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9 Good emperors, bad emperors: The function of physiognomic representation in Suetonius’ *De vita Caesarum* and common sense physiognomics

Suetonius’ biographies deal with the lives of the first twelve Roman emperors and try to reconstruct the historical characters and personalities of these protagonists by narrating stories about their private lives. Typically at the end of each of the biographies, we find a precise description of the emperor’s body, constructed as an ekphrasis, which Suetonius correlates with their virtues and traits. This paper aims at reconstructing the function of physiognomic representations within the fictional construction of Suetonius’ emperor-biographies and at analysing the reception and use of the physiognomic literature and theories in his work. Furthermore, iconographic sources such as images of the emperor on coins, reliefs, and statues are also taken into consideration in order to discover possible points of contact with or divergences in the literary texts. Due to the complexity of this topic, I shall concentrate my analysis on the body descriptions of the emperors Tiberius and Caligula, examples of bad emperors, and of the prince Germanicus, who incarnates the good prince, able to dominate the passions. First of all, however, I want to introduce and explain the concept of “common sense physiognomics”, its importance in Roman culture and its possible use in literature and art.

In this context, I think it is also important to emphasize the key role of ekphrasis in describing the physiognomy of the emperors. As we shall see, the use of physiognomic terms gives these images of the emperors a greater reality and vivacity, almost as if the emperors were in the presence of the reader. From this point of view, Suetonius is one of the authors who best demonstrates the links between physiognomics and ekphrasis as rhetorical techniques within ancient literature.

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1 Among the most recent works published on Suetonius’ biographies, see Malitz 2003; Pausch 2004, 233–326; Rohrbacher 2010; Chong-Gossard 2010; Duchêne 2016, and the contributions in Poignault 2009; Power-Gibson 2014.
2 On this literary technique, see Graf 1995; Cianci 2014, 69–84; Stavru 2017, and the contributions in Marino and Stavru 2013; for the relationship between physiognomics and ekphrasis see the papers in this volume.
3 The texts have been collected by Evans 1963, 93–94 and Stock 1998, 109–112 (Jul. 45, 1; Aug. 79, 1–3; Tib. 68, 1–3; Cal. 3, 1; Cal. 50, 1; Claud. 30; Nero 51; Galb. 3, 3; Galb. 21; Otho 12, 1; Vit. 17, 2; Vesp. 20; Tit. 3, 1; Dom. 18, 1).
Human physiognomy and “common sense physiognomics” in the Roman culture

Within the framework provided by Roman culture, the strong relationship between physiognomy and biography goes back to the old Republican ages. This relationship also helps us to reconstruct a “common sense physiognomics” in the context of Roman society. I use the term “common sense physiognomics” to refer to a shared common knowledge and perception of human physiognomy by ordinary people.\(^4\) In the framework of literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence, we find an impressive number of references concerning the importance of the relationship between bodily appearance and character. To take only one example from an immense and important literature, we might briefly consider the important sentence by Sallust (\textit{Cat.} 61), in which Catilina is said to have a face that revealed the brutality of his mind \((\text{ferociam animi, quam habuerat vivus, in vultu retinens})\). The words \textit{ferocia animi} (ferocity of mind) and \textit{vultus}, typical of the physiognomic lexicon, show that Catilina’s character is being examined here through a physiognomic lens.

The paradoxical portrait is another interesting example of common sense physiognomics.\(^5\) A paradoxical portrait is a portrait of a person whose physical appearance and features contradict his deeds. In other words: the physical features of the person being portrayed are inappropriate to his deeds and behaviour. The Latin literature of the imperial age is particularly rich in examples of this type of portrait. To take only two examples, we might consider the portrait of the emperor Otho by Tacitus (\textit{Hist.} 1, 2, 22), according to which “Otho’s mind was not effeminate like his body” \((\text{non erat Othonis mollis et corpori similis animus})\).\(^6\) Suetonius too describes Otho (12) in a similar way: \textit{tanto Othonis animo nequassam corpus aut habitus competit} (Neither Otho’s person nor his bearing suggested such great courage). Plutarch (\textit{Galba} 25, 2) tells us that his mind was not corrupted like his body.\(^7\) Put somewhat

\[^{4}\] This concept is reminiscent of the approach to common sense geography, which is seen as a lower form of geographical knowledge and is distinguished from professional or higher geography. See Dan, Geus and Guckelsberger 2014.

\[^{5}\] On the paradoxical portrait, see La Penna 1976; 1980.

\[^{6}\] The following passage (\textit{Hist.} 1, 71, 1): \textit{Otho interim contra spem omnium non deliciis neque desidia torpescere: dilatae voluptates, dissimulata luxuria et cuncta ad decorem imperii composita, eoque plus formidinis adferebant falsae virtutes et vitia reditura.}

Otho, meanwhile, contrary to everyone’s expectation made no dull surrender to luxury or ease: he put off his pleasures, concealed his profligacy, and ordered his whole life as befitted the imperial position; with the result that these simulated virtues and the sure return of his vices only inspired still greater dread.

The expression \textit{contra spem omnium} emphasizes that the Otho’s reaction was unexpected, because Otho was devoted to the vices. See the remarks in La Penna 1976, 272–273; Stok 1995, 117–120.

\[^{7}\] Plut. (\textit{Galba} 25, 1): \textit{ενταῦθα τοὺς πρῶτους ἐκδεξαμένους αὐτὸν καὶ προσειπόντας αὐτοκράτορά φασὶ μὴ πλείους τριῶν καὶ εἴκοσι γενέσθαι, διό, καίπερ οὐ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ σώματος μαλακίαν καὶ θηλύτητα τῇ ψυχῇ διατεθρυμμένος, ἀλλὰ ἰταμὸς ὡν πρός τα ὀεινά καὶ ἀτρεπτος, ἀπεδειλάσεν.}
differently, Otho’s body did not match his mind (animus) (and Otho’s biographers agree on this point).

Another interesting example of a paradoxical portrait is that of the effeminate soldier by Phaedrus (Fabulae novae 9). This soldier is said to have a vastum corpus together with a feminine bearing (ambulando molliter) and a weak voice (mollis vox); he has a feminine appearance but the vigour of Mars (cinaedus habitus, sed Mars viribus). In spite of his effeminate appearance (habitus), this soldier defeats his rival before Pompeius in a duel. In this case too, the habitus of this man is not appropriate to his courage and true character. As the terms habitus, corpus, mollis, and vastus show, this text uses a distinctive physiognomic terminology, which makes the image of this cinaedus real and more vivid for the reader. In this framework, we should bear in mind that the physiognomics treatises analyse the figure of the cinaedus using the same terms.

