

Writers and rioters

*Perceptions and portrayals of urban crowds in
Suetonius' De vita Caesarum*

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**WRITERS AND RIOTERS: perceptions and
portrayals of urban crowds in Suetonius'
*De vita Caesarum***

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Introduction

On 6th 2021, a riot occurred at the United States Capitol in Washington D.C. when supporters of President Donald J. Trump stormed the building. The crowd was described as a ‘violent mob’ that was engaging in unprecedented ‘political violence’.¹ The year before, protests surrounding the death of George Floyd turned grim when violent protestors, described by the president as ‘mobs’, engaged in looting and burned buildings, causing significant danger in urban areas and leading to condemnation by many politicians and media figures.² Since 2018, France has been plagued by groups of mostly lower-class protestors, whose anger, ‘frustration and contempt’ have resulted in ‘riots’, ‘worsening violence’ and ‘an atmosphere of civil war.’³

The responses of politicians, media figures, scientists and others to these violent expressions of discontent by (urban) crowds share one common element: the negative portrayal, and even fear, of large masses of people using means such as force to accomplish their goals, often against the ruling class. This negative portrayal and fear are not unique to modern-day news article writers. On the contrary: remarkably similar sentiments are expressed by ancient Roman authors. They lived in times where cities were volatile environments, just as they are now, with the threat of violent mobs being ever-present. This was especially the case in the Late Republic and during Late Antiquity, when social and political divides were strong and the urban masses were

¹ Lisa Mascaro, Eric Tucker, Mary Clare Jalonick and Andrew Taylor, ‘Pro-Trump mob storms US Capitol in bid to overturn election’, *Associated Press* (7 January 2021); Tina Nguyen and Mark Scott, ‘Right-wing extremist chatter spreads on new platforms as threat of political violence ramps up’, *Politico* (12 January 2021); Heather Alaniz, Kimberly D. Dodson and Jared R. Dmello, ‘Race, Rallies, and Rhetoric: How Trump’s Political Discourse Contributed to the Capitol Riot’, *Journal of Criminal Justice and Law* 5:1 (2021).

² ‘George Floyd death: Widespread unrest as curfews defied across US’, *BBC* (31 May 2020); Kaelan Deese, ‘Vandalism, looting following Floyd death sparks at least \$1B in damages nationwide: report’, *The Hill* (16 September 2020); Bradford Betz, ‘George Floyd unrest: Riots, fires, violence escalate in several major cities’, *Fox News* (31 May 2020); Michelle Mark, ‘Trump says George Floyd’s killing ‘should never have happened,’ vows to ‘stop mob violence, and we’ll stop it cold’’, *Business Insider* (May 31 2020); Chloe Banks, ‘Disciplining Black activism: post-racial rhetoric, public memory and decorum in news media framing of the Black Lives Matter movement’ *Continuum* 32:6 (2018) 709-720.

³ Cecilia Rodriguez, ‘Riots In Paris: ‘Yellow Vests’ Violence, Vandalism And Chaos Hitting Tourism’, *Forbes* (2 December 2018); Adam Nossiter, ‘‘Yellow Vests’ Riot in Paris, but Their Anger Is Rooted Deep in France’, *The New York Times* (2 December 2018); Vivienne Walt, ‘‘There Is an Atmosphere of Civil War.’ France’s Yellow Jackets Are Driving Fury at Macron’, *Time* (30 November 2018).

often willing to enact harm upon others to assert themselves. Because of a long-standing scientific fascination with crowds and their disorderly conduct throughout history, a lot of attention has been paid to these two turbulent periods of the Roman past. However, the Roman Empire has not received nearly as much attention from historians and classicists when it comes to crowd violence and author's responses to it. This is peculiar, since when one reads Imperial-era authors like Suetonius, one does not get the impression that violent crowds were not at all a problem anymore.

To fill this gap, the aim of this thesis is to shed light on Roman Imperial authors' perceptions of (urban) crowds in the Roman world, the nature of their rhetoric towards them, and the patterns of judgement and representation that can be discerned from analysing various their writings. For this research, the writings of the 1st and 2nd-century BC author Suetonius will function as the case study. The main research question is as follows: 'How are urban and lower-class crowds and their actions in the early- to mid-Empire perceived and portrayed in Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum*?' This question will be answered in two ways: first, by conducting an investigation into broader patterns in all available passages on crowds with the help of a database; second, by analysing a number of representative passages on an individual level as case studies. A crowd is defined in this thesis as a large mass of people that broadly share the same characteristics, activities, and often (though not always) the same goals.⁴ My starting hypothesis was that crowds would be represented overwhelmingly negatively by Suetonius, and my main aim was to illustrate how this negative representation is constructed in passages from *De vita Caesarum*. However, during this research I have had to nuance this hypothesis and approach, as I will elaborate upon.

It is impossible to definitively say how exactly Suetonius thought about crowds, because we simply cannot look directly into the man's mind. However, an analysis of the ways in which he talks about crowds, whether through explicit judgement or indirect (negative) associations in the text, provides important insights into his perceptions. After all, someone's writings can reasonably be interpreted to a large extent as a reflection of their views. This is the foundational assumption I will be operating out of when considering patterns of judgements and representations as extensions of Suetonius' own thoughts and perceptions. In my opinion, this is the most reasonable way of estimating and approximating what went on in Suetonius' mind.

⁴ Robert E. Park, *Masse und Publikum* (Bern 1904) 80.

Chapter I will discuss the important historiographical framework of the thesis within the broader research field of (ancient) crowd studies, and will examine Suetonius and his perspective. In Chapter II, I will present my findings from the database that I have compiled for this thesis, consisting of 40 passages from Suetonius that clearly feature crowds. Chapter III will consist of a more detailed textual analysis of 7 passages that I have judged to be best suited for individual examination (see Methods). These three chapters will allow me to provide a balanced answer to the main research question.

This thesis builds upon methods of text analysis used by authors such as Newbold, Lühr and Kröss (see Methods) and applies their approaches to a research field that has not received the proper attention beyond these authors: crowd representation in Roman imperial literature.⁵ By doing a large-scale analysis of narratives and tropes in a single author, I also intend to test observations by Africa, Magalhães and Kelly (see Chapter I) about the almost constant negative literary representation of crowds by aristocratic writers.⁶ Additionally, my research will be a supplement to claims made by MacMullen and others about the Roman Empire being a mostly orderly and peaceful era for the urban environment.⁷ Crucially, this thesis does not deal with the historical reality, because that is in fact not at all what Suetonius was describing; because of this, my findings are not necessarily meant to dispute historical claims.⁸ However, letting an ancient Roman writer speak and analysing his perspective to determine how vivid the fear and distrust for crowds still were for authors in the imperial age will certainly prove to be a fruitful addition to the

⁵ R.F. Newbold, 'The vulgus in Tacitus', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 119:1 (1976) 85-92; Franz-Frieder Lühr, 'Zur Darstellung und Bewertung von Massenreaktionen in der Lateinischen Literatur', *Hermes* 107:1 (1979) 92-114; Katja Kröss, *Die politische Rolle der stadtrömischen Plebs in der Kaiserzeit* (Leiden/Boston 2017).

⁶ Thomas W. Africa, 'Urban Violence in Imperial Rome', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2:1 (1971) 3-21; Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira, 'The crowd in late antiquity: problems and possibilities of an inquiry', in: Cyril Courier and Magalhães de Oliveira, *Ancient History from Below: Subaltern Experiences and Actions in Context* (New York 2021) 254-277; Benjamin Kelly, 'Riot control and imperial ideology in the Roman empire', *Phoenix* (2007) 150-176.

⁷ Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge 1967).

⁸ Richard Saller, 'Anecdotes as Historical Evidence for the Principate', *Greece & Rome* 27:1 (1980) 69-83, there 73: 'The important conclusion to be drawn about these contexts for generation and transmission is that when modern scholars tap anecdotes for historical information, they are using them for a different purpose than the Romans who recited them.'

historiography. Where many historians and classicists, such as Brunt, have instrumentalised ancient writers and used them as tools for investigating the historical reality, I will take a different path, placing the author very much at the centre.⁹ Suetonius' views, perspectives, opinions and emotions form the heart of this thesis. Somewhat surprisingly, this approach has not been taken in many (recent) publications, as I will demonstrate in Chapter I.

I have chosen to use only Suetonius in this research due to the limited length of this thesis.¹⁰ Suetonius was chosen both because of my prior experience in examining his texts, and also because his tendency for telling tall tales makes for a very interesting perspective that provides a different viewpoint than, for example, Tacitus' more traditional historiography (see Chapter II). Because of the limitation in the number of authors examined, my conclusions about Suetonius' perspectives and perceptions are not completely representative of the entire body of Roman imperial writers, and I will not pretend that they are. However, this thesis about Suetonius does provide an example of the type of research into ancient Roman authors that I think is interesting and scientifically relevant for studies concerning Roman literature and Roman history as a whole.

⁹ P.A. Brunt, 'The Roman Mob', *Past & Present* 35 (1966) 3-27. Brunt uses passages from a range of ancient writers to determine the characteristics, motivations and actions of crowds and mobs in the Late Republic, but like most authors does not treat the ancient writers as an end in itself.

¹⁰ The choice was also not made because of a lack of interest, as during the writing process I heavily considered also including Tacitus, and even compiled the beginnings of an *Annales* database in the same format as the *De vita Caesarum* database. Including both Suetonius and Tacitus would have undoubtedly made for an engaging thesis that would have presented an overview that was more representative of Roman imperial authors, seeing as these two writers worked in different genres (biography and historiography respectively). However, due to the length of this thesis, this approach would not have allowed me to do a detailed, individual-level text analysis of a number of passages in either author. I therefore chose to incorporate only one of the authors in order to provide a more in-depth discussion.

Methods

This thesis will feature both quantitative and qualitative analysis of ancient literature. The body of ancient text for this research consists of 40 passages from Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum* that I have selected because they mention lower-class (urban) crowds or crowd actions. I have compiled these 40 through digital searches of internet versions of *De vita Caesarum* on the basis of several keywords in both Latin and English.¹¹ The whole body will be the subject of a quantitative analysis in Chapter II. I have also made a selection of 7 passages that I thought were representative and/or interesting; these will receive an individual qualitative text analysis in Chapter III.¹² It is through this combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis that we gain the most insight into Suetonius and his approach to crowds. I will elaborate upon the two methods.

The first component of the method of this thesis is the use of a database, which extracts and gathers information from a number of passages in order to recognize patterns in a text.¹³ This database functions as an instrument to aid in the analysis of the large number of passages: it is not itself a factual object, but a tool for my examination of the 40 scenes from Suetonius. A similar method was used by Newbold when analysing the use of the term *vulgus* in Tacitus' work.¹⁴ Newbold's article has been a tremendous inspiration to me, especially his discussion of (semi-)statistical subjects like the ratio of positive and negative references, words that are commonly used when discussing crowds, and the amount of times the crowd acts in a violent manner. Many elements of this approach have therefore been incorporated in my own database and its analysis.

¹¹ Keywords include the following: crowd, throng, multitude, mass, mob, riot; *vulgus*, *multitudo*, *turba*, *plebs*. By using both English and Latin terms, I largely eliminate the risk of missing or misinterpreting a passage because of translation issues. The digital versions of *De vita Caesarum* I have used are the following: the Lacus Curtius version, based on the Loeb Classical Library Edition of 1913-1914 and found on <https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/home.html>; and the PDF-version of the 2000 translation by Edwards: Catharine Edwards, *Suetonius: Lives of the Caesars* (Oxford 2000).

¹² It should not come as a surprise that I had hoped to analyse more passages, because there are many interesting scenes where much can be said about them and about the way I judged them when compiling the database. However, due to the limited number of words of this thesis, I have had to make a selection.

¹³ The database can be found in a lightly modified version in the PDF-file of this thesis; the full version has been included as a digital appendix.

¹⁴ Newbold, 'The vulgus in Tacitus'. See especially 86-87, where Newbold displays the numbers and data that he has gathered through the analysis of Tacitus' texts.

First, I have compiled all the fragments of *De vita Caesarum* in which Suetonius discusses lower-class or urban crowds into an Excel-sheet. This excludes purely aristocratic crowds and military crowds, which are beyond the scope of this thesis.¹⁵ I must point out I did experience difficulties in determining the nature of crowds in some cases, but most times it was relatively clear.¹⁶ After the collection process, I subjected the passages to analysis on the basis of several parameters and categories that are useful for schematising and ordering the text fragments. These parameters will be discussed more in Chapter II, where I will present an analysis of the results of gathering information and compiling the database. By utilising the database, I inject some modest statistic elements into a thesis that would have otherwise been purely text-based, and I ensure that my conclusions are not just based on the detailed analysis of a few passages but are also embedded in a more general examination of all available Suetonian material.

This detailed analysis is the second component of the method of this thesis. In Chapter III, I will be conducting qualitative analysis of 7 individual passages; this will serve as a demonstration of the approaches I used to categorize all the passages in the database, and will also function as a focused, detailed addition to the more generalized database. The passages that are discussed in Chapter III have been added to the appendix of the thesis; the relevant fragments from the other passages can be found in the footnotes if they are used as examples in Chapter II.

¹⁵ The exclusion of military crowds is not absolute. Both *Aug.* 14 and *Cal.* 51 feature a crowd of soldiers, but they do not appear in a military context (for example, a battle with an enemy army) but in a context where it does not really make a difference that they are soldiers. I felt I could not exclude these passages purely on the basis that the crowd consists of soldiers; after all, Suetonius' message would have probably been largely the same had they not been soldiers but city-folk. Additionally, we should not forget that Roman soldiers were in many cases city-dwellers themselves. This qualifies them for analysis in this thesis, as long as they do not feature in a purely military context.

¹⁶ In quite a few cases, the text does not make entirely clear what type of crowd Suetonius is discussing. This requires closer analysis by the reader, because the nature of the crowd can be somewhat determined by looking at the context. For example, in *Nero* 28 it is mentioned that a wedding at Nero's house was attended by a large crowd; we can reasonably assume that this crowd would have largely or exclusively consisted of aristocrats and not the common people, so this passage is not suited for analysis in this thesis. Other times, 'the crowd' is discussed in a more general manner and there is no elaboration on the type of crowd Suetonius talks about, such as *Tib.* 72. Again, analysis of the context is needed in this case. There is certainly room for interpretation here. I have tried to determine the nature of the crowds that are discussed as accurately as possible and have accordingly made choices about which passages to include, but as with any research into ancient literature, some errors of interpretation are inevitable.

Several factors have been used to determine which passages receive individual treatment. First of all, I have selected several passages that I have judged to be representative examples for the broader patterns in Suetonius that have become clear through analysis of the database.¹⁷ In addition, I have also selected passages where things are less clear or explicit, including scenes where Suetonius' judgement is 'mixed'. Of course, there is a great deal of subjectivity involved in determining which passages are deemed useful and representative and which ones can be left aside.¹⁸ Above all, my personal estimation of the overall usefulness of the scene for illustrating how the author presents and represents large masses of people has been the chief factor in making the selection. I am confident I have provided a balanced selection that will give a comprehensive overview of perceptions and representations of crowds in *De vita Caesarum*.

In order to maximise the value of the various passages for answering the main research question of this thesis, I will utilise a method of text analysis in Chapter III. This approach is similar to the one used by Kröss, who investigates literary phenomena such as wordplay, narrative context and textual symbolism when discussing the perceptions Roman authors had of urban crowds during the Principate.¹⁹ A similar method is employed by Lühr in an older publication, where he pays very careful attention to the words and sentences used by Roman authors to cast crowd actions in a certain light, usually negative.²⁰ Following Lühr and Kröss, my method places significant emphasis on the use of words with certain meanings by the author, on the

¹⁷ For these type of passages, it is important that they clearly demonstrate Suetonius' approach and way of writing. For example, scenes have been incorporated where the link between crowds and violence is particularly clear, and passages are discussed where the judgement and portrayal are clearly positive. Parameters like the prominence of the crowd and the explicitness of Suetonius' judgement have also been important factors to consider during the selection process. As a general rule, the more prominent the crowd is in the scene (i.e. how actively it asserts itself as an actor in the scene) and the more explicit Suetonius' judgement is, the more suited the passage is for individual analysis. Of course, this is not an exact science, and many considerations have been at the basis of my selection that are not necessarily quantifiable or do not follow strict patterns.

¹⁸ In my original selection and surface analysis of passages from Suetonius, I marked 9 out of 40 passages as 'Maybe' as to the question whether they would be analysed in-depth in the thesis. These 9 have since all been assigned to 'Yes' or 'No', as visible in the database. This demonstrates that the selection process has not always been clear-cut.

¹⁹ Kröss, *Der stadtrömischen Plebs*, 71-112. For example, Kröss pays attention to the various words the Roman imperial authors use to describe the crowds, since using the term *vulgus* could have a substantially different implication than using *multitudo*. Kröss' work will be discussed more in Chapter I.

²⁰ Lühr, 'Massenreaktionen'.

rhetoric of sentences, and on the textual and narrative contexts of the analysed passages.²¹ I will pay particular attention to Suetonius' word choices by analysing the original Latin and the connotations of the words he uses to describe large groups of people. Additionally, I will closely watch the narrative context of the passage and the way this paints the crowd, implicitly or explicitly. For example, as will become clear, crowds are often mentioned by Suetonius when discussing violence, which provides a negative association with the crowd even though Suetonius' judgement toward the crowd might not be explicit or direct. Among other authors, Newbold has recognized that the type of words that appear in textual proximity to the crowd can have great effects on the way the reader reads the text and on the things he will associate with the crowd.²² This will be one of the foundational principles of my analysis of the passages from Suetonius.

