

SULLA AND THE ‘PROPHECY’ OF CAESAR’S DESTRUCTION OF THE *OPTIMATES* (SUET. *IUL.* 1.3)

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The extant life of Julius Caesar by Suetonius begins with the dictator Sulla predicting that Caesar will destroy the *Optimates*, *i.e.*, undo all that Sulla himself had achieved. In presenting Sulla’s forecast Suetonius uniquely in examples of divinatory material in the *Lives* appears to be ambiguous as to its divinatory status. This paper examines how Suetonius secures credibility for this piece of ‘prophecy’ and considers the role of Sulla’s words in the economy of the *Life*.

Keywords: Julius Caesar; Suetonius; L Cornelius Sulla; divination.

The first extant chapter of Suetonius’ *Diuus Iulius*,¹ his biography of Julius Caesar, provides a very dense narrative of the vicissitudes of the young Caesar in his conflict with L Cornelius Sulla. Incurring the dictator’s wrath for refusing to divorce his wife Cornelia, daughter of the late Cinna, he was considered to be a political opponent (*diuersarum partium habebatur*) and fled for his life. Intervention by (some of?) the Vestal Virgins and Mamercus Aemilius Lepidus Livianus and C Aurelius Cotta led to the following:

satis constat Sullam, cum deprecantibus amicissimis et ornatissimis uiris aliquamdiu denegasset atque illi pertinaciter contenderent, expugnatum tandem proclamasse — siue diuinitus siue aliqua coniectura — uincerent ac sibi haberent, dummodo scirent eum quem incolumem tanto opere cuperent quandoque optimatum partibus, quas secum simul defendissent, exitio futurum: nam Caesari multos Marios inesse.

It is an acknowledged fact that Sulla, after he had for a long time refused the pleas of men who were very dear friends and of very great distinction and after they stubbornly kept on pressing his (Caesar’s) case, was finally won over and announced, either by divine inspiration or by some inference, ‘You win and he’s yours, so long as you know that the one whose safety you desire so much will someday destroy the Optimate cause, which you have defended together with me; for in Caesar there are many Mariuses’.²

¹ For a sound discussion of the missing beginning of the *Life*, see Garrett 2015.

² Text is that of Kaster 2016. The translation is mine; individual choices are justified below.

In the 1940s Syme could write that this was ‘a notorious but neglected passage’.³ Indeed Butler and Cary, in their excellent commentary on Suetonius’ *Diuus Iulius*, devoted a mere five and a half lines to the passage.⁴ More recently Scantamburlo provides useful comment on two phrases, but I am unaware of any substantial treatment.⁵ I propose first to examine the passage in some detail, somewhat like an historical and philological commentary, so as to show what precisely Suetonius is saying, with particular emphasis on the apparent dilemma that he poses his reader through the alternative explanations presented in *sive ... sive*. I will then discuss why Suetonius introduces this episode and how it functions in the broader economy of the *Life* as part of the divine over-determination that is fundamental to his understanding of Caesar’s career and that of all his Caesars.⁶

Suetonius begins with a prominently positioned phrase that, for him at least, supports the historicity of the episode, *satis constat* (it is an acknowledged fact).⁷ Of Suetonius’ thirteen examples of *constat* eight are combined with *satis* (*Tib.* 49.1, *Cal.* 3.1, 59, *Cl.* 15.4, *Vi.* 7.2, *Dom.* 1.1, 10.5) and in five of these the combination is positioned at the beginning of the sentence (*Tib.* 49.1, *Cal.* 59, *Vi.* 7.2, *Dom.* 1.1, 10.5). The combination in this position introduces material over which the reader needs to be reassured because of its shocking or unusual nature: Tiberius’s rapacity forced Lentulus Augur to commit suicide and name the emperor his sole heir; the custodians of the gardens where Caligula’s corpse had lain crudely buried, experienced nightmares until he was interred properly; Vitellius was so short of money that he had to move his family into rented accommodation and pawn one of his mother’s earrings; Domitian left an incriminating, handwritten note in which he offered himself sexually to Clodius Pollio, and the only conspirators from Antoninus’ revolt whom he pardoned were

³ In a paper written sometime after 1945, see Syme 2016:65.

⁴ Butler and Cary 1927:44.

⁵ Scantamburlo 2011. *Diuus Iulius* falls outside the timeframe of the excellent, detailed study of divine signs in Suetonius, that is, Vigour 2001.

⁶ I am not interested here in the historicity of the episode, although that has attracted a range of opinions, e.g., a typical *post eventum* creation, a useful narrative expedient to create a dramatic link between Caesar and Sulla (Giardina 2010:39). Nor is it possible to date Sulla’s prophecy precisely: the persecution of Caesar must follow Sulla’s arrival in Rome in early November 82 BC after the Battle of the Colline Gate (1 November) and perhaps even after his punitive expedition to Praeneste (App. *BCiv.* 1.93.428–95.444). How long Caesar evaded capture before the intervention of his intercessors was required is uncertain. This episode may belong late in 82 BC or early in 81 BC.

