"Adoption will Determine the Worthiest Successor": Roman Imperial Adoption

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"ADOPTION WILL DETERMINE THE WORTHIEST SUCCESSOR":

ROMAN IMPERIAL ADOPTION

by

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B.A. December 2005, Louisiana State University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

HISTORY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
August 2009

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ABSTRACT

“ADOPTION WILL DETERMINE THE WORLTHIEST SUCCESSOR”:
ROMAN IMPERIAL ADOPTION

Stephen C. Hebert
Old Dominion University, 2009
Director: Dr. Kathy Pearson

This thesis examines the process by which successors to the Roman Principate were chosen under the Julio-Claudians, Flavians, and Antonine dynasties. Rome extended its hegemony over the Mediterranean and Europe with citizen-farmer legionaries who were loyal to the senate and Roman state. Warfare necessitated the creation of a professional army in which loyalty shifted from that of the state and senate to their respective military commander. Generals such as Sulla and Caesar used their legions to gain power establishing new political precedence from which future ambitious generals built upon, ultimately leading to the end of the Republic and the birth of the Empire.

Military success brought new wealth and territories to the Empire along with a new pervasive feeling of victory culture. Octavian’s victory at Actium in 31 BC left him sole ruler of Rome, supplanting the house of Caesar as Rome’s first imperial family. The formation of the Principate brought new questions never before contemplated; the most important dealt with the problem of how to pass power to an heir and what qualifications and characteristics were most desirable. Augustus envisioned his successor to possess the four virtues of pietas, iustitia, clementia, and virtus as inscribed on the clupeus virtutis. These virtues alone did not solely determine the selection of an heir apparent. The power of the Principate rested upon the ability to possess arcanum imperii. Imperial power was derived from the force and loyalty of the legions at his disposal. Premature
deaths of young heirs instilled Augustus to select an heir by process of adoption. Military commanders were optimal choices as they possessed military leadership which in theory enabled the heir to retain the support of the legions, a necessity for the *arcanum imperii*. Augustus’s successor, Tiberius, detracted from the adoption principle, choosing instead to promote a less competent family member to the Principate. Hereditary succession continued under the accession of the Flavians and was never successfully implemented until the reign of the Antonines in the second century A.D.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first want to thank Dr. Kathy Pearson for her patience and expert guidance throughout the writing process, pushing me to think and write outside the realm of Roman history. I am greatly appreciative of committee members Drs. Michael Carhart and Douglas Greene for the comments and academic advice both in and out of the classroom. I am indebted to the entire Old Dominion History Department for making this an enriching experience. I also want to thank Matthew Eng and Kit Crawford for their friendship and for facilitating my adjustment to a new home and school, Brett Jeresa and Doug Forrest for their interesting and lively conversation, Leanne White for her support and help throughout the writing process, Adam Pollet for increasing my interest in Classical Studies and for introducing me to Virginia, my friends from my undergraduate years at LSU, and my family who have faithfully supported my highest goals and ambitions.
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CHAPTER I
HISTORIOGRAPHY

Under the Principate, imperial succession took a number of different forms. Augustus preferred the Roman custom of adoption because it allowed him the ability to hand choose an heir who exemplified certain characteristics such as military leadership and morality. After the end of the Julio-Claudian succession procedures changed under the Flavians, with Vespasian choosing to pass the Principate directly to his sons. Upon the death of the last Flavian, Domitian, the Senate selected the next emperor from their own body and chose Nerva who began the prosperous reign of the Antonines. They distinguished their reign by passing the Principate to hand selected heirs who were acceptable to both the army and the Senate, bringing prosperity to Rome. This thesis examines the adoption principle as it pertains to three ruling families of Rome and the means by which their heirs claimed imperial legitimacy.

At the core of the Roman economic, social, and political system was the *familia*, whose importance was determined by lineage and name. Legally speaking, the Roman *familia* operated under strict patriarchal control granting the *pater* authority over “all *personae* in the *potestas* of the *paterfamilias*.1” Social standing and political influence centered upon a “name system” that placed importance on the *nomen*, which was based on the ability of patricians to “trace their origin to a common ancestor.”2 Name

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1 Richard P. Saller. *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman family* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 75. This included adopted children.
recognition became extremely vital in the development and continuation of the Principate as imperial successors stressed their connection to the house of Caesar as a means of claiming legitimacy. Roman politics and law were heavily influenced by the Roman family emphasizing the inheritance of property, which meant the succession of a male heir and continuation of the family name. As Caesar's adoptive heir and founder of the Principate, Augustus "considered it his duty to secure the continuance of the name by leaving sons," but the absence of a male heir led Augustus to turn to the custom of adoption to find an heir.3

Adoption by definition "was conducted between males and involved the legal transfer of the adoptee into the agnatic family of the adopter" and became an acceptable method for the ruling class to sustain the family name.4 Adoptive heirs were able to succeed as emperor because "Romans considered the bonds of family and kinship to be biologically based but not biologically determined."5 Augustus preferred the idea of imperial succession through adoption since the pre-selection of heirs guaranteed the "line of succession...protecting the dynasty into a third generation."6

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3 R.B. Steele. "Roman Personal Names," The Classical Weekly 11, no. 15 (Feb. 4, 1918): 113-115. Roman names consisted of three parts: "the nomen or tribe name, the cognomen or family name, and the praenomen or personal name."


6 Richard P. Saller, Patriarchy, property and death in the Roman family, 43.

6 Beth Severy. Augustus And The Family At The Birth Of The Roman Empire (New York: Routledge, 2003), 190.
Scholars have extensively studied the religious, economic, social, and political institutions of Rome. The influence of Roman civilization on the development of Western civilization is incalculable and therefore remains a topic of continuous study. This research specifically acknowledges the qualifications of how the adoption principle as envisioned by Augustus under the Julio-Claudian reign was intended to serve as the template for future imperial succession. Instead of looking at each specific emperor up to the Antonines, this study focuses on Germanicus and Tiberius under the Julio-Claudians, the Flavians, and concludes with the first two emperors of the Antonine period.

This thesis concentrates on the *arcanum imperii* or the secret of power, the influence that came from control of the legions of the provinces and came to legitimize imperial reigns along with the four virtues inscribed on the *clupeus virtutis*. It will examine how emperors legitimized their reign through the use of propaganda such as numismatic evidence and name recognition along with the emperors' relationship with the legions, whose political power became more defined as Rome evolved from a Republic to a world empire.

Primary sources by Tacitus and other ancient authors who wrote on the Republic and the Empire were rediscovered by historians of the Renaissance. From the rebirth two styles were followed. The Thucydidean model "dominated mainstream history in the Renaissance" especially in the sixteenth century "politico-military narrative" works of French historians Georges Chastellian and Philippe de Commynes. But the Tacitean style, which discusses the nature of the *arcanum imperii* and its relationship with the Principate, also gained favor among Renaissance authors because of the ability "to

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transmute the raw materials of history and memory into a readable narrative, or meaningful analysis, and in this way to give utility as well as pleasure to readers.\textsuperscript{8}

Tacitus, in his major works the \textit{Annals}, the \textit{Historiae}, and the \textit{Agricola}, followed the theme of the "problem of power viewed from a moral perspective" wrapped around "Rome in decline after a glorious past founded on republican virtues."\textsuperscript{9} Tacitus grew up as a member of the Roman aristocracy and knew only what life was like under the Principate. His distaste for the Empire stemmed from his experiences under the tyrannical rule of Domitian and his dislike for the bad emperor is abundant in the \textit{Agricola}. In his writings, it is evident that "his sympathies... go out to the aristocratic Republic, but he is sufficiently clear-sighted to perceive that its time is over."\textsuperscript{10} Despite any realizations Tacitus held about the Roman past, certain aspects of his style raise questions. In the beginning of Tacitus's \textit{Annals} he made a point in his first paragraph to address his promise of writing with a non-biased viewpoint. Tacitus mentioned his desire to recount the facts of the history of the early Principate. He took care to mention that his history of the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius were "without either bitterness or partiality, from any motives to which I am far removed."\textsuperscript{11} Through the course of his narrative, however, certain tendencies arise bringing into question his promise to relay only the facts. Quite often during the scope of his work, Tacitus found it necessary "to

\textsuperscript{8}Kelley, \textit{Faces of History}, 65.


report rumour without taking responsibility for it” while at the same time he used his language “to insinuate that there is truth behind it.” Tacitus found it acceptable and pertinent to incorporate his dislike for the corruption of power at the highest level and never gave the impression that he was apologetic for doing so.

Aware that the creation of the Principate was an absolute necessity, Tacitus made the point of “attacking bad principes rather than the Principate itself.” Tacitus’s standing as a part of the aristocracy introduced him to the workings of government through the holding of offices and eventually membership in the Senate. Certainly as an educated noble and senator, one finds in Tacitus’s works his feelings for a return to senatorial power. Where some might discern that Tacitus “considered this form of government with bitterness,” he was cautious to make sure that “all the criticisms cited are personal ones, failings of the emperor’s character and of his household, not of the form of government which he had established.” His need to recount the moral deficiencies of the holders of the imperial office may be why he “implies more than he writes” and includes rumors and speculation that surround the principes.

For Tacitus, the problem remained in the perception of the Principate and as J.G.A. Pocock stated “the problem of the Principate is the character of a monarchy disguised as the continuation of a republic” which Tacitus criticized Augustus for creating. The reality was that “the power of the imperator rests on military virtue

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15Lidia Storoni Mazzolani, *Empire Without End*, 144.
separated from civic.” Given the history of civil wars and the rise to power of Caesar and himself, Augustus used the Principate to “stabilize, or rather freeze, the situation which had produced the Civil Wars” and with the given nature of the armies’ new found power “all Augustus could do was discourage further wars of conquest.” Evidence for this can be seen in Tiberius’s resolve to honor Augustus’s wishes to maintain border control and thus prevent provincial commanders from usurping his power.

All of the previous holders of the Principate came under the scrutiny of Tacitus. Even the founder of the imperial office did not escape some sort of criticism for an abuse of power. Initially, Tacitus remained keen to the idea that after the civil wars of the second triumvirate there was no other course to take in reestablishing order in Rome. Tacitus did not lament over the destruction of the Republic but took solace in the fact that a “republic with a guiding princeps offered the only escape from chaos.” His idealizing of Augustus’s intentions faded as Tacitus discussed the nature of the imperial province of Egypt. Because of the importance of the Egyptian grain supply in Rome and Antony’s use of it as a base for his bid for power, Augustus “among other secrets of imperial policy, had forbidden senators and Roman knights of the higher rank to enter Egypt except by permission.” Tacitus disagreed with Augustus’s decision to withhold the province of Egypt from the Roman aristocracy; he saw that the “image of Augustus’

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19 Tacitus *Annals* 2.59.87.
Principate was pure facade” and was “based upon unreality and deception.”

If Augustus, the founder of the Principate and the holder of virtues, used the imperial office to foster his own political agendas, then in Tacitus’s opinion succeeding emperors were equally prone to the same types of corruption and abuse of power.

This thesis is concerned with the adoption principle as a guideline for the criteria of an heir; in order to ensure quality rulers the adoption principle in essence meant the succession of a non-hereditary family member. The adoption of heirs did in fact make the heir a legal member of the emperor’s family linking him to the images of Caesar and Augustus and also adding the weight of the divine lineage that they used to bolster the public imperial image. In the beginning of the Annals, Tacitus referred to Augustus’s early problem of dynastic succession and lists a brevetted account of potential heirs that Augustus marked out for succession. In the last half of his reign Augustus conferred many titles and powers upon members of his family. At first, Augustus looked to his long time friend and best general Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa and marked him as his heir. Agrippa’s death left a vacancy for the heir apparent leading Augustus to take a personal interest in the upbringing of his grandchildren Gaius and Lucius. Tacitus inferred that Augustus was determined to see the two boys succeed him and although the boys “had yet laid aside the dress of boyhood he had most fervently desired, with an outward show of reluctance” to designate the boys as his heirs. This inference of premeditation from

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20 Bernario, “Tacitus and the Principate,” 104.


22 Tacitus Annals 1.3.4. Tacitus mentioned Claudius Marcellus, Marcus Agrippa, and his sons Caius and Lucius as Augustus’ early nominees for heir apparent.

23 Tacitus Annals 1.3.4.
Tacitus gives credence that “Augustus’ plans for succession look toward the continuation of his family’s hegemony.” Initially, the adoption principle referred to the succession of a handpicked qualified successor who also was a distinguished military commander. As his heirs died prematurely, necessity insisted that Augustus find an heir even if it was from his direct family. Tacitus presented evidence of this when “Tiberius Nero and Claudius Drusus, his stepsons” from his marriage to Livia were “honoured with imperial titles.” Tiberius and Claudius both distinguished themselves with military service and it was not uncommon that they received titles. But Augustus must have considered it prudent to affix titles to his two stepsons. While the imperial titles did not directly imply their potential as successors, they did serve as an insurance policy that if a time came requiring their designation as heir then the groundwork was already in place thus giving them legitimacy.

Tacitus’s tendency to report rumors and tales of intrigue left some questions open-ended. His account of Augustus’s death was flimsy as he omitted details about Augustus’s actual affliction but instead immediately pursued speculation and rumor as the basis for his analysis. The fact that Augustus suffered from an illness was certain but Tacitus, rather than giving specific details, decided instead to report conjecture that as “the infirmities of Augustus increased... some suspected guilt on his wife’s part.” Here Tacitus offered no other explanation as to what caused Augustus’ illness but was content to conclude with a rumor that Livia conspired to hasten Augustus’ death so that her son

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25Tacitus Annals 1.3.4.

26Tacitus Annals 1.5.6.
Tiberius could ascend to the imperial throne sooner rather than later. Tacitus also alluded to Livia’s own desires to obtain and wield some sort of authority. Again he implied that Rome would suffer a great misfortune if either Tiberius or Drusus were to rule because Rome would hence be “subject to a female and two striplings” that “would burden, and some day rend asunder the State.” Tacitus continued his tirade against Livia and Tiberius and found it necessary to cast further doubt on Tiberius’s candidature and recounted certain apprehensions Augustus may have had in the choice of Tiberius. He claimed that Augustus “had not even adopted Tiberius as his successor out of affection or any regard to the State, but, having thoroughly seen his arrogant and savage temper, he had sought glory for himself by a contrast of extreme wickedness.” Tacitus’s statement questioned Tiberius’s own morality and legitimacy since Augustus prided himself on his bestowed virtues and his many reforms that were meant to reinvigorate morals into Roman society.

Morality was an essential part in the writing style of the ancients because the “Romans saw political issues in personal and social terms.” The constructs of Roman morality emphasized virtue in its leaders and how they wielded their power. Such was the standard of Roman politics that “it became obligatory to accuse your political opponent of all the more recondite forms of private vice.” Tacitus found it acceptable to include in his writings personal attacks on the princeps whom he deemed bad

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\(^{27}\) Tacitus \textit{Annals} 1.4.6.

\(^{28}\) Tacitus \textit{Annals} 1.10.11.


emperors. Tacitus’s dislike of Domitian was recorded in his work *Agricola*. The *Agricola* was Tacitus’s laudatory account of his father-in-law and proconsul Cnaeus Julius Agricola. Tacitus used the life of his father-in-law as an example of what can be accomplished by a leader who possessed virtue. At the same time, Tacitus intended to contrast the life of a virtuous politician with that of a bad *princeps*, Domitian. In the beginning Tacitus talked about himself as a historian and his motives for writing. He stated “in these days, I, who have to record the life of one who has passed away, must crave an indulgence, which I should not have to ask had I only to inveigh against an age so cruel, so hostile to all virtue.” He goes on to state that the oppressive reign of Domitian was the reason for his decision to recount the life of his father-in-law. He compiled details of Agricola’s career as proconsul of the province of Britain and his military campaigns against the barbarian inhabitants combined with the theme of the bad *princeps*. Tacitus went deeper and wrote that “there may be great men even under bad emperors” reflecting on the role virtue played in his comparison.

Agricola’s greatness was predicated upon his virtue during his life and career as a politician and a military leader. Tacitus’s history of Agricola allowed him to enhance his own image by his relation to such a virtuous politician and his father-in-law’s image in comparison to Domitian. He impugned Domitian as “a ruler who was the foe of virtue” inferring that Domitian intentionally chose to reject virtue and therefore continued to reign as a bad *princeps*, wishing to contrast “the hostility of the times to the virtutis on which gloria was based” in the context of military leadership and its relationship with the

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32 Tacitus *Agricola* 1.42.703.
Principate. Tacitus stressed Agricola’s military career as proconsul of Britain and in particular his victory over Boudicea and other tribes of Britons. He wanted to draw attention to Domitian’s many military failures and undeserving triumphs. He played on Domitian’s excessive paranoia “that the fame of a subject should exceed that of the emperor” as this fear led Domitian to hold a “mock triumph over Germany” confirming Tacitus’s feelings of ill repute towards Domitian. Tacitus leads the reader to share in his opinion of Domitian even though self-aggrandizement “was inherent in the nature of the imperial system under good emperors as under bad.”

