

Raschieri, Amedeo Alessandro

Species without genus : Suetonius, Frontinus, and the organisation of imperial prose

Graeco-Latina Brunensia. 2026, vol. 31, iss. 1, pp. 119-133

ISSN 1803-7402 (print); ISSN 2336-4424 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/GLB2026-1-7>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.84138>

License: [CC BY-SA 4.0 International](#)

Access Date: 14. 07. 2026

Version: 20260626

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

Species without Genus: Suetonius, Frontinus, and the Organisation of Imperial Prose

Amedeo A. Raschieri

(Università degli Studi di Milano)

Abstract

The construction *per species* is attested in several Latin prose authors of the first and second centuries CE as a principle of thematic organisation. Frontinus, in his *Strategemata*, develops this into a fully explicit *genus/species* framework. Suetonius, in the programmatic statement of *Aug.* 9.1, employs *per species* as the counterpart to *per tempora*, yet never refers to overarching *genera*. This article investigates the significance of that asymmetry. Through an analysis of the semantic history of *species* — from visual perception to classificatory and rhetorical usage — and of the construction *per species* in Republican and imperial authors, the study shows that the term functions in this period as a flexible yet consistently recognisable principle of thematic organisation. A close comparison between Frontinus' fully theorised *genus/species* system and Suetonius' rubric-based arrangement reveals that Suetonius' lexical choice is theoretically informed rather than casual: organising biographical material *per species*, without subsuming them under explicit *genera*, produces implicit evaluation through structure and reflects a broader methodological horizon shared by imperial Latin prose. The semantic range of *species* in Suetonius — spanning both the dissimulation of power and the thematic organisation of discourse — further suggests that this lexical choice is not without broader cultural resonance.

Keywords

species; *genus*; Suetonius; Frontinus; rhetoric; rubric; biography

1. Introduction¹

The point of departure for this contribution is Donna Hurley's study on the organisation of material within the individual *Lives* of Suetonius' *De uita Caesarum*.² In general terms, the scholar speaks of a 'sandwich structure', in which the narrative is framed by the extreme limits of each emperor's birth and death. More specifically, within each biography it is usually possible to identify a turning point, generally associated with the acquisition of imperial power. The narrative preceding this turning point largely follows a chronological criterion, whereas the subsequent part is organised into thematically homogeneous sections marked by keywords, the rubrics.³ Hurley points out that only in the *Life of Augustus* (9) does Suetonius make explicit reference to the rubrics, through the distinction between exposition *per tempora* and *per species*.⁴

Hurley's analysis of this expository system is part of a broader scholarly tradition, developed most recently in David Wardle's commentary on the *Life of Julius Caesar*. Starting from the concept of the rubric, Wardle analyses the expository and argumentative effectiveness of the work, both in its overall structure and in its individual sections.⁵ More specifically still, Wardle identifies four organisational principles operating both in the *Lives* as a whole and within the individual categories: chronological, hierarchical, climatic, and anticlimactic, which may also combine with one another.⁶ Based on his analysis of this articulated expository and argumentative system, the scholar is able to refute traditional negative judgements of Suetonius as a writer.⁷

1 I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of this article and their valuable suggestions, which have significantly improved the final version. I am also grateful to Stefano Rozzi for generously making his doctoral dissertation on Frontinus' *Strategemata* available to me.

2 Hurley (2014).

3 Hurley (2014: pp. 21–22). Already Cizek (1977) examined in depth the organisation by rubrics in Suetonius' work; see Cizek (1977: pp. 52–56). He nevertheless focuses chiefly on the relationship between *per tempora* and *per species* as organizational subdivisions. He rightly emphasises the connection between the rubrics and the rhetorical procedure of classification into *partitiones* or *diuisiones*; see Cizek (1977: p. 53). The rubric system and the organisation *per species* had already been analysed by Wardle (1994: pp. 21–26) in his commentary on the *Life of Caligula*. A comparable organisational principle, though without explicit use of the term *species*, is attested in the biographical tradition already in Cornelius Nepos' *Atticus*, where the central section of the work is structured thematically rather than chronologically; see Wardle (1994: p. 18).

4 Hurley (2014: p. 26); cf. also Wardle (1994: p. 21).

5 Wardle (2025: pp. 18–22), building on his earlier commentary on the *Life of Caligula* (Wardle 1994: pp. 21–29).

6 Wardle (2025: p. 18).

7 Wardle (2025: p. 22).

In a related study, Phoebe Garrett has shown that Suetonius' *De uita Caesarum*, often regarded as stylistically neutral, is in fact highly persuasive by virtue of its structure.⁸ Suetonius' argumentation does not focus on explicit judgements, but on the organisation of material according to the rubric system (virtues, vices, public and private behaviour), which are not mere informational containers: the choice of categories, their sequence, and the way *exempla* are accumulated produce a powerful evaluative effect. Suetonius guides the reader by emphasising repetition and systematicity of behaviour, thereby transforming individual episodes into stable character traits. The system of rubrics also enables implicit comparisons between emperors, which may create an illusion of objective judgement that nonetheless conceals a refined argumentative strategy grounded in textual architecture rather than in the explicit statement of evaluation.

