

A Mere Equestrian? Sejanus and the Succession to
Tiberius in its Augustan Context

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Summary

The issue of succession in the Roman Empire has long drawn scholarly attention. Since succession was anathema to Roman political sensibilities, Augustus was forced to take an indirect approach to perpetuating his regime, indicating potential candidates rather than designating them directly. This requisite subtlety introduced great instability into the heart of the principate, since succession was at once necessary and impossible. The position of leading political deputy was thus defined, as Augustus' own position was, by legal, rather than hereditary, mechanisms. This definition of the position of *princeps* ironically widened the pool of potential successors, since it was the powers, rather than family connections, that defined the candidates. Even if Augustus used family connections, including marriage and adoption, to indicate potential successors, these connections did not, in and of themselves, allow a man to succeed. Detailed discussion of the legal powers granted to potential successors, as well as marriage and adoption, will lead to the definition of the 'mechanics of succession', that is, the means by which Augustus and then Tiberius attempted to perpetuate their regimes. These mechanics will then be applied to the career of Lucius Aelius Sejanus, prefect of the praetorian guard under Tiberius, to determine whether Sejanus was ever in a position to succeed as *princeps*. This approach deviates from the standard view that Sejanus, due to his equestrian status, was never a potential successor to Tiberius. If potential successors are defined in terms of the mechanics of succession, and Sejanus was granted parallel privileges, the issue of him as Tiberius' successor is worthy of re-examination.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) Timothy M Jones Date: 17/10/2017

Timothy M Jones

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Timothy Michael Jones

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Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in this thesis conform to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edition.

Introduction

discordantis patriae remedium fuisse quam [ut] ab uno regetur

The [only] remedy for a nation in chaos was unitary rule

Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.9.

In the first century CE, and indeed for many centuries following, the succession in the Roman empire was a highly contentious issue. Even if instances of actual civil war were rare, succession remained a source of rivalry and tension among members of the imperial families. In October of 31 CE, Lucius Aelius Sejanus, prefect of the praetorian guard under Tiberius, was removed from his post and executed. His death came after many years of loyal service to the state. Sejanus had risen to unprecedented heights of power and influence. This thesis will examine whether Sejanus was ever in a position to succeed Tiberius.

In order to contextualise this, it is necessary to understand the concept of succession in Roman politics and the reason it was so controversial. Following the chaos of the late Republic, Augustus had restored stability to the state, and this he valued above all else. To maintain peace within the state, he deemed it necessary that the firm foundations on which he rebuilt the state should endure beyond his rule. The rule of one man had proven effective in bringing stability. Augustus knew that he would need to put appropriate measures in place to secure the regime into the future. Competition for prominence among oligarchs had led to civil war and the collapse of the Republic. To prevent this reoccurring, it would be necessary for Augustus to have a replacement for himself: in other words, a successor. With no direct means by which he could do this, he adopted a less direct approach, constructing what we will call the ‘mechanics of succession’. Augustus sought to maintain power within his family, but as circumstances

changed, he was forced to take a pragmatic approach, although he never lost sight of his desire for blood succession.

Augustus developed a position for himself based on two main legal powers: superior military authority and control over the legislative process. These powers will be dealt with in detail later in this thesis, but for now, we note their use in forming part of the mechanics of succession. Augustus used grants of versions of these powers to raise to prominence men he considered suitable as leading political deputies, specifically Agrippa and Tiberius. Such grants of power made them legally equal to Augustus and sufficiently empowered them to assume control. However, they are better understood as colleagues, rather than heirs, to Augustus.

During Augustus' reign, versions of his powers were voted to Agrippa and Tiberius. Rather than indications of favour in a succession scheme, these powers were *earned* through service and loyalty to Augustus, and hence the state. These two men would become members of Augustus' family. Later in Augustus' reign, circumstances forced him to promote younger, inexperienced relatives. An illustrative example is Gaius Caesar in 6 BCE, but even he was expected to prove that he was competent to serve the state and popular with the people.¹ Birth was not considered a substitute for political and military experience. Augustus created a system whereby the individuals he selected as leading deputies were demarcated by grants of his powers combined with membership of the imperial family by marriage and, eventually, adoption. This combination of legal powers and personal connection came to signify the transition from colleague to potential successor.

When Tiberius succeeded, he continued with this system, but with some modifications, until the death of Drusus II in 23 CE. This event removed not only the leading deputy but also the

¹ For discussion, see Sec 2.5.

middle generation, creating a situation where the Caesar's grandsons, who were too young to rule, were the next heirs. This age gap produced a highly unstable situation. Tiberius' inertia regarding the succession, a function of both his growing disinterest in public life and his reluctance to promote the younger generation, created a vacuum in terms of the future of the regime. Tiberius had long sought assistance in administering the state, and it seems he found such an assistant in Sejanus. As Tiberius' weariness with public life increased, he allowed Sejanus to assume an increasing role in the administration. As a result, Sejanus increased his personal power and influence, not only with Tiberius but also with the Senate. Sejanus' relationship with Tiberius would change from that of an assistant to something approaching a colleague.

Ancient authors dismissed Sejanus as a potential successor to Tiberius. Despite these elite authors' contempt for Sejanus, the Caesar himself seems to have been comfortable with Sejanus' role, at least until he felt his own power was threatened by Sejanus' increased prominence. Roman attitudes to Sejanus at least partially explain the common modern view that he was an outsider. According to this view, despite Sejanus' loyal service to the Caesar, eventual membership of his family and partial receipt of the powers necessary to rule, Sejanus would never have been able to succeed Tiberius. This thesis deviates from the standard view, which is typically grounded in the assumption that because Sejanus was an *eques* it was simply impossible for him to succeed. This thesis will set aside Sejanus' rank, which Tacitus touts as a reason to dismiss him as a potential successor, and focus instead on imperial political precedents and the evolving definition of the position of leading political deputy and consider Sejanus' career in light of that definition.

Chapter 1 will provide historical context and a framework for consideration of the succession in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. It will include a brief overview of the late Republic and Augustus' solution to the chaos of that period. We will then turn to the primary evidence—

literary, numismatic and epigraphic—for the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. In addition, we will look briefly at the issues surrounding these sources, including any biases and the completeness of the texts, and how these factors affect our understanding. Having examined the historical context and the sources, Chapter 1 will proceed with an overview of the facts around the succession to both Augustus and Tiberius, up to and including Sejanus' fall in 31 CE. We will also note the promotions, adoptions and marriages that were used to perpetuate the principate.

Augustus' use of these mechanisms to expand his family leads to a brief discussion of the term 'dynasty'. This is a modern term applied to hereditary monarchies, and since this was not the situation at Rome, the term is, strictly speaking, an anachronism for the period under discussion. However, for ease of reference, and to keep with the literature, terms such as 'dynasty' and 'dynastic stability' will be used where appropriate.

Chapter 2 will examine the vexed issue of the succession to Augustus and will deal in detail with the models proposed by modern scholars, including regency and paired succession. In recent decades, there has been an observable trend of modern scholars' succession models becoming increasingly fluid. The monarchy model, as advanced by Ronald Syme, and its rigid sequitur, regency, have been jettisoned in favour of models that attempt to account for Augustus' pragmatism in response to circumstances. However, when set against the facts, these models do not hold up to scrutiny, and indeed we occasionally observe the data being manipulated to fit the model, rather than the reverse. The main reason for this increased fluidity is that an evolving process that took place over many decades is unlikely to be subject to unitary explanation.

We will build on this recent increasing fluidity around succession models and take this concept to its logical conclusion; that is, Augustus' approach was *ad hoc*. We will see Augustus,

whatever his feelings or intentions, reacting pragmatically to the loss of his leading political deputy to death or retirement. Augustus typically turned to the next most senior man in the state (and in his family), a decision which has had needlessly anachronistic, and at times hostile, intent read into it by both ancient and modern authorities. Augustus' desire to ensure his family's prominence is not to be doubted; however, he saw the need to incorporate men of ability into the regime. He did this by granting them versions of his powers and forging a personal connection with them. In this way, Augustus ensured that he had a colleague who could assist him, step in if necessary and potentially succeed him.

Chapter 3 will deal with Tiberius' attempts to perpetuate the principate following Augustus' death. In the early part of his reign, Tiberius used the mechanisms that Augustus had set in place, with one minor but quite significant modification. To demarcate his leading political deputies, in addition to granting them versions of his own powers, Tiberius shared the consulship with them. There are two illustrations of this from early in Tiberius' reign, involving his adopted son, Germanicus, and his own natural son Drusus (hereafter identified as Drusus II). Following Germanicus' death, Tiberius appointed Drusus II as his new leading deputy. We see here Tiberius' continuation of Augustus' pragmatic approach: following the death of his leading political deputy, Tiberius turned to the next most senior member of his family and administration. This pragmatism, combined with the fact that Tiberius shared the consulship with his leading deputy in both cases, will be critical in our assessment of Sejanus. Chapter 3 will conclude in 23 CE, with Drusus II receiving versions of Tiberius' legal powers.

Chapter 4 will deal with the narrative of the 20s CE and focus on Sejanus' career and its ramifications for the house of Caesar. Tiberius' inertia on the succession following the death of Drusus II resulted in a succession vacuum, which generated an opportunity for the rise of someone such as Sejanus. Tiberius did not advance the next most senior member of his administration, Nero, the son of Germanicus and Agrippina. This lack of advancement

generated impatience in Agrippina. Sejanus took advantage of this impatience, along with pre-existing tensions within the imperial house, to cause the removal from political consideration of Germanicus' sons, Nero and Drusus, hereafter identified as Drusus III. Tiberius' ruling style and desire to be rid of political matters, especially after the death of Drusus II, facilitated Sejanus' continued rise. This thesis will argue that Tiberius' political apathy, and the void that now beset the dynasty, created the opportunity for Sejanus to unofficially, if only briefly, become Tiberius' colleague. Chapter 4 will conclude with Sejanus' fall from grace.

Chapter 5 will collate the accumulated evidence and interpretations to determine whether circumstances made it not only possible, but probable, for Sejanus to have been Tiberius' successor. Sejanus had served Tiberius for more than a decade. He shared the consulship with Tiberius and received a share in his legal powers, and he was betrothed to an imperial woman. Chapter 5 will consider whether the social and political privileges acquired by Sejanus reflected the mechanics of succession that had applied to previous colleagues and successors.

The approach adopted is chronological, which is justified by the methodology of this thesis. Since our consideration is based on the development of the principate and the centrality of precedent to Roman politics, such a structure is both useful and necessary. A thematic approach would not appropriately contextualise the mechanics of succession, which, like the system they were designed to perpetuate, were constantly evolving.

Chapter 1: Overview

1.1 Historical Context

The Roman world changed dramatically after the battle of Actium in 31 BCE. Augustus² had emerged victorious from the protracted period of civil war and divisive internal politics that had brought the Republic to a close. The civil conflict and internal dissension of that chaotic century had riven society, and no one, not even the staunchest Republican, wanted a return to that. The rule of Caesar the Dictator in the 40s BCE had provided a brief respite from the previous decades of political instability and occasional civil war. His rise to sole rule was made possible through a series of precedents set in previous decades.

The traditional political processes had been manipulated and abused to such an extent that the Republic was exposed, as Caesar himself said, as a word without substance.³ Caesar had witnessed the rule of Sulla and the control over state affairs that Pompey, through his army, had been able to exercise. The centrality of precedent and ancestral custom (*mos maiorum*) to Roman politics created a situation whereby once a political potentiality had been realised—in Caesar's case, the rule of one man—it became a precedent for the future.⁴

Sulla established such a potentiality in the late 80s and early 70s BCE. He had turned his army on Rome and been installed as dictator. He used rule by dictatorial decree as a temporary

² When referring to Augustus prior to his name change in 27 BCE, it is more accurate to refer to him as Octavian, but for purposes of consistency, the name Augustus will be used throughout this thesis.

³ Suet., *Iul.* 77. The abuse of the processes of state included the use of the tribunate for purposes beyond its intended purview (e.g., Tiberius Gracchus deposing a colleague [see App., *B Civ.* 1.12] and, more gravely, bypassing the senate entirely to introduce his land redistribution bill [Plut., *Vit. Ti. Gracch.* 9; App., *B Civ.* 1.9]. Caesar himself also bypassed the senate and indeed behaved more like a tribune than a consul [Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 14]).

⁴ Val. Mx. 4.1.3 (C. Marcius Rutilus Censorinus speaking); Festus 220.9; Prisc. In *G.I.2*, 226.16; Gell. *NA* 4.3.37, 4.20.1, 14.2.21 (M. Porcius Cato Maior); Macrob. *Sat.* 3.14.6 (P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus Aemilianus); Cic. *De or.* 2.200 (C. Antonius, the orator), *Tul.* 49 (L. Quinctius), *Balb.* 2 (Pompey). For a recent modern discussion of *mos maiorum* with useful bibliography, see Henriette van der Blom, *Cicero's Role Models The Political Strategy of a Newcomer*, (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). 12-17.

measure to restore and make official through legislation the pre-eminence of the senate, which in his view had been undermined in recent decades. When he was satisfied that his task was complete, Sulla resigned his dictatorship.⁵ This use of the office of dictator to achieve a political agenda set the precedent for Caesar.⁶ Caesar's dictatorship provided a solution, albeit a temporary one, to the problems of the late Republic. However, because the Republic itself had been founded in reaction to monarchy, open autocracy of the kind practised by Caesar the Dictator was not a viable long-term solution to these problems. Caesar's open autocracy, devoid of any attempt to disguise his control, and his refusal to lay down his powers led to his assassination at the hands of a cabal of his fellow senators.

The murder of Caesar the Dictator resulted in more than a decade of civil war, first between the assassins and their adherents (termed 'the 'Liberators') and the Caesarean party, followed by an inter-Caesarean power struggle between Augustus, Caesar's adopted son and personal heir, and Marc Antony, a close adherent of Caesar.⁷ Augustus was successful in the inter-Caesarean conflict, which placed him at the head of the state. Recent history had shown in the cases of Sulla and Caesar the dictator that autocracy was a solution to the problem of internal instability.

⁵ For Sulla's march on the city, see Plut., *Vit. Sull.* 9.2–3. For his installation as dictator with a notably broad mandate, see App., *B Civ.* 1.98–9. Plutarch's comment that Sulla appointed himself dictator should be questioned, given both Sulla's reverence for tradition and Plutarch's own comment that 'an act was passed' ratifying Sulla's appointment. For Sulla's resignation as dictator, see App., *B Civ.* 1.104; Plut., *Vit. Sull.* 34.3. Modern treatments of Sulla include George Philip Baker, *Sulla the Fortunate: The Great Dictator; Being an Essay on Politics in the Form of a Historical Biography* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967); Arthur Keaveney, *Sulla, The Last Republican*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁶ For details on the events of the Late Republic, see Plut., *Vit. Sull.*; Plut., *Vit. Caes.*; Plut., *Vit. Cic.*; Plut., *Vit. Pomp.*; the fragments of Dio Cass., 22–35, 36–50; Suet., *Iul.*; Suet., *Aug.* Critical editions of selected texts include M.J. Edwards, ed. *Plutarch, The Lives of Pompey, Caesar and Cicero With Introduction and Commentary*, Classical Studies series (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1991); A. J. Woodman, *The Caesarian and Augustan Narrative (2.41–93)*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries (Cambridge, UK Cambridge University Press, 1983). Modern treatments include Luciano Canfora, *Julius Caesar : The Life and Times of the People's Dictator*, trans. Kevin Windle and Marian Hill, English language ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Adrian Keith Goldsworthy, *Caesar : The Life of a Colossus* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006); Maria Wyke, *Caesar : A Life in Western Culture* (London: Granta, 2007).

⁷ The sources for these events are plentiful and worthy of detailed study. See RG; Plut., *Vit. Ant.*; App., *B Civ.*; Suet., *Aug.*; Dio Cass., 45–52; Vell. Pat., 2.41–93. Critical editions of selected texts include C. B. R. Pelling, *Life of Antony*, Cambridge Greek and Latin classics (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Meyer Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 49-52 (36-29 B.C.)*, An Historical commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman history (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1988); P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of The Divine Augustus* (London,: Oxford U.P., 1967); Alison Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti : Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge, UK Cambridge University Press, 2009); John Scheid, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Hauts Faits du Divin Auguste* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2007).

Augustus would use the precedent of the rule of one man to restore the state (*res publica restituta*). However, the fate of Caesar the Dictator demonstrated that open autocracy was not an option for Augustus' future regime.

The problem faced by Augustus, then, was twofold: to prevent a return to civil war and to survive while doing so—something that Caesar the Dictator had failed to achieve. To prevent a return to civil war, it was necessary for Augustus to first establish, and then maintain, internal stability. Suetonius reports that Augustus expressed his desire for the principate to endure.⁸ To this end, Augustus would need some mechanism to perpetuate the system, and to survive doing so, he would need to disguise the autocratic nature of his rule. This problem had no simple solution: powers voted to Augustus himself could not be bequeathed, which made directly designating a successor impossible. Augustus ultimately solved this dilemma by adapting the existing social and political framework for his own purposes.

1.2 The Sources

Prior to assessing modern scholarship, it is first necessary to make some observations on the primary evidence for the Augustan and Tiberian periods. For Augustus, the main literary source is Cassius Dio, a senator writing in the third century CE, some two hundred years after the events that he describes.⁹ Dio's account is influenced by his own historical times. He had witnessed true despotism and blood succession under Commodus and the Severans, and this

⁸ Suet., *Aug.* 28.2. For analysis, see David Wardle, "Suetonius and Augustus' 'Programmatic Edict' " *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 148, no. 2 (2005). Suetonius frequently cites letters of Augustus (*Aug.* 71.2-3, 76.1-2, 86.3, 87, *Claud.* 4), so the citation of an edict, presumably also written in his own hand, should not be seen as unusual.

⁹ The standard edition of Dio is Cassius Dio, *Dio's Roman history*, trans. Earnest Foster Cary, Herbert Baldwin, 9 vols., The Loeb classical library (London. Cambridge, Mass.: Heinemann ; Harvard University Press, 1954). All translations throughout this thesis are my own, but useful editions of specific sections of the text include Jonathan Edmondson, ed. *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio* (London: London Association of Classical Teachers, 1992); John Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History* 53-55.9, Classical texts (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1990).

influenced his assessment of Augustus' principate and attempts to perpetuate his power.¹⁰ A consequence of Dio's personal historical context is that he saw the principate, even from the very earliest times, as an hereditary monarchy.

Dio's chronological perspective is not the only issue surrounding his account. The incomplete nature of the text also poses problems; it is often fragmentary. However, later compilers, such as Xiphilinus and Zonaras, made abridgements (called 'epitomes') of earlier works, and Dio's text falls into this category.¹¹ The epitomes, which contain quotations, excerpts and summaries, present their own issues for historians, since events are often recounted out of context and sometimes contain anachronisms.¹² This results in a text that is inconsistent in both its context and sequence of events. Thus, both Dio's chronological perspective and the incomplete nature of the text demand judicious use of his account. Many of these problems remain, or indeed are more of an issue, in Dio's text for Tiberius' reign. It should be acknowledged that Dio, like many of our sources, presents a hostile image of the Caesars, particularly Tiberius.¹³

The second major literary source for the Julio-Claudian period is Tacitus, writing in the second century CE.¹⁴ His work focuses on the period following the accession of Tiberius, but he does include a brief background section on Augustus. Tacitus talks about Augustus' rise to power and role in the state. He says that Augustus coalesced the powers he had acquired into the title

¹⁰ Consider the monarchic interpretation of Augustus' adoption of Agrippa's sons in Dio Cass., 54.18.1.

¹¹ Dio's account of the years 29–31 CE is largely preserved in epitome. On the state of the text, see Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*, 28-9.

¹² A highly illustrative example is Dio Cass., 57.22.4b, to which we will devote much attention in Chapter 4.

¹³ Consider Dio Cass., 55.9.4, where Dio downplays Tiberius' importance by describing Tiberius' grant of military command (*imperium proconsulare*) and tribunician power (*tribunicia potestas*) not as a deserved appointment but as a means of chastising Gaius and Lucius Caesar.

¹⁴ As with Dio, the translations of Tacitus throughout this thesis are my own; however, the following editions were consulted in formulating them. Tacitus, *The Annals and The Histories*, trans. A.J. Church and W. J. Brodribb, Great books of the Western world (Chicago, Ill.: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952); *The Annals*, trans. A.J. Woodman, Hackett Classics Series (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004); *The Annals: The Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero*, trans. J.C. Yardley (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); *Tacitus: Annals*, trans. Cynthia Damon (London: Penguin 2012).

of first citizen (*princeps*).¹⁵ Tacitus writes of Augustus' attempts to consolidate his position by raising selected members of his family to positions of prominence.

Augustus, Tacitus says, made Tiberius his heir reluctantly, implying that Augustus did so because he had no other choice. The result, Tacitus says, was that matters settled around Tiberius, a reference to his adoption by Augustus in 4 CE. This unambiguously designated Tiberius as Augustus' leading deputy.¹⁶ In his depiction of Tiberius' rise to power, Tacitus intimates a monarchic view of the principate. Tacitus writes that Tiberius was raised in an imperial house, wherein consulships and triumphs had been heaped upon him.¹⁷ Tacitus' focus is on the shift from the atomistic to the pyramidal model of society, which was a natural flow-on from autocratic rule. In this new political order, members of the court and aristocracy competed for greater proximity to the ruler and the benefits this brought. Sejanus is said to have manipulated and used these politics to his advantage by courting constituents. Tacitus' account does reflect the facts well; however, his use of innuendo and his speculation about motives necessitates a careful reading of this well thought out and brilliantly crafted document.

An example of where such careful reading is required is Tacitus' treatment of Tiberius' character. Tacitus takes every opportunity to portray Tiberius in a negative light. This is evident from the very first words Tacitus writes about the reign: the first crime of the new regime was the murder of Agrippa Postumus.¹⁸ Despite the doubt over who was responsible for Postumus' death, Tacitus says that it was most likely that Tiberius and Livia (the latter known as Augusta after Augustus' death) were involved.¹⁹ Much of Tacitus' denigration of Tiberius is done through rumour and innuendo. In addition, Tacitus had witnessed both the 'Year of The Four Emperors' and the tyrannical reign of Domitian, and this clearly affected his writing, both in

¹⁵ *qui cuncta discordiis civilibus fessa nomine principis sub imperium accepit.* Tac., Ann. 1.2 .

¹⁶ *illuc cuncta vergere* Tac., Ann. 1.3.

¹⁷ *hunc et prima ab infantia eductum in domo regnatrice; congestos iuveni consulatus, triumphos.* Tac., Ann. 1.4.

¹⁸ *primum facinus novi principatus fuit Postumi Agrippae caedes.* Tac., Ann. 1.6.

¹⁹ *propius vero Tiberium ac Liviam, illum metu, hanc novercalibus odiis, suspecti et invisi iuvenis caedem festinavisse.* Tac., Ann. 1.6.

the level of attention he gives to the mutinies of 14 CE and in his largely negative portrayal of Tiberius.²⁰ However, despite this negative portrayal, the evidence suggests that Tacitus had a grudging respect for Tiberius.²¹

Another contemporary source is Velleius Paterculus, a cavalry officer who served under Tiberius. His brief history covers the period from Romulus to late in the reign of Tiberius.²² The wide scope and brevity of Velleius' work necessitate an infuriating lack of detail. The work lauds Tiberius, whose political and military brilliance is a central theme. Tiberius' succession is depicted as inevitable or predestined.

The final major literary source for this period is Suetonius, an equestrian biographer and contemporary of Tacitus.²³ Although much maligned for his use of sensational material, Suetonius' interest in the men themselves provides insight into the personalities of the Caesars, a dimension that historians who focus on the narrative of events cannot provide. This is especially important in a system where the focus and direction of the reign was so closely bound to the character of the incumbent. This fact follows naturally from the centrality of the Caesar

²⁰ For discussion of Tacitus, see the following non-exhaustive list, including Herbert W. Benario, "Tacitus and the Principate," *The Classical Journal* 60, no. 3 (1964); Eleanor Cowan, "Tacitus, Tiberius and Augustus," *Classical Antiquity* 28, no. 2 (2009); Henry Furneaux, *P. Cornelii Taciti Annalium ab excessu divi Augusti libri = The Annals of Tacitus*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896); Francis Richard David Goodyear, A. J. Woodman, and Ronald H. Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book 1.1-54*, 2 vols., Cambridge classical texts and commentaries (Cambridge,: University Press, 1972); Miriam T. Griffin, "Tacitus as a Historian," in *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, ed. A. J. Woodman (Cambridge, UK Cambridge University Press, 2009); I. Malkin and Z.W. Rubensohn, eds., *Tacitus, Tiberius and the Principate*, Leaders and Masses in the Roman World: Studies in Honor of Zvi Yavetz (Leiden, The Netherlands: 1995); N. P. Miller, *Annals, Book I* (London: Bristol Classical, 1992).

²¹ For Tacitus' obit of Tiberius, which, for all its criticism, does have some praise, see *Ann.* 6.51.

²² Editions of Velleius that were consulted to aid translation include Caius Velleius Paterculus, *The Roman History*, trans. Fredrick W. Shipley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924); *The Roman History*, trans. J.C. Yardley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2011). Critical commentary, with a focus on textual issues, is provided by A. J. Woodman, *The Tiberian narrative, 2.94-131*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1977); *The Caesarian and Augustan Narrative (2.41-93)*.

²³ Modern translations of Suetonius include Suetonius, *The Lives of The Twelve Caesars*, trans. John Carew Rolfe, 2 vols., Loeb classical library (London: W. Heinemann, 1914); *The Caesars*, trans. Donna W. Hurley (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2011). Critical editions of Lives of interest to this research are Hugh Lindsay, ed. *Suetonius Tiberius* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995); Hugh Malcolm Lindsay, *Suetonius Caligula* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993); John Mackenzie Carter, *Divus Augustus* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1982); D. Wardle, ed. *Life of Augustus = Vita divi Augusti*, First edition. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Lindsay, *Suetonius Caligula*; D. Wardle, *Suetonius' Life of Caligula : a commentary*, Collection Latomus (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1994). A recent modern treatment is Tristan Power and Roy K. Gibson, *Suetonius the biographer : studies in Roman lives*, First edition. ed. (2014).

to the administration, as well as his legal powers. He maintained command over the soldiers and an absolute veto over all government business: such a man would clearly control the direction of the state. Suetonius does not take a chronological approach, but rather organises his information about his subjects by type or rubric, including drinking habits, relations with family, military campaigns and political career. If a sequence of events piques his interest, Suetonius does delve into the chronology, but this is rare.²⁴ Suetonius' thematic approach, whereby events from different periods of the reign are grouped together, makes it difficult to rely on him for chronology, but he can be used to supplement other sources.

Suetonius' approach to the principate is shaped by traditions he inherited about each ruler: the conscientious Augustus, the brooding Tiberius and even the 'mad' Caligula. Suetonius is also guilty of interpreting the data to fit his preconceived ideas about certain Caesars.²⁵ Thus, the traditions that our sources perpetuate about each ruler should be kept in mind.

Suetonius does not include a succession rubric. A useful modern treatment of the succession issue in Suetonius is Josiah Osgood's contribution to Gibson's volume on the Augustan succession.²⁶ Osgood points out that not only is 'succession' never used as a rubric in the *de vita Caesarum*, but limited attention is given to the issue of succession, even under other rubrics where it could have been discussed. Suetonius does devote considerable attention to the family of his subjects and their involvement in public life, but there is no explicit succession rubric.

²⁴ A case in point is Tiberius' retirement to Rhodes in 6 BCE, which occupies Suet., *Tib.* 10–13.

²⁵ An example would be two Caesars, Augustus and Caligula, portraying themselves as gods. In Augustus' case, the event is considered harmless, even though it was unpopular. But with Caligula, the very same behaviour is presented as evidence that he was insane and that he sought to be worshipped as a god while he was alive. Compare Suet., *Aug.* 70.1–2 with Suet., *Calig.* 22.3.

²⁶ Josiah Osgood, "Suetonius and the Succession to Augustus," in *The Julio-Claudian Succession: Reality and Perception of the "Augustan Model"*, ed. A.G.G. Gibson (Boston: Brill, 2013), 20–23.

We now turn briefly to the epigraphic and numismatic record for the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius.²⁷ We have observed that the literary sources have their biases, particularly regarding Tiberius. A useful counterbalance to this often-hostile material may be found in inscriptions. Unlike the literary sources, which have survived by being copied down through the centuries, this class of evidence is a direct window into the ancient past: it comes to us directly from the period under study. However, this does not mean that it should be accepted uncritically. Inscriptions were written about the regime by provincials, or by the regime itself in the case of senatorial decrees (*senatus consulta*) in Rome, and so have a clear pro-regime bias. Thus, their text does not necessarily provide an unbiased record. A modern parallel might be the press release, which presents the version of events most favourable to the government's position. We will see this in detail when the senatorial decree concerning Gnaeus Piso the Elder is considered in Chapter 3.

A major inscription for the reign of Augustus is the 'Achievements of the Divine Augustus' (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*), a record of Augustus' career penned by the man himself and to which Tiberius later added an appendix.²⁸ It is best understood as a piece of propaganda, since it represents a highly sanitised account of Augustus' career. A common technique is the inclusion of statements that are, strictly speaking, true but that intentionally omit important details.²⁹ As with any such material, it naturally passes over the more unpleasant aspects of Augustus' career. These aspects are passed over in total silence or rationalised. Certain aspects of his political manoeuvrings are emphasised while others are downplayed. Although it is self-serving and contains clear pro-regime bias, as a primary source the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* remains a highly important document for the Augustan Age.

²⁷ A useful compilation of inscriptions for the Augustan and Tiberian periods is Victor Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus & Tiberius*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949).

²⁸ For a list of critical editions of *RG*, see n. 7.

²⁹ A useful example is Augustus' claim that following the First Constitutional Settlement of 27 BCE, he exceeded all in eminence (*auctoritas*) but possessed no more official power than did his colleagues in the various magistracies. *Post id tem[pus a]uctoritate [omnibus praestiti, potest]atis au[tem n]ihilo ampliu[s habu]i quam cet[eri qui m]ihi quoque in ma[gis]tra[t]u conlegae f[u]erunt*. *RG* 34.

Finally, we come to the coins for the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius.³⁰ Like inscriptions, coins are contemporary documents that have not been copied. Similarly with inscriptions, the coins have a clear bias in favour of the regime, but they do contain a great deal of useful information, including offices that the Caesar has held, imperial salutations claimed and the links between the incumbent Caesar and previous *principes*. They typically feature the head of the Caesar in profile and his most important names and titles. A typical text reads: Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the Deified Augustus, hailed general seven times, chief priest and holder of the tribunician power for the seventeenth year (TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVST IMP VII / PONT MAXIM TRIBVN POTEST XVII).³¹ The text provides a summary of Tiberius' political career and his familial ties with Augustus. In addition, since we know from the literary sources that Tiberius first received *tribunicia potestas* (tribunician power) in 6 BCE, this coin was minted in 15 CE. Inscriptions on the coins often carried powerful political messages, and this will become of critical importance with the appearance of Sejanus on the coins in 31 CE.

1.3 The Early Regime and Initial Attempts at 'Succession'

Augustus' attempts to perpetuate his power led to a long and highly complicated series of manoeuvres. Although the narrative is not our focus, some recounting will be necessary to provide a framework through which to examine the explanatory models put forward by modern commentators.³² The scholarship on this issue is abundant, and as much as some have tried, so complicated an issue is unlikely to be explained by one model that will account for all the

³⁰ The imperial coinage for the Julio-Claudians is discussed in C. H. V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy 31B.C.-A.D. 68* (London: Methuen, 1951).

³¹ *RIC* 1, 34.

³² As an exemplary bibliography, see, on regency, Robin Seager, *Tiberius* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005). on paired succession, Barbara Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, Aspects of Greek and Roman life. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976). For both an overview and a substantive critical analysis of the main models, see Garrett G Fagan, "The Roman Imperial Succession under The Julio-Claudians, 23BC-AD69" (Trinity College, 1988).

adoptions, marriages and promotions. The related and highly complex issue of Augustus' personal powers and position in the state is deferred until Chapter 2.

Dio reports, under the year 25 BCE, that Augustus tentatively attempted to establish a mechanism by which the principate might be perpetuated. This effort focused on his nephew Marcellus.³³ By advancing Marcellus' career and marrying him to Augustus' daughter, Julia, he had marked Marcellus out as someone who might continue the principate. The advancement of Marcellus in this way was met with disquiet among the political class. However, events in 23 BCE were to demonstrate the tentative and pragmatic nature of Augustus' attempts to continue the principate. When Augustus was seriously ill and it was feared that he might die, he did not appoint a successor *per se*. Rather than making Marcellus' alleged role explicit, Augustus presented his signet ring, which related only to his personal estate, to Agrippa, who was his chief general and close political associate as well as his friend.³⁴

The resistance to Marcellus' rise resulted in Augustus temporarily setting aside his desire to perpetuate the principate and focusing on internal stability. These plans would not include Marcellus, as he would die soon after. As will be examined below, some scholars, including Syme, have argued that Augustus was looking to perpetuate the principate from within his own family, even at this early stage. This may explain why Agrippa was not considered, at least initially. Close as he was to Augustus, Agrippa was not family.

³³ Dio Cass., 53.27.5, 28.3.

³⁴ o(d' Au1goustoj e9nde/katon meta_ Kalpourni/ou Pi/swnoj a1rcaj h)rrw&sthse au}qij, w3ste mhdemi/an e0lpi/da swthri/aj sxei=n: pa&nta gou~n w(j kai\ teleuth&swn die/qeto, kai\ ta&j te a)rxaj tou&j te a1llouj tou_j prw&touj kai\ tw~n bouleutw~n kai\ tw~n i9ppe/wn a)qroi/saj dia&doxon me\n ou)de/na a)pe/deice, kai/toi to_n Ma&rkellon pa&ntwn prokriqh&sesqai e0j tou~to prosdokw&ntwn, dialexqeij de/ tina au)toi=j peri\ tw~n dhmosi/wn pragma&tw'n tw|~ me\n Pi/swni ta&j te duna&meij kai\ ta_j prosodouj ta_j koina_j e0j bibli/on e0sgra&yaj e1dwke, tw|~ d' OAgri/ppa. Dio Cass., 53.30.1–2.

The brevity of Marcellus' ascendancy has meant that modern scholars have placed little emphasis on it.³⁵ However, some have seen the beginnings of a pattern, which would continue with Agrippa and Tiberius and beyond: political advancement for these men was combined with a familial connection to Augustus himself. We will now examine some modern scholars' interpretations of Augustus' preliminary attempt to continue the principate.

Syme attributes the rise of Marcellus to Augustus seeking a succession that was to be 'not merely dynastic, but in his own family and of his own blood'.³⁶ Werner Eck suggests that Marcellus was earmarked for succession in the long term.³⁷ We should be cautious of such monarchic analyses, particularly since this was in the very early history of the principate.

Erich Gruen offers a different perspective. He agrees with previous scholars that Marcellus was being prepared to succeed Augustus.³⁸ He qualifies this idea by noting that there was no formal blueprint for succession at this point.³⁹ It is certainly true that there was not, and in accordance with Roman political custom could there ever be, a formal scheme or mechanism for succession. The rise of Marcellus may well have represented Augustus' first attempt to create such a mechanism, but it had facilitated discontent among the more conservative elements of the political class. Even Agrippa, his staunch ally, was not pleased.⁴⁰

This, combined with Marcellus' premature death, ensured that when Augustus resumed his attempts to perpetuate the principate, he would be forced, despite his dynastic aspirations, to be more pragmatic in his approach, which would take an ad hoc form. It cannot be denied that

³⁵ One example is D. C. A. Shotter, *Augustus Caesar*, Lancaster pamphlets. (London: Routledge, 1991), 74-5. Marcellus is only mentioned in passing; the point is his marriage to Julia.

³⁶ Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 341.

³⁷ Werner Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, 2nd ed., Blackwell Ancient Lives. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 151. See also Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 20; Anthony Everitt, *Augustus : The Life of Rome's First Emperor*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Random House, 2006), 216.

³⁸ Erich Gruen, "Augustus and The Making of The Principate," in *The Cambridge Companion to The Age of Augustus*, ed. Karl Galinsky (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38.

³⁹ Gruen, "Making of the Principate," 38. Ibid. Ibid. Ibid. Ibid. Ibid. Ibid. Ibid. Ibid. Ibid. Ibid.

⁴⁰ Suet., *Aug.* 66. See Barbara Levick, "Primus, Murena, and 'Fides': Notes on Cassius Dio Liv. 3," *Greece & Rome* 22, no. 2 (1975): 157., citing Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 341-2.

Augustus, even at this early stage, had a desire for a blood successor. If his intention had simply been to perpetuate the principate without consideration for his own family, he would surely have chosen Agrippa, who was not yet part of his family. Even though he was Augustus' contemporary (both men were then aged in their forties) Augustus would have seen Agrippa as a temporary stabilising force, should circumstances dictate. In addition, Agrippa was the clear choice based on his administrative experience (he had been consul and censor with Augustus) as well as his age and loyalty to the regime. Finally, all other men connected to Augustus' family who could have been potential successors, Tiberius, Drusus I and Marcellus, were all too young and thus lacked experience.

Barbara Levick, in her *Augustus: Image and Substance*, follows Gruen in that she does not see a formal concept of succession in 23 BCE. She identifies Augustus' elevation of Marcellus as the *princeps* making 'provisional dynastic arrangements'.⁴¹ The context of these so-called succession arrangements provides additional information. When Augustus was confronted with his own mortality, it became more urgent for him to consider what would happen in the event of his death. Gruen is correct that there was no blueprint, for no precedent—indeed no legal basis—existed for the formal passing of offices between family members.

1.4 The Rise of Agrippa

The political situation changed in 23 BCE. Augustus resigned the consulship, which he had held continuously from 31 BCE, in what we will call the period of crisis and reconstruction. The first attempt to define the post-Actium government took place in 27 BCE. This would prove to be only a temporary solution, which was re-examined in 23 BCE. Theories abound to explain this redefinition of Augustus' position, which will be examined in Chapter 2. When Augustus

⁴¹ Barbara Levick, *Augustus : Image and Substance*, 1st ed. (Harlow, England: Longman, 2010), 80.

stepped down from the consulship, he received substantial powers from the senate, specifically superior military authority (*imperium proconsulare maius*) in the provinces and tribunician power (*tribunicia potestas*), which granted him, among other things, the ability to both legislate and veto legislation in Rome.⁴² This placed his position in the state on firmer legal ground. Augustus, and later Tiberius, would use versions of these powers to demarcate leading political deputies in the forthcoming decades. This will be examined in Chapters 2 and 3.

The 23 BCE Settlement, like that of 27 BCE, would prove only a temporary measure, and we will see in Chapter 2 that further instability resulted in a final modification of Augustus' powers in 19 BCE. By this time, Agrippa had been granted *imperium proconsulare* and *tribunicia potestas*, versions of Augustus' own powers. The general was also married to Augustus' daughter Julia. This marriage would produce children who would dramatically affect the succession question. We will see the increased importance of marriage into the imperial family as part of the mechanics of succession in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

The marriage of Agrippa and Julia is particularly important for our purposes because it becomes part of the mechanics of succession. It is important to remember that Marcellus was married to Julia and that Augustus had been advancing him politically. In 21 BCE, Agrippa was married to Julia. He had always been an integral part of the regime, but this marriage made him part of Augustus' family. This principle would continue. Cases in point include Tiberius, Germanicus and Drusus II. This detail will become important for our examination of Sejanus' position in 30 and 31 CE.

In 18 BCE, when Augustus' powers were renewed, he asked the senate to confer similar powers on Agrippa.⁴³ This grant elevated Agrippa to legal equality with Augustus. It is clear, as John

⁴² A. H. M. Jones has discussed the complex details of Augustus' military authority. See A. H. M. Jones, "The Imperium of Augustus," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 41 (1951).

⁴³ Dio 54.12.4.

Rich points out, that if anything had befallen Augustus in this five-year period, Agrippa would have taken his place.⁴⁴ Rather than seeing Agrippa as any kind of heir, the position he occupied is better understood as a man sufficiently empowered to take over should anything happen to Augustus. It may be a fine distinction, but it is certainly there: Agrippa was a colleague, not an heir.

Syme suggests that because Agrippa was not an acceptable candidate to the elite, the general was never intended to succeed Augustus.⁴⁵ It should be remembered that the political class was not the principate's only constituent group. It is true that the *princeps* governed in part through his rapport with the elite, but the real basis for the Caesar's power was the army, to which Agrippa would surely have been acceptable. The suggestion that a man was not a viable candidate simply because he was not acceptable to the nobles will be important in our examination of Sejanus.

Frank Marsh takes the opposite view, insisting that Agrippa was always the intended successor.⁴⁶ Levick describes Agrippa as being legally coequal with Augustus and states that, if anything had befallen Augustus, the general would have been 'left supreme by default'.⁴⁷ Again, this did not make Agrippa the appointed political successor of Augustus but rather a colleague with equal powers who could replace Augustus if necessary.

A parallel exists between Agrippa's legal position in 18 BCE and that of Tiberius in 14 CE following the death of Augustus, to the extent that no successor could be legally designated. However, in both situations, Augustus ensured that a second man with powers equivalent to his own was in place. Such a man was well placed to continue the system. The position of Agrippa in the late 20s BCE and beyond was complicated by the fact that he had two sons, Gaius and

⁴⁴ Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History* 53-55.9, 189.

⁴⁵ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 345.

⁴⁶ Frank Burr Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 33.

⁴⁷ Levick, *Augustus : Image and Substance*, 179.

Lucius, born in 20 and 17 BCE respectively. These boys were descendants of Augustus—his grandsons—but we will see in Chapter 2 that Augustus adopted them as his own sons. The fact that Agrippa's sons were descendants of Augustus has led some modern commentators to advocate the model of regency—that is, the idea that an older man of experience with the relevant powers would rule temporarily for an intended future ruler.

This model is relevant to Sejanus to the extent that, by the early 30s CE, Caligula and Gemellus, the two potential successors to Tiberius, were either too young or inexperienced to rule in their own right. This fact has led Seager to propose regency as a means to explain Sejanus' tactics in the 20s CE.⁴⁸ This will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 4, but for now, the model as it applied during Augustus' reign will be examined.

Seager also embraces regency to explain Agrippa's role in the late 20s and 10s BCE. In 23 BCE, Augustus identified a potential problem. There was a parallel between the situation in 23 BCE and that of twenty years earlier, when Caesar the dictator had made the young Augustus his heir, and this had led to many years of civil war between Augustus and Antony, Caesar's chief lieutenant. The institution of a younger, personally connected heir had led to civil war between the established lieutenant and the family member.

According to Seager, if Augustus had married Julia to another man and the marriage had produced heirs, the potential for future conflict between Agrippa and those children would have been very real if Agrippa had decided to use his powers to pursue the principate for himself. Augustus attempted to avert this problem by marrying his daughter to Agrippa, who, at this point, was second only to the *princeps* himself in the state. This marriage, as Seager says, solved both of Augustus' problems simultaneously. Augustus would have grandsons to carry on his line, and the potential threat that Agrippa posed would be nullified by the fact that Agrippa

⁴⁸ Seager, *Tiberius*, 153.

would be the father of those grandsons. The powers granted to Agrippa meant that if Augustus were to die before an heir could rule in his own right, Agrippa could rule as a regent. It is unlikely that the kind of problems that could arise between Agrippa and an unrelated heir would occur between Agrippa and his own son.⁴⁹ These factors were designed to ensure the smooth eventual transfer of power to a blood relative of Augustus by lessening the potential for conflict between the established politician and the intended heir.

The term 'regency', used by Seager and many other modern scholars, is, strictly speaking, an anachronism. It is a term used in the high empire that is out of place when discussing the early principate. However, for the sake of consistency with the literature, the term is used in this thesis when discussing the model.

The regency model has its genesis in the birth of sons to Julia and Agrippa. On the birth of the younger son, Lucius, Augustus adopted the two boys as his own sons, even though they were his natural grandsons.⁵⁰ The reason for these adoptions is clear. Concerning the birth of Gaius, Osgood observes that 'a new Vipsanius Agrippa was born'.⁵¹ The child took his name from his father, and so both he and Lucius were born members of the Vipsanian clan (*gens Vipsania*). This fact helps to explain the *princeps*' adoption of children who were already his descendants. Upon their adoption, the boys took the names Gaius and Lucius Caesar and became Julians.

Augustus' decision to adopt his grandsons has generated many theories among modern scholars. Some, including Seager, have either followed or attempted to salvage parts of the monarchy model espoused by Syme in *The Roman Revolution*. They see Augustus' adoption of his grandsons as an attempt to form a dynasty. Syme describes the adoption of the boys as fulfilling Augustus' 'dynastic aspirations', with Agrippa's role being that of 'protector of the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Dio Cass., 54.18.1; Tac., *Ann.* 1.3; Suet., *Aug.* 64.

⁵¹ Osgood, "Suetonius and the Succession to Augustus," 26.

young princes'.⁵² Clearly, Syme's conception is of an hereditary monarchy. John H. Corbett has argued against this model, suggesting that Syme was preoccupied with the children of Julia and with the monarchy implied by their existence.⁵³ In addition, Corbett discusses Syme's suggestion of a regency council if Augustus were to die before the boys reached their majority. The regency council, Corbett suggests, is a consequence of Syme's monarchy argument.⁵⁴

One of the scholars to follow Syme is Seager, who also espouses the monarchic model, or at least the 'principle of hereditary succession'.⁵⁵ Seager interprets the adoptions in 17 BCE as cementing Augustus' plan to be 'succeeded by one of his own blood'.⁵⁶ W. K. Lacey also suggests a monarchic model for the principate and, by extension, the succession. However, it was not a monarchy in which hereditary succession was the sole concern, unlike the modern concept of monarchy. Potential heirs would, Lacey writes, need to develop their own profile and gain a following among the key constituent groups of the principate, especially the people and the army.⁵⁷ This position accounts for the accelerated career advancement of certain members of Augustus' family. The careers of Gaius and Lucius Caesar, which Lacey also discusses, will be dealt with in Chapter 2.

John Mackenzie Carter offers an interesting interpretation of the adoption in his commentary on Suetonius' *Divus Augustus*. Carter suggests that adoption was common practice in the Republic to sustain clans (*gentes*) with new members. According to Carter, Augustus' motive for the adoption, rather than being specifically dynastic, was his desire to 'endow his grandsons with ... similar good fortune' that he himself had received by taking the name Caesar.⁵⁸ This

⁵² Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 416.

⁵³ John H. Corbett, "The Succession Policy of Augustus," *Latomus* 33, no. 1 (1974): 88.

⁵⁴ Corbett, "Succession Policy," 88.

⁵⁵ Seager, *Tiberius*, 15.

⁵⁶ Seager, *Tiberius*, 15.

⁵⁷ W. K. Lacey, "Agrippa's Provincia," in *Augustus and The Principate : The Evolution of The System* (Leeds, Great Britain: Francis Cairns, 1996), 190.

⁵⁸ Carter, *Divus Augustus*, 184. Augustus' initial rise to power was based on courting the loyalty of Caesar the Dictator's veterans using the name Caesar. It would have been ill advised for Augustus to attempt to perpetuate a system based on army loyalty through a non-Caesar. The point here is that Augustus' desire for succession within his family need not necessarily be seen as monarchic: it was the name Caesar that was important.

idea, combined with Osgood's observation about the origins of Gaius and Lucius is an interesting counterbalance to Syme's monarchic interpretation of the adoption.⁵⁹ We will see Augustus make use of adoption in his quest to perpetuate the principate.

The situation in 17 BCE, then, places Augustus at the helm of the state, having adopted his grandsons as his own sons, and with Agrippa as his colleague. Agrippa's role has been explained variously, but his position as second to Augustus is not to be doubted.⁶⁰ In 13 BCE, Agrippa's powers expired; they were renewed for a further five years, but he died in 12 BCE.⁶¹ The death of Agrippa posed a new problem for Augustus. He had already adopted his grandsons at this point, but they remained too young to rule or even to enter the administration. The solution was to find a man to take Agrippa's place, not only as Augustus' colleague but also as a husband for Julia.

1.5 The Years 13 BCE to 4 CE: Tiberius and the Young Caesars

It was after the death of Agrippa that Tiberius became an increasingly important figure in Roman politics. The details of his career will be covered in detail in Chapter 2. For now, the significance of Tiberius' career is that he was another man close to the regime who could expect a career of some prominence, even if the extent of that prominence was not clearly defined at this point. Aside from the privilege of the years, whereby a man was granted exemptions in terms of age restrictions and sequence for office holding, there was nothing remarkable about Tiberius' early career. The privilege of the years served a dual purpose for Augustus: to differentiate the young men of his family from their peers and prepare his family members for

⁵⁹ For discussion of adoption at Rome, see Hugh Lindsay, *Adoption in the Roman world* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁶⁰ His collegial role is made explicit by *Ann. ép.* 1920, 43, where he is identified as *col[legium] Aug[usti]*.

⁶¹ Dio Cass., 54.28.1–2.

future roles in the administration. Despite this, Tiberius' career, for all the novelty of his youth, would follow the traditional path.⁶²

The unexpected death of Agrippa placed Tiberius at the centre of imperial politics. Augustus needed a man to serve as his leading political deputy. Through his political, military and diplomatic achievements, which included a term as consul in 13 BCE, Tiberius was well placed to fill such a role. He would serve as a legate until 11 BCE, and on his return to the city, he would marry Julia.⁶³ Two years later, in 9 BCE, Tiberius' brother, Drusus I, died.⁶⁴ This damaged Augustus' contingency plans. Should the need have arisen, Drusus I could have replaced Tiberius in the way that Tiberius had replaced Agrippa. However, with Drusus I's death, there was no one to replace Tiberius: he was now indispensable. Dio reports that, when Drusus I died, Tiberius replaced him in Germany and then, in 7 BCE, became consul for the second time.⁶⁵ In 6 BCE, Augustus, as he had done with Agrippa, requested that *tribunicia potestas* and an eastern command be conferred upon Tiberius.

Modern scholars have interpreted Tiberius' rise according to their own models for succession. Syme asserts that Tiberius replaced Agrippa as Augustus' chief minister and 'protector of the young princes'.⁶⁶ The suggestion that Tiberius was the guardian of Gaius and Lucius ignores the fact that Augustus had adopted them: *he* was charged with raising the boys to manhood. Tiberius, as Julia's husband, could only assume this role should Augustus die. Syme has read anachronistic and monarchic significance into Tiberius' marriage to Julia. By 6 BCE, Tiberius was sufficiently empowered to take over in his own right if anything befell Augustus. Indeed,

⁶² For the privilege of the years as well as Tiberius' early career, see Dio Cass., 53.28.3, Suet. *Tib.* 9.3. The other works on Tiberius also contain sections on Tiberius' early career. See Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, 34ff.; Seager, *Tiberius*, 11-14.; Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 19-30.

⁶³ For the campaigns, see Dio Cass., 54.31.2-34.4. For the marriage to Julia, see Dio Cass., 54.31.2, 35.4; Vell. Pat., 2.96.1.

⁶⁴ Dio Cass., 55.1-2. Henceforth, Tiberius' brother, Drusus, will be referred to as Drusus I. Where distinction is required, a similar system will be used with the other members of the Julio-Claudian family who share the same name; a note will be provided at the time.

⁶⁵ Dio Cass., 55.6.5. For discussion, see Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History 53-55.9*, 224. Velleius and Suetonius also discuss Tiberius' advancement. See Vell. Pat., 2.99 and Suet., *Tib.* 9.3.

⁶⁶ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 416.

this would surely have been Augustus' intention. His precise intentions for the young Caesars are not clear, but he would not have placed the state in the control of two so young. That said, the evidence for the notion that Augustus ever thought in terms of regency is very limited. To do so at that stage would have been, at the very least, politically unwise. Indeed, the regency model presumes that the principate was a monarchy and interprets the data to fit.

In his commentary, Rich questions Dio's contention that Tiberius' marriage to Julia secured his position in the state. Rich advances another model, that of paired succession. He notes the parallels between the careers of Tiberius and Drusus I, and suggests that they were assistants to Augustus and that the *princeps* envisioned both brothers succeeding him.⁶⁷ Levick makes a similar suggestion: that it was Augustus' intention for both Tiberius and Drusus to succeed him simultaneously.⁶⁸

The paired succession model, as the name suggests, posits that Augustus sought to establish pairs of rulers, presumably as insurance against fate. However, the nature of the intended partnership is not clear. There are two possible alternatives: a two-tiered system with a clear senior party, as had been the case with Augustus and Agrippa, or two men equally empowered at one and the same time. This latter formulation may have appeared more palatable to the Romans, given that it was similar in form to the paired consulships of the Republic.

In 6 BCE, after being granted *tribunicia potestas* and *imperium proconsulare*, Tiberius, for reasons that remain subject to intense debate, left both the city and public life. This not only deprived Augustus of his colleague but also forced him once again to reformulate how he was going to perpetuate his power. Augustus' reaction was to advance his adopted sons, specifically Gaius. It is significant that Tiberius retained his powers in the years 6–1 BCE, and in light of

⁶⁷ Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History* 53-55.9, 209.

⁶⁸ Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 31-2.

this, he remained suitably empowered to assume the role of *princeps* if anything were to befall Augustus.

Augustus' decision to advance his grandsons was the pragmatic response to Tiberius' departure and was surely intended to show that Tiberius was no longer central to Augustus' plans. Tiberius and Augustus were still linked by Tiberius' marriage to Julia, but this tie would soon be severed. In 2 BCE, Augustus became aware of his daughter's adulterous affairs, and reacted by exiling her and executing some of her paramours.⁶⁹

Julia's exile had considerable consequences for Tiberius. When he was married to Julia, Tiberius had a familial connection to Gaius Caesar as well as to Augustus himself, but following Julia's exile and the dissolution of their marriage by Augustus, that connection no longer existed. This could explain why Tiberius wrote to Augustus begging lenient treatment for Julia: he was attempting to protect his own position. When his *tribunicia potestas* expired, Tiberius was further exposed politically, lacking as he did the personal protection afforded a tribune (*tribunicia sacrosanctitas*).

Tiberius requested permission to return to Rome in 1 BCE but was rebuffed. When he was eventually permitted to return to the city, Augustus left the final decision to Gaius, both in terms of *when* Tiberius could return and under what circumstances. Tiberius' return was based on the understanding that he would take no further part in public life.⁷⁰ Augustus' succession plans for the future of the regime would continue to centre on Gaius Caesar. What is not clear, however, is Augustus' plan in the event of his death before Gaius was experienced and old enough to rule in his own right.

⁶⁹ Dio Cass., 55.10.12–14.

⁷⁰ Suet., *Tib.* 13.2.

In the events of the period between the departure of Tiberius and the deaths of the young Caesars, those modern scholars who advocate a monarchic scheme have seen further evidence to support their theory, specifically in Augustus' targeted and rapid promotion of his own blood relatives. However, such scholars are reading monarchy into a decision that was surely motivated by necessity. There is no denying that Augustus desired his successors to be of his own blood, but he also wanted them to be of age and experience—in Lacey's formulation, to have earned their following with the regime's constituent groups. Tiberius' departure had forced Augustus to move his plans for Gaius and Lucius forward considerably. The rapid advancement of the boys was thus a *consequence* of Tiberius' departure, rather than a cause. Therefore, we need not read monarchy into a decision that was pragmatic. The plain fact was that there was no one else to whom Augustus could turn after Tiberius' retirement.

Gruen has challenged the very idea of blood inheritance in the reign of Augustus. While Gruen admits that it was in Augustus' interest to 'assure the stability of his achievement', he states that Augustus wanted to avoid establishing a position that was based solely on inheritance.⁷¹ He is emphasising a seemingly redundant, but very subtle, legal point. The titles, priesthoods and powers that constituted Augustus' position in the state were not property and so could not be bequeathed. To take Gruen's argument further, it was not that Augustus did not *want* to establish a position based on inheritance, but rather that he *could not* establish such a position, at least not directly.

During the period of Tiberius' withdrawal, then, Augustus was preparing his adopted sons to succeed him. This was similar to his reaction to Agrippa's death. Augustus' advancement of the young Caesars was a pragmatic response to the void left by Tiberius' departure. Augustus' motivations here are not difficult to discern: his primary concern was always the stability of the state. This is not to say that ensuring the continued prominence of his clan (*gens*) did not enter

⁷¹ Gruen, "Augustus and The Making of The Principate," 38.

his calculations; indeed, to Augustus from this point on, the two became increasingly synonymous. In evaluating this suggestion, we should consider that, from 2BCE, Augustus was the father of both the Julian clan and the entire country (*pater patriae*).

When Gaius Caesar assumed the gown of manhood (*toga virilis*) in 5 BCE, the people ‘elected’ him consul, but Augustus insisted that this not take place until five years hence (*post quinquennium*).⁷² Gaius became consul in 1 CE, and he was subsequently sent to the east.⁷³ Lucius’ career followed a similar path, allowing for the age difference, and he was sent to Gaul. Both would later die on their respective missions.⁷⁴

Following the deaths of the boys, Augustus was again forced to rethink the succession issue. This time, because he had no other choice, he turned to his wayward stepson, Tiberius. On 26 June 4 CE, Augustus adopted Tiberius after compelling him to adopt his own nephew, Germanicus.⁷⁵ When Velleius reports Augustus’ adoption of Tiberius, he notes that Augustus said he adopted Tiberius for the sake of the state (*hoc, inquit, rei publicae causa facio*).⁷⁶ This is a highly ambiguous statement. It means that Augustus adopted Tiberius either because he was the man best qualified for the position or because Augustus realised that the future of the state depended on the perpetuation of the principate and Tiberius was the only possible choice. The context, it must be said, supports the latter conclusion, given that the adoption and the statement took place only after the deaths of Gaius and Lucius Caesar. If Augustus had always intended to follow this course, many years had passed during which he could have adopted

⁷² For the election as consul, see Dio Cass., 55.9.2–3. For Augustus’ *post quinquennium* insistence, see RG 14.1.

⁷³ Dio Cass., 55.10.18–19. Dio’s text for the years 1 BCE to 3 CE is preserved in epitome only. See Peter Michael Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio’s Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, American classical studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111–40.

⁷⁴ For the deaths of Gaius and Lucius, see Dio Cass., 55.10a.8–10; Tac., *Ann.* 1.3; Suet., *Aug.* 65.1; Vell. Pat., 2.102.2–3.

⁷⁵ Dio Cass., 55.13.1a–2; Suet., *Tib.* 15.2 (uses *coactus [est]*); Suet., *Aug.* 65.1. These citations cover the events of 26 June 4 CE and will not be cited multiple times.

⁷⁶ Vell. Pat., 2.104.1.

Tiberius. On this day, Augustus also adopted Agrippa Postumus, his grandson and the last surviving son of Agrippa and Julia.

The adoptions of 4 CE settled the immediate issue of the succession to Augustus, but it was also necessary to begin preparing the next generation. The next ten years would see the rise of a second generation to public careers, particularly Germanicus and, to a lesser degree, his adopted brother, Drusus II, the son of Tiberius. This was designed to bring them to prominence and create long-term stability.

1.6 The Last Years of Augustus and the Accession of Tiberius

The next major event for the future of the regime took place in 7 CE. Dio reports that Tiberius was on campaign and that Augustus suspected that the war was intentionally not being prosecuted effectively by Tiberius so that he could retain his soldiers for as long as possible.⁷⁷ Augustus dispatched Germanicus, who held the rank of quaestor. This event marked Germanicus' first military experience. It is possible that this appointment was the genesis of the future poor relations between Tiberius and Germanicus.

Also in the year 7 CE, Augustus banished his grandson Agrippa Postumus, whose life up to this point had been highly unstable. His father had died before he was born; he had lost his mother to exile; and he had lost his brothers, Gaius and Lucius. Postumus' traumatic childhood may partially explain what Dio calls his slave-like (best understood as 'uncivilised') nature (δουλοπρεφής).⁷⁸ This will be examined in detail in Chapter 2.

⁷⁷ Dio Cass., 55.31.1.

⁷⁸ Dio Cass., 55.32.1–2.

Germanicus' career proceeded apace, and he held his first consulship in 12 CE.⁷⁹ The events of that year serve as useful indicators of just how autocratic the principate had become. Augustus wrote a letter to the senate, commending Germanicus to its care and the House to Tiberius' care. There is, as Peter Michael Swan notes 'a remarkable monarchic presumption' in this letter.⁸⁰ Augustus had effectively placed Tiberius in charge of the senate and designated Germanicus as central to the future of the regime.

In August of 14 CE, Augustus died.⁸¹ Our focus here is his will, which declared Tiberius his majority heir and Livia his minority heir. We will examine other aspects of Augustus' will in Chapter 2, including second-tier heirs and the fate of Postumus. Edward Champlin has examined Augustus' will in detail.⁸² Despite the apparent legal simplicity of the situation, there were problems almost immediately with Tiberius' assumption of power. The would-be *princeps* presented himself as unwilling to assume full control, even though his clearly superior position was defined by his powers, which had been renewed in 13 CE.⁸³ This will be examined at length in Chapter 3, but for now, the main point is that relations between Tiberius and the senate were initially defined by suspicion, uncertainty and mistrust.

1.7 The Early Years of Tiberius' Reign to the Death of Germanicus

Tiberius ultimately accepted his role as *princeps*, or, in Tacitus' portrayal, he ceased objecting to it.⁸⁴ The reaction to Augustus' death was varied, but it was nowhere more threatening than in the army camp. Two army groups revolted when they learnt of Augustus' death.⁸⁵ Dealing

⁷⁹ Dio Cass., 56.26.1.

⁸⁰ Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, 285.

⁸¹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.5.1-4, 9.1; Dio Cass., 56.29.2-31.1; Vell. Pat., 2.123; Suet., *Aug.* 97.1-100.1.

⁸² Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, 285.

⁸³ For the renewal, see Dio Cass., 56.28.1-29.1; Vell. Pat., 2.121.1; Suet., *Tib.* 21.1.

⁸⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 1.13.

⁸⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 1.16-53.

with these revolts was the first test for the new regime, specifically the leadership qualities of Germanicus and Drusus II. Given that these men were Tiberius' leading political associates, as set out in Augustus' will, their degree of success in dealing with the revolts would demonstrate not only their relationship with the army but also their temperament in response to crisis.

These mutinies will be examined in Chapter 3, with a focus on how Germanicus and Drusus II attempted to bring the troops back to order. For the moment, we note that based on his handling of one of the army groups, serious doubts must be cast over Germanicus' temperament and his ability to respond to crisis. The commander of one of the army groups was Quintus Junius Blaesus, the uncle of Sejanus. Sejanus, in his capacity as prefect of the praetorian guard (*praefectus praetorio*), accompanied Drusus II on this mission.⁸⁶ Both appointments suggest a strong connection between the family of Sejanus and the imperial house.

Following the suppression of the mutinies, Germanicus and Drusus II continued to campaign. This should not be interpreted as an example of paired succession, because Augustus' will had been explicit: Germanicus and his line were to take precedence over Drusus II. The inclusion of Germanicus' line suggests that Augustus had put plans in place for successive generations. Germanicus' forthcoming term as consul, which he would share with the Caesar in 18 CE, is further evidence of his primacy. Tiberius only ever served as consul during his reign with his leading deputy. Germanicus' primacy was made clear when Tiberius sent him to the east in 19 CE. Tiberius asked the senate to grant his leading deputy *imperium proconsulare maius* over the eastern provinces.⁸⁷ He also removed the governor of Syria and appointed as his replacement Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso, who was to cause Germanicus much trouble during his assignment.

⁸⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 1.24; Dio Cass., 57.19.6.

⁸⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 2.43.

Germanicus' appointment to the east was not a typical provincial assignment. It followed in the tradition of Agrippa, Tiberius himself and Gaius Caesar to the extent that Germanicus was to control an entire region rather than a single province. Such an extraordinary command not only demonstrated Germanicus' position as Tiberius' leading political deputy but also allowed Germanicus to hone his diplomatic skills and develop yet more administrative experience. However, Germanicus' assignment would ultimately prove fatal, creating issues for the plans that Augustus had established to perpetuate the principate. It should be noted that this is not a particular 'model' of succession, but rather represents application of precedents from Tiberius' own career.

1.8 The Ascendancy of Drusus II and the Rise of Sejanus

The response to Germanicus' death in 19 CE was to conduct a trial in the senate, which resulted in a senatorial decree. This document has survived in an inscription and has led to extensive modern discussion.⁸⁸ The importance of the Decree in terms of the succession is the open acknowledgement that Drusus II would succeed Tiberius. Pragmatism dictated that the succession be realigned, from Germanicus and his line to Drusus II. What is not clear is whether Drusus II *and his line* were to succeed, or whether he was simply to be a placeholder for one of Germanicus' sons. This uncertainty around the succession, specifically the lack of advancement of Germanicus' sons after the death of Drusus II, which created a void, will be central to our examination of Tiberius' vague and seemingly inert succession plans.

During the same period, Sejanus' career was accelerating. We first hear of him as a companion to Gaius Caesar on his eastern mission of 1 BCE. Tacitus reports that Sejanus' father, Strabo,

⁸⁸ As a sample, see Seager, *Tiberius*, 48-61.; Cynthia Damon, "The Trial of Cn. Piso in Tacitus' Annals and the 'Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre': New Light on Narrative Technique," *The American Journal of Philology* 120, no. 1 (1999).; D. S. Potter and Cynthia Damon, "The 'Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre'," *ibid.*

had been appointed as prefect of the guard by Augustus and had been among the first to swear loyalty to Tiberius. Sejanus became his father's colleague in 14 CE, and Dio adds that when Strabo became prefect of Egypt, Sejanus assumed complete control of the guard.⁸⁹ He was sent with Drusus II to quell the mutinies of 14 CE. It was not until after the death of Germanicus that Sejanus' ascendancy began in earnest and it was the political void after the death Drusus II that marks the truly rapid rise of Sejanus.

The Decree containing the verdict in the trial surrounding the death of Germanicus is dated 10 December 20 CE. The consular elections for the following year had already taken place: Drusus II was to be consul, with Tiberius as his colleague. This is the second example of Tiberius sharing the consulship with his leading deputy. This will become central to our examination of Sejanus' position in 31 CE. The previous example was in 18 CE with Germanicus. Drusus II's position in the state was confirmed by the Decree's explicit statement that he was to succeed Tiberius, augmented by a forthcoming consulship with the Caesar as his colleague.

Drusus II's position as leading political deputy was put beyond all doubt the next year when Tiberius asked for *imperium proconsulare* and *tribunicia potestas* for his son.⁹⁰ We have seen that these powers, granted previously to Agrippa and then Tiberius, were used to demarcate the leading political deputy by conferring legal equality with the *princeps* himself. Tiberius remained in the same uncertain position as his father in that he could not openly designate a successor but only indicate his preferences indirectly by using the same mechanics of succession as had Augustus.

⁸⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.7.2; Dio Cass., 57.19.6.

⁹⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 3.56. On sections 3.56–59 on this event, see Beth Severy, "Family and State in the Early Imperial Monarchy: The Senatus Consultum de Pisone Patre, Tabula Siarensis, and Tabula Hebana," *Classical Philology* 95, no. 3 (2000). For a discussion of the date of the grant, see A.J. Woodman and R.H. Martin, eds., *The Annals of Tacitus Book 3* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 413–29.

1.9 The Years 23–29 CE: The Ascendancy of Sejanus

The years 23 CE and following are highly complex, and the task of reconstruction and interpretation of events is made even more difficult by the vague and fragmentary nature of the sources. Tacitus' narrative for the years 29–31 CE, including Sejanus' fall, is lost. We are thus reliant on Suetonius and the epitomes of Dio, a fact that presents its own set of difficulties. We should consider these limitations when examining events. It is in 23 CE that Sejanus becomes the focus of the ancient writers, and modern scholars have advanced many theories about what Sejanus hoped to achieve.⁹¹ However, as we have seen with Augustus' approach to the succession, complex issues over many years are unlikely to be explained by monolithic models. Sejanus' career after 23 CE is best understood as evolving and pragmatic, whereby his intentions and subsequent actions changed in response to circumstances. Indeed, many of these circumstances are presented as being Sejanus' own creation.

Under the year 23 CE, Tacitus reports an affair between Sejanus and Livilla, the wife of Drusus II. In Chapter 4, this liaison will be examined in detail, including the motives behind the affair and the opinions held by modern scholars. Views range from doubting Tacitus completely because Livilla would not have relinquished her position as wife of the future Caesar for Sejanus, to Seager's suggestion that Livilla was acting in the future interests of her children.⁹²

⁹¹ The corpus on Sejanus is considerable. Consider the following non-exhaustive list of works: Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*; Seager, *Tiberius*; D.C.A. Shotter, ed. *Tacitus Annals IV* (Aris and Philips Ltd, 1989); Ann Boddington, "Sejanus. Whose Conspiracy?," *The American Journal of Philology* 84, no. 1 (1963); Anthony Birley and Nicholas Sekunda, *Sejanus : His Fall / Anthony Birley* ([s.l.] The Foundation for the Development of Gdansk University for the Department of Archaeology Gdansk University, 2007.); R. Syme, "Seianus on the Aventine," *Hermes* 84, no. 3 (1956); Edward Champlin, "Seianus Augustus," *Chiron* 42 (2012); Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*; H. W. Bird, "L. Aelius Sejanus: further observations," *Latomus* 28 (1970); "L. Aelius Sejanus and His Political Significance," *Latomus* 28 (1969); Christopher J. Tuplin, "The False Drusus of A.D. 31 and the Fall of Sejanus," *ibid.* 46, no. 4 (1987); D. C. A. Shotter, "The Fall of Sejanus: Two Problems," *Classical Philology* 69, no. 1 (1974); Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*; Freeman Adams, "The Consular Brothers of Sejanus," *The American Journal of Philology* 76, no. 1 (1955); A. J. Woodman and Ronald H. Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, Cambridge Greek and Latin classics. (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁹² Seager, *Tiberius*, 154.