Since some authors were well removed from the periods they wrote about while others wrote about the time they lived in, their language and biases vary as do their interpretations of the Principate. Ancient authors who wrote histories of the Republic and the civil wars of the triumvirs include Polybius, Appian, Sallust, Lucan, and Livy. Polybius, a Greek who wrote On Roman Imperialism, styled his work in the likeness of Thucydides in an attempt to write a “pragmatic history” of Rome. Polybius fit into Pocock’s Gracchan explanation because his method of “finding in libertas the explanation of imperium” by placing “Roman history itself within a philosophical topos of the necessary evolution of cities through greatness to decline.”

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33 Tacitus Agricola 1.41.702; Donald Earl, The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome, 89.

34 Tacitus Agricola 1.16.686. Between AD 60-61 Boudicea led a revolt against Roman rule in Britain.

35 Earl, The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome, 89; Tacitus Agricola 1.39.701. Tacitus stated that Domitian “purchased from traders people whose dress and hair might be made to resemble captives.”


38 Pocock, Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall, 33.
tried to give a complete history of Republican Rome, he admitted that he deliberately omitted details and explained to the reader that “his omissions ought to be attributed to deliberated judgment and not to ignorance.” Livy, under the patronage of Augustus, "brought to his writing a devotion to the ideals of the Republic and the traditions of early Rome.” At times Livy admitted in his writing that multiple versions of one story existed and that he used his discretion as a historian to give the account “which is generally accepted.”

Appian concentrated on the civil wars of Rome and is the “only surviving history to treat the era of the Gracchi, Marius, Sulla, and the Social War.” Appian discussed the arcanum imperii during the civil wars in which the violence following the death of Tiberius Gracchus resulted in the use of armies “being employed not in the pursuit of faction or class struggles within the city, but in the pursuit of ambitions for high command.” Appian's history built upon the precedent that accumulated and allowed opportunists such as Caesar and Augustus to come to power. Lucan’s book on the civil wars of the first triumvirs was biased in favor of Pompieus Magnus in that he viewed him as the last hope of the Republic. As for Caesar, Lucan stated that “in manibus vestris, quantus sit Caesar, habetis.”

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40 Mellor, ed., The Historians of Ancient Rome, 169.


42 Mellor, ed., The Historians of Ancient Rome, 66.

43 Pocock, Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall, 42.

Works from imperial authors such as Suetonius, Josephus, and Cassius Dio gave different interpretations of the Principate but more historians place emphasis on Tacitus for his specific method of writing. Suetonius endeavored in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* to write a complete history of the Julio-Claudian emperors. Suetonius immersed “himself in the character and moral qualities of his subject” and glossed over specific events, which he “reduced to the status of items of evidence.” Suétone identified the many vices and virtues of the Caesars, making his biases known in assessing that “virtues made a praiseworthy emperor, vices a tyrant.” Suétone’s influence fell short of the impact that his counterpart Tacitus had on the style of history. Although he offered a detailed account of the Caesars’ morality, it was Tacitus who concentrated his writing on the development of the *arcanum imperii*.

In the *Res Gestae* Augustus deliberately emphasized that he “did not have more power than others who were colleagues,” even though in reality he “surpassed all in authority.” Written as a testament to his reign and a propaganda ploy, Augustus did not want to openly admit the extent of his power. His omission of details concerning his *imperium* in his *Res Gestae* served to cloak the true nature of his reign. Augustus willfully acknowledged that “by my own decision and at my own expense, I raised an army, with which I freed the republic oppressed by the tyranny of a faction.” Wanting to be seen as a savior and not a tyrant Augustus downplayed his *imperium* “because he

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was anxious to keep the military side of his power in the background and avoid exposing
his claim to have restored the Republic in 27 BC for a sham and a mockery.  

Although Augustus never would have risen to control the highest position in the
Roman state without an army, publicly Augustus maintained the stance that everything he
did was for the good of the state and that most of his power was not taken by force but
was granted to him by the senate and people of Rome. But as he gradually accumulated
more and more power, Augustus found it prudent to relinquish his position as consul.
The people on the other hand “feared that its champion was going to abandon his
dominating position and that the anarchy of the Republic would begin anew.”
Starting with Augustus, the Principate was strengthened as “more people tended to accept the
princeps’ unique position in the state” and future emperors were less subtle in their
portrayal of military power as a part of their authority as they displayed the military’s
importance in titles and coins.

Whereas Augustus felt secure with the knowledge that a military commander was
to succeed he also placed great emphasis on the role virtue played in good governance.
Once power was consolidated into his hands, Augustus used the opportunity to promote a
resurgence of Roman morality. Augustus believed that Roman life was degenerating into
the grip of vice and therefore he pushed a platform of moral reform and family values.
As the new position of the Principate formed around Augustus, “the Senate and People
felt obliged to invent new and unique honors to express their gratitude to the man


51 Eck, The Age of Augustus, 67.
responsible for these illusory gains." This unprecedented honor was awarded to Augustus in the form of a golden shield known as the \textit{clupeus virtutis} inscribed with what the Senate believed were the four greatest virtues possessed by their leader: \textit{virtutis, pietas, clementia,} and \textit{iustitia}. These virtues expressed Augustus's link to his valor in warfare with his ending of the civil wars and also to his virtue as a conqueror since many of his opponents were spared death and given amnesty. In addition to military experience, Augustus looked for these virtues in a suitable successor intending these qualifications to serve as precedent for future succession. Absolute power corrupted the succeeding emperors of the Julio-Claudian family and these standards were never truly reinstated until the reign of the Antonines.

A range of secondary sources are examined including works by Ronald Syme, E.T. Salmon, Karl Galinsky, and J.G.A. Pocock. Research on this topic has been limited in recent years as the majority was written in the first half of the twentieth century. The most recent work on the \textit{arcanum imperii} is from J.G.A Pocock's third volume of \textit{Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall}. Pocock traced the origins of the \textit{arcanum imperii} and its relation to Roman decline. He examined different explanations of the interpretation of the \textit{arcanum imperii} as found in the works of certain ancient authors and their influence on later writings of Roman imperial history.

As the Republic grew and incorporated multiple provinces outside of Italy into the \textit{res publica}, Rome's legions gradually shifted their loyalty from the state to their commanding general. Augustus knew the importance of the \textit{arcanum imperii} because he had the foresight once in power to limit a provincial commander's ability to accrue power that had the potential to rival his own authority. The question of succession, according to E.T. Salmon, Karl Galinsky, and J.G.A. Pocock. Research on this topic has been limited in recent years as the majority was written in the first half of the twentieth century. The most recent work on the \textit{arcanum imperii} is from J.G.A Pocock's third volume of \textit{Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall}. Pocock traced the origins of the \textit{arcanum imperii} and its relation to Roman decline. He examined different explanations of the interpretation of the \textit{arcanum imperii} as found in the works of certain ancient authors and their influence on later writings of Roman imperial history.

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\footnotesize{52 Eck, \textit{The Age of Augustus}, 55.}
Pocock, "becomes uncontrollably important, and heirs presumptive and competitive develop personalities shaped in an environment at once secluded, over-privileged and insecure." Hereditary succession could not be relied upon as a reliable means of succession as sons of nobility saw the imperial office as their birthright and therefore did not feel the need to rule with virtue. This competition for power within his family may have been why Augustus chose to adopt his successor rather than leaving it to kin. The adoption of a qualified, hand-picked successor ensured that the machinations of imperial government would not be corrupted by petty and jealous sons of privilege, who were considered more susceptible to the corruption that absolute power could yield.

Pocock addressed the importance of the legions "which might act as agents in the succession" and it was their influence which allowed commanders, especially those in the provinces, to march on Rome during times of civil strife and impose their authority.\textsuperscript{54} Pocock proposed the argument that the power of the legions as a political base actually had its roots in the Republic and resulted from "the consequence of the defeat of Tiberius Gracchus."\textsuperscript{55} The proposed agrarian reforms of Tiberius Gracchus were meant to create a "warrior peasantry who will join in further imperial expansion."\textsuperscript{56} Gracchus reasoned that "public virtue depends upon the liberty to bear arms" but he could not foresee that the future of the Roman army would create standing professional armies, eliminating the need for armed citizenry.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55}Pocock, \textit{Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall}, 29.

\textsuperscript{54}Pocock, \textit{Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall}, 27.

\textsuperscript{55}Pocock, \textit{Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall}, 43.

\textsuperscript{56}Pocock, \textit{Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall}, 46.

\textsuperscript{57}Pocock, \textit{Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall}, 47.
The anomaly Pocock discerned as the facilitator of Roman power politics rested with “the increasing willingness of competitors for power and office to use the provinces and commands” that were entrusted to them for provincial defense “to intervene in the political process itself.” Pocock concentrated on Tacitus and his style of history. Pocock stated that “there is no evidence of what he thought about the history of empire from Augustus to Hadrian” but what one finds in Tacitus’s style “is the discovery by the armies of the arcanum imperii that a princeps can be made elsewhere than at Rome.”

In contradiction to Gracchus’s view that virtue and arms were directly related to the libertas of the people, Pocock referred to the Humanist movement that took hold in Italy during the Renaissance. Machiavelli said that “arms remained crucial to the analysis of both liberty and society” because “the exercise of arms did not cease to be essential to the virtus of the individuals,” but that it was a necessity “to the state in order to pursue more complex freedoms which followed involvement in the more complex relationships of a commercial society.” In Roman antiquity “arms signified the individual’s direct involvement of his Republic” and functioned as a guarantor of individual libertas. As control of the provincial armies shifted to the Principate, the people accepted the princeps’ authority as the protector of their libertas. In theory, the princeps used the army to attain power and once his authority was secured the princeps used his power to correct the problems of the state and ensure the peoples’ libertas.

58 Pocock, Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall, 48-49.
59 Pocock, Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall, 59.
60 Pocock, Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall, 156.
61 Ibid., 156.
Early twentieth century Roman historian J.S. Reid, in his article “Tacitus as a Historian,” asserted that it was Tacitus’ intention to express this type of imperial corruption and to cast doubt on Augustus’ perceived benevolence for the state. Reid said that Tacitus’ objective was to show how “Augustus foisted Tiberius on the world as ruler, knowing his wickedness and intending that his own record should shine by contrast with that of Tiberius.”62 If this was the case and Augustus truly intended to leave Rome in the hands of someone unworthy of the imperial office, especially one who did not meet all of the criteria that the adoption principle looked for, then it was Tacitus’ aim to discredit Augustus and the future rulers of his house. Similarities also existed with later Julio-Claudian emperors since Tiberius possibly chose Caligula as his heir for the aforementioned reason as did Claudius and his selection of Nero before his death. The problem with this assumption is that Augustus did in fact stipulate the requirement that Tiberius adopt Germanicus as his heir. If Augustus truly intended to use Tiberius as a point of comparison, he would not have insisted on the insurance of Germanicus, who adhered to his views on morality and held a higher public image.

The iconography of coinage represents the best surviving medium of imperial propaganda. Harold Mattingly and C.H.V. Sutherland, the leading authorities in Roman imperial coinage, produced the definitive survey of Roman imperial coinage between 1923 and 1926. Coinage represents an invaluable source for historians because it is a surviving testament to imperial prerogatives. Augustus emphasized the practicality of placing images and inscriptions on coinage as they “gave him his best opportunity to publicize the aims and accomplishments of his central government and of himself as the

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62 Reid, “Tacitus as a Historian,” 196.
head of that government." The iconography chosen “represent images of authority” while the bust “is a symbol of authority based in ideal on consent” of the people and Senate.

Imperial succession was a dual process. First the candidate in theory, had to meet all of the prescribed criteria and once chosen, the heir’s image, titles, and conquests had to be disseminated among the Roman populace and peoples living in the provinces. The minting of coinage fulfilled this purpose and became instrumental for the emperors to legitimate their heir. Roman coinage under the Principate was political and symbolic representations of propaganda because the issue of coinage “embodied the authority of the state, clear and unmistakable.” Much coinage was issued under the Republic but the images minted did not serve to enhance any one person’s image and authority in the state. The origins of the minting of a single persons image on coinage for the sole purpose of commanding authority in the later Republican days are accredited by Sulla and Pompeius Magnus. Sulla’s military reform making the legions distinctly subordinate to their commander propagated the issue of coins since commanders had to “strike coins for the payment of their troops.” By striking his own coinage, Sulla was able to add to his magnanimity by paying the soldiers from his own purse. To facilitate the indoctrination of the soldier, commanders “omitted all reference to Rome, choosing instead types and

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66 Sutherland, “The Historical Evidence of Greek and Roman Coins,” 71.
legends (i.e. inscriptions) referring only to their own history or achievements.\textsuperscript{67} Since loyalty could now be purchased, they intended that coins should remind soldiers to whom they owed their allegiance for the "uncritical legionary who looks at his coins to see their source of issue."\textsuperscript{58} The coin functioned as a physical form of the commanders' promise of wealth for loyal service and became the normality of minting under the Principate.

Imperial coinage grew from the established precedent that developed in the late Republic. Private minting by commanders diminished the authority of the Senate as the sole authority of Rome, its peoples, and legions. Theodor Mommsen in his The History of Rome mentions coinage and its relation to the growth of the Principate. Mommsen's work concentrated on the history of the Republic and concluded with chapters that looked at Caesar's rise to power. In his discussion, Mommsen referred to Caesar's form of government and its relationship to the coinage as that of a monarchy in which he said "the image of the monarch on the coins" coincides with the "universal view of antiquity."\textsuperscript{69} It was custom in antiquity for monarchs to place their images on coinage and Mommsen referred to Caesar as a monarch because "from the year 44 B.C. the head of Caesar appears on those of the Roman state" and Caesar was the only person who held the right to issue coinage.\textsuperscript{70} As dictator, Caesar reserved "to himself the right of coining in gold or silver" as well as becoming the "first of all Romans-in the last year of his life to have his portrait placed on the coinage."\textsuperscript{71} Following the precedent set by Caesar,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{67}] Sutherland, "The Historical Evidence of Greek and Roman Coins," 71.
\item[\textsuperscript{68}] Sutherland, "The Historical Evidence of Greek and Roman Coins," 72.
\item[\textsuperscript{69}] Theodor Mommsen, The History of Rome (Greenwich: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958), 503.
\item[\textsuperscript{70}] Ibid., 503.
\item[\textsuperscript{71}] Sutherland, "The Historical Evidence of Greek and Roman Coins," 72.
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Augustus, as Caesar’s legal heir, assumed the complete authority to mint coinage with his likeness.

Under Augustus the symbolism of coinage evolved further. The function of coins as means of propaganda for Augustus became redefined. According to Karl Galinsky, the concept of using coins as propaganda was not entirely accurate since the minting of coins was not entirely overseen by the imperial office. Galinsky stated that “there were over two hundred cities in all areas of the Augustan empire that issued coins independently.” He added that in conjunction with the disbursement of mints there was little or no imperial oversight that suggested direct involvement from the imperial office and minters “had no precedent for placing the portraits of living Romans on their coins.” The coinage of Sulla and Caesar was issued explicitly by them, thus portraying their likeness on the coin. However, under Augustus, independent minters who took it upon themselves to strike Augustus’s likeness did so “under no legal obligation to do so nor did the head of Augustus signify that the coins bearing his likeness had been issued on his authority or been authorized by him.”

Galinsky also discussed the symbolism behind the decisions to place the imperial image on the obverse of the coin. The obvious reason was to elicit public recognition of the emperor and his position in the state. Another reason is that Augustus wished “to

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73 Ibid., 29.
74 Ibid., 29.
75 Ibid., 29. Continuity of the metal content was stable among the primary minters in Rome.
76 Ibid., 29.
have his *auctoritas* translate into the economic efficiency of the coin.\textsuperscript{77} Because of the importance in the ability to conduct business, coins received “unquestioned acceptance” from the people and the coin “reinforced the *auctoritas* of the *princeps*” attesting that the coin was worth its proscribed amount.\textsuperscript{78} Just as many of the duties and functions of the Principate developed with no clear design in place, so too did the imperial control of minting. Later emperors brought the administration of minting coins under their express control and used them to serve as a medium of propaganda for their military conquests, titles, and charitable works.

The first chapter analyzes the historiography of the Principate and concentrates on the writings of Tacitus and his style. Morality dominated the themes of the ancient authors and Tacitus in particular used morality and character discussion to draw contrasts between the reigns of bad emperors such as Tiberius and Domitian with those of Germanicus and the first two Antonines.

In chapter two, a short survey of the development of the Principate is examined as power was gradually obtained by illegal means. The Principate did not evolve over night but was the product of an accumulation of events with each having a part in the dissolution of the Republic. Criminal acts that went unchecked in Roman politics had the adverse effect of establishing legality from precedent. Opportunistic men used precedent as a justifiable means of fulfilling their own political ambitions, which led to the installation of the Julio-Claudians as the rulers of Rome.

\textsuperscript{77}Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 29. The economic efficiency amounted to the purity of the coin.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., 29.
The third chapter concentrates on the reign of Tiberius and the question of whether Tacitus intended to use Germanicus as a point of comparison to further discredit Tiberius. Various forms of propaganda, especially numismatics, are examined in this chapter. Imperial coinage personified virtue, military conquest and the legitimacy of the heir apparent.

