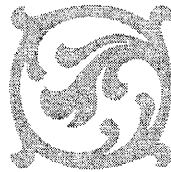


THE ROMANS



From Village to Empire

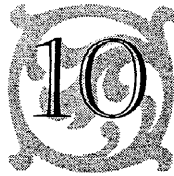
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THE EARLY PRINCIPATE

(A.D. 14–69)

*The Julio-Claudians, the Civil War of 68–69,
and Life in the Early Empire*

SOURCES

Most literary sources for this chapter center on members of the imperial family, now called the Julio-Claudians because of their relation by blood or adoption either to Augustus, who was adopted into the Julian family by Julius Caesar's will, or to Livia, whose sons had been born into the Claudian family (see Chapter Nine). Reading the lively portrayals of political manipulation and human frailty in the biographies of Suetonius, the *Annals* of Tacitus, and Cassius Dio's *History*, it is easy to forget the rest of the Roman world. Tacitus' *Histories*—which begins at Nero's death, covers the civil war of 68–69, and breaks off in 70 while discussing the Germano-Gallic revolt of Civilis (see Chapter Eleven)—similarly tends to focus on Rome's elite. Plutarch wrote biographies of Galba and Otho, two of the contenders in 68–69, and his information largely corresponds with that preserved by Tacitus and Cassius Dio. The latter's history survives primarily in abbreviated or excerpted form after 46; we cannot identify the presumed common source. Taking its lead from our literary sources, therefore, the first part of this chapter offers a chronological account of civil government and military affairs in the early Principate.

Information about wider social history and matters outside of Rome—the subject of the chapter's second half—comes from nonhistorical literature, such as the poems of Ovid (see Chapter Nine). In addition, papyri, coins, and archeological material—including silverwork, tombstones, and historical reliefs, as well as more mundane pottery and glass—provide vivid details overlooked by the authors. Inscriptions supply valuable insights into laws and procedures in Rome and

other communities (see Box 10.1, which gives part of the senatorial decree concerning the elder Gnaeus Piso). *Acts of the Apostles* offers a fascinating glimpse into the incipient Christian religion in Judaea and the eastern Mediterranean; Jewish life is reported in the *Jewish Antiquities* and the *Jewish War*, both by Josephus. Philo, a Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, documents Jewish-Greek tensions there, as well as attempts made from Egypt to engage the attention of the Princeps, in this case Gaius. Between them, the surviving materials illustrate many changes throughout the Roman world, including growing prosperity for the political elite in cities.

THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN EMPERORS: CIVIL GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY CONCERNS

The relations between each emperor and his subjects encompassed dealings with the highest orders, that is, senators and *equites*, and with the masses comprising the populace of Rome itself and Roman subjects elsewhere. Julius Caesar's assassination had revealed how dangerous it was for a Roman ruler to shame or humiliate his supposed peers in any way. Augustus had deliberately opted to portray himself as a princeps who was *primus inter pares*, first among equals, rather than as *rex* or *dictator*, thus emphasizing civil rather than military power.

The personal tone of his relationships with individuals had disguised or mitigated his transformation of Rome's institutions; further, the civil upheavals of the end of the Republic had brought many new men into the upper orders. Through Augustus' genius, charm, and diplomacy, not to mention his deceitfulness and bribery, they had been convinced to work with him for the good of the state. Congeniality and accessibility (*comitas, civilitas*) were among the imperial virtues. Augustus' immediate successors came from his extended family so that, although the principle was never enunciated, a single dynasty ran the Roman empire from 14 to 68. Yet Augustus' virtues were not genetic. The political difficulties of his successors usually stemmed from neglecting civil consensus and from alienating Rome's traditional political and military elite.

