ *De Viris Illustribus*—by which to judge the novelty of Suetonius’ approach. A few examples, however, will show that a biographer of a Roman statesman would not fail to mention the family’s position, usually at the very beginning of a *Life*.

In the first century BCE, Cornelius Nepos opens the *Life of Atticus* by stating the equestrian rank of Atticus’ paternal ancestors and their long establishment at Rome, in the same breath as the name of the subject:

Titus Pomponius Atticus, descended from the most ancient Roman stock, never abandoned the equestrian rank which he had inherited from his ancestors.79

His lineage is not fancy—Atticus would not have claimed a legendary genealogy of the kind he wrote for others80—it is, however, established and well-heeled. This opening sentence lays out the legal, financial, and social status of the family.

Nicolaus of Damascus indicates the same information about his subject’s position in society by supplying the name and rank of Augustus’ father in his *Life of Augustus*:

His father was Gaius Octavius, a Senator. His ancestors were much noted for their wealth and kindness, and they left their money to him, now an orphan. The men put in charge of his affairs plundered his estate, but he refrained from exacting justice from them and lived on what was left from their depredations.81

The father’s rank is important. The ancestors are wealthy and virtuous, and their generosity lays the foundations for an early comment about Augustus’ clemency.

So, too, second-century biography maintains the rubric. Suetonius’ peers, Tacitus and Plutarch, also see fit to situate their Romans in a very specific circle, a task swiftly accomplished with a simple reference to lineage.

In the Agricola, a laudatory biography written in the last years of the first century, Tacitus does not deem it below his dignity to prove in close detail the equestrian and senatorial connections of his subject’s father and grandfathers, as well as their links with the house of the Caesars. In fact, as it will confirm his own status, it suits him to provide his father-in-law with as elevated an ancestry as possible.

Gnaeus Julius Agricola was a scion of the ancient and illustrious Roman colony of Forum Julii: each of his grandfathers was ‘Procurator of Caesar,’ an office which involves the superior order of knighthood [quae equestris nobilitas est]. His father, Julius Graecinus, reached the rank of Senator and was noted for his interest in rhetoric and philosophy; the same virtues earned for him the hatred of Gaius Caesar (Caligula); in fact, he received orders to accuse Marcus Silanus, and, refusing, was put to death. His mother was Julia Procilla, a woman of rare virtue.

The important features of this introduction are the names and statuses of Agricola’s parents, demonstrated in both cases by the positions of his two grandfathers. They are not noble, but they are respectable enough, and the phrase *equestris nobilitas est* distracts from the lack of senatorial nobility, which even the father cannot claim. We might note that a provincial origin is shown in the best possible light. Emphasising the respectability of the family, Tacitus gives his Agricola the requisite three names, and virtuous parents into the bargain. As with Nepos, the maternal side is almost as significant as the paternal. It is apparently important that both parents be of good status and upright citizens, but they are not characters in their own right as, we shall see, are so many of the ancestors in Suetonius.

Plutarch, in the Parallel Lives, also situates his Roman heroes in their social context by means of family, but never in as much detail as Suetonius. The Life of Fabius Maximus, for instance, is prefaced with the story of his divine descent from Hercules via a family that ‘produced many great men.’ Crassus is the son of a censor and triumphator. In the Life of Antonius both his father and mother are named and their

---

82 R.M. Ogilvie & I. Richmond (1967) 11. It is usually taken to have been published in 98 CE. Birley (2009) 48 dates it to late 97-early 98.
83 Tacitus’ own connections were quite similar to those he gives Agricola here—he probably the equestrian procurator of Gallia Belgica, mentioned by Plin. HN 7.76.
characters described; his father, though of a good lineage, was not especially distinguished himself, while his mother was of both good lineage and good morals. Coriolanus was descended from a great house, the notable exploits of which, we learn, include censorships; the Life of Brutus treats both his mother’s and father’s families at length, their deeds as important as their nobility. Camillus was born of an undistinguished family and this, too, is duly noted. Even the parents of the humbly born Cicero and Marius merit mention, if only to demonstrate their very obscurity. Marius’ parents are named, and not much else; Cicero’s agnate family is of some mystery and his cognomen is a topic of interest, but his mother is certainly well-born.  

Of Plutarch’s accounts of the Caesars, unfortunately (as with Suetonius) we have not the beginning of the Julius Caesar, which was paired with the Alexander as part of the Parallel Lives. However, the Galba and Otho, the extant Caesars of Plutarch’s earlier series of Lives from Augustus to Vitellius, show that lineage is still a concern. Plutarch’s Galba and Otho are limited to their lives as rulers, and as such more restricted than Suetonius’ when it comes to birth and life before their reigns. A list of famous relatives immediately precedes a summary of Galba’s character; Otho’s family is also relevant but arises at Otho’s first appearance in the Galba rather than at the beginning of the Otho. Otho’s ancestry, appearing as it does in medias res, is not just a generic requirement for the beginning of a Life, then, but part of the required information about a new, major character in the narrative.

None of these biographers—Plutarch, Tacitus, Nicolaus, and Nepos—uses ancestry in as much detail as Suetonius, but ancestry appears in order to establish three kinds of status. One might be classified by a legal status, defining political rights (described with terms such as ingenuus, libert(in)us, and servus); membership of a political class, based on property (eques, senator); or, within the propertied classes, the ancient classification of patrician or plebeian, signifying descent from the powerful families of early Rome or their clients; and finally noble or unknown (nobilis, nouus), a social status based on convention rather than constitution. Where these identifying

85 Plut. Fab. 1.2: πολλούς δὲ <καὶ> μεγάλους τῆς οἰκίας ἐξενεγκαµένης ἄνδρας Trans. B. Perrin (1916); Plut. Crass. 1.1; Ant. 1.1-3; Cor. 1.1; Cam. 2.1; Brut. 1-2.1; Mar. 3; Cic. 1.1-2.
86 D. Little & C. Elhrhardt (1994) 42.
87 Plut. Galb. 3.
descriptors appear in republican literature and later, they signal to the reader social position, as well as access to political power, based on lineage.

1. Legal Status
That legal status begins in parentage is obvious enough. Servile/freed/freeborn (seruus/libertus/ingenuus) status is of consequence in matters of rights and privileges, and it also has weighty implications for social status.\(^9\) Freedom is almost completely dependent on parentage, as is Roman citizenship. The freed and their descendants were socially inferior to the free-born, although the legal status of slaves’ descendants fluctuated in the first century of the Principate.\(^9\) Plenty of the upper class must have had servile ancestry. For example, Pliny writes of a Larcius Macedo, a man of praetorian rank, whose father had been a slave. The story interests Pliny because Macedo was so cruel to his slaves that they killed him.\(^9\) For a member of the upper classes, however, it can be assumed on the basis of other information, such as senatorial ancestors or well-known parents, that legal status is not in question. Only when it can reasonably be questioned is it raised in judgment.

2. Financial Status
Financial status, less important than legal status, might also be demonstrated by the mention of parentage. A member of a senatorial or equestrian family—the kind of family Suetonius is careful to give Augustus, Otho, and Vitellius\(^9\)—is differentiated from those below him by possession of property. Suetonius’ audience can be fairly confident that these men, although from newer families, were at least citizens, and had at least a minimum amount of money. Legal and financial status is established with just an adjective. In the case of Vitellius, after the long account of the available pedigrees, the very next section establishes that, whatever the more distant origins of the family, Vitellius’ father and grandfather were respectable and wealthy: his grandfather was an eques and his father and all his uncles held senatorial offices under the Julio-

---

\(^9\) A.M. Duff (1958). Legal restrictions on sons of freedmen (libertini) were already obsolescent in the late Republic, according to Treggiari (1969) 236, but such a background would still affect social status. On the social status of freedmen, see now H. Mouritsen (2011) 66-119.
\(^9\) Aug. 2.2; 4.1; Oth. 1.1; Vit. 2.2.
Claudians. Therefore, they must have all held enough for the relevant census, and presumably Vitellius inherited a small fortune, too.

3. Social Status

The equestrian/senatorial class produced all twelve Caesars, so freedom, citizenship, and wealth may be presumed in Suetonius’ *De Vita Caesarum* in a way it could not be in his *De Viris Illustribus*. But in a class of men where everyone is of comparable legal and financial status, the biographer and audience become interested in the subtle differentiation between members of the ruling order. What differentiates Galba, for instance, from Otho?

3a. Low or High Birth

The principal division of social status amongst the higher orders is low or high birth, a qualitative measure of one’s ancestors. The labels ‘low born’ and ‘high born’ are outside the realms of legal and financial status—they are conventional, relative, informal categories. Alföldy can say of Roman culture that ‘humble origin was always regarded as a taint’ and, although humility of origin can be connected with new senators, where it boils down to a distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ money, it can just as easily be attached to senators of the highest rank, who married beneath themselves, or whose ancestors had unseemly professions. In the competitive arena of the late Republic, a common feature of invective was the imputation of low birth. In fact, the first-century BCE manual of rhetoric *Rhetorica ad Herennium* exhorts the use of low birth in criticism, but it does not imply that mean origins are themselves a fault—in fact, low birth might also be used in praise. Rather, the manual suggests that a man might be called a disgrace even to his low-born ancestors, just as he might be a disgrace to higher.

---

93 Vit. 2.2: *siue ille stirpis antiquae siue pudendis parentibus atque avis*. Grandfather, father, and uncles:
Vit. 2.2-2.5.
94 The men of *De Viris Illustribus* are of disparate statuses, e.g. Terence (a slave); Horace (son of a freedman); cf. Tibullus and Persius Flaccus, both knights.
96 Which professions were ‘unseemly’ will be elucidated below, 23-4.
‘Low birth’ is a stigma, indicated by references to ancestors in the vulgar trades, or with servile or foreign origins. For instance, amidst the dying embers of the Republic, Antonius is supposed to have used Octavian’s low birth against him, reported in Suetonius’ *Augustus* and in the *Philippics* of Cicero.\(^9\) Antonius allegedly claimed Octavian’s ancestors included a money-changer, a rope-maker, a perfumer, and a baker. These are classic ‘low’ professions, a category that includes any job involving manual labour or handling money. Although money was a prerequisite of the senatorial lifestyle, it would ideally be inherited. Even the nobility partook of entrepreneurial activity, but they did best not to flaunt it.\(^10\) In the landed class, an occupation that drew a daily wage was socially unacceptable, even amongst one’s ancestors, and new money was less respectable than old, inherited money.\(^11\) The stigma attached to money extended to any profession that involved handling money, including distributing bribes (*diuïsores*). Cicero himself tells us, in the *De Officiis*, exactly which occupations are derided. He follows, with some exceptions, Posidonius’ classification of *artes* into *uolgares*, *ludicrae*, *pueriles*, and *liberales*.\(^12\) Cicero’s *artes uolgares* encompass all manual labour, excluding some useful professions such as medicine and architecture, and *artes ludicrae* include everything that enables pleasure. Occupations that enable pleasure include anything concerning food, for example bakers, fishmongers, and butchers, not to mention the more obviously ‘pleasing’ professions, such as perfumers and dancers.\(^13\)

To take examples from Suetonius, Vespasian’s ancestors’ careers in the financial sector are no more fashionable than Vespasian’s own ventures in business.\(^14\) The allegation that Augustus’ ancestors were involved in the banking industry was bad enough, without dragging them down into manufacturing.\(^15\) We see in these taunts several elements that, to a Roman, bespeak the wrong kind of people: manual labour, particularly labour involved with producing luxuries (including comestibles);

---

99 Aug. 2.3; Cic. Phil. 3.15-17.
103 Cic. *Off.* 1.150: *Opificesque omnes in sordida arte versantur; nec enim quicquam ingenuum habere potest officina. Minimeque artes eae probandae, quae ministrae sunt uoluptatum: Cetarii, lanii, coqui, fartores, piscatores,*

*ut ait Terentius; adde huc, si placet, unguentarios, saltatores, totumque ludum talarium.*
104 Vesp. 1.2-3; cf. Vesp. 4.3.
105 Aug. 4.2.
occupations to do with handling money; a freedman in the line; origins in the provinces and then in an undesirable part of Italy. These claims are not Suetonius’, but Antonius’ derogations. Suetonius would in fact rescue the family from such affiliations, but he must address them, to acknowledge and correct what his readers might come across elsewhere. These ruminations about the occupations of previous Octauii concern status, just as similar comments in the Vitellius concern status. In both cases, the imputation of low connections probably originated in the uituperatio of the times, and is a symptom of the hostile political environment as much as anything. As far as Suetonius is concerned, the Octauii are rich, respectable, and until recently, outside the world of politics—much as Augustus described them in his memoirs.106

When examples of some of these professions appear in the De Vita Caesarum, such as Antonius’ claims that Octavian’s ancestors included purveyors of pleasure and handlers of money, this really betrays the rumours of low status or poverty that circulated about the Caesars, rather than an interest in specific occupations. Salaried occupations separate ‘new money’ from the more prestigious ‘old money.’ The repairer of shoes that appears in Vitellius is an extreme alternative to Vitellius’ far-fetched divine ancestry.107 Suetonius feels these rumours are worth reporting, if only to correct them. Social status is at the heart of his research into the origins and occupations of the Caesars, particularly when it is most dubious.

3b Nouus and Nobilis

For families of long-standing high status, however, the biographer must be more specific than ‘new’ money and ‘old’ money, and here he can divide the upper crust into nouus (new) and nobilis (noble).108 Amongst men of the senatorial order, a pool of high-born men of equivalent legal and financial status, there must have been an impetus to create further social distinction. The most important distinction in social status during the Republic was the holding of high office within the cursus honorum. Unlike the equestrian ordo, in the senatorial ordo the mere possession of the census was not

106 Aug. 2.3. On the fragmentary memoirs of Augustus, see C. Smith & A. Powell (2009).
107 Vit. 2.1.
108 Suetonius uses the denominations nobilis and nobilissimus, and imagines to stand for nobilitas, frequently in these beginning sections; nouus less frequently. Vit. 1.1; nobilis; Galb. 2; nobilissimus; Aug. 4.2 and Vesp. 1.1: imago to stand for nobilitas. Of these ancestry sections, nouus is used of a family only at Vit. 1.1, where it is paired with obscurus in opposition to uetus et nobilis.
qualification enough. A man must seek and win election to one of the magistracies to enter the Senate, and the higher the office the better. As well as enhancing his own social status, office-holding improved the status of a magistrate’s children: during the Republic and early Principate, descendants of magistrates could (by convention rather than law) display a wax mask (imago) of any ancestor who had held office at Rome, and Augustus introduced the latus clausus as an additional status marker to mark the sons of senators. The denomination nouus or nobilis is constitutionally unimportant, but socially and practically very important, and stems entirely from the candidate’s family background. Suetonius makes this distinction himself, when he asks whether Vitellius’ family was ‘ancient and noble (nobilis)’ or ‘new (nouus) and obscure, even sordidus’. In the Republic, nobility appeared to have a concrete effect on success in elections, and even after the visible success of a few noui (particularly Marius and Cicero), nobilitas was still valued and respected. Cicero speaks of consuls from the cradle, consuls designated at birth, and men heaped with honours while they slept. Keith Hopkins and Graham Burton questioned whether nobility was really as effective as authors such as Cicero claimed.

Despite the decline in electoral competition, pedigree was, in the early Principate, perhaps even more valuable than it had been in the last generation of the Republic. This is partly due to the value of a familial link with the domus Augusta, and partly to the rarity of old nobility after the civil wars. It was very important to Caligula, who preferred to come from incest between Augustus and Julia than from the ignobilis Agrippa. Really high nobility, though valuable in pursuit of offices and priesthods, was also a liability: it was a threat to the princeps. Nero felt the competition, and persecuted the high-born. Nobility remained a desideratum in a princeps even after the right to rule passed from the Julio-Claudians. Galba sought his

---

109 Vit. 1.1: partim ueterem et nobilem, partim uero nouam et obscurum atque etiam sordidam.
110 Cic. Agr. 2.100; Att. 4.8a.2; Verr. 2.5.180.
111 For a statistical approach to continuity of office-holding in Roman families in the late Republic, K. Hopkins & G. Burton (1983) 32ff. They argue that noble families did not actually hold as firm a grip on the consulship as the literary sources imply.
112 Syme (1958a) 570.
113 Calig. 23.1.
114 Nobility a threat to the princeps: Ner. 36.1, where Nero kills many nobles to avert a bad omen from himself, even more assiduously after the conspiracies of the Piso and Vinicius are uncovered. He was afraid of being unseated, particularly by another noble.
heir amongst the high nobility, if unsuccessfully;\textsuperscript{115} on the fall of Domitian, his successor Nerva was selected partly because he was ‘extremely noble.’\textsuperscript{116}

The near-extinction of the republican nobility and the rule of the Flavii in the last part of the first century surely changed the public perception of nobility, but the Younger Pliny confirms that, in his and Suetonius’ time, descent from the republican nobility was still thought worthy of special treatment. He lauds Trajan for his attention to those of the republican nobility who remained, but his praise is unwarranted: not only were the nobles rare amongst the consules ordinarii under Trajan, but Calpurnius Piso, one of the few really high-born remaining in this period, was in fact exiled and executed.\textsuperscript{117} Perhaps the danger to the high-born, in addition to the extinction of the great families, explains the decline in the use of imagines from the Julio-Claudian period onward.

Suetonius is still interested in nobility, although it appears to be less important in the later Lives than in the earlier ones. The families of Tiberius, Nero, and Galba have their nobility demonstrated by a list of consulships, ovations, and triumphs, although only in Galba is the family described plainly as nobilissimus. In the Augustus, the importance of nobility is badly hidden when Suetonius excuses Augustus’ father’s lack of a consulship.

A corollary of the rarity of genuine republican nobility, inherited on the agnate line, was an increase in the use of the maternal line for high status.\textsuperscript{118} Suetonius says Galba had a family tree in the palace—demonstrating that becoming princeps had not dulled pride in his nobility, or perhaps that this nobility validated his position—that linked him on one side to Pasiphaë and on the other to Jupiter.\textsuperscript{119} Such a stemma must be in addition to a group of imagines, if it included women.\textsuperscript{120} Galba’s family tree highlights the important transition from Republic to Principate, wherein the maternal line became much more valuable as a source of distinction. In Suetonius’ period, the maternal line was increasingly commemorated in nomenclature: Vespasian, for

\textsuperscript{115} Suet. Galb. 17.  
\textsuperscript{116} Cass. Dio 67.15.5; A. Garzetti (1974) 296.  
\textsuperscript{117} Plin. Pan. 69; Syme (1958a) 577-8.  
\textsuperscript{118} R.P. Saller (1984) 349, 355. See also A.J. Boyle (2003) 27. For the value of the maternal ancestry where it could trace distinction, see Tac. Hist. 1.14 (referring to Piso); also Apul. Met. 1.2 (somewhat later than Suetonius).  
\textsuperscript{119} Suet. Galb. 2.  
\textsuperscript{120} Flower (1996) 212.
instance, took a form of his mother’s nomen as his cognomen. A new trend for polyonomy allowed the advertisement of numerous connections by agnate, cognate, and collateral lines, not to mention adoption, in an amplified version of the advertisement of distant family connections by reviving obscure names, a vogue in the period after the Hannibalic war.\footnote{Wikander (1993) 80ff. The extreme example is Q. Sosius Priscus (cos. 169 CE) whose full nomenclature comprises no fewer than 38 names, built around 14 different nomina! B. Salway (1994) 132.} There, too, the impetus had been the declining influence of the aristocracy. Agnate ancestry remained primary, and so it appears to be in Suetonius, but the Lives of the Caesars from Galba onward show an increasing deployment of maternal ancestry in pursuit of status. Where the mother’s family would have been little solace in the Republic, Otho’s sorry family connections are rescued by two good female lines; even Vitellius was possibly descended from a minor goddess, whatever his more recent ancestors had to show for themselves. Galba’s connections on his mother’s side, and even on his stepmother’s side, are brought to bear on his position, bolstering the already high status of the Sulpicii.\footnote{Suet. Galb. 2, 3.4; Oth. 1.3; Vit. 3.1; Vesp. 1.3.}

\section*{3c Patricians and Plebeians}

A finer marker of distinction between the high-born—even between nobiles—is the designation plebeian or patrician.\footnote{J.-C. Richard (1986); also R.E. Mitchell (1986) 130-74. Suetonius uses patricius, e.g. Aug. 2.1, 5, Tib. 1.1 (bis), 2.4 (substantive); and plebeius, e.g. Tib. 1.1, 2.4, 3.1, 26.1, Ner. 56. It is interesting to note that both words are especially common in the beginning of Tiberius. The importance of this distinction there is discussed below, 50-3, 131.} In the regal period and early period of the Republic, patrician status was a closed nobility of birth rather than wealth.\footnote{P.A. Brunt (1978) 47; Alföldy (1988) 7. The early history of the patrician-plebeian distinction is not significant to my argument, but is discussed by Mitchell (1990).The important aspect is that the distinction was, from the outset, hereditary.} As the political distinction between the patricians and plebeians fell away, so too the social distinction became less marked, but it did not disappear. Even during the Principate, patrician status was still prestigious enough to buy special privileges for the young man seeking office.\footnote{Alföldy (1988) 121; see also Syme (1958a) 67.} This prestige is perhaps due in part to its rarity: most of the original, republican, patrician families were extinct or no longer represented in the Senate by the Flavian period.\footnote{C. Nicolet (1980) 30.} Those patricians were replaced from time to time with new

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{3c Patricians and Plebeians}
appointments, but newly patrician status did not carry the same weight (unless one could prove a transitio ad plebem).\textsuperscript{127}

Suetonius mentions plebeian or patrician status in relation to the noble families as a means to differentiate the very noble from each other. Plebeian status does not preclude nobility—the Domitii are very noble but plebeian until very late in the piece—but plebeian status creates a subtle difference between Nero’s paternal ancestors and his maternal ancestors and predecessors, the patrician Julians and Claudians.

The juxtaposition of patrician status and plebeian is best observed in the Tiberius. Tiberius’ two families, the Claudii and Liuii, are respectively patrician and plebeian; they are both very noble, but they are not in the same group.

*Patricius, nobilis* and *vetus* are terms Suetonius uses to describe families, in order to categorise the Caesars according to their social status. They are terms he inherits from the republican system, but he cannot be accused of anachronism. Only the newer Caesars, Otho and Vitellius, had fathers who were climbing the ranks after Actium, and in accordance with the usage of Tacitus and Pliny their consulships, being post-republican, do not earn them *nobilitas*.\textsuperscript{128} These families are designated neither *nouus* nor *nobilis*. Vespasian’s family, rather than being *nouus*, is *obscurus*. His ancestors were not senators at all, let alone in the republican period. *Obscurus* seems to be basically synonymous with *nouus*, as it is here glossed with *sine ullis imaginibus*.\textsuperscript{129} This is confirmed in Vitellius, where *nouus et obscurus* is opposed to *vetus et nobilis*.\textsuperscript{130}

### 3d Family Identity

Suetonius’ family trees differentiate families from each other on the levels of old and new money, new and noble, patrician and plebeian, and also on the individual level of *gens*. When he attributes particular characteristics and legends to those *gentes*, he is participating in and continuing the republican phenomenon of family identity. Just as senators accentuated the difference between themselves and the lower ranks by markers of their high social status, such as distinctive shoes and the narrow or broad purple

\begin{footnotes}
\item[127] Suetonius excuses the only recently patrician status of the Octauii with a previous transitio. *Aug.* 2.1.
\item[129] *Vesp.* 1.1.
\item[130] *Vit.* 1.1.
\end{footnotes}
border on their tunics, so they wished to mark the many levels of social status within that single order. In the competition between members of the relatively small and homogeneous nobility of the Republic, individual families sought to differentiate themselves from other families. Family identity, a ‘unique image every aristocratic clan projected to the Roman public,’ created a distinction within the social stratum. The immediate end of such distinction was success at elections. In an electoral system that filled more than fifty offices a year, and usually fielded many more candidates, family identity could differentiate men of different families at the ballot box. The great families seized opportunities to renew in the public eye the specific stories that differentiated their family from others of the same rank. A number of elements, such as specific ancestors of note, legendary or divine genealogy, or a particular ethnic identity, creates this distinction, which Farney calls family identity, promulgated by family advertisement. This is a particularly republican phenomenon, born out of a culture that privileged descendants of known quantities, but there are remnants of these family identities in later sources, including Suetonius.

According to Farney, the purpose of family identity was to ‘equate the individual with his family in order to make it easier for the public to recognize the individual.’ An individual from a well-known family who has never sought office and is unknown to the public comes to an election with a ready-made persona, because he is perceived to represent his family identity. As Denis Feeney has put it, ‘to a Roman a noble was … the temporary incarnation of the essence of his family.’ Family identity explains Suetonius’ decision to include more than the names and consulships of famous ancestors in the Lives.

**Ancestors as Status Markers in Society and Literature**

Let us now consider the evidence for the nobility’s advertisement of their own ancestors, with a view to putting Suetonius’ literary use of ancestors in its appropriate context as part of a long tradition of looking for social status in ancestors. With the

---

weakening of the position of the nobility in the second century BCE, the nobility sought a vehicle through which to stress their ancestry, and coins became a powerful and broadly disseminated medium of aristocratic values. The first private type (i.e. a coin that alludes to the moneyer, rather than just to Rome) was not only private but an ancestral image—an isolated issue in the 180s BCE by a Mamilius, portraying his supposed ancestor, Ulysses. By 170 BCE most coins had gained the name or symbol of the moneyer, but retained the head of Roma and other images of gods or goddesses or Roman themes. After this, private types became the dominant type. The ancestral type spiked in the 130s, after the *Lex Gabinia* implemented the secret ballot. The aristocracy had to work harder to ensure their election, and coins became a popular vehicle for self-advertisement through ancestors. Ancestral themes on coins were especially popular in the first century BCE. There was another jump in ancestral types on coins in the 60s-50s after Sulla’s constitutional changes were revoked. The spikes in the 130s and the 60s-50s coincided with periods when the traditional power of the aristocracy was under threat, and moneyers tried to reassert the dominance of the few families who had until this time held uncontested control of politics.

As a medium of self-advertisement, it was acceptable to adorn a coin with an ancestor’s portrait for more than a century before portraits of living figures appeared on coins. Coins commemorated famous achievements of ancestors, such as that of M. Sergius Silus, 116/15 BCE, which shows the moneyer’s grandfather who lost his right hand in battle and went on fighting with his left; and a coin of L. Manlius Torquatus, 113/12 BCE, which illustrates the victory of the first Torquatus, who earned the *cognomen* in single-handed victory over a Gaul. Family symbols provided a convenient shorthand for coins, such as the elephant representing the Metelli, which

---

137 Ö. Wikander (1993) 78.
138 M.H. Crawford (1974) 2.721. Public types, such as the head of Roma, gods and goddesses, and exclusively Roman themes such as the wolf and twins, had been the norm on all Roman coins until after the Punic wars.
139 Crawford (1974) 2.725.
142 Coins showed living people after Pharsalus: A. Alföldi (1956) 66.
144 Coin 295, Crawford (1974) 1.308.
came from an ancestor’s famous triumph over the Carthaginians. 

Advertisement of ancestors through coins confirms the value of ancestors as status markers.

Although low or high birth is qualitative, nobility (defined as descent from a senator) can be measured quantitatively: *imagines* were a numerable and tangible measure of the abstract notion of nobility. In fact, the connection between ancestor masks and nobility is so strong that Suetonius and other authors equate *imagines* with *nobilitas*.

*Imagines* were lifelike, wax masks made during the lifetime of a man who had been elected to office, at least at the level of aedile, first displayed at his own funeral. After his death his *imago*, along with all the other *imagines* of the family, was brought out at the man’s funeral. Polybius tells us that the masks were worn (although Pliny says they were carried) by men of similar stature to the ancestor, who mimicked the ancestor’s carriage and character, to create the impression that all the great members of the family had come together for the funeral procession. Polybius’ description of an aristocratic Roman funeral conjures a vivid picture of the imposing presence of *imagines maiorum*, masks representing those ancestors whose achievements were proclaimed in the oration. A well-connected family could parade hundreds of masks at a funeral, all the relevant men from each side of the family (in the direct line in the republican period and including all *gentiles* in the period afterward) and all those gained through adoption into another family, where applicable. At the funeral of Drusus, son of Tiberius and thereby a Iulius by adoption, the funeral procession included the masks of his biological ancestors, the Claudii, and his adoptive family, the

---

146 I will not go into the various definitions of *nobilis*. The primary question is whether only the consulship or any office conferred nobility. The confusion is possibly caused by change in usage over time. D. Earl (1967) 13 suggests the net was wider at an earlier date and narrowed over time.
147 Ancient sources equate *imago* with *nobilitas*: Sall. *BJ* 85.29-30; Tac. *Ann.* 2.27.2; Sil. *Pun.* 17.12. Sen. *Ep.* 44.5 argues that masks do not make nobility (which supposes the opposite had been claimed). This connection (between *imago* and *nobilitas*) is so often made that it was once thought that any Roman ennobled by holding office bequeathed to his descendants a legal right to create and display his ancestor mask in public, a right called the *ius imaginum*. The concept of a *ius imaginum* as a legal entity can be safely discarded as a modern fiction: Flower (1996) 53; Zadoks- Josephus Jitta (1932) 104. Rather, the ubiquity of the ancestor mask amongst the office-holding class was based on convention.
149 Flower (1996) 91-106.
150 Plin. *HN* 35.6; see also V. Dasen (2010) 115.
151 Polyb. 6.53ff. Pliny the Elder (*HN* 35.153) describes the manufacture of wax masks by pouring wax into a plaster mould taken from a living person.
152 H.T. Rowell (1940) 136.
Iulii, but also masks of the legendary ancestors of the Iulii such as Aeneas, Romulus, and the Alban kings.\textsuperscript{153} The funeral of Junia, a member of a prominent republican family related to the Iunii and Seruillii, was punctuated by the masks of twenty great families, according to Tacitus, even without the conspicuously absent \textit{imagines} of the tyrannicides Brutus and Cassius.\textsuperscript{154} The sheer number of masks at a funeral, a numerable manifestation of \textit{nobilitas}, created an ostentatious display of status and power. A funeral in such a family as Junia’s could not avoid making a political statement.

While the right to display an \textit{imago} was not officially or legally conferred, it was within the power of the Senate to ban the use of an \textit{imago}, a central part of a \textit{damnatio memoriae}, as for instance in the case of Scribonius Libo Drusus,\textsuperscript{155} and as documented in the \textit{Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisoni Patre}.\textsuperscript{156} The significance of the \textit{imago} in a \textit{damnatio memoriae}—its interdiction a punishment transferred from the guilty party to his descendants—demonstrates that the \textit{imago} was a valued status marker, jealously guarded. By extension, we might say that the nobility that those \textit{imagines} represented was also a status marker, and reasonably important to a family tree.

For the nobility, ancestor masks were part of everyday life as well as of special occasions. Between funerals, the masks were kept in labelled, wooden cabinets in the family atrium, opened on feast days, where members of the family would pass them every day, and visitors to the house, including the influential and important, would not fail to notice their impressive presence.\textsuperscript{157} In the Flavian era, the Elder Pliny refers to an old-fashioned tradition of stemmata with lines between painted portraits (\textit{imagines pictae}), probably in addition to masks.\textsuperscript{158} Such prominent display of family connections must have been aimed at visitors to the home as well as members of the household.

\textsuperscript{153} Tac. \textit{Ann.} 4.9.2.
\textsuperscript{155} Tac. \textit{Ann.} 2.32. On this passage, see F.R.D. Goodyear (1981) 2.281-2. In addition to his \textit{imago}, the use of the \textit{cognomen} ‘Drusus,’ another symbol of his family’s ancestry, was also banned. On the \textit{damnatio memoriae}, see Flower (1998) and (2006) 115ff.
\textsuperscript{156} \textsl{SCPP} lines 80-2, in the text of M. Griffin (1997) 252; W. Eck, A. Caballos, & F. Fernández (1996) 195-7; Flower (1998); D.S. Potter & C. Damon (1999).
\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Stemmata uero lineis discurrebant ad imagines pictas}. Plin. \textit{HN} 35.6. Boëthius (1942) 230 interprets this to mean that the painted stemma with its portraits was in addition to the group of \textit{imagines}; Flower (1996) 40, 211 agrees these portraits are painted on a flat surface, distinct from wax masks. R. Winkes (1979) 481-4 thinks Pliny refers to the \textit{clipeatae imagines}, ancestor portraits painted on shields. I agree with Flower that there must have been painted portraits, in order to include women on the stemma.
In addition to the display of *imagines*, the Roman funeral described by Polybius also honoured the ancestors in the funeral oration. The native Roman genre of *laudatio* (or *laus* *funebris*), given after a man’s death to those present at his funeral, was the only common form of praise literature in republican Rome. A very old tradition, the *laudatio* was, according to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, first given for Brutus by Valerius Publicola, even before the Greeks took up the practice, and at first given only in honour of the most distinguished men. In time the honour was extended to women. Extant *laudationes* are almost exclusively imperial and given in honour of women, although it has been proposed that the *Agricola* of Tacitus is basically a *laudatio funebris*. The *Agricola* certainly has many of the same elements as a *laudatio*, and it may well have begun as one, but these similarities can be more satisfactorily explained by generic requirements common to both *laudatio funebris* and biography, not least of which is the important position of ancestry.

From Polybius we know that a standard ingredient of the *laudatio funebris* is an account of the more significant ancestors of the family, particularly office-holding forefathers, and their achievements. The oration, Polybius tells us, praised first the man recently deceased, and then went back to the most ancient of his ancestors and recounted the deeds of those whose *imagines* were present at the funeral. Just as in other kinds of rhetoric, praising the ancestors is a vital part of praising the man. Other examples of praise literature, the Caligulan *Laus Pisonis* and Augustan *Panegyricus Messallae*, demonstrate a similar approach to the ancestors.

When a public funeral was not held, a *laudatio* was sometimes written and published although not proclaimed: an example is the *laudatio* for Appius Claudius written by Brutus in 48 BCE. Suetionius himself mentions published *laudes* in the time

159 F. Vollmer (1892) 469. The classic discussion of the *laudatio funebris* is still Vollmer (1892), despite W. Kierdorf (1980); see Horsfall (1982a) 36-8.
161 The *laudationes* that survive in length are for Murdia, which is probably Augustan, Lindsay (2004) 91; Matidia (Hadrianic), and Turia (Augustan age), on which see Lindsay (2009a). The texts are printed in Vollmer (1892).
162 Martha (1896) 26.
163 Polyb. 6.53-54; Plin. *HN* 7.139-140 also lists the contents of a funeral oration, but does not include ancestry.
164 E.g. Quint. 3.7.10; Rhet. *Her.* 3.13 (cited below, 75).
165 *Panegyricus Messallae* 28-34, *Laus Pisonis* 2ff. The texts of these are reproduced in Flower (1996) as appendices T52 and T36. Flower gives them these dates. Pliny’s *Panegyricus* does not exhibit the same interest in ancestry, perhaps because Trajan was adopted.
166 Vollmer (1892) 469.
of Domitian. As it was usual to recite this list of ancestors at every family funeral, much material could be recycled from one funeral to another, and it would therefore be eminently sensible to write it down for next time—essentially a written genealogy that might resemble the fragment of Julius Caesar’s oration for his aunt Julia, preserved by Suetonius. As a funeral oration for a woman, this *laudatio* probably had different contents from the usual *laudatio funebris*, but the ancestors are present as they would be elsewhere. As North observed in his discussion of *laudationes*, a woman’s funeral was ‘as good an opportunity for family advertisement’ as a man’s.

### Legendary Genealogies

Suetonius cites the funeral oration given by the young Julius Caesar for his aunt Julia in about 69 BCE:

> in the eulogy of his aunt he spoke in the following terms of her paternal and maternal ancestry and that of his own father: ‘The family of my aunt Julia is descended by her mother from the kings, and on her father’s side is akin to the immortal Gods; for the Marcii Reges (her mother’s family name) go back to Ancus Marcius, and the Julii, a family of which ours is a branch, to Venus. Our stock therefore has at once the sanctity of kings, whose power is supreme among mortal men, and the claim to reverence which attaches to the Gods, who hold sway over kings themselves.’

We might ask why legendary genealogies such as this one appear in Suetonius’ *Lives*. Caesar’s oration is significant to Suetonius (significant enough that he cites it verbatim) as it adduces his aunt’s, and thereby his own, descent from the Alban king Ancus Marcius on one side, and on the other, the goddess Venus. In the late Republic, a legendary genealogy was in fact an increasingly common pretension amongst the

---

167 Dom. 10.3.
171 The oration was given before he went to Spain in 68, Broughton (1952) 136. In addition to flaunting his own connections with Venus, with his references to the Marcii Reges, Caesar was probably ingratiating himself with the consul of 68, Q. Marcius Rex, with whom he later went to Cilicia.
173 Suetonius would not have been unaware of the similarities of theme (divine and kingly power) between this oration and the *Julius*. In fact, I would argue he deliberately chose that passage, if he did not improvise it, for the sake of that parallel.
Roman aristocracy, patrician and plebeian, both long-standing families and parvenus. Fergus Millar summarised very nicely the fashions in republican genealogies when he said that:

if one thing is certain about the self-consciousness of the Roman upper class in the late Republic, it is, firstly, that there was an outburst of interest in family histories—and, secondly, that not all these histories wholly corresponded to historical reality.\textsuperscript{174}

Suetonius attests legendary genealogies for both very noble and very new families. Venus was a popular ancestress, famously claimed by the Iulii, and shared by the Memmii.\textsuperscript{175} The prominent family of the Sulpicii laid claim to descent from no less a deity than Jupiter.\textsuperscript{176} It was during the mid-first century BCE, the time of Caesar, Cicero, and Atticus, that genealogies, genuine or not, were taken most seriously as a mark of social position.\textsuperscript{177} A scion of a long line of consuls need only make that record known. Voters could presume that he would conduct himself as his distinguished forefathers had done, and thus elect him in good conscience. But when his forefathers had done nothing special, or were thin on the ground—even when he had a long line of consuls but none worth writing home about—a god in the family tree would separate him from the herd. As Seneca glibly remarks, some time after the height of genealogies, 'wherever there is no famous name, there they slip in a god.'\textsuperscript{178}

It was quite widely acknowledged that family histories were fiction—Sextus Empiricus tells us that Asclepiades of Myrlea (c. 100 BCE) divided history into three categories, 'true', 'as if true,' and 'false', and to the category of 'false history', only genealogy belongs.\textsuperscript{179} Yet, family history was respected, legendary genealogy an indication of an old and distinguished family. The primary function of such genealogies was to impress,\textsuperscript{180} but inevitably they became part of the historical record, because family records, including stemmata as well as genealogies, were often used by the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{174} Millar (1988) 47.
\item \textsuperscript{175} J.D. Evans (1992) 28. The more profligate gods were best used, for their many liaisons afforded many branches of the 'family.' The Antonii, for instance, claimed to be descended from Hercules, through Hercules' son, Anto(n), A.R. Anderson (1928) 42, and Marcus Antonius is said to have cultivated a likeness to the hero: Plut. \textit{Ant.} 4. From Hercules the Fabii also descended: Plut. \textit{Fab.} 1.2.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Suet. \textit{Galb.} 2.
\item \textsuperscript{177} Millar (1988) 47.
\item \textsuperscript{178} Sen. \textit{Ben.} 3.28.2: \textit{ubicumque nomen illustre defecit, illo deum inflicuiunt}. Trans. J.W. Basore (1935). Seneca’s origins as a provincial might be relevant to his attitude towards self-aggrandising nobility.
\item \textsuperscript{179} Sext. Emp. \textit{Math.} 1.252-3.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Wiseman (1974) 159.
\end{itemize}
annalists in the composition of their works. Cicero and Livy\textsuperscript{181} bemoan the corruption of perfectly good histories by self-aggrandising family histories. Cicero says that ‘false triumphs, too many consulships’ have crept into the records, a remark which has been investigated by Ron Ridley, who found that there were indeed discrepancies between the annals and the \textit{acta}, and that such discrepancies could be explained by family histories’ distorting the historical record.\textsuperscript{182}

In the time of Cicero, Cornelius Nepos tells us in his laudatory \textit{Life of Atticus}, Atticus was prevailed upon to write a series of genealogical works for a number of families: the Iunii, Claudii Marcelli, Aemilii, Fabii, and possibly others.\textsuperscript{183} At least some of these were commissioned for political purposes; they were also sources for historical research.\textsuperscript{184} Valerius Messalla Rufus wrote a work on the families, supposedly (according to Pliny) suggested by an erroneous stemma of the Scipiones which Rufus saw fit to correct in writing.\textsuperscript{185} Such specific genealogies would serve well on an occasion that called for a \textit{laudatio}, or some other kind of speech a public figure might make to recommend himself by the merits of his ancestors, such as that Tiberius applauded.\textsuperscript{186}

Soon after Atticus, Varro, and Hyginus, Augustus’ freedman, each wrote works with the title \textit{De Familiiis Trojanis}, ‘on the Trojan families.’\textsuperscript{187} The title betrays the growing fashion in the first century for a Trojan genealogy. It has been suggested that Varro’s work, and later Hyginus’ (perhaps a revision of Varro’s),\textsuperscript{188} were both written at the behest of Caesars. Varro’s was commissioned by Julius Caesar to establish the legitimacy of his expansion of the patriciate (an extraordinary step, achieved by the \textit{Lex Cassia}) to include more families by a genealogical work linking his friends and connections to Troy; later, Augustus also expanded the patriciate (by the \textit{Lex Saenia}), and he might have requested Hyginus’ work on the subject to cover the families Varro had missed.\textsuperscript{189} A Trojan genealogy would raise a family’s social status and suggest that

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{181} Cic. \textit{Brut.} 62; Liv. 8.40. \\
\textsuperscript{182} Cic. \textit{Brut.} 62; \textit{falsi triumphi, plures consulatus}; discussed by R.T. Ridley (1983). \\
\textsuperscript{183} Nep. \textit{Att.} 18.1-4; A. Marshall (1993). \\
\textsuperscript{184} Marshall (1993). \\
\textsuperscript{185} Plin. \textit{HN} 35.8; Billows (1982). \\
\textsuperscript{186} Tib. 32.1. \\
\textsuperscript{187} Toohey (1984) 5. On these works by Varro and Hyginus, see H. Peter (1967) 32-3; 101-7. \\
\textsuperscript{188} Wiseman (1974) 157 suggested Hyginus was a sort of revision of Varro. Varro’s work: Serv. \textit{A.} 2.166; Hyginus’: Serv. \textit{A.} 5.389. \\
\textsuperscript{189} Toohey (1984) 9.
\end{flushright}
it had always been of stock deserving of the patrician rank. Since ‘new’ patrician status might be considered less legitimate than ‘old’, the genealogy might include references to past transitions from patrician to plebeian status (such as is found at *Augustus* 2.1), and thereby ‘prove’ the family was originally patrician and therefore deserved to be again. What remains of those genealogies is a few fragments, mostly preserved in Servius’ commentary on Vergil’s *Aeneid*.\(^{190}\)

Legendary genealogy was advertised in the family home and in the same public media as any other genealogy: on stemmata, in *laudationes*, on coins, occasionally even in *imagines*. For instance, the first coins to portray an ancestor in fact portray a legendary ancestor—showing Ulysses, a legendary ancestor of the Mamilii.\(^{191}\) In the middle of the first century, ancestral themes were mainly legendary. The famous example is Caesar’s use of Venus: but before Caesar used Venus on his coins, Lepidus minted coins of Venus in 61,\(^{192}\) the Plautii Hypsaei claimed descent from Neptune on coins, the Memmii from the Trojan Mnestheus.\(^{193}\) The triumvirs Octavian, Antonius, and Lepidus were portrayed on their *aurei* with a legendary ancestor each: Aeneas for Octavian, Hercules for Antonius, and the Vestal Aemilia for Lepidus.\(^{194}\)

Augustus had legitimate claim to Julian ancestors after his adoption,\(^{195}\) but even well into the Principate Suetonius provides evidence for the creation of links with divinity by obscure but aspiring families: one of several origin stories connects the Vitellii with a goddess, and Vespasian dismisses attempts to create him a legendary background.\(^{196}\) Otho does not appear to have a legendary genealogy, but his supposed connection with the royal family of Etruria is probably a first step towards a full-blown god complex. When Suetonius reports such genealogies, he reveals the pretension of legendary genealogy even in families with little other claim to fame. In spite of his upward mobility, Vespasian did not have delusions of grandeur, a quality that Suetonius admires and possibly overstates. It was rumoured, Suetonius says, that the Flauii were not just from Reate but were in fact descended from the founders of that town, and

---

\(^{190}\) Toohey (1984) 21, n. 4.
\(^{191}\) Evans (1992) 27.
\(^{192}\) Farney (1999) 80.
\(^{193}\) Alföldi (1956) 80.
\(^{194}\) Flower (1996) 85.
\(^{195}\) The unusual adoption is discussed by E.J. Weinrib (1968) and R.A. Billows (1982) 57, n. 15. See also Lindsay (2009b) 182-9.
\(^{196}\) *Vit.* 1.2; *Vesp.* 12.
perhaps even from a companion of Hercules, who was commemorated in a monument on the Via Salaria (probably near Reate):

[i]ndeed, when certain men tried to trace the origin of the Flavian family to the founders of Reate and a companion of Hercules whose tomb still stands on the Via Salaria, he laughed at them for their pains.197

Perhaps the genealogy was created in response to that of his rival Vitellius,198 or perhaps a legendary genealogy was, by the time of Vespasian, a prerequisite of the princeps, and his supporters fashioned one for him—giving him an opportunity for humility. The Flauii would have been continuing a long tradition of creating genealogical links with mythological characters, but Vespasian (Suetonius reports) was adamant that no such links existed, and his biographer does not presume to impose them. Suetonius appears to approve of Vespasian’s feet of clay, just as he approves of Vespasian generally, and the opportunity for praise is the reason Suetonius mentions the genealogy at all. The spirit of the times, and a desire for distance from the previous Caesars such as Nero and Galba, encouraged Vespasian to keep his family connections humble.

The unlikely legendary genealogy199 of an obscure family such as the Vitellii is symptomatic of a fashion for divine family trees amongst the upwardly mobile of the late Republic and early Principate. Lesser families, such as those of Vitellius and Otho, sought a general sort of legitimacy through their pretensions to divine ancestors, but legendary genealogy was not only a matter of pride. Different kinds of genealogies had different connotations, so one could tailor a family history to create a particular message. One might justify a role in the Senate, or pontifical college, based on ancestral tenure. In the mid-first century BCE a Caesar, possibly the dictator (or, if not, certainly one of his relatives) wrote a work on the Pontiffs, which, Perret suspects, might have been the first to align their eponymous ancestor Iulus with the creation of the role of Pontifex Maximus. Ancestry is here a mechanism of justifying Caesar’s position in that priesthood.200 Caesar and Augustus could use their distinguished Trojan and divine ancestry to justify their dominance in Roman politics201—just as Aeneas had founded

199 Vit. 1.2.
200 J. Perret (1942) 565.
the state, so too Caesar had belonged at the head of the state, and Augustus had ‘restored’ the Republic, founding it over again. Dionysius of Halicarnassus says that Iulus’ descendants still held the position in his time, as if to justify their tenure by descent. So as well as legitimising, or creating, social status, genealogy differentiates the many families on the same social level. As Wiseman asked, with a god in the family tree, who needed consuls?

Not even Suetonius would claim that the Caesars were particularly arrogant in claiming a legendary genealogy. Julius Caesar was, however, at the beginning of a trend to transform his ordinary legendary genealogy into a Trojan genealogy, and likewise to transform a Trojan genealogy into the most fashionable kind of genealogy.

Why the sudden popularity of the Troy myth at the time of Caesar? It has been suggested that the Romans of the late Republic/early Principate were anti-Greek (and therefore pro-Trojan), but this is unsatisfactory. On the contrary, the attraction of the Trojans could be their very Greekness. The Romans were of two minds about whether the Trojans were Greek—in some versions they were descended from Greeks, and in others from Italians. It can be argued both ways: either the Trojans were Greek, and therefore admired, or they were emphatically non-Greek, but just as ancient and famous. Whatever the reason to choose Troy, once Caesar made a success of linking himself to Troy through Aeneas and the Alban kings, other families coveted a Trojan genealogy. Although it is difficult to say how many there were before Caesar, by the time of Dionysius of Halicarnassus there were fifty Trojan families at Rome.