From a structural point of view, Suetonius' rubric system is characterised not only by the presence of thematically homogeneous sections, which may be organised according to the criteria identified by Wardle and Garrett, but also by a series of textual elements which in some cases tend to assume the status of potential paratextual features and which in any case guide the reception of the work, both in listening and in reading.⁹ Generally, at the beginning of each thematic section a key-word appears that anticipates and thematises the ensuing pericope; it is placed, if not in initial position, at least within the first clause of the section. These keywords structure the work from an expository and argumentative point of view, orient the reader's understanding of the text, and function, at least implicitly, as titles: hence the use of the term rubric to designate the different articulations of the discourse.¹⁰

In fact, rubric-based writing is not an exclusive feature of Suetonius, but is widely attested in Latin literature, and not only in the biographical domain. We may cite the expository organisation of rhetorical handbooks such as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* or Cicero's *De inuentione*, in which each section systematically opens with a summary of the issues to be treated. These topics are then developed in

8 Garrett (2018).

9 The term 'paratext' was first introduced by Genette (1981), and the same author subsequently devoted an entire volume to the topic in Genette (1987). By 'paratext' are meant all those extratextual elements that accompany and frame the main text of a work in order to guide and orient its reception. The term is used here in an extended sense to include certain intratextual elements which, while formally part of the text, perform an analogous orienting function and display a latent paratextual vocation: in the subsequent manuscript and editorial tradition of works such as handbooks or collections of *exempla* (e.g. the *Facta et dicta memorabilia* by Valerius Maximus), elements of this kind were frequently extracted and repositioned as marginal annotations, keywords, or section titles, making explicit a paratextual function already implicit in the original text.

10 Traditionally, in studies on *De uita Caesarum*, the term 'rubric' is used to refer to the organisation of material *per species*; see, e.g., Gascou (1984: p. 348).

subsections marked by the previously listed keywords, often accompanied by definitions and, where appropriate, by further elaboration through significant *exempla*. In rhetorical theory, the model finds a further and more refined articulation in Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, where the thematic sections acquire greater breadth and a more complex internal structure.

In light of this methodological framework, the present study intends to take a step back and to focus attention not so much on the overall functioning of the rubric system as on the expository links explicitly stated by Suetonius himself, in particular the formulas *per tempora* and *per species* in the *Life of Augustus* (*Aug.* 9.1: *proposita uitae eius uelut summa partes singillatim neque per tempora sed per species exequar*).¹¹ While the meaning of *per tempora* is more immediately transparent, the notion of *species* raises more complex interpretive questions: far from indicating a generic 'category', the term in the imperial period refers to an articulated semantic range, encompassing the ideas of appearance, typical manifestation, and recognisable form of a phenomenon, and finds frequent application both in rhetorical theory and in technical prose. What makes its occurrence in *Aug.* 9.1 particularly significant, moreover, is not its frequency — *per species* is attested in several Latin authors of the period — but its placement in a programmatic context, where Suetonius explicitly reflects on the organisational principles of his own work.

The study therefore sets out to investigate whether, and to what extent, the term *species* may be employed to designate thematic subdivisions within a literary work, and what degree of theoretical awareness underlies this lexical choice in Suetonius. From this perspective, a privileged point of comparison is provided by Frontinus' *Strategemata*, a work characterised by an insistent and programmatic use of *species* to articulate the material according to recurring typologies. Through a parallel analysis of the uses of *species* in Suetonius and Frontinus, the study ultimately seeks to assess the structural and methodological significance of organisation *per species*, showing that it does not represent a merely descriptive alternative, but rather a genuine organising principle of discourse, shared and recognisable in Latin prose between the first and second centuries CE.

11 The text of Suetonius is cited throughout from Kaster (2016). For a commentary on the passage of the *Life of Augustus*, see Wardle (2014: p. 117), who chooses to translate *species* as 'categories' rather than 'rubrics', with an explicit reference to scholastic practice: 'Suet. employs the methodology of the ancient "scholar" in posing a question and then amassing evidence by which to answer the whole'. On the *per species* arrangement in Suetonius' work, see also Gascou (1984: pp. 414–423) and Wallace-Hadrill (1983: pp. 9–10, 13–14, 44).

2. The term *species* in literary and rhetorical contexts

The noun *species*, derived from the archaic verb *specio* ('to look, to observe'), originally belongs to the semantic field of visual perception. Ancient tradition already connected *species* with the act of seeing and with the object seen, in a dynamic relationship between the perceiving subject and the observed reality. As *Forcellini* makes clear, the term primarily denotes 'id, quo aliquid cernitur' or 'quidquid primo aspectu apparet', thus oscillating between an active function and the passive result of vision.¹² In its most concrete sense, *species* designates what presents itself to the gaze as a 'spectacle, appearance, visible form', and in this sense the term is frequent in historical prose and epic poetry.¹³ *Species* is therefore, properly speaking, that which imposes itself upon sight prior to any conceptual elaboration.

