

Tiberius Cunctator: Fabius Maximus in Suetonius' Life of Tiberius

Studies on Suetonius have traditionally focused on aspects such as his social background (Della Corte 1968) or his relative value as a historical source (Wallace-Hadrill 1983), even if his status as a historian has been challenged by some. However, scholars have recently begun to revisit Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, examining these biographies as literary works informed by their imperial context, including questions of style, form, and the coherence of the collection (Power and Gibson 2014). As part of this rehabilitation, several studies have explored the ways in which citations operate within the *Lives* (Damon 2014, Mitchell 2015). In this paper, I argue that such references were integral to the artistry of Suetonius' *Lives*, focusing in particular on the *Life of Tiberius* to illustrate how Suetonius makes use of direct quotation to activate a fuller range of intertexts for his reader, and to cast his imperial subject against earlier literary precedents.

In his *Life of Tiberius*, Suetonius records a letter sent by the emperor Augustus to his stepson and heir Tiberius lauding the latter for his accomplishments on campaign. In the midst of his praise, Augustus alludes to Ennius' famous verse attributing Fabius Maximus' preservation of the state in the Second Punic War to his delaying tactics (Suet. *Tib.* 21.5, cf. Ennius *Ann.* 363 Skutsch; Stanton 1971, Elliott 2009). In reporting Augustus' reworking of Ennius, Suetonius introduces Quintus Fabius Maximus, an exemplary Roman hero, into his characterization of Tiberius, a figure marked by his own hesitation throughout the *Life of Tiberius*. In particular, Suetonius describes several episodes of Tiberius' own *cunctatio*; while Ennius extols Fabius Maximus for his service to the state, Suetonius calls attention to Tiberius' delays to emphasize moments of the emperor's duplicity, especially his hesitation to accept the title of *princeps* and the various pretexts that were offered (*Tib.* 24.1). In the *Annales* Ennius utilized the paradoxical

nature of Fabius Maximus' success through delay to convey his singular role in overcoming the Carthaginian threat. However, Tiberius represents the flipside of the coin, as Suetonius evokes the ambivalence of Tiberius' delays, which represent the negative facets of *cunctatio*.

By corrupting an exemplary model of Roman heroism in this way, Suetonius' Tiberius becomes an anti-Fabius, delaying only for his own interest rather than that of the state. Further, Tiberius' inability to live up to the Roman hero Fabius is thrown into higher relief when compared against similar episodes in the preceding *Lives*. Indeed, these scenes, with their careful intertextual layering, emphasize how far Tiberius has fallen from the examples offered by Augustus, who in Suetonius' hands is an exemplar of deliberate planning, and Julius Caesar, who is typified by dynamic action. Augustus especially offers a paradigm for how a Caesar might conduct himself (Langlands 2014), and his own cultivation of Fabius Maximus as a figure of praise, as indicated by the Augustan *elogium* of Fabius (*CIL* 11.1828 = *CIL* I² p.193, no. 3), suggests that Suetonius' use of Fabius in the *Life of Tiberius* is not accidental. In focalizing his treatment of Tiberius through the figure of Fabius Maximus, especially as imagined by Augustus, Suetonius depicts the later *princeps*' failure to adhere to the positive exemplars of either his immediate predecessor or the Republican hero.

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