Equally significant for success or failure was the emperor's relationship to the army and Rome's military traditions. The yearly oaths of allegiance to the Princeps and imperial family were by no means the armed forces' only ties to the imperial house. The feast days of deified emperors and empresses—first Augustus; next, ephemerally, Gaius' sister Drusilla; then Livia and Claudius—were holidays for the camps. The emperor was commander-in-chief of all armed forces by virtue of his *maius imperium*. Restriction of the right of a full triumph to him or a member of his family after 19 B.C. underlines his military preeminence. Men outside the imperial house could and did still receive "triumphal ornaments," which included some of the symbols of a triumph, but not the right to enter the city in a triumphal procession. Alternatively, they could be awarded an "ovation," a procession in which

the victorious general entered the city on foot or on horseback rather than in a triumphal chariot. But neither of these accolades was as impressive as the traditional triumph.

The state's military traditions meant more than armed men loyal to Rome. As its history amply confirms, the military and imperial growth were two of Republican Rome's key elements. Social, political, and religious rituals, as well as the economy, sustained Rome's militarism at the same time as they depended on it. But the political and social turmoil of the last century of the Republic, as well as the limited technology and communications of the time, brought into question Rome's indefinite expansion. Augustus is said to have advised in his will that Rome be kept within its boundaries. Borders are conceptual rather than real,



Figure 10.1 "Sword of Tiberius." This silver relief—from a commemorative scabbard found in Germany, and now in the British Museum—depicts a young general in military costume presenting a small, winged statuette of Victory to an emperor, enthroned and represented as Jupiter. A shield inscribed *Felicitas Tiberi* ("the Good Fortune of Tiberius") leans against the throne. The gods *Mars Ultor* and *Victory* flank the two mortals, and *Victory* carries a shield inscribed *Vic(toria) Aug(usti)* ("the Victory of Augustus"). The scene has been interpreted as Tiberius offering to Augustus a victory that he gained in the Alps in 16–15 B.C., but it is perhaps better to see it as Germanicus offering to Tiberius his German victory of A.D. 14–16/17. In either case, the smaller stature of the general, his deferential gesture, and the iconography of the emperor as Jupiter, all emphasize the primacy of the Princeps as supreme commander-in-chief. The difficulties in identification highlight the similarities marking portrayals of Augustus and the Julio-Claudians.

however, and the frontier was permeable everywhere, especially in the north and east. Moreover, borders were constantly renegotiated in Rome's vital yet shifting treaties with kings at its edges, most notably with the kingdom of Armenia that separated the Romans and their most organized enemy, the Parthians. The fifty-four years of Julio-Claudian power after Augustus' death witnessed different ways of dealing with the army and with the ideological and practical ramifications of militarism and its renunciation. Military revolts in 14 strikingly underscored the necessity of military support for imperial power. At the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, this truth was revealed again by the revolt of Julius Civilis and the wider military dissatisfaction of 68.

TIBERIUS (14–37)

Although at Augustus' death in 14 Tiberius hesitated to don the mantle of ruler, declaring his reluctance and inadequacy before the senate, he immediately assumed control of the Praetorian Guard; it was imperative that someone take this step. His authority as Augustus' heir also stemmed clearly from his tribunician power, his adoption by Augustus, and Augustus' bequest to him of most of his estate as well as the name Augustus. Yet Rome's armies in Pannonia and on the German border saw Augustus' death as an opportunity to mutiny. They clamored for higher pay, more humane treatment, fixed terms of enlistment, and no recalls to service. Tiberius sent his own son Drusus the Younger to Pannonia, and dispatched to Germany his nephew and adopted son Germanicus. The revolts were quelled primarily by capitulation to the soldiers' demands, which were reasonable enough. Among other concessions, legionary service was fixed at twenty years, although it was later restored to twenty-five—a saving to the state, since many fewer men would survive to receive their discharge bonus.