From this perceptual core, *species* early develops abstract values, which *Forcellini* clearly distinguishes according to active and passive senses. In the active sense, *species* denotes the faculty of seeing, sight itself, as in *Lucr.* 4.242 (*speciem quo uertimus*), where the term indicates the direction of the gaze and the perceptual act as such. A similar usage is found in *Vitruvius* (3.3.13; 3.5.9), who speaks of *oculi species* in order to describe the limits and deceptions of visual perception. More productive, however, is the passive value, where *species* comes to mean appearance, that which 'seems' rather than that which 'is'. Here lies a central usage in Roman ethical and political reflection: *species honestissima* opposed to *uoluntas impudentissima* (*Cic. Catil.* 2.18) shows how *species* may mask moral reality. Expressions such as *specie quidem blanda, sed reapse ... repudianda* (*Cic. Lael.* 47) or *praeclara classis in speciem sed inops et infirma* (*Cic. Verr.* II 5.86) establish a structural dichotomy between appearance and substance.¹⁴

A further semantic development, decisive at the theoretical level and crucial for understanding Suetonius' usage, is the employment of *species* as an articulation of *genus*. Since only individual entities are perceptible by the senses, *species* comes to designate the particular determination within a broader class.¹⁵ In philosophical and rhetorical contexts, the pair *genus/species* becomes an essential classificatory tool. Cicero defines *genus* as that which comprises several parts differing in *species*

12 *Forcellini*, s.v. *species*. The entry *species* in *ThLL* has not yet been published.

13 *Non tulit hanc speciem* (*Verg. Aen.* 2.407) refers to a vision that is unbearable for the mind, whereas *noua atque inusitata specie* (*Caes. Gall.* 2.31.1) characterises the visual impact of an unexpected event. The *OLD*, s.v. *species*, emphasises this dimension of 'sight, spectacle', highlighting the concreteness of the perceptual act and its emotional force.

14 Along these lines, the *OLD* places *species* among the key terms denoting 'outward appearance', often with implications of deception or simulation.

15 *Forcellini* explicitly highlights this transition: *species* is defined as 'pars subiecta generi', distinct from yet coordinated with other *species*.

(Cic. *de orat.* 1.189),¹⁶ while Quintilian (*inst.* 8.6.58) more explicitly systematises the relationship by stating: *cui accedit hoc quoque, quod genus, cum diuidatur in species, nihil habet proprium.*¹⁷

In rhetorical and literary discourse, *species* accordingly assumes a prominent role as a category of representation and persuasion. On the one hand, the term designates the visual and emotional impact of discourse. Cicero speaks of a *species eloquentiae* as an ideal model internalised by the *orator* (Cic. *orat.* 18), while Quintilian insists on the capacity of discourse to imprint *species* upon the listener's mind (Quint. *inst.* 12.10.43).¹⁸ On the other hand, *species* may denote a rhetorical *façade*, an appearance deliberately constructed: expressions such as *inanem speciem clementiae* (Cic. *ad Brut.* 1.2a.2) or *specie quadam uirtutis adsimulatae* (Cic. *Cael.* 14) show how oratory can produce deceptive images. Finally, the term *species* is often linked to imaginative visuality: from *species* as supernatural visions in Lucretius (1.125) and Ovid (Ov. *Pont.* 3.3.4) to the mental images of artists (Cic. *orat.* 9).¹⁹ In this sense, *species* becomes an important notion for connecting perception, imagination and discursive construction.

Taken together, these different values show that *species* constitutes a semantically flexible notion, capable of maintaining a firm anchorage in the sphere of visual perception while progressively extending into conceptual, classificatory and rhetorical domains. From immediate and sensible vision to deceptive appearance, from particular determination within a *genus* to discursive and imaginative representation, *species* functions as a mediating category between what is seen and what is understood, between phenomenological data and intellectual construction. It is precisely this semantic continuity, grounded in the idea of that which 'offers itself to the gaze' — whether real or simulated, sensible or mental — that explains the term's success in the literary and technical language of the imperial period and makes its use in authors such as Suetonius, attentive to the interplay between appearance, classification and interpretation of reality, particularly significant.

16 *Genus autem id est, quod sui similis communione quadam, specie autem differentis, duas aut pluris complectitur partis.* Cf. Cic. *inu.* 1.40: *cum genere idem sit, fit aliud, quod parte quadam et specie, ut diximus, differat.*

17 The *OLD* documents this sense extensively, extending as far as the logical-definitional usage (*equus genus est animal, species mortale*, Quint. *inst.* 7.3.3).