One family with a Trojan connection, probably created by etymology, was the Atii, the family of Octavian’s mother. An Atys appears in Vergil as the childhood friend of Iulus and the forefather of the Atii. The name of Atys was already known from

---

202 D.H. Ant. 1.70.
204 There had long been a connection between Troy and Rome. At least as early as Fabius Pictor, who wrote a history of Rome in the second century BCE, the Romans had believed they were descended from Trojans. The legend possibly arose at the time of the war with Pyrrhus, according to H. Nettleship (1879) 50 and Perret (1942) 412ff.
206 Dionysius of Halicarnassus sought to make the Romans descendants of Greeks, and his Aeneas is Greek. Vergil’s Dardanus, however, came originally from Etruria, making the Romans Italian through and through: Gruen (1992) 7.
207 The Trojans were not Greek, but were ancient and distinguished: Toohey (1984) 11.
209 D.H. 1.85.3.
Homer, so it was an acceptable connection to make by etymology. A king of Alba called Atys Silvius was probably added at this period. Adding to the Alban king list (there was a gap of a few hundred years between the fall of Troy and the foundation of Rome) was a convenient way of creating an old Roman and at the same time Trojan descent. Caesar may have created or encouraged the Atys connection for his relatives; it has also been suggested that one of the genealogies of the Calpurnii Pisones, drawing their line from an Alban king, was created to justify Caesar’s marriage to Calpurnia. The Trojan genealogy for the Atii was, at the latest, Vergil’s invention in the Augustan age.

Trojan genealogies seem not to interest Suetonius: it is curious that Suetonius omits to make the Vergilian link of the Atii with Troy, despite the fact that he searches high and low for other signs of distinction in the Octauii and Atii. During the first century of the Principate, Trojan genealogies became so commonplace that Juvenal could allude snidely to a Trojan descent even for freedmen, but while anyone could be Trojan, only the Iulii could be Aeneadae. By the time of Vergil, the Aeneas theme had been entirely co-opted by the Julian house, and was to remain the domain of the imperial family for almost a century until the extinction of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. However, although Suetonius’ Caesars are often linked with legendary genealogies, none of them is a Trojan genealogy. The link with Venus was most likely mentioned in the lost beginning of the Julius, and one might plausibly argue that the Trojan genealogy of the Julio-Claudians can be presumed, along with the unstated connections with the Julian family, and is therefore unnecessary to Suetonius’ introductions to other Lives. So although the Trojan genealogy is not mentioned after Julius, perhaps one ought more accurately to say none of these genealogies is Trojan after Nero’s. It seems that Nero’s successors felt entitled to, and comfortable with, the name of Caesar, but not a link with Troy—or at least they did not advertise such a link. In some ways, it would be better not to be associated with the Iulii. These later Caesars have legendary genealogies of the most general kind, and uncontroversial. Galba’s connection with

---

211 Atys (of Vergil and Liv. 1.3.6) is equivalent with Epytus, found at Hom. Il. 2.604; R.M. Ogilvie (1965) 44-5.
212 Farney (1999) 76.
213 Farney (1999) 64-5. Farney notes that this was first suggested by Trieber in 1894.
214 Suetonius’ interest in finding distinction for Augustus’ family will be addressed below, 63-7.
Jupiter has been called an attempt to rival the family tree of the Iulii, and that is certainly its role in Suetonius: only such an important god could take the place of a Trojan genealogy, vindicating the new princeps as heir to the domus Augusta while distancing the new Caesar from the old ones. Perhaps Galba’s connection with Livia was also a valuable link back to Augustus, bypassing the Julio-Claudians.

Some of these legendary genealogies survive in Suetonius, and what we have seen here of the popularity and power of the legendary genealogy might be considered when reading these family trees. The biographer is not pointing out a quaint pretension, nor is he gullibly claiming literal divinity for his Caesars where we might be more cynical. His legendary genealogies are part of a tradition that proves, rather than actual divinity, the status and antiquity of family, and calls to mind the mythologies with which his Caesars wished to be associated. A legendary genealogy scores a point for social status, just as nobility and antiquity of family do.

Non-Roman Backgrounds

A similar device is employed when the biographer reports the ethnic background of his Caesars. A seemingly innocuous titbit can connote to his readers a wealth of information. Ethnic (non-Roman) origin is a less obvious but still very powerful signpost to the audience of position in society. All of Suetonius’ Caesars except Nero and Galba have some sort of non-Roman, usually municipal, background. A municipal origin is ammunition to Tacitus, who insults the powerful Sejanus with the biting description municipalis adulter.

What is the significance of non-Roman backgrounds to Suetonius? Unlike Tacitus, he does not let the simple fact of ‘municipal’ ancestors—common as they are—damn his Caesars. In fact, the municipalis families of Vespasian, Otho, and Augustus were excused with being important at home if not at Rome. Even families that had been at Rome for generations retained an ethnic identity. The Iulii were justly proud of their Alban connection, and the Claudii appear to have advertised a Sabine origin, in both cases hundreds of years after coming to Rome. None of the Caesars is really

\[\text{Non-Roman Backgrounds}\]

A similar device is employed when the biographer reports the ethnic background of his Caesars. A seemingly innocuous titbit can connote to his readers a wealth of information. Ethnic (non-Roman) origin is a less obvious but still very powerful signpost to the audience of position in society. All of Suetonius’ Caesars except Nero and Galba have some sort of non-Roman, usually municipal, background. A municipal origin is ammunition to Tacitus, who insults the powerful Sejanus with the biting description municipalis adulter.

What is the significance of non-Roman backgrounds to Suetonius? Unlike Tacitus, he does not let the simple fact of ‘municipal’ ancestors—common as they are—damn his Caesars. In fact, the municipalis families of Vespasian, Otho, and Augustus were excused with being important at home if not at Rome. Even families that had been at Rome for generations retained an ethnic identity. The Iulii were justly proud of their Alban connection, and the Claudii appear to have advertised a Sabine origin, in both cases hundreds of years after coming to Rome. None of the Caesars is really

218 Suet. Galb. 5.2.
220 See below in more detail, e.g. 60, 65-6.
dramatically foreign: all have some kind of Italian background. Otho and Vitellius are only a couple of generations Roman; Vespasian grew up in Cosa; Augustus is related to some senators but his own line had only recently come to Rome from the Latin town Velitrae. His possible connection with Africa—adduced by Antonius—is potentially controversial, but not even worth Suetonius’ attention. Both the Iulii and the Claudii had long histories at Rome, but Suetonius still takes an interest in their non-Roman origins.

When thinking about the specific origins Suetonius gives his Caesars, it is important to note that the Romans held certain common prejudices about people of other towns outside Rome, and other more distant ethnic groups. There was a long republican tradition of publicising and deriding ethnic identities for political and rhetorical advantage. Certain ethnicities were desirable, and happily advertised, such as the austere and honest qualities of Sabine families; others an embarrassment, such as the decadence and cruelty of the Etruscan stereotype. So when a family claims Sabine origins, we should recognise in this a claim to certain characteristics; when a Roman calls another man Etruscan, he is playing on his audience’s prejudices in the expectation that this will characterise him, in their eyes, negatively. During the Republic, the exclusivity of Roman blood in preference to Italian remained a social force; later, as Roman citizenship extended further abroad, however, an Italian *origo* became less obviously foreign than it had been and was preferable to the increasingly common provincial background. In Suetonius, *origo* still appears to be important, but non-Roman Italian origins do not seem quite as foreign as they had been before Augustus.

Ethnic stereotyping has been a subject of much scholarship in the past decade. Farney collected examples of Roman prejudices against (and occasionally for) people of certain ethnicities. These prejudices seem to hold no matter how long past the connection with another community. The current vogue for reading negative ethnic stereotyping in Roman texts has been questioned by Erich Gruen, who argues that hostility towards ‘the Other’ has been overemphasised and taken out of context—ignoring, in particular, the many connections Romans made between themselves and other peoples. He rightly brings up in the face of examples of ethnic vilification some

---

221 *Aug.* 4.2.
examples of good qualities in ‘the Other.’ The Gauls, for instance, are often adduced as
victims of Roman stereotyping on the evidence of Cicero’s famous vilification in the
_Pro Fonteio_. Authors such as Woolf have seen in Cicero’s criticism an appeal to
common prejudice in the audience, if not personal enmity in the orator, but Gruen
protests that the _Pro Fonteio_ is not representative of ‘Roman’ views, given the
sympathetic treatment the Gauls receive in Caesar’s Gallic Wars. Certainly, I allow that
Cicero’s remarks are, in their rightful context, meant to blacken the witness, and may
well exaggerate (where Caesar minimises) the differences between Romans and
Gauls.\(^\text{224}\) Although I agree that the hostile comments should not be taken out of context,
in this case I am more inclined to side with Woolf, who reads in the rhetoric against the
Gauls a common prejudice at Rome.\(^\text{225}\) Cicero himself says elsewhere\(^\text{226}\) that the orator
should appeal to common beliefs of the audience. Surely this tactic would not have been
effective unless there was already some prejudice in the audience. In the case of
Suetonius, the ethnic identities he mentions are all Italian: Latin, Sabine, and Etruscan.
By no means do these all connote negative characteristics—Sabinum, in particular, is a
rather prestigious _origo_—but the important thing for us is to note that they do have their
own connotations.

The best kind of ethnic identity in our period is Roman _ab urbe condita_. Should
_Romanitas_ be beyond reach, non-Roman Italian blood of certain ethnicities makes a
respectable substitute, especially if it can be made to form a connection of its own with
early Rome, such as a Latin or Sabine origin.

The fairly neutral _origo_ of Latium implies the same Latin stock as most old
Romans, and the Latins as a whole were not stereotyped as different from Romans.\(^\text{227}\) In
fact, Romans from towns in Latium could claim an ancient connection with Rome and
an ethnic similarity.

Of Suetonius’ Caesars, Julius and Augustus came from Latium. Caesar was
proud of his connection with the Alban kings, especially with the Latin town of
Bovillae. He drew attention to it on special occasions by wearing the customary red
boots of the Alban kings.\(^\text{228}\) Augustus had connections with both Velitreae and Aricia,

\(^{224}\) Caesar ‘minimizes, rather than accentuates, the differences.’ Gruen (2011) 158.
\(^{226}\) Cic. _Inv. rhet_. 1.29; _Orat_. 2.68.
\(^{227}\) Farney (2007) 77.
\(^{228}\) Cass. _Dio_ 43.43.2; Farney (2007) 57.
two Latin towns. His ancestors in Aricia are supposedly a disadvantage, brought up as they are by Antonius, but probably only in comparison with Antonius’ long Roman genealogy. Of Italian connections, one with Aricia would not be very dubious. In fact, Aricia is also advertised on coins in connection with the moneyer’s *origo*. At least as early as the Augustan age, these Latin towns began to seem much less foreign, and Augustus’ origins in Velitrae are no longer a liability as far as Suetonius is concerned.

Sabinum—the home of the Claudii, the Vespasii, and the Flauii, according to Suetonius—was the most desirable non-Roman *origo*, certainly the most prestigious in Suetonius’ *De Vita Caesarum*. The Sabines, by virtue of their connection with Rome from the very beginning, could claim many of the same good qualities as the Romans of aboriginal Latin descent, including shared history and ethnic origins. The myth of the rape of the Sabine women, part of the Romulus story, made a large number of Romans part-Sabine, purporting to explain the Sabine-Roman heritage of the oldest families at Rome. It could have been invented to rationalise the presence of so many Sabine families at Rome. In either case the Sabine genealogy was popular even among the oldest, most prominent families: of patrician families, the Claudii, Valerii, Aemilii, Pinarii, and Marcii Reges laid claim to a Sabine origin; plebeian families including the Pomponii and Calpurnii claimed to be Sabine via a descent from the Sabine king Numa Pompilius. A Sabine genealogy was unusual in that it was privileged even by those families who could also claim a long presence at Rome, such as the Claudii. The benefits of a Sabine genealogy even encouraged non-Sabine families to invent a Sabine ancestry, such as perhaps the Calpurnii; Holleman has postulated that the famously Sabine Claudii were in fact Etruscan.

The stereotype of the Sabines in literature is generally positive, and in many ways recalls the stereotype of the Spartans. In fact, in some traditions the Sabines were said to be descendants of the Spartans, perhaps an extension of the perceived similarity between their characteristics. The Sabines are portrayed as austere, disciplined in war,

---

229 Aug. 4.
231 *Tib.* 1.1; 1.2; *Vesp.* 1.2 for the Flauii; 1.3 for the Vespasii.
233 Syme (1960a) 85, n. 3 thinks the Calpurnii were in fact Etruscan.
courageous, and very pious. Sabines were thought to have a special piety, perhaps by virtue of their connection with King Numa, who was closely involved with Roman religion.

The positive stereotype that the literary sources attach to the Sabines explains the popularity of a Sabine genealogy, particularly in the first century BCE. In Suetionius, the Sabine origins of the Claudii and the Flauii seem to be prestigious, or at least neutral—not negative. The Sabine origins of the Claudii are the first and last points of the opening section on the ancient beginnings of the family, without any indication that this should detract from the prestige of their long presence at Rome and the several honours granted them by the Roman people in the early days of the Republic. In fact, that the Sabine connection is brought in at all after several hundred years suggests it was an important aspect of Claudian identity, probably encouraged by the family if it was remembered so long. With Vespasian, the Sabine connection is much closer to home on both sides of his family, and Vespasian even has a rural accent. Monuments to the family at Vespasiae compensate for any sense that the family was not sufficiently Roman.

Just as we have seen family connections advertised in names, Sabine origin was commonly advertised in cognomina and praenomina: the Claudii used the unusual praenomen Appius, which had been latinised from a Sabine name, but was nonetheless a praenomen so specific to the Claudii that Cicero could coin the term Appietas in reference to Appius Claudius Pulcher. The cognomen Sabinus was by far the most common cognomen to recall an ethnicity—and in fact one of the most common cognomina overall. It was a cognomen taken up by non-Sabine Romans in hope of political advantage, according to Cicero. Wiseman thinks that the cognomen came to have moral connotations over and above claiming actual Sabine descent.

Some of the families who are thought to have pretended a Sabine genealogy were probably Etruscan: not surprising, given the sordid reputation of Etruscans as the villains of Roman historiography. Decadent and cruel, the men were debauched and

---

235 Farney (2007) 97-104. Cato in the Origines makes them Spartan; Varro makes them Italians.
237 Vesp. 22.
238 Vesp. 1.3.
239 Cic. Fam. 3.7.5.
240 Cic. Fam. 15.20.1; Farney (2007) 91-2.
241 Wiseman (1971) 258.
effeminate and the women loose. Etruscans are stereotyped as fat, lacking in self-control where food, alcohol, sex, and general luxury are concerned.\textsuperscript{242} As early as Plautus, Etruscan women are characterised as of easy virtue.\textsuperscript{243} Diodorus Siculus provides an extended description of the foibles of the Etruscans.\textsuperscript{244} Etruscans were said to be descended from the Lydians, an Asian lineage that connotes luxury, but can be deployed as a Trojan connection.\textsuperscript{245} Maecenas’ family held both an Etruscan and a Lydian genealogy;\textsuperscript{246} he was criticised for decadence and effeminacy.\textsuperscript{247} Otho is the only one of Suetonius’ Caesars to come from Etruria. He shows typically Etruscan characteristics in the final analysis: he is dandy and effeminate in care of his person, which is incongruous, so Suetonius says, with his noble death.\textsuperscript{248}

The negative connotations of an Etruscan lineage discouraged men from publicising such connections during the Republic.\textsuperscript{249} However, just as the Latin \textit{origo} became more fashionable in the 40s BCE after the Social War, so too an Etruscan lineage became less foreign in the 30s, when more provincials entered the Senate as part of Augustus’ \textit{tota Italia}.\textsuperscript{250} Under the Principate the Saluii, along with other Etruscan families who had not been prominent in the Republic, such as the Cilnii and Urgulanii, did begin to advertise their lineage with legendary genealogies that connected them with Etruscan royalty.\textsuperscript{251}

Is \textit{origo} important to Suetonius? He does often name the \textit{origo} of a family, even when it had been at Rome for generations. I propose that when Suetonius labels his subjects with certain ethnicities, these create a link in the reader’s mind with Roman preconceptions. In some cases that is as simple as calling a family Roman of great antiquity, and in others, finding or imputing a non-Roman origin for a family that has in fact been at Rome for years, where family origin might have been otherwise irrelevant to their narrative. By the time of Suetonius, then, beginnings in Italy have lost much of

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item Farney (2007) 139.
\item Plaut. \textit{Cist.} 562-3.
\item Diod. Sic. 5.40.1-5.
\item Farney (2007) 140-2.
\item Hor. \textit{Sat.} 1.6.1-4.
\item Sen. \textit{Ep.} 114.4-6.
\item Oth. 12: \textit{tanto Othonis animo nequaquam corpus aut habitus competit. Fuisse enim et modicæ staturæ et male pedatus scambusque traditur, munditiarum uero paene muliebrum} \ldots{} Cf. Tac. \textit{Hist.} 1.22.
\item Farney (2007) 125-77.
\item Etruscan royalty: Farney (2007) 145.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
their stigma. In the first century BCE, Antonius could belittle Octavian’s origins in the Latin town Aricia, but he was drawing a long bow even then. Certainly, in Suetonius’ day, Aricia is not remote. Suetonius has much less interest in belittling Augustus for Latin origins than he might have had in the late Republic, but the negative and positive connotations of ethnic backgrounds do make their way into his presentation. Such information reveals more about his sources than about the prejudices of his own time. Suetonius’ favourite Caesars do not fall victim to their municipal ancestries. \(^{252}\) However, I do think it is worth asking how Suetonius might be using ethnic stereotypes: Sabine austerity and military discipline, for instance, are features of Tiberius; effeminacy, an Etruscan trait, is also a trait of Otho, the only Caesar identified as Etruscan. The links are subtle, but perhaps they would not have appeared so subtle through a second-century lens.

\(^{252}\) The municipal backgrounds of Vespasian and Augustus are made to work for them, not against them.
As Wallace-Hadrill has aptly noted, Suetonius is anxious to establish the ‘precise degree of nobility’ of each Caesar’s family. Suetonius’ predecessors in oratory and biography had also been curious to place their subjects on a spectrum of social status from very low to very high birth, and conscious of the fine distinctions between those of very high birth. Suetonius is continuing a long and familiar tradition of separating out the various shades of grey in the term nobilitas.

With such generic precedents established by Tacitus, Nicolaus of Damascus, Cornelius Nepos, and Plutarch, Suetonius’ audience would surely have expected no less than the name and rank of his subject’s father, and optionally his mother, which would establish for the knowledgeable reader legal, financial, and social status—all that Nepos had revealed in the opening sentence of Atticus. But this is only the bare necessity. In practice, Suetonius usually searches out more detail, following more the manner of the funeral oration than the republican biography, often looking several generations back for the ‘precise degree of nobility’ of his Caesars. The kind of short genealogy furnished in a biography or in the death notices of Tacitus and Livy is reserved, in Suetonius, for the very ‘newest’ and most obscure Caesars—and then, I suspect, only because his sources limit him. More often the Caesars, in particular the Caesars from Tiberius to Galba, were of long republican nobility, furnishing their biographer with generous records of offices, triumphs, divine genealogies, and other quantifiable measures of status. All but Vespasian are sons of senators—Suetonius need not linger over the legal or financial status of men with such qualifications. There is occasional mention of low-born ancestors, but when Suetonius dispels this rumour (or leaves it to the reader whether to accept it or not—sit in medio, Vitellius 2.1), it is as a matter of social connection rather than actual legal status of the Caesar. Suetonius maintains a highly specialised republican vocabulary of status with only slight change in meaning to accommodate the new political system. He functions on the same

---

254 Outlined above, 18-20.
255 The death notices are the more biographical parts of Tacitus and Livy. On death notices, see Syme (1958b); A. Pomeroy (1988) and (1989).
spectrum and with the same vocabulary as other authors, but makes much more of status than other biographers known to us. Suetonius’ approach to the ancestors—as important to his biographies as any other part of their descendant’s career—is fully justified by the centrality of ancestors to the world of his Caesars. His first concern is to demonstrate that his Caesars were born of respectable families, and only second to situate them very carefully amongst their peers in the senatorial order. With some this is an easy task, quickly dismissed with a single phrase—Galba, for instance, is ‘unquestionably of noble origin and of an old and powerful family.’

It happens that Galba’s agnate and maternal line are both very distinguished, and prosapia might be taken to mean both sides of the family—stock, in general. The respectability and status of the family can be considered demonstrated, and the biographer moves swiftly on to the more captivating details of the family glories and scandals, almost exclusively drawn from the agnate line. Elsewhere, in longer Lives, Suetonius is at leisure, and he forgoes the concise description of the family found here (nobilissimus magnaque et uetere prosapia) in favour of a comprehensive list, such as those found in the family trees of the nobles, Nero and Tiberius.

Tiberius

The Claudii, ancestors of Tiberius, are the topic of a long and detailed catalogue. Claudius was a name well known to the Fasti, by any criteria one of the noblest in the state. In his long introduction to the Tiberius, Suetonius does not use any of the available descriptors, such as nobilis, splendidus, or clarus, to denote the level of nobility. Instead, his point is made by a blow-by-blow account of the exact number of each honour accorded to previous Claudii: ‘twenty-eight consulships, five dictatorships, seven censorships, six triumphs, and two ovations.’ The status and importance of the family is unquestionable.

This history of the Claudii demonstrates their legal, financial, and social status from the beginning of the Republic to the time of Tiberius’ birth. From several references to patrician status, the Senate, and the very specific date of their entry to

257 Tib. 1.2: Deinceps procedente tempore duodetriginta consulatus, dictaturas quinque, censuras septem, triumphos sex, duas oationes adepta est. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1998). For stemmata of the Claudii, see Figures VII and VIII.
Rome, we know that the early Claudii were respectable, wealthy, and honoured by the Romans—the name of Titus Tatius, dropped fairly pointedly, goes to show their connections in high places—in the very infancy of the Republic. The citation of a specific year suggests very good family records or (more likely) energetic mythologising. That we are dealing with the patrician branch of the family, not the plebeian, is emphasised—the concept is so important that the opening word of the Life is *patricia*—and this will be important later, both when the Claudii are said to be ‘staunch upholders of the prestige and influence of the patricians’ and when the plebeian Liuii arise in the same *Life*. Already we are assured of the family’s indisputable position in the state: although foreign, a Sabine origin is the best kind of foreign extraction. This is only implied in Suetonius, but his audience would know the code.

The family’s origin in Sabinum, as long ago as just after the foundation of Rome (*Romam recens conditam*)—nearly 900 years before Suetonius—and the closing statement of s.1 (that Tiberius’ *cognomen* is a Sabine word) invoke the positive connotations of the Sabine identity. The family had not lived in Sabine country for hundreds of years, and yet a Sabine origin seems still to have a powerful message, which the author brings to the forefront by enclosing this passage about the ancient history of the family with two references to Sabinum. Modern researchers have wondered whether the Claudii might have been Etruscan, inventing the Sabine story. We have seen the reasons they would not want to be associated with Etruria—maybe Suetonius is repeating a fictional genesis story. An invented Sabine identity would not weaken the currency of the Sabine story in Suetonius. Rather it would speak volumes for the impact of a certain kind of non-Roman ethnicity and the utility of faking a new origin story. We might wonder at what Suetonius wanted his audience to take from the Sabine story in the version he reports. Sabine qualities, such as old-fashioned austerity

---

258 Tib. 2.4; 3.1.
259 See above, 44-5.
260 See above, 44.
261 Suetonius did not invent the Sabine story: it had already appeared, e.g. in D.H. 5.40.1-5; Liv. 2.16.4; Verg. *Aen.* 7.706-9.
and military talent, are motifs of Tiberius’ life—justifying the mention of the Sabine meaning of ‘Nero’ here and its omission in the Nero, where it would have to be ironic. 

Moving on with the family tree, from the next section of the Tiberius we learn that his relatives were competent commanders, with triumphs and censorships to their names. A little later, the mention of a Vestal Virgin (albeit in demonstration of the Claudian arrogance) implies a family in good standing. In the republican tradition of valuing ancestral achievement, Suetonius has situated Tiberius in a social position based entirely on his forebears and relations. In most Lives the agnate line would suffice, but in this case a similar catalogue—eight consulships, two censorships, and three triumphs, a dictatorship, and a magister equitum—distinguishes the mother’s line, the Liuii. The Claudian and Livian families are both distinguished and noble, but they are differentiated from each other in this passage:

[s]uch was the stock from which Tiberius Caesar derived his origin, and that too on both sides: on his father’s from Tiberius Nero; on his mother’s from Appius Pulcher, both of whom were sons of Appius Caecus. He was a member also of the family of the Livii, through the adoption into it of his maternal grandfather. This family, too, though of plebeian origin, was yet of great prominence and had been honoured with eight consulships, two censorships, and three triumphs, as well as with the offices of dictator and master of the horse. It was made illustrious too by distinguished members, in particular Salinator and the Drusi.

This juxtaposition of the Claudii with the Liuii is one of two indirect comparisons Suetonius makes between families. Although both families are famous and old, the Claudii are quantifiably much more notable, not to mention patrician from day one. The Liuii are almost as emphatically plebeian as the Claudii are patrician. In fact, there is a noticeable concentration of the words patricius and plebeius in this first section of

---

262 Tiberius’ Sabine aspects: Tib. 9: military talents; 18: austerity; cf. Vell. 2.114.3 for a similar account of Tiberius’ strict discipline on campaign. His hairstyle, a family trait according to Tib. 68.2, was also a Sabine trait according to Farney (2007) 99. The cognomen Nero: Tib. 1.2: quo significatur lingua Sabina fortis ac strenuus.

263 For a stemma of the Liuii Drusi, see Figure IX. The unusual amount of attention given here to the mother’s line will be discussed below in Chapter Four.


265 The second is the comparison between the Julio-Claudians and the Sulpicii, at Suet. Galb. 2.1.
Tiberius. The number of consulships and classification as patrician or plebeian make the fine distinction between two very noble families, and the emphasised antiquity of the Claudii also separates the two families in terms of status. The unusual level of detail on the mother’s line is in aid of characterisation rather than status, and will arise again below.

Although the biographer has not employed the adjectives *nobilis* or *clarus* (or any other similar word denoting their position) with respect to the Claudii, his audience would infer from his references to consuls, censors, and triumphs a coded evaluation of the family’s exact position in republican society, all before Tiberius is even mentioned.

The same principle holds for other Caesars of the republican nobility. Caligula and Claudius are descended from the same family as Tiberius, and those *Lives* do not repeat the family trees but linger on the life and reputation of the father of the Caesar in question. Status can be taken as read from the *Tiberius*, but the father is essential. In each case, his honours and achievements are catalogued in great detail. The unusual structures of *Caligula* and *Claudius* contribute to characterisation, and will arise below.266

Nero

In the *Nero*, the agnate line is neither Julian nor Claudian, but a family with blood at least as blue as Tiberius’ and its own connections with Augustus. Nero may have attained power as a Claudius, but to Suetonius he is a Domitius. Nero was born Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus,267 and thus belonged to a long line of Domitii, who had held a remarkable number of public offices, including consulships and censorships, back into the mists of the Republic. The achievement was remarkable in the literal sense: Velleius Paterculus saw fit to comment on the family’s spectacular consistency in winning consulship after consulship over two centuries.268 The Domitii Ahenobarbi were plebeian until 30 BCE when the patriciate was enlarged by the extraordinary *Lex Saenica*.269 The family had close connections with the *domus Augusta*: Nero’s father was

266 Caligula, below at 101; Claudius, below at 105.
267 Only Plut. *Ant.* 87 and Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 5.1 attest the praenomen: R.M. Geer (1931) 59, n. 9. According to Suetonius the family used the praenomena *Lucius* and *Gnaeus* alternately, so Lucius would follow his father Gnaeus, cos. 32 CE.
268 Vell. 2.10.2.
the grandson of Augustus’ sister. By adoption Nero became son of Claudius, who was
himself brother of Germanicus and son of Drusus the elder. Despite the value of his new
connections within the Julio-Claudian family, Nero remained proud of his connections
with the Domitii and at his ignoble end was eventually interred in the mausoleum of the
Domitii. Suetonius emphasises his connections with the Domitii over other branches
of his family.

Like the Tiberius, the Nero has a list, for impact:

… they had attained seven consulships, a triumph, and two censorships,
and were enrolled among the patricians.

Suetonius’ list has given the family a quantifiable value that can easily be compared
with another, most obviously the Claudii, Nero’s predecessors. There is not much
between them. The Claudii certainly have more honours, but Suetonius’ list of Claudii
includes all kinds of gentiles; in the Domitii, all these honours are in the direct line to
Nero. The small matter of distinction between plebeian and patrician might be called
in to work for the Claudii here: where they had been a patrician family since they came
to Rome, the Domitii had until recently been plebeian.

Unlike numerous other aristocratic families, the Domitii did not claim divine
ancestry, but they could boast of a long-held relationship with Rome’s tutelary deities,
Castor and Pollux. An aetiological myth appears in Suetonius and Plutarch that
attributes the family’s hereditary bronze beard to a brush with the Dioscuri, who gave
the message of victory to a Lucius Domitius after the Battle of Lake Regillus in the

270 Ner. 41; 50.
272 The precise number of consulships held by Domitii has been a subject of discussion, since there is
apparently an error in Suetonius, who gives seven consulships, when there were certainly more than seven
amongst gentiles. Sansone’s discussion of Suetonius’ sources concludes that the biographer used two
sources, one composed during or shortly after Nero’s lifetime, and the other composed between the
seventh and eighth consulships of the Ahenobarbi (i.e. before 16 BCE). Sansone (1986) 270-3. Velleius
Paterculus refers to seven consuls before the consul of 32 CE (Nero’s father), to which Bradley objects
there were in fact eight, two of them (cos. 96 BCE and cos. 94) being brothers. Bradley (1978) 26.
Perhaps Velleius can be exonerated if one assumes he means to exclude the Domitii outside the direct line
of his contemporary’s ascendants, and therefore does not count non-ascendant gentiles such as the consul
of 94. Suetonius conflates the cos. 96 with his father, cos. 122, both called Gnaeus, an error Sansone
attributes to the omission of the generation of the consul of 96 in one of the sources. Sansone (1986) 272.
Suetonius’ count of seven consuls would be correct, counting Nero’s father (whom Velleius does not
count) and all the consuls in the direct line, except that he conflates the father and son at the beginning of
the line, omitting a consul and making seven when he should have eight.
early fifth century BCE.\textsuperscript{273} By this myth the Ahenobarbi claimed not descent from, but a connection with, the Dioscuri, who were also the patron gods of the equestrian order. The suggestion of a mutual connection might have curried favour with the equestrians at a time, the second century BCE, when the order was rising in influence.\textsuperscript{274} To Suetonius this divine connection explains the \textit{cognomen}, but it is also another unit of nobility, in addition to consulships and other honours, that enables him to mark the fine distinction between families of the same social stratum. Mythical genealogy is also a feature of the next \textit{Life}, the \textit{Galba}.

\textbf{Galba}

Suetonius records\textsuperscript{275} that Galba was descended on his father’s side from Jupiter, and on his mother’s side from Pasiphaë, wife of King Minos of Crete. Suetonius does not question or condone the genealogy. He associates Pasiphaë with the maternal line, so it is curious that Silius Italicus, writing of the Second Punic War, imputes descent from Pasiphaë to his much earlier Galba.\textsuperscript{276} Whatever the connection, there is an unstated significance to the imputation of a mythical genealogy that comes into status along with consulships and family connections. Suetonius will not have wanted to belittle any claim to divine ancestry, especially when his own \textit{princeps} Hadrian was committed to the imperial cult.\textsuperscript{277} For Suetonius, the legendary genealogy is another figure to take into account when computing nobility.

For the first Caesar to follow the Julio-Claudians, as an attempt to rival the divine descent of the Iulii,\textsuperscript{278} a mythological genealogy is perfectly reasonable. The pretension to such a family tree might also have preceded the Principate and only attracted attention on Galba’s accession.\textsuperscript{279} Without a connection with Julius Caesar and Augustus, Galba must find another justification to occupy the role, where the same

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{273} Ner. 1.1; Plut. \textit{Aem.} 25.1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{274} Carlsen (2006) 18.
\item \textsuperscript{275} Suet. \textit{Galb.} 2.1: \textit{quo paternam originem ad Iouem, maternam ad Pasiphaam Minonis uxorem referret.} I have included a stemma of the Sulpicii and Galba’s other connections as Figure II.
\item \textsuperscript{276} Sil. \textit{Pun.} 8.468-71. Wiseman (1974) 156, n. 4 says Silius Italicus is wrong to make it the paternal ancestry. F. Spaltenstein (1986) 1.535 suggests Silius is thinking here of Galba Caesar when he attaches this genealogy to this Galba. If Suetonius is correct, Silius must have retrojected what he knew to be Galba Caesar’s ancestry onto his third-century BCE ancestor, without realising he was dealing with the other side of the family.
\item \textsuperscript{277} On Hadrian’s cultivation of the imperial cult, Birley (2000) 120-4.
\item \textsuperscript{278} Murison (1992) 28.
\item \textsuperscript{279} This is the preference of G. Morgan (2006) 32.
\end{thebibliography}
\end{footnotesize}
position had always been granted on the basis of family connection with the previous Caesar. Galba was connected with Livia, even recognised in her will, and this would have had some cachet, but these are not the grounds on which Suetonius seeks to justify Galba’s position. He prefers to explain Galba’s eligibility with his nobility. The first order of business is to acknowledge the social status of the new Caesar compared with the old one. This opening reference to Galba’s family is the second indirect comparison of two families, one of only two in the whole De Vita Caesarum:

[Galba] was related in no degree to the house of the Caesars, although [nullo gradu contingens Caesarum domum, sed] unquestionably of noble origin and of an old and powerful family …

The family is never explicitly compared (with a comparative adjective or adverb, for instance) with the Julio-Claudians or the Domitii. The comparison is more subtle—it is all expressed in the sed (‘although’). Galba’s nobility must stand in for his lack of connection with the domus Caesarum—only later do we find out that he was a favourite of Livia. After this juxtaposition, the biographer uses these offices and honours as units in a formula to calculate nobility. He steers his audience to add up all these consulships and legendary genealogies to find that the nobility of the Sulpicii is on a par with that of Galba’s predecessors.

At the demise of the last Julio-Claudian, there were few Roman senators still standing whose lineage could rival the Iulii and Claudii in republican credibility. One of the few such families was the Sulpicii. It is little wonder that Servius Sulpicius Galba is said to have drawn attention to his own family tree, in his atrium and in inscriptions on statues: he did indeed come from a long and illustrious line, politically prominent on both sides of the family. He was also said to have been the wealthiest man ever to come to the Principate. The Sulpicii Galbae had been politically engaged at Rome for centuries by the time a member of the family succeeded the Julio-Claudians. In this quite short Life, there is no list of the number of honours, its absence excused with a rare first-person verb:

280 Suet. Galb. 5.2.
281 Suet. Galb. 2: ... nullo gradu contingens Caesarum domum, sed haud dubie nobilissimus magnaque et uetere prosapia ... Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1997). The first indirect comparison of two families was between the Claudii and the Liuii, Tib. 3.1, discussed above, 50-2.
282 Suet. Galb. 5.2.
284 Plut. Galb. 3.1.
[i]t would be a long story to give in detail his illustrious ancestors and the honorary inscriptions of the entire race, but I shall give a brief account of his immediate family.285

On his father’s side, Galba was eleven generations removed from the consul (304 BCE), censor, and interrex, P. Sulpicius Sauerrio, and descended, in the intervening generations, from a slew of senators, including the dictator of 203, and the jurist (although the degree of descent is uncertain).286

Amongst his direct ascendants on that line alone, Galba could have displayed an *imago* for almost every generation for 300 years. Instead of reciting a list, perhaps for want of space, Suetonius explicitly states that the family is very noble: *nobilissimus magnae et uetere prosapia*, much as Plutarch and Tacitus do.287 He then supplies a short catalogue, in chronological order, of just three of his more notable ancestors, and his father. Suetonius, like Plutarch, mentions that Galba was especially proud of his connection with Catulus.288 We are equipped with the legal, financial, and social status of the Sulpicii before we learn a thing about Galba.

Galba is shown to be an acceptable replacement for the Julio-Claudians on account of his republican nobility. In the third chapter we shall see that high status does not make for a good Caesar, but for now it is important we notice that the nobility of the Julio-Claudians and Galba is comparable, and easily established. Nobility may not augur a good Caesar, but it is at least a factor in eligibility. Galba’s successors, however, are another story: they have not the family connection with each other, and are not even recently noble. Their eligibility to be *princeps* requires closer scrutiny and a different approach.

**Non-noble Caesars**

We have seen that Suetonius is comfortable drawing fine distinctions between the very noblest of the republican nobility; it remains to see how he approaches the four Caesars who rose from ignoble beginnings. In the *Lives* of non-noble Caesars, the information about ancestry rarely surpasses the basic requirements of status. In those *Lives*—

---

Augustus, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian—Suetonius’ concern (and sometimes his challenge) is to establish that the family was respectable, if not noble. In fact, despite a few dubious connections, in the end all nine Caesars are bequeathed respectable families. Suetonius is careful about nobility. The value of good family shows in his scheme, but he does not impute good family willy-nilly, even if it does seem distasteful to deny nobility to his favourite Caesars. Suetonius’ approach to the Caesars of questionable backgrounds illuminates the importance of the rubric to his programme, as he addresses the issue no matter how murky or unsavoury the history.

**Vespasian**

The *Vespasian* is proof that nobility is not a requirement of Suetonius’ Caesars, even of the good ones, but there certainly must be no skeletons in the closet. Suetonius is not embarrassed to admit that Vespasian’s family is obscure, but he is very careful to emphasise that it is not shameful:

> this house was, it is true, obscure [obscura] and without family portraits, yet it was one of which our country had no reason to be ashamed [nequaquam paenitenda] …

This is the first in a series of statements that aim to dispel any question about Vespasian’s respectability. From a reference to an ancestor’s ‘honourable’ discharge from the army, the honour of the father’s recognition as an ‘honest tax-gatherer,’ to the mother’s ‘honourable’ family and the ‘renown and antiquity’ of the maternal line, we are not allowed to forget that the family of Vespasian is not shameful. Suetonius appears to have undertaken serious research in his quest for the respectability of non-noble Caesars, but he has not seen reason to invent *imagines*. Even when higher connections could have been imputed, such as the legendary genealogy Vespasian dismissed, Suetonius errs on the side of respectable non-noble. Vespasian’s legendary genealogy appears not in the ancestry at the beginning of the *Life*, but later, in demonstration, and approval, of Vespasian’s humility.

Our main source for the antecedents of Vespasian is *Vespasian* 1.1-4. The lack of *comparanda* will make it difficult to pinpoint how much Suetonius has shaped his

---


290 *Vesp.* 12. On Vespasian’s legendary genealogy, see below, 63.
material. Suetonius tells us that Vespasian was the younger of two sons of T. Flauius Sabinus, who was himself son of T. Flauius Petro, and that Vespasian’s grandfather, Petro, was a farmer at Reate. Suetonius reports, rejecting as unsubstantiated, a tradition that Petro’s father was a contractor at Reate who might have come from Transpadane Gaul. It is a testament to the family’s obscurity that the biographer has no better suggestion, but it seems to be important that he mention it anyway. The name Petro is certainly Gallic. At Pharsalus, Petro fought for Pompey, possibly as a centurion. Suetonius calls him centurio an euocatus, either a centurion or a soldier who stayed on in the army after his obligations had been fulfilled. He fled Pharsalus, received a pardon from Caesar, and, returning to civilian life, became a debt collector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father of Petro</th>
<th>Came from across the Po to settle in Reate?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Flauius Petro</td>
<td>Fought at Pharsalus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debt collector in Reate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Flauius Sabinus</td>
<td>Banker and tax collector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibly ex-military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Flauius Vespasianus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like many ancient women, Petro’s wife is known to us only by one name. Tertulla, a diminutive of Tertia, is a relatively common cognomen. Nicols postulates the nomen

---

291 Vesp. 1.2-3. The stemma of the Flauii is Figure III.
292 Vesp. 1.4.
295 Vesp. 1.2.
297 G.D. Chase (1897) 171.
Sabina, based on the *cognomen* of her son, T. Flavius Sabinus.\(^{298}\) In fact, Tertulla might have been related to the Arrecini, as an Arrecina Tertulla was married to Titus a few generations later, and Titus’ first cousin Sabinus also married an Arrecina.\(^{299}\) The family was important under the Julio-Claudians. It is conceivable that the connection between the two families began as far back as Petro’s wife.\(^{300}\)

As for Vespasian’s father, T. Flavius Sabinus, Suetonius provides three conflicting accounts of Sabinus’ military career: the first that he was a centurion, the second that he retired, on account of poor health, before reaching that level. Such an excuse for failing to rise higher in the ranks is reminiscent of Suetonius’ apology for Augustus’ father. The third option, and the biographer’s preference, is to rule out involvement in the military altogether. Instead, he makes him a tax farmer in Asia, and later a banker in Helvetia.\(^{301}\) He was supposedly singled out for honourable mention amongst the people of Asia for his fairness, an uncommon occurrence for a *publicanus*.\(^{302}\) Sabinus made sufficient profit from his business dealings in Asia and Helvetia to enter the equestrian order,\(^{303}\) and his marriage to Vespasia Polla was a boon both financially and socially.\(^{304}\)

\(^{298}\) Nicols (1978) 36. Flavius, if he was the second son, might have taken the *cognomen* Sabinus from his mother’s *nomen*, as Vespasian took a form of his mother’s *nomen* as his *cognomen*. It must be admitted, however, that Sabinus is quite a common *cognomen*, particularly (but not only) amongst families from the Sabine country, such as the Flauii. Wiseman (1971) 257-8; Farney (1999) 116-7.

\(^{299}\) Townend (1961b) 56, n. 7.

\(^{300}\) Edmundson links Tertulla with M. Arrecinus Tertullus Clemens, Praetorian Prefect under Caligula, and therefore with the family of Titus’ wife. G. Edmundson (1913) 228-9. More modern scholars, Levick (1999) and Jones (1992), have preferred not to speculate on Tertulla’s connections.

\(^{301}\) De Laet places him in Asia and in Helvetia at the end of the Augustan period and/or the beginning of the Tiberian. S.J. de Laet (1949) 371-8.

\(^{302}\) *Vesp.* 1; de Laet (1949) 371, n. 2.

\(^{303}\) Jones (1984) 1. Levick (1999) 5, however, thinks Sabinus was likely 'to have reached just below equestrian rank or to have been close enough to pass as an *eques*.'

\(^{304}\) Jones (1992) 2.
Of the Flauii and the Vespasii, the maternal line is the more distinguished, and Sueto-
nius looks to the Vespasii for evidence of high status. The Flauii were of
equestrian status in the two generations before Vespasian, but Vespasia’s father,
Vespasius Pollio, was an equestrian *praefectus castrorum*, most likely under
Augustus. The position indicates he was probably an experienced centurion. The
family was not prominent at Rome, but it was not unknown: Vespasia’s brother entered
the Senate, probably during the reign of Augustus, and he reached the praetorship.
Vespasia herself is probably the dedicator of an inscription found at Spoletium, dated to
the reign of Caligula. The Vespasii were prominent at Nursia, and Suetonius claims
familiarity with their family monuments at nearby Vespasiae. Suetonius’ *modus
operandi* is to vindicate the parvenu’s success by adducing the obscure municipal
family’s importance in their own *patria*, just as he would for an unknown paternal
family.

305 It is questionable whether they had actually attained equestrian rank. Petro was probably ‘from the
stratum of society just below that of the knights,’ and his son Sabinus was likely ‘to have reached just
below equestrian rank or to have been close enough to pass as an *eques*.’ Levick (1999) 4-5. See above, n.
303.
306 Equestrian, according to A.R. Birley (1981) 226; the prefecture was probably held under Augustus,
309 H.C. Newton (1901) 99-100; E. Bormann (1892) 37.
310 *Vesp.* 1.3. The place Suetonius calls ‘Vespasiae’ might be genitive, i.e. ‘Vespasia’s’, but is probably the
nominative form of the adjective: A.W. Braithwaite (1927) 22.
From humble beginnings, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian came from a family with a head for finances and social strategy. Within the four generations recounted by Suetonius, they had moved up in the world from entrepreneurship, amassing property and cash via careful marriages and various financial enterprises, to the Roman Senate. Vespasian was the first in his line to become a Roman senator and a patrician. He was still a parvenu, but in addition to the money and position he had inherited, he had also cultivated helpful connections with the imperial court from the time of Caligula. By the time of Claudius, Vespasian was prominent enough that, Suetonius reports, his son Titus was raised in the court alongside the ill-starred Britannicus.\footnote{Tit. 2.}

Unlike his father and grandfather, Vespasian did not marry up. Flavia Domitilla, a Junian Latin, was certainly below Vespasian’s senatorial rank.\footnote{Vesp. 3: \textit{mox ingenuam}. On Flavia Domitilla, see A.A. Barrett (2005) and M.B. Charles & E. Anagnostou-Laoutides (2010).} Suetonius is obviously interested in Flavia’s status but he is not definitively clear when he gives it. He says:

\begin{quote}
[m]eanwhile he took to wife Flavia Domitilla, formerly the mistress of Statilius Capella, a Roman knight of Sabrata in Africa, a woman originally only of Latin rank, but afterwards declared a freeborn citizen of Rome in a suit before arbiters, brought by her father Flavius Liberalis…\footnote{Vesp. 3: \textit{inter haec Flauiam Domitillam duxit uxorem, Statili Capellae equitis R. Sabratensis ex Africa delicatam olim Latinaeque condicionis, sed mox ingenuam et ciuem Rom. reciperatorio iudicio pronuntiatam, patre asserente Flauio Liberale Ferenti genito nec quicquam amplius quam quaestorio scriba.} Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1997).}
\end{quote}

Flavia’s status has been the subject of much discussion.\footnote{On Flavia’s status, see especially Barrett (2005). Jones & Milns (2002) assert that she was a Junian Latin. Levick (1999) 12 suspects this passage of Suetonius means she was the daughter of Flavius and his slave. The criteria for Latin status are discussed in P.R.C. Weaver (1990). Cf. \textit{Epit. De Caes.} which calls her a freedwoman at 10.1 (\textit{matre liberta Domitilla}) and 11.1 (\textit{Vespasiani et Domitillae libertae filius}). Perhaps this was due to a misreading of Suetonius’ \textit{mox ingenuam}, according to Braithwaite (1927). The placement of the phrase concerning her Latin status alongside her connection with Statilius Capella confuses the matter of whose freedwoman she was. J.K. Evans (1979) 201 agrees with H.W. Ritter (1972) 759-61 that Flavia was probably the daughter of Flavius Liberalis, but the freedwoman and concubine of the African knight, Statilius Capella. At \textit{Vesp. 3}, Flavia is called the former mistress of the knight Statilius Capella of Africa: \textit{Statili Capellae equitis R. sabratensis ex Africa delicatam olim.} Barrett concludes that she was probably born free, and then became servile, possibly by Flavius’ selling her to Statilius. Barrett (2005) 388-9.}

One wonders why Vespasian made this particular match, if her status was as far below Vespasian’s as Suetonius would have us believe. Levick supposed Flavia was related to Vespasian, which is possible, since, as Bush and McHugh have shown, close-
kin marriage was quite common in Rome. However, from the passage in Suetonius, it would appear that her name came from her emancipation, not her father. Levick also points out that the marriage might have been made for money, but if so it appears not to have had any immediate effect.