Since I cannot myself read Latin, I have had to resort to using translations. I have opted to use multiple translations side by side; I will use the one by Edwards as the standard version in the footnotes and the Appendix.²³ Using different translations is required because my method of text analysis looks very specifically at the words that are used, which can and do vary widely between versions. For this reason as well, I have tried as much as possible to consider the original Latin words and approximate their meanings to the best of my abilities by comparing translations and using the Oxford

²¹ In a way, this is an analysis of Suetonius' 'discourse', which in this context is defined as the entirety of the manner in which the author discusses a subject- in this case, Suetonius writing about Roman crowds. For my thesis however, I will not use the popular term 'discourse analysis', as this is an even more in-depth method of examination that also includes comprehensive discussions on aspects which go beyond the scope of my research. I do intend to use certain elements of the approach, such as considering the emotional effect of certain words on the reader, in order to deconstruct the various components of Suetonius' discourse and to gain insight into the narrative, rhetorical and discursive strategies Suetonius utilises to construe and represent crowd actions in certain ways. Verena Schulz, *Deconstructing Imperial Representation: Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius on Nero and Domitian* (Leiden / Boston 2019) 38-39; Jae Hyun Lee, *Paul's Gospel in Romans: A Discourse Analysis of Rom 1:16–8:39* (Leiden/Boston 2010) 25-33. The literature on discourse analysis is quite large. See for example T.A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse as Structure and Process* (London 1997); G. Brown and G. Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge 1983); Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, Heidi Hamilton (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Malden 2005); Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Harlow 1995).

²² Newbold, 'The vulgus in Tacitus', 90.

²³ Edwards, *Lives of the Caesars*; J.C. Rolfe, *Suetonius: Lives of the Caesars*, Volumes I and II (Loeb Classical Library 31 and 38) (Cambridge 1914); D. Den Hengst, *Suetonius: Keizers van Rome* (Amsterdam 2018).

Latin Dictionary by Glare (abbreviated as *OLD*).²⁴ Some differences are inevitable, and nuances might get lost in translation, but I believe that even with these impediments, I have been able to paint a clear picture of Suetonius' perception and presentation of crowds.

²⁴ P.G.W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford 1968-1982).

Chapter I

Writers and rioters: state of research

Introduction

In this chapter, I will give an overview of the historiography that is relevant for the rest of this thesis. Because the thesis focuses less on the historical reality and more on literary representation, this chapter will mostly centre around the existing historiographical framework and developments within the literature, and on how my research fits into this. In addition, I will establish another crucial framework by discussing Suetonius, his work, and his perspective on the world. The accompanying question is as follows: “What is the state of research on (ancient Roman) crowds, crowd representation and Suetonius’ work that I situate my research in?”

1. Crowd studies: a crowded field

Crowd studies is a field which concerns itself with many questions regarding the (collective) psychology, behaviours, actions, and characteristics of crowds. Because the study of Roman crowds is based in general crowd studies, I feel it is necessary to discuss the broader field as well.

The study of crowd behaviour came into prominence for a large part as a result of the turbulent socio-political situation in 18th and 19th-century Europe, where collective action- often violent- was becoming more common.²⁵ In this context, several authors attempted to “explain” crowds and what drove them. Arguably the most important founder in this field was French author Gustave Le Bon, who published *Psychologie des Foules* in 1895, translated into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*.²⁶ This work was firmly rooted within the 19th-century French context of urban violence and uprisings. However, with its analysis of themes such as crowd psychology, urban riots and mob behaviour, *The Crowd* was hugely influential throughout the world. By disapproving of almost all crowd behaviour, Le Bon established an image that would remain widely popular: that of the ‘madding crowd’, a group where people lost their individuality and were absorbed into a riotous mass bringing chaos and

²⁵ Clark McPhail, *The Myth of the Madding Crowd* (London/New York 1991) 1.

²⁶ Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des Foules* (Alcan 1895).

unrest.²⁷ Because this attitude is shared by (most) Roman authors, Le Bon's work is important for this thesis.

After Le Bon, subsequent scholars adopted the narrative of 'the madding crowd'. This is illustrated by the works of scholars such as Park, Blumer, Canetti, Allport, Miller, and Dollard.²⁸ Across the field of crowd studies, the association between crowds and violence remained widely popular. From the second half of the 20th century onwards, this stereotype has been challenged by multiple authors. This includes McPhail, who offers reviews and criticisms of the most important works in the field, and has therefore made a crucial contribution.²⁹ Numerous other authors have also added all kinds of nuances, theories and new views.³⁰ Additionally, the crowd is one of the topics discussed in the recent work *Ancient History from Below*, which confirms that research on crowds is still seen as relevant within the ever-growing field of subaltern studies.³¹

Despite of the many theories and nuances that have been added to the field of crowd studies throughout the years, many scholars remain pre-occupied with violent and

²⁷ David Waddington, 'The Madness of the Mob? Explaining the 'Irrationality' and Destructiveness of Crowd Violence', *Sociology Compass* 2:2 (2008) 675-687, there 676; McPhail, *The Madding Crowd*, 1, 13-14.

²⁸ Park and Blumer perpetuated the idea of crowds being an irrational and chaotic mass in which people lost their individuality. Canetti further elaborated upon the negative aspects of unruly crowds, describing how crowd action often leads to mass violence. Allport, Miller and Dollard, while offering critiques and alternative models to Le Bon, were still operating in the same frame *The Crowd* had established. Differences of opinion existed as to the exact psychological mechanisms governing those individuals participating in crowd actions, but the association between crowds and violence remained broadly accepted in the field of crowd studies. McPhail, *The Madding Crowd*, 5-13, 25-26; ; Robert E. Park (ed.), *Principles of Sociology* (New York 1939); Herbert George Blumer, 'Social Unrest and Collective Protest', in: Norman K. Denzin, *Studies in Symbolic Interaction, Volume 1* (Greenwich 1978) 1-54; Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (New York 1962); Floyd H. Allport, 'The Influence of the Group upon Association and Thought', *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 3 (1920) 159-182; Floyd H. Allport, *Social Psychology* (Boston 1924); Neal Miller and John Dollard, *Social Learning and Imitation* (New Haven 1941).

²⁹ McPhail, *The Madding Crowd*.

³⁰ Rudé has challenged the idea, often presented by authorities, that unruly crowds exclusively consisted of people from the lower classes- the so-called riffraff. Couch, Berk and Tilly have characterised individuals within crowds as rational actors, greatly nuancing both the view put forth by Le Bon and the views we will encounter in Suetonius. Schnapp and Tiews have collected essays discussing the crowd from various interesting and often innovative angles. George Rudé, *The Crowd in History* (New York 1964); Carl J. Couch, 'Collective Behavior: An Examination of Some Stereotypes', *Social Problems* 15 (1968) 310-322; Richard Berk, *Collective Behavior* (Dubuque 1974); Charles Tilly, *As Sociology Meets History* (New York 1981); Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews (eds.), *Crowds* (Stanford 2006).

³¹ Courier and Magalhães, *Ancient History from Below*, 266.

unruly behaviour by crowds, such as urban riots and uprisings- partly because these events are common occurrences even in the modern world.³² It is within this context that we should situate the historiography on crowds in the ancient Roman world, which I will discuss next.

2. “The age of crowds”: crowds in the (Late) Republic and Late Antiquity

The role of the crowd in the Roman Republic is a topic which has been extensively studied. Much work has been done to shed light on the role of the crowd within the semi-democratic system of the Republic. A large number of authors collectively paint a picture of the Republic where the crowd was an important political actor: when gathered in an assembly, large groups of people had significant political power because of their ability to vote on many issues. Fergus Millar has been one of the most foundational authors in investigating and illustrating the political system of the Roman Republic.³³ Millar often takes the stance that the crowd had great political powers and that the urban *plebs* were able to assert their influence and let their voice be heard in the Republican political system. Yakobson, Mouritsen and Hölkeskamp present a more moderate view, ascribing to the crowd more limited powers within the very aristocratic system of elections and political culture.³⁴ Vanderbroeck, Malkin, Rubinson and Morstein-Marx have demonstrated how ‘populist’ leaders and charismatic orators fit into the picture of crowd’s political power: because they manipulated the crowd and played into their needs and emotions, Roman elite politicians were able to utilise the

³² See for example: James F. Short and Marvin Wolfgang (eds.), *Collective Violence* (Chicago 1972); David Waddington, *Policing Public Disorder – Theory and Practice* (Cullompton 2007); Robert Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (London 2004).

³³ Fergus Millar, ‘The Political Character of the Classical Roman Republic, 200-151 B.C.’, *JRS* 74 (1984) 1-19; Fergus Millar, ‘Politics, Persuasion and the People before the Social War (150-90 BC)’, *JRS* 76 (1986) 1-11; Fergus Millar, ‘Political Power in Mid-Republican Rome: Curia or Comitium?’, *JRS* 79 (1989) 138-50; Fergus Millar, ‘Popular Politics at Rome in the Late Republic’, in: Irad Malkin and Wolfgang Zeev Rubinson (eds.), *Leaders and Masses in the Roman World: Studies in Honor of Zvi Yavetz* (Leiden 1995) 91-113.

³⁴ Alexander Yakobson, *Elections and Electioneering in Rome: A Study in the Political System of the Late Republic* (Stuttgart 1999); Alexander Yakobson, ‘Traditional political culture and the people’s role in the Roman Republic’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 59:3 (2010) 282-302; Henrik Mouritsen, *Plebs and Politics in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge 2001). Karl J. Hölkeskamp, *Reconstructing the Roman Republic: An Ancient Political Culture and Modern Research*, (Princeton 2010). Mouritsen critically addresses the difference between the Roman system in theory on the one hand, and the lack of participation opportunities for the lower classes on the other, which limits the actual power of the political crowd.

crowd to achieve political power.³⁵ As we will see, this theme translates to a trope that is present in Suetonius, namely that of the crowd being easily manipulated.³⁶ All in all, the view held by most scholars is that crowds were political actors of varying importance in the Republic. The literature focuses mostly on the ‘political’ crowd, which is a fair assessment because of the peace and relative lack of cases of mob violence in that period.³⁷

During the Late Republic, which was a time of great social and political upheaval, the role of the crowd changed dramatically. Their function as voters continued in many ways, but mob violence became increasingly commonplace during this chaotic and violent era.³⁸ Because of this, a relatively large part of the historiography on Roman crowds has focused on the Late Republic, which is often imagined as an ‘age of crowds’. The main contributor to this lopsided historiography, though perhaps unintentionally, is Fergus Millar, who shaped the field in important ways with *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic*.³⁹ Millar provides a relatively balanced discussion of his theme, approaching the subject from different angles and focussing mainly on the political crowd in the different chronological phases of the Late Republic. One of his assertions is that popular politics, in which the crowd has an important role, was very prominent during most of the Late Republic, but entered a state of decline near the beginning of the Principate and onward.⁴⁰ These claims, whether or not they are true, have contributed to a historiographical framework that has caused most authors on Roman crowds to follow Millar’s period of interest. As a consequence, much of the dominant literature is focussed on elaborating upon the Roman crowd in the Late Republic.

³⁵ Paul J.J. Vanderbroeck, *Popular Leadership and Collective Behavior in the Late Roman Republic* (ca. 80-50 BC) (Amsterdam 1987); Malkin and Rubinsohn, *Leaders and Masses in the Roman World*; Robert Morstein-Marx, *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge 2004). Hölkeskamp problematises the picture of an almost fully democratic Rome that Millar has endorsed, and presents a more pessimistic view on the political power of crowds, stating that above all, the Republic had an aristocratic system of government.

³⁶ Suet. *Cal.* 15, 42; Suet. *Nero* 28, 53.

³⁷ Brenda J. Lutz and James M. Lutz, ‘Political Violence in the Republic of Rome: Nothing New under the Sun’, *Government and Opposition* 41:4 (2006) 491-511, there 496.

³⁸ Vanderbroeck, *Popular Leadership*, 146; Lutz and Lutz, ‘Political Violence in the Republic of Rome’, 496.

³⁹ Fergus Millar, *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic* (Ann Arbor 1998).

⁴⁰ Millar, *The Crowd in Rome*, 167-196.

A large part of this literature has focussed specifically on the violent aspects of the (Late) Republican crowd, since this is seen as an exciting topic and corresponds well with the view of the Late Republic as a time of chaos and unrest. The historiography on the Late Republican crowd, both before and since Millar's seminal publication, has focussed less on the political crowd, and more on the unruly and chaotic crowd as described by Le Bon. This is unsurprising given the enduring attraction of the 'madding crowd' trope. Brunt made a valuable contribution to Roman crowd studies when he published a 1966 article on the characteristics of the Roman (urban) mob, that often used violence.⁴¹ The theme of violence in particular had already been explored by several authors prior to the publication of Millar's book: Heaton, Lintott, and Sherwin-White have all confirmed the prominence of urban unrest, disorder and mob violence in the Late Republic.⁴² More recent publications, such as the one by Lutz and Lutz, give crowds themselves a more prominent place in their discussions, exploring how Late Republican politicians were able to mobilize their supporters into mobs that were willing to commit violence.⁴³ Crowd violence in the Late Republic continues to be a well-studied subject, with two dissertations being published around the theme of gang violence on Roman streets in 2014 and 2016.⁴⁴ However, this particular field seems mostly saturated as of the year 2022. Additionally, criticisms have emerged on the old

⁴¹ Brunt, 'The Roman Mob'. Brunt mainly focuses on the historical reality of the crowd and its motivations, characteristics, and actions.

⁴² Heaton clearly establishes associations between the Late Republic and violence in his monograph *Mob Violence in the Late Republic*. Similarly, Lintott extensively discusses urban unrest and disorder, and naturally gives the crowd a large part in this. Political violence is a focal point for Lintott, who asserts that the political landscape of the Late Republic was in many ways dominated by the violent actions of mobs. In particular, the violence surrounding the careers and reforms of the Gracchi have been studied extensively and are a very famous chapter in the history of ancient crowd violence. Political violence was also a point of interest for Sherwin-White, who in 1956 explored several events in the Late Republic where force was used, often by crowds or bands of armed men. John Wesley Heaton, *Mob Violence in the Late Republic, 133-49 BC* (Urbana 1939); Andrew Lintott, *Violence in Republican Rome* (Oxford 1968); A.N. Sherwin-White, 'Violence in Roman Politics', *JRS* 46:1-2 (1956) 1-9.

⁴³ Lutz and Lutz, 'Political Violence in the Republic of Rome', 495-498.

⁴⁴ William F. Poff-Webster, *Cui Bono?: Gang Violence in the Politics of the Late Roman Republic*, PhD Thesis Harvard University (Cambridge 2014); Alex McGrath, *Gangsta's Paradise: Popular Politics and Gang Violence in the Late Roman Republic (63-52 BCE)*, PhD Thesis Reed College (Portland 2016).

clichés of analysing crowd behaviour in terms of tension and polarisation, rendering the relatively one-sided analyses of 20th century historians “out of fashion”.⁴⁵

Most of the attention of those ancient historians interested in (crowd) violence in Rome has shifted towards a different period, namely that of Late Antiquity. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that ever since Peter Brown’s seminal publication, Late Antiquity has been seen as an exciting new research field.⁴⁶ Similarly to the Late Republic, Late Antiquity was a time of chaos, upheaval and violence, especially in cities.⁴⁷ Religious violence was particularly prominent, as has been discussed by Mayer, Engels and Van Nuffelen, among others.⁴⁸ Within this context, it is anything but a stretch to describe Late Antiquity as an ‘age of crowds’. Very recently, Magalhães has done important work illuminating the large role crowds played in Late Antiquity: riots, religious fights, political violence and gang wars were all very prominent in Late Antique Mediterranean cities.⁴⁹ Kohns, MacMullen and Greatrex have also contributed to the study of Late Antique riots and urban masses.⁵⁰ On the forefront of current research into (late) antique crowd behaviour is Dutch historian Daniëlle Sloop, who

⁴⁵ Daniëlle Sloop, ‘Crowd Behaviour in Late Antique Rome’, in: Michele Renee Salzman, Marianne Saghy and Rita Lizzi Testa (eds.), *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistence in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge 2016) 178-194, there 179.

⁴⁶ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London 1971); Arnaldo Marcone, ‘A Long Late Antiquity: Considerations on a Controversial Periodization’, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1:1 (2008) 4-19, there 5.

⁴⁷ T. Gregory, ‘Urban Violence in Late Antiquity’, in: R.T. Marchese, *Aspects of Graeco-Roman Urbanism: Essays on the Classical City* (Oxford 1984) 138–157.

⁴⁸ D. Engels and P. Van Nuffelen (eds.), *Competition and Religion in Antiquity* (Brussels 2014); P. Van Nuffelen, ‘“A Wise Madness”: A Virtue-Based Model for Crowd Behaviour in Late Antiquity’, in: W. Mayer and C.L. de Wet (eds.), *Reconceiving Religious Conflict: New Views from the Formative Centuries of Christianity* (London, 2018) 234-258; Wendy Mayer, ‘Religious Violence in Late Antiquity: Current Approaches, Trends and Issues’, in: Jitse Dijkstra and Christian Raschle (eds.), *Religious Violence in the Ancient World: From Classical Athens to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2020) 251-265. A broader study of religious relations within Late Antique Rome has been published in 2016: Salzman, Saghy and Testa, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome*.

⁴⁹ Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira, *Potestas Populi: participation populaire et action collective dans les villes de l’Afrique romaine tardive (vers 300–430 apr. J.-C.)* (Turnhout 2012); Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira, ‘Late Antiquity: The Age of Crowds?’, *Past & Present* 249:1 (2020) 3-52; Magalhães, ‘The crowd in late antiquity’.