If we now turn to the archaeological evidence, an interesting case is that of the masks of the ancestors, preserved in the atrium of the domus, which were shown during public religious ceremonies such as the funus publicum (public funeral). These masks, famous for their severe expressions (severitas), were aimed at preserving the memory of the ancestors and at stimulating younger generations to emulate the ancestors’ deeds. The severe expression of these masks was, of course, meant to mirror the animus of the ancestors, who through their deeds made their domus and Rome itself so powerful. These masks show the importance of the link between physiognomy and biography in the Roman culture of the Republican period. Furthermore, they were also a fundamental element of the identity of the Roman aristocracy, because the ius imaginum was a privilege reserved for few families. Unfortunately,

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8 La Penna 1976, 281–283.
11 Polybius (6, 53–54) conveys a detailed description of this ritual. On this important topic, see the stimulating monograph of Montanari 2009; for the relationship between pompa funebris and triumph, where the imagines maiorum also played a role, see Rüpke 2006 and Papini 2008.
12 We can for instance remember Polybius’s statement about the realism of these images: (6, 53, 10) τὸ γὰρ τὰς τῶν ἐπ᾿ ἀρετῆς δεδοξασμένων ἀνδρῶν εἰκόνας ἰδεῖν ὅμοιοι πάσας ὅσον εἴ ζώσας καὶ πεπνυμένας τήν οὐκ ἐν παραστήσει; τί δ᾿ ἄν κάλλιον.
13 The possession of the ius imaginum was important for a political career (Cic. De leg. agr. 2, 1; In Pison. 1; Pro Planc. 18; Tac. Hist. 4, 39, 3 ff.); remarks in Montanari 2009, 89–106. In this context we
we do not have material evidence of these masks, because they were generally made of wax.\textsuperscript{14} According to R. Bianchi Bandinelli, these \textit{imagines maiorum} influenced the development of the realistic Roman portrait,\textsuperscript{15} attested since the time of Sulla. Other scholars prefer, instead, to derive the Roman realistic portrait of the Late Republican time from Hellenistic models.\textsuperscript{16} Leaving aside for the moment these discussions of the origin of the Roman portraits,\textsuperscript{17} the impressive realism and pathos of these images have a huge visual impact. Indeed, the physiognomic features of these portraits express values like \textit{severitas, fortitudo, virtus}, and the like, values that served as the foundation for the main ethical norms of Roman Society. Furthermore, the contemplation of such portraits, which incarnated these important values, could educate the young generations. Pliny the Younger,\textsuperscript{18} for example, remembers an ancient tradition (\textit{antiquitus institutum}), according to which “the old custom of Rome was for young people to learn from their elders the proper course of conduct, by watching their behaviour as well as by listening to their spoken instructions, and they afterwards and in turn, so to speak, taught their juniors in the same way” (transl. by J.B. Firth). In another passage, Pliny the Younger emphasizes the importance of the statues of ancient glorious Romans as \textit{exempla virtutis} for the young generations.\textsuperscript{19} In a similar

\textsuperscript{14} Appropriately, Flower 1996, remarks (p. 1): “The evidence we have for the \textit{imagines} is not physical, and their relationship with Roman portraits in other media remains obscure and disputed”. A funerary relief, on exhibit in the National Museum of Copenhagen and dated to the 30 BC, probably shows two \textit{imagines maiorum}, kept in a shrine. On these masks, see Papini 2011.

\textsuperscript{15} Bianchi Bandinelli 1979; 1976, 71.

\textsuperscript{16} See, for example, Zanker 1976; Smith 1981 (Hellenistic artists as authors of the republican Roman portraits); Smith 1988 (romanisation of the Hellenistic portraits); Zanker 1995a (with a revision of his former theory, considering the individuality, which characterizes Rome’s political context of the Late Republican time, the cause of the origin of the individual portrait); Giuliani 1986, who analyses the physiognomic features of these portraits; Tanner 2000 (the portraits as expression of \textit{patronus’} social status).

\textsuperscript{17} There is a good overview in Junker 2007, 85–88 and Borg 2012.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Erat autem antiquitus institutum, ut a maioribus natu non auribus modo verum etiam oculis disceremus, quae facienda mox ipsi ac per vices quasdam tradam minoribus habemus.}


Faith and loyalty are not yet extinct among men: there are still those to be found who keep friendly remembrances even of the dead. Titinius Capito has obtained permission from our Emperor to erect
way, referring to the portrait of L. Brutus as a symbol of freedom, Cicero mentions the didactic importance of these images.\textsuperscript{20}

It should also be kept in mind that L. Giuliani, due to the public character of the Roman portraits, actually suggested replacing the term physiognomics with that of “Pathognomik”. The term “Pathognomik” refers to that set of values (or \textit{ethe}) that a portrait can express through the construction of a facial mimicry.\textsuperscript{21} I am convinced, a statue of Lucius Silanus in the forum. It is a graceful and entirely praiseworthy act to turn one’s friendship with a sovereign to such a purpose, and to use all the influence one possesses to obtain honours for others. But Capito is a devoted hero-worshipper; it is remarkable how religiously and enthusiastically he regards the busts of the Bruti, the Cassii, and the Catos in his own house, where he may do as he pleases in this matter. He even composes splendid lyrics on the lives of all the most famous men of the past. Surely a man who is such an intense admirer of the virtue of others must know how to exemplify a crowd of virtues in his own person. Lucius Silanus quite deserved the honour that has been paid to him, and Capito in seeking to immortalise his memory has immortalised his own quite as much. For it is not more honourable and distinguished to have a statue of one’s own in the forum of the Roman People than to be the author of someone else’s statue being placed there.

Farewell. (Transl. by J.B. Firth).

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{20} Cic. \textit{Phil.} 2, 26: \textit{Quam veri simile porro est in tot hominibus partim obscuris, partim adolescentsibus neminem occultantibus meum nomen latere potuisse? Etenim, si auctores ad liberandam patriam desiderarentur illis actoribus, Brutos ego impellerem, quorum uterque L. Bruti imaginem cotidie videret, alter etiam Ahalae? Hi igitur his maioribus ab alienis consilium peterent quam a suis et foris potius quam domo? Quid? C. Cassius in ea familia natus quae non modo dominatum, sed ne potentiam quidem cuiusquam ferre potuit, me auctorem, credo, desideravit; qui etiam sine his clarissimis viris hanc rem in Cilicia ad ostium fluminis Cydni confecerit, si ille ad eam ripam, quam constituerat, non ad contrariam navis appulisset.
\end{quote}

Moreover, how likely it is, that among such a number of men, some obscure, some young men who had not the wit to conceal any one, my name could possibly have escaped notice? Indeed, if leaders were wanted for the purpose of delivering the country, what need was there of my instigating the Bruti, one of whom saw every day in his house the image of Lucius Brutus, and the other saw also the image of Ahala? Were these the men to seek counsel from the ancestors of others rather than from their own? and but of doors rather than at home? What? Caius Cassius, a man of that family which could not endure, I will not say the domination, but even the power of any individual, – he, I suppose, was in need of me to instigate him? a man who even without the assistance of these other most illustrious men, would have accomplished this same deed in Cilicia, at the mouth of the river Cydnus, if Caesar had brought his ships to that bank of the river which he had intended, and not to the opposite one (transl. by D. Yonge).

On the importance of past knowledge in order to imitate and emulate the deeds of the \textit{summi virii} see also Cic. (\textit{fin.} 5, 2, 6): \textit{atqui, Cicero, inquit, ista studia, si ad imitandos summos viros spectant, ingeniis suos sunt; sin tandem modo ad indicia veteris memoriae cognoscenda, curiosorum. Te autem hortamur omnes, currentem quidem, ut spero, ut eos, quos novisse vis, imitari etiam velit. “Well, Cicero, said Piso, these enthusiasms befit a young man of parts, if they lead him to copy the example of the great. If they only stimulate antiquarian curiosity, they are mere dilettantism. But we all of us exhort you – though I hope it is a case of spurring a willing steed – to resolve to imitate your heroes as well as to know about them” (Transl. by H.H. Rackham).

