

THE CHANGE IN *PRAENOMEN*  
OF DRUSUS GERMANICUS

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SUETONIUS IS THE ONLY ANCIENT AUTHORITY for the elder Drusus' having the *praenomen* Decimus: *patrem Claudii Caesaris, olim Decimum mox Neronem praenomine* (Claud. 1.1). At some time in his infancy, youth, or early manhood, the *praenomen* Decimus was discarded in favour of that of Nero, and thus was established a praenominal use for what previously had been a time-honoured *cognomen*. When the change took place is not known; there is no contemporary reference to Drusus or Tiberius before 15/14 B.C. (Hor. Carm. 4.4.27–28) nor is the word *mox* in Suetonius' statement of any help.

For many years it has been accepted that the *praenomen* Decimus was a well-used name appropriate to this particular branch of the Claudian gens.<sup>1</sup> The only evidence adduced by Mommsen, however, is the early inscription *ILLRP* 882. That inscription does *not* record any familial *cognomen* and is, therefore, no evidence for an association of the *praenomen* Decimus with the Claudii Neronēs.<sup>2</sup>

Drusus was born in 38 B.C. and the ancient literary evidence suggests a date either three days before Octavian's marriage to Livia Drusilla or in the third month after the wedding ceremony on 17 January.<sup>3</sup> The *dies natalis* is not recorded in the extant calendars. Nevertheless, what is obvious in either case—given that the child was born after his mother Livia's divorce from his father Ti. Claudius Nero—is that his father's fortunes were at a particularly

<sup>1</sup>Th. Mommsen, *Römische Forschungen* 1 (Berlin 1864) 16, n. 18; H. Smilda, *C. Suetonii Tranquilli De vita Caesarum. Liber V. Divus Claudius* (diss., Groningen 1896) 1. Cf. F. Münzer, *RE* 3 (1899) 2774.

<sup>2</sup>*ILLRP* 882: *sextos klodos / dekomou libertinos / anti dion tertion nonais*. This inscription constitutes the only evidence employed by Mommsen in support of a sweeping statement that Decimus was a well-used *praenomen* of the Claudii Neronēs. DD. Claudii appear only in *CIL* 1.1630 (*ILLRP* 643, a XXXvir at Pompeii) and 1648 (also from Pompeii). DD. Clodii, however, are slightly more common: *CIL* 1.1733 (Beneventum) and *CIL* 6.200 at vii.22 (D. Clodius Primus, A.D. 70); 1057 at v.70 (D. Clodius Honoratus, A.D. 210); 4804 (D. Clodius Princeps, associated with the Claudii Marcelli); 15716 (D. Clodius Comicus); 15768 (D. Clodius D. I. Princeps; cf. *CIL* 6.4804); 37437 (D. Clodius D. f. Gentius, D. Clodius D. I. Silo, D. Clodius DD. C. I. Speratus). These hardly support Mommsen's contention.

<sup>3</sup>Suet. *Aug.* 62.2, *Tib.* 3.1, *Claud.* 1.1; Vell. Pat. 2.95.1; Tac. *Ann.* 1.10.5, 5.1.3; Dio 48.4.1 ff. For a full discussion, see W. Suerbaum, "Merkwürdige Geburtstage," *Chiron* 10 (1980) 327–355, at 337 ff. R. Seager, *Tiberius* (London 1972) 10, favours 14 January; B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (London 1976) 15, opts for a date before 17 March 38 B.C.

low ebb.<sup>4</sup> In such a situation, it would not have been unreasonable for Drusus' parents to have laid less emphasis on the infant's paternal lineage and, in bestowing the *cognomen* Drusus, to have brought to the fore the child's maternal ancestry and links with the Livian *gens* through his grandfather M. Livius Drusus Claudianus.

If the *cognomen* Drusus were given the child in a barely veiled attempt to cloud the reality of his paternity, it may well be that the *praenomen* Decimus was chosen for a similar reason, i.e., it was chosen because it was *not* a name used by the *Claudii Neronēs*. Indeed, the name Decimus was almost universally ignored by the more prominent families of late Republican Rome. Apart from its association with D. Iunius Brutus Albinus (*cos. des.* 42 B.C.), the *praenomen* may well have been thought politically neutral.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, the name was not chosen because Drusus was the tenth child born to Ti. Claudius Nero or because he was born in the tenth month of the year.<sup>6</sup>

Second, why was there a change in *praenomen* and when did this change occur? The three most likely occasions for a change in name were, as far as I can discern, (a) the time of the future emperor Tiberius' "testamentary adoption" by M. Gallius, (b) the death of the father Ti. Claudius Nero in 33/32 B.C., and (c) the time of Drusus' assumption of the *toga virilis*.