⁵⁰ H.P. Kohns, *Versorgungskrisen und Hungerrevolten im spätantiken Rom* (Bonn 1979); Ramsay MacMullen, ‘The Historical Role of the Masses in Late Antiquity’, in: R. MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton 1990) 250–276, 385–393; Geoffrey Greatrex, ‘The Emperor, the People and Urban Violence in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries’, in: Dijkstra and Raschle, *Religious Violence in the Ancient World*, 389-405.

as of 2022 is carrying out a research project on crowds in pre-modern Europe, with a focus on Late Antiquity.⁵¹ Slootjes has done important work in problematising old clichés about the unruly, riotous crowd and introducing a more nuanced, multi-faceted view concerning the historical reality of crowd behaviour in Late Antiquity.⁵² One of the aspects of this updated method is a more critical reading of the ancient written sources, which are no longer taken at face value, and are not seen as giving an objective view of the crowd in antiquity. This point is very relevant for the study of Suetonius, whose views do not always correspond with the views of current historians.

3. The missing link: historiography on Roman crowds in the early- to mid-Imperial age

In large contrast to the (Late) Republic and Late Antique periods, no broad studies examining the subject of crowds in the Empire in its entirety have been attempted so far.⁵³ The Roman Empire is often ignored in favour of the Late Republic and Late Antiquity in the study of Roman crowds: Imperial-era crowds are granted nowhere near as much attention as their Late Republic counterparts. This is in large part due to the established view that states that the Roman Empire was a more peaceful period for the Roman urban environment, one in which crowds did not play such a large role anymore. This view is expressed in the influential work by MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (1967), where the author devotes some 30 pages to urban unrest in the Empire.⁵⁴ MacMullen states that uprisings and rioting by crowds ‘were few and uncharacteristic’ during much of the Imperial age because of the ability of the emperor and the state apparatus to control the urban crowd much more efficiently: the emperor and his police force had ‘the power to restrict mob disorder’.⁵⁵ This view is shared by Kelly, Griffin, and others.⁵⁶ These claims reflect broader ideas and preconceptions

⁵¹ Slootjes, ‘Crowd Behaviour’; Erika Manders and Daniëlle Slootjes, *Leadership, Ideology and Crowds in the Roman Empire of the Fourth Century AD* (Stuttgart 2020).

⁵² Slootjes, ‘Crowd Behaviour’, 179.

⁵³ It should be mentioned that two recent works provide a very helpful overview of the role of the urban *plebs* in the Roman Empire in general. However, these works largely focus on the political role and political culture of the urban population, and do not touch upon the subject of (violent) crowds as much. See Cyril Courier, *La plèbe de Rome et sa culture (fin du IIIe s. av. J.-C.–fin du Ier s. ap. J.-C.)* (Rome 2014); Katja Kröss, *Der stadtrömischen Plebs*.

⁵⁴ MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 163-191.

⁵⁵ MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 163.

⁵⁶ Kelly, ‘Riot control’, 150; M.T. Griffin, ‘Urbs Roma, Plebs and Princeps’, in: L. Alexander (ed.), *Images of Empire* (Sheffield 1991) 19-46, there 40-41.

about the Roman Empire being a period of peace, stability and order- and the Late Republic and Late Antiquity being the opposite of that. However, as I will demonstrate in my thesis, imperial writers do not necessarily share this view. Therefore, it is important that we do not take MacMullen's claims at face value: even though crowd violence may have been more prevalent in the Late Republic and Late Antiquity, this does not mean we should discard similar themes in the Roman Empire.

Luckily, some important work has indeed been done about crowds in the Roman Empire. Sadly however, the theme has thus far almost exclusively been explored in scattered volumes that discuss only one aspect at a time and do not offer grand hypotheses like the literature on the Late Republic and Late Antiquity do.⁵⁷ In 1987, Vanderbroeck, focusing on collective violence in the Late Republic, managed to find only three publications which in some way or another attempted to give an overview of collective violence in the Roman Empire: a discussion of urban violence by Africa, the book by MacMullen, and a monograph by Yavetz on the power relations between the emperor and the city populace.⁵⁸ Even though these publications do not analyse crowd behaviour specifically, they demonstrate that crowds did still play a role- often violent- in the early- to mid-Imperial Era.

These three publications have illuminated two main ways in which the crowd played a role in the Roman Empire: their function as spectators at the games, and their tendency to break out into riots. Various kinds of riots arising out of lower-class discontent occurred often in imperial Rome, though they are seen as more manageable than in the Late Republic, as expressed in Kelly's 2007 article on riots and the authority's responses to them.⁵⁹ The 1971 article by Africa features many references to riots, and also provides explanations for their frequency, such as poor living conditions and frustration about a lack of food and other necessities.⁶⁰ Nippel and Erdkamp have contributed publications about suppressing riots and the origin of food riots,

⁵⁷ Magalhães, 'The crowd in late antiquity', 254.

⁵⁸ Africa, 'Urban violence'; MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*; Zvi Yavetz, *Plebs and Princes* (Oxford 1969). Africa provides a very decent discussion on urban violence in Imperial Rome, addressing several types of unrest and their possible causes. Yavetz deals with the power relations between the emperor and the city populace. However important this book may have been for the development of studies on the Roman urban population and their political participation, Yavetz never really reaches a satisfactory analysis of crowd action in the Empire- largely because the book does not explicitly focus on the crowd, but more on city-folk in general.

⁵⁹ Kelly, 'Riot control', 150.

⁶⁰ Africa, 'Urban violence'.

respectively.⁶¹ Most of the other literature has focussed on analysing specific riots instead of trying to paint a broader picture.⁶²

Another component of imperial-era crowd studies is the subject of crowds and mobs at spectacles and the games. The ancient sources often mention the (dis)behaviour of the masses at the games; the tone is predominantly negative, as I will demonstrate is the case in *De vita Caesarum*.⁶³ Of course, the most foundational recent work is the 2011 book by Fagan, *The Lure of the Arena*, which incorporates themes from the broader field of crowd studies to analyse crowd participation and behaviour at the games.⁶⁴ Large spectacles feature large groups of people in a relatively small space, which can naturally lead to violent situations, as pointed out by Crowther.⁶⁵ Crowds and crowd violence at the games has therefore been a much beloved theme for historians and classicists.⁶⁶

Lastly, crowds feature in publications on the urban environment in the city of Rome, for example when discussing urban traffic.⁶⁷ In these types of publications, crowds are often associated with the chaos of everyday life at Rome, which is an image one also sees quite often when reading Suetonius and his tropes about being dangerous in numbers.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Wilfried Nippel, 'Policing Rome', *JRS* 74 (1984) 20-29; Paul Erdkamp, 'A Starving Mob Has No Respect': Urban Markets and Food Riots in the Roman World, 100 b.c.–400 a.d., in: L. de Blois and J. Rich (eds.), *The Transformations of Economic Life under the Roman Empire* (Amsterdam 2002) 93–115.

⁶² E.g. Walter O. Moeller, 'The Riot of A. D. 59 at Pompeii', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 19:1 (1970) 84-95; Sandra Gambetti, *The Alexandrian Riots of 38 C.E. and the Persecution of the Jews: A Historical Reconstruction* (Leiden/Boston 2009); Dorothea R. French, 'Rhetoric and the Rebellion of A.D. 387 in Antioch', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 47:4 (1998) 468-484;

⁶³ E.g. Suet. *Iul.* 10, 39; Suet. *Aug.* 44; Suet. *Cal.* 26.

⁶⁴ Garrett G. Fagan, *The Lure of the Arena: Social Psychology and the Crowd at the Roman Games* (Cambridge 2011).

⁶⁵ Nigel B. Crowther, 'Sports violence in the Roman and Byzantine empires: a modern legacy?', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 13:3 (1996) 445-458.

⁶⁶ E.g. Kathleen Coleman, 'The contagion of the throng': absorbing violence in the Roman world', *European Review* 5:4 (1997) 401-417.

⁶⁷ Van Tilburg devotes one chapter of his monograph to the users of Roman roads, i.e. crowds of city-folk: Cornelis van Tilburg, *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 2007) 41-84. See also Ray Laurence, 'City Traffic and the Archaeology of Roman Streets from Pompeii to Rome: The Nature of Traffic in the Ancient City', in: Dieter Mertens, *Stadtverkehr in der antiken Welt: Internationales Kolloquium zur 175-Jahrfeier des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Rom.* (Rome 2008) 87-106; Claire Holleran, 'The Street Life of Ancient Rome', in: Ray Laurence and David Newsome (eds.), *Rome, Ostia, Pompeii : movement and space* (Oxford 2011).

⁶⁸ E.g. Suet. *Tib.* 2; Suet. *Cal.* 4, 26; Suet. *Galba* 18.

4. The representation of crowds in aristocratic sources

The literature I have discussed up to this point has attempted to give information about the historical reality. However, an analysis of rhetoric and narratives in the ancient sources would also be hugely relevant. Even though this kind of research would give us great insights into crowds in ancient Rome, would build nicely on already existing literature, and would add to the current historiography, such research has not been comprehensively carried out. Instead, the ancient sources have often been treated as an instrument for trying to access the ‘historical truth’, and have been relegated to only the footnotes far too many times. This is a shame, because this type of source analysis could allow us to critically reassess the claims made by MacMullen and others about the Roman Empire being a clean, orderly period.

In this context, author’s responses to disorderly crowd actions, and attitudes on the role of the crowd in the Imperial era, have not been satisfactorily explored in recent years. One of the fundamental works on the representation of crowds, that by Laser, predictably only focuses on the Late Republic.⁶⁹ Hubbard gives some brief remarks on the views of Roman authors on the subject of civil unrest, but this passage is brief and does not attempt to provide any meaningful general conclusions.⁷⁰ A 2011 dissertation by Schwab does employ a method of individual text analysis and of viewing the subject of crowd behaviour through the ancient sources, in the process putting the focus on the representation of crowds, as I will do in this thesis. However, this dissertation only concerns the Greek sources, and thus leaves a lot of room for similar research on Roman sources.⁷¹

This is not to say that there is no research at all that this thesis can build upon. In the 1970s, some attempts were made to analyse Tacitus’ work for his opinions on several groups of people, such as soldiers or slaves.⁷² These articles are quite old and mostly do not address crowd action specifically, with the notable exception of Newbold’s important contribution about Tacitus, but are somewhat useful nonetheless because of

⁶⁹ G. Laser, *Populo et scaenae serviendum est. Die Bedeutung der städtischen Masse in der späten römischen Republik* (Trier 1997).

⁷⁰ Moyer Hubbard, ‘Urban Uprisings in the Roman World: The Social Setting of the Mobbing of Sosthenes’, *New Testament Studies* 51:3 (2005) 416-428, there 419-423.

⁷¹ Justin John Schwab, *The Birth of the Mob: Representations of Crowds in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature*, PhD Thesis University of California (Berkeley 2011).

⁷² Iiro Kajanto, ‘Tacitus’ Attitude to War and the Soldier’, *Latomus* 29 (1970) 699–718; Abraham B. Breebaart, ‘Volk en soldaten – Sociale historie en massa-psychologie bij Tacitus’, *Lampas* 7 (1974) 378–393; Antonella Borgo, ‘Aspetti della psicologia di massa in Lucano ed in Tacito’, *Vichiana* 5 (1976) 243-257; Newbold, ‘The vulgus in Tacitus’.

the method of text analysis they employ.⁷³ Some 40 years ago, Lühr made an important contribution in a 1979 article discussing the representation in Latin literature of ‘*Massenreaktionen*’; in other words, the responses of the Roman urban masses to certain events.⁷⁴ Despite its age, this is still a hugely relevant article, because it discusses the various associations authors had with crowds, such as violence and wild emotion, based on analyses of ancient texts. Probably the best recent publication touching upon discourse and representation is that by Kröss.⁷⁵ Discussing the political role of the urban *plebs*, she questions the ancient sources and concludes, in large part through text analysis, that the representation and perception of the urban masses by elite authors was almost exclusively negative.⁷⁶

An important remark needs to be made about the elite perspective of Roman sources. Kelly assesses the following: ‘Since Roman history was written by men of the senatorial class, or by those who had attached themselves to its interests, it is not surprising that Roman historians had little sympathy for the lower classes.’⁷⁷ Magalhães, Kröss, Rudé and Africa have all confirmed that urban masses and crowds are looked down upon by authors, who in most cases were aristocratic partisans that saw Roman history as a story of the elite, frowning upon actions by the lower classes whom they regard as a loathsome group of people. In the view of these historians, ancient Roman elite writers subjected the plebs- including plebeian crowds- to (almost) constant negative representation.⁷⁸

It is crucial to be aware of this elitist perspective when analysing the ancient sources, as will be demonstrated at later points in this thesis. However, scholars often fail to elaborate upon the actual contents of this elite perspective: questions on how this perspective becomes visible in the kind of language used by the ancient Roman authors are rarely asked. I think it would be most helpful to the historiographical

⁷³ Newbold, ‘The vulgus in Tacitus’. Newbold has tried to tackle the task of identifying Tacitus’ attitudes towards urban crowds and the lower classes, first of all by examining Tacitus’ use of the term *vulgus* (crowd). This type of approach is very useful, and will be applied to Suetonius in this thesis.

⁷⁴ Lühr, ‘*Massenreaktionen*’.

⁷⁵ Kröss, *Der stadtrömischen Plebs*.

⁷⁶ Kröss, *Der stadtrömischen Plebs*, 10-23, 71-112.

⁷⁷ Kelly, ‘Riot control’, 152. Kelly has also problematised the available ancient sources, judging that their elitist character is ‘a significant impediment to our proper understanding of riots, which by their nature involve conflict between the ruling élite and the masses’.

⁷⁸ Magalhães, ‘The crowd in late antiquity’, 256; Kröss, *Der stadtrömischen Plebs*, 10-11; Rudé, *The crowd in history*, 11-12; Africa, ‘Urban Violence’, 3.

community if claims about the biased perspective in the ancient sources were backed up by an in-depth analysis of the narratives, clichés, preconceptions, judgements and recurring themes in the texts produced by the Roman authors themselves. With this thesis, I hope to achieve this type of analysis, and in the process to further our understanding on a small, yet very relevant dimension of crowds in ancient Rome: their literary representation.

5. Gaius Suetonius Tranquilus and *De vita Caesarum*

Before continuing to the analysis of *De vita Caesarum*, it is necessary to remark upon its author and his perspective. Gaius Suetonius Tranquilus was a Roman author who lived in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.⁷⁹ He was born into the *equites*, the second highest social order in Roman society, but most historians assess that he held more ideological and political affinity for the senatorial class.⁸⁰ In addition, he served in high government positions during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian.⁸¹ These two observations firmly establish Suetonius as an elite writer with a typical aristocratic outlook on the world.⁸² His perspective is strongly traditionalist and conservative, having a preference for both the conservation of hierarchical social structures and for following the old traditions, not least in the political sphere.⁸³ These two elements clearly stem from his pro-senatorial ideals, consistently describing the Senate as the legitimate heart of Roman political power.⁸⁴ Any threat to this traditional power structure, whether it comes from an emperor or from a rebellious plebs, is vehemently

⁷⁹ Edwards, *Lives of the Caesars*, vii. The most important publications about Suetonius are Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* (New Haven 1983); Barry Baldwin, *Suetonius: Biographer of the Caesars* (Amsterdam 1983); Tristan Power (ed.), *Suetonius the Biographer: Studies in Roman Lives* (Oxford 2014).

⁸⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 25, 99-115, 102.

⁸¹ For publications about Suetonius' life and career, see: Barry Baldwin, 'Was Suetonius Disgraced?', *EMC* 19 (1975) 22-26; Barry Baldwin, 'Suetonius: Birth, Disgrace and Death,' *Acta Classica* 18 (1975) 61-70; J.A. Crook, 'Suetonius Ab Epistulis', *PCPhS* 4 (1956-57) 18-22; Hugh Lindsay, 'Suetonius as "ab epistulis" to Hadrian and the Early History of the Imperial Correspondence', *Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 43:4 (1994) 454-468; H.A. Sanders, 'Suetonius in the Civil Service under Hadrian', *American Journal of Philology* 65 (1944) 113-23; G.B. Townend, 'The Hippo Inscription and the Career of Suetonius', *Historia* 10 (1961) 99-109.

⁸² David Wardle, 'Suetonius on Augustus as god and man', *The Classical Quarterly* 62.1 (2012) 307-326, there 307: 'the overarching evaluative framework within which Suetonius assesses his emperors is that of the Roman elite'.

⁸³ Jaques Gascou, 'Suetone et l'ordre equestre', *Revue des Etudes Latines* 54 (1976) 257-277, there 269.

⁸⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 117.

and consistently opposed and disapproved of by Suetonius.⁸⁵ One can imagine the sheer distaste an elite author with a strongly aristocratic outlook on the world would have towards lower-class and urban crowd asserting themselves, as they so often do in Roman history- even during the Empire. Kelly’s remark about the lack of sympathy the senatorial writers had for the lower classes and the urban masses (see Chapter I) is quite true for Suetonius, as will be illustrated by the many scenes from *De vita Caesarum* in which crowds feature.⁸⁶

De vita Caesarum is Suetonius’ most well-known work. It is a biography of the first twelve emperors of the Roman Empire, including Julius Caesar, and was intended to serve as moral instruction to readers.⁸⁷ In stories about the character and the deeds of the various emperors, readers may find instructions on how to behave properly in Roman society. Suetonius essentially subjects emperors to thorough examination on the basis of a type of code of conduct, judging emperors that do bad things in a negative way and vice versa.⁸⁸ Two observations follow from this moralistic purpose that I describe as ‘selection bias’ and have a negative effect on Suetonius’ usefulness for assessing the historical reality.