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{21} L. Giuliani (1986, 49–51) compares the mimicry of the Roman portraits with the \textit{actio} of ancient rhetoric. For a definition of “Pathognomik” I refer to Marcucci’s words (Marcucci 2015, 126–127): “La
however, that in constructing this mimicry, common sense physiognomics has played a key role. For our purposes here, therefore, the portraits represent important evidence for the presence of common sense physiognomics within the Roman culture of the time. In fact, these images must express values that were not only appropriate to the man himself, but also to the class to which he belonged.

In this context, we should also mention, however briefly, the epigraphic genre of the *elogia*. The *elogia* are images of famous Romans put on display in the public spaces of a city and accompanied by a short biography and eulogy of these prominent men. According to Pliny the Elder and Gellius, Varro probably collected this epigraphic material and composed an ensemble of 700 biographies of famous Romans, accompanied by these images. Cornelius Nepos (*Att. 18, 6*) says that Atticus, Cicero’s famous friend, had also written a biographical collection of notorious Romans: *sub singulorum imaginibus facta magistratusque eorum non amplius quaternis quinique versibus descriptis* (under the individual images, he described the deeds and the offices of these men in only four and five verses). These images also aimed both at preserving the memory of these men and at stimulating the reader to emulate their deeds. Unfortunately, the archaeological evidence provides us with only a very rough idea about the features of these masks and archaic portraits. According to the literary sources, they inspired or represented values like *severitas* and *fortitudo*, which characterized the Roman *mos maiorum*. A passage in Cicero shows the importance of the *clari viri* images from the past as examples to be emulated, and on the basis of these images as well as the images of the ancestors Cicero sketched his depiction of Demosthenes. Although from a different context, we should also consider a passage from Seneca, in which the importance of the images of well-known men from the past as a stimulus for the mind (*incitamentum animi*) was emphasized. Unfortunately, we do not know what these pictures looked like and we can only assume that their

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Pathognomonie étudie les signes qui révèlent les mouvements de l’âme. Au contraire de la physiognomonie, elle ne s’attache pas à relever la récurrence des signes qui manifesteraient une tendance fondamentale de la personnalité, comme la mélancolie. La pathognomonie se focalise sur l’expression, par exemple un rictus, un micromouvement, qui dénote le dégoût... La physiognomonie est du côté de la fixité tandis que la pathognomonie intègre le mouvement de la vie et des émotions.”


23 *Cic. Or.* 110: *Demos thenes quidem colus nuper inter imagines tuas as tuorum, quod eum credo amares, cum ad te in Tusculanum venissem.*

appearance was appropriate to the deeds of the people represented, in other words that their physical appearance inspired values like *fortitudo*, *severitas* and so on. Images must also express the values of the society of course, and according to the Roman ideology, public portraits in particular must function as *exempla*, which manifest the personality and the virtues of the man who deserved such an honour. Common sense physiognomics probably served as an important tool in the construction of these images, since they needed to communicate recognizable virtues such as *fortitudo* and *severitas*.

In this context, we should also look at an interesting passage from Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 3, 10, 6),²⁵ according to which rich Romans often asked a painter or sculptor to retouch and improve the physiognomic traits of a recently deceased relative. In the process of retouching and improving the physiognomy of the deceased, common sense physiognomics may also have played an important role.

Common sense physiognomics may also have influenced the development of the iconic representation (*Körperdarstellung*) in Roman art. According to Tonio Hölscher’s theory of *decorum*, every place must be decorated with an appropriate image.²⁶ Images of philosophers, for instance, are appropriate for libraries or for spaces dedicated to intellectual work,²⁷ while images of athletes should be located in stadia and gymnasia. If we want to contrast the images of philosophers and athletes in terms of common sense physiognomics, we must imagine the athletes with a slim physical body and with trained muscles. In ancient art, athletes (along with gods and heroes) were usually the only ones to be represented naked. According to common sense physiognomy, we should imagine the philosophers with a crowned forehead, beard and a non-athletic body in old age. Likewise, we expect the bodies of the warriors to be mighty, muscled and covered with armor. In the creation of such works of art, representing athletes, philosophers and warriors, common sense physiognomics probably played an important role in isolating the most appropriate physiognomic features in the representation.

The epigraphic evidence also provides us with noteworthy material for the investigation of the relationship and correspondence between mind and physical

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²⁵ Pliny (*Ep.* 3, 10, 6): *Difficile est huc usque intendere animum in dolore; difficile, sed tamen, ut sculptorem, ut pictorem, qui filii vestri imaginem faceret, admoneritis, quid expresseret quid emendare deberet, ita me quoque formate regite, qui non fragilem et caducam, sed immortalem, ut vos putatis, effigiem conor efficere: quae hoc diuturnior erit, quo verior melior absolutior fuerit. Valete.* “It is difficult to focus the mind on such subjects when one is in trouble, but in spite of that I want you to deal with me as you would with a sculptor or a painter who was making a model or portrait of your son. In such a case, you would advise him as to the points he should bring out and alter, and similarly I hope you will guide and direct me, for I am essaying a likeness, neither frail nor perishable, but one, as you think, which will last for ever. It will be the more durable, according to its trueness to life and correctness of detail. Farewell.” (transl. by J.B. Firth).

²⁶ Hölscher 2018.

²⁷ On this iconography, see Scatozza Höricht 1986; Danguillier 2001.
appearance. We can, for instance, look at the famous *elogium Scipionis* (298 BC), in
which the formula *quois forma virtutei parisuma fuit* emphasizes such a relationship. Another epigraphic text is a funerary inscription from Rome (CIL VI 15346), in
which we read *heic est sepulcrum hau(d) pulc(h)rum pulc(h)rai feminae* (this is the not beautiful grave of a beautiful woman). The beauty of this woman is described with a reserved rhetoric and posture (*sermone lepido, tum autem incessu commodo. domum servavit, lanam fecit* – she took care of her home and spun the wool). While the term *forma* and the adjective *formosa* refer to bodily beauty with an explicit erotic connotation, the word *pulcher* means a beautiful appearance, characterized by a good balance between internal and external beauty. In these inscriptions, the description is of the simplest sort, yet briefly suggests the unchanging excellence of body and character in the cases of both Scipio and Claudia.

All these examples show the importance of the relationship between physiognomy and biography within the Roman culture; furthermore, according to common sense physiognomics, the bodily features of a person usually express his or her true character and give us information about his or her mind. In this regard, common sense physiognomics seems to have played an important role in the ethical and moral judgment of people within the Roman culture.

Finally, common sense physiognomics can be used in art to create or construct the most appropriate physiognomy (for example by retouching and improving the real physical appearance of a person), while in literature it can guide the selection of key terms that are most appropriate for the physiognomy (“physique du role”) of a given character.

