

VELLEIUS PATERCULUS 2.130.3 AND THE SON(S) OF DRUSUS CAESAR

In the conspicuously doleful conclusion to his history, Velleius Paterculus notes the decease of Tiberius' two sons and a grandson (2.130.3):¹

*ut ad maiora transcendam, quamquam et haec ille duxit maxima, quid
ut iuuenes amitteret filios? quid ut nepotem ex Druso suo?*

dixit P A : duxit Rhenanus Druso suo Burer : Drusuo B : Druso P A

Commentators have noted that this grandson must be the twin brother of the ill-starred Ti. Iulius Caesar (Gemellus) (PIR² I 226); that is to say Ti. Germanicus Iulius Caesar (PIR² I 224), who expired in A.D. 23 (Tac. Ann. 4.15.1).² Yet what is less often acknowledged is that this conclusion leaves us with something of a prosopographical crux.

The union of Drusus and Livia produced at least four children.³ Aside from the aforementioned twins, a certain Iulia (PIR² I 636), *Drusi filia*, first married the eldest son of Germanicus, Nero Iulius Caesar (PIR² I 223) in A.D. 20, then the senator C. Rubellius Blandus in A.D. 33. Given the date of her betrothal to Nero, it seems likely that Iulia was born in either A.D. 5 or A.D. 6. Another child, a close coeval of Iulia's, is suggested by our sources. Among his annalistic notices for A.D. 15, Cassius Dio (57.14.6) records the death of an unnamed son of Drusus. The date of death is not implausible. A.D. 15 was a year of flooding at Rome, and it is possible that the various diseases that almost inevitably accompanied the Tiber floods caused the death of this child.⁴ Whatever his cause of death, this son of Drusus seemingly died before the birth of Gemellus and his brother,⁵ at the age of less than ten years. Yet any record of this unnamed scion of Drusus is conspicuously absent from the more elaborate narrative of Tacitus. Suetonius too offers nothing.

1) The text and apparatus cited of Velleius are those of W.S. Watt, *Velleius Paterculus Historiarum libri duo* (Stuttgart 1998).

2) E.g. A.J. Woodman, *Velleius Paterculus, The Tiberian Narrative* (Cambridge 1977) 273; M. Elefante, *Ad M. Vinicium consulem libri duo* (Hildesheim 1997) 541.

3) The date of Drusus' marriage to Livia is not known, although it was probably contracted not long after A.D. 4: R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford 1986) 94 n. 7.

4) For the floods in A.D. 15, note Dio Cass. 57.14.7; Tac. Ann. 1.76.1.

5) Tacitus places the birth of the twins in A.D. 19 (Tac. Ann. 2.84.1). The dating of the birth of the twins is disputed: E. Koestermann, *Cornelius Tacitus, Annalen, Band 1, Buch 1–3* (Heidelberg 1963) 408. E. Champlin, *Tiberius and the Heavenly Twins*, *JRS* 101 (2011) 73–99 at 93, dates the birth to A.D. 20 following the conjectures of Degrassi (*I.It. XIII*, 1.226) and ultimately O. Hirschfeld, *Zur annalistischen Anlage des Taciteischen Geschichtswerkes*, *Hermes* 25 (1890) 363–73 at 365–73.

As a result, the existence of this unnamed child of Drusus and Livia has been either disputed or denied.⁶

Such doubt is problematic. Suetonius' knowledge of Drusus' family is patently defective and inadequate.⁷ Tacitus' silence does not offer firm ground for disbelief either. The campaigns of Germanicus, the 'reintroduction' of charges of *maiestas*, unrest in the theatres, and sundry senatorial transactions occupy the bulk of Tacitus' narrative for A.D. 15. With such a programme, a token obituary notice for a peripheral figure of the *domus Caesaris* might be omitted for compositional reasons.⁸ Indeed, for the Latin annalist, the progeny of Drusus only assume significance after the death of Germanicus and with the question of the imperial succession seemingly reopened.⁹

More conclusively, positive evidence may be adduced for the existence of this unnamed son in Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponto*. Ovid makes an oblique reference to sons born to both Drusus and Germanicus in a poem datable to around A.D. 12 or 13,¹⁰ when he says (Pont. 2.2.73–4):¹¹

adde nurum neptemque pias natosque nepotum ceteraque Augustae membra ualere domus,

nurum A B e bl : *nuros* C (?) : *nurus* le s : *neptemque* A : *neppamque* (ex *neptamque?*) B (p.c.) : *neptesque* C le e bl

Given that no other attested male children were born to Drusus prior to the birth of Gemellus and his brother Ti. Germanicus Iulius Caesar in A.D. 19, the sons of

