



The Date of Composition of Suetonius' Caesares

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THE DATE OF COMPOSITION OF SUETONIUS' *CAESARES*

THE only external evidence we have of the date of publication of Suetonius' *Caesares* is the statement of Iohannes Lydus¹ that it contained a dedication to Septicius Clarus as praetorian prefect—a statement, incidentally, which is related to the correct nomenclature of the office, and not in any way to the persons concerned. This dedication, lost along with the opening chapters of *Iulius*,² must accordingly have been made some time during the years 119–22, before Septicius and Suetonius were dismissed from their respective posts, apparently for lack of respect to the empress.³ What is by no means certain is that the dedicatory epistle was attached originally to the whole series of Lives; nor that all the Lives were completed, far less published, while Suetonius was still employed as *ab epistulis* to Hadrian. Various arguments have been adduced from Suetonius' alleged use or alleged neglect of the *Annals* of Tacitus; but Syme is surely right in his conclusion⁴ that there is no positive evidence that Suetonius used either the *Annals* or the *Histories*, the latter of which were certainly available for his use. If the *Annals* were completed before the death of Trajan, as was suggested by Meister⁵ with much more cogent arguments than Syme⁶ gives him credit for, and certainly with more regard for the context of the vexed passage in *Ann.* 2. 61 than Syme himself accords it, then it must simply be argued that Suetonius recognized the double unsuitability of employing Tacitus for his own work. In the first place, borrowings from the *Annals* would require much more thorough assimilation than he normally allowed his material, if they were not to stand out from the non-descript style of the *Caesares*; and secondly he was well aware of the cavalier use Tacitus had made of sources which might more safely be used at first hand. But in our present state of knowledge Tacitus' dates can throw no light at all on Suetonius'.

For clues to this problem we can search only in the Lives themselves. Here the outstanding feature of significance is the disparity between the earlier and later Lives in respect of the use of documents. These are frequent in the first two Lives, especially the long and varied citations of Augustus' correspondence; and more of these occur in *Tiberius*, *Caligula*, and *Claudius* where those Lives overlap the lifetime of Augustus.⁷ And that is all. The single quotation from a letter of Nero⁸ is plainly taken from a narrative source which Suetonius was using, and in no way appears to come directly from the original (which was in all probability in Greek, considering the occasion of its dispatch, the nationality of the recipient, and the strange syntax of the Latin). Contrast the claims made particularly in *Tib.* 21. 3, *Cl.* 3. 2, and in the *Vita Horatii*. Again, the reference to the autograph of Nero's poems⁹ is such an isolated exception as to emphasize the complete lack of documentary sources elsewhere in the later Lives. Yet

¹ *de Mag.* 2. 6.

² Macé, *Essai sur Suetone*, p. 200.

³ S. H. A. *Hadr.* 11. 3; but see Crook, in *Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc.* clxxxiv, n.s., no. 4 (1956–7) pp. 18–22, for a suggested re-dating of this dismissal to 128 or later.

⁴ *Tacitus* (1958), pp. 781–2.

⁵ *Eranos*, xlvii (1948), 94–122.

⁶ *Op. cit.* 768–70.

⁷ Macé, p. 182.

⁸ *Nero* 23. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.* 52.

Suetonius plainly recognized the value of such evidence (cf. especially the use of a letter to clinch his argument about Caligula's birthplace in *Cal.* 8. 4), which, unlike orthodox historians, he did not mind quoting in full, Greek and all—a habit which he bequeathed to those unscrupulous forgers, the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*.

Some reason must be given for this change of method. Macé,¹ well aware of the problem, suggests that Suetonius simply lost interest in the subject; or else that he was pressed by Septicius to publish before he was ready, and was thus prevented from quoting the letters of Titus or the will of Vespasian. Neither of these suggestions is plausible or supported by any sort of evidence; nor is the unexplained statement of della Corte,² that where he could no longer make use of the correspondence of Augustus, as he did for the Lives of that emperor and his successor, he turned to the personal recollections of his grandfather, father, and himself. More credible might be the view that Hadrian took exception to his secretary's exploitation of the archives for such purposes and forbade further use of this material. But if it was the appearance, or private reading, of *Augustus* which drew his attention to Suetonius' practice, the ban would presumably have prevented the use of those extracts which have come down to us in the following Lives. What we have to account for is the fact that *Tiberius*, *Caligula*, and *Claudius* are well provided with quotations from Augustus' letters, but with nothing from those of the emperors in question.