Chapter four looks at the nature of the *arcanum imperii* after the decline of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. As the Julio-Claudian line degenerated, emphasis on the Augustan method was lost and Rome spiraled into civil war. After Nero committed suicide in AD 68, power shifted to the provincial commanders and the legions they commanded. Galba is discussed first because he tried to reinstitute the adoption principle but failed because he ignored "the state of the provincial armies." Under Vespasian, hereditary succession became the preferred method as he felt his son Titus was prepared to succeed to the imperial office. Domitian's legitimacy will be the main focus of interest since he was the only member of the imperial family not to receive military training. Domitian's oppressive reign received harsh criticism by the contemporary writer Tacitus. In the *Agricola* Tacitus vilified Domitian as a bad emperor opposed to virtue in order to compare his reign with Tiberius and to contrast it with the good emperors of the Antonines.

Chapter five explores the first two Antonines, Nerva and Trajan. Nerva was a member of the Senate and secured his tenuous holding of the Principate with the adoption of a strong well-liked provincial commander. With the adoption of Trajan, Nerva retained the loyalty of the legions and advocated Trajan as 'the best man' and guarantor of the Principate. Augustus intended select members of his family to succeed but

necessity drove him to choose Tiberius. Nerva, however, pledged not to pass succession to a family member and adopted Trajan strictly for his merit. Antonine emperors adopted their successors until the adoption principle was abandoned by the ascension of Commodus in A.D. 180.

The final chapter concludes with an analysis of the state of the office of the Principate and the decline of the Empire after the death of Commodus. As the army accumulated increasing power, it led to the formation of a military monarchy where the imperial throne went to the highest bidder. The virtues of Augustus’s adoption principle vanished with the end of the Antonines and the arcanum imperii, which insured security, degenerated into a melee of avarice and corruption.
CHAPTER II
THE PRINCIPATE

Once victory was achieved at Actium, Augustus consolidated control of the state into the office of the Principate, which used the provincial armies to impose claims of legitimacy and authority. The tumultuous political climate that engulfed Rome during the late Republic “when the world was wearied by civil strife” gave license to Augustus, who “subjected it to empire under the title of ‘Prince.’”¹ Octavian cunningly disguised a new monarchical form of government around traditional Republican norms. The young Caesar portrayed himself as a savior of the Republic and a champion of the people so that the legality of his acquisition of power could not be questioned and labeled as despotic usurpation. The Principate was not formed haphazardly overnight but rather developed over the course of the Republic as opportunistic men established political precedent, culminating in the rise of Caesar and the succession of his adoptive son Octavian.

Historians of the imperial age such as Livy, Polybius, and Sallust devoted their works to the history of the founding of the Republic. These historians wrote of Rome’s early history not only to relate the story of Roman beginnings but also to use the past to justify and explain the imperial political situation of Rome. In respect to the aristocratic Senate Polybius stated that its primary duty was “the control of the treasury” along with the authority over “all crimes committed in Italy requiring public investigation.”² But his

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² Polybius, On Roman Imperialism, ed. Alvin H. Bernstein (South Bend, Indiana: Regnery/Gateway, Inc., 1980), 188.
focus rested with the consuls and the people. Even though the Senate remained the
traditional governing body of Rome under the Principate and in some instances had the
power to appoint a succeeding emperor, it was the power and authority possessed by the
consuls which was more germane to the development of the Principate.

The office of the Principate derived much of its authority from *consular
imperium*. The *imperium* of the consuls gave them command of the legions while also
making them the "supreme masters of administration" in Rome.³ Livy’s account of the
founding of the Republic examined the transition from Tarquinius Superbus to the
Republic and how the Romans "would allow no man to be king and no man to live in
Rome who threatened her liberties."⁴ Safeguards were placed on the consulship to
prevent any one man from gaining too much power. Two consuls were elected annually
with each holding veto power over the other. Veto power limited one consul’s ability to
acquire absolute control of the government. In the later Republic consuls overcame this
legal obstacle from their relationship with the legions.

In his work *The Catilinarian Conspiracy*, Roman historian Sallust gave a more
succinct description of the development of the consuls. According to Sallust, the Romans
intended to create a system of checks and balances to ensure that they would never again
be subjected to the control of a monarchy. Sallust stated that the Etruscan kings "at first
had tended to preserve freedom and advance the state" but monarchy "had degenerated
into a lawless tyranny."⁵ Because the Romans prided themselves on their liberty, "they


altered their form of government and appointed two rulers with annual power, thinking that this device would prevent men’s minds from growing arrogant through unlimited authority.  

Ironically, while trying to prevent tyranny, the early Romans actually started the machinations that established precedent for the creation of the Principate and the dissolution of the Republic.

Roman senators remained fairly indifferent in their view of the Principate because the emperor held the loyalty of the legions and the senators wanted to keep their semblance of power even if it was in tradition only. However, Rome’s populace had to be won over through imperial propaganda. The emperors offered the people games, gifts, and social welfare in an effort to earn political points and retain good standing with the citizen body. Caesar realized the necessity of winning over the populace if he was to legitimize his seizure of power. As noted by Polybius, the people held tremendous power in the Republic: “it is the people who bestow offices, which are the most honourable rewards of virtue, on the deserving.” Augustus, like his adoptive father Caesar, held the consent of the people because of charitable gifts and the backing of Caesar’s legions. Therefore future emperors emphasized their connection to the house of Caesar in order to strengthen their claim of legitimacy to the people.

The safeguards in place to prevent opportunistic men from seizing absolute power waned as Rome expanded its boundaries beyond the Italian peninsula through military conquest. Consuls held imperium which granted them the authority to command Rome’s legions. Rome expanded its territory through the commitment of legionnaires who

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6 Sallust The Catilinarian Conspiracy: Historians of Ancient Rome 1.6.85.

fought for the Republic and not the individuals commanding them. Early Roman victories were won by soldiers who as "Roman citizens were obliged to serve in the legions for a certain number of campaigns." This citizen-farmer soldier proved adequate until the defeat of Carthage left Rome in control of the Mediterranean. As Rome marched into the frontier to conquer adjacent hostile peoples, a significant shift occurred in the army between the soldier and his commander. A "military clientela developed" due to continuous military expansion along with an abundance of wealth gained from such conquests. The clientela derived from a change in the attitude of the soldier and the subsequent professionalization of the military. Soldiers now pledged their allegiance not to the state but to their commanding general in the hopes of gaining future rewards for service in the form of land or gold. The soldier no longer concerned himself about the welfare of the state "because he was not personally interested in it or because he came from that social class of peasants which... is completely without influence in Roman political life."10

The professionalization of Rome's legions into private armies drew the attention of Sallust. Sallust commented that it was Sulla who first recognized the potential that the army played in power politics. Sulla marched his men to the frontiers of the provinces before his decision to march on Rome. Whoever controlled the legions ultimately had the ability to control Rome. Exploiting this realization to his own advantage, Sulla

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granted his men a luxury and license foreign to the manners of our forefathers. With his soldiers won over by gold, Sulla marched his men to the walls of Rome where he made himself dictator of the Roman state. Caesar knew what he wanted and used every advantage at his disposal to achieve his goals employing past precedent established by Sulla, securing the loyalty of the legions under his command as a power base from which he launched his political ambitions unimpeded. Under the Principate the army played a vital role in the emperor's ability to stay in power and claim legitimacy.

Growing social unrest increased the fear of Rome's aristocracy that civil strife could disrupt the city and threaten the stability of the Republic. Fearful of losing power, the consuls placed extreme importance on the influence the military played in the exercise of their authority. Livy noted that in the wake of social opposition "the consuls quickly realized the insecurity of high position unsupported by force." Though Livy touched on the importance consuls placed on the military, his work stopped short of the civil wars between the first and second triumvirs. The civil wars of the later Republic were the primary focus of the ancient writers Appian and Lucan. While Lucan's text only contains the history of the civil war between Gaius Julius Caesar and Pompeius Magnus, Appian began his book with a brief survey of Sulla's rise to power and the correlation with Caesar and the wars of the second triumvirate.

Appian wished to discuss the precedent that induced Caesar and later his adoptive successor Octavian to use civil war and the necessity of authoritative rule as a precursor for obtaining absolute power. Appian explained that Roman government was inundated

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11 Sallust The Catilinarian Conspiracy 1.6.87.

12 Livy The Early History of Rome 2.56.179.
with corruption leading to the rise of men who "refused to give up control of the armies entrusted to them by the people." Appian placed Sulla in this category of opportunistic men vying for power but singled Sulla out for his decision to march on Rome in order to end the civil wars. Appian did not denigrate Sulla for proclaiming himself "dictator for life" but alluded to this as the only option if Rome was to survive. Appian did not shy away from the fact that Sulla's seizure of power was camouflaged in the appearance of an election but pointed out that he took power "in reality by force and necessity." Despite Sulla's unorthodox rise to power, Appian commended him for possessing "the courage, when he had had enough power, to lay down his monarchial office voluntarily." From here Appian compared Caesar's actions with those of Sulla's stating that necessity fueled Caesar's decision to march on Rome with his legions. Unlike Sulla who used his military power to quell civil insurrection, Caesar marched on Rome because the Senate ordered him to relinquish command of Gaul and its legions, which Caesar claimed was legally his "by decision of the people."

The civil wars of the first triumvirs had drastic consequences for the Roman state and the lessons learned greatly affected the institution of the Principate. In book two of Lucan's *The Civil War*, he berated the two belligerents for the actions they took in the pursuit of power. Lucan stated "Tantone novorum proventu scelerum quaerunt, uter

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14 Appian *The Civil Wars* 1.3.2.

15 Ibid., 1.3.2.

16 Appian *The Civil War* 1.4.2.
imperet urbi? Although Lucan is more favorable towards Pompeius Magnus in his later books, he chose here to denounce both men for using Rome as the battleground in a war that could potentially harm the Republic. Though opportunistic, neither Caesar nor Pompeius could have achieved success if they had not held the loyalty of the legions they commanded. In book five Lucan mentioned the case with which soldiers shifted their loyalty. He posed the question “praemia miles dum maiora petit, damnat causamque ducemque” pointing to Caesar's ability to win over defeated foes and have them back his claim because of his military successes and support of the people in Rome. Despite the support of the people and the backing of his legions, Caesar and his policies were deemed tyrannical by a faction of Rome's senators. The results of Caesar's death in 44 BC did not meet with the expectations of the conspirators and instead they created a power vacuum sealing the fate of the Republic for good.

Caesar passed his legacy to his grandson and adoptive heir Octavian, who systematically employed the precedent set by earlier rulers to maneuver and manipulate his rise to the highest position in Rome. Octavian inherited Caesar's legions, wealth, and most importantly his name. Because of Octavian's youth and inexperience in seasoned warfare, his inheritance was critical to the retention of Caesar's legions. Legal delays forced Octavian to borrow large sums of money to pay the indemnities to the people as promised by Caesar's will and also to pay the soldiers in order to maintain his political power base.

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17 Lucan, The Civil War, ed. E.H. Warmington, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), 60. “Must they produce such a monstrous crop of crime, in order to settle which of the two shall be master of Rome?”

18 Lucan The Civil War 5.245.256. “Or was it greed for greater rewards that made the soldiers repudiate their cause and their leader.”
By forming a second triumvirate, Octavian consolidated his wealth allowing him to increase the size of his army which he gave “more gifts to those soldiers who were in difficulties” and “as a result the army transferred its loyalty to him and he received great gratitude because he gave them land, towns, money, and houses.”\(^{19}\) Giving land to veterans was nothing new and was not without political backlash. The limited availability of arable land in Italy forced Octavian to dispossess thousands of people in order to acquire enough acreage for the veterans. Appian stated that “the dispossessed malevolently denounced him” but this, as the language suggested, did not deter Octavian for “an onslaught he endured to win the thanks of the army.”\(^{20}\) Octavian must have figured that the short lived inconveniences of the people, who could be appeased later once his power was established, were small in comparison to the rewards to be won from the support of the army.

Octavian’s adoption by Caesar became the defining moment in his political career “because the Romans have a custom whereby adoptive children take the names of those who have adopted them.”\(^{21}\) Octavian, according to Appian, was more than willing to take the name of Caesar but this desire was met with antagonism by his family who “warned him solemnly to beware of Caesar’s enemies, because he was Caesar’s son and heir, and advised him to renounce both the inheritance and the adoption.”\(^{22}\) This notion was unacceptable to Octavian because without the name and legal recognition he could not legally claim Caesar’s estate or a relation to a god. More importantly without the

\(^{19}\) Appian *The Civil Wars* 5.13.285.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 5.13.285.

\(^{21}\) Appian *The Civil Wars* 3.11.159.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 3.11.159.
name of Caesar, Octavian would be unable to carry out his political platform to avenge the murder of Caesar and destroy the traitors to the Republic.

Octavian publically announced his adoption to the people and legions because it was necessary for him to assert his legitimacy and the image that Caesar lived on in him. Appian spoke of the adoption and pointed to Octavian’s cunningness for “he did not, however simply add it, but changed both his own name and his patronymic completely, so that he became ‘Caesar, son of Caesar’, instead of ‘Octavius, son of Octavius’.” The result of this carefully crafted move met all of Octavian’s expectations as people and soldiers proclaimed their allegiance to the new Caesar.

Octavian encountered hostility from members of the senate, especially Marcus Tullius Cicero who was one of the staunchest defenders of the Republic. In a letter to his friend Atticus, Cicero used incensed language when he asked Atticus to “consider his name, consider his name!” Unconvinced of Octavian’s sincerity to continue the Republic, Cicero further lamented when Octavian took the legal name of Caesar. During his reign, Octavian was honored with the title Augustus and from there he adopted the name Imperator Caesar divi filius. The name gave reference to his divine lineage but “not one of the name’s elements corresponded to tradition.” The importance of this name change rested with the title of Imperator because the “name suggested a permanent

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23 Appian The Civil Wars 3.11.159.


25 Werner Eck, The Age of Augustus (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 57. Imperator Caesar son of the deified one.

26 Ibid., 57.
link with the Roman tradition of victory.” The title of Imperator accentuated the emperor’s important relationship with the military. Cassius Dio stated that under the Principate the title was held by emperors “for life, not only by those who have won victories in battle, but also by those who have not.” While some emperors were skilled in military service, other less militaristically trained emperors like Caligula, Nero, and Domitian took the title in order to capitalize on the propaganda aspects that a title commanded among the people and the army.

The growth of the Principate stemmed as much from ancient tradition and precedent as it did from the necessity placed on it by the senate and people of Rome. The socio-economic problems that came as a result of civil war enabled Caesar and Augustus alike to acquire more power and control of the state. Although the opponents of Caesar labeled him a tyrant as he extended his dictatorship for another ten years, much of Augustus’s power was conferred on him by the Senate with or without their enthusiastic consent. Once in power, his primary concern was “not to lose power” so “he just took whatever measure seemed necessary to that end from time to time.” Augustus held “imperium maius quam” which was without restriction and even eclipsed the power held by the proconsuls in command of provincial legions.

27 Eck, The Age of Augustus, 57.


30 Eck, The Age of Augustus, 65. “Power greater than that of the proconsuls.”
CHAPTER III
THE JULIO-CLAUDIANS

The nature of imperial succession devised by Augustus hinged on the acceptance of a legitimate heir in the eyes of the public and the Senate while at the same time commanding the fidelity of the provincial legions. Julius Caesar rose to the highest position in the Roman state because he held the loyalty of his legions. He recognized the unstable state of Roman politics during his time and knew how to use the army to his advantage. Caesar desired to found a new dynasty of Rome and therefore needed a male relative to succeed him. Mommsen suggested that Caesar in all likelihood felt that “the ruler should be succeeded by his son” and if he proved inadequate then “the ruler might choose his successor by adoption.” Caesar passed his name to Octavian, who like his adoptive father, had to find a way to pass power to an heir without established guidelines. Augustus stipulated that the candidate should possess virtue, specifically the four virtues inscribed on the clupeus virtutis, along with the requirement to hold arcanum imperii, which guaranteed the support of the legions and solidified the heir’s political power base.

This chapter compares the character and public perceptions of Tiberius with those of his nephew and designated successor Germanicus. Both men were able to claim a familial tie to Augustus and had distinguished military careers but differed in their personal character and virtue. The question then is not whether Tiberius was inherently bad or Germanicus good but how they compare to the qualifications of Augustus’s adoption principle.

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Augustus intended that succession under the Julio-Claudians should follow the formula of adoption in which legitimacy rested upon the heir’s ability to retain the *arcanum imperii* through name recognition. Caesar set the precedent when he adopted Octavian as his legal heir, which led Augustus to officially adopt Tiberius because of his “age, experience and by possession of power.” As Augustus advanced in age and Tiberius’s position as heir solidified, Augustus stipulated that Tiberius in turn adopt his nephew Germanicus as his heir despite having two sons of his own. In the *Annals*, Tacitus wished to cast further suspicion on Tiberius’s duplicitous character by stressing the fact that “Augustus excluded Drusus,” implying that Augustus did this so that he “might have several safeguards to rest on.”

As Tiberius’s heir apparent, Germanicus’s image was placed on coinage because “honour to *Divus Augustus* was almost a constitutional necessity for his immediate successors.” Many of the coins minted in Germanicus’s image feature his bust with the inscription GERMANNICVS CAESAR AVG GERM. The inscription above his image indicated his relationship to the deified Augustus Caesar and his role as Tiberius’s heir apparent. Roman coins under the Julio-Claudians did not always bear an obverse portrait.