⁷ For this meaning, see *TLL* 4.533–536.

two shameless *impudici* ('homosexuals').⁸ In the context of *Diuus Iulius*, a *Life* in which he deploys a wide variety of sources, Suetonius is clearly aware of the issues of hostility towards Caesar on the part of many of his contemporaries.⁹ His use of *satis constat* signals his scholarly satisfaction with the material he is about to present rather than authorial distance from it.¹⁰

Deprecantibus ... contenderent shows Sulla facing forceful and persistent pleas from those who could exercise the greatest influence on him, his closest friends and those of the highest distinction in the state. The two named advocates for Caesar, Mamercus Aemilius Lepidus Livianus and C Aurelius Cotta, to some degree fit this bill,¹¹ but Suetonius' two superlatives *amicissimis* (very dear friends) and *ornatissimis* (of very great distinction) may hint at more distinguished individuals.¹² As will become clear with the sequel, these unnamed individuals are

⁸ Where *constat* or *satis constat* are less prominent the information confirmed is less remarkable or the need to assure the reader is not as pronounced: Augustus was generally considered to have his passions under control (*Aug.* 72.1); Germanicus' physical and mental qualities were unequalled (*Cal.* 3.1); in a trumped-up case against an *eques* Claudius admitted the testimony of prostitutes (*Cl.* 15.4); the children of condemned conspirators were killed *en masse* at a single meal (*N.* 36.2); the elderly Augustus prophesied that Galba would become emperor (*G.* 4.1).

⁹ See e.g., Wallace-Hadrill 1983:61, 63–64, Baldwin 1983:108–122 and Gasco 1984:458 and 463–465. The most detailed studies are Strasburger 1938 and 1953.

¹⁰ Although we can suspect, and in one instance see in his text itself (*Tib.* 1.1), that there were differing versions between which Suetonius is choosing, it is important to recognize that he has also decided not to enter into a scholarly discussion. For expressions such as *constat*, see Pauw 1980.

¹¹ Mam. Aemilius Lepidus Livianus (*RE* i. 564) was Sulla's son-in-law, helped preserve Sulla's property against the Marians, was praetor in 81 and in the same year became a *pontifex* through Sulla's expansion of the priestly college by his *lex Cornelia de sacerdotiis*. Although the Cotta in question has been identified (Russo 2015:104) as L Aurelius Cotta (*RE* ii. 2485–2487), cos. 65, he is the youngest of three brothers who each reached the consulship, the least close to Sulla and, despite his later adherence to Caesar (*Suet. Iul.* 79.3), no more than a quaestor during Sulla's dictatorship. More likely is C Aurelius Cotta (*RE* ii. 2482–2484), cos. 75, who had returned from exile with Sulla in 82, secured an aedileship in 81 (Ryan 1995:99) and, like Aemilius Lepidus, was made a *pontifex* in 81. The tribune Macer describes him as being 'from the heart of the Sullan faction' (*Sall. Hist.* 3.34 McG). See Halpern 1964:46–48.

¹² Cicero claims that P Sulla interceded with his father to save many senators and *equites* (*Sull.* 72; but see Berry 1996:282); Plutarch gives a similar role to Sulla's wife Metella (*Sull.* 6.12). *Ornatissimis* may suggest individuals who had held the consulship or praetorship: it is believed that only four were alive when Sulla returned in 82 (see Steel 2013:130) and of these none is a likely candidate; L Marcius Philippus, who had given

to be identified as leading *Optimates* and are to be held responsible for Caesar's ultimate triumph over the *Optimates*.

To present a Sulla who does not want to spare Caesar, but who in the end relents, Suetonius uses a powerful metaphorical image in *expugnatum*: the dictator has been besieged and has fallen to the besiegers.¹³ The predominant picture of Sulla's use of his civil war victory commemorates his cruelty against those who had opposed him, but examples of clemency also appear.¹⁴ In the more expansive narratives of Appian and Plutarch, these examples do not necessarily celebrate any virtue, but highlight the more frequent displays of harshness.¹⁵ Suetonius deliberately avoids the term *clementia*, not because it would reflect on Caesar's later highly controversial application of the virtue (*cf. Iul. 75*), but because he reserves it for his imperial exemplars.¹⁶ His account does, however, align with other sources in locating the credit for Sulla's few instances of leniency with the

up his previous allegiance to Marius, was the most influential and active, but no link between him and Caesar is known. Of those who were consuls or praetors during Sulla's dictatorships only M Minucius Thermus (*RE xv. 1966–1967*) has a known connection with Caesar (Suet. *Iul. 2*). If he did advocate for Caesar, perhaps the latter's serving on Thermus' staff in Asia immediately after his sparing by Sulla was the dictator's way of making Caesar's sponsor take personal responsibility for his good behaviour.

¹³ See *TLL* 5.2 1810 ll. 35–38. In the two other appearances of the verb in Suetonius, two good emperors are overcome by women: Augustus capitulates to the pleas of Livia (*Tib. 21.2*) and Vespasian gives in to a persistent paramour (*Ve. 22*). By contrast the noun *expugnatio* is not used metaphorically.

¹⁴ Clemency towards prominent Roman individuals is particularly rare, L Cornelius Scipio Asiaticus (Diod. fr. 38.16; Liv. *Per. 85*, App. *BCiv. 1.85.387–86.388*, Plut. *Sull. 28.1–3*) and P Cornelius Cethegus (App. *BCiv. 1.80.369*). See Dowling 2000 and Thein 2014.

¹⁵ See Thein 2014:166–168.