Tacitus notes that, even at this early stage in his ascendancy, Sejanus enjoyed great influence over Tiberius, which caused conflict between Sejanus and Drusus II. Drusus II could not tolerate a rival, and according to Tacitus, he resented Sejanus' closeness to Tiberius, and asked how long it would be until the 'outsider' was called a colleague.⁹³ Even allowing for Tacitus' tendency to overstate, this incident does illustrate Sejanus' influence, at least as perceived by Drusus II. Tacitus also notes Sejanus' courting of the senate with offices and provinces for his clients.⁹⁴ Sejanus was building a network of adherents and acting in the role of patron in the patron–client relationship, which placed his beneficiaries under an obligation to him. Sejanus would later use the favours thus accrued to further his future efforts.

The details of Drusus II's career and death will be dealt with in Chapter 4. The sources allege intrigue in his death, with the suggestion that Sejanus was involved. Whatever the details about Drusus II's death, Tiberius had lost his leading political deputy, and some form of political response was required.⁹⁵ Tacitus reports that Tiberius asked for the sons of Germanicus to be brought into the senate chamber and commended to the care of the *patres* (senators). We recall here that Augustus had commended Germanicus to the care of the senate in 12 CE.⁹⁶ The difference in Tiberius' reign is that there was no established leading political deputy to whom the senate could be commended as they had been to Tiberius in 12 CE.

Despite Tiberius commending Germanicus' children to the care of the senate, there was no coherent plan for the future of the regime following the death of Drusus II. As we will see in Chapter 4, the careers of the boys were form over substance. In addition, the youthfulness of Nero and Drusus III left Tiberius without a leading deputy of relevant age and experience. This

⁹³ Tac., *Ann.* 4.7.

⁹⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 4.2.

⁹⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 4.7–12; Dio Cass., 57.22.1–4. For an analysis of Tacitus' account of Drusus' death, see Seager, *Tiberius*, 154–8.

⁹⁶ Dio Cass., 56.26.1.

lack of experience and ability made it possible for a man of proven loyalty such as Sejanus to capitalise on the situation, and capitalise he did.

In the years 24–26 CE, a series of incidents led to a complete breakdown in relations between Tiberius and Germanicus' widow, Agrippina. The conflict centred on the clash between Tiberius' unwillingness to advance the young boys prematurely and Agrippina's sense of entitlement around her sons' futures. These incidents, as well as Sejanus' alleged role in creating and exploiting these events, will be examined in Chapter 4. Sejanus exploited the tension to inflame Tiberius' already suspicious nature. Under the guise of protecting Tiberius and the state from an alleged threat, Sejanus initiated prosecutions, first against the friends and associates of Germanicus and, ultimately in 28 CE, against the family of Germanicus. The degree of Sejanus' influence is demonstrated by the fact that he was able to convince his adherents to attack a wing of the imperial house. In addition, Tiberius did not resist these prosecutions. Some modern scholars, following Tacitus, believe the cases that went to trial were a response to a conspiracy in furtherance of the interests of Germanicus' line, centred on Nero and Drusus III's political advancement.⁹⁷ The prosecutions were designed to undermine Agrippina's support base. These trials will be dealt with in Chapter 4.

Sejanus' approach to furthering his career and influence, to this point, had involved acting against perceived threats to Tiberius. In 25 CE, Sejanus attempted to forge a personal connection to the Caesar by asking for permission to marry Drusus II's widow, Livilla. Sejanus' letter and Tiberius' response will be discussed in Chapter 4. Tiberius' response caused Sejanus to attack Germanicus' family directly. Modern scholars, including Levick and Seager, cover

⁹⁷ S. J. V. Malloch, "Who Were the Rudes Nepotes at Tacitus, Ann. 4.8.3?," *The Classical Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2001). See also Robert Samuel Rogers, "The Conspiracy of Agrippina," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 62 (1931). Robert Samuel Rogers, *Criminal trials and criminal legislation under Tiberius*, Philological monographs, pub by the American Philological Association no VI (Middletown, Conn.: American Philological Assoc., 1935). Robert Samuel Rogers, "A Tacitean Pattern in Narrating Treason-Trials," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 83 (1952).

this issue in some detail, and we will examine the motivations for, and implications of, Sejanus' request in due course.

Relations between Tiberius and Agrippina were already tense over Germanicus' death. The prosecutions that Sejanus and his agents undertook worsened this relationship. Tacitus presents Agrippina as ruled by her emotions and prone to rash outbursts, particularly towards Tiberius. She is also presented as believing that it was Tiberius' intention to deny her children what she considered their rightful positions in the succession. Relations between them deteriorated to the point where there was a complete loss of trust. The role of Sejanus in this loss of trust will be investigated in Chapter 4. The two wings of the imperial house were in conflict, and Sejanus worked to exploit this chaos for his own ends. He also cultivated and manipulated Tiberius' longstanding disaffection with public life.⁹⁸

Tiberius had been contemplating leaving Rome for some time. There was precedent for this: Tiberius' retirement to Rhodes in 6 BCE and his more recent absence from the city during his shared consulship with Drusus II in 21 CE. The Caesar departed the city in 26 CE and eventually left the mainland altogether.⁹⁹ Tiberius' departure from the city, and its implications, will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4.¹⁰⁰ For now, two key consequences of his absence are noted. Not only was he even less accessible now than he had been when in Rome, but his tribunician veto, which had to be exercised in person and was the only corrective force over governmental excess, in effect no longer applied. The main consequence of Tiberius' departure was that Sejanus, through his adherents in the city, could greatly influence events because there was no overarching authority.

⁹⁸ See Sec 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8.

⁹⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.57.

¹⁰⁰ In addition to other works, we will consider George W. Houston, "Tiberius on Capri," *Greece & Rome* 32, no. 2 (1985).

Tacitus reports the beginnings of Sejanus' attack on Nero in the same chapter as he documents Sejanus protecting Tiberius from a rockfall, which secured the Caesar's complete trust. Sejanus, growing in confidence, launched a direct attack on Nero. Concerning Sejanus' motivation for moving against Nero, consider Seager's suggestion that Sejanus had acted out of self-preservation in his alleged involvement in Drusus II's death. The same motive could easily account for Sejanus' attack on Nero. If Nero had come to power, the possibility would have existed for what Levick calls 'a clean sweep' of those who had served Tiberius.¹⁰¹ We must also consider the political motivations for Sejanus' attack on Nero. I speculate that, by this point, particularly after the rockfall incident and the implicit trust he had earned from Tiberius, Sejanus was contemplating pursuing power in his own right, which would have necessitated the removal of Germanicus' family from political consideration. For now, despite the Caesar's continued absence, the regime would retain a certain level of stability. However, the sources do note a marked change following the death of Augusta¹⁰² in 29 CE.

1.10 The Last Years of Sejanus

Following his report of the death of Augusta in the year 29 CE, Tacitus notes a discernible change in the character and behaviour of both Tiberius and Sejanus.¹⁰³ Soon after Augusta's death, a letter from Tiberius denouncing Agrippina and Nero was read in the senate. The accusations against Nero were moral rather than political. Such accusations were not possible against Agrippina, so Tiberius rebuked her arrogance and self-important attitude. Nero and Agrippina were banished, but the timeline of events is a subject of considerable debate.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Tac., *Ann.* 5.3; Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 161.

¹⁰² A title assumed by Tiberius' mother, Livia, following Augustus' death.

¹⁰³ Tac., *Ann.* 5.1.

¹⁰⁴ For a bibliography on this issue, see Lindsay, *Suetonius Caligula*, 69.

Modern scholars have interpreted Nero's fate in various ways, with Marsh believing that if Tiberius were already suspicious of Sejanus and wished to use Nero as a foil against him, this gave Sejanus a motive to attack the young man.¹⁰⁵ There is limited evidence to support this idea. Ann Boddington offers the suggestion that, if this were the case, Tiberius would surely have taken measures to protect Nero, which he did not.¹⁰⁶ The Caesar believed that Nero, connected as he was to the circle around Agrippina, was a threat; however, it is likely that Sejanus was the source for that belief.

Nero's removal meant that his brother, Drusus III, became the heir presumptive to Tiberius. Drusus III also suffered at the hands of Sejanus, which left Caligula as both the sole surviving son of Germanicus and the heir to Tiberius. It is at this point that the text of Tacitus breaks off, and we are thus reliant on Dio and Suetonius. Dio's text is preserved in epitome, which involves out-of-context and ambiguous quotations. Even so, Dio is the fullest narrative source and hence the best we have. A major modern treatment of Sejanus' last years is Jonathan Edmondson's commentary on selections of Dio's text for the years 29–31 CE.¹⁰⁷

From the year 29 CE, Sejanus was linked with Tiberius in public displays, including statuary and religious sacraments, what Edmondson calls 'imperial ritual under the principate'.¹⁰⁸ Such public and direct links with the Caesar were typically reserved for members of the imperial family. This is an indication of just how important Sejanus was in those years. However, as esteemed as Sejanus was, Fagan is surely correct that Sejanus remained completely reliant on Tiberius' favour for his position.¹⁰⁹ If Sejanus were ever to lose that favour, his position would be untenable.

¹⁰⁵ Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, 194.

¹⁰⁶ Boddington, "Sejanus: Whose Conspiracy?," 9.

¹⁰⁷ Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁰⁹ See Fagan, "The Roman Imperial Succession under The Julio-Claudians, 23BC-AD69," 61. John Nicols, "Antonia and Sejanus," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 24, no. 1 (1975).

For reasons that remain obscure, Tiberius began to grow suspicious of Sejanus. This issue will be examined in detail in Chapter 4. For now, we focus on Sejanus' term as consul in 31 CE, with Tiberius as his colleague. The importance of this term of office cannot be overstated: as already noted, during his reign, Tiberius only ever held the consulship with his leading political deputy. This has led Champlin to suggest that Sejanus was 'the junior colleague and thus, insofar as the role existed, the heir apparent of the *princeps*'.¹¹⁰ From Tiberius' point of view, Sejanus was a man of proven loyalty and ability who was now a part of the imperial family. He had proven his worth to the regime and to Tiberius personally as his assistant, and he was rewarded for his service. This issue will be revisited in detail in Chapter 4, but, on the basis that it was the powers a man held that defined his political position, the idea that Sejanus was, at one point, considered a colleague and potential successor by Tiberius is worth examining.

The principate had brought stability to the Roman world following a century of civil war. In that period, competing oligarchs had proven themselves incapable of governing a Mediterranean-wide empire, which resulted in a series of protracted civil wars and internal conflict. Augustus' rule had reinstated stability. However, because autocracy was anathema to Roman political sensibilities, Augustus could not openly designate a successor. Indeed, if the legalities were strictly followed, at Augustus' death the principate should have lapsed. This would surely have led to the return of civil war as competing aristocrats, or, more likely, members of Augustus' own family, tried to install themselves as new *principes*.

We have seen that directly indicating a successor was politically dangerous. However, it was also legally impossible, since the powers and titles that constituted the position had been voted to Augustus personally by the senate and people, and thus could not be bequeathed. If stability

¹¹⁰ Champlin, "Seianus Augustus," 374.

were to be maintained, it would require a less direct approach to indicate who would continue the system.

Modern scholars have applied various ideas to the marriages, adoptions and advancements of imperial family members, including monarchy and its corollary, regency and paired succession. However, as we have seen, many of these ideas run into problems when set against the facts. The application of modern conditions to the ancient world distorts the facts and often results in the data being manipulated to fit the model. Schemes such as regency and paired succession are rigid; they do not allow for flexibility and adaptation to circumstances. Recent models have become increasingly fluid, and one example of this is Fagan's 'pool of princes', which will be examined in Chapter 2 in support of the contention that Augustus' approach to the issue of succession was entirely ad hoc.

Indeed, circumstances proved the single greatest influence on Augustus' and Tiberius' efforts to perpetuate the principate. Augustus developed, and Tiberius continued, the mechanics of succession—political and social indicators that a man was the leading political deputy. We have seen that Augustus' two chief powers, *tribunicia potestas* and *imperium proconsulare*, were bestowed upon carefully selected leading political deputies to indirectly indicate a potential successor. Future chapters will examine in detail Augustus' succession plans, and then those of Tiberius, such as they were. This examination will provide the background to, and context of, Sejanus' career, information that we will use to investigate whether Sejanus' career and the careers of previous leading political deputies shared the same elements.

Augustus, and later Tiberius, in their attempts to perpetuate the principate, engaged in a series of highly complex manoeuvres involving marriage, adoption and political advancement of members of their direct and extended family. We must remember that, due to circumstances, Tiberius did not have as many options as Augustus. Tiberius' disinterest in governing,

particularly after the death of his son Drusus II, led to a paralysing inertia and political indecision. This in turn created a void, and it was this void that Sejanus exploited during his ascendancy.

Chapter 2: The Succession to Augustus

This chapter follows the framework outlined in Chapter 1 for Augustus' reign but provides greater detail. It posits that, rather than following a structured plan for the perpetuation of his power, Augustus took an ad hoc approach. This typically involved Augustus reacting to circumstances in the political moves he made to continue the stability that his victory at Actium had brought to the Roman state. This chapter will examine in detail Augustus' attempts to facilitate the transfer of power to one of his own blood, and suggest that despite this desire, Augustus was a political pragmatist.

Augustus' final victory at Actium placed him unquestionably at the head of the Roman world. He was, as Caesar the Dictator had been before him, the unchallenged master of Rome. However, Caesar, for all his brilliance, had lacked the political vision to see a long-term solution to the problems of the Republic. He was content to be consul every year or Dictator for ten years. He did not attempt to formulate his position in any sustainable way. Augustus would surely have seen the fate of Caesar as an object lesson in how not to conduct autocratic statecraft at Rome.

The apparent genius of Augustus' political Settlements, beginning in 27 BCE, allowed him to solve the problems he had inherited from the late Republic. Prior to examining the succession, it is first necessary to consider the position that Augustus formed for himself, itself a long-debated topic. An examination of Augustus' evolving position will allow us to define the position itself as well as what would become the mechanics of succession.

2.1 The First Constitutional Settlement: 27–23 BCE

On 13 January 27 BCE, Augustus entered the senate. In a lengthy speech, he returned dominion of the Republic to the senate and people, and retired to private life.¹¹¹ His own account of this event in the *Res Gestae* is worthy of consideration. The text reads:

*In consulatu sexto et septimo, postquam bella civilia exstinxeram, per consensum universorum potitus rerum omnium, rem publicam ex mea potestate in senatus populique Romani arbitrium transtuli. Quo pro merito meo senatus consulto Augustus appellatus sum.*¹¹²

During consulships six and seven that I held, after I had extinguished the civil wars, at a time when through general consensus I was in control of all affairs, I transferred the public business from my power to the dominion of the senate and Roman people. For this service of mine, I was named Augustus by senatorial decree.

This account of what happened in January 27 BCE is factually accurate, but it omits some rather important details. In his account, Augustus focuses on the power he relinquished rather than on what he received in the aftermath of his ‘retirement’, as well he might have. The precise meaning of Augustus’ claim that he ‘restored the public business from my power to the dominion of the senate and people of Rome’ has been subject to much debate.¹¹³ This statement does not reflect the reality of the situation, as the aftermath will show.

¹¹¹ Dio’s version of the speech, doubtless at least in part his own creation, is found in Dio. Cass., 53.3–10.

¹¹² *RG* 34.1.

¹¹³ For a discussion of this passage, see William Turpin, “Res Gestae 34.1 and the Settlement of 27 B. C.,” *The Classical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1994).

The *Res Gestae* is, of course, a political document, and this explains Augustus' omissions. Dio provides more detail of the actual Settlement, and his account more accurately reflects its true nature. He writes:

lo&gw| me\n o3pwj h000000000000000000000000000000(me\n gerousi/a
a)dew~j ta_ ka&llista th~j a)rxh~j karpw|~to, au)to_j de\ tou&j te po&nouj kai\
tou_j kindu&nouj e1xh|, e1rgw| de\ i3na e0pi\ th|~ profa&sei tau&th|
e0kei=noi me\n kai\ a1oploi kai\ a1maxoi w}sin, au)to_j de\ dh_ mo&noj kai\
o3pla e1xh| kai\ stratiw&taj tre/fh.¹¹⁴

On the one hand, his [Augustus'] apparent motive was that the senate might enjoy the finest part of the empire, while he took on the burdens and challenges, but his true motive was that through this arrangement they would be unarmed and ill-equipped, and he alone would maintain arms and soldiers.

Dio presents first what may be termed the 'official version' of events, the version that reflects best on Augustus. He was to administer those less safe areas of the empire while the senate ran the prosperous provinces. Dio then gives what he views as Augustus' *true* motives: through his administration of those regions that required a military presence, Augustus would retain control over the vast majority of the troops. This was to serve as the first, and ultimate, pillar of Augustus' authority.

Dio insists that, to appear less monarchical, Augustus assumed control of those provinces assigned to him for ten years only.¹¹⁵ The impermanent nature of Augustus' control is important

¹¹⁴ Dio Cass., 53.12.3.

¹¹⁵ th_n me\n ou}n h(gemoni/an tou&tw| tw|~ tro&pw| kai\ para_ th~j gerousi/aj tou~ te dh&mou e0bebaiw&sato, boulhqeiv de\ dh_ kai\ w4j dhmotiko&j tij eivnai do&cai, th_n me\n fronti/da th&n te prostasi/an tw~n koinw~n pa~san w(j kai\ e0pimelei/aj tino_j deome/nwn u(pede/cato.” Dio Cass., 53.13.1.

to bear in mind when considering the concept of succession. Given that his own powers were only temporary, even if, in the future, he would ask that they be assigned to others, it necessarily followed that these grants too could only be temporary. These temporary grants of power disguised the permanent nature of Augustus' position, and the details have received much attention from modern scholars.¹¹⁶ Augustus' position and powers changed over time and continued to be subject to renewal. In 27 BCE, Rome was still in the reconstruction period of the immediate post-Actium world. The concepts of the principate and of succession in particular are out of place in this period.

The major figure close to Augustus in the post-Actium period was Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa. This man, whom Tacitus describes as born in obscurity, a fine soldier and (Augustus') ally in victory (*ignobilem loco, bonum militia victoriae socium*), was a contemporary of Augustus and one of his oldest friends.¹¹⁷ They had navigated the complex world that existed after the Ides of March, with Augustus handling the politics and Agrippa the armies. Tacitus says that Augustus raised Agrippa to two successive consulships (*geminatis consulatibus extulit*).¹¹⁸ Agrippa's importance to the regime is not to be underestimated.

Concerning Augustus' powers, Dio outlines the basic facts, but a lack of clarity prevails. The following passage describes the political and military position of Augustus and indeed of the *principes* down to Dio's day. Even though minor modifications were made, Dio's description does contain the essential premise of the position as established by Augustus. Dio writes that Augustus assumed all the power of the people and senate (το& te tou~ dh&mou kai\ to_ th~j

¹¹⁶ For a sample of the debate, see the following non-exhaustive list: Eck, *The Age of Augustus*; B. W. J. G. Wilson and M. G. L. Cooley, *The Age of Augustus*, Lactor (London, England: London Association of Classical Teachers, 2003); Goodyear, Woodman, and Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book 1.1-54*; Miller, *Annals, Book I*; Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History 53-55.9*; Klaus Bringmann, *Augustus*, [2nd ed., Gestalten der Antike (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012)]; Levick, *Augustus : Image and Substance*; Everitt, *Augustus : The Life of Rome's First Emperor*; Gruen, "Augustus and The Making of The Principate."; G. E. F. Chilver, "Augustus and the Roman Constitution 1939-50," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 1, no. 3 (1950); Richard J. A. Talbert, "Augustus and the Senate," *Greece & Rome* 31, no. 1 (1984); Shotter, *Augustus Caesar*.

¹¹⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 1.4.

¹¹⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 1.4. For details of Agrippa's consulship, see Dio Cass., 53.1.

gerousi/aj kra&toj pa~n).¹¹⁹ The essential nature of the Caesar's position is contained in Dio's comment that

kai\ e0k me\n tou&tw n tw~n o)noma&tw n katalo&gouj te poiei=sqai kai\
xrh&mata a)qroi/zein pole/mouj te a)nairei=sqai kai\ ei0rh&nhn spe/ndesqai,
tou~ te cenikou~ kai\ tou politikou~ a)ei\ kai\ pantaxou~ o(moi/wj a1rxein.¹²⁰

because of these voted titles, the Caesars can gather funds, raise troops, declare war and conclude peace, and rule both foreigners and citizens alike in all places and at all times.

Dio goes on to state that the powers of the Caesars were essentially those formerly bestowed upon the consuls. The change under the principate was that a higher authority now oversaw the actions of the consuls. Even though Dio's description reflects his own day in many of the details, the centrepiece of the Caesar's role in politics is contained in this passage.¹²¹ The events in the years immediately following the Settlement of 27 BCE led to more tensions between Augustus and the *patres*. We begin with his ongoing consulships, and then turn our attention to an event that led to his military authority being defined more explicitly.

The first issue was Augustus' ongoing tenure as consul, which contradicted his protestations about wanting to retire from public life. Levick has undertaken some prosopography on Augustus' colleagues in office, and Augustus' intention to either reward those loyal to him or

¹¹⁹ Dio Cass., 53.17.1.

¹²⁰ Dio Cass., 53.17.5–6.

¹²¹ An example of a later detail that Dio inserted is the issue of the Caesar's ability to declare war and conclude peace—that is, his military power. That this was still an issue in the time of Augustus is illustrated by the *Primus* trial. See Dio Cass., 54.3.2–5.

have his friends in power with him contributed to the tensions with the *patres*.¹²² Augustus' shared consulships with Agrippa, noted above, is a good example of this practice.

Following the 27 BCE Settlement, Augustus toured the provinces. While foreign affairs may have been the pretext, it is more likely that Augustus left the city to give the inhabitants time to adjust to the new political realities. He hoped that any discontent that may have formed because of the Settlement would have dissipated by the time of his return.

The 27 BCE Settlement was the first attempt to define the new order. For now, a certain stability prevailed, but there would be further tension between Augustus and the *patres*. Augustus saw that it would be necessary to perpetuate the principate if stability were to be maintained. His first effort focused on his nephew, Marcellus. Before examining the details of the young man's rise, it is important to examine the useful context and precedent established in Augustus' own early career during the administration of Caesar the Dictator, to which Dio alludes briefly.

Dio writes:

kai\ e1melle kai\ au)to_j dikta&twr e0n a)mfote/roij au)toi=j a1rcein, tou&j te
i9pparxh&sontaj a1llon te/ tina kai\ to_n 0Okta&ouion, kai/per meira&kion
e1ti kai\ to&te o1nta, proexeiri/sato.¹²³

For both years, he [Caesar] himself intended to rule as Dictator, with a certain man and Octavius [Augustus] as masters of the horse, although this latter was but a boy.

¹²² Levick, *Augustus : Image and Substance*, 80.

¹²³ Dio Cass., 43.51.7.

Caesar was set to leave the city and campaign in the east. A sign of his autocracy was his decision to appoint magistrates for two years in advance. Dio states that Caesar appointed a replacement for himself (a useful precedent for the idea of suffect consuls) and left Antony in office. This fact allows us to date this event to 44 BCE. Caesar intended, according to Dio, to be dictator for the next two years, with Augustus and an unnamed man as *magistres equitum*. This was to take place while the dictator was out of the city. Caesar sought to involve his nephew in his administration from an early age. The young Augustus was a mere teenager, as Dio states, and was clearly not of the appropriate age to hold any position of state, much less such a high position in the administration of a dictator. Even if Augustus' role were to be largely ceremonial, Caesar's desire to involve his nephew in politics serves as precedent for Augustus' advancement of Marcellus.

Under the year 24 BCE, Dio reports Augustus' political manoeuvres regarding Marcellus. Tiberius, Augustus' stepson, was also included in these arrangements, but at a lower level of privilege than for Marcellus. Dio writes:

tau~ta me\n a)podhmou~nti e1t' au)tw|~ e0yhfi/sqh, a)fikome/nw| de\ e0j
th_n 9Rw&mhn a1lla tina_ e0pi/ te th|~ swthri/a| kai\ e0pi\ th|~
a)nakomidh|~ au)tou~ e0ge/neto. tw|~ te Marke/llw| bouleu&ein te e0n toi=j
e0strathghko&si kai\ th_n u(patei/an de/ka qa~tton e1tesin h1per
e0neno&misto ai0th~sai, kai\ tw|~ Tiberi/w| pe/nte pro_ e9ka&sthj a)rxh~j
e1tesi.¹²⁴

These things were voted to him [Augustus] in his absence, and upon his return to Rome, others were voted because of his health and recovery. For Marcellus,

¹²⁴ Dio Cass., 53.28.3. The translation offered here differs from that of both Rich and Cary, to the extent that the passive construction (Marcellus was given) is not used, since he is not the subject of the sentence.

he asked the right to deliberate among the praetors and stand for the consulship ten years earlier than was the custom, and for Tiberius he asked five years.

The parallels between Caesar the Dictator and Augustus are not perfect, but we do see an immediate family member being granted career advancement, in both the age at which he first entered public life and his accelerated career path. Despite the parallel between the young Augustus and Marcellus, we need not infer that Augustus intended Marcellus to succeed him, not in the short term at least. Augustus' own position in the state was not yet secure, and his control was largely based on his ongoing terms as consul combined with his command of the soldiers.

In addition to his career advancement, Marcellus was brought even closer to the imperial house (*Domus Augusta*) through his marriage to Augustus' daughter, Julia.¹²⁵ This marriage represents yet another continuation of Republican practice under the Augustan regime. Marriages between members of the elite had long been forged with the intention of creating and solidifying political alliances.¹²⁶ Augustus' use of marriage for political purposes is best understood in this context. Although the principle was the same, the difference with Augustus was that, over time, his use of marriage and eventually adoption came to be about strengthening the Julian clan, which carried political implications. This was necessary because Augustus did not have a son. Here we see Augustus once again adapting established practices for his own purposes.

¹²⁵ tou&j te ga_r ga&mouj th~j te qugatro_j th~j Olouli/aj kai\ tou~ a)delfidou~ tou~ Marke/Ilou mh_ dunhqeiv u(po_ th~j no&sou eOn th|~ 9Rw&mh| to&te poihsai di' e0kei/nou kai\ a)pw_n e9w&rtase. Dio Cass., 53.27.5.

¹²⁶ Examples of this practice include Aemilius Paulus marrying his sons and daughters to members of the elite (Plut., *Vit. Aem.* 5.1–8), Caesar the Dictator marrying his daughter, Julia, to Pompey Magnus to secure the so-called First Triumvirate (Suet., *Iul.* 21), and Augustus (or Octavian as he then was) marrying his sister to Antony to bolster their alliance (Plut., *Vit Ant.* 31.1–3).

At this point in Augustus' reign, the two significant elements in his attempts to establish 'mechanics of succession' were career advancement and marriage into the *Domus Augusta*. His options were quite limited, by both the political climate and the paucity of candidates. Marcellus' marriage to Julia is the first example of Augustus' attempts, through both marriage and adoption, to augment his relationships with those he saw as potential successors for purposes of perpetuating his power. Despite this, there never was an 'office' of *princeps*, and as already noted, the constituent offices, which gave the *princeps* his unique position, were not property subject to inheritance. This remained the case some forty years later when Augustus' will was read. The opening lines of his will made no mention of political office; it referred only to his personal estate.¹²⁷

All that Augustus could bequeath was his personal fortune, which was considerable. Even when Augustus' political position was established with the twin pillars of *tribunicia potestas* and *imperium proconsulare maius*. The fact that these powers were voted to him personally by the senate meant the powers he held were state property. This would also have applied to Marcellus, as it did to Tiberius, Augustus' ultimate successor.

In his preamble to the reign of Tiberius, Tacitus alludes briefly to Augustus' attempts to perpetuate his power. The opening chapters of *Annales* I provide an overview of Roman history, with a focus on the change in governing style, from monarchy to Republic and back to monarchy in all but name under Augustus.¹²⁸ The section relevant to the careers of the politically significant men leading up to the eventual rise to power of Tiberius is translated here in full. The text reads:

¹²⁷ Suet., *Tib.* 23.

¹²⁸ For details and analysis, see Christina Shuttleworth Kraus, "The Tiberian Hexad," in *The Cambridge companion to Tacitus*, ed. A. J. Woodman (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 100.

Ceterum Augustus subsidia dominationi Claudium Marcellum sororis filium admodum adulescentem pontificatu et curuli aedilitate, M. Agrippam ignobilem loco, bonum militia et victoriae socium, geminatis consulatibus extulit, mox defuncto Marcello generum sumpsit; Tiberium Neronem et Claudium Drusum privignos imperatoriis nominibus auxit, integra etiam tum domo sua. nam genitos Agrippa Gaium ac Lucium in familiam Caesarum induxerat, necdum posita puerili praetexta principes iuventutis appellari, destinari consules specie recusantis flagrantissime cupiverat. ut Agrippa vita concessit, Lucium Caesarem euntem ad Hispaniensem exercitus, Gaium remeantem Armenia et vulnere invalidum mors fato propra vel novercae Liviae dolus abstulit, Drusoque pridem extincto Nero solus e privignis erat, illuc cuncta vergere: filius, collega imperii, consors tribuniciae potestatis adsumitur omnisque per exercitus ostentatur, non obscuris, ut antea, matris artibus, sed palam hortatu.¹²⁹

At the same time, Augustus, as reinforcement for his control, raised his sister's son, Claudius Marcellus, who was still a boy, to the pontificate and the curule aedileship. Marcus Agrippa too, born in obscurity but a fine soldier and his [Augustus'] ally in victory, he raised to two successive consulships. When Marcellus died soon after, Augustus accepted Agrippa as his son-in-law. Tiberius Nero and Claudius Drusus, his stepsons, he had honoured with imperial titles, even while the integrity of his own family was intact. For he had admitted into the house of the Caesars, Gaius and Lucius, the sons of Agrippa. Before

¹²⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.3.

they had set aside the garb of childhood, he [Augustus] expressed his most fervent desire, veiled by faux reluctance, that they be styled leaders of the young and consuls designate. When Agrippa departed life, and the boys, Lucius while travelling to our armies in Spain, Gaius ill and wounded returning from Armenia, were carried off by fate, or the guile of their stepmother, Livia, and Drusus was long since dead, [Tiberius] Nero was the sole remaining stepson: on him all things focused. He was adopted as a son, colleague in military power, consort in tribunician power and paraded before all the armies, no longer based on the secret crafts of his mother, but at her open suggestion.

Tacitus' analysis of the events leading up to Tiberius becoming the focus of Augustus' plans is notable for its brevity and simplicity. However, this period was not Tacitus' focus. On Marcellus, he merely notes that Augustus raised him to be one of the priests (*pontifices*) and elevated him to a rank of some importance within the senatorial career path (*cursus honorum*), that of curule aedile. This office, which did not confer any military power, had been used in the Republic to garner public support through the staging of games for the people of Rome (*populus Romanus*). The reasons for Augustus raising Marcellus to this position, if his intention were to gain popularity for his nephew, are not difficult to discern. Tacitus then lists all the men who were prominent in Augustus' attempts to perpetuate the principate. We will return to the careers of these men, including those of Agrippa and Tiberius, in due course.

As we have seen, Marcellus' political rise was accompanied by a strengthening of his personal connection to Augustus through marriage. In 25 BCE, Marcellus was married to Augustus' daughter, Julia. Modern scholars have noted this as the beginning of a pattern, with husbands of Julia being marked out as successors to Augustus.¹³⁰ However, this is an anachronism, where conditions in an hereditary monarchy are applied to the Augustan period. For Augustus at this

¹³⁰ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 416.; Seager, *Tiberius*, 20.

early stage, marriage into his family did not mean ‘the succession’. The significance of this marriage is not its political importance per se, but rather the precedent it set regarding the ‘mechanics of succession’, which Augustus was in the process of formulating. Marcellus’ premature death meant that any plans Augustus may have had for him could not eventuate.

This precedent will be applied to Julia’s other marriages: to Agrippa and then to Tiberius. However, even these marriages did not mean that Agrippa or Tiberius was necessarily to succeed Augustus. It would be this, combined with versions of Augustus’ own powers earned through service to the state that would demarcate them as his colleagues, sufficiently empowered and integrated into the Julian clan—what we may term legitimate power circles in Rome.

Marcellus’ career, despite its brevity, represents Augustus’ first attempt to establish stability for the future. Such a theory is difficult to apply or test because not only was Augustus’ position ill-defined at this early stage but it is also best understood as a series of extraordinary measures put in place in response to the post-Actium crisis. Velleius does note a contemporary rumour that Marcellus was in fact designated as the successor to Augustus.

Velleius writes:

homines ita, si quid accidisset Caesari, successorem potentiae eius arbitrabantur futurum ... ingenuarum virtutum laetusque animi et ingenii fortunaeque, in quam alebatur, capax. ¹³¹

Men said that, if anything should befall Caesar [Augustus], [Marcellus] would be his successor in power ... [he was] possessed of noble characteristics, light

¹³¹ Vell. Pat., 2.93.1.

in disposition and mind, and eminently qualified for the position for which he was being prepared.

Velleius' comment, even though it is contemporary, is infused, like much of his writings, with a pro-regime bias. This explains the flattering description of Marcellus. In terms of Marcellus' future role, the hypotheses of men (*homines*) about what might happen are not trustworthy historical data.

The rise of Marcellus only served to exacerbate the tensions between Augustus and the elite, tensions that had their genesis in Augustus' ongoing terms as consul. Adding to Augustus' political woes were legal issues, particularly the trial of the governor of Macedonia.¹³² Dio reports that Primus, the governor of Macedonia, a public province, was charged under the treason law after making war on a friendly tribe. Primus offered the defence that he was acting under orders either from Augustus or from Marcellus. Dio further reports that Augustus appeared in court, despite not having been summoned, and denied that he had issued such an order.¹³³ This is best understood as Augustus trying to settle the issue to avoid greater trouble. Dio finally notes that more than a few of the judges voted to acquit Primus, which suggests that at least some of them thought his defence was plausible. The date of these events has long been discussed; however, its relevance for our purposes is when it took place vis-a-vis the change in Augustus' legal powers.¹³⁴

¹³² As an aside, it is worth noting that Levick, in her recent *Augustus: Image and Substance*, dates the trial of Primus and the conspiracy of Murena to late 24 BCE. If this is the case, then the conspiracy provoked the settlement of 23 BCE. The other possibility is that the conspiracy dates to 22 BCE, in which case the men saw through the 'settlement' and were provoked into conspiracy. The position adopted here is the latter. See Levick, *Augustus: Image and Substance*, 82.

¹³³ The trial narrative is covered in Dio Cass., 54.3.2–8.

¹³⁴ For discussion of the date, see the following small sample: David Stockton, "Primus and Murena," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 14, no. 1 (1965).; Kathleen M. T. Atkinson, "Constitutional and Legal Aspects of the Trials of Marcus Primus and Varro Murena," *ibid.* 9, no. 4 (1960).; Lawrence J. Daly, "Varro Murena, cos 23 B.C.: ['magistratu motus] est'," *ibid.* 27, no. 1 (1978).; Shelagh Jameson and Shelach Jameson, "22 OR 23?," *ibid.* 18, no. 2 (1969).

Dio reports the trial under the year 22 BCE. However, Dio's date runs into problems in light of the changes to Augustus' legal position in 23 BCE. Given that the incident in question occurred before the settlement of 23 BCE, when Augustus received *imperium proconsulare maius*, the defence offered by Primus was both valid and a serious test of Augustus' true position in the state. The defence that Primus was acting under orders from Augustus seems to have been designed to cause political embarrassment to the *princeps* by implying that Augustus had overstepped his legal authority by interfering in a public province. The fact that the terms of the forthcoming Settlement of 23 BCE addressed this very problem does suggest that the 'Primus incident' was one of its catalysts.

In this same year, both Augustus and Marcellus fell ill, and the latter did not survive. Despite Marcellus' apparent prominence, when Augustus thought that he himself would not survive, it was Agrippa, and not Marcellus, to whom he gave his signet ring.¹³⁵ Some modern scholars have interpreted this as Augustus intending to name Agrippa as his successor.¹³⁶ This is an unnecessary reading of politics into a personal event. The signet ring indicated inheritance of a man's *personal estate* and was not related to politics. Even if Agrippa had inherited Augustus' personal estate, it did not necessarily mean that Agrippa would take over from Augustus.

Augustus may have realised that Marcellus was too young and inexperienced to rule in his own right, or he may have feared that Marcellus and Agrippa would repeat the rivalry that had occurred between himself and Antony after the murder of Caesar the Dictator. There would surely have been resistance if Augustus named someone, or indeed anyone, as his successor. Augustus seems to have realised this possibility and temporarily refrained from making any definitive moves in the direction of the succession. The contemporary poet Horace alludes to Marcellus's career in one of his *Odes*. He talks about Marcellus' fame and then notes the

¹³⁵ Dio Cass., 53.30.

¹³⁶ Seager, *Tiberius*, 15-7., Levick, *Augustus : Image and Substance*, 83.

constellation of the Julii shining brightly.¹³⁷ This implies that Horace saw the principate as an hereditary monarchy, or he at least perceived a system of power centred on the Julian clan (*gens Iulia*).

2.2 The Second Constitutional Settlement: 23–19 BCE

The political climate combined with the tension between the *princeps* and the elite, as well as his recent illness, forced Augustus to rethink not only the nature of his own position but also his plans to perpetuate it. He saw the consulship as a point of contention for the elite, and Dio reports that Augustus ascended the Alban Mount and resigned the consulship (απειπεθὺν ὑπατεύειν ἐν Ἀλβανῷ).¹³⁸ Modern scholars have speculated about Augustus' motives for doing this.

Syme states that Augustus simply 'resolved to refrain from holding the supreme magistracy year by year'.¹³⁹ This simplistic explanation ignores the wider context of discontent within the senate; instead, it presents this decision as the magnanimous Augustus attempting to placate the elite. Augustus saw the decline in the number of ex-consuls (*consulares*) capable of filling posts overseas and sought to address the issue by making the office available to more of the senators. Anthony Everitt posits that Augustus' continual consulships were 'stretching constitutional propriety very thin' and 'blocking off access to one of Rome's two top jobs every year'.¹⁴⁰ This seems reasonable. The period immediately after Actium was a time of post crisis reconstruction, and a firm hand was needed to re-establish and maintain order, as Augustus had done through his ongoing tenure as consul. That time was now at an end. A return to functional and

¹³⁷ *fama Marcelli; micat inter omnis Iulium sidus, uelut inter ignis luna minors*" Hor., *Carm.* 1.12. For discussion of this poem and its portrayal of the succession, see Williams Gordon, "Horace "Odes" i. 12 and the succession to Augustus," *Hermathena*, no. 118 (1974).

¹³⁸ Dio Cass., 53.32.3.

¹³⁹ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 336.

¹⁴⁰ Everitt, *Augustus : The Life of Rome's First Emperor*, 217.

sustainable government no longer based on extraordinary measures was in the interest of both Augustus and the state.

When Augustus resigned the consulship, the *patres*' response was to grant him what were deemed sufficient powers to replace those he had lost. Dio writes:

kai\ dia_ tau~q' h(gerousi/a dh&marxo&n te au)to_n dia_ bi/ou ei]nai
e0yhfi/sato, kai\ xrhmati/zein au)tw|~ peri\ e9no&j tinoj o3pou a2n
e0qelh&sh| kaq' e9ka&sth n boulh&n, ka2n mh_ u(pateu&h|, e1dwke, th&n te
a)rxh_n th_n a)nqu&paton e0saei\ kaqa&pac e1xein w3ste mh&te e0n th|~
e0so&dw| th|~ ei1sw tou~ pwmhri/ou katati/qesqai au)th_n mh&t' au)qij
a)naneou~sqai, kai\ e0n tw|~ u(phko&w| to_ plei=on tw~n e9kastaxo&q
a)rxo&ntwn i0sxu&ein e0pe/treyen.¹⁴¹

And because of this, the senate decided that he [Augustus] was to be tribune for life, and that he should be given the right to bring whichever motion he liked, even when he was not consul. It further decreed that he was to be once and for all time proconsul, such that he should not be required to lay down the power or have it renewed when he crossed the sacred boundary of the city. Finally, he was to have authority in the subject territories greater than that of the governor on the spot.

Augustus' proconsular power was originally geographically bound to the regions assigned to him. In the earlier Dio passage referenced above, Dio mentions Augustus' control over the troops, which surely implies a grant of such power.¹⁴² It is from this point in 23 BCE that

¹⁴¹ Dio Cass., 53.32.5.

¹⁴² Dio Cass., 53.12.3.

Augustus' *imperium proconsulare* was upgraded to be greater (*maius*) vis á vis other governors. This meant that he had superior authority in any province, regardless of whether it was governed by one of his representatives (*legati*) or by a senatorial governor. Dio's comment about Augustus not being required to surrender his power when crossing the sacred boundary of the city (*pomerium*) was, like the grant of *imperium proconsulare* itself, grounded in Republican precedent, specifically the case of Pompeius Magnus in the 50s BCE.¹⁴³

Dio also reports that Augustus was granted tribunician power (*tribunicia potestas*) at this time. As Rich points out, the idea that Augustus actually held the office of tribune is unlikely.¹⁴⁴ The simplest explanation for this is the fact that, as a patrician, Augustus could not hold this position. Even if strict legality and adherence to tradition were occasionally shunned in favour of political expedience, Augustus, with his now conciliatory tone, was unwilling to take on the position but quite willing to accept the powers. Dio describes earlier events that we may interpret as the beginning of a staggered process of acquiring the rights and privileges associated with the tribunate. One example occurred in 36 BCE when, according to Dio, Augustus was granted the right of inviolability (*sacrosanctitas*) of the tribunes and the right to sit on the benches outside the senate-house.¹⁴⁵

Augustus' *tribunicia potestas* granted him what Rich calls 'a formal position in the city of Rome'.¹⁴⁶ Tacitus discusses the later significance of the *tribunicia potestas* for the regime. He writes:

¹⁴³ Dio Cass., 39.39.4; App., *B Civ.* 2.18. The Appian passage describes Pompey sending his lieutenants into the field while he himself would remain in Rome. Dio adds that Pompey would attend to other duties in the city. For these men to be subject to Pompey's orders in the field while he was in Rome, it necessarily follows that Pompey had used, and indeed continued to use, his *imperium proconsulare* inside the city—that is, over the *pomerium*. See also Plut., *Vit Pomp.* 53.1. This situation is an example of what was mentioned above about once a potentiality was realised, it could be used as precedent to legitimate future actions. See sec. 1.1.

¹⁴⁴ Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History* 53-55.9, 169.

¹⁴⁵ Dio Cass., 49.15.5–6. For analysis see Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 49-52 (36-29 B.C.)*.

¹⁴⁶ Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History* 53-55.9.

*Tiberius ... mittit litteras ad senatum quis potestatem tribuniciam Druso petebat. id summi fastigii vocabulum Augustus repperit, ne regis aut dictatoris nomen adsumeret ac tamen appellatione aliqua cetera imperia praemineret. Marcum deinde Agrippam socum eius potestatis, quo defuncto Tiberium Neronem delegit ne successor in incerto foret.*¹⁴⁷

Tiberius ... sent a letter to the senate, which asked for the tribunician power for Drusus. Augustus had devised it for the supreme dignity in order to avoid the titles of king or of dictator but still maintain supremacy over the other officials. He later chose Marcus Agrippa as his colleague in power, and when he died chose Tiberius Nero such that the succession was not in doubt.

In Tacitus' formulation, then, the *tribunicia potestas* was a mask for 'the supreme dignity'—that is, the position of the Caesar. This was the case when the power was first granted to Augustus. As we noted above, when Augustus' powers were renewed in 18 BCE, he requested that similar powers be granted to Agrippa, including the *tribunicia potestas*. This, I would suggest, set the precedent for the use of a grant of such power to demarcate leading political deputies. For full context, we note Agrippa's long service, both to the state and to Augustus personally. The timing of the grant suggests that it was a reward; it was *earned*. Despite this, the granting of this power served a wider political purpose. It allowed Augustus to put in place a man with the ability, and the power, to run the state if he should die.

Following the Settlement of 23 BCE, Augustus displayed his political acumen by leaving the city, as he had done in 27 BCE, while the inhabitants adjusted to the changes. Dio reports that quarrelling broke out over the election of the consuls for 22 BCE.¹⁴⁸ Augustus' response was

¹⁴⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 3.56. Furneaux discusses this passage. See Furneaux, *P. Cornelii Taciti Annalium ab excessu divi Augusti libri = The Annals of Tacitus*, 458-9.

¹⁴⁸ Dio Cass., 54.6.1.

to recall Agrippa, who was on assignment in the east, to supervise the city in his absence. Dio suggests a rather implausible basis for the general's role

e0zh&tei tina_ au)th|~ e0pisth~sai, kai\ e1krine me\n to_n 0Agri/ppan
e0pithdeio&taton e0j tou~to ei]nai. boulhqeij de\ dh_ kai\ a)ci/wma au)tw|~
mei=zon periqei=nai, i3na kai\ e0k tou&tou r(a|~on au)tw~n a1rxh|,
metepe/myato au)to&n, kai\ katanagka&sajth_n gunai=ka, kai/per a)delfidh~n
au)tou~ ou}san, a)palla&canta th|~ 0louli/a| sunoikh~sai.¹⁴⁹

He [Augustus] was seeking someone to keep watch over the city, and he judged Agrippa to be most suitable for this. In order to instil him with a greater dignity, such that he might govern with greater ease, he sent for him, coerced his wife from him, although she was his own [Augustus'] niece, and married him to Julia.

It would be an overstatement to say that Agrippa was married to Julia to strengthen his position as supervisor of the city. The marriage may be better understood as reinforcing Agrippa's connection to Augustus and his family. Based on this connection, and Agrippa's sharing of governance in the past, he would surely have been accepted by the people, even without the marriage to Julia. The marriage to Julia did not *legitimate* Agrippa's role in governing the city, but it did strengthen his position via a direct link to Augustus, along with the associated dignity. During Augustus' previous absence from the city following the first Settlement, he had placed a senator in charge of the city, but this had led to difficulties because the man believed the position to be unconstitutional.¹⁵⁰ Even if the evidence is not clear, I would speculate that Agrippa was fulfilling the role, even if unofficially, of prefect of the city (*praefectus urbi*).

¹⁴⁹ Dio Cass., 54.6.4–5.

¹⁵⁰ For this claim, see Levick, *Augustus : Image and Substance*, 80. For a description of the position and its functions, see Tac., *Ann.* 6.11; Dio Cass., 53.33.3, 54.6.6, 17.2.

Rich suggests that Agrippa's 'supervisory role did not rest on any formal position', and given that Agrippa could not use his military authority (*imperium*) in the city, this is plausible. The marriage, Rich concludes, was a matter of 'dynastic politics'.¹⁵¹ To speak of dynastic politics at this point in the principate's history is an anachronism; however, we cannot ignore the fact that Augustus was integrating Agrippa into his family, as he had with Marcellus. This process would be refined and extended in the forthcoming years. We finally turn to Marsh on Agrippa's marriage to Julia.

Marsh holds the view that Augustus married Agrippa to Julia to prevent disloyalty on the part of the general.¹⁵² Agrippa was the second man in the state; therefore, for Augustus to seek a direct connection with him was quite logical. However, the notion that the marriage was a means of preventing disloyalty seems at odds with the relationship between Augustus and Agrippa. He had been at Augustus' side from the very beginning of his career and had won many of the battles that led to Augustus' supremacy. The two had shared not only the censorship but also two consecutive consulships in 28 and 27 BCE. They were also contemporaries and friends who had formed an invaluable partnership. It is not obvious why Agrippa would attempt to undermine this partnership and possibly place himself in personal danger.

The Settlement of 23 BCE required further modification in 19 BCE, based on the irreconcilable conflict over the consular elections. Dio describes the situation in detail. He writes:

e0peidh& te mhde\n w(molo&gei o3sa te a)po&ntoj au)tou~ stasia&zontej kai\
o3sa paro&ntoj fobou&menoi e1prasson, e0pimelhth&j te tw~n tro&pwn e0j
pe/nte e1th parakhqei\j dh_ e0xeirotanh&qh, kai\ th_n e0cousi/an th_n me\n

¹⁵¹ Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History* 53-55.9, 179.

¹⁵² Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, 33.

tw~n timhtw~n e0j to_n au)to_n xro&non th_n de\ tw~n u(pa&tw n dia_ bi/ou
e1laben, w3ste kai\ tai=j dw&deka r(a&bdoij a)ei\ kai\ pantaxou~ xrh~sqai, kai\
e0n me/sw| tw~n a)ei\ u(pateuo&ntwn e0pi\ tou~ a)rxikou~ di/frou
kaqi/zesqai. yhfisa&menoi de\ tau~ta diorqou~n te pa&nta au)to_n kai\
nomoqetei=n o3sa bou&loito h)ci/oun, kai\ tou&j te no&mouj tou_j
grafhsome/nouj u(p' au)tou~ Au)gou&stouj e0kei=qen h1dh proshgo&reuon,
kai\ e0mmenei=n sfisin o)mo&sai h1qelon.¹⁵³

Their [the senate's] conduct was at total variance: when he [Augustus] was absent, they quarrelled; when he was present, they were frightened. So, he was made, having been invited, supervisor of public morals for five years and granted the power of the censors for the same length of time and the power of the consuls for life, such that he was able to use the twelve *fascēs* always and in all places and sit between the elected consuls on a curule chair. These powers having been voted, they asked if he would set matters right and bring in such laws as he wished. They further decided that any such laws should be called 'his'. They also wanted to swear an oath that they would be willing to abide by them.

Dio's wording makes it clear that the firm hand of Augustus was still needed to maintain order and that the political atmosphere remained tense. This is reasonable, given the conflict that had taken place over recent consular elections. The grant of supervision of public morals for five years gave Augustus powers that were part of the censorial powers, which Dio also mentions. The overlapping of powers in the description is a sign of Dio's confusion, or possibly the state of the text. This passage describes Augustus' acquisition of what was effectively supreme

¹⁵³ Dio Cass., 54.10.5–6.

executive power, since, according to Dio, Augustus was granted a form of consular authority for life.

Precisely what this means is not clear. Translated literally, the text says that Augustus received ‘the power of the consuls for life’. This means either that Augustus received the combined power and authority of both consuls simultaneously or that that he received those powers that accrued to individual consuls. Dio offers a clue, which Anthony J. Marshall elucidates. Dio suggests that Augustus, because of this grant, could use the symbols of authority (*fascēs*) at all times and in all places. In a regular consular year, the *fascēs* alternated monthly between the two incumbents, with supreme executive power resting with the one who held the *fascēs* in a given month.¹⁵⁴ If we read Dio as meaning that Augustus received the combined power of both consuls, Augustus could wield supreme executive power at all times, as his power was not subject to monthly rotation.

However, the grant of consular power for life is questionable. Augustus had resigned the consulship in 23 BCE and received the *tribunicia potestas* in return, thus returning to him the legislative and other powers he had relinquished when he resigned the office of consul. The legislative and veto power of the tribunate rendered consular *imperium* redundant. That said, it might be as simple as mere symbolism. Unlike the tribunate, the holder of consular power possessed *fascēs* and lictors—that is, demonstrable signs of his authority. When he stepped down from the consulship, Augustus gave up these symbols. In terms of appearances, it would have seemed as though Augustus had lost authority.

The subtlety of the *tribunicia potestas*, whereby Augustus maintained the legal privileges of the consulship, including the ability to legislate, summon the senate and veto legislation, was

¹⁵⁴ Anthony J. Marshall, "Symbols and Showmanship in Roman Public Life: The Fasces," *Phoenix* 38, no. 2 (1984): 131-2.

lost on the populace. Augustus' legal position had not changed, but the titles under which he exercised his control had. His attempt to base his new political order on the old system, with subtle alterations, created uncertainty about what this order meant. Augustus saw it as necessary to concentrate effective power in his own hands, and he attempted to mollify the more traditional elements of Roman society by defining his new order in terms of the offices and powers from the old Republic.

The issue of Augustus and consular power may be partially reconciled by the suggestion that he received what we may call 'superior consular power' (*imperium consulare maius*)—that is, a city version of his pre-eminent power in the provinces, once again without actually holding the office. This would have pacified the people (and reassured the senate), because it guaranteed Augustus' guiding hand would be present to maintain order. It would also have given him the kind of overarching authority that would allow him to maintain his position at the head of the state, even if he did not hold the necessary offices.

Dio reports that, in 19 BCE, Agrippa was sent on campaign. Given that Agrippa's powers were renewed the following year in 18 BCE, we may infer that on this campaign he was using the power that had been granted to him in 23 BCE. Dio also states that Agrippa was voted a triumph for his military achievements but that he refused the honour.¹⁵⁵ This incidental detail, along with Lacey's analysis, sheds useful light on Agrippa's position in these years. Lacey suggests that the fact that Agrippa was voted a triumph implies that he was commanding under his own authority (*suis auspiciis*) and was not a deputy of Augustus (*legatus Augusti*). This is supported by Dio's comment that Agrippa sent his legates into Syria, which was indicative of independent *imperium*. These factors suggest that, in terms of military authority, Agrippa was a colleague rather than a subordinate to Augustus.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Dio Cass., 54.11.6–7

¹⁵⁶ Lacey, "Agrippa's Provincia," 130.

We may ask precisely what Augustus' intentions were with this grant of independent military authority to Agrippa and what, if anything, this meant for the future of the regime. Augustus recognised Agrippa's centrality to the principate. For all the appearances of legally defined government, Augustus had, as Cyril Edward Robinson says of Severus, 'come to power by the sword and by the sword alone he held it'.¹⁵⁷ If Augustus had ever lost the loyalty of the soldiers, his regime would have been severely undermined. Agrippa was an important part of maintaining this critical constituency.

2.3 The Ascendancy of Agrippa: 18–13 BCE

Dio's comment about Agrippa refusing the triumph leads into a panegyric on the general, which culminates in a description of Agrippa being granted powers similar to those of Augustus when his powers were renewed in 18 BCE. The section on the grant of the powers is important for our purposes. Dio writes:

prw~ton me\n au)to_j pe/n te th~j prostasi/aj e1th, e0peidh&per o(deke/thj xro&noj e0ch&kwn h~n, prose/qe to tau~ta ga_r Poupli/ou te kai\ Gnai/ou Lentou&lwn u(pateuo&ntwn e0ge/neto, e1peita de\ kai\ tw|~ 0Agri/ppa| a1lla te e0c i1sou ph| e9autw|~ kai\ th_n e0cousi/an th_n dhmarxikh_n e0j to_n au)to_n xro&non e1dwke.¹⁵⁸

The first thing he [Augustus] did was add five years to his term as leader, because the ten-year period [granted in 27 BCE] was soon to expire (these things

¹⁵⁷ Cyril Edward Robinson, *A history of Rome : from 753 B.C. to A.D. 410* (London: Methuen, 1935), 392.

¹⁵⁸ Dio Cass., 54.12.4.

happened when Publius and Gnaeus Lentulus were consuls); he also granted to Agrippa powers almost equal to his own, especially the tribunician power for the same amount of time.

Dio's description of these events, as is typical, omits the political procedure that would have been observed. This leaves the misleading impression that Augustus was the main protagonist of these events. It was surely the case that the *patres* granted Agrippa these powers in 18 BCE, even if they acted at Augustus' behest. Rich suggests that Agrippa's *tribunicia potestas* sufficiently empowered him to take over from Augustus.¹⁵⁹ This, along with the renewal of his *imperium proconsulare*, firmly placed Agrippa in the role of colleague to Augustus.

In 17 BCE, Julia gave birth to Agrippa's second son, Lucius. This event and its aftermath are an inherent part of the future mechanics of succession. Dio writes:

ἐὸς πῖλ' δὲ δὴ [τοῦ] Γαῖου τε Φουρνίου καὶ Γαῖου Σιλανοῦ ὑπατέρων
 υἱοῦ ἀυτοῦ οἱ ὁ Ἀγρίππας ἀνεῖλετο τὸν Λοῦκιον ὀνόμαζε/ντα, καὶ
 αὐτὸν εὐχόμενος (Αὐτοῦ μετα τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τοῦ Γαῖου
 ἐὸς ποιεῖν, μή αὐτὸν ἀποκαλέσῃ ἀνδρῶν ὡς αὐτὸν αὐτὸς ἐπὶ
 διαδοῦναι τὴν ἀρχὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ, ἵνα ἡ τῶν ἐπιβουλευμάτων.¹⁶⁰

When Gaius Furnius and Gaius Silanus were consuls, Agrippa again announced the birth of a son, named Lucius, and Augustus immediately adopted him, along with his brother Gaius, without waiting for them to grow up, and appointed both successors to his rule then and there, such that fewer plots would be formed against him.

¹⁵⁹ Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History* 53-55.9, 189.

¹⁶⁰ Dio Cass., 54.18.1.

This passage shows the impact of Dio's chronological perspective on his account. He lived during the time of the Antonines, where the practice of adopting a successor was well established. Dio was also a contemporary of the Caesar Septimius Severus, who was succeeded by own his natural sons, Caracalla and Geta. Dio is surely reading the conditions of his own time into his description of earlier events. Augustus had gone to great lengths to avoid the appearance of monarchy.¹⁶¹ To adopt two young boys, who were also his grandsons, and appoint them as his successors would have undermined his carefully cultivated persona of first among equals (*primus inter pares*).

Rather than reading anachronistic schemes of monarchy or paired succession into these adoptions, it seems more prudent to follow Carter. He contends that adoption was commonplace among the aristocracy to prevent a clan from dying out. It is thus not necessary to read political significance into adoption, at least in the short term.¹⁶² Once Augustus had adopted the boys, they became members of the *gens Iulia*, the most prominent clan in the state. Augustus was following the pattern that Caesar the Dictator had used with him: the gift of the name Caesar and all the associated benefits. As the principate moved forward, Augustus would eventually come to use adoption as one of the mechanics of succession to preserve his own clan and provide for the stability of the state. Indeed, he seems to have seen these two goals as synonymous.

At this point, Augustus had in his political ambit not only Agrippa and his two sons, but also Tiberius and his brother, Drusus I. The latter were the adult sons of Augustus' wife, Livia, and were in the early stages of their careers. This group of men forms the first example of what

¹⁶¹ For examples of Augustus' attempts to disguise the autocratic nature of his rule, see Dio Cass., 53.13.1, 31.3. We note also the fact that Republican forms remained in place: the senate still met, the consuls, censors, praetors and other officials were elected. The choice of the word 'forms' is deliberate; there was no substance to any of this. Augustus remained in effective control.

¹⁶² Carter, *Divus Augustus*, 184.

Fagan calls the ‘pool of princes’. Fagan rejects the established models of succession, which will be examined later in this section. He suggests that Augustus established a large group of candidates, all at different stage in their careers, from which one, who we may call a leading political deputy, would be chosen. If the chosen leading deputy were later removed from consideration, the next most senior member of the pool would replace him.¹⁶³ This model accounts for the flexibility of the Augustan moves to perpetuate the principate. However, Fagan’s model is not without its potential problems, which will be examined after first considering two other models of succession. Brief definitions and outlines of the issues with these two models will also be provided, and these will be tested against the data as the narrative proceeds.

The first model for consideration is paired succession. This model posits that Augustus sought to establish pairs of rulers across successive generations. What is not clear is whether the pairs would be hierarchical, with a clear senior party, or equal, with no legal distinction between the parties. We must ask if this latter formulation means that both men would succeed Augustus and rule at one and the same time. If only one were to succeed, the fate of his partner is left unexplained, and this could have led to serious political conflict. Given that Augustus placed stability for the state above all other concerns, such a model of succession does seem unlikely.¹⁶⁴

We now turn to the concept of regency. This model, which has its basis in a monarchic system, suggests that an older man of experience would rule temporarily while the intended successor was in his minority.¹⁶⁵ The regent would necessarily require the legal powers to rule. These powers could not be revoked, and some form of overlap would be required during the transition.

¹⁶³ Fagan, "The Roman Imperial Succession under The Julio-Claudians, 23BC-AD69," 18ff.

¹⁶⁴ Suet. *Aug.* 28.2.

¹⁶⁵ As noted in sec. 1.1, given that the Republic had been founded in reaction to monarchy, such a system was not an option for Augustus.

There would also be the possibility that the regent would not voluntarily withdraw, which again could lead to political strife. On these grounds, the regency model seems unlikely.

A noteworthy feature of both models is the potential for bypassed parties, those who did not become Caesar themselves, to cause trouble. This criticism would also appear to apply to the ‘pool of princes’ model. Members of the pool who did not hold the position of leading political deputy could easily have viewed themselves as overlooked. Indeed, the validity of these models is grounded in the assumption that the other parties would always accept the primacy of the leading deputy. An example of this potential problem is the attested rivalry between Tiberius and Gaius Caesar in the last decade of the first century BCE.¹⁶⁶ In Chapter 4, we will see that serious problems also eventuated when Germanicus’ son, Nero, was perceived as having been overlooked for the succession in the 20s CE.

Prior to returning to the narrative, some discussion is needed on the application of these models in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. We start with Fagan’s pool of princes model. Despite the potential for rivalry, the argument does have merit. Augustus, as Diocletian would be in the late third century CE with the tetrarchy, was the senior party and had the eminence (*auctoritas*) to hold the system together. In addition, Augustus was able, through marriage and adoption, to repopulate the pool if fate intervened, which it frequently did. According to this model, the pool during the middle part of Augustus’ reign consisted of Agrippa, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, and the Claudian brothers, Tiberius and Drusus I.

Towards the end of Augustus’ reign, the pool would consist of Drusus I’s son, Germanicus; Agrippa’s surviving son, Agrippa Postumus; Tiberius’ son, Drusus II; and, most importantly, Tiberius himself, who ultimately succeeded Augustus. At the beginning of Tiberius’ reign, Postumus was removed from consideration. This left Germanicus and his young children along

¹⁶⁶ Dio Cass., 55.9.

with Drusus II as members of the pool. This situation, of course, changed dramatically following the death of Germanicus, since Drusus II was left as the sole viable heir. Germanicus' brother, Claudius, who would later become Caesar, was dismissed as a candidate because of perceived deficiencies. In addition, Germanicus' children were not old enough and Drusus II's own children were only just born.¹⁶⁷

Events following the death of Drusus II further complicate the pool of princes model. His death compromised Augustus' forward planning for the succession. Germanicus' children were now the sole surviving heirs nominated in Augustus' will, but age and a lack of political and military experience meant that it would have been difficult to integrate them into the administration in any meaningful way. The final consequence of Drusus II's death was that the pool of potential successors had contracted to an unsustainable level. Tiberius decided, for reasons that remain unclear, not to advance Germanicus' son, Nero, which intensified factional conflict within the imperial house over the succession. Tiberius' lack of a definitive political response to Drusus II's death created a political void that opened up opportunities for Sejanus.

We now turn to how the regency model could have been applied in the early principate. During the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, there were periods in which potential successors were too young to succeed in their own right. According to the regency model, the age of the potential successor necessitated the presence of an older and more experienced man to govern the state temporarily during the successor's minority. Experienced men such as Agrippa and Tiberius could have ruled for Gaius or Lucius Caesar in the reign of Augustus. Similarly, Drusus II could have ruled for Nero or Drusus III following the death of Germanicus in the reign of Tiberius. We have already noted the problems with this model. In Chapter 4, we will see that Sejanus' initial goal may have been to rule as a regent for a young member of the imperial family.

¹⁶⁷ Refer to Appendix 1 – Julio-Claudian Stemmata.

Finally, we turn to the paired succession model. One possible basis for this model may be found in the paired consulships of the Republic, but other possible bases include the partnership between Augustus and Agrippa in the immediate post-Actium world, the simultaneous adoptions of Gaius and Lucius, and the parallel careers (accounting for the age difference) of the young Caesars, Tiberius and Drusus I and, eventually, Germanicus and Drusus II. Fate frequently intervened, which caused many of the proposed pairs to break down, not only in Augustus' reign, but also in that of Tiberius.

Garrett G. Fagan has undertaken a detailed examination of this issue. He suggests that Augustus did not think in terms of co-rulership. According to Fagan, Augustus thought about the possible problems that could result with two men succeeding to a position that was obviously designed for one. Fagan raises issues with this and suggests that if the goal were to guarantee stability, deviating from the fundamental nature of the principate and changing the structure of the system would not achieve this.¹⁶⁸ The evidence shows that the paired succession model was not applied in the Julio-Claudian period.

Parallel advancement (allowing for the age difference) of members of the same generation is not evidence for paired succession. I concede that pairs existed, but any that involved Augustus himself had a clear senior party. This rules out co-equal pairs. The other version of paired succession, the two-tiered model, would have seen the senior party succeed, with the fate of the junior member left unclear. If we are to embrace this two-tiered model, we do not, in fact, have 'pairs' at all, but rather a leading deputy under the ruling Caesar and a future successor. This arrangement became explicit in Tiberius' reign when, due to the terms of Augustus' will, Germanicus and his children were majority second-tier heirs to Augustus' estate, and Drusus II

¹⁶⁸ Fagan, "The Roman Imperial Succession under The Julio-Claudians, 23BC-AD69," 15-16.

was the minority second-tier heir.¹⁶⁹ The hierarchy, even if only implied, in terms of the future succession, is clear: Germanicus and his line were the immediate successors to Tiberius.

Paired succession as a model is undermined both by the presence of an overarching senior party (the ruling Caesar) as well as hierarchies within the prospective 'pairs' of younger successors. Any potential 'pair' involving Augustus should not be considered a pair at all, given his superiority both in *potestas* and *auctoritas*. Even if Agrippa and Tiberius held *imperium proconsulare*, their regions of influence were geographically bound, whereas Augustus' grant was empire-wide. These arrangements cannot be considered co-equal 'pairs'. Even within the proposed pairs of future successors, Gaius was the clear senior party in his so-called pair with his brother Lucius, as was Germanicus with Drusus II. Given that, in one formulation, there are no 'pairs' at all, and in the other model there were hierarchies, paired succession would appear to be a flawed model.

In Tiberius' reign, fate, combined with his own inertia on the succession issue, rendered the paired succession model inoperative.¹⁷⁰ Now that we have briefly examined these models and some of the potential problems surrounding them, we return to the narrative of events and consider how these theoretical models may have worked when set against the facts.

In 17 BCE, Agrippa was sufficiently empowered to take over if anything were to happen to Augustus. This did not make Agrippa the 'heir' but an obvious choice to continue the stability Augustus had achieved. The events in and around 23 and 19 BCE had established the twin pillars of Augustus' position in the state: superior military power in the provinces combined with legislative and veto power in Rome. In addition, Augustus had introduced a partner into the system. This created increased stability because peace in the state was no longer contingent

¹⁶⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 101.

¹⁷⁰ For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Fagan, "The Roman Imperial Succession under The Julio-Claudians, 23BC-AD69," 15-43.

on Augustus' own survival. Finally, for all their extraordinary powers, the partnership of Augustus and Agrippa took its form from the collegial structure of the Republic. This arrangement concealed the true nature of Augustus' rule.

Tiberius and Drusus I were in the early stages of their careers during this time. They proceeded, aside from the privilege of the years, according to the standard path. However, they were overshadowed by the adoption of Gaius and Lucius. Tiberius and Drusus were not blood relatives of Augustus, and this fact would bear a bitter harvest. The situation that existed had seen Agrippa, the father of Gaius and Lucius, share many of Augustus' powers to the extent that Agrippa was sufficiently empowered to take over if anything were to befall Augustus. Through his adoption of Agrippa's children, Augustus had two young boys who could potentially succeed him. If Augustus had ever considered the Claudian boys to be part of the future of the regime, their position had certainly been clouded by the adoption of Gaius and Lucius.

The next matter for consideration is the renewal, in 13 BCE, of Agrippa's powers. Dio describes the situation:

ka)n tou&tw| to_n 0Agri/ppan e0k th~j Suri/aj e0lqo&nta th|~ te dhmarxikh|~
e0cousi/a| au}qij e0j a1lla e1th pe/nte e0mega&lune kai\ e0j th_n Pannoni/an
polemhsei/ousan e0ce/pemye, mei=zon au)tw|~ tw~n e9kastaxo&q i1cw
th~j 0Itali/aj a)rxo&ntwn i0sxu~sai e0pitre/yaj.¹⁷¹

He [Augustus] increased the powers for Agrippa, who had returned from Syria, by granting him the tribunician power again for five years. He sent him into the

¹⁷¹ Dio Cass., 54.28.1.

region of Pannonia, which was ready for war, with more power than the governors outside of Italy typically had.

The renewal of the *tribunicia potestas* confirmed the primacy of Agrippa. In addition, Dio notes that Agrippa was sent to a military zone, though the power he was granted is only briefly alluded to. It is surely the case that he was granted *imperium proconsulare*, possibly even *maius*, given that his power was greater than a typical governor outside Italy. This ambiguity is a useful example of the vague nature of the sources, where many of the details and nuances are presumed and not deemed worthy of explanation or explicit definition.

2.4 The Death of Agrippa and the Rise of Tiberius: 13–6 BCE

Agrippa, however, did not survive. On his return to Campania, he died in March of 12 BCE.¹⁷² The death of his finest general created a serious political problem for Augustus. Dio describes this problem in detail, and his summation of Agrippa and introduction of Tiberius is worth examining since it says a great deal about the attitude of later historians to Tiberius. Dio writes:

w(j d' ou}n o(0Agri/ppaj, o3nper pou di' a)reth_n a)ll' ou) di' a)na&gkhn tina_
h)ga&pa, e0teqnh&kei, kai\ sunergou~ pro_j ta_pra&gmata polu_tw~n a1llwn
kai\ th|~ timh|~ kai\ th|~ duna&mei profe/rontoj, w3ste kai\ e0n kairw|~ kai\
a1neu fqo&nou kai\ e0piboulh~j pa&nta dia&gesqai, e0dei=to, to_n Tibe/rion
kai\ a1kwn prosei/leto: oi9 ga_r e1ggonoi au)tou~ e0n paisi\n e1ti kai\ to&te
h)san. kai\ proapospa&saj kai\ e0kei/nou th_n gunai=ka, kai/toi tou~ te
0Agri/ppou qugate/ra e0c a1llhj tino_j gameth~j ou}san, kai\ te/knon to_me\n

¹⁷² Dio Cass., 54.28.1–5.

h1dh tre/fousan to_de\ e0n gastri\ e1xousan, th&n te Olouli/an oi9 h)ggu&hse
kai\ e0pi\ tou_j Pannoni/ouj au)to_n e0ce/pemye.¹⁷³

Now that Agrippa, whom he [Augustus] loved on account of his moral excellence rather than any blood connection, was dead, Augustus needed to bring forth a colleague in the public business who would surpass all others in fitness and capacity, in order that he might carry out all public business effectively with less intrigue and conspiracy. For this task, he chose Tiberius, but only reluctantly, because his grandsons were still boys. He first, as he had done with Agrippa, compelled Tiberius to divorce his wife, even though she was the daughter of Agrippa from another marriage and was raising one child and expecting another, and then betrothed him to Julia and sent him against the Pannonians.