The obvious explanation for this phenomenon (which Macé and others seem not to have been prepared to consider) is that Suetonius ceased to draw on the imperial correspondence because he ceased to have access to it: that is to say, because he was dismissed from his employment as *ab epistulis*, and thus was deprived of the use of such records as were the responsibility either of that bureau or of those of his previous imperial posts, *a studiis* and *a bibliothecis*. We do not know whether his dismissal involved Suetonius' withdrawal from the capital, perhaps to Hippo Regius in Numidia, which appears to have been his *patria*;³ but he appears to have been able still to carry out the research implied in *Vesp.* 1. 3–4 in the north-east corner of Samnium (perhaps familiar country, if Syme is right in suggesting⁴ that he had family connexions with Pisaurum). Nor is it clear what would have been the standing in the public libraries of a former director who had incurred imperial displeasure; nor how easy historical research would be to a writer deprived of the use of the libraries.

However this may be, it is important to consider the view of M. A. Levi,⁵ that Suetonius never drew on the imperial archives at all. The suggestion is made, and followed by della Corte,⁶ that the correspondence of Augustus, together with Antony's letters to him, was actually published—or at least that copies were available in the public libraries and presumably elsewhere. Antony's letters, as quoted in *Aug.* 69, indeed raise a grave problem, since they could hardly have been published with the approval of the recipient or his heirs, and can hardly have been perused except at the time of dispatch (possibly by Pollio, though he could hardly have published them), or by a subsequent researcher in the imperial files, who is more likely to have been Suetonius than anyone else. Augustus' letters, on the other hand, are quoted, or referred to, by

¹ pp. 183, 210–11.

² *Suetonio, eques Romanus* (1958), p. 154.

³ Marec and Pflaum, *Libyca*, i (1953), 214, with the doubtful concurrence of Syme,

p. 780.

⁴ p. 781.

⁵ *Divus Augustus* (1951), pp. xlv ff.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 168.

various later writers: Nepos¹ seems merely to have learnt from Atticus concerning the frequency of Octavian's letters to him; Tacitus² to have read a life of Virgil containing suitable extracts such as Macrobius³ quotes from Virgil's own letters (Tacitus' words, *testes Augusti epistulae*, no more prove the accessibility of the original letters than the following phrase, *testis ipse populus*, proves the Augustan plebs still to have been alive); the elder Pliny⁴ quotes letters which he does not appear to have seen; Charisius appears to be quoting from a work by Hadrian⁵ or by Suetonius himself,⁶ as does Priscian;⁷ Macrobius⁸ is always dubious when he professes to quote directly. Gellius⁹ claims to have read in his own home a book of Augustus' letters to the young C. Caesar; and this is confirmed by Quintilian,¹⁰ indicating that such a book was indeed in circulation. Suetonius never quotes from this collection, presumably for the very reason that it was easily available to the public. Quintilian elsewhere¹¹ claims to have studied the autograph of Augustus' letters, *quas sua manu scripsit aut emendavit*. These were clearly not at the disposal of the general public; but there is no reason to suppose that the official professor of rhetoric and imperial tutor would have had much difficulty in perusing the same archives which were available to Suetonius *ex officio*. It is hypercritical to question Suetonius' own statements¹² about his inspection of these autographs: *litterae ipsius autographae ostentant . . . ; notavi et in chirographo eius illa praecipue: non dividit verba . . . saepe non litteras modo sed syllabas aut permutat aut praeterit*. These details must be derived from somebody's inspection, and presumably from that of Suetonius. In the latter passage, however, he does not claim to have broken Augustus' code for private letters, but in fact derives his knowledge of it, as Levi saw, from Augustus' own statement in a letter *ad filium*, perhaps to be found in the book of letters *ad C. Caesarem*, and known to us from a quotation by Isidore,¹³ who took it from some work of Suetonius, whether an *epimetrum* to the *de viris illustribus*, as Reifferscheid suggests,¹⁴ or from a distinct work *de notis litterarum*. Dio¹⁵ is also aware of this code, though in a different context, for he declares that it was employed in letters to Agrippa, Maecenas, and other close friends. Suetonius' oblique reference to the letter in *Augustus* rather confirms his practice of refusing to quote verbatim material which was available elsewhere, even in his own published works. Levi's doubts thus appear quite unjustified.