The first option does not work, for what slender evidence we have for the time of Tiberius' "testamentary adoption" suggests that Drusus was not yet born. Tiberius, after all, dropped Gallius' name because that man had been opposed to Octavian. Thus it is hardly possible that the adoption would have taken place after Drusus' birth in 38 B.C.<sup>7</sup>

The second option, the time of Ti. Claudius Nero's death in 33/32 B.C., is more attractive but for the fact that the assumption of the *praenomen* Nero would have recalled Drusus' paternity.<sup>8</sup> Ti. Claudius Nero was, after all, a republican and certainly a victim of Octavian's lust for his wife. Moreover, the liaison and marriage of his Livia to Octavian had caused some scandal (Suet. *Claud.* 1.1). Far from the scandal dying down by the time of Ti.

<sup>4</sup>Seager (above, n. 3) 9 ff.; Tac. *Ann.* 5.1; Suet. *Tib.* 4.3; Vell. Pat. 2.79.2.

<sup>5</sup>Other Decimi exist: D. Brutus (*cos.* 77 B.C.); D. Iunius Silanus (*cos.* 62 B.C.); and the younger Julia's lover, also D. Iunius Silanus. A thorough search of *CIL* 6 reveals a remarkable dearth of senatorial Decimi. The case is driven home by Cicero who can refer to D. Brutus simply as Decimus. As S. M. Treggiari has suggested to me, Cicero could only do this because "he is the only senatorial Decimus who would spring to mind." Cf. Cic. *Att.* 15.29.1.

<sup>6</sup>Cf., for example, H. Petersen, "The Numeral Praenomina of the Romans," *TAPA* 93 (1962) 347–354, esp. 350 ff.

<sup>7</sup>Suet. *Tib.* 6.3. Cf. Levick (above, n. 3) 19. Also R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (London 1986) 53, n. 29.

<sup>8</sup>Suetonius reports (*Tib.* 6.4) that Tiberius *novem annos defunctum patrem pro rostris laudavit*. According to *Tib.* 5.1, Tiberius was born on 16 November 42 B.C. See *Inscr. It.* 13,2.210 (*F. Ant. Min.*), 279 (*Fer. Cum.*).

Claudius Nero's death, Octavian's marriage to Livia was becoming a notable feature in Antony's propaganda against Octavian (Suet. *Aug.* 69).<sup>9</sup> Thus the time of Ti. Claudius Nero's death may not have been an appropriate occasion for Octavian to emphasize Drusus' paternity, no matter that Ti. Claudius Nero had passed on guardianship of his sons to Octavian.<sup>10</sup>

The third, and to my mind most likely, time for Drusus' change in *praenomen* was the occasion of his assumption of the *toga virilis*.<sup>11</sup> There has been no discussion of when that took place. From a comparison, however, of the early and analogous careers of Drusus and his brother Tiberius, both of whom were allowed to hold public office five years prior to the legal minimum age, it may be suggested that the elder Drusus assumed the *toga virilis* at the same age as his brother. This would place Drusus' assumption of the *toga virilis* in his fifteenth year, in 24 B.C.

In 24 B.C., the elder Drusus' guardian Augustus had returned to Rome and, along with M. Claudius Marcellus, Drusus' brother Tiberius received his first extraordinary public honours.<sup>12</sup> If Drusus assumed the *toga virilis* in this year, as seems likely, and at the same time took up the *praenomen* Nero, the change in nomenclature and coincidence of events would have underlined publicly the close relationship that existed between him and his elder brother. Tiberius, of course, also bore the name Nero and, if for no other reason than his accelerated rise to public office, had certainly gained the attention of the Roman people. Indeed, about a decade later the power of the name Nero was securely placed in the Augustan firmament by Horace (*Carm.* 4.4.27–28: . . . *quid Augusti paternus / in pueros animus Nerones*).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>M. P. Charlesworth, "Some Fragments of the Propaganda of Mark Antony," *CQ* 27 (1933) 172–177, at 175, rightly dates Antony's letter (Suet. *Aug.* 69.2) to 33 B.C.

<sup>10</sup>Dio 48.44.5; Horace *Carm.* 4.4.27–28; cf. *Cons. ad Liviam* 209.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. *Valerii Maximi factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri novem*, ed. K. Kempf (Leipzig 1888) 589; Mommsen (above, n. 1) 31, n. 3; J. Regner, *RE*, Zweite Reihe 6 (1937) 1450.

<sup>12</sup>Tac. *Ann.* 3.29.1 ff.; Dio 53.28.3; Seager (above, n. 3) 14; Levick (above, n. 3) 32, n. 6; Syme (above, n. 7) 318. For Drusus, see also Dio 54.10.4.

<sup>13</sup>This poem, which provides a *terminus ante quem* for Drusus' change in *praenomen*, was written in honour of his Alpine victories and, therefore, was composed no earlier than 15/14 B.C.