¹⁶ Suetonius' use of *clementia* as a category of evaluation looks back to Cicero and also recognizes the contemporary value placed on the virtue, as seen in oratory and the Hadrianic coinage (*cf. Plin. Paneg. 3.4; cf. Noreña 2001:156–158*), and the distinctions that had to be drawn between appropriate and inappropriate claims made by his emperors. Augustus initiated a policy of *clementia* only after Actium, when he had completed his mission of revenge for Caesar, and in relation to those guilty of plotting against him (*Aug. 51*). His one reference to Tiberius' *clementia* (*Tib. 53.2*) is appropriately ironical. Nero's early claim that he would rule like Augustus (*N. 10.1*) is exemplified only in his expressed desire to be unable to sign death-warrants. Sycophantic celebration of Vitellius' *clementia* is shown to be worthless (*Vi. 14.2*); Domitian's real *clementia* was short-lived (*Dom. 10.1*) and his later protestations of the virtue a rhetorical pose (*Dom. 11.2*).

intercessors, a point well made by Thein.¹⁷ Comparison with the language of Plutarch (*Caes.* 1.4: ἐνίων λεγόντων ὡς οὐκ ἔχει λόγον ἀποκτινύναι παῖδα τηλικούτων; ‘some were saying that it made no sense to kill so young a boy’) in his version of this event and Dio (43.43.4: ἐξαιτησαμένοις — ‘pleading’) for a similar incident shows how Suetonius has emphasized the duration and persistence of Caesar’s intercessors.

Proclamasse simply indicates an audible, possibly loud, statement by Sulla that could be recorded; in itself the word does not identify the statement as prophetic.¹⁸ That comes in the next phrase, introduced parenthetically within the period, *siue diuinitus siue aliqua coniectura*.¹⁹ The two alternatives here are crucial for understanding how Sulla’s words operate within Suetonius’ presentation of Caesar: both relate to the (potential) divinatory status of the saying.

Cicero’s treatise *De diuinatione* is the best text from which to illustrate the decision that faced Suetonius and his predecessors in relation to apparent prophecies made by historical figures. In the two-book dialogue Cicero presents arguments for and against the existence of divination, which he defines in the introduction (1.1) as ‘the pre-perception and knowledge of things to come’, *praesensionem et scientiam rerum futurarum* (1.1).²⁰ In Quintus Cicero’s presentation of the argument for the existence of divination a key distinction that is drawn, which goes back at least to Plato and was basic to Stoic arguments, is between natural and artificial divination.²¹ The former, exemplified by dreams and

¹⁷ 2014:176, 179. Cf. Memnon (*FGrH* 434 F 22). Thein is also right on the real motivation for Sulla’s clemency (2014:176): ‘his actions follow a clear, utilitarian logic, for he asserts his superiority, reinforces the loyalty of the intercessors, and establishes bonds of gratitude and obligation with the recipients of his clemency’.

¹⁸ Of Suetonius’ fifteen uses of *proclamo* eight lead on to a quotation in *oratio recta* (*Iul.* 78.2, *Aug.* 65.4, *Tib.* 24.1, *Cl.* 21.6, *N.* 47.2, *G.* 20.1, *Vi.* 14.3, *Dom.* 12.3) seven to varieties of *oratio obliqua* (*Iul.* 1.3, 75.2, *Aug.* 51.3, *Cal.* 27.4, *Cl.* 15.4, *O.* 10.1, *Ve.* 16.3). No special religious or other sense is attached to the use.

¹⁹ The phrase is ignored by Butler and Cary and discussed only as an example of asymmetry by Scantamburlo.

²⁰ Quintus’ reformulation of this at 1.9, *diuinatione, quae est earum rerum, quae fortuitae putantur, praedictio atque praesensio* (‘divination, which is the prediction and presentiment of those things that are thought to occur by chance’) and Marcus’ misquotation of that at 2.13 *diuinationem esse earum rerum praedictionem et praesensionem, quae essent fortuitae* (‘divination is the prediction and presentiment of those things that occur by chance’) are important within the dialogue but not for the purposes of this note.

²¹ *Diu.* 1.11–12: *duo sunt enim diuinandi genera, quorum alterum artis est, alterum naturae*. See, e.g., Wardle 2006:126–127 and Schultz 2014:71–72.

prophecy, required the intervention of no human interpreter as the god(s) communicated directly with the recipient.²² The latter, exemplified by augury, astrology and the three areas of expertise of the *haruspices*, rely on the skill (*ars*) of human interpreters to give a meaning to a sign, which itself was divinely sent. Quintus' argument makes use of the two terms found in Suetonius: the adverb *diuinitus* is applied to lot oracles (1.34) and to natural divination *tout court* (1.66: *inest igitur in animis praesagitio extrinsecus iniecta atque inclusa diuinitus*; 'there is in the soul a power of presaging which is imposed from outside and which is kept in by divine power'), and the adverb *diuinus*, combined with nouns such as *instinctus*, *inflatus*, *adflatus*, *incitatio* and *permotio*.²³ *Coniectura*, a calque of the Greek σύμβολη, literally 'a throwing together', is a juxtaposition of two things and hence an inference from the one to the other and the *-ura* ending foregrounds the processual element.²⁴

The first of Suetonius' alternatives relates straightforwardly to Cicero's divinatory categories: of the types of natural divination available, prophecy and dreams, the former is that most obviously relevant — Sulla was not asleep, nor made reference to any dream.²⁵ We would have to concede that Suetonius gives us no clue as to the presence of *furor* which attends the most canonical instances of oracular prophecy that Cicero treats, but in the climactic, contemporary example of predictive prophecy that Quintus presents, the fivefold prediction of Coponius' oarsman in 48 BC (1.68), there is also no indication of physical manifestations. If Sulla's words are an instance of prophecy, then they came to him directly from the gods (*diuinitus*).

