

NOTES ON THE TEXT OF SUETONIUS *DIVUS IULIUS*

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The article makes critical comments on and proposes alternative readings to Kaster's 2016 edition of Suetonius' *Divus Iulius*.

Key words: Suetonius, *Divus Iulius*, Kaster, textual criticism.

In 2016 Robert Kaster produced a new *Oxford Classical Text* of Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum* and an accompanying volume in which he explained the editorial decisions he had made. Both are exemplary works of scholarship, well received and a firm basis from which other scholars must work.¹ As Franz Dolveck (2017) has written, to dissent from Kaster requires the dissenter to provide as much evidence as Kaster has done.

In preparing a commentary on Suetonius' *Divus Iulius* I have had to examine the text carefully from a historical and philological perspective as well as from a palaeographical perspective, which sometimes leads me to suggest readings that differ from Kaster. The following presents justifications for these disagreements and comments on other passages.

19.1

Igitur cum Bibulo consul creatur

So he was elected consul with Bibulus.

The reading of the manuscript's *creatur* must be understood as an historic present, normally a dramatizing, intensifying device that Suetonius avoids in his narratives in which perfect tenses predominate. Neither Ihm (1907) nor Kaster questions *creatur*, but Sage (1979:25–6) rightly notes the very few examples of indisputable historic presents in the *Lives*. He considers the possibility that *igitur* signals that we have the conclusion to a piece of research by Suetonius and that the present marks this as such. Rightly, however, he emphasises that this would remain an isolated example in the *Lives*. The 11th century manuscript G, however, which has a shared heritage with *M* and had at least one bold reader who confronted textual errors (Kaster 2016: 7–8), reads *creatus*. Sage (1979:25 n.27) notes that *esse* is

¹ Kaster 2016 and 2016a. Reviews have been uniformly positive as to his analysis of the manuscript tradition with only minor hesitations expressed by Dolveck (2017); Briscoe (2018:284–5) essentially believes Kaster is too radical in accepting scholarly emendations and filling *lacunae*. The overwhelming view, however, is that Kaster has produced the new standard text (cf. Ohst 2017:1048; Stok 2020:253; Salazar 2018:128; Wardle 2018:105–7).

frequently omitted in Suetonius, so it seems that he lends his support to *creatus* (*esse*). Because the phrase is isolated from the next verb of which Caesar is subject (*adsectatus est*), a main verb is required, hence *creatus est* would be better.²

19.2

eandem ob causam opera ab optimatibus data est ut prouinciae futuris consulibus minimi negotii, id est siluae callesque, decernerentur

For the same reason the Optimates ensured that the future consuls would be decreed provinces of the least significance, namely woods and drove-roads.

Willems (1883:576 n.5) and Rafferty (2019:188) consider *id est siluae callesque* to be a gloss, while Kaster and all modern editors retain *M*'s reading which includes this explanatory clause. Fraenkel too, who considered several *id* clauses in Suetonius to be glosses, had no qualms about this instance.³ Halbertsma (1896:169) proposed transposing *siluae callesque* and *minimi negotii*, making the latter part of the explanatory clause on the grounds that explanation of uncommon terms usually follow the term being explained.⁴ This would certainly fit better with Suetonius' wider practice with explanatory clauses (cf. *Iul.* 56.6 x 2, *Aug.* 88.1, 97.2, *Tib.* 57.1, *Galb.* 3.1).

20.2

Nonnulli urbanorum, cum quid per iocum testandi gratia signarent, non Caesare et Bibulo, sed Iulio et Caesare consulibus actum scriberent, bis eundem praeponentes nomine atque cognomina

Some wits, when they were jokingly setting their seals to certify a document, wrote that it had been done not in the consulship of Caesar and

² The perfect participle followed by *est* occurs very frequently in Suetonius: 301 times, of which 54 times as the final two words of a sentence. A perfect participle appears as the last word 29 times, mostly in typical pendent clauses. On two occasions only, it seems, has an *est* been suppressed: *Ner.* 48.3, *Vesp.* 4.3.