However, whatever the reason for the match, Barrett points out that marrying below himself would not be out of character for the unambitious Vespasian whose mother had to pressure him into joining the Senate. Curiously, where Suetonius had brought in higher connections from the maternal side of Vespasian’s family, here he appears to over-emphasise just how obscure his wife’s family is. Her father, Flavius Liberalis, is said to have been a quaestor’s clerk (scriba quaestorius) from Ferent(i)um. Suetonius downplays his distinction—he calls him ‘no more than [nec quicquam amplius quam] a quaestor’s clerk’—but a quaestor’s clerk could easily be equestrian, and scriba quaestorius alone would have been an adequate description of the man’s occupation. The scriba was an upwardly mobile profession, but in this instance still not prestigious. The Flauii were certainly of inferior status to the Julio-Claudians, and it appears to be important that we know this. However, their humility is to their credit. The humble origin of the family was something Vespasian emphasised in his own publicity. With his mox ingenuam and nec quicquam amplius quam, describing the family of Vespasian’s wife, Suetonius downplays their status as deliberately as he had previously emphasised the respectability of the Vespasii. The status of Vespasian’s wife has a direct bearing on Titus and Domitian, and the question of her low birth may have come from anti-Domitianic sources. While Suetonius declares that Domitian deserved his end, he has no such problem with Titus, and given that this information prefaces Vespasian and does not reappear in either of the final two Lives, it does not seem to affect the legitimacy of Titus or Domitian. In fact, in the Vespasian, it seems as though low origins are preferable, and the lower the better, as long as things stay above sordid.

317 Vesp. 2.2; A.A. Barrett (2005) 391.
318 The same town as Otho’s ancestors (Oth. 1.1: Ferentio), according to Barrett (2005) 387.
319 Braithwaite (1927) 25.
320 N. Purcell (1983) 136 read a sneer in Suetonius’ description here; possibly due to the fact that the scriba drew a salary: Jones & Milns (2002) 47.
321 Vesp. 1.1.
In spite of his newfound high status, Vespasian did not have delusions of grandeur, a quality of Vespasian that Suetonius admires. It was rumoured, Suetonius says, that the Flauii were not just from Reate but were in fact descended from the founders of that town, and perhaps even from a companion of Hercules, who was commemorated in a monument on the Via Salaria (probably near Reate). The Flauii would have been continuing a long tradition of creating genealogical links with mythological characters, but Vespasian (Suetonius reports) was adamant that no such links existed—and his biographer does not presume to impose them. Suetonius reports that Vespasian laughed off claims that he had illustrious, even mythological, ancestry:

[i]Indeed, when certain men tried to trace the origin of the Flavian family to the founders of Reate and a companion of Hercules whose tomb still stands on the Via Salaria, he laughed at them for their pains.23

The spirit of the times, and a desire for distance from the previous Caesars such as Nero and Galba, encouraged him to keep his family connections humble. The wealth of detail makes it plain that Suetonius is curious about the precise level of status here, just as he is interested in the nuances of nobility in other Lives. The dilemma of the Flauii, for Suetonius, is that he would like to convey both the important fact that the Flauii were, in Roman terms, respectable enough, and that they were ordinary people; hence the emphasis on the low status of Vespasian’s wife and his denying any legendary genealogy.

**Augustus**

This is different from the way the biographer approaches the Augustus, although his material is much the same. Suetonius is decidedly more flattering to the Octauii than he is to the Flauii, finding a good deal more nobility for Augustus, but allowing low connections to Vespasian. Both accounts are favourable overall, but we can detect a preference for nobility in the Augustus, but not in the Vespasian, where lower origins are admirable. Most likely this is partly because Augustus did have at least a senatorial father, and partly to do with a gradually rising tolerance of new men amongst the ruling élite over the first century CE. In the period between Augustus and Vespasian, Nicols

322 Vesp. 12.
postulates, there was enough of a change in attitude towards *nouitas* (at least for the army, influential in appointing *principes*) that a *nouus* such as Vespasian was eligible for the Principate while he would never have been during the triumvirate.\(^{324}\) The demise of the old aristocracy in the period after Galba might have necessitated this change. Where Vespasian could be proud of his humble family tree, Augustus’ peers still had strong opinions about nobility.

Augustus’ family line was in one way very well known, and in another absolutely ordinary. On the one hand, Octavius’ assumption\(^{325}\) into the Julian family by the will of Julius Caesar afforded him a unique opportunity to style himself *diui filius*, as well he did on coins and in inscriptions. Along with the usual worldly goods left him by will, the young Caesar Octavianus inherited the Julian mythological genealogy, and could now claim descent from Iulus and Aeneas, a Trojan connection in a period when a Trojan genealogy was fashionable, and through them a divine ancestry in the person of Aeneas’ mother, Venus. Augustus’ enthusiastic embrace of the concept of *pius Aeneas* is well-attested in art and poetry of the period, manipulated as a central part of his self-promotion.\(^{326}\) Although Julius Caesar had alluded to his connection to Venus on coins, it was Augustus who really embraced Aeneas as the family’s progenitor, almost on an equal footing with Venus. Vergil’s *Aeneid*, the great epic of the Augustan age, chronicles the adventures of Aeneas, the supposed progenitor of the Romans but most specifically of the Iulii Caesares—and Augustus. Vergil explains that Aeneas’ son, Ascanius, received the *cognomen*, Iulus, which came from ‘Ilium’ via Ilus;\(^{327}\) elsewhere the name ‘Atius,’ the family name of Augustus’ mother, is attributed to Atys, a companion of Aeneas.\(^{328}\) It was only in the Augustan age that Aeneas’ piety came to the forefront to invite comparison of *pius Aeneas* with *pius Augustus*. Suetonius does not emphasise the Julian connection with Venus in the *Augustus*, probably because he dealt with it in the lost beginning of the *Julius*. The extant portion of the *Julius* includes a funeral oration, given by Caesar for his aunt, which links the Caesars with gods and

---

\(^{324}\) J. Nicols (1978) 91.
kings. It is likely this was not the first mention of the divine genealogy in the *Life*, and we might be expected to be familiar with it, just as we are expected to be familiar with the Claudii when we read the *Caligula*, or the Flauii when we read the *Titus*.

On the other hand, the line of Augustus’ father was somewhat obscure, and Suetonius is not as concerned with his grandiose connections as with his modest ones. The controversy surrounding Octavian’s rise to fame and power did, unsurprisingly, beget both derogatory and flattering stories of his origins—the vituperative versions Antonius preferred were discussed above—but, whether respectable or shameful, his agnate relatives were certainly obscure. The elder Octaviius’ connection with the Iulii was much more consequential than his career in the Senate. As Gascou notes, Suetonius is much more expressive on the Octavii than other authors—this is partly a side-effect of his genre, but one must wonder at how generous he is to them. According to Suetonius, of two branches of Octavii, both descended from (C. or Cn.) Octavius Rufus, quaest. 230 BCE, one was more distinguished in consulships than the other; the family in which we are interested was the less eminent. This line was equestrian for generations until Augustus’ father. He was the first of his line since the aforementioned quaestor to hold curule office at Rome, his praetorship in 61.

As with the *Vespasian*, in the *Augustus* the parvenu’s family is at least important on home soil. Suetonius goes to great pains to assert that, while at Rome the Octavii were not well known before Augustus, at home in Velitae, they were people of circumstance. In fact, so important is this information that this is the force of the very opening sentence:

---

329 *Iul.* 6.1, cf. another reference to the genealogy at *Iul.* 49.3.
330 Above, 22.
332 The *praenomen* Gaius is attested by *Aug.* 2.1; its accuracy is discussed in L. Pietilá-Castrén (1984) 76-7.
333 A stemma of the Octavii is Figure IV. Whether by Augustus’ design or Suetonius’ mistake, Suetonius’ family tree might be wrong. Since the two branches were of different voting tribes, Augustus’ line of Octavii was probably not related to the Octavii already senatorial at Rome: Wiseman (1965) 333. On the evidence of similar cases in the *Lives*, I am inclined to believe that this is a mistake, rather than deliberate misrepresentation on the part of the biographer.
334 *Aug.* 2.2.
335 Shuckburgh (1908) 1.
336 Broughton (1952) 179.
[t]here are many indications that the Octavian family was in days of old a distinguished one at Velitrae …

The biographer attests a street in Velitrae called Octauia and an altar, *Octauio consecrata*, either consecrated to or by an Octauuius. The Octauui of Velitrae are intrinsically connected with the local cult of Mars, the story of their ancestral sacrifice conveying both intimacy with the gods and military success, but most of all high status at Velitrae. Particular connection with a god such as the one this story demonstrates is a kind of legendary genealogy and conveys status, much like the Domitii’s connection with the Dioscuri.

Suetonius is most forthcoming on the topic of Augustus’ father, whom, he says, some would make a money changer and distributor of bribes at elections. The source of this slur is the appropriately vague *a nonnullis … proditum* ‘some have put it about that …’, adduced only for balance; the biographer himself finds it rather surprising that anyone would say that he was anything other than wealthy and distinguished,

for, as a matter of fact, being brought up in affluence, he readily attained to high positions and filled them with distinction.

Octavius, Augustus’ father, was the first in the family to reach the Senate, becoming a praetor (61 BCE) and having great success as governor of Macedonia afterwards. His defeat of the Bessi in Macedonia was a respectable military achievement. Inscriptional evidence supports his praetorship and proconsulship in Macedonia.

Suetonius tells us he died suddenly on his way back from Macedonia, and was therefore unable even to stand for the consulship. The implication is that he would have been consul had he lived. Where he cannot bestow nobility, the biographer grants potential nobility instead. It is curious that Suetonius seems so attracted to nobility, especially in the early *Lives*, and yet he would prefer to find some good, honest ‘almost-nobility’ here than play the trump card of Augustus’ connections with Venus. This hints

---

338 Shuckburgh (1896) 1. There is still a Via Ottavia through the centre of Velletri today, A. Everitt (2006) 4.
341 Broughton (1948) 323.
342 *Aug.* 4.1: *decedens Macedonia, prius quam profiteri se candidatum consulatus posset, mortem obit repentinam*. 

66
that perhaps the biological line is the really important connection: so, too, with Tiberius and Nero, each adopted by his step-father, there is no suggestion that the family of adoption is significant to the *Life*. In the *Galba*, his mother’s line, less important than his father’s, is still more important than the family of his step-mother who adopts him. Only when the adoptive family appears a few generations back, as is the case with the Liuii in *Tiberius*, does it play a role in the narrative.\footnote{This will be discussed below in Chapter Four.}

Augustus’ father had made the advantageous marriage into the family of Julius Caesar, and it is this branch with which Suetonius rescues the family connections. A brief mention suffices to establish its respectability. The supposed legendary genealogy of the Atii through Atys, familiar from Vergil,\footnote{Verg. *Aen.* 5.568-9.} does not appear in Suetonius’ account, but he mentions their *multi imaginies* (read *nobilitas*), connection to the family of Pompeius Magnus, and Atius Balbus’ achievements in government. This is a case where Suetonius might have embroidered: Atius was in fact a *nouus homo*, according to Wiseman, who argues from Cicero’s silence.\footnote{Wiseman (1965) 333. He thinks Suetonius’ mistake is in a misreading of Cic. *Phil.* 3.16, and that Cicero would have mentioned Atius’ consular ancestors if he had had any. This is basically an argument *ex silentio* and is not really reason enough to impugn Suetonius’ evidence. There is also the possibility that Suetonius and Cicero’s definitions of *nobilitas* differed. See above, n. 146.} Not only is Suetonius more informative on the background of Augustus’ family, as Gascou noticed, but he is also more generous than other authors. Augustus is one of Suetonius’ favourite Caesars, so one might suspect him of creating nobility out of respect for him. However, while respectability is an essential ingredient of the Suetonian Caesar, nobility is not—we know this from his complete lack of discomfort about Vespasian’s family. A favourable picture of Augustus should not require the biographer to invent *imagines*, so the exaggeration of Atius’ *imagines* is probably an honest mistake rather than an arrogance. But if the Atii are not really noble, and the Octauii are neither noble themselves nor related to the noble Octauii, one must admit it is a curious coincidence that Suetonius has mistakenly given Augustus too many (viz. any) *imagines* on both sides of the family. Perhaps Suetonius’ approach is influenced by the attitudes of his sources here, and he is reflecting the difference between the prerequisites of a *princeps* in the 40s-30s BCE and those of the 60s CE. Vespasian (in the 60s) can get away with his family and still be a virtuous Caesar, but Augustus (coming to prominence in the 40s-30s BCE)
would benefit from a few sly amendments to his family tree. Whether this was a Suetonius’ mistake or one he found in his sources, someone (possibly Augustus himself) wanted Augustus’ background to look a bit more distinguished.

**Otho**

These source problems aside, it is a feature of Suetonius’ introductions that some kind of position in society is preferable to complete and utter obscurity. Even municipal beginnings are not to be discounted, and just as with Augustus and Vespasian, in the *Otho* Suetonius finds local distinction when he cannot adduce nobility at Rome.

Otho’s family is *uetus et honoratus*, but only at home. The Saluii Othones came from Ferentium in Etruria, as recently as Otho’s great-grandfather, and Otho Caesar himself was said to have been born there. The name ‘Otho’ does not appear on the tombs of the Saluii at Ferentium, but at Rome the name ‘Saluius Otho’ was passed down intact, as an hereditary *nomen* and *cognomen* pair.346

To Romans, Otho Caesar’s grandfather had obscure origins as the son of an *eques* from Etruria and a woman who was, according to Suetonius, possibly not even freeborn.347 The grandfather was raised in Livia’s household and was elevated from equestrian to senator by her influence. He reached the praetorship,348 but no further. He married a woman from an illustrious family, but her name is unknown to us.349 It is neither certain nor inconceivable that she was Tiberius’ mistress; as Suetonius reports, her son, Otho’s father, was so like Tiberius and dear to him that people suspected he was in fact Tiberius’ progeny.350 Perhaps the connection with Livia and Tiberius—and therefore the *domus Augusta*—raises his currency with the reader, where his nominal father Saluius is fairly undistinguished.

The family continued to profit from their relationships with later Julio-Claudians. Otho Caesar’s father, L. Saluius Otho, flourished under Claudius, becoming cos. suff. in 33 CE, Arval Brother, and proconsul of Africa in 40–41.351 He offended Claudius in his management of the rebellion of Camillus in Illyricum, but was restored

346 Murison (1992) 89. For a stemma of the Saluii Othones, see Figure V.
347 Otho’s great-grandmother: *Oth.* 1.1: *humili incertum an ingenua*.
348 Murison (1992) 94.
349 Otho’s grandmother: *Oth.* 1.2: *praeclarus*.
350 *Oth.* 1.2.
351 *DNP*, s.v. L. Saluius Otho II.7.
to favour at court when he uncovered a conspiracy against the Caesar, for which Claudius made him a patrician (in 48 CE) and the Senate erected a statue to him in the palace. His wife, Albia Terentia, was probably the daughter of Q. Terentius Culleo and his wife Albia. If so, she would have come from a family with a prestigious republican history, socially superior to the Saluii Othones, who might have been an old family in Etruria, but had not held a single office in republican Rome. Certainly Suetonius thinks she is of good family, calling her *splendida femina,* better than he can say for the Saluii. It is interesting to note that Tacitus, in his obituary notice for Otho, goes the other way and ascribes more value to the Saluii than Albia’s line: he says that Otho’s mother’s side was certainly respectable but in fact not as illustrious as his father’s. This is perhaps on account of the *maternum genus praeclarum* of Otho’s paternal grandmother. The status of the family is important to both authors, whether it be found on the maternal or paternal side.

This family tree illustrates an unusual feature of the later *Lives,* the use of the maternal family, which appears in *Augustus* and *Tiberius,* and *Galba* to *Vespasian:* that is, all the non-noble families, plus *Tiberius* and *Galba.* During the Principate, the maternal line became more and more acceptable as a source of nobility, so we might expect an increasing interest in that side of the family, but Suetonius is only secondarily interested in such things. His approach differs from that of Tacitus and even their republican predecessor Nepos in that Suetonius does not give the maternal line the same attention as the paternal line. In the passage we took from Tacitus’ *Agricola,* the mother’s line is equally important as the father’s; Nepos finds Atticus’ status on both sides of the family. Of predecessors, only Nicolaus is uninterested in the maternal side of his subject, Augustus.

---

352 *DNP,* s.v. L. Salvius Otho, II.7.
353 *Oth.* 1.3.
355 *Oth.* 1.3. *Splendidus* probably indicates the daughter of a knight, according to G.E.F. Chilver (1979) 215.
356 *Tac.* Hist. 2.50.1: *pater consularis, aaus praetorius; maternum genus impar nec tamen indecorum.* The accuracy of this statement is in question: C.A. Perkins (1993) 849, n. 5.
357 *Oth.* 1.2.
358 In all the *Lives* in which the mother’s family does not appear (Caligula, Claudius, and Nero; Titus and Domitian are special cases) this can be explained by relationship between the mother’s family and one of the families already catalogued, assuming that the Iulii were described in the *Julius.* I expect the mother’s family was at least mentioned in the lost part of the *Julius.* For more detail, see the Appendix to this thesis.
Plutarch is more interested in the agnate line: for example, in the *Fabius, Camillus, and Aemilius Paulus*, the mothers are not even named; in the *Coriolanus*, in which the mother, Volumnia, has a major role, she is not named until *Coriolanus* 4. The focus of the introduction remains on the line of the Marci. The dominance of the agnate line appears to be standard practice in Plutarch’s *Lives*. However, Plutarch will bring in the mother’s side when it is especially notable (such as in the *Brutus*, where the mother’s line and the father’s both have similar tyrant-slaying traditions) or better known than the father’s (such as in the *Cicero*).359

Suetonius usually gives at least as much attention to the mother’s family as Nepos or Tacitus had done, but he exceeds their interest in the paternal line, with the result that the two sides of the family are unevenly represented. The father of the Caesar is indeed the only sine qua non of this rubric, present in every *Life* in which the rubric occurs. Like Plutarch, Suetonius reserves detail about the mother’s line unless it is more prestigious than the father’s, that is, usually in the *Lives* of non-noble Caesars, but, unlike Plutarch, Suetonius’ practice is usually to supply the mother’s name. This is not a hard and fast rule, and two facts about the *Lives* prevent our drawing any conclusions about the role of the maternal line. The first obstacle is the loss of the beginning of the *Julius*. If the lost part of the *Julius* included the maternal family, then the *Caligula, Claudius*, and *Nero* would in fact be the odd ones out for not including the mother’s name, but as they are descended from families already documented we might presume that family tree unnecessary. On the other hand, the *Julius* might not have included the maternal line, and in that case we would have to wonder why the *Galba* is the only life of a noble Caesar (along with the *Tiberius*) that names the mother.360 The second hindrance is the problematic introduction to the *Tiberius*, which will be addressed below.361 Let us say for now, however, that Suetonius is only minimally interested in maternal ancestry, that is, his statements are only as detailed as those of Nepos or Tacitus, this despite the growing importance of the maternal line to status in the period since Nepos. To Suetonius, the agnate line is still primary. The maternal line is usually only good for finding status absent from the paternal.

---

359 Plut. *Brut.* 1.3; *Cic.* 1.1.
360 See above, n. 358.
361 See below, in Chapter Four.
We began this discussion with the curious beginning to the *Vitellius*, which featured a long discussion of the possible origins of the Vitellii. Returning to *Vitellius*, let us see if we are any closer to explaining why the ancestry rubric appears here even though the traditions vary wildly—from shameful beginnings in manual labour to divine parentage—and Suetonius makes no attempt to decide between them.

**Vitellius**

Already in Suetonius’ day the antiquity, not to mention the respectability, of the Vitellii was uncertain. The records were no doubt affected by Flavian propaganda, but had already been inconclusive for generations. Since the biographer’s schema requires family background, he does some careful research, and finds evidence both for an obscure, base origin, stemming from a repairer of shoes—a two lower-class professions, surely representative of new money and low status if not reality—as well as for a more presentable lineage starring Italian kings and a minor goddess. If he had wanted to give Vitellius a legendary ancestry, the material was available. So, too, could he have argued for complete obscurity: there was no denying that there were no Vitellii in republican annals. To Suetonius’ credit, he acknowledges that both sides of the history could be prejudiced by recent politics, but he rules that the discrepancy existed quite early. In the end, he does not choose between *nobilis* and *obscurus*, but leaves the matter undecided. Nowhere else in the series has he had so little to go on, yet the rubric remains. This passage is ample demonstration of the importance of the ancestry rubric, and its desired outcome. Suetonius’ purpose is not to show that Vitellius was noble, but to show that his immediate family was at least respectable.

While the Vitellii were not politically prominent in the Republic, they rose quickly under the new conditions of the Principate, when currying favour with one man could make all the difference. Like Galba and Otho, Vitellius has ancestral links with the Julio-Claudians. Publius Vitellius, the Caesar’s grandfather, was an *eques* in

---

362 A *ueteramentarium* (a hapax legomenon) is a repairer of old shoes, according to D. Shotter (1993) 161.
363 Ogilvie (1965) 242.
364 Vit. 1.1: *quod ego per audulatorum obrectatoresque imperatoris Vitelli euinisse opinarer, nisi aliquanto prius de familiae condicione varlatum esset.*
365 Vit. 2.1: *sed quod discrepat, sit in medio.*
charge of Augustus’ estates, and all four of his sons reached the Senate. Lucius, Vitellius Caesar’s father, was consul in 34, flattered Caligula’s vanity, and later, maintaining favour at court, held two more consulships (43, 47 CE) and a censorship along with Claudius Caesar. He married a Sestilia, a woman of good family, called probatissima. His reputation suffered from his public attachment to a freedwoman, but Tacitus can nonetheless attribute to his claritudo the whole of his son Vitellius’ success. Suetonius reports that the Senate honoured him at his death with a public funeral and a statue inscribed pietatis immobilis erga principem, ‘of unwavering loyalty to his emperor.’ Vitellius may not be related to the domus Augusta, but Suetonius’ summary of his ancestors shows that he, like his predecessors, was connected with them.

Most of the twelve Caesars are from families in a very small section of society—all except Vespasian are sons of senators. None of Suetonius’ Caesars is in the undesirable position of seruus or libertinus, although as with many senators one cannot rule out a freedman somewhere in the family line. Therefore, the difference in their status is not legal or financial, but social. In the Augustus, Vitellius, Otho, and Vespasian, Suetonius concentrates on respectability; that is, social status of non-noble families. All of these families have a prominent role in municipal politics, although they are new at Rome. In lesser families, a connection with divinity excuses obscurity at Rome. Pretension to legendary genealogy (such as occurs in the Vitellius, and is mentioned in the Vespasian) or particular connection with the gods (like that of the Octauii) in these newer families points to the popularity of the legendary genealogy as a way to status. In the time of Suetonius the stigma of low birth is not what it once was, but we see that the vituperation of the earlier period affects his discussion. Low birth is clearly more of an insult in the time of Augustus than the time of Vespasian, who revels in it, but Suetonius shows the vituperation of his sources and not only his own view of low birth. In the Augustus, he reports slurs on Augustus’ ancestry by openly hostile contemporaries, only to deny them; his swiftness to deny low connections betrays his discomfort with perpetuating such slurs about his favourites, even if only to correct

---

367 Vit. 2.4. For a stemma of the Vitellii, see Figure VI.
368 Sestilia to M. Ihm (2003), but called Sextilia in the manuscripts P, O, S, T, and Tac. Hist. 2.64. Vit. 3.1: probatissima.
369 Tac. Hist. 3.86.
them. But in the *Vespasian* he does not shrink from the manual occupations of the Flauii—in fact he emphasises them, in accordance with Vespasian’s own sentiments about his family origins. Suetonius’ favourite Caesars are those with lowly origins, but family background remains an area of interest to his audience, and nobility is still a desideratum. Perhaps more importantly, they all have a connection, ancestral or personal, with the *domus Augusta*.

Nobility might be a desideratum in a Caesar, but as far as Suetonius is concerned, republican nobility does not augur well for a good emperor. The worst Caesars (say, Nero and Caligula) have the best pedigrees, and the best (for argument’s sake, Augustus, Otho, and Vespasian) are not only new in the Senate but also come from municipal families. Their newness is, perhaps, their saving grace.

All the Caesars, in fact, are endowed with respectable families, whatever their obscurity. But much the more interesting thing about Suetonius’ use of the ancestors is what he does when respectability is not in question, when he has reams of information, dozens of *gentiles* in the public record. Suetonius is in his element in *Lives* of really noble Caesars, the Julio-Claudians and Galba. In these *Lives* the heft of evidence is not geared towards establishing legitimacy or respectability but towards separating one noble family from another by ‘degree.’ Suetonius’ task is to make the very fine distinction between different kinds of upper-class families. The degree of nobility is demonstrated by certain factors—consulships, triumphs, and other public honours—with the precision of a mathematical formula. As we have seen in other biographies, a list of offices and connections would suffice to demonstrate status, but Suetonius sees in the ancestors his first opportunity to draw character traits. The extended genealogy at the beginning of a Suetonian *Life* is not wasted, and as we will see in the next chapter, it is not without art.
III Characterisation via Lineage

As we saw in Chapter One, examples from other biographies by Nepos, Nicolaus, Plutarch, and Tacitus show that Suetonius could have situated his Caesars using just nobility and ethnicity. We will now ask why he also describes the ancestors and their character traits. We will see that in fact he uses ancestors more extensively in the interests of characterisation than other biographers. That is not to say that those authors do not characterise, but they do not use ancestry as a source of praise or blame to the degree Suetonius does. He follows more the model of Cicero’s speeches than that of his predecessors in biography. To Suetonius, the ancestry rubric might as well be any other rubric such as cruelty, marriages, discipline, and so on, because it performs the same task: it is another opportunity to list character traits in support of the overall portrait. However, as it is the first rubric, it also has the important role of setting the tone for the Life, and directing the audience towards a moral assessment of the subject. After status and ethnicity, the character traits of the ancestors are a third signpost to his audience of the direction the Life will take. Lest the reader miss this device, there is a passage in the Nero in which Suetonius breaks third person to explain the role of the ancestors in this Life:

I have decided to revive a number of members of the family, so that, knowing them, it might more easily appear that Nero degenerated so much from the virtues of his ancestors that it was as if he revived only innate and hereditary vices.371

Such programmatic statements are relatively rare in Suetonius, and there is no parallel reference to ancestors in the rest of the extant De Vita Caesarum. Does this statement really explain what Suetonius does with the ancestors? Keith Bradley opined that the principle this passage assumes, that character was in part hereditary and stable throughout life, was applicable throughout the Lives.372 This chapter considers the appropriateness of Suetonius’ statement to his practice: that is, how aptly his explanation degenerasse ... rettulerit describes what actually happens in the

371 Ner. 1.2: pluris e familia cognosci referre arbitror, quo facilitis appareat ita degenerasse a suorum uirtutibus Nero, ut tamen uia cuiusque quasi tradita et ingenita rettulerit. My translation.
characterisation of Nero, and further, whether Nero is unusual in his degeneration, or whether the statement can fairly be applied to other Caesars. That is, we are testing whether Bradley was correct to say that the principle of hereditary character, outlined in the *Nero*, can be taken as ‘operative throughout.’ We begin by adducing parallels in other literature—history, biography, and oratory—that might be models for Suetonius’ use of ancestors for characterisation.

When he begins his characterisation with ancestors, Suetonius is adhering to a recommendation of the first-century BCE *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. The unidentified author advises that in an epideictic argument, whether in attack or defence, a man’s descent can and should be used, and any kind of descent can be made to prove either side of the argument:

The following is the order we must keep when portraying a life:(1) External Circumstances: Descent—in praise: the ancestors of whom he is sprung; if he is of illustrious descent, he has been their peer or superior; if of humble descent, he has had his support, not in the virtues of his ancestors, but in his own. In censure: if he is of illustrious descent, he has been a disgrace to his forebears; if of low descent, he is none the less a dishonour even to these.\[373\]

We see here that, according to the theory, (a) an author must make something of the subject’s ancestry, and (b) the perceived quality of the ancestry is of little consequence, since the author will make it work to his advantage whether it be the lowliest or loftiest. A similar prescription appears in Quintilian:

[in praise] [w]ith regard to things preceding a man’s birth, there are his country, his parents and his ancestors, a theme which may be handled in two ways. For either it will be creditable to the objects of our praise not to have fallen short of the fair fame of their country and their sires or to have ennobled a humble origin by the glory of their achievements … The same method will be applied to denunciations as well, but with a view to opposite effects. For humble origin has been a reproach to many, while in some cases distinction has merely served to increase the notoriety and unpopularity of vices.\[374\]


\[374\] *Quint. Inst.* 3.7.10: ante hominem patria ac parentes maioresque erunt, quorum duplex tractatus est: aut enim respondisse nobilitati pulchrum erit aut humilium genus illustrasse factis. 3.7.19: qui omnis
According to these prescriptions, there are four ways to use ancestry outside of social status: two in praise, two in censure.

In practice, as in theory, ancestry does appear as evidence for both sides of the argument. The first use of the ancestors in praise—that a man has been the peer or superior of his ancestors—is aptly demonstrated by the famous epitaphs of the Scipiones, a series of inscriptions that show the importance of meeting and surpassing the merit of the ancestors. The epitaph for the young son of Scipio Africanus claims that he would have surpassed his ancestors; a later Scipio ‘claims’ to have increased the honour of his family by his own deeds:

I heaped up the honours of my clan through my behaviour.  
I begot offspring. I pursued the deeds of my father.  
I obtained the praise of the ancestors so that they rejoice that I was born to them. Honor has ennobled my stock.  

These epitaphs either claim that the son outstripped his ancestors, or that he would have, had he had the opportunity. Both he and his ancestors are honoured by these claims.

The *locus classicus* for the second—that a man has his support in his own virtues—is Marius as portrayed by Sallust in *Bellum Jugurthinum*. Sallust’s Marius claims that it is better to be the creator of one’s nobility than to inherit it; his nobility comes from virtue, as did the nobility of other men’s ancestors.

Praise of a young man is often expressed as his similarity to his father and/or ancestors, or his being worthy of them. For instance, in the *Philippics*, Cicero praises Lucius Philippus as ‘most worthy [dignissimus] of his father, his grandfather, his ancestors,’ and P. Scipio as ‘a man of great distinction and most resembling his ancestors.’ In the Principate, praise of the *Princeps* was a common genre; preserved

---

376 Relevant epitaphs, such as *ILLRP* 311 and 312, are collected in Habinke (1998) and in J. van Sickle (1987).  
for us in Pliny’s *Panegyricus*, which deals delicately with the subject of Trajan’s adoption in ss.7-9. Trajan’s nobility is praised, as is his respect for other nobles.³⁸¹

More common, however, is the use of lineage in attack, in court cases and invectives. The third use of ancestry is to compare the descendant unfavourably with his illustrious ancestors—a favourite device of Cicero’s. In the *In Pisonem* he compares the object of the invective unfavourably with those of his ancestors who are famous; in the *Pro Caelio* he wonders why Clodia, the main witness for the prosecution, is so unlike her illustrious forebears.³⁸² The fourth suggestion, that a man of low descent is a dishonour even to his forebears, is an emphatic insult: Cicero uses this, too, in the *In Pisonem*, saying Piso dishonours even his Gallic relatives, the Caluentii.³⁸³ The same fellow is a disappointment to both his noble relatives and his shameful ones. The *Philippics* compare Antonius with his famous ancestors, to their credit and Antonius’ discredit, shaming one Antonius by similarity to shameful ancestors, and his brother with difference from respected ones.³⁸⁴ Just as some are called worthy, other men are cast as unworthy (*indignus*) of their ancestors.³⁸⁵

Suetonius does not call his Caesars *dignus* or *indignus*, or even *(dis)similis*, except implicitly; rather, the ancestors have specific virtues which show their descendant’s dissimilarity, or they have vices, which emphasise their similarity. In Suetonius, any kind of vice in a Caesar can be drawn out by the use of a paradigm or foil in the opening section.

It was long assumed—and often enough stated³⁸⁶—that Suetonius’ method was essentially passive—that he artlessly collated information by rubric and did not have an opinion on the content. Wallace-Hadrill, while acknowledging Suetonius’ deliberate method, then shows no appreciation for style or rhetoric in Suetonius.³⁸⁷ In fact, quite the contrary—he goes as far as saying:

Suetonius is innocent of all these devices. He is mundane: has no poetry, no pathos, no persuasion, no epigram. Stylistically he has no pretensions. No writer who sees himself as an artist, one of the elect, could tolerate

---

³⁸¹ Plin. Pan. 9.2; 69.
³⁸² Cic. Pis. Fr. 12-15; Pis. 1.2; Cael. 34.
³⁸⁴ In Cic. Phil. 2.43 and 2.111 dissimilarity is an insult; similarity is an insult at Phil. 13.30.
³⁸⁵ For examples, see S. Treggiari (2003) 150.
³⁸⁶ See the Introduction, above.
³⁸⁷ Lounsbury (1986-7) 159.
the pervasive rubric; the repetitiveness of the headings, the monotony of
the items that follow, the predictable ending ‘such he did; and such he
did; and such he did.’

It is the purpose of this chapter to argue, against this characterisation of Suetonius’
style, that Suetonius is using the ancestors for rhetorical purpose, in a way that
conforms to the recommendations of Quintilian and the Rhetorica ad Herennium. He is
characterising his Caesars through lineage.

Suetonius’ models and contemporaries often use paradigms and foils to
emphasise certain qualities, and more often than not, the paradigms and foils are
ancestors or relations. The ancestors in Suetonius’ Lives are either paradigms or foils.

As a rhetorical device, the foil is popular in Roman literature. A foil
characterises one person by describing another, the contrast made more obvious by
juxtaposition. It is often remarked that Tacitus constructs Germanicus as a foil to
Tiberius, and although Pelling warns that it is not that simple,\(^{388}\) that juxtaposition has
parallels with the foils in Suetonius. Plutarch also points out differences between family
members, such as Pompeius and his father, and between Gaius and Iunius Brutus.\(^{389}\)

The contrast is not always made with a relative, as shown in Livy’s use of the
Quinctii as foils to Appius Claudius the Decemvir;\(^{390}\) Plutarch’s Nicias/Crassus uses
famous, unrelated men as foils in the first half of each Life.\(^{391}\) Cicero makes extensive
use of foils in his invective, identified as ‘virtuous’ and ‘ironic’ foils by Robin Seager.
Often, Cicero himself is the virtuous foil.\(^{392}\) A virtuous ancestor as a foil to a
descendant, however, is particularly effective because of its contrast with expectation.
In Cicero, an obvious example is the prosopopoeia in Pro Caelio, in which Cicero takes
on the persona of Clodia’s famous ancestor, Appius Claudius Caecus, in comparison
with whom Clodia and her brother seem hopelessly vicious.\(^{393}\) Elsewhere Cicero
comments that unrelated young men behave more like these nobles’ virtuous ancestors
than the noblemen do themselves.\(^{394}\) The implication is that the descendants of such men

\(^{388}\) Pelling (1993); cf. Shotter (1968); Bird (1973).
\(^{389}\) F. Albini (1997) 64.
\(^{391}\) F. Titchener (2012).
\(^{392}\) Examples in Seager (2007).
\(^{393}\) Cic. Cael. 33-34.
\(^{394}\) Others: e.g. Cic. Verr. 2.4.79ff, Scipio supports Verres instead of his ancestor, Scipio Africanus, and
Verr. 2.4.147 contrasts Metellus with Numidicus, ‘a real Metellus.’ On these passages, see Seager (2007) 35.
should behave like them, if only by emulation, and their dissimilarity is shameful. An ancestral foil creates the impression of degeneration in the descendant.

Like a foil, a literary paradigm characterises one person by describing the other, but in this case deliberate juxtaposition brings out implicit similarities between the two characters. Once again, Plutarch is a good example, as he often begins his Lives with a paradigm, such as Brasidas in Plutarch’s Lysander or Herakles in the Themistokles. References to these unrelated characters at the beginning of the Life foreshadow aspects of the Life we are about to read. However, Plutarch more often finds a paradigm in an ancestor. The Lives of Antonius, Solon, and Cimon bring out the similarity of traits between the subject and his father or grandfather. In fact, in the Antonius Plutarch goes even further and shows that not only did Antonius reproduce his father’s traits, but they appear in his son too, and in the closing passage of the Life Plutarch reveals Antonius’ connection with his descendant, Nero. Nero is not bequeathed the usual family traits, according to Plutarch, but ‘folly and madness.’ Although the author does not explicitly attribute Nero’s traits to Antonius, the context has tempted scholars to seek out parallels between Nero and Antonius in Plutarch’s Life. Though similar in function, the role of ancestors is not as fully developed in Plutarch as we shall see it is in Suetonius.

Like Plutarch, Suetonius sees a strong link between Nero and his ancestors, but he compares him not with the Antonii but with the Domitii Ahenobarbi. The Nero is the Life in which Suetonius makes most explicit the link between ancestors and descendant, as I noted above. Suetonius’ explanation for the ancestry of Nero is that Nero could or should have inherited both vices and virtues from his ancestors, but in fact he seemed to inherit only vices because, although his ancestors did have virtues, they were so weak in Nero as to be indiscernible. As a programmatic statement, this implies that we will hear about both virtues and vices in the ancestors, but should expect to see only vices in

396 Plut. Ant. 1 (father); Sol. 1-2 (father); Cim. 4 (grandfather); see Albini (1997) 64.
397 Generosity and liberality in his father: Plut. Ant. 1; the same traits in his son, 28.7-12.
399 Ner. 1.2: ‘I have decided to revive a number of members of the family, so that, knowing them, it might more easily appear that Nero degenerated so much from the virtues of his ancestors that it was as if he revived only innate and hereditary vices.’ My translation. Latin cited above, n. 371.
400 The implications of this statement for Suetonius’ view of heredity will be addressed in Chapter Five.
Nero himself. Is this the case? First, let us test the claim that Suetonius’ Nero degenerated from his ancestors’ virtues.

The Domitii Ahenobarbi were an important family well before Nero. Unlike, for instance, the Flauii, with the Domitii there is available to us a comparative wealth of evidence about them which gives us something to compare with Suetonius’ portrayal, and allows us to see how Suetonius uses the evidence selectively to bring out certain aspects in the ancestors that will foreshadow Nero’s character traits, sometimes down to very specific preferences and choices. As he claims to do, Suetonius uses the historical Domitii to bring out similarities with Nero.

Suetonius’ interest in the Domitii purports to take in ancestral virtues and vices (virtutibus…uitia), and we can be fairly confident, from the evidence of other sources, that both virtues and vices in the historical Domitii were well documented. Suetonius’ usual list of consulships and military victories supplies the requisite information about the long-held high status of the family and their success in elections, and also proof of the most general kind of virtus: military effectiveness. But, as we will see, the moral virtues that arise in other sources do not come into Suetonius’ portrait of the Domitii.

The first few Domitii on my stemma do not appear in Suetonius. Between the first Ahenobarbus, who received a red beard from the Dioscuri in 498 BCE, and the first consul, there are three centuries of early Ahenobarbi Suetonius might mention but does not. In fact, Suetonius does not even start with the first consul, Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. 192 BCE), the first recorded Domitian with the cognomen Ahenobarbus to be a magistrate. Instead he skips ahead to Gnaeus, cos. 122 BCE and censor for 115. Unfortunately Suetonius conflates the cos. 122 and his son, cos. 96, missing a generation to make the consul of 122 only great-great-great-grandfather to Nero.

401 See above, 57.
402 The stemma of the Domitii Ahenobarbi is Figure I.
The first Domitius of this family tree, which purports to describe the consul of 122, in fact deals with his son, who was upset not to be elected to the pontificate. His is a tale of petulance and exhibitionism. Although he was consul in 96 BCE and later censor in 92, his tribunate of the plebs, held in 104-3, is the most fruitful source of anecdotes about his career, being, as it was, marked by personality clashes and frustrated ambition:

Gnaeus Domitius, when tribune of the commons, was enraged at the pontiffs for choosing another than himself in his father’s place among them, and transferred the right of filling vacancies in the priesthods from the colleges themselves to the people.

As the first anecdote Suetonius tells about the Domitii, this story of childish petulance is in an emphatic position. Domitius’ petty jealousy is reminiscent of Nero’s envy of his rival, Britannicus, and later the actor, Paris. Although it was not unusual for the priesthood to be passed down through the family, it was not standard that a son should inherit his father’s position, and Domitius need not have waited to seek a place in one of the other colleges. Domitius blamed M. Aemilius Scaurus, Princeps Senatus and Pontifex, for failing to co-opt him into the college, and promptly prosecuted him on a charge of neglecting his own priestly duties. The prosecution was unsuccessful, but what we do not learn from Suetonius is that it did have the advantage of earning Domitius a reputation for fairness: one of Scaurus’ slaves is reported to have come to Domitius offering evidence against his master, and Domitius sent him back to Scaurus.

404 Ner. 2.1, beginning.
405 Ner. 2.1: Cn. Domitius in tribunatu pontificibus offensor, quod alium quam se in patris sui locum cooptasset, ius sacerdotum subrogandorum a collegiis ad populum transtulit.
406 Ner. 33.2; 54.
408 J.A. North (1990) 532.
410 Bates (1986) 266 places the prosecution before the lex Domitia.
without listening to his claims. Valerius Maximus records the incident as a triumph of justice over personal profit, and attributes Domitius' election as consul, censor, and even Pontifex Maximus, to this event and his other virtues. For he did, indeed, become a priest. Here is a concrete virtue unconnected with the military that Suetonius might include but he omits.

Cicero claims he was a good speaker, certainly good enough for a political career, and in 96 BCE he was consul, and in 92 censor, with L. Licinius Crassus. Suetonius reports Crassus' quip that it was little wonder Domitius had a bronze beard (a[ha]enea barba, cf. Ahenobarbus) since he also had a heart of lead, and a face of iron.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quasi ... triumphi, Ner. 2.1</th>
<th>Triumphi eius, Ner. 25.1–2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jealous, offensor, 2.1</td>
<td>Jealous of Britannicus, aemulatio, 33.2; jealous of celebrities, aemulus, 53; actor Paris, ‘a dangerous rival,’ grauis aduersarius, 54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of Suetonius' conflation of two Domitii, we now retreat up the family tree to the father, the consul of 122 BCE. During his proconsulship in Gaul, he and his colleague earned triumphs over Gallic tribes: Domitius over the Arverni, Fabius over the Allobroges. It was the only triumph of the Domitii Ahenobarbi, and a memorable one, for all that it was achieved by treachery. Domitius and Fabius built

411 Cic. Deiot. 31; V. Max. 6.5.5.
412 V. Max. 6.5.5: ‘[h]oth for his other qualities and more gladly on account of this the people made him Consul and Censor and Chief Pontiff.’ Quem populus cum propter alias uirtutes tum hoc nomine libentius et consulem et censorem et pontificem maximum fecit. Trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (2000).
413 At the end of 104 BCE, Domitius became tribune of the plebs, and in 103 he took his revenge: he passed the Lex Domitia de sacerdotiis, taking away from the college the privilege of co-opting new members, and giving the power to elect new priests for all the major colleges to the assembly that had previously elected only the pontifex maximus: Taylor (1942) 387. The year after the Lex Domitia, the pontifex maximus, L. Metellus Dalmaticus, conveniently met his end, and Domitius was elected to the vacancy as pontifex and, soon after, as pontifex maximus. 414 Cic. Brut. 165.
415 Ner. 2.2: quod aeneam barbam haberet, cui os ferreum, cor plumbeum esset.
418 V. Max. 9.6.3.
triumphal monuments in Gaul—the first Roman monumental trophies—and Domitius held a symbolic triumph in Gaul on an elephant, which Suetonius describes:

> [t]hen having vanquished the Allobroges and the Arverni in his consulship, he rode through the province on an elephant, attended by a throng of soldiers, in a kind of triumphal procession.

A triumph over the Arverni does appear on the Fasti, but Suetonius belittles it as *quasi inter sollemnia triumphi*. A triumph has little to offer Suetonius’ portrait of Nero, but a quasi-triumph is pertinent to Nero’s pseudo-triumph on his return from the Greek singing-circuit. Nero returns victorious from a tour of the singing-contests of Greece, entering Rome with an ostentatious procession:

> in the chariot which Augustus had used in his triumphs in days gone by, and wore a purple robe and a Greek cloak adorned with stars of gold, bearing on his head the Olympic crown and in his right hand the Pythian, while the rest were carried before him with inscriptions telling where he had won them and against what competitors, and giving the titles of the songs or the subject of the plays. His car was followed by a claque as by the escort of a triumphal procession, who shouted that they were the attendants of Augustus and the soldiers of his triumph. Then through the arch of the Circus Maximus, which was thrown down, he made his way across the Velabrum and the Forum to the Palatine and the temple of Apollo. All along the route victims were slain, the streets were sprinkled from time to time with perfume, white birds, ribbons, and sweetmeats were showered upon him.

And so it goes on. This faux-triumph—all the sillier since Nero celebrates no actual military victories—resembles Augustus’ funeral procession as described by Tacitus.

---

421 *Ner. 25.1-2: sed et Romam eo curr, quo Augustus olim triumphauerat, et in ueste purpurea distinctaque stellis aureis chlamyde coronamque capite gerens Olympiacam, dextra manu Pythiam, praeeunte pompam ceterarumcum titulis, ubi et quos cantionum quaeque fabularum argumento uisset; sequentibus currum uquantum ritu plausoribus, Augustianos militesque se triumphi eius clamitantibus. Dehinc diruto Circi Maximi arcu per Velabrum Forumque Palatium et Apollinem petit. Incedenti passim victimae caesae sparsos per uias identidem croco ingestaque aues ac lemnisci et bellaria.*
422 Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.
The next Domitius on the list is Lucius, cos. 54, who was a very important individual in the civil wars between Caesar and Pompeius. As proof of his influence, Caesar met with Pompeius and Crassus at Luca detrudendi Domitii causa, ‘for the sake of defeating Domitius’ in the election to the consulship. He shared the consulship of 54 BCE with another highly distinguished senator, Appius Claudius Pulcher, but the two were both implicated in an electoral scandal in which they were bribed to support certain candidates in the elections for 53.

There are several sources in which Lucius comes across as ‘sharp and rude.’ Those are qualities often applied to various Domitii. Suetionus’ characterisation of him is ‘a man of no great resolution [neque constans], though he had a violent temper [ingenium trux].’ Nero himself will also have trouble making up his mind, and will be described with a similar phrase, immanitas naturae.

---

423 Iul. 24.
424 Cic. QF 3.2.3; Broughton (1952) 221.
425 Caes. Civ. 2.82; Ner. 2.3; Plut. Pompey 67.2; Caes. 47; cited Broughton (1952) 277.
426 Carlsen (2006) 66, referring to Plut. Cic. 38.3, recognises those characteristics in Lucius, but he mistakes his Plutarch when he says: ‘[a]ccording to Cicero, the appointment of Domitius [as commander at Pharsalus, 48 BCE] was due to the gentleness and prudence of his character, but neither of these qualities was characteristic of the Consul of 54 BC, and the reason was doubtless political.’

Plutarch’s Cicero is not speaking about Ahenobarbus; he is, in fact, speaking to Ahenobarbus about an appointment the latter was making on account of another man’s gentleness and prudence. The text reads: ‘[w]hen Domitius, then, was advancing to a post of command a man who was no soldier, with the remark that he was gentle of disposition and prudent, “Why, then,” said Cicero, “do you not keep him as a guardian of your children?” ’ Plut. Cic. 38.3. Trans. Perrin (1919).

This anecdote from Plutarch, then, has no bearing on our Domitius after all.
427 Ner. 2.3: uir neque satis constans et ingenio truci.
428 Ner. 7.1: immanitas naturae; 26.1: crudelitas.
Of several options, the story that Suetonius gives is his ill-considered suicide attempt. This is no doubt strategic, since in this version it certainly does seem relevant to Nero. Before the surrender at Corfinium in 49 BCE, Ahenobarbus supposedly had his slave-physician give him poison to assist his suicide. The slave gave him only a sleeping potion, and was vindicated when Ahenobarbus later changed his mind about the suicide.

By now, Suetonius’ intention must be less to show degeneration from virtue than to show inherited vices. Suetonius’ Lucius is a paradigm for Nero’s fear and suicide in the exitus sections. The obvious parallel is Nero’s ambivalence about suicide. Lucius is always changing his mind; Nero also changes his mind whether or not to commit suicide. Lucius’ fear of death is an expurgated version of Nero’s in ss.46-49 where Nero is constantly afraid. Nero, like his ancestor, needs an assistant of lower station (a slave for the ancestor, a freedman for Nero) to kill himself. Unlike his ancestor, whose suicide was unsuccessful, Nero achieves his aim.