18 *Sed cum debeat delectare, mouere, in plurimas animum audientis species inpellere, utetur his quoque adiutoriis, quae sunt ab eadem nobis concessa natura.*

19 *In mente insidebat species pulchritudinis eximia quaedam.*

3. The construction *per species* in Latin authors and the term *species* between the first and second centuries

In order to clarify the significance of the Suetonian dichotomy *per tempora* – *per species* in the *Life of Augustus*, it is useful to examine how the construction *per species* is employed in Latin authors of the Republican and imperial periods (excluding Christian and late-antique writers) and, more generally, to consider the shared semantic values of the term *species* in Quintilian, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and Suetonius.²⁰

In Latin works up to the second century CE, *per species* occurs fourteen times and displays a marked semantic variation, which may be traced back to two broad areas of usage, with a development that is also recognisable on a chronological level. A first group, dominant between the first century BCE and the first century CE, employs *per species* in an ordering, taxonomic, and methodological sense. In Columella, the expression is used programmatically to indicate an analytical treatment ‘by individual categories’, contrasted with a perspective organised *per genera*.²¹ A comparable value is found in Pliny’s *Naturalis historia*, where the *digestio aquatilium per species* (1.9) defines the encyclopaedic criterion for arranging the material. The same usage appears in technical-administrative contexts in Frontinus’ *De aquaeductu urbis Romae* (*per species operum*, 16.1), and in an explicitly structural sense in the preface to the *Strategemata*, where *per species* designates the thematic articulation of the work.²² In rhetorical theory, Quintilian employs the construction both to indicate the impossibility of an exhaustive exposition *per singulas species* (*inst.* 5.10.100) and to describe a comprehensive understanding extending *per omnes species* (*inst.* 2.5.14).²³

A second group, more clearly attested in imperial historiography and epistolography, develops *per species* in the sense of a perceptual or apparent instrument. In Livy (26.19.3), Scipio acts *per nocturnas ... species*, that is, ‘through apparitions’, which are symmetrically coupled with the *monita* of the *mens*: here *species* denotes visionary images used as a means of legitimising one’s actions. A similar semantic shift can be observed in Tacitus (*ann.* 15.48.2), where the expression *per uirtutem aut species uirtutibus similes* contrasts genuine virtue with its appearance. In two passages of Pliny’s *Epistulae* (2.5.6; 6.31.2), finally, the expression *per plures* (*di-*

20 The data were extracted using the Cross Database Search Tool of BREPOLiS. Brepols Online Databases (<https://apps.brepolis.net/BrepolisPortal/>).

21 *Per species, quae sunt innumerabiles* (Colum. 2.2); *per infinitas terreni species* (Colum. 3.12); *per species digerendae uites* (Colum. 3.20).

22 For Frontinus’ *Strategemata*, see below, §4.

23 Along the same lines is the *Peri hermeneias* (*De interpretatione*), dubiously attributed to Apuleius, where *per illas quinque praedictas species* (6) has a demonstrative and categorial value.

cendi) *species* assumes a rhetorical-functional value, indicating the multiplicity of modes or forms through which eloquence or forensic virtue is exercised.

Having analysed the construction *per species*, we may now turn more specifically to the uses of the term *species* in the principal prose authors whose works survive from the second half of the first century CE and the first decades of the following century. In Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, *species* displays an extremely flexible yet coherent usage.²⁴ First, the term is central to logical and classificatory vocabulary: it denotes the hierarchical relationship with *genus*, applied both to conceptual definition and to the construction of argumentation and the theory of *status*.²⁵ Secondly, *species* designates particular instances of rhetorical practice with a usage that underscores the need to move from the general to the particular in forensic practice.²⁶ In a third domain, the term assumes a perceptual-evaluative significance, such as appearance or *facies*, often in tension with truth, utility, or nature.²⁷ Finally, and perhaps most revealingly, the term serves to express the controlled variety of eloquence: multiple *species* are legitimate within a single *genus*, provided that they are governed by *ars* and *iudicium*.²⁸

In the works of Tacitus, the term *species* shows a notable semantic concentration around the idea of constructed appearance, often in tension with a different or opposing reality.²⁹ A first and largely dominant usage is rhetorical-political, in which *species* denotes the pretext, ideological or symbolic cover of an action (*species amicitiae, honoris, religionis, legis*): here the term signals a device of dissimulation characteristic of imperial power.³⁰ A second cluster concerns *species* as visual or scenic impression, applied to military displays, ceremonies, prodigies, or natural *tableaux* with a strong descriptive and emotional force.³¹ Moreover, in a more tech-

24 In the *Institutio oratoria* there are a total of 171 occurrences of the term *species*.

25 E.g., *numquam itaque tolletur a specie genus, nisi ut omnes species, quae sunt generi subiectae, remoueantur* (Quint. inst. 5.10.56), where *species* denotes the ultimate and decisive level of definition, distinct from *genus* and functional to argumentative demonstration.