Dio's description of these events, specifically that Augustus had only chosen Tiberius reluctantly in light of the ages of Gaius and Lucius Caesar, is typical of the literary sources' portrayal of Tiberius in that it downplays his role. He was clearly the second man in the empire after Agrippa's death and had surely earned this role given his military and diplomatic experience. Rich says that Dio is wrong to suggest that Tiberius' betrothal to Julia meant that Tiberius was to take Agrippa's place as Augustus' colleague.¹⁷⁴ There is a degree of truth to this, given that Tiberius was already second man in the state *before* he married Julia, due to his long service. The marriage to Julia brought the man who was already second in the state into Augustus' own family: no longer just a stepson but also now a son-in-law. This is the third example we have seen of Augustus using marriage as part of the evolving mechanics of succession.

¹⁷³ Dio. 54.31.1–2.

¹⁷⁴ Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History* 53–55.9, 209.

Tiberius' marriage to Julia placed him in the role of stepfather to Gaius and Lucius Caesar, but we need not see any political significance in this relationship. I would suggest that, with the death of Agrippa, Augustus reacted by turning to Tiberius, the next most senior and experienced man in the empire, as both his leading political deputy and his son-in-law. In addition, it should be noted that, since Augustus had adopted the boys in 17 BCE, it was he, rather than Julia's husband, who was the youths' primary carer. It is thus unnecessary to read schemes of regency or paired succession into the marriage of Tiberius and Julia. It was simply a pragmatic decision on Augustus' part to turn to the man who was now his most experienced general and diplomat.

Augustus' hopes for the future of his regime seemed secure at this point: Tiberius was his colleague and married to his daughter, and there was a younger generation in Gaius and Lucius Caesar. Tiberius' brother, Drusus I, also had a military and political career and would have been viewed as a potential replacement for his brother, as had Tiberius for Agrippa. Domestic tranquillity was not to last, however. In 9 BCE, Drusus I died.¹⁷⁵ His death made Tiberius indispensable because there was no one who could take his place if the need arose. Tiberius' career proceeded apace, and in 7 BCE, he was elected consul for the second time.¹⁷⁶ The events of that year clarified Tiberius' position in the state. Dio reports that Tiberius celebrated a triumph, which suggests that, like Agrippa before him, Tiberius possessed independent *imperium*.¹⁷⁷ He had surely replaced Agrippa as the pre-eminent active general in the state. This position would become precarious in the future.

Gaius and Lucius Caesar were now beginning to approach the age of majority. Gaius, in particular, was becoming prominent in public life, even before he was of military age.¹⁷⁸ His

¹⁷⁵ Dio Cass., 55.1.4.

¹⁷⁶ Dio Cass., 55.6.5.

¹⁷⁷ Dio describes the events of this year in 55.8.1–7.

¹⁷⁸ Dio Cass., 55.8.3.

increased public profile is demonstrated when we read that he replaced Tiberius, who was in the field at the time, in running a festival in honour of Augustus' return to the city. Such prominence for a boy of his age, even accounting for the fact that he was Augustus' son, shows how much Gaius was being advanced. This may help to explain, or at least provide context for, why the people were attempting to appoint him consul in the year 6 BCE.¹⁷⁹ We will examine this in its proper place, but first let us consider Tiberius' position in the state.¹⁸⁰

The security of Tiberius' position should be assessed in context. For all his powers and prestige, Tiberius was not a direct descendant of Augustus; however, he was clearly the second man in the state. As Gaius and Lucius Caesar came of age, it became evident that they were going to undertake prominent public roles. By 6 BCE, it was clear that they were being advanced far beyond their years. The possibility for rivalry between Tiberius and the young Caesars, and with it serious political trouble, was very real. As we will see in the next section, the situation was defused by a decision that Tiberius made in 6 BCE.

Following his year as consul, Tiberius was invested with *tribunicia potestas* and assigned a command. Dio's comment on this is worth analysing. He writes:

boulhqeij de\ dh_ tro&pon tina_ ma~llon au)tou_j swfroni/sai, tw|~ Tiberi/w|
th&n te e0cousi/an th_n dhmarxikh_n e0j pe/nte e1th e1neime kai\ th_n
0Armeni/an a)llotrioume/nhn.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Dio Cass., 55.9.1–2.

¹⁸⁰ For the issue of Gaius and the consulship, see sec. 2.5.

¹⁸¹ Dio Cass., 55.9.4.

He [Augustus] wished in some way to chasten them [Gaius and Lucius Caesar] more harshly, so he granted *tribunicia potestas* to Tiberius for five years, and assigned him Armenia.

As Swan observes, the idea that Augustus used the conferral of *tribunicia potestas* on Tiberius to bring Gaius and Lucius Caesar ‘to their senses’ trivialises Tiberius’ role in the state.¹⁸² Indeed, this shows Dio’s hostility to Tiberius, since the powers were not a sign of Tiberius’ favour, but rather a means of achieving Augustus’ wider ends of chastising his wayward grandsons. The young Caesars, for all their social prestige, were political and military neophytes. Further, Tiberius’ position had been earned through years of service to the state; it was not an appointment designed to demonstrate primacy in a succession scheme. Finally, it should be remembered that Tiberius was the only possible candidate for such an appointment.

We have noted that Gaius Caesar had taken Tiberius’ place in running a festival during Tiberius’ term as consul. This led to a popular demand that Gaius be elected consul for 5 BCE, the year he was to assume the *toga virilis*. Augustus responded to this development by saying that no circumstance should arise whereby a man younger than the age of twenty should become consul. Swan adds that this was ‘a *recusatio* [refusal] rather than a veto’, which allowed for Gaius to be consul in some future year.¹⁸³

In his own account of his career, Augustus quite naturally presents what Swan calls a ‘sanitized version’ of these events. Augustus writes:

*Filios meos, quos iuvenes mihi eripuit fortuna, Gaium et Lucium Caesares
honoris mei causa senatus populusque Romanus annum quintum et decimum*

¹⁸² Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, 85.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 83-4.

*agentis consules designavit, ut eum magistratum inirent post quinquennium, et ex eo die quo deducti sunt in forum ut interessent consiliis publicis decrevit senatus.*¹⁸⁴

My sons, of whom fortune bereaved me in their youth, Gaius and Lucius Caesar were, in order to honour me, designated consuls by the senate and people of Rome in their fifteenth year that they should hold office after an interval of five years, and that after they had been led into the forum, they should participate in the councils of state.

This version of events, as we may expect, reflects well on Augustus. He himself had not actively insisted that a fifteen-year-old be designated consul. However, it was surely the case that Gaius' advancement, under Augustus' guidance, which had culminated in the young man taking the place of the incumbent consul in a public festival, had encouraged the people to seek this honour for Gaius. Augustus' apparent detachment from this situation is consistent with his attempts to appear less autocratic. Republican political custom dictated strict age requirements for office, and Augustus was mindful of being seen to respect such precedents. However, his actions suggest that this was a façade. Tacitus presents Augustus' reluctance for the boys to be consuls designate at such a young age as disingenuous.¹⁸⁵

Augustus' reluctance for Gaius to be consul at fifteen years of age is the key point. He wanted the boys to be advanced as high as possible as quickly as possible, but he knew that practical politics required him to remain within established custom. If a fifteen-year-old boy had been made consul, even if it had been the will of the people, Augustus could hardly have presented himself as the defender of ancient Roman ways.

¹⁸⁴ *RG* 14.1.

¹⁸⁵ Refer to the text and translation of Tac., *Ann.* 1.3 in sec. 2.1.

Augustus was, as the events post-Actium show, constantly focused on appearances and masking the nature of his rule. To have his adopted son become the youngest ever consul would surely have caused upheaval among the more conservative members of the political class. His own continuing terms in the office had caused political trouble in the late 20s BCE. The issue of the consulship was very sensitive for the elite, and for Augustus to allow his young son to hold the office would only have caused greater trouble. Tacitus' formulation, then, cynical as it is, does reflect Augustus' cautious approach to the advancement of Gaius Caesar. The year 6 BCE also brought an unexpected event, which was to have political consequences far beyond that year.

2.5 Tiberius on Rhodes and the Rise of the Young Caesars: 6 BCE

Tiberius, following his receipt of tribunician and military power in 6 BCE, for reasons that remain subject to debate, left the city and retired to the Greek island of Rhodes. Authors from antiquity to the present day have attempted to rationalise Tiberius' departure in political terms. Due to source textual problems and biases, it is difficult to arrive at a unitary explanation. However, it does seem that Tiberius' departure for Rhodes was a personal decision that carried political ramifications rather than a politically motivated decision. That said, there is little doubt that there were tensions between Tiberius and the young Caesars and that a rivalry did exist.¹⁸⁶ Tiberius' appointment to the eastern command gave him the opportunity, if he so desired, to leave the city under legitimate circumstances. The fact that he chose to retire suggests that weariness with public life, more than any political tensions, motivated his departure. During his retirement, Tiberius retained his powers for the full five years. This demonstrates the permanent nature of such grants of power.

¹⁸⁶ Dio Cass., 55.9.5, 7–8.

Tiberius' motives for his departure are intriguing, and worthy of further study, but for our purposes, the consequences of his decision are more important.¹⁸⁷ Augustus, although not pleased with Tiberius' departure, reacted in his usual fashion by turning, almost certainly earlier than he had originally intended, to the next most senior man in his family, Gaius Caesar.

Following the incident of Gaius Caesar and the consulship, Dio reports that his advancement continued, though Dio's chronology is not clear. Dio says that before Gaius assumed the *toga virilis*, he was made a priest, allowed to attend senate meetings and granted various social privileges of that class.¹⁸⁸ Here, Dio is suggesting that these privileges all occurred in 6 BCE—that is, when Gaius was still a child. Yet, under the year 5 BCE, the year Gaius assumed the *toga virilis*, Dio states that Gaius was introduced into the senate and granted the typical privileges of the sons of aristocrats, which will be discussed later in this section.¹⁸⁹ These two passages seem to reference two separate events, or it is an error in transcription. Consequently, the text poses a problem in relation to the sequence of events.¹⁹⁰ If in fact these are separate events, it shows that Gaius was being granted privileges well beyond his years, even before he was of age, which would indicate Augustus' intent to advance him rapidly.

We have seen that Dio reports the standard introduction into public life for Gaius under the year 5 BCE. Suetonius elucidates the privileges granted after the assumption of the *toga virilis*, privileges that he maintains were available to all senators' sons, not only to members of the house of Augustus. In a chapter about Augustus' generosity, Suetonius deals briefly with the advancement of young men of senatorial rank. He writes:

¹⁸⁷ The sources offer many speculations regarding the reasons for Tiberius' decision. See Suet., *Tib.* 10–13, on which see Lindsay, *Suetonius Tiberius*, 83.; Tac., *Ann.* 1.53. Goodyear, Woodman, and Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book 1.1-54*, 324.; Dio Cass., 55.9.5–8, on which see Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, 86-8.

¹⁸⁸ Dio Cass., 55.9.4.

¹⁸⁹ Compare Dio Cass., 55.9.4 with 55.9.9.

¹⁹⁰ For the state of the text of Books 55–56, see Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, 36-8.

*Liberis senatorum, quo celerius rei p. assuescerent, protinus avirili toga latum clavum induere et curiae interesse. permisit militiamque auspicantibus non tribunatum modo legionum, sed et praefecturas alarum dedit.*¹⁹¹

He [Augustus] permitted the sons of senators, in order that they should become familiar with the public business more quickly, to don the broad purple stripe and attend house meetings as soon as they assumed the *toga virilis*. Also, at the start of their service, he granted to them not merely a tribunate in a legion, but the command of a cavalry squadron as well.

The advancement of Augustus' grandsons after they assumed the *toga virilis* was no different from the advancement offered to the sons of senators. Thus, we need see no special privileges in the social advancement of Gaius Caesar around this time. What *was* unique was Augustus' assumption of the consulship for part of the year 5 BCE when Gaius assumed the *toga virilis*. It was noted in Section 2.2 that Augustus acquired 'the power of the consuls for life', as Dio says.¹⁹² We may ask why it would be necessary for Augustus to hold the actual office again if he already possessed the relevant powers. The answer lies in the suggestion that his final two terms in the office, in 5 BCE, and then in 2 BCE when Lucius Caesar assumed the *toga virilis*, were merely honorific. These consulships were designed, as Swan says, to dignify the occasion.¹⁹³ The lists of consuls (*fasti*) attest to the fact that Augustus was *consul ordinarius* and that replacements (*suffecti*) were appointed part way through the year.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Suet., *Aug.* 38.

¹⁹² Dio Cass., 54.10.5-6.

¹⁹³ Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, 89.

¹⁹⁴ Ehrenberg and Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus & Tiberius*, 38. *Consul ordinarius* refers to the consuls who took office on 1 January and after whom the year was named.

The year 2 BCE would prove to be of great significance for Augustus and his regime. In that year, Augustus served as consul, and his son Lucius assumed the *toga virilis*. The year 2 BCE also saw the honorific title ‘Father of the Country’ (*pater patriae*) conferred on Augustus by the senate. Dio says that Augustus had been addressed by this title previously without a vote, and so this conferral represented the formalisation of what had previously been an ad hoc title.¹⁹⁵ Despite associations drawn between it and the terms ‘father of the family’ (*paterfamilias*) and ‘fatherly power’ (*patria potestas*), the title did not confer any legal power.¹⁹⁶ It was a title that had been held by many Romans, including Caesar the Dictator and Cicero. The title was about *auctoritas* rather than *potestas*. It encapsulated Augustus’ position in the state and represented the pinnacle of his career. However, his joy was not to last. This event was marred by the discovery of his daughter’s adultery, which, among its other consequences, included her exile.

The main consequence of Julia’s exile for our purposes was that Augustus initiated her divorce from Tiberius in his absence. This severed the familial link between Augustus and his stepson. In the year 1 BCE, Tiberius’ powers expired, and pointedly, they were not renewed. Tiberius was now isolated, both geographically and politically. Suetonius reports that Livia had to scramble to obtain the title of ambassador (*legatus*) for Tiberius, to conceal the true nature of the situation.¹⁹⁷ In addition, in 1 BCE, Gaius Caesar, continuing his advancement, was appointed to a command in the east. The main source for these events is Dio, and his text for these years is highly fragmentary.¹⁹⁸ He calls Gaius’ eastern mission ‘training for command’: the dangerous assignments were handed out to others while Gaius observed.¹⁹⁹ It is noteworthy that Sejanus was present on this mission with the young Caesar.

¹⁹⁵ Dio Cass., 55.10.10; cf Suet., *Aug.* 58.1–2; *RG* 35.1.

¹⁹⁶ Contra Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, 103-4.

¹⁹⁷ Suet., *Tib.* 12.1.

¹⁹⁸ Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, 112.

¹⁹⁹ Dio Cass., 55.10.17.

Dio also reports that Gaius was married and granted *imperium proconsulare*. The marriage foreshadows what was to come in the linking of the Julian and Claudian clans. Gaius, a Julian by adoption, was married to Julia Livilla, hereafter identified as Livilla, the daughter of Tiberius' brother, Drusus I. Following Gaius' death in 4 CE, she would be married to Tiberius' son, Drusus II. Augustus used both marriage and adoption to strengthen the relationship between the two clans (*gentes*). It is an anachronism to suggest that Augustus was forming a 'royal family', since intermarriage between prominent families was a long established republican pattern. However, he does seem to have arranged marriages with the view to such unions producing children to strengthen the *gentes*. In a similar way to the adoption of Gaius and Lucius, the political consequences were the *result* of, rather than the motivation for, these marriages.

On his eastern mission, Gaius was wounded during a siege. Despite this, the Romans took the city, and Augustus and Gaius both received a salutation as imperator.²⁰⁰ Dio reports that Gaius' wound became worse, and his testimony is complemented by Velleius, who adds that the young Caesar was mentally as well as physically incapacitated.²⁰¹ This led to Gaius' extraordinary request that he be permitted to relinquish his powers and retire.

Interestingly, Augustus allowed this to happen with the caveat that Gaius return to Italy, after which he could do as he wished.²⁰² Swan suggests that the caveat was to prevent Gaius from being a threat to security if he remained in the east.²⁰³ Like Tiberius after his retirement, Gaius would have retained his *imperium proconsulare* while he remained in the east, whether he was actively campaigning or not. Retaining his *imperium proconsulare* may have exposed Gaius to

²⁰⁰ Dio Cass., 55.10a.7.

²⁰¹ Dio Cass., 55.10a.8; Vell. Pat., 2.102.2–3.

²⁰² Dio Cass., 55.10a.8.

²⁰³ Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56* (9 B.C.-A.D. 14), 133.

personal risk in the region. Augustus not only allowed the retirement (even if he was not pleased) but also went through official channels to make it happen. Dio writes that Augustus conveyed Gaius' wish to the senate and then inserted the caveat.²⁰⁴ Also around this time, Lucius Caesar died on provincial assignment. The withdrawal and eventual death of Gaius, and the death of Lucius, left Augustus once again without a colleague.

Tiberius had returned to the city in 2 CE on the understanding that he would take no further part in public life.²⁰⁵ However, the deaths of Gaius and Lucius forced Augustus to turn, once again, to Tiberius. A more permanent and broader ranging solution to the issue of the future of the regime was required. This led to a series of adoptions and marriages. These events will be examined in detail because they represent the final form that the Augustan succession would take and have implications for the next two generations of the principate.

2.6 The Settlement of 26 June 4 CE

On 26 June 4 CE, Augustus initiated a series of adoptions. Tiberius was compelled to adopt his nephew Germanicus. Augustus then adopted Tiberius and asked the senate to grant Tiberius *tribunicia potestas*. On the same day, Augustus also adopted his sole surviving grandson, Agrippa Postumus.²⁰⁶ Suetonius, in his *Life of Augustus*, *Life of Tiberius* and *Life of Caligula* offers some brief comments about these adoptions. In his *Life of Augustus*, Suetonius outlines the raw facts of the adoptions.²⁰⁷

Tiberius was forced (*coactus [est]*) to adopt Germanicus. This reveals the order in which the adoptions took place. Since an individual had to be legally independent (*sui iuris*) to initiate an

²⁰⁴ Dio Cass., 55.10a.8.

²⁰⁵ Vell. Pat., 2.103.1.

²⁰⁶ Vell. Pat., 2.103.1–3.

²⁰⁷ Suet., *Aug.* 65.1.

adoption, it was necessary for Tiberius to adopt Germanicus before he himself could be adopted by Augustus. The adoption of Agrippa Postumus may be explained by Augustus' unwillingness to alienate his sole surviving grandson and possibly the Julian faction. Postumus' comparatively late adoption may be explained by the fact that, at the time of his birth, the presence of Tiberius, Drusus I, Germanicus, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, and Drusus II meant that Augustus had ample political options.

When Augustus adopted Tiberius, he is reported to have added an extra line to the adoption announcement, which is quoted by Velleius:

*Hoc, rei publicae causa facio.*²⁰⁸

This I do for the sake of the state.

Once again, Augustus was making a pragmatic decision in the interest of the state. The accounts contain anecdotal evidence of Augustus' personal feelings towards Tiberius, and they are not all positive.²⁰⁹ However, Augustus apparently put his personal feelings to one side in his decision to adopt Tiberius. The adoption of Germanicus indicates Augustus' intended future direction for the succession.

In his *Life of Caligula*, Suetonius includes a condensed biography of Germanicus. The most relevant section for our current purposes is found in Chapter 4, where Suetonius comments:

²⁰⁸ Vell. Pat., 2.104.1.

²⁰⁹ Suet., *Tib.* 21.2.

*Quarum virtutum fructum uberrimum tulit, sic probatus et dilectus a suis, ut Augustus — omitto enim necessitudines reliquas — diu cunctatus an sibi successorem destinaret, adoptandum Tiberio dederit.*²¹⁰

He [Germanicus] was deriving the most fruitful benefits of these virtues.²¹¹ He was so esteemed and cherished by his own that Augustus, (I omit the rest of the relatives), having hesitated for a long time about designating him successor to himself, secured his adoption by Tiberius.

The idea that Augustus considered placing Germanicus ahead of Tiberius in his plans to perpetuate his power is doubtful in light of Germanicus' age. Germanicus was merely twenty years old in 4 CE and was, compared with Tiberius, inexperienced in both the political and military spheres. Suetonius is following the theory that Germanicus was Augustus' ultimate intended successor, and Tiberius was merely a means to achieving that end; hence, Augustus compelled Tiberius to adopt the young man. In the historical tradition, this establishes the alleged rivalry between Germanicus and Tiberius, with the latter regularly living in fear that the former would challenge him for power. The main problem with this idea is that, by the time the adoptions occurred in 4 CE, Germanicus' position was secure. He had no need to challenge Tiberius, unless of course he wished to secure immediate power for himself.

In his overview of Augustus' succession plans, Tacitus includes a brief comment on these adoptions. He writes, quoting the text and translation offered in Section 2.1:

²¹⁰ Suet., *Calig.* 4.

²¹¹ Outlined in Suet., *Calig.* 3.

Drusoque pridem extincto Nero solus e privignis erat, illuc cuncta vergere: filius, collega imperii, consors tribuniciae potestatis adsumitur omnisque per exercitus ostentatur, non obscuris, ut antea, matris artibus, sed palam hortatu.

Drusus was long since dead; [Tiberius] Nero was the sole remaining stepson; on him all things focused. He was adopted as son, colleague in military power, consort in tribunician power and paraded before all the armies, no longer based on the secret crafts of his mother but at her open suggestion.

This passage is an example of the negative tradition around Livia and her role in Tiberius' rise to power.²¹² Even when Tiberius was the sole choice for succession, Tacitus still portrays him as having been placed in that role because of Livia's machinations. Both Tacitus and Dio use this technique to deny Tiberius his rightful place in the historical narrative.

Modern scholars have produced a large array of theories to explain this series of adoptions. Some of these theories will now be examined against the critical analysis of the ancient data. We begin with Seager. He posits that, following the death of Gaius Caesar, Augustus had been robbed of both his 'deputy' and his 'successor of the blood', the young man having filled both roles.²¹³ Augustus was therefore forced to rely on Germanicus, to whom he would marry Agrippina the Elder, the daughter of Julia and Agrippa, to perpetuate his bloodline. Seager does acknowledge that Germanicus' age prevented him from ruling in 4 CE. He then applies the regency model to the adoptions of that year. According to Seager, Tiberius had served as guardian for Augustus' intended heir, Gaius Caesar. This pattern was now to be repeated with

²¹² Anthony Barrett, "Tacitus, Livia and the Evil Stepmother " *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 144, no. 2 (2001); Anthony Barrett, *Livia : First Lady of Imperial Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); R.A. Bauman, "Tanaquil-Livia and the Death of Augustus," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 43, no. 2 (1994).

²¹³ Seager, *Tiberius*, 30.

Germanicus. By Seager's reasoning, Augustus adopted Tiberius as a regent for Germanicus and his children.

I would argue that Tiberius, and indeed Germanicus himself, were to rule in their own right and ultimately be succeeded by one of Germanicus' children, who would preserve the direct line of Augustus. Germanicus was married to a direct descendant of Augustus. Therefore, it was Germanicus' *children* in whom Augustus placed his hopes for the succession. The ancient historians have overlooked this (intentionally or otherwise) and placed Germanicus himself in the primary position of intended heir. However, Germanicus was a Claudian by birth because he was the son of Tiberius' brother, Drusus I and Antonia. Germanicus' mother was the daughter of Marc Antony and Octavia, the sister of Augustus. Thus, Germanicus was a distant relative of Augustus. He now became Augustus' grandson as a result of the adoption. This reinforces the idea that Germanicus was, like Tiberius, a means to an end rather than an end unto himself. This continues Augustus' ongoing machinations to achieve, and seeming obsession with having, a blood relative to continue the principate.

Levick identifies Tiberius as 'co-regent as well as heir' to Augustus.²¹⁴ Strictly speaking, the term 'co-regent' is misleading because it suggests that Tiberius and Augustus were ruling together at one and the same time. There is no doubt that Tiberius was Augustus' leading political deputy, colleague in power and heir presumptive, but Augustus remained supreme. It is also true that Tiberius and Postumus had been adopted simultaneously, and as sons of Augustus, they had parallel status, at least in theory. However, there is no suggestion, despite the equal nature of their relationship to Augustus, that Tiberius and Postumus were politically equal.²¹⁵ Postumus had not been granted versions of any of Augustus' legal powers and was not involved in the administration in any way. Both of these facts are to be expected given

²¹⁴ Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 49.

²¹⁵ For recent discussion of Agrippa Postumus and his fate see Tim Jones, "A Deafening Silence: Agrippa Postumus and The Will of Augustus," *Iris: Journal of the Classical Association of Victoria (New Series)* 29 (2016).

Postumus' age. The adoptions were designed to fill the void left by the deaths of Gaius and Lucius Caesar and create stability in the ruling line. Tiberius' adoption is explained by pragmatism—that is, the need for a man of ability and experience as second in command to Augustus.

Postumus was adopted because he was Augustus' sole surviving grandson. This served to balance the Julian and Claudian elements of what Levick calls 'the inner-most circle' and placate the supporters of the descendants of Julia and Agrippa. Levick sees the settlement as conforming to the paired succession scheme, specifically in the second generation of successors. She says that Tiberius' sons, Germanicus and Drusus II, would both expect to receive their share of imperial power when the time came.²¹⁶

In an earlier article, Levick goes into greater detail, focusing on Drusus II. The adoptions were designed, she says, 'not to replace Drusus with Germanicus, but to make Germanicus the equal of Drusus'.²¹⁷ She later identifies Drusus II as 'co-heir with Germanicus'²¹⁸, a reference purely to the fact the two men were equal in their relationship to Tiberius. Augustus' will explicitly contradicts any notion that Germanicus and Drusus II were equal in terms of the succession, since Germanicus is identified as the second-tier majority heir, while Drusus II is the second-tier minority heir.²¹⁹ The hierarchy between the two men is clear.

In an article on these adoptions, R. A. Birch comments that Tiberius was not compelled (or, I would argue, not allowed) to remarry as part of the Settlement. It is true, as Birch points out,

²¹⁶ Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 50.

²¹⁷ Levick, "Drusus Caesar and the Adoptions of A.D. 4," *Latomus* 25, no. 2 (1966): 232.

²¹⁸ Levick, "Drusus Caesar," *ibid.*, 233.

²¹⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 101.2, *Tib* 23, Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.

that another descendant of Tiberius would only have complicated matters for the future.²²⁰ Linked to this is the matter of whom Tiberius would have married if Augustus had wished him to marry at all. Had Tiberius been married to a politically connected woman, this would doubtless have caused consternation among the Julians. Conversely, had he been married to a politically unconnected woman, this would have alienated the Claudians and been considered beneath the dignity of a son of Augustus. It was therefore in the interests of all concerned that Tiberius not remarry.

Birch also comments that the adoptions contained 'internal balance' between the descendants of Augustus and those of Livia, challenging the view that the adoptions represented the eclipse of Augustus' descendants in favour of those of Livia.²²¹ In practical terms, as a consequence of Tiberius' political dominance in Augustus' last years, this was true. However, even after the disgrace and exile of Julia the Younger and Agrippa Postumus, Agrippina the Elder was 'still available to provide continuity for the other side'.²²² Agrippina's marriage to Germanicus, a Claudian with distant Julian blood, would ensure the direct line. Therefore, even if the descendants of Livia appeared to be in a powerful position in 4 CE, the *gens Iulia* was by no means to be discounted: this supposed ascendancy of the Claudians, even if dictated by practicalities, had ultimately taken place on Augustus' terms and for his own ends.

Corbett, in his article on Augustus' succession policy, sees Germanicus' adoption in a slightly different light.²²³ He sets it in the context of the position of Tiberius' son, Drusus II. Augustus' preference for the Julian line meant that he would have chosen Germanicus over Drusus II as successor to Tiberius, given that he was looking to the next generation to preserve his own bloodline. This explains Drusus II's apparent exclusion from the process. Corbett suggests that

²²⁰ R. A. Birch, "The Settlement of 26 June AD 4 and Its Aftermath," *The Classical Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1981): 444.

²²¹ Birch, "The Settlement," 444.

²²² Birch, "The Settlement," Birch, "The Settlement of 26 June AD 4 and Its Aftermath," 444-5.

²²³ Corbett, "The Succession Policy of Augustus," 88.

undue importance has been placed on the fact that Germanicus was adopted by Augustus, whereas Drusus II was not: he did not *need* to be adopted. As the natural son of Tiberius, Drusus II became Augustus' adopted grandson. According to Corbett, this placed both Germanicus and Drusus II 'under the immediate protection of Tiberius'. Germanicus' centrality to Augustus' plans for the future of the regime is made clear by his marriage to Agrippina, Augustus' granddaughter. Lindsay says that this marriage was 'a product' of the adoptions.²²⁴

It is true that *anyone* who married Agrippina and thereby preserved the Julian line would have met Augustus' requirements, so we may ask why Germanicus in particular was chosen. He was a relative of Tiberius and thereby a descendant of Livia, which allowed Augustus to achieve his goals of perpetuating the Julian line without offending the Claudians. The most obvious way to do this was to include both the Julian and Claudian lines. Gruen agrees with this assessment, suggesting that the adoptions took place in the way that they did in order not to leave any member of either family disgruntled. It was not in Augustus' interest to alienate any member of his own or Livia's family. This was done, as Gruen says, to promote unity and prevent factions forming within Augustus' household.²²⁵ This theme of unity within the imperial house leads Gruen to an intriguing reinterpretation of the opening lines of Augustus' will, which will be examined in Chapter 3.

Syme is surely correct when he says that Augustus' adoption of Tiberius was forced by circumstances. Tiberius being compelled to adopt Germanicus is explained in terms of Augustus preserving his own bloodline. This is the clearest indication of Syme's opinion that the principate was not only a monarchy but also a hereditary monarchy with power to pass to a Julian. This necessarily excluded the possibility that Drusus II would succeed Tiberius. Syme

²²⁴ Lindsay, *Suetonius Caligula*, 61.

²²⁵ Gruen, "*Augustus and The Making of The Principate*," 48. This view is also adopted by Lindsay Powell, *Germanicus: The Magnificent Life and Mysterious Death of Rome's most Popular General* (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Military, 2013), 19.

views this as Tiberius being ‘cheated’ out of passing power on to his biological son.²²⁶ The idea seems to be that Tiberius should have had the right to be succeeded by Drusus II. This is a function of Syme’s monarchy model, except that the focus has shifted from the Julian to the Claudian line. The idea of Tiberius being ‘cheated’, then, refers to Augustus robbing him of this right by compelling him to adopt Germanicus, whose purpose, in Syme’s own words, was to continue ‘the descent of the municipal Octavii’.²²⁷

Eck notes Germanicus’ family connection to Augustus. He posits that the incorporation of Germanicus into the succession arrangements was Augustus attempting to resolve the long-term succession issue on his own terms by ensuring the continuation of the Julian line.²²⁸ Germanicus was a Claudian; however, he also had a distant connection to Augustus through Augustus’ sister, Octavia. It was Augustus’ hope, then, that the marriage between Agrippina, his granddaughter, and Germanicus, a grandson of Livia, would produce children who would be direct descendants of both Augustus and Livia.

Tiberius’ position following these adoptions reflected many of the mechanisms that Augustus had used in his ad hoc approach to dealing with the succession. Agrippa, too, had possessed both *tribunicia potestas* and *imperium proconsulare*, but he had not been adopted by Augustus. Gaius and Lucius, for their provincial assignments, had possessed some military power, and they were Augustus’ sons, but they did not possess the *tribunicia potestas*. The combination of legal equality with Augustus *and* status as his son sets Tiberius apart from his predecessors.

The principate also became more openly hereditary after 4 CE. The adoptions had indicated the future direction of the principate. Tiberius was clearly Augustus’ leading deputy, and now he was Augustus’ son and personal heir. In a similar fashion, Germanicus was Tiberius’ son and

²²⁶ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 431.

²²⁷ Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 431.

²²⁸ Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, 157.

personal heir. The political implications of these personal adoptions were not made explicit until Augustus' will was read in 14 CE. His ultimate goal was to be succeeded by a Julian. These adoptions meant that, in Tiberius, Germanicus and Germanicus' children, three successive generations were now all Julians. We may ask why so many successive generations were being put in place. The earlier adoption of Gaius and Lucius had been but a single generation. Fate had intervened in the past, and Augustus was implementing contingency plans.

2.7 The Last Years of Augustus: 4–14 CE

The narrative for the next ten years up to Augustus' death is not central for our purposes; however, two events do require our attention: the banishment of Agrippa Postumus in 7 CE and Germanicus' consulship in 12 CE.

Agrippa Postumus had suffered a traumatic life, which had affected him greatly and manifested in inappropriate behaviour. Augustus was not able to convince his grandson to change his behaviour, and thus had him exiled in 7 CE.²²⁹ This removed one of the potential heirs from consideration. However, Postumus' complete lack of advancement, despite his adoption, surely suggests that he was never considered a potential heir. The exile may have been for his protection, but it was his fate to suffer a violent death soon after Augustus died, which will be examined briefly in Chapter 3.

The other incident from this decade that requires our attention is the advancement of Germanicus, culminating in his first consulship in 12 CE. Dio reports Germanicus' term in office as uneventful. However, one incident requires some discussion. Augustus sent a letter to the senate, wherein he commended Germanicus to the *patres*, and, in turn, the senate itself to

²²⁹ For discussion of Postumus' fate and his death, see my recent article in the journal *Iris*. Jones, "A Deafening Silence: Agrippa Postumus and The Will of Augustus."

Tiberius.²³⁰ Augustus was making his intentions for the future of the regime clear. He was linking the future heir, Germanicus, to the governing apparatus, and linking that to his chosen heir, Tiberius. Dedicating leading members of the imperial house to the senate will occur again again in Tiberius' reign, when, in response to the death of Drusus II, Tiberius commended Nero and Drusus III to the chamber, in accordance with Augustan precedent.

Thus, when Augustus died in 14 CE, he had, through the Settlement of 4 CE, established his regime on a secure footing and put in place contingency plans for three generations. He had been caught in a paradox; his victory at Actium and subsequent administration, for all its contradictions and internal problems, had brought stability to the Roman world. It was natural for Augustus to want that stability to continue. Through various techniques of political manipulation, he had created a unique position for himself that was intensely personal in nature: the powers and offices had been voted to him personally. The principate that Augustus created was without precedent. Granted, it did consist of a series of precedents grounded in the old Republic. However, Augustus had manipulated the system and established a position for himself that was at once part of the Republic and separate from it. How could such a personal position be perpetuated?

The continuity and order Augustus craved could only be ensured if someone were to assume his position upon his death. However, the powers granted to Augustus were a unique combination. They were state property and could not be bequeathed. Herein lay the paradox. The post-Actium order needed to be maintained, but it was imperative that Augustus not openly designate a successor lest he appear overtly autocratic. The latter had cost Caesar the Dictator his life. That said, Eck is correct when he says that Augustus became obsessed with being succeeded by a Julian.

²³⁰ Dio Cass., 56.26.2.

Augustus' attempts to perpetuate his rule, much like the system itself, evolved as he reacted to circumstances. His plans were frequently disrupted when chosen colleagues died or, in the case of Tiberius, retired from public life. This, along with the fact that the political class at Rome, at this point at least, would not tolerate succession, prevented Augustus from taking a coherent and structured approach to the issue. Thus, in the area of succession, Augustus was far more limited in what he was able to do. Like any other nobleman, Augustus was expected to facilitate the continued prominence of his family. His own rise had been facilitated by the power of the name Caesar. This explains Augustus' attempts to populate, in various ways, the house of Caesar. His family came to represent an amalgamation of members of many *gentes* through marriage and adoption, but it primarily represented Julians and Claudians.

Augustus' family became more than just a noble family. It was the pre-eminent family in the state. Members of that family had experienced enhanced political careers. However, this does not change the fact that Augustus could not legally designate a successor, which he ultimately did not do, formally at least. Instead, he made sure that his preferred successor was not only personally connected to him but also sufficiently empowered to take his place.

Throughout his rule, Augustus made many changes to the existing social and political structures of the state (*res publica*). The system, after a century of chaos and civil war, was fractured and needed stability to be restored. Augustus achieved this, but the system was permanently changed. For all of Augustus' claims to have restored the state, the 'classic' Roman Republic was long dead. This new system was an extraordinary magistracy and, if the legalities were strictly followed, should have lapsed on Augustus' death. Without doubt, this would have led back to civil war, and Augustus could not allow that to happen. To that end, he established both a position for himself and a role for his family in the state. His single greatest challenge was the continuation of the stability that his rule had brought. Since direct appointment of a successor was not possible, Augustus worked within established Roman social precedent—that

is, marriage and adoption—as well as the principate itself, specifically the powers voted to him, to establish what we have termed the mechanics of succession.

Through analysis of both the ancient accounts and some modern literature, we have arrived at the suggestion that circumstances prevented Augustus from implementing and holding to any coherent plan to perpetuate his power until 4 CE. Augustus' will stated that Tiberius was its main beneficiary. This, together with the powers already held by Tiberius, saw him replace Augustus as *princeps* upon the death of his father.

This chapter has provided contextual framework for an examination of Tiberius' reign and his succession arrangements. Augustus had, through the adoptions of 4 CE, set in place a further two generations beyond Tiberius. This stability in the imperial house—what Tacitus later called the 'plenitude of Caesars'—possibly created complacency on the part of Tiberius in terms of the succession to himself. However, once all candidates of the appropriate age had been removed from consideration, and confusion about the succession had been created, then and only then did the possibility exist for a connected and loyal outsider to enter calculations. This uncertainty around the succession created conditions that made possible the rise of Sejanus.

Chapter 3: The Succession to Tiberius

Chapter 2 dealt with the complex issue of the succession to Augustus. In that chapter, it was suggested that, rather than having any predetermined and structured plan, Augustus pursued an ad hoc solution to the conundrum of securing the future of the principate. In this, he had not been entirely successful. Augustus' initial moves to perpetuate his power created consternation within his inner circle and the wider elite.²³¹ The *princeps*, wary of any potential negative reaction, temporarily retreated from securing the future of the state and focused instead on bolstering his position. Despite the chaos that cruel fate (*atrox fortuna*) had wrought on his plans, by the adoptions of 4 CE, Augustus had secured a personal heir in Tiberius, and, as we will see when we examine his will in Section 3.2, established the regime for successive generations. However, Tiberius' accession would not be without its own set of controversies.

That chapter also provided background for an analysis of the succession question in Tiberius' reign. A central theme of this chapter will be the careers of Germanicus and Drusus II, as well as their untimely deaths. Examination of these men's careers will allow us to define the mechanics of succession in Tiberius' reign and consider how these mechanics evolved from those that Augustus had put in place. This chapter will also provide context for our consideration of Sejanus' career.

Prior to our examination of Tiberius' succession arrangements (such as they were), we must first establish him in power. We need not examine Augustus' death itself, since our focus is the aftermath. The sources present Tiberius as being reluctant to assume sole control of the empire.²³² However, political succession was a unique situation for which there was no official

²³¹ Suet., *Aug.* 66.3.

²³² Tac., *Ann.* 1.8, 11–13, on which see Goodyear, Woodman, and Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book 1.1-54*, 169-89. Suet. *Tib.* 24, on which see Lindsay, *Suetonius Tiberius*, 108. See also Dio Cass., 57.2.1–7.

protocol. The confusion around Tiberius' official rise to power was exacerbated by a lack of precedent and by the hesitancy of a senate accustomed to acting at the behest of a higher authority.

For all the official uncertainty, Augustus had given the strongest possible indication for what should happen after his death. Tiberius had been in effective control of the state for some years due to Augustus' infirmity and advanced years. A consequence of Augustus allowing Tiberius to gradually assume effective control was that the senate became accustomed to working with Tiberius. There should not have been an issue surrounding Tiberius' accession, but his reign did not begin in a particularly auspicious manner.

3.1 The Aftermath of the Death of Augustus

Tacitus opens his account of Tiberius' principate with the comment that the first deed of the new principate was the murder of Agrippa Postumus (*primum facinus novi principatus fuit Postumi Agrippae caedes*).²³³ The historian uses this crime to set the tone for the rest of Tiberius' principate; it was the first of many crimes to follow.²³⁴ The death of Postumus was never investigated, and Tiberius did not raise the subject in the senate. Tacitus says that Tiberius tried to deflect suspicion away from himself by citing a directive from Augustus. This order was said to have stated that Postumus should be killed once Augustus had died.

Tacitus rejects this idea, correctly pointing out that Augustus had never ordered any of his wayward children or grandchildren killed.²³⁵ He may have, as Tacitus says, deemed the murder of Postumus necessary to ensure the stability of the principate. Both Tacitus and Suetonius

²³³ Tac., *Ann.* 1.6.

²³⁴ This line is comparable to the opening lines of Book XIII about Nero's principate.

²³⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 1.6.

suggest that the imperial house was involved in Postumus' death, and they present conflicting possibilities. Tacitus alone offers a definitive judgement, which reflects his bias towards Tiberius and Livia. He writes:

*propius vero Tiberium ac Liviam, illum metu, hanc novercalibus odiis, suspecti et invisi iuvenis caedem festinavisse.*²³⁶

I believe it likely that Tiberius and Livia, him through fear, her through a stepmother's hatred, hastened the slaughter of a suspected and resented youth.

Tacitus presents Postumus as a threat to Tiberius, and this is used to explain the young man's elimination. Whatever we may think about the alleged motives of Tiberius, Livia, Augustus or some combination thereof, suspicion could be cast on any one of them. Postumus was, in short, a problem. However, there are several issues with this line of reasoning.

Postumus, despite his status as a son of Augustus (*filius Augusti*), possessed none of the powers that Tiberius did. His age in 4 CE had prevented such equality. In addition, Postumus had been in exile for eight years by the time Tiberius came to power. Even if Augustus had considered restoring Postumus to favour as some sources allege, such favour would not have changed his position in the state.²³⁷ That said, a restoration would have generated anxiety in Tiberius' circle, especially if Postumus were backed by soldiers, as Suetonius suggests was attempted at one point.²³⁸ In addition, Tacitus uses the restoration, or threatened restoration, of a natural descendant to displace the clear heir as an imperial leitmotif. A second example of this is found in Claudius' death scene.²³⁹

²³⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 1.6.

²³⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 1.5; Dio Cass., 56.30.1–2.

²³⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 19. See Carter, *Divus Augustus*, 112–3.

²³⁹ Compare Tac., *Ann.* 1.5 with 12.68.

Dio does not describe the death of Agrippa Postumus until Book LVII, since the end of Book LVI is centred on the death and deification of Augustus. Dio would not have seen it as appropriate to tarnish such an occasion by describing a murder. Rather, he uses the murder as an illustration of Tiberius' character. After initially blaming Tiberius for Postumus' death, Dio reports that Tiberius denied complicity but did not punish the perpetrators. This could imply that Tiberius knew who had murdered the boy, or was personally involved, but sought to cover up the crime. Dio then reports that Tiberius encouraged people to create their own versions of events, which Dio recounts, including that Livia was responsible.²⁴⁰ This account shows not only Tiberius' personal hypocrisy but also the incompetence of his government. This is consistent with Dio's general portrayal of Tiberius as secretive, untrustworthy and sinister.

The fate of Agrippa Postumus has generated many theories among modern scholars.²⁴¹ These theories often involve complex analysis of legal minutiae that are beyond the scope of this research. However, the controversy surrounding the murder and status of Agrippa Postumus certainly reflected poorly on the beginning of Tiberius' reign.

3.2 Augustus' Will

Tacitus writes that Tiberius was uncertain in nothing except in his dealings with the senate (*nusquam cunctabundus nisi cum in senatu loqueretur*).²⁴² These events will be examined in more detail in Section 3.3 but for now it suffices to note that the first session in the chamber after the death of Augustus, where it must have been assumed that Tiberius would be confirmed

²⁴⁰ Dio Cass., 57.3.5–6.

²⁴¹ Walter Allen, Jr., "The Death of Agrippa Postumus," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 78 (1947).; Edward Champlin, "The Testament of Augustus," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie Neue Folge* 132, no. Bd., H.2 (1989).; R. H. Martin, "Tacitus and the Death of Augustus," *The Classical Quarterly* 5, no. 1/2 (1955).

²⁴² Tac., *Ann.* 1.7.

as the new *princeps*, did not go well. The only business that Tiberius permitted to be discussed concerned the reading of Augustus' will and his funeral.²⁴³ Tacitus' description of the will is brief, but Suetonius provides many details.

Suetonius describes Augustus' will as creating multiple tiers of heirs. In the first tier, Tiberius was named majority heir, entitled to two-thirds of the estate, and Livia was the minority heir, entitled to the remaining one-third.²⁴⁴ The second-tier heirs were Germanicus and his sons, in the majority, and Drusus II, in the minority. Second-tier heirs are defined as those who would inherit if, for any reason, the first-tier heirs could not or would not accept their inheritance within the requisite timeframe. The terms of the will also confirmed the framework of the *Domus Augusta* initiated by the adoptions of 4 CE. This can be inferred from the second-tier heirs. Germanicus and his sons, rather than Drusus II, were in the majority position should Tiberius default. Tiberius would have been expected to appoint Germanicus as his own majority heir. That said, the crucial point of Augustus' will for our purposes at this point is the fact that Tiberius was named as the chief heir to Augustus' personal estate.

Champlin has undertaken a detailed study of Augustus' will. After outlining what he suggests are the basic structural requirements for a Roman will, Champlin discusses the details of Augustus' will itself. He dedicates quite a deal of attention to what he calls 'the notorious opening words of the will'.²⁴⁵ The words are quoted by Suetonius:

*Quoniam atrox fortuna Gaium et Lucium filios mihi eripuit, Tiberius Caesar mihi ex parte dimidia et sextante heres esto.*²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Tac., *Ann.* 1.8.

²⁴⁴ Suet., *Aug.* 101.2; Tac., *Ann.* 1.8.

²⁴⁵ Champlin, "The Testament of Augustus," 156.

²⁴⁶ Suet., *Tib.* 23.

Since cruel fate has ripped my sons Gaius and Lucius from me, Tiberius Caesar shall be the heir to my estate for two-thirds.

Champlin questions Augustus' motives in making this statement. Tiberius was, as Champlin points out, the obvious heir. Despite this, he also suggests that *atrox fortuna* could be blamed not only for the loss of the young Caesars but also for forcing the choice of Tiberius on Augustus.²⁴⁷ Given that the latter was a consequence of the former, the suggestion is not entirely unreasonable.

Champlin further notes an easily overlooked nuance in the opening line of Augustus' will. Gaius and Lucius are identified as sons (*filios*), but Tiberius is not referred to as a son (*filium*). This raises the issue of Augustus' disposition to Tiberius since he was 'just as much his [Augustus'] adopted son'.²⁴⁸ Champlin cites other wills where the heir and the relation of the testator to the heir are explicitly defined. He suggests that the effect of those opening words, ringing out around the chamber, must have been 'shattering' for Tiberius. The words used in wills were carefully chosen, and thus they reflected precisely what the testator intended to say. It would initially appear as though Augustus' contempt for Tiberius was thinly veiled indeed. This is especially poignant since these words are not from a later, biased source, such as Tacitus or Dio, but written in Augustus' own hand. Even if we are inclined not to see an active dislike for Tiberius in the opening words, it is not difficult to recognise that Augustus was expressing his anguish at the deaths of his preferred heirs, Gaius and Lucius Caesar.

Gruen offers a different interpretation. He reads the statement, often seen as a slight against Tiberius, as Augustus issuing 'an indirect appeal to those who had placed their hopes in Gaius and Lucius to rally around Tiberius'.²⁴⁹ The point of this statement was to unify the Julian and

²⁴⁷ Champlin, "The Testament of Augustus," 157.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. *ibid.*, 158.

²⁴⁹ Gruen, "Augustus and The Making of The Principate," 48.

Claudian factions around Tiberius. He was a useful central figure because he was, by birth, a Claudian and, by adoption, a Julian. Therefore, according to Gruen, we need not necessarily read this statement as a slight against Tiberius.

Champlin's point about Gaius and Lucius being identified as *filios* whereas Tiberius was not referred to as *filium* is well taken, but Tiberius is explicitly identified as Caesar, while Gaius and Lucius are not. We may see here yet another example of what Birch calls 'internal balance', where Tiberius is identified as Caesar but not son, and Gaius and Lucius are identified as sons but not Caesars.²⁵⁰ The use of the term 'Caesar' in reference to Tiberius identifies him explicitly as a member of Augustus' family, which carried clear political implications. Finally, in the will, Tiberius was granted the title 'Augustus', which conveyed Augustus' wish that Tiberius inherit both his estate and his position in the state. Tiberius did not accept the title until it was voted by the senate.²⁵¹

3.3 Tiberius the Politician

The early days of Tiberius' reign are complex and worthy of detailed scrutiny. We start with an overview of the facts, expressed in Tacitus' compressed style, from Chapter 7 of Book I.

Following his report of the death of Agrippa Postumus, Tacitus turns his focus to the city. After berating the senators and equites for their servility, Tacitus writes:

Sex. Pompeius et Sex. Appuleius consules primi in verba Tiberii Caesaris iuravere, apudque eos Seius Strabo et C. Turranius, ille praetoriarum cohortium

²⁵⁰ R. A. Birch, "The Settlement of 26 June AD 4 and its Aftermath," *The Classical Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1981), 444.

²⁵¹ Dio Cass., 57.2–3.

*praefectus, hic annonae; mox senatus milesque et populus. Nam Tiberius cuncta per consules incipiebat, tamquam vetere re publica et ambiguus imperandi: ne edictum quidem, quo patres in curiam vocabat, nisi tribuniciae potestatis praescriptione posuit sub Augusto acceptae. verba edicti fuere pauca et sensu permodesto: de honoribus parentis consulturum, neque abscedere a corpore, idque unum ex publicis muneribus usurpare. sed defuncto Augusto signum praetoriis cohortibus ut imperator dederat; excubiae, arma, cetera aulae; miles in forum, miles in curiam comitabatur. litteras ad exercitus tamquam adepto principatu misit, nusquam cunctabundus nisi cum in senatu loqueretur.*²⁵²

Sextus Pompeius and Sextus Apuleius, the consuls, were the first to swear the oaths to Tiberius Caesar, and in their presence Seius Strabo and Gaius Turranius, the first prefect of the praetorian cohorts, the second of the corn supply. Soon the senate, the soldiers and the people followed. However, Tiberius was initiating all things through the consuls, as if in a Republic, and he was uncertain about ruling. Even in the edict by which he had summoned the fathers to the senate-house, he employed nothing except the tribunician power that he had received under Augustus. The words of the edict were brief and of a modest tone, stating that he would only raise the issue of honours for his father, whose body he was not leaving. This was the only public duty he would assume. However, since Augustus' death, he [Tiberius] had issued the watchword to the praetorian cohorts as commander-in-chief. He had sentries, armed guards and the other trappings of a court. Soldiers accompanied him to the forum [and] to the senate-house. He sent letters to the army as though he had obtained the principate, and was hesitant in nothing except when speaking with the senate.

²⁵² Tac. Ann. 1.7.

This passage describes events immediately after the death of Augustus but *before* the first meeting of the senate. Oaths of allegiance to Tiberius were taken first by the incumbent consuls and then by the prefects of the guard and the corn supply. Tiberius' reappointment of these men is grounded not only in the suggestion that his *imperium* was valid inside the city but also in the fact that these positions lapsed on the death of Augustus. Following the administering of these oaths, the senate, the soldiers and the people followed. These events suggest that Tiberius was master of Rome, with many important officials gathering to swear allegiance to him. He appeared to be in control.

Despite this, Tacitus begins to create an impression of doubt around Tiberius by juxtaposing his use of personal authority with his use of the consuls to initiate matters. Tacitus creates a sense of illegitimacy around Tiberius' actions when he says that the new Caesar referenced only his *tribunicia potestas* in his edict to summon the senate. What this means is not clear, since it was well within Tiberius' prerogative to summon the senate under this power.

Initially, there is a disconnect between Tiberius' rhetoric and the reality of the situation. Tacitus has him use an unassuming tone and eschew further public duty beyond instituting honours for Augustus, and then proceeds to describe Tiberius' use of his *imperium*. Tiberius had, Tacitus writes, issued watchwords to the praetorian guard as commander-in-chief; he had sentries and armed guards and what Tacitus calls the trappings of a court. Tiberius was accompanied to both the forum and the curia by soldiers. Finally, Tacitus says that Tiberius sent dispatches to the army as though he had obtained the principate. This, it must be said, he seemingly had done. These uses of his *imperium* were entirely legitimate, and again, they suggest that Tiberius' *imperium* was valid inside the city, yet Tacitus has cast doubt over them. Tiberius was exercising both his *imperium* and his *tribunicia potestas* in entirely legitimate ways, and yet Tacitus still decries his actions. Tiberius' only area of indecision, according to Tacitus, was in

his dealings with the senate. Tacitus has retrofitted later conditions—that is, what happened at the second meeting of the senate—onto these earlier events.

Following his account of the first meeting of the senate, where Augustus' funeral was discussed and his will was read, Tacitus undertakes a post-mortem of Augustus' career before describing the second meeting of the senate, which took place nine days after the funeral of Augustus.²⁵³ Tacitus writes that all prayers were directed towards Tiberius (*versae inde ad Tiberium preces*).²⁵⁴ He claims that Augustus chose Tiberius such that Augustus might improve his own reputation with posterity by comparison.²⁵⁵ Once again, we see Tiberius' role in the succession being downplayed by the ancient authors.²⁵⁶

In Tacitus' account of Augustus' death and Tiberius' rise to power, Tiberius is portrayed in a passive role. The central figure of Tacitus' narrative is Livia, who made the preparations and sent out the contradictory reports until all was in place for Tiberius to succeed. Tacitus' focus is not the actual death of Augustus, but rather Livia's role in securing Tiberius' position as head of state.²⁵⁷ The statement she issued about Augustus' death was expected, and the proclamation of Tiberius' role was surely designed to prevent a political vacuum. Rather than seeing Livia as a sinister manipulator, as she is depicted in Tacitus' narrative, her actions may be better understood as working to maintain stability by reassuring the senate and the populace. In addition, given Augustus' obsession with the future stability of the state, Livia may have been acting on his instructions. One so concerned with the future may well have left instructions on what should be done following his death.

²⁵³ Champlin, "The Testament of Augustus," 156 n.9.

²⁵⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 1.11.

²⁵⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 1.10.

²⁵⁶ As another example, see Dio Cass., 55.9.4.

²⁵⁷ The precise day on which Tiberius assumed power in his own right has been a topic of much discussion and is discussed by K. Wellesley, "The Dies Imperii of Tiberius," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 57, no. 1/2 (1967).

The first meeting of the senate following the death of Augustus had concerned his funerary rights; Tiberius permitted no other discussion. At the second meeting, Tiberius addressed the chamber on the greatness of the Roman empire and his own reluctance to accept sole rule. He commented, as Tacitus phrases it:

*solam divi Augusti mentem tantae molis capacem: se in partem curarum ab illo vocatum experiendo didicisse quam arduum, quam subiectum fortunae regendi cuncta onus. proinde in civitate tot inlustribus viris subnixa non ad unum omnia deferrent: plures facilius munia rei publicae sociatis laboribus exsecuturos.*²⁵⁸

Only the mind of the divine Augustus had been capable of such a burden; when he himself [Tiberius] had been summoned by him [Augustus] to share his experience, he had seen how arduous and subject to fortune was the task of ruling the entire world. In a state with so many illustrious men, all things should not rest upon one man, but many who, united in their efforts, would more easily carry out the public business.

Tiberius had experienced the difficulties of leadership, and he is presented as doubting his own competence and suitability for the task. Suetonius is even more explicit in his treatment of the scene. He writes:

*Ipsius verba sunt: "Dum veniam ad id tempus, quo vobis aequum possit videri dare vos aliquam senectuti meae requiem."*²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 1.11.

²⁵⁹ Suet., *Tib.* 24.2.

His [Tiberius'] own words were (that he was to be *princeps*) 'until such a time comes as you all see fit to give me rest in my old age.'

According to Suetonius, Tiberius only ever saw himself as a temporary *princeps*. There was precedent in his own career for this impermanent presence in public life; Tiberius, as we have seen, withdrew from public life in 6 BCE. That situation did not detract from the day-to-day running or stability of the state. However, if Tiberius were to withdraw while *princeps*, political uncertainty, which could be exploited, would be real possibility. As we will see in Section 4.5, when Tiberius left the city in 26 CE, Sejanus attempted to do just that.

Tiberius' reluctance to rule is difficult to explain. He was the chief heir in Augustus' will, he possessed the requisite powers to govern and he had been Augustus' leading political deputy for a decade: his transition to *princeps* should not have been complicated. However, as we saw in Section 3.2, Augustus' will meant nothing in terms of the legality of Tiberius' political position. Even though Augustus had done everything possible to indicate that he wished Tiberius to be his successor, he could do nothing legally to ensure that this would be the case. Thus, there was an inherent uncertainty in the procedure for the transfer of power, based on Augustus' indirect attempts to solve the succession issue. This, combined with Tiberius' Republican mindset—that is, his belief that he required official recognition from the senate—partially explains the difficulties.

Augustus had been, at least in theory, first among equals. However, he was *not* that, as his powers made him clearly politically supreme. Tiberius, by contrast, was similarly politically supreme but considered himself truly first among equals, a *princeps* in the true sense of the word, serving alongside the senate rather than ruling over them. The confusion resulted from the contradiction inherent in a man who was clearly politically superior deferring to a body accustomed to having an overarching authority guiding its actions. We have noted Tacitus'

comment that it was public knowledge that Tiberius was master of the realm. The senate may therefore have thought that it was not required to take any action regarding Tiberius' position.

The personalities and ruling styles of Augustus and Tiberius were also very different. In 27 BCE, Augustus had laid down his powers and presented himself as the reluctant servant of the senate. As Dio says, the reality was that Augustus sought to maintain control in his own hands, and we have seen that he was duly compensated for his 'concessions'.²⁶⁰ Of course, this was disguised in unthreatening, familiar, Republican terms. In addition, Augustus had the *auctoritas* to manage this charade. Peter Astbury Brunt suggests that Tiberius' protestations of reluctance were motivated by a desire to emulate Augustus' conduct in 27 BCE.²⁶¹

Tiberius may also have been attempting to implement a document attached to Augustus' will, which, according to Dio, was one of four codices appended to that document. It said that state business should not be dependent upon one man but upon all who were willing and able. Its primary goal was to prevent stability being contingent on one man's survival.²⁶² We note here that Suetonius, who provides many details on Augustus' will, does not mention this mysterious fourth codex.²⁶³ We note here that, in Tacitus' account, even though the codex is not mentioned explicitly, Tiberius is not only reluctant to assume sole rule, but asks that helpers be assigned. That is, even if Tacitus does not mention the document, its *contents* are acted out in the chamber. By contrast, in Dio's account, we have the fourth codex mentioned. The facts in both accounts appear to be the same, but in Dio they are a result of a document appended to Augustus' will, whereas in Tacitus the document itself is omitted, allowing Tacitus to present Tiberius as duplicitous. The senators' reactions in this account indicate that they did not expect Tiberius to behave in this way.

²⁶⁰ See sec. 2.1, and sec. 2.2.

²⁶¹ P. A. Brunt, "The Role of the Senate in the Augustan Regime," *The Classical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1984): 425.

²⁶² Dio Cass., 56.33.3–4.

²⁶³ Suet., *Aug.* 101.

Brunt notes the possibility that, rather than this command from Augustus being in a physical document, Tiberius may have simply been reporting what Augustus had told him in their final conversation, itself not a confirmed event.²⁶⁴ We must also confront the fact that, as we have seen, when Livia announced Augustus' death, she also said that Tiberius was master of Rome. In addition, Tiberius had used his powers to reappoint two important prefects (*praefecti*) even before the *first* meeting of the senate. He had also summoned two meetings of the senate. Thus, even if Augustus had advised against entrusting the public business to one man alone, Tiberius' early actions did not reflect that. His reluctance to rule alone only became apparent during the second meeting of the senate. If we accept Dio's account about the fourth codex, and the instructions contained therein, Tiberius' loss of resolve is readily explained.

At the first meeting of the senate, Tiberius permitted no discussion aside from Augustus' last rites. Even though the will was read, and it named Tiberius chief heir, politically it was meaningless. If the fourth codex had been read, advising collective governance rather than stability being dependent on one man, and no official discussion of Tiberius' position had taken place, his role in the state would have remained uncertain. The existence of this document could explain many of Tiberius' actions during the second meeting of the senate, particularly his comment about the task of empire being too great for one man and the related request that helpers be assigned.

We should consider the possibility that Tiberius saw the command in the fourth codex as a way to forgo his duty and re-establish the Republic. This will reoccur later in Tiberius' reign when, following the death of Drusus II, a similar breakdown occurred in succession continuity, and Tiberius raised the possibility of the consuls assuming control and the Republic being

²⁶⁴ Brunt, "The Role of the Senate in the Augustan Regime," 425. The conversation is only reported in Velleius – see Vell. Pat., 2.123.2.

restored.²⁶⁵ In both situations, if this were Tiberius' intention, it failed. Augustus' will had been read before the entire chamber at the first meeting. If the fourth codex had indeed been part of the will, this is certainly not reflected in the senators' confused and increasingly irascible reactions to Tiberius' protests. If Augustus had commanded that the administration be divided among several men, this would have been done, such was his *auctoritas*.

In Augustus' later years, there had been an advisory council (*consilium*) with some permanent members, which had consisted of twenty regular members as well as the consuls, the consuls designate and the leading members of the *Domus Augusta*—namely, Augustus, Tiberius, Germanicus and Drusus II. Dio notes the force given to decisions made by the *consilium*. He writes:

kai\ proseyhfi/sqh, pa&nq' o3sa a2n au)tw|~ meta& te tou~ Tiberi/ou kai\ met'
e0kei/nwn tw~n te a)ei\ u(pateuo&ntwn kai\ tw~n e0j tou~to
a)podedeigme/nwn, tw~n te e0ggo&nwn au)tou~ tw~n poihtw~n dh~lon o3ti,
tw~n te a1llwn o3souj a2n e9ka&stote prosperala&bh|, bouleuome/nw|
do&ch|, ku&ria w(j kai\ pa&sh| th| gerousi/a| a)re/santa ei]nai. ²⁶⁶

And it was decided by the senate that all things decided by him [Augustus] in consultation with Tiberius and the others, the incumbent consuls, the consuls designate, his adopted grandsons and so many as he might include in the *consilium* each time, should be seen as having come from the entire senate.

²⁶⁵ Consider the parallel situation when Tiberius entrusts Nero and Drusus III to the Senate in 23 CE. See Tac., *Ann.* 4.8–9 and the discussion in sec. 4.2.

²⁶⁶ Dio Cass., 56.28.2–3.

This council, with some permanent members, replaced the original advisory body first established by Augustus, possibly, as Rich suggests, as early as 18 BCE in connection with Augustus' social reforms.²⁶⁷ The point of this group was to ensure that senatorial business was worked out in advance so that the debate would proceed as Augustus intended. Swan suggests that Dio's description of the *consilium*, with its 'precise, legalistic formulation' is likely based on an original decree of the senate (*senatus consultum*).²⁶⁸ The fact that both Drusus and Germanicus were part of this group reflects their status not only in the state but also within the *Domus Augusta* itself. Even though they were only junior members of this council (the major decisions would surely have been made by Tiberius and Augustus), their inclusion would have provided them with valuable administrative experience. Thus, in Augustus' last years, an effective administrative apparatus had been established, and Tiberius, as Augustus' leading deputy, would have been at the centre of its deliberations.

Tacitus describes the unfolding drama in the chamber. We have noted Tiberius' request for several helpers to be assigned to him. When this was not successful in leading to an arrangement with the *patres*, Tiberius changed tack again, suggesting that he would assume control of any one aspect of the state that the senate might assign to him. This prompted Asinius Gallus to ask 'which part of the public business would you like assigned to you?' (*quam partem rei publicae mandari tibi velis*).²⁶⁹ This reflects the tense discussions in the senate. As Tacitus presents them, the relations between Tiberius and the senate did not have an auspicious beginning.

The confusion around Tiberius' position in the city is likely to have arisen from the fact that the reappointment of the *praefecti*, and indeed the initial meeting of the senate after the death of Augustus, took place *before* any formal discussion of Tiberius' position was conducted in

²⁶⁷ Dio Cass., 53.21.4. Rich, *The Augustan Settlement: Roman History 53-55.9*, 154.

²⁶⁸ Swan, *The Augustan Succession : An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)*, 295.

²⁶⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.12. Goodyear has noted the parallels and divergences between this passage and Dio's treatment of the scene. See Dio Cass., 57.2.5-7; Goodyear, Woodman, and Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book 1.1-54*, 179.

the senate. Augustus had used his powers to administer the state, and this had been accepted as standard practice. As we have noted, it was Tiberius' reluctance to accept formal recognition as sole ruler, and its contradiction to the realities on the ground, that caused the confusion and set the precedent for his increasingly tenuous relations with the *patres* as his reign progressed.

The expectations now placed upon Tiberius, to be essentially, and quite literally, a new Augustus, were huge, and those around him seem to have ignored the very different personalities and political psyches of the two men.²⁷⁰ Seager proposes an intriguing suggestion to the earlier question of Tiberius' motives in his unsuccessful attempt at modesty. After noting the inevitability of Tiberius' rise to sole power, Seager suggests that Tiberius knew he must succeed, but was trying, through his repeated refusals and other tactics, to convey the sincerity of his desire to serve only in a temporary and limited capacity if he were to serve at all.²⁷¹

Peter Burgers casts an interesting perspective on these events. He notes how entrenched Tiberius was in being second to Augustus in the state. Tiberius had held the *tribunicia potestas* for more than a decade and had been on the coinage with Augustus. Tiberius' role as Augustus' colleague had been acknowledged, publicly and officially. After the *princeps*' death, Tiberius had issued orders as though he were commander-in-chief and had surrounded himself with the praetorian guard. We have noted these events and the evidence for them above, but the key point, as Burgers states, is that the senate did not know how to deal with the disconnect between Tiberius' actions and his rhetoric.²⁷²

Tiberius' reluctance to assume sole control while using his power and authority does suggest that his protestations were not entirely genuine. Even accounting for the fact that this was a

²⁷⁰ For a discussion of this issue, see Eleanor Cowan, "Tiberius and Augustus in Tiberian Sources," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 58, no. 4 (2009).

²⁷¹ Seager, *Tiberius*, 46-7.

²⁷² Peter Burgers, "The Role and Function of Senatorial Debate The Case of the Reign of Tiberius AD 14-37," *Latomus* 58, no. 3 (1999): 569.

unique situation, Tiberius was clearly politically supreme and had acted on that supremacy. The senate could well have assumed that the transfer of power, if it had not already happened de facto, would be seamless and automatic with no expectations on the senate to participate in the process. We recall Tacitus' comment that Livia had announced simultaneously that Augustus was dead and that Tiberius was master of Rome.²⁷³ She may have issued such statements, as mentioned above, to reassure the senate and people following Augustus' death, but Livia's statement does claim supremacy for Tiberius as a *fait accompli*. Thus, the senate saw no active role for itself in the process other than to accept a decision already made. This compliant senate is what Brunt calls 'the inheritance of Augustus' domination'.²⁷⁴

In assessing Tiberius' tactics in the senate, the personal nature of the principate and its powers must be borne in mind. The powers had been voted to Augustus, and eventually to Tiberius, personally. They could not delegate their precise authority to anyone, even if versions of it had been granted to chosen deputies. This personal aspect to Roman politics dates to the classical Republican era, when politics was carried out in person.²⁷⁵ Tiberius embraced this aspect of Republican politics. Tacitus points out that Tiberius had been raised in an imperial house, and yet he was still a Roman heavily steeped in Republican tradition.

For all the discussion in the sources about Tiberius' duplicity and secrecy being the central element of events in the senate, we should not lose sight of the larger point. It is entirely plausible that Tiberius wished to be relieved of his powers, just as he had said. The senate and Tiberius were approaching each other at cross-purposes. Both parties kept to their roles: Tiberius, the public face of the regime, using his powers, and the senate a compliant rubber

²⁷³ Tac., *Ann.* 1.5.

²⁷⁴ Brunt, "The Role of the Senate in the Augustan Regime," 444.

²⁷⁵ Examples of this personal element of politics in the pre-Augustan era include personal presence required to stand for office (Caesar the Dictator, Plut., *Vit Caes.* 13.1), as well as to intercede a tribunician veto (Tiberius Gracchus, Plut. *Vit Tib. Gracch.* 10). Consider also the personal element later in Plutarch's *Life of Tiberius Gracchus* where he puts a bill to the people deposing his colleague after personal appeals to the man to support his land reform bill were ignored (Plut. *Vit Tib. Gracch.* 11–12).

stamp. The unexpected element was Tiberius' apparently sincere reluctance to rule alone and his demands for an active senate. This deviation from the established patterns for both Tiberius and the senate may well have caused the confusion during the second meeting in the chamber. As we have noted, if Dio's account of a fourth codex attached to Augustus' will is accepted, Tiberius' protestations are more easily explained.

3.4 Germanicus and Drusus II in the Early Years of Tiberius' Reign

Tiberius accepted his role, or, as Tacitus says, he stopped objecting to it. He was now officially in power. His succession arrangements had been largely determined by the contents of Augustus' will; Tiberius was to name Germanicus as his majority heir. Germanicus had served as consul in 12 CE, and had been commander in Germany since 13 CE. Following his accession, Tiberius requested renewed *imperium proconsulare* for Germanicus.²⁷⁶ It was necessary to renew this power, since it had surely lapsed with the death of Augustus. This makes sense since commanders in the field now represented an *imperium* that no longer existed. For a stringent legalist like Tiberius, redefining these appointments to represent his own *imperium* was a necessity.²⁷⁷ Tacitus says that the reason such power was not requested for Drusus II was that he was consul designate. Given that these two men were so important for Tiberius' succession plans, we should make some observations on their careers thus far.