**Suetonius and the physiognomics: State of art**

There is substantial disagreement about the use of the physiognomics (or of the presence of physiognomic knowledge) within Suetonius’ biographies in the work of different scholars. In his important monograph on the development of the biographic genre within the Greek and Roman literature, F. Leo suggested that in his composition of the emperors-biographies Suetonius drew on the Alexandrian model.28 This model was typically used for the biographies of artists and writers and included a section with a description of the bodily appearance (*eidos*), while a politician’s or a king’s biography normally used the “peripatetic” model, according to which a person’s true character was reconstructed (or constructed) by narrating his deeds and anecdotes from his private life.29 According to Leo, Suetonius was the first to have used the Alexandrian

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29 According to Leo’s theory, Plutarch and Cornelius Nepos used the “peripatetic” model in composing the biographies of politicians, kings, and emperors. In their biographies, indeed, we find only few
model in composing his biographies of the emperors. Furthermore, Suetonius probably utilized this model in writing his work *De viris inlustribus*, as some fragments seem to show.\(^{30}\) The authors of the *Historia Augusta* and Ammianus Marcellinus seem to have followed him in going so,\(^ {31}\) since they describe the bodily appearance of the later emperors using physiognomic terms. Since the entirety of peripatetic and Alexandrian biography are lost, scholars have criticized the rigidity of Leo's theory. D. Stuart, for example, did not exclude the possibility that the peripatetic biography also

\[\text{oùte γάρ ιστορίας γράφομεν, ἀλλὰ βίους, οὔτε ταῖς ἐπιφανεστάταις πράξεις πάντως ἐνεστὶ δήλωσις ἁρετῆς ἢ κακίας, ἀλλὰ πράγμα βραχὺ πολλάκις καὶ ἱμή καὶ παιδά τις τὰς ἐμφανυν ἰθὺς ἔποιησε μᾶλλον ἢ μάχαι μυριόκικοι καὶ παρατάξεις αἱ μέγισται καὶ πολιορκίαι πόλεων,} \]

For it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities (transl. by Bernadotte Perrin).

In the passage, *οὔτε γάρ ιστορίας γράφομεν, ἀλλὰ βίους,* Plutarch emphasizes the difference between the historian and the biographer. This difference, however, was not always clear in antiquity; Suetonius is for example said to be an historian by several later authors: Jerome calls him a ‘historian’ (Chron. praef. p. 6 Helm = p. 288 Roth: *de Tranquillo et ceteris illustribus historicis curiosissime excerpimus*) and Johannes Malalas defines him “the most learned Roman historian” (Chron. p. 34 Dindorf = p. 266 Reiff ὁ σοφώτατος Τράνγκυλλος, Ῥωμαίων ἱστορικός). Pliny the Younger (Epist. 10, 94, 1) calls Suetonius *probissimus,* *honestissimus,* *eruditissimus,* praising his honesty.

\(^{30}\) Suet. *Vita Hor.* p. 47,5–6 Reiff: *habitu corporis fuit* [scil. *Horatius*] *brevis atque obsesus.* Suet. *Vita Ter.* 6 Wess.: *fuisse dicitur* [scil. *Horatius*] *medioci statura, gracilli corpore, colore fusco.* These texts use a remarkable physiognomic terminology. On this work, see Pausch 2004, 237–252; Power 2016; on the character of these biographies, see Dihle 1987, 64: “(Sueton) geht es nicht um die Zeichnung eines geschlossenen Lebensbildes als eines moralischen Phänomens, sondern darum, daß alle Informationen über eine Person geordnet mitgeteilt werden, die für das Gebiet, auf dem sie sich ausgezeichnet und zu dessen Entwicklung sie beigetragen hat, wissenswert und von Bedeutung sind”.

\(^{31}\) Evidence collected in Evans 1969, 75–76, 94–96; see remarks in Rohrbacher 2010, 103–113; I do not know of any monograph that analyses the use of the physiognomic terminology by these authors. In this remarkable passage, Ammianus Marcellinus, describes the first appearance of the emperor Julian: 15, 8, 16; *quo quantoque gaudio praeter paucos Augusti probaver: iudicium Caesaremque admiratione digna suscipiebant imperatorii muricis fulgore flagrante. Cuius oculos cum venustate terribles vultumque excitatus gratum diu multumque contuentes, qui futurus sit colligebant velut scrutatis veteribus libris, quorum lectio per corporum signa pandit animorum interna.*

It was wonderful with what great joy all but a few approved Augustus’ choice and with due admiration welcomed the Caesar, brilliant with the gleam of the imperial purple. Gazing long and earnestly on his eyes, at once terrible and full of charm, and on his face attractive in its unusual animation, they divined what manner of man he would be, as if they had perused those ancient books, the reading of which discloses from bodily signs the inward qualities of the soul (transl. by J.C. Rolfe).

In this passage, the mention of physiognomic ancient books (*veteres libri*) is noteworthy. These books testify to the use of physiognomic treatises at this time.
made use of bodily descriptions, emphasizing the originality of the Roman biography of Suetonius. J. Couissin and E. Evans have both suggested that the bodily descriptions of the emperors from Suetonius were physiognomic in character. According to J. Couissin, Suetonius used Polemon’s physiognomic treatise as a manual, and while E. Evans agrees with the use of a physiognomic treatise, she emphasizes the iconic quality of the Suetonian descriptions. S. Mazzarino has argued for the influence of an artistic portrait. The development of the artistic portrait, which took place especially in the imperial period, could have influenced Suetonius’s choice to insert bodily descriptions of the emperors in his biographies. A. Wardman formulated a similar thesis in a paper published in 1967, in which he emphasized the impressive realism of the Suetonian descriptions. Later Suetonius scholars have often mentioned the physiognomic and the realistic thesis, avowing a critical approach to it. A new approach to physiognomics in Suetonius’s biographies has been provided by F. Stok, who in a stimulating paper argued that Suetonius, perhaps influenced by medicine, made use of diagnostic physiognomics. Another way of putting it: the emperors’ bodily features make it possible to predict their true characters. We find possible references to such physiognomics in the medical treatises since Hippocrates’ times as well as in some authors from the Roman imperial period. Furthermore, according to