³ As revealed by the handwritten comments in his edition of Ihm 1907 in the Sackler library Oxford. That Fraenkel supports the deletion of two other *id est* clauses (*Aug.* 88.1, 97.2), following Polak (1882:10), makes his support for *id est siluae callesque* the more notable.

⁴ The meaning of *siluae callesque* has been keenly debated for a century, see most comprehensively Rich 1986:505–521. Mattingly 1969:505–511 has argued that *Gallica* at *Claud.* 24.2 be emended to *callium* to provide another attestation of the phrase, but Kaster is probably correct not to adopt it into his text.

Bibulus but in that of Julius and Caesar, writing down the same man twice by name and surname.

As evidence of Caesar's effective one-man rule of Rome in 59, Suetonius includes the witty practice of some Romans of using two parts of Caesar's nomenclature and omitting any reference to his consular colleague Bibulus. The final explanatory clause quoted above (*bis...cognomina*) was considered a gloss by Lipsius (according to Oudendorp) and was deleted by Torrentius,⁵ but Kaster follows Ihm in retaining it. As Suetonius' twenty-two other uses of *praepono* bear the meaning 'put in charge of', I follow Torrentius in excising the whole phrase. Cassius Dio, when faced with the harder problem of explaining the witty practice to his Greek readers,⁶ and probably sharing the same source as the biographer, should not be less ponderous than Suetonius, even if one suspects the eye of the *ab epistulis* is keen to explain the minutiae of the action.

20.4

Cicerone in iudicio quodam deplorante temporum statum Publium Clodium inimicum eius, frustra iam pridem a patribus ad plebem transire nitentem, eodem die horaque nona transduxit

When Cicero was complaining during some trial about the state of the times, that same day and at the ninth hour he transferred his enemy Publius Clodius from the patricians to the plebeians, something he had been trying to no avail for a long time.

The text of all Suetonius' manuscripts provides the time at which Caesar accomplished the *transitio ad plebem* of P. Clodius Pucher as 'the ninth hour' (*horaque nona*). Lucarini (2014:331) wants to emend *nona* to *una* (in one hour), producing a Caesar who reacts with even more amazing speed. Lucarini writes that he does not understand why Suetonius wishes to state with precision the hour of Clodius' *transitio*. The answer must be because Cicero, whose authority he follows throughout the *Divus Iulius*,⁷ offers incontrovertible detail on the timing (*Dom.* 41).

⁵ See Kaster's apparatus *ad loc.*

⁶ Cass. Dio 38.8.2: *χαριεντιζόμενοι τινες τὸ μὲν τοῦ Βιβούλου ὄνομα παντάπασιν ἀπεσιώπων, τὸν δὲ δὴ Καίσαρα δις καὶ ὠνόμαζον καὶ ἔγραφον, Γάϊον τε Καίσαρα καὶ Ἰούλιον Καίσαρα ὑπατεῦειν λέγοντες* ('Some people, being witty, completely suppressed the name of Bibulus and both in speaking and writing would use Caesar's name twice, saying that the consuls were Gaius Caesar and Julius Caesar').

⁷ Note the emphatic position accorded to Ciceronian information in the most developed displays of scholarship in the *Life* (9.2, 30.5 and 50.2).

25.2

Germanos, qui trans Rhenum incolunt, primus Romanorum ponte fabricato adgressus maximis adfecit cladibus

He was the first Roman to build a bridge and attack the Germans who lived across the Rhine and inflict major defeats on them.

Because of the absence of the two words *ponte fabricato* from Eutropius' otherwise very close rendition of Suetonius,⁸ Deutsch (1916:23–33) argues plausibly that they are a gloss. For, if the manuscript text is followed, Suetonius must be held to follow an exaggerated tradition of Caesar's achievements that does not spring from Caesar himself. Caesar's account of the eighteen days he spent on the right bank of the Rhine in 55 (*B Gall.* 4.18–20) and the raid of 53 (*B Gall.* 6.9–10, 29) records no victories to his credit, but simply that tribes sought his friendship. This is the overwhelming picture from a range of sources.⁹ Although Livy and those who derive from him speak in general terms of conquest,¹⁰ Deutsch plausibly argues

⁸ Eutr. 6.17.3: *Germanosque trans Rhenum adgressus inmanissimis proeliis vicit* (he attacked the Germans across the Rhine and defeated them in battles of extreme cruelty).