26 E.g., *et quia narrationum [...] tris accipimus species, fabulam, [...] argumentum, [...] historiam* (Quint. inst. 2.4.2), a passage in which *species* designates the different operative modes of *narratio*, derived from a common *genus*.

27 E.g., *ingenium iudicio caret et specie boni fallitur* (Quint. inst. 8.3.56), where *species* denotes the deceptive appearance of the good, set in opposition to proper critical discernment.

28 E.g., *in oratione uero si species intueri uelis, totidem paene reperias ingeniorum quot corporum formas* (Quint. inst. 12.10.10), which expresses the idea of a legitimate multiplicity of expressive *species* governed by *ars*.

29 In the *corpus* of Tacitus there are a total of 126 occurrences of the term *species*.

30 E.g., *specie amicitiae inlectum* (Tac. ann. 2.3), where friendship is understood as a mask for violence.

31 E.g., *Britannorum acies in speciem simul ac terrorem* (Tac. Agr. 35.3), in which the military formation is perceived as an intimidating spectacle.

nical meaning, the term designates different varieties or forms in ethnographic or natural descriptions, and in the *Dialogus de oratoribus*.³² Finally, and more polemically, a moral-evaluative usage recurs, in which the term indicates a merely apparent quality (virtue, liberty, simplicity), unmasked by the narrator as false.³³ Taken together, *species* emerges in Tacitus as a key term in the critique of appearance, functional to a historiography that reads reality through the lens of deception and representation.

In Pliny the Younger, the term *species* exhibits a marked polysemy revolving around the relationship between appearance and reality.³⁴ The most characteristic usage is ethical-evaluative: *species* designates the outward semblance, often deceptive, under which ambition, flattery, or merely apparent severity may be concealed, as in expressions such as *in speciem adulationis* (Plin. *epist.* 5.3.5) or *sub aliqua specie seueritatis* (Plin. *epist.* 3.9.10). In this sense, the term becomes a critical instrument for unmasking distortions of public life and social behaviour. Alongside this value, *species* retains its perceptual meaning of ‘visible aspect’ or ‘sensible form’, applied to images, natural phenomena, or spatial arrangements, where attention is focused on visual perception and its impact on the observer.³⁵ Finally, in administrative and judicial contexts, the term assumes a more technical value, indicating a ‘case type’ or factual configuration falling within the governor’s competence.³⁶ Taken together, these usages make *species* a hinge-term in Pliny’s prose, one that connects the sensible sphere, moral judgement, and rational classification under the recurrent pressure of the tension between appearance and truth.

Suetonius presents a similarly rich but differently inflected picture.³⁷ The term can designate outward and visible appearance — especially of the human body or of objects — with a descriptive and often evaluative force that conveys beauty, impressiveness, or decorum.³⁸ It can equally signal institutional semblance or fiction, as in *species libertatis* or *species dominationis*, where it becomes a vehicle for Suetonian

32 E.g., *plures species deprehendi* (Tac. *dial.* 18.3), about the plurality of forms of eloquence.

33 E.g., *falsa species libertatis* (Tac. *hist.* 1.1.2), where liberty is reduced to a mere semblance.

34 In the *corpus* of Pliny there are a total of twenty occurrences of the term *species*.

35 E.g., *nube inusitata et magnitudine et specie* (Plin. *epist.* 6.16.4).

36 *Haec quoque species incidit in cognitionem meam* (Plin. *epist.* 10.56.4).

37 The data were extracted from the following works of Suetonius available in the *Cross Database Search Tool* of BREPOLiS (see above, n. 20): *De grammaticis et rhetoribus*, *De uita Caesarum*, *Vita Horatii*, *Vita Lucani*, *Vita Passieni Crispi*, *Vita Plinii maioris*, *Vita Terentii* (apud Donatum *seruata*), and *Vita Tibulli* (*dubium*). All 26 occurrences of *species* are found exclusively in the *De uita Caesarum*. A search of the fragments of Suetonius, as edited by Duchêne and Garrett (2025), yields no further occurrences of *species* or *genus* in a classificatory or methodological sense; the search also covered the corresponding Greek terms εἶδος and γένος.

38 E.g., *ob egregiam corporis amplitudinem et speciem* (Suet. *Cal.* 35.2).

reflection on the dissimulation of power.³⁹ A third domain is visionary or hallucinatory, referring to dream-apparitions, prodigies, or mental images, often in contexts of psychological disturbance or ominous foreboding.⁴⁰ And *species* occurs, finally, with the rhetorical-structural value familiar from the *Life of Augustus*, where it corresponds to expository ‘categories’ or ‘rubrics’ (*per species*). What emerges from this survey is a term that functions as a nodal point between visibility, representation, and the construction of meaning — a semantic complexity that the following sections will examine more closely.