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3 D.C.A. Shotter, “Tacitus, Tiberius and Germanicus,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 17, no. 2 (Apr., 1968): 195; Tacitus *Annals* 1.3.5. Tiberius’s son Drusus was of mature age and military experience and may have had expectations of succession.

4 C.H.V. Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69*, 3 vols (London: Spink and Son Ltd, 1984), 104. The coin honored the lineage to the divine Augustus and their hereditary connection.

5 *The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69*, C.H.V. Sutherland, vol. 1, Plate 13. Germanicus Caesar Augustus Germanicus
type. The reverse sides of Julio-Claudian coinage usually consisted of but were not limited to pictorial designs and inscriptions of honorific titles.

Germanicus is very peculiar in the Tacitean narrative. Tacitus draws attention to Germanicus's favorable character as “contrasting strongly with the proud Tiberius,” but the section on the mutinies of the Rhine suggests a different perception of Germanicus. In order to further harm Tiberius’s reputation, Tacitus used Germanicus “as a foil for the blackened Tiberius” making “Germanicus what he needs to be for each episode” of his history. This interpretation becomes apparent in the context of the adoption principle as certain discrepancies make themselves known in the writings of Tacitus. Necessary to the adoption of an heir was the ability to establish a concrete claim of legitimacy. Given the nature of Augustus’ seizure of power through military means and because there was no precedent for succession to the imperial office, Augustus was prescient to develop a set of criteria that he believed were essential to maintaining the Principate. Augustus adhered to traditional Roman virtues and looked to instill the virtues of _virtus_, _clementia_, _iustitia_, and _pietas_ as inscribed on the _clupeus virtutis_ as the standard benchmark for the selection of future emperors. The shield served as a testament to the senate’s recognition of Augustus’s legitimacy and his exceptional virtues, which emphasized his morality and military prestige. Tacitus saw in Tiberius a distinct correlation between

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8 A session of the senate on January 13, 27 B.C., bestowed Octavian the title of “Augustus” and the gift of the _Clupeus virtutis_, which was a golden shield displayed in the new senate house the Curia Iulia. The inscription is as stated: “Senatus populusque Romanus Imp Caesari Divi Augusto Cos VII Dedit Clipeum Virtutis Clementia E Institue Pietais Erga Deos Patria Move.” “The Senate and people of Rome in the Seventh Consulship of the deified Augustus Caesar Imperator, dedicates this shield of virtues; Clemency, Justice, and Piety towards the affect of the god the father.”
Tiberius’s reign and character and that of Augustus’s Principate. He scrutinized Tiberius’s character because of his distaste for bad emperors. Tacitus thought of Augustus and Tiberius as one and the same with “the murderousness, the hypocrisy, the bloody elimination of rivals, the dissimulatio, even the choice of a worse successor” when he identified the true nature of their reigns. Germanicus, on the other hand, was free of criticism because there was simply “no similar strand of unpopularity” for the “people were keen on Germanicus.”

Familial devotion was the cornerstone of Augustus’s moral reforms and “the ostentatious frugality of Augustus’s own lifestyle was intended to demonstrate his faith in it.” To the Romans pietas represented “the time-honoured Roman ideal of social responsibility which includes a broad spectrum of obligations to family, country, and gods.” It became increasingly important to Augustus that the candidates in line for succession should possess family morality for the well being of the Roman state. In book two of the Annals, Tacitus mentioned Germanicus’s pietas, referring to him as “the husband of one wife” and having “only legitimate children” in a time where it was not uncommon to find members of the imperial house and senatorial class engaging in adulterous relationships that tarnished the Augustan platform of family morality and

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9 Pelling, “Tacitus and Germanicus,” 78.

10 Ibid., 78.

11 David Shotter, Rome and Her Empire (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 155. In 2 B.C. Augustus’s daughter Julia became the center of scandal when it became known that she was sexually involved with members of the senate; she was banished by Augustus. She died in despair on an island off the Italian coast.

virtue. Germanicus kept his family life void of scandalous political intrigue as the "evidence indicates that Agrippina the Elder and Germanicus were a devoted couple" thus becoming an idealized example of Roman morality.

In contrast, Tiberius’s early family life elicited scrutiny from contemporary writers. Unlike Germanicus, who represented a moral family life, Tiberius conducted himself in a manner contrary to the propaganda of the imperial family. Tiberius’s position as heir apparent necessitated a marriage alliance for political reasons, and his first marriage to Vipsania Agrippina ended in divorce at the instigation of Augustus and Livia. Persuaded to marry Augustus’s widowed daughter Julia, Tiberius’s subsequent actions did not bode well publicly for Augustus and the image he wished to present. Suetonius in book three briefly discussed Tiberius’s marriage to Julia, noting that Tiberius, "lived in harmony at first" with Julia and even at times "returned her love." The language used by Suetonius implicated Tiberius as the culpable party in the sham marriage because it was he who “soon grew cold, and went so far as to cease to live with her at all.” Suetonius went further in his efforts to defame Tiberius by adding that he left his wife after the death of their infant child. It is not until chapter eleven of book three that Suetonius mentioned Julia’s banishment for her immoralities.

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13 Tacitus *Annals* 2.73.94.


16 Ibid., 3.6.303.

17 Suetonius *Tiberius* 3.6.303. Suetonius mentioned that the child died in 9 BC at Aquileia.

18 Suetonius *Tiberius* 3.9.311
Certainly because of Tacitus's and Suetonius's criticism of Tiberius as a bad emperor, there is very little or no mention of his virtues. Velleius Paterculus, whose "accuracy is often questioned solely on the grounds of his prejudices," does not mention any possession of virtues. Tiberius gained notoriety for his numerous *maiestas* trials, which decimated much of his political opposition. Tiberius pardoned certain individuals while his "repression of professional accusers had won for him the reputation of *Moderatio*—a quality which is frequently combined with *Clementia*." Tiberius minted coinage "glorifying the consecrated *princeps* whom he followed" and also to the "imperial virtues of Justitia, Pietas, Salus, Clementia, and *Moderatio*." Coinage featuring the virtue *clementia* came from a series of *duspondii* dating from the years AD 16-22. The obverse features Tiberius laureate with the inscription TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVST IMP VIII. The reverse bears the inscription CLEMENTIAE and depicts a bust laureate "within laurel-wreath on round shield edged with raised circle of 'petals' within outer circle of palmettos and dots." His coinage featuring MODERATIONI resembled the same iconography as his CLEMENTIAE series.

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19 William E. Metcalf, "Coins as Primary Evidence," *American Numismatic Society in Roman Coins and Public Life under the Empire*, ed. E. Togo Salmon (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 2. Velleius Paterculus lived from 19 BC to AD 31; he had a more favorable disposition towards Tiberius than either Tacitus or Suetonius. Velleius served as praefect of the cavalry under Tiberius's command in Germany and Pannonia starting in AD 4. For his service Velleius was promoted to the quaestorship in AD 8.


21 Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69*, vol. I, Plate 11.

22 *The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69*, C.H.V. Sutherland, vol. 1, Plate 11. Tiberius Augustus Caesar Son of the Divine Augustus Imperator VIII.

23 Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69*, 97.
There was an instance, however, where Tacitus mentioned a letter from Tiberius addressed to the Senate concerning lax morality among members. From the letter it is understood that Tiberius is aware of the pleas for government control but is unable to pass laws or penalties because “those very same persons will cry out that the State is revolutionized” and “that no citizen is safe from incrimination.” Here Tiberius is portrayed as “a man unable to bear the climate of hypocrisy by which he is enveloped.” This may account for Tiberius’s self imposed exile, which incurred criticism by public and ancient authors.

Towards the end of his reign Tiberius retreated to the confines of his pleasure palace on the island of Capri, a move which drew harsh criticism from Tacitus and Suetonius. The island of Capri offered complete seclusion where the emperor indulged “himself in secret profligacy and a leisure of malignant schemes.” While Tacitus is brief on the matter and did not offer any specifics of Tiberius’s nefarious conduct, Suetonius, however, recounted the vices of Tiberius in detail. His love for wine, Suetonius said, caused him to receive the nickname “Biberius, instead of Tiberius” and in private he experimented with all kinds of taboo sexual license. Tacitus’s lack of details

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24 Tacitus Annals 3.54.130-131.


26 Tacitus Annals 4.67.183.

27 Suetonius Tiberius 3.42.353. “Secusa vero Caprensi etiam sellaria excogitavit, sedem arcanarum libidinum, in quam undique conquistti puellarum et exoletorum greges monstrosique concubitus repertores, quos spintrias appellabat, triplici serie conexi, in vicem incestarent coram ipso, ut aspectu deficientis libidines excitaret.” “Indeed with the isolation of Capri also he thought up sitting rooms, the seat of secret lusty place in which from all directions the recruiting of girls and flocks of male prostitutes and displayers of sexual intercourse.”
on this topic may suggest his effort to stay focused on the institution of the Principate, while Suetonius’s purpose was exposing the vices of the Caesars.

Military command became both advantageous and detrimental to the Principate as successors looked to balance power and security. While the emperor held *arcanum imperii* which secured his *auctoritas*, subordinate military commanders represented a threat to their power. The virtues of the *clupeus virtutis* reflected military service and leadership. As *pietas* represented a good and moral family life, the other virtues of *virtus*, *iustitia*, and *clementia* represented military ambition and skill. *Clementia* referred to “the conduct of military affairs by the Roman state and its generals” in the sense that a general should “practice moderation toward a defeated enemy.”

From a military sense *iustitia* referred to the traditional attitude held by Romans that war should be waged only if it proved to be “*bellum pium et iustum*.”

*Virtus*, a derivative of the Latin *vir* meaning man, came to represent “manly valor on the battlefield” and also came to be associated with morality. The meaning of *virtus* and its inscription on the *Clupeus virtutis* championed Republican ideals and “consisted in the winning of personal preeminence and glory by the commission of great deeds in the service to the Roman state.”

In militarily terms *virtus* came to embolden the exercise of power over “foreign peoples as

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28 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 85; Tacitus *Annals* 1.58.39. Germanicus in an act of forgiveness granted safety to Segestes and his family for they were at one time allies of Rome. Arminius was held responsible for the massacre in the Teutoburg Forest and for the rebellions of the Germans on the Rhine. Tacitus described Segestes as possessing a “stately figure, fearless in the remembrance of having been a faithful ally.”

29 Ibid., 85. “A pious and just war.” This was the Roman standard for the justification of fighting a war.

30 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 84.

31 Ibid., 84.
the *imperator* of the Roman state." As a member of the imperial family, Germanicus was allowed to lead Rome’s legions in Germany and the East “although he was only a quaestor,” which placed him in the position to acquire *arcanum imperii.* Germanicus’s first test came in Dalmatia where he worked to suppress rebellion in the region. For his victories, Tiberius awarded him the *ornamenta triumphalia.* Publically, Tiberius honored Germanicus, but privately he worried about Germanicus’ popularity.

Although Germanicus appeared to be on the fast track for career advancement from his victories over the Dalmatians, Tacitus described certain instances that implied Germanicus was “most undignified and inept.” Following Tiberius’s succession in AD 14, legions of the Rhine mutinied against Tiberius over monetary donatives owed to them. The Rhine legions threatened to disrupt Tiberius’s power base and potentially usurp his *auctoritas.* Germanicus, as the ranking officer and member of the imperial family, was offered the support of the legions “whose force could carry everything before it.” The problem is not that he passed up the opportunity to make his own bid for power, but in how he handled the mutinous legionaries. In Germanicus’s speech to the legions, he foolishly “plucked his sword from his side, raised it aloft and was plunging it

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32 Ibid., 84.
34 Pelling, “Tacitus and Germanicus,” 63.
35 LEG XX, LEG I, LEG V, LEG XXI composed the Lower Army of the Rhine and LEG II, LEG XIII, LEG XIV, LEG XVI composed the Upper Army of the Rhine.
36 Tacitus *Annals* 1.31.22.
into his breast” until a soldier named Calusidius “offered him a drawn sword, saying that it was sharper than his own.”

Tacitus noted a second instance of poor judgment on the part of Germanicus. With the situation worsening, Germanicus decided “that a letter should be written in the prince’s name” but the mutinous “soldiers perceived that all this was invented for the occasion.” The act was seen as desperation on Germanicus’s part and only further incensed the soldiers that their demands be met. Germanicus’s leadership was again questioned when “the soldiers are allowed to sit in judgment not merely on the ringleaders but even on their own centurions.” As commanding general, Germanicus exercised no form of military discipline but instead allowed the men to act as judge, jury, and executioner.

In the following chapters, Tacitus related Germanicus’s victorious exploits over the German barbarians led by Arminius in which the coveted legionary standards of the XIX legion “taken in defeat of Varus” were recovered. Although Germanicus’s leadership showed signs of ineptitude during the mutiny in the Rhine, Tacitus followed the episode with laudations for his defeat of the German barbarians who disgraced Rome in years past.

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37 Tacitus Annals 1.35.25.
38 Tacitus Annals 1.36-37.26.
40 Tacitus Annals 1.57.38; Adrian Goldsworthy, The Complete Roman Army (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2003), 47. Before the first century BC, Roman legions marched under five standards depicting the images of a bull, horse, boar, wolf, and an eagle. Under the reforms of Marius, the five animals were replaced with a single silver eagle.
Following Augustus was not an easy task for Tiberius. Using his predecessor's reign as a template, Tiberius had to assert his position before the senate, people, and legions of Rome. Although Tiberius received distinction as a general under Augustus, there was no certainty as to whether the legions would transfer their loyalty to him. As the new princeps, it was essential for Tiberius "to assert his authority over the army."\footnote{Shotter, "Tacitus, Tiberius and Germanicus," 195.} From Tacitus's account, Tiberius was consumed by fear and his anxieties were increased by the delicate situation developing in the Rhine. The mutiny had the potential to split the arcanum imperii of the new Principate because "Germanicus, as commander-in-chief on the Rhine, had under him a total of eight legions" and Tiberius realized that the Rhine legions were "sufficiently powerful to carry its chosen nominee to the throne."\footnote{Shotter, "Tacitus, Tiberius and Germanicus," 197.} Since Germanicus met the mutineers' demands by paying them, Tiberius perceived Germanicus to be a threat to his arcanum imperii. The reassignment of the heir apparent to the provinces in the East was a preemptive act in case Germanicus "might prefer the possession to the expectation of empire."\footnote{Tacitus Annals 1.7.8.} While Tacitus highlighted Tiberius's fears of his heir apparent, he added to the emperors' perfidious nature by insinuating that his fears were unfounded since "there is no evidence that Germanicus contemplated making a premature and hazardous bid for supremacy when his future position was guaranteed by ancestry, adoption, experience, and powers."\footnote{Barbara Levick, Tiberius: The Politician (New York, New York: Routledge, 1999), 148.}

As a young man and military commander, Tiberius won many victories for Augustus in the provinces of Germany, Dalmatia, Pannonia, and Armenia. Before his
death, Augustus stopped territorial expansion and settled his army into provincial garrisons. The stationing of soldiers along Rome’s frontier provided safety for the people who lived in the provinces but also established a buffer region for Rome. Barbarian incursions threatened the peace of the Empire and tested the loyalty of Tiberius’s legions for “on the frontiers were the soldiers, who must be paid if their ambitions were to be moderated, and within the frontiers were the peaceful provincials.” Upon Tiberius’s succession, the Rhine legions threatened mutiny presenting a potential opportunity for an aspiring leader to be cajoled into a position as usurper. Tiberius dispatched Germanicus hoping to end the dispute quickly but at the same time risked handing Germanicus an easy opportunity to seize power. Tacitus stated that the legions of the Rhine pressed upon Germanicus that “should he wish for empire” they were “abundantly willing” to profess allegiance to him. According to Tacitus, Tiberius “rejoiced that the mutiny was crushed” but still remained paranoid of Germanicus’s success because he “had won the soldiers’ favour by lavishing money,” which greatly “annoyed him.” As a result, Germanicus was transferred to the East to remove him from the support of his legions on the Rhine and isolate him in the provinces.

Under the reign of Tiberius, the Praetorian Guard and its commanders the Prefects acquired great power and influence and became incorporated into the Principate’s

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45 Tiberius wanted to uphold the treaties of Augustus and feared that if Rome went to war then Germanicus had a chance to win triumphs and popularity thus making him a rival to the throne.


47 Tacitus *Annals* 1.35.25.

48 Ibid, 1.52.35. After subduing the mutiny on the lower Rhine Germanicus then “went to the Upper Army, and the second, thirteenth, and sixteenth legions, without any delay, accepted from him the oath of allegiance.”
In 2 BC, Augustus elevated two men to the position of prefect in the hopes “perhaps to strengthen the Princeps’ hand against the pressure exerted on him” by Julia. Other internal forces regarding security placed the holders of the Prefect in a position as a potential usurper of power. The Praetorian Guard functioned as the princeps’ personal bodyguard and muscle behind his auctoritas. The aspect of popular discontent and the threat of citywide rioting frightened Tiberius because he feared agitation from Julia’s supporters who had the ability to “command strong support amongst the people.” Tiberius’s awareness of his unpopularity with the people led him in AD 23 to reposition the Praetorian cohorts at Sejanus’s request closer to the city walls “because it was in Rome that disturbances were most feared.” The growing dependence placed on the Prefect transformed it into a powerful political position equal to the provincial commanders in its ability to challenge the holder of the Principate. The plot by the Praetorian Prefect Sejanus in AD 31 alerted Tiberius to the dangers to his security, causing him to tarnish his image through numerous maiestas trials.