When Tiberius returned to the city in 2 CE following his retirement on Rhodes, he led Drusus II into the forum.²⁷⁸ When Augustus adopted Tiberius in 4 CE, Drusus II became Augustus' grandson. Despite this, he is not reported as having gone on campaign even though he was of

²⁷⁶ For Germanicus' term as consul, see the *fasti* as compiled in Ehrenberg and Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus & Tiberius*, 40.

²⁷⁷ For Tiberius' interest in the law, see Tac. *Ann.* 1.72, 2.27-32 (Libo trial), 3.1-19 (Piso trial). All were conducted according to strict legal procedure.

²⁷⁸ Suet., *Tib.* 15.1.

military age. Germanicus was sent to fight in the war in Dalmatia and received great distinction and rewards for his service.

Drusus II, who did not take part in the war, was nevertheless granted privileges in the senate. He was, like other aristocrats' sons, allowed to attend meetings of the senate-house before he had officially become a senator. Dio also notes that once Drusus II had officially entered the chamber, he could vote ahead of the ex-praetors at meetings.²⁷⁹ The hierarchical nature of the senate meant that Augustus could reinforce his control over the direction of the debate by having Drusus II vote ahead of the second main group of speakers, who would then follow his lead.

Drusus II achieved the office of quaestor in 11 CE.²⁸⁰ The contrast with Germanicus' position in that year is evident from the fact that Germanicus was on campaign with Tiberius in Germany with a grant of *imperium proconsulare*. This continues a discernible trend in the careers of the two grandsons of Augustus; Germanicus' training included years of military experience, whereas Drusus II was mostly limited to civilian duties. Drusus II was therefore not exposed to the troops, a central element of the Caesar's position. Germanicus would be consul in 12 CE, while Drusus II would hold that position three years later.

Tiberius' powers were renewed in 13 CE. At the same time, Drusus II was granted some acceleration in the senatorial career path (*cursus honorum*) by being exempted from the praetorship, which allowed him to stand directly for the consulship.²⁸¹ As we have seen, Augustus also requested that Drusus II be a member of his *consilium*.

²⁷⁹ Dio Cass., 56.17.3.

²⁸⁰ Dio Cass., 56.25.4.

²⁸¹ Dio Cass., 56.28.1.

The careers of Germanicus and Drusus II up to this point demonstrate their relative positions in the succession to Tiberius, again in accordance with Augustus' intentions, no doubt with his complete consent and quite possibly at his insistence. Germanicus was to succeed Tiberius, with Drusus II playing the role of the 'insurance prince' to the heir apparent. Let us now move on to discuss Germanicus' career in detail.

Germanicus holds a special place in Roman historiography, often being presented as the antithesis to Tiberius. A useful illustration of this special place is the condensed biography of the prince found in the first seven chapters of Suetonius' *Life of Caligula* (*Vita Caligulae*). We start with this short biography.

Germanicus' early and speedy rise through the *cursus honorum* reflected his imperial status. In 7 CE, he was quaestor and, as Suetonius writes, he proceeded directly to the consulship (*post eam consulatum statim gessit*). This implies that Germanicus did not hold any of the mid-range offices (*honores*) in the sequence (*cursus*) such as aedile or praetor. Adhering to the age requirement remission of five years (*quinquenium*), Germanicus was consul in 12 CE.²⁸² Thus, his consulate was in his twenty-seventh year, if we assume he was born in 15 BCE.

This advancement was even more rapid than that of Tiberius, who was twenty-nine when he was first consul. The minimum age for consuls, following Sulla's revamping of the *lex Villia Annalis*, was forty-two. Augustus had modified the minimum age for the consulship to thirty-two. This modification was extended in the case of the imperial family, to the extent that they were, as Lindsay says, not subject to such age requirements.²⁸³ Specifically, the modification took the form of the privilege of the years, where five years was removed from the age

²⁸² Suet., *Calig.* 1.1.

²⁸³ Lindsay discusses this issue at length, suggesting that Germanicus was twenty-five when he was first consul. However, Lindsay himself notes that Germanicus was born in 15 BCE, and was consul in 12 CE. This suggests, but does not prove, the age of twenty-seven suggested here. See Lindsay, *Suetonius Caligula*, 49-50. Drusus was consul in 15 CE, whereas Germanicus held office in 12 CE. This three-year gap in appointments suggests that this was the likely gap in their ages.

requirements for office. Between Augustus' modified age requirement and Germanicus' privilege of the years, we arrive at twenty-seven as the age for his first consulship, which places his birth in 15 BCE. Similar calculations for Drusus II suggest that he was born in 12 BCE.

The inconsistency between Tiberius' and Germanicus' respective advancements may be explained by the fact that the Augustan system of advancement and promotion was in its early stages when Tiberius was being advanced. Augustus was still in the process of structuring a tolerable political arrangement. The advancement of members of the imperial family so many years ahead of their contemporaries, a move designed to set them apart, was not as blatant in the early years as it would become under later Caesars.

Suetonius next describes the role of Germanicus in quelling the mutiny that took place following the death of Augustus, an issue which we will consider in the next section. Velleius notes that Tiberius was training Germanicus in the basics of the military (*rudimentis militiae*).²⁸⁴ We see Tiberius' adherence to Augustus' plans for the succession in the contrast between Germanicus' martial career and Drusus' mostly civil training and advancement. Germanicus' military appointments clearly demarcated him as the one to succeed Tiberius. The relative competence of these two young men would be tested very early in Tiberius' reign, with telling results.

3.5 Germanicus and Drusus Tested: The 14 CE Army Rebellions

Among the many elements of uncertainty surrounding Tiberius' accession reported in our sources, perhaps the most threatening was a purported breakdown in the loyalty of the legions (*fides legionum*). The sources all report Tiberius' hesitation and reluctance to accept sole rule,

²⁸⁴ Vell. Pat., 2.129.2.

with various reasons given, including fear of revolt among the soldiers.²⁸⁵ The loyalty of the troops, although not holding the critical place that it would in later imperial history, was important even at this early stage. The sources for these mutinies are plentiful, but we are only concerned with these events as they pertain to the succession to Tiberius.

Tacitus devotes more than thirty chapters of Book I to the mutinies, much of which is dedicated to dramatic flair.²⁸⁶ Suetonius gives them passing mention in Chapter 25 of his *Life of Tiberius* and more detail in his *Life of Caligula*. Dio offers a summary with a focus on Tiberius' reaction and its impact on his behaviour as Caesar.²⁸⁷ Velleius' description is notably brief, given that the mutinies reflect poorly on the regime of which he was so fond.²⁸⁸

We note here that the commander of three of the mutinous legions in Pannonia was Junius Blaesus, the uncle of Sejanus and consul in 10 CE. The appointment of Blaesus, and his consulship, suggests that the *Domus Augusta* trusted him. This will be examined in detail in Chapter 4, but for now, it suffices to note that Sejanus and his family were by no means new men (*novi homines*) in terms of Roman politics.

Tacitus devotes some attention to the grievances of the troops in Pannonia, before turning his attention to Tiberius' response. He writes:

Drusum filium cum primoribus civitatis duabusque praetoriis cohortibus mitteret, nullis satis certis mandatis, ex re consulturum ... simul praetorii praefectus Aelius Seianus, collega Straboni patri suo datus, magna apud

²⁸⁵ Dio Cass., 57.3.1–3; Suet., *Tib.* 25.

²⁸⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 1.16–52. The possible reasons for this seemingly excessive treatment are discussed in Goodyear, Woodman, and Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book 1.1-54*, 194ff.

²⁸⁷ Dio Cass., 57.4.

²⁸⁸ Vell. Pat., 2.125.

*Tiberium auctoritate, rector iuveni et ceteris periculorum praemiorumque ostentator.*²⁸⁹

He [Tiberius] sent Drusus, his son, with some leading citizens and two praetorian cohorts, not with any specific orders, but told him to garner his actions to the situation. ... The prefect of the praetorians, Aelius Sejanus, given to his own father, Strabo, as colleague, had great influence with Tiberius, was to act as a guide to the youth [Drusus] and focus the rest [the mutinous soldiers] on either the dangers they faced or the rewards they could earn.

Drusus II had surely been granted *imperium proconsulare*, because sending a man without military authority into a military zone was all but useless. We may assume that this grant was for a period of five years, as was standard for young Caesars. Sejanus' presence is easily explained as he was prefect of the praetorian guard (*praefectus praetorio*), the security force around the imperial family. Tacitus comments that Sejanus, even then, enjoyed great influence over Tiberius, but Tacitus is likely imposing later conditions on earlier events. Drusus II's mission soon became highly complex as the political and military situation in the camp deteriorated.

Drusus restored order in Pannonia with a minimal amount of violence. The tense situation in the camp was resolved through a combination of a natural phenomenon and, what Tacitus calls, the ignorance of the soldiers. He writes:

Noctem minacem et in scelus erupturam fors lenivit: nam luna claro repente caelo visa languescere. id miles rationis ignarus omen praesentium accepit, suis

²⁸⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.24.

*laboribus defectionem sideris adsimulans, prospereque cessura qua pergerent
si fulgor et claritudo deae redderetur.*²⁹⁰

It was a night that threatened menace and crime, when suddenly fortune calmed the situation: the moon began to lose visibility in a clear sky. Of the cause of this, the soldiers were ignorant, but they accepted it as an omen. The state of the heavenly body reflected their labours, and they assumed that they would be successful if the radiant splendour were restored to the goddess.

Drusus' ultimate solution was to take advantage of the superstition of the soldiers and use this to berate the men and convince them to give up the leaders of the mutiny. His tone became more conciliatory when he said that if they repented of their mutinous ways Tiberius would listen to them, and an embassy was sent to Rome.²⁹¹ His handling of the mutiny, a complicated situation for a man with limited military experience, was appropriate and did ultimately result in calm. The contrast with Germanicus' handling of the mutiny in Germany could not be starker.

Tacitus opens his description of the mutiny in Germany by continuing the theme of Germanicus as a threat to Tiberius. He writes:

*magna spe fore ut Germanicus Caesar imperium alterius pati nequiret daretque
se legionibus vi sua cuncta tracturis.*²⁹²

Great was the hope [of the legions] that Germanicus Caesar, unable to accept the rule of another [Tiberius], would place himself with the legions, who, by force, would conquer all.

²⁹⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 1.28.

²⁹¹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.28–9.

²⁹² Tac., *Ann.* 1.31.

Unlike Drusus, who had been sent from Rome to quell the mutiny in Pannonia, Germanicus was already on assignment in Gaul. We must question the idea that Germanicus would have contemplated mounting an armed challenge to Tiberius. Germanicus' position in the state was secure; by the adoptions of 4 CE, he was Tiberius' son and clearly his intended successor.²⁹³ The sources also portray him as essentially the ideal Roman, a good soldier loyal to the established order (in this case Tiberius). Even allowing for the glowing portrayal of Germanicus, the fact is that loyalty to the Augustan system served his own political interests.

Prior to his description of Germanicus' attempt at quelling the mutiny on the Rhine, Tacitus formally introduces Germanicus. Given that Germanicus occupies such an important position in the historiographical tradition, it is worth quoting Tacitus at some length. He writes:

*Interea Germanico per Gallias, ut diximus, census accipienti excessisse Augustum adfertur. neptem eius Agrippinam in matrimonio pluresque ex ea liberos habebat, ipse Druso fratre Tiberii genitus, Augustae nepos, set anxius occultis in se patruī aviaeque odiis quorum causae acriores quia iniquae. quippe Drusi magna apud populum Romanum memoria, credebaturque, si rerum potitus foret, libertatem redditurus; unde in Germanicum favor et spes eadem.*²⁹⁴

Meanwhile, Germanicus was proceeding through Gaul, as we said, assessing their taxes when he was informed of Augustus' death. He was married to his [Augustus'] granddaughter Agrippina who had given him several children. He himself was the son of Drusus, brother of Tiberius, and thus was a grandson of

²⁹³ Rutledge discusses the idea that Germanicus and his wife, Agrippina, were indeed a threat to Tiberius. See Steven H. Rutledge, *Imperial inquisitions : prosecutors and informants from Tiberius to Domitian* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001), 138-40.

²⁹⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 1.33.

Augusta. Nevertheless, he was troubled by the veiled hatred directed against himself by his father [Tiberius] and grandmother, even more cutting because it was unjust. For the memory of Drusus was still great among the Roman people, for, it was believed, if he had gained control of affairs, he would have restored liberty.²⁹⁵ As a result, the same hope was placed in Germanicus.

Germanicus' credentials are established through his connection to the *Domus Augusta*: his descent from Drusus and his relationship to Tiberius and Augusta. The prince's own family, including his wife, Agrippina, as well as his sons, Nero, Drusus III and the future Caesar Caligula, accompanied him on campaign and became popular with the troops. This relationship will become significant when the position of Agrippina and her children in the 20s CE is examined in Chapter 4.

The sources report the troubled relationship between Germanicus and Tiberius, which possibly originated with Tiberius' forced adoption of his then nephew to secure Augustus' succession plans. Once he himself came to power, Tiberius is reported to have viewed Germanicus' popularity, with both the soldiers and the people, as a threat. These initial tensions between Tiberius and Germanicus morphed into a wider conflict between Tiberius and the household of Germanicus, which included not only Agrippina and her children but also their associates. Such conflict, and the instability it created, would not only have consequences for the succession but also facilitate the rise of Sejanus.

We now turn our attention to the mutinies in Germany, and Germanicus' response to the complaints of the soldiers. The soldiers said that if Germanicus wanted to revolt against Tiberius and secure the empire for himself they would support his claim.²⁹⁶ This suggestion

²⁹⁵ That is, the Republic.

²⁹⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 1.35.

could be more of Tacitus' lionising of Germanicus at the expense of Tiberius. Regardless, Germanicus' response to the soldiers' offer of support for his immediate claim to power exposes his poor leadership qualities. Tacitus writes:

*tum vero, quasi scelere contaminaretur, praeceptis tribunali desiluit. opposuerunt abeunti arma, minitantes, ni regrederetur; at ille moriturum potius quam fidem exueret clamitans, ferrum a latere diripuit elatumque deferebat in pectus, ni proximi prensam dextram vi attinuissent.*²⁹⁷

Then, truly, somewhat affected by their [the soldiers'] criminality, he [Germanicus] descended from the tribunal with haste. They blocked him with their weapons, threatening violence if he did not return. Exclaiming that he would rather die than depart from his loyalty to Tiberius, he raised his sword and would have buried it in his breast had the men not held his arm by force.

Germanicus' initial response, then, was to indulge in histrionics and threaten suicide. This should cause us to question Germanicus' qualities of leadership. The futility of this act is compounded by the soldiers' reaction, best described as amused. One soldier even offered Germanicus his own sword.²⁹⁸ At this, there was sufficient chaos such that Germanicus and a group of advisors could escape.

Germanicus and his advisors were now at a loss about what to do. Their response to this conundrum again calls Germanicus' fitness to lead into question. Tacitus writes:

²⁹⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 1.35.

²⁹⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 1.35; Dio Cass., 57.5.2.

*igitur volutatis inter se rationibus placitum ut epistulae nomine principis scriberentur: missionem dari vicena stipendia meritis, exauctorari qui sena dena fecissent ac retineri sub vexillo ceterorum immunes nisi propulsandi hostis, legata quae petiverant exsolvi duplicarique.*²⁹⁹

It was therefore decided, having weighed their options, that a letter was to be written in the name of the *princeps* that authorised dismissal for twenty-year veterans, discharge for sixteen-year veterans (the latter being retained under the standard with no duties aside from actual battle) as well as double payment of all the legacies to which the men had laid claim.

The duplicity and short-sightedness of Germanicus in forging a letter from Tiberius yielding to the soldiers' demands cannot be overstated. If the letter were legitimate, Germanicus would surely have had it read out to the troops upon his arrival. The soldiers were not deceived by the forgery but insisted that the payments promised in the letter be dispersed nonetheless, which Germanicus was obliged to pay, in part from his personal funds.³⁰⁰ This he did, for both army groups on the Rhine, even though the men on the upper Rhine had made no such demands.

A delegation then arrived from the senate. This struck both rage and fear in the mutinous soldiers: they feared that the delegation would invalidate the concessions they had extracted through the mutiny.³⁰¹ Tacitus reports that both Germanicus and the senatorial envoys narrowly avoided being killed as the camp descended into chaos. Germanicus, seeing how unstable the situation in the camp had become, decided to remove his family, including his wife Agrippina and two-year-old Caligula, from danger. This requires some background, which is offered by Suetonius. He writes that the future Caesar Caligula was 'born in camp, raised among the

²⁹⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.36.

³⁰⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 1.37.

³⁰¹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.39.

nation's armies' (*In castris natus, patriis nutritus in armis*) and that the boy became a mascot for the soldiers. He was given a miniature military uniform, and he received his name from the soldiers based on the tiny military sandals that he wore, called *caligulae*.

The relevance of Caligula to the outcome of the mutiny arises in Germanicus' second attempt to restore order. It is worth quoting Suetonius at some length. He writes:

*Caligulae cognomen castrensi ioco traxit, quia manipulario habitu inter milites educabatur. Apud quos quantum praeterea per hanc nutrimentorum consuetudinem amore et gratia valuerit, maxime cognitum est, cum post excessum Augusti tumultuantis et in furorem usque praecipites solus haud dubie ex conspectu suo flexit. Non enim prius destiterunt, quam ablegari eum ob seditionis periculum et in proximam civitatem demandari animadvertissent; tunc demum ad paenitentiam versi reprenso ac retento vehiculo invidiam quae sibi fieret deprecati sunt.*³⁰²

The cognomen of Caligula he obtained from a camp joke, since he was raised among the soldiers and dressed as one of them. The degree to which he, having been raised among them, won their favour and love may be discerned from the fact that, after the death of Augustus when they were prepared for any folly, the mere sight of him calmed them. For they did not stop [the mutiny] until they had observed him being taken to safety in another town because of the danger they had created. At this they relented, and, having grasped and held back the vehicle in which he himself was to be transferred, repented of the shame to which their act had exposed them.

³⁰² Suet., *Calig.* 9.

We see in this passage the strong relationship between Germanicus' family and the soldiers. As we will see in Section 3.7, even after Germanicus' death, there was tremendous respect and affection for his family among the troops. This is one of the issues that Sejanus would later use to undermine Germanicus' family and exacerbate the existing tensions between Tiberius and Agrippina, with disastrous results.

Tacitus' comment on the situation in the camp as Agrippina and Caligula were leaving is scathing and highly critical of Germanicus. He writes:

*Non florentis Caesaris neque suis in castris, sed velut in urbe victa.*³⁰³

[The scene] was not of a Caesar at the height of power in his own camp, but of a city captured.

Here we see Tacitus likening Germanicus to an enemy commander who has just captured a city, rather than a Roman leader commanding his own troops, such was the chaos in the camp. When Germanicus restored comparative order, the troops became repentant, calling for him to administer justice to the guilty, forgive the repentant and lead the legions against the Germans. Justice was administered through lynch mobs in an extrajudicial manner.³⁰⁴ Germanicus did not attempt to put a stop to these barbarous acts: they were being carried out at his insistence. However, worse was to come.

He soon received information that trouble still existed among the soldiers in the other camp on the Rhine. Tacitus reports that Germanicus was willing to restore order by force if his authority were ignored.³⁰⁵ Germanicus was prepared to resort to actual civil war. A letter was sent to the

³⁰³ Tac., *Ann.* 1.41.

³⁰⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 1.44.

³⁰⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 1.45.

legate in the second camp warning that if the mutinous troops were not punished, Germanicus would march on the camp and subject its personnel to indiscriminate bloodshed. The legate followed the instructions, and chaos descended on the second camp. The violence in the camp provoked a desire for bloodshed in the men, and when Germanicus arrived, rather than attempting to restore calm, he ordered an attack on the Germans across the Rhine, whose civilian population paid a heavy toll to assuage the Roman soldiers' sense of shame.³⁰⁶

During his description of Germanicus' trans-Rhenic campaigns, Tacitus reports a rumour about the Roman forces being cut off and an effort to destroy a bridge across the river to prevent the Germans from crossing. He reports that Agrippina took on the role of commander, tending to the soldiers' wounds and issuing orders, ultimately preventing the bridge from being destroyed.³⁰⁷ We may ask why Roman soldiers would have listened to a woman, even Agrippina, over their senior officers, who, presumably, were present. We are told that Germanicus was elsewhere, in charge of a fleet.³⁰⁸ Tacitus' depiction of Agrippina's involvement in this martial context establishes her as strong-willed and gives an insight into her strength of character, a trait that would become a source of conflict with Tiberius, following her husband's death.

3.6 Treason at Rome

Following the suppression of the Rhine and Pannonian mutinies, Germanicus campaigned in Germany in 15 and 16 CE to increase his military reputation (*gloria*). However, domestic affairs were to take a turn for the worse. The sources, principally Tacitus, devote much attention to a conspiracy that took place in 16 CE involving the nobleman Drusus Libo. Tacitus says that he

³⁰⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 1.48–51.

³⁰⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 1.69.

³⁰⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 1.70.

offers the amount of detail he does because it was this conspiracy, along with the new interpretation and application of the treason law (*lex Iulia de Maiestate*), that served as the basis for the later treason trials in the 20s CE.³⁰⁹ These trials not only caused a general instability in the state, by creating a climate of fear, but also facilitated the meteoric rise of Sejanus. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. For now, we note that it was the treason law that Sejanus used as his means to attack the circle around Agrippina, ostensibly to protect Tiberius from the perceived threat from Germanicus' family.

Treason was defined as diminishing the majesty of the Roman people (*maiestas populi Romani minuta*)—that is, the state. Since the time of Augustus, the state had increasingly become synonymous with the *princeps*. Thus, diminished majesty (*maiestas minuta*) became wounded majesty (*maiestas laesa*). The definition, and hence the application, of the treason law changed to include not only words but also deeds. To act or speak against the *princeps* was viewed as treason. We will see in Chapter 4 that the treason law would be used to eliminate potential challengers to Tiberius. To place this law in its full context, an examination of its history under the republic and how it changed under Augustus now follows.³¹⁰

We begin with Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.³¹¹ Dionysius traces an early treason law to the time of Romulus, the founder and first king of Rome. The context of Dionysius' brief and vague description is the relationship between citizens, specifically patrons and clients. Enmity or conflict between them, regardless of the instigator, could result in a charge of treason.³¹² The law seems to have been aimed at maintaining harmony (*concordia*) between the orders and thereby in the state itself. Livy describes how Horatius Cocles, a war hero in the time of Tullus Hostilius, murdered his own sister, who had been betrothed to a member of a

³⁰⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 2.27.

³¹⁰ Select cases of treason are dealt with in detail by Elmer Truesdell Merrill, "Some Remarks on Cases of Treason in the Roman Commonwealth," *Classical Philology* 13, no. 1 (1918).

³¹¹ See also the oblique reference in the Twelve Tables of Roman Law, IX.5.

³¹² Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.10.3.

defeated tribe, and mourned the loss of her betrothed.³¹³ This incident, like much of the Regal period of Roman history as recorded by Livy, clearly represents a moral tale where Horatius' strict adherence to principles (*severitas*) is on display. In addition, it is interesting that he was not tried for murder but rather for treason.³¹⁴

This became a working definition of treason carried into the late Republic. In the late second century BCE, a tribune of the plebs, one Appuleius Saturninus, proposed what Seager calls the first general law of treason in the Republic.³¹⁵ Cicero mentions some elements of the law in a speech in defence of Lucius Calpurnius Piso:

*Hic si mentis esset suae, nisi poenas patriae disque immortalibus eas quae gravissimae sunt furore atque insania penderet, ausus esset mitto exire de provincia, educere exercitum, bellum sua sponte gerere, in regnum iniussu populi Romani aut senatus accedere, quae cum plurimae leges veteres, tum lex Cornelia maiestatis, Iulia de pecuniis repetundis planissime vetat?*³¹⁶

If he [Piso] had been in his own mind, if he were not already paying to the country and to the immortal gods that most grave of penalties, by his furore and insanity, would he have dared to leave his province, to lead the army, to make war on his own initiative, to enter a kingdom without orders from the Roman people or the senate, which, by many previous laws were forbidden in the

³¹³ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.26.

³¹⁴ Benjamin Foster, in his notes to his translation, offers the intriguing suggestion that the treason charge was based on Horatius usurping a function of the state. See Livy, *"Ab Urbe Condita Books I and II with an English Translation,"* (London: Harvard University Press, 1919), 93.

³¹⁵ Robin Seager, *"Maiestas in the Late Republic: Some observations,"* in *Critical Studies in Ancient Law, Comparative Law and Legal History Essays in Honour of Alan Watson*, ed. Olivia Robinson John Cairns (United Kingdom: Hart Publishing, 2001), 144.

³¹⁶ Cic., *Pis.* 50.

clearest manner, including the Cornelian law concerning treason and the Julian law concerning extortion.

In his discussion of the *lex Appuleia*, Seager suggests two possibilities for the ‘many previous laws’ covering Piso’s conduct that Cicero mentions. The two possibilities are the *lex Mamilia* passed in 109 BCE, and the other the *lex Appuleia* itself. Seager infers this from recent Republican history, specifically a series of incompetent military leaders resulting in serious defeats, most notably at Arausio.³¹⁷ These laws reflected the growth of the Roman empire. As Rome expanded, competence and integrity in the army became increasingly important. The definition of treason had changed from the maintenance of civil order instituted by Romulus to holding military leaders and other officials accountable for their corruption and incompetence.

This definition of treason, although legislated, does not appear to have been widely applied. The context for the career and laws of Saturninus, as we have said, was the late second century BCE. This places his career in what Syme so aptly christened The Roman Revolution, a period of increasing disorder in Rome that eventually led to the collapse of the Republic. The next major protagonist in this process was the general Lucius Cornelius Sulla, architect of the Cornelian law mentioned by Cicero. Sulla seized power in the late 80s BCE and was appointed dictator.

As part of his notably broad dictatorial mandate, which was to write laws and reconstitute the state (*legibus scribendis et rei publicae constituendae*), Sulla enacted a new treason law, the text of which is lost. However, the essential elements can be inferred from scattered references in Cicero. The two most important elements for our purposes are that the law made it illegal to tamper with the loyalty of the soldiers under one’s command or to leave one’s province and

³¹⁷ Seager, "*Maiestas in the Late Republic: Some observations*," 144-5.

make 'private war'.³¹⁸ The irony that such a law was enacted by Sulla is palpable. He had enacted a law that rendered illegal precisely what he himself had just done.

Sulla's treason law was designed to prevent generals from suborning the loyalty of their troops and seizing power. However, as is so often the case with laws, there was a disconnect between the text as written and its application. Indeed, Pompey was to challenge the validity of this and other laws. This was exemplified when he said 'cease quoting the laws to us, for we carry swords!'³¹⁹ Pompey's challenge aside, this was Sulla's law of treason as Cicero describes it. To tamper with the loyalty of the soldiers or to use them for private purposes was a crime against the state.

The treason law, like any other aspect of jurisprudence, evolved over time. The version from the late Republic, with its provision against tampering with the troops, remained in place down to Augustus' time. Given this, it is no small irony that, under Augustus, this became the concept at the very heart of the establishment of the new state. Augustus had suborned the loyalty of Caesar's veterans as well as other troops and used them for his own purposes, even if that use was disguised as being in the interest of the state. As already noted, the treason laws up to this point had all applied strictly to *actions*. It was later in the reign of Augustus that the definition of treason was to change.

Tacitus, late in Book I, turns his attention back to domestic affairs. He writes briefly of the moderation of Tiberius, but says that because of his restoration of the treason law, the *princeps*

³¹⁸ Cic., *Clu.* 97; Cic. *Pis.* 50. Sulla's treason law is discussed as part of the context for the principate treason laws in C.W. Chilton, "The Roman Law of Treason under the Early Principate," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 45, no. 1 and 2 (1955).

³¹⁹ Plut., *Vit Pomp.* 10.2 For analysis, see Edwards, *Plutarch, The Lives of Pompey, Caesar and Cicero With Introduction and Commentary*.

could not be viewed as possessing liberal tendencies.³²⁰ However, so judicious an individual as Tiberius, at least at this point in his reign, is unlikely to have reintroduced a law without cause.

Tiberius sought to interpret and enforce the treason law in a more rigorous manner, and Tacitus provides some detail about its history and evolution. He comments as follows:

*nam legem maiestatis reduxerat, cui nomen apud veteres idem, sed alia in iudicium veniebant, si quis proditione exercitum aut plebem seditionibus, denique male gesta re publica maiestatem populi Romani minuisset: facta arguebantur, dicta inpune erant.*³²¹

For he [Tiberius] had reintroduced the law of treason, the name for which had been the same under the old legal system, but covered different crimes. These included betrayal of an army, inciting the plebs to sedition, or any other act that diminished the majesty of the Roman people. Acts were argued against; spoken words were immune.

The phrase used (*maiestas populi Romani munita*) is notably vague. Treason was not subject to a precise definition, but the implication is that the conduct of the accused was un-Roman. The negative connotations of being so accused are unmistakable. The point of this passage lies in Tiberius' reintroduction, or perhaps reinforcement, of the existing law. Such a law had existed under Augustus, even if actual prosecutions were rare.

³²⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 1.72. This section is subject to substantial comment from Goodyear. See F.R.D. Goodyear, ed. *The Annals of Tacitus: Volume II Annals 1.55-81 and Annals 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 141-50.

³²¹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.72.

This wider definition, extended to include words, is attributed to what we may call the final version of the Julian treason law in the later Digest of Justinian. The text reads:

*lex autem iulia maiestatis praecipit eum, qui maiestatem publicam laeserit.*³²²

The Julian law concerning treason states that he who wounds the dignity of the state commits treason.

The concept of treason hinted at in the Digest fits quite well with Tacitus' brief description of the case in which Augustus applied this wider definition. Tacitus reports that Augustus initiated criminal prosecution against Cassius Severus, a man who wrote works critical of 'men and women of distinction'.³²³ The nobility and those around Augustus represented the *res publica* in politics, religion and war. Since they were representatives of Rome in those fields, sullyng their reputation did wound the dignity of the state. However, in the case of Severus, Augustus *himself* was not the subject of any of the alleged slander. Even if he did initiate this prosecution, he is reported to have tolerated dissent up to a point.³²⁴ We will see in Chapter 4 that Tiberius would not be as tolerant.

The first major treason trial during the reign of Tiberius was that of Drusus Libo (hereafter referred to as Libo), who was charged with plotting against the Caesars. He counted among his ancestors Pompey Magnus, and Scribonia, who had been married to Augustus. Given that Scribonia was the grandmother of Gaius and Lucius Caesar, and Libo was her nephew, he could have been, as Lindsay says, a real threat to Tiberius.³²⁵ Tacitus defines this explicitly when he

³²² *Dig.* 48.4.3.

³²³ *Tac., Ann.* 1.72.

³²⁴ *Tac., Ann.* 4.34. Livy and Augustus' friendship was not compromised by Livy's pro-Pompey stance in his books on the civil wars of the 40s BCE.

³²⁵ Lindsay, *Suetonius Tiberius*, 112. For further analysis of Libo's ancestry, see E. J. Weinrib, "The Family Connections of M. Livius Drusus Libo," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 72 (1968).

says that Libo had Caesars among his cousins.³²⁶ He may have had the most connected of family members, but his choice of friends showed a lack of judgement.

Tacitus reports that an alleged friend of Libo, Catus, was attempting to trap him. Catus' precise motive is left unstated, but personal rivalries among senators were common. After he had gathered the evidence and established the case against Libo, Catus requested an audience with Tiberius after initially using an intermediary to bring both the name of the accused and the charge to his attention.³²⁷ Tiberius' reaction to being told about a plot against him is difficult to explain. The *princeps* granted a term as praetor to Libo, invited him to dinner parties and generally showed favour towards him. Tacitus says that this was because Tiberius had suppressed his anger.³²⁸ According to this view, Tiberius' positive behaviour towards Libo was a means to create a false sense of security in Libo while allowing Tiberius to keep him under surveillance.³²⁹ This led to formal charges being laid.

The trial of Libo serves as a useful precedent for the trials that would take place later in Tiberius' reign.³³⁰ With his family connection to the Caesars, Libo, peripheral as he was, remained a potential threat to Tiberius, at least as the Caesar may have perceived it. How much more of a threat, then, were the sons of Germanicus, instituted as heirs in Augustus' will? We may see Tiberius as paranoid, but the fact is he had no Julian blood. Here were men, Libo and later the sons of Germanicus, who had better 'Julian credentials' than Tiberius, at least as the 'Julian faction' saw it.³³¹ In Tiberius' own mind, then, his position was less than secure, and he faced

³²⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 2.27.

³²⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 2.28.

³²⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 2.28.

³²⁹ We will see the sources, principally Dio, make a similar argument about Tiberius' treatment of Sejanus in 31 CE. See Section 4.15.

³³⁰ A highly detailed discussion of this case and the suggestion of an almost generation-long plot against Tiberius and his regime can be found in Andrew Pettinger, *The Republic in Danger: Drusus Libo and the Succession of Tiberius*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³³¹ We will see below that Agrippina saw herself as the true image of Augustus, and she taunted Tiberius with this fact. See Section 4.5.

potential threats from multiple sides. His attempts to manage the complicated politics of his reign caused much consternation for the state.

3.7 Germanicus in the East

Libo's trial was the second major test of Tiberius' regime in his still quite young reign, the first being the mutinies of 14 CE. Despite these political problems and Tiberius' seeming insecurity, his regime was, at least in terms of its future, quite stable. Between Germanicus and his children (three of them boys) and Tiberius' natural son Drusus, the house of Caesar was well stocked. We have seen that Germanicus and Drusus had been sent to quell the mutinies in 14 CE. The time had now come, in 17 CE, to advance Germanicus to yet greater heights. During Augustus' reign, commissions to the east, an ongoing trouble spot, had served to mark out the man identified as Augustus' leading deputy. Tiberius was to continue this tradition.

Tacitus sets out the parameters for Germanicus' mission in detail. He writes:

Igitur haec et de Armenia quae supra memoravi apud patres disseruit, nec posse motum Orientem nisi Germanici sapientia conponi: nam suam aetatem vergere, Drusi nondum satis adolevisse. tunc decreto patrum per missae Germanico provinciae quae mari dividuntur, maiusque imperium, quoquo adisset, quam iis qui sorte aut missu principis obtinereni.³³² sed Tiberius demoverat Syria Creticum Silanum, per adfinitatem conexam Germanico, quia Silani filia Neroni vetustissimo liberorum eius pacta erat, praefeceratque Cn. Pisonem, ingenio violentum et obsequii ignarum.³³³

³³² Punctuation is my own.

³³³ Tac., *Ann.* 2.43.

Then he [Tiberius] discussed these things with the senate as well as those I have mentioned concerning Armenia. He said that the eastern disturbances could not be settled except by the wisdom of Germanicus. He himself was an old man and Drusus [II] lacked sufficiency. So, by a decree of the senate having been issued, the provinces separated from Rome by the [Adriatic] sea were assigned to Germanicus, with greater power in any location than those who had been sent as governors either by lot or by the Caesar. Also, Tiberius had removed as governor in Syria Creticus Silanus, who had a marriage connection with Germanicus, his daughter being engaged to his eldest son Nero, and appointed Gnaeus Piso, a man of violent temper who did not know how to follow orders.³³⁴

We begin with the wisdom (*sapientia*) of Germanicus. This may be dramatic irony on Tacitus' part, where Tiberius is made to look like a fool by extolling the virtues of Germanicus, whom Tacitus, in his account of the mutinies, had previously shown as highly suspect. However, we should also consider that, even if Germanicus had not performed to expectations and members of his entourage knew of his incompetence, no one who wished to maintain a social or political existence would have exposed him. Indeed, it is quite likely that glowing reports would have been sent ahead, concealing Germanicus' ineptitude. Tiberius, then, based on these reports, in all likelihood would have drawn the conclusion that Germanicus was indeed a man of wisdom worthy of the eastern mission. In addition, the triumph that Germanicus had celebrated suggested, officially at least, that Germanicus' mission to Germany, specifically the trans-Rhenic campaigns, had been a success.

Scholars have also debated the precise nature of Germanicus' *maius imperium*. According to Last, *maius imperium* existed in two forms, active and passive. The active type, which usually applied to commanders in the field, subordinated all other power under itself. The passive type,

³³⁴ Literally ignorant of compliance.

typically that invested in the Caesar, existed as a final authority if conflict about overlapping powers should arise.³³⁵ F. R. D. Goodyear adds the extra detail that Germanicus was being sent east on what he calls ‘a roving commission’, whereby Germanicus was not appointed to govern a specific province but to settle various issues in the region. In theory, the fact that Germanicus held the superior command in the field should have allowed him to complete his mission without interference.³³⁶

We now turn to the alleged ‘insufficiency’ of Drusus II. It is not clear whether this refers to age or military experience, although the two would be linked. According to Lindsay, Germanicus and Drusus II were rough contemporaries, with Germanicus perhaps eighteen months older.³³⁷ However, as noted above, appointments to office for the two young men suggest an age difference of three years.³³⁸ It must be remembered that Drusus II had been assigned primarily civilian and domestic duties. His relative lack of diplomatic experience may be the ‘insufficiency’ to which Tiberius refers. However, Germanicus also lacked diplomatic skills, as his handling of the mutinies showed. Germanicus’ trouble in the east also resulted, in part, from his lack of diplomacy. That said, Tiberius sending Germanicus, rather than Drusus, to the east, indicates Germanicus’ priority in the succession.

Tacitus defines Germanicus’ power for the eastern mission in legalistic terms. Germanicus was granted, to paraphrase the translation offered above, greater proconsular power in the provinces east of the Adriatic. Following the pattern of his career to date, it seems reasonable to conclude that his *imperium proconsulare maius* was valid for five years, granting Germanicus superior authority to that of the governor on the spot but still subordinate to Tiberius. Tacitus adds the detail that Germanicus’ authority was to be superior regardless of how the governors in the

³³⁵ Hugh Last, “Imperium Maius: A Note,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947).

³³⁶ Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus: Volume II Annals 1.55-81 and Annals 2*, 323.

³³⁷ Lindsay, *Suetonius Tiberius*, 92.

³³⁸ See discussion in sec. 3.4.

provinces had been appointed, whether as a *legatus* or a senatorial governor. Such a formulation suggests a very precise, almost legalistic tone designed to account for all possible scenarios and remove any ambiguity. This raises the possibility that Tacitus may have had access to the *senatus consultum* for this appointment, or at least a copy thereof.³³⁹

Finally, we come to Piso's appointment to command in Syria.³⁴⁰ Piso's role, in particular the scope of his authority, was ambiguous. David Shotter has undertaken a detailed study of this man's career.³⁴¹ He first reviews Piso's career under Augustus, but it is Piso's relationship with Tiberius that warrants our attention.

Tacitus records incidents from the early part of Tiberius' reign where Piso is said to have contributed to debates in the chamber, speaking in a frank—one might even say blunt—manner about the issue under discussion.³⁴² The point of the episode for our purposes is that Piso received no rebuke from Tiberius, despite his frank manner.³⁴³ This incident demonstrates the closeness of the relationship that Tiberius and Piso shared.

Shotter also analyses why Tiberius chose to specifically appoint Piso as governor of Syria. The Caesar had two main objectives when he assigned a new governor to the region. He needed someone with a connection to himself and, to quote Shotter, he needed someone who was 'not likely to be overawed by Germanicus' authority'.³⁴⁴ This comment must refer to the less tangible concept of Piso being intimidated by Germanicus and his power, because legally, if

³³⁹ Tacitus and Suetonius both comment on the availability of such documents. See Suet., *Aug.* 36; Tac., *Ann.* 5.4.

³⁴⁰ For an alternative perspective on Germanicus, Piso and Syria, see Fred K. Drogula, "Who was Watching Whom? A Reassessment of the Conflict Between Germanicus and Piso," *American Journal of Philology* 136, no. 1 (2015).

³⁴¹ David C. A. Shotter, "Cnaeus Calpurnius Piso, Legate of Syria," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 23, no. 2 (1974)

³⁴² Tac., *Ann.* 1.74.

³⁴³ Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus: Volume II Annals 1.55-81 and Annals 2*, 324.

³⁴⁴ D. C. A. Shotter, "Cnaeus Calpurnius Piso, Legate of Syria," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 23, no. 2 (1974): 233.

Piso were merely governor of Syria and Germanicus had *imperium proconsulare maius*, Germanicus did have overall command.

Piso's appointment served Tiberius' dual purposes nicely. The incident referred to above, where Piso spoke bluntly to Tiberius in the chamber, suggests that he would not be intimidated by Germanicus, and the fact that Piso was *able* to speak in such a manner without earning the rancour of the Caesar indicates that a close relationship existed between them. Piso was therefore the ideal choice, at least on the surface.

The issue of Germanicus' mission to the east raises many legal and constitutional details that are worthy of further study, but these are not germane to the issue of succession.³⁴⁵ The points for examination for our purposes are Germanicus' continued rise, his premature death and the consequences of his death for the succession.

We start with his advancement. Tacitus writes:

*Tiberius nomine Germanici trecentos plebi sestertios viritum dedit seque collegam consulatui eius destinavit.*³⁴⁶

Tiberius, in the name of Germanicus, gave to the plebeians 300 HS and designated himself as his colleague in the consulship.

The distribution of money to the plebeians was a long-established pattern. Since the days of Augustus, such distributions had been made to coincide with major events in the careers of

³⁴⁵ The literary evidence for Germanicus' eastern mission is Tac., *Ann.* 2.43–6, 53–83, 3.1–19; Suet., *Tib.* 52.2–3; Suet., *Calig.* 1–7; Dio Cass., 57.18.6–10. Critical editions of the relevant texts are Lindsay, *Suetonius Tiberius*; Lindsay, *Suetonius Caligula*.; Woodman and Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus Book 3*. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus: Volume II Annals 1.55-81 and Annals 2*.

³⁴⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 2.42

young members of the *Domus Augusta* to ensure their popularity with the mob. Augustus had wished to show that the principate was a benevolent form of government, and this served that purpose nicely. In terms of Tiberius sharing the consulship with Germanicus, we note here that throughout his reign the Caesar would only ever share the consulship with his leading deputy and presumed successor. This will be revisited in Section 4.13 when we come to consider the joint consulship of Tiberius and Sejanus in 31 CE.

Germanicus entered this joint consulship while en route to his provincial assignment. The details of the eastern mission need not delay us, but the events in the aftermath will command our attention. Germanicus' task was to settle the Armenian succession, which had been unstable for some time. His response was to follow local popular sentiment and crown the son of the Pontic king as ruler of Armenia.³⁴⁷ This strategy had the added advantage of placing an easterner on the throne; a native of the east would appear less of a Roman imposition. This event was later commemorated on coins struck by Caligula.³⁴⁸ When Germanicus had completed the negotiations, he ordered Piso to march part of the army based in Syria into Armenia, presumably as a ceremonial guard for the new king. However, Piso refused to follow orders, and this forced a meeting between the two men, which ended in open enmity.³⁴⁹

In 19 CE, Germanicus entered Egypt, which, considering Egypt's unique place in the empire, created further tension between himself and Tiberius: no senator could enter the region without the Caesar's permission. Germanicus' intention seems to have been recreational, but the inhabitants treated it as an official visit. Given Germanicus' familial links to Egypt, through both Antony and Augustus, it was perhaps reasonable for the young man to want to visit the region. Tiberius had sent Piso, in part, to advise Germanicus. However, we note here that the

³⁴⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 2.56.

³⁴⁸ Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy 31B.C.-A.D. 68*, 107-8.

³⁴⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 2.57.

relationship between the two men at this point was highly strained. The *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*³⁵⁰ provide considerable insight into Germanicus' sense of his own importance as well as a seeming disregard for the unique place that Egypt occupied within the Roman empire.

When Germanicus left Egypt and returned to Syria, he discovered that the orders he had issued before he went to Egypt had been rescinded or ignored.³⁵¹ Piso resolved to leave Syria but delayed his departure because of Germanicus' ill health. When Germanicus recovered, and sacrifices were being offered for him, Piso broke up the rituals. Germanicus then suffered a relapse, and began to suspect that Piso was poisoning him. His response was to write a letter renouncing his friendship with Piso, and Tacitus says that many of his sources claimed that Germanicus had ordered Piso out of Syria.³⁵²

The events immediately preceding the death of Germanicus are presented as highly dramatic, with Tacitus using his rhetorical skill to heighten the tension. The speech attributed to Germanicus on his deathbed is not important for our purposes, aside from his prediction of the tension that would soon exist between Agrippina and Tiberius. Tacitus writes:

*Tum ad uxorem versus per memoriam sui, per communis liberos oravit exueret ferociam, saevienti fortunae summitteret animum, neu regressa in urbem aemulatione potentiae validiores inritaret.*³⁵³

Then, turning to [his] wife [Agrippina], he [Germanicus] begged her, by her memory of himself and their children, to submit herself to the temper of fortune,

³⁵⁰ POxy. 25.2435

³⁵¹ Tac., *Ann.* 2.69.

³⁵² Tac., *Ann.* 2.69–70.

³⁵³ Tac., *Ann.* 2.72.

and, if she returned to the city, not to raise the ire of those of greater power than herself by a competition for power.

Tacitus' rhetorical skill and hindsight are on full display here as he pre-empts the breakdown in the relationship between Agrippina and Tiberius and the open hostility that would eventuate between the two. Soon after this, Germanicus died. The public response to Germanicus' death was what we would expect for what was, by any other name, a royal death. The senate decreed all manner of public honours, both newly invented and already existing, as Tacitus comments.³⁵⁴ The reaction of the upper echelons of the government is presented as a stark contrast to the grief of the populace. Both Tacitus and Dio describe Tiberius and Livia as being thoroughly pleased at the death of Germanicus.³⁵⁵

Amidst all the public grief, one piece of domestic good fortune did take place. Under the year 19 CE, Tacitus reports that Livilla, the wife of Tiberius' son, Drusus, gave birth to twin boys. However, even this event does not resound to the good of the state; Tacitus comments that these twins, since they were from the house of Drusus, would put more pressure on the house of Germanicus.³⁵⁶ Germanicus' family, and their supporters, may have seen these births as diminishing the likelihood of Germanicus' children succeeding. Drusus II's line was now growing, and as we will see, he was designated to succeed Tiberius.³⁵⁷ This suggestion runs counter to the terms of Augustus' will, which stated that the heirs in the second degree were to be Germanicus *and* his children before Drusus, and, one would assume, any children Germanicus may have had in the future.

³⁵⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 2.83.

³⁵⁵ Dio Cass., 57.18.6, Tac., *Ann.* 3.3.

³⁵⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 2.84.

³⁵⁷ Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus: Volume II Annals 1.55-81 and Annals 2*, 439.

If the terms of Augustus' will were strictly followed, the death of Germanicus should have had no impact on the succession because he was but one element in the succession hierarchy. Pragmatism, however, would result in a deviation from the strict terms of the will. What is not clear is whether this deviation was a permanent change to the succession arrangements, which would now centre on Drusus II *and his line*, or whether this change was temporary, and the succession would revert to the house of Germanicus once his sons came of age.

Tacitus opens Book III with the return from the east of Agrippina carrying Germanicus' ashes. These opening chapters depict the reaction of the people in Rome as well as innuendo and rumours about Tiberius and Livia's joy at the death of Germanicus. The Caesar and his mother made no public appearances when Agrippina returned to Rome. The reason, according to Tacitus, was that they feared that their duplicity and joy at the passing of Germanicus would be revealed.³⁵⁸ One possible reason for Tiberius and Livia not appearing in public may have been the desire to grieve in private. The absence of this possibility can be accounted for by Tacitean bias.

Tacitus then adds to the words he attributed to Germanicus late in Book II about future conflict between Tiberius and Agrippina. Since this conflict later becomes a major theme of Book IV, where it is depicted as a source of power and influence for Sejanus, it is worth examining Tacitus' detailed comment. He writes:

*nihil tamen Tiberium magis penetravit quam studia hominum accensa in Agrippinam, cum decus patriae, solum Augusti sanguinem, unicum antiquitatis specimen appellarent versique ad caelum ac deos integram illi subolem ac superstitem iniquorum precarentur.*³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 3.3.

³⁵⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 3.4.

However, nothing impacted Tiberius more than the fondness of the citizens³⁶⁰ directed at Agrippina, who was called the glory of the fatherland, the only one of Augustus' blood and the sole specimen of antiquity. They turned to the sky and to the gods and prayed that her children would remain safe and that they would outlast those who wished ill to her.

It is disingenuous of Tacitus to manipulate what was no doubt a sincere outpouring of public grief, sympathy and affection for Agrippina, into slights against Tiberius. The description of Agrippina as the lone member of Augustus' bloodline makes Tiberius' adopted status the issue, thereby questioning his legitimacy. The adoption, of course, was entirely legitimate, and this is simply Tacitean partisanship. Finally, given what would later happen, there is dramatic irony to be found in the statement about the prayers of the populace that Agrippina's children would remain safe.

Seager suggests that the future breakdown of relations between Tiberius and the family of Germanicus had its genesis at this point.³⁶¹ This is not entirely unreasonable given Germanicus' popularity, his death under suspicious circumstances and the allegations of Tiberius' involvement. Tiberius harboured concerns that Germanicus' family would seek revenge. His response to the ongoing public grief at Germanicus' death was, after an appropriate interval, to issue an edict ordering that business and life in general in the city was to resume. Tiberius may have wanted life to continue as it had before Germanicus' death; however, the populace wanted vengeance. An investigation would need to be conducted, and a hearing was set before the senate.

³⁶⁰ To avoid unintentional modern connotations around the phrase 'the fondness of men' (*studia hominum*), the phrase 'fondness of the citizens' has been adopted in its place.

³⁶¹ Seager, *Tiberius*, 92.

Tacitus describes the opening of the trial by focusing on Tiberius' words to the senate-house.

He writes:

*Die senatus Caesar orationem habuit meditato temperamento. patris sui legatum atque amicum Pisonem fuisse adiutoremque Germanico datum a se auctore senatu rebus apud Orientem administrandis. illic contumacia et certaminibus asperasset iuvenem exituque eius laetatus esset an scelere extinxisset, integris animis diiudicandum.*³⁶²

On that day, Caesar gave a calculated oration before the senate. He said that Piso had been a legate and friend of his [Tiberius'] father and of himself, and, by the authority of the senate, had been given as a helper to Germanicus in the administration of the affairs of the east. He said 'the issue is whether he [Piso] had, by military struggle and obstinacy, raised the ire of the youth [Germanicus] and expressed joy at his death, or had, by crime, put an end to his life. You must decide this, with unbiased minds!'

Tiberius outlined the issues to be investigated by the senate. He noted Piso's service to the state and his connection to Tiberius and his family. Tiberius' desire was that the senate conduct the investigation with open minds. The senate-house was to examine the circumstances surrounding Germanicus' death, Piso's alleged involvement in that incident and Piso's reaction to Germanicus' death.

Tiberius made it clear that if the charges were proven, he would deal with this transgression in the same way that a private citizen would deal with a friend who had crossed him: he would renounce his friendship and exclude the perpetrator from his house. If the charges were

³⁶² Tac., *Ann.* 3.12.

substantiated, Tiberius continued, the senate should administer appropriate measures.³⁶³ The senate-house was also to decide whether the charges against Piso concerning the corruption of the military and other seditious actions were grounded in fact or were lies spread by his detractors.³⁶⁴ Tiberius made his desire for a fair trial known when he said that the actions of *both* Piso and Germanicus should be scrutinised. Tiberius' grief was not to prevent Piso from being allowed to be represented or to have his side of the case heard. The *princeps* ordered that this investigation be treated as any other case: the senate-house was to ignore the fact that the case involved a member of the *Domus Augusta*.³⁶⁵

What is noteworthy about this speech is Tiberius' insistence on impartial justice and an unbiased investigation. This is yet another example of Tiberius' adherence to justice and the rule of law. Whether Tiberius took this approach for purposes of appearances is not clear; however, even according to Tacitus, Tiberius tells the senate that they should undertake the investigation with clear minds. The verdict in the case and the outcome of the investigation are not presented as foregone conclusions. Despite this, no verdict was reached because Piso committed suicide before the trial was concluded.

Germanicus' death and the events surrounding it were investigated by the senate and overseen by Tiberius. The senate issued a decree containing its findings in the trial, which will be discussed later in this section. below. Part of the text refers to the succession. Tiberius adhered to established Augustan precedents to ensure the continuation of the principate.

The death of Germanicus, the heir presumptive to Tiberius, generated problems for Augustus' preferred plans for the succession. It was clear that Germanicus was to succeed Tiberius, and in turn be succeeded by one of his own children. However, Germanicus' death, combined with

³⁶³ Tac., *Ann.* 3.12.2.

³⁶⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 3.12.3.

³⁶⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 3.12.5–7.

the youth of his children, necessitated the rise of Tiberius' son, Drusus II, as the next most senior member of the administration, to replace Germanicus as Tiberius' leading deputy. The precise capacity in which Drusus was to serve is not clear. That is, was he to be a permanent replacement and therefore succeed Tiberius in his own right, or was he to be a placeholder for one of Germanicus' sons?

Similar uncertainty had existed during the last decade of the first century BCE. Tiberius had replaced Agrippa as Augustus' leading deputy, and he was granted all the powers necessary to govern. Tiberius' position was complicated by the presence of the young Gaius Caesar. It was Augustus' intention that Gaius eventually succeed him. Tiberius' position at this point was unclear. Was he to succeed in his own right, or was he to be a placeholder for Gaius?

A parallel existed in Drusus II's case, where if anything were to befall Tiberius before one of Germanicus' children was capable of ruling, Drusus II would have filled that void. However, just as Tiberius had, Drusus II now faced the dilemma posed by the presence of a younger intended successor, in this case Nero. What was left unexplained was whether Drusus II *and his line* would succeed Tiberius, or if, once Nero came of age, Drusus II would be expected to relinquish his position in favour of Nero. There was the potential for serious political trouble in the future, should one of Germanicus' children claim what he (or perhaps his mother Agrippina) saw as his rightful place in the state. For now, Tiberius, as Augustus had done, chose the pragmatic path by turning to the most senior man in his administration. The senate attempted to clarify this issue in its decree published in the wake of the death of Germanicus.

Such is the literary account of Germanicus' eastern mission, of his death and of the trial of Piso. In the 1980s, an inscription was found in Spain that has shed considerable light on these issues. The best-preserved version of the inscription bore the title across the top: *Senatus Consultum*

de Cn. Pisone Patre, or ‘The Decree of the Senate Concerning Gnaeus Piso the Elder’.³⁶⁶ The inscription is dated to four days before the Ides of December (*a[n]te d[iem] IIII eid[us] Dec[embres]*)—that is, the tenth of the month.³⁶⁷ The precise year of the decree can be inferred from the preamble. It reads that the senate had been charged with investigating the case of Gnaeus Piso by Tiberius Caesar Augustus (son of the deified Augustus), who was chief priest, of twenty-two years tribunician power, who had been consul three times and was designated for a fourth (*Ti[berius] Caesar divi Aug[usti] f[ilius] Aug[ustus] pontifex maxumus, tribunicia potestate XXII, co[n]s[ul] III, designatus IIII*).³⁶⁸ These facts place the decree in the year 20 CE.

Before proceeding, some preliminary observations on the decree are required.. Since we are dealing with an inscription, the text is precisely what was carved on the stone. It is thus the clearest example of a primary source: it has not been preserved by being copied down the centuries. Obviously, scribal errors and copyist mistakes are impossible for such a text. As a result, this text may be viewed as providing a more accurate record of what happened. Thoughts along this line should be tempered with consideration of precisely what it is that the text represents. This is the official government response, overseen by the Caesar. It is therefore going to portray the Caesar, his household and the principate as a system of government in a positive light.

We are mainly concerned with what the Decree says about the future of the principate now that Germanicus was dead. The first essential part of the decree for our purposes is the actual decision of the senate-house concerning the charges. Only a brief sample from the decree is

³⁶⁶ Henceforth, the Decree will be referenced using the shorthand SCCPP.

³⁶⁷ SCCPP, I.1. All insertions and extrapolations in the text are those taken from the edition contained in Potter and Damon, "The "Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre". "All translations, as has been the case throughout, are my own.

³⁶⁸ SCCPP, I. 5.

provided here to demonstrate the damning indictment against Piso before moving to the epilogue, which deals with the future of the regime. The Decree states:

*ob id morientem Germanicum Cae/sarem, quouis mortis fuisse caussam
Cn.Pisonem patrem ipse testatus sit, non inme/rito amicitiam ei renuntiasset, qui
cum deberet meminisse adiutorem se datum / esse Germanico Caesari, qui a
principe nostro ex auctoritate huius orrdinis ad / rerum transmarinarum statum
componendum missus esset desiderantium / praesentiam aut ipsius Ti.Caesaris
Aug(usti) aut filiorum alterius utrius[.] neglecta / maiestate domus Aug(ustae),
neclecto etiam iure publico, quod adlect(us) pro co(n)s(ule) et ei pro co(n)s(ule),
de quo / lex ad populum lata esset, ut in quamcumq(ue) provinciam venisset,
maius ei imperium / quam ei qui eam provinciam proco(n)s(ule) optineret, esset,
dum in omni re maius imperi / um Ti.Caesari Aug(usto) quam Germanico
Caesari esset.³⁶⁹*

The senate decided that, because of Piso's savagery, the dying Germanicus Caesar himself declared the elder Piso to have been the cause of his death. He [Germanicus], not unreasonably, had renounced his friendship with a man who would have done well to remember that he was given as a helper to Germanicus Caesar. He, by our princeps and the authority of this order, had been sent to resolve matters overseas that would have required the sending of Tiberius Caesar Augustus himself or one of his two sons. The senate decreed that Piso had ignored the majesty of the Augustan house as well as the law of the land, since he had been attached to a proconsul, indeed a proconsul concerning whom a law had been put to the people to the effect that in whatsoever province he went, he did so with greater power than the proconsul on the spot, with the

³⁶⁹ SCCPP, II. 25–36.

exception that, in every case, the power granted to Tiberius Caesar Augustus was to be greater than his.

Our primary interest in the Decree is as it relates to the succession. We have seen already that, since the days of Augustus, missions to the east were a way to promote the leading deputy. Examples include Agrippa, Tiberius and Gaius Caesar. Germanicus' appointment to a similar mission indicates his primary role in the succession to Tiberius. A point of interest regarding the succession is the precise definition that the Decree offers of *imperium proconsulare maius*. This is a useful counterbalance to the often-vague literary evidence, which frequently takes many of these details for granted. That said, the fact that the hierarchy of command had to be so explicitly explained suggests that there was confusion between the theory and the practice of grants of *imperia* and about how the two overlapped.

The Decree proceeds in this vein, but this passage, along with another from the epilogue, is sufficient for our purposes. The tone of the text is best described as highly sycophantic. The legacy and achievements of Augustus, who had been dead approximately six years, are mentioned throughout as a means of justifying Tiberius' actions.

The text, translation and analysis provided here is intended to give something of a sample of the image of Piso, Germanicus and the event in the east as presented in the official record. In the passage cited, Germanicus is not identified explicitly as the heir apparent. Indeed, the Decree specifically states that Tiberius himself or either of his two sons could have been sent to the east. However, the fact that Germanicus was sent does, on the model of Gaius Caesar, confirm him as Tiberius' leading deputy. How the Decree deals with the issue of the succession in light of Germanicus' death will now be examined.

3.8 Drusus II's Position Confirmed

The immediate context for what follows is the epilogue of the Decree, which consists of lengthy praise for the imperial house and all its members for maintaining order in the state and a rejoinder to the soldiers to remain steadfast in their loyalty to Tiberius. The Decree states:

Item cum iudicaret senatus omnium partium pietatem antecessisse Ti.Caesarem Aug(ustum) principem nostrum ... magnopere rogare et petere, ut omnem curam, quam / in duos quondam filios suos partitus erat, ad eum, quem haberet, converteret,/ sperareq(ue) senatum eum, qui supersit, /t/anto maior/i/ curae dis immortalibus /fore, quanto magis intellegent, omnem spem futuram paternae pro / r(e) p(ublica) stationis in uno repos[i]ta<m>, quo nomine debere eum finire dolorem / ac restituere patriae suae non tantum animum, sed etiam voltum, qui / publicae felicitati conveniret.³⁷⁰

Since the senate judged that the grief of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, our *princeps*, had exceeded that of all parents ... [the senate] sincerely asked and sought that all care that he [Tiberius] had previously placed in his own two sons be now devoted to the one he had [left—Drusus]. The senate also hoped that he [Drusus] would be a greater object of the care of the immortal gods to the extent that they understood that all future hope of his father's guard-duty on behalf of the state resided in one man. On this account, the senate thought that he should end his grief and reinstate to his own country not merely a mindset without animus but one that would resound to the bliss of the public.

³⁷⁰ SCCPP, II. 124–33.

The message of this section of the Decree is clear: Drusus was to succeed Tiberius now that Germanicus was dead. What is not clear is what was to happen after Drusus succeeded his father. The only insight the Decree offers is the statement that *all* future hope of Tiberius' guard-duty on behalf of the state (*statio pro re publica*) lay with Drusus. I would suggest that this vagueness around the future of the regime, combined with the pre-existing tensions over the death of Germanicus, formed a considerable part of the basis for the future conflict between Tiberius and Agrippina. It is not imprudent to speculate that Agrippina may have seen the decision that Drusus would succeed Tiberius not as pragmatic and temporary but as a permanent shift away from her sons to those of Drusus and his wife, Livilla.

3.9 The Early Career of Germanicus' Son, Nero

The death of Germanicus forced Tiberius, as Augustus had been forced when Gaius Caesar died, to change his succession plan. The difference in Tiberius' case was that an extensive succession plan was already in place should fate intervene. The issue with this plan was that its final intended form, whereby one of Germanicus' sons would succeed, would take time to come to fruition. In the past, Augustus had instituted preferred heirs, typically of his own blood, but he had always made the pragmatic choice. The precedent for this is found in Tiberius' own career. When Agrippa died, Tiberius, as the next most senior member of the administration, replaced him as Augustus' leading deputy. In a similar fashion, Drusus was elevated to replace Germanicus following his death. However, it must be said that from this point, 20 CE, succession planning was neglected and, after Drusus II's death, virtually non-existent. No contingencies were in place if anything were to befall Drusus. The manipulation of this uncertainty was part of Sejanus' *modus operandi*.

The Decree was issued late in the year 20 CE. Tacitus also describes, under this year, the coming of age of Germanicus' eldest son, Nero. Tacitus writes:

*Per idem tempus Neronem e liberis Germanici iam ingressum iuventam commendavit patribus ... et quinquennio maturius quam per leges quaesturam peteret ... additur pontificatus et quo primum die forum ingressus est congiarium plebi admodum laetae quod Germanici stirpem iam puberem aspiciebat.*³⁷¹

At about this time, Nero, son of Germanicus, had reached the official status of a young man, and he [Tiberius] commended him to the fathers [senators] ... and requested that he [Nero] be granted a five-year remission on the age requirements to be quaestor ... He was also placed among the priests, and when he first entered the forum, cash was distributed to the commons, who were joyous to see that a child of Germanicus had entered puberty.

Here we see continuation of a pattern, which started with Marcellus in the early 20s BCE. Nero, like Marcellus and Gaius Caesar before him, was granted the so-called privilege of the years. However, at least as Tacitus has it, Tiberius asked for the five-year remission for Nero specifically regarding the quaestorship, rather than office generally. Despite this limitation, his entry into public life was accompanied by liberal distributions of cash. We have already seen this sort of largesse used to raise the public profile of young members of the *Domus Augusta*. The games that Marcellus had given as aedile had been financially supported by Augustus, and the coins used to pay the donative granted to the troops when Augustus took Gaius Caesar to Gaul in 8 BCE were inscribed with the image of the young man.³⁷²

³⁷¹ Tac., *Ann.* 3.29.

³⁷² For the visit to Gaul, see Dio Cass., 55.6.4. For the coins, see *RIC* 198, 99.

This establishes two patterns. The first is accelerated career advancement, whereby young Caesars began their careers at an earlier age than their contemporaries. The other is that of imperial financial support. Augustus had established this pattern, and Tiberius continued it with the donative to the commons to celebrate his shared term in the consulship with Germanicus in 17 CE. The distribution of cash demonstrated both the generosity of the regime as well as the political prominence of the young men. As Germanicus had before him, Nero represented the next generation of the principate so it was necessary to set him apart from his contemporaries.

The beginning of Nero's career conforms to this pattern. However, Tiberius did not integrate him into the administration in any meaningful way, so his career did not progress. He was, as we have seen, enrolled among the priests, granted an age requirement remission and other privileges. He was also popular with the mob, a function of his descent from Germanicus and bolstered by the distribution of cash. For all this, it should be noted that Nero's early career was all form and no substance. Even accounting for his age, Nero's advancement could be dismissed as little more than a *façade*. Tiberius was aware of the popular support for Germanicus and his family, and he would have viewed the *façade* of advancing Nero as politically expedient.

What this did not do was provide any indication of what would happen regarding the succession to Tiberius should anything befall Drusus. If either Tiberius or Drusus were to die, there would be no one suitably experienced to fulfil the role of leading deputy, and, we would suppose, heir apparent. This would be the case for a minimum of five years hence. Even then, Nero would only be quaestor, with no military or judicial, and very limited administrative, experience. For all the confidence of the Decree concerning the future of the regime, the fact is that Tiberius' unwillingness to raise up a younger deputy as a contingency created a highly fragile succession arrangement.

Tiberius' response to the death of Germanicus was multifaceted. Even before the Decree was issued, Tiberius and Drusus II had been elected as consuls for the following year.³⁷³ Tiberius' intentions could not have been clearer: he had shared the consulship with Germanicus, who was clearly his leading deputy at the time, and he was now doing so with Drusus. Tiberius chose the number of his consulships, and his colleagues, strategically and deliberately. The Caesar used a shared consulship to demonstrate whom he saw as the heir apparent. He was to share a third term in the consulship with Sejanus in 31 CE. The SCCPP explicitly declared Drusus II to be Tiberius' heir apparent. The term 'heir apparent' is used in place of the previously adopted 'leading deputy' because it is from this point that the Romans themselves unapologetically speak of political succession.

Included under the year 20 CE is a subtle reference to the forthcoming rise of Sejanus when he reports that Sejanus' daughter was betrothed to the son of Claudius.³⁷⁴ Claudius is often portrayed in the ancient sources as the 'black sheep' of the imperial family because of various physical defects, which were viewed as indicative of mental defects. This prejudice against Claudius is even present in the SCCPP. Even though he was thirty years old, Claudius is only mentioned among the women and children, at the very end of the epilogue's lengthy thanks to the imperial house. That said, 'black sheep' or not, he was a member of the imperial family. He was the brother of the immensely popular and recently deceased Germanicus. For Sejanus, having his daughter betrothed to the nephew of Germanicus, although a distant connection to the imperial family, was a connection nonetheless.

The year 21 CE, in which Tiberius and Drusus were the ordinary consuls, is the subject of a great deal of discussion in the sources, centred on domestic matters, in part concerning the ramifications of the death of Germanicus. Jane Bellemore has discussed the chronology of the

³⁷³ Coins confirm this term in office. See *BMC* 95.

³⁷⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 3.29.

events of the year 21 CE, with specific reference to Dio's account.³⁷⁵ A significant event in that year was Tiberius' withdrawal from the city. We should look briefly at the reasons Tacitus gives for this event. He writes:

*eius anni principio Tiberius quasi firmandae valetudini in Campaniam concessit, longam et continuam absentiam paulatim meditans, sive ut amoto patre Drusus munia consulatus solus impleret.*³⁷⁶

At the start of that year (21 CE), Tiberius, somewhat for the firming up of his health, departed for Campania. This he did either for reasons of gradual training for a long and continued absence, or to allow Drusus, by the retirement of his father, to fulfil the requirements of the consulship alone.

The suggestion that Tiberius left to prepare himself and, perhaps more importantly, the city, for his planned permanent departure in the future is a post-hoc derivation from the fact that Tiberius did indeed leave the city in 26 CE, never to return. A more reasonable explanation is that Tiberius was attempting to allow Drusus to exercise the functions of office alone, given that it would allow him to gain further and, perhaps more importantly, independent, administrative experience.

The events of this consulship, aside from one minor detail, are not relevant to this discussion. The accounts focus on Drusus dealing with what may be called mundane business in the chamber. One such item of business concerned the issue of provincial commands. It was necessary to assign a senator to the governorship of Africa. Various candidates were put forward, before Blaesus, the uncle of Sejanus, was appointed to this important command. Of

³⁷⁵ Jane Bellemore, "Cassius Dio and the Chronology of A.D. 21," *The Classical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2003).

³⁷⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 3.31.

particular note is the fact that another candidate, Lepidus, was put forward, but he advanced various legitimate personal reasons why he could not take up the assignment.

Tacitus, however, suggests that Lepidus was reluctant to oppose Blaesus because of the latter's connection to power.³⁷⁷ This statement may well be true; recall that Blaesus' brother, Strabo, who was Sejanus' father, had been made prefect of Egypt early in Tiberius' reign. Between this appointment for Strabo, and Sejanus being allowed to remain sole prefect of the guard after serving with his father, Sejanus' family was clearly in the inner circle of Tiberius' governing apparatus. Thus, Tacitus' 'connection to power' need not be seen as a sinister reference to Sejanus. Sejanus was quite well connected, despite his portrayal by the ancient historians. This series of appointments suggests that his family was trusted by Tiberius and the imperial family.

3.10 The Constitutional Powers of Drusus II

The next major political event is Drusus being granted versions of Tiberius' legal powers. Under the year 22 CE, Tacitus writes:

*Tiberius ... mittit litteras ad senatum quis potestatem tribuniciam Druso petebat. id summi fastigii vocabulum Augustus repperit, ne regis aut dictatoris nomen adsumeret ac tamen appellatione aliqua cetera imperia praemineret. Marcum deinde Agrippam socum eius potestatis, quo defuncto Tiberium Neronem delegit ne successor in incerto foret.*³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 3.35.