The application of *aliqua coniectura* is less straightforward. In both arguments of *De diuinatione* there is recognition that in everyday experience dreams were interpreted by 'experts',²⁶ but here there is no indication of a dream let

²² Cf. 1.4: *et cum duobus modis animi sine ratione et scientia motu ipsi suo soluto et libero incitarentur, uno furente, altero somniante* ('there are two ways in which spirits are moved by their own force and unfettered impulse and not by reason or knowledge — by raving and dreaming').

²³ 1.12: *aliquo instinctu inflatuque diuino*; 1.34: *instinctu diuino adflatuque*; 1.38: *adflatus*; 1.66: *instinctus*; 1.89: *mentis incitatione et permotione diuina*.

²⁴ See Wardle 2006:165. Zellmer 1976:180–182.

²⁵ From the fragments of his *commentarii* it seems that Sulla believed in, or was prepared to present himself as believing in, the prophetic power of dreams. See Harris 2009:180 and Noble 2014: *passim*.

²⁶ E.g., 1.45, 2.121, 123, 134. As far back as Plautus (*Poen.* 444), *coniector* was used to designate professional dream-interpreters. In the *Lives* Suetonius includes only one instance where dream-interpreters were consulted (*Iul.* 7). *Coniectores* appear more frequently for artificial divination (*Aug.* 95, *Cal.* 57.2, *N.* 6.1, *Vi.* 18.1).

alone of an interpreter. It is necessary to look to another part of Quintus Cicero's argument, probably drawn from the Peripatetic Cratippus, which sets out another kind of 'prediction':²⁷

*Rarum est quoddam genus eorum, qui se a corpore auocent et ad diuinarum rerum cognitionem cura omni studioque rapiantur. Horum sunt auguria non diuini impetus, sed rationis humanae; nam et natura futura praesentiunt, ut aquarum eluiones et deflagrationem futuram aliquando caeli atque terrarum; alii autem in re publica exercitati, ut de Atheniensi Solone accepimus, orientem tyrannidem multo ante prospiciunt; quos prudentes possumus dicere, id est prouidentes, diuinos nullo modo possumus.*²⁸

Rare is that class of men who call themselves away from the body and are possessed by an all-consuming concern and enthusiasm for the contemplation of things divine. The auguries of these do not derive from divine inspiration but from human reason. On natural evidence they predict the future, for example, floods and the conflagration of heaven and earth which is to come sometime. **Some practised in statesmanship, as we understand of the Athenian Solon, foresaw the rise of tyranny far in advance.** We can call these men prudent, that is, they take forethought, but we can in no way call them divine.

So, carefully distinguishing these skills from divination, Quintus acknowledges that experienced statesmen could forecast, for example, future deterioration of the political landscape. The example cited bears some examination, as it parallels so closely the foreknowledge attributed to Sulla. A late fourth/early third century BC papyrus (*P Oxy.* 664), which is plausibly identified as a fragment of Heraclides Ponticus' *Περὶ ἀρχῆς*,²⁹ a dialogue set in Pisistratid Athens, offers a tantalisingly brief glimpse of the story: ἐπεὶ δὴ προλέγων Ἀθηναῖοις ὅτι Πισίστρατος ἐπιβουλεύει τυραννίδι πίθειν αὐτοῖς οὐκ ἦν ('[Solon], when telling the Athenians in advance that Pisistratus was plotting to become tyrant, was unable to persuade them'). *προλέγων* may simply mean 'warning' or have a more pregnant sense of 'foretelling'. Plutarch (*Sol.* 29–31.1) offers the most detailed account of the relationship between Solon and Pisistratus, at the heart of which is Solon's rebuke to Pisistratus for staging an attempt on his life to win popular support, his

²⁷ 1.111. See Wardle 2006:374–375 and Schultz 2014:184.

²⁸ For Cicero's changing understanding of *prudencia* and *prouidentia*, especially as applied to Roman politics, see Traversa 2015 and Santangelo 2013:56–65. Traversa argues for the influence of Panaetius on Cicero's conception of a *prouidentia* that was not *diuinatio* at work in this part of *De diuinatione* (2015:328–329).

²⁹ Dorandi 2009:15–19.