The idea that Tacitus used Germanicus as a foil is evident in the types of imperial propaganda issued. Publically, Tiberius gave the appearance of an amicable relationship with his heir apparent; however, in private he was quite jealous and fearful of Germanicus’s popularity with the legions. Six years after the defeat of Varus at Kalkriese in the Teutoburg Forest, Germanicus dedicated a war memorial at the site of

49. Levick, Tiberius the Politician, 43.
50. Levick, Tiberius the Politician, 64.
51. Levick, Tiberius the Politician, 121.
52. The discovery of Sejanus’s plot triggered Tiberius to purge the Roman nobility through a series of maiestas trials. Vengeance was exacted for treason where proscribed persons, who politically opposed or threatened Tiberius, were executed. It is estimated that between 20 and 30 thousand people died.
the battle. Tacitus described Tiberius’s fury towards Germanicus because he should not
“have polluted himself with funeral rites.” Tacitus regarded Tiberius’s disapproval as a
sign of jealousy which prompted Tiberius “to remove Germanicus from the political
scene whilst appearing to promote him.” However, Tiberius, for the sake of public
opinion had to honor Germanicus’s victories because he was his heir. Tiberius chose to
commemorate Germanicus on his coinage, most particularly the issue of the Quadrige. The obverse side of the coin has Germanicus riding in a chariot pulled by four horses that symbolize his military triumph for his service during the Germanic rebellions.

Germanicus also stands in a chariot with military cuirass; he is shown bare headed and
holding the Aquila or eagle, which represented the Roman legionary standard. Above the
image is the inscription GERMANICVS CAESAR, defining his tie to the imperial
family. The reverse side of the coin depicted Germanicus togate with cuirass, bare
headed, and holding an Aquila with his right hand outstretched in the traditional Roman
manner of salute. The inscription SIGNIS RECES DEVICTIS GERMS referred to
Germanicus’s recovery of the lost standards from the Varus episode in AD 9 in the

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53 Peter S. Wells, The Battle that Stopped Rome (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 45. The first theory that Kalkriese was the battle site was in 1716 by Zacharias Goeze. He heard of large amounts of Roman coins found by local farmers. In July of 1987 a British army officer named Tony Clunn discovered the site.

54 Tacitus Annals 1.62.41. As a consul Germanicus legally could not perform funeral rites. Only the Pontifex Maximus could perform the ritual.

55 Shotter, “Tacitus, Tiberius and Germanicus,” 205.

56 The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 B.C. to A.D. 69, C.H.V. Sutherland, vol. 1, Plate 14.
Teutoburg Forest. Also inscribed were the letters S and C, which referred to the traditional role of the senate as the advisory body of Rome.

In Tacitus's writings, Tiberius comes off "as a hypocrite" and "a man who continually hid his real thoughts, while pretending to think something quite different." It is hard to arrive at an understanding of Tacitus from his writings, because "he represents Tiberius as practicing greater and greater cruelty and indulging in vice more and more." Germanicus was presented in a more favorable light because Tacitus wanted to discredit Tiberius's character and highlight the point that he was a bad emperor. Germanicus's early death meant that he never ascended to the Principate and never had the chance to prove whether his rule would mimic what Augustus envisioned, while the later successors to the Julio-Claudian line failed to uphold virtue. Relying on their name and the imperial coffers to hold the fidelity of the legions, the Julio-Claudian emperors abandoned the legacy Augustus tried to install and instead allowed the political intrigues of absolute power to corrupt the imperial family and the government leading to their downfall.

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57 The standards retrieved by Germanicus. This inscription refers to the recovered battle standards of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Legions under the command of Varus in the Teutoburg Forrest. These legions were never reconstituted.


CHAPTER IV
THE FLAVIANS

Nero’s suicide ended the reign of emperors with a direct and distinct relationship to Augustus. Augustus intended the family name and the Principate to be linked with the image of Rome, making them in essence one and the same, but the events of AD 69 altered the stability that the Julio-Claudian emperors relied upon. The emperors of AD 69 and afterward ascended to the imperial throne solely through the wishes and strengths of their legions. The people accepted the continuation of the Principate after the dissolution of the Julio-Claudians “as long as the emperor remained in principle based in Rome.”¹ Instead of following the qualifications for succession as prescribed by Augustus, contenders for the imperial office after AD 69 gained power exclusively from their respective commands in the provinces. Having installed the emperor, the army had to protect him from potential usurpers to the throne both internally and externally, which made military command a vital necessity.

Four men ascended to the Principate in AD 69 but only the first and the last-Galba and Vespasian—will be discussed in this chapter. Galba tried reinstituting Augustus’ template for imperial succession with disappointing results while Vespasian successfully employed his status and standing with his legions to propel him into office and bring stability to Rome under a new familial dynasty.

The events of AD 69 constitute the bulk of Tacitus’s Historiae. Tacitus discussed Galba’s promotions under the Flavians but admits that unlike his critical stance toward

Domitian, Tacitus “has no personal cause for being unfair” to Galba and the others, emphasizing that he speaks “without partiality and without hatred.” That does not mean that Galba escaped Tacitus’s criticism. While Tacitus brushed over many details of Galba’s early career, he did mention in passing the rumors which hinted at Galba’s “feebleness and avarice.” Even though it is clear that Tacitus does not particularly approve of Galba’s reign, he does “condone a sympathetic portrayal of the tragedy of Sulpicius Galba.”

In book one of the Historiae Tacitus emphasized the “secret of empire” that existed in Roman politics because after Nero, “emperors could be made elsewhere than at Rome.” He referred to provincial commanders seizing upon the opportunity to utilize arcanum imperii in their favor: one was Galba, who received his provincial command in AD 33 with his appointment as “governor of Upper Germany” and was elevated to “governor of Nearer Spain” under Nero. Hailed as Imperator by his legions and with the backing of Otho, Galba received the Principate and the duties of the state.

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3 Tacitus Historiae 1.5.422.

4 Syme, Tacitus, 204.

5 Tacitus Historiae 1.4.421. At the time of Nero’s suicide Galba was governor of Hispania Tarraconensis. He only had the legion VI Victrix at his disposal but quickly raised the VII Galbiana.


7 The Cambridge Ancient History: The Augustan Empire 44 B.C.-AD 70 vol. 10, eds. S.A. Cook, F.E. Adcock, and M.P. Charlesworth (London: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 817. Otho was of noble birth but not ancient lineage serving as the governor of Lusitania under Nero in 58.
Although the Julio-Claudian line ended with Nero, the name Caesar still commanded respect and fostered images of political stability. Civil war remained a possible threat to Galba’s security and so he publicized his connection to the house of Caesar. It is well known that Livia held Galba in high esteem and thought highly enough to leave “him 50 million sesterces in her will.”8 Livia boasted an impeccable lineage claiming ancestry from both the Julian and Claudian lines. 9 The propaganda implications that her patronage afforded inclined Galba to mint “several series of coins honouring her.”10 An aureus issued by Galba depicted him laureate, with the inscription Imperator and Caesar on the obverse while the reverse shows an image of Livia draped holding a patera and scepter with arm outstretched symbolically showing her patronage of Galba. 11 Although Livia held tremendous political clout in Rome she did not, however, hold the backing of the legions.

Provincial discord left Galba feeling “anxious as to the direction which the violence of the legions might take” necessitating the naming of an heir to demonstrate political stability. 12 Galba witnessed firsthand the degeneration of the Julio-Claudian

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8 Anthony A. Barret, Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 174; 189. Tiberius eventually decreased the amount to 500,000 claiming “the sum had not been written out and the numerical symbol was erroneous.” Caligula paid out the total sum to Galba.

9 Barret, Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome, 4. Mythically the Claudians traced their lineage to Clausus, who allegedly helped the Trojan Aeneas. According to record, the Claudii migrated to Rome in 503 BC of the Sabine Attus Clausus.

10 Barret, Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome, 223.


12 Tacitus Historiae 1.13.427.
emperors and chose to follow "the precedent of the Divine Augustus." But necessity, not prudence, may have been Galba's driving force in his decision to adopt. Galba's recognition of the Augustan adoption principle was the only option available to him because of "his age and his childlessness rendering it impossible for him to establish a dynasty of his own blood." Tacitus used "sober and lapidary language" in his depiction of Galba's adoption speech, which "seems to speak as the 'res publica' should speak" when he quoted Galba as saying "I look for one in the state." Perhaps this is why Tacitus lends a sympathetic ear to Galba; he represented an attempt to return to Republican tradition. Whether Galba truly intended to transform the Principate based on Republican ideals is irrelevant because he neglected the key element in his security. Galba focused on adopting an heir "of noble birth and high character," who naturally appealed to the Senate when he "ought to have considered the state of the provincial armies." Galba's *arcanum imperii* was slipping both in the provinces and among the Praetorians as he recanted his promises of indemnities to the Guard, negating the "safeguard intended to be provided by the adoption of Piso."

Piso's adoption did not placate the soldiers, which led the legions stationed in Germany to mutiny and proclaim their support of Otho. Galba's short-lived reign proved that the struggles of opportunistic men and the prolongation of civil war still

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13 Tacitus, *Historiae* 1.15.428.


15 Syme, Tacitus, 182; Tacitus *Historiae* 1.16.428.


loomed over Rome. Galba held the patronage of the most illustrious Roman woman and secured an heir by adoption, but he was unable to mend the financial woes plaguing Rome's imperial treasury. The legions deposed Galba on the promises of another opportunistic general. Galba, along with his adopted heir, was slain in the Forum by soldiers loyal to Otho.19

It was not until the accession of Vespasian, the last of four emperors in AD 69 to hold the imperial office, that stability descended upon Rome. The dynasty of the Flavians followed the Julio-Claudians as the second imperial family of Rome consisting of Vespasian and his two sons Titus and Domitian. Contemporary writers such as Josephus were more favorable to Vespasian and Titus than they were to Domitian. Josephus’s praise can be attributed to his pardon by Vespasian and his time spent in the Roman camps.20 Even what survives of Tacitus’s Historiae speaks well of the first two Flavians because it was under Vespasian that he “had been given permission to aim at a senatorial career.”21 Domitian, though, receives the harshest criticism from Tacitus in the Agricola and also from Suetonius’s Lives of the Twelve Caesars. Domitian is attacked for his lax morality and his oppressive reign and the authors question his legitimacy. Vespasian recognized that the Principate’s “principle power structure still remained the army” and proved that “the most powerful general could make himself emperor.”22

19 Tacitus Historiae 1.41.443.

20 Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, ed. and trans. Abraham Wasserstein (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 20. In 69 after Vespasian took the throne he freed Josephus. “There he lived in Vespasian’s house, became a Roman citizen, and was granted a pension.”


the year AD 69 the "arcanum imperii is out of the bottle" according to J.G.A. Pocock, solidifying the army as the ultimate wielders of imperial power.23

Evidence of Domitian’s upbringing in the imperial palace and his authoritarian reign sustains the argument against his legitimacy since Titus was trained for the imperial office and held military commands. Domitian earned the resentment of the Senate, inciting them to purge his image from Rome and to erase his name from the scrolls of Roman history.24 For the ancient writers, Domitian’s denigration afforded writers new literary freedoms, which they used to castigate Domitian’s reign. Perhaps Domitian’s harshest critic, Tacitus, writing under the Antonines, used Domitian’s reign as a backdrop to the laudations of his father-in-law Agricola. Tacitus “loses no chance of vilifying Domitian” and included any rumors that confirmed Domitian’s cruel character even if it “is only a fiction invented to suit the Emperor’s character.”25

Domitian spent his entire reign finding ways to legitimate himself to the people and the legions stemming from his subordinate position in the imperial hierarchy. The safety and self-assurance of arcanum imperii eluded Domitian since he was deprived of the opportunity to “take an independent military command” from an early age.26 Lacking the military honors essential to the security of the arcanum imperii, Domitian used the

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23 Pocock, Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall vol. 3 (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 30.

24 Suetonius Domitian 7.23.385. The Senate decreed that “his inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated.” Much like the de-Stalinization period that transpired after Stalin’s death in the Soviet Union by his successor Khushchev, the Senate affixed the damnatio memoriae upon the name of Domitian.


memory and military careers of his father and brother as propaganda adding credence to his Principate.

Vespasian built his career and fame under the patronage of the Julio-Claudians. From his early commands Vespasian gained wealth, promotions, and recognition, all adding to his aura as a commander. Vespasian’s resume included the conquest of Britain where he brought “Claudius’s cherished and indeed most important scheme to successful fruition.”27 From Britain, Vespasian accepted the promotion to quell the rebel uprisings in the province of Judea. He received this command from Nero and the circumstances surrounding his appointment distinguish Vespasian’s ascendancy to the Principate.

Unlike other provincial commanders who came from noble families, Vespasian survived Nero’s court because of his humble background.28 Nero, whose legitimacy stemmed from his patronymic name of Caesar, believed that Vespasian, though a successful general, could not threaten his power because of his non-noble lineage. Vespasian played his role as a humble subservient general and remained safe because he was perceived as “one to whom so great a power could be entrusted without risk.”29

While the obscurity of his family kept him safe from purges, Vespasian’s military successes caught the eyes of the people. Tacitus portrayed him as “a Western leader backed by the supernatural forces of the East” because of the riches and glory from the

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27 Barbara Levick, Vespasian (New York: Routledge, 1999), 19. Britain was the benchmark for Claudius’s dreams of conquest. Before him Caligula had tried to conquer Britain but was thwarted by lack of funds and instead had his soldiers collect seashells as spoils of war from the god Neptune.

28 Suetonius Vespasian 8.4.289. While in Nero’s court Vespasian fell asleep during one of Nero’s singing performances. Vespasian was banished from the court and withdrew from public life in fear for his life until he was recalled and given command of an army.

29 Suetonius Vespasian 8.4.289.
Once in the Principate, Vespasian cunningly consolidated his power to secure the *arcandum imperii* that was crucial to his reign. The legions of Germany contained men who supported the generals Otho and Vitellius and their presence in the legions inspired Vespasian to clean house so that the remaining legions were loyal to him and him only. The fact that Vespasian had two sons of mature age enhanced his ability to maintain security; he played on this with “his bold experiment of associating his son Titus with him in the empire.” Titus’s presence in his father’s administration served to project the image of dynastic stability and the wealth his military success brought financed Flavian imperial propaganda. Flavian propaganda was used not only to affirm Titus as an heir but also to build up the prestige of a humble name that did not have the benefit of association with Caesar or Augustus.

Examples of such propaganda included the personification of the imperial cult as seen in the chosen iconography depicted on coinage minted in triumph. Titus’s conquest of Judea shortly after Vespasian took office was depicted in his coinage. The obverse of an *aureus* and a *denarius* depicted Vespasian laureate with the titles *Imperator* and *Caesar* inscribed on either side of the bust. The reverse of the coin shows Vespasian standing over a distressed Jewish woman under a palm tree with the inscription *IVDEA*

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31 Levick, *Vespasian*, 59. Vespasian distrusted the Rhine legions and dispersed them in favor of the legions stationed in the Balkans. XI Claudia was transferred to Dalmatia, VII Gemina to Carnuntum in Pannonia and ordered the I Adiutrix to relocate to Spain. Vespasian consolidated his power base by bringing the legions V Macedonia, IV Scythia, and XV Apollinaris closer to Rome. All of whom came from the Balkans.


The coin represents the image of Vespasian’s military achievements and also draws attention to Titus who conquered Judea in his father’s name. Vespasian affixed the Flavian name to a grand new amphitheatre for the Roman populace, built over the private gardens of Nero. The amphitheatre satiated the crowds’ thirst for blood and games while publically defaming Nero’s image and memory. Along with promoting his good image to the people, the ancient writers also credited Vespasian with certain Christ-like miracles. Tacitus’s account of the miracles of Vespasian described him as extremely reluctant to publicly perform miracles out of fear of backlash from failure. The image of certain god-like powers made up for the lack of deified ancestors.

Vespasian, like Augustus, “feared the possibility that the empire would disintegrate on his death” and Titus’s succession is proof of Vespasian’s hereditary dynastic intentions; Titus’s role in his father’s administration and military affairs primed him to be the legitimate successor. Titus appealed to the military faction of Vespasian’s arcanum imperii, but the Senate was reticent to recognize his legitimacy due to “the disastrous history of the Julio-Claudian emperors.”

Controversy arises from two of the ancient sources as to whether Vespasian included his youngest son Domitian in his dynastic plans. From the texts it is clear that

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34 Tacitus Historiae 4.81.652. According to Tacitus, Vespasian spit on the cheek and eye of a blind man thus curing him. Vespasian also touched a man’s diseased hand with his foot and restored its use.

35 Brian W. Jones, The Emperor Titus (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 80. The honors of proconsular imperium and the tribunicia potestas were meant to “ensure Titus’s smooth accession to the principate” since the consignment of tribunicia potestas “indicated senatorial approval.”