³⁷⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 3.56. Furneaux discusses this passage. See Furneaux, *P. Cornelii Taciti Annalium ab excessu divi Augusti libri = The Annals of Tacitus*, 458-9.

Tiberius ... sent a letter to the senate, which asked for the tribunician power for Drusus. Augustus had devised this term for the supreme dignity to avoid the titles of king or dictator but still maintain supremacy over the other officials. He later chose Marcus Agrippa as his colleague in power, and, when he died, chose Tiberius Nero such that the succession was not in doubt.

Tiberius cited the examples of both himself and Agrippa as precedent for his request for *tribunicia potestas* for Drusus II. In the same section of *Annales* 3, Tacitus has Tiberius note that Drusus was the same age as he himself had been when Augustus had called him to assume the *tribunicia potestas*. This took place, as we have seen, in 6 BCE. Tellingly, that grant had included versions of *both* of Augustus' powers: *imperium proconsulare* and *tribunicia potestas*.³⁷⁹ We recall that Agrippa had been granted versions of *both* of Augustus' legal powers.³⁸⁰ If Tiberius was citing these incidents as precedent for his request, he surely intended to have the senate grant *both* powers to his son; a legalist like Tiberius was unlikely to cite irrelevant precedent.

Any doubt about Tiberius' intentions for his son is settled by the brief quotation that Tacitus offers, wherein Tiberius makes explicit mention of Drusus' military exploits, including conducting wars and suppressing the mutinies of 14 CE, none of which could have been done without *imperium proconsulare*. Tacitus is surely accurate when he says that Drusus was being called upon to share a task in which he was already well versed.

Once again, we see the repetition of a pattern that had commenced during the reign of Augustus, where leading political deputies were granted versions of Augustus' own powers. In the cases of Agrippa and Tiberius, a man with close ties to Augustus and who was married to his

³⁷⁹ Dio Cass., 55.9.4.

³⁸⁰ Dio Cass., 54.12.4 – that the *imperium proconsulare* is not explicitly mentioned here is noted, but the text does mention Augustus granting Agrippa many powers almost equal to his own. See also Dio Cass., 54.19.6, 28.1–2.

daughter, was granted versions of the powers that defined Augustus' position. This created a situation of legal equality. They remained, of course, subordinate to Augustus due to his *auctoritas*. This was as close as Augustus could have gone to officially designating a successor: a man equipped with the relevant powers, who could assume control of the state if necessary.

We can see these elements of the Augustan pattern being repeated in Drusus II's case: he was Tiberius' son, he was married to Tiberius' niece and he had received versions of Tiberius' legal powers. Tiberius' innovation was to share the consulship with his presumed political heir. A further innovation comes with the nature of Drusus II's *imperium proconsulare*. Augustus had insisted that no further expansion of the empire take place. Deference to this order necessitated that Drusus' *imperium proconsulare* was more administrative than military in its application. We see here a useful demonstration of Last's differentiation between the active and passive *imperia*, as discussed in Section 3.7. Tiberius, since the last years of Augustus, had possessed the passive form of *imperium*—that is, focused on administration rather than active campaigning. In a similar fashion, Drusus II, in 23 CE, was not to command troops in the field but rather to serve alongside Tiberius and, ideally in Tiberius' mind, replace him in administrative duties, thus allowing Tiberius to retire.

This chapter has established Tiberius in power through an examination of Augustus' will. The confirmation of Tiberius in power created uncertainty in his relationship with the *patres*, an uncertainty that grew, over time, into frustration and contempt. This chapter also examined Tiberius' initial plans for the succession, the main details of which were already in place with Germanicus as his leading deputy. Germanicus' career reflected his new status in both acceleration and appointments granted. However, his fitness to rule was questioned in this chapter, based on his handling of the rebellions in 14 CE.

Regardless of any issues with his fitness to rule, Germanicus was, on the model of Agrippa, Tiberius and Gaius Caesar, appointed to a command in the east. However, Germanicus died during his mission, throwing Tiberius' plans for the succession into chaos. Tiberius' reaction was similar to that of Augustus on the death of Gaius Caesar in 4 CE. He turned to the most senior member of his administration, his own son, Drusus II. After sharing the consulship with him, Tiberius had the senate grant his son versions of his own powers. He was now clearly empowered as Tiberius' colleague.

When the SCCPP was issued in 20 CE, Livilla, Drusus' wife, had already given birth to twin sons sometime in the previous year. This created a line for Drusus. It is not clear from the evidence whether the selection of Drusus as Tiberius' successor was a pragmatic and temporary move or a permanent realignment. Regardless of its motivation, the rise of Drusus II would fuel the forthcoming conflict between Tiberius and Agrippina.

Augustus' plan for the succession—that a Julian would ultimately succeed—became unstable upon the death of Germanicus because one of his sons was not old enough to be advanced in preparation for future rule. Germanicus' death while his children were too young to rule severely disrupted all of Augustus' carefully constructed plans. Following the death of Germanicus, Tiberius, out of necessity, turned to the next most senior man in his administration, as Augustus had done. It is surely the case that even though Drusus was Tiberius' son, the *princeps*' decision was based on pragmatism rather than a desire to see his own son succeed him.

By 23 CE, then, Tiberius' son, Drusus II, was the heir apparent. His position was established by default because he was the most senior member of the administration. It was augmented by two factors: he had shared a term in the consulship with the Caesar and he had been granted versions of the Caesar's powers. These privileges represented Tiberius' succession mechanics.

Therefore by 23 CE, the Caesar seemed to have solved the issue of the succession, based on the assumption that between his own reign and then that of Drusus enough time would pass to see a member of the younger generation old enough to rule. However, we will see in the next Chapter that, as Tacitus would later comment, fortune deranged everything (*turbare fortuna coepit*).

Chapter 4: Sejanus

The last chapter ended with Tiberius having put in place measures to secure the succession. The SCCPP had endorsed the rise of Drusus II, and his shared consulship with Tiberius, as well his share of Tiberius' powers, confirmed his place as successor. What was less clear was whether the rise of Drusus should be characterised as a permanent shift, an adaptation of a traditional pattern, or another in an ongoing series of pragmatic decisions. Drusus' movement to the fore mirrored the decision made by Augustus when Gaius Caesar died. Following the death of Germanicus, there remained what Tacitus would later call the plenitude of Caesars (*plena Caesarum domus*): Drusus and his two sons as well as the three sons of Germanicus.³⁸¹ This chapter will examine the career and ascendancy of Sejanus, and consider what Levick calls the 'dynastic catastrophe',³⁸² which Tacitus attributes to Sejanus.

Augustus' succession plan was designed to create stability by linking all politically important figures to himself and his family. It was not yet possible to simply seize imperial power in Rome: there was an intangible mystique to the Caesars as the basis for political stability. Legitimacy in politics was grounded in a connection to this revered family. Sejanus used his proximity to Tiberius to rise to unparalleled levels of power and influence for one outside the imperial family. This, of course, remained unofficial until the year 30 CE. It was only in that year that the mechanics of succession could be applied to Sejanus, and this formalised his position.

This chapter will consider events from 23 through to 31 CE, with specific focus on Sejanus' career, his rise in influence and the level of destruction that influence proved to have for the

³⁸¹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.3.

³⁸² Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 148.

house of Caesar. The goal in this chapter is to investigate the question of Sejanus' viability as a successor to Tiberius, using the mechanics of succession described in previous chapters. Sejanus' machinations, ironically akin to those of Augustus in perpetuating the principate, were in large part ad hoc reactions to circumstances rather than the implementation of a coherent plan. Although Sejanus did not necessarily *create* the circumstances that led to his rise, he certainly manipulated Tiberius personally and used unfolding events to his advantage. Modern scholarship has much to say on Sejanus and this period, with divergent views being advanced. In this chapter, some of these views will be evaluated using the historical record pertaining to Sejanus.

As precedents for Sejanus, we note the careers of Agrippa, Tiberius and now Drusus II. These men had all received *tribunicia potestas* and *imperium proconsulare*, and all were members of the imperial house by birth, marriage or adoption. These privileges, both political and social, have been defined here as the mechanics of succession. We have seen that this pattern established these men in positions that would have allowed them to assume control. The sheer length of Augustus' reign, combined with the fact that so many members of the imperial house perished before he did, necessitated many repetitions of this pattern. This typically involved a man marrying Julia: a key element in the mechanics of succession given that all the men who were considered leading deputies down to 4 CE were either the husband or son of the *princeps*' only daughter.

The cases of Agrippa and Tiberius demonstrate that both the primacy of the *domus Caesaris* and the judgement of the incumbent *princeps* regarding the merit of potential candidates were integral to the process of choosing successors. They confirm Augustus' use of marriage to establish a connection between himself and those he wished to promote. The careers of these men also show that a blood connection to the ruling *princeps* was not essential, as we see Augustus arranging for the marriages of first Agrippa, and then Tiberius, into the family of the

Caesars. These marriages demonstrate a continuation of Republican practice on Augustus' part.³⁸³ Augustus' intent with these marriages was to serve his own ends. However, the corollary was also true: the man who was married to an imperial woman was now in the inner circle of the imperial family. Agrippa and Tiberius were already integral to the administration, and at the time of their respective marriages both men were considered the leading deputy to Augustus. We will see that Sejanus is reported to have sought such a connection to Tiberius' family.

The criterion of marriage maintained its importance in the mechanics of succession into Tiberius' reign. A useful case in point is Germanicus, who was married to Augustus' granddaughter, Agrippina. Augustus arranged this marriage as part of the Settlement of 4 CE. Germanicus' connection to Augustus was by blood, but it was a distant relationship: he was his great nephew. However, Germanicus' marriage to Agrippina meant that any *children* the marriage produced would be direct descendants of Augustus. We see here Augustus' recognition of the importance of marriage alliances to the political elite of the Roman republic, and the way in which this traditional relationship came to reflect the importance, for potential heirs apparent, of a marriage connection to the reigning Caesar.

Augustus was, once again, adapting an established precedent for his own ends. The use of marriages to form political alliances had long been practised at Rome; but with one family at the centre of affairs, this practice became even more significant. This is not to say that Augustus was forming a dynasty, as we understand it. The *princeps* was very mindful of the consequences, as well as the legal impossibility, of openly establishing a dynasty. Rather, the

³⁸³ As examples of this practice, consider Caesar the Dictator marrying his daughter, Julia, to Pompey to secure the so-called First Triumvirate and other alliances (Plut., *Vit Caes.* 14.7–8). Consider, too, the marriage between Sulla and Metella, the daughter of Metellus, the *Pontifex Maximus*, in 88 BCE (Plut., *Vit Sull.* 6.10). Finally, for this non-exhaustive list, consider the marriage between Antony and Octavia to secure the Second Triumvirate (Plut., *Vit Ant.* 31.1–3).

marriages are explained by adherence to established practice as well as by the connection that Augustus forged between the strength of his *gens* and that of the state itself.

Following the death of Germanicus, and the associated succession realignment discussed in Chapter 3, Livilla became the parallel of Julia in Tiberius' reign. Married to the heir apparent, Livilla was the mother of the next generation: if anything were to befall Drusus, her centrality would not decrease. Indeed, the prominence of any man married to her would have increased dramatically. It is this centrality that Sejanus tried to exploit in furthering his overarching strategy.

As important as we may see a marriage connection to the Caesar, according to the principles of governance developed under the Augustan dispensation it was more specifically the legal powers that a man possessed, *imperium proconsulare* and *tribunicia potestas*, bolstered by the marriage relationship, that defined the position of colleague. Sejanus attempted to create a parallel situation for himself in Tiberius' reign to increase his own social and political prominence. This will be dealt with in more detail in Section 4.4.

4.1 The Year 23 CE to the Death of Drusus II

We start with Tacitus' account of the situation in 23 CE and his detailed introduction of Sejanus, from the beginning of Book IV:

C. Asinio C. Antistio consulibus nonus Tiberio annus erat compositae rei publicae, florentis domus (nam Germanici mortem inter prospera ducebat), cum repente turbare fortuna coepit, saevire ipse aut saevientibus viris praebere. initium et causa penes Aelium Seianum cohortibus praetoriis praefectum cuius de potentia supra memoravi: nunc originem, mores, et quo facinore

*dominationem raptum ierit expediam. genitus Vulsiniis patre Seio Strabone equite Romano, et prima iuventa Gaium Caesarem divi Augusti nepotem sectatus ... mox Tiberium variis artibus devinxit: adeo ut obscurum adversum alios sibi uni incautum intectumque efficeret, non tam sollertia (quippe isdem artibus victus est) quam deum ira in rem Romanam, cuius pari exitio viguit ceciditque. corpus illi laborum tolerans, animus audax; sui obtegens, in alios criminator; iuxta adulatio et superbia; palam compositus pudor, intus summa apiscendi libido, eiusque causa modo largitio et luxus, saepius industria ac vigilantia, haud minus noxae quotiens parando regno finguntur.*³⁸⁴

The year with Gaius Asinius and Gaius Antistius as consuls was, for Tiberius, the ninth year of stability for the state and prosperity for his house (for he counted the death of Germanicus among his prosperities), when, suddenly, fortune deranged everything. He himself became tyrannical, or else abetted tyranny in others. The beginning and cause of this was Aelius Sejanus, prefect of the praetorian cohorts, of whose power I have already spoken.³⁸⁵ I shall now describe his origins, his character and those deeds by which he grasped at power. Born at Vulsinii, the son of Seius Strabo, a Roman knight, he attached himself in his early youth to Gaius Caesar, the grandson of the Divine Augustus. ... Soon he [Sejanus] had so captivated Tiberius by various arts that, although obscure with others, he was relaxed with him alone. Sejanus achieved this not through subtlety (for it was by these arts that he was overthrown), but rather from the anger of the gods towards the Roman state, for whose damnation he alike flourished and failed. His body was tolerant of burdens and he had an audacious spirit, protecting himself while incriminating others, at once fawning and

³⁸⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 4.1. For Dio's introduction of Sejanus, see Dio Cass., 57.19.6–7.

³⁸⁵ See, for example, Tac., *Ann.* 1.24.2.

arrogant. While modest on the outside, inside he was driven by a powerful ambition. This compelled him simultaneously to lavishness and luxury, but more often to vigilance and industry, which are no less noxious when aiming for kingship.

The city had recovered from the death of Germanicus, and Tacitus says that Tiberius was pleased at the young man's death, a comment that is surely little more than a Tacitean gloss. Tiberius' comment at the time about individual princes being mortal, whereas the state was eternal, was correct, although it is presented as insensitive.³⁸⁶ A newly empowered heir apparent, Drusus, had been installed, and thus political stability seemed secure. However, Tacitus then says that fortune then began to unravel the apparent stability (*turbare fortuna coepit*).

Ronald Martin and A. J. Woodman draw attention to the similarity between Tacitus' comment and a statement made by the earlier Roman historian Sallust.³⁸⁷ In both passages, specific events represent historical turning points that initiate future disaster. For Sallust, the destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE displayed Rome's arrogance as an imperialist power, which eventuated in a prolonged political crisis. For Tacitus, the rise of Sejanus represented a similar turning point in the reign of Tiberius. We may infer this from Tacitus' comment that Sejanus was the origin and cause of the future trouble.³⁸⁸

Tacitus observes Sejanus' connection to Gaius Caesar. Not only does this connection establish a link between Sejanus and the imperial family back to the reign of Augustus, but also such a relationship to Gaius Caesar, the then heir apparent, suggests that both Augustus and Gaius trusted Sejanus. Had Gaius succeeded, Sejanus could have looked forward to a prominent

³⁸⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 3.6.

³⁸⁷ Martin and Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 79.

³⁸⁸ As another example, see Livy *AUC* 39.6.

career. The fact that Gaius' death did not impinge upon Sejanus' career reflects his ongoing ties with the *Domus Augusta*.

Tacitus describes Sejanus' provincial origins, which he uses to declare Sejanus' rise and influence illegitimate. Specifically, Tacitus identifies Sejanus as the cause of the trouble that was to come. He describes Sejanus as 'grasping' for power (*facinore dominationem*) and as being driven by arrogance (*superbia*) and ambition (*libido*). These terms suggest that, according to Tacitus, Sejanus had forgotten his place in the social hierarchy. However, equites could become very important men with considerable wealth and power. Sejanus' father, for example, had been the prefect of Egypt (*praefectus Aegypti*), a region that was held as the personal estate of the Caesar. The placing of an eques rather than a senator in charge of the Caesar's personal domain suggests a great deal of trust between the imperial family and the equites as a class. The fact that Sejanus' father in particular was placed in such an important position suggests a high level of trust between the Caesar and that family.

It is also possible that herein lies an explanation for the senatorial historians, Tacitus and Dio, holding Sejanus in such contempt. The trust that the Caesars placed in the equites typically took place at the expense of the senators. One reason for this trust was that, at least in theory, equites had no desire to pursue a career in the *cursus honorum*, and they were therefore not considered a threat to the Caesar. If we consider briefly the posts available to these men, a picture begins to emerge. Posts included prefect of the praetorian guard (*praefectus praetorio*), prefect of the night watch (*praefectus vigilum*) and the very important prefects of Egypt and of the corn supply (*praefectus Aegypti* and *curator annonae*).³⁸⁹

³⁸⁹ Dio Cass., 53.13.2 (Egypt), 15.2-3 (procuators), 55.26.4 (*vigiles*), Tac. *Ann.* 1.7, 4.1 (*praefectus praetorio* and *curator annonae*).

These were all posts that integrated the equites into the administration, but the prefect of the guard, as the commander of the imperial security force, would have had the most regular direct contact with the Caesar himself. The positions available to the equites were important, but their power and influence were localised to their specific role in the administration. This, combined with their lack of political ambition, should have rendered them less of a threat to the Caesar.

Prior to continuing with Tacitus, let us turn briefly to a comment in Velleius that further elucidates, and sets in historical context, Sejanus' connection to the ruling house. Velleius writes:

*Raro eminentes viri non magnis adiutoribus ad gubernandam fortunam suam usi sunt...divus Augustus M. Agrippa et proxime ab eo Statilio Tauro, quibus novitas familiae haut obstitit quominus ad multiplicis consulatus triumphosque et complura eveherentur sacerdotia. Etenim magna negotia magnis adiutoribus egent interestque rei publicae quod usu necessariurn est, dignitate eminere utilitatemque auctoritate muniri. Sub his exemplis Ti. Caesar Seianum Aelium, principe equestris ordinis patre natum, materno vero genere clarissimas veteresque et insignes honoribus complexum familias, habentem consularis fratres, consobrinos, avunculum.*³⁹⁰

It is rare that men of greatness have not employed great men to assist them in directing their fortune ... the deified Augustus used Marcus Agrippa, and soon after Statilius Taurus, whose newness of family was not a hindrance to their being appointed to many consulships, triumphs and numerous priesthods. Great tasks necessitate great assistants, and it is of interest to the state that the ones deemed essential to her service be granted prominence of rank and have

³⁹⁰ Vell. Pat., 2.127.1–3.

their usefulness strengthened by official authority. Given these examples, Tiberius Caesar had and retains³⁹¹ Aelius Sejanus as his advisor, whose father was the leader of the equestrian order, who was linked through his mother to old families of the highest esteem and to men who had been glorified through public honours, having among them an uncle, brothers and cousins as consuls.

Woodman suggests that Velleius is citing, as a means of defending Tiberius, Augustan precedent for men holding positions analogous to that of Sejanus.³⁹² Despite allegedly being *novi homines*, both Agrippa and Taurus were raised to great heights in Augustus' administration.³⁹³ Velleius also justifies the positions of influence, as well as the official power that such men held, in terms of their service to the state. He implies that, at least in part, advancement was *earned* through loyal service to the reigning Caesar. The precedent of Agrippa, as well as the idea of earned advancement, will be critical in our assessment of Sejanus' viability as Tiberius' successor.

This passage also shows that, for all the elitist attitudes of the senatorial historians, Sejanus was a well-connected man with established links to families who could claim public achievements going back generations. As a specific example, Velleius reports that Sejanus had brothers and other relatives who had been consuls. Much discussion has taken place regarding precisely who these men were, but the point for our purposes is that Sejanus was a man with connections to the traditional aristocracy.³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ At this point in the text there is no verb. The past and present tense verbs are inferred from the context. Velleius was writing in the year 30 CE when Sejanus was at the height of his power, and Velleius' reference to precedents followed by Tiberius suggests some form of past action. Two editions were consulted to arrive at this suggestion. See Caius Velleius Paterculus, *The Roman History*. Caius Velleius Paterculus, *The Roman History*.

³⁹² Woodman, *The Tiberian narrative*, 2.94-131, 248.

³⁹³ Tacitus also references Agrippa's supposedly obscure birth (Tac., *Ann.* 1.3). By obscure birth, the authors appear to mean that Agrippa was not born in Rome. However, Nicolaus of Damascus attests that Agrippa was educated in Rome, alongside Augustus (*FGrH*, fr. 127.7). This suggests that Agrippa's family was of considerable wealth and property. I would speculate that they were perhaps local elites, who were, in the opinion of the Roman established nobility, indeed obscure.

³⁹⁴ Adams, "The Consular Brothers of Sejanus."

Returning to *Annales* 4.1, Tacitus focuses on the influence that Sejanus enjoyed over Tiberius and presents it in a sinister manner (*Tiberium variis artibus devinxit*). However, Sejanus was the prefect of the praetorian guard, the force charged with the Caesar's personal protection. For all the legal definitions of the Caesar's power, its true basis lay in the loyalty of the soldiers. In the city, the manifestation of this relationship between the Caesar and the army was the praetorian guard.

It was only logical that the commander of that body of troops should be a trusted individual of some influence. According to Tacitus, the closeness between Tiberius and Sejanus was such that Tiberius was only completely comfortable when he was with Sejanus, the prefect. Tacitus comments that Sejanus would cultivate this closeness, and Tiberius' suspicious personality, for his own purposes in the future (*accendebat haec onerabatque Seianus, peritia morum Tiberii odia in longum iaciens, quae reconderet auctaque promeret*).³⁹⁵ However, we should remember that Tiberius is depicted as a very private person. Therefore, it should not be surprising that he trusted few and lacked true friends. Thus, between Tiberius' personality and the natural trust between a Caesar and his prefect, the relationship between Tiberius and Sejanus at this early stage need not be viewed as unusual. Of course, Sejanus' influence became much greater as the years progressed.

According to Tacitus, Sejanus initiated this close relationship with Tiberius. Dio, by contrast, describes Tiberius as the instigator. Caesar drew Sejanus to *him*, rather than the reverse.³⁹⁶ These possibilities are not mutually exclusive. It is quite possible that Tiberius trusted Sejanus, depended on him and brought him into his inner circle. It is also feasible that Sejanus, to ingratiate himself even further with Tiberius, carried out instructions and generally did what he

³⁹⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 1.69.

³⁹⁶ Dio Cass., 57.19.6–7.

thought would please the Caesar. Sejanus is presented as doing this, not out of duty to Tiberius, but rather, to further his own career. In addition, by the year 23 CE, Sejanus had served Tiberius as prefect of the guard for almost a decade. A great deal of trust can be built over that length of time. Tacitus also describes Sejanus' character and personality traits, with emphasis on his ambition and unscrupulousness. He is presented as a chameleon who adapted his behaviour to the situation, but his ambition was always present (*eiusque causa modo largitio et luxus, saepius industria ac vigilantia*).

The sources next report the relocation of the praetorian troops from scattered barracks into one camp outside the city and the consequences of that move. Since the account of Tacitus is the most detailed, we will follow it, but Dio too refers to this incident.³⁹⁷ Tacitus writes:

*Vim praefecturae modicam antea intendit, dispersas per urbem cohortis una in castra conducendo, ut simul imperia acciperent numeroque et robore et visu inter se fiducia ipsis, in ceteros metus oreretur. praetendebat lascivire militem diductum; si quid subitum ingruat, maiore auxilio pariter subveniri; et severius acturos si vallum statuatur procul urbis inlecebris. ut perfecta sunt castra, inrepere paulatim militaris animos adeundo, appellando; simul centuriones ac tribunos ipse deligere.*³⁹⁸

He [Sejanus] augmented the formerly moderate power of the prefecture by gathering the troops scattered throughout the city into one camp, in order that they might receive their orders at the same time and that, by their numbers and strength, and the sight of one another, they would inspire confidence in themselves and awe in others. He claimed that a dispersed soldiery could

³⁹⁷ Dio Cass., 57.19.6.

³⁹⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.2.

become unruly, and that, if a sudden disaster should strike, assistance could more readily be provided and that, if the camp were placed away from the city, discipline would be less lax. When the camp was completed, he began gradually to crawl into the affections of the soldiers, fraternising with them and addressing them by name. At the same time, he himself also took charge of appointing the centurions and tribunes.

Tacitus' comment on the 'moderate' power of the position of *praefectus praetorio* should be dealt with first. Tacitus himself indicated the importance of the position as early as 14 CE when he described the prefects of the guard and of the corn supply taking the oath of loyalty to Tiberius, described by Martin and Woodman as occurring, 'after the two consuls but before the senate, soldiers and people'.³⁹⁹ The order of events here is important. That the consuls and the prefect of the guard would take the oath stands to reason. However, that the prefects of both the praetorian guard and of the corn supply should take the oath before the senators illustrates the relative importance of the prefects and the senate. The guard was responsible for the Caesar's personal security, while the corn supply kept the populace fed, thereby increasing domestic security. It was therefore far more important, at least at first, for Tiberius to secure oaths from these men than it was for him to secure oaths from the senate, which he eventually did with a great deal of controversy.⁴⁰⁰

Martin and Woodman comment that Tacitus presents multiple reasons for the camp being moved, and this further demonstrates Sejanus' duplicity. The point, they contend, was to conceal Sejanus' true intention: to increase his own personal power.⁴⁰¹ Tacitus is certainly explicit when he says the reason for moving the soldiers into one camp was to increase the power of the prefecture: not of the guard as a unit but of the prefecture itself. I would suggest

³⁹⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 1.7; Martin and Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 87.

⁴⁰⁰ See discussion in sec. 3.3.

⁴⁰¹ Martin and Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 88.

that Sejanus was not being entirely duplicitous here; there were indeed benefits to be had from the concentration of the soldiers in one location. Sejanus' stated reasons for concentrating the praetorians are not without merit, specifically in terms of disaster response and maintaining discipline. Even if these reasons are accepted, Sejanus cannot have been *unaware* of the benefits to himself as a result of the concentration of forces.

Finally, we come to the suggestion that Sejanus was ingratiating himself with the troops, the implication being that this was done for some nefarious purpose. However, it was necessary for the commander of a group of soldiers to earn the respect of his troops if he were to do his job well.⁴⁰² Tacitus has downplayed this natural state of affairs for dramatic purposes. We have seen him use a similar approach to his writing during the narrative. He takes a typical situation and exaggerates it to provide dramatic flair and to shape the identities of the figures in his narrative.⁴⁰³ Tacitus uses a similar approach in this passage to characterise Sejanus' relationship with the praetorians.

Initially, we may question the suggestion that it was only in 23 CE that Sejanus began to ingratiate himself with the troops that had been under his sole command since 15 CE. Since the present passage in Tacitus appears under 23 CE, the troops had been under Sejanus' command for nine years. This was surely sufficient time to form a cohesive relationship. However, we note here that the circumstances had changed: troops previously scattered were now concentrated, which altered the dynamics. Dio dates this concentration of the troops to 20 CE, whereas Tacitus places it in the year 23 CE.⁴⁰⁴ Whatever the precise date, the result was that the soldiers would have had closer contact with their prefect. Tacitus accuses Sejanus of

⁴⁰² Two illustrative examples are the cases of Germanicus and Drusus II on the Rhine during the mutinies of 14 CE. See Tac., *Ann.* 1.16–53 and the discussion in sec. 3.5.

⁴⁰³ Consider the examples of Tac., *Ann.* 1.3 on the deaths of Gaius and Lucius Caesar where, after mentioning their deaths, Tacitus first posits natural causes (*fato*) and then insinuates Livia's involvement. In a similar fashion, in his narrative of Augustus' death (Tac., *Ann.* 1.5), he again insinuates Livia's involvement, even though Augustus was an old man by Roman standards.

⁴⁰⁴ This passage of Dio has many textual issues. The precise passage, 57.19.6, is placed immediately before the first reference to Drusus II's consulship with Tiberius in the year 21 CE. For Tacitus see Tac., *Ann.* 4.2.

attempting to take the relationship between himself as prefect and those under his command beyond a good working relationship in order to further his own agenda.

Tacitus suggests that Sejanus' goal was to integrate the soldiers into what he calls the prefect's ever-expanding power base. Sejanus is reported to have courted the senate as well. Sejanus' involvement in the selection of the officers was part of his role. Sejanus may have made the selections of soldiers for promotion, but Tiberius, as commander-in-chief and the one to whom the oaths were sworn and from whom the payments were received, presumably ratified, or at the very least approved, these promotions.

Tacitus' introduction of Sejanus is a masterpiece of historical rhetoric. He has taken legitimate functions of Sejanus' role as *praefectus praetorio* and written about them in such a way that Sejanus is presented as negatively as possible. That said, given the events that were to come, it is difficult to imagine that Sejanus was not acting to further his own interests, which, at this early stage, were limited to increasing his own prominence. However, the elite senatorial families considered politics their own personal purview and saw Sejanus as a threat to the established order. In other words, the senate believed there was no place in the upper echelons of politics for equites. Tacitus' presentation of Sejanus projects the situation in 30 CE onto the year 23, implying that Sejanus was always this powerful. We will show that he garnered his influence over time.

Further evidence is presented of Sejanus' attempts to broaden his power base beyond the soldiers. Tacitus writes:

*neque senatorio ambitu abstinebat clientes suos honoribus aut provinciis
ornandi, facili Tiberio atque ita prono ut socium laborum non modo in*

*sermonibus, sed apud patres et populum celebraret colique per theatra et fora effigies eius interque principia legionum sineret.*⁴⁰⁵

Nor did he [Sejanus], in his ambition, abstain from courting the senate, by providing offices and provinces for his own clients, with Tiberius readily yielding to such an extent that, not merely in general conversations but also among the fathers and the populace, he celebrated Sejanus as the partner of his labours. Also in the theatres, the legionary camps and the fora, he [Sejanus] set his images up.

Sejanus was looking to expand his power base. Martin and Woodman comment on the irony that senators should have an eques as their patron, with themselves being in the inferior position of *cliens*.⁴⁰⁶ This was a function of the change from the atomistic societal model of the republic to the pyramidic model of the principate. This requires some explanation.

In the pre-Augustan period, a central core of nobles held the true power in the state. Augustus coming to power represented the ultimate centralisation of government at Rome. This led to marked changes, both socially and politically. It should be remembered that, during the civil wars following the Ides of March, many of the families representing the old political establishment had been decimated.⁴⁰⁷ It was therefore necessary for Augustus to reconstruct the Roman elite. This rebuilding of the Roman upper class was an exercise in Augustan patronage, and Rome was soon fundamentally changed.

Tacitus explicitly notes this when he says that the world was entirely altered, with nothing of the old Roman character remaining: equality, by which he means political equality, presumably

⁴⁰⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 4.2.3

⁴⁰⁶ Martin and Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 90.

⁴⁰⁷ For the proscriptions, see Appian *BC* 4.8ff. For the reconstitution of the Roman elite, see Dio 52.42.1-6.

among senators, was now a thing of the past. All eyes, he says, now looked up to the commands of the leader (*Igitur verso civitatis statu nihil usquam prisci et integri moris: omnes exuta aequalitate iussa principis aspectare*).⁴⁰⁸ Augustus attempted to conceal this societal shift by referring to himself as first among equals (*primus inter pares*) and being careful to exercise both tact and modesty in his governance.

The creation of such a central figure, who was the source of all social and political advancement and who could promote whomever he deemed worthy, would have consequences. Such promotions resulted in the broadening of the political elite as well as its composition. These structural changes included the creation of positions made available solely to the equites, which was briefly discussed above.⁴⁰⁹ The promotion of men who owed their position to Augustus made them personally loyal to him. Their connection to him increased their importance, and in return, they provided Augustus with an expanded group of competent and loyal administrators.

As a result, one's proximity to power—that is, closeness to the Caesar—became more important than one's social rank. Those who were closer to the Caesar naturally drew adherents. Those adherents would have hoped that an individual with closer ties to the centre of power (*locus potentiae*) could be a conduit for them. Sejanus, as a man with such proximity to power, gained a large group of clients, which will be discussed later in this section. below. We note here Sejanus' influence was multifaceted. Between obtaining offices for his clients, standard practice for the Roman elite, and his position as prefect of the guard, he had a broader constituency than his counterparts in the senate.

Dio indicates the relevance of this to Sejanus when he comments that, as early as 21 CE, all the leading citizens, up to and including the consuls, would visit Sejanus' house in the mornings to

⁴⁰⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 1.4.1.

⁴⁰⁹ See sec. 4.1.

convey requests that they wished to make to Tiberius.⁴¹⁰ This ritual, called the greeting (*salutatio*), had a long history going back to the Republic, and exemplified the patron–client relationship.⁴¹¹ We can see that this concept, and its public manifestation, continued, but in this case the nature of the power had changed: senators were appealing to an eques, in theory their social inferior, because he was closer to the Caesar.

Richard Saller notes that Tiberius granting Sejanus a wider sphere of administrative influence was a means of creating rivalry among the senators, however, this also resulted in Sejanus becoming more powerful.⁴¹² There are two points to note here. First is the strategy that this tactic served: it neutralised the potential threat that the aristocracy posed to Tiberius by keeping the senate focused on its own rivalries. Second, with Sejanus serving as his conduit, Tiberius could foster rivalry in the senate while distancing himself from that rivalry. Tacitus later makes explicit Sejanus’ role as conduit to the Caesar when he attributes to Marcus Terentius a comment that proximity to Sejanus reflected one’s proximity to Tiberius.⁴¹³ What is less clear is whether Tiberius realised the implications of Sejanus filling such a role, in terms of the great influence and network of clients that this position afforded Sejanus.

Let us now turn to what Tacitus calls Tiberius’ willing complicity in Sejanus’ attempts to ingratiate himself with the senate and the unofficial title of partner of labours (*socius laborum*) that Tiberius bestowed upon him. Tiberius allowed Sejanus to play an intermediary role

⁴¹⁰ Dio Cass., 57.21.4.

⁴¹¹ This relationship appears to stretch back to the beginning of Roman history. See Dion. Hal., *Ant Rom* 2.9, 10, 46, 5.40; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 2.56. Dionysius also reports that the Sabines brought their clients with them when they settled in Rome (*Ant Rom* 2.46). By the Late Republic, in the time of the Gracchi and Marius, clientele (*clientéla*) was an established part of Roman political life. See Plut. *Vit. Ti. Gracch.* 13.2; Plut. *Vit. Mar.* 5.4–5. An extension of this, prevalent in the imperial period, was the use of client kings to govern territories for the city. Benefits from this included the territory being ruled for Rome by a ruler acceptable to the local population. Examples in the imperial period include Dio Cass., 53.25.1, 57.17.3, 58.26.2. As modern treatments of the late Republic generally, with reference to the patron–client relationship, see Erich S. Gruen, *The Last Generation of The Roman Republic*, California library reprint series (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). H. H. Scullard, *Roman politics, 220-150 B.C.*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); Henrik Mouritsen, *Plebs and Politics in The Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴¹² Richard P. Saller, *Personal patronage under the early empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 77-8.

⁴¹³ Tac., *Ann.* 6.8.

between Tiberius and the senate. Tiberius willingly accepted that Sejanus had such a role. Despite Sejanus' influence, we must again assume that Tiberius ultimately approved all appointments. Tacitus has ignored this to highlight the importance of Sejanus. The role of the Caesar has been minimised by Tacitus, both to emphasise the power of Sejanus and to undermine Tiberius' centrality. We see here another example of Kraus' theory whereby Tiberius is presented not only as one of a pair but also as playing the junior role in the arrangement.

This role for Sejanus served another purpose for the Caesar. Sejanus was handling the administrative side of governing the empire, with Tiberius' full knowledge. This minimised the Caesar's dealings with the chamber and with what Tacitus calls the sycophants therein.⁴¹⁴ Since the beginning of his reign, Tiberius had sought to work with the senate and make them active participants in the administration. Consider the situation immediately following the death of Augustus: at the second meeting of the senate, Tiberius sought the assistance of the *patres* in administering the empire, which, as we have seen, was not forthcoming.⁴¹⁵ The senate seemed unable, or perhaps unwilling, to offer this kind of support perhaps because it was accustomed to answering to a higher authority, thanks to nearly half a century of Augustan rule. The result was that the senate was tentative in its dealings with the new *princeps*.

A second example of Tiberius' attempted integration of the senate into the administration occurred during the trial of Libo in 16 CE. He had asked one of his relatives to make an appeal to Tiberius to spare his life, and the Caesar responded that the appeal must be heard by the senate.⁴¹⁶ Here we see Tiberius attempting to involve the senate in the decision-making process. The trial of Piso in 20 CE is yet another example of Tiberius attempting to involve the senate in administrative decisions. The Caesar insisted that a trial be set before the senate. In addition,

⁴¹⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 1.7.

⁴¹⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 1.11.

⁴¹⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 2.31.

he directed that the investigation be undertaken, and the case conducted, with no consideration for the fact that it involved the imperial family.⁴¹⁷ We stress here that he put the senate in charge of the investigation, both to ensure impartiality and to immerse them in the judicial process, a key aspect of the administration.

Under the year 21 CE, Tacitus provides evidence of Tiberius' increasing frustration at the unwillingness of the *patres* to aid him in the administration of the state. He sent a letter to the senate expressing his annoyance that they had transferred all responsibility to him (*castigatis oblique patribus quod cuncta curarum ad principem reicerent*).⁴¹⁸ We can thus see that Tiberius had attempted to make the senate his partners in the administration. Their timidity resulted in his later declaration, upon leaving the chamber, that the *patres* were men primed for slavery (*o homines ad servitutem paratos!*).⁴¹⁹ Given his contempt for, and frustration with, the senators, it is not extraordinary that Tiberius came to rely on a trusted ally in the form of Sejanus.

Such is Tacitus' introduction of what we may call the villain of the second half of the Tiberian hexad. Tacitus makes this division clear when he describes, prior to fortune-deranging events, the tranquillity for both the state and Tiberius' house.

We should examine what Sejanus' agenda is reported to have been—that is, what it was that he hoped to achieve. Tacitus and Dio both make comments, but in different contexts, that hint at Sejanus' ambitions. Tacitus' account is set before the death of Drusus, whereas Dio's is set after the death of Drusus. Dio's account will be examined in Section 4.5. We start with Tacitus, who writes:

⁴¹⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 3.12.

⁴¹⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 3.35.

⁴¹⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 3.65.

*Ceterum plena Caesarum domus, iuvenis filius, nepotes adulti moram cupitis adferebant; et quia vi tot simul corripere intuitum dolus intervalla scelerum poscebat. placuit tamen occultior via et a Druso incipere, in quem recenti ira ferebatur. nam Drusus impatiens aemuli et animo commotior orto forte iurgio intenderat Seiano manus et contra tendentis os verberaverat. igitur cuncta temptanti promptissimum visum ad uxorem eius Liviam convertere, quae soror Germanici, formae initio aetatis indecorae, mox pulchritudine praecebat. hanc ut amore incensus adulterio pellexit, et postquam primi flagitii potitus est (neque femina amissa pudicitia alia abnuerit), ad coniugii spem, consortium regni et necem mariti impulit. atque illa, cui avunculus Augustus, socer Tiberius, ex Druso liberi, seque ac maiores et posteros municipali adultero foedabat ut pro honestis et praesentibus flagitiosa et incerta expectaret.*⁴²⁰

The house of the Caesars was full: a son, who was a young man, and grown-up grandchildren, who were impediments to his [Sejanus'] ambition. Since sweeping so many away by force would be dangerous, guile demanded intervals in crime. The more concealed path therefore pleased him, and so he started with Drusus, against whom he carried a recent grudge. Drusus, who could not tolerate a rival, and had a quick temper, had, when a struggle had arisen, raised his hand to Sejanus, and struck him in the face when he resisted. Sejanus, then, having assessed the situation, determined that the best approach was to turn to Drusus' wife, Livia,⁴²¹ who was the sister of Germanicus and, despite being unbecoming in her formative years, grew into a woman of surpassing beauty. Feigning a passion for her, he lured her into an adulterous relationship and, with the first shameful act complete, knowing that a woman who has parted with her virtue

⁴²⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 4.3.

⁴²¹ 'Livia' is used here purely to reflect the Latin. For purposes of clarity, we have used 'Livilla' in the discussion.

would be willing to do anything, pushed her towards marriage, partnership in the monarchy and the destruction of her husband. And this woman, who had Augustus as her uncle, Tiberius as her father-in-law and children by Drusus, was bringing shame upon herself, her ancestors and her children, by taking up with a provincial adulterer, exchanging a secure and stable future for a criminal and dangerous one.

The plenitude of Caesars was referenced in the introductory remarks to this chapter. Between Tiberius, Drusus and his sons, and the three sons of Germanicus, the imperial house was relatively stable. However, Sejanus was to prove a major threat to this stability. He showed remarkable audacity in that his first target was Drusus, the very heart of the dynasty. The grudge that Tacitus mentions was grounded in animosity between the pair, based on Drusus' jealousy of the relationship between Tiberius and Sejanus. This rivalry had once resulted in a physical confrontation.⁴²² Tacitus describes Sejanus' revenge against Drusus as being orchestrated through Livilla. This served an additional purpose for Sejanus it allowed him to become closer to the inner circle of the imperial house.

If Sejanus' motivations for pursuing this relationship with Livilla are clear enough, Livilla's reasons are significantly less clear. Unless inspired by raw passion, it is not at all clear why a woman married to a Caesar, and the heir apparent no less, would involve herself with Sejanus. As the wife of Drusus, Livilla was assured of the very future ruling partnership (*consortium regni*) that Sejanus is reported to have promised her. It is thus not clear what motivated Livilla to undermine her own position by involving herself in an alleged plot to eliminate Drusus, her personal connection to power.

⁴²² This rivalry will be discussed in more detail under the death of Drusus.

Seager has offered an intriguing suggestion to explain Livilla's behaviour in these years. If Drusus had succeeded Tiberius, Seager writes, he would have followed Tiberius' own plans for the succession and raised one of Germanicus' sons to the position of heir apparent. If Drusus had done this, it would have meant bypassing his own sons.⁴²³ This, of course, would also mean that Livilla would not achieve her goal of having one of her sons succeed. Livilla's actions, then, are best understood in terms of her sons and her desire for their eventual succession. This suggestion reveals a certain political intransigence in Livilla, and it would explain her willingness to sacrifice her immediate connection to power. The concept of Julio-Claudian imperial women working to further their sons' careers is a leitmotif in the scholarly writings. We have seen similar motives ascribed to Augusta, wherein she is accused of taking (sometimes-violent) action to secure Tiberius' future role in the state. Livilla's actions are consistent with this tradition and may be the precedent for the actions of Agrippina II (the Younger).⁴²⁴

Seager also uses this passage to suggest that Sejanus sought to make himself regent over a younger member of the imperial family. He suggests that Tacitus' claim that Sejanus sought 'imperial power for himself' lacks sufficient detail to be helpful to modern scholars.⁴²⁵ Ironically, Seager is reading more substance into Tacitus' account than is there. According to the translation of *Annales* 4.1 provided above, Tacitus describes the violent means by which Sejanus grasped at power. The adjective 'imperial' is not in the text. Sejanus' goal at this point was nothing more than a desire to expand his personal influence. It is surely speculative to suggest that, in 23 CE, Sejanus sought to be Caesar.

⁴²³ Seager, *Tiberius*, 154.

⁴²⁴ For Augusta, see Tac., *Ann.* 1.3, 5; Dio Cass. 56.31.1. For Agrippina the Younger, see Tac., *Ann.* 12; Dio Cass. 60.31.3–35.2, 61.1–3. For modern treatments of Augusta, see Barrett, *Livia : First Lady of Imperial Rome*; Barrett, "Tacitus, Livia and the Evil Stepmother "; Bauman, "Tanaquil-Livia and the Death of Augustus." For Agrippina, see Anthony Barrett, *Agrippina : Sex, Power, and Politics in The Early Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Elizabeth Keitel, "Tacitus on the Deaths of Tiberius and Claudius," *Hermes* 109, no. 2 (1981).

⁴²⁵ Seager, *Tiberius*, 153.

Seager is advocating a theory of regency to explain Tiberius' entire succession plan. Specifically, he suggests that Drusus was intended to rule as regent for Nero, the eldest son of Germanicus.⁴²⁶ However, the Decree runs counter to this in its suggestion that Drusus was to succeed Tiberius in his own right. What is critical about that line of the Decree is that Germanicus' children go entirely unmentioned. The focus is on Drusus ruling in his own right, rather than as a proxy for a younger prince. This is the plain reading of the text. There is little evidence to support the idea that Drusus was only to temporarily continue the political stability that Tiberius had maintained.

Seager applies his regency theory to Sejanus when he says that the members of the imperial house who were too old to need a guardian, or who could potentially fill the role of guardian for a younger man, were the threats to Sejanus' ambitions. According to Seager, Sejanus' goal was to seek greater personal power by being a regent. Given the plenitude of Caesars, and their relative youth, regency was the most legitimate way for Sejanus to increase his personal power. In addition, given that Sejanus was a servant of Tiberius and there were tensions between Tiberius and the house of Germanicus, it would only be possible for Sejanus to be regent for one of Livilla's children. This may be a plausible reading of the situation in 23 CE, but Sejanus grew increasingly confident as the 20s wore on and began to contemplate pursuing power in his own right.

Tacitus next reports the assumption of the *toga virilis* by Tiberius' grandson Drusus III. Tacitus further reports that the senate decreed the same honours for him as they had for his elder brother, Nero, in 20 CE.⁴²⁷ Martin and Woodman add that Nero was the obvious successor to Tiberius following the death of Drusus II later in 23 CE. The honours decreed for Drusus III were analogous to those for other young members of the imperial house and were designed to set

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 4.4. For Nero, see Tac., *Ann.* 3.29 and the analysis in sec. 3.9.

him apart from his peers.⁴²⁸ Tacitus uses the next chapters of Book IV to outline the military and administrative status of the empire, before turning his attention to the death of Drusus II.

4.2 The Death of Drusus II and its Aftermath

Tacitus begins his account of the death of Drusus II by introducing the conflict between the heir apparent and Sejanus. He also notes that the presence of Drusus maintained Tiberius' waning interest in governance. We have seen that the Caesar had envisioned leaving his son in charge: he had left the city during their shared consulship in 21 CE. Tacitus says that, with the death of Drusus, Tiberius' reign became unstable, with previously existing positive characteristics disappearing. Tacitus writes:

*nam dum superfuit mansere, quia Seianus incipiente adhuc potentia bonis consiliis notescere volebat, et ultor metuebatur non occultus odii set crebro querens incolumi filio adiutorem imperii alium vocari. et quantum superesse ut collega dicatur? primas dominandi spes in arduo: ubi sis ingressus, adesse studia et ministros. extructa iam sponte praefecti castra, datos in manum milites; cerni effigiem eius in monimentis Cn. Pompei; communis illi cum familia Drusorum fore nepotes...neque raro neque apud paucos talia iaciebat, et secreta quoque eius corrupta uxore prodebantur.*⁴²⁹

For while he [Drusus II] lived, the status quo continued,⁴³⁰ and Sejanus, as yet at the beginning of his power, wanted to be known for his good counsel. He [Sejanus] feared the avenger [Drusus II] who did not conceal his hatred and who

⁴²⁸ Martin and Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 97.

⁴²⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.7.

⁴³⁰ The object of the sentence has been left unstated; 'the status quo' is a suggestion inferred from the rest of the passage.

complained repeatedly that, even though a son still lived, another was being called ‘helper in rule’. How long until he was called a colleague? The hope of being appointed to rule is difficult to attain at first, but when the first step has been taken, zealous helpers are soon at hand. Already, by the prefect’s command, a camp had been constructed, and the soldiers had been put into his hands! His likeness was to be found among the monuments of Cn. Pompey! His grandsons would live in common with the family of the Drusi.

This passage represents the preamble to Drusus’ death. According to Tacitus, the conflict between Sejanus and Drusus was grounded in the jealousy that Drusus experienced over the closeness of his father and Sejanus. In Tacitus’ formulation, Drusus thought that he should have been the one acknowledged as Tiberius’ ‘helper in rule’. He had occupied this position since the death of Germanicus. The process had been formalised and made explicit by Drusus sharing the consulship with the Caesar and being granted versions of his powers. Sejanus could claim none of that. Drusus *was* Tiberius’ colleague, yet Tacitus says that he feared Sejanus’ influence was so great that Sejanus’ role would change from being Tiberius’ helper to being his colleague.

Tacitus says that Drusus was also concerned that Sejanus’ monuments were among those of the great men of the Republic and that his grandchildren would be of the *gens Drusia*. This is a reference to the fact that Sejanus’ daughter had been betrothed to the son of Claudius. Drusus would often complain about this, and Tacitus further states that Livilla was relaying information about Drusus’ actions and words to Sejanus. Tacitus displays a strong dislike for Sejanus, and we should not discount the possibility that Tacitus is using his report of Drusus’ words to convey his own contempt for Sejanus.

Seager provides interesting insight into the conflict between Drusus and Sejanus. He notes the immediate political context of the rivalry: Drusus and Tiberius’ shared consulship and Drusus’

grant of *tribunicia potestas* and *imperium proconsulare*.⁴³¹ As Seager writes, this made Drusus the heir apparent to Tiberius, but perhaps more importantly, given Tiberius' recent withdrawal from public affairs, there was a very real possibility that he could withdraw completely and that Drusus could replace him.⁴³² This is quite plausible: Drusus was sufficiently empowered to replace his father. If this were to happen, given the rivalry between Sejanus and Drusus, Sejanus was potentially in grave danger. It is quite possible, according to Seager, that Sejanus was motivated to remove Drusus out of self-preservation.

The conflict between Drusus and Sejanus was to escalate, and Sejanus, as Tacitus reports, decided to act. Tacitus writes:

*Igitur Seianus maturandum ratus deligit venenum quo paulatim inrepente fortuitus morbus adsimularetur. id Druso datum per Lygdum spadonem, ut octo post annos cognitum est. ceterum Tiberius per omnis valetudinis eius dies, nullo metu an ut firmitudinem animi ostentaret, etiam defuncto necdum sepulto, curiam ingressus est. consulesque sede vulgari per speciem maestitiae sedentis honoris locique admonuit, et effusum in lacrimas senatum victo gemitu simul oratione continua erexit ... se tamen fortiora solacia e complexu rei publicae petivisse.*⁴³³

Therefore, Sejanus, having decided that he would waste no time, chose a slow-acting poison such that the death it brought would have mimicked that of a natural ailment. This was given to Drusus by the attendant, Lygdus, as was learnt eight years later. Tiberius attended the senate-house for all the rest of the days of his son's illness, either because he was not afraid or to show his strength of

⁴³¹ For the inferred grant of *imperium proconsulare*, see sec. 3.10.

⁴³² Seager, *Tiberius*, 154.

⁴³³ Tac., *Ann.* 4.8.

mind, and he continued to attend the senate-house, even between Drusus' death and burial. Tiberius, seeing the consuls, as a sign of grief, sitting on regular benches, reminded them of their office and place; and when the senate burst into tears, suppressing a groan, he raised them up with an uninterrupted oration ... but he had sought a more manly consolation in the embrace of the *res publica*.

Tacitus reports that Sejanus attempted to conceal his role in Drusus' death by having it mimic a natural ailment. This is consistent with the idea that, at the time, there was no suspicion of foul play in Drusus' death: it appeared to be natural. Suspicion about potential violence in the death of Drusus only became known eight years later when Apicata, Sejanus' former wife, wrote a letter to the Caesar that allegedly revealed the true nature of Drusus' death, which will be discussed in Section 4.16.

We next turn to Tiberius' stoic reaction to the death of his son. Although he is often presented as uncaring and insensitive, Tiberius' reaction to his son's death was in line with his reaction to death in general during his reign: a stoic equilibrium in public, with actual grief to take place in private. We have seen this in his response to the death of Germanicus, which Tacitus also criticised.⁴³⁴ However, Tiberius' reaction to death is complicated by the fact that when his brother Drusus I died in 9 BCE, Tiberius walked to Rome from Germany with Drusus' body.⁴³⁵ This was a very public display of grief. We can thus see that Tiberius' reaction to the deaths of family members changed with time, the Caesar hardening as he aged. This is consistent with the sources, which depict Tiberius as becoming increasingly more brutal as his life progressed.

Suetonius supports the tradition that Tiberius did not care for his sons. He writes:

⁴³⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 3.3. Consider also Tac., *Ann.* 3.6, where Tiberius says that princes were mortal but the state was everlasting. We will see in Section 4.9 that Tiberius' reaction to his mother's passing was similar.

⁴³⁵ Dio Cass., 55.1–2.

*Filiorum neque naturalem Drusum neque adoptivum Germanicum patria caritate dilexit, alterius vitiis infensus. Nam Drusus fluxioris remissiorisque vitae erat. Itaque ne mortuo quidem perinde adfectus est, sed tantum non statim a funere ad negotiorum consuetudinem rediit iustitio longiore inhibito.*⁴³⁶

He [Tiberius] displayed a father's affection for neither his natural son, Drusus, nor his adopted son, Germanicus, being incensed by his [Drusus'] vices. Indeed, Drusus led a somewhat reckless and loose life. When Drusus died, he [Tiberius] was not greatly affected impacted, but soon after the funeral, he returned to his regular business and forbade a longer period of mourning.

Tiberius was a solid Roman of the old style. The issue was not that he did not care for his sons, despite the sources' claims to the contrary. Rather, his public reaction, which is the sole basis for the sources' claims given that Tiberius' private feelings are beyond recovery, was the expected stoic one. Dio, too, in his account of the death of Drusus II essentially follows Tacitus, including the rumour about Tiberius' involvement.⁴³⁷

Drusus' funeral followed the model of imperial funerals to date, in that it was spectacular. His place in the *gens Iulia* was emphasised by the presence of an image of Aeneas, the deified son of Mars and the founder, at least in propaganda, of the Julian line.⁴³⁸ Tacitus ends his account of the death of Drusus by discussing, and refuting, a contemporary rumour about Tiberius' alleged involvement in the death of his son.⁴³⁹ Martin and Woodman suggest that Tacitus includes this rumour, and refutes it, for purposes of improving his historiographical credibility.⁴⁴⁰ This insertion of rumour may be examined in two ways.

⁴³⁶ Suet., *Tib.* 52.1.

⁴³⁷ See Dio Cass., 57.22.1–4.

⁴³⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.9

⁴³⁹ The excursus is found in Tac., *Ann.* 4.10–11.

⁴⁴⁰ Martin and Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 123.

Tacitus states at the beginning of his work that he intended to write without rancour or bias, but rumour served as a device to insert bias into the record.⁴⁴¹ Regardless of whether he refutes the rumour or substantiates it, it has been reported. By the very act of reporting the rumour, regardless of its veracity, Tacitus is promoting an unsubstantiated claim, the opposite of his stated goal. Ironically, by attempting to create greater historical credibility in this way, Tacitus may have created greater doubt in the minds of ancient and modern readers alike.

However, it may be that Tacitus, through his refutation of the rumour, wants the reader to know that he has conducted research: he has investigated the rumour and found it to lack credibility.⁴⁴² Rumour and other aspects of oral history, which are difficult to substantiate, played a role in history writing in Tacitus' time, as they do in our own. Tacitus admits to using oral sources.⁴⁴³ In addition, historians of the ancient world were not working according to modern techniques of historiography. It is not appropriate to impose modern methods on ancient authors. Of course, rumour (*fama erat* or *traditur*) also serves to blacken Tiberius' character, the underlying theme of the Tiberian hexad.⁴⁴⁴ The facts that Tacitus presents, at least before the death of Drusus II, do show Tiberius as a competent administrator and an effective ruler, but the interpretation of those facts and the motives assigned to the Caesar make the discovery of the competent Tiberius a demanding task. The Tiberian hexad creates the impression that Tacitus holds an almost reluctant respect for Tiberius.

The possibility for the rise of a man such as Sejanus lay in the frailty of the regime after the death of Drusus II. With his death, the future of the principate was highly unstable because there was no viable heir or clear leading deputy. This is explained by the generation gap: there

⁴⁴¹ For Tacitus' claim of impartiality, see Tac., *Ann.* 1.1.

⁴⁴² On Tacitus' use of rumour, see B. J. Gibson, "Rumours as Causes of Events in Tacitus," *Materiali e Discussioni per L'analisi Dei Testi Classici*, no. 40 (1998), and his extensive bibliography.

⁴⁴³ See, for example, Tac., *Ann.* 3.16.

⁴⁴⁴ See the discussion of Tacitus in sec. 1.2.

was a gap of two generations between Tiberius and the next heirs, his grandsons. Drusus had been the linchpin, and his death had the potential to be highly destabilising, but there was precedent to deal with the loss of such a figure.

The precedent lay in Augustus' reaction to Tiberius' departure for Rhodes in 6 BCE. Although the sources downplay his position, Tiberius, at this point, was clearly the centrepiece of the Augustan succession plan. His removal from the situation represented the loss of political stability, at least in the short term. As annoyed as Augustus is said to have been, he did not panic: he adapted to fit the new reality by further, and more rapidly, advancing his grandsons. This was not Augustus' preferred option, but he was a pragmatist.

Tiberius' withdrawal from Rome in Augustus' reign is paralleled in his own reign by the death of Drusus. The heir apparent was removed, thereby exposing the potential heirs who were young and politically inexperienced. Inexplicably, Tiberius did not react as Augustus had: he did not promote Nero and Drusus III in any meaningful way. The accounts give no indication of the reason for this.

One possible reason is that Tiberius had seen the early promotion of youth in the careers of Gaius and Lucius Caesar. He had observed those premature advancements lead to what he saw as the corruption of the young Caesars. He may have wished to avoid this in the cases of Nero and Drusus III and thus prevented their early advancement. Whatever the motivation, this lack of promotion for Nero and Drusus III left the succession uncertain, which opened further possibilities for Sejanus. Had there been a definitive political response to the death of Drusus II, Sejanus' options would have been severely restricted.

However, the situation as it stood, and the issue of the generation gap, did provide an opportunity for someone of the appropriate age, experience and proximity to Tiberius to enter

calculations. Sejanus had a close working relationship with the Caesar, he was of the relevant age and he had administrative experience. He did, however, lack any of the requisite powers at this point. In an important move to counteract his outsider status, Sejanus would seek to marry into the imperial family. Tiberius may have been encouraged to consider Sejanus for promotion, given his ambition and clear capabilities. That this was even a possibility indicates the central role that Drusus had played in the dynasty, and the enormous political gap that was created by his death.

Dynastic stability was not the only factor that would have an impact on Sejanus' prospects. Tiberius' personality and his attitude to ruling should also be borne in mind, specifically his frequently expressed desire for a partner in power and even for relief from his responsibilities altogether. Following the death of Germanicus, Drusus became the colleague that Tiberius had sought throughout his reign. We must ask why Tiberius is reported to have been closer, both personally and politically, to Sejanus than he was to his own son.

Returning to the narrative, the death of Drusus caused a repeat of the situation that had resulted from the death of Germanicus: the heir apparent was dead, and a solution needed to be found. Tacitus describes what happened next:

miseratusque Augustae extremam senectam, rudem adhuc nepotum et vergentem aetatem suam, ut Germanici liberi, unica praesentium malorum levamenta, inducerentur petivit. egressi consules firmatos adloquio adolescentulos deductos que ante Caesarem statuunt. quibus adprensis 'patres conscripti, hos' inquit 'orbatos parente tradidi patruo ipsorum precatusque sum, quamquam esset illi propria suboles, ne secus quam suum sanguinem foveret attolleret, sibi et posteris coniormaret. erepto Druso preces ad vos converto disque et patria coram obtestor: Augusti pro nepotes, clarissimis

maioribus genitos, suscipite regite, vestram meamque vicem explete. hi vobis, Nero et Druse, parentum loco. ita nati estis ut bona malaque vestra ad rem publicam pertineant'.⁴⁴⁵

Tiberius, lamenting the extreme age of Augusta, the youth of the grandsons and his own declining years, asked that the children of Germanicus, his sole comfort in this period of misfortune, be brought in to the chamber. The consuls departed and, having encouraged the youths with consoling words, led them in and stood them in front of Caesar. Taking them by the hand, he said 'Conscript fathers, when these boys lost their father, I placed them in the care of their uncle, and begged him, even though he had his own offspring, to cherish them as if they were his own blood, to raise them and fashion them for posterity's sake. With Drusus now being taken, and in the presence of gods and country, I appeal to you to receive and guide these great-grandchildren of Augustus, descendants of the most noble houses, and thus to fulfil your duty and mine. To you, Nero and Drusus, these men are as fathers. Such is your birth that your prosperity and adversity must affect the state.

At this point, Tiberius had five grandsons: two natural and three adopted. This passage causes difficulties because the grandsons (*nepotes*) are not identified by name. The view one takes about the identity of the grandsons has consequences for how one interprets Tiberius' actions regarding Nero and Drusus III.

If one follows Martin and Woodman and considers the grandsons to be Nero and Drusus III, Tiberius was responding to the death of Drusus II, to whom he had entrusted Nero and Drusus

⁴⁴⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 4.8.3–4. See also Suet., *Tib.* 54.1.

III, by committing the boys to the senate for the facilitation of their careers.⁴⁴⁶ The point is that Tiberius was, by this interpretation, advancing Nero and Drusus III by choice, which implies that the line of succession had changed, once again, back to the family of Germanicus. We note here, as a counterpoint to this interpretation, that Nero and Drusus III were *not* advanced, at least not in a way that would prepare them for any prominent future role.

The second interpretation of this passage is based on reading the *nepotes* as Tiberius' natural grandsons, Gemellus and Germanicus II. It suggests that Nero and Drusus III were brought into the chamber for one reason only: someone was needed to fill the void left by the death of Drusus II. By this reading, Germanicus' sons were brought in for no other reason than that Tiberius' grandsons by Drusus II were too young to succeed. This interpretation is based on reading the SCCPP line 'all future hope of his [Drusus'] father's guard duty on behalf of the state rested in one man' to mean that a permanent shift had taken place in the succession: from the family of Germanicus to that of Drusus. Tiberius saw the shift to Drusus' line—following the death of Germanicus—as permanent. However, there was also a generation gap because Drusus II's sons were too young to rule. Under this reading, Germanicus' children were to fill that gap temporarily.

We thus have two options when it comes to identifying the grandsons of Tiberius in this passage. S. J. V. Malloch has examined this issue. He infers that the *nepotes* were, in fact, Drusus II's twin sons, based on the theme of Tacitus' statement: age. It was the *ages*, more specifically the *extreme* ages, young and old, of the relevant figures—Tiberius, Augusta and the grandsons—that was the issue. Since Nero and Drusus III were men, their age was not a factor. Malloch is referring to the phrase 'youth of the grandsons' (*rudem nepotum*), and he is almost certainly correct when he suggests that identifying the grandsons as Nero and Drusus

⁴⁴⁶ Martin and Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 119.

III would negate Tacitus' theme of age as the defining motivation for Tiberius' decision.⁴⁴⁷

Malloch offers further insight when he suggests that Nero and Drusus III cannot be considered the children of Germanicus (*Germanici liberi*) and the young grandsons (*rudes nepotes*) because it does not make sense for Tiberius to decry the youth of these men while simultaneously placing hope for the future in them.

Tacitus draws a distinction between Tiberius' natural grandsons and Nero and Drusus III: they are not synonymous. Tiberius' decision, then, was pragmatic. This adds force to the idea that the SCCPP, at least in Tiberius' mind, did represent a realignment of the succession from the line of Germanicus to that of Drusus. We note here Tiberius' role, not only in editing the final version of the decree but also in mandating its distribution to all provinces of the empire. Clearly, he intended for this realignment to be known throughout his realm.

Tiberius bringing Nero and Drusus III into the chamber is best understood as the Caesar doing what he thought was politically necessary. He may have desired the succession of Drusus' line, but he did what was best for the state. The succession had reverted to the line of Germanicus but only, to paraphrase Velleius, for reasons of state. Germanicus' children were not Tiberius' first choice. Tacitus is explicit: were it not for Tiberius' and Augusta's old age, and the youth of the Caesar's natural grandsons, the sons of Germanicus would not have been commended to the care of the senate.⁴⁴⁸ The suggestion that Tiberius' actions towards Nero and Drusus indicated that he wanted them to succeed him is challenged by the fact that they were not advanced in any meaningful way in the following years. An alternative explanation for Nero and Drusus III's lack of advancement is that Tiberius did not see the need to advance another colleague because he already had one in Sejanus. Even accounting for age, hostility to

⁴⁴⁷ Malloch, "Who Were the Rudes Nepotes at Tacitus, Ann. 4.8.3?," 629.

⁴⁴⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.8.3.

Germanicus' line and other factors, no member of the imperial family was advanced between the death of Drusus II and the fall of Sejanus.

It is not clear precisely what Tiberius hoped to achieve by committing the young men to the senate. The scene took place before the entire chamber, but it seems likely that responsibility for the boys would have fallen to the inner council first established by Augustus.⁴⁴⁹ In Tiberius' reign, the collection of names at the beginning of the SCCPP may have represented such a group.⁴⁵⁰ The responsibilities of this group are not specified. For all the vagueness of this passage of Tacitus, it does represent public acknowledgement by Tiberius that these boys were important enough to entrust to the senate. Such action on the Caesar's part also resulted in him relinquishing his responsibility for Nero and Drusus. This parallels Tiberius' attitude to responsibility in general: he had been reluctant to rule in the first place, and now he faced, as Seager says, 'the indefinite prolongation of his labours'.⁴⁵¹

Tacitus comments that Tiberius' speech would have been well received had he not included comments about restoring the Republic.⁴⁵² Tiberius was giving the consuls the opportunity to re-establish a Republican model of governance, perhaps hoping that such a restoration would have allowed him to retire.⁴⁵³ Tiberius had long held the view that his position was only temporary. He could well have hoped that the lack of an heir with suitable age and experience would have resulted in the consuls managing the state in his stead, thereby setting a precedent that could have resulted in a return to the old model of governance. If this were Tiberius' opinion, he had badly misjudged the situation. Indeed, the irony of his recent actions was lost

⁴⁴⁹ Dio Cass., 56.28.2.

⁴⁵⁰ SCCPP II. 1–4.

⁴⁵¹ Seager, *Tiberius*, 157.

⁴⁵² Tac., *Ann.* 4.9.

⁴⁵³ There is precedent for this. Consider Tiberius' attempts to avoid his duties on his day of command (*dies imperii*), which we understand to represent the first day of his reign. See sec. 3.3. cf. his many attempts to illicit more active participation from the senate in the administration, and his eventual loss of patience, sec. 4.1. Also see the discussion of Tiberius' commendation of Nero and Drusus III to the senate: sec. 4.2.

on him. He was calling for the restoration of the Republic and of the previous powers of the consuls after he had just set in motion the perpetuation of the principate. The consuls, and indeed the entire chamber, were unsure how to react to this, so the status quo was maintained. Tiberius would continue to rule.

Tacitus reports that the public reaction to the death of Drusus II was a celebration of the fact that the house of Germanicus was once again to provide Rome with her next Caesar. Tacitus then records Sejanus' reaction to this event. Since Drusus' death was not treated as suspicious, Sejanus grew increasingly audacious in his ambitions and turned his attention to destroying the family of Germanicus.⁴⁵⁴ Tacitus is returning to his theme from earlier in Book IV of Sejanus' ambitions his plans for achieving them. Initially, Sejanus' method of achieving his goals was to align himself with Livilla. However, the succession was structured in such a way that with Drusus II dead, and his children not old enough to succeed, the family of Germanicus would once again come to the forefront. Thus, to restore Drusus II's line to the forefront of the succession, it would be necessary to remove Nero and Drusus III from political consideration.

Sejanus saw the restoration, and continued prominence, of Drusus II's line as a means to not only serve Tiberius but also further his own interests. We have suggested that, at this point, Sejanus saw regency for a younger member of the imperial family as the apogee of his aspirations. The only way to achieve this would be for Sejanus to align himself with either the family of Germanicus or that of Drusus. The former was not an option, for both personal and political reasons.

Consider the tensions between Tiberius and the family of Germanicus and the fact that Sejanus was a servant of Tiberius. Given that Sejanus' position, and continued rise, depended on Tiberius' favour, Sejanus would have been ill-advised to cultivate a relationship with

⁴⁵⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 4.12.

Germanicus' family. It is also unlikely that Agrippina and Germanicus' family would have welcomed Sejanus, given that he was as servant of Tiberius. Second, Nero and Drusus III would not need a regent in the long term. Even if at this point they were not able to rule in their own right, as time progressed and they presumably gained more experience, the position of a regent would become untenable. Thus, Drusus' family was Sejanus' only choice.

Tacitus structures the current narrative to correspond with Sejanus' later actions. Even at this early stage, Tacitus identifies a plot against the house of Caesar.⁴⁵⁵ That said, he concedes that there was no suspicion of foul play in Drusus' death until a letter written some eight years later by Sejanus' jilted wife, Apicata, revealed the details. It is surely the case that if there were any suspicion around Drusus' death, as the son of the Caesar, his death would have been investigated. The possibility certainly exists that rather than causing the death of Drusus, Sejanus may simply have taken advantage of it.

Sejanus' alleged involvement in the death of Drusus is ancillary to the result: Sejanus became emboldened and moved to attack Germanicus' family. His method was to exploit the already existing tensions within the imperial house. We will see that Sejanus' method was multifaceted, but his intended targets were Agrippina and her adult sons. Agrippina's desire for her sons to rule and Tiberius and Augusta's rejection of her sense of entitlement were at the centre of the trouble that was to come.