A further point of Levi's is also invalid: that Suetonius himself, in his *Vergil* and *Horace*, quotes extracts from other letters of Augustus at the time when he was not yet employed in the palace; and that therefore these letters must have been accessible outside the archives. This argument always depended on our ignorance of Suetonius' early career; and the epigraphic evidence available since 1950¹⁶ suggests that his appointment as a *studii*, leading on to that of a *bibliothecis*, is to be dated a number of years before the death of Trajan. It is doubtful whether the *de viris illustribus* belongs before Pliny's death, in

¹ *Atticus* 20. 1-3.

² *Dial.* 13. 2.

³ *Sat.* 1. 24. 11.

⁴ *N.H.* 18. 94, 139, 21. 9.

⁵ *C.G.L.* i. 129, ii. 209 K., Malcovati, *Augusti Operum Fr.* (1947), p. 14, no. xviii, n.

⁶ Cf. Roth, pp. 303-4.

⁷ *C.G.L.* x. 43 K., Roth p. 305.

⁸ *Sat.* 2. 4. 12.

⁹ *N.A.* 15. 7. 3.

¹⁰ *Inst.* 1. 6. 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 1. 7. 22.

¹² *Aug.* 87, 88.

¹³ 1. 25. 2.

¹⁴ *Suetonii Reliquiae*, pp. 137, 419.

¹⁵ 51. 3. 7.

¹⁶ Marec and Pflaum in *Contes Rendus de l'Acad. des Inscr.* (1952), pp. 76-85, *Ann. ép.* (1953), no. 73.

order to account for his exclusion from among the orators, or after it, to explain the divergency from his account of his uncle's death.¹ In any case, throughout his employment in the palace Suetonius will have had access to the archives; in which he presumably studied the wills of Augustus and Tiberius,² in both of which he noticed the differences of handwriting of the two emperors and their secretaries—a point which would hardly have been mentioned in any ordinary historical source or been comprehensible except to a man who had himself worked extensively in the imperial secretariat and could compare documents of all sorts. Levi objects to his use in *Aug.* 101. 2 of the phrase *heredes instituit* as improper legal language; but Gaius himself, whom Levi quotes as authority for this ruling, admits that such language was still actually in common use in his own day. In any case Suetonius does not say whether he is reproducing Augustus' original words.

Thus the implication of the facts is clear enough: that Suetonius undertook the composition of the *Caesares* at some time during his tenure of office on the Palatine, and, while the archives were not particularly rich in material for *Iulius*, soon found in the files of Augustus' letters a unique source of information, not only for that emperor but for his three successors. Having already formed the project for the lives of the Julio-Claudians at least, he made excerpts from the letters to illustrate points for the following emperors; and at the same time made observations on the wills of Augustus and Tiberius. It was probably at this time that *venere in manus meas pugillares libellique* of Nero's poems written in his own hand;³ which he similarly noted for future use in connexion with a well-known controversy concerning that emperor's originality. With the material at his disposal he completed the excellent life of Augustus, which was then published, probably together with *Iulius*, both introduced by the dedication to Septicius Clarus. If Hadrian disapproved of the use which his secretary had made of the official files, he may have shown it at this juncture; and it is possible that for a short time Suetonius continued to compile material for *Tiberius* without further use of the archives. More probably his abandonment of this source of material coincides with his dismissal from office. With the excerpts already collected he was able to enrich the next Lives, so far as they went; and he had already carried out the competent piece of research on the birthplace of Caligula which stands out so conspicuously from the rest of that Life. In no other context does he cite the *Acta*, nor use authorities against one another with such relevance. Admittedly for many of the main controversies in the later Lives documents could hardly have established the truth: for example, the manner of Claudius' poisoning,⁴ the origin of the Fire in 64,⁵ the one sin of Titus;⁶ but for many other problems documentary evidence would have been of the greatest value, especially for the sketchy biographies of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius.

But lack of documents is not the only feature of the later Lives. With the end of Augustus a striking decline sets in, with a growing tendency to generalizations and to the replacement of proper names which must have appeared in the literary sources (we continually know them from Tacitus or Dio) by vague descriptions or even generic plurals. Such a practice is virtually unknown

¹ Macé, pp. 68 ff.; della Corte, op. cit., pp. 94-96.

² *Aug.* 101. 1, *Tib.* 23. 76.

³ *Nero* 52.

⁴ *Cl.* 44. 2.

⁵ *Nero* 38. 1.