⁹ Cf. Flor. 1.45.15: *quippe cum Rhenum suum sic ponte uasi iugo captum viderent, fuga rursus in silvas et paludes, et, quod acerbissimum Caesari fuit, non fuere qui vincerentur* ('when they [the Germans] saw their Rhine captured, as it were, under the yoke of the bridge, they fled again to the woods and marshes and no enemy remained to be conquered, a fact that was most disappointing to Caesar'); Plut. *Caes.* 23.1: περιώσας δὲ τὴν δύναμιν, οὐδενὸς ὑπαντῆσαι τολμήσαντος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἡγεμονικωτάτων τοῦ Γερμανικοῦ Σουήβων εἰς βαθεῖς καὶ ὑλώδεις αὐλῶνας ἀνασκευασμένων ('when he had taken his force across and no one dared to confront him; even the most dominant of the German tribes, the Suebi, departed into their deep and wooded dells'); Cass. Dio 39.48.5: εὐρὼν δὲ τοὺς τε Συγάμβρους ἐς τὰ ἐρυμνὰ ἀνακεκομισμένους καὶ τοὺς Σουήβους συστρεφομένους ὥς καὶ βοηθήσοντάς σφισιν ἀνεχώρησεν ἐντὸς ἡμερῶν εἴκοσιν ('finding that the Sugambri had taken themselves to their strongholds and that the Suebi were assembling to come to their assistance, he retired in less than twenty days') and, of 53 (40.32.2) καὶ ἔπραξε μὲν οὐδὲ τότε οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ ταχέων φόβῳ τῶν Σουήβων ἐπανεχώρησεν, ἔδοξε δ' οὖν αὐτῷ τὸν Ῥῆνον διαβεβηκέναι; Jerome *Chron.* 154H: *Germanos vastat* ('on this occasion too he accomplished nothing, but actually retreated rapidly out of fear of the Suebi. Nonetheless he secured the reputation of having crossed the Rhine again').

¹⁰ *Per.* 105: *Caesar Rhenum transcendit et proximam partem Germaniae domuit* ('Caesar crossed the Rhine and subdued the part of Germany closest to it') and Oros. 6.9.1: *Caesar in Germaniam facto ponte transgreditur, Sugambros et Ubios obsidione liberat; Suebos*

that this refers to a pacification of a strip of Germany but not to any military victories. During the Civil Wars, however, both Caesar and Labienus are recorded as talking of the ‘pacification’ and ‘defeat’ of Germany (*B Civ.* 1.7.7, 3.87.1), understandable exaggerations in the context but not to be retrojected onto the earlier narrative.

Once *ponte fabricato* is excised, the sentence refers to Caesar’s defeats of the Germans who crossed over into Gaul from the right bank of the Rhine, Ariovistus in 58 and the Usipetes and Tencteri in 55, of which he (*B Gall.* 1.54.2, 4.15.2–3, 16.7, 5.55.2), his contemporaries (*e.g.*, *Cic. Prov. Cons.* 33) and the later tradition (*e.g.*, *Liv. Per.* 104–5, *Tac. Hist.* 4.73.3, *Plut. Caes.* 19, 22 *Flor.* 1.45.10–14, *App. Celt.* fr. 1.5, *Cass. Dio* 38.34–50, 39.47–8, *Oros.* 6.7.6–10, 8.23) all make much. Suetonius in fact echoes closely Caesar’s own designation of these tribes (*B Gall.* 1.1.3, 28.4, 2.35.1) and clearly differentiates Caesar’s target from the Germans who had long lived on the west bank.

56.7

feruntur et †aituero† ab adolescentulo quaedam scripta, ut 'laudes Herculis', tragoedia 'Oedipus', item dicta collectanea

...certain works by Caesar as a very young man are also handed down, *e.g.*, ‘Praises of Hercules’, a tragedy ‘Oedipus’, also collected sayings.