It is worth pausing on the relationship between these different semantic domains of *species* in Suetonius. The political use of the term — *species libertatis*, *species dominationis* — and its methodological use — *per species* as an organising principle of biographical discourse — are not explicitly connected in the text, and it would be arbitrary to infer a conscious authorial intention linking the two. Nevertheless, it is plausible that the broad semantic range of *species*, which in the cultural and literary horizon of the early empire covered both the dissimulation of power and the thematic organisation of discourse, played a role in the choice of this term as a key concept of biographical organisation. For an author deeply immersed in the political and rhetorical culture of his time, the word *species* would have carried with it a whole set of associations — appearance, representation, the visible form of things — that made it particularly apt to designate the way in which an emperor’s character and conduct are given form and presented to the reader. In this light, organising biographical material *per species* is not a neutral methodological choice: it means giving the emperor a visible shape, offering him to the reader’s gaze in the form of recognisable and repeatable patterns of behaviour. The two dimensions of *species* — as a mask of power and as a principle of biographical organisation — thus converge, perhaps unconsciously, in Suetonius’ use of the term, revealing the profound semantic coherence of a word that connects, in imperial Latin prose, the sphere of political representation with the construction of biographical discourse.

4. *Genus* and *species*: from Suetonius to Frontinus

In the *Life of Augustus* by Suetonius, the noun *species* recurs as a tool for structuring content thematically, but without the individual *species* being explicitly traced back to overarching categories of *genera* within a clearly defined conceptual hierarchy. Three considerations, however, counsel caution before interpreting this absence as a deliberate choice. First, the *De uita Caesarum* is an incomplete work: the general

39 E.g., *speciem libertatis quandam induxit* (Suet. *Tib.* 30.1).

40 E.g., *materna specie uerberibusque Furiarum* (Suet. *Ner.* 34.4).

preface and the opening of the *Life of Julius Caesar* are lost, and it is precisely in such programmatic sections that one would expect a methodological declaration of this kind. The possibility therefore remains open that Suetonius did address the relationship between *genus* and *species* in the lost portions of the text. Second, the distinction between *per tempora* and *per species* in *Aug.* 9.1 is strictly local in its function: it governs the organisation of that specific biography, and its extension as a general system governing all the *Lives* is a critical inference rather than an authorial statement. Even the chronological sections preceding the accession — which may include, depending on the individual biography, elements such as childhood, education, military service, or the stages of the *cursus honorum* — may themselves be read as a sequence of *species* ordered temporally, which further blurs the boundary between the two principles.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, in a biographical context the concept of *genus* may not require explicit expression, precisely because it coincides with the figure of the emperor himself. If each imperial biography constitutes a narrative unity centred on an individual ruler, then the *genus* is in effect embodied by that figure, while the *species* are the narrative categories through which his character and conduct are analysed and presented to the reader. The hierarchical relationship between *genus* and *species* would thus be implicit in the very form of the biographical genre, rather than declared in the manner of a technical treatise. In order to understand how the binomial *genus/species* could instead assume a structuring role in the construction of an organic collection of *exempla*, it is particularly instructive to turn to the case of Sextus Iulius Frontinus — an author of roughly one generation earlier than Suetonius — in whom this opposition is thematised and exploited with greater theoretical and organisational awareness.⁴¹

In the first book of the *Strategemata*, Frontinus makes a conscious and explicitly programmatic use of the terms *genus* and *species*, which constitute the conceptual backbone of the work.⁴² In the preface, the author states that he first identified the *genera* and then assigned to them their respective *species*, thereby preparing an ordered system of *exempla* conceived as *opportuna exemplorum ueluti consilia*. The work is in fact articulated into three major *genera* (actions to be undertaken before battle, during battle and in peacetime, and in siege warfare), each further subdivided

41 For Frontinus, see Eramo (2020) and Eramo (2022). See also Rozzi (2019) for a detailed commentary on the preface to Book I of the *Strategemata*. For the epistemological function of *species* and *genera* as organizational devices in Frontinus' *Strategemata*, see now Zainaldin (2025: pp. 304–305).

42 Santini (1992: p. 987) states that 'Frontino d'altra parte evoca al riguardo l'impostazione tassonomica della tradizione aristotelica'. In fact, Frontinus not only evokes this taxonomic framework, but employs it systematically through his repeated references to the terms *genera* and *species*.

into *species* that collect concrete cases of *ducum sollertia*, intended for practical and decision-making use. In Book I this approach emerges with particular clarity: the first *genus* is broken down into twelve *species*, which coincide with the titles of the individual sections. The classificatory system responds to an eminently didactic requirement, aimed at facilitating consultation, explicitly stated in the polemical comparison with the tradition of historical *excerpta*, accused of confusing the reader by accumulating material without order.

