

THE JULIO-CLAUDIANS & THE ROMAN EMPIRE

AD 14 - 69

by Ken Webb

Here it is: the factual detail, the historiography, revision exercises and advice on how to write HSC essays on The Julio-Claudians and the Roman Empire AD 14-69



eBook

"Everything you wanted to know about The Julio-Claudians and the Roman Empire AD 14-69, but were afraid to ask."

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by Ken Webb M.A. (Oxon), C.Ed

*“Everything you wanted to know about The Julio-Claudians
and the Roman Empire AD 14-69, but were afraid to ask.”*

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About the author

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"The Julio-Claudians and the Roman Empire AD 14-69" is one of fourteen titles in the "Everything you wanted to know about... but were afraid to ask" series *written specifically* for the new NSW Modern and Ancient History syllabuses commencing 2018-19. Other titles in this series include:

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Author's note

The purpose of this book – as with all titles in the “Everything you wanted to know about... but were afraid to ask” series – is to make life easy for students and teachers preparing for the HSC examination in Ancient History. It is not intended to be the final word on *The Julio-Claudians and the Roman Empire AD 14-69*; nothing beats wide-reading and going back to the ancient sources!

However, neither teachers nor students always have the time for such luxuries. Teachers have several other classes to worry about, not to mention a growing multitude of administrative and bureaucratic tasks to fulfill. Students have other subjects to study, and may also be burdened with a series of major works. Thus, “Everything you want to know...” steps in to make life easy.

The principal aims of this book are to:

- provide the essential factual detail needed to understand the period;
- provide references to the main ancient written and archaeological sources;
- provide references to major modern written and visual sources;
- provide ideas for approaching the types of questions that can be expected in the HSC examination on The Julio-Claudians and the Roman Empire AD 14-69..

Rationale for the structure of this book

In the Ancient History HSC examination paper, The Julio-Claudians and the Roman Empire AD 14-69 topic appears in Section IV – Historical Periods, Question 32, Option J. Each year there are TWO choices of questions in this option from which students can choose. ¹ HSC questions on this area tend to fall into essentially three types:

1. Some might refer to a **specific emperor**: eg “*To what extent was Claudius a successful emperor?*”
2. Some might refer to a **specific issue across the entire period**: eg “*Why did the relationship between princeps and Senate change during this period?*”
3. Some might link a **specific issue to a specific emperor(s)**: eg “*Compare the administration of the empire during the principates of Claudius and Nero.*”

With this in mind, and following many years of teaching the topic, this book has been structured to examine the period “emperor by emperor”. The emperors are fascinating characters and so this makes the overall topic more fun. Examining the issues across the entire period can be done later and provides a most useful revision exercise. One suggestion is to draw up a giant matrix with the emperors listed down the left hand side and the issues listed across the top. The various boxes can then be filled in. This could be done at the end of the topic or as an on-going exercise. Either way, it is an excellent method of revision.

This arrangement makes it much easier for students (and teachers) to ensure that they are covering the key elements of the topic.

¹ Students are advised to be careful checking past HSC papers. Before 2006, the topics *The Augustan Age* and *The Julian-Claudians* were combined. The Augustan Age 44 BC – AD 14 became a discrete topic only in 2006.

Survey ■ The Geographical Context

The story of Rome is a remarkable one. In the 8th century BC, Rome was nothing more than a small village on the western coast of Italy. By the end of the 1st century AD, the city of Rome controlled an empire that stretched from Britain to the Sahara Desert, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Middle East and southern Russia.

Rome was situated midway along the western coast of the Italian peninsula. It grew along the banks of the river Tiber and around a series of easily-defended hills. The Tiber was partly navigable but Rome would later develop the port of Ostia, to the west, which was closer to the sea.

- To the north of Italy is the Alps mountain range.
- From north to south, stretch the Appenine Mountains, though they are much lower in altitude than the Alps.
 - To the east, the Appenines fall steeply to the coast whereas their descent in the west is much more gradual.
- Italy has volcanoes such as Vesuvius which was to destroy Pompeii in AD 79.
 - Earthquake activity is also common. Pompeii suffered a major earthquake in AD 62.
- Unlike Ancient Greece whose city states were able to develop in isolated and defensible locations, the Italian peninsula was open to invasion from outside powers.
 - In 390 BC, Gauls attacked the city of Rome. Barbarian tribes would sweep south almost a thousand years later.

In the west are fertile plains. These included the plain of Latium where Rome was located. Similar plains existed to the north of Latium in Etruria, and to the south in Campania. There were fewer plains areas in the east. One such was located at Apulia, north east of Campania. Between the Alps and the Appenines was another fertile area along Po River. The plains of western Italy were able to support a growing population, particularly when the marshy regions in Latium were drained.

Rome's climate is, not surprisingly, typically Mediterranean. Winters can be wet but not excessively cold, and they do not last long. In the summer it is dry with bright sunshine, and temperatures often make it above 30 degrees Celsius.

Rome's central location would be a factor in its eventual drive towards empire. The Italian peninsula dominates the Mediterranean Sea. To the east is the Adriatic Sea, to the west is the Tyrrhenian Sea, and to the south around the region which in classical times was called Magna Graecia (Great Greece) is the Ionian Sea.

By the end of the 4th century BC, Rome had gained control of most of the area along Italy's western coast. By the early 3rd century BC, Etruria had been absorbed under Roman control. Etruscan civilisation had flourished there since about 800 BC.

Greek influence had been significant in southern Italy (Magna Graecia) and on the island of Sicily. Sicily would play a significant part in the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta of the late 5th century BC. However, as the power of Macedon grew in the 4th century BC under Alexander the Great, its interest was towards the east. Rome's main rival in the 3rd century BC was the city of

Carthage, located in modern-day Tunisia. Carthage dominated much of the western Mediterranean including parts of Spain, Sicily and Sardinia, as well as much of the North African coastal areas. Rome would fight three wars with Carthage. These were known as the Punic Wars.

- The First Punic War was 264-241 BC
- The Second Punic War was 218-202 BC
- The Third Punic war was 149-146 BC.

Rome's destruction of Carthage made it the master of the western Mediterranean.

Far to the north of the Alps lay Gaul and Germania. Gaul would be brought under Roman control in the 50s BC by Julius Caesar. Rome never managed to gain ascendancy in Germany. Augustus lost three legions in Germany in AD 9.

To the east of the Adriatic Sea lay the regions of Illyria, Pannonia and Dalmatia. By the 2nd century BC, Greece had been brought under Rome's control. Further east was Thrace and Asia Minor. By the end of the first century BC, Rome had been able to establish provinces here, some of which it allowed to be ruled by client kings.

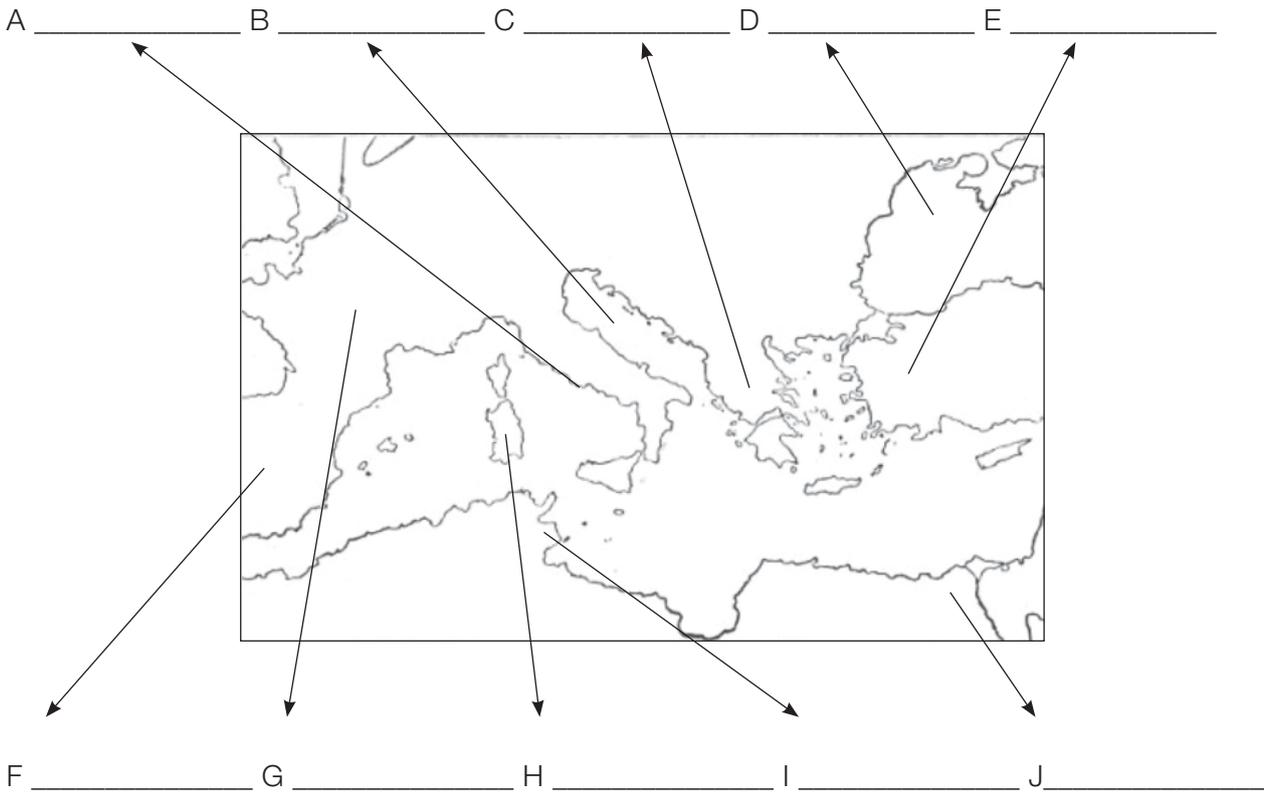
There were various key powers in Rome's world which were confronted over time. Etruria and Carthage were mentioned above. Egypt was a declining power which had been subjugated and turned into the emperor's personal province by 30 BC. Further east the Parthian Empire remained a constant thorn in Rome's side. Both Crassus and Mark Antony failed to gain control over Parthia. Augustus finally reached a diplomatic settlement with Parthia in AD 19. However, in future decades, Parthia would continue to cause Rome headaches in the east.

Roman civilisation would have a lasting impact on Europe for centuries to come with its rich legacy of language, literature, architecture, engineering and the spread of Roman/ Latin culture. However, Rome was not only an exporter of cultural influences. It was capable of **absorbing influences** from other societies. The most notable influence on Roman society came from the Greek world. However, as with any empire in history, the imperial power cannot fail to adopt some elements of the societies it conquers. Etrurian, Egyptian, Greek, Jewish and Asian influences made their way into Rome.

Chronological context

- 753 BC – The legendary founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus
- 509 BC – End of the monarchy. The Roman Republic is established
- 390 BC – A Gallic invasion sees the sacking of Rome
- By 265 BC – Rome completes its occupation of the Italian Peninsula
- 264-241 BC – First Punic War against Carthage
- 238 BC – Rome conquers Sardinia
- 229-219 BC – First (229-8) and Second (219) Illyrian Wars
- 218-202 BC – Second Punic War with Carthage
- 215-148 BC – First (215-205), Second (200-197), Third (171-168) and the Fourth (149-8) Macedonian Wars
- 192-189 BC – The Syrian War
- 149-146 BC – Third and final Punic War with Carthage
- 133 BC – Tribune Tiberius Gracchus assassinated by landowners
- 91-88 BC – The Social War: revolt of Rome's Italian allies
- 88-64 BC – The First (88-84), Second (83-81) and Third (74-64) Mithridatic War in the Asia Minor/ Pontus region
- 73 BC – The Spartacist slave revolt, eventually crushed by Crassus and Pompey
- 70 BC – Crassus and Pompey are joint consuls
- 59 BC – First Triumvirate of Caesar, Pompey and Crassus. Caesar is consul
- 50s BC – Caesar conquers Gaul
- 53 BC – Rome defeated at Carrhae by Parthia. Crassus is killed.
- 55/54 BC – Caesar invades Britain.
- 49-45 BC – Civil War in Rome. Caesar is triumphant.
- 44 BC – Assassination of Caesar
- 43 BC – The Second Triumvirate of Antony, Octavian and Lepidus.
- 30s BC – Rivalry between Octavian and Antony results in civil war. In 31 BC, Antony is defeated in the Battle of Actium. He and Cleopatra commit suicide in 30 BC. Octavian (from 27 BC known as Augustus) is triumphant. Augustus cements his control of Rome and the empire. The republic morphs into the empire.
- 31 BC-AD 14 – Augustus' rule brings an end to civil war and the empire experiences more peace and security than it has for centuries. Following the death of Augustus in AD 14, Tiberius becomes emperor and will rule for 23 years.

Exercise i.i Name the following locations.



Exercise i.ii Place the following events in the correct chronological order

1st event		Battle of Actium
2nd event		Tiberius succeeds Augustus as emperor
3rd event		2nd Punic war
4th event		Caesar conquers Gaul
5th event		Augustus triumphant in Rome
6th event		Assassination of Caesar
7th event		Revolt of Spartacus
8th event		The First Triumvirate
		Rome gains control of Italy
		Augustus' settlement with Parthia

Focus of Study

Section 1 ■ Tiberius (AD 14-37)

Chapter 1: Impact of the death of Augustus

The second that Queen Elizabeth II dies, Prince Charles will become king. This was not the case with Tiberius following the death of Augustus in AD 14. Indeed, if Suetonius is to be believed, Tiberius not only delayed assuming his position as princeps, but declared a reluctance to take on the role.

*“...a long time elapsed before he assumed the position of Emperor. When his friends urged him to accept it he went through the farce of scolding them for the suggestion, saying that they did not realise what a monstrous beast the monarchy was; and kept the Senate guessing by his carefully evasive answers...”*¹

Even when he had finally agreed to accept the position, Tiberius stated that he might one day give it up, *“Until I grow so old that you may be good enough to grant me a respite”*. Was Tiberius genuinely reluctant to take on the role that was now expected of him? At 55 years of age, he was already an old man for the times. He resented the fact that he had never been Augustus’ first choice to follow him.² He claimed that he was all too aware of the enormous burden that was about to be placed upon him. Tiberius was speaking from experience as he had effectively been running the empire for some years.

- Following his eight year self-imposed exile on Rhodes (6 BC-AD 2), Tiberius had been ordered to lead lengthy military campaigns in Germany, Pannonia and Illyricum. He was one of Rome’s greatest generals.
- In AD 4, Tiberius was adopted as Augustus’ son. Tiberius was granted *maius imperium* and *tribunicia potestas* for ten years, effectively making him the partner of Augustus. Augustus had liked to emphasise the tribunician aspect of his rule above all others as the tribune had traditionally been seen as the protector of the people. Tiberius’ powers were renewed in AD 13.
- Also in AD 13, Tiberius was given consular imperium.³

Augustus had clearly designated Tiberius as his “successor”, though his stepson was a reluctant choice. However, there was no automatic mechanism for Tiberius to assume his powers. He clearly wanted power to be bestowed upon him by the senate, *“...instead of one who had wormed his way in by an old man’s adoption, and intrigues of the old man’s wife”*.⁴ In many ways, the situation facing Tiberius in AD 14 was not dissimilar to that facing Augustus in 27 BC when Augustus had *“...transferred the state from my own power to the control of the Roman senate and people”*.⁵ Few imagined that Tiberius was about to walk away from power any more than Augustus had intended to 41 years earlier.

Indeed, both Suetonius and Tacitus are convinced that Tiberius’ apparent reluctance to take power after Augustus’ death was at least disingenuous, and probably totally hypocritical and farcical. Tacitus lists Tiberius’ immediate actions following Augustus’ death as proof that he may not have been so reluctant to assume power. See Figure 1.1.

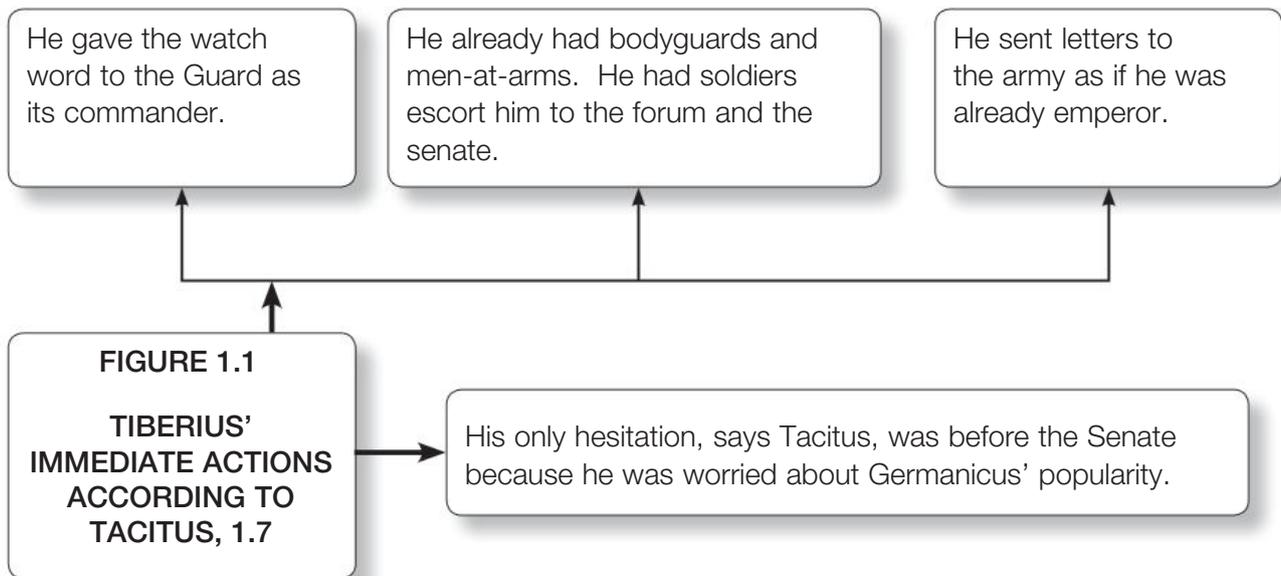
1 Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Tiberius 24

2 See Figure 1.2

3 Refer to the glossary for an explanation of these powers and other terms throughout the book.

4 Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, 1.7

5 Res Gestae, Divi Augusti, 34



Tacitus argues that Tiberius was hesitant about taking power as he was hoping to work out what men were really thinking. Tiberius was, “*by habit or nature – always hesitant, always cryptic. And now that he was determined to show no signs of his real feelings, his words became more equivocal and obscure...*”⁶ Eventually, following the senate’s “*most abject appeals*”, Tiberius finally gave way to the pleas of the Senate to take power.

The first business of the new reign was organisation for the funeral of Augustus and the reading of his will. The main elements of the will were:

- adoption of Livia into the Julian family with the name Augusta;
- Tiberius and Livia were named Augustus’ heirs;
- 43.5 million sesterces were left to the people of Rome; and
- various sums of money were left to members of the Guard and the army.

The first crime of the new reign, according to Tacitus, was the murder of Agrippa Postumus who had been exiled to the island of Pansia. Tiberius said that the orders for this act had come from Augustus. Tacitus argues strongly against this and suggests that Tiberius’ mother, Livia, “*...through stepmotherly malevolence, loathed and distrusted the young Agrippa Postumus and got rid of him at the first opportunity*”.⁷ Figure 1.2 illustrates why this might have been the case. Agrippa Postumus, who according to the ancient sources was a vicious brute, was nonetheless blessed with Julian blood, and so a threat to Tiberius’ position. Augustus’ reluctance to pass the reins to Tiberius continued right to the end of his life, as Augustus placed Tiberius’ nephew, the popular Germanicus, in charge of the armies on the Rhine. In addition, though Tiberius had a grown son of his own, Augustus had forced him to adopt Germanicus, “*...for Augustus wanted to have another iron in the fire...*”

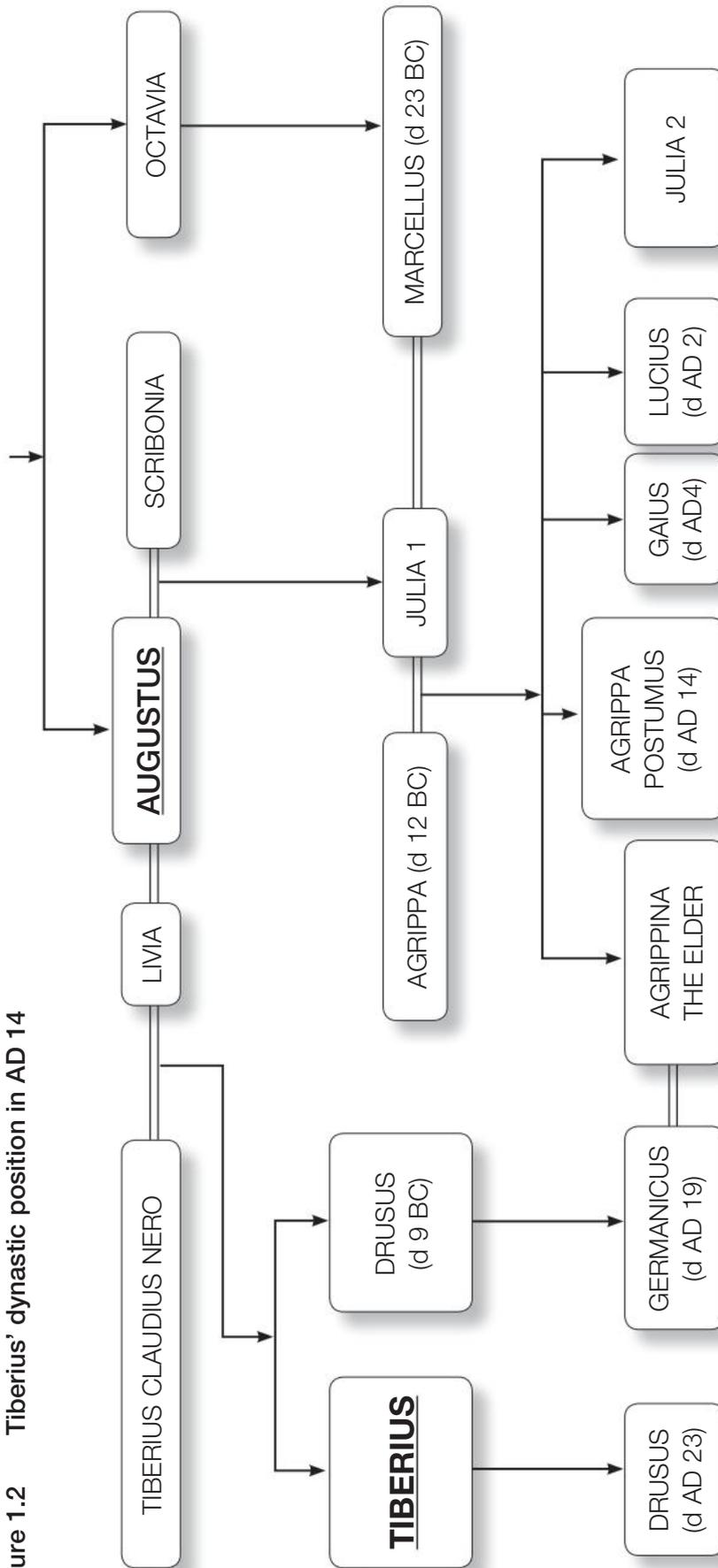
The mutinies in Pannonia and Germany

The first major crisis Tiberius had to deal with was the mutinies of his troops in Pannonia (along the river Danube) and in Germany (along the river Rhine). The mutinies were not aimed against the new emperor but were rather protests at the horrendous conditions which the troops had to face. The transition in imperial leadership was a good opportunity to bring their cause to national attention.

⁶ Tacitus, 1.10

⁷ Tacitus, 1.5

Figure 1.2 Tiberius' dynastic position in AD 14



Augustus' reluctance to select Tiberius as his successor is well illustrated in the Julio-Claudian family tree above. His first choice was his nephew, MARCELLUS, son of his sister Octavia and husband to his daughter Julia (from his second wife, Scribonia). Marcellus died in 23 BC. Julia was then forced to marry AGRIPPA but he died in 12 BC. Julia was then forced to marry TIBERIUS (son of Augustus' third wife, Livia). This proved to be an unhappy marriage. Augustus adopted his grandsons, LUCIUS and GAIUS but they died in AD 2 and AD 4 respectively. Tiberius' brother Drusus, whom Augustus preferred to his brother, had died in 9 BC. This left Tiberius as Augustus' reluctant choice of successor but he even then forced Tiberius to adopt his brother's son, Germanicus. The remaining son of Julia 1 and Agrippa, (and Augustus' remaining grandson) Agrippa Postumus, was murdered in AD 14.

Some of the complaints the men in **Pannonia** had included:

- Length of service, which was supposed to be 20 years, was often extended for another ten years or more, and men could even then be kept in the reserve. The troops were demanding service of 16 years.
- Pay was poor, averaging 900 sesterces a year, from which two thirds could be deducted for weapons and equipment.
- Conditions were appalling, and included severe floggings from commanders and being forced to serve in some of the most inhospitable parts of the empire.

The troops in Pannonia were under the command of Q Junius Blaesus. His men had been encouraged to revolt by a private soldier, Percennius. Blaesus urged his men to send a delegation to Rome rather than mutiny, and even offered to send his own son. This quietened the troops but events again got out of hand and further violence erupted, including the killing of senior officers. Tiberius sent his son, Drusus, with the best of his troops picked from the Praetorian Guard and his own German bodyguard. Drusus told the men that he would have their demands heard in Rome but they must desist from their actions. Just when it appeared that violence might again erupt, there was an eclipse of the moon. Fear and superstition soon spread amongst the men on which Drusus played. He warned them that the eclipse was an omen, a sign of worse to come because of their actions. The following day, Drusus spoke to the men and calmed the situation. Tacitus says of Drusus' actions:

*"...Though not a practised orator, he spoke with natural dignity. He censured their former behaviour, and expressed approval of their new attitude. Intimidation and menaces, he said, made no impression on him..."*⁸

He won over most of the men, and with superstitious fear still in the air, he rounded up the mutiny ringleaders and they were executed. Some of the leaders were given up by the men as evidence of their new found loyalty. The mutiny was over.

However, the situation in **Germany** was far more serious for Tiberius and for the empire's northern regions. Tacitus does not hold back in describing how serious the revolt in Germany was:

*"...This was a massive outbreak... Students of army psychology could see the momentous and implacable character of the revolt from the fact that its instigators were not few and far between, but there was universal, silent fury, as resolute and unanimous as if they were acting on orders..."*⁹

Of even greater concern for Tiberius were the calls made by some of the troops in Germany for Germanicus to lead them in a march on Rome and to seize power. Germanicus melodramatically neutralised this threat by offering to kill himself rather than be disloyal. Despite Tacitus' best efforts, Germanicus' reputation is not enhanced by his handling of the mutiny in Germany:

- to quell the trouble he made improvised, unthought-out concessions;
- he failed to call in loyal reinforcements from Upper Germany;
- he endangered the lives of his pregnant wife, Agrippina, and his young son, Gaius (Caligula); and
- he failed to intervene and prevent the butchering of mutiny ringleaders.

Germanicus certainly does not appear to have acted as effectively as Tiberius' son, Drusus. Tiberius was criticised for sending two ill-tested, young men out to do men's work at a critical moment. However, this is probably an unfair comment as Tiberius' absence from the capital, if he had gone to quell the revolts himself, could have caused dangerous instability back in Rome. No admirer of Tiberius, Tacitus suggests that Tiberius was probably wise in sending his sons to deal with the trouble rather than going himself.

⁸ Tacitus, 1.28

⁹ Tacitus, 1.32

“...he was determined not to jeopardise the nation and himself by leaving the capital...If the emperor were treated contemptuously (by the mutineers), no expedient was left...”¹⁰

A note about sources:

This book, and all far more learned tomes before it, refers frequently to the works of Suetonius and Tacitus. Though neither of these men lived through the Julio-Claudian period – Tacitus was a child during the reign of Nero, and Suetonius was born c AD 69 – they had gained significant positions of power under later emperors.

- Tacitus was in turn a senator, consul and later a governor.
- Suetonius was for a time the chief secretary to the emperor Hadrian.

This gave both men valuable insight into the workings of the imperial regime and even more importantly, access to valuable documents, most of which we do not have today. However, both writers need to be treated “with care”.

- Tacitus had republicanism in his blood. He hated the imperial system that had developed from the time of Augustus and looked back nostalgically on the Republic. For him, absolute power corrupted men’s minds and much of his writings in “*The Annals*” highlights the worst of the Julio-Claudian emperors.
- Suetonius might not pass the test of rigorous scholarship which is demanded of historians today, and some of his later sections read more like a tabloid press than a hefty historical record. However, it is still a valuable read for all students of the period.

Exercise 1.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE for each of the following statements.

1	Tiberius was always Augustus’ first choice as a successor.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	Agrippa Postumus represented a real threat to Tiberius’ position.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	Tacitus suggests that Livia was behind the murder of Agrippa Postumus.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	Tiberius sincerely did not want to take on the burdens of the princeps’ position.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	Augustus had been reluctant to grant Tiberius tribunician powers.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	Drusus handled the mutiny in Pannonia with skill, calm and some ruthlessness.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	Tacitus is full of praise for the way Germanicus handled the mutiny in Germany.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	Tacitus believes that Tiberius should have led the efforts to quell the mutinies.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	Suetonius suggests that Tiberius’ early reluctance to take power was farcical.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	Tacitus can be relied upon to always provide an unbiased, objective account of events.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

¹⁰ Tacitus, 1 46

What do the historians have to say about the “Impact of the death of Augustus”?

1. Barbara Levick: *Tiberius the Politician*

Levick argues that Tiberius’ apparent hesitancy in assuming power in AD 14 has been misunderstood. Tiberius was not waiting for power to be conferred upon him; he had all the power already. He was *collega imperii* – Augustus’ colleague – he had tribunician power and his *imperium* was *maius*. His *imperium*, like Augustus’, extended to Rome. As for *auctoritas*, he was already a *Iulius Caesar* and he was soon to be a *Divi filius* – son of the deified Augustus. Levick suggests that what appeared as hesitancy on Tiberius’ part was actually a genuine “request for help from the numerous distinguished men in the state”. Tiberius’ hesitancy actually drew irritation from some senators, such as C Asinius Gallus, who foolishly asked Tiberius which powers he would like. Levick argues that what Tiberius wanted could not be granted; it was too late. The principate had moved along.

*“...What Tiberius wanted was impossible because power was indivisible. Once gathered into one pair of hands it could not be redistributed throughout the body politic.”*¹¹

2. Suetonius: *Tiberius*

Suetonius is quick to paint the blackest picture of Tiberius. However, he does make the point that, at least at the start of his reign, Tiberius acted with significant restraint. He detested sycophantic behaviour and refused the many honours which senators and others sought to heap upon him. He refused to have temples and priests dedicated to his divinity and forbade statues of him being placed amongst those of the gods. He refused to have the months of September and October renamed as Tiberius and Livius (after his mother). He refused to have the title “imperator” before his name or the title “father of the country” after it.

*“...Tiberius at first behaved with great discretion, and almost as modestly as if he never held public office. Of many high honours voted him, he accepted none but a few unimportant ones...”*¹²

¹¹ Levick, B, *Tiberius the Politician*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1976, p 77

¹² Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Tiberius, 26

Chapter 2: Tiberius the man: Changing role and image of the princeps

The nature of Augustan rule

Barbara Levick explains how after forty years of Augustus, political power in Rome had become indivisible. Even if Tiberius was sincere about his reluctance to assume power, or to share power – which the ancient writers did not accept – such developments were impossible (see Historians section, Chapter 1).

In the *Res Gestae* (Augustus' brief account of his life), he states that:

*"...I transferred the state from my own power to the control of the Roman senate and people... After that time I excelled all in authority, but I possessed no more power than the others who were my colleagues in each magistracy."*¹

Augustus knew that he had not surrendered power. The Senate and the people of Rome knew it. However, as the years went by, Rome became prosperous and politically stable, and the horrors of a century of civil war were distant memories. The gratitude expressed by the Senate and most sections of Roman society was genuinely felt. Tacitus might argue that:

"...Opposition did not exist...(and that) slavish obedience was the way to succeed... (and that) Political equality was a thing of the past; all eyes watched for imperial commands..." but he also had to concede that *"...(Augustus) attracted everybody's goodwill by the enjoyable gift of peace..."*²

The settlements of 27 BC and 23 BC, and the following years of Augustan rule, had solidified the power of the princeps. Figure 2.1 summarises what both ancient and modern writers have had to say about the nature of Augustan rule.

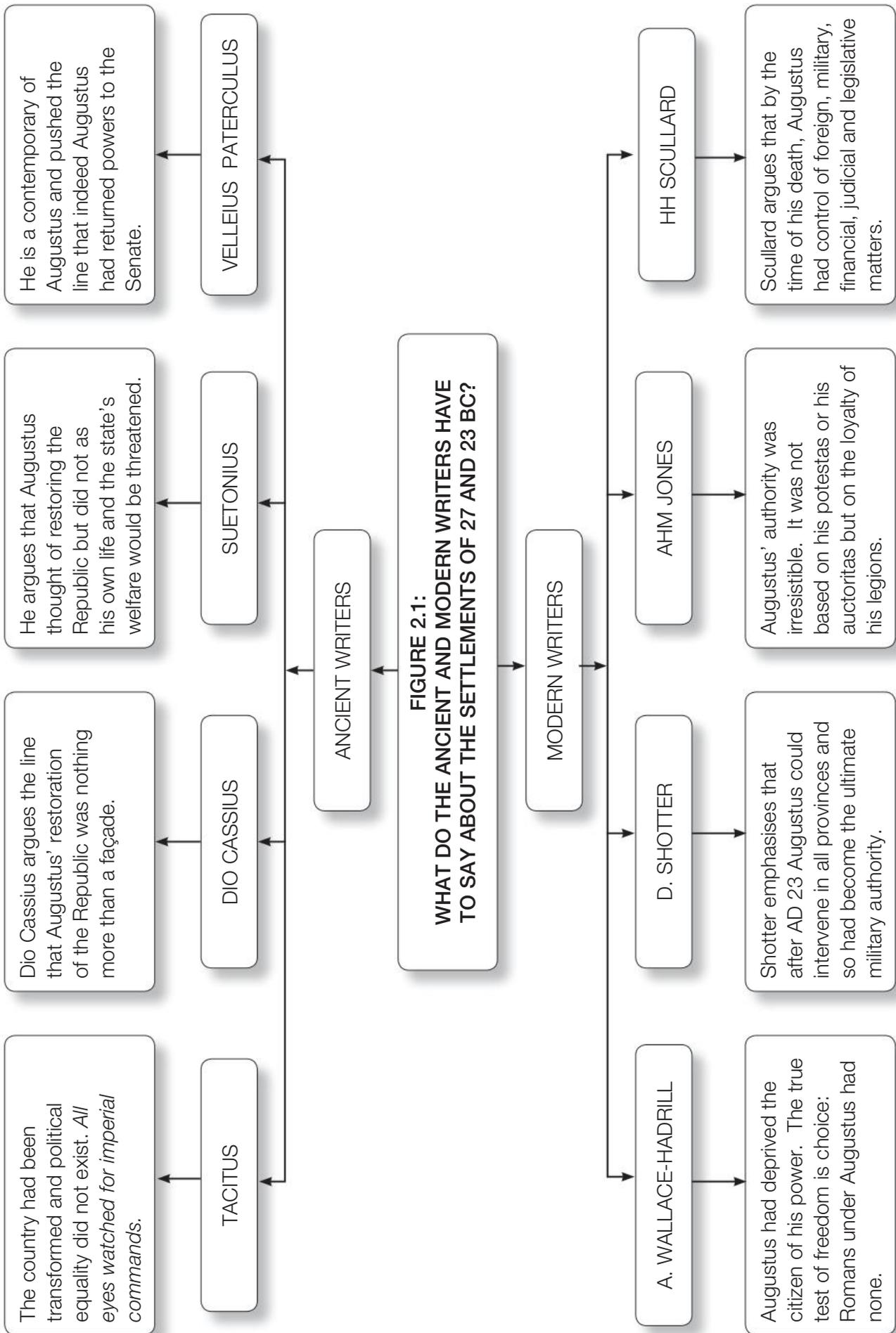
Changing role of Tiberius as princeps

At the time of Augustus' death, Tiberius already had tribunicia potestas, maius imperium and consular imperium, and nothing was going to change. Tiberius might entreat the senate to share the burdens and responsibilities of administration, but he was not going to share the power. However, early in his reign, there were few hints of the 'reign of terror' that was to later leave its mark on Tiberius' rule. Indeed, there were no significant changes in the style of Augustan rule. Tiberius was not a radical visionary, not a revolutionary thinker, not an innovator. He was in many ways the classic embodiment of that traditional Roman idea of service to the state. His career up to this point certainly supported such a view, seen no less than his enormous contribution to Rome's military successes. Tiberius aimed to maintain the conservative elements of Augustan policy in each area of state business.

- there would be no dramatic shifts in the relationship between princeps and senate;
- there would be no extravagant territorial expansion; and
- building projects in progress would be finished but there would be no unnecessary new ones.

¹ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 34

² Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 1.1, 1.3



Tiberius' relations with the senate, and his policies and administration will be covered in Chapters 3 and 4. However, a few general comments here will serve to highlight his manner of rule, and its effectiveness.

- He showed an almost “excessive courtesy” when dealing with the senate (Suetonius, 29).
- If decrees were passed of which he disapproved, he did not complain (Suetonius 31).
- He safeguarded the country against bandits and brigands (Suetonius 37).
- Though Tiberius was known for his austerity – even miserliness – he was prepared to spend state funds on worthy causes (Tacitus 1.74).

Tacitus and Suetonius revel in their lurid descriptions of what the reign of Tiberius was to become. His relationship with the senate would steadily deteriorate (Chapter 3). The power later wielded by the Praetorian Prefect, Sejanus, and the subsequent reign of terror would put the lie to the maintenance of law and justice (Chapter 5). In fact even when Tacitus is suggesting a positive view of Tiberius' rule, he cannot stop himself alluding to what was to come:

*“...Yet in relations to the facts, (his pronouncements)... were meaningless, if not disingenuous. The impressiveness of the Republican façade only meant that the slave-state, which was to grow out of them, would be all the more loathsome.”*³

The image of the princeps – Tiberius

Unlike other emperors, Tiberius did not encourage a personality cult. There were no extravagant temples or statues or lasting memorials; Tiberius' tight hold over the treasury purse strings ensured this. Roman leaders often used coinage as a means of spreading their image and propagating the beneficial impact of their rule. However, Tiberius did not do this. Much of the coinage of Tiberius' reign honoured the deified Augustus. Sometimes his son, Drusus, was represented. When Tiberius was featured on coins, it was done in a non-idealised style.

Figure 2.2
Bust of the Emperor Tiberius



Figure 2.3
Silver denarius showing Tiberius



³ Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 1.77

Figure 2.4 The negative image of Tiberius

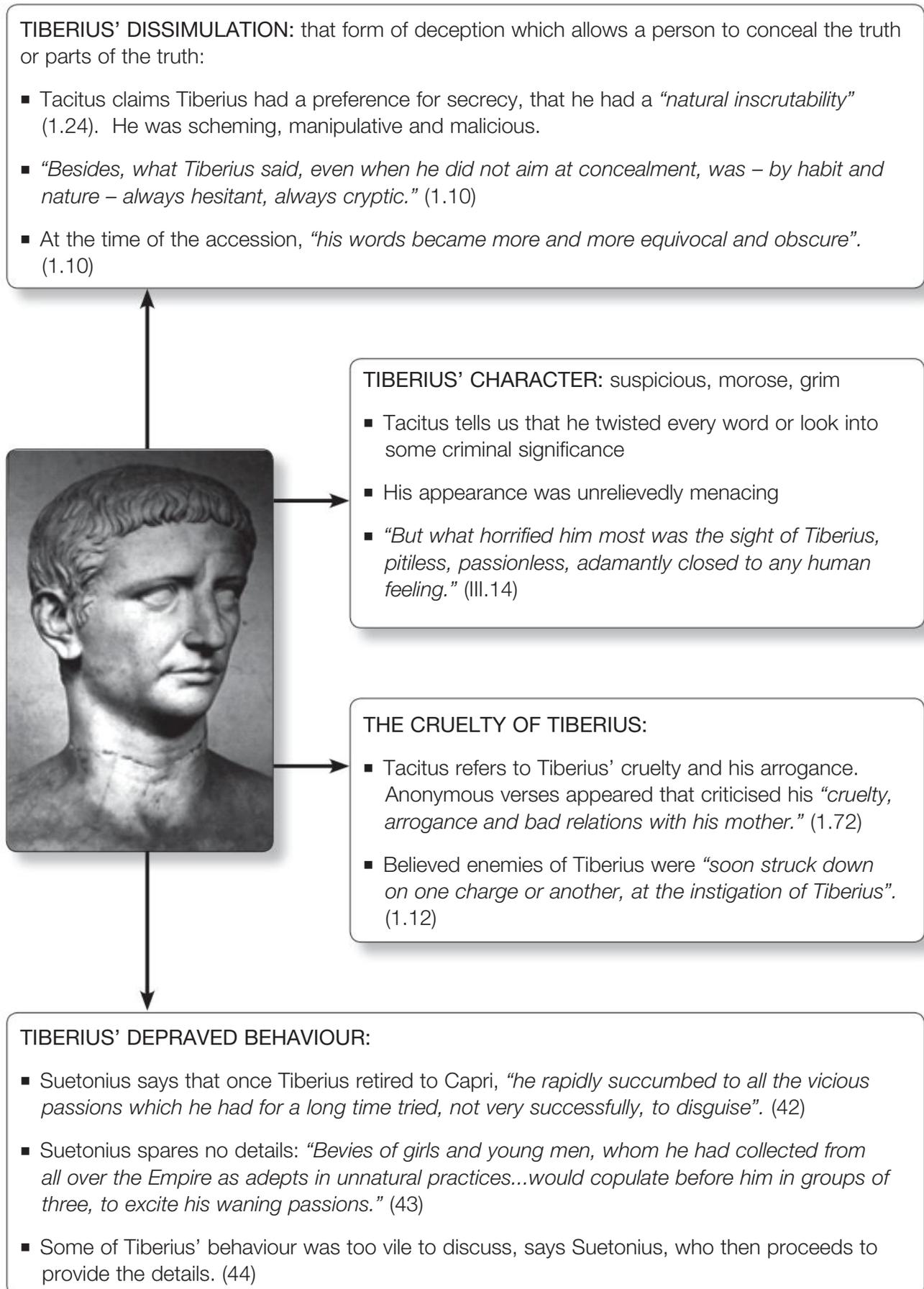
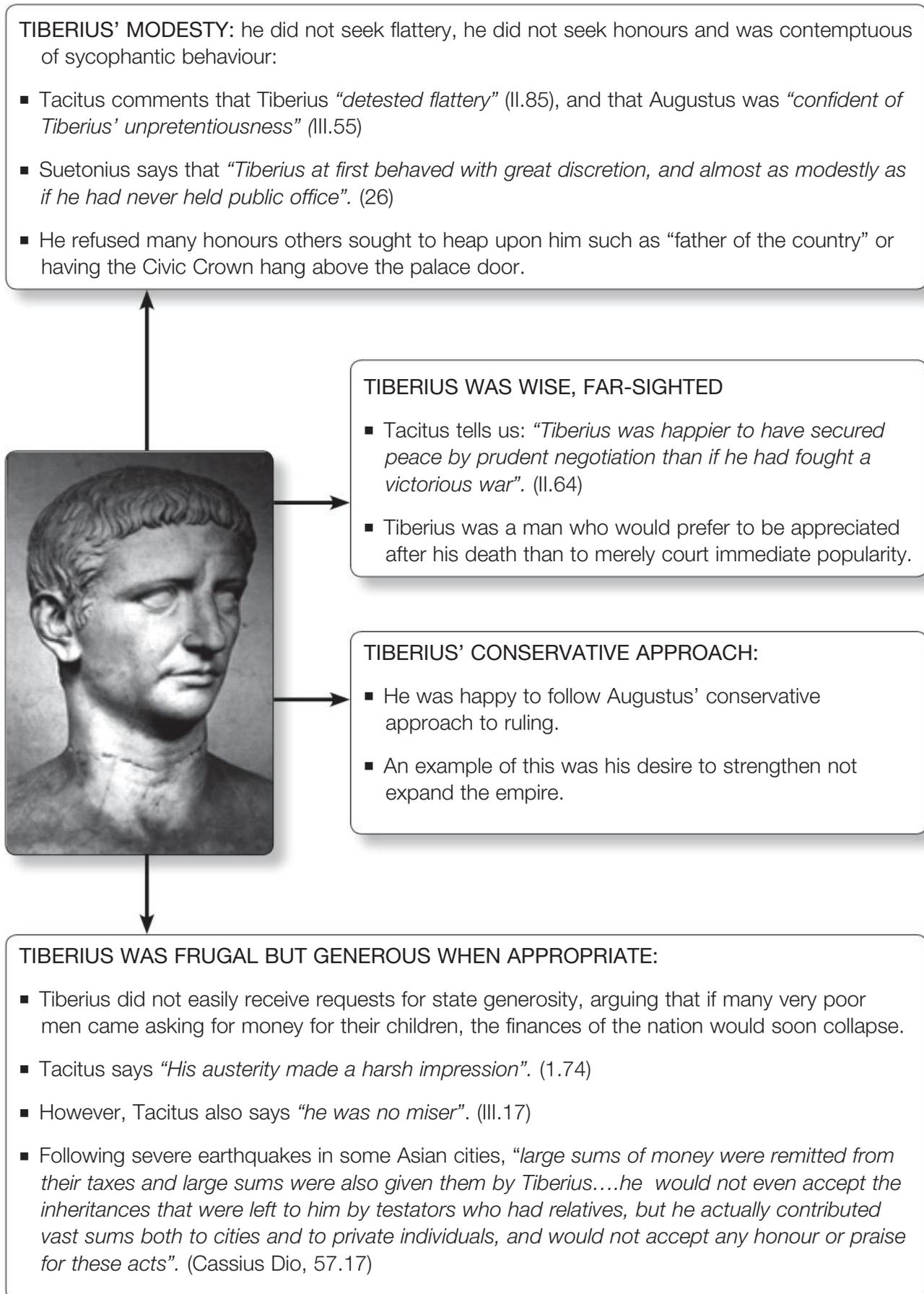


Figure 2.5 The positive image of Tiberius



The view the ancient writers have passed down about Tiberius is of a man who had for many years managed to hide his evil nature. Following the death of his son, Drusus, in AD 23, and then his retreat to Capri in AD 26, (after which the Praetorian Prefect, Sejanus, was to wield so much power), Tiberius' cruel, evil nature is alleged to have come to the fore. Thus, the overwhelming image passed down to us of Tiberius is negative. The principal written sources come from Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio (who wrote over 150 years after the death of Tiberius). These accounts are overwhelmingly critical. A contemporary writer, Velleius Paterculus (19 BC-AD 31), gives a more complimentary view of the emperor. However, it is possible his more complimentary version of Tiberius was coloured by a desire for self-preservation.

Tacitus' view of the Julio-Claudian period is coloured by his pro-republican perspective and his moral purpose in writing about the past. Suetonius' work is coloured by his preference for court gossip and scandal.

- Tacitus was a republican romantic. He had not experienced the violence and civil wars of the republic's final century, and so looked back nostalgically on what he believed was a golden age for Rome.
- Tacitus had experienced first-hand what he judged as the despotic rule of Emperor Domitian ⁴ (a Flavian, not a Julio-Claudian).
- For Tacitus, Julio-Claudian rule was characterised by tyranny, corruption and decadence, seen no more clearly than in the person of Tiberius.
- Suetonius enjoys delving into the all the alleged degrading and decadent behaviour of Tiberius during his time at Capri.

Exercise 2.1

Use the terms in the box below to complete the passage that follows.

In the _____, Augustus claimed to have no more power than any other man. What he did excel in was _____. On his accession, Tiberius already possessed _____ authority, _____ imperium across the empire and _____ imperium inside Rome. Supporters of Tiberius saw him as _____ and _____, whereas _____ and _____ saw Tiberius as being _____ and _____. Tacitus maintained a _____ longing for the _____. Suetonius, on the other hand, chose to focus on Tiberius' _____ especially when he went to the isle of _____ in AD 26.

nostalgic	tribunician	Capri	modest	clear-headed	Res Gestae
maius	consular	authority	Tacitus	dissimulative	Suetonius
cruel	depravity	Republic			

⁴ Domitian ruled from AD 81 to AD 96, when he was assassinated.

What do the historians have to say about the “Changing role and image of the princeps”?

1. H H Scullard: *From the Gracchi to Nero*

Scullard is unwilling to accept the scandal-ridden, poison-pen versions of the principate that have been passed down from the likes of Tacitus and Suetonius. He accepts the deficiencies in Tiberius' personality such as his morose temperament and his lack of affability. However, he argues that the tragedy of Tiberius was that he was merely a man who had been thrown into a position that he had not sought and which demanded talents that he did not have. Scullard maintains that few people would believe the notion that this man wore a mask of virtue for seven decades and then dropped it to indulge his various vices on the isle of Capri.

*“...If Tiberius had died shortly before or shortly after his accession, he would have been judged very differently by later generations. As it is, his years of competent and even outstanding service as soldier and administrator have been overlaid by a hatred which his last years engendered...”*⁵

2. Thomas Wiedemann: *The Julio-Claudian Emperors*

Wiedemann explains that for Tiberius to be accepted as Augustus' successor, he had to prove that he was in actual control of Augustus' household. In Roman law, the theory had developed that the man in control of the household (*possessio*) had full legal recognition until someone could prove that they had a better claim before a court of law.⁶ However, the person who had possession of the late Augustus' household was also the ruler of Rome, and Wiedemann points out it was highly unlikely that a court of law would rule against this person. Thus, it was essential that Tiberius take immediate possession of Augustus' household, and it explains why Livia urgently summoned her son to Augustus' bedside.

*“...The question of the succession was solved the moment Tiberius had possession of the household of Caesar. The first thing he did as the new Caesar was to write to inform all Roman armies of the fact. Those individuals in public life who considered themselves to be clients of the domus Caesaris immediately took an oath of loyalty to Tiberius as the new Caesar...”*⁷

5 Scullard, H H, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 292

6 From this comes the notion that “possession is nine tenths of the law”.

7 Wiedemann, T, *The Julio-Claudians*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989, p 20

Chapter 3:

Tiberius and the Senate

Tacitus states that Tiberius became extremely frustrated at the servility of the senate. Tiberius, he alleges, exclaimed in Greek each time he left the senate house: *“Men fit to be slaves!”*¹

- Few men understood more than Tiberius the enormity of the task of running the Empire. He needed the help of experienced administrators who could show initiative.
 - It was not until the time of Claudius that a working imperial bureaucracy was in place.
 - Thus, Tiberius looked to the senate for assistance in this enormous task.
- However, the senate had changed enormously since Tiberius had had any significant dealings with it.²
- It had become totally subservient during the four decades of Augustus’ rule.
- This subservience, combined with Tiberius’ taciturn and dissimulative nature, meant that senators were not likely to suddenly spring into independent action with the arrival of a new emperor.

(1) Tiberius and the Senate – raising its profile, prestige, responsibilities

Tacitus and Suetonius accuse Tiberius of hypocrisy in his dealings with the senate, arguing that the emperor’s early attempts to work with the senate and the respect he gave them were insincere. However, there is significant evidence that at least before the death of his son Drusus (AD 23) and his departure to Capri (AD 26), Tiberius was endeavouring to raise the senate’s profile and give it more responsibility.