36 Levick, Vespasian, 185. Claudius adopted Nero because of the death of his son Britannicus. This brought Nero’s terror to the city and people of Rome until Nero committed suicide.
“there was no place for Domitian in Vespasian’s power-structure.”37 His lack of military training and the dominant position of his older brother brings into question whether Vespasian intended Domitian to ever hold the imperial office. Suetonius and Cassius Dio’s accounts differ drastically in the meaning of the Flavian succession. Cassius Dio quoted Vespasian as saying that “my successor shall be my son or no one at all,” while Suetonius quoted Vespasian as saying “sons.”38 If Suetonius’s account is accurate, then Vespasian intended for Domitian to rule after Titus. If Cassius Dio is correct, only Titus was intended to rule in hopes that he would produce a male heir, properly trained for the imperial purple.

Even if Domitian was not intended for imperial succession, the image of a solidified family, whether on coinage or in military triumphs, was meant to ensure the image of a stable family dynasty. Coins issued by Vespasian and Titus served to promote Titus and Domitian as co-heirs, thus promoting a harmonious family image to the public. The obverse of an aureus depicted Vespasian laureate while the reverse showed Titus and Domitian facing each other holding a patera and roll.39 Both sons are shown laureate signifying their position as heirs, and the inscription CAESARES VESP AUG FILI signified the boys as the sons and future heirs of Vespasian. Though “Domitian’s titles simply remained unaltered when the year 80 began,” publically, Domitian is portrayed as


a co-heir while in private he was relegated to the background, leaving no impression that his position in the line of succession was altered. 

Growing up in the imperial palace Domitian surely must have felt resentment toward his father who never granted him a military command. In comparison to his brother Titus, Domitian became insecure about his chances for succession, since Titus “was assured the military experience which had been denied Nero” and now Domitian had to watch from the background as Titus’s military successes mounted. Titus’s military career marked him for succession when he obtained a legionary command in Judea in 67. This act symbolized the confidence Vespasian had in Titus to finish the Judean campaign and succeed to the Principate. If Domitian truly was intended to legitimately succeed his brother then there is no logical reason why Domitian was restricted from military command. Vespasian’s preference for Titus is undeniable and perhaps he was wary of letting Domitian “anywhere near troops in case he developed ideas above his station.”

Earlier denied military glory, Domitian as emperor, spearheaded an aggressive foreign policy on the frontiers of the Empire in an attempt to attach his own name to military success. Conquest was synonymous with wealth and fame from which the emperor could pay his armies, thus retaining their *fidelis*.

Most of Tacitus’s *Agricola* contains a cultural and geographic history of Britain and an account of Agricola’s successful subjugation of the Roman-controlled part of the

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42 Titus served as Vespasian’s legate and was given command of the legion XV Apollinaris when he was twenty-seven years old.

island. Tacitus takes direct aim at Domitian’s many unsuccessful campaigns and particularly notes the emperor’s jealousy of his father-in-law. Domitian purchased slaves in order to imitate captured prisoners and Tacitus described his victories as a mere farce, lambasting him for “his late mock triumph over Germany.”\textsuperscript{44} In the \textit{Agricola}, Domitian’s Germanic campaigns are described as “a cheap and fraudulent substitute for genuine glory” in contradiction to the emperor’s perception that the campaigns were a “considerable operation, securing the whole frontier of Upper Germany.”\textsuperscript{45} To counter any misgivings as to the integrity of the campaigns, Domitian vigorously employed various means of propaganda linking his name and image to military success.

Domitian’s coinage projected images and inscriptions to foster the favorable perception of his military glory. A favorite reverse of Domitian was the image of the goddess Minerva. Minerva was important to Domitian because she was the “patroness of arms and letters alike” and “was a fitting protectress of an emperor who aspired to success in both fields.”\textsuperscript{46} He used Minerva’s image to harmonize his two interests while at the same time glorify his military exploits no matter how disastrous they proved to be.

Since Domitian was inexperienced both in military command and administration, he placed images on his coins depicting his military triumph and his patron goddess Minerva. On a bronze denarius Domitian is depicted laureate while the reverse showed

\textsuperscript{44} Tacitus \textit{Agricola} 1.39.701; Cassius Dio \textit{Roman History} 67.7.331. The emperor waged wars on the Chatti and Dacians in 82 using the success to add the title of Germanicus to his name. Tacitus stated that slaves were bought “whose dress and hair might be made to resemble those of captives.” Again in 89, Domitian marched against the “Quadi and the Macromani because they had not assisted him against the Dacians.”

\textsuperscript{45} Syme, \textit{Tacitus}, 214. Upper Germany consisted of the regions along the Rhine and the Danube.

\textsuperscript{46} Howard Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, \textit{The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian}, vol. 2, 151. Minerva was the patron goddess of war and intelligence. As a child, Domitian studied the classical curriculum since he was withheld from military training.
Minerva standing with spear below the inscription GERMANICVS COS XVI.\textsuperscript{47} Domitian also wished to stress his military glory by issuing coinage that mimicked the iconography used by Vespasian. The obverse of a \textit{sestertius} displayed Domitian standing and holding a spear in front of a kneeling German.\textsuperscript{48} The inscription GERMANIA CAPTA is also on the reverse, which mirrored the issue by Vespasian to commemorate the subjugation of Judea.

The uses of monuments, like coinage, were influential in promoting the family name and image to citizens and visitors of Rome. The Arch of Titus stands as a testament to Titus’s military success and to the Flavian dynasty, with its depiction of the conquest of Judea and the sacking of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The construction of the arch is traditionally attributed to Domitian’s reign but Donald McFayden questions this assumption. McFayden stated that the arch in all likelihood was completed under the first two Antonines because the “arch is nowhere mentioned in Latin literature” texts of Domitian’s Principate.\textsuperscript{49} But there is still doubt, McFayden explained, as to the validity of this argument. Scholars who agree on dating the arch to Domitian’s reign believe that perhaps “Domitian felt compelled to complete it” as a public form of propaganda.\textsuperscript{50} Even if Domitian interpreted the arch as eclipsing his own eminence, the arch symbolized the success of the Flavian name and the \emph{bona fortuna} that was attached to it. Whether the

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian}, Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, vol. 2, Plate V.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian}, Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, vol. 2, Plate VI.

\textsuperscript{49} Donald McFayden, “The Date of the Arch of Titus,” \textit{The Classical Journal} 11, no. 3 (Dec., 1915): 131.

\textsuperscript{50} McFayden, “The Date of the Arch of Titus,” 133.
arch was completed under Domitian is arguable but Titus’s deification represents
acknowledgement of the bigger picture on Domitian’s behalf, as any publicized
achievement of his father or brother added to the Flavian mystique, which he could use to
his own purpose.

The reigns of Vespasian and Titus were predicated upon military command and
thus the ability to hold the loyalty of the legions. Since Domitian’s military ambitions
had been checked by his father, as emperor he had to rely on monetary payments to
maintain legionary support. Domitian must have known how flimsy his arcanum imperii
actually was. The uneasiness he felt as emperor was personified by his vain attempts to
achieve military glory and security for his regime. Domitian, though, skirted a fine line
in his interactions with his provincial commanders. Upon the conclusion of the Rhine
campaigns, Domitian hastily promised to pay indemnities to the army but later changed
his mind and instead “reduced the number of the soldiers.” 51 Promotion of provincial
officials and the imperium they wielded was considerably higher in Domitian’s reign in
comparison to the first two Flavians. His reasons were simple: by allowing provincials
more opportunities at promotions, he hoped “to gain further support from them” since
they were stationed in the provinces. 52 Promotions aside, Domitian jeopardized his
relationship with the army and its commanders as he was quick to place “the blame on his

51 Cassius Dio Roman History 67.3.325. Domitian promised a pay increase of 400 sestertes to
each soldier.

52 Brian W. Jones, “Praetorian Proconsuls under Domitian,” Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte
Geschichte 24, no. 4 (4th Qtr., 1975): 632. Promotions of Legati legionis under Domitian had a 56% 
increase, consules 82%, and legati (cos.) 56% in comparison to lower numbers under Vespasian and Titus.
commanders” but even quicker to accept “for himself all the successes.” Slowly he isolated and antagonized the source of his power, threatening to destabilize his authority.

It is unfair to judge Domitian based solely on his character since Tacitus derided the last Flavian to heighten his father-in-law’s legacy. Suetonius insinuated that “Domitian had illicit dealings with many married women” but neglected to mention any names. Suetonius did, however, state that “his savage cruelty was not only excessive, but also cunning and sudden” and these became manifest in his desire “to be flattered,” the culmination of which led to his request that in speech and letters he be referred to as *dominus et deus.* This is in stark contrast to his father’s deathbed quip of “*Vae, inquit, puto duas fio*” provided by Suetonius. Not since the notorious reign of Caligula had a Roman emperor declared himself a living god. Naturally this caused unrest among not only the imperial court but also the people, as the declaration contradicted the traditional practice of deification of the emperor after death.

The familial dynasty dreamed of by Vespasian seemed to hang in the balance since Titus left behind no male heirs. On his deathbed Titus is quoted by Cassius Dio as saying “I have made but one mistake.” Two explanations are offered as to the

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53 Cassius Dio *Roman History* 67.6.331.


55 Suetonius *Domitian* 8.3.345-8.11.363; Cassius Dio *Roman History* 67.4.325. Early in his reign the signs of Domitian’s instability were known in the imperial palace as “he used to spend hours in seclusion every day, doing nothing but catch flies and stab them with a keenly-sharpened stylus.” Domitian, according to Cassius Dio, despised those who did and did not pay court to him “because they seemed to be flattering him and with the latter because they seemed to despise him.” “Our lord and god.”

56 Suetonius *Vespasian* 8.23.319. “Woe’s me. Methinks I’m turning into a god.”

57 Titus had only one daughter, Julia, from his first marriage to Marcia Furnilla.

58 Cassius Dio *Roman History* 66.3.315.
meaning of his words. While the more plausible reason points to Titus's failure to appoint a proper heir, Titus may also have referred to the fact "that he had not killed Domitian when he found him openly plotting against him" and that he "had surrendered the empire of the Romans to a man like Domitian." The death of Domitian ended the twenty-six year reign of the Flavian dynasty and as Domitian left no successor it fell to the Senate to select a new emperor from the senatorial class to lead Rome. Supporters of the conspiracy to assassinate Domitian were unwilling to commit to the plan "until they had determined who was to succeed to the imperial office."

The year AD 69 dramatically changed the formula for obtaining the imperial office. Only Galba tried to secure a suitable heir by means of the Augustan model of the adoption principle. Unfortunately for Galba, he failed to select an heir who appeased both the Senate and the army. Vespasian ascended to the Principate with the intention of creating a new dynasty from which succession passed hereditarily to his two sons. Titus was bred for the imperial purple but his early death and short reign left many uncertainties. Domitian's lack of military training and his feeble attempts to satisfy his own personal glory raised questions about the legitimacy of Domitian's succession and reign. After the death of Domitian, Rome thrived under the guidance and leadership of

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59 Cassius Dio Roman History 66.3.315. The first explanation given by Cassius Dio revolved around a rumored affair between Titus and Domitian's wife Domitia. Cassius Dio rejected this in favor of the second explanation because if the affair was true Domitia would have certainly revealed the nature of the affair.

60 Cassius Dio Roman History 66.4.315; Ivar Lissner The Caesars Might and Madness, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (New York: Van Rees Press, 1958), 166. Domitian was found guilty of conspiring against his brother and was pardoned by Titus in hopes that Domitian would "return his own brotherly affection."

61 Cassius Dio Roman History 67.4.353. The plot to assassinate Domitian was a conspiracy perpetrated by his wife Domitia and the Prefects Norbanus and Petronius Secundus. The actual assassination was carried out by Stephanus, who faked an arm injury and stabbed Domitian with a knife concealed in the bandage.
what is termed the age of the Five Good Emperors. It is under the Antonines that the
adoption of the ‘best man’ to rule as envisioned by Augustus came to fruition.
CHAPTER V
THE ANTONINES

The second century A.D. instituted a new era of prosperity and a new found resurgence of the people's faith in the Principate with the accession of the Antonines. During the period historians have dubbed that of the Five Good Emperors, Rome "returned to a most prosperous condition after being entrusted with great fortune to virtuous rulers."¹ Domitian's succession brought to light the marked deficiencies in the system of hereditary succession. Since he died childless and left no designated successor, his death placed the question of succession in the hands of the Senate. To avoid civil war and the repetition of four men ascending to the Principate as in AD 69, it was crucial for the new emperor to hold arcanum imperii; if the dynasty was to continue, he must choose a successor who appealed both to the Senate and the army. In choosing Nerva, the Senate succeeded in reviving the adoption principle of Augustus because they "ingeniously had chosen as successor to the dead Domitian an elderly man without any son of his own."²

As a lawyer and senator, he took pride in the law and the function of state, which made him an optimal candidate for the Principate.

The reigns of the Flavians and the Antonines are significantly different in the accounts of the ancient authors. Despite receiving promotion under Domitian, Tacitus


² Bernard W. Henderson, Five Roman Emperors: Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Nerva, Trajan A.D. 69-117 (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc, 1969), 174. Before becoming emperor Nerva served as a well respected lawyer in the Roman courts and in 65 was granted the triumphal insignia for his actions in suppressing Piso's conspiracy against Nero. Gaius Calpernius Piso served as co-consul with the emperor Claudius and was a powerful senator during Nero's reign. Piso conspired to assassinate Nero until a freedman exposed his plot. He then took his own life.
lashed out at the emperor’s authoritarian reign and loss of *libertas* among the Senate.

Tacitus praised the accession of the first two Antonines, the period in which he transcribed his history, commenting on the “rare happiness of times, when we may think what we please, and express what we think.” Under the Antonines he was finally able to express his dissatisfaction with Domitian and other ‘bad emperors,’ but gave few details about Nerva and Trajan. Direct references to Nerva and Trajan exist only as sharp contrasts to the dismal experience felt under Domitian. More detailed accounts of Nerva and Trajan are found in the writings of later authors such as Cassius Dio; however, his history of Nerva is relatively short due to the brevity of Nerva’s reign, with the majority of the descriptions focusing on his adoption of Trajan.

Nerva’s appointment to the imperial office mirrored the functions of an *interrex* during the Republic. In the tradition of the Republic, during times of national crisis it fell to the Senate to choose a man for the office of *dictator* until the end of six months or the crisis was resolved. If no one was chosen, they then selected an *interrex* to hold office until a more suitable person was chosen. Adoption by the Senate may have acted “as a palliative to the popular indignation aroused by their immediate predecessors.” It is true that much of “what Tacitus thought of Cocceius Nerva may perhaps be divined from the

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4 The most notable example from the Republic is the story of Cincinnatus. In 457 BC Cincinnatus was given dictatorial powers from the Senate in order to fight an adjacent tribe of peoples called the Aequins. After defeating the Aequins, Cincinnatus humbly relinquished his dictatorial powers and returned to his farm.

way he deals with Galba’s rule—and with Galba’s choice of successor.”

Thirty years earlier, Galba, like Nerva, was selected by the Senate to correct the wrongs of a familial dynasty. But unlike Galba, Nerva succeeded in bringing stability back to Rome and avoided the chaos of civil war. Nerva renewed faith in the imperial office by winning the support of the army and people. He reinstituted the Augustan legacy of imperial adoption of the ‘best man’ to ensure the rule of qualified leaders. Galba’s downfall had been directly related to his failure to choose a successor who was acceptable to the army. Nerva, though, skillfully selected an heir who was congenial in the eyes of both the Senate and the army, which gave his brief reign the stability needed to reform the Roman government and ensure the smooth transition of power to his heir.

Nerva had witnessed the chaos of the events of AD 69 and the oppressiveness of Domitian, instilling in him the importance of holding arcanum imperii along with legitimizing his reign. Nerva ascended to the Principate as “one of the few men alive who could claim a family tie with the house of Augustus.” Nerva traced his lineage to Tiberius through his mother’s side, but concentrated his propaganda campaigns not on his familial tie to the Julio-Claudians but on the denigration of his predecessor and strengthening his relationship with the army. Nerva’s successful transition was facilitated by the senatorial decree of the damnatio memoriae, which he used as a pretext to set himself apart from the notoriety of Domitian. Nerva eased tensions between the Senate and the Principate, since he came from their ranks and owed his accession to their vote, and reinstated their advisory position to the Principate by doing “nothing without the

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advice of the foremost men." In casting off the fetters imposed on the Senate under Domitian, Nerva received praise from Tacitus. Tacitus’s Agricola, though primarily concerned with denigrating Domitian’s character as compared with that of Agricola, also wished to laud the Antonines because “Nerva Caesar blended things once irreconcilable, sovereignty and freedom.”