33 Couissin 1953.
34 The original of Polemon’s treatise is unfortunately lost. We have only Arabic translations of this treatise (see Hoyland 2007 and Ghersetti 2007).
35 E. Evans (Evans 1935, 80–84; 1950, 277–282; 1969, 51–56) quoted the studies of Fürst 1902; 1903, 370–440, about the Egyptian origin of the iconic portraits and his use in the Greek and Roman biography. On the concept of “iconistic portrait”, see Misener 1924, who collected and discussed the evidence. In the administrative papyri from the Roman period, the term εἰκονισμός means a distinctive physical trait that allows the identification of a person. On the papyri, see Caldara 1924.
36 Mazzarino 1990 II, 454–455 (concerning the importance of the individual in Adrian’s time and the influence of Polemon’s treatise on the literature of this time); Mazzarino 1990 III, 126 (who suggested a comparison with the reliefs of the Benevento Arch).
37 On the relationships between art and physiognomics in the Roman imperial period, see the remarks in Elsner 2007.
38 Wardman 1967.
39 For example, Dihle 1956, 116; Della Corte 1967, 159–160; Alsina 1975 (who emphasizes the peripatetic and ethic character of these bodily descriptions); Cizek 1977, 139–141; Baldwin 1983, 498–499, 523 n. 53; Gascou 1984, 598–615 (who, criticizing Couissin, thinks that Suetonius’s portraits are realistic); overview by Stock 1995, 116–117.
41 A good example for the Roman time is Celsus (2,2,1: si plenior aliquis et speciosior et coloratior factus est, suscepta habere bona sua debet; 2, 1, 5: corpus ... habilissimum quadratum est, neque gracile neque obesum. Nam longa statura, ut in iuventa decora est, sic matura senectute conficitur, gracile corpus infirmum, obesum hebes est). A good example for diagnostic physiognomics is the following sentence found in Seneca’s letters (epist. 52, 12): omnia rerum omnium, si observentur, indicia sunt et argumentum morum ex minimis quoque licet capere: impudicum et incessus ostendit et manus mota...
the medical wisdom of his time, Suetonius thinks that some bodily features, such as Nero’s paunch, may be due to the life-style of the emperors. These bodily features are, however, a visible expression of his vices. In an article published in 2009, as part of a comparative analysis of Suetonius’ text with the official portraits of Augustus, de Croizant argues that Suetonius’s aim was to desacralize the official image of the emperors. In other words, de Croizant suggests that the well-known official iconographies of the emperors should be taken as a rhetorical contrast to the often denigrating descriptions. The problem with the use of physiognomics treatises by Suetonius has been studied by Rohrbacher in an article published in 2010. He believes that the author has made use of the physiognomics literature to describe the bodies of the emperors and that his physiognomic descriptions have influenced later authors such as the anonymous biographers of the Historia Augusta and Ammianus Marcellinus.

Both the physiognomic and the realistic thesis, however, do not succeed in explaining the origin of the Suetonian emperor-portraits. Concerning the physiognomic thesis, whereas Suetonius utilizes specific physiognomic terms, we do not find an exact correspondence with any treatise on physiognomics. Regarding the use of real emperor-statues and portraits as sources, we also cannot find an exact correspondence between Suetonian bodily descriptions and iconographic evidence.

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et unum interdum responsum et relatus ad caput digitus et flexus oculorum. Improbum risus, insanum vultus habitusque demonstrante. Illa enim in apertum per notas exeunt; qualis quisque sit, scies, si quemadmodum laudet, quemadmodum laudetur, aspexeris. In another passage of the Epistulae (66, 1–4), Seneca manifests his dissent against the classical topos of the “kalokagathia”, because his condiscipulus Claranus has a beautiful animus in a weak body (inique enim se natura gessit et talem animum male conlocavit: aut fortasse voluit hoc ipsum nobis ostendere, posse ingenium fortissimum ac beatissimum sub qualibet cute latere ..... errare mihi visus est, qui dixit ‘gratior et pulchro veniens e corpore virtus’ .... Claranus mihi videtur in exemplar editus, ut scire possemus non deformitate corporis foedari animum, sed pulchritudine animi corpus ornari). Concerning Seneca’s view, F. Stok (1995, 126) remarks appropriately: “La fisiognomica, in questa prospettiva, è funzionale non più alla predizione bensì al giudizio sull’individuo, un giudizio che è insieme medico e morale, per la stretta correlazione che la cultura di quest’epoca stabilisce fra la salute e regime di vita”.

42 Stok 1995, 130: “Per questo aspetto Svetonio risulta decisamente lontano da una fisiognomica del tipo di quella esposta da Polemone. Questa distanza è ulteriormente accentuata dalla correlazione causale che Svetonio suggerisce fra il costume e il regime di vita di un individuo e tratti fisiognomici che definiremmo non-costituzionali”.

43 de Croizant 2009, 52: “Suétone, lui, a créé une image ambigue, dont le premiere objectif est le désacraliser le portrait officiel et de casser les mythes impériaux ayant trait au physique ou à la personnalité de l’empereur (superstition, talent oratoire, quotient intellectual).”

44 Rohrbacher 2010, 94–103, analysing the body-descriptions of Augustus, notes that the detail of dentes rarios et exiguos et scabros (teeth wide-apart, small, and ill-kept) is not attested in the physiognomics manuals. The description of the teeth may be a “realistic” detail.

45 Stok 1995, 117: “la comparazione fra ritratti e caratteri degli imperatori svetoniani non trova apparezzabile riscontro nella trattatistica fisiognomica. Ma neppure la tesi «realistica» risulta del tutto soddisfacente: se per «realismo» si intende l’utilizzazione di dati documentari (autoptici o iconografici o anche immaginari).” Trimble 2014, 121: “No Roman statue shows a ruler with the physical
commissioned art, especially that of the imperial official portraits, was usually flattering rather than polemical, while physiognomics mostly deals with negative cases. Furthermore, the body-types in statuary are replications of a standard repertoire. Therefore, some scholars find it impossible to reconcile the text of Suetonius with the iconographic tradition of imperial portraits. A new approach to this problem has been made by J. Trimble, who in a study published in 2014 highlights the rhetorical aspect both of Suetonius’s descriptions and the portraits of the emperors. She emphasizes how the physical descriptions offered by Suetonius are not neutral, but always linked to the praise or blame of the emperors, often pointing to the proportion or disproportion of the different parts of the body. In this sense, these descriptions do not intend to provide a photographic (realistic) image of the emperor, but are instead a rhetorical medium used (mostly) as invective. Imperial portrait statuary was also rhetorical, but its purpose was to honour the ruler being portrayed and not to offer an invective against him.

Another possibility is that Suetonius used caricatured portraits of the emperors that emphasized some of their particular bodily features. Unfortunately, we do not have any portraits like this. If these existed, they must have been prohibited. Moreover, we must keep in mind that Suetonius’s readers knew the physical appearance of the emperors from their official portraits, throughout the Roman Empire as well as from the coins, on the front-side of which the emperor’s face was always impressed. These portraits, which performed important communicative functions, were also a means of propaganda which circulated the official image of the emperor. From this point of view, it does not make much sense to investigate these images as photographic documents of the emperor’s true character. It makes sense to look at them from a physiognomic point of view, and to investigate whether physiognomics or common sense physiognomics played a role in constructing these images. In other words, imperial iconography (especially in the case of Augustus) does not
reflect reality; it is an idealization of the emperor’s figure, destined for immortality through official propaganda. It should also be noted that except for the portrait of Nero, which in fact seems to be realistic, all portraits of the Julio-Claudian dynasty show an apparent and intended resemblance to Augustus, in order to legitimise the succession. Furthermore, thanks to the studies of P. Zanker,\(^2\) it is widely believed that many images of the emperors were actually commissioned by private persons and in this way – through the consecration and exhibition of the emperor’s image in a private or public space – they were intended to honour the person of the emperor. These images had two recipients: the emperor, who was honoured, and the ordinary public of the people who saw these images and read the epigraph of dedication.