*“Tiberius seems genuinely to have desired to see a senate which could take the role of an independently-minded and honest partner in the business of government.”*³

Tiberius tried hard to prevent sycophantic behaviour and sought to maintain the traditional and respectful position of the senate:

- As mentioned in Chapter 1, he refused honours offered to him and his mother by the senate. Such offers had ranged from renaming months to dedicating temples and placing his image amongst those of the gods.⁴
- He deliberately showed great respect to the senate and individual senators. He would enter the senate unescorted and would stand when he greeted a consul and make way for them when passing them in the street.
- He only assumed the consulship three times, and then only to provide prestige for his consular colleague, such as his son Drusus.
- When special powers should be given to his son (tribunicia potestas) or to his adopted son, Germanicus (proconsular imperium), he approached the senate.
- He was angered when senators flattered him or called him master. He refused to allow senators to approach his litter. Suetonius describes how Tiberius was unperturbed by abuse and slander against him.⁵
- Tiberius referred to the senate as his *“generous, just and indulgent masters”*.⁶

1 Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, III.65

2 Tiberius had been a praetor 30 years earlier, in 16 BC.

3 Shotter, D, Tiberius Caesar, Routledge, London, 1992, p 24

4 See Suetonius 26 for a detailed list of such measures.

5 Suetonius, 28

6 Suetonius, 29

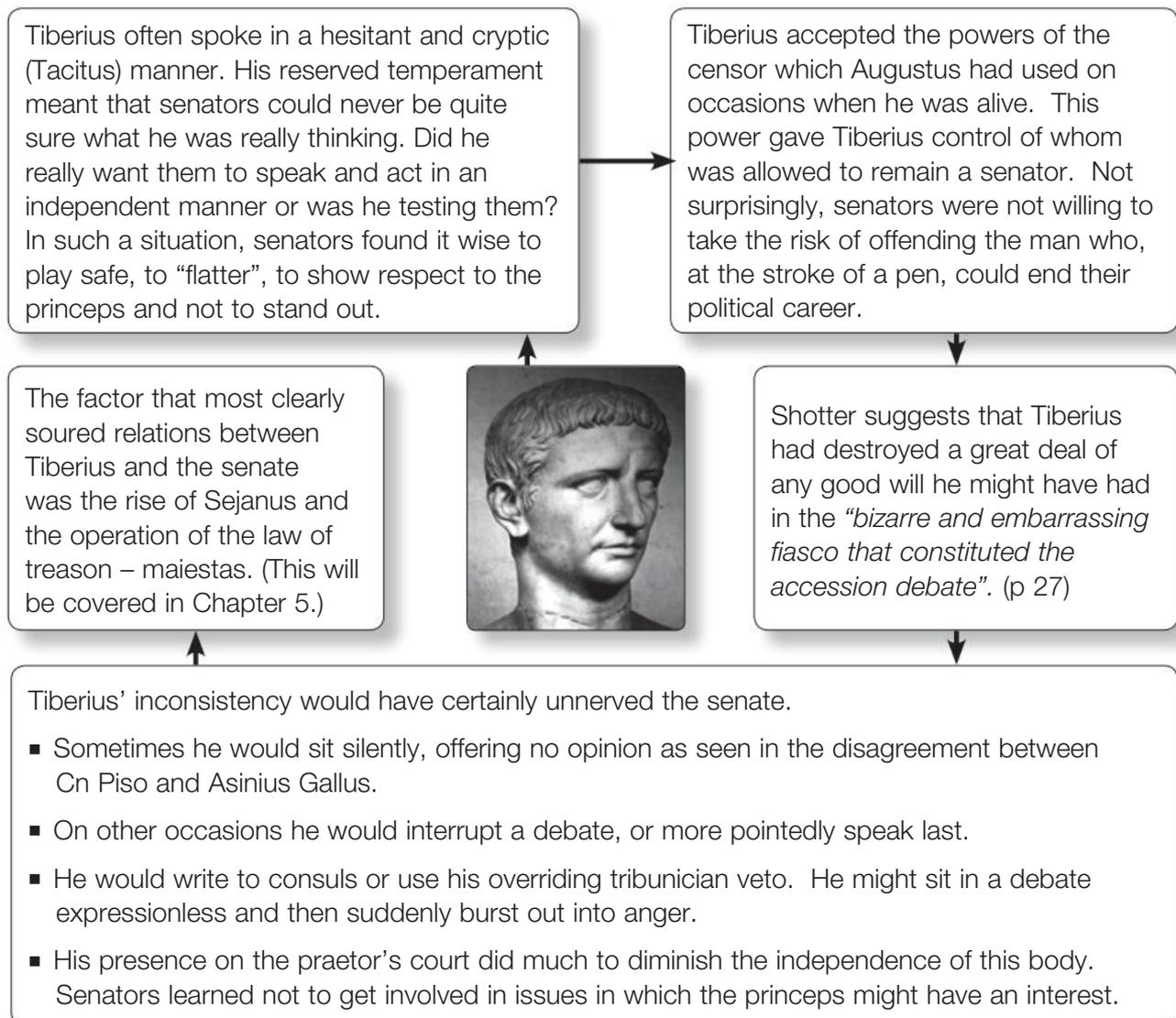
Tiberius went further than mere gestures in elevating the role of the senate. He took specific steps to increase its role and responsibilities:

- The election of magistrates was transferred from the *comitia* back to the senate.
- The senate was allowed to make some military decisions such as the allocation of certain military commands.
- Senators were placed on boards of enquiry.
- There were instances of the senate voting against Tiberius to the extent that on one occasion he was in a minority of one.
- The judicial role of the senate was also increased with it being given the job of handling major state trials and also handling cases of *maiestas*.

Even Tacitus is willing to praise Tiberius' efforts at working with the senate, at least in the early part of his reign.

*"...public business – and the most important private business – was transacted in the senate. Among its chief men, there was freedom of discussion: their lapses into servility were arrested by the emperor himself..."*⁷

Figure 3.1 Reasons for the failure of Tiberius' senatorial policy



⁷ Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, IV.6

(2) The failure of Tiberius' policy of working with the Senate

That Tiberius' hopeful efforts of working with an independent and responsible senate were unsuccessful is clear. Ancient and modern sources both highlight this development, their only point of difference being the timing of this development. Why did things turn out so poorly for Tiberius? Part of the explanation lies in the fact that it was too late for the senate to share power. As Levick explains, power in the principate was indivisible; when Augustus died, Tiberius was not waiting to be given power; he already had it.⁸ However, there were other factors which help explain the failure of Tiberius to establish a long-lasting working relationship with the senate. These are discussed in Figure 3.1.

Exercise 3.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	How did Tiberius allegedly refer to the senators as he left the senate house?	
2	Who arguably was ultimately responsible for the subservient behaviour of senators?	
3	On how many occasions did Tiberius assume the consulship?	
4	What important political function did the senate regain?	
5	What major judicial role did the senate become increasingly involved with?	
6	What two events arguably suggest the moment when cordial relations with the senate ended?	
7	How did Tiberius' personality make relations with the senate difficult?	
8	What constitutional power did Tiberius have that gave him ultimate control over individual senators?	
9	What term best sums up Tiberius' behaviour in senate proceedings which unnerved them?	
10	Which judicial issue eventually destroyed the relationship between princeps and senate?	

⁸ See Levick in the historians section at the end of Chapter 1.

What do the historians have to say about “Tiberius and the Senate”?

1. David Shotter: *Tiberius Caesar*

Augustus had claimed that he possessed no more power than anybody else, that he had surrendered his powers to the senate. Historians have debated the genuineness or disingenuousness of this statement but what can be accepted is Augustus' additional statement that he excelled all in authority, *auctoritas*, that indefinable prestige that gave him the support and acceptance of the Roman nobility and people. Shotter makes the point that Tiberius' reign was harmed from the outset because he lacked *auctoritas*. He was seen as being arrogant, secretive and hypocritical, and everyone knew that Tiberius was far from being Augustus' first choice as his successor.

*“...A personal auctoritas, which was essential to Tiberius' successful relationship with the nobility, was undermined before Tiberius even started...”*⁹

2. Barbara Levick: *Tiberius the Politician*

Levick readily acknowledges the flaws in Tiberius' personality and his inconsistency. However, she argues that the blame for the breakdown in the princeps-senate relationship cannot be placed solely at Tiberius' door. Certainly there were different groupings within the senate – some respected Tiberius' policy, some thought him misguided, some feared him while some hated him. However, Levick argues that the senate never acted as a body living up to its responsibilities while it might be quick to act to defend its privileges.

*“...But the Senate, after all, ought to have been more than a group of individuals. It had privileges and responsibilities... The Senate was less vociferous about its responsibilities... They would listen to lectures on their duties as senators and magistrates and go their own way...”*¹⁰

⁹ Shotter, D, *Tiberius Caesar*, Routledge, London, 1992, p 27

¹⁰ Levick, B, *Tiberius the Politician*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1976, p 115

Chapter 4:

Tiberius: Reforms, policies and building programs

History's view of the Julio-Claudian emperors is inevitably coloured by the words of Tacitus and Suetonius. If they are to be believed, Rome was ruled by men who, in turn, were vicious and cruel, tyrannical and mad, drunken and controlled by others, or self-indulgent and narcissistic. Any achievements that might have occurred in this period are drowned out by a sea of terror, depravity and despotism. Regarding Tiberius, most of what the ancient writers chose to focus on concerns the demise of Germanicus, the rise and fall of Sejanus, the treason trials and Tiberius' alleged behaviour at Capri.

However, is such a view fair or accurate? For Tiberius, such a version is only partially true and certainly in the period to AD 26 is quite unfair. Here are two views of Tiberius' record:

"...During the earlier part of Tiberius' reign the civil administration was, by general consent, excellent." ¹

"...His (Tiberius') conferments of office took into consideration birth, military distinction and civilian eminence, and the choice manifestly fell on the worthiest men..." ²

Tiberius was a careful, prudent and cautious administrator.

- He was not extravagant and so there were no memorable construction projects which lasted the centuries.
 - His frugal, austere habits meant that: *"The fortune he bequeathed to his successor amounted to 2,700,000,000 sesterces (some sources say 3,300,000,000)."* ³
- He satisfied himself with completing works which Augustus had started.
 - As mentioned earlier, he opposed new constructions going up in his name.
 - Major works were restricted to completing Pompey's theatre, the construction of the temple to the Deified Augustus and the building of a palace on the Palatine.
- His was a Rome which for most people involved the experience of peace at home and abroad. The stability and prosperity of Augustan times continued.
 - Tacitus refers to the *"oppressive food prices"* of the time but then immediately absolves Tiberius of any blame, going on in fact to point out that Tiberius *"spared neither money nor labour in combating bad harvests and stormy seas"*.
- Tiberius did not enter power with a radical reform program. He saw his job to safely steer the ship of state not to take it into dangerous waters.
 - Unfortunately, the rise of Sejanus and the role of maiestas cases during his later years overshadowed his able governance of Rome and its empire.
- Tiberius took a hard line against foreign cults. Anyone practising Jewish or Egyptian cults was forced to destroy their religious accessories. Jewish men of military age were removed from

¹ Scullard, H H, From the Gracchi to Nero, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 282

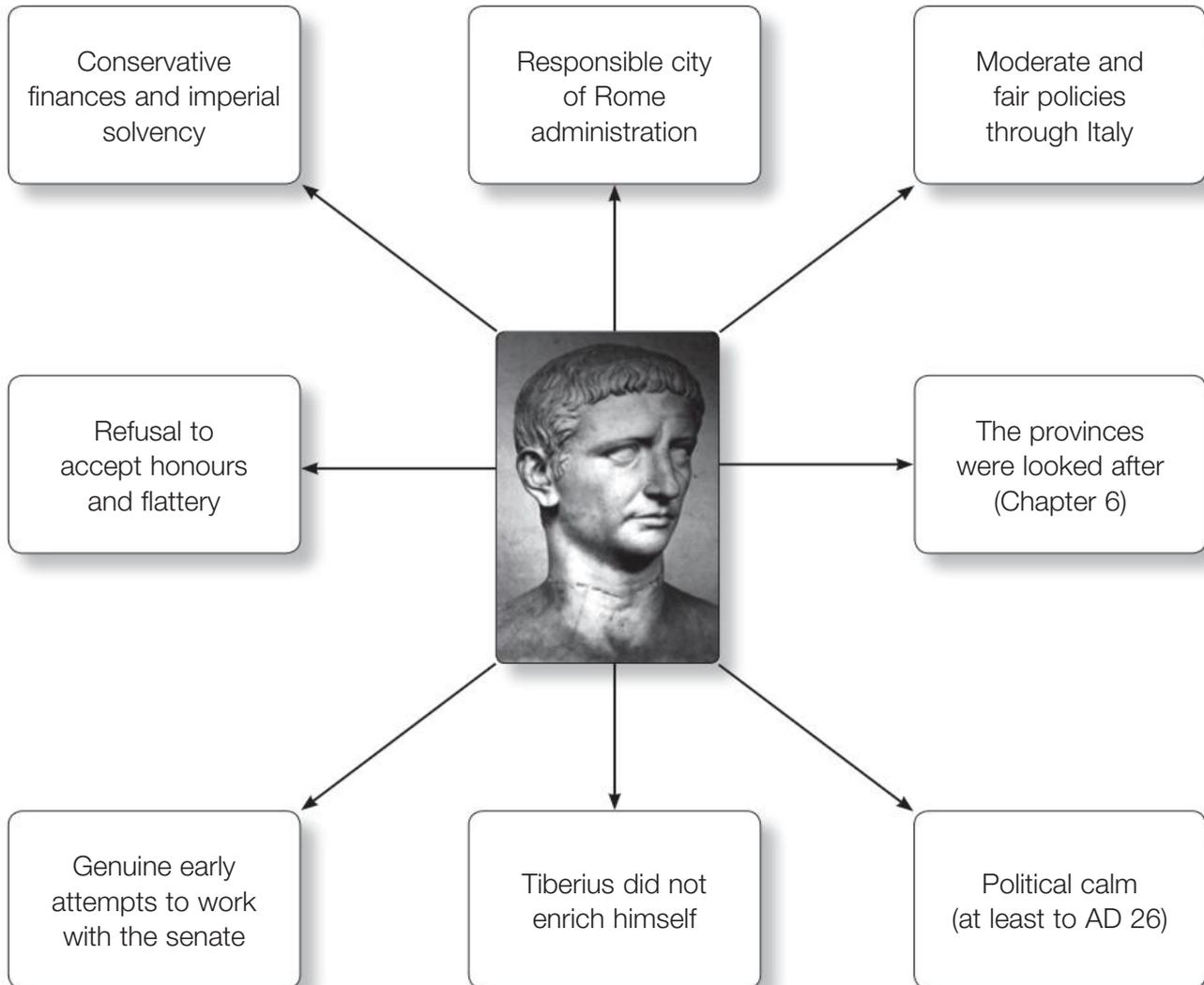
² Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, IV.6

³ Salmon, ET, A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138, Methuen, London, 1968, p 143

Rome. Astrologers were banned unless they “asked for his forgiveness and undertook to make no more predictions”.⁴

Figure 4.1 sums up Tiberius’ administrative achievements.

Figure 4.1 Success of Tiberius’ administration



⁴ Suetonius, Tiberius, 36

Exercise 4.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE for each of the following statements.

1	Tacitus never has a good word to say about Tiberius' administration.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	Tiberius was extremely careful with the finances of the state.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	Tiberius built extravagantly whilst he was in power.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	Tiberius was unconcerned about food prices faced by ordinary people.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	Tiberius was not eager to promote a radical, new reform program.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	The later maiestas cases had little impact on the reputation of Tiberius.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	Tiberius was intent on enriching himself and his family.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	Tiberius was careful to look out for Italy and the provinces.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	Tiberius was opposed to foreign cults inside Rome.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	Tiberius spent most of his reign in Capri.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

Chapter 5:

Tiberius and the Praetorian Guard: Sejanus and “maiestas”

What was the Praetorian Guard?

During the Roman Republic, it had become common for military commanders to select a loyal group of troops – a praetorian cohort – to act as their loyal bodyguards. By 27 BC, this had evolved into the Praetorian Guard, set up by Augustus as a personal bodyguard.

- At first there were nine cohorts of 500 men but these eventually each comprised 1000 men:
 - small cavalry units of 30 men, called *turmae*, were also set up.
- To avoid possible threats to himself, Augustus made special arrangements regarding the leadership of the guard:
 - it was placed under the command of two commanders, Praetorian Prefects;
 - these men were always selected from the equestrian order;
 - from 2 BC, these men were Quintus Otrius Scapula and Publius Salvius Aper.
- Membership of the guard was eagerly sought:
 - the job of protecting the emperor brought personal prestige for guard members; and
 - conditions in the guard were far better than the army with members serving 16 years (not the 20-25 of the army) and receiving better pay, conditions and privileges than regular legionaries.
- Augustus stationed regular legionary troops in the provinces. This was done for two main reasons:
 - to maintain order and control in areas distant from Rome; and
 - to avoid the appearance of a military dictatorship which the presence of large numbers of troops inside Italy might have presented.
- Though Augustus was keen to ensure his political and personal safety, he also did not want to undermine the Republican veneer of his regime.
 - Thus, only three guard cohorts were kept on duty at one time.
 - The other troops were billeted in towns surrounding Rome which had the effect of giving them a low profile.

At the time of Tiberius' accession in AD 14, the Praetorian Guard was commanded by Lucius Seius Strabo and his son, Lucius Aelius Sejanus.

Who was Sejanus?

Sejanus comes over as one of history's great unscrupulous schemers, willing to do anything to achieve his aim of gaining power.¹ He was born in the Etruscan town of Vulturnum, though the exact date of his birth is unknown; sources suggest about 20BC. In his early twenties, Sejanus gained an appointment to the staff of Gaius Caesar during his visit to the east. Tiberius was in self-imposed

¹ One of the great pleasures of studying the Julio-Claudian period is that students will almost certainly get to watch episodes of the classic TV series "I Claudius". Patrick Stewart's interpretation of Sejanus is masterful.

exile on the island of Rhodes at this time, and it is possible the two may have met. Tacitus has Sejanus suddenly appear on the scene in AD 23 but clearly he had become close to Tiberius before this. In AD 14 he had accompanied the emperor’s son, Drusus, to deal with the mutiny in Pannonia which is in fact Tacitus’ first mention of Sejanus – a mention delivered in suitably portentous terms:

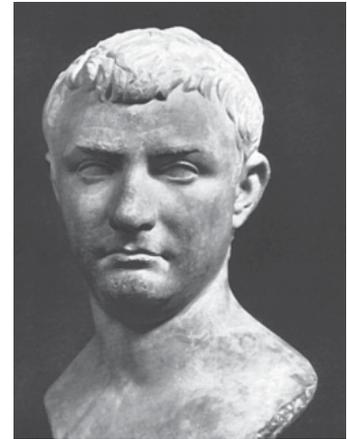
*“...He (Sejanus) was to be the prince’s (Drusus) advisor, and not to let the rest of the party forget what they stood to gain – or lose.”*²

Shotter further makes the point:

*“...He is shown shortly afterwards as sufficiently close to the princeps to be able to warn him of the influence of Agrippina over the Rhine legions.”*³

His father had senior equestrian status, and in AD 15/16 was appointed to the highest post an equestrian could attain, Prefect of Egypt. This left his son, Sejanus, in sole command of the Praetorian Guard.

Though Sejanus was an equestrian, he had solid links to members of the senatorial order which would not have done his career ambitions any harm.



Sejanus

- Through his father he was related to the Terentii family.
- Through his mother he was linked to the Lentuli family, and in turn to Q Junius Blaesus who was governor of Pannonia (see Chapter 1).
- Sejanus had been adopted by Quintus Aelius Tubero which meant that he had three brothers of consular status.
- His niece, by adoption, Aelia Paetina, would go on to become the second wife of the future emperor, Claudius.
- Sejanus’ daughter had been betrothed to the son of Claudius, Drusus.

From the time he took control of the guard, Sejanus cleverly began to make himself indispensable to the ageing Tiberius. It is clear that Tiberius valued and trusted his young commander, and to Sejanus alone spoke “freely and unguardedly”. As Tiberius got older, he became more isolated, many of his contemporaries were dying off. Sejanus cleverly ingratiated himself. In AD 22, Tiberius praised Sejanus’ work in limiting a fire in Rome, stopping it spreading beyond Pompey’s theatre. In the same year, he granted an honorary Triumph to Quintus Junius Blaesus, governor of Africa.

*“...the emperor indicated that this was a compliment to the latter’s nephew Sejanus...”*⁴

The rise and rise of Sejanus

Tacitus’ moral purpose in writing history is brought out no more clearly than when he is discussing the career of Sejanus. He suggests that the cause of the evils about to befall Rome with the rise and fall of Sejanus was:

*“...heaven’s anger against Rome – to which the triumph of Sejanus, and his downfall too, were catastrophic.”*⁵

² Tacitus, I.23

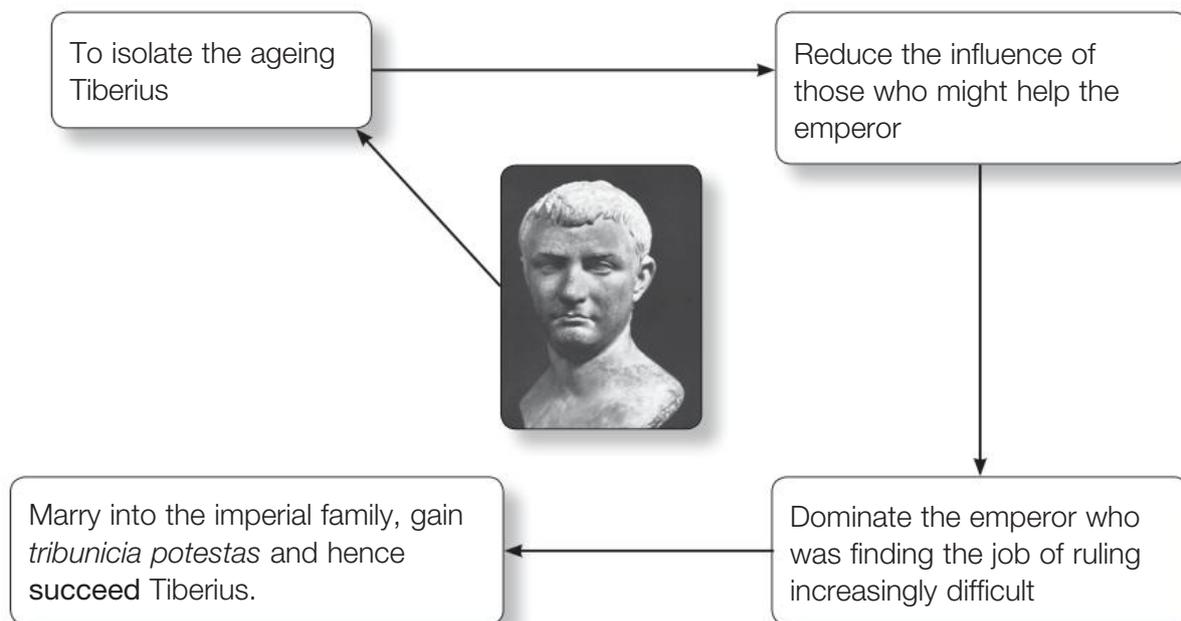
³ Shotter, D, Tiberius Caesar, Routledge, London, 1992, p 42

⁴ Tacitus, III.72

⁵ Tacitus, IV.I

We will never know whether Sejanus’ ultimate goal really was supreme power. However, Figure 5.1 suggests a fairly clear summary of his aims.

Figure 5.1 Sejanus’ political aims



Tacitus leaves us in no doubt about Sejanus’ aims.

“...Of audacious character and untiring physique, secretive about himself and ever ready to incriminate others, a blend of arrogance and servility, he concealed behind a carefully modest exterior an unbounded lust for power.”⁶

That Tiberius came to trust Sejanus so much seems almost contradictory. The image passed down of Tiberius is of an old man, disenchanted with fighting and the politicking in Rome and distrustful of all. Yet this probably explains the closeness that developed between the two. As Tacitus says, Sejanus worked incessantly, which clearly removed the burden from Tiberius. Sejanus was to become for Tiberius *socius laborum*, “the partner of my labours”.

Sejanus took two major steps in order to enhance his power.

1. For the sake of efficiency, he persuaded Tiberius that all the cohorts of the Praetorian Guard should be brought into a single fortress in the city of Rome. Clearly this would give Sejanus a far greater ability to intimidate any political opponents he faced.
2. He seduced Livilla, the wife of Drusus, son of Tiberius. He encouraged Livilla by sending away his own wife, Apicata. Together, so the ancient sources tell us, Sejanus and Livilla planned and carried out the murder of Drusus with the help of two domestic slaves, Eudemus and Lygdus.⁷

This raises the question of motivation:

- For Sejanus it is clear. Drusus resented Sejanus’ power and had on at least one occasion struck him. With Drusus out of the way, Sejanus could divorce his own wife, marry Livilla and become part of the imperial family. He could then present himself as a guardian for Tiberius’ grandson, Tiberius Gemellus, and thus gain power for himself.

⁶ Tacitus, IV.1

⁷ This is clearly Tacitus’ version of events (see IV.2). Apicata’s later letter to Tiberius in AD 31, just after Sejanus’ execution, her children’s deaths and just before her own suicide, allegedly laid out the details of Drusus’ death eight years earlier, a death that had broken Tiberius’ spirit.

- For Livilla, motivation was more complex. Drusus was a sick man, and had almost died in AD 21. Perhaps the combination of insecurity, sex and power was enough for her to be drawn towards Sejanus. More importantly, perhaps, Livilla feared her sister-in-law, Agrippina, who had ambitions for her own sons Nero, Drusus and Gaius.⁸

With Drusus out of the way, Sejanus now needed to destroy the family of Agrippina (the elder). Agrippina was the widow of Germanicus.⁹ Germanicus the highly popular son of Tiberius’ brother, Drusus, had died in suspicious circumstances in AD 19. Agrippina was a strong-willed, and a not altogether pleasant personality, despite Tacitus’ best efforts to give her good press. Agrippina had Julian blood, she was a granddaughter of Augustus. Importantly, she had three sons who were growing to manhood – Nero, Drusus and Gaius. She thus presented a major threat to Sejanus’ ambitions (and indeed Livilla’s). A detailed family tree can be found in Chapter 7.

- Agrippina sought Tiberius’ permission to remarry.
 - Tiberius was, to say the least, lukewarm to this idea.
 - Tiberius did not want the sons of Germanicus and heirs to his position, to come under the control of Agrippina and a new husband, and so threaten his power.
- To compound matters, Agrippina sought permission to marry Asinius Gallus.
 - Tiberius had a particular hatred for Asinius Gallus for he was the man who married Vipsania, the woman Tiberius had been forced to divorce by Augustus to marry Augustus’ daughter, Julia.
 - Tiberius had been deeply in love with Vipsania and forever held a grudge against Asinius Gallus.

Sejanus now moved to isolate Agrippina, prevent any reconciliation between her and Tiberius, destroy her supporters (sometimes referred to as the *partes Agrippinae*) and eventually destroy her and her family. Part of Sejanus’ skill in these dealings was to convince Tiberius that Agrippina was scheming against him, and to convince Agrippina that the attacks on her and her friends and family emanated from Tiberius. This ensured no reconciliation between the two would be possible. Using trumped up charges and false evidence, Sejanus used a series of maiestas trials to remove potential opponents.

Sejanus’ plans were greatly helped when Tiberius took himself to Capri in AD 26. Sejanus now became the conduit between the emperor and the political events inside Rome, and would have a freer hand to carry out his schemes.

Fate intervened to confirm Tiberius’ trust in Sejanus. During a rockfall in a cave at Sperlonga near Naples, Sejanus saved the emperor’s life.

The death of Livia in AD 29 removed a further possible restraint on Sejanus.

The following table lists some of Sejanus’ victims in his thrust for power.

⁸ Not all historians accept this traditional version of events. See Bill Leadbetter’s article, *The Courtier Sejanus*, for a much more sympathetic view of Sejanus (Teaching History, Journal of the HTA of NSW, November 1992)

⁹ Details of imperial family intrigues and the succession will be dealt with in Chapter 7.

Date	Victims	Actions
AD 24	Gaius Silius and his wife Sosia Galla	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ attacked on the grounds of their enthusiasm for the <i>partes Agrippinae</i> ▪ needed to be destroyed to avoid the possibility of civil war, said Sejanus ▪ Silius knew he was lost and committed suicide
AD 26	Claudia Pulchra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ she was a cousin of Agrippina ▪ accused of trying to poison Tiberius ▪ died in exile
AD 27	Varus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ son of Claudia Pulchra ▪ condemned to death for treason
AD 28	Titius Sabinus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ he was persuaded to speak unguardedly about Sejanus and Tiberius by his friend Latinius Latiaris ▪ he was executed in prison
AD 29	Agrippina and Nero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ denounced by Tiberius ▪ banished by the Senate ▪ Nero committed suicide
AD 30	Drusus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ imprisoned in Rome ▪ allegedly went mad and was executed in AD 33

The fall of Sejanus

Sejanus' continuing rise seemed irresistible even if Tiberius had been reluctant to allow him to marry Livilla. By AD 30, he was gaining “imperial trappings”. His sons had become priests in the same year as Gaius (Agrippina's son) and he himself had been awarded *imperium proconsulare*. In AD 31, he shared the consulship with Tiberius, a major achievement for a man born an equestrian.¹⁰

There is a gap of two years in the manuscripts of Tacitus that have been handed down to us covering the treatment of Agrippina, and her sons Nero and Drusus. More importantly we do not have Tacitus' words on the arrest and execution of Sejanus.

Why was Sejanus felled so suddenly? Several theories have been put forward.

1. He was brought down by an influential group of jealous senate nobles.
2. Sejanus' plans for bringing down Tiberius – having removed Agrippina and her sons – were discovered by the emperor.
3. Sejanus had planned all along to take Tiberius' power and was found out.¹¹

This brings into question why would Sejanus try to remove Tiberius? The emperor was settled on Capri and Sejanus was already running affairs in Rome. Perhaps the answer is no more complicated than age and impatience. Sejanus was about fifty at the time of his fall. Tiberius was in his 70s; Augustus had lived to 77, while Livia had lived into her late 80s. Tiberius was showing no signs of dying. In addition, by AD 31, Sejanus' position was beginning to weaken.

- He had brought a prosecution against a leading senator, Lucius Arruntius but thanks to the intervention of Tiberius, the case against Arruntius failed.

¹⁰ A last person to move from equestrian rank to the consulship had been Pompey, 100 years earlier.

¹¹ This is the popular view presented in Robert Graves novel (and later TV series) *I Claudius*. It has also been argued in Barbara Levick's work *Tiberius the Politician*.

- Tiberius had shown an ambiguous attitude towards Sejanus throughout AD 31. As well as intervening in the Arruntius case, he made Sejanus give up his consulship in May.
- Suetonius relates that Tiberius knew that Sejanus was plotting against him and took steps to isolate him. He even had plans for Drusus (son of Germanicus and Agrippina) to be released from prison and appointed commander-in-chief if a revolt occurred.¹²
- Tiberius’ suspicions were deepened by a message he received from Antonia, warning him of Sejanus’ intentions. Antonia was the wife of his late brother, Drusus. Tiberius had remained on good terms with Antonia and he trusted her.
- Tiberius moved carefully. He had Germanicus’ son, Gaius, brought to Capri. He sent Naevius Sutorius Macro to Rome with a secret order to replace Sejanus as Praetorian Prefect.
- The final move against Sejanus involved a lengthy and verbose speech from Tiberius read out to the senate. It began by praising Sejanus, who on hearing the speech expected it to end with a request that the senate grant him *tribunicia potestas*, which would have indicated Sejanus as Tiberius’ successor. It ended with him being denounced as a traitor.

“...The senate then condemned him; he was strangled in prison and his body was torn to pieces by the mob. His children and many of his partisans were illegally put to death by the senate and the mob in Rome.”¹³

After Sejanus

Sejanus’ death was followed by a witch-hunt of any who were suspected of supporting him. This could have involved the deaths of many, after all even the emperor had trusted and worked with Sejanus. The poet Juvenal provides a graphic account of the violence that followed Sejanus’ fall; an extract appears at the end of this chapter. However, the impression given by the ancient writers of Tiberius’ final years do not really stand up to scrutiny.

Suetonius enjoys describing Tiberius’ degrading life of vice which seemed to know no bounds (*Tiberius* 42-45) and his penchant for brutality (*Tiberius* 60-61). However, there is little evidence of this beyond Suetonius, and it is known that until the end of his life, Tiberius enjoyed the company of scholars and men of letters while at Capri.

Tacitus tries to present the final years as a reign of terror and lists several cases of men brought to trial on a range of pretexts. These men included Publius Vitellius, Publius Pomponius, Lucianus Latiaris, Gaius Caesilianus.

- Tacitus explains how leading senators were now willing to become informers on their fellows, regardless of whether a crime had been committed. He says that friends and relatives became as suspect as strangers. An innocent dinner-party remark could lead to a man being prosecuted. To play safe, senators denounced their fellows to prove their loyalty.
 - Politicians pursuing their ambitions or merely a personal grudge could launch a charge of treason or *maiestas* against a rival. The charges were always vague in the extreme.
 - A successful prosecution meant a man could claim a quarter of the condemned man’s estate. Laying a charge of *maiestas* by these *delatores* became a path to fortune for some unscrupulous Romans.

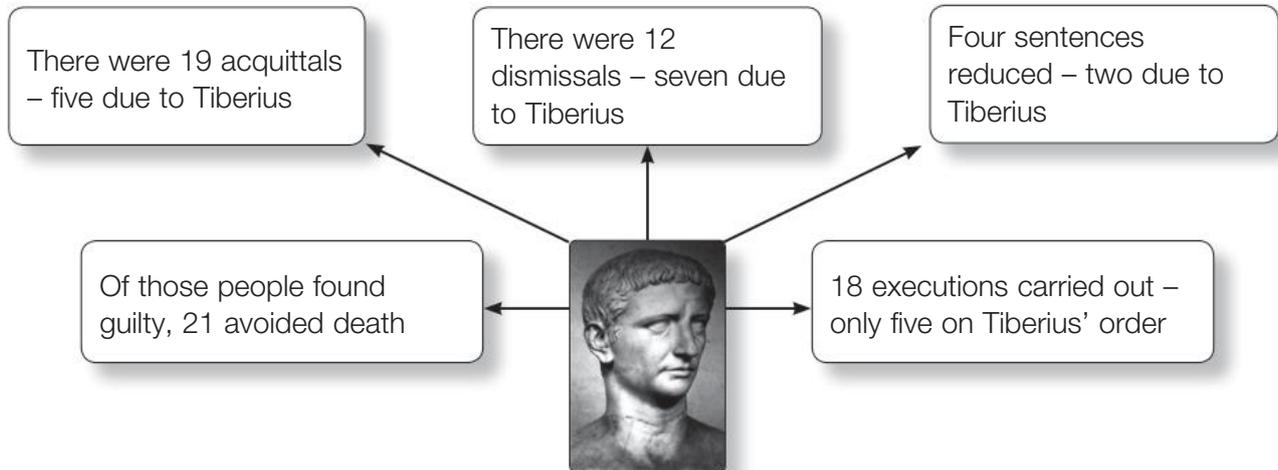
However, the facts do not tend to support this negative view of Tiberius’ final years. Certainly he became more morose and probably indecisive, but the description of him as a brutal, sinister tyrant does not bear scrutiny. Bessie Walker’s 1952 work, *The Annals of Tacitus: A Study in the writing*

¹² Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 65

¹³ Scullard, H H, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 287

of history, systematically examines the story of maiestas trials during Tiberius’ reign.¹⁴ She points out that during the whole of Tiberius’ reign, there were 86 cases of maiestas. Bearing in mind that Rome had a population of one million, that maiestas covered a wide range of crimes, and that Tiberius was in power for 23 years, the average of less than four a year does not add up to the blood bath described by Tacitus. Figure 5.2 summarises Walker’s conclusions.

Figure 5.2 Summary of Walker’s conclusions



Exercise 5.1

Place the events listed on the left in the correct chronological order.

Arrest of Sejanus	1st event	
Death of Drusus	2nd event	
Sejanus sent to Pannonia	3rd event	
Tiberius goes to Capri	4th event	
Death of Livia	5th event	
Sejanus takes command	6th event	
Death of Augustus	7th event	
Trial of Titius Sabinus	8th event	
Death of Nero	9th event	
Macro replaces Sejanus	10th event	

Exercise 5.2 Match the term below with the meaning

1	Those who inform for political or financial gain	
2	The charge of treason	
3	Partner of my labours	
4	Social order below senatorial	
5	Commands the Guard	

MAIESTAS SOCIUS LABORUM DELATORES PRAETORIAN PREFECT EQUESTRIAN

¹⁴ Walker, B, *The Annals of Tacitus: A Study in the writing of history*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1952

What do the historians have to say about “The Praetorian Guard: Sejanus and “maiestas”?”

1. Juvenal: Satire X

In his Satire X, written in the late 1st/ early 2nd century AD, the Roman poet, Juvenal, provides a dramatic account of the fall of Sejanus. He does not attempt to provide any political analysis but rather points to the mob mentality of the Roman people, and shows that having surrendered their responsibilities, the mob would follow whoever seemed to have fortune’s favour and could provide bread and circuses.

“...By the people glows in the furnace, flames crackle around huge Sejanus; the face of a man who was number two in the world Is converted to jugs and basins, turned to pots and frying pans. Deck your houses with laurel, lead a great bull whitened with Chalk up to the Capitol: come see Sejanus dragged along by A hook, everyone’s celebrating! ‘Look at the lips, look at the Face on that! You can take it from me, he was never a man That I liked’ ‘But what was the crime that brought him down?’ Who informed, what’s the evidence, where are the witnesses?’ ‘That’s all irrelevant; a lengthy and wordy letter arrived from Capri.’ ‘That’s fine, answer enough.’ But what of the Roman Mob? They follow Fortune, as always, and hate whoever she Condemns. If Nortia, as the Etruscans called her, had favoured Etruscan Sejanus; if the old Emperor had been surreptitiously Smothered; that same crowd in a moment would have hailed Their new Augustus. They shed their sense of responsibility Long ago, when they lost their votes, and the bribes; the mob That used to grant power, high office, the legions, everything, Curtails its desires, and reveals its anxiety for two things only, Bread and circuses. ‘I hear that many will perish.’ ‘No doubt, The furnace is huge.”¹

2. Tacitus: The Annals of Imperial Rome

Tacitus almost revels in his description of post-Sejanus Rome in which Tiberius, now with no restraint, demanded that blood should flow. He describes the pursuit of former supporters of Sejanus as a massacre in which age, social status or sex was of no importance. Bodies were dragged to the Tiber and thrown in, where they would float away or be grounded. No one was allowed to touch them or cremate them.

“...Terror had paralysed human sympathy. The rising surge of brutality drove compassion away.”²

¹ Juvenal, Satire X, 62-81

² Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, VI.19

Chapter 6:

Tiberius: The army, the frontier and provincial policy

Under Tiberius, the army was maintained much as Augustus had left it, the frontiers were secured but not expanded and care was taken to maintain a high quality of provincial administration. In this, Tiberius was following Augustus' advice:

*"...the empire should not be extended beyond its present frontiers. Either he feared dangers ahead or he was jealous."*¹

Tiberius approached the issues of army/ frontier and provincial policy in a decidedly conservative manner. He was an experienced military leader himself – arguably the greatest of his time – and so he knew more than anyone the realities of war, the costs of military expansion and the dangers associated with expansionist policies. Under Tiberius, the aim of frontier and provincial policy was the maintenance of the status quo and consolidation. Figure 6.1 summarises the main aims of Tiberius' army/ frontier/ provincial policy. Even so, the reign of Tiberius was not devoid of military activity, though it was usually reactive.

Frontier activities under Tiberius

From AD 17 to 24, there was a protracted guerrilla war against Roman rule in **North Africa** led by Tacfarinas, a man who had fought in the Roman army and thus was familiar with its methods.

- Though Rome was ultimately successful, the length of the rebellion caused embarrassment.
- Africa was a senatorial province and the senate's failure to contain this revolt angered Tiberius.²
- In AD 21, Tiberius sent his Pannonian commander, Junius Blaesus to take charge. By AD 22, Tacfarinas' forces had been defeated and the guerrilla leader himself was killed in AD 24.

The mutiny in **Germany** of AD 14, was, only with some difficulty neutralised (see Chapter 1). However, Germanicus decided that a campaign against German tribes across the Rhine might restore discipline to his troops.

- Tiberius was not happy about Germanicus' escapades but due to his adopted son's popularity, his status as heir and his Julian blood, allowed him to continue his adventure.
- In AD 17, he recalled Germanicus to Rome, gave him many honours and then sent him east on a mission.³
- For Tiberius, this was the end of any German expansion. The empire's frontier would be the Rhine, not the Elbe, and during Tiberius' rule Germany did not cause Rome major problems.

In AD 21-22, Tiberius faced the problem of a nationalist revolt in **Gaul**.

- This revolt was led by two Roman citizens, Julius Sacrovir and Julius Florus.
- The revolt had both nationalist and religious elements, and had probably been inspired by druid priests. Resistance to Rome often centred around druidism.

1 Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, I.11

2 Under Augustus, the empire had been divided into "imperial" and "senatorial" provinces. Imperial provinces tended to be the more troublesome areas which required a greater military presence. This way, Augustus was able to keep the legions under his direct control. However, his "maius imperium" allowed him to interfere in senatorial provinces if the need arose.

3 The role of Germanicus and his untimely death will be covered in Chapter 7.

Figure 6.1 The main aims of Tiberius/ army/ frontier/ provincial policies

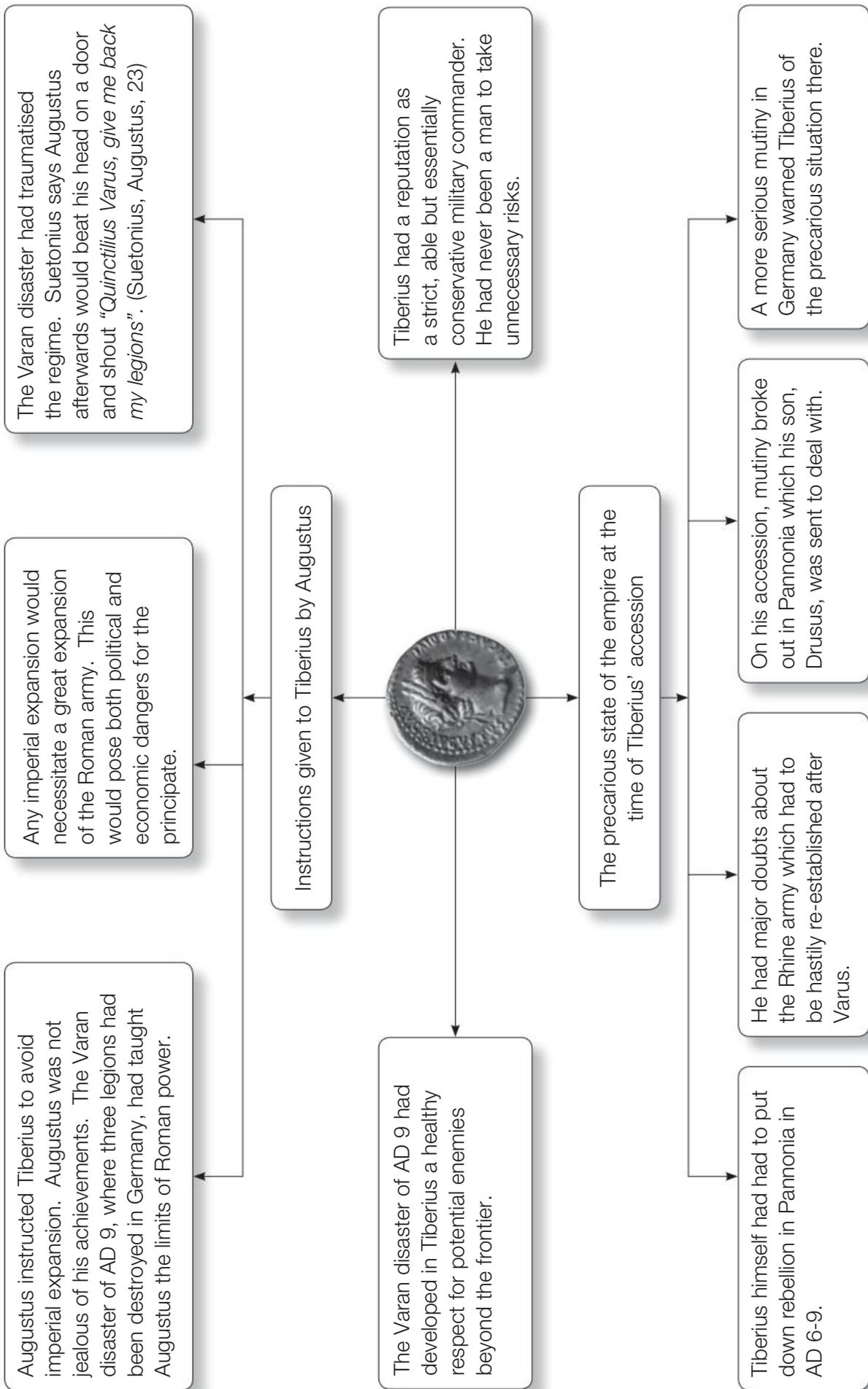
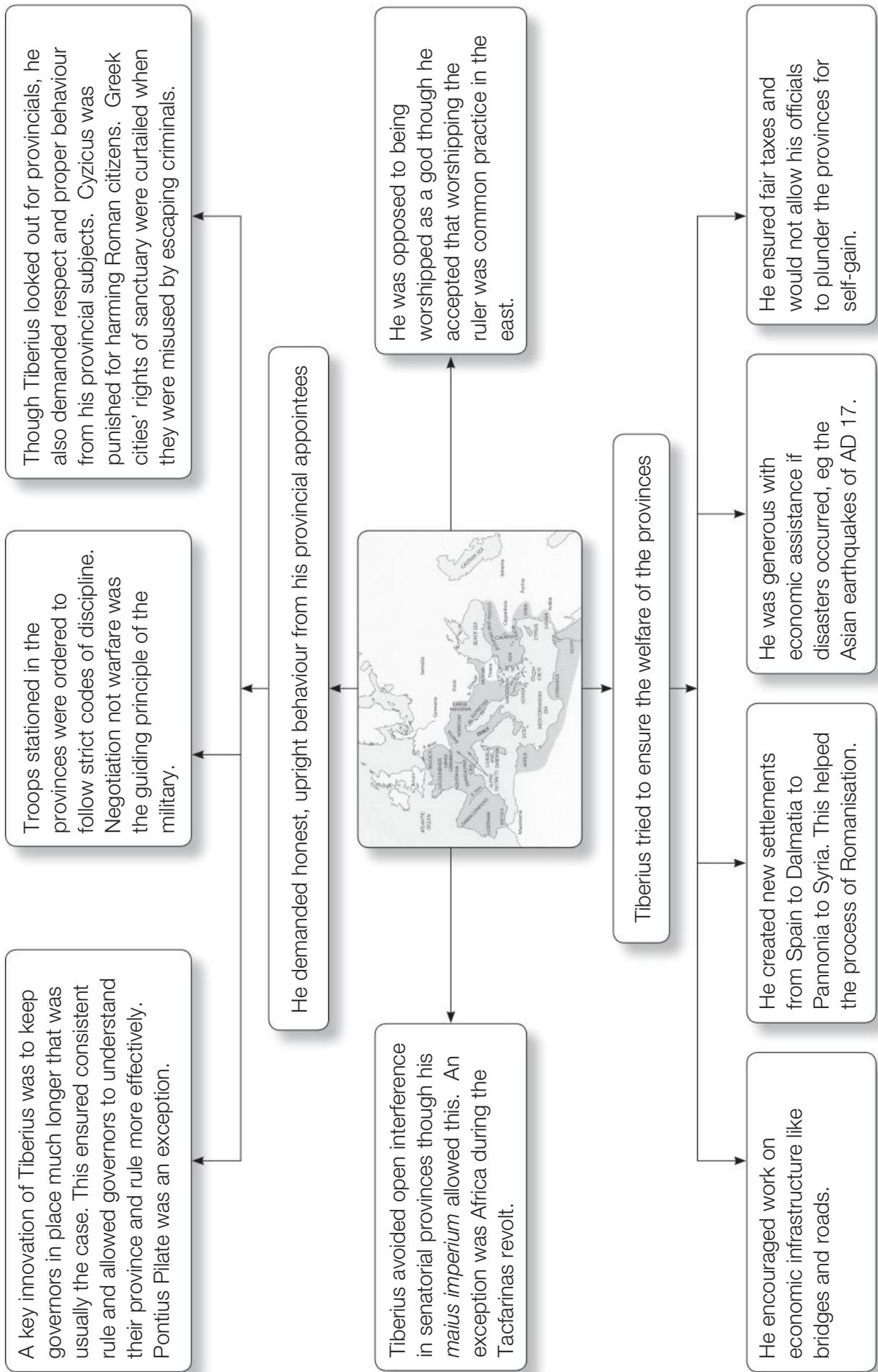


Figure 6.2 Aspects of the Provincial Policy of Tiberius



- The garrison in Gaul was quite small and reinforcements from the Upper Rhine had to be called for. Troops under Gaius Silius finally crushed the revolt.
- Silius apparently got carried away with his success and was later charged with extortion. Tiberius had him exiled for three years for his behaviour.

Central and Eastern Europe proved less of a concern for Tiberius.

- The loyalty of the Suebi and Marcomanni, led by the chieftain Vannius, kept the central Europe frontier along the Danube quiet.
- In AD 15, Tiberius combined the senatorial provinces of Achaëa and Macedonia with Moesia, a successful arrangement which lasted until AD 44.
- Augustus had divided Thrace into two client kingdoms. However, one of the kings murdered the other in AD 19 and a Roman force was sent in from Moesia to restore order. Thrace remained fairly quiet for the rest of Tiberius' reign and in AD 46 formally became part of the empire.

The east and relations with Parthia had long caused problems for Rome.⁴

- There was unrest early in the reign in Syria and Judaea. The client kingdoms of Cilicia, Cappadocia and Commagene had vacant thrones and the pro-Roman king of Parthia, Vonones, had been driven from the throne by Artabanus. Vonones then took the throne of Armenia.
- Tiberius did not want to be drawn into any eastern dynastic disputes and so sent Germanicus to the east to work out a diplomatic settlement.
 - Germanicus' trip to the east would have major repercussions for politics back in Rome (see Chapter 7).
 - Germanicus' mission succeeded in calming the situation in the east:
 - Commagene became a province and suitably pro-Roman kings were found for the vacant thrones.
 - Asia Minor was calmed down.
 - Zeno (Artaxias) was installed as King of Armenia and remained there till his death in AD 35. Zeno ruled well and the threat from Parthia ended.
- Trouble reappeared when Zeno died and the Parthian king, Artabanus, placed his son Arsaces on the Armenian throne. He demanded Tiberius surrender territory in Asia Minor.
 - Tiberius appointed the able and youthful Lucius Vitellius, governor of Syria and at the same time supported the claims of Mithridates of Iberia to the Armenian throne. This unnerved Artabanus.
 - Lucius Vitellius was able to reach a negotiated settlement of issues which brought another twenty year period of calm to the region.
 - Vitellius' intervention in Judaea also led to the eventual removal of the hated Pontius Pilate.

Imperial policy under Tiberius

An overview of Tiberius' policies within the empire can be found in Figure 6.2. However, a few introductory comments are in order at this stage. In a manner similar to the last 22 years of

⁴ Rome had suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Parthians at Carrhae in 53 BC. Antony's forces were also defeated in 36 BC. In the 20s BC, Augustus and Tiberius managed to restore Roman pride through a combination of diplomacy and threats. However, the lesson was learned, avoid conflict with Parthia.

Augustus' reign, Tiberius never left Italy, did not tour the regions and did not visit the troops on the frontier. For this he was criticised but it might be remembered that the last time Augustus travelled was in 8 BC at the age of 55 – Tiberius' age when he became emperor.

Tiberius made some changes to Augustus' arrangements in army matters.

- Following the mutinies in Germany and Pannonia, Tiberius realised the dangers of concentrating too many troops together. From now on they were gradually spread along Rome's frontiers.⁵
- Tiberius knew all too well how bad winter quarters could be for troops in the north. This had been a cause of the AD 14 mutinies. He set about making sure troops were now quartered in timber buildings.
- In North Africa he encouraged the construction of forts and the use of mobile troop units against Tacfarinas.
- As related above, Tiberius' frontier policies were effective but *"his financial stringency did not permit the just demands from the soldiers for improved pay and shorter service to be met."*⁶

Barbara Levick sees two sides to Tiberius' imperial policies.⁷

Barbara Levick on Tiberius' imperial policies	
The positive view	The negative view
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Imperial legates and proconsuls were allowed long tenure in their provinces ■ Poppaeus Sabinus ruled Moesia for 24 years, P Petronius was proconsul in Asia for six years. ■ They gained experience, learned the ways of their province and so established a relationship. ■ Some men ruled their provinces in absentia, ie from Rome. These included men like the Syrian legate L Aelius Lamia and L Arruntius, the legate of Tarraconensis. ■ Tiberius was planning a centralised imperial bureaucracy – he could keep an eye on his legates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tiberius seemed more concerned with exploiting provinces rather than uplifting their social/economic life. ■ Keeping governors in office a long time was not good if such men lacked sensitivity and political acumen, such as Pontius Pilate in Judaea. ■ There were many prosecutions of administrators for dishonest practices. ■ Maladministration often led to revolts against Rome, eg those of Sacrovir in Gaul and Tacfarinas in Africa. ■ Tiberius was too far away to fully know what was going on in the provinces.

⁵ By the time of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96), two legions were never brigaded together.

⁶ Webster, G, *The Roman Imperial Army*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1969, p 58

⁷ Levick, B, *Tiberius the Politician*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1976, p 125-7

What do the historians have to say about “The army, the frontier and provincial policy”?

1. David Shotter: *Tiberius Caesar*

Shotter is full of praise for the calm, yet firm approach that Tiberius displayed in frontier matters. He was able to achieve Rome’s aims without a direct military intervention in the regions. The fact that he was able to achieve this twice in the troublesome eastern regions of the empire was evidence of skill and imagination on Tiberius’ part, argues Shotter. Tiberius’ wise decision to follow Augustus’ advice and not tamper with existing arrangements paid off.