To rectify years of neglect, Nerva instituted a policy of imperially sponsored socio-economic reform which “granted allotments of land worth 60,000,000 sesterces” to Rome’s poor. Many of the recipients consisted of Romans whose property had been seized unlawfully by Domitian. Nerva hoped to perpetuate the image of a virtuous ruler who cared for the well-being of his people by paying for the expense out of the imperial coffers. This put Nerva in a most advantageous position since the people had Nerva alone to thank for the gifts of land and money. In order to help pay for his reforms Nerva “sold much wearing apparel and many vessels of silver and gold, which belonged to the imperial residence” instead of resorting to heavy taxation or the seizure of personal property. The social gaps between the patricians and plebeians meant that a majority of Rome’s urban populace depended on government assistance. Previous emperors granted some form of assistance to the city’s poor either in grain donatives, money, or gifts given

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9 Tacitus, Agricola, ed. Moses Hadas and trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: Random House, 1942), 678; Anonymous, Lives of the Later Caesars, ed. and trans. Anthony Birley (England: Penguin Books, 1976), 32. To show his goodwill Nerva “set free all who were on trial for treason and recalled the exiles” while at the same time “he put to death all the slaves and freedmen who had conspired against their masters” and forbade anyone “to accuse anyone of treason.”

10 Cassius Dio Roman History 68.2.363. Poor in Roman standards meant the absence of property ownership. The amount of land one owned determined into their wealth.

11 Ibid., 68.2.363. Selling his personal affects did little to alleviate the financial woes but it did increase his public persona.
at the games. Nerva dedicated himself to improving Rome’s standard of living; under Nerva, aqueducts to the city received much needed repairs, more citizens were exempt from inheritance taxes, and more land was allotted to the landless plebs.\(^{12}\)

Nerva’s social reform by means of the *alimenta* built new storehouses, which made grain distribution more efficiently to the populace.\(^{13}\) The *alimenta* was Nerva’s solution to “stimulate the Italian birthrate” and “find working capital for small farmers.”\(^{14}\) The new emperor quickly saw the potential of the *alimenta* as a propaganda tool, reckoning that the “small farmers would welcome it, while the public at large would be impressed by the picture of well-fed, healthy children.”\(^{15}\) Even though Nerva had a short reign, his policy of *alimenta* was continued by his successor Trajan, retaining for him a favorable public image which allowed him to capitalize on the favorable image of his adoptive father.

Nerva’s socio-economic programs reform and care of the Roman state prompted him, according to Cassius Dio, to say, “I have done nothing wrong that would prevent my laying down the imperial office and returning to private life in safety.”\(^{16}\) Nerva’s career

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\(^{12}\) E.T. Salmon, *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138* (London: Routledge, 2004), 269. Nerva granted a 5% tax exemption to parents and their children and he allowed landowners to receive loans if they paid 5% interest to their local municipality.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 269. The Gracchi brothers were the first to endorse a program like the *alimenta* in 123 BC. This was part of their agriculture reform to repopulate Rome’s farmland with the excess population of the city. From the taxes collected from the small farmers, the *alimenta* was a form of public charity that gave maintenance grants to poor parents with children until they reached puberty within the territorial bounds. The *alimenta* was controlled by a Praetorian *praefectus alimentorum*. The Praetorian was from the senatorial class who managed an equestrian staff known as the *procurators alimentorum*.

\(^{14}\) Salmon, *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138*, 270. The *alimenta* was instituted in at least forty towns in Italy. It meant to stress the provision for legitimate male children but there were cases where girls and bastard children were eligible to receive welfare.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 270.

\(^{16}\) Cassius Dio *Roman History* 68.3.363-365.
did not include military training or leadership so it became pivotal for him to promote an amicable relationship with the provincial armies. Looking back at Galba’s mistake in disregarding the importance provincial armies played in *arcanum imperii*, Nerva propagated a unified relationship with the army on his coinage. A *sestertius* minted around AD 97 depicted two hands clasped over a Roman standard with the inscription CONCORDIA EXERCITVVM. Only a cohesive relationship with the army ensured political stability leading Nerva to depict this on his coinage. The second component to his ability to maintain *arcanum imperii* rested with the loyalty of the Praetorian Guard. His predecessor, though an incompetent military leader, secured the loyalty of the Praetorian Guard and the army by paying large donatives. The death of their benefactor Domitian did not bode well among the Praetorian Guard and the army. Though Nerva was not directly implicated in the assassination, Casperius Aelianus threatened Nerva with a mutiny if he did not bring Domitian’s killers to justice. This placed Nerva in a very precarious situation, because while he owed his Principate to Domitian’s assassins, he could not afford to displease the Praetorians given their political power.

Moved by the uncertainty of his standing with the provincial armies and the Praetorians, Nerva’s urgency to select an heir was exacerbated because he “lacked the bodily vigour to withstand them.” The elderly Nerva did not have a son of his own to ascend to the imperial office so the only option left to him was to adopt an heir. He thus had the opportunity to reinstitute the Augustan policy of adoption of the ‘best man’ who

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17 *The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian*, Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, vol. 2, Plate VII.

18 Casperius Aelianus was Praetorian Prefect under Domitian and threatened to usurp power from Nerva unless he handed over Petronius Secundus and Parthenius for execution.

was both youthful and appealing to the senate and army, but he had to show extreme caution in his selection as “Galba’s career, however, had shown that a candidate who was acceptable to the Senate was not necessarily so to the soldiers.”\(^\text{20}\) The threat of mutiny and the discovery of plots against Nerva’s life brought about the realization “that the reign needed the enthusiastic support rather than the sullen acquiescence of the troops” and the only way to maintain military support was “to adopt an associate and successor who would be able to keep the soldiers in order.”\(^\text{21}\)

The adoption of Trajan was a very popular move on Nerva’s part instigated by the “spectacle of Domitian’s last years, and the crisis following his death which had obliged Nerva to nominate Trajan as his successor.”\(^\text{22}\) In so doing Nerva fulfilled his primary function as an interrex and brought the aspirations of the senatorial body to fruition as Rome was placed in the hands of a general who represented a prosperous future for Rome. Trajan commanded the respect of the army and represented someone who would cooperate amicably with the senate. It was Trajan, though, who issued coinage with iconography depicting the designation of Trajan as heir. The reverse of an aureus issued later by Trajan depicted laureate busts of Nerva and Trajan with the inscription DIVI NERVA ET TRAIANUS PAT, identifying the divine and familial status of Nerva and

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\(^\text{21}\) Salmon, *A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138*, 271; Cassius Dio *Roman History* 68.3.365. Determined to keep his promise and provide for the betterment of the Roman state, Nerva made his way to the Capitol and proclaimed “May good success attend the Roman senate and people and myself. I hereby adopt Marcus Ulpius Nerva Trajan.”

Trajan as Father of the Fatherland. The inscription stressed his connection to Nerva and the divinity of his adoptive father while also signifying his status as the father of Rome.23

Believing in the 'best man' theory, "Nerva did not esteem family relationship above the safety of the State" and so he selected an heir outside of his family and more importantly, from outside of Italy.24 In accordance with his prudence, Nerva "believed in looking at a man's ability rather than at his nationality" and he performed a great service to Rome as "he provided for the good of the state with divine foresight by adopting Trajan."25 Nerva established precedent for future provincial men with ambitions for the imperial office "because the latter was a Spaniard instead of an Italian."26 Nerva may have believed that Trajan's provincial status shielded him from the bureaucratic corruption that commonly occurred in Roman politics. Cassius Dio marked this historical precedent in his writings since this was the first time in the history of the Roman Empire that the emperor was a provincial.

Trajan's succession bridged the gap between the army and the Principate. Trajan started his career serving as military tribune for ten years and from there was given

23 The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian, Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, vol. 2, Plate IX. Trajan deified his biological father Marcus Ulpius Traianus Major in AD 113 as well as other members of his family.

24 Cassius Dio Roman History 68.4.367., Salmon, A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138, 272. Trajan passed through the cursus honorum and distinguished himself as a soldier. Shortly before his adoption Trajan was appointed by Nerva to the governorship of Upper Germany.

25 Ibid., 68.4.367., Eutropius Breviarium 8.1.48. Although generals made their bid for empire outside of the city of Rome starting in AD 69, these men were still Romans. Trajan's ascension marked the first time in Rome's history that a non-Italian became emperor.

26 Ibid., 68.4.367. Trajan heard the news of his adoption through a letter he received from Nerva in which Nerva outlined the nature of his adoption and gave Trajan his diamond ring. The letter contained the passage "May the Danaans by thy shafts requite my tears" taken from Homer's Iliad. The passing of Nerva's ring to Trajan symbolized Trajan's designation as heir apparent and became the mark of the Antonine Emperors.
command of his own legion. He made the military a career, finding “military life and expeditions congenial,” which is why he personally commanded many campaigns during his reign. As their emperor and general, Trajan took great measures to maintain and care for his soldiers. Nevertheless, Trajan could not retain the legions’ loyalty without payment and he granted large donatives to the army upon his succession. With plans of conquest in the future, Trajan raised “two new legions, II Traiana and XXX Ulpia Victrix,” since the army’s strength had then reduced due to financial strain under Domitian. The new legions opened up new jobs for soldiers with Trajan as their benefactor, which added to Rome’s military strength.

The ancient writer Eutropius stated that Trajan “surpassed his military renown with his graciousness and restraint,” while Cassius Dio noted that his reputation “was most conspicuous for his justice, for his bravery, and for the simplicity of his habits.” Trajan looked to the power of propaganda to spread the word of his attributes and deeds. He knew how Domitian’s departure from the Augustan virtues had contributed to his demise and so Trajan went to great lengths to propagandize the four virtues of *virtus, clementia, iustitia*, and *pietas*. The propaganda value of his linkage to Augustus by means of the four virtues invigorated a sense of nostalgia for past good government. Previous emperors tried to link themselves in one way or another to Augustus but few tried to emulate his concordance with the four virtues. The virtues became important to

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27 Trajan was given his first command over the VII Gemina in Tarraconensis in Syria. He led them against the forces of Antoninus Saturninus when he rebelled against Domitian but arrived after the rebellion was crushed.


29 Anonymous *Lives of the later Caesars* 47.

30 Eutropius *Breviarium* 8.4.49.; Cassius Dio *Roman History* 68.15.369.
Trajan politically since his commitment to follow the virtues helped to improve his relationship with the Senate.

As the ‘Father of Rome,’ Trajan “took more pleasure in being loved than in being honoured” and strove to combine “humanitarianism with discipline and efficiency,” concentrating his efforts on continuing the improvement of the social welfare of Rome’s citizens.31 One way he did this was through the continuance of public welfare in the form of the alimenta first instituted by Nerva, which was critical to the sustenance of Rome’s plebs and urban poor. Trajan, fearful of the de-population of Italy, increased the number of children eligible to receive grain and was exalted for “improving the lot of the poor.”32 An aureus issued during Trajan’s reign popularized Trajan’s charity to the Roman populace.33 The obverse showed the usual laureate bust while the reverse had Trajan togate distributing grain to Roman children. Without the distribution of the alimenta many of Rome’s poor would have suffered tremendously from starvation and malnutrition. The alimenta benefitted Trajan politically while at the same time relieving daily pressures amongst Rome’s destitute.

Also beneficial to Trajan’s reign, public works functioned as a concrete testament to the prosperity under Trajan.34 He refurbished the Circus Maximus with the inscription “that he made it adequate for the Roman people,” and continued in his public works


32 Alice M. Ashley, “The ‘Alimenta’ of Nerva and His Successors,” The English Historical Review 36, no.141 (January 1921): 14. Illegitimate children were usually restricted from receiving the alimenta. This was the government’s way of promoting legal marriages in the city.

33 The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian, Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, vol. 2, Plate VIII.

34 He funded many repair projects of roads and harbors that had fallen into disrepair, while on the Esquiline Hill, Trajan placed his bath complex over the site of Nero’s Domus Aureus, erasing his public memory.
expenditures with the completion of the Forum of Trajan in the slopes of the Quirinal Hill.\textsuperscript{35} Trajan’s Forum housed both Latin and Greek libraries in between which stood Trajan’s Column.\textsuperscript{36} The column was a testament to Trajan’s military conquest of Dacia “as an honorary monument” and may also have been “intended to ‘emphasize’ the Trajanic epic by means of a series of selected scenes specifically chosen to form a synthesis of the imperial virtues.”\textsuperscript{37} The column was not only beautiful, but also served as a public display of his greatness where all had the opportunity to view the details of Trajan’s victory over King Decebalus of Dacia. Completing the Forum were the Markets of Trajan, comprised of more than one hundred fifty shops. The Forum and bath complex were a magnificent display of public patronage adding to Rome’s splendor and Trajan’s popularity.\textsuperscript{38}

Trajan offered new hope for Rome and the “plebs loved an Emperor who provided fine shows and caught their imagination with his victories.”\textsuperscript{39} Trajan not only cared for the governance and welfare of the inhabitants of Italy but also for the people in the provinces, since he too was a provincial. Trajan’s good conduct in the administration

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Cassius Dio \textit{Roman History} 68.7.371. On his return to Rome in AD 107, Trajan gave one hundred twenty three days of \textit{circenses} where eleven thousand animals and ten thousand gladiators fought.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Cassius Dio \textit{Roman History} 68.16.393. Trajan employed his court architect Apollodorus for the project. The hills were excavated so that the Forum was equal to the height of the column. In the Forum was a column which was a monument to himself for building the Forum.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Michael Grant, \textit{The Roman Emperors} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985), 75. The markets were built of concrete and heat resistant brick. The center of the market was the market hall, which was a single cross-vaulted rectangular space, twenty-eight yards by ten yards across.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Salmon, \textit{A History of the Roman World 30 BC to AD 138}, 292.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of the provinces elicited the praise of one governor in particular who owed his position to Trajan. The correspondences of Pliny the Younger and his panegyric were intended to praise Trajan but also had an ulterior motive because "much of its content is devoted to an attack upon Domitian, who, in the eyes of Pliny, is indeed the pessimus princeps."\textsuperscript{40} The conversation between the two mostly pertained to the construction of public works, provincial defense, citizenship requests for non-Italians, and the laws concerning Christians.\textsuperscript{41} Pliny’s letters showed the importance Trajan placed on provincial administration as long as the requests were within the means of the administration’s ability. Trajan spent his career adding territory to the empire, thus increasing the need for good provincial administration. Hadrian later relinquished some of the territory added by Trajan but spent his career touring the provinces and seeing to provincial administration.

The virtues endorsed by Trajan reflected his commitment towards good government, which encouraged him to present a sword to his Praetorian Prefect remarking "take this sword, in order that, if I rule well, you may use it for me, but if ill, against me."\textsuperscript{42} Trajan was no fool for he knew the history of the earlier emperors and the powerful position of the Praetorian Prefect in the 	extit{arcanum imperii} of the Principate.

\textsuperscript{40} Kenneth Scott, "The Elder and Younger Pliny on Emperor Worship," \textit{Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association} 63 (1932): 160.

\textsuperscript{41} Pliny the Younger, \textit{The Letters of Pliny the Younger}, ed. and trans. Betty Radice (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), 268; 292-293. Pliny the Younger became governor of Bithynia under the auspices of Trajan. Pliny requested permission to construct a new public bath complex at Prusa in Bithynia. Trajan granted the request as long as the city could afford it. Pliny often asked grants of citizenship for people he knew. As long as Pliny vouched for said person Trajan graciously extended citizenship. At this point in the Empire Christianity was not a legal religion. Pliny deferred to Trajan on the matter and Trajan told him to follow the stipulations of the law in regards to Christians. Trajan forbade the practice of hunting Christians for the sake of persecution and stated that accused Christians were to be released as long as they renounced Christianity and pledged oaths to the state’s religious deities.

\textsuperscript{42} Cassius Dio \textit{Roman History} 68.16.393. The Prefect Saburanus may be the one mentioned by Cassius Dio.
Following in the footsteps of his adoptive father, Trajan pledged to them the same oath as Nerva and pledged not to “slay nor disfranchise any good man;” keeping this promise throughout the duration of his reign. The Senate admired Trajan’s genius for he chose “to exercise his influence through measured prerogative rather than authoritarian dictum.” He did nothing to alienate the senators and maintained the appearance of equality when socializing with them.

Trajan displayed a degree of humility rarely seen in the emperors who preceded him. It was common for emperors to take the name of Imperator and Caesar as a requirement to claim their legitimacy to the throne. Among his many titles Trajan was given the title of Optimus Princeps by the Senate. Pleased with the honor of the titles Dacicus and Parthicus from the provincial wars, he loved Optimus the most since “it referred rather to his character than to his arms.” The title of Optimus Princeps resonated well with the people and senate, unlike Domitian who requested that he be referred to as dominus et deus. For Trajan the title alluded to the “fact that high moral standards were necessary to withstand the temptations of power.”

The new title placed Trajan in the same mold as the deified Augustus. Realizing the propaganda value, Trajan capitalized on this connection to Augustus displaying it through coinage and statues. Trajan emulated Augustus in statues that depicted him in the same manner as the Augustus of Prima Porta. In a statue from Xanten, Trajan is shown in full military garb with his right hand outstretched holding a scepter and a

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44 Cassius Dio Roman History 68.23.401.

45 C. Wirszubski, Libertas As A Political Idea At Rome During The Late Republic And Early Principate (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 154.
draped left arm. His statue differs only slightly from the original *Prima Porta* where Augustus has the same clothes and stance with the exception that Augustus is pointing and the baby Cupid is at his feet. In his statue Augustus wanted to emphasize his family lineage to the goddess Venus, while his military dress alluded to the *auctoritas* he commanded. Augustus explicitly stated in his *Res Gestae* that “he surpassed all others in *auctoritas*, while possessing no more official power (*potestas*) than those who were colleagues of his in magistracy.” The reference to virtue is implied as Augustus saved Rome without overstepping the legal bounds and harmonized his new role with the senate. Trajan chose to mimic Augustus’s display of *auctoritas* to enhance the idea of an Augustan connection.