Tiberius had spent much of his adult life away from Rome before becoming Princeps, and he did not have many personal friends in the city. After an auspicious start in public life at Rome itself, he had then spent many years elsewhere on military service. His brilliant exploits during this period (see Map 9.2) have been obscured by the hatred he later aroused among senators, the authors of most Roman histories. In 20 B.C. he had advanced into Armenia in a show of force against the Parthians; in 15–14 he had campaigned in the Alps to secure Raetia and Noricum; from 12 to 9 he had fought insurgent tribes in Illyricum; and from 9 to 7 B.C., as well as again from A.D. 4 to 6, he had led strikes against Germanic tribes. From 6 to 9, he was again in Illyricum to take command during the bloody Dalmatian-Pannonian revolt, which was quelled only by the virtual extirpation of the tribes south of the Dravus River (modern Drava). From 6 B.C. to A.D. 2, however, he had withdrawn to the Aegean island of Rhodes. His eight-year stay there allowed him to deepen philosophical, astrological, and other intellectual interests, and to escape his failed marriage to Julia (see Chapter Nine).

Largely absent from Rome itself, therefore, for the thirty years between his twenties and his fifties, Tiberius had never developed the easy familiarity with his peers that Augustus enjoyed. His personality only aggravated the situation: From all accounts he seems to have been a secretive, even suspicious soul, reticent, introspective, and cautious. He did have some trusted senatorial and equestrian confidants and friends, such as Gaius Sallustius Crispus (related to the historian Sallust), to whom he turned for advice. But he was made uneasy by the blunders that individual senators committed when dealing with him. Unused to Tiberius, and unsure of how far he really wanted to be treated as an equal in his role as Princeps, at times they spoke too familiarly and apparently disrespectfully, while at other times they seemed sycophantic. Tiberius' interactions with senators only worsened as treason (*maiestas*) trials increased during his rule. By this date—although no formal enactment was ever issued—charges of treason could be made on the grounds of conspiracy against the Princeps' life, libel and slander against him, or adultery with a member of the imperial family; those laying successful charges received a portion of the convicted person's estate.

Tiberius' general distrust, combined with his military background, led him to rely on the Praetorian Guard. Between 19 and 23 he built them a huge barracks at the edge of Rome itself (see Map 11.3). This ensured that all future emperors would have a personal bodyguard there, and over the next two centuries these troops did often influence the choice of emperors. Gaius, Claudius, Otho, and Didius Julianus all came to power through their support; Septimius Severus, however, broke their grip in 193. The prominence of these special troops, underscoring the military basis of imperial power, subverted the value of civil consensus and contributed to the difficulties of Tiberius' Principate. By the early 20s, Lucius Aelius Sejanus was sole Praetorian Prefect, and he exploited Tiberius' trust and confidence to advance himself. Treason trials proliferated. In 23, Sejanus may even have masterminded the death of Tiberius' own son, Drusus the Younger. Sejanus' influence increased after Tiberius' move to Capri in 26, since thereafter it was he who controlled communications with the Princeps. Although Sejanus' unscrupulous intrigues finally brought about his own denunciation and execution in 31, Tiberius looked at the individual and not the weakness of the system. The equally dissembling Quintus Sutorius Macro then took over as Praetorian Prefect, restricting access to the Princeps just as closely as had Sejanus.

Despite his early military successes and the construction projects in Rome sponsored by him or in his honor—such as the Porticus of Livia which he and his mother Livia dedicated in 7 B.C.—Tiberius never developed a close relationship with Rome's populace. The popularity once enjoyed by Gaius and Lucius was replaced at the beginning of Tiberius' rule by even more fervent approval for Germanicus, the son of Tiberius' deceased younger brother Drusus. A vivid impression of the public outcry at Germanicus' premature death is offered by a recently discovered senatorial decree concerning the elder Gnaeus Piso (see Box 10.1). As Princeps, Tiberius proved generally apathetic about providing Rome