*“...In the day-to-day management of existing provinces, Tiberius’ principate was acknowledged as a period in which high standards were sought and generally enforced; officials who overstepped the mark were usually dealt with firmly, and Tiberius’ subsequent attitude to such people was generally hostile...”*⁸

2. Tacitus: *The Annals of Imperial Rome*

Tacitus’ account of Tiberius’ likes to focus on the morose personality of the man, his alleged brutality, misuse of maiestas and the later “reign of terror”. Several of these ideas have already been challenged. However, one area where Tacitus does not seek to denigrate the emperor is in the area of provincial policy. On occasions, so laudatory is Tacitus’ account, that it almost seems that he is writing about a different person.

When twelve Asian cities were devastated by earthquakes in AD 17, Tiberius was generous in aiding their reconstruction (II.47).

His description of Rome’s naval strength and dependent monarchs (IV.5) sits oddly between a description of Livilla as “degraded” and Sejanus’ murder of Drusus.

Tiberius did not allow his appointees to get away with exceeding their instructions and abusing provincials, as seen in the case of the emperor’s agent in Asia, Lucilius Capito. Tiberius said that the provincials’ complaints must be heard, and so *“the case was tried, and Capito condemned”*. (IV.14).

Tacitus also refers to Tiberius’ seemingly inconsistent attitude to the desire of provincials to worship him. Like Augustus, he was comfortable with his statue going up in the east and prayers being offered to him, because this was an act of loyalty to Rome. He was not happy about such things in the west.

*“...to have my statue worshipped among the gods in every province would be presumptuous and arrogant... I emphasise to you that I am human, performing human tasks, and content to occupy the first place among men.”*⁹

⁸ Shotter, D, *Tiberius Caesar*, Routledge, London, 1992, p 56

⁹ Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, IV.37

Exercise 6.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	What was Tiberius' attitude to Augustus' advice to avoid military adventures?	
2	What disaster had befallen the Roman Army in AD 9?	
3	What power allowed Tiberius to interfere in senatorial provinces if he so chose?	
4	What was the state of the Rhine armies when Tiberius took power?	
5	Where did mutinies break out in AD 14?	
6	What was Tiberius' view of Germanicus' campaign across the Rhine?	
7	Where was Rome's longest military engagement during Tiberius' reign?	
8	List three factors that caused the revolt in Gaul.	
9	How successful was Tiberius' eastern policies?	
10	Who was the disastrous governor of Judaea?	
11	How frequently did Tiberius visit the provinces and his frontier troops?	
12	Why did Tiberius keep some provincial governors in Rome?	
13	What was Tiberius' view of imperial worship?	

14	How did Tiberius assist the process of Romanisation?	
15	What happened in Asia in AD 17 which required Tiberius' personal intervention?	
16	Which city was punished for harming Roman citizens?	
17	Who remained governor of Moesia for 24 years?	
18	What was Webster's view of Tiberius' policy towards the army?	
19	What impression does Shotter provide of Tiberius' imperial policy	
20	Comment on Tacitus' view of Tiberius' imperial policies?	

Chapter 7:

Tiberius, the imperial family and problems of the succession

Introduction

Within a decade of the Battle of Actium (31 BC), Augustus had succeeded in consolidating his rule. In future years, there would be minor amendments but the essential basis of Augustan rule centred upon his:

- Tribunicia potestas
- Maius imperium
- Consular imperium.

Tribunician authority gave the princeps the right to veto senatorial legislation and to initiate his own. Maius imperium gave the princeps the power to override the senate in the provinces under its control. Consular imperium gave him power inside Rome. Ultimately, of course, Augustus' power rested on his control over, and the loyalty of, Rome's legions. As the Chinese communist leader, Mao Zedong, said in a more modern context:

"...political power grows out of the barrel of a gun".

Whatever appearance the Settlements of 27 BC and 23 BC sought to convey, it was clear that the real power within Rome now resided in the household of Augustus. As a result, it was unlikely that any future princeps would come from outside the imperial family. Such a development would be a sure recipe for renewed civil war as claimants for power promoted their cause.

*"Augustus' policy was to achieve national unity and avoid any recurrence of civil war. The succession of a non-Julian would almost certainly provoke pretenders to put forward their claims; armed conflict would result."*¹

Augustus made several attempts to find a successor. Though he lived to be 77, he had been sick, to the point of death, on several occasions, and so the need for an orderly succession was essential for Rome.

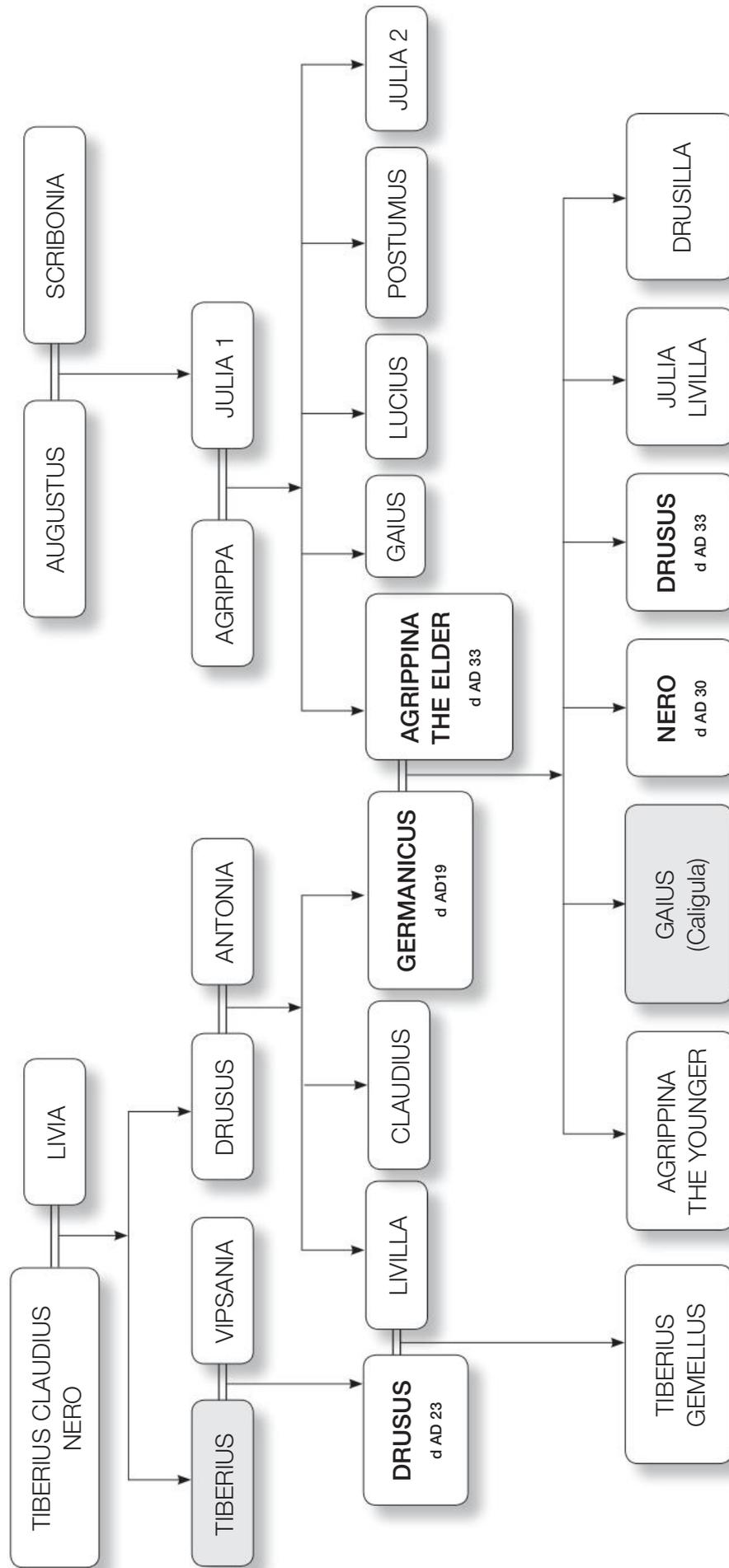
- Augustus' first choice had been his nephew, Marcellus, who was married to his daughter, Julia. Marcellus died in 23 BC.
- Julia was then married to Agrippa, Augustus' long-time friend. Agrippa died in 12 BC but he had three sons.
- Augustus adopted two of these sons, Gaius and Lucius. It appeared that the succession was heading in their direction. However, Lucius died in AD 2; Gaius died in AD 4.
- Augustus with some reluctance now adopted the elder son of his wife Livia, Tiberius, and gave him tribunicia potestas for ten years. However, Augustus still had hopes for a Julian succession:
 - He adopted the third son of Agrippa and Julia, Agrippa Postumus;²
 - He forced Tiberius to adopt Germanicus, the husband of his granddaughter, Agrippina (the elder). It was clear that Augustus preferred Germanicus to Tiberius but, at 19 years of age, he would have been too young to be designated heir.

¹ Salmon, ET, A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138, Methuen, London, 1968, p 33

² Agrippa Postumus was banished to exile in AD 7.

Figure 7.2 Tiberius and the succession

This part of the family tree shows where the possible candidates of the post-Tiberius succession fit in. Tiberius' (and Livia's) direct line ends with Tiberius Gemellus. Augustus' direct line leads to his great grandson, Gaius (Caligula).



“...The fact that Augustus forced Tiberius to recognise Germanicus as his heir caused resentment in Tiberius and helped further to polarise the imperial family into the two ‘camps’ – Claudians and Julians.”³

When Augustus died in AD 14, Tiberius moved quickly to take possession of the Augustan household, and hence the principate.⁴ Figure 7.1 presents the relationships of the imperial household up to AD 14.

Exercise 7.1 Match the personality with their position in the imperial family.

1	Father of Julia 1		6	Mother of Tiberius	
2	Younger son of Livia		7	2nd husband of Julia 1	
3	Died in AD 4		8	Daughter of Octavia	
4	Son of Vipsania		9	Mother of Postumus	
5	Husband of Agrippina		10	Son of Octavia	

LIVIA	DRUSUS	AGRIPPA	AUGUSTUS	DRUSUS
MARCELLUS	GERMANICUS	GAIUS	ANTONIA	JULIA 1

Tiberius and the succession

Tiberius was quickly able to consolidate his position, even though mutinies occurred in Germany and Pannonia. To deal with the mutinies, Tiberius sent the two men most likely to succeed him as emperor:

- Germanicus, the adopted son of Tiberius and son of his younger brother Drusus, was sent to Germany.
- Drusus, the son of Tiberius and his first wife Vipsania, was sent to Pannonia.

Neither of these prospective candidates for the succession would outlive the ageing emperor. Germanicus was to die in AD 19; Drusus died in AD 23.

Germanicus did not handle the mutiny in Germany well, and his subsequent adventure across the Rhine greatly concerned Tiberius, for whom memories of the Varan disaster of AD 9 were still fresh in his mind. Germanicus' reputation was not enhanced by his work in Germany, despite Tacitus' efforts to bathe him in glory. Figure 7.3 shows the artistic legacy of Tacitus' writing in Rubens' work “The Glorification of Germanicus”. Germanicus was recalled to Rome, heaped with honours and then sent on a mission to the east. Germanicus would never return to Rome alive. In Germany, Germanicus had proven himself to be popular, gallant, even charismatic, but clearly unsuitable for a major command. Tiberius' decision to end Germanicus' time in Germany might have been good policy, but it suggested that Tiberius was jealous of his young rival and perhaps had sinister intent towards him. Tacitus certainly tries to develop this theme.

The details of Germanicus' mission to the east are covered in Chapter 6. Tacitus argues that

³ Shotter, D, *Tiberius Caesar*, Routledge, London, 1992, p 35

⁴ See Chapter 1

Tiberius was trying to remove Germanicus by sending him to the east but this view is unjustified.

*“...By appointing Germanicus, Tiberius was also following the precedent set by Augustus, who had sent Agrippa, Tiberius himself, and Gaius Caesar to rule the eastern provinces when these men were the heirs-apparent.”*⁵

- Germanicus was accompanied by an ‘advisor’ chosen by Tiberius. He was Cnaeus Calpurnius Piso, known to Tiberius as being trustworthy and reliable.
 - Piso had just been appointed governor of Syria.
 - Piso’s wife, Plancina, accompanied her husband; she was a good friend of Livia.
 - Piso kept Tiberius informed of each indiscretion, no matter how innocent, committed by Germanicus.
- On his way home Germanicus visited Egypt.
 - This broke protocol as Egypt was the private property of the princeps and could not be entered without the permission of Tiberius.
 - Germanicus’ informal and incorrect behaviour in Egypt suggested that he was oblivious to Egypt’s special status.
 - With Germanicus in Egypt, Piso started undoing some of Germanicus’ provincial arrangements he had settled in the east.
 - Angered by this, Germanicus ordered Piso to leave Syria.
- Germanicus now headed back to Rome. Whilst in Antioch, he fell ill and died. Almost certainly, his death was due to natural causes but Agrippina and her family accused Piso of having poisoned her husband.
 - The rumour now spread that Piso had acted on the instructions of Tiberius and Livia.
 - Piso and Plancina did not help matters by celebrating Germanicus’ death.



Figure 7.3 The Glorification of Germanicus by Rubens

A new governor of Syria was appointed by Germanicus’ staff, though this was illegal. Piso tried to use force to regain his position, an action which angered Tiberius. Piso was forced to return to Rome to face trial for Germanicus’ murder. The evidence was flimsy at best, but Piso knew his position was weak. There was popular hysteria following Germanicus’ death (see below), Tiberius remained ‘very’ neutral, and Livia ensured Plancina’s safety. Piso committed suicide before the end of the trial.

To say the least, Germanicus’ widow, **Agrippina** (the elder) strongly suspected Tiberius’ involvement in the death of her husband. Tacitus does his best to highlight the apparent joy of Tiberius and Livia at the death of the young rival:

*“...everyone knew that Tiberius could scarcely conceal his delight at the death of Germanicus.”*⁶

What followed the arrival of Agrippina and her family at Brundisium in southern Italy, and their slow progress back to Rome, can only be described as mass hysteria. The scenes that followed the

⁵ Wiedemann, T, *The Julio-Claudians*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989, p 25

⁶ Tacitus, III.3

death of Princess Diana in 1997 perhaps give us an idea of the people's reaction to Germanicus' death. Tacitus provides a detailed description (see *Tacitus*, III, 1-3). Here is part of Tacitus' description;

*"...Agrippina, with her two children, stepped off the ship, her eyes lowered, the urn of death in her hands. Her companions were worn out by prolonged grieving; so the sorrow of the fresh mourners who now met her was more demonstrative. Otherwise everyone's feelings were indistinguishable; the cries of men and women, relatives and strangers, blended in a single universal groan."*⁷

With Germanicus dead, Tiberius' son, **Drusus**, now seemed to be the likely successor. In AD 22, Drusus was given tribunicia potestas and made the guardian of the two elder sons of the late Germanicus.

- However, any possible grooming of Drusus came to an abrupt end with his death in AD 23.
- The wife of Sejanus, Apicata, later told Tiberius that Drusus had been poisoned on the order of Sejanus and Livilla, Drusus' wife. (see Chapter 5 for the details of this episode).

Tiberius now seemed to be planting the succession on the shoulders of Germanicus' two elder sons, **Nero** and **Drusus**. He placed them under the guardianship of the Senate. However, other developments now intervened.

- The Praetorian Prefect, Sejanus, had ideas of his own to succeed Tiberius.
 - Having removed Drusus, Sejanus sought to marry his widow, Livilla, and thus make himself part of the imperial family.
 - Livilla was the sister of Germanicus (and the future emperor Claudius).
 - Chapter 5 relates how Sejanus made himself indispensable to the ageing emperor, even saving his life on one occasion.
- If Tacitus and Apicata are to be believed, Sejanus sought to eliminate any possible rivals, which of course meant the family of Agrippina the Elder.
 - He sought to make Tiberius suspicious of Agrippina, while convincing Agrippina that her hardships were due to Tiberius' actions.
 - Neither Tiberius nor Agrippina was the most pleasant of people, a fact that certainly made Sejanus' task easier.
- Sejanus sought to intimidate Agrippina's son, Nero, even using his brother, Drusus, to spy on him. Sejanus was aware of a jealousy between the two brothers.
- In AD 28-29, a series of maiestas cases prepared the ground for a direct attack on Agrippina and her family. The death of Livia helped this. Livia was no friend of Agrippina but the presence of Augustus' widow had had the effect of holding back Sejanus.
- Agrippina, Nero and Drusus were now directly attacked, and they, with many of their supporters, were imprisoned.
- Nero committed suicide in AD 30.

The fall of Sejanus in AD 31 brought no relief for Agrippina, Drusus and her supporters. Tiberius may well have believed that she had been conspiring with Sejanus, due in part to Sejanus' dishonest befriending of her. Relations between the two steadily worsened. Agrippina died on 18 October AD 33, two years to the day after the death of Sejanus. Drusus had died a few weeks

⁷ Tacitus, III.1

earlier. His death was followed by a harsh attack on him by Tiberius who may well have felt justified in this due to Drusus' actions against his brother, Nero.

In AD 30, not long before the fall of Sejanus, Tiberius had taken the advice of his sister-in-law, Antonia (wife of his late brother, Drusus). He ordered that the remaining son of Germanicus, Gaius (Caligula) be sent to Capri for protection. Tiberius now became more preoccupied with the issue of the succession.

- His grandson, Tiberius Gemellus was too young.
- His nephew, Claudius (brother of Germanicus) was considered simple-minded.
- Thus, attention fell to Germanicus' remaining son, Gaius. In AD 35, Gaius and Gemellus were made joint heirs and no doubt Tiberius hoped to live long enough to set aside Gaius. Tiberius certainly did not spend time preparing Gaius for leadership, though in AD 33 he received the quaestorship.

Sejanus' successor as Praetorian Prefect, the 'evil' Macro, began to ingratiate himself with the young Gaius. The circumstances of Tiberius' death in AD 37 are shrouded in uncertainty. The story goes that having learned of Tiberius' death, Gaius excitedly took on "the trappings of his new role". However, Tiberius revived, and at this point Macro smothered him. The emperor's death was welcomed in Rome and people were heard to cry out "to the Tiber with Tiberius".

Exercise 7.2

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE for each of the following statements.

1	Tiberius was unquestionably responsible for the death of Germanicus.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	Relations between Agrippina and Tiberius improved after Germanicus' death.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	The people of Rome blamed Tiberius and Livia for the death of Germanicus.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	Tacitus blames Sejanus and Livilla for the death of Drusus.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	Sejanus wanted to marry Drusus' widow, Livilla.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	Sejanus tried to intensify the suspicions between Agrippina and Tiberius.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	Sejanus' death brought some respite for Agrippina's family.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	Tiberius planned for Claudius to succeed him.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	Gaius and Gemellus were appointed joint heirs in AD 35.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	Macro was keen to promote the claims of Gemellus to the throne.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

What do the historians have to say about “The imperial family and problems of the succession”?

1. E T Salmon: *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138*

Salmon makes the point that Tiberius had no illusions about the nature of the character of Gaius. Suetonius suggests that Tiberius recognised Gaius’ murderous inclinations early on and that he would have gladly passed over the son of Germanicus but for the boy’s Julian blood. Hoping that he would live long enough to see his grandson, Gemellus, to manhood, Tiberius made Gaius and Gemellus joint heirs.

*“...Meanwhile, distrusting Gaius, Tiberius did not give him any responsible office or administrative post to fill, but kept him at Caprae, possibly to shield him from conspiratorial intrigues, but more probably to keep an eye on him.”*⁸

2. Barbara Levick: *Tiberius the Politician*

Levick argues that Tiberius’ will and numismatic evidence from the time support the view that Tiberius had in mind a joint succession for Gaius and Gemellus. She mentions Tacitus’ view that even Claudius was briefly considered by Tiberius for the succession but quickly rejects this. Using the research of the German writer, Helga Gesche, Levick shows that the coins produced in the last three years of Tiberius’ reign clearly indicated that he was planning for a joint succession. The youthful busts placed on these coins clearly represented his grandsons, Gaius and Gemellus. This evidence, plus crucially Tiberius’ will, leads Levick to conclude:

*“...The political significance of Caesar’s will, of Antony’s, and of Augustus’ has never been denied; Tiberius’ will is not to be denied it either. Its implications are clear: Gaius and Gemellus were seen by Tiberius as prospective partners in power...”*⁹

8 Salmon, E T, *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138*, Methuen and Co, London, 1970, p 144

9 Levick, B, *Tiberius the Politician*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1976, p 210

Chapter 8:

Assessment of Tiberius as princeps

Winston Churchill once said: *“History will be kind to me for I intend to write it”*. Tiberius was never able to do what Churchill did and provide his version of events, though he did allegedly write a brief autobiography but this has been lost to us. However, what Tiberius might have been able to say was: *“History will be kind to me for scholars will assess me fairly”*. This is essentially what has happened with the historiography of Tiberius. The early accounts of his reign present Tiberius in the worst possible light – morose, cunning, cruel and depraved. Modern scholars have been kinder to Tiberius, justly praising the high quality of administration that the Roman Empire experienced during his time in power.

Tiberius: a negative assessment

Tacitus and Suetonius established the orthodox view of Tiberius; this is the Tiberius of popular imagination. For Suetonius ¹ Tiberius was the man:

- who took himself off to Capri to surround himself with pornography and who used children for his sexual delight;
- who took great pleasure in inflicting casual cruelty upon his underlings;
- who delighted in humiliating women; and
- who let the affairs of state slide.

This is the version of Tiberius which the 1979 film *Caligula* presents. The actor Peter O’ Toole plays Tiberius as depraved, embittered and syphilitic.

Tacitus’ version of Tiberius’ reign is equally damning. For Tacitus Tiberius was:

- morose, untrustworthy, dissimulative and hypocritical;
- the man who delighted in the death of Germanicus, even if he had not directly instigated it;
- the man who ruled as an oriental tyrant, revived the crime of maiestas and used it, or allowed it to be used to remove his enemies;
- the man who instigated a reign of terror in Rome after the fall of Sejanus; and
- the man, who in order to satisfy his criminal lusts, sent slaves out to procure young children. *“It was like the sack of a captured city.”* ²

Tacitus’ final words on Tiberius are:

“...as long as he favoured (or feared) Sejanus, the cruelty of Tiberius was detested, but his perversions unrevealed. Then fear vanished, and with it shame. Thereafter, he expressed only his own personality – by unrestrained crime and infamy.” ³

Tiberius: a positive assessment

Modern scholars have been kinder to Tiberius. Indeed, his period of rule is looked on as a period of stability, peace and prosperity. While conceding that Tiberius was not the most amiable of men, his administration deserves high praise.

¹ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Tiberius, 41-45

² Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, V.II

³ Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, VI.51

- He continued ruling in the conservative manner of Augustus and avoided unnecessary military entanglements, avoided aggressive action and dealt with imperial/ frontier issues through negotiation rather than confrontation.
- Provincial rule was, if not perfect everywhere, of a high quality and was noted for its fairness and efficiency. The rare presence of a corrupt official such as Pontius Pilate merely served to highlight that provincial rule was of a generally high quality.
- Tiberius genuinely sought to work with the Senate. Their failure to rise to their responsibilities caused Tiberius much angst though.
- Tacitus writes at length about the use of maiestas and a later reign of terror. The statistics simply do not support such an assessment of Tiberius' rule.
- Civil administration was typified by such things as the alleviation of food shortages, the provision of relief in times of crisis and the maintenance of order in Rome and across the empire.
- Tiberius was accused of miserliness. However, his prudent control of financial matters left the Roman economy in a strong position for his successor. Scullard's conclusion on this matter is instructive:

*"...Where possible he practised economy; he spent little on public shows or buildings, or on the upkeep of a lavish court...(he was able) to leave 2700 million sesterces in the treasury when he died."*⁴

Finally, it is difficult not to feel sorry for Tiberius. He had been an able and devoted soldier and administrator, one of Rome's best. However, his personal life was wracked with misery. Augustus clearly did not like him and turned to him only with great reluctance; his mother was a controlling, dominating influence; his beloved brother died at the age of 29; he was forced to divorce his soul mate Vipsania and enter a miserable marriage with the debauched Julia; he lost his son at age 36, poisoned by his wife and her lover; he was betrayed by Sejanus, the man he had called the 'partner of his labours'; and he was hated by Agrippina and her family. Despised by most of the Roman populace and the senate aristocracy, perhaps it is small wonder Tiberius sought solace on Capri for the last years of his life.

⁴ Scullard, H H, From the Gracchi to Nero, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 291

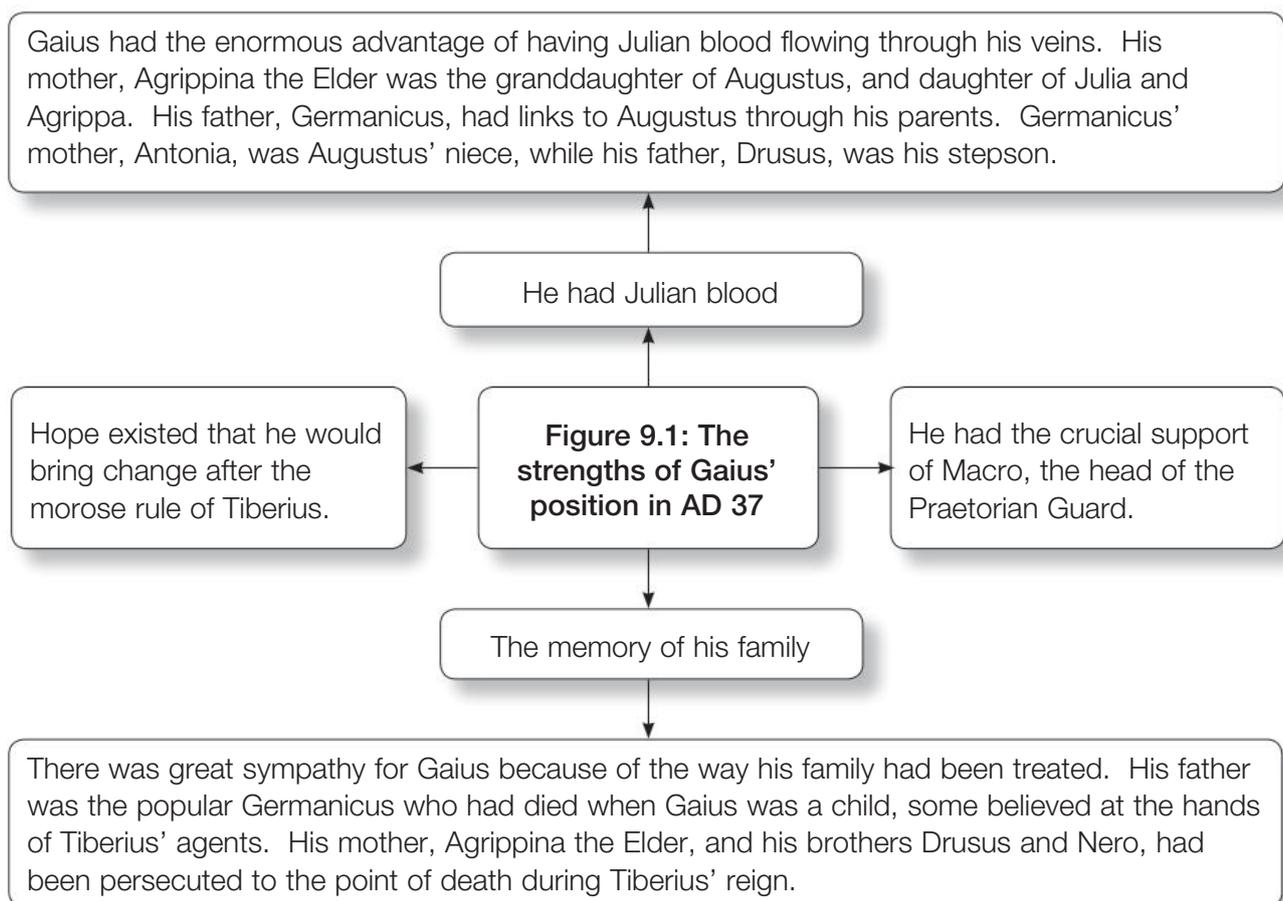
Section 2 ■ Gaius (AD 37-41)

Chapter 9: Gaius the man: Changing role and image of the princeps

There were three possible candidates to succeed Tiberius: Tiberius Gemellus, Claudius and Gaius. Tiberius Gemellus was the grandson of Tiberius, who had been made joint heir with Gaius in Tiberius' will, but was still a minor. Claudius was the brother of the late Germanicus. Aged 47, he was never seriously considered as a successor due to his record of ill health and the view that he was "weakminded". That left Gaius.

Many in the senate were unsure of Gaius. Tiberius had not given him political or administrative tasks to prepare him for power, and he had not been given tribunician authority. At 25, he was also very young.

However, Gaius had much going for him as Figure 9.1 illustrates.



The image of Gaius ¹ that has been passed down presents him as one of the great monsters of history. The traditional image of Gaius presents him as a vicious, cruel, sadistic, malicious, immoral and possibly insane megalomaniac. Modern interpretations, while not denying some of the excesses attributed to Gaius, suggest 'there was wisdom in his madness'.

¹ Gaius is often referred to as Caligula. Suetonius writes: "He won his surname, Caligula ('Bootikin') from an army joke, because he grew up among the troops and wore the miniature uniform of a private soldier." (Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Gaius,9)

In October AD 37, seven months after becoming emperor, Gaius suffered a major illness. He had been a sickly child who suffered from bouts of epilepsy and was known for his violent mood swings. Even before his illness, Gaius had been guilty of capricious cruelty and depressive episodes. After the illness, he allegedly now claimed to be divine and his behaviour descended into bloodthirsty depravity.

- The sections on Gaius' reign from Tacitus have been lost to us. However, Tacitus does make the occasional reference to Gaius' evil character.
 - *"A deceitful discretion concealed Gaius' horrible character."*²
 - *"Temperamental though he was, intimacy with his grandfather had taught him dissimulation."*³
 - *"There had never been a better slave or a worse master."*⁴
- His penchant for cruelty and violence became a feature of his rule.
 - He ordered the deaths or suicides of Tiberius Gallus, M Junius Silanus (his father in law), Macro (the Praetorian Prefect who had helped him to power and Ennia (Macro's wife whom Gaius had earlier seduced).
 - Suetonius relates how Gaius would order the execution of prisoners and have their bodies fed to animals he had collected for his shows. Men from noble families were branded, sent down the mines or thrown to wild beasts. Men were sawn in half or burned alive.⁵
- The ancient writers also like to dwell upon Gaius, immorality and sexual depravity. Being a "god" meant that he did not have to constrain himself to live by the rules of ordinary men.
 - *"He had not the slightest regard for chastity, either his own or others'."*⁶
 - He allegedly partook in homosexual relations, visited prostitutes and slept with any upper class women who happened to take his fancy.
 - He allegedly engaged in incest with each of his sisters (see below).

Does this behaviour indicate a man who was insane? Does it suggest a man who was simply corrupted by the absolute power he wielded? Or as suggested above, was there wisdom in his madness? Could it be argued that what seems to us in the 21st century the actions of a madman were in fact carefully thought out strategies of isolating his enemies, humiliating the senate and of showing his authority (see Chapter 10)? Could the explanation of Gaius' behaviour be even more prosaic – a misunderstanding of an offbeat, sardonic sense of humour?

- Seneca was no admirer of Gaius but even when he writes in a negative manner about him, it is to criticise his arrogant or foolish behaviour, not to paint him as a madman. An episode, in which Gaius allegedly argues with Jupiter, Seneca puts down to nothing more than a man's angry outburst when something goes wrong.
- Gaius' treatment of the Jews (see below) was often misunderstood. One scene of Gaius' madness described by the Jewish writer, Philo, could equally be interpreted by presenting:

*"an almost engaging Caligula, with a sharp sense of humour, a penchant for engaging in clever verbal badinage, a man who knows that his audience is afraid of him and plays on this knowledge, disconcerting his company by making them follow him from room to room."*⁷

2 Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, VI.19

3 Tacitus, VI.45

4 Tacitus, VI.19

5 Suetonius, Gaius 27.

6 Suetonius, Gaius 36

7 Barrett, A, Caligula: The Corruption of Power, Yale University Press, 1990, p 215

Barrett argues that many of Gaius' contemporaries failed to understand his dark and sarcastic jests, while later writers sought to blacken his name by describing his "comic" actions out of context.

*"Caligula's barbs of humour were directed at every available target, including himself (the suggestion that he would retire to purge his brain), and members of his own family."*⁸

In fact an examination of Gaius' reign leads Barrett to conclude:

*"In fact we see that Caligula was able, when the occasion and his inclination demanded, to behave sensibly in every phase of his reign."*⁹

As evidence of his sound rule, Barrett refers to:

- His handling of the Aemilian district fire in AD 38.
- His appointment of sound officials like Galba (the future emperor).
- His willingness to accept advice.
- His practice of what today might be called "open government" by publishing details of government activities.

Historians have to be careful not to judge far off events in terms of their own time. Behaviour which is considered intolerable and immoral today might be viewed differently in an earlier time. That is not to excuse the excesses of Gaius. Perhaps the lesson of Gaius is that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Barrett puts it this way:

*"...Caligula's disturbing obsession with the dark humour of destructive power suggests that he was a man who would see the principate as an expression of his right to exercise unchecked powers... (sending men to their deaths was seen as) a matter of almost total indifference."*¹⁰

Exercise 9.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	Who were the three likely candidates to succeed Tiberius?	
2	What crucial military support did Gaius have in AD 37?	
3	What was Gaius' relationship to the Emperor Augustus?	
4	What had happened to Gaius' family during the reign of Tiberius?	
5	What is the traditional image of Gaius presented by historians?	

⁸ Barrett, p 217

⁹ Barrett, p 240

¹⁰ Barrett, p 241

6	Why is it difficult to assess Tacitus' view of Gaius?	
7	What happened to Macro and his wife Ennia?	
8	Which modern historian questions the "insane" view of Gaius?	
9	Which aspect of Gaius' personality does Barrett suggest causes most misunderstanding?	
10	Did Gaius perceive any checks on his power?	

What do the historians think of "Gaius the man: Changing role and image of the princeps"?

1. Anthony Barrett: *Caligula – The Corruption of Power*

Barrett makes the point that Gaius was able to act in a rational manner and throughout his book, he is reluctant to take the easy path, trot out Suetonius' and Dio's catalogue of atrocities. However, even Barrett has to acknowledge his almost blasé attitude to violence such as instances when he laughed at a consul because he knew that he could have the man's throat cut with just a nod. How did Gaius' outlook develop? Was it a result of his family's trials and tribulations? The result of being hurled into absolute power from obscurity? Whatever the cause, Barrett draws this conclusion.

*"...What emerges clearly from the sources is that while he was not clinically mad he was so obsessed with a sense of his own importance as to be practically devoid of any sense of moral responsibility."*¹¹

2. Suetonius: *Gaius*

Suetonius explains that Gaius mocked the gods and people's faith in their power, yet he would run and hide at the sound of thunder. When he visited Sicily he ridiculed people's miraculous stories associated with local shrines, yet when Mt Etna began spitting smoke from its crater he fled in fear. Suetonius gives other similar examples which leads him to conclude:

*"...I am convinced that this brain-sickness accounted for his two contradictory vices – over-confidence and extreme timorousness."*¹²

¹¹ Barrett, A, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, Yale University Press, 1989, p 240

¹² Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Gaius, 51

Chapter 10:

Gaius and the Senate

During the reign of Tiberius, the senate had become almost totally dependent upon the emperor, Tiberius had quipped that its members were merely men “*fit to be slaves*”.¹ Relations between the senate and Gaius completely broke down during Gaius’ reign. There were early conciliatory gestures from Gaius towards the senate but following his illness in October AD 37, his increasingly despotic behaviour saw him ridicule and humiliate individual senators and the body as a whole.

At first it seems that Gaius followed the advice of his grandmother, Antonia, and displayed respect to the senate and treated it in a conciliatory manner.

- He denounced Tiberius’ rule to the senators and stated he intended ruling in a quite different manner;
 - sycophants were quickly punished.
- He immediately ended the activities of informers (delatores) and pending treason trials were halted.
- Senators who had been exiled by Tiberius were allowed home.
- He adopted Tiberius Gemellus and made him princeps iuventutis. He further honoured the Claudian family by making his uncle, Claudius, his colleague in the consulship.
- Writings and histories previously banned were now allowed to circulate.

At first relations were cordial and Gaius seems to have been generally popular during the early part of his reign. The legacies promised to the people in Tiberius’ will were honoured, lavish games were staged for the people of Rome and the unpopular sales tax was removed.

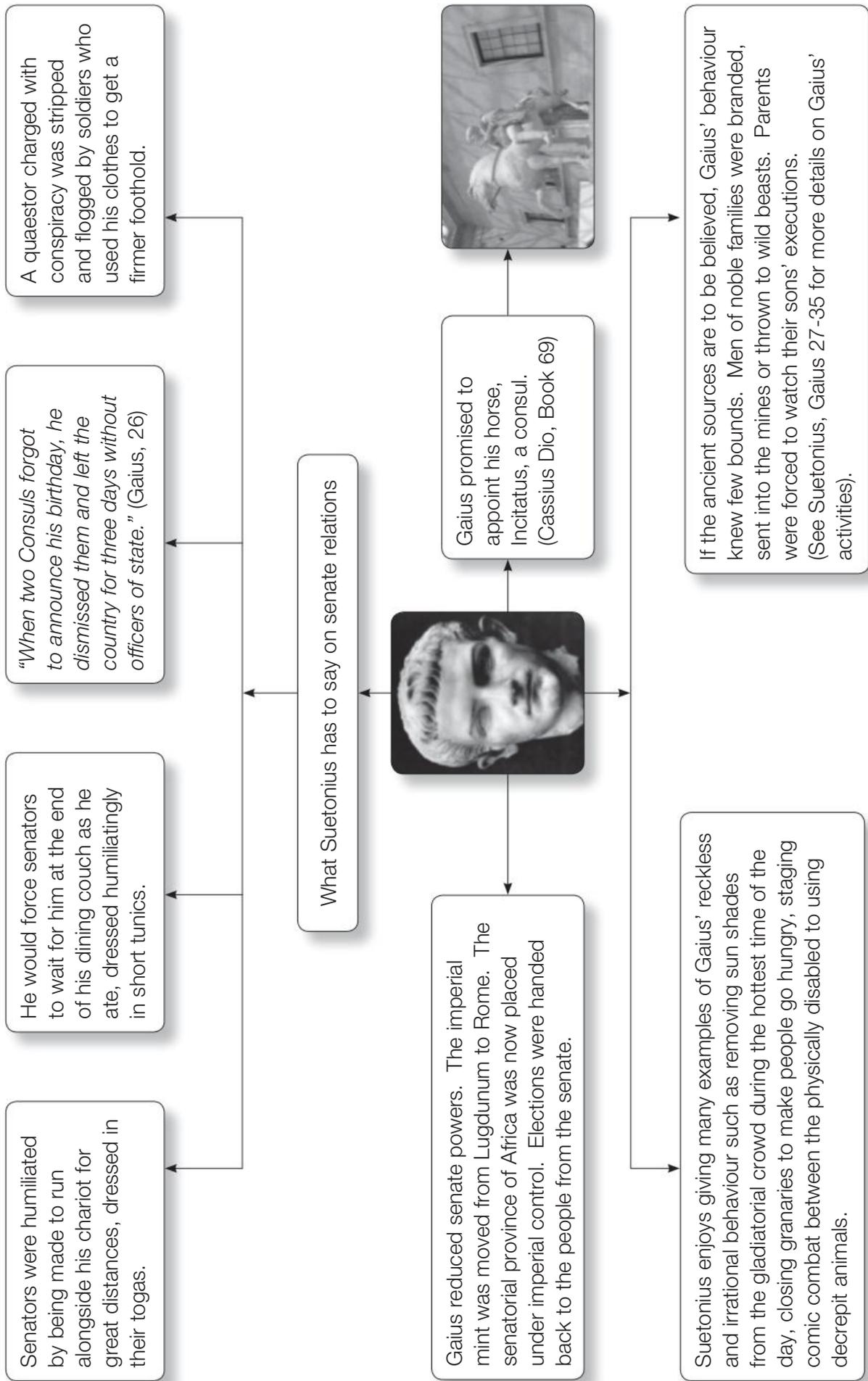
However, following his recovery from a serious illness in October AD 37, any pretence of respect for, or cooperation with, the senate quickly evaporated. Gaius seems to have taken the idea of his divinity seriously and expected to be treated accordingly. Both Augustus and Tiberius had spurned the ridiculous honours which the senate attempted to heap upon them, while allowing such things in the distant regions of the empire. Worshipping one’s leaders as a god in the backward east was accepted practice at this time. However, sophisticated Rome did not carry on this practice, not, that is, until the arrival of Gaius.

- Gaius no longer sought to work with the senate but rather ruled as an eastern-style absolute monarch, and expected to be worshipped as a god.
- His attitude to the honours heaped upon him by the senate was contradictory.
 - On the one hand, he was delighted when the senators fawned and bowed to flatter him with all manner of titles.
 - However, he was angered by the senate’s presumption that it was enough to offer him, a god, anything.

Figure 10.1 provides some detail on the relationship between Gaius and the senate and more general examples of his arrogant and despotic behaviour.

¹ Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, III.65

Figure 10.1 Gaius as Emperor from October AD 37



Gaius and his divinity

Gaius' claims to be a god can be approached from several angles.

- It could be that he was simply stark, raving mad. A reading of Suetonius and Cassius Dio provides a multitude of examples of crazed behaviour. John Hurt's superlative depiction of Gaius in the TV series "*I Claudius*" has done much to reinforce this view.
- However, perhaps Gaius deserves more credit than he is given. His treatment of Macro and his humiliation of the senate could be seen as ways of merely consolidating his power. The idea of making his horse, Incitatus, a consul or a priest might be seen as madness. Then again, it might also be seen as a superb way of humiliating those in the senate.

An alternative view of Gaius' behaviour, and his treatment of the senate, could be his intention to turn Rome into an eastern style, oriental absolute monarchy. Early on, he sought to strengthen his links to the deified Julian family at the expense of the non-deified Claudian family. This can be seen clearly during his dedication of the Temple of the Deified Augustus in August AD 37. One of Gaius' key advisors was the eastern prince, Herod Agrippa I, who may well have fed Gaius' mind with such notions. Gaius' great grandfather was Mark Antony who arguably entertained similar notions during his liaison with Cleopatra.² Is it fanciful to suggest that Gaius had ideas of emulating him? A common practice of oriental monarchs at this time was marriage between brother and sister. Gaius' incest with his sisters, and his obsessive elevation of Drusilla, could be seen in such a light.³

Exercise 10.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE for each of the following statements.

1	Relations between Gaius and the senate were highly antagonistic right from the start of the reign.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	Gaius chose to ignore his uncle, Claudius, throughout his reign.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	Gaius seems to have taken the idea of his divinity seriously.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	Gaius enjoyed humiliating individual senators by making them run after his chariot.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	Throughout his reign, Gaius steadily reduced the powers of the senate.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	Gaius abhorred the practice of cruel and unusual punishments.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	Gaius entertained plans of elevating his horse Incitatus, to the consulship.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	It was common practice for the princeps to be worshipped as a god in Rome.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	Barrett strongly disagrees with the idea that Gaius promoted the memory of Antony at the expense of Augustus.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	The TV series " <i>I Claudius</i> " provides an accurate and unbiased version of the reign of Gaius.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

² Before Antony married Cleopatra, he had married Octavian's (Augustus') sister, Octavia. This was part of a political deal between the two men in the 30s BC. The daughter of Antony and Octavia was Antonia, Gaius' grandmother, who had provided him with advice early in his reign.

³ See Chapter 14 for details of Gaius and the imperial family.

What do the historians have to say about “Gaius and the Senate”?

1. Anthony Barrett: *Caligula – The Corruption of Power*

Barrett completely rejects the idea that Gaius was promoting the memory and image of Antony at the expense of Augustus. He argues that the weight of literary evidence contradicts the Antony idea. Furthermore, an examination of the numismatic and inscription evidence of the period clearly indicates that Gaius promoted the Augustan element of his heritage. The story of Gaius’ attack on consuls who celebrated the Battle of Actium of 31 BC, when Augustus (Octavian) defeated Antony, is contradicted by the fact that Gaius carried out sacrifices in AD 38 at the Temple of Augustus to mark the festival celebrating the defeat of Antony. Those consuls who were criticised for celebrating Actium (and by implication were denigrating Antony), would no doubt have been criticised for “not” celebrating Actium (and by implication were denigrating Augustus).

*“...There is not a single scrap of numismatic or epigraphic evidence to show any special favour for Antony. Certainly, a few months after the incident of the dismissed consuls, Caligula does not seem to have shown much sentimentality about Antony’s memory and sold at auction one of his possessions, seized as spoil by Augustus.”*⁴

2. H H Scullard: *From the Gracchi to Nero*

Scullard leans towards “the Gaius as the oriental monarch idea”. He supports his line with references towards the relationship Gaius had with Herod Agrippa and Gaius’ alleged incest with his sisters, which emulated the practice of eastern Hellenistic monarchs. He began to dress in the style of gods and established a temple dedicated to his own divinity. In this way, Gaius saw himself as a new Alexander the Great.

*“...Hardly less offensive to the nobility...was when he drove, wearing the breastplate of Alexander the Great, over a bridge of boats which he had constructed across the Bay of Naples from Baiae to Puteoli.”*⁵

⁴ Barrett, A, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, Yale University Press, 1990, p 219

⁵ Scullard, H H, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 294

Chapter 11:

Gaius: Reforms, policies and building programs

Gaius' administration of Rome during his short time as emperor was inefficient and inconsistent. Policies, financial arrangements and building programs depended on whatever took his fancy at the time. Rome under Tiberius had been a rather dour place. Tiberius was not extravagant, spent money only when it was necessary and indeed might be described as miserly. The advantage of this was that when he died, so the ancient sources tell us, he left 2.7 million sesterces in the Roman treasury. One of the main accusations against Gaius is that he plundered this in a very short time, though this claim will be challenged later.

Financial extravagance

The sources tell us that Gaius was inordinately extravagant and seemed eager to spend the funds that Tiberius had amassed. Gaius had a penchant for parties, public games and constructing fine villas throughout Campania. Barrett mentions that on one occasion Gaius dined at a cost of 10 million sesterces.¹

*"...His personal habits were expensive; he squandered money on luxurious banquets and doted on the horse races and other spectacles of the circus; he is even said to have appeared himself occasionally as a singer, gladiator or charioteer..."*²

Great spectacles were staged such as the three and half mile roadway built across ships from Baiae to Puteoli.³ Certain individuals certainly benefited from Gaius' financial excesses:

- he gave two millions sesterces to his favourite charioteer;
- Antiochus was granted 100 million sesterces and made King of Commagene;
- Livius Geminius was given 1 million sesterces after he had told Gaius that he had seen the emperor's sister soar heavenwards after her death.

*"...He lavished gifts on friends, actors, gladiators and chariot-drivers. He reputedly gave the men who played ball with him 100 000 sesterces each. Lucius Caecilius, presented with only 50 000, is said to have queried, 'Do I play one-handed'..."*⁴

Gaius was quick to pay the legacies promised in the wills of Tiberius and Livia. The bequests promised in Tiberius' will came to 45 million sesterces. These were paid in two stages on 1 June and 19 July AD 37, when each Roman received 300 sesterces on each occasion. He also made additional bequests to members of the Praetorian Guard, the urban cohorts (city police forces) and his legionary troops. It was a shrewd political move to get one's military forces onside early in the reign.

In modern terms, Gaius' inflationary policies and pump-priming (brought on by his building program) did much to stimulate the Roman economy. The impact of this "Keynsian-style economic policy" can be seen in the Satyricon of Petronius, in which the character, Trimalchio makes much money buying and selling wine. Barrett suggests that this episode can be best placed in the late 30s AD, at the time of Gaius.

¹ Barrett, A, Caligula: The Corruption of Power, Yale University Press, 1990, p 224

² Salmon, E T, A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138, Methuen and Co, London, 1970, p 152

³ Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Gaius, 19

⁴ Barrett, p 225

Financial problems

Not surprisingly, funds in the Roman treasury began to dwindle. Reckless spending and lack of financial know-how soon led to the need for the raising of additional treasury funds in whatever manner was deemed necessary:

- old taxes were brought back and new taxes were introduced;
- large payments were demanded for entrance into the College of Priests to his own godhead;
- troops were used to force payment in lawsuits, and also on food, porters and prostitutes;
- he may well have deposed King Ptolemy ⁵ to facilitate the annexation of Mauretania and take control of its funds;
- the treason trials were reintroduced by which means Gaius was able to take control of the wealth of individual senators;
- he is alleged to have opened a brothel in his Palatine residence which was staffed by the children and wives of noble families, and to have sent touts out into the city to drum up business;
- imperial memorabilia were auctioned off at inflated prices; and
- taxes were imposed on taverns, artisans slaves and the hiring of slaves.

Financial assessment

It is always difficult to properly assess the financial policies of the early emperors because there is always uncertainty about the nature of expenditure and income – is it the emperor’s own personal funds that are involved or those of the state? There was always an overlap between the personal and the public finances, and it was a long time before the two were satisfactorily separated.

Whatever the nature of Gaius’ spending, most historians agree that he destroyed Rome’s financial security. Here is the conclusion of a historian writing in 1960.

“...But he had not reigned long before the Romans discovered that they had made a change for the worse, for his lack of training in practical administration betrayed itself in a reckless profusion of money, which made serious inroads on Tiberius’ accumulated savings, and finally obliged him to increase taxation.” ⁶

However, this is not a view held universally. Consider the following assessment of financial affairs during Gaius’ reign.

“...For all his predecessor’s (Gaius’) supposed extravagances, Claudius must have found the treasury in a fairly healthy state. He gradually abolished most of the taxes, and refunded some of the money collected, even though he was able to engage in such expensive ventures as the building of the harbour at Ostia...” ⁷

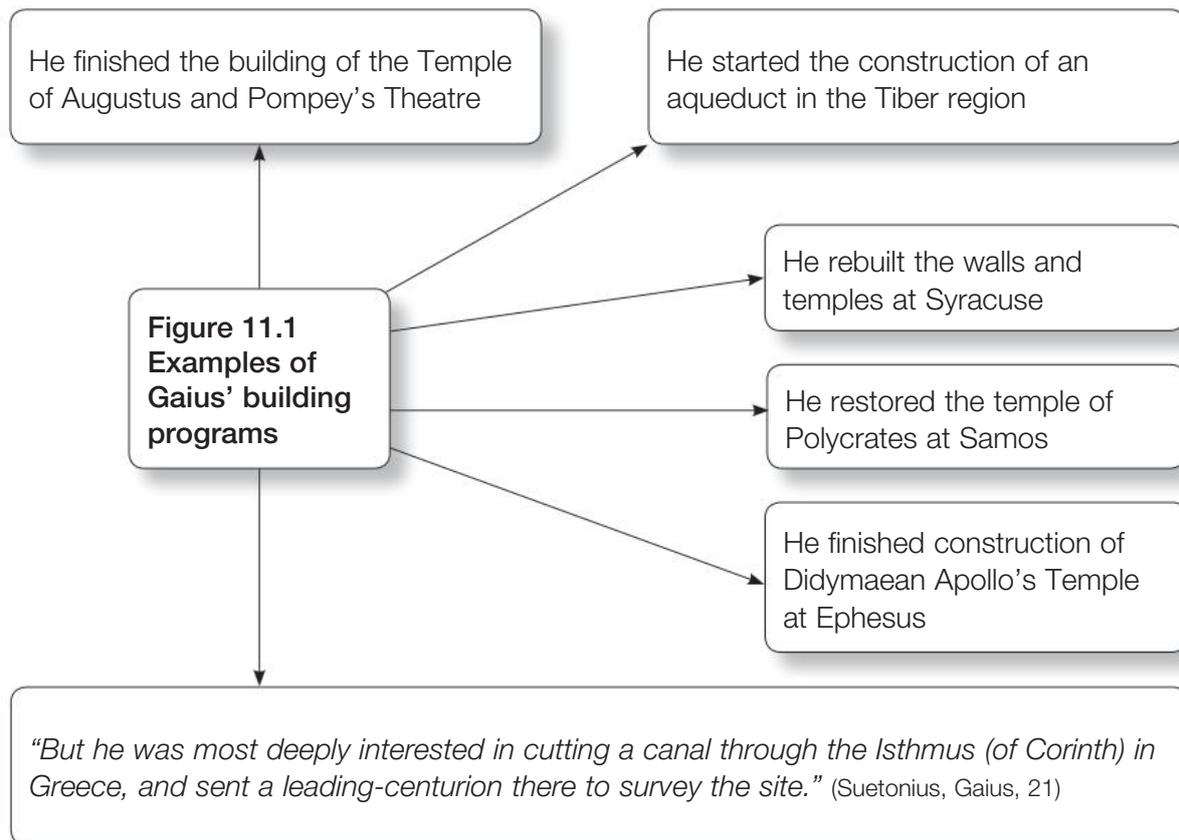
⁵ Son of Cleopatra’s daughter, Selene

⁶ Cary, M, A History of Rome, Macmillan, London, 1960, p 525

⁷ Barrett, p 228-9

Gaius' building programs

Figure 11.1, below, summarises the main elements of Gaius' building programs.