Frontinus instead seeks to offer a structured repertory, capable of providing *ad interrogatum* what the situation requires.⁴³ Compared with Valerius Maximus as an earlier collector of *exempla*, Frontinus dispenses with introductory frames for each thematic section and instead entrusts the coherence of the work to a classificatory framework explicitly theorised in the prefaces, a sign of a unitary and authorially guaranteed organisational project.⁴⁴ Indeed, for Valerius Maximus it is not certain that the titles of the thematic sections were envisaged by the author himself or whether they were instead added at a later stage, drawing at a paratextual level on the keywords inserted by the author at the beginning of each section. In Frontinus, by contrast, the thematic categories (*species*), which also constitute the titles of the various sections, can certainly be traced back to the author, since the system is explained explicitly in the prefaces of the individual books.⁴⁵

In the prefaces to Books II and III of the *Strategemata*, Frontinus reiterates and at the same time refines the use of the concepts of *genus* and *species* as organising tools of the work. Book II is presented as a double volume, because it accommodates two distinct *genera*: on the one hand, actions pertaining to battle, articulated into eight *species*; on the other, actions following the engagement, organised into five *species*, for a total of thirteen. The numerical clarity and the sharp separation of levels confirm the intention to render the classificatory structure explicit and to guide the reader in consultation.

The preface to Book III introduces new and more markedly paratextual elements. Frontinus makes explicit reference to the *tituli* and to the reader as the addressee of the system: the *priores libri*, he states, *responderunt titulis suis* and have

43 Here *ad interrogatum* assumes a technical sense: the *exempla* must respond precisely to the question posed by the situation. The expression, rare in classical Latin, is attested chiefly in late legal contexts (*Digesta*, *Institutiones*) as a criterion of formal and semantic congruence of the response. Frontinus anticipates this usage by transferring into historical-strategic discourse a forensic principle of functional adequacy.

44 On the relationship between Frontinus and Valerius Maximus, see Eramo (2020: pp. 61–63).

45 This remains true even when account is taken of the doubts concerning the authenticity of §§ 3–4 of the preface to Book I, on which see Santini (1992: pp. 988–989). The issue relates to the problem of the authenticity of Book IV of the work, on which see Eramo (2020: pp. 49–54), with a synthesis of the earlier debate and the proposal to understand the *Strategemata* as a work in progress, open to further expansions even by the author himself.

led the reader *cum attentione*. The term *titulus* here assumes a dual function: it designates both the overall subject of the book, corresponding to the *genus*, and the titles of the individual thematic sections, that is, the *species*.⁴⁶ In the same preface the author declares that he renounces any *praelocutio* (preface, preamble), signalling a further contraction of introductory discourse. These passages, however, have been regarded as interpolated by the Teubner editor Robert Ireland, who suspects both the sentence on the *priores libri* and the mention of the *praelocutio*.⁴⁷ The problem, not discussed by Immacolata Eramo (2020; 2022), is reinforced by the late character of the term *praelocutio*, which makes a spurious interpolation in the text plausible.⁴⁸ Book III likewise features a double classificatory series: eleven *species* for siege operations and seven for those of the besieged, for a total of eighteen.

Book IV presents more radical difficulties, connected with doubts about its very authenticity.⁴⁹ The preface insists on a reworking based on *lectio* and *digestio* of the material (*multa lectione conquisitis strategematibus et non exiguo scrupulo digestis*), and introduces a reflection on the *species* that remained excluded from the *discriptio* of the preceding books.⁵⁰ Unlike the first three books, however, these are not specific operative categories, but rather residual material of a different *substantia*, nonetheless ordered into seven *species*. It is precisely this structural anomaly, together with the reflective and metatextual tone of the preface, that has fuelled doubts among many scholars about the Frontinian attribution of Book IV.

5. Conclusions

The analysis developed in this contribution has shown that the Suetonian dichotomy *per tempora – per species* is not a mere methodological declaration, but rather the reflection of a structural and conceptual choice deeply rooted in Latin prose between the first and second centuries CE. Through an examination of the lexicon

46 On the possible connection between the chapter titles of the *Strategemata* and the theoretical treatment in Frontinus' lost work on strategy, see Eramo (2020: p. 16).

47 This is the text as printed by Ireland (1990: p. 70): [*Si priores libri responderunt titulis suis et lectorem huc usque cum attentione perduxerunt*] *Edam nunc circa oppugnationes urbium defensionisque στρατηγήματα* [*nec morabor ulla praelocutione*], *prius traditurus quae oppugnandis urbibus usui sunt, tum quae obsessos instruere possint*.

48 The term *praelocutio* is rare and characteristic of Late Latin, attested chiefly in rhetorical-exegetical contexts (with the plural occurring only in Cassian and Cassiodorus); see *ThLL* 10.2.692.65–693.9 (Scotti 1987).