### Suetonius and the bad emperors

In the framework of the genre of Latin biography, Suetonius is, as said above, the first who accompanied the descriptions of the individual’s life with bodily descriptions, putting them generally at the end of the biography and constructing them like an *ekphrasis*. Furthermore, he uses a precise physiognomic terminology, which refers to the individual parts of the body. He usually begins with the general features of the person (*statura, corpus, color, forma*), and then moves on to the features of the head and the face (*cervix/caput; os/vultus/facies*), lingering particularly on the features of the eyes and hair (*occuli and capilli*), the facial elements that are innate, according for example to the Anonymous Latinus.\(^3\) This is unsurprising. According to the traditional instruction in rhetoric, the face is said to be the mirror of the mind. Cicero (*De oratore* 3, 216) says that the face reflects all movements of the mind (*omnis enim motus animi suum quendam a natura habet vultum*)\(^4\); and according to Quintilian (*Inst*. 11, 3, 65: *ex vultu ingressuque perspicitur habitus animorum*), the face reveals the aspect of the minds. Ancient medicine also shared this view. For diagnostic purposes, Hippocrates (*progn*. 2) recommended examining the face of the patient first:\(^5\) “First

\(^2\) Zanker 1987, 264–293.

\(^3\) 13: *Sciendum etiam de capillis his qui cum homine nascuntur quod certiora sint signa, ut capitis, superciliorum et oculorum*. It must also be known that those hairs with which a man is born are rather sure signs, such as those which belong to the head, the eyebrows, and the eyes (transl. by Ian Repath).

\(^4\) See also Cic. (*De legibus* 1, 9, 26–27): “has formed the features of man’s face in such a way as to express the character hidden deep within it” (*tum speciem ita formavit oris, ut in ea penitus reconditos mores effingeret*) and that “the face . . . indicates the character” (*vultus . . . indicat mores*). Cicero often draws attention to the physical features of his oratorical opponents (*Pro Rosc*. 7, 20; *de red*. 6, 15–16; *In Pis*. 1); for a collection of Cicero’s passages see Evans 1969, 43–44.

\(^5\) *Prog*. 2: Σκέπτεσθαι δὲ χρὴ ὑδὲ ἐν τοῖσι οξέα νοσημάτι. Πρῶτον μὲν τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ νοσεόντος, εἰ διοικόν ἐστι τοῖσι τῶν ὑγιαινόντων, μάλιστα δὲ, εἰ αὐτὸ ἐωστέω.
he must examine the face of the patient, and see whether it is like the faces of healthy people, and especially whether it is like its usual self”. Seneca shares a similar point of view and recommends a careful examination of facial mutations in order to recognize the appearance and the signs of anger.\(^{56}\)

In analysing Suetonius’ text, I will begin with the life of Tiberius, the first five chapters of which deal with the history of the \textit{gens Claudia} (Tiberius was adopted by Augustus). Suetonius remembers that Tiberius’ ancestors (both the men and the women) were praised for glorious deeds as well as for ignominious crimes. Tiberius is said to have had a very unhappy childhood; furthermore, he was not the favourite of Augustus and he was designated as emperor only thanks to the intrigues of his mother. His life as emperor was modest; he refused, for example, honorific titles like \textit{pater patriae} as well as the civic crown, and he tried to reduce the luxury and the expense of the organisation of the public games. According to Suetonius, the death of his sons, Germanicus in Syria and Drusus in Rome, represented the turning point in his life.\(^{57}\) He left Rome and went to Campania, and after a long stay in his Villa in Terracina, he retired to his luxurious residence in Capri. Here, according to Suetonius (42) “having obtained the licence afforded by seclusion, far from the eyes of the city, he finally gave in simultaneously to all the vices he had so long struggled to conceal.”\(^{58}\) To put it another way: in Capri, Tiberius revealed his true nature.

The expression \textit{cuncta vitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit} is noteworthy. Tiberius had a natural inclination toward vice; he was, however, able to repress it. After the death of his sons, this nature re-emerged and dominated his life. Suetonius’ careful, yet perhaps exaggerated description of the corrupt life of the emperor in Capri aims at creating a negative image of Tiberius. The reader is led to hate this emperor and consider him an old, dangerous, and perverted man, who raped young girls and

\(^{56}\) Seneca (De ira, 1, 1, 3): \textit{Ut scias autem non esse sanos quos ira possedit, ipsum illorum habitum intuere; nam ut furentium certa indicia sunt audax et minax vultus, tristis frons, torva facies, citatus gradus, inquietae manus, color versus, crebra et vehementius acta suspuria, ita irascentium eadem signa sunt; flagrant ac micant oculi, multus ore tota rurbo, exaestuante ab imis praecordiis sanguine, labra quatiuntur, dentes comprimuntur, horrent ac surriguntur capilli, spiritus coactus ac stridens}. “That you may know that they whom anger possesses are not sane, look at their appearance; for as there are distinct symptoms which mark madmen, such as a bold and menacing air, a gloomy brow, a stern face, a hurried walk, restless hands, changed colour, quick and strongly-drawn breathing; the signs of angry men, too, are the same: their eyes blaze and sparkle, their whole face is a deep red with the blood which boils up from the bottom of their heart, their lips quiver, their teeth are set, their hair bristles and stands on end, their breath is laboured and hissing” (transl. by A. Stewart).

\(^{57}\) 39: \textit{Sed orbatus utroque filio, quorum Germanicus in Syria, Drusus Romae obierat, secessum Campaniae petit.}

\(^{58}\) 42: \textit{Ceterum secreti licentiam nancus et quasi civitatis oculis remotis, cuncta simul vitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit.}
boys and lived in a state of decadent luxury. After the enumeration of Tiberius’ misdeeds in chapter 68, the short ekphrastic description of the emperor’s body follows.

_1 Corpore fuit ampio atque robusto, statura quae iustam excederet; latus ab umeris et pectore, ceteris quoque membris usque ad imos pedes aequalis et congruens; sinistra manu agiliore ac validiore, articulis ita firmis, ut recens et integrum malum digito terebraret, caput pueri vel etiam adolescens talitro vulneraret. 2 Colore erat candido, capillo pone occipitium summissiore ut cervicem etiam obtegeret, quod gentile in illo videbatur; facie honesta, in qua tamen crebri et subiti tumores, cum praegrandibus oculis et qui, quod mirum esset, noctu et in tenebris viderent, sed ad breve et cum primum e somno patuissent; deinde rursum hebescebant. 3 Incedebat cervice rigida et obstipa, adducto fere vultu, plerumque tacitus, nullo aut rarissimo etiam cum proximis sermone eoque tardissimo, nec sine mollis quadam digitorum gesticulatione. Quae omnia ingrata atque arrogantiae plena et animadvertit Augustus in eo et excusare temptavit saepe apud senatum ac populum professus naturae vitia esse, non animi._

_He was big and strong in body, his height being above average and his chest and shoulders broad, with the rest of his body right down to his toes being well in proportion._ His left hand was the more agile and powerful and his joints were so strong that he could push one through a fresh and sound apple and with the tap of a finger he could injure the head of a boy or even a youth. _His complexion was pale and his hair at the back of his head grew far down, so that it covered his neck, which seems to have been a family trait._ His face was noble though affected by sudden and violent flashes of emotion, with very large eyes, which, astonishingly, could see even at night and in darkness (though only briefly when he had just woken up; then they would lose their sharpness). When he walked, he held his neck stiffly drawn back, with a _rather severe expression on his face._ For the most part he was silent, only speaking very rarely, even with those closest to him and then with no alacrity. When he spoke, he would always gesticulate rather affectedly with his fingers. All these characteristics, which were unpleasant and suggested arrogance, Augustus had observed and he often tried to make excuses for them to the senate and people, claiming that these faults were ones he was born with and not a reflection of his character. Tiberius enjoyed extremely good health, suffering from virtually no illness throughout the period of his rule, even though from the time he was thirty he had relied on his own judgement and taken no advice or help from doctors (transl. by C. Edwards).