Exercise 11.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	How much money was Tiberius reputed to have left in the Roman treasury when he died?	
2	What is the generally accepted view of Gaius' financial policies?	
3	Compare Gaius' "generosity" to that of Tiberius	
4	What was Gaius' attitude to the legacies promised in the wills of Livia and Tiberius	
5	What problems did Gaius' spending cause?	

6	How did Gaius use maiestas trials?	
7	What is Barrett's view of Gaius' financial policies?	
8	Whose temple and theatre did Gaius finish building?	
9	Where was construction of Didymaeon Apollo's Temple finished?	
10	In what building project does Suetonius suggest Gaius was most deeply interested?	

Chapter 12:

Gaius and the Praetorian Guard

Gaius and Macro

Gaius owed much to the Praetorian Guard for the ease with which he was able to assume power after the death of Tiberius. The Praetorian Prefect, Macro ¹, had judged correctly that Gaius would be the man to follow Tiberius, and so, “nailing his colours to Gaius’ mast”, he carefully nurtured a close relationship with the young emperor-to-be.

“...Macro had become excessively powerful. Never neglectful of Gaius’ favour, now Macro cultivated him more strenuously every day.”²

Macro went one step further and persuaded his wife, Ennia, to feign love for Gaius, hoping this would further entrench him with the young prince. When Macro was informed by the doctor, Charicles, that Tiberius was fading fast, dispatches were quickly prepared to be sent to generals and imperial governors. When news came through that Tiberius was dead, Gaius was surrounded by an excited crowd, eager to see the beginning of a new reign. However, Gaius was premature and Tiberius revived. The crowd and Gaius stood in ‘stupefied silence’. However, Macro did not panic, and acted quickly.

“...Macro, unperturbed, ordered the old man to be smothered with a heap of bed-clothes and left alone.”³

Gaius understood clearly the debt he owed to Macro and the Praetorian Guard. One of his first actions on becoming emperor was to grant significant payments to the members of the Guard. Suetonius tells us that on one occasion, Gaius’ grandmother, Antonia, asked for a private audience with him. Gaius insisted on taking Macro along as ‘an escort’. However, this did not mean that he had affection for Macro, or that he trusted him. Within months of his accession, Gaius decided he no longer needed Macro and he ordered the Praetorian Prefect and his wife, Ennia, to commit suicide. Following Macro’s demise, Gaius appointed two prefects of the guard and increased its size to twelve cohorts.

Gaius and Cassius Chaerea

In September AD 39, Gaius began an expedition to the Rhine. ⁴ Germany had been the scene of some of the exploits of his father, Germanicus, and because of this Gaius could expect a good reception from the legions based there. However, it appears that the main reason for Gaius’ trip was to ‘nip in the bud’ a conspiracy against him that was underway.

- One of the chief conspirators was Aemilius Lepidus, the widower of Gaius’ sister, Drusilla. Lepidus also happened to be the lover of another sister, Agrippina (the younger), and was possibly involved with the third sister, Julia Livilla. ⁵
- Lepidus was promised support from one of the Rhine commanders, Lentulus Gaetulicus.
- Gaius acted quickly. Lepidus and Gaetulicus were executed, and his two sisters were banished.

1 Tiberius had appointed Macro to succeed Sejanus in AD 31.

2 Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, VI.45

3 Tacitus, VI.51

4 Provincial and frontier policy is covered in Chapter 13.

5 Imperial family relations during Gaius’ reign are covered in Chapter 14.

Gaius had previously shown favour towards Lepidus as Dio Cassius explains:

*“...Another of his victims was Lepidus, that lover and favourite of his, the husband of Drusilla, the man who had together with Gaius maintained improper relations with the emperor’s other sisters, Agrippina and Julia, the man whom he had allowed to stand for office five years earlier than was permitted by law and whom he kept declaring he would leave as his successor to the throne...”*⁶

To regain control of the situation on the Rhine, Gaius appointed the tough disciplinarian, Galba and Vespasianus. Both these men would become emperor in the future.

By late AD 40, Gaius had managed to alienate almost every key group in Rome.

*“...The execution of Lepidus and disgrace of Agrippina and Julia Livilla together with supporters such as Seneca led to a cooling in relations between Caligula and the elite...”*⁷

In fact the only group that showed any loyalty to Gaius was the Praetorian Guard. They had been given financial rewards, their numbers had increased and he had generally improved their conditions to make up for the death of Macro. However, Gaius’ arrogance and lack of sensitivity soon lost him this group’s support. His constant humiliation of the Tribune of the Guard, Cassius Chaerea, which included accusations of homosexuality, led Chaerea to seek revenge. However, it is likely that there was also senate involvement, led by ex-consul L Annius Vinicianus. On 24 January, AD 41, Gaius was brutally murdered, along with his wife Caesonia and their infant daughter.

Suetonius provides two graphic alternative accounts of Gaius’ murder at the hands of the Guard.⁸ One version has Gaius talking to two young actors about a performance they were rehearsing. Chaerea comes up behind him and “gave him a deep sword-wound to the neck” which was followed by a stab wound to the chest from Cornelius Sabinus. Suetonius’ second version is even more melodramatic.

- Sabinus apparently asked Gaius for the watchword of the day to which Gaius replied “*Jupiter*”. At this Chaerea screamed “*So be it!*” and split his jawbone.
- As Gaius hit the floor he called out “*I’m still alive*” after which he was hit with thirty more blows, including “*sword-thrusts through his genitals*”.
- Gaius’ German bodyguards arrived quickly on the scene and killed some of the assassins and some innocent senators standing nearby.⁹

6 Dio Cassius, Book LIX, 22, 6-7

7 Wiedemann, T, The Julio-Claudian Emperors, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989, p 43

8 Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Gaius, 58

9 Cassius Chaerea was executed for his crime early in the reign of Claudius.

Exercise 12.1

Place the following events in the correct chronological order.

Banishment of Agrippina	1st event	
Gaius' trip to the Rhine	2nd event	
Murder of Gaius	3rd event	
Payments made to the Guard	4th event	
Gaius and Ennia lovers	5th event	
Death of Tiberius	6th event	
Execution of Chaerea	7th event	
Execution of Lepidus	8th event	
Macro replaces Sejanus	9th event	
Death of Macro	10th event	

Chapter 13:

Gaius: The army, the frontier and provincial policy

Thanks to the skilful provincial administration of Augustus and the sound but conservative approach to imperial matters followed by Tiberius, the Roman Empire was in good shape at the time of the accession of Gaius. Frontiers had been strengthened, expansion seemed to have gone far enough and much of the corruption and weakness of imperial governance had been rooted out. As a result of this, the empire was able to withstand even four years of Gaius' erratic and at times foolhardy approach to army, frontier and provincial policy.

Gaius' provincial policy was active in four main areas:

1. Dealing with the conspiracy emanating from Germany.
2. The alleged fiasco of his plan to invade Britain.
3. The issue of client kings and senatorial provinces, and his policies in the east.
4. Gaius' attitude towards the Jews.

Gaius' expedition to **Germany** in AD 39 has already been touched upon in Chapter 12. Germany had been a source of trouble for the Romans for some time.

The Varan disaster of AD 9, when three entire legions were lost, was a memory deeply imprinted on the governing psyche.

Tiberius had been reluctant to let Germanicus get carried away in Germany and was happy to be able to bring an end to his adventures east of the Rhine.

By the time of Gaius, German tribes were launching occasional attacks across the Rhine though Suetonius suggests that Gaius went to Germany to collect Batavian recruits for his bodyguard.

Whatever the truth of Gaius' motives, little was achieved in Germany beyond a couple of raids across the Rhine. Suetonius takes delight in describing how ridiculous Gaius' actions in Germany were. ¹

"...Fantastic stories circulated about this campaign; for his 'triumph' he used slaves who had to dye their long hair red and even learn some German." ²

However, it would seem that the main purpose of Gaius' German expedition was to deal with the growing conspiracy that was developing there (see Chapter 12). Once he had dealt with Lepidus and Gaetulicus, Gaius wintered in neighbouring Gaul. Suetonius tells the story that when Gaius' uncle Claudius visited Gaius as part of a senate delegation, following the suppression of the conspiracy, Gaius had him thrown into the river. ³

The ancient sources delight in their description of Gaius' apparently ill-judged plans to invade **Britain**. It is impossible to assess whether Gaius had serious plans to invade Britain or whether this was another example of his outrageous exhibitionism.

¹ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Gaius, 45

² Scullard, H H, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 295

³ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Claudius, 9

- In early AD 40, troops were marshalled at the English Channel, ready to invade. However, like Claudius later, Gaius had difficulty persuading his “possibly mutinous” troops to cross the channel.
 - More likely, Gaius was eager to return to Rome fearing possible threats to his position there.
 - Amminius, the exiled son of the British chieftain, Cunobelinus, offered submission to Gaius. Perhaps Gaius was able to use this as an excuse for cancelling the invasion.
- Suetonius tells the story of Gaius ordering his troops to collect sea shells and take them back to Rome as booty.⁴ Some historians have suggested that this story results from a mistranslation of the word *musculi* which refers to the troops’ equipment. Maybe Gaius was merely ordering his men to pack up and leave. A much less interesting anecdote.

Gaius’ interference in the running of the **wider empire** was often erratic and had the effect of weakening Rome’s position.

- Gaius liked the idea of placing client kings in power across the empire. He restored Commagene (modern south central Turkey) to Antiochus. Other provinces such as Pontus, Lesser Armenia and part of Thrace were given to the sons of a Thracian prince. His friend Herod Agrippa was given parts of Judaea.
- There are possibly two explanations for these actions:
 - Gaius felt more secure with leaders tied to him personally; and/or
 - he liked the idea of “ruling kings”.
- In Mauretania he deposed its king, Ptolemy, an action that angered its people. Africa was taken from the senate and placed under imperial control. Was this a way of reducing senate power or a logical and sensible action given the senate’s poor record in handling Africa? (see Chapter 6)
- Gaius’ actions in the east had greater ramifications. By weakening Rome’s position in the east, he had created a vacuum of power which Parthia was more than willing to fill. It had always been a priority of Augustus and Tiberius to neutralise the power of Parthia, without having to use military action.

Gaius’ most disastrous step into the provincial area concerned his attitude to the **Jews**. The Jews had been one of the few communities in the east which had not announced honours for Germanicus and his family; Gaius did not forget this. Though he was great friends with the Jew, Herod Agrippa, this did not stop him from deliberately antagonising the Jews.

- The Greeks of Alexandria in Egypt had long resented the Jews for the privileges that the latter had in that city. An anti-Jewish pogrom took place in Alexandria in AD 38.
 - To win favour against them, the Greeks demanded that the Jews place Gaius’ statue in their Alexandrian synagogues, and indeed in Jerusalem.
 - This was an idea that they knew would appeal to Gaius.
- Gaius used the unrest to recall to Rome the Prefect in Egypt, Avillius Flaccus. Flaccus had been close to Tiberius Gemellus and Macro, and was soon put to death on his return.
- The Greeks and Jews sent delegations to Rome to speak to Gaius. Philo, the leader of the Jewish delegation, tells the story of Gaius dragging the delegation from room to room. He quotes Gaius as saying of the Jews:

⁴ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Gaius, 46

“...These men do not appear to me to be wicked so much as unfortunate and foolish, in not believing that I have been endowed with the nature of God;” and so he dismissed us, and commanded us to depart.”⁵

- Fortunately for Roman officials in Syria and Judaea, Gaius died before his order to have his statue placed in synagogues there could take effect. It would certainly have led to major political unrest.

What do the historians have to say about “The army, the frontier and provincial policy”?

1. H H Scullard: *From the Gracchi to Nero*

Traditional accounts of Gaius’ forays into frontier and provincial policy tend to side with the accounts from the ancient sources. They repeat the stories recounted by Suetonius or agree with the Jewish writer and philosopher, Philo, that Gaius was a lunatic. Scullard’s conclusion is typical of such interpretations.

“...With Judaea on the point of revolt and Mauretania in open rebellion, Gaius’ death did not come too soon. With disorder abroad and autocracy at home, the Augustan system was subjected to a severe strain which fortunately was not prolonged to breaking point.”⁶

2. Anthony Barrett: *Caligula – The Corruption of Power*

More recent writers such as Barrett tend to have a more “understanding” view of Gaius’ efforts in provincial/ frontier policy, as they do in other areas of Gaius policies. Barrett sees Gaius’ work in the east quite differently to the likes of Scullard. He points out that the men placed in power in the east ruled effectively, with no evidence of crises during Gaius’ reign. Polemo II, Gaius’ chosen ruler of Pontus, was still in power as late as the mid-60s and fought with Nero’s commander, Corbulo, against Parthia. Barrett also points out that Claudius maintained most of the arrangements which Gaius had put in place.

“...The arrangements that Caligula made in the east in fact reflect the one talent that he clearly did seem to possess as an administrator, the ability to choose competent subordinates. The appointment of Roman legates like Petronius and Galba were outstanding...The eastern client kings...are further examples.”⁷

5 Philo, On the Embassy to Gaius, XLV.367

6 Scullard, H H, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 297

7 Barrett, A, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, Yale University Press, 1990, p 223

Exercise 13.1

Match the personality with their role in Gaius' provincial/ frontier policy.

1	Prefect of Egypt	
2	Jewish writer and philosopher	
3	British chieftain	
4	King of Pontus	
5	Leading conspirator of AD 39	
6	Son of Cunobelinus	
7	King of Mauretania	
8	King of Commagene	
9	Rhine military commander	
10	Jewish friend of Gaius	

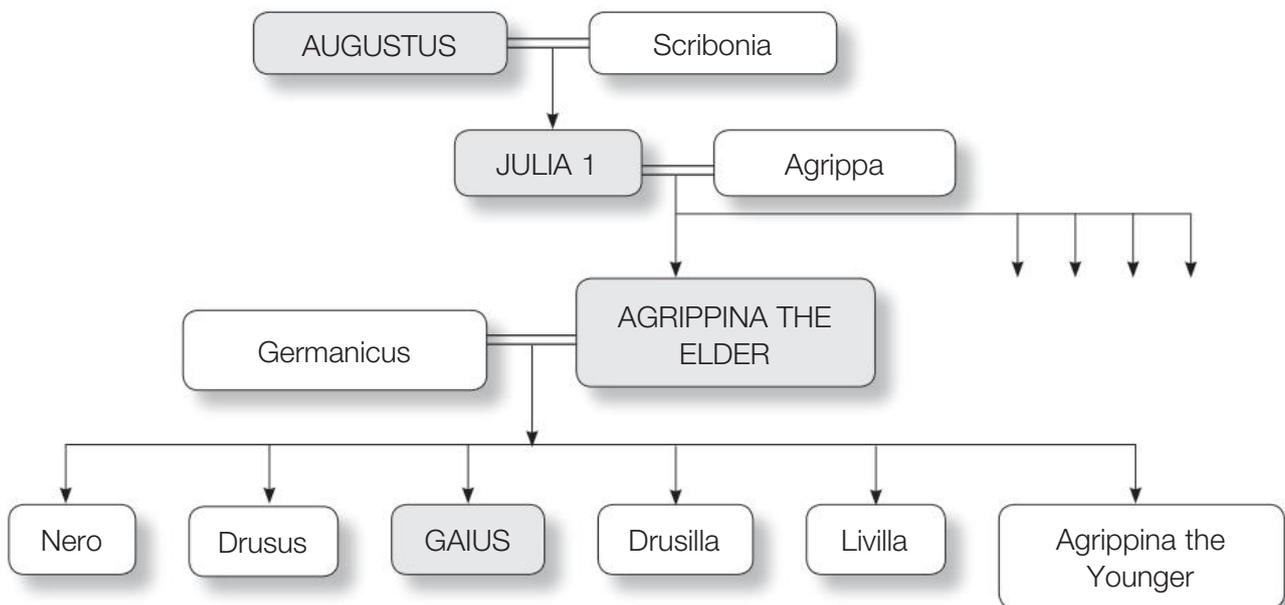
GAETULICUS	PHILO	HEROD AGRIPPA	ANTIOCHUS	LEPIDUS
CUNOBELINUS	PTOLEMY	AVILLIUS FLACCUS	POLEMO II	AMMINIUS

Chapter 14:

Gaius, the imperial family and problems of succession

Gaius did not have much to recommend him when he assumed power following the death of Tiberius. He was very young, inexperienced and there were already doubts about his character and personality. However, what he did have going for him was his Julian blood, a fact of which he was very much aware. He was a direct descendent of the divine Augustus, as Figure 14.1 illustrates.

Figure 14.1 Gaius' Julian pedigree.



- Gaius honoured his family in a variety of ways.
- His mother's ashes were returned to Rome from Planasia, a cenotaph was built for his late brother Drusus, his uncle Claudius was made a consul and the month September was renamed Germanicus after his father.
- He also honoured his grandmother, Antonia, by granting her all honours that had been given to Livia. She was given the privileges of a vestal virgin, made a priestess of Augustus and titled Augusta. Antonia died on 1 May, AD 37.
- He also adopted Tiberius Gemellus the son of his late uncle, Drusus, and had him made 'prince of youth', *princeps iuventutis*.

Gaius went to great pains to honour his sisters: Drusilla, Livilla and Agrippina (the younger). Each was granted vestal privileges and seats in the imperial enclosure at the games. They were included in the annual vows for the emperor's safety and allegiance to the emperor. His sisters' names were also included in proposals that he sent to the senate.

Figure 14.2 Coin from Gaius' reign.



Numismatic evidence from the time shows Gaius' elevation of his sisters. This coin from AD 38 clearly shows Drusilla, Livilla and Agrippina included on the coin. Other coins displayed his late mother and brothers.

This honouring of his family had several motives.

1. He demonstrated his *pietas*, i.e. his loyalty, devotion to his family. In Confucianism, the term filial piety might apply. *Pietas* was an important virtue for a Roman; it was expected and greatly admired.
2. It built up the image of the imperial *domus*. This was important as the centre of political power was the imperial household.
3. It also had a constitutional purpose. Early on, Tiberius Gemellus was seen as Gaius' successor.

Gaius and his sisters

Suetonius does not hold back in his description of Gaius and his sisters Drusilla, Livilla and Agrippina.

*"...It was his habit to commit incest with each of his three sisters and, at large banquets, when his wife reclined above him, placed them all in turn below him."*¹

Drusilla seems to have been the most important person in his life and the sources generally agree that he committed incest with her. Suetonius says that she lost her virginity to him and that their grandmother, Antonia, had caught them in bed together. He took her from her husband, Consul Cassius Longinus and treated her as his wife. During his illness in AD 37, he planned to leave her his wealth and the throne. When Drusilla died in AD 38, Gaius was overcome with grief and:

*"...at her death he made it a capital offence to laugh, to bathe or to dine with one's parents and children while the period of public mourning lasted..."*²

The TV series "I, Claudius" depicts Gaius as Zeus/ Jupiter, committing outrageous acts against his sister but even Suetonius does not include such things. Following her death, Drusilla was deified and a temple and games were dedicated to her. His fourth wife, Milonia Caesonia bore him a daughter, who was named Drusilla.³

Gaius' obsession with Drusilla raises the obvious question: what was he really doing? There are several possible explanations.

- It could be the case that Gaius was simply depraved and saw incest as an issue of no consequence.

1 Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Gaius, 24

2 Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Gaius, 24

3 Gaius seems to have had four wives: Junia Claudilla, Livia Orestilla, Lollia Paulina (later considered as a wife for Claudius) and Milonia Caesonia.

- Was it genuine emotion? Was it a sexual obsession?
- More interestingly, was there a political element to Gaius' 'interest' in Drusilla?
 - Gaius certainly had Hellenistic tendencies, and saw himself as a kind of Ptolemaic ruler. Within the Hellenistic tradition, brother-sister unions were common. Was Gaius hoping to introduce this to Rome?
 - Was it a case of Gaius trying to secure the Julian bloodline? This might have strengthened the imperial domus, though of course it went totally against Roman tradition.
 - Dio Cassius suggests that Gaius was considering Drusilla's husband, Lepidus for the succession before the conspiracy of AD 39.⁴

Livilla and Agrippina seemed to have been involved in some way with Lepidus. When Lepidus was put on trial in AD 39, they were condemned for having committed adultery with him. Tacitus certainly attests to this:

*"...In her (Agrippina) earliest years she had employed an illicit relationship with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus as a means to power..."*⁵

- Dio suggests that sex was a key factor in the relationship between Lepidus and Agrippina.
- Tacitus is more of the view that Agrippina allowed herself to be seduced by Lepidus as a means of winning power, and thus securing her son's (Nero) future. (This was certainly to become a preoccupation of Agrippina once she became Claudius' fourth wife).
- Lepidus became entangled in the conspiracy involving Gaetulicus. Suetonius suggests he was behind the whole thing, but lack of evidence means we can never be certain of the involvement of the key figures in the AD 39 conspiracy.
- Regardless of what the sources fail to tell us, Gaius soon moved against his sisters:
 - Livilla and Agrippina were banished to the Pontian Islands;
 - their jewels were sold in Gaul;
 - Gaius boasted that he now had ready for use 'the three daggers' with which the sisters allegedly planned to kill him.

At the time of Gaius' assassination the succession was uncertain. Tiberius Gemellus, Tiberius' grandson, who had been chosen as joint heir with Gaius was dead, executed or forced to suicide. Nobody took seriously the possibility of Claudius becoming emperor. Was Gaius considering his daughter for the succession? Such an idea is probably fanciful but proved to be academic when she was murdered along with her parents in AD 41.

⁴ Dio Cassius, Book XIX, 22.7

⁵ Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XIV.2

What do the historians have to say about “The imperial family and problems of succession”?

1. T Wiedemann: *The Julio-Claudian Emperors*

Wiedemann makes the point that once Tiberius Gemellus had been removed in AD 37, the only source of instability in the regime was the lack of an heir. Before Gaius had produced an heir, it was his sisters who would inherit the domus Caesaris. In the Roman tradition, women could not assume power but their sons could, and their husbands could administer state affairs until the sons had reached manhood. Augustus had done this for Agrippa’s sons, and Tiberius did the same for Germanicus. Wiedemann suggests that Gaius’ “interest” in his sisters might have been a desire to control their husbands. He suggests that the Conspiracy of AD 39 could be connected to the succession and his sisters.

*“...The birth of a daughter in the summer or autumn of 39 meant that Caligula’s sisters (and their husbands) ceased to be supporters and turned into threats that Caligula felt it necessary to eliminate.”*⁶

2. Anthony Barrett: *Caligula – The Corruption of Power*

Barrett rejects the notion that Gaius was pursuing a Ptolemaic model for Roman rule. The usual evidence for this is Gaius’ incest with his sisters and presumably the desire to maintain a pure bloodline. However, apart from being generally sceptical about Gaius’ incest, Barrett makes the point that Gaius’ ‘interest’ with Drusilla allegedly first occurred when he was a youth in Antonia’s home, long before he had been picked as Tiberius’ successor. Also, if Gaius was obsessed with the bloodline, why did he allow Drusilla two husbands and himself four wives? As for a desire to emulate eastern kings, and indeed move the capital to Alexandria, Barrett argues the evidence “is not compelling”.

*“..In any case, Alexandria was to the Romans the epitome of oriental corruption, and a charge that Caligula planned to move there was an easy way to discredit him. The very same accusation was levelled against Caesar and Mark Antony.”*⁷

⁶ Wiedemann, T, *The Julio-Claudians*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989, p 41

⁷ Barrett, A, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, Yale University Press, 1990, p 220

Exercise 14.1

Match Gaius’ relationships with the personality listed below.

1	Father	
2	Sister banished by Gaius	
3	Fourth wife	
4	Grandmother/ wife of Agrippa	
5	Uncle	
6	Favourite sister	
7	Great grandfather	
8	Cousin/ adopted son	
9	Mother	
10	Grandmother/ wife of Drusus	

ANTONIA	DRUSILLA	CLAUDIUS	AGRIPPINA YOUNGER	AUGUSTUS
GERMANICUS	JULIA 1	MILONIA CAESONIA	TIBERIUS GEMELLUS	AGRIPPINA ELDER

Chapter 15: Assessment of Gaius

A charitable approach to assessing Gaius' time as emperor is to argue that it is difficult to judge his rule because his time in power was so brief – less than four years. On the other hand, perhaps it could be argued that damage to the imperial system was only limited by the fact that Gaius did not rule for long. Chapters 9-14 have covered the various aspects of Gaius' time in power. What follows is a brief summary of this material in the form of two diagrams, each presenting a positive and a negative angle to Gaius' rule. A useful exercise would be to check the historians' comments from Chapters 9-14 and balance the positives and the negatives.

Figure 15.1 The positive view of Gaius' rule AD 37-41

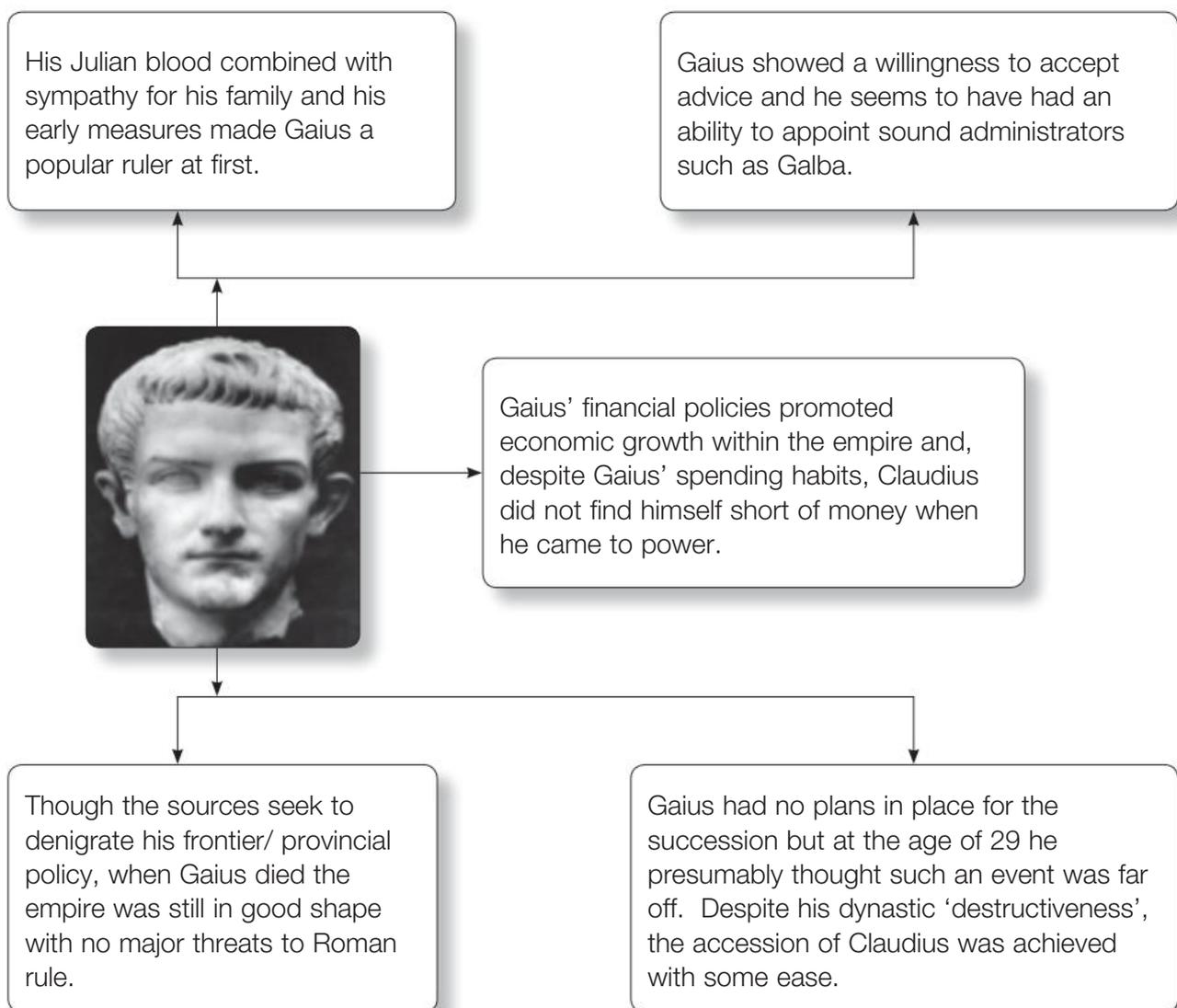
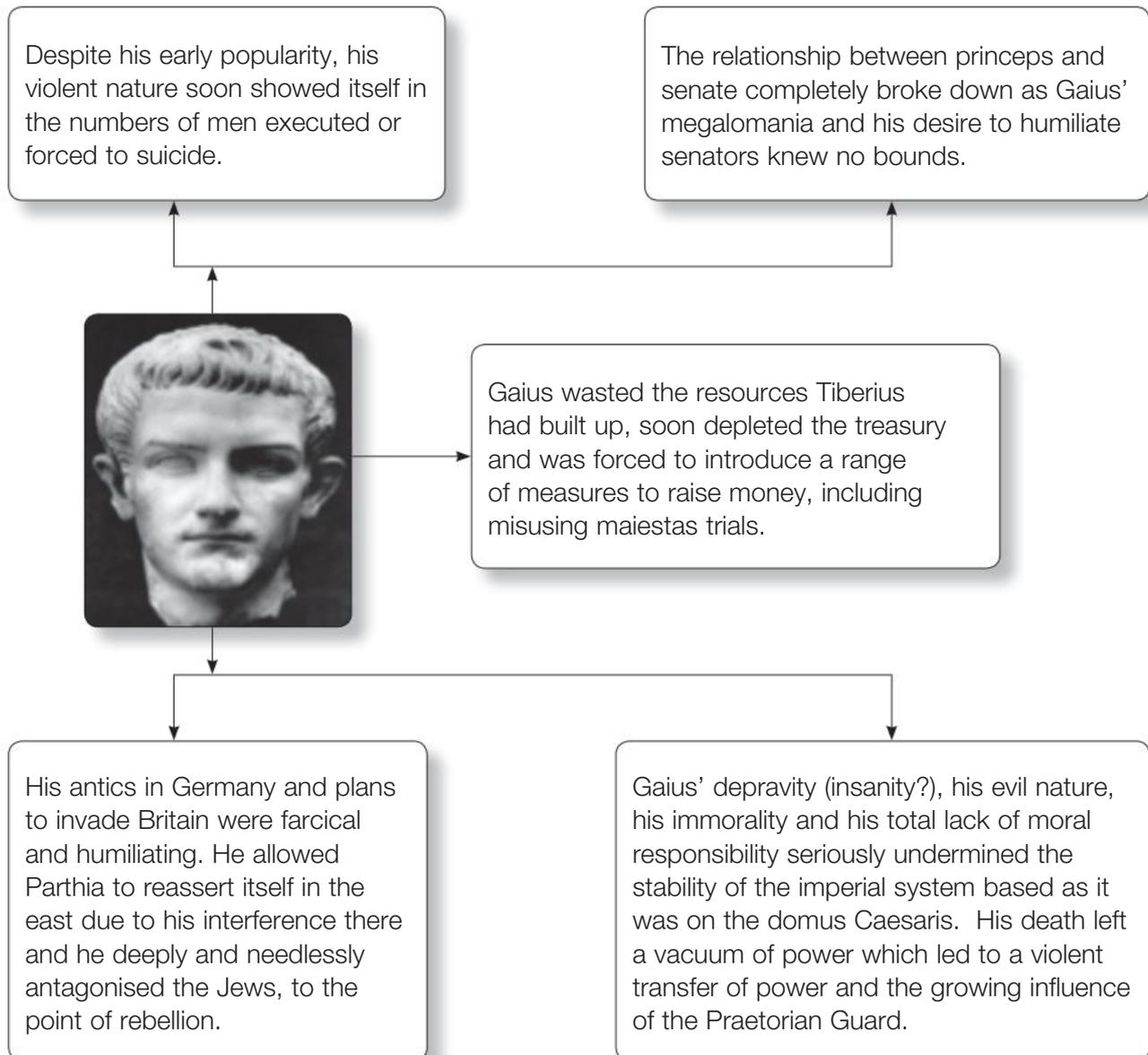


Figure 15.2 The negative view of Gaius' rule AD 37-41



Several film/ TV versions have been produced on the rule of Gaius. The 1939 play *"Caligula"* by the French writer, Albert Camus, made it to German television in 1966 and Belgian television in 1975. A BBC series on *"The Caesars"* with an episode on Gaius appeared in 1968. By far the best version is John Hurt's 'tour de force' in the 1976 BBC series *"I, Claudius"*, written by Jack Pulman, based on the books of Robert Graves *"I, Claudius"* and *"Claudius the God"*. Almost certainly the worst is the 1979 film *"Caligula"* starring Malcolm McDowell as Caligula. Though the film boasts the acting talents of the likes of Helen Mirren, Peter O' Toole and John Gielgud, it was panned at the time as little more than pornography.

Chapter 16:

Claudius the man: Changing role and image of the princeps

Like Gaius, Claudius¹ could claim a strong imperial pedigree, with strong bloodline links to both Augustus and Livia, though his Claudian links were stronger than his Julian links. His maternal grandmother was Octavia who was the sister of the emperor Augustus. His paternal grandmother was Livia, who was the wife of Augustus. His brother was the beloved Germanicus, his uncle was the emperor Tiberius and his nephew was the emperor Gaius. These links are explained in Figure 16.1.

Thanks to the TV series *“I, Claudius”*, the emperor Claudius has become one of the best known of Rome’s emperors, and certainly one of its less infamous. Thanks also to the TV series, and the books on which the series is based,² the emperor Claudius comes over to us as a wise, effective, intelligent ruler, much underestimated by those around him. However, Claudius was probably never as astute and clever as Graves would want us to believe, nor was he as stupid and incompetent as the ancient sources have painted him to be.³

The negative image of Claudius: the traditional, orthodox view

Claudius was born in 10 BC, the son of Antonia and Drusus. As a child, he suffered a form of palsy which greatly affected his movement, his speech and his general demeanour.

- He had a terrible stutter, dribbled and walked in a shuffling manner. As he got older, his body developed disproportionately; his head seemed too big for his body and he had a pot belly.
- His stammer was accompanied by a nervous tic of the head.
- Suetonius happily lets his sources speak for themselves.
 - Apparently, Antonia considered her son *“a monster, a man whom nature had not finished but had merely begun”*.
 - Livia treated him with scorn.
 - Augustus doubted the boy had his full senses.

*“...Nearly the whole of his childhood and youth was so troubled by various diseases that he grew dull-witted and had little physical strength...”*⁴

As well as having physical, and apparently psychological deficiencies, Claudius is alleged to have had a series of other major character faults.

1 The circumstances surrounding Claudius’ accession to power will be covered in Chapter 17.

2 The TV series is based on the books of Roberts Graves, *“I, Claudius”* and *“Claudius the God”*. In the series, Claudius has been immortalised by the actor Derek Jacobi.

3 Tacitus is incomplete on the reign of Claudius. Tacitus’ record of the first six years of Claudius’ rule have been lost to us. Most of Claudius’ own works (he was a keen writer of history) are also missing.

4 Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars, Claudius*, 2

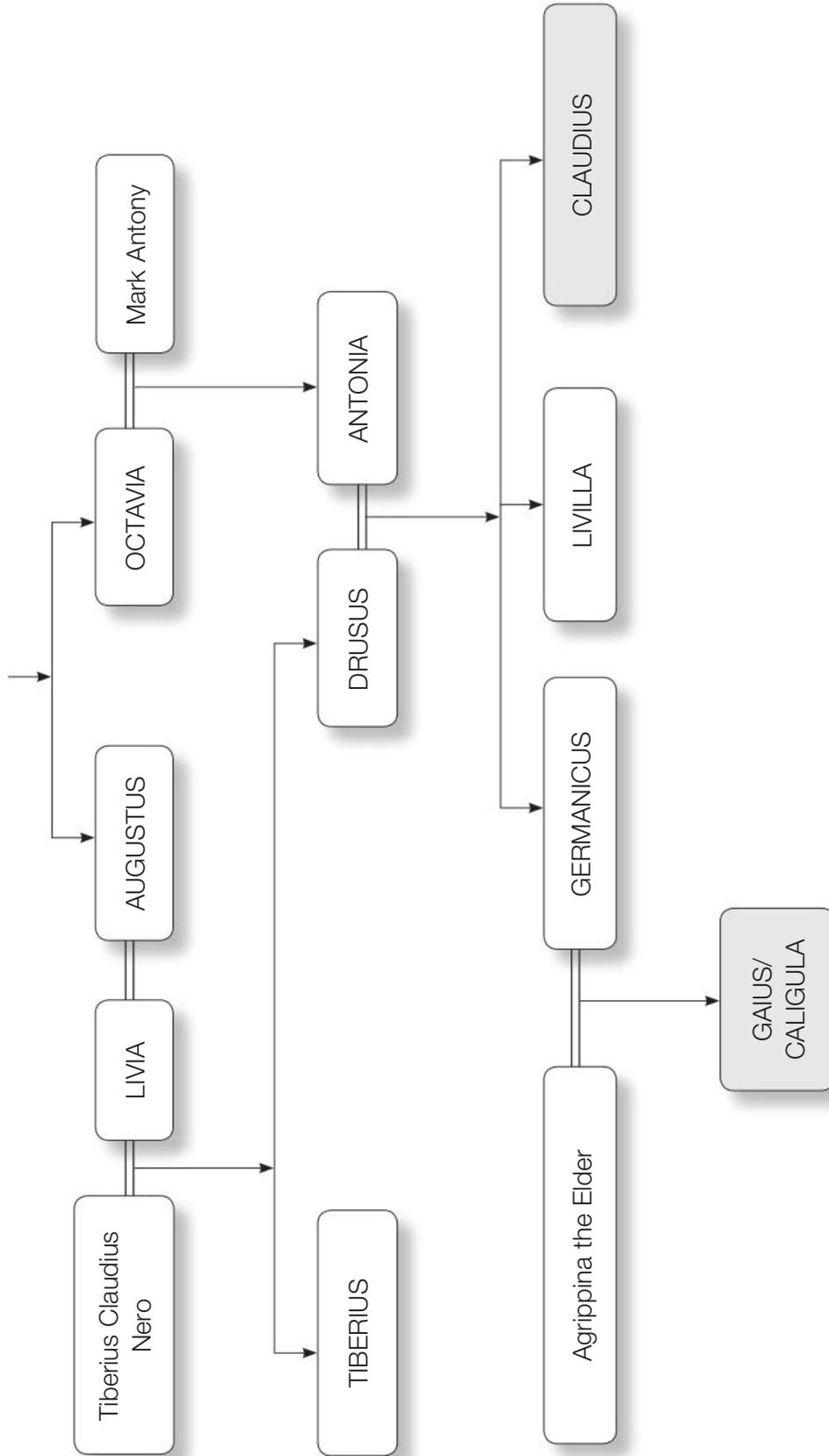


Figure 16.1 The imperial relationship background of Claudius

- The sources accuse Claudius of having no mind of his own, no original ideas and of being easily taken in by others. Tacitus states:
 - "...The emperor continually changed his mind according to whatever advice he had heard last." ⁵
 - "...But with an emperor whose likes and dislikes were all suggested and dictated to him, anything seemed possible." ⁶
 - Describing the governor of Cappadocia as being "as contemptible for his stupidity as for his absurd appearance", Tacitus says that before becoming emperor, Claudius "amused his idle leisure with the company of such buffoons". ⁷
- He was a glutton, a drunkard, a gambler and prone to cruelty.
 - "...It was seldom that Claudius left a dining-hall except gorged and sodden; he would then go to bed and sleep supine with his mouth wide open...." ⁸

The ancient sources also present a very negative view of political aspects of Claudius' rule. These elements will be covered in more detail in succeeding chapters but here are a few general comments in these areas.

- Tacitus states that Claudius was "easily controlled by his wives". He allegedly operated at the bidding of his wives, particularly Messalina and Agrippina. ⁹
 - Tacitus refers to Claudius' "sluggish uxoriousness" (XI.27) (being extremely submissive or devoted to one's wife).
 - Suetonius likewise states that so under the control of his wives was Claudius, that "he seemed to be their servant rather than the emperor". (Claudius, 29).
- However, Wiedemann warns us to treat such statements carefully.
 - "For a weak man to be ruled by his slaves or wives is a topos (commonplace) of literary invective." ¹⁰ It makes great reading but how true is it?

The positive image of Claudius: the modern, revisionist view

Tacitus' dislike of the principate and Suetonius' penchant for giving us a tabloid version of history mean that the critical presentation of Claudius coming from the ancient sources has to be viewed carefully. Was Claudius really as bad as the sources present him? The only way to answer that question is to examine the historical evidence beyond the immediate written sources. Presenting the emperors as personally reprehensible might perhaps be nothing more than a literary construct on the part of Tacitus. Perhaps Claudius' "slobbering demeanour" was something that Claudius himself sought to exaggerate. Life expectancy for imperial family members in the 1st century AD was often limited; as long as Claudius was considered to be an idiot, he was deemed to be harmless and hence perhaps this is why he escaped the attention of men like Sejanus and Gaius. ¹¹

Claudius' works will be examined in more detail in succeeding chapters, but the following points provide a more balanced view of the man and his period of rule.

- Claudius' policies towards the empire were rational, balanced and often forward-thinking:
 - he was willing to expand the empire where he thought it appropriate and if he thought it would help the regime;

⁵ Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XII.1

⁶ Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XII.3

⁷ Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XII.49

⁸ Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Claudius, 33

⁹ Issues of Claudius and the imperial family will be dealt with in Chapter 21.

¹⁰ Wiedemann, T, The Julio-Claudians, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989, p 48

¹¹ Suetonius states that Claudius said that this accounted for his behaviour during Gaius' rule (Claudius 38).

- he seems to have been willing to assimilate provincials as seen in the episode when he sought to allow Gauls into the senate; ¹²
- he was polite and conciliatory to foreign nobles as seen in the capture of Mithridates, King of Crimean Bosphorus. ¹³
- Even Suetonius concedes that Claudius was responsible for a range of activities such as public works, the upkeep of the city, fire controls and the regular delivery of supplies. ¹⁴
- Claudius took a serious interest in the law and was a conscientious judge, whose judgments were generally fair, wise and prudent (though on occasions also thoughtless and hasty).
- Many of the works on Claudius produced after his death sought to denigrate his rule, often for reasons of personal revenge (such as Seneca). However, as Nero's reign degenerated into chaos and violence, an early reassessment of Claudius began under the Flavian emperors (Vespasian and Titus) and his achievements began to be considered in a newer, more positive light. ¹⁵
- In more modern times, historians have paid greater attention to epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological evidence. This has led to a more positive interpretation of Claudius' rule. The 1930s saw a re-evaluation of Claudius in a positive direction. This period coincided with:
 - The appearance of Robert Graves' novels.
 - The public works policies of Mussolini in Italy and Franklin Roosevelt in the United States. Centralised, government intervention of the style sometimes associated with Claudius was in vogue. ¹⁶

Exercise 16.1

Indicate whether each of the following statements is a fact or an opinion.

1	Claudius had strong links to both the Julian and the Claudian families.	FACT / OPINION
2	The books and TV series <i>I Claudius</i> have brought a welcome re-evaluation to the rule of Claudius.	FACT / OPINION
3	Claudius suffered from various physical ailments similar to a form of palsy.	FACT / OPINION
4	Tacitus argues that Claudius was feeble-minded and accepted the last point of view he heard.	FACT / OPINION
5	Claudius was feeble-minded and accepted the last point of view he heard.	FACT / OPINION
6	Presenting Claudius as weak and incompetent is merely a literary construct.	FACT / OPINION
7	Physical and epigraphic evidence suggest a more positive view of Claudius' time in power.	FACT / OPINION
8	The image of Claudius underwent a rehabilitation during the Flavian period.	FACT / OPINION
9	Context always determines how historical figures are presented in history.	FACT / OPINION
10	Claudius' approach to provincial policy was sound and farsighted.	FACT / OPINION

¹² Tacitus, XI.23-4

¹³ Tacitus, XII.19

¹⁴ See Suetonius, Claudius, 18-21

¹⁵ The Flavian emperors ruled in the period AD 69-96.

¹⁶ Extension History students might consider how context has affected interpretations of the rule of Claudius, ranging from the times of Seneca to those of writers like Momigliano (1930s).

Chapter 17:

Claudius and the Senate

The accession

Claudius was certainly not the choice of the senate as successor to Gaius. Indeed many senators were hoping that this was the moment that the Republic might be restored. The traditional story of Claudius' accession to power places him at the mercy of the Praetorian Guard. Following Gaius' murder, guardsmen were wandering through the palace when one of them came across a cowering Claudius who had been hiding behind a curtain. He was placed in a litter and taken to the Praetorian Guard camp. While the senate was arguing about what to do next, crowds in the streets demanded a monarchy, specifically calling for Claudius. Willingly or otherwise, Claudius accepted the title thrust upon him by the Guards and they swore allegiance to him. In response:

*"...He also promised every man 150 gold pieces, which made him the first of the Caesars to purchase the loyalty of his troops."*¹

The senate had no choice but to confer upon Claudius the imperial powers. Having just seen one emperor murdered, Claudius realised that his position, indeed his life, was not secure.

- He guaranteed the loyalty of the Guard with the donative mentioned above. This was repeated each year of his reign.
- He endeavoured to identify himself with the Julian family and quickly took the name Caesar. The senate was not keen on this but Claudius knew it was popular with the urban mob and more importantly the military. He stated that he intended to rule as Augustus had.
- Claudius set about treating the senate with great respect. As a devoted student of history, Claudius had a keen appreciation of Roman tradition, including the importance of the senate, and of Rome's ability to bring in change.
- He even let off some of the senators who had been involved in the conspiracy against Gaius, though the principal conspirators, men like Cassius Chaerea, were executed. The murder of an emperor, even an emperor like Gaius, could not be allowed to go unpunished.

Claudius had the support of the Praetorian Guard; he had the support of the legions, being saluted *imperator* on twenty seven occasions. There was a brief senate-inspired revolt in AD 42 in Dalmatia but the troops refused to follow its instigator, Furius Camillus Scribonianus. The Equestrian Order had long been close to Claudius, and by a time-honoured policy of bread and circuses, Claudius maintained the support of the Roman populace. Claudius' main source of opposition was likely to be the senate.

Claudius and the Senate – a successful story of cooperation?

When Claudius assumed power, he genuinely respected the institution of the senate and he wanted to work with it. Like Tiberius, he wanted the senate to take the initiative, to offer ideas, to debate and not simply rubber stamp proposals that came before them. He also wanted the senate to function more efficiently. To these ends, Claudius took several actions.

- He restored magistrate elections to the senate, reversing the policy of Gaius.
- He also made use of the *senatus consulta*, senatorial decrees, which though originally designed to be only opinions, evolved under the early empire to have the force of law.

¹ Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Claudius, 10

- Claudius was keen to restore the prestige of the senate:
 - he was consul only four times, thus allowing more men of noble rank to take on this role;
 - senate membership was tightened up as Claudius used the role of censor to remove dishonest or incompetent senators;
 - he attended senate meetings, showed the body respect but also demanded the same from senators; and
 - he insisted that senators attend debates and debate seriously.
- Claudius also tried to revamp senate membership by allowing provincials into the chamber. When he faced stiff opposition to this proposal, even Tacitus could not deny Claudius' eloquent defence of his position.

*"...Senators, however ancient any institution seems, once upon a time it was new! First, plebeians joined patricians in office. Next, the Latins were added. Then came men from other Italian peoples. The innovation now proposed will, in its turn, one day be old: what we seek to justify by precedents today will itself become a precedent..."*²

Claudius attempted to give the senate greater responsibility throughout the empire.

The provinces of Achaea and Macedonia were returned to senate control.

New provinces he shared between senate and equestrian administrators, eg the senate received Britain, while the equestrian order received Lycia.

The senate was now allowed to mint copper coinage.

Senators were given preferential seating in the theatre.

*"...Indeed he vigorously upheld Augustus' hierarchical division of society, re-enslaving freedmen who posed as knights and executing men who falsely claimed Roman citizenship..."*³

As well as going out of his way to show respect to individual senators, there was a social side of Claudius' attempts to improve his relationship with the senate, as Barbara Levick explains.

*"...Claudius visited the sick and gave a banquet for senators and their wives, for knights and the people in their tribes. The Emperor made a point, perhaps early in the reign, of sharing senatorial festivities..."*⁴

Claudius and the Senate – a failure of cooperation?

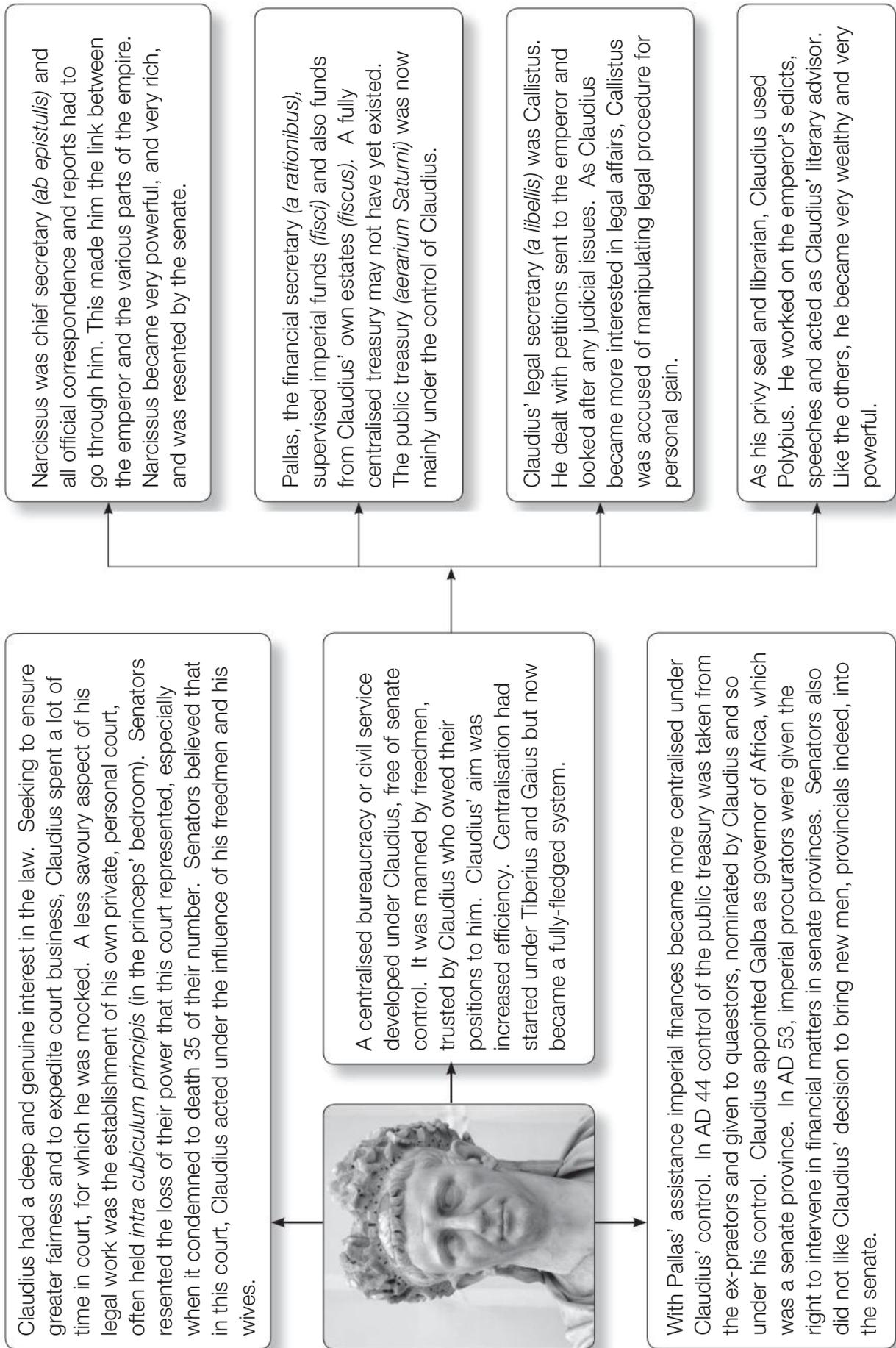
However, despite his best intentions, Claudius succeeded only in developing a system in which the power and prestige of the senate diminished. The sources tell us that during Claudius' reign, thirty five senators were executed. Under Claudius, a centralised imperial bureaucracy grew, in which government departments came to be run by his freedmen, a development bitterly resented by the senate. Senate power and prestige were also reduced in other areas such as the law, finance and provincial administration. These developments are summarised in Figure 17.1.

² Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, XI.24

³ Salmon, E T, *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138*, Methuen and Co, London, 1970, p 165

⁴ Levick, B, *Claudius*, B T Batsford, London, 1990, p 94

Figure 17.1 Claudius and the Senate – a failure of cooperation?



What do the historians have to say about “Claudius and the Senate”?

1. Barbara Levick: *Claudius*

Levick explains that one of the ways Claudius sought to honour the senate was to use a time-honoured method of honouring men whose parents had distinguished themselves. To achieve this, he added fourteen gentes, involving about thirty three men, such as Q Veranius and T Sextius Africanus. There was a precedent for this as Caesar (45 BC) and Augustus (30 BC) had done this. As censor and pontifex maximus, Claudius was qualified to do this.