The reception of this story betrays a difference between the Neronian and post-Neronian authors. Before Nero’s suicide of 68, Seneca includes the anecdote in a list of loyal slaves. Later authors, Pliny, Suetonius, and Plutarch, writing after the death of Ahenobarbus’ ill-fated descendant Nero, put the spotlight on Ahenobarbus instead of the slave, drawing portraits of a coward, afraid to take his own life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lucius changes his mind, <em>uir neque satis constans</em>, Ner. 2.3</th>
<th><em>reuocato rursus</em>, Ner. 48.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cruelty, <em>ingenium trux</em></td>
<td><em>crudelitas</em>, 26.1, <em>immanitas naturae</em>, 7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has slave help him commit suicide</td>
<td>Freedman helps him commit suicide, 49.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite his long-held antipathy for Pompeius, Domitius fought and fell on Pompeius’ side at Pharsalus, killed by Caesar. Tacitus reports he died at the head of the

---

optimates. Caesar’s account of his adversary’s death is unsurprisingly hostile: he treats Domitius with ‘scorn and contempt’ to equal only one other figure in the Bellum Civile. Collins supposes that Caesar does not mention the suicide attempt because he did not want to give Ahenobarbus the credit for considering the courageous act of suicide. Caesar portrays Ahenobarbus as being cut down as he flees the battle; Cicero, criticising M. Antonius, also describes his flight. Lucan is the only source to glorify Ahenobarbus’ death. These authors wrote before Nero’s death, but in the light of his ignominious end, a dithering suicide seems more of a coward’s escape. Suetonius does mention that Ahenobarbus died at Pharsalus—more honourable than suicide—but any honour is overshadowed by his tergiversation and cowardice.

His son, Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. 32 BCE), led an existence fraught with peril: pardoned by Caesar after both Corfinium and Pharsalus, in 43 he was counted amongst the assassins of Caesar, and was indicted (banished, according to Velleius; condemned to death, according to Denniston) under the Lex Pedia. Later sources, including Suetonius, state the opinion that he was innocent. Ahenobarbus survived to fight another day, and appears several times in accounts of the whirligig of the conflict between M. Antonius and Octavian. Suetonius’ picture of a quickly degenerating line, heading towards Nero, is hindered by this curious individual, whom he damnns with faint praise as ‘better than the rest of the family.’ Supporting Suetonius’ judgment that this was the best Domitius, Cicero calls him ‘a young man of the highest valour, resolution, and steadiness;’ Velleius ‘a man of eminent and noble

433 Tac. Ann. 4.44; App. B Civ. 2.82; cf. Ner. 2.3.  
434 Caes. Civ. 3.99. The only other object of such hostility is Q. Titurius Sabinus, according to J.H. Collins (1972) 954.  
435 Collins (1972) 950.  
436 Luc. 7.599-616, on which see: B.M. Marti (1945); P. McCloskey & E. Phinney Jr (1968) 80-81; F.M. Ahl (1971); Lounsbury (1975); R. Mayer (1978) 86. Lucan’s portrayal is probably exaggerated—Carlsen (2006) 66, n. 167 would make it ‘fictitious’—but to what end is unclear. Some say he glorifies Nero’s ancestor for Nero’s sake, but it would seem of little benefit, since the Pharsalia is otherwise an attack on Julius Caesar and the imperial house of the Caesars. Lounsbury (1976) 224 rightly asks ‘how can one reconcile that Book Seven contains the most ferocious attacks on the empire of the Caesars and likewise the most enthusiastic laudation of an ancestor of Nero?’ Here Lounsbury paraphrases an opinion earlier voiced by R. Pichon (1912) 155.  
437 Carlsen (2006) 68.  
438 Vell. 2.69; J.D. Denniston (1926) 115. On the Lex Pedia, see R.A. Bauman (1967) 171-97.  
439 Ner. 3.1; according to App. B Civ. 5.62, he was innocent but condemned out of personal animosity. K. Welch (2012a) and (2012b) has traced the confusion here to a problem of vocabulary relating to several degrees of guilt in this case.  
simplicity’ and ‘illustrious.’

He had a military success against Domitius Calvinus in the naval battle at Brundisium, for which he received the title ‘Imperator.’

Domitius (cos. 32 BCE) made a career of changing sides in the civil wars, or at least gained a reputation for doing so: as Denniston remarks, ‘his various allegiances appear to have sat lightly on him.’ His friendship with Antonius suffered because Domitius would not suffer Cleopatra’s influence on the campaign. According to Plutarch and Velleius Paterculus, he tried to persuade Antonius to send her back to Egypt; not long afterwards, he defected to Octavian, and, according to Suetonius, Antonius smeared Domitius’ reputation with the rumour that he had left because he was lovesick. Only a few days after he joined Octavian he died, supposedly of natural causes.

The biographer makes him a competent naval commander, mixed up in politics between Caesar and M. Antonius, and possessor of ‘all the highest offices,’ but no specific virtues. Suetonius is shaping his material here. Virtues were no doubt available to him, but they serve no purpose, and he moves on to more Neronian traits. Even Suetonius’ favourite Domitius ‘does not escape unblemished’ by Antonius’ slurs on his reputation for unseemly devotion to his mistress. We know from the Augustus that Suetonius does not blindly accept Antonius’ aspersions, but neither does he leap to Domitius’ defence. In fact, rumour or not, this anecdote only strengthens Suetonius’ portrait of Nero: letting love affairs get in the way of work is just the inappropriate sort of thing his Nero does.

---

441 Cic. Phil. 10.13: adulescens summa uirtute, grauitate, constantia; Vell. 2.72.3: eminentissimae ac nobilissimae simplicitatis uiri, Vell. 2.84.2: uirque clarissimus.
443 Denniston (1926) 115.
444 Plut. Ant. 56.2; Vell. 2.84.2; Broughton (1952) 417.
445 Ner. 3.2.
446 Vell. 2.84.2; Ner. 3.2; Plut. Ant. 56.2; Cass. Dio 50.13; Carlsen (2006) 73.
447 Ner. 3.2: amplissimos honores percucurrit.
448 Ner. 3.2: nonnulla et ipse infamia aspersus.
As we approach Nero, the evidence builds more towards inherited vice than corrupted virtue, and the similarities between ancestor and Caesar become more and more obvious. Nero’s grandfather, L. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. 16 BCE), had a strong military career, but in Suetonius this plays second fiddle to his vices. Lucius is an excellent illustration of the virtues and vices Nero is supposed to have degenerated from and inherited:

He was the father of the Domitius who was later well known from being named in Augustus’ will as the purchaser of his goods and chattels, a man no less famous in his youth for his skill in driving than he was later for winning the insignia of a triumph in the war in Germany. But he was haughty, extravagant, and cruel, and when he was only an aedile, forced the censor Lucius Plancus to make way for him on the street. While holding the offices of praetor and consul, he brought Roman knights and matrons on the stage to act a farce. He gave beast-baitings both in the Circus and in all the regions of the city; also a gladiatorial show, but with
such inhuman cruelty that Augustus, after his private warning was disregarded, was forced to restrain him by an edict.449 In this passage we detect a few suggestions of traditional Roman virtues: Lucius won the triumphal ornaments in Germany; he was praetor and consul; he gave shows in the city; not to mention he was relatively close to Augustus—which can only curry favour with Suetonius. Each of these, excluding the last, is tempered with an undesirable aspect: the triumph is balanced against skill in driving, which is a rather decadent sort of pastime; although he held the highest offices, he brought the upper classes onto the stage.450 He gave shows, but they were so cruel that Augustus—often a gauge of Suetonius’ own opinion—would not abide them.

This ancestor’s good qualities are better than Nero’s: he was the executor of Augustus’ will, with military exploits and political offices. Certainly Nero could be said to have degenerated from these. On the other hand, his grandfather’s vices are remarkably faithful to Nero’s own. Nero’s skill and passion for driving chariots is a vice he indulges against his teachers’ wishes; he puts on a stage-show with senators and matrons.451 His shows are not cruel, but cruelty is one of his characteristics. In fact, the descriptive phrase arrogans, profusus, immitis could as well describe Nero as his grandfather.


450 In the Augustus (43.3) we learn that the Senate outlawed this, but only after Augustus himself had put knights in his shows with impunity. In Domitius’ time this was not illegal, but when Nero did it, it had been unacceptable for some time.

451 Ner. 22: driving; 11-12: stage-shows. From at least 19 CE, putting high-ranking Romans on the stage was in contravention of the laws on infamia, discussed by B. Levick (1983) 108ff.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upper classes on stage (Ner. 4)</th>
<th>[At the <em>Juvenales</em>] 'he had even old men of consular rank and aged matrons take part'(^{452})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chariots</td>
<td>‘From his earliest years he had a special passion for horses … He soon longed to drive a chariot himself … ’(^{453}) ‘Since he was acclaimed as the equal of … the Sun in driving a chariot … ’(^{454})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrogans</td>
<td>Nero is haughty with the Senate; vain about his musical talents(^{455})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>profusus</td>
<td>Extravagant feasts and debauchery, 27. ‘He thought that there was no other way of enjoying riches and money than by riotous extravagance;’(^{456}) ‘There was nothing however in which he was more ruinously prodigal than building;’(^{457}) Even when Galba was revolting, ‘he did not abandon or amend his slothful and luxurious habits; on the contrary, whenever any good news came from the provinces, he not only gave lavish feasts’(^{458}) ‘His health was good, for though indulging in every kind of riotous excess, he was ill but three times … ’(^{459})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

\(^{452}\) Ner. 11: *iuenalibus senes quoque consulares anusque matronas recepit ad lusum.*  
\(^{453}\) Ner. 22: *equorum studio uel praecipue ab ineunte aetate … Mox et ipse aurigare atque etiam spectari saepius voluit.*  
\(^{454}\) Ner. 53: *quia … Solem aurigando aequiperare existimaretur.*  
\(^{455}\) Ner. 37.3: haughty with the Senate; Ner. 41.1: vain about his musical talents, cf. 53.  
\(^{456}\) Ner. 30: *diuitiarum et pecuniae fructum non alium putabat quam profusionem.*  
\(^{457}\) Ner. 31: *non in alia re tamen damnosior quam in aedificando.*  
\(^{458}\) Ner. 42.2: *nec eo setius quicquam ex consuetudine luxus atque desidiaem omisit uel iniminit; quin immo, cum prosperi quiddam ex prouinciis nuntiatum esset, super abundatissimam cenam locularia in defectionis duces carmina lasciueque modulata.*  
\(^{459}\) Ner. 51: … *ualitudine prospera; nam qui luxuriae immoderatissimae esset, ter omnino per quattuordecim annos languit, atque ita ut neque uino neque consuetudine reliqua abstineret.*
Consider the above passage of Suetonius in comparison with Tacitus’ obituary of the same Domitius, cos. 16 BCE:

Domitius derived distinction from a father who had held the command of the sea during the Civil War, until he attached himself to the cause of Antony, and, later, to that of the Caesar: his grandfather had fallen on the aristocratic side upon the field of Pharsalus. Himself chosen to receive the hand of Octavia’s daughter, the younger Antonia, he crossed the Elbe with an army, penetrating deeper into Germany than any of his predecessors, and was rewarded for his exploit by the emblems of triumph.\footnote{Tac. Ann. 4.44: *Domitium decorauit pater ciuali bello maris potens, donec Antonii partibus, mox Caesaris misceretur. Auus Pharsalica acie pro optumatibus ceciderat. Ipse delectus, cui minor Antonia, Octavia genita, in matrimonium daretur, post exercitu flumen Albim transcendit, longius penetrata Germania, quam quisquam priorum, easque ob res insignia triumphi adeptus est.* Trans. J. Jackson (1937).}

Quite the glowing report. Unconcerned with Nero, Tacitus focuses on Domitius’ distinguished family, and military achievements. To Suetonius, however, his unattractive character traits are more important than his record.

His son, who became Nero’s father, held the consulship in 32 CE and was married to Agrippina minor, great-granddaughter of Augustus. With Domitius’ family connections, he was a high-profile figure and a potential threat to the princeps. For Suetonius, however, this Domitius is detestabilis. True to pattern, Nero’s father is by far the worst of Suetonius’ Domitii, if never quite as despicable as Nero himself.

Although he was ‘old’ money, he is portrayed as parsimonious,\footnote{Quintilian *Inst.* 6.1.50 reports a court case between Domitius and his sister, Domitia, over money. Her husband, Passienus, made the remark that there was nothing either of them needed less than what they were arguing about.} and in Suetonius, Domitius is charged with perfidia regarding money he owed others.\footnote{Ner. 5.2.} He is also needlessly violent: Suetonius accuses him of killing a freedman on the trivial charge of not drinking enough (which was too much even for Caligula), running over a boy with a team of horses, and gouging out the eye of a knight.\footnote{Ner. 5.1-2.} In fact the horse-drawn chariot seems to be a motif of the Domitii, occurring in relation to two of Nero’s ancestors (a third rides elephants) and it is a theme of Nero’s *Life*, appearing amongst his frivolous hobbies and in his pseudo-triumph.\footnote{Ner. 11.1; 24.2; 25.1.}
In the final year of Tiberius’ Principate, Nero’s father was accused of *impietas in principem*, and our sources tell us that while his co-accused, Arruntius, committed suicide, Domitius prepared a defence. He chose well. The timely death of Tiberius and accession of Caligula saved him from prosecution. \(^{465}\) Although it was perhaps due to his excellent connections, Suetonius would have us believe the charge was one more demonstration of his detestable character, adding to *impietas* charges of adultery and incest with another sister, Domitia Lepida. \(^{466}\) This salacious detail foreshadows Nero’s numerous charges of adultery, including the rape of a Vestal virgin, and suspected incest with his mother. \(^{467}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The father was charged with <em>maiestas</em> and incest with his sister.(^{468})</th>
<th>‘Besides abusing freeborn boys and seducing married women, he debauched the vestal virgin Rubria … That he even desired a sexual relationship with his own mother … was notorious … whenever he rode in a litter with his mother, he had incestuous relations with her, which were betrayed by the stains on his clothing.’(^{469})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Keeping to pattern, Nero’s father is the worst Ahenobarbus yet. In fact, to Suetonius, he is entirely vice-ridden, a catalogue of his vices rounded up with the snide *omni parte uitae detestabilis*, ‘a man hateful in every walk of life,’ and a consulship is the only suggestion of virtue. Success in elections might be something of a family tradition, but Suetonius’ Nero does not have the air of civic duty about him. He certainly cannot be said to have revived (*rettulerit*) those military inclinations. He is reported to have


\(^{466}\) *Ner.* 5.2: incest.

\(^{467}\) *Ner.* 28.2.

\(^{468}\) *Ner.* 5.2: *maiestatis quoque et adulteriorum incestique cum sorore Lepida*.

performed admirably at the Troy games,\textsuperscript{470} but after maturity his interests are all frivolous. So far is Nero from military prowess that his pseudo-triumph through the Italian towns after singing in the Greek contests is his crowning glory.

In summary, whatever the virtues of the historical Domitii, virtues in Suetonius’ Domitii are few and far between. Although Suetonius lays out the extraordinary number of consulships and military positions between the Domitii, when it comes to concrete, identifiable virtues he is not generous with description. The Domitii are not characterised with specific virtues such as fortitude or clemency. Their virtues are expressed in terms of consulships, military posts, and the like, and even then they are never unmitigated. There is no paragon amongst the Domitii from whom Nero might be a clear-cut degeneration. In comparison with, for instance, the Liuii Drusi as they appear in the \textit{Tiberius}, Suetonius’ Domitii are not very impressive, even when viewed in their element, on the battlefield. His purpose is to show degeneration, so hearty description of virtue would afford little benefit.

In the absence of concrete examples of ancestral virtue, Suetonius’ claim that Nero had degenerated from their virtues would seem an empty statement. Nero does not degenerate from his ancestors’ vices, since the whole line was degenerating anyway, and in vices he can hardly be called ‘unlike’ his family (\textit{i.e.} \textit{de + genus}). It is the vices that Nero revives (\textit{rettulerit}). But it must be said that the Domitii of the Republic, even according to Suetonius, were at least resolute and competent military types, as we can see in their record of magistracies and victories, if not in anecdotes; and it is equally evident that Suetonius’ Nero does not exhibit any slight talent in that field. If Nero is supposed to have degenerated from that model, there will be no arguments on that count. Just as there was no paragon, there is no ancestor in the list quite as prodigal, as dissolute, as Nero. He can only have degenerated.\textsuperscript{471}

Let us concede, then, that whatever little virtue Suetonius saw in Nero’s ancestors does not appear in Suetonius’ Nero, and he was indeed unlike his family’s better qualities. In fact, he does not inherit a skerrick of virtue, so as tools of

\textsuperscript{470} \textit{Ner.} 7.1.
\textsuperscript{471} The question remains, however, whether Nero can really be said to degenerate in the literal sense, \textit{i.e.} diverge from his family type (\textit{de + genus}), when his ancestors already exhibit a steady trend to vice? He is not dramatically different from them, but he is certainly worse. We should specify that he is not strictly \textit{degener} from his ancestors, in general, but only from their virtues, as Suetonius says: \textit{degenerasse e suorum uirtutibus}.  

93
characterisation the virtues of his ancestors are a non-event. Suetonius’ programmatic statement is not completely hollow: he also promises to show that Nero revived (rettulerit) his ancestors’ vices, ‘as if inherited and innate,’ and in this he is true to his word.

This is much the stronger part of Suetonius’ characterisation via lineage. He is forthcoming with evidence of vice amongst the republican Domitii, and, faithful to his promise, their specific vices do appear in Nero himself, sometimes with eerie similarity. Each of Nero’s vices, catalogued at 26.1 ‘petulantia, libido, luxuria, auaritia, crudelitas’ is prefigured by a vice in at least one of his ancestors. In fact, the diction at 4 describing his grandfather as arrogans, profusus, immitis is a summary of the more detailed list, even following the same order, with arrogans standing for petulantia, profusus a gloss of libido, luxuria, auaritia, and immitis standing for crudelitas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>arrogans</th>
<th>profusus</th>
<th>immitis, Ner. 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>petulantia</td>
<td>libido, luxuria, auaritia</td>
<td>crudelitas, Ner. 26.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fact, Nero appears to be a composite of his ancestors’ vices, that much the worse for having them all in the one person. The first two ancestors give Nero the theatricality of the pseudo-triumph and irrational jealousy of others; the next a violent temper and a model for suicide; the fourth, the best of the family, lost the respect of his peers over a love affair. The grandfather and father of Nero conform to the pattern of degeneration and display even more vices than their ancestors. The grandfather anticipates Nero’s love of driving and the infamia of putting respectable Romans on the stage, as well as the three Neronian qualities: arrogance, luxury, and cruelty. Finally, Nero’s father bequeaths unreasonable cruelty, perfidy, adultery, and incest. There is not one ancestor in this list who does not in some way prefigure Nero.

Based on the parallels between Nero and his ancestors, it is my contention that Suetonius carefully selects from the historical Domitii to create the impression of an unbroken line of vice, playing down the virtues in Nero’s ancestors and emphasising their vices for literary effect. The Domitii as they appear in Suetonius are each in their own ways paradigms for Suetonius’ construction of their famous descendant—even

---

472 Bradley lines up the parallels between the traits in the lineage and in Nero, (1978) 29.
more than paradigms, however, they are what Seager called ‘ironic foils’, that is, they are vice-ridden, but Nero is not just like them, he is even worse than they are, because he embodies all their worst qualities in the one individual. Nero is worse than all of the Domitii put together.

If Suetonius’ programmatic statement concerning the ancestors can be taken to apply to the Life of Nero, can it also be taken to represent the biographer’s use of lineage across the rest of the Lives? Although the author does not make any claims (in the extant text) about the role of the ancestors in the other Lives, the same principle might apply elsewhere as an across-the-board model for the way Suetonius uses ancestors in the De Vita Caesarum. If the other Lives are modelled on the same structure as the Nero, one would expect a list of ancestors along the direct, agnate line, beginning with the first consul, complete with relevant honours and character traits that are directly related to their descendant. On the model of Nero, the ancestors would be as bad as or better than their descendant, but never obviously worse.

Galba
The succeeding Caesar in Suetonius’ series is Servius Sulpicius Galba, a Caesar of a longstanding, republican family, at least as noble as his predecessors. Tacitus quips that Galba did not so much have vices as lack virtues. Suetonius’ Galba lacks virtues and has vices. Like Nero, he is an example of virtue degenerated and vice inherited, but on a reduced scale. Suetonius’ approach to his family background is along the same lines of inherited vice and debased virtue. The difference is in the detail: just as Galba’s life does not receive the same depth of description as Nero’s, the character traits of his ancestors are also kept to a minimum.

Although Galba lived to a riper age than Nero, he was not princeps for long and his Life is much shorter. There is nevertheless room made for a fairly extensive genealogy. In the Nero the first Domitius to appear is neither the first consul of the nomen nor even the first with the cognomen. The same is true of the Sulpicii. Even keeping to the direct, agnate line, Suetonius has a formidable task summarising their exploits—as he admits:

473 Tac. Hist. 1.49.
[i]t would be a long story to give in detail his illustrious ancestors and
the honorary inscriptions of the entire race, but I shall give a brief
account of his immediate family.474

Accordingly, he does not begin with the first consul of the family, which would rightly
be Galba Maximus, cos. 211 BCE.475 The list would be too long. The fact that the
genealogy is abbreviated but not sacrificed to economy is testament to its importance.

Despite the brevity of the opening section, certain aspects of the ancestors’
careers echo in Galba. Della Corte identified in Galba’s ancestors a thematic parallel
with Galba’s own saeuitia and his rebellion against Caesar.476

Galba’s great-great-great-great-grandfather was the famous orator, Ser.
Sulpicius Galba, cos. 144 BCE. Cicero is effusive in his praise for Galba’s oratorical
prowess, which surpassed even the big names of the day: L. Cotta, C. Laelius, and P.
Africanus.477 He was also an innovator, being the first of the Latin orators (Cicero says)
to use those rhetorical flourishes that were stock in trade in Cicero’s day. Galba’s
considerable oratorical flair made him famous—and it got him out of hot water after the
Lusitanian massacre of 150 BCE, for which he became infamous, but was never
formally called to account.

As promagistrate in Farther Spain, Galba had convinced three Lusitanian tribes,
on the promise of a treaty and land, to surrender their weapons. He proceeded to have
his men round them up, slay thousands of them, and sell the rest into slavery. Cicero,
elsewhere so generous in his praise, finds the deceit more offensive than the massacre.478
Appian, more hostile, judges Galba’s deceit “unworthy of a Roman.”479 Galba’s
colleague, Lucullus, also behaved treacherously, but Galba’s rapacity exceeded even
his.480

He became infamous not only for the massacre, but also for the way he
wheedled his way out of prosecution on his return to Rome in 149 BCE. When the
tribune of the plebs, L. Libo, brought a measure to the assembly to pass a public law

474 Suet. Galb. 3: imagines et elogia uniuersi generis exsequi longum est, familiae reuiter attingam.
477 Cic. Brut. 82. See also Brut. 127, Orat. 1.58.
478 Cic. Brut. 89. For Cicero, “the issue was the breach of faith, not the massacre”: A.E. Douglas (1966)
77.
479 App. Hisp. 60.
480 App. Hisp. 59-60.
(quaestio extraordinaria) that would effectively have condemned Galba on the charge of misconduct as governor,⁴⁸¹ Galba’s defence consisted not of a denial, but of an appeal to the people’s mercy on behalf of his dependants.⁴⁸² His melodramatic display of his two young sons and the orphan son of his relative, (Sulpicius) Gallus, is described by Quintilian as an example of the power of persuasion in the court-room. The boys evoked the sympathy of the people, as they were intended to do, and the measure did not pass.⁴⁸³ With the proposal defeated, despite the infamy of the incident, he went on to become consul for 144.

Suetonius gives this Galba the honour of being temporum suorum uel eloquentissimus, ‘decidedly the most eloquent speaker of his time,’ but this praise is immediately tempered with the imputation of responsibility for the war with Viriathus. Suetonius, keeping his version concise, does not mention the pathetic defence, just the treachery. It is possible that Suetonius’ illustrauit (‘he made [the family] famous’) is ironic, referring to the notoriety of the massacre.⁴⁸⁴ The story, for Suetonius, does not bear dwelling on: his Galba is also greedy, but he is not duplicitous.

This Galba’s son was the priest,⁴⁸⁵ C. Sulpicius Galba. In a dramatic fall from grace in 110-109, he was prosecuted, along with other prominent Romans, for improper connections with Jugurtha. The prosecution of the priest seems to have precipitated a reverse in the family’s fortunes: from the Jugurthine war to the Principate, there were four or five praetorships, but no consulships for a century.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸¹ M.C. Alexander (1990) 3.
⁴⁸² Cic. Brut. 89-90; Quint. Inst. 2.15.8.
⁴⁸³ G.L. Hendrickson (1939) 82, n. B.
⁴⁸⁵ Cicero calls him sacerdos: Brut. 128. He may have followed his father into the augurate: Farney (1997) 28, n. 13.
In view of the available air of drama, it is interesting that Suetonius does not mention this Galba, but instead skips straight from the consul of 144 to Galba’s great-grandfather, praetor in 54 BCE. He stood as Caesar’s choice for the consulship for 49\(^487\) but on that occasion Caesar’s support was ‘a liability rather than an asset.’\(^488\) Galba faced some energetic anti-Caesarian campaigning by two of Caesar’s opponents, M. Claudius Marcellus and L. Cornelius Lentulus\(^489\) and he lost the election. According to Suetonius, after this defeat he ‘conspired’ with Brutus and Cassius, and, after Caesar’s assassination in 44, was condemned under the *Lex Pedia*.\(^490\) It is Suetonius who makes the connection between the lost election and Galba’s defection to Brutus and Cassius. The anti-Caesarian element of this story echoes in Galba’s own overthrow of Nero.

The scholarly Suetonius was naturally interested in C. Sulpicius Galba, Galba’s historian grandfather, despite the fact that Galba did not show any historical inclinations himself. The grandfather wrote a history of Rome from her foundation to his own day,\(^491\) cited by Plutarch.\(^492\) We know little about his life: even his praetorship is of uncertain date.\(^493\) Oliver identifies him with the praetorian proconsul of Achaia (13 BCE or shortly

\[\text{Ser. Sulpicius Galba} \quad \text{Massacred the Lusitanians}\]

\[\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{cos. 144 BCE} & \\
\hline
\text{C. Sulpicius Galba} & \\
\text{Triumv. 121-118 BCE, Augur (?) 109 BCE} & \\
\hline
\text{Ser. Sulpicius Galba} & \\
\text{pr. by 91 BCE} & \\
\hline
\text{Ser. Sulpicius Galba} & \\
\text{pr. 54 BCE} & \text{Conspired with Brutus and Cassius} \\
\end{array}\]

---


\(^488\) Gruen (1974) 158.


\(^491\) H. Bardon (1952) 1.260-1.


\(^493\) Broughton (1952) 465.
afterwards) honoured by three Augustan inscriptions found at Delphi, Samos and Athens.\footnote{J.H. Oliver (1942) 386-7.}

Galba’s father, C. Sulpicius Galba, managed at least a suffect consulship (5 BCE), but history has not been effusively complimentary. Suetonius called his oratory ordinary, but he also praised his effort.\footnote{Oratory \textit{modicus}, Suet. \textit{Galb.} 3.3.} He was famously hunchbacked,\footnote{Suet. \textit{Galb.} 3.3: hunchbacked.} a characteristic possibly reproduced in Galba’s own physical appearance.\footnote{Suet. \textit{Galb.} 21: \textit{excreuerat etiam in dexteriore latere eius caro praependebatque adeo ut aegre fascia substringeretur.}} He married a woman of famous forebears, Mummia Achaica, and later (after Mummia had borne him two sons and expired) the wealthy Liuia Ocellina. Suetonius is interested in Mummia’s relatives, who bring to the family tree some very significant military conquests. As a rule the biographer only catalogues maternal family when it is more prestigious than the paternal line, so for him to bring them up against the Sulpicii he must see in Mummia’s connections some importance.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
    \node (l) at (0,0) {Q. Lutatius Catulus Capitolinus}
    \node (c) at (0,-1) {cos. 78 BCE}
    \node (m) at (0,-2) {cos. 146 BCE}
    \node (l2) at (0,-3) {Mummius}
    \node (l3) at (0,-4) {Lutatia}
    \node (l4) at (0,-5) {Mummius}
    \node (l5) at (0,-6) {Mummia Achaica}
    \node (l6) at (0,-7) {L. Mummius Achaicus}

    \draw (l) -- (c)
    \draw (c) -- (m)
    \draw (m) -- (l2)
    \draw (l2) -- (l3)
    \draw (l3) -- (l4)
    \draw (l4) -- (l5)
    \draw (l5) -- (l6)
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Galba’s mother was the great-granddaughter of L. Mummius Achaicus,\footnote{PIR\textsuperscript{2} s.v. Mummia Achaica. Galba’s principal maternal connections appear on the stemma at Figure II.} a \textit{nouus homo}\footnote{L. Pietilli-Castrén (1978) 116. Discussed at length by L.M. Yarrow (2006) 60, n. 8. His father had been praetor in 177.} best known for his role in the sack of Corinth of 146 BCE—hence his \textit{agnomen}. 

\footnote{99}{L. Pietilli-Castrén (1978) 116. Discussed at length by L.M. Yarrow (2006) 60, n. 8. His father had been praetor in 177.}
Velleius Paterculus credits Mummius with being the first nouus to win a cognomen from a military victory.\textsuperscript{500}

Suetonius leaves his audience to bring their own opinions on Mummius, situating him only as the Mummius qui Corinthum excidit, ‘who destroyed Corinth.’ Impressive military credentials, certainly. On his mother’s side, Galba is also connected with Lutatius Catulus Capitolinus. In the Galba, Suetonius mentions Capitolinus twice: once in his genealogy and again when he records Galba’s (otherwise unattested) proclivity for claiming Capitolinus as his ancestor on statues.\textsuperscript{501}

The son of Q. Lutatius Catulus (cos. 102 BCE), a respected orator, and Domitia, sister of the tribune of 104,\textsuperscript{502} the younger Q. Lutatius Catulus (cos. 78 BCE) earned his agnomen ‘Capitolinus’ from the rebuilding of the Capitoline temple, dedicated in 69. Suetonius drops in the name of Catulus, but makes no more of his achievements than to name him Capitolinus in the first reference, perhaps expecting his audience to know the competition between Catulus and Caesar already, or wishing not to make too much of it. The link between Galba and Nero (through Capitolinus’ mother) is not mentioned, and so distant that we are presumably not meant to read so closely between the lines.

With such a lineage, Galba could lay claim to a strong record of military and oratorical skill, a stemma that stretched all the way back to Jupiter, and an atrium full of imagines. On the model of the Nero, we might expect to see Galba’s other prominent traits in his ancestry. Amongst his ancestors are a famous orator and a grandfather better known for writing a history than anything else; but to Suetonius, there is little of the intellectual in Galba. His distinguishing features are excessive cruelty and greed.\textsuperscript{503} He is elsewhere coloured with other signs of degeneracy, such as gluttony and homosexuality.\textsuperscript{504} The most famous of his ancestors had flourished more than a century earlier, and they were well known, but had not always acquitted themselves with the

\textsuperscript{500} Vell. 1.13.2; also Verg. Aen. 6.836; Paus. 7.16.7.
\textsuperscript{501} Suet. Galb. 2; 3.4.
\textsuperscript{502} H.W. Garrod (1913) 58. This would make her the sister of Nero’s great-great-great-grandfather, cos. 96 BCE.
\textsuperscript{503} Suet. Galb. 12.
\textsuperscript{504} Suet. Galb. 22. C.A. Williams (1999) 81 presumes Galba was the dominant partner on the grounds that he is not criticised for his preference; I am reluctant to accept that argument, given the position of the criticism of his gluttony just before his homosexuality. In context, both gluttony and sexual practice seem like criticisms. T.F. Carney (1968) 12 pointed out that Suetonius’ worst Caesars are homosexuals; but J.H.K.O. Chong-Gossard (2010) 298; esp. 298, n. 2 suggests it is Galba’s preference for older men that is deviant. On Galba’s sexual preferences, see now M.B. Charles & E. Anagnostou-Laoutides (2012).
greatest honour. In fact, in some cases they were as famous for the sneaky way they achieved their victories as for the victories themselves.

In some ways Galba is cut from similar cloth to Nero: his paternal ancestors were noble, even divine, and many of his ancestors (particularly maternal, namely Mummius and Capitolinus) were successful in the military. Galba himself is degenerate from virtue as well as the heir of vice.

Although Galba does well in the military, which cannot be said for Nero, he is otherwise virtue-free. What little virtue he possesses becomes ‘inconsistency’ in combination with vices—and that is more a vice than an excuse for vices, attributed to Galba’s being under the control of three different men.\[505\]

The saeuitia and rebellion that Della Corte identified in Galba’s ancestors are represented by the first two ancestors, the propraetor of Spain and his grandson. The war in Lusitania, and other references to Spain amongst these ancestral anecdotes, could be taken as an allusion to Galba’s future rise in Spain: he is ‘the emperor created in Spain.’\[506\] This Galba is also greedy, despite his wealth—as is his descendant. The conspirator against Caesar is significant to Suetonius’ account as the preview of Galba’s rebellion against Nero, Caesar’s descendant.

The Galba fits the model laid out in the Nero, albeit on a less dramatic scale: a mix of virtue and vice in noble ancestors bears a degenerate son, in some ways resembling the ancestors but never quite measuring up to their successes, and in other ways reproducing their faults.

Caligula

To demonstrate the other extreme of Suetonius’ model, the Caligula provides an example of a noble, virtuous father with an aberrant, vicious son. In this Life the usual list of ancestors is replaced with a longer, more detailed account of the subject’s father, Germanicus. Caligula’s more distant ancestors would already be well known to us from the lists given in previous Lives: the catalogue of the Claudii that begins the Tiberius, that of the Iulii (presumably given in the Julius), and that of the Octauii, given in the

\[506\] References to Spain amongst Galba’s ancestors: Suet. Galb. 3.1-2; Galba made emperor in Spain, imperatorem in Hispania factum, Galb. 16.2, see also Galb. 22-3.
\[507\] Della Corte (1967) 118-119; Benediktson (1996-97) 168.
Augustus. For the same reason, the Life of Germanicus’ brother Claudius begins with a description of his father and not his longer family tree. If the statement in the Nero can be applied to this Life, Caligula should inherit his father’s flaws and degenerate from his celebrated virtue. Where Nero had been characterised by the similarities with the ironic foils of his detestable ancestors, the literary technique in the Caligula is to bring out the monstrum in Caligula by contrast with a virtuous foil, the heroic Germanicus.

In the six sections that introduce Suetonius’ Caligula—a twelfth of the Life—Germanicus is portrayed as a paragon whose early death is a devastating loss to the Roman people. He comes from a noble family, marries and reproduces responsibly, and has particular success as a military commander. Augustus so loved Germanicus that he wanted to make him successor, and forced his uncle Tiberius to adopt him into the line of succession. The implication is that Germanicus would have succeeded Tiberius (or Augustus) as princeps had he not been treacherously murdered by Piso on Tiberius’ orders; the accession of Tiberius and then Caligula is all the more regrettable when it might have been Germanicus.

It soon becomes apparent that, in accordance with the statement in the Nero, Germanicus’ myriad virtues are corrupted in Caligula. Caligula follows the model and inherits his father’s vices, as in the Nero. Germanicus has no moral vice, but for the sake of argument we will take his one defect, according to Suetonius: his skinny legs. Suetonius makes sure even his one flaw (a physical rather than a moral fault) serves to demonstrate an extra virtue in Germanicus—that he seeks to improve the flaw—which is not present in Caligula. The conscientious Germanicus makes a habit of horse-riding to improve his one fault. The same defect appears in Caligula; the young princeps makes no effort at self-improvement—or, at least, Suetonius mentions the flaw but no such effort.

Much more numerous are the virtues from which Caligula might degenerate. Germanicus is unmatched in goodness, virtue, and appearance. Suetonius says:

[i]t is the general opinion that Germanicus possessed all the highest qualities of body and mind, to a degree never equalled by anyone: a handsome appearance, unequalled valour, surpassing ability in the
oratory and learning of Greece and Rome, unexampled kindliness, and a remarkable desire and capacity for winning men’s regard and inspiring their affection.  

Suetonius then gives examples of these profuse virtues, in specific areas such as personal bravery and respect for the dead.

Each of Germanicus’ virtues finds its opposite in Caligula. Germanicus is handsome, with the virtues of body and mind, but Caligula is unattractive, and weak in both body and mind. Caligula’s curious mixture of self-assuredness (confidentia) and timidity (metus) is attributed to his mental weakness, and immediately followed by a statement of his contempt for the gods. The opposite qualities in Germanicus—pietas and constantia—are also paired. Only in oratory does Caligula approach Germanicus. Josephus also speaks highly of Caligula’s oratorical flair.

The contrasts between Germanicus and Caligula do not end there. Germanicus is ‘mild and lenient’ even to his critics; Caligula is neither mild nor lenient, not even towards the Senate. Germanicus is so patient that he does no more than renounce the friendship of his enemy Piso (especially remarkable to Suetonius, who thinks that Piso murdered him) whereas Caligula has, not only his enemies, but even his relatives and friends, killed. Germanicus is civilis, but Caligula is a tyrant. Although Germanicus is an extraordinary general, his son has only one, frivolous, military campaign ‘and then on a sudden impulse.’

Even in their deaths, both somewhat sudden, Suetonius brings out a contrast. The dramatically different reactions to their deaths demonstrate the people’s disparate attachment to father and son. Germanicus dies young, and the public suspects him poisoned. Impassioned mourning ensues, and people expose their newborn children in


511 Calig. 3.1: omnes ... corporis animique virtutes; cf. Calig. 50.1-2: ualitudo ei neque corporis neque animis constiit.

512 Calig. 51.1; cf. Calig. 1.1: incertum pietate an constantia maiore compescuit.


515 The important source on the Piso-Germanicus case, the S.C. de Pisone Patre, will be discussed below, 151.

516 Calig. 3.3; 1.2-2; 26.1.

517 Calig. 3.2: Germanicus is civilis; cf. 22.1: Caligula is a monstrum.

518 Calig. 43.1: neque ex destinato.
grief for Germanicus. His son, on the other hand, forced suicides. Caligula, who started as the people’s darling, is assassinated and his body hastily put out of the way until his sisters’ return from exile. Caligula’s death is met with general cynicism, but there is widespread mourning even at the news of Germanicus’ illness. The dismay at Germanicus’ demise is described over two sections, in contrast with a brief sentence dismissing Caligula’s funeral arrangements.

It is generally agreed that Germanicus was a very capable and popular fellow, but there are aspects of his life Suetonius strategically omits. He is idealising Germanicus for literary effect. Wardle’s commentary on Caligula noted that this quasi-Life of Germanicus characterises Caligula by contrast:

[i]ndeed Suetonius employs the same methods to whiten Germanicus as he does to blacken Caligula.

Although he mentions the skinny legs, a physical defect that appeals to the biographer and not the historian, Suetonius does not mention what we learn from Tacitus about Germanicus’ controversial, unlawful entry to Egypt in 19 CE. In fact, Suetonius mentions Germanicus’ trip to Alexandria in the Tiberius, offering Tiberius’ objection to Germanicus’ selfless act as an example of Tiberius’ unreasonable dislike for Germanicus. It would seem that Suetonius is concealing Germanicus’ faults to show up Caligula. Nor has Tacitus given a warts-and-all account of Germanicus. In fact, both Tacitus and Suetonius have idealised Germanicus as a foil to another character. Tacitus sets up Germanicus as a foil to the unpopular Tiberius in the Annals; in Suetonius’ Caligula Germanicus is a foil to his son. We saw that Nero’s sins are compared with the paradigms of his ancestors; in the Caligula, the degeneration of virtue into vice is magnified by emphatic contrast. The model, however, remains the same: virtue degenerates, and vice is inherited.

---

519 Calig. 27.2.
520 Calig. 5-6, cf. Calig. 59.
521 Wardle (1994) 89.
522 Tac. Ann. 2.59.
523 Tib. 52.2.
524 On the Tacitean treatment of Germanicus, see D.O. Ross Jr. (1973); Bird (1973) 98-9; on Suetonius’ contrast between Germanicus and Caligula, see Hurley (1993) 1.
Claudius

In the *Claudius*, Suetonius again uses the virtuous foil. The degeneration of Drusus’ many virtues into his disappointing son, Claudius, makes for a weaker contrast than was made in the *Caligula*, but once again we see a scion of a noble house fail to live up to his father’s achievements, and the faults of the son are highlighted by comparison with his father, too soon lost. As with Caligula and Germanicus, there is a sense that Drusus would have made a much better *princeps* than Claudius, even if Claudius is infinitely preferable to his predecessor and successor.

Tiberius’ brother, Drusus, was a general on a par with his son, Germanicus. Augustus trusted him with responsibility for the war in Germania, and, indeed, his successes in Germania earned his descendants the *cognomen* Germanicus.\(^{525}\) He was very popular with the people of Rome and the army, not to mention Augustus, who wrote his epitaph and biography.\(^{526}\) With Antonia he had the famous sons Germanicus and Claudius. Drusus is the subject of a long study in the *Claudius*.\(^{527}\)

Although Claudius is neither very vicious nor very virtuous, the juxtaposition of Drusus and his son leaves Claudius looking foolish and insipid. Even the matron Antonia is ashamed of her son’s stupidity. Drusus is a model magistrate and soldier, and ‘eager for glory;’ Claudius is sickly and timid, is kept out of state business until the reign of Caligula, and makes only one campaign: *expeditionem unam omnino suscepit eamque modicam*.\(^{528}\) Although the expedition to Britain was historically important, the *modicus* suggests Suetonius is unimpressed. Certainly Claudius’ efforts in Britain, achieved through his generals, are nothing like Drusus’ personal triumphs in Germany.

Where Augustus made every effort to include Drusus in his succession plans, Claudius was deliberately excluded, especially from public life. It is significant that he only becomes *princeps* ‘by accident.’\(^{529}\) In fact, that is just one of a number of facets of his life of which he is not in control: his whole reign is under the control of his freedmen and wives.\(^{530}\) He is, according to Suetonius, ‘not … a prince, but … a

\(^{525}\) *Claud.* 1.3.

\(^{526}\) *Claud.* 1.5.

\(^{527}\) The long introduction is discussed by Hurley (2001) 55-66, bringing out a few comparisons with Claudius himself.

\(^{528}\) *Claud.* 1.3-4; 7.1; 17.1; 35.1.

\(^{529}\) *Claud.* 10.1: *mirabili casu*.

\(^{530}\) *Claud.* 25.5; 29.1.
servant.' He also swings between popularity and ridicule: at first popular because of the mildness of his rule, he is later held in contempt and considered a laughing stock because he is so suggestible and blind to the ways he is manipulated by others.

There is a verbal echo in Suetonius’ accounts that brings out the contrast in the achievements of father and son:

[Drusus] was the first of Roman generals to sail the northern Ocean
\textit{oceanum septemtrionalem} \textit{primus Romanorum ducum nauigauit}

[Claudius] being the first of the Caesars who resorted to bribery to secure the fidelity of the troops
\textit{primus Caesarum fidem militis etiam praemio pigneratus}.

Drusus’ death in battle is much more honourable than the ‘unseemly’ demise of Claudius. His comparison with Drusus, the great hero of the Romans, emphasises Suetonius’ disappointment with Claudius. Drusus was supposedly planning to restore the Republic, but he never had the opportunity; Claudius did not even attempt to restore the Republic, at a time when there was strong popular feeling in its favour. Drusus was a great favourite with Augustus. Augustus wanted his grandsons to be more like Drusus; he later wanted Claudius to find someone suitable to imitate. As elsewhere, Augustus’ opinion is a gauge of Suetonius’.

It is the example of his father, especially his supposed commitment to the Republic, which leads the audience to expect more from Claudius as \textit{princeps}. Without Drusus to introduce the \textit{Life}, the audience might not consider Claudius’ ‘potential,’ and he would not be such a disappointment. It is this introduction that brings this to mind and sets up the audience to read Claudius in this way. Immediately following the \textit{Caligula}, the audience is also in mind of Germanicus, Claudius’ much more popular brother. Claudius might seem quite a good Caesar, at least in comparison with his predecessor Caligula and successor Nero, were it not for the wasted potential in his family line that the biographer suggests to the audience by comparison with Drusus.

---

531 \textit{Claud.} 29.1: \textit{non principem, sed ministrum egit}.
532 \textit{Claud.} 12.3: at first popular; 15-16: later held in contempt and ridiculed; 21: a figure of fun.
535 \textit{Claud.} 1.4; cf. \textit{Calig.} 60; \textit{Claud.} 10.3; 11.1.
536 \textit{Claud.} 1.5; 4.5.
Non-noble Caesars

In the case of new men, the family line is often very obscure, and Suetonius’ close scrutiny of their respectability seems to be the only object of the family tree in the *Augustus* and *Vespasian*. Their ancestors are not sources of anecdote or paradigm. Even in the shorter *Lives* of *Otho* and *Vitellius*, however, there is occasionally a foreshadowing of character traits. Otho and Vitellius are from parvenu families whose ancestors had done well under the Julio-Claudians. Cizek saw in Otho Suetonius’ favourite Caesar and Vitellius his most hated, but he had not considered these early sections as characterising. It will be rewarding to see how these ancestries affect that assessment.

Augustus

Augustus’ ancestors are portrayed as humble, but not shameful. In the process of demonstrating their respectability the biographer also tries to bring out their admirable qualities—or, at least, suppress scandals.

According to Suetonius, Augustus’ ancestors were ‘distinguished’ at Velitrae, and were admitted to the Senate by Tarquinius Priscus. A distant ancestor had been a quaestor, but more recent members of the line were equestrians until Augustus’ father. Augustus’ memoirs gave little detail, but Suetonius’ researches turned up a tribune great-grandfather and a wealthy, quiet-living grandfather. Antonius had accused the Octauii of including a freedman and a money-changer. Suetonius does not disagree with this account but does not set much store by it. The sources appear to agree that Augustus’ father was the first in recent generations to enter the Senate.

As usual the father is the most important part of the family tree. Octauius cannot have been completely unsullied by his son’s rise, for Suetonius needs to acknowledge the unsavoury rumours about his early career before he can categorically deny them. The rumour was, apparently, that he was a money-changer (as was Augustus’ grandfather, if Antonius was to be believed) and even a distributor of bribes. Suetonius would much prefer to have him independently wealthy and competent in winning and

537 Cizek (1977) 155.
carrying out offices. He had not even arrived in his province when he dealt with a special commission from the Senate; in Macedonia he won great respect from his victory over enemies and fair treatment of the allies. The qualities are fortitudo and iustitia. Even Cicero praised Octavius’ conduct.

He died on the way back from Macedonia, ‘before he could declare himself a candidate for the consulship.’ There are two interesting aspects to this account. The first is that it appears Suetonius would have liked the Octauii to be consular. His excuse for Octavius recalls one of the Scipionic epitaphs, which pleads that the deceased would have won a consulship, had he lived long enough. The biographer does not abuse his power and make the Octauii noble, although he is careful to point out that Augustus’ father could have been. The second thing to note is that the strongest evidence Suetonius adduces for family virtue turns out to be Cicero’s good opinion of C. Octavius on his effectiveness in Macedonia. If they are not noble of family, at least they could be noble of virtue. Here, Cicero recommends his brother behave in the manner that had won Octavius good regard as praetor. As it happens, Suetonius has the wrong Octavius. The important thing is that Suetonius wanted to find positive things to say about Augustus’ forebears. We might expect their character traits to be important in the Life, but the iustitia and fortitudo that Octavius displayed in Macedonia are not qualities ascribed to Augustus. Overall, there is not a strong indication of inheriting good traits, but there is an absence (or deliberate omission) of unsavoury qualities in Augustus’ ancestors.

**Otho**

For the next ‘new’ Caesar, it appears that although paradigms are still few and far between, the biographer is even more determined to prove respectability. In fact, this is true of all the good Caesars: Augustus, Otho, and Vespasian, none of whom is completely virtuous but who are all basically good rulers. These families are new, and

---

538 *ILLRP* 311.
539 But see Figure IV for the difficulties with this family tree.
540 Suetonius respects Cicero’s opinion in all things, Macé (1900) 288-9, 296; W.C. McDermott (1971) 213-14.
541 *Aug.* 3.2. Suetonius is probably attributing these good qualities to the wrong Octavius. Cicero’s letter as we have it today (Cic. *Q. Fr.* 1.1.21) refers to Gnaeus, not Gaius Octavius: A.W. Lintott (1968) 130, n. 2.
new men do not lend themselves to extended digressions on family traits—the evidence is just not available.