49 See above, n. 45.

50 *Hoc exhibebo ea quae parum apte discriptioni priorum ad speciem alligata<e> subici uidebantur*. Here *discriptio* is equivalent to *distributio*; see *ThLL* 5.1.1363.49–73 (Vetter 1914). The term *discriptio* takes up the action expressed shortly before by the verb *digerere*.

of *species* and of the construction *per species* in literary, rhetorical, technical, and historiographical contexts, it has emerged that the term functions as a genuine conceptual hinge between perception, classification, and the construction of discourse. In Suetonius in particular, organisation *per species* replaces chronological linearity with a thematic arrangement that implicitly guides the reader's judgement. If we compare this usage with the broader Latin prose tradition — rhetorical, technical, and historiographical — from Cicero to Quintilian, Pliny, and Tacitus, we can situate it within a semantic and methodological continuity, showing that *species* is a flexible yet consistently recognisable category within the lexicon of imperial prose.

From this perspective, the comparison between Suetonius and Frontinus acquires particular significance. The coincidence of the expression *per species* in Suetonius (*Aug.* 9.1) and in Frontinus' *Strategemata* (4 *prae*f.) is not accidental, but rather signals their shared placement within the same chronological and cultural horizon, in which *species* is perceived as an appropriate term for designating a principle of thematic organisation. The differences, however, are no less revealing. In Suetonius, the *species* are not explicitly subsumed under *genera*, but function as autonomous rubrics sufficient to structure biographical discourse; in Frontinus, by contrast, the hierarchical arrangement of *genera* and *species* is declared, numerically controlled, and explicitly thematised in the prefaces.

In both authors, *species* does not simply denote a 'category', but rather a way of giving form to material, of rendering it consultable and intelligible from a thematic point of view. If the more complete and explicitly theorised system is indeed found in Frontinus' *Strategemata*, it is plausible that Suetonius drew on the same methodological tradition as Frontinus, adopting *species* as a technical term to designate and legitimise the thematic sections of his work. Suetonius' lexical choice thus appears less isolated than has often been assumed, and instead fits into a broader methodological convergence, which makes *species* a key term of expository and argumentative writing in Latin prose of the imperial period. The semantic analysis developed in section 3 further suggests that the choice of this term as a key concept of biographical organisation is not without broader resonance. If *species* in Suetonian usage covers both the dissimulation of power and the thematic articulation of discourse, then organising a biography *per species* means not only structuring the material thematically, but also giving the emperor a visible and recognisable form — with all the ambiguity that the term carries between appearance and reality.

Bibliography

- Cizek, E. (1977). *Structures et idéologie dans Les vies des douze Césars de Suétone*. Bucuresti – Paris: Editura Academiei – Les Belles Lettres.
- Duchêne, P., & Garrett, P. (Eds.). (2025). *Suetonius: The Fragments*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

- Eramo, I. (2020). *Exempla per vincere e dove trovarli. Introduzione agli Strategemata di Frontino*. Bari: Edipuglia.
- Eramo, I. (Ed.). (2022). *Frontino. Stratagemmi*, with a foreword by G. Traina. Santarcangelo di Romagna: Rusconi Libri.
- Ireland, R. I. (Ed.). (1990). *Iuli Frontini Strategemata*. Leipzig: Teubner.
- Garrett, P. (2018). Structure and Persuasion in Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum*. *Ramus*, 47, 197–215.
- Gasco, J. (1984). *Suétone historien*. Rome: École française de Rome.
- Genette, G. (1981). *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Genette, G. (1987). *Seuils*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Hurley, D. W. (2014). Suetonius' Rubric Sandwich. In T. Power, & R. K. Gibson (Eds.), *Suetonius the Biographer* (pp. 21–37). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaster, R. A. (Ed.). (2016). *Suetonius. Lives of the Caesars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rozzi, S. (2019). *Testo, traduzione e commento del primo libro degli Strategemata di Sesto Giulio Frontino*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt.
- Santini, C. (1992). Il prologo degli *Strategemata* di Sesto Giulio Frontino. In C. Santini, & N. Scivoletto (Eds.), *Prefazioni, prologhi, proemi di opere tecnico-scientifiche latine* (volume 2, pp. 981–990). Rome: Herder.
- Wallace-Hadrill, A. (1983). *Suetonius. The Scholar and his Caesars*. New Haven – London: Yale University Press.
- Wardle, D. (1994). *Suetonius' Life of Caligula: A Commentary*. Bruxelles: Latomus.
- Wardle, D. (Ed.). (2014). *Suetonius. Life of Augustus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wardle, D. (Ed.). (2025). *Suetonius. Life of Julius Caesar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zainaldin, J. L. (2025). *The Artes and the Emergence of a Scientific Culture in the Early Roman Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

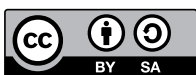
Amedeo A. Raschieri / amedeo.raschieri@unimi.it

Assistant Professor (tenure-track)

Dipartimento di Studi Letterari, Filologici e Linguistici

Università degli Studi di Milano

Via Festa del Perdono, 7 – 20122 Milano



This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-SA 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>). This does not apply to works or elements (such as image or photographs) that are used in the work under a contractual license or exception or limitation to relevant rights.