*“...It was a good reward and kept the structure of the House satisfactorily traditional, as well as providing persons qualified for indispensable ceremonials.”*⁵

2. H H Scullard: *From the Gracchi to Nero*

Scullard suggests that despite his best efforts, Claudius only succeeded in alienating the senate with his attempts at improving administrative efficiency. The senate was not happy to see its duties diminished, particularly when the beneficiaries were former foreign slaves (Claudius’ freedmen). They resented changes that Claudius made to the composition of the House, especially when such changes involved the deaths of their members following a trial *intra cubiculum principis*.

*“...He perhaps underestimated the resentment of some of the older aristocratic families when they found their members being turned, through his drive for efficient administration, from independent officers of state into officials of an emperor.”*⁶

⁵ Levick, B, *Claudius*, B T Batsford, London, 1990, p 101

⁶ Scullard, H H, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 302

Exercise 17.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE for each of the following statements.

1	Claudius’ accession to the principate was overwhelmingly welcomed by the senate.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	The Praetorian Guard declared Claudius emperor only with the greatest reluctance.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	From the beginning of his rule, Claudius sought to treat the senate with great respect.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	Some of the senators involved in the conspiracy to kill Gaius escaped execution.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	Claudius wanted to introduce provincials into the senate body.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	The senate became an integral part of Claudius’ centralised administration.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	Men like Narcissus and Pallas were greatly admired by members of the senate.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	Claudius played a major role in judicial processes during his rule.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	Senate control of Rome’s finances diminished significantly under Claudius.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	Claudius avoided all social interaction with members of the senate.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

Chapter 18:

Claudius: Reforms, policies and building programs

Tacitus and Suetonius, and of course *I Claudius*, present a view of Claudius' reign as being nothing more than thirteen years of court intrigue and self-aggrandisement by his ever more wealthy freedmen, and his ambitious and scheming wives. The impression gained is that the period AD 41-54 was nothing more than a glamorised imperial Roman soap opera that began with the murder of one emperor and ended with the poisoning of another. There is some truth in this. ¹

However, it would do Claudius an enormous injustice if his reign was seen as nothing more than the activities of manipulative freedmen and women taking advantage of an ageing, infirm emperor. It was under Claudius that Rome returned to Britain, control of Germany was extended and Rome's position in the east was strengthened. However, it is domestic issues which are of main concern here. Claudius could proudly point to significant achievements in the areas of justice, finance, religion and public works.

The issue of **finance** was covered in Chapter 17. However, in summary Claudius managed to achieve the following:

- A much closer control of the empire's financial affairs was achieved during Claudius' rule, thanks in large part to the efforts of his freedman, Pallas.
- He used special imperial procurators to control specific elements of finance:
 - the *procurator vicesimarum hereditatum* looked after inheritance tax;
 - procurators were appointed to control finances in senate provinces;
 - he achieved greater control over the central treasury (*aerarium*), removing the praetors who had been in charge and replacing them with his own quaestors.
- However, Claudius' sound financial management did not stop him from the normal extravagances of the emperors.

"...Claudius often distributed largesse to the people, and gave numerous magnificent public shows; not only the traditional ones in the customary places, but others, including novelties and ancient revivals, where nobody had ever seen them staged before..." ²

Judicial matters were also mentioned in Chapter 17. Claudius was mocked at the time for his intense interest in legal matters and was often accused of allowing his freedmen or his wives to dictate his decisions in legal matters. However, even Suetonius has praise for Claudius' judicial work, both in terms of his work ethic and his desire to achieve fairness:

"...Claudius was a most conscientious judge: sitting in court even on his own birthday and those of his family... Instead of always observing the letter of the law, he let himself be guided by his sense of equity, and when he thought the punishments prescribed were either too lenient or too severe, changed them accordingly..." ³

In summary, Claudius' main achievements in the judicial area were as follows.

¹ See Chapter 21

² Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Claudius, 21

³ Suetonius, *Gaius*, 14

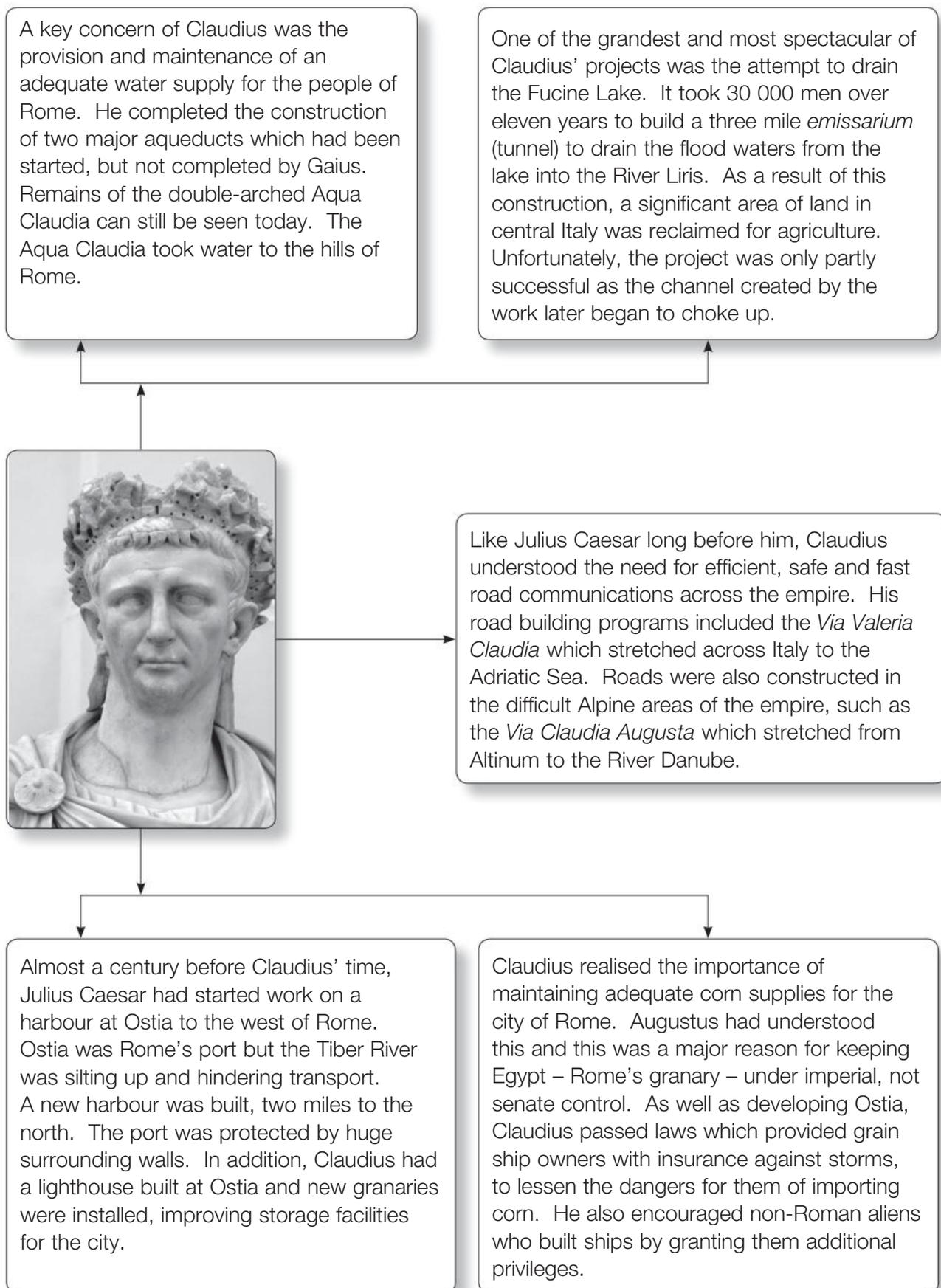
- Of major importance was the increased speed of judicial proceedings.
- He introduced a series of laws which:
 - attempted to prevent poor behaviour at major public events;
 - lessened sentences handed out to debtors;
 - tried to prevent property speculation; and
 - and banned loans being made to a son in the likelihood that his father would soon die.
- However, there was also a darker side to Claudius' judicial work.
 - Claudius held many cases, formerly supervised by the senate, in his private quarters.
 - such trials are referred to as *intra cubiculum principis* (in the princeps' bedroom);
 - this practice was deeply resented by the senate;
 - up to 35 senators would lose their lives because of these courts.

Claudius placed great emphasis on **public works**. Such activities stimulated the economy, provided significant infrastructure benefits for Rome and the empire, and gave thousands of men regular employment. This area of Claudius' work is summarised in Figure 18.1.

Claudius also paid special attention to the issue of **religion**. His overall aim was to continue the Augustan policy of maintaining and restoring traditional Roman religious practices and limiting the impact of alien religions.

- Claudius was well versed in history. One of his religious policies reflected this as he reorganised the *college of haruspices* (singular *haruspex*).
 - The ancient practice of *haruspicy* came from the Etruscans though its earliest origins came from the Near East.
 - *Haruspicy* was the practice of divining the future from the examination of the entrails of dead animals.
- In AD 47, Claudius staged the *Secular Games*, the first time Rome had seen these since Augustus staged them in 17 BC.
 - The Games were usually held about every one hundred years.
 - Claudius justified his holding of the Games early by an adjustment of the date of the very first Games.
 - As a result, his holding of the Games also coincided with the 800th anniversary of the legendary founding of Rome.
- When it came to foreign religious practices, Claudius was generally tolerant unless he felt that they threatened the state.
 - He expelled astrologers from Rome.
 - He tried to suppress Druidism altogether.
 - To the Jews, Claudius followed a mixed policy. Across the empire restrictions against them were eased but they were not allowed to worship in their synagogues in Rome itself.
 - In AD 49, the Jews were expelled from Rome.
- Claudius tried to prevent worship of himself, following the example set by Augustus and Tiberius.
- He also extended the sacred boundary of Rome, the *pomerium*, traditionally meant to be the original lines ploughed by Romulus around the walls of Rome.

Figure 18.1 The public works programs of Claudius



What do the historians have to say about “Reforms, policies and building programs”?

1. Barbara Levick: *Claudius*

Barbara Levick shows that in his public works programs, Claudius was driven by a strong desire to ensure Rome’s food supplies. This was done out of political necessity as much as compassion. As well as the measures referred to in Figure 18.1, Levick lists other measures of Claudius, that sought to maintain grain supplies. These included exempting citizens who built ships from the *Lex Papia Poppaea*.⁴ Aliens who carried out this activity were even offered citizenship. In AD 52, Claudius set up a colony at Ptolemais in Palestine. One of its functions was to serve as a staging post for grain shipments which might be faced with prevailing northerly winds.

*“...Most of the constructions were of direct benefit to the population. Claudius’ attention was dominated by the problem of food supplies, especially for the free distribution to which about 200 000 citizens of Rome were entitled...Claudius determined to take permanent measures to avoid further shortages...The supply to Rome would take priority...”*⁵

2. Suetonius: *The Twelve Caesars*

Suetonius praises Claudius for his efforts in ensuring regular grain supplies and for his upkeep of the city. He relates the story of Claudius sitting with bags of coins in front of him paying fire-fighters “on the nail” to ensure a fire in the Aemilian quarter was effectively dealt with. He has another anecdote that suggests another reason for Claudius’ insistence on maintaining grain supplies.

*“...Once, after a series of droughts had caused a scarcity of grain, a mob stopped Claudius in the Forum and pelted him so hard with curses and stale crusts that he had difficulty in regaining the Palace by a side-door; as a result he took all possible steps to import grain, even during the winter months...”*⁶

4 This was a law which penalised citizens for celibacy or childlessness by limiting inheritance rights. It was one of a series of measures introduced by Augustus to restore Roman morals and increase the population.

5 Levick, B, *Claudius*, B T Batsford, London, 1990, p 109

6 Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Claudius, 18

Exercise 18.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	Who was largely responsible for Claudius' improved control of Rome's finances?	
2	How did Suetonius view Claudius' work in the judicial field?	
3	What was the Roman term for Claudius' private "bedroom court"?	
4	What was Claudius' attitude to foreign cults and religions?	
5	What major religious event did Claudius stage in AD 47?	
6	What was Claudius' major public works project that employed 30 000 men over 11 years?	
7	What major construction project did Claudius carry out to assist in ensuring adequate grain supplies?	
8	What was the major aqueduct built by Claudius, the remains of which can still be seen?	
9	Where did the Via Valeria Claudia take people?	
10	What could aliens gain if they built ships that helped ensure Rome's grain supplies?	

Chapter 19:

Claudius and the Praetorian Guard

The increasingly important role of the Praetorian Guard was a feature of the politics of the early empire. There had existed a *cohors praetoria* to protect individual generals during the Republic but it was not until the time of Augustus that the Guard played a significant role in Rome. During Tiberius' time, the Praetorian Prefect, Sejanus, had used the Guard to strengthen his position. It was another Praetorian Prefect, Macro, who was instrumental in Sejanus' fall and in placing Gaius on the throne. Claudius' fate was also bound up with the Praetorian Guard. It was responsible for placing him in power, protecting him from the opposition of senators and later played a key role in organising the succession of his adopted son, Nero.

The Guard and the accession of Claudius ¹

In January AD 41, Gaius was murdered by members of the Praetorian Guard led by Cassius Chaerea. Gaius' German bodyguard then ran amok throughout the palace killing alleged conspirators, including three senators. Guardsmen under Julius Lupus then invaded the palace, and killed Gaius' wife and daughter, Milonia Caesonia and Drusilla. The traditional story that follows is that Claudius was found by guardsmen cowering behind a curtain fearing for his life. He was declared emperor and taken in a litter to the Praetorian Guards barracks. ²

"...A Guardsman, wandering vaguely through the Palace, noticed a pair of feet beneath the curtain, pulled their owner out for identification and recognised him. Claudius dropped on the floor and clasped the soldier's knees, but found himself acclaimed Emperor." ³

- The Senate then demanded Claudius' attendance in the house but he stated that he was being forcibly detained and was hence unable to come.
 - In the meantime, the Senate debated issues ranging from "should the Republic be re-established" to "which senator should become princeps".
- In the Praetorian Guard barracks, Claudius praised the Guard and they addressed him as emperor. He gave each man 15 000 sesterces. Having gained the loyalty of the Guard (and soon the legions), the urban cohorts' ⁴ loyalty to the senate was shaken. As Chapter 17 explains, the senate then went through the motions of granting Claudius imperial powers.
- Claudius owed his position to the Guard but this did not stop him executing the leading conspirators in Gaius' murder, such as Cassius Chaerea. The murder of an emperor was a dangerous precedent and could not be left unpunished.

The Guard under Claudius

The restoration of the Republic for which some senators had hoped posed a major threat for the Praetorian Guard. Barbara Levick explains it this way:

"...The Praetorians did not have only donatives in mind: they were concerned for the very survival of their corps if the Principate as they knew it came to an end. Claudius must know as well as his predecessors what was due to a loyal Praetorian Guard." ⁵

¹ The story of Claudius' accession was explained briefly in Chapter 17.

² The guardsman who found Claudius was called "Gratus" (grateful), a seemingly appropriate name.

³ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Claudius, 10

⁴ Created by Augustus as a kind of city police force.

⁵ Levick, B, *Claudius*, B T Batsford, London, 1990, p 33

Claudius may not have had the charisma of Germanicus or appear to have the statecraft of an Augustus, but he had enough imperial blood running through his veins for the Guard:

*“...True, Claudius was not a natural heir of Gaius, but he was a kinsman, and a kinsman of Gaius’ predecessor.”*⁶

The Guard would be there to protect Claudius during his reign though he faced far less serious opposition than he might have feared. Though Claudius needed the Guard, Claudius tried hard to court senate favour. He would only ever allow Guardsmen into the senate house if the senators gave their permission. In AD 42 there occurred an abortive rebellion led by the governor of Dalmatia, Camillus Scribonianus. It came to nothing when Scribonianus’ legions remained loyal to Claudius and Scribonianus committed suicide.

*“...It was thought that he was acting on behalf of conspirators in Rome: Annius Vinicianus, whose name had been discussed in the senatorial debate following Caligula’s death, and Pomponius Secundus, the consul who had presided at that debate, were among those executed.”*⁷

During his time in power, the activities of Claudius’ wives were to have an impact on the role of the Praetorian Guard.⁸

- During the early years of his reign, Claudius was married to his cousin Messalina. At this time the Guard was under the joint command of Lusius Geta and Rufrius Crispinus.
 - It was Rufrius Crispinus who arrested Decimus Valerius Asiaticus in AD 47 and brought him back to Rome in chains. Asiaticus was one of Messalina’s victims.
- When Messalina “married” Gaius Silius in AD 48, Claudius’ position was seriously under threat. Fearing for his life, he interrogated one of the Guard commanders, Lusius Geta, who confirmed what Messalina had done. The importance of the Praetorian Guard was now clear as:

*“...The rest of the emperor’s entourage loudly insisted that he must visit the camp and secure the Guard – safety must come before vengeance.”*⁹

- Following the fall of Messalina, Claudius was persuaded to marry his “niece”, Agrippina (the Younger). Agrippina’s twin aims were to enhance her power and ensure the succession for her son, Nero.
- Agrippina doubted the loyalty of the current Guard commanders to her son’s cause. Thus, in AD 51 she secured the removal of Geta and Crispinus.
- In their place she had Sextus Afranius Burrus brought from Vaison (S E Gaul) to become the sole commander of the Guard. Agrippina could count on Burrus’ loyalty and Burrus was:

*“...fully aware whose initiative was behind his appointment.”*¹⁰

- During the early years of Nero’s reign, Burrus and (Nero’s former tutor) Seneca would be the power behind the throne.
- Just as Macro had ensured the succession of Gaius, so too was Burrus there to ensure the succession of Nero. Following the death of Claudius in October AD 54:

*“...Nero was presented by Burrus to the Praetorian Guard, to each member of which was presented a substantial donative for hailing the seventeen-year-old as emperor...”*¹¹

6 Levick, p 33

7 Wiedemann, T, The Julio-Claudians, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989, p 49

8 The details re-Claudius, his wives and the imperial family are covered in Chapter 21.

9 Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XI.30

10 Tacitus, XII.41

11 Shotter, D, Nero, Routledge, London, 1997, p 10

Exercise 19.1

Place the following events in the correct chronological order.

Messalina's "marriage" to Silius	1st event	
Execution of Cassius Chaerea	2nd event	
Arrest of Asiaticus	3rd event	
Macro helps Gaius into power	4th event	
Burrus presents Nero to the Guard	5th event	
Claudius marries Agrippina	6th event	
Murder of Gaius	7th event	
Appointment of Burrus	8th event	
Attempted revolt of Scribonianus	9th event	
The Guard declares Claudius emperor	10th event	

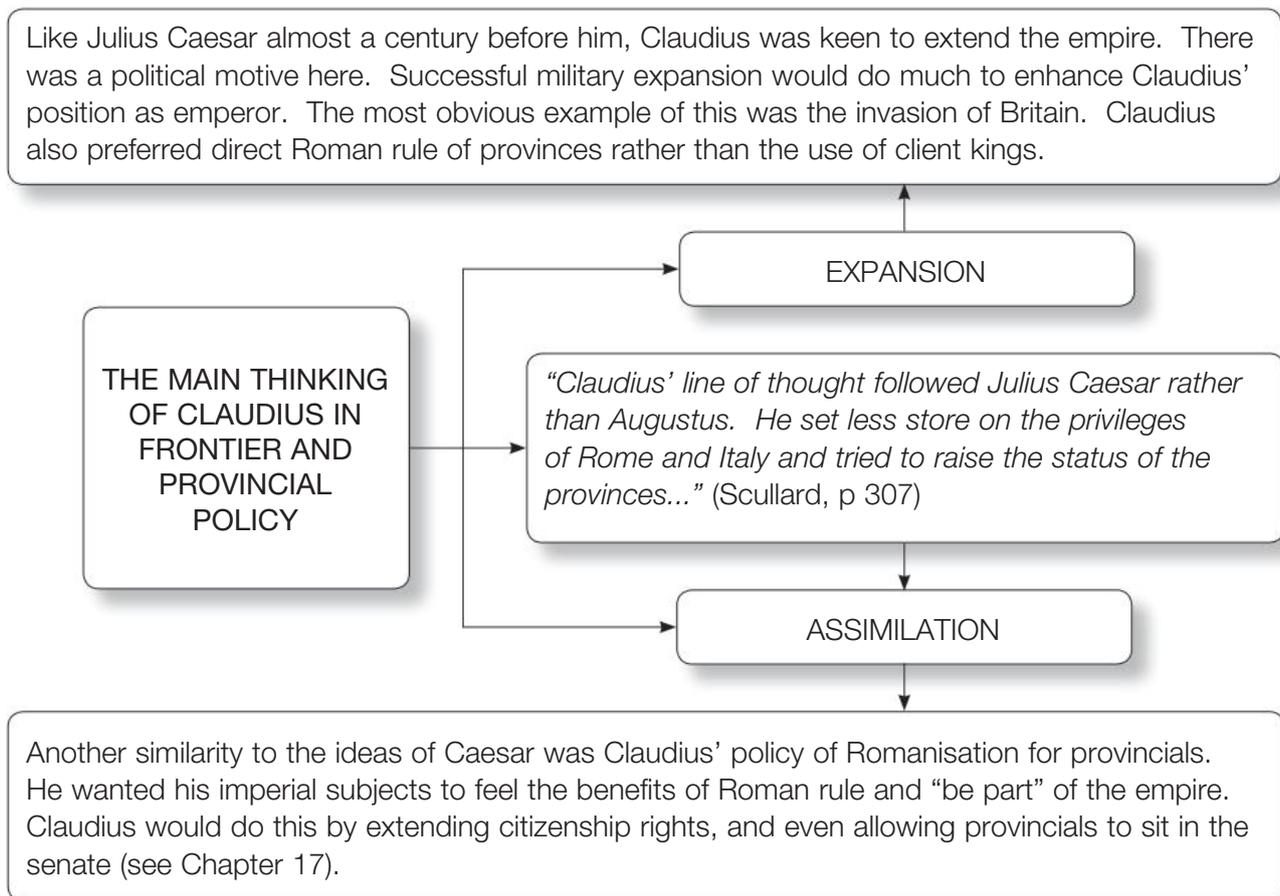
Notes

Chapter 20:

Claudius: The army, the frontier and provincial policy

Rome's frontier and provincial policy since Augustus had remained fairly consistent. Augustus had favoured consolidation of existing frontiers rather than military expansion. He had avoided military activity unless it was absolutely necessary. The Varan disaster in Germany of AD 9 merely served to reinforce the wisdom of the Augustan policy. Tiberius was by nature a conservative ruler and he was happy to follow the Augustan line. His concern over Germanicus' adventures across the Rhine had far more to do with security concerns than it did with jealousy of a young rival. Despite the occasional gesture, even Gaius' policies avoided an aggressive, expansionist approach to frontier and provincial policy. However, with Claudius policy was to change. Claudius' model in this area reflected more the ideas of Julius Caesar than those of Augustus. Figure 20.1 summarises Claudius' main thinking on frontier and provincial policy.

Figure 20.1 Claudius and frontier and provincial policy.



Gaius had left Claudius some imperial problems which had to be dealt with. Following the murder of its ruler, Ptolemy, **Mauretania** rose in revolt. In AD 41-42, Claudius sent C Suetonius Paulinus to deal with the rebels, and he became the first Roman general to cross the Atlas mountains to the Sahara. Cn Hosidius Geta completed the job two years later.

- Claudius decided to avoid the use of a client king in Mauretania.

- Two imperial provinces were established:
 - Mauretania Caesariensis and Tingitana;
 - The people of this region were never fully accepting of Roman rule.
- As part of his assimilation policy, Claudius established five *coloniae* in Mauretania to raise the level of Romanisation in the two provinces.

Claudius was more cautious when it came to dealing with **Germany** and **Gaul**. The earlier disastrous policy of attempting to extend the empire from the Rhine to the Elbe was not to be repeated.

- He sent his general, Domitius Corbulo to extend Roman control to the mouth of the river Rhine. Corbulo also defeated the Frisii, who had caused Tiberius trouble a generation earlier, and he dealt firmly with the Chauci, who were engaged in pirate activities in the North Sea.
- Having achieved this, Corbulo was ordered back to the west of the Rhine.

*“...And indeed Claudius forbade further aggression against the Germans and even ordered the withdrawal of our garrisons to the west of the Rhine...Though he had forbidden war, Claudius awarded Corbulo an honorary triumph.”*¹

- Again Claudius pursued assimilation policies in Germany. Two colonies were established in Germany:
 - Colonia Agrippinensis (Cologne) in honour of his fourth wife, Agrippina;
 - Augusta Treverorum (Trier).
- Entire tribes were granted Latin rights in Gaul and many individuals were granted Roman citizenship. Within a generation, non-Italians were becoming a common sight in the senate and before the century was over a provincial would become emperor.²

In the **east** of the empire, Claudius did much to strengthen Rome's position following the errors of Gaius in this region.

- Claudius was more assertive when dealing with Parthia. He insisted on having a Roman nominee, Mithridates, placed on the throne of Armenia which had become vacant in AD 49.
- He also encouraged internal strife inside Parthia to keep it preoccupied and thus less willing to interfere in Roman matters.

*“...This policy is sometimes said to have been responsible for the trouble with Parthia in Nero's reign; but trouble with Parthia surely would not have been avoided by appeasement.”*³

- Claudius preferred direct Roman rule in the east to the use of client kings.
 - Lycia in AD 43, Judaea in AD 44 (following the death of Herod Agrippa), Thrace in AD 46 and Ituraea in AD 49.
 - However, he restored Commagene to Antiochus IV. Antiochus had formerly been installed by Gaius and then removed.

South east Europe and the **Danube** area remained fairly quiet during Claudius' reign.

¹ Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XI.19

² The emperor Trajan AD 98-117 was of Spanish origin.

³ Salmon, E T, A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138, Methuen and Co, London, 1970, p 163

- There was an attempted revolt in Dalmatia (AD 42) but that was dealt with quickly (see Chapter 19).
- The provinces of Achaëa and Macedonia were returned to the senate.
- Noricum near the northern Danube was run by an imperial procurator.

“...Tiberius had converted the provinces of Greece and Macedonia into a private domain of his own; Claudius gave them back to the senate. He deprived the Lycians of national independence to punish their love of savage vendettas; but restored the Rhodians’ independence to express his pleasure at their recantation of their faults.”⁴

The conquest of Britain

a) Motivation

Julius Caesar had paid two visits to Britain in 55 and 54 BC. Once Augustus had established his power, he determined that the empire should stop on the southern side of the English Channel. Tiberius was content to maintain Augustus’ policy of non-intervention in Britain. Meanwhile trade between the empire and Britain was gathering pace, especially as British chieftains were becoming accustomed to Roman luxuries. Gaius may or may not have been serious in his plans to invade Britain (see Chapter 13). Once in power, Claudius was keen to embark on an invasion of Britain. There were several reasons for this:

- He wanted to restore Rome’s prestige after the fiasco of Gaius’ “sea shell collecting expedition”.
- Claudius distrusted Druidism and occupying Britain would have contributed to this. Stamping out Druidism would be a major factor that could lead to the proper Romanising of Gaul.
- Britain was reputed to contain great wealth in metal, timber, cattle and slaves, and so the economic motive would have been strong.
- The Britons had refused to extradite certain individuals requested by Rome and instead replied by staging brief raids on the northern coast of Gaul.
- Augustus had earlier sought to keep the south coast of Britain friendly by preventing the expansion of the Catuvellauni people at the expense of the pro-Roman Trinobantes.
 - However, by the 30s, the power of the Catuvellauni had spread from Northampton in the north to Gloucester in the west to Essex in the east and was threatening the south coast. The south coast region of Britain was under the rule of Verica who accepted Roman suzerainty.
 - The Catuvellauni ruler, Cunobelin, fell out with his son, Adminius. It was Adminius who had come to Gaius and interested him in an invasion.
 - Cunobelin died in AD 39 and was succeeded by his sons Caractacus and Togodumnus.

“...Caractacus and Togodumnus showed no good will to Rome, and moved on the south coast... Pressure became irresistible after Caractacus took over. Verica fled to Claudius and Rome had lost her suzerainty over the south coast.”⁵

However, by far and away the most important factor leading to the invasion of Britain was Claudius’ desire (and need) to achieve military glory and thus consolidate his power. Military glory would strengthen his support amongst the legions and would enormously enhance his popularity with the people of Rome. It would also minimise any possible senate moves against him.

⁴ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Claudius, 25

⁵ Levick, B, *Claudius*, B T Batsford, London, 1990, p 140

b) Planning

Roman commanders did not expect the invasion to be a walkover and preparations for the invasion were intense. Great care was taken over numbers, logistics and commanders.

- The invading army comprised almost 50 000 men:
 - Four legions: the II Augusta, the XIV Gemina (both from the upper Rhine), the XX Valeria Victrix (from the lower Rhine) and the IX Hispana (from Pannonia).
 - Auxiliaries and detachments were added from other legions (eg VIII Augusta).
 - There were also some Praetorian Guard troops.
- The invasion force included some of Rome's most experienced commanders including:
 - the commander-in-chief A Plautius;
 - Cn Hosidius Geta, T Flavius Sabinus and his younger brother, the future emperor Vespasian.

*"...This was a show-case of display of Roman military might; nothing must go wrong..."*⁶

- The invasion landed on the Kentish coast in late May/early June AD 43. Ill-discipline amongst some of the troops on the Gallic coast had caused a brief delay.

c) Invasion

Roman forces moved quickly from the Kent coast towards the river Thames. Once Claudius arrived with reinforcements, the river was crossed. The enemy capital, Camulodunum (Colchester) fell quickly. Claudius was able to return to Rome and announce that there had been a new major addition to the empire.

- Though the campaign in Mauretania had brought more territory under Rome's control than the invasion of Britain, Claudius chose to emphasise the British success. The news of the victory was received deliriously by the people and senate back in Rome.
- Claudius had taken an enormous risk in invading Britain and in making himself part of the expedition. Defeat would have destroyed him. He cleverly took with him many leading senate figures *"distinguished for high pretensions or military talent...They shared the glory – and were kept from mischief at Rome...In Rome Claudius entrusted everything to Vitellius, including command of troops..."*⁷

Over the next decade, Britain was gradually pacified, a process helped by the strong divisions amongst the various British chieftains, a division that made possible the capture of Caractacus and his being taken to Claudius in Rome.⁸ In AD 47, Plautius was replaced by P Ostorius Scapula and the extent of Roman control was marked by a line (the Fosse Way) stretching roughly from Lincoln to Exeter in the south west. In AD 51 Colchester became the first colony in Britain, though the imperial procurator sat in London (Londinium) which was commercially far more important. By the time of Claudius' death, Britain south of a line from Chester to Lincoln was under Roman control (excluding Wales), with client kingdoms having been established in Sussex and East Anglia.

⁶ Levick, p 141

⁷ Levick, p 142

⁸ Caractacus so impressed Claudius with his courage and his dignity that the emperor "pardoned him and his wife and brothers." (Tacitus, XII.36)

The army

Levick highlights that Claudius introduced several measures to improve the lot of the army. This was good policy as the loyalty of the legions was always paramount in the mind of an emperor, but it did seem to be a genuine response to demands.

- The Lex Papia Poppaea was eased so that legionaries had the right to give and receive bequests in the same way that married men with children could.
- He allowed auxiliaries to remain in Judaea when their transfer to Pontus was being considered.
- Certificates of honourable discharge were now given to auxiliaries and praetorians who had served well.
- Auxiliaries could also gain citizenship.

What do the historians have to say about “The army, the frontier and provincial policy”?

1. Barbara Levick: *Claudius*

Levick emphasises the enormous importance that the successful invasion of Britain held for Claudius. As mentioned earlier, had the invasion failed, it would have been an unmitigated disaster for Rome, and for Claudius personally. However, success breeds success, which even his other domestic problems could not diminish.

*“...For Claudius himself his invasion of Britain was the greatest event of the reign, and one of his prime claims to rule, as his systematic exploitation of it shows. It was celebrated when the news of it arrived in Rome, and when he returned in triumph; A Plautius’ ovation of 47 renewed the mood...and the parade of Caractacus in 51 gave Claudius virtually another triumph.”*⁹

2. E T Salmon: *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138*

Salmon points out that Claudius’ provincial policy had a major impact on the running of the empire. As Augustus had tried to narrow the gap between Rome and Italy, so Claudius sought to do it between the provinces and Italy. Everybody in the empire was a subject, and so they tended to find the same level.

*“...Under Claudius the assimilated provincials began to play their full part in the Empire. He himself obtained his officials from them, and the army was being increasingly recruited from their number.”*¹⁰

⁹ Levick, B, *Claudius*, B T Batsford, London, 1990, p 148

¹⁰ Salmon, E T, *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138*, Methuen and Co, London, 1970, p 165

Exercise 20.1

Use the terms in the box below to complete this passage.

Claudius' foreign policy followed the ideas of _____ much more than those of _____. The twin bases of his frontier/ provincial policy were _____ and _____. Claudius was not so keen on the use of _____ kingdoms as previous rulers, preferring to create _____ provinces. From _____ he created the provinces of Caesariensis and Tingitana, while in the east he took _____ in AD 44 and _____ in AD 46. Claudius saw _____ and _____ benefits from an invasion of Britain but his prime concerns were _____ and domestic _____. A key feature of Claudius' policy of Romanisation was the establishment of _____ and the granting of _____.

prestige	colonies	Augustus	Mauretania	Judaea	Thrace
citizenship	Caesar	expansion	imperial	strategic	assimilation
economic	client	politics			

Chapter 21:

Claudius, the imperial family and problems of succession

The background of Claudius

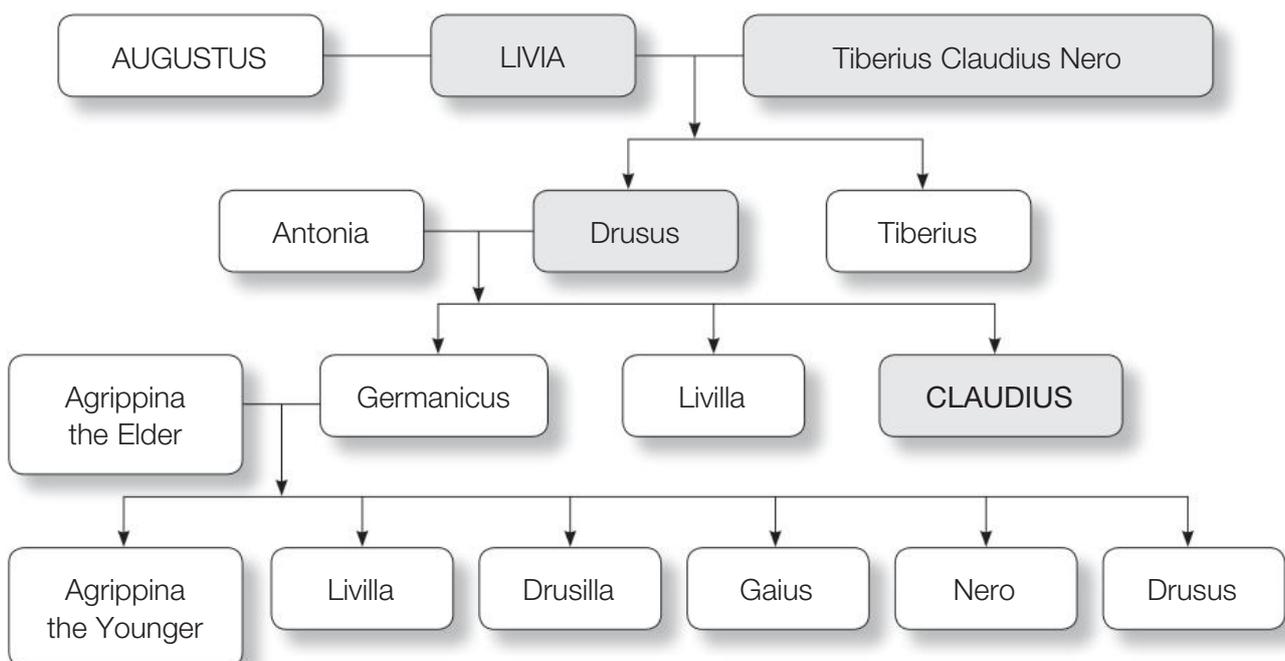
Claudius had never been considered a serious candidate for high office, certainly not emperor. Chapter 16 refers to contemporary opinions of the young Claudius. His mother called him a monster while Augustus doubted the young man's wits. Gaius' death had left a vacuum in the succession stakes:

- his brothers, Nero and Drusus, had died a decade earlier;
- his favourite sister, Drusilla had died in AD 38;
- his other sisters, Livilla and Agrippina (the Younger) were in exile; and
- his wife and daughter had been murdered at the same time as him.

Some senators were seriously contemplating a return to the republic but the Praetorian Guard pre-empted this once they had found Claudius hiding behind the curtain.¹ Though Claudius was not well thought of, his connections to the imperial line were strong.

Figure 21.1 below, shows the strong Claudian strand of his lineage.²

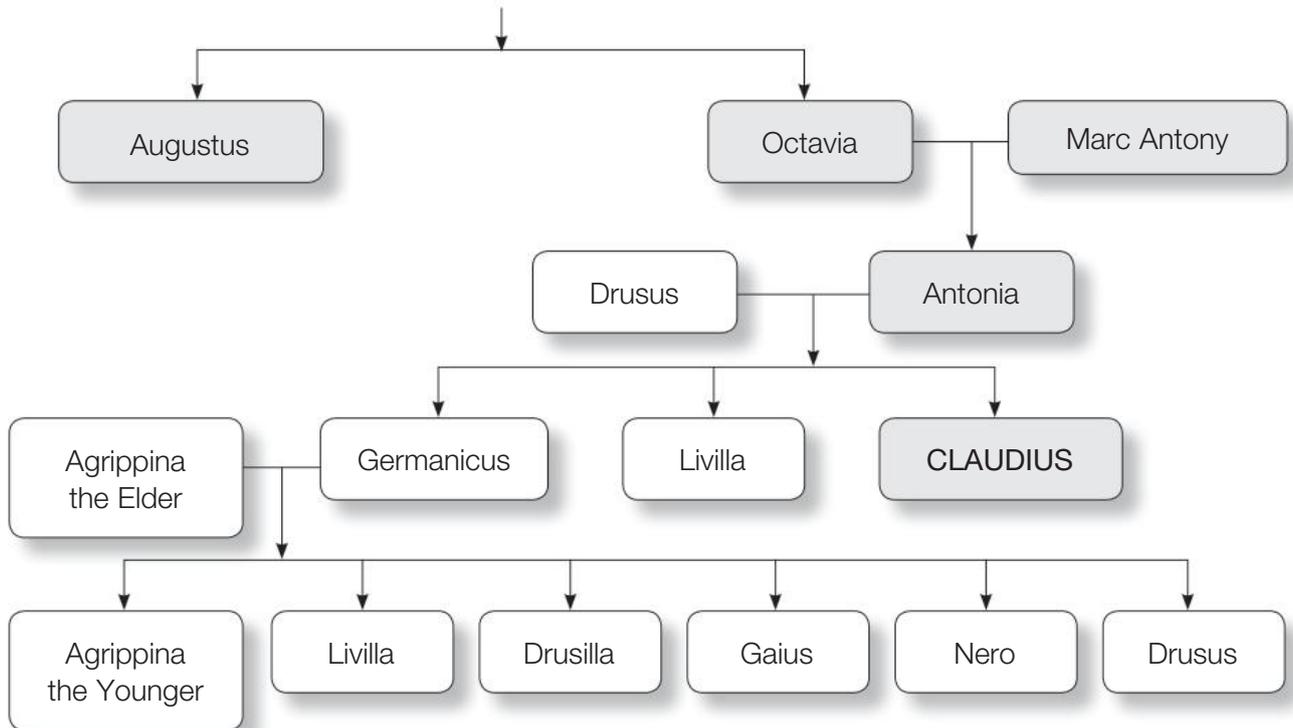
Claudius was the uncle of an emperor (Gaius), the nephew of an emperor (Tiberius), and his grandmother, Livia, was the wife of an emperor (Augustus). His brother was the beloved Germanicus. Claudius also had a close link to the Julian family (and to Mark Antony).



¹ See Chapter 19

² Adapted from Webb, K, Agrippina the Younger, Get Smart Education, Sydney, 2009, p 20

Figure 21.2 below shows Claudius' link to Augustus.³



His mother was Antonia, daughter of Augustus' sister, Octavia, and Mark Antony.

Claudius and his wives

Claudius was married four times.

1. Wife No 1 was Plautia Urgulanilla. Claudius and she were married c AD 9. He divorced her about AD 24 *“for scandalous misbehaviour and the suspicion of murder”*.⁴ Plautia's family had been close to that of Augustus' wife, Livia. They had one son, Claudius Drusus, but he died shortly after becoming betrothed to Sejanus' daughter, Junilla.
2. Wife No 2 was Aelia Paetina. They were married about AD 28 and had a daughter, Claudia Antonia. Aelia Paetina was connected to the family of Sejanus, and Claudius may have divorced her when Sejanus' demise made such a move politically desirable.
3. Wife No 3 was Valeria Messalina whom Claudius married in about AD 39. She was his first cousin, once removed. They had two children, Octavia and Britannicus. Messalina was executed in AD 48.
4. Wife No 4 was Agrippina the Younger, his niece, whom Claudius married in AD 49. He later adopted her son, Nero, from a previous marriage. Agrippina outlived Claudius who died in AD 54.

³ Adapted from Webb, K, Agrippina the Younger, Get Smart Education, Sydney, 2009, p 20

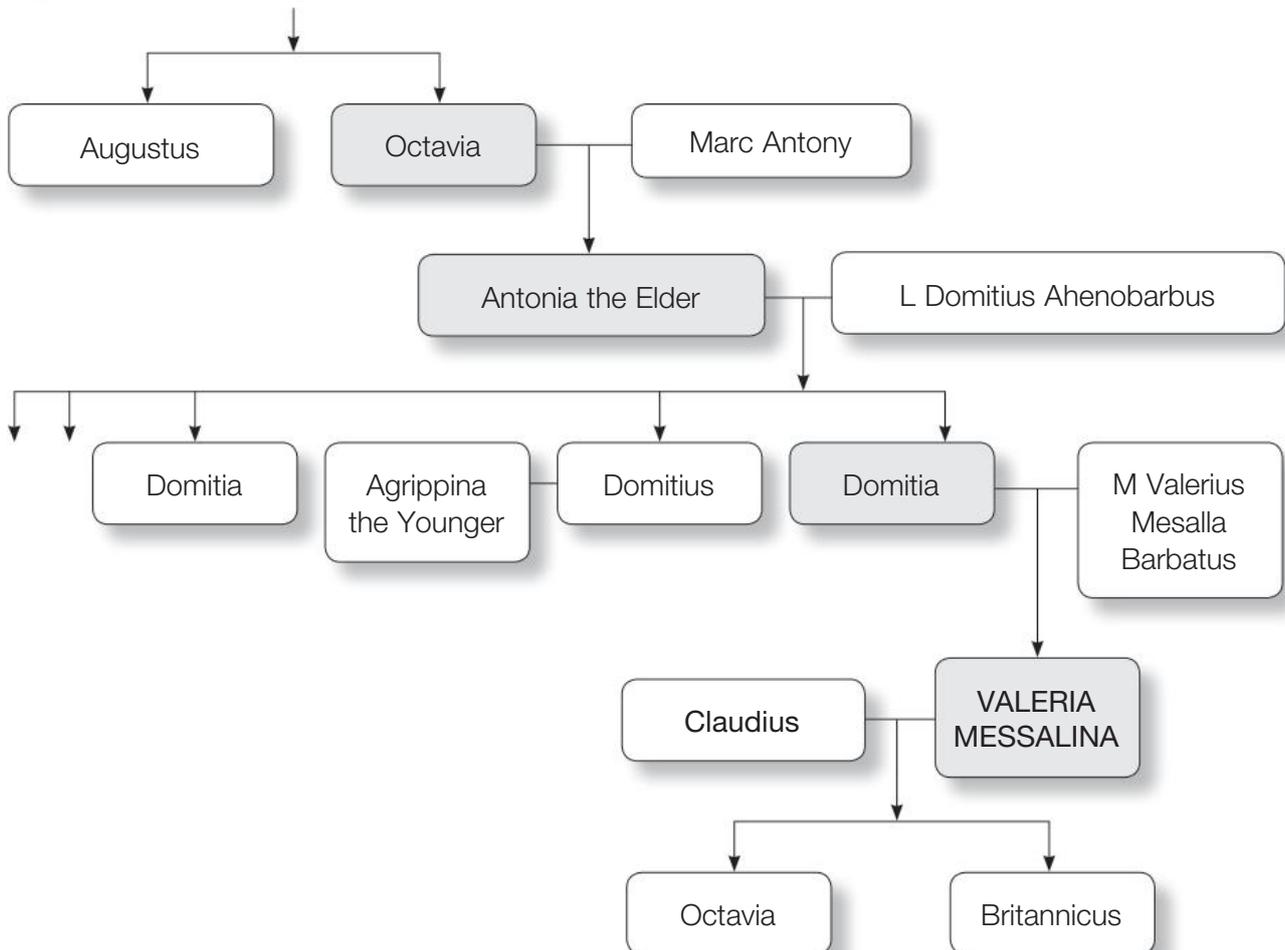
⁴ Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Claudius, 26

Claudius and Messalina

Messalina was a woman who certainly added colour to Claudius' reign. Bauman says "*the Messalina of the sources is one of the great nymphomaniacs of history*".⁵ Tacitus says she had twelve lovers while Juvenal mentions her visits to brothels and Dio Cassius says she forced husbands to watch their wives' sex sessions.

Messalina could boast strong links to the Julian family.

Figure 21.3 The lineage of Valeria Messalina⁶



Messalina's date of birth is not certain, with estimates ranging from AD 3 to AD 26. This is actually quite important. If she was born in AD 26, her "licentious" behaviour might be put down to the 'wild abandon' of a sexually active woman married to a much older, infirm man. However, if she was older, her behaviour might be seen to have had a much more political character about it.⁷

The first five years of Claudius' reign is missing from Tacitus, and Suetonius is surprisingly light on the outrageous activities of Claudius' third wife. Apart from her sexual adventures, Messalina clearly manipulated Claudius to remove those whom she felt threatened by or was merely jealous of.

- She had Agrippina's sister, Livilla, exiled to Pandateria, a move motivated by either jealousy or fear that Claudius might one day think of marrying her.

⁵ Bauman, R, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, Routledge, London, 1992, p 168

⁶ Adapted from Webb, K, *Agrippina the Younger*, Get Smart Education, Sydney, 2009, p 40

⁷ Students studying Agrippina the Younger as their personality study, will find more detail about the activities of Messalina (and Agrippina) in "Webb, K, *Agrippina the Younger*, Get Smart Education, Sydney, 2009".

- Appius Iunius Silanus was brought back to Rome to marry Messalina's mother but her real aim was to bed him herself. His refusal would cost him his life.
 - Was the Silanus affair a mere matter of rejection or might Silanus have been involved in the Scribonianus revolt of AD 42?
 - Bauman suggests that Messalina played the role of "*Claudius' Sejanus, searching out his enemies and destroying them.*"⁸
- Messalina also destroyed D Valerius Asiaticus (consul in AD 35 and 46). She accused him of treachery and convinced Claudius to try him *intra cubiculum principis*.
- Her next target was the freedman, Polybius. This was a dangerous move on her part because the freedmen, such as Pallas and Narcissus, were powerful. If she could destroy Polybius, could she destroy them? It is little surprise that Narcissus played a key role in Messalina's fall.

The fall of Messalina

The demise of Messalina is one of those stories that are almost too fantastic to believe. She had become infatuated with the good-looking, consul-elect, Gaius Silius. She persuaded him to divorce his wife, Junia Silana, and then marry her in a public, bacchic-style wedding while Claudius was away at Ostia, checking port installations.

*"...it turned out that she (Messalina) was not only guilty of other disgraceful crimes, but had gone so far as to commit bigamy with Gaius Silius, and even sign a formal marriage contract before witnesses..."*⁹

What on earth was Messalina doing? Was this some sort of coup to remove Claudius, and replace him by Silius in the hope that he would ensure the succession of her son? She would certainly have been aware of the growing popularity of Agrippina and her son Nero.¹⁰ Barrett certainly thinks there is something in this line of argument.

*"...But clearly more than sexual passion was involved...and there can be little doubt of a conspiracy."*¹¹

Or was it simply a case of Messalina acting out of boredom and seeking some additional sexual excitement. Tacitus certainly thinks along these lines:

*"...However, the idea of being called his (Silius') wife appealed to her owing to its sheer outrageousness – a sensualist's ultimate satisfaction."*¹²

Whatever the motive, Claudius' freedmen understood the threat of what was going on. Their power depended on Claudius' favour. They acted immediately, warned Claudius of the danger, isolated Messalina so she could not play on the emperor's emotions, and had members of the wedding party arrested. At one stage Claudius forlornly asked "Am I still emperor?" A series of summary trials were held that led to the executions of Silius and others. When Claudius asked to see Messalina, Narcissus ordered her execution. The gravity of what was occurring was not lost on the likes of Narcissus and Pallas.

*"...The imperial household shuddered – especially those in power... 'While a ballet-dancing actor violated the emperor's bedroom', they said, 'it was humiliating enough. Yet it did not threaten Claudius' life. Here on the other hand is a young, handsome, intelligent nobleman consul-to-be – but with a loftier destiny in mind..."*¹³

⁸ Bauman, R, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, Routledge, London, 1992, p 171

⁹ Suetonius, *Claudius*, 26

¹⁰ At the Secular Games in AD 47, Nero received far greater cheers from the crowd than did Britannicus.

¹¹ Barrett, A, *Agrippina*, B T Batsford, London, 1996, p 93

¹² Tacitus, XI.26

¹³ Tacitus, XI.27

Claudius, Agrippina and Nero

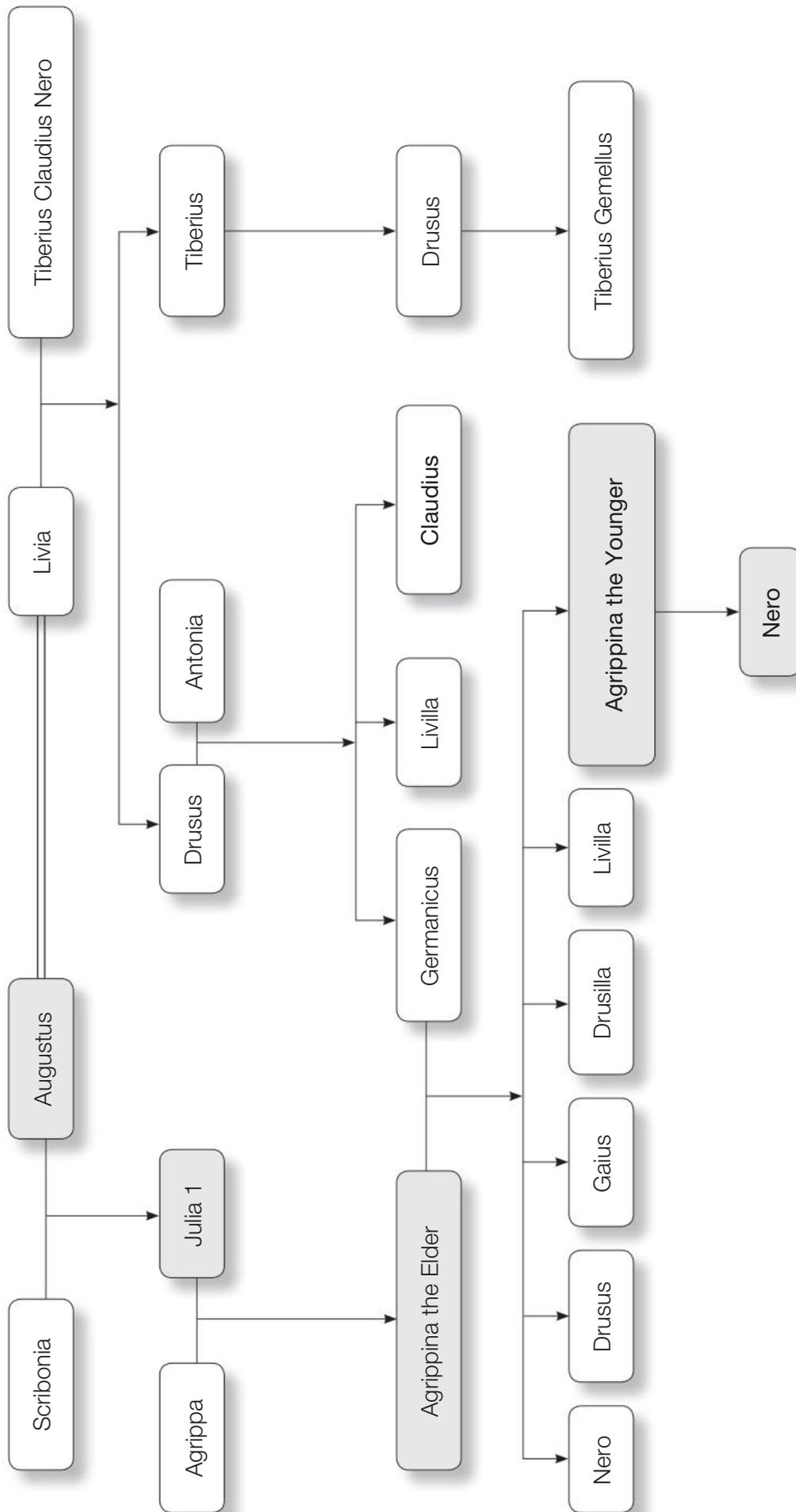
Following the demise of Messalina, Claudius stated that he would not take another wife and ordered the Praetorian Guard to kill him if he did. Within a year he was married to his 'niece', Agrippina. Tacitus tells us that Agrippina would visit Claudius and 'tempt' him into giving her preference as his wife. Pallas argued that it was good politics to bring a grandson (Nero) of Germanicus into the imperial house (and prevent her marrying someone else). The problem of Agrippina being Claudius' niece was dealt with by Lucius Vitellius who steered a law through the senate that allowed a man to marry his brother's daughter.