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59 On the sexual behaviour of the emperors in Suetonius’s biographies, see Chong-Gossard 2010.
The terminology is noteworthy. Tiberius’ body is said to have been *amplum et robustum* (large and strong). Indeed, Tiberius was a brave and victorious general, who fought against the barbarians and defeated them, as Suetonius also reports. Furthermore, he had a large and strong thorax. According to physiognomic theory, a large and strong body with broad chest and shoulders represents an evident sign of courage. As Suetonius testifies, Tiberius gained such bodily features through hard training and discipline. They represented the signs of his glorious past, when he was a brave general. Nevertheless, the analysis of the other bodily features reveals his true nature. His complexion was *candidus* (white, clear) and his long hair covered his neck. Such a complexion is a sign of a vile character, according to Pseudo-Aristotle (812a12: οἱ δὲ λευκοί ἄγαν δειλοί). Furthermore, the combination of white (or clear) complexion with long hair – unusual for a Roman – is said to be a sign of a licentious character (λάγνου σημεία). We also find the same characterisation of the licentious in the Anonymus Latinus on physiognomics. The colour *albus* is said to be *virtuti contrarius* (opposite the virtue). Concerning the long hair, it represents an evident sign of an *ingeugnum calidum et libidinosum* as well as of a *ferum animum*. Suetonius’ combination of complexion and hair is not a coincidence and emphasizes the innate cruelty of the emperor; this fact is also expressed in the sentence *quod in illo gentile videbatur*, which explains the innate true inclination of Tiberius. Indeed, complexion, hair, and particularly the eyes are said to be the main elements of the physiognomics, because they are innate in all human beings. His face looked honest and was affected by sudden and violent flashes of emotion. His eyes are said to have been very large (*praegrandibus*) and capable of seeing at night. This is another negative feature. According to Pseudo-Aristotle, large and glittering eyes betray a licentious character (812b11–12, οἱ δὲ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς στειληνοὺς ἔχοντες λάγνοι, ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀλεκτρυόνας καὶ κόρακας). Moreover, Tiberius’ carriage was characterised by a stiff neck, which became particularly evident when he walked. According to the Anonymus Latinus, the stiff neck is a sign of an ignorant, insolent, and arrogant person (54: *rigida et tanquam defixa cervix indolentum et insolentem significat – cervix dura indolciem hominem ostendit*). According to Suetonius, Tiberius was criticised by the senators for this reason, and Augustus himself had to defend him in the Senate, claiming that these faults were ones he was born with and not a reflection of his character. In other words, these features were innate (*natura*) and not part of his true mind. Generally, Tiberius’ bodily appearance is said to have the clear features (or

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63 On this passage, see the remarks of Stok 1995, 121, who identifies this discourse with that mentioned by Tacitus (*ann. 1, 10, 7*) concerning the renovation of Tiberius’ tribunitian power. In this context, Augustus probably should have mentioned the virtues of Tiberius in order to convince the senators.
signs) of a licentious and cruel man. These signs are: the pale complexion, the large and glittering eyes, the long hair covering the neck, and the stiff neck. In this case, the physiognomic description of Tiberius coincides with his true character, as revealed by his misdeeds. A comparison between Suetonius’ physiognomic description and the iconographic tradition of the official imperial portrait of this emperor may be useful in highlighting points of contact and divergences from this literary text. These artistic portraits represented the official images of the emperors which circulated in the empire. Furthermore, these images constituted an important medium to circulate and manifest the face of the most important person in the empire.64

We have three different kinds of sources: the portraits on coins, the busts, and the statues.65 The coins display on the obverse the emperor’s bust in profile; according to the iconographic tradition, the head often bears a laurel crown and the face has features that resemble those of Augustus in order to emphasize the dynastic continuity. Busts and statues, however, offer us the possibility of a better comparison with Suetonius’ text. The hair covers the cervix, but we cannot establish whether the eyes were glittering or not (the largeness of the eyes is not exceptionally large in my opinion). We also cannot know whether this neck was really stiff when Tiberius walked. Anyway, the body looks big and strong. The physiognomic features of Suetonius’ portraits do not contradict the iconographic tradition. Suetonius (or his source) interprets the iconographic portraits, and he adds those elements of the physiognomic tradition that are visible on a living person but not verifiable on a marble portrait. According to this new point of view, Suetonius’ descriptions complete the eikones (the images) that imitate only the body and do not express the ethos, the true character of a person.

The description of Tiberius in Suetonius provides the most striking example of an emperor whose physical merits and defects correspond to the virtues and vices of his character from a physiognomic point of view. Furthermore, Suetonius’ description of Tiberius’ appearance does not belong to any stated period of his life.

Caligula’s biography provides another remarkable example for the reconstruction of a bad emperor’s personality. Caligula, Tiberius’ successor, is said to have had an innate inclination to cruelty and depravity, which he, however, was able to dissimulate during his youth. Often, he attended tortures and executions in disguise in order to see the pain of the convicted without being recognised. According to Suetonius (Cal. 11), Tiberius recognized the true nature of his successor and used to remark that “Caligula alive would bring death for himself and all others, that he was rearing a viper for the Roman people – and a Phaethon for the world”. Suetonius then goes on to recount the sexual excesses of this emperor, who raped his own sisters and had

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64 On the images of Tiberius, see Hertel 2013 (Typus Ephesos, Basel, Kopenhagen (or Adoptiontypus), Berlin-Napoli-Sorrento, Chiaramont, Kopenhagen 624).
65 The small bronze statuettes represent another interesting category of emperor-images, see Dahmen 2001.
countless relationships with prostitutes and married women, in order to emphasize his depravity and to construct a negative image of him.

If we consider Caligula’s description, we again find remarkable points of contact between Suetonius and the physiognomic tradition, particularly in terms of the emperor’s vices.

\[50\] 1 Statura fuit eminenti, colore expallido, corpore enormi, gracilitate maxima cervicis et crurum, oculis et temporibus concavis, fronte lata et torva, capillo raro at circa verticem nullo, hirsutus cetera. Quare transeunte eo prospicere ex superiore parte aut omnino quacumque de causa capram nominare, criminosum et exitiale habebatur. Vultum vero natura horridum ac taetrum etiam ex industria efferabat componens ad speculum in omnem terrorem ac formidinem. 2 Valutudo ei neque corporis neque animi constitit.

1. He was tall of stature, very pallid of complexion. His body was ill formed, his neck and legs very thin. His eyes and temples were sunken, while his brow was broad and intimidating. His hair was sparse, his crown being completely bald, while the rest of his body was hairy. Because of this he pronounced it a crime meriting death if, when he was passing, anyone should look down on him from above, or if, for whatever reason, the word ‘goat’ was mentioned. Though nature had made his face hideous and repulsive, he deliberately tried to make it more so by practising all kinds of terrifying and dreadful expressions in the mirror. 2. His health, both of body and of mind, was unstable (transl. by C. Edwards).