opposition to a proposal put to the popular assembly to vote Pisistratus a bodyguard and finally, once the proposal had been passed, remorseful words to the people who had voted for it and to the rich who had not opposed it. Plutarch's Solon knew Pisistratus well, and tried to counsel him not to become a tyrant; and Plutarch himself plays down any prophetic dimension to Solon's warnings.³⁰ Diodorus has Solon warn the assembly only *after* the tyranny had been established (9.20.1), but adds a section introduced by a distancing λέγεται (it is said) of an elegiac poem by Solon that had predicted the approaching tyranny (9.20.2). This same poem is quoted by Diogenes Laertius (1.49–50), who acknowledges derivation from Sosicrates and explicitly credits Solon with foreknowledge, προαισθόμενος τὸ ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ διεκώλυσεν ... τὰ δὲ περὶ τῆς τοῦ Πεισιστράτου τυραννίδος ἐλεγεία προλέγοντος αὐτοῦ ταῦτα ἦν ('perceiving in advance the move against him he attempted to prevent it ... these were the elegiac lines relating to the tyranny of Pisistratus in which he made his prediction').³¹ The latest and briefest of the three extant Greek versions, found in Aelian's *Varia historia* (8.16), credits Solon only with a suspicion in relation to Pisistratus' intentions and only at the stage where he was requesting a bodyguard.³² As far as one can contextualize the proposal for a bodyguard within Pisistratus' career, it seems that it occurred around 561 BC, shortly before he seized the acropolis and became tyrant.³³ So, it seems all the Greek versions, while maintaining that Solon foresaw what Pisistratus would become, do not present this unambiguously in the language of divination, but as the warning of a wise statesman. This, then, fits well with Quintus' categorization.³⁴

One consequence of Suetonius' method of composition under rubrics (*divisiones*) is that material can be separated which, if put together, could shed light on the individual items.³⁵ In his detailed discussion of Caesar's physical

³⁰ Ferreira Leão 2008:158–163.

³¹ Fr. 9W. For scholarly rejection of any specific prophecy against Pisistratus, see Mülke 2002:202–203 and Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010:309–311.

³² Σόλων ὁ Ἐξηκεστίδου γέρων ἤδη ὦν ὑπόπτειε Πεισίστρατον τυραννίδι ἐπιθήσεσθαι, ἡνίκα παρήλθεν ἐς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ ἤτει φρουρὰν ὁ Πεισίστρατος ('in his old age Solon the son of Execestides suspected that Pisistratus was about to institute tyranny when the latter entered the Athenian assembly and asked for a bodyguard').

³³ See Rhodes 1993:191–199. For Solon's opposition, see Goušchin 2016:101–113.

³⁴ What the more detailed Greek versions do is show that, in terms of time at least, Solon's prophecy did not have far to look ahead; Quintus' *multo ante prospiciunt* more readily fits a period of years rather than weeks or months.

³⁵ See Mouchová 1968.

appearance and mode of dress Suetonius notes a peculiarity that clearly Caesar adopted from youth (45.3):³⁶

etiam cultu notabilem ferunt: usum enim lato clauo ad manus fimbriato nec umquam aliter quam <ut> super eum cingeretur, et quidem fluxiore cinctura; unde emanasse Sullae dictum Optimates saepius admonentis, ut male praecinctum puerum cauerent.

They say that he was remarkable even in his dress: for he wore a broad-striped tunic with frilly sleeves that reached his hands and was never without a girdle over the top of it, and a rather loose-fitting one at that. From this came the saying of Sulla, as he often warned the *Optimates*, that they should beware the ill-girt boy.

As the son of a senator the young Caesar was entitled to wear the tunic with the two broad purple stripes that denoted senatorial status, but he altered it scandalously.³⁷ The traditional tunic by the time of the late Republic was sleeveless or had short sleeves, but Caesar wore not just sleeves to his wrists in the Greek fashion but also added frills. Long sleeves alone were a mark of effeminacy (Gell. *NA* 7.12.1), drawing criticism from Scipio Aemilianus as censor against P Sulpicius Gallus who affected the same style in the 140s BC (Gell. *NA* 6.12.5), but the frills were a further outrage of dandification.³⁸ Combining a belt with the senatorial tunic was no longer the norm in Suetonius' time (Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.138), but had been so in the Republic; but again Caesar wore his tunic more loosely girt than was acceptable, another indication of a rejection of masculine norms.³⁹

³⁶ Macrobius preserves an extract of Cicero's wit (*Sat.* 2.3.9: *praecinctura me decepit*; 'the cincture deceived me') that is contemporary evidence of Caesar's style observed in the 40s.

³⁷ Olson 2017:19.

³⁸ Olson 2017:142; Paterson 2009:129 suggests that Sulla's rebuke indicates that Caesar did not respect the demanding taboos attached to the *flamen Dialis* by wearing his loosely tied cincture and this could be used against him in formally deposing him from the role. If, however, Caesar was not technically *flamen Dialis* because the *pontifex maximus* had not confirmed him on the grounds that the nomination had been made by Cinna (and Marius) (see, e.g., Liou-Gille 1999), he would not have been bound by the taboos. If, however, Caesar conducted himself as if he were *flamen Dialis* with his loose cincture being a way of (arguably) fulfilling the requirements, we can see that Caesar was in fact acting out a form of opposition to Sulla.

³⁹ Olson 2017:143–144. Cf. Macrobius' comment on Cicero's witticism quoted above in note 36: *iocatus in Caesarem, qui ita toga praecingebatur ut trahendo laciniam velut mollis incederet, adeo ut Sulla tamquam providus dixerit Pompeio: Cave tibi illum puerum male praecinctum* ('he mocked Caesar who was wearing his toga in such a way

What Caesar was doing ostentatiously and provocatively was to reject the norms of the *Optimates*, to show his opposition to Sulla.⁴⁰ Dio goes further than Suetonius in reporting that Sulla wanted to have Caesar killed for his loose-girt tunic:

τὸ δ' οὖν χαῦνον τοῦ ζώματος αὐτοῦ ὁ μὲν Σύλλας ὑπετόπησεν, ὥστε καὶ ἀποκτεῖναι αὐτὸν ἐθέλησαι, τοῖς τε ἐξαιτησαμένοις εἰπεῖν ὅτι ‘ἐγὼ μὲν χαριοῦμαι τοῦτον ὑμῖν, ὑμεῖς μέντοι καὶ πάνυ τοῦτον τὸν κακῶς ζωννύμενον φυλάττεσθε’.