Once married, Agrippina came the closest to wielding real power as any woman ever did in the history of Rome. However, power was not enough. Agrippina's true purpose in marrying Claudius – it surely would not have been love or passion – was to ensure the succession of her son, Nero, as emperor. Nero's pure Julian blood was indisputable as Figure 21.4 illustrates.

Over the next five years, Agrippina systematically worked to ensure Nero's succession as the table below illustrates.

The Ten Steps to Nero's succession	
Step 1	The betrothal of Claudius' daughter, Octavia, to L Iunius Silanus was cancelled on the grounds of his alleged incest.
Step 2	Nero was betrothed to Octavia.
Step 3	In AD 50 Claudius adopted Nero as his son.
Step 4	Octavia was "adopted out". This now made possible the marriage of Nero and Octavia, otherwise they would have been brother and sister.
Step 5	Nero was given precedence over Britannicus in the succession.
Step 6	In AD 51 Nero was elected consul, a post he would take up in five years' time.
Step 7	Nero was made Prince of Youth and given proconsular imperium outside of Rome.
Step 8	Britannicus was steadily isolated.
Step 9	In AD 53 Nero and Octavia were married.
Step 10	Following Claudius' death, Nero was proclaimed emperor on 13 October, AD 54.

Figure 21.4 Nero's Julian and Claudian lineage



What do the historians have to say about “The imperial family and problems of succession”?

1. Tacitus: *The Annals of Imperial Rome*

Tacitus makes it clear that Agrippina was behind the death of Claudius in AD 54. Agrippina feared the growing favour being shown to Britannicus and felt the time was right to install Nero. Claudius was allegedly poisoned by mushrooms – his favourite food. Tacitus tells the story of how Agrippina used talents of the poisoner, Locusta, who prepared the dose that was administered by the eunuch Halotus. However, due to excessive drinking and a timely major bowel movement, Claudius survived. Agrippina now dragged in Claudius’ doctor, Xenophon, to help her.

*“...while pretending to help Claudius vomit, he put a feather dipped in a quick poison down his throat. Xenophon knew that major crimes, though hazardous to undertake, are profitable to achieve.”*¹⁴

2. David Shotter: *Nero*

Shotter concedes that Josephus is the only ancient source to suggest that the popularly accepted version of Claudius’ death was just a rumour. However, Shotter is not convinced that this is how it happened. He thinks that the story arose only because Nero later quipped that mushrooms were the food of the gods (Claudius). Shotter suggests a more prosaic explanation for Claudius’ end.

*“...mistakes can be made with poisonous fungi, so that a venomous item could have escaped the food-taster, whose corruption does not therefore have to be assumed in this instance.”*¹⁵

¹⁴ Tacitus, XII.66

¹⁵ Shotter, D, *Nero*, Routledge, London, 1997, p 10

Exercise 21.1

Match the personality listed in the box with the following descriptions.

1	Messalina's bigamous marriage partner	
2	Great grandmother of Agrippina and grandmother of Claudius	
3	Claudius' first wife, divorced for scandalous behaviour and suspicion of murder	
4	Son of Claudius and Messalina whose chances of succession were denied by Nero	
5	The man who pushed through the senate the law allowing a man to marry his niece	
6	The freedman who ensured Messalina's demise	
7	His betrothal to Octavia was ended to make possible Nero's marriage to her	
8	He rejected Messalina and paid with his life, perhaps involved in the Scribonianus coup	
9	Grandfather of Messalina and father-in-law of Agrippina	
10	Great great grandson of Augustus	

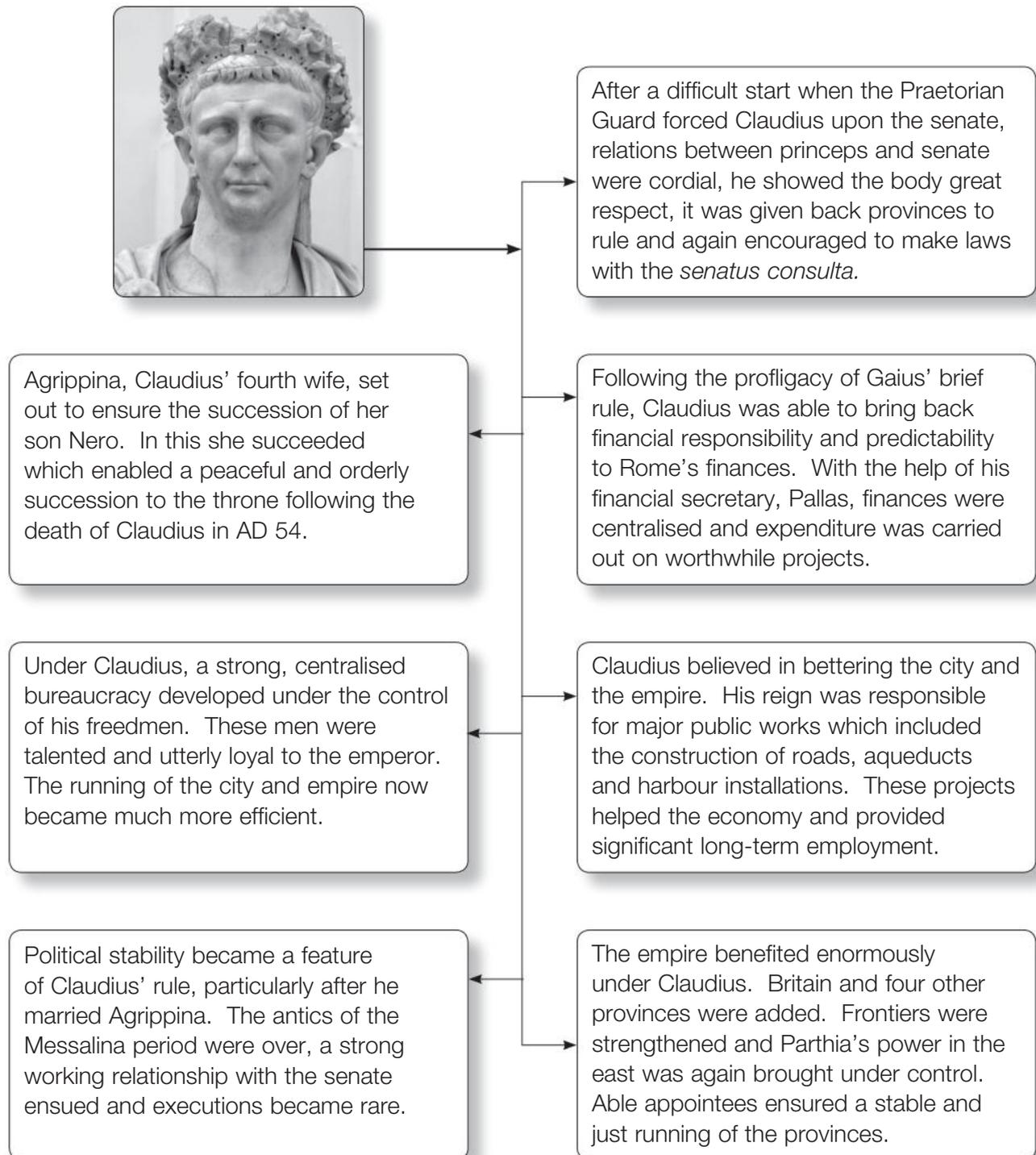
LUCIUS VITELLIUS	APPIUS IUNIUS SILANUS	GAIUS SILIUS	NARCISSUS
PLAUTIA URGULANILLA	L IUNIUS SILANUS	BRITANNICUS	NERO
L DOMITIUS AHENOBARBUS	OCTAVIA		

Chapter 22:

Assessment of Claudius

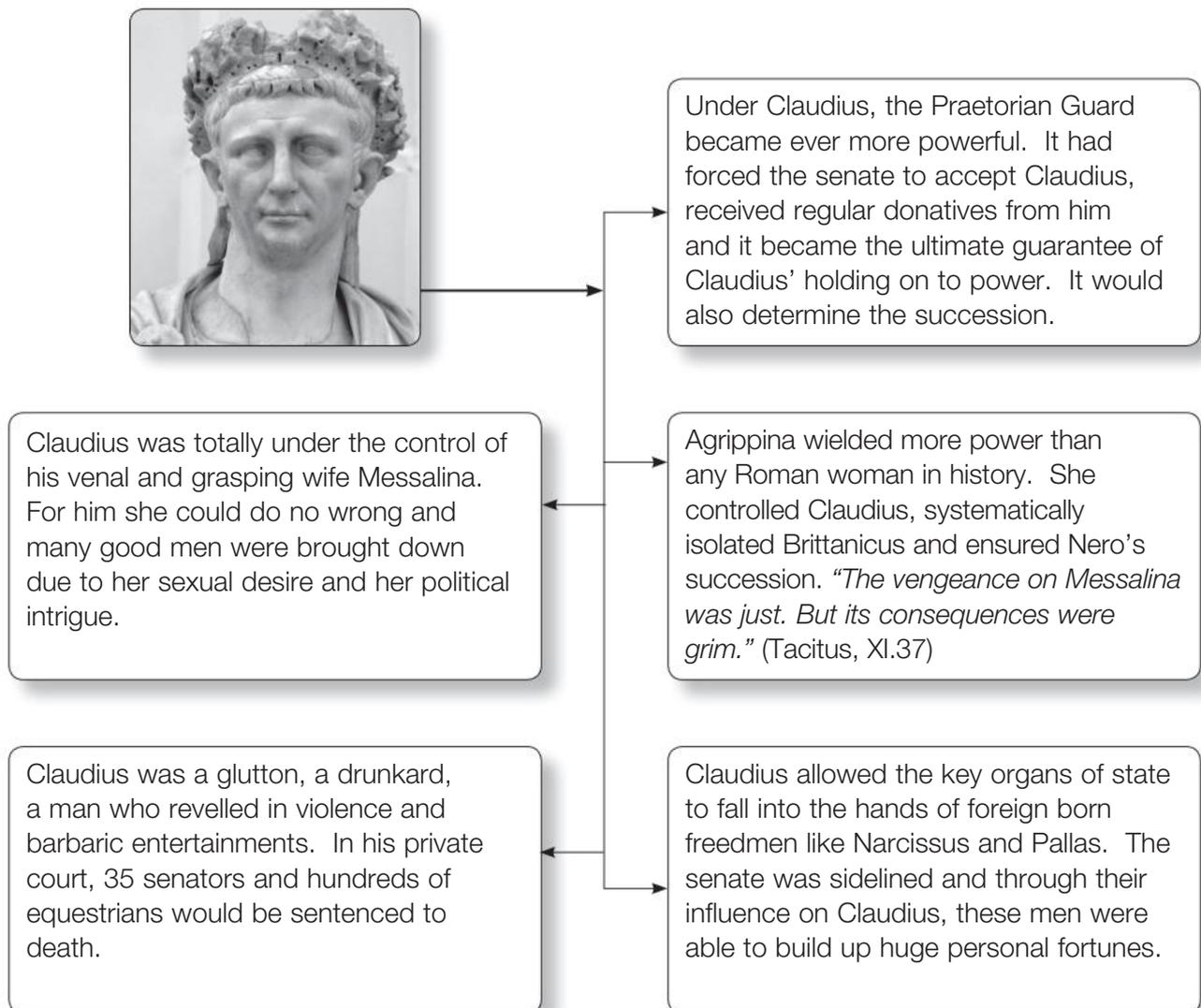
The reign of Claudius was arguably the highlight of the Julio-Claudian period. Economic strength, political stability, a valuable public works program and imperial security were all key elements of his time in power. Figure 22.1 summarises this positive view of Claudius' rule.

Figure 22.1 The positive view of Claudius' rule



The alternative view of the reign of Claudius from the ancient sources presents a time when Rome was ruled by a drunken, gluttonous, buffoon under the control of his grasping freedmen, and wives. Figure 22.2 summarises this view.

Figure 22.2 The negative view of Claudius' rule



Finally, consider these two contrasting views from Barbara Levick.

*"...Claudius was a usurper who depended for support on army and people. As a usurper... Claudius yielded to the temptation to intervene more than was acceptable to the senate. And in struggling to stay in power he had to destroy potential rivals and confer favours and power on groups and individuals outside the senate to a degree unknown before."*¹

*"...To his credit must be put his very efforts to remain in power and secure it for the next generation, averting for nearly three decades civil war...In dealing with Rome, Italy and the Empire, Claudius showed extraordinary initial energy, partly spontaneous, and partly as an ostentatious reaction against the neglect or misdirected efforts of Tiberius and Gaius."*²

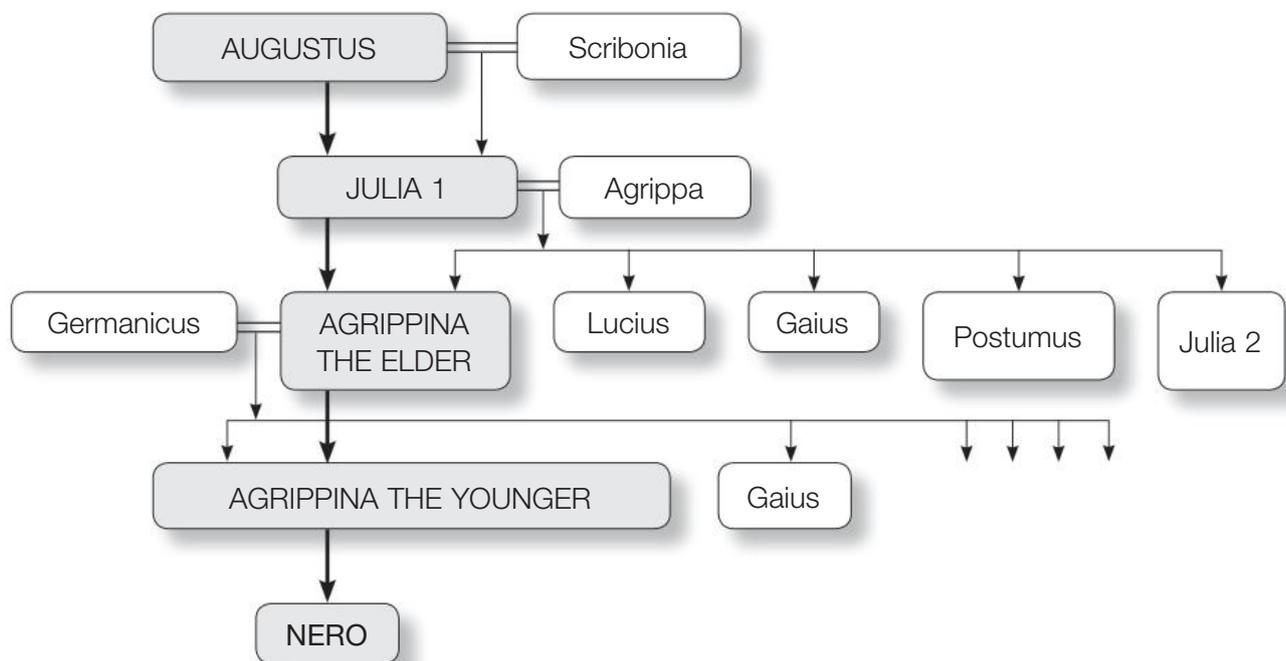
¹ Levick, B, *Claudius*, B T Batsford, London, 1990, p 196

² Levick, B, *Claudius*, B T Batsford, London, 1990, p 197

Chapter 23: Nero the man: Changing role and image of the princeps

Nero's imperial pedigree was unimpeachable. Here was a true Julian, with a direct bloodline to the divine Augustus. Chapter 21 contains several genealogies which show Nero's, and his mother's place, in the Julio-Claudian family. Figure 23.1 below provides a simpler way of illustrating Nero's heritage.

Figure 23.1 Nero's family line



Thus, Nero was the great, great grandson of Augustus and the grandson of Agrippina the Elder and Germanicus. His mother was Agrippina the Younger and his uncle was the emperor Gaius. His adoptive father (husband of Agrippina the Younger) was the emperor Claudius.

As with all the Julio-Claudian emperors, there is no easily agreed interpretation of Nero as emperor. To some he was a popular and effective ruler who sensibly followed the advice of those close to him, at least for the early part of his reign. To others he was a self-indulgent, self-obsessed mediocrity who nearly brought Rome and the empire to ruin. One historian ¹ suggests that it is Nero who is mentioned in the Book of Revelation of St John the Divine, as the beast whose number is 666, as the Hebrew numerals making up that figure are the same as Nero's name.

"...and anyone who has the intelligence may work out the number of the beast. The number represents a man's name, and the numerical value of its letters is six hundred and sixty six." ²

¹ Grant, M, Nero: Emperor in Revolt, American Heritage Press, New York, 1970, p 251

² Book of Revelation, Chapter 13, verse 18

Nero Emperor of Rome AD 54-68: the positive slant

Any judgment of Nero's reign is complicated by the fact that it tends to fall into two distinct halves. The first half of the reign is deemed to be efficient, just, prosperous, indeed even a 'golden age'. However, the second half of the reign is seen as being quite the opposite. It was a time when Nero's self-indulgence and self-obsession came to the fore and the affairs of state were allowed to slide. However, this simple division of Nero's reign into a 'good half' and a 'bad half' is not totally justified. There were clearly negative aspects in the first half and positive aspects in the second half. Nero's hooligan behaviour came as early as AD 54 while his generosity in dealing with corn shortages Tacitus dates as AD 64. However, to provide a sense of clarity, this discussion of Nero's image will be based on the usual division of the reign.

Nero's first five or even seven years as emperor have been lauded across the ages. The Latin phrase "*quinquennium Neronis*" has been associated with the early part of Nero's rule with the implicit understanding that this was a great time for Rome. Shotter uses this term to refer to the period AD 54-58 while Salmon argues that historians are wiser to use the phrase to refer to the period AD 56-61. The phrase apparently was first used by the Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117) though scholars tend to agree that Trajan was referring primarily to Nero's architectural achievements.

However, regardless of which specific years are referred to or what Trajan really meant, the image of Nero that pervades that early period of his rule is overwhelmingly positive.

- Nero was seventeen when he became emperor. Being young and self-indulgent, Nero took only a marginal interest in the details of government. The key influences on government came from Agrippina, Burrus and Seneca.
 - His mother, Agrippina, was a major influence at first, though this influence waned once Nero began to tire of this maternal influence. The coin shown in Figure 23.2 illustrates her power and the fact that Nero was happy, at first, to honour her role.

Figure 23.2 Coin from the early phase of Nero's reign showing the emperor and his mother



The coin in Figure 23.2 contains the legend that "*identifies Agrippina as Agrippina Augusta, the wife of the deified Claudius, the mother of Caesar and thus brings together on a single coin the three roles that brought her the greatest pride.*"³

- Burrus the Praetorian Prefect, not a great intellectual but sound and a man of integrity; and
- Seneca⁴ who had been brought back from exile to be Nero's tutor. Seneca was the intellectual powerhouse of the early reign.

³ Barrett, A, *Agrippina*, B T Batsford, London, 1996, p152

⁴ See Chapter 27 for a more detailed account of Seneca's role.

“...(*Burrus*) was the perfect associate of the affable and worldly *Seneca*, and *Tacitus* recognised in their partnership a unanimity rare for men in such powerful positions.”⁵

- Nero had connections to both the Julian and Claudian families but it was his direct link through the Julian line that was emphasised. Any reference to *Claudius* on Roman coinage seemed to have disappeared after AD 56. *Claudius* never appeared on Nero’s bronze coinage.
- Indeed, Nero tried to present an image of himself as being quite different to *Claudius*. *Seneca* had already mocked *Claudius* in his writing.⁶
- Nero announced that the senate would be honoured, there would be no more *maiestas* trials and no more private hearings in the princeps’ bedroom.

The image that comes over of Nero early in his reign is of a young man eager to be cooperative with the senate, which is conciliatory, moderate and averse to receiving extravagant honours. Financial management was solid and the dismissal of *Pallas* also meant it was more open to scrutiny. How much this was due to Nero will always be difficult to assess. How much was the good government of the *quinquennium Neronis* due to Nero or to *Seneca* and *Burrus*? As a youth, Nero had his own interests which he continued to pursue once he became emperor. Eventually, his indulgent interests would conflict with the running of the state, and from this point on, the image of Nero would change.

Suetonius spends the early part of his account of Nero’s reign by cataloguing his less atrocious acts from his follies and crimes.

“...As a further guarantee of his virtuous intentions, he promised to model his rule on the principles laid down by *Augustus*, and never missed an opportunity of being generous or merciful, or of showing how affable he was.”⁷

“...During his reign a great many abuses were suppressed by the imposition of heavy penalties, and among the equally numerous novel enactments were sumptuary laws limiting private expenditure...”⁸

Tacitus likewise presents a scene of calm, orderly government in which the affairs of state were carried on with a respect of law and order, and in the spirit of fairness.⁹ “There were still signs of a free country.”

Nero Emperor of Rome AD 54-68: the negative slant

The popular image of Nero is of a corpulent, narcissistic man who indulged himself in the arts, despite his mediocre talents. He was the emperor who fiddled as Rome burned (not true), who engaged in a wide variety of sexual activities and who was responsible for the persecution of the Christians. Once he had removed his able advisors of the *quinquennium Neronis* period, there were no constraints on his behaviour. His earlier indulgences could be tolerated because they did not affect the effective running of the state. Once he had become his own man, and was surrounded by the likes of *Ofonius Tigellinus* and *Poppaea Sabina*, his whims and extravagances would have a serious impact on Rome and the Empire.

The point at which Nero changed is difficult to judge. The murder of his mother, *Agrippina*, in AD 59 would seem to mark a definite turning point. Nero had been tiring of his mother for some time. She resented her lessening influence on her son, and had, so the sources suggest, even tried to develop a sexual relationship with her son to maintain her control.¹⁰ Prompted by his new

⁵ Shotter, D, Nero, Routledge, London, 1997, p 16

⁶ This was seen in *Seneca’s Apocolocyntosis* or Pumpkinification that sought to highlight *Claudius’* failings.

⁷ Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Nero, 10

⁸ Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Nero, 16

⁹ Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XIII.27ff

¹⁰ Suetonius, Nero, 28

love, Poppaea Sabina, who taunted him for being dominated by his mother, Nero had Agrippina murdered. Despite the horror many felt about this crime of matricide, Nero survived, his popularity almost intact.

- Seneca and Burrus were not part of the plot to kill Agrippina. However, they bear responsibility for allowing Nero to get away with his crime and to indeed even prosper. They managed to establish the official line that Nero had succeeded in escaping his mother's plot to kill him.
- The senate went along with this version, whether they believed it or not, and when Nero returned to Rome, he was welcomed back as a conquering hero and saviour of the nation.
- The demise of Agrippina removed the final restraints which had managed to keep Nero under some control.

*"...Then he plunged into the wildest improprieties, which vestiges of respect for his mother had hitherto not indeed repressed, but at least impeded."*¹¹

- In AD 62 Burrus died. Nero now moved to free himself of Seneca's wise control. Burrus was succeeded as Praetorian Prefects by Ofonius Tigellinus and Faenius Rufus. Seneca realised his time was up and he retired into private life. Seneca would be later caught up in the Pisonian conspiracy (see Chapter 27) and he committed suicide in AD 65.

It is now that the popular image of Nero came to the fore. With no restraints, and urged on by unscrupulous hangers-on, "Nero's conduct now became unbridled".¹² Figure 23.3 summarises the later image of Nero that has been handed down to us from the ancient sources.

Nero on screen

For most people, the image of Nero that persists is that which has appeared on screen. Not surprisingly, screenwriters have leant heavily on the more scandalous elements of the ancient sources. Nero and his times have proven to be fertile ground for directors and writers. Below are just five images of Nero that cinema and television have presented.

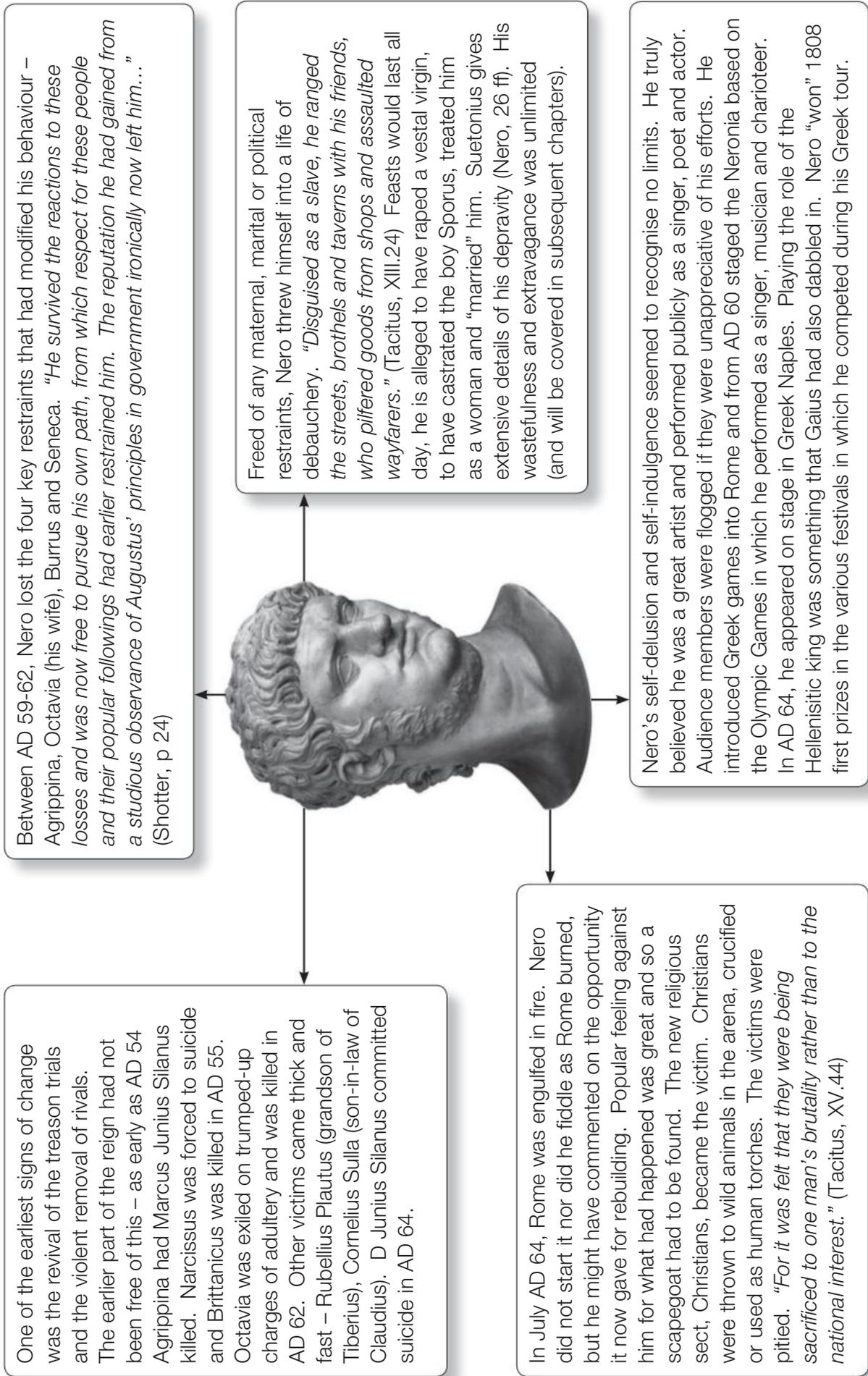
- 1931 Charles Laughton played a Nero in *Sign of the Cross* which focussed on the persecution of Christians after the Great Fire of Rome.
- 1951 Peter Ustinov played a classic Nero in the Hollywood spectacular *Quo Vadis*, a film as much about the beginnings of Christianity as it was about Rome.
- 1965 Dr Who found himself in Nero's Rome with Derek Francis playing the pyrotechnic emperor.
- 1976 The ultimate Julio-Claudian screen version, *I, Claudius*, based on Robert Graves' books had Christopher Biggins playing the teenage Nero. This final episode of the series opens with Agrippina and Nero viewing Claudius' dead body and then proceeds to show how Agrippina manoeuvred her son into power.
- 2006 A more recent histrionic version called *Rise and Fall of an Empire*, has Michael Sheen playing Nero as a deranged megalomaniac.¹³

¹¹ Tacitus, XIV.12

¹² Salmon, E T, *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138*, Methuen and Co, London, 1970, p 180

¹³ *I, Claudius* will always remain the best viewing for the Julio-Claudians. However, for sheer entertainment value, Peter Ustinov in *Quo Vadis* is difficult to beat.

Figure 23.3 The image of Nero free of restraints



Exercise 23.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE for each of the following statements.

1	Nero was a direct descendent of the emperor Augustus.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	Nero promoted his Claudian family connections at the expense of his Julian family connections.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	References to the period of Nero's rule, known as the quinquennium Neronis, suggest a period of wise and stable rule in Rome.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	Nero was always reluctant to be swayed by advice from Agrippina, Burrus and Seneca.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	The murder of Agrippina was an act of justifiable homicide on Nero's part as she was trying to murder him.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	During the whole of Nero's reign, there was never any use of maiestas trials.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	Though not responsible for the fire of Rome, Nero was suspected of causing it and sought to make the Christian sect his scapegoat.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	Nero had a very high regard for Greek artistic and athletic performances.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	Both Burrus and Seneca were murdered by Nero as he felt his position weakening.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	Screen adaptations of the image of Nero rarely show him as anything more than a mad, indulgent, pyrotechnic.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

Chapter 24:

Nero and the Senate

Nero's accession was achieved quickly and efficiently in a not dissimilar manner to the accession of Gaius and Claudius. His early relations with the senate were respectful and cooperative, thanks in large part to Seneca's influence. However, even Seneca could not stop all political and imperial murders. Gradually, Nero dispensed with his advisors (see Chapters 23, 26) and relations between emperor and senate completely broke down.

The accession

Agrippina had carefully planned for her son's succession. When Claudius died, his natural children, Octavia and Britannicus were hidden away while Nero was taken to the barracks of the Praetorian Guard by the praetorian commander, Burrus. Here Nero was hailed as imperator and each guardsman was granted a donative of 15 000 sesterces. Having ensured the loyalty of the troops, Nero was taken to the Senate building where he was granted the various honours and offices expected of the emperor. The will of Claudius was suppressed, as had been Tiberius' will years earlier. Agrippina did not want any hint that Britannicus was Nero's equal, though Tacitus suggests a slightly different reason.

*"...The army's decision was followed by senatorial decrees. The provinces, too, showed no hesitation....Claudius' will was not read, in case his preference of stepson to son should create a public impression of unfairness and injustice."*¹

Suetonius² describes Nero's immediate actions as being moderate and respectful. He refused the title pater patriae on the grounds of his youth, displayed notable filial duty by attending to Claudius' funeral and finally deifying him. Nero also honoured the memory of his own father, and for a while allowed his mother, Agrippina, to play a significant role in state affairs. *"On the day of his accession the password he gave to the colonel on duty was 'The Best of Mothers'..."*

Nero and the senate: the positive view

The early positive view of Nero during the *quinquennium Neronis* has already been noted in Chapter 23. Part of this 'golden age' was Nero's ability and willingness to work well with the senate. Nero was not a great speaker and it was noted that unlike previous emperors, Nero had a need of borrowed eloquence. However, helped by Seneca, he was able to overcome this. One of the most important speeches Nero made was his accession speech, penned by Seneca. In this speech, Nero stated that he intended to renounce the more unpopular aspects of his predecessor's methods. Tacitus quotes Nero saying:

*"...I will not judge every kind of case myself and give too free rein to the influence of a few individuals by hearing prosecutors and defendants behind my closed doors. From my house, bribery and favouritism will be excluded. I will keep personal and state affairs separate. The senate is to preserve its ancient functions. By applying to the consuls, people from Italy and the senatorial provinces may have access to it. I myself will look after the armies under my control."*³

1 Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XII.68

2 Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Nero, 8-9

3 Tacitus, XIII.4

This was a momentous speech, for it suggested that Nero's relations with the senate were headed in a much more positive and cooperative direction than had occurred with previous emperors. In essence, Nero (or Seneca) was saying:

1. No more maiestas trials *intra cubiculum principis*;
2. Senatorial provinces will be left alone;
3. The power of the freedmen will end; and
4. Most importantly: there will be a separation of the state and the domus.

For a while it seemed that the positive early signs were being realised. Tacitus is able to show that Nero's "promise" was soon in evidence.⁴

- Nero refused to have gold or silver statues of him erected. He rejected the idea of commencing a year in December, just because that was the month of his birth. Here was Nero's *modesty*.
- He forbade the prosecution of Julius Densus just because he had favoured Britannicus. He similarly let off a junior senator, Carrinas Celer. Here was Nero's *clemency*.
- He allowed Plautius Lateranus to re-enter the senate despite his earlier adultery with Messalina. Here was Nero's *leniency*.
- Tribunes who were abusing their powers were restrained and were not allowed to encroach on the powers of consuls and praetors. Tribunes could not demand provincials' attendance in Rome if issues could be dealt with at a local level.
- The powers of aediles and the fines they could demand were limited.
- Control of the treasury was transferred from quaestors to commissioners who were experienced former praetors.
- The senate even felt free enough to reject some of Nero's proposals, such as his plan for imperial free trade.
- No wonder Tacitus declares: "...there were still signs of a free country."

The senate was further pleased with what appeared to be a lessening of the influence of Claudius' freedmen. However, the reverse side of this development was what it said of Nero's behaviour. Messalina had earlier removed Polybius. Now, under Nero, it was the turn of Narcissus and Pallas.

- Narcissus had fallen out with Agrippina. He was imprisoned and harshly treated early in the reign. Fearing execution, he was driven to suicide. This was Agrippina's doing and Seneca soon stepped in to curtail her activities.
- Nero did not like Pallas, whose arrogance he found "*anomalous in a man of servile origin*" and in AD 55, Nero removed him from the posts he had held since Claudius' time. This action further weakened the influence that Agrippina was able to wield. In AD 56, Pallas was accused of conspiring with one Faustus Cornelius Sulla Felix but was found innocent. In AD 62, Nero had Pallas poisoned "*for reserving his own immense riches for himself by living so long*".⁵

Nero and the senate: the negative view

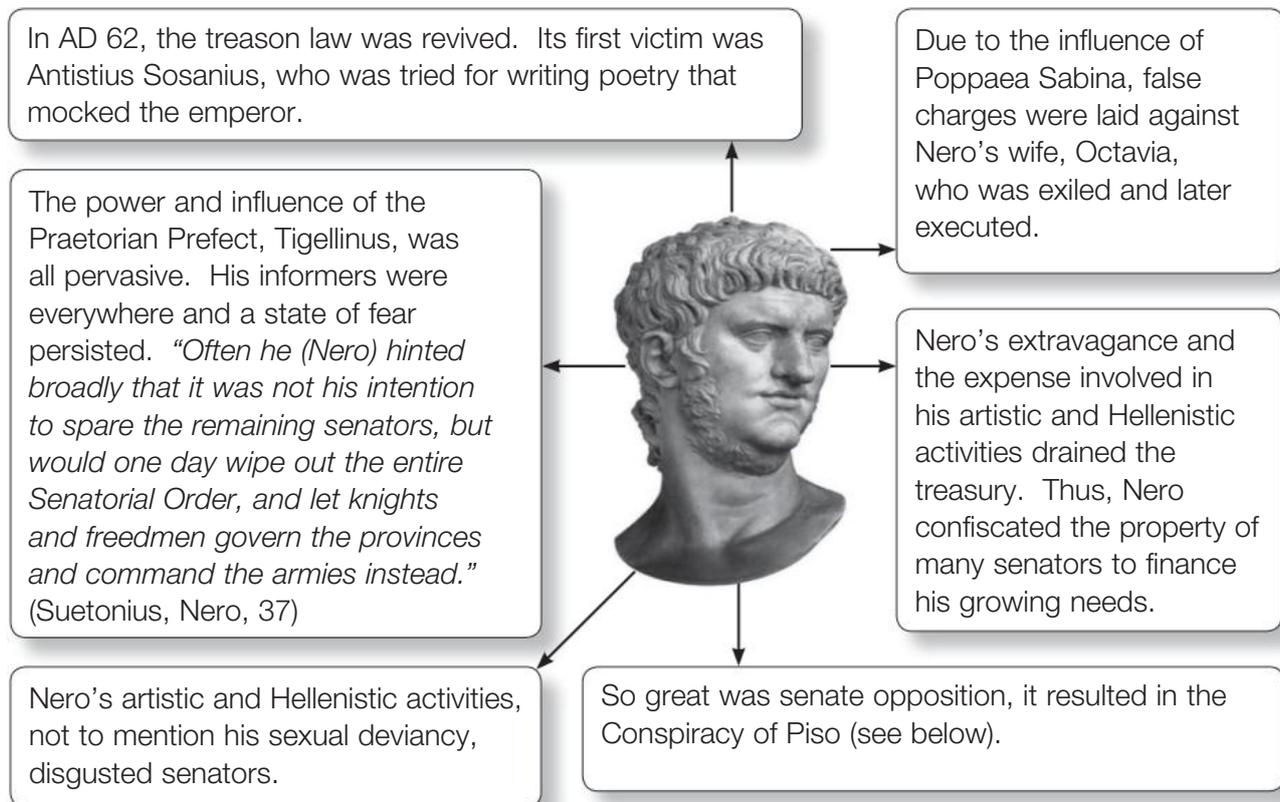
Once Nero was able to shake off the calming and responsible influence of his mother Agrippina, and then Burrus and Seneca, his true disposition came to the fore (see Chapter 23). As a result,

⁴ Tacitus, XIII.10 and XIII.28-31

⁵ Tacitus, XIV.64

the positive relationship which the early years of the reign had witnessed descended into acrimony and eventually revolt. Some of the earlier good signs were reversed as shown in Figure 24.1.

Figure 24.1



The Piso Conspiracy of AD 65

By the early 60s, Nero was virtually at war with the senate. A significant senate opposition was forming which sought, if not to replace the principate with the republic, to at least replace Nero. To many the worst days of Gaius had returned to Rome. The reasons for this opposition were various:

- The fear and terror which were pervading Rome, thanks to the activities of Tigellinus and the erratic nature of Nero, motivated many.
- Some senators had become disgusted with the sexual, artistic and Hellenistic activities of the emperor.

“...Narrator: Nero's enthusiasm for the sport of commoners scandalized Rome's elite. But it endeared him to the masses. *"For such is a crowd," sneered the stately historian, Tacitus, "Eager for excitement and thrilled if the emperor shares their tastes". Nero did, long past his childhood years.*

Professor Judith P. Hallett: *It is not clear to me that Nero ever changed or that Nero ever grew up. That was both his strength and his weakness. Nero was an extraordinarily popular emperor. He was like Elvis...*"⁶

- As explained in Figure 24.1, it seemed as if Nero was planning to destroy the entire senate membership.
- Tacitus suggests the conspirators had a variety of motives.⁷

⁶ <http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/series/transcript3.html>

⁷ Tacitus, XV.48

- For some the motive might be quite personal – the poet Lucan resented Nero’s poetic pretensions.
- For Plautus Lateranus, the consul-designate, the motive was patriotism.
- For others it was “*personal advancement*”.
- For the co-commander of the Guard, Faenius Rufus, it could have been his hatred of Tigellinus and the slanders he had had to suffer from him.

Some of the conspirators belonged to what might be termed the “*stoic opposition*”. Stoicism had become popular with some upper class Romans. It was essentially a moral rather than a political philosophy, and its adherents were not automatically opposed to Nero. Seneca, after all, managed to serve Nero for almost a decade. Stoicism “*came to show how the moral man might serve the republic and keep intact his dignity and freedom. Its moral code made a strong appeal to traditionally minded Romans, and it came to be associated with mos maiorum (‘ancestral custom’), that most traditional expression of morality and virtue*”.⁸ It is hardly surprising that such men would oppose a man like Nero for whom duty and virtue seemed unknown. However, Shotter argues that stoicism was not a major motive behind the conspiracy.

The plot, involving up to 41 senators, sought to replace Nero with C Calpurnius Piso. Tacitus thought little of Piso, doubting the man’s reputation for good qualities and suggesting he was “*superficial, ostentatious and sometime dissolute*”. Such a widespread plot could not be kept secret, and the hesitancy on the part of some of the conspirators soon allowed Nero loyalists to nip it in the bud. Fear and torture forced many to implicate others and the conspiracy was quickly ended. Nero joined Tigellinus in the torture interrogation sessions. Many senators were executed or forced to suicide, even some who were not involved. Seneca was dragged into the net even though Nero had no evidence of his involvement.

The aftermath of the failed conspiracy was to see the streets of Rome bathed in blood. “*Nero became increasingly frightened. His guard had been redoubled. Indeed, the whole of Rome was virtually put in custody*.”⁹ Executions abounded in the city. Tacitus describes how some men, renowned for their courage in battle, surrendered meekly when ordered to confess or suicide.¹⁰ He does not enumerate them all for fear of being monotonous. And as for the reason for Rome’s calamity, Tacitus falls back on his moral purpose in writing:

“...For the fault was not theirs. The cause was rather heavens’ anger with Rome.”¹¹

8 Shotter, D, Nero, Routledge, London, 1997, p 59

9 Tacitus, XV.57

10 Students of Modern History might see a parallel here between Nero’s victims and those of Stalin in the 1930s, who often confessed to crimes of which they knew they were innocent.

11 Tacitus, XVI.15

What do the historians have to say about “Nero and the Senate”?

1. Michael Grant: Nero – Emperor in Revolt

Grant points to the activities of Tigellinus as a key reason for the Pisonian Conspiracy. Tigellinus seems to have put in place a widespread secret police system, more akin to a 20th century dictatorship. There were spies watching people's reactions to Nero's performances, there were spies in brothels and taverns. There were even spies in toilets, as the poet Lucan found out to his cost. During a moment of involuntary flatulence, Lucan was heard to say “You might suppose it thundered ‘neath the earth”. This was a line of Nero's poetry. The emperor was not impressed when informed of the use of his words. Grant says the upper class in Rome were disgusted by Nero's activities but that Tigellinus was the key factor prompting revolt.

*“...the main reason was because the plotters understandably felt afraid that they themselves would be the next to fall.”*¹²

2. Miriam T Griffin: Nero – The End of a Dynasty

Griffin considers the role of the Stoics in the Pisonian Conspiracy. Nero was certainly reminded that some of his enemies and victims were Stoics. Tacitus describes the death of Thrasea Paetus as such an example. Men with stoic beliefs were involved in the conspiracy, such as Lucan, Seneca was alleged to have been involved and Arulenus Rusticus who had offered to use his tribunician veto on Thrasea's behalf. However, despite the involvement or alleged involvement of such figures, Griffin considers that Stoicism was not a major issue in the revolt.

*“...we must first note that on every occasion the punishment suffered by Stoic adherents was shared by others who cannot be connected with the sect... There is no evidence that C Calpurnius Piso (and the other conspirators) were also Stoics... Finally, of the victims that perished in 66 before Thrasea Paetus...none...is attested as a Stoic.”*¹³

¹² Grant, M, Nero: Emperor in Revolt, American Heritage Press, New York, 1970, p 213

¹³ Griffin, M T, Nero: The End of a Dynasty, B T Batsford, London, 1984, p 171

Exercise 24.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	Whose support was most crucial in making possible the orderly accession of Nero?	
2	What is the Latin phrase, coined by the Emperor Trajan, which has been used to describe the early golden period of Nero's rule?	
3	What very unpopular activity of Claudius did Nero promise to end in his accession speech?	
4	What was arguably the most significant promise made in Nero's accession speech?	
5	Who were most responsible for Nero's golden early period of rule?	
6	Which two individuals seemed to have the worst influence on Nero after his mother's death?	
7	What had changed by AD 62?	
8	What were the key motives behind the Pisonian Conspiracy?	
9	Why did the conspiracy fail?	
10	How important was the Stoic movement in the Pisonian Conspiracy?	

Chapter 25:

Nero: Reforms, policies and building programs

Nero's time in power is both often horrific and yet fascinating. His rule has matricide, the murder of a wife and countless judicial and non-judicial killings. His henchmen ran an almost terror state, he faced a senate conspiracy and would eventually be overthrown. His nocturnal activities ranged from hooligan violence to the full range of sexual involvement. He rode chariots, performed in festivals, wrote poetry, played music and arguably revelled in Rome's burning. He also launched a bloody persecution of the new Christian sect.

It might seem that his reign had little to boast in a constructive and administrative sense. It will be the purpose of this chapter to cover some of the reforms, policies and building programs that were carried out during his reign. Political issues, senate relations, the empire and matters regarding the succession, are covered in other chapters.

Thanks in large part to the influence of Seneca and Burrus during the first half of the reign, Roman economic life was stable and a degree of prosperity existed.

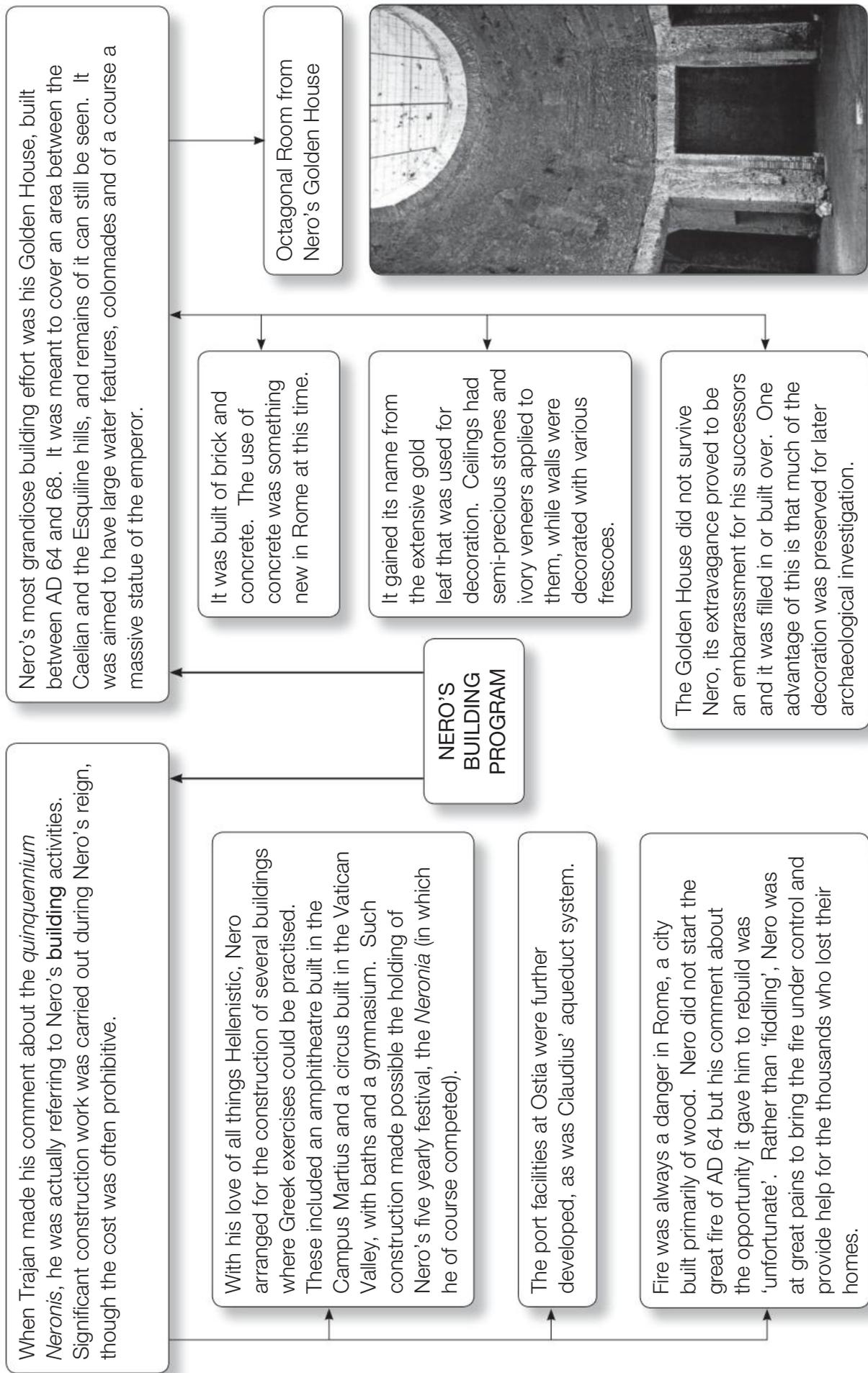
- In AD 56, Claudius' organisation of finances was reversed and control of the *aerarium* was taken from the less experienced quaestors and given to imperial *praefecti*. This enabled Nero to grant the senate treasury forty million sesterces of his own money.
- Rome's grain supply was made more secure due to the work of Faenius Rufus who was appointed *Praefectus Annonae* (prefect of the provisions).
- Greater control was brought to bear on *publicani* and governors who were believed to be extorting their provinces.
- To relieve population pressures in Italy and provide for veterans, several colonies were established, eg Capua (AD 57), Tarentum (AD 60) and Pompeii (after the earthquake of AD 62).
- In AD 58, Nero sought to remove all indirect taxes and establish free trade. The idea was that the boost given to trade would in turn lead to an increase in revenue from direct taxes.

*"...The suggestion was dropped in the face of the practical difficulties involved, but it at least showed interest in promoting the economic life of the Empire."*¹

- However, not all economic developments were good for Rome. Nero's extravagant building programs had to be paid for and there had been a steady flow of precious metals to the east to pay for luxury goods. This led to his reforming of the mint system.
 - The precious metal content of Rome's coins was reduced (an inflationary measure akin today to a government printing money).
 - The weight of the aureus was reduced by ten per cent and the silver content of the denarius by just under ten per cent.
 - The gold and silver coins were now brought in line with the bronze coins but Nero was probably motivated more by the desire to make ends meet than stabilise Rome's currency.

¹ Scullard, H H, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 318

Figure 25.1 Nero's building programs



Nero and the senate worked together on dealing with the issue of **law and order** (rather ironic considering Nero's nocturnal marauding). Examples of this include:

- ending disturbances in Puteoli in AD 59 caused by local corruption; and
- punishing hooliganism in the amphitheatre at Pompeii by ordering its closure for ten years.

Nero's apparent concern for Italy was welcomed by the senate which had been dismayed at Claudius' preference for provincial advancement. The development of the empire meant that men from more distant lands were gaining higher positions. Traditionalists had been concerned at Claudius' policy of promoting provincials.

*"...Nero's favour, particularly in the early years, towards senators of republican and Augustan origins was probably an attempt to reassure Romans and Italians that they would not be outstripped by such new developments."*²

Nero's decision not to hear cases *intra cubiculum principis* was appreciated by the senate (see Chapter 24). However, the improvement in **legal** procedure (at least early in the reign) went further than this, thanks to the influence of Seneca and Burrus.

- Nero took great care in hearing cases and his decisions relied heavily on the written opinions of his assessors.
- His own opinions were published, suggesting a desire not only to be fair and just, but to be seen to be fair and just.
- More appeals were now coming to the senate. In AD 58 and 59, quarrels within and between the Italian cities were being dealt with in the senate.

The time-honoured Roman way to maintain power was to provide bread and circuses. Nero was at pains to ensure adequate food supplies (see above); he was even more diligent about providing **entertainment**.

- Suetonius describes gladiatorial combats staged in the wooden theatre built near the Campus Martius, in which Nero forbade anyone to be killed.
- However, he did make *"400 senators and 600 knights, some of them rich and respectable, do battle in the arena; and some had to fight wild beasts and perform various duties about the ring."*³
- A naval engagement was staged on an artificial lake of sea water.
- Nero did not share the Roman preference for bloody entertainments. His preference was for more Greek style amusements, as seen in the Neronia, which comprised competitions in music, gymnastics and horsemanship.

² Shotter, D, Nero, Routledge, London, 1997, p 19

³ Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, Nero, 12

Nero and the imperial cult

Eastern peoples often considered their rulers to be gods and worshipped them accordingly. This was a practice that most Roman leaders frowned upon. Augustus was very unhappy about being worshipped as a god but accepted the practice in the eastern parts of the empire as it was a way of developing acceptance of Roman rule.