⁶ *Tit.* 10. 2.

in *Iulius*, where all individuals are named, except for certain freedmen,¹ whose names were probably never recorded, and Artemidorus the soothsayer, who appears as *obvio quodam*,² perhaps following one of the sources indicated by Plut. *Caes.* 65 as not stating the identity of Caesar's would-be helper. Similarly in *Augustus*, apart from the unspecified catalogues of victims in 13. 1-2 and 15 (of whom the *patrem et filium* of 13. 2 are known from Dio³ as the Aquilii Flori) and the consular's wife in Antony's libel in 69. 1, who was probably never named, there are virtually no anonymities but the *vir praetorius* in 100. 4, who is known from Dio⁴ to have been Numerius Atticus and is the only individual whose identity is patently obscured in the whole Life.

With *Tiberius* Suetonius evidently begins a deliberate policy of concealing names and often multiplying individuals into vague plurals. Examples of the latter tendency are the *immaturae puellae* in 61. 5 (Seianus' daughter), *praesidibus* in 32. 2 (Rectus, according to Dio⁵), a series of other known persons in 32 and 35, even the *provincias gravioris caeli* in 36 (specified by Tacitus and Josephus as Sardinia); while individuals are left unnamed in 24. 1, 27, 58 (two), 61. 4, and 61. 6, not to mention others whose identity we have lost altogether. In *Caligula* and *Claudius* plurals are harder to find: Caligula's two champions in *Cal.* 14. 2, the actors in *Cl.* 21. 2, perhaps the elderly generals in *Cl.* 24. 3, who presumably represent simply Curtius Rufus;⁶ but there are a great number of unnamed individuals, many of them identifiable from extant sources.⁷ In *Nero* the *matronas anus* of 11. 1 refers to Aelia Catella;⁸ *quaestoriae dignitatis et nonnullis ex equestri ordine* of 15. 2 to Nerva and Tigellinus;⁹ *hieronicarum* in 24. 1 to Pammenes;¹⁰ the subject of *affirmant* in 28. 2 is almost certainly Fabius Rusticus;¹¹ *quidam* and *nonnulli* in 36. 2 are Subrius Flavius and Sulpicius Asper respectively, as both Tacitus and Dio make clear; and notorious individuals left unnamed are Montanus in 26. 2 and Caesellius Bassus in 31. 4, among many others. After this, examples decrease in number again: most distinctive are the *legiones* in *Gal.* 10. 2 (VII Galbiana), *quidam tradunt* in Otho 7. 1 (Cluvius Rufus¹²), and probably *praestantes poetae* in *Vesp.* 18 (apparently Saleius Bassus¹³); with such unnamed individuals as Phoebus in *Vesp.* 14 and the Vestals' lovers in *Dom.* 8. 4.

A few of these anonymities might be explained in terms of tact, as Tacitus¹⁴ claims to spare the memory of descendants still alive. Thus the omission of Nerva's name¹⁵ might still be discreet twenty years and more after his death, although Tacitus has no such scruples, nor over many others whose identity Suetonius conceals. And there can be no such reason for glossing over Seianus' daughter¹⁶ or the Attalids.¹⁷ Sometimes the effect is simply to add weight to some charge against the emperor in question (e.g. many of the victims of tyrannical prosecutions), or to multiply into a tendency what was in fact a single example of cruel or depraved behaviour. That the latter is Suetonius' main purpose is suggested by the number of gross generalizations which must refer to single

¹ *Iul.* 2. 48.

² *Ibid.* 81. 4.

³ 51. 2. 5-6.

⁴ 56. 46. 2.

⁵ 57. 10. 5.

⁶ *Tac. Ann.* 11. 20.

⁷ See especially *Cal.* 27-29, *Cl.* 24-26.

⁸ *Dio* 61. 19. 2.

⁹ *Tac. Ann.* 15. 72.

¹⁰ *Dio* 63. 8. 5.

¹¹ *Tac. Ann.* 14. 2.

¹² *Plut. Otho* 3. 2.

¹³ *Tac. Dial.* 9. 5.

¹⁴ *Ann.* 14. 14. 5.

¹⁵ *Nero* 15. 2.

¹⁶ *Tib.* 61. 5.