Due to his physical appearance, this emperor can be associated with the disagreeable features of the panther and of the goat. Like a panther, Caligula shows oculis et temporibus concavis (sunken eyes and temples). The panther is said by Pseudo-Aristotle (809b36–810a21) to be a completely vile animal ὅλως δολερόν, whose eyes are small and sunken (μικρὸς καὶ ἐγκοίλους). The noteworthy expression corpore enormi, gracilitate maxima cervicis et crurum finds an interesting correspondence with the description of a panther as an animal without bodily proportion (ὅλον ἄναθρόν τε καὶ ἀσύμμετρον). Like a goat, the body of Caligula was completely covered by hair, which, according to the physiognomic tradition, betrays an inclination to luxury. According to Pseudo-Aristotle (808b; 812b),66 the goat is the most lascivious of the animals. Finally, we should mention the following quotation from the Anonymus Latinus, according to which men whose bodies are covered by black prickly hair have a natural inclination to luxury: (103) homo hirsutus capillis negris directis, hirsuto ore ac mento temporibus oculis punguibus relucentibus furiosus erit pronus in libidinem. Moreover, all libidinosi

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are said to have a pallid colour and the body covered by hair: (112) *libidinosi et intemperantes libidinum ita sunt: color albus, corpus hispidum rectis capillis*).

His complexion, *colore expallido*, is a sign of cowardice, as the author of the Anonymus Latinus puts it: *color vehementer albus virtuti est contrarius* (79). Furthermore, according to Pseudo-Aristotle, such a complexion betrays a lascivious character (808b: λάγνου σημεῖα· λευκόχρως καὶ δασὺς εὐθείαις θριξὶ καὶ παχεῖαις καὶ μελαίαις; 812a12: οὶ δὲ λευκοὶ ἄγαν δειλοὶ).

The expression *fronte lata et torva* indicates stupidity and foolishness (17: *qui frontem spatiosam nimium habent, pigrioris ingenii sunt*.).

Just like for Tiberius, Suetonius constructs for Caligula as well a fitting physiognomic picture, which does not contradict his misdeeds.

The numismatic and the archaeological evidence can be used to reconstruct the official portrait of this emperor. Like Tiberius’ head, Caligula’s head on the obverse of the coins, minted both with and without the laurel crown, shows an impressive similarity to that of Augustus. This somewhat constructed similarity aimed at emphasizing the continuity of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The numismatic evidence does not, unfortunately, provide us with any evidence that we can compare with Suetonius’ description of this emperor. Furthermore, from the busts and statues, we do not know whether Caligula had a body covered with hair, nor whether his complexion was pallid. Moreover, his brow does not look particularly large, whereas his eyes are (perhaps) a bit sunken. Personally, I do not see any similarity with a goat and I do not understand why people have said him to be goat-like. Finally, his face does not look as terrible as Suetonius says.67

In this case, the physiognomic reconstruction (or construction) of Suetonius seems to have been based on a fictional construction of the personality of this bad emperor, who had an innately lascivious and cruel character. Such a portrait stands in contrast to the official iconographic type, diffused by coins and sculptures in the Roman empire.

Finally, as an example of a good and virtuous person, I would like to present the case of Germanicus. Suetonius inserts the short physiognomic description of him in the 3rd chapter of Caligula’s biography. According to the idea of the perfect Roman citizen, expressed for example in the eulogium for Scipio, Germanicus united in his person all virtues of the body and of the mind, as emphasized in the description of his body.

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67 J. Trimble describes in the following manner the contrast between the iconographic evidence and the Suetonius’ description of Caligula (Trimble 2014, 118): “By contrast, visual representations of Caligula show very little of this ugliness. On coins, he is depicted with large eyes, but that is a recurrent feature of Julio-Claudian dynastic portraiture and not specific to this ruler. Neither his eyes nor his temples appear particularly hollow; his neck does not look particularly thin, and he has a normal amount and distribution of hair. The portrait sculptures are even more distant from Suetonius’ account. They show Caligula with plenty of hair, unremarkable temples and a reasonably sized neck. His eyes are large but not especially hollow; there is no sign of unusual height, spindly legs, or copious body hair. Rather, his full-length statues depict a standard, well-proportioned body.”
That Germanicus had all the virtues of body and spirit to a degree achieved by no other man is generally agreed. His person was striking, his valour conspicuous, his talent for eloquence and learning, both Greek and Roman, was outstanding. He was noted for his kindliness of disposition and was remarkably successful in his endeavours to secure people’s goodwill and to merit their affection. One aspect of his appearance out of proportion with the rest was the thinness of his legs but even this he gradually managed to improve through assiduous riding after meals (transl. by C. Edwards).

He was beautiful – the term forma refers to bodily beauty – and courageous. The association of the terms formam et fortitudinem egregiam (excellent form, beauty and firmness, courage) is also noteworthy. Furthermore, he was intelligent and wise. The thin legs represented, however, the only deficiency that disturbed the symmetry of his perfect body. He is said to have reinforced his legs through regular training and discipline. It is important for us to keep in mind that an innate corporeal deficiency could be corrected through self-control and discipline. In other words, human physiognomy can be partially created or constructed throughout the course of one’s life by means of the aforementioned discipline and self-control. This passage caught the attention of F. Stok, who interpreted it as a reference to the use of diagnostic physiognomics in the framework of Suetonius’ work.68 Thus, discipline and self-control allow for the change and improvement of innate bodily features (and deficiencies), also improving thereby the character. This use of the physiognomic tradition, in connection with one’s way of life, is said to be diagnostic. Therefore, by virtue of bodily appearance, it is possible to discover the features of an individual’s character. For his descriptions of the emperors, Suetonius adopted a diagnostic physiognomics, according to which the bodily appearance reflects the passions, the way of life as well as the attitudes of a person. This type of physiognomic tradition investigates the body posture, the attitudes, and the expressions of the face; it aims at expressing a judgment about a given person. This judgment is both moral and medical by virtue of the correlation between way of life and health.

Conclusions

Suetonius adopted a physiognomic method in constructing an image of the emperors that was appropriate to their deeds and misdeeds. These depictions, which often stand in contrast to the official iconographic tradition of the imperial portraits, represent the physiognomic mirror of the emperors’ true nature. Unfortunately, we cannot confirm whether or not Suetonius used a specific physiognomic treatise, such as that of Polemon. Probably, like other later authors (Ammianus Marcellinus and the biographers of the *Historia Augusta*), his physiognomic knowledge goes back to some sort of “common sense physiognomics”. This knowledge enabled him to construct the most appropriate physical features for the protagonists of his biographies, in order to meet the expectations of his readers. Furthermore, it is also no coincidence that these descriptions were mostly placed at the end of the biographies, after the reader had read about the vices and misconduct of the emperors and had already made a judgment about them.

The answer to the question we began with, whether Suetonius knew and used physiognomics, is clearly yes. As both his terminology and other points of contact with the extant physiognomic treatises show, Suetonius utilised physiognomic knowledge within the fiction of his work in order to create a “physique du role” for the protagonists of the Roman history. Moreover, a consideration of the archaeological evidence allows us to further suppose that Suetonius had existing official models in mind and offered a picture of the emperors that contrasted with their widely disseminated official portraits.

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