Tiberius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tiberius was happy to establish a temple and a priesthood for the deified Augustus. ■ Tiberius did not approve of being worshipped and denied a Spanish request to build a temple for him. ■ However, in the further reaches of the empire, there were signs of an imperial cult. Tiberius was included in a cult centre at Aphrodisias and a Tiberius cult statue has been found at Biblis in Spain. ■ When Livia died, Tiberius did not allow her deification and he was not deified after his death.
Gaius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gaius had a quite different attitude to the imperial cult. He was happy to be worshipped as a god, both in Rome and in the further regions of the empire. ■ After her death, Drusilla was given a shrine and priesthood in Rome. ■ Gaius encouraged a cult around himself and there were daily sacrifices made in his name, though historians are divided on how far this practice actually went. ■ Perhaps the cult around Gaius was for his welfare or genius (or spirit), something that existed even under Augustus.
Claudius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Claudius granted Livia divine honours but was not keen on having them for himself. ■ He was regarded as a god in the east and a temple for the imperial cult was built at Camolodunum in Britain. ■ Claudius was deified after his death.
Nero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nero rejected divine honours early in his reign. ■ In this east he was associated with various gods such as Apollo. At Aphrodisias, he and Agrippina became part of an imperial cult centre. ■ Later in his reign, Nero encouraged the imperial cult and possibly even encouraged worship of himself in Rome. ■ Nero's wife Poppaea Sabina and his daughter, Claudia, were deified after their deaths.

What do the historians have to say about “Reforms, policies and building programs”?

1. Suetonius: *The Twelve Caesars*

Suetonius explains how Nero carried out his judicial duties. He comments that he took his judicial role seriously, took his time coming to a conclusion in a case and was keen to hear both sides of a case.

*“...On withdrawing to study a problem of law, he never consulted openly with his judicial advisors in a body, but made each of them write out an opinion; then mulled over these documents in private, came to his own conclusion, and passed it off as a majority opinion.”*⁴

2. Michael Grant: *Nero – Emperor in Revolt*

Using descriptions from the Eclogues by the poet Calpurnius Siculus, Grant provides a vivid description of the extremes that Nero would go to in order to provide the people with “a good show”. Referring to the day that the arena was flooded:

*“...fishes and other sea animals were launched upon the waters, and polar bears were set to kill seals. When the amphitheatre was dry, spectators were able to watch the slaughter of many a rare beast, including maned, bearded and ‘bristly’ oxen and ‘horned boars’ which may have been warthog from the sources of the Nile.”*⁵

4 Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Nero, 15

5 Grant, M, *Nero: Emperor in Revolt*, American Heritage Press, New York, 1970, p 69

Exercise 25.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE for each of the following statements.

1	During Nero's early rule, valuable changes were made to encourage a more responsible approach to the empire's finances.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	Nero's scheme for the abolition of indirect taxes throughout the empire was enthusiastically adopted.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	Nero sought to revalue the currency by increasing the percentage content of gold and silver in Roman coins.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	Nero tended to favour provincials at the expense of Romans and Italians.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	Nero took a studious and involved approach to his judicial duties.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	By the early 60s, Nero had reintroduced maiestas trials and was abusing legal procedures.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	Nero was opposed to the staging of elaborate and dramatic public spectacles for the people.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	All through his reign, Nero was strongly opposed to any development of an imperial cult.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	Under Nero, valuable construction work on ports and aqueducts was carried out.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	Nero's vast Golden House project has been forever lost to us.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

Chapter 26:

Nero and the Praetorian Guard

Agrippina had married Claudius in AD 49. As well as wishing to wield her own power and influence, her fundamental goal was to ensure the succession of her son, Nero. Agrippina realised that to achieve this, she needed the support and loyalty of the Praetorian Guard. The Praetorian Prefect, Macro, had ensured Gaius' accession and so Agrippina began to look for "her own Macro".

During the early years of Claudius' reign, the Praetorian Guard was jointly run by the Praetorian Prefects, Lusius Geta and Rufrius Crispinus. They had done some of the bidding of Messalina but had also rallied behind Claudius when Messalina's "marriage" to Gaius Silius seemed to threaten Claudius' position.

Agrippina could not guarantee the loyalty of Geta and Crispinus and she feared their possible sympathy of Claudius' son, Britannicus. In AD 51, she managed to have Geta and Crispinus removed from power and replaced with Sextus Afranius Burrus. Tacitus makes the point that Burrus was well aware "*whose initiative was behind his appointment*". (Tacitus, XII.41)

Burrus was born c 5 BC, probably in the town of Vaison in south Gaul, the province of Gallia Narbonensis. His family had likely been enfranchised during the civil wars and subsequently adopted the name of one of Pompey's officers.

His family was prosperous enough to qualify as equites and so Burrus served as a military officer, holding the post of military tribune.

During the reigns of Tiberius and Claudius, Burrus served as a procurator in charge of various estates of imperial family members.

*"...Profoundly respectable as this background was, it gave no promise of the elevation that political circumstances were to bring to Burrus."*¹

- Agrippina first removed junior officers by persuading Claudius to remove those centurions and tribunes who were sympathetic to Britannicus. Then she was able to have Geta moved to take up the Prefecture of Egypt while Crispinus became Consul.

¹ Griffin, M T, Nero: The End of a Dynasty, B T Batsford, London, 1984, p 67

The Praetorian Guard played a crucial role in Nero's seamless accession. Burrus took him to the Guard barracks where he was quickly hailed as emperor. Some guardsmen did query Britannicus' absence but a donative of 15 000 sesterces seemed to settle any doubts. Once the loyalty of the Guard was achieved, senate acceptance of the new emperor was just a matter of course.

The stability and good governance of Rome during the early years of Nero's reign was largely due to the cooperative efforts of Seneca and the Praetorian Prefect, Burrus. With Seneca, Burrus was able to control Nero's worse inclinations and limit Agrippina's influence. However, Burrus was unable to prevent her murder, despite his clear refusal to be a part of it.

Agrippina had her own Praetorian bodyguard during the early part of Nero's reign, until he took it from her. Following Britannicus' death in AD 55, Agrippina cultivated the favour of Praetorian tribunes and centurions. So successful was she in this that several guardsmen gave as the reason for their involvement in the Pisonian conspiracy, her murder in AD 59.

Burrus remained loyal to Nero even after his patroness' death. Tacitus makes the point that he had the loyalty and respect of his men. Nero was becoming irritated at Burrus' influence and would have welcomed the Praetorian Prefect's death in AD 62. The sources cannot show for certain whether Burrus' death was poison or natural causes.

Burrus was followed by two co-Praetorian Prefects, Faenius Rufus and the odious Ofonius Tigellinus. Whereas Burrus had tried to keep Nero under some sort of control, Tigellinus saw it in his interests to pander to Nero's vices.

- The sources are generally agreed that Tigellinus succeeded in playing a significant and evil role during the second half of Nero's reign.
- Tigellinus' social standing was lower than either Seneca or Burrus. In his youth he had lived a debauched life (so says Tacitus) and happily enjoyed numerous sexual relationships with both men and women, many married. In AD 39 he allegedly committed adultery with Agrippina.
- His behaviour led to his expulsion from Rome until allowed to return by Claudius. Tigellinus bought land in Calabria and began to breed race-horses which allowed him to develop a relationship with the young Nero who was becoming passionate about horsemanship.

*"...His connection with Nero brought him not only great wealth but, especially after his appointment as Prefect of the Praetorian Guard in 62, considerable influence and status. After the exposure of the Pisonian conspiracy in 65 he was granted triumphal decorations and a statue on the Palatine."*²

² Griffin, M T, Nero: The End of a Dynasty, B T Batsford, London, 1984, pp 103-4

Several guardsmen were involved in the plot to assassinate Nero in AD 65. That it took so long for them to try to avenge Agrippina's murder was due to the control Burrus and his successor, Faenius Rufus had been able to wield. Tigellinus' growing influence ended this. Faenius was gradually persuaded to support a conspiracy due to the constant insults he had had to suffer from Tigellinus and Nero.



The plot failed (see Chapter 24) but Nero must have been gravely concerned at the disloyalty of so many Guardsmen. He could now only rely on recent recruits and even then only after donatives were handed out.



When Nero was faced with a full-scale revolt in AD 68 (see Chapter 30), his loss of the loyalty of the Praetorian Guard became crucial. Gaius Nymphidius Sabinus, the prefect of the Praetorian Guard abandoned his allegiance to Nero and declared his support for Galba. Tigellinus was ill by now and playing a subordinate role in events. He had already secured his position by aligning himself with Galba's legate, Vinus. (Tigellinus outlived Nero but in January AD 69 was ordered to commit suicide by Emperor Otho).

Tacitus and Plutarch describe the role of the Praetorian Prefect, Nymphidius Sabinus in the following way:

*"...The city garrison, for its part, had a long tradition of sworn allegiance to the Caesars, and had been induced to desert Nero more by cunning and suggestion than from any inclination of its own."*³

*"...For, as already related, Nymphidius Sabinus, captain of the guards, together with Tigellinus, after Nero's circumstances were now desperate, and it was perceived that he designed to fly into Egypt, persuaded the troops to declare Galba emperor, as if Nero had been already gone, promising to all the court and praetorian soldiers, as they are called, seven thousand five hundred drachmas apiece..."*⁴

³ Tacitus, The Histories, 1.5

⁴ Plutarch, Galba, 2

Exercise 26.1

Place the following events in the correct chronological order.

Appointment of Faenius Rufus and Ofonius Tigellinus	1st event	
Appointment of Burrus	2nd event	
Pisonian Conspiracy	3rd event	
Death of Britannicus	4th event	
Removal of Geta and Crispinus	5th event	
Nymphidius Sabinus declares support for Galba	6th event	
Praetorian Guard accepts Nero's accession	7th event	
Death of Burrus	8th event	
Murder of Agrippina	9th event	
Claudius allows Tigellinus' return to Rome	10th event	

Chapter 27:

The role and contribution of Seneca

Seneca's background

- Seneca was born c 1 BC in Cordova in Spain. He was the middle of three sons of an Italian immigrant family which had settled in the south of Spain during the Civil War.
- He was educated in Rome. His father was a stern taskmaster, himself a master of rhetoric, who encouraged his son to study oratory and history. As a teenager, Seneca had immersed himself in philosophy.
- His climb up the *cursus honorum* was slow, and by AD 41 he had only gained the position of quaestor, and perhaps aedile.
- He had become an accomplished orator, a talent which was not appreciated by Gaius.

*"...(Gaius) so despised all polished and elegant style that he discounted Seneca, then at the height of his fame, as a 'mere text-book orator', or 'sand without lime'..."*¹

- Seneca was a friend of Gaetulicus and Gaius' sisters, Agrippina and Livilla, and so became caught up in the conspiracy of AD 39. He narrowly escaped death.²
- Such an escape occurred again in AD 41 when Messalina was manoeuvring against Livilla, whom Claudius had allowed to return to Rome.

*"...The man selected by Messalina to be punished as Livilla's partner was Seneca. Agrippina may have been responsible for his avoiding sentence of death, but it was not until he had endured eight long years on the island of Corsica that she was able to effect his recall."*³

- During his exile on Corsica, Seneca tried in vain to persuade Claudius to allow him to return to Rome.
- Messalina was executed in AD 48. The following year, Agrippina married Claudius and set about manoeuvring Nero towards the succession. As part of her strategy, she arranged for Seneca's return to Rome and his appointment as praetor. In this she was motivated by several factors:
 - Agrippina hoped that Seneca's popularity, due to his literary eminence, might rub off on her;
 - She wanted Seneca to become Nero's tutor. Her prime concern was for Seneca to teach the young Nero rhetoric. (Suetonius relates that during the night following his appointment as tutor, Seneca had a dream in which he believed his pupil was really Gaius.)

Tacitus sums up the purpose of Seneca's recall for Agrippina (and Nero):

*"...Seneca's advice could serve their plans for supremacy; and he was believed to be devoted to her – in gratitude for her favours – but hostile to Claudius whose unfairness he resented."*⁴

Seneca during the *quinquennium Neronis*

When Nero came to the throne, Seneca did not hold an official position. He had been praetor in AD 50 and in AD 56 would hold the consulship. Instead, he became known as *amicus principis*, friend of the emperor. However, being called the friend of the emperor was in effect a position, as clearly one would be called upon to offer advice.

1 Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Gaius, 53

2 For details on the conspiracy of AD 39 see Chapter 14.

3 Griffin, M T, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty*, B T Batsford, London, 1984, p 71

4 Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, XII.8

Much has already been said about the positive elements of the early part of Nero's reign, which had gained the label *quinquennium Neronis*. It is generally assumed that the stability and progress made at this time was due to the influence on Nero of his two key advisors, Burrus and Seneca. Tacitus refers to them managing to control Nero's *perilous adolescence*. Chapter 24 has already illustrated some of the influence that Seneca was able to wield in Nero's relationship with the senate.

- Nero's accession speech (and most others) was penned by Seneca, and it clearly indicated that the affairs of state and the domus would be separated.
- There would be an end of trials *in cubiculum principis*.
- Due to Seneca, relations between Nero and the senate during the *quinquennium Neronis* were generally cooperative, cordial and respectful.

Nero's self-indulgent and permissive behaviour remained a constant concern for Seneca. However, on occasions it suited him to almost encourage this in his young charge. Nero began an affair with a former slave girl called Acte.

- For Seneca this affair was actually a relief as Acte did not come from an aristocratic family with all the political problems an affair with the emperor might involve.
- Helping Nero in this affair was one of his friends, Annaeus Serenus, commander of the Watch. He pretended to be Acte's lover so as to hide the reality of Nero's relationship from the world. Serenus was a relation of Seneca.
- Agrippina was concerned about Acte as Nero's infatuation would lessen her control over her son. Agrippina veered from open hostility to the girl to suggesting to Nero that he meet with Acte in her own bedroom.
- Agrippina felt further threatened following the death of Britannicus in AD 55.⁵
- Seneca even used Acte for his own purposes. Tacitus tells us that Seneca sent Acte to Nero to warn him that Agrippina was *boasting of her intimacy with her son*. On Seneca's instructions, Acte was to warn Nero that the army would never tolerate a *sacrilegious emperor*.⁶

Seneca used his writing to try and influence the politics of his times. One such work was *De Clementia*. Written in part as a guide for Nero to follow, Seneca also argues that Rome must maintain its monarchical system. He does this not out of any love of such a system but because he sees no alternative.

*"...He may have been urging the upper classes to accept that Caesar's power was absolute and to concentrate their efforts on seeing that he was well-trained and well-provided with good advice."*⁷

Seneca did not approve of Agrippina's attempt to wield power and influence, despite the fact that he owed his own position to her. He quickly put a stop to her murderous activities. At the start of the reign, Marcus Junius Silanus had been killed without Nero even knowing about it. Seneca would have been further concerned at the idea of Agrippina sitting behind a curtain in the senate listening to a debate.⁸ When an Armenian delegation came to plead before Nero, Agrippina was about to climb the emperor's dais and sit next to Nero. This would have implied an equality between mother and son. To quash any such implication:

*"...Seneca instructed Nero to advance and meet his mother. This show of filial dutifulness averted the scandal."*⁹

Though Seneca was opposed to Agrippina's attempt to interfere in affairs of state, it is unlikely he approved of Nero's murder of his mother. In fact, Grant argues that Agrippina's presence was quite useful for Seneca.

⁵ Dynastic matters and issues of the succession are covered in Chapter 29.

⁶ Tacitus, XIV.2

⁷ Griffin, M T, Nero: The End of a Dynasty, B T Batsford, London, 1984, p 78

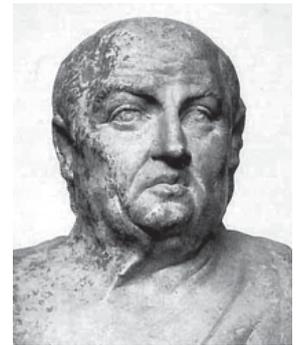
⁸ Tacitus, XIII.4

⁹ Tacitus, XIII.4

- He and Burrus were able to provide a refuge for Nero from Agrippina's *tactless and arrogant demands*. Seneca was able to engineer a reconciliation between mother and son when relations first broke down.
- However, once Poppaea Sabina came on to the scene, she was able to turn Nero against his mother.
- Following the murder of Agrippina, both Burrus and Seneca had to move into what we today would call "damage control". Burrus kept the Praetorian Guard loyal, while Seneca composed a letter for the senate in which he argued that the unsavoury aspects of Claudius' reign had been due to Agrippina and that she was preparing to assassinate Nero.
- Seneca's argument of justification was so effective that Nero managed to win the senate's approval for what he had done.

Seneca: the later years

In AD 62, Burrus died. Tacitus suggests that this "*undermined the influence of Seneca.*" Surrounded by *disreputable* advisors, Nero no longer had need of his ageing advisor; Seneca was now well into sixties. Nero's new colleagues tried to poison the emperor's mind against Seneca – he is too rich, his properties are too grand, he mocks Nero's amusements and he writes poetry now that Nero does. Nero was told he was a man who needed no more guiding. Seneca sought an audience with Nero who had started to avoid him. The usual flatteries were exchanged and they parted company.



*"...Then he clasped and kissed Seneca. Nature and experience had fitted Nero to conceal hatred behind treacherous embraces. Seneca expressed his gratitude."*¹⁰

For the next three years, Seneca tried to slip out of the limelight. He gave up his large receptions, rarely came to Rome and chose to pursue his philosophical studies at home. However, when the Pisonian Conspiracy was discovered in AD 65, Seneca could not avoid being dragged into it.

- It is probable that Seneca had no direct involvement in its planning or carrying out of the plot, though he might have had knowledge of it.
- As the plot fell apart, the conspirators were arrested one by one.
- Faced with the *threat and sight of torture*, the first to give in and surrender names was Antonius Natalis. As well as surrendering up the name of Calpurnius Piso, he denounced Seneca.

Nero ordered Seneca to commit suicide. Tacitus describes in some detail the difficulty Seneca had trying to do this.¹¹ Slitting veins, being immersed in a bath and taking poison did not work. Finally, he suffocated on being put into a vapour bath. Seneca's wife, Pompeia Paulina, was saved from suicide on Nero's orders, not out of any sense of virtue but to lessen the blackening of his name.

*"...Seneca embraced his wife and gently begged her to live and temper her grief. But she chose to die with him. With a single stroke of the blade, they sliced their arms. Seneca, hardened by frugal living, did not bleed easily. He cut the veins of his knees and thighs. But still he did not die. He asked his doctor to dispense some poison hemlock. He drank it in vain. Finally, he was carried into the baths, where he suffocated in vapour."*¹²

Tacitus tells us that Seneca's death *delighted the emperor*.

¹⁰ Tacitus, XIV.55

¹¹ Tacitus, XV.60-64

¹² <http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/series/transcript3.html>

What do the historians have to say about “The role and contribution of Seneca”?

1. Tacitus: *The Annals of Imperial Rome*

Tacitus gives Seneca high praise for the way he managed to keep control of things during the early part of Nero’s reign. Seneca was able to steer Nero away from serious vices into licensed channels of indulgence. He kept a lid on Agrippina’s activities early in the reign, and guided Nero into limiting her influence. Even though he and Burrus were quite different men, one a man of military background and the other a philosopher and thinker, Tacitus commends their ability to complement their skills and work together.

*“...These two men, with a unanimity rare among partners in power, were, by different methods, equally influential. Burrus’ strength lay in soldierly efficiency and seriousness of character, Seneca’s in amiable high principles and his tuition of Nero in public speaking.”*¹³

2. Michael Grant: *Nero – Emperor in Revolt*

Grant discusses the dilemma with which Seneca was constantly faced when dealing with Nero. He had no illusions about Nero’s character, his immorality or his penchant for violence, seen most clearly in the murder of his mother. In such a situation, what is a man like Seneca to do? Does he retire to escape the capriciousness of an unrestrained young ruler like Nero? Or does he stay at his post to try to restrain him as best he can for the good of the state? Seneca decided on the latter course, at least as long as could.

*“...even if the collaborator (ie Seneca) could do some good by remaining at his post, it had to be realistically accepted that his possibilities in this direction were severely limited...The prospects of reforming Nero were equally discouraging.”*¹⁴

¹³ Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, XIII.2

¹⁴ Grant, M, *Nero: Emperor in Revolt*, American Heritage Press, New York, 1970, p 80

Exercise 27.1

Using the terms in the box below, complete the following passage.

Seneca was renowned as a great _____ and _____ of works on statecraft and _____. He had been exiled by both emperor _____ and _____ but was allowed back to Rome in AD 49 at the behest of _____. He became the _____ of the youthful Nero. In AD 50 he became a _____ and in 56 a _____. However, it was his position as _____ that gave him his real influence. During the _____, Seneca and Burrus were able to control _____ with the result that Rome experienced good governance. Seneca was able to control Nero's _____ behaviour and limit Agrippina's _____. Seneca wrote Nero's _____ speech which argued for a division between the state and the _____. After the death of _____ in AD 62, Seneca's influence declined and he retired to private life. However, Seneca became implicated in the _____ Conspiracy in AD 65. He was ordered to commit _____. With some difficulty he died but his wife was saved from suicide by Nero's troops. Seneca's death brought Nero great _____.

quinquennium Neronis	immoral	Agrippina	consul	philosophy		
Pisonian	delight	orator	Gaius	Burrus	Claudius	
tutor	suicide	writer	Nero	amicus principis	praetor	domus
		influence	accession			

Notes

Chapter 28:

Nero: The army, the frontier and provincial policy

Nero was the most unmilitary of all the Julio-Claudian emperors. He had little interest in the empire or in provincial policy, except for Greece where he hoped to extend his artistic activities. He never visited the troops and he had no interest in seeing the impact of his provincial policy. Yet despite this:

*“...in the major fields of imperial conflict during his reign, Nero can be seen to have acted sensibly, choosing sound commanders, trusting them to do their jobs and providing them with the necessary resources.”*¹

Much of the empire remained calm during Nero's reign. The ancient sources provide us with little comment on events along the Rhine, in Gaul, along the Danube, in the south east or in Africa. Figure 28.1 summarises the main developments during Nero's reign in these areas. However, Nero did face major revolts in Britain and Judaea, and his policies caused problems with Parthia in the east.

The Boudicca revolt, AD 60-61

Since the Claudian invasion of Britain in AD 43, Roman forces had spread north and west across the island. Treaties were signed with pro-Roman monarchs such as Queen Cartimandua of the Brigantes, in the north, and with King Prasutagus in East Anglia. By the late 50s, the main focus of Roman activity was in northern Wales where the legions sought to suppress the forces of Druidism. Meanwhile, in the south and south east, colonies were being established for veterans such as the one at Camulodunum. Tensions between local Britons were increasing due to Roman land policies and the decision to build a temple for the Imperial Cult at Camulodunum.

The client-king of the Iceni in East Anglia, King Prasutagus, had agreed to a treaty with Claudius on a personal basis. Consequently, this was not likely to survive the king's death which came in AD 59. In his will, Prasutagus had named the emperor as one of his heirs and accordingly hoped to obtain good treatment for his family. The exact opposite occurred and the seeds of Rome's worst revolt in the 1st century were sown.

- The financial procurator, Catus Decianus, stepped in and claimed the entire kingdom for the emperor. Tacitus says that Decianus' rapacity drove the province to war.
- Some in Rome had been thinking that Britain was too expensive to maintain and argued for a Roman withdrawal. When such rumours spread, investors (like Seneca) began to withdraw their funds from Britain. The lack of financial resources this caused might have been a factor in Decianus' behaviour.
- To further inflame matters, Prasutagus' widow, Boudicca, and her daughters were treated in an outrageous manner.

*“...his (Prasutagus') widow Boudicca was flogged and their daughters raped. The Icenian chiefs were deprived of their hereditary estates as if the Romans had been given the whole country. The king's own relatives were treated like slaves.”*²

The rebels, led by Queen Boudicca, were merciless in their treatment of any Romans or Romano-British they came across in the south east of the country. Terrible punishment was meted out to the towns of Verulamium, Londinium and Camulodunum and tens of thousands were killed. The bulk

¹ Shotter, D, Nero, Routledge, London, 1997, p 36

² Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XIV.30

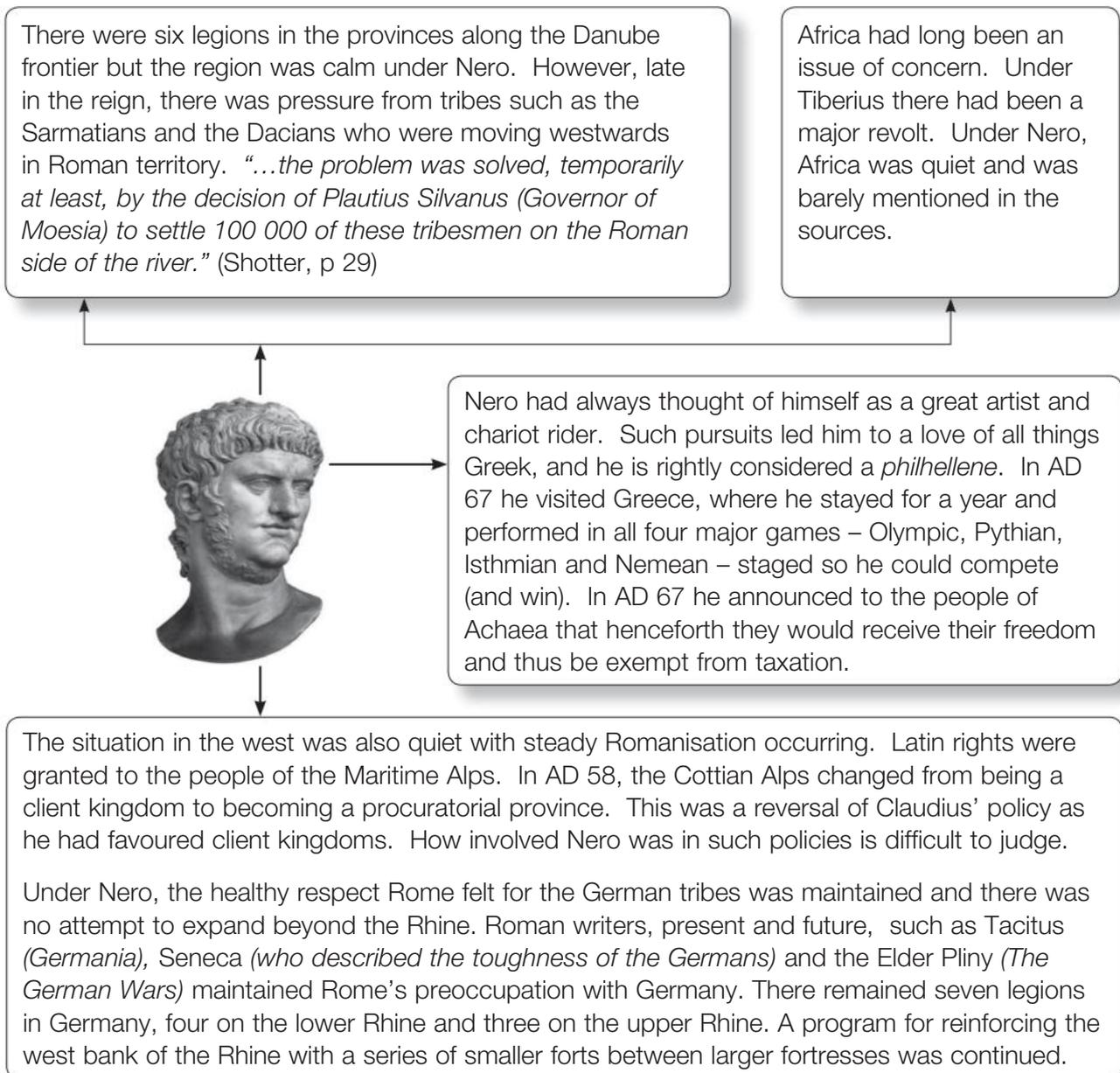
of Rome's legions were in the west with Suetonius Paulinus, while the 9th Legion alone was not able to deal with the rebels. Reinforcements sent from Rome, combined with Suetonius' forces, eventually brought the revolt under control.

- "The Romans did not spare even the women. Baggage animals too, transfixed with weapons, added to the heaps of dead."³
- Almost 80 000 Britons were killed; Roman casualties were about 800.

The Boudicca revolt had been a major shock for Rome. Nero sent Polyclitus to examine the situation and changes were instituted in the province.

- For a time at least, further expansion across Britain was placed on hold.
- A new governor was appointed, Petronius Turpilianus, with orders to rule in a way to avoid further rebellion. The situation was brought under control for a few years, but shortly after Nero's death, there was new trouble for Rome in the north of England.

Figure 28.1 Imperial Affairs under Nero



³ Tacitus, XIV.37

Parthia, Armenia and the east

In the 60s BC, Pompey had achieved great success in the east and had managed to establish a series of provinces along the coast of Asia Minor. A series of client kingdoms were set up inland. This brought Rome in direct contact with the kingdom of Parthia, which was never going to meekly submit to Roman power. In 53 BC, a major Roman force had been defeated at Carrhae under the command of Crassus. Mark Antony's forces suffered a similar fate in 36 BC.

Augustus tried to avoid military conflict with Parthia, and with good diplomacy and a 'threat' of force, even managed to retrieve the standards that had been lost at Carrhae. A remaining source of tension remained the kingdom of Armenia. By Augustus' time, Rome and Parthia had agreed to accept as King of Armenia a person who was acceptable to both of them.

In AD 57, Rome's nominee for the Armenian throne was replaced by Tiridates, brother of the King of Parthia. Armenia was now effectively part of the Parthian Empire. Nero appointed Corbulo as governor of Cappadocia and Galatia and gave him orders to restore Armenia to Roman rule. His forces crossed the river Euphrates and captured Tigranocerta, the Armenian capital. He placed the Roman candidate, Tigranes on the throne but this provoked Parthia. Neither Corbulo nor the Parthian king, Vologaeses sought conflict and tried for a negotiated settlement.

- Nero now decided on annexing Armenia and sent Caesennius Paetus to the area with the aim of reducing Armenia to a province.
- Paetus' forces were defeated by the Parthians at Rhandaia.
- Corbulo was given a major eastern command and ordered to pressure Parthia as if Rome intended making Armenia a province.
- However, Vologaeses was still keen on compromise and negotiations recommenced.
- The result of these events was that Parthia was to be allowed to have Tiridates on the Armenian throne but he had to be installed and crowned in Rome.
- The final outcome was more or less what Corbulo had offered the Parthians at the outset.

The major result of these confusing events was that it presaged a period of fifty years of peace between Rome and Parthia in the east.

Judaea

Throughout the 50s AD, Judaea had been fairly quiet but there were many underlying tensions between Romans and Jews, Jews and Greeks, and Jews and Christians. The Jews were not united and there were differences between the Saducees who sought cooperation with Rome, and the Pharisees (and their extremist wing, the zealots) who sought independence. To make matters worse for the government back in Rome, the standard of the administration in Judaea in the early 60s AD was poor, and Rome was preoccupied by events in Armenia.

- The spark for the Jewish revolt was the actions of the procurator, Gessius Florus, who infringed the temple in Jerusalem by trying to seize money due to Nero. The revolt broke out in AD 66 and involved a force of over 60 000 Jews. There were also riots in Alexandria.
- The governor of Syria, Cestius Gallus, entered Judaea but he was killed in AD 67.
- In AD 67-68, Vespasian overran the country with three legions but Nero's death interrupted the campaign.
- In AD 70 (two years after Nero's death), Jerusalem finally fell, destroyed by Titus. Resistance continued until AD 73 when the fortress of Masada finally fell. The Arch of Titus at the eastern end of the Roman Forum, celebrates the Roman victory against the Jews.



The practice of provincial administration under Nero had mixed results. Unlike Claudius, Nero was less keen on granting citizenship. Significant advances in the process of Romanisation occurred only in the west, in Gaul and Spain, and even then loyalty could not be guaranteed as the Gallic-German revolt of AD 69-70 showed. There were attempts to control avaricious provincial administrators, eg Cossutianus Capito in Cilicia in AD 57, Vipsanius Laenas (governor of Sardinia) in AD 56 and Vibius Secundus in Mauretania.

◀ The Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum

What do the historians have to say about “Nero and The army, the frontier and provincial policy”?

1. David Shotter: Nero

Shotter is full of praise for the way Nero’s government handled the problems in the east. Nero had shown flexibility in the face of a difficult situation, and apart from Paetus’ defeat (due mainly to his incompetence), Rome had come out of the eastern conflict strongly. Nero had shown loyalty to Corbulo and had provided reinforcements when they were needed. Corbulo had effectively used a combination of diplomatic skill and the threat of military force. These things lead Shotter to favourably compare Nero’s regime with that of the ‘master’.

*“...(Nero’s strategy represented) a reapplication of the formula successfully used by Augustus in the twenties BC...”*⁴

2. Michael Grant: Nero – Emperor in revolt

Like Shotter, Grant is full of praise for the way that Nero handled the situation in the east. The ancient writers dismiss Nero’s efforts and Grant argues that this is because they were arguing from the perspective of the aristocratic, expansionist tradition. Nero’s settlement was hard to attain but once won it was excellent. His diplomatic solution to the east brought peace for fifty years (until Trajan took the offensive in the region).

*“...Much of the credit must go to him personally, because it was he, young though he was, who presided over the councils whose general directives, in his name, even strong-minded commanders like Corbulo were obliged to obey.”*⁵

4 Shotter, D, Nero, Routledge, London, 1997, p 34

5 Grant, M, Nero: Emperor in Revolt, American Heritage Press, New York, 1970, p 127

Exercise 28.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE for each of the following statements.

1	Nero was a military-minded emperor who displayed an enormous interest in military and imperial issues.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	It could be strongly argued that the Romans brought the Boudiccan revolt upon themselves.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	The suppression of the Boudiccan revolt brought a permanent peace to Britain.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	Nero's policy in the east, dealing with the problem of Parthia, was similar in essence to that of Augustus.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	By the early 70s AD, Roman rule in Judaea had been fully consolidated.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	Nero seemed little interested in the affairs of Greece and that region gained little from his period of rule.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	Nero was a keen supporter of Claudius' policy of establishing client kingdoms.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	Nero followed the tradition established by Tiberius of the pursuit of a conservative policy regarding Germany.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	Like Tiberius, Nero had to spend much time dealing with rebellious groups in Africa.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	During Nero's reign, peace and stability were the norm along the Danube frontier.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

Notes

Chapter 29:

Nero, the imperial family and problems of succession

As was explained in Chapter 23, Nero's imperial pedigree was impressive. He was a direct descendent of Augustus through his grandmother, Agrippina the Elder, and of Livia through his grandfather, Germanicus. Nero had been adopted by Claudius in AD 50 and then married Claudius' daughter, Octavia, in AD 53.¹

Dynastically, there might appear to be no rivals to Nero. However, this did not stop the usual round of threats, exiles and mysterious (not so mysterious) deaths that tended to affect members of the Julio-Claudians during their time in power.

The first victim of Nero's reign was **Marcus Junius Silanus**. Silanus was killed on the orders of Agrippina without Nero's knowledge. Tacitus describes Silanus as lazy and presumably unthreatening.² However, Agrippina felt that she had reason to be concerned about Silanus:

- He was seen as a *mature blameless aristocrat*, perhaps a better candidate for emperor than Nero.
- He was a great, great, grandson of Augustus.
- His brother, I Iunius Silanus, who had formerly been betrothed to Claudius' daughter, Octavia, had been 'removed' to make way for Nero. Might Silanus not want to seek revenge?

At this stage, Agrippina and Nero were close, as the coinage of the time showed.

Figure 29.1 Coin with Nero and Agrippina on the obverse side, AD 54



Claudius' natural son, **Britannicus**, had been seen by Agrippina as a rival to her son's future prospects of power. Agrippina had succeeded in isolating Britannicus and ensuring Nero's succession. However, as Nero began to tire of his mother's interference, Agrippina began to see Britannicus as a way she might reassert herself. She threatened to take the boy to the Praetorian Camp and announce him as the legitimate ruler.

- Relations between Nero and Britannicus were not good. Britannicus often mocked Nero's singing and deliberately referred to him by his previous family name Lucius Domitius (Ahenobarbus).
- Britannicus' end came when during a palace banquet, poisoned cold water was added to his hot drink – "*he instantly ceased to breathe*". Nero claimed Britannicus' death was the result of the boy's epilepsy. His death caused little stir, and even Seneca and Burrus did not make an issue of the event.

¹ Octavia was "adopted out" so that the marriage would not be deemed incestuous.

² Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XIII.I

Feeling isolated, Agrippina now became a supporter of Octavia. Tacitus even refers to a kind of *partes Octaviae* being organised by Agrippina. However, the days of Agrippina's great influence were coming to an end as Nero pushed her aside. She tried in vain to regain influence with her son, from offering him her bed to share with the former slave girl, Acte, with whom Nero had become infatuated, to offering him her bed to share with herself! Nero eventually felt confident enough to have his mother murdered in AD 59.³

One of the reasons for Nero's estrangement from his mother was his relationship with **Poppaea Sabina**.

*"Poppaea Sabina was destined to achieve what the professional politicians of two reigns had not been able to do, namely the complete and final destruction of Agrippina."*⁴

Poppaea Sabina is one of those women in history that television mini-series script writers adore. If the sources are to be believed she was beautiful, intelligent, rich, upper-class and a great conversationist. Tacitus tells that she had every asset except goodness, seemed respectable but that her life was depraved. She cared not about her reputation and was willing to sleep with whoever could advance her interests.⁵

- Poppaea Sabina was married to Otho (later emperor) and apparently considered him a 'real' man. In order to eliminate Otho as a rival, Nero sent him to Lusitania (Portugal) as governor.
- Poppaea played on Nero's weaknesses. She taunted him about his relationship with a slave girl like Acte and mocked him about the way he was still subject to the demands of his mother.
- Poppaea knew that her chances of marrying Nero were nil so long as Agrippina was alive and so she set about poisoning Nero's mind against his mother.
- Using her *tears and a lover's tricks*, Nero was won over.

*"...Everyone longed for the mother's domination to end. But no-one believed that her son's hatred would go as far as murder."*⁶

Once Nero had removed his mother from the scene, he eagerly sought to marry Poppaea Sabina. However, this meant having to dispose of his wife, **Octavia**.

- Octavia was modest, unassuming, popular and an emperor's daughter, all reasons for Nero's hatred of her to grow.
- In AD 62, Nero divorced Octavia on the ground of her *barrenness* and immediately married Poppaea Sabina.
- Poppaea persuaded one of Octavia's servants to accuse her mistress of adultery. Evidence was gained by torture. Though clearly innocent, Octavia was banished to Campania.
- However, Octavia was popular and the people demanded that she be recalled. Nero was so moved he even offered to make her his wife again. Poppaea responded by warning Nero of potential mass violence and that Octavia could be used to replace him as emperor. All that had to be done was to find her a suitable husband.

*"Poppaea's arguments, playing on Nero's alarm and anger in turn, duly terrified and infuriated him."*⁷

Nero now sought a stronger motive to finally remove Octavia. He persuaded Anicetus, the fleet commander at Misenum, and the murderer of Agrippina, to admit to adultery with Octavia. Anicetus was happy to oblige and was rewarded with a comfortable exile in Sardinia. Nero

³ See Chapter 27 for details on Acte, Agrippina's relationship with Nero and her death.

⁴ Bauman, R, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, Routledge, London, 1992, p 199

⁵ Tacitus, XIII.45

⁶ Tacitus, XIV.1

⁷ Tacitus, XIV.61

announced that Octavia had tried to win over the fleet by seducing its commander. She was exiled to the island of Pandateria. Within a few days, Octavia was murdered. Tacitus' version evokes pity as this young, innocent woman was manhandled by guardsmen, had her veins opened, and then when she would not bleed was suffocated in a vapour bath. Finally her head was cut off and taken to Rome for Poppaea.

Poppaea now had the position she craved as the coinage of the time showed. The coin in Figure 29.2 has a draped bust of Poppaea on the reverse.

Figure 29.2 Coin of AD 63-64



AD 62 was an eventful year for Nero. Burrus died, Tigellinus became Praetorian Prefect, Seneca retired from public life, potential rivals to his position – Sulla Felix and Rubellius Plautus – were executed in their exile, and Octavia was killed. Two years later, Nero forced one of Augustus' last legitimate descendants, Decimus Junius Silanus Torquatus, to commit suicide.

In January AD 63, Poppaea gave birth to a daughter, Claudia Augusta, but the child lived for a few months only. The child became a goddess and was granted a shrine and a priest. By AD 66, Poppaea was pregnant again but she died after Nero *“in a chance fit of anger, kicked her”* says Tacitus. Wiedemann dismisses this version of events, as Tacitus' effort to further blacken the Julio-Claudian brand. She was buried in Augustus' mausoleum, and rather than being cremated, she was embalmed. Few in Rome mourned her passing.

Now denied an heir, Nero sought a new wife.

- His first choice was Claudius' surviving daughter, Antonia. Antonia could not be persuaded to marry him.
- In AD 66, he then married Statilia Messalina who was known for her great beauty but who played a lower key role than Poppaea. She was descended from two of Augustus' leading generals. In order for the marriage to take place, Nero had her husband executed for alleged involvement in the Pisonian Conspiracy.
- Following Nero's death, she became involved with the emperor Otho and nearly married him before he lost the throne.
- Figure 29.3 shows Statilia Messalina's appearance on the reverse of a Roman coin from AD 66.

Figure 29.3 Nero and Statilia Messalina on a coin of AD 66



What do the historians have to say about “Nero and the imperial family and problems of succession”?

1. Miriam Griffin: *Nero – The End of a Dynasty*

Griffin makes the point that Poppaea was no Agrippina. She did not have the support of any freedmen and none of the ancient sources suggests that she was able to establish any close connections with the Praetorian Guard prefects.

*“...Poppaea’s actual position could only distantly approximate to Agrippina’s. She was far inferior in birth, and she had not the time, nor probably the skill, to build the nexus of political support.”*⁸

2. Suetonius: *The Twelve Caesars*

Suetonius comments on Nero’s treatment of his wives in a very matter of fact manner. To marry Statilia Messalina “he was obliged to murder her husband Atticus Vestinus” while life with Octavia bored him and “he tried unsuccessfully to strangle her on several occasions”. Suetonius makes the point that Nero had no qualms in abusing any of his family relationships.

*“...When Claudius’ daughter Antonia refused to take Poppaea’s place, he had her executed on a charge of attempted rebellion; and destroyed every other member of his family, including relatives by marriage, in the same way.”*⁹

8 Griffin, M T, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty*, B T Batsford, London, 1984, p 103

9 Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Nero, 35

Exercise 29.1

Match the description on the left with the personality in the box below.

1	He used to mock Nero but ultimately paid for such barbs with his life in AD 55.	
2	She was the daughter of Nero and Poppaea Sabina who lived for a few months only.	
3	Nero's second wife who died while pregnant after Nero allegedly kicked her.	
4	Statilia's unfortunate husband who had to make way for Nero with his life.	
5	She was Claudius' daughter and Nero's first wife. She was murdered in AD 62.	
6	As well as killing Agrippina he willingly confessed to a non-existent adulterous affair with Octavia.	
7	He was unfortunate to become Agrippina's first victim of Nero's reign.	
8	She married Nero in AD 66 and later had a relationship with the emperor Otho.	
9	Poppaea Sabina's husband who was shipped off to be governor of Lusitania while Nero pursued his wife.	
10	She was Claudius' daughter who refused to marry Nero but later paid for this with her life.	

POPPAEA SABINA	STATILIA MESSALINA	OCTAVIA
MARCUS JUNIUS SILANUS	BRITANNICUS	ANICETUS ANTONIA
ATTICUS VESTINUS	OTHO	CLAUDIA AUGUSTA

Chapter 30:

The death of Nero and the Year of the Four Emperors: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian

Nero in Greece

The fallout from the Pisonian Conspiracy was a massive purge of suspected opposition elements amongst civilians and soldiers. Victims included Petronius (the author of *Satyricon*) and some of Rome's ablest commanders such as Corbulo and Scribonianus Rufus, commander of the armies of Upper Germany.

Yet despite the political upheaval of the past year, in AD 67 Nero took himself off to Greece where he threw himself into countless competitions and all the major games. He won many first prizes, even for contests in which he had not competed, though he avoided competing in Athens where one might have thought he would really have wanted to show off. As mentioned in Chapter 28, he announced the 'liberation' of Achaëa which amounted to the region being excluded from paying taxation. The senate was compensated for the loss of its province by being given Sardinia. Like Gaius, Nero also entertained ideas of building an Isthmian canal, and he ceremoniously turned the first sod of its construction.

- While in Greece, he had not appointed a City Prefect to administer Rome but left matters in the hands of his freedmen such as Helius.
- Discontent was growing as grain supplies were short and there was growing anger at the increased use of delatores (informers).
- When Helius pleaded with Nero to return, the emperor replied: *"Yes, you have made yourself quite plain. I am aware that you want me to go home; you will do far better, however, if you encourage me to stay until I have proved myself worthy of Nero."*¹

The revolt of Vindex

Nero returned to Italy in early AD 68 and found Rome seething with discontent. The ordinary people were hungry, the aristocracy hated him and most seriously, the armies were restive, partly due to his lack of interest but also due to the treatment of some of their commanders, such as Corbulo. However, Nero's main preoccupation was showing off his 1800 medals and celebrating his 'triumphs'.

In March AD 68, the governor of the Gallic province of Lugdunensis (SE France), C Julius Vindex, rose up in revolt. Vindex was a Romanised Gaul but most historians dismiss the idea that his revolt was associated with Gallic national resistance to Rome.

- Vindex was soon leading a force of 100 000 with the call of 'freedom from the tyrant'. The coins and pamphlets Vindex circulated at this time used slogans like 'Rome restored' and 'Jupiter the Liberator'. Nero was also attacked for his performing and his philhellenism.
- However, there were divisions within Vindex's forces and he was soon defeated by legions loyal to Nero from Upper Germany led by L Verginius Rufus at the battle of Vesontio.

¹ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Nero, 23

- Rufus' men urged him to assume the leadership of Rome but he refused, his reluctance possibly due to his equestrian status.
- Vindex committed suicide.

The death of Nero

Ser. Sulpicius Galba, governor of Hispania Tarraconensis (north eastern half of Spain) associated himself with Vindex, believing that Nero was plotting to kill him. ² Galba announced he was the 'Legate of the Senate and Roman People' and formally called for Nero's overthrow. In this venture he had the support of Otho, the governor of Lusitania (Portugal) and A Caecina Alienus of Baectia (SW Spain).

For a moment, if Nero had acted he might have prevailed. Galba had only one legion and Nero had forces ready for an eastern campaign. The senate prevaricated and briefly declared against Galba. Tigellinus disappeared, and Clodius Macer, governor of Africa, revolted in the name of the republic. Verginius Rufus put himself and his men at the senate's disposal. With Tigellinus gone and the other Praetorian Prefect, Nyhphidius Sabinus promising the Guard a 15 000 sesterces donative in the name of Galba, Nero's power base was gone. As the provincial armies renounced their allegiance to Nero, he fled Rome on 8 June, AD 68.

- He reached the villa of a freedman, Phaon, just outside Rome.
- Lacking the courage to kill himself, he needed the help of his freedman Epaphroditus. Nero died on 9 June, AD 68.
- He was buried by Acte and his nurses on the slopes of the Pincian Hill.

His companions prepared for his burial fetching marble, wood and water. *"As they bustled about obediently he muttered through his tears: 'Dead! And so great an artist!'"* ³

Galba to Otho

The spotlight now turned to Galba as he made his move for power. Galba had been a significant figure in Rome for several decades. Thirty years previously, he had once been considered as a husband for Agrippina. Galba was an able soldier with a reputation for no-nonsense discipline. However, he was seventy three years old and had no children and presumably would not be in power for long. His two main supporters were Titus Vinius (commander of the 6th legion) and Otho (governor of Lusitania).

- These men had their own agenda. Otho agreed to marry Vinius' daughter.
- Thus, when Galba died, Otho would take over and Otho's children would be Vinius' grandchildren.

However, Galba set about securing power on his terms. As an old disciplinarian, he did not pander to those below: *"I choose my soldiers, I do not buy them"*. A noble sentiment perhaps, but this was probably not good politics at this time. He placed his own people in positions of authority, such as Aulus Vitellius in Lower Germany and Hordoneonis Flaccus in the Upper Rhine. He executed several of Nero's freedmen, such as Helius and Polyclitus. Galba's arrival in Italy was a bloody affair and was accompanied by hundreds of executions, suicides and the cutting down of Nero's Legio ¹ Adiutrix which had been raised from the Misenum marines. Once in Rome, Galba set about trying to repair the damage that had been done by Nero.

² Galba briefly contemplated suicide after Vindex's defeat.

³ Suetonius, Nero, 49

*“Galba seemed to be doing nothing to win the loyalty of either the domus Caesaris or the army.”*⁴

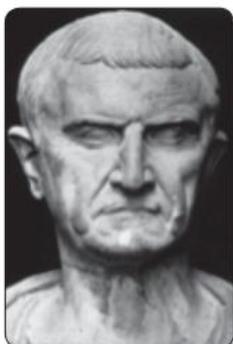
- He tried to repair Rome’s finances and enforced a rigid economy, a policy which won no friends.
- He proposed putting on fewer shows than Nero and sought the return of gifts Nero had handed out. This affected his popularity with the people and the senate.
- He sought out Neronian informers in a bloody vendetta.

Galba’s position was far from secure, a situation which became clear when the legions of Upper and Lower Germany refused to take the routine New Year’s Oath to the emperor. Galba also realised that his lack of a successor was a weakness. His closest relative was Publius Cornelius Dolabella but Galba sought to shield him from the dangers that political involvement would inevitably create. However, he also wanted to limit Otho’s ambitions. The solution was his adoption of Lucius Calpurnius Piso in January AD 69.

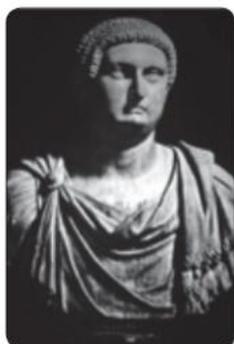
Knowing that Galba was trying to exclude him, Otho now acted. Many of the Praetorian tribunes had been dismissed by Galba, and the regular Guardsmen had been denied their promised donative. They were willing to support a new emperor. On 15 January, AD 69, Galba, Piso and Vinius (despite his earlier agreement with Otho) were assassinated in the forum. The senate duly accepted that Otho was now in control of Rome. Tacitus’ verdict on Galba’s brief tenure in power is not a generous one, but is probably appropriate.

*“...No one would have doubted his ability to reign had he never been emperor.”*⁵

Figure 30.1 The Year of the Four emperors



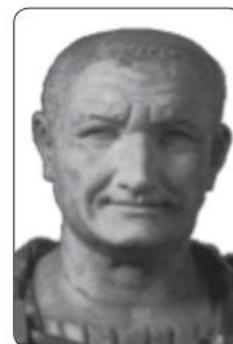
Galba



Otho



Vitellius



Vespasian

Otho to Vitellius

Otho was the first emperor who gained power by killing his predecessor. He acted quickly. Galba’s freedmen were executed, he stated that he was Nero’s successor (not Galba’s) and all the blame for recent excesses were placed at the door of Tigellinus who was quickly executed. He assumed the name of Caesar and restored many of Nero’s statues. Statues of Poppaea Sabina (his former wife) were removed. He even planned to marry Statilia Messalina to add legitimacy to his claim of being Nero’s successor. Otho cleverly honoured military commanders such as Verginius Rufus and soldiers were rewarded for their military activities. A state of calm seemed to have been re-established in Rome though Otho had to restrain some of his supporters from massacring the senate.

*“...Otho was recognised as legitimate head of the domus Caesaris throughout the empire. Coins bearing his titles were minted as far away as Antioch, and the legend ‘Peace on Earth’ (PAX ORBIS TERRARUM) was not unduly optimistic.”*⁶

⁴ Wiedemann, T, *The Julio-Claudia’s*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989, p 70

⁵ Tacitus, *Histories*, I, 49, 6

⁶ Wiedemann, T, *The Julio-Claudians*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989, p 72

Unfortunately for Otho, the German legions had already saluted Vitellius as emperor on 3 January AD 69. Vitellius had been appointed governor of Lower Germany by Galba following the murder of the previous governor, Fonteius Capito.

- Vitellius came from a well-connected family; his father had been consul three times and he himself had held a series of imperial positions, including a temporary stint as proconsul in Africa.
- However, Vitellius had a reputation as a glutton. Galba claimed that the only reason he had appointed Vitellius was that 'a glutton was the sort of rival he feared least'.
- Despite this, Fabius Valens ⁷ persuaded the German armies to declare for Vitellius as emperor.

"...Their candidate was quite an insignificant person, and not more than half willing to have greatness thrust upon him..." ⁸

Suetonius leaves us in no doubt about Vitellius' appetite.

"...He banqueted three and often four times a day, namely morning, noon, afternoon, and evening – the last meal being mainly a drinking bout – and survived the ordeal well enough by taking frequent emetics." ⁹

As Vitellius' forces prepared to march on Rome, Otho dallied and took no action. Otho's position seemed quite strong, he was able to claim the allegiance of seventeen legions but they were spread far and wide, while the forces in the west and in Africa had declared for Vitellius. Otho had about 25 000 men he could call upon immediately, including Praetorians and conscripted gladiators. Vitellius had almost 100 000 men. There was a strong *esprit de corps* within Vitellius' forces and he wisely gave his resolute commanders a free hand, unlike Otho. Vitellius' forces were divided into three groups.

