

Spes Imperii: Hope in Suetonius' Imperial Lives
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In the first century CE, *Spes* took on an important role in the ritual and iconographic representation of the emperor. *Spes Augusta* was explicitly associated with dynasticism and indicated the promise of future benefit represented by the emperor's heirs; at the same time, *Spes Populi Romani* represented the expectations of the Roman people for the emperor's continued generosity and success. These dual imperial meanings of the virtue *Spes* were revealed by literary analysis the works of authors like Tacitus, Seneca, and Pliny (Strack, 1931; Walsh, 1974; Clark, 1982), and by discussions of imperial coinage showing personified *Spes* (Mattingly *Coins of Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vols I-III; Grant, 1950).

As straightforward as this conception of *spes*' meaning in the context of first- and second-century imperial language and thought is, it is challenged by a reading of Suetonius' imperial Lives. Suetonius' use of the term *spes* significantly complicates our notion of the *Spes Augusta*, as he frequently shows his subjects developing a particular and personal kind of hope: a hope for imperial power, even when their chances of imperial succession seem unlikely at best (e.g. *ad occasionem maioris spei*, Tib. 11; *spem successionis*, Cal. 12; *spem imperii*, Vesp. 5). This use of the term is related to the known dynastic meaning of imperial *Spes*, but connotes personal imperial ambition (sometimes even at the expense of the imperial house), rather than a hope bestowed on a ruling emperor and his family by the Roman public. So Suetonius is presenting a form of *spes* that is a personal imperial ambition that is at odds with *Spes*' supposed connotations of dynastic stability and public benefit.

Furthermore, Suetonius seems to be deploying the word strategically throughout the Lives, and he reliably uses the word *spes* to indicate the moment at which each of his subjects first thinks that he might one day rule. This observation contributes to our understanding of Suetonius' narrative and biographical style, as it shows that he saw the beginnings of imperial ambition as a key moment in the story of each emperor's life and career.