First of all, one cannot ignore the fact that the figure of the emperor is fundamentally central to Suetonius’ narrative.⁸⁹ Crucially, the author writes biography and not history, which is in sharp contrast to practitioners of ‘formal history’ such as Tacitus.⁹⁰ Suetonius engages in what Stadter called “Emperor-Watching”, which

⁸⁵ Richard Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton 1984) 163-164. Plenty of research has been done on the way Suetonius describes the often rocky relationship between emperors and senators; see for example Yves Roman, *Empereurs et sénateurs: Une histoire politique de l'Empire romain* (Paris 2001). Suetonius often used imperial-senatorial interaction as a décor for his moral instruction: through the actions and behaviour of the emperor towards the Senate and its members, the negative or positive character traits of the *princeps* are made clear. Good emperors are the ones who respect the traditional power of the Senate and behave amicably towards senators (Suet. *Aug.* 35, 44, 53, 54, 55; Suet. *Tib.* 29, 30, 31). On the other hand, bad emperors make themselves hated by disrespecting, shaming, ridiculing, ignoring and murdering senators (Suet. *Iul.* 16, 18, 28, 30, 76, 78; Suet. *Cal.* 26, 28, 55; Suet. *Nero* 26, 37, 43).

⁸⁶ Kelly, ‘Riot control’, 152.

⁸⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 167-168.

⁸⁸ K.R. Bradley, ‘Imperial Virtues in Suetonius’ *Caesares*’, *JIES* 4 (1976) 245-253, there 245; Jacqueline Klooster, ‘Ancient Biographies of Statesmen’, in: Koen de Temmerman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Biography* (Oxford 2020) 323-333, there 326.

⁸⁹ Kröss, *Der stadtrömischen Plebs*, 20; Power, *Suetonius the Biographer*, 5.

⁹⁰ Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford 1958) 502: ‘Suetonius estimated correctly the taste and market of the times. Readers were drawn to the personal items that formal history disdained. There was room for a rival or supplement to the *Annales*-and the chronicle of ancient folly and depravity, compiled by a government official, carried no political danger.’

distorts his perspective significantly and affects the types of stories he tells.⁹¹ This leads to a disproportionate focus on the emperor, which means subjects such as the lower classes and the urban environment get less attention than the political and private spheres around the emperor. The consequence of this approach is that crowds almost exclusively appear in *De vita Caesarum* when the emperor is also in some way involved. During the Empire, there will undoubtedly have been many Roman crowds where the emperor did not play any role whatsoever; however, Suetonius' emperor-centric approach does not allow him to discuss these crowds. The exact effect this has on Suetonius' portrayal of crowds cannot be determined precisely, but I would imagine that it has resulted in a larger focus on crowds in the political sphere and a relative disregard of typical lower-class concerns such as food riots- a disparity that will be discussed later on during the analysis of the database in Chapter II. Suetonius' focus on the emperor often leaves the plebs to be a passive player, a receiver of the actions of the Caesar.⁹² When the crowd does assert itself as (political) actors, they do this almost exclusively in an imperial context.

Secondly, the aspect of moral instruction in *De vita Caesarum* also distorts the type of stories Suetonius selects and chooses to tell. Most Suetonian passages, including the ones featuring crowd actions, serve the overarching goal of demonstrating the positive or negative characteristics of the emperor.⁹³ The author tells stories and anecdotes to create a character profile of the Caesars for his readers, and these stories were never intended to be accurate historical information.⁹⁴ We must therefore be extremely cautious when attempting to use Suetonius as a source for investigating the historical reality; as Wallace-Hadrill has pointed out, there is significant factual unreliability.⁹⁵ Because Suetonius wants to provide stories that very clearly demonstrate the emperor's qualities and flaws, the tales he tells are necessarily full of hyperbole and exaggeration in order to get his message across more easily. Suetonius goes out of his way to gather

⁹¹ Philip Stadter, 'Biography and History', in: John Marincola (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography, Volume II* (Oxford 2007) 528-540, there 534.

⁹² Kröss, *Der stadtrömischen Plebs*, 20.

⁹³ Edwards, *Lives of the Caesars*, XV.

⁹⁴ Saller, 'Anecdotes as historical evidence', 73.

⁹⁵ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, 'Suetonius as Historian', *The Classical Review* 36:2 (1986) 243-245, there 244. Referring to Suetonius as a historian is a topic that has been intensely discussed within the scientific community. See for example Gasco, who does describe Suetonius as a historian, but with the important caveat that the genre of *De vita Caesarum* is quite ambiguous and is situated in the grey area between biography and history. Jacques Gasco, *Suetone historien* (Rome 1984).

the most saucy tales of ‘folly and depravity’, which results in a text that has often been dismissed by historians like Syme as a collection of gossip and tall tales that serve as nothing but a vulgar addition to more sophisticated works of history.⁹⁶ This assessment might not be entirely fair, but the fact remains that Suetonius’ strategy of moral instruction results in a skewed selection of stories, namely those that he judges to be most interesting for his audience.

To make matters even more complicated, readers will observe that Suetonius often injects significant drama and extravagance into the stories, further distancing them from any historical truth. Suetonius’ cocktail of skewed perspectives, dismissal of ‘boring’ and disregard for historical truth will have significantly affected the picture he paints of crowds. Violent crowds naturally constitute a more interesting story, and are therefore much more likely to be included in *De vita Caesarum* than a simple everyday crowd at the market. As a consequence, we simply cannot take *De vita Caesarum* at face value as a tool to assess how crowds behaved in Rome or how much crowd violence actually occurred.⁹⁷

The factual unreliability of *De vita Caesarum* has often resulted in an unfair treatment of Suetonius as simply a bad or useless writer by many authors, an opinion that I dispute because Suetonius in my view actually accomplishes his goals of moral instruction quite well.⁹⁸ Since the milestone publications by Baldwin and Wallace-Hadrill, most scholars mostly no longer dismiss Suetonius.⁹⁹ However, they do remain

⁹⁶ Syme, *Tacitus*, 502; James Kim On Chong-Gossard, ‘Who slept with whom in the Roman Empire?’, in: Andrew Turner, James Kim On Chong-Gossard and Frederik Juliaan Vervaeke (eds.), *Private and Public Lies The Discourse of Despotism and Deceit in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden/Boston 2010) 296-327, there 296; R.M. Ogilvie, *Roman Literature and Society* (Harmondsworth 1980) 264. Ogilvie claims ‘Suetonius is compiling a series of portraits based upon anecdote, scandal and fact, which are meant to divert, amuse and, on occasion, shock.’

⁹⁷ One could realistically make the argument that Suetonius’ texts are not even an accurate reflections of his own views: since he above all wants to make his stories engaging for his audience, he might have exaggerated to the point where even his own thoughts about crowds did not correspond to the hyperboles in his work.

⁹⁸ For excellent summaries of the historiographical development of Suetonian studies, see: K.R. Bradley, ‘Review: The Rediscovery of Suetonius’, *Classical Philology* 80:3 (1985) 254-265; D. Thomas Benediktson, ‘A Survey of Suetonius Scholarship, 1938-1987’, *The Classical World* 86:5 (1993) 377-447. Bradley and Benediktson demonstrate that views on Suetonius as an author have varied widely: an antiquarian simply writing down facts, a gossip indulging his audience in the most vulgar stories imaginable, a sophisticated political operative who answers the emperor’s bad behaviour towards the senatorial class with aggressive literary warfare, et cetera.

⁹⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*; Baldwin, *Suetonius*.

sceptical of instrumentalizing him for gaining an insight into the historical reality, instead choosing to analyse his work with narrative-discursive research.¹⁰⁰ This is the type of research I do in this thesis: instead of being preoccupied with the historical reality, I analyse perceptions, narratives and representations, which in Suetonius' case are both more interesting and more relevant. Suetonius is uniquely suited for this kind of discussion, precisely because of his strong opinions, clear perspective and non-historical approach. This is why I selected Suetonius for this research, instead of a practitioner of formal history such as Tacitus, whom I also considered incorporating into this thesis. In the case of crowds, I would even dare say Suetonius' tall tales might be a better representation of aristocratic views towards crowd actions, and of the often irrational ideas senators and other elites held, than writings by Tacitus that were intended more as factual documentation of historical events. In other words, because of his clearly formulated goals and ideals, Suetonius' work in many cases provides a more direct view into his mind and the minds of his audience and social circles.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. Schulz, *Deconstructing Imperial Representation*.

Chapter II

Database analysis: tropes and patterns

Now that I have discussed the position of this thesis vis-à-vis the existing historiography, I will move on to an analysis of Suetonius and his text. This chapter will deal with the following question: ‘By using the database, what patterns and observations emerge out of the analysis of the 40 Suetonian passages about crowds?’ When operating out of the assumption that the database gives us insights into Suetonius’ perceptions of crowds and his ways of thinking by giving an overview of his representation of the crowd, we can gather some interesting conclusions. In Chapter III, the individually analysed passages will serve as specific examples of the general patterns I discuss in this chapter. Because of the limited size of this thesis, I have not been able to examine all possible intersections of categories and parameters; I have selected the observations I found most interesting and/or relevant.

1. Some disclaimers

First of all, I must address two disclaimers that are important for understanding the purpose and scope of the database. Firstly, I should note that compiling a database that is based on literary text is a highly subjective matter. Reading passages full of nuance and meaning and trying to order them into a fixed system leaves a lot of room for interpretation and differences of opinion, especially in categories such as Portrayal by author. However, this caveat does not take away from the usefulness of this type of database for gaining valuable insights into patterns in a large body of text. Secondly, because of issues of selection bias in Suetonius, I must insist that readers do not interpret the database as factual insight into any historical reality.¹⁰¹ The database excels at giving an overview of Suetonius’ own perceptions and descriptions, but it does not represent the actual state of affairs in the Empire. That was never Suetonius’ goal, and it therefore cannot be the goal of the database.

¹⁰¹ For example, when observing that Suetonius describes the crowd as disorderly in 19 out of 40 passages, one should obviously not subsequently conclude that 47,5% of Roman crowds during the Empire were disorderly.

2. Parameters and categories

I will briefly discuss the various parameters and categories I have used in the database. These are crucial to this research, since the ones I have chosen to incorporate into the database directly effect the types of conclusions I can draw from it.

‘Context’ denotes the type of event that takes place in a passage. It is largely a descriptive category, but is also intended to enable establishing connections between it and other parameters. ‘Setting’ serves a similar purpose and refers to the location the events take place in. ‘Type of crowd’ is useful for recognizing the sort of crowds that Suetonius describes and the people in them. ‘Prominence of the crowd’, rated from Low to High, gauges how active the crowd is in a certain passage, how much it asserts itself as an actor, and how important its role is in the events that transpire.

Two parameters are crucial for determining the way crowds are represented in Suetonius. ‘Characteristics of the crowd’ concerns various descriptions of the crowd that are recurring in *De vita Caesarum*. I have compiled these into a list that encompasses most characteristics and can accurately summarize Suetonius’ treatment and description of the crowd.¹⁰² The ‘Characteristics of the crowd’-category is supplemented by the ‘Portrayal by author’-category, a parameter which summarizes the way Suetonius presents the crowd. It is practically synonymous with Suetonius’ judgement and perception of the crowd, so I will be using the words ‘portrayal’ and ‘judgement’ interchangeably despite some nuance differences. I chose the word ‘Portrayal’ for the parameter because it is somewhat more objective while still giving an indication of Suetonius’ own views.¹⁰³ By examining things like words used and characteristics presented, I fill out the ‘Portrayal of the crowd’ category with a label that I think is an accurate representation of how Suetonius viewed the crowd in question. Whether the elements of the description are negative or positive is largely determined

¹⁰² Suetonius rarely directly uses clear words that explicitly describe the characteristics of his crowd, instead leaving it to his readers to recognize these characteristics for themselves. The labels in this category are my own; in essence, they are summaries of Suetonius’ descriptions of the crowd.

¹⁰³ In other words: Portrayal is something that can be directly extracted from the text and is only subject to differences in interpretation by readers of Suetonius (though often it is quite clear what label is to be used), while alternative terms such as judgement and perception are concerned with Suetonius’ own mindset and thoughts, which we cannot directly look into. However, the way Suetonius portrays the crowd does indeed give us some indication of Suetonius’ personal thoughts: his judgements and perceptions cannot be directly accessed, but they can be inferred from his portrayal of the crowd. This principle allows me to answer the main research question by using the database.

by the type of words used and the emotions and associations the description invokes. If positive phenomena are present (e.g. support, happiness and a celebratory atmosphere), I have marked the passage as containing positive elements; the same principle is true for negative emotions and phenomena (e.g. violence, fear, chaos). Negative passages such as *Caligula* 26 feature exclusively negative elements and characteristics, while Positive passages like *Caligula* 13 contain only positive associations and labels.¹⁰⁴ Passages with a Mixed portrayal, such as *Iulius* 79, contain both negative and positive elements and therefore do not fit into either category.¹⁰⁵ Finally, Neutral passages are ones where there is simply no judgement because the crowd is passive or is only mentioned in passing by Suetonius.¹⁰⁶

Violence and Disorder are also two vital parameters. These are factual categories, since most of the time, there either is disorder/violence or there is none. By giving an overview of which crowds are disorderly/violent and which ones are not, I again allow for valuable observations and conclusions when connecting these parameters to others. With the ‘Directness of judgement’ parameter (0-5, with 0 indicating ‘no judgement’), I assess how explicitly Suetonius describes crowds in a certain way. The category also indicates the intensity of Suetonius’ judgement. Because of this, it provides an extra nuance to the ‘Portrayal by author’ category: for example, in a Negative passage with a

¹⁰⁴ Suet. *Cal.* 13: ‘Thus it was that, as he came from Misenum, though wearing mourning and accompanying the funeral train of Tiberius, among the altars, sacrificial victims, and blazing torches he encountered thronging crowds of people rejoicing greatly who greeted him with auspicious names: ‘star’, ‘chick’, ‘child’, and ‘little chap’.’ The crowd is happy and enthusiastic, supporting their new emperor with loving adoration without any mention of disorder or other negative elements. At this early point in his reign, Caligula was still loved by practically all people, which is very much what Suetonius demonstrates in this passage. Suet. *Cal.* 26: ‘When he was disturbed in the middle of the night by people trying to secure the free seats in the Circus he had them all driven away with cudgels. In the confusion more than twenty Roman knights and the same number of ladies, along with a vast number of others, were trampled to death. At the theatrical shows, trying to stir up fights between the common people and the Roman knights, he distributed the free tickets early so that the places for the knights were taken by the commonest people.’ The crowd is associated with the negative characteristic of being anti-traditional and causes disorder and violence, and the passage does not contain any positive elements to compensate.

¹⁰⁵ Suet. *Iul.* 79: ‘(...) at the time of the Latin festival he was returning to the city, amid the other excessive and unprecedented demonstrations by the people’. Positive elements are present in the fact that there is a celebratory atmosphere, with the crowd enthusiastically supporting Caesar. However, Suetonius describes this manifestation of support in a negative way, using the word *inmodicas*, from *inmodicus*: immoderate in size or amount, excessive in degree, extravagant (*OLD*, 837). Because the indirect associations are positive but the direct description by Suetonius is negative, the passage receives a Mixed portrayal, with the negative aspects being slightly more prominent in this case.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Suet. *Aug.* 27, *Nero* 13.

Directness score of 5, the crowd is portrayed in a more intensely negative way than the crowd in a passage with a lower score. The directness of Suetonius' judgement largely follows from the kinds of words he utilises to describe the crowd. These have been added in a separate parameter, 'Words used'. Finally, I have designated which passages are individually analysed in Chapter III in the 'Analysed'-category.

3. Context, setting, type of crowd

The parameters 'Context', 'Setting' and 'Type of crowd' are mainly descriptive categories that serve to inform the readers of the database about the context of the passage in lieu of actually reading the full passage. When we look at the context, broadly speaking there are four categories that are prominently featured in *De vita Caesarum*: the urban environment (sometimes with violence), crowds at the games, manifestations of support, and (violent) politics. These often overlap, such as in Suet. *Claud.* 27, where the labels 'Manifestation of support' and 'Crowds at the games' would both be applicable. 'Political violence' is a specific category that denotes crowds inflicting harm upon political opponents for the sake of accomplishing the political goals of their leader or the person they support. This is different from violence committed in a general political context, which is applicable to nearly all violent passages because of Suetonius' emperor-centric approach.

'Setting' refers to the specific location the described events take place in. Nearly all of the scenes Suetonius writes about occur in Rome, which is hardly surprising given that this was the place the emperor was to be found most often. A large number of passages (9 out of 40) are set on a location where some sort of spectacle is being carried out, in an arena or a theatre. Crowds feature here as masses of spectators and are variously described as *multitudo*, *turba* or *plebs*. In many cases, spectacles are associated with disorder by Suetonius (5 out of 9 times), but the range of judgements by Suetonius is quite varied: 4 negative, 1 mixed, 2 positive, 2 neutral. These statistics indicate that Suetonius viewed spectacles as a dynamic, volatile setting where crowds played a large role due to the sheer number of spectators present, and where emotions could run high- sometimes with violence as a consequence (3 out of 9), but other times leading to loving adoration by the crowd for an emperor or leader (3 out of 9).

Violence and disorder occur across all contexts, settings, and types of crowd. From this we can gather that Suetonius presents the risk of crowd disorder or violence as nearly universal, no matter the event or location. Some settings, such as spectacles and the busy urban environment, carry particular danger.