The opening section of the *Otho* is geared towards the respectability of the family. Both Otho and his father are more distinguished on the mother’s side; the paternal line is Etruscan, and although obscure in Rome they are supposedly a good family at home. Our first impressions of Otho are typical Etruscan traits: he is *prodigus ac procax*, ‘extravagant and wild;’ he is also a dandy, although this titbit is reserved for the final judgment.\(^{542}\) In his prime he improves, governing with *moderatio atque abstinentia*.\(^{543}\) In support of his overall approval, Suetonius weights the account of Otho’s ancestry a little to the positive, despite the family’s general obscurity.

Otho’s ancestors are more well-connected than noble, his father so close to Tiberius as to engender suspicion. Otho does not show particularly Tiberian traits, so it is unlikely that Suetonius is seriously implying a link between the two, but Otho does profit from his favour in the imperial household. Otho’s father makes a few questionable career moves but comes out well in the retelling: according to Suetonius, he is courageous in justice even at his own expense, and praised for his loyalty.\(^{544}\) Otho, too, was courageous in the end.

Interestingly, Vitellius and Otho, who are in so many respects unlike each other, both have a father specifically praised for loyalty under Claudius. Both betray their predecessor to come to power in a coup, but only Otho redeems himself by committing suicide rather than prolonging the conflict with Vitellius. For Suetonius, Otho’s unwonted courage at the end characterises the *Life* as a good one rather than bad, despite previous marks against him.\(^{545}\)

**Vitellius**

In the *Vitellius*, a long family tree is not available but three uncles are catalogued along with the father and grandfather. As with the *Otho*, the heft of the evidence about ancestry is geared towards proving the respectability of the family, and only a few references suggest similarity between relatives. Although there are two contradictory

---


\(^{543}\) *Oth.* 3.2.

\(^{544}\) *Oth.* 1.3.

\(^{545}\) *Oth.* 12: *tanto Othonis animo nequaquam corpus aut habitus competit.*
schools of thought about the distant origins of the Vitellii. Vitellius himself is basically one-sided. No doubt his reputation was injured by propaganda on behalf of Vespasian, which Suetonius appears to have used. Suetonius certainly does not give Vitellius much credit, given that what admirable deeds he happened to commit were not from his nature, but his two ‘besetting sins’—luxury and cruelty—are in his natura. Although there is no obvious precursor to his cruelty, luxury is readily evident in the family tree, along with another theme of Vitellius’ life, adulatio: luxuria in his uncle, Aulus, and adulatio in his father.

Of adulatio (flattery), Vitellius’ father made an art form. He had some success under the Julio-Claudians, due to his cultivation of relationships with the principes. Supposedly his first big break came (according to Suetonius) when he prostituted his son to Tiberius amongst the spintriae. Although Vitellius Caesar’s services to Tiberius were in his youth, and possibly at the behest of his father (being as they were the reason for his advancement, if not specifically for the sake of his advancement: causa incrementorum patri), his status as one of the spintriae is a point against Vitellius himself—a foreshadowing of his debauchery and homosexual inclinations. Homosexual tendencies are attributed to Suetonius’ most villainous Caesars, according to Carney. For a number of reasons, not least of them chronological, Murison counts this story as untrue, probably originating in uituperatio of the Flavian period.

Vitellius senior’s career of adulatio also won him advances under Caligula and Claudius. He shared a consulship with Claudius, ‘an unmistakeable sign of his importance.’ The son, too, did well out of the Julio-Claudians: in addition to his questionable services to Tiberius, Vitellius himself won the favour of Caligula, Claudius, and finally Nero, in each case by indulging their vices.

546 Vit. 1.1.
547 Vit. 13.1: praeципue luxuria saeüitiaeque deditus; Vit. 10.1: apart from his anomalous good deeds on accession, the rest of his life was ‘more like his nature and prior lifestyle,’ cetera magis ex natura et priore uita sua. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1997).
548 Vit. 3.2.
549 Vit. 12.
550 Carney (1968) 12.
552 Vit. 2.5-3.
554 Vit. 4.
A second parallel in Vitellius senior is his disreputable affection for a freedwoman, whose saliva he used as a medicine;\textsuperscript{555} Vitellius, too, carries on with unsuitable (the commonest: \textit{uilissimi}) people: he is under the thumb of his lover, the freedman Asiaticus, to the point of giving him undue influence.\textsuperscript{556}

A stronger paradigm than his father is available in his uncle Aulus. Aulus was well known for extravagant feasts:

\begin{quote}
\textit{praelautus alioqui famosusque cenarum magnificentia.}
\end{quote}

who was given to luxury and especially notorious for the magnificence of his feasts.\textsuperscript{557}

\textit{Luxuria} is one of the motifs of the Vitellius. Vitellius’ gluttony—in particular his taste for exotic ingredients—is a recurring theme, mentioned several times, once at length:

\begin{quote}
[b]ut his besetting sins were luxury and cruelty. He divided his feasts into three, sometimes into four a day: breakfast, luncheon, dinner, and a drinking bout; and he was readily able to do justice to all of them through his habit of vomiting. Moreover, he had himself invited to each of these meals by different men on the same day, and the materials for any one of them never cost less than four hundred thousand sesterces.\textsuperscript{558}
\end{quote}

Gluttony is one of the traits Suetonius is nodding to when he refers to Vitellius’ ‘natural disposition’:

\begin{quote}
[these acts were] altogether admirable and noble, and such as to give hope that he would be a great prince, had it not been that the rest of his conduct was more in harmony with his natural disposition and his former habits of life than with imperial dignity.\textsuperscript{559}
\end{quote}

The next sentence speaks of his ‘lavish banqueting,’ \textit{profusissimos obsoniorum apparatus.} At least one of Vitellius’ two ‘besetting sins,’ which are supposed to be

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{555} Vit. 2.4: \textit{sed amore libertinae perinfamis, cuius etiam saliuis melle commixtis.}
\footnotetext{556} Vit. 12.
\footnotetext{557} Vit. 2.2. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1997).
\footnotetext{558} Vit. 13.1-2: \textit{sed vel praecipue luxuriae saeuitiaeque deditus epulas trifariam semper, interdum quadrifariam dispertiebat, in iantacula et prandia et cenas comissionsexque, facile omnibus sufficiens uomitandi consuetudine. Indicebat autem aliud aliud eadem die, nec cuiquam minus singuli apparatus quadringenis milibus nummum constiterunt.} Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1997). Gluttony is also mentioned at Vit. 7.1; 10.2; 10.3; 17.2. Cf. Tac. \textit{Hist.} 1.62; 2.62. Cass. Dio 64.2-4 reports his gluttony and that some dishes are called ‘Vitellian’ after him. For the dishes, see Apicius 5.3.5; 5.3.9; 8.7.7. Lindsay (2012) 176 comments on Vitellius’ status as an epicure and the role of Vitellius’ gluttony in Flavian propaganda.
\footnotetext{559} Vit. 10.1: \textit{egregie prorsus atque magnifice et ut summi principis spem ostenderet, nisi cetera magis ex natura et priore uita sua quam ex imperii maiestate gessisset.} Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1997).
\end{footnotes}
‘natural,’ is indeed foreshadowed in another member of his family. So much does Suetonius want to press this point that he must adduce an uncle—not even a direct ascendant—for the paradigm. In the Vitellius, then, respectability is important, and consulships and offices are duly listed, but there is no special effort to make the Vitellii virtuous. Character traits of ancestors serve to foreshadow Vitellius’ traits, rather than to cast their owners in a good light.

### Vespasian

Like the Augustus and the Otho, Suetonius’ account of Vespasian’s ancestors shows a similar concern that there be no vicious streaks, even if there are no especially virtuous paragons, either. And so it happens that there are no discernible vices in Vespasian’s ancestors, and his humble origin is something to vaunt rather than conceal. Suetonius does not have a long tradition of Flauii from which to pick his examples, but there are three important themes in the ancestry that bear on Vespasian himself. First, as appears to be necessary for a good Caesar, his family is new but respectable. In fact, on the maternal side at least, the family is quite important. Second, the Flauii are all financially occupied, and Vespasian’s one vice, according to Suetonius, is a love of money: sola est, in qua merito culpetur, pecuniae cupiditas. Vespasian did like to emphasise his own frugality, as opposed to the prodigality of his predecessors, and this became cupiditas in the eye of the beholder. As we will see, according to Suetonius, this cupiditas is not innate, but perhaps the bankers and tax collectors of the ancestry sections foreshadow an important theme. His ancestors stooped to business in pursuit of financial reward, and so too Vespasian was not above trading for his livelihood. As equestrians, business was not a blight on his ancestors’ reputations, but Vespasian’s denigrators might have emphasised that professional cash-handling was not worthy of a senator. Suetonius, an equestrian himself, is not concerned about the moral aspects of Vespasian’s money-making activities, but he does feel the need, later, to excuse Vespasian’s reputation for cupidity. Third, there are several military men spread over

---


561 Vesp. 1.2; 1.4 (a rumour Suetonius does not endorse), cf. Vesp. 4.3.
both sides of the family, although there is some uncertainty about Sabinus’ military connections, and it is Vespasian’s military success that brings him to prominence.562

This account of his ancestors is not brimming with virtues and vices, in common with the Lives of Suetonius’ other new Caesars. It is, however, stronger on virtues than vices, a corollary of Suetonius’ intention to portray Vespasian, Augustus, and Otho as his better Caesars, descendants of honest if undistinguished men. For those family trees, Suetonius weights his evidence a little in favour of their ancestors’ better qualities, in a way he does not do for Vitellius. The vicious streak in Vitellius’ family tree supports the portrait of the only vicious Caesar amongst these new families.

Conclusions of Chapter

The programmatic statement of Nero 1.2, that the ancestors will illustrate inherited vice and degenerate virtue, holds true for Nero. He does not display any of his ancestors’ virtues, such as military talent and leadership, but he seems to inherit all of their vices: cruelty, extravagance, arrogance, petulance, and envy. The statement is also applicable to the other noble Caesars, Galba, Caligula, and Claudius. In the Galba, as in the Nero, the principle is best illustrated by paradigms of inherited vice, but in the Caligula and Claudius Suetonius uses virtuous fathers to his advantage as foils of degenerated virtue rather than paradigms for inherited vice. The principle of inherited vice and degenerate virtue remains constant: virtue is never inherited.

For the newer Caesars, Augustus, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian, ancestral character traits are not as common. The family trees are urging the respectability of the family rather than the virtues and vices of the Caesars. However, for the three ‘good’ Caesars on this list, the family background is carefully presented to emphasise that although their ancestors were not especially famous or virtuous, they definitely had no history of scandal or dishonour. Vitellius, however, does have a vicious streak, and while his family is still shown to be respectable, Suetonius also looks to his ancestry, in particular his father and uncle, for paradigms of his own weaknesses, in much the same way as he had done for Nero and Galba. The use of lineage in characterisation appears to be a tool Suetonius uses across the board in the Lives from Augustus to Vespasian. It

562 Vesp. 6-7.
only remains to test the model of inherited vice and degenerate virtue in *Tiberius*, which will be the task of the next chapter.
IV The Trouble with Tiberius

The Tiberius is the real test of the statement, in the Nero,

[he] degenerated so much from the virtues of his ancestors that it was as if he revived only innate and hereditary vices because Tiberius’ ancestors offer examples of both virtue and vice. Tiberius is far less idealised than his brother Drusus or nephew Germanicus, but (unlike Nero) Tiberius is not without redeeming virtues. In this chapter I will identify the ways the ancestry section in Tiberius is unlike those of the other Lives and explain the aspects of Tiberius’ character that justify Suetonius’ divergence from usual practice. Tiberius is in fact the exception that proves the rule.

On the model of Nero, Galba, and other Lives, Suetonius does nothing surprising when he dedicates a long and detailed introduction to the Claudii, covering a period of several hundred years from their very first appearance at Rome. We have already seen that a list of triumphs, ovations, and other honours established beyond question the enviable position of the family.\textsuperscript{563} From the birth of the Republic, hardly a generation had passed without a controversial Claudius, and the prominence of Claudii in politics over so many centuries put their progeny in an excellent position to receive the mantle of power from Augustus. The bias of the sources, however, has clouded our evidence on all but the least interesting of the Claudii, and the validity of the tradition of superbia Claudiana, Claudian arrogance, has already been the subject of much discussion.\textsuperscript{564}

The first Claudius had supposedly come to Rome in the late sixth century BCE from the Sabine country as Atta (so Suetonius), Attus (so Tacitus), or Attius (so Livy) Clausus and, once at Rome, quickly became involved in public life as Appius Claudius.\textsuperscript{565} His Sabine ancestry may have been itself a legend—Holleman thinks the family was really Etruscan but, like other families, assumed a Sabine origin for its

\textsuperscript{563} Above, 49.
\textsuperscript{564} E.g. Mommsen (1894); Wiseman (1979); A. Vasaly (1987).
preferable connotations. More recently, Keaney has suggested, on linguistic evidence, that the name Clausus was indeed Sabine, or at least a very convincing fake. They may also have been at Rome even earlier, since Claudii appeared on the Fasti so soon after the expulsion of the kings. Suetonius reports two traditions of the coming of the Claudii to Rome. The patrician line includes the Pulchri, Nerones, and Centhones; the plebeian line (as Suetonius states, of equal importance) the Claudii Marcelli. Two lines of the patrician Claudii are relevant to us, as Tiberius was nominally Claudius Nero (through his father), and probably (through his mother) descended also from the Claudii Pulchri. In the late Republic the more famous branch was the Pulchri, amongst whom a generation of Pulchri used the Clodius form of the gentilicium, instead of Claudius. The Claudii were not a family famous for military conquests, but the gens did distinguish itself by important contributions to science, literature, and politics.

The ancestry section of the Tiberius is long and detailed, and should be good evidence for Suetonius’ practice, but there are several ways the ancestry section at the beginning of the Tiberius does not conform to the pattern of the other Lives. I propose to account for the unusual aspects of this introductory section by identifying other ways in which Tiberius’ character traits differ from those of other Caesars. This account of the family is carefully shaped to suit the Tiberius, although the Claudii are also progenitors of the later Caesars, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. In this I differ from Power’s view that the beginning of the Tiberius also sets up the Caligula and the Claudius. Although these latter Lives presume a reading of the Tiberius, and can therefore bypass the long family tree, the list of Claudii in Tiberius was crafted to fit the unusual character traits of Tiberius himself, and does not address itself to the traits of Caligula and Claudius as well. That the family tree is Tiberius-specific can be demonstrated by a study of the places where the structure of the family tree in the Tiberius differs from other family trees.

566 A.W.J. Holleman (1984) and (1986). I argued that it was not important whether they were really Sabine or not, above, 50.
568 Mommsen (1894) 498.
569 Tib. 1; cf. other sources which give only one or the other: D.H. 5.40.3-5 (cf. 9.47.1); Plut. Publicola 21.4-10. Wiseman (1979) 57-76 discusses the contradictions of the two stories across the sources.
570 Tib. 1.1.
572 Mommsen (1894) 497-502.
The Structure of the Tiberius

After the fairly usual list of honours and remarks about family cognomina, we expect a family tree to proceed in chronological order from the most distant, important ancestor to the subject’s father. For instance, the Nero follows the family tree, one ascendant after another in chronological order, each Domitius worse than the last; even the Otho and Augustus, which do not have long family trees, proceed from more distant ancestors and end with the Caesar’s father. Only the Vitellius includes non-ascendant relatives, presumably because of limited information about the extended family tree, but at least one of those non-ascendants is definitely paradigmatic. The ancestry section of Vitellius remains chronological by generation.

In the Tiberius, however, we find the first structural difference between the Tiberius and the other Lives. The notable Claudii are not arranged in chronological order, but they are sorted into two lots according to merit and infamy. Suetonius situates the examples he will provide by saying:

[t]here are on record many distinguished services of the Claudii to their country, as well as many deeds of the opposite character. \(^5^7^4\)

Thereby he introduces a catalogue of three good Claudii: Appius Caecus, his brother Caudex, \(^5^7^5\) and Caecus’ descendant, Tiberius Nero, \(^5^7^6\) all of whom contributed to some sort of military success, a forte they share with Tiberius himself. Note that, of these good Claudii, it is possible that only one of them (Caecus) is actually Tiberius’ ancestor.

Suetonius’ first Claudius, Appius Claudius Caecus, \(^5^7^7\) is the ancestor of Clodia that Cicero adduces in his famous prosopopoeia in his oration Pro Caelio when he

\(^5^7^5\) The relationship between Caudex and Caecus is not clear.
\(^5^7^6\) Suetonius’ ‘Tiberius’ should accurately be Gaius, according to Broughton (1951) 294. The ‘Tiberius’ here is probably an assimilation with the name of the Life’s subject proper, and his father. Gaius Claudius (who defeated Hasdrubal in 207) was not an ascendant of Tiberius, but if the mistaken cognomen was in the original text, it may be that the biographer thought he was dealing with a direct ancestor. Of course it may also be a manuscript error.
\(^5^7^7\) Caecus means ‘blind’, and Livy (9.29.9-11) and Valerius Maximus (1.1.17) record that Caecus went blind in his old age, and attribute it to his offending Hercules by transferring the cultivation of his worship from the Potitii, who had always undertaken it, to public slaves. Alternatively, according to Diodorus Siculus (20.36.6) he did not go blind but pretended he was blind to avoid the Senate’s wrath after his censorship. It seems, however, that ‘Caecus’ was never blind: the cognomen Caecus had been recorded on the Fasti at the time of his censorship, 312 BCE. Mommsen supposes that these explanations were created.
wishes to address Clodia ‘severely, solemnly, and in an old-fashioned manner.’

He held all the important offices, including the censorship (312 BCE) and the dictatorship, and left behind him public works such as the Appian Way and the Claudian aqueduct (also called the Appian Aqueduct). He is something of an enigma in Roman history, so variously understood that the two great historians, Neibuhr and Mommsen, could place him at opposite ends of the political spectrum:

the one claiming the Censor as the last bastion of patricianism in the fight against the encroachments of the new plebeian aristocracy, the other as a premature Caesar, demagogue, and would-be tyrant.

The contradictory nature of the tradition about Caecus was also a challenge for Humm’s more recent analysis. Suetonius emphasises Caecus’ wisdom in advising against an alliance with Pyrrhus, thus maintaining Rome’s independence.

The second good Claudius is Caudex, cos. 264, who headed the first military mission across the sea from Rome, opening up Sicily and the way for Roman imperialism. The victory was so significant that Polybius set the stage for his history with that battle. Once again, his achievement is in the military sphere, foreshadowing Tiberius’ military achievements.

The third good Claudius was also notable for his military leadership in a crucial battle. A son of Caecus, C. Claudius Nero (whom Suetonius calls Tiberius) distinguished himself in a military defeat of Hasdrubal in his consulship with Liuius Salinator in 207.

---

579 Frontin. *Aq.* 5.1.
580 E.S. Staveley (1959) 411.
582 Lindsay (1995) 57.
583 Polyb. 1.10-12.
584 *E.g.* Tib. 9.1-2, 16-20.
585 Tib. 2.1; Lindsay (1995) 57.
586 Although he is sometimes said to have triumphed, Valerius Maximus singles him out as modest for taking an ovation when his colleague triumphed, because, although the Senate had approved triumphs for both consuls, the military victory in question (over Hasdrubal in 207) occurred in Salinator’s province. V. Max. 4.1.9: ‘Thus did he triumph without a chariot, and with greater éclat because in Salinator’s case only victory was praised, but in Nero’s moderation as well.’ *Sic sine curru triumphauit, eo quidem clarius quod illius victoria tantummodo laudabatur, huius etiam moderatio.* Trans. Shackleton Bailey (2000). Elsewhere Valerius Maximus (2.9.6), whose hindsight has alerted him to the fact that the consuls 207 BCE/censors 204, Liuius Salinator and C. Claudius Nero, were both distinguished in his own time as...
Tiberius’ impressive military credentials are an important part of his *Life*, and this catalogue of good Claudii (*egregia merita*) emphasises the military endeavours of earlier Claudii, prefiguring Tiberius’ own military achievements. Caudex’s role in beginning the First Punic War, Caecus’ rejection of Pyrrhus, and Nero’s defeat of Hasdrubal in the Second Punic War were all important services to Rome, and Tiberius’ victory in Pannonia is a significant achievement, explicitly compared with the Carthaginian war as ‘the most serious of all foreign wars since those with Carthage.’\(^{587}\)

This collection of good Claudii is immediately followed by *contra* and balanced by an equal number of worse (*sequius*) Claudii: Claudius Regillianus, Claudius Russus, and Claudius Pulcher. The choice of anecdotes, from amongst centuries of Claudian candidates, shows editorialising: these three are all characterised by some variety of imperiousness.

The first bad Claudius on Suetonius’ list, dredged up from the fifth century, was Appius Claudius Crassus Inregillensis Sabinus, known in Suetonius as Regillianus.\(^{588}\) A member of only the second generation of Claudii at Rome, he was consul for 471 and 451,\(^{589}\) and in 451 BCE, Regillianus became one of the Decemvirs for the purpose of passing the last of the Twelve Tables of laws.\(^{590}\) Although the laws were passed, and the Decemvirate should have dissolved, the Decemvirs refused to elect consuls or successors for 450 BCE, and remained in office illegally. According to Livy, the ringleader of this miscarriage of justice was Appius Claudius.\(^{591}\)

Still in office in 449 BCE, he tried to use his position to take advantage of a young plebeian woman, traditionally known as Virginsia. Suetonius’ version is not as ancestors of Tiberius Caesar, brings out the enmity between the two, but (diplomatically) does not criticise either of them.

\(^{587}\) *grauissimum omnium externorum bellorum post Punica, Tib.* 16.1.


\(^{589}\) There is some confusion about whether there were two different consuls in 471 and 451 or whether they were the same man. The Appius Claudius who was consul in 471 decimated his own army for deliberately losing a battle, Liv. 2.59.11; D.H. 9.50.3-7; App. *Ital.* 7; V. Max. 9.3.5. Livy (2.61.1-9) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (9.52.1-54.6) record that in 470 the tribunes Duillius and Siccius prosecuted Appius Claudius, cos. 471, but that he died before the proceedings ended. On the strength of this evidence, Vasaly (1987) 209 imputes the consulship and Decemvirate in the 450s to another Appius Claudius. Other scholars, however, have questioned the statements in Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus as contradicting the Fasti, which make the same man consul in 471 and 451. ‘Note, however, that according to *Fast. Cap.* he became consul in 451 and Decemvir in 451 and 450.’ Broughton (1951) 31; cf. Mommsen (1894) 498-9. Suetonius does not clarify the matter, but deals only with the events of the Decemvirate (451-449).

\(^{590}\) Broughton (1951) 47.

detailed as Livy’s, but concise and to the point: the Decemvir tried to enslave a freeborn woman, for the sake of his lust for her (*libidinis gratia*), and so caused the second secession of the plebs.592 The story has all the crucial qualities of *libido*, conflict between the orders, and tyrannical conduct.

The next ‘bad’ Claudius, Suetonius’ Russus,593 who had a statue in the Forum Appii and tried to take over Italy, is a mysterious figure.594 It is possible that this ‘Russus’ is in fact Caecus’ son: there is now evidence that a son of Caecus (RE 317), who died in office as consul in 268 BCE, had the *cognomen* Russus.595 This would make him a relation, but not an ancestor, of Tiberius, and that would discount him from most of Suetonius’ *Lives* but, as we see in other examples such as the inclusion of Caudex, this would not preclude his appearance in Suetonius’ list of Claudii.

According to Suetonius, Russus is a would-be tyrant. He set up a statue of himself with a diadem, and he tried to take over Italy through his clients. The parallel between his attempt to control Italy and Tiberius’ rule over the empire raises the question of whether Suetonius thinks Tiberius really seized power or had it thrust upon him. The diadem, a symbol of monarchy, appears elsewhere in the *Lives*, usually on kings, and on tyrannical *principes*.596 Tiberius never assumes a diadem, but he is described as *tyrannus* in the part of the *Life* that describes his legacy.597 The references to tyranny at the beginning and end of the *Life*, before Tiberius’ birth and after his death, form a frame around the central section, which narrates the opposite

592 Tib. 2.2. On the secession, Livy and Dionysius attribute this to Appius specifically, while Diodorus only records that the perpetrator was one of the Decemvirs. Liv. 3.44-58; D.H. 11.28.3; D.S. 12.24.3. On this incident in the context of the *secessio*, J. von Ungern-Sternberg (1986).
593 Tib. 2.2. Russus, or Rufus/Drusus/Russes: the manuscripts are in disagreement. The Loeb gives Russes; the edition of Ihm (2003) 111 gives Drusus, although Ihm himself had written that Russus was to be preferred, in Ihm (1901) 303-4.
594 Mommsen (1894) 504; P.M. Martin (1982) 1.383. Mommsen identified him with Appius Claudius Caecus, on the basis of certain parallels in their careers. He adduced the evidence that Caecus had a large *clientela*, and was responsible for constructing the Forum Appii. However, as Ihm (1901) 303 and E. Rawson (1973) 22, n. 10 noticed, it is unlikely that Suetonius would have given Caecus as an example of both the good and bad Claudii.
595 C. Huelsen (1926); Lindsay (1995) 59.
596 The diadem is inappropriate for a *princeps*. To demonstrate that Caligula was a *monstrum*, Suetonius claims Caligula would have taken a diadem if he had not changed his mind and had a temple instead: Calig. 22.1. Titus raised eyebrows by wearing a diadem, even though it was as part of a religious ceremony, Tit. 5.3; Julius did not accept the diadem Antonius tried to give him, Iul. 79.2. Foreign kings have diadems at Ner. 13.2; Tib. 9.1.
597 Tib. 75.3. This is the only occurrence of the word *tyrannus* in the *Lives*: A. Howard & C. Jackson (1922) 254.
characteristic, his *ciuilitas*. These Claudii demonstrate a narcissistic sense of entitlement, doing and taking whatever they want.

Russus’ brother, P. Claudius Pulcher (cos. 249 BCE) is the third of Suetonius’ ‘bad’ Claudii, and a direct ascendant of Tiberius on Livia’s side. Pulcher was responsible for a huge naval disaster at Drepana. Suetonius’ version of this disaster is, at two sentences, the longest piece on a single Claudian ancestor in the *Tiberius*:

Claudius Pulcher began a sea-fight off Sicily, though the sacred chickens would not eat when he took the auspices, throwing them into the sea in defiance of the omen, and saying that they might drink, since they would not eat. He was defeated, and on being bidden by the senate to appoint a dictator, he appointed his messenger Glycias, as if again making a jest of his country’s peril.

 Appropriately to the biographical format, Suetonius is more interested in the personal behaviour than in its consequences for history, and he does not emphasise the catastrophe that befalls the Romans but rather the contempt (*contemptum ... in ludens*) for the gods and the Senate this Claudius demonstrates. We know from other references that Suetonius takes omens quite seriously. He is very taken with the omens of birth and death in the *Lives*, and in fact his concern for omens in his own life appears in a letter of Pliny.

The Pulcher episode occurs in several other sources as an example of the folly of disobeying the gods. When the story arises in Cicero, the commentator A.S. Pease identifies a family trait of ‘religious radicalism’ (shared by Pulcher and his father, Caecus) since Caecus’ blindness was meant to have been caused by his own innovations in religious practice. Suetonius makes a similar connection between Pulcher and Tiberius. Pulcher’s selfishness takes the form of irreligiousness; Tiberius, too, is blasé about the traditional religion, carrying out executions even on sacred days, and hardly

---

598 *Tib.* 26-40.  
599 Despite Suetonius’ *ab Appio Pulchro, Tib.* 3.1, which mistakes the *praenomen*. It should be Publius: Lindsay (1995) 63.  
602 D.S. 24.3; Polyb. 1.49-52; Liv. *Per.* 19; Liv. 22.42.9; Flor. 1.18.29; V. Max. 1.4.3.  
waiting for a sacrifice to be over before assaulting both the incense-bearer and the flute-player.\textsuperscript{604} He is ‘neglectful’ of the gods.\textsuperscript{605} At first superstitious and taken in by astrology, he later becomes suspicious and afraid of oracles, soothsayers, and astrologers.\textsuperscript{606}

These three Claudii are examples of the Claudian tradition that Tacitus names \textit{Claudiae familiae superbia}, although Suetonius puts it neither so clearly nor concisely.\textsuperscript{607} The tradition of \textit{superbia Claudiana} was certainly already proverbial by the time Tacitus and, to a lesser extent, Suetonius associated it with Tiberius. The Claudian pride is very famous and has been discussed at length.\textsuperscript{608}

Suetonius’ three bad Claudii are united by their character traits, but they are not all Tiberius’ ancestors. This is the second structural difference between \textit{Tiberius} and the other \textit{Lives}. It is quickly followed by a third, and these two will be best addressed together.

Following this catalogue of Claudii, Suetonius feels the need to tell us about the Claudiae:

\begin{quote}
the women also have records equally diverse, since both the famous Claudias belonged to that family
\end{quote}

and, once again, we have an equal number of good and bad, in this case one of each.\textsuperscript{609} Moreover, neither of these Claudiae is a direct ancestor of Tiberius.

The first Claudia is Claudia Quinta, who, Suetonius reports, publicly demonstrated her chastity (\textit{pudicitia}) by rescuing the statue of the mother of the gods when it became lodged in the Tiber. The goddess in question, Cybele, was often associated with Tiberius’ mother, Livia,\textsuperscript{610} and perhaps the reader is meant to connect Livia with Claudia. Suetonius’ Claudia is immaculate: he does not question her chastity

\textsuperscript{604} Superstitious, \textit{Tib.} 19; raped the two men after sacrifice, barely waiting for the ceremony to be finished, 44.2; executions, 61.2; oracles 63.1.
\textsuperscript{605} \textit{Tib.} 69 \textit{religiones neglegentior}, but his great-nephew Gaius is contemptuous, \textit{Calig.} 51.1.
\textsuperscript{606} \textit{Tib.} 14.4; 36; 63.1; 69.
\textsuperscript{607} Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.4.3.
\textsuperscript{608} Mommsen (1894) 505 supposes that the stereotype that first appears in Livy was based on the Claudii of the generation of Sulla, and the inventor was Licinius Macer. Wiseman (1979) 104-15 follows Mommsen as far as to say that the tradition is an invention of the late Republic, retrojected back onto the earlier Claudii, but he places the origins of the stereotype in the Claudii of the 50s.
\textsuperscript{609} One good and one bad. There is another Claudia later, the Vestal who enabled the triumph by her sacrosanctity, but she is not so much an example of the women of the family as an example of the headstrong and stubborn Claudii.
\textsuperscript{610} G. Grether (1946) 244.
or even suggest that it was in question. If he had wanted to exploit her bad reputation, the evidence was available, but as it happens he generously gives her this act of pietas as proof of her chastity, without imputing any doubts on her virtue. In fact, this Claudia (unlike the other two) is, in Suetonius, completely virtuous—and also only very vaguely connected with Tiberius himself.

This anecdote of untrammelled virtue in one of the famous Claudiae is immediately followed by her counterpart, the other famous Claudia, who, as we have seen, epitomises Claudian superbia. She is the sister of a Pulcher, and thus immediately identifiable to the reader as a gentilis of Tiberius’ mother, Livia. It was her brother Pulcher who lost a fleet in a maritime disaster, and it is a similar disregard for the Roman people that singles Claudia out for mention. She achieved notoriety for loudly and publicly declaring (after her brother’s death: Aulus Gellius dates the story to 246 BCE) that she would have her famous brother return and lose another fleet, so that her personal comfort might be improved by the diminution of the crowd at Rome. She was supposedly charged and fined for the arrogance of her outburst. Bauman connects Claudia with the conflict of the orders, as she was a prominent patrician and was prosecuted by two plebeian aediles, and the fine she paid contributed to the building of a temple in the plebeian precinct of the Aventine. Of the sources that report the charge, only Valerius Maximus professes her innocence.

Suetonius makes her a female representative of the Claudian superbia, noting that she was the first woman to face a charge of maiestas. As a representative of the conflict of the patricians with the plebeians, this Claudia is an appropriate segue into Suetonius’ generalising comment about the arrogance of the Claudii, en masse:

>[i]t is notorious besides that all the Claudii [Claudios omnis] were aristocrats and staunch upholders of the prestige and influence of the patricians, with the sole exception of Publius Clodius … Their attitude

---

611 Other sources suggest her chastity was in question, and that her demonstration was an effort to put down the rumours. E.g. Ov. Fast. 4.309-10 for the rumours against her, and Fast. 5.155-6 for the suggestion that the rumours were not true; also, App. Hann. 56; Sil. Pun. 17.23-45; Plin. HN 7.120; Ov. Pont. 1.2.141-2; Stat. Silv. 1.2.245-6; Propert. 4.11.51-2; Liv. 29.14.12; App. Hann. 56; Sil. Pun. 17.23-45; Plin. HN 7.120; Ov. Pont. 1.2.141-2; Stat. Silv. 1.2.245-6; Propert. 4.11.51-2; Liv. 29.14.12.

612 Tib. 2.3; frater suus Pulcher.


615 V. Max. 8.1 damn. 4; cf. Liv. Per. 19; Tib. 2.3.
towards the common people was so headstrong and stubborn [uiolentos
ac contumaces] …

The Claudia charged for maestas was only displaying traits—arrogance, obstinacy, and anti-plebeian sentiments—possessed by ‘all the Claudii.’ The best examples appear to be female, since the passage about the family’s superbia continues with a final Claudia. Interestingly, she is not an addition to the feminarum exempla diuersa aequae, but an example of Claudios omnis … uiolentos et contumaces. Ap. Claudius Pulcher, as consul for 143 waged war on the Salassi, an Italian people, and was defeated. After the Decemvirs made an offering in enemy territory, he was victorious, but the Senate denied him a triumph. Not to be discouraged, he arranged a triumph himself, and his daughter or sister, a Vestal Virgin, was there with him to make sure the triumph went unhindered. In Suetonius’ account, it appears to be the Vestal who is contumax, not the consul. Indeed, Bauman identifies this incident as the first use of the Vestal Virgins’ sanctity as a privilege or power. He says:

[s]anctity had never been defended in a positive way; it only surfaced when it was violated by unchastity. But now it was being given an extended meaning, it was being used as a constitutional, or would-be constitutional, weapon in the game of politics.

This challenge of the tribune’s sacrosanctity with the Vestal’s sanctity was unprecedented.

This last Claudia is a neat instance of Suetonius’ own interpretation of historical figures to his own ends—Suetonius, who makes her the sister (rather than daughter) of the triumphator, has her demonstrate the familial superbia, where for Cicero and Valerius Maximus the same anecdote is a virtuous example of pietas towards her father. Although she is a Claudia, she is not closely associated with Tiberius himself, just as Claudia Quinta was not given a direct relationship with him. These two Claudiae

616 Tib. 2.4: praeterea notatissimum est, Claudios omnis, excepto dum taxat P. Clodio … optimates adsertoresque unicos dignitatis ac potentiae patriciorum semper fuisse atque adversus plebem adeo uiolentos ac contumaces … Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1998).
617 Broughton (1951) 471. The legality of the war and the triumph is discussed by I. McDougall (1992).
619 Bauman (1992) 47.
620 Tib. 2.4; cf. Cic. Cael. 34; V. Max. 5.4.6. Both Cicero and Valerius Maximus make it pater; Suetonius is probably wrong to say frater, since he is in the minority here, according to Wiseman (1979) 58, n. 8, and Lindsay (1995) 62. A more satisfactory argument, but to the same effect, is made by Du Four (1941 [1979]) 15, n. 22, who makes the Vestal a daughter since the consul was an only child.
are related to Tiberius only at the most generic level. The only Claudia whose connection with Tiberius is clear is the sister of Pulcher, also the only completely vicious woman of Suetonius’ three Claudiae. Her relationship with Pulcher is important to the anecdote, but perhaps also a clue to the reader that Suetonius would have her associated with Tiberius’ mother, Livia, whose family were once Pulchri.

One final Claudius remains to Suetonius: Clodius, who constitutes the exception to the above ‘rule’ of Claudios omnis, becoming a plebeian ob expellendum urbe Ciceronem, for the sake of driving Cicero from the city.\(^{621}\) Although becoming a plebeian goes against the usual family vice of hating the plebs, his reason for breaking that rule is not admirable, especially given Suetonius’ reverence for all things Ciceronian.\(^{622}\) In fact, the means by which he becomes plebeian, adoption by a younger man—not in the spirit of the adoption process\(^ {623}\)—is also less than dignified. The etiam natu minori pokes fun at Clodius.\(^ {624}\)

All these examples of Claudii, brought together from a wide selection over several centuries, are building towards a statement to the effect that Tiberius was descended from the Claudian family on both sides:

[s]uch was the stock from which Tiberius Caesar derived his origin, and that too on both sides: on his father’s from Tiberius Nero; on his mother’s from Appius Pulcher, both of whom were sons of Appius Caecus.\(^ {625}\)

This passage holds the key to some of the problems we have already identified, but as it continues it raises two further questions. The fourth and fifth structural divergences both appear in the form of a catalogue of the Liuii, the family into which Tiberius’ maternal grandfather was adopted. The passage continues:

[h]e was a member also of the family of the Livii, through the adoption into it of his maternal grandfather.\(^ {626}\)

Richard Saller\(^ {627}\) raised the difficulty of Suetonius’ phrase ‘insertus est’ concerning the Liuii—does he consider Tiberius part of the Livian familia as well as the Claudian?

---

\(^{621}\) Tib.2.4. On the adoption of Clodius, see W.J. Tatum (1999) 104-8 and Lindsay (2009b) 174-81.

\(^{622}\) Macé (1900) 288-9, 296; McDermott (1971) 213-14.

\(^{623}\) Adoption by a younger man would be out of kilter with nature, see for instance Cic. Dom. 14.36.

\(^{624}\) Tib. 2.4: ‘[adopted by a plebeian and] one too who was younger than himself.’ Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1998).


\(^{626}\) Tib. 3.1: insertus est et Liuiorum familiae adoptato in eam materno auo. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1998).
Saller’s problem was with the definition of *familia*, and he preferred Tacitus’ narrower definition of *familia* to that of Suetonius. This is not the problem that concerns us. For us, the presence of this detailed list represents problems four and five, being as it is a long catalogue of the mother’s family, and of a family only related to Tiberius through adoption—legally, but not biologically, ascendent. If the Claudii provided both biological lines, the Liuii provide a third line of descent from which to draw paradigms.

The Liuii, a plebeian family\(^{628}\) of some distinction, had probably received Roman citizenship in 338 BCE.\(^{629}\) Like the Claudii, the Liuii had made several important contributions to the state, and their family tree provides examples of both very good and very bad behaviour, much of it controversial.

In this catalogue, we read only of four of the most interesting Liuii, given in no particular order—certainly not chronological. The impressive list of triumphs, consulships and so on excuses a few gaps in the family tree. The catalogue could have begun with the [Liuius] Drusus who was *magister equitum* in 324 BCE, or his son, M. Liuius Denter (cos. 302), who was the first consul of the family, as well as one of the first plebeian pontiffs.\(^{630}\) In fact we begin with his grandson, Salinator (cens. 204), and then go back to the first Drusus.

The first two of the Liuii in Suetonius’ catalogue are famous for military victories. Salinator was twice honoured with a triumph: once, as consul in 219,\(^{631}\) and the second time, again as consul, in 207, after the defeat of Hasdrubal.\(^{632}\) This triumph is the same one cited above in relation to the good Claudii. However, this is not the anecdote Suetonius recalls here: he chooses to tell the story of the spiteful censor who put a mark against all the tribes for their fickleness in electing him again after he had been convicted in his consulship. He did so even at the cost of reminding people of his own misconduct as consul. The second Liuius is the one who won the *agnomen* of Drusus by defeating an enemy called Drausus, according to Suetonius.

The final two of Suetonius’ Liuii are the two tribunes, Drusus the elder (tr. pl. 122 BCE), and his son (tr. pl. 91 BCE). They are known for political controversy rather

\(628\) *DNP*, s.v. Livius, col. 369.
\(630\) *DNP* s.v. Livius col. 370.
\(631\) Broughton (1951) 236.
\(632\) Broughton (1951) 294; Liv. 28.9.7-10; V. Max. 4.1.9; [Aur. Vict.] *Vir. Ill.* 48.5.
than military achievement, but they were far from unified in their politics. Drusus the elder is best known for his pro-senatorial stance in staunch opposition to C. Gracchus. Drusus’ legislation benefitted the poorer classes at the expense of the *equites*, whom Gracchus sought to support with his legislation. Gracchus wanted to establish colonies in Italy, which would grant land to the poor as well as the *equites*.633 Plutarch portrays Drusus as a puppet of the Senate, his only aim to undermine the other tribune, Gracchus, and win the people’s favour at his opponent’s expense. Contra Plutarch, Drusus had a unified programme of legislation and was not merely reactionary against Gracchus.634 As well as being defender of the plebs, he was also called the ‘champion of the Senate,’635 his pro-senatorial stance (i.e. anti-equestrian, rather than anti-plebeian) having something in common with Tiberius.

His son, Drusus the Younger, achieved infamy as tribune of the plebs in 91 BCE. His *cursus* is somewhat confused, the main sources for his career being ‘two not wholly reliable sources.’636 A champion of the rights of the Italians, during his tribunate he moved to enfranchise all the Latins south of the Po. He was unsuccessful, and the Allies plotted to murder the consuls. To his credit, Drusus revealed the plan to the consuls; for his efforts he was accused of complicity and himself murdered,637 his death ‘the decisive element leading to the outbreak of armed revolt in the Social War.’638 The portrait in Suetonius is plaintive about the treacherous (*per fraudem*) murder of the tribune.639

The Liuii, then, are known for great military achievements and controversial politics over several generations. They are also plebeian. The four Liuii Suetonius has chosen are a mixture of good and bad, much like the selection of Claudii.

The tribune of 91 BCE is probably the Liuius who adopted a Claudius, later known as M. Liuius Drusus Claudianus, the father of Livia.640 Livia’s father was born a

---

635 *Tib.* 3.2, Hardy (1913) 263.
636 Broughton (1986) 126; the two sources are [Aur. Vict.] *Vir. Ill.* 66 and *ILS* 49.
640 That the adopter was probably the tribune: Wiseman (1965) 334; that it was probably the tribune, but might have been his adoptive brother: Huntsman (1997) 19-20.
Claudius, but whether a Pulcher or a Nero is uncertain.\textsuperscript{\textit{641}} Suetonius says Pulcher, making Tiberius the product of both the Nerones and the Pulchri, and justifying his inclusion of anecdotes about both lines; Tacitus is also interested in the family, but he only says that Tiberius was a Claudian on both sides.\textsuperscript{\textit{642}}

It is the usual practice in Suetonius’ family trees that the father, i.e. the most recent member of the family line, is the only \textit{sine qua non}. In this list, Livia might be thought to fill that role, as the connection between Tiberius and the Liuii. But the Liuii who appear here are all fairly distant from Tiberius—neither Livia nor her father, Claudianus, is singled out for characterisation in this list. In fact, apart from his status as the future father-in-law of Augustus, this Claudianus is little known and is of no interest to Suetonius. His wife, Livia’s mother, was called something like Alfidia, but her actual name is still a matter of debate.\textsuperscript{\textit{643}} Claudianus was an adherent of the First Triumvirate, but after the assassination of Caesar he was proscribed by the new Triumvirs, committing suicide after the Battle of Philippi.\textsuperscript{\textit{644}}

It would appear that the father really is the only \textit{sine qua non} after all. Following the two types of Claudii, and the Liuii, in a separate category, appears Tiberius’ father. His career receives a good long section, including his rather individual approach to Caesar’s tyrannicides. He is not made one of the good or bad Claudii, but he does share with Tiberius a certain enthusiasm for the Republic.

He appears to have switched allegiances fairly readily during the civil wars: at first loyal to Caesar, in 47 BCE as proquaestor he commanded Caesar’s fleet in the Alexandrian war. Caesar is much less effusive in his praise of Nero than Suetonius, who gives him substantial credit for the victory: \textit{plurimum ad uictoriam contulit}.\textsuperscript{\textit{645}} Although he was not a conspirator in the death of Caesar, Suetonius says that when the Senate was deciding on a punishment for the tyrannicides, Nero ‘even’ (\textit{etiam}) wanted to reward them.\textsuperscript{\textit{646}} The \textit{etiam} suggests an extreme or controversial opinion. This pro-

\textsuperscript{\textit{641}} For discussion, see Huntsman (1997) 3, 12-16.
\textsuperscript{\textit{642}} \textit{Tib.} 3.1: \textit{utrumque}; Tac. \textit{Ann.} 6.51: \textit{utrimque}. He is a Pulcher according to \textit{DNP} s.v. Drusus I.5 (Claudianus), M. (Livius), col. 825.
\textsuperscript{\textit{643}} Suetonius calls Livia’s grandfather Aufidius (\textit{Calig.} 23.1), but it is quite likely Livia was actually descended from Alfidii: Huntsman (1997) 29-31; Wiseman (1965).
\textsuperscript{\textit{646}} \textit{Tib.} 4.1.
republican stance is relevant to the *Life*, as Tiberius, too, is anxious to maintain the *mos maiorum*.\(^{647}\)

In 41 BCE Octavian besieged Perusia, where L. Antonius (and Nero) had taken refuge. Tacitus says that Nero was exiled in the Perusine war.\(^{648}\) In fact his exile was the result of his failed attempt at an uprising in Campania after he escaped from the siege of Perusia. Velleius represents the uprising as a noble war, Nero as a protector of the disenfranchised; Syme calls it ‘revolution.’\(^{649}\) When he escaped to Sicily he defected to Sex. Pompeius, but they fell out, and Nero took himself off to M. Antonius in Greece.\(^{650}\) He only returned to Rome after the Pact of Misenum of 39. Suetonius’ emphasis falls on Nero’s military talent, political conservatism, and tergiversation during the civil wars.

Nero married Livia, and their marriage appears to have been a successful one. Livia accompanied him around the Mediterranean on his several changes of alliance during the heady years of the second triumvirate; by her, he sired Tiberius, and Livia was carrying a second son, Drusus, when, in 38, Nero obligingly divorced her so that Octavian might marry her. Livia’s first mention in the *Tiberius* comes at this point in her husband’s biography.\(^{651}\) Nero died in 33, after the divorce from Livia,\(^{652}\) and a few years before the battle of Actium would have settled his allegiances once and for all.

To summarise thus far, although the presence of ancestors in the Tiberius is perfectly usual, there are five unusual aspects to this introductory section. The first is the arrangement of the ancestors into good and bad, instead of chronological order; the second the inclusion of more general family members as well as direct ascendants. Third, the *Tiberius* is the only *Life* in which we hear of the character traits of women. Fourth, it is the only one that makes much of the maternal line, and fifth, the only one that brings in an adoptive line, on the maternal side, no less. I am interested in working out the explanation for these differences in the *Tiberius* from the other *Lives*. I propose to account for these differences of structure by linking them to some differences between the character traits of Tiberius and those of the other Caesars.