Sulla was suspicious of the looseness of his girdle, so much so that he had wished to kill him, and said to those who pleaded for Caesar: ‘For my part, I will grant him to you, but you must be thoroughly on your guard against this ill-girt fellow’ (Dio Cass. 43.43.4).

In the light of this, returning to Sulla and his foreknowledge, it could be a rational inference drawn from Caesar’s ostentatious rejection of *Optimate* norms and stubborn adherence to his Marian connections. Thus it could have no divine origin.

Suetonius’ alternatives leave the reader with a choice and with no clue from the author as to which he finds more plausible.⁴¹ The fact that large amounts of divinatory material appear in the *Lives* and the way that Suetonius authorially frames that material show that he accepts that the gods can influence human beings and nature to produce prophecies or signs, but he does not attribute this particular prophecy to the gods. His refusal cannot be explained by doubts as to the moral excellence of the prophet, as he presents with no qualification Tiberius’ prophecy relating to Caligula (*Cal.* 11). He also presents the paradigmatic Augustus as able to predict that Galba would destroy the rule of the Julio-Claudians (*G.* 4.1).

The reader then moves on to the actual words of Sulla’s prophecy, which Suetonius has chosen to render in *oratio obliqua*, as does Plutarch, οὐκ ἔφη νοῦν ἔχειν αὐτούς, εἰ μὴ πολλοὺς ἐν τῷ παιδί τούτῳ Μαρτίους ἐνορῶσι (*Caes.* 1.5: ‘he said they were mad if they didn’t see many Mariuses in the boy’). Notably Suetonius presents a far more dramatic, powerful and pointed message than

that by dragging its hem he walked as if he were effeminate; even Sulla, as if he were prescient, told Pompey, “Beware that badly draped boy”). It has been argued that Suetonius carefully constructs his whole description of Caesar’s physical appearance and his style of dress to highlight a fundamental passivity in Caesar (Dubuisson 2004).

⁴⁰ Corbeill 2004:134–135 (with some caution Starbatty 2010:100: ‘eher abwegig erscheint die Interpretation von Corbeill’). Kraus 2005:109 aptly notes that Caesar’s very different behaviour with the pirates who had taken him prisoner reveals that his dress was an affectation — he knew the effect of his costuming and exploited it.

⁴¹ Appian (*BCiv.* 1.104) leaves his readers with the same dilemma in another instance of Sullan foresight (see below).

Plutarch, some of the force of which has been recognized by Scantamburlo. *Uincerent*, which I would render in direct speech as 'you can have your victory' or perhaps even more colloquially 'OK, you win!' or 'Have your victory', is deliberately ironic (in Suetonius' view at least). I think this preferable to Their's characterization of Sulla as a 'petulant tyrant'.⁴² *Sibi haberent* can be plausibly interpreted as playing on the well-known formula that was frequently used when a husband divorced his wife, *tuas res tibi habeto*.⁴³ Extant examples of the combination can suggest either a colloquial tone (Plaut. *Bacch.* 502, Sen. *Ben.* 6.23.8) or one more solemn indicating formal renunciation (Cic. *Phil.* 2.69, Quint. *Decl.* 262, Apul. *Met.* 5.26). The latter is the case here: Sulla is 'washing his hands' and formally transferring responsibility for Caesar to the unnamed leading *Optimates*.⁴⁴ To this he adds an outright warning: the consequence of the decision will be that Caesar would someday destroy the *Optimatum partes*. This description is undoubtedly anachronistic: *Optimates* was not a word used in this sense (as far as we can tell) until Cicero started using it as shorthand for his coalition of 'all good men' in the mid-50s BC;⁴⁵ Sulla is more likely to have spoken of the *causa nobilitatis*.⁴⁶ However, Tiersch's discussion of the semantics involved in the use of *Optimates* would suggest that in the context where one *nobilis* was speaking to other *nobiles* about the shared interest of their group, *Optimates* carried the correct connotations and so its use would make sense to the reader.⁴⁷ The most apothegmatic element of Sulla's prophecy, as seen by the very close parallel of Suetonius' and Plutarch's versions, *Caesari multos Marios inesse* and πολλοὺς ἐν τῷ παιδὶ τοῦτῳ Μαρίου (Caes. 1.4), is the comparison that Sulla made between Caesar and Marius. Sulla's comparison goes beyond any idea of Caesar simply as

⁴² 2014:168. Cf. Sulla's 'Let him triumph' in relation to Pompey, see in note 44.

⁴³ So Scantamburlo 2011:109. For the legal status of the phrase, see Treggiari 1991:446–447.

⁴⁴ In Macrobius' account of Cicero's witty explanation for choosing the wrong side in the civil war (*Sat.* 2.3.9) Sulla issues his warning to Pompey. This would fit nicely with the story that after resisting Pompey's demand for a triumph and Pompey calling on Sulla to recognize that he was 'the rising sun', Sulla conceded with words of similar resignation 'let him have his triumph' (see Plut. *Mor.* 203e, *Pomp.* 14.3).