4. Violence and disorder

In order to get an overview of how rowdy and violent Suetonius' crowds are, I have added the parameters 'Violence' and 'Disorder', which mostly generate a simple 'yes or no' answer. The scope of both these categories is quite generous. Disorder is defined as a situation where events do not transpire in a way Suetonius will have viewed as orderly or proper. Violence is defined as any act that is carried out by the crowd, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that causes harm upon a person or group of people. Crucially, this violence is per definition unlawful, because it is carried out by a group which is not authorised to do harm: the crowd of regular city-dwellers.¹⁰⁷ This, combined with Suetonius' distaste for anything disrupting law and order in Rome, has caused me to recognize Suetonius' judgement of crowds committing violence as always containing negative elements, which leads to either a negative or a mixed representation.¹⁰⁸ Since violence is inherently disorderly, all passages that have been marked as violent have also been marked as disorderly, but the opposite is not the case.

The complexities and nuances of the situations described by Suetonius have prompted me to add a third answer to the question of violence besides a simple yes or no: 'potentially' (abbreviated as 'maybe' in the database). This indicates that there is something I call a 'context of violence', in which there are mentions of violence (often the threat of violence) but no violent actions actually get committed. This is the case for passages such as *Tib.* 4, where senators let their decisions be influenced by the threat of mobs and riots; and *Nero* 47, where Nero fears he could be torn to pieces by a mob while he is way to the Forum, because he had angered the commons. No violent act is actually committed in these passages, but the thought of it is clearly present in

¹⁰⁷ This kind of violence is termed *vis* by jurists in the context of the law: 'unlawful force or violence' (*OLD*, 2074). Crowds of soldiers, when they engage in warfare, do not commit *vis* because they are authorised to enact harm upon enemies to accomplish Rome's goals. There is therefore a crucial difference between military and non-military crowds: violence by military crowds is not inherently seen as bad by Suetonius because there is no *vis*, while violence by lower-class, non-military crowds (i.e. crowds not acting in a military context) is always *vis* and is therefore always a bad thing.

¹⁰⁸ In my estimation, this is also the way in which Suetonius would have thought about the matter. Any passage indicating otherwise- e.g. any lower-class urban crowd committing some sort of 'righteous', non-illegal violence- is either missing from my selection (which I think is doubtful), or simply does not exist in *De vita Caesarum*. Therefore, it is not far-fetched at all to always attach a negative (or sometimes mixed) label to passages that feature violence.

Nero's mind, and therefore in Suetonius' mind as well.¹⁰⁹ The passages with potential disorder and/or violence are in a sense a grey area, but I have included them in their respective statistics nonetheless because they clearly do contribute to an overall image that associates crowds with violence and disorder. To further account for variations in Suetonius' texts, I have differentiated between intentional and non-intentional violence, and included a parameter in the database to that effect. Intentional violence is violence committed with the express intent of doing harm, while non-intentional violence is harm done or damaged caused while this was not the goal of the crowd, such as Caligula being nearly inadvertently crushed by his own supporters in *Cal.* 4 (see Chapter III).

From the database, we can conclude that Suetonius often associated the crowd with disorder. 19 out of 40 feature disorder in some way (47,5%), whether factually or potentially. Suetonius' judgement of these disorderly crowds is quite negative: 15 are presented negatively, and 4 receive a mixed portrayal. Crucially, none of the disorderly crowds is ever presented positively by Suetonius, and none are described in a neutral way. This heavily points to Suetonius' sharp disapproval for any crowd engaging in disorderly conduct. Given the author's overall distaste for anything or anyone breaking rules, traditions or regulations, this is hardly surprising.

Violence is only slightly less prominent (15 out of 40). The number is only 4 lower than the number of disorderly passages, which tells us that, in the Suetonian mind, most disorder is violent where crowds are concerned. Out of the 15 passages, 10 feature intentional violence (67%) and 5 unintentional violence (33%), so for Suetonius, most crowds committing violence do so willingly. However, Suetonius judges those crowds unintentionally harming people less harshly than their

¹⁰⁹ Suet. *Nero* 47: 'It is believed he was too frightened to carry out his plan, in case he was torn apart before he could reach the Forum.' No crowd is explicitly mentioned; however, in my estimation it is definitely implied that Nero feared to be killed by an angry mob specifically because of the earlier mention of him wanting to appear before the people (e.g. a crowd of spectators) on the Rostra, which is on the Forum. Alternatively, Nero's fears could be about a group of soldiers, some of which were starting to rebel against him. I think this is less likely, as Nero's fear of being 'torn apart' clearly indicates a large mass of people. The word Suetonius uses for this action, *discerperetur*, is a very violent term that implies the crowd ripping of limbs from Nero's body, which would have been a bloody affair indeed, with a significant negative impact on readers.

intentionally violent counterparts.¹¹⁰ As is the case with disorderly crowds, Suetonius' judgement of violent crowds is overwhelmingly negative: 12 passages feature a negative portrayal (80%), while a mixed portrayal occurs 3 times (20%). Violent crowds can only receive a mixed judgement when there are also elements of support involved. We can conclude that for Suetonius, a violent crowd is almost automatically a bad actor: there are no cases of Suetonius looking favourably upon crowds committing violence.

The picture is somewhat different for non-violent and non-disorderly crowds. Crowds that are neither violent nor disorderly appear in 21 out of 40 passages (52,5%). They are more likely than disorderly/violent crowds to be presented in a neutral (28%), positive (19%) or mixed way (28%), and are much less likely to be presented in a purely negative way (24% versus 79%). All 4 positive passages fall into the non-disorderly category, which again demonstrates that a lack of disorder is essentially a prerequisite for a positive judgement by Suetonius. Still, Suetonius finds plenty of space to cast non-disorderly crowds in an unfavourable light: despite the lower percentage of purely negative portrayals when compared to disorderly crowds, 10 out of 21 passages (48%) contain negative elements (5 negative portrayals, 5 mixed). This reveals to us that even crowds that technically behave properly are often bad actors for Suetonius for various reasons. This is because many negative characteristics of the crowd, such as Easily manipulated, do not necessarily contain disorder but still lead to a negative judgement.

The statistics indicate that Suetonius sees the potential for disorder, violence and harm as a major risk when dealing with any crowd, even the ones that do not actively seek to do harm. However, the 37,5% statistic for violent crowds was somewhat lower than I had expected, as was the 47,5% for disorderly crowds. This nuances the image that is presented by Le Bon and others: that of crowds throughout history being capable of nothing more than violence and barbarism. Judging from his writings and the stories he chooses to tell, Suetonius would only have agreed partially with that statement. However, in my opinion, violent crowds would have had a much larger impact on his emotions, views and ways of thinking than crowds that were mostly passive and/or peaceful. So even though only slightly over a third of Suetonian crowds are violent, the association between crowds and violence is still very strong.

¹¹⁰ Intentionally violent crowds are presented in an 90% negative way and have an average Directness score of 3.8, indicating a relatively intensely negative judgement. Non-intentionally violent crowds receive a 60% negative representation and an average Directness score of 3, indicating an average intensity of judgement.

5. Prominence of the crowd

Looking at the ‘Prominence of the crowd’ parameter, we can assess that often the crowd is quite active, such as in *Iulius* 85; other times, the crowd is plays a more passive role in the background (e.g. *Aug.* 93, *Nero* 13) or is talked about in more general or abstract terms (*Tib.* 72). *De vita Caesarum* features a wide array of crowds of varying prominence: 12 Low, 18 Medium, 10 High. A pattern can be discerned where the more prominently a crowd asserts itself as an actor, the more likely it is to be disorderly or violent, and the more negative Suetonius’ portrayals and judgements become.¹¹¹ This underlines the conclusion that Suetonius generally disapproves of lower-class urban crowds taking any significant action. The disorder percentages in each of the three categories (from low to high prominence: 8%, 39%, 90%) clearly show the pattern that for Suetonius, most active crowds are disorderly- or, alternatively formulated, most crowd actions are disorderly.

There is very little room for actions by prominent crowds that Suetonius would describe as proper. 3 out of 4 passages with a positive portrayal feature medium-prominence crowds, with only 1 featuring a high-prominence crowd: *Claud.* 18.1, which is the lone exception here (see Chapter III for individual analysis).¹¹² This in turn indicates that for Suetonius, a good crowd is generally one which does not overstep its bounds, and a bad crowd is one that is disruptive and invasive. This fits neatly into Suetonius’ worldview, where the only legitimate (political) action is one taken by the Senate, the People, or (to a lesser degree), the Emperor.

¹¹¹ Low-prominence crowds are only disorderly and violent 1 out of 12 times (and in this case, this one passage features a crowd that is merely potentially disorderly/violent) and are often described in a neutral way (6 out of 12). Medium-prominence crowds are disorderly 7 out of 18 times and violent 6 out of 18 times, with the 6 violent passages equally divided between 3 intentionally violent crowds and 3 non-intentionally violent ones. They are judged mostly either negatively (9 out of 18) or mixed (4 out of 18), but 3 out of 4 positive passages feature medium-prominence crowds. High-prominence crowds are significantly more prone to disorder (9 out of 10) and violence (8 out of 10, 7 intentional), and are also judged much more negatively (6 negative, 3 mixed, 1 positive).

¹¹² Suet, *Claud.* 18.1. The crowd undertakes a positive action by helping Claudius to put out a fire.

6. Characteristics of the crowd: the crowd is disorderly, violent

From the analysis of the ‘Prominence of the crowd’ parameter, we can determine that Suetonius generally views assertive crowds as invasive when they take action in the political sphere he describes in his emperor-biographies. However, there are many more labels one could attach to the way Suetonius describes crowds. These labels have been collected in the ‘Characteristics of the crowd’ category, that has been an important contribution to determining Suetonius’ portrayal of crowds. I will now discuss most characteristics on the list, and the patterns associated with them. Many of these labels will become even clearer during the individual analysis in Chapter III.

Broadly speaking, there are three categories of characteristics that share a similar underlying message. The first has become clear in my discussion of the ‘Violence’ and ‘Disorder’ parameters: the crowd is often presented as violent and disorderly. Variations on those designations occur in 17 out of 40 passages (43%). Crowds with these types of characteristics often assert themselves prominently by taking clear action (mostly violent), and are overwhelmingly presented negatively because of the nature of their actions.¹¹³

Threatening: For Suetonius, the presence of a crowd always carries the risk of harm being done. The characterisation ‘threatening’, occurring 4 times, is used for passages where no (intentional) violence is actually committed, but where there is very much a threat that violence could break out. For example, this is the case in *Iulius* 16: a spontaneous mob of Caesar’s supporters offers to help him reclaim his position of power by using violence against his opponents.¹¹⁴ No violence is eventually committed because Caesar manages to dissuade the mob from doing so. However, the threat of a political riot breaking out very much scared senators, who panicked and engaged in an

¹¹³ Prominence of the crowd: 8 high, 8 medium, 1 low. Portrayal by author: 14 negative, 3 mixed.

¹¹⁴ Suet. *Iul.* 16: ‘And on the following day a rather unruly mob flocked to him spontaneously and of their own accord, offering him their help in reasserting his position; when he restrained them, quite contrary to expectations, the senate (which had been hastily summoned to deal with the same crowd) made him a vote of thanks through its leading men, and then, having summoned him to the senate house, praised him in the highest terms and restored him to his former position, cancelling the earlier decree.’ Violence is not explicitly mentioned in the second half of the passage; however, the ‘context of violence’ has been clearly established in the first half when Caesar learns that his opponents were ready to move against him with violence. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Caesar’s supporters were also willing to use violence, even though this is not directly stated.

emergency session. This shows that the threat of crowd violence was very real in the minds of the elite.

Dangerous: Because of their very nature, the presence of large masses of people can become harmful when there are simply so many people present that dangerous situations occur. I have used the characterisation ‘Dangerous’, occurring 6 times, to indicate situations where no intentional violence is committed, but where a large crowd nonetheless creates a dangerous situation by blocking the road, almost crushing the emperor out of enthusiasm, et cetera. The term is therefore synonymous with the age-old trope that crowds are dangerous in numbers. An example is *Iulius* 39, where the crowds drawn to games given by Julius Caesar become so large that a number of people are crushed to death.¹¹⁵ Another is *Galba* 18, where the density of the throng of people in the streets of Rome almost causes the emperor to be killed when he is pressed against a spear held by one of his soldiers.¹¹⁶

Chaotic, wild: Suetonius often describes and views the crowd as a (potential) maelstrom of mayhem, madness and disarray; it is an uncontrollable mass whose wildness can only seldomly be successfully suppressed, *Iulius* 16 being a notable exception. In numerous passages, the crowd is presented as a force of pure chaos that does not listen to reason and has a poignant- and in Suetonius’ eyes undoubtedly quite shocking- disregard for law and order. The label appears 7 times (5 Negative, 2 Mixed) and is applicable for example to *Caligula* 51, where someone speculates that people in a Roman caravan traveling through enemy territory would panic and erupt in a flurry of confusion and disarray if there were to be an appearance by a barbarian; the thought of this chaos scares the emperor, and it would probably have scared Suetonius.¹¹⁷ See also *Caligula* 4 and 6, discussed in Chapter III.

¹¹⁵ Suet. *Iul.* 39: ‘Drawn by all these spectacles, a vast number of people flooded into Rome from every region, so that many of the visitors had to lodge in tents put up in the streets or along the roads. And the crowds were so great on a number of occasions that many people were crushed to death, even including two senators.’

¹¹⁶ Suet. *Galba* 18: ‘Then, when Galba alighted, he was almost wounded by the thrust of a bodyguard’s lance, as the crowd pushed forward.’ Rolfe’s translation ascribes the crowd a more direct responsibility for the incident: ‘And as Galba dismounted, one of his guards, pushed forward by the crowd, almost wounded him with his lance.’

¹¹⁷ Suet. *Cal.* 51: ‘Despite the threats he would utter against barbarians, when he was travelling by chariot, on the farther side of the Rhine, with a tightly grouped body of men through a narrow passage and someone remarked what a panic there would be if the enemy made an appearance somewhere, he immediately mounted a horse and hurried back towards the bridges.’

Riotous: This label is given to crowds that intentionally commit violence for a particular purpose. For this thesis, I define the term ‘riot’ as a violent action, taken collectively by a large mass of people, with the intention of accomplishing a certain goal (such as expressing discontent) by using force. This is the case in *Augustus* 14, where a mob of soldiers attending the games set out to kill Lucius Antonius because of the rumour he had tortured and killed a man within their ranks.¹¹⁸ In this passage and in others, the driving factor behind the crowd’s decision to riot is anger about a certain event or issue. The Riotous label appears 7 times and always receives a negative judgement. A related characteristic is **Rebellious**, which appears when the crowd rebels against the Roman political establishment instead of against a particular person. For example, in Suet. *Iul.* 16, the mob that supports Caesar is willing to aid him in acquiring illegitimate amounts of power by committing violence, presumably against members of the Senatorial establishment. In Suet. *Tib.* 4, the Senate expresses its concern about mob violence breaking out, probably fearing that violent crowds will rise up against the Senate and try to overthrow the Roman government in the wake of Caesar’s tumultuous years in power.¹¹⁹ The label only appears three times, which could indicate that imperial authors were less afraid of political violence than their Late Republic counterparts and that the historiography is partially correct when stating mass uprisings were rarer in the Empire than in the Late Republic.

Impulsive: Many crowds are quick to action and do not consider the finer details of the situation. In Suetonius, all of these impulsive actions are violent actions, which is why I have marked impulsivity as a violent characteristic. *Augustus* 14, discussed above, is an example of a passage featuring an Impulsive crowd: the soldiers base their violent action on nothing suspicion, committing serious violence almost immediately after hearing unconfirmed rumours. The impulsive label, appearing 5 times and always receiving a Negative portrayal, is related to the Ignorant characteristic: sudden violent action often arises out of a lack of proper understanding

¹¹⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 14: ‘For, when, during some games, he gave orders that the official should remove a common soldier who was sitting in the fourteen rows reserved for the orders, a rumour was spread by his detractors that he had later had this same man tortured and killed, and he only just escaped death himself, as an angry crowd of soldiers gathered. What saved him was the sudden appearance of the missing man, safe and sound. Then, when he was offering a sacrifice near the walls of Perusia, he almost fell into the hands of a group of gladiators who had burst out of the town.’

¹¹⁹ Suet. *Tib.* 4: ‘However, when Caesar was murdered, and everyone else, fearing the anger of the mob, voted for an amnesty, he supported a move to reward the tyrannicides.’

of the situation, such as in *Iulius* 85 (see Chapter III). Also, while committing the action, the crowd is often not bound by any clear logical thinking, which can be described as irrational.

7. Characteristics of the crowd: the crowd is stupid

The second category of characteristics of the crowd consists of labels that share an overarching sentiment: that of the crowd being stupid. Just as with the violent crowd, the stupid crowd is a trope that has appeared in many sources, including Suetonius.