\(^{647}\) *Tib*. 26-32, especially 30.
\(^{649}\) Vell. 2.75.1; Syme (1960a) 210.
\(^{650}\) *Tib*. 4; Broughton (1952) 381.
\(^{651}\) *Tib*. 3.3.
\(^{652}\) *DNP*, s.v. Claudius 1.19; *Tib*. 4.3.
The first and most obvious structural difference is that Suetonius’ list of ancestors is not arranged in chronological order, as it is in other Lives, but all the male Claudii are bundled in together and then divided into good and bad; then the females, good and bad. My suspicion is that this arrangement of good and bad Claudii is a response to Tiberius’ unusual character, and perhaps Suetonius’ own uncertainty about Tiberius’ virtues and vices. The pattern in Suetonius’ Lives is that Caesars either degenerate from virtue or inherit vice, or both, resulting in a one-sided nature of vice which compounds on itself over the generations, or, in the case of the new families, virtue springs spontaneously from a stock that is neither very virtuous nor very vicious. The Flavians, Titus and Domitian, are rather exceptional in inheriting virtues rather than vices, but they are exceptional in other ways, too.\footnote{For instance, they are the first set of Caesars whose succession proceeds in the traditional, biological, generational order (father-son and then brother-brother); they are also a ‘new’ family. Perhaps these circumstances exclude them from the usual pattern.}

Other Caesars are basically good or bad, and they are preceded by very good or very bad ancestors, either paradigms or foils to their namesake. But Tiberius is neither good nor bad, and Suetonius accommodates Tiberius’ bi-fold nature by adjusting this introductory section, breaking the pattern. The author acknowledges the curious presence of both virtue and vice in Tiberius at 21.3 where Augustus weighs up Tiberius’ virtues and vices and decides that virtues outweigh vices.\footnote{Cf. Cass. Dio 58.28.5, to the effect that Tiberius had many virtues and many vices, and followed each set in turn as if the other did not exist: Τιβέριος μὲν ἄρετας μὲν ἄρετας δὲ καὶ κακίας ἔχων, καὶ ἐκατέρας αὐτῶς ὡς καὶ μόνας κεχρημένος, οὐδὲ μετήλλαξε τῇ ἔκτη καὶ εἰκοστῇ τοῦ Μαρτίου ἡμέρᾳ.}

This also reflects Suetonius’ own view, which, I argue, is foreshadowed at 2.1 with the division of the Claudii into two groups.

On the model of other Lives such as the Nero and the Caligula, I would look to Tiberius’ ancestors for clear-cut allusions to Tiberius himself, but in this case the portrait of Tiberius must be cobbled together from a number of ancestors. In other Lives, the vices are truer than virtues to family lines, and Suetonius does revel in the family history of Claudian arrogance, but it is really Tacitus who makes the most of Tiberius’ \textit{superbia}.\footnote{Tac. Ann. 1.4.3: \textit{uetere atque insita superbia}. Tiberius’ \textit{superbia} also appears at Ann. 1.72 and 6.13. Tacitus also attributes \textit{superbia} to Sejanus, 4.1, 4.68. In Suetonius, only Caligula has \textit{superbia}: Calig. 17.1 (people thought it was arrogance but it was not), 26.4 \textit{simili superbia uiolentiaque}, 34.1 nec minore liuore ac malignitate quam superbia saeuitiaque.} The bad Claudii in the list are narcissistic and imperious rather than arrogant. Suetonius makes one reference to Tiberius’ arrogance, a remark ascribed
to Augustus, excusing his arrogant mannerisms as ‘natural failings, not intentional.’

We might take it that any arrogance he shows is also to be ascribed to natura, but this is the only reference to arrogantia or superbia in the whole Life. In fact, over the Life Tiberius is as often described as ciulis, ‘citizenlike,’ as he is arrogant. However, he does display a kind of arrogance. What Tacitus describes as ‘Claudian arrogance’ becomes, in Suetonius, a sense of entitlement, whether an entitlement to sex, money, or power. Claudius Pulcher, Regillianus, and Russus all did whatever they wanted without a thought for others, and it is this same conceit that marks the later years of Tiberius. In his old age, Tiberius’ most prominent traits are saeuitia, depravity (libido and obscenaetas), and diritas. His famous dictum ‘let them hate me, provided they respect me’ exemplifies his disdain for inferiors.

However, Tiberius does not display every one of his ancestors’ vices. An early remark of Suetonius about the Claudians invites the expectation that he would be staunchly patrician and hate the plebs:

[all the Claudii were aristocrats and staunch upholders of the prestige and influence of the patricians, with the sole exception of Publius Clodius ... Their attitude towards the common people was so headstrong and stubborn ...]

After this tarring of ‘all’ the Claudii, it is rather surprising to find that Tiberius is actually quite self-conscious in his interactions with ordinary people—at least in the beginning. The best example is his horror at having imposed on the convalescents on Rhodes. In the early period, i.e. the sections before 40, he is often ciulis or perciulis, and only once uses his tribunician power—even then not unreasonably. Early in his Principate he displays moderatio, which appears to be genuine until Suetonius later says

658 Tib. 2.4: praeterea notassimum est, Claudios omnis, excepto dum taxat P. Clodio, qui ob expellendam urbe Ciceronem plebeio homini atque etiam natu minori in adoptionem se dedit, optimates advertereque unicos dignitatis ac potentiae patriciorum semper fuisse atque adversus plebem adeo violentos et contumaces, ut ne capitis quidem reus apud populum mutare vestem aut deprecari sustinuerit. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1998).
659 Tib. 11.2.
660 Tib. 11.2: the sick people he inconvenienced; 11.3: tribunicia potestas, used once (before he was princeps, when on Rhodes), not unreasonably; 26-8: would not accept honours; 27: loathed flattery, wanted free speech (cf. 29: this was ‘more noteworthy’ because with the Senate he was very obsequious).
his *moderatio* was a show.\(^{661}\) He is ‘almost excessively’ courteous with the senators. He loathes flattery, a fairly un-arrogant trait. Even later in life, although he is no longer excessively respectful of those lower in station, Tiberius is not noticeably anti-plebeian. In fact, although he becomes more flagrantly vicious as he gets older, he is never completely one-sided.

The Claudii also possess virtues, and Tiberius, unlike Nero, shows familial virtues as well as familial vices. Some of his successors appear to be virtuous but slide into vice as time goes on, but in Tiberius both good and bad occur together. The curious co-existence of both vices and virtues in Tiberius poses a challenge to the biographer, which is part of the reason for the unusual structure of the ancestry section along good/bad lines.

Tiberius shows virtue even after coming to power. When ‘little by little he unmasked the *princeps*,’\(^{662}\) this is not a sudden shift to despotism but actually a gradual improvement. This is in contrast with Suetonius’ usual usage of *paulatim*: when it signifies a change it is usually a change for the worse.\(^{663}\) We need not see here an actual change, however, but an ‘unmasking’ of virtues already present. The passage continues ‘although for some time his conduct was variable, yet he more often showed himself kindly and devoted to the public weal.’\(^{664}\) That is, Tiberius becomes a *princeps*, a complimentary term, perhaps in distinction to the *impudentissimus mimus* of 26.1. *Paulatim principem* introduces a section in which he is no longer content to sit back and let the Senate rule, but starts to intervene himself for the public good—a state of affairs that seems to prevail until he goes off to Capreae. Once on Capreae, he starts to act differently, but again the change is not really a change, but more the appearance of vices later in life that had been there all along, as we know from comments such as ‘he at last gave free rein to all the vices which he had for a long time ill concealed’\(^{665}\) and ‘his cruel and cold-blooded character was not completely hidden even in his boyhood.’\(^{666}\)

---

\(^{661}\) *Tib.* 32.2: *moderatio*; but it was a show, 57.1.

\(^{662}\) *Tib.* 33. This is vaguely reminiscent of *Liv.* 36.1, where Appius Claudius begins to act according to his true nature. *Ille finis Appio alienae personae ferendae fuit. Suo iam inde uiuere ingenio coepit nouosque collegas, iam priusquam inrent magistratum, in suos mores formare.*

\(^{663}\) For instances of *paulatim*, see A. Howard & C. Jackson (1922); of those, instances that indicate change: *Ner.* 20.1, 27.1, *Galb.* 9.1.


The change that Tiberius himself predicts—when he warns the Senate not to invest him with too much power lest he change⁶⁶⁷—is assumed to have occurred by the end of his life, but it need not be a change in character but rather in public esteem for him. This is a warning of qualities already present in his character, and already at odds within himself. It would appear that both vices and virtues are innate in Tiberius.

This conflict in Tiberius’ character traits might not be so obvious, were it not flagged by the contrasting Claudii at the introduction. The two types of Claudii provide the paradigms, and the fact that Tiberius is doubly Claudian explains this contradiction in his nature.⁶⁶⁸ After the preface on the *exempla diuersa* of the Claudii, Suetonius’ segue is:

> [s]uch was the stock from which Tiberius Caesar derived his origin, and that too on both sides.⁶⁶⁹

The double heritage of Tiberius is another point of difference between Tiberius and other Caesars: although Livia is nominally and legally a Livia on account of her father’s adoption, and later a Julia, Tacitus and Suetonius think of her as a Claudia, and therefore make Tiberius Claudian on both sides.⁶⁷⁰ This is interesting in itself, since it does not reflect the legal situation but the biological. Perhaps this reflects their opinion of his characteristics—he is so thoroughly ‘Claudian’ in manner and mores. Certainly to Tacitus this could be the case, but it does not quite work with Suetonius’ different portrait of Tiberius. Perhaps Suetonius has taken the reference to ‘Claudian on both sides’ from Tacitus, or even from Tiberius’ own autobiography.⁶⁷¹ Suetonius, unlike Tacitus, also sees a role for the Liuii, and this gives his Tiberius a ‘third’ family, to be discussed below.

The second, third, and fourth problems with the ancestry section must all be explained in light of this unusual relationship between Tiberius’ parents. The double heritage justifies the treatment of all the Claudii together, rather than an agnate and then a cognate line, but it also creates a problem of interpretation: is Suetonius adducing all these Claudii as members of the same group or does he consciously bring in maternal

---

⁶⁶⁷ *Tib.* 67.
⁶⁶⁸ This was noted in passing by Barton (1994) 51.
⁶⁷¹ *Tib.* 61. Suetonius seems to have seen the autobiography.
ancestors where, in other *Lives*, he does not? In other *Lives*, the mother’s ancestry is only passingly mentioned; here Suetonius does not differentiate between the mother’s side and the father’s but conceives of a great pool of patrician Claudii, all from the right branches of the family but not all ascendants of Tiberius, from which to choose his *exempla*. This is unusual. In the *Nero*, for instance, all the Domitii who are named are direct ascendants of Nero. These Claudii could not all have contributed to Tiberius’ character traits in a biological way, as the Domitii named in *Nero* could all have contributed to Nero’s; instead they are grouped together as examples of familial character traits which they might be thought to share with Tiberius, paradigms rather than the progenitors of his characteristics. The character traits of non-ascendant relatives only appear elsewhere in the *Vitellius*, and there they are even more obviously paradigms for behaviour. If we accept that the Claudii are paradigms, rather than progenitors, this solves these three problems: problem two, that the Claudii are not all ancestors; problem three, the presence of Claudiae; and problem four, an unusual focus on the maternal ancestors. In fact, problems three and four are revealed to be facets of problem two. Maternal ancestors, women, and non-ascendant family members are all representatives of Tiberius’ various, contradictory character traits, not their sources.

The maternal ancestors, then, would no longer pose a problem, except for the presence of relatively detailed information on the Liuii Drusi, and this brings us to the fifth problem—the appearance of adoptive ascendants.

Taking into account Suetonius’ usual scheme, the digression on the Liuii should have some relevance.

If Suetonius had wanted to bring out Tiberius’ maternal line, because he thought Livia’s influence had been especially important in Tiberius’ childhood, or because Livia will be a fairly major character in the biography, this would still not explain the detail on the Liuii Drusi: both Tacitus and Suetonius think of Livia as a Claudian despite her being two generations Livian, or at very least they think of Tiberius as Claudian ‘on both sides’ rather than part Claudius and part Liuius. This is in contrast with other examples such as Augustus, who seems to be considered part Octavius and part Atius, and Galba, who is closely associated with the Mummii as well as the Sulpicii. It would make sense for Tiberius to be considered part Claudian and part Livian, but as it happens Suetonius wants to have it both ways: Tiberius is Claudian ‘on both sides’ and Livian.
This marks a difference between Suetonius and Tacitus. Tacitus’ Tiberius is also Claudian ‘on both sides.’ But although Tacitus’ Tiberius is the quintessential Claudian,\textsuperscript{672} Suetonius’ Tiberius cannot be explained away as thoroughly Claudian at all. His good points are mainly military, and Suetonius, naturally, emphasises the military members of the Claudii in his \textit{Tiberius}, but Mommsen noticed that the Claudii produced remarkably few triumphatores for such an old and prominent family.\textsuperscript{673} Of Suetonius’ three good Claudii, two are famous for military achievements and the third for an important decision that bore on military matters. This is another example of Suetonius’ selectiveness when it comes to ancestors, but even when he is quite selective there is not much military might in the Claudii to choose from. The dearth of outstanding soldiers in the Claudii partly explains Suetonius’ decision to bring in the Liuui in support of his picture. It is reasonable to suppose that the Livian side bolsters the Claudian contribution to Tiberius’ proclivity and talents in the military arena.

The Liuui, like the Claudii, also bring controversial political activism to the \textit{Life}, in roughly equal parts popular and unpopular. Both families can be thought to support the vice/virtue conflict in Tiberius. It is also interesting that the Claudii are supposed to be vehemently anti-plebeian, but Tiberius is neither noticeably for nor against. This un-Claudian feature of his character requires the explanation that his Livian ancestors (and therefore his mother) were plebeians. The Livian parts of Tiberius, more a theme of Suetonius than Tacitus, might even be a revision of Tacitus’ black portrait.\textsuperscript{674}

In sum, then, I propose to account for these five differences in structure by three aspects of Tiberius that are unlike his fellow Caesars. Proceeding in reverse order, the fifth divergence, the unexpected appearance of adoptive ancestors, must be explained by the need to account for Tiberius’ particular talents in the military arena, which cannot satisfactorily be sought in his Claudian progenitors, a tendency towards controversial politics, and a curious mix of good and bad that is found in both families and in Tiberius himself.

\textsuperscript{672} E.g. Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.4.3; 1.33; 4.57.
\textsuperscript{673} Mommsen (1894) 497. The one triumph that represented a real achievement (that of C. Claudius Nero and M. Liuuii Salinator at the battle of Sena, 207 BCE) was celebrated by one of the lesser branch, the Claudii Nerones, a family significant here, but otherwise little mentioned. Of course, this triumph is important to Tiberius on both Claudian and Livian sides. This underachievement of the Claudii is also noted by Du Four (1941 [1979]) 10, n. 2.1. For the Claudii Nerones, see Figure VIII.
\textsuperscript{674} It has been noticed that Suetonius’ portrait of Tiberius goes from good to bad, whereas Tacitus’ goes from bad (but concealed) to bad: D.M. Pippidi (1965) 81, n. 2. Suetonius has been thought to have responded to Tacitus in other parts of the \textit{Lives}, on which see Beaujeu (1960) 234 and Hurley (1993) 19.
The third and fourth problems, the character traits of women, and the inclusion of the maternal line, turn out to be part of the second, the inclusion of more general gentiles as well as direct ascendants. That question finds an answer if we accept that these Claudii are not the progenitors of Tiberius’ qualities but exempla, paradigms of the same family traits that appear in him.

These three can all be explained by the curiosity that Tiberius is biologically the product of the same line on both sides, unlike the other Caesars. The availability of a huge pool of Claudii—limited only by the requirement of patrician status—affords Suetonius the luxury to be particularly selective in this Life, choosing anecdotes as he will.

The first unusual aspect we noticed, the arrangement of the ancestors into good and bad, instead of chronological order, reflects the coexistence of both virtue and vice in Tiberius, and in fact emphasises it by this foreshadowing at the beginning of the Life.

This central section of the thesis has demonstrated that the ancestry sections, in their privileged position at the beginning of the Life, have an important role to play in setting the tone for the rest of the Life. The opening section of the Tiberius has an effect on how we read the rest of the Life: if we compare it with, say, the Claudius, we have two Caesars who have similar ancestry, are both more or less balanced, and have many of the same qualities: for instance, cruelty and depravity. Claudius is juxtaposed with his completely virtuous father Drusus, and although he is cruel and weak, the strongest impression is that he is a bit disappointing and pathetic after Drusus. On the other hand, Tiberius, on account of the set-up with the mixed ancestry, comes out looking fairly evenly balanced. The way Suetonius constructs the ancestry at the beginning of the Life is crucial to the overall effect of the Tiberius, and accounting for the unexpected aspects of the ancestry section is of no little importance to the way we approach the Tiberius as a whole. Even in the Tiberius, which is an exception in so many ways, Suetonius uses the ancestors to shape his subject.

In fact, these differences between the Tiberius and the other Lives support the proposition that each family tree is shaped to suit its Caesar. Only rarely voicing value judgments,675 Suetonius is (however subtly) persuading his readers through these ancestors, and his writing is therefore rhetorical by Kennedy’s definition:

675 Carney (1968) 11, n. 18.
rhetoric, defined in the strictest sense, is the art of persuasion as practised by orators and described by theorists and teachers of speech … In all of these uses rhetoric is an abstraction; its concrete manifestations are principally oratory, but also other literary forms which share the purposes or techniques of oratory …  

Not only is Suetonius’ method ‘rhetorical’ in the broadest sense, but it is also influenced by rhetoric as practised by orators. It is specifically cognate with epideictic oratory, the rhetoric of praise and blame. Stuart located Suetonius’ model in laudatio funebris, but this is too narrow. A more satisfactory solution was found by Lewis, who broadened the list of antecedents to include the larger genre of laudatio and uituperatio, the mainstays of epideictic oratory in Ancient Rome, of which the funeral oration was just one example. I believe there is evidence that Suetonius sought his models in these kinds of literature, particularly the invective of Cicero, since there is a strong similarity between the structure of Suetonius’ introductions and the structure of Cicero’s epideictic speeches, for example In Pisonem and Pro Archia as well as the prescriptions of the rhetorical manuals, including Rhetorica ad Herennium and Quintilian’s advice on the genus demonstrativum. The similarities between Suetonius’ method and republican rhetoric were raised by Barton. As far back as Aristotle, the rhetorical manuals suggest that when dealing with a person’s life, either in praise or in blame, one must begin with external circumstances (externa), namely country, ancestry, and parents, and go on with the circumstances of birth, including the accompanying omens; then on to the honours and achievements of youth, and finally facta: the actions of manhood, arranged by virtues (or vices, depending on genre). This is the structure Cicero follows in many of his invective or encomiastic speeches, and it is eerily similar to Suetonius’ method in his Lives.

676 G. Kennedy (1972) 3-4.
677 Stuart (1928) 210ff.
678 Lewis (1991); see also Kennedy (1972) 21.
679 On which see J. Dugan (2001).
680 Duff (2003) 106 sees a similarity between Cicero’s praise/blame oratory and certain parts of Suetonius, especially s.28 of the Nero.
681 Barton (1994).
682 Cic. Part. Or. 74; similar prescriptions in Rhet. Her. 3.7; Quint. Inst. 3.7.10 on praise, and 3.7.19 on blame; [Rh. Al.] 3.1-14 on amplification and minimisation in praise and criticism; 35.4-11 on ‘external goods’ including genealogy; genealogy is an essential part of praise or blame; how to amplify and minimise genealogy, with particular resonance with Suetonius’ procedure. The generic structure of panegyric and invective is studied in V. Arena (2007) and R. Rees (2007).
To summarise Suetonius’ use of ancestors, the ancestors are basically historical, but they are selected and shaped according to rhetorical requirement: for a good Caesar, ancestors are little known and without vice; for bad Caesars, ancestors are (as relevant) vicious paradigms for vice, or paragons, emphatically juxtaposed with their vicious descendant. Only the father is a *sine qua non*; other ancestors (including maternal) may be included or omitted at the author’s discretion. Virtues are never paradigmatic, but rather, as Sallust and Juvenal would have it,683 virtues are a light shining on their descendant, making their vices look even worse by comparison. Virtues that appear in Caesars are not prefigured in ancestry but spontaneous—the Flauii seem to be an exception, but in fact they are not, as those *Lives* do not have the usual ancestry rubric at the beginning. Their similarities with their father are not foreshadowed within the *Life* but rely upon a reading of the *Vespasian*. As we saw in *Tiberius* and *Claudius*, ancestors even support the narrative of *Lives* that show contradictory traits. The conflicting traits in Tiberius are brought out by the two opposing groups of Claudii; Claudius is neither very good nor very bad, but after the example of his father, Drusus, he seems rather more lacklustre. Plutarch sometimes uses an important figure, including ancestors, as a foil or paradigm for the subject of his *Life*;684 compared with his peers and predecessors, Suetonius is interesting because he employs this technique in almost every *Life*. Nero is the best example of inherited vice, and Caligula the most obvious degenerate, but they are just the strongest examples of an across-the-board approach to the *Lives* of the Caesars.

**Vices and Virtues in Suetonius**

In Chapters Three and Four I have been uncovering patterns in Suetonius’ characterisation that suggest an internally consistent approach to virtues and vices in the ancestors. Most commonly, resemblances along the agnate line reproduce vices, a phenomenon that Suetonius communicates by paradigm in the opening section. Vice is, in Suetonius, a powerful force that grows over the generations. The *Nero* is ample evidence of this. Although some of the ancestors are more like Nero than others (the consul of 16 BCE is particularly similar), each has a specific vice in common with

---

Nero. As the generations approach Nero, each Domitius is worse than the last, with the predictable result that Nero’s father is the worst Domitius, surpassed only by Nero himself.

In other Lives, too, vices are faithfully transmitted from generation to generation, overpowering virtues. Gluttony is a vice that appears in Vitellius’ uncle and in Vitellius himself; Vitellius also receives his father’s ‘gift’ for adulation. Rebellion against Caesar is a vice transmitted from Galba to Galba, as is avarice. Even Germanicus’ skinny legs reflect on Caligula—this physical flaw is a feature of Caligula as well, but where Germanicus strives to overcome this fault, Caligula’s inaction converts this physical fault into a moral one.

Many vices appear in the Caesars with no apparent antecedent in the family tree, but Suetonius presents them instead as degeneration from virtues. Once again, he adheres to the prescription of the Rhetorica ad Herennium of emphasising vice either by vice or virtue. The Caligula is the strongest example; the Claudius another. Neither is explicitly said to have degenerated—the word degenerare is used in Suetonius only at Nero 1.2 and Augustus 17, of Antonius—but rather the point is made by description of the father. Virtues in the father make the virtueless son look vicious: Claudius, for instance, in comparison with his father, Drusus, particularly when it comes to soldierly pursuits; with Tiberius, who shares many of Claudius’ traits, the effect is different, because he is compared with different ancestors.

While ancestral vices are paradigmatic, it is far harder to divine the behaviour of virtues. Tiberius’ main virtue is military prowess, and he does have ancestral precedent for such a predilection, given that the Livian military record could account for the presence of the Liuii in Tiberius. In the same Life we learn that the name ‘Nero’ means strong and brave—fortis ac strenuus. Military talent is the only kind of ‘virtue’ that occurs in more than one generation, and even then it tends to fall away amongst the Caesars. But military talent does not appear to be a moral virtue, or at least it is not one of the common measures of character. In Germanicus it is fortitudo, one of his four virtues, but this is never given to any of our Caesars—it appears only in Julius, and in the ancestry section of Augustus but not of Augustus himself. Family virtues are either inherited, if they are military, or they degenerate, if they are not military, and sometimes

685 Tib. 1.2.
686 Calig. 3.1; Jul. 68.3; Aug. 3.2.
even if they are. The Caesars who do exhibit non-military virtues are not overshadowed by an antecedent vice or virtue: rather they are the scions of respectable families, who create their own virtues. Virtues are not amongst the character traits that repeat over the generations. In fact, they do not seem to be connected with parentage, except that they do not spring spontaneously from vicious parents. They might, however, spring from non-vice. There are conditions that can engender only vice, but no conditions guarantee virtue.

Virtues behave differently in noble Caesars and new. Nobility, which had promised virtue in the age of Cicero, is now a bellwether of vice. In noble families, Suetonius emphasises ancestral virtues, for they foreshadow only degeneration in their descendant. The Caligula is the strongest example; Claudius another. We have already seen that Nero is at best aberrant from his ancestors’ virtues. As Friedländer noticed, the noble Caesars were the more violent rulers. In fact, although Suetonius respects nobility, it would appear that a noble family cannot produce a virtuous Caesar.

New families are not as predictable. Augustus’ father displays non minore iustitia quam fortitudine, but neither of these qualities is specifically ascribed to Augustus. If we are supposed to read in this an allusion to Augustus, it is an abstruse reference. Otho’s father acts seuerissime, (which could be a virtue, as seuerus is a laus in Cicero, and seueritas is complimentary in Tacitus) but Otho is not seuerus, nor is he described with the negative counterparts crudelis or saeuus. On the whole, virtues are the property of new men, not nobiles. In the families of Augustus or Otho, the father or ancestor is neither a paradigm nor a foil for his scion: rather, the parent is neither very virtuous nor very vicious, but at minimum honourable enough to produce a son with virtues. The same can be said for Vespasian’s forebears.

This picture is complicated by Vespasian’s sons: this is a family in which the son succeeds the father for the first time in the De Vita Caesarum, and the only instance of improvement along the family line. The similarities between Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian were possibly influenced by Flavian propaganda connecting the virtues of Titus and Vespasian. However, Suetonius cannot have wanted to emphasise this

---

687 L. Friedländer (1908) 106.
688 Oth. 1.2.
689 Cic. Deiot. 26; in Tac. Hist. 1.5, seuerus is complimentary, according to P. Plass (1988) 41.
690 Titus’ self-advertisement used the same virtues as Vespasian: Boyle (2003) 11.
anomaly, perhaps even this possibility, since he does not draw attention to it with the customary introduction: instead, the introduction to the Vespasian must stand as the introduction to the whole of Book Eight.\textsuperscript{691} Any reference to their ancestry, similarity with each other, or similarity with their ancestors, is not emphasised by an introductory section on the ancestors but requires knowledge of other texts.\textsuperscript{692}

In fact, virtues usually degenerate, something which Suetonius communicates by foil. Virtues exist in the ancestors only for rhetorical colour, not as paradigm: virtue degenerates, most obviously in the Caligula and the Claudius. The pattern of inheritance is basically that given in the Nero: virtues degenerate, vices continue on down the line.

A feature of the lives is that vices build up not only over the family line but also over dynasties, despite the fact that most of the dynasties in Suetonius do not proceed by simple father-son succession. Each of the dynasties (Augustus-Tiberius-Caligula; Claudius-Nero,\textsuperscript{693} Vespasian-Titus-Domitian) tends to degenerate, until the last of the house is assassinated and replaced with a new man, who has come to power under his own merit and rules well. The first of the new house is often relatively unknown—Augustus, Vespasian—but Claudius evades this rule by virtue of his unusually low status in the ruling house. Tiberius succeeds Augustus and does middlingly well; he is succeeded by his great-nephew Caligula, ‘a viper for the Roman people,’\textsuperscript{694} who meets a sudden end. Claudius succeeds ‘by accident’ and confounds expectations to become quite a good Caesar; his adopted son, Nero, needs no intervening generation but is immediately worse than Claudius, and the house ends with him. In the interregnal period we have no dynasts, although Galba tried to continue his line by adoption. The civil wars end with the entrance of Vespasian, who has the unusual luck of valid sons to

\textsuperscript{691} Braithwaite (1927) 19.
\textsuperscript{692} On the model of previous Caesars, one might expect Titus to share Vespasian’s one vice, or at least be degenerate from him in some way, but never that he would surpass him in virtue. Alone amongst the Caesars, this is a family united not by vices but by virtues. Granted, Domitian and Vespasian do share the vice of avarice, but in both cases this is ascribed to need and specifically not to nature. (\textit{Dom.} 3.2, see below, 170; \textit{Vesp.} 16.3, see below, 169.) Far more intriguing are the virtues in common between Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. As Wallace-Hadrill noticed, imperial virtues are often negative, representing the lack of the corresponding vice: (1995) 157. The Flauii are virtuous by lacking vices: they are each not extravagant, not bloodthirsty. (Not extravagant: \textit{Vesp.} 19; \textit{Tit.} 7.2; \textit{Dom.} 2.1; not bloodthirsty: \textit{Vesp.} 15; \textit{Tit.} 9-10; \textit{Dom.} 9.1.) They are also each industrious and generous. (\textit{Industria, Vesp.} 4.5; \textit{Tit.} 4.1; \textit{industrie, Dom.} 8.1; generosity \textit{Vesp.} 17; \textit{Tit.} 7-8; \textit{Dom.} 9.2.)
\textsuperscript{693} Although we today do not consider Claudius-Nero a separate dynasty, there is reason to believe that Suetonius does: \textit{Vesp.} 25.
succeed him. When Domitian succeeds his brother, however, he is the end of the house, and deservedly killed, says Suetonius.\footnote{Vesp. 1.1.}
In the course of Chapters One and Two, I explored the ways the ancestors in the introductory sections contribute to Suetonius’ portraits as vehicles of status. In the process I explained that the value of the ancestors as status markers rests on shared assumptions about ancestors and status, such as the inherent value of nobility, ethnic origin, and legendary genealogy.

In Chapters Three and Four, I argued that Suetonius is further using the ancestors to characterise his Caesars, and that the patterns of virtue and vice are internally consistent. These ancestry sections raise some practical questions. Did Nero’s detestable character come to him by nature or nurture? If nature, how do we explain the difference between the brothers Titus and Domitian, or the extended digression on the Liuii in the Tiberius? If nurture, why is there not more interest in the mother’s traits? In the final section I will attempt to answer these questions, extrapolating from Suetonius’ statements and usage the author’s position on the mechanism by which character traits are reproduced across generations.

I now propose that the currency of Suetonius’ characterisation-via-lineage also rests on some shared assumptions about the role of the ancestors in vices and virtues: that is, if the reader is to make the intended connection between ancestral traits and traits in the subject, he must be prepared to accept the author’s position on nature versus nurture in the creation of character traits.

What we have seen of Suetonius’ characterisation through ancestry already begs the question of nature or nurture, but more than its inherent interest, knowing Suetonius’ position on nature/nurture will put us in a better position to read the full meaning of his text in relation to other aspects of characterisation such as character change and degeneration. In the process of characterising his Caesars through their resemblances and dissimilarities to their ancestors, Suetonius follows or creates a consistent pattern of inheritance and degeneration that might betray an underlying ideology. This pattern of corrupt virtue and inherited vice—which was laid out at the end of Chapter Four—goes for the most part unstated, assuming certain knowledge on the part of the audience. It is the task of this final chapter to ascertain what one must know about Suetonius’ world view in order to comprehend these introductory sections. I am looking to explain the
underlying assumptions at work in Suetonius’ use of ancestors as tools of characterisation.

In the first part of this chapter, I will adduce parallels from Suetonius’ predecessors and contemporaries to determine the prevailing view on nature/nurture in the period of his sources—the one and a half centuries from the late Republic to the Hadrianic era. A survey of the evidence before and outside of Suetonius will indicate the probable expectations of his audience before I look at the nature/nurture question in Suetonius’ text itself.

In the second part of the chapter I use internal evidence from Suetonius to determine his position on nature/nurture as the source of character traits. To do this, I discuss the relevant passages of Suetonius on innate or developing character, character change over time, and family traits. I investigate the available options for the mechanism by which his audience expected character traits to be passed on. In the last part of this chapter I will consider the differences between Suetonius’ position on inheritance and that of his peers and predecessors, to identify areas in which Suetonius is innovative.

Ancient authors did not formulate their debate as nature versus nurture, but this is the model we operate on today, since Francis Galton used the phrase ‘nature and nurture’ in his scientific study of inheritance. A ‘nature’ model of personality sees traits formed physiologically, therefore present at birth and probably inherited from parents; a ‘nurture’ model sees traits formed after birth by instruction and environment, with no role for inheritance. Modern psychological research has swung between nature and nurture, depending not only on scientific advances but also on changing world views, and now sits between the two. The ancient Romans also moved between the two as social and political conditions shifted.

---

696 One of the earliest recorded uses of nature and nurture together occurs in Shakespeare’s The Tempest 4.1. Prospero describes Caliban as ‘A devil, a born devil, on whose nature/Nurture can never stick.’ For the entry of the phrase ‘nature and nurture’ into science, see Galton (1874).

Before Suetonius

In republican literature, there are dozens of references to ‘family’ character traits, or assumptions that the virtue of the father lives on in the son. Any reader of Livy is alive to the similarities between men with the same name. Cicero refers to the frugalitas bred into the line of the Pisones Frugi; the Decii Mures, famous for their deuotio; and wisdom in every generation of Nasica’s ancestors. In fact, the assumption of inherited virtue appears to be fairly central to republican politics, as it might justify the common practice of electing the son to an office held by the father. Susan Treggiari claims, based on evidence from Cicero, that the electorate appointed noblemen’s sons not because they automatically deserved the honour, but because voters ‘were supposed to believe that merit ran in families.’ Sons of noble families can be assumed to have inherited their father’s merit.

In fact, very specific character traits run in families. To investigate this we must return to family identity, but where we were previously interested in it as a vehicle of status, we are now looking for what it says about inherited character traits. It is a commonplace of Roman historiography that famous families had certain characteristics:

- a Gnaeus Piso was expected to be hard and proud, a Lucius Piso to be cultured and civilized, a Domitius Ahenobarbus to be ferocious.

These are examples of what Farney calls family identity. Although historians have been suspected of inventing these stereotypes, Farney believes that the historians were recording a tradition they found already established. Certainly, when family identity appears in Suetonius, he is not inventing stories—they usually appear in other sources as well—but he is manipulating them to suit his message.

It is Farney’s thesis that these stereotypes were actively advertised by members of the family to create a family reputation by which any individual member of the family could be identified. The main purpose of this identity is to win elections, and it

---

698 Vasaly (1987) and (1999).
699 Cic. Sest. 21.
700 Cic. Tusc. 1.89.
701 Cic. Brut. 2.12.
appeared to work: certainly, Cicero blames it for the election of Piso: the people elected ’a Piso, not this Piso.’

There are some situations that call for certain attributes: in a position that calls for military discipline, family identity suggests a Manlius Torquatus would be the best candidate. More than one generation of Manlii were said to have chosen state over family, such as a Manlius who executed his own son for disobeying orders on the battlefield in the fourth century BCE. There was a certain amount of doubling up of family reputations: for instance, both the Aelii and the Calpurnii were known for their frugality; the Cassii, Marcii, and Valerii were all famous for a love of democracy.

One reason for this duplication is that some of the family characteristics were in fact qualities associated with a certain ethnicity, and therefore common to all families from the same area, such as Sabinum or Etruria.

The personality trait in question, such as the proverbial superbia Claudiana, might be more rhetorical than historical, especially when retrojected onto historical figures. Such stereotypes appear in the historians as a way of characterising historical figures by the character traits of their descendants, which is precisely the way Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus characterise the Appii Claudii. Claudian pride is not only pertinent to our Caesars but also a prime example of family identity. The arrogance of the Claudii, supposedly a feature even of the first Claudius to come to Rome at the birth of the Republic, and appearing from generation to generation forever after, is now supposed to be a confection of the late Republic, either in the 80s BCE, according to Mommsen, or in the 50s, according to Wiseman, thrown up by competition in elections in response to the Claudii of that generation, and superimposed on the historical figures according to this new stereotype. The supposed resemblance between men of the same name allows historians to paint any Claudius with the same character traits as the Claudius of their own period.

---

706 Cic. Pis. 1.2: aedilis es factus: Piso est a populo Romano factus, non iste Piso.
707 In 340 BCE, a Manlius Torquatus executed his son for defying orders in battle; in 140 BCE a Manlius Torquatus found his son guilty of extortion; the son committed suicide and the father did not come to the funeral. See Farney (1999) 8, n. 2.
708 Farney (1999) 11, n. 11.
710 Mommsen (1894) 505; Wiseman (1979) 104-115. The superbia Claudiana has been alluded to above, 115, 122, 130.
The expected similarity between father and son has a broader application in Roman culture—and it does not only apply to the nobility. Without specifying a family, Varro shows the ubiquity of the concept when he explains how a nominative form can be predicted from an oblique case just 'as the father’s qualities may be seen from the son, and the son’s from the father.’\(^{711}\) That the concept is broadly understood is apparent in Cicero’s speeches, where the expectation of similarity between father and son has the force of character witness. James May, discussing Cicero’s court speeches, summarises:

> [t]he Romans believed that character remains essentially constant in man and therefore demands or determines his actions. Since character does not evolve or develop, but rather is bestowed or inherited by nature, an individual cannot suddenly, or at will, change or disguise for any lengthy period his ethos or his way of life; nor is it wise to attempt such alteration. The Romans further believed that in most cases character remains constant from generation to generation of the same family.\(^{712}\)

As we will soon see that the belief in natural character was not constant across Roman civilisation, May’s phrase ‘the Romans’ should be taken to mean the contemporaries of Cicero. Cicero often makes arguments based on character rather than the facts of the case, and of those times his pronouncements are often actually based on the parent or child’s character, as if that could stand for the character of his client. Several times he adduces the virtues of his clients’ ancestors in defence. He defends Fonteius by the good name and achievements of his ancestors; representing Scaurus, he parades Scaurus’ father and grandfather as models of virtue; and, in a most blatant appeal to belief in character inheritance, he posits the virtue of Sulla’s father: since the father is virtuous, would the son really be vicious?\(^{713}\) He extends the concept to teacher and student in aid of his *Pro Q. Roscio*: Cicero argues that Roscius, a talented actor hired to teach his skills to another, must have produced a good student,

> for no one would think that a good comic actor could be created by a very bad actor any more than that a moral son could be born of an immoral father.\(^{714}\)


\(^{713}\) Cic. *Font.* 41; *Scaur.* 45-49; *Sull.* 58.

Whether or not Cicero himself believes in the transmission of character, the effectiveness of the argument rests upon the audience’s common belief in character inheritance.

Cicero is not the only Roman using parents in court cases, and when it suits him, he is not too proud to contradict himself. For instance, in the Pro Plancio he argues, against the opposition’s claim (and against several other statements of his own), that the father should not be evidence against the son! He confirms here that the opposition had adduced the father to make a case against the son.

Most of these examples are along the agnate line, but there are occasional references to inheritance on the maternal line. For instance, Spinther is like his maternal great-grandfather in uirtus. Daughters are like their fathers in Cicero, Valerius Maximus, and Pliny.

Dissimilarity might create doubt in paternity: Vergil’s Priam doubts whether Neoptolemus is really Achilles’ son, since he behaves unworthily of him. In the Tiberian author Valerius Maximus, a section ‘on sons who degenerated from famous parents’ lists famous names who were infamously dissolute or depraved, in stark contrast with their illustrious fathers. Their degeneration merits comment because it is both uncommon and unexpected.

The expectation is that merits are inherited, and degeneration is possible but remarkable. If merits will be reproduced over the generations of an agnate line, it remains now to establish the mechanism of such reproduction as republican writers saw it.

There is some indication that emulation (aemulatio) or imitation (imitatio) was an important Roman method of acculturating young Romans. Resemblance created by imitation would be the product of nurture. Polybius speaks of the role of aristocratic

---

715 R.Y. Tyrrell & L.C. Purser (1894) 156, on Att. 10.4, claim Cicero did not believe in heredity. Perhaps so, but Cicero had said elsewhere that it is important to appeal to the common beliefs of mankind: Inv. 1.29; Orat. 2.68.
716 Corbeill (1996) 77.
717 Cic. Planc. 31-32.
718 Spinther: Cic. Har. resp. 22. Daughters: Cic. QFr. 1.3.3: Tullia is like her father; Cic. Brut. 2.11: Laelia is like her father in diction; V. Max. 8.3.3: Hortensia is like her father in eloquence. Plin. Ep. 5.16.9: Fundanus’ daughter was just like him.
funerals in providing exempla to young men. The laudatio and the display of imagines praise great Romans of the past, glorifying the ancestors and inspiring young men to match their deeds and sacrifices. Polybius applauds the power of the display as an exhortation to young men, but he does not specify that the example is being set to descendants. The example is in fact for all young men, that they might learn how to be Romans.

The effect of ancestor masks as exempla to young men is also implied in Cicero’s Philippics, in which he suggests that the brothers Brutus emulated their ancestors in tyrannicide because they saw their masks so often. Whether this is a literal description of the effect of daily brushes with ancestor masks or a rhetorical device to represent the biological fact of lineage is hard to say. Elsewhere in the Philippics he refers to Brutus as ‘fated’ by his parents’ families to do what he did, mindful of his name and an imitator of his ancestors. He also suggests that Brutus’ action was not a natural reflex, but decided on conscious reflection because he remembered he was a Brutus. Tacitus reports that, during the reign of Nero, there were those who protested Seneca should retire, because Nero had his ancestors for teachers.

It is occasionally suggested that a young man modelled himself on another, or would have done well to do so, and although the resemblance is the result of ‘nurture,’ the model is often a relation. For instance, Cicero’s client Rabirius Postumus never saw his father but modelled himself on him (similitudinem deductus est); this is to his credit. Antonius is more like his step-father when he should have been like his (maternal) uncle; Castor should have modelled himself (imitari) on his grandfather. The model does not have to be a relation, though—Cicero postulates that Glabrio might have inherited qualities from his father, his grandfather, his father-in-law, suggesting that he might have emulated other role models in his life apart from biological relations.

---

721 Polyb. 6.53.
722 Cic. Phil. 2.26.
723 Cic. Phil. 10.14: tum fato quodam paterni maternique generis et nominis. See also Cic. Phil. 3.8. Praise of Brutus in Philippic 10, often in terms of his ancestry, is discussed by T. Dawes (2008).
724 Cic. Phil. 6.9.
Augustus hoped that the young Claudius would find a suitable role-model;\textsuperscript{726} Dolabella modelled his cruelty on Antonius.\textsuperscript{727}

Amidst the many resemblances between children and parents, dissimilarity is even more noticeable, and drawn out for rhetorical effect because it goes against the status quo of inherited merit. In \textit{Brutus}, a son born after his father’s death is unlike him, to his discredit.\textsuperscript{728} These examples from Cicero suppose that a son ought to model himself on his father, even if he does not know him. Polybius suggests both adoptive and natural family affect the character of Scipio Aemilianus, when he approves of the young man’s spending time with his natural father in his childhood.\textsuperscript{729}

Association with vicious types can conceivably affect character, at least in childhood: Cicero expresses the inevitability that Verres’ son would turn out to be disagreeable from association with his family, even if he had been born with an angelic character.\textsuperscript{730} This passage shows that, for Cicero, there is a role for nature and nurture in the formation of character. Even if some of character is formed by nurture, the rest is formed by nature.

Although Cicero is one of the best sources for the nurture model, he also gives some good evidence in favour of nature as the source of character traits. In the \textit{De Officiis} he remarks that nature furnishes every man with two kinds of nature: one, universal character, which is essentially human nature, all men share alike; the second is given to individuals, creating countless different natures.\textsuperscript{731} He comments here that some sons are different from their fathers, but he is elsewhere much more committed to resemblance. Deploying the similarity between parents and children in his argument against the astrologers, Cicero remarks that gestures and mannerisms, in addition to physical features, are inherited from parents.\textsuperscript{732} In the \textit{Tusculan Disputations} he cites a

\textsuperscript{726} \textit{Claud.} 4.5.
\textsuperscript{728} Cic. \textit{Brut.} 213-214.
\textsuperscript{729} Polyb. 31.24-5, especially 31.25.9: Scipio spent time with his real father, which was good for him. Cooley (1998) 207.
\textsuperscript{730} Cic. \textit{Verr.} 2.3.160.
\textsuperscript{731} Cic. \textit{Off.} 1.107-9: \textit{intellegendum etiam est duabus quasi nos a natura indutos esse personis; quarum una communis est ex eo ... altera autem, quae proprie singulis est tributa.}
\textsuperscript{732} Cic. \textit{Div.} 2.94: \textit{quis enim non uidet et formas et mores et plerosque status ac motus effingere a parentibus liberos?}
Stoic, Panaetius, to the effect that character is inherited from parents in addition to physical resemblance.\textsuperscript{733}

Cicero was a product of late republican Rome, a culture that rewarded and valued inherited merit. It seems that the prevailing opinion in Cicero’s Rome was that character was inherited from ancestors, whether through nature (just like physical features) or \textit{aemulatio} within the family—either nature or nurture might be used as required for the sake of argument.\textsuperscript{734} Where he is influenced by Stoics, such as in \textit{De Officiis} and the \textit{Tusculan Disputations}, Cicero inclines more to the nature side. The expectation is that virtues will remain constant in families, and degeneration is possible but remarkable. This explains the Romans’ trust in unknown men with known ancestors.

Late-republican parents encouraged the connection between themselves and their children, as we can see from masks of children which have been found to have features resembling the portraits of their parents.\textsuperscript{735} The science of the time seems to have supported this cultural assumption of inherited merit. Like Cicero, but influenced by Epicureanism, Lucretius expresses a view that gestures and mannerisms are inherited,\textsuperscript{736} and holds that the mind, the \textit{animus}, is a physical part of the body as much as the eyes or hands, and is therefore transmitted by inheritance just like physical features.\textsuperscript{737} The character traits of our parents are transmitted with their seed, which is supposed to explain why animals behave like others of their breed.\textsuperscript{738} Later, Lucretius discusses in more detail the mechanism by which character is passed from parent to child, and the roles of mother and father in that process.\textsuperscript{739}

The concept of inherited \textit{nobilitas} appears to be functional on the assumption of inherited merit; more specific inherited traits explain the tradition of family identity. Into the Principate, the role of the nobility in society shifted slowly, and many noble families died out or were killed off. An expectation of inherited merit became less central to the political system. The \textit{Senatus Consultum de Pisone Patre}, of the Tiberian

\textsuperscript{733} Cic. \textit{Tusc.} 1.79-80: \textit{nasci autem animos, quod declarret eorum similitudo, qui procreentur, quae etiam in ingeniis, non solum in corporibus appareat}. The argument Cicero presents here, given also by other philosophers, is discussed by G. Boys-Stones (2007) 80-3.
\textsuperscript{734} Treggiari (2003) 156.
\textsuperscript{735} Dasen (2010) 135.
\textsuperscript{736} Lucr. 1.598.
\textsuperscript{737} Lucr. 3.94-7.
\textsuperscript{738} Lucr. 3.741-7.
\textsuperscript{739} Lucr. 4.1218-32; P. de May (2009) 70.
era, shows concern that Piso’s sons distance themselves from their father by becoming completely different (*dissimillumum*) from their father.\textsuperscript{740} The implication is that they are expected to be like him, but that they could control this. The language of this *Senatus Consultum* suggests both nature and nurture in the continuity of family traits.

Nurture became more and more visible in literature as the political system changed. Seneca’s dramas still refer to children ‘born that way’\textsuperscript{741} and express surprise at a daughter dissimilar to her family,\textsuperscript{742} but his letters encourage the study of philosophy as a path to nobility.\textsuperscript{743} Quintilian also gives more credit to teaching than nature when it comes to oratory, but nature is still important.\textsuperscript{744}

In the Flavian era, when most of the old families had died out, and even the *princeps* was a new man, the nature/nurture discussion appears to have gone through an intermediate stage between Cicero and Suetonius. Cicero’s inherited merit and Suetonius’ inherited vice are bridged by Statius’ preference for nurture in both. Flavian attitudes to nature/nurture are discussed at length by Neil Bernstein. He reads the various works of Statius as discussions of ‘the value of descent in assessing status,’\textsuperscript{745} part of a conversation that he sees in other literature of the period.

The shifting definition of nobility is reflected in inherited character traits: in this period, when maternal connections gained new currency for status or ‘nobility,’ the maternal side also became a source of character traits, such as in the Menoeceus episode in *Thebaid*, in which Menoeceus’ mother bemoans how little he has inherited from her.\textsuperscript{746} She suggests that he might have been more like her and less like his father. This confirms that the preference for nature or nurture reflects a broader social structure. The *Thebaid* does not privilege nurture over nature: rather, sons reproduce their fathers’ crimes, but in later works, the *Achilleid* and the *Silvae*, nurture is at least as important as nature for identity and nobility.\textsuperscript{747} This is a shift from Cicero’s attitude. In an era that saw the very visible success of Vespasian, a *nouus homo*, and the creation of a new


\textsuperscript{742} Sen. *Phoen.* 81: *unde ista generi virgo dissimilis suo?*

\textsuperscript{743} Sen. *Ep.* 44.3; 21.2.

\textsuperscript{744} Quint. *Inst.* 2.19.2-3; Bernstein (2008) 111.

\textsuperscript{745} Bernstein (2008) 27.


\textsuperscript{747} Bernstein (2008) 81; 106.
‘nobility,’ there was a new appreciation for the merits of self-made men. In the *Silvae*, Statius:

proposes a provocative new concept of nobility to which economic, moral and artistic values rather than hereditary qualifications are essential.\(^{748}\)

This Flavian preference for nurture appears to have lost its appeal in the period of Suetonius, Plutarch, and Tacitus. After the fall of the Flauii, the first really hereditary dynasty of the Principate, authors return to a nature model, this time seeing in nature the source of inherited vices and degeneration, rather than merit.