Tacitus spends the next four chapters concluding his narrative of the year 23 CE by focusing on what Martin and Woodman call 'miscellaneous domestic items'.⁴⁵⁶ These events are tangential to our discussion, other than the death of one of Drusus II's children, which left Gemellus as the sole surviving member of his line.⁴⁵⁷ We have suggested that Sejanus' intention

⁴⁵⁵ See sec. 4.1a & 4.1b.

⁴⁵⁶ Martin and Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 134.

⁴⁵⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 4.15.

at this point was to use Drusus' line to secure his own power. He would attempt to achieve this through marriage into the imperial family. Consequently, he would assume guardianship over Tiberius' surviving natural grandson, with the ultimate aim that he would be a regent for him. Such a position represented the limit of Sejanus' political scope at this point.

4.3 The Year 24 CE: Sejanus Attacks Agrippina's Associates

Tacitus' account of the year 24 CE occupies some twelve chapters of Book IV. He begins with the priests (*pontifices*) offering up prayers to the gods for the health and wellbeing of Tiberius. At the same time, they also dedicated Nero and Drusus III to the same gods. Tiberius resented these two youths being placed on the same level as himself.⁴⁵⁸ He asked the *pontifices* if they had made this dedication because of the entreaties, or threats, of Agrippina. Martin and Woodman suggest that the priests would not have expected such a reaction from Tiberius given that he had committed the boys to the senate the previous year.⁴⁵⁹ This is likely a reference to the senate-house expecting to be able to bestow honours on the boys without criticism from Tiberius, since he had placed the *patres* as guardians over them. I would suggest that Tiberius, as a staunch traditionalist opposed to unearned privileges for the young, indeed was opposed to this dedication. The reason for the light rebuke was that many of the *pontifices* were not only members of the nobility but also his personal friends.

Shotter provides some insight into Tiberius' negative reaction when he notes that one of the *pontifices* was Asinius Gallus, Tiberius' personal enemy.⁴⁶⁰ However, it is possible that Gallus, who was later accused of being Agrippina's lover, had suggested the honours for the boys

⁴⁵⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.17.

⁴⁵⁹ Martin and Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 144.

⁴⁶⁰ Shotter, *Tacitus Annals IV*, 148.

precisely because it would anger Tiberius.⁴⁶¹ We also cannot rule out the possibility that Sejanus, in an attempt to foster greater friction between Tiberius and Agrippina, was involved in having the honours granted to Nero and Drusus. As we have seen, he had courted the senate, and doubtless, he had allies in the chamber.

Further context for Tiberius' rebuke is found in his speech in the senate following this incident. The Caesar argued strongly that Nero and Drusus III might be corrupted by the conferment of premature honours.⁴⁶² We see an issue from Tiberius' earlier career reappearing in this situation. Premature honours had been conferred on the young Gaius Caesar. Tiberius' experiences with the conferral of such honours on youths were not positive, and this may well have influenced his reaction to this incident.⁴⁶³

Tacitus then offers what he calls the true reason for Tiberius' reaction to this incident: advice from Sejanus. Tacitus writes:

*instabat quippe Seianus incusabatque diductam civitatem ut civili bello: esse qui se Agrippinae vocent, ac ni resistatur, fore pluris; neque aliud gliscentis discordiae remedium quam si unus alterve maxime prompti subverterentur.*⁴⁶⁴

Naturally, Sejanus took this position and accused them [Agrippina's *factio*⁴⁶⁵] of dividing the state, as though by civil war. He said that there were some who called themselves the faction⁴⁶⁶ of Agrippina. Unless they were resisted, there

⁴⁶¹ Tac., *Ann.* 6.25. This accusation is almost certainly baseless and comes across as a post hoc rationalisation from Tiberius to justify his treatment of Agrippina.

⁴⁶² Tac., *Ann.* 4.17.

⁴⁶³ See sec. 2.5.

⁴⁶⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 4.17.

⁴⁶⁵ Partisans.

⁴⁶⁶ The word 'party' is used in some translations.

would be more. He further said that the only remedy for the increasing discord would be if one or other of the most public malcontents were overturned.

To avoid the anachronistic term ‘party’, we are better served speaking in terms of a group of adherents loyal to Germanicus, who had transferred their support to Agrippina in her quest to see her sons succeed. There is little doubt that Agrippina would have had considerable support among both the populace and those of noble birth (*nobiles*) at this point. Tacitus is insinuating that Sejanus used the incident involving Nero, Drusus III and the *pontifices* to present Agrippina and her supporters as an opposing force to Tiberius, a useful way for Sejanus to generate further suspicion between the Caesar and his daughter-in-law.

It is difficult to understand the strategic intent in this request—that is, what those partial to Agrippina, or indeed Agrippina herself, sought to achieve. Such a request would surely raise the ire of the Caesar and further damage what was already a fractious relationship. Sejanus, in his quest to discredit this group, may well have exaggerated its actions and intentions regarding Nero and Drusus III. The impatience and sense of entitlement *were* there, at least in the narrative pertaining to Agrippina, but Sejanus framed the threat as coming from not only Agrippina but her supporters as well.⁴⁶⁷ This would allow Sejanus to launch an offensive against the family of Germanicus and its supporters. Sejanus now began his campaign to discredit this group and to work towards its eventual elimination as a political force.

Tacitus reports that based on Tiberius’ suspicions about the faction loyal to Agrippina, Sejanus undertook a series of prosecutions against the alleged malcontents about whom he had warned Tiberius. His mechanism was the law of treason. Two elements of these trials are noteworthy. As discussed above, Augustus had widened the definition of treason from being limited to

⁴⁶⁷ This will be discussed in detail when Tac., *Ann.* 4.52 is analysed. Consider also Suet., *Tib.* 53.

actions to encompassing words.⁴⁶⁸ Tiberius followed the Augustan example but, according to Tacitus' presentation, in a stricter sense. The Caesar lacked Augustus' capacity for discretion when it came to dissent, as the case against Cremutius Cordus will show. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Sejanus had convinced Tiberius that he was facing potential opposition from Agrippina and her circle.

The other aspect of these treason trials that is of interest is the strict judicial approach taken: there were no extrajudicial punishments. This reflected Tiberius' desire for legal precision. Much like the trial of Piso, Tiberius insisted on impartial justice. This was the case for the trials narrated in Book IV, Chapters 17 through 38. It would drastically change later in the reign.

Those subject to prosecution in 24 CE were invariably connected to the family of Germanicus. The first trial concerned Gaius Silius, who had served for seven years on the Rhine, earned triumphal insignia and won the final victory in the Gallic revolt led by Sacrovir.⁴⁶⁹ The charges against Silius related to his finest hour: he was accused of *complicity* in the revolt because he had not informed Tiberius about it until well after it had begun. In addition, it was alleged that his victory had been followed by extortion and, finally, that his wife had been his accomplice in these crimes.⁴⁷⁰ The impact of the charges was compounded by the fact that Silius gloated about his own ability to control the loyalty of the troops under his command during the mutinies of 14 CE.⁴⁷¹

This prosecution had a direct link to Tiberius, in both fact and rumour. The factual element was Silius' alleged complicity in Sacrovir's revolt, a direct military threat to Tiberius' position. The other direct link to Tiberius was based on rumour and gossip: Silius had gloated that the legions

⁴⁶⁸ See Tac., *Ann.* 1.72 and sec. 3.6.

⁴⁶⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.18. For the revolt, see Tac., *Ann.* 3.42.

⁴⁷⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 4.18.

⁴⁷¹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.18.

under his command had remained loyal during the mutinies of 14 CE while others had tended towards revolution. Tacitus reports that Silius allegedly implied that, if it were not for him, Tiberius would not have remained in power.⁴⁷² Politically, Silius' words were very dangerous. The army was of critical importance to the Caesar's power. Through this prosecution, Sejanus had successfully linked a man loyal to Agrippina to potentially treasonous acts.

Steven Rutledge suggests, citing R. A. Bauman, that there was good reason for Tiberius to be suspicious of Silius, his wife Sosia and Agrippina. The latter, as a Julian, could claim the loyalties not only of the Gallic tribesmen but also of the legions that had once been under her husband's command.⁴⁷³ Tacitus presents Agrippina as a direct military threat to Tiberius should she choose to take advantage of the loyalty of the troops.

Sejanus had targeted a man who had proven military ability and experience, and who was loyal to Agrippina. Robert Samuel Rogers suggests that Silius, as a general, may have been 'an asset to Agrippina' if her faction had ever considered pressing its claim by force of arms.⁴⁷⁴ Sejanus, it seems, had chosen his target well. Tacitus insists that Tiberius despised Silius' wife, Sosia Galla, because of her affection for Agrippina. This is an example of Sejanus' initial approach: he was not attacking Agrippina directly, but rather undermining her by pursuing her associates. Rutledge observes the difficulty in defining this prosecution as a direct attack on Agrippina and her associates but accurately points out that she saw it as such.⁴⁷⁵ This situation is a useful example of perception being more important than reality in politics, particularly where reactions are concerned. Regardless of whether it was or was not a direct attack on her and her confidants, Agrippina reacted as though it was.

⁴⁷² Tac., *Ann.* 4.18.

⁴⁷³ Rutledge, *Imperial inquisitions : prosecutors and informants from Tiberius to Domitian*, 142.

⁴⁷⁴ Rogers, "The Conspiracy of Agrippina," 143-4.

⁴⁷⁵ Rutledge, *Imperial inquisitions : prosecutors and informants from Tiberius to Domitian*, 142.

4.4 The Year 25 CE: Sejanus' Ascendancy Begins

The first event described by Tacitus under the year 25 CE is the trial of Cremutius Cordus, arraigned on a charge of publishing a history of the civil wars that occurred after the Ides of March, in which he praised Brutus and referred to Cassius as the last of the Romans (*laudatoque M. Bruto C. Cassium Romanorum ultimum dixisset*).⁴⁷⁶ The prosecutors in this trial were clients of Sejanus. Part of Sejanus' duties as prefect was to protect Tiberius from those who might pose a threat. Sejanus would later evolve his position as prefect into a role analogous to an enforcer. Further to this point, Seager notes that this trial was in no way connected to Sejanus' campaign against Germanicus' line.⁴⁷⁷ Sejanus was merely fulfilling his duties to Tiberius, at least initially. Later in the 20s CE, Sejanus would turn his attention to the house of Germanicus, ostensibly to protect Tiberius but in reality to serve his own ends.

Tacitus dedicates the next two chapters to Tiberius and the imperial cult. These details need not delay us, for Sejanus was in the process of making a major move: to request the hand of Livilla (Livia in the text) in marriage. Tacitus writes:

At Seianus nimia fortuna socors et muliebri insuper cupidine incensus, promissum matrimonium flagitante Livia, componit ad Caesarem codicillos: moris quippe tum erat quamquam praesentem scripto adire. eius talis forma fuit: benevolentia patris Augusti et mox plurimis Tiberii iudiciis ita insuevisse ut spes votaue sua non prius ad deos quam ad principum auris conferret. neque fulgorem honorum umquam precatum: excubias ac labores ut unum e militibus pro incolumitate imperatoris malle. ac tamen quod pulcherrimum adeptum, ut

⁴⁷⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 4.34. Rogers has called into question the historicity of the accounts of this trial. See Robert Samuel Rogers, "The Case of Cremutius Cordus," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 96 (1965).

⁴⁷⁷ Seager, *Tiberius*, 164.

*coninunctione Caesaris dignus crederetur: hinc initium spei. et quoniam audiverit Augustum in conlocanda filia non nihil etiam de equitibus Romanis consultavisse, ita, si maritus Liviae quaereretur, haberet in animo amicum sola necessitudinis gloria usurum. non enim exuere imposita munia: satis aestimare firmari domum adversum iniquas Agrippinae offensiones, idque liberorum causa; nam sibi multum superque vitae fore, quod tali cum principe explevisset.*⁴⁷⁸

Sejanus, emboldened by excessive good fortune, and spurred on by the passion of a woman, for Livia was demanding the promised marriage, composed a letter to the Caesar: it was a matter of custom to approach him by writing even though he was present. Its form was as follows: because of the benevolence of the father, Augustus, and the many signs of Tiberius' favour, he [Sejanus] was accustomed to bring his hopes and wishes to the ears of the *princeps* as soon as to the gods. He had not sought the glamour of public honours: he preferred guard duty and toil as one of the common soldiers for the security of the emperor. And, yet, somehow, he had gained what was most illustrious: he had been deemed worthy of an alliance with the *princeps*. This was the beginning of his hope. He had heard that Augustus, when giving his daughter in marriage, had even considered Roman knights. And, so, if a husband should be sought for Livia, he asked that Tiberius bear in mind a friend who would profit nothing from the connection but the attached glory. He did not seek to be excused from his duties: he deemed that it was sufficient that the house should be protected against the unjustified hatred of Agrippina, and this for the sake of the children. As for himself, it would be enough and more if he could live out his life with such a *princeps* in power.

⁴⁷⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.39.

Tacitus says that Sejanus was emboldened by the good fortune he had experienced. He was connected to both Livilla and Tiberius. In addition, if it were true that Sejanus had been involved in Drusus II's death, he would have been further encouraged by the fact that the death had been assigned to natural causes. In Tacitus' comment that Sejanus was spurred on by Livilla's passion, we see Tacitus the historian placing at least partial blame on Livilla for the trouble that was to befall come on her. This is another example of an imperial leitmotif, whereby political machinations are attributed to influential women. These were often related to the succession and were used to undermine the rule of many Julio-Claudian Caesars. The pattern even extends into the reign of Hadrian.⁴⁷⁹

We return now to Sejanus' petition to Tiberius. The Caesar was to be petitioned by letter, even while he remained in the city. According to Martin and Woodman, this practice had existed since the days of Caesar the dictator, and thus it was well established by Tiberius' time.⁴⁸⁰ It is significant that at this point even Sejanus had to write to Tiberius, in this instance on a personal matter but presumably in other more formal or official contexts as well.

Sejanus flattered both Tiberius and the imperial family. It is true that a degree of flattery was common in correspondence between members of the elite, but if the relationship between Sejanus and the Caesar were as close as Tacitus portrays—that is, that Tiberius felt totally at ease only with Sejanus—we may question the necessity of this level of flattery.⁴⁸¹ It is true that in the context of making a request to marry into the imperial family, some servility would be required, but this does seem to be overreaching in light of the apparent closeness of the two

⁴⁷⁹ As examples of the theme of women in politics, consider Augusta (Tac., *Ann.* 1.3, 5, 6, 3.17, 4.12, 60; Dio Cass., 55.10a.10, 22.2, 56.30.1–2, 31.1, 57.3.3, 6, 57.12, 18.6.) Agrippina I [the Elder] will be discussed in detail below. As other examples, consider Messalina (Tac., *Ann.* 11.2, 12, 26–38; Dio Cass., 60.14.1, 3–4, 15.5–6, 16.2, 6, 17.5, 8, 29.6a, 31.2–5), Agrippina II [the Younger] (Tac., *Ann.* 12.4, 22, 25, 26–7, 37, 41–2, 56–7, 59, 64, 66–9, 13.1–2, 13–14, 21; Dio Cass., 60.31.6, 8, 32.1–4, 32.5, 33.1, 3a, 7, 9–10, 12, 34.1–5, 35.2, 61.3.2–4, 6.4, 7.1–2), Poppea Sabina (Tac., *Ann.* 14.1, 60; Dio Cass., 62.12.1, 13.1, 4) and Plotina, the wife of Trajan (SHA, *Hadr.* 4.1, 4, 10; Dio Cass., 69.1.2–5, 10.3[1]).

⁴⁸⁰ Woodman and Martin, *Annals. Book IV*, 194.

⁴⁸¹ Consider Plin., *Ep.* 6.16, 20.

men. That said, Tacitus' own agenda—that is, to portray Sejanus as the scheming and power-seeking eques—may also account for the tone of the letter. We note here that speeches and reports of letters in ancient history are often literary and rhetorical creations of the author designed to explore and explain the issue at hand rather than accurate representations of what was said or written.

We now turn to the content of the letter itself.⁴⁸² To bolster his request, Sejanus cited Augustan precedent regarding the marriages of Julia the Elder. Sejanus knew well of the general deference to Augustus, but he was also well aware of how highly influenced Tiberius was by Augustus. The decisions in the early years of Tiberius' reign were largely based on Augustan precedent, and Sejanus used this to full advantage in his quest to marry Livilla.

Seager has examined this letter. He suggests that Sejanus was aiming to establish himself as a guardian for Tiberius Gemellus, specifically to protect both Livilla and her son from the alleged conspiracy of Agrippina. Seager notes that Sejanus' letter does not mention Germanicus' children.⁴⁸³ We must remember that Nero and Drusus III were still very much alive and the most senior members of Tiberius' family and administration. However, their advancement was notably slow. This fact, along with the wording of the Decree, may have led Sejanus to believe that Drusus II *and his line* were to succeed. To prove his loyalty to Tiberius after the death of Drusus II, Sejanus offered himself as the protector of the interests of Drusus II's son.

Sejanus was trying to augment his connection to Tiberius: he sought to change his relationship from that of an outsider who served the imperial family to that of a member of the family itself. That said, this marriage alone would not have served any wider political ambitions other than the potential for Sejanus to be a regent for Gemellus. Even this had its limitations given both

⁴⁸² Syme dismisses the letters as having been created by Tacitus. See Ronald Syme, *Ten Studies in Tacitus* (Oxford, 1970), 5. See also Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford: Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1958), 404.

⁴⁸³ Seager, *Tiberius*, 165.

Gemellus' age and the fact that Nero and Drusus III, who were older, would take precedence in the succession. Another obstacle was the fact that Germanicus' line would have been expected to provide Rome with her next Caesar, thus making Drusus' line politically irrelevant at this point. Sejanus had already alerted Tiberius to the potential threat posed by Agrippina and those connected to her, and he was now positioning himself as the defender of Tiberius' interests. Since, at this point, regency was the apogee of Sejanus' ambitions, he would need to restore the prominence of Drusus II's line if Sejanus' marriage to Livilla were to further his career.

Consider the situation at this point: Drusus II, the heir apparent, had died. His death had brought the house of Germanicus to the fore again. This was demonstrated specifically by Tiberius' decision to bring the sons of Germanicus into the senate. However, there was a difference between the pageantry—that is, the *form* that events took—and the substance. Whatever Tiberius' motivation, this decision resulted in Agrippina's sons remaining politically stagnant, and her frustration at this was clear. The lack of advancement for Nero and Drusus III resulted not only in there being no definitive plan for the succession in the long term but also in no one being brought forward to replace Drusus II in the short term.

A similar situation followed the death of Agrippa in 12 BCE but with a very different outcome. The leading deputy to the *princeps* had died, and the next generation (Gaius and Lucius) were too young to rule. Thus, a man with the relevant experience, Tiberius in that case, was raised to the position of leading political deputy. This occurred despite the availability of potential heirs with what Augustus saw as the right bloodlines.⁴⁸⁴ These boys were brought to the fore after Tiberius departed for Rhodes in 6 BCE. We recall that, since 11 BCE, Tiberius had been married into the imperial family. We thus have a precedent at which Sejanus could aim: a man

⁴⁸⁴ Dio Cass., 54.31.1–2.

of experience, close to the Caesar, married into the imperial family, filling a vacuum created by a destabilised succession plan.

Tiberius, of course, did not make Sejanus' position official but rather allowed Sejanus to assume the duties of leading political deputy in an informal capacity, while continuing in his role of *praefectus praetorio*. Such a role for Sejanus resulted in Tiberius not seeing a *need* to advance an official leading political deputy to replace Drusus II. This virtually ensured, and quite possibly explains, the political stagnation of Nero and Drusus III. The result was a failure of dynastic succession planning. Tiberius' decision to allow Sejanus to fill this role was not for lack of personnel. Had he wished, he could have followed the precedent of Augustus in 6 BCE and advanced Nero and Drusus III despite their youth.

In 25 CE, then, the future of the succession was unstable and vulnerable to manipulation. Sejanus sought to take advantage of this dynastic weakness. He began with a proposal to marry into the imperial family. We have defined marriage as an element of the mechanics of succession. Sejanus' request to marry Livilla therefore carried implications for the succession. As discussed above, Sejanus' highest political aspiration at this point was regency for Gemellus. If Sejanus were to marry into the family, he would be guardian for the child. This combination of political legitimacy and Sejanus' position as prefect of the guard could place him in a very strong position to rule for Gemellus, should Nero and Drusus III be removed from political consideration. However, they were still officially the heirs apparent.

Agrippina would have been fearful at the idea of Sejanus marrying into the imperial family. She would have seen a decision by Tiberius to allow Livilla to marry Sejanus as a precursor to again changing the focus of the succession from the line of Germanicus to that of Drusus. The lack of advancement for Nero, along with a decision allowing Sejanus to marry into his side of the family, would have exposed Tiberius' partisanship for his own line and further angered

Agrippina. As Tacitus' narration proceeds, his depiction of Agrippina takes a sharp negative turn; she is reported as behaving irrationally and allowing her emotions to govern her decisions, making her an easy target for Sejanus, which modern scholars have questioned.⁴⁸⁵

Sejanus said in the letter that the only benefit to him of such a marriage would be the glory resulting from a connection to the imperial house. In the short term, this was correct. However, Sejanus is unlikely to have made this request for the immediate benefits but rather for the long-term advantages. Any *children* produced from this marriage would be great nieces and nephews of Tiberius and potential candidates for the succession.

Tacitus claims that Sejanus sought the marriage so that the family would be protected from the actions of the rash Agrippina, and this for the sake of the children. It is possible that Tacitus has added this detail to support his narrative of Tiberius' dislike for the family of Germanicus. If Sejanus did mention Agrippina and the alleged risk she posed, this would have allowed him to reinforce his loyalty to Tiberius. If we identify the children as Tiberius' natural grandchildren, Gemellus and Julia, the house that Sejanus seeks to protect is best understood specifically as Tiberius' house rather than the broader house of Caesar.

Tiberius' response to Sejanus' letter is quite long; only those selections deemed essential will be translated here. Tacitus' source for such correspondence is unclear, but Suetonius does quote from letters written by and to the Caesars, which suggests that such correspondence was part of the archives.⁴⁸⁶ However, Tacitus was more of a literary creator, and so he does not quote

⁴⁸⁵ On Tacitus' portrayal of Agrippina, see David C. A. Shotter, "Agrippina the Elder: A Woman in a Man's World," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 49, no. 3 (2000); Tina Saavedra, "Agrippina the Elder: Vixen or Victim?," in *Kentucky Foreign Language Conference* (1996); Mary R. McHugh, "Ferox Femina Agrippina Maior In Tacitus's *Annales*," *Helios* 39, no. 1 (2012).

⁴⁸⁶ As examples, consider Suet., *Aug.* 51.3, 69.2, 70.1, 71.2–4, 76.1, 86.3; Suet., *Claud.* 3.2–4.6.

these letters verbatim but rather uses them as the basis for a summary of the exchange between prefect and Caesar.⁴⁸⁷

Tacitus says that Tiberius opened his reply with praise for Sejanus and his services as well as commenting on his own favours (*beneficia*) to Sejanus. The Caesar avoided the question of Livilla's marriage by suggesting that she could make her own decision concerning her future or seek advice from her relatives, specifically Augusta and Antonia.⁴⁸⁸ Tiberius, as was typical, was indecisive. His goal was to act in such a way as not to inflame the already tense relationship between Agrippina and Livilla.

If Tiberius were to allow Livilla to remarry, it would certainly increase the tensions between the women. Since Germanicus had died before Drusus II, Agrippina would naturally have completed her period of mourning first and thus would have been able to remarry before Livilla. If Tiberius were to allow Livilla, who had just completed her period of mourning for Drusus, to remarry before Agrippina, this could easily be perceived as partiality, both personal and political. This is a useful example of Tacitus' presentation of Tiberius as a politically astute man.

If Livilla were to marry Sejanus, this would bolster her position at court. Given that he was the prefect of the praetorian guard, the marriage also carried with it serious political ramifications. The guard was, ostensibly, loyal to the entire imperial house, but once again, perception may be more important than reality. If a praetorian prefect were to marry into one side of the imperial family, this could create the perception of partiality in terms of the loyalty of the soldiers under his command. This is significant in terms of the conflict that existed within the Julio-Claudian

⁴⁸⁷ An example of this can be seen in Tac., *Ann.* 4.41.

⁴⁸⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.40.

house, which was motivated by the succession: if the conflict ever came to arms, the faction aligned with Sejanus would potentially be supported by the troops.

Tacitus also says that Tiberius suggested that Livilla could make her own decision concerning her future husband, and it is true that wealthy Roman widows did have a degree of influence over who their future husbands would be. This fact allowed Tiberius to maintain some distance from this politically and personally contentious issue.⁴⁸⁹

We now turn in more detail to Tiberius' response. For purposes of ease of analysis, the text, which accounts for the remainder of *Annales* 4.40, will be broken into two sections. Tacitus writes:

*Ad ea Tiberius laudata pietate Seiani suisque in eum beneficiis modice percursis ... simplicius acturum, de inimiciis primum Agrippinae, quas longe acrius arsuras si matrimonium Liviae velut in partis domum Caesarum distraxisset. sic quoque erumpere aemulationem feminarum, eaque discordia nepotes suos convelli: quid si intendatur certamen tali coniugio? 'falleris enim, Seiane, si te mansurum in eodem ordine putas, et Liviam, quae G. Caesari, mox Druso nupta fuerit, ea mente acturam ut cum equite Romano senescat. ego ut sinam, credisne passuros qui fratrem eius, qui patrem maioresque nostros in summis imperiis videre? vis tu quidem istum intra locum sistere: sed illi magistratus et primores, qui te invitum perrumpunt omnibusque de rebus consulunt, excessisse iam pridem equestre fastigium longeque antisse patris mei amicitias non occulti ferunt perque invidiam tui me quoque incusant ...'*⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁹ Consider Cornelia Africana – see Plut., *Vit Ti. Gracch.* 1.2; *Vit C. Gracch.* 19.

⁴⁹⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 4.40.

[In reply] to this, Tiberius praised the devotion of Sejanus and touched briefly on his own favours to him ... He [Tiberius] would be straightforward: first, concerning the enmity of Agrippina, which would burn for longer if the marriage of Livia were, so to speak, to tear the house of the Caesars into parts: as things stood, there were outbreaks of feminine rivalry, and his own grandchildren were torn apart by the discord: what would happen if the rivalry were to be exacerbated by this proposed marriage? He then said ‘for you are deceived, Sejanus, if you think that you will retain your present rank, and if you think that Livia, who has been the wife of Gaius Caesar, and then to Drusus, will be content to grow old with a Roman knight. Even if I were to consent, do you honestly believe that those who have seen her brother, her father and our ancestors in the highest offices of state, would suffer it? You yourself wish to remain within your current position, but those magistrates and the nobles, who invade your privacy and consult you concerning all matters, are saying, without subtlety, that you long ago rose above the equestrian order and far surpassed many of my father’s friends, and through jealousy of you they criticise me also.’

Tiberius demonstrated an acute awareness of how Agrippina might react to his decision concerning Livilla’s future. This was the first part of his rationale for why Sejanus should not marry Livilla. The Caesar then gave the second part of his opinion on the matter, which was that Sejanus was not of the same class and political importance as Livilla’s previous husbands. Tiberius said that even if he allowed the marriage it was unlikely that the magistrates and other men of importance would accept the marriage. This was despite Sejanus’ clear importance to them as a conduit to Tiberius. The grounds for noble opposition to the marriage were that Livilla would be marrying below her station.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹¹ Compare Julia the Elder’s comment about Tiberius as her social inferior. Tac., *Ann.* 1.53.

Here, it is perhaps useful to briefly distinguish between the nobles and the equites. Despite these two groups broadly constituting the Roman elite, the Senators viewed the equites as their social inferiors.⁴⁹² Tiberius was citing noble opinion, which stemmed from this elitism, as a reason for avoiding the issue of the marriage.

We see Tiberius behaving with reverence for traditional Roman values because he was an elite citizen belonging to Rome's aristocracy.⁴⁹³ He wanted matters to remain as they were. Despite this, he did allow, and indeed facilitate, Sejanus' rise without consideration of his rank. Class prejudice did not influence Tiberius' decision to allow the continued social and political rise of his friend and confidant. The condescension in Tiberius' letter could be attributed to Tacitus' own prejudice towards.

Although Tiberius was aware of the importance of senatorial opinion and the need to assuage it, the reality was that once a decision was made, the senate would have accepted it, and by this point in his reign, Tiberius knew this. What is less clear is whether the nobles would have been supportive of the decision. That is, there was a difference between noble acceptance of Tiberius' decisions and active support of them. A series of tolerated but unsupported decisions could well have bred animosity between the Caesar and his nobility. Tiberius was using potential senatorial opposition to the marriage, on class grounds, as another means to avoid making a decision in response to Sejanus' request.

⁴⁹² We have noted Julia's contempt for, and perceived superiority to, Tiberius. Consider also Tacitus' introduction to Sejanus, wherein Tacitus calls him a small town adulterer (Tac., *Ann.* 4.3). Dio, too, has thinly veiled contempt for Sejanus. See Dio Cass., 58.5.1.

⁴⁹³ Of particular note is the sense that rank should be respected (we see this here with Tiberius citing Sejanus' social rank as part of his rationale for why Sejanus should not marry Livilla) and that advancement should be gradual and earned, rather than a privilege of birth into an imperial family (the case in point here is his refusal to advance Nero and Drusus III before their time). Tiberius' desire for legal precision should also be noted. In addition, there was also Tiberius' dedication to the wishes of Augustus, as well as his reverence for his mother. Finally, we especially note his insistence that the Senate legitimise his position as *princeps* in 14 CE.

Finally, we see Tiberius more concerned with the criticism directed towards him from the nobles regarding Sejanus' rise than with that rise itself. Tiberius' attitude in this situation is not clear: evidently, noble opinion was not considered when the decision was made to raise Sejanus to such heights. If the opinion of the senatorial order about Sejanus' rise had ever been an issue, Tiberius did not seem to have considered it, at least not until it affected him personally.

Tiberius' reply continues:

*at enim Augustus filiam suam equiti Romano tradere meditatus est. mirum hercule, si cum in omnis curas distraheretur immensumque attolli provideret quem coniunctione tali super alios extulisset, C. Proculeium et quosdam in sermonibus habuit insigni tranquillitate vitae, nullis rei publicae negotiis permixtos. sed si dubitatione Augusti movemur, quanto validius est quod Marco Agrippae, mox mihi conlocavit? atque ego haec pro amicitia non occultavi: ceterum neque tuis neque Liviae destinatis adversabor. ipse quid intra animum volutaverim, quibus adhuc necessitudinibus immiscere te mihi parem, omittam ad praesens referre: id tantum aperiam, nihil esse tam excelsum quod non virtutes istae tuusque in me animus mereantur, datoque tempore vel in senatus vel in contione non reticebo.*⁴⁹⁴

You suggest that Augustus had considered giving his own daughter to a Roman knight. Amazing, by Hercules, that he was torn asunder by every type of anxiety, and foreseeing also the boundless extent to which such a man would be raised above others through such an alliance, he spoke of Gaius Proculeius and some others, distinguished by their tranquil life: none was mixed up in matters of state. But if we are guided by the hesitancy of Augustus, how much stronger is the

⁴⁹⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 4.40.

fact that he married her to Marcus Agrippa, and then to me? I have not hidden these things on account of our friendship, and I will oppose neither your plans nor those of Livia. Concerning those things that are within my own mind, and the ties by which I plan to bind you to myself, I will—for the moment—not speak. I will, however, say this: that nothing is too great to be deserved as a result of your merits and affection for me, and, when the opportunity is granted, either in the senate or in a popular assembly, I shall not be silent.

As with the previous passage, Tiberius showed himself in full command of the situation: Augustus may have *thought* about marrying Julia to an eques, but he did not actually do so, choosing instead to marry her to Agrippa and then eventually to Tiberius. The Caesar demonstrated his awareness of Sejanus' tactic of using Augustan precedent to achieve what he wanted. In Tiberius, Sejanus appeared to have met his match.

Tiberius was obviously aware of the magnitude of an imperial marriage, particularly the increase in dignity that would be afforded to the man who married the princess. His own career had illustrated this. As disinterested as Tiberius is said to have been concerning the business of the state, he was, at least as Tacitus presents him in this letter, demonstrating his awareness of the inner workings and nuances of imperial politics. We may infer from this that despite his distance from state affairs, Tiberius still insisted that proper procedure be followed in social custom, specifically that rank be respected.

Despite providing a series of reasons why the marriage should not go ahead, the Caesar would not oppose Sejanus and Livilla's plans, and the closing of the letter hinted at a greater future for Sejanus. We see Tiberius, presumably after weighing the arguments for and against the marriage, attempting to distance himself from the issue so that he could not be blamed for any consequences. A possible second interpretation is that Tiberius, with his comment that he would

not stop Sejanus and Livilla getting married despite having given reasons for it not proceeding, was testing Sejanus the prefect. If Sejanus went through with the marriage despite Tiberius' objections, Sejanus' the prefect's motive for serving the Caesar could be questioned.

Tiberius then changed tack again, praising Sejanus for his service, perhaps to mollify Sejanus following his equivocal response to the marriage request. This praise defined Sejanus as a loyal servant and nothing more. There was a distance implied by this statement. However, Tiberius then went on to say that he would soon bring Sejanus closer. Such plans hinted at a brighter future for Sejanus.

Sejanus was clearly taken aback by Tiberius' response, particularly by the reference to the noble criticism levelled against the Caesar because of Sejanus the rise in status and influence. Tacitus comments that Sejanus ignored the marriage to Livilla because he now faced an even greater problem. For some time, he had been receiving groups of daily callers (clients) to his house. He would reward these clients with appointments to various offices of state and other favours. In this regard, Tacitus says that Sejanus was in a bind. If he continued to receive his clients, his detractors would have evidence to present to Tiberius that Sejanus was too powerful. However, if Sejanus did not receive his clients, his influence would wane. His goal was to escape the bind, and he would do this by seeking a legitimate reason to leave the city.⁴⁹⁵ Therefore he devised a plan by which Tiberius would leave the city. If this were to happen, Sejanus' position as prefect of the guard necessitated that he, too, would leave the city. This, as we will see in Section 4.7, would result in many other benefits for Sejanus.

Sejanus' means of encouraging Tiberius to leave Rome was to extol the virtues of life in the country while also criticising life in Rome. Tacitus writes:

⁴⁹⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 4.41.

*multa quippe providebat: sua in manu aditus litterarumque magna ex parte se arbitrum fore, cum per milites commearent; mox Caesarem vergente iam senecta secretoque loci mollitum munia imperii facilius tramissurum: et minui sibi invidiam adempta salutantum turba sublatisque inanibus veram potentiam augeri. igitur paulatim negotia urbis, populi adkursus, multitudinem affluentium increpat, extollens laudibus quietem et solitudinem quis abesse taedia et offensiones ac praecipua rerum maxime agitari.*⁴⁹⁶

As one might expect, Sejanus saw many advantages in Tiberius leaving the city. Access to him [Tiberius] would be in his [Sejanus'] own hands and letters, in large part conveyed by soldiers, would be managed by himself. Soon Caesar, already verging on old age, and when made soft in a place of retirement, would transfer more readily the functions of empire. Further, jealousy towards him [Sejanus] would be lessened by the removal of the daily callers to his house and his own true power augmented with these empty trappings removed. So, he gradually began to criticise city business: the bustling of the people and the gathering of the crowds, while extolling the virtues of quiet and isolation in which tedium and conflict were absent and particular attention could be given to the greatest matters.

Sejanus would accompany Tiberius if he were to leave Rome, a natural part of his position as praetorian prefect. Tacitus outlines many potential benefits that Sejanus saw in this situation. Others' access to Tiberius would be even more restricted if the Caesar were to leave Rome. In addition, Sejanus would have tighter control over the correspondence that reached the Caesar. We have seen that Tiberius was always to be petitioned by letter in Rome; even Sejanus himself had been required to write to Tiberius rather than consult with him in person. While Tiberius

⁴⁹⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 4.41.

was in Rome, he would have maintained interpersonal contact with long-term friends, associates and, of course, family. If Tiberius were to live outside the city, he would still be available to these people but more isolated than he had been in Rome.⁴⁹⁷

Sejanus' hope that Tiberius would eventually be more open to transferring the functions of government to him once the Caesar was out of the city needs to be assessed in terms of Tiberius' own views on ruling. Tacitus comments that Tiberius was entering the decline of life: the idea of retirement would surely have been appealing. As we have seen, Tiberius had only ever seen his position as temporary and had sought assistance in carrying out his duties. The Caesar had first Germanicus, and then Drusus II, as his colleague. Recall that Drusus II had asked how long it would be before Sejanus replaced him in that role.⁴⁹⁸ Even accounting for Drusus II's (or Tacitus') bias against Sejanus, there is no reason to doubt that he *was* helping Tiberius in a capacity fitting the evolving and increasingly administration-focused duties of the praetorian prefect.⁴⁹⁹

We note here that Tiberius' two previous leading deputies, Germanicus and Drusus II, had been members of the imperial family, and indeed heirs apparent, who had shared a consulship with Tiberius. Therefore, the Caesar's recent refusal of Sejanus' request to become a member of that family would certainly have been a setback for Sejanus in terms of the likelihood of the functions of empire being transferred to him. The elite of Rome would have been more tolerant of a member of the imperial family being so heavily involved in the administration than they would have been of an outsider. It should also be remembered that Sejanus could claim none of the powers that Germanicus or Drusus II had possessed.

⁴⁹⁷ For a discussion of the Caesar's retirement to Capri, see Houston, "Tiberius on Capri."

⁴⁹⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.7.

⁴⁹⁹ The role of the praetorian guard, and its prefect, was consistently evolving. The guard was established by Augustus soon after Actium and was initially a personal security force for the *princeps* and his family. Over time, the soldiers evolved an administrative aspect to their duties, including the confinement of prisoners. For detailed discussion of the history of the guard and how their duties evolved under the Julio-Claudians, see Sandra Bingham, *The Praetorian Guard : a history of Rome's elite special forces* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2013).

Sejanus' criticism of life in the city is an example of his attempts to exploit, for his own benefit, Tiberius' desire to be free of public life. It was unlikely, at least at this point, that Tiberius' withdrawal would result in the transferral of the functions of government to Sejanus. However, Sejanus' role as the sole conduit between the Caesar and Rome would significantly increase his influence.

As with the year 23 CE, Tacitus concludes his account of the year 25 CE with an account of senatorial business and some noteworthy deaths that occurred during the year. Let us now turn our attention to the year 26 CE, a year in which relations between Tiberius and Agrippina were to break down entirely.

4.5 The Year 26 CE: A Year of Change

Following his discussion of foreign affairs, Tacitus returns to domestic affairs, focusing on the trial of Claudia Pulchra, the second cousin of Agrippina. The charges were serious: Pulchra was accused of being unchaste, committing adultery, and threatening Tiberius' life by means of spells and poison (*crimen impudicitiae, adulterum Furnium, veneficia in principem et devotiones obiectabat*).⁵⁰⁰ Tacitus does not say that the charges were in any way fabricated.⁵⁰¹ Agrippina ignored the nature of the charges, instead attributing them to an attack on her. It is worth examining Tacitus' account of this incident in detail. He writes:

Agrippina semper atrox, tum et periculo propinquae accensa, pergit ad Tiberium ac forte sacrificantem patri repperit ... non eiusdem ait mactare divo Augusto victimas et posteros eius insectari. non in effigies mutas divinum

⁵⁰⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 4.52.

⁵⁰¹ Tacitus says that he consulted Agrippina's memoirs as one of his sources for these events. Tac., *Ann.* 4.53.

*spiritum transfusum: se imaginem veram, caelesti sanguine ortam, intellegere discrimen, suscipere sordis. frustra Pulchram praescribi cui sola exitii causa sit quod Agrippinam stulte prorsus ad cultum delegerit oblita Sosiae ob eadem adflictae.*⁵⁰²

Agrippina, always cruel, and now incensed by the danger of her kinswoman, rushed to Tiberius and by chance found him sacrificing to his father, whereby lay the beginning of her ill will. She said that it was not fitting for the same man who had sacrificed victims to the divine Augustus to persecute his descendants. It was not into mute statues that his divine spirit had been transferred: she herself was the true image, sprung from his celestial bloodline. She was aware of the peril she faced, and she was assuming the gown of mourning. It was in vain to make an example of Pulchra, for whom the only cause of destruction was the utter foolishness inherent in choosing Agrippina as the object of her affection, forgetting that Sosia had been brought down for the same reason.

It does appear that Agrippina allowed her emotions to gain control in this situation. The charges levelled against Pulchra were serious: they included adultery, for which the penalties were severe. In addition, Agrippina's attack on Tiberius for sacrificing to Augustus while persecuting his descendants is misplaced. Tiberius' devotion to Augustus was well known, and his enforcement of the law against people who happened to be related to Augustus did not invalidate that devotion.

Agrippina's comment that she was the true descendant of the first *princeps* was surely a dangerous and provocative move, both for herself personally and for her children politically. Such a claim was a challenge to the legitimacy of Tiberius' position. It was, at best, ill-advised

⁵⁰² Tac., *Ann.* 4.52.

of Agrippina to tout her blood connection to Augustus, with its implication that it was *her* children, and not those of Drusus and Livilla, who were the legitimate heirs to the principate. We also see Agrippina ignoring the words that Tacitus ascribes to Germanicus on his deathbed, wherein Germanicus warned his wife against raising the ire of those more powerful than herself by lusting after power.⁵⁰³

In her final statement, Agrippina suggested it was unnecessary for Tiberius to have prosecuted Claudia Pulchra simply because she had made the mistake of being friends with Agrippina. She excluded the possibility that Pulchra had been prosecuted because she had broken the law. According to Agrippina, the sole motivation for the action against Pulchra was the fact that she was connected to Agrippina.

Both Suetonius and Tacitus report Tiberius' reaction to this accusation, recording that Tiberius quoted a line of Greek to Agrippina:

Εἰ μὴ τυραννεῖς, τέκνον, ἀδικεῖσθαι δοκεῖς;⁵⁰⁴

If you are not ruling, child, do you appear to have been wronged?

This dramatic line aptly encapsulates Tiberius' attitude towards Agrippina and her desire for power. Given this exchange between the Caesar and his daughter-in-law, which suggests that relations had become strained, what Tacitus reports next represents an audacious request on Agrippina's part. He says that Agrippina, still carrying her anger, became ill, and, when Tiberius visited her, asked him to provide her with a husband.⁵⁰⁵ From Agrippina's perspective, this request was entirely understandable; she had been a widow since the death of

⁵⁰³ Tac., *Ann.* 2.72.

⁵⁰⁴ Suet., *Tib.* 53.1; Tac. *Ann.* 4.52. For further details on Tiberius and Greek, see Suet., *Tib.* 70–71.

⁵⁰⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 4.53.

Germanicus in 19 CE. It was a social expectation that she remarry following the customary mourning period.

However, a marriage for Agrippina, as with all marriages within the imperial house, carried broad implications. As the widow of Germanicus, Agrippina could lay claim to his immense network of associates and clients. She was a figure around whom this network could rally and pose a challenge to Tiberius' rule. Allowing Agrippina to remarry would only serve to augment the threat posed by such a group. Given the threat that Tiberius perceived this faction to constitute, whether real or imagined, it would not have been in Tiberius' interests to allow a marriage to a well-connected and competent man who could strengthen such a group. Tiberius may have feared that such a figure could have led a coup to press Agrippina's sons' claim to power. Tiberius' fear may have been exacerbated by Agrippina's impatience and sense of entitlement for her sons, who were Julians and, in her mind, the only true heirs to Augustus, to be advanced. We have suggested previously that there had been concern about those loyal to Agrippina.⁵⁰⁶ Sejanus had warned Tiberius of the threat posed by this group. We have also seen that there is precedent for Tiberius perceiving men who are connected to Agrippina as potential threats.

One case in point, from 24 CE, is that of Silius, who was both an adherent of Agrippina and a decorated and respected general. There was a basis for Silius being charged: he is said to have commented that were it not for the loyalty of the troops under Silius' command, Tiberius would have suffered a more serious challenge to his rule during the mutinies of 14 CE.⁵⁰⁷ Here was a man who could have potentially led a coup in pursuit of Agrippina's desire for her sons to come to power.

⁵⁰⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 4.17. See sec. 4.3.

⁵⁰⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 4.18.

It is therefore apparent that Tiberius, with the assistance of Sejanus, had begun to take actions designed to inhibit any progress towards the rise of Agrippina's sons. To provide Agrippina with a husband at this point would have been politically unwise.

Agrippina's motives for making this request for a husband are complicated, given the intricate nature of imperial politics. A potential motive for Agrippina's request may simply have been adherence to social custom by remarrying after the mourning period. In contrast to this, a politically astute woman such as Agrippina would have been aware of the advantages that remarrying would grant her, both in terms of social status and the factional conflict within the court. Marriage, as we have seen, was one of the chief mechanics of succession, and a new husband for Agrippina had the potential to bring a rival into Tiberius' court. This may well explain Tiberius' decision to refuse to allow her to remarry. Whether for personal or political motives is not clear, but the political ramifications, at least as Tiberius saw them, of such a marriage would surely have played no small role in his decision.

Sejanus, to exacerbate the tensions between Tiberius and Agrippina, sent agents to infiltrate her circle. Their mission was to warn her of the apparent threat Tiberius posed the intention being to inflame her paranoia. Between this indirect approach with Agrippina and his previous advice to Tiberius, Sejanus could heighten the tension by warning each side of the threat posed by the other.

Tacitus then recounts an incident at a party where Tiberius and Agrippina were dining together. He writes:

*atque illa simulationum nescia, cum propter discumberet, non vultu aut sermone
flecti, nullos attingere cibos, donec advertit Tiberius, forte an quia audiverat;
idque quo acrius experiretur, poma, ut erant adposita, laudans nurui sua manu*

*tradidit. aucta ex eo suspicio Agrippinae et intacta ore servis tramisit. nec tamen Tiberii vox coram secuta, sed obversus ad matrem non mirum ait si quid severius in eam statuisset a qua veneficii insimularetur. inde rumor parari exitium neque id imperatorem palam audere, secretum ad perpetrandum quaeri.*⁵⁰⁸

And she [Agrippina], ignorant of pretence, when reclining alongside, did not soften her voice or features, nor did she touch the food, until Tiberius noticed either by luck or because he had been told. Therefore, to test her more rigorously, he praised some fruit as it was placed in front of him and handed it to his daughter-in-law with his own hand. This act only increased the suspicions regarding Agrippina, who, leaving it untouched by her mouth, gave it to the slaves. Even so, no obvious word followed from Tiberius, but he turned to his mother and observed that it would not be a surprise if he resolved to be harsh towards a woman by whom he was being accused of poisoning. A rumour then circulated about her destruction, but the Caesar did not dare do so openly, and was planning to carry it out in secret.

This scene, as Tacitus presents it, portrays Agrippina as allowing her emotions to take control: she was utterly deceived by Sejanus, at least in part because she was already suspicious of Tiberius. She was hearing what she wanted to hear, and Sejanus was only too willing to supply the information. Agrippina's emotions are a recurring theme through these passages. Her depiction in this scene as emotional and somewhat politically naive should be assessed in terms of Tacitus' less than flattering depictions of the women of the imperial family.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.54.

⁵⁰⁹ As an example, consider his portrayal of Livilla in Tac., *Ann.* 4.3. See also Patrick Sinclair, "Tacitus' Presentation of Livia Julia, Wife of Tiberius' Son Drusus," *The American Journal of Philology* 111, no. 2 (1990). Despite his somewhat laudatory obituary of Augusta (Tac., *Ann.* 5.1–2), Tacitus is scathing in his portrayal of her elsewhere. As a non-exhaustive list, see Tac., *Ann.* 1.3, 1.5, 1.6, 1.10. Dio, too, is less than flattering in his portrayal of her. See Dio Cass., 55.10.9–10, 22.1–2, 32.1–2, 56.30.1–2, 31.1, 47.1. Modern treatments, of Augusta herself and of the references just offered, include Barrett, *Livia : First Lady of Imperial Rome*; Barrett, "Tacitus, Livia

We should deal with Tacitus' suggestion that Tiberius was similarly influenced by Sejanus' misinformation campaign against Agrippina and her circle. At this point in his reign, Tiberius was not one to act without at least some evidence. For all of Sejanus' exaggerations and manipulations, there *were facts* to support the idea that Agrippina and her adherents posed a threat. Consider first the dedication of Nero and Drusus III to the same gods as the Caesar. This was surely an unwise move politically, given that it implied equality between Tiberius and the youths. Tiberius questioned Agrippina's involvement in this incident.⁵¹⁰ Regardless of her involvement, such a dedication would have added to Agrippina's already existing sense of entitlement, which could only have inflamed Tiberius' resentment.

Consider also that Agrippina's sense of entitlement was on full display when she found Tiberius sacrificing to Augustus and accused her father-in-law of hypocrisy for persecuting his descendants. She claimed to be Augustus' true descendant, a reference to Tiberius' adopted status.⁵¹¹ This incident took place *independent of any* manipulation by Sejanus, which indicates that third-party intervention was not necessary to cause conflict between Tiberius and his daughter-in-law. Sejanus did not *create* the tensions between Tiberius and Agrippina, but he did *exacerbate* them for his own ends.

Tacitus notes that Agrippina refused to eat some food that Tiberius had given her with his own hand, as though she feared poison. The suggestion that Tiberius would so openly seek to poison Agrippina makes limited sense. She herself was no political threat, although she was a potential rallying point for resistance. This position was based on her popularity and the fact that she was agitating for the advancement of her sons, Nero and Drusus III, who were, in her mind at least,

and the Evil Stepmother "; Bauman, "Tanaquil-Livia and the Death of Augustus."; Goodyear, Woodman, and Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book 1.1-54*; Miller, *Annals, Book 1*.

⁵¹⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4.17.

⁵¹¹ Tac. *Ann.* 4.52.

the true descendants of Augustus. These elements combined to make her imperious and, as Tiberius perceived her, a political threat. However, if it were Tiberius' goal to remove Agrippina, he did have other options available; for example, he could have sought to discredit her, as would ultimately happen. Resorting to violence would have marked a significant deviation from Tiberius' typically judicious behaviour.

Such behaviour on the part of Tiberius would also have gone against his political interests. Rumours had circulated to the effect that the Caesar was somehow involved in Germanicus' death. At the time, poison was suspected. If Agrippina, too, were to succumb to poison, Tiberius would have been subject to even greater suspicion. In addition, Tiberius had previously made remarks about being mindful of how his decisions would be perceived by the nobles. It would have been contrary to his *modus operandi* to take rash action in this case. The Caesar himself was careful to retain an appropriate degree of separation from any proceedings. The approach thus far was indirect, with those personally aligned with Agrippina targeted. The resultant prosecutions were initiated through Sejanus, with Tiberius' knowledge. For Tiberius to become personally involved would have represented a drastic deviation from his previous approach.

We now turn our attention to the account of Dio. It expresses many of the same sentiments but contains multiple contextual problems, which are possibly a reflection of the epitomised nature of the text. On Drusus II's death, Dio writes:

polloi/ te ga_r kai\ a1lloi diw&lonto kai\ h(0Agrippi=na meta_ tw~n pai/dwn
 au)th~j, tou~ newta& tou xwri/j. polla_ ga_r kat' au)th~j o(Sei''ano_j
 parw&cune to_n Tibe/rion, prosdokh&saj e0kei/nhj meta_ tw~n te/knwn
 a)polome/nhj th|~ te Libi/a| sunoikh&sein th|~ tou~ Drou&sou gunaiki/, h{j

h1ra, kai\ to_ kra&toj e3cein mhdeno_j tw|~ Tiberi/w| diado&xou
tugxa&nontoj: to_n ga_r ui9idou~n e0mi/sei w(j kai\ moixi/dion.⁵¹²

For others were destroyed [as a result of Drusus II's death], among [them] Agrippina and her children, one by one over time. For Sejanus had encouraged Tiberius against her in many things, hoping that, upon the destruction of her and her children, he [Sejanus] might be married to Livia, the wife of Drusus II, whom he loved, and he hoped that he might gain power, since there would be no successor for Tiberius, on the grounds that he [Tiberius] detested his grandson [Gemellus] as illegitimate.

This passage causes many historical issues. It is true that the immediate context is the aftermath of the death of Drusus II; however, the fact that the account is an excerpt has caused elements that came much later to be included out of sequence and out of context. Dio says that many were punished for having rejoiced at Drusus II's death (ὁ δὲ δὴ θάνατος αὐτοῦ πολλοῖς αἴτιος θανάτου ἐγένετο ὥς ἐφησθεῖσι τῇ ἀπωλείᾳ αὐτοῦ).⁵¹³ He then adds that Agrippina and her sons were among this group.

In a slightly earlier passage, Dio asserts, as a matter of fact, that Drusus II was poisoned and that Sejanus was involved.⁵¹⁴ Tacitus tells us that allegations of foul play in Drusus II's death did not emerge until Apicata's letter alerted Tiberius to them in 31 CE.⁵¹⁵ Dio is discussing the result of this letter, and Tiberius' reaction to it, as if they occurred in the immediate aftermath of Drusus II's death in 23 CE. This highly conflated account borders on the misleading and presents a distorted sequence of events.

⁵¹² Dio Cass., 57.22.4b.

⁵¹³ Dio Cass., 57.22.4a.

⁵¹⁴ Dio Cass., 57.22.2.

⁵¹⁵ Dio Cass., 58.11.6. See sec. 4.16.

Dio's statement that Agrippina and her sons were removed for taking pleasure at Drusus II's death suggests that their removal took place quite soon after. However, we will see that the fates of Nero and Drusus III (and of Agrippina, for that matter) were not sealed until after the death of Augusta in 29 CE.⁵¹⁶ This is an illustrative example of Xiphilinus, in his epitome of Dio, creating contextual and sequential problems. Agrippina died in exile in 33 CE, and Suetonius records that Nero committed suicide on his island of exile, possibly in 31 CE.⁵¹⁷ Suetonius further reports that Drusus III starved to death, confined to a room in the palace. This took place, according to Tacitus, in 33 CE.⁵¹⁸ This passage of Dio, together with its supplementation and correction by other authors, represents a useful example of sources working in concert.

Further issues with this passage by Dio are evident in its comment on the dynastic situation. The way Xiphilinus has epitomised Dio, the passage is set in 23 CE, but as already noted, it includes elements from different times. The dynastic situation in 23 CE, following the death of Drusus II, would come to be centred on Nero and Drusus III because they were the only male heirs who were even close to governing age. We have examined Tacitus' account of Tiberius commending the boys to the senate in 23 CE. We have also examined the events of 24 CE, specifically the dedication of Nero and Drusus III to the same gods as Tiberius. In *Annales* 4.17, under the year 24 CE, Tacitus says that Sejanus was warning Tiberius about those who were partial to Agrippina. Therefore, Xiphilinus is in error to suggest that Sejanus' warning to Tiberius about Agrippina took place in 23 CE.

⁵¹⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 5.3. A contextual issue with this will be discussed in section 4.9.

⁵¹⁷ See Lindsay, *Suetonius Tiberius*, 160. See also Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 175-6.

⁵¹⁸ Suet., *Tib.* 54.2; Tac., *Ann.* 6.23. See also Ronald Martin, ed. *Tacitus Annals V & VI* (England: Aris and Phillips Ltd, 2001), 151.

The passage also mentions Sejanus' desire to marry Livilla; although the possibility that Sejanus may have thought about it in 23 CE cannot be ruled out, he did not act upon until 25 CE, as we saw in Section 4.4. The passage also claims that it was necessary for Agrippina and her sons to be removed before Sejanus could marry Livilla. Placing this in 23 CE is out of chronological sequence. Sejanus' request to marry Livilla is dated to 25 CE, and it is in that year that Tiberius is reported to have identified Agrippina and her potential reaction to Sejanus marrying Livilla as an obstacle to the marriage.

It is difficult to use a passage such as this, with its many contextual and chronological difficulties, as a basis for examining the ways in which Sejanus' behaviour and intentions changed over time, specifically in the period after the death of Drusus II. It is likely that Xiphilinus has omitted significant detail and nuance that was present in the original text. His adaptation of Dio's text becomes increasingly biographical, from the time of Augustus to the end of the text in 238 CE. Christopher Mallan notes Xiphilinus' own historical context, that of the eleventh century CE, when the Caesar was far more central to the administration to the extent that he was held personally responsible for the course of his reign.⁵¹⁹ This aptly explains not only the biographical nature of Xiphilinus' epitome of Dio but also its relative lack of broader historical detail.

Despite this lack of detail, there is one aspect of Dio's account that warrants closer attention. The statement that Sejanus sought to gain power is not as direct as it initially appears. On first reading, it appears that Dio is suggesting that Sejanus was attempting to gain the principate for himself. However, a different picture emerges when we consider the complete omission of Drusus II's line from Sejanus' plans: only Agrippina and her children were to be removed. Following the death of Germanicus, pragmatism dictated that Drusus II should come to the fore.

⁵¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of the *Epitome*, with a focus on its biographical nature and omission of many details, see Christopher Mallan, "The Style, Method and Programme of Xiphilinus' *Epitome* of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 56 (2013): 617.

However, Drusus' II's death resulted in Germanicus' line, again on pragmatic grounds, becoming the senior line in the succession. As we have seen, if Germanicus' children were to be removed from consideration, the same logic would bring Drusus II's line back to the fore.

In Dio's account, if Sejanus' plan had come to fruition, the entire line of Germanicus would have been out of contention, and Sejanus and Livilla would have been married. This marriage would have provided Sejanus with a familial connection to the imperial house. With his connection to power thus established, the lack of suitable heirs would have increased Sejanus' importance.

Dio suggests that Tiberius both detested Gemellus and removed him from consideration because he was illegitimate. This is questionable given what ultimately happened regarding the succession: Gemellus and Caligula were declared joint heirs in Tiberius' will.⁵²⁰ This fact effectively rules out the question of Gemellus' legitimacy. Sejanus may have ignored Tiberius' other grandson, Caligula, on grounds of age. However, Suetonius offers a more likely suggestion. He reports that, following the death of Germanicus, Caligula lived with his mother, and when she was exiled he was placed in the care of Augusta and then of Antonia. These were powerful and influential women, and Sejanus would have been ill-advised to cross them.⁵²¹

We should briefly consider whether Sejanus should have been similarly cautious regarding Agrippina. She, too, was a member of the imperial house. However, unlike Agrippina, both Augusta and Antonia had strong relationships with Tiberius. This closeness to Tiberius insulated Augusta and Antonia from Sejanus' machinations: it would not have been possible for Sejanus to undermine those relationships. By contrast, Agrippina and Tiberius' relationship had been fractured from the time of Germanicus' death. In addition, Agrippina and Tiberius

⁵²⁰ Dio Cass., 59.1.1.

⁵²¹ Suet., *Calig.* 10.1.

were from different generations, with different expectations. Sejanus manipulated both of these sources of conflict between the Caesar and his daughter-in-law to negate any influence that Agrippina may have had as an imperial woman.

To return to the dynastic situation following the death of Drusus, we may infer from Dio that Sejanus seized on the fact that following this event there was no immediate *viable* heir to Tiberius. It is true that Nero and Drusus III had assumed the *toga virilis* and technically did not require any sort of guiding hand. That said, they were utterly lacking in administrative and political experience. However, this would not be the case for much longer. It would have been assumed that their careers would be advanced. If this were to happen, they would eventually gain sufficient experience to rule in their own right. Thus, Sejanus' continued rise, indeed his continued survival, could not be guaranteed, given his loyalty to Tiberius.

However, if Germanicus' entire line were to be removed from political consideration, following the precedent of pragmatism, the succession would return to Drusus' line. At the time of Drusus II's death, both of his sons were alive but still infants. When Germanicus II died in late 23 CE, Gemellus became Drusus II's sole heir. Given that Gemellus was named as an heir in Tiberius' will, we have questioned Dio's claim that the Caesar detested Gemellus as illegitimate. The logical inference is that Gemellus was a potential successor to Tiberius. However, Gemellus' age necessitated that a guardian be put in place.

This leads to the suggestion that Sejanus, once he had discredited Germanicus' family, sought to gain power, initially as a regent or placeholder for a successor too young to rule in his own right. With Nero and Drusus III removed from consideration, there were two potential heirs: Gemellus and Caligula. The latter presented a serious issue for the prefect. At the age of eleven, Caligula could not be suspected of political malfeasance and discredited, and this would remain the case for years to come. It is not unreasonable to suggest that, with Germanicus' line

removed, Sejanus' preferred outcome would have been to establish himself as a regent for Gemellus. We have seen that Sejanus had established a liaison with Livilla prior to Drusus II's death and that he promised her a partnership in power. It is possible that if Sejanus established himself in the role of placeholder for Gemellus, given Sejanus' desire for power, he could then consider eliminating the boy and ruling in his own right. Thus, Drusus II's line was a means for Sejanus to facilitate his ambitions.

We have seen Sejanus' attempts to augment his connection to Drusus' line through his relationship with Livilla. Her involvement with Sejanus leads to a brief discussion of her character as Tacitus presents it. Patrick Sinclair argues that Livilla misread the political situation. Whether she did this intentionally or because Sejanus had misled her is not clear, but Sinclair follows Tacitus in criticising Livilla for believing she could gain a partnership in power through Sejanus' guardianship of Gemellus.⁵²²

A different reading of Tacitus' characterisation of Livilla is worth considering. We have seen Tacitus' attempts to lay the problems of Tiberius' early reign at the feet of a woman, specifically Augusta. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that Tacitus is now attempting to place the problems for the second half of Tiberius' reign at the feet of yet another woman. Even if Sejanus were the driving force, a woman of the imperial house was integral to achieving his goals. The two wings of the imperial house, the families of Germanicus and Drusus II, were at odds with one another, and any attempt to exploit that conflict for personal political gain required having a relationship with a woman from one of these two families.

Marsh identifies specific competing factions within Tiberius' court. There were people within the court who were loyal to Agrippina and supported the succession of her sons, and there was a similar group loyal to Drusus and his line. To these, Marsh adds a third: the *factio* of

⁵²² Sinclair, "Tacitus' Presentation of Livia Julia, Wife of Tiberius' Son Drusus," 247.

Sejanus.⁵²³ That there was a group loyal to Agrippina and her interests is not to be doubted, however, there is limited evidence of a group in support of Drusus II and his line. We are better served to follow Shotter, who speaks of factional conflict between the Julians, as represented by Agrippina and those loyal to her, and the Claudians, as represented by Tiberius, Livilla and her children.⁵²⁴ We note here that Augusta's adoption into the Julian clan, along with Augustus' own, made Tiberius' parents Julians, thus confirming his status as a 'naturalised' Julian, even if his sentiments appeared Claudian. These two factions, the Julian and Claudian, were centred on the succession and grounded in the assumption that a member of one group was to succeed. A hypothetical group around Sejanus could not have claimed any member who could potentially succeed. This seems reasonable cause to question the existence of such a group.

Sejanus' adherents were more likely using their association with Sejanus as a means of advancing themselves within the senatorial career path rather than as part of any grand political scheme. To the extent that all members of Tiberius' court supported the principate, they were broadly in political agreement. However, the ultimate goals of the factions were very different, with each supporting a particular line of succession. In Sejanus' case, to pursue his goals, it would have been necessary for him to become part of (and ultimately dominate) one faction. The fact that he had initiated a liaison with Livilla suggests that he saw Drusus' family as the means to facilitate his own advancement. This was surely the logical choice, given Sejanus' proximity to Tiberius.

As we have seen, the term 'faction' in this context refers to a group of adherents supporting a potential successor. In this regard, let us consider the alleged *factio* of Sejanus. That Sejanus established a group of adherents is not to be doubted. This group would not have been aligned to, or based on, the interests of the imperial family. We must question, then, what Sejanus hoped

⁵²³ Frank Burr Marsh, "Roman Parties in the Reign of Tiberius," *The American Historical Review* 31, no. 2 (1926).

⁵²⁴ Shotter, "Agrippina the Elder: A Woman in a Man's World," 348.

to gain in terms of the succession by forming such a group. Its members, who had received favours from Sejanus, became his clients and were obligated to return the favours. Rather than seeing Sejanus and his group of dependents as a court *factio*, it is more accurate to consider them as being in a typical patron–client relationship.

This tacit arrangement would allow the prefect to call in a series of favours in the future. This is not to say that Sejanus knew exactly how he was going to take advantage of such favours, but, as we have seen, he was able to use his clients to discredit friends and relatives of Agrippina. Sejanus, by planning agents in the circles around Nero and Agrippina, encouraged them to rail against Tiberius.

As a final comment on Sejanus' alleged *factio*, it is noteworthy, as Champlin points out, that Sejanus, for all the praise and elaborate titles bestowed upon him by Tiberius, did not hold any official political power until 31 CE.⁵²⁵ It is true that his personal influence and network of connections had grown; indeed, we will see the scope and effectiveness of this network when we examine the prosecutions undertaken by his clients while Sejanus himself was out of the city. For all that, he made no official political progress in almost a decade. His goal seems to have been to accrue favours for future deployment in a wider scheme to affect the succession indirectly, rather than to form a *factio* and directly participate in the conflict.

When the narrative of 26 CE resumes, Tiberius had not taken any action against Agrippina, but the divisive politics of the city, specifically the imperial family, were taking their toll on the Caesar. After briefly describing senatorial business, Tacitus turns his attention to Tiberius' intention to leave Rome. We have seen Tiberius' previous attempts to absent himself from the city during his consulship with Drusus in 21 CE and as far back as his retirement to Rhodes in 6 BCE.

⁵²⁵ Champlin, "Seianus Augustus," 367.

Tacitus describes Tiberius' departure from the capital and offers considerable speculation with regard to why the Caesar left. Tacitus writes:

*Inter quae diu meditato prolatoque saepius consilio tandem Caesar in Campaniam, specie dedicandi templa apud Capuam Iovi, apud Nolam Augusto, sed certus procul urbe degere. causam abscessus quamquam secutus plurimos auctorum ad Seiani artes rettuli, quia tamen caede eius patrata sex postea annos pari secreto conionxit, plerumque permoveor num ad ipsum referri verius sit, saevitiam ac libidinem cum factis promeret, ... traditur etiam matris impotentia extrusum quam dominationis sociam aspernabatur neque depellere poterat, cum dominationem ipsam donum eius accepisset. nam dubitaverat Augustus Germanicum, sororis nepotem et cunctis laudatum, rei Romanae imponere, sed precibus uxoris evictus Tiberio Germanicum, sibi Tiberium adscivit. idque Augusta exprobrabat, reposcebat.*⁵²⁶

Meanwhile, after long meditation on, and frequent deferral of, his plan, Caesar departed for Campania on the pretext of dedicating a temple to Jupiter at Capua and another to Augustus at Nola, but he was determined to live far from the city. I have followed a plethora of authorities in assigning the cause of the withdrawal to the craft of Sejanus. However, given that his [Tiberius'] exile remained intact for six years after his [Sejanus'] execution, I am for the most part in doubt about whether it could be ascribed more truly to himself and his wish to hide in that place the cruelty and lust shown by his acts ... It was also said that he was driven away by the imperious nature of his mother, whose alliance in power he could no longer stand, but with whom he could not dispense given that he had received

⁵²⁶ Tac. Ann. 4.57.

power itself as her gift. For Augustus had thought about whether Germanicus, his sister's grandson who was praised by all, should be placed over the state. However, overwhelmed by the entreaties of his wife, he [Augustus] compelled Tiberius to adopt Germanicus and adopted Tiberius himself. With this, Augusta continually taunted him and threatened to reclaim it [the gift of power].

Tacitus hints at Tiberius' indecision around his potential withdrawal. While no specific reason is offered, the Caesar must have considered what would happen politically and administratively in the aftermath of his withdrawal. As much as he had tried to include the senate in the decisions of state, the senate-house had shown itself to be utterly inept. They were so accustomed to functioning at the behest of a higher authority under Augustus that they were now unwilling to act independently.

The dedication of the two temples, which Tiberius is said to have used as a reason to leave the city, suggests that the Caesar was not entirely disinterested in his duties. As chief priest (*pontifex maximus*), it was Tiberius' duty to oversee relations between the state and the deities who ruled mortal affairs. The assumption that Tiberius was using the dedication of the temples to justify his leaving the city has two issues. The first is why it would be necessary for Tiberius, Caesar of Rome, to justify his actions to anyone. The pretext was unnecessary; the Caesar was simply leaving the city. The second issue is why he would feel it necessary to conceal his true reason for leaving.

Tacitus then engages in an interesting piece of personal historiography when he comments that, in attempting to explain Tiberius' withdrawal from the city, he has followed a plurality of contemporary historians in ascribing the Caesar's departure to Sejanus. However, Tacitus questions the opinions of those historians when he notes that Tiberius remained in exile for nearly six years after Sejanus' execution. Tacitus comments on other explanations and

emphasises the claim that the Caesar could no longer tolerate the imperious character of his mother.

As Tacitus presents this scene, Tiberius owed his position to the machinations of Augusta. Tacitus is explicit here: Until Augusta had convinced him otherwise, Augustus had considered making Germanicus his immediate successor. This is surely little more than Tacitean bias. At the time of the adoptions in 4 CE, Germanicus was but nineteen years old, and Tiberius was an experienced and able politician and general.

Linda Rutland has focused on Tacitus' construction of Augusta's role in Tiberius' rise to power. She notes Tacitus' comments on Augusta's involvement in the deaths of Gaius and Lucius Caesar, and in the murder of Agrippa Postumus. She also notes what Tacitus says about Augusta's role in securing the position of *princeps* for Tiberius. In the immediate aftermath of Augustus' death, she placed guards around the house where Augustus died and sent out conflicting reports concerning his health until Tiberius' accession was announced. Rutland draws a parallel between Augustus' death scene and that of Claudius in 54 CE, where Agrippina II is said to have issued conflicting reports concerning Claudius' health until all things were in place for her son, Nero, to succeed.⁵²⁷

We note here the parallel between Augusta threatening to reclaim the gift of power and a similar scene in the Neronian books of the *Annales*, where Agrippina II threatened, first, to make public her role in making Nero Caesar and, second, to take Claudius' son, Britannicus, to the *Castra Praetoria* and make him Caesar.⁵²⁸ This leitmotif would be repeated in later imperial history, specifically when Plotina, the wife of Trajan, is said to have secured the succession for

⁵²⁷ See Linda W. Rutland, "Women as Makers of Kings in Tacitus' Annals," *The Classical World* 72, no. 1 (1978): 18-19. For the deaths of Gaius and Lucius Caesar, see Tac., *Ann.* 1.3. For Postumus' murder, see Tac., *Ann.* 1.6. For Livia's role following Augustus' death, see Tac., *Ann.* 1.5 (note the Tanaquil parallel, Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.40). The parallel scene for Claudius is found in Tac., *Ann.* 12.68.