6) This putative child of Drusus is omitted from E. Stein's stemma of the Julio-Claudian family in Pauly-Wissowa (E. Stein, Iulius, RE X.1 [1917]), and is not acknowledged by V. Gardthausen, Iulius (136), RE X.1 (1917) 433, or by many of the standard works on Tiberius, e.g. F.B. Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius* (Oxford 1931); B.M. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (London 21999); R. Seager, *Tiberius* (Malden 2005). His historicity, however, is recognized by M. Gelzer, Iulius (154), RE X.1 (1917) 501; R. S. Rogers, *Studies in the Reign of Tiberius* (Baltimore 1943) 95–6; W. Eck, Drusus (II.1), DNP 3 (1997) 826; PIR² I 219 with the accompanying stemma of the Julio-Claudian family, and tentatively by F. Millar, *Ovid and the Domus Augusta: Rome seen from Tomoi*, JRS 83 (1993) 1–17 at 13.

7) E.g. Suet. Tib. 54.1: *cum ex Germanico tres nepotes, ... ex Druso unum Tiberium haberet.*

8) If we are right to assume that Tacitus knew of it. On the whole Tacitus' selection of annalistic material for the years A.D. 15–16 is different from that of Dio, and may be indicative of his reliance on a different source or sources. Thus, R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford 1958) 691; cf. R. Syme, *Roman Papers III* (Oxford 1984) 1014–42 at 1019.

9) E.g. Tac. Ann. 2.84: *ceterum recenti adhuc maestitia soror Germanici Livia, nupta Druso, duos uirilium sexus simul enixa est. ... sed populo tali in tempore id quoque dolorem tulit, tamquam auctus liberis Drusus domum Germanici magis urgeret.*

10) For dating, see R. Syme, *History in Ovid* (Oxford 1978) 37–42.

11) The text and apparatus are those of J. A. Richmond, *Ovidius ex Ponto libri quattuor* (Leipzig 1990).

Augustus' grandchildren (*natosque nepotum*) must refer to the sons of Germanicus and a son of Drusus, presumably the very one whom Dio believed died in A.D. 15.

With the historicity of this child secured, we need to turn again to Velleius and his apparently contradictory statement about Tiberius' loss of a single grandson. Two options present themselves to explain this apparent omission of Drusus' first-born son.

The first is that the error lies with Velleius, and that he simply forgot about the death of this member of the imperial *domus*. But such a conclusion seems unlikely. While often vague, Velleius is seldom negligent when it comes to matters of prosopography. Indeed, Velleius seems to have dealt with such matters with appropriate care and precision, especially for those individuals close to the seat of power.¹² Moreover, Velleius was praetor in A.D. 15 (Vell. Pat. 2.124.4), and would have recalled Tiberius' seemingly exemplary conduct in the aftermath of his grandson's death, as noted by Dio.

The second and preferable explanation is that the mistake is in the transmitted text. As always the wretched text of Velleius presents would-be editors with problems as well as possibilities. The manuscript tradition of Velleius – three imperfect copies descended from a now lost archetype – is scrappy and riddled with scribal errors.¹³ Therefore, it is tempting to propose the conjecture *nepotes* for *nepotem* found in the MSS, so that the emended text reads: *quid ut nepotes ex Druso suo*. That such an error (the substitution of a *m* for an *s*) could have entered into the tradition is not difficult to appreciate at any stage of transmission. Indeed, the introduction of such a corruption is observable in the transmitted text of Ovid quoted above, where readings in the MSS are divided between *neptesque* and *neptemque*.¹⁴

It may also be noted that stylistically, as well as historically, such an emendation is consonant with the tenor of the passage. At this point in the narrative, Velleius has no intention of suppressing any details concerning Tiberius' misfortune. Had Velleius' text read,

*ut ad maiora transcendam, quamquam et haec ille duxit maxima, quid
ut iuvenes amitteret filios? quid ut nepotes ex Druso suo?*

we as readers would be presented with a balanced crescendo of misfortune – the loss of his two sons, and the loss of two of his grandsons – thus amplifying the extent of Tiberius' *dolor*.

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12) As in the case of the familial connections of Sejanus (Vell. Pat. 2.127.3), or his comment on the exemplary influence of Quinctilius Varus' father and grandfather (Vell. Pat. 2.119.3).

13) For the standard overview of the textual tradition for Velleius, see L. D. Reynolds, Velleius Paterculus, in: L. D. Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford 1983) 431–433.

14) Modern readings are divided as to which is to be preferred. E. g. M. Helzle, *Ovids Epistulae ex Ponto*, Buch I–II: *Kommentar* (Heidelberg 2003) 283, essentially follows Owen's OCT reading: *adde nurum neptesque pias natosque nepotum / ceteraque Augustae membra valere domus*. However, *neptemque* (referring to Augustus' granddaughter Agrippina) is surely preferable to the plural *neptesque*.