Yet the nature/nurture question remains unsettled in this period. Martial refers to inherited character, and Juvenal is concerned about the teaching of bad habits to children.\(^{749}\) Perhaps the puzzling difference between Domitian and Titus prompted a reconsideration of the paradigm.

Both nature and nurture as causes of familial resemblance can be demonstrated within Plutarch’s huge corpus. Some passages suggest learnt character: Lycurgus takes two puppies from the same litter and teaches them to behave differently, and Cornelia’s exceptional care for her sons’ rearing is responsible for their virtues.\(^{750}\) Other passages in Plutarch show a strong interest in inherited vice. A passage in the *Delays of Divine Vengeance* refers to family traits, suggesting nature rather than nurture; the genealogical ending of the *Antonius* sees Antonius’ vices passed on to his descendant, Nero.\(^{751}\)

In Plutarch’s *Lives*, a preference for nature or nurture might be shown by an interest in formative childhood experiences, but in fact Plutarch’s *Lives* use both a developmental and a static model of character, sometimes both in the one *Life*.\(^{752}\) Tacitus never uses children to demonstrate adult character traits, but some elements of his characterisation suggest change over the lifetime.\(^{753}\) Christopher Gill tested the assumption of a nature model in Tacitus and Plutarch, finding that character in both Plutarch and Tacitus comes from both innate and acquired traits.\(^{754}\)


\(^{751}\) Plut. *De sera* 559d; Plut. *Ant.* 87, on which see Brenk (1992) 4348-75.

\(^{752}\) Duff (2008a) 1-26, esp. 10-11.

\(^{753}\) On character change in Tacitus, see particularly S. Daitz (1960); A.R. Hands (1974); A.J. Woodman (1998); Gill (1983) 482-6.

\(^{754}\) Gill (1983) 474-86.
Nature and Nurture in Suetonius

Suetonius’ peers and predecessors had found the beginnings of character traits in a combination of nature and nurture, but Suetonius’ greater interest in ancestry hints that his approach might be different. To determine which—if any—model underlies Suetonius’ work, the first step is to establish whether, in Suetonius, vices and virtues are innate, i.e. present at birth, and forever after immutable. If they are innate and unchanging, then they might also be inherited, and a nature model would be likely. If they are not present at birth but change or develop over the lifetime, it is possible that their traits are affected by the environment or learnt by instruction, and thus formed by nurture. Both nature and nurture might be at work—as they supposedly are in Plutarch and Tacitus—if Caesars have both innate and learnt characteristics, or if their characteristics are innate, but also changeable.

A first clue to Suetonius’ position on innate or acquired character traits is his use of words such as *natura* and *ingenium*. Etymologically, both *ingenium* (from *ingigno*, like *ingenitus*) and *natura* suggest inborn characteristics.\(^{755}\) The two can have different senses,\(^{756}\) but in Suetonius the two words are synonymous. This passage in the *Caligula* demonstrates the interchangeability of the two:

[y]et even at that time he could not control his natural cruelty and viciousness [*naturam tamen saeuam atque probrosam*], but he was a most eager witness of the tortures and executions of those who suffered punishment, revelling at night in gluttony and adultery, disguised in a wig and a long robe, passionately devoted besides to the theatrical arts of dancing and singing, in which Tiberius very willingly indulged him, in the hope that through these his savage nature [*ferum ingenium*] might be softened.\(^{757}\)

For our purposes, *naturam tamen saeuam atque probrosam* would be better translated to reflect the fact that both adjectives describe *natura*, along the lines of ‘his savage and shameful nature.’ In this passage, there is nothing to suggest that *ferum ingenium* is

---

\(^{755}\) OLD, s.v. *natura*, *ingenium*.

\(^{756}\) C. Müller (2001) 326 points out that the two are not synonymous in a passage of Cicero (Cic. *Orat.* 1.25.113-14: *naturam primum atque ingenium*).

\(^{757}\) *Calig.* 11: *naturam tamen saeuam atque probrosam ne tunc quidem inhibere poterat, quin et animadaesierionibus poenisque ad supplicium datorum cupidissime interesseret et ganeas atque adulteria capillamento celatus et ueste longa noctibus obiret ac scaenicas saltandi canendique artes studiosissime appeteret, facile id sane Tiberio patiente, si per has mansuefieri posset ferum eius ingenium*. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1998).
referring to some other aspect of Caligula, but the placement of the synonymous phrases saeua natura and then ferum ingenium at opposite ends of a long sentence is presumably chosen for variation. Later in the Caligula, he is given saeuitia ingenii.\footnote{Calig. 27.1.} In the Domitian, where both natura and ingenium appear together, it is an emphatic accumulation of synonyms (amplification per congeriem), rather than implying a contrast between the two.\footnote{Dom. 3.2. Discussed below, 170.}

In Suetonius, there are several occasions on which a certain characteristic is present ‘by nature,’ for example, natura parcissimus erat.\footnote{Aug. 77.} Cruelty and its opposite are especially sought in natura.\footnote{Wallace-Hadrill (1995) 159, n. 26.} For instance, Titus is natura autem benevolentissimus; Julius is natura lenissimus.\footnote{Tit. 8.1; Iul. 74.1.} In addition to Caligula’s saeua natura (and saeuitia ingenii, 27.1), Claudius is savage and bloodthirsty ‘by nature,’ and Nero has cruelty ‘of nature.’\footnote{Claud. 34: saeueae et sanguinarium natura fuisse; Ner. 7.1 immanitate naturae.}

There is reason to believe that Suetonius distinguishes between the natural character (natura or ingenium) and the ‘mind’ or ‘habits’ (animus) because of passages in which they occur together. That natura is distinct from animus in Suetonius’ usage is obvious from Tiberius 68.3, where the two kinds of character are opposed to each other: the arrogant mannerisms are ‘vices of natura, not of animus.’\footnote{Tib. 68.3: naturae uititae esse, non animi. Ingenium can also be paired with ars. At Titus 1, ingenium is contrasted with ars and fortuna, its context suggesting that ingenium signifies natural ability: uel ingenii uel artis uel fortunae. Similarly, ingenium is paired with ars at Vespasian 17—Vespasian encourages ‘men of talent and the arts’ (ingenia et artes). This pairing suggests that innate talents and abilities co-exist with acquired skills and inclinations. Seneca argues that the animus cannot be different from the ingenium, acknowledging that there is a perception of difference between the two even as he denies that difference. Sen. Ep. 114.3: ingenium is contrasted with animus, but Seneca’s point is that they are both the same. His ingenium cannot be one way and his animus the other. See also Ep. 106.}

The distinction between natura and animus might not extend to mos as well, considering that natura seems to be synonymous with mos in the phrasing of Vespasian 16 (‘the fox changes his fur, but not his mos’).\footnote{Vesp. 16: uulpem pilum mutare, non mores. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1997).} However, the use of mos here is proverbial, so the occurrence of mos rather than natura might not be significant to our definition.\footnote{This passage will be discussed below, 169.}
Suetonius’ usage of terminology is strongly in favour of innate character traits occurring *alongside* learnt traits and mannerisms. Most traits are innate, but some are learnt. This would suggest both nature and nurture as sources of traits, but Suetonius’ more direct references to character inheritance suggest a nature model rather than a nurture model of resemblance.

Returning to the *Nero* for Suetonius’ own explanation, the ancestors of Nero have a stated role in the *Life*:

> I have decided to revive a number of members of the family, so that, knowing them, it might more easily appear that Nero degenerated so much from the virtues of his ancestors that it was as if he revived only innate and hereditary vices.\(^{767}\)

According to this statement, Nero’s ancestors bequeath him vices but not virtues. We have already seen that this statement is accurate as it pertains to this *Life*: it would appear that Nero did inherit only vices and not virtues. The overall structure of Suetonius’ list of Domitii Ahenobarbi correlates with *uitia ... tradita et ingenita*. As the generations progress towards Nero, each Domitius is worse than the last. There is an anomaly in the great-grandfather, which Suetonius (generously) does not presume to fictionalise, but all the ancestors, even he, contribute a vice to create the detestable Nero. Each Domitius is more vicious than his forefathers. According to this pattern, Nero’s father should be the worst Domitius so far, and so he appears to be.

Let us seek Suetonius’ interpretation of the origins of character traits as it appears in the *Nero*:

> [on Nero’s birth] a remark of his father Domitius was also regarded as an omen; for while receiving the congratulations of his friends, he said that ‘nothing that was not abominable and a public bane [*detestabile et malo publico*] could be born of Agrippina and himself.’\(^{768}\)

Whatever its historicity, this anecdote supports Suetonius’ already strong argument for similarity between ancestor and progeny, and suggests that his readers were familiar with a theory of heredity, whether or not they believed in it. This comment attributes

\(^{767}\) Ner. 6.1: pluris e familia cognosci referre arbitror, quo facilius appareat ita degenerasse a suorum uirtutibus Nero, ut tamen uitia cuiusque quasi tradita et ingenita rettulerit. My translation.

\(^{768}\) Ner. 6.2: de genitura eius statim multa et formidulosa multis coniectantibus praesagio fuit etiam Domitii patris uox, inter gratulationes amicorum negantis quicquam ex se et Agrippina nisi detestabile et malo publico nasci potuisse. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1998); cf. Cass. Dio 61.2.3.
more to the maternal line, giving Agrippina a role in the character of her child, than Suetonius ever gives the mother of a subject. Otherwise it fits perfectly with the overall picture of inherited vices that opens the *Nero*. This story contributes to Suetonius’ characterisation, which is all the while leading the reader towards seeing Nero as a *malum publicum*. The implication is that at the time of birth Nero is already a ‘public bane’—no extra stage between birth and adulthood is required to create this abomination, yet an abomination he does turn out to be.

If this were not proof enough of a ‘nature’ model of reproduction, there is a serendipitous comment in the *Caligula* that suggests nature and even alludes to the mechanism. In the course of describing Caligula’s detestable behaviour as a husband, Suetonius mentions Caligula’s own belief that his daughter’s nasty temper proved his paternity:

> [a]nd no evidence convinced him so positively that she was sprung from his own loins [*sui seminis*] as her savage temper, which was even then [*iam tunc*] so violent that she would try to scratch the faces and eyes of the little children who played with her.\(^770\)

This reference to Julia Drusilla is quite specific in attributing her behaviour to biology: it proves her origins in *sui seminis*, i.e. in his seed. This passage has attracted surprisingly little comment. Wardle acknowledged it, but he thought it just as likely to be a joke as to reflect Caligula’s belief in heredity.\(^771\) Even presuming Caligula’s comment was a joke, and Domitius’ (at *Nero* 6.1) was a joke too, both remarks must function on the basis of some kind of understanding that there is—or might be—a connection between parents’ and children’s character traits, even if it is not taken very seriously. Moreover, whether or not they were jokes (at the time or in Suetonius) they are still contributing something to the characterisation of Nero and Caligula.

For our purposes, this passage from *Caligula* is interesting in two ways: first, it characterises Caligula himself by the implication that he shares these character traits with his daughter, much as the portrait of Germanicus characterises Caligula by the emphatic differences between them; second, it betrays an interest in (if not belief in) character inheritance on the part of our author as well as his subject. The surprise that

\(^{769}\) Suetonius does bring in maternal lines, but usually in aid of status rather than character.


\(^{771}\) Wardle (1994) 237, cf. 96 in the same work.
she was ‘even then’ so violent is not unlike another comment, ‘yet even at that time,’ in reference to Caligula’s natural cruelty.\textsuperscript{772} Both Caligula and Julia are so savage that it shows even in childhood, which, we will see, is a remarkable state of affairs to Suetonius.\textsuperscript{773} This reference to the proof of Julia’s parentage rules out a nurture origin for her own character traits, because they are explicitly attributed to Caligula’s ‘seed.’ Other passages support the thesis that character traits are the work of nature. However, it is still too soon to dismiss all force of nurture in Suetonius’ \textit{Lives}. Suetonius’ peers, Tacitus and Plutarch, are exponents of both nature and nurture,\textsuperscript{774} so we might expect him to be interested in both.

There are certain things we would expect to find in the text if a nurture model created these character traits. First, we might expect to see character changes over the lifetime. Second, there could be references to learnt traits, or to the process of acquiring such traits. Outside influences (such as teachers and parents) would be relevant, and childhood anecdotes could be brought in as formative experiences. In Plutarch’s \textit{Lives}, such as in the \textit{Themistocles}, childhood anecdotes sometimes show the development of a trait.\textsuperscript{775} Plutarch also uses childhood anecdotes that do not demonstrate the development of the trait, but demonstrate characteristics that were present in the child as in the adult, such as in the \textit{Alcibiades} and the \textit{Alexander}.\textsuperscript{776} For instance, when the young Alexander tames the horse Bucephalas, the event does not form his traits but demonstrates that the traits of his maturity were already present in the child.\textsuperscript{777}

In Suetonius, there are at least twenty-one discrete anecdotes about childhood (\textit{pueritia}) and youth (\textit{iuuenta} or \textit{adulescentia}) spread across the \textit{Lives}.\textsuperscript{778} In addition, there are three references to reputations gained ‘in youth,’ but these are two out of three times mentioned only to be denied. Augustus and Titus attracted bad reputations but these turned out to be unfair; only Domitian’s bad reputation is neither confirmed nor

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{772} \textit{Calig.} 11: \textit{tunc quidem}.
\item \textsuperscript{773} See below, 164-5.
\item \textsuperscript{774} Gill (1983).
\item \textsuperscript{775} Plut. \textit{Them.} 2; the \textit{Themistocles} shows both developmental and static models of character: Duff (2008a).
\item \textsuperscript{776} Anecdotes that show adult qualities already present in the child: Plut. \textit{Alc.} 2-3; \textit{Alex.} 4.8-10.4. See Duff (2003b) 90-109.
\item \textsuperscript{777} Plut. \textit{Alex.} 6.
\item \textsuperscript{778} \textit{Iul.} 71; \textit{Aug.} 84; \textit{Tib.} 6.1-4; 57; \textit{Calig.} 11, 24.1; \textit{Claud.} 2.1-2, 3.1, 3.2-4.7; \textit{Ner.} 6.3, 6.4, 7.1, 22.1; \textit{Galb.} 4.1; \textit{Oth.} 2.1; \textit{Vit.} 3-4; \textit{Vesp.} 2; \textit{Tit.} 3.1; \textit{Dom.} 1.3, 12.3, 14.1.
\end{itemize}}
denied, and it has been placed in a prominent position at the beginning of the Life, so it is probably meant to be believed, or at least to colour the reader’s assessment.\footnote{779}

These twenty-one anecdotes or short references to childhood fall into three categories. The first comprises four references that do little for characterisation.\footnote{780} When Galba was a boy, he met Augustus, who happened to make a prophetic statement about Galba’s future. The anecdote is relevant as an omen, but does not add to the characterisation of Galba. If anything, the story does make Tiberius look a bit cantankerous.\footnote{781} Similarly, Domitian was told of the manner of his death when he was a young man, which is relevant as an omen, but not important otherwise. That Vespasian grew up on his grandmother’s estates at Cosa and held her memory fondly does not appear to affect characterisation, as his connections with Cosa are not important elsewhere.\footnote{782} Lastly, the dramatic scenes at the beginning of Tiberius, recounting the peril of his parents as they fled civil unrest, the fire in which they could have perished and Tiberius’ nearly betraying them by his cries, paint a picture of the atmosphere into which he was born, but do not seem to flag any characteristics of Tiberius’ life or personality. The connection of their flight with his future father is passed over without comment. Following this, comments about Tiberius’ role in Augustus’ honours and his eulogy for his father are standard pre-accession achievements which are catalogued for all the Julio-Claudians.\footnote{783}

Having dismissed these four anecdotes, then, there remain seventeen references to childhood that are in some way characterising. The second category, the largest of the three, comprises ten remarks in the pre-accession section of the Lives, chronologically in the childhood part of the narrative, which demonstrate character traits in the child that are also present in the adult. These stories look forward to adulthood, foreshadowing

\footnote{779} Reputations gained in youth: Aug. 68; Tit. 6.2-7.1; Dom. 1.1.
\footnote{780} In this category: Galb. 4.1; Dom. 14.1; Vesp. 2; Tib. 6.1-4.
\footnote{781} According to Tac. Ann. 6.20 and Cass. Dio 57.19.4, the incident occurred when Augustus was dead, and the prophecy was made by Tiberius.
\footnote{782} Vespasian’s countrified accent (Vesp. 22) is similar to the Sabine accent with its flat vowels, and could be an affected Sabine accent in allusion to his Sabine ancestry, or perhaps something he picked up in Etruria as a child. Of course Hadrian also had an accent (SHA Hadr. 3.1), so Suetonius will not be deriding Vespasian’s.
themes of the *Life* in much the same way as ancestral character traits flag traits in the subject of the *Life*.⁷⁸⁴

Nero’s educational arrangements—his tutors were a barber and a dancer⁷⁸⁵—demonstrate the deplorable financial situation in which Nero grew up. The contrast with his next tutor, a considerable move up in the world to the senator Seneca,⁷⁸⁶ brings out the unsuitability of his first tutors. Nero’s later devotion to the performing arts (at the expense of his official duties) might be traced back to this inauspicious beginning, but a connection is not emphasised. Following immediately upon this reference to his tutors is the dramatic change in Nero’s circumstances. This time the anecdote is definitely looking forward to his adult life, though purporting to describe the danger in which Nero found himself, due to his mother’s position:

[when his mother was recalled from banishment and reinstated, he became so prominent through her influence that it leaked out that Messalina, wife of Claudius, had sent emissaries to strangle him as he was taking his noon-day nap, regarding him as a rival of Britannicus. An addition to this bit of gossip is that the would-be assassins were frightened away by a snake which darted out from under his pillow. The only foundation for this tale was that there was found in his bed near the pillow the slough of a serpent; but nevertheless at his mother’s desire he had the skin enclosed in a golden bracelet, and wore it for a long time on his right arm. But when at last the memory of his mother grew hateful to him, he threw it away, and afterwards in the time of his extremity sought it again in vain.⁷⁸⁷

Although the threat of would-be assassins might be a good demonstration of the perilous situation Nero lived in as a child, the snake embellishment, suggesting some sort of divine protection, has the hallmarks of a legend created about his childhood once he was heir apparent or already ruler, especially as it is supposed to have occurred when Messalina was still alive. The reflection on the bracelet’s significance later in life demonstrates neither a character trait in the child, nor a formative experience in childhood, but foreshadows themes of his adulthood: his fickleness, his fraught

⁷⁸⁴ In this category: *Calig.* 11; *Claud.* 2.1-2, 3.1, 3.2-4.7; *Ner.* 6.3, 6.4, 7.1; *Vit.* 3-4; *Tit.* 3.1; *Dom.* 1.3.
⁷⁸⁵ *Ner.* 6.3: *saltatore atque tonsore*.
⁷⁸⁶ On Seneca’s role as Nero’s tutor, see Griffin (1976) 63ff.
relationship with his mother, and his panic in his final days. In fact it performs much the same function as the description of ancestral character traits. The episode serves to raise the themes of Nero’s life at the first opportunity, looking forwards from childhood to adulthood. Just after this story, also in reference to his rivalry with Britannicus, is a further reference to Nero’s childhood traits, this time more in demonstration of his character. Nero’s innate cruelty \((immanitas naturae)\) was demonstrated ‘at the earliest opportunity’ \((primum potuit)\), against Britannicus.  

This sets up a longer demonstration of Nero’s cruelty later in the Life.

So, too, in the early sections of the Caligula, a reference to vices in his youth is significantly parallel with the same vices in his adulthood. The pervasiveness of vice in Caligula’s character is evident even in the first section of the Caligula, where it should be the princeps who is portrayed (according to 22.1). Cruelty, gluttony, and adultery are all heaped upon each other in the one section:

\[\text{yet even at that time he could not control his natural cruelty and viciousness, but he was the most eager witness of the tortures and executions of those who suffered punishment, revelling at night in gluttony and adultery, disguised in a wig and a long robe, passionately devoted besides to the theatrical arts of dancing and singing, in which Tiberius very willingly indulged him, in the hope that through these his savage nature might be softened. This last was so clearly evident to the shrewd old man, that he used to say now and then that to allow Gaius to live would prove the ruin of himself and of all men, and that he was rearing a viper for the Roman people and a Phaethon for the world.}\]

Tiberius’ prophecy will of course be proven true. This whole passage is a kind of prophecy, showing the reader what they can expect to find later in the Life. The first section of the Life does not just describe the princeps (as opposed to the monstrum), but in fact the good deeds of the young Caligula are interspersed with criticisms such as this. These vices are not illustrated at length, but they plant the seeds of themes that will be enlarged in the monstrum section of the Life. The implication of ‘even at that time’ is that the trait is consistent, as a similar remark in the Domitian shows his high-handed

\[\text{788 Ner, 7.1.}\]
\[\text{789 Calig, 11: naturam tamen saeuam atque probrosam ne tunc quidem inhibere poterat, quin et animaduersionibus poenisque ad supplicium datorum cupidissime interesset et ganeas atque adulteria capillamento celatus et ueste longa noctibus obiret ac scaenicas saltandi canendique artes studiossimse appeteret, facile id sane Tiberio patiente, si per has mansuefieri posset ferum eius ingenium. Quod sagacissimus senex ita prorsus perspexerat, ut aloquoiiens prae dicaret exitio suo omniumque Gaum uiuere et se matricem populo Romano, Phaethonem orbi terrarium educare. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1998).}\]
attitude was consistent from his very first experience of power to his conduct as princeps—he showed ‘even then’ how he would rule: licenter.\textsuperscript{790}

Supposedly, Vitellius was corrupted by debauchery in his youth, spending his boyhood on Capreae amongst Tiberius’ spintriae, and ‘stained by every sort of baseness.’\textsuperscript{791} It is unsurprising, then, that he shows homosexual tendencies in adulthood. More plausibly, however, the childhood experiences were created only to add to Vitellius’ bad reputation. Suetonius’ presentation of sexual tastes in the Caesars has been interpreted variously, but it is certainly true (as Carney noticed) that his worse Caesars tend to the homosexual end of the spectrum.\textsuperscript{792} Homosexual activity was a motif of uituperatio, so slurs of such behaviour in Vitellius might well have had their origin as only as late as 68-69 CE. Today we might see the beginnings of his homosexuality in his childhood experiences, but Suetonius does not hint at a connection. In fact, Suetonius’ Vitellius might as well be the agent of his own prostitution, giving the impression that his transgressive behaviour was always his own preference.\textsuperscript{793}

Claudius’ childhood provides three separate pieces of information to explain aspects of his later life: he was a sickly child, which explains some of his strange behaviour as an adult; he was studious from youth, as of course he is in adulthood; even his family did not like or respect him, which explains the unusual position he was in during the reign of Caligula, and foreshadows his lack of dignitas even during his reign.\textsuperscript{794}

Usually, vices discernible in youth are warnings of the same vices in the princeps. Titus shows the only example in this group of a virtue that was visible even in childhood:

\textsuperscript{790} Dom. 1.3.
\textsuperscript{791} Vit. 4.
\textsuperscript{792} Sex in Suetonius is the subject of T.F. Carney (1968) 12; R.F. Newbold (1984); J.H.K.O. Chong-Gossard (2010).
\textsuperscript{793} Vit. 3-4, looking forwards to 12. Vitellius, Nero, and Caligula were particularly questionable for being the passive partners in homosexual relations; however transgressive the sexual tastes of Tiberius and Galba, they do not stand accused of being penetrated. Vitellius’ assumption of the passive role is the implication of Vit. 3, although he was the dominant partner in Vit. 12; Nero had sex with both men and women, and took both the passive and dominant roles with men (Ner. 28-9); Caligula was allegedly the passive partner of Valerius, Calig. 36. Tiberius had depraved sexual tastes but there is no suggestion that he was ever the passive partner, Tib. 43-5. Galba preferred masculine men, but whether passively or dominantly is not stated, Suet. Galb. 22. On Galba’s sexual tastes, see above, n. 504, and M.B. Charles & E. Anagnostou-Laoutides (2012) 1077-87.
\textsuperscript{794} Sickly, Claud. 2.1-2; studious, Claud. 3.1; his family did not take him seriously or include him in the succession plans, Claud. 3.2-4.7. He was actively excluded from public duties unless he could be supervised, Levick (1990) 16-7. Cf. Claudius is the subject of fun at Claud, 8, 15.
[e]ven in boyhood his bodily and mental gifts were conspicuous and they 
became more and more so as he advanced in years.\textsuperscript{795}

This continuity of virtue from childhood to adulthood should not really be surprising, as 
the prominent traits of other Caesars are also carried over from childhood to adulthood. 
Suetonius’ method is consistent: it just happens that Titus is the only one who is really 
outstanding for his virtues. He is also the only one who seems to improve on accession, 
as he somehow cultivated a reputation for vices that he did not display once in power. 
Unlike Domitian’s, Titus’ high-handedness in command of the Praetorian Guard is an 
anomaly rather than a sign of the future.\textsuperscript{796}

These ten references to childhood come close to the beginning of the \textit{Lives}, 
foreshadowing traits that also arise later. They are examples of Suetonius’ method, as 
formulated by Steidle: he begins with a view of the Caesar, and builds up his 
characterisation to lead the reader to that view.\textsuperscript{797} Stories from childhood are used only 
when they agree with that view, and not just out of curiosity. The final seven examples 
of childhood anecdotes occur not in the pre-accession section but in the course of 
showing adult vices. They look from adulthood back to childhood to find convincing 
evidence of character traits, or strengthen the claim of such vices by stating that they 
had been discernible ‘even in boyhood’ or ‘from youth.’\textsuperscript{798}

Caligula’s peculiar penchant for incest—just another item in a long catalogue of 
sexual vices\textsuperscript{799}—would be adequately demonstrated by adulthood anecdotes, but is 
reinforced by the salacious detail that his grandmother Antonia found him in bed with 
Drusilla when he was only a boy (\textit{praetextatus}), confirmation that the trait was 
continuous from childhood to adulthood.\textsuperscript{800}

Tiberius’ cruelty is a prominent characteristic of his reign, and it is interesting to 
the biographer that his \textit{saeua ac lenta natura} (a feature of his adulthood) was visible

\textsuperscript{795} \textit{Tit.} 3.1.
\textsuperscript{796} \textit{Tit.} 6.2-7.1. It is not a real change but contrary to expectations. Titus is possibly constructed as a foil to 
Domitian, so this contrast would serve to highlight the vice in Domitian. Vespasian was the only emperor 
who changed for the better, according to Tac. \textit{Hist.} 1.50. There is no sense of this in Suetonius’ 
\textit{Vespasian}.
\textsuperscript{797} Steidle (1963) 72-3.
\textsuperscript{798} In this category: \textit{Calig.} 24.1; \textit{Dom.} 12.3; \textit{Tib.} 57; \textit{Aug.} 84; \textit{Iul.} 71. \textit{Ner.} 22.1; \textit{Oth.} 2.1.
\textsuperscript{799} \textit{Calig.} 36.
\textsuperscript{800} \textit{Calig.} 24.1: \textit{cum omnibus sororibus suis consuetudinem stupri fecit plenoque conuiuio singulas infra 
se uicissim conlocabant uxore supra cubante. Ex iis Drusillum uitiasse virginem \textit{praetextatus} adhuc 
creditur atque etiam in concubitu eius quondam reprehensus ab Antonia auia, apud quam simul 
educabantur.
‘even as a boy’ (in puero quidem), growing more obvious later. Just as Tiberius saw the evil in Caligula, so too Tiberius’ own teacher saw the evil in his nature. Suetonius not only agrees whole-heartedly with this assessment—it is detected sagaciter and described aptissime—but he also goes on to prove it with four specific examples of Tiberius’ cruelty. Livia, too, had remarked upon Tiberius’ acerbitas et intolerantia morum. These stories are raised in the adulthood section of the Lives, looking back to childhood to demonstrate a trait of the grown adult. The presence of a trait is confirmed by its being visible early: Domitian was contrary ‘from youth’ (ab iuuenta) and by implication he continued to be so; the same can be said of Otho, who was extravagant and wild ‘from earliest youth’ (a prima adolescentia). A similar phrase describes Nero’s love of horses ‘from his earliest years’ (ab ineunte aetate) which continues unabated into adulthood. Traits appear in Augustus and Julius from youth and do not wane. A story from childhood appears to be just as valid as a proof of a trait as one from adulthood, because character is already fully formed in the young Caesar. Suetonius’ usage of childhood anecdotes is unlike that of Tacitus, who never uses a child to illustrate adult traits. Formative childhood experiences are therefore unimportant, and indeed they do not seem to be part of Suetonius’ scheme.

Continuity of vice from childhood to adulthood appears to be the default setting for Suetonius’ Caesars: the only difference between the child and the adult is that the child is usually in control of his vices and knows to conceal them. Instances of childhood vices only need appear when the child is surprisingly open about his cruelty. The author’s surprise is expressed with just a word such as quidem, iam, or etiam. The surprising element is not the continuity of vices from childhood to adulthood but that these Caesars did not manage to conceal their vices as children. Suetonius acknowledges the cliché lubrica aetas of youth, but only to deny it: Nero’s youthful follies were in fact of his nature, not his age. Caligula’s cruelty (naturam tamen saeueam atque probrosam) was evident even in childhood. It is Caligula who is really
exceptional: even in childhood (\textit{tunc quidem}), he was unable to control his innate brutality.\textsuperscript{808} He is not unusual for having innate vices, but for being subject to them in his youth, when he should have been strong. It seems, with Caligula, this natural process of being overpowered by one’s vices was accelerated, perhaps because of the unusual degree of his cruelty, or perhaps because he came to power so young. Caligula’s daughter, we have already seen, was ‘so savage’ that she was obviously Caligula’s progeny, even \textit{(iam)} as an infant.\textsuperscript{809} To Suetonius, the state of youth cannot be blamed for vices: in fact, on the contrary, young Caesars should be able to restrain their vices even if they cannot later. Suetonius’ Caesars are fully formed in character as children, only needing to choose whether they exercise or conceal their vices. Whether or not it is manifest, the vice is inherent. Judging by this criterion, nurture has no role.

Another test of the nature/nurture model is whether character ever changes over the lifetime. If character is already fully formed in the child, as it appears from the way Suetonius uses childhood anecdotes, there should be no changes. Can we identify any changes to character in Suetonius’ Caesars?

The obvious place to seek character change is in the \textit{Tiberius}, as we have already seen in Chapter Four.\textsuperscript{810} Tiberius’ character appears to undergo change twice, once for the better and once for the worse. However, as I have already shown, neither is a change to his inherent nature: both changes reflect innate qualities that had been present all along. When he changes for the better, it is an unmasking; when he changes for the worse, he is letting out vices he had been concealing. Neither is really an example of character change—both shifts are in keeping with his nature.

Degeneration over the lifetime is to be expected, just as degeneration over the generations seems to be, but any deterioration is only a slip from best behaviour to unrestrained display of \textit{natura}. Sometime after the death of Claudius, Nero’s vices ‘grew stronger,’ and he stopped trying to hide them.\textsuperscript{811} They appear to be his original vices, amplified, rather than new ones springing up. As he loses power, Nero plans his greatest crimes, magnified versions of his previous \textit{probris ac sceleribus}, but not incongruous with them:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{808} \textit{Calig.} 11.
  \item \textsuperscript{809} \textit{Calig.} 25.4.
  \item \textsuperscript{810} On character change in Tiberius, see above, 132-3.
  \item \textsuperscript{811} \textit{Ner.} 27.1: \textit{paulatim uero inualescentibus uitiiis iocularia et latebras omisit nullaque dissimulandi cura ad maiora palam erupit}; cf. Tac. \textit{Ann.} 13.47: \textit{hactenus Nero flagitiis et sceleribus uelamenta quaesuit}.
\end{itemize}
plans of monstrous wickedness, but in no way inconsistent with his character.\footnote{Ner. 43.1: \textit{multa et inmania, uerum non abhorrentia a natura sua}. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1997).}

To Suetonius, the fact that Nero did not actually carry out these plans is no credit to him. Nero’s nature (\textit{natura sua}) has not changed, only expressed itself more freely.

Caesars often reveal their own characters ‘little by little,’ \textit{paulatim}, but in the structure of the \textit{Life} the transition is actually sudden.\footnote{\textit{Pualatim} marks a sudden transition in the \textit{Life}, e.g. Tib. 58; Ner. 27.1.} Sharp transitions of behaviour are features of Tiberius and Nero. The \textit{Tiberius} is unusual for having two transitions, the first to virtue and the second to vice. Neither is actually a break with character. The transitions in the \textit{Tiberius} and \textit{Nero} mark the revelation of traits that had been there all along, actively hidden with more or less success by their owner until there was no longer any reason to keep them secret.

Vices are gradually revealed over the lifetime, but although it has been claimed that Suetonius reveals character gradually,\footnote{Croisille (1969-70) 81-2, disputed by Bradley (1978) 15.} this literary technique would not suit the biographer’s method of proceeding by rubric, rather than chronology. Vices that appear later in life are not new. Nero is quoted to have thought that everyone was hiding vices,\footnote{Ner. 29.} relevant because of course he was hiding his.\footnote{Ner. 27.1.} Tiberius, like Nero, was supposed to have been hiding his vices; according to Suetonius, Tiberius’ concealment was never quite effective.\footnote{Tib. 42: ‘all the vices which he had for a long time ill concealed,’ \textit{cuncta simul uitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit}; cf. Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.4: \textit{multaque indicia saeuitiae, quamquam premantur, erumpere}. Tib. 57.1:‘His cruel and cold-blooded character was not completely hidden even in his boyhood … But it grew still more noticeable after he became emperor.’ Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1998).} Sudden transitions are worded to give the subject the responsibility for the change. Tiberius, for instance, is the subject of the verb \textit{exseruit} at 33, where he ‘unmasked the ruler’; Nero the subject of \textit{erupit} at 27, where he ‘openly broke out into worse crime.’\footnote{Ner. 27.1: Nero’s vices do ‘grow stronger’ but the ablative absolute (\textit{inualescentibus uitiis}) conceals whether Nero is in control of this or not. He is the subject of the main verb.} Both sudden transitions in the narrative are flagged by \textit{paulatim}, marking a transition that is only sudden in literature and in real life gradual. Caesars do not ‘become’ more vicious, but they unleash their vices. Galba also changes his behaviour \textit{paulatim}, but the implication is that he is only trying to appear lazy so as not to attract attention. His nature does not change.\footnote{Suet. \textit{Galb.} 9.1.}
occur without *paulatim*, but the Caesars maintain personal control over the shift, such as when Tiberius ‘at last gave free rein to all the vices which he had for a long time ill concealed,’ and Domitian moves from mercy and integrity to cruelty and avarice.\(^\text{820}\) Although the vices and virtues are innate, there is an element of personal control in whether or when they are exercised.

While it is possible to restrain vices in youth and feign virtue, control diminishes over time. This may be circumstantial—the Caesars gain power and then need not control their vices. If youth is no excuse, old age, on the other hand, is a vulnerable period: Tiberius’ particular sexual proclivities in his senescence are attributed to both *natura* and *aetas*.\(^\text{821}\)

The sense that Tiberius and Nero have some control over their vices makes it all the more noticeable when Caligula makes no attempt to hide his vices. Unlike the *Nero* and *Tiberius*, in the *Caligula* there is no sense of deliberate, conscious change in behaviour. This is appropriate enough, since it had been earlier expressed with some surprise that Caligula was not in control of his brutality, even in youth.\(^\text{822}\) The sudden transition at *Caligula* 22.1 (*hactenus quasi de principe*) is a transition in the structure of the *Life* rather than in Caligula’s character or behaviour, although other authors describe a sudden change in Caligula’s character around the time of his illness.\(^\text{823}\) Suetonius does report the rumour of Caesonia’s love potion as the cause of his ‘madness,’\(^\text{824}\) but it is very late in the piece and he does not refer directly to the onset of this madness elsewhere. In other Caesars, control of vices tends to fall away with age, whether because circumstances change or due to some natural process, but the traits themselves are basically constant. There is no reason why Caligula should gain control of his vices later in life if he did not have it in the beginning. Deterioration over the lifetime causes trouble for Plutarch, because he finds it difficult to believe that a person who had chosen to be good would then choose to be bad.\(^\text{825}\) Suetonius’ Caesars do not change from good to bad, but they do make a choice to stop hiding vices. A gradual release of control over vices—whether voluntary or involuntary—which had been easily

\(^{820}\) *Tib.* 42 (*tandem profudit*); *Dom.* 10. At *Tit.* 7.1 a sudden transition in the structure of the *Life* marks the vast difference between rumour and truth.

\(^{821}\) *Tib.* 44.1.

\(^{822}\) *Calig.* 11.

\(^{823}\) There is a turning point of Caligula’s personality in Philo *Leg.* 14-21; Cass. Dio 59.8.1-2.

\(^{824}\) *Calig.* 50.2: *in furorem uerterit*. Suetonius does not use the word *furor* elsewhere of Caligula.

\(^{825}\) Gill (1983) 482; see also Wardman (1974) 135.
harnessed in youth explains why, to Suetonius, youth, the proverbial *lubrica aetas*, is no excuse for vices, but they can be blamed on old age.\textsuperscript{826}

In summary, these apparent changes in behaviour can all be explained as outward changes, never inward changes. It is possible to act out of character in response to circumstance, but none of Suetonius’ Caesars undergoes an actual change to *natura* or *ingenium*. In these examples, an outward change is always towards nature, not away from it: Nero became more like his true nature (which had previously been controlled) later in life;\textsuperscript{827} Vitellius is notably ‘admirable and noble’ on his accession, but soon reverts to ‘natural disposition [*natura*] and his former habits.’\textsuperscript{828} Nurture does not change character.

Although it seems that characters do not change, there still remain two further passages that might suggest character change *away* from nature, or at least ‘learnt’ traits in addition to nature—one in *Vespasian*, and one in the *Domitian*. Referring to Vespasian’s one vice (*pecuniae cupiditas*), Suetonius does something unusual. He dwells on the source of the vice, distinguishing between *natura* and *necessitas* as possible causes:

\[ \text{the only thing for which he can fairly be censured was his love of money} \ldots \text{Some say that he was naturally covetous [*natura cupidissimus*], and was taunted with it by an old herdsman of his who, on being forced to pay for the freedom for which he earnestly begged Vespasian when he became emperor, cried: ‘The fox changes his fur, but not his nature [*mores*].’ Others on the contrary believe that he was driven by necessity [*necessitate compulsus*] to raise money by spoliation and robbery because of the desperate state of the treasury and the privy purse} \ldots \text{This latter view seems the more probable, since he made the best use of his gains, ill-gotten though they were.} \textsuperscript{829} \]

\textsuperscript{826} E.g. *Tib*. 44.1.
\textsuperscript{827} *Ner*. 26-7.
\textsuperscript{828} *Vit*. 10.1.
\textsuperscript{829} *Vesp*. 16.1-3: *sola est, in qua merito culpetur, pecuniae cupiditas. Non enim contentus omissa sub Galba uectigalia reucasce, noua et graua addidisse, auxisse tributa prouincii, nonnullis et duplicasse, negotiationes quoque uel priuato pudendas propalam exercuit, coemendo quaedam tantum ut pluris postea distrabreter. Ne candidatis quidem honores reise tam innoxis quam nocentibus absolutiones uendiare cunctatus est. Creditur etiam procuratorum rapacissimum quemque ad ampliora officia ex industria solitus promouere, quo locupleiores max condemnairet; quibus quidem uolgo pro spongiis dicebatur uti, quod quasi et siccos madefaceret et exprimeret uementis.

\textit{Quidem natura cupidissimum tradunt, idque exprobratum ei a sene bubulco, qui negata sibi gratuita libertate, quam imperium adeptum suppliciter orabat, proclamauerit, uulpem pilum mutare, non mores. Sunt contra qui opinentur ad manubias et rapinas necessitate compulsuum summa aerarii fiscique inopia, de qua testificatus sit initio statim principatus, professus quadringenties milies opes esse, ut res p.
Elsewhere, Suetonius uses *necessitas*—and similar words such as *necessario* and *necesse*—to indicate that there is no alternative. Here, necessity is the opposite of volition, such as at *Tiberius* 23 and *Domitian* 6.1.  

Nowhere else is there such a long deliberation on whether or not a trait is innate. The default position seems to be that the traits are natural, and we can assume so unless told otherwise. Even Nero’s vices are explicitly not sins of his age but of his nature. Outside this passage of the *Vespasian*, traits are given no attribution, or attributed to nature without discussion. This is basically in keeping with Suetonius’ usual silence on matters of method. In this exceptional case, however, the biographer does not want to give the impression that the vice was natural, so he must take pains to rule nature out in this instance. The occurrence of both *natura* and *mos* in the same sense complicates the issue, but the use of *mos* is clearly proverbial. Either way, the meaning seems to be that *cupiditas* was outside of both *natura* and *mos*—even if only Suetonius thinks so. Making the distinction between necessity and nature acknowledges that his Caesars can act—if necessary—outside of their innate traits.

The complete difference between brothers Titus and Domitian (not to mention Germanicus and Claudius) would seem to stack up against nature as the font of character traits—but as they were raised in the same household, neither does it support a nurture view. Titus can do no wrong in Suetonius’ account, but Domitian is one of his worst Caesars. However, Domitian’s principal vices, as bad as they are, are *not* innate. Although cupidity is common to Domitian and Vespasian, it is in both cases attributed to straitened circumstances and not nature—it does not seem to be a ‘family’ trait. Certainly it is not accentuated by an ancestry section linking the three Flauii. Interestingly, outside *Vespasian*, Domitian is the only other Caesar whose traits are attributed to something other than nature:

---


---

830 *Dom. 6.1: necessario* is contrasted with *sponte; Tib. 23:* Tiberius was chosen more out of necessity than choice. Other uses of *necesse* and cognates indicate compulsion, coercion, and obligation: e.g. *Aug. 6; 81.1; Tib. 6.1; 18.1; 37.4; 62.1; Calig. 2; 29.2; 30.2; Ner. 4; 23.2; 40.2; 43.2; and Vesp. 4.3, where *necessario* occurs with *obligo.*

831 Wallace-Hadrill (1995) 151 states that Suetonius ‘is anxious to demonstrate that virtues or vices were “natural” inborn characteristics.’ I agree that Suetonius would attribute vices and virtues to nature, but I demur on the ‘is anxious to demonstrate’ since the source of vices and virtues is rarely examined.

832 *Ner. 26.1.*

833 With the possible exception of *Dom. 3.2,* which we will examine below, 170.
... with about an equal number of virtues and vices, finally he turned the virtues also into vices; [uitr\textic|tes quoque in uitia deflexit] for so far as one may guess, it was contrary to his natural disposition [super ingenii naturam] that he was made rapacious through need and cruel through fear.\textsuperscript{834}

\textsuperscript{834} Dom. 3.2: ... mixtura quoque aequabili uiiorium atque uirtutum, donec uirtuates quoque in uitia deflexit; quantum coniectare licet, super ingenii naturam inopia rapax, metu saeuus. Trans. Rolfe/Hurley (1997).

This is a problematic passage, for two reasons, both in the phrase super ingenii naturam: the first is the question of whether ingenium and natura are being contrasted with each other here; the second is created by the difficulty with the meaning of super.

The first is most quickly dispatched. The ingenii naturam of the second section is a rephrasing of uitiorum atque uirtutum. The ‘nature of his character’ does not translate well, but I believe the two words are synonyms, as they were used in the Caligula, and that this is an example of amplification by accumulation of terms. The two words together emphasise the existence of innate characteristics, as distinct from these new traits.

The second problem with this passage is that the meaning of super in this phrase is disputed. On the meaning of super here, see Mooney (1979) 520; Steidle (1963) 95 follows Mooney; see also Jones (1996) 34; also Gascou (1976) 271 n.1; Wallace-Hadrill (1995) 151. The TLL is not yet available for super; according to Lewis and Short s.v. super §A2b, it would express measurement, ‘over’ or ‘in addition to’. There is no suggestion of a ‘contrary to.’ OLD suggests ‘in addition to’ or ‘besides’ but not ‘contrary to.’ The solutions that have been floated for this particular phrase are (1) to read super as ‘contrary to’; (2) to read it as ‘in addition to’; or (3) to emend the text.

The first solution is in line with the approach most often taken by translators. The super is often (as here, in the Loeb translation) translated ‘contrary to’ his character, and it does make sense to see the rapacity and cruelty as out of character, since they are attributed to specific, external causes.

This argument requires the super to mean ‘contrary to,’ but, as Mooney (1979) 520 pointed out, there is no parallel for this meaning. If he had wanted to express ‘contrary to’ Suetonius could just as easily have used contra, as he does at Dom. 9.3. There is no good reason to distort the meaning of super here, when ‘on top of’ would be a more natural translation of super + accusative, and would not contradict the sense of inopia rapax, metu saeuus. The argument for the second solution is that elsewhere in Suetonius (and other authors), super with the accusative is usually ‘in addition to,’ rendering this phrase something like ‘in addition to the nature of his character.’ This seems more sensible, but unfortunately does not get us much closer to the answer. If it be translated ‘in addition to,’ it is possible that some vices and virtues were innate, which is expressed by ingenii naturam, but this does not include the vices that caused him to be rapax and saeuus, and not even their opposite virtues—say, liberalitas and lenitas. The process by which Domitian became rapax and saeuus (for which no verb is expressed) might be indicated by deflexit, but the inopia and metus (both in the ablative) seem to be the agents of this change. He must either be acting temporarily out of character, which has no parallel in the Lives, or with new traits formed by nurture. Domitian therefore has innate virtues, innate vices, and learnt vices—both nature and nurture play their part.

However, coming as it does flush against the accusation that Domitian turned his virtues into vices, it does not seem to mean that these vices were innate, nor is it clear that Domitian was already a little bit rapax and only became more so through inopia, or a little bit saeuus and became more so through metus. The key is deflexit. Because he is said to have ‘turned [deflexit] virtues into vices’ I would prefer to see the greed and cruelty not as innate vices amplified by circumstances but as new, learnt vices added to his natural mixture of vices and virtues—created out of virtues. The super ingenii naturam creates a distinction between innate and learnt traits, and these vices are learnt ‘on top of’ (super) the innate traits. In view of the ambiguity, it is perhaps better to take this super not as ‘contrary to’ but ‘in addition to.’ Wallace-Hadrill’s ‘over and above’ acknowledges and retains the ambiguity of the phrase. Wallace-Hadrill (1995) 151. If the super is taken to mean ‘over and above’ his natural character, we could see these qualities as already present within Domitian, and only exacerbated through want and fear, as Gascou and Couissin would have it. Couissin (1953) 252 supported his theory of Domitian’s innate rapacitas with the physiognomical features Suetonius ascribes to Domitian elsewhere. Reading the phrase
First, does the phrase *uirtutes quoque in uitia deflexit* mean the new vices came from their opposite virtues, and did not spring up spontaneously? I think it must. It is tempting to understand from this that Domitian had innate virtues and vices, which did not include rapacity or cruelty, but included the opposites of rapacity and cruelty, and external forces of need and fear caused Domitian to start acting differently—not only neutralising the virtues but also converting those innate virtues into their opposing vices. The innate virtues, then, were something like *liberalitas* and *lenitas*, and when Domitian became *rapax* and *saeuus* he added learnt vices to his innate ones. However, the *deflexit* suggests that the learnt vices replaced the innate virtues—as close an example of changed character as appears in the *Lives*. Although Domitian had innate virtues and vices, his worst vices—greed and cruelty—are examples of the virtues that he turned into vices, learnt rather than innate.

Second, there is a difficulty with the translation of *super* as ‘contrary to.’ Perhaps a better translation for *super ingenii naturam* would be ‘in addition to his nature.’ This passage appears to contradict Domitian 9-12.\(^{835}\) Section 9 lists proofs of Domitian’s *lack* of greed and cruelty; s.10-11 the transition to cruelty, s.12 his avarice, to which he was driven by financial need. The virtues he displays in s.9 are not portrayed as simulated, but as real ‘proofs,’ that is *experimenta*. In light of these passages, contrasted with his youth, his later greed and cruelty do seem to be contrary to his earlier actions. Not only did the young Domitian not show signs of these vices, but his actions were in fact of the opposite kind. This would suggest that he was not just hiding vices to reveal them later, and there is no indication to the contrary. It might be protested that even Nero showed signs of being a good *princeps* in his youth, hiding his vices and turning towards his ‘true’ nature later. While he faked virtue, he was not completely successful, and hints of his vices emerged early,\(^{836}\) just as Tiberius ‘ill

---

more closely, Jacques Gascou (1976) 271, n. 1 also objected to the translation ‘contrary to,’ but because he preferred to see the beginnings of the vices in Domitian’s nature—in his *uitiorum atque uirtutum*. For him, Domitian was already basically bad, and *super* indicates only that the natural vices became more pronounced because of external factors.