The last category of works written by Caesar to appear in Suetonius’ discussion of his literary abilities concern his earliest literary efforts that Augustus forbade to be circulated. In the introductory sentence, Kaster obelises seven letters *aitvero*, rejecting emendations that restore proper names, Varro (Bentley) or Tubero (Reifferscheid) or the *puero* found in the β stem of manuscripts. If the affirmation of an earlier scholar (Varro being the more likely both in terms of Suetonius’ reading and palaeographically) or *vero* were what Suetonius wrote, then he was endorsing the authenticity of the *juvenilia*, and thus the opening word of the sentence *feruntur* becomes awkward – ‘they are said and Varro says’. As to the former, Suetonius does not use *ait* to introduce the comments of scholars and *vero et* would be a unique combination in his extant works. I find the *a puero* of some manuscripts in the less authoritative branch (R, β_2 , ζ) palaeographically convincing

maximam et ferocissimam gentem, quorum esse centum pagos et populos multi prodidere, totamque Germaniam aduentu suo terret; mox in Galliam rescisso ponte concedit (‘Caesar built a bridge, crossed into Germany, and lifted the siege on the Sugambri and Ubii. He terrified the whole of Germany by his arrival and the Suebi, its largest and most ferocious tribe, whom many have recorded are composed of a hundred lands and peoples. Shortly thereafter he broke down the bridge and retired into Gaul’).

and appropriate to the context; when combined with *aut* (Jernstedt 1907:308–10) this allows *feruntur* to perform the same function as at 55.3 where the common view is countered by Augustus' and Suetonius' researches. Thus here, *feruntur et a puero aut ab adolescentulo quaedam scripta* ('there are also said to be certain works written by him <as a boy or > as a very young man').¹¹

63

The text printed by Ihm and Kaster, *non minor illa constantia eius, maiora etiam indicia fuerint*, which is the reading of the superior branch of the manuscript tradition, must be translated as 'Of the fact that his renowned determination was no less great, there may be even greater indications'. The comments of Butler and Cary (1927:126), 'the connexion is so clumsy as to be almost impossible in so finished and careful a writer', exemplify the unhappiness felt by Suetonius' editors from the sixteenth century onwards. Following Torrentius, Butler and Cary exclude the lines, but that has the unsatisfactory result of leaving the following material without introduction. Kaster (2016:78) in effect admits the difficulty of the text he prints, by producing his own gloss, 'that firmness of his was no less [sc. than his valour], while tokens of it might have been even greater'. Distinct questions need to be posed for any evaluation: (i) what does *constantia* mean for Suetonius? (ii) Does Caesar's confrontation of Cassius demonstrate a different quality from that demonstrated in 62, i.e., is *constantia* the quality at issue or is Suetonius effecting a transition to *constantia*? (iii) What is/are the contrast(s) that Suetonius seems to be making, if the text transmitted does reflect something of his intentions?

(i) *Constantia* was a virtue celebrated by the Roman elite (cf. Hellegouarc'h 1972:283–5), which had a wide range of meanings (Lind 1989:20–3), but does not feature prominently in the *Lives*: the abstract noun *constantia* appears only twice elsewhere, both times of paragons (*Aug.* 42.2, *Cal.* 1.1), in the sense of resistance rightfully offered in the face of pressure from a demanding common people and mutinous legions respectively, to do the wrong thing. Adverbial forms are more

¹¹ Jernstedt (1907:310) notes as a parallel for the combination of *puer* and *adolescens* Cicero's words in *De oratore* (1.5) which are highly appropriate to the context in *Iul.* 56: *vis enim, ut mihi saepe dixisti, quoniam quae pueris aut adolescentulis nobis ex commentariolis nostris incohata ac rudia exciderunt vix <sunt> hac aetate digna...* ('it's your desire, as you have often told me, that since the unfinished and unpolished essays, which slipped out of the notebooks of my boyhood or youth, are hardly worthy of my present time of life'). Perhaps either Augustus himself, in the letter in which he forbade the circulation of Caesar's *juvenilia* (*Iul.* 56.7), or Suetonius, who was very familiar with all Cicero's work, deliberately adapted Cicero's words.

common (e.g., *Aug.* 66.1, *Tib.* 19.1, *N* 7.1, *Ve.* 4.6), two of which inform the military context: (overcoming his habitual caution) Tiberius joined battle with greater determination whenever he had received a favourable omen and Vespasian with such determination that he was wounded at close quarters.