⁴⁵ See Stone 2005 for a theory (based on Festus 290L) that the term has a political sense back to the late fourth century BC and that Cicero revived and reformulated the idea in *Pro Sestio*.

⁴⁶ For *causa nobilitatis* cf. Cic. *Rosc. Amer.* 135, 138. Only two uses predate Cicero, both from drama relating to well-born women (Ennius *Alexander* 1.34 Jocelyn; Afranius 56 Daviault). For a useful discussion of Cicero's changing use of the term, Lapyrionok 2008, esp. 28–36.

⁴⁷ Tiersch 2018, esp. 61–63.

Marius' relative,⁴⁸ but suggests that the slaughter of many *nobiles* for which Marius was responsible in his final reign of terror will be eclipsed by Caesar.⁴⁹ Even if, as it turned out, Caesar became renowned for his *clementia*, many died on the various battlefields of the civil wars or took their lives rather than live under Caesar, or be spared by him. Sulla can be thought by Suetonius' reader to have been correct — detail is less important than dramatic assertion.

As we have seen, Suetonius gives no explicit answer to *how* Sulla made his forecast, whether it was through divine inspiration or the application of the forethought that marked statesmen, but it seems beyond question that he accepts that the forecast was made and that the forecast was correct, at least so far as the influence and power of the *Optimates* as a group was greatly weakened.⁵⁰ In presenting Sulla as possessing a certain prescience, Suetonius offers what Thein calls 'a well-established trope'.⁵¹ What perhaps needs greater emphasis are the variations within the trope to highlight what is distinctive to individual authors. Dio offers two contrasting perspectives in different parts of his history: a Sulla who made an unusual error for him in trusting L Cornelius Cinna to act responsibly as consul of 87,⁵² and another Sulla who in his dictatorship took Caesar's distinctive way of wearing the tunic as indicative of danger.⁵³ But, of course, Sulla did nothing to prevent his forecast coming true.

Appian relates an incident that befell Sulla immediately after the ceremony in which he abdicated his dictatorship (*BCiv.* 1.104):

ἀναχωροῦντα δ' ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν μόλις ποτὲ μειράκιον ἐπεμέμφετο καὶ οὐδενὸς αὐτὸ ἀπερύκοντος ἐθάρρησε καὶ λοιδορούμενον αὐτῷ μέχρι τῆς οἰκίας ἐλθεῖν. ὁ δὲ κατὰ τῶν μεγίστων ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ πόλεων ἄκρος ὄργην

⁴⁸ In the lost beginning of the *Diuus Iulius*, either in the genealogy of his family or in the narrative of Caesar's early years, the marriage of his aunt to Marius will have appeared (cf. Garrett 2015) and it is likely that the hand of Marius in Caesar's appointment as *flamen Dialis* (cf. Vell. Pat. 2.43.1) was confirmed.

⁴⁹ For the massacres of 87, see conveniently Santangelo 2016:91–93.

⁵⁰ It is perhaps important to note that in key respects Caesar did not become a Marius: Suetonius and the primary sources in general celebrate Caesar's *clementia*, e.g., Velleius Paterculus 2.56.3.

⁵¹ Thein 2006:238–249.

⁵² 30–35 102.4: αὐτός τε οὖν, καίτοι δεινότατος ὢν τὰς τε γνώμας τῶν ἀνθρώπων συνιδεῖν καὶ τὰς φύσεις τῶν πραγμάτων συλλογίσασθαι, πάνυ ἐν τούτῳ διεσφάλη, καὶ πόλεμον τῇ πόλει μέγαν κατέλιπεν ('[Sulla] himself, although very skilful at seeing through men's intentions and calculating the nature of things, erred greatly in this instance and bequeathed the city a great war').

⁵³ See Dio Cass. 43.43.4 quoted above.

γενόμενος εὐσταθῶς τὸ μειράκιον ἤνεγκε καὶ τοσοῦτον ἐσιῶν ἐς τὴν οἰκίαν, εἴτε ἀπὸ ξυνέσεως εἴτε καὶ τύχῃ καταμαντευόμενος τῶν ἐσομένων, ἀπεκρίνατο, ὅτι κωλύσει τὸ μειράκιον τὸδε ἕτερον ἄνδρα ἀρχὴν τοιάνδε ἔχοντα ἀποθέσθαι. Καὶ Ῥωμαῖοις μὲν οὕτω γενέσθαι συνηνέχθη μετ' ὀλίγον, Γαίου Καίσαρος τὴν ἀρχὴν οὐκέτι μεθέντος.

Once when he was going home a mere boy kept reviling him and, because nobody restrained this behaviour, he became emboldened to follow Sulla right to his house, casting insults at him. Sulla, who had been quick to anger against the greatest of men and cities, calmly put up with the boy and as he went into his house said, either by his intelligence or by chance surmising the future, 'This young man will prevent any future holder of such power from laying it down'. This saying was shortly confirmed to the Romans, for Gaius Caesar never laid down his power.

