In his biography of Augustus Suetonius offers no discussion of Augustus’ plans for succession, nor in subsequent lives is ‘succession’ ever used as a rubric to organize material or judge emperors. The contrast with modern scholars of the Caesars is striking. Barbara Levick, for example, devotes a chapter of her study of Tiberius to the “Dynastic Catastrophe” and a chapter of her _Vespasian _to “Vespasian and His Sons.” More explicitly, Anthony Barrett has an early chapter in his life of Caligula on “The Struggle for the Succession” and Miriam Griffin a retrospective chapter in her life of Nero on “The Problem of the Succession.” Contributors to Barrett’s serial _Lives of the Caesars _regularly include a section on the succession (e.g., Werner Eck on “Succession” in his chapter on Augustus, Anthony Birley on “Hadrianic Succession” in his chapter on Marcus Aurelius). In my own recent study of the principate of Claudius the problem of succession is foregrounded throughout. Whole articles and monographs are devoted to various aspects of the subject, and it looms large in a remarkable essay by Paul Veyne “Qu’était-ce qu’un empereur romain?”.

Suetonius’ practice, to be sure, is followed by Fergus Millar, who (as Keith Hopkins noted in a review) never mentioned in _The Emperor and the Roman World _the problem of succession, despite its evident interest to modern historians. It certainly is anachronistic, and arguably misleading, to use such phrases as “succession policy” when speaking of Roman emperors, especially early Roman emperors, and Millar’s avowed goal in his study was

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1 Levick (1976) 148–179 and Levick (1999) 184–195 respectively. I take the opportunity to acknowledge here very helpful comments from Alisdair Gibson on an earlier draft of this chapter.
5 Veyne (2005) 15–78. Examples of articles and books heavily concerned with the subject are Parsi (1963), Scheid (1992), and Flaig (1992), and for further remarks on the literature see Osgood (2011) 268.
to avoid the use of any “conceptions drawn from wider sociological studies.” Still, historians are right to debate what Augustus’ own plans for a successor were, or for that matter were not, and in particular if he had a conception of hereditary succession—of a succession, as Ronald Syme influentially put, “in his own family and of his own blood.” If for no other reason, the debate matters because these plans did impinge on the legitimacy of Augustus’ actual successors, especially Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, and therefore influenced decisions that they and others such as provincial governors, the Praetorians, and courtiers made (as the chapters by Gibson and Drinkwater in this volume explore).

In this paper, then, I deal with two problems, the first being the traditional problem of Augustus’ plans for a succession—much has been written on this, we shall see, but it is a vital issue for this volume. The second, more novel, problem is how to explain Suetonius’ treatment of succession. After examining what Suetonius has to say about the succession to Augustus, I then use other evidence to suggest what decisions were made regarding succession under Augustus. Some significant omissions in Suetonius’ account are thus revealed, but I will conclude by suggesting that Suetonius, writing in the second century AD, does after all have a specific approach to the problem of succession, which has shaped his account of Augustus. His views are worth taking seriously because they help to suggest not only how Romans of his day thought about succession but also how Augustus’ approach to succession could be reconceived to supply a continuing precedent for the developing political culture of the principate. As with other renowned historical events—the issuing of Magna Carta or the Boston Tea Party for example—the grand theme of ‘The Succession to Augustus’ could be reinvented by later generations to suit their own needs.

**Suetonius on the Succession to Augustus**

Suetonius, as noted, nowhere mentions Augustus’ specific plans for how, if at all, the extraordinary power he had achieved should be directly perpetuated after his death. The closest he gets is to quote Augustus’ edict of 2 BC,

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7 Millar (1977) xii.
8 Syme (1939) 341.
9 See also, for example, on Caligula, Winterling (2011) 52–89; on Claudius, Osgood (2011) 206–224; on Nero Griffin (1984) 189–196.
10 The bibliography is immense, and my citations throughout are intended as illustrative rather than exhaustive.