¹⁷ *Nero* 28. 1.

occasions: such as *Tib.* 62. 4 *nemo punitorum non . . .*; *Cal.* 30. 1 *non temere in quemquam nisi . . .*; *Cl.* 33. 1 *nec temere unquam . . .*; *Nero* 32. 4 *nulli delegavit officium ut non . . .*; *Vesp.* 16. 2 *procuratorem rapacissimum quemque . . .*; and a whole series of patent exaggerations involving such conjunctions as *quotiens*¹ in the middle Lives, contrasted with a number of clauses of the same form from the earlier period,² including three from those chapters of *Caligula* which fall in the lifetime of Augustus, and two from Suetonius' own manhood,³ all clearly describing genuine habits.

Taking these features of the Lives from Tiberius to Vespasian in isolation, it would be possible to argue that they simply reflect a shortcoming of the sources available for that period, which obliged Suetonius to generalize if he was to come to any conclusions about the subjects of his biographies. But there is no sign of such a deficiency in Tacitus; and Tacitus, of course, was not hampered in his search for materials. When we compare the growth of generalization and vagueness with the disappearance of documents for the same Lives, it can only be inferred that the deficiency in Suetonius' materials, and his inept attempt to disguise it, is similarly the result of his loss of many sources of information which were still available to Tacitus. Whether Suetonius was actually banished from the city for a time, or was simply not *persona grata* in the palace archives and the public libraries, it is apparent that he was restricted to the main literary authorities and to personal recollections,⁴ including his own,⁵ and had no chance to continue the systematic exploitation of records which made *Augustus* so rich a work. He cannot have been altogether satisfied with the falling-off of his standards.

Now despite the extremely impersonal manner in which Suetonius composes his biographies, there are a few indications of his attitude to contemporary events. He refers specifically to Hadrian (possibly to Trajan) in *Aug.* 7. 1, concerning his gift of a statuette to the emperor; and perhaps by implication in *Dom.* 23. 2 *abstinentia et moderatione insequentium principum*, which ostensibly refers to Nerva and Trajan. So far as subtler references to contemporary issues are concerned, the search is made harder by our comparative ignorance of Hadrian's reign. But we do know of three matters which must have been considered delicate during the early years of the reign: (1) the adoption of Hadrian on the death of Trajan; (2) the execution of the four consulars; (3) the abandonment of Trajan's conquests beyond the Euphrates.

1. Syme argues⁶ that Tacitus' account of the death of Augustus and its sequel 'may seem to hint and foreshadow the accession of Hadrian'. Taken seriously, this suggestion involves the view that *Annals* 1 was radically revised after its original completion; for even Syme's most special pleading cannot establish a date for this later than Trajan's death, and the weight of evidence still supports a considerably earlier date. It also involves the view that Dio's extremely invidious account of Tiberius' accession⁷ is largely based on Tacitus, whom for the most part, as Syme himself sees,⁸ he does not know at all. An impartial reader cannot doubt that what Tacitus and Dio have in common, they take from a common source: that is, one which published the rumours of

¹ *Tib.* 19, *Cal.* 33, 35. 2, 36. 2, 55. 1, *Cl.* 8, 22, 42, *Nero* 15. 1, 27. 3, 28. 2.

² *Iul.* 26. 3, *Aug.* 41. 1, 45. 1, 56. 1, 77, 82. 2, 88, *Cal.* 3. 2, 4, 7.

³ *Dom.* 2. 1, 21.

⁴ *Cal.* 19. 3, *Nero* 29, *Tit.* 3. 2, *Dom.* 17. 2.

⁵ *Nero* 57. 2, *Dom.* 12. 2.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 481-8.

⁷ 56. 30 ff.

⁸ pp. 688-92.

poisoning by Livia, etc., long before they could be inspired by the death of Trajan. The most important feature in this common account is the double tradition concerning Tiberius' presence at Augustus' death-bed. Tacitus says:¹ *neque satis compertum est spirantem Augustum apud urbem Nolam an exanimem reppererit. acribus namque custodiis domum et vias saepserat Livia, laetique interdum nuntii vulgabantur donec provisus quae tempus monebat simul excessisse Augustum et rerum potiri Neronem fama eadem tulit.* Dio² has: ἡ γὰρ Λιουία . . . συνέκρυψεν αὐτὸν (his death) μέχρις οὗ ἐκεῖνος ἀφίκετο. ταῦτα γὰρ οὕτω τοῖς τε πλείοσι καὶ τοῖς ἀξιοπιστοτέροις γέγραπται· εἰσὶ γὰρ τινες οἱ καὶ παραγενέσθαι τὸν Τιβέριον τῇ νόσῳ καὶ ἐπισκήψειν τινὰς παρ' αὐτοῦ λαβεῖν ἔφασαν. Some elements in Tacitus' version are certainly coloured by accounts of the death of Claudius, especially the use of *Neronem* for Tiberius;³ and it requires excessive subtlety to suppose that the writer also intended a reference to the death of Trajan. But the important point is that both stories were already in the common source.