Stupid/ignorant: The crowd in Suetonius commits actions that demonstrate its pure stupidity and lack of critical thinking. These are situations for which aristocrats like Suetonius probably would have ridiculed the crowd, because it confirms their preconceptions that the lower-class masses are inferior to them. The crowd shows its ignorance when it does not have a proper understanding of the situation. The Stupid/ignorant label appears 5 times, with 4 passages receiving a Negative portrayal and 1 a Mixed portrayal. The label is applicable to *Caligula* 42, where a large amount of people give Caligula their money when he pretends he has become poor. Suetonius will have judged the crowd as stupid in this case, because it should be clear to anyone that the Roman emperor is not a poor man at all; Caligula clearly manipulates them.¹²⁰

Easily manipulated: This trope of the crowd being easily manipulated appears 4 times in Suetonius: twice in *Caligula*, twice in *Nero*. In all 4 cases, crowds allow themselves to be manipulated by these emperors, who Suetonius views as bad people. Being blindly obedient to a bad emperor when he is seeking the support of the people (e.g. *Cal.* 15, *Nero* 53) to accomplish his own goals does not reflect very positively on the crowd. The trope of the crowd being easily manipulated is not unique to Suetonius; for example, it also appears in Tacitus, where a crowd of soldiers is easily swayed by a speech by someone with a saucy tongue.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Suet. *Cal.* 42: ‘When his daughter was born, however, he lamented his poverty still more, complaining that he now had to bear a father's burdens as well as those of an emperor, and received contributions to the girl's upbringing and dowry. He announced that he would be accepting New Year's presents at the start of the year and stood in the temple vestibule on New Year's Day in order to take the donations which a crowd of all sorts of people heaped upon him with overflowing hands and togas.’ This passage follows after several passages where Suetonius does assert that Caligula was indeed in need of money. However, since immediately after this passage Caligula is described as walking ‘with bare feet on the huge heaps of gold pieces he had piled up’, I think it is reasonable to assume that when Caligula was asking for money from the crowd, he had already amassed enough funds.

¹²¹ Tacitus, *Annales* I.16.

Anti-traditional: In Suetonius, the crowd is associated 7 times with the breach of traditions and the disruption of social norms and hierarchies in Roman society. For a traditionalist author like Suetonius, this would have been a major offence. By not conducting themselves according to the established traditions, crowds show that they are inferior and deserve their lower place in society- at least, this is how Suetonius probably thought about the matter. In *Nero* 28, the crowd engages in a serious breach of tradition: by attending the emperor's sham wedding, the crowd indulges Nero in the delusion that he can legitimately marry a young boy, completely contrary to Roman tradition and Suetonius' conservative social views.¹²² In *Augustus* 40, Augustus berates a crowd for not wearing the proper clothing, casting the emperor in a positive light by contrasting him with the anti-traditional crowd.¹²³ In *Caligula* 26, crowds are associated with not following the traditional hierarchical seating in the arena.¹²⁴ In *Claudius* 10, a crowd of commoners and soldiers declares Claudius the new emperor, even though this is the traditional prerogative of the Senate.¹²⁵

Emotional: Suetonius often associates the crowd with strong emotions. These can be negative, such as anger or distrust, but they can also be positive, such as happiness or enthusiasm. Since these emotions are often wild and/or not entirely rational, I have placed this label under the 'the crowd is stupid' category. In *Claudius* 12, the crowd demonstrates that it is often guided by irrational emotion, which makes them do bad things. In this scene, the commoners (verbally) assault soldiers and senators when they

¹²² Suet. *Nero* 28: 'He had the testicles cut off a boy named Sporus and attempted to transform him into a woman, marrying him with dowry and bridal veil and all due ceremony, then, accompanied by a great crowd, taking him to his house, where he treated him as his wife.'

¹²³ Suet. *Aug.* 40: 'He sought, too, to revive the ancient manner of dress and once, when he saw at a public meeting a crowd of people dressed in dark clothes, he grew angry and cried out: Behold the Romans, lords of the world, the toga'd race! and he made it the business of the aediles to prevent anyone being seen again in or near the Forum unless wearing a toga and without a cloak.'

¹²⁴ Suet. *Cal.* 26 (see Chapter II.2)

¹²⁵ Suet. *Claud.* 10: 'On the next day, however, when the senate was proving rather slow in executing its plans, since there was much disagreement between those advocating different courses, and the crowd of people standing around were by now demanding a single leader and calling for Claudius by name, he allowed the armed assembly of soldiers to swear allegiance to him and promised fifteen thousand sesterces to each man.'

learn of a rumour that their beloved Claudius has been killed.¹²⁶ The positive aspects of the ‘emotional’ appear in *Augustus* 58, where large crowds of commoners enthusiastically express their support for Augustus when he is named *pater patriae*.¹²⁷

8. Characteristics of the crowd: positive labels

As one can observe from the database, most labels that can be attached to crowds carry negative meaning. However, there are a few that do not. 4 Suetonian crowds are **Happy**, which Suetonius would have appreciated because in his mind, one of the chief responsibilities of the emperor was to keep people happy and satisfied. This label therefore leads to a positive portrayal in 3 out of 4 cases.¹²⁸ A characteristic that appears more frequently is **Supportive**: in 16 passages, the crowd undertakes some action that expresses their support for a particular person, in most cases the emperor. I have marked the Supportive label as a positive element because it is very much a good thing in Suetonius’ mind if there is balance and harmony between the lower classes and the elite, which is expressed when lower-class crowds support aristocrats. However, passages with the Supportive label often receive a Mixed judgement, either because the crowd is supporting a bad emperor or their support leads them to commit violence or disorder (e.g. *Caligula* 4).

¹²⁶ Suet. *Claud.* 12: ‘Because of this behaviour, in a short time he secured so much affection and support that when it was reported that he had been ambushed and killed as he was travelling towards Ostia, the people were greatly upset and, with horrible curses, insistently attacked the soldiers as traitors and the senators as parricides, only stopping when first one, then another, then numerous magistrates appeared on the rostra to confirm that the emperor was safe and on his way home.’

¹²⁷ Suet. *Aug.* 58: ‘All joined together with alacrity and unanimity in conferring upon him the title ‘Father of the Fatherland’. First of all the common people made the attempt, sending messengers to him at Antium. When he would not accept it they greeted him in throngs, crowned with laurel, as he arrived at the games in Rome.’

¹²⁸ The one exception is *Augustus* 53: here, the crowd is happy because someone at the games calls the much adored emperor Augustus ‘Master’, but the portrayal by Suetonius is Mixed because Augustus does not approve of their enthusiastic chants, which are described as ‘unbecoming adulation’ (compare to *Iulius* 79). It is not entirely clear if these are Augustus’ words or Suetonius’s.

9. Portrayal, judgement, and perception

Throughout this chapter, I have already illuminated many interesting facts involving the ‘Portrayal by author’ parameter. This parameter gives us the most direct insight into the way Suetonius presents, represents and judges Roman crowds in *De vita Caesarum*. When taking even a basic look at the database, one will observe that no less than 30 out of 40 passages contain negative elements, with 20 receiving a purely negative judgement and 10 being mixed (i.e. containing some positive elements as well). From this statistic, we can gather that for Suetonius, a lower-class or urban crowd was often a bad actor that is associated with all kinds of negative characteristics, which I have discussed above. However, not all crowds have a negative impact, with 14 (35%) containing positive elements (4 Positive, 10 Mixed) and 6 being presented in a neutral fashion by Suetonius.

Based on the database, we come to the conclusion that Suetonius’ treatment of crowds is actually quite diverse and multi-faceted. The crowd is not one-dimensional, but is presented and perceived in a variety of different ways. This observation significantly nuances claims by Magalhães, Africa, Rudé and others, discussed in Chapter I, about constant negative representation of crowds by elite authors. Suetonius does not exclusively describe the crowd as a harbinger of chaos and disorder like Le Bon often does; there is also room for crowds doing positive things or being associated with positive emotions and phenomena. The representation of crowds by Suetonius may be quite diverse, but his personal perception of crowds might be a different matter, which is why I differentiated between the two in the main research question of this thesis. Suetonius’ personal perceptions are, of course, impossible to know exactly. My estimation is that his overall view on crowds is somewhat more negative than his representation of them in *De vita Caesarum*. This is due to the fact that the negatives in many cases have a larger impact than the positives, which is a basic fact of human psychology. I suspect that stories about rowdy, riotous and rebellious crowds featured much more prominently in Suetonius’ mind than the rarer ones about supportive, helpful or passive crowds- partly due to the fact that these positive passages feature a much lower ‘Prominence of crowd’ score on average, as we have seen. However, these remain my interpretations and are impossible to prove definitively.

10. Manifestations of support

I want to elaborate upon some interesting themes in one specific Context that appears in Suetonius 13 times, which is the ‘Manifestation of support’ category. These passages are about crowds supporting a person, usually the emperor, and almost always feature positive elements such as joy, happiness, and adoration for a person.¹²⁹ However, they often receive a Mixed judgement (9 out of 13). This is due to my estimation that crowds supporting a bad emperor, such as Caligula or Nero, would not have been viewed favourably by Suetonius, who might have used labels like ‘Ignorant’ and ‘Easily manipulated’ to describe these crowds. In this category, the author largely uses the crowd as a prop to indicate the fact that the emperor- who is the central figure in this biographic work- enjoys support from the crowd and the wider public or plebs. Because passages in Suetonius serve the purpose of illustrating the emperor’s positive or negative characteristics, the supportive crowd is in a sense an extension of the emperor himself. Suetonius’ portrayal and judgement of these crowds is intrinsically bound to his judgement of the emperor they adore, which becomes clear when we observe that crowds supporting unstable ‘bad’ emperors like Caligula often commit violence as well.

Even so, the crowd often still asserts itself as an actor, as becomes visible in the ‘Perception of the crowd’ score: 1 Low, 7 Medium, 5 High. This is mainly the case in *Caligula*.¹³⁰ This could indicate that Suetonius viewed crowds as having played a large role during Caligula’s reign, which he often described as having been tumultuous; a large presence of chaotic crowds might be a reflection of the overall instability of this emperor’s period in power. It could also mean that Caligula enjoyed great support from the common people, since 6 out of 13 appearances of the ‘Manifestation of support’ category are in *Caligula*.

The judgement also often becomes Mixed because the crowd expresses their support by taking bad actions, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Manifestations of support are disorderly in 31% of passages and violent in 23% of passages, which is not an insignificant amount. Both these percentages are lower than the averages (47,5% and 37,5%), but themes of violence and disorder are still very much present in this category. The fact that even supportive crowds are disorderly and violent somewhat often demonstrates the extensive manner in which these themes and

¹²⁹ 3 out of 4 Positive passages are in the Manifestation of support category, and even the fourth (*Claud.* 18.1) can be interpreted as a manifestation of support.

¹³⁰ Suet. *Cal.* 4, 6, 13, 14, 42.

associations permeate Suetonius' work. Still, the below-average level of violence in supportive crowds requires us to recognize these crowds as a different type of crowd than the rowdy urban mob that also features prominently in Suetonius. This distinction between 'bad' and 'slightly less bad' crowds has also been recognized in Tacitus by Africa.¹³¹ In both authors, Manifestations of support are highly complex, diverse and varied passages.¹³²

The prominence of the 'Manifestations of support' category was quite surprising to me, because one would not expect these kinds of passages to occur often when one is acquainted with the image of negative representation in Africa, Rudé, Magalhães and others. I had expected Suetonius to portray crowds in a one-sided, overwhelmingly negative way, but the database has made clear to me that his approach is much more varied. The 'Manifestations of support' category in particular has illuminated that for Suetonius, crowds are not always one-dimensional forces of chaos, and that the historiography on both Suetonius' perspective and on the historical reality of Roman crowds might need some adjustments.

11. The database and the historiography: riots, political violence

In fact, the database can provide quite a few additions and nuances to the historiography. As I made clear, this thesis is not meant to provide statements about the historical reality. However, some observations from the dominant historiography can be indeed be amended.

For example, Suetonius barely mentions actual riots. As I demonstrated in Chapter II, many publications have been devoted to discussing this largely lower-class phenomenon.¹³³ According to these historians, food riots and other urban uprisings continued to occur during the Empire, though in a less prominent manner than during the (Late) Republic era.¹³⁴ The image is different in Suetonius. Out of 40 passages, 7 feature the label 'Riotous', but many of these passages do not feature the type of urban unrest that is described in the historiographical literature on riots; rather, they mostly take place in the political sphere. An urban riot stemming from typical lower-class

¹³¹ Tacitus, *Historiae* I.4; Africa, 'Urban violence', 3.

¹³² For passages in Tacitus featuring manifestations of support, see for example: Tac. *Ann.* II.40, II.75; Tac. *Ann.* III.1-2, III.4; Tac. *Ann.* IV.64; Tac. *Ann.* VI.42.

¹³³ E.g. Kelly, 'Riot control'; Africa, 'Urban violence'.

¹³⁴ MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 163; Kelly, 'Riot control', 150; Griffin, 'Urbs Roma, Plebs and Princeps', 40-41.

concerns (which is the type of riot described by Magalhães, Kelly and others) appears only once: in *Claudius* 18.2, a food riot erupts when a crowd assaults emperor Claudius because of a scarcity of corn in the city.¹³⁵

The relative lack of scenes of urban riots might indicate that MacMullen was right when he asserted that riots and other forms of urban disorder were less prominent in the Empire than in the Late Republic. In my opinion, a more logical explanation relates to Suetonius' perspective, which I addressed in Chapter I. The purely lower-class concerns of Rome's city dwellers, such as enough food and clean water, were for the most part simply outside of Suetonius' sphere of interest. His focus lies on the private and political lives of the emperors. Consequentially, crowds are almost exclusively discussed in an imperial context, and "earthly" phenomena such as anxiety over the grain supply are not discussed unless the emperor is involved. This is the case in *Claudius* 18.2, where the focus is clearly on Claudius rather than on the crowd: Suetonius' main point seems to be that Claudius easily gives into forceful demands made by the people when his own safety is at risk, which is in accordance with Suetonius' general image of Claudius as a weak emperor.¹³⁶

Another interesting observation is that political violence features relatively infrequently in *De vita Caesarum*. Before writing this thesis, I had expected that Suetonius' main fear in relation to crowd action was the threat of political violence being committed by mobs supporting bad emperors. However, this occurs in only three passages, all of which are about Julius Caesar during the turbulent transition between the Late Republic and Imperial periods.¹³⁷ This could very well confirm the view by Lutz and Lutz that it was mostly the Late Republic where political violence by mobs supporting various factions was a common occurrence, and that this phenomenon had

¹³⁵ Suet. *Claud.* 18.2: 'On one occasion, after repeated poor harvests had led to a shortage of corn, he was held up in the Forum by a mob who, hurling insults as well as crusts of bread, attacked him so fiercely that he was scarcely able to escape into the Palace. He then left no means untried of importing supplies even in the winter season.' I find it hard to determine whether or not Suetonius would have had any sympathy for the plight of the city-folk who carry out this riot, though he does clearly disapprove of their violent action.

¹³⁶ E.g. Suet. *Claud.* 29: Claudius 'acted not as an emperor but as a servant'.

¹³⁷ Suet. *Iul.* 16, 85; Suet. *Tib.* 4. I have not classified *Claudius* 12 as political violence. In this passage, the crowd does commit violence that is related to politics by (verbally) assaulting soldiers and senators. However, *Claud.* 12 differs from the passages about political violence in that the crowd's violent actions are simply an impulsive expression of their support for Claudius, instead of an explicit attempt to accomplish the political goals of their leader by inflicting harm upon political enemies, as is the case in the three passages mentioned above.

become much less of an issue in the Empire, which is seen as more stable under the central leadership of the emperor.¹³⁸ Even so, it is improbable that fear for violent crowds simply disappeared in the Principate: the cultural memory of the turbulent Late Republic and Julius Caesar's reign was likely still very much alive in Suetonius' time and in his social circles.

12. Words used

For each of the 40 passages, I have added the words Suetonius uses to describe the crowd to the database. This was mainly done to prepare for Chapter III, where I will take the words used into consideration during the individual analysis. I have chosen to only insert the original Latin terms, because they give us a better insight into what Suetonius actually meant than the translations, which are always imperfect and can differ from edition to edition.

Certain standard words occur often in Suetonius, as they do in all Latin literature. The most prominent Latin terms for crowd are *multitudo*, *turba*, and *vulgus*. These words can have various different (nuance) meanings, both in Suetonius and in general. Because of this diversity in definitions, it has not been possible to formulate a coherent hypothesis such as 'If Suetonius uses the word *vulgus*, he is always describing the crowd negatively'. There does not seem to be any clear connection between the choice of word to use for 'crowd' and the characteristics and representation of the crowd. *Turba* appears in all categories of judgement, which can be attributed to the fact it is used the most (19 out of 40). It is said that out the three terms, *turba* most clearly denoted a disorderly crowd.¹³⁹ This is not exactly the image in Suetonius: 9 out of 19 passages with a *turba* are disorderly (47%), which is the same as the average disorder rate in the whole body of 40 (19 out of 40, also 47%). In *Augustus* 98, Suetonius uses the term *turba*, even though the crowd in question is clearly not disorderly.¹⁴⁰ *Multitudo* is used 6 times, is used to describe disorderly crowds 3 out of 6 times, and appears in the negative (4), mixed (1) and neutral (1) categories. This again does not correspond to the view that *multitudo* is a more neutral

¹³⁸ Lutz and Lutz, 'Political Violence in the Republic of Rome', 496.

¹³⁹ OLD, 1990-1991.

¹⁴⁰ Suet. *Aug.* 98: 'This Masgaba had died the previous year and Augustus, noticing, as he looked out from the dining-room, that his tomb was surrounded by a crowd of people and many lights'; '*Huius Masgabae ante annum defuncti tumulum cum e triclinio animadvertisset magna turba multisque luminibus frequentari*'. The crowd is described as *turba*, even though it does not commit any disorderly actions; on the contrary, what Augustus witnesses here seems to be quite a solemn gathering at a man's grave.

term used to factually describe a large group of people.¹⁴¹ *Vulgus* is usually used for an undifferentiated mass of common people; Suetonius uses it only 2 times, both of which have negative elements.¹⁴² From looking at the various uses of *turba*, *vulgus* and *multitudo* in *De vita Caesarum*, we can gather Suetonius does not seem to have chosen his word for the crowd based on any thorough consideration of meaning or nuance in the Latin lexicon. These observations demonstrate, if anything, that literary language is highly complex.