(ii) In the light of Suetonius' wider usage, Caesar's determined resistance to fleeing troops and his preservation of Roman symbols of honour (*Iul.* 62), failure to flee in the face of Cassius' superior forces (*Iul.* 63) and finally his preservation of his symbols of rank in the midst of danger (*Iul.* 64), all exemplify *constantia* (cf. Butler and Cary 1927:126). By contrast, Kaster's gloss requires a transition from a virtue unspecified by Suetonius to a more striking demonstration of *constantia*. On balance I find it more likely that Suetonius is not signalling a transition.

(iii) If the sentence is merely a gloss that became incorporated into the text at an early stage, its excision means the loss of any reference to *constantia* itself. This may be considered significant but needs not be fatal. If the whole sentence is to be retained, with the understanding that it is linking examples of *constantia*, as argued above, the two comparatives (*non minor* and *maiora etiam*) are not a logical pair and the contrast between a suppressed *est* (or *sunt*) and the subjunctive *fuertint* is not easy to imagine. Hitherto the combination of the comparative adjective (*minor*), the demonstrative pronoun (*illa*), a noun (*constantia*) and the genitive of the personal pronoun (*eius*) has not been thought problematic. I suspect pleonasm: Suetonius does not use *ille* in the sense of 'that famous' except in relation to well-known sayings (cf. *Iul.* 49.4, 68.4, *Calig.* 30.1, *Claud.* 40.3, *Ner.* 40.2, *Tit.* 8.1). What Suetonius may have written is *nec minore constantia post aciem Pharsalicem...neque refugit* (with no less determination, after the battle of Pharsalus...he did not flee).¹² *Nec minore* is a frequent way for Suetonius to start a sentence (cf. 28.1, 77.1, *Aug.* 42.2, *Calig.* 15.1, 34.1, *Claud.* 42.1, *Ner.* 36.1); the formula binds what precedes and what follows explicitly, here helpfully categorising both as *constantia* and through the litotes indicating that what follows is more emphatic.

69

All the manuscripts read *seditionem per decem annos Gallicis bellis nullam omnino moverunt* (they did not mutiny at all during the ten years of the Gallic wars).

¹² Lucarini 2014:332 is justifiably unhappy with the text and suggests *constantia*<e> *eius etiam maiora indicia fuerint* (of his resolution there may have been even greater indications). With my proposed reading, *maiora etiam indicia fuerint* (these may have been even greater indications) is to be understood as a marginal comment, explaining the progression to more striking *exempla* of *constantia* that at some stage became incorporated into the text.

Because Suetonius has earlier in the *Life* (25.1) correctly indicated the length of the Gallic Wars as nine years and because that is indisputably the length of the Gallic campaigns, he should not be saddled with an error that easily results from a miscopying of IX to X before the Carolingian period. Therefore, we should read *seditionem per nouem annos Gallicis bellis nullam omnino moverunt* (they did not mutiny at all during the nine years of the Gallic wars).

76.2

In his discussion of the offensive, untraditional ways in which Caesar held and dispensed public offices, he notes first that his third and fourth consulships, held in 46 and 45 BC, were exercised in name only and that *simul atque utroque anno binos consules substitui sibi in ternos novissimos menses* (in both years he substituted two consuls for himself for the last three months). In fact, Caesar appointed suffectus only in 45 BC after resigning (cf. Dio 43.46.2 and *Fast. Alb.*). Suetonius' discussions of how his individual emperors treated the consulship are for the most part accurate¹³ and highlight patterns that were considered abnormal in Suetonius' day.¹⁴ Suetonius could be saved from the charge of carelessness and confusion in *Divus Iulius*, if *utroque* were emended to *altero*, thus pinpointing the major innovations and abuses to the 'second' year, 45 BC, during which Caesar was sole consul until October, when he abdicated his office and appointed two suffectus for the rest of the year.¹⁵ Thus we should read *simul atque altero anno binos consules substitui sibi in ternos novissimos menses* ('in the second year he substituted two consuls for himself for the last three months').