What is remarkable, then, in Suetonius' accounts of Augustus' death, is that he gives no sign that he was aware of the version accusing Livia of dissimulating the death. In *Aug.* 98. 5 he asserts flatly that Tiberius was recalled from his journey (not yet from Illyricum, as Tacitus states) and closeted with Augustus *diu secreto sermone*. In *Tib.* 21. 1 he gives virtually the same words as Tacitus: *spirantem adhuc Augustum repperit fuitque una secreto per totum diem*. He is prepared, in the long section which follows, to quote variant authorities, including Augustus' letters, concerning the relationship between Augustus and his successor—one of the most satisfactory fruits of his research during the period when the archives and libraries were fully available—yet there is not a word of the tradition which might be held to recall the dubious circumstances of Hadrian's succession. And this is exactly what one would expect. No imperial servant would venture to refer to such a dangerous topic during the first years of the reign; although to Tacitus, writing several years earlier from more or less the same sources, it had been open to give both stories, and to improve the latter with a cross-reference to the universally accepted crime of Agrippina. Since 117 tact has become compulsory.

But this is not the last doubtful death-bed that Suetonius describes. By the time he comes to describe the death of Tiberius,⁴ he quotes conflicting rumours considerably more freely than Tacitus⁵ or Dio;⁶ and on the death of Claudius,⁷ where again an empress is deeply concerned in the succession and commonly accused of complicity in her husband's death, he not only admits (as Tacitus and Dio do not) the possibility of an imperial death remaining an unsolved mystery, but so expresses what followed (*mors eius celata est, donec circa successorem omnia ordinarentur*) as to recall very closely the prevalent gossip in circulation about Trajan's death, as Dio⁸ had it from his father: ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Τραϊανοῦ ἡμέρας τινὰς συνεκρύφθη ἢ ἢ ποίησις συνεκφοιτήσοι. This cannot be accidental; and although it is very far from being an attack on Hadrian, it is a striking decline from the tactfulness which marked the earlier work. It is no longer the language of a loyal court official anxious not to offend a captious master.

2. The next passage goes farther. In *Tit.* 6. 1 Suetonius describes the early savagery of Titus: *siquidem suspectissimum quemque sibi . . . haud cunctanter*

¹ *Ann.* 1. 5. 5.

² 56. 31. 1.

³ Martin, in *C.Q.* xlviii (1955), 123–8.

⁴ *Tib.* 73, 2, *Cal.* 12. 2–3.

⁵ *Ann.* 6. 50.

⁶ 58. 28.

⁷ *Cl.* 44. 2.

⁸ 59. 1. 3; cf. *S.H.A.Hadr.* 4. 10.

oppressit. in his A. Caecinam consularem, vocatum ad cenam ac vixdum triclinio egressum, confodi iussit; sane urgente discrimine, cum etiam chirographum eius praeparatae apud milites contionis deprehendisset. This is all straightforward, except the habitual exaggeration, since only Eprius Marcellus appears to have suffered besides Caecina;¹ and it is noteworthy that the *Epitome* of Victor,² while quoting the same source as Suetonius for the words *adhibitum cenae, vixdum triclinio egressum*, gives quite a different charge, of adultery with Berenice, as if that were originally the sequel in the source in question. But Suetonius' following words are more remarkable: *quibus rebus sicut in posterum securitati satis cavit, ita ad praesens plurimum contraxit invidiae, ut non temere quis tam adverso rumore magisque invitit omnibus transierit ad principatum.* In the first place, on his own account the execution was not a precaution against future dangers, but a measure to put down an immediate threat to his father, apparently with every justification. But more significant is the comparison implied with other unpopular accessions. There is no indication in Suetonius that any other of his Caesars was faced with unpopularity at the beginning of his reign, even Tiberius. Yet he does not say simply *nemo*: the phrase *non temere quis* implies quite clearly that one such emperor might be found if the reader thought carefully. At any time during the first ten years or so of Hadrian's reign, when the execution of the four consulars had aroused deep disquiet about the emperor,³ the biographer's words could hardly have been more unfortunately chosen.