I have not only inserted the Latin words Suetonius uses for crowd into the database, but also the related words that describe the crowd. The terms for crowd are often surrounded by words that carry negative meanings and/or invoke negative emotions, as has been observed by Newbold.¹⁴³ These descriptive words can cast the crowd in a bad light and can strengthen Suetonius' negative judgement that is often already inferred from the context. Some examples are *tumultuosi*, *inmodicas*, *consternatione*, *indignabundus*, *infestatus*, *attonita*, *maesta*. However, there are also terms with positive meanings, such as *gestiensis*, *gratulantium*, *auxilio* and *adclamantium*.

¹⁴¹ *OLD*, 1143.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, 2122.

¹⁴³ Newbold, 'The vulgus in Tacitus', 90.

Chapter III

Text analysis: Suetonius' rowdy urban crowd

In this chapter, I will elaborate upon findings and patterns from the database by analysing a number of representative passages on an individual, more detailed level, organized into 5 categories.¹⁴⁴ These passages will also serve as examples of the way in which I categorized and schematised the entire body of 40 passages into the parameters and categories of the database. The corresponding sub-question is as follows: 'Which patterns and observations about the literary representation and portrayal of Roman crowds emerge from individual text analysis of Suetonian passages?' All passages discussed in this chapter can be found in the Appendix.

1. Suetonius' violent crowds

Suet. *Iul.* 85: This passage portrays the crowd in a manner that is not uncommon in *De vita Caesarum* and works by other Roman authors: as a force of unbridled rage, a maelstrom that is unable to be controlled and is willing to use serious violence to satisfy its anger. In this case, Ceasar's supporters set out to burn down the houses of two of his killers, Brutus and Cassius. They are only barely repelled from accomplishing this goal; the use of the words *aegre repulsa* indicates that the crowd (*plebs*) is something that has to be controlled in order to prevent great damage.¹⁴⁵ After this, the crowd brutally murders an innocent politician and poet called Helvius Cinna because they have mistaken him for Cornelius Cinna, one of the conspirators against Caesar. By doing this, the crowd shows that it is not merely extremely violent and out of control, but also stupid, ignorant and impulsive. Instead of thinking clearly about their actions

¹⁴⁴ The categories are: crowds committing real violence (10 out of 40), threatening crowds where there is only potential violence (5), dangerous crowds that unintentionally commit disorder and violence (6), crowds with a mixed portrayal (10), and crowds with a positive portrayal (4).

¹⁴⁵ *Aegre* = 'painfully, with difficulty or effort, hardly, scarcely' (*OLD*, 63); *repulsa*, from *repello* = 'to push or thrust away from one, drive back; to drive away (persons, etc.)' (*OLD*, 1616). Translated as 'being repelled with difficulty' by Rolfe and 'only just held back' by Edwards. Suetonius uses the word *plebs* to describe the crowd, which could be a way of emphasizing that the crowd committing the violence consists of the 'urban rabble', the people from the lower classes who blindly followed Caesar because he had made shallow attempts to buy their favour throughout his time in office. This in turn could be a narrative strategy to underscore that the political violence of this era was in many ways a war between the lower classes and the elite, leading to aristocrats having to fear for their lives.

and the goals they want to accomplish, people in the mob engage in a rampage, with the consequence being that someone is murdered who had nothing to do with Caesar's death. This plays very well into the broader trope of the crowd being stupid, prominently present in *De vita Caesarum*, and also corresponds with claims by Park and Blumer that one of the aspects of crowds is that the people in them lose their individuality and their ability to independently think, instead blindly following the whims of the mob.¹⁴⁶ Because this passage takes place in the final stages of the Late Republic period, it is also consistent with claims by MacMullen and Lutz and Lutz (see Chapter I) about political violence being quite common in this era. Reading about Helvius Cinna being murdered and mutilated by the mob will most likely have instilled fear in Suetonius' audience, who were members of the elite and were therefore potential targets of the mob as well. Suetonius' portrayal of the crowd is one-dimensionally Negative, and the passage also receives a rare score of 5 in Directness of judgement because the actions of the crowd are the central subject of the scene

2. Suetonius' threatening crowds

Suet. Iul. 10: In this scene, Julius Caesar is serving as aedile early in his career, a position which makes him responsible for organizing games and spectacles. In this context, he makes preparations to give a gladiatorial show. However, the sheer number of gladiators and slaves he brought frightens the political opponents Caesar had already made in this point in his career in such a way that they introduce legislation to alleviate the threat.¹⁴⁷ It is not explicitly mentioned by Suetonius, but in my estimation, the reason Caesar's opponents do this is because they fear Caesar could unleash violence by inciting the huge throng of gladiators and slaves to assault them. It is one of only 5 passages in *De vita Caesarum* where elite persons explicitly express their fear of the crowd, though this fear would not have been exclusive to these scenes.¹⁴⁸ The passage can therefore be described as representing the threat of political violence,

¹⁴⁶ McPhail, 'The Madding Crowd', 7, 10; Park, *Masse und Publikum*, 12.

¹⁴⁷ It is not entirely clear what type of crowd this is exactly. The Loeb translation mentions a loosely defined 'huge band', while Edwards writes about a 'great number of gladiators' and Den Hengst about '*het enorme aantal slaven*' (the great number of slaves). Suetonius uses the word *multiplici*, from *multiplex*, which indicates a crowd with a large number of people in it (*OLD*, 1142). Given the gladiatorial context of the passage, I think it is reasonable to assume that the passage concerns a crowd of gladiators that Caesar had gathered to partake in the games and that was under his command.

¹⁴⁸ The others are *Iul.* 16; *Tib.* 4 and 72; *Nero* 47.

which I have defined as a crowd inflicting harm upon political opponents to accomplish a political goal in support of their leader, in this case Caesar. Because there is only a threat and not an action, the Prominence of the crowd in this passage is Medium.¹⁴⁹ In addition, *Iulius* 10 is an example of a passage that is rated as containing potential violence: the threat of the crowd of gladiators committing violence is very much there, but in the end, no violent action is actually taken. Nonetheless, I have rated the ‘Intentional violence’ parameter as ‘yes’: if the crowd of gladiators had become violent, it would have been under orders of Caesar- at least, that is how the aristocrats passing the bill probably judged the situation. Seeing as Suetonius is of the same aristocratic persuasion as Caesar’s opponents that are mentioned in this passage, he would have shared this assessment, which is why I have labelled the characteristic of the crowd as ‘Threatening’. The principal negative word Suetonius uses is *exterruisset*, from *exterreo*: to frighten, scare, terrify.¹⁵⁰ The use of this very negative terminology indicates that for Caesars opponents within the elite, and most likely for Suetonius as well, the threat of violence is quite significant when a crowd is present- especially when this crowd is under the command of a political opponent. Because of this, Suetonius’ judgement and portrayal of the crowd in this passage are clearly Negative.

Suet. Tib. 72: This passage features the emperor Tiberius receiving a metaphorical warning of the danger that the mob can present for the ruling class. When going to feed his beloved snake, he shockingly discovers that the pet has been devoured by a horde of ants. The emperor, who is described in this passage and others as paranoid and overly careful, interprets this as a sign he should be careful to avoid large crowds of people. Tiberius likely sees the crowd as a threat to either himself or someone in his entourage, fearing that the mob could inflict violence upon them, as the ants had done to his pet snake.¹⁵¹ Just as in *Iulius* 10, the elite (in this case Tiberius) shows itself to be highly suspicious of crowds. The use of a metaphor by Suetonius is quite interesting and unique, since most passages about crowds in *De vita Caesarum* feature

¹⁴⁹ If the violent action that Caesars opponents fear had actually been carried out, it would have been rated High, but this is not possible because no violence occurred. However, the crowd also does not have a Low prominence: it might not in this case carry out any action, but one of the most important elements of this passage is the hypothetical situation Suetonius describes: a situation in which the crowd would have had High prominence. Therefore, for this passage and for similar ones (e.g. *Tib.* 4), the label Medium has been chosen as a compromise.

¹⁵⁰ *OLD*, 660. Translated as ‘terrified’ by Rolfe and ‘struck such terror’ by Edwards.

¹⁵¹ David Woods, ‘Tiberius on Caligula the snake and other contextual problems’, *Arctos Acta Philologica Fennica* 47 (2007) 117-127, there 119.

real events. The snake, a larger creature that can be described as elegant because of its smooth, elongated shape, represents the patricians in Roman society. The plebs is represented by the ants, smaller in size but greater in number and therefore much more dangerous than the elite.¹⁵² Even though an individual ant is inferior to a snake, a horde of inferior creatures presents a real danger in Tiberius' mind. In my estimation, the metaphor is a reflection of deep-seated anxieties of the elite concerning their position within the Roman social system. Urban uprisings of the plebs against the patricians were not an uncommon occurrence throughout Roman history, owing to the fact that the patricians held all the power but were much smaller in number, and a risk of a plebeian revolt- the 'ants' rising up against the 'snake'- was always present.¹⁵³ I think Suetonius' readers will have understood the metaphor in this historical context and will likely have been seriously alarmed by the mental image of a beautiful snake having been mutilated by the horde of ants. The message is reinforced by the language chosen by Suetonius: like Tiberius, readers should be warned (*monitus*) to be careful of (*caveret*) the dangers of the masses (*vim multitudinis*), who can become Rebellious and receive that label in the 'Characteristics of the crowd'-category.¹⁵⁴

3. Suetonius' dangerous crowds

Suet. Cal. 4: This passage clearly demonstrates the 'Dangerous' characteristic that can be found 6 times throughout the 40 passages and that indicates the crowd causes 'accidental' violence. In this scene, the emperor Caligula is greeted by a large amount of people wanting to express their love and support for him. However, the sheer size of

¹⁵² See also Suet. *Nero* 46 for a similar comparison.

¹⁵³ Social unrest, likely involving many violent crowd actions, was said to have been quite prominent during Tiberius' reign: R.F. Newbold, 'Social tension at Rome in the early years of Tiberius' reign', *Athenaeum* 52 (1974) 110-143.

¹⁵⁴ *Monitus*, from *moneo* = 'to serve as a reminder or warning to' (*OLD*, 1130); *caveret*, from *caveo* = 'to guard against, beware of' (*OLD*, 287); *vim*, from *vis* = strength, power (*OLD*, 2074-2076). The use of the term *multitudo* implies that Tiberius should be afraid of not just violent crowds, but anything containing a large number of something (which in this case clearly means crowds of commoners). The word Suetonius uses to describe the act of the ants eating the snake is *consumptum*, from *consumo*, a word which could have both a neutral meaning ('to destroy, wear away, consume') and a more violent meaning ('to cause the death of, kill') (*OLD*, 425). I cannot say definitively which nuance definition Suetonius meant to invoke, though I would argue he probably meant to give the more violent connotation, given the context of mob violence. In any case, the language conjures up a negative mental image of a snake having been (half) eaten by the ants, which would have been a bloody affair and would have had quite an effect on readers who understood the correlation between the snake and their own patrician class.

the crowd becomes dangerous, and Suetonius reports that Caligula's life was actually in danger here because of the threat of him being crushed. The passage is a fine example of non-intentional violence: people in the crowd clearly do not want to inflict violence upon their beloved emperor, but because there are so many people present, harm is done nonetheless. This underscores my observation in Chapter II that for Suetonius, the risk of violence is always very realistic when encountering a crowd, even when the crowd does not actually intend to bring any violence. Suetonius' Mixed representation of the crowd is reflected in the language he uses. On the one hand, Caligula is positively described with the term *vulgo favorabilis*, which Edwards translates as 'so loved by the common people'. On the other hand, Suetonius invokes danger by using the words *discrimen vitae*, indicating that the crowd posed a very real threat to Caligula's life, and signifies the extremely high amount of people present with the verb *effudisse*, translated as 'flooded out' by Edwards.¹⁵⁵ This type of language will have informed readers of the many dangers posed by crowds, and the fact that harm can even befall a popular emperor when he receives support from the *plebs* might have made Suetonius' elite audience more distrustful of commoners altogether.

4. Suetonius' ambiguous crowds

Suet. Cal. 6: In this passage, the crowd shows why it is often portrayed in a Mixed way by Suetonius. The Roman city-folk had received news that Germanicus, a beloved military leader from the Julio-Claudian house, had taken ill. When a rumour arises that he in fact is alive and well, various urban crowds express their support for Germanicus in a disorderly fashion, marching through the streets at night with torches and reportedly tearing off temple doors at the Capitol. Afterwards, they are informed that Germanicus had indeed passed away, and a tremendous public grief ensues. The passage contains a wide array of both positive and negative characteristics, words and emotions. The fiery, sincere love of the crowd for Germanicus is clearly a positive element and is expressed by language like *gestiensis* (Edwards: 'eagerness') and *gratulantium* ('rejoiced').¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, negative elements are also prominently present: *attonita et maesta* ('shocked and grieving'), *revolsae* ('torn off',

¹⁵⁵ *Discrimen* = 'a dangerous or critical situation, a situation in which the safety or existence of a thing is at stake' (*OLD*, 552); *effudisse*, from *effundo* = 'to pour out, stream forth' (*OLD*, 593).

¹⁵⁶ *Gestiensis*, from *gestio* = 'to desire eagerly, long' (*OLD*, 763); *gratulantium*, from *gratular* = 'to be glad, rejoice' (*OLD*, 774).

expressing violent action), *luctus publicus* ('public mourning'), *desideriumque* (Rolfe: 'and regret for his loss'), and *atrocitas* (Rolfe: 'horror', Edwards: 'cruelty') are all used to describe emotions and events in this passage.¹⁵⁷ The Characteristics of the crowd are also very diverse: Dangerous, because the crowd does damage to the urban environment without expressly setting out to do so; Chaotic, because they are not able to be controlled and destroy parts of a building because it stands in their way; Supportive, because all their actions arise from their love for Germanicus; and Emotional, because they are guided by emotion and Suetonius describes their emotional state of mind quite often.¹⁵⁸

The passage is a clear example of one where the portrayal of the crowd is Mixed.¹⁵⁹ The crowd itself does not receive direct judgement from Suetonius, but the portrayal still has negative elements because the crowd is associated with both disorder and, more importantly, strong negative emotions. However, this passage is quite complex and multidimensional, as many in the 'Manifestation of support'-category are. This is because the disorder and negative emotions stem from the crowd's support of Germanicus, a general who Suetonius also greatly admired.¹⁶⁰ Consequentially, it is my estimation that Suetonius would have had some sympathy for the crowd in this case, and might even have excused their disorderly behaviour to an extent. His tone in the second half of the passage (*Cal.* 6.2) is quite solemn, and in my opinion, Suetonius'

¹⁵⁷ *Attonita*, from *attonitus* = 'stricken with grief or calamity, overwhelmed, stunned' (*OLD*, 222); *maesta*, from *maestus* = 'unhappy, sad, mournful' (*OLD*, 1061); *revolsae*, from *revello* = 'to tear (a thing) loose from its attachment, wrench off, tear down' (*OLD*, 1645); *luctus* = 'grief, mourning, lamentation (esp. over the death of someone loved)' (*OLD*, 1047); *desideriumque*, from *desiderium* = 'a desire, (for something lost or absent), longing; desire (for a dead person), regret' (*OLD*, 525); *atrocitas* = 'dreadfulness, horror, violence, savageness, barbarity, wickedness' (*OLD*, 199).

¹⁵⁸ I have rated the violence committed in this passage as Non-intentional; this is somewhat of a grey area, but because the crowd does not harm any person and do not have violent action as one of their goals (the tearing apart of the temple doors is simply something that happens along the way), I did not feel it was fair to the crowd to mark their violence as intentional.

¹⁵⁹ Because the negative emotions of grief and sadness arise out of the positive emotions of love and adoration for a good person like Germanicus, perhaps a more accurate label would have been 'Mixed, leaning positive', but I have not opted to use these kinds of labels because the Mixed judgement already provides satisfactory nuance and variation to the 'Portrayal' parameter.

¹⁶⁰ Suet. *Cal.* 3: '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 kindness of disposition and was remarkably successful in his endeavours to secure people's goodwill and to merit their affection.'

elite audience will have experienced some sadness after reading this passage, feeling sympathy for the crowd instead of fearing their disorderly disposition.

5. Suetonius' amicable crowds

Suet. *Claud.* 18.1. This passage is quite unique, since it is the only scene in the body of 40 passages where the crowd is portrayed in a unequivocally positive way when carrying out a prominent action. As I discussed in Chapter II, when a crowd takes strong action (i.e. it has a high Prominence score) it is usually portrayed negatively because the action involves disorder or violence. This is not the case in *Claudius* 18.1, where Claudius summons help from crowds of common folk to help put out a fire in a suburban residential area. The crowd is uniquely presented here as a force for good, assisting the emperor and taking decisive action to combat the flames. The only somewhat negative element here is the fact that Claudius in effect bribes the commoners, casting them as people willing to do anything for money. However, this does not take away from the fact that, in my estimation, Suetonius will have viewed this helpful crowd in a positive light. This is expressed in his word choices: *auxilio* (Edwards: 'assistance') and *subveniendum* (Edwards: 'give help', Rolfe: 'to the rescue').¹⁶¹ The passage also has a very positive tone because it tells a story about people from all classes of Roman society working together: emperor, soldiers, magistrates and commoners all take action to put out the fire. To Suetonius, who strongly believed the emperor should work in harmony with all kinds of people, the events of passage would have been quite a wonderful sight indeed.