⁵²⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 13.14.

Hadrian.⁵²⁹ The centrality of Roman females to the imperial succession is thus not to be doubted.

Returning to Augusta, she is mainly present in Tacitus' narrative when there is conflict or difficulty, as exemplified by her absence from his pages between Agrippa Postumus' murder and Germanicus' ill-fated mission to the east.⁵³⁰ Rutland also notes discrepancies between the openly hostile Tacitus and the less certain Dio and Suetonius in their depictions of Augusta. Tacitus exaggerates Augusta's power for effect, but her importance should not be underestimated for that reason. Indeed, a consequence of her adoption into the Julian clan in 14 CE was that both of Tiberius' parents were now Julians, thus securing his position as a 'naturalised' Julian. Even if we question the violent actions that Augusta is said to have taken to make Tiberius *princeps*, the fact that she was a politically legitimising force for his rule is not to be doubted.

Whatever Tiberius' motives for leaving the city, he left with a small retinue, which included Sejanus. The presence of Sejanus may be understood in two ways. First, the Caesar wanted his trusted confidant at his side, and as befitted his position, Sejanus was simply carrying out his duties as *praefectus praetorio*—that is, protecting the Caesar. Therefore, Sejanus' presence need not be seen as extraordinary, although it must be said that his position of influence would be consolidated during this period as a result of Tiberius' isolation.

Both Tacitus and Suetonius⁵³¹ refer to an incident that highlights Sejanus' dedication to Tiberius. Suetonius' account is the more perfunctory, so we focus on Tacitus, who writes:

⁵²⁹ Dio Cass., 69.1.2.

⁵³⁰ Rutland, "Women as Makers of Kings in Tacitus' Annals," 20.

⁵³¹ Suetonius also writes of this incident, but it is interesting to note that he does not mention Sejanus, who does not dine with Tiberius or save the Caesar's life. Even if Suetonius' version lacks the specificity of Tacitus', it is under the section of the Life dealing with Tiberius' reclusiveness; it deals with many of his sojourns out of the city. It is reasonable to infer that Sejanus would have at least been present.

*Ac forte illis diebus oblatum Caesari anceps periculum auxit vana rumoris
praeibitque ipsi materiem cur amicitiae constantiaeque Seiani magis fideret.
vescebantur in villa ... in specu. eius os lapsis repente saxis obruit quosdam
ministros: hinc metus in omnis et fuga eorum qui convivium celebrabant.
Seianus genu voltuque et manibus super Caesarem suspensus opposuit sese
incidentibus atque habitu tali repertus est a militibus qui subsidio venerant.
maior ex eo et quamquam exitiosa suaderet ut non sui anxius cum fide
audiebatur.⁵³²*

In those days, a serious incident occurred involving Tiberius, which encouraged rumour and caused him to trust more fully in the friendship and fidelity of Sejanus. They [Tiberius and Sejanus] were dining⁵³³ in a villa ... in a natural grotto. The rocks at its entrance suddenly fell and buried some of the servants. This caused panic and a general flight of all who were present. Sejanus suspended himself over Caesar, using his knees, hands and face against the falling rocks, which is how he was found by the soldiers who arrived to assist. Following this, he was greater than ever, and despite recommending pernicious things, he was listened to with confidence as someone not concerned for himself.

This incident illustrates Sejanus' loyalty and dedication to the Caesar. When Sejanus covered the Caesar with his own body to protect him from the rocks, Sejanus took care to maintain that position until soldiers, presumably members of the praetorian guard, arrived to help. There should be no suspicion regarding Sejanus' motives in this situation. The primary function of the guard, and of Sejanus as the prefect of the guard, was to protect the Caesar. As Tacitus

⁵³² Tac., *Ann.* 4.59.

⁵³³ Literally being fed—the verb is passive.

says, soldiers were present with Tiberius, so it was logical for Sejanus to be present as well. The critical point of this passage is the result of Sejanus' actions. Tiberius noted Sejanus' willingness to sacrifice himself the Caesar from the rockfall and began to place even greater value on his friendship and advice—advice that Tacitus deems pernicious. Sejanus, it seems, had proven his loyalty.

4.6 Sejanus Attacks Germanicus' Line

Tacitus then turns his attention to the result of this new implicit trust between the Caesar and Sejanus. Sejanus' influence increased, and he began to attack Germanicus' line directly. He specifically targeted Nero, who was at this point the heir apparent.⁵³⁴ Tacitus describes Sejanus' method, as well as what happened next:

*adsimulabatque iudicis partis adversum Germanici stirpem, subditis qui accusatorum nomina sustinerent maximeque insectarentur Neronem proximum successioni et, quamquam modesta iuventa, plerumque tamen quid in praesentiarum conduceret oblitum, dum a libertis et clientibus, apiscendae potentiae properis, extimulator ut erectum et fidentem animi ostenderet: velle id populum Romanum, cupere exercitus, neque ausurum contra Seianum qui nunc patientiam senis et segnitiam iuvenis iuxta insultet.*⁵³⁵

He [Sejanus] was emulating the role of judge towards the children of Germanicus, suborning people who would take on the role of prosecutors. He moved especially against Nero, who was closest to succession and, although modest in his youth, often forgot what the circumstances demanded. His

⁵³⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 4.59.

⁵³⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 4.59.

freedmen and clients, whose purpose was the pursuit of power, urged him to show courage and confidence of spirit: the Roman people longed for it, they said, the army desired it, and Sejanus would not be so bold as to act against this, even though he now scoffed at both the submission of an old man [Tiberius] and the hesitancy of a youth [Nero].

The identity of those whom Sejanus employed to entrap Nero is not clear, but they were presumably his clients. We can see here the results of Sejanus' courting of the senate, which was discussed above.⁵³⁶ Sejanus by this point, undoubtedly had many people who owed him favours. This situation also represents the culmination of Tacitus' earlier comment about ambitions encountering difficulties at first, but once the first step is taken, helpers are in abundance.⁵³⁷ Sejanus had shown himself to be an operative of some considerable skill, and he was now yielding the results. It is another sign of Sejanus' influence that people would be willing to inform not only on a member of the imperial family but more specifically on one of the sons of Germanicus.

Tacitus says that even though Nero was modest, he often forgot what the circumstances demanded. This suggests that Nero perhaps did not know his place and may have acted or spoken out of turn. However, it should be pointed out in Nero's defence that his position was extremely ill-defined. It is true that Tiberius had committed both Nero and his brother to the senate. The Caesar had said that Nero and Drusus' birth was such that their fates were parallel with that of the state itself. These were, however, mere empty words, for Tiberius' *actions* in advancing Nero and Drusus III were notably slow. Such lethargy not only bred a sense of frustration in Agrippina but also left the precise role of the young men unclear. In Nero's case,

⁵³⁶ See sec. 4.1.

⁵³⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 4.7.

his ill-defined position, combined with the fact that he did not have a guardian to instruct him in precisely *how* he should act, made him vulnerable.

Given that he lacked a guardian, Nero was compelled to take advice from people around him, principally his freedmen and clients, whose goal was to obtain power and wealth for themselves, presumably from a grateful Nero rewarding his supporters. We must remember that one of Sejanus' preferred tactics was to place agents into the circles of those he wished to discredit.⁵³⁸ It is therefore likely that some of those people encouraging Nero were agents that Sejanus had placed in Nero's circle.

Tacitus' comment about Nero's clients and freedmen encouraging him to show courage and firmness of spirit appears to be a reference to Nero staking his claim to power. However, given that Tiberius still lived, this carried risks. To make such a claim would have amounted to treason. No matter how much the Roman people, and especially the armies, may have wanted Nero to press his claim, to act on that suggestion, particularly regarding the armies, would have been revolution. In addition, there was no legal basis on which Nero could have acted, given that he lacked the requisite powers.

Tacitus' final sentence is complex. He says that Sejanus had been able to manipulate Tiberius due to his old age and Nero due to his youth. The sentiment seems to be that Sejanus had control over both Tiberius and Nero but, even so, would not dare to act directly against Nero. I would suggest that Sejanus did not want to risk direct action at this point lest he compromise himself. It may be useful to speculate about what was happening here. It is possible that Nero's advisors, some of whom were Sejanus' agents, were understating the danger that Sejanus posed to Nero, their purpose being to encourage the prince to feel secure in pressing his claim, thereby ensuring his downfall and thus alleviating the need for Sejanus himself to act directly against Nero.

⁵³⁸ See discussion in 4.5.

Nero's position, for all its symbolic importance, lacked political substance. He was, essentially, the heir apparent, yet he had not been advanced or prepared for his ostensible future role as Caesar in any way. For all his social prominence, Nero was very much at the beginning of his political career. He had no power by which he could have posed any kind of threat to Tiberius. Tacitus says that Sejanus now increased his surveillance for purposes of gathering evidence for future prosecution of Nero.

We have seen that earlier prosecutions, grounded in alleged criminal behaviour that went back many years, had targeted friends and associates of Agrippina. Such cases sometimes involved the use of informers (*delatores*), whose information may or not have always been reliable. We see Sejanus using similar tactics against Nero in this case. He was subject to constant surveillance to create an air of suspicion around him, but his modest and unassuming behaviour did not lend itself to entrapment. Tacitus describes this situation in detail. Given that the following passage is quite long, the text, translation and analysis will be broken into two sections. Tacitus writes:

*Haec atque talia audienti nihil quidem pravae cogitationis, sed interdum voces procedebant contumaces et inconsultae, quas adpositi custodes exceptas auctasque cum deferrent neque Neroni defendere daretur, diversae insuper sollicitudinum formae oriebantur. nam alius occursum eius vitare, quidam salutatione reddita statim averti, plerique inceptum sermonem abrumpere, insistentibus contra inidentibusque qui Seiano fautores aderant. enimvero Tiberius torvus aut falsum renidens vultu: seu loqueretur seu taceret iuvenis, crimen ex silentio, ex voce.*⁵³⁹

⁵³⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.60.

He [Nero] listened to these and other things with no wicked thoughts in his mind, yet, occasionally careless and ill-advised statements did come from him, which the spies took up and reported with exaggeration, and no opportunity was given to Nero to defend himself, and diverse forms of anxiety were stirred up. For, one man would avoid meeting with him; another, after returning his greeting, would turn away at once; many others upon starting a conversation would instantly terminate it, while those who were adherents to Sejanus stood and laughed at Nero. Indeed, Tiberius greeted him with an angry frown or a duplicitous smile. Whether the youth spoke or remained silent, there was crime in silence or speech.

Nero's rejection of advice that he should press his claim was logical given that he possessed none of the requisite powers and speaks again to his unassuming character. The out-of-place remarks attributed to Nero were due to a combination of his lack of experience in public life and the exaggerations of the informers. Nero may have been a man in the legal sense, but he lacked experience in the formalities and, perhaps more importantly, in the subtleties and the unwritten rules of imperial politics. Tiberius' inertia around the succession, specifically his lack of instruction and preparation in advancing Nero, created a very ambiguous and thereby dangerous situation for the young man.

Here, a brief aside on Tacitus' framing of this scene will repay our attention. Nero's guards (*custodes*) may be perceived in two ways. They may be seen in the benign sense of the term 'guards', as in protection detail. Alternatively, they may be viewed in the hostile sense of 'spies', operatives designed to gather information for use against Nero. However we view them, they are reported to have heard Nero's out-of-place remarks and reported them with exaggeration. It should be remembered that it was part of the job of the guard to provide security for members of the imperial family. This would necessarily involve being close by, which could

involve overhearing the conversations of family members. If Nero did say something that was, or could be construed as, seditious, it would have been the duty of the soldiers to report it to Sejanus. That there was factional infighting within the Julio-Claudian house was well known; therefore, an effective security force to protect all sides would necessarily monitor the lives of all members of the imperial house. This explains the presence of the guards (*custodes*).

The presence of Sejanus' agents explains the exaggeration with which the slightest error on Nero's part was reported to Sejanus. The groups of soldiers protecting any particular member of the imperial family would surely have been subject to rotation. However, Sejanus' agents, unlike the soldiers, could be in Nero's circle consistently. Sejanus' agents served as *delatores*, no doubt with the promise of rewards. To appreciate the role of these men in Tiberius' reign, some brief discussion is necessary.

This class of men had become increasingly important as the early principate evolved. Autocracy was a necessary condition for stability and this created an increasingly militant desire in the regime to uncover and remove the disloyal. The Caesar would naturally want to reward those who helped remove suspected dissidents. Examples include the general rule of successful *delatores* receiving a portion of the convict's confiscated estate. There was also the extraordinary case of Avillius Flaccus, who was involved in the downfall of Agrippina and soon after became prefect of Egypt.⁵⁴⁰ That said, this perverse incentive encouraged rank opportunism, corruption and the settling of grudges. The *delatores* became despised figures, because they profited from the misfortunes of others. However, this did not detract from their effectiveness at identifying enemies of the regime, real or imagined.

⁵⁴⁰ For Flaccus' involvement in the downfall of Agrippina, see Philo, *In Flacc.* 9. For the speculation that Tiberius appointing Flaccus' as prefect of Egypt was a reward for prosecuting Agrippina, see Rutledge, *Imperial inquisitions : prosecutors and informants from Tiberius to Domitian*, 146, cf 201-2.

In the current passage, Tacitus reports that some men would shun meetings with Nero or even turn away from him after he greeted them. Tacitus suggests that Nero was being ostracised. The information that Sejanus had gathered was used to create an air of suspicion around Nero. This suspicion became common knowledge among Nero's social peers, no doubt with Sejanus' help. Sejanus' dissemination of this information, likely via his own associates, led to some people not wishing to be seen with Nero for fear of guilt by association, a reflection of the political climate. Finally, Tacitus comments that Tiberius greeted Nero with either a frown or a duplicitous smile. Tiberius was not in the city at this point, so the implication is that Nero had gone to Campania to visit his grandfather. Thus, despite the suspicion around him, Nero still had freedom of movement.⁵⁴¹

To return to Tacitus:

*ne nox quidem secura, cum uxor vigilias somnos suspiria matri Liviae atque illa Seiano patefaceret; qui fratrem quoque Neronis Drusum traxit in partis, spe obiecta principis loci si priorem aetate et iam labefactum demovisset. atrox Drusi ingenium super cupidinem potentiae et solita fratribus odia accendebatur invidia quod mater Agrippina promptior Neroni erat. neque tamen Seianus ita Drusum fovebat ut non in eum quoque semina futuri exitii meditaretur, gnarus praeferocem et insidiis magis opportunum.*⁵⁴²

Nor was night secure [for Nero], with his wife reporting his sleeplessness, his dreams, and even his sighs to her mother Livia, and she reported these things to Sejanus. Sejanus drew Nero's brother, Drusus, into his scheme by offering him the hope of becoming *princeps* in place of an older brother already all but deposed. Drusus' vicious cruelty, as well as his desire for power and the conflict

⁵⁴¹ Modern treatments of this incident are limited in their analytical scope. See Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 168., Seager, *Tiberius*, 172.

⁵⁴² Tac., *Ann.* 4.60.

common among brothers, was inflamed with jealousy by the partiality to Nero of their mother, Agrippina. And yet Sejanus, while at this point he favoured Drusus, was not without thought to sowing the seed of his future ruin, well knowing how impetuous he was, and therefore the more exposed to entrapment.

Once again, Sejanus was exploiting existing tensions within the imperial family to his advantage. He achieved this by playing on Drusus III's ambition and his reaction to the fact that Agrippina favoured Nero over him. Tacitus reports that Sejanus corrupted Drusus III and brought him over to his side by allegedly offering him the principate. This is grounded in the assumption that Sejanus, rather than Tiberius, was the arbiter of the succession. That said, it is certainly true that Sejanus, as prefect of the praetorian guard and the main conduit to Tiberius himself, would have *seemed*, especially to the politically naïve Drusus III, powerful enough to make such a decision. Drusus III's decisions were not guided by logic and reason. Rather, he simply wanted power and was willing to comply with any scheme. His lust for power would have blinded him to the fact that he was being manipulated as part of a larger deception. Tacitus suggests that this was indeed the case, by portraying Sejanus as using Drusus for his own purposes. Sejanus was still, even when he allegedly favoured Drusus, seeking a means to ruin him as well.

Tacitus spends the next few chapters of Book IV describing domestic matters. When he returns to politics, he reports that Tiberius had finally tired of life in Italy (to say nothing of life in Rome) and that he was on the verge of leaving the mainland permanently. Given that Tacitus has inserted a great deal of geographic detail about the island that is not relevant to this discussion, we start with Tiberius' initial departure and proceed with the political implications and significance of this event.

4.7 Tiberius Leaves the Mainland: Political Consequences

Tacitus writes under the year 27 CE:

*At Caesar dedicatis per Campaniam templis, quamquam edicto monuisset ne quis quietem eius inrumperet, concursusque oppidanorum disposito milite prohiberentur, perosus tamen municipia et colonias omniaque in continenti sita Capreas se in insulam abdidit ... solitudinem eius placuisse maxime crediderim, quoniam importuosum circa mare et vix modicis navigiis pauca subsidia; neque adpulerit quisquam nisi gnaro custode.*⁵⁴³

The Caesar, having dedicated the temples in Campania, warned through an edict that his peace not be disturbed and distributed the soldiery in order that the crowds of townsfolk might be prevented from seeing him. However, he so loathed all the colonies and municipalities—namely, everywhere on the mainland—that he hid himself away on the island of Capri ... I believe that the solitude pleased him the most, because a sea without a harbour surrounds it, and even for a small craft, there are few landing spots and no one may land without the guards' knowledge.

We may infer from Tiberius' edict ordering that his solitude not be disturbed that the Caesar's presence in the south resulted in the inhabitants wanting to see him. This offers a contrast to the comments in the sources that Tiberius was unpopular. Tacitus then comments on the nature of the island, and the protection it offered to Tiberius. As Caesar, Tiberius required security. Now that he also sought seclusion, the island was the ideal location.

⁵⁴³ Tac., *Ann.* 4.67.

Tiberius' departure from the mainland had consequences for the state. As a magistrate, at least in theory, Tiberius was required to be present to carry out the functions of his office. These included both civilian and military tasks. Civilian tasks included legislating, appointing governors and serving as an overarching authority over government business in general through his tribunician veto. The Caesar was also commander-in-chief of the army, with all the associated strategic and administrative duties. The military aspect of the Caesar's position under Tiberius differed from that under Augustus: it had shifted from expansion and conquest to consolidation and maintenance.⁵⁴⁴

Despite Tiberius' apparent centrality to the administration, the government seems to have largely functioned in his absence. However, the absence of the tribunician veto is particularly important in the context of the prosecutions that Sejanus, through his adherents, launched following Tiberius' departure. The oversight, and potential for redress or appeal, that Tiberius' veto provided was now gone. Sejanus and his clique could act unimpeded, which would allow Sejanus to become immensely influential through his clients in the city despite he himself being on Capri with Tiberius. We note in passing, if Tiberius had remained in the city, his mere presence would almost certainly have altered the course of events.

Tiberius' retirement to Capri was not the complete isolation that we may be inclined to think it was. We should note that Tiberius' obligations to his family and friends would not have ceased with his retirement. The sources report the presence on the island, at various times, of a great number of visitors, including future Caesars such as the ill-fated Vitellius and Galba as well as members of the Julio-Claudian family.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁴ Augustus had commanded no further expansion of the empire in his will (Dio 56.33.5). Further, the changing nature of the *imperium proconsulare* is suggested by the fact that Drusus II did not actively campaign when he received this power in 22 CE (Tac. *Ann.* 3.56-8).

⁵⁴⁵ For Vitellius, see Suet., *Vit.* 3.2. For Galba, see Tac., *Ann.* 6.20. For more detail on the visitors, see Houston, "Tiberius on Capri," 183-5.

We have reviewed Tacitus' earlier comment about those who were part of Tiberius' entourage when he first left Rome but who remained on the mainland. There were two phases to Tiberius' withdrawal from Rome. During his time in Campania, access to Tiberius was at least possible, if highly restricted. However, when he retired to Capri, access was far more, if not completely, controlled. This is similar to what occurred during Tiberius' retirement to Rhodes. In the first phase of his retirement, while he retained his powers, he remained grudgingly available to people wanting to call on him. However, once his powers expired, he chose to isolate himself completely.

Given his centrality to the administration, Tiberius' personal isolation was even more extraordinary. Roman politics had always been an intensely personal institution, where actual presence was required to carry out the functions of one's office. This was no different after the transition from Republic to empire.

Such is Tacitus' comment on Tiberius' departure for Capri. We now return to his narrative on the political consequences of the Caesar's departure. Tacitus writes:

*manebat quippe suspicionum et credendi temeritas quam Seianus augere etiam in urbe suetus acrius turbabat non iam occultis adversum Agrippinam et Neronem insidiis. quis additus miles nuntios, introitus, aperta secreta velut in annalis referebat, ultroque struebantur qui monerent perfugere ad Germaniae exercitus vel celeberrimo fori effigiem divi Augusti amplecti populumque ac senatum auxilio vocare. eaque sprete ab illis, velut pararent, obiciebantur.*⁵⁴⁶

He [Tiberius] continued to retain his suspicion and rash willingness to believe, which Sejanus, even in the city, had cultivated and which, in this place, he

⁵⁴⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 4.67.

agitated more eagerly, since he was no longer keeping secret his plots against Agrippina and Nero. Soldiers observed them, and every message, every visit, everything public and private, was related as if in a chronicle. There were even some who were suborned to advise them to seek refuge in Germany with the army or, when the forum was most crowded, to embrace the statue of the divine Augustus and to call on the senate and people for assistance. These counsels they ignored, but they were accused as if they had followed them.

As Tacitus presents this scene, an advantage that Sejanus saw in Tiberius residing on Capri was that Sejanus no longer needed to restrain himself in his designs against Nero and Agrippina. Once again, Tacitus portrays Sejanus as using the guard for his own purposes, with sinister intent. This is indicated by Tacitus' comment that every message, visitor and act, public or private (*miles nuntios, introitus, aperta secreta velut*), was relayed to Sejanus in detail.

As in an earlier passage about Nero, the guard's natural function explains the presence of the soldiers and even the fact that observations were reported back to Sejanus, but this was only the first part of Sejanus' attack strategy. The second part, direct incitement to commit treasonous acts, was carried out, in accordance with Sejanus' *modus operandi*, by agents that Sejanus had planted in Nero's circle for the precise purpose of informing on him.

The details of the advice given to Nero and Agrippina by Sejanus' agents included encouraging them to flee to the army in Germany. This suggestion was especially insidious and a deliberate choice. Recall that Germanicus had commanded these legions in the second decade of the first century CE, and Agrippina knew them well. Similar statements can be made about the suggestion to appeal to the people. We see here Sejanus' agents inciting Agrippina and Nero to appeal to groups central to Tiberius' power, specifically the people and the army. If either of these constituent groups had given their support to Agrippina and Nero, the potential, in fact or

suspicion, for serious political or military trouble in the form of an uprising would have been very real.

Nero and Agrippina had the wisdom to ignore these suggestions, but the very fact that they had discussed such actions at all, combined with the propensity of Sejanus' agents to exaggerate any conversations, was enough to cast suspicion on them, regardless of how they acted as a result. The agents would naturally have acted as witnesses if Sejanus had ever attempted to prosecute based on these accusations.

Tacitus comments that Agrippina and Nero were also encouraged to either embrace the statue of Augustus or call on the senate for assistance against the regime. As with the suggestion that they should seek refuge with the German armies, a call for assistance against the regime would have amounted to treason. We see Sejanus' agents targeting Agrippina and Nero by using the very elements that could have made them a serious political force—that is, their connection to Augustus in addition to their popularity with the people, the senate and the army.

4.8 The Year 28 CE: Prosecution of Sabinus and Sejanus Ascendant

Tacitus opens his narrative for the year 28 CE with a detailed account of the case of Titius Sabinus, an eques and close friend of Germanicus, whose prosecution had been delayed in 24 CE.⁵⁴⁷ Sejanus evidently deemed that now was the time to initiate this prosecution to keep the idea of the threat posed by Agrippina and her circle fresh in Tiberius' mind.

Four ex-praetors initiated the attack against Sabinus. Tacitus says that all four men coveted the consulship, and the only way to advance in the senatorial career path at that time was through

⁵⁴⁷ This case is described in Tac., *Ann.* 4.68–70. The delay from 24 CE is found in Tac., *Ann.* 4.19.

the favour of Sejanus. It was also the case, Tacitus says, that Sejanus' favour could only be purchased through complicity in his scheme to undermine the family of Germanicus.⁵⁴⁸ The four men would have been aware of Sejanus' past actions and the identity of his previous targets. It is likely they would have remembered that Sabinus was to have been prosecuted in 24 CE. It is therefore possible that, motivated by their desire for the consulship, they approached Sejanus and offered their services. That said, Tacitus is not explicit regarding who made the decision to approach Sabinus; rather, he says that the plan was organised among the men themselves (*compositum inter ipsos*).⁵⁴⁹

Even if the precise details are elusive, the approach employed in the attack on Sabinus followed Sejanus' previous approach to discrediting his targets. One of the four ex-praetors, Latiaris, who was an associate of Sabinus, approached him and talked about his loyalty to the family of Germanicus. Latiaris' purpose was to encourage Sabinus to rail against the regime, and he did so by appealing to Sabinus' emotions.⁵⁵⁰ He attempted to draw out Sabinus' feelings by praising Germanicus and speaking with compassion about Agrippina.

The appeal to Sabinus' emotions was successful, and he broke into a tirade about Sejanus, his ambition and his arrogance. Even Tiberius was not spared. Latiaris would continue this supposed friendship for as long as was necessary to gather sufficient evidence against Sabinus. The gathering of this evidence demonstrates the lengths to which men would go in order to obtain high office.

Tacitus reports that the 'investigation' involved the other three would-be consuls listening to Sabinus' conversation with Latiaris. Tacitus mocks this act as shameful.⁵⁵¹ When the evidence

⁵⁴⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.68.

⁵⁴⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.68.

⁵⁵⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 4.68.

⁵⁵¹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.69.

had been gathered, the four men wrote a letter to Tiberius outlining the details of Sabinus' alleged treasonous utterances. The charges against Sabinus, the punishment imposed (he was summarily executed) and, perhaps more importantly, how the evidence had been collected became known. The result was that fear gripped the body politic (*civitas*), by which Tacitus surely means the upper class. He reports that people were afraid to speak. Friends and enemies alike refrained from conversing with each other, and even the walls and roofs were regarded with distrust.⁵⁵² This latter point may be a literary flourish, but it does convey the point that fear and suspicion had spread throughout the aristocracy.

The regime's drastic response to this incident is consonant with a conspiracy uncovered. Tiberius was not one to carry out extrajudicial killings. This response, combined with the fact that the execution took place in the new year, a solemn time where malicious speech—to say nothing of actual violence—was not carried out, shows the sense of urgency surrounding Sabinus' actions. In addition, this incident demonstrates both Sejanus' influence and the highly organised nature of his network. Even in his absence—he remained on Capri with Tiberius at this point—he could still manipulate the political climate.

Tiberius had written a letter to the senate accusing Sabinus of corrupting some of the Caesar's freedmen and even of making an attempt on his life. The letter also ordered vengeance against Sabinus, which was decreed immediately. Sabinus described his suspicion regarding the real reason for his condemnation in an interesting way: as Sabinus was dragged away, Tacitus quotes him as saying that he was a sacrificial victim to Sejanus (*has Seiano victimas cadere*).⁵⁵³

Tiberius' letter had accused Sabinus of treasonous words, which Tiberius (or Sejanus) manipulated into treasonous actions. These actions had allegedly taken place on Capri while

⁵⁵² Tac., *Ann.* 4.69.

⁵⁵³ Tac., *Ann.* 4.70.

Sabinus was in Rome. Such plainly specious charges were now being acted upon despite being the very type of charges that Tiberius would have refused to hear a few years earlier.⁵⁵⁴ The nature of the regime was clearly changing, with Tiberius' paranoia and suspicion increasingly guiding his decisions and overruling his previously judicious approach.

After news of the execution of Sabinus was conveyed to Tiberius, he sent another letter to the senate thanking them for their actions in eliminating an enemy of the state.⁵⁵⁵ In this letter, despite the removal of what was perceived as an immediate threat, Tiberius continued to complain that he was under threat from his enemies. He did not mention these enemies by name, but Tacitus says it was clear that Tiberius was referring to Agrippina and Nero. There appears to be no factual basis for such a claim, but in this new and increasingly less judicious phase of the regime, Tiberius' suspicion drove events fuelled by Sejanus' manipulations.

Tacitus devotes the next two chapters to dealing with a Roman military defeat. When he returns to domestic matters, he uses a series of ironic comments to demonstrate both the supremacy of Sejanus and the hypocrisy of the regime he served. Tacitus reports that despite the senate being consulted on important matters of governance—Tiberius was once again to involve them in the governing process—its response was not to address the military defeat but to decree that altars to friendship and clemency be constructed.⁵⁵⁶ These altars were to be flanked by monuments to Tiberius and Sejanus. The coupling of statues of Sejanus with statues of the Caesar himself is highly illustrative of Sejanus' influence and even of his ascendancy as Tiberius' colleague. Such monuments were public recognition of Sejanus' position.⁵⁵⁷ The senate's decision not to

⁵⁵⁴ Seager, *Tiberius*, 175.

⁵⁵⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 4.70.

⁵⁵⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 4.74.

⁵⁵⁷ For more on this, see Dio Cass., 58.2.7 and the discussion in sec. 4.10. See also Suet., *Tib.* 65. Sejanus' ascendancy is attested in Juv., *Sat.* X.54–103, cf Jane Bellemore, "The Wife of Sejanus," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 109 (1995).

attend to state business, but to construct altars instead, reflects the climate of fear and uncertainty in which the state was operating.

The hypocrisy of the regime (or at least the irony of the senate's attitude towards the regime) is to be found in the altars that were constructed. The recent actions of the regime had been anything but friendly or merciful. Tacitus is therefore correct in his derision of these sycophantic and placatory acts by the House. These altars may have been genuine dedications to the relevant deities; however, surely the senate's underlying purpose was to cultivate the friendship and mercy of both Tiberius *and* Sejanus.⁵⁵⁸

These altars are also useful indicators of Sejanus' power and position at this point. Typically, only the Caesar and members of the imperial family were depicted among the gods. Consider, for example, Augustus' altar of peace (*ara pacis*) to the deity Pax. The significance of such an honour being given to Sejanus who, at this point, was not a member of the family cannot be overemphasised.

Tacitus also says that the senate repeatedly asked Tiberius and Sejanus to return to the city and to be seen in public. This comment, combined with this passage being dated to 28 CE, indicates that Sejanus and Tiberius had remained on Capri since the Caesar's arrival there in 27 CE. When they did return to the mainland, specifically to Campania, which Tacitus again dates to 28 CE, they were met by large crowds encompassing senators and equites as well as the mob (*eo venire patres, eques, magna pars plebis*), indicating that Rome was missing its Caesar. What is novel here is that this adulation was now being extended to Sejanus.

Tacitus comments that when the Caesar and Sejanus met the crowd in Campania, they were confronted by, to use Tacitus' phrase, the sycophants in the crowd. For Sejanus, the attitude of

⁵⁵⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.74.

the crowd only served to augment his arrogance.⁵⁵⁹ As the Caesar, Tiberius would have been used to such reactions from crowds, but Sejanus had no such experience. Tacitus says that Sejanus was corrupted by the status he now possessed. This arrogance brought with it an aloofness, a detachment from society. Tacitus comments that in a similar fashion to Tiberius himself Sejanus was now more difficult to access.

Tacitus predicts Sejanus' future fall when he ends Chapter 74 with a comment on the reaction of people of high rank in the crowd when they were forced to return to Rome without seeing either Tiberius or Sejanus. Those whom Sejanus had not acknowledged retreated to the city with alarm, fearing that they were out of favour. Conversely, those whom Sejanus *had* greeted had returned to the capital with what they thought was favour, but ultimately, as Tacitus says, they had the burden of an ill-fated friendship hanging over them—a reference to the purge that followed Sejanus' fall in 31 CE.

⁵⁵⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.74.

4.9 The Reins Unleashed: The Death of Augusta

Tacitus' account of 29 CE in *Annales* V opens with his laudatory obituary of Livia Augusta, who died in that year.⁵⁶⁰ The ancient literary tradition around Livia Augusta is hostile, with Tacitus and Dio often impugning her character and her motives. This includes accusations of involvement, both rumoured and factual, in the deaths of Marcellus, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, Agrippa Postumus and, in a truly monstrous charge, that of Augustus himself.⁵⁶¹ For all that, Tacitus' obituary of Augusta does offer some praise; he describes her as a solid Roman of the old style, even if he does manage to remark that her affability went beyond what was acceptable.⁵⁶² We will see that Tacitus considers Augusta's death as a turning point in Tiberius' reign. In Section 4.8, we noted that the regime was already beginning to change prior to Augusta's death.

Tiberius' reaction to his mother's death was to pay it no attention: he did not even return to the city. He continued with public business, despite his absence from Rome. Tiberius allowed his mother a simple public funeral, at which Caligula delivered the eulogy.⁵⁶³ Tiberius ignored the provisions of Augusta's will: her bequests and other gifts were not paid, and indeed, he is alleged to have ruined many of her closest friends.⁵⁶⁴ His irreverence went further: he also vetoed many of the lavish honours the senate voted to her.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁰ Tac., *Ann.* 5.1; Dio Cass., 58.2.1–6. For more detail, see Martin, *Tacitus Annals V & VI*, 97.

⁵⁶¹ Dio Cass., 56.30.1–2; Tac., *Ann.* 1.3.5–6. The body of literature on Livia is considerable. As a small sample, consider Barrett, *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome*; Barrett, "Tacitus, Livia and the Evil Stepmother"; Bauman, "Tanaquil-Livia and the Death of Augustus."; Fagan, "The Roman Imperial Succession under The Julio-Claudians, 23BC-AD69."; Martin, "Tacitus and the Death of Augustus."; Charles Tesoriero, "Livia grauis: a Note on Tacitus, *Annales* I,10,5," *Latomus* 65, no. 2 (2006).

⁵⁶² Tac., *Ann.* 5.3. As a contrast to this praise, consider Tacitus' brief comment on Augusta's support for Julia the Younger in her exile. Tacitus says (4.71) that despite Augusta having caused the downfall of her stepchildren (Julia, Gaius and Lucius, and Postumus), she openly displayed pity towards them in their plight. Such a person would necessarily be a total fiend. However, Tacitus, in a mere four chapters, has utterly changed his attitude regarding Augusta.

⁵⁶³ Suet., *Calig.* 10.

⁵⁶⁴ Suet., *Tib.* 51.

⁵⁶⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 5.2; Suet., *Tib.* 51; Dio 58.2.1.

Tacitus associates the death of Augusta with a marked change in Tiberius' reign. Tacitus writes:

Ceterum ex eo praerupta iam et urgens dominatio: nam incolumi Augusta erat adhuc perfugium, quia Tiberio inveteratum erga matrem obsequium neque Seianus audebat auctoritati parentis antire: tunc velut frenis exoluti proruperunt missaeque in Agrippinam ac Neronem litterae quas pridem adlatas et cohibitas ab Augusta credidit vulgus: haud enim multum post mortem eius recitatae sunt. verba inerant quaesita asperitate: sed non arma, non rerum novarum studium, amores iuvenum et impudicitiam nepoti obiectabat. in nurum ne id quidem confingere ausus, adrogantiam oris et contumacem animum incusavit, magno senatus pavore ac silentio, donec pauci quis nulla ex honesto spes (et publica mala singulis in occasionem gratiae trahuntur) ut referretur postulavere, promptissimo Cotta Messalino cum atroci sententia. sed aliis a primoribus maximeque a magistratibus trepidabatur: quippe Tiberius etsi infense invectus cetera ambigua reliquerat.⁵⁶⁶

Now, following Augusta's death, there was a hard and rash despotism. For until this point, while Augusta lived, there was a refuge since, in Tiberius, maternal deference was longstanding, and Sejanus did not dare to usurp the authority of a parent. So now, as it were, they cut loose the reins, by sending a letter [to the senate] against Agrippina and Nero, which was thought to have been sent long ago but had been held back by Augusta: indeed, it was read very soon after her death. The words were of contemplated harshness, yet the charge was not

⁵⁶⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 5.3.

rebellion under arms or desire of revolution but rather that his grandson had young lovers and was immoral. Concerning his daughter-in-law, he did not dare to fabricate similar charges, so he was critical of her words⁵⁶⁷ and her defiant disposition. Amid the great silence and fear in the senate, some who had no hope of gaining anything from honesty (and public tragedies are often used for the acquisition of favour) demanded that [the letter's contents] be discussed. The most determined was Cotta Messalinus, with a cruel contribution. But among the leading senators, and even the magistrates, there was confusion, for Tiberius, for all his invective, had left the rest [i.e., what should be done] ambiguous.

Tacitus comments that, following the death of Augusta, Tiberius became utterly ruthless in his political life. Tacitus credits Augusta, as a result of Tiberius' ingrained deference to her, as the reason for the relative restraint of the reign up to this point. Tacitus says that Sejanus, too, was hindered by Augusta's presence. Her level of influence is highlighted by the fact that the letter denouncing Agrippina and Nero was not read in the senate until after her death. Tacitus suggests that such a letter had been sent earlier but that Augusta, or at least her presence, had caused it to be suppressed. He infers this from the fact that the letter was read so soon after her death. The point seems to be not that Augusta had directly suppressed the letter but that it was seen as imprudent to read such a letter while she was alive.

The accusation levelled against Nero in particular is interesting, for it was not political, but moral—specifically, that Nero had young lovers. Such a moral charge was a means to remove Nero, both from political consideration *and* the city, without levelling a political charge. Such a moral accusation against Nero was evidently plausible, but Agrippina, being the paragon of virtue that she was, could not legitimately have moral accusations levelled against her. As such, she was accused obliquely of speaking haughtily and possessing a defiant spirit. Despite the

⁵⁶⁷ Literally 'mouth'.

accusations, Tiberius, in his usual manner, did not lay down specific instructions about what should be done; rather, once again, he expected the senate to take appropriate action without any input from him.

Tacitus notes the uncertainty and tension in the chamber when the letter was read. Cotta Messalinus responded by giving a speech, which Tacitus calls his attempt to exploit a tragedy for personal gain. The speech followed the pattern of Messalinus' addresses to the senate in previous times of tragedy, including Piso's trial in 20 CE and the case against Silius and Sosia in 24 CE.⁵⁶⁸ Tacitus describes the speech as cruel, from which we may infer that it was a scathing criticism of Agrippina and Nero.

Following Messalinus' speech, a senator named Rusticus, whom Tiberius had appointed to compile the minutes of senatorial debates, warned the consuls not to listen to Messalinus because Tiberius might one day regret the destruction of Germanicus' line.⁵⁶⁹ Rusticus seems to have been trying to act as the voice of reason: if the senate took drastic and irrevocable action, there could be serious consequences. We note here the implications for the succession that would have resulted from an attack on Germanicus' line: the options for potential legitimate successors would have been severely limited, which could have carried serious consequences for the state. Tiberius, as we saw, offered *no* explicit instructions regarding Agrippina and Nero's fate.

Tiberius' decision to be vague about Agrippina and Nero's fate may be interpreted in multiple ways. It is possible that political reasons motivated the Caesar to maintain a personal distance from any potential action being taken against Germanicus' family. If the senate acted and there was a political backlash, Tiberius would be able to deny personal complicity. In addition, as we

⁵⁶⁸ See Tac., *Ann.* 3.17, 4.20.

⁵⁶⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 5.4.

have just seen, Tiberius seems to have wanted the senate to take appropriate action without any prompting from him. This, too, may explain Tiberius' inaction on this point: he wanted the senate to be the final arbiter of state business. However, after half a century of Augustan rule, during which the senate's role had been diminished, this was unlikely. Finally, Tiberius' hesitancy may have stemmed from his recognition of the support that Germanicus' family was receiving from key constituent groups of the regime: the senate, the people and the army. To initiate drastic action against Agrippina and Nero would have risked angering one or more of these groups, which could have carried serious political consequences for the Caesar.⁵⁷⁰

News of the events in the Chamber soon reached the people, for they surrounded the House with representations of Agrippina and Nero, where they shouted support for the Caesar and declared that the letter was a forgery.⁵⁷¹ The reaction of the populace suggests they did not believe that Tiberius would have acted to destroy his own house. This reaction seems to have inspired some confidence in certain members of the senate. Forged accusations against Sejanus, submitted under consular names, were read in the Chamber.⁵⁷²

Ironically, the accusations levelled against Sejanus in the senate provided him with evidence for more charges of treason. Tacitus attributes a brief speech to Sejanus, wherein he told Tiberius of treasonous activities in the city.⁵⁷³ Sejanus represented these events not as favourable to the imperial house but as a rebellion, apparently to be led by or at least conducted on behalf of Agrippina and Nero.

Tiberius' reaction to hearing this was to issue an edict in which he repeated the earlier accusations against Nero and Agrippina. He also criticised the fact that the dignity of the

⁵⁷⁰ We noted this relationship in sec. 4.7.

⁵⁷¹ Tac., *Ann.* 5.4.

⁵⁷² Tac., *Ann.* 5.4.

⁵⁷³ Tac., *Ann.* 5.4.

principate had been threatened by the recent activity, especially by the behaviour of Rusticus. This man, as we have seen, had advised the senate not to act against Agrippina and Nero. Tiberius had issued no instructions, and yet when the senate did not act in the way that he wanted them to, he criticised them. The senate's inaction prompted the Caesar to assume control of the entire situation and insist that the fate of his daughter-in-law and grandson should be his personal decision. The senate stated its eagerness to exact punishment, but it was prevented from doing so by Tiberius' order.⁵⁷⁴ Both Agrippina and Nero were banished to islands, presumably on Tiberius' orders, following his decision to assume personal control over the situation.⁵⁷⁵

The details surrounding the accusations against Agrippina and Nero are highly complex, in part because of the vague nature of the sources but largely because Tacitus' text breaks off at this point. We have seen that the suspicions surrounding Agrippina and Nero late in 27 CE centred on either seeking refuge with the armies or calling on the senate and people for assistance. However, it is critical to note that, in 27 CE, no charges were filed, seemingly for lack of evidence. We have seen that Sejanus used his network of clients to gather evidence against Nero in the late 20s CE. Yet, despite the aura of suspicion around Nero, no charges were filed.

Tracy Deline points out that our knowledge of Agrippina's fate is more detailed than our knowledge of the accusations she faced.⁵⁷⁶ We have no solid evidence that formal charges were laid or that a trial ever took place. There was a risk that such a trial would not have resulted in a conviction on evidentiary grounds. In addition, there was also a serious possibility of popular revolution in the city, in support of Agrippina and Nero. Levick states that Tiberius' treatment

⁵⁷⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 5.5.

⁵⁷⁵ Deline has discussed the chronological problems with Tacitus' account and provides primary evidence to support the idea that the banishment of Agrippina and Nero took place *before* Augusta's death in 29 CE. See Tracy Deline, "The Criminal Charges Against Agrippina The Elder in A.D. 27 and 29" *The Classical Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2015).

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 768.

of Agrippina and Nero was essentially as a *paterfamilias* dealing with ‘recalcitrant children’—that is, as a personal, rather than a political, issue. Tiberius, she says, did not reveal the true issue, ‘their immediate claim to a share in the [imperial] power’, a political issue, to either the senate or the people. She draws a parallel between Agrippina’s situation and the exile of Augustus’ daughter, Julia, whereby a moral accusation was used to conceal political machinations of a far more serious nature.⁵⁷⁷

We have noted that the accusation against Nero was moral, rather than political. On this point, Tacitus draws a distinction. In a parallel to Agrippina’s case, a moral accusation was used to conceal political charges that Tiberius either did not believe he could substantiate or did not wish to be made public. When the accusations became public knowledge, this resulted in popular protests outside the senate-house. Sejanus linked these popular protests, which were, in fact, pro-Caesar, to rebellion, which motivated Tiberius to assume personal control over the fates of Nero and Agrippina.

4.10 Sejanus at the Height of His Influence

We are reliant upon Dio and Suetonius for our information regarding Sejanus’ last years. The state of Dio’s text for these years, preserved in epitome, and Suetonius’ biographical style, with its brevity and non-sequential approach, hamper us greatly in our understanding. This has caused considerable confusion for scholars, which indicates that these texts should be approached with care.⁵⁷⁸ These textual and source problems necessarily limit what can and cannot be said about the period 29–31 CE, but this author remains confident that careful

⁵⁷⁷ Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 169.

⁵⁷⁸ Consider Suetonius’ two references to the incidents around Agrippina and Nero. See Suet., *Tib.* 53.2, 54.2. See Lindsay, *Suetonius Tiberius*, 157–60. As a sample of the scholarship, see Boddington, “Sejanus. Whose Conspiracy?.”; Fagan, “The Roman Imperial Succession under The Julio-Claudians, 23BC-AD69.”; Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*; Seager, *Tiberius*; D. C. A. Shotter, “Tiberius and Asinius Gallus,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 20, no. 4 (1971); Tuplin, “The False Drusus of A.D. 31 and the Fall of Sejanus.”

examination of the available data will provide an overview of events, even if some of the finer details remain elusive.

Under the year 29 CE, Dio reports that Sejanus' ascendancy continued, with his birthday being publicly celebrated.⁵⁷⁹ This is highly significant given that such public recognition of anniversaries and birthdays was usually limited to the imperial family. There was further evidence of the public acknowledgement of Sejanus' influence: Dio says that the senate, the people and even the equites sent one set of envoys to Sejanus the prefect and another to the Caesar. In addition, the annual prayers and sacrifices for the Caesar's wellbeing now extended to Sejanus and both men's names were now included in oaths.⁵⁸⁰ Sejanus' inclusion in what Edmondson calls 'imperial ritual under the principate' further demonstrates the great heights to which Sejanus had risen.⁵⁸¹ This cannot be overstated: although he did not have any of the requisite powers at this point, Sejanus' depiction in monuments and other public displays would surely have created the impression that his role was now more than that of prefect of the guard and that he was increasingly being acknowledged as Tiberius' colleague.

This perception was legally recognised and made official by a series of events in 30 and 31 CE, including Sejanus' betrothal to an imperial woman and his sharing of the consulship with Tiberius. The year 30 CE sees Sejanus' position becoming increasingly legitimised. It is under this year that we are told of Tiberius' suspicions regarding Sejanus' ambition. The events of the years 30 and 31 CE are complex, and investigation of them is not helped by the nature of Dio's text.

⁵⁷⁹ Dio Cass., 58.2.7.

⁵⁸⁰ Dio Cass., 58.2.8.

⁵⁸¹ Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*, 114.

Under the year 30 CE, Dio reports that Tiberius sent Drusus III to Rome without specific instructions. From this, we can infer that he had been on Capri with his grandfather. Sejanus, fearing that Tiberius would change his mind and recall Drusus III to Capri, persuaded Cassius to initiate prosecution against Drusus III with the intention of ruining him. Dio adds the detail that Sejanus enlisted the help of Drusus III's wife in this process.⁵⁸² This tactic of using wives against their husbands mirrors what Sejanus had done with Drusus' brother, Nero, as well as with Drusus II.⁵⁸³ Dio adds that Sejanus' practice of forming liaisons with men's wives was not limited to the imperial family: Sejanus used this as a tactic to remain informed about what men of renown were doing and saying. We note here that Augustus is reported to have used similar tactics during the triumviral period, but whereas Augustus was not criticised for this, Sejanus was maligned for the same conduct.⁵⁸⁴ Sejanus had even promised to marry some of these aristocratic women to ensure their compliance in his scheme. We have seen that Sejanus did this when carrying on his liaison with Livilla: she, too, was allegedly promised a partnership in power if she became an ally of Sejanus.

Sejanus used this tactic to gather evidence that would lead to Drusus' downfall. In an earlier epitomised passage, Dio says that Drusus III was accused of taking pleasure in the death of Drusus II. That passage states, ostensibly under the year 23 CE, that Agrippina and her sons were among many people executed for allegedly being pleased at the death of Drusus II.⁵⁸⁵ Since the present passage is dated to 30 CE, and it is only now that Drusus III is being prosecuted, the earlier passage is clearly superimposing later events on the year 23 CE.

⁵⁸² Dio Cass., 58.3.8.

⁵⁸³ See Tac., *Ann.* 4.1, 60.

⁵⁸⁴ Suet., *Aug.* 69.1.

⁵⁸⁵ Dio Cass., 57.22.4a.

A different perspective on the accusations levelled against Drusus III may be found in his earlier conduct. Sejanus promised Drusus III the succession if he would inform on his brother Nero. The success of this tactic provided Sejanus with evidence of ambition on Drusus' part, which Sejanus was now able to use against him.⁵⁸⁶ Therefore, if Sejanus reported Drusus III's ambition to Tiberius, it is plausible that allegations of this nature were brought against Drusus III.

Suetonius says that Tiberius' true feelings towards Nero and Drusus III were revealed as early as 24 CE during the incident where the boys were dedicated to the same gods as Tiberius.⁵⁸⁷ The Caesar, according to Suetonius, tried many methods to provoke the boys into railing at him and later pronounced them enemies of the state in the senate. As noted previously, given that Drusus III is now being sent *back* to Rome, it is surely the case that he had been on Capri with Tiberius until this point. Dio suggests that Sejanus brought false accusations against Drusus III with the assistance of his wife and that Tiberius then sent Drusus to Rome.

The order of events is important here. Sejanus brought the accusation, presumably to Tiberius, who then removed Drusus III from his presence by sending him to Rome, but without precise instructions regarding his fate, possibly out of concern for how the populace would react. In not giving orders regarding Drusus' fate, Tiberius was again trying to avoid personal complicity if there should be a negative reaction. The lack of specificity may explain Dio's comment that Sejanus feared that Tiberius might change his mind—that is, recall Drusus III to Capri. The false accusation against Drusus allowed Sejanus to separate him from his grandfather's protection, and it was not in Sejanus' interest for Drusus to be allowed to return to Capri; hence the subornation of Cassius to bring formal accusations against Drusus.

⁵⁸⁶ Tac., *Ann.* 4.60.

⁵⁸⁷ Suet., *Tib.* 54.

These events took place in the first half of 30 CE. Tiberius' actions seem to have created uncertainty in Sejanus' mind. Tiberius had removed Drusus III from his presence, suggesting some form of hostility, but Drusus' precise fate was not specified. This was an opportunity for Sejanus to remove Drusus from political consideration. I would suggest that this is the point at which Sejanus considered pursuing the role of successor to Tiberius for himself. If he could successfully remove Drusus, there would be no one of the appropriate age who could succeed Tiberius. We note here that, following Nero's exile and subsequent removal, Drusus III was de facto heir to Tiberius. The opportunity to succeed Tiberius, seemingly now attainable for Sejanus, is another possible motivating factor for Sejanus' action against Drusus III.

Both Tacitus and Suetonius report an anecdote about Drusus III in Rome that is of interest. Suetonius says that Drusus III was declared a public enemy (*hostis*) and thrown into a dungeon in the palace.⁵⁸⁸ This is significant for multiple reasons. First, Drusus III was not exiled as his mother and brother had been, nor was he detained in a regular gaol cell. Second, it is not clear who ordered Drusus III to be put into the dungeon of the palace. However, Suetonius says that Tiberius later ordered Drusus III to be released and made Caesar in the event of an uprising, which will be examined in Section 4.12. It is surely the case that Drusus' imprisonment took place with Tiberius' full knowledge.⁵⁸⁹

We noted above that Tiberius sent Drusus III back to Rome before the consular elections of 30 CE. Another event that can be dated to this time is Sejanus' betrothal to an imperial woman. Dio states that Tiberius made Sejanus part of his family by betrothing him to Julia, the daughter of Drusus (khdesth_n e0pi\ Olouli/a | th|~ tou~ Drou&sou qugatri\ poihsa&menoj).⁵⁹⁰ This is a highly ambiguous statement given that the names Julia and Drusus were very common names among the imperial family. The reason for this confusion is that Drusus I, the brother of

⁵⁸⁸ Suet., *Tib.* 54.2, *Calig.* 7, Tac., *Ann.* 6.23.

⁵⁸⁹ Suet., *Tib.* 65.2, cf Suet., *Calig.* 7.

⁵⁹⁰ Dio Cass., 58.3.9.

Tiberius, had a daughter named Livia Julia (Livilla). Tiberius himself had a son also named Drusus (our Drusus II). He and Livilla were married and had a daughter named Julia, Tiberius' granddaughter. The commonality of names, combined with Zonaras' vague comment, renders a definitive answer to this question difficult. However, the point for our purposes is that, regardless of the precise identity of his betrothed, Sejanus was to be married to a member of the house of Caesar.

Therefore, the situation in the middle of 30 CE, before the consular elections for 31 CE, appears to have been as follows. Tiberius had sent Drusus III to Rome. Sejanus had initiated action against Drusus III and he had been imprisoned in the palace. Sejanus continued to be praised by the populace and nobles alike, and he was finally betrothed to an imperial woman. The forthcoming consular elections would see Sejanus elected consul with Tiberius for 31 CE, and Sejanus' rise would continue. However, we will see that a year was a long time in imperial politics. The events from this point to Sejanus' fall in October 31 CE require careful consideration in light of the nature of Dio's text, which is our main source for this period.

4.11 A Year is a Long Time in Politics

Dio goes into some detail about Sejanus and the political situation as well as Tiberius' growing suspicions regarding the prefect's ambitions and the Caesar's attempts to move against him. He writes:

o(de\ dh_ Seiano_j kai\ mei/zwn kai\ foberw&teroj a)ei\ e0gi/gneto, w3ste
kai\ tou_j bouleuta_j kai\ tou_j a1llouj e0kei/nw| me\n w(j kai\ au)tokra&tori
prose/xein, to_n de\ Tibe/rion e0n o)ligwri/a| poiei=sqai. maqw_n ou}n tau~ta
o(Tibe/rioj ou1te e0n e0lafrw|~ to_ pra~gma e0poihsato, fobhqeij mh_ kai\
au)tokra&tora a1ntikruj au)to_n a)podei/cwsin, ou1te h)me/lhsen. e0k me\n

dh_ou}n tou~ profanou~j ou)de\ n e1drase: to& te ga_r doruforiko_n pa~n
i0sxurw~j w|)kei/wto, kai\ tw~n bouleutw~n to_ me\n eu)ergesi/a ij to_ de\
e0lpi/si to_ de\ kai\ fo&bw| prosepepoi/hto, tou&j te peri\ to_n Tibe/rion
o1ntaj ou3tw pa&ntaj proshtai/risto w3ste ta_ me\n e0kei/nou pa&nta
a(plw~j, kai\ o3sa e1lege kai\ o3sa e1pratte, parauti/ka oi9 a)gge/llesqai, ta_
d' u(p' au) tou~ drw&mena mhde/na tw|~ Tiberi/w| dhlou~n. a1llw j ou}n
au)to_n meteporeu&eto, kai\ u3pato&n te au)to_n a)pe/deice kai\ koinwno_n
tw~n fronti/dwn w)no&maze, Sei''ano&j te o(e0mo&j polla&kij
e0panalamba&nwn e1lege, kai\ tou~to kai\ gra&fwn pro&j te th_n boulh_n
kai\ pro_j to_n dh~mon e0dh&lou.⁵⁹¹

Sejanus was becoming both greater and increasingly feared, such that, while both the senate and the others paid court to him as though he were Caesar, Tiberius was held in contempt. When Tiberius learnt these things, he neither treated the matter lightly, fearing⁵⁹² that they [the senators] would appoint him [Sejanus] Caesar in his own right, nor did he ignore what he had learnt. He did not act openly, for he [Sejanus] had co-opted all the praetorian guard and appropriated the favour of the senators by favour, hope and threats. He had, to such an extent, taken into his confidence all who were close to Tiberius.⁵⁹³ So, they openly and immediately reported to him all things concerning that man, both what he was saying and doing, while no one made known to Tiberius things concerning him [Sejanus]. So, he [Tiberius] attacked him [Sejanus] in a different way: he made him consul and called him the partner of his cares and often

⁵⁹¹ Dio Cass., 58.4.1–3.

⁵⁹² The participle at this point is aorist passive, but this makes no sense in English, hence the decision to render it as active.

⁵⁹³ This is an editorial choice to facilitate easier reading in English. There is no break in the text.

repeated the phrase ‘My Sejanus’ and made this [relationship] known when writing to the senate and people.

Sejanus’ influence was ever on the increase, to the extent that it was *him*, rather than Tiberius, who was looked upon as having the greater authority. Dio then further augments Sejanus’ power by suggesting that Tiberius was afraid that the senate would make Sejanus Caesar in his own right. Given that Sejanus lacked *any* of the legal powers, it would have been necessary for the senate to act independently, and against the wishes of Tiberius, to remedy this. Given the senate’s reluctance to act without orders from Tiberius, this does not seem a likely scenario.

Edmondson offers additional reasons to suggest that this was unlikely.⁵⁹⁴ He notes the pre-existing opposition to Sejanus among certain members of the senate. He cites two examples, the first of which is *Ann.* 3.29. This passage refers to the reaction in the chamber to the news that Sejanus’ daughter was to be betrothed to the son of Claudius in 20 CE. This took place at the same time as the marriage of Julia, the daughter of Livilla and Drusus II, to Nero. Ronald Martin notes Tacitus’ juxtaposition of these two marriages, the implication being that the marriage of Julia and Nero was beneficial to the imperial house, but the marriage of Sejanus’ daughter to the son of Claudius sullied it.⁵⁹⁵

The second example is *Ann* 4.11, which describes Sejanus as a special favourite of Tiberius and the discontent that this partiality generated among ‘the rest of the world’ as Tacitus puts it. Edmondson interprets this phrase to mean the wider Roman polity. This widespread, albeit concealed, contempt makes it unlikely that the senate would have made Sejanus sovereign of Rome. If Sejanus were to be made ruler in his own right, this would necessarily require the removal of Tiberius given that the most the senate could grant Sejanus was legal equality with

⁵⁹⁴ Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*, 118.

⁵⁹⁵ Martin, *Tacitus Annals V & VI*, 156.

the incumbent Caesar. It is possible, though impossible to prove, that the senate's views may have changed in the years following the expiration of *Annales V*. Given how officially powerful he would become, and the fact that, as Tacitus comments, the only way to advance one's career was to be a partisan of Sejanus, the views of the *patres* may well have changed.

Dio, as all writers of history in the ancient world, sought to entertain his audience, and it serves his literary purposes to exaggerate Sejanus' power to make his eventual fall from grace appear even more spectacular and ironic.⁵⁹⁶ The senate, the source of the legal powers required to govern, was politically inert and contained considerable elements hostile to Sejanus. Between the senate's attitude to Sejanus, Dio's literary motives to overstate Sejanus' power, and the fact that Sejanus *had* no legal power, it does seem unlikely that he could have been declared Caesar in his own right at this point.

As grounds for Tiberius' fear that Sejanus would be made Caesar in his own right, Dio suggests that Sejanus had brought the entire praetorian guard, as well as substantial numbers of senators, over to his side.⁵⁹⁷ This he achieved in a multitude of ways: through bribery, the hopes he inspired and intimidation. We have seen Tacitus' comment on Sejanus' bribery of the senate, which involved granting offices and provinces to his clients.⁵⁹⁸ As for the hopes that were inspired by Sejanus, this is not clear, but it may be a reference to individual members of the senate earning further advancement.⁵⁹⁹ Finally, intimidation is likely to mean that the prefect threatened senators with the ends of their careers if they did not assist him.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁶ Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*, 118.

⁵⁹⁷ Dio Cass., 58.4.2, cf Tac., *Ann.* 4.2.

⁵⁹⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 4.2. See sec. 4.1

⁵⁹⁹ See sec. 4.8.

⁶⁰⁰ This is an inference from Tac., *Ann.* 4.68, where Tacitus says that the only path to the consulship was through Sejanus and that his favour could only be purchased by being complicit in his scheme.

Some brief discussion of why Tiberius turned on Sejanus will repay our attention. Tiberius essentially allowed Sejanus and his machinations to proceed regardless of who became ruined in the process, including members of his own house in Agrippina and Nero. Indeed, Tacitus states that, after the death of Augusta, Tiberius became an active participant in the scheme to discredit Germanicus' line.⁶⁰¹ Tiberius began to become suspicious of Sejanus only when his *own* power seemed to be under threat.

Dio also suggests that Sejanus had turned Tiberius' intimates into friends of his own, forming even closer ties with them than Tiberius had. The result was that Sejanus the always knew about Tiberius' movements, but no one told Tiberius of Sejanus' actions. It may well have been this infiltration of Tiberius' inner circle that confirmed Tiberius' suspicions regarding Sejanus.

We have seen Sejanus use similar tactics of infiltration as part of his *modus operandi*, specifically in the cases of Nero and Agrippina. Usually through agents, Sejanus would infiltrate the circles of those he wished to undermine to learn what they were doing and find a way to use their words or actions to discredit or, in some cases, eliminate them. His purpose in the case of Tiberius was to be informed of the Caesar's movements and words. He needed confirmation that he retained Tiberius' favour. This may well be what Tacitus means when he says that Sejanus rose to the heights that he did through his cleverness, but it was by this very cleverness that he was overthrown.⁶⁰² Tiberius may have tolerated, and possibly even encouraged, Sejanus' use of such tactics against others, but when Tiberius became aware that Sejanus was monitoring Tiberius' own movements, the consequences for Sejanus would be dire.

⁶⁰¹ Tac., *Ann.* 5.3.

⁶⁰² Tac., *Ann.* 4.1.

Dio states that Tiberius' suspicions caused him to move against Sejanus. Tiberius, following his standard procedure, did nothing openly, choosing instead to act more indirectly. The Caesar, according to Dio, made Sejanus consul. This is, as Edmondson states, strictly inaccurate. The Caesar did not have the power to appoint a man consul.⁶⁰³ Tiberius had removed what little popular participation remained in the election of officials. The senate chose candidates from those recommended by Tiberius, who were then ratified by the popular assemblies.⁶⁰⁴ Such a role for the senate, combined with Tiberius' own eminence in the chamber, did make his recommendations foregone conclusions, but Dio has oversimplified the process, providing the result rather than discussing in detail the procedures involved. He suggests that Tiberius was using the honour of the consulship to create a sense of complacency in Sejanus while Tiberius worked to undermine him. Tiberius, by this logic, was conspiring against Sejanus.

Let us assume that Tiberius was laying a trap for Sejanus as early as 30 CE. This trap incorporated privileges that followed the pattern for previous potential successors. Dio maintains that Tiberius used the consulship, the forthcoming *imperium proconsulare* and the promise of *tribunicia potestas*, as well as betrothal to a princess, as elements of his trap. These were the same privileges that Tiberius had used to designate a successor in the cases of Germanicus and Drusus II. These privileges were the well-known and recognisable mechanics of succession. Dio indicates that Sejanus remained in Tiberius' favour, even in the early part of 30 CE. It is the contention of this author that Tiberius intended to bestow these privileges on Sejanus because he believed that Sejanus had earned them. This would have resulted in Sejanus being officially designated as Tiberius' leading deputy and quite possibly his successor.

However, when the Caesar became suspicious, he used the granting of these very same privileges to undermine and ultimately ruin Sejanus. That is, Tiberius' reasons for granting

⁶⁰³ Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*, 119.

⁶⁰⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 1.15.

these privileges to Sejanus had changed, but his actions remained the same. The *perception* created by the *substance* of the trap renders Tiberius' intentions in setting it secondary. At this point, Sejanus had reached a position in which such privileges could have been realistically granted to him.

The passage ends with what may be the true context for Tacitus' claim that Tiberius referred to Sejanus as the partner of his labours (*socius laborum*). This term, which Tacitus includes at the beginning of his narrative of Sejanus, would be better placed in the first half of 30 CE when Sejanus had been serving as Tiberius' assistant for many years.

4.12 Tiberius' Contingency Plans

We have seen that by the middle of 30 CE Drusus III was in prison. Dio adds further detail to this, but it is placed much later in the narrative, after Sejanus' fall. However, despite its placement, the detail provided by Dio most likely refers to a time somewhere in the period from the middle of 30 CE to Sejanus' fall in late 31 CE. We can securely date Drusus' imprisonment to the first half of 30 CE given that Dio references Sejanus suborning an unidentified Cassius, consul in 30 CE, to take action against Drusus III.⁶⁰⁵ Dio writes of the situation prior to Sejanus' fall:

ο(de\ dh_ Tibe/rioj te/wj me\n e0n de/ ei mega&lw| kaqeisth&kei mh_ ο(Seiano_j katasxw_n au)th_n e0p' au)to_n e0pipleu&sh|, kai\ ploi=a pareskeua&sato i3na, a1n ti toiou~to sumbh|~, diafu&gh|: tw|~ te Ma&krwni, w3j tine/j fasin, e0netei/lato o3pwj, a1n ti parakin&sh|, to_n Drou~son e1j te

⁶⁰⁵ Dio does not give his praenomen. For a Cassius as consul in 30, see the *fasti* as compiled in Ehrenberg and Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus & Tiberius*, 42.

th_n boulh_n kai\ e0j to_n dh~mon e0saga&gh| kai\ au)tokra&tora
a)podei/ch.⁶⁰⁶

Tiberius was, for a time, resolved with great fear that Sejanus would occupy it [the city] and sail against him, and so he had prepared ships for himself for escape, lest something like this should occur. Also, to Macro, as some say, he ordered that if there should be a disturbance he should produce Drusus, bring him to the senate and people, and proclaim him Caesar.

We can infer from Tiberius' fear that Sejanus would occupy the city that Sejanus was in Rome at this time. In addition, to command the troops on the ships, Sejanus would have required *imperium proconsulare*, which he did not receive until sometime after May of 31 CE. This latter fact narrows the possible date for these events to after May of 31 CE—that is, when Sejanus received his *imperium proconsulare*. Dio's claims in this passage can be supplemented by other sources, but first, some further comments on this passage of Dio. He suggests that Tiberius was preparing as if he feared a rebellion led by Sejanus. Dio states that the Caesar prepared ships as a means of escape.

Dio states in an earlier passage that after setting in motion Sejanus' election as consul, Tiberius sent him back to Rome, because it was a requirement that he be physically present in the city to stand for office, and promised that he himself would follow. The ships may have been for the journey back to Rome. Tiberius may also have been amassing a sizeable armada in the case of rebellion, either to escape or to fight a naval battle.

Tiberius also put in place a contingency plan for Macro to remove Drusus III from his dungeon in the palace and make him Caesar in the event of a rebellion. It is not clear when these orders

⁶⁰⁶ Dio Cass., 58.13.1.

were issued concerning Drusus III. His return to Rome occurred before the consular elections, but our information is insufficient to precisely date both the hearing before the senate and the condemnation. Despite being declared a *hostis*, Drusus was not placed on an island as his mother and brother had been; rather, he was confined to the palace.⁶⁰⁷ It is possible that Tiberius, already suspicious of Sejanus, had, under the guise of ruining Drusus III and thus making him appear no threat to Sejanus, smuggled a legitimate heir into the city. This, combined with the orders issued to Macro, further suggest that Tiberius was putting contingency plans in place, possibly as early as 30 CE.

Despite the lack of temporal specificity, the fact that Tiberius was issuing such orders to Macro suggests not only that Sejanus had begun to lose favour with Tiberius but also that the Caesar was looking for an alternative conduit to the city. Even if the involvement of Macro cannot be dated precisely, it is surely the case that Tiberius issued the orders after Drusus III had been sent back to Rome. This we can infer from the content of the orders; it would be illogical for Macro to be given orders to free Drusus III if he were not already in prison. Macro's closeness to Tiberius is evidence of the Caesar's suspicions regarding Sejanus and, therefore, is likely a *consequence* of it. It is unlikely that Tiberius would have brought Macro into his confidence while Sejanus was on Capri. I would therefore suggest that Macro's rise may be dated as early as the second half of 30 CE, after Sejanus had returned to the city.

We turn now to Tacitus on these events. He confirms Dio's claim that Tiberius ordered Macro to make Drusus leader of the people if Sejanus attempted an uprising, adding the detail that Drusus III was to be released from custody.⁶⁰⁸ Tacitus' only reference to this incident is at the time of the death of Drusus III; however, it is likely that this would have been dealt with in the now lost portion of the *Annales*.

⁶⁰⁷ For the declaration as a *hostis*, see Suet., *Tib.* 54.2; Suet., *Calig.* 7.

⁶⁰⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 6.23; Dio Cass., 58.13.1.

The final source for this event is Suetonius. In the chapter where he reports on the crushing of Sejanus' conspiracy, he comments that even after Sejanus had been removed from power and killed, Tiberius still feared an uprising. Tiberius therefore ordered that, if the situation were to become dire, Drusus III should be removed from the dungeon and placed in charge of the state.⁶⁰⁹ The difference between the three sources is in the order of events. Suetonius describes Tiberius as fearing that an uprising would occur *after* Sejanus' fall—I would suggest as a *consequence* of it— whereas Tacitus and Dio have the potential revolt take place *before* the fall, with Dio citing, as a motive, Sejanus' fear that he had lost Tiberius' confidence.⁶¹⁰

These three accounts do seem irreconcilable, but Suetonius' claim about the possibility of a revolt *after* Sejanus' fall does seem unlikely. We will see Section 4.16 that the reaction of the senators when Tiberius' letter denouncing Sejanus was read in the senate-house was to abandon him and create as much distance as possible between themselves and Sejanus. This reaction suggests that the senators did not wish to be associated with a man so clearly the object of Tiberius' displeasure. The reaction in the senate-house says a great deal about the quickly shifting nature of fortune under imperial rule.