As a last resort to solve this tangled web, Mooney (1971) 520 proposed the emendation of *naturam* to *natura*, which would indeed improve the sense of *super*, rendering the translation ‘as far as one can guess about his natural disposition, it was need that made him rapacious and fear that made him cruel.’ The translation is acceptable, but still would not clarify the relationship between *natura* and the two adjectives, *rapax* and *saeuus*. If the need and fear affected his *natura*, we would have to broaden the definition of *natura* out from innate nature to include learnt traits.

\(^{835}\) Wallace-Hadrill (1995) 151, n. 13, referring only to s.9. I would extend this to 9-12.

\(^{836}\) Ner. 7.1.
concealed’ his vices in his youth. Domitian, however, is not portrayed as a faker of virtues—apart from an interest in poetry. At Domitian 9-12 there is no explanation for the sudden transition to saeuitia, so we must look back to 3.2 to see that it is the saeuitia Suetonius had already foreshadowed.

Domitian’s vices are not family vices, then, but learnt, because of the circumstances of the Principate. It appears that external circumstances turned his innate virtues into vices, and that those vices had nothing to do with inheritance. Both Domitian and Vespasian are greedy, but there is a difference of degree—while Vespasian is only cupidissimus, Domitian is rapax. There is no sense of a connection between the father’s cupiditas and the son’s rapacitas. Vespasian’s greed was also circumstantial, rather than innate, yet his behaviour in the face of necessitas did not imply actual change of character—only an addition to it.

Suetonius prefers necessity as the cause of Vespasian’s vice, but just because it is not innate does not make it a change of character. The opposite virtue is not innate, either, and examples from other Lives—the Tiberius in particular—show that a Caesar can have both innate and learnt traits. Augustus claimed that Tiberius’ disagreeable mannerisms were faults of his natura, not his animus. The diction of Tiberius 68 raises the co-existence of animus alongside natura, so although natura does not change, and is probably not learnt, there is room in this model for learnt traits, i.e. animus. We must concede that both nature and nurture must be responsible for character traits if our distinction between animus and natura is accurate. However, Suetonius does not give any clues as to the process by which traits are learnt; only how they are inherited.

It appears that Suetonius’ Caesars do not undergo change over the lifetime. Apparent change is usually not change at all, but a change from pretence to natural character traits that had been present all along. Both vices and virtues appear to be mostly natural, i.e. innate, or at least already present in childhood and not created by experience or instruction. Innate vices are never kept completely under control, although they may be concealed in the period before accession. Vices are occasionally learnt over the lifetime due to outside pressures, but virtues do not appear to be learnt. Where they are present, they are natural. It is possible to have both vices and virtues—

838 Dom. 2.2.
839 Tib. 68: naturae uitae esse, non animi.
Tiberius, Domitian, and Galba all appear to have both naturally. 840 All of these patterns support the notion of innate character traits, and therefore a ‘nature’ model is likely. Such a model would also fit with the unusual prominence of ancestors in the Lives. However, hints of learnt character traits we have just identified in the Domitian, Vespasian, and Tiberius warn against ruling out the possibility that some character traits might be acquired during the lifetime.

Another indicator of a ‘nurture’ model would be the role of adults in the childhood of the Caesar. In such a model of inheritance, the mother would presumably be as influential as the father, but nowhere does Suetonius attribute influence to the mother. Livia, Tiberius’ mother, and Agrippina, Nero’s mother, are important within those Lives, but their influence is with their respective husbands, responsible for insinuating their sons into positions of power. They are each overly influential in their sons’ reigns, but never responsible for their sons’ character traits. This is in contrast with the supposed influence of mothers, such as Cornelia, in their sons’ education. 841 Additional evidence against the nurture model is the lack of interest in stepfathers. Augustus, Tiberius, and Nero grew up with stepfathers, but in each case the house in which they were brought up receives relatively little attention, just as their childhoods in general are not treated with interest. In fact, in the Tiberius the adoptive ancestry of Livia is treated more comprehensively than Tiberius’ own upbringing with his stepfather and, later, adoptive father Augustus. Augustus had been treated in detail earlier in the same book, but we might presume that if Suetonius had wanted to suggest something about Tiberius in comparison with Augustus, the way was open to him to make this clearer within the Tiberius itself.

The unusual beginning of the Tiberius, which treats adoptive relatives in almost as much detail as biological relatives, could be taken as an indication that Suetonius might see a role for nurture in resemblance. The Liuii do appear to have a characterising purpose, but it is not clear whether Tiberius is supposed to have inherited their traits, or if they are present only as paradigms of Tiberius’ behaviour. I have already argued that the Claudii are paradigms rather than progenitors of his behaviour, and I propose to take

840 For Tiberius, see above, 130, 132-3; on Dom. 3.2, see above, 170; Suet. Galb. 14.1.
the Liuii in the same way. If they are in fact paradigms rather than progenitors, they can support neither the nurture nor the nature model of inheritance.

One final piece of evidence for a nature model is the physiognomical element of Suetonius’ descriptions of physical appearance. Physiognomy, the ‘art of interpreting character from physical appearance,’ was in vogue in Suetonius’ time, and seems to have influenced Suetonius. Polemon, a contemporary of Suetonius, wrote a handbook of physiognomy, drawing upon the works of previous medical and philosophical schools, including Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Hippocratics. George Boys-Stones has compiled the opinions of Polemon’s predecessors on physiognomy. He argues that, to the ancients, physiognomy concerned innate character. Any connection between body and personality would require character to be physiological, congenital, and probably inherited.

Elizabeth Evans made a detailed study of the parallels between Suetonius’ portraits and the handbooks of physiognomy. She found that Suetonius’ statements about physical appearance were sufficiently parallel with passages from the handbooks that Suetonius can be assumed to have been familiar with the tradition, if not with the handbooks themselves. A similar line of argument led Couissin to impute familiarity with the tradition to Suetonius, especially given the likelihood of his having mixed with Polemon himself, and certain passages in the text (most convincingly Otho 12.1) that suggest physiognomical inclinations.

[n]either Otho’s person nor his bearing suggested such great courage. He is said to have been of moderate height, splay-footed and bandy-legged, but almost feminine in his care of his person. He had the hair of his body plucked out, and because of the thinness of his locks wore a wig so carefully fashioned and fitted to his head that no one suspected it. Moreover, they say that he used to shave every day and smear his face with moist bread, beginning the practice with the appearance of the first down, so as never to have a beard; also that he used to celebrate the rites of Isis publicly in the linen garment prescribed by the cult. I am inclined

---

842 See above, 134.
843 Evans (1935) 45.
846 Evans (1935).
847 Couissin (1953).
to think that it was because of these habits that a death so little in harmony with his life excited the greater marvel.\textsuperscript{848}

That passage in \textit{Otho} is particularly suggestive that Suetonius had not just consulted handbooks but was influenced by physiognomy as an idea. Although Gascou and Baldwin have since pronounced Suetonius uninterested in physiognomy,\textsuperscript{849} a few other passages also hint that his descriptions of appearance are written with character in mind. His portrait of Tiberius, for instance, which Evans found to be the most ‘physiognomical’ of Suetonius’ descriptions, displays both cowardly and courageous aspects, agreeing closely with his two-sided Tiberius.\textsuperscript{850}

Are we any closer to identifying a ‘nature’ or ‘nurture’ pattern in Suetonius? In sum, a ‘nurture’ model is unlikely, on the basis of the lack of interest in mothers and childhoods. Based on references to ancestors and the idiosyncrasies of character traits throughout the \textit{Lives}, it appears that Suetonius is writing on the assumption that those character traits are both innate and inherited, that is, he uses a nature model of reproduction. This impression is reinforced by statements which suggest biological inheritance of vices, such as those at \textit{Nero} 6.1 and \textit{Caligula} 25.4. There does seem to be a distinction between \textit{natura} and \textit{animus}, which must allow for ‘habits’ or ‘ways’ as external to nature, and therefore possibly learnt. Innate vices and virtues must co-exist with \textit{animus}. Nature is a powerful force, but a son is not a clone of his father. There are identifiable patterns to which character traits are inherited and which are not.

The patterns laid out at the end of Chapter Four made the distinction between virtue and vice: a vice mentioned in the opening section is likely to reappear in the main part of the \textit{Life}, but a virtue in the family tree is for illustrative purposes only. Vices are inherited, often very faithfully, and sometimes they are created by degeneration from virtue. It is possible for a Caesar to possess both vice and virtue—for example, Tiberius, Domitian, and Galba—but those virtues are not generally inherited, or at least they are not foreshadowed in the ancestors, no matter how important and noble those ancestors.

\textsuperscript{848} \textit{Otho}, 12.1-2: \textit{tanto Othonis animo nequaquam corpus aut habitus competit. Fuisse enim et modicae staturae et male pedatus scambusque traditur, munditiarum verno paene multiebrum, udso corpore, galericulo capiti propter raritatem capillorum adaptato et adnexo, ut nemo dinosceret; quin et faciem cotidie rasitare ac pane madido linere consuetum, idque instituisse a prima lanugine, ne barbatus umquam esset; sacra etiam Isidis saepe in lineae religiosaeque ueste propalam celebrasse. Per quae factum putem, ut mors eius minime congruens uitate maiores miraculo fuerit.}


\textsuperscript{850} Evans (1959) 55-6.
Noble ancestors, then, are no advantage to the Caesar except in status. As far as morals are concerned, they appear to be a disadvantage, bequeathing only vices.

In summary, it appears that neither republican nor Flavian authors have the same idea about inherited vices that Suetonius has, but their interest in them justifies our expecting Suetonius’ audience to be familiar with the concept. Republican authors favoured a nature model, in which virtue was inherited, but in the Flavian period a nurture model appealed to commentators on a new political structure. Yet the model used by Suetonius is also not the nurture model of Flavian authors, in which all men might achieve virtue. Instead, there is a return to the pre-Augustan model with its expectation that ancestors contribute to status and character traits, but the model is inverted: lower ancestors are better indicators of virtue, and noble ancestors bequeath not virtue but vice.

**Nature/Nurture and the Political System**

In the Roman Republic, the political system favoured, or appeared to favour, sons of known families. The ‘nature’ model, then, suits the system: an expectation that virtue will be inherited simplifies the electoral process. It is in the interest of the status quo that writers perpetuate the idea of inherited merit, particularly in noble families. In the Flavian period, however, with the rise of new men and the disappearance of what was left of the republican nobility, a ‘nurture’ approach is more appropriate to the political situation: it allows for merit in unknown families and the influence of good training. Good sons may arise from bad parents, as appears from the trope of tyrants with virtuous sons in Valerius Maximus, Vergil, and Statius. This would be unexpected in the pre-Augustan period, and in fact in Suetonius it seems that degeneration, rather than improvement or stability, is the norm. Where, in the time of Cicero, degeneration was ‘possible’, in Suetonius it is likely. Suetonius’ picture of inherited vice and diluted virtue appears to invert the republican model that virtues are inherited faithfully, justifying the political advantage given those of known families.

851 Arguing that noble families were actually not as successful in reproducing their pre-eminence over the generations as Cicero (et al.) would have us believe, Hopkins & Burton (1983) 32ff. On continuity in specific families, see J. Matthews (1967); M. Dondin-Payre (1993); and C. Settipani (2000).
Despite Paratore’s pronouncement that Suetonius had neither political, nor philosophical, nor religious belief,\textsuperscript{854} it would seem on the basis of parallels in Roman and modern European society that Suetonius’ approach to nature/nurture could reflect contemporary society. Chong-Gossard’s discussion of sex in Suetonius connects the portrayal of sexual relationships in Suetonius with social issues of his age, including the new practice of adopting successors.\textsuperscript{855} This issue of adopted successors is also relevant to the discussion of nature and nurture.

There are two trends in the Lives that might betray an ideological subtext in Suetonius.

The first is that noble Caesars are more likely to be vicious than virtuous, and all the best Caesars are from new families. Noble ancestors might be advantageous for the status-conscious, but they appear to be a handicap where vices and virtues are concerned. It could be coincidental, but the pattern of Suetonius’ Caesars is that the noblest Caesars are the most vicious, most degenerate. The new men Augustus, Otho, and Vespasian are certainly better emperors than the nobly born Caligula, Nero, and Galba.\textsuperscript{856}

The second is that dynasties tend to degenerate over their lifetime just as an individual Caesar degenerates over his lifetime. In a way this is related to the first trend, because successors are nobler than their ancestors, if we accept that being princeps ennobles the family. A new man at the head of a dynasty comes to power under his own steam and is generally virtuous, and his successor(s) undo(es) his good work. Augustus is followed by Tiberius, who is not all bad but is certainly less popular with Suetonius than Augustus had been; Caligula succeeds Tiberius and is justly assassinated. The new dynasty proceeds from Claudius, who is not of a new family but has low status, to Nero, with whom the whole line is extinguished. Galba makes an abortive attempt to create his own dynasty; so, too, Otho and Vitellius are promptly dispatched without designating successors.

As dynasties approach the end of the family line, they worsen: Tiberius is worse than Augustus, and Caligula worse again; with Claudius we begin a new dynasty, going

\textsuperscript{854} E. Paratore (1959) 341 ‘il n’a ni foi politique, ni foi religieuse ou philosophique.’
\textsuperscript{855} Chong-Gossard (2010) 296.
\textsuperscript{856} The vicious but new Vitellius is the exception. Domitian’s pedigree does not explain his degeneration, but it can be explained by the second trend, that dynasties tend to degenerate over time.
back a generation before Caligula. Claudius-Nero is something of a repeat of Tiberius-Caligula.

Although Claudius is of very noble family, not to mention brother of Germanicus, he does not have the decadent qualities of the nobility, perhaps a hangover from his lowly position in the domus in his youth. Like Tiberius, Claudius is not completely vicious, but he is certainly no match for his father Drusus. With his step-son Nero (and the end of the line) degeneration is total. Nero is the morally bankrupt conclusion of the Domitii, the house of Claudius, and the Julio-Claudians.

In this way, the tendency of the dynasty to degenerate over time parallels the tendency of the individual to deteriorate over the lifetime. The longer the line, the worse the Caesar. However, this is not a hard and fast rule: Vitellius is a perfectly new Caesar who has no redeeming qualities. The three Caesars after Nero are not connected with him or with each other, which unusual situation is marked by the lack of the word gens in Book Seven, although it introduces most of the dynastic Caesars. Vespasian begins a new dynasty, and Domitian appears, predictably enough, to be the dissolute end of the line, but in fact he is innately no worse than Titus or Vespasian. All three of them share virtues, and Vespasian and Domitian’s vices are excused as not natural. Anything they have in common might as well be coincidental, since it is not emphasised with an introductory section on the ancestry. It is obvious, however, that Domitian is the worst of the three. Gelzer pointed out that (according to Tacitus) Otho thought he would ennable his family by holding the Principate. Perhaps Vespasian’s Principate ennobled his family, so Domitian is worse than his father because he is noble, not new.

Paratore thought that Suetonius had neither politics nor philosophy of his own, but the patterns of inheritance appear to be relevant to Suetonius’ own day, not just the period he describes. Perhaps there is room for a political interpretation. Both of these trends—degenerating nobility, and degeneration over the dynasty—show a preference for a new man rather than a noble, and at first glance it appears that the system of inherited monarchy is unsatisfactory, as it perpetuates the cycle of vicious noble after vicious noble. Certainly, all three proper dynasties (Augustus-Tiberius-Caligula,

858 Even Titus and Domitian are not necessarily ennobled by their father, although this seems to be the case in Tacitus Hist. 2.48.2. See Gelzer (1969) 144.
859 Paratore (1959) 341.
Claudius-Nero, Vespasian-Titus-Domitian) deteriorate as they go on, although the decline is markedly faster in the second group. The quick decline of Claudius-Nero correlates with the fact that Claudius is not really a ‘new’ man, and so his line is more prone to degeneration from the beginning.

After the death of Domitian, in the period of our main sources Suetonius, Tacitus, and Plutarch, the trend for succession by biological relationship became unpopular, replaced by a fashion for adopting a worthy young man as a successor. Suetonius could, then, be criticising inherited power when he paints a picture of inherited vice through generations of the same family and redemption only in a new man.

However, this solution does not fit the actual trend for adopted versus biological succession in these twelve Caesars. Inherited vice over the generations applies to a biological family, and that is how it is used in Suetonius—the ‘ancestors’ of the introduction are the agnate ancestors, and the adoptive father who brings the new Caesar into the line is given little attention as an ancestor. If the Caesars were bequeathing their positions to their biological sons, we would be quite right to expect degeneration, but as a matter of fact they almost always left their empire to an adopted son, not a biological one. So the successions Julius-Augustus-Tiberius-Caligula and Claudius-Nero were all effected by legal decision rather than direct biological connection, and the adoptions were often of step-sons. Suetonius does not fail to mark the role of wives in the adoption of their sons, always in a disapproving tone. This is exactly the kind of adoption Pliny criticises in the Panegyric. He prefers the kind of adoption Nerva had made, and Galba had attempted, of a young man chosen for his nobility and merit, but not at the behest of a wife. That Hadrian became princeps because of a wife is not mentioned by Carney in his collection of Suetonius’ possible references to Hadrian.

Could nature/nurture reflect political ideas? In the modern era, a preference for nature or nurture has tended to follow a pattern according to the broader social changes. For instance, in the Enlightenment, man was believed to be a tabula rasa, but in

---

860 On this division of dynasties, see above at n. 693.
861 Suet. Claud. 43; Ner. 6.4; Tib. 21.2 (but Suetonius does not agree that Augustus would have adopted Tiberius just because of Livia). Cf. a similar disquietude about the wife’s role, Tac. Ann. 1.3.
862 Plin. Pan. 7.4.
863 Carney (1968). On the role of Plotina in the adoption of Hadrian, see Birley (2000) 77, n. 2; Cass. Dio 69.1.1-2; SHA Hadr. 4.10.
eighteenth-century France, doctors saw hereditary causes in many diseases, sometimes linking common diseases (such as tuberculosis) with perceived moral degeneracy. The shift in attitudes to heredity followed a change in ideas about demographic decline and gender in French society.\(^{864}\) In the nineteenth century, the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology became popular in France, where the various developments in the sciences were adapted to political causes across the spectrum.\(^{865}\)

Francis Galton wrote his studies on hereditary genius in late nineteenth-century Britain, when the social and political upper class was concerned about the growing working class. Galton’s work urged human manipulation of natural selection to improve the human race, which he called eugenics. Eugenicists connected hereditary weaknesses with the lower classes and saw the source of poverty in natural failings.\(^{866}\) Eugenics became popular in the USA, where thousands were sterilised, and Europe, notably in Germany in the 1930s.\(^{867}\) In fact, the interest in natural traits spilled over into Classics, with a few studies of inheritance in Roman and Greek families in 1930s Germany.\(^{868}\) After the war, the similarities between eugenics and Nazi policies put the topic out of fashion until the 1960s and ’70s,\(^{869}\) an apt example of the effect of social conditions on the nature/nurture debate, something which pertains to Suetonius. In the mid-twentieth century, more attention was given psychological causes of traits. Current psychological research locates personality traits in both nature and nurture. Modern history supports the correlation between the nature/nurture debate and the prevailing socio-political system. It seems fair to see in the Roman cycle of attitudes to nature/nurture a reflection of their socio-political environment, too.

\(^{864}\) S.M. Quinlan (2006).

\(^{865}\) M. Staum (1995) discusses the political elements of the French interest in phrenology and physiognomy.

\(^{866}\) G. Jones (1982).


\(^{868}\) The ancestors and inheritance were popular topics amongst classicists in 1930s Germany. E. Bethe (1935), W. Haedicke (1937), and R. Fuhrmann (1938) explored the evidence with varying degrees of critical success. Haedicke deals only with Greece. Fuhrmann’s work, which deals only with Rome, describes character traits being passed down through the generations of aristocratic families, based on evidence from literature. A.R. Bellinger (1939) thought it took the literary portrayal of family traits too literally in presuming those traits to be historical. Bethe’s work, which deals with both Greece and Rome but concentrates on poetry, has been appreciated as a refreshing approach to the subject of inheritance in families. H.H. Scullard (1936), R. Thomas (1989) 96ff. J.H. Thiel (1935) described the nature of Tiberius in terms of the characteristics he inherited from his ancestors.

\(^{869}\) P.J. Pauly (1993).
I believe Suetonius comments on the political system when he posits dynasty as tending to degeneration and the model of the new man with his own merit making the best princeps. He has seen the dissolute Julio-Claudians and the end of the Flavians, and goes back to nature to explain that the line weakens over time: virtues degenerate and vices compound. Even over the lifetime vices get stronger and virtues weaker. The paradigm shift between the Republic and the Principate changed the role of the republican nobility and the status of noutitas, and Suetonius is reacting to that change when he styles his ‘new men’ as virtuous and his noble scions as degenerate wastrels. According to this model an adopted successor chosen for merit is much better than the unsuccessful model of inherited monarchy. His model of character inheritance and degeneration reflects a broader social transition away from meritocracy to monarchy and then away from lineage-based power back to a kind of meritocracy. In this way Suetonius comments on the old and new political systems.
Conclusions

The broad aim of this thesis has been to show that Suetonius has been underestimated by some critics, who made statements such as Grant’s.\textsuperscript{870} His assessment is wrong, because Suetonius’ version is both rhetorically and morally preconceived. Some critics have missed this aspect of his work because Suetonius’ judgments are not as obtrusive as those of Plutarch and Tacitus. Suetonius wants his reader to know his opinion, but rather than declare his own judgments, he nudges his reader gently around to his own viewpoint by subtle devices of characterisation. Some of those devices are rhetorical techniques such as those used in Cicero’s invective and praise, and one of the stock elements of that epideictic rhetoric is ancestry.

More specifically, this thesis has tried to show that Suetonius leads his reader to a certain view even from the very beginning of the \textit{Life}, with the introductory section on the ancestry. I hope it is now clear that connections between the ancestry section and the rest of the \textit{Life} are more widespread and more internally consistent than they have hitherto appeared. That is, the ancestors are not just vehicles of status, but they are also vehicles of characterisation, in a characterising strategy that is used across the board in Suetonius’ \textit{Lives of the Caesars}. The ancestry sections are written specifically to suit each \textit{Life}, and ancestors are more obviously and more extensively used in some \textit{Lives} than in others, according to the requirements of the portrait. The ancestry sections are also more integrated into the rest of the \textit{Lives} than they have seemed, and are not discrete parts of the \textit{Life} that serve only as introductions. Cizek and Du Four, in particular, were too quick to dismiss the ancestry sections out of hand as aspects of characterisation.

In Chapter One, I asked why Suetonius brings in the ancestry of the Vitellii when the evidence is so muddled and uncertain. I sought to begin answering that question by setting out the role of ancestry in Roman society and literature before Suetonius. Using sources from the late Republic to the early second century, I laid out the kinds of status that ancestry could demonstrate, and showed that the name and rank of the paternal family was to be expected in any biography of a Roman statesman. The

\textsuperscript{870} Grant (1954) 119. Cited above, 10.
evidence of Nepos, Plutarch, and Tacitus contributed to this judgment. These authors used ancestry to establish the legal, financial, and social status of their subjects, usually close to the beginning of their *Lives* and concisely.

I also looked to social history to find evidence of the importance of ancestry in everyday life and politics. Elements of Roman society that demonstrate the Roman interest in ancestry include ancestor masks, coins, the *laudatio funebris*, legendary genealogy and a non-Roman *origo*. As a means of differentiating very noble families from each other, family identity contributes to social status at the level of family. I also found that the importance of nobility and the maternal family was shifting over the first century CE, so we might expect to see a different focus in Nepos from that in Suetonius and his peers. Nobility continues to convey status although it no longer conveys virtues. I also surveyed the connotations of certain kinds of family background, such as non-Roman ethnic origin and legendary genealogy, with a view to showing that Suetonius’ seemingly passing references to Sabine genealogy or descent from Jupiter are in fact in aid of demonstrating social status, and that Suetonius’ readers would have picked up on these allusions.

Chapter One showed that ancestry was an important part of the identity of the upper classes and to be expected as part of the introduction to a Roman biography.

In Chapter Two I applied the findings of Chapter One to Suetonius’ use of ancestors as status markers by comparing Suetonius’ usage with those of his peers and predecessors. I drew out his references to *imagines*, patrician and plebeian families, and the differences in his approach to Caesars of noble and new families. I also looked for occasions on which the ethnic origin of the family might be meant to reflect well or badly on the status of the Caesar. In this chapter I continued to search for the answer to the Vitellii question (posed at the beginning of Chapter One) by identifying the role of the ancestors as status markers in Suetonius’ *Lives*. I found that the first purpose of the ancestry sections is to demonstrate beyond question that each Caesar came from respectable stock, and where possible to show whether the family was in fact ‘ancient and noble [or] new and obscure.’

871 In newer families, the establishment of respectability is paramount and calls for close study of the records, but a consulship or two will suffice. For families of old republican nobility, respectability is assumed and

871 *Vit.* 1.1: *uterem et nobilem … uero nouam et obscuram.*
the biographer cites the finer distinctions between noble families to pinpoint each family's 'precise degree of nobility.' To this end, he adduces the small differences between families: the antiquity of the family, where several centuries at Rome makes for a more distinguished family than just a few decades, and similarly the antiquity of senatorial status in that line; status as patrician or plebeian, and likewise the antiquity of that status; the more individual aspects of family identity such as legendary ancestry and connection with certain origines. With these aspects of the family's distant origins, Suetonius uses ancestry to differentiate between families of similarly high status.

I also showed that Suetonius uses maternal ancestry on a less than equal footing with paternal, and only when it serves to elevate the status of the family. Consequently, the maternal line usually appears when it is particularly noteworthy or when the paternal line is somewhat less than noble. I finished by noting that Suetonius is much more careful to prove the respectability of newer families than he is with nobler families, whose histories are fuller and can be more usefully mined for character traits. In using ancestral rank to establish the social status of his subjects, Suetonius has so far been doing in more detail much the same thing that his peers and predecessors had done with ancestors in their biographies. Where he parts from them is in his use of the ancestors beyond their usefulness as status markers.

In Chapter Three, I proposed that Suetonius used ancestors as tools of characterisation, mentioning peculiarities of ancestors in order to foreshadow character traits (or highlight the lack of those traits) in the Caesar himself. I found that Suetonius uses techniques of characterisation that appear elsewhere—for instance, in Cicero and Plutarch—but that the consistency and integration of Suetonius' characterisation via lineage surpasses his predecessors in its detail and sophistication. I situated Suetonius' use of ancestry within a broader genre of praise and blame literature, in which comparison with good and bad ancestral models is an important tool. Although Suetonius' text is often used for information about the Roman rhetoricians, he is not often considered rhetorical himself. I argued that Suetonius was influenced by rhetoric, and that it is therefore valid to look for rhetorical devices in his biographies.

I explained the importance of the programmatic statement at Nero 1.2 for our reading of the ancestry sections in Suetonius. There, Suetonius explains that he will bring up Nero's ancestors in order to show that he inherited their vices but degenerated from their virtues. I compared anecdotes and character traits in the ancestry sections with other episodes from the Lives, and I argued that the parallels were significant
enough to claim the anecdotes in the ancestry section were deliberately chosen and manipulated to bring out the similarities and differences between the Caesars and their ancestors. I found that Suetonius’ portrayal of ancestors across the Lives is basically as it is set out in Nero: Caesars degenerate from virtues, and inherit vices.

In Chapter Four I considered the Tiberius as a case study in those patterns of inheritance and degeneration. I found that the ancestry section of the Tiberius differs from other family trees in at least five different ways, and I accounted for those differences by bringing out the important ways in which Tiberius’ character traits are unlike those of the other Caesars. In some ways Tiberius appears to be the exception that proves the rule of inherited vices and degenerate virtue.

I argued that the opening section affects how we read the rest of the Life. Vitellius and Otho, for instance, have very similar family trees, but as they are very different men, their ancestries are treated differently. The dignity of Otho’s ancestors contributes to Otho’s portrait, whereas in Vitellius’ relatives it is their peculiarities that are emphasised. On the other hand, two related Caesars, Claudius and Tiberius, would come out looking very similar if it were not for the different approaches to their ancestry at the beginning of the Life. The historical family tree is manipulated to a literary effect: Nero and Caligula appear to be very similar, but they are introduced with very different family trees, one full of vice, the other full of virtue.

Just as the use of ancestors as status markers rested on a shared view of ancestors in society, in Chapter Five I argued that the use of ancestors as tools of characterisation also rested on shared assumptions of the resemblances between ancestors and descendants.

I explored the possible mechanisms of these resemblances, first identifying the prevailing views of nature and nurture in the republican and Flavian periods. I found that the late-republican view tended to a nature model in which merit was inherited, and Flavian authors preferred a nurture model in which anyone could become virtuous.

I then compared these views with the picture we found in Suetonius, looking beyond the resemblances between ancestor and descendant for other clues to Suetonius’ opinions on innate character and the mechanism of inheritance. On the basis of terminology such as ingenium, natura, and animus, references at Caligula 25.4 and Nero 6.1 to inherited characteristics, and reports of character change or consistency, I decided that Suetonius’ Caesars have mostly innate traits, consistent from childhood to adulthood, which exist alongside a few instances of traits learnt in adulthood in
response to external circumstances. Traits that appear in childhood are innate and unchanging, and will appear even more overtly in adulthood. The innateness of traits and the absence of information about mothers, step-fathers, and teachers support a nature model of resemblance rather than a nurture model. I found that Suetonius follows a nature model, unlike the Flavian authors, but his nature model is also unlike the late-republican model: in Suetonius, vice is inherited, but not virtue. Virtues, where they occur, are innate, but noble parents are not their source. Some vices are learnt, imposed by environmental causes, but they do not appear to change the underlying innate vices. Where the republican authors saw the virtues of the *nobiles* reproduced in their sons, and only exceptionally degenerated, Suetonius posits a model whereby the virtues of the great republican families are diluted in their descendants, and family continuity consists only in family vices. He transforms the republican standard into a more appropriately post-Flavian mechanism wherein the *noui* are the virtuous and the *nobiles* the vicious. His model of character inheritance and degeneration reflects a broader social transition away from meritocracy to monarchy and then away from lineage-based power back to a kind of meritocracy.

I found that Suetonius fits into a longstanding tradition of Roman literature that reads the ancestors of aristocrats and the upwardly mobile as vehicles of status as well as the bearers of recurring character traits. Suetonius uses that tradition to create a systematic schema of characterisation for the new ‘aristocrats,’ his Caesars; his peers, Plutarch and Tacitus, show a similar understanding of the concept, but use it to a lesser degree.

In search of an explanation for Suetonius’ innovative approach to inherited vice and degenerate virtue, I linked the nature/nurture debate with prevailing social structures. I raised the parallel of eighteenth- to twentieth-century Europe and Britain, where the ‘scientific’ view of nature/nurture often reflected socio-political concerns, and vice versa. On the basis of that parallel, I thought it fair to look for links between socio-political conditions in the Roman era and the nature/nurture view we find in the sources. I found that the extant republican literature expresses an aristocratic view of ancestors as the sources of inherited merit, reproduced over the generations. The inheritance of virtues ties in with a society that privileges the descendants of earlier high-achievers. Attitudes towards ancestors as status markers underwent a shift under the Principate, particularly after the accession of Vespasian, a prominent *nouis*, and this appears in Flavian literature, reflecting the new political and social reality. I argued that
Suetonius fits into a tradition of using ancestors to persuasive purpose, but that, magnifying the broader social mores, he rejects or inverts the republican reverence for *nobilitas*. In the new model, nature still dominates nurture but virtue degenerates, and only vice is inherited faithfully. Ancestors are still meaningful: so meaningful, in fact, that Suetonius goes to the family tree even when he can make no definitive statements about it (such as in *Vitellius*). But the meaning of those ancestors appears to have changed.

As a consequence of my study, future students of characterisation in Suetonius will recognise the ancestry sections of the *Lives* as indirect characterisation of the Caesars themselves, and give credit to the author for shaping his Caesars from the very beginning.
Appendix

The beginning of the *Julius*, as reconstructed by Philemon Holland, 1606 (edited J.H. Freese, London [1930])

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE BEGINNING OF GAIUS JULIUS CAESAR, DICTATOR

The Julian lineage, as most men are persuaded, is descended from Ascanius Iulus, the son of Aeneas by Creusa; which Iulus, after he had left Lavinium, built Long Alba, wherein also he reigned. Others, grounding upon a more assured evidence, have thought it good to derive the same rather from Iulus, the son of Ascanius. For when, after the death of this Ascanius, the kingdom of the Latins was devolved again upon Silvius the son of Aeneas and Lavinia, the charge of religion and sacred ceremonies in the Latin and Trojan nation both remained yet still in the race and progeny of Iulus, out of which are sprung the Julii. These Julii, with certain other most noble families of Latium, Tullus Hostilius, king of the Romans, after he had razed Alba, translated to Rome, and ranged among the nobility. Late it was ere they rose and mounted to high place of magistracy, but were reckoned almost in the last rank of the patricians of ancient nobility; and of them the Julii bare the principal name. For C. Julius (son of Lucius), surnamed also Iulus, was consul together with P. Pinarius Mamercinus Rufus, in the year after the foundation of Rome city 264; and seven years after, his son, with Q. Fabius Vibulanus (consul) the second time. Again, some space of time coming between, Vopiscus Julius, son of Gaius and nephew of Lucius, bore the consulship with L. Aemilius Mamercinus, third time consul, in the year 280. I find likewise, that in the year 302 Gaius Julius, son of Gaius, and nephew of Lucius, was a decemvir for the enacting and penning of laws, and that in the former election of that magistracy; as also that Gaius Julius, son of Gaius and nephew of Gaius, became consul with Marcus Geganius Macerinus, in the year 306, and the self-same man a second time, with Lucius Verginius Tricostus, in the year 318; and immediately in the year next following, a third time, with the same Verginius now twice consul. And thus much for the Julii. For to rehearse and collect all them of that family, together with the honourable places of every one, which were many in number and of sundry kinds, is not our purpose; and besides, the thing itself is apparent and upon record in the public registers.
Moreover, I have observed in the Julian line a certain house also of the Mentones: and among them one Gaius Julius, colleague in the consulship with T. Quintus Pennus Cincinnatus, in the 322nd year after the foundation of the city. I find likewise Gaius Julius Denter to be master of the horsemen, when Gaius Claudius Crassus Sabinus Regillensis was dictator, for to hold their solemn assembly of election, in the year 405. There were besides of these Julii others going under the name of Libones, and of the same race one triumphed; to wit, Lucius Julius, son of Lucius and nephew of Lucius, companion in the consulate with Marcus Atilius Regulus, in the year 486. But as touching Gaius Julius, son of Lucius and surnamed Caesar Strabo, whom Suetonius also meant in the 55th chapter of Julius Caesar and Cicero praiseth in his Brutus, and in the second book of his Orator, I doubt whether this addition Strabo should not be taken as a byname. For otherwise there is in our hands a piece of silver coin, with the inscription of Lucius Julius, son of Lucius, and surnamed Strabo. The epigram of the former is extant among the antiquities of Rome city, in this manner:

C. Julius, L.F. Caesar Strabo, Aed. Cur. Q. Trib. Mil. bis

XVIR AGR. Dand. ADTR. IVD. Pontif.

To conclude, I have met with writers, who reckoned also among the Julii certain Annales; which for mine own part verily, I could never yet light upon, in searching the records and chronicles. But in the eighth part of the Familiar Epistles (of Cicero) and namely in the [eighth] letter there, of M. Caelius unto Cicero, there is mention made among others, of one L. Julius, son of Lucius, Pomp. Annalis, where the writing (as I suppose) is not very certain and clearly acknowledged. For besides that the better corrected copies call him Villius (for Julius), Livy also hath expressly and plainly written in his fortieth book, that one Lucius Villius, a tribune of the commons, made a law which provided and ordained, in what year of men’s age that they might sue for every kind of magistracy, and be capable thereof. Whereupon unto that family was given this surname, to be called Annales. Thus far Livius. Hereunto may be added his moreover; that the kindred Julia is reckoned in the tribe Fabia (and not Pomptina), as we have noted in the fortieth chapter of Augustus. I am of opinion therefore, that safer it is to account the Annales among the Villii, and not the Julii. But thus much hereof, by the way, and as it were passing by; now proceed we to the rest.

In the lineage Julia, then, there was a family also of the Caesars. But what the reason should be of that surname, it is not certainly known; no more than who he was, that first bore the said surname. For before Caesar the dictator, and his father and
grandfather, there were Julii named Caesares. As for example, he who (as Livy
witnesseth in his 27th book) was in the second Punic war sent from the senate to
Crispinus the consul, about the nomination of the dictator. As for the term Caesares,
those usually the Roman tongue surnamed so, who were born, either by ripping their
mother’s womb, or with a bush of hair growing on their heads, or else grey-eyed. Some
add, moreover, the tale of an elephant slain in Africa, which the inhabitants there call
caesar; and upon that very cause the surname first befell unto Caesar the dictator’s
grand sire. But Spartanus and Servius, the authors hereof, are of the meanest credit and
authority. For not his progeny alone of all the Julii had this surname, but many others
besides of his house and kindred, both long before and also together with him.

Consuls before Julius Caesar the dictator there were, Sext. Julius, son of Gaius,
nephew of Lucius, together with Lucius Aurelius Orestes, in the year after the
foundation of Rome 596: also Sext. Julius, son of Gaius, nephew of Sextus, was
colleague with L. Marcius Philippus in the beginning of the Social war in the year after
the city’s foundation 662, and in the next year after, Lucius Julius, son of Lucius and
nephew of Lucius, bore the consulate with Pub. Rutilius Lupus. Neither before these
were any of the Caesars renowned or advanced to the highest office of state. Many years
after, out of the same family, Lucius Caesar, son of Sextus and cousin-german to that C.
Julius Caesar, who begat the dictator and attained only to the praetorship, who also died
at Pisae without any evident sickness, even as he did his shoes on in a morning, that L.
Caesar, I say, came to be consul.

Well, Caesar the dictator was born at Rome (when Gaius Marius and Lucius
Valerius Flaccus were consuls) upon the fourth day before the ides of Quintilis, which
month after his death was by virtue of the Antonian law called for that cause July. His
bringing up he had with his mother Aurelia, daughter of Gaius Cotta, and his aunt by
the father’s side Julia, wife of Marius. Whereupon grew the love that he took (a
patrician though he were) to the plebeian faction, and the hatred he bore to Sulla. The
Greek and Latin tongue, the precepts also and rules of oratory, he learned of M.
Antonius Gnipho, a Frenchman born. Who, being of excellent wit and singular memory,
courteous besides in his behaviour and of a kind and gentle nature, taught the Greek and
Latin grammar and rhetorical withal, first in the house of Gaius Caesar his father,
afterwards in his own; and got much thereby, such was the bounty of his scholars,
considering that he never compounded with them for any wages or reward. Now was
this Caesar wondrous docile and apt to learn, yea, and framed naturally for eloquence.
His Latin speech was trimly garnished (through domestic acquaintance) by his mother Aurelia, a woman that spoke the Roman tongue purely and elegantly: like as the Muciae, Laeliae, Corneliae, and other right honourable dames did, in whose families there arose orators of great name.

Comments
Now that we have studied the comparable sections of the *De Vita Caesarum*, we can make an assessment of how accurately Holland’s supplement represents Suetonius’ usual habits.

As we saw in the Introduction, the basic structure of the ancestry section in the *Life* of a Caesar of noble family—to which category Julius belongs—is best demonstrated by the *Galba*. The family tree of a noble Caesar begins with the paternal family’s name (*nomen*), including an explanation of the *cognomen* and the names of other branches of the *gens*, and often including the *origo* of the *gens*. The non-Roman *origo* of the family might be hundreds of years removed from the present, and still appear to be significant to the family identity. In the *Julius* the family’s connections with Alba Longa and Troy would certainly feature, since we know it was an element of Julius’ own career. Where relevant, a legendary genealogy appears at this point, and we would naturally expect to hear in the *Julius* of his famous connection with Venus.

A family tree then proceeds with a list of the forefathers, in chronological order, beginning with the first of the family to achieve fame or office, thus ennobling the line, or, more likely, the first of those with the *cognomen*. The women the ancestors married are not named until the last generation, the mother of the Caesar. The honours voted to the agnate ancestors are provided, in a concise tally when they are very abundant, and otherwise one by one in generational order. If the family was originally patrician, or created patrician later, this would be relevant; so too, any family connection with a certain cult or priesthood. As we saw in Chapter One, this list will establish the degree of nobility of the Caesar, categorising him not only as noble (as opposed to new), but precisely *how* noble and *how long* noble, and either patrician or plebeian.

At this point the name of the mother’s family is usually provided and its general importance summarised. As we saw in Chapter Two, the mother’s family is subordinate to the father’s, but it can contribute status when it is lacking in the paternal line, or when the maternal line is especially distinguished. The mother’s family does not appear in the
Caligula and Claudius, where only the father is eulogised; neither does it appear in the Nero, where the mother’s line might be taken as read in the Julius and the Tiberius. It does appear in the Lives of Tiberius and Galba, where the maternal line is at least as noble as the paternal. So we might expect the mother’s line (the Aurelii Cottaee) to appear in the Julius, since it had not been mentioned previously in the series, and was very noble. From the mother’s family, the Life moves on to the issue of the marriage, and then into the Life proper with the birth of the subject.

Holland’s reconstruction of this section is in some ways true to this structure, and in some ways a little liberal. On the one hand, the agnate ancestry is correctly this author’s focus, and the account of the other branches of the family is correctly present, though quite prolix. In this case we would expect Suetonius to begin either with the first consul in the family, the consul of 489 BCE, or with the first of the Iulii with the cognomen of Caesar, the praetor of 208 BCE, and certainly to provide an explanation of the origin of that name. The interest in consular ancestors is also Suetonius’; interpretation of the cognomen is probably as Suetonius would have it. As it is, Holland begins with the first Iulius (cos. 489) and catalogues several of the earliest Iulii, before eventually arriving at the Iulii Caesares. The connection with Aeneas and Alba Longa are all mentioned, but Venus is not mentioned, and I expect Suetonius might have made more of this, since the divine ancestry was relevant to Caesar’s own deification. The connections of the family do, of course, appear in the extant text at 6.1 as part of the laudatio for Julia.

On the other hand, a few aspects of Holland’s supplement seem out of place. First, it is rather a lot longer than a Suetonian introduction, with more detail on the more distant ancestors and less on the father of the subject, which would usually be the biographer’s focus. I suspect Suetonius would have abbreviated the catalogue of the earlier Iulii in favour of the Caesares, and given at least a few sentences over to the study of the father. Holland also neglects the character traits of ancestors, which we have seen (in Chapters Three and Four) are in fact a feature of all the Lives of nobly born Caesars. Based on the other Lives, one or two of his vices would probably have been found in Julius’ ancestors, such as perhaps an anecdote about paying bribes, or a tendency to arrogance and imperiousness. Earlier Caesars who had died violently (to

872 For the family tree, see Sumner (1971) and (1976).
whom Suetonius alludes at *Caligula* 60) might also have provided a paradigm here for Caesar’s end, as the suicide of L. Domitius prefigures Nero’s end at *Nero* 2.3. Caesar’s political inclination—an important theme of the *Life*—might also have been foreshadowed in *popularis* ancestors, such as his uncle Marius. Julius’ support for the plebs is part of the message Holland tries to convey in the description of the boy’s education, but (as we saw in Chapter Five) Suetonius would probably have incorporated this theme into the catalogue of ancestors, rather than analyse childhood and education. Holland gives a great deal more attention to Julius’ rearing and childhood influences than Suetonius ever does in another *Life*.

Holland is also rather more forthcoming with sources than Suetonius would have been, which reflects the different practices of the seventeenth-century historian and the second-century. Although the mother is rightly named we might have expected a little more information about her father and his line, particularly as they were a prominent family.

Based on the analysis I have here conducted of the ancestry sections of the *Lives*, Holland’s reconstruction of the beginning of the *Julius Caesar* is basically sound, but rather longer than a Suetonian introduction, and lacks the foreshadowing of themes that we see in other *Lives*. Holland has alluded to themes of the *Life* in the section on Julius’ rearing, attributing his love of the plebs and hatred of Sulla to his childhood with the daughter of Cotta and the wife of Marius. The author probably implies that the characteristics were learnt from Cotta and Marius themselves, but as we saw in this thesis, it is very unlikely Suetonius would have commented on Julius’ boyhood and education unless to demonstrate an innate trait, already present. The political themes Holland attributes to the boy’s education with his mother and aunt would, in Suetonius, more likely have been explained by their foreshadowing in a demagogic ancestor, perhaps amongst the Aurelii or Marcii Reges if an example was not forthcoming amongst the Iulii. Julius’ uncle, Marius, would have made a good paradigm, despite being related only by marriage. Cicero had referred to uncles and even fathers-in-law as models for behaviour, and since the ancestors in Suetonius are not always sources of traits but paradigms for behaviour, Marius would provide an acceptable and obvious model.

The other theme Holland drew out in this preliminary section was Caesar’s eloquence. An eloquent ancestor might have arisen in the family tree to explain Caesar’s
talent in that arena, but Holland’s interest in Caesar's *acquisition of eloquence* is un-Suetonian.

In comparison with the ancestry sections of the other *Lives*, this reconstruction is structurally sound, and conforms to the pattern laid out in the *Galba* of following the agnate line, cataloguing names and honours, and speculating on legendary origins, *origo*, and *cognomen*. However, this thesis has shown that the translator’s interest in the formation (rather than inheritance) of character traits is not the biographer’s. For the most part, Holland has attributed to Caesar’s education what Suetonius would have attributed to ancestry.
Bibliography


Alexander, M.C. (1990), *Trials in the Late Roman Republic, 149 BC to 50 BC* Phoenix Supplementary Volume 26 (Toronto).


Becker, G. (1862), *Quaestiones criticae de C. Suetonii Tranquilli de vita Caesarum libri VIII* (Memel).


———. (1991), ‘Candidates Defeated in Roman Elections: Some Ancient Roman “Also-Rans”’, TAPhA 81, i-64.
———. (1977), Structures et idéologie dans “Les Vies des Douze Césars” de Suétone (Bucharest; Paris).


Dalmasso, L. (1906), La grammatica di Svetonio Tranquillo (Turin).

D’Anna, G. (1954), Le idee letterarie di Suetonio (Florence).


Degrassi, A. (1954), Fasti Capitolini (Turin).


della Corte, F. (1967), Suetonio Eques Romanus (Florence).


Eck, W., A. Caballos, & F. Fernández (1996), Das Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone patre (Munich).


———. (2006), The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture (Chapel Hill).


Geer, R.M. (1929), ‘M. Aemilius Scaurus (Suetonius Nero ii.1 and Asconius on Cicero Pro Scauro 1)’, *CPh* 24, 292-94.


Leo, F. (1901), *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form* (Leipzig).


———. (1990), *Claudius* (London).


———. (1994), ‘Suetonius as “ab epistulis” to Hadrian and the Early History of the Imperial Correspondence’, *Historia* 43, 454-68.


Macé, A. (1900), Essai sur Suétone (Paris).


Mouchova, B. (1968), _Studie zu Kaiserbiographien Suetons_ (Prague).


Rogers, R.S. (1935), *Criminal Trials and Criminal Legislation under Tiberius* (Middletown, CT).


Shuckburgh, E.S. (1896), C. Suetoni Tranquilli Divus Augustus (Cambridge).
Smith, C., and A. Powell (eds.) (2009), The Lost Memoirs of Augustus (Swansea).
Stuart, D.R. (1928), Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography (Berkely).
Treggiari, S. (1969), Roman Freedmen during the Late Republic (Oxford).
———. (1976), Rome’s Debt to Greece (London).
Weaver, P.R.C. (1990), ‘Where Have All the Junian Latins Gone? Nomenclature and Status in the Early Empire’, Chiron 20, 275-305.


