

The Use of *Caesar* in the First Triad of Tacitus' *Annales*

The first triad of Tacitus' *Annales* documents the early years of Tiberius' principate and the struggles which the Roman state underwent in its efforts to come to terms with its new political arrangement in the wake of Augustus' death. Though Tacitus does not shy away from explicitly invoking these issues throughout the course of the narrative, he likewise makes use of more subtle methods to communicate this theme. One of these is his use of the names by which characters are addressed. While some recent studies have grappled with the use of the name *Augustus* in Tacitus' works (e.g., Thom 2008, Wardle 2015), there is as of yet no sustained analysis of the name *Caesar* in Tacitus.

In this paper, I analyze the use of the name *Caesar* in the first three books of the *Annales*. Eight different characters are referred to by the name *Caesar*, or compounds of the name such as *Tiberius Caesar*, throughout this first triad of the *Annales* alone. Though the narrator uses the name *Caesar* for a variety of figures, Tiberius is the only one who is called *Caesar* by characters in the text. He is likewise the only figure referred to by the name *Caesar* during his tenure as *princeps* in the history of Velleius Paterculus, who is described by Rubincam as "observing the practice of the period of which he was writing" (1992: 92-3). The tendency to use *Caesar* as one of the titles for the *princeps* would only get stronger as time progressed, as the family to which it referred had lost possession of the principate with the death of Nero, and *Caesar* eventually became a standard imperial title (Rubincam 1992: 94). The use of the name *Caesar* in the voice of the Tacitean narrator, then, is particularly instructive in the broadness of its application: not only is it used for Augustus and Tiberius, but likewise for characters who were not *principes*, such as Germanicus and Tiberius' son Drusus. It stands to reason, then, since the narrator uses the name *Caesar* in a fashion contemporary neither to the period of the work's narrative nor to

the period of its composition, that this was a deliberate stylistic choice intended to communicate a specific point about the time period of the narrative.

I will demonstrate that the use of *Caesar* in the early books of the *Annales* indicates its use as a title which implies an active possession of significant political power. Furthermore, this use of *Caesar* contributes to the portrayal of the relationship between Germanicus and Tiberius: the frequency with which Germanicus is referred to as *Caesar*, in that it is nearly identical to the frequency with which Tiberius receives that same title, suggests that the narrator wants to demonstrate that in the narrative present, Germanicus was perceived as holding a power similar to that of Tiberius. The similarity of their perceived power, and Tiberius' reaction to this perception, contributes to the characterization of Tiberius as jealous and insecure in his role as Augustus' successor to the principate.

Bibliography

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