In addition to the loss of support from the senators, the praetorians were removed from their post outside this senate meeting, which negated any potential support for a rebellion on behalf of Sejanus. It would also have been very dangerous to participate in a revolt in support of a man who no longer retained the favour of the Caesar. This would have been considered a treasonous act, and would have been not only political suicide but quite possibly literal suicide as well.

⁶⁰⁹ Suet., *Tib.* 65.2.

⁶¹⁰ Dio Cass., 58.6.3–4.

Another event that can be dated to the second half of 30 CE is Caligula's arrival on Capri. Such detailed analysis of chronology is justified by the fragmentary and incomplete nature of the sources for this period. Suetonius describes Caligula's early life:

*Unde reversus primum in matris, deinde ea relegata in Liviae Augustae proaviae suae contubernio mansit; quam defunctam praetextatus etiam tunc pro rostris laudavit. Transitque ad Antoniam aviam et undevicensimo aetatis anno accitus Capreas a Tiberio uno atque eodem die togam sumpsit barbamque posuit, sine ullo honore qualis contigerat tirocinio fratrum eius.*⁶¹¹

He [Caligula] lived first with his mother; then, after she was banished, he lived with his grandmother Livia Augusta in her own *domus*.⁶¹² Following her death, though he still wore the gown of boyhood, he praised her from the speaker's platform. He lived with his grandmother Antonia until, when he was nineteen years old, being summoned to Capri by Tiberius, he assumed the gown of manhood and shaved his first beard on the day he arrived. This was done without the honours that attended the coming of age of his brothers.

Caligula was called to Capri in his nineteenth year. He had previously lived, in turn, with his mother, great-grandmother and grandmother, and he had taken no part in public life. The sequence of Caligula's living arrangements creates a chronological inconsistency between Suetonius and Tacitus. Suetonius states that Caligula lived with his mother, Agrippina, *before* her banishment, and after that with Augusta. However, Tacitus says that the banishments of Agrippina and Nero did not take place until *after* Augusta's death in 29 CE.

⁶¹¹ Suet., *Calig.* 10.1.

⁶¹² Literally tent.

The two accounts are irreconcilable, but there is evidence that Tacitus has reported events out of sequence to bolster his narrative. The immediate case in point is the relocation of the praetorians into a single camp, which he reports under the year 23 CE, whereas Dio reports the incident under the year 20 CE.⁶¹³ Tacitus' use of this device, in this case to bolster Sejanus' importance, should cause us to exercise caution in accepting his sequence of events: Tacitus was not above shaping his reporting of events to align with his underlying agenda.

It is possible that Tiberius removed Agrippina and Nero from the city while Augusta was alive, perhaps to a villa some distance from Rome, and then waited until after Augusta's death to relegate them to islands, based on the accusations contained in the letter read in the senate. In the reconstruction of events we have offered, Agrippina and Nero were sent away from the city *before* Augusta's death, in what we may see as a form of unofficial exile. The fact that the letter containing the accusations against them was read in the senate *after* Augusta's death, and after their removal from Rome, suggests that it was designed to rationalise a decision already made by Tiberius.

The remainder of this passage deals with events surrounding Caligula's arrival on Capri. Suetonius reports that, on the day Caligula arrived, he shaved his first beard and assumed the *toga virilis*. The immediacy of this suggests that the process was rushed. Tiberius had, prior to this, neglected to perform his duty as Caligula's eldest living male relative. This may be explained by the fact that at the time when Caligula would have been led into the forum not only was Tiberius not in the city but Nero and Drusus III were ascendant: raising Caligula may not have been seen as necessary. Caligula's delayed entry into public life may also be explained by Tiberius not wanting to advance his grandson.

⁶¹³ Compare Tac., *Ann.* 4.2.1 with Dio Cass., 57.19.6.

Tiberius summoned Caligula to Capri after 31 August 30 CE. In the reconstruction of events offered thus far, Tiberius became suspicious of Sejanus in the first half of 30 CE. The consular elections followed, and then the Caesar summoned Caligula to him. We noted above that Tiberius had placed Drusus III, a legitimate heir, in the city, possibly as part of a contingency plan. Tiberius' decision to bring Caligula, another legitimate heir, into his presence further indicates his loss of confidence in Sejanus and his realisation that he had ignored the succession.

I would suggest that this lack of planning around the younger generation occurred precisely because *Sejanus* had been the centre of Tiberius' plans. His loss of confidence in Sejanus necessitated some form of succession planning. There are two problems with Tiberius' planning in these years. First, Drusus III was confined to a dungeon in the palace and Caligula was on Capri. Even if Tiberius wanted them to succeed him, neither one could begin a public career from their current position. We have just seen the rushed nature of Caligula's entry into public life. Second, much like the earlier career of their brother Nero, Caligula and Drusus III's early careers were all form and no substance. Neither had been prepared for a place in the administration. The lack of advancement of Caligula and Drusus III princes and the hostile treatment of the latter indicates that, at this point, Tiberius had limited options in terms of his future successor. Even if his suspicions around the family of Germanicus still lingered, Tiberius made the pragmatic decision to centre the succession on these two young men, but ultimately on his own terms. Both Drusus' confinement to the dungeon and Caligula's presence on Capri kept the young men isolated from Roman politics, thereby negating any threat that Tiberius may have feared they posed.

Tiberius' loss of confidence in Sejanus necessitated that the Caesar advance a new successor, and he settled by default on Germanicus' sons. However, because Sejanus' method had been to present Germanicus' line as a threat to Tiberius, the Caesar remained suspicious of them even after he lost confidence in Sejanus. That is, the discrediting of the source of Tiberius' suspicion

did not change his perception of Drusus III and Caligula. The late and subdued advancement of the last two sons of Germanicus was a combination of Tiberius' suspicion around them and the impending loss of Sejanus, who had seemingly been at the centre of Tiberius' plans for the regime.

At this point in the narrative, we are midway through the year 30 CE. Sejanus' link to the regime was augmented when the senate decreed that Sejanus and Tiberius should be consuls together every five years.⁶¹⁴ Edmondson comments that such a measure, if it had been adopted, would have represented a deviation from the traditional pattern of office holding under the principate.⁶¹⁵ He notes that the established pattern had been modified for members of the imperial family, especially heirs apparent. If Tiberius and Sejanus were to be consuls together every five years, Sejanus would have been granted extraordinary political privileges akin to those of Tiberius himself. Even if the senate had passed the motion, it is unlikely that Tiberius would have consented to such an idea, on the grounds of his age, his ever-increasing disinterest in public affairs and his denouncement of extraordinary privileges and honours.

Dio says that gilded chairs were set up for Sejanus and Tiberius in the theatre, which further illustrates the supreme position that Sejanus had attained: he was once again being linked with the Caesar in public ritual. Edmondson discusses the significance of these chairs and the symbolic messages they implied.⁶¹⁶ Specifically, they were a sign of great power and importance associated with Hellenistic monarchs. Caesar the Dictator also had one voted to him in the theatre.⁶¹⁷ The voting of such a chair to Sejanus represented public acknowledgement of his place in the regime. Dio then confirms Sejanus' ascendancy when he notes that sacrifices

⁶¹⁴ Dio Cass., 58.4.4.

⁶¹⁵ Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*, 120.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Dio Cass., 44.6.3.

were made to the images of both Tiberius and Sejanus.⁶¹⁸ As the year 31 CE approached, Sejanus' prominence, indeed his pre-eminence, cannot be overstated.

Dio takes his description of Sejanus' prominence even further when he reports, under the year 31 CE, that it was Sejanus who was the true Caesar of Rome, whereas Tiberius was a mere island despot.⁶¹⁹ According to Dio, the large groups of people continued to attend Sejanus' house in the *salutatio*. By the year 31 CE, then, Sejanus' social prominence, secured by his betrothal to an imperial woman, and his political eminence were as strong as they had ever been. This year would see Sejanus share the consulship with Tiberius, which would be followed by a grant of *imperium proconsulare*. The only condition that Sejanus lacked to be legally equal to Tiberius himself, and indeed to be considered his successor, was the *tribunicia potestas*.

4.13 Sejanus' Consulship: January to May, 31 CE

Dio's introduction of Sejanus as consul in 31 CE is noteworthy for its vagueness. Rather than introducing the year in the typical annalistic fashion by naming the consuls, Dio simply states that on the first day of the month a large crowd outside Sejanus' house followed him to the Capitol where he made the customary sacrifices. Edmondson clarifies these sacrifices as those usually made by incoming consuls.⁶²⁰ The fact that Dio does not name the consuls could be a function of the state of the text, but his hostility to Sejanus is clear, and by not naming him as one of the consuls, Dio downplays Sejanus' importance. However, we have a useful numismatic record of Sejanus' importance in a coin, struck in the provinces, that specifically commemorates his term in office.⁶²¹ Previous consular colleagues of Tiberius had also appeared on coins with

⁶¹⁸ Dio Cass., 58.4.4

⁶¹⁹ Dio Cass., 58.5.1.

⁶²⁰ Dio 58.5.5–6. Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians - Selections from Books 58-63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio*, 121-2.

⁶²¹ *RPC* 398.

the Caesar.⁶²² This is yet another example of Sejanus receiving similar privileges to those previously considered heirs apparent.

Sejanus was addressed as Tiberius' colleague, a designation that Xiphilinus says did not refer to the consulship but to the imperial power itself.⁶²³ This seems unlikely: for all the public recognition and other signs of his supremacy, and even acknowledging that Tiberius had previously shared consulships, Sejanus, at this point, had not even received the *imperium proconsulare*. He clearly was not yet Tiberius' colleague in the supreme power. This clarification may be an insertion by Xiphilinus, which has obscured the fact that Tiberius and Sejanus were, for the moment at least, nothing more than consular colleagues.

During this consulship, which lasted from January to May of 31 CE, Tiberius sent a barrage of letters to the senate and to Sejanus, in which the Caesar wrote among other things that he was at once close to death and then that his health was such that he could return to Rome at any time.⁶²⁴ These letters were intended to create a sense of uncertainty among the senators, and especially within Sejanus himself. Tiberius' correspondence also vacillated between praise and criticism of both Sejanus and his associates. This again served to maintain a level of uncertainty in the capital.

The letters had their intended effect: Dio comments that Sejanus did not know how to react. Dio specifically says that Sejanus, given that he was apparently still in Tiberius' favour, praised as he was by some of the letters, had no reason to panic and attempt to overthrow the Caesar. Yet, the criticism in the letters did leave Sejanus in a state of confusion, and according to Dio, because Sejanus was being undermined, he did not dare make any kind of revolutionary

⁶²² *RPC* I 3622 (Drusus II), *RPC* 3623b (Germanicus). Even though these coins are commemorative, the point still stands: consular colleagues of the Caesar appeared on the coins.

⁶²³ Dio Cass., 58.6.2.

⁶²⁴ Dio Cass., 58.6.3.

move.⁶²⁵ Tiberius' undermining of Sejanus meant that Sejanus would not have had the confidence to attempt any action against the Caesar, because the senate, or anyone else, would not have been willing to support him, given the uncertainty that Tiberius had created through his letters.

Dio states that it was Tiberius's intention to keep the politicians in Rome unsettled. Indeed, Dio says that, as far as Tiberius was concerned, it was useful that in Rome they thought he was either dead or on his way to the city.⁶²⁶ Dio's narrative then returns to omens foretelling Sejanus' fall, before its attention turns to relations between Tiberius and Caligula.

The instability and uncertainty that Tiberius had created with his letters soon took its toll. Dio comments that the elite did not know how to interact with Sejanus because from their perspective, despite all the criticism levelled against him, he remained Tiberius' favourite. The Caesar conferred priesthods not only on Sejanus and his son but also on Caligula.⁶²⁷ These parallel appointments are a useful example of Tiberius' vacillation: he honoured Sejanus even further by conferring priesthood on both him and his son, yet at the same time, the appointment of Caligula promoted a legitimate heir. This would have created further doubt and uncertainty in Sejanus. Tiberius' habit of creating confusion and his unwillingness to act definitively was undertaken, as Dio comments in a different context, lest his intentions should be understood.⁶²⁸ This strategy helps to explain the concurrent appointment of Caligula.

4.14 Sejanus' *imperium proconsulare* in Historical Context

⁶²⁵ Dio Cass., 58.6.4.

⁶²⁶ Dio Cass., 58.6.5.

⁶²⁷ Dio Cass., 58.7.4.

⁶²⁸ Dio Cass., 58.7.4. For Tiberius' seeming desire to never be understood, see Dio Cass., 57.1.1–4.

The conferral of the priesthoods must have taken place after Sejanus and Tiberius had resigned their consulship, because Dio also notes around this time that the senate voted Sejanus the *imperium proconsulare*.⁶²⁹ This was not the empowerment typical of a provincial assignment: Tiberius himself possessed the same power—that is, empire-wide. However, Tiberius surely retained the guiding hand of *maius imperium*, as Augustus had. This grant of power to Sejanus was a major step, given that *imperium proconsulare* was one of the two central pillars of the Caesar's own powers.

We have seen this power granted to men such as Agrippa, Tiberius and Gaius Caesar under Augustus, as well as Germanicus and Drusus II under Tiberius. These men were all recognised as leading political deputies, and this power indicated, along with the *tribunicia potestas*, that they were sufficiently empowered to take over from their Caesar.

Agrippa was granted *imperium proconsulare* in 23 BCE, which was renewed in 18 BCE when he was also granted *tribunicia potestas*.⁶³⁰ As early as 18 BCE, then, Agrippa was sufficiently empowered to take over if anything were to befall Augustus. The second case in point under Augustus was that of Tiberius. Following his term as consul in 7 BCE, Tiberius received a five-year grant of *tribunicia potestas* and a grant of *imperium proconsulare*.⁶³¹ Like Agrippa before him, Tiberius was sufficiently empowered to assume control of the empire should the need arise.

In 6 BCE, as we have seen, Tiberius withdrew from Rome and went into retirement, but he retained his powers. These powers lapsed in 1 BCE, and soon after, Gaius Caesar, who was the next most senior member of Augustus' family and administration, received a grant of *imperium proconsulare*. However, upon the deaths of Gaius and Lucius, Augustus, again out of necessity,

⁶²⁹ Dio Cass., 58.7.4.

⁶³⁰ See sec. 2.3.

⁶³¹ See sec. 2.4.

adopted Tiberius, whose powers were reinstated in 4 CE and renewed in 13 CE.⁶³² This state of affairs was both a practical measure as well as an indication of his primacy in the succession to Augustus.

A further example of the importance of *imperium proconsulare* may be found in the early days of Tiberius' reign. Tacitus reports that Tiberius asked for a grant of *imperium proconsulare* for Germanicus, which did not represent a new grant, but rather was designed to reflect the reality that he now represented Tiberius' *imperium* rather than Augustus'. Germanicus' career culminated in his appointment to settle affairs in the east, with a grant of *imperium proconsulare maius*. This mission clearly designated him as Tiberius' leading political deputy.⁶³³

The final case in the reign of Tiberius is that of his son, Drusus II, who was sent to deal with mutinous soldiers in 14 CE. Drusus would continue to acquire military experience as his career progressed. He was granted a command in 17 CE following his consulship of 15 CE. He had also been sent on campaign in 19 CE, as Tiberius referenced in his letter to the senate asking for *tribunicia potestas* for his son in 22 CE.⁶³⁴

Drusus' grant of *imperium proconsulare* is noteworthy in that he does not appear to have been assigned a specific region for command. This represents a definite change in the nature of this power: rather than being over a particular region, as had previously been the case, Drusus' grant was analogous to Tiberius' own—that is, empire-wide. The nature of the grant had changed from being a practical military power over a region to a more general power encompassing administration and legal equality with the Caesar. We note here that this change in the nature of *imperium proconsulare* is possibly a function of Augustus' injunction against further territorial expansion: the focus was now on guarding the frontiers rather than expanding

⁶³² For the renewals, see Dio Cass., 55.13.2; 56.28.1.

⁶³³ See sec. 3.7.

⁶³⁴ Tac., *Ann.* 3.56. For Drusus' commands, see Tac., *Ann.* 2.44.1, 46.5, 64.1.

them.⁶³⁵ In addition, the nature of Drusus' appointment may well have been motivated by Tiberius' desire to withdraw from administration. As a result of the powers granted to him, Drusus was empowered to take over Tiberius' duties.

Both Augustus and Tiberius, then, had used the grant of *imperium proconsulare* to indicate those who were considered leading political deputies. Following Tiberius' departure and the rise of Gaius and Lucius Caesar, grants of this power became openly political, designed to indicate the successor to Augustus. Ironically, for a man of his political sentiments, Tiberius continued this practice in his own succession plans, indicating the primacy first of Germanicus, then of Drusus II.

The evolving nature of the succession is demonstrated by certain elements of the careers of Agrippa and Tiberius under Augustus. Both men received *imperium proconsulare* and the *tribunicia potestas* simultaneously. Early deaths prevented Gaius and Lucius Caesar from receiving both powers simultaneously. By contrast, under Tiberius, due to circumstances, *tribunicia potestas* was not bestowed upon anyone until nine years into the reign. We note that Germanicus' early death, analogous to the deaths of Gaius and Lucius, prevented him from receiving both powers. The grant of *tribunicia potestas* to Drusus II was ultimately to be the only such grant in Tiberius' reign. As we will see, under the year 31 CE, Dio states that Tiberius circulated a rumour that he was going to bestow *tribunicia potestas* on Sejanus.

4.15 Shifting Fortunes

⁶³⁵ For further discussion, see sec. 3.10.

Returning to the year 31 CE, now that Sejanus had received the *imperium proconsulare*, all he required to be legally equal with Tiberius himself was a grant of *tribunicia potestas*. Sejanus must have thought that he had won.

However, it is at this point that Dio notes further subtle instances of Tiberius beginning to place some distance between himself and Sejanus. Although the Caesar had honoured Sejanus and his son with priesthoods, he did not summon him into his presence. Indeed, when Sejanus requested permission to go to Campania to visit his fiancée, who was ill, Tiberius ordered him to remain where he was. The Caesar indicated that he would soon arrive in the city.⁶³⁶ Tiberius was clearly maintaining a distance between himself and Sejanus.

Tiberius had introduced Caligula into public life. The Caesar now wrote a letter to the senate, commending him to their protection. In doing so, Tiberius was following precedent established in his own and Augustus' reign.⁶³⁷ In all these cases, across both reigns, those commended to the senate—from the point of view of appearances at least—were marked out as future candidates for the succession.

Dio says that Sejanus would have led a rebellion against Tiberius, given that the army was ready to follow his orders in any matter at all. He adds that Sejanus abandoned the idea of rebellion because of the popular support that was forthcoming for Caligula.⁶³⁸ This is plausible: recall the popular support surrounding Nero and Drusus III.⁶³⁹ We have noted the popularity of Germanicus and his family, particularly Caligula, with the army.⁶⁴⁰ In addition, Germanicus'

⁶³⁶ Dio Cass., 58.7.5

⁶³⁷ For Germanicus, see sec. 1.6; for Nero and Drusus III, see sec. 4.2.

⁶³⁸ Dio Cass., 58.8.2.

⁶³⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 5.4.

⁶⁴⁰ Suet., *Calig.* 8.

family was part of the house of Caesar, and it was to that house that the soldiers swore their loyalty.⁶⁴¹ It is therefore unlikely that the army would have participated in such a rebellion.

Popular support for Caligula, Dio says, severely affected Sejanus' morale, for he lost heart and regretted not launching his attempt on the throne while he was consul.⁶⁴² During his term in office, Sejanus did not have any of the requisite powers to launch a rebellion. Consular power, temporary as it was, could not have sustained him as Caesar. Long-term viability relied on the legal powers of the Caesar, which had to come from the senate. Sejanus' ability to command the army came with his grant of *imperium proconsulare*, which he did not receive until *after* he had been consul. How Sejanus would have carried out his prospective rebellion while consul is therefore not clear.

The only military force in the city, the guard, was loyal to the Caesar, not Sejanus. It was the Caesar to whom the oaths were sworn and from whom the donatives and other payments were received. The true loyalty of the guard was demonstrated when Sejanus fell: the troops made no effort to save their erstwhile prefect. This abandonment of Sejanus was secured by a generous donative.⁶⁴³ It is therefore unlikely that Sejanus had the capabilities, resources or support to launch a revolution, not just when he was consul but at any point in the lead-up to his fall.

When the Caesar sent a letter to the senate regarding Nero's death, Tiberius referred to Sejanus by his name only rather than in formal style with his normal titles.⁶⁴⁴ Tiberius also refused to have any honours voted to himself because, given how closely the Caesar and Sejanus were linked, any honours voted to the Caesar were also being voted to Sejanus. This created yet more

⁶⁴¹ SCCPP II. 162–65.

⁶⁴² Dio Cass., 58.8.3.

⁶⁴³ Dio Cass., 58.9.5.

⁶⁴⁴ Dio Cass., 58.8.4.

distance between them. Critically, Dio states that the political class noted this cooling of relations between Tiberius and Sejanus. As a result, they began to avoid being alone with Sejanus and even meeting with him.⁶⁴⁵

It is a testament to how powerful Sejanus was, or perhaps to how much Dio has downplayed Tiberius' role in this situation, that Sejanus' loss of popular sentiment is what gave Tiberius the confidence to act against him. Here was Tiberius, Caesar of the Romans, so fearful that he had lost the loyalty of his constituents inside the city that he required their support before he could remove one of his subordinates.

Dio reports that, to reduce any suspicions on Sejanus' part, Tiberius, with his new-found confidence, let the rumour be circulated that he intended to have the senate grant Sejanus the *tribunicia potestas*. This was the last power that Sejanus needed in order to be legally equal with Tiberius.⁶⁴⁶ We will return to the narrative in Section 4.16, but for now some remarks on the importance of the *tribunicia potestas*.

We have seen that this power, along with the *imperium proconsulare*, made up the core of the Caesar's powers, which allowed simultaneous control over the armies in the field and the governmental apparatus in Rome. This power was only ever bestowed upon carefully selected political deputies, specifically Agrippa, Tiberius and Drusus II. What was unique about granting the *tribunicia potestas* to a colleague of the Caesar was that it applied to that man a similar extraordinary privilege as applied to the Caesar himself. This power set the Caesar apart, and such a grant similarly marked the recipient as a man apart, on the same legal level as the Caesar. The importance of such a grant therefore cannot be overstated.

⁶⁴⁵ Dio Cass., 58.9.1.

⁶⁴⁶ Dio Cass., 58.9.2.

Throughout the history of the principate thus far, we have seen that there were three instruments, often used in concert, for the Caesar to highlight those he considered potential candidates to succeed him: grants of versions of his own powers, marriage into the family and adoption into the clan. Sejanus had received *imperium proconsulare*, and he had been betrothed to an imperial princess. He was also hopeful of receiving *tribunicia potestas*. Therefore, in the middle of the year 31 CE, Sejanus would surely have thought that he could have been Tiberius' successor. That he fell from grace and lost his life in a mere few months shows how quickly fortunes could turn in imperial Rome. We turn to that narrative now.

4.16 The Final Act

Dio reports that Tiberius ordered Macro, whom he had appointed to replace Sejanus as *praefectus praetorio*, to take a letter denouncing Sejanus to the senate.⁶⁴⁷ Dio suggests that Macro's appointment was done in secret. However, in a later book that deals with the reign of Trajan, Dio reports that such a replacement at that time involved a formal ceremony.⁶⁴⁸ It is not clear if this was the case in the reign of Tiberius, and such a practice may have arisen only later. However, if we recall Dio's general opinion of Tiberius, the Caesar was not fond of direct action, and so such a secretive replacement would fit this portrayal. Finally, we should note that Dio may have, as he often does, ignored the procedural aspect of such a changing of the prefecture and simply reported the result.

⁶⁴⁷ Dio Cass., 58.9.2.

⁶⁴⁸ See Dio Cass., 68.16.1(2).

Another interpretation of this event, and in this author's view, the correct one, is that Tiberius promised Macro the position of prefect of the guard in return for aiding him in removing Sejanus. Macro's role, then, did not represent an official replacement of Sejanus until he was in custody. There are multiple reasons to consider this, chief among them Dio's comment that when Tiberius sent Macro to the city with the letter denouncing Sejanus, the Caesar gave precise instructions on what was to be done.⁶⁴⁹ Macro could not assume his new role as prefect until Sejanus had been arrested. Macro had been ordered to remove Sejanus and maintain order, especially among the praetorians. A second reason to suspect that such a replacement was not immediate is the fact that if the appointment had been made official, Sejanus would have been forewarned that his career, and quite possibly his life, were in danger. This could have provoked him to resort to drastic measures, something Tiberius would have wanted to avoid. Tiberius therefore acted covertly, hence the secret arrangements.

Dio reports that when Macro entered the city he conveyed his instructions to the two most important men in the city: a consul who was loyal to Tiberius and to the new prefect of the night watch (*praefectus vigilum*), who had replaced Macro himself in that role.⁶⁵⁰ The senate was due to meet in the forthcoming days. At such a meeting of the senate, Sejanus must have anticipated that he would be granted a share in the *tribunicia potestas*.

The following day, Macro went to the Palatine hill, where the senate was due to meet. Although Sejanus was already there, he had not yet entered the chamber. Dio says that Sejanus the prefect was worried because he had received no communication from the Caesar, but Macro reassured him that the letter he was carrying contained a message from Tiberius along with a grant of *tribunicia potestas* for Sejanus. Calmed, Sejanus entered the temple.⁶⁵¹ Dio also notes that members of the guard were outside the chamber to protect both Sejanus and the senators. This

⁶⁴⁹ Dio Cass., 58.9.2.

⁶⁵⁰ Dio Cass., 58.9.3.

⁶⁵¹ Dio Cass., 58.9.3–4.

shows how ingrained the militaristic nature of the principate had become. Even though the Caesar was not present, the ritual of the praetorian guard being stationed outside the House, for the protection of the civilian government, continued.

Macro, displaying and using his prefectural authority, ordered the praetorians on duty to return to their camp and replaced them with members of the night watch (*vigiles*), who, until recently, had been under Macro's own command. He returned to the *Castra Praetoria* before the letter was read. That the praetorians were replaced by troops recently under Macro's own command suggests that there was some doubt over the potential reaction of the guard.⁶⁵² In the chamber, the letter from Tiberius was read. It contained no explicit condemnation of Sejanus, although it was very critical of him as well as those close to him.⁶⁵³ Once again, we see Tiberius not giving specific instructions on how to proceed. Tiberius was still not confident that his commands would be carried out.

We can imagine some confusion in the chamber following the letter, and indeed Dio states that before the letter was read out, members of the House were praising Sejanus and communicating their willingness to confer the grant of *tribunicia potestas*, should Tiberius request it. However, when it became obvious that no such request was forthcoming, members of the senate, previous friends of Sejanus, began to abandon him. They clearly knew that Sejanus had lost Tiberius' favour, and they sought to distance themselves from him.⁶⁵⁴ Regulus, the loyal consul to whom Macro had spoken before the meeting, then stepped forward, and rather than asking the whole chamber what should happen to Sejanus, he asked a single senator if Sejanus should be imprisoned. The question was not whether Sejanus should be killed—he had too many friends and relatives in the chamber. However, when Regulus was told that Sejanus indeed should be

⁶⁵² Dio Cass., 58.9.5–6.

⁶⁵³ Dio Cass., 55.10.1–2.

⁶⁵⁴ Dio Cass., 58.10.1–3.

imprisoned, Sejanus was dragged off and executed.⁶⁵⁵ Thus ended the career of Lucius Aelius Sejanus.

Following the death of Sejanus, Tiberius lost all restraint. The one man he had trusted had betrayed him. He sought to rid himself of anyone connected to Sejanus, and so a purge was instituted. The reality of the last eight years set in when Tiberius received a letter from Sejanus' ex-wife, Apicata, informing Tiberius that his own son had been Sejanus' first victim. Dio provides more detail than Tacitus does on this incident, and so we turn to Dio.⁶⁵⁶ He writes under the year 31 CE:

kai\ h(gunh_ 0Apika~ta ou) kateyhfi/sqh me/n, maqou~sa de\ o3ti ta_ te/kna au)th~j te/qnhke, kai/ sfwn ta_ sw&mata e0n toi=j a)nabasmoi=j i0dou~sa, a)nexw&rhse, kai\ e0j bibli/on gra&yasa peri\ tou~ qana&tou tou~ Drou&sou kata& te th~j Lioui/llhj th~j gunaiko_j au)tou~, di' h3nper pou kai\ au)th_ tw|~ a)ndri\ prosekekrou&kei w3ste mhke/ti sunoikei=n, to_ me\n tw|~ Tiberi/w| e1pemyen, au)th_ d' e9au th_n diexrh&sato.⁶⁵⁷

But his [Sejanus'] wife, Apicata, was not condemned, and upon learning that her children were dead, and seeing them in the stairwell, she secluded herself and wrote a pamphlet concerning the death of Drusus, implicating his wife, Livilla, who had been the cause of a conflict between her and her husband. When the statement had been sent to Tiberius, she committed suicide.

⁶⁵⁵ Dio Cass., 55.10.4,8.

⁶⁵⁶ Compare Tac., *Ann.* 4.11.

⁶⁵⁷ Dio Cass., 58.11.6.

We may ask why a letter, written eight years after the fact by a wronged wife, should be taken as substantial evidence of Sejanus and Livilla's involvement in Drusus' death. Such a source is surely questionable given that its author had a clear agenda: to destroy Livilla because of her role in ruining Apicata's marriage to Sejanus. The letter achieved this precise purpose. It is demonstrative of Tiberius' interest in justice, even at this point, that Apicata, despite her obvious connection to Sejanus, had not been targeted for execution. However, Tiberius did believe this letter, despite its source. He then began his own brutal investigation into the death of Drusus.

4.17 Modern Scholarship on Sejanus: A Selection

At this point, given that we have examined the evidence, it is fitting to consider some modern views on Sejanus' position in 31 CE.

We start with Boddington's 1963 *American Journal of Philology* article, "Sejanus: Whose Conspiracy?" Boddington suggests that the shared consulship, the grant of *imperium proconsulare* and the rumour of *tribunicia potestas* for Sejanus were part of Tiberius' plan to abandon Augustus' dynastic succession scheme. The goal was to make Sejanus a stand-in for Caligula, on whom Tiberius had just conferred a priesthood and given some vague hints that he should succeed him. Boddington writes that Tiberius had noticed that

the next princeps would be extremely young, and [so he] gave the powers he thought necessary for securing the succession and carrying on the government to a man of proved loyalty and ability [Sejanus], whose equestrian birth might be a guarantee against dangerous ambition.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁸ Boddington, "Sejanus. Whose Conspiracy?," 5.

It is not clear who ‘the next *princeps*’ was to be, although Caligula is the probable candidate. The role of Sejanus in this apparent divergence is best explained by pragmatism, something to which the succession in the early empire was always subject. It is possible that Tiberius had taken the precedent of pragmatism and extended it, deciding that his choice of candidates was not necessarily limited to members of the imperial family. His own case provides evidence for this. He was Augustus’ stepson when he was adopted, and even accounting for the stories in the sources that Augustus was not fond of Tiberius, the *princeps* had made the pragmatic decision: Tiberius was a man of the appropriate age with the relevant experience. Based on this precedent, it seems reasonable to suggest that Sejanus could have been considered by Tiberius as his potential heir, even if the precise capacity in which he would function is not clear.

It is true that later in his reign, possibly in the year 33 CE, Tiberius did make some limited plans for the succession concerning Caligula. Dio comments that the Caesar made the young man a quaestor and promised to grant him the privilege of the years.⁶⁵⁹ The year of these events, derived from the consular naming and the mention of the death of Agrippina, is important because Sejanus had been dead for two years by this point. The evidence for the idea that Tiberius laid the groundwork for Caligula to be his heir while Sejanus was alive is not demonstrated in the Dio passages that Boddington references. It should also be noted that it was not possible for Caligula to have carried out the responsibilities of a quaestor, given that he was not in the city. Even if such appointments had occurred during Sejanus’ ascendancy, Sejanus would not have perceived Caligula as a threat.

Boddington also says that Suetonius and Dio are inaccurate when they suggest that the honours and titles conferred on Sejanus were designed to give Sejanus a false sense of security while Tiberius worked to undermine and eventually remove him. Boddington suggests two reasons for this. Her first reason is that such a method would have been ‘singularly inept’, with Sejanus

⁶⁵⁹ Dio Cass., 58.23.1–2.

not being the only one deceived by Tiberius' conduct.⁶⁶⁰ Boddington maintains that such a deception would only have made Sejanus more influential and, to the political class, second man in the state. I would argue that Sejanus was already widely considered the second man in the state. Dio notes that separate envoys were sent to the Caesar and Sejanus as early as 29 CE.⁶⁶¹ The change in the nature of Sejanus' influence from 29 to 31 CE is that it went from tacit to explicit. His position was well established by the earlier date, and it is not clear how making his position official would have made it any more difficult to undermine and remove him.

Boddington's suggestion that Tiberius would not have used deception in his dealings with his opponents runs counter to the picture of him that we have from the accounts. Tiberius was nothing if not a conniving, opaque and manipulative politician who often kept the aristocracy off its guard with his seemingly erratic and unpredictable behaviour. Two cases will suffice to clarify this. Tiberius deceived Drusus Libo in 16 CE by inviting him to dinner and supporting his career (we are told Tiberius conferred a term as praetor on Libo), all while working to undermine him.⁶⁶² There is also the case of Asinius Gallus, who, despite being Tiberius' personal enemy (he had married Tiberius' first wife, Vipsania), was invited to Capri and treated with favour but ultimately suffered death at Tiberius' hands.⁶⁶³ We thus have two examples from different parts of Tiberius' reign that suggest deception was part of Tiberius' means of dealing with opposition.

Another issue is the fact that Tiberius' plan did work: Sejanus was indeed deceived. Dio is explicit: Sejanus thought that he retained Tiberius' favour despite the changes in Tiberius' correspondence, which vacillated between praise and criticism. The honours and titles fostered

⁶⁶⁰ Boddington, "Sejanus. Whose Conspiracy?," 5.

⁶⁶¹ Dio Cass., 58.2.8.

⁶⁶² Tac., *Ann.* 2.28.

⁶⁶³ Dio Cass., 58.3.3.

security on the part of Sejanus, while the letters created doubt. Sejanus did not revolt, which indicates that he thought either that he retained Tiberius' favour or that such action was unwise. Tiberius created confusion by bestowing honours and titles on Sejanus while at the same time sending contradictory messages: the unpredictability of the situation prevented Sejanus from deciding on a course of action.

Boddington's second reason for doubting the veracity of Dio's account is his failure to explain why the 'lesser partisans of Sejanus ... suffered most from his fall'.⁶⁶⁴ The fact that Tiberius spared the 'greater partisans' of Sejanus may be explained if we consider his lack of action against the *pontifices* when they dedicated Nero and Drusus III to the same deities as he himself was dedicated: he took no action because he counted the *pontifices* among his friends. We may see similar motivations here. The possibility also exists that it may have been in Tiberius' political interests (or it was his own political prejudice) to refrain from attacking high-ranking members of the elite. Whatever the case, it is interesting that Boddington should seek to question an entire account, which she herself admits is the most detailed we possess, simply because it does not adequately explain one specific detail.

On Boddington's suggestion, we have Sejanus acting as some sort of regent for Caligula. Even if she does note the powers granted to Sejanus and the honour of sharing the consulship with Tiberius, she makes it clear that, in her opinion, Sejanus' equestrian birth prevented Tiberius from ever considering him as a potential successor in his own right. However, we have seen that a man's powers, rather than his birth, defined the position of colleague. Recall Tacitus' description of Agrippa: a fine soldier but born in obscurity. With the powers Agrippa had received, no one could have doubted his importance and prominence, regardless of his origins. Regarding Sejanus, Boddington's reading is an example of a modern commentator mirroring the prejudice of Tacitus. Such a reading oversimplifies what is a very complicated picture and

⁶⁶⁴ Boddington, "Sejanus. Whose Conspiracy?," 6.

can lead to a distorted view of Sejanus' career. Tacitus' account is often criticised for its presentation of events, yet in this case, because Boddington accepts the preconceived idea that Sejanus was never a viable candidate to succeed Tiberius is accepted, she also accepts Tacitus' presentation.

In his 1969 *Latomus* study, "L. Aelius Seianus and His Political Significance", H. W. Bird suggests that in 31 CE Sejanus had 'overplayed his hand' by becoming a member of the senate.⁶⁶⁵ Bird suggests that the consulship was viewed, particularly by the *nobiles*, as the preserve of that group. The idea of Sejanus as consul would have been tolerable to them, Bird says, had his term in office not been shared with the Caesar and had Sejanus not been betrothed to an imperial princess.⁶⁶⁶ Internal competition among the Roman elite was a longstanding tradition, but there was always an ethos of equality. Such distinctions as Sejanus had acquired clearly marked him as one apart. The *nobiles* were envious. This envy is possibly part of the reasoning for Boddington's suggestion that a secret cabal of senators convinced Tiberius to overthrow Sejanus.⁶⁶⁷

However, Raphael Sealey has conducted an analysis, with various caveats, of the balance of *nobiles* and *novi homines* among the consuls during various periods of Tiberius' reign.⁶⁶⁸ We are concerned most with the period of Sejanus' ascendancy, which, in Sealey's division, is the period from 24–31 CE. In this period, twenty-three *nobiles* held the consulship compared with nine *novi homines*. These figures indicate that the *nobiles* were well represented in the consulship during Sejanus' ascendancy. Sealey suggests that this, and the fact that Sejanus was at the apogee of his power in these years, indicates that the number of *nobiles* being elected to the office 'reflects the influence of Sejanus and his associates', particularly among the elite.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁵ Bird, "L. Aelius Seianus and His Political Significance," 86-7.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Boddington, "Sejanus. Whose Conspiracy?," 16.

⁶⁶⁸ Raphael Sealey, "The Political Attachments of L. Aelius Seianus," *Phoenix* 15, no. 2 (1961): 109-10.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 111.

Boddington's secret cabal, then, may be inferred as those members of the *nobiles* who were not adherents of Sejanus and were therefore not subject to advancement in these years.

Bird maintains that this group, combined with a group of senators loyal to the Caesar, applied pressure on Tiberius and demanded Sejanus' removal.⁶⁷⁰ No doubt, such a group would have viewed Sejanus being consul, with Tiberius as his colleague, as the final insult. That said, there is limited evidence that such a group from within the senate initiated action against Sejanus, which would surely have been a theme of interest to the senatorial historians. This paucity of evidence leads to difficulties in identifying members of the group.

Bird suggests that a large part of the group's motivation was the threat that Sejanus posed to their own ascendancy.⁶⁷¹ They appear to have believed, accurately or not, that Sejanus would be regent at the very least, if not actual Caesar in his own right. If this had come to pass, such a group would have been at risk of being politically marginalised under an administration led by Sejanus, if this were not the case already. We have shown that the senate was utterly dependent on Tiberius for instruction in all matters. This suggests that such independent action on the part of sections of the *patres* was unlikely.

Finally, we turn to the recent view of Champlin. As the title might suggest, his 2012 *Chiron* article "Seianus Augustus" offers the suggestion that Sejanus, by the powers and honours he was granted, was 'the junior colleague, and thus, insofar as the role existed, the heir apparent of the *princeps*'.⁶⁷² Champlin is explicit: Sejanus was the heir apparent. He traces the career trajectory of, as well as the honours granted to, Sejanus. He even references, following Velleius, the precedent of Agrippa. Champlin's treatment of the facts of Agrippa's career and of earlier succession politics in general was necessarily superficial because those were not his topics. The

⁶⁷⁰ Bird, "L. Aelius Sejanus and His Political Significance," 98.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Champlin, "Seianus Augustus," 374.

analysis offered by this research up to this point largely concurs with Champlin's hypothesis. It is hoped that, in examining the concept of the imperial succession from its origins in the immediate post-Actium world and gathering the strands of historical data, this thesis has added context and further dimension to Champlin's case.

This chapter has traced the rise of Sejanus in the years 23–31 CE. Tacitus considered the year 23 CE to be a turning point in Tiberius' reign, best expressed in his claim that fortune deranged everything. Tacitus blames Sejanus for the change that occurred, both in Tiberius personally and in the state. We have seen Sejanus' rise and subsequent fall, and while the latter is beyond the scope of this research, we have discussed some recent scholarship around it. Our focus has been on how Sejanus manipulated both the political landscape and the tensions within the imperial family to advance his own career. The issue for consideration has been whether Sejanus' career path, and the honours he was granted, could have resulted in him being the heir apparent to Tiberius.

We have taken the approach that a man's powers, rather than his birth, defined his position. This approach rejects the position put forward by Tacitus, and followed by some modern commentators, that Sejanus' rank as an eques prevented him from fulfilling such a role. Another area of focus, despite its difficulties, has been discerning Tiberius' changing aspirations, both for the succession in general and for Sejanus in particular. The former was guided, following Augustan precedent, by pragmatism, whereby succession plans changed to reflect the circumstances, typically the death of the heir apparent. In our final Chapter, we will consider the precedents set by Augustus for the succession, Tiberius' adaptations of them, and discuss the possibility that Sejanus was, if only briefly, Tiberius' chosen successor.

Chapter 5: The Case for Sejanus as Tiberius' Successor

The current study has examined the historical issue of the succession in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius to contextualise an examination of Sejanus' viability as Tiberius' successor. It began with a brief examination of the reign of Augustus, which had brought stability to the state. However, succession for Augustus was a paradox, at once essential and impossible. As Tacitus would later write, it was necessary for stability that one man rule.⁶⁷³ However, since Augustus was officially nothing more than a magistrate, it was impossible for him to appoint a successor directly. This necessitated an indirect approach, which evolved into the mechanics of succession.

It may be useful to consider the speech given by Galba to Piso in 69 CE, which looked back on the succession under the Julio-Claudians. This will provide us with a contemporary assessment of what the mechanics of succession evolved into under the first imperial family. Adopting a quasi-dynastic approach, Augustus had sought a successor specifically from within his own family. Galba, by contrast, sought the most suitably qualified candidate and indeed explicitly rejected his own relatives.⁶⁷⁴ In Galba's view, the dynastic approach had failed Rome, and new thinking was needed.

We should consider Tacitus' own perspective here. He had witnessed Trajan's adoption and lived through his successful reign. His personal experience of the selection of the best candidate, regardless of the candidate's relation to the previous Caesar, has coloured his account

⁶⁷³ Tac., *Ann.* 1.9.

⁶⁷⁴ Tac., *Hist.* 1.15. For discussion on the speech, see Guy Edward Farquhar Chilver, *A historical commentary on Tacitus' Histories I and II* (Oxford Eng. New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1979), 75-9.; Cynthia Damon, *Tacitus Histories I* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 136-41.

of Galba's use of adoption. However, this does not detract from the overview of the Julio-Claudian succession mechanics that the speech provides.

In Chapters 2 and 3, we derived these mechanics from an examination of the primary evidence for the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. In Chapter 4, we examined the unique circumstances of Sejanus' rise in the years 23–31 CE and considered his political advancement against the mechanics of succession. We now bring together the salient points from those chapters to determine whether Sejanus was ever in a position to succeed Tiberius.

To set Sejanus' political ascendancy, as well as the issue of the succession itself, into broader historical context, we began our examination by defining the legal bases on which the principate rested, specifically *imperium proconsulare* and *tribunicia potestas*. Holding these powers allowed Augustus to control both Rome's foreign and domestic affairs, through superior military authority in the provinces and control over the governmental apparatus in the city. Once his position was firmly established, Augustus used grants of versions of his own powers to indicate those he considered his leading political deputies.⁶⁷⁵ This was the first pillar of what we have delineated as the mechanics of succession.

Versions of these powers were granted to leading men close to Augustus, specifically Agrippa and Tiberius. However, Augustus also desired that the man he chose as his leading political deputy and colleague had a personal connection to Augustus himself. The connection between the personal and the political at Rome had always existed, and Augustus' regime was to be no exception. This led to the second pillar of the mechanics of succession: marriage into the imperial family, which would continue into future generations.⁶⁷⁶ This will be significant when we consider Sejanus' betrothal to an imperial woman in 30 CE.

⁶⁷⁵ See sec. 2.3.

⁶⁷⁶ See chap. 4.

The fact that Augustus did not have a son meant that, like any other *gens* lacking fresh blood, he would either need male grandchildren or he would be compelled to adopt to perpetuate his line. This gave rise to the third pillar of the mechanics of succession: adoption into the Julian clan. We have seen this strategy deployed in the cases of Gaius and Lucius Caesar in 17 BCE and Tiberius in 4 CE, the latter being compelled to first adopt Germanicus.⁶⁷⁷ It should be clear that, through a combination of marriages and adoptions, Augustus was attempting to establish his guard duty (*statio*) on a firm footing for generations to come. Both marriage and adoption involved expanding Augustus' family. Rome had now changed from an oligarchy—that is, the rule of a narrow collective of elite families—to a dynastic and quasi-monarchic system centred on one family. The term 'dynastic' is applied by modern commentators, but it would have made limited sense to contemporaries.

Augustus' chief mechanics of succession, then, were grants of versions of his own powers, marriage into his family or adoption into the *gens*. We have seen that Augustus often used these mechanics in concert.⁶⁷⁸ The succession had regularly been at the forefront of Augustus' thinking, and by the time of his death in 14 CE, the arrangements, which were intergenerational, had been in place for ten years. His will confirmed his preferred order of succession: Tiberius, as his first-tier majority heir, was to succeed Augustus; Germanicus, as the second-tier majority heir, was to succeed Tiberius.

When Tiberius succeeded in 14 CE, he adhered to Augustus' instructions for the succession. He redefined Germanicus' *imperium proconsulare* for his command in Germany, which was augmented to *maius* for his fatal eastern mission. This, along with his shared consulship with

⁶⁷⁷ See sec. 2.3 and sec. 2.6.

⁶⁷⁸ Adoption was used first in the case of Gaius and Lucius, but they were too young to receive the powers. In 6 BCE, Tiberius had already been married into the family, and received the powers, but was not adopted. Finally, in 4 CE, Tiberius was adopted and once again received the powers, but was not allowed to marry into the clan, his previous marriage to Julia having been dissolved at Augustus' behest.

Tiberius in 18 CE, clearly marked Germanicus out as Tiberius' leading political deputy. Germanicus was also Tiberius' eldest son by adoption, and he was married to Augustus' granddaughter, Agrippina. This combination of quasi-constitutional and familial links with the Caesar placed Germanicus' role as the successor to Tiberius beyond doubt.⁶⁷⁹ These links with Tiberius are particularly relevant to our assessment of Sejanus' position leading up to October 31 CE.

Germanicus' death in 19 CE brought the issue of the succession back into sharp focus. The death of the heir apparent was a destabilising event. It had been Augustus' desire that Germanicus, who would then be followed by one of his own sons, would succeed Tiberius. Since Germanicus' eldest son, Nero, was too young to replace his father as Tiberius' leading deputy, the Caesar's response was to turn to his own biological son, Drusus II, who had been named as a second-tier heir in Augustus' will. Drusus' elevation to leading political deputy and colleague was confirmed in the text of the SCCPP, dated to the year 20 CE.⁶⁸⁰ This was the obvious choice in light of his age and experience. The Caesar shared the consulship with Drusus II in 21 CE. Then, in 22 CE, Tiberius requested that the senate grant Drusus II both *imperium proconsulare* and *tribunicia potestas*.⁶⁸¹ What Tiberius did not do was put in place any form of political contingency plan beyond Drusus II. His death in 23 CE left Tiberius without a colleague of the relevant age and experience.⁶⁸²

A parallel existed between the situation after the death of Drusus II and the situation after Tiberius' departure for Rhodes in 6 BCE. In each situation, there was no one of the appropriate age and experience to fill the role of colleague. In 6 BCE, Tiberius, Augustus' leading deputy,

⁶⁷⁹ See sec. 3.7.

⁶⁸⁰ See sec. 3.8.

⁶⁸¹ See sec. 3.10.

⁶⁸² Tiberius did commit Nero and Drusus III to the senate, but there was no substance to their advancement. For this incident, see sec. 4.2.

removed himself from political consideration.⁶⁸³ In response, Augustus chose to accelerate the promotion of the young and inexperienced Gaius Caesar, with the express purpose that he would occupy the position of leading deputy. By contrast, Tiberius offered very little in terms of a political response to the death of Drusus II in 23 CE. He did commend Nero and Drusus III to the senate, but their career advancement was not addressed. Tiberius' decision not to advance the next generation had both short-term and long-term consequences.

An immediate consequence was that the Caesar was left without a leading political deputy, and, more significantly, there was no one from the imperial family with the age or experience to fill that role. This uncertainty created the opportunity for Sejanus to advance his career further by filling the role of leading deputy, albeit in an unofficial capacity. Not only did Sejanus do this, but he also cultivated a close relationship with the Caesar and expanded his own power base. This represented the continuation of a process that had begun before the death of Drusus II, who had expressed his displeasure at the closeness between his father and Sejanus.⁶⁸⁴ In addition, by not advancing Germanicus' sons, Tiberius raised the ire of Agrippina, Germanicus' widow, and the *factio* connected to her. The conflict between Agrippina and Tiberius meant that he was even less inclined to advance Nero and Drusus III, creating further dynastic instability.⁶⁸⁵

Sejanus exploited the existing tensions within the imperial family, tensions that centred on the succession, to further his own career. Sejanus had warned Tiberius of the threat posed by Agrippina's *factio*. This allowed him, in his capacity as prefect of the guard, to undermine this group, which he did through a series of treason trials in the mid 20s CE. These prosecutions, which, in reality, favoured his own interests, were presented as protecting Tiberius. The Caesar

⁶⁸³ See sec. 2.5.

⁶⁸⁴ See sec. 4.2.

⁶⁸⁵ See sec. 4.6.

evidently took Sejanus' warnings seriously, and this legitimated Sejanus' actions against Germanicus' household.

The long-term consequence of Tiberius' inertia was that, for all the dramatic events reported between the death of Drusus II in 23 CE and that of Tiberius himself in 37 CE, the succession issue remained largely unresolved. Tiberius did not apply the mechanics of succession, specifically political appointments, to the next generation—in this case, Germanicus' eldest son, Nero. This youth was not advanced, despite meeting many of the social criteria for succession. Nero was a member of the family through his descent from Augustus through the maternal line and through his father's adoption into the *gens*. The young man was also married to Tiberius' granddaughter, Julia, and was, by the terms of Augustus' will, the next most senior heir.

Indeed, no member of the imperial family was raised politically during those years. Nero and his younger brother, Drusus III, were the only viable candidates, since both Gemellus and Caligula were too young. One possible explanation for Tiberius' decision not to advance the younger generation was that he already had a colleague: Sejanus. While Sejanus lived, Tiberius neglected to advance anyone. Rather, he implicitly allowed Sejanus to fill the void that the death of Drusus II had left.

Our focus is the result of Tiberius' succession inertia. The fact that Drusus II was not replaced gave Sejanus, with his age, experience and proximity to Tiberius, the opportunity to fill the void and further prove himself as a loyal servant. Sejanus appears to have been quite confident in his relationship with Tiberius by 25 CE, confidence that Tiberius seems to have shared. When the Caesar replied to Sejanus' request to marry Livilla, despite tacitly denying the request, he did hint at greater plans for Sejanus' future.⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸⁶ See sec. 4.4.

Since the time of Augustus, the succession had been subject to what the *princeps* called cruel fate (*atrox fortuna*). Augustus was forced to be pragmatic in his approach to the succession. This led to the favouring of men with relevant experience rather than younger intended heirs. Following Germanicus' death, Tiberius had raised Drusus II (33 years of age in 19 CE) to take his place, rather than relying on Germanicus' sons, Nero and Drusus III (respectively, 13 and 12 when their father died). The rise of Drusus II shows that age and experience (on the battlefield and in positions of government) were given priority over strict linear succession.⁶⁸⁷ This highlights a critical aspect of how Sejanus could rise to such prominence. The fact that Tiberius did not integrate Nero and Drusus III into the administration in the years 23–30 CE represented a deviation from Augustus' policy regarding the succession. The generation gap that this created, combined with the principle of pragmatism, were important elements in Sejanus' ascendancy.

The rise of men of appropriate ability and age in preference to younger intended heirs adds another aspect to Sejanus' ascent. Tiberius, much like Agrippa before him, had served Augustus, and by extension the state, for decades. It was only *after* these decades of service that that these men received independent commands and a share of Augustus' legal powers. This leads to the conclusion that these ascendancies were *earned*. The careers and ascendancies of both Tiberius and Agrippa showed that, for all Augustus' dynastic intentions, and even accounting for them being married or adopted into his family, the principate was a system wherein loyalty and service often overlapped with familial connections. This overlap will inform our assessment of Sejanus' viability as a successor to Tiberius.

We have, to this point, considered Augustus' mechanics of succession and noted Tiberius' deference to them in his own reign. Tiberius did show, however, that he was willing to depart

⁶⁸⁷ Tiberius' rise following the death of Agrippa in 12 BCE is precedent for this. See sec. 2.4.

from customary practice by applying an additional element. At various points in his reign, he shared the consulship with those he considered his leading deputies and successors: Germanicus in 18 CE and Drusus in 21 CE.⁶⁸⁸ Sejanus' consulship with Tiberius in 31 CE must be assessed in light of this precedent.

Since the beginning of his reign, Tiberius had been searching for a colleague. Initially, he had tried to integrate the senate into the administration, seeking assistance from one or more of their number. He had then sought assistance from Germanicus and Drusus II, members of the Julio-Claudian family who were of age and had the relevant experience. Such a group or individual would be someone to help him with or, ideally, bear many of his duties for him. On his *dies imperii*, he had attempted to refuse the powers that were being confirmed by the senate, seemingly seeing the transition period following the death of Augustus as a chance to avoid ruling on his own.⁶⁸⁹ When it became clear that this was not going to happen, Tiberius, as Tacitus says, stopped objecting to his inevitable role, which he only ever saw as temporary. Even though he did integrate Germanicus, and then Drusus II, into the administration, they were of limited assistance to him with his duties in the city, since their primary roles were military rather than civil.⁶⁹⁰ This meant that Tiberius bore what he saw as the burden of day-to-day administration in these years. This can only have augmented his frustration with public life, which events in the years 19 to 23 CE would make even worse.

The death of Germanicus in 19 CE resulted in Drusus II being brought to the fore, and he shared a consulship with Tiberius in 21 CE. This term in office clearly marked Drusus as Tiberius' colleague. Tiberius was largely absent from the city during their shared tenure. This granted Drusus independent administrative experience. His ascendancy was confirmed by the

⁶⁸⁸ See sec. 3.9.

⁶⁸⁹ See sec. 3.3.

⁶⁹⁰ See sec. 3.4 and sec. 3.5.

simultaneous granting of *imperium proconsulare* and *tribunicia potestas*.⁶⁹¹ Drusus had been granted a share in Tiberius' quasi-constitutional powers, and Tiberius may have hoped that his son would relieve him of his duties. We see, in these incidents, examples of Tiberius' reluctant attitude towards sole dispensation of *imperium* and *potestas* and administration of the duties associated with the imperial position, as well as his desire to find a capable and loyal colleague to share his duties. This attitude is important when we consider Sejanus' role in the years 23 to 30 CE.

Sejanus' official role in 23 CE was, naturally, integral to ensuring the physical safety of the incumbent Caesar; however, in relation to the governance of the *res publica*, he was nothing more than that of prefect of the praetorian guard. As we have seen, he had been taking steps since 23 CE to raise his political profile, principally through patronage, a function of his relationship with Tiberius.⁶⁹² In 25 CE, two years after the death of Drusus II, Sejanus sought to augment this relationship by petitioning to become a member of the imperial family by marrying Drusus II's widow, Livilla.⁶⁹³ We have already noted the importance of marriage into the imperial family as one of the mechanisms of succession. Marriage to Livilla would have made Sejanus the stepfather, with the associated *patria potestas*, to her son, Gemellus, a direct descendant of Tiberius. At the time, Sejanus may have thought that such a role was the highest point to which he could aspire.

Gemellus was not politically relevant in 25 CE because Germanicus' sons, Nero and Drusus III, were the next most senior members of Tiberius' family and would have taken precedence in the succession. Germanicus' third son, Caligula, like Gemellus, was too young to be considered politically relevant. We saw in Chapter 4 that Sejanus began a campaign against the

⁶⁹¹ See sec. 3.10.

⁶⁹² See sec. 4.1.

⁶⁹³ See sec. 4.4.

two older boys to discredit them and remove them from political consideration.⁶⁹⁴ It is interesting that Sejanus made no attempt to discredit Caligula along with his older brothers.⁶⁹⁵ As Sejanus continued to acquire honours and, eventually, some of the requisite powers to succeed Tiberius in his own right, he may have disregarded the younger generation as no longer relevant. His thoughts now turned to gaining power in his own right.

When Tiberius left the city in 26 CE to go to Campania and ultimately to Capri, the political void, which had been present since the death of Drusus II in 23 CE, was now clearer than ever before. Sejanus' position in 26 CE as a loyal and trusted servant of Tiberius was bolstered by Sejanus' willingness to risk his life to protect Tiberius from a rockfall when they were in Campania.⁶⁹⁶ Tacitus is explicit when he says that this selfless act made Tiberius trust Sejanus' advice more than ever, even when it was detrimental. Sejanus used this trust to full advantage and turned his attention directly to Germanicus' line.⁶⁹⁷

Sejanus attacked Agrippina, her children and her associates very soon after his request to marry Livilla. If we recall the Caesar's response, he noted two obstacles to the marriage. The first was Agrippina and her circle, and the second was Sejanus' own equestrian rank.⁶⁹⁸ Tiberius indicated that when the time was right he would further Sejanus' career, thus resolving the issue of Sejanus' rank. This would remove one of the obstacles to the marriage.

To resolve the second issue, that of Agrippina and her circle, Sejanus had already acted against her adherents and would eventually move against Agrippina herself. Such attacks initially targeted Nero, the heir presumptive, which further destabilised the succession. We have seen that Sejanus had suborned Drusus III as part of his attack against Nero. Sejanus would later

⁶⁹⁴ See sec. 4.6.

⁶⁹⁵ For the details of Caligula's early life, see sec. 4.12a & 4.12b.

⁶⁹⁶ See sec. 4.5.

⁶⁹⁷ See sec. 4.6.

⁶⁹⁸ See sec. 4.4.

have charges brought against Drusus also, to complete the political destruction of Germanicus' family, apart from Caligula.

Despite these attacks against his family, Tiberius did not object to the continued growth of Sejanus' importance. This importance manifested in Sejanus being voted many honours that linked him ever more closely to Tiberius, including his and Tiberius' images being grouped together in what Edmondson calls imperial ritual under the principate.⁶⁹⁹ Letters were also sent to Capri, begging not only Tiberius, but also Sejanus, to return to the city. These incidents illustrate how in the late 20s and early 30s CE Tiberius and Sejanus had become linked together in the eyes of the senatorial order and the wider Roman constituency. This development strongly suggests that the two were increasingly viewed as colleagues. Tiberius was seemingly correct when he observed that Sejanus had long ago ceased to be an eques, at least in the eyes of the senators.⁷⁰⁰ In terms of his official career, Sejanus *was* no more than an eques, because he had not yet held a magistracy. However, from the point of appearances, and given the honours that had been voted to Sejanus that linked him with Tiberius, Sejanus was clearly considered to be more than an eques.

We have seen Sejanus initiate investigations against Nero and Agrippina, which ultimately led to their exile. Tacitus attributes the timing of this strategic intervention to the communication of a letter from Tiberius, which was read in the senate after Augusta's death in 29 CE. The sources differ in their chronological placement of this letter.⁷⁰¹ Regardless of the details, Nero was removed from political consideration, leaving Drusus III as the most senior member of Tiberius' household. Once again, the Caesar made no attempt to advance the next heir. This, as suggested above, may have been a consequence of Sejanus' position; Tiberius did not see the

⁶⁹⁹ See sec. 4.10.

⁷⁰⁰ See sec. 4.4.

⁷⁰¹ See sec. 4.12.

need to advance Drusus III.⁷⁰² Meanwhile the senate continued to honour Sejanus and link him ever more closely with Tiberius.

The Caesar became directly involved in this process of honouring Sejanus when, in the summer of 30 CE, he recommended Sejanus for the consulship of 31 CE, with Tiberius himself as his colleague.⁷⁰³ Given the precedents of Germanicus and Drusus II, both of whom shared the consulship with Tiberius, and were considered his leading deputies and presumed successors, the significance of this term in office for Sejanus cannot be overstated.

At this point, early in the year 30 CE, Sejanus had been Tiberius' trusted confidant for more than a decade. The Caesar had relied on Sejanus as his enforcer against perceived threats, and since 26 CE, Sejanus had been with Tiberius on Capri. Despite his absence from the city, Sejanus had been able to discredit Agrippina and remove her son, the heir presumptive, from political consideration. Sejanus had also received official honours, including the public recognition of his birthday.⁷⁰⁴ This period also provides the true context for Tiberius labelling Sejanus as his *socius laborum*.⁷⁰⁵ At this point, Sejanus was also betrothed to an imperial woman. These privileges placed him at the height of both his social and political influence. The only thing that he lacked was a share in the Caesar's legal powers, which had been granted to those considered colleagues and successors in both Augustus' and Tiberius' reign.

However, for reasons that remain maddeningly unclear, Tiberius began to become suspicious of Sejanus. Dio, the principal source for this period, suggests that Tiberius' recommendation of Sejanus for the consulship was part of his scheme to undermine and eventually remove Sejanus. In Chapter 4, we questioned this suggestion, based on Dio's contempt for Sejanus as an eques

⁷⁰² See sec. 4.2.

⁷⁰³ See sec. 4.11.

⁷⁰⁴ Dio Cass., 58.2.7.

⁷⁰⁵ Tacitus uses this term under the year 23 CE. See Tac., *Ann.* 4.2.

and the fact that Dio minimised Tiberius' power as Caesar, in particular his reluctance to take decisive action.⁷⁰⁶

On 1 January 31 CE, then, Sejanus was the consular colleague of the Caesar, a position previously held only by Germanicus and Drusus II, each of whom was considered Tiberius' leading political deputy and presumed successor at the time. This term in office led to a grant of *imperium proconsulare* for Sejanus.⁷⁰⁷ To be sufficiently empowered to succeed Tiberius, Sejanus lacked nothing but a grant of *tribunicia potestas*. We saw in Chapter 4 that, prior to his entering the Chamber on 18 October, Sejanus was assured that he would be granted this power.⁷⁰⁸ Thus, his position seemed secure on the very day of his spectacular fall. These are the facts of Sejanus' position at the time of his fall.

The nature of the guard duty of the *princeps* (*statio principis*) had initially compelled Augustus to use his legal powers, bolstered by a personal connection to himself, to demarcate his colleagues and eventually set in place a wider succession framework. Thus, the *powers a man received*, rather than his birth, defined the position of colleague. In the cases of Agrippa, Tiberius and Drusus II, all of whom received both *imperium proconsulare* and *tribunicia potestas*, there was no doubt that if anything were to befall the Caesar they served they would be sufficiently empowered to take his place. Even though these men were all of high birth, it was *not* their birth but their legal powers that would have made it possible for them to succeed their Caesar.

Such an approach to the definition of imperial colleague allows us to jettison the class-based prejudices of the senatorial sources and assess objectively those historical data preserved by the primary sources. Sejanus had not only received a partial share of the Caesar's legal powers, but

⁷⁰⁶ See sec. 4.12.

⁷⁰⁷ See sec. 4.14.

⁷⁰⁸ See sec. 4.16.

he had also been granted in the shared consulship that unique privilege that Tiberius had established to demarcate his colleagues. If we add to this the personal connection to Tiberius that resulted from Sejanus' marriage into the family, and the links in ritual and ceremony, Sejanus was surely in a position of great strength according to the mechanics of succession that we have discussed.

Sejanus' filling of the role once occupied by Germanicus and Drusus II was, at least until 30 CE, unofficial. If Tiberius had wished to make Sejanus' position official, he could have followed Augustan precedent and adopted Sejanus. However, any decision by Tiberius to adopt a man from either of the court factions, to say nothing of an outsider such as Sejanus, would have carried political consequences. Tiberius had always shown that he was acutely aware of how others would react to his decisions, and this partially explains his inertia when it came to taking any action to secure the succession as Augustus had done. This resulted in the void left by the death of Drusus II not being filled by anyone, which facilitated the rise of Sejanus.

We now consider Sejanus' career in light of the mechanics of succession as we have defined them across the reigns of both Augustus and Tiberius. Specifically, we will consider whether he was ever in a position to succeed Tiberius. Precedent, both republican and Augustan, directed Tiberius' early actions when it came to the succession. Tiberius did add to the mechanics of succession, in the form of the shared consulship. How the succession was to proceed under Tiberius—that is, the linear hierarchy—had been established before he even assumed power, through the provisions of Augustus' will: Germanicus and Drusus II were named as second-tier heirs, with the former being the majority stakeholder and the latter the minority. Thus, Drusus II's line would only become politically relevant if Germanicus' line were removed from consideration. When this hierarchy broke down following the death of Drusus II, Tiberius (as Augustus had been) became the final arbiter of the succession. Tiberius' unwillingness to advance the next generation made possible the rise of a man such as Sejanus.

In the early years of Tiberius' reign, the order of succession was established beyond doubt. Tiberius applied the mechanics of succession to his two leading deputies, Germanicus and Drusus II. Both men received grants of *imperium proconsulare* and were sent into the field. In addition, both were members of the imperial house. Drusus II was Tiberius' natural son, and Germanicus was his adopted son and biological nephew. Both were married to imperial women: Drusus II to Germanicus' sister, Livilla, and Germanicus to Agrippina, the granddaughter of Augustus. The young men had shared the consulship with Tiberius, each one at a time when he was clearly the leading deputy of the Caesar. This sharing of the chief magistracy of the Republic represents Tiberius' innovation when it came to the succession: indeed, it was his unique method of demarcating his colleagues. The significance of Sejanus sharing the consulship with Tiberius, receiving *imperium proconsulare* and being betrothed to an imperial woman is of critical importance: he was granted identical privileges to the men who had been clearly marked out as Tiberius' leading political deputies.

In the course of this study, we have focused on the mechanics of succession under Augustus and Tiberius and applied them to Sejanus. This legal approach necessitates that we base our assessment on the available historical data and set aside the senatorial historians' class-based dismissal of Sejanus. We have defined the position of colleague in terms of the legal powers a man received and his connection to the imperial house, rather than in terms of his birth. From the earliest days of his reign, Augustus had indicated his preference to keep power within his family to maintain the stability that his rule had established. That said, birthright succession was not politically feasible, hence Augustus' development of the mechanics of succession. Even the potential heirs who were part of his family, such as Gaius Caesar, still had to be legitimised with versions of the Caesar's own powers. A man, regardless of his birth, who was connected to the imperial family and who had been sufficiently empowered would have possessed the legal authority to take over from his Caesar.

The model of succession we have advanced, with its focus on quasi-constitutional powers and familial connections, has implications for the study of future principates. The series of events in the final four years of Claudius' principate (50–54 CE) that led to Nero's succeeding Claudius largely conforms to this pattern. Nero had been married to Claudius' daughter, Octavia, he had prematurely donned the *toga virilis*, and he had received *imperium proconsulare*. Claudius had also adopted him.⁷⁰⁹

If we consider the succession of Trajan to Nerva in 97 CE, we see the mechanics of succession used once again. Nerva had adopted Trajan following trouble among the praetorians over Nerva's refusal to reveal Domitian's assassins.⁷¹⁰ In addition, the Augustan History reports that Hadrian was sent to Lower Germany, where Trajan was governor, to extend the army's congratulations to him, which we may interpret as his acclamation as emperor, a sign of *imperium proconsulare*. Further evidence for this power is the fact that Hadrian was then sent, presumably by Trajan, to Upper Germany. If we recall that when Agrippa sent his legates into Syria in the 20s BCE we inferred that his *imperium* was independent given that a representative of someone else's *imperium* could not send *legati* anywhere. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Trajan, too, possessed independent *imperium*.⁷¹¹

The mechanics of succession, then, informed the way successors were empowered for decades to come. The determining factor in appointing a successor was not birthright; rather, it rested on legal powers and familial connections. The way the mechanics of succession were applied proved to be fluid, as individual *principes* adapted to political circumstances. We see this in the cases of both Claudius and Nerva, where the mechanics were manipulated to centre the future

⁷⁰⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 12.41; Dio Cass., 61.32.1–2. Note the centrality of adoption, and the broader pool of heirs it implies, to Galba's attempt to perpetuate his regime in 69 CE. See Tac., *Hist.* 1.15–16.

⁷¹⁰ Dio Cass., 68.3.4.

⁷¹¹ SHA *Hadr.* 1.5.

of the regime around a particular candidate, who was, in both cases, the choice of the incumbent. The precedent for such actions on the part of future *principes* lies in the reign of Tiberius and his use of the mechanics of succession to promote Sejanus.

By October of 31 CE, Sejanus had served Tiberius diligently for well over a decade. He had fulfilled the role of colleague, in both administrative and personal matters, which Tiberius had sought from the start of his reign. The senate had honoured Sejanus by linking him with Tiberius in ritual. Sejanus was also betrothed to an imperial woman and was thus a member of the imperial family. He had shared the consulship with Tiberius. Coins had been struck featuring dedicatory inscriptions to both Sejanus and Tiberius to commemorate this event. Sejanus had received a partial share of the Caesar's own powers in the form of *imperium proconsulare*. In the months leading up to his fall, it was widely believed that Sejanus would be granted *tribunicia potestas*. The legal powers and familial connection represented critical elements of the mechanics of succession that both Augustus and Tiberius had used to designate their chosen successors.

This research has examined the evolving mechanics of succession under Augustus and Tiberius and used these to define the social and political position of successor in those two reigns. It has considered the career of Sejanus against these mechanics, setting his social rank aside and taking a purely legalistic approach. This research has demonstrated the many parallels that existed between the career of Sejanus under Tiberius and men previously identified as successors. Sejanus, then, met the criteria established by Augustus and Tiberius in demarcating their successors. This strongly suggests that, in the year 31 CE, Sejanus was Tiberius' successor.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Julio-Claudian Family Tree