82.1

Cimber Tillius, qui primas partes susceperat, quasi aliquid rogaturus propius accessit renuentique et gestu in aliud tempus differenti ab utroque umero togam adprehendit: deinde clamantem: 'ista quidem uis est!' alter e

¹³ E.g., Aug. 26, with detailed justification by Wardle 2014:197–203; his criticism of Domitian's repeated consulship and short tenures of office (*Dom.* 13.3) is similarly precise. Scherberich 1995:155 is overly harsh in saying that Suetonius' errors in relationship to imperial consulships are 'nicht selten'.

¹⁴ In the discussion of Caligula's consulships (*Calig.* 17.1), the manuscript text *duos novissimos coniunxit* (he held the last two without an interval) requires that Suetonius errs, in that Caligula's last *three* consulships were held in consecutive years (39–41). Pagius and Bentley rightly suspected textual corruption, that at some stage a scribe wrote II for III; see Wardle 1994:180.

¹⁵ See Broughton 1952:293–4, 304–5.

Cascis auersum uulnerat paulum infra iugulum. Caesar Cascae brachium arreptum graphio traiecit...

Cimber Tillius, who had taken the leading role, approached closer as if he were about to ask him something and, as Caesar refused and with a gesture was putting him off to a later time, grabbed his toga at both shoulders; as he cried out ‘This is an act of violence indeed!’, one of the Cascas wounded him from the back just below the throat. Caesar grabbed Casca’s arm, stabbed it with a stylus...

In the description of Caesar’s assassination all manuscripts have the present indicative *uulnerat*, whereas every other main verb in the murder scene is the expected perfect.¹⁶ *Uulnerat* must be understood as an historic present. Sage (1979: 26–7) is inclined to attribute this case and two others to slips of the pen by Suetonius as he follows his sources too closely. Comparison with other vivid descriptions of imperial assassination in the *Lives* which feature no similar historic presents certainly suggests no concern for achieving dramatic vividness or colour by this means. If there was a slip of the pen, it was not by Suetonius but by later copyists. *Uulnera<ui>t* is the obvious reading. The missed syllable is easily explained by the *uu* at the beginning of the word.

82.2

Suetonius and Dio (44.19.5) both record a tradition that they do not consider convincing, in which Caesar responded to the blow delivered by Marcus Brutus with a brief Greek phrase, καὶ σὺ, τέκνον. In all editions of Suetonius of the modern age, notably Baumgarten-Crusius (1816), Roth (1858), Ihm (1907), Butler and Cary (1927), Scantamburlo (2011) and Kaster (2016), and the standard editions of Cassius Dio, Boissevain (1816) and Cary (1916), all punctuate with a question mark, as the dominant interpretation of Caesar’s words before 1980 was as a pathetic question uttered in pained surprise by an unsuspecting Caesar that one to whom he had shown favour was now attacking him. Subsequently however, greater weight has rightly been placed on the formula καὶ σὺ as apotropaic and retributive, i.e., ‘to hell with you’, firstly by Russell (1980:123–8) and most recently by Ziogas (2016:142–6) and Ubhi (2023). For Ziogas, the words subvert a common formula seen in epic poetry and particularly in funerary inscriptions and for Ubhi (2023, unpaginated) a Homeric line (*Od.* 11.618) provides a sentiment that is highly appropriate to the end of Brutus. Because Caesar’s words are best interpreted as a

¹⁶ *Apprehendit* could be a present, but the preceding *accessit* makes the perfect certain.

curse *cum* prophecy of the miserable fate that Brutus will suffer, the most appropriate punctuation to apply is an exclamation mark.

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