3. Thirdly, in *Nero* 18 Suetonius uses language which cannot be accounted for simply by its own context: *augendi propagandique imperii neque voluntate ulla neque spe motus unquam, etiam ex Britannia deducere exercitum cogitavit, nec nisi verecundia, ne obtractare parentis gloriae videretur, destitit.* Syme⁴ observes that this is peculiar, and remarks shrewdly that 'the passage has more relevance for Hadrian than for Nero'. He does not mention just how odd the language is. Suetonius appears to speak of extending the empire as a regular imperial obligation—an idea which he suggests nowhere else, and which is not particularly appropriate in criticism of Nero, however little in fact came of his projects for expansion in the East. He suggests that Nero was concerned for Claudius' *gloria*, in complete opposition to his assertions in *Nero* 33, which evidently cover Nero's attitude from very early in the reign; and the only moment when a withdrawal could have been contemplated was on the news of the disaster in 61,⁵ long after any pretence of *pietas* had been abandoned. Indeed, if Nero then wished to abandon Britain, the accepted *μωπία* of Claudius would have been a welcome pretext. Finally, the use of *parentis*, not *Claudii* or *patris*, deliberately leaves the door open for interpretation in terms of another adoptive father.⁶ There need be no reference to Hadrian's supposed withdrawal from part of Britain;⁷ but at a time when the emperor had declared his intention to turn his back on territorial expansion and to concentrate on preserving peace, this suggestion that an emperor had a self-evident obligation to extend the empire and to respect the military prowess of a *parens* is certainly not without relevance to a policy on which Hadrian was particularly touchy.

¹ Dio. 65. 16. 3.

² 10. 4.

³ S.H.A. *Had.* 7. 3, Dio 69. 2. 5, Syme, pp. 244-5, 485-8.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 490, n. 6.

⁵ *Nero* 39. 1; cf. Syme, l.c., for Stevens's

argument for 58 and Birley's answer.

⁶ For Suetonius' use of *parens* cf. *Iul.* 7. 2, *Vit.* 14. 5, *Tit.* 8. 3, *Gram.* 16, never simply as a synonym for *pater*.

⁷ Syme, p. 490.

These three points appear to exhaust the sum of indiscretions which Suetonius allows himself. References to Nero's philhellenism,¹ love of music and poetry,² and pederasty³ can hardly be read in this connexion. At all events, there is no need so to explain them, as there is in the case of the two latter passages considered above; and they are shared by all our sources. If Syme⁴ is right in arguing that Suetonius' words in *Tit.* 10. 2 *Domitia iurabat* show that he wrote them after this lady was dead, perhaps as late as 130, then imperial pederasty in particular will indeed have become a delicate point. But the tense of Suetonius' verb more probably refers to the period before 122 when he was in a position to hear gossip about the old dowager,⁵ or perhaps to a time when she was still to be seen about in court society. Nothing in the Lives can be held to constitute a positive criticism of Hadrian, apart from the remarks in *Aug.* 86 on Augustus' dislike of obscurity and archaism in style, both of which were typical of Hadrian,⁶ as of many of his contemporaries, always excepting Suetonius himself.⁷ Henderson⁸ goes too far in speaking of 'a very notable revenge on Autocracy, if not on Hadrian himself'. There are signs merely of a petty vindictiveness, such as are to be expected of the disgruntled polymath in retirement.

All the clues thus combine to the same conclusion: the cessation of documentary evidence, the affectation of vagueness over details, the decline of discretion in connexion with contemporary issues. Suetonius' dismissal can be placed after the publication of *Iulius* and *Augustus* and the assembly of some of the material for the early part of *Tiberius*, *Caligula*, and *Claudius*. Whether these Lives were completed immediately afterwards or laid aside in despair, to be resumed after an interval, we do not know. But there can be no doubt that these and their successors would have been more on a level with the first two Lives if the author had not proved deficient in *reverentia domus aulicae*.

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¹ *Nero* 12. 3, etc.

² *Ibid.* 20-21.

³ *Ibid.* 28.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 780.

⁵ For this use of the imperfect cf. *Dom.*

17. 2, of a witness to Domitian's murder.

⁶ S.H.A. *Hadr.* 16. 2-5.

⁷ Macé, pp. 56-57, D'Anna, *Le Idee letterarie di Suetonio* (1954), pp. 94 ff.

⁸ *Life and Principate of Hadrian*, p. 23, n. 5.