Suet. *Claud.* 27: This passage is an example of the usual pattern within the Positive passages: a good crowd is a crowd that remains largely passive and does not assert itself too much. As with other passages in the 'Manifestation of support'-category, the positive elements of this passage are provided by the fact that the crowd expresses its support in a non-disorderly way. In this case, a crowd at the games makes its love for the infant Britannicus, son of the emperor Claudius, clearly known by enthusiastically cheering and applauding when Claudius shows him to them during a spectacle. Because of this, the characteristics of the crowd are Supportive and Happy. There is an overall atmosphere of adoration and hope for the future of this imperial child, expressed by the words *faustisque* (Edwards: 'good omens', Rolfe: 'happy

¹⁶¹ *Auxillio*, from *auxilium* = 'assistance, help, aid' (*OLD*, 221); *subveniendum*, from *subvenio* = 'to come to the support (of persons, etc., in danger or difficulties), bring relief; to provide help or relief (against a danger, ill)' (*OLD*, 1854-1855).

auspices’) and *adclamantium* (Edwards: ‘applauding’).¹⁶² The joy and expressions of support also serve a narrative purpose in this passage: in my estimation, the scene of the enormous love for Britannicus serves as a literary ‘setup’ for Suetonius so that he can frame Nero, who he later claims murdered Britannicus, in a deeply negative way later on.¹⁶³ Since practically every sentence in *De vita Caesarum* aims to contribute to the reader’s understanding of the characters of the emperors, this is hardly surprising. Consequentially, mentioning the crowd in *Claudius* 27 is in a sense a tool for Suetonius to prove his broader point. The crowd is not much more than a prop, a vehicle for indicating that a person, in this case Britannicus, enjoys tremendous popularity. The presence of the crowd amplifies this message because of the sheer amount of people that feature in this passage and others in the ‘Manifestation of support’ category; this great amount makes it particularly clear to the audience which of the illustrious men in history had the support of the people.

¹⁶² *Faustisque*, from *faustus* = ‘attended by good fortune, fortunate, lucky; bringing good fortune, of good omen, favourable’; *adclamantium*, from *acclamatio* = ‘a shout of comment, of approval’ (*OLD*, 22).

¹⁶³ Suet. *Nero* 33.

Conclusions

Suetonius' madding crowd?

In this thesis, I have investigated Suetonius' portrayal and literary representation of ancient Roman crowds. By placing the author at the centre of the research and using a combined method consisting of both quantitative and qualitative elements, this thesis has been able to illuminate many interesting points about this aristocratic author's perceptions of crowds. With the help of the database and the individual analysis, it has become clear that Suetonius portrays the crowd in many different ways. The crowd is almost always imagined as a faceless mass of people who do not have an individual identity, often lose their ability to think rationally, and many times act impulsively- with disorder, obstruction or violence being the consequence. However, their actions are not always presented in a one-sided, purely negative manner, as one might expect. Half of the passages (20 out of 40) either contain positive elements or feature passive crowds that do not commit any good or bad actions. This statistic challenges claims by Africa, Rudé and Magalhães, who state that crowds are subjected to nearly constant negative literary representation by Roman elite authors. Passages about crowds in *De vita Caesarum* certainly carry a relatively negative overarching tone, but not nearly as harshly as I had expected when starting this research. Therefore, I feel confident in stating that using a database has been a successful method that has the potential to nuance existing statements in the historiography.

Crowd actions in Suetonius can be broadly summarized in three categories. Expressions of discontent mostly feature negative associations and events of violence and death. Manifestations of support often contain positive elements such as happiness and celebration, but the threat of disorderly actions arising out of that support is always present. Lastly, the crowd is sometimes passive, not carrying out any action but merely being present in the background. Because this is quite a varied array of crowd activities, there is also a wide range of tropes that are present in Suetonius. The crowd is often presented as a chaotic, uncontrollable maelstrom that kills and destroys indiscriminately, with people in a crowd falling into barbarism just as Le Bon described. Because of this, any hint of a violent crowd is a serious threat that is often feared by members of the elite. City-folk are dangerous in numbers, sometimes unintentionally crushing, trampling and wounding people in the streets of Rome- even their beloved emperor. Crowds can be riotous, using violence to accomplish their goals,

and rebellious, setting their sights on powerful aristocrats or other political enemies. Another prominent trope in Suetonius is that of the crowd being stupid. When in a crowd, people act irrationally and impulsively, often out of strong emotions such as anger or grief. In addition, crowds are easily manipulated by people with a saucy tongue, mostly emperors whom Suetonius views as 'bad'. Certain crowds display positive aspects in Suetonius' portrayal: emperors are often supported by large amounts of people with an atmosphere of love, adoration and happiness.

Disorder and violence are two phenomena that Suetonius clearly sees as a significant risk when dealing with crowds: 15 out of 40 passages feature a 'context of violence', and the number is even higher for disorder (19). This observation nuances statements by MacMullen and others, who claim that the Roman Empire was a more peaceful period where urban unrest and crowd violence were not as prominent as in prior periods. This might very well have been the case, but it is not the image presented by Suetonius: people in the Roman elite most likely viewed crowd violence as a major danger, and passages describing the theme will have instilled fear into Suetonius' aristocratic audience. This indicates to us that we should not discard the Roman Empire when discussing ancient Roman crowds, as the current historiography has often done. Suetonius' accounts differ from the historiography in another way: whereas Kelly, Africa and others have mainly written about urban unrest and expressions of lower-class discontent such as food riots, the violence in Suetonius takes place more in the political sphere. This discrepancy is likely caused by Suetonius taking an emperor-centric approach, dedicating most of his passages to the personal and political behaviour of the *princeps*. Because of Suetonius' skewed perspective and the non-objective goals of *De vita Caesarum*, I remain wary of using this author to obtain any factual information about the 'historical reality'. However, in my opinion, research into literary representation and the perceptions of authors also has great value.

Answering the main research question, we can state that Suetonius' portrayal and literary representation of the crowd is quite complex, varied and multi-dimensional. As for his personal perception of crowds: being aware of the author's aristocratic views and support for traditions and law and order, I estimate that Suetonius' personal views on lower-class urban crowds will have been somewhat more negative than his overall portrayal of them in *De vita Caesarum*. This is due to a basic fact of human psychology: negative experiences and stories leave a greater (emotional) impact on us than positive or unremarkable experiences. Even though we cannot

directly access his mind and he lived thousands of years before us, Suetonius was still human and would have felt emotions, often irrational, such as fear and distrust. Looking at how aristocrats in *De vita Caesarum* act towards crowds and mobs, it is safe to assume that Suetonius shared similar sentiments to people in his stories.

In my opinion, this research into portrayals and perceptions has been very fruitful in gaining a deeper understanding of Suetonius, and by extension ancient Roman authors, concerning the topic of crowds. There are many possibilities to apply the database method to other subjects, such as perceptions of actions by women, or to other authors like Tacitus. This might very well lead to valuable new insights into these topics, like this thesis has done for the so-called “madding crowd” in Suetonius.

Appendix 1: Text passages¹⁶⁴

Suet. *Iul.* 10: ‘In addition to this, Caesar provided a set of gladiatorial games, though with fewer pairs of fighters than he had planned, for the great number of gladiators he had assembled struck such terror into his opponents that a bill was passed limiting the number of gladiators which any individual might keep in the city.’

Suet. *Iul.* 85: ‘Straight after the funeral the common people made for the houses of Brutus and Cassius armed with torches and were only just held back. Encountering Helvius Cinna and confusing his name with that of Cornelius Cinna for whom they were searching because the previous day he had spoken out in strong terms against Caesar, they killed him and carried round his head impaled on a spear.’

Suet. *Tib.* 72: ‘He kept a snake as a pet and when he went to feed it from his own hand, as he usually did, and discovered that it had been consumed by ants, he took this as a warning to beware the power of the many.’

Suet. *Cal.* 4: ‘He was so much loved by the common people, as many writers report, that whenever he arrived anywhere or left anywhere vast crowds came to meet him or see him off, sometimes even endangering his life. Indeed, when he was returning from Germany after the suppression of the mutiny, all the praetorian cohorts came to meet him, although it had been announced that only two were to undertake this duty, while all the people, whatever their age, sex, or status, flooded out of Rome as far as the twentieth milestone.’

Suet. *Cal.* 6: ‘Back in Rome, the citizens, shocked and grieving at news of his ill health, had been waiting for further information, when towards evening a report spread, its source unclear, to the effect that he was recovering. At once crowds flocked to the Capitol with torches and sacrificial victims. They almost tore off the temple doors such was their impatience at any delay to their offerings. Tiberius was roused from sleep by their voices as they rejoiced on all sides, chanting: Rome is safe, our fatherland safe, for Germanicus is safe. And when at last his death became known, no consolation, no orders could contain the public mourning, which lasted even through the feast days of the month of December. The dreadfulness of later events increased the reputation

¹⁶⁴ Translations by Edwards.

of the dead man and regret for his loss. All believed and with good reason that only respect for Germanicus and fear of him had held in check the cruelty to which Tiberius soon gave rein.’

Suet. *Claud.* 18.1: ‘When the Aemilian area was afflicted with a rather stubborn fire, he stayed for two nights in the Diribitorium, and, when the assistance supplied by the soldiers and his own slaves was not enough, he had the magistrates call on the common people from every area of the city and, with chests full of money in front of him, he urged them to give help, paying each person on the spot a suitable reward for their services.’

Suet. *Claud.* 27: ‘While he was still very small, Claudius would commend him to assemblies of soldiers, taking him in his arms, and to the people at the games, holding him on his lap or in front of him, and he would invoke good omens for him, with the approval of the applauding crowd.’

Appendix 2: Database¹⁶⁵

Passage	Context	Setting	Type of crowd	PotC	Crowd action(s)	Characteristics	Viol.	Intent.	Dis.	Portrayal	DoJ	Words used	An.
Iul. 10	Crowds at the games	Spectacle	Gladiators/slaves	Medium	Passive	Threatening	Maybe	Yes	Maybe	Negative	3	<i>multiplici, exterruisset</i>	Yes
Iul. 16	Political violence / unrest	Rome	Rioters, supporters of Caesar	High	(Almost) rioting	Riotous, rebellious, supportive, threatening	Maybe	Yes	Yes	Negative	4	<i>Multitudinem, tumultuosius, conpescuit</i>	No
Iul. 39	Crowds at the games	Spectacle	Urban crowd	Medium	Crushing people	Dangerous, chaotic	Yes	No	Yes	Negative	4	<i>confuxit hominum, turba, elisi exanimatique</i>	No
Iul. 79	Manifestation of support	Spectacle	Urban supporters of Caesar	Low	Being spectators	Supportive, emotional	No	-	No	Mixed	3	<i>inmodicas, populi acclamationes</i>	No
Iul. 84	Manifestation of support	Funeral	Urban supporters of Caesar	Medium	Supporting Caesar	Supportive, emotional	No	-	No	Mixed	0	<i>turba, multitudo</i>	No
Iul. 85	Political violence	Rome	Urban supporters of Caesar	High	Violence, murder	Stupid, angry, ignorant, riotous, impulsive	Yes	Yes	Yes	Negative	5	<i>Plebs, aegre repulsa concursu et indignatione</i>	Yes
Aug. 14	Political violence	Rome	Common soldiers	High	Violence, chaos	Angry, riotous, impulsive, stupid	Yes	Yes	Yes	Negative	4	<i>turbae militaris</i>	No
Aug. 27	Politics	Assembly	Civilians	Low	Being spectators	Passive	No	-	No	Neutral	0	<i>turba paganorum apud milites</i>	No
Aug. 40	Politics (?)	Public meeting	Not specified	Medium	Not following tradition	Ignorant, anti-traditional	No	-	No	Negative	3	<i>pullatorum turba, indignabundus confusissimum, correxit, consessu frequenti</i>	No
Aug. 44	Crowds at the games	Spectacle	Spectators	Medium	Being disorderly	Anti-traditional	No	-	Yes	Negative	3	<i>multitudine aegre, turba Romae</i>	No
Aug. 53	Manifestation of support	Spectacle	Spectators	Medium	Giving support	Supportive, happy, emotional	No	-	Yes	Mixed	2	<i>turba, vexatus plebs, spectatula frequens, consensum</i>	No
Aug. 58	Manifestation of support	Spectacle	Spectators	Medium	Giving support	Supportive, happy, emotional	No	-	No	Positive	3	<i>corona circumstantium</i>	No
Aug. 93	Religion	Court case	Not specified	Low	Passive	Passive	No	-	No	Neutral	0	<i>Magna turba</i>	No
Aug. 98	Manifestation of support	Island of Capri	Not specified	Medium	Assembly at grave	Supportive	No	-	No	Mixed	1	<i>obviorum agmine</i>	No
Tib. 2	Urban crowd	Rome	Urban crowd / traffic	High	Obstruction	Disorderly	No	-	Yes	Negative	3	<i>turbam metu monitus, vim multitudinis</i>	No
Tib. 4	Political violence	Rome	Urban mob (political groups)	Medium	Threat of mob violence	Threatening, riotous, riotous	Maybe	Yes	Maybe	Negative	3	<i>caveret vulgo, turba, discrimen vitae adisse attonita,</i>	Yes
Tib. 72	Crowd violence	Not specified	Urban crowd	Medium	Threat of mob violence	Threatening, rebellious, riotous	Maybe	Yes	Maybe	Negative	4	<i>maesta, luctus, desiderium densissimo et laetissimo</i>	Yes
Cal. 4	Manifestation of support	Not specified	Urban crowd	High	Giving support, obstruction	Dangerous, chaotic, supportive	Yes	No	Yes	Mixed	3	<i>obviorum agmine</i>	Yes
Cal. 6	Manifestation of support	Rome	Urban citizens	High	Giving support, disorder	Dangerous, chaotic, emotional, supportive	Yes	No	Yes	Mixed	2	<i>irrupentis, turbae contione, ordinis medio</i>	Yes
Cal. 13	Manifestation of support	The road	Urban people (all classes)	Medium	Giving support, celebrating	Happy, supportive, emotional	No	-	No	Positive	4	<i>plebem, infimo infensus, turbae</i>	No
Cal. 14	Manifestation of support	Senate chamber	Urban crowd	High	Involving political sphere	Disorderly, supportive, anti-traditional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mixed	4	<i>omnis generis turba consternationem, impedimentis</i>	No
Cal. 15	Manifestation of support	Rome	Urban crowd	Low	Passive	Easily manipulated	No	-	No	Mixed	2	<i>multitudine</i>	No
Cal. 26	Crowds at the games	Spectacle	Spectators	Medium	Obstruction	Dangerous, chaotic, anti-traditional	Yes	No	Yes	Negative	3	<i>magna consternatione, populus</i>	No
Cal. 30	Crowds at the games	Spectacle	Spectators	Medium	Giving support	Supportive, emotional	No	-	No	Mixed	1	<i>turba auxilio plebem</i>	No
Cal. 42	Manifestation of support	Rome	Urban people (all classes)	Medium	Giving support	Easily manipulated, stupid, supportive	No	-	No	Mixed	3	<i>turba, infestatus</i>	No
Cal. 51	Crowd chaos	Expedition	Soldiers and others	Medium	Creating chaos	Chaotic	No	-	Yes	Negative	3	<i>operantium servorumque turba</i>	No
Claud. 10	Politics	Rome	Civilians	Medium	Giving support	Ignorant, supportive, anti-traditional	No	-	No	Negative	2	<i>adclamantium turba, faustis</i>	Yes
Claud. 12	Politics	Rome	Civilians	High	(verbal) attacks	Impulsive, emotional, ignorant, stupid	Yes	Yes	Yes	Negative	4	<i>multitudini</i>	No
Claud. 18.1	Urban crowd	Rome	Common people	High	Helping	Supportive	No	-	No	Positive	4	<i>turba, infestatus</i>	No
Claud. 18.2	Food riots	Rome	Urban crowd	High	Rioting	Riotous, angry, impulsive, chaotic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Negative	4	<i>discerperetur</i>	No
Claud. 22	Urban crowd	Rome	Workmen and slaves	Low	Passive	Passive	No	-	No	Neutral	0	<i>vulgi</i>	No
Claud. 27	Manifestation of support	Spectacle	Spectators	Medium	Giving support	Supportive, happy	No	-	No	Positive	3	<i>turbae</i>	No
Nero 13	Politics	Spectacle	Spectators	Low	Passive	Passive	No	-	No	Neutral	0	<i>paganorum turba</i>	No
Nero 28	Wedding	Nero's house	Not specified	Low	Passive	Ignorant, anti-traditional	No	-	No	Negative	1	<i>contione</i>	No
Nero 37	Public speech	Korinth	Not specified	Low	Passive	Anti-traditional, supportive	No	-	No	Negative	1		No
Nero 47	Threat of mob violence	Rome	Urban people	Low	Threat of mob violence	Threatening, riotous	Maybe	Yes	Maybe	Negative	3		No
Nero 53	Politics / manif. of support	Not specified	Not specified	Low	Passive	Easily manipulated	No	-	No	Negative	3		No
Galba 18	Danger of crowds	Not specified	Not specified	Medium	Dangerous obstruction	Dangerous, chaotic	Yes	No	Yes	Negative	3		No
Galba 19	Urban crowds	Rome	Urban crowd	Low	Passive	Not described	No	-	No	Neutral	0		No
Vesp. 7	Public action by Vesp.	Rome	Not specified	Low	Passive (spectators)	Not described	No	-	No	Neutral	0		No

¹⁶⁵ The layout of the database has been slightly modified to fit better on this page. The non-modified version, including colorations, can be found as the digital appendix of this thesis. Abbreviations: PotC = Prominence of the Crowd; Characteristics = Characteristics of the Crowd; Viol. = Violence; Intent. = Intentional violence; Dis = Disorder; Portrayal = Portrayal by author; DoJ = directness of judgement, An. = Analysed.

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