- Caecina Alienus was moving south through Switzerland and the St Bernard pass.
- Fabius Valens' troops were moving through eastern France and across the western passes of the Alps.
- Vitellius stayed behind in Germany forming a new reserve army.

The movement of Vitellius' forces south across the mountains was impressive.

"...The plan of campaign of the Vitellians was of a boldness that recalled the greatest exploits of Lucullus or Caesar...the Rhenish armies accomplished their march without serious loss or delay – an achievement ranking with Hannibal's or Napoleon's passages of the Alps..." ¹⁰

Otho's forces did unexpectedly well against those of Caecina. Otho was now advised to wait for reinforcements from the east but he feared that as the enemy had superior numbers, it could divert troops to Rome and once established there, Vitellius would be impossible to move. Thus, he decided to tackle the now far superior Vitellian forces at Cremona. Otho's army was routed and forced back to Bedriacum where it surrendered on 15 April AD 69. This major encounter is referred to as either the Battle of Cremona or the Battle of Bedriacum. Over 40 000 men died.

Otho's position was still strong. He had control of the sea, he occupied Rome and he had the support of legions in the east. However, Otho did not want to inflict on Rome a prolonged bloody civil war.

⁷ He had been the man who murdered Fonteius Capito.

⁸ Cary, M, A History of Rome, Macmillan, London, 1960, p 599

⁹ Suetonius, Vitellius, 13

¹⁰ Cary, M, A History of Rome, Macmillan, London, 1960, p 600

*“...Otho immediately decided on suicide. It is more probable that his conscience prevented him from continuing to hazard lives and property in a bid for sovereignty than that he believed his men had become demoralised and incapable of success....”*¹¹

Otho was aged 37. He had been emperor for 95 days.

The Othonian forces offered the leadership to Verginius but he refused, and the army made peace with the Vitellian forces. The Rhine armies completed their march to Rome, facing no more opposition.

Vitellius to Vespasian

Vitellius' position was not strong as he was soon to face opposition in the east of the empire. Flavius Vespasianus (Vespasian) had his three legions in Judaea take an oath of allegiance to Vitellius but they had done this with some reluctance. The governor of Syria (Mucianus), the Prefect of Egypt (Tiberius Alexander) and Titus (Vespasian's elder son), urged Vespasian to declare himself emperor. After some hesitation, he agreed and the eastern legions swore their allegiance to him.

- 1 July: the Egyptian legions
- 3 July: the Judaeian legions
- 17 July: the Syrian legions
- By the end of July, Vespasian had 14 legions loyal to him.

The Danubian legions supporting Vespasian now began to move on Rome while the eastern legions under Mucianus took longer. Vespasian stayed in Egypt in control of corn supplies to the capital. Vitellius had plenty of men and could have made an early stand. However, his inertia, Valens' illness and Caecina's treachery were to weaken his position.

- Under Antonius Primus, the Danubian legions entered northern Italy. A rebellion had been organised along the Rhine to keep Vitellius' forces there busy.
- Caecina persuaded the Adriatic fleet to go over to Vespasian but he failed to persuade the army and his men arrested him. Now led by their chosen officers, Vitellius' forces faced those of Primus on 24 October at the Second Battle of Cremona. It was another very bloody affair. Vitellius' army was virtually destroyed and Cremona was burned down, merely the worst of the pillaging that had been a feature of the year AD 69.
- Valens tried to make his way to the Rhine armies but he was captured and executed by Primus.
- By December, Primus' forces were near Rome and Vitellius agreed to negotiate with Flavius Sabinus. Sabinus was Vespasian's brother but had been allowed to keep his position as the Urban Prefect. Vitellius agreed to abdicate and retire to a comfortable country life but his men refused to allow him to do this.
- The Flavian forces attacked the capital but were repulsed and they took refuge on the Capitol. In a violent attack, Sabinus and other Flavian leaders were killed and the temple was destroyed. Vespasian's younger son, Domitian, escaped.
- No negotiation was now possible as Primus' forces entered Rome on 20 December. After much bloody fighting, Vitellius was killed. The senate promptly granted Vespasian imperial power and Domitian took the role of vice-regent. However, this did not stop Primus' Danubian troops from running amok for several days.

¹¹ Suetonius, Otho, 9

Once Mucianus reached Rome, he took over from Domitian, ordered the Danubian troops back to their frontier stations and prepared the ground for Vespasian's arrival. Primus was quickly isolated and never played a political role again.¹² Mucianus also saw to it that several possible 'imperial candidates' were quickly put to death. Vespasian entered Rome in the summer of AD 70.

The powers granted to Vespasian by the senate on 22 December were listed in the Lex de Imperia Vespasian.

*"...(This was) the earliest known example of the imperial powers and prerogatives being conferred en bloc. They included an unlimited power of commendatio¹³."*¹⁴

What do the historians have to say about "The death of Nero and the Year of the Four Emperors: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian"?

1. David Shotter: Nero

Shotter has a pretty poor opinion of Galba's abilities (as does Tacitus). He tried to enforce an old fashioned morality on his people yet allowed inefficiency and corruption to flourish. He allowed favourites to do what they wanted while enforcing severe punishments on his opponents. He feared any possible opposition and would remove able men and replace them with mediocrities that provided no threat to his position. He failed to adequately court the Praetorian Guard.

*"...Galba proved to be a martinet, with old-fashioned ideas of probity, but ironically totally unable to exercise any control over his closest entourage...His attitude to his opponents was little short of paranoia..."*¹⁵

2. H H Scullard: From the Gracchi to Nero

Scullard concludes that though the promise of Nero's early years had been unfulfilled, and though he became hated for his tyranny and open absolutism, his death did not solve Rome's problems as the lack of an heir *"undermined the hereditary principle of succession"*. It took the efforts of the armies of the Danube and the east to solve this, temporarily at least, and vindicate Vespasian's claims. The rule of the Flavian emperors moved Rome further along the road to absolutism but at least Rome had sound and stable government.

*"...Since he had two sons, Titus and Domitian, Rome might look forward to a period of peace in which the succession would not again be contested in bitter civil war, and in fact the new dynasty of the three Flavian emperors served Rome well."*¹⁶

¹² Wiedemann argues that Primus had "not so much led his army in support of Vespasian, as against Vitellius." (p 80)

¹³ The right of the emperor to 'commend' people for public office. Even Augustus had only used this power for minor offices.

¹⁴ Salmon, E T, A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138, Methuen and Co, London, 1970, p 210

¹⁵ Shotter, D, Nero, Routledge, London, 1997, p 71

¹⁶ Scullard, H H, From the Gracchi to Nero, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 332

Exercise 30.1

Place the following events in the correct chronological order.

The murder of Galba	1st event	
Nero's trip to Greece	2nd event	
Suicide of Otho	3rd event	
2nd Battle of Cremona	4th event	
Vespasian enters Rome	5th event	
Revolt of Vindex	6th event	
Death of Nero	7th event	
Battle of Bedriacum	8th event	
Lex de Imperia Vespasian	9th event	
Rhine armies refuse allegiance oath to Galba	10th event	

Exercise 30.2

Match the description on the left with the personality in the box below.

1	He was one of Vitellius' leading generals	
2	He was adopted by Galba in January AD 69	
3	Governor of Syria who supported Vespasian	
4	The Urban Prefect and brother of Vespasian, killed in December AD 69	
5	He led the revolt against Nero from Gaul in March AD 68	
6	The armies along the Rhine saluted him as emperor on 3 January AD 69	
7	He led the Danubian legions against the forces of Vitellius	
8	Governor of Hispania Tarraconensis who became emperor after Nero	
9	He was the first of the Flavian emperors	
10	He succeeded Galba as emperor and ruled for only 95 days	

C JULIUS VINDEX	GALBA	LUCIUS CALPURNIUS PISO	
VITELLIUS	FABIUS VALENS	MUCIANUS	VESPASIAN
ANTONIUS PRIMUS	FLAVIUS SABINUS	OTHO	

Chapter 31:

The consequences of the death of Nero

The failure of Nero

With hindsight, it is not difficult to isolate the factors that explain the failure of Nero as emperor. During the *quinquennium Neronis*, Rome had been ably ruled, thanks in large part to the influence of Seneca and Burrus. Though Nero preferred to indulge himself in artistic and 'other' activities, his ventures into government were often thoughtful. Suetonius comments on his care in legal affairs and Shotton is full of praise for Nero's provincial policy.

However, from the early 60s AD onwards, things changed dramatically.

- The murder of Agrippina in AD 59 removed a key restraint on his behaviour.
- Burrus died in AD 62 and was replaced by Tigellinus. Tigellinus encouraged Nero's excesses and put in place a virtual police state that both intimidated opponents and created hatred for the regime.
- The wise and steady hand of Seneca disappeared as he retired from public affairs. Seneca would be forced to commit suicide in AD 65.
- Poppaea Sabina was able to influence Nero, seen most clearly in the treatment that was meted out to Octavia.
- As Nero began to indulge himself ever more in music, poetry and Greek games, the affairs of state were allowed to slide.¹ Nero may not have been fiddling when Rome burned in AD 64, but metaphorically that is exactly what he was doing when he spent a year in Greece in AD 67 'competing'.

*"...amid his artistic triumphs and joys he failed to heed the fact that Judaea was in revolt and, more serious still, that the whole basis of his power in the west was threatened."*²

Nero's megalomania encouraged him to seek to create an eastern style absolutist regime. This angered traditionalists in Rome, in the same way that Gaius earlier had angered them. However, such a policy had little chance of success for the simple fact that Nero was a man of mediocre political ability.

*"...An absolutist policy ill becomes a weakling, and such Nero was...the cowardice with which he met his end stamped him as an imperial charlatan. His reign no doubt accelerated the trend of the principate towards autocracy, but its more irresponsible and unbridled features perished with him."*³

Nero's greatest failing, at least in terms of maintaining political power, was his complete lack of interest in the army.

- The power of the principate ultimately rested on the loyalty of the legions to the emperor.
 - Augustus had realised this which is why he ensured his control of the more troublesome provinces, and hence control of most of Rome's legions. The senate was given the quieter provinces which required fewer legions.

¹ Students of Modern History who have studied the Conflict in Indochina might see a parallel here with the antics of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia in the 1960s.

² Scullard, H H, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, Methuen and Co, London, 1973, p 323

³ Salmon, E T, *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138*, Methuen and Co, London, 1970, p 189

- Tiberius did not give in to the mutineers following his accession, but he listened and soon put in place improvements.
- From Gaius onwards, emperors were wise enough to offer donatives to the members of the Praetorian Guard.
- Claudius had given the army the opportunity to prosper in Britain.
- Nero on the other hand never visited the troops; he made no attempt to cultivate the army and consequently never earned their respect or loyalty.
 - Tiberius may have been a morose, grim person but he had earned the respect of Rome's legions. This could not be said about Nero.
 - Nero compounded the issue by his treatment of the army's best, eg the forced suicide of Corbulo.
- When the system began to break down in AD 68, the troops eagerly encouraged their commanders to march on Rome. Following his suppression of Vindex's revolt by the troops of L Verginius Rufus at the Battle of Vesontio, Rufus was encouraged by his men to assume the leadership of Rome. Rufus declined but soon after Galba did not.

Ultimately, any form of political power rests on control and support of a nation's military forces.

The significance of Nero's demise

The most obvious point about Nero's demise is that it heralded the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and within eighteen months would see the beginning of a new one (the Flavians AD 69-96). However, why should Nero's fall have heralded this development? The section above outlines some reasons why Nero lost power. However, why did his fall mean the end of the dynasty?

The answer lies in the nature of the system that Augustus had put in place. Before Augustus, Rome had experienced a century of bloody civil war, which came to end at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. However, ending war is one thing, maintaining peace is something else. Augustus understood that certain things were necessary to ensure long-term peace. Though he was conservative, and a respecter of Rome's traditions, Augustus understood the need for a new system.⁴

- Above all, the princeps must be in control of Rome's legions.
 - This is why he divided the empire into imperial and senatorial provinces. He took control of the troublesome regions which needed the most troops; the senate had the quieter areas.
 - Consequently, he had control of most of the legions.
 - During the latter days of the republic, individual commanders – such as Caesar, Pompey, Antony – could rely on the loyalty of their men to fight for them.
- However, the system of the principate requires a man at the top who is respected, strong and decisive. This was Augustus and certainly Tiberius. It was not Nero.
 - If a system is to have power concentrated at the top, it needs a capable man to wield that power. The system is only as strong as its leader.
- To avoid further civil war, Augustus realised that his successor had to come from his family, from the domus caesaris. The word 'king' was not a popular one in Rome, but a monarchy is what Augustus had effectively put in place.

⁴ Historians have long debated whether Augustus was systematically putting in a new regime. More likely his system evolved, and it is with hindsight that we can see how the Augustan regime was different.

- His lengthy search for a successor, ending finally and reluctantly with Tiberius, proved this.
- The system also needed orderly changes of leadership.
 - When Augustus died, Livia ensured a smooth transition to Tiberius, making sure that he was in possession of the domus.
 - The Praetorian Guard ensured Gaius' accession.
 - Even Claudius accession was achieved easily, considering what had preceded it.
 - The transition from Claudius to Nero was smooth, thanks to Agrippina's earlier work and Burrus' influence over the Guard.

However, Nero lacked a successor. This vacuum gave the generals their chance to make a move for power. The bad old days of the Republic, when politics was determined by the strength of one's legions had returned. Thankfully, the issue was decided in a relatively short period of time.

The events of AD 69 also proved something new. Leadership of the empire no longer had to be decided inside Rome. The leader did not have to be a Julio-Claudian ruling with the backing of the Praetorian Guard. The ruler could be anyone who had a provincial army to back up a claim to power. Galba was governor in Spain, Otho in Lusitania, Vitellius in Germany and Vespasian in Judaea. Tacitus summed this up succinctly when he wrote:

*"...the secret of empire was revealed: an Emperor could be made elsewhere than at Rome..."*⁵

Even then, any military commander also needed strong personal qualities. He had to be firm and disciplined, yet also show himself to be constructive and conciliatory in victory.⁶

- Galba lacked these traits.
- Otho understood them but lacked the backing needed to implement them.
- Vitellius was so self-indulgent he probably never even thought about such things.
- Vespasian showed a willingness to enact significant change where it was needed.

*"...He saw the need too of the reconstruction and conciliation that had characterised Augustus after Actium."*⁷

Equally important was Vespasian's creation of the image that he was creating a new dynasty. He quickly issued coins in the names of his sons. The system now had the two things it needed which Nero could not provide: sound, wise leadership and provision for an orderly succession.

⁵ Tacitus, Histories, I, 4,2

⁶ Winston Churchill later put it this way: "In war: Resolution, In defeat: defiance, In Victory: magnanimity, In Peace: Goodwill".

⁷ Shotter, D, Nero, Routledge, London, 1997, p 82

Exercise 31.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE for each of the following statements.

1	In the AD 60s, Nero had proven himself to an effective and successful administrator.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	Nero failed to cultivate the loyalty of Rome's legions.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	Augustus had sought to keep the control of the legions in the hands of the princeps.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	It was necessary to select the new princeps from the domus caesaris to prevent the possibility of renewed civil war.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	The transition from one emperor to another was never achieved easily during the Julio-Claudian period.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	Nero's failure to make provision for a successor was not a matter of particular significance.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	The events of AD 69 proved that Rome's leadership could be decided outside of Rome.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	Vespasian proved that he had the qualities that were needed to restore peace and stability to Rome.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	Vespasian did not have any special plans put in place regarding the succession.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	Tacitus deals thoroughly with Nero's suicide and the Year of the Four Emperors in his Annals of Imperial Rome.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

Responding to HSC questions on The Julio-Claudians AD 14-69

The purpose of this section is to provide some ideas on answering the types of questions which might be asked in the HSC. These outlines are not presented as the 'be all and end all' responses to these questions. To provide a sense of reality to this section, what follows is a 'first draft response' to each question, ie what were the first ideas that came into the author's head as he thought about each question?

Questions might be asked on any of the following areas:

- An analysis of the rule of a particular emperor. Such a question might seek a judgment about the degree of success achieved by an emperor. ¹
- The impact of Julio-Claudian rule on a particular aspect of Roman political life, eg relations between emperor and senate, provincial policy. ²
- A comparison might be sought about an issue between emperors, eg Tiberius and Claudius in the area of frontier and provincial policy. ³
- The role of the Praetorian Guard throughout the period. ⁴
- The issue of the succession during the Julio-Claudian period. ⁵
- Issues surrounding the Year of the Four Emperors. ⁶

Indeed, students should be aware that questions can be posed on any aspect of the topics indicated in the HSC syllabus for Ancient History.

Question No 1

“To what extent was Tiberius a successful ruler?”

This is a fairly straightforward question but it does contain some traps about which students need to be aware.

- The unwary student might be tempted to simply launch into a detailed description and pour out all the information he/she knows about Tiberius. He/she might describe relations with the senate, frontier and provincial policy and the impact of various individuals such as Sejanus. Alternatively, he/she might decide to provide a detailed narrative, starting with the hesitant acceptance of power, moving on to the mutinies, Germanicus, Sejanus and the 'reign of terror' and Gaius' accession.
 - Such an approach is to be avoided.
 - A response like this would get credit for its detail, but it is not answering the question.
 - The term “to what extent” is expecting an analysis and a judgment.
- The term “successful” needs to be defined carefully. What criteria should be used to judge the success or otherwise of a Julio-Claudian ruler?

1 See the HSC questions for 2012, 2011, 2009, 2007 and 2006

2 See the HSC questions since 2012

3 See the HSC question for 2008

4 See the HSC question for 2008

5 See the HSC question for 2007

6 See the HSC question for 2006

- Is success managing to stay in power for a long time?
- Is it maintaining a working relationship with the senate?
- Is it keeping the empire secure and quiet?
- Is it maintaining things as Augustus had?
- Also, what does the phrase “to what extent mean”? No government in history has ever been successful in everything it has tried to do.
 - Perhaps, Tiberius could be deemed to be successful in some areas but to have failed in others.
 - Is the extent of Tiberius’ success to be measured in the degree to which he achieved his aims?
- A key element in writing Ancient History essays is providing evidence from the sources to support any ideas that are being presented. This question might use Tacitus and Suetonius, and also modern sources such as Levick.
 - However, better students do not simply throw in references to Tacitus, either a direct quotation or a paraphrase.
 - They attempt to evaluate the reliability of the sources used, eg any reference to Tacitus needs to be qualified by the stance from which Tacitus is coming.
 - Reference to modern sources, which often contradict the ancient writers, need to be backed up with a brief explanation on why the modern source disagrees with the ancient source.
 - Equally, students should not “name drop” for the sake of it. Be sure to provide solid factual detail to back up your ideas as well as any reference to the sources.
 - Reference to archaeological or numismatic evidence often can add much to a response.

Be sure to provide an introduction which attempts to outline the argument that is being presented. Though the sources present Tiberius as either a ruthless despot or depraved, his record as ruler of Rome is impressive. He maintained the Augustan line on the frontier and ensured sound provincial administration; his economic policy was sound and avoided wasteful expenditure; and he did his best to ensure a working relationship with the senate. However, Tiberius’ rule was marred by failure to control Sejanus and his propensity to allow bitter personal feelings to colour his decisions. His absence from Rome for the last eleven years of his reign only served to worsen the political situation.

- Refer to Augustus’ advice on the empire and show how Tiberius succeeded in continuing with this:
 - he prevented adventures in Germany, holding Germanicus in check;
 - his eventual success in dealing with Tacfarinas in North Africa; and
 - his dealing with revolts in Gaul and maintaining reasonable relations with Parthia in the east.
- Discuss Tiberius domestic policies relating to finances, building and social policies:
 - comment on Tiberius’ frugality, his lack of a need to court public support with expensive games;
 - Tiberius did not engage in costly building, preferring to merely finish what had already been started;

- end result: Gaius inherited an extremely healthy treasury when he became emperor;
- His successful conservative approach to governing was also reflected in his religious policies and refusal to be flattered.
- Though Tiberius did become frustrated with the lack of initiative on the part of the senate (*men fit to be slaves*), he did establish a reasonable working relationship with it:
 - argue that at the start of his reign he was sincere in seeking senate assistance in running the empire; and
 - provide evidence of his respect for and cooperation with the senate.
- However, to a significant extent Tiberius' rule was not a success and indeed could be described as a disaster, particularly if Tacitus and Suetonius are to be believed:
 - comment on the growing power of Sejanus and the Praetorian Guard;
 - make reference to the dynastic issues going on all around Tiberius – his son Drusus, Livilla, Agrippina and her family;
 - Sejanus finally falls but was Macro any better?
 - make reference to Tacitus' 'reign of terror' idea (but evaluate it in the light of Walker's evidence); and
 - refer to Tiberius on Caprae.

Conclude by making the point that though there were problems with Tiberius' rule, particularly later on, the view of the ancient writers who seek to demonise Tiberius and his rule has to be greatly qualified as Tiberius had achieved significant success in several major fields of administration.

Question No 2

“Why were relations between the emperor and the senate so difficult?”

This question is presupposing that relations between princeps and senate were difficult. It is often a good strategy to challenge the assumption made in a question, but on this occasion most students would probably accept the underlying assumption of the question.⁷

- This question also has traps of which students need to be aware.
 - Avoid simply providing a narrative of the relations between princeps and senate from the time of Tiberius' accession to Nero's death.
 - Do not simply tell a story from Tiberius' early hesitancy in AD 14, to the treason trials, Gaius' ridiculing of the house, Claudius' reliance on his freedmen to Nero and the Pisonian Conspiracy.
 - These things need to be mentioned but not simply as a straight narrative.
- The key word in the question is “why”.
 - A straight narrative response is not going to get to the ‘why’ part of the question. At best a student might ‘accidentally’ provide some reasons.
 - Specific reasons for the difficult relations need to be established, not merely a run through showing that the relations were difficult.

⁷ Students of Extension History are advised that it is often a good strategy to challenge ideas presented in the source provided for Question 1.

- Another issue with this question concerns structure.
 - Should the question be dealt with “emperor by emperor”, and in doing so attempt to show why each emperor’s relations with the senate were so difficult?
 - Or would it be better to isolate several factors that explain the difficulty across the whole period and illustrate each factor with reference to each emperor?
 - There is no right or wrong way of attempting this question. For the purposes of examining this question, the second approach will be examined.
- Each emperor, initially at first, sought a cooperative relationship with the senate. However, this relationship was always going to be bedevilled by the fact that the real power in Rome lay with the emperor. As time was to show, senate hesitancy was often wise. The relationship was further affected by the growing influence of the Praetorian Guard, and the growing influence of individuals close to the emperor. Finally, the relationship often proved difficult due to the personality of the individual emperor.
- In his *Res Gestae*, Augustus had stated that he handed power back to the senate and people of Rome, and that he excelled all others only in *auctoritas*. This of course was not true.
 - Discuss the nature of the principate – look at *maius imperium*, *tribunician potestas* and *consular imperium*, plus Augustus’ role as censor at times.
 - Thus, even before Tiberius, the real power in Rome was with the princeps and the senate knew this. The senate had grown used to not challenging an emperor backed by Rome’s legions.
 - Tiberius might seek cooperation but forty years of Augustan rule had changed the senate. It looked to the emperor for guidance and signs, it was not the independent body it had been in centuries before.
 - Perhaps refer to Levick’s comments on the indivisibility of power. The institutionalised nature of the principate meant that the relationship between emperor and senate was always going to be problematical, especially as imperial power became more embedded as time went on.
- Under the Julio-Claudians, power was becoming concentrated in groups and individuals close to the emperor. Experience would show that it was not wise to challenge to these groups or at best was fruitless. The senate was becoming increasingly marginalised.
 - The Praetorian Guard was becoming more significant and having the power to determine the process of government. Refer to the activities of Sejanus, Macro and Tigellinus.
 - The Guard was becoming decisive in the issue of the succession as seen in the accession of Gaius, Claudius and Nero.
 - Imperial freedmen close to the emperor were deciding policies rather than an independent senate, refer to Pallas and Narcissus during Claudius’ reign. Under Nero the senate realised that it was Seneca and later Tigellinus who were most influential.
 - Under Claudius, his wives had a major impact on the relationship with the senate, though, arguably, the influence of Agrippina was to improve the emperor-senate relationship.
- Ultimately, the relationship with the senate was made more difficult by the personality of the individual emperor.
 - Tiberius might have been genuine about seeking the senate’s help but his grim, morose and dissimulative nature caused the senate to be wary of him. The situation between Tiberius and the senate only worsened as Sejanus became more influential and Tiberius left for Caprae.

- Gaius' bizarre behaviour caused fear amongst senators whose most sensible course of action under his rule was to keep a low profile.
- Like Tiberius, Claudius sought a working relationship with the senate and his knowledge of history bred in him respect for the senate. However, the relationship of emperor and senate would be affected by the presence of the freedmen and his wives (use Tacitus here). The fact that 35 senators were executed following trials *intra cubiculum principis* did not help things.
- Nero's relations with the senate started well, thanks to the influence of Seneca and Burrus, but once Nero took control himself by the early 60s AD, the relationship crumbled. By AD 65, the senate was behind a full scale conspiracy to remove Nero.
- Thus, the relationship between emperor and senate proved to be difficult due to the nature of the principate that Augustus had put in place, the growing influence of groups and individuals around the emperor and the personality of the individual emperors.

Question No 3

"Why did Rome have four emperors in AD 69?"

A question on this area has been set only once for the HSC.⁸ The question seems quite straightforward, and it is. However, that in itself should make students wary of the possible pitfalls with this question.

- The Year AD 69 is extremely complicated, hardly a surprise as the Roman Empire had four rulers during this twelve months. Students must therefore be very clear on the narrative of the year. An important part of a student's revision must be to isolate the key events from Galba to Vespasian, without becoming bogged down with an excess of detail.
- However, though students need to be fully versed on the narrative, it would be a mistake to simply provide a narrative response. The key word in the question is "why". Thus, an argument has to be provided in response to the question, not simply a narration.
- Another issue is 'how far back should a response go?' The question is not only about the Year AD 69, but also about the impact of Nero's rule, and the broader nature of the system put in place by Augustus a century before.
- Nero's demise in AD 68 left a vacuum of power in Rome. The Augustan system for all its cleverness, ultimately relied upon the individual, and the likelihood of an orderly succession from one princeps to another. Nero failed as a ruler and in providing a successor, but he was arguably more a symptom of the system's failure rather than its root cause. Once the system broke down, Rome's fate rested with individual commanders and the loyalty of their legions in the provinces. The fate of Rome in AD 69 would then be determined by brute force.
- Before Augustus, Rome had experienced a century of bloody civil war. Augustus' achievement was to bring this to an end, establish a system which allowed him to maintain control of the legions and so prevent further conflict while satisfying the main interest groups in Rome, primarily the senate.
 - Give a brief outline of the Augustan system – maius imperium, tribunician potestas etc.
 - Power in Rome now became concentrated in the domus Caesaris. This had two main implications:
 - The holder of that power had to be a capable ruler who had the respect and loyalty of the legions;

⁸ Go the Board of Studies website (<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/>) and check the Ancient History HSC paper for 2006. The examiners' note for that year stated that students answered this question poorly, many believing that the Julio-Claudians were in power throughout the year.

- As power was in the domus Caesaris, it would have to pass to a member of that domus, for if this did not happen, Rome would revert to its pre-Augustan days of civil war.
- Augustus and Tiberius had been excellent rulers. Gaius' brief tenure was not enough to damage the system and Claudius' rule was also effective. Rome during the *quinquennium Neronis* was ably administered by Seneca and Burrus.
- Nero's later years showed him incompetent, he lost the respect of all groups in Rome and most importantly of the legions for whom he had no interest. Once the support of the legions was gone, the system could not work.
- The Augustan system also needed as orderly a succession as was possible. Show how this had been achieved before and that Nero's failure to provide an heir proved fatal to the system.
- Nero's suicide in June AD 68 left a vacuum of power. He had no base of support, even the Praetorian Guard had deserted him. There was no heir. Thus, Rome's fate now rested with individual commanders and their loyal troops. Military skill, the willingness to employ bloody tactics and the personality of the leaders now determined the course of AD 69.
 - It is here that some narrative detail is required but be sure to try and integrate the detail with the argument.
 - Refer to Galba, his bloody arrival in Italy and his personal failings which caused opposition in Rome. Galba tried unsuccessfully to deal with the issue of succession but was murdered in January AD 69.
 - Otho's rule was brief and he suffered immediately from not having the loyalty of the troops on the Rhine. His failure at the Battle of Cremona and his self-sacrificing suicide ended his brief tenure in power.
 - Vitellius had able commanders but his major personality defects and failure to control his men made his brief rule unpopular. Detail his failure leading to his death in December AD 69.
- Vespasian's ultimate success was due to several factors. He soon had fourteen legions swearing allegiance to him, he had the respect of his men and the support of able supporters like Mucianus.
- Vespasian also had two sons – Titus and Domitian – and so once in power the issue of succession was settled.
- The Year AD 69 had four emperors because the Augustan system had broken down due to its two fundamental weaknesses. It was a system that required a strong capable ruler and, because power was concentrated in the domus Caesaris, an orderly succession was needed. Neither of these things were in place under Nero. The Year AD 69 was then at the mercy of individual commanders, their abilities and the respect and loyalty that they could earn from their men.

Timeline

BC

- 31 – Augustus victorious in the Battle of Actium
- 27 – Augustan Settlement of 27 BC
- 23 – Augustan Settlement of 23 BC

AD

- 4 – Augustus chooses Tiberius as his successor
- 9 – The Varan disaster
- 14 – Death of Augustus
Accession of Tiberius/ mutinies in Germany, Pannonia
- 19 – Death of Germanicus
- 20s – Revolt in North Africa led by Tacfarinas
- 23 – Tiberius' son, Drusus, poisoned by Livilla and Sejanus
- 26 – Tiberius retires to Caprae
- 29 – Death of Livia/ Nero (son of Agrippina the Elder) commits suicide
- 31 – Execution of Sejanus/ Macro appointed Praetorian Prefect
- 33 – Death of Drusus and his mother Agrippina the Elder
- 37 – Death of Tiberius/ accession of Gaius
Gaius suffers a psychological illness
Birth of Nero
- 38 – Death of Drusilla
- 39 – Conspiracy of Lepidus/ Gaius
- 40 – Gaius' planned "invasion" of Britain
- 41 – Assassination of Gaius
Praetorian Guard choose Claudius as emperor/ exile of Seneca
- 42 – Revolt in Dalmatia is defeated
- 43 – Invasion of Britain
- 47 – The Secular Games
- 48 – Messalina "marries" Gaius Silius/ Execution of Messalina
- 49 – Claudius and Agrippina (the Younger) marry/ Seneca recalled to Rome

- 50 – Claudius adopts Nero
- 51 – Burrus appointed Praetorian Prefect
- 53 – Nero and Octavia marry
- 54 – Death of Claudius/ accession of Nero
- 55 – Death of Britannicus
- 59 – Murder of Agrippina
- 61 – The Boudiccan Revolt
- 62 – Death of Burrus/ retirement of Seneca/ Tigellinus Praetorian Prefect
Death of Octavia/ Nero marries Poppaea Sabina
Birth of Claudia Augusta
- 64 – Great Fire of Rome
- 65 – The Pisonian Conspiracy/ death of Seneca
- 66 – Death of Corbulo/ death of Poppaea Sabina
Nero marries Statilia Messalina
The Jewish Revolt
- 67 – Nero tours Greece
- 68 – Vindex rising in Gaul/ death of Nero
Galba takes power
- 69 – Galba assassinated/ Otho takes power
Otho defeated at the Battle of Cremona/ Otho commits suicide
Vitellius briefly emperor in Rome
Danubian legions enter Italy/ Second Battle of Cremona
Vitellius overthrown and killed
Senate confers imperial power on Vespasian

Glossary

aedile	magistrate in charge of games and urban services
aerarium	treasury
assimilation	process of provincials becoming Romanised
Auctoritas	prestige and influence
censor	regulated senate membership
Civic crown	military decoration given for saving a citizen's life
Consular imperium	power of a consul
cursus honorum	ladder of office politicians climb as they get older
delatores	informers
Divi filius	son of a god
Domus Caesaris	house of Caesar
druidism	ancient religion practised in Celtic regions
equestrians	social order below the senatorial order
equites	see equestrian order
haruspicy	divining the future from examining animals' entrails
imperator	commander
imperial cult	divine sanction attributed to an emperor, worshipping of an emperor as a god (in the east)
imperium	authority
intra cubiculum principis	scene of emperor's private trials, "in the princeps' bedroom"
Maiestas	treason
Maius imperium	the princeps' greater authority
Ostia	Rome's port
Pater patriae	father of the country
philhellene	sympathy for things Greek
pietas	piety, respect for the gods
pomerium	sacred boundary of Rome
pontifex maximus	chief priest of Rome
Possessio	possession of
Praetorian Guard	elite military force in Rome and Italy supporting the emperor
Praetorian Prefect	in charge of the Praetorian Guard
Princeps	first citizen, title used by early emperors
princeps iuventutis	prince of youth
quinquennium Neronis	term describing the five years of good rule during Nero's reign
Res Gestae	(literally 'things done') Augustus' brief autobiography
senatus consultum	senate decree, has the force of law
socius laborum	partner of my labours
tribune	officials originally elected by Plebeians to protect their rights against Patricians
Tribunicia potestas	authority of a tribune, emphasised by Augustus as his real power
turmae	cavalry unit of the Praetorian Guard

Dramatis Personae

Acte	former slave girl, lover of Nero
Aelia Paetina	second wife of Claudius
Agrippa	leading Augustan general, husband of Julia 1
Agrippa Postumus	son of Julia 1 and Agrippa, murdered AD 14
Agrippina the Elder	wife of Germanicus, granddaughter of Augustus
Agrippina the Younger	wife of emperor Claudius, son of emperor Nero
Amminius	British chieftain loyal to Rome
Antonia	mother of Claudius, wife of Drusus
Antonius Primus	commander of Danubian legions, AD 69
Appius Iunius Silanus	victim of Messalina during Claudius' reign
Augustus	ruler of Rome 31 BC-AD 14
Boudicca	Queen of the Iceni
Brittanicus	son of Claudius and Messalina
Burrus	Praetorian Prefect AD 51-62
Caecina Alienus	Rhine commander, supporter of Vitellius
Callistus	freedman of Claudius
Caractacus	British chieftain, pardoned by Claudius
Cassius Chaerea	assassin of Gaius
Claudius	emperor AD 41-54
D Valerius Asiaticus	consul, a victim of Messalina during Claudius' reign
Dio Cassius	Roman author, late 2nd/ early 3rd century AD
Domitius Corbulo	Roman general, forced to suicide by Nero AD 67
Drusilla	sister of Gaius
Drusus	son of Tiberius, father of Gemellus
Ennia	wife of Macro
Fabius Valens	Rhine commander, supporter of Vitellius
Faenius Rufus	Praetorian Prefect under Nero, AD 62-65
Flavius Sabinus	brother of Vespasian, Urban Prefect AD 69
Gaetulicus	involved in the plot against Gaius AD 39
Gaius	emperor of Rome AD 37-41
Gaius Silius	married Messalina in a 'bacchic' ceremony
Galba	emperor between Nero and Otho, AD 68-69
Germanicus	son of Tiberius' brother, Drusus, died mysteriously AD 19
Halotus	involved in poison attempt on Claudius, AD 54
Helius	freedman of Nero
Herod Agrippa	client ruler of Judaea
Incitatus	Gaius' horse
Julia 1	daughter of Augustus
L Iunius Silanus	formerly betrothed to Claudius' daughter, Octavia
Lepidus	involved in plot against Gaius AD 39
Livia	third wife of Augustus
Lucius Calpurnius Piso	Galba's choice of successor
Lucius Vitellius	secured law allowing Claudius to marry his niece
Lusius Geta	Praetorian Prefect under Claudius

Macro	Praetorian Prefect after Sejanus
Messalina	third wife of Claudius, executed AD 48
Milonia Caesonia	wife of Gaius
Mucianus	Governor of Syria, supporter of Vespasian
Narcissus	freedman of Claudius
Nero	emperor of Rome AD 54-68
Octavia	daughter of Claudius, wife of Nero
Otho	emperor between Galba and Vitellius, AD 69
Pallas	freedman of Claudius
Petronius	author of Satyricon, died AD 66
Philo	Jewish writer, historian
Piso (2)	figurehead leader of plot against Nero AD 65
Piso (1)	accompanied Germanicus east, suspected of killing him
Plautia Urgulanilla	first wife of Claudius
Polybius	freedman of Claudius
Poppaea Sabina	second wife of Nero
Prasutagus	King of the Icenii
Ptolemy	client king of Mauretania
Rufrius Crispinus	Praetorian Prefect under Claudius
Scribonianus	attempted a revolt against Claudius AD 42
Sejanus	prefect of Praetorian Guard under Tiberius
Seneca	effectively ran Rome with Burrus during first half of Nero's reign
Statilia Messalina	third wife of Nero
Suetonius	author of The Twelve Caesars
Tacfarinas	rebel commander in Africa in AD 20s
Tacitus	author of The Annals of Imperial Rome
Tiberius	emperor of Rome AD 14-37
Tiberius Gemellus	grandson of Tiberius, killed by Gaius
Tigellinus	Praetorian Prefect under Nero, AD 62-68
Trajan	emperor of Rome, AD 98-117
Varus	defeated general who lost three legions in Germany, AD 9
Verginius Rufus	Rhine commanders, AD 60s
Vespasian	emperor of Rome AD 69-79
Vindex	led the Gallic revolt against Nero, March AD 68
Vipsania	former wife of Tiberius
Vitellius	emperor between Otho and Vespasian, AD 69
Xenophon	Claudius' doctor

Ancient and Modern sources

Given the time, we would all like to immerse ourselves in the ancient texts and the modern interpretations that relate to the Julio-Claudians. However, students studying this topic for the HSC have only limited time – there are in fact subjects other than Ancient History. Teachers teaching this topic are burdened down with a plethora of administrative tasks and duties which prevent us from reading more widely than we would like. With this in mind, what follows is a list of sources, many of which have been referred to throughout this book.

NB: This list of sources is not meant to be exhaustive, or the most important. It comprises sources which are accessible, in the author's view reliable, and provide enough for a HSC student to extend their studies. The emphasis here is on what can be easily located and mastered by most students.

Ancient Sources:

Suetonius: *The Twelve Caesars*

- The chapters on Tiberius/ Gaius/ Claudius and Nero are easy to read and are referred to by all secondary writers on this period. Suetonius might not pass the test of rigorous scholarship which is demanded of historians today, and some of his later sections read more like the tabloid press than a hefty historical record. However, it is still a valuable read for all students of the period. Students can also refer to the briefer chapters on Galba, Otho, Vitellius and the early part of Vespasian.

Tacitus: *The Annals of Imperial Rome + The Histories*

- Tacitus is a major resource for any student of the Julio-Claudian period. Tacitus had few illusions of the reality of the nature of power under Augustus, and he had no love of the principate or of the Julio-Claudian emperors. So, be aware of his pro-republican sentiments. The final part of the course – the Year of the Four Emperors – is covered in the early part of Tacitus' work *The Histories*.

If time allowed, it would be nice to be able to dip into Josephus, Philo, Velleius Paterculus and Dio Cassius. Perhaps teachers could suggest specific references for their students.

Archaeological sources:

Archaeological evidence from the time, be it major structures, art works, statues or coins, offer insight into the period. Wiedemann and Grant (see below) are particularly valuable in this regard. A 'careful' use of the internet can provide much archaeological and numismatic evidence.

Modern Sources:

David Shotter: *Tiberius Caesar* (Routledge, London, 1992)

Shotter is extremely readable and it is brief (less than 100 pages). It provides a good balance of factual detail and analysis, but does assume the reader knows something of the period. It is one of the best straightforward narratives of Tiberius' reign currently available.

Barbara Levick: *Tiberius the Politician* (Thames and Hudson, London, 1976)

Levick is a heavier read than Shotter but for anyone wanting to gain a more in depth understanding of Tiberius' time in power, Levick is an excellent source. She provides a fairly even-handed view of Tiberius, important to have when one relies so much on Tacitus.

Anthony Barrett: *Caligula – The Corruption of Power* (Yale University Press, 1990)

Barrett is extremely detailed. One of the advantages of reading Barrett is that he spends time putting Gaius in context and so the earlier chapters provide a good understanding of the early period. Barrett's research is thorough and he provides a challenging contrast to the view normally accepted from the ancient writers.

Barbara Levick: *Claudius* (B T Batsford Ltd, London, 1990)

As with her book on Tiberius, Levick is exhaustive in her detail and provides an even-handed view of Claudius. This is good for students wishing to gain a more in depth understanding of Claudius.

David Shotter: *Nero* (Routledge, London, 1997)

Shotter's book on Nero comes from the same series as his book on Tiberius (*Lancaster Pamphlets* – highly recommended). Again, this is brief, readable, has good detail but also provides some accessible analysis.

Michael Grant: *Nero – Emperor in Revolt* (American Heritage Press, New York, 1970)

Grant is quite detailed but certainly readable. It has an almost 'coffee table book' feel about it as it is crammed full of great illustrations and photographs. This makes it valuable for students wanting to examine archaeological and numismatic evidence.

Thomas Wiedemann: *The Julio-Claudian Emperors* (Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1989)

Wiedemann is a slender volume – 80 pages. However, it is of great value as it is crammed full of interesting analysis not always found elsewhere. It is excellent on numismatic sources. However, Wiedemann assumes that the reader already has knowledge about the period.

HH Scullard: *From the Gracchi to Nero* (Methuen, London, 1970)

This is an old standard, well known by older Ancient History teachers. It is still an excellent source which covers its period well. Students might find some of the language difficult to handle, but it is almost a case of 'if the factual detail is not in Scullard, don't worry about it'.

ET Salmon: *A History of the Roman World 30 BC-AD 138* (Methuen, London, 1970, Sixth Edition)

Another old text which is probably more readable than Scullard. This is a good text to use to get a mastery of the factual detail of the period. It breaks up the various aspects of the content into straightforward, accessible sections.

M Cary: *A History of Rome* (Macmillan, London, 1954)

Cary's book is very 'old school' and unfashionable. It can be a difficult, dense read. However, it is extremely detailed and if read along with more modern works such as Shotter and Barrett, extremely useful. Many schools would have copies of this (and the later edition with Scullard)

buried deep in their book rooms. Forty years ago this was a standard text on Roman history which nearly all Ancient History students used.

Students who are also studying “Agrippina the Younger” as their personality study, will find works relevant to her career, relevant for much of this period, particularly the reigns of Claudius and Nero. In particular:

Anthony Barrett: *Agrippina* (B T Batsford, London, 1996)

Richard Bauman: *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (Routledge, London, 1970)

Robert Graves: *I, Claudius and Claudius the God* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, (orig) 1934)

Graves’ book is wonderfully entertaining and rich in detail, and he is at pains in his author’s notes to have critics acknowledge the depth of his research. However, it is not always an easy read. It is very detailed on Claudius’ reign and provides an interesting view of Agrippina’s involvement in politics.

Most students will not read Graves, but they will probably watch the BBC TV series “*I, Claudius*” (or ensure their teacher shows a few episodes in class). It is classic television, based on Robert Graves’ books *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the King*.

It leans heavily on Suetonius, and should not be relied upon as ‘the’ version of the Julio-Claudian period. However, it is great viewing! It is easily available on DVD (check the ABC shop) and sometimes on streaming services.

Answers to Revision Exercises

Exercise i.ii

A – Rome; B – Adriatic Sea; C – Greece; D – Pontus; E – Asia Minor; F – Spain; G – Gaul; H – Sardinia; I – Carthage; J – Egypt

Exercise i.ii

1st – The Gauls sack Rome; 2nd – Rome gains control of Italy; 3rd – 2nd Punic war; 4th – Revolt of Spartacus; 5th – The First Triumvirate; 6th – Caesar conquers Gaul; 7th – Assassination of Caesar; 8th – Battle of Actium; 9th – Augustus triumphant in Rome; 10th – Augustus' settlement with Parthia

Exercise 1.1

1 – false; 2 – true; 3 – true; 4 – false; 5 – false; 6 – true; 7 – false; 8 – false; 9 – true; 10 – false

Exercise 2.1

Res Gestae – authority – tribunician – maius – consular – clear-headed – modest – Tacitus – Suetonius – dissimulative – cruel – nostalgic – Republic – depravity – Capri

Exercise 3.1

1 – men fit to be slaves; 2 – Augustus; 3 – three; 4 – election of magistrates; 5 – trials of maiestas; 6 – death of Drusus/ Tiberius' departure for Capri; 7 – his hesitancy/ his cryptic nature; 8 – censorial power; 9 – his inconsistency; 10 – law of maiestas

Exercise 4.1

1 – false; 2 – true; 3 – false; 4 – false; 5 – true; 6 – false; 7 – false; 8 – true; 9 – true; 10 – false

Exercise 5.1

1st – Death of Augustus; 2nd – Sejanus sent to Pannonia; 3rd – Sejanus takes command; 4th – Death of Drusus; 5th – Tiberius goes to Capri; 6th – Trial of Titius Sabinus; 7th – Death of Livia; 8th – Death of Nero; 9th – Arrest of Sejanus; 10th – Macro replaces Sejanus

Exercise 5.2

1 – Delatores; 2 – Maiestas; 3 – Socius Laborum; 4 – Equestrian; 5 – Praetorian Prefect

Exercise 6.1

1 – he accepted it; 2 – Varus lost three legions in Germany; 3 – maius imperium; 4 – uncertain, had been quickly rebuilt after Varus; 5 – Germany, Pannonia; 6 – he opposed it, recalled Germanicus when he could; 7 – Africa; 8 – nationalism, Druidism, economic exploitation; 9 – very, maintained Roman power and influence without warfare; 10 – Pontius Pilate; 11 – never; 12 – perhaps establishing an imperial bureaucracy; keep an eye on them; 13 – tolerated it in the east, stopped it in the west; 14 – building infrastructure, establishing settlements; 15 – earthquakes; 16 – Cyzicus; 17 – Poppaeus Sabinus; 18 – failed to address their just demands on pay and service; 19 – generally positive; 20 – generally favourable even though he speaks against Tiberius whenever he can on other matters

Exercise 7.1

1 – Augustus; 2 – Drusus; 3 – Gaius; 4 – Drusus; 5 – Germanicus; 6 – Livia; 7 – Agrippa; 8 – Antonia; 9 – Julia 1; 10 – Marcellus

Exercise 7.2

1 – false; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – true; 5 – true; 6 – true; 7 – false; 8 – false; 9 – true; 10 – false

Exercise 9.1

1 – Tiberius Gemellus, Claudius, Gaius; 2 – Macro and the Praetorian Guard; 3 – He was his great grandson; 4 – Persecuted by Sejanus and Tiberius to the point of death; 5 – Mad, cruel, sadistic, immoral; 6 – Tacitus' sections on Gaius' reign have been lost; 7 – Ordered to commit suicide; 8 – Anthony Barrett; 9 – His sense of humour; 10 – no.

Exercise 10.1

1 – false; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – true; 5 – true; 6 – false; 7 – true; 8 – false; 9 – true; 10 – false

Exercise 11.1

1 – 2.7 million sesterces; 2 – extravagant, reckless, profligate; 3 – Gaius willing to hand out large gifts to friends and admirers; 4 – paid promptly and in full; 5 – shortage of funds, new taxes needed; 6 – as a means of gaining funds from condemned men; 7 – not as bad as has been traditionally presented; 8 – Augustus, Pompey; 9 – Ephesus; 10 – canal across the Isthmus

Exercise 12.1

1st – Macro replaces Sejanus; 2nd – Gaius and Ennia lovers; 3 – Death of Tiberius; 4th – Payments made to the Guard; 5th – Death of Macro; 6th – Gaius' trip to the Rhine; 7th – Execution of Lepidus; 8th – Banishment of Agrippina; 9th – Murder of Gaius; 10th – Execution of Chaerea

Exercise 13.1

1 – Avillius Flaccus; 2 – Philo; 3 – Cunobelinus; 4 – Polemo II; 5 – Lepidus; 6 – Amminius; 7 – Ptolemy; 8 – Antiochus; 9 – Gaetulicus; 10 – Herod Agrippa

Exercise 14.1

1 – Germanicus; 2 – Agrippina Younger; 3 – Milonia Caesonia; 4 – Julia 1; 5 – Claudius; 6 – Drusilla; 7 – Augustus; 8 – Tiberius Gemellus; 9 – Agrippina Elder; 10 – Antonia

Exercise 16.1

1 – fact; 2 – opinion; 3 – fact; 4 – fact; 5 – opinion; 6 – opinion; 7 – fact; 8 – fact; 9 – opinion; 10 – opinion

Exercise 17.1

1 – false; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – true; 5 – true; 6 – false; 7 – false; 8 – true; 9 – true; 10 – false

Exercise 18.1

1 – Pallas; 2 – hardworking, fair, efficient; 3 – intra cubiculum principis; 4 – tolerant if they posed no threat to Rome; 5 – The Secular Games; 6 – draining of the Fucine Lake; 7 – the port, lighthouse and granaries at Ostia; 8 – Aqua Claudia; 9 – across Italy to the Adriatic; 10 – citizenship

Exercise 19.1

1st – Macro helps Gaius into power; 2nd – Murder of Gaius; 3rd – The Guard declares Claudius emperor; 4th – Execution of Cassius Chaerea; 5th – Attempted revolt of Scribonianus; 6th – Arrest of Asiaticus; 7th – Messalina's "marriage" to Silius; 8th – Claudius marries Agrippina; 9th – Appointment of Burrus; 10th – Burrus presents Nero to the Guard

Exercise 20.1

Caesar – Augustus – expansion – assimilation – client – imperial – Mauretania – Judaea – Thrace – strategic – economic – prestige – politics – colonies – citizenship

Exercise 21.1

1 – Gaius Silius; 2 – Octavia; 3 – Plautia Urgulanilla; 4 – Britannicus; 5 – Lucius Vitellius; 6 – Narcissus; 7 – L Iunius Silanus; 8 – Appius Iunius Silanus; 9 – L Domitius Ahenobarbus; 10 – Nero

Exercise 23.1

1 – true; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – false; 5 – false; 6 – false; 7 – true; 8 – true; 9 – false; 10 – true

Exercise 24.1

1 – Praetorian Guard/ army; 2 – quinquennium Neronis; 3 – secret private trials; 4 – separation of domus and state; 5 – Agrippina, Seneca, Burrus; 6 – Tigellinus, Poppaea Sabina; 7 – Burrus dead, Seneca out of office; 8 – fear, disgust, self-interest; 9 – hesitancy, failure to keep secrets, terror tactics; 10 – not very

Exercise 25.1

1 – true; 2 – false; 3 – false; 4 – false; 5 – true; 6 – true; 7 – false; 8 – false; 9 – true; 10 – false

Exercise 26.1

1st – Claudius allows Tigellinus' return to Rome; 2nd – Removal of Geta and Crispinus; 3rd – Appointment of Burrus; 4th – Praetorian Guard accepts Nero's accession; 5th – Death of Britannicus; 6th – Murder of Agrippina; 7th – Death of Burrus; 8th – Appointment of Faenius Rufus and Ofonius Tigellinus; 9th – Pisonian Conspiracy; 10th – Nymphidius Sabinus declares support for Galba

Exercise 27.1

orator – writer – philosophy – Gaius – Claudius – Agrippina – tutor – praetor – consul – amicus principis – quinquennium Neronis – Nero – immoral – influence – accession – domus – Burrus – Pisonian – suicide – delight

Exercise 28.1

1 – false; 2 – true; 3 – false; 4 – true; 5 – true; 6 – false; 7 – false; 8 – true; 9 – false; 10 – true

Exercise 29.1

1 – Britannicus; 2 – Claudia Augusta; 3 – Poppaea Sabina; 4 – Atticus Vestinus; 5 – Octavia; 6 – Anicetus; 7 – Marcus Junius Silanus; 8 – Statilia Messalina; 9 – Otho; 10 – Antonia

Exercise 30.1

1st – Nero's trip to Greece; 2nd – Revolt of Vindex; 3rd – Death of Nero; 4th – Rhine armies refuse allegiance oath to Galba; 5th – The murder of Galba; 6th – Battle of Bedriacum; 7th – Suicide of Otho; 8th – 2nd Battle of Cremona; 9th – Lex de Imperia Vespasian; 10th – Vespasian enters Rome

Exercise 30.2

1 – Fabius Valens; 2 – Lucius Calpurnius Piso; 3 – Mucianus; 4 – Flavius Sabinus; 5 – C Julius Vindex; 6 – Vitellius; 7 – Antonius Primus; 8 – Galba; 9 – Vespasian; 10 – Otho

Exercise 31.1

1 – false; 2 – true; 3 – true; 4 – true; 5 – false; 6 – false; 7 – true; 8 – true; 9 – false; 10 – false