In a way that is strikingly similar to Suetonius, Appian offers his readers two alternative explanations for Sulla's ability to foresee the future, *ξυνέσις* or *τύχη*, neither of which implies any divinatory element. That idea comes only in *καταμαντεύομαι*, which merely describes the fact of Sulla's forecast.⁵⁴ Sulla foresees another dictator with the range of powers that he had been granted who would not, as he did, step aside once the work has been completed; the role he assumed in a state of emergency will become permanent.⁵⁵

To return to Suetonius, I conclude by asking why he includes this episode and how it might function in the *Life* as a whole. Within the extant imperial *Lives* signs from the gods play a prominent role relating to imperial births, accessions and deaths, a role that is more prominent than, for example, in Livy's extant Republican narrative if we think of the scale of divinatory material compared to the length of the overall narrative.⁵⁶ Nor is Suetonius' use of signs characterized by notes of scepticism and distancing, unlike Livy and Tacitus. As a consequence of the loss of perhaps a quaternion of the archetype we do not know what divinatory material may have appeared foretelling the future of Caesar before or at his birth. We know such material existed and can be reasonably certain that Suetonius included some of it.⁵⁷ Its function is to show the reader that Caesar's rise was

⁵⁴ Appian uses the compound *καταμαντεύομαι* only twice in his extant works, here and at *Lib.* 77; in both cases the force of the prefix seems to be that the forecast was negative (and correct).

⁵⁵ The boy is not a young Julius Caesar, although Appian has been understood to mean that; cf. Wilson 2017:493.

⁵⁶ For a detailed study, see Vigourt 2001.

⁵⁷ See Garrett 2015 and Wardle 2020.

predestined and to foreshadow something of the character of his supremacy. In the extant part of the *Life*, when Caesar was on the first rung of his magisterial career, he received a dream that was interpreted as meaning world rule (*Iul.* 7) and led to him accelerating his pursuit of power. At the key moment when Caesar went to war against the *Optimates* in 49 and was pausing briefly to contemplate whether to pursue a course that would mean fighting, he was given an unambiguous divine assurance that war was called for: a figure of superhuman size and beauty seized a trumpet from one of Caesar's soldiers, blew the call for battle and led Caesar's forces across the Rubicon into Italy (*Iul.* 32). For some modern readers this can only have been an event deliberately staged by Caesar, in the manner of Pisistratus who had Athena accompany him as he took control of Athens.⁵⁸ In Suetonius, however, who is the only source for this divine epiphany, there is no hint that it is anything but a miraculous manifestation. If it is Suetonius' own invention, as some suggest,⁵⁹ then it speaks with unique power about Suetonius' readiness to justify Caesar's seizure of sole power. But even if the sign was related in works now lost to us (with or without suggestions that it was concocted by Caesar), the fact that Suetonius includes it is still significant for his belief in the power of divine signs. The other material of this kind that he includes reinforces the picture: Caesar's horse was born with strange hooves (*Iul.* 61) that were interpreted as a sign of world rule; in March 44 BC the Sibylline Books authorized the use of the title 'king' (*Iul.* 79.3); over a period of several months seven signs of his assassination were given (*Iul.* 81.1–3); and in July 44 BC at games staged in his memory the gods sent a comet (*Iul.* 88) that was held to prove his divinity. Throughout the *Life*, then, Suetonius offers progressive revelation of Caesar's ultimate power and destiny, sealed by posthumous confirmation of his newly conferred divine status.

Within this broader matrix of signs we can see the role of Sulla's prediction. At the crucial moment of having escaped death at the hands of Sulla's agents and being at the mercy of the great enemy of his sponsor and relative C Marius, Suetonius chooses to include Sulla's prediction. What is significantly different from the other divinatory material in the *Life* is that, by representing alternative explanations of the nature of the prediction, Suetonius does not make it easy for the reader to assign a divinatory status to it: if *diuinitus*, then Sulla was under the influence of an external power and was prophesying; if *aliqua coniectura*, then Sulla was applying the evidence of his senses and rationally extrapolating from them. One might argue that the reader with hindsight knows that that prediction came true, so perhaps technicalities of divinatory status do not matter; yet, for

⁵⁸ E.g., Bicknell and Nielsen 1998 and Canfora 2007:144–145. For the idea that the story originates from a drama staged in 44, see Wiseman 1996.

⁵⁹ E.g., Santangelo 2013:236–237.

Suetonius, as one who accepts the power of signs and is familiar with the technical distinctions of Roman divination, perhaps the issue is how to establish credibility for a prediction by a renowned politician as opposed to a seer or other traditional source of prophecy. One way he does this, as we have seen, is to begin the account with *satis constat*, and his next distinctive authorial addition, which is the two alternatives (*siue diuinitus siue aliqua coniectura*), bolsters the credibility of the account by showing the reader that the author is aware that the status of Sulla's prediction may be disputable and that he is not trying to dupe the reader into a casual acceptance of something untrustworthy.⁶⁰

So the destruction of *Optimate* rule and the institution of the new rule of the Caesars is foretold, by the very Sulla who did much to restore and secure *Optimate* rule and wanted to eliminate the threat he saw that Caesar posed, and it is facilitated by leading *Optimates*. Whether the gods gave Sulla special prophetic prescience or his acute political senses enabled him to divine the danger of Caesar, Suetonius sets before his readers the destiny of the Roman political system.⁶¹

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⁶⁰ For this as a Suetonian technique, see Duchêne 2016.

⁶¹ I thank Dr Jeffrey Murray (UCT) and Alwin-Jon Hills for reading an earlier draft of this article; all remaining errors are to my account.

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