with monuments and amenities; other than the Praetorian barracks, he sponsored only the Temple of the Deified Augustus (which has yet to be located) and a new stage for Pompey's theater. His restraint may have stemmed from fiscal concern, since maintaining the pace of building and other expenditure set by Augustus would have beggared the treasury; even so, the change marked an unwelcome break with Augustan precedent. Tiberius did respond quickly to public calamity, yet he chose not to highlight his generosity; for instance, he is the only Princeps not to assume the honorific title *Pater Patriae*. When twelve cities in Asia were devastated by an earthquake in 17, he remitted taxes and gave other aid, perhaps even sending architects to the province. In 33 he lent 100 million sesterces at low interest to defaulting debtors, and in 37 he spent another 100 million sesterces to rebuild the houses and apartment blocks destroyed by a fire on Rome's Aventine Hill. Yet none of this liberality improved his reputation.

Some of Tiberius' decisions must have seemed harsh, as when a scandal induced him to have priests of Isis crucified, or when he deported 4,000 Jews from Rome to Sardinia (both in 19). We have no way of knowing how Rome's citizens reacted to the transfer of consular and praetorian elections from the Centuriate assembly to the senate in 14. By this time, however, the Roman populace was accustomed to communicating its likes and dislikes at gladiatorial games and other public spectacles in the Forum Romanum and similar public spaces. Augustus had encouraged this behavior by his constant attendance at public gatherings, by the creation of new public spaces such as the Forum Augustum, and by the embellishment of traditional gathering spots like the Forum Romanum and the Saepta Julia (both formerly voting sites). In contrast, Tiberius rarely attended public games, and he had actors expelled from Italy in 23, and the number of gladiators limited. After twelve years as Princeps, in 26 he moved to the island of Capreae (modern Capri) in the Bay of Naples. He never returned to Rome, not even for the public funeral of his mother, Livia, in 29. His absence meant that he had no direct contact with anyone there, and his relationships with both the elite and the populace remained at a low ebb to his death in 37.

Most of Tiberius' energies went to military and administrative matters. In 14, after Germanicus had quelled the uprising of the troops stationed in Germany, Tiberius ordered him to go on the offensive along and beyond the Rhine. These strikes against the Germans from 14 to 16–17 were ostensibly to avenge the great disaster of 9, when the Germans had cut down Varus' three legions in the Teutoburg Forest; but they also suggest Rome's customary use of external war to encourage internal harmony. Germanicus did not succeed in establishing a new border north of the earlier one at the Rhine, and Tiberius recalled him in 16–17. After a great triumph in Rome, he next sent the young general east with *maius imperium* (but subordinate to his own), since the Parthian king had just expelled the Roman nominee from the throne of Armenia. Amid his dealings with Armenia, the newly organized province of Cappadocia, and the recently annexed territory of Com-magene, Germanicus visited famous sights. Egypt was among them, although

Augustus had declared this province off-limits to senators without express imperial permission. Then, in 19, Germanicus sickened mysteriously and died, allegedly poisoned by Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso the Elder, the governor of Syria, who had quarreled repeatedly with him.

To display Rome's military might, Tiberius also turned to his own son Drusus, two years younger than Germanicus, as well as to other men of less renown. It was Drusus the Younger who was dispatched to the rebellious legions in Pannonia in 14. Upon returning to Rome he held a consulship in 15, then from 17 to 20 served in Illyricum, another area of Tiberius' own early successes. The progression of honors that Drusus continued to receive—a triumph when he returned to Rome in 20, a second consulship in 21, and the grant of tribunician power in 22—signify Tiberius' preference for the military in his conception of the Principate. But Drusus' premature death in 23, allegedly by poison at Sejanus' agency, ended his career. Tiberius also relied on men who were not his relatives. He entrusted to

BOX 10.1: Senatorial Decree Concerning the Elder Gnaeus Piso

In 20, the year after Germanicus' death, Piso and his associates were tried in the senate. Even though Piso committed suicide before his formal condemnation, the senate still published its final verdict and recommendations. As the inscribed copies of these measures state, it was decided that: "this decree of the senate, inscribed in bronze, be posted in the most frequented city of every province and in the most frequented place of that city; and likewise . . . it should be posted in the winter quarters of each legion near the standards" (lines 170–72). The document is fascinating in many particulars. The one passage reproduced here illuminates the dynamics between Princeps and senate:

Whereas Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the deified Augustus . . . referred to the senate for decision: how the case of the elder Gnaeus Piso had seemed, and whether he seemed to have taken his life with due cause, and . . . what the senate's judgment was concerning Visellius Karus and Sempronius Bassus, members of the elder Gnaeus Piso's staff, CONCERNING THESE MATTERS THEY DECREED AS FOLLOWS: THAT the senate and Roman people, before all else, expressed gratitude to the immortal gods because they did not allow the tranquility of the present state of the Republic—than which nothing better can be desired, and which it has fallen to our lot to enjoy by the favor of our Princeps—to be disturbed by the wicked plans of the elder Gnaeus Piso; then to Tiberius Caesar Augustus, their own Princeps, because he made available to the senate everything necessary for seeking out the truth; and THAT the senate admired his fairness and forbearance on this account also, because, although the crimes of the elder Gnaeus Piso are most manifest and Piso himself had exacted punishment from himself, nonetheless he wanted Piso's case to be tried, . . . (lines 4–20, excerpted from the translation by Cynthia Damon in *American Journal of Philology* 120.1 [1999], pp. 15–17).

Marcus Furius Camillus, governor of Africa in 17, the suppression of a chieftain's rising; in 22 renewed disturbances there were tackled by Quintus Junius Blaesus, the uncle of Sejanus. In 21 Gaius Silius and other generals suppressed a rebellion in Gaul. Problems in Thrace in the early 20s were finally resolved by Gaius Poppaeus Sabinus (grandfather of Poppaea, the later wife of Nero), who received triumphal ornaments for his success. Altogether, the number of commanders employed, as well as the readiness with which Tiberius authorized the use of force, demonstrated Rome's military preparedness and the emperor's willingness to associate others with himself in the empire's defense.

Tiberius also monitored the activities of provincial governors closely. Ironically, his habit of extending the tenure of good governors for more than the customary single year may have discredited him at Rome: Some men who had hoped for such a position possibly felt deprived of it by this practice. His death at the age of seventy-seven in 37 was generally welcomed in Rome itself. His standing in the provinces is harder to gauge. As Princeps he neither traveled through the empire nor, after the death of his son Drusus the Younger in 23, did he send family members out of Italy. Though this lack of mobility prudently spared communities the enormous costs of hosting an imperial visit, at the same time it significantly diminished opportunities for provincials to feel a personal link with the Princeps. Yet his rule did generally better the empire. How perceptible such benefits were, however, is hard for us to discern.

GAIUS (CALIGULA) (37–41)

Tiberius' grandnephew and successor Gaius is known by the nickname Caligula given him for the miniature military boots (*caliga*) that he wore as a toddler when he lived in military camps with his parents, Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder. He had a glorious lineage, directly descended from Augustus through his mother and from Livia through his father; he advertised this ancestry when, aged only seventeen, he gave a public funeral oration for his grandmother Livia. But he had a difficult childhood, and suffered severe bouts of epilepsy throughout his life. When he was seven, his father died amidst malicious rumors; as a teenager, he saw the exile and execution of his mother and brothers voted by the senate under apparent pressure from Tiberius. When eighteen he was summoned to Capri, where his companions were an ill-assorted group—his cousin, Tiberius' young grandson Tiberius Gemellus; royal hostages from Rome's bordering states; astrologers; and Tiberius himself, by then in his seventies. Gaius had no familiarity with his peers from the senatorial and equestrian orders, and although he was elected pontifex in 31 and quaestor in 33, he was not permitted to fulfill the duties of either position.

At Tiberius' death the Praetorians' favor for Gaius, rather than for Tiberius' grandson Tiberius Gemellus (made coheir by Tiberius), seemed suspicious to