New coins were issued in commemoration of his new title of *Optimus* and he used “the association of traditional Roman virtues” to invigorate the symbolism of a return to Augustan principles. The reverse of a *denarius* issued around AD 114 depicted the personification of Trajan’s *genius* standing in military garb holding *patera* and cornucopia. His *genius* was sometimes substituted with the image of Diana, who was shown crowning Trajan signifying his honor as *Optimus Princeps*. This mimicked a similar coin first issued by Augustus. The reverse of an *aureus* issued around 27 BC

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46 David Potter, *Emperors of Rome: The Story of Imperial Rome from Julius Caesar to the Last Emperor* (Great Britain: Quercus, 2007), 44.


49 *The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian*, Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, vol. 2, Plate VIII.

50 Diana was the Roman goddess of the hunt and sister to Apollo. Her depiction is significant because Diana was regarded with great reverence by the plebs and poor. She represented the common people of Rome, which demonstrated the faith the people had in the emperor.
depicted Diana reaching for an arrow from a quiver with bow in hand. The obverse depicted a laureate bust with the inscription DIVI AUGUSTUS commemorating his new title as the Divine Augustus. Augustus redefined the image of Diana to represent “specific Roman virtues.” As princeps Augustus championed the path of moral reform using his four virtues and family as the ideal Roman template. Trajan likewise was granted the title of Optimus by the senate and he used the image of Diana to convey his virtue in the Augustan image.

The Roman practice of deification served to enhance the successor’s legitimacy by claiming a divine heritage which in theory made him suitable to rule. Unlike Germanicus, whose legitimacy stemmed from his connection with the Julio-Claudian family, Trajan could only claim divine lineage through his adopted father Nerva. Later Trajan had his biological father M. Ulpius Traianus deified so that he could claim a divine linkage through both of his fathers. Publically, Trajan displayed his divine ancestry on coins and sponsorship of games. As seen with the Julio-Claudians and the Flavians, the divinity of the imperial family served an important role in propaganda. Domitian had used his family’s divinity to enhance his own public image and spread the worship of the familial cult, perhaps to make up for his shortcomings in comparison to

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51 C.H.V. Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 B.C. to A.D. 69*, vol. 1 (London: Spink and Sons Ltd., 1984), Plate IV.


53 In 2 BC Julia was exiled by Augustus for her many acts of adultery against her husband and future emperor Tiberius.

54 Grant, *The Roman Emperors*, 75-76. In 105 Trajan’s wife Pompeia Plotina and sister Ulpia Marciana were granted the title Augusta. When Marciana died she was deified and her daughter Matidia was given the title of Augusta.
his father and brother. It was more important for Domitian to be known as the son and brother of gods than it was to rule in a virtuous way.

Trajan opted to perpetuate the Augustan image of a virtuous and moral family, concerned with family image and the role it played in public opinion. When it came to matters of the family, his wife, sister, and niece fulfilled their duties as devoted family members and strengthened the bond between family and virtue. Trajan’s family helped to uphold the imperial image and represented the “idea of a united house, impervious to court intrigue.” For Trajan, his family’s role was to lead by example. They gave obeisance to the genius of their sovereign and adhered to moral virtues in their private and public lives. Trajan’s family acted in perfect accordance with his wishes and the image of a virtuous family soon became synonymous with Trajan’s reign. His wife Plotina helped facilitate this image as early as his succession when upon entering the imperial house she is quoted “I enter here such a woman as I would fain be when I depart.” She expressed her commitment to lead by example just as Trajan pledged his sword to his Praetorian Prefect. There is no evidence that she ever deviated from her original intentions.

Trajan rose to the imperial office “as an accomplished general who restored Rome’s self-esteem-- and her coffers-- through military victory.” Trajan’s image emulated that of his more illustrious predecessor Germanicus. Trajan and Germanicus both had their first military appointment as the supreme commander of the legions.

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56 Cassius Dio Roman History 68.14.369.

57 Penelope J. E. Davies, “The Politics of Perpetuation: Trajan’s Column and the Art of Commemoration,” 41.
stationed in Germany. In AD 9 Germanicus had achieved fame and honor in Germany for retrieving the coveted legionary standards that were lost by Varus in the Teutoburg Forest. Likewise, Trajan added to his glory when he “recovered the standard of the legion lost under Domitian” in the war against the Dacians.\footnote{Anonymous \textit{Lives of the Later Caesars} 41. Cornelius Fuscus, a prefect of the guard under Domitian, was killed by the Dacians in AD 86 and as a result the standard of Legio V Alaudae was captured.} Trajan’s recovery of the lost standards stemmed from his incorporation of an aggressive offensive strategy which emulated that of Claudius rather than the defensive policy of border maintenance and consolidation of Augustus. The provinces of Dacia and Parthia became Trajan’s battlegrounds and his strategy reflected his desire to march his legions to India in the footsteps of Alexander.\footnote{Cassius Dio \textit{Roman History} 68.29.417. Trajan’s campaigns took him to the frontiers of the Empire. There he honored Alexander in Babylon and in 116, while gazing into the Persian Gulf; he saw his dreams of conquering India evaporate lamenting “I should certainly have crossed over to the Indii, too, if I were still young.”}

Unlike Nerva who publically declared Trajan his adoptive son and successor, Trajan left the question of succession unresolved even while on his deathbed. The ancient accounts of Cassius Dio and Hadrian related the events of Trajan’s death and suggested a conspiracy against the \textit{princeps} on the parts of Trajan’s wife Plotina and Praetorian Prefect Attianus.\footnote{Praetorian Prefect Acilius Attianus was co-ward of Hadrian with Trajan. Cassius Dio’s account stated that Plotina and Attianus kept Trajan’s death a secret until the announcement of Hadrian’s succession had been made.} Where Cassius Dio’s accounts are sparse in this area, Hadrian’s personal memoir gave a detailed account of the events. Hadrian’s memoirs are invaluable as they provide insight into his own thoughts on the question of his succession. Hadrian estimated that Trajan’s reluctance to name him publically as his successor stemmed from his admiration of Alexander the Great. For Hadrian believed...
that Trajan in the likeness of Alexander “had decided not to name his heir himself” and felt that Trajan “was refusing to face his end.”

The nineteen year reign of Trajan expanded the borders of the Empire and revived the victory culture of Rome. His reign also signified the successful implementation of the Augustan adoption principle. The Antonines may never have had a chance to reign if it were not for Nerva’s prudence in adopting the provincial commander Trajan; and thus maintaining the *arcanum imperii* necessary to remain in power. Four of the Antonines preserved the continuation of the dynasty because the selected heirs appealed to the legions, ensuring stability in the Principate and the Empire.

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CHAPTER VI
THE COST OF EMPIRE

With his death in AD 161, Antonius Pius was succeeded by his adopted heir Marcus Aurelius. Aurelius intended to continue Trajan’s offensive plan of conquest in the provinces and so spent much of his reign on campaign. Upon his death in AD 180, Marcus Aurelius passed the throne to his nineteen year old son Commodus. Although he characterized himself as a Stoic philosopher and believed that a princeps must rule by virtue, with the appointment of Commodus as his heir apparent, Marcus Aurelius broke “with a system of succession which ostensibly recognized such matters and bequeathed power to a son who proved himself to be so unworthy of it.” The reasons surrounding Marcus Aurelius’s decision appointing his son Commodus as heir apparent and ending the adoption principle are unknown since Cassius Dio’s accounts after the death of Hadrian were lost over time. Commodus’s succession marked “the end of the Augustan Principate” and the end of the Antonine emperors. Never again was Rome ruled by the ‘best man’ and the adoption principle of Augustus was replaced by “the inception of a new style of military monarchy.”

Why Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher emperor, chose to abandon the Augustan principle that his four predecessors valued is lost to history. One can only speculate as to

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1 Marcus Aurelius waged war against Armenia (161-163), Parthia (163-165), and Media (165-166). The latter part of his reign was spent on campaign in the Rhine and Danube regions of Germany.

2 David Shotter, Rome and Her Empire (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 349.

3 Shotter, Rome and Her Empire, 352.

4 Ibid., 352.
Marcus Aurelius's reasons for naming his son Commodus as his heir and successor. Perhaps his reasons were influenced by his devotion to Stoic philosophy and his relationship with the earlier Antonine emperors. It is clear that Commodus did not possess any of the Augustan virtues, but perhaps Marcus Aurelius was oblivious to Commodus's true character and believed that his son possessed all the same virtues he had in order to rule Rome benevolently. Or perhaps it was that Marcus Aurelius intended to establish a new familial dynasty as the next rulers of Rome. More likely, Commodus was chosen because his father spent much of his reign on campaign and his sudden illness required the naming of a successor to keep the stability of the Principate and avoid the disasters of civil war. For whatever his reasons, the adoption principle of choosing the 'best man,' which proved successful under the Antonines, came to an abrupt end after eighty-four years.

If Marcus Aurelius believed that his son possessed any of the four virtues he was gravely mistaken. When looking at Commodus's succession it is important to consider that "the dynastic principle once again produced, as in the cases of Caligula and Nero, a princeps convinced that he was 'born to be king.'" Commodus truly believed that he was destined to be emperor and he placed little esteem on virtue since it was his divine right to rule Rome. Commodus turned to the practice of cult worship in order to make up for his shortcomings and insecurity as a ruler. Ironically, in A.D. 192, the last year of his twelve year reign, Commodus "had the senate declare him a god" along with various other titles, which were meant to convey his excellence. His titles did not reflect the

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5 Shotter, *Rome and Her Empire*, 349.

6 M.P. Speidel, "Commodus the God-Emperor and the Army," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 109. At his request Commodus was declared a living god by the senate. Commodus also took the
nature of his true character and Commodus was assassinated on New Year’s Eve in AD 192. Nerva saw that “what Rome needed was a system that would ensure an unquestioned succession and yet be free from the disadvantages of a strictly dynastic monarchy” finding the “solution of that problem in the principle of succession by adoption, as distinct from succession by birthright.”

Since the inception of the Empire, the Principate continued to evolve as Augustus strove to instill virtue in the office and in his successors. After the death of Commodus, there was a significant shift between the role of the Principate and the power of the army as the emperor’s political base. Traditionally, the emperors “based their power directly on the control of troops and needed to maintain this if they were not to be deposed by the army’s senior officers.” It was because of this reason that Augustus placed emphasis on the *arcanum imperii* and his successor’s ability to command and hold the loyalty of the troops. As seen with the reigns of Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, emperors who lost the favor of the army were easily usurped by popular generals in control of large numbers of troops. Although the functions of the senate body were limited under the Principate, in order to retain the image of republican traditions the senate conferred titles on the successor and formally recognized imperial legitimacy. In the third century senatorial

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7 Adrián Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2003), 200. Commodus was strangled in a conspiracy, which involved the commander of his Praetorian Guard.

8 C. Wirszubski, *Libertas As A Political Idea At Rome During the Late Republic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 155.

approval of emperors diminished as the army established itself as the maker of emperors for the right price.

At the end of the second century and the beginning of the third century A.D., the army still remained a determining factor in deciding who was to succeed to the Principate. The army after Commodus's death "demonstrated their power to make or break emperors."\(^\text{10}\) The Principate allowed the political power of the army to grow exponentially, which culminated in the process of succession by the accumulation of wealth instead of by virtue. Legionary officers witnessed an opportunity to acquire instant wealth and therefore they "auctioned the throne off to the highest bidder from the walls of their barracks in Rome."\(^\text{11}\) From the Julio-Claudians to the Antonines the army "had the practical power to make a man emperor, by fighting for him or promising to do so."\(^\text{12}\) The army undermined the practice that the holder of the Principate must possess the Augustan virtues in order to rule Rome benevolently. The auctioning of the Principate directly led to the establishment of a military monarchy in the third century. Consequently, the new role of the military as emperor makers coalesced with the "succession of feeble emperors" to the throne, which in the later centuries proved disastrous.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^\text{10}\) Shotter, Rome and Her Empire, 352.

\(^\text{11}\) Goldsworthy, The Complete Roman Army, 200.

\(^\text{12}\) J.B. Campbell, The Emperor and the Roman Army 31 BC—AD 235 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 375. Earlier emperors claimed that they held imperium by virtue of a lex sanctioned by the people and senate.

\(^\text{13}\) Christopher S. Mackay, Ancient Rome: A Military and Political History (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 266.
The founding of the Principate under Augustus was without legal precedent, leaving Augustus to define the position from his auctoritas derived from the consent of the Senate, the people, and the army.\(^\text{14}\) The advent of this new position in Roman politics came with the problem of how to successfully pass power to an heir “in a government that officially remained a republic.”\(^\text{15}\) Power could corrupt the leaders of Rome if they acquired too much, and Augustus wanted to pass power to an heir who possessed certain characteristics because the “virtues of the Princeps are the only effective safeguard against the abuse of authority.”\(^\text{16}\) Adoption seemed the best choice to assure that an heir possessed virtue. Unfortunately after his death, the system instituted by Augustus was abandoned. The successors of his familial dynasty proved unable to rule virtuously and the collapse of the Julio-Claudian dynasty came with Nero’s suicide in AD 68.

Because Vespasian had two sons he neglected the adoption principle in favor of passing authority hereditarily to his son Titus, whose reign for a moment placed Rome in capable hands. Titus showed himself to be competent in government administration but his early death proved disastrous for Rome as his unqualified brother Domitian ascended to the throne. Domitian’s reign epitomized the flaws that came with hereditary succession and his assassination left the question of succession in the hands of the senate, who wanted to maintain the ideals of the reconfigured republic as seen under the reign of Augustus by selecting a ‘best man’ from among their ranks. Nerva reinstituted the adoption principle of Augustus and selected a ‘best man’ to bring prosperity to Rome.

\(^{14}\) Werner Eck, *The Age of Augustus* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 148. Along with the consent of the senate, people, and army, Augustus also derived his power from his immense personal fortune and the extensive patron-client relationship he had with many of Rome’s nobility.

\(^{15}\) Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, 150.

\(^{16}\) C. Wirszubski, *Libertas As A Political Idea At Rome During the Late Republic*, 155.
The Antonine emperors validated Augustus's reasons for his decision to adopt an heir who proved himself worthy rather than leaving Rome in the hands of untrained family members. Never again did the rulers of Rome institute the adoption principle and so a multitude of unsuitable men ascended to the throne. Many future emperors obtained the imperial office by the purse only to be usurped once they outlasted their welcome. These men proved incapable of maintaining stability in the Empire, which helped lead to the eventual collapse of Rome. The fascination of playing king makers distracted the army from frontier security as they found it increasingly difficult to hold the permeable and deteriorating borders between their ever encroaching barbarian neighbors.
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APPENDIX:

COINS AND STATUES

Fig. 1. Obverse of sestertius. C.H.V. Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69*, vol. 1 (London: Spink and Son Ltd, 1984), Plate 13. Caesar Augustus Germanicus.
Fig. 2. Duspondii. C.H.V. Sutherland, The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69, vol. 1 (London: Spink and Son Ltd, 1984), Plate 11. Tiberius Augustus Caesar Son of the Divine Augustus Imperator VIII.
Fig. 3. Quadriga. C.H.V. Sutherland, The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69, vol. 1 (London: Spink and Son Ltd, 1984), Plate 14. Recent military standards from the defeated Germans.

Fig. 4. Aureus. C.H.V. Sutherland, The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69, vol. 1 (London: Spink and Son Ltd, 1984), Plate 27. Imperator Sulpicius Galba Caesar.
Figs. 5 and 6. Figure 5 is an *aureus*. Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian*, vol. 2 (London: Spink & Son Ltd, 1989), Plate II. Judea Captured. Figure 6 is an *aureus*. Vespasian Augustus sons of Caesar.


Fig. 9. *Sestertius*. Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian*, vol. 2 (London: Spink & Son Ltd, 1989), Plate VII. Concord with the army.
Fig. 10. *Aureus*. Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: Vespasian to Hadrian*, vol. 2 (London: Spink & Son Ltd, 1989), Plate IX. Nerva the Father and Trajan.

Fig. 12. Augustus of Prima Porta. David Potter, *Emperors of Rome: The Story of Imperial Rome from Julius Caesar to the Last Emperor* (Great Britain: Quercus, 2007), 44.
Fig. 13. Trajan at Xanten.

Fig. 15. *Aureus*. C.H.V. Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage: From 31 BC to AD 69*, vol. 1 (London: Spink and Son Ltd, 1984), Plate 4. Deified Augustus.
I am originally from New Iberia, Louisiana. After graduating high school in 2001, I attended Louisiana State University and graduated in 2005 with a BA in History. I began the Masters Program at Old Dominion University in the fall of 2006. I spent my first year at ODU as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) under Drs. Michael Hucles and Edward Ragan. My second year, I taught discussion sections as a Graduate Teaching Assistant Instructor (GTAI) under Dr. Douglas Greene and Timothy Nevin. I work as an Educator at the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, in Norfolk, VA and teach European History at Tidewater Community College. Furthermore, I will continue to work towards my goal to enter a history doctoral program with an emphasis in classical studies and ancient Rome.